

# Economic Impact of Kumbh Mela on Local Communities and Spiritual Tourism

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## Abstract

*The Kumbh Mela, one of the largest religious gatherings in the world, has profound economic implications for its host communities and the broader sector of spiritual tourism in India. This study examines the direct and indirect economic impacts of the festival on local businesses, infrastructure, employment, and the rise of spiritual tourism. Data was collected from tourism reports, government statistics, and surveys with local vendors, hotel owners, and service providers. The findings reveal that Kumbh Mela generates significant revenue for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and leads to substantial infrastructure investments, positively impacting the local economy even after the event concludes. However, the festival also poses environmental challenges and strains public resources, raising concerns about sustainability. This paper provides a balanced analysis of the economic benefits and costs, along with policy recommendations to enhance the socio-economic advantages while addressing environmental and logistical challenges. The research underscores the importance of sustainable development in maximizing the economic potential of spiritual tourism, offering insights for future events and their role in regional economic growth.*

**Keywords:** Kumbh Mela, Local Communities, Spiritual Tourism, Economic Impact.

## Introduction

### Kumbh Mela

Kumbh Mela is the biggest tranquil gathering of pilgrims on the planet, where attendees immerse themselves in a holy river. Countless individuals arrive at the site of Kumbh without receiving any invitation. The Kumbh Mela takes place in Prayagraj, Haridwar, Ujjain, and Nashik every four years in rotation, attracting millions of visitors. Since it takes place in four

different cities in India, it features various social and cultural activities, resulting in a festival that is culturally diverse. Another fundamental significance of Kumbh Mela is a spiritual awareness, the movement of people, the current of rivers, harmony between nature and human existence, a wellspring of energy, the journey toward enlightenment, and the merging of cultures throughout the universe (Kumbh Mela and Sangam | District Prayagraj, Government of Uttar Pradesh | India, n.d.).

### Historical Background of Kumbh Mela

The origins of Kumbh Mela are steeped in ancient mythology and have been mentioned in sacred texts like the Puranas. According to legend, the event is tied to the story of the Samudra Manthan (churning of the ocean of milk), where gods and demons vied for the pot (Kumbh) of Amrit (nectar of immortality). During the battle, drops of Amrit fell at four locations— Prayagraj, Haridwar, Ujjain, and Nashik—sanctifying these places. This mythological event is believed to be

the basis for the festival, with pilgrims seeking blessings at these holy sites (Ernst & Young, 2024a).

The earliest documented reference to Kumbh Mela is found in the accounts of the Chinese traveller Xuanzang (Hiuen Tsang), who visited India in the 7th century CE during the reign of King Harsha. Over time, the festival gained prominence, becoming a grand spectacle that unites millions in devotion. The British administration formally organized the mela in the 19th century, introducing regulations and infrastructure to manage the massive crowds.

### Kumbh Mela - Prayagraj

The Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj is a major religious event and pilgrimage in India, held at the holy meeting point of the Ganga, Yamuna, and the legendary Saraswati rivers, referred to as the Triveni Sangam. This occasion is profoundly anchored in Hindu mythology, spirituality, and customs, establishing it as one of the most esteemed assemblies globally. The Kumbh Mela takes place in Prayagraj every 12 years, while the Ardh Kumbh Mela (half-Kumbh) occurs every 6 years, and the Maha Kumbh Mela (Great Kumbh) is celebrated once every 144 years. These periods are established according to the astrological alignments of the Sun, Moon, and Jupiter. The main emphasis of the Kumbh Mela is the ceremonial bathing at the Triveni Sangam, which is thought to purify individuals of sins and provide liberation (moksha). Devotees from all over India and beyond come together to engage in this holy ritual, alongside saints, sages, and ascetics from different Hindu traditions. This remarkable occasion represents

belief, loyalty, and togetherness, originating from the legendary story of the Samudra Manthan (churning of the ocean). According to legend, during the gods' conflict with demons over the sacred Kumbh (pot), drops of the nectar of immortality fell at four places, including Prayagraj. The Kumbh Mela has evolved beyond its religious importance to emerge as a cultural and social event, attracting millions of pilgrims, scholars, and travelers, and receiving acknowledgment as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO.

