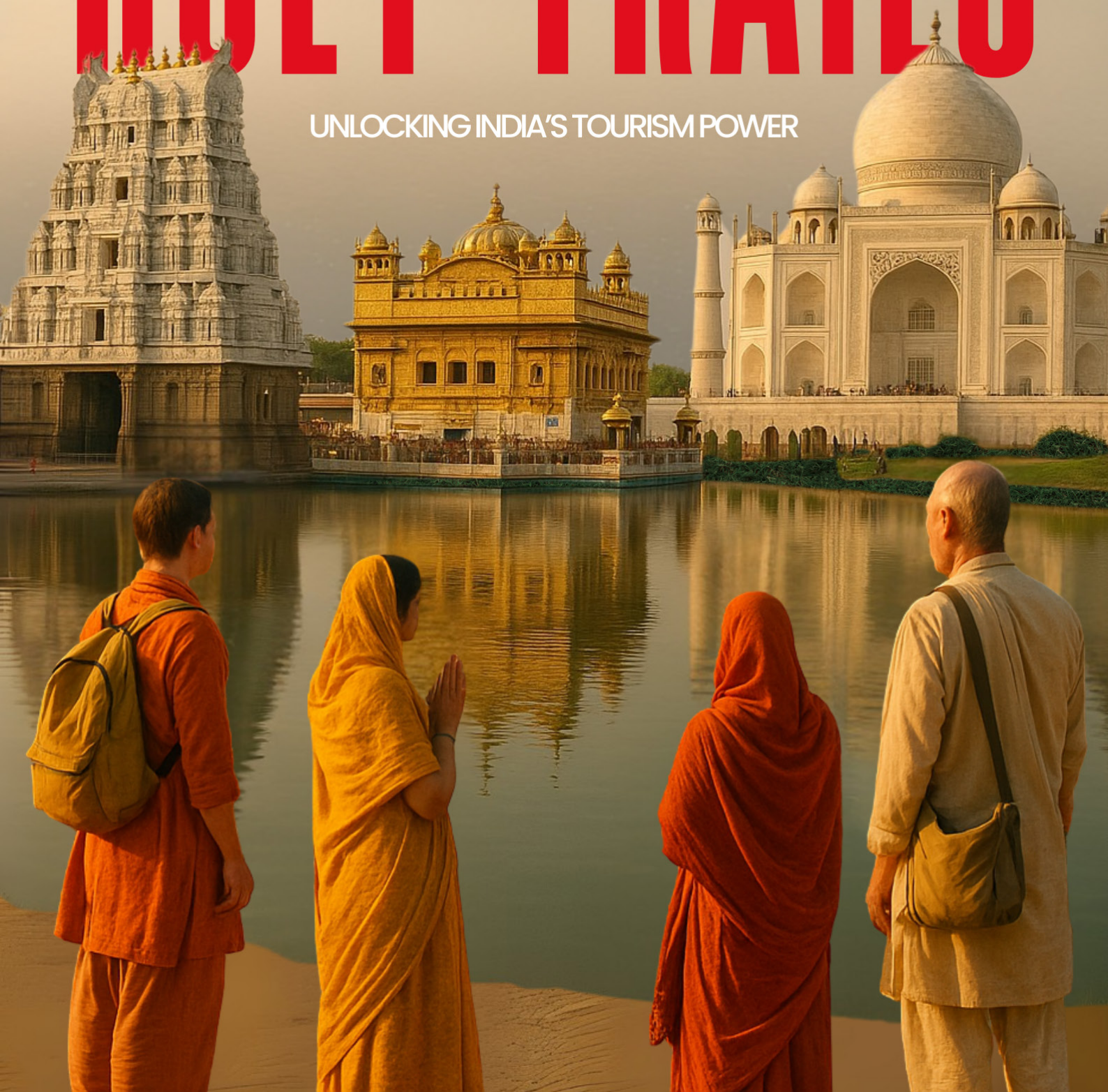


OUTLOOK BUSINESS

HOLY TRAILS

UNLOCKING INDIA'S TOURISM POWER



Global Religious Tourist Sites



Ayodhya

Visitors: 16 crore

Tourism revenue: Rs80,000 crore*

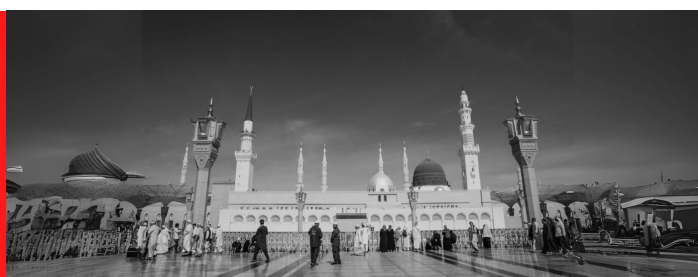
Employment: 2,00,000

Mecca-Medina

Visitors: 2 crore

Tourism revenue: Rs1,00,000 crore

Employment: 2,36,000



Vatican City

Visitors: 90 lakh

Tourism revenue: Rs7,000 crore

Employment: 5,000

Jerusalem

Visitors: 45 lakh

Tourism revenue: Rs13,500 crore

Employment: 70,000



Note: Assuming Rs5,000 spend per person on religious travel, per NSSO estimates. Visitor figures for Mecca-Medina are for 2024, while those for Vatican City are for 2023. Revenue figures for foreign tourist sites are converted at Rs85/\$ and Rs90/€ for comparison.

