

Yoga Tourism—A Unique Feather in the Cap of Indian Tourism

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Abstract—*The Indian Tourism Industry is experiencing a strong period of growth by the burgeoning Indian economy resulted in more visits of business travelers to India, more disposable income in the hand of middle class and more coordinated government campaign 'Incredible India' that have changed the image of India from a den of illusion to the place of hot and happening. Among several feathers in the cap of Indian tourism industry, yoga tourism has the highest potential as yoga is a great cultural asset on which Indian tourism can intelligently reach its goal. Although, yoga as a product of Indian Tourism is coincided with the buzz term of health, wellness, medical or spiritual tourism but it lacks together solely in regard of extensive study on its particular domain i.e. Yoga tourism. Interestingly, yoga remains relatively uncommercialized in India, as compared to other popular yoga destinations such as Hong Kong, Shanghai, Tokyo, and Singapore, which have seen new studios open in abundance. The present paper highlights the current scenario of Yoga Tourism industry in India. It also explores opportunities, discusses its key challenges and suggesting for developing yoga tourism in India.*

Keywords: *yoga tourism, health and wellness, alternative therapies, India.*

1. INTRODUCTION TO INDIAN TOURISM

Tourism has grown to be one of India's most significant industries. While a small player in terms of world arrivals, India is a major tourism destination in term of tourism receipt, ranking in the top twenty countries of the world. Tourism in India accounts for 6.8% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and is directly responsible for the employment of over 23 million persons and indirectly for a further 36.6 million. This accounts for 14.2% of total Indian employment [1].

Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) in India during 2014 were 7.70 million with a growth of 10.6% as compared to FTAs of 6.97 million during 2013 registering a growth of 5.9% over 2012. Foreign Exchange Earning (FEEs) from tourism in term of US dollars during 2014 was US \$ 20.57 billion (Rs. 1,20,083 crore) with a growth of 11.5% as compared to FEE of US \$ 18.44 billion during 2013 registering a growth of 4.0% over 2012 [2].

Since time immemorial, India has been known for its spirituality, religious tolerance and its secular character. India

is also internationally renowned for its ancient healing practices and alternative therapies such as yoga and meditation. Hence, it is no wonder then that people from all over the world are turning to the Indian sub continent for guidance towards a more healthy and satisfying way of life. This type of tourist segment is known as wellness market. Thus, India's wellness offerings are very understandable i.e. yoga, meditation and ayurveda. Wellness travel is now a \$439 billion industry worldwide within the \$3.2 trillion global tourism industry, representing 14 percent of all tourism spending. It's estimated to have a trillion dollars worth of economic impact [3].

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Draft Indian Tourism Policy (2015) Yoga is India's gift to the world which holds the promise of self-realization. Yoga has drawn followers from all over the world over the years. Properly marketed, Yoga has the potential to draw in significant number of long stay travellers.

Mimi Nichter (2013) observed that the burgeoning interest in yoga in the West was resulting in a revitalization of the practice of yoga in cosmopolitan India. Clearly, this repackaging of yoga into a highly accessible activity offers great potential for health tourism, as India attempts to capitalize on a product which is uniquely theirs.

Heather Lyon (2012) As the experience of yoga in the United States has science-ified, normalized, commercialized, and popularized and as Western conceptualizations of yoga and the yoga body have morphed, the yoga tourism industry in India has shifted in a variety of ways, reacting to a changing and expanding demand.

A.K. Aggrawal et al. (2008) India can be considered the yoga and spiritual capital of the world. People come to the country to learn yoga and for spirituality The land of spiritual salvation is the place which gave birth to multitude faiths like Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism to name only a few.

