



## Pilgrimage tourism and sustainable development: Significance and challenges before pilgrimage tourism in India

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### Abstract

Tourism basically comprises that social cultural and economic phenomena of any place. There are a number of definitions given by various scholars on to tourism. but they all put emphasis on the sole concept that tourist is that person who visit outside that place where he lives from daily routine life for a sort Spain of time and then returns to his/her place. tourism has great significance for India and it has great and prosperous historic tradition. because it touches the different horizons of any country and social economic and cultural spheres. prosperous and developed tourism lead to the revenue generation which play an important role for the strong economic base of any locality or country. There are a number of sub fields which fall in their vicinity of tourism like ecotourism, sustainable tourism, pilgrimage tourism. most of the researchers have worked on the topics like ecotourism and sustainable tourism, but few of them drag their attention towards pilgrimage tourism which influences their various horizons of the countries and there social, cultural aspects. India attracted number of travellers in ancient due to its fabled wealth. Visit of Hieun-tsang, a devout Chinese Buddhist is an example of this. Pilgrimage tourist started prospering and got a boost when emperors like Ashoka and Harsha started building rest houses. Arathsastra pointing out the importance of the travel infrastructure which play significant role in the past.post independence, tourism continuously remained the part of five year plans. every year there are an increase in the number of pilgrimage tourists which positively impacts the respective locality or country but there are also a number of challenges like accommodation, environmental pollution, poor infrastructure, weak information mechanism and lack of disaster management mechanism.

**Keywords:** pilgrimage tourism, sustainable development, disaster management, historical travellers

### Introduction

India is the land of prosperous and rich culture where every year tourist come to pursue they are educational spiritual and religious pursuits. Every year there is increasing trends of pilgrims in India, which are national as well as international tourists some pilgrimage hotspots are kedarnath, Badrinath, Banaras, are the places which remain the man destination of pilgrims tourists. Pilgrimage tourism has emerged as an instrument for employment generation, poverty alleviation and sustainable development of any pilgrimage place.

“The UNWTO have defined religious tourism as a kind of tourism that reflects itself with socially responsible actions by respecting the sacred and thorough stewardship of sacred sites (2011)”

Pilgrimage tourism promotes international understanding and gives boom to handicrafts and cultural activities. Through pilgrims there is also bell of the concept of cultural ecology among nations. Most of the Pilgrim is tourist place are home of important and critical species which conjures the biological diversity of the place, and repositories of medical plants. religious and cultural practises are mostly let it to forests and other natural phenomena and this helps in the conservation of resources. Some tracts of vegetable all forests remain untouched due to social fencing by local people. these type of forests are regarded as sacred grooves, which is another positive impact or influence of pilgrimage tourism for any place. In India there are hundreds of pilgrimage hotspots /destinations connected to Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian Jain which have great potential to generate employment and help to revive the handicraft of

concerned locality on sustainable bases. Sharma (2009) states that the contribution of pilgrimage tourism in gross exchange 15-17 percent According to Godfrey and clarke (2000) socio-cultural change relate to local quality of life and sense of place. Every year 7 million pilgrims visit the shrines, influencing the socio economic environment of the region (Rajesh raina, 2001). Besides the economic and socio- cultural positive impacts, there are also a number of challenges emerging before religious hotspots, to which due consideration should be given by the government or responsible authority by assuring community participation to cope up with these challenges.

### Objective

- To know the role of pilgrimage tourism in sustainable development of concerned area
- To know the significance and challenges before pilgrimage tourism in india
- Highlights of main pilgrimage hotspots in India

### Data sources and methodology

Present recent paper is based on the secondary sources of data. various research papers and articles helped a lot to make authentic this research paper. this research is also assisted with the information of relevant data provided by ministry of tourism and various years statistics on tourism. this is an attempt on the further study on the past researches which have been done on the topic. This paper is purely based on the secondary sources of data. After taking insight into their topic in past researches through Internet or in the news articles an attempts have been made to identify the

research gap researchers mostly emphasised on the topics like ecotourism, sustainable tourism, but the pilgrimage tourism did not have due concentration which is the area of thrust in the vicinity of tourism in present context.

