

# PrepAlpine

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## GS Paper II: Current Affairs

### 1. Tourism in India: From Potential to Performance

#### a. Introduction

Tourism is among the largest employment-generating sectors in the global economy and a powerful driver of service-led growth. For developing economies, it offers a unique pathway to generate jobs, earn foreign exchange, and stimulate regional development with relatively low capital intensity.

India, endowed with exceptional civilisational depth, geographical diversity, climatic variety, and cultural richness, possesses one of the strongest tourism potentials in the world. From ancient heritage cities and spiritual centres to beaches, deserts, mountains, and wellness traditions, India offers a tourism spectrum unmatched by most countries.

Yet, despite these natural and cultural advantages, India continues to underperform compared to both global and regional peers. Countries far smaller in size and resource base attract more foreign tourists and earn significantly higher tourism revenues. This persistent gap between potential and performance reveals that tourism in India has not been treated as a strategic economic sector, but largely as a supplementary or leisure-oriented activity.

Reimagining tourism as a core pillar of employment, inclusive growth, and national image-building is therefore essential.

#### b. Why Tourism Matters for India

Tourism occupies a distinctive position in India's development strategy due to several structural advantages.

##### i. High Employment Elasticity

Tourism generates more jobs per unit of investment than manufacturing or capital-intensive industries.

- Direct employment is created in hotels, transport, travel agencies, and guiding services.
- Indirect employment emerges in handicrafts, food supply chains, construction, and local services.

This makes tourism especially valuable in a labour-abundant economy like India.

##### ii. Driver of Inclusive Growth

Tourism absorbs unskilled and semi-skilled labour, particularly women and youth, who often face barriers to entry in formal employment. Homestays, local guiding, handicrafts, and food services allow communities to participate directly in economic activity.

##### iii. Balanced Regional Development



Unlike manufacturing, which clusters around industrial corridors, tourism can stimulate growth in rural, coastal, tribal, desert, hill, and border regions that are otherwise bypassed by mainstream development.

#### **iv. Instrument of Soft Power**

Tourism strengthens people-to-people connections and enhances India's global image. Positive tourist experiences reinforce cultural diplomacy and long-term goodwill.

In an era where automation steadily reduces industrial employment opportunities, tourism emerges as a future-oriented solution to India's employment challenge.

#### **c. India's Tourism Paradox**

India simultaneously qualifies as a budget destination, a luxury destination, and a spiritual-cultural destination. It offers Himalayan trekking and tropical beaches alongside ancient temples, heritage cities, and globally recognised wellness traditions.

Despite this, India attracts fewer foreign tourists and earns lower tourism revenues than countries such as Thailand or Singapore, which lack India's civilisational scale or diversity. This contradiction constitutes India's tourism paradox.

At the core of this paradox lie three deep-rooted structural weaknesses—often described as the three “I” deficits: Image, Infrastructure, and Experience.

#### **d. The Three Core Challenges**

##### **i. Image Deficit**

India's global tourism image is shaped less by its heritage and more by concerns related to safety, sanitation, and predictability.

- Issues such as women's safety, tourist scams, harassment by touts, poor cleanliness, and bureaucratic hurdles frequently dominate international perceptions.
- Branding campaigns alone cannot offset negative lived experiences. For tourists, trust, dignity, and ease of movement matter more than promotional narratives.

Unless ground-level concerns are addressed, image-building exercises remain superficial and short-lived.

##### **ii. Infrastructure Deficit**

Tourism infrastructure extends far beyond airports, highways, and hotels.

- It includes last-mile connectivity, clean public toilets, multilingual signage, well-maintained monuments, and modern, interactive museums.
- Fragmentation between urban planning, heritage conservation, and tourism development often disrupts experience continuity.

A world-class airport loses value if approach roads are chaotic or basic civic amenities are missing.

##### **iii. Experience Deficit**

India's scale and intensity can overwhelm visitors.

- Overcrowding, excessive noise, inconsistent service quality, and lack of trained multilingual staff dilute the tourism experience.
- Hospitality work is often viewed as a fallback occupation rather than a respected profession, resulting in weak service culture and accountability.

In contrast, successful tourism economies treat hospitality as a skilled career backed by training, certification, and progression.

## **e. Institutional and Policy Constraints**

Several governance-level bottlenecks continue to constrain tourism performance.

### **i. Hospitality Workforce Gap**

India faces a significant shortage of trained hospitality personnel, estimated at nearly forty percent.

- Although hospitality institutes exist, skilled graduates often migrate to office-based jobs due to better working conditions and career predictability.
- This results in persistent service quality gaps.

