

PILGRIMAGE TOURISM AND THE HOSPITALITY SECTOR IN ROHILKHAND: INDUSTRY PERSPECTIVES, ROLES, AND CHALLENGES

¹Mr. Pankaj, ²Dr. Indraneel Bose

¹Research Scholar, ²Associate Professor & Head

Bhikaji Cama Subharti College of Hotel Management Swami Vivekanad Subharti University
Merrut, Uttar Pradesh, India

Abstract

Pilgrimage tourism has emerged as an important component of India's tourism sector, generating demand for accommodation, food and beverage services, transportation, retail and other hospitality-related activities. The growth of religious travel has created new opportunities for the hospitality industry while also generating challenges related to seasonal demand, infrastructure, service quality, competition, sustainability and changing visitor expectations. The present study, "Pilgrimage Tourism and the Hospitality Sector in Rohilkhand: Industry Perspectives, Roles, and Challenges," examines the relationship between pilgrimage tourism and the hospitality sector in the Rohilkhand region of Uttar Pradesh. The study focuses on the role of hotels and hospitality establishments in supporting pilgrims and religious tourists and examines the perceptions of hotel owners, managers and employees regarding pilgrimage-tourism development. It further identifies major operational challenges and examines the economic and employment opportunities associated with pilgrimage tourism for the hospitality sector and local communities. The study is based on a review of literature from 2000 to 2026 covering pilgrimage tourism, religious destinations, accommodation services, visitor experiences, destination development, and infrastructure and hospitality management in India. The literature indicates that pilgrimage tourism can stimulate hotel demand, employment, local entrepreneurship and tourism infrastructure, while inadequate accommodation, transportation, sanitation, seasonal fluctuations, environmental pressure and service-management issues remain important concerns. The study highlights the need for coordinated planning among tourism authorities, religious institutions, local communities and hospitality businesses. Sustainable hospitality practices, digital accommodation services, employee training and improved infrastructure can further support pilgrimage-tourism development. The study contributes to the existing literature by emphasizing the relatively underexplored perspective of the hospitality industry in Rohilkhand and provides a basis for future research and sustainable tourism planning in the region.

Keywords: Pilgrimage Tourism, Hospitality Sector, Rohilkhand, Religious Tourism, Hotel Industry

Introduction

Pilgrimage tourism is one of the oldest and most significant forms of tourism in India. Unlike conventional leisure tourism, pilgrimage tourism is strongly connected with religious beliefs, spirituality, cultural traditions, rituals and sacred places. People travel to pilgrimage destinations for worship, spiritual fulfillment, participation in religious ceremonies, seeking blessings, fulfilling religious obligations and experiencing cultural traditions. At the same time, modern pilgrimage travel increasingly combines religious motivations with cultural exploration, social interaction, sightseeing and other tourism activities. Consequently, pilgrimage destinations have developed into complex tourism spaces where religious institutions, local communities, government agencies, transport providers, hotels, restaurants, retailers and other service providers interact with visitors.

India has considerable potential for pilgrimage tourism because of its diverse religious and cultural heritage. The country contains important pilgrimage destinations associated with Hinduism, Islam, Sikhism, Buddhism, Jainism and other religious traditions. The Ministry of Tourism has recognized pilgrimage and spiritual tourism as an important component of tourism development and has emphasized the need for integrated development of pilgrimage destinations. The government's PRASHAD programme specifically identifies infrastructure requirements such as accommodation, roads, last-mile connectivity, sanitation, hygiene and waste management as important issues in religious tourism development. The development of pilgrimage tourism has implications that extend beyond religious sites themselves. A pilgrimage destination requires a network of supporting services to accommodate visitors. These services include hotels, guesthouses, dharamshalas, homestays, restaurants, food outlets, transportation, travel agencies, guides, retail shops and other tourism-related businesses. Among these, the hospitality sector plays a particularly important role because accommodation and food services directly influence

the comfort and overall experience of pilgrims and tourists. Shinde (2011), in his study of Vrindavan, demonstrated that religious institutions and charitable trusts contribute to religious tourism by arranging accommodation, food and transportation, illustrating the importance of hospitality-related services within pilgrimage economies. The relationship between pilgrimage tourism and hospitality has become increasingly important as religious destinations experience changes in visitor numbers, infrastructure and visitor expectations. Pilgrims who previously depended mainly on traditional accommodation facilities are increasingly exposed to a wider range of lodging options. These include budget hotels, mid-scale hotels, branded hotels, guesthouses, homestays, online accommodation and religious accommodation facilities. This diversification creates both opportunities and challenges for hotel businesses. Hotels can benefit from increased occupancy, food and beverage sales, employment generation and investment, but they must also respond to seasonal demand, competition, infrastructure limitations, changing customer expectations and the distinctive cultural requirements of pilgrimage visitors.

The hospitality sector is particularly important during religious festivals and major pilgrimage events when visitor numbers can increase considerably within a short period. Such fluctuations create operational challenges for hotels, including managing room availability, staffing, food production, transportation arrangements, cleanliness and guest services. At the same time, periods of high pilgrimage demand can create substantial economic opportunities for accommodation providers and other local businesses. Therefore, understanding pilgrimage tourism from the perspective of the hospitality industry is important for evaluating the broader economic and tourism-development effects of religious travel.

Previous research has established the importance of pilgrimage tourism for destination development. Shinde (2012), in his study of Vrindavan, found that religious tourism activity was closely connected with accommodation, transport and other tourism services. The study also demonstrated that the growth of pilgrimage activity contributed to the development of hotels, guesthouses and restaurants. Similarly, research on Shirdi has demonstrated how pilgrimage destinations can undergo substantial urban and socio-spatial transformation as visitor numbers increase. Shirdi developed from a relatively small settlement into a major religious tourism destination with substantial visitor flows, creating wider implications for local services and businesses. The hospitality industry therefore acts as an important link between pilgrimage demand and local tourism development. Hotels do not simply provide rooms; they provide food, sanitation, security, information, transportation assistance and other services that contribute to the visitor experience. Hotel employees also interact directly with pilgrims and may influence their perception of the destination. In this context, hotel managers and employees can provide valuable information regarding visitor behaviour, seasonal patterns, service requirements, operational difficulties and infrastructure deficiencies. However, much pilgrimage-tourism research has traditionally concentrated on pilgrims, religious experiences, destination management and community perceptions, with comparatively less attention given to the perceptions and experiences of hotel-sector stakeholders.

The issue is particularly relevant in Uttar Pradesh, one of India's most important states for religious and pilgrimage tourism. The state contains numerous sacred destinations associated with different religious traditions. Government tourism information identifies Uttar Pradesh as a major religious destination with important Hindu, Buddhist, Jain and Sufi heritage. The growth of major destinations such as Ayodhya, Varanasi, Mathura-Vrindavan and Prayagraj has also demonstrated how pilgrimage activity can stimulate accommodation, food services, transportation and other tourism businesses.

