



# Harnessing India's sports tourism potential



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# Executive summary

Sports play a prominent role in India's culture, with ancient traditional sports that continue today, such as kushti, kho-kho, martial arts and archery to event organisation for participants, spectators, and residents. Regional, national, or international -- the objective of sports tourism also encompasses entertaining and regaling visitors.

As reported by market experts<sup>1</sup>, India's sports tourism market currently (2023) valued at USD 10,870.41 million is expected to surge at an incredible CAGR of 17.1 per cent and reach USD 52,967 million during the forecast period (2033). It is vital that the sports tourism sector assess its past and present performance, socio-environment-economic benefits, disadvantages, and adverse impacts to avoid in the present and future, and contextually plan frameworks to support local, regional, national, and international sports participation and event management potential. A task requiring comprehensive, contextual assessments and collaborations with the intent to harness the opportunity appropriately, to benefit society, environment, and economics.

Sports tourism's strength lies in: engagement in physical activities; occasions for interactions; and development potential in increasing investments in industries and sectors. Weaknesses and threats combine poor planning, substantial and risky investments, short-term inequitable gains, social and environment disparity, unskilled and inadequately trained workforce, cultural, community clashes, destination carrying-capacity abuse, misuse, and exploitation, corruption, large O&M economic and social projections to reach and maintain international standards, and other factors. The opportunities include diversification of tourism offerings, expansion of sports and games outside cricket bounds, sustainable social development, environment and social safeguarding, technological integration, increased female participation, marketing and branding, and cooperative collaborations for sustainable social, environment, and economic development.

Mega and small-scale sports events directly cause social, economic, and infrastructural development needs to arise. Additionally, sports events offer the opportunity to incorporate social and cultural features of the host destination into the overall tourist experience. Such events can be leveraged to display India's cultural heritage and enhance the nation's appeal as a sports tourism and global

entertainment destination, incentivising repeat visits. Sports tourism increases tourist influx, spending, and stay, generates immediate economic benefits, and makes a lasting impact by improving infrastructure and a destination's potential as a venue for future national and international sporting events.

Sports tourism expands and offers wide-spread media coverage of host destinations, transmitting sporting events nationally and internationally, while offering snapshots of a country's culture and heritage. India, a land of diverse landscapes, cultures, cuisines, art, history, and population profile has much to harness, to ensure development is environmentally, socially, and economically sustainable. Moreover, the Indian sports tourism market trends are expected to see an upward curve.

Most preliminary market research denotes that the global sports industry is experiencing shifts in its economy and policies. The broad-spectrum of the sports economy is expected to continue to increase and draw considerable attention in 2024. The report dives into increments that sports events induce in the tourism industry and ways sustainable tourism development contributes to local, regional, and international sports events experiences. It highlights government and private-sector initiatives undertaken to improve sports tourism potential in India while attending to its socio-cultural, environment, economic landscape.

It is imperative that the interest in socio-economic sustainability and environmental considerations be approached by India as an opportunity and not a disadvantage. Large impacts can be adverse and/or beneficial<sup>2</sup>. Ensuring that impacts remain beneficial, if not elaborate and short-term, yet sustainable and beneficial eventually; therein lies success. It is not how one starts; it is how one finishes.

The 'Harnessing India's Sports Tourism Potential' thought leadership presents socio-cultural-economic impacts sports has on the nation's economy and global profile, and the reciprocal role sports and tourism play in destinations. It elaborates the economic impacts, outlines brief studies, features government and private-sector initiatives, and the challenges and opportunities that sports tourism development entails. The report identifies the role of sports events in developing tourism destinations.

1. REP-GB-15292, Travel and Tourism, Sudip Saha, August 2023

2. Cerezo-Esteve, S.; Inglés, E.; Seguí-Urbaneja, J.; Solanellas, F. The Environmental Impact of Major Sport Events (Giga, Mega and Major): A Systematic Review from 2000 to 2021. Sustainability 2022, 14, 13581.





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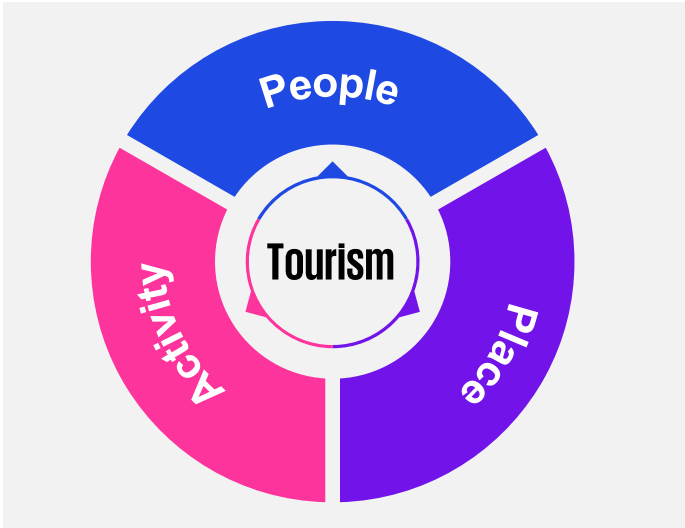
# Introduction

The correlation between sports and tourism has been widely discussed in recent decades<sup>3</sup> and realised as a complex area of global study<sup>4</sup>. The unified contribution of sports and tourism engaged appropriately can spur sustainable socio-economic development in host destinations. However, deliberations must be considered when developing sports tourism to ensure its contribution to socio-environment-economic sustainable development is beneficial and equitable.

Sports tourism uniquely merges sports and tourism, involving active and passive participation in sport activities, necessitating travel away from one's primary residence. This phenomenon is characterised by the interaction of three integral elements: activity, people, and place. Sports tourism encompasses a range of experiences, from participation in sports events and visiting related attractions to observing sports at various levels, from grassroots to elite. It refers to travel undertaken to observe or participate in sports events commonly involving national or international, commercial, and non-commercial, competitive, performance-based activities. Prominent sports events, championships, and tournaments accelerating the global sports tourism industry are football (soccer), cricket, tennis, motorsports, basketball, hockey, table tennis, baseball, volleyball, badminton, athletics (track and

field), skiing, snowboarding, sandboarding, dune bashing, extreme sports, and more.

