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Emerging Issues Concerning Development of Tourism Sector in West Bengal

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Abstract:

Tourism sector is attracting the attention of the Govts. all over the world because of its vast potential to contribute to the overall development of the countries. West Bengal is India's fourth most populous State. The state is rich in both architectural and natural heritage. The study found that in West Bengal only a project titled 'Coastal Circuit' was sanctioned in 2025-16 for the development of Beach Circuit under 'Swadesh Darshan' scheme launched by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, for building convention centers, cafeteria, tourist facilitation centers, cultural centers, ramps at public places, etc. It was found that the length of national highway in Maharashtra is five times than that of West Bengal. In West Bengal, the length of national highway is only 3,910 km, but it is 18,462 km in Maharashtra and 12,123 km in Uttar Pradesh. Administrative measures are needed to enhance the length of national highway here in West Bengal. A Tourism University in West Bengal: is to be established for generating public awareness, protecting culture and heritage and promoting sustainable tourism. Land Bank is to be formed for the development of tourism sector. The study revealed that as the numbers of districts in West Bengal are very much low as compared to other states so more new districts are to be created for implementing different policies and strategies for the development of tourism sector. Development of tourism sector leads to high employment opportunities and overall economic development.

Key words: Tourism, GDP, FTA, FEE, Development.

1. Introduction:

Tourism is a socio-economic phenomenon which has become the world's largest and fast-growing industry. The economic importance of tourism in national economy can be appreciated with reference to its contribution in economic [development \(Batra and Chawla\)¹](#). Tourism helps a community become more attractive and prosperous. It is more attractive because a community must be appealing to draw and satisfy visitors, and it is more prosperous because these visitors spend money which is needed for the overall development of the community. Tourism sector is attracting the attention of the Governments all over the world because of its

¹ Batra G.S. & Chawla A. S. (1995). Tourism Management: A Global Perspective, Deep & Deep Publications, New Delhi. P 179



vast potential to contribute to the overall development of the countries. Tourism is an important means of promoting cultural exchanges and international cooperation. The Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTA) in India during 2025 were 90,16,594 as compared to the FTAs of 99,51,722 during 2024. Foreign Exchange Earnings (FEEs) from tourism were ₹ 2,73,638 crore in 2025 as against ₹2,93,033 crore in 2024 i.e. growth rate for 2025 has decreased by (-) 6.62% compared to 2024 (Bureau of Immigration, Annual Tourism Snapshot 2025 <https://tourism.gov.in>)³. West Bengal is India's fourth most populous State. It is located on the eastern bottleneck of India stretching from the Himalayas in the north to the Bay of Bengal in the south. It presents some of marvelous landscape features and natural scenic beauty.

2. Literature Review and Research Gap:

The tourism industry in West Bengal, in spite of being a part of rich heritage of Bengal and able to record significant progress through a process of great change after the independence of the country, has not received desired attention of the researchers (<https://www.researchgate.net>)⁴. Tourism being a service industry, its product is of a perishable nature. Prof. Howard Meek⁵, former Dean of the School of Hotel Administration, Cronell University, has very rightly observed - "There is no commodity more perishable than a hotel room. If it is not sold tonight, it can never be sold".

Chattopadhyay (1995)⁶ mentioned that most tourist centers of India were initially developed for reasons other than tourism. But this is not the case for Digha. Like Covalam, Manali, Mirik or Gopalpur, the basic motivational factor behind the birth of this coastal resort was tourism itself. The distinguishing feature of tourism at Digha is therefore, that is cost of building tourist infrastructure was borne almost entirely by the local state government in early days of development. Bhattacharya (1995)⁷ described that West Bengal is enviably endowed with a variety of natural scenes and landscapes ranging from high Himalayas to low coasts and islands. She has also mentioned that journey to the centers of nature tourism should be made smooth and comfortable and related transportation arteries need to be immaculately developed and

² Bureau of Immigration and Ministry of Tourism, Govt. of India. <http://tourism.gov.in>

³ Bureau of Immigration and Ministry of Tourism, Govt. of India. <http://tourism.gov.in>

⁴ Batra G.S. & Chawla A. S. (1995). Tourism Management: A Global Perspective, Deep & Deep Publications, New Delhi.

⁵ Seth P.N. (1978). Successful Tourism Management, Sterling, New Delhi, 1978. P 213.

⁶ Chattopadhyay, K.(1995). Economic Impact of Tourism Development, Kanishka, New Delhi. P 150.

