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## Prospects of eco-tourism in Bihar

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### Abstract

The rich diversity within flora and fauna with a blessing of the attractiveness of natural attractions has encouraged Eco-Tourism in India. Ecological tourist spots in Bihar have enormous potential to lead the socio-economic transformation of the State. Bihar is endowed with resources and natural vegetation that include forest cover and wildlife habitation. Hence, there are tremendous potentialities in Eco-Tourism in the State. It is high time to promote this sort of tourism.

**Keywords:** Bihar tourism, eco-tourism, flora and fauna, marketing strategy, socio-economic transformation

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### Introduction

The word “tour” comes from the Latin word ‘tornare’ and also Greek word ‘tornos’ meaning ‘a lathe or circle; the movement around a central point or axis.’ In developing countries like India, tourism has become one in every one of the major sectors of the economy, contributing to an outsized proportion of the value and generating substantial employment opportunities. It has become the fastest growing industry within the country with high potentials for its further expansion and diversification. However, there are pros and cons attached to the event of the tourism industry within the country.

Individuals become tourists after they voluntarily leave their usual surroundings, where they reside, to go to another environment. These individuals will usually engage in several activities, no matter how close or how far this environment (destination) is. Therefore, tourists are visitors, and what you are doing while visiting another place is also considered as tourism. Back in 1963, the international organization Conference on International Travel and Tourism agreed to use the term ‘visitors’ (other than residents) to explain individuals are visiting another country. This definition covered two classes of visitors: Tourists were classified as temporary visitors staying a minimum of 24 hours in an exceeding destination. If they are travelling for recreation, health, sport, holiday, study, or religious purposes, their visit can be categorized as leisure. Alternatively, excursionists, including cruise travellers, are also considered as temporary visitors, if they stay in an exceeding destination for less than 24 hours. However, these definitions fail to require into consideration domestic tourists. In 1976, the Institute of Tourism defined that tourism is the temporary short term movement of individuals to a destination outside the places where they usually live and work. Therefore, tourism includes the movement of individuals for all purposes, including day visits or excursions.

### Bihar: One of the Most Favoured Tourist Destination in India

Tourism and its allied sectors (travel and hospitality) have emerged as a key driver of income and employment growth in India. As per the Economic Impact Report 2020 of the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), travel and tourism accounts for 6.8 percent of India's GDP, placing India at the 10th position among 185 countries, in terms of the sector's contribution to country's GDP. Of this, the domestic spending accounts for 83 percent. Further, travel and tourism created employment for 3.98 crore people in India.

The Department of Tourism of the State Government is responsible for promoting tourism in Bihar; Bihar is one of the most favoured tourist destinations in India, for both domestic and international tourists. The state's tourist destinations encompass a wealth of tourism products across a range of themes, like heritage, culture, ecotourism. Spiritual, and adventure. To promote tourism, various tourist circuits have been identified and developed in the state. Among these, the important circuits are Buddhist Circuit, Ramayana Circuit, Sufi Circuit, Jain Circuit, Guru Circuit, Shiv/Kanwariya Circuit and Gandhi Circuit.

The tourism sector has enormous potential to lead the socio-economic transformation of Bihar. The State Government has taken several measures towards all round development of the sector. The decision to develop prominent sites as 'Iconic Destinations' is a significant effort in this direction; it will serve as a replicable model for other major tourist destinations. Further, emphasis on strengthening infrastructure and rural development will have a multiplier impact on the tourism sector. The capital-intensive infrastructural projects, like ropeways, will make the hilly region of the state accessible to tourists. Schemes such as Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Augmentation Drive (PRASHAD), Heritage City Development and Augmentation Yojana (HRIDAY), Swadesh Darshan and others are envisaged to develop ample infrastructure for theme- based circuits and improve linkages between major tourist destinations.

Bihar Tourism has adopted a comprehensive marketing strategy to attract higher footfalls and position Bihar as a most preferred destination for both domestic and international tourists. To make Bihar a top destination for tourists and leverage tourism's potential for socio-economic growth, following strategies have been adopted:

1. Tourism marketing and promotion,
2. Development of tourism infrastructure,
3. Development of tourism products,
4. Skill development.
5. Ensuring tourist comfort and safety,
6. Making tourism everyone's business,
7. Sustainable tourism,
8. IT and digital initiatives, and
9. Investment facilitation.

The Covid-19 pandemic caused a once-in-a-century global crisis in 2020 and 2021 that has severely impacted global travel and tourism. However, in the coming years, in course of an up-turn in tourism, the domestic tourism is expected to recover faster than international tourism. Through wider efforts to promote tourism and higher allocation for this sector, the focus of the State Government is to create a brand Bihar' in the tourism sector.

Till 2019, the footfall has steadily increased year after year in Bihar (Table 1). However, there was a sharp decline in the tourist arrival in 2020. The primary reason for the lower tourist turn out can be attributed to the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic and frequent closing down of international borders and restricted movements within the country.

