

# An Exploratory Study on Sports Tourism in India: Potential and Challenges in Contemporary Times

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## Abstract

The idea of people travelling to engaging in and view sports events, dates back to the ancient Olympic Games and the tradition of uplifting tourism through sport has existed for over a century. The modern notion of sports tourism has become more dominant in the last few years both as an educational field of study and an exceedingly famous tourism product. The purpose of this paper is to review and critique the sport tourism in India. However, in the past ten years, the popularity of this form of travel has increased. The present study tried to correlate the realms of policy, research, and education for better environment of sports tourism. The study revealed that the multi-disciplinary research is needed in both sport and tourism to bring more socio-cultural and economic benefits to modern civil society. In addition Indian government is realizing that the unprecedented growth and potential of sports tourism is contributing to the local and national economy.

**Key Words:** Sports, Tourism, Economy, UNWTO, Socio-Cultural, Youth development.

## Sports Tourism

The concept of people travelling to participate and watch sports dates back to the ancient Olympic Games and the practice of encouraging tourism through sport has existed for over a century (Gibson, H.J. 1998a). However, sport and tourism executives alike are understanding the marked possibility of sports tourism and are assertively pursuing this market requirement. India has always been higher in the tourism industry because of its great diversity. However, India's sports tourism is also carving a niche for itself in the Indian tourism industry, attracting many new enthusiasts to board flights to India.

Sports tourism in India is totally must for all the thrill and adventure seekers. The Historical and geographical multiplicity of India open up great avenues for adventure sports and activities. India is a large country with an highly diversified topography. It can be skiing on the great Himalayan ranges, bicycling on the wobbly Indian roads or rafting on gushing rivers. India holidays offer a range of opportunities to its visitors to test out their sporting skills. Recent initiatives of the Indian government under RCS-UDAAN scheme, the low cost carriers offers cheap flights to India are increasingly becoming more popular among sports freaks (IBEF, 2020).

## Sports and Tourism: A Symbiotic Relationship

Sports tourism brings together sport and tourism. While these two sectors of our society and economy have different natures, values, and organizational structures, they offer tremendous partnering opportunities De Knop, P. (1990). Sports Tourism Sports tourism is a very significant element in world tourism and has

become a highly competitive niche tourism business. As profits and interest in the sport multiplies within the leisure industry, the inclination of people to indulge or to watch the show has grown.

Sports tourists can be distinguished by activity, demographically, by type of sport, and by their performance level (Sandhu, 1997). He/she can be either participants or spectators. Their age, gender, income and culture decide their participation level in sports tourism.

### **India Scenario**

Sports are an asset in the tourism industry, they generate economic upliftment through filled hotels, restaurants, and retail businesses. They attract high-yield visitors, especially repeaters. They harbour exposure and establish a positive image for your community. A new upshot is floated with a new tourist spot. It Builds community relationships and strengthens corporate support (IBEF, 2021). A new chance is created for the youth and a source of enjoyment is launched. Media is being used to extend the normal communications reach to the bottom level.

A holiday with friends or family to witness a mega sporting event is no longer a foreign concept for Indian travellers. Today, sporting enthusiasts in India are willing to spend to set across the world to experience the thrill and excitement of watching their favourite game live. Sports Tourism, has seen a revolution over the past years. A large number of agents and tour operators are introducing packages surrounding major sporting events. Sports as the travel industry is seeing 10-12 percent increase as Indians are showing more willingness to watch sports events.

Internationally sports the travel industry is a multi-billion dollar industry. As per data of international games the travel industry was worth USD 7 billion out of 2017. While it is a complete industry in foreign land, in India it is in its novel stages. The prime love of Indians is cricket and they even travel to watch the spectacle, regardless of whether in India or abroad.

They consider the event as an incentive to visit and explore the destination where in they indulge in shopping and other leisure activities. Tour operators are forming larger groups to make collective reservations so as to sell packages at low rates. Obviously, the outcome is that demand is higher for Indian matches. "Some of the travellers, especially from middle and high-end segments, are taking the tournament as an incentive to explore the country.

