

India Tourism, The Road Ahead

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India Tourism: Perspectives and Challenges

In the 75th year of independence, India has achieved the distinction of fifth largest economy in the world and is poised to become one of the top three economies in the near future. Alongside other sectors, it is evident that the tourism sector will play a pivotal role in this growth. It is necessary to ensure that the tourism sector also performs and deliver the desired results. The Government of India envisions that in the next 25 years, tourism should be a \$1 trillion sector.

This ambitious target will be achieved only through a policy framework and a careful implementation of the plan. The National Tourism Policy is at the draft stage but aims to improve the framework for tourism development, supporting tourism industries, strengthening tourism support functions and developing allied tourism sectors.

Many reports on challenges to development on tourism in India deal with development of tourist infrastructure, transport and logistics and other generic issues that impede growth of the sector. However there are greater challenges such positioning India Tourism on a higher pedestal and the challenge of converting India to a yearlong destination from the current position of winter destination. Creation of jobs and real opportunities in the tourism sector continue to remain a challenge for policy makers. There is a lot of effort required to enhance competitiveness of the tourism sector, attract private investments

and simplify taxation and regulatory compliances to accomplish the target set for India@2047.

While an indigenous tourism development plan is unfolding, there have been parallel developments in the international scene. Numerous international organizations such as the UNWTO and WTTC have been engaged in development of tourism across the globe. Premier forums for international economic co-operation, such as G20 also recognize the potential of the tourism sector for regional economic development. Apart from other objectives, the G20 is intent on developing the global tourism potential.

The G20 and Global Tourism Development Agenda

The G20 Bali Guidelines: **Strengthening Communities and MSME as Tourism Transformation Agents – A People-centered Recovery** aim to provide a roadmap to advance the transformation of the tourism sector through policy. The tourism guidelines aim to pursue definitive outcomes linked to the wider agenda in steering three priority issues (i) Global Health Architecture (ii) Digital transformation (iii) Sustainable energy transition. The tourism guidelines have been draft on the basis of five pillars namely;

a. Human capital: jobs, skills, entrepreneurship and education: - The key outcomes of this theme is to address the priority issue of strengthening recovery and Resilience to withstand

future crises, sustainable job creation through human capacity development and bringing digital technologies in education

- b. Innovation, Digitalization and the Creative Covid-19 This pillar or cornerstone aims for the recovery alongside improving digital skills and digital literacy.
- c. Women and Youth Empowerment: The focus here is to drive the empowerment initiative with emphasis on women in MSMEs as drivers of economic growth.
- d. Climate Action, Bio Diversity Conservation and Circularity: - This pillar involves active persuasion of the framework provided by the *Glasgow Declaration on Climate Action in Tourism* to accelerate measurement, mitigation and adaptation efforts in tourism. This underscores the need to also follow the *Global Tourism Plastics Initiative* that must be the shared vision of the all the stakeholders in the tourism sector for circular economy of plastics.
- e. Policy, Governance and Investment Framework: - This is forms the basis of tourism related policies and also the *G20 Roadmap to Stronger Recovery and Resilience in Developing Countries*. The priority agenda is also to incentivize sustainable and mutually beneficial investments.

G20 Guideline Shaping Government of India Initiatives:

With a view to achieve the G20 goals the Government of India has identified five important tools and mission that seeks to address priorities of the tourism sector in India for the next decade.

- a. **National Green Tourism Mission:** This mission would meet the objectives of achieving sustainability, encourage climate action, promote responsible tourism and align tourism development with Sustainable Development Goals of 2030.
- b. **National Digital Tourism Mission:** In line with the guidelines and the objectives of the G20, this mission will work towards development of data interface, support MSMEs in digitalization, IT application in the sector and enable smart tourism destinations.
- c. **Tourism and Hospitality Skill Mission:** This mission would work towards enhancing the standards in the training with focus on providing quality human resources to the sector.
- d. **National Mission on Destination Management:** The Government recognizes the need to have a robust destination management organization that will maintain and market the destination. This mission will be focused towards creating a system that would maintain assets in the destination, market and promote the destination while also coordinating between the central and state government
- e. **National Mission on Tourism MSMEs:** The G20 Tourism perspective emphasizes the need to develop MSMEs in the tourism sector. This mission will aid creation and

build awareness of benchmark policies and create a healthy ecosystem.

The National Tourism Policy is based on the G20 guidelines with strategic objectives to deepen the contribution of tourism in India's economic development. The growth will be led by increased tourist footfalls, stay and spending and creating events to make India a year-round destination. As India assumes the Presidency of G20, meetings are proposed in 55 locations that will be on the global map. G20 countries account for more than 75 percent of international trade and the meet in India would be extremely critical from the tourism standpoint. Several countries have benefitted from hosting the G20 summit and this is an opportunity for India to position as an important destination for the world.

Improving Tourism Experience

India has a lot to offer to the discerning tourists. There are 40 UNESCO World Heritage Sites, ski resorts, desert, beaches, wildlife sanctuaries and other interesting locations. Few countries around the world offer this diversity. However, domestic and international tourists experience need to be enhanced by (i) encouraging travel to less popular destinations (ii) allowing for slow travel that would reduce carbon footprint and also add value to the experience (iii) Creating opportunities for less frequent but longer travel that would be more special and significant to the tourists (iv) Incentivizing domestic travel and creating experiences relevant for tourists (v) Supporting local communities by including local hotels, restaurants, cuisine, souvenir shops to boost local economy.

Special Interest Tourism

Apart from the conventional destinations and attractions, modern tourists also look for specialized interests and needs. In the recent

past, India has emerged as one of the leading destinations for 'Medical Tourism'.

Despite the unprecedented impact of COVID-19, most business report suggest that the growth in the global medical tourism would range between a CAGR of 21-25 percent by 2028. This exceptional growth would be driven by low cost and high quality of medical treatment, ease and affordability of international travel and government policies in support of travel for medical reasons. However the flip side has some issues like long wait time for certain medical procedures and post-surgery complications.

Medical tourism in India is also expected to grow at a CAGR of 19 percent by 2028. Affordable medical care coupled with high quality accommodation facilities make certain Indian cities attractive for medical tourism. Availability of the latest and technologically advanced equipment and facilities drive this growth. Alongside conventional treatments, there are also medical services for tourists seeking alternative treatments through use of Ayurveda, Unnani medicine and age old wellness practices such as yoga and meditation.

India has earned international reputation in medical expertise and a tight regulatory control will be a requirement to preserve the quality of healthcare services to be competitive among countries like Thailand, Singapore, South Korea and Dubai.

We have enormous potential for growth in all aspects of tourism in India and the time is perhaps ripe to sharpen focus and accord tourism the status it deserves as a strong growth engine for the economy. A policy framework and cooperative efforts of all the stakeholders will ensure achievement of India@2047 vision.