Within Uttar Pradesh, the Rohilkhand region represents an important but comparatively less studied geographical context for pilgrimage and religious tourism. Rohilkhand is associated with a diverse cultural and religious heritage and includes areas such as Bareilly, Budaun, Shahjahanpur, Pilibhit, Rampur and Moradabad. The cultural documentation of the region identifies its religious traditions, pilgrimage places, festivals, fairs and cultural practices as important components of its regional heritage.

The region contains several religious and cultural attractions that contribute to visitor movement. Bareilly, for example, contains Hindu temples, Sufi shrines, mosques and Sikh religious institutions. The official district tourism information describes Bareilly as a city containing numerous temples, including ISKCON Temple and Pashupati Nath Temple, as well as important mosques, dargahs and gurudwaras. Moradabad also contains pilgrimage attractions such as Sai Temple and Pataleshwar Temple, which attract devotees from surrounding areas. These destinations create a potential demand for accommodation, food and beverage services, transportation and other hospitality facilities.

The presence of tourism accommodation in the region further indicates the relationship between pilgrimage and hospitality. The Uttar Pradesh State Tourism Development Corporation operates or lists tourism accommodation facilities in several Rohilkhand locations, including Hotel Rohila in Bareilly, Rahi Tourist Bungalow in Badaun, Rahi Tourist Bungalow in Moradabad and Rahi Tourist Bungalow in Shahjahanpur. Such facilities represent part of the broader accommodation infrastructure through which visitors can be served in the region.

The importance of Rohilkhand as a potential religious tourism region has also gained policy attention. In a 2025 response concerning the promotion of religious tourism in Bareilly, the Government of India stated that central tourism schemes, including Swadesh Darshan and PRASHAD, provide financial assistance for tourism infrastructure development and that proposals for tourism development can be submitted by state governments and other agencies. This indicates that religious tourism development in the region is connected with broader government efforts to improve tourism infrastructure.

Despite this potential, the development of pilgrimage tourism can also generate challenges for the hospitality industry. Hotels may face shortages of rooms during peak pilgrimage periods while experiencing relatively low occupancy during off-season periods. Businesses may also face challenges related to transportation, parking, sanitation, waste management, water supply, electricity, staff availability, pricing, competition and visitor management. The Government of India's pilgrimage-tourism guidelines similarly identify inadequate budget accommodation, roads, last-mile connectivity, sewage, hygiene, cleanliness and solid-waste management as significant issues requiring attention. Another important issue is the changing nature of the pilgrimage tourist. Contemporary visitors may not fit into a single category of traditional pilgrim. Some visitors may travel primarily for religious purposes, while others combine religious activities with sightseeing, cultural exploration, shopping, food experiences and leisure. This creates a more diverse hospitality market. Hotels therefore need to understand differences in visitor expectations concerning price, cleanliness, food, location, comfort, safety and service quality.

Technology has further changed the relationship between pilgrimage tourism and hospitality. Visitors can now search for destinations, compare hotels, read online reviews, make reservations and make digital payments before and during their pilgrimage journeys. Online travel agencies and digital platforms have increased the visibility of smaller accommodation establishments while simultaneously creating greater competition based on price, service quality and customer reviews. Consequently, the hotel industry in pilgrimage destinations needs to adapt to changing consumer behaviour and increasingly digital travel planning.

Sustainability is another important dimension of pilgrimage hospitality. Large numbers of visitors can place pressure on water resources, energy consumption, sanitation systems and waste-management facilities. Hotels located near pilgrimage sites can contribute to sustainable tourism through responsible water management, energy conservation, waste segregation, reduction of single-use plastics, local sourcing and environmentally responsible food-service practices. Sustainable hospitality can therefore help pilgrimage destinations accommodate visitors while reducing pressure on local resources.

The hospitality sector also has an important role in local economic development. The expansion of hotels and other tourism businesses can generate direct employment for reception staff, housekeeping personnel, food production workers, service staff, security employees and managers. Indirect employment may also be created through suppliers, transportation providers, local food producers, handicraft businesses and other tourism-related activities. Thus, pilgrimage tourism can potentially create a broader economic network extending beyond the religious site itself.

However, the economic benefits of pilgrimage tourism are not automatically distributed equally. Small hotels and local businesses may face competition from larger hotel chains, online accommodation providers and religious institutions offering low-cost accommodation. Local communities may also experience pressure on infrastructure and resources during peak pilgrimage periods. Therefore, understanding the perceptions of hotel owners and managers is important for identifying whether pilgrimage tourism is perceived primarily as an economic opportunity, an operational challenge, or a combination of both. The study is significant because existing Indian literature has examined pilgrimage experiences, religious institutions, local communities, destination development, infrastructure and visitor behaviour, but comparatively limited attention has been given to the hotel industry's perspective in emerging pilgrimage regions. The Rohilkhand region provides an appropriate context for addressing this gap because of its diverse religious heritage, pilgrimage attractions, cultural resources and developing tourism

infrastructure. By examining the hospitality sector in Rohilkhand, the study can contribute to a better understanding of the relationship between pilgrimage tourism and hotel-sector development. It can identify the role of accommodation providers, examine business opportunities created by pilgrimage visitors, assess operational challenges, and explore issues related to infrastructure, service quality, employment and sustainability. The findings may also provide useful information for tourism planners, hotel managers, local authorities and other stakeholders involved in the development of pilgrimage tourism.

Overall, pilgrimage tourism should be understood not only as movement towards sacred places but also as a broader tourism system involving visitors, religious institutions, local communities, government agencies and hospitality businesses. The hotel industry forms an important component of this system because it supports visitors before, during and after their pilgrimage experience. Studying this relationship in Rohilkhand can therefore provide a region-specific contribution to the wider literature on pilgrimage tourism and hospitality in India.

Literature Review: Pilgrimage Tourism and the Hospitality Sector in India, 2000–2026

The literature published between 2000 and 2010 shows that pilgrimage tourism in India gradually moved beyond being understood only as a religious activity and began to be examined as a wider tourism, socio-economic, cultural and destination-management phenomenon. The studies during this period particularly discussed sacred destinations, pilgrim and tourist behaviour, host-community perceptions, economic benefits, cultural identity, destination management and the interaction between pilgrimage and tourism. However, comparatively limited attention was given specifically to the hotel and hospitality industry's role and perceptions, which provides a useful research gap for a study on the Rohilkhand region.

2000 – Gesler and Pierce

Gesler and Pierce (2000) examined the religious and geographical characteristics of Varanasi, one of India's most important pilgrimage destinations. Their study explored the relationship between sacred geography, pilgrim activities and the built environment of Varanasi. The authors showed that pilgrimage experiences are strongly connected with the physical and cultural characteristics of the destination. Their work is relevant to hospitality research because accommodation, food services, transportation and other tourism facilities operate within this sacred geographical environment. The study therefore provides an important foundation for understanding pilgrimage destinations as places where religious activities and tourism-related services coexist.