### Economic Significance of Kumbh Mela

The Kumbh Mela significantly affects the economy of the local communities that host it. During the festival, the arrival of millions of pilgrims creates a considerable demand for products and services, resulting in a boost in economic activity (Kumbh Mela | Significance, Festival, & History | Britannica, n.d.). The state authorities tasked with arranging the Mela make significant investments in infrastructure, including transportation, water supply, food stalls, and medical services, to accommodate the large number of attendees. This investment not only aids the festival but also establishes a durable legacy of enhanced infrastructure that will benefit the local community long after the event is over. Additionally, the Kumbh Mela offers a venue for different religious, social service, and political groups to obtain visibility and support, which further boosts the event's economic opportunities. (Lochtefeld, 2004) The festival additionally acts as a platform for ascetics and spiritual leaders, enabling them to connect with a broader audience and possibly gain new followers, resulting in economic advantages for their organizations (Ernst & Young, 2024b).

### Literature Review

The existing literature on the economic impact of the Kumbh Mela highlights the significant potential of the event to drive economic growth and development in the local communities. The influx of millions of pilgrims during the Mela creates a surge in demand for goods and services, leading to increased economic activity and the potential for job creation. (Jauhari & Munjal, 2015)

**Srivastava, S & Rai, A (May 2014)** the main objective of this paper is to study social and economic dynamic of Kumbh mela 2013. A structured questionnaire was prepared to collect data and information. This survey was carried out by directly interview of pilgrims in mela. Collected data was analysed using software like SPSS and gives the report.

**Singh, S & Bisht, A (December, 2014)** the aim of this paper is to discuss the environmental management with the help of case study of Kumbh Mela 2013 of Prayag. By collecting various data and information, the author revealed that gathering create various risk but there are many ways to solve this risk. Also, many advance technologies will be used to manage the gathering of these type of fair.

**Sayed A. Quadri & Prasad R. Padala (March, 2021)** the aim of this paper is to dwell in the religious and social background of Kumbh Mela massive gathering, as well as the ritualistic practices that could potentially entail public health risks in the current situation. It also aims to identify possible preparatory and interventional measures to evade such risks.

**Goel, L & Ernst and Young (July 2024)** this research paper analyse the economic impact of Kumbh mela on local economy of Prayagraj, employment creation and revenue generation. This paper reveals that the economic impact of Kumbh mela is positive for local economy of Prayagraj. The author also revealed that the vendors also faced challenges like high competition and supply chain issue.

### **Facts of Kumbh Mela 2001**

- The Kumbh Mela held in Prayagraj in the year 2001 lasted from January 9 to February 21 (44 days).
- In the fair, around 70 million people took a dip in Sangam.
- More than 50 thousand foreign citizens are also participated in this fair.
- More than 35 pontoon bridges and 40,000 tents were arranged for the pilgrims in the fair.
- 1500 hectares of land were used to build a temporary city in this fair.
- 10,000 temporary toilets were made in this fair.
- Arrangements for disease monitoring were made in this fair.
- 20 million pilgrims were taking a dip on Mauni Amavasya in Sangam.
- 15000 police were arranged for securities of pilgrims.
- Fair budget was 400 crore rupees.
- Economic impact of fair was 4500 crores.
- 20 hospitals and mobile health camps were arranged for pilgrims.
- Religious and cultural programs was arranged.
- Traditional method was used for the mela.

### **Facts of Kumbh Mela 2013**(Srivastava & Kumar Rai, 2014)

- The Kumbh Mela held in Prayagraj in the year 2013 lasted from January 14 to March 10 (55 days).
- In the fair, around 120 million people took a dip in Sangam.
- More than 80 thousand foreign citizens are also participated in this fair.
- More than 35 pontoon bridges and 50,000 tents were arranged for the pilgrims in the fair.
- 2000 hectares of land were used to build a temporary city in this fair.
- 100,000 temporary toilets were made in this fair.
- Arrangements for disease monitoring were made in this fair.

- 30 million pilgrims were taking a dip on Mauni Amavasya in Sangam (Singh Anshika Bisht Professor, 2014).
  - 20,000 police were arranged for securities of pilgrims.
  - Fair budget was 1300 crore rupees.
  - Economic impact of fair was 12000 crores.
  - 40 hospitals and mobile health camps were arranged for pilgrims.
  - Hundreds of cultural programs were arranged.
  - Limited cctv and manual monitoring was used for the mela (Maha Kumbh Mela 2013
- Maha Kumbh Mela Allahabad/Prayag 2013, n.d.).

