

Sustainable tourism in Gujarat: A descriptive analysis

Kalpana Satija¹, Manish Chhatlani²

¹ Head and Associate Professor, Department of Economics, KSKV Kachchh University, Bhuj, Gujarat, India

² Department of Economics, KSKV Kachchh University, Bhuj, Gujarat, India

Abstract

Tourism stands as a dynamic force pushing economic growth, cultural exchange, and global interconnectedness. In this era of connectivity, the demand for travel experiences have increased, highlighting tourism's pivotal role as a key industry worldwide. However, this upswing in tourism brings challenges that demand a review of our travel approach. To achieve economic prosperity through tourism, prioritizing the conservation of historical and cultural heritage becomes important. This research article explores the complex equilibrium required to manage tourism sustainably, emphasizing the significance of preserving the past while nurturing responsible growth for the future.

This research article endeavours to explore such regional cases, shedding light on the practical implications and successes of sustainable tourism development. Through a mixture of current literature, cases, and practical insights, the aim is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities present in the exploration of sustainable tourism development.

JEL Classification: L83, Q01

Keywords: Sustainable tourism, heritage, historical sites, Gujarat

Introduction

Maintaining the distinct identity and historical richness of a destination is vital to uphold its authenticity and cultural value. As travellers increasingly seek immersive meetings with historic sites and cultural landmarks, the strain on these environments becomes clearer as it is equally important to preserve the natural beauty of the sites visited. Achieving a harmonious equilibrium between preserving the past and meeting modern tourism demands is crucial.

Additionally, the essential need to safeguard the environment cannot be ignored in search of sustainable tourism. The ecological consequences resulting from heightened tourist footfall, transportation-related carbon emissions, and the depletion of local resources pose severe threats to the fragile ecosystems of tourist destinations.

Sustainable tourism in the case of Gujarat, a western state in India, has emerged as an exemplary case. Boasting diverse cultural heritage, vibrant traditions, and a commitment to environmental conservation, Gujarat has implemented innovative approaches to foster sustainable tourism. Initiatives such as eco-friendly accommodations, community-driven tourism projects, and the preservation of historical landmarks, including the Rani ki Vav (Queen's Stepwell) and the UNESCO World Heritage Sites, Archaeological Parks, emphasize the state's dedication to balancing tourism growth with heritage preservation and environmental sustainability. Notable attractions such as the Gir National Park, home to Asiatic lions, and the lively handicraft markets of Kutch further enhance Gujarat's appeal as a sustainable tourism destination. The Statue of Unity, standing at 182 meters tall in Gujarat, India, is the world's tallest statue, dedicated to Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. It serves as a significant national symbol of unity and pride and attracts visitors from across the country.

Sustainable tourism is essential for harmonizing economic advantages with environmental and social responsibility, ensuring positive impacts on destinations while preserving natural and cultural assets for future generations. By prioritizing responsible economic activities, sustainable tourism aims for lasting financial benefits without compromising long-term consequences. This involves reducing the ecological footprint through eco-friendly practices, conservation efforts, and engaging with communities to protect the environment. Social responsibility is crucial, encouraging fair employment and empowering local communities for improved well-being. Sustainable tourism envisions favourable interactions between tourists and host communities, striving for enriching experiences while safeguarding cultural heritage. Its primary objective is to establish an enduring legacy, where destinations benefit comprehensively, ecosystems remain resilient, and natural and cultural treasures endure for the enjoyment of future generations.

Various SDGs, primarily within Goal 8: "Decent Work and Economic Growth," Goal 12: "Responsible Consumption and Production," and Goal 14: "Life Below Water" and Goal 15: "Life on Land," which focus on environmental sustainability and biodiversity.

In its analysis, (Ahmed, 2013) ^[1] states that Sustainable tourism is built around four pillars of tourism, economic sustainability, ecological sustainability, cultural sustainability and local sustainability. All four of these elements must be addressed if we are to achieve sustainable tourism. He discusses these aspects with respect to Uttarakhand region of India. Let us discuss these components in detail.

