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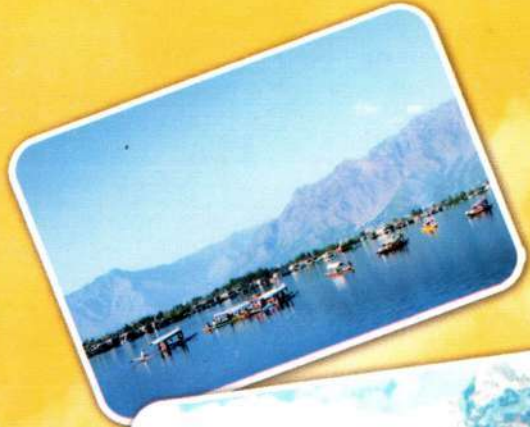


Kurukshetra

A JOURNAL ON RURAL DEVELOPMENT



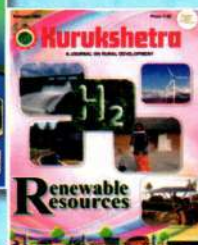
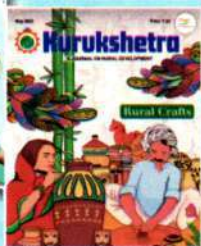
**Tourism: Enriching
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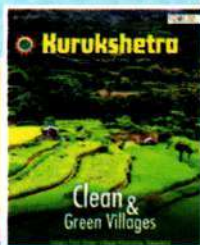
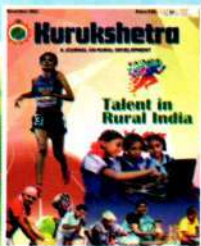
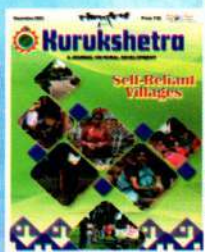
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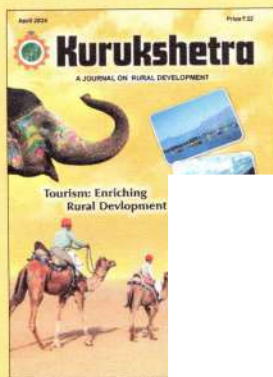
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Neeraj Ridlaan

EDITORIAL OFFICE
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Email : kurukshetrajournal@gmail.com

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Editorial

In India the Rural tourism has immense potential to support local economies and preserve the local cultures while experiencing the authentic and traditional lifestyle of rural communities. The rural tourism has certain typical characteristics that it is experience oriented, the locations are less populated and mostly dominated by natural environment, it meshes with local events and seasons and most importantly it is based on preservation of culture, heritage and traditions. It is a form of tourism that goes beyond city breaks and popular tourist attractions.

This issue of Kurukshetra looks into the role and potential of tourism in the socio-economic development and regeneration of rural areas. All the articles in this issue touch upon the different aspects of Rural Tourism. The article **'Amenitisation of Rural India for Nature Tourism'** discusses that how we can make the Nature Tourism more popular in India by providing enabling amenities in villages in the form of Affirmatory, Supportive and Value adding amenities like basic healthcare, sanitation, digital service, travel connectivity, hospitality skill set and village Kutir udhyam etc.

Article **'Crafting rural cultural trails through tourism'** delves into the idea of opening up the rural cultural heritage trails ranging from exquisite handloom weaves to vibrant music passed through the generations of rural India. When local festivals and dances of rural India are built by local community in local environment, it gives genuine feeling and immense pleasure to the tourist as well to the local community.

As Rural tourism in India is emerging as a catalyst for economic growth and community empowerment, the government is focusing on developing the border and far flung areas to sustain rural tourism aiming at the well-being and empowerment of local communities. The article **'Rural Tourism: Catalyzing the multifold Development in Rural India'** focuses on how the Government efforts are fostering economic growth of these areas while preserving the cultural and traditional values of rural India.

Rural Fairs and festivals are the mainstay of rural tourism which delivers economic and social-cultural benefits to the country. The article **'Rural Fairs and festivals'** encompasses the role and importance of festivals in reinvigorating the heritage, sustaining Indian arts and facilitating rural produce while enhancing the economy.

Touching upon the unusual aspect of the subject, the article **'Converting Postal Heritage into Tourist Attractions'** suggests that how the colonial era postal heritage buildings can be converted into museums or tourist attractions turning them revenue earners which can be used for maintenance of these heritage buildings thus opening more vistas for tourism.

Rural areas often lack basic amenities such as good roads, electricity, and healthcare facilities, which can deter tourists from visiting. So adequate infrastructure is as much necessary for enhancing rural tourism as the preservation of culture, heritage and traditions. There are also possible chances of negative impacts of environmental pollution, displacement of locals and large carbon footprints due to unbridled infrastructure development and unhindered expansion of rural tourism. However an integrated and sustainable approach which is so crucial to rural tourism can help avoid damage to the resource on which it depends. □



Rural Tourism

Catalysing the Multifold Developments in Rural India

Rural tourism in India is emerging as a catalyst for economic growth and community empowerment. Government initiatives, competitions, and international recognition, such as UNWTO awards, spotlight successful models like Pochampally and Dhordo. The Vibrant Village Program focuses on comprehensive development in border areas, and capacity-building efforts aim to sustain rural tourism, fostering collaboration and resilience for the well-being of local communities.

* Dr. Kamakshi Maheshwari

** Mr. Chandradeep Singh

Rural tourism is tourism that happens in the countryside or a rural area. However, it has been noted that the concept of rural tourism is much more diverse when it is dismantled to the elemental level. Superficially, the elemental level of rural tourism consists of the area that concerns the land use pattern, economy of the area, involvement of

the community, undisturbed development of the area, and its traditional and cultural identity.

As a practice the initiation of rural tourism at the global level dates back to the beginning of the nineteenth century, when the countryside started appealing to tourists as a result of rapid expansion in the industrialisation in the cities. Since the 1980's after the World Commission on Environment and Development's

* The author is Nodal Officer, Central Nodal Agency Rural Tourism and Rural Homestay, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, Assistant Professor, Indian Institute of Tourism and Travel Management. Email: kamakshi.maheshwari@iittm.ac.in

** The author is Manager, Central Nodal Agency Rural Tourism and Rural Homestay, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India.

report on 'Our Common Future' and the adoption of the Millenium Development Goals in 2000 rural tourism has been seen as the tool for the regeneration of the rural economy and development by the developed as well as the developing nations.

Rural tourism in India is still in a nascent stage, emerging as a niche sector within the broader tourism industry. A significant portion of India is rural, with a substantial population residing in these rural areas, remaining untrodden to take tourists on a stroll to showcase glimpses of the authentic essence of India. Fostering the growth of the rural economy by creating employment opportunities.

India's villages serve as a storehouse of the nation's rich culture, traditions, crafts, heritage, and agricultural practices. Harnessing the potential of these local elements through tourism cannot only generate income but also create job opportunities in rural regions. This approach is empowering local communities, youth, and women. Moreover, it contributes to mitigating distress migration from rural areas, addressing poverty, and promoting sustainable development.

Realising the Potential

In India, one of the first mentions of rural tourism can be seen in the tenth five-year plan (2002 - 2007). However, rural tourism was first prioritised through the eleventh five-year plan (2007 - 2012) by providing infrastructural development in these areas as the new form of tourism. Within the specific time frame, out of the total 1003 projects 65 were specifically sanctioned for rural tourism.

The twelfth five-year plan (2012 - 2017) tries to embrace the opportunities and opening the avenues for the development of the niche areas of tourism like medical tourism and rural tourism.

Strategising the Way Forward

The Ministry of Tourism, Government of India for promoting and developing rural tourism in India has formulated two strategies.

The National Strategy and Roadmap for the Development of Rural Tourism in India and the National Strategy for the Promotion of Rural Homestays in India. Both strategies are formulated with a broader vision to capitalise on the potential of Indian rural tourism. The strategies focus on the holistic approach for developing rural tourism uplifting the rural economy

alongside. To deliver the multifold benefits of rural tourism the strategies are based on several major key strategic pillars:

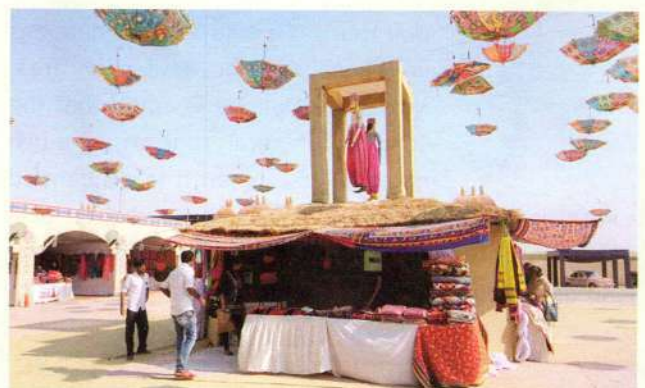
- I. Benchmarking of state policies and best practices
- II. Digital technologies and platforms for rural tourism
- III. Developing clusters for rural tourism
- IV. Marketing support for rural tourism
- V. Capacity building of stakeholders
- VI. Governance and Institutional Framework

The Ministry of Tourism to bust the predicament lying in the rural areas for strategic development has formulated strategies focussing on providing multidimensional developmental opportunities like secondary forms of occupation, training and development, infrastructural development, reverse migration and opportunity generation, etc.

For the effective implementation of the National strategies and the providing support for promotion and development of Rural Tourism in the country Ministry of Tourism has designated Indian Institute of Tourism and Travel Management as the Central Nodal Agency for Rural Tourism and Rural Homestay.

Rural Tourism for Community Empowerment & Poverty Alleviation

Tourism is an industry with no boundaries. Nations are working in harmony to reap the benefits of tourism. World's largest economies came together in the form of G-20. Among the discussions on the numerous horizons the first Tourism Working Group (TWG) meeting held at Rann of Kutch with the special focus on Rural Tourism. The first side event of the first TWG meeting was on the Rural Tourism for Community Empowerment & Poverty Alleviation. The discussions at this global level event



Rann Utsav, Dhordo, Gujarat

focussed on the maturing multiplier effect of rural tourism at the ground level. The Ministry of Tourism is focussing on brightening the impact of rural tourism on the environment, culture, tradition, and economy alongside strengthening the local community has been added as the objective of rural tourism.

Cataloging Indian Rural Tourism

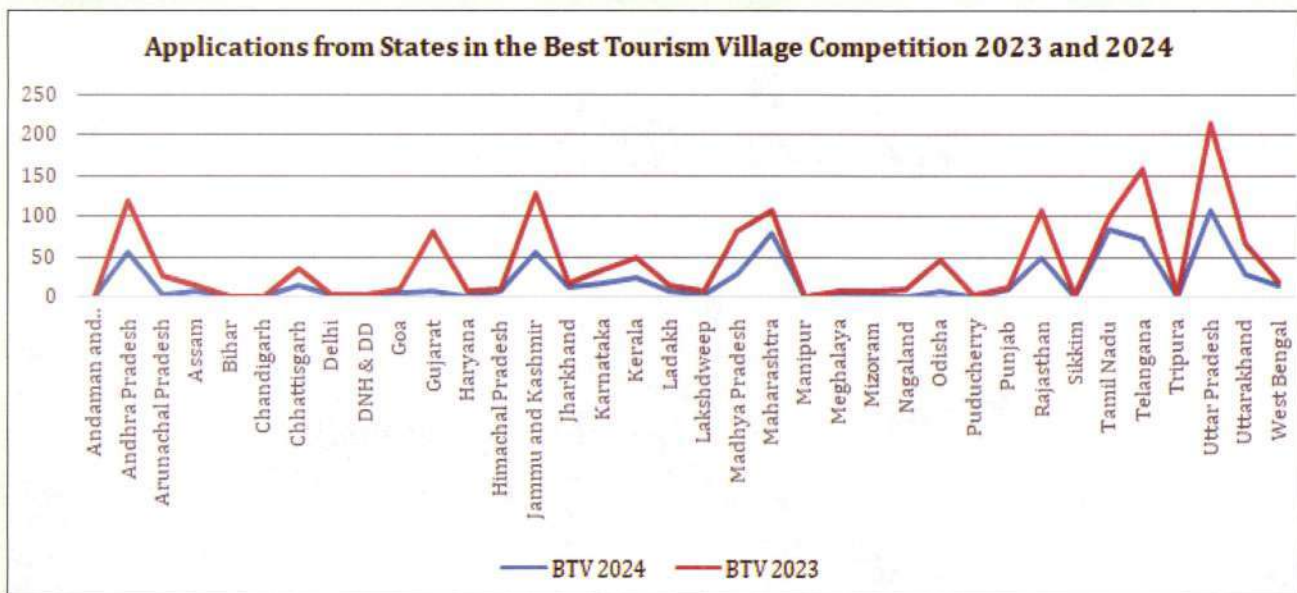
India is a land that has countless potential for rural tourism. To map the potential of Indian rural tourism the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India has launched the Best Tourism Village Competition and Best Rural Homestay Competition.

In the first edition of the Best Tourism Village Competition, a total of 795 villages filed applications from 315 districts spanning over 31 states and UTs out of which 35 villages were recognised as the Best Tourism villages of India. The recognised 35 villages were analysed from multiple perspectives and the best practices and the models were drawn out from these villages which will be shared with the rest of the villages for the replication of the existing models and the development of the villages.

The current edition of the Best Tourism Village competition has received a total of 991 applications in the Best Tourism Village Competition 2024 and 802 applications in the Best Rural Homestay Competition 2024.



In the race to identification of the Rural Tourism destinations and making the globe aware about Indian rural tourism the Ministry of Tourism has launched a dedicated website (www.rural.tourism.gov.in) for rural tourism of India. The website has been developed to showcase the potential of Rural Tourism in India. The website has information about the rural tourism





Khonoma Village, Nagaland

destinations in India, Rural homestays in India, government and industry initiatives for rural tourism, etc. The website will act as an Indian Encyclopedia for Rural Tourism and also work in setting up equilibrium between the Government, stakeholders, community and tourist.

Positioning Indian Rural Tourism at Global Level

The efficacy and triumph of the initiatives undertaken by the Government of India to foster rural tourism development are being accentuated by the international acclaim received from the UN Tourism (earlier UNWTO). Pochampally village from Telangana state is recognised as the UNWTO Best Tourism Village in the year 2021. Pochampally is a small hamlet of weavers known for the renowned Pochampally silk adorned with the Ikat design. The village

demonstrates one of the finest models of community involvement in rural tourism and their development thereto.

