



Tourism in Amritsar: A Study of Its Impact on Local Economy

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ABSTRACT :

Punjab is one of the top tourist destinations in the country due to its rich culture and history, breathtaking pieces of architecture and delicious cuisine, which offers enormous opportunities for development of tourism in form of cultural, religious, eco-tourism, rural tourism, etc. Amritsar, considered as one of the holiest places in the country, is widely renowned for its stunning architecture and spiritual experiences. Amritsar accounts for more than half of total tourist footfall in the State. Heavy footfall of tourists has left its impact both positive and negative on city. The paper aims to study the various tourist attractions of Amritsar city and impact of heavy tourist footfall on tourists and residents of city.

Keywords: Tourists, footfall, heritage, Amritsar

INTRODUCTION :

Since the beginning of time, travel and tourism have been significant social activities for people. Since the beginning of time, man has been captivated by the idea of traveling to far-off lands. People used to travel from their homes mainly to meet their biological needs, go on pilgrimages to sites of worship, or flee oppression. Famine was one of the reasons they traveled. Due to a lack of adequate transportation facilities, safety measures, and comfort along the way, traveling in the past was challenging. But since then, a greater feeling of tolerance and quick scientific and technological advancements have changed things. More individuals travel for fun these days than to avoid starvation or religious persecution. For religious reasons, travel started to becoming somewhat organized. The emergence of roadside sarais, inns, and dharamshalas facilitated political visits, business travel, and knowledge-seeking expeditions. Industrialization and the rapid advancement of science and technology resulted in social and economic advancement. Travel was also encouraged by the expansion of education. Tourism grew astronomically as a result of significant advancements in the aviation sector and visitor amenities. Around 790 million tourists traveled abroad in the first seven months of 2024, an 11% increase over 2023, according to UN Tourism's most recent World Tourism Barometer. In addition to creating jobs, generating foreign cash, and improving living standards, tourism also helps people understand one another better. It is now one of the primary ways that many nations maintain their economies.

Tourism is concerned with pleasure, holidays and travel. These motivating factors make people leave their usual place of work and residence for short-term temporary visits to other places. Thus tourism is the act and process of spending time away from home in pursuit of recreation, relaxation, and pleasure while making use of the commercial provision of services

One of the earliest available definitions of tourism was provided by Hermann V. Schullard, an Austrian economist, as late as in 1910. He defined tourism as "the sum total of operators mainly of an economic nature, which directly relate to the entry, stay and movement of foreigners inside and outside a certain country, city or region".

Burkart and Medik provided yet another definition of tourism by saying: "Tourism denotes the temporary, short-term movement of people to destinations outside the place where they normally live and work including their activities during their stay at these destinations".

International Association of Scientific Experts in Tourism (AIEST). Professor Hunziker has described tourism as a "Total relationship" and pronounces as 'linked with stay of foreign persons to a locality, on the condition that they do not settle there to exercise a major permanent or temporary activity of a lucrative nature".

According to the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), tourism entails the movement of people to countries or places outside their usual environment for personal, business, or professional purposes. Tourism is the act and process of spending time away from home in pursuit of recreation, relaxation, and pleasure while making use of the commercial provision of services.

In Sanskrit literature, there are three terms for tourism with the suffix 'atana', meaning leaving home for some other place. These are:

- **Paryatana:** going out for pleasure and knowledge
- **Deshatana:** going out of the country primarily for economic gains
- **Tirthatana:** going out to places of religions merit.

Tourism in Punjab :

Punjab, which gets its name from the five full-bodied rivers that run across its expansive plains—the Sutlej, Beas, Ravi, Jhelum, and Chenab—is a symbol of plenty. One of India's smaller but more affluent states, it is situated on the country's northwest border and is inhabited by a vibrant, friendly, and dynamic populace. It is often regarded as the birthplace of civilization and is home to a diverse range of ethnic and religious groups. Sikhism, Buddhism, and Sufism are just a few of the religious systems that have originated and developed there. The Indo-European linguistic family, which also includes Latin and Persian, is where the Punjabi language originated. It is mostly an agricultural state that is naturally abundant in rich water supplies and fertile soils. It has made a continuous and incalculable contribution to the Indian Republic's food security.

