

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN INDIA: POLICY REVIEW

By Aditya, Naresh Prajapati & Kirti Ruhil

Research Scholar, Department of Sociology, University of Lucknow

Research Scholar, Department of Law, Central University of Punjab, Bathinda

Research Scholar, Department of Administration and Governance, Gurugram University

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ABSTRACT

This research paper provides an in-depth policy review of sustainable tourism in India. Sustainable tourism is crucial for India's economic growth while balancing environmental conservation and community well-being. The study aims to understand and promote sustainable tourism practices in India's rich cultural heritage, diverse natural landscapes, and increasing tourism activities. A comprehensive policy review uses secondary data sources such as government reports, academic publications, industry journals, and online databases. The research paper emphasises the importance of sustainable tourism in mitigating negative impacts and promoting positive ones. The authors, researchers, and institutions involved in this study are given due weightage. The findings of this research paper can provide valuable insights into the status of sustainable tourism in India, which can aid in policymaking and decision-making for sustainable tourism practices.

Keywords: Conservation, Natural Resource Management, Sustainable Tourism, Tourism Policy, Sustainable Development Goals

INTRODUCTION

India is a popular destination for tourists seeking various experiences, thanks to its diverse landscapes, rich cultural heritage, and historical landmarks. As tourism grows, managing its impact on the environment, society, and culture is increasingly important. Sustainable tourism, which involves responsible and conscious travel practices, is becoming more critical to India's tourism sector. This policy review examines India's multifaceted sustainable tourism policies, exploring the nation's efforts to balance economic growth in the tourism sector with environmental conservation, community engagement, and cultural preservation.

In recent years, there has been a surge in tourism in India, both domestic and international, highlighting the need for a comprehensive and strategic approach to mitigate the potential adverse effects of uncontrolled growth. Sustainable tourism policies play a central role in achieving this delicate balance. These policies aim to transform tourism from a purely economic activity into a force for positive change that nurtures the environment, empowers local communities, and safeguards the cultural heritage that defines the nation.

India's sustainable tourism vision includes eco-tourism initiatives, community-based tourism projects, and conservation efforts for cultural heritage sites. In collaboration with various stakeholders, the government has implemented a framework designed to promote responsible travel, infrastructure development with minimal environmental impact, and the preservation of biodiversity. As India works towards achieving its sustainable development goals, it becomes increasingly important to examine the intricacies of the policies to understand the trajectory of the nation's tourism industry.

This research paper explores keywords such as eco-tourism, community-based tourism, cultural heritage conservation, and others, offering a comprehensive analysis of India's sustainable tourism policies. By navigating through these key themes, we aim to unravel the strategies and challenges underpinning the nation's commitment to fostering a tourism industry that delights visitors' wanderlust while upholding sustainability principles, ensuring the longevity and vitality of its diverse destinations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Muhammad Ashraf Fauzi conducted a study in 2023 that focused on sustainable tourism and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The study reviewed 479 journal publications, using a bibliometric approach to analyse past, present, and future trends. The SDGs, introduced in 2015, have provided a cohesive and goal-oriented framework for sustainable tourism. The study's key findings highlight significant clusters in the evolving discourse, interconnected themes, and emerging trends. These insights have practical implications for both theorists and practitioners, serving as a roadmap for future research and policy considerations in the tourism and hospitality sector. Sunita Jatav, in 2023, studied current trends in sustainable tourism in India. The study highlights the significant role of India's tourism sector, which ranks 7th globally and contributes 9.6% to the GDP. With an anticipated annual growth of 6.9%, the industry is expected to become the fourth-largest. The study notes India's digital advancement, increasing middle-class disposable income, and a projected market growth of US\$125 billion by 2027. It emphasises the need for sustainable practices in the tourism industry and sets the stage for identifying the best practices in India's evolving tourism landscape. Ashoka G. Dessai's (2023) research on Sustainable Tourism in Goa highlights the dilemma of using tourism as a development tool while also causing adverse impacts. The rapid growth of tourism has strained the environment and local communities. The study reveals a gap between policy and execution, adversely affecting the ecology, socio-economic conditions, and cultural heritage. The study emphasises the need for state intervention to ensure safety, social equity, and environmental sustainability. It advocates for regulating tourism to sustainable levels and proposes future perspectives based on human, economic, environmental, and social sustainability principles. The research conducted by Nidhi Yadav, Naresh Chandra Sahu, and other authors (2018) examines the obstacles faced in implementing sustainable tourism management (STM) in India's National Chambal Sanctuary (modelling). Through interpretive structural modelling, the study identifies 16 barriers that hinder STM, focusing on the lack of coordination among stakeholders and government incentives as the most significant challenges. While the research offers practical insights for practitioners and academics, it is important to remember that issues in implementing sustainable practices may vary regionally. The study emphasises the need for targeted strategies to address the identified barriers and achieve sustainability in the tourism sector.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework for sustainable tourism provides a conceptual structure and theoretical foundations for understanding and analysing sustainable tourism practices, Sustainable Development Goals and Tourism.

