

# Sustainable Tourism In India: Achievements And Emerging Challenges

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## ABSTRACT

*India's sustainable tourism relies on balancing economic growth with environmental and infrastructural limits. With roughly 318 million tourist visits in 2024 concentrated in states like Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, tourism contributes substantially to regional GDP but strains scarce resources and elevates waste generation in ecologically sensitive zones such as the Himalayas and Sundarbans. The economic analysis identifies gaps in the implementation of sustainability initiatives and limited local participation, reducing policy effectiveness. Examining environmental, socio-cultural, and infrastructure-related factors throughout the nation, this article delves into the challenges encountered when developing sustainable tourism. The study rely on secondary data from government reports and academic sources to assess challenges and opportunities. Its findings highlights that Tourism boosts local economies, especially via community-based initiatives, but unmanaged activities cause environmental degradation in sensitive areas (e.g., Himalayas, Sundarbans). Waste generation and cultural commodification threaten traditional practices. The study thrusts robust government policies, strengthen waste management, leverage technology for efficient resource allocation, enforce stricter ecological regulations, and offer tax incentives for energy-efficient restorations; collaborate with tech firms to optimize tourist flow for sustainable tourism in India.*

**Keywords:** *Tourism / tourist, Sustainable / sustainability, Environmental, communities / community, Heritage, Development, Resources, Management, Infrastructure*

## INTRODUCTION

Developing a cohesive strategy for India's tourist industry has grown in significance. There are several opportunities and threats to sustainable tourism in India that have recently emerged as a result of the growth of the country's tourist sector. Striking a balance between ecological preservation, sociocultural considerations, and the economics of development is one of the primary obstacles that sustainable tourism in India faces. This is the intended subject of this study. The study aims to suggest ways that these disputes might be resolved by taking into account factors including infrastructure limits, local community engagement, and international frameworks. In terms of more concrete goals, the study draws on case studies from a variety of locations to provide concrete recommendations for the ongoing evaluation of India's tourist growth.

## Aim and objectives

**Research Aim:**

The purpose of this study is to assess the current state of sustainable tourism in India, identify its obstacles, and provide solutions that would allow the industry to expand while still protecting the environment.

**Research Objectives:**

- To analyze the environmental impacts of tourism in ecologically sensitive regions of India.
- To assess the socio-cultural effects of tourism on local communities and heritage sites.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of government initiatives and policies promoting sustainable tourism.
- To identify actionable strategies to address infrastructure gaps and resource management challenges.

**Problem statement**

Sustainable tourism in India is making strides, but there are still a lot of obstacles to overcome. The increasing number of tourists has been one of these problems, since it has degraded once-pristine regions along coastlines and in the Himalayas and the Western Ghats. Goa and Manali are only two examples of overcrowded places that have put a burden on the environment due to their high energy and water consumption and garbage production (Fernandes, 2024). Furthermore, fragile habitats are disturbed and biodiversity is lost as a result of excessive and disorganised tourist infrastructure development. It is already difficult to implement sustainability initiatives in the face of several sociocultural problems, such as the eradication of indigenous traditions and the exploitation of local communities. Despite government programs like STCI aiming to address these challenges, progress is hindered by their uneven implementation and lack of local/situational understanding. Low ability to handle waste disposal systems and inadequate usage of renewable energy and other climate-friendly fuels are further challenges. Efficiently balancing environmental preservation with economic development is a problem that needs political will and policies (Ghosh, 2024). Without immediate action, the country's unparalleled cultural and natural legacy might be irreparably damaged by the unchecked growth of the tourist sector. Sustainable tourist development that does not compromise environmental management or the sustainability principle requires concerted action from all relevant parties, including the public and commercial sectors as well as the local population.

