



SPIRITUAL TOURISM AT 'BENARAS' - THE HEART OF SPIRITUAL INDIA

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ABSTRACT :

Tour for the purpose of experiencing spirituality, faith, and culture is recently becoming an area for research in the domain of business studies as people travel over the globe for spiritual attainment has been going day by day. This has also focused on a new paradigm vision emphasized the Industry of Tourism with a fresh research terminology, known as Spiritual Tourism. Spiritual Tourism is such, an emerging research getting widespread attention by the researchers. Tourism always has been considered as an emerging industry and consequently has been undergoing through new dimensions for the modernizing tourism practices. Tourists who are in religious or spiritual travel are experiencing an enhancement of spiritual growth and improves quality of life within the self. '



Varanasi' popularly known as 'Banaras' a city of spiritualism and also the centre for spiritual pilgrims in India, the city is known for its ancient glory for religious practices. The people of Banaras have been still adhering the old age traditions and practices of Indian Culture. As a result, a tourist from all parts of the globe gathers here to experience the spiritual ethos of Indian culture and religion.

The present study is a step towards exploring the various facts and prospects of the spiritual tourism in Varanasi

KEYWORDS : Benares, Spiritual, Tourism, Tourist, Pilgrims.

PROLOGUE:

|| Flower-like the heels of the wanderer,
His body growth and is fruitful;
All his sins disappear,
Slain by the toil of sacred journey||

___ 'The Aitareya Brahmana', Rig Veda (7.15).

Humans have travelled since time immemorial. In fact, travelling was an integral part of human life. Food, water, security or the acquisition of resources were the first incentives to travel. Then came the idea of travelling for pleasure or exploration. Nowadays, tourism can be described as the free time used to travel and seek the required experience. Extremely stressful life can be attributed as a reason for people seeking pleasure in tourism. People need new activities and experiences and adventures to be able to disconnect

from work and homework and try to reconnect with the "me". At the correct time in the monument, the Sanskrit words say that "Nahrushu Kanchi" means the states of the sanctity of this great city.

India is the land of ancient flourished civilization which is enriched by its traditions and places of spiritual importance. It is the land of wisdom where every belonging of nature (rivers, trees, mountains, forests) are worshipped which are claimed to be sacred. As a result, where ever these sacred belongings have its existence, that place has been considered as a holistic place with its divine significance. Every individual who has faith or believes towards it, they will visit all these places at least once in his / her lifetime. Therefore, a large number of people from all across the globe do visit these places and tries to search the answer for their existence and its purpose in this cosmic universe.

SPIRITUAL TOURISM:

The philanthropic incorporation of the term 'Spirituality' in Tourism Industry is a phenomenon that has been appearing through conceptual discussion among the researchers in the 20th century. In the 21st century, there is more attention to spirituality than ever before, people no longer trust religion and strive to find other ways of life to answer the questions they have. Knowing that India's spiritual vacations are successful, one may wonder why. Although religion and spirituality are used interchangeably, they are not the same thing, but they are not very different from each other, in two different ways but with the same purpose.

At best, "Spiritual Tourism" can be called a journey of the people/group, to a place of the greatest holiness in search of moral, religious or spiritual realization. It is an unforgettable journey of firm faith and personal faith, in search of divine awakening and commitment to what one believes. Often, this journey is equated to 'Pilgrimage' or 'Yatra'.

The ultimate objective of this spiritual journey could be in search of:

- Fulfillment of a commitment (*Mannat*)
- Divine Happiness – (*Param – Ananda*)
- Abundant Prosperity (*Sukh & Aishwarya*)
- Above all, Peace & Liberation (*Shanti & Moksha*)

People often guided by self-commitment and unflinching belief, unquestionable faith & Pure Bhakti towards what they truly believe.

SPIRITUAL TOURISM IN INDIA:

In the western world, it is now fashionable to practice elements of distant religions and spiritual practices. Yoga studies are implanted even throughout the United States, as well as in meditation practitioners and believers in Ayurvedic medicine. It is not surprising that some of these people are interested in going to the birthplace of their new beliefs and, therefore, are involved in "Spiritual Tourism." India may be the most popular destination for so-called spiritual tourism, a logical choice based on the number.

