

# THE TRANSFORMATIVE IMPACT OF RELIGIOUS SITES ON INDIA'S TOURISM RENAISSANCE AND ECONOMY

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## Abstract

*Religious Tourism in India unfolds as a captivating journey into the essence of spirituality, art, culture, traditions, and architecture. As one of the world's oldest civilizations, India's cultural tapestry has been interwoven with the threads of various major religions, such as Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, and Christianity, along with niche beliefs like Sikhism, Jainism, Vaishnavism, and Judaism.*

*The Indian perspective on Religious Tourism reveals a dual prism, with domestic tourists driven by deep spiritual attachments aligned with their faith, while foreign visitors seek the novelty of spiritual experiences different from their own, all within a shared ethical framework. The delicate interplay between business and belief emerges prominently in the socio-economic structures of temples, mosques, churches, Gurudwaras, and other religious centres, which function as tangible assets, necessitating monetization for survival in societal environments.*

*In response to the pilgrims' essential needs for security in food, shelter, and health, diverse entities, including business houses, individuals, agencies, and governmental bodies, actively contribute to creating a robust Religious Tourism industry. Despite its immense potential, this sector remains largely untapped, presenting a sea of opportunities for new businesses and offering substantial employment prospects.*

*Beyond its economic implications, Religious Tourism holds the promise of blessing both businesses and the local communities. It has the potential to catalyse revenue generation, elevate the standard of living for locals, and foster comprehensive infrastructural development, including improvements in road and rail connectivity, electricity, and drinking water facilities. In essence, Religious Tourism emerges as a transformative force, intertwining spirituality, commerce, and community development, poised to shape the future narrative of India's cultural and economic landscape.*

**Keywords:** Religious Tourism, Religious sites, Transformative force & Economy

## INTRODUCTION

In the vibrant tapestry of India's cultural landscape, religious sites stand as monumental pillars, not only of spiritual significance but also as transformative hubs driving the nation's tourism renaissance and economic growth. From the majestic temples of Varanasi to the serene shores of Rameswaram, India's religious sites have long captivated the hearts and minds of pilgrims and travellers alike, offering profound experiences that transcend mere tourism. These sacred destinations serve as conduits for spiritual seekers, historians, and curious adventurers, weaving narratives of ancient wisdom and modern dynamism. Each visit becomes a journey through time, where traditions intertwine with contemporary life, offering visitors a glimpse into India's rich heritage and cultural diversity.

Moreover, the economic impact of religious tourism cannot be overstated. These sites, steeped in history and mythology, attract millions of visitors annually, injecting vitality into local economies through hospitality services, artisanal crafts, and infrastructure development. Beyond tangible gains, they foster cultural exchange and understanding, forging connections that transcend borders and beliefs.

As India embraces its role as a global tourism hotspot, the transformative power of its religious sites emerges as a beacon, illuminating paths to both spiritual enlightenment and economic prosperity. In this symbiotic relationship between tradition and modernity, India's religious heritage continues to shape its narrative, inviting the world to embark on a journey of discovery and renewal.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

**Sacred Spaces and Economic Development:** The Case of Religious Tourism in India by Gupta, R., & Mishra, S. (2023). This paper explores the relationship between religious tourism and economic development in India, examining how investments in infrastructure and promotion of religious sites have contributed to local economies.

**Pilgrimage Tourism and Sustainable Development:** A Case Study of Varanasi, India by Sharma, A., & Singh, R. (2022). This study investigates the sustainability of pilgrimage tourism in Varanasi, highlighting the economic benefits derived from pilgrim visits and the challenges in managing tourism growth while preserving cultural and environmental heritage.

**Religious Tourism and Destination Branding:** Insights from India by Reddy, K. S., & Kumar, A. (2024). This research delves into the branding strategies employed by Indian states to promote religious tourism, analysing the impact on visitor perceptions and economic outcomes.

**Cultural Tourism and Economic Empowerment:** A Study of Handicraft Industries Near Religious Sites in India by Patel, D., & Jain, P. (2023). Focusing on the handicraft sector, this paper explores how proximity to religious sites influences artisan communities' economic empowerment and the role of tourism in sustaining traditional crafts.