Source: Media reports, Astrolabs, Arab News, Vatican News, Hayley Stainton Blog

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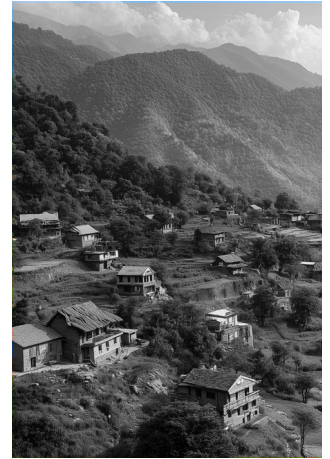
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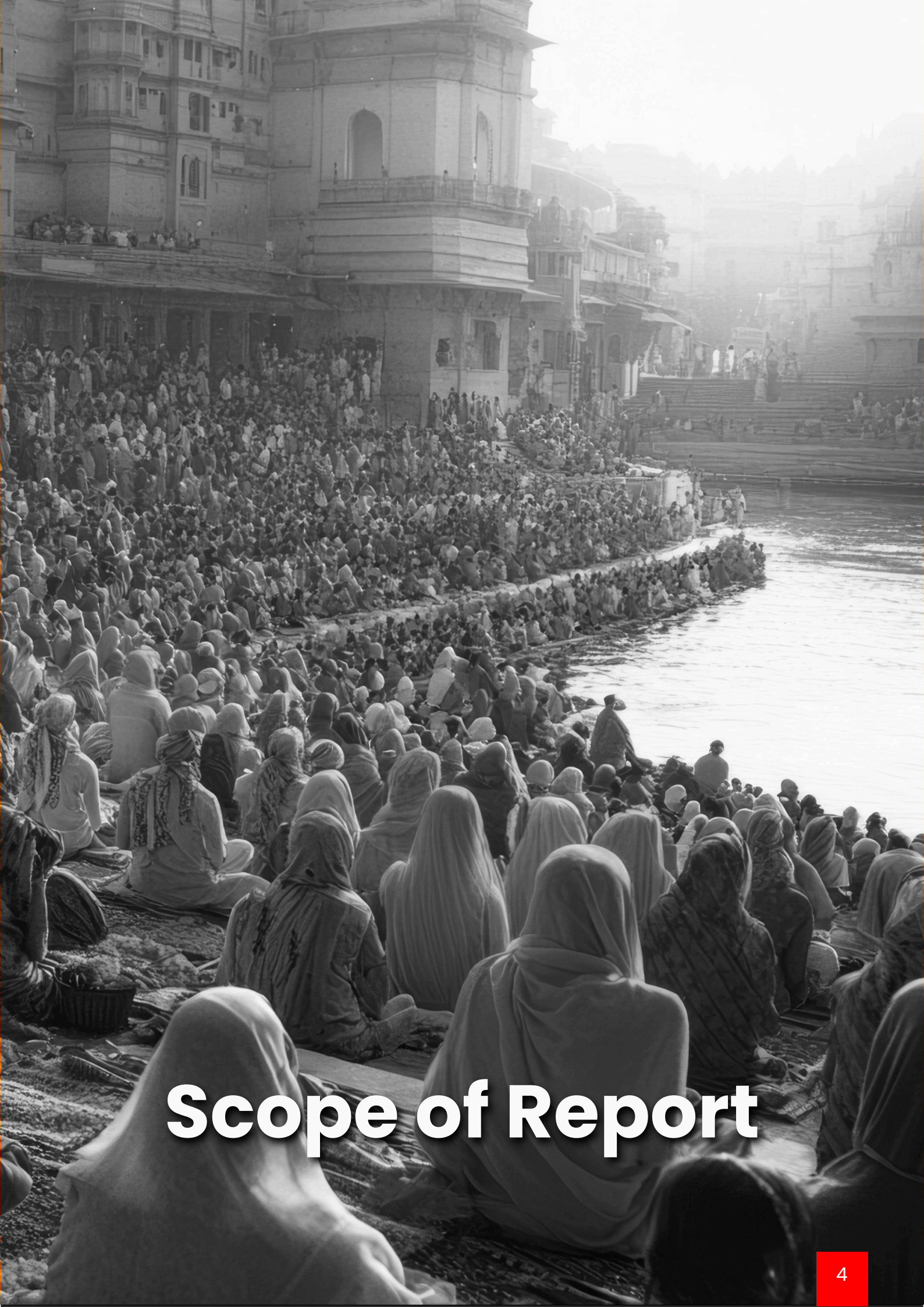
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Scope of Report

For centuries, India's sacred geographies have drawn seekers of truth, offering spiritual solace and timeless wisdom.

Over time, as their fame travelled far and wide, these holy trails evolved into the beating heart of India's thriving cultural tourism economy, drawing both the devout and the curious in search of an experience like no other.

No longer the preserve of the elderly, they now attract global travellers, high-spending NRIs, and millennials looking to blend spirituality with modern comfort.

The revitalised landscapes of Ayodhya and Varanasi personify the immense, previously un-tapped economic power unlocked through modern infrastructure, seamless accessibility and strategic vision.

For local communities, the resurgence of pilgrimages has been a godsend—driving local economies, creating jobs, attracting investment and boosting government revenue.

Opportunities are flourishing across sectors—hospitality, real estate, fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG), automotive, and more—all tapping into the expanding pilgrimage economy.

In its trail, the rising popularity of pilgrimages has exposed an acute shortage of quality accommodation in key hubs, with the Investment Information and Credit Rating Agency (ICRA) forecasting a 5% demand-supply gap in the next three years.¹

In addition to its natural wealth, India is among the world's richest repositories of cultural legacy. Yet, it captures only 1.5% of the global tourism market.²

Drawing on granular insights, emerging trends and illustrative case studies, this report highlights how religious tourism can bridge this gap.

1 ICRA Analysis, Jan 2025

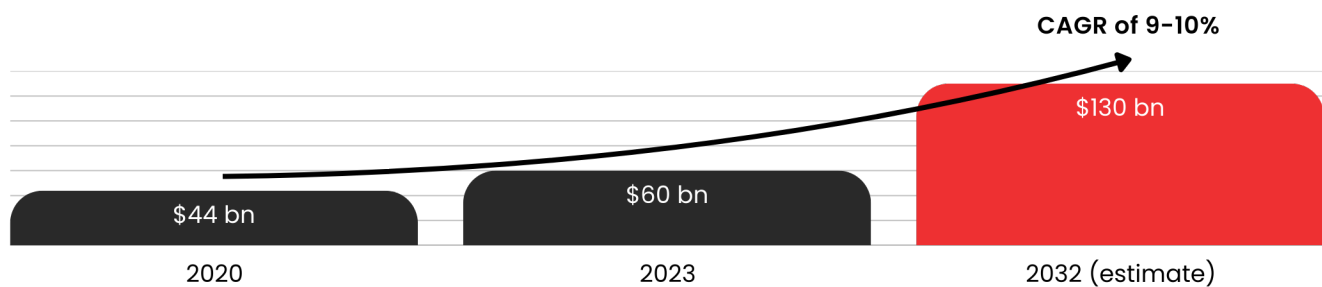
2 Ministry of Tourism, Govt. of India



4,50,000+ Religious sites

Religious Tourism: Indian Landscape

Market Size



14 crore people

To be employed by 2030



8 out of 10

Top-ranking domestic tourist destinations are pilgrimage sites



12 out of 42

UNESCO sites in India are religious heritage

Source: Sacred journeys, KPMG report, August 2024; Equitable Growth and Emerging Real Estate Hotspots, Colliers, June 2024; NCAER report, 2003; PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry; NSSO.

