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#### **INDIA: A DESTINATION FOR ALL SEASONS**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

The Indian tourism industry has emerged as one of the key drivers of growth among the services sector in India. Its contribution to the global Gross Domestic Product and employment has increased significantly. India is the land of amazing cultures, great diversity, warm people and magnificent natural beauty. The country's natural beauty is reflected in snow-capped mountain peaks, profound desserts, golden beaches, exotic wildlife and stunning deep blue seas. India also boasts of remarkable historical monuments which are the testaments of a great Indian history. The jovial fairs and festivals of India put the icing on the metaphorical cake. It is indeed as astonishing charming and magnetic country that beckons people from all parts of world to have their holidays in India. India is a very popular destination among travel agents who offer several Indian tour packages that may include cheap tickets to India on various flights to India. The fact that India can be visited almost any time of the year makes it all the more fascinating. The varied tourism products of India include: 25 bio-geographic zones,  $\Box$  wildlife,  $\Box$  adventure,  $\Box$  beaches,  $\Box$  inland water ways.  $\Box$  32 world heritage sites,  $\Box$  diverse culture,  $\Box$  art and craft,  $\Box$  fairs and festivals,  $\Box$  rural experienc  $\Box$  shopping,  $\Box$  variety of cuisines,  $\Box$  traditional healing systems and  $\Box$  modern medical treatm**e**n

#### **INTRODUCTION**

. Tourism in India is a sun rise industry, an employment generator, a significant source of foreign exchange for the country and an economic activity that helps local and host communities. India is a tourism product which is unparalleled in its beauty, uniqueness, rich culture and history has been aggressively pursuing the promotion of tourism both internationally as well as in the domestic market. With increasing tourist inflows over the past few years, it is a significant contributor to Indian economy as well. Rising income levels, changing lifestyles, development of diverse tourism offerings and policy and regulatory support by the government are playing a pivotal role in shaping the travel and tourism sector in India. Tourism, being the largest service industry in India, contributes 6.23 per cent to the national GDP and 8.78 per cent of the total employment in India. India's



performance in tourism sector has been quite impressive. During 2014, India witnessed an increase of 10.2 per cent in the foreign tourist arrivals when compared to 2013.

India offers an experience that very few destinations in the world can offer. There is a wide variety of choices for a tourist in India which includes a mix of nature, wild life, adventure, culture, architecture, festivals, varied cuisine and shopping. Indians, therefore have many reasons to be proud of the great tourist resources of our country. The varied tourism products of India include: 25 bio-geographic zones,  $\Box$  wildlife,  $\Box$  adventure,  $\Box$  beaches,  $\Box$  inland water ways,  $\Box$  32 world heritage sites,  $\Box$  diverse culture,  $\Box$  art and craft,  $\Box$  fairs and festivals,  $\Box$  rural experience,  $\Box$  shopping  $\Box$  variety of cuisines,  $\Box$  traditional healing systems and  $\Box$  modern medical treatments.

#### **INDIA - A LAND OF ALL SEASONS**

India is so large that it can provide any season or climate any time of the year. India has some of the highest peaks, the longest plains, the hottest, the coldest and the wettest regions in the world. From the Himalayan peaks in the north to Kanyakumari in the south, from the Rann of Kutch in the west to Assam in the north-east, the 3.3 million square kilometers of the vast Indian subcontinent encompasses a diversity of geographical conditions, scenery, climate and people far greater than what is found in entire Europe. A seasonal change in India is more than a change of weather. There is also a subtle change of mood that colors the season's festivals, music, dances and even its food.

#### Winter

Most foreign tourists arrive in India during winter. Winter is the time for skiing in Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh or Garhwal Himalayas. The tourists also have the option of swimming in the coastal regions of India as the water is generally a warm 200 Celsius (or more) even in winters. They may also enjoy the cultural festivities, plays, exhibitions, concerts and dance performances in the big cities during this period.

#### Spring

In spring Kashmir, the Kullu valley and Darjeeling are enchanting with their meadows of multi-coloured wild flowers against a backdrop of Himalayan mountain peaks. The gardens in the plains, too, are full of variety of flowers of many different colors, sizes and fragrance.