**Tourism Infrastructure Development and Regional Disparities:** A Case of Religious Tourism Circuits in India by Khan, F., & Choudhury, S. (2023). This study investigates the spatial distribution of tourism infrastructure along religious circuits in India, examining how investment patterns impact regional development disparities and economic growth."

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To find out the opportunities and challenges of religious tourism in India,
2. To find out the possibilities and potential of religious tourism in India.
3. To find out the satisfaction level of pilgrims / visitors.
4. To analyse religious tourism as a tool for socio – economic development.

## NEED OF THE STUDY

The study is imperative due to the pivotal role that religious sites play in India's tourism landscape and economic development. Understanding the transformative impact of these sites is crucial for policymakers, tourism authorities, and local communities alike. It addresses the need to comprehend the intricate dynamics between religious tourism, cultural heritage preservation, and economic prosperity. Additionally, with India emerging as a prominent destination for spiritual seekers and leisure travellers worldwide, there is a pressing need to examine the sustainable management of religious tourism to ensure long-term benefits for both visitors and host communities, making this research essential for informed decision-making and strategic planning.

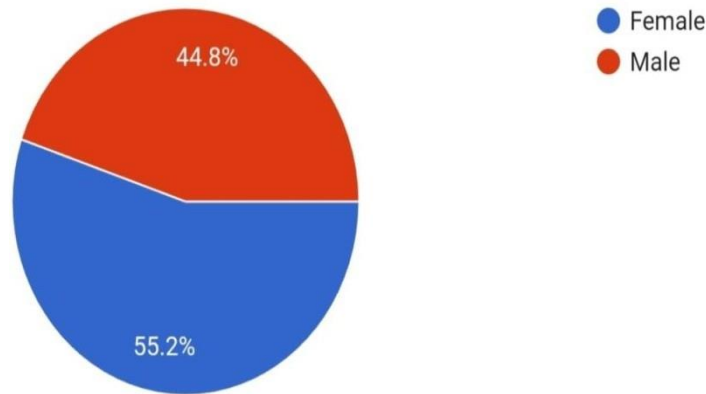
## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research paper focuses on understanding the role of religious sites in India's tourism industry development. The sample comprises individuals from diverse backgrounds and age groups, including tourists, pilgrims, and government officials. Probability sampling techniques, such as simple random and convenience sampling, were employed to distribute a digital survey, resulting in 56 responses. Data collection methods involved both primary and secondary sources. The primary method utilized a questionnaire distributed online, while secondary data was gathered through literature review. The survey consisted of 18 questions aimed at fulfilling research objectives concerning opportunities, challenges, and satisfaction levels related to religious tourism in India. Data analysis tools employed include column charts, bar charts, pie charts, surveys, and diagrams. This comprehensive approach allows for a thorough examination of the transformative impact of religious sites on India's tourism renaissance and economy.

## DATA ANALYSIS

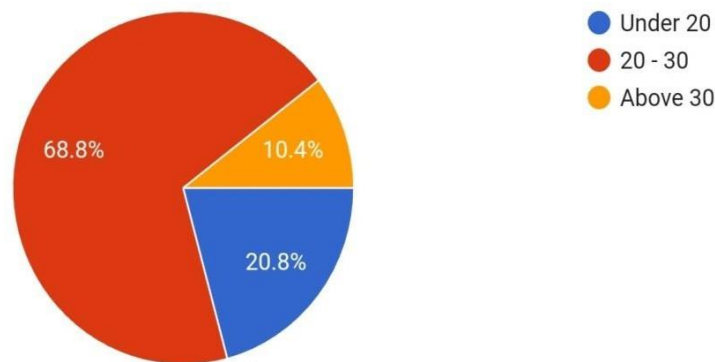
On the basis of the collected data through google questionnaires 56 respondents replied. After detailing and getting results from the survey about the population, the same is discussed here. Both male and female were included in this survey.

**FIGURE 1 - GENDER REPRESENTATION OF THE SAMPLE**



The chart above represents the respondents who participated and took part in online survey to analyze the role of religious sites in development of tourism industry in India. The respondents includes both male and female. The maximum respondents are female with 55.2 % and males are with 44.8%.

