



Sustainable Tourism Development in Dhule District: A Strategy for Economic Recovery

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Abstract

The present paper proposes a model for sustainable tourism development in Dhule district, Maharashtra, India, with the main objectives of providing positive experiences for tourists and local people, promoting sustainable development, generating quality employment, considering environmental and cultural peculiarities, and reducing the negative impact of tourists due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The study area, Dhule district, is located in the north-western part of Maharashtra and has an area of 7,195 square kilometres with diverse climate and mountain ranges. The proposed model includes initiatives such as developing attractive tourism destinations, creating quality jobs, investing in education and training, promoting social equity, and protecting the environment. However, the district faces challenges such as lack of awareness about tourist attractions, poor infrastructure, and negative impacts of tourism including pollution, congestion, and exploitation of local people and cultures. Overall, the proposed sustainable tourism model has the potential to boost the local economy, create jobs, and improve the quality of life for the local community but requires collaboration between public and private sectors and measures to address the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism sector.

Keywords: *sustainable tourism, COVID-19, economic recovery, environmental protection world-class tourism destinations*

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is an economic activity of enormous global worth. However, the exact measurement of travel and tourism has not always been straightforward. Vellas and Becherel (1995) define the World Tourism Organization (WTO) as the primary source of statistics on international tourism. According to the WTO, tourism is now the largest industry in the world, generating 10.4% of global GDP and accounting for 10.6% of all jobs. In 2019, international visitor expenditure amounted to US\$1.7 trillion, which is 6.8%



of total exports and 27.4% of global services exports. Demand for travel and tourism has grown at a faster rate than demand for most other areas of economic activity. Tourism has experienced sustained growth in recent decades, and this trend is expected to continue in the future. The number of international tourists has increased dramatically since the end of the Second World War (France et al., 1994). In 1950, there were only 25 million international tourists worldwide. By 2019, this number had increased to approximately 1.5 billion. This growth has been relatively stable, with periods of disruption associated with specific events and economic downturns. The growth of tourism has had a significant impact on the global economy. Tourism has created jobs, boosted GDP, and helped to improve the balance of trade. It has also had a positive impact on the environment, as it has encouraged people to travel more sustainably. However, tourism also has some negative impacts. It can put a strain on local resources, such as water and energy. It can also contribute to pollution and congestion. Additionally, tourism can sometimes lead to the exploitation of local people and cultures.

India's tourism industry is a vital part of the Indian economy. It attracts a large number of foreign tourists every year, and the percentage of foreign tourist arrivals (FTAs) has been growing in recent years. India is known for its warm hospitality, diverse culture, and rich history and heritage. These factors, along with its natural beauty, make India a popular tourist destination (Goswami, 2018). The main attractions for foreign tourists in India are heritage buildings, temples and other religious sites, coastal areas and beaches, yoga and Ayurveda, and spiritual and religious tourism. Domestic tourism in India is also growing, as more people are taking advantage of the country's many historical and cultural attractions (Kumar, 2020). However, the tourism industry in India has been badly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. In March 2020, the government of India imposed a nationwide lockdown, which severely disrupted tourism activities. The government also suspended all tourist visas from March 13 to April 15, 2020. These measures have had a significant impact on the tourism industry, which is expected to see a decline in FTAs and revenue in the coming years. The government of India is taking steps to revive the tourism industry. These include providing financial assistance to tourism businesses, promoting domestic tourism, and easing visa restrictions. However, it is likely to take some time for the tourism industry to fully recover from the impact of the pandemic. In 2020, the number of foreign tourist arrivals in India fell by 78% compared to 2019. The tourism industry lost an estimated \$20 billion in revenue in 2020. Millions of jobs in the tourism industry have been lost due to the pandemic. The tourism industry is expected to take several years to



fully recover from the impact of COVID-19. Despite the challenges, the Indian tourism industry has a bright future. India is a unique and diverse country with a lot to offer tourists. With the right policies and support, the tourism industry can play a major role in the country's economic growth.

Sustainable tourism can be seen as the application of the sustainable development concept to the tourism industry. Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Sustainable tourism, therefore, is tourism development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to enjoy the benefits of tourism (Budowski, 1976). In order to be sustainable, tourism must minimize its negative impacts and maximize its positive impacts. Some of the negative impacts of tourism include environmental degradation, social disruption, and economic leakage. Some of the positive impacts of tourism include job creation, cultural preservation, and economic development.

