

## IMPACT OF PILGRIM TOURISM AT JAMMU AND KASHMIR

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### ABSTRACT

The growth of pilgrimage tourism in India has been astonishingly impressive. India is blessed with plenty of well-known religious destinations. Pilgrimages to these destinations bring enormous economic gains to local residents. In recent years, Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine has become very popular destination among pilgrims. Pilgrimage Tourism to Vaishno Devi Shrine constitutes an important component of total tourism in Jammu and Kashmir and has contributed effectively to the growth and development of the place.

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## INTRODUCTION

India is a vast country, peopled with diverse and ancient civilizations, and its religious geography is highly complex. Over 80% of India's population practices Hinduism, the ancient indigenous religion of India which has a wide variety of forms and expressions. Muslims, concentrated mainly in north India, constitute about 10% of the Indian population. Other significant religious groups in India include Sikhs, Jains, and Christians. Buddhism is almost extinct in the land of its birth, but many exiled Tibetan Buddhists now make their home in India, including His Holiness the Dalai Lama. India's famed spirituality has made it a popular destination for spiritually-inclined travelers. The process of racial and cultural mixture that began in India 5000-10,000 years ago has been continuous into historical times. Although isolated from the rest of Asia by oceans on three sides and impassable mountain ranges to the north, India has experienced a near-constant influx of differing cultural influences, coming by way of the northwest and the southeast..

The practice of pilgrimage in India is so deeply embedded in the cultural psyche and the number of pilgrimage sites is so large that the entire subcontinent may actually be regarded as one grand and continuous sacred space. Following the Vedic period the practice of pilgrimage seems to have become quite common, as is evident from sections of the great epic, the Mahabharata (350 BC), which mentions more than 300 sacred sites spanning the sub-continent. Hindus call the sacred places to which they travel tirthas, and the action of going on a pilgrimage tirtha-yatra. The Sanskrit word tirtha means river ford, steps to a river, or place of pilgrimage. In India all temples are considered sacred places and thus religious visitors to the temples may be described as pilgrims. For the purpose of our discussion, however, for a temple to be considered a true pilgrimage shrine it must have a long-term history of attracting pilgrims from a geographic area beyond its immediate region. Given this condition, the number of pilgrimage sites in India is still extremely large.

The primary intention of a pilgrim's visit to a holy site is to receive the darshan of the deity resident in the temple's inner sanctum or open-air shrine. The word darshan, difficult to translate into English, generally means the pilgrim having a sight and/or experience of the deity.

### **Some Religious sites of India:**

Dwarka; Krishna temple of Dwarkadhish

Somnath; Shiva Jyotir linga temple

Ujjain; Mahakaleswar Jyotir linga Shiva temple

Sanchi; Buddhist stupa

Ajanta caves; 29 Buddhist, Hindu, Jain sacred caves

Ellora; Buddhist, Hindu, Jain caves and Grineshwar Jyotir linga

Mt. Abu; Jain temples

Pushkar; Brahma temple,

Ajmer; Shrine of Mu'in al-din Chishti

Amritsar; Hari Mandir

Govindval; Sikh temple  
Anandpur Sahib Sikh temple  
Vaishno Devi; cave of Kali, Lakshmi and Saraswati  
Amarnath; Shiva cave  
Leh; Buddhist monasteries  
Kurukshetra; Brahma Sarovara  
Rishikesh; Laksman Jhula, Neela Kantha Mahadeva temple  
Haridwar; Hari-ki-Pairi Ghat, numerous temples  
Badrinath; Badrinath temple and nearby five Badri temples  
Kedarnath; Jyotir Linga Shiva temple  
Yamnotri; source of holy Yamuna river  
Gangotri; Goddess Ganga temple  
Vrindavan; numerous beautiful Krishna temple  
Varanasi / Banaras; numerous temples, ghats and pilgrimage circuits  
Kushinagar; Holy site where Buddha passed away  
Gaya; Vishnupada temple  
Parsanath; Jain temple

Pilgrimage tourism constituent an important component of the total tourism in the country. It has a vast potential during the present financial crises. More people are expected to visit more secret places. The despair and disappointment due to the economic crises generally motivates a person towards the supreme power for the hope of miracle. The motive for the pilgrimage involve a solution for a problem. People in India go for seeking divine help for the solution of their worldly problems. Generally people go to the deity for a sukhana, which involves a commitment or vow to the deity.

The Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine is one among the most popular religious shrines of India. . Located in the Himalayas in the state of Jammu & Kashmir at 5,000 feet above sea-level, it has a staff of 2,300 assisted by the Central Reserve Police and Jammu & Kashmir Police. The number of pilgrims visiting this holy shrine is increasing continuously. But the numbers have increased since September 2008 onwards. The shrine is operational 365 days 24 hours per day. On an average day, the shrine has approximately 25-30,000 visitors and on festive days, weekends and holidays, the number rises to 45-50,000 per day.

Figure No. 1 Guide Map of Vaishno Devi Shrine from Katra (The Base Camp)



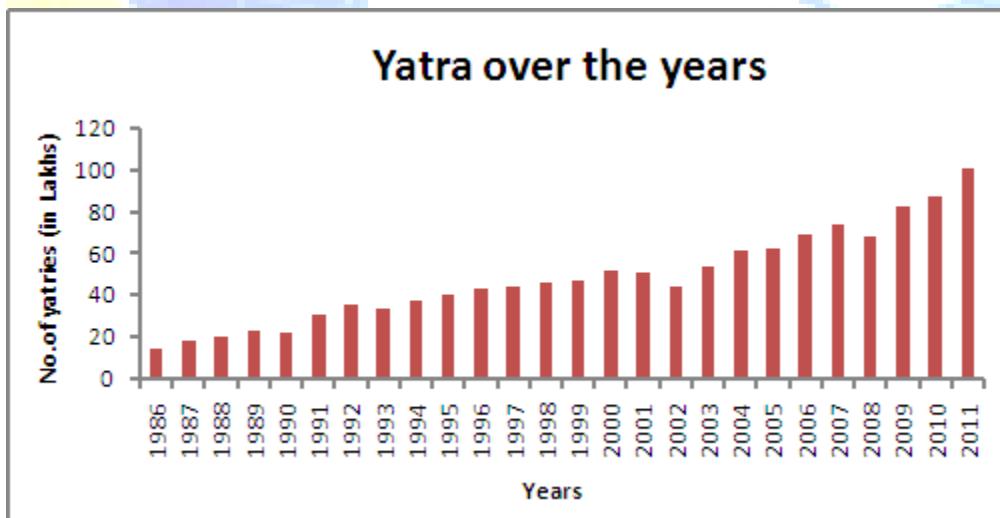
Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine is attracting nearly 07 million pilgrims every year with a roughly annual increase of 10-12% pilgrims at a daily average of 18,000 to 19,000 pilgrims every day .The arrivals of tourists are shown in Table:

Table No – 1  
Tourists Arrivals in Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine

S. No.	Year	No. of Yatries (In Lakhs)
1	1986	13.96
2	1987	18.58
3	1988	19.92
4	1989	23.12
5	1990	21.69
6	1991	31.15
7	1992	35.16
8	1993	33.69
9	1994	37.05
10	1995	40.11
11	1996	43.35
12	1997	44.34
13	1998	46.22

14	1999	52.17
15	2000	52.17
16	2001	50.57
17	2002	44.32
18	2003	54.00
19	2004	61.00
20	2005	62.52
21	2006	69.50
22	2007	74.17
23	2008	67.92
24	2009	82.35
25	2010	87.49
26	2011	101.15

Source: Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board,



## **Economic Impacts of Tourism on Jammu & Kashmir with reference to Mata Vaishno Devi:**

### **Hotel Industry (Income and Employment generation)**

The hotel industry has been defined for the present purpose in a broader sense so as to include all types of accommodation- Be it star hotels or lodges or Guest Houses or Dharamshalas. All such accommodations generate employment and income to the people of Katra along with other parts of the state, particularly Jammu and Srinagardistricts which are visited by a large number of pilgrims.

### **Income and Employment generation from Transport sector:**

Increased inflow of pilgrims in Katra for the holy darshan has raised demand on transport services. Pilgrims coming from various parts of the country and arriving at Jammu recourse to road transport to reach at the base camp, Katra due to non-availability of rail transport between twin cities. i.e, Jammu and Katra. The preferred means of road transportation are buses, mini buses, taxis and sometimes a chartered helicopter from Jammu.

### **Employment to Pithoos and Ponywallas :**

Pithoos render labour services to the pilgrims by carrying their luggage during the journey to the Shrine and back. The Ponywallas, with the help of ponies cater pilgrims by carrying them along the difficult Trikuta hills to reach Bhawan of Mata Vaishno Devi. More than 8000 Pithoos are earning their livelihood due to Mata Vaishno Devi shrine. It is found that average monthly income of a Pithoo is Rs. 7863.