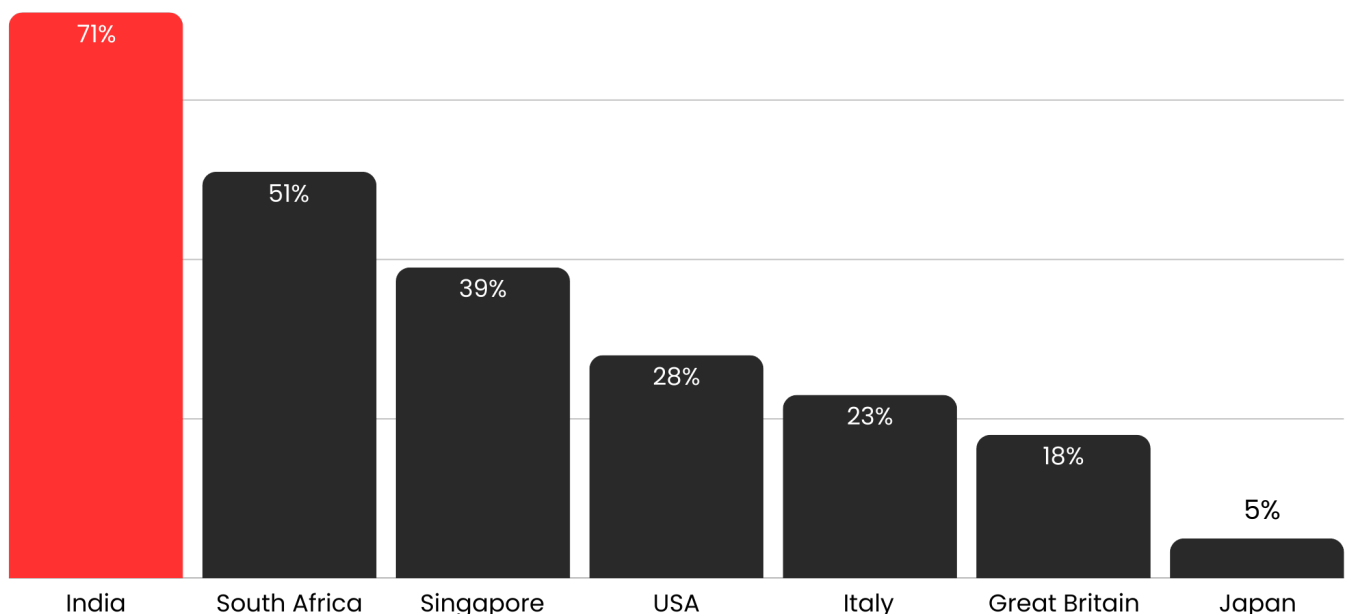


81% Indians believe in God or a higher power

What drives religious tourism

- Devout nation

%age of people who visit a place of worship once a month or more³



³ e.g., a church, temple or mosque.



Rs20,250 crore

Amount donated to religious insitutions by households ³

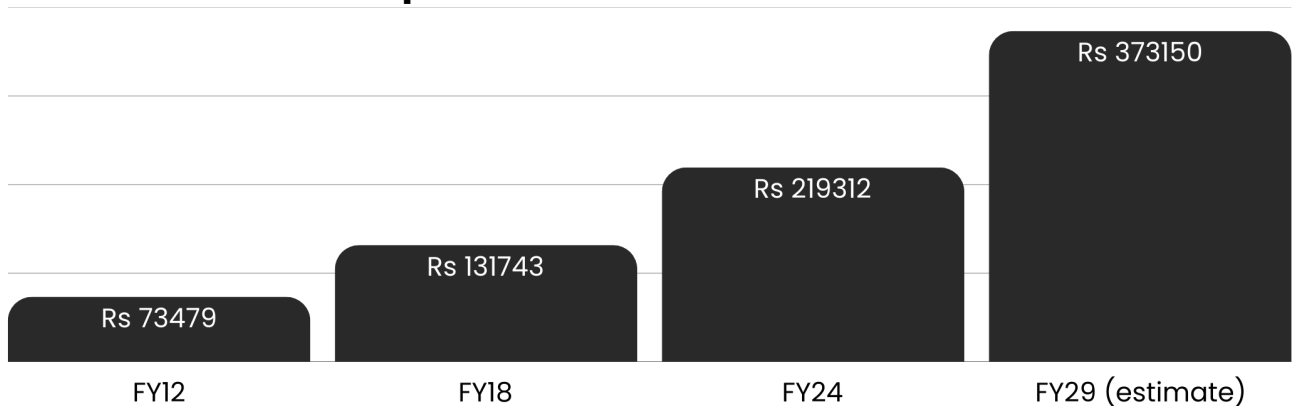


Rs4,864

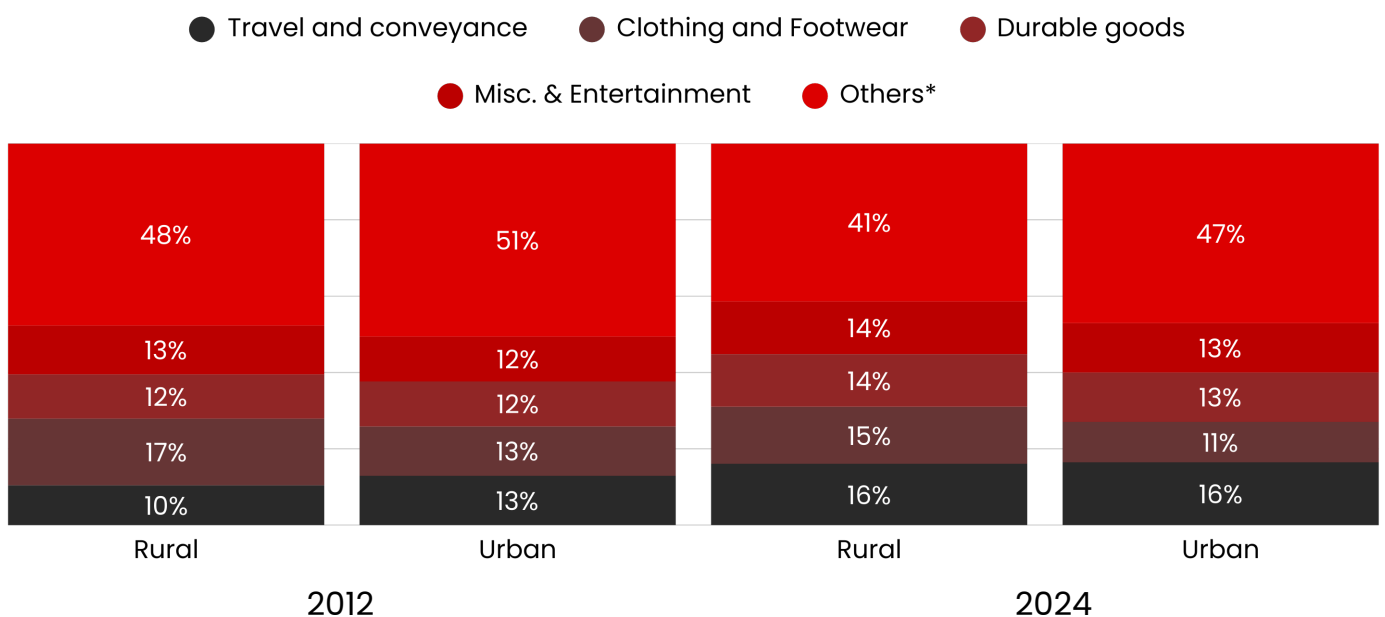
Average expenditure per overnight religious trip ⁴

Source: Global Religion 2023, a 26-country survey by Ipsos, May 2023; Domestic Tourism in India, NSS 72nd round, MoSPI.

