

# Prospects and Challenges of Smart Tourism Development: A case study of Bhopal

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## Abstract

The tourism industry is the most lucrative industry in the world, for country tourism not only brings foreign exchange but is also capable of generating employment even with zero or very less investment. When we talk about India, tourism has its importance as it is major share to GDP and contributes 10% in the total GDP and also shares 9% of total jobs generated in the Country. Tourism is a very popular social phenomenon and is motivated by social, economic and various other factors. In the present world, where everything is turning smart, tourism is adopting this 'smart' concept. In the current scenario, the tourism industry and the experience of tourists are changing drastically due to the intervention of the internet, smartphones and various kinds of gadgets, artificial intelligence and various other modern technologies. The concept of 'smart tourism' emerges from the modern technological advancement in all aspects of tourism including airline, accommodation, transport, amenities at the destinations and other allied services. This research paper focuses on the various prospects and challenges in the development of smart tourism and the impact of the use of the latest technologies in enhancing the tourist experience, with a case study of Bhopal city.

*Keywords: Smart Tourism, Digitalization, Technology, Tourist Experience*

## INTRODUCTION

In the modern era, things are developing in a faster and smarter way. The role and importance of the internet, information technology, smart gadgets, artificial intelligence and communication technology is increasing day by day. Along with the other product and service-based industries, the tourism industry is also experiencing the evolution and importance of information and communication technology (ICT). Information and communication technology is proving to be an essential component of the tourism industry. The aid of advanced technology in tourism and the idea of smart cities have created multiple opportunities for stakeholders in the tourism industry. The concept of 'smart cities' is to connect the cities with the modern technological advancement, artificial intelligence, information and communication tools to make life easier and improving the living standard of the people. The key objective of the smart city concept is to use the technology in an innovative way for optimisation of resources, smooth governance, sustainability, safety and security of the people. When a city achieves sustainable economic growth and the people living in that city experience a better living condition and high quality of life through human capital investment, government policies and involvement of stakeholder's then that city can be called as a smart city (Caragliu et al. 2009). Infrastructure, human capital and information services is the

basic requirement for a city to be developed as a smart city (Komninos et al. 2013).

Similarly, the concept of 'smart tourism' focuses on the technology-driven industry to enhance the tourism experience in terms of attraction, accessibility, accommodation and amenities. Smart tourism also focuses on the managing tourism destination and attraction efficiently and effectively for its sustainable development. Smart tourism is essential for the service providers to serve the tourists effectively and conveniently way. In the Indian context, the practice of the concept of smart tourism is in its initial phase. The smart city project by the Government of India brings great opportunity for smart tourism to grow, as the objectives of both the concepts are similar in various contexts.

Smart cities can provide better opportunities to the various objectives of smart tourism concept, as it provides better scope in its development with the aid of technological advancement. In fact for the developing nation and emerging economy like India, which has a lot to offer to the tourists, smart tourism concept can be very fruitful in terms of the increased number of tourist, which results in more economic activities, employment generation along with meeting the sustainable development goals. Keeping in view the great importance of smart tourism in Indian context and upgrading technological developments to provide best facilities to the tourists for their convenience as per the modern requirement.

## OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this study is an attempt to discuss the concept of smart tourism from the Indian perspective. The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

- To study the concept of smart tourism existing in India.
- To discuss various prospects and challenges in developing smart tourism in the Bhopal area.

## METHODOLOGY

This exploratory study is based largely on secondary data and to some extent, field visits and observation. The secondary data was collected from the review of five published empirical papers across reputed international journals of the last decade. This review helped the investigator to track the development of the concept of smart tourism. Government reports, newspaper articles, magazines, media contents and various other reliable sources were also referred for this study.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In the world of technology, smart tourism is an important aspect of the tourism industry being among the top industries, which generates numerous direct and indirect employments and is also important from the economic point of view. As per the definition of tourism by UNWTO, "the activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for

leisure, business and other purposes." (UNWTO, 2015)

The technology has always been a very essential and important component in the tourism industry. But, thus it needs to be understood that smart tourism is way ahead than the e-tourism which has helped the industry all these years. Information Communication Technology (ICT) in tourism was adopted with the start of Computer-based Reservation System (CRS) in airline sector during the 1950 and with the emergence of Global Distribution System (GDS) during 1980. Smart tourism is changing the various aspects of the tourism industry, enhancing the experience of the tourists along with the service providers, leading to the effective manner of doing business and interaction of tourists with the service providers (Buhalis, 2003; Buhalis & Law, 2008). "In Smart tourism system, there are various factors such as Information Exchange Center, tourist, government, tourist's attractions and service providers". (Zhu, Zhang & Li, 2014). The 'new-age tourist' gathers travel-related information using the internet and information technology. Service providers offer various services like tour packages, accommodation, transportation and many others through their websites or on various internet electronics platforms.

## STUDY AREA

Among the 100 identified cities all over the India, Bhopal, the capital city of Madhya Pradesh, finds a place in the smart city project.

Madhya Pradesh, the heart of India, which is area wise second largest state of the country and is home to three very important UNESCO world heritage sites. Madhya Pradesh is blessed with natural, wildlife, cultural, heritage, architectural and religious tourist attractions. World heritage sites and other fascinating tourism destination like Khajuraho, Sanchi, Bhimbetka, Mandu, Ujjain, Orchha, Chanderi, Bandhavgarh, Jabalpur, Bhopal, Gwalior, Omkareshwar, Maheshwar attracts tourists not only from India but also from across the world. Pachmari and Amarkantakas hill stations also attract large number of tourist. Madhya Pradesh with maximum numbers of national parks has highest numbers of tigers in India is a very popular wildlife tourism destination among the tourists. Hanuwantiya in Madhya Pradesh also hosts Jal Mahotsav, which is one of very famous tourist attraction among the adventure lovers all over the world.

