

Potential And Possibilities Of Religious Tourism With Reference Of Shravasti District

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ABSTRACT

India is known for its magnificent heritage and immense abundance of nature. On one side there are the Himalayan peaks and on the other side there are dense forests, golden beaches and sandy deserts, which truly make India an 'incredible destination'. Every Indian feels proud of the historical, spiritual and cultural sites. Every state of India is beautiful, which attracts tourists. India has been famous for tourism since ancient times. Even today lakhs of people from India and abroad come here. Whose impact is visible in the socio-economic and cultural sectors. A large amount of foreign exchange is generated there. At the same time, the religious tourism industry provides a lot of opportunities to new business startups and provides a large number of jobs in the country. This tourism is not only a boon for business entities but also helps in developing the local market of the area. And increases the standard of living of the local people. Through tourism, the cultural heritage, beauty, art, history and culture of the country can be understood. Similarly, due to tourism local knowledge, language and art become widely known. Therefore, through this paper we want to know the possibility and potential of religious tourism in Shravasti district, the border area of Uttar Pradesh.

Keywords: -Tourism, Religious tourism, Socio-economic, culture, possibility, potential, sustainable development.

INTRODUCTION:

Religious tourism has been one of the most rapidly developing forms of tourism since ancient times. And it represents an important and increasingly diverse sector of the market globally (Sharpley, 2009). Religious tourism, sometimes also called faith tourism, is a form of cultural tourism. Tourists traveling for religious purposes have to leave their country for a period of more than half a year to visit holy places and religious centers. Religious tourism includes activities related to the services and needs of tourists visiting holy places and religious centers outside their normal environment. Religious tourism is the trend of visiting more than one religious place. Due to which people are able to gain knowledge about other religious cultures (Gupta, 2017). According to Blackwell 2007 "Religious tourism involves various forms of travel driven by religious beliefs, with the primary purpose being to visit religious sites. These sites may not always be linked to present-day religions, as there have been numerous religions throughout history that have faded into obscurity. Despite their decline, these religions have left behind remarkable artifacts such as temples, churches, shrines, statues, and other cultural legacies."

India's natural, cultural and historical heritage makes it a very important region from the tourism point of view. From Kashmir to Kanyakumari, from Arunachal Pradesh to Gujarat, each region has its own uniqueness and culture. These areas have the potential to attract tourists with their natural and religious features like rivers, forests, islands, mountains and plateaus, temples, Gurdwaras, mosques, churches etc. At the same time, the wide variety of landscapes and cultural heritage found here is providing many options for

tourists (Goswami, 2016). If we want to see a miniature India, then Uttar Pradesh would be its best example, because the tourism of Uttar Pradesh, drenched in Ganga-Jamuni culture, is unique. While on one hand the cities of Maryada Purushottam Ram, Krishna and Bholenath are Ayodhya, Mathura and Kashi respectively, on the other hand the cities of Gautam Buddha, Mahavir Swami and Tulsi are Sarnath, Kaushambi, Shravasti and Chitrakoot respectively. And there is the Taj Mahal, built of marble and attracting everyone's attention, which is in the World Heritage list. The state is also full of natural richness; there are unique treasures of beauty like national parks, sanctuaries, biodiversity areas and wetlands belonging to the Ramsar list, which are a mixture of cultural, religious, historical and natural places. This is the reason why the Indian tradition has been 'Atithi Devon Bhava'. (Singhsheelwant, 2023).