The late 1980s were characterized by a search for knowledge about tourism's potential impacts in tourist destinations around the world. This research has helped to identify the negative and positive impacts of tourism and to develop strategies for sustainable tourism development (Jafari, 1989).

According to Smith (2007) Here are some of the key principles of sustainable tourism: Environmental sustainability: Tourism should be developed in a way that minimizes its impact on the environment. This includes protecting natural resources, reducing pollution, and conserving biodiversity. Social sustainability: Economic sustainability: Tourism should be developed in a way that is economically viable. This includes generating income, stimulating economic growth, and reducing poverty.

Total number of tourist arrivals in the state of Maharashtra during the period of 2019 was 15,48,23,407, out of the total number of tourists, domestic tourists in Maharashtra accounted for 14,92,94,703 (India Tourism Statistics, 2019). Maharashtra has a glorious place in the annals and geography of India the history of the state resonances with tales of chivalry and brave deeds for, in their efforts to protect Indian culture and heritage, the people of Maharashtra resisted all destructive or corrupted invasions from outside (Erlet, 1993). Dhule district occupies momentous place on the world map taking into consideration the most favoured destinations of the tourist of the whole world. That's why a large number of tourists visit North Maharashtra which is most famous in the whole world for the wonderful strongholds Dhule district. In the present paper author develop sustainable tourism model and study effect of Covid -19 on tourism for Dhule district.

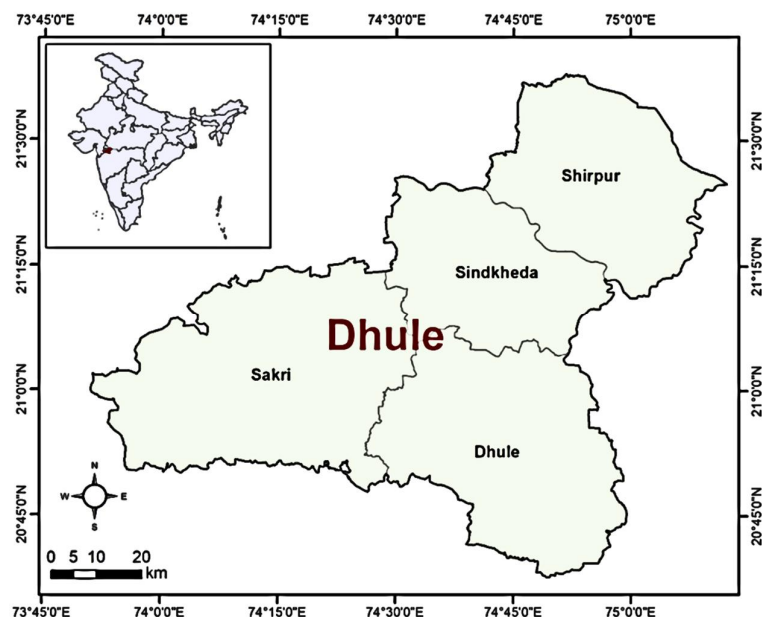


Figure 1 Location Map of Dhule district

STUDY AREA

Dhule district is located in the northwestern part of the Indian state of Maharashtra. It is bordered by the districts of Nandurbar, Jalgaon, and Nashik. The district has a total area of 7,195 square kilometers. Dhule district is situated at the foot of the Satpuda hill range. The mountain range of Sahyadri touches the western side of this district. Besides, the mountains of Galna are situated in this district. The Tapi, Panzara, Kan, Arunavati, Amravati, and Aner rivers flow across the district.

The climate of Dhule district is tropical. The average annual rainfall is 607 millimeters. The rainy season is from June to September. The rest of the year is dry, with hot summers and cool winters. The coldest month in Dhule is January, with an average high-temperature of 29.1°C and an average low-temperature of 17.8°C. The warmest month in Dhule is May, with an average high-temperature of 40.9°C and an average low-temperature of 28.7°C.

AIM OF THE STUDY

The proposed model is based on the principles of sustainability, which include economic viability, social equity, and environmental protection. The paper aims to provide a comprehensive and sustainable approach to tourism development in Dhule district by developing world-class tourism destinations, creating jobs in the tourism sector, investing in education and training, promoting social equity, and protecting the environment.



OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objectives of this research paper are to:

- Analyze the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism sector in Dhule district.
- Propose a sustainable tourism model for Dhule district that is based on the principles of economic viability, social equity, and environmental protection.
- Identify specific initiatives that can be implemented to promote sustainable tourism in Dhule district, such as developing world-class tourism destinations, creating jobs in the tourism sector, investing in education and training, promoting social equity, and protecting the environment.
- Provide a comprehensive and sustainable approach to tourism development in Dhule district that will help to mitigate the negative impacts of the pandemic and promote economic recovery.
- Offer recommendations for government policies and guidelines that can support sustainable tourism development in Dhule district.

DATABASE AND METHODOLOGY

In this study both primary and secondary data has been used. Primary data is collected directly from the source. In this case, the primary data was collected by creating a vector map of Dhule district using ArcGIS 10.8. This involved collecting data on the location of roads, rivers, buildings, and other features in the district. Secondary data is collected from existing sources. In this case, the secondary data was collected from published and unpublished sources, mainly from the Department of Tourism, Maharashtra, and district websites. The published data was collected from different government agencies, Covid-19 web portals, municipal corporations, the Department of Tourism, the Railway Department, the Department of Transportation, and other non-government agencies.

GPS was used to acquire the location of tourist hotspots, ATMs and banks, lodges, hotels and restaurants, fuel stations, transportation networks, and health facilities. This data was then converted into GIS vector data. GIS Overlay techniques were used to identify sites for sustainable tourism. This involved overlaying the primary data, secondary data, and GPS data to identify areas that are suitable for sustainable tourism.



RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Domestic Tourist Influx

Dhule district has traditionally ranked behind Nashik district in terms of domestic tourist arrivals. However, it has recorded an impressive 5% growth in domestic arrivals in the past five years (2014-2019). The Aner dam Wildlife Sanctuary is a popular destination for domestic tourists, and it is rapidly gaining popularity. Other popular tourist attractions in Dhule district include the Ekvara Devi Temple, Laling Fort, Songir Fort, Bhamer Fort, Thalner Fort, Swami Narayan Temple, and Hemadpanthi Temple, Jhodge.

However, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a negative impact on tourism in Dhule district. In 2020, domestic tourist traffic suddenly declined. This decline was due to the COVID-19 lockdown and travel restrictions. We expect that domestic tourist traffic will recover in the coming years.