2001 – Joseph and Kavoori

Joseph and Kavoori (2001) studied tourism and the host community in Pushkar, Rajasthan, an important Hindu pilgrimage destination. They found that the local community experienced an ambivalent relationship with tourism: tourism generated economic benefits while also creating concerns about cultural and religious traditions. The study demonstrated that local residents were economically involved in tourism even when some aspects of tourism were perceived as conflicting with local values. This finding is particularly relevant to the hospitality sector because hotels, guesthouses, restaurants and other tourism businesses are part of the local economic system surrounding pilgrimage destinations. The authors' work suggests that understanding stakeholder perceptions is essential when examining the development of pilgrimage tourism.

2002 – Singh

Singh (2002) examined the management of tourist and pilgrim mobility in the Indian Himalayas. The study highlighted the increasing movement of visitors to pilgrimage and tourism destinations and considered the impacts associated with concentrated visitor flows. The research is relevant to the present topic because pilgrimage destinations require adequate infrastructure and management of accommodation, transportation, sanitation and other visitor services. The findings indicate that pilgrimage tourism cannot be considered independently from destination-management challenges, particularly where large numbers of visitors arrive within relatively short periods.

2003 – Development of the domestic tourism perspective

For **2003**, the literature available in the major scholarly sources reviewed here provides less direct evidence of a dedicated India-specific hotel-sector study on pilgrimage tourism. Nevertheless, the early-2000s research

environment increasingly treated domestic travel, cultural tourism and pilgrimage as interconnected areas of tourism research. This period is important for the present study because it represents the transition from viewing pilgrimage primarily as a religious movement toward examining its broader tourism and economic dimensions. A later review of Indian tourism research confirms that the period 1997–2004 constituted a distinct phase in the development of published research on Indian tourism and hospitality.

2004 – Singh

Singh (2004) examined the relationship between religion, heritage and travel in the Indian Himalayas. The study explained that pilgrimage has a long historical connection with travel in India and argued that religious journeys should be understood in relation to heritage, culture and geographical place. The research is useful for the present study because pilgrimage destinations are not merely locations for religious rituals; they also become destinations requiring visitor accommodation, food, transportation and other hospitality facilities. Thus, the study provides a conceptual basis for examining how pilgrimage activity can stimulate broader tourism and hospitality development.

2005 – Sharpley and Sundaram

Sharpley and Sundaram (2005) investigated ashram tourism in Pondicherry, focusing on tourists visiting the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and Auroville. The authors examined visitor motivations and experiences and identified different categories of visitors according to their relationship with spirituality. Their findings demonstrated that visitors to religious and spiritual destinations may have both religious and non-religious motivations. This is important for hotels and other hospitality businesses because accommodation providers at pilgrimage destinations may need to serve visitors with different expectations, motivations and service requirements. The study therefore supports the idea that hospitality services in religious destinations should consider the diversity of visitor experiences rather than treating all visitors as traditional pilgrims.

2005 – Singh

Singh (2005) further examined pilgrimage in the Indian Himalayas, distinguishing between pilgrimage and tourism while exploring the changing nature of sacred travel. The study discussed the idea of the pilgrim in relation to sacred places and geographical attachment. It showed that contemporary pilgrimage involves complex relationships between religious devotion, travel and the destination itself. For the hospitality industry, this distinction is significant because accommodation and other services must operate within a setting where visitors may simultaneously behave as pilgrims and tourists.

2006 – Shinde

Shinde (2006) examined the intersection between contemporary pilgrimage and tourism in India. The study highlighted the growing overlap between religious travel and tourism and questioned the strict separation between a pilgrim and a tourist. This perspective is particularly important for hospitality research because hotels and other accommodation establishments serve visitors whose reasons for travel may include religious devotion, family travel, cultural exploration and leisure. The study therefore supports examining pilgrimage tourism as a broader tourism system in which hospitality providers play an important supporting role.

2006 – Partha Sarathy

Partha Sarathy (2006) provided an overview of religious tourism and discussed its importance across different religious traditions in India, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism and Jainism. The author emphasized the capacity of religious tourism to generate substantial visitor flows and economic activity. This perspective is directly relevant to the hotel industry because high visitor volumes create demand for accommodation, food and beverage services, transportation and other hospitality-related services. The study therefore strengthens the argument that religious tourism should be considered an important component of the tourism economy rather than only a religious phenomenon.

2007 – Shinde

Shinde (2007) examined the question of whether visits to sacred sites in India should be understood as religious tourism or pilgrimage. The author emphasized the difficulty of maintaining a strict distinction between the two

forms of travel. The study is significant for hospitality research because visitors to sacred destinations may use the same accommodation, restaurants, transportation and tourism facilities regardless of whether their primary motivation is religious or tourism-oriented. Consequently, hotel businesses in pilgrimage destinations must respond to a heterogeneous visitor market.

2007 – McCleary and others: religion, spirituality and tourism representation

Research during this period also increasingly examined how India was represented to travellers through tourism information and travel media. McCleary and colleagues' work on religion and spirituality in representations of India (2007) demonstrated that religious traditions and sacred places could be presented differently to domestic and international travellers. Such representations are relevant to hospitality because destination image influences visitor expectations and consequently the type of services expected from accommodation and tourism businesses.

2008 – Bandyopadhyay, Morais and Chick

Bandyopadhyay, Morais, and Chick (2008) examined religion and identity in India's heritage tourism. Their research compared representations of India's heritage in government tourism materials, domestic tourism media and popular tourism media. The study demonstrated that religion and heritage are closely connected to the ways India is represented as a tourism destination. This has implications for pilgrimage destinations because hotels and tourism businesses operate within culturally and religiously constructed destination images. Hospitality providers may therefore need to understand local religious identity and cultural expectations while developing tourism services.

2008 – Libison and Muraleedharan

Libison and Muraleedharan (2008) examined the economic benefits of Sabarimala pilgrimage tourism in Kerala, with particular reference to Pandalam. Their empirical study focused on the economic activity generated during the pilgrimage season and found positive effects on local income, employment and living standards. This study provides especially important evidence for the present research because it demonstrates that pilgrimage tourism can produce economic benefits beyond the religious institution itself. Hotels, restaurants, transportation providers, retailers and other local businesses can form part of the wider economic network generated by pilgrimage flows.

2009 – Libison and Muraleedharan

Libison and Muraleedharan (2009) further documented their Sabarimala-related research, emphasizing the relationship between pilgrimage activity and local economic development. Their findings suggested that the pilgrimage season contributed to employment, income generation and improvements in the standard of living of residents in the Pandalam area. From a hospitality perspective, the study indicates that pilgrimage tourism can create seasonal demand for accommodation and other visitor services. It also suggests that the contribution of pilgrimage tourism should be examined at the destination level rather than only through visitor numbers.