India has several spiritual destinations. Visiting them is necessary if one is on the path of spiritual self-discovery. In fact, spiritual trips from India allowing anyone to take care of the spirituality within itself, through the development of the depth of the rich spiritual history of the country. Spiritual tours in India take one on excursions to many spiritual destinations in the country, which is famous for a lot of religious and spiritual significance. Scattered throughout India, and these places to tourists the happiness and peace that has eluded them for a long time, which has inspired them to visit India as esteemed spiritual and religious. Holistic places such as 'Golden Temple- Guru Dwara' (Amritsar); 'Varanasi' or 'Kashi', 'Mathura' & 'Vrindavan' (Uttar Pradesh); 'Somnath' & 'Dwarka' (Gujarat); 'Darga Khwaja Saheb' (Ajmer); 'Haridwar' & 'Rishikesh', 'Gangotri' (Uttarakhand); 'Rameshwaram' (Tamil Nadu); Jagannath Puri (Orissa); Tirupati (Andhra Pradesh); and Bodh Gaya (Bihar) are just some.

Many of the supreme religious and spiritual destinations in India, which inspire people to travel religiously from distant places to go on excursions and spiritual meaning of their lives and physical presence and discovery.

Spiritual tourism has expanded the traditional concept of "the most difficult journey, and the best reward", to a broader concept of the desire for change and the relief from the boring everyday life and enthusiasm and the divine nature of a common man. Consequently, raised academic interests in the analysis of various aspects of spiritual tourism as a new sector are increasing the power of momentum. Spirituality has become an increasingly important area in the social, health and Business research (Heck et al., 2008). The trip registered for spiritual places has a dramatic increase in recent years. Truthfulness in spirituality has caused people to travel, even he spent so much time with poor travel and communications infrastructure. Nevertheless, a scientific study on the aspects of spiritual tourism is very limited. more than the studies are case by case or demographic.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY:

The objective of the paper is to explore the various facts and prospects of the spiritual tourism in Varanasi

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY:

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.

LITERATURE REVIEW: Tourism has a great significance for the development of any country. It contributes not only to the economic development but also very important from a social and cultural point of view. In fact, it is multidimensional activity. In this study, we tried to analyze some available and relevant literature that are detailed below:

- **Reinched, G., (1992)**, in his study entitled "*Forms of religious tourism*" has stated that the religious pilgrimage has occurred for hundreds of years without causing negative environmental, cultural and social impacts associated with tourism. Common characteristics of the pilgrimage they are: it is not an excessive burden for the environment, it is useful for the local communities; At certain times of the year only, people carry their own belongings and buy food, etc. locally, pilgrims are silent and respectful of the law; kill animals or take taboos of nature. Some lessons can be learned from this for modern tourism.
- **Vukunik, B., (2002)**, this article titled "*Religion, Tourism, and Economics: A Convenient Symbiosis*" has explained and supported the idea that the economic effects of religion are important, although traditionally religious, should not be neglected or underestimated they tried to belittle him in the past. In addition, the document says that religion and tourism have a lot in common. In the modern world, it is hard to ignore the impression that in most places of pilgrimage the bad effects of tourism are no less important than religious ones. This document lends theoretical and empirical support for this argument.
- **Bandyopadhyay, R., et.al. (2008)**, in their study entitled "*Religion and identity in India's heritage tourism*" have stated that increase in heritage value in the renegotiation and the dissemination of identities have intensified conflicts that dominate heritage representation of tourism. This study, therefore, compares the way India's heritage has been represented by the Government of India, by the media of domestic tourism and popular tourism media. Results reveal that India is consistently represented as an ethnically diverse country preceded by Hinduism and dominated by all races / other religions; a representation that strengthens the secular national nationalism of the state narration. In addition, trade and the mass media confirm the colonized colonial experience history, while the government emphasizes the calculations of resistance against colonial powers and suffering because of Islamic atrocities.

