

बौद्ध बिहार

Developing Buddhist Pilgrimage in Bihar



**The mind is everything.
What you think you become.**

Buddhist Tourism is one of the highest revenue generating niches in the Indian tourism portfolio, however there is immense untapped potential which needs infrastructural overhaul, greater community involvement and use of Information Technology. This paper analyzes the Buddhist tourism potential in Bihar and suggests measures to position Bihar firmly on the world Buddhist map thereby making brand '**Incredible Buddha**' synonymous with '**Incredible India**'.

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1. Introduction

"Just as a candle cannot burn without fire, men cannot live without a spiritual life"

One of the major unifying characteristics of South and South-East Asia is the Buddhist heritage which spans a long and rich history dating back almost 2,500 years. India holds the unique distinction of being the originating source of the Buddhist philosophy, holding within its boundaries a number of significant destinations, from the highest regions of the Himalayas to other parts of the Indian subcontinent, that Lord Buddha traversed on his path to enlightenment.

The Buddhist circuit is one of the most popular tourism product offerings, drawing in huge numbers from South and South East Asia, as well as from other western regions of Europe and America, where the Buddhist philosophy is strongly gaining momentum and translating into healthy tourist footfalls. The importance of this niche is also highlighted in the Government's efforts to develop the circuit, both in terms of core and peripheral infrastructure near key destinations, as well as extending services like Visa on Arrival for tourists from Buddhist countries and focusing on the 'Clean India Campaign' for these destinations.

2. Bihar: The Heart of Buddhist Circuit

"As you walk and eat and travel, be where you are. Otherwise you will miss most of your life"

Buddha's life, from his birth, to the journey, to transcendence has been centered around the modern day states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. This makes Bihar perhaps the most crucial state in terms of Buddhist Circuit. Excluding the upper Himalayan regions of Himachal, Jammu & Kashmir and North-East India, we observe that a majority of destinations in the Buddhist Circuit fall within the boundaries of Bihar, making it the most important region for Buddhist Pilgrimage worldwide.

Figure 1: Buddhist Pilgrimage: A Pan Asian Tourism Product

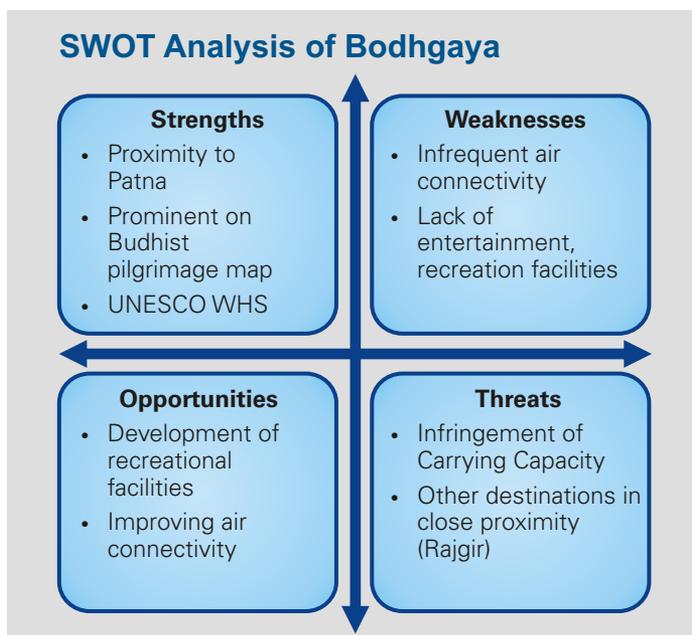


An important fact to note here is that Bihar not only attains importance in terms of the number of Buddhist sites, but also covers important stages of Buddha's life, thereby not only attracting leisure travellers, but also scholars and practitioners of Buddhist faith who are interested in meditative practices and seek deeper insight into Buddha's life and philosophy. Tourists do not mind a longer stay in some of these destinations thereby resulting in a higher number of tourist nights which is in line with the Ministry of Tourism's objectives.

3. SWOT Analysis of Buddhist Sites in Bihar

“However many holy words you read, however many you speak, what good will they do you if you do not act on upon them”

Bihar is considered to be the richest in terms of Buddhist heritage. We analyzed the five major sites, viz. Bodhgaya, Nalanda, Vaishali, Rajgir and Champanagar and did a brief SWOT analysis to identify the potential gaps and scope for promoting Buddhist tourism in Bihar.

