

IMPORTANCE OF WORLD HERITAGE SITES: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES IN AGRA REGION, INDIA

Dr. Sunaina Charlet Nickels*

ABSTRACT

Tourism is one of the offshoots of Commerce and Industry and has been an integral part of Indian culture and tradition. The Tourism industry is a multibillion industry in India. It's potential and needs an indicator in terms of its economic magnitudes. All types of tourism in India have registered growth in the last decade ever since the Indian government decided to boost revenues from the tourism sector by projecting the country as the ultimate tourist spot. It is the world's largest and fast growing labor intensive industry in the nation with gigantic potentials for its further expansion and diversification. It also considers the effects of tourism economic growth in India, major players in the economic growth, role of Indian tourism industry in GDP, contribution of Indian tourism industry to foreign exchange, FDI and employment generation. Travel and tourism not only provides livelihoods for both rural and urban communities, but also has the capacity when planned, developed and managed properly – to enhance community relations and build bridges of understanding and peace between nations. The present study describes important World Heritage Sites in Agra, India and analyses the factors contributing to their popularity among global tourists. The study provides an in depth account and tourism growth potential of the Taj Mahal, the Agra Fort, and Fatehpur Sikri, in Agra-Circle (as per Archaeological Survey of India Classification).

Keywords: *Tourism, Historical, Spiritual, Global, Heritage.*

Introduction

The social, political and economic world has developed at a rapid pace. The encroaching globalization of the world and increasing use of technology with its inherent liberalization, have altered the way business is conducted. In doing so, these factors have affected the relationship between people and the environment. The inevitable shift towards 'globalization' is transforming workplaces, job markets, lifestyles, communities, industries and markets. Travel and tourism can play a vital role in balancing these forces. It not only provides the livelihoods for both rural and urban communities, but has the capacity when planned, developed and managed properly – to enhance community relations and build bridges of understanding and peace between nations.

The word TOURISM is derived from the term TOUR which according to Oxford English Dictionary means *a journey from place to place or time to be spent at a station or rambling excursion*. The Webster's International Dictionary defines tour as *a journey in which one returns to starting point*. The word Tourism means operation of tours as business such that provision of things and services attracts tourists. Tourism has been a major social phenomenon of societies all over the world. It is driven by the natural urge of every human being for new experience, and the desire to be both educated and entertained. The motivation for tourism is also activated by religious and business interests. The spread of education has fostered a desire to know more about different parts of the globe. The basic human thirst for new experience and knowledge has become stronger as communication barriers are being overcome by technological advances. Progresses in air transport and development of tourist facilities have also encouraged people to venture beyond their regional/national boundaries.

* Independent Researcher.

One of the important motivations for travel is industrial development of an area. Most international travelers are interested in the economy of the region. They would like to see the industries and manufacturing of product in their country of visit. Visits of the foreigners to industries will develop an interest in the culture of the region and will also allure them to purchase local products upon their return home. All types of tourism in India have registered growth in the last decade ever since the Indian government decided to boost revenues from the tourism sector by projecting the country as the ultimate tourist spot. The reason why India has been doing well in all types of tourism is that it has always been known for its hospitality, uniqueness, and charm- attributes that have been attracting foreign travelers to India in hordes. The Indian government in order to boost tourism of various kinds has set up the Ministry of Tourism and Culture. This ministry recently launched a campaign called 'Incredible India' in order to encourage different types of tourism in India. The current study was undertaken to understand the importance of World Heritage sites in different countries and potentialities of tourism in India particularly in Agra city. It also examines the problems and prospects of tourism in Agra and the impact of Covid-19 on the same.

Research Methodology

The study is based on primary as well as secondary data. Primary data was collected by sample survey. Convenience sampling method was used for data collection. A sample survey is a questionnaire based survey; the questionnaire form consisted of both open ended and closed ended questions covering basic information about the tourist, tourist interest, review, liking and problems of study area. Some Covid-19 based questions were also included to gain a tourist's perspective. The study was conducted over a period for six months from June to December 2020. Fifty responses were obtained from tourists, both inbound as well as outbound of Agra. Data analysis was done by percentage method.