- **Hema, B.G.** (1979): *"Tourism in a developing area: The case of Tamil Nadu, India"*. This document analyzes the development of tourism in the country - Tamil Nadu, India. Maintains that the State is rich in natural and cultural resources, but lacking in the infrastructure and a well-defined development strategy. Resources based on urban development strategy is discussed and suggests that the latter may have advantages for the developing region first stages of tourist participation.
- **Vijayanand, S.**, (2012): in his study titled *"Pilgrimage Tourism Management - Issues and Challenges With Reference To Tamil Nadu"* has stated that Hajj tourism is this type of exclusive motive for religious reasons. One of the oldest types of tourism and a universal phenomenon of religious history can be mixed in different ways. Short-term religious tourism is characterized by trips to nearby pilgrimage centres or conferences. Long-term visits describe several days or weeks of pilgrimage sites or national and international conferences. This document examines Hajj tourism, its problems, challenges, cultural importance, social and economic development through tourism Hajj and also analyzes the problems of basic infrastructure in the places of pilgrimage. Tourists have been identified as a key factor in the development of authentic tourism. The data in this study were obtained from local residents who participated in pilgrimage activities. Tourists have been identified as a key factor in the development of pilgrimage tourism in local communities. This research is mainly based on secondary data only. The secondary data required for this study are collected from different sources.

VARANASI: THE SPIRITUAL HERITAGE OF INDIA:

Varanasi, also known as Benares, Banaras, or Benaras or Kashi or Kasi, is a famous Hindu spiritual city located on the banks of the Ganges River in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. The city is called 'Kasi', "glowing" in Rigveda. It is often referred to as "the city of Moksha and spiritual learning".

***"Benaras is older than history, older than tradition,
older even than legend and looks twice as old as all of them put together"***

- **Mark Twain**

It is the ancient living city and heterogeneous with several layers of religion, culture, art forms, and believes in nature. However, the city is highly regarded by the three major religions in India, namely Hinduism or Sanatan Dharma (which has five major sects), Buddhist and Jain, but has a strong influence from Shiva (one of the Sanhata Dharma denominations) worshipers since one of the Twelve Jyotirlingas ie Vishishwara or Vishwanath are installed here.

Varanasi culture is closely linked to the Ganges and the religious importance of the river. Varanasi is mainly known for its 84 Ghats, a religious bathhouse for pilgrims. The city has been a centre for cultural and religious in the northern part of India for many decades. Varanasi has its own elegance of Hindustani classical music and that has produced several prominent philosophers, poets, writers and musicians in the history of India.

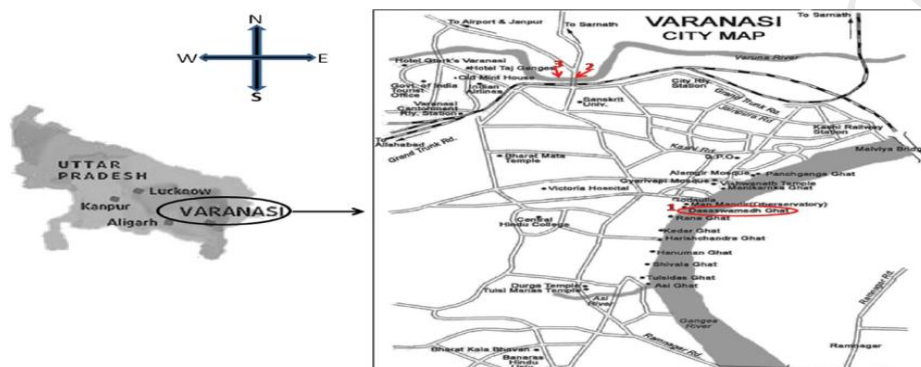
Traditionally, Kashi is compatible with Trivalas (Trident) of Shiva. Radically speaking, Kashi means the place that shines and shines through the glory of learning, the legendary meaning and the constant flow of the flow of Indian culture from time immemorial to the present.

According to ancient myth, Varanasi was created by Lord Shiva. There is a battle between the two Supreme Lords, 'Brahma' and 'Shiva', and the successful struggle led to one of the five heads of Brahma torn apart by Shiva. It was the tradition of the time that the victor would take the opponent's head in his hand and leave it hanging from his hand like a work of disturbances and signify his own courage. So, Lord Shiva dishonoured the head of Brahma and kept it with him all the time. When he arrived in the city of Kasi or Varanasi in this case, the hanging head of Brahma fell from the hand of Shiva and disappeared into the ground. Therefore, the land of Varanasi is a very sacred religious site.

The city is also known as Varanasi because of which is located between the streams of Varuna and Assi, and this part is highly respected by Hindu worshipers. Many stories and legends are associated with the

city and attract a large number of saints from distant parts of the country throughout the ages. Kings, nobles, traders, and merchants and its followers founded a series of institutions and built buildings for charity, philanthropy and religious merit. This place represents almost all important pilgrimage centres in India.