Shinde, K. A., & Olsen, D. H. (2022) in his research titled "Reframing the Intersections of Pilgrimage, Religious Tourism and Sustainability" focus on the research underscores the significance of integrating religious and cultural elements into conversations about sustainability in pilgrimage and religious tourism sites. Traditional sustainability models may not be entirely applicable to pilgrim-towns due to their distinct features and constant influx of visitors. To address this gap, the authors advocate for a more inclusive model that takes into account both the physical and metaphysical aspects of these destinations. Discussions on sustainability in pilgrimage and religious tourism should encompass the tangible and intangible aspects of a place's sacredness, incorporating religious and cultural viewpoints. The study challenges the conventional understanding of sustainability in contemporary pilgrimage and religious tourism, prompting a reevaluation of whether these practices can be managed in a more sustainable manner given their environmental impacts and historical patterns of disease transmission. Scholars contend that sustainability dialogues in pilgrimage sites should extend beyond economic, socio-cultural, and environmental considerations to encompass the sanctity of these locations. The authors propose that a comprehensive grasp of sustainability in pilgrim-towns necessitates an examination of disruptions, resilience, and the physical and metaphysical ecosystems present in these destinations.

Romanelli, M., Gazzola, P., Grechi, D., & Pollice, F. (2021) in his research titled "Towards a sustainability-oriented religious tourism" focusing on the Religious tourism and pilgrimages are key drivers of sustainable tourism development, contributing significantly to the social and economic advancement of local economies and communities. Pilgrimages, such as those along the Camino de Santiago de Compostela and Via Francigena, serve as successful religious and touristic destinations that promote sustainability within local ecosystems through collaborative efforts among multiple stakeholders. This study delves into the intricate relationship between spirituality, cultural elements, and sustainability in religious tourism, underscoring the significance of spiritual encounters and indigenous customs in enriching the travel experience. By adopting a relational approach to tourism development, pilgrimage tourism underscores the importance of cooperation among diverse actors to enhance community well-being and foster sustainable value creation. The research endeavor seeks to examine the dynamic interplay of spiritual, emotional, and cognitive processes during pilgrimages, shedding light on the transformative impact of these experiences at both individual and collective levels

Stranjančević, A. (2019) in his research titled "Integrated model of religious tourism in underdeveloped destinations." focusing on the Throughout history, religious beliefs have played a crucial role in inspiring human movements, with the earliest instances of religious tourism tracing back to ancient Egypt. Festivals held in ancient Greece were imbued with significant religious significance, drawing in travelers from distant regions. The concept of religious tourism was officially recognized as a means of promoting human solidarity and cultural exchange during the inaugural Congress of Religious Tourism in Ravenna in 1990. This form of tourism often caters to visitors belonging to specific religious groups who are eager to deepen their understanding or involvement in a particular faith. A distinction is made between spiritual and religious tourists based on the level of devotion and emotional investment in their religious quest. Religious tourism typically involves visits to sacred sites, monuments, and destinations that appeal to both religious and non-religious individuals interested in cultural heritage. The standard of accommodation for religious tourists has seen improvement, with a growing expectation for top-notch amenities. Categories of religious tourist attractions encompass pilgrimage sites, religious landmarks, and festivals with religious themes. Religious tourism is a multifaceted system that encompasses a range of motivations, including worship, cultural discovery, and sightseeing, catering to both religious and non-religious participants.

Apart from being an international Buddhist site, Shravasti is also an important place for Jains and Hindus. The district is located in the western part of Uttar Pradesh and is famous for its rich religious and historical heritage. Shravasti has a rich history of thousands of years old Buddhist temples, museums, mausoleums, important mausoleums of saints, beauty and ancient artifacts. This district is also an important place for Hindus, Sikhs, Jains and Muslims. There are many ancient temples and religious sites here. Initially it was a popular pilgrimage for Hindu pilgrims. Later it became one of the holy places related to the life of Gautam Buddha. The pilgrimage here was originated by Lord Mahavira and he had visited here many times in his life (Ministry of tourism of India).

