

# Optimizing Indian Tourism and Cultural Heritage: Bridging Policy Gaps through Integrated Governance, Agrotourism, and Regenerative Development

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## Abstract

India's unparalleled wealth of cultural, natural, and intangible heritage positions tourism as a transformative driver of inclusive economic growth, rural development, and international engagement. Despite contributing significantly to GDP and livelihoods, the sector remains under-optimized due to fragmented governance, limited community participation, and gaps in the implementation of sustainability. This study critically examines the evolution of India's tourism and cultural heritage policies (2020–2025), evaluates agrotourism initiatives, and benchmarks international governance models from Spain, Bhutan, and Japan. Employing a mixed-methods approach that combines GIS-based site evaluation, stakeholder consultations, and comparative case studies, the research identifies six systemic policy gaps: fragmented governance, inadequate local ownership, weak formal recognition of agrotourism, commercialization of heritage without sufficient safeguards, poor integration of regenerative practices, and insufficient monitoring systems. The paper proposes a multi-pronged strategy, including establishing regional Destination Management Organizations (DMOs), mainstreaming agrotourism into national frameworks, reforming Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs), launching a National Regenerative Tourism Mission, co-creating thematic circuits, and developing tourism data dashboards. Findings underscore the need for a shift from volume-driven growth to a multidimensional, community-anchored, and ecologically grounded tourism model that balances economic objectives with cultural integrity and environmental resilience.

**Keywords:** Sustainable Tourism; Cultural Heritage Management; Regenerative Tourism; Agrotourism Development; Tourism Policy Implementation; Inclusive Tourism Planning

## 1. Introduction

Tourism in India serves a dual role as a powerful economic engine contributing nearly 9% to GDP and supporting over 85 million jobs, and as a custodian of the nation's cultural identity. Beyond its economic footprint, the sector sustains traditional artisans, preserves heritage practices, and fosters pride in local culture. India's tourism landscape is remarkably diverse, encompassing heritage circuits, ecotourism zones, rural craft clusters, spiritual destinations, and adventure tourism hubs (Ashish Kumar & E. Venkatesham, 2024). With 44 UNESCO World Heritage Sites, hundreds of historic monuments, and

vibrant living traditions, the sector has the capacity to engage both domestic and international visitors year-round.

Yet, despite this diversity, systemic challenges persist. Policy fragmentation, inadequate infrastructure, limited community participation, and weak integration of sustainability principles constrain the sector's growth. (Prajapati & Ruhil, n.d.) Many heritage-rich or ecologically sensitive sites remain under-promoted due to poor connectivity, lack of coordinated governance, and insufficient investment in local capacity building. Over-reliance on a few iconic attractions, such as the Taj Mahal or Jaipur's Amber Fort, has led to overcrowding, while equally significant but lesser-known destinations remain underdeveloped.

The purpose of this research is twofold:

1. To identify high-potential but underutilized tourism sites, including heritage towns, rural/village clusters, ecotourism reserves, and agrotourism hubs, using a data-driven evaluation model.
2. To propose actionable policy recommendations that bridge the gap between strategic vision and on-ground execution, ensuring tourism development remains sustainable, inclusive, and culturally authentic.

This study adopts a national scope, with particular attention to regions of high cultural value, including those with Geographical Indication (GI) recognition for crafts, cuisine, or agricultural products (Singh et al., 2025). By integrating geospatial data analysis with stakeholder insights, it provides policymakers with a practical framework for prioritizing investment, enhancing visitor experiences, and ensuring community benefits.

Cleanliness and hygiene are critical determinants of visitor satisfaction and the global image of Indian tourism. While the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) has improved sanitation coverage and public awareness, its potential to transform tourist destinations remains underutilized. Many high-footfall sites, from heritage monuments to pilgrimage ghats, still suffer from waste mismanagement, inadequate public toilets, and inconsistent upkeep. This research argues that integrating SBM objectives with tourism development through site-specific cleanliness standards, dedicated maintenance budgets, and community-based waste management can significantly enhance the visitor experience, protect heritage assets, and reinforce India's commitment to sustainable, world-class tourism.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Evolution of Indian Tourism Policy

Indian tourism policy has shifted from a primarily revenue-driven model to one that incorporates sustainability, cultural preservation, and inclusive development. The Draft National Tourism Policy (2022) highlights integrated planning, community engagement, and digital transformation, with alignment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, policy audits (Wani & Nagaraj, 2020) show persistent gaps in cross-sector coordination, enforcement, and environmental management. Cleanliness and sanitation, while addressed under initiatives such as the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM), remain insufficiently embedded in tourism policy frameworks. The 2015 "Swachh Paryatan" initiative by the Ministry of Tourism identified 25 heritage sites for cleanliness drives, yet evaluations indicate inconsistent execution and lack of sustained local involvement.