⁷ Anima Bhattacharya (1995). Article "Nature Tourism" in the book Tourism Management: A Global Perspective, Batra G.S. & Chawla A. S., Deep & Deep Publications, 1995, New Delhi, pp 118-125.



impeccably maintained. Dr. Banerjee (2006)⁸ focused on acquiring relevant information vis-à-vis the significant dimensions considered by the actual and potential tourists for evaluating service quality in tourism.

The discussion in the above literature and articles is broad based and identifies the importance of the industry as a whole in Indian economy. But State level problems relating to this industry are not clearly discussed. Here requires a State level based in-depth study to identify the factors faced by the tourism sector.

3. Objectives of the study:

The objectives of the study are-

- (i) to analyses the problems of tourism sector here in West Bengal,
- (ii) to highlight the problems of tourism management,
- (iii) to show the position of the State in the central scheme,
- (iv) to identify the problems in tourist transportation,
- (v) to highlight the reforms needed for the development of tourism sector.

4. Rationale of the Study:

Domestic tourism has emerged as a key driver of economic growth. In the year 2025, India recorded Foreign Tourist Arrivals of 9.02 million (provisional) which account for Foreign Exchange Earnings of 2,73,638 crores (provisional). There were 4132.8 million (provisional) Domestic Tourist Visits all over the country during the year 2025 (Bureau of Immigration, Annual Tourism Snapshot 2025 <https://tourism.gov.in>)⁹. The Ministry of Tourism, Government of India launched Swadesh Darshan scheme for building tourism facilities across the country but participation of West Bengal in this scheme is nominal. Numbers of Districts and length of National Highways are very much low in West Bengal in comparison to other States. Administrative reforms necessary to enhance these factors to improve tourism sector for overall economic development.

5. Methodology:

For the study, data have been collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data have been collected by field survey. For this field survey a questionnaire has been prepared first and then with this questionnaire we have explored the different sources for the collection of

⁸ Banerjee Sudipti (2006). Service Quality in Tourism: Some Directions for Research, Business Insight, Journal of the Department of Commerce, The University of Burdwan, Volume-1, Number-1, March 2006.

⁹ Annual Report, Ministry of Tourism, Govt. of India



data and information relevant to our study. In this study I have applied multi-stage stratified random sampling technique for data collection. Here geographical locations serve as the sampling frame. The geographic locations are selected as part of multi-stage design. In such design's households, individuals, businesses or other organizations are studied, and they are sampled within the geographical areas selected for sample. In this sampling technique the geographic locations to be covered is divided into a number of smaller sub-areas from which a sample is selected at random within these areas, either a complete enumeration is taken or a further sub-sample. As I have used geographic units (e.g., Census Districts) as strata so this sampling technique can also be called as multi-stage cluster sampling technique. For the required sample I have followed the following three steps-

5.1 Step- 1: At first, I have stratified the state of West Bengal in respect of census district which I have used as the geographic strata. As there are 19 districts according to Census 2011 (Burdwan, Birbhum, Bankura, Purba Medinipur, Paschim Medinipur, Howrah, Hooghly, North 24 Parganas, South 24 Parganas, Kolkata, Nadia, Murshidabad, Uttar Dinajpur, Dakshin Dinajpur, Malda, Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling, Cooch Behar, and Purulia) in the state of West Bengal so in this study there are 19 strata.

5.2 Step- 2: Within each district I have chosen a probability sample of one tourist spot, that is, I have randomly selected one tourist spot from the tourist spots enlisted in the census district strata (Durgapur in Burdwan district, Shantiniketan in Birbhum district, Mukutmonipur in Bankura district, Digha in Purba Medinipur district, Jhargram in Paschim Medinipur district, Gadiara in Howrah district, Chandannagar in Hooghly district, Taki in North 24 Parganas district, Sunderban in South 24 Parganas district, Jorasanko Thakurbari in Kolkata district, Bethuadahari in Nadia district, Hazarduari in Murshidabad district, Raiganj in Uttar Dinajpur district, Hilli in Dakshin Dinajpur district, Adina Mosque in Malda district, Jaldapara in Jalpaiguri district, Mirik in Darjeeling district, Cooch Behar Palace in Cooch Behar district and Ayodhya Hills in Purulia district.

5.3 Step- 3: The Researcher has randomly collected the sample units from the selected tourist spot covering all the districts in West Bengal. Total numbers of collected samples are 1079. Among which 575 samples belong to male category, and 504 samples belong to female category, again 817 samples belong to tourists/ individual's category and 262 samples belong to other tourism stakeholder's category such as hotel owners, car owners, businessmen, etc.