The strength of sports tourism lies in: mostly competitive, organised involvement in physical activities based on skill, abilities, and performance; occasion for interactions and sportsmanship, and collective, sustainable destination development potential<sup>5</sup>. These attributes when directed attentively can help forward socio-environment-economic and sustainable development goals at tourism destinations.



The four categories identified in sports tourism are as follows.

 <p><b>Sport event-based tourism</b> Travelling to another city or country to watch commercial-sports</p>	 <p><b>Active-sports tourism</b> Visiting a destination as an active participant</p>	 <p><b>Sports-heritage (nostalgia) tourism</b> Visiting places with historical significance in sports</p>	 <p><b>Sports-themed cruises or tours</b> Combining travel with recreational sporting events or activities</p>
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These four categories have significantly increased globally due to the popularity of travelling to watch mega sports events.

3. Bazzanella, F., Schnitzer, M., Peters, M., & Bichler, B. F. (2023). The role of sports events in developing tourism destinations: a systematized review and future research agenda. *Journal of Sport & Tourism*, 27(2), 77–109.

4. Zajadacz A., 2016, *Turystyka sportowa – próba zdefiniowania pojęcia/ Sports tourism: An attempt to define the concept*, *Turyzm/Tourism* 2016, 26/1: 96-97.

5. *Sport Tourism and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*, 2019, UNWTO, eISBN: 978-92-844-1966-1 | ISBN: 978-92-844-1965-4

Inter-continental commercial events, hosted in various locations vis., the Cricket World Cup, the tennis Grand Slam, the Formula 1 races, attract large following from around the world. Today, the increased interest in travel for sports, alongside destination experiences advertised through multiple-digital social-media avenues contribute to the segment's rapid propagation. The rise in population, literacy rate, disposable and supplementary income sources, and digital travel-booking options has increased inactive participation in sports tourism.

It is also noted that increased interest in physical and mental wellness, digital access and integration, convenient transport, meals, and accommodation bookings has unexplored potential in developing nations' capital markets. The UNWTO identified sports tourism as one of the fastest-growing sectors of the travel industry. Furthermore, countries, for example, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, China, position sporting events to strategically improve their international position and invigorate local economies<sup>6</sup>.

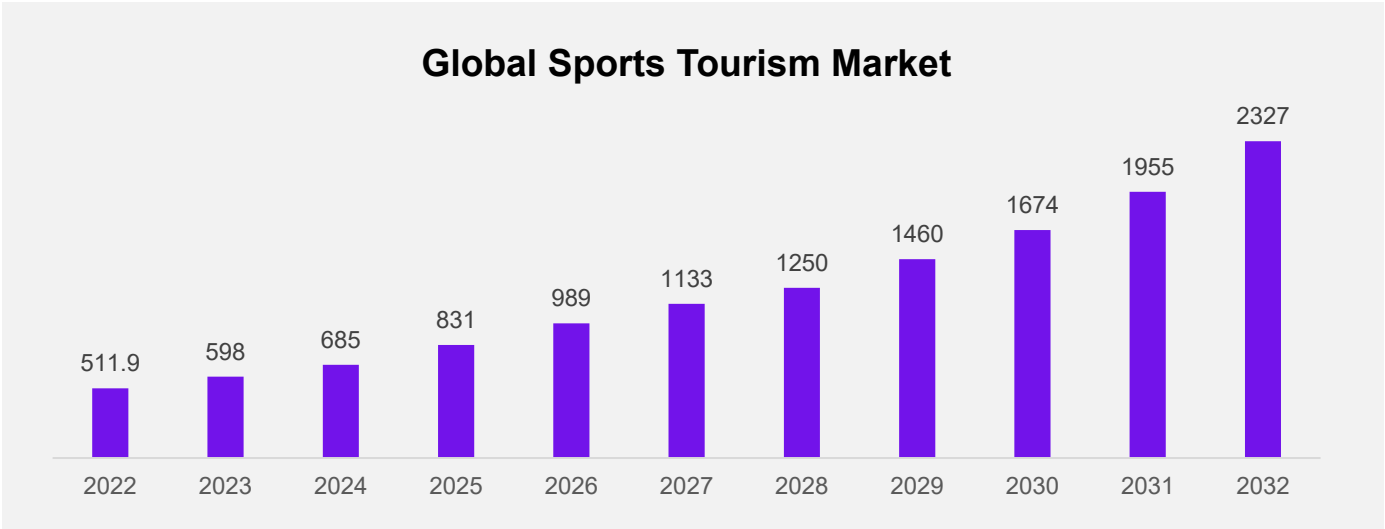


6. [youtu.be/gDgwE0g6s\\_o?si=0Jm-31cikUL0G2px](https://youtu.be/gDgwE0g6s_o?si=0Jm-31cikUL0G2px)

## Global overview of sports tourism

Sports tourism generates approximately 10 per cent of the world’s expenditure on tourism<sup>7</sup>. The global sports tourism market was valued at USD 511.90 billion in 2022 and is expected to be worth USD 2,327 billion by 2032, growing at a CAGR of 16.80 per cent<sup>8</sup>. While Europe held the largest revenue share of 38.01

per cent in 2022 on account of the rising number of athletes, sports events, and the number of visitors from all over the world, Asia Pacific is expected to grow at the fastest CAGR of over 18 per cent owing to rising per capita income, the growing middle-class population, and increasing disposable income<sup>9</sup>.



Source: Global Sports Tourism Market Report, market.us, Sep 2023

The growth of sports tourism is linked to trends in the sport and tourism industries. In the sport industry, anticipated trends are performance analytics, fan engagement, smart stadia, immersive training, women’s elite sports, and more. Tourism-related trends include the increasing popularity of travelling for specific purposes, including sports events, adventure activities, and wellness experiences. Sport-tourists tend to include visits to state-of-the-art sports venues, museums, theme-parks, and sports retail stores. Further, sports tourists spend on transport, accommodation, meals, and other tourism and hospitality-related activities increasing revenue-generation in host destinations. When planned appropriately, the potential of sports tourism can increase travel during sluggish and off-season months.