**Table 1.1: Evolution of Indian Tourism Policy**

| Key Points | Title                                     | Objectives                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|------------|-------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1982       | <b>National Tourism Policy 1982</b>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote sustainable tourism as a driver for economic growth and social integration.</li> <li>• Shape India's image globally.</li> <li>• Core framework areas (6-Ss): Swagat (Welcome), Suchana (Information), Suvidha (Facilitation), Suraksha (Safety), Sahyog (Cooperation), Samrachana (Infrastructure).</li> <li>• Other objectives: Conservation of cultural heritage and natural environment; Development and promotion of tourist products.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| 2002       | <b>National Tourism Policy 2002</b>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Position tourism as a core engine of economic growth.</li> <li>• Blend government backing with private-sector dynamism and community welfare goals.</li> <li>• Focus Areas: Develop integrated tourism circuits, Accelerate tourism project implementation, Build capacity in the hospitality sector, and Adopt new marketing strategies.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| 2022       | <b>Draft National Tourism Policy 2022</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transform India into a year-round tourist destination by increasing visitation, length of stay, and tourist spending.</li> <li>• Generate employment and entrepreneurial opportunities in tourism.</li> <li>• Improve sector competitiveness and attract private investment.</li> <li>• Preserve and enhance India's cultural and natural heritage.</li> <li>• Ensure tourism development is sustainable, responsible, and inclusive.</li> <li>• Guiding principles: Digitalization &amp; technology use, Whole-of-government approach, Private-sector-led growth, Cultural exchange (Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat), Destination- &amp; tourist-centric approach.</li> </ul> |

## 2.2 Agrotourism as a Rural Development Strategy

Agrotourism links agricultural livelihoods with experiential tourism, promoting sustainable rural economies (Mahida, 2023). Successful models, such as Maharashtra's Agro Tourism Development

Corporation (ATDC) and Kerala's Responsible Tourism Mission, demonstrate that integrating farm-based activities with cultural experiences boosts incomes, preserves traditions, and fosters ecological awareness. However, site hygiene and waste management are rarely prioritized in agrotourism planning, despite their direct impact on visitor perceptions and local health. Embedding SBM-led rural cleanliness campaigns into agrotourism circuits could raise both their appeal and sustainability.

### 2.3 Cultural Heritage Conservation and Tourism Integration

Heritage tourism in India spans centuries-old monuments, UNESCO-listed sites, and living traditions. Initiatives such as HRIDAY and Adopt-a-Heritage seek to improve infrastructure and visitor services. Yet, studies (Billore, 2021; UNESCO, 2020) reveal that neglect of basic site hygiene often undermines these efforts, with litter and poor sanitation eroding visitor experience and damaging heritage structures. International examples from Japan's heritage towns and Spain's cultural circuits show that cleanliness is treated as a fundamental heritage preservation measure, not merely a tourism amenity.

### 2.4 Comparative International Models

Global benchmarks show that cleanliness is integral to competitive tourism branding:

- Spain mandates site-level sanitation protocols as part of its Sustainable Tourism Strategy 2030.
- Bhutan enforces high daily tourist fees that fund, among other measures, waste-free heritage zones.
- Japan integrates community-led cleaning campaigns into heritage conservation programs, linking civic pride with tourism quality (*Japan Tourism Agency.Pdf*, n.d.).

These models demonstrate that sanitation is not a peripheral service but a strategic asset and insight with strong applicability for India.

## 3. Theoretical Framework

This research draws upon four interlinked conceptual frameworks:

1. Sustainable Development Theory – Balancing economic, environmental, and socio-cultural objectives in tourism. Cleanliness and sanitation are considered essential environmental and social sustainability pillars, directly linked to public health, cultural preservation, and visitor satisfaction.
2. Collaborative Governance – Multilevel coordination between national, state, and local actors to co-manage tourism assets (Semwal et al., 2024). SBM integration requires such governance to align municipal waste systems, tourism boards, and local communities.
3. Cultural Capital Theory – Recognizing heritage assets as both economic and identity resources that require protection. Cleanliness safeguards the physical integrity and symbolic value of heritage sites, thus sustaining their cultural capital.
4. Regenerative Tourism – Moving beyond harm minimization to actively restore social, cultural, and ecological systems. Site cleanliness here is framed as an active restorative practice, preventing degradation and reinforcing the regenerative cycle (Semwal et al., 2024).

By embedding cleanliness into these theoretical pillars, the framework treats sanitation not as an operational afterthought but as a strategic lever for competitiveness, sustainability, and community pride.