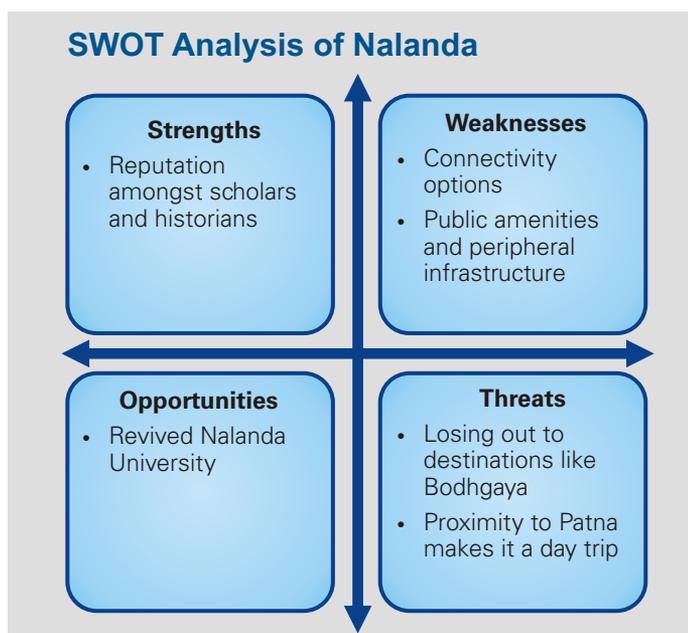


Bodhgaya

As the site of Buddha Shakyamuni's enlightenment, Bodhgaya is the most revered of all Buddhist sacred sites. The main temple complex houses the famous Mahabodhi temple / stupa and a descendent of the original Bodhi Tree under which Buddha gained enlightenment. Bodhgaya has several Buddhist temples and monasteries all around the Mahabodhi temple, that have been constructed by people from other countries like Bhutan, Bangladesh, China, Japan, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Tibet.

Key Areas of Improvement

- Bodhgaya needs more trained tour guides to improve the overall tourist experience
- More parking spaces / better public transport services need to be provided to prevent congestion
- Although adequate hotels are present, there is a need for more budget as well as luxury hotels to cater to tourist demands during the peak season
- Greater investments in tourist facilities and public amenities required



Nalanda

Tibetan Buddhism, both its Mahayana and Vajrayana traditions stems from Nalanda teachers and traditions (the late 9th-12th century). A number of ruined structures dot the Nalanda landscape. The known and excavated ruins extend over an area of about 150,000 square metres. However, Xuanzang's account of Nalanda's extent indicates that a vast area still remains unexcavated.

Key Areas of Improvement

- Basic tourist facilities such as public toilets, ATMs, Foreign exchange facility, safe drinking water supply, lighting and signages need to be improved. Moreover, professional training should be provided to the local guides to improve the overall travel experience
- Parking facilities have been seen to be a major drawback of these sites. Realizing the future potential of tourism, more parking spaces are required
- Nalanda faces frequent power cuts; Power infrastructure needs to be improved

Vaishali

Vaishali is well known for its close association with Buddha. Gautama Buddha preached his last sermon before his death in 483 B.C. and announced his *Mahaparinirvana*. In the year 383 B.C. the Second Buddhist council was convened here by King Kalasoka, making it an important site for both Jain and Buddhist religions. The city finds mention in the travel accounts of Chinese explorers, Faxian (4th century B.C.) and Xuanzang (7th century B.C.).

Key Areas of Improvement

- Parking facilities need to be improved. Land is available but lacks organized parking space
- There is a requirement for more deluxe and budget hotels to meet current demand during peak season
- Tour guides need professional training

Rajgir

The name Rajgir is derived from Rajgriha- 'Abode of the kings'. This city has witnessed several episodes of Buddha's life. Here he

SWOT Analysis of Vaishali



SWOT Analysis of Rajgir



preached various sermons, proselytized Emperor Bimbisar at Griddhakoota- Vulture Hill and meditated many times. The Jivekarmavan monastery at Rajgir was the favourite residence for Buddha. His teachings were penned down at Rajgir and this was also the venue for the first Buddhist Council. The reverie of Rajgir is now a prime Buddhist Pilgrim spot.