2010 – Collins-Kreiner

Collins-Kreiner (2010) reviewed the changing scholarship on pilgrimage and argued that the boundary between pilgrimage and tourism had become increasingly blurred. The study identified important social, cultural, political and economic dimensions of pilgrimage and showed how contemporary pilgrimage can overlap with tourism. This perspective is useful for studying hotel businesses because hospitality establishments serve the practical needs of visitors irrespective of whether their journey is classified as pilgrimage, religious tourism or general tourism. The study therefore provides a broader theoretical foundation for examining the hospitality industry's involvement in pilgrimage destinations.

2010 – Collins-Kreiner: pilgrimage, tourism and destination planning

Collins-Kreiner (2010) also examined the geographical transformations associated with pilgrimage and tourism and discussed their implications for planning and economic activities. The study indicated that pilgrimage destinations undergo changes as visitor movements increase and tourism becomes integrated with destination economies. Such changes are directly relevant to hotel development because increasing visitor flows can create demand for accommodation infrastructure while simultaneously producing challenges relating to congestion, resource use and destination management.

2010 – Lotus Temple study

Research on the Lotus Temple in New Delhi (2010) investigated the relationship between socio-cultural factors and tourist satisfaction in a pilgrimage-tourism context. Based on questionnaire data from 196 respondents, the study found that visitor motivations differed between domestic and foreign tourists and that socio-cultural factors were associated with overall tourist satisfaction. The findings are particularly relevant to the hospitality sector because visitor satisfaction is also an important consideration for accommodation and service providers operating around religious destinations.

2011 – Shinde

Shinde (2011) examined the role of charitable trusts in religious tourism through a case study of Vrindavan, a major pilgrimage destination in northern India. The study found that religious trusts were important actors in the pilgrimage economy and were involved in providing or facilitating essential tourism infrastructure, including accommodation, food and transportation. Shinde explained that these institutions did not simply manage religious activities; they also influenced the visitor experience and the functioning of the local tourism economy. The study is particularly relevant to the hospitality sector because it demonstrates that accommodation and food services at pilgrimage destinations can be provided through a combination of private businesses, religious institutions and charitable organizations. The findings suggest that understanding the hotel industry's role requires consideration of the wider institutional structure of pilgrimage destinations.

2011 – Singh

Singh (2011) examined pilgrimage and tourism in Varanasi and Sarnath, focusing on the relationship between sacred places, tourism development and community life. The author discussed the increasing importance of pilgrimage tourism and highlighted tensions between religious meanings and tourism-oriented development. The study suggested that tourism promotion can contribute to the preservation and visibility of heritage, but destination managers must also recognize the contemporary religious significance of sacred places. For hospitality businesses, this indicates the need to provide tourism services while remaining sensitive to the cultural and religious character of the destination.

2011 – Shinde

Shinde (2011) also examined pilgrimage sites such as Shirdi and Tuljapur, focusing on the spatial and social organization of religious tourism. The research showed that different pilgrimage destinations have different management structures. In Tuljapur, religious specialists and informal networks played an important role in facilitating pilgrimage activities, including lodging and boarding, while in Shirdi, a public charitable trust, hotels, guides and tour operators contributed to visitor management. This study is highly relevant to hospitality research because it directly identifies hotels and accommodation providers as mediators of pilgrim movement and experience.

2012 – Shinde

Shinde (2012) investigated policy, planning and management for religious tourism in Indian pilgrimage sites, using Vrindavan as the principal case study. The study reported that a substantial part of religious tourism activity operated outside conventional state tourism structures. Religious actors provided services such as accommodation and transportation, while the absence of adequate policy coordination and infrastructure created management challenges. The research further noted the development of hotels, guesthouses and restaurants in response to growing domestic and international religious tourism. These findings are particularly important for the present study because they demonstrate that the growth of pilgrimage tourism creates both business opportunities and regulatory/infrastructural challenges for hospitality providers.

2013 – Shinde

Shinde (2013) continued to emphasize the relationship between religious tourism, destination development and environmental change. His work on Vrindavan demonstrated that large visitor flows can affect the physical and social environment of pilgrimage destinations. The increasing number of pilgrims and tourists creates pressure on accommodation, transportation, sanitation, water, waste-management and other urban services. This is relevant to

hotels because the hospitality sector forms part of the destination infrastructure and must respond to fluctuations in visitor demand while operating within environmentally sensitive religious destinations. The broader Vrindavan research subsequently published in *Geoforum* documented these connections between pilgrimage, tourism and environmental transformation.

2014 – Poria, Reichel and Cohen

Poria, Reichel, and Cohen (2014) contributed to the wider understanding of religious tourism by emphasizing that visitors' experiences of sacred destinations are influenced by their personal relationship with religion and the meaning they attach to the destination. This perspective is useful for hospitality research because service providers at pilgrimage destinations encounter visitors with different motivations and expectations. Some visitors may be strongly motivated by religious devotion, while others may combine pilgrimage with cultural, heritage or recreational activities. Consequently, hospitality providers may need to accommodate different categories of visitors rather than relying on a single model of the pilgrimage tourist.

2014 – Maddrell and others

Research during this period increasingly examined pilgrimage as a multidimensional visitor experience rather than simply a religious journey. The growing literature emphasized the emotional, social, cultural and experiential dimensions of pilgrimage. This development is important for hotels because accommodation quality, food services, cleanliness, location, safety and staff interaction can become part of the overall pilgrimage experience. Thus, hospitality services should be considered as one component of the broader destination experience.

2014 – Kumbh Mela research

Researchers examining the 2013 Kumbh Mela in Allahabad reported that pilgrims had diverse motivations and experiences, including prayer, meditation, participation in religious discourse, engagement in spiritual activities and service to others. The research demonstrated that pilgrims should not be treated as a completely homogeneous group. The Kumbh Mela case is particularly relevant to the hospitality sector because very large pilgrimage gatherings create temporary and permanent demand for accommodation, food, transportation, sanitation and visitor-support services.

2015 – Sharma and Kesar

Sharma and Kesar (2015) examined the possibility of integrating pilgrimage tourism and rural tourism in the Jammu region, using the Vaishno Devi Shrine as the focal context. Their research found that pilgrimage tourism contributed to the development of surrounding service activities, including transport, hospitality, camping, retail and other small-scale sectors. The authors also identified infrastructural problems in villages surrounding the shrine and argued that pilgrimage tourism could help distribute tourism benefits into rural areas. The findings are directly relevant to the present study because they demonstrate how pilgrimage visitors can generate economic opportunities for hospitality businesses beyond the immediate religious site.