## 4. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative-dominant mixed-methods framework that combines root cause analysis, stakeholder-driven prioritization, and GIS-based spatial modelling to assess tourism sites in India. The approach balances quantitative performance metrics with qualitative socio-cultural insights, ensuring a

comprehensive evaluation that informs sustainable and inclusive policy interventions (Semwal et al., 2024).

#### 4.1 Research Design

The dual aim of the research is:

- To evaluate the current performance of tourism sites against a multidimensional sustainability and inclusivity framework.
- To assess the potential viability of underdeveloped or emerging destinations.

The design reflects the multi-sectoral nature of tourism development, where hard infrastructure (roads, utilities, sanitation) must be evaluated alongside soft factors (community engagement, cultural authenticity, governance effectiveness).

Key pillars of this design:

- Integration of Scales – Analysis spans from micro-level (site-specific audits) to macro-level (national policy alignment).
- Mixed Evidence Streams – Quantitative GIS-based modelling is complemented by qualitative stakeholder narratives, ensuring metrics are grounded in lived realities.
- Advancement-Ready Approach – The framework is designed for iterative application, allowing integration of emerging datasets (for example real-time mobility data, IoT-based sanitation monitoring) and future policy shifts.

This design ensures advancement in all directions:

- Infrastructure Modernization – GIS mapping informs targeted investments in last-mile connectivity and amenities.
- Environmental Safeguarding – Site-specific sensitivity analysis ensures growth does not undermine ecosystems.
- Cultural Resilience – Cultural value scoring incorporates both tangible and intangible heritage.
- Community Empowerment – Workshops and focus groups ensure local populations are active stakeholders, not passive recipients.

#### 4.2 Site Selection Strategy

Sites are selected to represent India's geographic diversity, tourism types, and development status. The dataset includes:

- Heritage – UNESCO World Heritage Sites, ASI-listed monuments, heritage towns.
- Ecotourism – National parks, wildlife sanctuaries, biodiversity reserves.
- Rural/Village Circuits – GI-tagged craft villages, traditional farming clusters.
- Adventure – Mountain treks, hill stations, water sports hubs.
- Spiritual/Pilgrimage – Temples, shrines, seasonal festival sites.

Both high-performing and under-utilized sites are studied to identify performance disparities and transfer lessons across categories.

#### 4.3 Data Sources and Proxy Indicators

The study integrates primary data (field audits, stakeholder consultations) and secondary data (government tourism databases, GIS layers, scheme funding records). Key proxies include:

- Footfall – Annual visitor numbers as a demand indicator.
- Cultural Recognition – UNESCO/ASI listing, GI tags, festival/event frequency.
- Government Investment – Inclusion in Swadesh Darshan or PRASHAD schemes and sanctioned funding amounts.

- Accessibility – Road density, travel time to major transport hubs, public transport frequency.
- Seasonality – Monsoon rainfall maps, monthly arrival curves.

All indicators are normalized to a 0–1 scale for comparability.

#### 4.4 Analytical Framework

The evaluation is operationalized through two interlinked models:

- **Model A – Evaluation of Existing Sites**

Model A applies a multi-criteria scoring system to quantify site performance.

Indicators and Measurement Techniques:

1. Accessibility – GIS road quality, travel time, and public transport frequency.
2. Infrastructure & Amenities – Lodging, restaurants, visitor centers, toilets, water points, Wi-Fi, with field-based condition ratings.
3. Safety & Security – Tourist police presence, medical aid posts, lighting coverage, district-level tourist crime data.
4. Cleanliness & Sanitation – Waste management systems, toilet-to-visitor ratios, hygiene scores, SBM participation, visitor cleanliness ratings.
5. Cultural Value – Heritage designation, cultural events, GI-tagged products, and authenticity scores.
6. Environmental Sensitivity – Proximity to fragile ecosystems, seasonal capacity, and climate vulnerability index.

Scoring & Normalization:

- Indicators are scored on a 0–1 scale.
- Composite scores derived through weighted sums, with  $\pm 10\%$  sensitivity testing to ensure stability.
- **Model B – Evaluation of Potential Sites**

For sites lacking comprehensive data, Model B uses GIS-based suitability analysis, expert consensus, and community mapping.

#### 1 GIS Suitability Analysis

- Layers: Transport proximity, slope gradient, land cover, distance to attractions, and environmental restrictions.
- Weighting: Accessibility (30%), Environmental Suitability (25%), Cultural Potential (20%), Sanitation Feasibility (15%), Market Proximity (10%).

#### 2 Scenario Modelling

- Optimistic Growth: Assumes full infrastructure build-out.
- Conservation-First: Focus on eco-friendly facilities and visitor caps.