In the year 2023, Dhordo from Gujarat state was recognised as the UNWTO Best Tourism Village. Dhordo village sets the perfect example of incorporating tourism as the key economic driver impacting trade, job creation, investment, infrastructural development, social inclusion, etc. Also, the recognition of Dhordo as the UNWTO Best Tourism Village is a testament to Dhordo's commitment to eco-conscious living and its contribution to promoting sustainable tourism.

Khonoma, Nagaland, and Madla, Madhya Pradesh were recognised under the Upgrade Program of the UNWTO. These villages were recognised in the years 2022 and 2023 respectively. The villages recognised in the upgrade program had the potential to be the Best Tourism Villages with a scope of improvement.

From the Last Village to the First Village

The so-called last villages of India located at the country's border are not the last village but the First village of India. With the same vision Government of India has initiated the Vibrant Village Program for India's Border Villages. These villages have been inhabited by determined class people who work hard to sustain their way of life. The livelihoods of the locals are based on farming, raising cattle, and other traditional jobs. The Indian government has put in place several development programs and efforts to raise living standards in border communities,



upgrade infrastructure, increase access to healthcare and education, and foster economic growth. The basic areas of development are connectivity with all-weather roads, drinking water, 24x7 electricity – Solar and wind energy to be given focused attention, and mobile and internet connectivity. Tourist centres, multi-purpose centres, and health and wellness centres.

Community Reinforcement

Identifying the need to generate awareness and understanding about rural tourism Ministry of Tourism is strategising capacity-building initiatives amongst the stakeholders ranging from the Central Government Ministries to the local communities. To enhance the capacity and ensure the enduring sustenance of rural tourism, the Government is aiming to establish Capacity Building Resource Centres at the National, State, and Cluster levels. These resource centres will serve as pivotal platforms for stakeholders, facilitating knowledge exchange and fostering interaction among practitioners, educational institutions, government agencies, and volunteers. These Capacity Building

Resource Centres at various levels will serve as repositories for tourism knowledge. This knowledge will be tailored into modules for local communities and MSMEs, contextualised for regional use, and used to develop standards for responsible tourism. The centres will also support local community-based tourism, build stakeholder capacities, and emphasize collaboration over competition for the resilience of communities and rural tourism providers in the face of challenges.

In fostering rural development, rural tourism plays a pivotal role in providing a range of benefits and avenues for development. Initiatives like competitions, international recognition and strategic programs taken for the development of Indian rural tourism, unlock economic growth, preserve cultural heritage, and empower local communities. These comprehensive approaches not only showcase the untapped potential of rural India but also position it as a vibrant hub for responsible tourism, fostering resilience, and enhancing the overall well-being of rural communities. □

Redefining Tourism

Festivals, Cuisine, and Music of Northeast India

In recent decades, there has been a new trend in the Northeast of organising tourism festivals focused on traditional dance, music, and cuisine. Colourful folk dances depicting war, community hunting and farming, traditional music, and food have not only enabled tourists to have a wonderful glimpse of different tribes but have also helped the region and the communities benefit economically. In the Northeast, as every district or every tribe offer its own exclusive cuisine, tourists have begun to increasingly consider the region as a land of food festivals.



* Dr. Tapati Baruah Kashyap

The Northeastern Region is home to over 200 different tribal and non-tribal ethnic communities belonging to different human races. It is because of this that the region has been often referred to as an anthropologists' paradise. While human footprints in the region have been traced back to the Early Stone Age or Paleolithic Age (between 40,000 and 35,000 years ago), ethnologists have said

that apart from the prominence of Mongoloids and Aryans, other races whose presence are confirmed in the Northeast include the pre-Dravidians, Eurasians, Austroloids, Alpines or Armenoids, Mediterraneans, Indo-Aryans, Irano-Scythians, and Negritos too.

Given the racial diversity that the region presents, it is only natural that the Northeast is also an epicentre and meeting point of diverse races, cultures, and traditions. This diversity is best reflected in the numerous festivals

* The author is a Guwahati-based writer. She has so far published 15 books in English and Assamese.
Email-tapatibkashyap@gmail.com

that are observed by different ethnic communities in different parts of the year. Thus, when it comes to the culture of the Northeast, the region presents a wide canvas, which comprises numerous festivals, a wide range of cuisine, and of course, music, handloom, and handicrafts.

Almost all ethnic communities are primarily engaged in agriculture since time immemorial. Taking a close look, one will find that most festivals of the various ethnic indigenous communities of the Northeast are related to the annual agricultural cycle; some are held to mark the sowing season, while most others are celebrated after the harvest is over. While these ethnic festivals have always attracted the attention of visitors, it is only in the recent decade or more that more tourists are visiting the region intending to enjoy or watch these festivals.

There was a time when the flow of visitors to the region remained restricted mostly to a few spots like Kaziranga National Park and Kamakhya Temple in Assam, Shillong and Cherrapunjee in Meghalaya, Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh, and Loktak Lake in Manipur. But, with the passing of time and with significant improvement in the security scenario, the region has started redefining its tourism potential from the traditional attractions of wildlife and nature to ethnic resources.

According to insiders in the tourism industry, a number of factors have contributed towards this shift from traditional destinations and attractions to ethnic festivals, cuisine, music, and culture. The first and foremost is the overall situation in the region, which has sent a strong signal to potential tourists from outside the region, including abroad. "There was a time when a lot of negative news was emanating from the region. Things have changed, and negative publicity has become a thing of the past," points out leading Guwahati-based tour operator Deepak Sarma.

What is also equally important is the growing interest in the communities themselves to look at tourism as an important economic activity. Information sharing, which has increased manifold with the arrival of the Internet and digital media, has added further impetus to tell the hitherto untold stories of various communities – about their unique festivals, culinary habits, music, dance, folklore, handloom and handicraft.

Ethnic Festivals

Though every ethnic community in the Northeast has its own set of distinct cultural traits and festivals, not all have been able to promote them for the purpose of attracting tourists for various reasons. Those festivals that have been able to stand out or make a difference in the past couple of decades definitely include the Rongali Bihu festival of the Assamese, the Chapchar Kut festival of the Mizos, and the Wangala, or hundred drums festival of the Geros of Meghalaya, to name a few.

In Assam, Rongali Bihu, the New Year festival, continues to be the biggest attraction among all ethnic festivals in the region. While music and dance are the major components of this Bihu held in spring (mid-April), it is also the best season to buy various kinds of Assam silk fabrics (paat, golden muga, and endi). While a variety of traditional pithas – cakes made of rice powder – draw attention of foodies, Rongali Bihu is best enjoyed in villages close to Guwahati, Jorhat, Dibrugarh, Sivasagar, and Tezpur. In Guwahati, the centrally organized Rongali Bihu at the Srimanta Sankaradeva Kalakshetra, however, is worth attending.

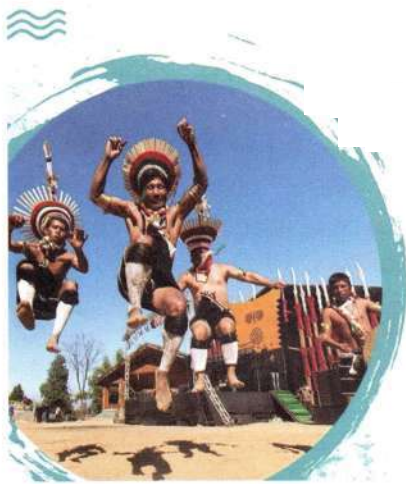


Bihu Festival, Assam

In recent decades, there has been a new trend in the Northeast of organising tourism festivals focused on traditional dance, music, and cuisine. In Assam, one such is the Chandubi Festival, held in the first week of January beside the picturesque Chandubi Lake, 50 km west of Guwahati. It showcases music, dances, and cuisine, particularly of the Rabha tribe, of which the Farkanti dance is most colourful. At Jagiroad, about 45 km east of Guwahati, the traditional Jon-Beel Mela, held since time memorial as a barter festival between the Khasis of the Meghalaya hills and the Tiwas of the Assam plains, has emerged as a tourist attraction in the past two decades.

While the tribal communities barter traditional food and fabrics between them, other visitors can buy them.

It is important to note that it was the Karbi community of Assam that first identified their culture – dance, music, and food – as a potential tourism activity and began organising the Karbi Youth Festival exactly fifty years ago. Held during every February, it was the President of India who graced the festival as it celebrated its golden jubilee this year. In 2000, Nagaland launched a fixed-date festival in the first week of December covering all seventeen major tribes of the state by christening it as Hornbill Festival. Following a sustained publicity campaign in the past two decades of more, Hornbill Festival today attracts several hundred foreign tourists to Nagaland in the first week of December every year. Colourful folk dances depicting war, community hunting and farming, traditional music, and food– all showcased within a few days, have not only enabled tourists to have a wonderful glimpse of 17 different tribes in a span of four or five days but have also helped the State and the communities benefit economically. In December 2023, for instance, Kohima registered over 2100 foreigners, apart from over 37,000 domestic tourists.



Kjyry as the 'festival of festivals', Hornbill festival is celebrated to encourage inter-tribal harmony and to protect the unique Naga heritage.



It is probably because of the success of these two ethnic festivals in attracting tourists that similar festivals have come up in different States of the region in recent times. Among the traditional festivals of Arunachal Pradesh that have become tourist attractions, Lossar, the New Year festival of the Monpa tribe of Tawang, held in February, is the most colourful. Buddhists by faith, the Monpas perform Aji Lhamu, a mask dance, which is a feast for photographers.

In Mizoram, on the other hand, Chapchar Kut, the spring festival, has been brought out of the traditional village field to Aizawl, the state capital, to become the biggest festival to attract tourists to the tiny hill state. Celebrated in villages in mid-March after completion of their most arduous task of jhum operation (clearing the jungle by burning the studs), the Chapchar Kut festival centrally held in Aizawl draws huge crowds from all over. Tourists are particularly drawn by the thrilling Cheraw or Bamboo Dance, which is performed in unison by several dozen groups of young men and women to the beat of the *khuang* (drum), *dar*, *darbu*, *darmang* (different types of gongs), and *seki* (mithun horn), dancing amid the clapping of several sets of bamboo poles. Those visiting Mizoram in August-September enjoy Mim Kut (Maize festival), while those visiting in December can enjoy Pawl Kut (harvest festival); while the food may vary, the dance and music are similar to those of Chapchar Kut in these festivals.

North East India's Vibrant Festivals and Cultural Diversity



Rongali Festival, Assam:

Promoting Assam's music, dance, craft and culinary traditions



Cherry Blossom Festival, Meghalaya:

Autumn's blooming cherry blossoms, offering visitors a modern and traditional experience



Shirui Lily Festival, Manipur:

A celebration of Manipur's state flower with diverse community participation



Likewise, several ethnic festivals of Nagaland are picking up popularity among tourists, be they domestic or foreign. Most popular of them are the Sekrenyi and Moatsu festivals. Held in February, Sekrenyi is a ten-day celebration of the Angami people who live in and around Kohima, which signifies purification and sanctification before going to war. Moatsu, on the other hand, is observed by the Ao people in Mokokchung district in the first week of May, and is a festival of community bonding held after the sowing season. Tourists particularly find interest in traditional dress, music, musical instruments, and dances, and of course, different kind of cuisine, which are not found in other parts of India.

In Meghalaya, where Shillong ('Scotland of the East') and Cherrapunjee and Mawsynram (the two wettest places on earth) have drawn increasingly more crowd every passing year, local entrepreneurs have launched a few other tourism products in recent times. The most important among them is the *Mawphlang Sacred Groves*, which the indigenous communities consider sacred and holy because of the medicinal value of the trees there, but also carries extreme significance to them as they serve as a link between nature and man. While those with an interest in music and dance continue to find traditional dances – like Nongkrem and Shad-Suk- mynsiem of the Khasi community, Wangala or hundred drums festival of the Garos, and the Bahdienkhlam of the Jaintia tribe – very interesting, a large number of younger tourists nowadays also look towards the Cherry Blossom Festival held in November in Shillong, a city known for the best locally made guitars and other string instruments.

North East India's Vibrant Festivals and Cultural Diversity



Ziro Music Festival, Arunachal Pradesh:

Largest non-pilgrimage tourist event featuring captivating music & cultural performances



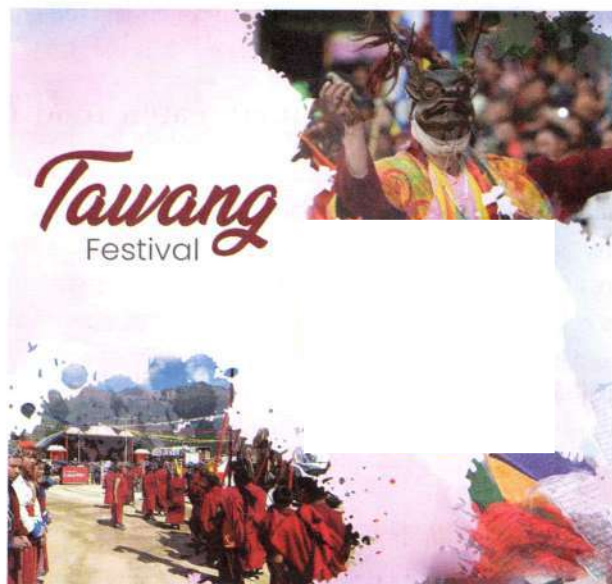
Hornbill Festival, Nagaland:

A cultural extravaganza with adventure, art, handicrafts, and more



Temi Tea Autumn Festival, Sikkim:

A unique event that celebrates organic tea at the renowned 'Temi Tea Estate'



Tawang Festival

Launched in 2012, the Ziro Music Festival in the Apatani Valley of Arunachal Pradesh, on the other hand, showcases traditional music of the Himalayan state alongside performances by big bands for about a week in October every year. The highlight of this festival is the arrival of several hundred music lovers from across the country on motorbikes.

Majuli, the world's largest inhabited river island in the heart of the Brahmaputra, on the other hand, has more than one reason to attract tourists with ethnic festivals, music, and cuisine. Epicentre of Vaishnavite culture initiated by the great saint-reformer of medieval Assam, Majuli's biggest attraction has been the Raas Festival held in November. This seven-day event comprises a performance of Bhaona – traditional play, written in the 16th century, which comprises, among others, the Sattriya dance, a classical dance form. In April, as the Mising tribal community of the island celebrates Ali-ai-Lrigang, their spring festival, tourists return home carrying in their hearts the unique tune of the Oinatam, 'songs of love' as those are called.