The popularity of international sporting events that showcase professional teams, such as Formula One races, tennis Grand Slam tournaments, Commonwealth Games, Cricket World Cup, and such, is a major factor in attracting sport enthusiasts from all around the world, contributing to the segment’s growth. The initiatives undertaken by

governments of various nations to increase investments in sports infrastructure is expected to support the growth of the industry. In addition, technological advancements and expanded digital-media broadcasts have played a significant role in increasing sport-related travel and engagement by enabling effective advertising and marketing along with seamless planning of sport-event tours.



7. Sports Tourism (unwto.org)  
8. Global Market Insights Report ID: GMI8404, Published Date: Mar 2024  
9. Sports Tourism Market Size & Share Analysis Report, 2030 (grandviewresearch.com)



Factors influencing global sports tourism's growth.

- Encompasses various niches, including motorsports, water-sports, adventure-sports, sports-clubs, and training-camps.
- Growing popularity of sports events, adventure activities, fitness, and wellness experiences.
- Increase in demand for sports-related travel and entertainment.
- Numerous digital social media platforms transforming the sports tourism landscape, improving fan engagement and experience.
- Rising global deliberations regarding social, environmental, and economic sustainable development.
- Sports events generate substantial revenue for host countries.
- Governments, sports-organisations, tourism-boards, and the private-sector collaborations, driving growth and development.

## Economic impact

The sports industry dominates the entertainment industry around the world, with the most recognised sports and teams highlighting a positive impact on the economy. Football, cricket, baseball, basketball, hockey, and soccer are the most popular sports played and watched globally<sup>10</sup>. Moreover, increase in advertisement and offers by sports-tour companies engages tourism in a specific region or sport, prompting further growth during an event's forecast period.

In 2022, a market research publication reported sports tourism to be a major economic driver in the tourism industry and estimated the global sports tourism market to reach USD 1.7 trillion by 2027<sup>11</sup>. Events like the FIFA World Cup and the Olympic Games attract millions of visitors, and the economic impact of sports tourism is profound, injecting substantial revenue into host cities and countries through direct and indirect spending by tourists. For example, the 2018 the FIFA World Cup held in Russia is expected to have added more than USD 14 billion to the Russian economy. During the competition days, the country received 570,000 tourists and triggered the creation of 100,000 jobs in different sectors<sup>12</sup>. Similarly, Super Bowl LIV 2020 held in Miami generated USD 572 million in new spending and attracted over 160,000 visitors to the city leading to extensive media coverage and promoting Miami as a tourist destination globally<sup>13</sup>.

The economic impact of sports tourism is undeniable, offering significant economic benefits to host destinations. While the sector faces challenges, including financial risks and the sustainability of investments, its potential to stimulate local

economies and enhance global profiles keeps countries bidding for the chance to organise major sporting events.

Developing collaboration between the tourism and sport industries involves affiliations, leading to the development of improved sports tourism experiences. Collaborated strategies such as joint-marketing and event-hosting campaigns, benefit destination appeal, improve visitor experiences, and drive sustainable growth in sports tourism.

## Key players in the global market

The global sports tourism market is supported by a complex network of stakeholders ranging from sports agencies and local governments to travel agencies and media partners. Key players in the global sports tourism market are a mix of sports agencies, hospitality providers, broadcasters, and travel services. Each plays a critical role in creating the infrastructure and experiences that define sports tourism, from event organisation and broadcast to accommodation and ancillary services. Their collective efforts enhance the spectator experience and bring substantial economic benefits to host locations.



10. Sports Tourism Market Size & Share Analysis Report, 2030 (grandviewresearch.com)

11. Global Sports Tourism Market to Reach \$1.7 Trillion by (globenewswire.com)

12. World Cup 2018 added \$14 billion to Russian economy, organisers report (insidethegames.biz)

13. Miami Super Bowl Provided Economic Stimulus to South Florida (prnewswire.com)

# Sports tourism in India

The sports tourism sector in India has experienced significant growth in the past five-years, driven primarily by the immense popularity of cricket and management of various international sporting events. India's sports tourism market, which was valued at USD 10,870.41 million in 2023, is expected to surge at an incredible CAGR of 17.1 per cent and is predicted to be valued at USD 52,967 million by 2033<sup>14</sup>. This is fuelled by the recent initiatives undertaken by the Indian government to develop sustainable tourism infrastructure and an increased interest of the private sector in franchise games.



Source: Forbes India, November 2022

## Government initiatives

The government has shifted focus to ensure the Indian sports market size increases in the coming future.

Some steps in this direction include the following<sup>15</sup>.

- Increasing the sports budget from INR 702 crores in 2014 to 2015 to INR 2216 crores in 2019 to 2020.
- Encouraging a culture of sports at the school-level by launching the Urban Sports Infrastructure Scheme and Khelo India Scheme.
- Introduction of the National Sports Talent Search System in 2015, which provides financial assistance to state governments to identify and nurture prospective athletes between the ages of 8 and 12.

Furthermore, the government has introduced sustainability schemes and programmes in the hospitality and tourism industry, such as the following.



## Travel for LiFE programme

Under the Mission LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment), the Travel for LiFE programme aims to create awareness about sustainable tourism and encourage tourists and businesses to adopt eco-friendly practices. This programme aims to reduce carbon footprint and promote responsible tourism<sup>16</sup>.



## National strategy for sustainable tourism

The Ministry of Tourism developed a comprehensive strategy to promote environmental sustainability, protect biodiversity, and support local communities. This includes initiatives like banning single-use plastics in tourist areas and promoting eco-friendly accommodations<sup>17</sup>.