### **Significance of pilgrimage tourism**

India has renowned culture and long historic tradition to visit religious destinations. Every year there are augmentation in the number of tourists as well as overseas tourists to pursue their spiritual needs. Pilgrimage or religious tourism leads to economic prosperity in revenue generation and pave the way for sustainable development in economic and social spheres of the region. Spiritual tourism also improves the mental health and promotes peace in the life of the people as they are too involved in materialistic today. It makes them avoid from stress, crime and anxiety. Tourists come from various religious backgrounds leads to the intermingling of cultural traditions and promotes the cultural understanding of different cultures and serves the quote of "unity in diversity". Cultural transformation make people aware with different societies that promotes the "cultural ecology" important concept on international level.

Pilgrimage or spiritual tourism enhance the employment opportunities in the respective destination or country, which helps in the making of strongest economic base for any country. Tourism industry has huge contribution in the GDP of India. The development of the tourism sector will stimulate the small business enterprises, cottage industries and will initiate diverse economic activities in the destination region. People of the respective area would get a chance to develop their skill, capabilities which helps in the improvement of their economic conditions. It is also a one of viewpoint that religious tourism promotes the harmony, peace and resolution of disputes.

So, promoting tranquility, harmony and mental peace are the main characteristics of pilgrimage tourism. It also triggers the communication techniques when he communicates with various socio-economic backgrounds people. It has emerged as a tool of employment generation, poverty alleviation, and sustainable human development and contribute in the revive of local handicrafts which is the economic base of the people of the region. Various case study reveals that people of that locality have started to give services to the tourists which contribute in their economic prosperity. People are involved in agricultural as well as becoming service providers which has positively impacted the standard of living.

Government various schemes has played significant role in the development of pilgrimage tourism hotspots. The ministry of tourism in India is the responsible authority to form the national schemes regarding tourism. Every year, on 25th of January national tourism day is celebrated in India to make people aware with the diverse beauty and its significance in India's unity.

Covid 19 pandemic badly impacted the pilgrimage tourism as well. Indian tourism sector suffered huge loss due to pandemic. But government schemes and the normality of situation is again getting momentum in the numbers of pilgrims.

### **Economic significance of tourism in Indian economy**

Tourism is not only the largest sector of the world economy, but also the largest service industry in India. In the year 2019, travel and tourism added US\$ 194.30 billion to India's

economy, which was 6.8 percent of the country's GDP. This will increase to US\$ 512 billion by 2028. Accordingly, the tourism industry's direct contribution to India's GDP is expected to grow at an annual growth rate of 10.35 percent between 2019 and 2028. Tourism has also been a major source of foreign monetary income for India. In the year 2010, the country received foreign monetary income of 14.49 billion US dollars from tourism. Which increased to US\$ 30.06 billion in 2019 and is expected to reach US\$ 50.9 billion by 2028.

India was ranked 13th in terms of foreign monetary income from tourism in the year 2019 and India's share of foreign monetary income from tourism has been 2.05 percent globally. The compound annual growth rate in foreign tourist arrivals in India during the years 2001 to 2020 has been 8.45 percent. However, due to COVID-19, there has been a sharp drop in foreign tourist arrivals in the world during the years 2020 and 2021 and demand India has been no exception, which was a result of restrictions related to the pandemic. The tourism sector is contributing 8.0 percent to the total employment of the country. In the year 2020, 39 crore people were employed in this sector and it is expected to increase to 53 crore jobs by 2029. It is also a good option for foreign investment. The country's hotel and tourism sector has received cumulative foreign direct investment of US\$ 15.89 billion during April 2000 and June 2021.