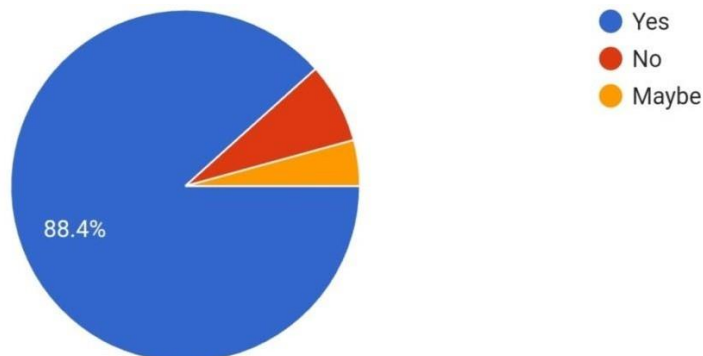
**FIGURE 2 - AGE REPRESENTATION OF THE SAMPLE**



The above pie chart represents the age groups of the respondents who all actively participated in our digital survey. This pie chart describes that maximum participants are from age group 20-30 which is 68.8%, the minimum participants are from age group above 30 which is 10.4% and 20.8% is the age group of under 20. The survey was conducted on convenience and random basis

**FIGURE 3 - REPRESENTATION OF TRAVELLING TO A RELIGIOUS SITE**

This pie chart describes that maximum participants have been went to the religious destinations i.e. 88.4% says



that they went to the religious sites, 7.4% have not been to the religious sites and 4.2% are not sure about this (i.e. the ones who have responded with maybe).

**FIGURE 4 - REPRESENTATION OF MEMBERS TRAVELLED IN GROUP**

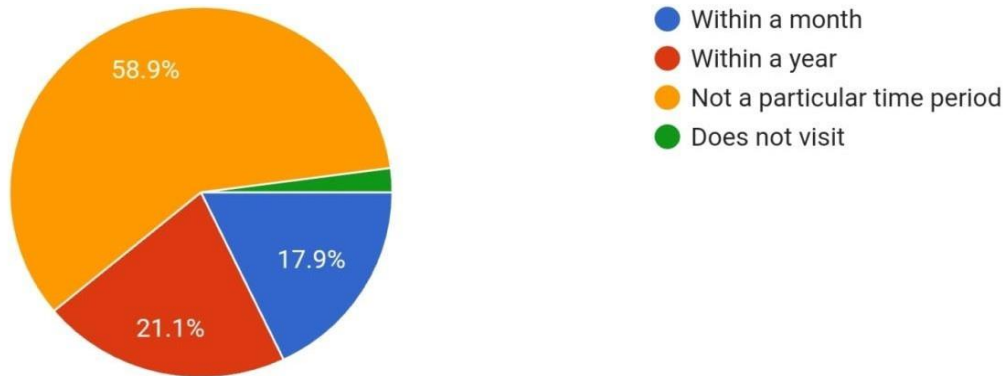
This pie – chart clearly describes about the respondents that they have travelled with how many members in a



group. The maximum number of respondents (55.8%) have been to a religious site with less than five members in a group. Then, 31.6% indicates that people have travelled in between 6-10 members in a group then 6.3% respondents have travelled in between 11-15 members in a group and the minimum number of respondents (6.3%) have travelled with more than 15 members in a group.

**FIGURE 5 - FREQUENCY OF TRAVEL**

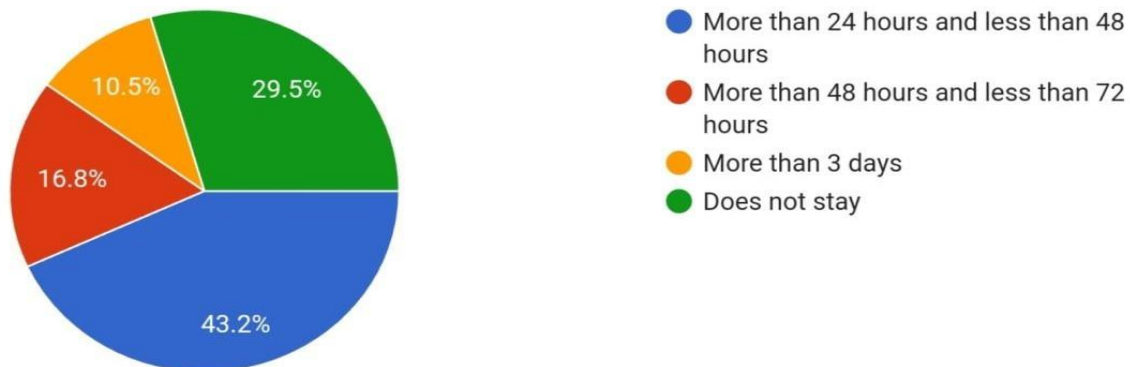
The pie chart above describes the frequency of travel to a religious site that how often the respondents visit to a religious site. So, from this we have observed that majority of the participants travel without any specific period



i.e. 58.9% of the 56 respondents, 21.1 % of the people are travelling within a year, 17.9% are travelling within a month and then there are some people who does not visit to a religious site i.e.2.1% which is the minimum response rate.

