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पर्यटन मंत्रालय
MINISTRY OF
TOURISM



1st Global Spiritual Tourism Conclave



23 August 2024 | Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh

REPORT



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Uttar Pradesh
UTTAR PRADESH TOURISM

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12 August, 2024

Message

I am happy to learn that the PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry is organizing the 1st Global Spiritual Tourism Conclave, themed "**रूहमantic**" on 23rd August 2024 in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh.

This event is a significant step towards promoting spiritual tourism and highlighting the rich cultural heritage of India. It offers a unique platform for stakeholders to explore opportunities, share insights and contribute to the development of this growing sector.

I extend my best wishes to the organizers, participants and all stakeholders involved in this initiative. May this conclave pave the way for greater awareness and appreciation of India's spiritual and cultural treasures, fostering both domestic and international tourism.

Anandi Patel

(Anandiben Patel)

गजेन्द्र सिंह शेखावत
Gajendra Singh Shekhawat



संस्कृति मंत्री एवं
पर्यटन मंत्री
भारत सरकार
Minister of Culture and
Minister of Tourism
Government of India



MESSAGE

I am happy to know that PHDCCI is organizing the **1st Global Spiritual Tourism Conclave** on the theme **रूहमantic** on **23rd August 2024** in **Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh**.

India, with its rich tapestry of spiritual heritage, has always been a beacon for spiritual seekers from around the world. Ministry of Tourism has undertaken several initiatives to promote spiritual tourism and its aims to develop destinations including pilgrimage destinations, ensuring improved infrastructure, accessibility and amenities for tourists.

I congratulate PHDCCI for this remarkable initiative for organizing the Global Spiritual Tourism Conclave. I wish this conclave a grand success.

(Gajendra Singh Shekhawat)

New Delhi



PHD CHAMBER
OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY
VOICE OF INDUSTRY AND TRADE

Sanjeev Agrawal
President



MESSAGE

Tourism is a vital pillar of India's economy, contributing substantially to GDP, job creation and cultural exchange. In 2023, India's tourism sector contributed approximately 9.2% to the national GDP and generated over 42 million jobs, representing 8.1% of total employment. With an ever-increasing number of both domestic and international tourists, India is poised to become one of the leading tourism destinations in the world.

The potential of the tourism sector in driving the vision of Viksit Bharat is unparalleled. As we strive towards holistic development, tourism plays a crucial role in not only boosting economic growth, but also in preserving our rich cultural heritage, promoting sustainable practices and fostering inclusive growth. The diverse and vibrant tapestry of India's cultural and spiritual heritage offers unique opportunities for tourists to experience the essence of our nation.

India, with its ancient traditions, spiritual wisdom and sacred sites, has always been a beacon for spiritual seekers from around the globe. Ayodhya, the birthplace of Lord Rama, is a prime example of a destination that embodies the spiritual essence of India. By promoting Ayodhya and other spiritual destinations, we can create pathways for sustainable development that benefit local communities and preserve our cultural legacy.

This report on Spiritual Tourism will serve as a comprehensive guide for stakeholders to navigate the opportunities and challenges in this sector, paving the way for sustainable and inclusive growth.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to all our partners, participants and stakeholders for their unwavering support and look forward to the valuable insights and outcomes that will emerge from this conclave.

(Sanjeev Agrawal)

"Voice of Industry & Trade"



PHD CHAMBER
OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY
VOICE OF INDUSTRY AND TRADE

Dr. Ranjeet Mehta
CEO & Secretary General



MESSAGE

In today's fast-paced world, spiritual tourism offers a unique opportunity for individuals to reconnect with their inner selves, seek solace and gain profound spiritual experiences.

As the birthplace of Lord Rama, Ayodhya attracts millions of devotees and spiritual seekers each year. This conclave aims to showcase Ayodhya as a leading spiritual tourism destination and highlight its potential for sustainable development.

Our commitment at PHDCCI to promoting spiritual tourism is unwavering. We believe that spiritual tourism not only contributes to economic growth, but also plays a vital role in preserving our cultural and spiritual heritage. By fostering sustainable tourism practices, we can ensure that these sacred sites are protected and cherished for future generations.

This report on Spiritual Tourism will be a cornerstone of our efforts to promote this sector. The report will provide a comprehensive analysis of the current landscape, identify opportunities and challenges and offer actionable recommendations for stakeholders.

As we embark on this journey, let us work together to create a robust ecosystem for spiritual tourism that benefits all stakeholders, including local communities, tourists and the environment. The discussions and collaborations at this conclave will undoubtedly pave the way for innovative strategies and partnerships that will drive the growth of spiritual tourism in India and beyond.

I extend my sincere thanks to all our partners, speakers and participants for their dedication and support. Let us make this conclave a resounding success and take significant strides towards promoting spiritual tourism as a key driver of sustainable development.

(Dr. Ranjeet Mehta)

"Voice of Industry & Trade"

Highlights

- Tourism & Hospitality Committee, PHDCCI with the support of **Ministry of Tourism, Government of India; Uttar Pradesh Tourism and Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board** organized the **1st Global Spiritual Tourism Conclave** with the theme **रूहमन्तिक** on **23 August 2024** at **Hotel Park Inn by Radisson Ayodhya**.
- Present in the Inaugural Session were **Mr. Sheo Shekhar Shukla (IAS)**, Principal Secretary – Tourism and Culture, Madhya Pradesh; **Ms. Eesha Priya (IAS)**, Special Secretary – Tourism, Government of Uttar Pradesh; **Mr. Arun Srivastava**, Joint Director General, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India; **Mr. Rajan Sehgal**, Co-Chair – Tourism & Hospitality Committee, PHDCCI; and **Ms. Shalini S Sharma**, Assistant Secretary General, PHDCCI.
- The Inaugural Session saw release of two reports – one by PHDCCI on the Conclave with messages from Uttar Pradesh Governor, Smt. Anandiben Patel; Tourism and Culture Minister, Shri Gajendra Singh Shekhawat and the Chamber. The second report was made by KPMG in partnership with PHDCCI on the scope, challenges and recommendations for spiritual tourism.
- Key sessions included insights from **Mr. Champat Rai** on Shri Ram Mandir's development, discussions on Ayodhya's transformation, exploration of digital spirituality's future, critical case studies on Buddhist Tourism and sustainable tourism in Vrindavan.
- The day of the conclave started with a yoga session which was curated by Isha Foundation. The conclave concluded with a Maha Abhishek Puja conducted virtually through Vama at Jarkutinatheshwar Mahadev Temple in Prayagraj.
- Delegates were also treated to a special **VIP darshan** of **Shri Ram Mandir in Ayodhya**, marking the perfect end to a spiritually enriching event.
- Among the industry partners of 1st GSTC were **Vama, Pawan Hans Ltd, Association of Domestic Tour Operators of India (ADTOI), Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO)**.



Background

India, a land steeped in spiritual heritage, draws millions of pilgrims and spiritual seekers annually to its multitude of sacred sites. From the snow-capped peaks of the Himalayas to the serene backwaters of Kerala, spiritual tourism in India offers a unique blend of historical depth, religious significance and cultural richness.

Spiritual tourism can contribute significantly to a destination's economic growth. Pilgrims and visitors tend to spend more on accommodation, transportation and local goods compared to conventional tourists. This influx of revenue can invigorate local economies, support infrastructure development and create employment opportunities.

Recognizing the significant economic and cultural benefits spiritual tourism can bring to the country, Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi introduced schemes such as **PRASAD (Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Augmentation Drive)** in 2015. Under the PRASAD Scheme, 41 religious sites from 25 states were identified for development in the country.

Focusing on developing pilgrimage sites across India, Modi's efforts to promote spiritual tourism were part of a broader strategy – to boost tourism in the country and showcase India's cultural and spiritual diversity to the world.