Extensive literature relating to the concept of economic significance of tourism industry in India and related subject was collected and reviewed to understand previous research work and existing research gap. The published literature on tourism concept, origin, destinations, growth, problems and measures etc. is vast and spread across books, articles, magazines, reports and websites. Many research studies have also been conducted by experts, academicians and organizations working for the betterment of Tourism Industry. Data was also collected through various reports of trusted sources such as UNWTO Economic Impact Report, WTTC Annual travel and Tourism Report, World Economic Forum Report, Ministry of tourism, Government of India reports etc. Additionally, some data is based on interviews and interactions on related topic from a sample of global tourists, tour and travel operators, hoteliers, guides, ASI, ADA and Government Tourism Departments (Centre & State) other agencies, NGOs, journalists, academicians and business leaders of the city. The information gathered from various authentic sources are analyzed and reported in the study

Results and Discussion

World Heritage Sites in different countries and potentialities of tourism in the study area

Throughout the ages, Tourism has been a feature of societies across the globe. It most probably originated for religious and business interests, but the natural human urge to explore and experience has been the driving force. As means of conveyance advanced, people could travel farther and in greater comfort. The motivation for tourism was also activated by the desire to know more about different parts of the globe. The basic human thirst for new experience and knowledge has become stronger as communication barriers are being overcome by technological advances.

World Heritage Sites play an important role in developing tourism in any country as they are main source of attraction for tourists. They have a positive economic and social impact, establishing and reinforcing identity. They help preserve culture and heritage and are instrumental in facilitating harmony and understanding among people, while renewing tourism. World Heritage sites are located across all continents except Antarctica. Our analysis of sites in Australia, Greece, Guatemala, India, Japan, Kenya, Malaysia, New Zealand and the Russian Federation indicates that cultural and spiritual significance of sacred and natural sites is under-recognized, especially in the case of natural World Heritage sites. In addition, Indigenous and religious custodians are frequently excluded from site management and governance. Recent worldwide initiatives at world heritage forums, especially UNESCO, have increased the importance of architectural heritage. Architectural heritage includes built structures that are of outstanding value of natural and cultural identity and require conservation, preservation, presentation and transmission to the future generations. Moreover, heritage sites suffer theft, vandalism, natural decay and other socio-cultural harms. One of the state-of-the-art methodologies is digital preservation of the historic sites. Amongst the various available computer technologies, photogrammetric is the quickest and most cost-effective method that can be used for digital preservation.

Our study area Agra is world renowned as the City of the Taj. It is an ancient site on the river Yamuna, between Mathura and Surajpur (Bateshwar), two sites of antiquity. The region originally formed part of the Surasena Empire, with Mathura as its capital. As one of the most important cultural units of India, it was famous as Braj, the play-ground of Krishna of the Mahabharata, Bhagwat-Gita and Bhagwat-Purana fame. Ancient relics, including sculptures and architectural parts have been found in and around Agra, on a large scale. Particularly noticeable are the ancient bricks of the Mauryan age (c.3rd century B.C.) which were excavated in the Agra Fort". A brief description of World Heritage Sites in Agra follows:

- **The Taj Mahal**

It was built by the Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan in the memory of his favorite wife Mumtaz Mahal. It took 22 years to complete. The emperor took tremendous interest in the construction of the monument and employed the finest of skilled artisans to inlay the white marble edifice. Though it looks majestic at any hour of the day, its beauty and charm are best manifested on a full moon night.

- **The Agra Fort**

It is a world renowned heritage site. Emperor Akbar began the construction of the imposing Fort in 1565. But it was his grandson Shah Jahan who gave it some of the finest buildings from 1630 to 1655. The Fort boasts of the Moti Masjid, Diwan-e-Aam, Jahangir Mahal and Khas Mahal. The Red stone Fort has four gates, of which Delhi Gate is the most impressive.

- **Fatehpur Sikri**

The Royal City- Akbar's capital was completed in 1572. Earlier, Akbar had come here to seek the blessings of Sufi Saint Salim Chisti. In 1569, the prophecy of the saint came true and he was blessed with a son. Among its many imposing buildings are palaces, Diwan-e-Khas, Panch Mahal, tomb of Salim Chisti and a 54 meter high gateway known as the Buland Darwaza.

The city of Taj is endowed with world famous monuments- The Taj itself, Agra Fort, Fatehpur Sikri, Itmad-ud-Daula and Sikandra. If we take the Brij circuit also, Mathura and Vrindavan could also be included in the heritage places of foreign tourist interest.

Types of Tourism

There are different types of tourism categorized on the basis of purpose destination, time etc.

- **Religious Tourism**

The major chunk of Indian population belongs to Hinduism. Also, religion such as Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism originated here. In addition, Muslims, Christians, Parsis and Jews also exist. Thus, India can well be described as the land of religions.

