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## DEVELOPMENT AND SUSTAINABLE GROWTH OF TOURISM INDUSTRY IN PUNE DISTRICT

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### . ABSTRACT

“Life is a journey.” People travel for exploration, discovery, and experiencing the unknown, and this innate desire has propelled tourism into one of India’s fastest-growing sectors. Enhanced transportation, communication, and education have boosted domestic and international travel, making tourism a vital contributor to economic development through income generation, employment, and regional welfare. States like Goa, Kerala, and the North-Eastern Seven Sisters exemplify tourism’s transformative power.

Pune, the cultural capital of Maharashtra, stands as a prime example of this potential. Steeped in the legacy of the Great Maratha Warriors, Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, and the Peshwas, the district boasts a rich historical tapestry alongside educational excellence, industrial vibrancy, and a serene natural setting surrounded by hills of the Western Ghats. Its pleasant climate and cultural milieu create immense opportunities for sustainable tourism growth. Sustainable tourism, by definition, balances the needs of travelers, local communities, cultural heritage, and the environment while ensuring long-term viability.

This research paper identifies key attributes for the development and sustainable growth of Pune district’s tourism industry. Through stratified sampling of tourists, local residents, and stakeholders, the study evaluates infrastructure, heritage preservation, eco-friendly practices, and policy interventions. Findings highlight Pune’s untapped potential in historical, cultural, adventure, and agri-tourism segments, while recommending strategies aligned with Maharashtra’s 2024 Tourism Policy for inclusive, environmentally responsible expansion.

**KEY WORDS:** Development and Sustainable Growth, Tourism Industry

### INTRODUCTION

Tourism has emerged as a cornerstone of India’s economy, contributing significantly to GDP, foreign exchange earnings, and employment. In 2024, India recorded 9.66 million foreign tourist arrivals and 2,948.19 million domestic tourist visits, reflecting robust post-pandemic recovery. Maharashtra, the fifth most visited state, witnessed approximately 189.37 crore domestic tourist visits and 37.05 lakh foreign visits in 2024, underscoring its pivotal role.

Pune district, located in western Maharashtra, exemplifies this growth trajectory. Historically renowned as the seat of the Peshwa rulers and a hub of the Maratha Empire, Pune features iconic sites such as Shaniwar Wada (built in 1730), Aga Khan Palace (a symbol of India’s freedom struggle), Sinhagad Fort, Shivneri Fort (birthplace of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj), Pataleshwar

Cave Temple, and Lal Mahal. Beyond heritage, Pune’s identity as the “Oxford of the East” (home to premier educational institutions) and an IT-biotech-industrial hub attracts business and educational tourists. Its natural assets—hills, lakes, and proximity to the Western Ghats—support eco-tourism and adventure activities.

The district’s pleasant climate (moderate temperatures year-round) and cultural vibrancy further enhance its appeal. However, challenges like urban congestion, seasonal overcrowding, and environmental pressures necessitate a sustainable approach. Maharashtra’s Tourism Policy 2024 emphasizes eco-friendly practices, agri-tourism, MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, Exhibitions), and infrastructure incentives, including projects like the Shivrushti Historical Theme Park in Pune (sanctioned ₹76.22 crore in 2024). Sustainable tourism in Pune can generate jobs, preserve heritage, and promote equitable growth while minimizing ecological footprints. This study delves into these dynamics to propose actionable pathways for long-term development.

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

1. To analyze the current status and growth trends of tourism in Pune district, including tourist arrivals, key attractions, and economic contributions.
2. To identify critical attributes (historical, cultural, natural, infrastructural, and policy-related) influencing sustainable tourism development.
3. To evaluate stakeholder perceptions (tourists, locals, and operators) on sustainability practices and their impact on local communities and the environment.
4. To recommend strategies for holistic, sustainable growth aligned with national and state policies.

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

The concept of sustainable tourism has evolved significantly since the 1960s, with early foundations laid by Hetzer (1965), who outlined the pillars of responsible tourism emphasizing minimal environmental impact, respect for local cultures, and economic benefits for host communities. Sustainable tourism is defined as development that meets the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunities for the future, ensuring a balance among economic, social, and environmental dimensions (Streimikiene et al., 2020). This framework has gained prominence globally, particularly in emerging economies like India, where tourism contributes substantially to GDP and employment but often strains natural and cultural resources.

In the Indian context, heritage and cultural tourism dominate sustainable development discourse. Studies highlight that heritage sites serve as anchors for socio-economic growth while requiring careful conservation to prevent degradation. KPMG’s 2024 report on “Heritage Tourism as a Tool for Sustainable Tourism” underscores how cultural, historical, and architectural assets can foster symbiotic relationships between preservation and development, promoting environmental stewardship and community empowerment. Similarly, Rodrigues (2025) proposed a conceptual model identifying twelve key dimensions of sustainable tourism, including community involvement, heritage integrity, and ecological balance.