Glory and affection of Varanasi or Kashi have been seen by peers, rulers, travellers, writers and lovers. Sanskrit works call it gentle, chanting, beautiful and able to eliminate sins and ignorance. The Ramacharyanas remember it as the spring of salvation and the treasure of Eastern knowledge. James Brinsb, a prominent scientist and consultant British orientalist, saw it as a moving sea of temples in the temples with the sound of cymbals and drums. Mirza Galib (the Jordanian poet) stated that the glory of Benaras was so high that it was impossible to measure or imagine



Source: Geeta Jiwatram Gautam "Toxicity and tissue accumulation of 4-nonylphenol in the catfish Heteropneustes fossils with a note on prevalence of 4-NP in water samples"

GHATS (RIVERFRONTS) OF BENARAS: Ghats in Varanasi are world-famous, it is made in steps of stone slabs along the riverbank where pilgrims perform rituals. These Ghats area vital accompaniment to the Hindu’s perception of spirituality signified as physical, philosophical, and mystic elements. Varanasi has 84 Ghats, most of which are used for bathing by pilgrims and the Hindu performing puja is spiritually large, while some are used exclusively in Hindu sites for cremation.

The most famous and oldest among these Ghats are Dashashwamedha, Manikarnika and Harish Chandra Ghat. Some of the ghats are made there by Hindu rulers such as Ahilya Bai Holkar of the Malwa region, Peshwa of Gwalior, Man Singh of Amber, Jai Singh of Jaipur, etc. Some of the famous personalities of Benaras have named the ghats in their own name. Munshi Ghat is after the poet Hindi Munshi Premchand, Tulsi Ghat is the Hindu poet Tulsidas who has written Ramcharitmanas. Many ghats are associated with legends in Varanasi since the ancient Kashi Naresh possesses Shivala or Kali Ghat.

Most of the Ghats were made at the time of Maratha. Marathas, Holkars, Bhonsles, Shindes (Scindias), and Peshwes (Peshwas) and current Varanasi shepherds. The morning boat ride and the evening Ghat Aarti in Varanasi is famous all over the world as an attraction for visitors.

Subah-E – Banaras (Morning of Varanasi): Varanasi is the mystical mixture of the greatness of nature and human existence. Rising Sunshine in the riverfront of Golden Ganges and luminous Ghats inspire people to love, sing and to perform yoga. Subah-e-Banaras, an early morning collective effort before dawn (sunrise) rather a phenomenon started in the year 2014, by the government of Uttar Pradesh. Tourist comes and lives with joy by starting their day with new hopes, aspirations and inner strength, inspired by the enchanting Vedic of Riches, charming Ganga Ghats, vibrant and affectionate Indian music in addition to meditation.

Subah-e-Banaras, a phenomenon attributed to civilization to promote cosmic evaluation and its super-consciousness. During the morning hours, the "creative energy" was revealed after removing the mask of darkness. It is true that no one can see nirvana consciousness with their organic eyes, but each one of us

can be achieved it with the help of pure thought and spirit. Subah-e-Banaras is a holistic platform provides golden opportunity to purify our mind and soul and creates the linkage with the divine cosmic feelings.



Picture 1: Ganga Ghats of Varanasi

ROLE OF VARANASI AND SPIRITUALITY IN INDIAN TOURISM: People from all over the world now come to India for practising Yoga & Meditation in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, which has been practised for centuries. India is known for its Spiritualism, Religious Tolerance, Yoga and Secularism Character for that reason it is called as "Moksha-Bhoomi" door to the cosmic paradise. Varanasi is internationally renowned for its ancient spiritual practices and cosmic healing treatments. Thousands of years, we have followed our Vedic spiritual systems and their own healing practices like Ayurveda, Meditation and Pranic healing. It's no wonder that people every part of the world goes to the Indo-Indian continent to receive orientation towards spirituality for satisfying their lifestyle, which continues to flourish here today.

