

UNTAPPED POTENTIAL: TOURISM IN INDIA FACES A NUMBER OF CHALLENGES



India is one of the most beautiful and diverse countries in the world, something which should make it a top choice for tourists looking to explore Asian cultures. However, the country is still only receiving less than a third of tourist visits when compared to other countries in the region.

According to the Indian tourism ministry, 6.97 million international tourists came to the country in 2013 while Thailand, for instance, recorded 26.7 million foreigners in the same year. **The reason for such a difference is not according to experts the lack of potential but rather the lack of a 'tourist-friendly' culture and infrastructure, which would attract tourists and make their holidays in India more enjoyable.**

India's monuments aren't well-kept, even the most basic amenities are easy to come by and security is lacking - both for the protection of the tourists and the country's historical sites. In fact, not even the Taj Mahal is safe from somewhat embarrassing security and heritage offenses and violations from tourists, although it isn't usually the target of any notorious incidents, unlike other, lesser known tourist sites.

Foreign tourists tend to face even bigger challenges than the state of conservation local monuments are in, though. On the one hand, access to drinking water - the most basic of human needs - is very limited. On the other hand, they are charged up to a whopping 150% more than local travelers as a 'gate fee', which is not only unfair but likely alienates foreigners.

Tourism has become the priority for India's government, according to the Prime Minister who engaging with tourists in order to find out what can be improved. So far, **a plan to make various lighthouses along the coast a major tourist attraction is taking shape and is said to have the power to bring real development to these areas through the creation of cafés, resorts and other facilities**, as well as updating the old structures present in the area.

This is a positive, yet ambitious plan. With the right resources, however, it can be an excellent opportunity for the development of India's tourism, finally helping it reach its full, untapped potential.

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