

Developing Religious Tourism Circuits in Jammu: Linking Vaishno Devi, Shiv Khori and Raghunath Temple

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Abstract- Religious tourism possesses considerable potential to stimulate economic growth, enhance cultural legacy, and encourage regional development in the Jammu region. This research examines the establishment of a religious tourist circuit connecting three significant spiritual sites: Vaishno Devi, Raghunath Temple, and Shiv Khori. Each location possesses profound religious importance and draws millions of adherents each year. The study analyses the existing infrastructure, visitor experience, and connection among these locations, while highlighting issues such as overpopulation, environmental deterioration, and insufficient facilities. Furthermore, it assesses the impact of technology, marketing, and community engagement on improving the tourist experience. The report offers measures to enhance accessibility, promote sustainability, and stimulate the area economy by combining these locations into a unified tourism circuit. The findings seek to furnish actionable insights for policymakers, tourist authorities, and local stakeholders to establish Jammu as a leading religious tourism destination while promoting sustainable development.

Keywords – Religious Tourism, Tourism Circuit, Sustainable Development, Pilgrimage Tourism, Visitor Experience.

1. Introduction

Religious tourism, often termed pilgrimage tourism, refers to the journeys undertaken by individuals or groups for spiritual or religious purposes. This form of tourism encompasses a wide range of activities, including visits to sacred sites, participation in religious rituals, and attendance at festivals or ceremonies. The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) defines religious tourism as "travel undertaken for religious purposes, whether for pilgrimage, worship, or spiritual renewal" (UNWTO, 2019). In the Indian context, religious tourism encompasses visits to a variety of sacred destinations associated with multiple faiths, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Christianity, and Islam. The scope of religious tourism in India is vast, covering pilgrimage sites like Varanasi and Bodh Gaya, as well as major festivals like Kumbh Mela, which attract millions of devotees.

The significance of religious tourism is multifaceted. Economically, it contributes to local economies through tourism-related spending, creating jobs and supporting local businesses. Socially, it fosters a sense of community and shared identity among pilgrims. Culturally, religious tourism plays a critical role in the preservation of traditions and heritage, ensuring that the customs

and practices associated with various faiths continue to thrive in a rapidly changing world (Sharma, 2018). Religious tourism also offers opportunities for intercultural dialogue and understanding. As people from diverse backgrounds come together in shared spiritual spaces, they can engage in meaningful exchanges that enhance mutual respect and appreciation for different cultures and beliefs. This aspect of religious tourism can promote social cohesion and reduce cultural misunderstandings, making it a significant force for peace and unity in a diverse nation like India.

Religious tourism in Jammu has been fundamental to the region's cultural and spiritual identity for centuries. Renowned for its hallowed temples and shrines, Jammu draws millions of devotees each year, especially to locations such as Vaishno Devi, Shiv Khori, and Raghunath Temple. The region's abundant religious heritage, coupled with enhanced infrastructure and accessibility, has established it as one of India's foremost pilgrimage sites. Religious tourism in Jammu has transformed from conventional pilgrimage activities into a structured and prosperous industry, substantially benefiting the local economy.

1.1 Linking Vaishno Devi, Shiv Khori and Raghunath Temple

Jammu, renowned for its sacred and culturally significant temples, has historically served as a center for religious tourism. The Vaishno Devi Temple, Shiv Khori, and the Raghunath Temple are among the most renowned pilgrimage destinations. These temples, each possessing unique spiritual importance, draw millions of devotees annually. Nevertheless, despite their significant popularity, the opportunity to link these sites via meticulously crafted religious tourism circuits has not been fully actualized. This paper examines the establishment of a tourism circuit connecting three significant religious sites to improve the pilgrimage experience, stimulate the local economy, and foster sustainable tourism in Jammu.

1.2 Principal Religious Locations

1.2.1 Vaishno Devi Temple - The Vaishno Devi Temple, situated on Trikuta Mountain near Katra, is among the most frequented religious sites in India. The site is devoted to Goddess Vaishno Devi, drawing millions of devotees each year. Pilgrims undertake a 13 km pilgrimage from Katra to the shrine, rendering it a physically arduous yet spiritually fulfilling endeavor.