In recent years, Majuli has added to its list of attractions Mon-geet, a new festival of music and culture, held in mid-January on the sandy banks of the Brahmaputra, which surrounds the heritage island. Essentially a festival of music and culture, this festival literally draws tourists with varied interests – from music to poetry, art, craft, food, ingredients, culinary techniques and indigenous herbs – in addition to visit to the dozen or more Satra, medieval Vaishnavite monasteries.

Music All The Way

Shillong also has the distinction of being the Rock Capital of India, thanks to not just the best-quality locally made guitars but also some of the best guitarists in the country, like Lou Majaw. Immortalised by the legendary Bhupen Hazarika in several of his songs, Shillong is any day a city of music, with the largest crowd descending around Bob Dylan's birthday celebrated in such a manner as if the Nobel Laureate had belonged to Meghalaya.

Bamboo Shoots

A widely eaten food of the North-East region, bamboo shoots are a chief component of the food in Arunachal Pradesh.



For The Taste Buds

Though each ethnic community has its own distinct cuisine and culinary tradition, it is only in the past two decades or so that ethnic food has become a favourite among tourists. The new generation tourism entrepreneurs of the region would say that the present-day tourist loves to taste all kinds of ethnic food. There was a time when foreign tourists looked for European meals and the domestic ones for typically Indian food like rice, dosa, and paratha. New-generation tourists appear to be not just mentally curious but also curious with their taste buds.

In the Northeast, as every district or every tribe offers its own exclusive cuisine, tourists have begun to increasingly consider the region as a land of food festivals. While every state capital or district town has a number of restaurants offering ethnic cuisine, tourists are also served local cuisine in many tribal villages.

With home-stay facilities becoming popular, tourists nowadays also get the opportunity to eat with the host family or host community, where ethnic food is the new catchline.

It is important to note that the new generation of tourists is not just leisure tourists. As pointed out by travel organiser Sarma, there is a growing interest among a sizable section of tourists, both domestic and foreign, to get into the details of a community's culture, music, culinary habits, and tradition. The best thing about this category of tourists is that, unlike making a one-day trip to a wildlife sanctuary or religious shrine, they spend more time, preferring to live with the community. With home-stay facilities increasingly becoming popular among the younger generation of local entrepreneurs, tourists are not only spending more time in a location, but many are also coming back in another season to learn more of a particular ethnic community. □

Amenitisation of Rural India for Nature Tourism

In spite of its significance, Rural Tourism is still perceived with scepticism, both by the rural communities from entrepreneurial perspective as well as by the prospective tourists in India. As a result, the potential of Rural Tourism continues to be largely untapped. Compared to countries where Rural Tourism is an established option, the need for providing enabling amenities in Indian villages is not recognised which has led to the declining interest. The process of creating an enabling environment, hitherto referred to as 'Amenitisation', is a multi-stakeholder engagement rather than merely a policy intervention.



* Prof. (Dr.) Virendra Kumar Paul

Rural India and Nature Tourism

T rue potential of tourism in India lies in the rural areas. The notion of rural conjures open areas, small settlements, farms, abundance of nature, and living in folk culture. And, this is where the opportunities of tourism in India

exist. Contrary view is rather misplaced in the context of Indian tourism. Who would want to see, say Shimla, if nature trails and the open landscapes dotted with small traditional houses and temples are removed from itinerary? If every view point in Cherrapunji is obscured and vastness of cloud-laden colourful sky with exotic patterns is deprived by edifices of urbanisation,

* The author is Professor, School of Planning and Architecture, New Delhi. Email: vk.paul@spa.ac.in



Kardang Village, Lahaul Valley, Himachal Pradesh

then who would want to go 'Scotland of the East' as Meghalaya is known for its rolling hills? Why then, even contemplate to urbanise tourism potential in India which has diversity and richness of nature experiences still largely unexplored. If villages are cloned to emulate urbanisation and deprive the experience of real nature, then possibly India is certainly not a preferred tourist destination. Artificiality by interventions such as fountains, 'disco lights' is no match for something as simple as a nature walk. Rural India is custodian of nature and proliferation of urbanisation is rather robbing the nature from the very custodians. And tourism is the economic boon for the, still to be developed, rural India. In this respect, the tourism needs pristine beauty of nature, and 'amenitisation' is the key to unlock the prospects of giving experience of life and living in nature for global appeal to the unique Indian tourism. Let's explore the hypothesis further.

Rural India has a unique experience to offer targeting not just domestic and urban, but also foreign travellers. While Home Stay concept has existed in India for quite some time, it still has not multiplied in a manner so as to furnish the possibility of expansion. One of the reasons could be the lack of comprehensive packaging of the Home Stay concept. For instance, there is apparent absence of skills sets to deal with value tourists to give a wholesome experience. Be that the issue of reasonable professionalism in upkeep of

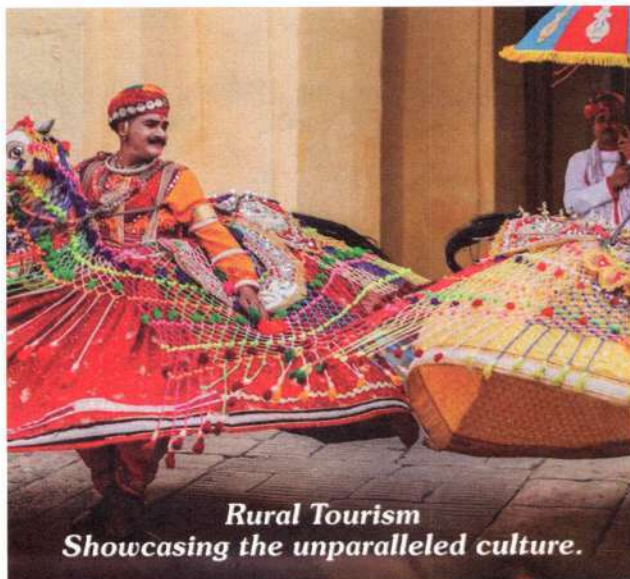
accommodation, sanitary infrastructure, service quality, or reliable support such as local transportation, there is a need for creating an attractive ecosystem. Besides, complexities of socio-cultural issues and gender roles need a rather community engagement to participate in such schemes of rural based tourism. It is important to underline the fact that most of the Home Stay entrepreneurs are from the lower and medium income groups which specifically require strategic intervention and hand-holding to deliver a sustainable micro entrepreneurship tourism business model.

Rural Tourism

Rural tourism, as per World Tourism Organization (UN Tourism) has characteristics as having: low population density; landscape and land-use dominated by agriculture and forestry; and, traditional social structure and lifestyles. In Indian context, rural tourism brings sustainable development to the aspirational countryside at the same time preserving cultural identity and social values for posterity. Urban migration is leading to immense pressure on limited capacity of cities to provide basic infrastructure and dwindling job opportunities. Rural tourism opens rather entrepreneurship based job opportunities and therefore is the key driver to check urban migration phenomenon.

This is certainly not an out of the box thinking. In Bhutan, for example, community-based tourism is a well

laid out strategy of sustainable tourism wherein village tourism provides an experience of the Bhutanese way of life. As a result, it delivers economic and livelihood benefits to the village communities. This strategy overlays selling of local farm products directly by the village folks thereby giving them additional financial dividends. As a policy intervention, the necessary training gets imparted to give a professional edge to the village communities.



Rural Tourism
Showcasing the unparalleled culture.

Innovative tourism entrepreneurs are experimenting with, for example, Farm Tourism where people actually work in farms and experience agriculture. It is exciting when such 'off beat tourists' get raw materials and vegetables for their meals from the farm and even cook traditional cuisine themselves in traditional kitchen environments. Using dairy products purchased from a confectionary is a convenience everyone would want, but to experience how it is produced starting from milking the cattle to processing using raw methods is indeed a leaning for the generation which has no connect with the folk life. Away from luxury cars, Nature Walks in villages is an untapped tourism potential where real rural life is showcased with touch-and-feel of cattle without earthly smell being artificially suppressed. In villages, one experiences the purity of dairy that one relishes in the luxury of homes.

In another innovation, Volunteer Tourism is also an important variant of rural tourism, wherein the tourists visit rural areas and enjoy their stay at the village and they contribute by teaching children, creating art work or adding value to knowledge like better agriculture. In return, they get life-changing

social bonding as well. Social service is becoming an increasingly significant area of engagement for the people who want to contribute to society and are 'no more' driven by the material achievements in career. Such enthusiasts are willing to devote their quality time through Volunteer Tourism in villages and contribute, including evolving creative solutions to the village problems.

LiFE actions that everyone can practice in their daily lives:

- Donate old clothes and books
- Do not let pets defecate in the public places
- Do not discard waste in water bodies and public spaces
- Practice natural or organic farming
- Plant trees to reduce the impact of pollution
- Use rechargeable lithium cells



Panacea for Environmental Challenges

Rural tourism is perhaps the best way of experiential promotion of sustainable lifestyle nestled in the nature. It is now a well-established fact that changing lifestyle is the most important aspect for sustaining development without infringing into the rights of the future generations on resources. At the same time, it reinforces the conviction in the minds of the rural populations to refrain from embracing the unnecessary urban attitudes of resource consumption. Instilling a sense of pride in the traditional LiFE principles is the best way to ensure conviction and perpetuity.

At the 28th Conference of Parties (COP-28) Dubai, the need to address climate change vulnerabilities in fragile eco-systems of Himalayan Mountain range were emphasised. It is now being contemplated that, if current urbanisation and other development practices continue unabated, 75% of the Himalayas would lose their snow cover by 2100. India has a huge Rural Tourism potential in villages in across Himalayan region in Kashmir, Ladakh, Himachal, Uttarakhand, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland,



Tripura, and Sikkim which is around 12.56% of the total area of the country. However, in terms of climate crisis-based development paradigm, this geographical region is the most significant, not just for India alone.

It is essential to integrate Rural Tourism with the National Mission for Sustaining the Himalayan Ecosystem (NMSHE) policy which was also highlighted at COP 28 by India.

India is committed to long-term low carbon development with a goal of reaching net-zero by 2070. 'Enhancing forest and vegetation cover consistent with socio-economic and ecological considerations' has been articulated as one of the low carbon development strategic pathways. Rural Tourism is the perfect solution to the low-carbon development strategy with multiple secondary benefits to other strategic pathways wherein pollution, emission in urban transport, energy demand in cities carbon dioxide removal etc are being specifically addressed. In fact, Rural Tourism creates a much-needed sustainable carbon dioxide sink harnessing green resources.

'Amenitisation'

In spite of its significance, Rural Tourism is still perceived with scepticism, both by the rural communities from entrepreneurial perspective as well as by the prospective tourists in India. As a result, the potential of Rural Tourism continues to be largely untapped. Compared to countries where Rural Tourism is an established option, the need for

providing enabling amenities in Indian villages is not recognised which has led to the declining interest. The process of creating an enabling environment, hitherto referred to as 'Amenitisation', is a multistakeholder engagement rather than merely a policy intervention. The 'Amenitisation', both tangible and information access could be categorised in three groups.

Affirmatory Amenities

The foremost may be termed as Affirmatory Amenities in absence of which the very idea would fail to create interest in Rural Tourism. Affirmatory Amenities include:

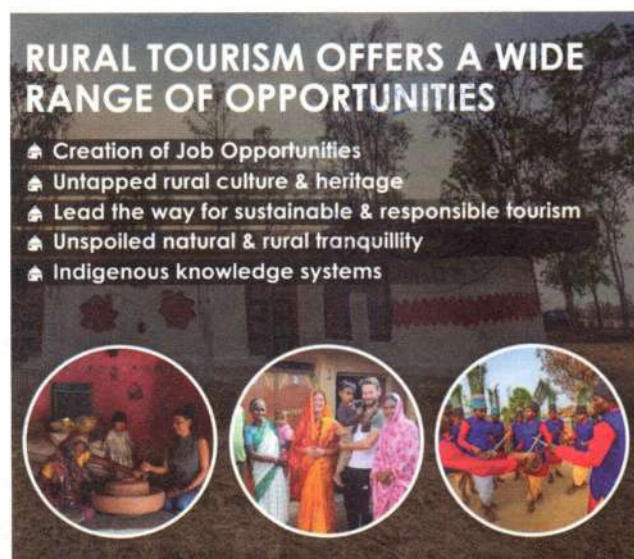
- **Access to healthcare:** Villages being rather remote from the main town, need to have reliable access to healthcare, especially for emergency support within a reasonable time. While aged populations may in any case be vulnerable, the younger 'adventure spirited' populations would need emergency support in case of any untoward incidents.
- **Sanitation and waste management:** Lack of sanitation and effective waste management is a major inhibitor. This can lead to unsightly conditions. In a small village level setting, it is fairly easy to overcome this challenge.
- **Access to safe potable water:** Assurance of safe potable water is important to ensure that the visitors would not fall sick.

- **Green power:** Besides having reliable power, it is important not to have to resort to noisy generators. Green power using solar panels is an explicit statement of environment consciousness.
- **Street lighting:** It is most essential for the safety and security for those who are not familiar with the surroundings. In any case, it is too restrictive to be confined just to the room after sun-set.
- **Smart security solutions:** For security needs, linkage to external remote support through smart solutions is an essential enabler.

Supportive Amenities

Basic Supportive Amenities would be necessary for creating tourist-friendly environment which would include:

- **Digital services:** Beyond mobile connectivity, access to digital services is a convenience to stay connected which can otherwise be an apprehension of disruption for career-sensitive populations.
- **Travel connectivity:** Preference of a remote location is an attractive option if supported by travel connectivity.
- **Explication of restrictive practices:** Making tourists aware of sensitivities of local communities and enhancing compatibility with tourists, bringing restrictive practices to the fore is a significant catalyst. Such common restrictive practices include dressing, gender issues, food, alcoholic beverages, religious sentiments, behavioural customs, use of certain language jargon, etc.



- **Access to conveniences:** Availability of basic confectionery, grocery, packaged food, bakery, and bank ATMs is a significant relief from the burden to stock up supplies.

