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[Anant Kumar Pathak](#) \*

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*Article*

# From Numbers to Nature: India's 2022 Tourism Policy and the Shift Toward Sustainable Pathway

A.K Pathak

Department of Geography, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi-110025; anant9@outlook.com

## Abstract

Tourism policy has evolved from promoting footfall to regulating it, and now toward governance that tackles crowding, climate risk, and community effects. India's National Tourism Policy 2022 signals a shift towards a green economy, prioritising green tourism. It advances destination management, resource-use measurement and reporting, standards, and certification. This article assesses the implementation and implications for destinations, businesses, and residents, including dampening resource-intensive peaks, increasing yield per visitor, and retaining more value locally. I found that the focus of the policy moves from tracking arrivals to improving visit quality, safeguarding ecosystems, enhancing liveability, and distributing demand as policy success becomes outcomes-based, emphasising sustainability, resilience, equity, and accountability.

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## Evolution of Tourism Policies

Governments have used tourism policies to control tourism at both national and local levels (Liu et al., 2020). They play a crucial role in steering tourism in the desired direction, particularly by managing tourism practices, providing economic support, and promoting tourism products at a global level. They develop tourism policies based on the needs and vision of the current administration, as well as socio-economic realities, both local and global, shaping their goals and objectives accordingly. These policies aim to enhance the tourism industry's contribution to economic growth and development. For instance, following the devastating effects of World War II on the global economy, nations were under pressure to revive their economies and were looking for avenues and strategies for quick economic expansion (Soshiroda, 2005). Tourism then was seen as one of the key industries to focus on for economic growth and development of suffering economies, as it showed promising prospects captured by (D'Amore, 2009). He emphasised:

"The industry has grown from a total of 25 million international arrivals in 1950 to a projected 1 billion international arrivals in 2010 and a further projection to 1.6 billion by 2020."

Clearly, the tourism industry has made a significant contribution to rejuvenating the pace of global economic growth since the Second World War.

Many of the newly independent, underdeveloped countries after the post-WW2 world order also benefited from tourism's growth. They had a rich natural and cultural heritage that was utilised by their national governments to generate revenues through tourism promotion. For example, (Bossen, 2000) establishes that making a cultural festival of Fiji into a tourist event helped diversify the Fijian economy and induce economic growth through policies on inbound tourism.

On similar lines, from the 1940s until the 1980s, many economies, such as China, America, and Europe, introduced legislation pertaining to inbound tourism (Airey, 1983) to systematise the industry, encourage its expansion, and direct the economic growth that tourism provides to their lesser developed regions (Zhao & Li, 2006).

However, the aggressive indulgence of governments in growing the tourism sector resulted in numerous unsustainable outcomes (Baum & Sivas, 2008) that negatively impacted the environment

and society in general (Edgell, 1983). Since governments valued the economic benefit of tourism over anything else, very little attention was given to the sustainability aspect of it (Joppe, 2018).

In this way, tourism as a facet of globalisation (Mair, 2005) was no different than other economic sectors in its striving to grow at the cost of human and natural resources (Muler Gonzalez et al., 2018).

The works of (Ehigiamusoe, 2022); (Liu et al. 2022); (Khoshnevis Yazdi & Shakouri 2017); and (Dreher, 2006) have established the fact that globalisation has helped countries achieve economic growth in general. In addition, tourism has been a major force shaping globalisation (Song et al., 2017), which makes tourism, if not equally, then to some extent, responsible for environmental degradation. To be fair, (Ehigiamusoe et al., 2022) give tourism credit for offsetting, to a degree, the adverse impacts of globalisation, like CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. However, the net outcome doesn't come in favour of the environment.

Therefore, switching to sustainable development was the only option left before the world (Wu & Wu, 2012), as there's only one option to sustainability, and that is unsustainability (Bossel, 1999).

The necessity for a comprehensive framework for sustainable development—economic growth combined with social progress and environmental preservation—is thus realised and institutionalised (Heinrichs & Schuster, 2016). The Stockholm Declaration in 1972 and the subsequent Rio Declaration of 1992 established exactly that: the institutionalisation of sustainability, primarily recognising people's right to a clean environment and holding governments responsible for it (Simon Yarza, 2012).

Post-Rio Declaration, tourism strategies took into consideration the need for sustainable growth, pooling local resources, and coordinating local governments. Hence, tourism policies nowadays place a strong emphasis on sustainability (Dodds, 2007).