S.P. Gupta et al. (2002) For a tourist to India, yoga simply stands for both physical fitness and mental upliftment. But

once he is initiated into the yoga, he becomes aware of the fact that yogic exercises are not only meant for physical fitness but also concentration of mind, a medium through which he hopes to attain an awareness of the real self.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The core objective of the paper is to highlight the potentiality of yoga tourism as a unique product of Indian tourism. However, the objectives of this study follow as

- 1) To draw a light on current scenario of yoga tourism in India.
- 2) To explore the opportunity at international, national and regional level to promote this niche type of tourism.
- 3) To identify the challenges and other issues lying on the way to Yoga tourism.
- 4) To provide suggestions for the development of yoga tourism in India.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is based on information method, which is drawn from available facts based on secondary data. The data was collected from various sources of publications such as books, journals, reports, magazines, brochures and online data sources that carry yoga tourism related information.

5. YOGA: A BIRD'S EYE VIEW

Yoga in fact is 'Yog' but has been popular as yoga is an art and science of maintaining physical and mental wellbeing, has its origin in India's oldest scripture of Vedas. The famous genre cited in holy book of Bhagavad-Gita, *Tatraikaagram manah kritwaa yatachittendriyakriyah; Upavishyaasane yunjaadyogamaatmavishuddhaye* means "There, having made the mind one-pointed, with the actions of the mind and the senses controlled, let him, seated on the seat, practice YOGA for the purification of the self [4]."

Yoga is about the union of a person's own consciousness and the universal consciousness. It is primarily a way of life, first propounded by Maharshi Patanjali in systematic form Yogsutra. Yoga is guided by eight principles namely, restraint (Yama), observance of austerity (Niyama), physical postures (Asana), breathing control (Pranayam), restraining of sense organs (Pratyahar), contemplation (Dharna), meditation (Dhyan) and Deep meditation (Samadhi). In support of the eight limbs are the six branches of yoga (Raja, Karma, Bhakti, Jnana, Tantra, and Hatha) [5]. Though, Yoga in all its forms tries to create harmony of the body with the mind and soul.

However, in the modern usage the term yoga has become a mainstream discussion of the lifestyle choices about health, stress, fitness and beauty, coupled with a billion Dollar industry in the West. They have reinvented yoga in ways that are more compatible with its commodified, pleasure-seeking culture that reduced the spiritual resources of yoga. But India

is still remained with a culture that has more opportunities to put the practices of yoga to meaningful use [6].

6. YOGA TOURISM IN INDIA

Yoga tourism signifies a journey of knowledge and enlightenment merging the physical and spiritual (Smith, 2003) [7]. Through yoga tourism the outer world of experiences may be woven together to create 'narratives' that metaphorically connect desires with understanding and the inner world of the spirit (Graburn, 2002). Lehto et al. (2006) defines broadly four motivational factors for going to yoga vacation in her research and they are (1) spirituality seeking, (2) enhancing mental well-being, (3) enhancing physical condition and (4) controlling negative emotions [8]. On the basis of these definitions of yoga tourism, four basic concepts can be used to understand the term of yoga tourism as in fig. 1