Key Areas of Improvement

- Additional parking lots at Buddhist sites in Rajgir are required. A minimum of 1.5 acres of land is required to match current and future requirements

- There is a need to increase the number of budget and deluxe hotels to cater to the demands of tourists during peak season.
- Professionally trained tour guides are important for improving overall travel experience for tourists
- Upgradation of existing ropeway system

Champanagar

Champanagar in Bhagalpur district was visited by Lord Buddha many times. This site also witnessed some important sermons and discourses from Lord Buddha including Kandaraka Sutta and Sonadanda Sutta. One of the main attractions of Champanagar is a tank named Gaggara's Lotus Lake where lotuses bloom. The grove of huge Champaka trees located on the banks of the lake was believed to be the most favorable spot of Buddha. Another lake, Sarovana Talab, yielded a number of Buddha statues in 1900's at the time when the lake was being cleaned.

Key Areas of Improvement

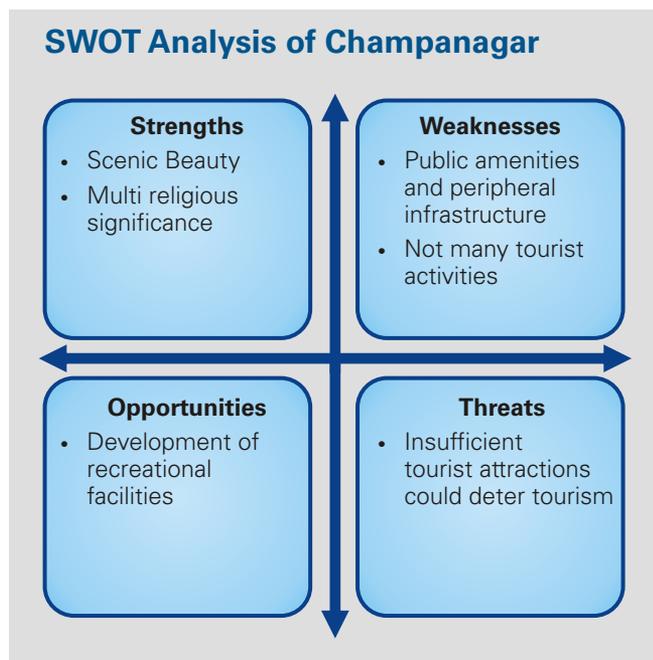
- Developing entertainment and recreational activities need to be taken into consideration to attract tourists
- Better tourist facilities such as public toilets, clean drinking water, sun shelters etc need to be provided

4. Developing the Buddhist Circuit

"If you do not change direction, you may end up where you are heading"

The Ministry of Tourism, as well as the State Government has been actively working towards developing the Buddhist circuit. Projects to boost the circuit have been identified, and collaborations with multilaterals like International Finance Corporation have been initiated with the aim to create more than 10,000 jobs in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, invest USD 200 million in the public sector and an additional USD 200 million in the private sector hotel investment¹. Overall, IFC aims to implement a comprehensive marketing strategy for circuit destinations while focusing on improving tourism infrastructure in Bihar.

In addition to the international support, the proposed India, Myanmar, Thailand trilateral highway and the India-ASEAN Foreign Trade Agreement in services and investment will also be instrumental in promoting Buddhist tourism between member States and India. In the case of New Zealand's services trade into ASEAN, almost 87,000 ASEAN tourists visited New Zealand, making it one of New Zealand's larger tourism markets². A similar scenario is expected in India.



¹International Finance Corporation

²New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Key Projects Identified in Bihar Buddhist Circuit

A number of Government and Public-Private Partnership initiatives have been made towards conserving the cultural heritage of Buddhist Sites in Bihar. The table below gives the list of initiatives made in this regard.

Table 1: Public Private Partnership Projects Identified in Bihar Buddhist Circuit

	Amount (₹ crore)
Total Cost of the Identified Projects	327.8
Public Funds	100.7
Private/PPP Investment	227.0

Source: *The Indian Express*

Buddhist Tourism: Attracting Major Investments

- The Japan International Co-operation Agency (JICA) has signed a loan agreement of ₹ 1,350 crore for the development of Bihar's national highway connecting Patna and Gaya. Being an important Buddhist site, this project would help promote tourism in Gaya.
- The Government of Thailand has recently sponsored nearly 300 kilograms of gold to be used in decorating the dome of the Mahabodhi temple.