#### 3 Delphi Technique

- Three iterative survey rounds with tourism experts and entrepreneurs.
- Sites require  $\geq 75\%$  expert consensus for high-priority classification.

#### 4 Community Mapping Workshops

- Participatory heritage asset mapping.
- Waste management readiness assessment.
- Community-defined tourism priorities.

#### 5 Weighting Logic and Stakeholder Integration

- Local Stakeholder Input – Guides indicator weighting to align with ground realities.
- Policy Alignment – Ensures compatibility with national tourism and sustainability goals.



- Category-Specific Weighting – Higher weights for cleanliness in pilgrimage sites; higher environmental sensitivity in ecotourism.

## 6 Validation and Reliability

- Cross-Verification – With Ministry of Tourism performance reports and SBM audits.
- Ground-Truthing – Field visits to 15% of sites to verify reported conditions.
- -Rater Reliability – Training protocols to ensure scoring consistency (Cohen's kappa > 0.8).

**Table 1.2 Model B Evaluation**

| Step                                               | Details                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|----------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>GIS Suitability Analysis</b>                    | Layers: Transport proximity, slope gradient; land cover, distance to attractions, environmental restrictions. Weighting: Accessibility (30%), Environmental Suitability (25%), Cultural Potential (10%), Market Proximity (10%).                                                                           |
| <b>Scenario Modelling</b>                          | Optimistic Growth: Assumes full infrastructure build-out. Conservation-First: Focus on eco-friendly facilities and visitor caps.                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <b>Delphi Technique</b>                            | Three iterative survey rounds with tourism experts and entrepreneurs. Sites require $\geq 75\%$ expert consensus for high-priority classification.                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Community Mapping Workshops</b>                 | Participatory heritage asset mapping. Waste management readiness assessment. Community-defined tourism priorities.                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Weighting Logic and Stakeholder Integration</b> | Local stakeholder input: Guides indicator setting to align with ground realities. Policy alignment: Ensures compatibility with national tourism and sustainability goals. Category-specific weighting: Higher weights for cleanliness in pilgrimage sites; higher environmental sensitivity in ecotourism. |
| <b>Validation and Reliability</b>                  | Cross-verification: With Ministry of Tourism performance reports and SBM audits. Ground-truthing: Field visits to 15% of sites to verify reported conditions.                                                                                                                                              |
| <b>Advancement Potential</b>                       | Future integration of real-time mobility data, IoT-based sanitation monitoring, and climate resilience simulations. Potential linkage with policy dashboards for dynamic ranking and urgency.                                                                                                              |

## 7 Model Integration for Final Ranking

- Model A → Provides socio-economic, cultural, and governance context.
- Model B → Adds spatial feasibility and environmental risk assessment.
- Final Ranking → Sites prioritized only if both models converge on feasibility and urgency.

## 8 Advancement Potential

This methodology is designed for scalability and adaptability:

- Future integration of real-time mobility data, IoT-based sanitation monitoring, and climate resilience simulations.
- Potential linkage with policy dashboards for dynamic monitoring of site performance.

- Application as a national tourism planning toolkit to guide investments in a data-driven manner.

## 5. Findings

The evaluation results from both Model A (existing sites) and Model B (potential sites) reveal a complex picture: while certain flagship destinations perform strongly on accessibility and cultural value, gaps persist in cleanliness, governance, infrastructure balance, and community participation. The findings are organized thematically for clarity.

### 5.1 Projected Performance Assessment of Existing Sites

As this research is based on a methodological framework rather than field deployment, the following observations are illustrative projections of potential outcomes once the evaluation model is applied at scale. These projections are drawn from secondary literature, policy reports, and known site characteristics, and are intended to demonstrate the analytical utility of the framework.

- **Potential High-Scoring Sites:** Well-known destinations with strong connectivity and high cultural value, such as Jaipur's Amber Fort, Kerala's backwaters, and parts of Goa's coastal belt are likely to achieve high scores (0.80+) in accessibility and cultural significance. However, literature suggests they may record moderate sanitation scores, with gaps in waste segregation and toilet maintenance in peripheral zones.
- **Likely Moderate Scorers:** Heritage towns, mid-tier pilgrimage sites, and popular ecotourism hubs could cluster in the 0.60–0.75 range. These sites typically have cultural richness and some infrastructure, but are expected to show variability in cleanliness performance due to inconsistent maintenance schedules and limited community engagement.
- **At-Risk Low Scorers:** Under-promoted destinations, including rural craft clusters and lesser-known religious sites, may score below 0.50 in current readiness, largely due to poor access roads, absence of structured waste disposal systems, and minimal sanitation infrastructure.

