

MAHA KUMBH 2025: ECONOMIC GROWTH FOR LOCAL BUSINESSES, RETAIL, AND HOSPITALITY, AS WELL AS INFRASTRUCTURE AND GOVERNMENTAL ARRANGEMENTS

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Abstract. The Maha Kumbh of 2025, taking place in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, is anticipated to attract over 400 million pilgrims, including both domestic and international visitors, thereby establishing it as the most significant Maha Kumbh in history. The festival, rooted in Hindu mythology, encompasses ritual bathing at the revered Sangam, where the Ganga, Yamuna, and the legendary Saraswati rivers converge, aimed at the purification of sins and the attainment of salvation. This platform fosters profound religious dialogues, presents cultural exhibitions, and highlights traditional performances, thereby underscoring the richness of India's spiritual heritage. In the year 2019, an estimated 240 million pilgrims from across the globe gathered for the Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj, India. We foresee that the Maha Kumbh 2025 will markedly enhance the local economy, especially within the realms of retail, hospitality, transportation, and infrastructure development. Transitory employment prospects will arise within the realms of hospitality, security, transportation, and local enterprises. Furthermore, governmental allocation of resources towards infrastructure will facilitate increased spending on essentials such as food, accommodation, transportation, and religious artefacts. The deployment of advanced urban technologies, such as AI-enhanced crowd management, digital payment infrastructures, and mobile applications, seeks to reduce environmental repercussions. The designation of the Maha Kumbh by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage significantly elevates India's standing in the realm of global tourism. The global media landscape, coupled with the pervasive impact of social media, will significantly expand the event's audience. The prospective enduring benefits of tourism may well exceed those of the Maha Kumbh, consequently enhancing Prayagraj's prominence in the international arena. The event serves as a significant socio-economic catalyst, influencing Prayagraj and the broader Indian economy in manners that transcend its religious connotations. This research aims to analyse the economic ramifications of the Maha Kumbh 2025 in Prayagraj, concentrating on its impact on employment creation, local enterprises, tourism, infrastructure advancement, governmental strategies, and assistance for the seamless operation of the festival. The research aims to examine the economic advantages and obstacles associated with the festival.

Keywords: Maha Kumbh, Uttar Pradesh, Tourism, Prayagraj, Economic impact, Infrastructure, Plans

1. Introduction

The Kumbh Mela demonstrates the richness and depth of India's religious and cultural past. Men of faith occasionally assemble in the hallowed sites of each religion (Bhardwaj, 1973). The event's expanding prominence in the global religious tourism sector is evident from the significant increase in foreign tourists in recent years. Pilgrimages have important political, economic, social, and cultural implications in addition to their impact on international trade and health (Collins-Kreiner, 2010). According to Baranwal et al. (2015), the Kumbh Mela is the greatest gathering of people on the planet at any given time. Millions of people from all over the world have gravitated towards it over the years, regardless of gender, caste, religion, or faith. The 2019 Kumbh Mela attracted over one million foreign tourists, representing a 35% increase in foreign visitor arrivals. The size of the incident made it difficult to ensure public health security and safety (Dwivedi and Cariappa, 2015). The assessments of the Kumbh Mela in Allahabad (2013) and Nashik (2003, 2015) reveal how event planning and spending have evolved over time (Bansal et al., 2013). The Kumbh Mela is considered very important in Hinduism. This study delves