- **Rise in discretionary spending and changing consumption behaviour India's household disposable income**



- **Travel now takes record household share**



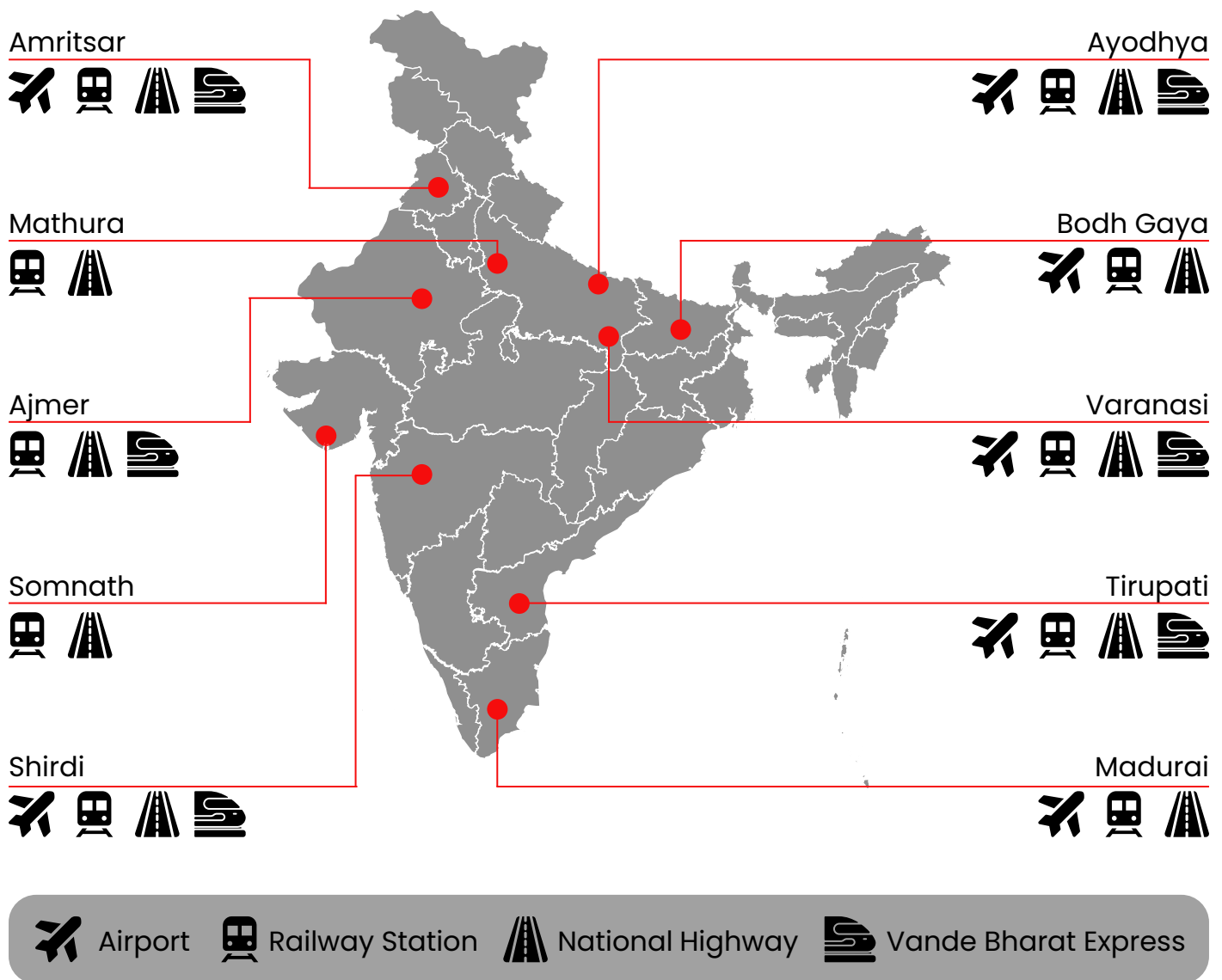
*includes education, alcohol, & tobacco, consumer services, fuel, and rent

Source: NSO, MoSPI, Feb 2025; Deloitte analysis, National Statistics Office (NSO), Feb 2025.

⁴ How India Gives, 2021-22, Ashoka University, Sept 2023

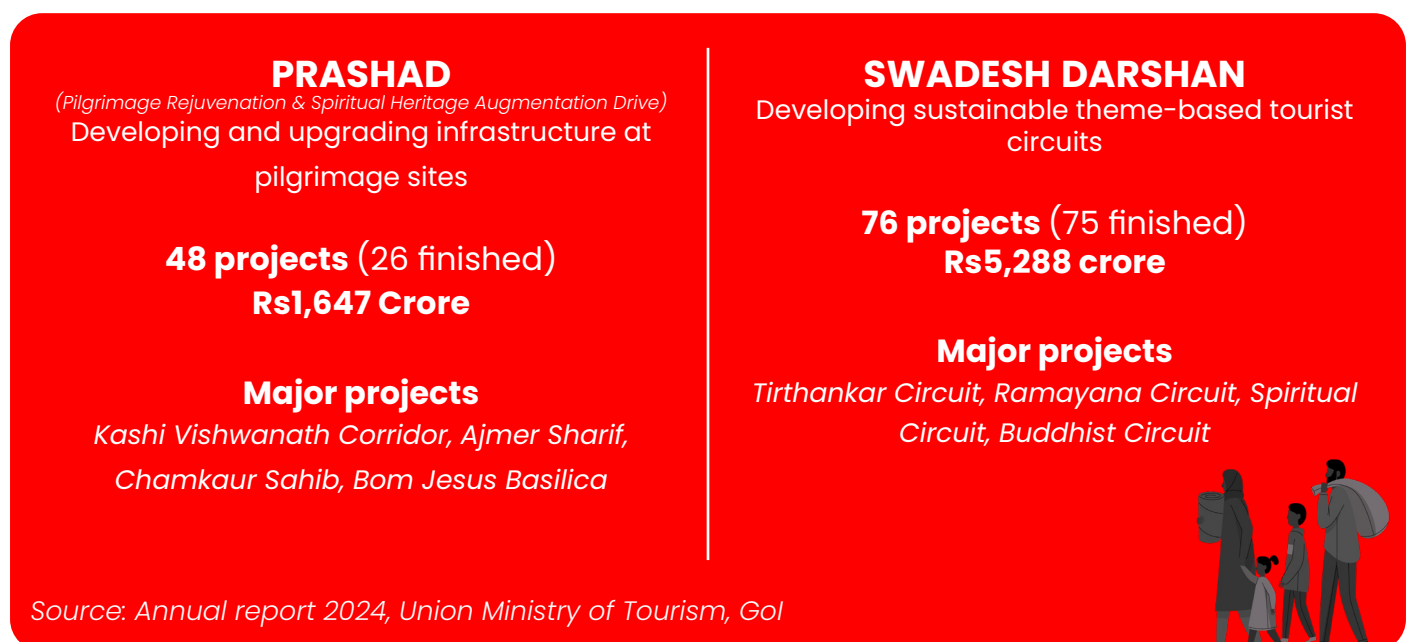
⁵ Expenditure was Rs 2,717 (NSSO survey, July 2014-June 2015), adjusted for 6% annual inflation.