- More than **60%** of tourism in India is associated with **religious and spiritual tourism**.
- According to Ministry of Tourism data, the number of **domestic tourists** that visited places of pilgrimage were **1,433 million in 2022**.
- The places of religious tourism earned **1,34,543 crore in 2022**, up from **65,070 crore** in 2021, as per data released by the Ministry of Tourism.
- The sector is expected to generate revenue of **59 billion by 2028**, creating **140 million** temporary and permanent jobs by **2030**.

Case Study: The success of Rishikesh and Varanasi

- Known as the 'Yoga Capital of the World', Rishikesh attracts thousands of yoga enthusiasts and spiritual seekers from around the globe. The International Yoga Festival, held annually, draws participants from over 100 countries. The town's ashrams, yoga schools and meditation centers contribute significantly to its economy.
- One of the oldest living cities in the world, Varanasi is a major pilgrimage site for Hindus. The city sees millions of pilgrims annually who come to bathe in the holy Ganges River,



perform rituals and seek spiritual solace. The recent development of the Kashi Vishwanath Corridor has enhanced the city's infrastructure, making it more accessible to tourists.

However, several challenges impede the realization of spiritual tourism's full potential. Infrastructure deficits, inadequate accessibility and poor facilities can deter visitors from embarking on religious journeys. Moreover, concerns about over commercialization and insufficient preservation of sacred spaces can alienate both local spiritual communities and tourists.

India's spiritual tourism sector holds vast potential for growth and development. By investing in infrastructure, embracing digital innovations, promoting sustainable practices and involving local communities, India can position itself as a global leader in spiritual tourism.



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The Ministry of Tourism is the nodal agency for the formulation of national policies and programs and for the co-ordination of activities of various Central Government Agencies, State Governments/ UTs and the Private Sector for the development and promotion of tourism in the country.

The Ministry is headed by the Union Minister for Tourism and Ministers of State. The administrative head of the Ministry is the Secretary (Tourism). The office of the Director General of Tourism provides executive directions for the implementation of various policies and programs.

The Ministry of Tourism functions as the nodal agency for the development of tourism in the country. It plays a crucial role in coordinating and supplementing the efforts of the State/ Union Territory Governments, catalyzing private investment, strengthening promotional and marketing efforts and in providing trained manpower resources.

The functions of the Ministry in this regard mainly consist of the following:

- Development Policies
- Incentives
- External Assistance
- Manpower Development
- Promotion & Marketing
- Investment Facilitation



State Partner



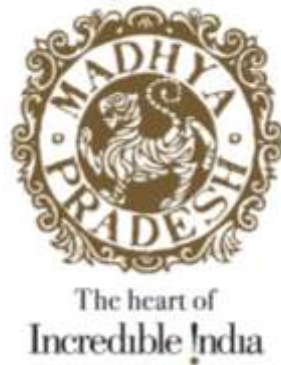
Uttar Pradesh is a globally known and popular tourism destination which receives the highest number of Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) and Domestic Tourist Arrivals (DTAs) each year. The tourism industry in UP has a significant contribution to the states' economic growth.

Uttar Pradesh has guarded India's treasure trove of heritage and cultural assets over the ages which attract heritage enthusiasts not just from all over the country, but across the world. Through quality upkeep and restoration of assets designed to improve visitor experience, the state aims to increase tourism earnings and footfall with increased average length of stay (ALS) and to encourage repeat visits.

Uttar Pradesh is now popularizing new thematic tourism products such as eco-tourism, adventure tourism, rural tourism and YUVA tourism as niche tourism products to build interest in new age tourists and travellers.



State Partner



Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board also referred to as MPTB was established in 2017 with an objective to promote tourism in Madhya Pradesh. Development of tourism with public, private partnership in sustainable manner, investor facilitation, skill- development, publicity, promotion of tourist destinations nationally and internationally, identification and development of tourism infrastructure are the core objectives of the Board.

The vision of the board is to promote balanced and sustainable tourism, which enables socio-economic development and establishes Madhya Pradesh as a destination that provides a complete tourism experience.



Virtual Puja Partner



Offering a wide range of services, including virtual puja remedies, astrology and tailored solutions, VAMA bridges the gap between devotion and distance. With expertise and knowledge, VAMA ensures safety, understanding and connection, providing all services through its dedicated App (VAMA) on iOS & PlayStore.

VAMA addresses the need to make Indian spiritual services accessible worldwide at the click of a button, whether it's a live Aarti or Prasad delivered to your doorstep. Their Puja service offerings bring you closer, virtually, to pujas conducted at renowned temples by prestigious priests, irrespective of your geographical location.



Associate Partner



The flagship helicopter service provider to the Government of India, Pawan Hans has now grown into South Asia's largest helicopter company, maintaining and operating a fleet of 43 helicopters. It offers a wide range of services, making it the most trusted brand in the field of helicopter services. Off-shore operations, connecting inaccessible areas, charter services, search and rescue operations, VIP transportation, corporate and special charters, hotline washing of insulators and heli-pilgrimage are some of the key services of Pawan Hans.

As the first of its kind, PHL has been granted Air Operators Permit for scheduled operations. Scheduled flights under RCS UDAN II have commenced in the state of Himachal Pradesh and plans are to expand services to the states of Uttarakhand, Assam and Manipur shortly.

In a period, PHL has clocked over 1 million flying hours and millions of landings and plans to become a 100 helicopter company by 2027. Further, to strengthen its core business, Pawan Hans is diversifying into the areas of small fixed wing aircrafts, training and skill development, safety audit and consultancy, overseas projects and construction of infrastructure such as heliports and helipads.



Knowledge Partner



KPMG entities in India are professional service firm(s). These Indian member firms are affiliated with KPMG International Limited. KPMG was established in India in August 1993. Its professionals leverage the global network of firms and are conversant with local laws, regulations, markets and competition. KPMG has offices across India in Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Chandigarh, Chennai, Gurugram, Hyderabad, Jaipur, Kochi, Kolkata, Mumbai, Noida, Pune, Vadodara and Vijayawada.

KPMG entities in India offer services to national and international clients in India across sectors. It strives to provide rapid, performance-based, industry-focused and technology enabled services, which reflect a shared knowledge of global and local industries and experience of the Indian business environment.



Association Partner



Association of Domestic Tour Operators of India (ADTOI), National Body of Domestic Tour Operators, constituted on 7th August 1996 with the express purpose of consolidating the efforts of all those tour operators who are actively engaged in the promotion of 'Domestic Tourism' in the country. There are nearly 780 members all over India on the association's rolls. Members work to ensure delivery of professional service to the consumer, through its principal suppliers, which are primarily the accommodation facilities, as also travel intermediaries like railways, transporters, airlines & guides.

As the strength of the association is Domestic Tourism, it enrolls as members who are connected with the following activities:

- A. Regional Tourist Corporation
- B. Travel Portals
- C. Hotels & Resorts
- D. Railways & Airlines
- E. Tourism Institutes
- F. Tourism Expo Companies



Association Partner



Established in 1982, the Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO) is the national body of the tourism industry. It has over 1600 members covering all segments of tourism industry. IATO interacts closely with the Government on all critical issues affecting the tourism industry in India with the highest priority to tourism facilitation. It has close connections and constant interaction with other Tourism Associations in US, Nepal and Indonesia, where USTOA, NATO and ASITA are its member bodies.

IATO has five categories of membership: Active, Allied, Associate, International and Honorary. All its active members are recognized and approved by the Indian government's Department of Tourism and have at least three years' experience of handling international tourists to India, before being admitted to the IATO fraternity.

IATO's affairs are managed by an Executive Committee, elected by the Active Members every two years. The Executive Committee is headed by President with a team of six Office Bearers and 9 Executive Members. The Executive Committee meets every month to discuss current tourism industry and membership issues. IATO networks through its State Level Chapters at the local level where all local issues are handled at the appropriate level.



