

# Marketing Buddhist Tourism in Bihar: Issues and Challenges



**Tripti Kumari**  
Research Scholar  
Deptt.of Tourism Management,  
Burdwan University,  
West Bengal

## Abstract

Geographically, historically, culturally and religiously, the state Bihar is a rich land. This provides the state with a great competitive advantage from tourism point of view with regards to other states of India. Currently the Bihar government has introduced new and innovative ways to boost tourism in the state by developing new tourist sites and renovating the existing ones. Renovation of old tourist circuits like Buddhist circuits, Jain circuits, wildlife circuits etc. Initiatives also taken by the state government for identification and development of new circuits like Bapu Circuit, Astro-tourism Circuit and Madhubani Circuit in the state. Key infrastructure development works are also being taken up in the form of tourists' residence, power, safe drinking water, etc. with important destinations being connected by better road, rail and air routes to attract more tourists to the state. This paper mainly focuses on various issues and challenges involved in marketing and promotion of Buddhist tourism in the state of Bihar.

**Keywords:** Travel Circuits, Astrotourism, Asi, Jica, Adb, Ficci.

## Introduction

Tourism, the largest service industry in India, contributes 6.23% to the GDP and around 9% to the total employment figures. Geographically, historically, culturally and religiously, the state Bihar is a rich land. This provides the state with a great competitive advantage from tourism point of view with regards to other states of India. Both domestic and foreign tourists visiting Bihar have increased significantly in the recent years, such that now Bihar attracts more foreign tourists than some of the leading tourist generating states like Goa, Kerala, Rajasthan etc..

The Bihar government has recently introduced new and innovative ways to boost tourism. It is developing new tourist sites and renovating the existing ones. Renovation of old tourist circuits like Religious Circuits (e.g. Buddhist and Jain Circuit) and Nature & Wildlife Circuit, and identification and development of new ones like Bapu Circuit, Astrotourism Circuit and Madhubani Circuit have been taken up on a very large scale. Key infrastructure development works are being taken up in the form of tourists' residence, power, safe drinking water, etc. with important destinations being connected by better road, rail and air routes.

## Aim of the Study

The main objectives of the study are as follows-

1. To understand historical development of Buddhist tourism in India.
2. To study the Buddhist tourism potential of Bihar.
3. To examine the role played by different agencies/ organizations to promote and market Buddhist tourism.
4. To identify various issues and challenges involved in marketing and promotion of Buddhist tourism in Bihar.

## Study Methods

The data for the proposed study has been collected from secondary sources. The secondary data has been collected from different Books, Journals, Periodicals, Newsletters, reports published by PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry & FICCI etc.

## Review of Literature

With the **prospect for growth in tourism in India** in next few years time, it is worthwhile to consider effective marketing strategies to be skillfully employed. **Dutta (1997)**, in his study titled "Application of Modern Societal Marketing Strategy Concept for Sustainable Tourism Development in India" has attempted to establish the fact as to how the modern marketing strategy along with the three major tools of promotion, participation and prevention i.e., 3 Ps will be useful strategic decision for sustainable tourism development in India.

**Raj and Crotts (1994)** have pointed out that Travel and Tourism are '**discretionary services**' that may be delayed, curtailed for even foregone if expectations turn pessimistic and consumers decide to save their income. It is crucial for **marketers** to know who decides at what time about the aspects of their trips and to provide the relevant information at that right time for the right audience

**Rise and Trout (1986)**, informs that **marketing battles** are fought in a mean and ugly place. A place that is dark and dumps with much unexplored territory and deep pit falls to trap the unwary. Marketing battles are fought inside the mind.

**Goosens (1994)**, in his paper "External Information Search: Effects of Tour Brochures with Experimental Information" says that Tourist-linked mass media, such as tour brochures play especially in the beginning of the vacation planning process a significant role in determining **choice of destinations**. Information about feelings of pleasure, relaxation, excitement, adventure and fun, meets consumers' hedonistic needs, advertising may motivate tourists with adequate pictures of travelers who express their satisfactory feelings.

