



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

Sports Tourism in India

Dr. S. B. Nandar¹ and Dr. Rajanna²

1. Assistant Professor, Department of Physical Education, University of Agricultural Sciences, Dharwad, Karnataka
2. Professor, Department of Physical Education, University of Agricultural Sciences, Raichur

Abstract:

Sports tourism is an increasingly significant segment of the global tourism industry, and India is rapidly emerging as a promising destination within this niche. This paper explores the current landscape of sports tourism in India, analysing its trends, economic impact, government policies, challenges, and opportunities. Drawing upon recent market data, governmental initiatives, and academic insights, it highlights the immense potential for India to solidify its position as a major sports tourism hub, driven by its diverse sporting culture, growing infrastructure, and strategic policy frameworks.

Keywords: Sports Tourism, India, Economic Impact, Government Policy, Challenges, Opportunities, Adventure Tourism, Event Tourism, Cricket, Khelo India.

1. Introduction

Sports tourism, broadly defined as travel which involves either observing or participating in a sporting event, or visiting sports attractions, has witnessed remarkable growth globally. In India, a nation with a deep-rooted passion for various sports, this sector is experiencing a significant revolution. While traditionally known for cultural and heritage tourism, India is now strategically positioning itself to capitalize on the vast potential of sports tourism, contributing significantly to its economy and enhancing its international visibility. This paper aims to provide a comprehensive overview of sports tourism in India, examining its current status and future trajectory.

2. Current Trends in Sports Tourism in India

The Indian sports tourism market is on a robust growth path, projected to reach ₹12.76 Lakh Crore by 2030, with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 19.3% from 2024 to 2030 (Grand View Research, 2023). This growth is driven by several key trends:

Dominance of Cricket but Diversification in Progress: Cricket remains the largest revenue-generating sport, holding a 33.09% share in 2023. However, other sports like soccer/football are rapidly gaining traction and are projected to be the fastest-growing segments.

Rise of Active Sports Tourism: Beyond spectating, there's a surging interest in active sports tourism, including participation in marathons (e.g., Tata Mumbai Marathon, Airtel Delhi Half Marathon, Ladakh Marathon), cycling tours, trekking, and adventure sports.

Adventure Sports Hotspots: India's diverse geography offers immense scope for adventure sports. Destinations like Bir Billing (paragliding), Rishikesh (white water rafting), Andaman & Nicobar Islands (scuba diving), Auli and Gulmarg (skiing), and Spiti and Leh (mountain biking) are attracting both domestic and international enthusiasts.

Growing Mass Participation Events: The increase in organized mass participation events, such as marathons and half-marathons, contributes significantly to active sports tourism.

International Event Hosting: India has demonstrated its capability to host major international events, such as the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup 2023, which attracted a diverse global audience and showcased India's cultural and infrastructural richness. States like Odisha have also successfully hosted major international hockey events, cementing their reputation as sports hubs.

3. Economic Impact of Sports Tourism

Sports tourism is a potent economic driver for India, generating substantial revenue, creating employment, and fostering infrastructure development.

Significant Revenue Generation: The Ministry of Tourism identifies sports tourism as one of the fastest-growing segments, expected to contribute over INR 20,000 crore to the Indian economy by 2030 (HolidayMonk). Large-scale events like the Delhi Half Marathon contribute hundreds of crores in socio-economic and health benefits through consumer spending, boosts to hospitality, travel, and training sectors, and employment generation.

Job Creation: The expansion of sports tourism directly translates into new employment opportunities for local residents across various sectors, including hospitality, transportation, event management, and sports-related services.

Infrastructure Development: Hosting major sporting events necessitates significant investment in infrastructure, including stadiums, accommodation, transportation networks (roads, metros), and other related facilities. This improved infrastructure not only serves sports tourists but also benefits local communities and enhances the country's overall capacity to attract more tourism and investment. Examples like Qatar's investment for the FIFA World Cup 2022, Canada US and Mexico FIFA World Cup 2026 and Glasgow(Scotland), Commonwealth games 2026 demonstrate the transformative power of such investments.

Increased International Visibility: Successful hosting of international sporting events significantly boosts a nation's international profile and reputation, attracting more tourism and foreign investment beyond the immediate event.

4. Government Policies and Initiatives

Recognizing the strategic importance of sports tourism, the Indian government has implemented several policies and initiatives to promote and develop this sector:

National Sports Policy (NSP) 2025: The recently approved NSP 2025 aims to reshape India's sporting landscape, with a key objective to "Promote sports tourism and attract major international events to India." This policy underscores the government's commitment to leveraging sports for economic development.

Khelo India Program: This flagship program is a cornerstone of India's sports policy, encompassing funding for infrastructure development, support for sports academies, and school sports programs. It aims to drive mass participation, promote a culture of fitness, and identify and nurture sporting talent from the grassroots level. The creation of Khelo India State Centres of Excellence (KISCEs) further decentralizes sports development and encourages local sporting cultures.

Budgetary Allocations: The government has consistently increased its budgetary allocations for sports initiatives, with a significant portion directed towards programs like Khelo India, indicating a strong financial commitment to sports development and its integration with tourism.

"Viksit Bharat" Alignment: The National Sports Policy aligns with the "Viksit Bharat" vision, emphasizing sports as a mass movement, broad-based economic growth, and bridging the gap between public and private sector performance.