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This investigation used a secondary research strategy by drawing heavily on previously collected and analysed material. Only reliable and authorised secondary data sources were consulted in order to get the necessary information. Due to the reliability of government websites in providing current statistics, reports, and policy documents, they surpassed all other sources as the primary data source. Moreover, by reviewing previously published research papers, articles, and pertinent institutional reports, the study aimed to get an in-depth understanding of the topic. The purpose of gathering this data was to better comprehend the topic's related trends, difficulties, and efforts. In order to ensure the correctness of the results, the selection of sources was done with an emphasis on authenticity and relevancy. The study's stated goal was to provide a thorough examination of a topic by

drawing on a variety of sources. This approach, the research focused on systematically reviewing existing literature, which reduced the need for original data gathering while still effectively answering the study's purpose.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Environmental Impact Assessment of Tourism in Sensitive Regions

Assessments of the environmental impacts of tourist development in India's Sundarbans, Himalayan belt, and Kaziranga National Park have shown difficult obstacles and negative consequences of tourism (Roy, 2020). Ferry traffic, which contributes to lead contamination and animal-human accidents, has caused significant environmental harm as a consequence of ecotourism in the Sundarbans Biosphere Reserve. Unregulated ecotourism has decimated animal populations and polluted water supplies, despite the fact that it provides much-needed revenue to local people. Pathania and Kumar (2024) discovered that mountains in Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand have degraded due to the excessive strain of mass tourism in popular destinations like Manali and Mussoorie.

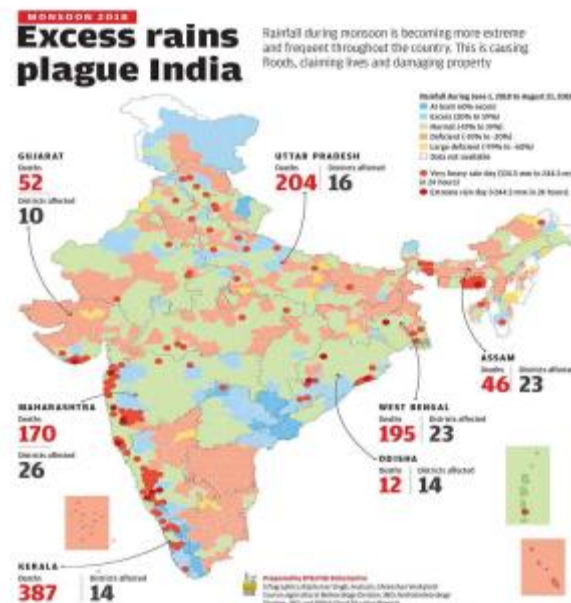


Figure 1: Excess rain plague in India (Source: downtoearth.org, 2024)

There is little money for ecotourism SMEs, which compounds the problem, and there is also poor infrastructure and uncontrolled businesses. Village stays are one way the government is trying to boost rural tourism and conservation, but the government isn't doing enough to regulate the industry and the guests aren't evenly distributed. But research from Kaziranga National Park shows that tourism may have good outcomes including increased revenue and awareness of the need to maintain the environment (Koch and kumar, 2021). Nevertheless, balancing economic growth with environmental protection must be a top goal in all locations.

### Socio-Cultural Implications on Local Communities and Heritage Sites

The socio-cultural influence on the local people and the legacy of India by means of tourism is a mixed bag. Historical forts, palaces, and the preservation of traditional arts have all benefited from tourism in Rajasthan's heritage towns, such as Jaipur and Udaipur. Craftspeople in the area, such as those who manufacture jewellery or block prints, have profited from the increase in visitors because of the demand for their products. As a result, cultural heritage, like performances of Kerala's Theyyam and Kathakali, has become famous around the world, boosted pride in the local culture, and even generated employment opportunities. The image below illustrates the States that were popular among Indian visitors during the year 2024. Uttar Pradesh reported a total amount of 318 million visitors, Tamil Nadu 219, Andhra Pradesh 193 (Florian Zandt, 2024). Tourists also flocked to the Indian states of Maharashtra (111 million), Rajasthan (108 million), Gujarat (136 million), and Karnataka (182 million). There is clearly a tourist boom in India, since 464 million people visited other states in 2024 (Florian Zandt, 2024). Although tourism is on the rise, it has brought with it some negative side effects, such as commercialisation and cultural erosion. The impact of mass tourism on Goa is immense. Negative effects have resulted from indigenous fishing groups' livelihoods changing and from the commercialisation of traditional events.