**Seaton and Bennett (1996)**, vouches saying, **destination marketing is the heartland of tourism marketing**. The destination is the catalyst links that precipice all the other industries in the tourism sector-transport, accommodation and attractions. Unless people want to go somewhere provision for transporting them, resting them, feeding them and amusing them will be in vain. 'Being there'-the destination factor-is the *sine qua non* for tourism.

**Chaudhury (2000)**, in his paper: "India 's Image as a tourist destination-a perspective of foreign tourists", projects that India can develop its image as a cultural destination –an image which is fairly well established. However, India lacks a positive image mainly at the infrastructure and safety fronts. A well-planned promotional campaign with the necessary improvements in these areas can be helpful.

**Singh (2004)**, in his article "India's Domestic Tourism: Chaos/crisis/challenge?" Pleads for an appropriate paradigm for pragmatic development of internal tourism. The challenge of sustainable development and its sub-set **sustainable tourism** lines in approaching the crisis of India's domestic tourism through a pragmatic, balanced and systematic paradigm.

In "Tourists Images of a Destination-An alternative Analysis" **Dann (1996)** opines that destination choice is predicted on internalized mental pictures. When destinations are advertised, interpretation of such stimuli is grounded in personality, experiences, interests, needs, motives and mood.

**Weaver and Weber (2007)** indicate that a significant portion of the variance in destination evaluation can be attributed to previous travel experience and trip related variables. Some previous experience and trip related variables do work together to affect destination evaluation.

**Smeral and Witt (2002)**, have carried out a "Destination Country Portfolio Analysis. Their evaluation of the **competitive position** of tourist destination is an important issue and the analysis of

destination country portfolios is a critical element in the evaluation. It is clear that there are marked differences in performance among the various tourist destinations. The driving force with regard to market share increase appears to be the percentage of tourism demand being generated from markets with above average income elasticity.

**Pike and Ryan (2004)** have made a comparison of Cognitive, Affective and Cognitive perceptions. On that basis they have suggested **effective positioning** of destination, which requires a succinct, focused and consistent message. The authors have recommended enhancing positioning effectiveness by understanding the benefits sought by the target audience and the relative performances of the competitive set of destinations. They have further emphasized on focused positioning strategy while staying in touch with target audience needs.

**Hsu, Wolfe and Kang (2004)** have suggested that for states and regions **with limited comparative advantages**, good planning is even more important because they must effectively analyze and use what little resources they have. Sound research results can assist visitors who face enormous competition and challenges to set priorities, find their **market niche**, maximize the benefits from their minimal endowed resources, and eventually develop their competitive advantages.

**Bercli and Martin (2004)**, in their paper titled "Tourist's characteristics and the perceived image of tourist destination: a quantitative analysis" have indicated that when there is congruence between the **tourists 'motivation** and the **nature of the destination**, the affective image is positively influenced. Further, they have pointed out that the affective image that the tourists have after their visit will influence the messages that they spread by word of mouth. It is necessary that the image projected on the destinations through their advertising possess integrity, since that image forms the customers' expectations of the destinations. Different communication strategies are also to be followed depending upon the tourist's country of origin.

**Bonn and Joseph (2007)** say that heritage and cultural attractions are unlike the **retailing sector**, in which the social factor plays a significant role in dependent variables such as word of mouth intentions. Ambient factors such as lighting, colour and signage combined with design factors such as spaciousness and traffic flow, are far more important to visitors than elements such as facility attractiveness, tour guide availability, music and merchandise quality. Cultural/heritage managers everywhere are missing the opportunity to increase their visitors' numbers via minor changes that ultimately can have major returns on their overall visitor perception and on the attractions as a bottom line.