The numerous festivals in Punjab, such as Baisakhi, Lohri, Basant, and Teej, are celebrations that reflect the agricultural culture. Bhangra, Punjab's traditional dance, does, in fact, center on and mimic the everyday activities of a farmer. Punjab has a rich, material legacy since it has historically been home to many different ethnic groups, such as the Aryans, Persians, Greeks, Afghans, and Mongols. Several locations around the state, including magnificent forts and palaces, historic monuments, architectural wonders, and several battlefields, reflect this history. In addition to creating jobs, generating foreign cash, and improving living standards, tourism also helps people understand one another better. It is now one of the primary ways that many nations maintain their economies.

Punjab is one of the top tourist destinations in the country due to its rich culture and history, breathtaking pieces of architecture and delicious cuisine, which offers enormous opportunities for development of tourism in form of cultural, religious, eco-tourism, rural tourism, etc. It has witnessed significant growth and contributed towards the State's value add. The development of infrastructure for tourists has enormous potential for income and employment generation. Punjab tourism has witnessed good expansion in the recent years with the overall tourist inflow in the State growing at an impressive rate of 29.5% between 2010 and 2018. The tourism sector is however, largely driven by domestic tourists (from within and outside the state). Around 445 lac domestic tourists and 12 lac foreign tourists visited the State in 2018 registering a growth rate of 10.7% and 8.3% respectively over the previous year. Punjab attained 7th position at the national level in terms of foreign tourist visits during 2018. In the year 2022, the domestic tourists arriving to the state of Punjab accounted for approximately 27 million, while the foreign tourist arrivals accounted for over 330 thousand.

Year-wise Tourist Visits in Punjab

Sr. No.	Year	Domestic	Foreign	Total
1	2015	2,57,96,361	2,42,367	2,60,38,728
2	2016	3,87,03,325	6,59,736	3,93,63,061
3	2017	4,02,93,352	11,08,635	4,14,01,987
4	2018	4,45,95,061	12,00,969	4,57,96,030
5	2019	4,73,85,387	11,01,343	4,84,86,730
6	2020	1,66,92,197	3,59,114	1,70,51,311
7	2021	2,66,40,432	3,08,135	2,96,48,567

Source: India Tourism Statistics, MoT, GoI

According to the State Tourism Policy, 2018, The Government's mission is to work relentlessly to double the annual tourist visits in the State from 25 million to 50 million in the next five years by creating new infrastructure and improving the existing one, particularly on site facilities such as access roads, parking lots, public toilets, food and beverage retail outlets, appropriate product development, promoting tourism through effective and efficient marketing and promotion campaigns, forging partnerships with private sector for investments in tourism-related projects, building linkages with travel and tourism trade, and development of appropriate human resources to provide quality services and facilities to tourists.

Amritsar Tourism :

Considered as one of the holiest places in the country, Amritsar is widely renowned for its stunning architecture and spiritual experiences. The city is also famous for its religious destinations and cultural heritage, national integrity of India, home to plenty of museums, forts, and bustling markets, must-visit street food destination and is a major commercial, cultural and transportation center. The history of Amritsar can be traced back to the 16th century, when the fourth Sikh guru, Guru Ram Das, founded the city as a spiritual center for the Sikh community. He constructed a large tank in the center of the city, which came to be known as the Amrit Sarovar (pool of nectar), from which the city derives its name.