**FIGURE 6 - REPRESENTATION OF STAYING AT RELIGIOUS SITES**

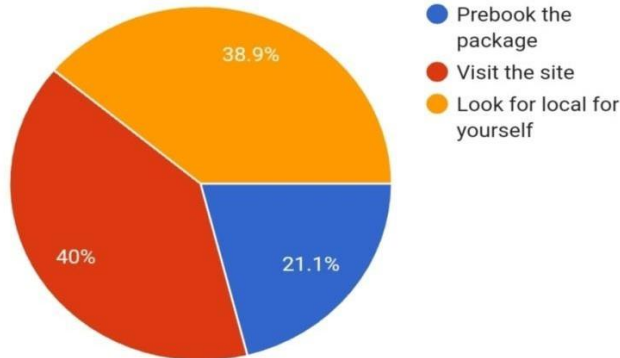
Usually people don't stay anywhere now a days but there are some situations and some religious sites which are away from our home places so we need to staythere, here the representation clearly states that 29.5% people



does not stay which means the religious sites are not so far from them where they like to visit but the people who stay there for at least more than 1 day i.e. more than 24 hours but less than 48 hours is 43.2%, then the people staying more than 48 hours but less than 72 hours is 16.8%, whereas the people staying for more than 3 days are 10.5%.

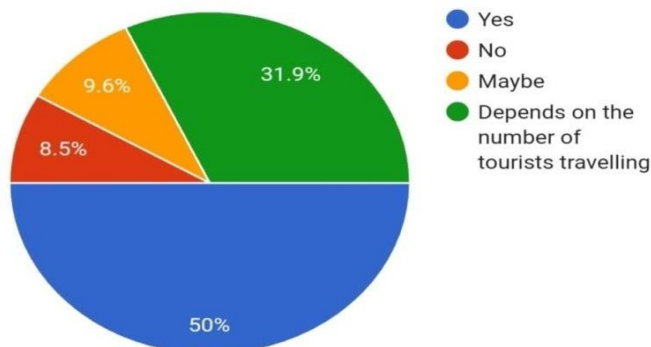
**FIGURE 7 - METHOD OF BOOKINGS**

In order to know how the respondents go for the bookings for travelling to a religious sites, then the maximum



number of respondents have answered for visit the site as in today's modern world every person prefers the online mode of maximum things i.e. 40% and many of the people like to prefer for local as we have good number of responses for look for local for yourself – 38.9% and 21.1% goes for pre book the package.

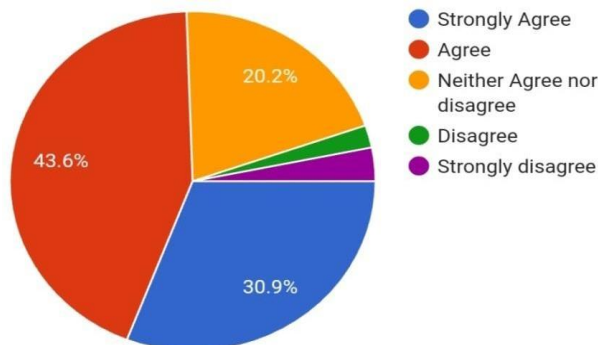
**FIGURE 8 - IMPACT ON ECONOMIC GROWTH**



As we all know that religious sites contribute to economy of our nation, and it depends on the number of tourists travelling to those sites and this has been approved by 31.9 percent of the 96 respondents which is a good number but 8.5 % of the population does not agrees with that because everyone has different view/perspective. So overall we can say that 50 percent of the population agrees that religious sites have an impact on Indian economy.