STUDY REGION:

Shravasti district is in the north-western part of Uttar Pradesh with an area of 2016 square kilometers. It is a district created in 1997 by separating it from Bahraich district. This shares its border with Balrampur, Gonda and Bahraich districts and in the north has international border with two districts of Nepal, Banke and Dank. Bhinga is the district headquarters of Shravasti and is about 175 kilometers from the capital Lucknow. Shravasti has three tehsils Bhinga, Ikauna and Jamunha respectively and five blocks Hariharpur Rani, Jamunha, Gilola, Sirsia and Ikauna. The area lies between North Latitude 27°04' and 28°24' and east longitude 81°35' and 82°15' and falls in Survey of India Toposheet No. 63E & 63I (Figure-1).

Physiography

From a natural point of view, it is divided into two parts, the Terai region in the north and the Rapti river basin, which is also called 'Upahar'. The Terai region of the North is covered with forests, in which there is a sufficient amount of valuable and useful wood and 'Tharu' Scheduled Tribes reside in this area. This is the height of ground level which is about 200 meters above sea level. The general main slope of the area is mainly from north to south. Bad land and rough topography have been observed at places along the banks of the Rapti River originating from the southern part of the region. Small hills of Shivalik are visible in the northernmost part of the district. The north-eastern corner of the area consists of boulders, sandstone and clayey sands. The rest of the area belongs to the central alluvial plain. Overall, this area is flat land.

Climate

The climate of Shravasti district is relatively subtropical with a high difference between summer and winter temperatures. The average temperature in summer is around 30°C-43°C and in winter it is around 6°C-18°C. The average annual rainfall during the south-west monsoon is 1020 mm. Winds are generally light and increase in speed from the beginning of summer and remain high until September.