In the 18th century, Amritsar came under the control of the powerful Sikh ruler, Maharaja Ranjit Singh, who transformed it into a major center of commerce, trade, and culture. Under his patronage, the city flourished, and several important monuments and buildings were constructed. During the British colonial era, Amritsar played a significant role in the Indian independence movement. After India gained independence in 1947, Amritsar became a part of the newly formed state of Punjab. The city has since grown into a major cultural and economic center, with a vibrant tourism industry and a thriving agricultural sector. Some of the major attractions of the city are as below:

Sachkhand Sri Harmandir Sahib Sri Darbar Sahib

Sachkhand Sri Harmandir Sahib Sri Darbar Sahib is the central religious place of the Sikhs. The Sikhs as well as people belonging to other religions also visit daily to pay their obeisance. The construction of Amrit Sarovar was commenced under the supervision of Sri Guru Ramdas Ji with the help of public(Sangat) . Fifth Guru, SriGuru Arjan Dev Ji established a central place of worship Sri Harmandir Sahib Sri Darbar Sahib in the middle of sacred Sarovar. The foundation stone of Sri Harmandir Sahib Sri Darbar Sahib was laid in 1645 Bikrami Samvat (1588 CE). The construction work was supervised by Sri Guru Arjan Dev Ji himself as well as assisted by the prominent Sikhs like Baba Budha Ji, Bhai Gurdas Ji, Bhai Sahlo Ji and many other devoted disciples. Sri Guru Arjan Dev Ji got built the four doors and made it accessible to every person without any distinction of caste, creed, sex and religion. He installed Adi Sri (Guru) Granth Sahib Ji on Bhadon Sudi 1st, 1661 Bikrami Samvat (August.1604 CE) at Sri Harmandir Sahib Sri Darbar Sahib and appointed Baba Budha Ji as its first Granthi.

Presently, lakhs of devotees visit daily to Sachkhand Sri Harmandir Sahib Sri Darbar Sahib and take holy bath in Amrit Sarovar. Sangat also listen to the blissful Kirtan that begins from Amrit Vela (Early dawn) till Sukhasan (Closing) of Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji. There is a multi-storied langar hall (community kitchen) which remains open for 24 hours where anybody can have meal in Pangat(rows) without any discrimination.

Durgiana Temple :

Built in the third decade of the 20th Century, the traditional Hindu temple is a well-known repository of Hindu scriptures. Its foundation stone was laid down by one of the greatest reformers and political leaders of resurgent India, Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya, laid.

Ram Tirath

Ram Tirath Temple Amritsar holds immense religious and historical significance in Hindu culture. Located in the ancient city of Amritsar, this temple is believed to be the birthplace of Lav and Kush, the twin sons of Lord Rama and Sita. The temple is deeply rooted in the epic Ramayana and is a revered pilgrimage site for devotees seeking spiritual solace and a connection to Hindu mythology. The temple is not only a place of worship but also a center for spiritual learning and meditation. The serene environment and the historical significance of the site provide a profound spiritual experience for visitors.

Wagah Border :

The international border between India and Pakistan- Wagah, an army outpost on Indo-Pak border – between Amritsar and Lahore, is an elaborate complex of buildings, roads and barriers on both sides. The daily highlight is the evening “Beating the Retreat” ceremony. Soldiers from both countries march in perfect drill, going through the steps of bringing down their respective national flags. As the sun goes down, nationalistic fervour rises and lights are switched on marking the end of the day amidst thunderous applause.

Jallian Wala Bagh :

The memorial at this site commemorates the 2000 Indians who were killed or wounded, shot indiscriminately by the British under the command of Gen Michael O’Dyer on April 13, 1919 while participating in a peaceful public meeting. This was one of the major incidents of India’s freedom struggle. The story of this appealing massacre is told in the Martyr’s Gallery at the site. A section of wall with bullet marks still visible is preserved along with the memorial well, in which some people jumped to escape.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh Museum :

