



Impact of Kashi Vishwanth Corridor on Varanasi: A Case study

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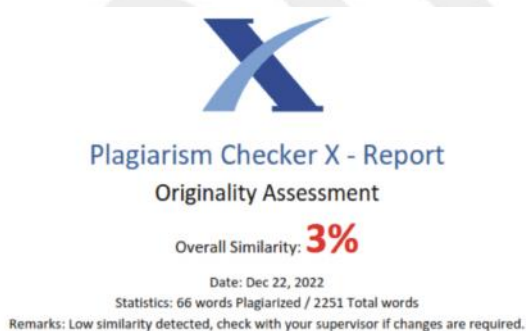


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ABSTRACT

As people travel around the world, tours for the purpose of experiencing spirituality, faith, and culture are increasingly becoming a topic of study in the field of business studies. Day by day, progress toward spiritual attainment has been made. This has also focused on a new paradigm vision that emphasises the tourism industry with a new research terminology known as Spiritual Tourism. Spiritual tourism is an emerging research topic that is receiving a lot of attention from academics. Tourism has always been regarded as an emerging industry, and as a result, it has undergone new dimensions for modernising tourism practises. With the inauguration of Kashi Vishwanath, devotees and tourists are interested in how the project's renovation of the temple premises caters to devotees. Travelers are flocking to one of India's oldest cities, Varanasi, to seek the blessings of Lord Vishwanath, despite the looming threat of Omicron. This paper focus on impact of local economy, employment generation and spirituality etc.

KEY WORDS

Temple, Corridor, Economy, Varanasi, Ghat.

INTRODUCTION

Kashi Vishwanath Temple is one of the most famous temple in Varanasi, also known as the Golden temple dedicated to the Lord Shiva. It was constructed in the year 1780 by the Maratha monarch, Maharani Ahilyabai Holkar of the Indore.

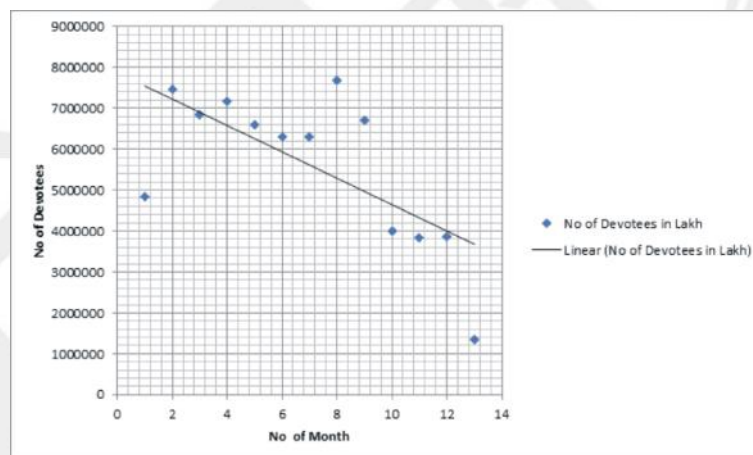
Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the Kashi Vishwanath corridor during his two-day visit to Varanasi. PM Modi is visiting Varanasi for

inaugurating the first phase of the construction of the Kashi Vishwanath Corridor. Constructed at a cost of Rs 339 crores, the project the Kashi Vishwanath Corridor will connect the various ghats to the historic Kashi Vishwanath Dham near the iconic and one of the most ancient ghats -Dashashwamedh Ghat. The foundation stone was laid on March 8, 2019, and in less than three years and irrespective of the pandemic, the project has been completed. It aims to provide easy access to the pilgrims to take a dip in Ganga and offer their prayers to Lord Shiva. The Kashi Vishwanath Corridor will bring about a lot of changes in terms of accessibility in the areas surrounding the Kashi Vishwanath temple. Earlier, the temple was not visible from far points of Ganga, but with the 20-25 feet wide corridor, that connects the Lalita Ghat in Ganga to the Mandir Chowk in the temple. Under the project, the area around the temple has been expanded from 3,000 to 5 lakh square feet. Around 40 temples have been restored to their original glory around here and 23 buildings have been added to the structure providing various facilities. Due to the project, it is being said that pilgrims no more have to walk through the congested lanes to visit the temple, as it would be directly visible from the Ganga and easily accessible. Varanasi's famous Kashi Vishwanath temple registered a record five times increase in offerings came by devotees within a year of the inauguration of a corridor.