**Sirakeya, Mclellan and Uysal (1996)** have also mentioned in their study that each traveler should be treated differently from the other, since people behave individually according to their varying needs and wants. Unfortunately, orientation and adaptation of the tourism product to individual needs is certainly not feasible. However, recognizing individual differences and their true needs on tour operation

may well serve the dual purpose of creating a better service to potential travelers and enabling tour agencies to employ individual specific marketing strategies.

**Austin (2002)**, in his "Managing Heritage Attraction: Marketing Challenges at Sensitive Historical Sites" has pointed to the complexity of interrelationships between and amongst visitors, site staff, local government agencies and local residents. For formulation and implementation of appropriate marketing communications, such analysis is very essential. He has warned that entrance fee at heritage sites could be a major source of visitor dissatisfaction.

India also has many places of historical and religious importance to the **Buddhist faiths**. The Indian Government is not turning a blind eye to these possibilities. Indian Railways has started a special **Buddhist circuit train-Mahaparinirvan Express-** that covers all important places of Buddhist pilgrimages in India in 15 days. Even the states like Bihar and UP are doing their bid promote Buddhist tourism in their state with their special Buddhist circuit tours covering the places of Buddhist interests within the state.

In addition to the Government's efforts, **Buddhist community** is also doing very good work. The ongoing *Maitreya* project to build a 500ft tall Buddha statue, which will be the world's biggest statue of Buddha in Kushinagar, Uttar Pradesh, is a great step forward. No doubt, once completed this will be a great attraction for the Buddhist tourists abroad. The campaign **Incredible India** brings the world wonder Taj Mahal, the Great Himalayas, the royal Indian palaces, the ancient art works, and rich cultural and historical sites to the minds of the tourists. **Buddhist circuit** definitely is not in the top list.

**The potential for Buddhist tourism circuits** has already been recognized. Two important sub-regional groupings, namely Bangladesh-India-Myanmar-Srilanka-Thailand Economic Co-operation (BIMST-EC) and the **Tourism Marketing Task Force** for the Greater Mekong Sub-region: East-West Economic Corridor, have recently identified the **development of Buddhist tourism circuits** as a **priority area** for cooperation. Moreover, at the regional level, the Commission that guides the work of **ESCAP** (Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific) has decided at its fifty-sixth session in June 2000 to organize a seminar about the development of Buddhist tourism circuits (**ESCAP, 2003**).

The papers presented in the **ESCAP Tourism Review** give an insight into the approaches, policies and practices of several Asian countries. At the same time, a better picture is emerging of the complex social and cultural issues that are involved; the role of various stakeholders and their main concerns at the national level; and thoughtful recommendations of what approaches and actions could be part of the dynamic for greater regional and sub-regional cooperation to promote **Buddhist tourism circuits**.

**Travel News (2007)** reported that Buddhism, founded in North India, is not a religion but a system of philosophy and a code of morality. With 6.6 million Buddhists, the country abounds in a plethora of monuments and locales associated with Buddhism.

**Pradhan (2009)** informs that The Asian Development bank (ADB) is working on a multi-million dollar plan to develop **Buddhist tourism** sites in the South Asian region including India, under which a USD 45 million project is under consideration to develop the birthplace of Gautam Buddha at Lumbini in Nepal. Manila based ADB is working out a plan to help develop infrastructure for **circuit tourism promotion** involving **Buddhist pilgrim** sites in Nepal, Bhutan, India and Bangladesh.

According to the **Government of Bihar, Department of Tourism** report in the article published in Guwahati edition of The Times of India, the state was going to achieve 30% growth in the domestic tourists' arrivals. Since domestic tourism is the base for developing international tourism in the state, so according to the govt. official it is a positive sign for tourism development in the state. The tourism department also conducted road shows at various places of India including New Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Ahmedabad, Jaipur and Siliguri which aims at making the people aware of the culture and heritage of Bihar, including religious places associated with all major religions, like Bodh Gaya and Nalanda." The state government is also trying to develop Bihar as a major destination for eco-tourism and this includes undertaking major projects in Rajgir, Jethiyan and Ghorakatora

According to the **Ministry of tourism, Government of India report** published in 2011 in Times of India New Delhi, Celebrated as the party destination in India, Goa appears to have lost its 'happening' tag to the humble Bihar. Data collected by the Union tourism ministry appears to indicate that Bihar attracted a larger number of foreign tourists in 2009 than Goa. The government's India Tourism Statistics report shows that while 4.2 lakh foreign tourists visited Bihar in 2009, Goa drew about 3.7 lakh losing its place in the top 10 destinations in India.