14. India Sports Tourism Market Size & Trends to 2033 (futuremarketinsights.com)  
15. India Sports Tourism Market Outlook (2023 to 2033), Sudip Saha, REP-GB-15292  
16. Sustainable Tourism Ministry of Tourism, Government of India  
17. Sustainable Tourism Ministry of Tourism, Government of India





### Private Sector Initiatives

The private sector has been goaded to take steps focusing on environment and sustainability, such as the following.



### Eco-friendly resorts and hotels

Increased private investments in eco-friendly resorts and hotels that support local communities, use renewable energy sources, and employ good waste-management practices. For example, the first eco-tourism venture of Jungle Lodges & Resorts Ltd., a joint venture of tourism and forest departments of Govt. of Karnataka, promotes conservation efforts and provides economic benefits to local communities<sup>18</sup>.

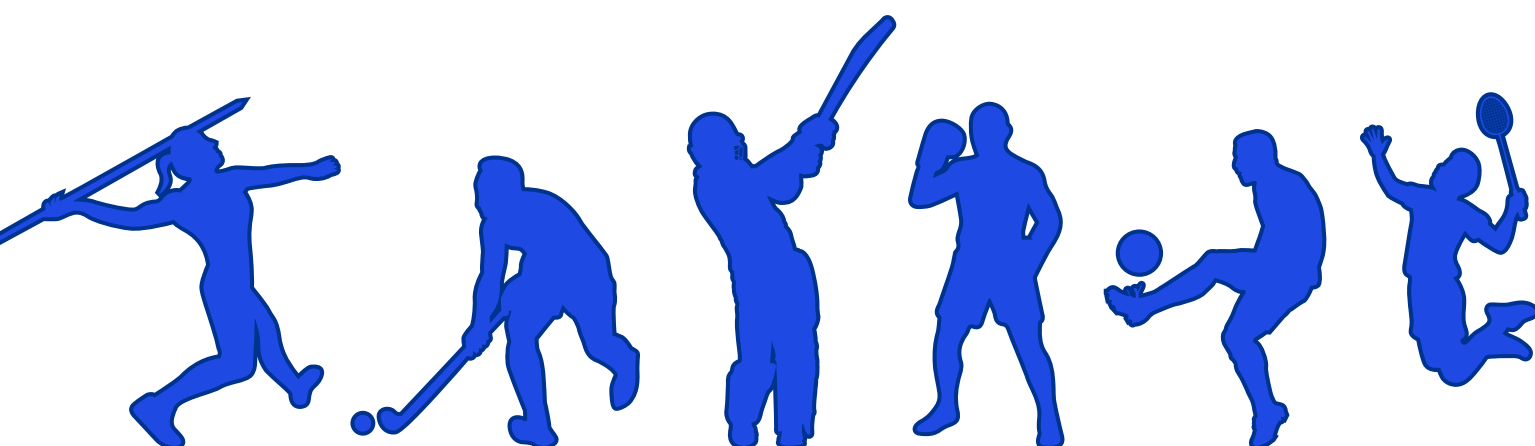


### Sustainable sports events

Increased focus on making sports events sustainable, such as using solar energy for stadia lighting, implementing waste management systems, improving sanitation and hygiene measures, employing local workforce, etc.

Further, India has made significant strides in promoting sports among girls and women through various initiatives, including the Women's Premier League (WPL) and the 'Khelo India' programme. The inaugural season of the WPL saw packed stadiums and high viewership, highlighting the growing popularity of women's cricket<sup>19</sup>, further players benefitted from the exposure and competitive environment<sup>20</sup>. The 'Khelo India' initiative has been instrumental in nurturing young talent, as the programme focuses on identifying and developing athletes from an early age, providing them with top-notch training and infrastructure<sup>21</sup>. 'Khelo India' addresses low-female participation in sports and aims to empower them by promoting gender-equality and fostering leadership skills.

Moreover, national organisations pioneering sports as a tool for development and gender equality have made inroads in the practice and economy of sports<sup>22</sup>. Legendry Indian women athletes have proactively established academies focused on sports excellence by pivoting women-led initiatives focused on training young female athletes along with providing the necessary resources to excel in sports<sup>23</sup>, including nurturing female talent in boxing and athletics. Also, launched on National Girl-Child Day, the 'Khelegi toh Khilegi' initiative aims to break gender stereotypes, and encourage girls' participation in sports<sup>24</sup>.



18. 20 Sustainable Tourism Practices and Destinations in India to Visit Now, GreenTourism, February 2023

19. 4 Initiatives Promoting Sports for Women in India, Shawn Morgan, Stumpblog

20. New faces make a mark in WPL team of the tournament | ESPNcricinfo

21. Unleashing Equality: When sport becomes a tool for women's development in India |sportanddev

22. Unleashing Equality: When sport becomes a tool for women's development in India |sportanddev

23. Inclusiveness of women in sports is key to making India sporting superpower (dailypioneer.com)

24. 4 Initiatives Promoting Sports for Women in India, Shawn Morgan, Stumpblog

Such initiatives also help assess the sporting landscape to understand the role of women in societal development, breaking down societal barriers and inspiring future generations.

Attributes of India's sports tourism potential.

- Good, age, and sex demographics.
- Growing popularity of sports like cricket, football, and hockey.
- Government programmes promote sports development, supporting infrastructure development, and event hosting.
- Investment opportunities in sports infrastructure and equipment in schools and universities, including stadia and training facilities.
- Opportunities for adventure sports and activities like trekking, rafting, and skiing.
- India's diverse landscape and sports culture, an increased interest, and digital marketing initiatives, present immense opportunities for advancing sports tourism.

In recent times, events like the IPL have drawn considerable domestic and international attention, transforming host cities into bustling hubs of activity that benefitted economically from increased occupancy in hotels, restaurants, and retail outlets. Beyond cricket, other sports like hockey, football, and badminton are also gaining traction, supported by professional leagues such as the Hockey India League and the Indian Super League. The country also hosted major international events, such as the ICC Cricket World Cup and the FIFA U-17 World Cup, cataloguing India as a suitable destination for cricket and football matches and tournaments.