Given the direct and indirect nature of employment generation from such investments, the following table projects the number of jobs that would be created using a multiplier of 78 jobs per million INR of investment, as per a Planning Commission study³.

Table 2: Expected Employment Generation from Buddhist Pilgrimage

Districts	Project Cost (₹ crore)	Expected Employment Generation
Gaya	233.6	1,82,208
Vaishali	42.9	32,566
Nalanda	40.6	30,871

Source: *Identification of Tourism Circuits across India, IL & FS*

With current international and Government initiatives in upgrading Bihar's infrastructure, improving connectivity and public amenities is the next step towards realizing the vision of making Bihar the most visited Buddhist pilgrimage destination in the world.

³India Today

Tourism has the power to uplift and educate communities. Given this fact, academic institutions have an increasingly crucial role to play in capacity building, as well as management and enrichment of destinations through key knowledge and behavioural inputs.

In a brief tête-à-tête, Dr. Ravindra Panth, Director, Nava Nalanda Mahavihara, shares his opinions on Buddhist Tourism.



1. What should be the model approach to promote Buddhist Pilgrimage?

Development of thematic pilgrimages based on Buddhist literature and archaeological sites based on Xuanzang's accounts.

2. How do you feel about institutions like Nava Nalanda Mahavira contributing towards supporting / supplementing Buddhist pilgrimage?

NNM can help in facilitating awareness generation through heritage promotion events like, mindfulness walks, workshops, exhibitions and development of brochures, publications and website.

NNM is currently working on involving the community at select heritage villages associated with the sublime wandering of the Buddha. NNM may facilitate Corporate-Community interface at these villages.

3. What role, in your opinion, should local communities play in promoting tourism?

Almost all the Buddhist heritage sites of Bihar are in vicinity of villages. Home-stay and local cuisine can be a very sustainable livelihood option for local communities. Local souvenirs and local youth as guides and escorts may generate employment among the local communities.

4. How should the private sector promote Buddhist sites?

Corporate trips to heritage sites and sponsoring heritage events along with publications, small infrastructure like, washrooms, meditation sheds and parks in select heritage villages associated with the sublime wandering of the Buddha should be taken up by the private sector promoters.

Nava Nalanda Mahavihara, formerly known as Magadh Institute of Post Graduate Studies & Research in Pali & Allied Languages & Buddhist Learning, was established in 1951. The university's main objectives comprise higher studies and research in Pali language & literature and Buddhism through Tibetan, Sanskrit, Chinese, Mongolian, Japanese and other Asian languages. It is also involved in editing, translating and publishing Buddhist works from Pali, Sanskrit, Tibetan, Chinese, Japanese, Mongolian and other languages as well as compiling and publishing original work on different aspects of Buddhism.

5. Ensuring 'Inclusiveness' in the Development of Buddhist Circuit

“When you realize how perfect everything is, you will tilt your head back and laugh at the sky”

Tourism has long been identified as one of the sunrise sectors of India which can serve the dual purpose of earning foreign exchange and boosting inclusion. With its backward and forward linkages and local connect, tourism becomes an important driver of equitable growth and prosperity, offering an alternative source of livelihood, development and growth in remote locations, preservation of local skills, enterprise development at the micro-level, and sustainable environment management. In India, while tourism is one of the largest employers, it remains grossly underutilized as a means of creating sustainable financial inclusion.

It is observed that currently most of the offerings in niche tourism areas are based on individual private efforts, and as a consequence the socio-economic benefits often do not percolate to a large part of the stakeholder community. This is where the co-operative model can help bridge the divide. Rather than individual efforts being driven single-handedly, the co-operative model brings all the aspects of a tourism product under the ambit of a co-operative structure, which not only controls the structure and volume of tourist activity, but also ensures that the entire destination is promoted rather than fragmented independent entities.

The concept of Co-operative Tourism aims to deliver sustainable economic development by building the capacity of local communities to realize the potential value of their natural and cultural heritage to create tourism enterprise opportunities through a co-operative destination management organization model.



Skill development and employability are two major concerns, and tourism has the potential to address both of these, Being an 'Umbrella' industry, it opens up avenues in a plethora of service based and other sectors like transportation, food and cuisine, performing and fine arts, handicrafts and other cottage industries.