#### **Buddhist Tourist Profile in India**

1. 6.6 million Buddhist population in south east Asia.
2. Buddhist tourist arrivals in India has doubled in 2009 from 2008.
3. 30% growth in the domestic tourists arrivals
4. 2012-13 the total tourist arrivals was 1.67 crore
5. Out of which 62 lakhs domestic tourists visited the state of Bihar.
6. In 2011 Bihar super seeded GOA in terms of most tourism happening state in India.

India is one of the world's great reservoirs of history, cultures, philosophies and religions. Global interest to visit and experience these assets puts India amongst the most desired destinations for tourists and pilgrims. The Buddhist Circuit is a route that follows in the footsteps of the Buddha from Lumbini in Nepal where he was born, through Bihar in India where he attained enlightenment, to Sarnath and Kushinagar in Uttar Pradesh in India, where he gave his first teachings and died. This iconic route only includes places where the Buddha actually spent time, and these sites – all of which are over 2500 years old – are among the most significant and revered for all Buddhists. The Buddhist Circuit is an important pilgrimage destination for the 450 million practicing Buddhists as well as travelers interested in history, culture or religion.

**Historical Development of Buddhist Tourism in India**

Tourism and pilgrimage have been said to be closely related. However, the relationship between tourists and the religions and religious contexts they visit has always been neglected. Why tourists travel to places of religious significance and how they conceive of their travels are important questions to both the study of tourism and of religion.

India has been ranked 52nd in the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index 2015 compiled by the World Economic Forum. It has gained 13 places over its last year's standing of 62nd out of the 141 countries listed in the rankings. The top 5 countries with highest score are Spain, France, Germany, United States, United Kingdom and the bottom 5 countries with lowest scores are Chad, Guinea, Angola, Yemen, Mauritania.

India has only scratched the surface in attracting a meaningful share of religious Buddhist travelers. Arrivals to India from Buddhist dominated countries comprised a mere 0.005 percent of all Buddhist adherents. Since the Buddhist Circuit is the area where Buddhism originated and where the Buddha lived, the potential for Buddhist tourism expansion is enormous.

**The most Important Places Associated with Buddhism in India**

1. Lumbini (in Nepal) – where he was born.
2. Bodhgaya (in Bihar) – where he attained enlightenment under the Bodhi Tree.
3. Sarnath (in Uttar Pradesh) – where he delivered his first sermon.
4. Nalanda and Rajgir (in Bihar) – where he lived and taught, and Nalanda, in particular, became the center of Buddhist learning and teaching.
5. Kushinagar (in Uttar Pradesh) – where he died.
6. Kapilavastu (on India Nepal Border) – Kapilavastu is deeply endowed with the Buddha's origins. It is believed that Buddha spent his first early years here before embarking on the long journey to enlightenment.
7. Vaishali (in Bihar)– Buddha's last sermon delivered.
8. Sravasti (in Uttar Pradesh) – Buddha spent twenty four rainy seasons here at the Jetavan monastery, built by his disciple Sudatta Anathapindika.
9. Kausambi (in Uttar Pradesh) – Buddha is believed to have stayed and preached at Kausambi.

