

Ayodhya's Transformation from a Religious Centre to a Tourism Hub: Infrastructure Development and Its Impact on Local People of Ayodhya

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Abstract

One of India's oldest holy and culturally important cities is Ayodhya. With the building and opening of the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Temple, the city has become a significant hub for religious tourism and is replete with historic temples, ghats, and religious attractions that highlight its cultural legacy. The city's infrastructure development, economic restructuring, and urban transformation processes have all accelerated due to the pilgrimage and tourism industries' rapid expansion. The current study looks at how Ayodhya's local population's quality of life is affected by the rise in religious tourists. Ayodhya's infrastructure, job creation, business opportunities, and overall economic transformation have all benefited greatly from the growth of religious tourism.

At the same time, a number of issues have been brought about by the sharp rise in pilgrimage and tourism, such as population pressure, traffic jams, rising demand for essential services, waste management issues, strain on natural resources, and environmental stress. Additionally, the study shows that not all segments of the local community receive the same economic gains from tourism, which raises questions about social and spatial inequality. The study comes to the conclusion that, when managed within an inclusive, participatory, and ecologically conscious planning framework, religious tourism can become a significant tool for enhancing Ayodhya's quality of life and fostering sustainable urban growth. In order to comprehend the intricate interaction between religious tourism, urban transformation, local livelihoods, and quality of life in developing pilgrimage destinations, Ayodhya is a crucial case study.

Keywords: Tourism, Ram Mandir Temple, Infrastructure Development, Local People, Benefits and Challenges

Introduction

Ayodhya was the capital of Kosala and is considered the birthplace of Lord Rama, according to the Ramayana. The city has great significance in Buddhist and Jain traditions and is also associated with the ancient city of Saketa. Ayodhya continued to be a significant religious hub during the Middle Ages. At the location that would subsequently become the centre of the Ram Janmabhoomi–Babri Masjid conflict, the Babri Masjid was built in 1528. While Ayodhya maintained its religious significance, Faizabad became a

significant political and administrative hub under the Nawabs of Awadh during the eighteenth century. One of the most significant topics in contemporary Indian history, the disputed site was the focus of judicial and social strife from 1949 till 1992. The district of Faizabad was formally renamed Ayodhya in 2018. The Supreme Court of India's ruling on the Ayodhya title dispute on November 9, 2019, marked a significant turning point. The Ram Temple's foundation stone was subsequently placed on August 5, 2020, and Ram Lalla's Pran Pratishtha ceremony took place on January 22, 2024. Since then, Ayodhya has seen tremendous expansion in religious tourism, infrastructure, economic and other areas of development, employment creation, commercial activity, and urban transformation, solidifying its status as one of India's top pilgrimage and tourism destinations.

Study Region

Ayodhya, the sacred city associated with Lord Shri Ram and regarded as an important historical and religious centre by Hindus, is located in the eastern part of Uttar Pradesh. The city lies to the south of the Sarayu (Ghaghara) River and forms part of the Middle Ganga Plain. It is situated approximately between 26°45' North latitude and 82°15' East longitude, at a distance of about 135 km east of Lucknow. Total Area 2,522 Sq.Km. National Highway No. 28, connecting New Delhi with Nepal, passes through Ayodhya, making the city an important centre of regional connectivity. Ayodhya city serves as the headquarters of Ayodhya district and division and comprises 60 wards, with each ward containing approximately 4–7 localities (mohallas).

Ayodhya, known as Saketa in ancient times, is traditionally regarded as the birthplace of Lord Shri Ram and is therefore an important pilgrimage centre. According to the 2011 Census, the population of Ayodhya Municipal Corporation was more than 25 lakh, while the total population of Ayodhya district was more than 24,70,996. The majority of the urban population belongs to the Hindu community; however, Muslims, Sikhs, Jains, and Christians also reside in the city. The literacy rate is approximately 75%, which is close to the national average. From a linguistic perspective, Hindi is the principal language, while Awadhi, Urdu, and Sanskrit are also used on various religious, cultural, and social occasions.

Methodology

The secondary data used in the study have been collected from various official and authentic sources, including reports, plans, and statistical publications of the Government of India and the Government of Uttar Pradesh. Major sources include the Census of India 2011, National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5), Uttar Pradesh Tourism Department, and annual reports published by the Ayodhya Municipal Corporation, NITI Aayog, and the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs.

To develop the conceptual and theoretical framework of the study, relevant research papers, journals, newspapers, books, and other academic literature concerning tourism development and quality of life were reviewed. This helped in understanding the various dimensions of tourism development and its implications for the local population of Ayodhya and the city's development.

Objectives

- To examine the transformation of Ayodhya's infrastructure following the construction and inauguration of the Ram Mandir.
- To analyse the positive impacts of the temple's construction on tourism development within local communities.

