

Prayagraj Kumbh Mela: A catalyst for India's Spiritual Tourism

¹ Kavya Tandon

Research Scholar

C.M.P. Degree College, University of Allahabad

Email-id: kavyatandon7@gmail.com

²Dr. Anjani Kumar

Assistant Professor

C.M.P. Degree College, University of Allahabad

Email-id: anjanikumar1983@rediffmail.com

Abstract:

Spiritual tourism is rapidly growing in India as it is blessed with plenty of religious destinations. Prayagraj is one of the famous spiritual tourist destinations and the host of world's largest religious and cultural congregation "The Kumbh Mela". It takes place after every 12 years at the confluence of three river Ganges, Yamuna and the mythical Saraswati. It has a huge potential to attract millions of tourists at Triveni Sangam for seeking spiritual solace and cultural experiences. It not only has religious significance, but it also impacts the local and national economy. It offers a platform for spiritual rejuvenation, cultural exchange and exploration of sacred rituals which results in the growth of spiritual tourism in that area. The aim of the paper is to explore the multifaceted role of Prayagraj Kumbh Mela in boosting the spiritual tourism market. It will examine how such large gatherings can enhance India's position as a spiritual destination and foster local economic growth.

Keywords: Tourism, Spiritual tourism, Kumbh Mela.

Introduction

The Kumbh Mela is the largest religious and cultural congregation in the world(Kumbh Mela, n.d.). It is held every twelve years, at the confluence of three sacred rivers Ganges, Yamuna, and the Saraswati. Prayagraj is spiritually renowned as Triveni Sangam. It has the potential to attract millions of tourists seeking spiritual solace and cultural experience. It serves as a cornerstone of India's spiritual heritage. It not only has religious significance, but it also impacts the local and national economy. It offers a platform for spiritual rejuvenation, cultural exchange, and exploration of sacred rituals which results in the growth of spiritual tourism in Prayagraj.

Spiritual Tourism

Spiritual tourism is also known as religious tourism or sacred tourism. It involves the voluntary movement of people to a location of religious or spiritual significance such as temples, cathedrals, mosques, and others for a short period of time. It also includes going to religious festivals, meditation retreats, and religious leaders. "Travelling to sacred or holy places" is undertaken to seek blessings, fulfil vows, or connect with spiritual figures(Tanmaya Kshirsagar, 2024).

India offers a distinctive fusion of spiritual travel and cultural immersion. Devotees of various religions have travelled to holy locations across the country. Spiritual tourism offers experiences including visiting holy towns, taking part in festivals and interacting with locals. The combination of spiritual enlightenment, cultural discovery, and a lively local environment makes spiritual tourism an important part of Indian tourism.

Kumbh Mela

The Kumbh Mela is the world's largest and most important religious event(Kumbh Mela – The World's Largest Religious Event, 2019). It is deeply ingrained in India's spiritual and cultural fabric. This event takes place at four distinct locations

Prayagraj, Haridwar, Ujjain, and Nasik alternatively. Prayagraj is known for its Triveni Sangam. The origin of Kumbh Mela shows its evidence from ancient Hindu mythology. "According to legend, during the churning of the ocean (Samudra Manthan) by the gods (Devas) and demons (Asuras), four drops of the nectar of immortality (Amrita) fell at these four locations, bestowing them with spiritual significance." (Ernst & Young, 2024) This heavenly occasion, celebrated as Kumbh Mela, draws millions of devotees who believe that taking a dip in holy water during the Kumbh can atone for their sins and bring them salvation.

Kumbh Mela at Prayagraj

Prayagraj is considered the most significant spiritual place and the presence of "Triveni Sangam" makes it more auspicious. In Prayagraj, a mela is organized every year in the month of Magh at the bank of rivers Ganga, Yamuna, and Saraswati. This annual mela is commonly known as Magh mela. Kumbh Mela takes place every 12 years and after every 6 years, we have (Ardh Kumbh) half Kumbh. The land of Prayagraj experiences Maha Kumbh after every 144 years. In the year 2025 in Prayagraj, we have Maha Kumbh.

It is a massive Hindu pilgrimage that transcends its religious significance to become a significant event in India's tourism landscape. It is a unique socio-cultural phenomenon, attracting millions of pilgrims from across India and internationally (Quadri & Padala, 2021). It attracts pilgrims, sadhus, ascetics, and saints from all walks of life, creating unique and diverse gatherings (Ernst & Young, 2024). Prominent ascetic groups, known as Akharas, lead processions to the riverbanks for the Shahi Snan (royal bath), one of the event's many religious rites. These processions highlight India's rich cultural legacy and are characterized by ornate acts of devotion, chanting, and traditional music. Its scale is unparalleled, creating a temporary city with its own infrastructure, logistics, and social dynamics (Gautam et al., 2021). A temporary city is established to accommodate millions of tourists. It involves the construction of tented houses, medical services, sanitary services, and others. A proper arrangement for safety and crowd management is done.

