

Projecting the State of Uttar Pradesh as an Emerging Festival Tourism Destination

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Abstract

Home to several round-the-year tourist-pulling festivals and events, the state of Uttar Pradesh has the potential to develop an alternative form of tourism that can act as a catalyst in preserving the heritage as well as promoting the culture of the state and can be termed "festival tourism." The surge of tourists at various destinations like Varanasi, Ayodhya, Mathura-Vrindavan, Prayagraj, Agra, etc. began to swell up at the times of festivals like Dev Deepawali, Deepotsav, Holi, Mahakumbh, Taj Mahotsav, etc., including the ones that host millions of tourists even on a single day as well. Development of such an organized form of tourism will not only preserve the heritage and culture but also help the administration in the management of crowds at such times, thereby reducing the incidents like overcrowding leading to stampedes and people getting separated from their known ones, as well as pose as ground for a number of research models and ground for the display of art, culture, tradition, etc. This study helps in analyzing the preferred festival in the state of Uttar Pradesh among tourists for the purpose of spending their vacations, along with the previously visited such festivals and events being held at various destinations.

Keywords: Festival, Tourism, Uttar Pradesh

Introduction

Festivals and events have been celebrated in the world since ages, which can be traced back to the origin of mankind, either in the form of Mahakumbh, ancient civilizations, or in the form of athletic meets that are considered to be held in the honor of Greek God Zeus, which in modern times are considered to have taken the shape of the Olympics. These festivals and events have been a ground for the gathering of millions of people either for participating in or witnessing such festivals and events. India is naturally blessed to be gifted with the world's oldest known civilization, the Harappan Civilization, along with the religion of Hinduism that makes the country of India home to a number of fairs and festivals either associated with some religious processions or being held individually. The state of Uttar Pradesh is home to several round-the-year tourist-pulling festivals and events that have the potential to develop an alternative form of tourism that can act as a catalyst in preserving the heritage as well as promoting the culture of the state and can be termed "festival tourism." Destinations like Varanasi, which hosts Dev-Deepawali; Prayagraj, which is host to the world's oldest known fair, the Mahakumbh and annually the Magh Mela; Deepotsav being celebrated at Ayodhya; the world-famous Laththa Maar Holi of the Barsana, Mathura & Vrindavan region; and the Taj Mahotsav in Agra are some of the famous festivals that attract millions of tourists to the land of Uttar Pradesh, with each of the festivals having its unique feature, like setting up a Guinness World Record for lighting up 26 lacs diyas at Ayodhya or hosting a record total of

68 crore tourists during the Mahakumbh 2025, including an approximate number of 8 crore tourists on a single day of Mauni Amavasya. The organization of these grand festivals has been a perfect model for crowd and tourist management and a source of research for a number of scholars based upon several variables, like socio-economic impact, quality of water, total footfall of tourists, etc., that affect the same. On the other hand, if festival tourism is being developed as an organized form of tourism, it will not only preserve the heritage and culture but also help the administration in the management of crowds at such times, thereby reducing the incidents like overcrowding leading to stampedes and people getting separated from their loved ones. It is pertinent to mention here that festivals are one of the most prominent sources for the preservation of heritage and promotion of culture of the state that may also result in the extension of the stay duration of a tourist, thereby strengthening the tourist retention in the state of Uttar Pradesh. Thus, promotion of such events will lead to widespread awareness about the festivals of the state throughout the world and help in spreading the culture. Although it has been evident that due to the consistent movement of tourists in a place, cultural leakage of tourism takes place as a negative impact, as well as, in a number of cases, the carrying capacity of any destination exceeding as well. This article observes the research gap based upon the review of literature and analyzes the preference among tourists to visit the state of Uttar Pradesh during festivals over any other state and identifies the most preferred festival as well as the festival previously visited by the respondents in the past. The article assesses the responses collected through the questionnaire as primary data along with the assessment of published reports, articles, books, etc. as secondary data and analyzes the state of Uttar Pradesh as an emerging festival tourism destination among the respondents.

Literature Review

Hans and Nejar (2025) labels festival tourism as an amalgamation of culture, history and economic growth and a way to present the customs, faith and identities before the world that helps in branding a destination. It also believed that festival tourism helps in keeping the traditions alive and raises awareness about culture and helps in fostering peace among nations. It reflects that India has potential to celebrate festivals all year long. It helps individuals in establishing connections to the culture and people of that place.