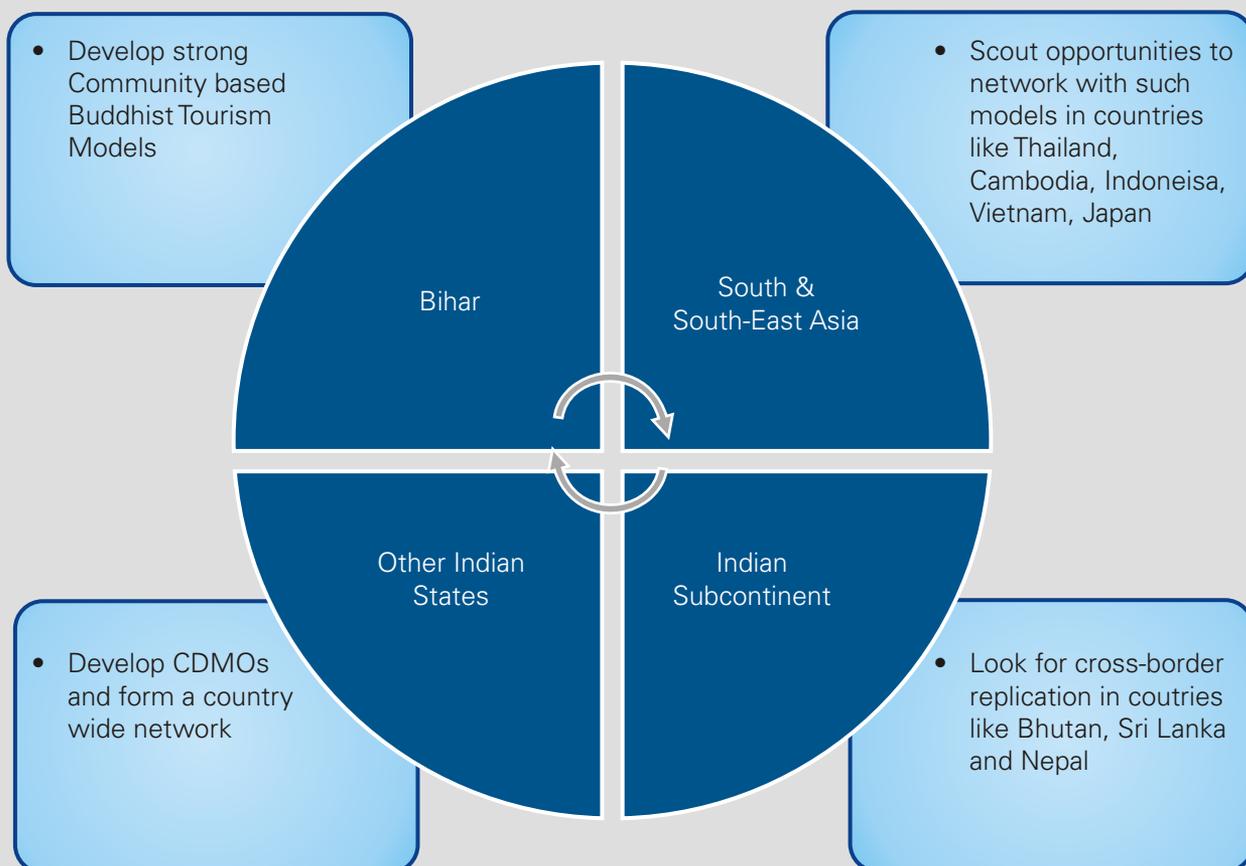
Further, building the capacity of local stakeholder organizations and individuals to design and implement effective action plans and development strategies, would enlighten the local community towards the value of its own cultural heritage.

The model establishment involves an initial research and assessment process, after which the training and development programs are delivered. The marketing and promotion process can be driven by the Government once the training programmes have been evaluated.

The model would also involve comprehensive capacity building measures, which is where the academia can play an important role. Nalanda is often referred to as one of the oldest learning centres of the world, and using tourism as a tool to effectively forge an industry-academia alliance would not only help develop the required human capital, but also help these destinations regain their image as the centres for 'intellectual and spiritual enlightenment'.

Another important aspect to consider in terms of community development is that these individual models can be replicated in not only other parts of the country like Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha and the Himalayan Regions, but also interlinked with such models in other countries like Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Nepal and other South & South-East Asian countries.