## Evolution of Indian Tourism Policy

The initial tourism policy in India, known as the Tourism Policy of 1982, primarily functioned as a marketing statement rather than a comprehensive development strategy. Its major goal was to promote India to visitors as the perfect vacation destination. In June 1982, the Planning Commission designated tourism as an industry. Policies to do this will be developed around six main categories (Six Ss): welcome (Swagat), information (Suchana), facilitation (Suvidha), safety (Suraksha), cooperation (Sahyog), and infrastructure development (Samrachana) (Iyer, 2006).

In June 1986, recognising the importance of long-term planning for the tourist industry, the Planning Commission of India took a significant step by establishing the National Committee on Tourism. In November 1987, the Committee, led by Mr Mohammed Yunus, issued its report. Mr Yunus' study proposed that the present Department of Tourism be replaced with a National Tourism Board (NTB) and that a separate cadre of the Indian Tourism Service be established to oversee the NTB's operations.

The National Action Plan for Tourism in 1992 outlines seven primary objectives that serve as central Ministry issues, focusing on areas such as the socioeconomic development of localities and the enhancement of domestic tourism for the budget market. Developing domestic tourism for the low-budget market. International tourist development. Increasing the number of available jobs. Preserving the nation's heritage and the environment. Product diversification in tourism. Increase India's share in global tourism (from 0.4% to 1% in the next five years).

The 2002 tourism policy in India adopts a multifaceted approach encompassing the expedited implementation of tourist projects, the establishment of integrated tourism circuits, the enhancement of capacity in the hospitality sector, and the introduction of innovative marketing strategies. The fundamental goal of the National Tourism Policy (2002) is to position tourism as a significant economic growth engine. The government attempts to accomplish this goal by encouraging domestic and international inbound tourism, agro-rural tourism, new tourist circuits, expanding tourist infrastructure, establishing new locations, and involving public-private partnerships (PPP) (Ahamed, 2018).

## Tourism Development During Indian Five-Year Plans

In 1951, the Planning Commission launched India's Five-Year Plans to set national priorities, allocate resources, and coordinate centre-state development. Over twelve plans (1951–2017), the system moved from heavy-industry to liberalisation and inclusive growth.

The seventh five-year plan improved Indian tourist planning by promoting domestic tourism and coastal resorts. India's seventh five-year tourist planning plan proposes these policies: To aggressively promote domestic tourism. It promoted more beach resorts. Conferences, trekking conventions, and winter sports add variety for international tourists.

The eighth five-year strategy stressed private sector tourism engagement. The Union government has created many tourist industry expansion provisions. National Action Plan for Tourism (12th Five-Year Plan) was announced in May 1992. This action plan aimed to safeguard the environment and national heritage, socially and economically develop tourist destinations, improve tourism job opportunities, and develop budget or economy domestic tourism. Promote foreign tourism, diversify tourist offerings, and increase India's global tourism share.

The government has prioritised transit, municipal utilities, accommodation, and other facilities for local and foreign tourists. Native and natural health tourism, rural and village tourism, pilgrim tourism, adventure tourism, history tourism, and youth and senior citizen packages were the 9 FYP's main focus.

Numerous initiatives have increased foreign visitor arrivals (FTAs) to India in the past three years under the tenth FYP. 'Incredible India' was an international advertising campaign. It rose 65% from 2.38 million in 2002 to 3.92 million in 2005, while foreign exchange revenues rose 96%. India's tourism satellite accounting showed that tourism contributed 5.9% to the country's GDP in 2003–04 and employed 41.8 million people, 8.78% of the total workforce (Twelfth Five-Year Plan, 2012–17). In the 12th Five-Year Plan, India emphasised 'pro-poor tourism' to optimise tourism advantages in disadvantaged areas and reduce poverty. The concept promotes "pro-poor tourism" to increase tourism advantages to disadvantaged communities and reduce poverty. The strategy paper emphasises developing a complete set of strategies for macro to micro activities like product and infrastructure development, marketing, branding, and promotion, planning, policy, and investment (12 Five Year Plan, 2012–17) and developing domestic tourism for budget or economy categories. It also attempted to boost India's global tourism share, attract international tourists, and diversify products.

The government upgraded transit and municipal utilities and provided lodging and services for all tourists. Indigenous and natural health tourism, rural and village tourism, pilgrim tourism, adventure tourism, heritage tourism, and youth and senior citizen packages were key areas.