- **Improved connectivity to major religious destinations**

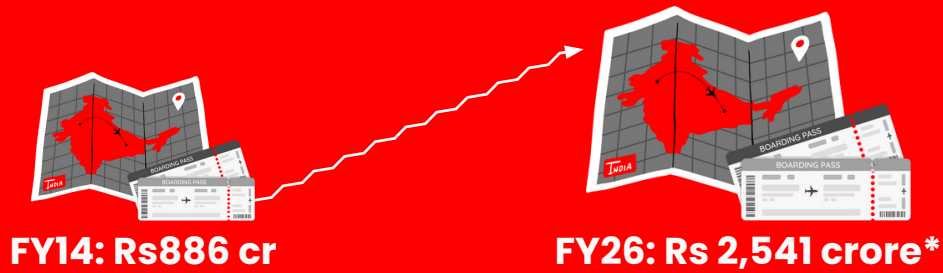


Source: Decoding real estate through the spiritual tourism lens, CBRE, March 2024

- **Government's push / Policy initiatives**



INCREASING TOURISM BUDGET



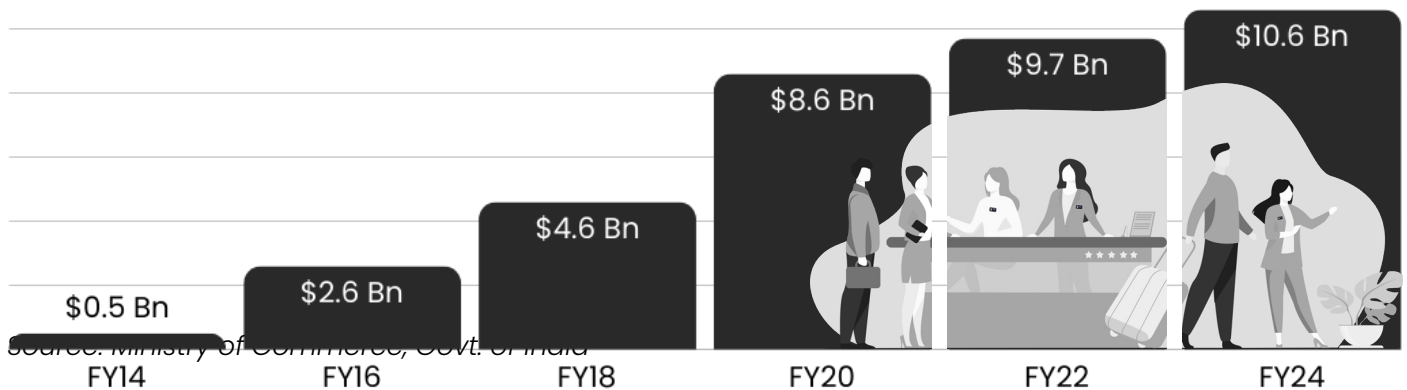
**Estimates*

Source: Budget documents, Union Finance Ministry; Tourism Ministry

- **Miscellaneous**

100% FDI in tourism & hospitality under automatic route

Cumulative FDI inflow into tourism & hospitality



International Yoga Day



E-Ayush Visa



Interest-free loans to states

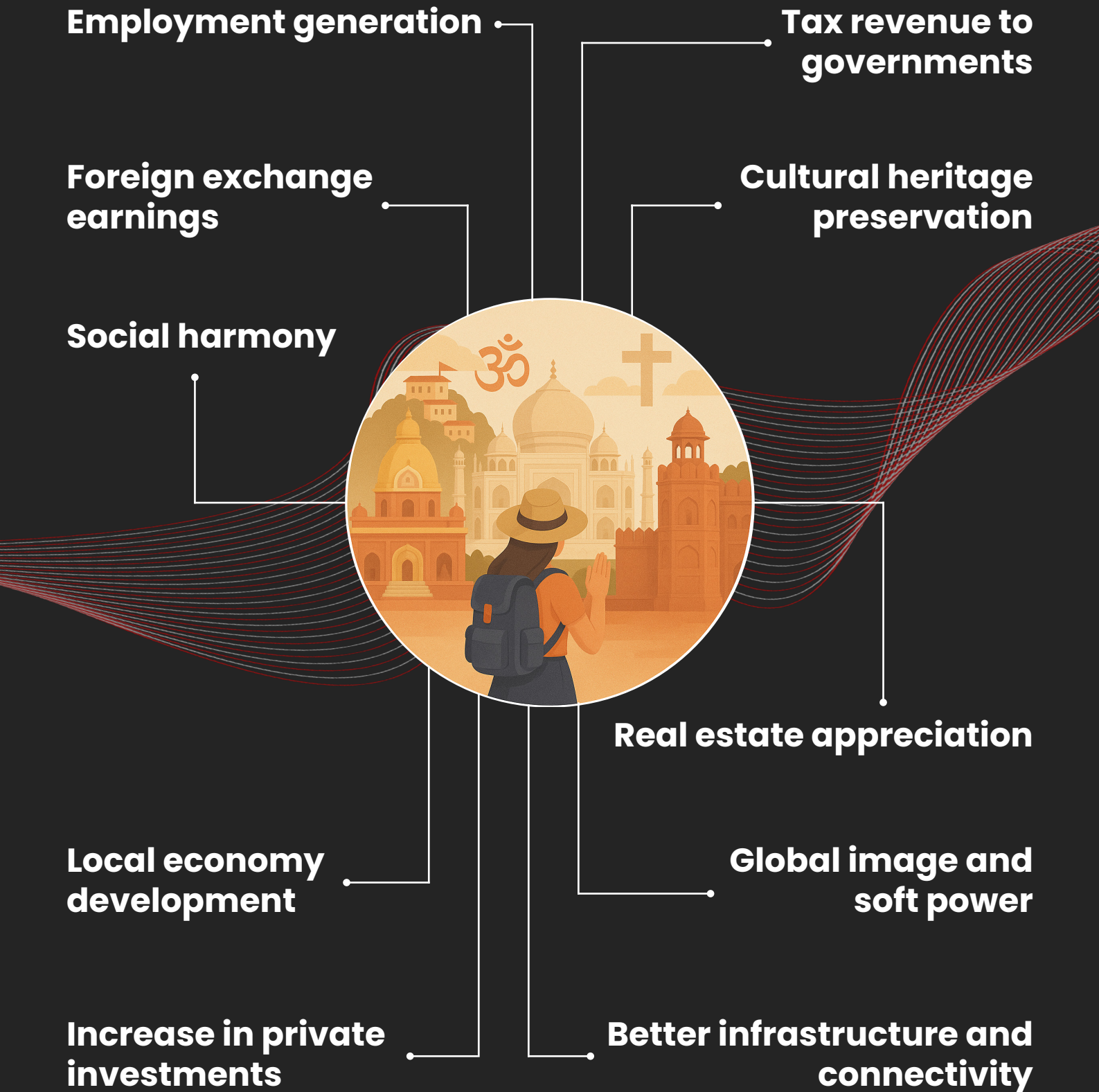


MUDRA loans for Homestay



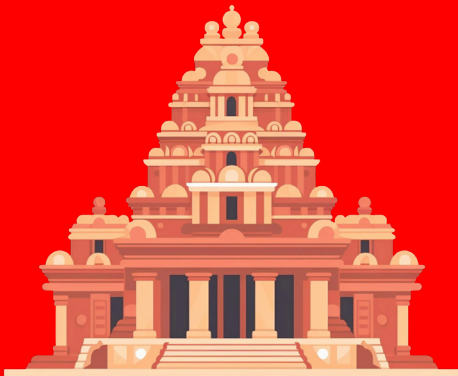
Draft National Tourism Policy

MULTIPLIER EFFECTS OF RELIGIOUS TOURISM



Top Tourist Sites in India

(Religious tourism outpaces non-religious destinations)



Tirupati Balaji

Visitors: 2.6 crore
Donation: Rs1,400 crore



Golden Temple

Visitors: 3 crore
Donation: Rs650 crore



Shirdi

Visitors: 2 crore
Donation: Rs400 crore



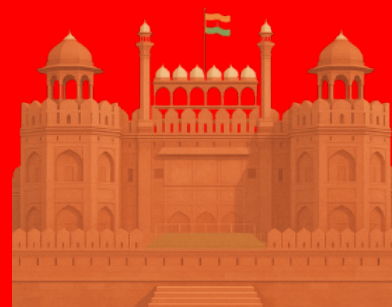
Vaishno Devi

Visitors: 95 lakh
Donation: Rs230 crore



Taj Mahal

Visitors: 60 lakh
Ticket Revenue:
Rs100 crore (98,55,27,533)



Red Fort

Visitors: 28 lakh
Ticket Revenue:
18 crore (18,08,90,825)

