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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

Tourism Is India Most Underused Engine of Jobs and Growth

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ECONOMY

GS3

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THE LIFT LINE

Few sectors turn a rupee of investment into as many jobs as tourism, and fewer still let a country monetise what it already possesses: its landscape, its history and its faith.

WHY THIS EDITORIAL MATTERS FOR YOUR EXAM

Tourism is often treated as a leisure category rather than an economic strategy, and that framing undersells it badly. It is among the most employment-intensive sectors in the economy, generating work across skill levels and reaching precisely the small towns, coastal belts and hill regions that industrial growth often bypasses. As India climbs the global competitiveness rankings and looks for labour-absorbing growth to match its **demographic** (<https://ujjyari.com/vocab/demographic/>) bulge, tourism deserves a central place in the jobs conversation. For the exam this is a GS3 growth-and-employment question with a strong infrastructure and federalism dimension.

The sector's promise is matched by its neglect. India possesses heritage, medical, ecological and spiritual assets that few countries can rival, yet it captures a fraction of the global tourist flows and spending that this endowment could command. Closing that gap is a question of infrastructure, ease of travel and Centre-state coordination rather than of any missing natural advantage.

GS Paper 3: growth, development and employment; infrastructure including tourism-related connectivity; inclusive growth; effects of policy on the economy; mobilisation of resources.

For **Prelims**, hold the specifics: the **World Economic Forum Travel and Tourism Development Index** benchmarks countries on the enabling environment for tourism, and India's rank has been **improving**; tourism contributes a meaningful share of both **GDP and employment** (figures here are approximate and should be framed as such); the Ministry of Tourism runs **Swadesh Darshan** (theme-based tourist circuits) and the **PRASHAD scheme** (Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual, Heritage **Augmentation**

(<https://ujjayari.com/vocab/augmentation/>) Drive) for pilgrimage-site development; the **e-Visa regime** eases entry for foreign tourists; **Dekho Apna Desh** promotes domestic tourism; the **Heal in India / Medical Value Travel** initiative targets medical tourists; and the **UDAN (Ude Desh ka Aam Naagrik)** regional connectivity scheme expands air links that feed tourism to smaller destinations.

For **Mains**, argue tourism as an employment-intensive growth engine, and specify the infrastructure, facilitation and coordination reforms that would unlock it.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

India's tourism story has always been one of potential outrunning performance. The country offers everything a diverse traveller could want, ancient monuments and living heritage, world-class medical care at a fraction of Western costs, biodiversity hotspots and long coastlines, and an unmatched density of pilgrimage sites drawing hundreds of millions of domestic devotees each year. Yet inbound foreign tourist numbers remain modest relative to peers, and the sector's contribution, while significant, sits well below its ceiling.

The reasons are structural. Last-mile infrastructure at destinations is often weak, air and rail connectivity to secondary sites is thin, the visa and arrival experience has improved but can be streamlined further, and tourism is a concurrent concern where the Centre sets schemes while states and local bodies must execute on the ground. Where these pieces have aligned, around improved circuits, better connectivity and targeted promotion, the response has been strong, which is itself evidence that the constraint is delivery rather than demand.

THE CORE ARGUMENT / ISSUE

Why tourism is a jobs multiplier

Tourism spreads spending across a long value chain: hotels and homestays, transport, guides, food, handicrafts, wellness and entertainment. Much of this is labour-intensive and locally rooted, which means the employment it generates is dispersed and inclusive, reaching women, youth and semi-skilled workers in non-metro India. A single tourist's spending supports jobs in several enterprises at once, which is why the sector's employment intensity per unit of output is among the highest in the economy.