**Table 1:** Number of Domestic & Foreign Tourist Arrivals

Year	Number of Tourists (in lakh)		
	Domestic	Foreign	Total
2012	214.5	10.9	225.4
2013	215.9	7.7	223.5
2014	225.4	8.3	233.7
2015	280.3	9.2	289.5
2016	285.2	10.1	295.3
2017	324.1	10.8	335.0
2018	336.2	10.9	347.1
2019	339.9	10.9	350.8
2020	56.4	3.0	59.5

Source: Department of Tourism, GoB

In 2020-21, a sum of Rs 14527.10 lakh was sanctioned for the development of various tourism projects in Bihar, followed by a sanction of Rs. 2025.34 lakh in 2021-22. The trend of approved budget and actual expenditure of the Department of Tourism in Bihar is presented in Table 4.30. As is evident from the table, the utilisation of fund has been high in earlier years, but has dropped to 19.6 percent in 2020-21, which is a consequence of the pandemic. Some of the major developments in the tourism sector in recent years are:

- Modernization and upgradation of Tourist Information Center (2021-22) in Bodhgaya at an estimated cost Rs 95.61 lakh
- To construct State Guest House in Bodh Gaya, costing Rs. 13615.00 lakh
- Beautification and upgradation work at Rajju Marg and surrounding areas near Rajgir, costing Rs. 1638.73 lakh
- Upgradation of Koteswar Dham Temple in Gaya district at an estimated cost of Rs 786.00 lakh
- Development of tourist amenities and landscaping at seven spots in Purnea district, costing Rs 912.10 lakh.

**Table 2:** Expenditure on Department of Tourism (2014-15 to 2020-21)

Year	Approved Budget (Rs. Crore)	Expenditure (Rs. Crore)	Expenditure as Percentage of Budget
2014-15	118.1	87.4	74.0
2015-16	66.0	65.4	99.0
2016-17	94.5	86.4	91.5
2017-18	91.0	76.7	84.3

2018-19	84.6	47.2	55.8
2019-20	275.0	82.8	30.1
2020-21	357.9	70.20	19.6

Source: Department of Tourism, GoB

In 2020-21 and 2021-22, the following projects have been planned to promote tourism in Bihar under Swadesh Darshan Scheme of Prime Minister's Special Package:

- **Development of Jain Circuit:** Under this scheme of Prime Minister Special Package, a sum of Rs 5238.95 lakh (revised to Rs 3719.22 lakh) has been sanctioned for the development of Jain Circuit in Bihar. Till date, Rs 2363.14 lakh has already been spent and the construction work is under progress.
- **Development of Kanwariya Circuit:** The sanctioned amount for the Kanwariya Circuit under the Swadesh Darshan Scheme was Rs 5235.00 lakh. Under this scheme, Rs 3976.01 lakh has already been spent till date and the construction work is almost completed.
- **Development of Mandar Hill and Ang Pradesh:** Of the sanctioned amount of Rs 4752.88 lakh for the development of Mandar Hill and Ang Pradesh, Rs. 3334.57 lakh has already been spent. The construction work is under progress.
- **Development of Gandhi Circuit:** For the development of Gandhi Circuit in Bihar, a sum of Rs 4465.02 lakh has been sanctioned. The construction work is in progress and the State Government has already spent Rs 2232.51 lakh for this scheme.

Finally, one may note that the State Government is developing a Cultural Center in Bodh Gaya to promote the city as a popular destination for meeting, conference and other events related to tourism. For this project, the State Government has sanctioned a sum of Rs 14514.00 lakh. The Building Construction Department of the State Government is the nodal agency for the construction of the Center. The work is under progress, and Rs 7834.16 lakh has already been spent till date.

### **Eco-Tourism in Bihar**

Bihar is endowed with resources and natural vegetation that include forest cover and wildlife habitation. The major species of land animals are-tiger, leopard, bear, hyena, bison, spotted deer and barking deer, etc. The list of aqua species includes-crocodile, gladiator, varieties of fishes and different species of tortoises. Since a number of major rivers flow through the state, the national aquatic animal Gangetic Dolphins are found in abundance in Bihar. The 60-kilometre stretch of the Ganga floodplain has been notified as a sanctuary for Gangetic Dolphins. Bihar is also inundated by Kanwar lake, Baraila lake, Kusheshwarsthan lake. Udaipur lake and manmade lakes such as Naagi dam and Nakati dam. The dams and lakes have been notified as natural wetland for different kinds of species. Bihar has a national park, a tiger reserve, 13 wildlife enclosures, two conservation reserves, and one community reserve.

### **Eco-Tourism in Valmiki Tiger Reserve**

The Valmiki Tiger Reserve is the sole national park in Bihar. It is located in the Terai region of the Shivalik Himalayan Mountain range in West Champaran district of Bihar. This reserve is covered with Sal trees and its auxiliary trees, such as Bait, Khair and Sheesum, which are spread throughout the 898.45 square kilometres of the reserve. This forest area is rich in varieties of flora and fauna. The Valmiki Tiger Reserve is home to 53 species of mammals, 26 species of reptiles, seven species of amphibians, and 256 species of birds.