6. Data Collection:

Primary data have been collected by field survey. Secondary data and information have been collected from the publications of different Govt. and non-Govt. organizations like India Tourism Development Corporation; Ministry of Tourism, Govt. of India; Ministry of Tourism, Govt. of West Bengal; Annual Report of Reserve Bank of India etc. The statistical handbook on tourism, journals, various census reports, research work on tourism, newspaper reports, budget speech of tourism ministers both at state level and at the centre have been used for our study.

7. Analysis of Collected Data/ Collected Information:

The data and information obtained at the field survey and that from secondary sources have been tabulated to highlight the present position and nature of problems faced by tourism sector in West Bengal and to suggest the remedial measures. Based on the analyzed data (both primary and secondary) different conclusions are drawn and recommendations are made accordingly.

8. Findings of the study:

8.1 Tourism GDP:

Tourism adds to GDP through money spent by visitors on transport, hotels, food, shopping etc. International tourists also bring foreign exchange. A sound tourism sector means more business transaction, tax revenue and employment. The contribution of the tourism sector to GDP and employment at the national level.

Table:1 Tourism and GDP

Tourism and GDP	Year				
	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024
Total share of tourism in GDP (%)	5.18	1.50	1.75	5.09	5.22
Direct (in %)	2.69	0.78	0.91	2.65	2.72
Indirect (in %)	2.49	0.72	0.84	2.44	2.50

Source: Estimates based on the National Accounts Statistics 2025¹⁰

It is seen that in the year 2023-24 total share of tourism in GDP is 5.22% of which direct share of tourism in GDP is 2.72% and indirect share of tourism in GDP is 2.50%.

¹⁰ Annual report 2025-26 (page : 112), Ministry of Tourism, Government of India (<http://tourism.gov.in>)



8.2 Tourism Development:

Tourism development means improving and promoting a place so more people get attract this place, stay longer and spend more. Tourism development is important as it generates income creates employment.

Table:2 Tourism Development

Tourism Development	Year				
	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024
Tourism Direct Employment (in million)	30.28	29.68	30.55	33.22	36.90
Direct share of tourism (%)	5.89	5.63	5.52	5.48	5.82
Total (Direct and Indirect) Tourism employment (in million)	69.44	68.07	70.04	76.17	84.63
Total share in jobs (in %)	13.50	12.91	12.66	12.57	13.34

Source: Estimates based on the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS)¹¹

It is seen that in the year 2023-24 direct share of tourism in direct employment is 5.82%. 84.63 million people engaged in tourism sector.

8.3 Swadesh Darshan Scheme:

Swadesh Darshan scheme is a flagship scheme launched by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India. It is introduced to complement the efforts of respective State Governments and Union territories for developing tourism facilities across the country. An amount of ₹5,290.33 crore has been sanctioned for undertaking 76 projects.

Table:3 States/UTs under Swadesh Darshan Scheme

Sl. No.	State/ Union Territory	Number of projects	Amount Sanctioned (₹crore)
1	Andaman & Nicobar Islands	1	27.57
2	Andhra Pradesh	3	152.62
3	Arunachal Pradesh	2	146.49
4	Assam	2	185.66
5	Bihar	5	262.72
6	Chhattisgarh	1	96.10
7	Goa	2	197.00
8	Gujarat	3	176.97
9	Haryana	1	77.39
10	Himachal Pradesh	1	68.34
11	Jammu & Kashmir	6	519.58
12	Jharkhand	1	30.44

¹¹ Annual report 2025-26 (page: 113), Ministry of Tourism, Government of India <http://tourism.gov.in>



13	Kerala	5	312.47
14	Madhya Pradesh	4	349.70
15	Maharashtra	2	64.53
16	Manipur	2	117.57
17	Meghalaya	2	184.10
18	Mizoram	2	158.63
19	Nagaland	2	195.50
20	Odisha	1	70.82
21	Puducherry	3	142.84
22	Punjab	1	85.32
23	Rajasthan	4	283.47
24	Sikkim	2	193.37
25	Tamil Nadu	1	73.13
26	Telangana	3	268.39
27	Tripura	2	127.68
28	Uttar Pradesh	8	490.95
29	Uttarakhand	2	145.49
30	West Bengal	1	67.99
31	Uttar Pradesh and Bihar (Joint scheme Wayside Amenities 2018-19)	1	17.50
Total		76	5290.33

Source: Annual Report 2025-26, Ministry of Tourism, Govt. of India (www.tourism.gov.in)¹²

By availing this scheme, a state can build Convention Centers, Cafeteria, Tourist Facilitation Centers, Cultural Centers, Ramps at public places, etc. In West Bengal only a project titled 'Coastal Circuit' was sanctioned in 2025-16 for the development of Beach Circuit: Udaipur-Digha-Shankarpur-Tajpur-Mandarmani-Fraserganj-Bakkhali-Henry Island and for this an amount of ₹ 67.99 crore was sanctioned. This is not a favourable position for the development of tourism sector in West Bengal.

