



Bihar as an important tourist destination in India: An evaluation

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Abstract

Bihar is one of the oldest inhabited places in the world. Bihar is rich in monuments, culture and heritages. Almost the entire Buddhist tourist circuit is here in places like Bodhgaya, Nalanda, Vaishali, Vikramsila and Rajgir. Among these, Bodhgaya alone gets five million plus visitors annually. It has Takht Sri Patna Sahib (the birthplace of the 10th guru of Sikhism, Guru Gobind Singh), Jain pilgrimage spots like Jalmandir in Pawapuri and several Hindu temples like the Janki Mandir in Sitamarhi and the Vishnupad Temple in Gaya. It also has wildlife hotspots like the Valmiki Tiger Reserve and Bhagalpur Dolphin Sanctuary. There is a rich cultural heritage associated with the state. Bihar has huge potential as a state which can be explored.

Keywords: tourism, pilgrimage, cultural heritages, natural heritages

1. Introduction

Tourism is travel for pleasure or business. The World Tourism Organization defines tourism as people traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure and not less than 24 hours for business and other purposes. Tourism can be domestic (within the traveler's own country) or international. International tourism has both incoming and outgoing implications on a country's balance of payments. The Manila Declaration on World Tourism of 1980 recognized its importance as an activity essential to the life of nations because of its direct effects on the social, cultural, educational, and economic sectors of national societies and on their international relations.

The economic foundations of tourism are essentially the cultural assets, the cultural property and the nature of the travel location. The tourism industry, as part of the service sector, has become an important source of income for many regions and even for entire countries. Tourism brings large amounts of income into a local economy in the form of payment for goods and services needed by tourists, accounting as of 2011 for 30% of the world's trade in services and for 6% of overall exports of goods and services. It also generates opportunities for employment in the service sector of the economy associated with tourism.

Travel outside a person's local area for leisure was largely confined to wealthy classes, who at times traveled to distant parts of the world to see great buildings and works of art, learn new languages, experience new cultures and enjoy pristine scenery and to taste different cuisines. Cultural and natural heritage are in many cases the absolute basis for worldwide tourism. Cultural tourism is one of the megatrends that are reflected in massive numbers of overnight stays and sales. As UNESCO is increasingly observing, the cultural heritage is needed for tourism but also endangered by it. Furthermore, the focus of UNESCO is to ensure the protection of cultural heritage in order to maintain this future important economic basis for the local population. There is intensive cooperation between UNESCO, the United Nations, the United Nations peacekeeping and Blue Shield

International.

2. Tourism in India

The Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report 2019 ranked India 34th out of 140 countries overall. India improved its ranking by 6 places over the 2017 report which was the greatest improvement among the top 25% of countries ranked. The report ranks the price competitiveness of India's tourism sector as 13th out of 140 countries. It mentions that India has quite good air transport infrastructure (ranked 33rd) and reasonable ground and port infrastructure (ranked 28th). The country also scores high on natural resources (ranked 14th) and cultural resources and business travel (ranked 8th). However, some other aspects of its tourism infrastructure remain somewhat underdeveloped. The nation has many hotel rooms per capita by international comparison but low ATM penetration. The World Tourism Organization reported that India's receipts from tourism during 2012 ranked 16th in the world and 7th among Asian and Pacific countries.

The Ministry of Tourism, Government of India designs national policies for the development and promotion of tourism. In the process, the Ministry consults and collaborates with other stakeholders in the sector including various central ministries/agencies, state governments, union territories and private sector representatives. Concerted efforts are being made to promote niche tourism products such as rural, cruise, medical and eco-tourism. The Ministry of Tourism maintains the Incredible India campaign focused on promoting the tourism in India.

3. Tourism in Bihar

Bihar is one of the oldest inhabited places in the world with a history going back 3000 years. The rich culture and heritage of Bihar is evident from the innumerable ancient monuments that are dotted all over the state. Bihar is home to many tourist attractions and is visited by large numbers of tourists from all over the world. Around total 6 million tourists visit Bihar every year. Bihar is also an

important transit point for the tourists dropping in from the other states of India.