At a distance of 1.5 km from Amritsar Junction and 4 km from Amritsar Golden Temple, Maharaja Ranjit Singh Museum is a popular museum situated in the middle of a beautiful Ram Bagh Garden in Amritsar, Punjab. It is one of the best museums in Punjab and also one of the top tourist attractions in Amritsar. The museum offers insights into the life of the Sikh monarch Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The Museum displays objects connecting to Maharaja Ranjit Singh such as arms and armour, outstanding paintings and century’s old coins and manuscripts. The paintings displayed in the galleries of the museum showcase the court and camp of the king. Among all the paintings, one that depicts the city of Lahore is most famous. Coins and manuscripts displayed at the museum reflect the spirit of secularism in the king and rich history of Sikh province, respectively. The arms and ammunition section of the Museum shows a rich collection of weapons, which were prevalent among the great warriors of that time. Next to this museum stands the beautiful Maharaja Ranjit Singh Panorama, an eternal visual record which encapsulates the life of the Maharaja.

Gobindgarh Fort :

The Gobindgarh Fort –the very symbol of Punjab, the iconic protector of Amritsar is situated right in the center of the holy city along the Grand Trunk Road spanning across 43 acres of land. This magnificent heritage site has a history of its own, spread across a period of over 300 years, right from the times of the Bhangi Misl-Maharaja Ranjit Singh-The East India Company-the Indian Army. This qilla has finally opened its gates for the very first to welcome not only the people of Punjab but also each one of those devotees and tourists that come here to pay their respects to Shri Harmandir Sahib. At

one time the world famous Kohinoor diamond was housed within the fort. The qilla is now being restored in a phased manner to hopefully revive it back to its past glory to the times of the Maharaja.

Pul Kanjari :

It is another heritage sight built by Maharaja Ranjit Singh ,situated near the villages of Daoka and Dhanoa Kalan right on the Wagha border. Pul Kanjari is about 35 kms both from Amritsar & Lahore. The Maharaja would often rest and leisure here in the baradari while passing by along with his royal troop and retinues.

Apart from these War memorial, sadda pind ,khalsa college Amritsar are also major attractions for tourists visiting Amritsar.

Amritsar accounts for more than half of total tourist footfall in the State. Table shows that number of tourists (both domestic and foreign) in Amritsar account for more than 50% of the total tourist inflow in the State. Inextricably linked with the history of Sikhism, Amritsar is revered for the Golden Temple. Among other tourist attractions, Jallianwala Bagh and Wagah border retreat ceremony are the prominent ones. Amritsar is also one of the 12 cities in India which have been included under HRIDAY scheme (Heritage City Development and Augmentation Yojana) with an objective to conserve the historic and cultural resources in the city.

Tourist footfall in Amritsar vis-a-vis Punjab

Year	No. of tourists in Amritsar	No. of tourists in Punjab	Amritsar's share in State's tourist footfall
2011	11096952	16567596	67%
2012	10072719	19119943	53%
2013	12058034	21544962	56%
2014	15368340	24526751	63%
2015	16924412	26038728	65%
2016	25462627	39363061	65%
2017	25978495	41401987	63%
2018	26935017	45796030	59%

Considering Amritsar as hub of tourism and developing it as wedding destination, the state government emphasized to develop it as wedding destination in '**Punjab Tourism Summit and Travel Mart 2023**' organised from September 11 to September 13,2023 .

The session was on promoting Amritsar as a comprehensive and holistic wedding destination, in addition to its current status as a hub for religious tourism. Vijay Arora, Founder of Touch Wood suggested utilizing the city's rich heritage, including historic buildings and havelis to attract a diverse range of tourists seeking unique wedding experiences.

Research Methodology:

Both primary and secondary sources were used to collect the data for the purpose of study. Interview (unstructured) method and observation method of data collection have been used on 150 respondents including 50 local residents, 50 tourists and 50 businessmen (shopkeepers, travel agents, hoteliers etc.) near tourists' spots of Amritsar.

