

EXPLORING THE HORIZON: UNPACKING THE CHALLENGES AND POTENTIAL ADVANCEMENTS OF COUCHSURFING IN THE INDIAN TOURISM SECTOR

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Abstract

India's distinct cultural legacy and the several internationally recognized festivals it hosts each year make it an ideal destination for tourism initiatives that highlight festivals and other cultural events with significant growth potential for the country's tourism industry. In a developing country such as India, festival tourism and its variations can generate substantial foreign exchange earnings (FEEs) and so accelerate the country's economic progress. In addition to providing recommendations for the industry's continued growth, this report provides an overview of the opportunities and obstacles facing Indian festival tourism. Travelling has changed as a result of the faster lifestyle. We may claim that travel has never been this simple and inexpensive thanks to the advancement of technology and the internet, which has made it possible to communicate virtually with people all over the world. People opt for shorter excursions, get to know the locals and discover their traditions and culture. This research explores the advantages of utilizing Couchsurfing and aims to show respondents from former Yugoslav countries' motivations for using the network when travelling and for hosting guests at their homes.

Keywords: Challenges, Potential Advancements, Couch surfing, Indian Tourism Sector.

1. INTRODUCTION

The tourist industry is widely acknowledged to possess significant potential for generating employment opportunities, drawing in foreign cash, and expediting the economic development of countries. This tendency is especially noticeable in developing countries like India. As a result, countries like India have begun to actively promote tourism in an effort to accelerate their own economies. Within the global economy, tourism is the second-largest source of income production, surpassed only by the oil and gas sector. In actuality, one of the world's biggest and fastest-growing industries today is tourism. More people are choosing trips thanks to increased leisure time and steadily rising purchasing power in the modern day. Governments around the world are paying more attention to this industry these days since it may guarantee higher foreign exchange earnings (FEE) than any other sector. In this sense, the Indian government is not an exception, nor are the situations of many other developing countries throughout the globe, including Bangladesh, China, and Nepal, which are close to India. The tourism industry has enormous linkages that drive many other connected industries. For example, the money that tourists spend on travel, lodging, food, and entertainment has clear links with adjacent industries, both forward and backward. Therefore, through the aforementioned connections, the tourism industry's promotion immediately propels the entire economy, leading to quicker economic development.

One of the main forms of tourism is festival tourism, in which visitors are drawn by celebrations of culture and other events. In the Indian setting, festivals are an integral component of this country's incredibly rich cultural legacy. In India, the national culture and festival tourism are inextricably linked. Naturally, festival tourism has previously been identified as a unique form of cultural tourism by the State and Union tourist ministries. However, festivals are significant from a macroeconomic standpoint because of their ability to draw thousands of visitors, both domestic and foreign. Millions of tourists attend these festivals and cultural events annually, which in turn generates significant amounts of revenue. Festivals draw significant numbers of foreign visitors and generate a sizable amount of foreign exchange earnings (FEE). Festivals' ability to draw in

foreign visitors and, consequently, FEE is a crucial advantage for the country's economic future, particularly for countries like India with amazing cultural legacies. India's rich cultural legacy and supportive government regulations create an ideal environment for the growth and success of festival tourism.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Experimental examinations on celebration tourism are uncommon, yet many investigations on tourism have addressed celebration tourism or its assortments like strict (journey) tourism, social tourism, and so on. Has intended to investigate the pertinence of Nepal tourism as an unfamiliar trade worker for the Nepalese economy. The creator has drawn out the social utility and monetary reasonableness basic tourism - the world as biggest help industry. The limit of tourism to acquire bigger net unfamiliar trade (sends out) to the economy due of its low degree of imports has been seen by the creator. Given the immense tourism assets of the Ñ Himalayan Realm of Nepal, the lively tourism advancement by the Nepalese Government the developing pattern in unfamiliar trade benefits, and so forth have been talked about.

