

BRIDGING KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICE: THE ROLE OF INDUSTRY-ACADEMIA COLLABORATION IN ADVANCING TOURISM INDUSTRY

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Abstract

Tourism represents a transformative approach that emphasizes sustainability, environmental governance and cultural respect. This form of tourism aims to minimize the ecological footprint of travel while fostering an appreciation for natural and cultural heritage. The industry-academia connection is pivotal in advancing eco-tourism by integrating research with practical application. Academic institutions contribute by generating research on sustainable practices, ecological impacts, and socio-economic benefits, and it also informs industry standards and policies. Collaborative efforts between academia and industry enhance ecotourism's efficacy in promoting responsible travel, preserving natural resources and supporting local communities. This innovation and best practices ensure that ecotourism initiatives are grounded in empirical evidence and practical experience. As eco-tourism grows, the dynamic interplay between research and practice will be crucial in shaping a sustainable future for global tourism. India is renowned for its rich cultural heritage, diverse wildlife, and stunning natural landscapes. Over the past few decades, our country has increasingly positioned itself as a significant destination for eco-tourism, leveraging its unique ecological and cultural assets to promote sustainable tourism practices. This research paper will examine the potential of the tourism industry, identifying successful strategies for industry-academia collaboration and areas for improvement. Data collected for the study was through secondary sources.

Keywords: Sustainability tourism, Nature-based tourism, Innovation and Collaboration.

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1 Introduction:

Tourism represents a rapidly growing segment of the global travel industry, characterized by a commitment to sustainability, conservation, and cultural sensitivity. This approach not only seeks to minimize tourism's ecological footprint but also aims to enhance the socio-economic benefits for local communities. As the demand for eco-friendly travel experiences increases, there is a pressing need to innovate and implement practices that align with the principles of environmental need and responsible tourism. The successful advancement of tourism depends on the effective integration of research and practical application. Herein lies the crucial role of industry-academia collaboration. Academic institutions generate valuable research on sustainable practices, environmental impacts, and socio-economic dynamics, providing a theoretical foundation and empirical evidence to guide tourism initiatives. Conversely, the tourism industry offers real-world

insights and operational challenges that can refine and test academic theories, ensuring their relevance and applicability. This paper explores the mutual relationship between academia and industry in advancing tourism. It examines how collaborative efforts between researchers and practitioners can bridge the gap between knowledge and practice, driving innovation and enhancing the effectiveness of tourism strategies. This paper highlights the benefits and challenges of industry-academia collaborations, offering a comprehensive view of how academia and industry can work together to promote sustainable tourism practices and achieve mutual goals.

2 Objectives:

1. To review and assess the current state of the ecotourism industry.
2. To examine the potential of the tourism industry, identifying successful strategies and areas for improvement.
3. To explore how academic research can inform practical applications in the industry, and how industry challenges can guide academic inquiry.
4. To highlight challenges and barriers to effective collaboration of industry-academia and propose solutions.

5. Current State of the Tourism Industry in India:

India's tourism industry is on a positive trajectory, especially in attracting international visitors. The significant rebound in domestic tourist spending suggests that local travel and tourism have strong potential. However, the 14% shortfall in international expenditure compared to pre-COVID levels indicates that global travel patterns are still adjusting. Factors like travel restrictions, changing consumer preferences, and economic uncertainties might be contributing to this lag.

To address this gap, India might consider strategies like enhancing marketing efforts targeted at international tourists, improving travel infrastructure, and offering attractive packages or incentives to boost international arrivals. Additionally, focusing on emerging markets and leveraging digital tools to reach a global audience could increase global tourism.

According to the Ministry of Tourism, foreign tourists arriving in India was continuously declining.

- 2022: 6.19 million foreign tourists
- 2021: 1.52 million foreign tourists
- 2019: 10.93 million foreign tourists

The decline from 2019 to 2022 is 44%, showing a significant decrease in foreign tourist arrivals, likely due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and related travel restrictions after the pandemic.

The Ministry of Tourism in India aims to enhance and facilitate tourism by improving infrastructure, simplifying visa procedures, ensuring quality standards, and promoting sustainable tourism. Domestic and inbound tourism are key drivers of economic growth, with India recording 9.66 million Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) in 2024, contributing significantly to foreign exchange earnings. In 2023, the country saw 2.5 billion domestic tourist visits (DTV).

The Ministry launched initiatives such as "Dekho Apna Desh" in 2020 to promote domestic tourism, including webinars, discussions, and social media campaigns. It also celebrated World Tourism Day with the theme "Tourism and Peace," during which several initiatives like Paryatan Mitra/Paryatan Didi (a responsible tourism program) were introduced in selected tourist destinations. In addition, the Ministry revamped the Incredible India Digital Portal, providing a comprehensive and user-friendly platform for travelers with information on destinations,

attractions, and itineraries. It also launched the” Dekho Apna Desh People’s Choice 2024” poll to gauge public preferences for tourist attractions.