The government and private-sector are increasingly recognising the potential of sports-tourism as a catalyst for regional development, prompting investment in infrastructure and promotional initiatives aimed at enhancing India's appeal as a premier sports tourism destination. Furthermore, local, national or international sports events organised, executed, and managed well can draw visitors travelling for other purposes, for example, foreigners visiting Kerala, hear about the boat race festival and decide to experience it live. Sport-related entertainment and events are frequently sought by sport enthusiasts travelling to destinations for other purposes.





## Economic impact

In India, sports tourism has emerged as a significant economic driver, contributing notably to local economies through various channels. Inbound tourism, influenced by several factors, includes government measures to promote sports and physical wellness. The Indian Premier League (IPL), a flagship event in the Indian sports industry, was estimated to have an economic impact of USD 6.7 billion on India's economy in 2020 and created over 30,000 temporary jobs during the season<sup>25</sup>.

Tourists, both domestic and international flock to cities hosting IPL matches, leading to spikes in demand for transport, accommodation, dining, and entertainment. This influx supports small and medium-sized enterprises and creates temporary employment opportunities. Beyond cricket, other sports events, such as the Pro Kabaddi League and the Indian Super League for football have started to make their economic mark.

Held in 2023, the ICC World Cup took place across ten cities, Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Chennai, Delhi, Dharamsala, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Lucknow, Mumbai, and Pune. It induced growth across various sectors, spurred India's economy and displayed the benefits of ICC events<sup>26</sup>.

The ICC Men's Cricket World Cup 2023, Economic Impact Assessment released by the International Cricket Council (ICC) indicates that the sport-event achieved an economic impact of USD 1.39 billion (INR 11,637 Crores) for the Indian economy<sup>27</sup>. International visitors journeyed to other tourist destinations, causing an economic impact of USD 281.2 million. Approximately 68 per cent of international attendees answered that they would suggest India as a tourist destination to family and friends<sup>28</sup>. Many international visitors spent more than five-nights in the country with domestic travellers staying in host cities for an average of two-nights.

Increased federal expenditures for athletic and sports activities, focused on supporting events included in the inter-regional, national, and international athletic events unified schedule, and activities promoting healthy, physical lifestyles also contribute to the growth of sports tourism in India. Furthermore, India hosting international sports events has amplified the economic impact of sports tourism within the country. Major events, such as the ICC Cricket World

Cup, the FIFA U-17 World Cup, the South Asian Games, and the Hockey World Cup, have drawn large numbers of international visitors and media attention, boosting local economies. For instance, the FIFA U-17 World Cup in 2017 helped enhance infrastructure, as stadiums and training facilities across multiple host cities were upgraded. Such events generate immediate economic benefits through tourism spending and make a lasting impact by improving infrastructure and increasing India's attractiveness as a venue for future national and international sports events. A prime example of this is the recently constructed Narendra Modi Stadium, which is among the largest in India with a capacity of 132,000<sup>29</sup>.

Government and private stakeholders often leverage sports events to promote tourism and culture, further extending economic benefits beyond the sports industry. This strategic approach helps in sustaining a sports tourism ecosystem that continues to contribute to the country's economic development.

## Key players in the Indian market

In India, the sports tourism sector is supported by several key members that contribute significantly to its growth and development. These range from sports organisations and leagues to travel agencies specialising in sports tourism.



25. How Does the IPL Affect the Indian Economy? (pvtcourt.com)

26. ICC Men's Cricket World Cup 2023 Delivers Economic Boost to India (icc-cricket.com)

27. ICC Men's Cricket World Cup 2023 Delivers Economic Boost to India (icc-cricket.com)

28. ICC Men's Cricket World Cup 2023 Delivers Economic Boost to India (icc-cricket.com)

29. Top 10 Largest Cricket Stadiums In The World (2024), Ankit Yadav, August 2024 (thecricketpanda.com)

## Sports events in india -- case studies

### Formula 1 Race in India

The impact of Formula 1 on the Indian economy has been multifaceted, involving significant economic, infrastructural, and tourism-related benefits. Hosting the F1 race has led to significant economic benefits for India. The construction of the Buddh International Circuit in Noida, Uttar Pradesh, required an investment of approximately USD 400 million<sup>30</sup>.

This investment created jobs and spurred development of surrounding areas, including improvements in transportation and hospitality infrastructure. The potential return of F1 to India, with a proposed new circuit in Gujarat's GIFT City, to be made functional by 2028, is estimated to cost between USD 650 million and USD 1.3 billion<sup>31</sup>. This project aims to further enhance the state's sports and tourism infrastructure, contributing to long-term economic growth. The proposed new circuit in Gujarat is expected to draw international visitors, further boosting the state's tourism industry.

The successful management of F1 races can also pave the way for India to bid for and host other significant sports events, further boosting its global reputation. The investments in infrastructure for organising F1 races have long-term benefits -- improvements in transportation, hospitality services, and tourist conveniences and amenities make the host cities more attractive to tourists and residents year-round, not only during the race season.

The Formula One Indian Grand Prix, held from 2011 to 2013, significantly impacted sports tourism in India in the following ways.



### Significant impacts of Formula 1 Race in India

- **Infrastructure development:** The construction of the Buddh International Circuit in Greater Noida demonstrated India's capacity to build world-class motorsports infrastructure.
- **Global spotlight:** The Formula 1 Race event brought international attention to India's sports tourism capabilities, displaying the country's ability to host world-class events.
- **Tourist influx:** The event attracted many international tourists, particularly visitors from Europe and the Middle East.
- **Economic benefits:** The event generated significant revenue from ticket sales, hospitality, and tourism-related activities, contributing to the state's local economy.
- **Impact:** It demonstrated India's interest in motorsports, and potential as a sports tourism destination.