**Buddhist Tourism Potentials of Bihar****Districts of Bihar**

There are altogether 38 districts of Bihar. These includes

West Champaran, Purbi Champaran, Sitamarhi, Gopalganj , Sheohar, Siwan , Muzaffarpur, Madhubani, Supaul, Araria, Purnia, Katihar, Madhepura, Saharsa, Darbhanga, Khagaria, Samastipur , Vaishali, Saran, Patna, Kishanganj, Begusaral, Bhagalpur, Banka, Munger, Lakhisarai, Nawada, Jamui, Sheikhpura, Nalanda, Buxar Bhojpur, Arwal, Jahanabad, Gaya, Aurangabad, Rohtas , Kaimur.

<b>State Capital</b>	<b>Patna</b>
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Area (Sq. km)	) 94,163
Population (Census 2011)	103.8 million
Population Density(Sq.Km)	1019.51
No. of Districts	38
Important Rivers	Ganges and its tributaries
Desert and Mountains	Rajgir Hills and Chhota Nagpur Plateau
GSDP at Current Prices (2010-11)	Rs 217814 Crore
NSDP at Current Prices ((2010-11)	Rs 201264 Crore
Real GSDP Growth (2010-11)	14.7%
Per capita income (2011) constant prices	Rs 14865
Gross Fiscal Deficit /GSDP (FY12)	2.93%
Government borrowings 2007-08 to 2009-10	Annual Plan 109.12
BPL population	53.5%
National Highway length (2011)	3,434 Kms
Rail Length (2011)	5400 kms
International Airport	Bodh Gaya Airport
Domestic Airport	Patna
Per Capita Health Expenditure (04-05)	Rs. 513
Human Development Index *	0.35
Literacy Rate (2011 Census)	63.8%
Life Expectancy at Birth (2002-06)	61.6
Sex Ratio (2001 Census)	921
Key Industries	Minerals, agro & food processing, leather & textile, Tourism, IT/ ITES, infrastructure
Composite ranking of the state	^ 20th
Macro economy^	20th
Agriculture^	16th
Infrastructure^	16th
Investment environment^	20th

Socio Economic Indicators of Bihar, Source: PHD Research Bureau, Compiled from various sources  
**Patna**

It is the capital of Bihar. During Ancient India Era it was popularly known as Patliputra. This place is among the world's oldest capital cities with unbroken history of many centuries as imperial metropolis of the Mauryas and Guptas imperial dynasties.

**Patna Museum**

This is famous for collection of many rare Buddhist statues and evidences reflecting the existence of Buddhism in India and especially in Bihar.

**Vaishali**

This place witnesses one of the earliest republics in the world (6th century BC). Lord Buddha preached his last sermon here. It is famous for Asokan Pillar, the eight great events of his life.

**Rajgir**

This place falls under Nalanda District of Bihar which is earlier known as Rajagrihaya. It was the ancient capital of Magadha Empire. Lord Buddha often visited the monastery here to meditate and to preach. The main tourist attractions of Rajgir are Ropeway, Hot water spring and Biraytan (famous for Jain Tourists).

#### **Bodhgaya**

it is considered to be one of the most important Buddhist tourist destinations of India in general and Bihar in particular. Lord Buddha attained enlightenment near the holy city of Gaya. The tree that had sheltered him came to be known as the Bodhi tree and the place Bodhgaya. Bodhgaya is an important place for pilgrimage and has Buddhist monastery galore. Some of them have been established by Buddhists of Japan, Thailand, Myanmar, Sri Lanka etc.

#### **Nalanda**

one of the oldest archaeological sites of Bihar, This place was a great centre of Buddhist learning. Nalanda came into prominence around the 5th century BC and was a flourishing university town with over ten thousand scholars and an extensive library. This is an important place having Buddhist monastery galore.

#### **Kesaria**

it is a newly excavated place of Bihar. Kesaria Stupa is situated in the Champaran (east) district of Bihar. It is believed that Lichhivis have built this stupa as a commemoration of the end-life of Lord Buddha. A six-floor structure this stands as a reminder to the last days of Lord Buddha and his humanitarian approach towards people, independent of caste and creed. The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) excavated the stupa in the year 1998. It is believed to date back to somewhere around 200 AD and 750 AD has a circumference of almost 1400 ft. The amazing stupa witnesses splendid Buddhist architecture and archaeological preservation.