#### Summer

During the hot summer months of April, May and June, beautiful flowering trees and trees of juicy tropical fruits like mangoes and litchis can be seen all around. Many people living in the plains head for the

mountain resorts of Kashmir, Shimla, Nainital, Kullu and Manali (in the north), Darjeeling (in the east) or Udhagamandalam (Ooty in short) and Kodaikanal (in the south).

#### **Monsoon (Rainy Season)**

The monsoon season is a time of dark thunder clouds and green valleys, singing birds, dancing peacocks and rain washed surroundings. It delights every Indian's heart and is considered ideal for romance and brisk activity. After the monsoon, comes the harvest season which is also the time for long festivals.

#### **INDIAN ARCHITECTURE**

India is like an open museum to see global architecture at one place. One can see the world in India through its varied architecture. Indian architecture dates back about 4000 years. Mohanjodaro and Harappa is the cradle of Indian architecture (though now in Pakistan. Lothal in Gujarat also dates back to that period. Cave temples represent the early Hindu, Buddhist and Jain architecture. Udaygiri and Khandgiri Caves in Orissa are probably the oldest cave temples (still intact). Ajanta-Ellora caves are great example of temples carved out of solid rock. Construction of stone temples probably came into style during the Gupta dynasty rule, which continued till 10th Century. Major Stone temples were built in the 7<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> Century A.D. The Chandellas in the north and the Cholla dynasty in the south made unique and magnificent temples using stone. Vijay Nagara kings and Nayakas were famous Hindu kings who believed in large-scale constructions and elaborate decorations.

The architecture of different periods shows the influences of contacts with the outside world, diverse geography, rulers and religions. The Sanchi Stupa built during the reign of Ashoka (2<sup>nd</sup> Century BC) is a unique architecture of Buddhist style. Jain temples in Rajasthan and Gujarat have totally different style, specially temple of Dilwara and Ranakpur in Rajasthan. West Bengal had Terra-cota style. Orissa has temples of many different styles. In 1192 Qutabuddin Aibak started the Islamic style construction. An example of this style of construction is known as the Quwwaat-ul-Islam (built 1192-1198. Qutab Minar (built 1199-1235) is another great example of Islamic style. Main thing about Islamic architecture is the Arch style. Craftsmen from Middle East who had the knowledge of Arch style introduced this latest trend of arches to Indian constructions. The next generation craftsmen became very perfect in the traditional Muslim construction as can be seen in the Iltutmish's tomb (completed 1233-4). Mughal architecture flourished between 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries during their reign. Mughal style was introduced with Humayun's tomb – large complex with garden divided into quadrants (Charbagh) and Mausoleum in the middle. Use of floral designs at this tomb reflects the Persian influence. Mughals also used Jain and Hindu style in later constructions like cubical/square halls etc. Akbar's reign can be taken as the formative period of Mughal architecture. It represents the finest example of the fusion of Indo-Islamic architecture. Red Fort in Delhi and Taj Mahal in Agra are the best example of Mughal architecture.



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European architectural history is generally understood to have started with the British rule. However, Baroque influences of Portuguese or influences of construction style of Roman, Greek, French and Danish are visible as per the historical relation of these communities with specific parts of India. These include for example, Portuguese in Goa, French in Pondicherry, Danish in Churchura (West Bengal) etc. Modern Gothic style architecture, which came with the British, has influenced lot of later constructions. British introduced colonial style of Europe in India and this impact (known as Indo-Sarcenic style) can be seen in the structures constructed during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Truly speaking India is the best place to enjoy the architectural heritage of different ages and dynasties.

#### **INDIAN ARTS AND CRAFTS**

The ancient temples, stupas, viharas and other monuments mentioned above are a reservoir of a wealth of sculptures in stone and bronze. Khajurao, Konarak, Ellora, Elephanta and Mahaballipuram are some of the excellent examples of India's sculptural heritage. India has a rich tradition of paintings too, from the 2000 year old Ajanta frescoes to the Mughal, Rajput and Kangra valley miniature. In this section we are going to learn about two other forms of Art: the Ritual Arts and the Performing Arts. The section also tells us about the Handicrafts of India.