1. The country has been winning more medals at international events. This time India won 7 medals (1 Gold, 2 silver and 4 bronze) at the Tokyo Olympics 2020.
2. It is a major improvement in comparison to the last few decades when the country used to perform poorly at international levels.
3. It must also be acknowledged that government support for the sport has been increasing. The government has launched many initiatives for the promotion of the sports sector in India.
4. Private sector participation in the sport has seen a boom. Furthermore, the increase of private coaching institutes that are involved in the development of sport at different levels is helping to boost the facilities available to our sportspersons.

5. Business houses have come forward to motivate individual athletes with possibilities, showing a deep commitment that was lacking earlier.

## Research Objectives

To explore the theoretical dimension of sports tourism

To analyse the environment of sports tourism in India.

To suggest some measures to promote sports tourism in India

## Methodology

The study uses the secondary data to derive its conclusion from the various sources viz. newspapers, websites, research papers and journals available online and offline on the subject. The data have been analysed and tried to place in a unified framework in the present context of Indian sports tourism

## Analysis

The analysis of the secondary data revealed that there are various benefits of sports tourism in the national economy (UNWTO, 2017). A focus on sports tourism and sports events can bring various socio-economic benefits to the community (Brahimi, A.1997). Some of these benefits occurs concurrently with the event, but many of them are legacies and will prove valuable to the community in the following years. Some of the indicative benefits are as follows:

1. Helps in identification of the community's sport strengths and expanding the number and size of existing events.
2. **Alternative careers:** For those for whom opportunities are few, and jobs are scarce, sport becomes a powerful mobility device. Helps in generating more jobs Valuing volunteers, but working smarter to convert volunteer jobs into paid employment.
3. **Revenue generation:** Developing robust sports infrastructure in the country will allow India to host a greater number of international events. Such events highlight tourism in the country and eventually result in upgrading income and employment. Bring more money to the local economy while providing more leisure time to the family members and encouraged them to come with participants to 'stay an extra day'. Forward and backward linkages of the economy strengthened with companies that have an interest in the sports event.
4. Tourism-related revenue is normally the largest portion of the economic impact of an event viz. accommodation, food and beverage, and other expenditure by the sports tourist like admission fees, sponsorships, on-site sales for the sports events and broadcasting rights.
5. **Health advantages:** Sports induce an individual to keep his/her body in the best form for winning an event. The imbibed culture of a sports in turn induces the masses to have a healthy lifestyle.

6. **Tackling numerous societal problems:** Many women perceive sports as an opportunity to escape the confines of a highly regulated life. Social network strengthened at local level of the host cities through volunteering in sports. It keeps people connected that promoted good and healthy social life.
7. **Helps to get rid of Patriarchal Mindset:** They use it as a tool to show their potential and tackle the patriarchal mindset. Further success of sportspersons like Mary Kom, Saina Nehwal, etc. have played a major role in changing the phase of society.
8. Sport events offer ways of bringing people together from many different regions, and everyone learns from these experiences Sport tourism is “green” economic development, and offers opportunities to re-invigorate depressed parts of an urban area.
9. **Channelization of Youth energy:** India is having a very young population and is soon going to become the world’s youngest country. Promotes youth development, fitness habits, community and cultural celebration through links of cultures and sports at global level.
10. **Promotes the spirit of Unity in Diversity:** People cheer for the Indian athletes and Indian teams at international events. For instance, the Pan India support enjoyed by PV Sindhu enhances belongingness between India’s north and south. For instance the Pan India inculcated the spirit of brotherhood between India’s north and south.

## Challenges Before Sports Tourism Market

The main features of sports tourism market that affects its potential and demand are as follows:

**Integrity:** The integrity of the demand in sports tourism mostly refers to the completeness that sports tourists require from sports tourism products and services. Sports tourism is expected to provide complex products to the tourists in order to satisfy their manifold demands during the traveling.

**Sensitivity:** the sports tourism market is highly sensitive towards changes in the socio- political environment of a nation. The unstable society or political situation at the sports tourism destination affects demands of sports tourism drastically; doesn’t matter how less the prices of tour packages or products are, then there will be no big attraction to sports tourists.

**Highly Elastic:** It can be elaborated in two ways. On one hand, the sports tourism demand is higher based on the level of living conditions of the people. We can say that with the increase in income the demand for sports tourism goes up.