Furthermore, Formula E's first-ever race in India, held in February 2023, made an economic impact of approximately INR 700 crore (USD 83.7 million) on Hyderabad's economy. More than 31,000 people attended or supported the race event, with the majority (59 per cent) arriving from outside Hyderabad, increasing significant inward investment into the local economy<sup>32</sup>.

30. At India's F1 Track, a \$400 Million Bet (cnbc.com)

31. F1 Rumour: Indian Grand Prix Could Return To Calendar With All-New Circuit - F1 Briefings: Formula 1 News, Rumors, Standings and More (si.com)

32. Formula E race in India made economic impact of nearly Rs 700 cr: Report



## IPL Matches in India

As of 2019, IPL became the second-most valuable sports league in the world, after the American National Football League (NFL). On a micro-level, IPL has had a profound impact on the Indian economy contributing significantly to other sectors, for example, a whopping 30 per cent increase in travel revenue in India according to Cox and Kings<sup>33</sup>. Apart from this, the IPL has had long-term impact on employment by creating job opportunities in hospitality and event management, contributing to significant economic growth. The report submitted by the UN General Assembly for Peace and Development highlighted an economic value of USD 3.2 billion created by IPL<sup>34</sup>. The market for sports equipment and gadgets has also witnessed a huge rise, with market size increasing to INR 40 billion<sup>35</sup>.

During the IPL season every year, there is a significant rise in tourist influx from Australia, South Africa, and the United Kingdom, which are cricket-supporting nations with large fan-bases, further popularising and increasing sports tourism over the years.



## Significant impacts of IPL

- **Tourist influx:** Increase in international tourists, particularly from cricket-playing nations, wishing to experience and share the excitement such events represent.
- **Economic benefits:** Alternative revenue-generation from ticket-sales, hospitality, and tourism-related activities, contributing to local economies and creating jobs.
- **Infrastructure development:** Increase in investments for world-class cricket stadia and infrastructure, enhancing India's sports tourism capabilities.
- **Cultural exchange:** IPL promotes cultural exchange between international players, teams, and tourists, and highlights India's rich cultural heritage and diversity.
- **Media coverage:** The sport-event's global media coverage displays India's sports tourism offerings, attracting potential tourists and promoting India as a sports tourism destination.
- **Local engagement:** IPL matches increase local engagement and participation in tourism-related activities, fostering community pride and ownership.

Another essential IPL impact on the Indian economy has been the improvement of tier-2 cities due to increased media exposure. IPL cricket matches happen all over India, drawing extensive media coverage, due to which tier-2 cities are increasing investment in the city's infrastructure leading to enhanced facilities and development benefits. Furthermore, these destinations experience increased tourism-related activities supplementing revenue-generation in the city<sup>36</sup>.

33. The T20 IPL and its Impact on Businesses in India (india-briefing.com)

34. Impact of IPL on Indian Economy - The Sports School Blog

35. Impact of IPL on Indian Economy - The Sports School Blog

36. The economics of IPL, Chandralekha Bhogadi (M20MS020)

## Challenges and opportunities

Sports tourism represents a sizeable portion of the global travel and entertainment industry and offers substantial economic benefits to host countries. The sports tourism sector, while lucrative and rapidly expanding, also poses several weaknesses and threats that need to be addressed persistently to harness its full potential. Simultaneously, there are numerous opportunities if leveraged correctly can significantly improve the segment's growth trajectory, impact, and sustainability.

Large impacts can be adverse and/or beneficial, ensuring that impacts remain beneficial, if not elaborate and temporary, yet sustainable and beneficial for the long run; therein lies success.



Some unfavourable situations to tackle in India are as follows.



**Infrastructure deficiencies:** Out-dated, poor-quality stadia equipment and facilities, lack of hygienic conveniences and amenities, inadequate transportation and accommodation, can affect the overall experience and deter repeat visits. Good sanitation, well-equipped infrastructure, and operation and maintenance in uniformity with international standards can encourage and motivate residents and visitors.



**Adverse social and environment impacts:** Large-scale sports events can have significant adverse environmental and social impacts, including road congestions, unfavourable resident and visitor experiences, pollution and waste issues, economic disparity, etc. There is increasing pressure to offer unique experiences while implementing sustainable practices and minimising the ecological footprint of events.



**Inadequate security:** High-profile sports events often require heightened security measures to ensure the safety of many visitors gathered in one location. This can pose logistical and financial challenges but is essential for maintaining the reputation of the host city or country as a safe destination.



**Economic dependency:** Over-reliance on sports tourism can be detrimental, especially if the success of a destination's tourism-sector is solely dependent on periodic sports events susceptible to changes in popularity and affected by external factors like political instability, weather alerts, or health pandemics.



**Seasonality and unpredictability:** Many sports events are seasonal, leading to periods of low-activity and uneven economic benefits throughout the year. Moreover, the unpredictable success of bidding for hosting international events can make long-term planning complex.



**Ineffective collaboration:** Misaligned competitiveness, lack of dialogue, weak collaborations, inappropriate infrastructure development, and inadequately trained sports professionals are other challenges facing sports tourism in India.



**Substantial costs and risks:** Sports events substantial investments and risks must undergo comprehensive impact assessments to ensure that the economic boost to the nation's economy justifies the investments and risks involved in developing sports tourism in India.

The brief analysis highlights the need for better transparency and coordination amongst agencies responsible for sports and tourism, multi-disciplinary research that builds upon existing knowledge bases', and overcoming territorial disputes between governmental and cultural departments.



# Opportunities

Developing sports tourism can help create jobs for locals, stimulate economies, and promote India's cultural and natural heritage. Leading tourism players and other country-based companies operating in India are focusing on extending their businesses. Additionally, major players are looking at avenues to enter exciting collaborations with prominent players in the hospitality industry to enhance customer delight.



**Diversification of offerings:** Expanding the scope of sports tourism to include lesser-known amateur and adventure-sports can attract a wider audience. This diversification can attract local, repeat visitors, and deal with the seasonality aspect of major sports events.



**Technological innovations:** Using technology such as virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) can enhance the spectator experience, making sports tourism more attractive. Technology can also be used for better crowd management, enhanced security, improving overall tourist satisfaction.



