

Positioning Ayodhya as a Global Tourist Hub: Potentiality and Future Prospects

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ABSTRACT

Religious tourism is one of the most attractive tourisms among other. Recently India is facing tremendous growth in religious tourism. Government of India takes several projects and policy to promote the tourism sector. Ayodhya is one of the most important religious sites in India. It is located in the state of Uttar Pradesh. Ayodhya is famous for known as birthplace of Lord Rama. The inflow of tourists in Ayodhya have been Occurred in immemorial time. Ayodhya consists several tourist spots such as temples, ghats etc. Ayodhya is also home to several festivals that showcase the city's vibrant cultural heritage. The construction of the Ram temple has sparked a renewed interest in Ayodhya among Hindu pilgrims and tourists. The primary objective of the research paper to examine the greater potentiality of religious tourism in Ayodhya.

Key Words: Religious Tourism, Tourism, Potentiality of Tourism, Cultural Heritage and Ayodhya

INTRODUCTION

Tourism one of the fastest growing industries in the world as remaining industries (Sharpley, 2009). According to the World Tourism Organization, tourism is a social, cultural and economic phenomenon which entails the movement of people to countries or placed outside their usual environment for personal or business/ professional purposes. Tourism is not a recent phenomenon. It has its own ancient background. Earlier it was a need for survival of human being as people moved one place to another place for searching foods and livelihoods. Now-a-days it is became a hobby and pleasure for which people travel for fun. In present time, at the accelerating phase of globalization, the significance of tourism is also increasing which contributed toward the economic growth and substantial cum development. It acts as a tool for employment generation, primary wealth generation, poverty eradication and development of the whole economy (Dhamija, 2021). Tourism is one of the fastest growing sectors in Indian market. India is receiving 3 million foreign tourist arrivals each year. It will be included to 15 million tourists visiting by 2025. It gives 10 million of employment opportunities and generating billions of dollars each year. Religious tourism encompasses different types of travel motivated by religious faith, with the main goal being to visit sacred sites. These sites are not always connected to current religions, as many religions throughout history have faded into obscurity. Despite their decline, these faiths have left behind impressive artifacts like temples, churches, shrines, statues, and other cultural legacies (Blackwell, 2007).

Shinde's (2006) in his research titled “Religious Tourism: Intersection of Contemporary Pilgrimage and Tourism in India” light on the dynamics of pilgrimage tourism, illustrating how pilgrims engage with locals and the resulting effects on all involved parties. This interaction often benefits all stakeholders and highlights the immediate environmental impact of such journeys (Lawrence, 1992). Additionally, these interactions have a broader, indirect influence on social structures and economic factors. The most significant impact stems from the pilgrimage itself, where tourists directly interact with various religious institutions at the destination.

Aguayo, E. (2012) “Impact of Tourism on Employment: An Econometric Model of 50 CEEB Regions” In this paper analyze the economic impact of tourism in the economy of Central and Eastern European Countries (CEEB) at regional level. The share of this group of countries, on hotel tourism of the European Union, has increased during the period 2000 to 2007 although the intensity of tourism per one thousand people is yet clearly below EU27 average. The econometric model shows the positive impact of tourism on employment in market services.

Mishra,A, Ojha. N (2018) in his research paper titled “A Study of Cultural Tourists’ Perceptions of Three Sacred Destinations of Eastern Uttar Pradesh Region, India” India's cultural identity is deeply connected to its ancient Sanskrit name, Bharat, named after Emperor Bharat. India, home to one of the world's oldest civilizations, the Indus Valley Civilization, continues to practice traditions, customs, and celebrations much like their ancestors did thousands of years ago. Traces of this ancient civilization have been found in the remains of 5,000-year-old urban communities such as Harappa, Mohenjodaro, Mehargarh (now in Pakistan), and Lothal (India). The Eastern Uttar Pradesh region is rich with sacred sites significant to Hinduism and Buddhism. This paper explores cultural tourists' perceptions of Allahabad, Varanasi, and Kushinagar in Eastern Uttar Pradesh, concluding that despite their status as important cultural tourism destinations, these cities suffer from inadequate facilities and services. Improved infrastructure is needed to accommodate the large number of cultural tourists.