Value Adding Amenities

It is necessary to provide Value Adding Amenities which would create a memorable impact and an enhanced experience of the folk culture, the unique selling proposition (USP) of Rural Tourism. These would include:

- **Digital skill set:** The interface between the tourist and the village host is through digital technologies which requires enhancement of digital literacy of village communities to handle social media engagements, e-marketing of home-stays, and home-based local produce.
- **Hospitality skill set:** Host communities need to acquire hospitality skill sets for professional treatment of the guests. National Strategy and Roadmap for Development of Rural Tourism in India, under the aegis of Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, has specifically delineated a 150-hour Homestay course as a part of its reforms to bridge the skill gap as a major initiative to boost entrepreneurial skills of Home Stay owners.
- **'Village Kutir Udyam':** Local art, craft, cuisine, pickles, wellbeing engagements, facilitation of outdoor activity such as trekking, are home-based value-added enterprises that give enhanced memorable experience to a tourist. At the same time, it gives additional income with no burden of overheads to the village communities.
- **Local community connect:** Targeting the volunteer tourists, connecting with organised local community groups is significantly motivating. It also helps in giving exotic exposure to cultures and life-styles wherein guests can also participate in family and social activities. A step further, village festival calendar can be a value adding USP.

Conclusion

Rural Tourism has a transformational potential for the villages. It is now for the other stakeholders to synergise their efforts and contribute to sustainable development of villages through Rural Tourism. □

Postal Heritage

Converting Postal Heritage into Tourist Attractions



India has among the world's oldest postal histories, dating back to the Mauryan times. However, the foundations of the modern organised Postal system were laid by the British in the 19th century. As Posts and later telegraph were the only means of communication in the 19th and 20th centuries, post offices, Dak Bungalows, mail trains, stamps, letters, etc. are a very important part of our history. With 44 heritage buildings and more than 350 Pre-1939 buildings, Postal Department manages a large heritage estate. Each of the heritage buildings has a rich history and needs to be developed as a tourist attraction so that citizens and foreigners can appreciate not only their beauty but also know about the past associated with these structures. Department of Posts is working closely with INTACH and CPWD to restore many of these important heritage buildings so that they become tourist attractions in such places.

* Rashi Sharma

W

ith 8-10 million international tourists, India ranks 8th in the Asia Pacific region. Domestic tourists, on the other hand, are a whopping 600-700 million per

annum. Whereas, Gujarat, Maharashtra, West Bengal, Delhi and UP are the top recipients of foreign tourists, domestic tourists prefer Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Gujarat. As regards the source countries of international tourists visiting India,

* The author is Deputy Director General (Establishment) in Department of Posts, Ministry of Communications, India.
Email: rashi.edu@nic.in

more than 80% tourists belong to Bangladesh, EU, USA, and UK. India shares a common history with Bangladesh and UK, meaning that almost 3.5 million tourists who visit India every year, would be definitely interested to visit the historical places dating back to the colonial times. As British were the rulers of India, Australia, a large part of South East Asia, Sri Lanka, etc. the heritage links in the form of similarly designed buildings and institutions is bound to attract tourists from these countries. The heritage of colonial times is represented majorly by the buildings that were constructed during the colonial rule as well as the institutions that were created or expanded by the British. Railways and Posts are the two major institutions that were created by the British for administering our vast country.

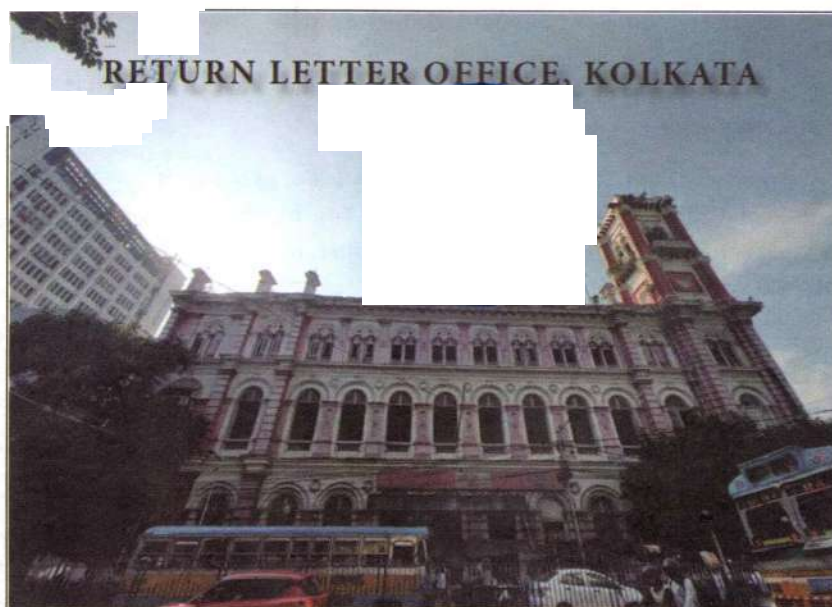
The foundations of the modern organised Postal system were laid by the British in the 19th century. As Posts and later telegraph were the only means of communication in the 19th and 20th centuries, post offices, dak bungalows, mail trains, stamps, letters, etc. became a very important part of our history. Few would know that the guard room of old Fort William where the Black hole tragedy happened in 1756 is situated in an alley just on the backside of Kolkata GPO. Mumbai GPO constructed in 1913 is a classic example of Indo-Saracenic architecture and has been inspired from Gol Gumbaz of Bijapur. Bombay GPO has 3 basements which are connected to the Bombay Docks, the Mint through 3 underground tunnels, to be used in case of an attack. The famous Bombay Duck fish derives its name from Bombay ~~hawk~~ mail train which used to transport this fish from Bombay to Kolkata during the colonial times. The famous Dak Bungalows which find mention in so many novels, stories, films and plays were built as resting points for the mail runners and Government officials on tour; they continued to be managed by the Postal Department for a very long time in British India.

With 44 heritage buildings and more than 350 Pre-1939 buildings, Postal Department manages a large heritage estate. Each of the heritage buildings has a rich history and needs to be developed as a tourist attraction

so that citizens and foreigners can appreciate not only their beauty but also know about the past associated with these structures. Department of Posts is working closely with INTACH and CPWD to restore many of these important heritage buildings so that they become tourist attractions in such places.

Historical Perspective

Before 1854, the Post Office was a medley of services in different provinces, each having separate rules and different rates of postage. Regular mails were conveyed over a very few main lines between important towns, and collectors of districts were responsible for the management of their own local post offices. In 1850, a Commission was appointed to consider the state of the postal services, and the result of its deliberations was the Post Office Act of 1854 and the conversion of the Post Office into an Imperial Department under a single head called the Director-General. The Post Office building construction was of prime importance and hence the General Post Office in Calcutta was built in 1868 from designs made by Mr. Grenville. Later, Bombay General Post Office was constructed in 1910 by Mr. James Begg. The building was hardly large enough for the great mass of work which it has to transact and although the removal of the Postmaster-General's Office and the Sorting Branch somewhat relieved the congestion, there was already a demand for increased accommodation. The same thing has happened in Madras where there was a large Post and Telegraph Office facing the sea, designed by Mr. Chisholm and opened to the public in 1885. The



expansion of business had outgrown the capacity of these building. Most head offices and important sub-offices were designed to provide a proper hall for the public who wish to transact business, with a counter for clerks and sufficient open space in the building to allow each branch to work independently and in comfort under the supervision of a responsible officer. At Nagpur, Patna, Chittagong, Bareilly, Kanpur, Calcutta, Pune, Agra, Allahabad, Varanasi, Mount Road Madras, beautiful Post Office buildings were constructed, followed by Delhi, Darjeeling, Ajmer, Ahmedabad and several other large towns.

Kolkata GPO was designed in 1864 by Walter B. Grenville who acted as consulting architect to the Government of India from 1863 to 1868. The building construction was executed by Mackintosh Burn Ltd. and completed in 1868. It was built to serve as a post office for the British East India Company and was built at the site of the first Fort William.

RLO building at Dalhousie square in Kolkata was India's first and largest Return Letter Office, earlier known as 'Dead Letter Office'. The building was completed in 1876 when Lord Lytton was the Governor General of British India. It has a 120-feet-tall bell tower. Yangon GPO, which was built a few years earlier and Melbourne's Mail Exchange, which was built a few years later, are architecturally similar to this building.

The Delhi GPO was the first Post office of Delhi. It was built in 1885 in the historic wall city of Shahjahanabad. It was the largest Post office of Delhi established by the East India Company. The building exhibits iconic decorative elements of Colonial architecture style. The Magazine which was blown up by the British soldiers during the siege of Delhi in 1857 is located right opposite Delhi GPO in Kashmere Gate.

The New Delhi GPO was constructed in 1934, as the Sub-Post Office called "Gol Dak Khana". The building was designed by Robert Tor Russell, the chief architect of PWD at that time. Located in the close proximity of Raisina village, the site earlier had the building of Viceroy Camp Post Office.

PMG Office Goa was built in 1914 as the divisional headquarters of Posts and now serves as the PMG office. The building is located in front of the Head post office at the Largo de Estanco square which was a very important historic commercial square. The style of the architecture has strong Portuguese and native Goan

influences developed over the centuries.

Panjim Head Post Office building's current structure was built in 1893 as the Portuguese Post on a footprint of a Tobacco Depot in succession to a police station until 1888. Located in front of the Largo de Estanco, which was a major commercial square during the 18th-19th century, it denotes the importance of the building during its time.

Chaura Maidan Post Office in Shimla is a beautiful building constructed in 1910. The architecture mirrored that of the G.P.O, boasting Neo-Tudor elements with round-dressed stones and pebble-dash walls, using the traditional Kath- Kuni construction style of the Himalayas.

Postal Museum building Bengaluru dates back to 1804. At one point, it held the Government Museum, later it was used as an administrative office by the Postal services. It was converted into a Postal Museum in 2019.

The Fort Kochi Post office, constructed in 1900, is a landmark structure and holds special significance in the lives of people of Fort Kochi. It was one of the busiest places in the city especially during the days when mails from Europe used to arrive here via ships.

PMG Office building Thiruvananthapuram was once the office of Chief Engineer of Travancore. In 1933-34, the Air Training Complex of the Govt. of India was established here. Later in 1939, Sri Chitra Thirunal started an Engineering College in this building. The



PMG Office building, Thiruvananthapuram



Lashkar Post Office, Maharaj Bada, Gwalior

Postal Department took over the building in 1961, after the college was shifted from here. It is a rectangular structure made of granite, bricks and lime mortar. It has 5 towers, one in each corner of the building and one in the front centre with a clock. Towers have pyramidal roof in keeping with the local architecture.

Thiruvananthapuram Fort Post Office building was part of Shree Padam Palace, constructed by Maharani Gowri Parvathi Bayi. The palace complex included two Nalukettu, double storied buildings and a main building. This building was once used as an outhouse of the palace complex. The building has timber flooring, balcony and railings, roof rafters. The wooden sloping roof is finished with Mangalore tiles.

Lashkar Post Office, at Maharaj Bada in Gwalior, is one of the most prominent areas of the city, having about seven buildings constructed in different architectural style centred with a statute of Jiwaji Scindia on grand white marble platform. The Post office building is one of those seven buildings. It is a rectangular structure built on a raised plinth. The front facade of the building is designed in Greek style.

The Nagpur GPO, which was originally the headquarters of the erstwhile Postmaster General of Central Provinces and Berar, was constructed in 1921. The heritage building is highly influenced by Victorian style of architecture.

The Office of Director Accounts (Postal) is a majestic Georgian-style building in Nagpur. The Nobel



General Post Office, Nagpur, Maharashtra

Prize Winner Dr. C.V. Raman, who served as the office's Deputy Accountant General, was one of the many distinguished figures with whom it had the honour to be connected. This office acts as the pay and accounts office for both the entire Army Postal Service Corps as well as the Maharashtra and Goa Postal Circle.

Pune HPO had a beginning when the city's first telegraph line was established here in 1854. This structure was replaced in 1873 by bigger structure designed and constructed by Colonel Finch R.E. The present building is however a renovated building, modified in 1903 when a dome and a front porch was added to it. The heritage building is highly influenced by Palladian style which had a revival in the 19th and 20th century in Europe as well as in its colonies.

Puducherry Head Post Office building dates back to mid 18th century. The old part of the building now lies behind the modern building constructed in 1980s. It once belonged to the industrialist, Henri Gaebele who was a French cotton yarn and fabric manufacturer and politician who was the Mayor of Pondicherry in French India from 1907 to 1928, and Senator of French India from 1922 to 1924.

Chennai GPO (then known as Madras GPO) was established in 1884. The building was designed by British architect Robert Fellowes Chisholm.

Philately Bureau Chennai building was constructed in 1900 as one of South India's first Electric theatre. It was designed by Warwick Major and his partner



Philately Bureau, Chennai

Reginald Eyre. The building was bought by the Postal Department in 1951 and used to house the Mount Road Post Office. In 1998, it was developed as the Philatelic Bureau.

Lucknow GPO building was designed by a British architect as a Ring Theatre and was used by British families for recreation purposes. It was also used as a platform for screening English films and dramas. At that time, Indians were not allowed to enter this building. It was later converted into a court where the Kakori trial in May 1926 was held. It was converted into GPO in 1929- 32.

Way Forward

Currently, the Postal Department has no policy to promote heritage buildings for tourism purpose as

2. Research and compile the history of its heritage buildings and get interesting facts about them displayed on attractive signages in front of such buildings. The same can be placed on social media and in tourist booklets & travel books for publicity. The tourist guide guilds of the respective cities/towns can also be roped in for placing such buildings on the regular tourist circuit/itinerary.
3. Restore the heritage buildings as per their original design
4. Free the main areas of such buildings from official use and make them accessible to tourists and guides
5. Set up museums on local postal history in parts of such buildings



Lucknow GPO building, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh

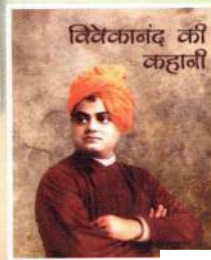
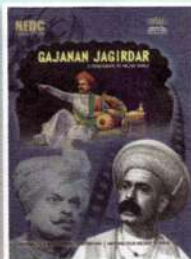
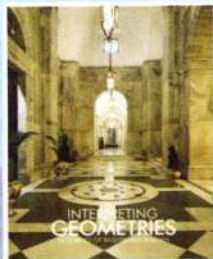
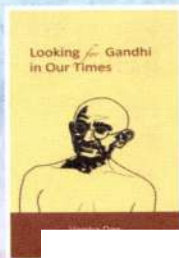
almost all these buildings are currently being used as offices and most of the administrative and operational areas are out of bounds for the general public. The following steps can be undertaken by the Department of Posts to convert the valuable Postal heritage into major tourist attractions:

1. Notify a Policy for opening up heritage buildings for tourism purpose. This can be done in consultation with Ministry of Tourism and Ministry of Culture.

