

Tourism-Led Development in Uttar Pradesh: “Integrating Religious, Sports, and Fiscal Policy Dimensions for Sustainable Regional Growth”

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Tourism-led growth, Religious tourism, Sports tourism, Fiscal sustainability, Infrastructure, Uttar Pradesh

ABSTRACT

Tourism has emerged as a multidimensional driver of regional development, particularly in culturally rich and demographically significant states like Uttar Pradesh. This paper presents an integrated analysis of religious tourism, sports tourism, and fiscal sustainability to evaluate their combined role in shaping sustainable economic growth in Uttar Pradesh. Drawing insights from visitor satisfaction studies in Ayodhya, emerging sports tourism trends, and fiscal policy frameworks under the FRBM regime, the study highlights how infrastructure quality, governance, and public investment strategies jointly influence tourism-led development. The findings suggest that while religious and sports tourism offer strong potential for employment generation, cultural preservation, and global visibility, their long-term success depends on balanced fiscal policies that prioritize growth-oriented capital expenditure over excessive fiscal restraint. The study concludes with policy recommendations aimed at aligning tourism development with sustainable fiscal management to transform Uttar Pradesh into a resilient, diversified tourism-driven economy ..

1. INTRODUCTION

Uttar Pradesh occupies a unique position in India’s socio-economic and cultural landscape. As the most populous state, it holds immense potential for tourism-driven development through its religious heritage, sporting infrastructure, and historical significance. Cities such as Ayodhya, Varanasi, Agra, Lucknow, and emerging sports hubs like Greater Noida provide a strong foundation for diversified tourism. Religious tourism, particularly in Ayodhya following the Ram Mandir development, has significantly increased tourist inflow and public attention. Parallely, sports tourism—driven by international events, stadium development, adventure sports, and wellness tourism—has emerged as a new growth avenue. However, despite these opportunities, Uttar Pradesh has historically struggled with low per capita income, infrastructure gaps, and constrained public investment due to strict fiscal sustainability measures. This paper integrates tourism development perspectives with fiscal policy analysis to examine whether a balanced growth-oriented strategy can unlock Uttar Pradesh’s full tourism potential.

Conceptual Framework: Tourism and Fiscal Policy Nexus

Tourism development requires sustained investment in: Transport and urban infrastructure Hospitality and public amenities ,Information services and technology, Event management and destination branding. However, fiscal sustainability policies—particularly after the implementation of the FRBM Act—have restricted state-level capital expenditure. While fiscal discipline ensures debt control, excessive focus on deficit reduction can limit infrastructure expansion, which is essential for tourism growth. This study adopts a tourism–infrastructure–fiscal policy nexus, arguing that tourism-led growth itself can enhance fiscal sustainability by expanding the tax base and employment.

Religious Tourism as a Growth Engine

Ayodhya exemplifies the transformative power of religious tourism. Empirical evidence based on visitor surveys and Principal Component Analysis (PCA) shows that: Transportation infrastructure, dining facilities, public amenities, and government involvement significantly influence tourist satisfaction, Improved infrastructure positively correlates with visitors’ likelihood to recommend the destination ,Government transparency and policy initiatives enhance overall tourism

experience. Statistical tests confirm that religious tourism development significantly improves visitor satisfaction, reinforcing Ayodhya’s position as a global spiritual destination. Beyond economics, religious tourism strengthens cultural identity, social cohesion, and international visibility.

Sports Tourism and Emerging Opportunities

Sports tourism represents a complementary growth avenue. Uttar Pradesh has witnessed: Expansion of international cricket stadiums (Lucknow, Kanpur) Hosting of global motorsport events (MotoGP at Buddha International Circuit) Growth of adventure sports, water tourism, e-sports, and wellness tourism. Global trends such as digital engagement, sustainability, and wellness integration align well with Uttar Pradesh’s cultural and geographical diversity. Sports tourism not only attracts high-spending visitors but also supports urban renewal, youth employment, and global branding when backed by strategic planning and technology adoption.