**Sustainable practices:** Sporting events that incorporate sustainability in their operations can attract a niche market of environmentally conscious consumers.



**Marketing and branding:** Effective marketing strategies can help promote lesser-known destinations. Branding around specific sports or events can attract local and foreign tourists year-round.



**Partnerships and collaborations:** Collaborations between governments, private stakeholders, and international sport-bodies can lead to more efficient event management and promotion. Such partnerships can reduce the financial burden on any single entity.



**Culture and experiential tourism integration:** Integrating local culture and other tourism activities with sports events can improve visitor engagement and experience, encouraging longer stays and increased spending.

Other recent developments are as follows.

In May 2023, a fast-growing Indian travel fintech, announced its partnership with a leading provider of worldwide sports tickets, hospitality, and experiential travel firm. The partnership intends to provide customers with an economical and complete journey to the biggest sporting events in the world<sup>37</sup>.

On June 20, 2023, a leading, national sports consulting firm focused on sports travel and experiential experiences, announced its unique association with a national airline's loyalty program. The liaison aims to steer travel for sporting events and experiences within and outside the nation, making them more accessible. The sports consulting firm aims to create sports-themed packages for travellers as the airline's retail and lifestyle partner. Aside from tickets to events, airport transfers, hotel rooms, stadium tours, athlete interactions, sightseeing, travellers will also be able to explore golf, surfing, diving and more<sup>38</sup>.

Further, in March 2024, a B2B digital travel/tourism/hospitality/cruise/airline industry magazine and trade network, reported a notable rise in Indian tourists to Azerbaijan in 2024's first half, with 118,985 arrivals, up from 47,670 in 2023<sup>39</sup>, due to the Baku F1 Grand Prix among other attractions. Likewise, a travel trends report highlights an increasing movement of F1 fans from India, arranging to visit Singapore, with 29 per cent inclined to travel more for sports events and 30 per cent categorically for F1<sup>40</sup>.

The global sports tourism market size, valued at USD 323 million (INR 2,697 crores) in 2020, is projected to reach USD 1.8 billion (INR 15,046 crores) by 2030<sup>41</sup>.

By navigating challenges, preparing for threats, and systematically approaching the available opportunities, the sports tourism sector can achieve sustainable growth and continue to be a significant contributor to global tourism.

37. Sports partners with Travel Fintech To Make Sports Tourism Accessible and Affordable

38. Sports Tourism gets a Boost with Partnership - Hospitality Lexis

39. SATTE 2024: Florian Sengtschmid shares tourists' influx to Azerbaijan, March

40. Exploring the rise of sports tourism in India: The journey beyond the game, Praveen Sudevan, July 2024

41. Exploring the rise of sports tourism in India: The journey beyond the game, Praveen Sudevan, July 2024

## Considerations for sustainable development in sports tourism

The United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) notes the following pertinent considerations when approaching sports tourism development to sustainably benefit a destination's socio-environment-economic landscape<sup>42</sup>.

- Strengthened, supportive relationships among stakeholders in sports (including sport commissions, government bodies), tourism-sector, and the private-sector.
- Local support (SMEs) involvement. This helps maximise local benefits and reduce economic leakage. It includes extending business advice and micro-finances.
- Promoting sport activities to locals for health and their well-being. When visitors and residents participate in the same sport event, it works as an opportunity for all to interact, this improves overall satisfaction of participants and residents alike.
- Ensuring female participation and involvement by adequately training and providing micro-finance for businesses owned by women. This entails creating and promoting opportunities for girl/women athletes.
- Sport-event planning must suit destination capacity and characteristics. Timing and venue of a sport-event must consider objectives of the event. Cultural uniqueness can be incorporated to make the event stand out, providing participants and visitors the opportunity to interact with local communities. Incentives, for example, coupons may be offered to participants and tourist to spend at local stores, restaurants, and other services. Sport-event planning is an opportunity to advertise the destination; especially, regular sports events can help achieve long-term positive impacts.
- Sports events can be organised for causes, where part of the fees go to local communities, charities, or a good cause.
- Safety of all is paramount. All must be briefed and informed on risks and safety measures and act responsibly. Guides and instructors must have good knowledge of how to respond in an emergency through appropriate trainings.
- Technological integration can increase engagement. Sports tourism sustainable development presents an opportunity to take advantage of updated technological advancements, for example, VR and AR.
- Sports events also offer the opportunity to participants, attendees, and visitors to explore and discover other attractions at a destination. Combining sports tourism with other tourism resources brings additional benefits to a destination as a whole.

There are additional considerations<sup>43</sup> when approaching sports tourism development focused on long-term sustainability of the developed infrastructure, destinations, and resources. The triple bottom line (TBL) reporting is a widely accepted approach to identifying and measuring impacts<sup>44</sup>. It is an assessment of economic, socio-cultural, and environmental influences as pertinent to sporting events and sport tourism on local communities.



42. Sport Tourism and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), 2019, UNWTO, eISBN: 978-92-844-1966-1 | ISBN: 978-92-844-1965-4

43. Sport Tourism and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), 2019, UNWTO, eISBN: 978-92-844-1966-1 | ISBN: 978-92-844-1965-4

44. Assessing and Considering the Wider Impacts of Sport-Tourism Events: A Research Agenda Review of Sustainability and Strategic Planning Elements. Sustainability 2020, mdpi, 12, 4473. Chersulich Tomino, A.; Perić, M.; Wise, N.



# Conclusion

Considering all elements deliberately when planning business of sports tourism in India to benefit the socio-economic and environmental landscape represents an unrecognised opportunity for the nation. Characterised by its ability to impact society and economy and foster cultural exchange between hosts and visitors, this sector uniquely combines the appeal of sports with the gain of exploring new destinations and experiences. Well-organised games, tournaments, and sports events can also draw in visitors not travelling for sports tourism.