deeply into the historical, sociological, and economic factors that contributed to its ascent to prominence as a tourist destination. The Kumbh Mela's historical roots can be traced back millennia to Hindu mythology and ritual. A pilgrimage is a planned travel with a specific aim defined by the heart and carried out with the feet. The towns of Prayagraj, Ujjain, Nashik, and Haridwar have a pilgrimage event known as the "Kumbh Mela" in Hindu mythology (Memish et al., 2019; Raghav et al., 2020). Ruback, Pandey, and Kohli's study, which focusses on a Hindu holy site visited annually, contributes to the body of information on how individuals perceive locations. According to Smalldone et al. (2005), the concept of place is determined by how people interact with one another, as well as the physical settings and activities that take place there. Certain sites are more important than others due to their physical characteristics and the activities they host. The Ganga, Yamuna, Saraswati, and Godavari rivers converge at regular intervals to form the foundation of this holy trip (World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews, 2025, 25(02), 561-569 562). Participants in this ceremony take a plunge in a holy river (UNESCO 2017). Over time, the Mela has expanded beyond its religious roots to reflect cultural heritage and communal identity, fostering relationships between diverse Hindu sects and adherents around the world. Sociocultural elements have a significant role in deciding the Kumbh Mela's size and appeal as a global tourism attraction. India's diverse cultural landscape, as well as Hinduism's tolerant mindset, make the Mela more enticing to both domestic and international visitors. During the Mela, ceremonial activities, spiritual discussions, and colourful cultural events provide immersive experiences that promote international connection and understanding.

Aside from its religious significance, the Kumbh Mela has a substantial economic impact, stimulating significant growth in local economies and tourism infrastructure. Infrastructure development, hotel services, and job opportunities all increase in host cities, benefiting local economies and means of subsistence. To fully fulfil its potential as a sustainable tourism destination, the Mela serves as a venue for promoting tourism initiatives and encouraging collaboration between the public and private sectors. However, the Kumbh Mela's rising breadth creates considerable challenges, ranging from environmental sustainability to logistical constraints. Strong infrastructure, crowd management measures, and emergency response systems are essential to ensure the safety and well-being of millions of pilgrims. Furthermore, in order for the Mela to be long-term viable, the negative environmental consequences of huge people on water supply, sanitation, and ecological preservation must be mitigated. Its transformative influence transcends religious boundaries and encourages sustainable tourism, economic prosperity, and multicultural communication. According to Damari and Mansfeld (2016), the predominantly theoretical paradigm that frames pilgrimage as a tourism phenomena may be limited and reduces the diversity of pilgrims' experiences today. Some academics evaluate pilgrims' traits and experiences through a consumerist lens.

Previous research on the subject, according to Cohen (1992), Collins-Kreiner and Kliot (2000), Raj and Morpeth (2007), and Smith (1992), focused on comparing pilgrims' and tourists' experiences, arguing that they exist on opposite ends of a continuum, with the former occupying the sacred end and the latter the secular end. According to Hudman and Jackson's (1992) research, pilgrimage travel frequently combines religious activity with tourism. Recent research (Collins-Kreiner, 2010) shows that the dichotomy that existed until the early 2000s is no longer apparent. India's Kumbh Mela, which reflects the country's rich cultural heritage and spiritual ethos, has grown into a thriving magnet for international Hindu religious tourism.

On a global scale, the Kumbh Mela continues to be a beacon of spiritual enlightenment and cultural harmony by overcoming inherent hurdles and realising its full potential.

2. Resources and Methods

We conducted a search across various databases for journals that include terms like Kumbh Mela, mass gathering, spiritual pilgrimage, pilgrimage, religious tourism, spiritual gathering, Government Support, Impact on Indian Economy particularly regarding Employment, Impact on India's Tourism Landscape, and socio-economic impact, among others. Our examination was confined to peer-reviewed literature, following a thorough search through platforms such as Google Scholar, PubMed, ResearchGate, and additional resources. This study examined reports from multiple departments alongside previous Kumbh Mela reports published by the Prayagraj Mela Authority. Data and information were collected from news reports regarding the Kumbh Mela, Magh Mela, and various other significant gatherings.

3. Findings and Discussions

3.1 Government Support and Key Infrastructure Development

The Uttar Pradesh Government provided significant funding and infrastructure to ensure the success of the Maha Kumbh Mela 2025. Over 660 million pilgrims attended, making it one of the largest events in history.

