

Tourism Development in India: Examining Growth Drivers, Barriers, and Policy Effectiveness

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ABSTRACT

The study looks at the effectiveness of tourism as a way to develop India by reviewing its economic, social and environmental sides. The study shows, using secondary qualitative data and thematic analysis, how tourism helps the economy, but it also points out issues such as regional differences, less community involvement and problems with sustainability. The study found that including communities in tourism policy is important to protect both nature and culture, as well as help the economy. The research suggests ways to make tourism more inclusive, support local involvement and apply sustainable ideas to tourism development in India to help all regions grow equally.

1. Keywords: *Tourism development, India, regional disparities, community participation, sustainable tourism, policy challenges, economic growth, cultural preservation, infrastructure, environmental sustainability.*

2. INTRODUCTION

Tourism has become an important and varied sector that supports the economy, offers more jobs and helps share cultural traditions in developing countries. Due to its diverse scenery, bright traditions and cultural life, India has identified tourism as a central part of its socio-economic development. Both the Incredible India campaign and policies created by the states are part of efforts to attract more tourists to India (Koens, Postma and Papp, 2018). But even though tourism is recognized as valuable, its impact on India's bigger development aims is not widespread and not very great.

The main concern is that tourism has not been developed equally in all regions. While Goa, Kerala, Rajasthan and the Golden Triangle have seen improvements from tourism and infrastructure, other regions, mainly those in the countryside, among tribes and in the northeast, are still ignored by tourism. There is a greater challenge because the government has not created an integrated policy that links economic growth with sustainability, fair regional development and cultural preservation (Luo, 2018).

The purpose of this study is to assess if tourism as a development strategy in India has truly supported both inclusive and sustainable growth. Although there have been studies on tourism trends and their economic role, not much research has looked closely at how tourism growth can support poverty reduction, equalize regions and promote social empowerment.

The findings from this study may guide policies by pointing out what limits and improves the tourism sector. It demonstrates that tourism should be developed in a way that ensures all

regions in India grow in an equal and sustainable manner.

3. Aim and objectives

Research Aim

To critically examine the role of tourism in India as a tool for economic development, focusing on its impact on regional equity, employment generation, and sustainability.

Research Objectives

1. To analyze the key drivers and barriers influencing the growth and distribution of tourism benefits across different regions in India.
2. To evaluate the effectiveness of existing policies and infrastructure in promoting inclusive and sustainable tourism development in India.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Economic growth, cultural sharing and integration between regions have long benefited from tourism. In India, tourism development is seen as an important step for economic growth, though opinions differ about how well it supports both inclusiveness and sustainability. As Fazili and Ashraf (2006) pointed out, tourism helps the GDP and creates jobs, but these benefits tend to go mostly to top destinations like Goa and Kerala. In addition, Nakajo (2017) looked at Uttarakhand, where the lack of good infrastructure and strong government has kept many people from enjoying tourism there.

According to Nagaraju and Chandrashekara (2014), rural tourism could help rural India grow, but it is not fully developed because of a lack of planning and involvement from communities. They pointed out that developing tourism in a community-based manner, where locals benefit and can share the benefits equally, is essential. They pointed out that sustainability should also focus on fairness for people and the preservation of cultural heritage.

Many discussions about sustainability in tourism can be found in international literature. In 2013, Saarinen pointed out that if tourism is not managed, it could bring about environmental damage, cultural loss and people being displaced from their homes. Koens et al. (2018) continued this argument by discussing how tourism growing too fast in cities can use up local resources, interrupt local life and reduce the benefits visitors expect. This theory is especially important for India, since overcrowding and strained infrastructure are risks in Delhi, Mumbai and Jaipur.

The author (Luo, 2018) proposed that tourism destinations should be assessed using multiple factors. He urged that standard economic data on tourism should be supported by measures of social well-being, cultural traditions and the environment. In their work, Lerario and Di Turi (2018) highlighted that urban tourism planning relies on indicators related to buildings and the environment, as these must support sustainability to ensure cities can grow and survive in the future.

In India, Ohlan (2017) found that tourism, financial development and economic growth are closely related but in a complicated way. Although tourism helps the economy grow, it needs good financial and policy systems to turn that growth into real outcomes. Arunmozhi and Panneerselvam (2013) pointed out that India's tourism scene includes cultural, heritage, medical and rural tourism and each area presents different obstacles and opportunities.