2.1 The Potential of the Tourism Industry:

Tourism in India contributes 5% to the nation’s GDP and supports over 12% of employment. The Ministry’s Swadesh Darshan scheme started in 2014-15, funds tourism infrastructure projects, with 75 of 76 projects completed. The PRASHAD scheme aims to rejuvenate pilgrimage and heritage sites, with 48 projects sanctioned. To combat the seasonality issue in tourism, India is promoting niche tourism products like Adventure, MICE, Medical Tourism, and Eco-Tourism, positioning the country as a 365-day destination for specialized interests. In recent years ecotourism has gained global popularity. Tourism and ecotourism differ in their primary objectives. While traditional tourism primarily focuses on economic significance, ecotourism serves a dual purpose—economic benefits and environmental conservation. Ecotourism is nature-based, where the main motivation of tourists is to observe and preserve nature, as well as the traditional cultures found in natural areas. It emphasizes education and interpretation, helping tourists gain a deeper understanding of the environment and local cultures. Moreover, ecotourism seeks to minimize the negative impacts on both the natural and socio-cultural environment. It supports the protection of natural areas by generating economic benefits for host communities, offering alternative employment and income opportunities for local populations, and raising awareness about the conservation of natural and cultural as- sets among both tourists and locals. Typically organized for small groups, ecotourism is often led by specialized, locally owned businesses, ensuring a sustainable and community-focused approach to tourism.

Tourism generates significant revenue for destinations. This in- come supports not only tourism-specific businesses like hotels and restaurants but also local economies by boosting spending in various sectors. This economic influx can lead to the creation of new businesses and job opportunities. The sector provides diverse employment opportunities, from hospitality and transportation to local artisan crafts and tour guides. It often creates jobs in areas where other industries might not be as prevalent, helping to reduce unemployment in those regions.

3 Ambitious Goals Set by the Government of India:

Revenue and Employment Goals: Foreign Exchange Earnings are projected to be \$56 billion from tourism by 2030 and employment generation will be around 140 million during the same period.

Tourism Growth and Impact: The tourism industry is one of the fastest-growing sectors in India. It is expected to generate revenue of over \$59 billion by 2028. Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) are expected to reach 30.5 million by 2028, with a significant contribution through eco-tourism.

3.1 Key Initiatives and Events:

- **Amrit Kaal Mission:** The vision is to develop tourism with a strategic roadmap to position India as a top global destination by 2047.
- **Global Tourism Investors Summit:** The purpose of the summit is to showcase Indian tourism opportunities to international investors and to highlight investment and trade prospects in Indian tourism products and services.
- **Union Budget 2023 Highlights:** Destination Development was planned and 50 tourist destinations were to be chosen and developed as comprehensive packages for both domestic and international tourism.
- **Skilling and Entrepreneurship:** Align sector-specific skills and entrepreneurship

development with the ‘Dekho Apna Desh’ initiative to promote domestic tourism.

- **Infrastructure and Amenities:** Improvement of tourism infrastructure in border villages through the Vibrant Villages Programme was initiated by the State Government.
- **Establishment of Unity Malls:** Unity Malls in state capitals and key tourist centers aim to enhance the tourism experience and local economic development.

These measures reflect India’s commitment to transforming its tourism sector into a major global player, creating new opportunities for economic growth and job creation while promoting sustainable and diverse tourism experiences.

3.2 Industry-academia Connect:

The table provided contrasts the perspectives and priorities between industrial and academic publication viewpoints. Here’s a breakdown of the key differences and how they might relate to bridging the gap between academia and industry.

Table 1. Key Differences Between Industrial and Academic Concerning Tourism Industry:

Subject	Industry	Academia
Applicability	Publications are valued based on their usefulness and practical value in solving real-world problems.	Publications are valued for their novelty, originality, and contribution to existing knowledge.
Orientation	Focuses on achieving specific goals and solutions.	Aims to expand knowledge, exploring theoretical concepts and the underlying reasons behind phenomena.
Subject-matter	Emphasizes practical, actionable information—how to apply knowledge.	Focuses on theoretical frameworks—why things happen, and what principles govern them.
Operation	Strives for clarity and understandability, often with a direct, practical tone.	Prioritizes rigorous argumentation, clarity in presenting evidence and positioning within existing research.
Economic	Industries are driven by public relations, intellectual property rights (IPR), and confidentiality. Creating jobs, enhancing economic growth and development, to increase GDP of the country.	Funding and career advancement are linked to the number of publications and citations.

There’s a disconnect between the academic training in tourism and the practical skills needed in the industry. To address this gap, schools and colleges need to adopt several strategies:

Industry-Academia Collaboration Strategies:

- **Industry Collaboration:** Partnering with tourism businesses to co-develop curriculum content and provide real-world case studies. This collaboration can help ensure that the subjects taught are aligned with current industry practices and demands.
- **Practical Experience:** Integrating internships, industry placements, or live projects into the curriculum. Practical experience can provide students with hands-on skills and a clearer understanding of their future roles.
- **Skill Workshops:** Offering workshops on elective courses on specific practical skills such as

itinerary planning, visa formalities, negotiation techniques, and tour costing can be designed in consultation with industry experts to meet current needs.