Ulrich Beck's concept of the risk society is particularly relevant today. As society continues to progress, there are both benefits and risks associated with tourism development. While tourism can bring about infrastructural development, employment opportunities, and foreign currency exchange, it can also lead to criminal activities such as fraud, theft, disease transmission, drug addiction, and prostitution. Therefore, improving and expanding our efforts to mitigate these risks and ensure that tourism development is sustainable and beneficial for all stakeholders involved is important. This can be achieved through effective regulation, education, and collaboration among all parties involved in the tourism industry.

The theory of ethnic development has been constantly improved and expanded from the point of view of sustainable development. Its focus is on the development and revitalisation of local culture and values. By using traditional cultural skills and heritage, people of the local community can improve their economic condition through tourism activities. This not only benefits the individuals but also contributes to the overall growth and sustainability of the community.

The feminist perspective suggests that the subjugation of women and the environment is a consequence of a male-dominated perception of the world. Ecofeminism is the leading feminist theory that explains how people and the environment interact. According to this theory, the exploitation of animals and the environment is usually caused by men driven by rationalism, domination, competitiveness, individualism, and a need for control. Cynthia Hamilton argues that social injustices concerning women, people of colour, and people experiencing poverty are reflected in environmental disputes.

Vandana Shiva focused on India's socio-economic conditions after the colonisers' arrival. She claims that the colonisers established a gendered division of labour where women were

responsible for all household responsibilities in subsistence economies that did not involve money. At the same time, men worked in cash-based economic relationships with the colonisers. Maldevelopment initiatives led to material poverty, where there was none before, by eliminating subsistence economies. Shiva claimed this resulted in the “feminisation of poverty,” the oppression of women, and the degradation of nature.

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM POLICY ANALYSIS

The Framework Convention on Tourism Ethics is an international legal framework that promotes responsible and sustainable tourism. It was adopted by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) in 2019 and serves as a global reference for implementing ethical practices in the tourism industry. The Convention provides guidelines and recommendations to various stakeholders, including governments, tourism businesses, and tourists, to ensure the positive impacts of tourism while minimising its adverse effects.

The primary focus of the Framework Convention on Tourism Ethics is sustainable development in tourism, which includes economic, social, and environmental dimensions. It encourages tourism development that is environmentally friendly, socially inclusive, and economically beneficial, fostering sustainable livelihoods and reducing poverty. The Convention establishes a Global Code of Ethics for Tourism, outlining the rights and responsibilities of all stakeholders in the tourism sector. It promotes respect for human rights cultural diversity, and protecting natural and cultural heritage.

The Convention also emphasises the need to protect the rights and interests of tourists. It advocates for fair and transparent business practices, accessibility for persons with disabilities, consumer protection, and providing accurate and reliable information to tourists. Additionally, the Convention recognises the importance of preserving and promoting cultural heritage. It encourages sustainable management of cultural sites, respect for local traditions and customs, and promotion of cultural exchanges fostering mutual understanding and respect.

Furthermore, the Convention encourages tourism businesses to adopt sustainable practices. This includes promoting resource efficiency, reducing waste and carbon emissions, supporting

local suppliers and communities, and providing employees with decent working conditions and fair wages. The Convention highlights the importance of collaboration and partnerships among stakeholders. It calls for increased cooperation between governments, international organisations, tourism businesses, NGOs, and local communities to address common challenges and achieve sustainable tourism objectives.