Programme

7:00 AM – 8:00 AM	Yoga Session conducted by Isha Foundation at Cygnett Collection KK Hotel	
9:30 AM – 10:30 AM	Registration with Tea, Coffee	
INAUGURAL SESSION		
10:30 AM – 10:40 AM	National Anthem and Lighting of the Lamp by dignitaries	
10:40 AM – 10:50 AM	Welcome Address by Mr. Rajan Sehgal , Co-Chair – Tourism & Hospitality Committee, PHDCCI	
10:50 AM – 11:00 AM	Address by Mr. Arun Srivastava , Joint Director General, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India	
11:00 AM – 11:10 AM	Address by Ms. Eesha Priya (IAS) , Special Secretary – Tourism, Government of Uttar Pradesh	
11:10 AM – 11:20 AM	Address by Mr. Sheo Shekhar Shukla (IAS) , Principal Secretary – Tourism and Culture, Government of Madhya Pradesh	
11:20 AM – 11:25 AM	Release of PHDCCI-KPMG Report and Event Report on Spiritual Tourism	
11:25 AM – 11:30 AM	Vote of Thanks by Ms. Shalini S Sharma , Assistant Secretary General, PHDCCI	
11:30 AM – 11:45 AM	Rejuvenating Tea	
AYODHYA: THE EMERGING SPIRITUAL HUB		
11:45 AM – 12:25 PM	Ayodhya holds a unique position in the hearts of millions worldwide as the birthplace of Lord Rama. The city boasts a rich cultural heritage, with numerous temples, ashrams and sacred sites attracting pilgrims and tourists alike. The recent construction of the Ram Mandir further elevates Ayodhya’s stature as a key spiritual destination. This session will focus on the initiatives of Nagar Nigam Ayodhya, Ayodhya Development Authority, investment opportunities, infrastructure requirements, transforming Ayodhya into a premier spiritual tourism destination.	
	Moderator	Mr. Prateek Hira Chairman – UP Chapter, Indian Association of Tour Operators
	Panellists	Mahant Girish Pati Tripathi Hon’ble Mayor, Ayodhya
		Mr. Ashwini Kumar Pandey (IAS) Vice Chairman, Ayodhya Development Authority
		Mr. Vinod Pandey Cluster General Manager, Hotel Taj Mahal, Lucknow
Mr. K S Sawhney Managing Director, Bakshi Transport Service (P) Ltd		



12:25 PM – 12:32 PM	Presentation by Uttar Pradesh Tourism	
12:33 PM – 12:40 PM	Presentation by Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board	
12:40 PM – 12:45 PM	Presentation by Pawan Hans Ltd	
12:45 PM – 12:50 PM	Presentation by KPMG India	
IN-CONVERSATION – KUBER NAMOH NAMA: SPIRITUAL TOURISM & THE GOD OF WEALTH		
12:50 PM – 1:30 PM	<u>Host</u> Ms. Shalini S Sharma Asst. Secretary General PHDCCI	<u>Special Guest</u> Mr. Champat Rai General Secretary Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra
1:30 PM – 2:30 PM	Satvik Bhojan	
BUDDHIST TOURISM: MASS CIRCUITS OR NICHE DESTINATIONS?		
2:30 PM – 3:00 PM	Case Study 1: India Presentation by Dr. Kiran Shinde , Convener – Planning Program, La Trobe University, Australia India has probably the largest concentration of archeologically and historically important Buddhist sites. But ironically, Buddhists account for only 0.8% of the 1.35 billion people in India and this makes up for the uniqueness of the situation of Buddhist tourism. Is it wise to promote Buddhist sites as circuits which are meant for mass international travellers or as ‘routes and destinations’ which are more frequented by domestic tourists? This case study analyses this conundrum and suggests a way forward.	
SAVE THY LORD: PRESERVING SANCTITY THROUGH SUSTAINABLE TOURISM		
3:00 PM – 3:30 PM	Case Study 2: Vrindavan The name ‘Vrindavan’ evokes images of Lord Krishna as a child frolicking in the idyllic surroundings of a place which is dotted with shrubs, trees, lakes and ponds. But the reality of the place where he is believed to have spent his childhood is very different from what one imagines it to be. This case study examines how ‘the idea of a pilgrimage to Vrindavan has changed, moving away from its original meaning as a trek to the home of the gods and instead becoming more of a holiday and leisure destination’. What are the lessons from this for other upcoming destinations?	
	Presenters	Ar. Charlie Gupta Research Fellow School of Planning & Architecture, Bhopal
		Ar. Ridhu Dhan Gahalot Research Fellow School of Planning & Architecture, Bhopal
3:30 PM – 3:45 PM	Rejuvenating Tea	



DO YOU KNOW THE ART OF LIVING?		
3:45 PM – 4:15 PM	Talk by Shri Sadhguru A spiritual sojourn is incomplete without the ability to understand how to live the right way. And it goes beyond pranayama and yoga. This session will feature Shri Sadhguru sharing tips on zindagi.	
PANEL DISCUSSION: NIRVANA THROUGH DIGITAL DARSHAN?		
4:15 PM – 5:00 PM	'Paavan', 'Smukti', 'Rgyan', 'DevotTed Distruptees' are some of the new-age technology companies which are doing business in spirituality. Technology is a great enabler for bringing tranquillity and God closer to those who are 'रूहमantic' but cannot travel too far and wide in search of a soulful experience. This session will explore the different ways which companies are devising to ensure wellbeing for all through digital devices.	
	Moderator	Dr. Sanjukta Ghosh Associate Professor, IIT(BHU), Varanasi
	Panellists	Mr. Aacharya Dev Co-Founder, VAMA App
		Mr. Giresh Vasudev Kulkarni Founder, Temple Connect
		Mr. Indraneel Dasgupta Founder & CEO, My Tirth India
Mr. Raghava Krishna Founder and CEO, Brhat		
5:00 PM – 5:10 PM	End of conference with <i>Maha Abhishek Puja through Vama App at Jarkutinatheshwar Mahadev Temple, Prayagraj</i>	
5:10 PM – 5:15 PM	Concluding Remarks by Ms. Shalini S Sharma , Assistant Secretary General, PHDCCI	



SPEAKERS

Special Guests



Mahant Girish Pati Tripathi

Hon'ble Mayor
Ayodhya



Mr. Champat Rai

General Secretary
Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra



Mr. Sheo Shekhar Shukla (IAS)

Principal Secretary - Tourism & Culture
Government of Madhya Pradesh



Mr. Ashwini K Pandey (IAS)

Vice Chairman
Ayodhya Development Authority



Ms. Eesha Priya (IAS)

Special Secretary - Tourism
Government of Uttar Pradesh

KEY SPEAKERS



Mr. Acharya Dev
Co-Founder, VAMA App



Mr. Arun Srivastava
Joint Director General
Ministry of Tourism
Government of India



Ar. Charlie Gupta
Research Fellow
School of Planning & Architecture
Bhopal



Mr. Giresh V Kulkarni
Founder
Temple Connect



Mr. Indraneel Dasgupta
Founder & CEO
My Tirth India



Dr. Kiran Shinde
Convener - Planning Program
La Trobe University, Australia



Mr. K S Sawhney
Managing Director
Bakshi Transport Service (P) Ltd



Mr. Nishant Pitti
Co-Founder
EaseMyTrip



Mr. Prateek Hira
Chairman - UP Chapter
Indian Association of
Tour Operators



Mr. Raghava Krishna
Founder and CEO
Brhat



Ar. Ridhu Dhan Gahalot
Research Fellow
School of Planning & Architecture
Bhopal



Dr. Sanjukta Ghosh
Associate Professor
IIT(BHU), Varanasi



Mr. Vinod Pandey
Cluster General Manager
Taj Mahal, Lucknow

Mahant Girish Pati Tripathi

Hon'ble Mayor, Ayodhya

Girish Pati Tripathi of the Bharatiya Janta Party is the Mayor of Ayodhya. A 49-year-old graduate of Defence Studies from the University of Allahabad, Tripathi comes from a political family. He went to Allahabad University to make a career in civil services. He even appeared twice for the main examination of the Civil Services Examination conducted by the Union Public Service Commission. However, he had to return to Ayodhya when his father passed away and he was crowned as the Mahant of Teen Kalash Tiwari Mandir Peeth.