2015 – Jeyakumar, Rajaram and colleagues

Jeyakumar and Rajaram (2015) examined pilgrimage tourism in Tamil Nadu, focusing on its importance, problems and promotional possibilities. The authors argued that pilgrimage tourism could contribute to investment, revenue generation, employment and socio-economic development. At the same time, they emphasized the need for government-supported infrastructure and development initiatives. The study is relevant to hotel-sector research because accommodation and food services depend strongly on destination infrastructure, accessibility and visitor-management systems.

2016 – Religious tourism and visitor experience

Research during the middle of the decade increasingly connected pilgrimage tourism with service quality, visitor satisfaction and destination management. The literature indicated that religious destinations were becoming more complex tourism environments where visitors expected adequate accommodation, transportation, cleanliness, safety and information services. This transition was important for the hospitality industry because hotels increasingly became part of the visitor's overall destination experience rather than functioning simply as places to sleep.

2017 – Pilgrimage destinations and sustainable development

By 2017, research on pilgrimage tourism increasingly emphasized the need for sustainable destination management. Large visitor concentrations can generate employment and business opportunities but can also increase pressure on infrastructure, natural resources, waste-management systems and local communities. These issues are particularly important for hotels because accommodation establishments consume water and energy and generate solid and food waste. Sustainable hospitality practices can therefore become an important component of sustainable pilgrimage-destination development.

2018 – Mohd

Mohd (2018) examined the potential for pilgrimage tourism in Pargana Kuthar, Anantnag, Kashmir. The study identified several shrines and argued that the region possessed considerable potential for pilgrimage tourism development. However, the author emphasized the need for appropriate tourism products, sustainability measures and destination-development strategies. The research is relevant to the hospitality sector because the development of relatively less-established pilgrimage destinations requires adequate accommodation, visitor facilities, transportation and other supporting tourism services.

2018 – Pilgrimage tourism and destination infrastructure

The literature during 2018 increasingly recognized that the attractiveness of pilgrimage destinations depends not only on religious significance but also on accessibility, infrastructure, safety, sanitation and accommodation. This represented a shift from an exclusively religious interpretation toward a destination-management perspective. For hotel businesses, such developments created opportunities for new accommodation facilities while simultaneously increasing expectations regarding service quality and visitor comfort.

2019 – Verma and Sarangi

Verma and Sarangi (2019) developed a model of religious tourism using the 2016 Ujjain Kumbh Mela as a case study. Their study used data from 2,326 respondents and examined the relationships among motivation, service quality, safety, satisfaction and event loyalty. The researchers found that perceived motivation, service quality and safety were important factors associated with pilgrim satisfaction and intentions to revisit or recommend the event. These findings are highly relevant to hospitality research because hotels and other tourism-service providers contribute directly to visitors' perceptions of service quality and safety. The study therefore provides empirical support for examining hospitality services as an important component of pilgrimage tourism experiences.

2019 – Puri and Varanasi

Research comparing Puri and Varanasi examined local residents' perceptions of tourism impacts, community satisfaction and support for tourism development. The study demonstrated that pilgrimage destinations should not be evaluated solely from the visitor perspective. Local residents also experience economic, social and cultural effects from tourism. The authors found differences between Puri and Varanasi in residents' perceptions of economic and socio-cultural tourism impacts. This is important for a study of the hospitality industry because hotels operate within local communities and their expansion can influence employment, income, infrastructure and community relationships.

2019 – Vidhya and Selvam

Vidhya and Selvam (2019) investigated factors influencing pilgrims' perceptions when selecting accommodation and transportation at the Golden Temple in Vellore, Tamil Nadu. Their research specifically recognized accommodation as an important component of pilgrimage travel and discussed problems related to transportation and hotel comfort. This study has particular significance for the proposed Rohilkhand research because it moves beyond general pilgrimage tourism and considers the decision-making and accommodation requirements of pilgrims.

2020 – Khare, Dixit and Sarkar

Khare, Dixit, and Sarkar (2020) investigated online travel purchasing behaviour in the context of pilgrimage packages in India. Using data from 356 travel website customers, the authors examined network benefits,

pilgrimage packages, website interactivity, information accessibility, trust and customer reviews. Their findings showed that pilgrimage packages and website interactivity contributed to trust, while customer reviews influenced the relationship between trust and continued website use. This research demonstrates the growing importance of digital channels in pilgrimage tourism, with implications for hotels because accommodation providers increasingly depend on online travel platforms, digital reviews and pilgrimage-oriented packages to reach visitors.

2020 – Religious tourism and the hospitality supply chain

Research published around 2020 also highlighted the vulnerability of India's religious tourism supply chain. The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the temporary closure of major religious destinations and disrupted accommodation, transportation, food services and other tourism activities. Researchers examining the Indian religious tourism supply chain argued that resilience, infrastructure, last-mile connectivity and standard operating procedures were important for managing future disruptions. The study specifically identified religious tourism as an economic system involving multiple interconnected stakeholders. This perspective is highly relevant to hotel-industry research because accommodation businesses are directly affected by sudden changes in pilgrim flows and destination access.

2021 – Mittal and Sinha

Mittal and Sinha (2021) examined the resilience of the religious tourism supply chain in the context of post-pandemic risks. Their study highlighted how religious tourism depends on interconnected services such as transportation, accommodation, food services, destination facilities and other tourism-supporting activities. The authors argued that the COVID-19 pandemic exposed the vulnerability of religious tourism destinations and emphasized the need for resilient supply chains, better coordination among stakeholders and stronger operational preparedness. For the present study of Rohilkhand, this work is relevant because hotels and other hospitality businesses are dependent on pilgrim mobility and the availability of supporting infrastructure.

2022 – Bhandari

Bhandari (2022) investigated visitor perceptions of religious tourism through a case study of a religious heritage site in India. The study emphasized that visitors are important stakeholders in religious tourism and that their experience should be considered when managing religious heritage destinations. The findings indicate that effective destination management requires attention to visitor expectations, spiritual experience and stakeholder participation. This perspective is important for understanding how hotels in pilgrimage destinations can respond to the changing expectations of pilgrims and religious tourists.

2022 – Shinde

Shinde (2022) examined the effectiveness of Buddhist pilgrimage circuits in India as tourism products and strategies for heritage tourism development. The study demonstrated that pilgrimage circuits can connect several religious and cultural attractions and encourage longer and more organized visitor journeys. Such circuit-based development has implications for hospitality because visitors travelling between several pilgrimage destinations require accommodation, food, transportation and other tourism services. The study therefore supports the argument that pilgrimage tourism can contribute to wider hospitality-sector development when destinations are developed as interconnected tourism circuits.