6. Include Postal heritage tourism as one of the revenue earning activities of the Department in order to make it sustainable. In fact, heritage building restoration can be funded partly from entry tickets, sale of souvenirs, etc.

Promoting our rich postal heritage shall go a long way in not only creating tourist attractions in our towns & cities and boost local employment but would also lead to restoration and maintenance of our historical buildings. □

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Crafting Rural Cultural Trails through Tourism

Rural India possesses a vast wealth of cultural traditions, from exquisite craftsmanship to vibrant performing arts. To preserve and promote these treasures, carefully crafted cultural trails offer a sustainable approach. These trails can stimulate economic growth in rural areas while nurturing pride in local heritage. Success depends on showcasing a mix of tangible and intangible assets, weaving a compelling narrative, and ensuring accessibility for diverse visitors. By thoughtfully integrating these elements and prioritising community involvement, rural tourism can revitalise communities and become a powerful force for cultural preservation.

* Hemanth Menon

India's rural heartland holds a treasure trove of cultural heritage. From the exquisite handloom weaves of Kashi and Kanchipuram passed down through generations to the vibrant folk music of coastal villages echoing through village squares, these areas hold the essence of the nation's identity. However, globalisation and changing lifestyles threaten to dim the flame of these traditions. Thoughtfully crafted cultural trails, coupled with systematised and responsible promotion of tourism practices, offer a powerful solution here. These trails can breathe new life into rural communities, fostering a sense of pride in their heritage while simultaneously generating economic opportunities.

The Art of 'Crafting' Cultural Trails

Rural Cultural Trails are curated routes that connect visitors with the heart of a rural region's unique cultural

identity. These trails, more often than not, highlight local crafts, traditional art forms, heritage sites, and immersive cultural experiences, designed to give tourists a rich and authentic understanding of the region. For rural communities, these trails have multifaceted



* The author is a regular columnist on Art and Culture and is a National Coordinator of SPIC MACAY.
Email: hemanth@spicmacay.com



significance. Economically, they can generate income, create jobs, and provide vital support for local artisans. Socially, trails cultivate a sense of community pride by preserving cultural heritage and traditions.

Crafting a successful cultural trail goes beyond simply connecting a few sites on a map. It requires a deep understanding of a region's unique cultural assets and the creation of a compelling narrative that weaves these elements together. This includes the following:

- A Tapestry of Tangible and Intangible Heritage:** The trail should encompass both tangible as well as intangible cultural assets. While historical monuments, temples, and traditional village architecture offer a glimpse into the past, the intangible heritage encompasses the very soul of a place—the skills of master weavers in Kutch, the pulsating rhythm of Theyyam performances in Kerala, or the age-old wisdom of Ayurvedic practitioners.

The natural landscape itself can be a significant cultural asset, with sacred groves, waterfalls, or agricultural practices deeply intertwined with local traditions. This is something that is already in action internationally. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church tradition maintains 'church forests', sacred groves surrounding places of worship. These forests offer a unique blend of spiritual reverence and rich biodiversity. Throughout the length and breadth of our country, myriad temples offer worship of forest deities. Cultural trails drawing tourists' attention to such forest temples can enrich their awareness about the wealth of rural spirituality.

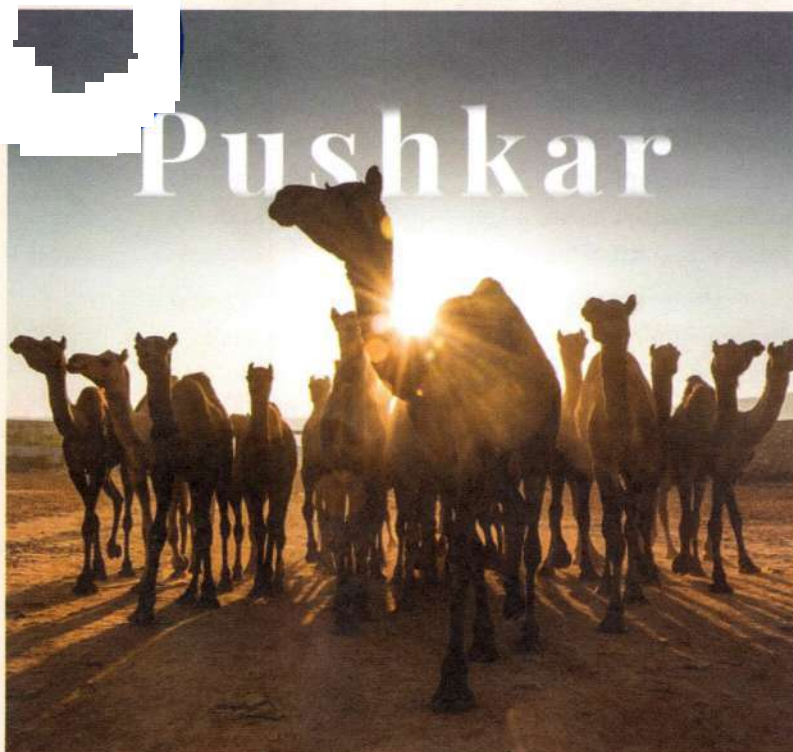
India's rural landscapes come alive with vibrant performing arts, offering a window into the very soul of its communities. From the rhythmic dances and dramas retelling ancient legends to the soulful melodies of inherited folk songs, these art forms

constitute vital threads in the fabric of a region's identity. Folk dances, music, dramas, and puppetry bring life to cultural heritage. A trail in Odisha could centre around performances of the dynamic 'Danda Nata'. Danda Nata is a folk dance that is part of the Ganjam region's rich folk tradition. It is a song and dance performance that only uses cymbals as musical instruments. The dance is performed to tell the story of Lord Krishna and to show devotion to Lord Shiva and Goddess Kali, while a Rajasthan experience could include not only seeing block-printers at work but also listening to Manganiyar musicians carry tunes passed down through generations.

- **A Story Waiting to be Unfolded:** A strong thematic thread binds the diverse elements of the trail. It could highlight the history of a specific craft, the evolution of a local festival, or the intricate connection between the people and their land. For example, the Living Traditions Chanderi Trail in Madhya Pradesh could take visitors on a journey through the history and techniques of Chanderi weaving, showcasing the skill of the artisans and the intricate motifs woven into the fabric. The powerful forms of the Chhau dance in Bengal, Jharkhand, and Odisha tell tales of both daily life and life from the epic.
- **Respectful Exploration:** The focus should always be on genuine exchange and respect for traditions. Visitors should be able to gain insights into the skills, beliefs, and daily lives that shape these cultural expressions. Rural art emerged from the raw lifestyles of the common man and was not necessarily meant for a proscenium setting; thus, the initial judgement may be that staged performances or inauthentic experiences should perhaps be avoided. Cultural trails thrive when they offer authentic experiences that truly reflect the soul of a place. Tourists seek a genuine connection with local communities and their ways of life. The trail could be designed to coincide with a local festival. Witnessing a celebration organically unfold in its traditional setting—whether it's the

camel races of the Pushkar Fair or the folk dances at the Desert Festival in Jaisalmer—provides a depth of understanding impossible to replicate in an artificial environment. Successful cultural trails are those built with, and by, the local community. Community members should be actively involved in the planning, management, and benefits derived from the trail. This ensures that their voices are heard, their traditions are respected, and they are the primary beneficiaries of tourism revenue.

Accessibility is the key to attracting a diverse range of tourists and ensuring the broadest possible benefits for the community. Consider aspects like the physical accessibility of trails and sites, especially for those with disabilities. Think about information being available in multiple languages, providing signage, and training local guides. Accessibility also encompasses affordability and creating a range of experiences to cater to different budgets. A successful cultural trail must have sustainability at its heart. This means managing tourism in a way that safeguards both the natural environment as well as the cultural fabric of the community. It becomes crucial to discuss strategies like limiting visitor numbers, promoting environmentally conscious practices, and mitigating the negative impacts of tourism on local resources.



Pushkar Fair, Rajasthan

Thinking beyond the Obvious Scope of Tourism

This involves recognising and tapping into the potential of lesser-known attractions and destinations that may not immediately come to mind when considering tourist initiatives. One such example is lighthouses, which can offer unique and compelling experiences for visitors while contributing to the overall tourism landscape of a region. Lighthouses, traditionally built to guide ships and ensure maritime safety, hold historical, architectural, and cultural significance. They often stand as solitary sentinels along rugged coastlines, offering breathtaking views and insights into maritime history. In recent years, many countries have started to recognise the tourism potential of these structures and have developed initiatives to promote lighthouse tourism.

For instance, in the United States, the National Park Service manages several historic lighthouses that are open to the public for tours. Visitors can learn about the role of lighthouses in navigation, explore the unique architecture of these structures, and enjoy panoramic views of the surrounding landscape. In addition to guided tours, some lighthouses offer overnight stays, providing visitors with an immersive experience and a chance to appreciate the solitude and beauty of coastal environments. Similarly, in India, with its vast coastline and rich maritime history, lighthouses offer significant tourism opportunities. By promoting lighthouse tourism, authorities can attract visitors interested in maritime heritage, architecture, and coastal landscapes. Guided tours, educational programmes, and cultural events hosted at lighthouses can enhance visitor experiences and contribute to local rural economies. The coast of

India, along the Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal, is dotted with lighthouses that not only serve as navigational aids but also possess historical and architectural significance. Locations including the ancient port of Poompuhar and the Lighthouse there in Tamil Nadu, Kaup Lighthouse in Karnataka, and Alappuzha Lighthouse in Kerala could be developed as tourist attractions, offering insights into maritime history and providing panoramic views of the coastline.

Aside from lighthouses, there are numerous other underdog cases that hold untapped potential for tourism development. These may include:

Industrial Heritage Sites: Former industrial sites, such as old factories, mines, and warehouses, can offer insights into the industrial history of a region. Tourists interested in heritage and industrial archaeology may find these sites intriguing. In India, there are several regions with a rich industrial heritage that could be developed for tourism. For example, the Ruhr region in Germany transformed its former coal mines and steel plants into cultural attractions. Similarly, regions like Jamshedpur in Jharkhand, known for its steel industry, and Raniganj in West Bengal, one of India's oldest coal mining areas, could develop industrial heritage tourism initiatives. Tours could be organised to showcase the history and evolution of these industries, with visits to old factories, mines, and warehouses. Interpretive centres or museums could be established to educate visitors about the technological advancements and social impact of these industries on local communities.

Agricultural Tourism: Rural areas with agricultural landscapes and farming traditions can offer authentic and immersive experiences for tourists. Activities like farm stays, agricultural tours, and harvest festivals allow visitors to learn about farming practices, interact with local farmers, and enjoy farm-fresh produce. The Lavender Fields in Provence, France, and the vineyards of Napa Valley, California, are examples of agricultural tourism destinations. Rural areas in India, particularly in states like Punjab, Maharashtra, and Karnataka, have vibrant agricultural landscapes and farming traditions. These regions could promote agricultural tourism by offering farm stays, agritourism experiences, and farm-to-table dining experiences. Educational programmes could be organised to teach visitors about sustainable farming practices, organic farming techniques, and traditional agricultural methods.



Alappuzha Lighthouse, Kerala



Lahaul Spiti, Himachal Pradesh

Dark Sky Tourism: Areas with minimal light pollution are ideal for stargazing and astronomy tourism. Dark sky reserves and observatories provide opportunities for visitors to observe celestial phenomena, learn about astronomy, and experience the beauty of the night sky. The International Dark-Sky Association designates dark-sky places around the world, such as the Kerry International Dark Sky Reserve in Ireland. India has several rural regions with minimal light pollution, making them ideal for Dark-Sky tourism. For example, areas like Ladakh in Jammu and Kashmir, Spiti Valley in Himachal Pradesh, and parts of rural Rajasthan offer excellent opportunities for stargazing and astronomy tourism. Local communities could establish dark sky reserves or observatories to facilitate stargazing tours and astronomy workshops. Accommodation options, such as eco-lodges or homestays, could be developed to cater to astrotourists seeking immersive experiences in rural settings.

Engaging Local Communities for Sustainable Rural Tourism

Engaging local communities is vital for sustainable rural tourism. Community involvement ensures alignment with local values and needs, fostering ownership and responsibility. Preservation of cultural heritage is the key to revitalising traditions and supporting artisans. Environmental conservation is integral, promoting responsible practices to safeguard rural landscapes and biodiversity. Capacity building

empowers locals with skills for employment and entrepreneurship. Equitable distribution of benefits ensures inclusive growth, reducing disparities. Cultural exchange fosters mutual understanding and respect, enriching both tourists and hosts. Long-term sustainability requires comprehensive planning, stakeholder collaboration, and monitoring of impacts. Through these efforts, rural tourism can thrive as a catalyst for positive change, preserving culture, supporting communities, and conserving the environment.

In implementing sustainable rural tourism, community engagement is paramount, ensuring alignment with local values and fostering a sense of ownership. Cultural preservation initiatives, such as heritage conservation projects and cultural festivals, enrich visitor experiences while also promoting local traditions. Environmental conservation measures, like waste management and sustainable transportation, safeguard rural landscapes and biodiversity. Capacity building empowers locals with skills for employment and entrepreneurship, contributing to inclusive growth. By embracing these strategies, rural tourism becomes a catalyst for positive change, preserving culture, supporting communities, and conserving the environment. Through ongoing collaboration and commitment to sustainability, rural destinations can thrive, offering authentic experiences that benefit visitors and residents alike. Before tourists book their next trips, they should consider the power of mindful tourism and choose destinations and experiences that uplift rural communities and protect their precious cultural heritage. □





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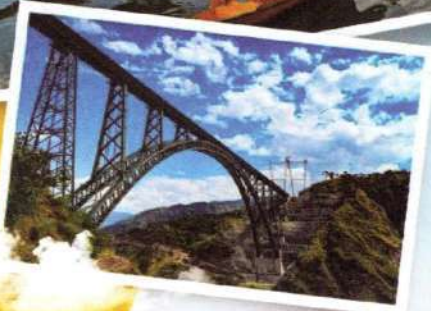
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Blooming J&K Tourism

Towards Growth and Development

Jammu and Kashmir's tourism sector is expanding and evolving. There has been a 155% surge in tourist arrivals, underscoring the region's potential as a leading global tourist destination. The pivotal impact of the G-20 Summit in 2023 illustrates how it reshaped the tourism landscape. The burgeoning trend of homestays portrays it as a grassroots movement that extends beyond lodging to offer authentic cultural experiences. The preservation of heritage through homestays is a mutually beneficial relationship between historical architecture and guest satisfaction. Additionally, the narrative encompasses religious pilgrimages, sustainability initiatives, and the burgeoning adventure tourism scene in the Himalayas. Jammu and Kashmir is a holistic destination, seamlessly blending spirituality, natural allure, cultural diversity, and sustainable practices, poised to enchant the global traveller.



