

A Review of Gujarat Tourism

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Abstract

India's rich history and its cultural and geographical diversity make its international tourism appeal large and diverse. Gujarat is one of the most popular tourist regions in the country, and was visited by 19.8 million tourists in 2010-11. Within Gujarat there are a wide variety of historic forts, palaces, mosques, temples, and places of historical importance in India's struggle for independence. Gujarat is a home to incredible diversity. After launch of the Ad campaign "Khushboo Gujarat Ki", featuring Amitabh Bachchan, Rann Utsav as well as whole of Gujarat received overwhelming response from all around the world since 2010. Gujarat is already the growth engine of India; it should now strive towards becoming the Gateway to tourism in India.

Introduction to Tourism Sector of India

Tourism in India is the largest service industry, with a contribution of 6.23% to the national GDP and 8.78% of the total employment in India. In 2010, total Foreign Tourist Arrivals in India were 5.78 million and India generated about 200 billion US dollars in 2008 and that is expected to increase to US\$375.5 billion by 2018 at a 9.4% annual growth rate. The Ministry of Tourism also maintains the 'Incredible India' campaign.

India's rich history and its cultural and geographical diversity make its international tourism appeal large and diverse. It presents heritage and cultural tourism along with medical, business and sports tourism. India has one of the largest and fastest growing medical tourism sectors.

Overview of Gujarat Tourism

Gujarat is the seventh largest state in India, located in the western part of India with the longest coastline of 1600 km. It is one of the most popular tourist regions in the country, and was visited by 19.8 million tourists in 2010-11. Gujarat offers scenic beauty from Great Rann of Kutch to the hills of Saputara. Gujarat is the only place to view pure Asiatic lions in world.

Amitabh Bachchan is currently the brand ambassador of Gujarat Tourism. The 'Khushboo Gujarat Ki' campaign by a celebrity like Amitabh Bachchan has increased tourism in Gujarat by 14 per cent per annum, twice that of national growth rate.

Business Tourism

Gujarat is one of the most industrialized states in the country. There are many Indian and global companies located in Gujarat and the area has seen double digit GDP growth in past decade. It is also known as "Growth Engine of India".

'Vibrant Gujarat' is biennial investors' summit held by the government of Gujarat. The event is aimed at bringing together business leaders, investors, corporations, thought leaders, policy and opinion makers; the summit is advertised as a platform to understand and explore business opportunities in the state. It has become a model for economic success for many states. According to the list of the top 10 Indian cities by GDP in 2009, based on a Price Waterhouse Coopers study, Ahmedabad ranks 7th in India with an annual GDP of 59 billion USD.

Gujarat International Finance Tech-City is an under-construction city in Gujarat. It will be located next to the Sabramati River, 12 km north of Ahmedabad and 8 km South of Gandhinagar, the political capital of the state. It will be built on 500 acres (2.0 km²) of land. Its main purpose is to provide high quality physical infrastructure, so that finance and tech firms can relocate their operations there from Mumbai, Bangalore, Gurgaon and other regions where infrastructure is either inconsistent or very expensive.

Archeological and Heritage Tourism

Within Gujarat there are a wide variety of historic forts, palaces, mosques, temples, and places of historical importance in India's struggle for independence. Many of these palaces and forts have been converted into heritage hotels to keep tourists close to the vibrant history of Gujarat. For example, Laxmi Vilas Palace, Vadodara is reputed to have been the largest private dwelling built at the time and it is four times the size of Buckingham Palace in London. These sites are under-developed and are considered to have huge development potential. World heritage sites like Lothal, Dholavira and Champaner are also located within Gujarat.

Medical Tourism

Ahmedabad, leading city of the state is the most preferred place for medical tourism or medical treatments in India. With world class health facilities and affordable cost, the city is becoming one of the most sought medical tourism center in the country. The 108 Service is the highly appreciated 'Medical at doorstep' Service. More than 1500 foreigners visit the state per year for various treatments in the state. Ahmedabad Civil Hospital is the biggest hospital in Asia.

For Gujarat, the overseas competitors in this sector are mainly Thailand, Malaysia & Singapore while the domestic competitors are the metros and some of the other big cities such as Pune. Though USA and UK are great countries for attracting NRIs, for targeting international medical tourists, the state should focus upon countries in Africa, Middle East, Fiji, Maldives, Madagascar etc.

Some of the plus points for Gujarat in attracting medical tourists are:

1. It has got good hospitals with advanced medical facilities at about 30% lesser cost on average;
2. There is no waiting time;
3. The State has good infrastructure with good connectivity of Ahmedabad to most important cities in the country;
4. Good English speaking population; and
5. A peaceful environment with warm & helping society.