#### **Organization Involved in Promotion and Development of Tourism in Bihar.**

**FICCI** conducted a study By designing effective strategies to promote India as a Buddhist hub, the circuits can aim to attract 0.25% of the world's Buddhist population by 2012. This is equivalent to about one million tourists-a rise of 500% from the current annual base of two lakhs, giving India tourist revenue of Rs 4,500 crores. It calls for increasing the number of direct international flights from important source markets like China and Japan to India, and raising the frequency of domestic flights between Buddhist sites like Bodhgaya and Varanasi.

International organizations/ agencies such as JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency), ADB (Asian Development Bank), (BIMST-EC): Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Srilanka- Economic Co-operation., ESCAP (Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific) etc. are mainly working on Creation of Tourism Marketing Workforce in the country by which promotion and development of Buddhist tourism can be possible in India in general and Bihar in Particular.

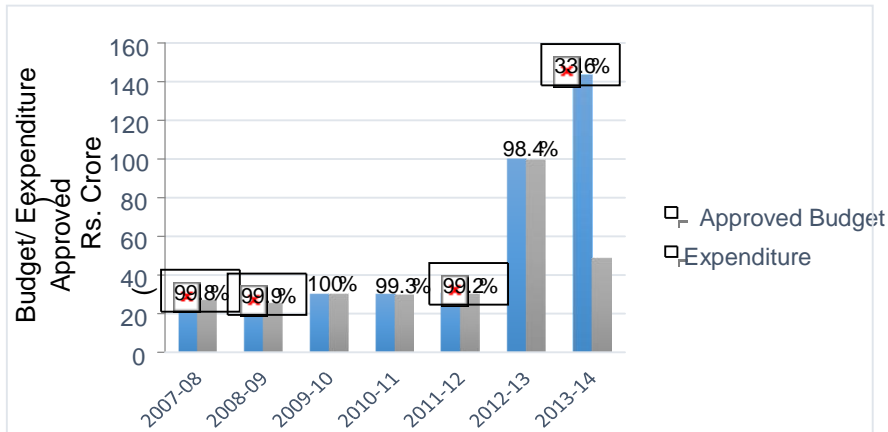
#### **Major Issues in marketing & Promotion of Buddhist Tourism in Bihar**

1. Need for an Holistic approach.
2. All segments of users should be taken care of for ensuring tourism promotion.
3. Pricing should be moderately done to attract budget tourists.
4. Infrastructural support should be provided for better connectivity to destinations.
5. Environmental and cultural values should be preserved for achieving sustainable tourism development.
6. Packages should be designed combining one or more of the religious products so that the state can attract repeat visitors.

#### **Major Challenges**

Some major challenges to promote and develop Buddhist tourism in Bihar includes:

1. To develop tourist complexes and amusement parks public private partnership is required. Since people from Bihar are spread out all over the world so investment opportunities can be given to "Apravasi Biharis". By seeing the return from the tourism sector most of the big corporate houses has entered in this business.
2. but the major challenge is to motivate the Apravasi Biharies it is necessary to guarantee them about the safety from naxalite and illegal elements of the society.
3. There is an urgent need to identify the target and domestic tourism in the state to be appraised to avoid the monotony in the tourism.
4. Provision for collection of primary data on the satisfaction level of tourist should be done in to see the difference on what is actually happening and what has been providing to the tourists.
5. Collecting data base for tourism development
6. Participating in Road shows abroad
7. Increase Budget allocations by the state government.
8. Maintenance of safety and security in the state
9. Development of infrastructure for tourism development.
10. Development of Communication network



Source: Economic Survey 2013-14, GoB

**Details of Budget & Expenditure of Tourism Department (in Rs. crore)**

1. In the recent years from 2007 to 2013, utilisation percentage of the approved budget has been almost 100%.
2. Additionally, the budget allocated to the Tourism Department has seen a substantial increase in the last couple of years, from Rs 30.4 crore in

2011-12 to Rs 100 crore in 2012-13, which further increased to Rs 143 crore in 2013-14.