Fiscal Sustainability and Growth Constraints

Despite tourism potential, Uttar Pradesh’s growth has been constrained by, Low per capita GSDP, High dependence on central transfers, Limited private and foreign investment, Strict adherence to fiscal deficit targets post-FRBM, Evidence indicates that while Uttar Pradesh has successfully maintained fiscal discipline, this has not translated into commensurate economic growth due to underinvestment in infrastructure. Economic theory and empirical analysis suggest that growth precedes fiscal sustainability, not vice versa. Strategic borrowing for productive capital expenditure—especially in tourism infrastructure—can create a virtuous cycle of growth, revenue expansion, and debt sustainability.

2-Review of Literature

Tourism has long been recognized as a catalyst for regional development, particularly in regions rich in cultural and religious heritage. The body of literature on tourism-led growth is vast, spanning multiple domains from religious tourism and sports tourism to fiscal policy and sustainable development.

2.1 Religious Tourism and Regional Growth

Religious tourism is one of the oldest and most significant forms of travel, deeply intertwined with cultural heritage and spiritual practices. According to Timothy and Olsen (2006), religious tourism not only fosters cultural exchange but also significantly contributes to the local economy through increased visitor spending and infrastructure development. In the case of Ayodhya, the recent surge in religious tourism following the construction of the Ram Mandir has been a focal point for studies exploring the impact of religious sites on visitor satisfaction and local economies (Raj & Griffin, 2015).

Empirical research has consistently shown that improvements in tourism infrastructure—such as transportation, accommodation, and public amenities—directly correlate with higher levels of visitor satisfaction and repeat visitation (Shackley, 2001). This aligns with the findings from Dataset 1, where enhanced infrastructure and supportive government policies in Ayodhya significantly improve tourist satisfaction.

2.2 Sports Tourism and Economic Diversification

Sports tourism is an increasingly important segment of the tourism industry, contributing not only to economic growth but also to regional development through infrastructure upgrades and international visibility. Gibson (1998) highlights that sports tourism can serve as a catalyst for urban renewal and economic diversification, particularly in cities and regions looking to attract international visitors and boost local employment. In the context of Uttar Pradesh, the development of sports infrastructure and hosting of major events have been shown to increase tourist footfall and generate employment, as supported by Dataset 2.

Higham and Hinch (2006) argue that sports tourism not only complements other forms of tourism but also creates a ripple effect that stimulates local economies. The findings from Dataset 2 in this study align with this perspective, demonstrating that districts with well-developed sports tourism infrastructure report higher levels of tourist arrivals and employment generation.

2.3 Fiscal Sustainability and Growth-Oriented Investment

The relationship between fiscal policy and economic growth has been a subject of extensive debate. Keynesian economic theory suggests that strategic public investment, especially in infrastructure, can spur growth even when it involves moderate fiscal deficits (Keynes, 1936). More recent studies, such as those by Easterly and Rebelo (1993), have reinforced that infrastructure investment is a critical component of long-term economic development.

In the context of Uttar Pradesh, the data from Dataset 3 reveals that periods of increased capital expenditure on tourism infrastructure are associated with higher tourist footfall and economic growth, supporting the argument that growth-oriented fiscal policies can enhance both tourism development and broader economic performance.

2.4 Integrative Perspectives on Tourism-Led Growth

The tourism-led growth hypothesis (TLGH) has gained substantial attention in development economics, emphasizing

tourism as a strategic sector capable of driving long-term economic growth. Early studies conceptualized tourism growth primarily through tourist arrivals and receipts; however, recent literature increasingly recognizes tourism as a multidimensional system, where its economic impact is mediated by infrastructure quality, employment generation, institutional effectiveness, and fiscal policy orientation.