Recently world tourism day was celebrated on 27th of October with the aim "rethinking tourism" to strengthen the tourism from covid pandemic impacts. There are a number of steps has been taken by the government of India to promote the tourism in the country. A number of circuits have been developed like Buddhist circuit, spiritual circuit, Ramayan circuit and heritage circuit. For the integrated development of identified pilgrimage destinations has been undertaken the national mission on pilgrimage rejuvenation and spiritual, heritage augmentation drive (PRASHAD). There were also the celebration of Parvati Parv from 16th to 27th September 2018 to encourage the Indians to visit tourist destinations in India.

### **Government efforts to promote tourism in India**

A number of initiatives has been taken by the government of India to promote sustainable tourism. Tourism constitutes the significant part of Indian economy as it generates huge revenue. It forms the bases of economy for most of the states. Some of significant schemes are discussed below-

#### **Incredible India Campaign**

Launched by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India in September 2002 under the name 'Incredible India', the campaign represents India at home and abroad and has opened new doors of possibilities in the country's tourism sector. Its aim is to elevate Indian tourism on the global stage. This was the first such effort to present the tourism potential of the country to the world. In the year 2003, 'Atithi Devo Bhava: (Guest is like God)' logo was started to be used under 'India' so that people from abroad come to India for tourism. To make this more effective, the 'Adopt a Heritage' project of Incredible India 2.0 campaign was launched on September 27, 2017, a joint initiative of Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Culture and Archaeology of India, which works on specific types.

### Know India Program

This program was organized by the Ministry of External Affairs in 2014 to create awareness amongst the talents on various aspects of Indian life and help them by the country in various fields like economic, industrial, education, science and technology. To provide information about the progress achieved in communication and information technology culture. Foreigners in the age group of 18 to 26 are selected. Main aim of this scheme is to make aware people of india as well as foreigners about the rich cultural heritage of india, which promotes more arrivals and visits to these tourism destinations.

### Swadesh Darshan Scheme

The 'Swadesh Darshan' scheme launched by the Ministry of Tourism and Culture, Government of India in the year 2014-15 for the integrated development of thematic tourism circuits, aims to promote, develop and harness the potential of tourism in India. Under this, central financial assistance is being provided to the states and territories for various projects for the development of tourism circuit infrastructure

### PRASAD (Pillimage Renewal for Spiritual Augmentation High) Scheme

It is a 'Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Augmentation Campaign' launched by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India in the year 2014-15. Its objective is to integrate the pilgrimage sites in a planned and sustainable manner on a priority basis. It focuses on developing destinations across the country to enrich religious tourism. Developing pilgrimage destinations brings the economic prosperity to any area, as it lead to the the revenue generation by attracting large number of pilgrims. Strengthening the basic infrastructure and developing destinations as tourism hotspots always pays the best results to the economy of respected region.

### Shyama Prasad Mukherjee Rurban Mission

This mission has been launched by the Ministry of Rural Development in the year 2016 to develop integrated project based infrastructure in rural areas. Its objective is to promote local economic development, enhance basic services and create well-planned Rurban clusters. Under this, 84 tourism infrastructure projects are being run in 23 states/UTs across the country to promote rural tourism, including tourist lodges, beautification of agri-tourism tourist places, construction of tourist parks, riverfront development for tourism, walkways along the tourist places. And public facilities cum cafeteria etc. are being developed near Bazarhat tourist places.

### Tourism as a dream of self-reliant India

The 'Self-reliant India' campaign has been launched by the Government of India on 13 May 2020 to make the country self-reliant. This economy rests on the five pillars of infrastructure, demographics and demand and calls for assertiveness of local products. It focuses on empowering individuals and enterprises to make the country prosperous, strong and developed. These schemes are implemented by the government to make people aware about the tourism potentials in the region.