#### The Ritual Arts

The ritual art in India is carried on mostly within the confines of home and generally it is an essential part of the celebrations in the family. The ritual art is mostly practiced by women of the household and is a tradition handed down from mother to daughter in succeeding generations. It mostly takes the form of drawings on the floor or on the walls of the house. These drawings are sometimes a daily ritual (such as the Kollam of South India) while others are made only on religious festive occasions.

The drawings are without image, figure or narrative. These purely abstract drawings are known under different names in the different parts of the country: mandna in Rajasthan, rangoli in Gujarat and Maharashtra, alpana in Bengal etc. The material used is mostly coloured powder of different shades but sometimes flower petals are also used.

Unlike the traditional floor drawings, the drawings made on the walls of the houses have figurative character. They are colorful and use mythical elements and powerful symbols. The Madhubani painting of Bihar is a fine example of this kind of figurative ritual art.

#### **Performing** Arts

There has been a close connection between religion and the performing arts in India. India has a rich heritage of many performing art forms, a tradition spanning several centuries. The performing arts such as dance, music and theatre are not mere spectacles; they arouse a lot of emotion and feeling in the audience. They provide an experience in which the audience begins to feel a kind of union with the performer/s.

#### Dance

In India dance as a performing art has an age old tradition. The classical dances of different regions of India revolve around a few fundamental principles such as the facial expressions, verbal expression and gestures involving hands and fingers. Each of these dances has its own colorful and elaborate costumes and jewellery. Some important dance forms are listed below:

Dance Form	From (Region)	Performed by
Bharatnatyam	Tamil Nadu	Both women and men as a solo item
Kathakali	Kerala	Men wearing make-up
Katthak	Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan	Both women and men as a solo item
Kuchipudi	Andhra Pradesh	Men in the form of dance-drama
Manipuri	Manipur	Group of men and women
Odissi	Orissa	Both women and men as a solo item

Besides the above mentioned classical forms of dances, there is also a wide range of folk dances from different regions of the country. An inventory of all folk dances may run into several pages so we mention only the two popular ones here as examples: Bhangra from Punjab and Garba from Gujarat.

#### **MUSIC**

Music in India has emanated from folk tunes and attained the status of a classical art. It is considered a vehicle for communion with God and has been an essential ingredient of our culture. Music has been part of Indian life from times immemorial. Later two distinct forms of musical styles developed in India. The more codified and text based form is known as the Carnatic system of music. On the other hand is the Hindustani system of music which is a loose and flexible musical form practiced mostly in the northern parts of India. The classical music has gained a lot of popularity in recent times. In North India it is being practiced under the guardianship of a few great performers claiming descent from traditional houses called gharanas of music. Some of the famous vocalists are: Ms. M.S.Subbulakshmi (Carnatic), Pandit Bhimsen Joshi (Hindustani), Smt.Gangubai



Hangal (Hindustani) and Shubah Mudgal (Light Classical). There is a range of folk music, musician and singers. Some of the popular forms of vocal music include the Quwwali and Gazhal. A variety of musical instruments are played by the music maestro in India.Some of the world famous artists are: Pandit Ravi Shankar (Sitar), Ustad Bismillah Khan (Shehnai), Hari Prasad Chaurasia (Flute), Ustad Zakir Hussain (Tabla) and Ustad Amzad Ali Khan (Sarod).

#### **HANDICRAFTS**

The diversity of Indian cultural tradition is aptly reflected in handicrafts which offer creative expressions to the great mass of Indians. Indian handicrafts represent perhaps the oldest tradition of living culture. The main mediums in which the crafts are practiced are stone, wood and metal. Almost all clusters of villages have their own craftsmen. While Kashmiri shawls and carpets are world famous, chikankari of Lucknow and Bandhej (tiedye) of Rajasthan are equally well known in India. Andhra Pradesh is known for its metal ware and stone craft while Kerala is famous for baskets, masks and woodcraft. Shawls from Himachal, terracotta of West Bengal, scroll painting of Orissa, lac jewellery from Rajasthan, papermachie from Kashmir, Ivory items from Karnataka, Applique embroidery of Gujarat, puppets of Tamil Nadu, silverware of Uttar Pradesh... the list is endless.