Mr. Champat Rai

General Secretary

Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra

Champat Rai is an Indian politician, Leader and Vice President of Vishva Hindu Parishad and currently serving as the General Secretary of Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra. Rai is a resident of Bijnor district of Uttar Pradesh. He was influenced by Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh since childhood and joined it. He has worked hard to propagate the ideas of the Sangh and was a campaigner for the organization. Rai studied physics subject and also worked as a professor of Physics in RSM Degree College located at Dhampur in Bijnor district.



Mr. Sheo Shekhar Shukla (IAS)

**Principal Secretary – Tourism and Culture
Government of Madhya Pradesh**

Sheo Shekhar Shukla, the Managing Director of Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board is serving as the Commissioner of Swaraj Sansthan and Trustee Secretary of Bharat Bhawan. His previous assignments were as Principal Secretary – Medical Education, Food and Public Relations Department for Government of Madhya Pradesh.



Mr. Ashwini Kumar Pandey (IAS)
Vice Chairman, Ayodhya Development Authority

Ashwini Kumar Pandey is a 2016 batch IAS officer and has extensive experience in Public Administration. He holds a BE in Chemical Engineering from NIT Durgapur and an MS in Chemical Engineering from Oklahoma State University. He gained valuable industry experience by working in the private sector for three years before transitioning to government service. In his present role, Ashwini Kumar Pandey is at the forefront of the planned and sustainable development of Ayodhya, contributing to the city's transformation into a modern, spiritual and cultural hub.



Ms. Eesha Priya (IAS)
Special Secretary – Tourism
Government of Uttar Pradesh

A 2016-batch IAS officer, Eesha Priya is currently appointed as the Special Secretary – Tourism in the Government of Uttar Pradesh. She has served as the Chief Development Officer for Mainpuri, Raebareli and Pratapgarh. She has also served as the Additional Commissioner and Additional Registrar (Admin) Cooperative Department in the Government of Uttar Pradesh.



Mr. Arun Srivastava
Joint Director General
Ministry of Tourism, Government of India

A distinguished figure in the tourism industry boasting over 29 years of experience, Srivastava's career spans across various sectors. At his present role, Srivastava oversees international cooperation, strategy & product development. Previously, he led key divisions within the Ministry such as global media and publicity outreach, social media, spiritual tourism destination development scheme, hospitality education infrastructure development, skilling and capacity development unit and niche tourism.



Mr. Acharya Dev

Co-Founder, VAMA App

Acharya Dev, along with his Co-Founders – Manu Jain and Himanshu Semwal, founded VAMA App in September 2020, with the vision of providing people with a trustworthy and hassle-free religious partner, virtually. His key responsibilities at VAMA include on-boarding, training and guiding astrologers for a seamless and accurate astrology experience, for the users of the platform. Acharya holds a Master's degree in Astrology from Central Sanskrit University and is a gold medalist.



Ar. Charlie Gupta

Research Fellow

School of Planning & Architecture, Bhopal

Charlie Gupta is an architect and urban designer with a Master of Architecture in Urban Design from the School of Planning and Architecture, Bhopal, where she is currently pursuing her PhD in the domain of Temple Cities of India. Specializing in urban conservation and heritage management, Charlie has presented her research at numerous national and international conferences, focusing particularly on spiritual and heritage tourism in India, with emphasis on Braj region.



Mr. Giresh Vasudev Kulkarni

Founder, Temple Connect

Giresh Kulkarni, a visionary entrepreneur and the Founder of Temple Connect, has made significant strides in bridging the gap between technology and spirituality. His initiatives aim to modernize and enhance the temple visiting experience through digital innovations, making spiritual journeys more accessible and meaningful for devotees around the globe. Kulkarni's work ethic and visionary leadership have made a significant impact on the devotional ecosystem, transforming how temples operate and engage with the community.



Mr. Indraneel Dasgupta

Founder & CEO, My Tirth India

Indraneel is the founder of My Tirth India, a spiritual portal which offers all the religious requirements of Hindu, Jain and Buddhist devotees, who wishes to travel to any religious destination across the country. He is a Master's in Environmental Biology, a serial entrepreneur, a columnist, a leading man in regional movies, a script writer and a published author of novel, 'Another Face in the Crowd'. For him, My Tirth India is a movement, which offers his countrymen a lifetime experience to visit and take blessings from their deity at any religious destination in the country.



Mr. Kanwarjit Singh Sawhney

MD, Bakshi Transport Service (P) Ltd

Kanwarjit Singh Sawhney, a dynamic leader in the tourist transport industry, carries forward a legacy established by his father, Sardar Gurbachan Singh Sawhney, a self-made entrepreneur. Sawhney joined the family business in 1982 with boundless enthusiasm and energy, bringing a fresh perspective and significantly expanding the company's reach into the tourism sector. Under his leadership, the company made a substantial impact on the tourism industry by expertly managing foreign tourists, incentive movements and large conferences.



Dr. Kiran Shinde

Convener – Planning Program **La Trobe University, Australia**

Dr. Kiran Shinde has researched extensively on topics related to cultural heritage and tourism, urban planning, destination management etc. With five books and more than 60 research articles published in high-ranking journals and books with reputed publishers, he is considered as a leading scholar in research on religious, cultural and heritage tourism and their intersections with urban planning and management. He was commissioned by UNWTO to lead a project on 'Buddhist Tourism in Asia: Towards Sustainable Development' that covered Buddhist heritage and tourism 16 countries.



Mr. Nishant Pitti

Co-Founder, EaseMyTrip

As the CEO and Co-Founder of EaseMyTrip, Nishant broadly looks after the company's long-term business strategy, growth and is also responsible for the overall management, business development and the other financial aspects of the company. Nishant with the help of his wide industry network and strategic business acumen is able to build the company to being a profitable bootstrapped unicorn of market capitalisation of USD 1.3 billion and the second- largest OTA player in the industry.



Mr. Prateek Hira

Chairman – UP Chapter Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO)

Prateek Hira is the Founder President and CEO of Tornos, an experiential travel company operating since 1994, catering in specific geographic areas and offering knowledge based products. On 27 September 2021, Prateek has been honoured by Uttar Pradesh's Chief Minister, Yogi Adityanath for promoting UP as a tourist destination and taking it to new heights during his dedicated service of 27 years to the tourism industry.



Mr. Raghava Krishna

Founder and CEO, Brhat

Raghava Krishna carries 23 years of experience across game development and academia with expertise in leading creative product development Teams, Learning Design and Org Culture. He was the Development Director at Electronic Arts (EA Sports) where he led product operations for EA's mobile game development studio in Hyderabad. After his corporate stint, he moved into Public Policy to engage with public policy. He was the Co-Founder and Assoc Dean Academics at Rashtram School of public leadership.



Ar. Ridhu Dhan Gahalot

Research Fellow

School of Planning & Architecture, Bhopal

Ridhu is an accomplished architect and urban designer with a distinguished academic background, holding a Bachelor's degree from MNIT Jaipur and a gold-medal-winning Master's in Urban Design from SPA Bhopal, where he is currently pursuing his PhD. Specializing in tourism management, heritage and urban conservation, Ridhu has presented his research at national and international conferences, authored book chapters and published journal papers focusing on heritage tourism in India and the phenomenon of over tourism.



Dr. Sanjukta Ghosh

Associate Professor, IIT(BHU), Varanasi

Sanjukta Ghosh is an Associate Professor of Linguistics in the Department of Humanistic Studies, IIT (BHU) Varanasi. Her major research areas are Cognitive Semantics and its application, Pragmatics and Natural Language Processing especially Computational Semantics. She has published in several international peer-reviewed journals. Her paper 'Navigating Linguistic Diversity: In-Context Learning and Prompt Engineering for Subjectivity Analysis in Low-Resource Languages' talks about leveraging large language models GPT-4 and BARD and provides critical insights for NLP applications.