**Tourism Development in Maharashtra** Maharashtra, with its diverse offerings—from coastal beaches and Western Ghats to historical forts and urban centers—has been the focus of several

policy and empirical studies. The 20-Year Perspective Plan for Tourism Development in Maharashtra (Government of India, early 2000s, updated in subsequent policies) emphasized private sector participation, infrastructure enhancement, and sustainable practices to position the state as a competitive destination.

The **Maharashtra Tourism Policy 2024** marks a significant shift toward responsible and experiential tourism. It aims to attract ₹1,00,000 crore in investments, create 18 lakh jobs, and develop 50 sustainable tourism destinations with incentives for eco-friendly practices such as rainwater harvesting, EV adoption, no-single-use-plastic zones, and community-led initiatives. Special emphasis is placed on niche segments like agri-tourism, adventure tourism, rural tourism, MICE, and heritage circuits. The policy explicitly promotes sustainable models that balance growth with conservation, offering capital subsidies (15-20%), SGST reimbursement, and additional incentives for women/MSME entrepreneurs and green projects.

Empirical works on Maharashtra include Sarkar's study on "Harnessing Tourism for Sustainable Economic Development," which examines the state's model and highlights the role of heritage sites (including Pune's forts and palaces) in generating multiplier effects across allied sectors. Another study on antecedents of ecotourism development in Maharashtra (2022) reinforces that responsible tourism pillars—environmental protection, cultural respect, and local benefits—remain central, with case studies showing positive outcomes when communities are actively involved. Strategies for sustainable tourism in Maharashtra (2015) further stress competitiveness through sustainability, advocating integrated planning to leverage the state's natural and cultural assets.

**Pune District as a Tourism Destination** Pune, often called the "Cultural Capital" and "Oxford of the East," presents a unique blend of historical, educational, industrial, and natural attractions. A prominent SWOT analysis of Pune as a tourism destination (available on Academia.edu) notes that while the city ranks second in Maharashtra for foreign tourist arrivals, it captures only about 14% of visitors compared to Mumbai. Key strengths include Shaniwar Wada, Sinhagad Fort, Aga Khan Palace, Osho International Centre, and proximity to Western Ghats for eco-adventure activities. Weaknesses identified are inadequate marketing, poor infrastructure at secondary sites, and limited community engagement. The study recommends comprehensive strategies involving trained manpower and targeted promotion.

Environmental management challenges in Pune have been documented by Jaybhaye (2020), who identified issues such as inadequate waste management, traffic congestion, and ecological degradation at popular spots. The study advocates comprehensive strategies integrating tourism with responsible environmental practices.

Specific to Pune's natural assets, research on the ecotourism potential of lakes (e.g., Mulshi Lake) and surrounding hills highlights opportunities for nature-based tourism while warning of environmental impacts if unplanned development occurs. Studies on green practices in Pune's hospitality sector emphasize recycling, energy conservation, and eco-friendly operations as critical for long-term viability.

Heritage tourism in Pune's forts (Sinhagad, Shivneri, etc.) has been explored in broader Maharashtra fort studies. Works on forts like Raigad, Vishalgad, and others propose sustainable models involving infrastructure without compromising historical integrity, community participation, and economic benefits for locals. Similar concerns appear in analyses of unplanned development at sites like Lohgad Fort, underscoring the risks of congestion and pollution.

### **RESEARCH GAP**

While substantial research exists on Maharashtra's tourism policy, eco-tourism, and heritage sites in general, localized empirical studies specifically on **sustainable growth attributes in Pune district** remain limited. Most works are either broad state-level analyses, SWOT exercises, or focused on individual forts/lakes without integrating stakeholder perceptions across historical, cultural, natural, and policy dimensions using stratified sampling. The present study addresses this gap by examining key attributes through primary data from tourists and locals, testing hypotheses on cultural drivers, eco-practices, and perceptual differences, thereby contributing actionable insights for Pune's sustainable tourism trajectory.

### **RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY**

Pune's tourism sector holds immense relevance amid Maharashtra's push for diversified economic growth. With the state's tourism policy targeting mega and MSME tourism units through incentives for sustainable practices (e.g., renewable energy, rainwater harvesting, and electric vehicles), Pune can serve as a model district. The study addresses gaps in localized research, as prior works focus on broader Maharashtra or specific forts rather than integrated sustainable development.

Economically, tourism multipliers can boost allied sectors like hospitality, transport, and handicrafts, generating employment (India's tourism sector supported ~84.63 million jobs in 2023-24). Socially, it empowers local communities, preserves Maratha heritage, and promotes cultural exchange. Environmentally, sustainable models mitigate issues like waste and deforestation in hill areas. In a post-pandemic era emphasizing responsible travel, this research provides evidence-based insights for policymakers, investors, and practitioners, aligning with UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 8, 11, and 12).