8.4 Status of National Highway length:

Tourist transport is an important tourist infrastructure for tourist movement and conducting tours to the various tourist spots and historical sites. The respondents were asked about the transport facilities for going to different tourists in West Bengal. Among 1,079 respondents, only 448 respondents i.e.41.52% replied they are satisfied about the transport facilities in West Bengal., but 577 respondents i.e. 53.48% respondents replied they are not satisfied about it, 54 respondents i.e. 5% denied to reply. A strong and sophisticated transportation system is necessary for the development of tourism sector in any State and National Highways play a

¹²Annual report 2025-26 (pages : 26-32), Ministry of Tourism, Government of India <http://tourism.gov.in>



pivotal role in this regard. National Highways act as the backbone of tourism. They connect many cities. It cuts journey hours and saves time. Villagers near National Highways get homestays as tourists prefer enjoying local food and culture. A tourist spot without road access remains hidden. We now present below the status of National Highway length in different States and Union Territories.

Table:4 State/UT-wise National Highway Length as on 31st December 2024

Sl. No.	Name of State/ Union Territory	Length (in km)
1	Andhra Pradesh	8,683
2	Arunachal Pradesh	4,367
3	Assam	4,077
4	Bihar	6,132
5	Chandigarh	15
6	Chhattisgarh	3,620
7	Delhi	157
8	Goa	299
9	Gujarat	8,111
10	Haryana	3,347
11	Himachal Pradesh	2,607
12	Jammu & Kashmir	1,935
13	Jharkhand	3,633
14	Karnataka	8,191
15	Kerala	1,858
16	Ladakh	806
17	Madhya Pradesh	9,160
18	Maharashtra	18,462
19	Manipur	1,840
20	Meghalaya	1,156
21	Mizoram	1,499
22	Nagaland	1,670
23	Odisha	5,897
24	Puducherry	64
25	Punjab	4,264
26	Rajasthan	10,733
27	Sikkim	709
28	Tamil Nadu	7,000
29	Telangana	4,926
30	Tripura	889
31	Uttar Pradesh	12,123
32	Uttarakhand	3,664
33	West Bengal	3,910



34	Andaman & Nicobar Islands	331
35	Dadra & Nagar Haveli	37
36	Daman & Diu	22
Total		1,46,195

Source: National Highways Authority of India (www.nhai.gov.in)¹³

The length of national highway in West Bengal is very poor in comparison to other States. In West Bengal, the length of national highway is only 3,910 km, but it is 18,462 km in Maharashtra, 12,123 km in Uttar Pradesh, 10,733 km in Rajasthan, 9,160 km in Madhya Pradesh, 8,191 km in Karnataka. Administrative measures are needed to enhance the length of National Highway here in West Bengal.

8.5 Lesser number of Districts:

Every district authority has a great role in developing tourism industry. For the implementation of Central policies and state policies district authority is the nodal agency to properly implement these policies. But in West Bengal the numbers of districts are very much low as compared to other states. We now present below a table to show the number of districts in some selected states including West Bengal.

Table: 5 Number of Districts in Selected States

State	Number of Districts in 2001	Number of Districts in 2011	Number of Districts in 2025
Rajasthan	32	33	41
Uttar Pradesh	70	71	75
Bihar	37	38	38
Assam	23	27	35
Jharkhand	18	24	24
Odisha	30	30	30
Chhattisgarh	16	18	33
Madhya Pradesh	45	50	55
Gujarat	25	26	34
Maharashtra	35	35	36
Andhra Pradesh	23	23	28
Karnataka	27	30	31
Tamil Nadu	30	32	38
West Bengal	18	19	23

Source: Census of India, 2011 and Integrated Government Online Directory (<https://igod.gov.in>)¹⁴

¹³ Indian Road Network, National Highways Authority of India, Ministry of Road Transport & Highways, Government of India (www.nhai.gov.in)