### Challenges before the pilgrimage tourism hotspots

There are a number of general issues faced by the pilgrims in india. There is the lack of basic amenities and polluted life supporting component, for instance impurity of drinking water faced by the tourists. For the sustainability in pilgrimage tourism development there should be well management of resources and access to basic amenities. due to the rapid increase in the number of pilgrims every year there are emerging a number of concerns, besides there contribution economic importance.

- These projects also face some other problems such as lack of trained manpower, inadequate financial support to start a new facility or business, lack of local community participation and maintenance of the project over time. There is lack of proper guidance and training units in pilgrimage destinations, which can make them aware about the prospects and schemes on rural tourism taken by government
- Lack of providing licences to locals as guide, is also the main challenge before the sustainable development of rural tourism hotspots. Development of pilgrimage tourism requires efficient infrastructure and proper information mechanism, what posses the critical position in destination areas, also works as barrier in the development of rural tourism.
- Connectivity posses biggest barrier in the development of spiritual tourism, areas with lower connectivity lagged behind in the pace of development. So there should ensure proper connectivity and efficient transportation to develop any region as tourist hotspot.

### Highlights of main pilgrimage hotspots in India Chardham yatra

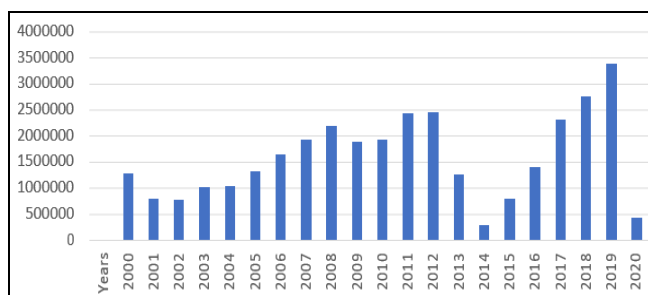
Chardham yatra consists the four pilgrimage sites which are- Ymunotri, Gangotri, Kedarnath, Badrinath. It is also called chota chardham yatra. Pilgrimage tourism is the backbone of the economy of uttrakhand. it is believed that visiting here we get moksha. A number of hindu tourists visit here from all parts of the country which positively impacts the economy of these area. The pilgrimage tourism has major contribution in the state of uttrakhand.it is believed that every hindu, once should visit to chardham sites. A study by think tank social development for communities 'foundation has predicted that 80 lacs tourist will visit by the year 2023 (The times of India). Chotta chardham yatra is the main pgrimage circuit of the state. A project on chardham yatra has been initiated for the better functioning of the phenomena. The main aim of this highway project to improve the all over connectivity of these sites. This project would ensure the connectivity of the railways, bridges and tunnels to eliminate the accident and land s. lide prone areas. This project will play crucial role in the economy of the state. The tourism sector is considered as a growth driver for inclusive social economic progress through its forward and backward linkages and the ability to create employment in the economy. The state is considering development of spiritual and religious theme-based circuits for tourism. Under the Swadesh Darshan scheme of the central government, Uttarakhand is a site for eco- tourism which play an important role in the economic development of the state

**Table 1**

Years	Pilgrims
2000	1292411
2001	809266
2002	790211
2003	1033424
2004	1040155
2005	1341304
2006	1662935
2007	1942785
2008	2199608
2009	1904239
2010	1942232
2011	2440855
2012	2468838
2013	1273553 (kedarnath flood)
2014	290509
2015	804008
2016	1404707
2017	2324158
2018	2769508
2019	3400000
2020	448000 (covid19)

Source;- ministry of tourism

With the help of the table which shows the data of pilgrims, we can interpret there were a number of pull and push factors which impacted the pilgrimage tourism in the state. The great disaster of 2013 devastated the economy of the state. The conditions of flash flood and cloud bursting badly impacted



Source:- table 1.1

**Fig 1:** Number of Pilgrimage tourists on chardham yatra

the infrastructure that leads to great economic loss. There were fast decline in the number of tourist after the disaster of 2013. but again the pilgrimage tourism is getting pace due to the implementation of new projects in the state for the ease of tourists. Other important phase of covid 19 which retarded the growth of tourism development in the state. After this pandemic there was sharp decline in the number of pilgrims which negatively impacted the socio-economic prosperity of the state. With the normalization of the situations people are taking keen interest to visit these holy sites.

