

RAM MANDIR A PLACE OF ECO- RELIGIOUS TOURISM IN AYODHYA: A COMPREHENSIVE STUDY

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Abstract

Nestled in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, Ayodhya has long been an important hub of religion and culture, best known for its connection to Lord Rama, one of the most important characters in Hindu mythology. For millions of Hindus worldwide, the building of the Ram Mandir (temple) in Ayodhya is of great historical, cultural, and religious significance. This study intends to investigate how the construction of the Ram Mandir has affected Ayodhya's tourism industry. This study examines the changes in visitor influx, infrastructure development, socio-economic issues, and cultural dynamics linked to the Ram Mandir's construction by utilizing both qualitative and quantitative approaches. It also looks at how growing tourism affects nearby companies, neighborhoods, and historical preservation initiatives.

Keywords: Ram Mandir, Ayodhya, tourism impact, religious infrastructure, socio-economic development

Introduction

Being the birthplace of Lord Rama, one of the most venerated deities in Hindu mythology, Ayodhya, which is located in the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, has great religious significance in Hinduism. The city's history goes back thousands of years, as evidenced by references in antiquated writings like the Ramayana, which tells the account of Lord Rama's life and exploits. Hindu legend states that the legendary King Dasharatha, the father of Lord Rama, governed the ancient kingdom of Kosala, with its capital in Ayodhya. Ayodhya is portrayed in the epic Ramayana as an affluent, peaceful city full of morality and goodness.

Given the contested nature of the ground where the 16th-century mosque Babri Masjid formerly stood, the idea of erecting a great temple at the birthplace of Lord Rama has been a cause of disagreement and controversy in recent times. In a historic decision rendered in 2019, the Indian Supreme Court approved the construction of a Ram Mandir at the contentious location and mandated the allotment of alternative land for the construction of a mosque. Following the Supreme Court's decision, the Ram Mandir project was launched with the goal of erecting a grand temple complex that would represent Hinduism and cultural legacy.

Careful planning, architectural design, and fundraising efforts were required for the building, with donations coming from donors and devotees all around the world, including India. As a reminder of Lord Rama's lasting influence, the Ram Mandir now acts as a hub for socioreligious dialogue, cultural exchange, and spiritual pilgrimages. It represents millions of people's religious beliefs as well as the tenacity of India's rich cultural legacy and the spirit of harmony in the face of diversity.

Beyond its financial advantages, tourism has significant cultural, religious, and social implications in Ayodhya. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath wants to make Ayodhya a popular travel destination, so he's launched the Divya Ayodhya app to make it easier for visitors and devotees to find their way around. The ambitious ambition of the Uttar Pradesh government is to turn Ayodhya into a Smart City by 2031, with initiatives estimated to cost Rs 30,500 crore.

Location

The Indian state of Uttar Pradesh is home to the city of Ayodhya. It is roughly 134 kilometers starting from Gorakhpur, 200 kilometers from the Varanasi, 170 kilometers from Prayag, and 136 kilometers from Lucknow. From Delhi, it is roughly 636 km. This city's center location, which is bordered by other well-liked tourist and pilgrimage sites, increases its allure to visitors. A vision document outlining the state government's plans to generate 4 lac direct and indirect jobs in Ayodhya has also been developed. It also includes an international museum, a tourism facilities center, and the 2,300-acre for Ramayana Spiritual Park.



Source: Ministry of Tourism, Govt. of India

The consecration ceremony took place on January 22, 2024, at the Ram temple. Nearly 25 lac disciples have visited the Ramnagari Ayodhya in the past 11 days, and according to the Rambhumi Trust since the temple was opened to the public, approximately Rs 11 cr. has been donated,. In the first 10 days from 23rd January 2024, nearly Rs 8 crore have been placed in the donation boxes, and approximately Rs 3.50 crore have been received online.