### **ii. Taxation and GST Issues**

Denial of full input tax credit under the GST regime has reduced hotel profitability and discouraged reinvestment. Paradoxically, many hotels were financially more viable under earlier tax structures.

### **iii. Visa and Immigration Constraints**

Visa and immigration procedures remain complex compared to competing destinations.

- Immigration is often approached purely through a security lens.
- Unfriendly first-contact experiences can permanently damage tourist perceptions.

## **f. International Best Practices**

Global examples highlight key governance principles.

- Thailand emphasises tourist police, safety messaging, and ease of travel.
- Singapore focuses on seamless experiences and zero tolerance for harassment or disorder.
- New Zealand prioritises sustainability by regulating tourist footfalls in fragile ecosystems.

India need not replicate these models mechanically, but can adapt their core principles.

## **g. Strategic Reform Framework**

### **i. Segmented Tourism Branding**

India must move away from a single generic narrative to multiple clearly defined identities.

- Spiritual, adventure, wellness, luxury, and heritage tourism should follow distinct strategies.
- Thematic circuits—such as the Buddhist Circuit, Ramayana Circuit, Himalayan belt, and coastal routes—can structure tourist flows.

### **ii. Infrastructure as Experience**

Tourism infrastructure must be designed around experience rather than isolated assets.

- A nationwide clean tourism campaign focusing on sanitation, waste management, signage, and digital facilities is essential.
- Digitisation of museums and public-private partnerships under schemes like *Adopt a Heritage* can enhance quality.

### **iii. Safety and Skill Development**

Safety must be visible, credible, and immediate.

- Expansion of tourist police, including women personnel, and strict action against harassment and scams is critical.
- Skill programmes should focus on local communities, homestays, eco-lodges, and artisans, converting tourism into dignified livelihoods.

#### **iv. Visa and Immigration Reform**

Visa regimes must prioritise ease and predictability.

- Faster e-visa processing, long-term multi-entry visas for low-risk countries, and cultural sensitisation of immigration staff are needed.
- The approach should shift gradually from exclusionary control to confidence-based openness without compromising security.

#### **v. Sustainability and Authenticity**

Unregulated mass tourism can damage ecosystems and cultural sites.

- Regulating footfalls, promoting community-based tourism, and protecting local traditions are essential.
- Tourism must enrich destinations economically and culturally rather than exhaust them.

#### **h. Way Forward**

Tourism must be formally recognised as a priority sector aligned with employment generation and skilling strategies.

- Rationalisation of the tax regime and stronger Centre–State coordination are essential.
- Tourism planning must be integrated with urban governance and local infrastructure development.

Above all, safety, dignity, and ease must be embedded as foundational principles of tourism policy.

India does not require reinvention—it requires refinement, professionalism, and trust-building.

#### **Conclusion**

India possesses the historical depth of Egypt, the natural diversity of New Zealand, and a cultural spectrum unmatched by any single country. However, unless structural deficits in image, infrastructure, and experience are addressed, tourism will continue to fall short of its promise.

Transforming tourism is not merely an economic choice. It is a strategic imperative for employment generation, inclusive growth, social stability, and India's global credibility.

## Reader's Note — About This Current Affairs Compilation

Dear Aspirant,

This document is part of the PrepAlpine Current Affairs Series — designed to bring clarity, structure, and precision to your daily UPSC learning.

While every effort has been made to balance depth with brevity, please keep the following in mind:

### 1. Orientation & Purpose

This compilation is curated primarily from the UPSC Mains perspective — with emphasis on conceptual clarity, analytical depth, and interlinkages across GS papers.

However, the PrepAlpine team is simultaneously developing a dedicated Prelims-focused Current Affairs Series, designed for:

- factual coverage
- data recall
- Prelims-style MCQs
- objective pattern analysis

This Prelims Edition will be released separately as a standalone publication.

### 2. Content Length

Some sections may feel shorter or longer depending on topic relevance and news density. To fit your personal preference, you may freely resize or summarize sections using any LLM tool (ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude, etc.) at your convenience.

### 3. Format Flexibility

The formatting combines:

- paragraphs
- lists
- tables
- visual cues

—all optimised for retention.

If you prefer a specific style (lists → paras, paras → tables, etc.), feel free to convert using any free LLM.

### 4. Monthly Current Affairs Release

The complete Monthly Current Affairs Module will be released soon, optimized to a compact 100–150 pages — comprehensive yet concise, exam-ready, and revision-efficient.

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