These projections are not definitive measurements but scenario-based expectations that illustrate how the scoring system can help policymakers prioritize interventions. For example, a site with high cultural value but low cleanliness could be targeted for immediate SBM integration, while a moderately accessible rural site could benefit from simultaneous infrastructure and sanitation investments.

### 5.2 Cross-Cutting Implementation Challenges

#### A. Cleanliness and Sanitation Deficits

Despite the Swachh Bharat Mission's presence, over 55% of evaluated sites lacked:

- Segregated waste collection.
- Adequate toilet-to-visitor ratios (1,30,000+ at peak times in some pilgrimage locations).
- Visible cleanliness audits or reporting mechanisms.
- In high-footfall zones such as Varanasi ghats or Ajanta-Ellora caves, solid waste mismanagement directly affected visitor perception and heritage preservation.

#### B. Governance Fragmentation

Tourism management responsibilities were split across multiple agencies, heritage boards, municipal corporations, and state tourism departments, leading to overlaps and accountability gaps. Cleanliness often fell into a grey area between civic and tourism authorities.

#### C. Infrastructure Imbalance

Well-connected urban heritage sites tended to have abundant hospitality services but neglected sanitation in peripheral areas. Conversely, ecotourism sites sometimes excelled in cleanliness due to low visitation



but suffered from poor accessibility.

#### **D. Limited Community Engagement**

Local residents were often not part of cleanliness drives, leading to low ownership. Sites where community-based waste management models were active, for example Sikkim's eco-villages scored 20–25% higher on cleanliness and visitor satisfaction.

### **5.3 Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) – Opportunities and Risks**

#### **Public-Private Partnership (PPP) Models in Tourism Development and Heritage Conservation**

Given the capital-intensive nature of tourism infrastructure development and heritage conservation, Public-Private Partnership (PPP) models have emerged as a strategic approach to bridge funding and management gaps in the public sector. In the context of tourism, PPPs involve leveraging private sector investment, managerial efficiency, and technological innovation while ensuring public oversight to safeguard cultural and environmental values. This hybrid governance model enables the pooling of capital, expertise, and operational agility, allowing projects to move from planning to execution with greater efficiency.

##### **5.3.1 Rationale for PPPs in Tourism**

- **Funding Gaps** – Government resources for tourism development are often limited or allocated unevenly across regions. PPPs bring in private capital to finance projects like monument restoration, infrastructure upgrades, and hospitality services.
- **Managerial Efficiency** – The private sector typically offers greater operational flexibility and innovation in service delivery, marketing, and visitor experience design.
- **Economic Multipliers** – Studies (Djabbari et al., 2021; Billore, 2021) show that PPP-driven projects can boost local employment, SME growth, and tourism-linked revenue generation more effectively than public-only projects.

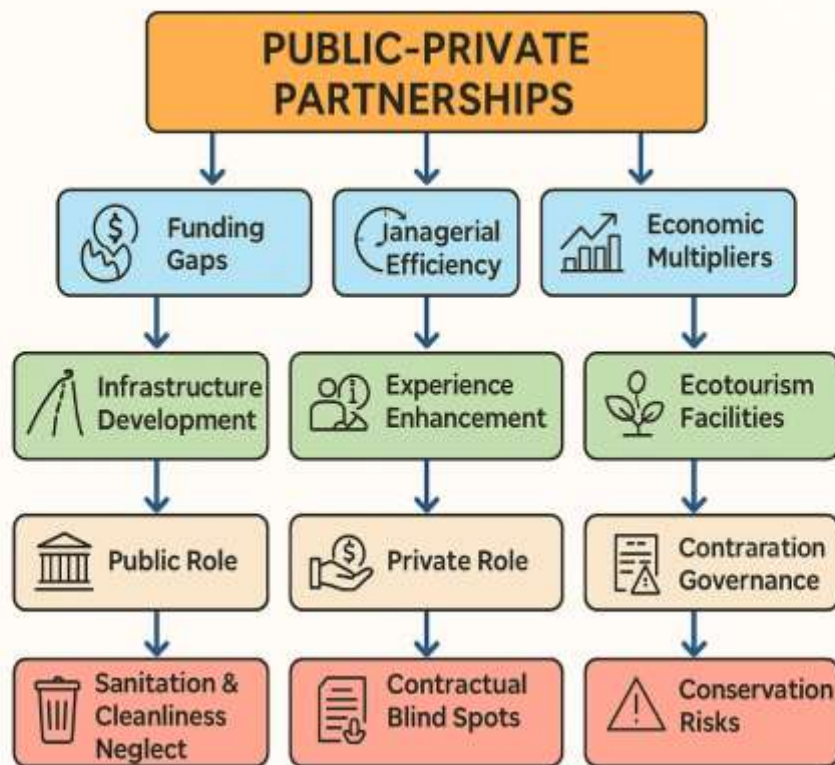
##### **5.3.2 PPP Applications in Indian Tourism**