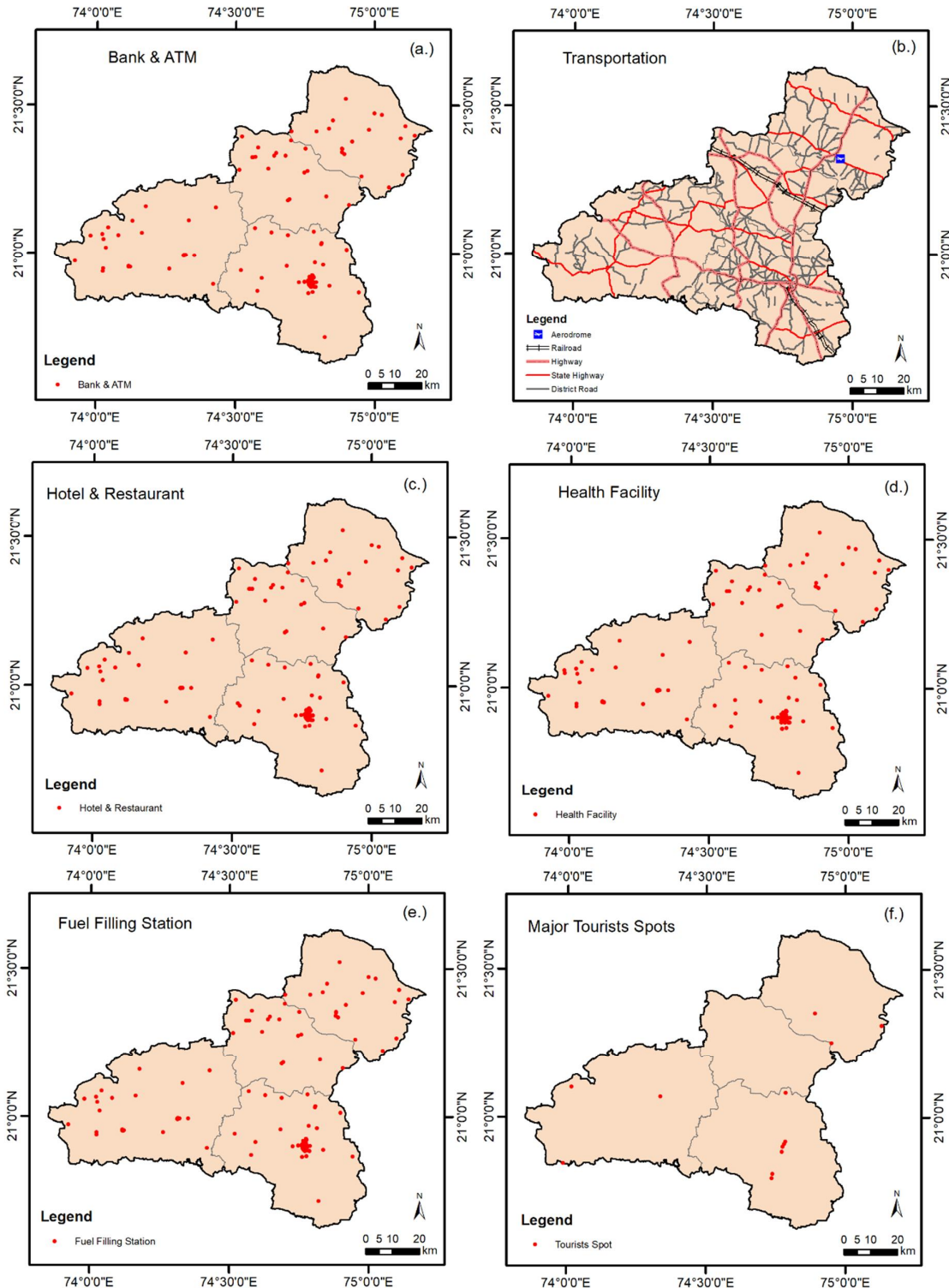
Foreign Tourist Influx

Dhule district receives the minimum number of foreign tourists. However, it has shown an 8% growth in the number of tourist arrivals in the past few years. This growth can be attributed to the development of new tourist attractions in the district, such as the Aner dam Wildlife Sanctuary. The Aner dam Wildlife Sanctuary is a popular destination for foreign tourists, and it is rapidly gaining popularity. Other popular tourist attractions in Dhule district include the Ekvara Devi Temple, Laling Fort, Songir Fort, Bhamer Fort, Thalner Fort, Swami Narayan Temple, Shri Samarth Vagdevta temples, and Hemadpanthi Temple, Jhodge. These tourist attractions attract foreign tourists during fairs and festivals.

Dhule city, which is traditionally a popular destination for foreign tourists, has also shown an incline in the number of arrivals in the same period. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a negative impact on tourism in Dhule district. In 2020, foreign tourist traffic suddenly declined. This decline was due to the COVID-19 lockdown and travel restrictions. We expect that foreign tourist traffic will recover in the coming years.

Here are some of the challenges that Dhule district faces in attracting foreign tourists: Lack of awareness about the tourist attractions in the district, Poor infrastructure, such as roads and hotels, Lack of promotional activities.

The district administration is taking steps to address these challenges. They are promoting the tourist attractions in the district through various media channels. They are also working to improve the infrastructure in the district. We believe that these efforts will help to attract more foreign tourists to Dhule district.



(Source: SOI Toposheet, GPS Survey Data & Google Earth Images)

Figure 2 Location of (a.) Bank & ATM, (b.) Transportation Network (c.) Hotel & Restaurant (d.) Health Facility (e.) Fuel Filling Station and (f.) Major Tourists Spots in the Dhule district.



Tourism connectivity

Shirpur Aerodrome is one of the airports in the study area. However, commercial air services to this airport have been temporarily discontinued recently due to its Flying School facility. A well-developed broad-gauge rail network connects the study region from Chalisgaon to Dhule. There are regular train services to Chalisgaon Junction to cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, and Bangalore. The study region is also well connected by roads with NH60, NH 53, NH 211, and NH 160 passing through Dhule and another town. In the study region, there are many other State Highway and District roads that connect with all over the country.

Here is a more detailed explanation of the transportation options in the study area:

Air: Shirpur Aerodrome is a small airport that is used for general aviation and flying training.

There are no commercial air services to this airport.

Rail: The study area is well connected by rail. There are regular train services to Chalisgaon Junction from cities like

Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, and Bangalore.

Road: The study area is well connected by road. The national highways NH60, NH 53, NH 211, and NH 160 pass through Dhule

and another town. There are also many state highways and district roads that connect the

study area with all over the country.