* Irtif Lone

Often hailed as the "Paradise on Earth," Jammu and Kashmir has recently emerged as a flourishing tourist hotspot. The surge in tourist arrivals, encompassing both domestic and international visitors, alludes to a growing fascination with the enchanting allure of this region. The statistical evidence is compelling, revealing a substantial increase in tourist footfall and marking a new era for the tourism industry in Jammu and Kashmir.

The statistical landscape paints a compelling

picture of the burgeoning tourism sector in India, with Jammu and Kashmir experiencing an astounding 155% increase in overall tourist arrivals in 2023 compared to the preceding years of 2021 and 2022. This exponential growth underscores the immense potential and allure of the Indian subcontinent as a premier tourist destination.

G-20 Summit

The G-20 Summit hosted in Kashmir in 2023 played a significant role in transforming the tourism landscape of Jammu and Kashmir. This international gathering



G20 meeting in Jammu and Kashmir

drew attention to the region's natural beauty and rich culture, contributing to a positive global perception of Kashmir as an attractive and safe destination. The summit, particularly the G-20 Tourism Working Group meeting in Srinagar, garnered praise and acted as a magnet for foreign tourists, playing a crucial role in the notable increase in tourist numbers.

Economically, the event brought tangible benefits to Jammu and Kashmir by infusing funds into the local economy. The arrival of foreign delegates and tourists provided a financial boost to sectors such as hospitality, transportation, and local businesses. This economic injection not only met immediate needs but also spurred investments in long-term infrastructure development, enhancing the overall appeal and accessibility of the region for visitors.

The successful hosting of the summit has had a lasting impact on Jammu and Kashmir's tourism industry, offering the region global recognition that continues to be utilised in ongoing promotional efforts. The positive image of Kashmir as a capable and secure destination for international events has attracted more tourists, while the cultural exchange and diplomatic connections established during the summit have further contributed to positioning Kashmir as a premier global tourist destination.

Homestays: A Grassroots Movement

The homestay industry in Jammu and Kashmir is experiencing a rapid surge, with 1,485 homestays and

13,000 rooms now registered across the Union Territory. This grassroots movement is proving to be a successful strategy in providing lodging options and an authentic cultural experience to visitors.

The tourism sector's recent grant of industry status has attracted significant investments, and these homestay initiatives are proving to be instrumental in accommodating the increasing flow of tourists. The positive impact is evident in the tourism sector's exceptional performance, with over 1.88

crore tourists visiting in 2022 and a staggering 2.11 crore in 2023, marking unprecedented growth for the region.

Beyond providing accommodation, this program has generated employment opportunities for unemployed youth. Tourists opting for homestays in the region enjoy a comfortable stay while experiencing the authentic local culture on a basic level.

Furthermore, homestays have become a crucial element in addressing lodging and food challenges in areas where hotels and restaurants are not well-established, offering a more sustainable and locally integrated alternative to traditional accommodations. Those with a minimum of four rooms can now register for homestays with the tourism department, fostering a collaborative and community-centric approach to tourism growth in Jammu and Kashmir.

Heritage Preservation

In the realm of tourism, a notable trend is emerging as wooden cottages, and traditional houses find new life as homestays. Beyond offering a unique and authentic lodging experience, this transformation serves a vital role in preserving architectural heritage. Many property owners in the hospitality sector are recognising the intrinsic value of these historical structures, breathing new life into them while safeguarding the rich cultural legacy they represent.

The decision to convert heritage properties into accommodations reflects a conscientious effort to

uphold the architectural identity of bygone eras. These homestays, often centuries-old, encapsulate the charm and character of their respective periods, providing guests with an immersive journey into the past. The careful preservation of elements like antique furniture, intricate woodwork, and traditional design ensures that the authenticity of these historical homes remains intact.

The symbiotic relationship between heritage preservation and the burgeoning homestay industry is evident in the positive reception from guests. Travellers seeking more than just a place to rest appreciate the cultural significance and unique ambience offered by these centuries-old abodes. Staying in such well-maintained heritage properties becomes a journey through time, allowing guests to connect with the architectural and cultural history of the region in a profoundly personal way.

Religious Pilgrimages: A Spiritual Sojourn

Religious pilgrimages have also significantly contributed to the tourism surge, with the holy cave shrine of Shri Mata Vaishno Devi welcoming at least 95 lakh pilgrims this year, marking the highest number in the past decade. Similarly, the annual Amarnath Yatra concluded with around 4.5 lakh devotees offering prayers at the cave shrine in the South Kashmir Himalayas, further highlighting the region's spiritual significance and appeal.

Beyond these major events, Jammu and Kashmir boasts a rich tapestry of religious diversity, featuring historic temples, shrines, and mosques. The Hazratbal Shrine, Charar-e-Sharief, Shankaracharya Temple, and the Raghunath Temple are among the many sites that attract pilgrims and tourists alike. This religious tourism not only contributes significantly to the local economy through accommodations, transportation, and businesses but also fosters cultural exchanges, bringing together individuals from different regions and backgrounds.

As the region thrives as a religious tourism destination, there is a pressing need for sustainable development and improved infrastructure to accommodate the growing number of pilgrims. The unique blend of spirituality, natural beauty, and cultural diversity in Jammu and Kashmir positions it as a holistic destination for those seeking a profound connection with their faith while immersing themselves in the region's scenic and culturally rich landscapes.

Sustainability in Tourism: A Paradigm Shift

Sustainability has become a focal point in Jammu and Kashmir's tourism sector, as the region endeavours to balance the growth of this industry with environmental conservation and socio-cultural responsibility. Various initiatives and strategic measures have been implemented to ensure that tourism development in J&K is not only economically viable but also ecologically and socially sustainable.

One key area of focus is the promotion of eco-friendly practices. Sustainable tourism efforts in Jammu and Kashmir include minimising the environmental impact of tourist activities. This involves waste management, energy conservation, and the promotion of eco-friendly transportation options. Additionally, there is an emphasis on preserving the natural beauty of the region, safeguarding its delicate ecosystems, and mitigating the carbon footprint associated with travel.

Community Involvement and Empowerment

Community involvement and empowerment are integral components of sustainable tourism in J&K. Initiatives have been launched to engage local communities in tourism-related activities, ensuring that they actively participate in and benefit from the industry. Homestays, as part of this strategy, not only offer unique cultural experiences to tourists but also provide local families with a source of income, fostering economic growth within rural areas.

Cultural Preservation

Cultural preservation is another essential aspect of sustainable tourism in Jammu and Kashmir. Efforts are underway to protect and promote the rich cultural heritage of the region. This includes the preservation of historical sites, traditional arts and crafts, and indigenous practices. By celebrating and sustaining the cultural uniqueness of J&K, the tourism industry aims to offer authentic experiences while ensuring the preservation of local identity.

Furthermore, there is an ongoing commitment to responsible tourism practices. The promotion of ethical behavior among tourists, such as respecting local customs and minimising environmental impact, is actively encouraged. Sustainable tourism certification programs are being explored to incentivise businesses and individuals who prioritise eco-friendly and socially responsible practices.

Off-the-Beaten-Path Homestays: Unveiling Hidden Treasures

In the realm of travel, a growing trend is steering wanderers away from conventional hotels, leading them to discover the charm of homestays nestled in lesser-explored locales. Away from the hustle and bustle of tourist hotspots, these accommodations often find their home in the heart of villages, amid orchards, or along the tranquil shores of serene lakes. The result is an immersive travel experience that goes beyond the ordinary, inviting guests to embark on a journey of exploration and authentic encounters.

Homestays, with their unconventional locations, open up a world of off-the-beaten-path experiences for travellers. Nestled in villages, these accommodations offer a gateway to hidden trails and untouched landscapes, providing guests with the opportunity to delve into the unexplored corners of a region. Surrounded by orchards and tranquil lakesides, visitors are presented with a serene backdrop to unwind, away from the typical tourist hustle.

Beyond the picturesque settings, the allure of homestays lies in the authentic interactions guests can enjoy with local communities. From vibrant village markets to shared meals with families, these experiences go beyond the scripted tourist itinerary. Travellers have the chance to delve into the untold stories of the region, gaining insights into the cultural tapestry and traditions that define these lesser-explored areas.

Redefining Travel

In essence, homestays redefine travel by offering an alternative to the well-trodden tourist path. They become more than just a place to rest; they serve as a portal to a region's soul, revealing its hidden gems and fostering genuine connections. As travellers increasingly seek authentic encounters over conventional sightseeing, the charm of off-the-beaten-path homestays continues to grow, promising an enriching and

unique journey for those willing to venture beyond the ordinary.

Adventure Tourism: Thrills in the Himalayas

The promotion of adventure tourism in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) has become a significant focus, capitalising on the region's diverse landscapes and offering thrilling experiences for adventure enthusiasts. From soaring mountains to pristine rivers, J&K provides an ideal backdrop for various adventure activities, and concerted efforts are being made to showcase and enhance these offerings.

Trekking Trails

One of the key draws for adventure tourism in J&K is its exceptional trekking trails. The challenging terrains of the Himalayas present opportunities for trekkers to explore breathtaking landscapes and witness the region's natural beauty up close. Popular trekking destinations such as the Great Lakes Trek and the Tarsar Marsar Trek attract adventure seekers from around the world, contributing to the growth of this niche tourism sector.

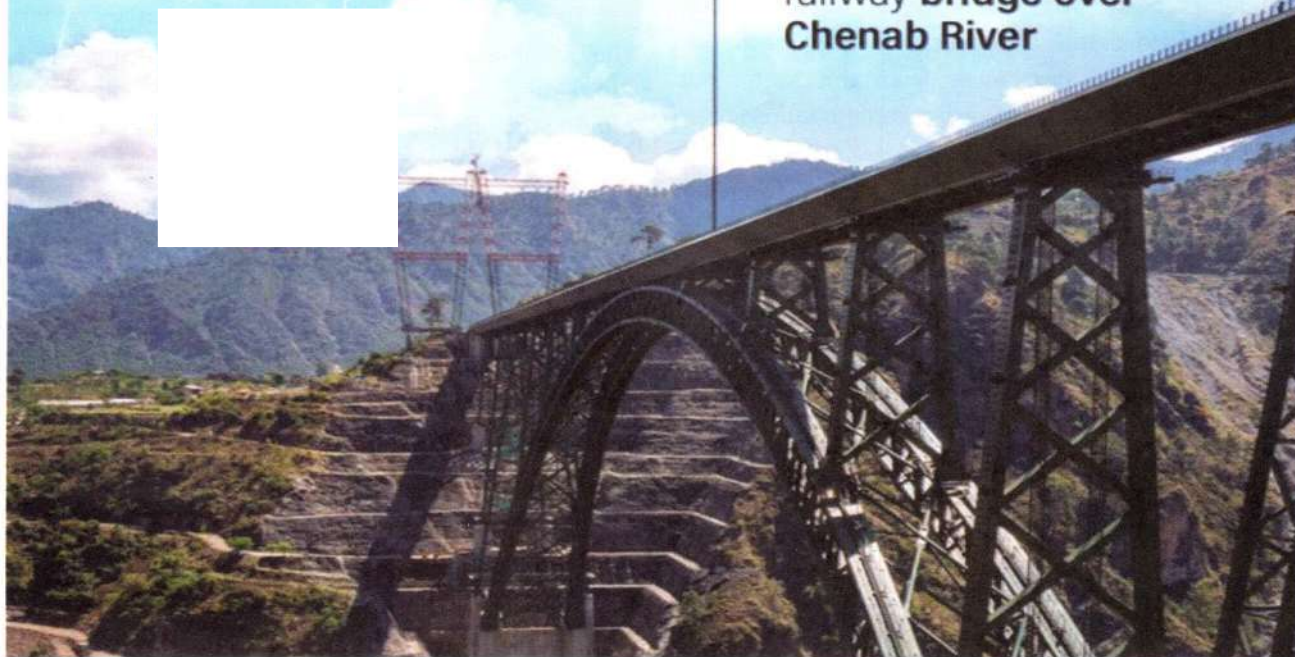
The region's vast network of rivers and lakes also lends itself to water-based adventure activities. White-water rafting in the turbulent rapids of the Lidder River



Paragliding in Jammu and Kashmir

Chenab Bridge

The world's highest railway bridge over Chenab River



or the Zaskar River has gained popularity, offering an adrenaline-pumping experience amidst stunning natural surroundings. Additionally, the pristine Dal Lake provides a serene yet adventurous setting for activities like kayaking and canoeing.

Jammu and Kashmir's snow-clad mountains offer a playground for winter sports enthusiasts. Gulmarg, in particular, has emerged as a hub for skiing and snowboarding, drawing thrill-seekers to its world-class slopes. The provision of state-of-the-art facilities, including ski resorts and cable cars, enhances the overall adventure tourism experience, making J&K a sought-after destination for winter sports.

The promotion of paragliding has also gained momentum, taking advantage of the region's panoramic landscapes. Paragliding activities in places like Sanasar and Pahalgam provide tourists with an opportunity to experience the breathtaking views of J&K from the sky, combining adventure with the beauty of the region.

To boost adventure tourism further, the J&K government has actively participated in events and festivals that highlight these activities. Adventure sports festivals, such as the Gulmarg Winter Festival and Khelo India, Winter Games, have been organised to showcase

the region's potential for adventure tourism and attract a global audience.

Conclusion

As Jammu and Kashmir's tourism sector continues to flourish, the strategic initiatives, sustainable practices, and diverse offerings underscore the region's potential as a premier global tourist destination. The convergence of heritage preservation, religious significance, sustainable tourism, and adventure activities paints a comprehensive picture of a region on the cusp of unparalleled growth and development in the tourism industry.