Mr. Vinod Pandey

Cluster General Manager

Hotel Taj Mahal, Lucknow

Vinod Pandey possesses over 29 years of experience as a hotelier and hospitality professional. He has worked in two of South Asia's reputed hotel organizations – Oberoi Hotels & Resorts and IHCL (Indian Hotels Company Limited). In his current role, Pandey is responsible for hotels operations of Taj Mahal Lucknow and Ginger Hotels clusters in Lucknow, Indore and Pant Nagar.



Inaugural Session



PHDCCI's first Global Spiritual Tourism Conclave, **रूहमantic**, held on **23 August** in **Ayodhya**, came in for high praise from the **Ministry of Tourism, Government of India; Uttar Pradesh Tourism** and **Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board**, which collaborated with it in organizing the conclave.

Mr. Sheo Shekhar Shukla (IAS), Principal Secretary – Tourism and Culture, Madhya Pradesh, extolled the concept of **रूहमantic** which he said was unique and showed the innovative thinking of the Chamber in combining spirituality with tourism. The conclave brought together global thought leaders, government officials and industry stakeholders, who took the holy city of Ayodhya's transformation into a global spiritual tourism destination a notch higher, fostering discussions that will shape the future of the industry.

Also present in the Inaugural Session were **Ms. Eesha Priya (IAS)**, Special Secretary – Tourism, Government of Uttar Pradesh; **Mr. Arun Srivastava**, Joint Director General, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India; **Mr. Rajan Sehgal**, Co-Chair – Tourism & Hospitality Committee, PHDCCI; and **Ms. Shalini S Sharma**, Assistant Secretary General, PHDCCI.



Mr. Shukla provided insights into Madhya Pradesh's efforts in preserving and promoting its spiritual heritage. Ms. Priya spoke about the state's commitment to enhancing infrastructure in spiritual hubs like Ayodhya. Mr. Srivastava highlighted the government's initiatives to promote spiritual destinations across the country. Mr. Sehgal emphasized on the significance of spiritual tourism in India's socio-economic landscape.

The Inaugural Session saw release of two reports – one by PHDCCI on the Conclave with messages from Uttar Pradesh Governor, Smt. Anandiben Patel; Tourism and Culture Minister, Shri Gajendra Singh Shekhawat and the Chamber. The second report was made by KPMG in partnership with PHDCCI on the scope, challenges and recommendations for spiritual tourism.

The day of the conclave started with a yoga session which was curated by Isha Foundation. Participants were told about the nuances of different types of yogic kriyas such as Upa yoga and Nada yoga.



Release of Knowledge Report

KPMG in India and PHDCCI have released a report titled **‘Sacred Journeys: Unfolding the Evolution and Growth of Pilgrimage and Spiritual Tourism in India’** at PHDCCI’s 1st Global Spiritual Tourism Conclave, which explores the key drivers behind this type of tourism, its economic impact, and the challenges and opportunities it presents for various destinations.

Pilgrimage and spiritual tourism are rapidly expanding within the global tourism sector, reflecting a growing interest in cultural, spiritual and faith-based travel. India, with over 450,000 religious and cultural heritage sites, offers a wealth of pilgrimage and spiritual landmarks.

Identifying different categories of pilgrims and addressing their unique needs is essential for enhancing the pilgrimage experience and managing resources effectively. Pilgrimage tourism can be broadly categorized into explorers, solo travellers and mass-organized pilgrims. Solutions to address these needs include the holistic development of religious sites by combining them with adventure and wellness tourism, increasing the visibility of lesser-known sites through research, preservation and local community involvement and implementing educational programs to attract tourists interested in cultural enrichment.



Case Studies

BUDDHIST TOURISM: MASS CIRCUITS OR NICHE DESTINATIONS?

Case Study 1: India

India has probably the largest concentration of archeologically and historically important Buddhist sites. But ironically, Buddhists account for only 0.8% of the 1.35 billion people in India and this makes up for the uniqueness of the situation of Buddhist tourism. Is it wise to promote Buddhist sites as circuits which are meant for mass international travellers or as 'routes and destinations' which are more frequented by domestic tourists?



Dr. Kiran Shinde, Convener – Planning Program, La Trobe University, Australia, presented a thought-provoking analysis on Buddhist Tourism in India, discussing whether these sites should be promoted as mass circuits or niche destinations.

SAVE THY LORD: PRESERVING SANCTITY THROUGH SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Case Study 2: Vrindavan

The name 'Vrindavan' evokes images of Lord Krishna as a child frolicking in the idyllic surroundings of a place which is dotted with shrubs, trees, lakes and ponds. But the reality of the place where he is believed to have spent his childhood is very different from what one imagines it to be. This case study examined how 'the idea of a pilgrimage to Vrindavan has changed, moving away from its original meaning as a trek to the home of the gods and instead becoming more of a holiday and leisure destination'. What are the lessons from this for other upcoming destinations?



Ar. Charlie Gupta and **Ar. Ridhu Dhan Gahalot**, Research Fellow, School of Planning & Architecture, Bhopal, focused on sustainable tourism in Vrindavan and how its pilgrimage landscape has evolved from a sacred trek to a leisure destination, drawing valuable lessons for other spiritual sites.



Sessions

Kuber Namoh Namah: Spiritual Tourism & the God of Wealth



A special guest at the conclave was **Mr. Champat Rai**, General Secretary, Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra who gave insights into the vision behind Shri Ram Mandir, the kind of facilities that it has and the direction which future development is going to take. Emphasising on the role of the Government in creating infrastructure and providing facilities to pilgrims, he criticized the profit-making which industry was getting into, in a holy place like Ayodhya.

Ayodhya: The Emerging Spiritual Hub

The session focused on civic initiatives, infrastructure development and strategic measures being undertaken to transform Ayodhya into a global spiritual tourism hub. Moderated by **Mr. Prateek Hira**, Chairman – UP Chapter, Indian Association of Tour Operators, the session featured insightful discussions from panelists including **Mahant Girish Pati Tripathi**, Mayor of Ayodhya; **Mr. Ashwini Kumar Pandey (IAS)**, Vice Chairman, Ayodhya Development Authority; **Mr. Vinod Pandey**, Cluster General Manager, Hotel Taj Mahal, Lucknow; and **Mr. K S Sawhney**, Managing Director, Bakshi Transport Service (P) Ltd.



Panel Discussion: Nirvana through Digital Darshan?



The panel discussion, explored how technology is revolutionizing the way people experience spirituality. Moderated by **Dr. Sanjukta Ghosh**, Associate Professor, IIT (BHU), Varanasi, the session brought together leaders from the digital spirituality space, including **Mr. Acharya Dev**, Co-Founder, Vama; **Mr. Giresh Vasudev Kulkarni**, Founder, Temple Connect; **Mr. Indraneel Dasgupta**, Founder & CEO, My Tirth India; and **Mr. Raghava Krishna**, Founder and CEO, Brhat.



Presentations

Mr. Sheo Shekhar Shukla (IAS)

**Principal Secretary – Tourism and Culture
Government of Madhya Pradesh**



Ms. Eesha Priya (IAS)

**Special Secretary – Tourism
Government of Uttar Pradesh**



Presentations

Mr. Vanrajsinh Dodiya

General Manager

Pawan Hans Ltd.



Ms. Prerana Parida

Associate Director

KPMG India



Media Coverage

Pre-Event Coverage

S. No.	Publication Name	Date	Link
1.	Travel Trade Journal (TTJ)	24/07/2024	PHDCCI announces 1st Global Spiritual Tourism Conclave in Ayodhya on August 23
2.	Travel and Tour World (TTW)	24/07/2024	Ayodhya Takes Center Stage as Global Hub for Spiritual Tourism
3.	Travel Trends Today (T3)	24/07/2024	PHDCCI announces 1st Global Spiritual Tourism Conclave in Ayodhya

PHDCCI announces 1st Global Spiritual Tourism Conclave in Ayodhya on August 23

By TTJ - July 24, 2024

The PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PHDCCI) extends its wholehearted support to the 2024 Union Budget presented by Union Finance Minister, Ms. Nirmala Sitharaman. The budget underscores the pivotal role of tourism in bolstering India's cultural heritage and economic growth, with a strategic vision to elevate India's status as a leading global tourist destination.

