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**INDIA'S PATH TO SUSTAINABLE  
TOURISM**

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## INDIA'S PATH TO SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

### Context

- As the tourism sector in India continues to grow, it is crucial to ensure that this growth is sustainable, balancing economic benefits with environmental and social responsibilities.

### About Sustainable Tourism

- **Tourism** is a vital pillar of economic growth and employment generation all across the world, offering vast potential for sustainable livelihoods while promoting India's rich cultural and natural heritage.
- **Sustainable tourism** is a vital aspect of India's tourism strategy, aiming to balance the economic benefits of tourism with environmental and social responsibilities.
- The **Union Ministry of Tourism** has been actively promoting sustainable tourism practices to ensure that tourism development is inclusive, resilient, and environmentally friendly.

### Current Landscape

- According to the **World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC)**, tourism's contribution to **India's GDP in 2024 is expected to be 6.8%, amounting to \$256.1 billion.**
  - ♦ It plays a crucial role in employment, providing jobs for 45.39 million people, or 9.2% of the Indian workforce.
  - ♦ The **Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MOSPI)** reports that **Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs)** reached 10.93 million in 2019, generating \$30 billion in foreign exchange earnings, which bolsters India's foreign reserves.
- **Globally**, tourism employs 348 million people, equating to 10.4% of global employment.
  - ♦ It accounts for **10% of the world's GDP of \$ 104 trillion in 2023.**

### Future Prospects

- The market is expected to generate billions in revenue, with a **Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR)** of 9.62% from 2024 to 2028.
- By 2030, the sector is anticipated to contribute USD 250 billion to the GDP and create employment for 137 million people.

### Benefits of Sustainable Tourism

- **Economic Growth:** Sustainable tourism can drive economic growth by creating jobs and supporting local businesses.
- **Environmental Protection:** By promoting eco-friendly practices, sustainable tourism helps in conserving natural resources and reducing pollution.
- **Social Inclusion:** Sustainable tourism initiatives often focus on empowering local communities and preserving cultural heritage.
- **Community Participation:** Involving local communities in tourism planning and development ensures that they benefit from tourism activities and helps preserve their cultural and natural heritage.
  - ♦ Initiatives such as *homestays, community-based tourism, and eco-tourism projects* empower local communities and provide them with sustainable livelihoods.

### Challenges

- **Environmental Degradation: Unchecked expansion** and a focus on mass tourism have led to environmental degradation, including pollution, deforestation, loss of biodiversity, and cultural erosion.
- **Overtourism:** Popular tourist destinations can become overcrowded, leading to strain on local infrastructure and resources.
- **Lack of Awareness:** There is a need for greater awareness and education about sustainable tourism practices among tourists and stakeholders.

## Government Initiatives and Strategies

- **National Strategy for Sustainable Tourism (2022):** It aims to mainstream sustainability in the tourism sector. It focuses on **seven strategic pillars** like *Promoting Environmental Sustainability; Protecting Biodiversity; Promoting Economic Sustainability; Promoting Socio-Cultural Sustainability; Certification of Sustainable Tourism; Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) and Capacity Building; and Governance.*
- **Travel for LiFE Program:** Launched under the **Mission LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment)**, this program encourages tourists and tourism businesses to adopt sustainable practices.
  - ♦ It focuses on themes such as saving energy, reducing waste, and empowering local communities.
  - ♦ The goal is to ensure that tourism contributes positively to the economy while safeguarding the environment and benefiting local communities.
- **G20 Goa Roadmap for Tourism:** It outlines a blueprint for sustainable global tourism. It emphasizes the role of tourism in economic growth, environmental stewardship, and social inclusion.
- **Swadesh Darshan 2.0:** It focuses on developing sustainable and responsible tourist destinations. It aims to create destinations that are environmentally sustainable, economically viable, and socially inclusive.

## Sustainable Practices

- The **Zero Waste Tourism Model in Sikkim** is an example of how communities can lead the way in sustainability.
- **Kerala's Responsible Tourism Mission** is another prime example, where community-driven **initiatives like PEPPER and STREET** create employment while preserving cultural heritage.

## International Efforts

- Globally, sustainable tourism emerged to mitigate the negative impacts of mass tourism. As defined by the **Cape Town Declaration (2002)** and **Magna Carta London (2020)**, sustainable tourism promotes responsible travel that benefits both people and the planet.
- **Policy and Framework Development:** Organizations like the World Economic Forum and the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) are emphasizing the importance of sustainable tourism in their reports and frameworks.
  - ♦ These efforts focus on balancing economic growth with environmental protection and social equity.
- **Economic Recovery and Growth:** The International Monetary Fund (IMF) highlights tourism as a critical driver of economic recovery, especially in countries where tourism is a significant part of the GDP.
  - ♦ The sector's recovery is linked to increased air connectivity and pent-up demand.
- **Innovation and Development:** The global tourism sector is leveraging digital innovation and sustainable development practices to enhance resilience and sustainability.
  - ♦ It includes adopting new technologies and promoting eco-friendly travel options.
- **Community and Environmental Impact:** There is a growing focus on minimizing the negative impacts of tourism on local communities and the environment.
  - ♦ It includes initiatives to reduce carbon footprints, manage overcrowding, and support local economies.

## Conclusion and Way Ahead

- India's path to sustainable tourism is a journey that requires the collective efforts of the government, industry stakeholders, and local communities.
- By adopting sustainable practices, promoting community participation, and addressing the challenges, India can ensure that its tourism sector continues to thrive while preserving its rich cultural and natural heritage for future generations.

Source: BL

### Mains Practice Question

India, with its rich cultural heritage and diverse landscapes, has immense potential for sustainable tourism. Discuss the key challenges and opportunities India faces in achieving this goal.