**Haridwar**

Haridwar is the holy place which always have remained the main destination. There a number of shrines and ashrams which depicts the art philosophy and science and rich heritage of the India.

Haridwar – 'The Gateway to the abode of Gods' is one of such sacred city situated at the base of Shivalik ranges of high Himalayas, as well as on the flow path of the river

Ganga. It is a hub of Hindu religion and mysticism for centuries.

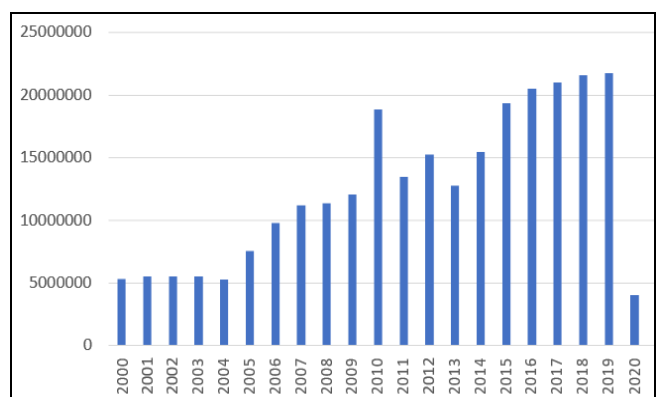
Lakhs of devotees from all over India and overseas, visit Haridwar every year to take a dip in the holy river Ganga to earn virtue. Not only domestic but also foreign tourists are also come here throughout the year. The tourism industry has played an significant role centering Haridwar and it becomes a boon. Source Markets According to a survey undertaken by a consultancy agency in 2005 on behalf of the Ministry of Tourism, the major source markets which contribute high in the tourism earning are united states of America, united kingdom, Australia, Nepal, Germany etc.

**Table 2:** Number of tourists who visited Haridwar during 2000-2020

Year	Indian	Foreigner	Total
2000	5316980	7659	5324639
2001	5502273	6276	5508549
2002	5518270	6029	5524299
2003	5524432	7532	5531964
2004	6283726	11012	5294738
2005	7527020	13624	7540644
2006	9800770	11774	9812544
2007	11204275	15609	11219884
2008	11356250	17854	11374104
2009	12049450	20067	12069517
2010	18837125	29555	18866680
2011	13454650	26722	13481372
2012	15231875	26875	15258750
2013	12763650	22611	12786261
2014	15456550	2092	15477542
2015	19332025	18615	19350640
2016	20486775	21322	20508097
2017	20985975	23123	21009098
2018	21555000	22583	21577583
2019	21749425	20807	21770232
2020	4016250	5581	4021831

Source:- ministry of Tourism

After analyzing the table we find that there were tremendous growth in the number of pilgrims year after year. But during the year 2020, there were abrupt fall in the number of pilgrimage tourists due to the pandemic of covid 19. Covid 19 pandemic widely impacted the tourism sector all over the world, India was also not exception of it. This phase was critical which badly impacted the various horizons of the economy. But with the normal conditions there is again getting ever increasing trends in the number of pilgrims to these holy destinations.