- To assess the negative social, economic, and spatial consequences of rapid development of the city.
- To suggest measures for promoting inclusive and sustainable tourism development in Ayodhya.

The Centre Of Ayodhya Ram Mandir

Total Area	2.7 Acres
Total Built -up Area	57,400 Sq. ft
Total length of the temple	360 feet
Total width of the temple	235 feet
The total height of the temple, including the peak	161 feet
Total number of floors	3
Height of each floor	20 feet
Number of columns in the ground floor of the temple	160
Number of columns in the first floor of the temple	132
Number of columns in the second floor of the temple	74
Number of peaks and pavilions in the temple	5
Number of Gates In the temple	12

Source: Press Information Bureau

The Overview Of The Temple



Source: Government Of Uttar Pradesh

Monthly Estimated Devotee Footfall In Ayodhya (Jan 2024- Dec 2025)



Source: Sadhukuti et al.(2026)

Ayodhya City Infrastructure and Service		
PARAMETER	BEFORE 2021	IN 2025
E-rickshaws	500	17,000
Schools	62	65
Restaurants	200	2,000
Hospitals	20	30
Street Vendors	500	Approx 2,000
Big shops	0	1 Mall
Jewellery shop	3	<20
Banks	15	60
Clothing shops	150	500 plus
Homestays	0	1,136
Hotels	20	200(Including 3 & 4 star)
Travel agents	0	200
Tours & travels	0	5
Taxis (From airport)	0	400
Sweet Shop	200	653

Source: IIM Lucknow Study

The Significant Infrastructure Development After The Construction Of The Ram Mandir

- The airport in Ayodhya, Maharishi Valmiki International Airport, serves as a major hub to connect people from around the world, bringing Ayodhya into the wider world through air travel.
- Terrestrial Connectivity: On the roadside, things are improving as the Purvanchal Expressway meets the Ram Van Gaman Path. Ram Path (13km), Ram Janmabhoomi Path(2km), and Bhakti Path (750m) are grand gate entry and exit points.
- Rail Infrastructure has changed a lot, too. Ayodhya Dham Junction was redeveloped, and now, with those high-speed Vande Bharat trains, it handles more passengers. This supports shorter trips, even day trips, for tourists who want to come and go quickly.
- The regional development strategy has put in place a multi-lodging plan to handle an expected yearly growth of 10 million tourists. In order to foster prosperity and socioeconomic stability, this approach strikes a balance between outstanding capital investments and community-based activities.
- The emergence of international hotel chains like IHG, Taj, and Radisson signals a dramatic change in the direction of upscale, luxury travel. This institutional investment creates uniform service standards within the local market in addition to enhancing the destination's reputation internationally.
- Inclusive Access with Public-Private Partnerships (PPP)-Budget-focused "Yatri Niwas" facilities are being developed through strategic partnerships. These PPP approaches are crucial for sustaining the financial sustainability of the urban circuit while guaranteeing socioeconomic inclusion and offering high-capacity, reasonably priced accommodation that caters to the traditional pilgrim audience.
- The Homestay Revolution is being promoted locally through the Navya Ayodhya program. It encourages people to host guests in their own homes. As a result, the money is more evenly distributed. Instead of giving everything to large corporations, locals can get involved in the heritage tourism sector directly.
- Then there are these public-private partnerships working on Yatri Niwas locations, which are similar to low-cost vacation hostels. They play a crucial role in guaranteeing that everyone, particularly the numerous pilgrims, can afford to travel. These establishments maintain the city's tourism industry while providing a large number of rooms at affordable rates.
- Ayodhya is currently being recognised as a Model Solar City, utilising Industry 4.0 technology to provide ecological and urban adaptability while addressing the difficulties of mass pilgrimage. This shift to a "Smart Pilgrimage" paradigm is characterised by three main environmental and technological foundations.
- An essential step toward data-based city management is the implementation of Intelligent Traffic Management Systems (ITMS). City officials can lessen crowding during peak hours, like Deepotsav, by implementing AI-driven routing systems. This strategy enhances traffic flow for both cars and pedestrians in a typically congested urban region while also promoting public safety. The Green Pilgrimage Paradigm and Renewable Energy.
- The installation of a 40 MW solar facility next to the Saryu River is the cornerstone of the city's energy strategy and sets a benchmark for sustainable urbanism. This initiative supports a "Green Pilgrimage" paradigm and currently meets around 30% of municipal energy needs. It reduces the carbon footprint of large-scale religious events and demonstrates that the expansion of tourism does not jeopardise the stability of the local ecology.

- A shift toward a tech-integrated spiritual economy is reflected in the digitisation of the visitor experience through unified tourism platforms and "Virtual Darshan" portals. These digital governance solutions enable a "frictionless" journey by lowering administrative and physical barriers. Real-time resource allocation is made possible by this Internet of Things (IoT) integration into the religious landscape, which also improves the overall quality of the experience for a globalised demographic.