- **Guest Lectures and Seminars:** Inviting industry professionals to speak about current trends, challenges, and real-world practices can provide students with valuable insights beyond textbook theoretical knowledge.
- **Updated Curriculum:** Regularly updating the curriculum to reflect changes in the industry. This could involve revising core subjects to include more practical applications or integrating emerging topics like digital marketing and sustainable tourism practices.
- **Simulation Tools:** These tools can help students practice and refine their skills in a controlled environment.
- **Feedback Mechanisms:** Establishing systems to collect and incorporate feedback from graduates and industry partners about the relevance of the curriculum. This feedback can be used to make continuous improvements in syllabi.

By adopting these strategies, educational institutions can better prepare students for the complexities and practicalities of working in the tourism sector, bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world application.

4 Challenges and Barriers to Effective Collaboration and Propose Solutions:

This study highlighted several critical issues in the disconnect between tourism education and industry needs. Here's a summary of the key points and possible solutions to address them:

- **Scope of Tourism Education:** The tourism industry is vast and dynamic, making it challenging for educational programs to cover all aspects comprehensively. Specialized courses in areas like airlines, hospitality, geography, and culture have evolved, but they often don't provide a holistic view of the industry.
- **Curriculum Structure:** At the master's level, core subjects are usually taught in the first year, with supporting subjects in the second year. This can result in students forgetting critical information by the time they enter the workforce. For example, Global Destination Knowledge, crucial for travel sales jobs, is often covered too briefly and not revisited in depth.
- **Lack of Industry-Academia Connection:** There is insufficient interaction between industry professionals and academic institutions. This disconnect hampers the ability to stay updated with current trends and to share knowledge effectively.
- **Training and Employment:** Many tourism organizations recruit employees straight out of college and provide them with short-term training. This approach suggests a potential gap in the practical readiness of tourism program graduates.
- **Institutional Autonomy:** Institutions offering tourism and hospitality programs often lack the flexibility to design and update their curricula effectively due to rigid affiliations and regulations.

5 Proposed Solutions:

- **Integrated Curriculum Design:** Educational programs should integrate core subjects throughout the course rather than isolating them in the first year. Continuous exposure to essential topics like Global Destination Knowledge throughout the program can help maintain relevance and enhance retention.
- **Enhanced Industry-Academia Collaboration:**
 - **Regular Industry Engagement:** Academic institutions should regularly organize seminars, conferences, guest lectures, and networking events with industry professionals.

- **Active Networking:** Encourage students to interact with industry professionals to stay informed about current trends and real-world applications.
- **Curriculum Updates:** Establish regular meetings between educators and industry experts to update and refine curricula based on industry needs.
- **Practical Training and Internship Opportunities:** Strengthen partnerships between educational institutions and tourism organizations to offer more practical training and internships. This can help bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical skills.
- **Industry Involvement in Education:**
- **Guest Participation:** Invite industry professionals to contribute to educational programs, participate in trade shows, and assist with research activities.
- **Collaborative Research:** Facilitate joint research initiatives between academics and industry to address current challenges and innovations in tourism.
- **Institutional Autonomy:** Grant autonomy to institutions offering tourism and hospitality programs. This flexibility can enable them to design curricula that are more aligned with industry needs, incorporate value-added programs, and adapt to emerging trends.

By addressing these areas, tourism education can better align with industry demands, leading to more effective preparation of students for their careers and fostering sustainable, mutually beneficial relationships between academia and the tourism sector.

6 Conclusion:

The Ministry of Tourism has focused on building a robust system for training and professional education to meet the growing demands of the tourism and hospitality industry. Industry academia plays an important role in achieving the targeted goals. Currently, there are 56 Institutes of Hotel Management (IHMs) and 13 Food Craft Institutes (FCIs), supported by the Ministry. A new Central IHM is also under construction in Uttar Pradesh. To enhance hospitality standards, the Ministry has facilitated partnerships between Central IHMs and leading hotel chains like IHCL, Marriott, and ITC. These collaborations aim to provide students with industry exposure and improve hospitality service standards.

Additionally, the Ministry runs the Incredible India Tourist Facilitator (IITF) Certification Program, offering online training to create a skilled pool of tourist facilitators and job opportunities, especially in remote areas. The existing Regional Level Guides (RLGs) have been renamed as Incredible India Tourist Guides (IITGs), expanding their area of operation across India. In terms of digital innovation, the Ministry launched an E- Marketplace for IITFs/IITGs to enable tourists and certified facilitators to interact via a web and mobile app platform, helping to manage bookings, ratings, and feedback. Furthermore, the Ministry has provided safety and security measures under the Nirbhaya Fund, releasing funds for projects aimed at improving women's safety in tourism.

The Ministry also issued guidelines to help the tourism sector recover post-COVID, supporting various travel-related service providers with operational recommendations. A new category for "Greenshoot/Start-up Agencies" was introduced to support the government's "Atma Nirbhar Bharat" initiative, facilitating entrepreneurship in the tourism industry. The Government is encouraging industry-academia connections to expand the tourism industry in a smarter and better way.

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