Figure 2: The Most Popular States for Indian Tourists

(Source: Florian Zandt, 2024)

Sheth (2023) notes that the deterioration of ancient sculptures of significant cultural value has been accompanied by the tremendous increase in visitors to UNESCO World Heritage Sites, such as the Ellora and Ajanta caves. As they adapt to contemporary life, the Ladakhi people's leisure customs have been harmed by the influx of tourists to Ladakh. International tourists often get the financial advantages of overtourism while the locals pay a

disproportionate share of the additional costs. Considering these cultural and social factors, one may say that tourism, as an economic activity, has both positive and negative effects on local cultures and communities.

### Evaluation of Government Policies on Sustainable Tourism

The actual implementations of the many laws and efforts aimed at promoting sustainable tourism in India vary from one region to another. Himachal Pradesh's ecotourism policy, for instance, encourages indigenous people to spearhead tourist initiatives that protect the Himalayan region's fragile nature. The figure below shows the estimated package prices for five days of chartering the Lakshadweep Samudram. The charges are organised hierarchically according on the passenger's accommodation class, whether they are adults or children (lakshadweeptourism, 2023). The total cost increases to Rs 37,500 for the Adult Diamond Class. The additional expense of Diamond Class for kids is Rs 33,000. Prices start at Rs 28,500 for adults and Rs 25,500 for children in the Gold Class. Transfer and tour fees are already included into these quotes (lakshadweeptourism, 2023).

Package rate for Five Days Lakshadweep Samudram Package.			
Class of Accommodation	Transportation Cost	Tour Charges	Total
Diamond Class (Adult)	Rs.25,000/-	Rs.12,500/-	Rs.37,500/-
Diamond Class(Child)	Rs.25,000/-	Rs.8,000/-	Rs.33,000/-
Gold Class (Adult)	Rs.18,000/-	Rs.10,500/-	Rs.28,500/-
Gold Class Class(Child)	Rs.18,000/-	Rs.7,500/-	Rs.25,500/-

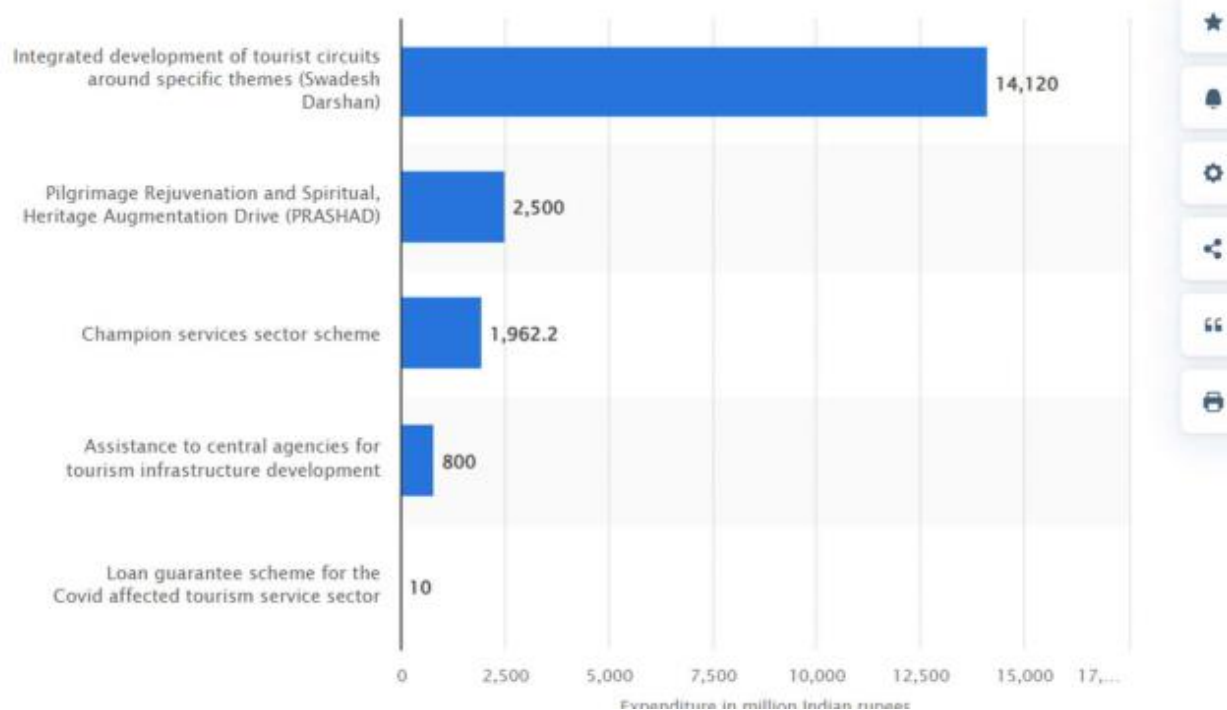
Figure 3: Package rate for Five Days Lakshadweep Samudram Package. (Source: lakshadweeptourism, 2023)