Bhopal is known as 'city of lakes' is nestled over seven hills, ruled by Mughals for a very long period and has its long historical importance. Bhopal is also awarded as the cleanest capital

and third cleanest city of India, according to the latest report on cleanliness by Government of India. With the rapid modernisation, this city has still maintained its original taste and glory. Also known as the city of Nawabs, Bhopal is rich in art, culture, tradition, monuments and natural beauty. The city has beautiful scenic attraction, mosques, temples, museums, art galleries, lakes and various other tourist attractions. Geographically Bhopal lies in the central part of India and is well connected with the roads, railways and airways to rest of India. It makes Bhopal an important tourist destination along with a point for entry and exit for visiting various tourist destinations in Madhya Pradesh and participating in various tourism activities.

**SWOT Analysis of Bhopal:** SWOT analysis is an analysis method used to identify the strength, weakness, opportunities and threats concerning the smart tourism in Bhopal and nearby tourist attractions. Considering various factors affecting tourism and related activities, a SWOT analysis has been done to understand the various factors affecting tourism activities.

<p><b>Strengths:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Geographical Location</li> <li>• Political Stability</li> <li>• Very Less polluted</li> <li>• Connectivity</li> <li>• Smart City &amp; Metro project</li> <li>• Varied Tourism Resources</li> </ul>	<p><b>Weaknesses:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of Smart Tourism Infrastructure</li> <li>• No Traffic Sense Among Locals</li> <li>• Less Dependency on Technology</li> <li>• Unawareness Among Locals</li> <li>• Unskilled Human Resources</li> <li>• More Traditional Local Transport</li> </ul>
<p><b>Opportunities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More scope for Eco-tourism</li> <li>• Wide scope for MICE Tourism</li> <li>• Emerge as Less Polluted Destination</li> <li>• More International Air services</li> <li>• Improving Advanced Infrastructure</li> </ul>	<p><b>Threats:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increasing traffic</li> <li>• Neighbouring State Tourism</li> <li>• Sustainable Tourism</li> <li>• Local Support</li> <li>• Traditional tourism services</li> </ul>

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In the last few years, the tourism industry has grown and developed up to some extent with the help of modern technical innovation, information and communication technology, smart gadgets and artificial intelligence but needs more on the same. Developed tourism infrastructure and improved tourist experience with technological advancement not only brings satisfaction among the tourists but also attracts new tourists through word of mouth and promotional activities as a smart tourism destination. Improved tourism infrastructure not only attracts tourists but also attracts tourism stakeholder which brings investment, improved customer services and develops a destination and modern tourism destination. MICE tourism can also be developed with the development of smart tourism in terms of accommodation, accessibility, activities and amenities. Transport and hotel industry requires much more attention when we talk about smart tourism because both transportation and hotel industry is going through the rapid transformation continuously. Technology and artificial intelligence-based transport services and accommodation facilities are the requirements of the modern tourism industry. The transport system technology can be used for developing better and sensor-based traffic system; GPS enabled vehicles, CCTV in public transport, prepaid taxi service, advanced local transportation and better traffic management.

### **Prospects in terms of Smart Tourism in Bhopal:**

- Very popular nearby tourist destinations like Sanchi, Bhimbetka, Bhojpur, Indore etc., gives a greater advantage to develop the Bhopal as a smart tourism destination to connect with them.
- Leisure and MICE tourism are growing day by day and Bhopal can establish itself as popular leisure and MICE destination.
- Smart city project and metro rail project is a bigger prospect for smart tourism development in Bhopal along with Indore.
- Modern infrastructure can boost tourism activities in Bhopal as well as Madhya Pradesh.
- Various Government initiatives taken for entrepreneurship development.

### **Challenges in Smart Tourism in Bhopal**

- A destination cannot be a smart destination, without educating and training the locals so unawareness and less interest in technology is the key challenge in Bhopal and nearby areas.
- Ineffective and limited availability of systematic local transport system.
- Poor traffic management.
- Poor performance in Technology-driven environment.
- Waste management & improper drainage system especially during monsoon.
- Unskilled and untrained human resource is also a major problem in developing smart tourism.

- Unprofessional attitude of hoteliers, tour and taxi operators.

### **CONCLUSION**

The future belongs to the smart and effective use of technology. The tourism industry and tourism destinations also need to keep themselves up-to-date with emerging technologies. Technology-based advancement is the base for developing smart tourism and smart destinations. Smart tourism not only enhances the tourist satisfaction and ease of access but also helps towards a reduction in the operational cost and optimum utilisation of the resources. Like developed countries India needs collaborative efforts from the public, stakeholders and the government to grow from a nascent stage to a developed smart tourism destination. The smart cities identified for smart city project have a lot of tourism potentials and needs to be promoted effectively through modern and smart approaches. The digitalization, artificial intelligence and internet revolution is a modern infrastructure for connecting people, to the world in an advanced, smart and effective manner. Bhopal being capital city and gateway for tourism activities in Madhya Pradesh has a lot of potential from tourism point of view. As Bhopal is also a part of smart city project so there is huge opportunities for developing as a smart destination which will eventually contribute to the concept of smart tourism and will cater the need of modern tourist in the most advanced and smarter way. If Bhopal develops as a smart destination, it will not

increase tourism activities in Bhopal and nearby areas but will also increase the tourist flow at all tourist destinations in Madhya Pradesh.

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