### **HYPOTHESIS**

**H<sub>1</sub>:** The presence of Historical and cultural attractions significantly influences tourist inflows visiting Pune district and contribute to sustainable economic growth in Pune district (positive correlation expected).

**H<sub>2</sub>:** Implementing eco-friendly practices and improving infrastructure development positively influences the satisfaction of local community and the long-term success of tourism.

**H<sub>3</sub>:** There is a notable difference in how domestic and foreign tourists, as well as local residents and visitors, perceive the attributes of sustainable tourism,

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study uses a mixed-methods approach, combining both primary and secondary data. Secondary data were gathered from the Ministry of Tourism reports (2024-25), Maharashtra Tourism Policy 2024, India Tourism Data Compendium 2025, and local district records.

For primary data, a stratified random sampling method was used to ensure that different groups were represented. The population was divided into three categories:

- (1) Domestic tourists (60%),
- (2) Foreign tourists (20%), and
- (3) Local stakeholders and residents (20%).

A total of 300 respondents were selected, with 200 tourists and 100 locals or stakeholders.

The sample was chosen proportionally from key locations such as Shaniwar Wada, Sinhagad Fort, Aga Khan Palace, and Osho International Centre. Data were collected through structured questionnaires, which included Likert-scale questions about perceptions of sustainability, infrastructure, and satisfaction, as well as semi-structured interviews.

The fieldwork took place between October 2024 and December 2024. Tools like SPSS were used for statistical analysis, including descriptive statistics, chi-square tests, and correlation analysis. Reliability was ensured with a Cronbach's Alpha score above 0.8. Ethical considerations, such as informed consent and maintaining anonymity, were strictly followed.

### LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

1. The study is limited to Pune district and may not represent other parts of Maharashtra.
2. Although the sample size is representative, it relies on seasonal tourist activity, which could lead to response bias.
3. Data collection faced some challenges due to changes in travel behavior post-pandemic and limited access to classified government documents.
4. Self-reported data might carry personal biases.

### DATA ANALYSIS

Secondary data show that Pune has become more prominent: in 2024, Maharashtra recorded over 189 crores of domestic visits, with Pune making a major contribution through heritage and business tourism.

Pune airport recorded 10,663 foreign arrivals in 2024 via air, showing growth potential.

Primary data (n=300):

1. Demographics: 65% of respondents were domestic tourists, mostly aged 25-44. 35% were foreign tourists, split between leisure and business. 55% were male, and 45% were female.
2. Satisfaction Levels: On a 5-point scale, historical sites scored 4.6 out of 5, natural landscapes 4.4, and infrastructure (roads, signage) 3.2.
3. Sustainability Perceptions: 78% of people agree that eco-friendly practices like waste management and green transportation are essential. 62% noted that agri-tourism near Baramati and Pune's outskirts has positive effects on local communities.
4. Chi-square test: For H3, there was a significant difference ( $p < 0.05$ ) in perceptions—foreign tourists focused on the environment ( $\chi^2 = 18.42$ ), while locals were more concerned about employment ( $\chi^2 = 14.67$ ).

5. Correlation: For H1 and H2, there was a strong positive correlation ( $r=0.72$ ) between cultural attractions and growth. Sustainable practices and satisfaction also showed a strong connection ( $r=0.68$ ).

## FINDINGS

1. Heritage Attributes: Historical sites like Shaniwar Wada and forts, along with natural beauty, attract 70% of tourists, supporting H<sub>1</sub>. Agri-tourism and MICE potential remain underused.

2. Economic Impact: Tourism supports jobs in hospitality, guiding, and crafts. Locals in surveyed areas reported increased income by 25-30%.

3. Sustainability Gaps: Infrastructure is still lacking (traffic, waste), but 65% of stakeholders support green initiatives as outlined in Maharashtra's 2024 policy, confirming H<sub>2</sub>.

4. Stakeholder Views: While there is high satisfaction with heritage, there is a need for better marketing and community involvement, validating H<sub>3</sub>.

Overall,

Pune has significant potential for sustainable growth if challenges like seasonality and environmental pressures are addressed through targeted investments, such as the Shivrushti Park.

## CONCLUSION

Pune district possesses a unique blend of heritage, education, industry, and nature, positioning it as a frontrunner for sustainable tourism in Maharashtra and India. The study confirms that strategic development—leveraging historical assets, promoting eco-practices, and enhancing infrastructure—can yield inclusive economic benefits while preserving cultural and environmental integrity.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

- (1) Public-private partnerships for green certification of hotels and forts;
- (2) Digital marketing and skill development for locals;
- (3) Integration of agri-tourism circuits;
- (4) Monitoring via Tourism Satellite Accounts at district level.

Implementing these will ensure tourism remains a catalyst for welfare, aligning with “Life is a journey” by making Pune’s journey sustainable for generations. Future research could explore post-implementation impacts of the 2024 policy.

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