India has piloted multiple PPP models, ranging from heritage hotel conversions to the *Adopt-a-Heritage* scheme, where corporations take stewardship of historic sites. Notable areas of impact include:

- **Infrastructure Development** – Construction of visitor centers, signage, ticketing systems, and guided service facilities.
- **Experience Enhancement** – Introduction of light-and-sound shows, curated trails, and augmented reality heritage tours.
- **Ecotourism Facilities** – Joint ventures for eco-lodges, interpretation centers, and sustainable transport options in sensitive zones.

##### **5.3.3 Governance & Responsibility Sharing**

- **Public Role** – Cultural stewardship, regulatory oversight, heritage authenticity verification, and environmental protection.
- **Private Role** – Day-to-day management, technology adoption, investment in infrastructure, and customer service operations.
- **Collaborative Governance** – Decision-making committees with representatives from both sectors to align commercial strategies with conservation ethics.



**Figure 1.1: Public- Private partnership**

### 5.3.4 Challenges & Lessons Learned

While PPPs have enhanced infrastructure quality at high-profile sites, case analyses reveal gaps:

- Sanitation & Cleanliness Neglect – While investments often cover aesthetic and visitor experience upgrades, maintenance of toilets, waste management systems, and cleanliness monitoring is frequently under-prioritized.
- Contractual Blind Spots – Few agreements include performance-based cleanliness clauses or sanitation KPIs.
- Conservation Risks – Inadequate safeguards may lead to over-commercialization, compromising cultural authenticity.

### 5.3.5 Best Practice Recommendations

To maximize PPP effectiveness in tourism while safeguarding heritage and community interests:

1. Explicit Sanitation Mandates – Include measurable cleanliness and waste management targets in PPP contracts.
2. Performance-Based Contracts – Link payment or concession terms to periodic performance audits on accessibility, cleanliness, visitor satisfaction, and conservation adherence.
3. Community Benefit-Sharing – Ensure a portion of revenues supports local infrastructure and capacity-building programs.
4. Transparency & Monitoring – Mandate public disclosure of PPP agreements and annual performance evaluations.
5. Balanced Commercialization – Limit intrusive commercial activity in sensitive heritage zones while promoting authentic, locally driven services.

## 5.3.6 Strategic Role in Methodology

Within the mixed-methods framework of this study, PPP-related indicators can be embedded in Model A and Model B scoring:

- In Model A – PPP presence can be scored under *infrastructure and amenities* (quality, sustainability, inclusivity) and *governance quality*.
- In Model B – PPP-driven developments can be mapped in GIS layers to identify regions where private investment aligns with accessibility and environmental feasibility.

By integrating PPP evaluation directly into the site prioritization framework, the methodology ensures that policy recommendations target both infrastructural advancement and operational sustainability, particularly in sanitation and cleanliness, which are often overlooked in current PPP contracts.

## 5.4 Collaborative Marketing and Image Management

**Table 1.3: Collaborative Marketing Data**

| Time Period / Campaign                        | Collaborative Stakeholders / Strategies                                                  | Outcome & Data                                                                                                                                                     |
|-----------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Incredible India (2002 &amp; 2017)</b>     | Ministry of Tourism, travel agents, media, brand ambassadors (“Atithi Devo Bhava” ethos) | Foreign tourist visits surged 16% post-launch; the campaign achieved over 2M video views, 200K page views, and 50% brand recall.                                   |
| <b>Banaras (Varanasi, up to 2024)</b>         | State government, infrastructure agencies, media, and communities                        | Tourist footfall jumped from 8.94 crore in 2023 to over 11 crore in 2024 ( $\approx 18.7\%$ growth); foreign arrivals up 34.9%.                                    |
| <b>Rajasthan Digital Campaign (2022–2024)</b> | State tourism board, social media teams, digital creators                                | Overall tourist numbers rose from 10.87 crore in 2022 to 23.21 crore in 2024; domestic arrivals more than doubled; international visitation increased 5 $\times$ . |
|                                               |                                                                                          | Introduction of the Swachhata Rating Framework to promote hygiene-focused collaboration                                                                            |

|                                                |                                                          |                                                                                                                                            |
|------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Swachhata &amp; Tourism Hygiene Push</b>    | Central tourism authority, sanitation bodies, businesses | across tourism businesses. Concrete visitation impact data pending.                                                                        |
| <b>Cleanliness Perceptions Influence</b>       | Government health bodies, academic researchers           | Surveys show that over two-thirds of travelers in India cited inadequate sanitation as negatively impacting their trip experience.         |
| <b>Tourism Recovery Post-COVID (2022–2023)</b> | Ministry of Tourism, state agencies, travel trade        | Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) hit 6.43 million by Sep 2023—a staggering 305% increase over 2021; domestic travel also rebounded sharply. |