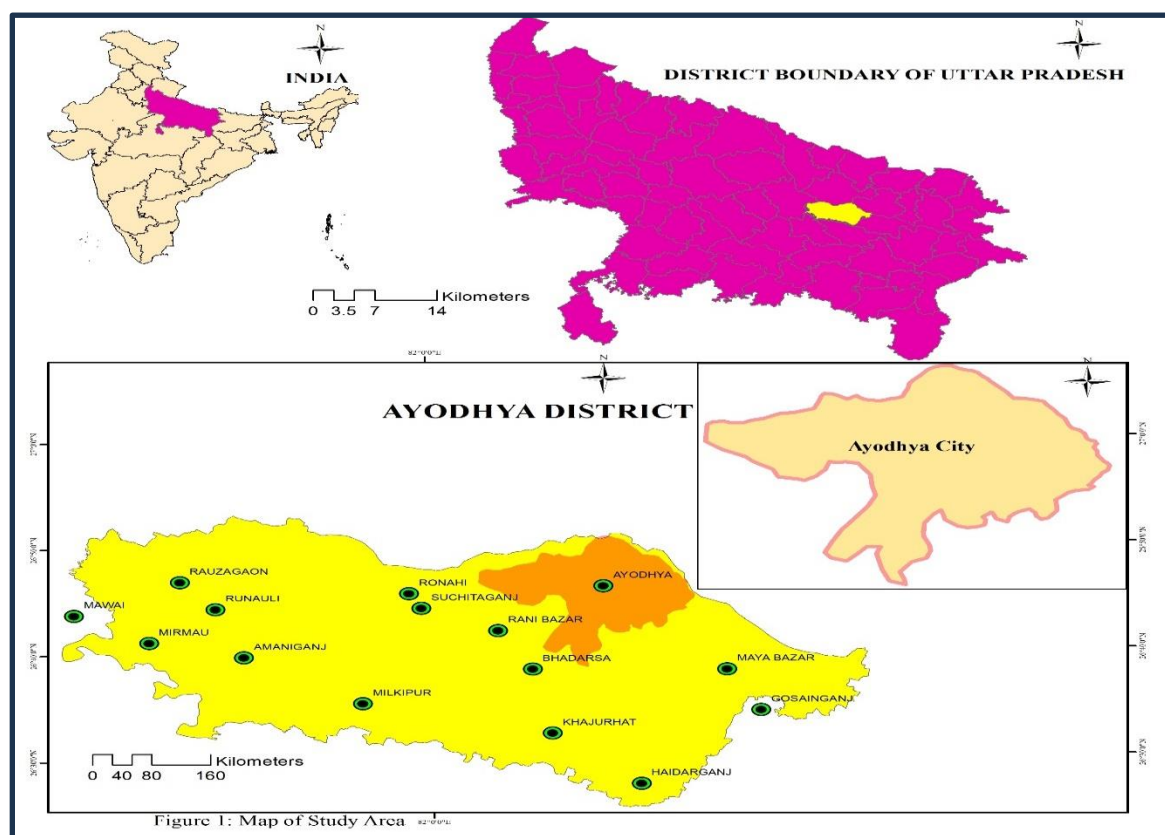
Dhamija, A. (2021). In his research titled “The Increasing Significance of Religious Tourism: A Case from Uttar Pradesh, India” examines the total influx of tourists in Uttar Pradesh along with exploring the data according to various parameters such as international, religious and recreational tourists and derives findings that note the increased speed of international tourists which has surpassed that of domestic tourists in recent years (2014 – 2018).

Gautam, P. (2023). In his research titled “Religious tourism and entrepreneurship: A case of Manakamana temple in Nepal” This study explores the relationship between religious tourism and entrepreneurship in Nepal and investigates the livelihood of local business owners, business sustainability, and the challenges facing tourism-dependent businesses by their business sizes. The study was conducted in the area surrounding Manakamana temple, located in the Shahid Lakhnan Rural Municipality ward nos. 2 and 3, Gorkha district, Nepal. A mixed method featuring qualitative and quantitative analyses of primary data was used to produce relevant findings. Among the key findings were that Nepal’s religious places provide an excellent opportunity to develop entrepreneurship that contributes directly to improvements in the health, education, and nutrition of business owners and

their families. Using survey and interview results, the author identifies policies and support measures that could/should be adopted by local governments to benefit and encourage local entrepreneurs.