The policy's homestay programs have been successful in drawing in more tourists and providing much-needed jobs to rural residents. But obstacles like insufficient waste management systems and lax supervision prevent it from becoming anything more than that. Cultural practitioners in Rajasthan are also participating in the historic Tourism Scheme, which sponsors historic projects in the region. Crafts have been revitalised and new employment have been generated as a result of this (Kar et al. 2024). On the other hand, historic places have sometimes been over-commercialized due to a lack of adequate supervision of its commercialisation, diluting cultural character. With some success, cultural buildings like Delhi's Red Fort have been handed over to private companies under the nationwide Adopt a cultural Scheme (Sharma, 2021). But critics say the plan puts businesses ahead of residents and ignores their needs for community involvement. On the other hand, Kerala's Responsible Tourism effort has been groundbreaking in its approach to balancing cultural and environmental concerns. Through the active participation of local populations in the tourist industry, it strengthens rural economies and promotes traditional customs. Still, no one area of the state has managed to make sustainability a priority due to their unique cultural and environmental concerns. Practice remains inconsistent even after these precautions.

Although the Sundarbans Ecotourism Policy aims to increase tourism and preserve mangroves, it is hindered by inadequate infrastructure and a lack of visitor education about the region, leading to environmental pressures. The Sundarbans aren't the only places in India where this issue is plaguing the country; policies there fail to address the cultural appropriation and resource inequality that overtourism exacerbates, and the results demonstrate the necessity for more robust measures, improved infrastructure, and increased community participation in decisions pertaining to the country's insatiable reliance on tourism (Sharma, 2021). In order to address local issues and preserve local culture and the environment, sustainable tourism policies need to be tailored to each location.

### Resource Management and Infrastructure Challenges Identified

Sustainable tourism in India has challenges in areas that are both culturally and environmentally sensitive due to issues with infrastructure and resource management. The mangrove ecology and the people who rely on it are both negatively impacted by unregulated tourism in remote regions like the Sundarbans, where water supplies are drying up and pollution levels are rising. According to Sandhya Keelery (2024), when there are insufficient waste management systems in place, non-biodegradable elements like plastics end up in the environment, where they endanger animals and disrupt natural equilibrium. Inadequate planning for infrastructure has led to problems like traffic, water shortages, poorly handled solid waste, etc., in underdeveloped Himalayan destinations like Manali and Ladakh. Overtourism and unsustainable reliance on local resources are major problems in these regions, and the lack of progress in sewage facility construction has a negative impact on water quality and human and environmental health.