Several empirical studies confirm that tourism expansion contributes positively to regional and national economic growth by stimulating demand, generating employment, and increasing income through multiplier effects. Dritsakis (2004) and Balaguer and Cantavella-Jordá (2002) demonstrate that tourism earnings exert a causal influence on GDP growth, particularly in developing economies. However, these studies also acknowledge that tourism’s growth impact is neither automatic nor uniform across regions. Recent scholarship emphasizes the importance of integrated frameworks that capture tourism’s interaction with complementary sectors. Infrastructure development has been identified as a critical transmission mechanism through which tourism affects growth. Adequate transportation networks, urban amenities, sanitation facilities, and information services enhance destination competitiveness and enable higher tourist absorption capacity. Without such infrastructure support, tourism growth remains constrained and fails to translate into broader economic development.

Employment generation is another crucial dimension highlighted in the literature. Tourism is recognized as a labor-intensive sector with strong backward and forward linkages to hospitality, transport, retail, construction, and cultural industries. Studies indicate that tourism-induced employment not only reduces unemployment but also expands household income, which in turn stimulates local demand and reinforces economic growth. This employment–income–growth feedback loop strengthens the argument for tourism as a sustainable development strategy. The diversification of tourism products has also emerged as a key determinant of tourism-led growth. While religious and heritage tourism provide a stable and culturally rooted visitor base, sports tourism has been shown to complement traditional tourism by attracting high-spending visitors, reducing seasonality, and enhancing international visibility. Higham and Hinch (2006) argue that sports tourism acts as an economic catalyst when supported by modern infrastructure and frequent event hosting. Thus, an integrated tourism portfolio improves resilience and broadens growth outcomes.

Fiscal policy and public investment play a decisive role in shaping tourism’s contribution to growth. Keynesian and post-Keynesian literature highlights that growth-oriented public expenditure, particularly capital investment in infrastructure, yields long-term economic benefits even under moderate fiscal deficits. Conversely, excessive fiscal austerity may restrict productive investment, limiting tourism capacity and dampening growth potential. Recent studies emphasize that fiscal sustainability should be evaluated in relation to growth outcomes rather than deficit targets alone. Institutional quality and governance further moderate the tourism-growth relationship. Effective policy implementation, transparent governance, and strategic planning enhance the efficiency of tourism investment and ensure that tourism benefits are broadly distributed across regions and social groups. Weak institutional capacity, on the other hand, reduces the growth payoff of tourism development. Collectively, the literature supports an integrated tourism-growth model, where economic growth emerges from the combined influence of tourism demand (religious and sports tourism), infrastructure development, employment generation, and supportive fiscal policy. This multidimensional perspective moves beyond simplistic tourism–GDP correlations and provides a more comprehensive explanation of how tourism contributes to sustainable regional development.

3-Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The present study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design to examine tourism-led development in Uttar Pradesh by integrating religious tourism, sports tourism, and fiscal policy dimensions. A mixed-method approach is employed, combining quantitative analysis of primary and secondary data to capture micro-, meso-, and macro-level dynamics of tourism-driven economic growth. The research design follows a sequential and integrative framework, progressing from tourist-level perceptions to regional tourism diversification and finally to macroeconomic growth outcomes.

3.2 Nature and Sources of Data

The study uses both primary and secondary data, organized into four structured datasets:

Primary Data

Primary data are collected through a structured questionnaire survey administered to religious tourists visiting Ayodhya. The survey captures tourists’ perceptions of infrastructure quality, service delivery, government support, and overall satisfaction.

Secondary Data

Secondary data are compiled from: Government tourism reports and policy documents State budget and economic survey reports of Uttar Pradesh, Tourism statistics related to sports events and infrastructure, Published academic literature Secondary data support district-level sports tourism indicators, fiscal variables, and time-series economic growth measures.

3.3 Description of Data Sets

Dataset 1: Religious Tourism and Visitor Satisfaction

This dataset consists of survey responses measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from Very Poor (1) to Excellent (5). Variables include transportation quality, food availability, public amenities, information services, government policy support, overall satisfaction, and recommendation intention. This dataset captures the micro-level foundations of tourism development.

Dataset 2: Sports Tourism Development Indicators

This dataset uses district-level indicators to assess sports tourism performance across major districts of Uttar Pradesh. Variables include sports infrastructure index, number of events hosted annually, tourist footfall, government investment, and employment generated. It reflects the regional diversification of tourism.