Source: Ministry of culture, Govt. of India; Shree Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board; Equitable Growth and Emerging Real Estate Hotspots, Colliers, June 2024; Media reports. Emerging Real Estate Hotspots, Colliers, June 2024; Media reports.

Case Studies





Mahakumbh, Prayagraj

Largest human gathering in the world

Input

Temporary city setup: improved connectivity, food, utilities, medical support and tourism initiatives

PROJECT COST
Rs 1,500 crore

SECURITY PERSONNEL
50,000+

Travel	1,50,000
Hotel	40,000
Food	33,000
Puja items	20,000
Donation	600
Toll Tax	300vv
Miscellaneous	66,000
Total Business (Rs)	3,09,960

Impact

FOOTFALL
66 crore

REVENUE
Rs3,00,000 crore+

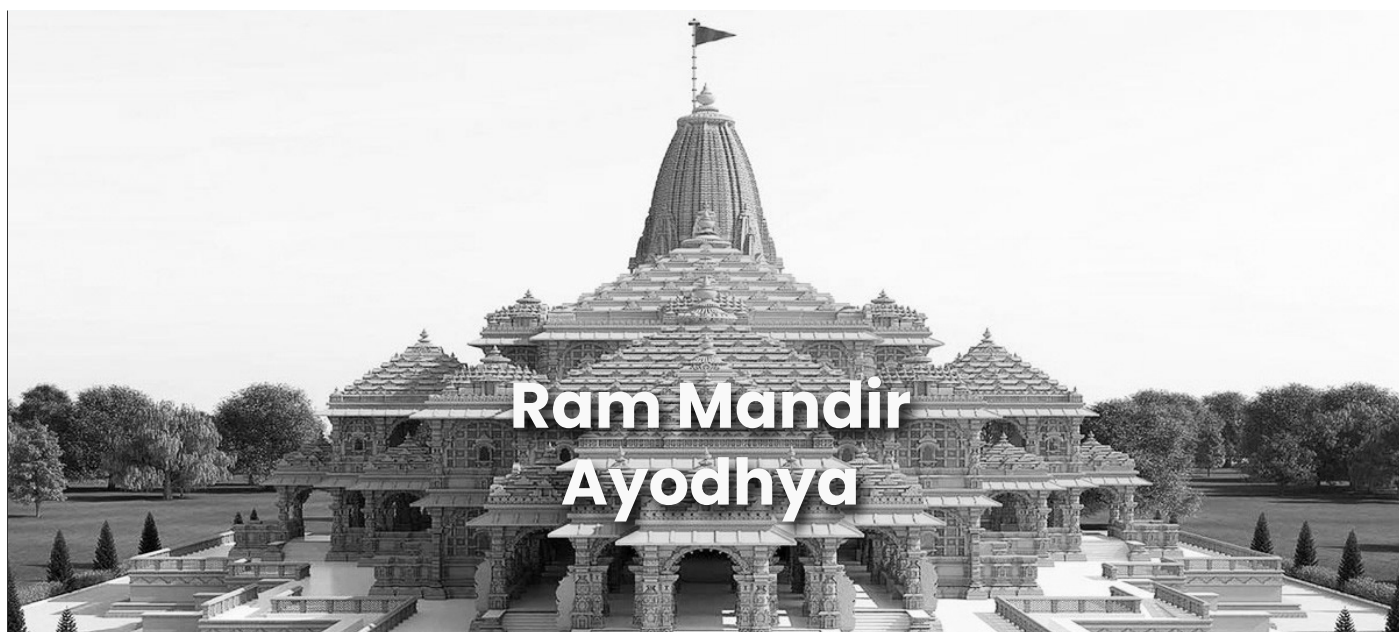
~ (11% of state's economy)

4-6%
Increase in average revenue per user (ARPU) of telecoms

21%
Hike in visa applications to India

Rs50-52k
Average daily earnings of boatmen

Assuming Rs5,000 spend per person on religious travel, per NSSO estimates. Source: Union Ministry of Information & Broadcasting; Source: Uttar Pradesh Govt.; Media reports



Ram Mandir Ayodhya

Input

Temple construction, city redevelopment, modern transportation infrastructure (airport, rail, bus) and river restoration

MAKEOVER COST

Rs 85,000

crore

TEMPLE COST

Rs 1,800

crore

NEW TOWNSHIP

Rs 2,200

crore

RAILWAY STATION

Rs 240 crore

Capacity: 30,000 to 60,000

GREENFIELD INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

Rs 1,800 crore (Phase I finished)

