INDIA AS A TOURISM HUB

Building a Globally Competitive, Inclusive and Sustainable Visitor Economy

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Executive Summary

India is steadily emerging as a major tourism hub, supported by its civilisational heritage, natural diversity, spiritual appeal and expanding visitor economy. The PIB backgrounder highlights stronger destination infrastructure, improved connectivity, digital platforms, travel facilitation and global promotion as key elements of a higher-value visitor economy, alongside sustainable and inclusive growth that supports local livelihoods, community participation and heritage preservation.

Indicator	Details
Domestic Tourist Visits (2024)	2.9 billion
International Tourist Arrivals (2025)	Around 2.02 crore
Tourism Contribution to GDP (FY 2023-24)	₹15.73 lakh crore; 5.22% of the economy
Tourism & Hospitality Employment (2023-24)	84.6 million jobs
International Tourism Receipts (2025)	Nearly USD 31.7 billion

Tourism as a National Growth Engine

Tourism supports a wide ecosystem of hospitality, transport, handicrafts, food services, wellness, culture and local enterprises. The source describes the sector as an important contributor to economic growth, employment and regional development, with domestic travel at record levels and international arrivals continuing to recover.

India’s Tourism Advantage

India’s tourism strength lies in the breadth of experiences available across cultural, natural, spiritual and wellness tourism. The country can serve multiple traveller segments throughout the year through its combination of tangible and intangible heritage.

- 44 UNESCO World Heritage Sites reflecting India’s cultural and natural heritage.
- 106 National Parks and 18 Biosphere Reserves supporting wildlife and nature-based tourism.
- A wide network of pilgrimage centres, heritage monuments, museums, forests, beaches, islands and cultural landscapes.
- Handicrafts, cuisine, festivals, performing arts, Yoga and Ayurveda that attract visitors from India and overseas.

Major Tourism Segments

Spiritual and Pilgrimage Tourism

India’s major pilgrimage destinations include Char Dham, Kashi, Ayodhya, Bodh Gaya, Amritsar, Tirupati and Puri. Continued investment in connectivity, infrastructure and visitor amenities is strengthening spiritual tourism.

Buddhist Circuits and Cultural Linkages

Destinations associated with the life of Lord Buddha and shared civilisational linkages reinforce India’s role as an important centre for religious and cultural tourism.

Heritage and Cultural Tourism

Forts, palaces, temples, archaeological sites, museums and historic cities are complemented by living traditions such as classical dance, music, festivals, handicrafts and regional cuisines.

Wellness, Yoga and Medical Tourism

Yoga, Ayurveda, naturopathy and traditional healing systems form the foundation of India's wellness offering. World-class healthcare facilities and comparatively cost-effective medical treatment further support medical tourism.

Eco-tourism and Wildlife Tourism

National parks, tiger reserves, wetlands, mangroves, biosphere reserves and Himalayan landscapes support wildlife safaris, birdwatching, trekking, turtle conservation trails and nature interpretation while creating livelihood opportunities for local communities.

Rural, Homestay and Community-based Tourism

Homestays, village walks, traditional cuisine, handicrafts, agricultural experiences and cultural interactions allow travellers to experience local life while generating direct income for rural households, artisans and community enterprises.

MICE Tourism

India is strengthening its Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions tourism through modern convention infrastructure, improved connectivity and experience in hosting major international events.

Coastal, Cruise, Adventure and Experiential Tourism

With more than 7,500 km of coastline, islands, rivers, deserts and mountain landscapes, India supports cruise tourism, water sports, trekking, mountaineering, river rafting, desert safaris, film tourism and other experiential offerings.

G20: Showcasing India's Tourism Potential

India's G20 Presidency provided a global platform for destination promotion. More than 200 G20 meetings were organised across over 60 cities, showcasing heritage monuments, crafts, regional cuisines, cultural performances and tourism experiences. The multi-city approach promoted lesser-known destinations and demonstrated India's capacity to host world-class international events.

Infrastructure-Led Destination Development

India's tourism development strategy is moving from isolated attractions towards integrated destination ecosystems with seamless connectivity, visitor infrastructure and immersive experiences. Several flagship programmes are driving this shift.

Programme / Initiative	PIB Status
Swadesh Darshan	76 projects sanctioned with investment of over ₹5,295.24 crore across 14 thematic circuits; 75 physically completed.
Swadesh Darshan 2.0	53 projects worth ₹2,207.08 crore sanctioned for destination-centric, sustainable and experience-based tourism.
PRASHAD	54 projects worth over ₹1,726.24 crore sanctioned at major pilgrimage and heritage destinations.
SASCI	40 projects across 23 States approved with an outlay of ₹3,295.76 crore for iconic tourist centres.
CBDD	37 projects worth ₹687.99 crore sanctioned for high-potential spiritual and eco-tourism destinations.

Connectivity as Tourism Infrastructure

Highway expansion, railway-station modernisation, Vande Bharat trains, UDAN regional air connectivity, airport development, last-mile connectivity, e-buses and improved public amenities are making tourism destinations more accessible. Viksit UDAN, with an outlay of over ₹28,840 crore, is expected to support development of more than 100 new aerodromes and 200 helipads in Tier-2, Tier-3 and remote regions.

Ease of Travel and Digital Tourism

Making Travel Easier

- e-Tourist Visa facility extended to nationals of 175 countries.
- Entry permitted through 33 designated airports, 19 seaports and 4 land ports.
- Expansion of visa categories and designated ports of entry under the e-Visa framework.
- Continued simplification of documentation, digital authorisation and travel procedures.

NIDHI+ Digital Ecosystem

The National Integrated Database of Hospitality Industry (NIDHI+) provides a unified digital platform for registration, recognition and classification of tourism service providers. It supports online processing, integrated payments and transparent approvals while improving ease of doing business.

Innovation Driving Tourism Growth

The travel and tourism sector had 1,497 DPIIT-recognised startups as of 17 April 2023 across 262 districts, employing nearly 13,919 people. About 58% were located in Tier II and Tier III cities. The source highlights activity in travel-tech, online booking, homestays, rural and experiential tourism, smart mobility and AI-enabled travel planning.

Sustainable and Inclusive Tourism

The source presents sustainability as a long-term principle for tourism development, with greater emphasis on responsible travel, community participation, skill development and destination management. Travel for LiFE and nature-based experiences such as trekking, birdwatching and turtle trails are intended to distribute visitor flows while supporting conservation and local livelihoods.

- SDG 8.9: Sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products.
- SDG 12.B: Tools to monitor sustainable tourism impacts.
- SDG 14.7: Economic benefits through sustainable use of marine resources, including tourism.

Future Outlook

India’s tourism vision extends beyond increasing visitor arrivals towards a resilient, high-value tourism ecosystem. Investment in destination infrastructure, connectivity, digital transformation, travel facilitation, skill development and sustainable destination management is intended to strengthen global competitiveness while keeping growth inclusive and beneficial to local communities.