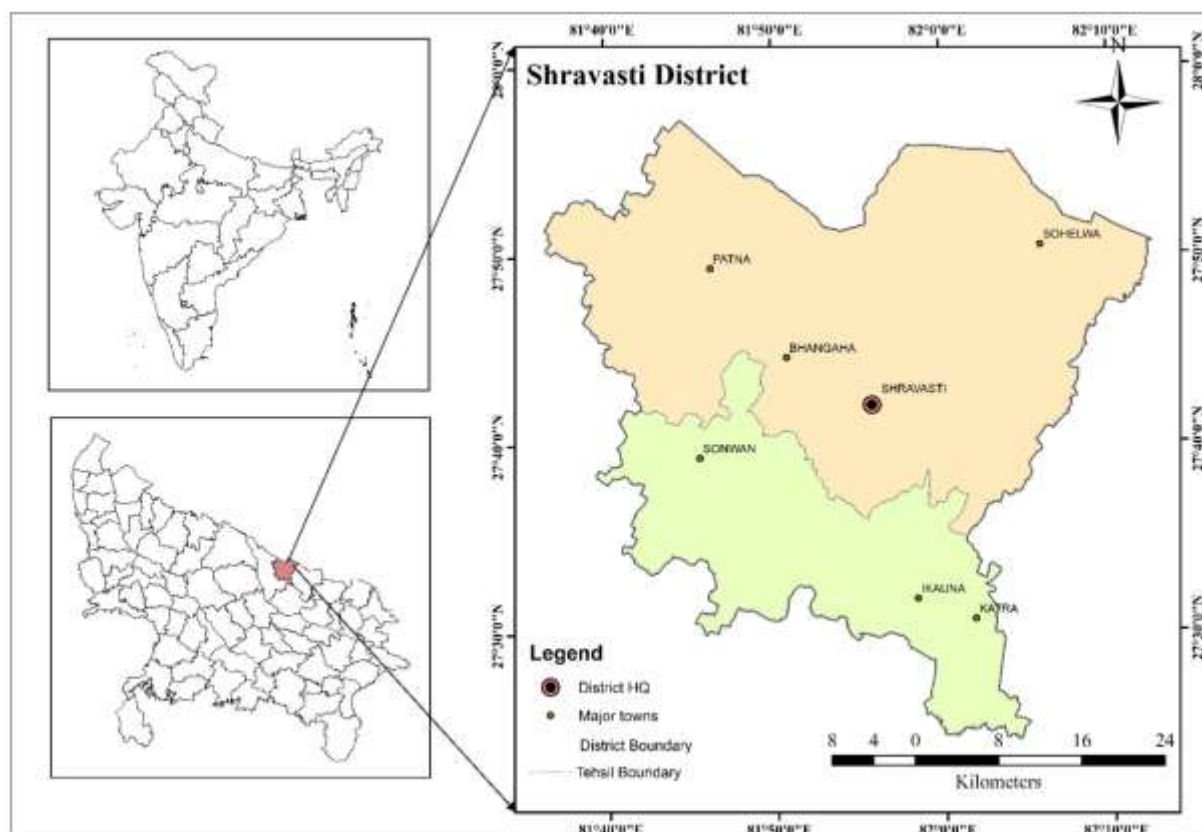


Figure. 1 Administrative map of study area

Drainage:

Rapti is the main river of the district, other water systems include Tehri River, Kuwana River, Baghel Tal etc., apart from these there are ample number of lakes and ponds.

Agriculture

The economy here is mainly agricultural. Topography, climate and soil are the main factors affecting agriculture. About 75% of the land comes under agriculture. In which the main crops of Kharif, Rabi and Zaid are grown. This mainly includes paddy, maize, sugarcane, wheat, barley.

Demographic status

Shravasti district has an area of 2458 square kilometers consisting of 3 tehsils, 5 blocks and 536 inhabited villages. According to the 2011 census, the population of the district is 1,117,361. The population density in the district is 681 per square kilometer. The sex ratio of the district is 881. As far as decadal growth is concerned, it is 30.54% in 2001-2011. The sex ratio in the district is 881 females per 1000 males and the literacy rate is 46.74%. The male literacy rate is 57.16% while the female literacy rate is 34.78%. 3.46% of the population lives in urban areas. Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes constitute 16.94% and 0.50% of the population respectively.

Religion

Shravasti district is Hindu-majority with 68.79%, but the number of Muslims here has also increased rapidly to 30.79%. Bhinga district headquarters is Muslim dominated. However, it was earlier a center of Buddhism. Along with this, there are also people of Buddhist and Jain religions in the district who are minorities.

OBJECTIVE:

- To know about the potential and possibility of religious tourism in Shravasti District.

DATABASE AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

This paper is based on secondary data collected from multiple sources such as the Ministry of Tourism, Uttar Pradesh Tourism, Shravasti Tourism, as well as various research papers and private publications. The secondary data was obtained from the Census of India, district census handbook, and district statistical abstract of the study region district. The processed data is presented in tabular and graphical forms, and the analysis is conducted based on this data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

Month wise Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) during 2023 in India

Figure. 2 shows Foreign tourist arrivals during the period January-October, 2023 stood at 72, 43,680, while it was 46, 55,160 in January-October 2022. Whereas in October, 2023 the arrival of foreign tourists was 8,11,411.



Figure. 2 Secondary data: Ministry of Tourism GOI

Purpose-wise percentage share of foreign tourist arrivals in India
Secondary data: Ministry of Tourism GOI