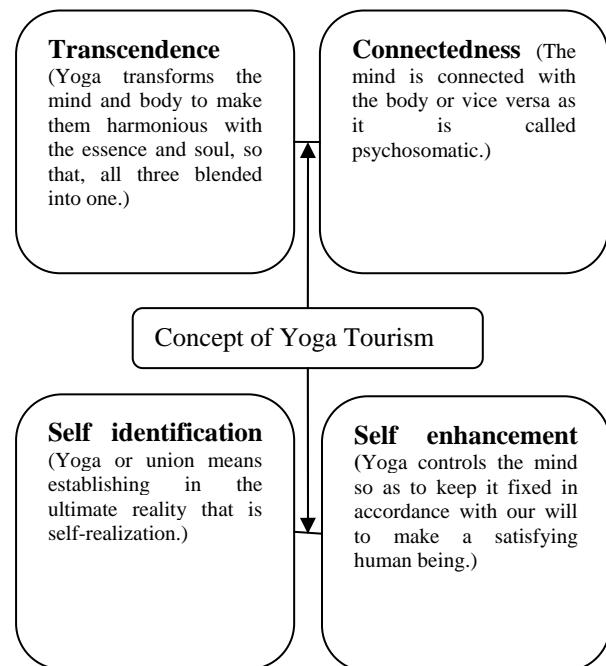


Fig. 1: Basic concepts of yoga tourism

For a tourist to India, yoga simply stands for both physical fitness and mental upliftment. A foreign tourist is often mystified by the term yoga; he is unable to understand as to how he can achieve spiritual heights through yogic exercises, but once he is initiated into the yoga, he becomes aware of the fact that yoga is not only meant for physical fitness but also concentration of mind, a medium through which he hopes to attain an awareness of the real self [9].

There are many different levels of yoga tourism in India today. From an ultra-luxury yoga package in an austere Himalayan retreat by the personal trainer to the multipurpose yoga workshop run throughout the year by number of foreign teachers especially on beaches that appeal to a global audience who come to India for one or two weeks to study yoga. A

typical yoga tour package includes organic vegetarian food, stay in an austere and hygienic ashram and a schedule of morning and evening time with aarti, attending yoga classes and learning the indigenous culture [10]. However there are many types of yoga travelling like yoga holiday, yoga retreat visits, yoga weekends, backpacking for yoga, etc.

Yoga has become a conduit for ayurveda, as many foreigners have gained awareness of the Indian system of medicine only after beginning their practice. Appealing to yoga tourists, some Indian tour companies suggest that ‘traditional ayurvedic oil massage and other therapies such as sirodhara be on the agenda of everyone visiting India, as it is helpful in curing and restoring the physique [11].

6.1. Type of yoga tourist

According to Nichter (2013) the foreign yoga tourists visiting India can be divided into four categories [12]. These categories allow the scholars, yoga tour planners and policy makers to draw attention to the heterogeneity and complexity of yoga tourists and to highlight their characteristics as in table 1 below.

Table 1: Types of yoga tourist and their characteristics

Type of yoga tourist	Characteristics
Yoga lite	Major aim is to learn simple yoga ‘asanas’ for pleasure and to live from the rush; participate in a yoga workshop with a non-Indian teacher; insulate themselves from the material reality of India.
Yoga traveler	Yoga is not their sole reason to visit India; sometime struggled to learn yoga practice and skip the class; lack of self-transformation and search for authenticity; some of them become yoga practitioner later.
Yoga practitioner	Major aim is to learn yoga in greater depth; visit India in search of inner quest and authenticity; keep regular practice in the ashram. Some of them become yoga professional later.
Yoga professional	Major aim is to receive the required authorization to teach yoga in their own country; elite categories of practitioners; multiple visits to India.

Source: Nichter (2013)

6.2. Segments of yoga tourism market

PricewaterhouseCoopers (2012) valued India’s total wellness (yoga, meditation and ayurveda) market at USD \$11 billion in 2011 and forecasted that it would surpass USD \$18 billion (INR 1 trillion) in the next four years [13]. Based on the report of PricewaterhouseCoopers wellness market, the yoga tourism market can be divided into four segments as in table 2 below.

Table 2: Segments of yoga tourism market and their features

Segments	Features
Passives	This segment is a substantial mass of individuals who do not follow health and wellness trends, and are largely financial restricted from partaking in them.

Beginners	This segment ranks seconds in number of individuals who demonstrate initial steps towards preventative care and improvement of mental and physical appearance.
Actives	This segment makes up a small number of individuals who are known to follow health and information, will pay premium dollars for product that claim benefits, and typically exhibit some brand loyalty.
Believers	This is the smallest segment that constitutes self selected individuals, is early adopters who demonstrate extensive awareness on the subject and demand result-driven solutions.