The success of Jammu and Kashmir's tourism journey is not just measured in numbers but in the lasting impact on local economies, cultural preservation, and the transformation of conventional tourist experiences. The region's commitment to sustainability ensures that the blooming tourism industry not only benefits the present generation but also preserves the natural and cultural treasures for generations to come. As travellers seek authentic, immersive, and sustainable experiences, Jammu and Kashmir stands poised to become an exemplar in the global tourism landscape, inviting the world to discover the diverse wonders it has to offer. □



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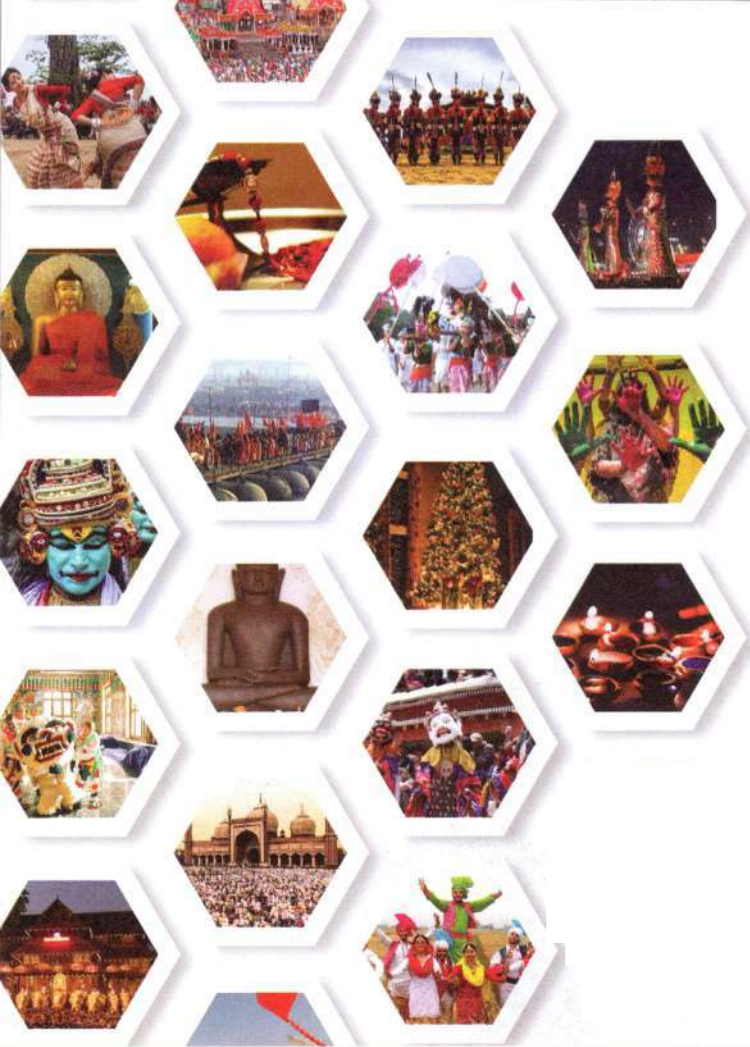
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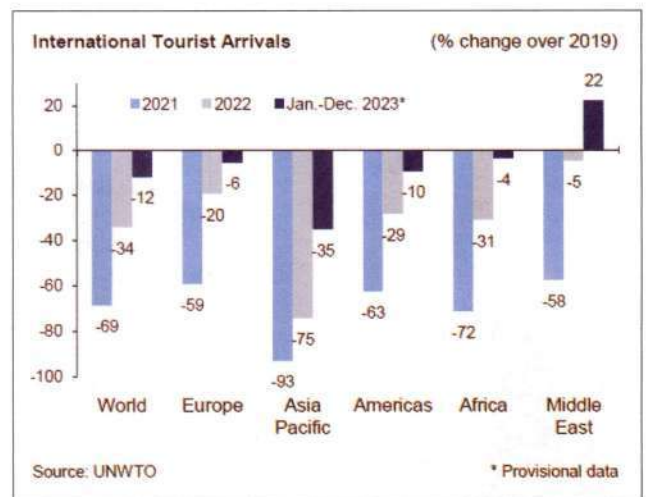
Rural Fairs & Festivals

With tourism sector recovering back to pre-pandemic levels, both nationally and internationally, a tourist's quest for authenticity can be quenched by capitalising on the fairs and festivals in India. Fairs and festivals are cultural tourism attractions. Pragmatic approach embedded with knowledge of tourism impacts, can transform fairs and festivals into a tourism product that will eventually deliver economic and socio-cultural benefits to the country.

* Dr. Suyash Yadav

UNWTO World Tourism Barometer 2024 states that international tourism recovered 88% of pre-pandemic levels. It is expected to fully recover by the end of 2024. India tourism statistics 2023 mentions that bulk tourism activity in India came from domestic tourism with 1731.01 million domestic tourist visits in 2022, foreign tourist visits stood at 8.59 million. Tourism sector is one of the big sources of foreign exchange earnings. Importance of tourism, particularly in rural and backward areas as an instrument for economic development and employment generation, has been well recognised. Fairs and festivals can be utilized both to attract more visitors and to convince them to stay for greater duration, because benefits of tourism get enhanced either by increasing the number of tourists or by increasing the duration of stay of tourists.

There can be no tourism without a destination. For a destination to develop and sustain itself, the following five 'A's are important: Attractions (features that pull



* The author is Assistant Professor, Institute of Tourism Studies, University of Lucknow, India.
E-mail id: yadav.suyash@gmail.com

a tourist to a destination); Accessibility (modes of transport); Accommodation (place to stay); Amenities (facilities at the destination); Activities (various pursuits of a tourist). Attractions play profound role in marketing campaigns of destinations. Fairs and festivals are big pull factors in tourism; they are cultural attractions which depict the history. Hindi words like 'mela' or 'mahotsav' or 'utsav' are associated with fairs and festival in India. Launched in 2021, Utsav portal is a digital initiative of Union Ministry of Tourism which showcases all events, festivals, and live darshans across India to promote different regions of the country as popular tourist destinations worldwide, so that tourists can prepare their upcoming itinerary easily.

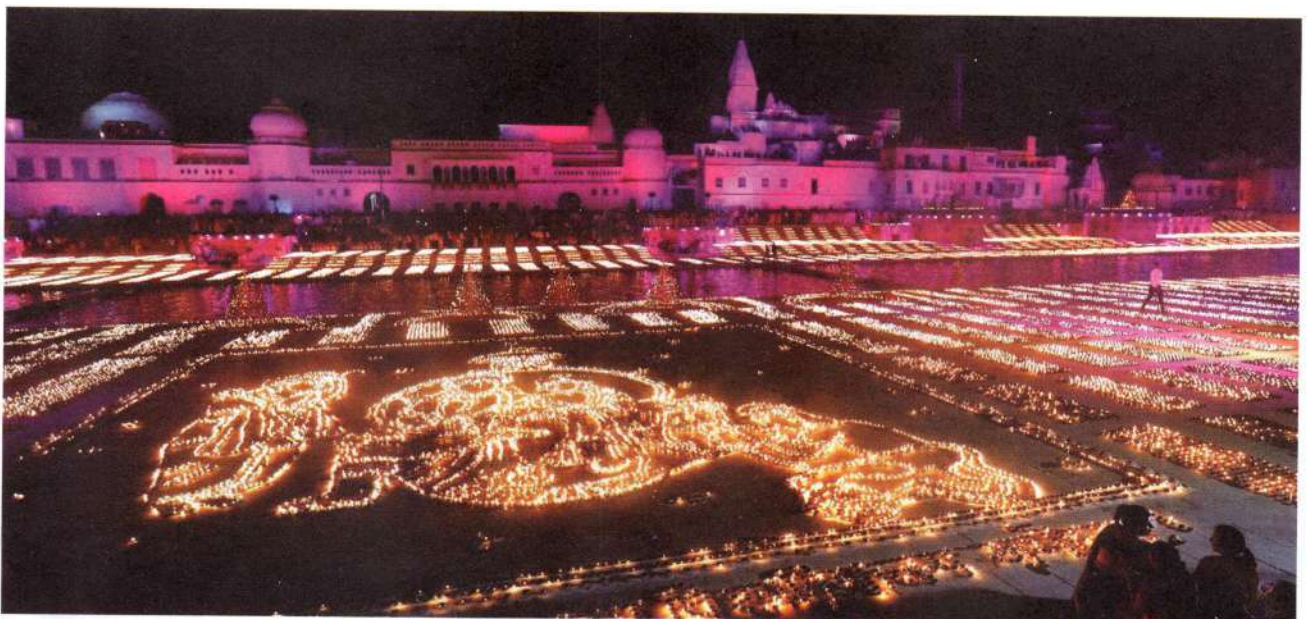
Importance of Fairs and Festivals

In India, traditional fairs and festivals are connected with harvests, changing seasons, religious beliefs, local customs, etc. Apart from this, many fairs and festivals have been introduced by various stakeholders including government tourism departments, usually aimed at enhancing tourist footfall. An attempt has been made to focus more upon the significance of fairs and festivals from a tourism perspective.

Economic importance: Pro-poor approach to tourism management talks about enhancing linkage between tourism businesses and poor people so that tourism's contribution to poverty reduction is increased and poor people are able to participate more effectively in product development. Celebrations

during festivals in India create livelihood opportunities for many artisans. Since 2019, Ayodhya Deepotsav is being organized. In 2023, Ayodhya entered Guinness world records for lighting the highest number of lamps (over 2.2 million) simultaneously at a single location. Those who make diyas and firecrackers get work because of such an event. Idol makers getting work during Durga and Ganesha pooja festivity is another example. Other prominent platforms catering to economic opportunities include Bali yatra festival (open trade fair) of Cuttack, Odisha; Surajkund international crafts fair, Haryana; Pushkar fair (annual multi-day livestock fair) Pushkar, Rajasthan.

Socio-cultural importance: Traditional Indian festivals have socio-religious context. Religious festivals have some norms performed according to the tenets of religion, but they also offer an opportunity to encourage social bonding across religions. Familial bonds have come under stress due to effects of globalisation, and westernisation; festivals provide a platform for maintaining them. Major harvest festivals (E.g. Wangala, Lohri, Nuakhai, etc.) in India are aligned with two harvesting seasons, Rabi and Kharif. Closely associated is change in season which is also celebrated in India with festivals like Makara Sankranti (Uttarayan/Winter Solstice), Pongal, etc. Festivals have celestial and spiritual connotations to them as well. Makara Sankranti means the date when Sun transits into Capricorn sign thereby green signalling the auspicious ceremonies (E.g. marriage) in the hindu tradition.



Ayodhya Deepotsav, Uttar Pradesh

MICE and Roots tourism through festival: 'MICE' includes all forms of tourism that are related to work/profession/business, i.e. when people are not primarily motivated by recreational pursuits but travel because of their work. Acronym MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions/Events) covers four core market areas. In tourism industry, destination weddings are treated under 'events' of MICE. Marriages are nothing less than festivals in India, more so with increase in aspirational class of India which is driving 'premiumisation'. Uttarayan must have been celebrated in India since ages but according to the website of Gujarat tourism, since 1989, the city of Ahmedabad has been hosting an international kite festival as part of official celebration of Uttarayan. This is an example of how a traditional festival's significance can be tapped to create a tourism product and receive tourist footfall, including NRI community. Heritage and Roots tourism are important for travellers who are seeking their family roots.

Lominé (2007) mentions that nostalgia is a longing for past which helps in understanding demand for heritage tourism and a subsequent number of events and attractions linked to social history. In few instances, nostalgia has also been associated with diaspora and migration with tourism being an opportunity to visit sites where one used to live. Nostalgia tourism is directly linked to social identity, making tourism a powerful existential experience. Sindhu Darshan festival held at Leh, Ladakh (started in 1997) attracts large number of tourists. It is a celebration of river Sindhu, also known as the 'Indus' valley civilization (earliest known urban culture of Indian subcontinent).

Adventure and rural tourism through festival: To overcome 'seasonality' in tourism i.e. fluctuation in tourism demand, to promote India as a 365 days' destination and to attract tourists with specific interest, 'adventure' has been identified as a niche product for promotion and development. Adventure tourism is a type of niche tourism where travel involves some degree of risk (real or perceived) and may require special skills, and physical effort. It can be any tourism activity that includes physical activity, cultural exchange, and connection with nature. Keeping in view that adventure tourism activities are largely away from cities, strategy for rural tourism is also relevant for the promotion of adventure tourism. In 2023, 8th edition of Hanuwantiya

Water Festival (which centres on adventure tourism) was organised by the Madhya Pradesh tourism board on Narmada river bank in district Khandwa, 230 km from Bhopal. It is an example of converting a tourism resource into a tourism product. Adventure tourism activities like rock climbing, rappelling, etc. are also offered in Kutch Rann Utsav, Gujarat.

Reinvigorating heritage through festivals: Heritage is legacy from previous generations. Heritage tourism, sometimes called historical tourism, particularly focuses on cultural heritage. It fulfils travellers' interest in historical attractions such as monuments and sites of important past events, as well as in traditions. Nostalgia for this heritage is a motivation for many tourists. UNESCO World Heritage Convention talks about cultural and natural heritage. There are 42 UNESCO World Heritage Sites in India. Many cultural entities in India have been included in the 'intangible' cultural heritage list of UNESCO. Some of these intangible facets have a festivity associated with them. For example, Kumbh Mela, a major pilgrimage for Hindus, is UNESCO's 'intangible' cultural heritage. A huge gain in tourist footfall is seen when Kumbh is organised. Another entry in the intangible list is traditional performance of Ramayana, performed across North India associated with Dussehra festival.

Pinjore heritage festival is organized to exhibit culture and tradition of Haryana. When Kerala established itself as a major centre for spice, Muziris was a port city, among earliest of its kind in world. Muziris heritage project is one of the biggest conservation projects in India, aimed to conserve a rich culture that is as old as 3000 years or more. Kochi-Muziris Biennale (organised at Kochi) is an art exhibition and festival that is largest of its kind in South Asia. Hornbill Festival is celebrated in Nagaland to preserve, protect and revive uniqueness and richness



Hornbill Festival, Nagaland



Mango eating competition during Mango Festival, Uttar Pradesh

of Naga heritage. Medaram Jatara, Telangana is Asia's largest tribal fair and showcases tribal heritage.

Facilitating rural produce through festivals: Farm produce and associated activities can be rural tourism attractions. U.P. produces a large variety of mangoes. Awadh mango growers association conceptualised and organised first UP Mango Festival in 2013. Wine tourism is identified as a growing area of special interest tourism throughout world. Maharashtra is capitalising on vineyard tourism. As per data from Maharashtra tourism department, Nashik (Indian Wine Capital) has 29 operating wineries. Started in 2008, Sulafest, organised by Sula Vineyards, is a popular wine and music festival in India where visitors see grape cultivation, wine manufacturing process, walk-in vineyards, etc.