Kumbh Mela leads to significant development in the city. This spiritual tourism also impacts the host city economically. This paper aims to explore how Kumbh Mela acts as a catalyst for spiritual tourism, examining its multifaceted impact on the local economy, infrastructure, cultural preservation and others.

Literature Review

Srivastava, S (2016) the paper aims to study the socio-economic impact of religious tourism, focusing on Maha Kumbh Mela 2013 at Prayagraj. It highlighted the potential of religious tourism to drive economic growth, create jobs, and enhance the quality of life of a region.

Sayed A. Quadir and Prasad R. Padala (2021) this paper explore the aspects of the Kumbh Mela's massive gathering and covid-19. It has provided an overview of Kumbh Mela, Ritual practices and its health implications, and the need for preventive measures. They has emphasised the complex relationship between religious practices and public health.

Penciuc, T (2023) this paper provides an overview of a significant Hindu pilgrimage, the Kumbh Mela. It provides insight into cultural, spiritual, and mythological dimensions. It also states that the presence of holy men and various religious activities fosters a unique atmosphere for self-realization and spiritual awakening.

Kanaujiya, A and Tiwari, V (2023) this paper aims to explore various dimensions of pilgrimage itineraries, particularly in the context of the Kumbh Mela, which is recognized as the largest religious gathering globally. It also states that this event generates substantial economic benefits through tourism, hospitality and local businesses, enhancing infrastructure and service in the region.

Goel, L (2024) The aim of the paper is to study the economic impact of Kumbh Mela on the local economy. It showcases that Kumbh Mela leads to significant economic boost and revenue generation in that area. It concluded that this event played a significant role in boosting Prayagraj's local economy.

Prayagraj Kumbh Mela: The essence of spiritual tourism

The Prayagraj Kumbh Mela, a colossal confluence of faith and festivity. It provides a unique blend of spiritual, social, and cultural experiences for pilgrims (Fraile-Garrido & Martín-Robles, 2024). This paper aims to explore the role of Prayagraj Kumbh Mela as a catalyst for spiritual tourism in India. Its spiritual ethos draws tourists from all over the world for its theme of harmony, rebirth and inner peace. Its profound spiritual significance for Hindus forms the bedrock of its immense tourism appeal (Divya & Murthy, 2020). The confluence of the sacred Ganga and Yamuna rivers at Prayagraj is not merely a geographical point; it is a locus of immense religious importance (Fraile-Garrido & Martín-Robles, 2024), drawing millions of pilgrims who seek spiritual cleansing, divine blessings, and a profound connection with their faith. The religious traditions and methodology of this place serve as the epicentre for a series of elaborate religious rituals and ceremonies, attracting devotees across the world.

This event is a unique fusion of tangible and intangible heritage (Fraile-Garrido & Martín-Robles, 2024). This Mela is not just a spectacle; it's a deeply felt religious experience for millions. The rituals and ceremonies performed during the Kumbh mela enhance its spiritual importance. The "Shahi Snan," or royal bath, is an important event, drawing massive crowds to the confluence of the rivers (Divya & Murthy, 2020). It is believed, the ritual of "Shahi Snan" cleanses individual sins and grants them spiritual merit which majorly draws pilgrims. The "Aarti," a devotional ceremony with lights and hymns, is spiritually significant and popular among devotees. These activities, together with other religious observances, enhance the spiritual aura of the Mela, attracting travellers seeking a transforming religious experience. It provides a unique chance for cultural immersion, showcasing Hindu traditions, rituals, and beliefs, highlighting India's rich cultural heritage. It provides an opportunity for social interaction and creating unforgettable experiences. The sheer scale of the event fosters a sense of community and belonging among pilgrims. The Mela offers a variety of activities, including religious ceremonies and social exchanges with pilgrims from throughout the world, which add to its overall appeal (Mukhopadhyay et al., 2020).

Fostering Growth: Economic impact and local development

The Kumbh Mela economic impact resonates far beyond the immediate vicinity of Prayagraj significantly benefiting local businesses, communities, and the Indian economy as a whole (Singh Jaswal, 2014). It significantly generates economic activities, creating a substantial number of temporary and permanent employment opportunities and boosting local businesses in a profound way (Arya et al., 2018). This spiritual event attracts millions of pilgrims across the world, which creates a huge demand for various goods and services like accommodation, transportation, food, and other necessities. This massive gathering boosts revenue for local companies, small vendors, hotels, and transportation providers. This provides an economic boost and drives local development by providing jobs and supporting economic growth in the region. The temporary tent cities that spring up to accommodate the massive crowds employ many locals. During the mela hotel and guest house occupancy rate increased. The increased demand for buses, trains, and other means of transport boosts the revenue of the transportation sector. Businesses selling religious items, souvenirs, and food, experienced a boom in sales during the Mela. It too has benefited the local artisans and craftspeople (Arya et al., 2018). This massive gathering generates substantial revenue for both domestic and international tourism. The organization of this event leads to infrastructural development in that region in the form of roads, bridges, sanitation, and public utilities. It provides numerous opportunities and uplifts the local communities and marginalized groups.