The State Government has provided various amenities for tourists in Valmiki Nagar. For instance, the accommodation facility is available for 60 people in Valmiki Nagar. The following services are available for tourists at Valmiki Tiger Reserve:

1. Valmiki excursion (Paryatan) Centre, jungle safari, cycle safari, canopy walk (Kaileshwar Jhula), Sangam Naukayaan, Jatashanker Temple and Nardevi Temple;
2. Cultural programme and film shows, and souvenir shops;
3. Mangurah travel centre, jungle safari, sunset point in Lalbhitiya (Manguraha), Sofa Mandir and Sabhyata Mandir;
4. Bhitiharwa Gandhi Aashram and collections therein. Ashok Stambh Rampurva, film show, souvenir shop and
5. Gowardhan excursion centre, forest safari, jungle trail and visit to Parevadah waterfall.

### **Eco-tourism at Kaimur Wildlife Sanctuary**

Kaimur Wildlife Sanctuary is a comprehensive area for investment in eco-tourism. It is a land full of natural heritage, along with its historical significance. It has significant ecological capacity. Suitable arable fertile land for agriculture, along with picturesque hilly surroundings is available here. It has Broad water

container with the construction of Durgavati reservoir plan. Further, Historical Shergad Kila is part of the visit. It is enclosed by forest cover from three sides.

### **Eco-tourism at Tutla Bhawani**

Tutla Bhawani (also known as Tutla or Tutla Dham) is located at a distance of 20 kms. from Dehri- on-Sone in the south-western direction. This place is specially known for Devi Tutla Bhawani Temple and incredible waterfalls. The hilly terrain further gives a fascinating view to the tourists. There is Kund waterfall or Dhuan Kund waterfall which is situated at about 10 kms, from Sasaram and at Kaimur hills. During the rainy season, tourists come for picnics and enjoy the natural beauty of the region. There is also a cultural fair, organized on the first Sunday after the Raksha Bandhan celebration every year. A large number of tourists gather there for the fair every year. Guptdham Mahadev Mandir, located about 12 kms. from Sasaram Town, is one of the oldest temples in Bihar.

### **Bhimbandh Ecological Tourist Centre**

Bhimabandh, located in the Khadakpur hill range under the Munger forest division of Bihar, is the main ecological tourist destination under the Bhimabandh Wildlife Sanctuary. This is covered by dense Sal trees. Under a plan for eco-friendly tourism, jointly prepared by the Bihar State Tourism Development Corporation and Department of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, hot water tank has been developed at the above site. Apart from hot water tank, there are forest rest houses, children's playground, and fountain.

### **Eco-tourism in Rajgir and Nalanda**

Rajgir Zoo Safari has been developed in Rajgir (Nalanda) on 191.12 hectares of land, which offers natural view of the wildlife and different varieties of lifeforms in their everyday instinctual involvement. This offers natural view of the wildlife through zoo safari. This zoo safari tries to join two different concepts - watch wildlife in their natural setting and, simultaneously, enjoy a safari ride. This zoo safari offers close view of varieties of different lifeforms, including butterflies, birds and different insects. This was developed for two important purposes first, to conserve species of lifeforms which include gestating reproduction of the vulnerable species and, second, to disseminate knowledge about wildlife and importance of conservation. This safari is being developed for five species of wildlife and also provides different provisions for tourists. It is reported that an area of 30.53 hectares is being developed for herbivorous wildlife in the zoo safari. During the safari, one can view Spotted Deer, Sambhar, Hog Deer, Barking Deer, Black Buck, Blue cows and other herbivorous wildlife in their natural setting. The promotional activities are also being carried out for the development of suitable living space for various herbivorous animals. The safari development also includes about 20.63 hectares of bear safari, Leopard Safari (20.63 hectares), Tiger safari (20.53 hectares of Sal forest) and Dawn safari (20.54 hectares). These safaris offer scintillating experience for tourists to closely observe wildlife in their natural setting. There are also plans for development of a state-of-the-art Ivory and Butterfly Park in Rajgir. There is also specialized development of reception-cum-orientation zone services, which includes information centre for various lifeforms and documentary film shows for dissemination of wildlife information by using new technological interfaces of 3-D representations. The State Government has also made arrangements for keeping control over safari vehicles and comprehensive surveillance over the wildlife ecosystem.

### **Conclusion**

Eco-Tourism is one among the diverse portfolio of niche tourism products in Bihar. Its rich natural scenery and wildlife make it an important destination for ecological tourism. People, who fancy travelling to new places, will appreciate the flora and fauna of Bihar. Bihar Eco-Tourism has much to offer to travellers. Eco-Tourism is intended to offer tourists insights into the impact of human beings on the environment and to foster a greater appreciation of our natural habitats. An integrated holistic plan should be prepared to promote the community based eco-tourism. It must ensure the involvement of all stakeholders and be implemented through the local people in order to harness the potentialities which is yet to be fully exploited and reap benefits.

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