

SPIRITUAL TOURISM FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT BY REDISCOVERING VALUES AND LINKING CULTURES

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ABSTRACT

The interaction among huge number of tourists has the potential for spiritual experiences and transformational spiritual growth. Moreover, transformational interactions, cultural exchanges and dialogues among these tourists from various states of India and other countries promote exchange of cultural values, spiritual values and family values like tolerance, respect, love, harmony and mutual understanding. To attain sustainability, local traditions, spiritual values and rich cultural heritage of visited destinations have to be understood and respected. The social and cultural dimensions of tourism-including spiritual tourism-if considered by decision makers and leaders can reap fruits in form of sustainable development. This paper presents a way of healthy and value-based life by way of spirituality for development of spiritual tourism and for creating employment opportunities, generating revenue and minimizing poverty.

KEYWORDS: Spirituality, Values, Culture, Traditions, Sustainable Development, Rajyoga Meditation.

INTRODUCTION

In the past few decades, tourism has registered continued growth to become the fastest growing economic sector in the world. It is termed as leading global industry. It is one of the major sectors of the economy and contributing a large proportion to the national income worldwide, generating employment opportunities in a big way. Focusing on the great potential of tourism sector, almost every country is making efforts in promoting tourism and making policies to attract tourists. The growth in tourism has brought tangible and intangible elements into considerations having economic, environmental and cultural effects.

Marketing and promotion of tourism has a vital importance because of the competition in this industry both within and between the generating countries. Tourism creates direct, indirect and induced employment. The spectrum of employment it produces is vast, ranging from highly qualified and trained managers of five-star hotels to room boys, sales girls, and artisans. With faster growth, new horizons of employment have opened up for the unemployed and underemployed youth of the developing countries. The 21st century is the century of tourism. It is a magic-magnet and the most powerful tool to gain name and fame.

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The ability to recognize and deal with change across a wide range of behavioral and technological factors is a key element of a successful tourism industry. Major changes are visible due to shifts in the leisure and tourism environment reflecting changing consumer values, political forces and growth of information tools. There is no doubt that *Spiritual Tourism* would really be a great asset to the economy. Spiritual wellness tourism is often an alternative space in which one can engage in self analysis without the stresses and distractions of stakeholders from family, home, colleagues and workplaces.

**PRAJAPITA BRAHMA KUMARIS
ISHWARIYA VISHWA VIDYALAYA
(PBKIVV) PROMOTING SPIRITUAL
TOURISM**

The Brahma Kumaris institution is a socio-spiritual education centre for higher learning in spiritualism nicknamed as 'Om Shanti Ashram' (as followers of this Ashram use this word 'Om Shanti' to exchange greetings with each other) having a network of study centers in all the five continents of world. It has its international headquarter at Mount Abu, District- Sirohi, Rajasthan and has 3 main Campuses for spiritual learning such as 'Pandav Bhawan' (which is the oldest campus), Gyan Sarovar Campus at Mount Abu whereas 'Shantivan' situated at base of hill 'Telhati', is the biggest campus having accommodation facility for more than 22,000 people and has a huge Spiritual Congregation Hall with 20,000 people's seating capacity which is named as 'Diamond Hall'. The seekers of spiritual education, learners of Ancient Rajayoga Meditation visit and stay at the serene and spiritually charged campuses of this Ashram. Professional Excellence Training Programmes and Spiritual Empowerment Courses under various faculties of this spiritual education centre are also organized here.

Special studies at this Ashram include the practice of values in life at workplace and change in behavior for holistic development of life has proved as a major attraction for the visitors.

The visitors to Brahma Kumaris Ashram are multi-national, multi-ethnic, multi-faith and multi-culture in nature. Moreover, transformational interactions, cultural exchanges and dialogues among these tourists from various states of India and other countries promote exchange of cultural values, spiritual values and family values like tolerance, respect, love, harmony and mutual understanding. Spiritual bonding among the participants of various training programmes at Brahma Kumaris Ashram lead to the development of Universal brotherhood (the ancient value of 'VASUDHAIVA KUTUMBAKAM'. It helps in developing peace among various castes/creeds/ ethnicities breaking the barriers of nationalities and inspiring them to focus on the value of Humanity as One-World-Family.

The tourists coming to Brahma Kumaris Ashram have the urge to learn Rajayoga meditation and develop peaceful life-style free from Stresses and Strains even during the adverse conditions and situations in life. They also play a major role in sustainable development of Abu because most of them stay for 3 to 5 days in Abu. Adhar Devi Temple, Gaumukh Vashisth Ashram, Guru Shikhar Dattatraya Mandir, Mahadev Mandir, Achalgarh are some of other beautiful attractions for enhancing Spiritual tourism. Those, who come to enjoy beauty of surrounding Nature, do stay in hotels on the outskirts of the city. Mount Abu Ras Shala (MARS) is of immense attraction for those having interest in Ayurveda Healing. There is no industrial production in Abu; major source of income in Mount Abu is based extensively on tourism. The number of visitors coming to Abu contribute to economic growth of Abu due to increased demand of eatables, transport facilities for sight-seeing and travel, shopping for garments and handicraft materials.