The abodes of gods in the Himalayas. Haridwar the Gateway to Heaven on the banks of holy Ganges, the temples of Mathura and Banaras, the sculpture of Khajuraho, the caves at Ajanta and Ellora all these beckon the traveler to come and enjoy their beauty. Large numbers of people go on religious pilgrimages to places well known in the religious literature. India is famous for its temples and that is the reason why pilgrimage (religious) tourism is increasing most rapidly among the different types of tourism in the country. Places for tourists to visit in India for pilgrimage are Vaishno Devi, Golden Temple, Char Dham, Mathura Vrindavan, Tirupati, Shirdi, Bodh Gaya, Ajmer, Goa etc.

- **Cultural Tourism**

Cultural Tourism covers all those aspects of travel where by people learn about each other's way of life and thought. Personal and international contacts have always been an important way of spreading ideas about other cultures. Tourism is an important means of promoting cultural relations and international cooperation. Development of cultural factors within a nation can be viewed as a means of enhancing resources for tourism. The whole way in which a country represents itself to a tourist can be considered its cultural factors. The food, drinks, hospitality, manufactured and hand-crafted products as well as other aspects of a nation's life, appeal to travelers and visitors. Theatres, libraries, museums and other national institutions are a great asset for attracting the interest of visitors. Museum and Monuments are among expected features in tourist itineraries.

India is a large and popular country with a great past and great tradition. It can boast of some four thousand years of civilized life and as such it must be ranked as one of the greatest civilization of the world. The various fairs and festivals that tourists can visit in India are the Pushkar fair, Taj Mahotsav, and Suraj Kund mela etc.

The Monumental Heritage of India includes art and architecture. Most tourists from Europe and America have an interest in this aspect. Our Monumental Heritage can be divided into four principal subject groups.

- Hindu Monuments
- Buddhist Monuments
- Indo-Islamic Monuments; and
- Monuments of European and British Association with India.

Adventure Tourism

As a kind of tourism, adventure tourism has recently grown in India. This involves exploring remote areas and exotic locales as well as engaging in various adventure activities. In India, tourists prefer to go for trekking to places like Ladakh, Sikkim, and the Himalayas. Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Jammu and Kashmir are popular for the skiing facilities they offer. White water rafting is also catching on in India and tourists flock to places such as Utrakhland, Assam, and Arunachal Pradesh for the adrenalin-packed activity.

Wildlife Tourism

India has a rich forest cover which is the habitat of some beautiful and exotic species of wildlife – some of which that are even endangered and very rare. This has boosted wildlife tourism in India. The places where a foreign tourist can go for wildlife tourism in India are the Sariska Wildlife Sanctuary, Keoladeo Ghana National Park, and Corbett National Park to name a few.

Medical Tourism

Tourists from all over the world have been thronging India to avail themselves of cost-effective and quality healthcare in terms of surgical procedures and general medical attention. There are several medical institutes in the country that cater to foreign patients and impart top-quality healthcare at a fraction of what it costs in developed nations such as the USA and UK. It is expected that medical tourism in India will hold a value of around US\$ 43.5 billion in the next 10 years. The medical centers in the city of Chennai attract 45% of medical tourists from foreign countries.

Eco Tourism

Eco tourism has also grown recently. It tourism entails the sustainable preservation of a naturally endowed area or region. This is becoming more and more significant for the ecological development of regions that have tourist value. For eco tourism in India, tourists can go to places such as Kaziranga National Park, Gir-National Park and Kanha National Park etc.

Social Tourism

An important form of tourism found all over the world and attached with cultural aspects also is known as Mass, Popular or Social Tourism. According to Dr. W. Hunziker "Social Tourism is a type of tourism practices by low income group and which is rendered possible and facilitated by entirely separate and therefore easily recognizable service".