Royal Orient Train

The Royal Orient Train is an Indian luxury tourism train that runs between Gujarat and Rajasthan, covering important tourist locations in the two states. The train started in 1994-95 as a joint venture of the Tourism Corporation of Gujarat and the Indian Railways. There are 13 coaches in the train, named after erstwhile kingdoms of Rajputana. The coaches provide five-star hotel comforts to passengers. Cabins are furnished in a palatial style and have spacious baths attached. There are multi-cuisine restaurants that offer Rajasthani, Gujarati, Indian, Chinese and continental cuisine. The Royal Orient train also has a bar on board, as well as a lounge in every coach where passengers can read books and magazines, watch television, listen to music and interact with other passengers. Other facilities include an intercom, channel music, TV, DVD system and a massage-cum-beauty parlor. The Royal Orient offers a 7 Days / 8 Night package that covers important heritage tourist locations in Rajasthan and Gujarat. The train starts from Delhi Cantonment station and has stops at Chittorgarh, Jaipur, Udaipur, Ahmedabad, Mehsana, Junagadh, Veraval, Sasan Gir, Mandvi, Palitana and Sarkhej.

Famous Tourist spots of Gujarat

Religious Places

Gujarat is high on Holy Tourism due to its inception of all-embracing religious faith ranging from caste

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to caste. The major religions followed are Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism. Islam, Christianity, Parsi, Sindhi and other religions are followed with faith all across Gujarat.

Since ancient times, Gujarat is noted for its temples. The temple of Somnath dedicated to Shiva is the first among the 12 Jyotirlingas in India. Somnath is an eternal shrine built way back during 10th century, believed to be built during Mahabharata times. Also known as Someshwar Mahadev, it is the seventh temple built to commemorate the glory of Lord Somnath known as Bhaireshvar in the Satva yug, Shravanikeshwar in the Treta Yug and Shrigaleshwar in Dwapar Yug.

Hill-top shrines like Ambaji, Palitana, Girnar and Pavagadh are similarly prominent in legend and historical. Palitana is a hilltop place of pilgrimage for Jains. 863 temples of all sizes crowd the hill which has to be paced on foot. Stone and marble spires with their rich detail of carving make for Palitana's architectural splendor.

Forts & Palaces of Gujarat

The Forts and Palaces in Gujarat have an impressive architectural monuments and the historical background. Hindu, Islamic and European architecture is the grace of the ancient forts in Gujarat. The Forts and monuments speak of the grandeurs of Gujarat as they exhibit the historical, cultural and traditional artcraft.

The famous 'Bhadra Fort' in Ahmedabad is a symbol of historical significance and belong to medieval era. Built by Sultan Ahmed Shah in 1411, the fort is named after 'Bhadra', Hindu goddess and incarnation of 'Kali' worshipped by many Hindus. Visited by Tourists from all over the world, the Bhadra Fort and Teen Darwaja is one of the most ancient fort with intricate designs and latticed windows attracts tourists from all over. The arches of the Bhadra Fort have excellent inscriptions carved on them. The Teen Darwaja (Triple Gate) use to be a royal entrance during the medieval period to enter to the Bhadra Fort.

Hill Stations & Tourist Spots

Gujarat has Saputara, a beautiful 'Hill Station' in Gujarat with nearby attractions offering Gujarat's green cover locations promoting eco-tourism.

Saputara is perched at an altitude of 1000 m, and is situated in the heart of Dangs district. Nearby Surat city, it is located on the second highest plateau of the Sahyadri range with cool bracing climate and a scenic view of the verdant valley.

The major tourist destination, Udwada in Valsad district, is being developed as an International centre of peace and harmony.

Gujarat is a home to incredible diversity. Ahmedabad, the cultural and intellectual capital of Gujarat hold the country's prime Tourist places. Gandhi Ashram, being the tourist destination from people visiting from all over the world, the city attracts major tourists.

Dekho Amdavad Initiative by GTCL

Gujarat Tourism Corporation Limited (GTCL) in partnership with Pink Travels, has launched two sightseeing buses for tourists visiting Ahmedabad on 1st May, 2012. The tour buses depart from Law garden based tourist information center every day in morning and afternoon.

International Kite Festival

Gujarat Tourism also hosts the International Kite Festival drawing crowds to witness the show of eminent kitists from many states and countries. The International Kite Festival in Gujarat has become a major tourist attraction. This International Kite Festival is held at Ahmedabad, to coincide with the festival of Uttarayan or Makar Sankranti. People from all over the world display their exotic kites of various designs. It is a splendid spectacular show to see the sky with colourful kites, huge size and varied designs and shapes. This gives the people of Ahmedabad the chance to see the unusual kites brought by the visitors some of which are truly works of art. Cuisine and Crafts display are also enjoyed by the participants and spectators.