Influx of more than 2 million tourists to Abu every year is a major source of revenue generation for Municipal Council of Mount Abu. Almost 15% of these visitors are those, who come solely for experiencing the power of spirituality. Brahma Kumaris Ashram provides all basic facilities to these seekers of Spirituality, who aspire to live a value based life through spiritual empowerment.

The practitioners of Rajayoga Meditation exhibit positive attitude towards their own self as well as others so as to move forward towards the goals of life, i.e., to be free from arrogance, annoyance, animosity and ignorance and to be full of virtues of peace, purity, prosperity, health and happiness.

STRATEGIES TO DEVELOP SPIRITUAL TOURISM

An integral part of strategy to develop spiritual tourism is 5 'E' Model which is as follows: Education, Empathy, Excellence, Eternal Qualities and Empowerment. On soft skill level, one has to be Educated about ethos of Spirituality, to be inspired to behave with Empathy towards the fellow beings. These two Es being in practice will lead to 3rd E, i.e., Excellence in life. Eternal Qualities (Innate Values) inherent in every soul are to be explored through education and these qualities and values once identified and used in daily practice will empower the individuals to shift focus from narrower oneself to the broader society. That is real spirituality in life.

NOW, REGARDING BASIC REQUIREMENTS TO DEVELOP SPIRITUAL TOURISM

- Though the Brahma Kumaris Ashram has translation facility in multiple languages during their programmes yet to attract more tourists, spiritual discourses in various languages should be organized for visitors from various regions within India and for various foreign language speaking tourists.

- Besides the Brahma Kumaris Ashram, other organizations should also plan to organize such multi-lingual spiritual orientation programmes, more often in their premises.
- Eco-friendly infrastructure facilities should be developed to accommodate more tourists. Eco-Sensitive nature of Abu should not be deterrent in tourism development. Since tourism is the only source of economic growth in Abu, there should be holistic approach to keep balance between tourism development and environment conservation.
- Arrangements should be made to provide seamless travel facilities during sight-seeing and for comfortable shopping by developing more shops having materials at reasonable price tag.
- Necessary laws should be enforced to make Abu pick-pockets free and to let the tourists feel secure.
- Cheaper travel facilities should be developed for economically weaker section of tourists.
- Air Connectivity should be provided by developing Airport at Abu Road and Helicopter services should be developed between Abu Road and Mount Abu.
- Publishing materials in major international and regional Indian languages should be developed and uploaded on major tourism web-sites so that people from different countries and states of India interested to visit Abu can explore Abu and Mount Abu.
- Needful arrangements should be made for the tourists interested in experiencing the benefits of Indian culture (traditions, music, dance, etc), so as to let them enjoy some cultural events during evening.

CONCLUSION

Spirituality is one of major attractions for domestic and foreign tourists in Abu. Some basic features need to be identified for Spiritual Tourism; and most important of them is that tourists coming for Spiritual Tourism are not

looking for luxury but they seek to meet their divine goal of life. They wish that the technology should make their traveling easier.

Abu has outstanding potential to become a major spiritual tourism destination. The city has a greater value for domestic tourists because of its spiritual sites, especially the Brahma Kumaris Ashram for learning Ancient Rajayoga Meditation. There has been a phenomenal increase in spiritual tourists in the recent years due to generic changes in the people's attitude towards spirituality. It seems that no study has been carried out regarding the marketing and logistics aspects of spiritual tourism of Abu. Infrastructure is one of the important aspects in spiritual tourism marketing.

There are many tourism promoting issues like cultural events, handicrafts, transportation and accommodation, which greatly boost tourism, but, as of now, Abu is lagging behind in these. These issues should be made an integral part of policies for the development of spiritual tourism. Foreign tourists, who visit Abu with purpose of

satisfaction with divinity, spirituality and self discovery, should have their utmost satisfaction. The gap between expectations and available resources can be minimized through proper strategic planning, which may result in a tourists' delight and boost tourist arrivals at Abu.

The tourism marketing for Rajasthan, in general, and Mount Abu, in particular, needs to change from its narrow and conservative approach to more competitive and modern approach. It needs to develop a unique image and brand, which cannot be held by any other competitor because of its uniqueness. It is only possible by presenting Abu as a unique place of spirituality and meditation. Abu, which had been known as Arbuda Parvat in the past as ancient Pilgrim Place because of Intense Spirituality of Sages and Saints still, has a lot of potential to attract large number of the domestic and foreign tourists, which can lead to economic growth and sustainable development through spiritual tourism by rediscovering values and spirituality and by linking Ancient Indian Cultures with global cultures.