

The Potential and Promotion of Yoga Tourism in India

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Introduction

The word Yoga is derived from Sanskrit word Yuj which means to join or unite. The union of mind, body & soul of an individual. The Indian Tourism Industry is performing strongly to cash-in the fastest going industry of the world, boosting Indian economy. This has resulted to increased business travel to India, availability of more disposable income available for middle class and more coordinated and aggressive government campaign like “Incredible India” which have transformed India’s image as an emerging new Socio-Economic power of the world. There are several successful types of tourism in India, a few new forms of tourism like yoga tourism is emerging. Interestingly, the potential of Yoga is not commercially realized by India as compared to other popular yoga destinations in Asia Pacific region. Yoga is believed to be originated in India over 5000 years ago. With this advantage, the land of India has global image of spirituality, religious tolerance and secular character. India is also known for its ancient healing practices and alternative therapies such as yoga and meditation practiced by Rishis, Sages & Gurus etc. as revealed in historical & Religious texts. The practice of Yoga is very important in an individual’s life because it increases body’s immunity, positivity, purity and strength of mind. Yoga tourism signifies a journey of knowledge and enlightenment merging the physical and spiritual (Smith, 2003). Lehto et al.(2006) defines broadly four motivational factors for going to yoga vacation in the research and they are (1) spirituality seeking,(2)enhancing mental well-being,(3)enhancing physical condition and (4)controlling negative emotions.

Type of Yoga Tourist

Nichter (2013) categorized the foreigner tourist coming India for Yoga learning and related purposes. Across the four categories, the purposes, learning level and Yoga practices are highlighted. This can be beneficial for planning & policy maker of Yoga tourism to understand the motives and expectations of tourist and provide appropriate yoga tourism components to satisfy this segment of modern tourism.

Type of Yoga Tourist	Characteristics
Yoga Lite	Major aim is to learn simple Yoga ‘asans’ for pleasure to live from the rush; participate in a Yoga workshop with a non-Indian teacher; insulate themselves with material reality of India
Yoga Traveller	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 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 category of practitioner; multiple visits to India

Source: Nichter (2013)

Pursuits of a Yoga Tourist

Yoga travel is pursuit of mind, body & spiritual blend and balance of the tourist. In Yoga tourism, person travel to such a place/ destination where he practices various asans, techniques & therapies to attain mental peace and salvation without escaping from worldly affairs. The pursuit of a yoga tourist may be classified in three broad categories-

Physical/ Corporeal Pursuit	Mental Pursuit	Spiritual Pursuit
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boost Immunity • Improves Flexibility • Perfect Posture • Health & Nutrition • Functioning of Major Organs of human Body • Metabolism of Body 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get rid of Depression • Mental Peace & Refinement • Improves Concentration/ Focus • Building Self-confidence • Change of Monotonous Daily Routine • Curing Mental Disorders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To Pursue ‘The Almighty’ • To Know Source of Internal Strength • To attain peace with your own Existence • To understand Reality of Life • To Connect, Communicate for Community Service • Empathy and Benevolence

Potential and Promotion of Yoga Tourism in India

The demand for yoga and meditation is increasing due to personal health problems and fitness issues in busy lifestyles. This is driving force in the growth of Yoga tourism market for India. With the continuous & rigorous efforts of Government of India, The United Nations General Assembly in 2014 officially announced 21st June as International Yoga day. This will help India to strongly push Yoga tourism along with Incredible India campaign all over the world.

The Major Centres of Yoga Tourism in North India -

Rishikesh & Haridwar region of Uttarakhand is emerging as a yoga hub for activities and yoga development in India. Rishikesh is known as Yoga capital of the world. Rishikesh is known for yoga and meditation therapies offered by several popular Yoga ashrams, such as Parmarth Niketan Ashram, Shivananda Ashram, Patanjai Yogpeeth, Yoga Study Centre (for Hatha Yoga), Yoga Niketan and many more located in the serenity of the holy river, The Ganga which attracts lot of pilgrims every year from India and all over the world. Uttar Pradesh is famous for the yoga and Ayurveda treatment. The State Government is interested to open the new yoga wellness centre in all the district. The state government is also planning to promote Ayurveda and Unani method treatment through post graduate courses in colleges. To increase the employment opportunities Assam government has started different schemes like Assam Bikash Yojana which sponsor the different Yoga centres at different tourist places in the state. India is being promoted as a 'Yoga Tourism' hub, by Ministry of Ayush and the Tourism Ministry where people can come to rejuvenate their bodies & minds. The marketing phrase 'India, Land of Yoga' is gaining popularity in overseas markets.

The Major Centres of Yoga Tourism in South India -

Kerala has the best health tourism facilities & treatment for Yoga and Ayurveda. A part from the scenic beauty of nature, Kerala promote wellness tourism which provides the best quality of infrastructure and facilities to the tourist. The Government of Maharashtra has framed different policies to develop Yoga, meditation and medical tourism. The Government also claim of having South Asia's best state of art hospitals is located in Pune, Mumbai and Nagpur. Karnataka is marketing itself as a focal destination with yoga pattern masters B K S Iyengar and Iyengar Yoga. Bangalore and Mysore has the best hospitals which provide qualitative and cost effective

treatment to the tourists. At present, there are two renowned Yoga institutes in Puducherry . Puducherry Government is keen to arrange and promote Yoga Festival regularly by organising Yogasana practicals, yoga workshops and Yogic therapy of music & dance to invite the tourist. The activities & promotion of Yoga tourism is also in the pipeline of state of Odisha and Gujrat. The Union Government is distributing publicity material of Yoga & Ayurveda through the Ministry of Tourism centres internationally. The Government of India is proving the facility of Yoga education through short-term courses by providing tourist visas and e-tourist visas to foreigners of 150 countries at 16 airports.

References

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