**FIGURE 9 - IMPACT ON QUALITY OF LIFE**

Religious tourism enhances the quality of life of residents in tourism dependent destinations, 74.5% agrees with

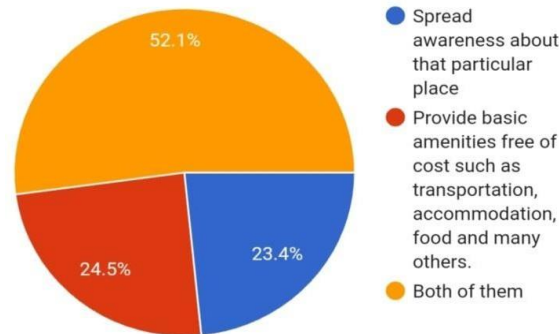


this statement (agree + strongly agree), 20.2% fall under the category of neutral whereas 5.3% does not agree

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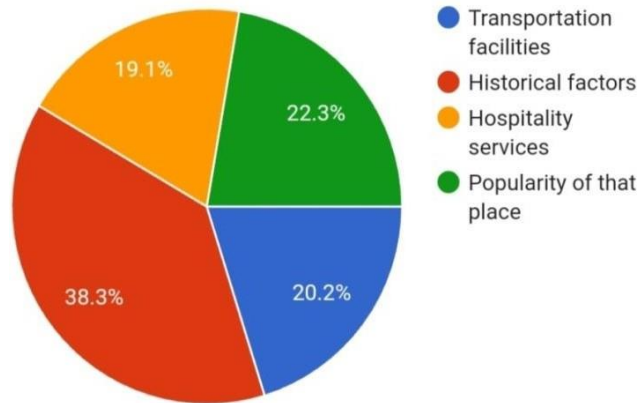
with it (2.1 disagree+3.2 strongly disagree).

**FIGURE 10- GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES TO PROMOTE TOURISM**



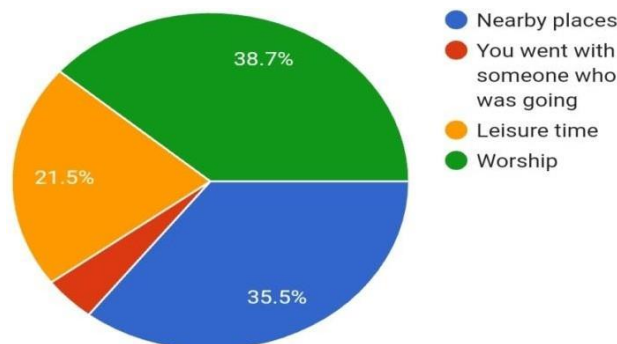
According to me, government's first initiative should be construction of proper roads and proper infrastructure. But here we are having the opinions of respondents – 23.4% wants that government should spread awareness about that place, 24.5% provide basic amenities free of cost and 52.1% agrees to both the statements.

**FIGURE 11 - CONTRIBUTING FACTORS**



As it is important for us to know in this research that which are the contributing factors of religious tourism, so here we gave transportation facilities, historical factors, hospitality services and popularity of that place. So 20.2% says that transportation facilities, 38.3% are with historical factors, 19.1% are with hospitality services and 22.3% are saying that popularity of the place is the contributing factor of religious tourism.

**FIGURE 12 - REASON OF VISITING RELIGIOUS SITE**



There can be various reasons of visiting religious site, so here we were not able to place all the options, here we have added some general options which are clearly visible in the above pie chart. 35.5% have visited due to residing nearby, 38.7% goes to worship, which is my personal perspective even. 21.5% went due to leisuretime, and 4.3% went with someone who was going.

**OPPORTUNITIES FOR RELIGIOUS TOURISM IN INDIA:**

**FIGURE 13 - OPPORTUNITIES OF RELIGIOUS TOURISM**



**Economic Revenue:** Religious tourism can significantly boost Indian economic revenue, contributing to sustainable economic development.

**Spiritual Health:** Religious tourism offers a retreat from materialism, aiding in improving individuals' spiritual health by alleviating stress, anxiety, and crime.

**Cultural Education:** It provides an excellent opportunity for the younger generation to learn about Indian culture, traditions, and religion, fostering a deeper connection to their heritage.

**Global Recognition:** India can emerge as a global icon for its rich cultural and religious heritage, attracting tourists from around the world.

**Communication and Dialogue:** Religious tourism facilitates communication and dialogue among individuals, both within and outside places of worship, fostering understanding and tolerance.