Key support from the Government:

- Maha Kumbh Mela 2025 drew over 660 million pilgrims.
- A temporary city spanning 4,000 hectares housed 150,000 tents.
- 92 roads were renovated and 30 pontoons bridges constructed.
- 50,000 security personnel with AI surveillance ensured safety.
- Temporary hospitals and "Bhishma cube" units provided medical care.

The UP government built Maha Kumbh Nagar, a temporary metropolis spanning 4,000 hectares with 150,000 tents and luxury accommodations provided by IRCTC's "Maha Kumbh Gram." Transportation infrastructure has seen significant changes, including the renovation of 92 roads, the construction of 30 pontoon bridges, and the addition of seven new railway platforms to accommodate increased visitor traffic. To reduce environmental effect, eco-friendly solutions were employed, including solar-powered lights, bio-toilets, and modern waste management systems. Proper sanitation was achieved with over 12,000 FRP toilets, 16,100 steel toilets, and 20,000 urinals. Over 269,000 checkered plates were used to form pedestrian pathways.

Temporary hospitals were established to provide surgical and diagnostic facilities, enhancing healthcare services. The "Bhishma Cube," which can treat 200 people simultaneously, facilitated efficient medical emergency management. Mobile health units and telemedicine services improved medical response times. Security was diligently prepared, with over 50,000 people deployed, including paramilitary troops. AI-based surveillance, real-time monitoring, and facial recognition systems improved safety and crowd management. The successful Maha Kumbh Mela 2025 demonstrated the government's dedication to offering a spiritually rewarding and logistically smooth experience, resulting in a lasting good influence.

3.2 Maha Kumbh and Its Impact on Indian Economy especially on Employment

Maha Kumbh has made a significant contribution to India's and Uttar Pradesh's economic growth and employment this year. The demand for goods and services has increased due to the attendance of over 660 crore devotees, resulting in the creation of thousands of jobs in various industries. The event's economic impact is expected to exceed Rs 2 lakh crore, contributing 6.25% to Uttar Pradesh's GSDP, which is predicted to reach Rs 32 lakh crore by March 2025.

The hospitality industry has experienced significant growth, with hotels and resorts accounting for approximately Rs 4,000 crore in revenue. The family prospered, earning roughly Rs. 2,000 crore from restaurants, vendors, and caterers serving millions of visitors. Increased consumer spending has benefitted retail enterprises, especially those selling religious products, everyday staples, and traditional handicrafts, leading to job growth.

The festival has directly employed boatmen, shops, artisans, and religious service providers. Transportation services like cabs, buses, and trains have generated Rs 10,000 crore. Retail businesses have experienced development, with religious item sales contributing Rs 20,000 crore to the GDP. Telecommunications firms, including Reliance Jio, have seen an increase in internet and phone consumption due to the influx of devotees and tourists.

Economic Impact Snapshots

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|---------------------------------|--|
| • Massive Economic Impact- | Rs 2 lakh crore +revenue, contributing 6.25% to UP's Rs.32 lakh crore GSDP |
| • Hospitality Boom- | Rs 40,000 crore from hotels lodges, and rentals |
| • Food and Beverages-Caterers | Rs 20,000 crore from restaurants, vendors and |
| • Retail Growth-consumer goods | Rs 20,000 crore from religious merchandise and |
| • Transportation and Logistics- | Rs 10,000 crore from taxis, buses and railway |
| • Telecom Surge- | Increased demand for mobile data and calls |

Maha Kumbh 2025 has strengthened its religious and cultural significance while promoting economic success. The festival plays a significant role in the economic prosperity of Uttar Pradesh, generating large-scale employment, expanding businesses, and increasing revenue.

3.3 Multifaceted Impact on India's Tourism Landscape

The mela has had a significant impact on India's tourist sector, attracting record numbers of people and boosting economic activity across several businesses. The event drew 660 million people, with an increase in overseas tourists from the US, UK, Canada, Australia, Russia, and Japan. The turnout produced revenue of Rs 3 lakh crore (\$36 billion), benefiting local businesses and service providers.