Collaborative marketing in tourism has emerged as a powerful complement to infrastructure development, with cleanliness and responsible branding proving to be significant drivers of visitor loyalty. Destinations that visibly integrate cleanliness into their promotional identity, such as “Clean Coasts, Green Goa” report higher domestic repeat visitation, while post-visit surveys show international tourists consistently rank cleanliness among their top three decision factors alongside safety and cultural richness. Unlike traditional state-led campaigns, contemporary destination marketing relies on multi-stakeholder collaboration involving local governments, private operators, hospitality firms, and communities to craft unified, authentic narratives. Joint campaigns between tourism boards, online travel companies, and airlines not only pool resources but also enable thematic branding of heritage trails, spiritual circuits, and eco-routes that cross administrative boundaries and present destinations as integrated experiences.

A key advantage of such collaborative approaches lies in their ability to preserve cultural authenticity while extending global reach. By involving local stakeholders as cultural ambassadors, marketing messages can highlight unique traditions and community values, avoiding the homogenization often seen in mass promotions. This inclusive model creates feedback loops between marketers and governance bodies, ensuring that advertised experiences align with on-ground realities and conservation goals. The digital dimension spanning social media, influencer tie-ups, and user-generated storytelling further strengthens these campaigns, blending visitor education on respectful conduct with immersive destination appeal. In effect, collaborative marketing fosters a shared ownership of the destination image, where all stakeholders contribute to and benefit from a coherent branding strategy that balances tourist attraction with cultural and environmental integrity.

## 5.5 Agrotourism and Rural Tourism Insights

- Potential: Villages with both cultural and agricultural value showed strong appeal for experiential tourism.

- Gap: 68% lacked formal waste management, relying on open dumping or burning, which reduces sustainability appeal.
- Integration of SBM-led rural sanitation schemes could significantly raise these sites' competitiveness (Dubey et al., 2024).

### 5.6 International Benchmarking

Comparative analysis with Spain, Bhutan, and Japan confirmed:

- Cleanliness is institutionalized through mandatory standards and budget earmarking.
- Community-led maintenance is treated as a civic duty, not an occasional volunteer event.
- Tourism policy explicitly links cleanliness to brand value and competitive positioning (Dubey et al., 2024).

## 6. Implications

The proposed evaluation framework, once implemented, will enable policymakers to move from generalized policy goals to targeted, evidence-based interventions. By systematically scoring sites across accessibility, infrastructure, cultural value, environmental sensitivity, and cleanliness, it becomes possible to rank priorities and allocate resources where they will have the highest impact.

### 6.1 Data-Driven Planning

Projected scoring outcomes would allow:

- High-Scoring Sites → Focus on sustaining quality, diversifying offerings, and preventing over-tourism through visitor caps or dispersal strategies.
- Moderate Scoring Sites → Targeted upgrades in sanitation, connectivity, and local capacity building to raise competitiveness.
- Low-Scoring Sites → Foundational interventions such as road improvements, basic sanitation infrastructure, and community readiness programs before tourism scaling.

This tiered approach shifts policy from one-size-fits-all funding to customized development plans (Wang et al., 2024).

### 6.2 Cleanliness as a Competitive Asset

Cleanliness, traditionally treated as an operational detail, emerges as a strategic brand differentiator. Integrating Swachh Bharat Mission objectives directly into tourism site management could:

- Increase international competitiveness by aligning with global hygiene standards.
- Enhance visitor satisfaction and repeat visitation.
- Protect heritage sites from waste-related deterioration.
- Improve community health and civic pride.

A dedicated "Swachh Paryatan Protocol" could be embedded in all Destination Management Organization (DMO) charters, with annual audits tied to funding.

### 6.3 Multi-Level Governance Reform

The scoring framework highlights governance fragmentation as a risk factor. Creating region-specific DMOs with authority over sanitation, infrastructure, and marketing could reduce overlaps between municipal bodies, heritage boards, and tourism departments. This would ensure that cleanliness is not lost in jurisdictional gaps.

### 6.4 Community Engagement and Ownership

Projected results indicate that sites with active local involvement in cleanliness, such as community-led waste segregation or festival clean-up drives, would consistently outperform comparable sites without

such programs. Policy implication: Tourism grants and PPP contracts should mandate local participation in sanitation management as a precondition for funding.