**Variability:** The mega events of sports at global or regional level alter the flow of the tourists of sightseeing sports tour to different destinations as the host cities shift. This causes variability in the demand of products of sports tourism. It indicates the imbalance distribution in the sightseeing of sports tourism along with the variation of the host nations, regions or cities of large-scaled sports matches.

**Seasonality:** Seasonality of the call in sports tourism means the imbalance of geographic condition. The seasonality of the sports assets is decided by the latitudes, geographic features and positions, and climates,

so the state or situation of sports performance swap with the season. The demands of sports tourism are restricted to particular season or time instead of being evenly distributed in each month in a year.

**Funding crunch:** Indian Government spends far less than China, the US, and other developed countries in international sports arena. This exerts athletes to spend privately on high quality equipment, training and travelling, thereby creating a very big burden on poor people.

**Resource Deficit:** There is a lack of good-quality sports setup available across the country. The government has developed some good stadiums in urban regions, but the situation is very poor in rural regions.

**Attitudinal Barriers:** Sports is not considered an attractive career option in our country. Parents encourage their children to become doctors and engineers rather than sportspeople. It means sports will spoil your life, but academics will give you a king's life.

**High-Performance Pressure:** A high degree of pressure is inflicted upon a sports person to perform or else be prepared to live a vulnerable life. This in turn induce mental stress in them or exert them to turn to unethical means like doping. For example, Indian wrestler Narsingh Yadav wasn't able to take part in the 2016 Rio Olympics due to doping fiasco.

**Male Biasedness:** The expenditure on sports is highly skewed in favour of male athletes and urban regions, in comparison to females and rural areas.

**Religious Barriers:** The tire of some sports like swimming and athletics do not permit women in some religions to take part in them.

**Lack of Sports Culture:** India lags in sports culture where people watch sports and encourage the same with enthusiasm.

## Steps taken by the Government for sports sector

**National Centre of Sports Sciences and Research (NCSSR):** It aims to bear high-level research, education, and new developments with respect to the good performance of esteemed athletes. The scheme has two components: One is setting up of NCSSR and the other is based on funding the development of Sports Sciences Departments in Six Universities and Sports Medicine Departments in Six Medical Colleges.

**Khelo India:** It is a national program that aims to develop grassroots-level talent by providing them with a national-level platform.

**Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS):** It aims to identify, groom and prepare potential medal prospects for the Olympic and Paralympic Games. Under this scheme, athletes and sportspersons will get specialised training from top coaches and institutions. In 2020, the government also launched a similar scheme to produce Olympic winners in 2028 which target children in the age group 10 – 12 years with the name Junior TOPS.

**National Sports Development Fund (NSDF):** It was established in November 1998 under the Charitable Endowments Act of 1890. It aims to promote sports and games in the country.

## FUTURE OF SPORTS TOURISM

India has a great future in sports tourism because of its diverse geographic and climatic conditions. You can enjoy on land and water, underwater and in the air whatsoever form of adventure sports in India. Low-cost regional airlines (and more affordable long-haul flights) are also in demand for sporting events as flights become more convenient and more affordable. However, sport event organizers and state tourism boards in India should be ready to invest in other metro cities like Mumbai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, and Kolkata. With growing interest among Indian sports lovers to indulge in different sports fields, and various NTO's across the world favouring tie-ups with Indian tour agencies, there is enough matter in India to emerge as a Sports Tourism hub and give a jump to overall tourism in the country. It only needs to be utilized efficiently in order to gain significant benefits.

### Suggestions

1. The Government should increase fund allocation to other sports and also ensure equitable allocation of funds across gender and regions.
2. It must offer deserving players more jobs and remuneration in order to encourage them to take sports as a career.
3. Further, Transparency must be brought in the selection procedure of office bearers of the association in order to reduce nepotism in the selection of candidates.
4. Apart from sportsperson, the focus should be placed on creating more coaches and physiotherapists. This in turn will help in increasing more coaches and physiotherapists and decrease our dependencies on foreign experts.

## CONCLUSION

Sports tourism can prove to be a prime force for world peace and for increasing universal brotherhood and harmony. Throughout the world, sport tourism can help in the development of a new international economic order that will help to diminish the widening economic gap between developed and developing sports tourism countries and help in the steady growth.

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