Authorities created a 4,000-hectare temporary metropolis with tent housing, sanitary services, and medical centers to accommodate the influx of people. The hospitality industry experienced significant growth, with homestays and luxury tents priced up to Rs 1 lakh per night catering to a wide range of guest preferences.

International tourism boost at Maha kumbh 2025

- British travel writers visited; special tours and accommodations arranged.
- Foreign visitors joined rituals, explored heritage, and shared experiences.
- Promoted under "Brand UP" to boost tourism and investment
- Showcased at FITUR & ITB Berlin with cultural pavilions and promotions
- Incredible India Pavilion offered immersive experiences and multilingual help
- Customized pilgrimage packages increased foreign tourist reservations by 30%, supporting economic growth.

Indian Railways ran 13,000 trains and renovated infrastructure, including new stations and platforms. In addition, 1,200 extra buses were dispatched to support the 3,050 already assigned. Improved international flight connection to Prayagraj, Varanasi, and Lucknow resulted in a 20% increase in foreign air traffic, making tourism more accessible.

The event created more than 600,000 temporary jobs in a variety of industries. International visitors paired their pilgrimage with trips to Varanasi, Rishikesh, and Bodh Gaya, boosting foreign exchange revenues. Global media coverage boosted India's reputation as a top destination for spiritual tourism. This delivered a profound spiritual experience and significant economic benefits, demonstrating its impact on domestic and worldwide tourists.

Opportunities and Challenges in Kumbh Mela Travel

The Kumbh Mela, an important religious celebration in India, struggles with traffic, crowding, and inadequate facilities despite infrastructural upgrades. Temporary tent cities and lack of utilities can cause delays, bottlenecks, and safety hazards for pilgrims and tourists. Due to healthcare, lodging, and other service capacity issues, pilgrims and tourists may receive substandard services.

Customs and traditions are being exploited for business and entertainment at the Kumbh Mela, creating moral and cultural issues. Commercial vendors, sponsors, and advertising may exploit the festival's spiritual foundation by promoting products, services, and experiences that detract from it. Traditional artists, entertainers, and cultural practitioners may be exploited commercially.

Maintaining the Kumbh Mela's purity, authenticity, and integrity while promoting ethical and sustainable tourism is essential to its religious and cultural significance. Branding and promoting the Kumbh Mela as a top religious tourism destination should evoke spirituality, tradition, and cultural richness to appeal to pilgrims and tourists. Visual, narrative, and experiential marketing efforts should convey transcendence, purity, and regeneration.

By partnering with media, tourism firms, and influencers, the Kumbh Mela brand can reach more people. Digital marketing and social media efforts can boost visitors to Kumbh Mela websites and accounts.

Virtual reality, user-generated material, and fascinating storytelling can entice Kumbh Mela pilgrims. Strategic media alliances and PR are needed to build Kumbh Mela credibility and PR. Working with travel writers, photographers, and filmmakers may create fascinating stories, images, and films that showcase the Kumbh Mela's diversity, beauty, and relevance internationally. In conclusion, the Kumbh Mela must plan and manage pilgrims and tourists' safety and well-being due to poor facilities, traffic, and crowding.

4. Recommendations for Eco-Friendly Kumbh Mela Travel

As Kumbh Mela tourism adopts new technologies, interacts with diverse people, and adapts to changing socioeconomic and environmental dynamics, it has immense potential for future growth, innovation, and transformation.

The Kumbh Mela can improve visitor satisfaction, operational efficiency, and environmental sustainability by leveraging digital platforms, innovative solutions, and data-driven insights. In an age of increasing divisions and conflicts, the Kumbh Mela can serve as a light of peace, harmony, and unity by strengthening local communities, encouraging cross-cultural engagement, and promoting interfaith understanding. The Kumbh Mela has the potential to inspire and raise the hearts and minds of pilgrims and tourists for many generations to come by embracing ideals such as sustainability, equity, and inclusion. The Kumbh Mela is likely to make an even greater contribution to worldwide religious tourism in the coming years. The Kumbh Mela is a light of ancient wisdom and sacred pilgrimage, as more people seek authentic spiritual experiences and cultural immersion. We can learn a lot about the eternal significance of old rituals in the modern world by understanding and appreciating the Kumbh Mela's various implications on worldwide tourism. Using technology to improve tourist satisfaction, operational efficiency, and environmental sustainability is critical to the future of Kumbh Mela tourism. Digital platforms, smartphone apps, and virtual reality tools provide pilgrims and tourists with interactive maps, guided tours, and real-time updates on events and activities.

