



Rethinking and Reimagining Tourism

This editorial is based on [“Pitching India as a signature destination”](#) which was published in The Hindu on 27/09/2022. It talks about the recent Dharamshala Declaration and future of the Tourism Sector in India.

For Prelims: Tourism in India, UN World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), UNESCO World Heritage List, Swadesh Darshan Scheme, Dharamshala Declaration, Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat.

For Mains: Status of the Tourism Sector in India, Challenges Related to the Tourism Sector in India, Recent Initiatives Related to Tourism.

Tourism has emerged as a **key driver of economic growth**. It is one of the fastest growing economic sectors and has significant impact on **trade, job creation, investment, infrastructure development and social inclusion**.

Tourism has been the most affected sector by the **Covid-19 pandemic**. According to the **UN World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO)**, this is by far the worst crisis international tourism has faced since records began in 1950.

Post Covid-19, it is a **challenge for the tourism sector in India** to return to business as usual while maintaining safety and hygiene. The crisis is an **opportunity to consider the long-term implications of the crisis and reimagine the future of tourism** and take coordinated action across governments at all levels and the private sector.

What is the Status of the Tourism Sector in India?

- The **World Travel and Tourism Council's 2019** report ranks India's tourism at **10th** in terms of its **contribution to World GDP (Gross Domestic Product)**.
- **India has 40 sites listed on the UNESCO World Heritage List** (32 cultural, 7 natural, and 1 mixed) as of 2021.
 - **Dholavira** and **Ramappa Temple** are the latest ones.
- A total of **39 million jobs** were created in the tourism sector in FY20, which represented 8% of the country's employment. **By 2029, it will account for 53 million jobs.**

What are the Recent Initiatives Related to Tourism in India?

- **Swadesh Darshan Scheme**
- **Draft National Tourism Policy 2022**
- **Dekho Apna Desh Initiative**
- **National Green Tourism Mission**

What are the Challenges Related to the Tourism Sector in India?

- **Lack of Training and Skill Development:** Given that the tourism industry is a **labour-intensive sector**, it is undeniable that practical training plays an important role. Over the years, **availability of trained manpower has not kept pace with growth of the tourism sector** in India.
 - The sector's growth is constrained by the **limited number of multilingual trained guides** and the **inadequate understanding of the benefits and responsibilities involved in tourism** among locals.
- **Underutilization of Tourism Potential:** India has an abundance of places that are left unexplored due to **lack of surveys, infrastructure, and connectivity**, which also results in lukewarm attitudes toward domestic tourism.
 - For instance, **despite the [Northeast's breathtaking natural beauty](#), it is not often seen in the travel itineraries** of either domestic or international tourists in the country because of **lack of connectivity with the rest of the country** as well as a lack of infrastructure and necessary facilities.
- **Overexploitation of Resources:** [Unsustainable Tourism](#) often puts **pressure on natural resources through overconsumption** especially in [Himalayan regions](#) of India, where resources are already scarce.
 - Unsustainable tourism also affects local land use, resulting in **soil erosion, increased [pollution](#), and loss of natural habitats** of endangered species.
- **Lack of Infrastructure and Security:** It is a major challenge for the Indian tourism sector. It includes a **lack of multi cuisine restaurants, basic health facilities, [public transport](#)** and hygiene and safety & security of tourists.
 - **Attacks on foreign tourists**, especially on women tourists have raised the security concern as India is placed at 114th position in terms of safety([WEF Index 2017](#)).

What Should be the Way Forward?

- **Global Opportunity for India:** India's philosophy of '**Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam**' sees the world as one family. It gives India an **unwavering belief in multilateralism**.
 - Considering India's **rich heritage and culture**, an **unmatched variety of cuisine** tourism can be a **vehicle for enhancing [India's soft power](#)** and attracting foreign revenue.
 - Recent [Dharamshala Declaration](#) that aims to **recognise India's potential in supporting global tourism and also promote domestic tourism** is a good step in this direction.
- **Responsible, Inclusive, Green and Hospitable Tourism (RIGHT):** To ensure **better accountability**, all stakeholders involved in [tourism management](#) need to be governed by a common umbrella of regulations.
 - There is a need to focus on **inclusive growth of tourism** by creating **opportunities for marginalised sections** of society including people living in remote areas.
 - Also, from **Gautama to Gandhi**, our **Indian culture has always stressed the importance of living harmoniously with nature and within our means**.
 - It is important to promote [green tourism](#) with minimal disturbance to the natural ecosystem and maintain **sustainable infrastructure** so that **warm hospitality can thrive**.
- **Unified Tourism System:** An **extensive market research and evaluation exercise** can be undertaken in order to **identify desired tourist destinations** across the country and major markets and segments.
 - It can be followed by developing a **digital unified system (promoting the essence of [Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat](#))**, to map these places and promote them through [social media](#).
- **Tourism Impact Assessment:** The impact of tourism on local resources, atmosphere, and residents needs to be assessed regularly.
 - Also, tourism regulations can be revised from time to time to **address the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment, and host communities**, taking into account current and future economic, social and environmental impacts.

- **One State One Tourism Mascot: State animals** can be used as advertising mascots for Tourism Departments of different states as an innovative tool to **promote tourism education, especially among children.**
- **Presidency of G20:** India has an opportunity to position itself as a major tourism destination during India's presidency of the **G20 (December 2022- November 2023).**
 - India's age-old dictum of '**Atithi Devo Bhava**' will come to the fore as it welcomes delegates from different countries.

Drishti Mains Question

Covid crisis is an opportunity to reimagine the future of tourism in India. Discuss.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Mains

Q.1 How can the mountain ecosystem be restored from the negative impact of development initiatives and tourism? **(2019)**

Q.2 The states of Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand are reaching the limits of their ecological carrying capacity due to tourism. Critically evaluate. **(2015)**

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