Several initiatives have enhanced foreign visitor arrivals to India in the past three years under the tenth FYP. The international 'Incredible India' advertising campaign grew 65% from 2.38 million in 2002 to 3.92 million in 2005, while foreign exchange income rose 96%. In 2003–04, tourism contributed 5.9% to India's GDP and 8.78% of total employment, employing 41.8 million people.

The 12th Five-Year Plan promoted 'pro-poor tourism' to aid disadvantaged communities and reduce poverty. It highlights complete strategies for product and infrastructure development, marketing, branding, planning, policy, and investment.

## Implications of the Indian Tourism Policy 2022

The National Tourism Policy 2022 organises green tourism. Tourism uses green-economy principles to protect ecosystems, use resources efficiently, and benefit locals fairly. That means two parallel steps: (1) build sustainable tourism offerings from the start, and (2) greenify existing ("traditional") tourism by tightening resource use, strengthening local value chains to keep more spending in the community, and equitably sharing revenue.

Famous vacation sites' tourism economies have adapted to the existing pressured resource usage circumstances and solidified over time. Greenifying such a tourism industry would reduce resource



overuse, value chain shrinkage, and local economic rewards. Thus, inclusion and resource transfer must be balanced with the tourism destination's carrying capacity and economic benefits.

The National Tourism Policy created the National Framework for Sustainable, Responsible, and Inclusive Tourism to facilitate this transition. The framework supports sustainable development, the climate action plan, and a global tourist definition. The framework uses the UNWTO concept of tourism to create and implement policies that address environmental, socio-cultural, and economic sustainability. The framework also aims to design and approve a climate action plan among tourism stakeholders. This climate action plan reduces greenhouse gas emissions, increases renewable energy use, and achieves net zero emissions in accordance with national requirements.

To achieve SDG 2030, India updated all national policies, including greenhouse gas emission reduction measures. Tourist development and the SDGs are linked by comparing sustainable development goals to tourism industry growth.

Another element is the national tourist policy's destination development, formulation, and administration guidelines. Sustainability frameworks and strategies, progress measurement and reporting, multi-stakeholder participatory planning, public investment and capacity building for green tourism, suitable taxation laws, and Indian government ministry coordination are included. Sustainable tourism requires understanding each place's uniqueness and creating methods to promote its growth as a travel destination. This concept gives stakeholders local authority by vertically linking place-specific actions to the plan. Place-specific sustainable frameworks respect local resources and cultural norms to plan destinations in light of local pros and downsides.

Continuous progress monitoring is crucial. It helps stakeholders calibrate destination planning and development actions and projections. Tourism emissions are important for national policy. It addresses groundwater contamination, greenhouse gas emissions, and solid waste. Tourism emissions are similar ecological footprints; fewer emissions promote sustainable tourism. Consider tourism footprints.

We advocate "Sustainable Tourism Criteria for India" accreditation for tourism and sites. Attractions, hotels, and tour companies will be accredited by the STCI. Sustainable tourism will be measured, reported, and verified using international best practices.

Multi-stakeholder participatory planning promotes tourism destination master plans. The policy restricts tourism to prevent economic, ecological, and cultural damage. Carrying capacity and visitor management measures, including the "plastic-free destination" (PFD) and green mobility program, will reduce sociocultural and environmental stress.

Cooperation and capacity-building for sustainable development promotion will reveal these programs, frameworks, and criteria. All levels of government will create excellence centres to train businesses and stakeholders ethical and sustainable tourism. This method preserves the mechanism's evolution and promotes knowledge-based sustainable tourism governance.

The financial plan uses PPPs and public investments. Government infrastructure expenditures in protected areas, cultural assets, water, waste management, sanitation, transportation, and electricity will boost private sector tourism. MSMEs would receive green tourism money first. MSMEs are the major link between the local community and industry and the small-scale, local growth engines that create jobs for them, so it's fair and shows the government's dedication to inclusiveness and resource conservation in sustainable development.

Capital influx and global promotion of local tourism attractions require FDI. This technique aligns private equity with portfolio investments.

Finally, coordination and collaborations between the ministries of environment, energy, labour, agriculture, transport, health, finance, security, and other essential sectors will enable national and subnational strategy implementation.

So, current tourism policies have become complete frameworks that organise sector growth and make it more equitable and sustainable. India can meet modern tourism needs and provide sustainable and robust tourist growth frameworks.

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