Pandey et al. (2024) talks about the diverse cultural heritage of fairs and festivals that gives a glimpse into way of life and showcase harmonious coexistence of various religious beliefs. The article advocates for needs to preserve the cultural essence of festivals that attracts tourists contributing towards the allied industries of tourism like handicrafts, transportations, hospitality, etc. As the festivals create intercultural interaction and are crucial for preservation and promotion of cultural heritage thereby, enhancing the holiday experiences of tourists. Thus, festivals help in increasing the global visibility of a destination and encourage repeat visits along with extension of stays. The article concludes with the statement that festivals are dynamic catalyst for cultural exchange and tourism growth.

Dhamija (2021) notices a consistent change in the profile of visiting tourists from seeking recreational activities to religious significance thereby advocating for the utilization of unutilized and underutilized potential of religious significance of India. The article finds the state of Uttar Pradesh as melting pot of culture and religion that has a significant number of religious destinations that attracts hordes of religious tourists round they year including the annual processions, fairs and festivals. Its findings state that religious tourism is consistently increasing and forms a major portion of the total number of tourists in Uttar

Pradesh. The article suggests further studies could be made in regard with religious events scheduled to be held in future.

Laing (2017) considers the aspects of research to be conducted in future related to festival tourism according to the current gaps in the literature including the impacts of festivals and events looking towards the sustainability. It reflects that the celebration of festivals and events holds a history dating back to prehistoric times and such literature is lacking and thus creating gap in the modern world, which could be filled with the establishment to repository of knowledge about festivals and events. It also talks about the sub-cultures that are created with the meeting of people sharing common interests in such festivals and events. The article concludes by marking the economic, cultural and environmental importance created by such festival tourism.

Ranga and Pradhan (2017) state that religious tourism in an unexplored sector that has been rarely taken up for research in an organized manner. It also reiterates that Tourism depends upon three components including the availability of disposable income along with the leisure time and the social sanctions and declares the term religious tourism as the fastest accelerating sector within tourism industry. The land of India has been home to pilgrimage since immemorial times and attracts pilgrims and religious tourists throughout the year. The article suggests a few models in which it the increase in state budget and investment pulled by the pilgrimage destinations like Varanasi, Allahabad, Buddhist Circuit and Mathura Vrindavan. It also suggests the development of special packages for religious tourism along with promotion of festivals like Magh Mela, Mahakumbh, Dev Deepawali, Laththmar Holi, etc.

Ma and Lew (2011) finds festivals as significant tools for economic development and segregates four types of festival events, namely, Local Heritage, Local Contemporary, National Heritage and Global Contemporary Festivals. It defines the term festival as a themed event that instills celebration and enjoyment and is built and conserved by the history of the place of its origin. It labels tourist orients events as festivals and develops a festival tourism contextual framework in four different contexts emerging from historical and geographical situation and highlights four issues developed in this framework which can be termed as local identity, uniqueness, liminality and authenticity.

Cudny (2011) studies the rapidly developing phenomenon that plays a major role in the development of tourism and its geography, festivals and considers the travel for visiting such festival as Festival Tourism. It focuses on what events can be regarded as festivals along with the features that constitute a festival. The article suggests that events which either use festival in its name, or happens at a regular interval of time and works towards the promotion of local culture can be termed as festivals. As these features of festivals attracts tourists, hence, can be called as Festival Tourism. The traffic generated due to such type of tourism creates tourist space that includes the cultural heritage and events. The author described the term festival tourism as a very wide term and considers it to be a spate type of tourism and calls such type of tourist as festival tourists and the surrounding area impacted due to its influence as festivalization. The article also studies the dysfunctions and reflects the positive and negative impacts of the festival tourism including the preservation of heritage and sustainable development under the former category, whereas, criminality rate, degradation of environment, etc. on the other hand.

O'Sullivan and Jackson (2002) shows the keens attitude of regions to show off their culture and surroundings by the promotion of festivals and considers its contribution with respect to local economic development along with the segregation of festivals into three types, namely, home grown, tourist-tempter and big bang. It considers such type of tourism as a "phenomenon in which people from outside a festival locale visit during the festival period". It reflects the possibilities of combining festival tourism with

sustainability and calls it as an emerging giant. It reiterates the generation of opportunities for community development and can extend the tourist season along with revenue generation as well as exceeding the carrying capacity. While home grown festivals are small scale and majorly run by volunteers, tourist-tempter aims at attracting visitors for economic development, whereas, the big bang events acts as a marketing tool for the promotion of activities over a defined geographical area and concludes by examining the potential of festival tourism.