Although the Framework Convention on Tourism Ethics is not legally binding, it guides governments and tourism stakeholders to develop policies, regulations, and initiatives that promote ethical practices in the tourism industry. By adhering to the principles outlined in the Convention, the goal is to ensure that tourism contributes to the well-being of host communities, preserves natural and cultural heritage, and provides a positive experience for tourists.

The Thirty-Fourth Report of The Estimates Committee on The Ministry of Transport - Tourism, 1956 discusses the importance of travel for social interaction and education. It recognises modern tourism's cultural, political, and economic significance, emphasising its role in fostering goodwill among nations. The report highlights tourism as an essential source of foreign exchange earnings, providing figures on tourists' expenditure over five years. The report also discusses the Sargent Committee's efforts in 1945 to promote tourism in India, emphasising the potential economic benefits. It outlines the increase in tourist traffic over recent years, attributing the growth to improved communication, post-war economic rehabilitation, increased interest in India, and enhanced publicity and facilities.

In 1963, The Ad Hoc Committee on Tourism published a report regarding the decline of tourist traffic to India that began in 1960 and intensified in 1962. The Emergency further aggravated the situation, highlighting the need for investigation and strategic planning. To tackle this issue, the Minister of Transport and Communications, in consultation with the Minister of Finance, appointed an Ad Hoc Committee. The committee was assigned to examine the country's conditions for promoting tourism and to propose ways to achieve a 20% annual expansion for the next three years, followed by a gradual increase. Specifically, the committee assessed the tourism requirements for hotel accommodation and transportation, suggested speedy provision and improvement measures, reviewed visa and customs rules, and recommended reorganising

publicity programs to encourage traffic expansion. The committee also proposed measures to protect foreign exchange earned from tourism against leakage. The main focus of the investigation was on the causes of the decline and ways to expand tourism, including infrastructure, entry procedures, and promotional efforts.

Tourism has been a significant part of India's history since the introduction of the first Tourism Policy in 1982. Under the Sixth Five Year Plan (1980-85), the policy aimed at achieving development objectives and introduced an action plan centred around the concept of a 'Travel Circuit.' This policy emphasised coordination and recognised tourism as a 'common endeavour.'

In 1988, a national committee on tourism was formed that recommended the following key actions:

- Reorganise the existing structure of the Department of Tourism and establish an apex body named the National Tourism Board.
- Form a standing committee of Tourism Ministers to ensure an integrated approach to tourism development and enhance collaboration with state governments.
- Develop a National Policy supported by comprehensive legislation to implement recommendations effectively.
- Integrate tourism into the overall plans of the country and area development plans.

These recommendations formed the foundation for a comprehensive tourism development strategy in India. The emphasis was on organisational restructuring, policy formulation, and integration into broader national and regional development plans.

The National Action Plan 1992 was presented to the Parliament in May and proved to be a transformative strategy for India's tourism sector. The plan addressed the existing system's deficiencies and weaknesses in the country's tourism development policy. There were seven key objectives outlined in the plan, which encompassed socio-economic development, increased employment opportunities, promotion of domestic tourism (especially for budget travellers), preservation of national heritage and the environment, optimisation of foreign exchange earnings, diversification of the tourism product, and an increase in India's share of

global tourism. To achieve these objectives, the plan emphasised improvements in tourism infrastructure, targeted development in specific areas, and the restructuring and strengthening of institutions to enhance human resources development. With this holistic approach, the goal was to propel India's tourism industry forward and align it with international standards, fostering sustainable growth and global competitiveness.

The New Tourism Policy 2002 was a comprehensive policy jointly managed by the central and state governments. It aimed to position tourism as a national growth and development catalyst by increasing government revenue and foreign currency earnings by attracting more domestic and international tourists. The policy emphasised the optimal use of India's scarce resources, sustainable development, high-quality employment, and fostering peace, understanding, national unity, and stability. The government planned to diversify tourism products and enhance infrastructure, marketing, visa arrangements, and air travel to achieve these goals. The international marketing campaign, 'Incredible India,' showcased Indian culture, yoga, and spirituality to a global audience.