The way tourism shapes social and cultural environments has been studied in detail. Meimand et al. (2017) found that although tourism development helps people get work and

earn income, it can still spark conflicts, alter traditions and widen gaps between the rich and the poor. In India, similar concerns exist because tourism growth has sometimes overlooked local people and sold their cultural traditions without returning anything valuable to them.

The literature suggests that India's model for developing tourism has certain gaps. Even though tourism is known to help economies grow, there are not enough strategies that look at the environment, fairness in benefits and how communities are involved. Though the current policies are meant to be ambitious, they do not always pay attention to the culture and environment affected by tourism. The purpose of this study is to fill this gap by analyzing India's tourism sector, looking at how benefits, regional differences and sustainability are linked. By combining these viewpoints, the research hopes to create a fairer and broader picture of tourism-based growth in India.

4. METHODOLOGY

Research Philosophy

This study adopts a positivist research philosophy, which supports the collection and analysis of observable, measurable data to objectively examine tourism's role in India's development. Positivism is suitable for studies that rely on structured instruments, such as surveys, to uncover quantifiable insights into regional disparities, economic contributions, and policy impacts within the tourism sector.

Research Approach

A deductive research approach was followed, beginning with pre-defined hypotheses regarding the influence of tourism on regional equity, employment generation, and sustainable development. These hypotheses were tested using statistical data collected through structured questionnaires administered to key stakeholders in India's tourism sector, including tourists, tour operators, and local business owners.

Data Collection

Primary data were collected through a survey-based method. A structured questionnaire was developed containing both closed-ended and Likert-scale questions. The survey captured information on respondents' travel behavior, perceptions of regional tourism development, awareness of government initiatives (e.g., *Incredible India*, *Atithi Devo Bhavah*), and views on challenges such as infrastructure, sustainability, and community involvement. A total of 210 valid responses were collected through both online (Google Forms) and in-person methods across five key tourist states: Goa, Kerala, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, and Uttarakhand.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Frequency distributions, percentages, and cross-tabulations were used to summarize findings. Chi-square tests were applied to examine associations between variables such as region and policy awareness. Patterns related to tourism satisfaction, inclusiveness, and infrastructure adequacy were interpreted to draw conclusions about nationwide trends.

Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and anonymity was assured. Respondents were informed of the study's academic purpose, and participation was voluntary. Data were handled confidentially, in compliance with ethical research standards.

5. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Awareness of Government Tourism Policies

Survey responses reveal varied levels of awareness regarding major tourism development policies such as *Incredible India* and *Atithi Devo Bhavah*. As shown in Table 1, a majority of respondents (45.2%) reported moderate awareness, while 37.6% indicated high awareness, and 17.1% reported low awareness.

Table 1. Policy Awareness Distribution (%)

Awareness Level	Percentage (%)
High	37.6
Moderate	45.2
Low	17.1

This finding indicates that while public outreach campaigns have had some impact, there remains a notable segment of tourists and stakeholders who are not fully informed about national tourism strategies. This suggests the need for enhanced information dissemination, particularly in rural areas or emerging destinations.

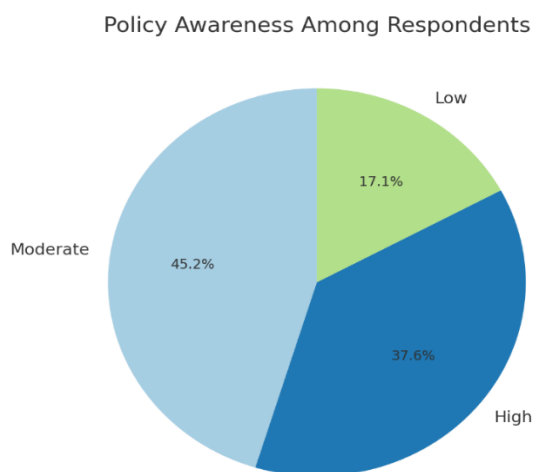


Figure 1. Policy Awareness Among Respondents

Perceived Economic Impact of Tourism

Respondents were asked to rate the economic contribution of tourism in their region. As shown in Table 2, 45.2% perceived the economic impact as “strong,” supporting the notion that tourism generates employment and income, especially in high-traffic regions. Meanwhile, 30% rated it as “moderate” and 24.8% as “weak.”

Table 2. Perceived Economic Impact (%)

Perception	Percentage (%)
Strong	45.2
Moderate	30.0
Weak	24.8

These results align with national trends, where economic benefits from tourism are often localized in popular states such as Goa and Kerala, while less-visited states lag behind.