Research Gap

The following research gaps could be ascertained after the review of literature:

1. There are a number of studies on festival tourism and religious tourism but the same lacks on the state of Uttar Pradesh.
2. There is a dearth of literature that ascertains the preferred festival to be visited by tourists in the state of Uttar Pradesh.
3. There is a lack of literature that analyses the previously visited festivals by tourists in the state of Uttar Pradesh, who want to visit any other festival in the state.

Objectives

1. To observe the preference of tourist to visit the state of Uttar Pradesh during festivals over any other state.
2. To identify the preferred festival that tourist wants to visit in the state of Uttar Pradesh.
3. To identify the festival that tourist has previously visited in the state of Uttar Pradesh.

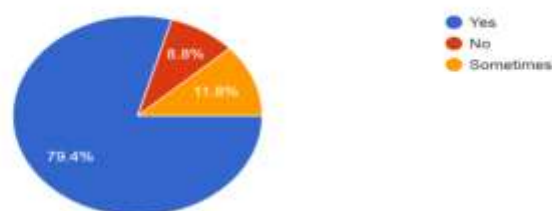
Research Methodology

Convenience sampling has been considered for the purpose of collecting the primary data for this study where a sample of 101 respondents will be collected through questionnaire based on Google Forms that will be circulated through various groups and platforms and for the purpose of secondary data, government reports, research articles, books and other publications will be considered. The data so collected will be tabulated in an organized manner and charts will be prepared through MS Excel.

Findings

Figure 1 Preference of Tourists to Visit the State of Uttar Pradesh as Compared to Other States

5. Do you prefer visiting Uttar Pradesh during festivals compared to other Indian states?
102 responses



A greater interest has been shown by the respondents (79.4%) who have said they have chosen the state of Uttar Pradesh as a preferred festival tourism destination over any other Indian state, whereas only 11.8% of respondents have chosen the option of "sometimes" as marking their preference for visiting the state

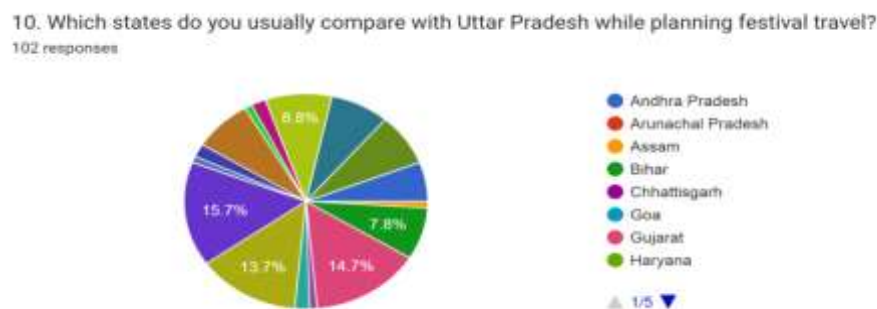
during festivals for tourism purposes. On the other hand, only 8.8% of responses have been received where Uttar Pradesh has been denied as the preferred state during the festivals for tourism purposes.

Figure 2 Likert Scale Marking for the State of Uttar Pradesh as the First Festival Destination Choice



Among 102 respondents, 44.1% agree to choose the state of Uttar Pradesh as their preferred festival tourism destination, whereas 22.5% strongly agree to the same fact. A significant number of 25.5% choose to remain neutral about the fact of their choice, and the remaining have opted for disagree and strongly disagree options.