Vibrant Gujarat Global Investors’ Summit

Global Investor’s Summit held during this time is also significant for Gujarat tourism. Since 2003, the word ‘Vibrant’ has become associated with Gujarat in yet another manner, enhancing the national and international reputation of the state. In spite of the economic slowdown, the two-day Vibrant Gujarat Global Investors’ Summit 2009 attracted promised investments of over Rs. 12 lakh crore. More than 8,500 Memorandum of Understanding were signed between the State government and the intending investors. These have the potential to create over 25 lakh additional employment opportunities. While the last three editions of the ‘Vibrant Gujarat’ summit in 2003, 2005 and 2007 together received promises for investment of over Rs 6.34 lakh crore, the 2009 summit alone had inked MoUs to invest 12 lakh crore.

Khushboo Gujarat Ki

With the launch of the campaign featuring the living legend and icon of the Indian film industry – Mr. Amitabh Bachchan, the tourist inflow to Gujarat has witnessed a phenomenal upswing. Of course, this campaign is not the sole reason for this sudden growth in tourist traffic. The fact is that a lot of groundwork has taken place in the

Flow of Tourist in Gujarat

The total flow of tourist during the year 2006 – 07 was 12.34 million and recorded a growth of 15% over the previous year. Growth of 18.5% was observed in the tourist flow from foreign countries during 2006-07. With a number of more than 2 Lacs foreign tourists in 2006-07 and around 1.75 Lacs in 2005-06.

The year on year growth between respective months in 2009 and 2010, one would notice that the international tourist traffic has gone up in the range of 30-80% while the domestic tourist traffic has increased by 14-30%.

STATEMENT SHOWING THE DETAILS OF TOURIST VISITED GUJARAT DURING THE YEARS 2006-12

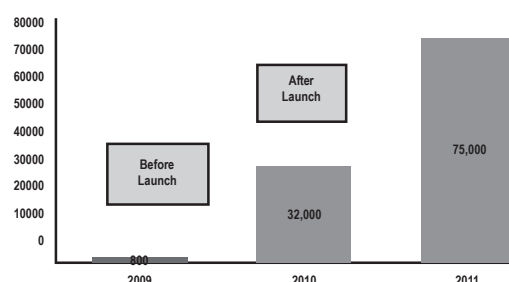
| Year | Within Gujarat | Other Indian States | Total Domestic | Foreigners/NRIs | Grand Total |
|---------|----------------|---------------------|----------------|-----------------|-------------|
| 2006-07 | 9596066 | 2540533 | 12136599 | 206729 | 12343328 |
| 2007-08 | 11128306 | 2765749 | 13894055 | 228976 | 14123031 |
| 2008-09 | 12285350 | 3227444 | 15512794 | 294739 | 15807533 |
| 2009-10 | 13077389 | 3624156 | 16701545 | 309702 | 17011247 |
| 2010-11 | 15062228 | 4354641 | 19416869 | 395067 | 19811936 |
| 2011-12 | 17175581 | 4727872 | 21903453 | 451212 | 22354665 |

Source : www.gujarattourism.com

State, in terms of infrastructure development, domestic road-shows for tourism promotion and relevant policy changes – all of these combined with a powerful advertisement campaign have led to the growth.

Fig. 1 Comparison of Tourist Visits at Rann Utsav, Gujarat

Growth in No. of Visitors to Rann Utsav, after launch of “Khushboo Gujarat Ki” campaign by Amitabh Bachchan :



Source : <http://www.travelagentsofindia.com/press-releases.php>

Fig. 1 clearly shows that after launch of the Ad campaign “Khushboo Gujarat Ki”, featuring Amitabh Bachchan, Rann Utsav as well as whole of Gujarat received overwhelming response from all around the world since 2010.

The study of number of tourists shows that within Gujarat, there has been an increase of 78% within the last 6 years. There has been a considerable increase of 118% in the Number of Foreigners/NRIs visiting Gujarat as tourists. Gujarat is one of the leading states in India promoting tourism at a very higher pace.

Current activities in Gujarat to Promote Tourism

Some of the recent activities in the Gujarat Tourism sector that are clear indications of the growth trends:

1. McDonlads has already made a decision to expand its chains - other food chains would follow.
2. A dozen new medical colleges (2,200 – 5,000 beds) are being setup in the State; Narayana Hrudayalaya is also coming up.
3. International hotel chains are coming up (the recently opened Marriott is a good example; next in line is Hyatt).
4. The state-of-the-art international airport in Ahmedabad is scheduled to get started soon.
5. The recently organized birds conference at Khijadia Bird Sanctuary was a roaring success – the single day revenue of the sanctuary crossed Rs. 25,000 (which typically never exceeds Rs. 1,500 – Rs. 2,000).