Source: Special Market Report, 2013, Horwath HTL Health and Wellness

Believer and actives represent the fastest growing segment of yoga tourism market; however beginner and passive, totaling more than ninety percent of the population, comprise the largest volume opportunity.

6.3. Major yoga tourism destinations of India

Many tourist destinations in India have become the epicenter for yoga for the foreign travelers. There are numerous teachers offering classes in diverse styles of yoga, and the internet makes it easy to plan one’s stay online. The detail of these destinations along with some of the popular yoga retreats, ashrams or studios can be shown as in table 3:

Table 3: List of yoga tourism destinations along with major yoga centers

Destinations	Yoga retreat/ashram/studio
Dharmasala (H.P.)	Himalayan Iyengar Yoga centre, Universal Yoga centre, Siddharth Yoga centre, Shivayogapeeth, Chandra Yoga International, Hatha Yoga World, Trimurti Yoga.
Mcleodganj (H.P.)	Kailash school of Yoga, Shiv Dharshan Yoga Centre, Amit Reiki and Yoga Center, Himalayan Iyengar Yoga centre, Ashta Yoga Valley, Hatha Yoga World.
Rishikesh (Uttanchal)	Parmarth Niketan Ashram, Patanjali Yogpeeth, Shivananda Ashram, Yoga Study Center, S. Niketan Dayananda Vedanta Ashram, Brahma Niwas, Sacha Vedic Sansthan, Meditation center of Mahesh Yogi.
Varanasi (Uttar Pradesh)	Yoga Education Training Society, Sri Yoga Mandir, Banaras Hindu University, Bhring Sanhita Kendra, Gyan Parvah, Kasha Yog Sangh, Siddharth Yoga Center, Shala Berlin Yoga Retreat.
Pune (Maharashtra)	R.I.M. Yoga Institute, Meditative Yoga International Foundation, Ashtanga Yoga, Ananda Center, Divyayog Studio, Bikram Yoga College, Chaitanya Yoga Wellness, Kaivalyadhama Yoga Institute.
Mysore (Karnataka)	S.K.P.J. Ashtanga Yoga Institute, Aananda Yoga India, Universal Yoga Center, Ashtanga Yoga, Ayush Yoga Darshanam, Mystic School of Yoga, Mysore Mandala Yogashala.
Goa	Little Cove Yoga Holiday, Yoga Magic Eco Retreat, SWAN yoga, Purple Yoga, Ashiyana Yoga, The Beach House, Oceanic Yoga School, Yoga Gypsys, Himalayan Iyengar Yoga Center, Neo Yoga, ABS Yoga.

Kerala	Shivananda Yoga V.D. Ashram, Pathajali Pranayama Yog & Arogya Kendra (Trivandrum); Amrutham Yoga, Sivasoorya Divine School of Yoga, Brahma Yoga School (Kovalam); Padma Karma Yogashala (Kochin); Sharanagati Hans, Svasayoga, Kashi Yoga Gurukulam, Sanjeevani Ayurveda & Yoga Center (Varkala).
Chennai (Tamilnadu)	Patanjali Yoga Centre, Sivananda Yoga, Karishnamacharya Yoga Mandiram, Asana Andiappan College of Yoga, The Art of Living, 136.1 Yoga Studio, The Chennai Iyengar School of Yoga Centre.
Pondicherry	ICYER@Ananda Ashram, Yoganjali Natyalayam, Ashtanga Yoga, Lifestyle Yoga Studio, Viniyoga Healing Center, Nnganesan Yoga Centre

Source: www.yoga.in and other concerned websites.

7. OPPORTUNITIES FOR INDIA AT INTERNATIONAL, NATIONAL AND REGIONAL LEVEL

With an increase in lifestyle-related disorders there is a worldwide resurgence of interest in holistic systems of health care, particularly with respect to the prevention and management of chronic, non-communicable and systemic diseases [14]. Practicing yoga and encouraging less pill-popping and more naturopathy are two affordable ways to maintain a healthy lifestyle. Yoga has a growing presence in India today. Several factors contribute to the growing popularity of yoga including (1) increased demand for health care services from countries with aging population like USA, UK, Japan; (2) fast paced life style increases demand for wellness and other activities; and (3) health and beauty consciousness among the masses.