Kumar, Yathish (2007) in his paper, "Tourism Sector and Supportable Turn of events" has brought up that while the fundamental objects of tourism incorporate improving the personal satisfaction of individuals and giving a decent encounter to the sightseers, it is similarly critical to guarantee that the natural quality is properly safeguarded on the grounds that the last option is imperative for both the vacationers and the nearby populace. The creator accordingly underlines the significance for keeping up with ecological immaculateness for long haul reasonability of tourism. A concentrate on the manageability of Indian tourism with extraordinary reference to Kerala tourism by Manoj P K (2008), Ñ Economical Tourism in India: A Review according to a Worldwide Viewpoint with Spotlight on Tourism Possibilities of Kerala Ä, gave in association the Second Worldwide Gathering on Capable Tourism in Objections, has examined the gigantic development possibilities of Indian tourism according to a worldwide viewpoint. Kerala tourism and its impossible to miss characteristics are analyzed in better detail. In view of his examination, recommendations have been made for the quicker development of tourism in Kerala in a way that is economical over the long haul. One more concentrate by a similar creator, Manoj P K (2009),

Climate Cordial Tourism for Maintainable Financial Improvement in India, has underlined the enormous development capability of Indian tourism for the fast monetary turn of events. A definitive prerequisite for guaranteeing that all tourism projects are climate well disposed has been brought up by the creator. In like manner, natural virtue and biological equilibrium are to be protected at any expense, and consequently climate amicable tourism exercises alone should be pushed.

A book on ecotourism in India created by Singh, Sarvjeet (2009) has expressed that ecotourism is completely another methodology in tourism and it gives open doors to guests to encounter strong presentations of nature and culture and to find out about the significance of biodiversity, preservation and nearby societies. It involves ventures towards districts wherein nature, creatures, social legacy and so on are the key attractions. It advances the local area's dynamic association in the tourism improvement's protection and instructive features. Manoj P. K. (2010) led an exhaustive examination of the Kerala traveler sector involving the SWOT method in his article, vacationer in Kerala: An Investigation of the Objectives and Obstructions with Spotlight on Ecotourism. The creator has given suggestions for Kerala's tourism industry's feasible development in light of the aftereffects of his examination. In their review, Nagy and Nagy (2013) noticed that celebration tourism has become a pivotal part of Hungary's monetary turn of events and will do as such from now on. It has been said that celebration tourism ought to be energized on the grounds that it is vital for the financial progression of Hungary's rustic networks.

In 2015, Sudheer, B. led research for his UGC-supported Minor Exploration Task, which inspected the social and monetary impacts of Capable Tourism (RT). His contextual investigation of RT at Kumarakom, Kerala, has shown the need of imaginative and elective methodologies, like RT, to lessen the negative ecological impacts of tourism and, thus, to make a drawn out reasonable vacationer industry. Positive linkage consequences for the territory (e.g., income from the buys made by vacationers) and beneficial outcomes on the RT at Kumarakom (e.g., work to the neighborhood local area, strengthening of ladies through RT-related exercises, such as giving vegetables, fish, meat, and so on which are completely secured locally) are noted. A field-put together review with respect to ecotourism in Kerala by Manoj P. K. (2015) (a) Kerala's

Ecotourism Possibilities: In light of proof from Kumarakam in the Kottayam Locale, proposition are given for the feasible development of Kerala's ecotourism industry. Manoj P. K. led one more experimental concentrate in 2015 In (b) Work Age from Rustic Tourism: A Field Investigation of the Nearby People group at Kumbalangi, Kerala, local people's points of view in regards to the business potential open doors introduced by country tourism, the proper government mediations they expected, and other related issues were consolidated. It has been seen that the probability of making position is high. It has been noticed that there is a need to further develop the framework connected with tourism, generally through government drives. A similar creator, Manoj P. K. (2016), has distributed another review named "Effect of Rustic Tourism on the Climate and Society: Proof from Kumbalangi in Kerala, India" in the Worldwide Diary of Advance Exploration in Software engineering and The board Studies. It features the unmistakable advantages of provincial tourism yet in addition focuses on the basic need to safeguard the climate by restricting the quantity of guests who enter the region uncontrolled, lessening the utilization of non-biodegradable squanders like plastics, stressing the significance of safeguarding the climate, and so on.

As indicated by the UN World Tourism Association (UN-WTO) (2015), South Asian tourism has expanded by over 7%, principally because of India's amazing development of more than 11% and Sri Lanka's development of more than 20%, among different nations. The World Monetary Gathering (WEF) (2015) directed a careful examination of the seriousness of various countries in the movement and tourism industry for its report on tourism intensity. Utilizing a couple of distinct measurements, this exploration looks at the intensity of countries at the provincial and overall levels. For instance, India's tourism positions 52 worldwide, contrasted with China's 17 positions. There is a critical uniqueness in seriousness at the territorial (Asia Pacific) level too; China is positioned 6th, while the US is in twelfth spot.