Jatayu Cruise

A pleasant cruise trip along the scenic Saryu River is now available in Ayodhya. Beginning on September 8, a private company has been given permission by the local government to run the "Jatayu" cruise service, which offers a distinctive voyage between Nayaghat and Guptarghat. This project will not only increase tourism but also provide residents and tourists with an excellent opportunity to discover Ayodhya's historical and natural splendour. To sum up, it's a fantastic addition to Ayodhya's attractions, guaranteeing everyone who travels there both leisure and cultural enrichment. Jatayu, which is themed around the Ramayana, has been painted to highlight some of the epic's most well-known scenes.

In reference to this, Vishal Singh, the Municipal Commissioner of Ayodhya, stated that every safety measure has been implemented to guarantee the well-being of the passengers enjoying the cruise. The company's managing director, Rahul Sharma, stated that a round-way ticket of INR 300 would be required. The excursion can accommodate up to 100 people and will take the tourists on a tour of the well-known ghats and temples in the city along the Saryu river. The first boat service in Ayodhya will be called "Jatayu," but a more luxurious cruise service called "Pushpak" will launch later this year. About 150 persons can be accommodated in Pushpak.



Source: Hindustan Times Newspaper

Water Metro

The state government has launched the Water Metro, an inventive project designed to improve the pilgrimage experience in Ayodhya. This innovative idea seeks to offer pilgrims and visitors a singular and peaceful experience while they explore the holy city. The introduction of Water Metro vessels by the state government infuses a sense of tranquillity into the customary pilgrimage experience. The purpose of the Water Metro service is to connect pilgrims with important sites along the river while providing smooth travel. By escaping the chaos of traditional transportation, devotees can visit well-known temples and other sacred sites with comfort thanks to this creative technique.



Source: Hindustan Times Newspaper

Legend and history abound along the banks of the Ayodhya, River, which come to life as you float along them. An immersive cultural experience is produced by the river's calm flow, the breathtaking scenery on either side, or the numerous holy places scattered around the area. Visitors now have an additional level of convenience when navigating Ayodhya's pilgrimage sites thanks to the deployment of Water Metro vessels. Travelers wishing to discover the city's cultural legacy, whether they are ardent pilgrims or just curious, the Water Metro offers an easy and fun way to get around. Beyond its usefulness, the Water Metro project demonstrates a dedication to protecting the ecological and natural beauty of Ayodhya.

In addition to guaranteeing a distinctive travel experience, the state government encourages sustainable tourism practices by selecting waterways as a mode of transportation. The Water Metro represents contemporary thinking and careful urban planning as Ayodhya develops into a major spiritual and cultural hub. Ayodhya is unique in that it combines innovation and tradition, providing a window into the pilgrimage experiences of the future.

E-Buses

In an effort to provide accommodations, pilgrims and visitors traveling to sites such as Ayodhya's shrines and Ram Janmabhoomi, the government has installed electric buses along the Dharma Path then Ram Path.



Electric Buses launched in Ayodhya by the Uttar Pradesh government.

E-Rickshaw

More electric vehicles will be used as Ayodhya gets closer to becoming a net-zero carbon emission city, which will improve the entire visitor experience and support environmental sustainability. To guarantee tourist transportation that is environmentally friendly, the government is implementing special measures, such as the implementation of electric automobiles.



Electric Vehicles in Ayodhya

Ram ki Paudi, the capital of the mythical "Ikshvaku" king of Kosala, is slated to be transformed into a solar city. A thorough action plan is currently being prepared on the subject by the Urban development Department, UP CM Yogi Adityanath, and the Non-Conventional Energy Development Agency (NEDA).

In addition to being a historically significant and sacred site, Ram Nagri will be transformed into an eco-friendly facade and a high-tech metropolis along the lines of "Smart City" initiatives now under way in the state.

Green building of Railway Station

The contemporary, three-story railway station building has all the amenities of today, with waiting zones, cloak rooms, stairways, food courts, shops for puja materials, plus lifts. Station structure will be "green station building certified by IGBC" and "accessible for all." Station of Ayodhya Dham railway Covering an area of 11,000 square meters, the station's central dome draws inspiration from the 'mukut' (crown) of Lord Ram. The sun is symbolized by the 'chakra' behind the 'mukut'. Moreover, the two-story building's two "shikhars" are modeled after the Janaki temple. Seven "mandapas" separate the "shikhar."