¹⁴ State/UT-wise list of Districts under Integrated Government Online Directory (iGOT), Govt. of India (<https://igod.gov.in>)



It is seen from the above table that Uttar Pradesh ranked 1st in respect to number of districts covering 75 districts followed by Madhya Pradesh with 52 districts, Bihar and Tamil Nadu both with 38 districts. The total numbers of districts are in Rajasthan (33), Assam (33), Jharkhand (24), Odisha (30), Gujarat (33), Andhra Pradesh (26), Karnataka (31) but in West Bengal it is only 23. It is the fact that total number of populations in West Bengal is more than that of Rajasthan, Assam, Jharkhand, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu.

At present in West Bengal there are twenty-three (23) districts but in 1951 it was 15, in 1961 it was 16, in 1971 it was 16, in 1981 it was 16, in 1991 it was 17, in 2001 it was 18, and in 2011 it was 19. Although population has increased so many times. The picture is presented below to show the number of districts in West Bengal since 1951.

Table-6: Number of Districts in West Bengal during 1951-2011

Year (As per Census)	Number of Districts
1951	15
1961	16
1971	16
1981	16
1991	17
2001	18
2011	19

Source: *Census of India, 2011*¹⁵

As there are lesser number of districts in West Bengal so the distance between the state capital and district headquarters is so long. We now present a table to show the distance from state capital i.e. Kolkata to district headquarters.

Table:7 Distance from State Capital to District Headquarters

Sl. No	District	Total Area (Sq. Km.)	Total Population	Distance from State Capital to District Headquarters (Km)
1	Burdwan	7024	7723663	105
2	Birbhum	4545	3502387	210
3	Bankura	6882	3596292	255
4	Purba Medinipur	4736	5094238	85
5	Paschim Medinipur	9345	5943300	100
6	Howrah	1467	4841638	03
7	Hooghly	3149	5520389	35

¹⁵ District Census Handbook (DCHB) , West Bengal Census Website (<http://westbengal.census.gov.in>)



8	North 24-Parganas	4094	10082852	24
9	South 24 Parganas	9960	8153176	05
10	Kolkata	185	4486679	00
11	Nadia	3927	5168488	100
12	Murshidabad	5324	7102430	200
13	Uttar Dinajpur	3140	3000849	405
14	Dakshin Dinajpur	2219	1670931	450
15	Malda	3733	3997970	330
16	Jalpaiguri	6227	3869675	614
17	Darjeeling	3149	1842034	590
18	Cooch Behar	3387	2822780	710
19	Purulia	6259	2927965	320

Source: Census of India, 2011¹⁶

As last census was conducted in 2011 and at that time there was 19 districts in West Bengal so 19 districts are included in the table. In this table Burdwan includes Purba Bardhaman and Paschim Bardhaman districts, Paschim Medinipur includes Paschim Medinipur and Jhargram districts, Jalpaiguri includes Jalpaiguri and Alipurduwar districts and Darjeeling includes Darjeeling and Kalimpong districts. From the above table it is seen that largest distance from state capital to district headquarters is 710 kms for Cooch Behar district followed by Jalpaiguri district with 614 kms and Darjeeling district with 590 kms. This long distance creates various problems for tourists, common people and officers.

9. Conclusion:

The study has stated the different policies taken by the Govt. both Central and State for the development of the tourism industry during the plan periods. These are related to financial assistance, improvement of marketing, welfare of the stake holders of tourism industry. But it is clear from the study that these are not effectively followed. The length of national highway in Maharashtra is five times than that of West Bengal. In West Bengal, the length of national highway is only 3,910 km, but it is 18,462 km in Maharashtra and 12,123 km in Uttar Pradesh. Administrative measures are needed to enhance the length of national highway here in West Bengal.

10. Suggestions:

More proposals are to be placed under 'Swadesh Darshan' scheme launched by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, for building convention centers, cafeteria, tourist facilitation centers, cultural centers, ramps at public places, etc. A Tourism University in West Bengal is to

¹⁶ District Census Handbook of different districts of West Bengal, Census of India 2011 (<http://census.gov.in>)



be established for generating public awareness, protecting culture and heritage and promoting sustainable tourism. Land Bank is to be formed for the development of tourism sector. As the numbers of districts in West Bengal are very much low as compared to other states so more new districts are to be created to reduce the distance between state capital and district headquarter for the development of tourism sector. Improvements of infrastructure results development of tourism sector hence leads to high employment opportunities and overall economic development.

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