The initiatives announced in the budget reflect a comprehensive approach to developing and promoting India's rich historical and spiritual heritage. The emphasis on the spiritual significance of the Vishnupath temple in Gaya and the Mahabodhi temple in Bodhgaya,

1st Global Spiritual Tourism Conclave
 23 August 2024 | Park Inn by Radisson Ayodhya
 Time: 9 am to 5 pm

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- Visa applications in India surpass pre-pandemic volumes in first half of... **Outbound** August 26, 2024



Media Coverage

Post-Event Coverage

S. No.	Publication Name	Date	Link
1.	BW Hotelier	23/08/2024	Spiritual tourism in India: Growth, opportunities, and the path forward
2.	EduKida	23/08/2024	Spiritual tourism holds significant economic growth potential, reveals Report
3.	Travel + MICE Showcase	24/08/2024	PHDCCI's Spiritual Tourism Conclave highlights Ayodhya's global potential
4.	ET Travel World	24/08/2024	Digital trends & sustainable practices to drive India's spiritual tourism growth
5.	Voyagers World	24/08/2024	PHDCCI's Spiritual Tourism Conclave Highlights Ayodhya's Global Potential
6.	TravelBiz Monitor	25/08/2024	KPMG-PHDCCI report highlights spiritual tourism growth
7.	Travel Mirror News	25/08/2024	KPMG-PHDCCI report highlights spiritual tourism growth
8.	Travel and Tour World (TTW)	25/08/2024	KPMG-PHDCCI Report Highlights Growth of Pilgrimage and Spiritual Travel Tourism in India
9.	Business of Travel Trade (BOTT)	26/08/2024	PHDCCI's Spiritual Tourism Conclave highlights Ayodhya's global potential
10.	Travel Turtle	26/08/2024	PHDCCI's Spiritual Tourism Conclave highlights Ayodhya's global potential
11.	Travel Daily Media	27/08/2024	'Spiritual Tourism on a growth trajectory in India': KPMG and PHDCCI report
12.	TravelBiz Monitor	27/08/2024	PHDCCI's Spiritual Tourism Conclave highlights Ayodhya's global potential
13.	Travel World Online	28/08/2024	PHDCCI's Spiritual Tourism Conclave highlights Ayodhya's global potential
14.	Travel World Online	28/08/2024	Spiritual tourism holds significant economic growth potential, reveals report
15.	The Blitz India	30/08/2024	Spiritual tourism conclave in Ayodhya
16.	Travel Trends Today (T3)	02/09/2024	PHDCCI & KPMG in India jointly release report on pilgrimage and spiritual tourism



'सुविधाएं मिलने से यूपी में बढ़ रहा धार्मिक पर्यटन'

अयोध्या में हुए ग्लोबल स्पिरिटुअल कॉन्क्लेव में विशेषज्ञों ने रखे विचार

■ एमसीटी, अयोध्या

यूपी में धार्मिक और आध्यात्मिक पर्यटन गतिशीलता को आधुनिक स्तर पर ले जाकर आगे बढ़ाने में यूपी में धार्मिक पर्यटन बढ़ावा देने में क्या है। यह ज्ञान मुद्राकार को अयोध्या में आयोजित 1st Global Spiritual Conclave में विशेषज्ञों की राय से जानने का मौका है।

यूपी के प्रमुख धार्मिक और पर्यटन स्थलों पर कटौती की योजनाएं विभिन्न स्तर पर चल रही हैं। यूपी के प्रमुख धार्मिक और पर्यटन स्थलों पर कटौती की योजनाएं विभिन्न स्तर पर चल रही हैं।

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Research - 3 Min Read

Digital trends & sustainable practices to drive India's spiritual tourism growth

Modern religious tourism in India is increasingly influenced by digital trends, with technology playing a crucial role in site selection and visitor engagement. The rise of digital pilgrimages and virtual reality experiences during the pandemic, such as live-streamed religious

घरेलू पर्यटन में 'आध्यात्मिक पर्यटन' का हिस्सा सर्वाधिक

संगोष्ठी में संयुक्त महानिदेशक पर्यटन बोले, 'तीर्थ क्षेत्रों' में सुविधा बढ़ाने के मिलने लगे हैं सुखद परिणाम

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यूपीयटी कैबिनेट और कॉन्क्लेव में हुए ग्लोबल स्पिरिटुअल कॉन्क्लेव में विशेषज्ञों की राय से जानने का मौका है।

PHDCCI's Spiritual Tourism Conclave Highlights Ayodhya's Global Potential

August 24, 2024 | VW Bureau | No Comments

PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry's (PHDCCI) first Global Spiritual Tourism Conclave, 'Santimatic', held here on 23 August.

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English

Ayodhya Takes Center Stage as Global Hub for Spiritual Tourism

Wednesday, July 24, 2024 Reading Time: 1 minute



Search results



Buddhist tourism: Mass circuits or niche destinations?

By Dr. Kiran Shinde



In recent years, Indian tourism industry has taken keen interest in promoting Buddhist heritage with a particular emphasis on Buddhist circuits as a key attraction. Besides the cultural aspects, the spiritual component in Buddhist heritage is garnering considerable attention. How exactly does this pilgrimage circuit work and is it effective as a strategy for promoting Buddhist heritage tourism in India? This is the central question explored in this presentation by examining four most sacred places, namely, Bodhgaya, Sarnath, Kushinagar and Lumbini that are a part of the most popular Buddhist pilgrimage circuit.

The fieldwork in these sites reveals a complex pattern of visitation that question the idea of a circuit as a tourism product. The interviews with various stakeholders including religious institutions, private tour operators and relevant government agencies, show that the itineraries of circuit-goers depend on several factors including the convenience of travel, accommodation facilities, the ability to perform pilgrimage rituals and institutional governance for tourism. The primary circuit-goers are foreign Buddhist followers, but the magnitude of their visitation is very low. They constitute less than 10% of visitors and are far outnumbered by domestic visitors. Domestic visitors driven by recreational purposes hardly complete the entire circuit; their visits are directed to two popular sites while other sites are used as 'middle-of-the-trip centers' or places for daytrips.



It can be argued that Buddhist pilgrimage circuits operate more as a cultural landscape at a cognitive level rather than as a distinct physical route and a product that can be effectively translated into as strategy for tourism development in Buddhist sites. Moreover, the idea of circuit becomes less meaningful for mass tourism as most domestic visitors (overnight and same day) undertake one-site visits; make their own travel arrangements themselves and a very small percentage avail of package tours. This means that the idea of forced circuits may not be that effective. And therefore, articulation of circuits for domestic tourism should be seen with caution; it is important to ask who the target audience for circuits is.

It would be advisable to modify these circuits as 'routes and destinations' for prioritizing decisions on investing in tourism infrastructure. For instance, developing interpretation facilities at key destinations should be a priority in archaeological sites and not 'a light and sound show because of the spiritual nature of these sites—they reflect deeper knowledge and meaning'.

The deeper meaning, mindfulness and overall wellbeing is what spiritual tourists are after when they embark on the pilgrimage circuits. Buddhist sites in the circuit offers religious and spiritual resources for wellbeing. Pilgrims are there for spiritual experience and spiritual growth that is best gained through solitude and meditative practices, yoga, chanting with their gurus. But this expectation is only partially fulfilled as most Buddhist sites are managed as archaeological sites by ASI and where any ritual performances are prohibited.

To make spiritual tourism a real experiential sojourn, the active and living sites of Buddhist practices situated in smaller fragile ecological and cultural regions need to be safeguarded against the negative impacts of increasing tourism that may soon be beyond their carrying capacities.