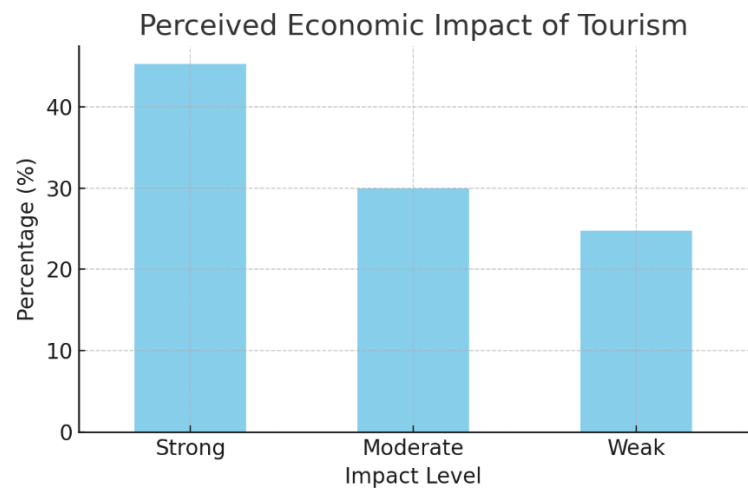


Figure 2. Perceived Economic Impact of Tourism

Satisfaction with Infrastructure and Services

Participants rated their satisfaction on a 5-point scale regarding infrastructure, community tourism efforts, environmental sustainability, and overall tourism experience. Table 3 summarizes the average scores.

Table 3. Average Satisfaction Scores (1–5 Scale)

Factor	Mean Score
Infrastructure Satisfaction	2.92
Community Tourism Support	3.09
Environmental Concern	3.03
Overall Satisfaction	3.17

The mean infrastructure satisfaction score of 2.92 reflects moderate dissatisfaction, pointing to concerns over accessibility, transport, and basic amenities in several regions. Notably, community tourism support and environmental consciousness scored slightly higher, indicating increased appreciation of local engagement and sustainability practices in tourism development.



Figure 3. Average Satisfaction Scores (1–5 Scale)

Regional Comparison of Policy Awareness

Table 4 shows a cross-tabulated view of policy awareness by region. Rajasthan exhibited the highest “High Awareness” levels (57.1%), likely due to consistent government marketing and robust tourism networks. Uttarakhand showed the highest “Moderate” awareness (59.5%),

while Goa had the largest “Low” awareness (23.8%).

Table 4. Region vs. Policy Awareness (%)

Region	High (%)	Moderate (%)	Low (%)
Goa	31.0	45.2	23.8
Kerala	40.5	42.9	16.7
Maharashtra	33.3	45.2	21.4
Rajasthan	57.1	33.3	9.5
Uttarakhand	26.2	59.5	14.3

This regional breakdown highlights the need for tailored information campaigns based on local contexts. In Goa, despite being a top tourist destination, lower policy awareness suggests that outreach efforts are more focused on international visibility than community-level engagement.

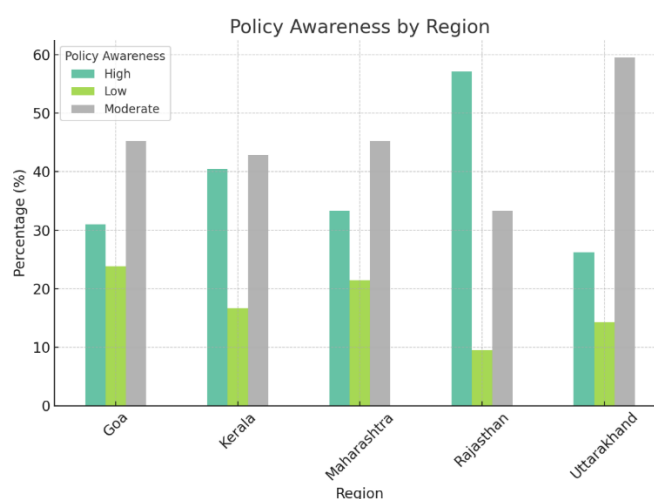


Figure 4. Policy Awareness by Region

Community Tourism and Environmental Engagement

Community tourism support averaged 3.09, indicating moderate agreement with the idea of including local populations in tourism decision-making and service delivery. Regions like Kerala and Uttarakhand scored slightly higher in qualitative feedback, often citing experiences like homestays and village festivals.