Floriculture and tourism through festival: According to Srinagar district's website, Indira Gandhi Memorial Tulip garden is the largest tulip garden in Asia, situated on foothills of Zabarwan range with an overview of Dal Lake. Garden was opened in 2007 to boost floriculture and tourism in Kashmir valley. Tulip festival (organized during the onset of spring season) is an annual celebration that aims to showcase the range of flowers in the garden as a part of tourism efforts.

Sustaining Indian arts and 'authenticity' through festivals: In his famous book 'The Tourist', Dean MacCannell says that tourism is a quest for authenticity. He stated that contemporary society is dominated by feelings of alienation, superficiality and disenchantment, and as a consequence many people go travelling and sightseeing in order to find some authentic experiences. They travel to rural areas to reconnect with past and with forgotten roots and heritage and to remote places where locals' lifestyles have not been contaminated by modernity and western culture. Fairs and festivals are apt means through which tourist itinerary can have this element of authenticity. According to Utsav portal, Virāsāt is heritage and folk life festival, held annually at Dehradun, Uttarakhand. It is organised by REACH (Rural Entrepreneurship for Art and Cultural Heritage) for past 24 years. It presents arts and culture of India in a unique, educative format that allows young people and visitors to learn about their roots while also enjoying arts. It has been instrumental in revitalising several rural art forms (music, dance, crafts, painting, sculpture, theatre, storytelling, etc.) on the brink of extinction due to lack of audiences. Authentic dance form like Kathakali features as chief attraction in traditional festival Onam, emphasis on authentic Bhangra during Lohri is also well known.



Sports Festival, Kila Raipur, Punjab

Wellness and sports tourism through festivals:

Wellness tourism is travel associated with objective of maintaining or enhancing one's personal well-being. International Yoga Festival (IYF), held every year in Rishikesh, Uttarakhand, was started as a small festival in 1999, which is now a sought-after international tourist attraction. 'Yoga' is an intangible cultural heritage of UNESCO. IYF celebrations usually involves 'Vedic Chanting' which is again an intangible cultural heritage

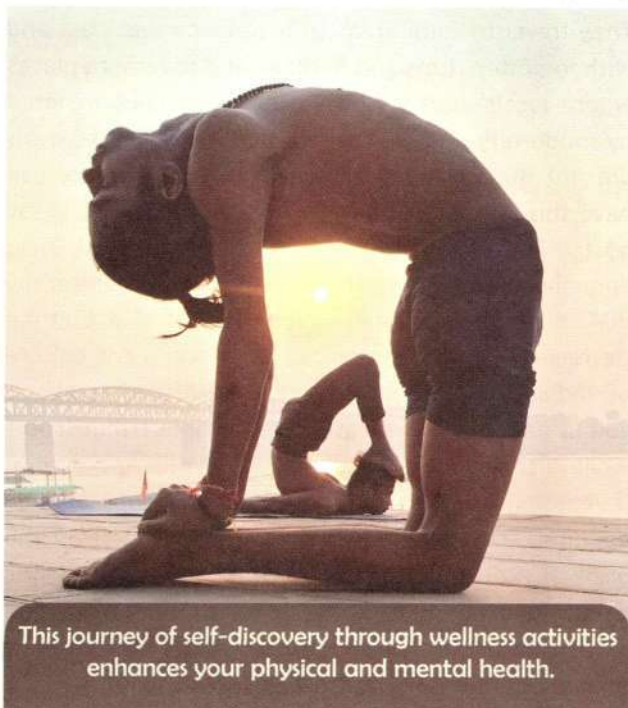
of UNESCO. Physical fitness through sports as a medium is a popular means for attaining well-being. Organised since 1983, Kila Raipur sports festival, famously known as the Rural Olympics, is a celebrated event held annually in Kila Raipur village, Ludhiana, Punjab.

Conclusion

Festivals improve the lives of communities by bringing prosperity to the economy; they contribute to overall well-being and social harmony. Fairs and festivals are tourism products that create opportunities for tourists to spend time together, connect with an area, and experience the diversity of cultures. If managed well, they create a positive image of the place by attracting visitors, thereby aiding in destination promotion. □

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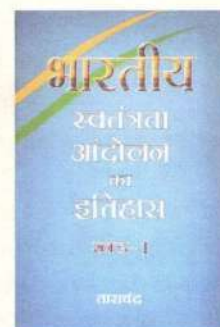
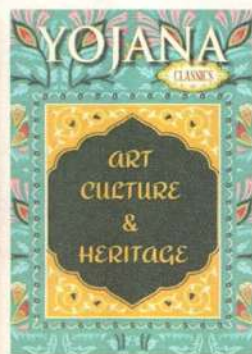
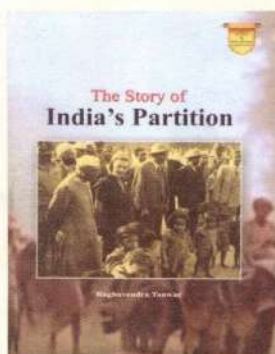
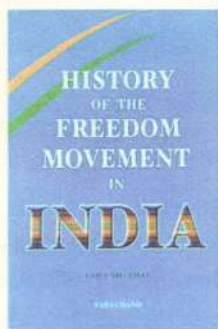


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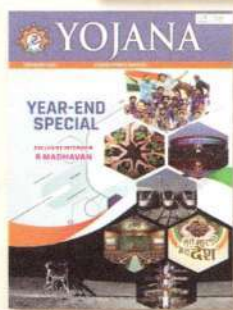


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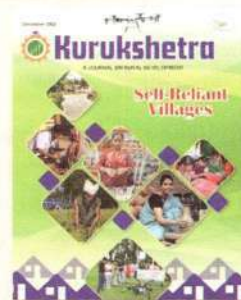
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Different Hues of Rural Tourism

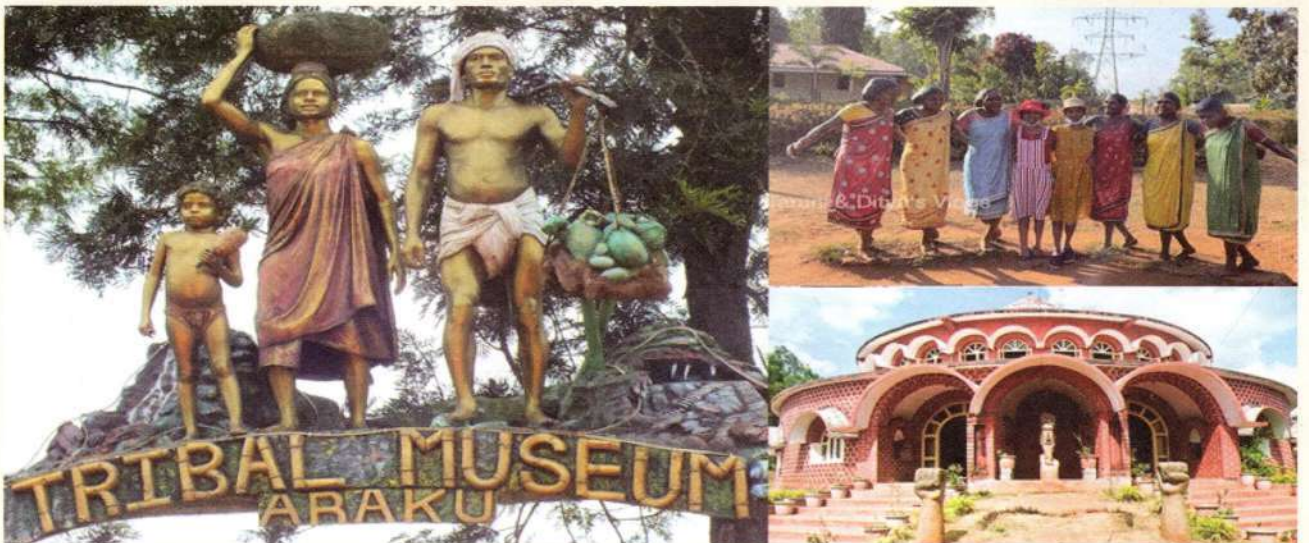
Tribal Tourism

Majuli Island, Assam



Majuli is a scenic, lush green, and pollution-free river island on the Brahmaputra River. It is the world's largest river island, drawing visitors from all over the world. Majuli's culture is distinct, as it is mostly populated by Tribals. It is also known as Assam's cultural capital. The events held here are all filled with pleasure and vibrancy, as well as a lot of music and dance. The primary celebration of Majuli is called Raas, and seeing it is an unforgettable experience. Majuli is a mystical area steeped in history and culture. It is the world's largest river island and the home of the Sattriya culture, which has played an important role in bringing together numerous ethnic groups in the region since the 15th century via the spread of Neo-Vaishnavism and its cultural traditions.

Araku Valley, Andhra Pradesh



There are many discovered jewels in South India that depict the old customs and rich cultural history. It is home to spectacular beaches, charming temples, and fascinating hill stations. And, of all the unknown and unspoiled areas, Araku Valley in Andhra Pradesh's heart is without a doubt a stunner.

Agriculture Tourism

Farm of Happiness, Ratnagiri District, Maharashtra



At this picturesque 20 acre organic farmstay, hidden away in a secluded agricultural community that has largely escaped modernisation, visitors have plenty to be joyful about. To gain an understanding of how crops like paddy, mangoes, and jackfruit are grown, you will be encouraged to actively involved in the farming process. Bullock cart excursions, trekking, bird watching, stargazing, and fishing are further options. Three earthy, yet contemporary, guest rooms with traditional touches like clay floors and antique furniture can be found in the farmhouse.

Konyak Tea Retreat, Mon District, Nagaland



Many of the well-known tea plantations in India may be familiar to the tourists who are interested in visiting agri-tourism destination. But this one in Nagaland, in the northeastern part of India, is genuinely unusual and outstanding! The upscale farmhouse is situated in the centre of a rural, 250-hectare tea estate that is privately owned. There are other crops growing besides tea, though. An organic vegetable garden and an orange tree orchard are located on the farm. During harvest season, visitors can pick and consume (mid-November to December). Other activities include learning how to traditionally smoke meat, doing nature treks, helping villagers in their rice fields, milking cows and goats, and more.

Other activities include milking cows and goats, working with locals in their paddy fields, going on nature hikes, learning how to traditionally smoke meat, and visiting local Konyak tribal villages. The atmospheric stone-walled farmhouse is decorated with tribal paintings and has two guest rooms overlooking a valley.

Kumarakom, Kerala



A beautiful combination of greenery and azure skies welcome backpackers to Kumarakom. A walk-through God's Garden, the paddy fields of Kumarakom, is an enriching and humbling experience. The backwater cruises in Kumarakom offer a distinctive and ravishing experience which will last a lifetime.

The net fishing practice in Kerala is truly a delightful sight to behold. Savouring the tastes of marine and freshwater fishes like Karimeen, shrimp, prawns etc. draw one to the ethnic tastes of Kerala. The ultimate crafted beauty of coconut palm weaving amuses the spectator in equal measure. The richly multifaceted craft of coconut frond weaving is one that furnishes an eco-directive effect. Kumarakom offers you the opportunity to watch the making of coir and the way its magical textures and natural properties are given life with the talent of master craftsmen. The process has been perfected to an art and is mastered and passed on through generations. A blend of myriad experiences, Kumarakom truly is a heaven made on earth.

Malarickal, Kottayam



Nestled far away from the chaos of urban life, there exists a quaint hamlet in the heart of Kottayam district. All it offers those who stumble upon it are a soothing experience of village life amidst endless paddy fields. Its massive

stretches of backwaters and intrinsic natural beauty are slowly attracting tourists who seek a rendezvous wholly detached from their routine. Malarickal or Malarikkal is a jewel that people in Kerala are only slowly awakening to themselves.

It is not just the emerald of its backwaters that awaits you here, as Malarickal lures you in with breathtaking shades of pink as well. The water lilies (*Nymphaea Stellata* or ambal in local parlance) greet the terrain during the end of the monsoon rains, which usually occurs annually between September and October. A carpet of pleasant pink envelops the entire region in a breathtaking formation that is hard to explain with mere words. They spread out over 600 acres of land, and locals advise that the best time to witness this phenomenon is morning and evening. These visuals alone draw in bigger crowds each year, as words spread of this natural wonder.

To begin the day with the water lilies, and end it with a glorious sun setting over the countryside is nothing short of a divine endowment.

Madla, Madhya Pradesh



With a river, mountains, and forest all within one kilometre of the area, Madla is a unique town in India that has all three natural geographic characteristics within one kilometre. The town is traversed by the Karnawati (Ken), the cleanest river in all of Asia. The level of environmental consciousness in the community is astounding. The Pandava Falls and Caves, which are close to the Panna National Park and Khajuraho—the UNESCO site—are only 10 kilometres from Madla. Folk music and dancing, regional celebrations, and Bundelkhand cuisine are a few examples of the village's intangible legacy. The village's character is still present in the dwellings' architecture. The murals on the dwellings' walls display the art and culture of the area. The village's character is still present in the dwellings' architecture. The murals on the dwellings' walls depict village life via art and culture.

This Village is a unique tourist destination since it offers experiences in rural tourism, wildlife tourism, and heritage tourism all at once.

Ajrakhpur



Ajrakhpur is an art and craft town located in the desert city of Bhuj of State of Gujrat. The region is well-known around the world for its Ajrakh print, which is block printing on cloth. The settlement, which is 15 kilometres from Bhuj, has a history with Ajrakh printing dating back to the Muslim Khatri community's forebears. Ajrakh's block printing is entirely handcrafted without the use of any machinery or automation, drawing its inspiration from the hues found in nature. The Indus Valley Civilization developed Ajrakh printing thousands of years ago, and it is being practised in the small community of Ajrakhpur today.

Ajrakh print production has a long history of close ties to the Khatri community. The print is, nevertheless, typically worn by the rural Maldhari community. Ajrakh's main theme is the sky, which is symbolised by the colours blue for daytime, crimson for sunset, and black for nighttime. The white designs that resemble stars are stars. Separating craft clusters was significantly impacted by the country's division.

Chanderi



A little town from the 11th century called Chanderi may be found in Madhya Pradesh's northern region. It is well-known for its charming forts, rolling hills, and exquisite hand-woven Chanderi sarees. This six-yard sculpture is prized for the creativity that went into its design all around the world. There are several different weaves available here, ranging from pure Chanderi silk to Chanderi cotton-silk, and each weave is exceptional. □

Source : Rural Tourism, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India

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