The design combines contemporary solutions with a dash of Indian temple building beauty. Because of its layout, the train station will use very little electricity during the day because there is an abundance of natural light. We have included rainwater collection as a way to increase water efficiency. The designers of the Ayodhya Dham Station green building have applied for a GRIHA three-star designation. Water that is delivered to a sewage treatment plant can be recovered for use in gardening. Various express trains, including the Vande Bharat and Amrit Bharat Express, arrive and depart at this station from various locations around the nation.

The train station is currently undergoing its second phase of expansion, which involves covering three platforms with a concourse and designing the ceiling to resemble lotus petals. Two extra platforms will eventually be built, together with a new terminal, in the station's southern section. The station can

accommodate more than one lakh passengers with the addition of a spacious waiting room and pilgrim parking at the terminal. There will be direct communication between the southern terminuses and NH27



Ayodhya Dham Railway Station

Airport

Maharishi Valmiki International Airport's infrastructure is a testament to its commitment to sustainability. Prominent examples of sustainable features include solar power plants, insulated roofing, LED lighting, sewage treatment plants, fountains, rainwater collection, and other eco-friendly elements.



Maharishi Valmiki International Airport Ayodhya

Surya Stambh

A popular tourist destination and site of pilgrimage is the Surya Stambh. Hindu customs hold that the Sun is a god that grants life. As a result, the Indian subcontinent has a large number of stambhs, or pillars, erected in its temples. The pillars represent strength and are revered by the followers. As Lord Ram was a Suryavanshi, Ayodhya has a particular relationship with the Sun. These emblems represent the splendour of the Sun, and pilgrims visiting the city will experience a sense of reverence for Lord Surya. After winning wars, rulers would erect "Vijay Stambhs" to symbolize their supremacy. Ayodhya is being constructed as a Sun City in addition to Surya Stambh.



Source: TOI newspaper Surya Stambh

Impact of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya's Economy.

It is projected that the Ram temple will welcome over 100 million tourists each year. The current spike in tourism indicates that Ayodhya has the potential to become a significant religious destination and a hub for spiritual seekers. Despite COVID-19 difficulties, India's tourist industry is predicted to rise from \$194 billion in FY19 to \$443 billion by FY33, making it a significant contribution to the country's GDP. Despite infrastructure issues, religious tourism plays a vital role, bringing millions of visitors.

With a new airport, an enlarged railway station, and a projected Greenfield township, Ayodhya's tourism is growing. The economy will gain from this development as it is expected to stimulate a number of industries, including cement, hotels, airlines, hospitality, FMCG, and tourism.

The financial assistance given by the Gov. India to holy places, such as Ayodhya, is likely to increase tourism overall. At now, tourism brings in \$200 billion (or 7% of India's GDP), and these figures are anticipated to rise with this support. The price of shares of Allied Digital Services increased by more than 41% between October 2023 and January 2024. Following the company's successful bid for the Ayodhya Smart City Project, which coincided with the impending Ram Mandir event, the rally got underway. India's Thomas Cook Following a 35% rise in share values as of October, Thomas Cook of India took advantage of the occasion by providing inexpensive Ayodhya trip packages prior to the consecration ceremony.

Easy Trip Planners early in announcing travel packages for Ayodhya, Easy Trip Planners witnessed a share price rally of over 20% since October 2023. Inter Globe Aviation with an increase in holdings in IndiGo Airlines and the announcement of commercial flights to Ayodhya, Inter Globe Aviation experienced a stock spike of over 27%.

Conclusion

Ayodhya is becoming into one of the top tourist attractions in the nation thanks to the building of a new train station, a contemporary international airport, and well-connected large roadways. Ayodhya's tourism industry contributes to the city's social, cultural, religious, and economic fabric in a variety of ways. Through the sustainable and inclusive exploitation of tourism, Ayodhya may effectively leverage its distinctive heritage and spiritual inheritance to foster prosperity, harmony, and cross-cultural interchange for future generations.

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