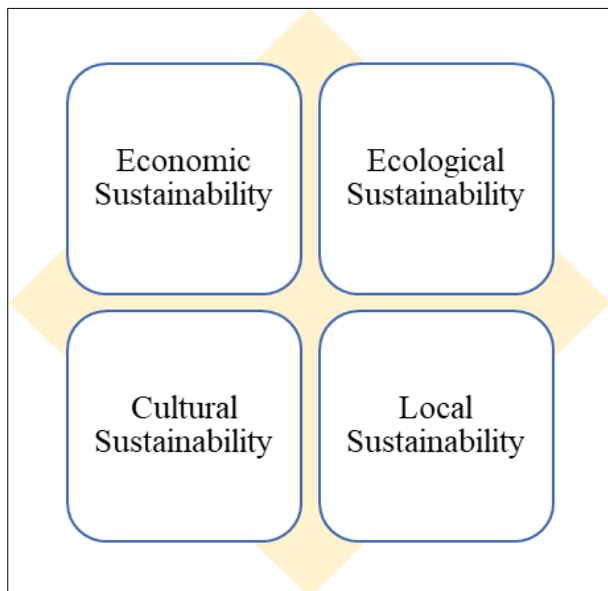


Fig 1: Components of sustainable tourism

Economic sustainability: means making sure our economy grows in a way that doesn't harm the environment or use up all our resources. It's about managing money and resources responsibly so that our economy stays strong over the long term and doesn't cause problems for future generations. Tourism has become a growing source of income for India.

Ecological sustainability: is about keeping ecosystems healthy and in balance, using natural resources responsibly for the benefit of future generations.

Cultural sustainability: involves the preservation and promotion of a community's unique traditions and heritage, ensuring their continued growth and vitality.

Local sustainability: centres on fostering the well-being of communities in a specific area, encompassing economic, social, and environmental aspects.

Literature review

In its paper on Rural Tourism in Gujarat, (Gandhi & Garg, 2023) ^[2] present the opinions of its respondents of survey (those who travel), the government officials & even the tour operators. It carries out subjective interpretation & chi-square analyses on its data. As per the views of the residents, the primary emphasis of the government lies in drawing increased tourists and advancing the tourism sector. Moreover, they feel that the well-being of local communities and the environment receives inadequate attention, and the progress of tourism development in the region is deemed insufficient.

(Rajan, Varghese, & Pradeepkumar, 2013) ^[6] in their study on coastal tourism explains sustainable tourism by aligning development with the area's capacity and regulating visitor numbers to prevent negative impacts. A balanced and well-managed approach is emphasized for maximizing benefits and minimizing adverse effects on the destination. The study advocates for the regulation of the number of visitors to the area.

The changing scene of tourism in Gujarat is brought out by (Shukla & Ansari, 2013) ^[8] in their paper. It talks about how the people of Gujarat primarily travelled for religious

reasons in present as well as past. However, shifting interests now encompass a diverse range of prospects, including entertainment, leisure, recreation, and cultural exploration. The government is increasingly focusing on developing various areas beyond religious sites. This includes initiatives in coastal tourism, beach tourism, island tourism, nature-based tourism, riverfront tourism, heritage tourism, and adventure tourism etc.

(Rajesh & Ramakrishnan, 2009) ^[7] contends that coastal tourism in Kerala has generated both positive and negative economic and environmental effects. Achieving sustainable coastal tourism development requires a strategic planning approach. The key components of this strategy include considerations for carrying capacity, decentralized development, fostering public-private partnerships, capacity building, promoting responsible tourism, and integrating coastal zone management. These components collectively form a comprehensive framework aimed at ensuring the sustainable growth of coastal tourism in Kerala, addressing environmental concerns, and optimizing economic benefits. In (NITI Aayog, 2018) ^[4] report on Sustainable tourism practices in the Himalayan region, it states that regions must develop a distinctive set of actions outlining immediate priorities, urgent short-term measures, initiatives for medium-term development, and work towards gradual implementation of long-term actions. It also suggests that revenues from tourism should be 'ploughed back' to the same sector for its growth.