Figure 3: Scaling up Buddhist Pilgrimage from the State to the Continent

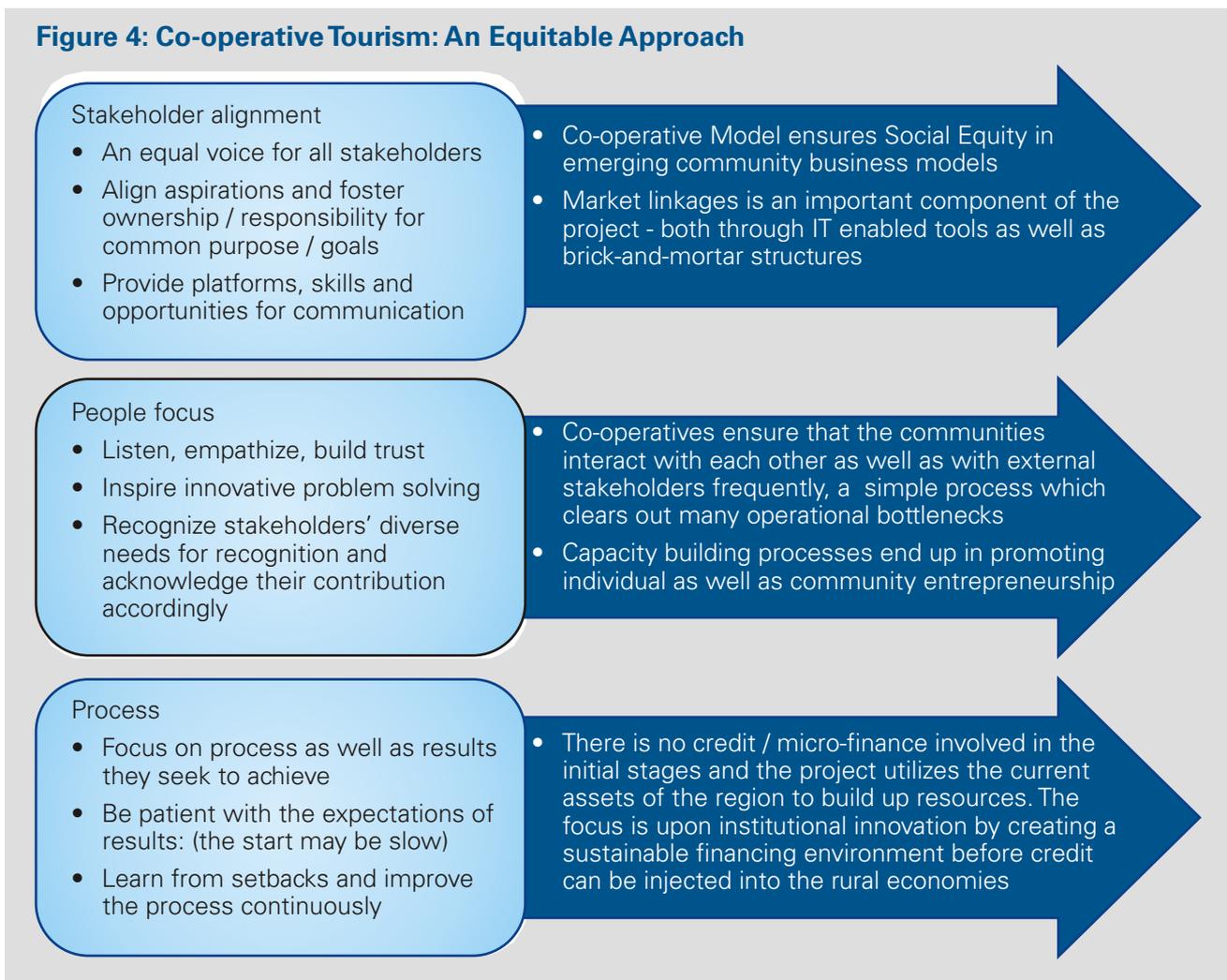


YES BANK: Developing Co-operative Tourism Models in Rural India

Realizing the value of tourism as one of the best solutions to ensure socio-economic inclusiveness, the Public & Social Policies Management (PSPM) division of YES BANK is involved as a Country Manager in Sustainable Development through Co-operative Tourism, an international development project funded by Scottish Government towards delivering sustainable economic development in some of the most socially and economically disadvantaged districts. The project is now active and the destinations are being promoted under an umbrella brand 'Edge of India' (www.edgeofindia.com)

The Co-operative Tourism Project is one of the first case scenarios to be included in India Backbone Implementation Network (IbIn), an initiative of the Planning Commission and India@75.