Places to visit at Varanasi: The most renowned places to visit at Varanasi are as mentioned below:

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

ELEMENTS OF SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE

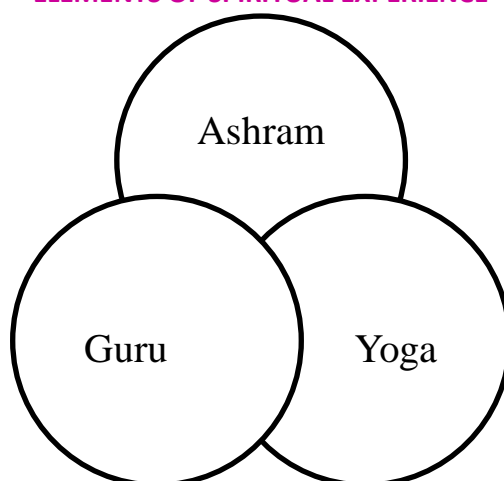


Fig 1: Elements of Spiritual Experiences (Banerjee, M. 2015)

The elements of spiritual experiences are as follows:

ASHRAM: Ashram generally was established deep in the natural world and at the most basic level, it is a place of religious retreat. Ashram residents usually participate in activities such as yoga, music or meditation.

GURU: The role of a Gurus' varies with different religious practices, however, Reverse and respect uniformly. In addition, one needs not to stay within the Ashram to follow a certain Gurus'.

YOGA: Yoga is a way of life that provides guidelines for behaviour and beliefs, and "asanas" (yogic poses) are a small aspect of these guidelines. Although the roots of yoga derived from Vedas and Hindu religion which has been chosen by many different religions.

REASONS FOR FOREIGN TOURISTS BEHIND VISIT AT VARANASI

- The majority of foreign tourists who visit Varanasi believe that religious places offer peace of mind and spiritual comfort. For this reason, they prefer to make their trips to religious places instead of adventurous, historical or exotic sites.
- Nearly half of the tourists are believed to be in India, religion and customs and enjoy the rituals followed in Indian traditions have the motivation to learn more about and the religious significance of Varanasi (Land of Moksha) and the holy river Ganges.
- Foreign tourists like the holy Ganges and the prayer perform at night in the bank of Ganges, temple cuisine (*Prashad*), sermons and the interaction with Sanyasis (*Monks*).
- Foreign tourists are likely to celebrate and participate in Indian festivals. They feel delighted and more self-satisfied in their lives.
- They think that they are not looking for luxury but for them, it is a journey to fulfil the divine purpose of making life simple, more satisfying and rewarding.

From secondary research, it was found that for national tourists at Varanasi increased from 37,13,809 in 2008 to 47,83,012 in 2012, while the number of foreign tourists increased from 1,78,396 in 2008 to 2,78,573. But there are still many potentials that need to be hit. It is expected that pilgrimage tourism will generate a high rate of tourism growth in Varanasi. National tourism is a large part of pilgrimage tourism, but it has to be converted/extended into other forms of tourism such as leisure tourism, providing interesting offers for tourists, etc. (Sources: http://www.up-tourism.com/pdf/tourist_flow.pdf)

ECONOMICAL BENEFICIARIES OF SPIRITUAL TOURISM

RELIGION: - Religious stakeholders are mainly those who live in Varanasi or are attracted to them for spiritual reasons.

- **Ashram:** These are many large organizations like 'Bharat Sevashram Sangha' and 'Kashi Annapurna Annakshetra Trust' are responsible for the trust that they are involved in charities such as running hospitals and social work, and at the same time spread the Spiritual message.
- **Temples:** There are many temples in Varanasi, dedicated to many different Gods, such as Kashi Vishwanath Temple dedicated to Lord Shiva, Kashi Annapurna Temple dedicated to Goddesses Parvati as the deity of Food, Kashi Vishalakhmi Temple is also a little prominent among the people from the southern part of India. Therefore, it is a focal point of the meeting of many religious pilgrims.
- **Pilgrims-** Pilgrims all over India and the world, pilgrims have a tendency to start their Yatra from Varanasi. Hindus prefer to take shower in the holy Ganges since it is thought that the Ganges will wash their sins.

CULTURE: The culture of Varanasi makes the area more prominent to showcase the creativity and religious items in they are famous for.