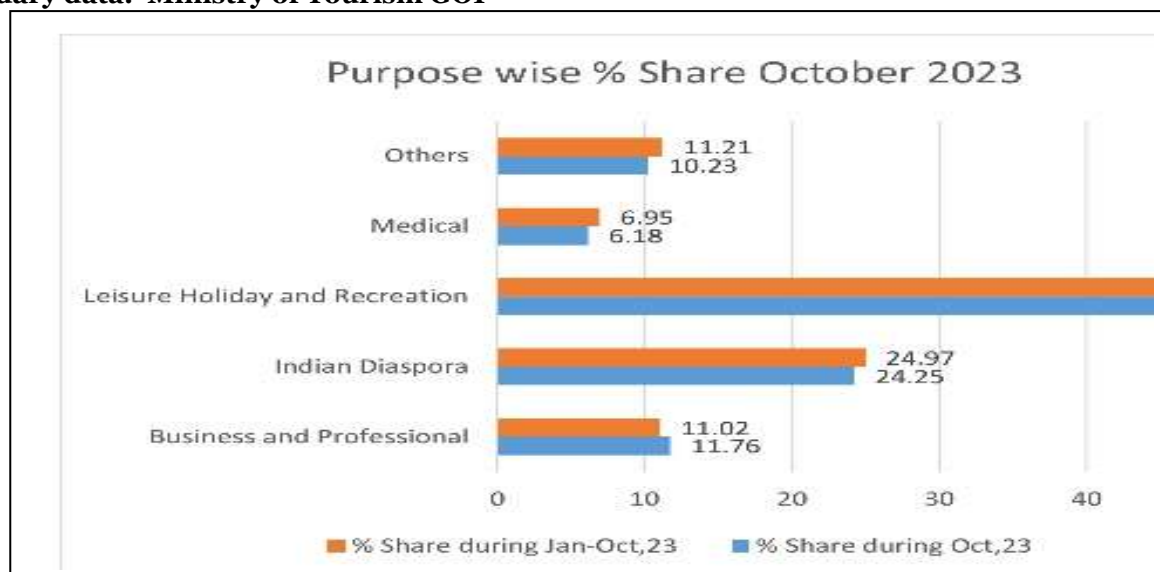


Figure. 3 Secondary data: Ministry of Tourism GOI

The following graph Figure. 3 shows the purpose-wise percentage share of foreign tourist arrivals in India during October 2023 and January to October 2023 to understand various purposes such as medical, business, holiday and Indian Diaspora.

The breakdown of Indian and foreign tourist arrivals in Uttar Pradesh from 2017 to 2022 is shown in the following table.

In the year 2017, 233977619 people from all over India visited Uttar Pradesh on various tourist trips, while 3556204 people from abroad visited Uttar Pradesh, which is 9.61% more as compared to the year 2016. Similarly, in 2018, 285079848 people came from all over India and 3780752 people came from abroad, which was 21.6% more as compared to the year 2017. In the year 2019, 535855162 people came from India and 4745181 people came from abroad, which was 87.14% more than the year 2018, due to the Maha Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj. In the year 2020, 86122293 people came from India and 890932 people came from abroad, which was (-) 83.90% compared to 2019 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. There was a huge shortage this year due to the lockdown. In 2021, 109708435 people came from India and 44737 people came from abroad, which is an increase of 26.14% compared to 2020. In the year 2022, 317913587 people came from India and 648986 people came from abroad, which was 65.55% compared to the year 2021.

The Indian and Foreign tourist visits in important tourist places of Uttar Pradesh in year 2017 to 2022

YEAR	INDIAN	FOREIGN	Percentage increase or reduce in comparison to last year in %		
			INDIA	FOREIGN	Total
2017	233977619	3556204	9.56	12.65	9.61
2018	285079848	3780752	21.84	6.31	21.6
2019	535855162	4745181	87.96	25.5	87.14
2020	86122293	890932	(-)83.92	(-)81.22	(-)83.90
2021	109708435	44737	27.39	(-)94.97	26.14
2022	317913587	648986	65.49	93.11	65.55`

Source: Department of Tourism, Uttar Pradesh

Table:1

In the year 2017, 120828 people from India and 137184 people from abroad traveled to Shravasti, a district bordering Nepal. In the year 2018, 982805 people traveled from India and 149304 people traveled from abroad. In the year 2019, 1116009 people traveled from India and 155740 people traveled from abroad. In 2020, 11238 people traveled from all over India and 5485 people traveled from abroad. In the year 2021, 10982 people came from India whereas no travelers came due to Covid-19 lockdown. In the year 2022, 55808 people traveled here and only 10 people from abroad traveled here.