Investment Opportunities

Starting all the way from South of Gujarat, there are very limited places in the State where investment opportunities do not exist in this sector. For example in South Gujarat, Rs. 150 crore has already been sanctioned and work is on for master-planning of the Valsad – Saputara area. Similarly, TCGL has appointed architects to work on master-planning of sixteen beaches of Gujarat. Some of the other specific locations for investment include:

1. The development of Nargol, Ummargam and Suali beaches that would require about Rs. 10,000 crore worth of investment.
2. Navsari & Surat that have great potential for development of Business Tourism facilities.
3. The Five ‘S’ of tourism investment in Gujarat - Saputara, Somnath, Sidhpur, Sasan and Suali beach: these would require a minimum investment worth Rs. 50,000 crore.

Recalling the recently conducted Gujarat Tourism road show in Mumbai, significantly the participation had gone up, compared to earlier road-shows by the Government. If this confidence continues, then the private players will soon help Gujarat become the number one Tourism State in India.

Government of Gujarat in May 2010 has decided to deliver 50 tourism projects within six to seven months. The entire assignment was eventually split into the following six sub-sectors with a total of 39 projects.

| Sub-sector | No. of Projects |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Eco tourism projects | 7 |
| Beach projects | 11 |
| Way-side amenity projects | 11 |
| Business tourism projects | 6 |
| Religious tourism projects | 3 |
| Rural and cultural tourism projects | 1 |

Future Role of Government to Promote Tourism

Gujarat is already the growth engine of India; it should now strive towards becoming the Gateway to India. Government should enhance the speed of approvals for hotel projects because as these projects are land intensive. Hotel industry should be treated like any other infrastructure industry – similar incentives and rebates must be given as are given to the industrial sector.

Government should put greater efforts in ensuring that more training facilities catering to the hospitality industry are set-up in the State. Training of women should be given special focus in all training programmes.

Training institutes are required for the tour operators also, especially in the area of foreign language training, if Gujarat has to work out a USP, it is very important that the triple bottom-line strategy is adopted (social, economic and environmental).

Some of the Government laws pertaining to building designs are archaic and need to be looked afresh. Given that water transport is the cheapest transportation mode in the world, three parallel lines - for water, railway and road should be developed eventually, especially for a State like

Gujarat which has India's longest coastline; and Gujarat should wipe out all earlier perceptions through a single window approach and at the same time ensure that there is not much gap between reality and perception.

Private Sector Initiatives

In Gujarat, both domestic and international tourist numbers have grown by over 35% (YOY). Travel time between Ahmedabad and Mumbai is expected to reduce to 4.5 hours (once the work on expressway is over) – this will lead to higher number of tourists flocking the State. Increase in agricultural income of rural Gujarat will create great demands for the restaurant industry in the State. Today is the most opportune time to invest in the Gujarat Tourism sector because the growth curve is steep - being an early investor is essential since once investment scenario starts getting crowded, land prices at all the favourable locations typically go up.

Investment opportunities

At least 1,000 hotels would be required in the State within the coming two years – involving creation about 1 lakh rooms or 1.5 lakh beds. Sixteen beaches of Gujarat including Nargol, Ummargam and Suali beaches require tourist outlook. Focus of tourism development in Gujarat would be - Saputara, Somnath, Sidhpur, Sasan, Navsari & Surat have great potential for development of Business Tourism facilities. Building designs should look at monuments of the future - whilst it is important that the services that are provided be of world class, the raw materials used should also be friendly to the environment.

Improvement in Medical Tourism

Gujarat has good hospitals but many of them lack international accreditation – Government may need to take up this issue at its end. Visa on arrival – if put in place, would be extremely helpful to promote this industry. Government should proactively help international medical tourists in case of death and legal matters and police enquiry during stay should be more courteous. Even the hospitals should be given an industry status-

Electricity Duty should be charged at industrial rates and incentives in the area of property tax should also be provided;

Government should support the industry in marketing it - satellite centres may be opened up in developing countries and stalls and booklets at various forums should be distributed; and systemize an honest, efficient, transparent and cost effective treatment in the State, preferably by involving Government, doctors and hospitals together.

International tourists should not be charged extra fee just because they are coming from overseas – doctors need to be extremely transparent in this regard. The travel agents and tour operators need to come up with more and better packages for the patient's relatives for site seeing and leisure (Thailand and Malaysia already offer this);

Conclusion

Gujarat Tourism has got immense growth opportunities because of the increased awareness as well as the recent developments taken place at the tourist spots of Gujarat. Today is the most opportune time to invest in the Gujarat Tourism sector because the growth curve is steep instead of having reached a plateau.

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