*These insights are emerging from a few studies undertaken by the author. The first one was commissioned by UNWTO where the author was the Technical lead and Chief Editor for a project titled '**Buddhist tourism in Asia: Towards sustainable development**' (2018-2020). For this project, the author worked with National Tourism Organizations of 16 countries to develop a comprehensive assessment of Buddhist heritage resources in those countries and how they can be used and promoted for tourism. The published report available: <https://www.e-unwto.org/doi/epdf/10.18111/9789284421619>. This was followed by a second study which was a field-based investigation titled '**Sustainability in question: Tourism and Heritage at Buddhist heritage sites**' (2019-2024).*



An endeavor to quench the inner and outer spiritual quest

By Raghava Krishna

Culture is a key pillar of our work at Bṛhat, where through programs on cultural storytelling, content creation, dialogue and immersive travel, we work on the objective of cultural furtherance. Our aim is to provide rampways for cultural immersion, experience and learning that are accessible to all age groups and can also be participated in by families, i.e. parents and children together.



Bṛhat Anveṣī is a travel program designed specifically for immersive cultural travel and heritage experience, containing guided tours to some of the most important cultural ensembles in India including temples, cultural centers and living systems.

The word Anveṣaṇa means discovery and the one who searches for it is called Anveṣī, the discoverer. This element of discovery has mainly two dimensions – inner and outer and the two are inter-connected. There is a deep inner dimension to this urge for discovery. Bhāratavarṣa and Hindu dharma created an entire tradition of traveling to sacred kṣetrās, where both the inner and the outer quest of man for discovery is quenched in a way that is not just fulfilling, fun and satisfying, but also spiritually elevating.

Anveṣī is a field learning offering from Bṛhat. Every chapter of Bṛhat Anveṣī focuses on a specific area of India with dense concentrations of great temples and cultural centers and involves travel to architectural, sculptural and cultural marvels that are off the beaten path but which are aesthetically mesmerizing with great cultural significance full of adventure, introspection and learning. We have completed six chapters till date:

Karnataka Chapter – Magnificent temples of Western Ghats and Hoysala architecture's fine sculpture and innovative śikharas and the coastal Kanara architecture. 37 participants took part with us in exploring Hoysala landscapes of Karnataka.

Odisha Chapter – Intricate temples dedicated to five deities of pañcāyatana worship and different Nāgara style vimānas and styles, built in pink sandstone and breathtaking vistas of eastern India. To explore Odisha with us, 19 people participated in this chapter.

Goa Chapter – Goa with lush green countryside, fast flowing rivers, jungle trails, mist-covered mountains, quiet highways and coconut-lined bylanes to some of the most unique temples in Bhāratavarṣa is the story of the reclamation and rebuilding of our great heritage. The Konkan land was explored by 24 participants.



Gwalior Chapter – Gwalior and Morena represent cultural continuity starting from around 1500 years ago to almost contemporary times. The heart of incredible India was participated by 34 cohort members.

Chamba Chapter – Chamba is connected with the Mani Mahesh Kailash legend and the presence of the sacred geography in legends legitimizes cosmology. The Himalayan chapter was participated in by 18 people.

Andhra Chapter – Andhra, a land of Pañcāyatana worship and legendary Pañcarāma Kṣetras on its vibrant coast; and hosts temples built by Eastern Chalukyas and Eastern Ganga dynasties. The Godavari land was explored by 28 people along with us.

Human history is full of courageous journeys taken by man, individually and in groups, changing the course of entire humanity in the process. This urge is biological, as most other species also have this urge to chart new waters and to discover new territories.

We are born – anveṣī.



Contextualizing AI for spiritual tourism

By Dr. Sanjukta Ghosh

The recent advances in AI in the form of Large Language Models (LLMs) have made a significant impact in every service sector, including the tourism and hospitality industry. The use of LLMs like ChatGPT has suddenly enhanced the power of information retrieval in terms of generating volumes of quality data in different forms.

Consequently, the decision-making capacity of well-informed customers has greatly improved. In this digital era, there are newer challenges to meet the needs and aspirations of tourists. The objectives of my presentation are to highlight the applications of LLMs in the tourism taking into account all stake-holders at various stages: from planning a tour to sharing experiences and feedback. For instance, integrating a chatbot can significantly enhance productivity and efficiency and can also ensure transparency in the tourism industry in its existing marketing services such as webpage and front office managers.

The AI tools help tourists and pilgrims at several stages of their tour plan including making them well aware not only of their rights but also of responsibilities. The use of LLMs to integrate data from different sectors and sources supports the tourism industry by helping the policy makers plan towards developing tourism infrastructure much more efficiently and building a framework of sustainable tourism. In the discussion, I will also share some of the risks and challenges involved in using a smart LLM model.

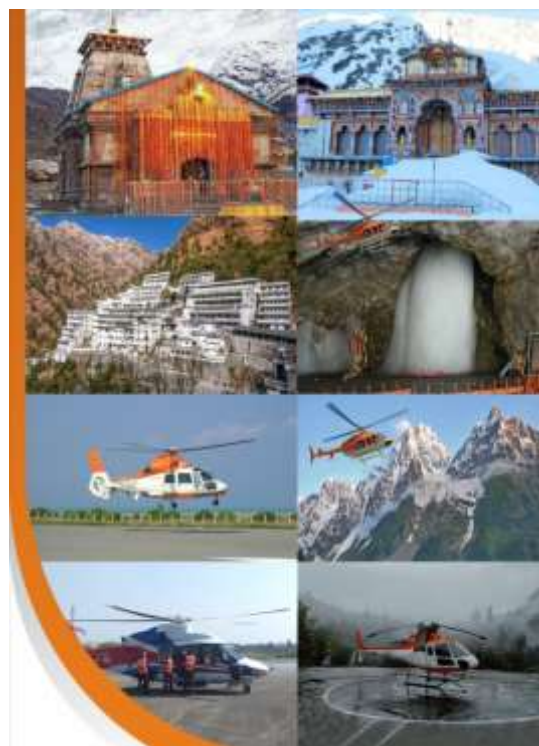


Pioneering heli-pilgrimage in India

By Pawan Hans Ltd

India's diverse landscape is dotted with revered pilgrimage destinations that hold immense spiritual significance for millions of devotees. However, reaching certain sites has often posed a challenge due to their remote and inaccessible locations. Recognizing the need for a more efficient and effective mode of transportation, Pawan Hans Ltd. has pioneered the heli-pilgrimage concept in India, transforming the way pilgrims travel to many of the 'remote and inaccessible' sacred sites. Pawan Hans is known for its pioneering efforts to develop the helicopter services in the religious shrines like Vaishno Devi, Amarnath, Macchail Mata and Kedarnath.

PHL successfully integrated major pilgrimage destinations across India on the country's air map. Additionally, PHL played a crucial role in promoting employment generation at pilgrimage destinations, particularly in far-flung and remote areas of the country.



Key destinations being served by Pawan Hans

- Kedarnath and Badrinath, Uttarakhand
- Hemkund Saheb, Uttarakhand
- Diu to Somnath

Apart from the direct connectivity to the pilgrimage destinations, PHL is the first helicopter operator in India to launch the government's flagship RCS UDAN scheme, which aims to enhance regional development by improving accessibility to underserved areas.

Under the RCS UDAN initiative, Pawan Hans has been actively operating in states like Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Assam through 36 routes. Over the past four years of RCS operations, Pawan Hans has successfully conducted over 10,000 flights on its RCS network, contributing significantly to enhancing accessibility to remote areas.

PHL has been also awarded a total of 42 networks, covering 128 routes across 8 states. The company received a 'Champion of UDAN' Certificate of Appreciation from the Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA) for connecting 42 underserved and unserved sectors.



Integrating spiritual heritage with sustainable urban planning

By Charlie Gupta and Ridhu Dhan Gahalot

In the rapidly expanding field of spiritual tourism, Charlie Gupta and Ridhu Dhan Gahalot stand out as visionary architects and urban designers whose work seamlessly integrates spiritual heritage with contemporary urban planning principles. Both have devoted their careers to exploring and enriching the distinctive character of India's temple cities and sacred sites, emerging as prominent advocates for the conservation and enhancement of the nation's sacred landscapes.