Bihar is well-connected by air, rail and road transport. Patna has its own airport known as Lok Nayak Jayaprakash Airport. It is a national airport and it is connected to all major cities of India via daily flights. Gaya Airport is the only international airport in Bihar which is 96 km from Patna. It is an international airport which is connected to Colombo (Sri Lanka), Bangkok (Thailand), Singapore and Bhutan. Bihar is strategically located in the main line of the East Central Railway and therefore connected with important cities of India and most cities within Bihar. The cities of Bihar are well connected by public transport including both private and government transport. The cities are interconnected as well as connected with the capital. The roadways also connected to adjacent states and regular bus service is available for different cities of adjacent states like Jharkhand, West Bengal, and Uttar Pradesh. The roadways also connect to Nepal. To boost the state roadways, the state government has introduced Mercedes Benz luxury buses. The Mercedes luxury buses ply between 17 routes including Patna, Bhagalpur, Gaya, Ranchi and Jamshedpur.

4. Tourist destinations in Bihar

There are various types of tourist destinations in Bihar which includes Archaeological sites, Forts, Pilgrimage sites and Museums. The tourist destination in Bihar includes Cultural as well as Natural heritages.

Archaeological sites in the Bihar includes Kumhrar, Agam Kuan, Barabar Caves, Nalanda, Vikramashila, Kesaria, Vaishali, Lauriya Araraj, Lauriya Nandangarh, Rampurwa, Balirajgarh, Lal Pahari Lakhisarai, Son Bhandar Caves, Vishnupada Temple, Mundeshwari Temple, Mahabodhi Temple, Jal Mandir, Sasaram, Maner Sharif, Pataliputra, Deo Sun Temple, Kurkihar Hoard, Mandar Parvat, Brahmayoni Hill, Pretshila Hill, Ramshila Hill, Thawe Mandir etc. Famous forts in the Bihar includes Someshwar Fort, Rohtas Fort, Shergarh Fort, Jalalgarh Fort, Raj Mahal, Munger Fort, Darbhanga Fort, Deo Fort, Buxar Fort, Navratna Palace in Champaganagar and Navlakha Palace.

The Hindu pilgrimage sites in the Bihar includes Mahavir Mandir, Mundeshwari Temple, Temples of Umga hill, Sitamarhi, Deo, Madhubani, Punausa, Buxar, West Champaran, Munger, Jamui, Maa Tara chandi Temple, Sasaram, Darbhanga, Anga area, Mithila region, Patna, Gaya, Aurangabad, Bhabua and Thawe mandir.

Buddhist pilgrimages in the Bihar includes Mahabodhi Temple, Bodh Gaya, Vaishali, Nalanda, Rajgir, Kesariya, Vikramashila, Areraj and Pataliputra.

Jain pilgrimages in the Bihar includes Rajgir (the birthplace of Munisuvrata, the twentieth Tirthankara), Pawapuri (Bhagwan Mahavira, the last Jain Tirthankar, attained Nirvana from Pawapuri), Pataliputra, Arrah, Vikramashila, Vaishali and Champapuri. Champapuri is a Jain Teerth Kshetra. It is the place where all the five kalyanaks of Bhagwan Vasupujya have taken place. The tallest statue of Bhagwan Vasupujya which stands 31 Feet in height was built in Champapur in 2014.

Patna is one of the holiest cities in Sikhism as the tenth Guru of the Sikhs Guru Gobind Singh was born here in 1666 and spent his early years before moving to Anandpur. Patna was also honoured by visits from Guru Nanak in 1509 as well as Guru Tegh Bahadur in 1666. Takht Shri Harmandir