#### **FESTIVALS OF INDIA**

India is a land of many festivals. People of different religions and different regions have their own important festivals. A tourist visiting a place gets a unique experience by witnessing a festival being celebrated by the local community. It is said that in India you will find each day of the year being celebrated as a festival in some part of the country or the other. However, some of the important festivals celebrated by a large number of people are described in this section. The year starts with Lohri in the North, Sankranti in the East and Pongal in South India. The three festivals celebrate in different ways the harvesting of new crop. Then comes the national festival Republic Day or Chabbis (26<sup>th</sup>) January which commemorates the day Indian Constitution was adopted and India became a Sovereign Republic. The day is celebrated with a magnificent and colorful parade by the three wings of Indian Armed Forces at Rajpath in Delhi. The President of India is the guest of honor on this occasion and important dignitaries and state guests from foreign countries grace the occasion with their presence. The parade is witnessed live by thousands of people en route while millions of Indians watch it on television. The day is celebrated in all state capitals too, albeit on a smaller scale. In the national capital, all state buildings are illuminated from January 26 to January 29. The closing ceremony of Republic Day celebrations known as the Beating Retreat is another colorful event. Bands of various wings of the three armed forces play patriotic tunes and march in colorful uniforms in front of the Rashtrapati Bhawan (President's House) in Lutyen's Delhi in the



evening. Rows of beautifully decorated camels line up the way to the North Block and the South Block in the background. Just as the sun sets, all buildings in the background get illuminated with festive lights. It is truly a magical moment which is attended not only by the government dignitaries but also hundreds of enthusiastic citizens. Spring arrives in late February with number of festivals including the festival of spring known as the Basant Panchami. The month of March brings the colorful festival of Holi which is celebrated with lot of vigor in north India particularly the towns of Mathura and Vrindavan in Uttar Pradesh.

The Sikhs celebrate the birthdays of their saints as well as their martyrdom days. These are known as the Guru Purabs. The most important of these is the Guru Purab celebrated to commemorate the birth of Guru Nanak Dev Ji (believed to be the last Guru). Eid is the most important festivals of Muslims. The festival is preceded by a month long period of fasting and prayers during Ramadan.

Mahavir Jayanti which is celebrated to commemorate the birth of Mahavir Jain (founder of Jainism) is the most important festival of the Jains. Ganesh Chaturthi is celebrated with a lot of festivity and color especially in Maharashtra.

Shiv Ratri is celebrated by the Hindu followers of Shiva. It is believed that he married Parvati (who did penance for a long time in order to have Shiva as her husband) on this day.

Janam Aashtmi is celebrated by Hindus to commemorate the birth of Lord Krishna. In north India temples are specially decorated with sculptures, paintings and pictures depicting the birth and life of Krishna. These are visited by millions of enthusiastic devotees (many of whom keep a fast on this day) at midnight. Dussehra is one of the most celebrated festivals of India. For ten days preceding Dussehra, the life of Lord Rama .It is called Ramlila. Dussehra symbolizes the victory of good over and evil and on this day huge effigies of the evil king Ravana and his brother Kumbhkaran and son Meghnath are burnt at various sites. Lacs of people come out of their houses to witness the spectacle.

The nine days preceding Dussehra are known as the Navratri or the nine holy nights. Bengalis celebrate these days in a big way worshipping Goddess Durga. Other worshippers of Maa (mother) Durga also organize night long community prayers (Jagrans) during this period. Karva Chauth is celebrated by Hindu married women in north India by keeping a fast through the day and prayers in the evening in the desire of a long life for their husbands. Similar festivals are celebrated in various parts of the country at different times of the year and are known by different names.

Diwali is the most celebrated festival of India. It is known as the festival of light because on this day people decorate their houses with fancy lights and candles and diyas (earthen lamp). Sweets and gifts are exchanged with family and friends. At night Puja (worship) of Goddess Lakshmi (goddess of wealth) and Lord Ganesh is performed.