1.2.2 Shiv Khori- Shiv Khori, a cavernous sanctuary situated in the Reasi district, is devoted to Lord Shiva. The temple contains a naturally occurring Shiv Lingam and is enveloped in legends and folklore. It provides a more tranquil and isolated pilgrimage experience in contrast to the crowded Vaishno Devi shrine. The cave's inherent beauty and spiritual ambiance render it a distinctive location for worshippers.

1.2.3 Raghunath Temple- The Raghunath Temple, situated in the center of Jammu city, is a significant Hindu sanctuary devoted to Lord Rama. It is among the largest temple complexes in North India, featuring numerous shrines devoted to various deities from the Ramayana and other Hindu texts. The temple's historical importance and its magnificent architecture render it a vital destination for religious tourists.

2. Objectives of Linking Vaishno Devi, Shiv Khori, and Raghunath Temple

2.1 Enhancing Pilgrimage Experience

By linking these sacred sites into a cohesive circuit, pilgrims can experience a more comprehensive spiritual journey. Instead of visiting these sites in isolation, travelers can explore a range of religious, cultural, and natural offerings, enhancing their overall experience.

2.2 Economic Boost for Local Communities

Creating a religious tourism circuit will encourage pilgrims to visit multiple sites in one trip, thereby increasing tourism revenue for local businesses, including accommodations, transport services, and retail outlets.

2.3 Promoting Sustainable Tourism

A well-managed tourism circuit can ensure that the natural and cultural heritage of the region is preserved, while accommodating the needs of a growing number of visitors. Sustainable practices in transportation, waste management, and conservation will be integral to this development.

3.Designing the Tourism Circuit: Vaishno Devi, Shiv Khori, and Raghunath temple

The tourism circuit should be designed with convenience, accessibility, and spiritual value in mind. The following are essential aspects to consider:

3.1 Circuit Route and Accessibility

The journey should connect the three temples in a logical sequence, making it easier for pilgrims to travel between the sites.

Proposed Circuit Design:

1. Vaishno Devi to Shiv Khori: After completing the pilgrimage to Vaishno Devi, pilgrims can travel by road to Shiv Khori, which is approximately 75 km away. A well-maintained road with transport options such as buses, taxis, and private vehicles can connect these two sites.

2.Shiv Khori to Raghunath Temple: After visiting Shiv Khori, pilgrims can head towards Jammu city to visit the Raghunath Temple, which is approximately 70 km from Shiv Khori. This leg of the journey can be facilitated through a combination of road travel and dedicated pilgrimage transport services.

3.Circular Itinerary: A circular itinerary can be designed, allowing pilgrims to either begin their journey at Vaishno Devi or Raghunath Temple, depending on their preference. This flexibility will help maximize convenience for visitors.

4. Marketing and Promotion

Promoting the tourism circuit effectively will ensure that it reaches a wider audience. The following strategies can be adopted:

4.1 Digital Promotion

- **Website and App:** Develop a dedicated website and mobile app for the tourism circuit that provides information on the temples, itinerary, transport options, accommodations, and online booking services.
- **Social Media Campaigns:** Utilize platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter to share the beauty, history, and spiritual significance of these temples. Video content showcasing the serene atmosphere at Shiv Khori or the majestic Vaishno Devi trek can attract pilgrims.
- **Influencer Collaborations:** Collaborate with religious and travel influencers to promote the circuit, helping to create awareness among a global audience.

5. Historical Context and Evolution of Religious Tourism in India

The roots of religious tourism in India can be traced back thousands of years. Ancient texts, including the Vedas, Mahabharata, and Ramayana, reference pilgrimage practices and sacred journeys undertaken by devotees seeking spiritual fulfillment. These texts outline the significance of various sacred sites and emphasize the importance of pilgrimage as a means of attaining spiritual merit (Vikram & Gupta, 2020).