In WTTC (2015's) broad examination on the monetary effect of tourism and the movement business, a careful investigation of the near exhibition of different nations overall in the vacationer space, as well as provincial execution and future standpoints, was directed. As per WTTC, with regards to the extent of the movement and tourism industry's Gross domestic product esteem, the

South Asian area — drove by India and the Center East — is extending at the speediest rate on the planet. India, alongside China, Indonesia, South Korea, and Turkey, is one of the major and quickly extending markets. Also, it has been expressed that India would outperform China by 2025 and that South Asia will extend at the speediest rate among sub-areas as far as Gross domestic product development in the movement and tourism industry until 2025 (7.0 percent). In a genuinely late industry examination on tourism and neighborliness, India Brand Value League (IBEF) (2017) perceived the tremendous capability of the tourism and friendliness sector to add to India's monetary turn of events.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Sample

One hundred respondents provided the sample of data. There were twenty questions in the online survey concerning the respondent's online and offline communication patterns, personal and sociodemographic information, and online behaviours. Despite the fact that they were either unable to travel overseas at all or had travelled sparingly in the previous year, respondents cited their prior experiences using the Couchsurfing network. A lesser percentage of respondents were impacted by the decreased number of journeys and, thus, fewer active network users. Table 1 presents socio-demographic characteristics.

Table 1: Respondents' sociodemographic details (n = 100)

		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	44	44
	Female	56	56
Education	Primary School	0	0
	High School	16	16
	Faculty	41	41
	Master Studies	33	33
	Phd Studies	10	10
Income	<50000	35	35

	50001 - 100000	43	43
	100001 - 150000	6	6
	>150000	16	16
Age	<20 years	2	2
	21 - 30 years	42	42
	31 - 40 years	30	30
	41 - 50 years	20	20
	51 - 60 years	4	4
	>61 years	2	2
Profession	Pupil	0	0
	The Student	17	17
	Employed	70	70
	Unemployed	11	11
	Retired	2	2

The sociodemographic details of the 100 respondents to the survey are displayed in Table 1. There is a fairly balanced proportion of participants by gender, with 44% of men and 56% of women. Regarding education, 16% of respondents only completed high school, while 41% of respondents have completed faculty studies or are presently pursuing them. With 35% earning less than \$50,000, 43% earning between \$50,000 and \$100,000, 6% earning between \$100,000 and \$150,000, and 16% earning more than \$150,000, the income distribution shows a broad sample. Respondents range in age from 21 to 30 years old, with the largest percentage (42%) falling in this age range. Regarding occupations, the majority of participants (70%) are in the workforce, with students coming in second (17%). The percentages of those who are jobless, retired, and students are, respectively, lower at 11%, 2%, and 0%.

3.2. Procedure

In March and April of 2021, the research was carried out. Through group posts and private messaging on social networks like Couchsurfing, Facebook, and LinkedIn, an online (Google Docs) questionnaire was disseminated. Respondents from the former Yugoslav nations of North Macedonia, Slovenia, Montenegro, Croatia, Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina were the subjects of a survey. Due to the crisis and the decline in travellers, active users, and participation in Couchsurfing groups, issues arose in gathering responses. Examining profiles from the Balkan region, it is evident that many people have stopped using Couchsurfing; in fact, there have been cases where users haven't logged on for more than five, and in extreme cases, even ten years.

3.3. Instrument

The author Liu's (2012) research provided the information for the questionnaire questions. The writers reviewed the Couchsurfing network before outlining potential solutions. Respondents had the option to write their replies to some semi-open questions. The survey's data were analysed using IBM SPSS 17 (t-test, ANOVA test, and descriptive statistical analysis).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 2: The respondents' nation of residence

Country of Residence	Frequency	Percent
Delhi	12	12
Mumbai	3	3
Bangalore	9	9
Ahmedabad	1	1
Bhopal	1	1
Missing Answer	6	6
Hyderabad	68	68