5. Challenges and Opportunities

Despite the promising outlook, sports tourism in India faces certain challenges that need to be addressed to unlock its full potential:

5.1. Challenges:

Infrastructure Gaps: While urban areas have good stadiums, quality sports infrastructure remains limited in many rural regions. This includes a scarcity of grounds, quality sports kits, and adequate training facilities for certain games.

Sponsorship and Funding: Securing sufficient sponsorship and financial support, particularly from state governments and public sectors, can be a hurdle for organizing and promoting smaller-scale sports events.

Logistical Issues: Challenges related to language barriers for international tourists, difficulties in obtaining visas, and ensuring seamless transportation and accommodation can impede growth.

Lack of Integration: The linkages between the sports and tourism sectors are not always well-established, leading to missed opportunities in maximizing tourism benefits from sporting events.

Attitudinal Barriers: Historically, sports has not always been considered a primary career option in India, impacting participation and professional development.

Environmental Concerns: The development of sports tourism infrastructure, especially for adventure sports, needs careful consideration to minimize environmental impact and promote sustainable practices.

5.2. Opportunities:

Diverse Topography: India's varied landscape, from the Himalayas to its extensive coastline, offers unparalleled opportunities for a wide range of adventure and outdoor sports, making it a natural fit for active sports tourism.

Large Population and Growing Middle Class: A massive population with increasing disposable income and a growing interest in fitness and sports provides a large domestic market for sports tourism.

Passionate Fan Base: The fervent fan following for sports like cricket and increasingly for football, kabaddi, and other disciplines, ensures a ready audience for passive sports tourism.

Strategic Location: India's geographical location makes it accessible to a large international market, particularly from Asia and the Middle East.

Technological Advancement: Leveraging digital platforms for promotion, ticket sales, and virtual experiences can significantly boost engagement and accessibility for sports tourists.

Public-Private Partnerships: Collaborative efforts between government bodies, private organizations, and local communities can address infrastructure gaps, secure sponsorships, and enhance overall tourism offerings.

Promoting Local Sports: Recognizing and promoting traditional Indian sports and local sporting cultures can create unique sports tourism experiences and further diversify offerings.

6. Case Studies and Success Stories

Odisha: The Emerging Sports Hub: Odisha has emerged as a prime example of successful sports tourism development. Through strategic investments in infrastructure (like the Kalinga Stadium in Bhubaneswar), successful hosting of major international events (FIH Men's Hockey World Cup, Asian Athletics Championships), and integrated cultural festivals (FEST during the Hockey World Cup), Odisha has firmly established itself as a sports tourism destination.

Cricket World Cup 2023: The ICC Men's Cricket World Cup 2023, hosted across multiple Indian cities, served as a powerful testament to India's capacity to organize and attract a global audience for mega-events. It significantly boosted bookings in host cities and showcased India's cultural richness alongside its sporting prowess.

Marathons and Adventure Sports Destinations: The continuous success of marathons in major cities and the growing popularity of adventure sports in regions like Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Goa, and the Andaman & Nicobar Islands demonstrate the potential of active and niche sports tourism.

7. Conclusion:

Sports tourism in India is at an inflection point, poised for significant growth and development. With a blooming interest in both active participation and spectating, coupled with supportive government policies like the National Sports Policy 2025 and initiatives like Khelo India, India is well-equipped to capitalize on this growing sector. While challenges related to infrastructure, funding, and integration exist, the vast opportunities presented by its diverse geography, large population, and passionate fan base outweigh these hurdles. By strategically addressing these challenges and fostering stronger collaborations between the sports and tourism sectors, India can not only establish itself as a global sports tourism powerhouse but also leverage sports as a powerful tool for economic development, social inclusion, and international diplomacy. Continued investment in infrastructure, targeted marketing, and the promotion of a wider arrangements of sports will be crucial for realizing India's full potential in the dynamic world of sports tourism.

References:

1. **Grand View Research.** (2023). *Sports Tourism Market Size, Share & Trends Analysis Report By Sports Type, By Type (Active, Passive), By Consumer (Group, Individuals), By Region, And Segment Forecasts 2024 - 2030*. Grand View Research. <https://www.grandviewresearch.com/industry-analysis/sports-tourism-market>
2. **HolidayMonk.** (2023). *The rise of sports tourism in India: Trends, economic impact, and opportunities*. HolidayMonk Travel & Tourism Insights. <https://www.holidaymonk.com>
3. **Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports (MYAS), Government of India.** (2025). *National Sports Policy 2025 (Khelo Bharat Niti)*. Union Cabinet Approved Policy Document, Government of India.
4. **Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports (MYAS), Government of India.** (2021). *Khelo India: National Programme for Development of Sports*. Scheme Guidelines and Infrastructure Development Framework. New Delhi: MYAS.
5. **Ministry of Tourism, Government of India.** (2023). *Annual Report 2022–2023: Niche Tourism Products and Sports Tourism Opportunities*. Government of India.
6. **NITI Aayog.** (2024). *Promoting Sports Economy and Infrastructure Development under Viksit Bharat @2047*. Government of India Policy Paper.

7. **Odisha Tourism & Department of Sports and Youth Services (DSYS).** (2023). *Case Study: Transforming Odisha into a Global Sports Hub through Major Event Hosting and Infrastructure Investment*. Government of Odisha.
8. **International Cricket Council (ICC).** (2023). *Post-Event Economic Impact Report: ICC Men's Cricket World Cup 2023 India*. Dubai: International Cricket Council.