Prayagraj Kumbh Mela 2025

"One can experience vibrant celebration and a profound spiritual journey, where timeless traditions meet modern comforts (Divine Union: Kumbh Celebration, n.d.). Join millions in a breathtaking fusion of culture and devotion for an unforgettable, soul-stirring experience". Prayagraj Kumbh Mela 2025 is scheduled from 13th January to 29th February. This will take place after 12 years at the Bank of Triveni Sangam. It will attract millions of devotees and spiritual seekers.

Bathing Dates of Maha Kumbh 2025

1. 13th January Paush Purnima
2. 14th January Makar Sankranti

3. 29th January Mauni Amavasya
4. 3rd February Basant Panchami
5. 12th February Maghi Purnima
6. 26th February Maha Shivratri

This event will offer a wide range of activities to enhance our experience including yoga, meditation, and spiritual talks by various saints. It will also provide cottage facilities for the devotees with various packages. Special attractions at Kumbh Cottages include Sri chakra sthapana and puja, fort view, yoga and meditation, cultural activities, and others. A proper arrangement for sanitation, crowd management, and other public utilities are made. A special area is reserved for the artisans, local vendors, and small businesses where they can set up their shops and showcase their products to this huge gathering which will bring revenue to them.

Table 1

Heads	2001	2013	2019
Pilgrims Attended	70 million	120 million	240 million
Budget	400 crore	1300 crore	4200 crore
Economic impact	4500 crore	12000 crore	1.2 lakh crore
Temporary infrastructure	35 pontoon bridges 40000 tents	35 pontoon bridges 50000 tents	50 pontoon bridges 1 lakh tents

Table 1 shows the data for the past year, for Kumbh Mela 2025 it is predicted that over 400 million devotees will become part of it. The estimated budget for 2025 Kumbh is around 7500 crores. It is estimated that this massive gathering will bring an economic impact of 3.2 Lakh crore. Organising this event also brings huge infrastructural development to the region. Therefore, the Kumbh Mela 2025 acts as a catalyst for spiritual tourism and impact the economy of the country.

Conclusion

The Prayagraj Kumbh Mela stands as a powerful symbol of the enduring appeal of spiritual tourism, showcasing the unique intersection of faith, culture, and economic activity. It stands as a compelling example of the complex interplay between religion, culture, and tourism in India. It serves as a powerful symbol of faith, community, and cultural identity, attracting millions of participants and observers from across the globe. This event enhances India's reputation as a spiritual tourism destination, attracting both domestic and foreign visitors seeking to experience its unique blend of faith, culture, and traditions. Its significance extends beyond its immediate economic and religious impact. Hence, Prayagraj Kumbh Mela acts as a catalyst for spiritual tourism in India.

References

1. Arya, V., Sharma, S., Sethi, D., Verma, H., & Shiva, A. (2018). Ties that bind tourists: Embedding destination motivators to destination attachment: a study in the context of Kumbh Fair, India. *Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research*, 23(12), 1160–1172. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10941665.2018.1528992>
2. Divya, B., & Murthy, K. (2020). Exploring the collective consciousness fields of Ardha Kumbh Mela 2019. *Journal of Health Research and Reviews*, 7(1), 36. https://doi.org/10.4103/jhrr.JHRR_28_20
3. Fraile-Garrido, P., & Martín-Robles, I. (2024). Transient Transformations: Memory and Identity Lessons from Kumbh Mela. *Ra. Revista de Arquitectura*, 96–109. <https://doi.org/10.15581/014.26.96-109>

4. Gautam, A., Singh, S. K., Mohan, U., Manar, M., & Gautam, K. (2021). Public health aspects of the world's largest mass gathering: Kumbh Mela 2019 Prayagraj Uttar Pradesh, India. *International Journal Of Community Medicine And Public Health*, 8(8), 4046. <https://doi.org/10.18203/2394-6040.ijcmph20213043>
5. Mukhopadhyay, S., Ranganathan, V., & Dhara, R. M. (2020). Motivations and Experiences in Kumbh Mela Pilgrimage—Insights from Twitter Analytic. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3545971>
6. Quadri, S. A., & Padala, P. R. (2021). An Aspect of Kumbh Mela Massive Gathering and COVID-19. *Current Tropical Medicine Reports*, 8(3), 225–230. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40475-021-00238-1>
7. Singh Jaswal, S. (2014). Role of Tourism Industry in India's Development. *Journal of Tourism & Hospitality*, 04(02). <https://doi.org/10.4172/2167-0269.1000126> Tummalapalli, N. (n.d.). *Mela: Vessels of Ephemeral Architecture*.