Figure 4: Co-operative Tourism: An Equitable Approach



6. Developing Competitiveness in Tourism

"Though one should live a hundred years without wisdom and control, yet better, indeed, is a single day's life of one who is wise and meditative"

Tourism has always been a very crucial sector for development and economic growth in advanced and developing nations. It not only is a source of foreign exchange income but also creates employment opportunities, stimulates growth in the tourism sector, and triggers overall economic growth. It is therefore very crucial to understand the various aspects of developing tourism.

As per the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report 2013, India ranks 65th vis-a-vis Singapore that ranks 10th and Thailand that ranks 43rd in Travel and Tourism Competitive Index. Evidently, the policies and factors that make it attractive to develop tourism in India need to be more favourable. With only three million tourists traveling to India each year, it lags behind other Buddhist sites such as Singapore and Thailand. Thus, India should encourage development on all the following aspects of tourism to gain a competitive edge over other Buddhist sites in the world.

To gain a broad understanding of the shortcomings of Bihar as an attractive destination for Buddhist tourists it would be instrumental to compare it to other Buddhist destinations in the world. The following table gives a broad comparison of the five 'A's of tourism in Bihar, Thailand and Singapore.

Table 2: Comparative Snapshot of Buddhist Pilgrimage Sites

	Bihar	Thailand	Singapore
Attractions	The land of Bihar is considered to be the richest in terms of Buddhist heritage. The sacred Buddhist sites in Bihar include Bodhgaya, Nalanda, Vaishali, Gurpa, Rajgir and Champanagar.	Thailand is one of the important hubs of Buddhist tourism. The main attractions are Wat Arun, Wat Phra Kaew, Wat Pho, Wat Benchamabophitr, Wat Mahathat Yuwaratrangs, Wat Saket and Wat Tramt.	The presence of Buddhism is also evident in Singapore. Some of the attractions are Buddha Tooth Relic Temple and Museum, Kwan Im Thong Hood Cho Temple and Thian Hock Keng Temple.
Access	Greater investment in infrastructure required to provide easy access.	Adequate investments in infrastructure and provision of easy access. Free transport services provided to monks.	Investments in infrastructure facilitating easy access are adequate.
Accommodation	Nearly 21% of all accommodation units in Bihar are located in Buddhist sites.	Presence of adequate Hotels, monasteries accommodation and guesthouses near Buddhist sites.	Adequate Hotels, monasteries accommodation and guesthouses present near Buddhist sites.
Amenities	Public amenities and peripheral infrastructure needs attention.	Thailand is relatively inexpensive, offering many public amenities including quality food and lodging.	Provision of high quality public amenities and peripheral infrastructure.
Activities	Development in entertainment and recreational facilities needed.	Presence of parks and gardens, theatres, amusement parks and international and Thai sports.	Adequate entertainment and recreational facilities present. (including educational museums, theatres and parks).