The Kashi Vishwanath temple recognized offerings worth more than Rs.100 crores since December 13, 2021, when Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the Kashi Vishwanath corridor. The offerings include various valuable metals like gold and silver worth Rs. 50 crores.

More than 7.35 crore adorer come in Kashi Vishwanath temple since the corridor's inauguration, according to temple administration. July 2022 saw the highest number of monthly comer at 76.8 lakh. The administration has placed scanning machines at different places to count the movement of devotees. "With the increase of facilities at the Vishwanath Dham corridor, the number of devotees is expected to enhancement further in the upcoming days. On the one side there will be additional earning from the buildings constructed on the corridor. According to Varanasi Development Authority many people are employed in the 'Sugam Darshan system', 100 people are employed for sanitation and 200 people are posted at different places of the temple to provide better security and facility to visitors."

Graph of No of Devotees in Kashi Vishwanath Corridor



The temple has drawn 7.35 million pilgrims and collected donations totaling Rs 100 crore against the previous records of 30-40 lakh devotees. As per the temple's data, tourer reached Kashi Vishwanath Corridor in year 2022 .while 7,459,471 came in January, 6,856,142 tourer came in February, 7,171,163 tourer came in March, 6,587,264 tourer came in April, 6,290,511 tourer came in May, 6,916,981 tourer came in June, maximum 7,681,561 came in July, 6,711,499 came in August, 4,013,688 came in September, 3,830,643 came in October, 3,870,403 came in November and 1,350,000 came in the current month (November 2022) till Monday. The Kashi Vishwanath Corridor administrators estimate that if the temple's earnings continue to see this regular development, the Rs 900 crore invested in creating the Kashi Vishwanath

Corridor will be get back in the next four to five years based on the trend of increasing number of pilgrim foot traffic as well as earning of temple.

Need of the Kashi Corridor

The Kashi Vishwanath Corridor is one of the most well-known Hindu temples in India. It is in Varanasi, Prime Minister Modi's constituency. One of the twelve Jyhotirlingas is housed in this temple. Lord Shiva is the main deity. Vishwanathar is his name. Kashi is the city's ancient name, so the temple is known as Kashi Vishwanath. Aibak destroyed the original Vishwanath temple in 1194 CE. A Gujarati merchant later rebuilt the Temple. It was restored in the 13th century by Delhi Sultan Iltutmish. During Akbar's region, Raja Man Singh reformed the temple. Raja Todar Mal expanded on it with Akbar's help. However, Emperor Aurangzeb destroyed the temple and replaced it with the Gyanvapi mosque. Ahilyabai Holkar constructed the current temple in 1780. A side from its historical significance, the temple also has significant religious significance.

During celebration times, the strait, small and claustrophobic street struggle to manage large crowd of people. Around five thousand people arrive the temple on regular basis. During festival time such as Mahashivaratri, it reaches to 3 lakhs people. The corridor is constructed to relief the congestion. The project also target to confer clean roads, clean drinking water and bright street lights

Objective of the Study

- To explore the various facts and prospects of the spiritual tourism in Varanasi.
- To study the impact of tourism industry in Varanasi.
- To study the impact on handicraft and handloom in Varanasi.

Research Methodology

This study mainly supports secondary data and is descriptive in nature. The data collection has been derived from several books, journals, research articles, ancient manuscripts and relevant sites, as mentioned in the references.

Study coverage & Period: the proposed study coverage only District Varanasi. The most renowned places to visit at Varanasi are as mentioned below:

- Kashi Vishwanath Temple.
- Annapurna Temple.
- Kashi Vishalakhmi Temple.
- Bharat Kala Bhawan BHU.
- Sarnath.
- Banaras Hindu University.
- Dashashwamedh Ghat.
- Assi Ghat.
- Ramnagar Fort.