2022 – Gayathri, Dixit and Verma

Gayathri, Dixit and Verma (2022) examined patience and aggression among religious tourists attending the Kumbh Mela in Ujjain, India. Based on a survey of 683 participants, the study identified factors related to crowd movement, tolerance, obstruction, norm violation and social behaviour. The authors suggested that understanding pilgrim behaviour is important for developing safer and more effective management systems at large religious gatherings. For the hospitality industry, these findings are significant because hotels, restaurants, transport providers and other service organizations must prepare for sudden increases in demand and large groups of pilgrims during major religious events.

2022 – Agarwal and Parashar

Agarwal and Parashar (2022) explored the development of holistic religious tourism using traditional Indian practices. Their study presented religious tourism as an experience involving spiritual, cultural and social dimensions rather than merely a visit to a religious site. This broader understanding is relevant to hospitality businesses because accommodation and food-service providers increasingly form part of the overall pilgrimage experience. Hotels operating near religious destinations therefore need to consider cultural expectations, spiritual requirements and the distinctive needs of pilgrimage travellers.

2022 – Western Maharashtra study

A 2022 study on pilgrimage and socio-economic development in Western Maharashtra examined the relationship between religious tourism, infrastructure, employment and local development. The study reported that religious tourism contributed to infrastructure development and employment while also identifying uneven economic benefits, environmental pressures and socio-cultural concerns. The findings suggest that pilgrimage tourism can create opportunities for local hospitality businesses, but these benefits depend on appropriate planning, community participation and sustainable destination management.

2023 – Government tourism evidence

Government data reported in 2023 showed the substantial economic scale of religious tourism in India. Religious-tourism destinations generated an estimated ₹1,34,543 crore in 2022, compared with ₹65,070 crore in 2021, while domestic tourist visits to pilgrimage places increased substantially during the same period. The Ministry of Tourism also highlighted the role of the PRASHAD scheme in improving infrastructure at pilgrimage and heritage destinations. These developments demonstrate the importance of pilgrimage tourism as a source of demand for accommodation, food and beverage services, transportation, retail and other hospitality-related activities.

2024 – Joglekar

Joglekar (2024) studied the prospects and challenges of pilgrimage tourism in Shirdi, Maharashtra. The study, published in *Atithya: A Journal of Hospitality*, is particularly relevant to the present research because it connects pilgrimage tourism with hospitality-sector concerns. The study highlights Shirdi as an important pilgrimage destination and considers both its development potential and the challenges associated with managing increasing pilgrimage activity. The findings support the need to examine how hospitality establishments respond to growing religious-tourism demand while maintaining appropriate service standards.

2024 – Rembhotkar and Tyagi

Rembhotkar and Tyagi (2024) examined religious tourism in and around Pune as an emerging tourism trend. Their work demonstrates that religious tourism is increasingly being considered beyond traditional pilgrimage practices and is becoming an important component of destination development. The emergence of religious tourism around urban areas creates opportunities for hotels, restaurants, transport operators and other hospitality businesses. This is relevant to Rohilkhand because religious destinations in the region can similarly be studied in terms of their capacity to generate wider tourism and hospitality activity.

2024 – Hariharan, Vedapradha, Pandey and Sudha

Hariharan et al. (2024) specifically examined tourists' experiences of hotel accommodation during pilgrimage tourism in southern India. The study used qualitative research and analysed the experiences of 76 pilgrims from Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. The findings identified **cleanliness, hotel staff and accommodation location** as important themes influencing pilgrims' accommodation experiences. The study is directly relevant to the proposed Rohilkhand research because it demonstrates that accommodation is not simply a supporting activity but an important component of the overall pilgrimage experience. It also suggests that hotel managers should pay particular attention to sanitation, employee interaction, accessibility and location.

2024 – Lohan

Lohan (2024) examined the geographical dimensions of religious tourism and its impact on budget hotels in Northern India. The study considered religious centres such as Haridwar, Amritsar and Rishikesh and investigated

the relationship between proximity to pilgrimage sites, hotel occupancy, financial sustainability and culturally appropriate services. Seasonal fluctuations were identified as an important challenge for budget accommodation, particularly during periods of lower pilgrim demand. This study has strong relevance to Rohilkhand because the region contains pilgrimage and religious destinations where accommodation businesses may similarly experience variations in occupancy according to religious festivals, special events and pilgrimage seasons.

2024 – Dahiya, Sharma and Kapoor

Dahiya, Sharma and Kapoor (2024) examined the economic benefits and challenges of religious tourism for budget hotels in Northern India. Their study identified pilgrimage tourism as an important source of hotel demand in destinations such as Haridwar, Amritsar and Varanasi. The authors noted that religious festivals can generate high accommodation demand and provide opportunities for increased hotel revenue, while off-season periods can create problems related to declining occupancy and competition from alternative accommodation. They also emphasized the importance of service improvement, guest feedback, government support and cooperation with religious institutions. These findings provide a strong conceptual foundation for examining the perceptions and challenges of hotel operators in Rohilkhand.

2024 – Singh and Bhuyan

Singh and Bhuyan (2024) conducted a systematic review of four decades of research on religious tourism. Their review examined research published from 1979 to 2024 and identified major themes and future research areas within religious tourism. The study demonstrates that religious tourism research has expanded across issues including pilgrimage, destination development, visitor experience, community participation and tourism management. For the present study, the review also helps establish the need for more focused research on the hospitality industry itself, particularly hotel owners, managers and employees operating in less-researched pilgrimage regions.

2024 – KPMG

KPMG's 2024 report on pilgrimage and spiritual tourism in India described a transformation in the sector after the pandemic. The report highlighted the increasing influence of digital information, changing traveller expectations and the growing importance of experience-oriented spiritual travel. It also identified economic opportunities and infrastructure challenges associated with the development of pilgrimage destinations. These developments have direct implications for hotels because pilgrims increasingly use digital platforms to discover destinations, compare accommodation and organize their journeys.

2025 – MakeMyTrip pilgrimage travel trends

MakeMyTrip's 2024–25 pilgrimage travel analysis provided important recent evidence about the relationship between pilgrimage tourism and accommodation demand in India. According to the analysis, accommodation bookings across 56 pilgrimage destinations increased by 19% during FY2024–25. The report also indicated growth in premium accommodation and an expansion of hotels, homestays, apartments and hostels at pilgrimage destinations. Prayagraj, Varanasi and Ayodhya were among the destinations experiencing strong pilgrimage-related accommodation demand. These findings demonstrate that pilgrimage tourism is increasingly influencing accommodation investment and diversification in India.

2025 – Ayodhya pilgrimage tourism

Soni and Chaturvedi (2025) examined pilgrimage tourism in Ayodhya during the period April 2024 to April 2025 following the consecration of the Ram Mandir. Their study considered changes in pilgrim flows and the adaptation of urban and community systems, including perspectives from hoteliers, transport workers, shopkeepers, tour operators and other local stakeholders. The inclusion of hoteliers is particularly important because it reflects the increasing need to study pilgrimage tourism through the perspective of businesses and service providers rather than only through visitor behaviour. The Ayodhya experience provides a useful comparative context for examining how religious destinations influence hospitality businesses in regions such as Rohilkhand.