Capacity: 600,000

Impact

ANNUAL FOOTFALL

2020: 60 lakh

2023: 2.3 crore

2024: 16.4 crore

REVENUE*

Rs 80,000

crore+

TAX REVENUE\$

Rs 1,100

crore+

PRIVATE INVESTMENT

Rs 2,200

crore

2 lakh

**JOBS TO BE
CREATED**

190

(and 470+ upcoming)

BRANDED HOTELS

Taj, Marriott, Ginger,
Raddison, India Hotels
(IHCL)

4x

**REAL ESTATE
APPRECIATION#**

585%

**JUMP IN TRAVEL
SEARCHES FOR
AYODHYA**

*Assuming Rs5,000 spend per person on religious travel, per NSSO estimates. #In 2024 compared to 2020. Stamp duty fees + Tax paid by Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust. Source: Ayodhya—unlocking India's tourism potential, Jefferies report, January 2024; Equitable Growth and Emerging Real Estate Hotspots, Colliers, June 2024; Union Ministry of Tourism; Indian Travel Trends, Makemytrip, April 2024; Decoding real estate through the spiritual tourism lens, CBRE, March 2024; media reports



Shri Kashi Vishwanath Temple Corridor Varanasi

Expansion of temple area, linking temple to Ganga river, redeveloping surroundings and comprehensive tourist facilities (centres, gallery, cafeteria).

Input

PROJECT COST
Rs 339
crore

PROJECT AREA
5 lakh sq ft
from 3,000 sq ft

Impact

ANNUAL FOOTFALL
2019: 68 lakh
2023: 10.2 crore

2250
(and 100+ upcoming)
BRANDED HOTELS
Taj, Raddison, Hilton, etc.

REVENUE
Rs 51,000
crore

PRIVATE INVESTMENT
~ Rs 48,000
crore

5 lakh sq ft
JUMP IN AIR TRAFFIC[#]

**Assuming Rs5,000 spend per person on religious travel, per NSSO estimates. [#]Change in FY25 vs FY22 Apr–Feb). Source: Official district website, UP Tourism, PMO, Sacred journeys, KPMG report, August 2024.*



Expansion, beautification, decongestion of temple area. (900m corridor, plazas, retail, modern amenities, parking, area redevelopment).

Input

PROJECT COST
Rs 850
crore

Impact

ANNUAL FOOTFALL 2021: 1.5 crore 2023: 5.3 crore 2024: 7.3 crore		REVENUE TO MUNICIPAL CORPORATION FY22: Rs 221 crore FY24: Rs 371 crore			
55% TOTAL TOURIST COUNT IN MADHYA PRADESH		REVENUE Rs 36,500 crores		3-8x APPRECIATION IN PROPERTY VALUES	
220% JUMP IN AIR TRAFFIC#		30-40% HIKE IN LOCAL BUSINESS REVENUE		359% JUMP IN TRAVEL SEARCHES FOR UJJAIN	
3x INCREASE IN NUMBER OF HOTELS					

#Change in FY25 vs FY22 (Apr-Feb) *Source: PMO, Economic Survey 2024-25, Govt of MP; Media reports,Indian Travel Trends, Makemytrip, April 2024, Airports Authority of India

ANNUAL FOOTFALL AND AIR TRAFFIC CHANGE IN KEY RELIGIOUS TOWNS

Ayodhya

16 crore
NA

Varanasi

10 crore
67%

Mathura

8 crore
NA

Amritsar

3 crore
75%

Tirupati

3 crore
49%

Puri

2.5 crore
94%

Shirdi

2 crore
380%

Katara

90 lakh
10%

Ajmer

80 lakh
-20%

Bodh Gaya

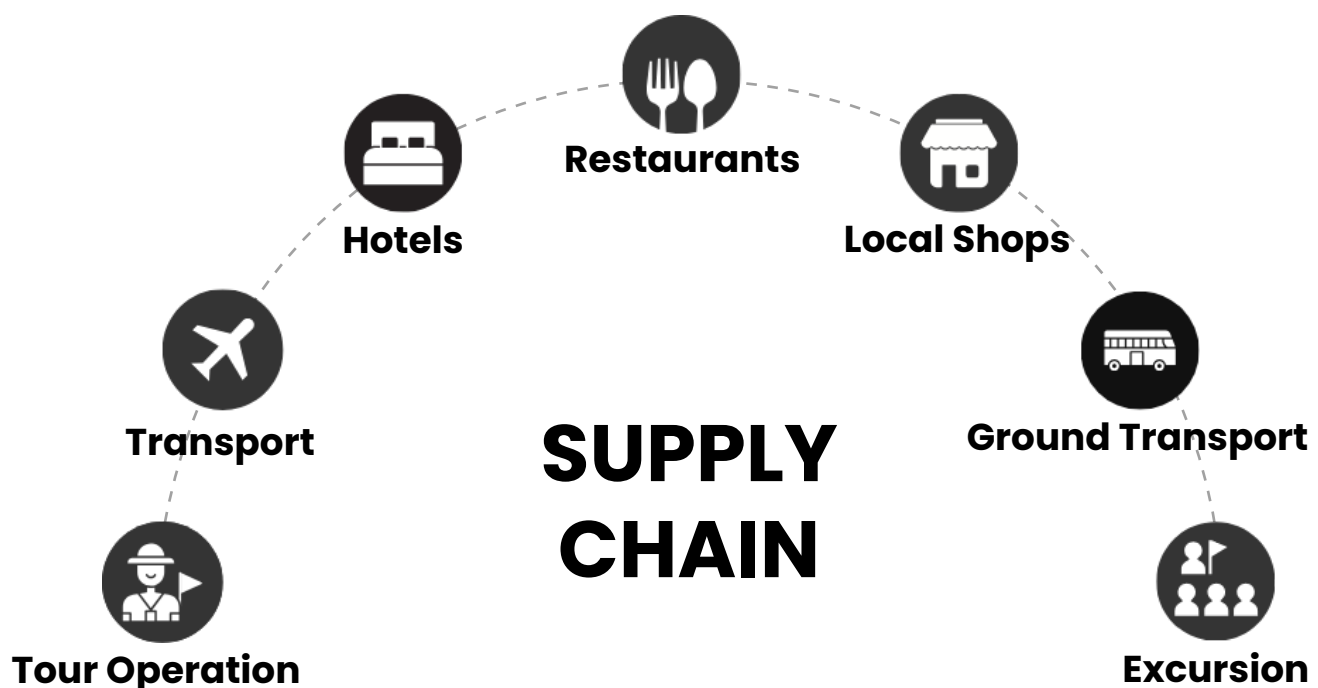
60 lakh
322%

Figures are rounded and latest available. #Percentage Change in Air Traffic: FY25 vs FY22 (Apr-Feb)
Source: Govt. of Pondicherry; Equitable Growth and Emerging Real Estate Hot-spots, Colliers, June 2024;
Jefferies report, January 2024; UP Tourism; Media reports.