Their journey in spiritual tourism began during their postgraduate studies at the School of Planning and Architecture, Bhopal, where their exceptional theses laid the foundation for careers focused on the intricate relationship between spirituality, urban environments and tourism. In their groundbreaking studies, such as 'Impact of Globalization on Religious Tourism: The Case of Vrindavan, India', both Charlie and Ridhu provided essential recommendations for sustainable development that respect local traditions while addressing the challenges of modern urban development. Their work critically examines the commodification of religious spaces and the impact of globalization on sacred cities like



Vrindavan, offering insights into balancing the preservation of spiritual heritage with the demands of contemporary urbanization.

Through presentations at prestigious forums, such as ICOMOS and the Indian Institute of Urban Designers, Charlie and Ridhu have highlighted the crucial balance needed in managing sacred sites that double as major tourist attractions. Their contributions to the IEREK Conservation of Architecture Heritage conference in Palermo, Italy, have been instrumental in shaping policies to protect India's priceless cultural assets. In their book chapters, such as 'Collective Identity in Sacred Urban Spaces: A Case Study of Braj Mandal Parikrama', they delve into the intricate relationship between spiritual practices and urban identity, providing valuable resources for urban planners and policymakers.

In their current research, both Charlie and Ridhu are delving into the urban form and morphology of Indian temple cities, with a particular focus on the spatial organization of these sacred towns. By examining the historical evolution, architectural elements and socio-cultural dynamics, they aim to provide new insights into how these sacred spaces have been shaped and how they continue to influence the contemporary urban landscape.

As educators at prestigious institutions like the National Institute of Technology, Calicut, Aayojan School of Architecture, Jaipur, Lovely Professional University, Bombay University and Sushant University, Gurugram, they are molding the next generation of architects and urban planners to consider the spiritual and cultural aspects of their work. Their comprehensive approach, combining meticulous academic research with practical urban design solutions, not only contributes to preserving India's sacred heritage, but also charts a course for a more sustainable and respectful approach to spiritual tourism on a global scale.



Empowering temple management globally

By Giresh Vasudev Kulkarni

Temple Connect has been closely working on empowering the temple management and the dependent ecosystem to support spiritual tourism and pilgrimages in India and 57 other global locations. Promoting inbound spiritual tourism with systematic hand holding of the devotee, pilgrim or seeker in various aspects is deeply encouraged and promoted by Giresh Vasudev Kulkarni, Founder Temple Connect and International Temples Convention & Expo. Spiritual tourism through retreats, meet ups, pilgrimage yatras and events are some of the prominent aspects encouraged by him to gain greater footfalls at various places supporting the sector.

As the spiritual and cultural landscape of India continues to draw millions of devotees and tourists annually, the need for effective temple management and sustainable spiritual tourism has never been more critical. At the forefront of this transformation is Temple Connect, where our mission is to elevate temple towns and their associated practices into thriving centers of spirituality, culture and community development. Temple management is a complex and multifaceted task that goes beyond the mere upkeep of physical structures. It involves the seamless integration of traditional practices with modern management techniques to enhance the overall experience for devotees and tourists alike.

At Temple Connect, we have developed a unique approach that emphasizes operational efficiency, community engagement and sustainability. Our work begins with a deep understanding of the specific needs of each temple town. This includes assessing the infrastructure, analyzing visitor flow and identifying areas where modern management practices can be implemented without compromising the sanctity of rituals. By doing so, we ensure that temples not only preserve their cultural heritage, but also adapt to the evolving expectations of today's visitors.

Recognizing the need for skilled professionals in this sector, Temple Connect has partnered with leading educational institutions to launch the first-ever Post Graduate Diploma in Temple Management. This course is designed to equip the next generation of temple administrators with the knowledge and tools they need to manage temple operations effectively. The curriculum covers a wide range of topics, including financial management, human resource development, marketing and digital transformation, all tailored to the unique needs of temple administration.

By combining academic rigor with practical insights, we are empowering individuals to take on leadership roles in temple management and contribute to the sustainable development of temple towns. Our vision extends beyond the walls of individual temples. We aim to empower entire temple towns by integrating them into the broader framework of spiritual tourism. This involves creating strategic partnerships with local governments, tourism



boards and private enterprises to develop infrastructure, promote local culture and enhance the overall visitor experience.

Temple Connect's approach to spiritual tourism is centered on the principles of sustainability and community engagement. We believe that tourism should not only benefit visitors, but also contribute to the economic and social well-being of local communities. By fostering a sense of ownership among residents and promoting responsible tourism practices, we are helping temple towns become more resilient and self-sustaining.

In the fast-paced world of modern tourism, it is essential to maintain the spiritual integrity of rituals and practices that are central to temple life. Temple Connect is dedicated to preserving these traditions while making them accessible to a global audience. We organize spiritual retreats, workshops and events that allow visitors to immerse themselves in the rich cultural heritage of temple towns. Through these initiatives, we ensure that the essence of spirituality is not lost in the pursuit of tourism. Instead, it is enhanced, offering visitors a deeper and more meaningful experience.





Transforming spiritual journeys with holistic travel solutions

By Indraneel Dasgupta

In the realm of spiritual tourism, My Tirth India stands out as a pioneer, offering end-to-end tirth yatras that cater to a wide array of needs and preferences. From budget-friendly dharamshalas to luxurious 5-star properties, group tours, fixed departures and customized travel options, My Tirth India ensures that every pilgrim's journey is comfortable and memorable. Whether traveling by bus or helicopter, pilgrims can expect seamless service, including funeral services, sightseeing and a variety of pujas and prasad tailored to individual requirements.

At My Tirth India, we specialize in facilitating a wide range of spiritual activities for pilgrims, ensuring a rich and fulfilling journey. We pay special attention to the needs of the elderly, children and families, recognizing that spiritual travel is deeply emotional. Understanding the vastness and diversity of India, we strive to be a trusted companion for every pilgrim, ensuring language barriers and other challenges are addressed effectively. Our strategic partnerships with hotels at spiritual destinations further enhance the pilgrimage experience, providing comfort and convenience.

My Tirth India goes beyond traditional travel services, offering a holistic spiritual platform that caters to every need a pilgrim might have. Our tie-ups with astrologers, Ayurveda practitioners, wellness centers and yoga instructors ensure that every facet of spirituality is accessible. For those unable to travel, we offer the unique service of online pujas, streamed directly to their homes, ensuring that everyone can partake in their spiritual rituals, regardless of their location.





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ABOUT PHDCCI

PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PHDCCI) has been working as a catalyst for the promotion of Indian industry, trade and entrepreneurship for the past **119 years**. It is a forward looking, proactive and dynamic **PAN-India apex organization**. As a partner in progress with industry and government, PHDCCI works at the grass roots level with strong national and international linkages for propelling progress, harmony & integrated development of the Indian economy.

PHDCCI, acting as the **'Voice of Industry & Trade'** with a large membership base of **1,50,000 direct and indirect members** consisting of large, medium and small industries, has forged ahead leveraging its legacy with the industry knowledge across multiple sectors to take Indian Economy to the next level.

At the global level, we have been working with the Embassies and High Commissions in India and overseas to bring in the International Best Practices and Business Opportunities.

PHDCCI's **Tourism & Hospitality Committee** aims to promote tourism activities in and outside the country and endeavours to organize various tourism conclaves, seminars, roadshows and webinars in close cooperation with the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India; State Tourism Boards; International Tourism Boards; and private stakeholders.

Tourism in its various forms like **Heritage, Medical, Golf, MICE, Film, Religious, Border, Rural, Sustainable**, plays a critical role in the growth of the tourism industry. Our main focus has been to join efforts with the tourism stakeholders for developing an integrated approach and promote the tourism industry.



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