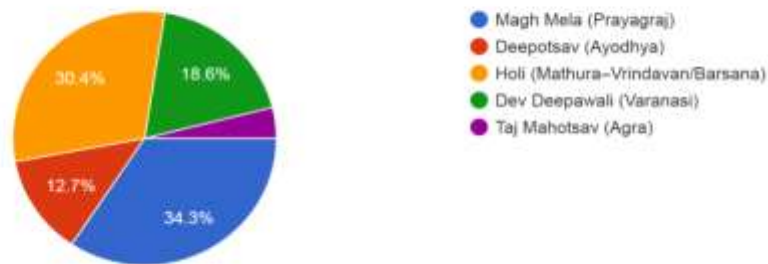
Figure 3 Comparison of Uttar Pradesh with Other States while Planning Festival Travel



While comparing the other states with Uttar Pradesh for the purpose of festival travel, the respondents have voted the highest, 15.7%, of responses to the state of Maharashtra as a competitor to the state of Uttar Pradesh, whereas the state of Gujarat has emerged in the second spot that respondents usually compare with the state of Uttar Pradesh while planning the festival travel. While the state of Madhya Pradesh has secured the spot with 13.7% of votes for comparison purposes. The states of Rajasthan, West Bengal, Uttarakhand, and Bihar remain in the joint position with the same number of votes for comparison with the state of Uttar Pradesh during festival travel.

Figure 4 Preference of Future Festival Visit in the State of Uttar Pradesh

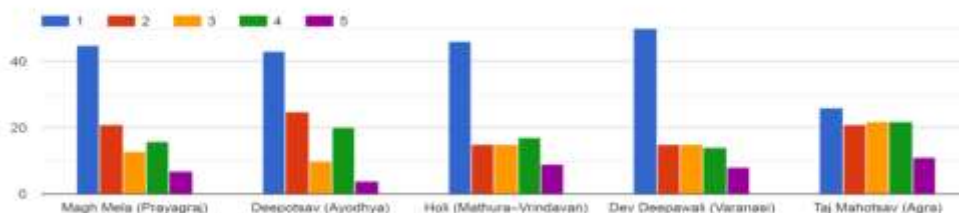
12. Which festival in Uttar Pradesh would you most like to visit in the future?
102 responses



Among a number of festivals being celebrated in the state of Uttar Pradesh, for the purpose of this study, five main or some of the most popular festivals, namely, the Magh Mela (Prayagraj), Deepotsav (Ayodhya), Holi (Mathura-Vrindavan/Barsana), Dev Deepawali (Varanasi), and Taj Mahotsav (Agra), have been identified as the variables. Following the footsteps and influence of the festival of Mahakumbh 2025, with 34.3% responses, Magh Mela has secured the most preferred festival tag, followed by 30.4% responses claimed by the world-famous Holi of the Mathura-Vrindavan/Barsana region. Dev Deepawali of Varanasi has secured 18.6% of the votes, and 12.7% of the votes have been secured by the Deepotsav of Ayodhya, making it the fourth preferred festival, with the remaining votes being claimed by the Taj Mahotsav.

Figure 5 Ranking of the Preferred Festival

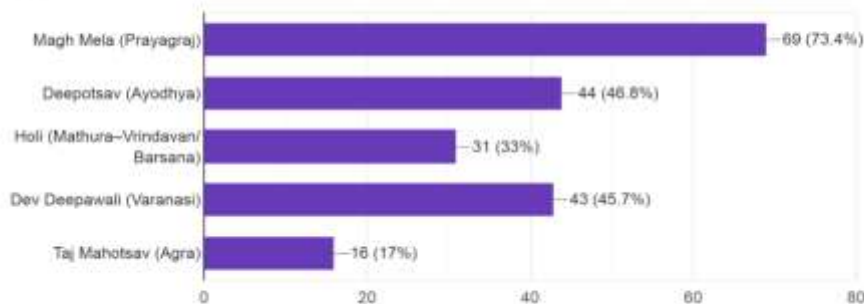
13. Rank the following festivals based on your preference (1 = Most Preferred):



Dev Deepawali of Varanasi emerged as the first-ranked most preferred festival among the five variables; the second rank was secured by Deepotsav of Ayodhya, followed by Magh Mela of Prayagraj in the third rank. The fourth rank was claimed by Holi of the Mathura-Vrindavan/Barsana region, whereas the fifth rank was given to Taj Mahotsav (Agra).

Figure 6 Previously Experienced Festival in Uttar Pradesh

(If Yes, please answer Q18–Q22) 18. Which festival(s) have you attended in Uttar Pradesh? (Tick all that apply)
94 responses



The highest numbers of respondents, 73.4% of 102, have previously attended the festival of Magh Mela in Prayagraj, followed by 46.8% of respondents who have already experienced the festival of Deepotsav at Ayodhya. The third position was secured by Dev Deepawali of Varanasi with 45.7% of votes, and the Holi of the Mathura-Vrindavan/Barsana region came up on the fourth spot. Taj Mahotsav of Agra was the least previously experienced festival of Uttar Pradesh among the respondents.