“Around 20% of our revenue comes from religious destinations”

Ritesh Agarwal
CEO & Founder, OYO

Beneficiaries of religious tourism



Major players

Accommodation



Transportation



Restaurants



Online Travel Aggregators

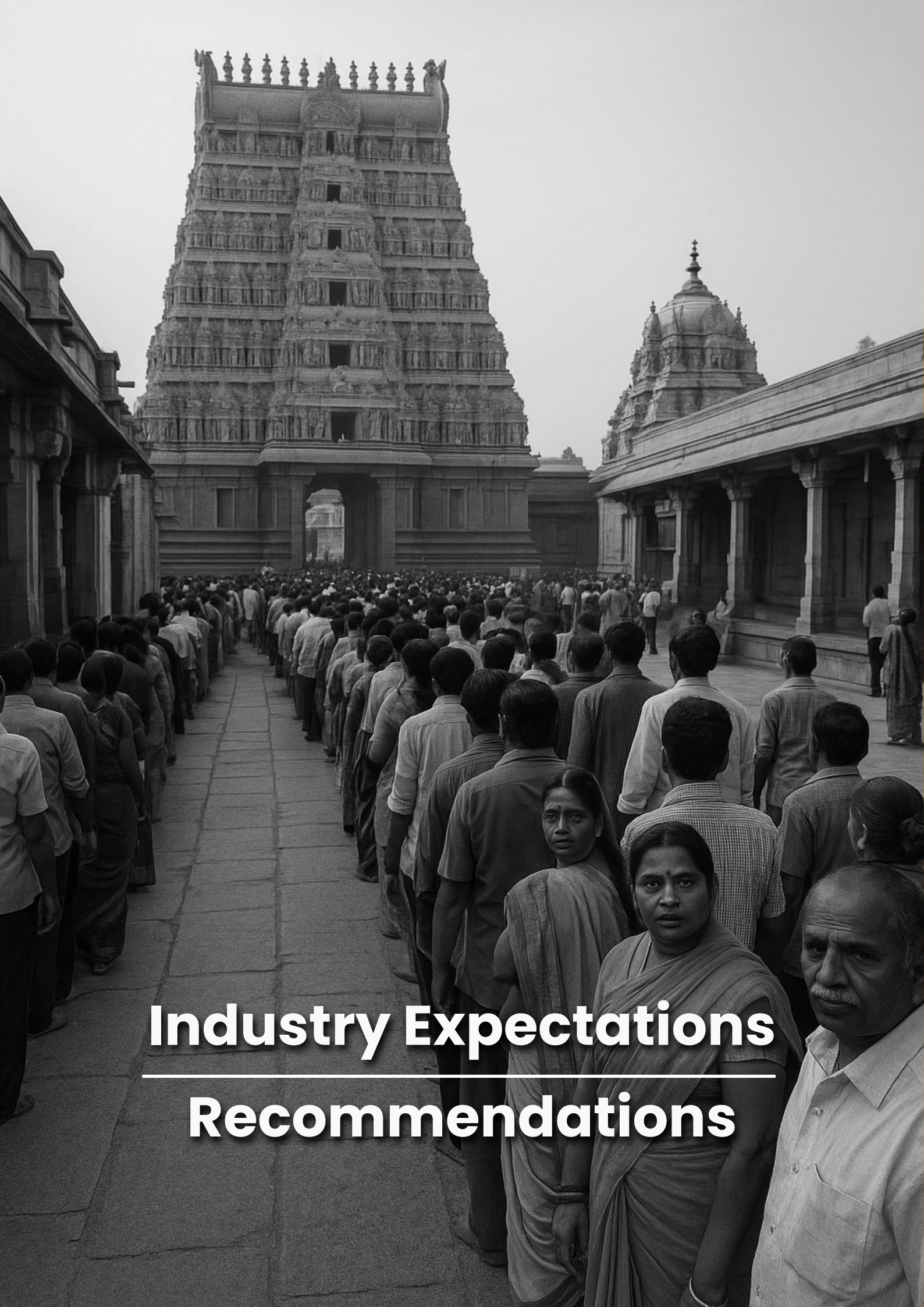


Tour Operators



Tech Providers





Industry Expectations

Recommendations

How governments are promoting religious tourism

Hub and spoke model

Connecting religious centres with lesser-known destinations.

Site expansion

Beautifying religious sites with modern amenities for a better experience.

Health and wellness

Integrating yoga, ayurveda and meditation into religious tourism.

International cooperation

Establishing bilateral or tripartite agreements with states, nations and international bodies to cross-promote tourism.

Incentives

Offering subsidies, tax exemptions and tourism awards to private players.

Public-private partnerships

Collaborating with private players in hospitality, transport and other sectors for world-class services.

Global promotions

Running high-quality, targeted marketing campaigns domestically and internationally.

Cultural integration

Blending religious tourism with cultural, educational and philosophical experiences.

Local heritage promotion

Showcasing local crafts, cuisine, products and arts for a holistic experience.

Digital strategy

Online project management, bookings, third-party partnerships and data insights.

Source: Ministry of Tourism, GoI; Rajasthan tourism, Uttarakhand tourism, UP tourism, De-coding real estate through the spiritual tourism lens, CBRE, March 2024

What needs to be done to unlock the full potential of religious tourism

Infrastructure tag to sector

Provide investors with cheaper capital, lower taxes, simplified land acquisition and faster environmental clearances.

GST rationalisation

Simplify and uniform lower tax slab, down from 12–18%, to make India more globally competitive

Visa-free/Visa-on-Arrival facility

Ease visa requirements to enhance inbound tourism.

National tourism authority

Offers single-window support for investors.

Develop lesser-known destinations

Alleviates congestion in popular spots and promotes equitable tourism growth.

Standardise industrial status

Encourages private investment in hotels and services to accommodate more tourists.

Overseas marketing

Targets global markets to increase foreign tourist arrivals.

Tech adoption

AI, internet of things and virtual reality to transform travel experiences at religious sites and otherwise.

Green initiatives

Tax rebates for eco-friendly and sustainable tourism practices.

Address skill gap

Training programmes to uplift local communities and enhance service quality.



The Way Forward

India is charting a bold vision: a \$1trn tourism economy with 100mn international visitors by 2047. ⁶

With religious tourism already accounting for 60% of domestic travel, it isn't just part of the journey—it's the engine.

The benefits are evident—job creation, tax revenue, private investment and local development.

Unlocking its full potential, however, will require more than infrastructure upgrades, investor-friendly policies or streamlined visas—it demands a paradigm shift in how tourism is imagined and delivered.

This means embedding technology across the tourism value chain and building a skilled workforce capable of delivering quality at scale.

Further, targeted investments in lesser-known destinations will be crucial to fostering more inclusive and regionally balanced tourism growth.

India's religious tourism momentum is set to continue—but it will take an extra push to fully realise its potential.

OUTLOOK BUSINESS

THINK BEYOND. STAY AHEAD.

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