7.1. International opportunities

- The United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution on 11 December 2014 to proclaim 21 June the International Day of Yoga. The UN recognizes that yoga provides a holistic approach to health and well-being. It also recognizes that wider dissemination of information about the benefit of practicing yoga would be beneficial for the health of the world population [15]. Indian government can take advantage of this opportunity on how to make this day more meaningful and how India can take a lead in it.
- For global promotion/ propagation of yoga, since past few year the Department, has adopted strategy for signing of Country to Country MoU on cooperation in Traditional Medicine including yoga and meditation; setting up of AYUSH Academic chairs in Foreign Universities / Institutes and opening of AYUSH Information Cell in the premises of the India Missions / ICCR Cultural Centre to disseminate authentic information about yoga and other alternative therapies [16].
- Ministry of Tourism (MoT) has been promoting India as a yoga tourism destination with the help of print, electronic, internet and outdoor media across target market.; the

marketing Development Assistant scheme (MDA), run by MoT, provides financial support to wellness tourism service providers for participation in International conference, fair, road shows, etc [17].

- The International Yoga Festival (IYF) which is held at Rishikesh (Yoga Capital of the World) and Puducherry attract the global tourists from all over the world.

7.2. National Opportunities

- With the growing popularities of yoga, Ayurveda and other forms of natural medicine in India & world alike, the government of India has set up a new ministry to deal with. This is the ministry of AYUSH (an acronym for - Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, Homoeopathy) with budget allocation of 10.69 billion rupees (US \$ 174 million) to develop and promote yoga and other traditional health system [18].
- India has many competitive advantages in the yoga tourism marketplace like (1) international reputation of yoga ashrams and Indian yogis; (2) diversity of yoga destination and experience; (3) quality services at affordable rate; and (4) vast supply of qualified yoga instructors.
- The Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority (IRDA) has issued a notification for the inclusion of non-allopathic systems within mediclaim insurance policies. This is expected to provide a boost to the sector. However, getting a buy-in from insurance companies in order to ensure adoption is critical [19].
- Recently in draft Tourism Policy 2015, the government has paid more attention to yoga not only because of its spiritual power but for its immense tourism potential. Accredited and certified yoga institutes are being recognized by a 'mark of excellence' to publicize these at various forums [20].
- Several factors contribute to the growing popularity of yoga in India including (1) the increasing flow of foreigners who come regularly to study yoga heightening local interest in the tradition; (2) rising health and beauty consciousness among Indians; and (3) increased stress of daily life [21].
- Yoga is not just about doing physical exercise, it is now perceived by masses to have an obligation to provide complete health care. Thanks to Swami Ramdev, the world famous Yoga teacher credited with reintroducing yoga to the middle classes of India, has a daily television program viewed by over 20 million people each morning, focusing primarily on the art of breathing (Pranayam) [22].

7.3. Regional Opportunities

- Yoga camps and other "manufactured" events can have significant impact at the regional and local level. Indeed, there are numerous foundations which lend themselves to

regional areas and the lower level of facilities and infrastructure which these areas generally possess.

- Many state government including Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Haryana has decided to introduce yoga course in the government schools.