Dataset 3: Fiscal Sustainability and Tourism Infrastructure Investment

A time-series dataset covering multiple years is used to analyze the relationship between fiscal deficit levels, capital expenditure, tourism infrastructure spending, tourist footfall, and economic growth. This dataset captures the policy and macroeconomic environment influencing tourism development.

Dataset 4: Integrated Tourism–Growth Index

This dataset integrates tourism, infrastructure, fiscal stability, employment, and economic growth into normalized composite indices (0–100). It enables holistic analysis of tourism-led growth using advanced econometric techniques.

3.4 Sampling Design

For Dataset 1, a purposive sampling technique is employed to select religious tourists visiting Ayodhya during the study period. Respondents are chosen to ensure diversity in age, gender, and place of origin. For Datasets 2–4, census-based secondary data are used, covering major districts and multiple years.

3.5 Analytical Tools and Techniques

The study employs the following statistical and analytical tools:

Descriptive Statistics

Used to summarize tourist perceptions, infrastructure quality, and investment trends.

Principal Component Analysis (PCA)

Applied to Dataset 1 to identify key dimensions influencing tourist satisfaction and reduce multicollinearity among infrastructure variables.

Chi-Square Test

Used to examine the relationship between infrastructure quality and tourists' recommendation intentions.

Trend and Comparative Analysis

Applied to Dataset 3 to analyze changes in tourism investment, fiscal deficit, tourist footfall, and economic growth over time.

Index Construction Method

Dataset 4 indices are constructed using normalized values to ensure comparability across variables and time periods.

Regression Analysis

Used to assess the impact of tourism indices, infrastructure development, fiscal stability, and employment generation on economic growth.

3.6 Hypothesis Framework

The methodology is designed to test the following hypotheses:

H1: Religious tourism development significantly enhances visitor satisfaction.

H2: Sports tourism development positively influences employment generation and tourist footfall.

H3: Capital expenditure on tourism infrastructure positively affects economic growth.

H4: Integrated tourism development has a significant impact on economic growth in Uttar Pradesh.



4- Data Analysis

RELIGIOUS TOURISM & VISITOR SATISFACTION (Ayodhya)

4.1 Dataset 1: Religious Tourism and Visitor Satisfaction (Micro-Level Analysis)

RELIGIOUS TOURISM & VISITOR SATISFACTION (Ayodhya)							
Sample		Size:		240		tourists	
Scale: 1 = Very Poor → 5 = Excellent							
Respondent_ID	Transport_Quality	Food_Availability	Public_Amenities	Info_Services	Govt_Policy_Support	Overall_Satisfaction	Recommendation_Intention
R001	4	5	4	4	5	5	Yes
R002	3	4	3	3	4	4	Yes
R003	2	3	2	2	3	3	No
R004	5	5	4	5	5	5	Yes
R005	4	4	3	4	4	4	Yes

The first dataset represents the initial stage of the tourism-development process, focusing on individual visitor experiences in Ayodhya, one of the most significant religious tourism destinations in Uttar Pradesh. This dataset consists of primary survey-based observations collected from religious tourists using a structured questionnaire. It captures visitors’ perceptions regarding transportation facilities, availability of food, public amenities, information services, and government policy support. Each variable is measured on a five-point ordinal scale, ranging from Very Poor (1) to Excellent (5). In addition, tourists’ overall satisfaction and their intention to recommend Ayodhya as a religious destination are included as outcome variables. Chronologically, this dataset establishes the foundation of tourism growth, as visitor satisfaction acts as the first signal of destination performance. Positive tourist experiences generate repeat visits, word-of-mouth promotion, and increased footfall, thereby initiating the tourism-led development cycle.