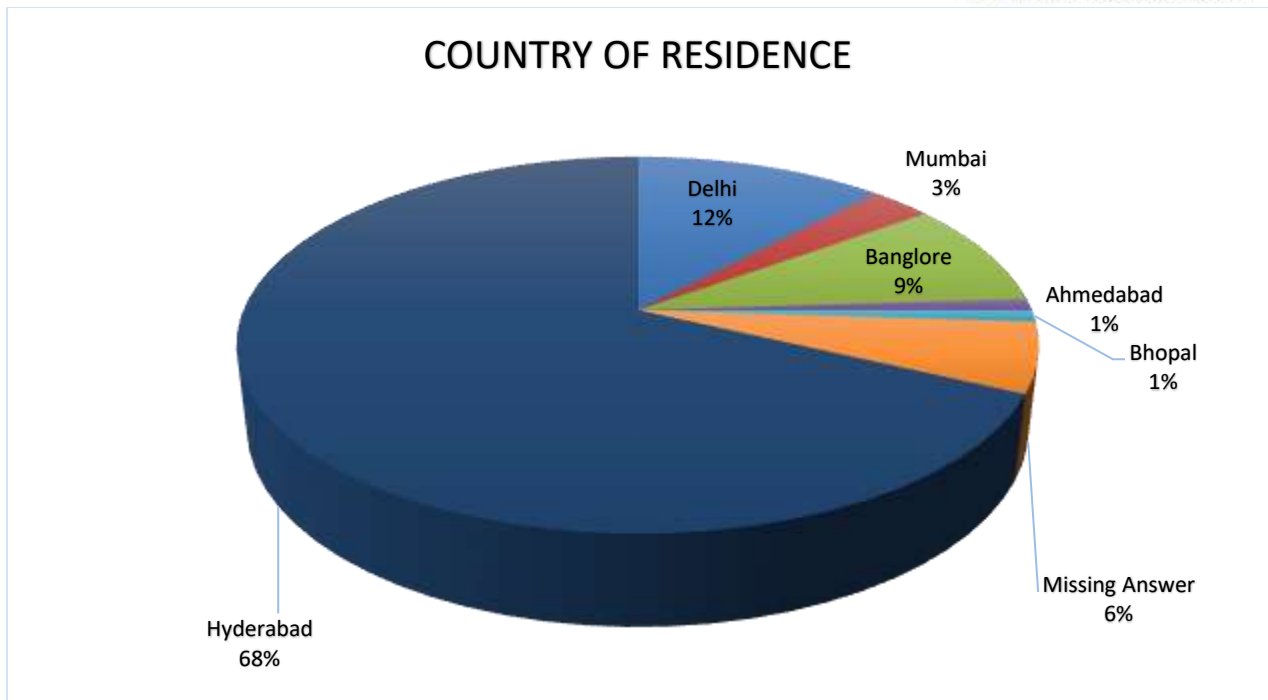


Figure 1: The respondents' nation of residence

Table 2 presents a snapshot of the geographic representation of the questioned population by showing the distribution of respondents according to their country of residence. Hyderabad is home to the majority of responders, making up a sizable 68% of the sample. At 12%, 9%, and 3%, respectively, other cities including Delhi, Bangalore, and Mumbai also have noteworthy representations. 1% of the respondents are from Bhopal and Ahmedabad. Graph 1 displays the respondents' places of residence. It is noteworthy that six respondents, or 6% of the sample, did not offer information about where they dwell. Hyderabad accounts for 68% of the responders, with Delhi coming in second with 12% and Bangalore with 9%. One respondent was from North Macedonia, and the other two were from Slovenia. Six respondents did not specify the nation they reside in, and none of the respondents were from Montenegro.

Table 3: Respondents' languages spoken (percentages)

Country	Frequency	Percentage
English	98	98

German	29	29
Spanish	29	29
Italian	22	22
Russian	18	18
French	15	15
Turkish	3	3
Hungarian	3	3
Chinese	2	2
Swedish	2	2