2009, the Indian government introduced the 'Atithi Devo Bhava' initiative as part of its New Tourism Policy. This campaign aimed to educate the locals on respectfully interacting with foreign tourists. The initiative highlighted the advantages of tourism and promoted awareness of India's heritage, culture, cleanliness, and hospitality. It worked with the 'Incredible India' campaign to enhance India's image as a preferred tourist destination.

The Tourism Policy 2012 was a significant milestone in India's tourism industry. It was developed based on the recommendations of the steering committee report for the eleventh five-year plan (2007–2012). The report identified six key strategic objectives crucial for the growth and development of India's tourism sector. These objectives have helped refine and adapt India's tourism policies over time.

The 2022 Draft National Tourism Policy of India has outlined several key points that aim to revitalise and enhance the country's tourism sector. One significant proposal is to grant industry status to the sector to attract more investments. Additionally, the draft policy suggests

giving infrastructure status to hotels, promoting investment in this crucial aspect of the tourism industry.

The policy highlights five key areas that will receive substantial focus over the next decade: green tourism, digital tourism, destination management, skilling the hospitality sector, and supporting tourism-related Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). This strategic approach reflects India's commitment to fostering sustainability, innovation, and skill development within the tourism sector.

Acknowledging the challenges faced by the industry, particularly during the pandemic, the draft policy proposes relief measures and tax breaks. These measures aim to support an industry severely impacted over the last two years.

While the draft policy does not delve into specific operational issues, it establishes a framework to guide the sector, particularly in recovering from the challenges posed by the pandemic. The overarching mission and vision of the policy are to improve the overall experience for both foreign and local tourists, signalling a commitment to rejuvenate and fortify India's tourism industry for the years to come.

BEST PRACTICES RELATED TO SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

When you choose to stay in eco-friendly accommodations, you are helping to reduce the impact of tourism on the environment. These lodgings focus on preserving the environment using renewable energy and bio-architecture practices. By staying in eco-friendly tourism accommodations, you can have a positive environmental impact and support the local economy. Most environmentally friendly lodgings offer organic, locally sourced food options, which can significantly impact the environment.

It's essential to make optimal use of environmental resources, as doing so preserves natural heritage and biodiversity. However, the consumption of environmental resources often exceeds their ability to regenerate, causing climate change and loss of biodiversity.

Taking public transportation is another way to reduce your impact on the environment. Using public transport instead of driving your car can reduce air pollution and improve road congestion. This can also lead to a reduction in the release of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere and fewer traffic jams on the roads.

Respecting the culture of local communities is also a crucial part of sustainable travel. By interacting with locals, you can learn about their traditions and help to preserve their cultural and artistic heritage. It's essential to respect these traditions as they form the local community's identity and create a sense of unity among people.

Buying from and supporting local businesses is a great way to empower the local economy. Local products require less transportation and packaging and create more jobs. By eating local food, you can ensure freshness and benefit local businesses. Locally produced food is fresh and nutritious and does not require transportation. Additionally, eating local products supports the local economy and increases employment and income within the community (tourism multiplier effect).

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

In conclusion, India's journey towards sustainable tourism reflects a growing recognition of the need to balance economic growth with environmental conservation, cultural preservation, and community engagement. Over the years, the policies and initiatives outlined in various reports and actions underscore a commitment to fostering a tourism industry beyond economic benefits, aiming for positive environmental and social impacts. From the early recognition of tourism's educational and cultural significance in the 1956 Ministry of Transport - Tourism report to the recent Draft National Tourism Policy of 2022, the trajectory has evolved to encompass diverse dimensions. The emphasis on eco-tourism, community-based projects, and conservation efforts demonstrates a holistic approach to tourism development. The theoretical frameworks, including Ulrich Beck's risk society concept and the feminist perspective on ecofeminism, highlight the complexities and risks associated with tourism growth, urging for responsible and sustainable practices. The recent Draft National Tourism Policy's key points, granting industry status, focusing on green and digital tourism, and offering relief measures,

underscore a contemporary commitment to revitalising the sector post-pandemic. However, the nation can benefit from enhanced collaboration, continuous monitoring, and international cooperation, ensuring sustainable tourism remains a cornerstone of India's global tourism identity. Through capacity building, technology integration, and incentives for sustainable practices, India can lead the way in creating a tourism landscape that attracts visitors and ensures the longevity and vitality of its diverse destinations.

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