Saheb is one of the Five Takhts of the Sikhism. The Gurdwara at Patna Sahib is in remembrance of the birthplace of Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Guru of the Sikhs. Gurdwara Pahila Bara commonly known as Gurdwara Ghai Ghat, is dedicated to Guru Nanak Dev, who during his visit in to Patna stayed here in 1509. Later Guru Tegh Bahadur along with his family visited this place in 1666. Gurdwara Gobind Ghat is where the child Guru Gobind Singh used to play with his playmates on the bank of the Ganges. It is situated on the bank of river Ganges and hardly 200 yards from Takht Shri Harmandir Saheb. It is also known as Gurdwara Kangan Ghat. Gurdwara Guru ka Bagh Gurdwara is situated 2 miles far from the birthplace of Guru Gobind Singh. Gurdwara Bal Leela is just few meters away from Takhat Patna Sahib. Guru Gobind Singh Ji used to play at this place with other children during his childhood. Gurdwara Bal Leela is also known as Maini Sangat. Gurdwara Handi Sahib was built in the memory of Guru Teg Bahadur. Guru Teg Bahadur with Mata Gujri and Bala Preetam stayed here in 1728. In addition to these, several other famous sikh pilgrimage sites in Bihar includes Prakash Punj, Gurdwara Taksali Sangat, Gurdwara Chacha Phaggu Mal, Gurdwara Pakki Sangat, Gurdwara Bari Sangat and Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji Chauki.

Islamic pilgrimages in the Bihar includes Sasaram, Maner Sharif, Bihar Sharif, Phulwari Sharif, Gaya, Aurangabad, Siwan, Katihar, Bhagalpur, Darbhanga and Purnia.

Bihar has various Historical museums as well as science Museums in addition to archaeological and pilgrimage sites mentioned above. Some of the famous Historical museums include Bihar Museum (currently opened only partially and under construction), Patna Museum (It is State museum of Bihar. It was built by the British during the British Raj in the year 1917 to house the historical artefacts found in the vicinity of Patna), Jalan Museum, Chandradhari Museum Darbhanga, Maharajadhiraja Lakshmeshwar Singh Museum Darbhanga, Nalanda Archaeological Museum, Bodh Gaya Archaeological Museum, Vaishali Archaeological Museum, Vikramashila Archaeological Museum, Budha Samyak Darshan Museum and Memorial Stupa.

Famous Science museums of the Bihar are as below:-

1. Patna Planetarium - is one of the largest planetariums in Asia. The Patna Planetarium was dedicated to the Nation and opened for the public from April 1, 1993.
2. Srikrishna Science Centre - This institution forms a unit of the National Council of Science Museums, an autonomous body under the ministry of Culture. It is located at south-western corner of the Gandhi Maidan.
3. Dr. A.P.J Abdul Kalam Science City

Besides various cultural destinations, Bihar is also equipped with various Natural and Biological heritages. Some of these sites are Valmiki National Park, Vikramshila Gangetic Dolphin Sanctuary, Kanwar Lake Bird Sanctuary, Bhimbandh Wildlife Sanctuary, Gautam Buddha Wildlife Sanctuary, Kaimur Wildlife Sanctuary, Pant Wildlife Sanctuary Rajgir, Manjhar kund, Dhuan Kund, Rajgir Zoo Safari, Ghora Katora, Sanjay Gandhi Jaivik Udyan (classified as one of the 16 large zoos in the country and is also known as Patna Zoo), Mega Biodiversity Park in Araria district, Kakolat Waterfall, Telhar Waterfall, Karkat Waterfall and Karkatgarh Waterfall.

Fairs and Festivals also act as a destination for tourists in Bihar. Some of the famous Fairs and Festivals of Bihar are Sonepur Fair, Rajgir Mahotsav, Patna Film Festival, Chhath, Sama Chakeva, Pitrapaksh Fair and Darbhanga International Film Festival.

5. Conclusion

Bihar is an undersold tourism spot, but totally on par with any other Indian states. Bihar government is focusing on eco-tourism, rural tourism and even cruises on river Ganga. The government is also focusing on niche areas of tourism like yoga and food festivals. The state stands at eighth position when it comes to talking about foreign tourist arrivals. Over five million tourists visit the holy place of Bodh Gaya annually. Bodh Gaya has recently been selected as one of the iconic sites of the country. Bihar is perceived as the Buddhist destination but there are many flavours and fervours of the state. There is a rich cultural heritage associated with the state. Bihar has huge potential as a state which can be explored. There is much scope for the Bihar tourism sector to improve still.

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