Prominent tourist destinations and points of interest

Dhule district is home to a number of historical and tourist attractions. Some of the most popular attractions include:

- Laling Fort: This fort is located in the Dhule tehsil and offers stunning views of the surrounding countryside.
- Songir Fort: This fort is also located in the Dhule tehsil and is known for its beautiful architecture.
- Bhamer Fort: This fort is located in the Sakri tehsil and is a popular destination for trekking and hiking.
- Thalner Fort: This fort is located in the Shirpur tehsil and is known for its well-preserved ruins.
- Alaladari Waterfalls: These waterfalls are located in the Amali area of the Sakri tehsil and are a popular spot for swimming and picnicking.
- V. S. Rajwade Museum: This museum is located in Dhule city and houses a collection of historical and archaeological artifacts.
- Shri Samartha Vagdevta Temple: This temple is located in Dhule city and is dedicated to the Hindu deity Shri Samartha Vagdevta.



- Ekvira Mata Temple: This temple is located on the banks of the Panjhara River and is dedicated to the Hindu deity Ekvira Mata.
- BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir: This temple is located in Dhule city
- Landor Bungalow: This bungalow is located near the Laling Fort and offers stunning views of the surrounding countryside. It is also the site where Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, the chief architect of the Indian Constitution, once stayed.
- Aner Dam Sanctuary: This sanctuary is located in the Shirpur tehsil and is home to a variety of wildlife.

Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the tourism industry

The lockdown has had a significant impact on the economy, particularly the tourism industry (Chinazzi et al., 2020; Murray, 2020). The lockdown has led to a decrease in travel, which has had a negative impact on the transportation, hospitality, and events industries. Airlines have grounded flights, and other modes of transportation have been disrupted (Sheller, 2020). Business meetings and conferences have been cancelled or moved online. This has led to a decrease in demand for hotels, restaurants, and other tourism-related businesses (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020). The tourism industry is a major contributor to the economy, and its decline is having a ripple effect on other sectors (Ellis, 2020). The government is taking steps to support the tourism industry, but it is likely to take some time for the sector to recover.

Here are some of the specific impacts of the lockdown on the tourism industry:

- Transportation: The lockdown has led to a decrease in air travel, as well as a decrease in train and bus travel. This has had a negative impact on airlines, railways, and bus companies.
- Hospitality: The lockdown has led to a decrease in demand for hotels, restaurants, and other tourism-related businesses. This has led to job losses and financial difficulties for these businesses.
- Events: The lockdown has led to the cancellation or postponement of many events, such as festivals, concerts, and sporting events. This has had a negative impact on businesses that rely on these events for revenue.
- Revenue: The tourism industry is a major contributor to the economy. The decline in tourism revenue is having a negative impact on the economy as a whole.



CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The conclusion of the research paper proposes policies to support the tourism sector in Dhule district, Maharashtra, India, which has been negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The government should provide financial assistance to tourism businesses, promote Dhule as a tourist destination through marketing and advertising campaigns, improve infrastructure such as roads, hotels, and restaurants, work with local communities to develop sustainable tourism practices, and relax tourist visa policies to encourage tourism in less-affected COVID-19 hotspots. Additionally, the government should allocate a significant amount of money and focus on the sanitation and cleanliness of all tourist destinations and spots in the study area and should provide relief to hotels and restaurants by reducing taxes and providing widespread relief as the cost of services will rise during and after COVID-19. The tourism industry should follow precautionary measures and improve its facilities and ensure proper hygiene and sanitation. Through these measures, the tourism sector can help to boost the local economy, create jobs, and improve the quality of life for everyone in the district. Based on the scientific and GIS analysis of this paper we can say that enhancement of sustainable tourism will give positive experience in between tourists and local people and it also helps in quality employment generate some of the key recommendations for the sustainable tourism sector.

Measures in sustainable tourism policies

One of the first steps to developing a sustainable tourism industry is to create a state policy that outlines the government's vision for the sector. This policy should focus on government initiatives, proposed and planned partnerships, new and existing incentives for developers and private investors, and the overall vision for sustainable tourism development in the state. The policy should also include a focus on revenue generation (Chandel, 2013).

According to Chandel (2013), a sustainable tourism policy should have the following goals:

- Protect the environment
- Promote local culture and heritage
- Provide economic benefits to local communities
- Create jobs
- Increase tax revenue



Transportation connectivity via road, rail, and air

The state government should focus on improving connectivity within Dhule district. This can be done by:

1. Launching the proposed high-speed passenger trains within the district.
2. Building new and improving existing rural roads.
3. Converting airstrips into small commercial airports in Dhule and Shirpur.
4. Setting up heliports in select key states that experience more foreign tourist inflow in the study area.
5. Exploring and improving connectivity through inland waterways in the Tapi River.