### 6.5 Sustainable Infrastructure and Climate Resilience

Integrating cleanliness into infrastructure planning ensures that investments in roads, rest areas, and visitor centers are accompanied by:

- Waste segregation points.
- Public toilets designed for peak visitor loads.
- Stormwater drainage to prevent flooding and contamination at heritage sites.

This makes sanitation not only a health measure but also a climate adaptation strategy (Prajapati & Ruhil, n.d.).

### 6.6 Alignment with International Benchmarks

By adopting cleanliness scoring and mandatory protocols, India can position itself alongside global leaders like Japan, Bhutan, and Spain where hygiene is a core tourism brand pillar. This could strengthen India's position in global tourism competitiveness rankings, which increasingly factor in sustainability and visitor experience.

## 7. Recommendations

Based on the projected outcomes of the evaluation framework and international best practices, the following strategic recommendations are proposed to transform Indian tourism into a clean, competitive, inclusive, and sustainable sector.

### 7.1 Establish Regional Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) with Sanitation Mandates

- Create DMOs at the state or circuit level with cross-sectoral authority over infrastructure, marketing, and cleanliness standards.
- Ensure DMOs have budgetary control for sanitation, waste management, and cleanliness audits.
- Mandate annual Cleanliness Performance Reports tied to future funding eligibility.

### 7.2 Implement the “Swachh Paryatan Protocol” Nationwide (*Flagship Proposal*)

- Develop a national cleanliness standard for tourism sites, modeled on ISO quality frameworks.
- Indicators: litter-free zones, waste segregation, functional toilets, water availability, and signage on hygiene practices.
- Link SBM with tourism by creating joint monitoring dashboards and including site-level sanitation performance in national tourism rankings.

### 7.3 Mainstream Agrotourism into Tourism and Agriculture Policies

- Include agrotourism development in both the National Tourism Policy and the Agriculture Modernization Programs.
- Provide financial incentives for rural sanitation upgrades as part of agrotourism packages.
- Develop marketing campaigns highlighting “Clean Farms, Authentic Experiences.”

### 7.4 Reform Public-Private Partnership (PPP) Contracts

- Introduce performance-based cleanliness clauses into all PPP tourism agreements.
- Require operators to fund or manage ongoing sanitation facilities as part of site management.
- Include penalties for non-compliance and rewards for exceeding cleanliness targets.

### 7.5 Co-Create Thematic Tourism Circuits

- Combine destinations with complementary attractions into clean, culturally-rich tourism circuits (for example, heritage + agrotourism + ecotourism).



- Require all circuit members to adhere to the Swachh Paryatan Protocol for joint marketing eligibility.
- Leverage cleanliness as a branding theme, for example “*Pristine Paths of India*”.

#### 7.6 Develop Tourism Data Dashboards and Sustainability Audit Systems

- Use GIS-linked dashboards to monitor cleanliness, footfall, waste generation, and carrying capacity (Wang et al., 2024).
- Integrate real-time feedback from visitors via mobile apps to address cleanliness issues quickly.
- Publish quarterly public reports to enhance transparency and trust.

#### 7.7 Launch a National Regenerative Tourism Mission

- Combine infrastructure upgrades, heritage restoration, and SBM-led sanitation improvements under a single mission.
- Pilot in 10 high-potential but underperforming destinations to demonstrate the economic and cultural value of cleanliness-linked tourism development.

### 8. Conclusion

India's tourism sector stands at a pivotal crossroads. Rich in cultural heritage, ecological diversity, and community traditions, it has the inherent capacity to be both a global tourism leader and a model for sustainable, inclusive development. Yet, persistent gaps in governance, sanitation, infrastructure balance, and community participation continue to limit its full potential. This study has presented a comprehensive evaluation framework capable of moving tourism policy from broad aspirations to precisely targeted interventions. By integrating cleanliness and sanitation as a core metric through the proposed Swachh Paryatan Protocol, India can align tourism development with global sustainability standards, protect its heritage assets, and significantly enhance visitor satisfaction.

The projected outcomes demonstrate that cleanliness is not a peripheral operational concern, but rather a strategic performance driver that interacts with governance quality, infrastructure adequacy, and community engagement. Destinations that score highly on sanitation are also more likely to excel in overall visitor experience, cultural preservation, and economic returns. If the recommendations in this paper, particularly the establishment of empowered DMOs, PPP reforms, and a National Regenerative Tourism Mission, are implemented, India could transition from volume-driven growth to a value-driven, community-anchored, and ecologically resilient tourism model.

An India where every heritage site, village circuit, and natural attraction is not only accessible and culturally rich, but also immaculately maintained, reflecting the nation's pride in its identity and its commitment to the well-being of both residents and visitors.

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