- **Gemstones:** There are many precious stones and gemstone shops throughout Varanasi selling amber, amethyst, crystal, sapphire and other religious important stones. They import these from abroad, but due to the large volume of tourists, it is a very good place to market.
- **Bookshops:** There are many bookshops that sell books about religion and spirituality for the tourists.
- **Religious Accessories and Ganges Water:** Many shops sell prayer materials and herbs which are very culturally significant. Ganges water is also available for sale.
- **Yoga** – There are many yoga instructors and schools, and many resorts also offer traditional services for tourists, such as Ayurveda and herbal massages.
- **Fooding** – Varanasi is full of a variety of restaurants offering varied cuisine. Their speciality is that they are all vegetarians for religious reasons. In addition, as there are many foreign tourists, the restaurants also offer Mexican, Italian, Israeli and German cuisine. This food is relatively expensive compared to northern and southern India, but the overall food is very cheap for tourists from large cities. Speciality in Local Fooding and its places at Varanasi are 'Ram Bhandar' for Kachoris' in morning breakfast, 'Das Gupta Pan Bhandar' for Varanasi mouth fresheners, 'Blue Lassi Corner' provides 80 plus varieties of milk shacks and Malai Yuk during the winter season, 'Pagal Sardar Ki Dukan' for South Indian delicacies and many more.

TOURISM PROMOTION STRATEGY

- Link religious places with international institutes around the world and international organizations related to spirituality to promote destinations.
- Create awareness about the spiritual destiny through a wide media campaign and aimed at tourists who spend a lot both nationally and internationally.
- Develop links from surrounding destinations around pilgrimage sites to attract tourists.
- For attracting branded hotel groups, restaurant chains, etc. and creation of quality facilities, Varanasi is the successful examples of debt utilization of religious tourism attracts luxury hotel chains such as Taj, Radisson, Clark, Sheraton and others.
- Promote websites' spiritual signs through a committed website and other travel portals.
- Develop cooperative marketing associations with specialized tour operators
- Develop cooperative marketing associations with specialized tour operators and travel agents.

RECOMMENDATIONS ON DEVELOPMENT OF SPIRITUAL TOURISM AT VARANASI

- Value-added services are very important for identifying a name in the sale of religious tourism packages at Varanasi.
- The religious place like Varanasi should give pilgrims the opportunity to explore new places along with their pilgrimage.
- Additional improvements to existing spiritual products to improve their value among potential tourists.

- Policies, strategies and marketing programs that must be adopted by Varanasi tourism community and it should be implemented to increase the flow of spiritual tourists to the region.
- Development of policies and strategies to overcome the seasonal problems and overcrowding in some destinations.
- Enhancing Sustainable guidelines for the advancement of spiritual tourism in the holistic region like Varanasi.
- Modification of limitations in Varanasi regarding spiritual tourism.
- Effective public relations and advertising campaigns that should be adopted by destinations to develop spiritual tourism grounded on market information.
- Innovations of spiritual tourism for an example: merging it with other types of cultural tourism or other types of tourism at Varanasi.
- Improving the prospective tourist's awareness and understanding of spiritual tourism in the region of Varanasi.

EPILOGUE: Spiritual tourism is the largest tourist sector in which more than 70 percent of the national tourist traffic is for religious purposes, and 20 percent of income in the tourism industry generated from religious tourism. Experts believe that religious tourism will gain importance if religious destinations are not sold in isolation. A study conducted by the 'National Council for Applied Economic Research' in Delhi shows that the largest proportion of trips is religious, accounting for 50 percent, while recreational travel packages account for 28 percent. Varanasi is the main tourist destinations that receive the most tourism from India and abroad.

Religion, Faith and Spirituality are so intertwined that a clear differentiation of all three aspects is necessary for a deeper understanding of the role of spiritual tourism. In fact, Buddhism and Hinduism can be considered as philosophical thinking instead of religions and some of the authors have documented this element and called for a definition of "spiritual" tourism. The statistics on spiritual tourism are limited or vague. This is due to the close link between religion and culture, where it is difficult to separate the motivation for travel, except in the specific case of legitimate and religious festivals. Virtually all archaeological monuments have some connotation to religion and form the backbone of tourist circuits. The study has clearly identified areas of interest that appeal to the spiritual aspects of travel and administrators and travel professionals should collect this information, as accurate data and universal application are essential for marketing and promotions. In the absence of modern places, the villages linked tourism to religious sites in antiquity. Based on the above discussion, we can conclude that spiritual tourism at Varanasi has great potential to develop the tourism industry in all dimensions.

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