**Fulfilment of Needs:** Some religious places are believed to fulfil the needs and desires of individuals, encouraging effective communication with religious leaders and enhancing knowledge.

**Employment Opportunities:** The development of religious tourism generates employment opportunities, stimulating entrepreneurship, small business ventures, and economic diversity.

**Preservation of Authenticity:** Ensuring the authenticity and original character of religious sites is vital, maintaining their significance and attracting visitors.

**Promotion of Peace and Harmony:** Religious tourism promotes peace, harmony, and resolution of conflicts and disputes, fostering agreeable relationships among individuals and communities.

Overall, religious tourism presents numerous opportunities for economic prosperity, cultural preservation, spiritual growth, and societal harmony in India.

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**CHALLENGES FOR RELIGIOUS TOURISM IN INDIA:**

**FIGURE 14 - CHALLENGES OF RELIGIOUS TOURISM**

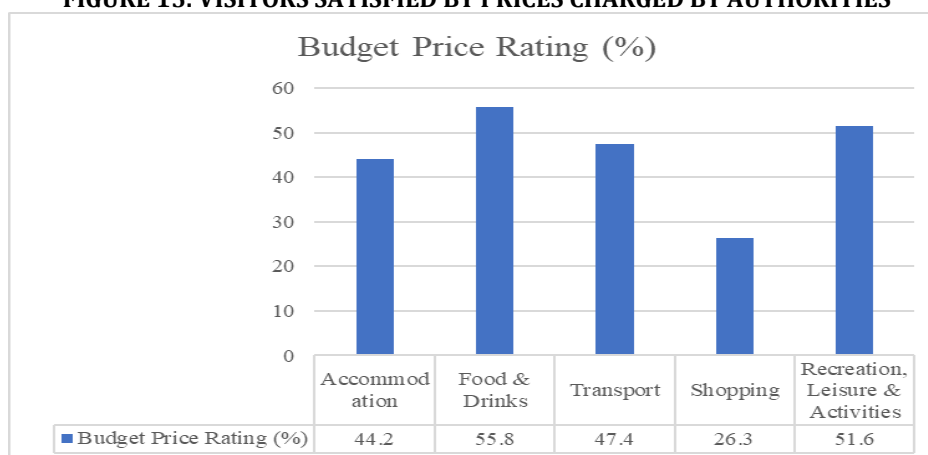


1. **Deficiency of proper substructure** – A big challenge in front of government to fulfil the deficiency of proper substructure. Substructure needs for the travel and tourism range from corporeal substructure such as roads, electricity, water supply, telecommunications etc. Because of the poor infrastructure the international tourist hesitates to come. It has been a vital cause why the international tourist has been skipping the country. Squander Management – In part a derivative of the problem of carrying capacity, the squander management problem has aggravated as science and technology grew to usher us into the ‘Plastic era.’
2. **Access and connectivity** – To harness India’s tourism efficacy, various endeavor is being taken for opening new destination and exploring alcove section. However basic facilities such as air, road connectivity and hospitality services at this destination and the connecting cities are insufficient. This is utmost obstacle for the development of tourism.
3. **Monetizing Religion** – In the race for developing as many niches as possible, there is oftentimes the issues of religion being ‘monetized,’ as the host community gets increasingly driven by the ‘profit motive.’
4. **Infringement of Carrying Capacity** – Most of the religious places within the country, major or minor, experience short term, but intense seasons that modify the dynamic forces and the changing aspects of the region for the rest of the year. The Char Dham Yatra in Uttarakhand is one such example. It begins from May until November and puts a severe pressure upon the transport infrastructure of the Garhwal region. When there is occurrence of monsoons and a lot of road construction is still under progress, then the region also experiences landslides. Hence, environmental issues, such as occurrence of landslides impose detrimental effects within the course of development of religious tourism (Shanthakumari, 2017).
5. **Convenience** – Convenience at various tourist locations and route need to be improved basic convenience such as drinking water, well maintained and clean waiting rooms, and toilets, first aid etc.
6. **Human Resource** – Availability of skilled manpower is an utmost challenge faced by the travel and tourism industry, to blemish growth in the travel and tourism industry, trained manpower or workforce is required. If manpower increased, travel and tourism industry will defiantly improve.
7. **Security and safety** – In India there are lack of security and safety. The major reasons being the internal community riots and also the terrorist attacks faced from time to time. The country is highly unsafe for females and there is poor discipline as well as political instability in the country.
8. **Lack of publicity** – Lack of publicity for good tourist destinations among the travelers and also lack of good education to the locals on receiving guests and hosting them. Also, lack of publicity on cuisines and cultures.