Source:- table 1.2

**Fig 2**

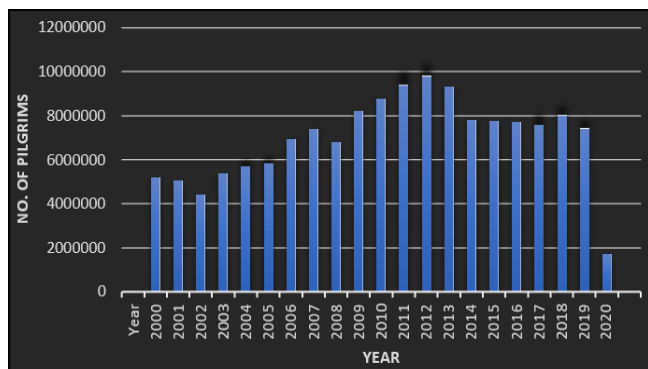
**Vaishno devi**

The cave shrine Mata Vaishnava Devi at katra in jammu and kasmir has emerged asa big boon for local economy, generating 475 crore every year and providing employment opportunities to 27000 people (Economic Times of India). Devotees, arrivals to shrine on trikuta hills generate revenue of rs 474.36 crore per annum for katra and provide employment to thousands (S.K Jain). The good transportation roots, connectivity to railways, auto rickshaws palaki and hotels/hostels make tourist with ease to move/visit these places.

**Table 3**

Year	No. of pilgrims
2000	5217715
2001	5056919
2002	4432178
2003	5400296
2004	6109895
2005	6251998
2006	6950573
2007	7417619
2008	6792223
2009	8234896
2010	8749336
2011	10115647
2012	10495269
2013	9323647
2014	7803193
2015	7776604
2016	7723721
2017	8178318
2018	8586541
2019	7940064
2020	1720357

Source: - Vashno Devi Shrine Board



Source: - table 1.3

**Fig 3**

Vaishno Devi is an important pilgrimage centre of Jammu and Kashmir which forms its backbone of the economy every year a number of pilgrimage. tourists come from the various corners of the country to pay offerings, but the period of covid- 19 badly impacted the number of tourists which harmed the economy of the state like other tourist destinations. pilgrims spends crores of Rupees on these Holi sites which distributes among various sectors of the economic development. besides, Tourist activities have affected the ecology of the area by generating wastes which leads to the degradation of air quality, water purity and land resources impurity. so tourists activities

should be managed properly which can lead to sustainable pilgrimage tourism.

**Pre and post covid scenario of tourism in India**

if we consider the pre covid period in the respect of tourism sector in country it hold 10th position in terms of GDP in the world tour and travel and tourism council report in 2019. During 2019, contribution of travel and tourism in GDP was 6.8 percent of the economy. In the FY20, the tourism sector in india accounted for 39 million jobs, which was 8 percent of total employment in the country, by 2029 it was expected to account for about 53 million jobs.

**Table 4:** Foreign tourists arrivals in india during January-july (lakh)

Year	Arrivals (lakh)
2018	59.6
2019	60.8
2020	24.6
2021	5.1
2022	27.6

(source:- ministry of tourism)

But due to the covid 19 it, tourism industry badly hit by the lockdowns and travel curbs. Recent studies shows that it is now again on the path of recovery. As there is constantly increase in the number of foreign as well as domestic tourists. If we compare the data of arrivals of tourists we observe that it is still below from the 2019 level. Between January 2022 and July 2022 india received 27.6 lakh foreign tourists, which is half in number of in the same period of 2019 (60.8 lakh). There is a great dip in the arrivals from many countries.

Bangladesh, US, and the UK were the three largest sources of tourists to india in the year 2019 with more than 1 million tourists from each. But due to the spread of pandemic there is fast decline in the number of tourists.