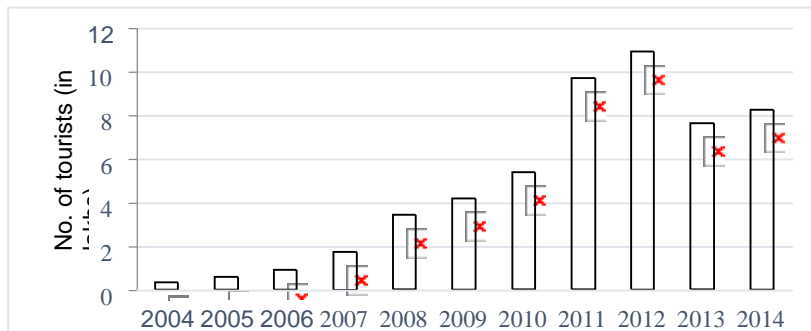
**Note**

The expenditure in FY 2013-14 is till September, 2013.

To give momentum to the government's efforts, a Tourism Policy was introduced in 2009.

**Between 2004 and 2014, the Footfall of Foreign Tourists Visiting Bihar has Increased by Over 21 Times.**

**Year wise Foreign Tourist Arrival (2004 -14)**

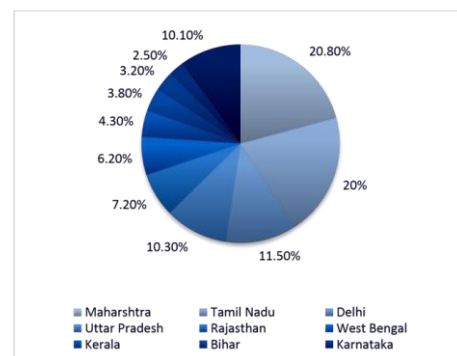


Source: Department of Tourism, GoB

1. The biggest attraction for foreign tourists in Bihar are the Religious Circuits – Buddhist, Jain, Ramayana, Sufi and Temple Circuit.
2. The number of foreign tourists visiting Bihar has grown from 2004 to 2013 at the CAGR of 39.6% (2004-13) as compared to the CAGR of 8.09% for India.

Foreign tourists to Bihar increased from 0.38 lakh in 2004 to 8.29 lakh in 2014.

**Bihar is ranked 8<sup>th</sup> among the top 10 States/ UTs of India (2013) with regard to the number of foreign tourists visiting the state.**



Source: India Tourism Statistics, 2013

**Share of Top 10 States/ UTs of India in Number of Foreign Tourist Visits in 2013**

Of the total foreign tourist arrival in the country, 3.8% visited Bihar. This put the state on the 8<sup>th</sup> position among the top 10 States/ UTs in the number of foreign tourists visiting India in 2013.

These top 10 States/ UTs – Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, West Bengal, Kerala, Bihar, Karnataka and Goa – constitute 89.9% of the total foreign tourist arrival in the country.

**Conclusion**

The travel and tourism sector has entered a take off stage and it is going to scale a great height in near future. Eastern region particularly Bihar has emerged as a front runner in the growth chart. The tourism potential of the state is very high. The challenges before the tourism Industry in Bihar are strengthening the public private partnership, upgrading tourism related infrastructure, clearance of projects by a single window agency, improving air and road connectivity relaxation of tax policy including exemption of entry tax and power and water subsidy for hotels etc. The government should concentrate on providing basic facilities, amenities for budget travelers and setting up more budget hotels in different tourist destination by inviting private entrepreneur to develop and operate tourist complexes, restaurants and amusement parks.

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