5.1 Historical Context and Development of Religious Tourism in Jammu- Jammu, referred to as the "City of Temples," possesses a lengthy and illustrious history that has established it as one of India's foremost religious tourism centers. The site's development into a prominent pilgrimage destination is fundamentally anchored in ancient religious traditions, chiefly Hinduism, while also shaped by Sikh, Muslim, and Buddhist influences. Throughout the centuries, the region has evolved from a local religious hub to a globally acknowledged site, drawing millions of pilgrims annually.

5.2 Antiquity and the Middle Ages- The religious significance of Jammu extends back thousands of years. The temples, shrines, and sacred sites are integral to its spiritual identity. The Vaishno Devi Temple, honoring Goddess Vaishno Devi, is among the oldest and most venerated pilgrimage sites in India. The Vaishno Devi legend, documented in the Skanda Purana, originates from antiquity when the goddess meditated in the Trikuta Mountains. The temple's historical importance commenced in the 8th century, subsequently evolving into a vital pilgrimage destination for Hindus.

In addition to Vaishno Devi, the area witnessed the establishment of other significant temples, including the Raghunath Temple, constructed in the 19th century by Maharaja Ranbir Singh. This temple emerged as one of the largest and most important centers of worship in North India. During the medieval era, locations such as Shiv Khori, a cave temple devoted to Lord Shiva, emerged, thereby enhancing Jammu's religious landscape.

5.3 Colonial and Post-Colonial Period- During British colonial rule, Jammu's religious tourism commenced its development due to the establishment of infrastructure, including roads and railways, which enhanced accessibility to pilgrimage sites. The Vaishno Devi temple has become more accessible to pilgrims due to enhanced transportation connections, resulting in an increase in visitor numbers. The colonial era witnessed the systematic development of pilgrimage services, including the creation of inns and rest houses for travelers.

Following independence, Jammu's religious tourism sector underwent substantial expansion. The Vaishno Devi Shrine Board, founded in 1986, significantly improved pilgrimage amenities, encompassing the development of superior pathways, lodging, and transportation services. The formalization of pilgrimage management signified a transition to a more systematic method of religious tourism, facilitating more efficient travel for millions of pilgrims.

5.4 Contemporary Period and Expansion of Pilgrimage Tourism- Since the late 20th century, religious tourism in Jammu has experienced significant growth, with annual visitor numbers rising consistently. The religious sites of Jammu, particularly Vaishno Devi, draw pilgrims from throughout India and overseas. The establishment of supplementary pilgrimage infrastructure, such as Shiv Khori and Raghunath Temple, enhanced the variety of the region's religious tourism options. Technological innovations significantly contributed to the modernization of the pilgrimage experience. The implementation of online booking systems for Vaishno Devi enabled pilgrims to organize their visits with greater efficiency. The promotion of these sites via digital platforms and social media facilitated global awareness.

5.5 Obstacles and Future Opportunities- Notwithstanding its expansion, religious tourism in Jammu encounters numerous challenges, including overcrowding, environmental issues, and pressure on local infrastructure. To mitigate these concerns, there is a growing emphasis on

sustainable tourism practices, encompassing waste management and environmentally friendly initiatives. Jammu's religious tourism sector possesses considerable potential for growth. Establishing interconnected pilgrimage routes, improving amenities, and adopting sustainable practices can guarantee the region's enduring viability as a spiritual and cultural destination. Jammu, by upholding its historical and spiritual heritage, can offer a profound and conscientious pilgrimage experience for future generations.