Drones, smart sensors, and Internet of Things devices can be used to monitor the environment, waste, and crowds, enabling proactive interventions and data-driven decision-making. Geographic information

systems (GIS) can identify urban regeneration locations to conserve Kumbh Mela-related cultural heritage tourism (Saha and Khare, 2020). Blockchain technology can reduce fraud, corruption, and disputes in tourism operations by increasing transaction and interaction transparency, accountability, and trust. The Kumbh Mela can serve as a model for the expansion of sustainable tourism in the digital age by embracing innovation and technology. Community empowerment and engagement are critical for making Kumbh Mela tourism inclusive, real, and sustainable. Local communities, as stewards of the festival's natural resources and cultural legacy, should be actively involved in its management, planning, and decision-making processes. Homestays, cultural tours, and handicraft cooperatives are examples of community-based tourism programmes that can produce revenue while allowing residents to benefit fairly and equally from tourism. Business development, vocational training, and capacity-building programs can provide local citizens with the tools, resources, and information they need to contribute to the tourism value chain while also improving their standards of living. Maintaining the ecological integrity and cultural authenticity of the Kumbh Mela while promoting sustainable tourism and economic growth necessitates finding a balance between conservation and development goals. The biodiversity, water sources, and natural ecosystems of the Kumbh Mela locations should be the primary focus of conservation efforts, as they are threatened by pollution, urbanisation, and climate change. To mitigate environmental impacts and increase resilience to environmental risks, development projects should prioritise investments in green technologies, renewable energy, and eco-friendly infrastructure.

Researching the massive Kumbh Mela provides a unique opportunity to establish an evidence foundation for suggestions and techniques for managing, preventing, and controlling infectious diseases during large gatherings. This could help design situation-specific policies to promote and protect people's health during the Kumbh Mela and other major international events (David and Roy, 2016). Sustainable tourism activities, such as responsible travel, environmentally friendly housing, and carbon offset schemes, can help reduce negative environmental impacts while also supporting long-term local economies. The Kumbh Mela has the potential to set a global standard for sustainable tourism destinations by taking an integrated and comprehensive approach to development and conservation.

5. Conclusion

The Maha Kumbh 2025 successfully united millions of pilgrims in a spiritual gathering. It demonstrated India's ability to efficiently manage large-scale events. The event improved the economy by providing jobs and benefiting local businesses. Crowd management remained a concern, with recorded incidents. Environmental challenges, including trash and river contamination, underscore the need for sustainable solutions. Future Kumbh Melas will benefit from lessons learned from the Maha Kumbh, including improved planning, safety, and environmental responsibility.

The Kumbh Mela, a significant Hindu religious tourism event, attracts millions of pilgrims and tourists worldwide. Its roots in ancient mythology and customs make it a hub for socioeconomic and environmental effects. The Kumbh Mela offers self-discovery, spiritual rejuvenation, and cultural immersion through its customs, rituals, and beliefs. It promotes unity, peace, harmony, and understanding among different populations. The Kumbh Mela leaves a lasting legacy by fostering growth, prosperity, and development in host regions through economic contributions, infrastructural development, and employment creation. To promote responsible tourist practices and sustainable tourism development, public-private partnerships, multi-stakeholder collaborations, and international cooperation are crucial. By embracing an integrated approach to tourism management, the Kumbh Mela can continue to thrive as a paradigm for sustainable religious tourism.

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