2026 – Mitra

Mitra (2026) examined religious tourism experiences in Varanasi through a phenomenological study involving 60 domestic and international tourists. The research identified spiritual, cultural, environmental, secular and educational dimensions of the religious-tourism experience. The study suggests that contemporary visitors may engage with religious destinations in multiple ways rather than solely through traditional pilgrimage practices. For the hospitality sector, this implies that hotels and other service providers may need to respond to increasingly diverse visitor expectations involving cultural experiences, comfort, information, sustainability and destination engagement.

2026 – HVS Anarock

HVS Anarock (2026) reported a growing relationship between faith-led tourism and organized hospitality in India. The report stated that religious and spiritual destinations accounted for approximately 6% of India's existing branded hotel keys but around 14% of the branded hotel development pipeline. It also identified a shift toward organized and branded accommodation in pilgrimage markets and highlighted continuing supply gaps and destination-level challenges. This evidence is particularly relevant to the proposed Rohilkhand study because it indicates that the hospitality industry is increasingly viewing religious destinations as viable hotel markets rather than solely as traditional pilgrimage centres.

2026 – KPMG

KPMG's 2026 analysis described the transformation of Indian spiritual tourism from a traditional pilgrimage-oriented model toward a broader, experience-led tourism ecosystem. The report noted that the visitor base is expanding to include experience seekers, lifestyle travellers, younger travellers and international visitors. This transformation may create new requirements for hospitality establishments, including improved accommodation quality, cultural experiences, wellness-oriented services, digital engagement and destination-based experiences. The changing nature of pilgrimage tourism therefore provides a strong basis for investigating whether hotels in Rohilkhand are prepared to respond to new visitor expectations.

Objectives

- To examine the role of the hospitality sector in promoting and supporting pilgrimage tourism in the Rohilkhand region.
- To assess the perceptions of hotel owners, managers and employees regarding the growth and development of pilgrimage tourism in Rohilkhand.
- To identify the major challenges faced by hotels and other hospitality establishments in serving pilgrims and religious tourists.
- To analyses the economic and employment opportunities generated by pilgrimage tourism for the hospitality sector and local communities in Rohilkhand.
- To explore strategies for sustainable and effective development of the hospitality sector in relation to the future growth of pilgrimage tourism in Rohilkhand.

Why Study?

The study provides several benefits for the development of pilgrimage tourism and the hospitality sector in the Rohilkhand region. It contributes to understanding the relationship between pilgrimage tourism and hotel-sector development from the perspective of hospitality stakeholders.

Benefits to the Hospitality Industry:

The study can help hotel owners, managers and employees understand the opportunities created by pilgrimage tourism. The findings can provide information about pilgrims' accommodation requirements, seasonal demand, service expectations and operational challenges. Hotels may use these insights to improve accommodation facilities, food and beverage services, cleanliness, customer service and guest satisfaction.

Benefits to Local Communities:

The development of pilgrimage tourism can create employment and entrepreneurship opportunities for local residents. Hotels, restaurants, transport operators, shops and other tourism-related businesses can generate direct and indirect income. The study can help identify ways through which local communities can participate more effectively in the tourism economy.

Benefits to Tourism Planners and Government:

The findings can provide useful information to government departments and tourism authorities for planning pilgrimage destinations. Information about accommodation shortages, transportation, sanitation, parking, waste management, and infrastructure and visitor facilities can support more effective tourism-development policies and infrastructure planning.

Benefits to Pilgrimage Destinations:

The study can help identify the factors that influence the ability of a destination to accommodate pilgrims effectively. Improvements in hospitality facilities and visitor services can contribute to a more organized and comfortable pilgrimage experience while supporting the development of the destination.

Benefits to Hotel Employees:

The study can highlight the need for appropriate training among hotel employees who serve pilgrims and religious tourists. Training in customer service, cultural sensitivity, communication, cleanliness, food safety and emergency management can help employees respond more effectively to the specific requirements of pilgrimage visitors.

Benefits for Sustainable Tourism:

The study can encourage hotels and tourism stakeholders to adopt sustainable practices such as water conservation, energy efficiency, waste segregation, reduction of single-use plastics and responsible food management. Such practices can help reduce environmental pressure associated with increasing pilgrimage activity.

Benefits of Digital Hospitality Development:

The findings may encourage hospitality businesses to make greater use of online booking systems, digital payments, online reviews, social media and other digital platforms. Digital tools can improve communication with visitors and increase the visibility of hotels among pilgrims planning their journeys.

Benefits for Small and Local Hotels:

Small and independently operated hotels can use the findings to understand pilgrimage-related demand and develop suitable services for budget-conscious visitors. This may help them compete with larger accommodation providers and diversify their customer base.

Benefits for Researchers and Academic Institutions:

The study can contribute to the academic literature on pilgrimage tourism and hospitality by providing a regional perspective on Rohilkhand. It can serve as a reference for future researchers studying religious tourism, hotel management, destination development, community participation and sustainable hospitality in India.

Benefits for Future Tourism Development in Rohilkhand:

The study can provide a foundation for developing strategies that connect religious attractions with accommodation, food services, transportation and other tourism facilities. A coordinated approach can support the development of Rohilkhand as a more organized pilgrimage-tourism region while creating opportunities for hospitality businesses and local communities.

Overall Synthesis of the 2021–2026 Literature

The literature from 2021 to 2026 demonstrates a significant shift in the study of pilgrimage tourism in India. Earlier research primarily concentrated on pilgrims, religious experiences and destination management, whereas recent studies increasingly examine accommodation, hospitality services, economic development, infrastructure, visitor expectations, digital travel behaviour and hotel investment.

The literature identifies several recurring issues. First, pilgrimage tourism generates considerable demand for accommodation and related hospitality services. Second, hotels located near pilgrimage destinations may experience strong seasonal demand, particularly during festivals and major religious events. Third, cleanliness, staff

behaviour, location, safety and service quality influence pilgrims' accommodation experiences. Fourth, pilgrimage destinations continue to face challenges involving infrastructure, crowd management, environmental sustainability and uneven development. Finally, recent industry evidence indicates increasing investment in organized and branded accommodation at religious destinations.

However, an important research gap remains. A considerable proportion of existing Indian studies examine pilgrims, visitors, residents, religious institutions, destination development and tourism policy, while relatively fewer empirical studies focus specifically on the hotel industry's own perceptions, roles and operational challenges. There is particularly limited literature examining how hotel owners, managers and employees perceive pilgrimage tourism as a source of business, employment and destination development.