Impact On The Local People After The Construction Of The Temple

Positive Impacts on the Community

In industries including hospitality, tourism, handicrafts, the creation of holy artefacts, local transportation, and tour guiding, almost 1.2 lakh direct and indirect jobs have been created. In order to facilitate employment in temple-related activities, the government is also offering skill development programs.

Small sellers' daily revenues have increased significantly, from roughly ₹400 to ₹500 to almost ₹2,500. The Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) claims that the consecration ceremony of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya generated more than ₹1,00,000 crore in economic activity nationally, with a significant amount of this activity centred in Ayodhya. Thousands of entry-level jobs are created as a result of increased demand for tour guides, photographers, and local transportation services like taxis and e-rickshaws.

Nearly 1.2 lakh direct and indirect jobs have been created in sectors such as hospitality, tourism, handicrafts, the production of sacred items, local transportation, and tour guiding. The government is also providing skill development programs to make employment in temple-related activities easier.

The daily earnings of small vendors have risen from about ₹400 to ₹500 to about ₹2,500. According to the Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT), the consecration ceremony of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya produced about ₹1,00,000 crore in economic activity nationwide, with a large portion of this activity concentrated in Ayodhya. The rising demand for tour guides, photographers, and local transportation services like e-rickshaws and taxis creates thousands of entry-level jobs. The "Smart City" plan, which includes widening, round-the-clock energy, and improved sewage systems, directly raises the local level of living. Ayodhya and its neighbouring districts, such as Basti and Gonda, have experienced exponential growth in property values. High-value commercial assets are now owned by local landowners who formerly owned agricultural land. As commercial companies hurry to establish a presence in the city, strong rental yields benefit even those who are not selling their properties.

Local customs that have been lost are frequently revived thanks to tourism. Local craftspeople who specialise in woodworking, mural painting, and stone carving have seen an increase in business.

The region's hospitality management schools and language training facilities are under increasing pressure to upskill young people due to the increase of foreign visitors.

Adverse Effects On The Community Following The Ram Mandir's Construction

Although the Ram Mandir has sparked an "economic renaissance," the local populace has suffered significant structural and social consequences as a result of Ayodhya's quick transformation.

- Unintentional Displacement faced by local people due to the widening of the area for construction purposes.
- The Compensation Gap: In comparison to market prices, the government's "ex gratia" (relief) payments were considerably too small.

- Market Surge: Due to the 400–500% increase in property values, the majority of displaced inhabitants are unable to purchase new homes or reopen their enterprises in the same region, which causes them to lose their ancestral roots and means of subsistence.
- Permanent residents are experiencing a "cost-of-living crisis" as a result of the enormous increase in tourists.
- Prices for real estate have become high. The local middle class found it practically hard to purchase homes as land prices surged from ₹700 to over ₹20,000 per square foot.
- The cost of basic groceries and services has increased dramatically as companies concentrate on travellers.
- The old small-scale economy is being displaced by the emergence of large hotel chains and retail brands.
- The primary temple areas, where the majority of patrons congregate, are frequently off-limits to small vendors, such as flower vendors and craftspeople. So these areas become exclusion zones for small vendors and locals
- The majority of new jobs require upskilling, digital skills, and upgraded knowledge. Yet many people in the city lack specialised education or digital skills, so there is a skill gap.
- Daily stress results from the city's systems not being built for a resident-to-tourist ratio of 1:10 due to overworked Environment and Infrastructure
- The city's waste management system is overburdened by the massive amount of rubbish produced by tourists, endangering the Saryu River's health.
- According to the study, Ayodhya's tourism growth is a "double-edged sword." The local community is currently suffering the most from this quick change, despite the city's enormous economic potential and increased international prominence.

Major Findings

Economic Growth vs. Local Hardship: While small-scale local traders are being displaced, the "economic renaissance" is mainly helping large-scale investors and the hospitality sector.

The Displacement Crisis: Because compensation amounts have not kept up with the 400– 500% increase in property values, the demolition of about 4,000 buildings has caused societal division.

Infrastructure Strain: The city's present infrastructure is unable to sustain the 1:10 resident-to-tourist ratio, which causes everyday mobility problems for residents and environmental degradation of the Saryu River.

Need for Inclusive Planning: Government-led training programs and designated vending zones are necessary to overcome the "skill gap" and "livelihood threat" facing traditional artists and sellers.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the "Ayodhya Master Plan" needs to change from infrastructure-first to people-first in order for Ayodhya to develop into a viable international tourism destination. Only when tourism development maintains both the magnificence of the temple and the heritage of the local community can it be deemed successful. The very people who have maintained Ayodhya's culture for generations run the risk of being left behind by its modernisation in the absence of social protections and equitable economic policies. So development and city modified is important, but the first priority should be the local community and to safe cultural of Ayodhya and its surrounding nature to achieve sustainable development.

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