Analysis and Interpretation

Impact on Tourism Industry

Easing of Covid-19 restrictions and opening of newly constructed Kashi Vishwanath corridor has created boom in the tourism industry at Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh. Last year, a large number of people from all over the country and abroad have flooded the lanes of holy city of Varanasi. The tourism industry in Varanasi is the heavy flow of tourists in off-season during summers and monsoon. In the months of Sawan i.e. July and August only nearly one crore tourists have come in Varanasi this year which have to break a record itself. The number of tourists coming to Varanasi in the month of July and August this year has exceed the figures of Taj

city of Agra in UP. After the inauguration of Kashi Vishwanath corridor around 1.75 crore tourists have visited Varanasi in the last six months. After Seeing that number of tourists increases in every year. The hotels and guest house owners in Varanasi have increase in their accommodation and amenities facility and most of them are planning for expansion of their business.

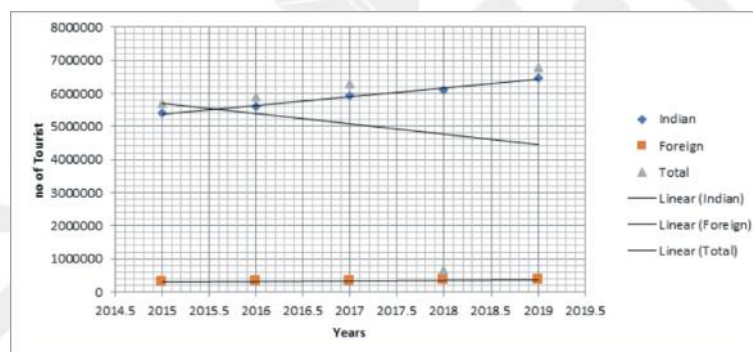
According to the hotel owners in Varanasi, very few tourists used to come during May, June and July but now the trend has changed due to corridor. While several lakhs of people hang around the city in May and June the figure of tourists crossed to more than 3-4 lakh per day in July when the Pure Hindu month of Sawan started. They claimed that the business has increased by approx 50 per cent from this year in comparison to previous few years.

After the inauguration of Vishwanath Corridor, the hotel, guest house business in the city has got revival. More than 40 hotels have been constructed in Banaras during one year. While construction of many hotels is going on. Some of these have been completed. In just one year of its inauguration, more than Rs. 2000 crore have been invested in the hotel industry. there are a dozen entrepreneurs who have built hotels by purchasing land for Rs. 3 to 5 crores. There are more than 20 hotels proposed 400 crores have been invested in this area. Restaurants are open in every hotel and cars have been purchased for the comfort of the passengers. New hotels have opened rapidly in Banaras and more than 500 people have got direct employment. Restaurants have also built in new hotels. This has given expansion to the catering business.

No. of Tourist Visit in Varanasi

Year	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Indian	5413927	5600146	5947355	6095890	6447775
Foreign	302370	312519	334708	348970	350000
Total	5716297	5912665	6282063	644860	6797775

(Source: www.uptourism.gov.in)



Impact on Handicraft and Handloom

Art & Crafts of Banaras

Varanasi's famous things like Art, Manual art, Music, Literature, Dance, and Textile traditions date back thousands of years. Silk weaving is the most well-known craft in Varanasi. 'Banarasi Sarees' made by local artisans, who are most popular not only in India, but also around the world. Aside from The famous Banarasi Saree, other crafts that Varanasi is known for include Brassware, Copperware, Ivory Work, Glass Bangles, Wood, Stone, Clay Toys and exquisite Gold Ornament. The Bhadohi Carpets and Musical Instruments are among the other charm in Varanasi and the surrounding areas.