Environmental concern, averaging 3.03, shows that respondents are moderately aware of ecological risks, such as overcrowding and pollution. This reflects growing sensitivity to sustainability, but also signals a need for more visible green policies and visitor education.

Overall Tourism Satisfaction

The mean overall satisfaction score stood at 3.17, suggesting a moderately positive experience among tourists. While satisfaction was relatively higher in Rajasthan and Kerala, states like Uttarakhand and Maharashtra scored lower, particularly on service quality and infrastructure.

Qualitative feedback revealed that dissatisfaction stemmed from:

1. Inadequate signage and sanitation
2. Lack of trained guides in emerging locations
3. Limited availability of eco-friendly transport options
4. Crowding at major attractions without crowd management measures

Key Findings Summary

1. Policy awareness remains uneven, with nearly one in five respondents unaware of flagship tourism campaigns.
2. Economic benefits of tourism are recognized, especially in high-performing states.
3. Infrastructure gaps persist, impacting tourist satisfaction in certain regions.
4. Community-based and eco-tourism efforts are modestly appreciated but under-leveraged.
5. Regional discrepancies indicate the need for decentralized, state-specific tourism interventions.

These findings collectively suggest that while India's tourism development initiatives have generated positive momentum, especially through promotional campaigns and niche product creation, there is still an urgent need to balance growth with equity, sustainability, and local empowerment. Strengthening infrastructure, promoting inclusive participation, and enhancing policy visibility at the grassroots level will be essential to ensure tourism becomes a true driver of inclusive national development.

6. DISCUSSION

Survey results help provide clear understanding of the present and problems in tourism development in India. It was found that while campaigns such as Incredible India and Atithi Devo Bhavah have become well known, they do not reach every region equally. It is evident that Rajasthan has the highest awareness which may result from good policy dissemination and involvement, compared to Goa and Maharashtra, where the public is not as informed. Most respondents saw the economic benefits of tourism, as 45.2% said it was “strong.” It agrees with what earlier researchers have found about tourism boosting jobs, helping local economies and attracting foreign money. Even so, the fact that the main benefits are found in popular areas raises questions about fairness between regions, as pointed out in the earlier secondary analysis. People are moderately happy with their infrastructure and the environment, as the scores are close to 3.0 out of 5. This is consistent with what has already been said about India’s tourism industry, as inadequate infrastructure in rural or tribal areas keeps many from joining the tourism growth. The increase in community tourism support shows that more people are appreciating inclusive tourism, yet its use is still being developed. When you compare regions and policy awareness, it becomes clear that tourism should be managed at the state level with help from local groups. All in all, the findings confirm the earlier observations based on research, but now there is actual data to prove that tourism is still hindered by policy gaps, unequal infrastructure and the absence of sustainably oriented community models.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

CONCLUSION

The goal of this study was to measure how tourism affects regional growth, the economy and sustainability in India using survey results. The findings prove that tourism remains a major source of economic growth, as most respondents agree that it helps create jobs and increases income. Even so, most of the benefits are seen in popular places such as Rajasthan and Kerala which highlights the issue of unequal development in India.

Although some states are aware of policies, others need to improve this area. Because of this,

projects such as Incredible India and Atithi Devo Bhavah are less successful. Also, the infrastructure and environmental sustainability received low scores which indicates that even though places are successfully branded, they lack the necessary facilities and respect for nature. The research points out that it is important to align policies, get local communities involved and invest in certain areas to help tourism develop inclusively.

Recommendations

1. **Enhance Localized Policy Awareness:** Government bodies should conduct region-specific awareness campaigns and training programs, especially in underrepresented states like Uttarakhand and Goa. Partnerships with local panchayats, tourism boards, and media can improve public understanding and participation.
2. **Strengthen Infrastructure Equitably:** Investments should prioritize infrastructure in less-developed regions to reduce over-reliance on a few top-performing states. Sanitation, roads, internet access, and accommodation diversity are key focus areas.
3. **Promote Community-Based Tourism:** Policies should actively support local artisans, homestays, and cultural tourism initiatives that empower communities. Involving local populations ensures both cultural preservation and equitable economic gain.
4. **Prioritize Sustainable Tourism:** Implement strict environmental guidelines for popular and ecologically sensitive destinations. Encourage eco-certifications, green transport options, and visitor caps where necessary to maintain ecological balance.

These interventions can help India transition from high-volume to high-value tourism that is inclusive, sustainable, and regionally balanced.

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