STUDY REGION:

For the present research work, Ayodhya city has been chosen, which is located on the banks of Saryu River (also known as Ghaghara River, a tributary of River Ganga) in the state of Uttar Pradesh. It is the administrative headquarters of the Ayodhya district of south-central Uttar Pradesh. The locational extension of the city is 26.47 N latitude and 82.12 E Longitude. Ayodhya city is administrated by the Ayodhya Municipal Corporation. The total area of Ayodhya district is 2522 sq.km and it is surrounded by Gonda and Basti district in the north, Amethi and Sultanpur in the south and Ambedkar Nagar in the east and Barabanki in the west. Primarily the district was named as Faizabad. In 2018, November renamed as Ayodhya.



Historical Background of Ayodhya

Ayodhya is an ancient town, popularly known as the seven sacred cities of the Hindus because of its association in the great Indian epic poem Ramayana with the birth place of Lord Rama, a major deity of Vaishnavism group. It is not only for Hindus sacred place, but also to other religions of India such as Jainism, Buddhism, Sikhism and Islam. Ayodhya enlisted as lots number of rituals, festivities, pilgrimages journey and famous ancient temple, river ghats, holy tanks, holy wells and holy ponds. Ayodhya was one of the famous cities and first capital of Koshala kingdom, which was a Mahajan pada of India among 16 Mahajan padas. By the end of 2nd century C.E, the city of Ayodhya was popularly known as Pilgrimage center and by the turn of Gupta period many temples and ghats along the bank of Saryu River were made. Archeological evidence identified this place to be 'Saketa', a key Buddhist center during 5th century BCE. In 1997 a Korean delegation paid

visit to Ayodhya in search of historical connection of Queen Huh, a progenitor of the kaya dynasty. This resulted to develop an Indo-Korean heritage linkages by adopting Ayodhya as a sister city of Kimhae/ Gimhae. In the 16th century, the temple of Ayodhya was attacked and destroyed by Mughal Emperor Babar and constructed Babri Mosque at the hypothesized birthplace of Lord Rama. Two archeological excavations in 1978 and 2003 conducted by the Archeological Survey of India found evidence indicating that the Hindu temple remains existed on the site. In 2019 Supreme Court decided that disputed land would be handed over to a trust formed by the GOI for the construction of Ram Temple. The first Phase of construction began in March 2020. It has been officially announced that the temple inaugurates on 22nd January 2024.

Demography of Ayodhya Nagar Palika

According to 2011 census of India, total population of Ayodhya Nagar Palika city is 55,890, out of which 31705 are males and 24185 are females. Total child population of the city is 5976 (0-6 age) which 10.69% of total population of Ayodhya. Female sex ratio is 763 against state average of 912. Literacy rate of Ayodhya city is 78.15% higher than the state average of 67.68% while female literacy rate around 71.10% and male literacy rate 83.43%. As per 2011 census, the majority population is of Hindu with 93.23 % and Muslims comes the second with 6.19%.

OBJECTIVES

- The primary objective of the study to examine the performance of religious tourism in Ayodhya as a global tourist hub.
- To analysis the potentiality and future prospects of religious tourism.

DATABASE AND METHODOLOGY

This paper is based on secondary data obtained from various sources such as World Tourism Council, Ministry of Tourism, Govt. of India, Uttar Pradesh Tourism Board, Census of India, District census handbook and District Statistical handbook as well as various published research paper, article and books.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION:

Month wise Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) in the period of 2018 to 2022

Fig.2 shows foreign tourist arrivals in the period for 2018 to 2022 in India. In 2018, India receives 17 million foreign tourists while it stood at 2.7 million in 2020. The arrival of foreign tourist gradually decreases due to COVID-19 Lockdown. However, the inflow of FTAs is gradually increase again in recent years.