**POSSIBILITIES AND POTENTIAL OF RELIGIOUS TOURISM**

**FIGURE 15: VISITORS SATISFIED BY PRICES CHARGED BY AUTHORITIES**



This study tried to know the price charged by authorities of the religious sites and the factors considered for the price level were accommodation, food and drinks, transports, shopping and Recreation, leisure, and cultural activities.

**a) Accommodation**

44.2% of the sample respondents have rated accommodation as their budget price. The accommodation availed by the visitors from authorities, majority being various trusts are rated as cheaper. Generally, it has come to light that Trusts provide accommodation facilities from INR 100/- per day/person (dormitories) to higher rates for AC Rooms which are lot cheaper than the tariffs in the private hotels and motels.

**b) Food & Drinks**

55.8% of the sample respondents have rated food and drinks. Basically, per meal cost/person for visitors are made available at INR 25/- to INR 30/-, which is an unbeatable price for private restaurants and other eating places. The price so low is probably due to economies of scale, as 27000 visitors are served per day. Some of the temples such as Sikh Gurdwaras provide free meal services to visitors.

**c) Transport**

47.4% of the sample respondents have rated transport. There are mostly two reasons behind the transport being rated as low cost, for example Shirdi Saibaba Sans than had been running a free bus service from Gate no. 1 to Bhakta Niwas and secondly, availability of State-run buses also being at a low cost.

**d) Shopping**

26.3% of the sample respondents have rated shopping. Shopping from the shops under the religious sites has been cheaper, as they keep the prices under control by keeping a check on it. Souvenir shops are mostly to be found around these sites. This shop mostly sells religious books and deity statues to the pilgrims.

**e) Recreation, Leisure & Cultural Activities**

51.6% of the sample respondents have rated Recreation, Leisure & Cultural Activities. The visitors are mostly pilgrims who have come here for devotion and inner peace, prayer sessions are conducted by the temple authorities which are free of charge.

**SATISFACTION LEVEL OF VISITORS**  
**FIGURE 16 - REPRESENTATION OF SATISFACTION OF VISITORS**

Aspect	Satisfaction Rate (%)
Tour Operator	17.9
Transportation	54.7
Tourist Guide	25.3
Accommodation Quality	49.5
Public Convenience	44.2
Eating Places	56.8
Information Centers	32.6
Souvenir Shops	27.4

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<b>Entertainment Places</b>	29.5
<b>Quality of Roads</b>	37.9
<b>Security</b>	41.1
<b>Behavior of Local People</b>	41.1
<b>Upkeep of Tourist Sites</b>	16.8
<b>Accommodation Tariff</b>	17.9
<b>Quality of Information</b>	37.9

The analysis was done in order to understand the satisfaction and dissatisfaction rate of visitors to temples as religious tourism place. The factors considered for satisfaction and dissatisfaction were availability of tour operators, availability of transportation, availability of tourist guide, availability of good quality accommodation, public convenience, eating places, information centers, souvenir shops, quality of roads, security, behavior of local people, up keeping of tourist sites and quality of information provided. Representation of the same (i.e. respondents views) are continued further.

**1. Availability of Tour Operator:** Although tour operators like makemytrip.com, yatra.com and many other online and brick & mortar are competing in the market, there has not been a huge profit for either of them. 17.9% are satisfied by this service.

**2. Availability of Transportation:** 54.7% of the sample respondents are satisfied by the availability of transportation. There are many buses and trains to specific pilgrimage places or temples.

**3. Availability of Tourist Guide:** 25.3% are satisfied by a tourist guide. A guide for temple is a rare sight. Many of the places is so well organized that the visitors do not feel the necessity to avail a guide.

**4. Availability of good quality accommodation:** There are two types of accommodation, one provided by authorities of religious sites and other provided by private players. Accommodations provided by temple authorities are very cheap, airy, and hygienic. Hence 49.5% of the respondents have been satisfied by the quality of accommodation.