These steps will make it easier for tourists to get to Dhule and will help to boost the local economy.

Here are some of the benefits of improving connectivity in Dhule district:

- Increased tourism: Improved connectivity will make it easier for tourists to get to Dhule, which will lead to an increase in tourism revenue.
- Economic development: Improved connectivity will make it easier for businesses to operate in Dhule, which will lead to economic development.
- Job creation: Improved connectivity will create jobs in the construction, transportation, and tourism industries.
- Improved quality of life: Improved connectivity will make it easier for people to get around Dhule, which will improve their quality of life.

Overall, improving connectivity in Dhule district is a win-win for everyone. It will boost the local economy, create jobs, and improve the quality of life for everyone in the district.

Tourist amenities and services

Foreign tourists have certain key requirements, such as easy access to visa offices, ATMs, and banks. These facilities should be available at all the main tourist destinations that generate high foreign revenue. In addition to basic facilities such as sanitation and drinking water, efforts should be made to provide parking and way side facilities to improve sustainable tourism.

Employment for the People

Many states are now focusing on the Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE) sector as a way to boost their tourism industry. The MICE sector is a growing market, and it can be a major source of revenue for a state. However, in order to be successful in the MICE sector, a state needs to have a strong infrastructure and a clear



strategy. The study area is currently not internationally connected, which makes it difficult to attract MICE events. The state needs to improve its connectivity in order to be more competitive. In addition, the state needs to invest in world-class infrastructure, such as international-level convention centres. This will make the study area more attractive to MICE organizers and attendees.

Accommodation amenities and services

India has some of the best luxury hotels and resorts in the world. However, there are also many unfamiliar destinations that need to improve their service levels and increase the number of hotels. In addition, theme-based resorts and hotels are a new option that can be explored in these destinations from the point of view of sustainable tourism. Some popular themes could be wildlife resorts in the Aner Dam reservoir, golf resorts, greenery and clean technology resorts at the Sakri and Shirpur tahsil forest area. In short, eco-friendly tourism can benefit the people in the study area.

Collaboration between the public and private sectors

The higher government authorities of districts need to collaborate and explore the best and most feasible opportunities to attract tourists by offering comprehensive and wide-ranging services and solutions. This can be done by working with the private sector to offer customized experiences and services to tourists.

Strategies to mitigate losses caused by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the tourism industry

As the COVID-19 situation improves, the government should relax tourist visa policies to encourage tourism in less-affected COVID-19 hotspots. The government should also issue more practical and detailed lockdown guidelines for tourists in the study area.

The government should allocate a significant amount of money and focus on the sanitation and cleanliness of all tourist destinations and spots in the study area. Strict guidelines should be made and implemented to provide improved hygiene facilities to combat the coronavirus outbreak at all tourist attractions.

The government should provide relief to hotels and restaurants by reducing taxes and providing widespread relief as the cost of services will rise during and after COVID-19. The government should also induce local tourists, NRIs, and foreign tourists by taking the following confidence-building measures:

- Providing quality medical facilities at minimal charges
- Providing medical insurance



- Ensuring that government protocols are followed throughout their stay and travel

The tourism industry should follow precautionary measures and improve its facilities and ensure proper hygiene and sanitation. The industry should also capacity build and reskill its staff to deal with the pandemic. Local workforces should be involved in catering and hospitality services. Attractive and reasonable tour packages should include yoga and meditation as these are immunity boosters. The government should encourage and emphasize less-affected COVID-19 hotspots such as Aner Dam Sanctuary Area, Laling & Bhameer Fort, and Alaladari waterfalls. Here are some of the benefits of these measures:

- Increased tourism revenue: Tourists bring money into the district, which can be used to improve infrastructure, create jobs, and provide social services.
- Economic development: Tourism can create jobs in the hospitality, transportation, and construction industries.
- Increased brand awareness: Tourism can help to raise the district's profile and attract more businesses and investment.
- Improved infrastructure: Tourism can help to improve the district's infrastructure, such as roads, airports, and convention centers.
- Increased immunity: Yoga and meditation are immunity boosters, and including them in tour packages can help to improve the health of tourists.
- Increased confidence: Confidence-building measures can help to reassure tourists and encourage them to visit the district.

Overall, these measures can help to boost the tourism industry in the district and create a more prosperous future for the local economy.

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