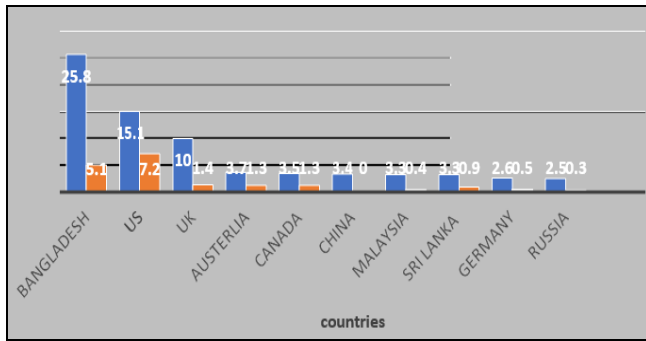
From below diagram we can make comparative analysis of the foreign tourists from different countries

**Table 5:** Major sources of tourists (lakhs)

Country	2019	2022
Bangladesh	25.8	5.1
US	15.1	7.2
UK	10	1.4
Australia	3.7	1.3
Canada	3.5	1.3
China	3.4	NA
Malaysia	3.3	0.4
Sri Lanka	3.3	0.9
Germany	2.6	0.5
Russia	2.5	0.3

(Source:- The Hindu)

We find the great contrast in the number of travellers due to pandemic restrictions and strict lockdown. However our government making initiatives to promote the tourism and taking various schemes to attract the foreign tourists. In 2019, india received about as many tourists from Bangladesh as the population of Manipur. According to the recent studies foreign tourists spend about two weeks in india. Americans, Australians and Canadians average more than 20 days. Their presence increases sales in india's local markets.



Source: - table 1.5

Fig 4

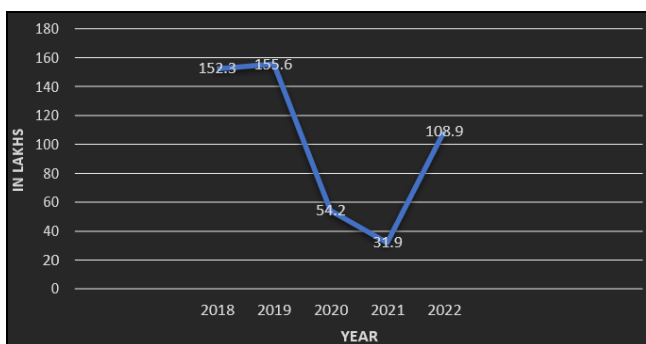
Indias forex earning from tourism grew tenfold between 2001 and 2019, from \$3.2 billion to \$30.1 billion. It will be looking to regain that level. Tourism has been the most affected sector by the Covid-19 pandemic. According to the UN World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), this is by far the worst crisis international tourism has faced since records began in 1950.

Post Covid-19, it is a challenge for the tourism sector in India to return to business as usual while maintaining safety and hygiene. The crisis is an opportunity to consider the long-term implications of the crisis and reimagine the future of tourism and take coordinated action across governments at all levels and the private sector. If we talk about the foreign travels from india, has almost touched the 70 per cent level of old pre covid period with 108.9 lakh in this year (2022), compared with 155.6 lakh in the same period in 2019. We can observe the Indian tourist departures in various years from the table below

Table 6: Indian Nationals departures from India during January-July (lakh)

Year	Departures (Lakh)
2018	152.3
2019	155.6
2020	54.2
2021	31.9
2022	108.9

(source:- ministry of tourism)



Source:- The Hindu

Fig 5

Way forward for the sustainable development of pilgrimage tourism destinations

If India would harness the potentials in pilgrimage tourism, the day is not far when tourism will become the one of the strongest pillars of the Indian economy. Since the world has celebrated the world tourism day on 27th of September 2022 with the theme “Rethinking tourism”. Its aims to stimulate discussion on the ways to develop tourism, mainly through

the employment and education as well as industrial impacts on the environment and tourism destinations. Let us effort for the more sustainable development tourism and for the people who are directly or indirectly related with it.

Religious tourism is the way to derive the socio economic prosperity and the key towards making India self reliant. Challenges including increasing accommodation facilities, drinking water accessibility, dumping of waste in water bodies water and landfills should be well addressed to have the sustainable growth of pilgrimage destinations. So by the community participation and active involvement of society can make it happen to harness the potentials of tourism in india. coordination among various concerned departments and implementation of various schemes related to tourism development, can make India self -reliant as it dreams.

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