This gap is especially relevant to Rohilkhand, where pilgrimage and religious destinations have potential to generate accommodation, food and beverage, transportation and other hospitality-related activities. Therefore, a study focusing on the perceptions of the hotel industry can extend existing pilgrimage-tourism research by examining the sector from the industry perspective, including its role, economic opportunities, operational challenges, seasonal demand, infrastructure requirements, service expectations and future development potential.

Future Scope of the Study

Future research on pilgrimage tourism and the hospitality sector in the Rohilkhand region can extend the present study by examining the changing relationship between pilgrimage demand and hotel-sector development. Further studies may investigate how increasing pilgrim arrivals influence hotel occupancy, room demand, pricing, employment generation, food and beverage operations, and investment in accommodation facilities.

Future research can also compare different pilgrimage destinations within Rohilkhand to identify differences in hotel infrastructure, service quality, visitor demand, accommodation availability and operational challenges. A comparative study involving destinations with different levels of pilgrimage activity could provide a broader understanding of how the hospitality industry responds to religious tourism.

Another important area for future research is the perception of hotel owners, managers and employees. Future studies can examine their views regarding seasonal demand, workforce requirements, customer expectations, religious and cultural sensitivity, employee training, service standards and competition from guesthouses, dharamshalas, homestays and online accommodation platforms.

The role of digital technology also provides an important direction for future research. Studies could examine the influence of online hotel booking, digital payments, online reviews, social media, artificial intelligence, online travel agencies and mobile applications on pilgrims' accommodation decisions in Rohilkhand. Future research may also examine whether digital platforms help small and independent hotels compete with larger accommodation providers.

Future studies may focus on sustainable pilgrimage hospitality by examining water consumption, energy use, food waste, plastic waste, waste management and environmentally responsible hotel practices. This would help determine how hospitality businesses can accommodate growing pilgrimage demand while reducing pressure on local environmental resources.

Another potential area is the relationship between pilgrimage tourism and local employment and entrepreneurship. Future researchers could examine employment opportunities created by hotels, restaurants, transport operators, tour agencies and other tourism-related businesses, particularly for local youth and small entrepreneurs.

Future research can also investigate pilgrim satisfaction and hotel service quality by collecting data directly from visitors. Variables such as cleanliness, staff behaviour, safety, location, affordability, food quality, religious sensitivity, accessibility and online reviews can be examined to understand their relationship with satisfaction, revisit intention and destination loyalty.

A longitudinal study could further examine how the hospitality sector changes over several years in response to increasing pilgrimage activity, infrastructure development, government tourism policies and major religious events. Such research would provide evidence about changes in accommodation capacity, investment, employment and service standards over time.

Future research may also examine the effects of government schemes and infrastructure development on pilgrimage tourism and hospitality businesses. Particular attention could be given to roads, public transportation, sanitation, water supply, parking, tourist information centres, safety facilities and accommodation infrastructure.

Finally, future researchers could develop a Rohilkhand Pilgrimage Hospitality Development Model incorporating pilgrimage demand, hotel infrastructure, service quality, local community participation, sustainability, digital technology and government support. Such a model could provide a framework for understanding how pilgrimage tourism can contribute to the sustainable development of the hospitality sector in the region.

Overall, future research should move beyond examining pilgrimage tourism only from the perspective of pilgrims and destinations and give greater attention to the hotel industry, hospitality workforce, local entrepreneurs and other tourism-service providers. This would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the role of hospitality in the development of pilgrimage tourism in Rohilkhand.

Key Research Gap

There is insufficient empirical research on how hotels and hospitality businesses themselves perceive and participate in pilgrimage tourism in emerging religious tourism regions of India. In particular, limited research has examined the role, perceptions, business opportunities, operational problems, infrastructure constraints and future expectations of the hotel industry in the Rohilkhand region.

Conclusion

Pilgrimage tourism has become an important component of India's tourism and hospitality sector, extending beyond traditional religious travel to include cultural experiences, accommodation, food and beverage services, transportation, shopping and other tourism-related activities. The literature reviewed from 2000 to 2026 indicates that pilgrimage destinations can contribute to local economic development by creating demand for hotels, restaurants, transport services, retail businesses and employment.

The review also demonstrates that the hospitality industry plays an important role in supporting pilgrimage tourism. Hotels and other accommodation establishments provide essential services such as lodging, food, cleanliness, safety, and information and visitor assistance. Recent research has increasingly highlighted the importance of accommodation quality, staff behaviour, location, affordability and service experience in shaping pilgrims' overall destination experience. At the same time, hospitality businesses face challenges associated with seasonal demand, overcrowding, infrastructure limitations, competition, resource consumption and changing visitor expectations.

The development of pilgrimage tourism also creates opportunities for local communities and businesses. Increased visitor movement can generate employment, encourage entrepreneurship and stimulate investment in accommodation and tourism infrastructure. However, the benefits need to be supported by effective destination planning, adequate infrastructure, sustainable resource management and coordination among government agencies, religious institutions, local communities and hospitality businesses. The literature further indicates that digitalisation is changing pilgrimage travel and hospitality. Online booking platforms, digital payments, online reviews, social media and mobile applications have influenced how visitors search for information and select accommodation. Hotels operating in pilgrimage destinations therefore increasingly need to respond to digital consumer behaviour while maintaining service quality and culturally appropriate hospitality. The Rohilkhand region provides an important context for extending this body of research. The region possesses diverse religious, cultural and heritage resources, yet comparatively limited academic attention has been given to the hospitality industry's perspective within the region. Existing research has more frequently focused on pilgrims, religious experiences, destination development, communities and infrastructure. Consequently, there remains a need to understand how hotel owners, managers and employees perceive the development of pilgrimage tourism and how they experience its economic and operational effects. The present study, "Pilgrimage Tourism and the Hospitality Sector in Rohilkhand: Industry Perspectives, Roles, and Challenges," addresses this research gap by placing the hospitality sector at the center of analysis. The study can contribute to understanding the role of hotels in supporting pilgrimage tourism, the business opportunities generated by pilgrimage visitors, the challenges faced by hospitality establishments, and the infrastructure and service requirements of the sector. The study also highlights the need for a balanced approach to pilgrimage tourism development. Expansion of tourism should be accompanied by improvements in accommodation facilities, transportation, sanitation, waste management, water and energy

management, visitor safety and workforce development. Sustainable and coordinated development can help hospitality businesses benefit from pilgrimage tourism while contributing to the long-term well-being of local communities and destinations. In conclusion, pilgrimage tourism and hospitality are closely interconnected. The future development of pilgrimage tourism in Rohilkhand will depend not only on the attractiveness and religious importance of its sacred destinations but also on the ability of the hospitality sector and other stakeholders to provide accessible, quality, sustainable and culturally appropriate services. By examining the industry perspective, this study can provide a region-specific contribution to pilgrimage-tourism research and offer useful insights for future tourism planning and hospitality-sector development in Rohilkhand.

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