The four underexploited frontiers

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SEGMENT	INDIA'S ENDOWMENT	WHAT IS MISSING
Heritage	Monuments, living culture, circuits	Site infrastructure, interpretation, upkeep
Medical	World-class care at low cost	Streamlined visas, accreditation, coordination
Eco	Biodiversity, coasts, hills	Sustainable capacity, waste and access management
Spiritual	Vast pilgrimage flows	Crowd management, amenities, connectivity

Each frontier is large and each is bottlenecked by delivery rather than demand. Heritage tourism needs sites that are well maintained, interpreted and connected. Medical value travel, backed by the Heal in India push, needs seamless visas and quality assurance. Eco-tourism needs capacity managed within ecological limits so that success does not destroy the asset. Spiritual tourism, already vast in scale, needs the amenities and crowd management that turn a devotional visit into a safe, repeatable, spending experience.

Facilitation and connectivity as the real levers

The policy architecture already exists: Swadesh Darshan for circuits, PRASHAD for pilgrimage sites, e-Visa for entry, Dekho Apna Desh for domestic demand, and UDAN for the air connectivity that brings travellers to smaller destinations. The gap is in execution, integration and last-mile quality. Tourism is where the enabling environment, ease of arrival, connectivity, safety, cleanliness and reliable amenities, matters more than headline promotion, because a traveller's decision to return, and to recommend, is made at the destination.

HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS (ANALYTICAL FRAME)

Assess tourism policy through three questions. First, the multiplier question: does the sector convert investment into jobs and dispersed local income more efficiently than the alternatives? Tourism's long, labour-intensive value chain says yes, especially for non-metro India. Second, the constraint question: is the binding limit demand or delivery? India's endowment and improving competitiveness ranking suggest demand is available and delivery, infrastructure, facilitation and coordination, is the bottleneck. Third, the sustainability question: can growth be scaled without eroding the very heritage and ecology that draw visitors? This is the discipline that eco and spiritual tourism especially require. The transferable insight is that in tourism the government's highest-leverage (<https://ujjayari.com/vocab/leverage/>) role is not marketing but plumbing: connectivity, ease of travel, and reliable amenities delivered through genuine Centre-state coordination.

THE DIAGRAM IN WORDS

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Vast endowment (heritage, medical, eco, spiritual) -> improving WEF Travel and Tourism Development Index rank -> but inbound flows below potential -> binding constraint is delivery, not demand -> schemes exist: Swadesh Darshan, PRASHAD, e-Visa, Dekho Apna Desh, UDAN -> gaps: last-mile infrastructure, connectivity, facilitation, Centre-state coordination -> fix the plumbing -> labour-intensive value chain activates -> dispersed, inclusive jobs in non-metro India -> tourism becomes an employment-intensive growth engine

WAY FORWARD

- ❶ **Invest in last-mile infrastructure.** Prioritise destination-level roads, sanitation, signage, safety and amenities under Swadesh Darshan and PRASHAD, since the traveller's experience, and the decision to return, is made at the site, not in the brochure.
- ❷ **Deepen connectivity and easy entry.** Extend UDAN air links and rail access to secondary destinations, and keep simplifying the e-Visa and arrival experience, so that the friction of getting there stops throttling demand that already exists.
- ❸ **Coordinate the Centre and the states.** Treat tourism as a genuinely joint mission, aligning central schemes with state execution and local-body delivery, so that circuits, medical hubs and pilgrimage sites are developed as integrated products rather than fragmented projects.
- ❹ **Grow within limits.** Build eco and spiritual tourism to sustainable carrying capacities, with waste, crowd and access management, so that scaling the sector protects rather than degrades the heritage and ecology that make India worth visiting.

PYQ LINKAGE AND PRACTICE

UPSC has examined employment generation, infrastructure, inclusive growth and the economic potential of sectors such as tourism. This editorial frames tourism as a jobs-and-growth strategy rather than a leisure afterthought, rewarding candidates who can specify the infrastructure, facilitation and coordination reforms that turn endowment into output.

Practice question: “India’s tourism potential is constrained not by a shortage of demand but by a deficit of delivery.” Examine, with reference to tourism as an employment-intensive engine of inclusive growth. (250 words, 15 marks)

Sources: *The Indian Express* (<https://indianexpress.com/>), *Ministry of Tourism* (<https://tourism.gov.in/>)

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