Figure 7 Potential of Uttar Pradesh as an Emerging Festival Tourism Destination

23. Uttar Pradesh has strong potential to emerge as India's leading festival tourism destination.
102 responses



Among 102 respondents, 49% of people strongly agree with the fact that the state of Uttar Pradesh has a strong potential to emerge as India's leading festival tourism destination, whereas 40.2% of respondents agree with the same fact. The remaining 4.9% of respondents remain neutral as well as strongly disagree with this fact. On the other hand, only 1% disagrees with the fact of Uttar Pradesh being an emerging festival tourism destination.

Results

Looking at the responses received on the questionnaire circulated, it is clearly evident that mostly the respondents have preferred to visit the state of Uttar Pradesh during festivals as compared to any other Indian state, making the state the first choice as a festival tourism destination of India. The cultural and religious significance of these festivals creates a strong pull factor for tourists, along with its contrasting diversity, placing it like a cherry on top. The respondents have majorly compared the state of Uttar Pradesh with states like Maharashtra, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, Bihar, etc. while planning

the festival travel. On one hand, the state of Uttar Pradesh has strong religious significance along with historical and cultural heritage, followed by authentic rituals and traditions with better accessibility due to newly built expressways, airports, and the introduction of new trains like Vande Bharat. On the other hand, it is pertinent to mention here that the state of Uttar Pradesh, in addition to its government branding and promotion, needs to enhance the scale and grandeur of festivals in order to improve the tourist footfall during festivals. The festival of Magh Mela turned out to be the most likely to be visited festival in the future by the respondents, with the festival of Holi of the Mathura-Vrindavan/Barsana region also grabbing the attention of respondents. If we talk about ranking the festivals of Uttar Pradesh, the festival of Dev Deepawali of Varanasi has been ranked in first position, and the world record-creating festival of Ayodhya, Deepotsav, has secured the second rank. Third rank was given to the festival of Magh Mela, stealing the preferred spotlight in the previous question, whereas fourth and fifth positions were granted to Holi of Mathura-Vrindavan/Barsana and Taj Mahotsav of Agra, respectively. The five selected festivals as variables represent the cultural identity of Uttar Pradesh, and the media exposure and promotion have majorly influenced the decision of respondents for a particular festival. Mostly the respondents have already visited the Magh Mela in Prayagraj, and there is almost a tie by one vote between the Deepotsav of Ayodhya and Dev Deepawali in Varanasi. A photographer's paradise and cultural extravaganza, Holi of Mathura-Vrindavan/Barsana was rarely visited by the respondents, with Taj Mahotsav of Agra being the least visited. The respondents have rated the overall satisfaction with festivals attended in Uttar Pradesh as 4.30/5.00, making it a perfect festival tourism destination, whereas the past experiences were rated as 4.21/5.00 for increasing the preference for revisiting the state. The majority of respondents strongly agree with the fact that the state of Uttar Pradesh has strong potential to emerge as India's leading festival tourism destination, and a similar majority has voted towards recommending the state of Uttar Pradesh to others for festival tourism over other states.

Conclusion

The results of this study have reflected the strong potential of the state of Uttar Pradesh as an emerging festival tourism destination in India. The study aligns with the research gap assessed after the review of literature, and the results show that the Magh Mela of Prayagraj is popular among the respondents, whereas Dev Deepawali is ranked first in the preference category of the tourists. The popularity of Magh Mela (Prayagraj) among the respondents is evident with the highest previous visits to the same, thereby making the study fulfill all three objectives undertaken in the same. The strong religious significance and media exposure play a vital role in influencing the decision of tourists while choosing the state of Uttar Pradesh for the purpose of festival tourism.

Limitations and Suggestions

This study only undertakes the five majorly popular festivals of the state of Uttar Pradesh, which may further be diversified in future research along with the selection of other states with respective tourism products. Impactful promotions and branding by the government may further lead to an increased tourist footfall in the state of Uttar Pradesh during festival season and create an opportunity for the development of a tourism product that pulls the tourists every year towards it.

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