(Pandya, 2019) ^[5] explains the initiatives taken by Gujarat Government under four actions, namely, increase in tourist infrastructure, Tourist-centric approach, Thrust on Environment-friendly practices, and employment generation and skill development in the sector.

Objectives of study

The objectives of the study include:

1. To describe the aspects of Gujarat's Tourism & examine its sustainability
2. To study measures taken by government to preserve the heritage & historical sites of Gujarat and provide suggestions.

Discussion

Sustainable tourism, also called responsible tourism, is a way of traveling that aims to positively impact the environment, local cultures, and communities. It focuses on practices that preserve nature, protect traditions, and benefit the people in visited places. The goal is to ensure tourism can continue without causing harm, finding a balance between economic benefits, environmental care, and social responsibility. In essence, sustainable tourism is about travelling in a way that is good for the planet, respects cultures, and supports local communities.

Gujarat, in western India, boasts diverse tourism sites. The Sabarmati Ashram holds historical significance in India's freedom movement, while the Statue of Unity pays tribute to Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. The Rann of Kutch transforms into a surreal landscape during Rann Utsav, and Gir National Park houses the endangered Asiatic lion. Dwarka, with its ancient temples, and the Champaner-Pavagadh Archaeological Park, showcase rich cultural heritage. Akshardham Temple in Gandhinagar, Adalaj Stepwell's architectural marvel, and Bhuj's vibrant handicrafts add to Gujarat's charm, making it a compelling destination for history, culture, and natural beauty.

Behind the idea of sustainable tourism, one must not forget the importance of preserving the past. Preserving our cultural heritage is important because it helps us keep our identity intact and connects us to our past. It's like a cool history lesson that shows us how people lived before and what they believed in. Cultural heritage also brings in tourists, which is good for our local businesses and creates jobs. Plus, it's a big source of inspiration for artists and helps us take pride in who we are.

Keeping our cultural heritage alive is like cherishing our traditions and languages, making sure everyone's rights are respected. It's a way of understanding the world and getting along with different cultures.

Following is the list of places popular for their type/theme of tourist places frequently visited in Gujarat:

1. **Heritage Tourism:** Ancient sites like Dwarka and Somnath
2. **Cultural Tourism:** The state's vibrant festivals, traditional arts, and crafts.
3. **Wildlife Tourism:** Gir National Park, home to the Asiatic lion, makes Gujarat a significant destination for wildlife enthusiasts.
4. **Pilgrimage Tourism:** Gujarat's numerous temples, specially Dwarka region
5. **Adventure Tourism:** The Rann of Kutch offers opportunities for adventure activities
6. **Coastal Tourism:** Gujarat's extensive coastline promotes beach tourism, with destinations like Diu and Daman being popular.
7. **Nature-Based Tourism:** The state's hills and forests, attract nature lovers
8. **Textile and Handicraft Tourism:** Gujarat's renowned textiles and handicrafts, such as Bandhni and Patola, attract tourists worldwide.

These tourism ideas offer a range of experiences for travellers with varied interests.

The Rann Utsav, or Rann of Kutch Festival, is an annual cultural extravaganza held in Gujarat's Kutch district. Celebrating the region's rich heritage, it features traditional music, dance, handicrafts, and cultural events. The festival, held during winter, attracts global visitors to experience the breathtaking white salt desert and vibrant cultural festivities, promoting tourism and showcasing the diverse culture of the area.

Tourism statistics

The Gujarat government has launched 'Aatithyam' portal that provides with data of tourism in the state.

In November 2023, Ahmedabad welcomed 15 lakh visitors, contributing to an annual total of 171.03 lacs. Girnar Temple, Ambaji Temple, and Somnath Temple also saw substantial crowds, with annual figures ranging from 28.53 to 125.77 lacs. Other significant destinations included Dwarka Temple, Surat, Pavagadh, Kankaria Lakefront, Kevadiya (Statue of Unity), and Rajkot, each playing a role in Gujarat's overall tourism with varying visitor numbers. These figures below in Table 1 show the appeal of tourists spot of Gujarat among visitors.