6. Findings

- **Potential for Economic Growth:** Religious tourism in Jammu, facilitated by the establishment of a cohesive circuit connecting Vaishno Devi, Raghunath Temple, and Shiv Khori, possesses considerable economic potential. Enhancing accessibility and marketing these sacred sites as a cohesive tourism route could augment tourism revenue in Jammu, thereby benefiting local enterprises, hospitality sectors, and associated industries.
- **Cultural and Religious Heritage Preservation:** Culturally and historically significant, the holy places of Vaishno Devi, Raghunath Temple, and Shiv Khori are also important spiritual centers for millions of worshippers. The planned tourist circuit has the potential to both conserve these traditions and bring in visitors interested in Jammu's religious and cultural history.
- **Infrastructure Challenges and Opportunities:** Even though it has been upgraded throughout the years, the current infrastructure still encounters problems including congestion, limited housing, and inadequate facilities, particularly during the busiest seasons for pilgrimages. To handle the increasing number of tourists and make sure the pilgrimage goes smoothly, it is vital to improve transportation networks, lodgings, and restroom facilities.
- **Role of Technology and Marketing:** Streamlining visitor management and improving the overall tourist experience could be achieved through technological improvements like digital promotions, smartphone apps, and online booking systems. With better advertising, Jammu may be promoted as a major religious tourist site, drawing in visitors from all over the world who are seeking spiritual solace, and all the while bringing attention to the importance of ecotourism.
- **Community Engagement and Local Involvement:** Local communities that are actively involved in religious tourism can improve the experience for visitors and make sure that the economic benefits are shared fairly. One way to foster community development and cultural preservation is to provide local stakeholders with job opportunities. Another is to support traditional crafts and businesses.

7. Recommendations

Jammu can position itself as a premier religious tourism destination in India by creating a circuit that links Vaishno Devi, Shiv Khori and Raghunath Temple. This circuit can lead to long-term growth and prosperity for the region if it is well-coordinated and incorporates accessibility improvements, sustainable practices, and community engagement.

8. Discussion and Conclusion

The exploration of religious tourism in India reveals its profound significance as a multidimensional phenomenon that intertwines faith, culture, and community. The definition and scope of religious tourism encompass a vast array of practices and experiences that attract millions

of pilgrims and tourists to various sacred sites across the country. The historical context of religious tourism in India showcases its evolution from ancient pilgrimage practices to contemporary tourism trends. This evolution reflects not only the resilience of religious traditions but also the dynamic nature of societal values and beliefs. As religious tourism continues to grow in contemporary society, it holds significant economic potential for local communities while fostering a deeper understanding of diverse cultural and religious practices.

The establishment of a religious tourism circuit connecting Vaishno Devi, Shiv Khori, and Raghunath Temple offers a distinctive opportunity to enrich the spiritual and cultural experiences of pilgrims in Jammu. By strategically linking these sacred sites, the circuit can provide a cohesive, enriching journey that enhances the pilgrimage experience and significantly benefits the local economy and community development.

The circuit features a meticulously designed infrastructure that facilitates easy access, comfortable lodgings, and essential amenities, thereby catering to the increasing influx of religious tourists and offering them both convenience and spiritual enrichment. Efficient marketing strategies and sustainable tourism practices will guarantee the enduring success of this initiative while safeguarding the region's natural and cultural heritage.

Ultimately, connecting these three iconic temples will enhance Jammu's status as a prominent religious tourism destination and foster a more integrated and comprehensive spiritual experience for pilgrims, motivating them to delve into the region's rich spiritual traditions. Through meticulous planning and cooperation among the government, local communities, and tourism operators, the religious tourism circuit can serve as a paradigm of sustainable, culturally attuned tourism that advantages both visitors and residents.

Moreover, the overview of major religious traditions in India, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, and Islam, highlights the rich tapestry of beliefs and practices that coexist within the nation. Each tradition contributes uniquely to the landscape of religious tourism, offering distinct experiences that resonate with pilgrims and tourists alike. As religious tourism evolves, it is essential to balance the spiritual, cultural, and economic dimensions to ensure that it remains sustainable and respectful of the sacredness of these sites, the significance of religious tourism in India extends beyond mere visitation; it plays a crucial role in shaping identities, fostering community bonds, and promoting intercultural dialogue. As we delve deeper into the subsequent chapters, we will explore the various facets of religious tourism, including pilgrimage sites, festivals, community engagement, and the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. By understanding and appreciating the complexities of religious tourism, stakeholders can work together to create a more sustainable and enriching experience for all involved.

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