From the above discussed opportunities, five major reasons can be systematically interwoven to create ‘Brand India’ in promoting yoga tourism which can be shown below in table 4:

Table 4: Five reasons for the potential growth of yoga tourism in India

Reasons	Descriptions
Price	The key selling point of Indian yoga tourism is its “cost effectiveness”. This is the major advantage factor of India in comparison of other competitive yoga destinations.
Service	Various health and mental rejuvenation activities and in consequence their benefits, and inner satisfactions are offered by world class yoga centers in India in connection with a complete yoga package.
Quality	Many yoga destinations of India fulfill the quality determinants such as safety and security, hygiene, accessibility, transparency, authenticity and harmony of the yoga tourism activity concern with the overall aura.
Availability	India has an advantage in the global resurgence of interest in yoga as it has a rich heritage of indigenous knowledge coupled with strong infrastructure and skilled manpower.
Diversity	India offers enormous diversity in topography, natural resources and climate. It is also fascinating kaleidoscope of art and culture. India is thus a tourist destination for all reasons and for all seasons.

8. CHALLENGES AND MAJOR ISSUES

India still needs to travel a long mile to harness the above discussed opportunities and equip itself to address the strategic challenges that include: pre dominant image of India, shortage of linguistic qualified workforce, and delays and inefficiencies due to inadequate legal and regulatory infrastructure. Comparatively poor services in power, water, and road and rail connectivity, lack of hygiene awareness and bureaucratic support, and absence of tourist-friendly approach are some of the critical operational issues facing the industry [23]. Overall, the biggest challenge is the lack of government vision and clear-cut futuristic policies with regard to the yoga tourism industry. Other challenges and issues are as follow:

- A foreign tourist is often mystified by the term yoga; he is unable to understand as to how he can achieve spiritual heights through yogic exercises [24].
- Most Indian yoga ashrams are facing the lack of trust from the foreign tourists because of lack of quality accreditation, heterogeneous pricing policy and no industry standard.

- Indian government campaign to make India a primary medical tourism destination may divert attention from yoga and other indigenous healthcare system [25].
- For medical education in yoga and naturopathy, no governing body exists such as Central Council of Indian Medicine (CCIM) or Central Council of Homoeopathy (CCH) [26].
- Lack of Public-Private-People Partnership (PPPPs); particularly a gap between administration and the managers.
- Poor visitor experience, particularly due to incidents of harassment, touting and ‘lapka’ culture at shopping malls and at other places.

9. SUGGESTION

The present study suggests the concerned authority to sort out the above discussed challenges and to look after other suggestions as are mentioned below;

- Yoga hub can be developed on the selected destinations as mentioned in this paper in table 3 with benchmarking themselves up for international quality accreditation standard.
- Yoga can be promoted with a supportive and concrete role of organic food; it is because organic, chemical free food is getting huge response from every individuals of a health consciousness market.
- This is the need of hour to capture the beginner and passive market segments by going beyond traditional yoga services with more innovative, exclusive and distinctive offering such as nutritional programs, exercise routines, spa services and wellness consultations on moderate price in conjunction to yoga offering.
- “School entrepreneurs”— the pioneers who run affordable private schools can start yoga incorporating into their programming for promotion and making people aware about its benefits at regional level. Similarly, ministry of AYUSH can work with the corporate sector to incorporate 20 minutes yoga break in their busy schedule. This can be equally applied to the government sector at center and state level.

10. CONCLUSION

In the words of Shiva Rea, a well known American Yoga teacher, yoga is accessible to all and that the place one needs to experience it is in India. India is a birth land of yoga, meditation and spirituality. But it is worth mentioned that in country like USA have built an empire of more than US \$ 7 billion around yoga but in India yoga industry is still in nascent stage. The major factor behind it might be the unsatisfactory role of government as also mentioned in National Policy on Indian system of Medicine and Homeopathy. However, the success of yoga tourism industry will be largely determined by the success achieved on all

strategic fronts. India needs to change its traditional marketing approach to one that is more competitive and modern. It needs to develop a unique market position, image and brand, which cannot be held by any other competitor. It can be done by presenting India as a birth land of spirituality, meditation and yoga. India is in an advantageous position to tap the global opportunities in the yoga tourism sector and can thus be marketed as the ideal destination for kick starting a lifestyle change with alternative therapies available such as yoga and meditation that India is world-renowned for.

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