### **Ovarall Development :**

Commercial establishments that have grown considerably with the increase in demand by ever increasing inflow of pilgrims in Katra, contribute a lot to the development of the economy of Katra. These establishments create employment opportunities, absorb surplus labour in the locality, promote household industries, help in generating income, create and expand employment avenues. These establishments operating in and across Katra range from individual service providers to factory owners, shop-keepers, barbers, washer men, tour operators & travel agents, restaurants and eateries (Dhabas)etc. The projection of the total estimated revenue generation of these establishments with an annual turnover growth rate of 4.4% for the years 2006-2010 is shown below in the table :

Year	Annual Turnover (Rs. [In Crores])
2006	296.14
2007	309.17
2008	322.77
2009	336.97
2010	351.79

Source: study of S.K.Gupta,RajeshRaina

### Development of Infrastructure:

Beside economic activity, Infrastructure has been developed manifolds in Katra that accrued monetary benefits to the locals and the region. Entire 15 kms stretch connecting Katra to National Highway NH1A from Domel has been widened to ensure better road network and make the journey more convenient and easy. Hotel Industry has also been flourished with mass tourist movement at the destination that led to the genesis of state of the art accommodation units with al modern amenities viz. The White Orchid, K.C. residency, Devi Grand, Country Inn & suites et al. Air-connectivity to the region (Jammu) has been improved thanks to the operations of almost all the air-carriers like Indian, jet airways, Air-Deccan ( Now Kings fisher), Spice jet etc. Further, Train frequency to the region has also been increased with introduction of a number of new trains and their extension up to Udhampur. All these ventures have directly or indirectly brought economic benefits to the region by way of employment opportunities for the locals as well as the development of the infrastructure in the region. Water supply since long was considered to be the grey area in Katra town but now due to mass development and tourist inflow, the problem is solved. Following the massive improvement and development in the area, a number of Schools has been opened and upgraded in the area. Katra, now houses a degree college of education and a technical university that is imparting quality education to the masses. Earlier, there was only one small dispensary / Primary health centre in Katra with little infrastructure. In order to provide medical services to patients and tourists at an affordable price, a multi-specialty Hospital is being constructed at Karkayal area. Therefore, it is needless to say that the mass tourism in foothills of Trikuta mountain peaks has brought numerous economic benefits and led to all out development in the area under reference i.e. Katra in particular and Jammu region.

### Negative Economic Impacts of Tourism

There are many hidden costs to tourism, which can have unfavorable economic effects on the host community. The less developed region have the most urgent need for income, employment and general rise of the standard of living by means of

tourism, but they are not able to realize these benefits fully,. Among the reasons for this are large-scale transfer of tourism revenues out of the host country and exclusion of local businesses and products.

### **Leakage:**

The direct income for an area is the amount of tourist expenditure that remains locally after taxes, profits, and wages are paid outside the area and after imports are purchased; these subtracted amounts are called leakage. In most all-inclusive package tours, about 80% of travelers' expenditures go to the airlines, hotels and other international companies (who often have their headquarters in the travelers' home city), and not to local businesses or workers. They are the ones that possess the necessary capital to invest in the construction of tourism infrastructure and facilities.

### **Increase in Prices and Infrastructure cost:**

Increasing demand for basic services and goods from tourists will often cause price hikes that negatively affect local residents whose income does not increase proportionately. Being a Tourist place, rates of commodities of daily use are substantially high thus making it difficult for the local population to meet their ends. This gap between the demand and supply has substantially increased prices thus making it difficult for the host population. Tourism development and the related rise in real estate demand may dramatically increase building costs and land values.

### **Economic dependence of the local community on Tourism:**

Diversification in an economy is a sign of healthy economy. However if a region becomes dependent for its economic survival upon one industry, it can put major stress upon this industry as well as the people involved to perform well. In Katra, for instance, 60% of the workforce depends directly or indirectly on tourism.

### **CONCLUSION**

It is now very much clear that there is significant direct contribution of the Shrine related tourism on the economy of Katra as well as Jammu & Kashmir. But it is very necessary, however, to develop and implement policies that take advantage of the potential benefits of pilgrimage tourism in socio-economic development. In some cases, this is simply a matter of increasing awareness so that the joint benefits to pilgrimage tourists and local communities can be —factored-in at the planning stage. In other cases it may involve reducing leakages (or retaining pilgrimage tourist spending). In yet other cases —affirmative action may need to be taken to capture the benefits. But in any event, there is a strong case for considering pilgrimage tourism as an important sector in socio-economic development.



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