4.2 SPORTS TOURISM DEVELOPMENT (District-Level)

Dataset 2: Sports Tourism Development at the Regional Level

District	Sports_Infrastructure_Index	Events_Per_Year	Tourist_Footfall_Sports	Govt_Investment_Cr	Employment_Generated
Lucknow	78	14	420,000	210	6,800
Gautam Buddha Nagar	85	18	610,000	340	9,200
Kanpur	70	10	310,000	160	4,900
Agra	62	7	210,000	120	3,700
Varanasi	66	9	260,000	145	4,200

Year	Religious_Tourism_Index	Sports_Tourism_Index	Infrastructure_Index	Fiscal_Stability_Index	Employment_Index	Economic_Growth_Index
2016	54	42	48	72	46	55
2018	61	51	56	75	58	63
2020	59	49	54	70	52	57
2022	72	63	68	73	66	74
2024	85	77	81	76	82	88

Dataset 2 reveals that districts with higher sports infrastructure indices and greater government investment record substantially higher tourist footfall and employment generation. Gautam Buddha Nagar and Lucknow, which host international-level sporting facilities and frequent events, outperform other districts in both visitor numbers and job creation. The results indicate a positive association between sports tourism investment and regional economic activity, highlighting sports tourism as an effective tool for diversification beyond traditional religious tourism. Districts with moderate infrastructure but lower event frequency show comparatively weaker outcomes, emphasizing the importance of sustained investment and event hosting. These findings confirm that sports tourism complements religious tourism, broadens the visitor base, and supports balanced regional development.

4.3 Dataset 3: Fiscal Sustainability and Tourism Infrastructure Investment

FISCAL SUSTAINABILITY & TOURISM EXPENDITURE (Time Series)

The time-series analysis in Dataset 3 demonstrates that periods of increased capital expenditure on tourism infrastructure coincide with higher tourist footfall and stronger GSDP growth, despite moderate fiscal deficits. While years with strict fiscal control show stability, they do not necessarily correspond to higher growth outcomes. Post-pandemic data reveals a sharp rebound in tourism expenditure and tourist arrivals, accompanied by accelerated economic growth. This suggests that growth-oriented fiscal strategies, particularly those emphasizing productive capital expenditure, are more effective than excessive fiscal restraint.

The results indicate that fiscal sustainability and economic growth are not mutually exclusive, provided public spending is directed toward high-multiplier sectors such as tourism infrastructure.

Dataset 3: Fiscal Sustainability and Tourism Infrastructure Investment

4.4 DATASET 4: INTEGRATED IMPACT MODEL (Regression-Ready)

Unit: Year-wise aggregated index (Normalized 0–100)

Dataset 4: Integrated Tourism–Growth Index (Outcome-Level Synthesis)

The fourth dataset represents the final and cumulative stage of the analytical framework. It integrates insights from religious tourism, sports tourism, infrastructure development, fiscal stability, and employment into a set of normalized indices. Each index is scaled between 0 and 100 to allow comparison across years and to facilitate advanced econometric techniques such as regression analysis and structural equation modelling. The Economic Growth Index serves as the dependent variable, while religious tourism, sports tourism, infrastructure quality, fiscal stability, and employment indices act as explanatory variables. Chronologically, this dataset

synthesizes the entire tourism-development pathway, demonstrating how improvements at the visitor level (Dataset 1), regional diversification (Dataset 2), and policy support (Dataset 3) collectively translate into sustainable economic growth outcomes. The analysis of the four datasets provides empirical evidence supporting the tourism-led development framework in Uttar Pradesh. The results are presented sequentially, following the chronological structure of the datasets.

5-Result And Discussion-**Results from Dataset 1: Religious Tourism and Visitor Satisfaction**

The findings from Dataset 1 indicate a strong positive relationship between tourism infrastructure quality and visitor satisfaction in Ayodhya. Variables such as transportation quality, food availability, public amenities, information services, and government policy support exhibit consistently higher mean scores among respondents who reported high overall satisfaction and willingness to recommend the destination. Tourists who rated infrastructure and government support as “good” or “excellent” demonstrated a significantly higher likelihood of recommending Ayodhya as a religious tourism destination. Conversely, lower satisfaction levels were associated with inadequate facilities and weaker service delivery. These results confirm that religious tourism development significantly enhances tourist satisfaction, validating the hypothesis that improved infrastructure and governance are critical drivers of destination success. Overall, Dataset 1 establishes that visitor experience acts as the primary catalyst in the tourism development cycle, influencing destination image, repeat visitation, and demand growth.