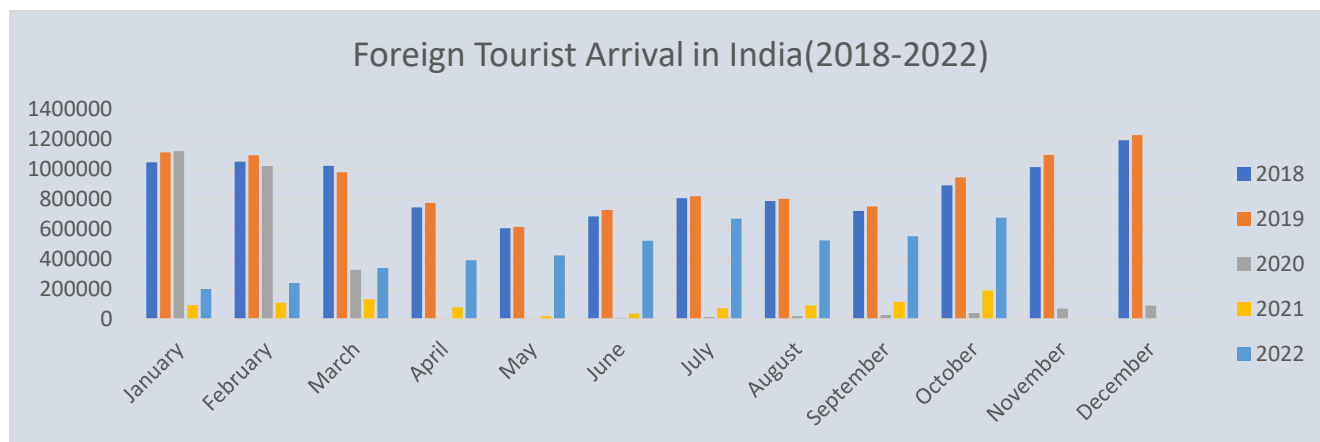


Figure:2 Foreign tourists’ arrival, Ministry of Tourism GOI

The Domestic and Foreign tourists’ status in Uttar Pradesh, 2016-2023

Uttar Pradesh is the 4th largest state in India, with an approximate area of 2,40,928 sq.km. It is the most populous state in the country, with a population of 199.5 million (2011). Uttar Pradesh is one of the most favored states for tourist in India, with a consistent ranking amongst the top states in terms of tourist arrivals. In 2016 Uttar Pradesh was ranked the 2nd state in terms if the total tourist arrivals, 2nd in terms of the domestic tourist’s arrivals and 3rd in terms of the foreign tourist arrival. Fig.3 shows the tourist inflow in the state for the period of 2016 to 2023. In 2016 tourist visit in Uttar Pradesh was 21 million while the number gradually increase to 48 million in 2023. The growth rate of tourist inflow approximate 14.50% for the above-mentioned period. The tourism industry in Uttar Pradesh has a significant contribution of tourism to employment generation both direct and indirect, is of immense importance to the state.

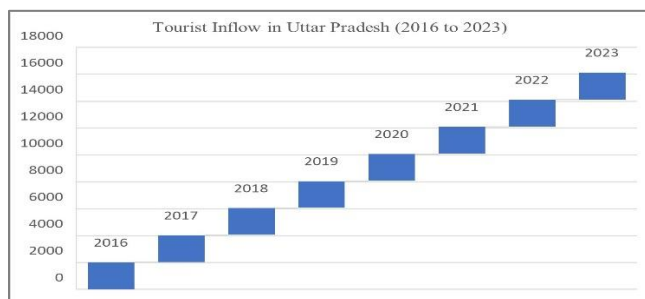


Figure 3 Tourist inflow in Uttar Pradesh,2016- 2023
UP Tourism Board

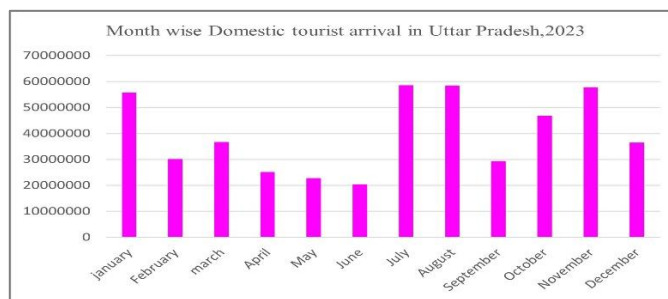


Figure 4 Month wise tourist flow in Uttar Pradesh,2023,
UP Tourism Board

The Indian and Foreign Tourist Arrival in Ayodhya, 2017 to 2023

Ayodhya has long held great historical and cultural importance, recognized as the birthplace of Lord Rama, a revered figure in Hindu mythology. It is also a significant site for followers of Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism. Recently, the town has seen a rise in tourism, attracting visitors from around the globe to its heritage sites. This growth has been facilitated by government initiatives to promote and

preserve Ayodhya's rich cultural heritage. Ayodhya's evolution as a tourist destination began in the early 1990s with the launch of the Ramayana Circuit project by the Indian government. This initiative focused on developing and promoting sites linked to the life and journey of Lord Rama, with Ayodhya being a key location. The government invested in enhancing Ayodhya's infrastructure and connectivity, including the development of roads, railways, and airports, making it more accessible for tourists to explore its heritage sites (prayagsamagam.com, 2024).