Shravasti is a historically famous district of eastern Uttar Pradesh. This is about 175 kilometers away from the state capital Lucknow. It has a deep connection with the life of Lord Buddha. It is one of the main sites for Buddhist and Jain pilgrimage. According to Hindu mythology, a famous historical temple, Sitadwar, is known as the birth place of Luv and Kush, sons of Lord Shri Ramji. Vibhutinath, a historical temple of Lord Shiva of the Mahabharata period, is located there, which is also known as Gupt Kashi. etc. Shravasti, full of various natural beauties, has a lot of potential in the field of tourism. Millions of people come here every year

The following targets have been set under Vision 2047.

- 1-Development of eco-tourism.
- 2-Wellness Centre.
- 3- Developed tourism hub.
- 4-Archaeological Museum.
- 5-Bidd Theme Park.
- 6-Connection to Ramayana Circuit and Buddha Circuit.
- 7-Digital library with preservation of culture.
- 8-Initial journey

The Indian and Foreign tourist visits in Sharvasti district in year 2017-22

Despite being an international tourist destination visited by people from all over the country and abroad, the district falls in a backward area of the state. This includes health, nutrition, education, agriculture, economic development, employment, infrastructure, transportation and communication etc. Apart from this, almost every year there is loss of life due to floods in Rapti river. The infrastructure of the district is accompanied by backwardness, which affects the development of the district.

Despite continuous improvement in health services, the district was very backward in health and nutrition services, currently there is 01 Joint District Hospital, 07 CHC, 11 PHC, 125 Sub-centers (106 Health and Wellness Centers) and 925 Anganwadi Centers. There is still shortage of staff, doctors, specialists etc. Since it is an international tourist destination and a border district of Nepal, foreign patients also come from here.

The condition of education was not so good earlier but after continuous improvement in education services currently 984 primary and UPS schools, 124 secondary colleges and 10-degree colleges and 2 polytechnics and 4 ITIs are available. There is a huge shortage of staff in these institutions. Smart classes are being run in 335 schools with the help of CSR. For the development of the district, a need is felt to improve education services.

The population of Shravasti mainly lives in rural areas. There is huge potential for development in the agriculture sector. The total agricultural area is 135554 hectares. The main crops are rice, maize, wheat, lentils, sugarcane and banana.

There is immense potential for development in the areas through modern and organic agriculture. There is lack of industries in Shravasti which is adversely affecting economic development and employment. Due to which people are continuously migrating to cities. There is a lack of resources and infrastructure in the field of sports in Shravasti. Here are quite interested in different games. Passion of swimming, cricket, wrestling, kabaddi, badminton etc. in the youth is clear, if these talents get the right guidance and proper coaching, these talent can skyrocket.