Impact of tourism in Amritsar

Heavy footfall of tourists in a region leaves its impact both positive and negative on that particular region .Tourism is widely considered as one of the world's most important sources of socio-economic outcomes and employment. Well managed tourism can play a positive role in the socio, cultural, economical, environmental and political development of the region. On the contrary, unchecked and unplanned tourism development can lead to very negative impacts both on society and nature. But whether the impact of tourism is positive or negative depends on the perception of the residents that which side of coin they are looking at. From the given responses by respondents, following inferences are made:

Positive impacts

- The tourists as well as residents of Amritsar are happy with the initiatives of government of Punjab of opening up of new tourist spots because these sites have opened doors for them for recreation during the weekends. Many of these sites depict the culture of Punjab which is very helpful in teaching the children about the traditions of Punjab. Moreover family members get the opportunity to spend some quality time together.

- Infrastructural development in Amritsar is result of rise in tourist count in the city. Better parking facilities, construction of roads and flyovers, introduction of BRTS buses, e rickshaws are providing better quality of services to the residents of city. The city got total rupees 72.96 crores of funds upto 31st March 2019 under 'The National Heritage City Development and Augmentation Yojana' (HRIDAY), a central sector scheme which was launched on 21st January, 2015 and ended on 31st March, 2019. This scheme was aimed to preserve and revitalise heritage cities of India to reflect their unique character
- As Amritsar's tourism industry has grown, Punjabi cuisine has become more well-known worldwide. Amritsari kulcha, keema kulcha, paya, Amritsari Lassi, faluda kulfi, mutton tikka, and other dishes have gained international recognition, which has fueled the city's food industry's expansion.
- One of the main benefits of Amritsar's high tourism is the creation of jobs and money for a large number of people. An increase in tourists necessitates more lodging, dining options, and transportation. In order to accommodate their demands, city dwellers have opened a large number of hotels, eateries, and travel agencies to draw tourists, which has enabled them to generate employment for the city's unemployed youth. In addition to these hotels and travel agencies, tourism has raised the incomes of local hawkers, rickshaw pullers, auto rickshaws, and other enterprises.
- An economy's retail sector grows as a result of tourism. Every traveler wishes to preserve memories of the locations they have visited. Amritsar is famed for its Panjabi jutti, pappad wari (snack), shawls, Panjabi outfits, phulkari, and other products that tourists like to purchase. As tourism has increased, the government has enhanced the quality of its services by building more banks and ATMs, better infrastructure, better drainage systems, and better health facilities. The lives of the locals are now lot better than they were before all of this.

Negative impacts

- Exorbitant charges are charged by hotels and travel agencies to travelers, particularly those from other states or foreign countries. Commodity prices have gone up, particularly in the neighborhoods around the tourist attractions. Since tourists have more money and are at leisure, businesspeople know that they will purchase the product even if it costs more.
- One of the biggest issues the city has is traffic congestion, particularly during the festival season. The city is crowded with tourists, especially in the vicinity of the Golden Temple. It's great to locate parking there, however the neighborhood gets really crowded on weekends and during festivals..
- The increase in tourism has had a detrimental impact on the city's ecosystem. Due to the rise in traffic, trash at the bus stop, train station, and other locations, there is air and noise pollution everywhere, which has an impact on Amritsar's environment either directly or indirectly. .
- In addition to creating jobs, generating foreign cash, and improving living standards, tourism also helps people understand one another better. It is now one of the primary ways that many nations maintain their economies. .
- Language problem is very common problem due to which the business suffers. Residents have to speak English and Hindi to have a conversation with tourists due to which the local language of Punjab is losing its essence.

Conclusion :

In nutshell it is concluded that every coin has two sides. Tourism in Amritsar has made the city more attractive city of the world due to its scenic heritage and history. Food business, cloth business, footwear business (especially Panjabi jutti) has been flourishing due to more and more tourist footfall. Employment has been generated for the residents, but on the other side traffic congestion, rising prices of commodities especially near tourist spots are matter of great concern.

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