### **Facts of Kumbh Mela 2019**

- The Kumbh Mela held in Prayagraj in the year 2019 lasted from January 15 to March 04 (49 days).
- In the fair, around 240 million people took a dip in Sangam.
- More than 10 thousand foreign citizens are also participated in this fair.
- More than 50 pontoon bridges and 100,000 tents were arranged for the pilgrims in the fair.
- 3200 hectares of land were used to build a temporary city in this fair.
- 122,500 temporary toilets were made in this fair.
- Arrangements for disease monitoring were made in this fair.
- 50million pilgrims were taking a dip on Mauni Amavasya in Sangam.
- 30,000 police were arranged for securities of pilgrims.
- Fair budget was 4200 crore rupees.
- Economic impact of fair was 1.2 lakhs crores.
- 100 hospitals and mobile health camps were arranged for pilgrims.
- 1500 cultural programs were arranged.
- Extensive use of, drones and apps were used for the mela.

### **Estimated facts of Kumbh Mela 2025 based on Kumbh Mela 2001, 2013, 2019**

- The Kumbh Mela held in Prayagraj in the year 2025 will be lasted from January 13 to 26 February (43 days).
- In the fair, around 350-400 million people took a dip in Sangam.
- More than 25 thousand foreign citizens are also participated in this fair.
- 4500 hectares of land were used to build a temporary city in this fair.
- 150,000 temporary toilets were made in this fair.
- Arrangements for disease monitoring were made in this fair.

- 45,000 police were arranged for securities of pilgrims.
- Fair budget was 6500 crore rupees.
- Economic impact of fair was 2 lakhs crores.
- 150+ hospitals and mobile health camps were arranged for pilgrims.
- 2000 cultural programs were arranged.
- Extensive use of AI based crowd management, drones and apps were used for the mela.

**Trend Analysis of Kumbh Mela 2025**

Category	2001 (Actual)	2013 (Actual)	2019 (Actual)	2025 (Projected)
Pilgrims attended	70 million	120 million	240 million	350-400 million
Duration (days)	44	55	49	50-55
Area covered (hectares)	1500	2000	3200	4500
Public toilets	10,000	1,00,000	1,22,500	1,50,000
Security personnel	15,000	20,000	30,000	45,000
Budget	400 crores	1300 crores	4200 crores	6,500 crores
Economic impact	4500 crores	12000 crores	1.2 lakh crores	2 lakh crores
Sanitation workers	1000	15000	20000	25000
Healthcare facilities	20 hospitals & camps	40 hospitals & camps	100 hospitals & camps	150 hospitals & camps
Cultural programs	Religious focus	Hundreds religious programs	1500	2000

Technology used	Minimal	Limited cctv and manual	Drones, apps, smart monitoring	AI-based crowd management, smart event tech
International visitors	1000	10,000	Above 10,000	25000

**Estimated Job Opportunities in Kumbh Mela 2025**

The Maha Kumbh Mela 2025 in Prayagraj is expected to generate a significant number of job opportunities across various sectors. As one of the largest religious gatherings in the world, it will attract millions of pilgrims, tourists, and stakeholders, creating demand for skilled and unskilled labor. Key sectors driving employment include event management, security, healthcare, hospitality, food services, transportation, and retail. Temporary jobs will be abundant, ranging from infrastructure development, sanitation, and medical services to roles in tourism, media, and logistics. It is estimated that the event could create 150,000 to 200,000 jobs, including roles for local workers and professionals. The scale of the Maha Kumbh Mela not only boosts regional employment but also contributes significantly to the local economy, offering opportunities for small businesses and entrepreneurs to thrive (Maha Kumbh Mela 2025, n.d.).

**Conclusion**

The Prayagraj Kumbh Mela 2025 is poised to become the largest gathering in human history, with technological and infrastructural advancements playing a pivotal role. Investments in sustainability, safety, and cultural richness will ensure a seamless experience for pilgrims while preserving the event’s spiritual essence.

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