Table 1: Most visited places in Gujarat

No.	Name	Nov – 2023 (lacs)	Annually 2023 (lacs)
1	Ahmedabad	15	171.03
2	Girnar temple	14.62	28.53
3	Ambaji temple	13	125.77
4	Somnath temple	10.07	79.71
5	Dwarka temple	9.56	67.15
6	Surat	8.97	55.46
7	Pavagadh	8.88	73.41
8	Kankaria lakefront	7.36	49.81
9	Kevadiya (statue of unity)	6	29.15
10	Rajkot	5.05	16.43

Source: Aatithyam Portal

In November, Ahmedabad district recorded the highest number of visitors at 35.3 lacs, contributing significantly to its annual visitors of 339.49 lacs. Junagadh, Banaskantha, Gir Somnath, and Devbhumi Dwarka districts also attracted notable visitor numbers, with annual figures ranging from 54.04 to 147.65 lacs. Surat, Panchmahal, Rajkot, Narmada, and Mahisagar districts showcased varying degrees of tourist influx, reflecting diverse regional attractions.(As per Data presented in Table 2)

Table 2: Highest footfall districts

No.	Name	Nov – 2023 (lacs)	Annually 2023 (lacs)
1	Ahmedabad	35.3	339.49
2	Junagadh	19.12	54.04
3	Banaskantha	14.85	147.65
4	Gir somnath	12.62	117.36
5	Devbhumi dwarka	12.48	122.22
6	Surat	10.38	73.91
7	Panchmahal	9.91	99.32
8	Rajkot	9.06	45.69
9	Narmada	6.67	34.55
10	Mahisagar	6.52	43.47

Source: Aatithyam Portal

Government initiatives

The Gujarat government has introduced several measures to boost tourism and enhance the state's attractiveness. These include the enhancement of heritage and cultural sites, improvements in infrastructure, and the hosting of festivals such as the Rann Utsav. There is also a focus on eco-tourism, wildlife preservation, and the promotion of sustainable practices. It earlier ran initiatives like the "Khushboo Gujarat Ki" campaigns and "Kutch nahidekhatohkuchnahidekha". Also, establishment of tourism circuits aim to diversify visitor attractions and stimulate the overall tourism industry in the state.

Some Government strategies towards sustainable tourism in Gujarat are outlined in the Gujarat Tourism Policy 2021-25, which encourages the aspects such as:

1. Increased use & adoption of E-vehicles by service/hospitality providers.
2. Green Building & sustainability certificates
3. Setting up e-vehicle charging stations at all major centres
4. Involving tour operators at GSTC certified-agencies

The idea of the policy has always been based on the phrase, 'Atithi Devo Bhava', It conveys the idea that guests should be regarded as Gods, emphasizing the cultural value of treating them with great respect and hospitality in Indian

tradition. At the same time, the government is working towards creating more infrastructure for such facilities and also encouraging local (vocal for local) entities to expand their beings to the tourists from across the globe. Several incentives have been put forward in the policy including some high-priority districts like Kachchh, Dwarka, Narmada, Gir Somnath, Porbandar, Junagadh & Dang regions, where all talukas are prioritised tourism centres. (Gujarat Government)

Findings & suggestions

As per (NITI Aayog, 2018) ^[4] Report, there are five aspects, or criteria one must ensure for best sustainable tourism practices. These were suggested for Himalayan region, but can be extended to our current study of Gujarat. These ideas are expressed below:

1. **Economic viability:** The tourist spaces must offer something tangible/intangible for it to continue to attract visitors. The Gujarat government provides concessions and capital subsidies to hotels and the hospitality industry.
2. **Resource efficiency:** For example, the popular Rann of Kutch enterprise provides the experience of white desserts, and tent-based overnight stay for visitors. The region of Kutch experiences ample amount of sunlight making it a great place to exploit solar energy. (non-renewables)
3. **Employment:** The idea should be to engage people in tourism and allied activities such as photographers, event organizers, tourist guides, translators. If the turnover in these practices can be reduced, it can better the holiday experience of the visitors.
4. **Local prosperity:** stimulating economic activities such as hospitality, transportation, and artisanal crafts. Additionally, increased visitor spending contributes to the overall income of the community, fostering economic growth and development.
5. **Community well being:** Tourism can make communities better by creating jobs, improving infrastructure, and encouraging cultural exchange, making the place more vibrant and connected.
6. **Cultural richness:** Tourism helps keep cultures alive by bringing people to historical sites, festivals, and traditional events, preserving and showcasing unique practices and traditions.
7. **Biological diversity:** Sustainable tourism works to protect different plants and animals by supporting conservation, responsible wildlife tourism, and making sure human activities don't harm natural habitats.
8. **Minimize pollution:** Sustainable tourism aims to keep the environment clean by promoting practices that reduce waste and manage resources wisely, making sure that tourism doesn't harm the surroundings.
9. **Visitor fulfilment:** Tourism aims to give visitors meaningful and positive experiences by offering authentic and responsible travel options that respect both the local culture and nature.

10. **Eco-labelled tourism standards:** When you see an eco-label in tourism, it means that the place or service follows specific rules to be environmentally friendly and socially responsible, ensuring that your visit supports a sustainable and responsible experience.

To make tourism more sustainable, we need to consider various steps. Travelers should act responsibly by respecting local customs and the environment. It's important to support businesses owned by the local community to ensure economic benefits reach residents. Cultural sensitivity programs can help people understand and appreciate different cultures. Using eco-friendly transportation options, like public transit or energy-efficient vehicles, is a good way to reduce the environmental impact of travel.

Managing the number of visitors to popular places and implementing systems to properly handle waste are crucial for preserving natural resources. Involving local communities in planning tourism activities helps empower residents and showcase their unique culture. Educating those who organize tours about sustainable practices and promoting activities with low environmental impact also contribute to responsible tourism. Working together with various groups and advocating for supportive policies is essential to make sustainable tourism a reality.

Conclusion

In conclusion, our examination of tourism in Gujarat highlights the region's fascinating mix of cultural heritage and natural beauty, drawing in visitors globally. However, it's crucial to recognize our duty in safeguarding these treasures for the coming generations. This research has explored sustainable ways of managing tourism, stressing the need to find a balanced approach that considers economic growth, environmental protection, and community well-being. By adopting practices that are good for the environment, supporting local communities, and practicing responsible tourism, Gujarat can not only protect its historical and cultural wonders but also ensure that tourism has positive effects.

As we move towards more sustainable tourism, preserving the past is not just about culture; it's a promise to keep Gujarat's incredible heritage alive. With mindful actions, we can create a future where tourism becomes a force for good, preserving and cherishing the unique spirit of Gujarat.

References

1. Ahmed N. Sustainable Tourism development in Uttarakhand. *International Journal of Management & Social Sciences Research*, 2013, 106-111.
2. Gandhi R, Garg R. Rural Tourism Development in Gujarat: Views of The Stakeholders. *Vallis Aurea*, 2023;9:37-49.
3. Gujarat Government. (n.d.). *Tourism Policy*, 2021-25.
4. NITI Aayog. *Sustainable Tourism in Indian Himalayan Region*, 2018.
5. Pandya R. An Economic evaluation of Gujarat's tourism industry. *International Journal of Research in all Subjects in all Languages*, 2019.
6. Rajan Varghese, Pradeep kumar. *Beach Carrying Capacity Analysis for Sustainable Tourism Development in South West Coast of India*. EREM, 2013.
7. Rajesh, Ramakrishnan. *Coastal Tourism in Kerala*. Cochin University of Sci & Tech, 2009.
8. Shukla, Ansari. A study of changing scenario of tourism development in Gujarat. *IJEEFUS*, 2013, 57-68.