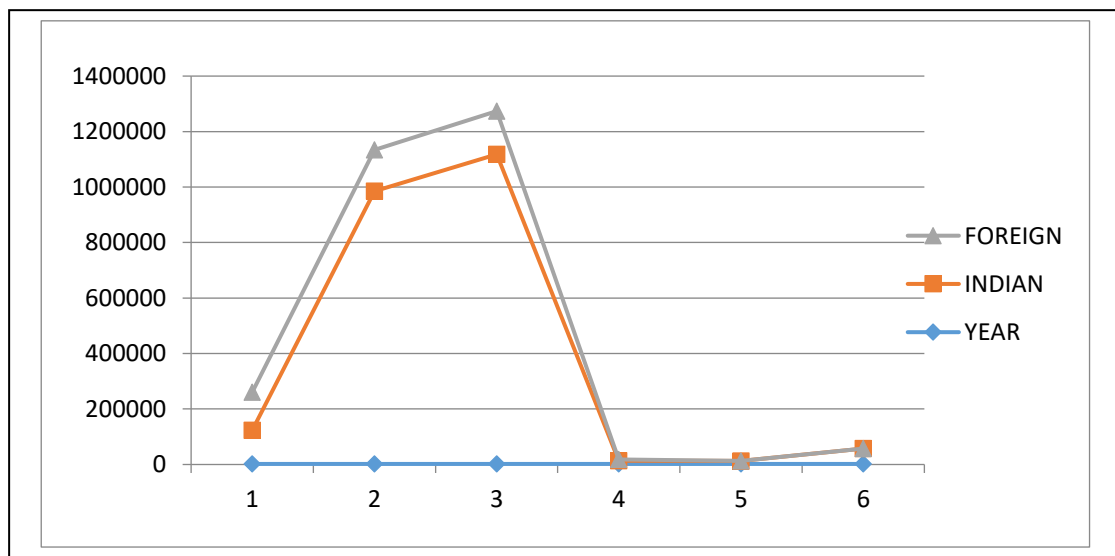


Figure. 4 Secondary data: Department of Tourism, Uttar Pradesh

Flood disaster is a problem which causes the district almost every year. Floods not only affect life and economic assets, but agricultural land and crops are also destroyed in water. Rapti River enters the district with water from the hills of Nepal. This water is containing natural estate. Therefore, it is very important to have a permanent arrangement for flood rescue in the district.

IT and e-governance acts as a fuel, which can be made simple, civil-oriented to rule. Transparent, accountable and quick through e-governance. It is the use of ICT and e-governance to deliver government information and services to citizens, businesses, employees and governments. Under which improve the efficiency of the current system and save money and time.

There is a need to improve the condition of women due to illiteracy, unemployment and superstition. Various programs are being run to make women self-reliant and economically strong. Apart from this, non-governmental organizations are also working for the development of women. Special emphasis is also being given to the education of girl students. Women empowerment will ensure the development of the district as well as the entire country.

Tribal people live in some villages of the district and efforts are being made to improve their health, education and social security and economic development. Rose water made by the tribal people of the district is also available on the world's largest online portal Amazon. Similarly, there are plans to run other schemes in the district, so that the tribal's can develop.

The condition of the district in the field of environment is better than others; we have abundant water, forests on large part of the land. The district has abundant availability of natural resources which need to be conserved. Shravasti lacks connectivity facilities and has low infrastructure. At present some roadways and private buses are available.

6. Suggestion

1. Religious tourism areas should be identified and developed on the basis of global standards by renovating them. Tourists can be attracted by this.
2. Tourists can be attracted by providing basic facilities to the dilapidated religious places.
3. For the up gradation of neglected religious sites, the government can develop such religious sites by allocating some funds from its budget.
4. Complete arrangements can be made for transportation and accommodation of passengers at eligioussites at reasonable prices.
5. Security arrangements and primary health arrangements should be made for the Tourists.

7. Conclusion

The development of tourism largely depends on tourism policy. Tourism is a very important part of the economy. The economic development of any country, whether developing, developed or underdeveloped, is greatly influenced by the tourism sector. Therefore, every country in the world has developed some tourism policies to develop the tourism industry. Spiritual or Religious tourism are two sides of the same coin. It is difficult to accept the concept of spiritual tourism by separating pilgrimage from tourism, because only a group of religious people travel to pilgrimage and other religious places. The most popular type of tourism is religious tourism, which accounts for more than 70% of national tourist arrivals and 20% of tourism income. According to a survey conducted by the "National Council for Applied Economic Research" in Delhi, spiritual travel accounts for 50% of all travel, while recreational travel packages account for 28%. Shravasti is a major religious tourist attraction in Uttar Pradesh, India and around the world because religion, faith and spirituality are all interconnected. Almost all the ancient sites have religious significance (mainly Buddhist) and are popular tourist destinations. Lakhs of people from India and abroad come here every year. This affects religious, social, cultural and economic aspects to a great extent. Therefore, we can say that Shravasti has immense potential for development in all aspects of religious tourism and tourism industry.

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