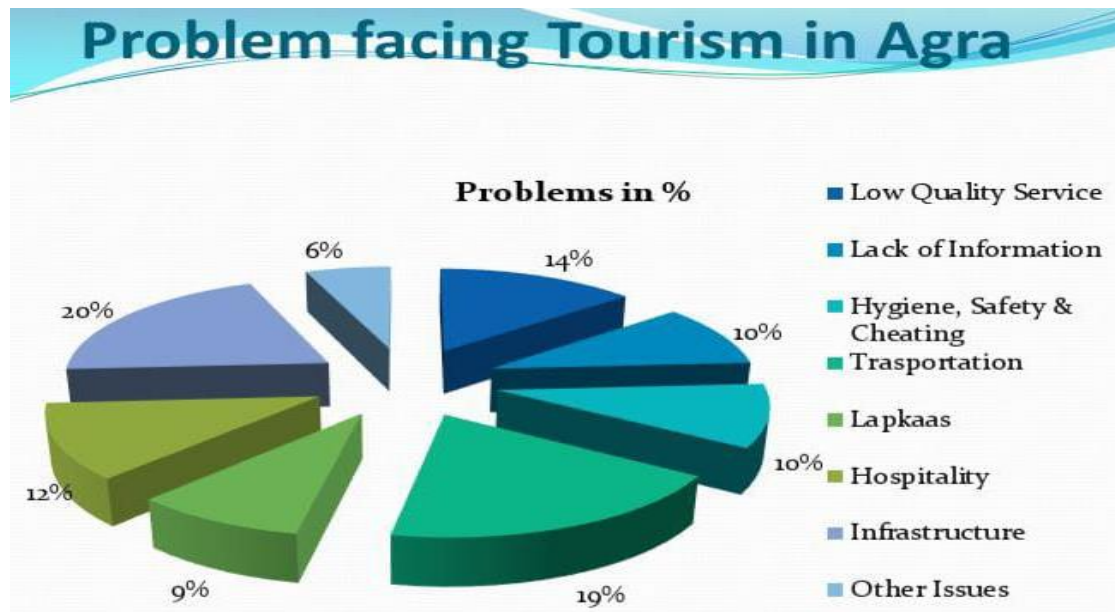
According to Dr. M. Andre Polimont "Social Tourism is the type of tourism produced by those who could not be able to meet the cost without social interventions i.e. without the assistance of an association to which the individual belongs". Thus, the essentials of social tourism are:

- Limited Means
- Subsidized Tourism
- Outside Travel

With the growing interest in culture and community, tourism is finally being recognized as an industry that can boost rural economies, create entrepreneur and jobs and help preserve indigenous cultures.

Problems and Prospects of Tourism in Agra

As per the survey some prominent problems were diagnosed in the Agra region. The survey based on the questionnaire used indicates 20% of the tourists surveyed mentioned the lack of infrastructure facilities; 19% had problems regarding cost of transportation, 14% reported low quality service at all tourist spots surveyed, 12% were dissatisfied with poor hospitality services, 10% reported non-reliability, 10% reported languages difficulties with local people, 9% were not happy with the "lapkaas" or brokers, while 6% had problem with other issues.



Challenges and Problems in Agra Region

- **Language Barriers:** Language is the basic problem found. It creates hurdles in the growth of tourism. Local people are found lacking proper fluency in proper Hindi instead Brij Bhasha is common.
- **Insufficient Finance:** Proper financial assistance can boost the tourism prospects of the region. This would further enhance the preservation of local culture, traditions, heritage, art forms etc.
- **Transportation, Communication and Accommodation:** Transportation and communication are another problem in the study area. As per survey 50% tourists preferred personal conveyance for the visit, 30% preferred Rail transport while 20% preferred Bus transport.

As per survey on accommodation facilities at Agra Region is 25%. 50% tourists prefer to stay in Delhi, the capital, and only came for a day to visit Agra and Mathura region and then return. Roughly 10% tourists stayed at resorts and 10% put up with friends or relatives. Few tourists stayed in the hotels.

Prospects in Agra Region

- Agra has a wide scope of tourism. Tourism Sector is increasing the life standard of the study area.
- Tourism seems important to create an economy and it is drastically helping other subsidiary businesses like Leather, Handicrafts, Petha, and Dalmoth which form a major part of the regional economy.
- Tourism is a supplemental income source that can increase the well-being of local inhabitants, a chance to reduce out-migration and development of the rural and the urban area.
- Tourism is increasing drastically after the initiation of G-20 in various set-ups, Yamuna Express Way, Taj (Lucknow) Expressway and rotational Airways facilities.
- Agra Region is looking forward towards to expansion of the recently started Agra Metro services.

Impact of Covid-19 on Agra Region Tourism

Covid-19 is a disaster which affected the whole world. Due to this the whole economy around the world crashed and Agra region was not an exception. According to the survey the pandemic had a pronounced impact on tourism in the study area. Among the tourists surveyed, 45% ranked the debilitating effect as high, while 20%, 19% and 16% ranked it as moderate, low and very low, respectively. It is the need of an hour to create awareness about safety measures while travelling to public places visited by tourists from around the world.

Conclusions

Tourism Industry is a growing service industry. Tourism growth can revive the stagnant economy of Agra which is facing all kind of problems especially due to Covid-19 and other neglections. Its promotion and development will lead to trickle down effects on the economy of the region and also on the social and cultural life of area. Agra with three world famous and recognized heritage sites—the Taj, the Agra Fort and Fatehpur Sikri—has tremendous growth potential through tourism promotion and development. The global competitiveness of these majestic buildings could be raised substantially through suitable strategies and measures and consequently international tourists could be attracted to these World Heritage Sites in Agra in vast numbers.

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