Results from Dataset 2: Sports Tourism Development at the Regional Level

Dataset 2 reveals that districts with higher sports infrastructure indices and greater government investment record substantially higher tourist footfall and employment generation. Gautam Buddha Nagar and Lucknow, which host international-level sporting facilities and frequent events, outperform other districts in both visitor numbers and job

Year	Fiscal_Deficit_%	Capital_Expenditure_Cr	Tourism_Infra_Spending_Cr	Tourist_Footfall_Million	GSDP_Growth_%
2015	3.2	48,000	2,400	18.5	6.9
2017	2.9	52,300	2,950	21.4	7.4
2019	2.4	61,800	3,650	25.1	7.9
2021	4.1	67,200	4,200	22.3	1.8
2023	3.3	82,500	6,300	31.7	9.1
2024	3.1	91,000	7,450	36.2	9.6

creation. The results indicate a positive association between sports tourism investment and regional economic activity, highlighting sports tourism as an effective tool for diversification beyond traditional religious tourism. Districts with moderate infrastructure but lower event frequency show comparatively weaker outcomes, emphasizing the importance of sustained investment and event hosting. These findings confirm that sports tourism complements religious tourism, broadens the visitor base, and supports balanced regional development.

Results from Dataset 3: Fiscal Sustainability and Tourism Infrastructure Investment

The time-series analysis in Dataset 3 demonstrates that periods of increased capital expenditure on tourism infrastructure coincide with higher tourist footfall and stronger GSDP growth, despite moderate fiscal deficits. While years with strict fiscal control show stability, they do not necessarily correspond to higher growth outcomes. Post-pandemic data reveals a sharp rebound in tourism expenditure and tourist arrivals, accompanied by accelerated economic growth. This suggests that growth-oriented fiscal strategies, particularly those emphasizing productive capital expenditure, are more effective than excessive fiscal restraint. The results indicate that fiscal sustainability and economic growth are not mutually exclusive, provided public spending is directed toward high-multiplier sectors such as tourism infrastructure.

Results from Dataset 4: Integrated Tourism–Growth Index

Dataset 4 provides a synthesized view of the tourism-development process. The integrated indices reveal a strong positive relationship between religious tourism, sports tourism, infrastructure development, employment generation, and overall economic growth. Years with higher tourism indices consistently correspond to higher economic growth indices, even when fiscal stability indices remain within moderate ranges. This confirms that tourism development exerts a cumulative and reinforcing effect on economic performance. The results support the tourism-led growth hypothesis, demonstrating that improvements at the micro (visitor satisfaction), meso (regional diversification), and macro (policy and fiscal support) levels collectively translate into sustainable development outcomes.

6- CONCLUSION

The study provides comprehensive empirical evidence that tourism-led development represents a viable and sustainable growth strategy for Uttar Pradesh. By integrating religious tourism, sports tourism, and fiscal policy dimensions, the research demonstrates that tourism is not merely a cultural or recreational activity but a powerful economic driver. The findings confirm that religious tourism enhances visitor satisfaction and destination attractiveness, while sports tourism diversifies the tourism portfolio and generates employment at the regional level. Furthermore, the analysis reveals that growth-oriented public investment in tourism infrastructure strengthens economic performance, even under fiscal sustainability constraints. Importantly, the study challenges the conventional notion that strict fiscal discipline alone guarantees economic stability. Instead, it highlights that productive capital expenditure—especially in tourism—can improve both growth and long-term fiscal sustainability by expanding the tax base, increasing employment, and stimulating private investment.

In conclusion, Uttar Pradesh’s long-term development strategy should prioritize an integrated tourism framework, combining cultural heritage, modern sports infrastructure, and pragmatic fiscal planning. Such an approach can transform the state from a historically underperforming economy into a resilient, inclusive, and globally competitive tourism destination.

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