Moreover, integration of technology, such as VR and AR, is transforming sports and tourism industries in India by enhancing fan engagement and experiences. For instance, the IPL integrated AR and VR through fan engagement apps, offers immersive experiences, such as virtual stadium tours and interactive player stats. Additionally, the Pro Kabaddi League utilised VR to provide fans with a 360-degree view of matches, making them part of the live-action without in-person attendance.

In addition to enhancing fan engagement, AR and VR technologies are being utilised in India to improve training and performance of athletes. For instance, VR is used to simulate game scenarios, allowing athletes to practice and refine their skills in a controlled environment. This technology is particularly beneficial for sports like cricket and football, where players can experience match-like conditions without physical strain. Moreover, AR is being employed to provide real-time data and analytics during training sessions, helping coaches and players make informed decisions.

The Gujarat Tourism Corporation has also piloted VR initiatives to promote state tourism, creating 360-degree immersive videos of historical sites like the Indus Valley ruins of Lothal and Dholavira<sup>45</sup>. Similarly, Kerala Tourism has launched an AR-based virtual tour guide app for the Muziris Heritage Project, providing tourists with detailed information and virtual tours of heritage sites<sup>46</sup>. These innovations improve experience and promote sustainable tourism by reducing the need for physical travel, thereby lowering sports tourism's carbon footprint.

Sports tourism offers opportunities for improving socio-environment-economic infrastructure development, and strategic international positioning.

Integrated planning, stakeholder collaboration, and targeted marketing can help India tap into the global sports tourism market.

It is necessary to mention that many sports events do not offer long-term gains and can induce disparities in societies and communities, if conducted improperly and superfluously. Much research, planning, assessments, collective deliberations, and collaborations need strengthening. *"Sport-tourism events create a broad spectrum of impacts on and for host communities. However, sustainable sport-tourism events, which emphasise positive impacts, and minimise negative impacts, do not arise by chance —they need careful planning and implementation"*<sup>47</sup>.



45. Gujarat Tourism to soon make 360-degree live action virtual reality videos, Economic Times, Sep 2016

46. Keralatourism.org/2024/mobile-applications

47. Assessing and Considering the Wider Impacts of Sport-Tourism Events: A Research Agenda Review of Sustainability and Strategic Planning Elements. Sustainability 2020, mdpi, 12, 4473. Chersulich Tomino, A.; Perić, M.; Wise, N.

## Sustainable sports tourism development in India

Some recommendations to consider before planning sports tourism development in India follow.

- **Diversification:** Promotion of diverse sports and activities, such as adventure sports, extreme sports, local sports, and wellness tourism.
- **Integrated planning:** A comprehensive national sports tourism policy, aligning government initiatives, sports organisations, and tourism boards is needed.
- **Infrastructure development:** Investment in world-class sports infrastructure and equipment, amenities and facilities at stadia, training facilities, and sport centres.
- **Marketing and promotion:** Targeted marketing campaigns that leverage digital, social media platforms to display India's sports tourism offerings.
- **Event management:** Vie for and host international sports events, leveraging existing human potential, infrastructure, and expertise.
- **Green Certifications:** Implementing green certifications for sports venues and events can encourage organisers to adopt sustainable practices. This can include criteria like energy efficiency, waste management, and community involvement.
- **Training and capacity building:** Develop trained professionals and guides to cater to sports tourists, focusing on knowledge, visitor management, hospitality, and customer service.
- **Public-private partnerships:** Foster collaborations between government agencies, sports organisations, and private-sector entities to drive investment and innovation.
- **Regional development:** Focus on developing sports tourism infrastructure and events in rural and peripheral areas, promoting inclusive growth.
- **Technology integration:** Leverage technology to enhance the sports tourism experience, including digital ticketing, virtual tours, and social media engagement.
- **Sustainability:** Emphasise environment-friendly and sustainable practices in sports tourism development, minimising adverse social, environment, and economic impacts.
- **Cultural exchange:** Promote cultural exchange programmes, allowing sports participants and tourists to experience India's cultural heritage.
- **Safety and security:** Ensure robust safety and security measures for sport participants, tourists, and residents for a secure and enjoyable experience.

The measures and guidelines outlined in this TL can help direct India to tap into the global sports tourism market, driving economic growth, cultural exchange, and tourism development. The government's supportive stance on sports infrastructure and tourism development further facilitates this growth, with the dual aim of enhancing the country's sports industry profile and stimulating regional economies. The ongoing endeavour to develop sports facilities to execute local and international events is expected to sustain and increase the economic impact of sports tourism in India, reinforcing its role in the broader national economic strategy.







# Acknowledgements

## KPMG research team

- Anumeha Raj (Associate Director)
- Vikram Thapar (Associate Director)
- Lipsa Sahoo (Manager)
- Nishant Pokale (Assistant Manager)
- Nishu Iyer (Consultant)
- Shaivya Singh (Consultant)
- Mansi Handa (Specialist)

## KPMG design and compliance team

- Nisha Fernandes (Associate Director)
- Pooja Patel (Assistant Manager)
- Karthika Prabasankar (Executive)





# KPMG in India contacts:

**Akhilesh Tuteja**

Head

Clients & Markets

E: [atuteja@kpmg.com](mailto:atuteja@kpmg.com)

**Vivek Agarwal**

Partner

Industrial & Infrastructure Development Advisory (IIDA)

E: [vivekagarwal1@kpmg.com](mailto:vivekagarwal1@kpmg.com)

**Aalap Bansal**

Partner

Industrial & Infrastructure Development Advisory (IIDA)

E: [aalapbansal1@kpmg.com](mailto:aalapbansal1@kpmg.com)

**Prasanth S**

Partner

Head of Sports Sector

E: [prasanths@kpmg.com](mailto:prasanths@kpmg.com)

[kpmg.com/in](https://kpmg.com/in)



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KPMG Assurance and Consulting Services LLP, Lodha Excelus, Apollo Mills Compound, NM Joshi Marg, Mahalaxmi, Mumbai - 400 011 Phone: +91 22 3989 6000, Fax: +91 22 3983 6000.

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