Christmas is the most important of festivals celebrated by Christians. They attend Mass prayer meetings on the night of December 24th known as the Christmas Eve. The next day is celebrated as the Christmas Day, the day when Lord Jesus was born to mother Mary.

#### **SHOPPING BARGAINS**

India's bazaars are a delight, providing a feast of color, objects and bargains. The country is a fabulous storehouse of traditional skills and crafts that find expression in objects of great beauty and charm. There are many goods from which to choose – bangles, brassware, leather shoes, jackets, handbags, toys, paintings and figurines of perfumed sandalwood or rosewood. Almost everything can be made to order, whether it is a silk shirt or a winter suit, a diamond ring or a carpet. The artist and the artisan here are not separated by great distance. In the market place, a tourist can see people beating metal, making jewellery of intricate design, weaving tapestries in wool or silk, and carving a great variety of substances.

India's silks have been famous since Roman times – the silks of Varanasi, Kanchipuram (home of the 'Kanjeevaram Sari', synonymous with the best in Indian silk sarees), Mysore or Murshidabaad. A five and a half meter long sari can be fashioned into a beautiful evening dress in one day if the tourist so desires.

Most goods are handcrafted out of material like metal, stone, wood, marble, silk or leather. Carpets in India are woven even today as they were for royalty in a bygone era. Marble is inlaid with semi-precious stones as it was for the Taj Mahal. Rubies, emeralds, pearls and diamonds are encrusted in hand-fashioned gold jewellery as if for a queen. Tourists should be advised to buy regional handicrafts from the state-run stores or emporia, where prices are reasonable and fixed.

#### **CULINARY TRADITIONS**

Food is one of the important attractions of India. Again variety is the name of the game. Every region of India can boast of a score of traditional culinary styles. It ranges from the royal Mughal feast of North India to the vegetarian (as well as non vegetarian) thali meals of the South. Some of the specialties of Mughal style cooking include kababs made from chicken, mutton or vegetables mixed with flour, marinated in a subtle blend of spices and grilled over glowing charcoal. Tender chicken cooked in a thick paste of tomatoes and cream known as Murgh makhani or Butter Chicken is an all time favourite in North India particularly Punjab and is eaten with Naan or Tandoori Roti (soft bread baked fresh in oven).Cooking Biryani, a fragrant dish made of rice and meat, chicken or vegetables has been elevated to the rank of an art form by discerning food lovers. Large towns and big



cities also have restaurants that serve authentic Italian, Chinese, Mexican, Thai and American food as well as franchisees of international fast food and other restaurants such as McDonald's, Domino's and Pizza Hut. India is a heaven for people who love vegetarian food. Vegetarian cooking in India is superb and has a variety that is difficult for a Westerner to imagine. To sample regional food, it is better to order a thali which generally consists of a large plate or coconut leaf heaped with rice and bordered with little bowls consisting of delicious preparations of cheese, lentils, vegetable/non vegetable curries, curd, chutneys and pickles served with hot rotis or pooris. It is best to eat this food with fingers. Then there are a variety of snacks and sweets. From the delicious pakoras, Kachoris, chaat paapri and golgappas (also known as paani puri) of the north to the Dosa, Vada and Uttapam of the south, the list of anytime snacks is endless. The famous Indian sweets include burfi, rasgulla ,gulabjamun, jalebis, ladoos, soan papri etc. The array of delicious food available in India can perk up the most jaded appetite. The Indian cold drinks include nimbu pani (fresh lime juice) and lassi. Tea in the north and coffee in the south are the most favoured beverages.

#### CONCLUSION

India is the land of amazing cultures, great diversity, warm people and magnificent natural beauty. The country's natural beauty is reflected in snow-capped mountain peaks, profound desserts, golden beaches, exotic wildlife and stunning deep blue seas. India also boasts of remarkable historical monuments which are the testaments of a great Indian history. The jovial fairs and festivals of India put the icing on the metaphorical cake. It is indeed as astonishing charming and magnetic country that beckons people from all parts of world to have their holidays in India. India is a very popular destination among travel agents who offer several Indian tour packages that may include cheap tickets to India on various flights to India. The fact that India can be visited almost any time of the year makes it all the more fascinating.

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