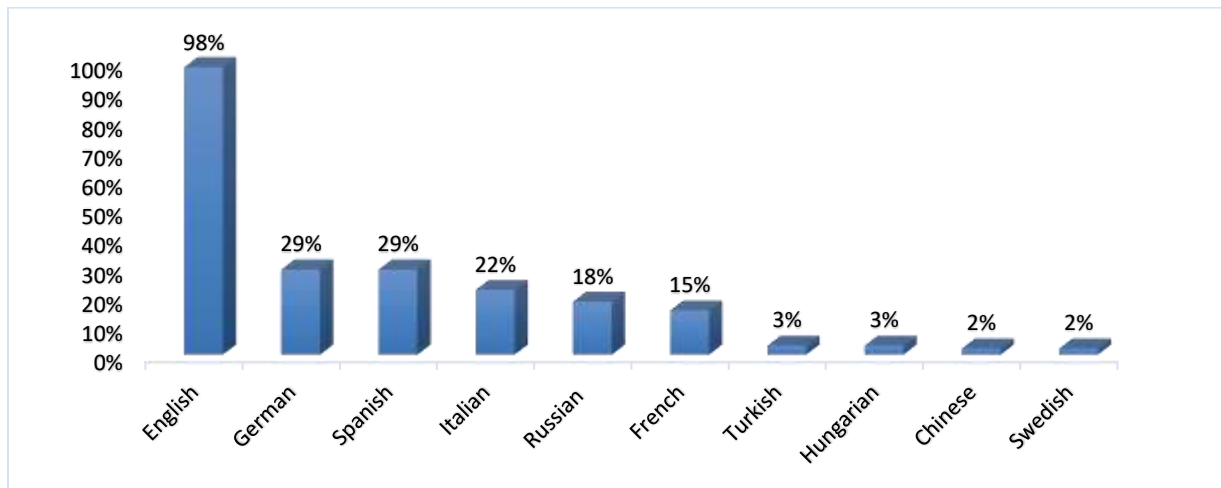


Figure 2: Languages used by participants (percentages)

The languages that the survey participants spoke are shown in Table 3, which sheds light on their linguistic diversity. The majority language is English, as indicated by 98% of respondents who said they are proficient in it. The next two languages spoken by 29% of the individuals were Spanish and German, indicating a considerable multilingualism or bilingualism within the sample. Spoken by 22% of people, Italian is the next most popular language after Russian (18%) and French (15%). Additionally, the data shows that a lower proportion of respondents—between 3% and 2%—speak Turkish, Hungarian, Chinese, and Swedish.

A major aspect of modern life is travelling, which is a means of reducing the pace of existence. Keeping in mind that travelling is a means to unwind and discover new things, picking the appropriate vacation companion is typically the most important decision. Some people would rather travel alone, while others would rather bring friends, family, or a spouse. Table 3 displays the respondent's selection of travel companion.

Table 4: With whom do the responders go on trips?

Who do you travel with most often?	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Family	16	16
Partner	32	32
Friends	30	30
Alone	22	22

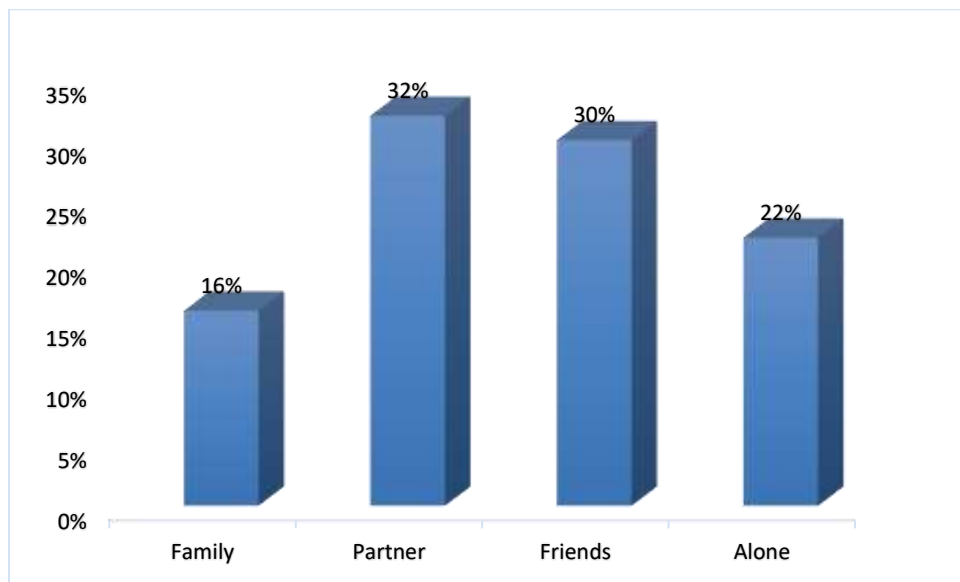


Figure 3: Who goes on trips with the responders?

Table 4 offers information on the preferred travel companions of those who completed the poll. Three-quarters of the respondents said they travel with their partners most of the time, highlighting the importance of romantic connections in their travel experiences. With 16% of respondents usually choosing to travel with relatives, family members rank as the second most popular travel companions. Furthermore, 30% of participants choose to travel with friends, demonstrating how important social interactions are to their vacation experiences. Significantly, 22% of respondents said they would rather go alone, indicating a sizable section of the population that values autonomous discovery.

5. CONCLUSION

This research brought the subject of using Couchsurfing in the targeted demographic into the spotlight, and it serves as the foundation for subsequent research that will expand on the sample size. It is possible to draw the conclusion that the respondents believe Couchsurfing to be a secure platform, but they also emphasized how important it is to build trust in a potential host, and that the reviews posted on profiles are the first step towards achieving that trust.

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