**5. Public Convenience:** Public convenience has been rated as satisfaction by 44.2% of the sample respondents. Although authorities have done a commendable job, the government has been lagging behind to provide such facilities to the visitors.

**6. Eating Places:** Eating places has been given a high weightage of satisfaction level i.e. 56.8% . Theregional authorities provide cheap and good quality of food and on the other hand private players charge a higher rate.

**7. Information Centers:** There are various information centers inside the religious sites. Hence, 32.6% are satisfied by this service.

**8. Souvenir Shops:** The souvenir shops are well placed all across the city. The visitors can avail various statues of God and Goddess , devotional books, and other local souvenir product. 27.4% of the sample respondents is satisfied with the quality of souvenir shops.

**9. Entertainment Places:** There are water parks and other parks and play ground. Sample respondents have an average review on the satisfaction level of entertainment places i.e. 29.5%.

**10. Quality of Roads:** The roads have been under construction in recent years. Government has been trying to improve the quality of roads since many past years. 37.9% of the sample is satisfied by the quality of road. This shows dedication of the government to improve religious tourism.

**11. Security:** 41.1% of the sample population is satisfies with the security . There are cases of theft many a times. The temple is surrounded with good security.

**12. Behavior of Local People:** 41.1% of the sample respondent tourists have been satisfied by the behavior of local people. A bias treatment favoring mother tongue speaking people could be clearly seen.

**13. Upkeep of tourist sites:** There has been again below average review in this factor i.e. 16.8% of the respondents are satisfied by this factor. Through personal observation it could be said that there has been only low level of up keeping of the tourist site.

**14. Accommodation tariff:** The accommodation tariffs of religious authorities are very low, which has been

the major reason for satisfaction in this sector. On the other hand, tariff of private hospitality sector charges high due to the objective of profit maximization. 17.9% of the respondents are satisfied from this factor.

**15. Quality of Information:** 37.9% of the sample respondents have given a review that they are satisfied the quality of information provided by the authorities, internet, and other sources.

**From the above data interpretation and analysis following observation can be made:**

**Satisfied Sectors:** The visitors are satisfied with the services such as availability of transportation, good quality of accommodation, eating places, public convenience, , quality of roads, security, behavior of local people and quality of information which are mostly provided by the authorities or the government.

**Dissatisfied Sectors:** The visitors to are dissatisfied with the services such as availability of tour operator, availability of tourist guide, souvenir shops , information centers, entertainment places, upkeep of tourist site, accommodation tariff. Hence, the government should work on providing more information centers, take due care of the tourist site to aid the tourist.

## CONCLUSION

This research delved into the pivotal role of religious sites in India's tourism industry development. Despite challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the study garnered significant insights from 56 respondents, primarily aged between 20-30, shedding light on key aspects of religious tourism. It revealed the profound impact of religious tourism on India's economy, cultural heritage, and societal harmony. Additionally, the research highlighted the importance of government promotion and marketing efforts to harness the full potential of religious tourism. Crucially, it emphasized the spiritual significance and pilgrimage aspect inherent in religious tourism, offering a unique blend of worship, cultural exploration, and employment generation. Overall, the findings underscored the transformative potential of religious tourism as a catalyst for national development, cultural preservation, and fostering peace and harmony, positioning it as a cornerstone of India's tourism renaissance.

## SUGGESTIONS & RECCOMENDATIONS FOR ENHANCING RELIGIOUS TOURISM IN INDIA:

1. **Develop Infrastructure:** Improve infrastructure at religious sites to attract more visitors and ensure a comfortable experience.
2. **Maintain Ecological Balance:** Implement measures to preserve the natural environment and mitigate negative impacts on tourists.
3. **Inspect Religious Trusts:** Conduct regular financial audits of religious trusts to ensure transparency and effective utilization of funds.
4. **Preserve Local Values:** Maintain the authenticity of religious sites by conserving local customs, traditions, and beliefs in the face of globalization.
5. **Address Carrying Capacity:** Manage visitor influx to prevent overcrowding and environmental degradation, especially in sensitive areas like hilly regions.
6. **Improve Waste Management:** Implement efficient waste management systems to tackle pollution and maintain cleanliness at religious sites.
7. **Combat Pollution:** Address air, water, land, and noise pollution through effective regulatory measures and community participation.

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