One of the major attractions of Ayodhya is the Ram Janmabhumi, the site where it is believed that Lord Rama was Born. Another important tourist spot is Hanuman Garhi, Kanak Bhawan, Tretha ka thakur temple, Nageshwernath Temple, Ram ki Paidi etc.



Figure 5 Tourist arrival in Ayodhya, 2017-2023 UP tourism Board

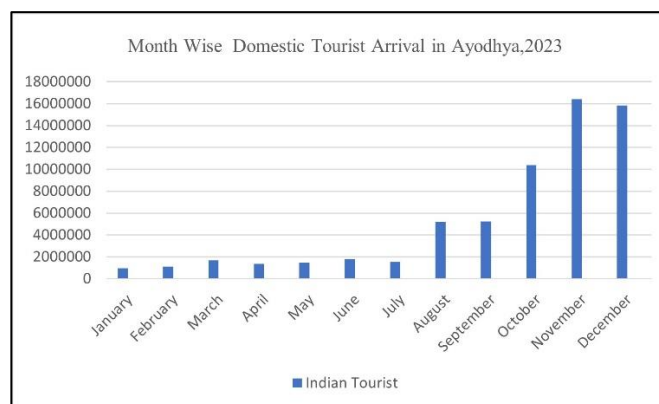


Figure 6 Domestic Tourist Arrival.in Ayodhya,2023, UP Tourism Board

Fig 5 shows that there is a gradual growth in tourist both domestic and foreign visits in Ayodhya since 2017. The year 2023 record maximum domestic tourist inflow in Ayodhya while figure 6 shows that most of the tourists are prefer to visit Ayodhya in the month of October, November and December. Recently Tourism Board of UP estimated that, Ayodhya received 2.75 Lakh tourist in 2021 to 2.39 crore in 2022. Its increasing at the rate of 85% in 2021-2022. This will be increasing very faster rate along with inauguration of Ram temple in upcoming year. An estimation suggests that, Ayodhya will become the world's largest spirituals tourism destination by 2030, approximately 5 crore tourists attract every year and also increase the tourism potentialities in the state. With the rapid growth of tourism several impacts also noticed in the study area such as socio-cultural changes, economical changes and environmental transformation.

Government Initiatives

Ayodhya has been a site of profound historical and cultural importance for centuries. In the recent years, Ayodhya has experienced a significant increase in tourism, attracting visitors from across the globe to its heritage sites. This growth has been made possible by the government's efforts in promoting and preserving the town's rich cultural heritage. The Union Minister recently stated that, Ayodhya will become the world's largest religious tourism hub by 2030. Ayodhya's transformation into a tourist destination began in the early 1990s when the Indian government first initiated the

Ramayana Circuit Project. The project focused on developing and promoting sites connected to the life and journey of Lord Rama, with Ayodhya being a key location.

The government invested in enhancing Ayodhya's infrastructure and connectivity, including the construction of roads, railways, and airports. These improvements made it more convenient for tourists to visit the town and explore its heritage sites (prayagsamagam.com, 2024). Under this programmed also State Government of UP proposed special sub-circuits in Ayodhya. One of these sub- circuits is Ayodhya Ram mandir. Ministry of Tourism and Culture and Ministry of Urban development, Govt. of India have recently proposed two programs HRIDAY (heritage City Development and Augmentation Yojana) and PRASAD (Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Augmentation Drive). These programs aim to promote religious tourism, cultural development and strengthen the heritage sites using national and international resources in making the environment green and sustainable. Under these programs, Govt of Uttar Pradesh select five sites for heritage and religious tourism in 2017 viz Varanasi, Ayodhya, Mathura, Gorakhpur and Agra.

CONCLUSION

The development of tourism industry is largely depending on infrastructure, government projects and policy. Tourism is playing a major role in the economic structure of any region. Therefore, each country develops own tourism policy to promote tourism activity. The most popular type of tourism is religious tourism, which accounts more than 70% of national tourist arrival and 20% of tourism income. Ayodhya is a major religious tourist spot in Uttar Pradesh. Lakhs of people from all over the world visit Ayodhya. This may affect religious, social, cultural and economic aspects to a greater extent. Therefore, we can say that Ayodhya Positioning as a global tourist hub with immense potential for future development in all aspects of religious tourism and tourism industry

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