**Figure 4: Expenditure of infrastructure in the tourism sector across India in the financial year 2024, by type(in million Indian rupees)**

The issue is exacerbated by the unchecked development of tourist lodgings, which causes erosion, landslides, and habitat loss. Goa is experiencing a similar situation, with its beaches and mangrove ecosystems being weakened by uncontrolled coastal development. As the coastline gets overrun by tourist infrastructure, local fishing villages are left with limited possibilities due to the development of tourism. The inhabitants also have a hard time getting the water they need since hotels and resorts have a stranglehold on the water resources. Unsustainable resource extraction has pushed the Rajasthan area, particularly its dry districts like Jaisalmer, to the brink of disaster, but the problem is much more widespread than just water. Littering is a major problem at historical monuments like Jantar Mantar because of the lack of effective waste management procedures in the area (Mathur et al., 2024). India must embark on a tourism growth drive. Such economic advances, however, must be undertaken with environmental protections in mind. Additionally, there are a number of limitations that hinder the growth of sustainable tourism, including a lack of renewable energy, inadequate public transportation, and outdated road infrastructure. This necessitates green infrastructure investment that does not damage India's cultural and environmental legacy while helping local people prosper, as well as efficient resource management strategies and stricter enforcement of environmental laws.

**Proposed Strategies for Enhancing Sustainable Tourism Practices**

A systematic strategy is necessary for each of India's regions in order to tackle the complex issue of sustainable tourist growth. In order to stop the loss of natural resources, community-based tourism could provide locals more authority. Training local populations on eco-tourism practices to encourage fair income is one opportunity in Kerala, where the Responsible Tourism Initiative has the potential to be expanded up. In Ladakh, similar strategies may be used to restrict the expansion of homestay programs to the development of tourism while also preserving the indigenous culture and ecology (Vogel and Field, 2020). In densely populated regions like Goa and Manali, improved waste management systems are very necessary. Waste separation at the source, recycling facilities in tourist regions, and pagan education may greatly reduce the likelihood of devastation. Other than cars, people in these areas may reduce their carbon footprints by using electric buses and bicycles. To manage tourism and prevent resource overexploitation, it is important to conduct capacity assessments of vulnerable ecosystems, such as the Sundarbans and Kaziranga (Areendran et al. 2020). These regions should be protected against unplanned development that would harm animal habitats and scenic views by enforcing efficient restrictions that do not allow for their encroachment. This also implies that new rules are required to enhance historic tourism. It is possible to incentivise cultural preservation and environmental sustainability among Rajasthan's historic property owners. Proposed subsidies and tax breaks to restore protected buildings in an energy efficient manner would also be beneficial in the long run. Efficiency may be further enhanced by partnerships with IT businesses (Kumar and Shekhar, 2020). To help management redirect vacationers to less impacted locations, AI can monitor tourist activity

and identify hotspots with a high concentration of visitors. One more thing: let's not forget to remind people how to act appropriately when it comes to tourism and its growth. Building a healthy ecosystem for future generations may be achieved by promoting a knowledge of cultural context and by striving to have little influence on nature. India can preserve its cultural and environmental treasures while boosting its economy via tourism if it follows these steps.

### CONCLUSION

Finally, this research evaluates sustainable tourism in India by looking at its successes and failures over the years. There has been a lack of universal adoption of many government policies and community-based initiatives, despite the fact that they have brought about some good change. We need stronger regulations and improved management techniques to protect environmentally fragile areas like the Sundarbans and the Himalayas from environmental neglect. Similarly, the proportional impact of tourism on local economies and social practices is shown by the developments in Goa and Ladakh. The cultural qualities and integrity of historic sites like the Ajanta caves and Rajasthan's forts have been jeopardised due to their excessive commercialisation. While there are some well-documented successes, such as Kerala's Responsible Tourism Initiative, other political arrangements paint a picture of overall failure. Sustainable development is elusive due to resource scarcity, inadequate infrastructure, and ineffective monitoring. Community development, technology, and social campaigns are all put up as potential methods for practical implementation; nevertheless, it is emphasised that they should be implemented correctly and that governmental support is necessary. According to this study, in order to accomplish sustainable tourism in India, a broader view that involves all stakeholders is needed to make sure that the economic development that comes from tourism doesn't harm the natural and cultural ecosystems. Otherwise, India's natural and cultural treasures, as well as the resources upon which its tourist economy is built, are at risk in the long run.

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