Banarsi Sari

A Banarasi sari from Varanasi is one of the beautiful sari in India, with Gold and Silver zari, fine silk, and stunning embroidery. The saris are less heavy due to their finely woven silk construction and complex design and engravings. Superlative work and primitive embroidery techniques known as 'Kal Balta' and 'Khinbab'

bring antique fashions to life in the city. Varanasi's craft culture is frequently linked with myths and legends. They have a distinct elegant sense that reflects a strong Indian flavour. Pink minakari jewellery and artefacts are among Varanasi's most popular and unique crafts. Patterns, Motifs, and weaves from the past can still be found in the works of Banaras's Traditional weavers. The match of traditional designs and techniques with contemporary elements adds to the interest of their work.

With the rapid increase in the number of visitor after the inauguration of Shri Kashi Vishwanath Dham, the demand for handicrafts and handloom products has also increased. Devotees made a lot of purchases of worship utensils, saris, dupattas, religious symbols, while wooden toys, pink meenkari products also entered in the gift items. According to officials of the handicrafts and handloom department, there has been a jump of 40- 50 percent in the sale of craft products. every devotee takes lutiya, panchpatra, annapurnaji idol, pechdar lota filled with gangajal in the form of worship vessel. The local kesra samaj is involved in the manufacturing of these products. In Banaras such a situation also often arises when the supply of pechdar lote is not available according to the demand. On the other hand the products of pink meenkari demand was limited. Usually foreigners liked it more but now the situation has changed. Due to more than doubling the demand of these products in a year, the supply is not being met.

Reasons of Foreign Tourist behind visit at Varanasi

The element of spiritual experiences is available in Varanasi. The number of foreign tourists who came in Varanasi believe that religious sites provide spiritual comfort and peace of mind. As a result, they prefer to visit religious sites rather than adventurous, historical, or exotic locations.

Nearly half of all tourists are thought to be in India, religion and customs, and enjoy the rites followed in Indian traditions, with the motivation to learn more about and the religious significance of Varanasi (Land of Moksha) and the holy river Ganges. Foreign tourists enjoy the holy Ganges and the night prayers performed on the Ganges bank, temple cuisine (Prashad), sermons and interactions with Sanyasis (Monks). Foreign tourists are likely to attend and celebrate Indian festivals. They are glad and more satisfied with their lives. They believe they are not seeking luxury, but it is a journey to fulfil the divine purpose of making life simpler, more satisfying and rewarding.

From secondary research, it was found that for national tourists at Varanasi from December 2021 to December 2022 is increased from previous years, while the number of foreign tourists is also increase. However, there are still many untapped opportunities. It is anticipated that pilgrimage tourism will drive rapid tourism growth in Varanasi. National tourism accounts for a significant portion of pilgrimage tourism, but it must be converted/expanded into other forms of tourism, such as leisure tourism, providing interesting offers to tourists, and so on. (Sources: http://www.up-tourism.com/pdf/tourist_flow.pdf).

CONCLUSION & SUGGESTION

On the basis of above discussion these are the following suggestion and conclusion:

- To promote destinations, connect religious sites with international institutes around the world and international spiritual organizations.
- Create awareness about spiritual destiny through a broad media campaign aimed at high-spending tourists both nationally and internationally.
- To attract tourists, develop links from nearby destinations to pilgrimage sites.
- Varanasi is a successful example of debt use of religious tourism draw attention of luxury Hotel chains such as Taj, Radisson, Clark, Sheraton, and others for attracting branded Hotel groups, Restaurant chains, etc. and creation of quality facilities.
- Promote spiritual signs on websites via a dedicated website and other travel portals.
- Create cooperative marketing alliances with specialized tour operators.

- Create collaborative marketing alliances with specialized tour operators and travel agents.

Recommendations for Tourism Development in Varanasi

- Pilgrims should be able to explore new places while on pilgrimage in religious places like Varanasi. Existing spiritual products should be improved to increase their value among potential tourists.
- Policy and strategy development to address seasonal issues and overcrowding in some destinations.
- Effective public relations and advertising campaigns that should be implemented by destinations in order to develop Commercial tourism based on market data.
- Improving prospective tourists' awareness and understanding of tourism in the Varanasi region.

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