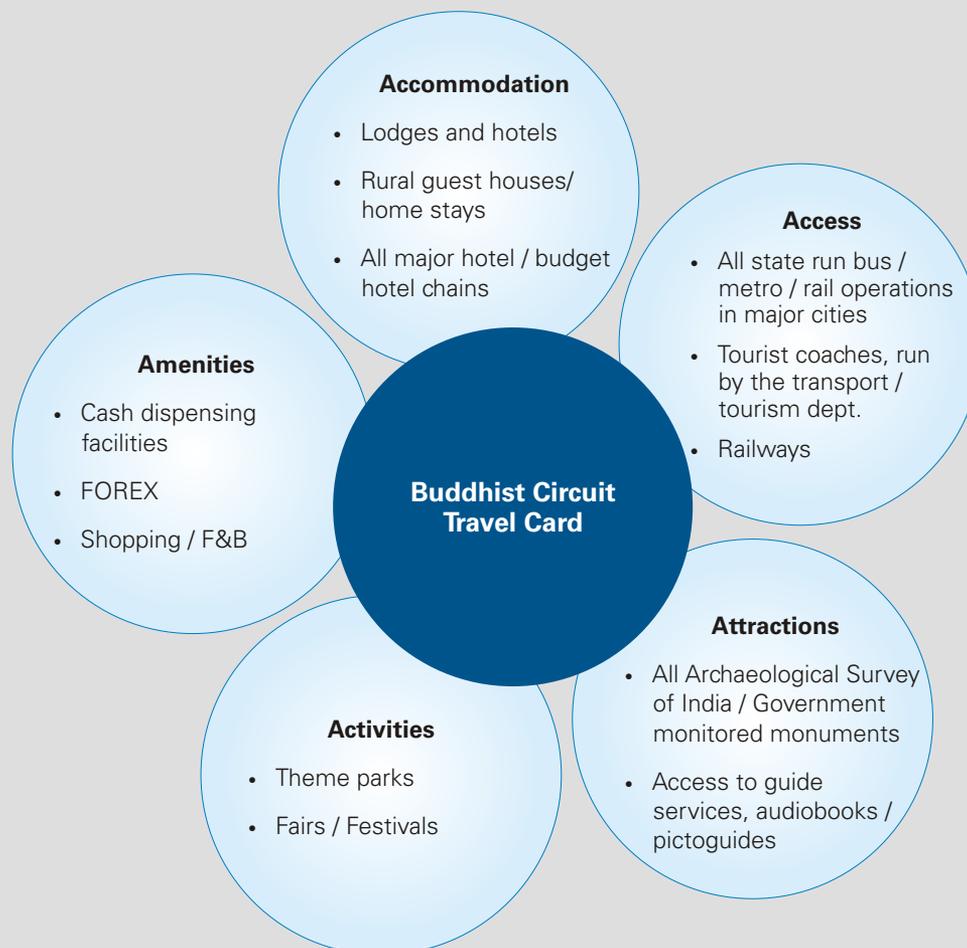
ICT Enabled Measures to Promote the Buddhist Circuit

Internet has transformed the way we do business, and tourism has been a frontrunner in adopting the e-commerce models – B2B or B2C. The Government has taken due cognizance of this fact and is working towards strengthening the peripheral infrastructure as well as improving the tourist experience in heritage sites across the country.

The Buddhist Circuit is one of the leading tourism products of the country, and ICT-enabled products and services can greatly contribute towards further enriching the product and delivering a world class experience to the tourist. We briefly discuss here the concept of a 'Buddhist Travel Card', a prepaid travel card that can greatly improve the tourist experience, as well as boost the destination image.

- **Creation of a Cashless Eco-system** – Easy management of Cash
- **Revenues** – Increased revenues through stoppage of leakages
- **Avoidance of the Fake Currency**–The prepaid card ensures that tourists are NOT inconvenienced with fake currency
- **Loyalty**– Opportunity to better manage the tourists loyalty
- **Tourism Intelligence** – Cashless payments help gauge key consumer behavior patterns like heritage sites most frequented by international tourists of a particular country
- **Multipurpose Utility Card** - Can be used for air / rail / local transport (like fleet cabs), thereby lowering the chances of the tourist being charged exorbitantly
- **Souvenir**: The card can be an attractive travel souvenir

Figure 5: Buddhist Circuit Travel Card: A multi-utility product



The Buddhist sites in the State can be enveloped by an integrated ICT infrastructure, using a common technology platform, which would benefit the sites by offering the tourists the following services and amenities, apart from solving currency hassles:

Entry at Monuments: The card can be used as an entry ticket to various sites within the Buddhist circuit.

Virtual Guides: Many popular monuments across the country (the Qutub Minar, for instance) are being upgraded with virtual audio-visual guides that offer information about the monument at strategic locations. The card can be used as an access tool for such devices.

Discounts & Offers: The card holders can be offered discounts at select government or private handicraft emporiums / hotels and restaurants, thereby catering to the 'incentivization' element for both the stakeholder and the tourist.

Travel Applications: Interactive travel applications across popular devices like smart phones, laptops and iPads can be bundled along with the card offering information like interactive maps, travel tips (Must See / Must dos), emergency / helpline information, not only enriching the tourist experience, but also creating a safe tourist environment.

Conclusion

“ From a withered tree, a flower blooms ”

Buddhist tourism has established itself firmly as one of the strongest and most comprehensive tourism products that the country has to offer. Having said that, there is a high degree of competition from neighbouring countries, and we need to keep evolving and offering better services, amenities and recreational / interpretational facilities to increase the tourist footfall. We also need to undertake active community engagement which would automatically lead to sustainable capacity development for the destinations.

Figure 6: An Integrated and Balanced Approach to Promoting Buddhist Tourism

