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TOURISM SECTOR -ITS IMPACT ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN KARNATAKA ECONOMY

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the economic role of the tourism sector in Karnataka during 2010–2019, a period marked by sustained growth in tourist arrivals, policy evolution, and increasing recognition of tourism as a priority sector in the state's economic strategy. Karnataka's tourism economy is distinctive: it attracts the third-largest share of domestic tourists in India while ranking lower in foreign tourist arrivals, and its tourism product mix is dominated by heritage and religious sites rather than leisure or adventure tourism. Using secondary data from the Ministry of Tourism, Karnataka Tourism Department, CAG audit reports, and state economic surveys, this study analyzes the contribution of tourism to Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP), employment generation, and regional economic development. The central hypothesis posits that tourism's economic contribution to Karnataka during 2010–2019, while substantial in aggregate terms, was constrained by infrastructure deficits, weak policy implementation, and an over-reliance on heritage and religious tourism that limited the sector's multiplier effects. Findings indicate that tourism's share in GSDP, measured through the "Trade, Hotels and Restaurants" sub-sector, declined from 14.2% in 2010–11 to 11.4% in 2014–15, even as tourist arrivals increased, suggesting that the sector's growth did not translate proportionally into state income . By 2019, broader estimates placed tourism's contribution at 14.8% of GSDP and over 30 lakh jobs, though methodological differences complicate direct comparison. The study concludes that Karnataka's tourism economy grew during the decade but failed to realize its full potential due to implementation gaps and strategic limitations. Recommendations emphasize infrastructure modernization, diversification beyond heritage tourism, and performance-linked public investment.

Keywords*: Tourism, Karnataka Economy, GSDP Contribution, Tourist Arrivals, Tourism Policy, Employment Generation, 2010–2019*

I. INTRODUCTION

Tourism in Karnataka occupies a paradoxical position. The state is home to UNESCO World Heritage Sites (Hampi, Pattadakal), major religious centers (Udupi, Sringeri, Dharmasthala), diverse natural landscapes (Coorg, Western Ghats, coastal beaches), and a vibrant cultural capital in Mysuru. Its "One State, Many Worlds" branding captures this diversity. Yet Karnataka's tourism economy has historically punched below its weight, particularly in international tourism, where it ranks eleventh among Indian states despite its cultural and natural assets.

The decade 2010–2019 represents a critical period for assessing tourism's economic role. This period witnessed the implementation of the Karnataka Tourism Policy 2009–14, the formulation of a subsequent policy framework, and growing state investment in tourism infrastructure. It also saw significant growth in domestic tourist volumes: domestic arrivals rose from 38.2 million in 2010–11 to over 215 million by 2018, a more than fivefold increase. Foreign tourist arrivals grew more modestly, from approximately 3.8 lakh to 5.4 lakh over the same period.

The economic significance of these trends is not self-evident. Higher tourist numbers do not automatically translate into higher state income if the visitors are concentrated in low-spending segments, if tourism infrastructure is inefficiently managed, or if the sector's growth is absorbed by leakages outside the state economy. The CAG's performance audit of Karnataka tourism for the period 2010–15 identified precisely these concerns: declining occupancy in state-run hotels despite rising arrivals, unexecuted infrastructure projects, and the absence of a clear roadmap for tapping tourism potential.

This study is needed because the existing literature on Karnataka tourism is largely descriptive, focusing on arrival statistics or policy documents rather than economic analysis. Studies that do examine economic contribution often rely on broad national estimates or inconsistent methodologies. A systematic assessment covering 2010–2019, integrating arrival data with GSDP contribution, employment estimates, and policy implementation evidence, can provide a more reliable picture of tourism's actual role in Karnataka's economy.

II. DEFINITIONS

Tourism Sector: The aggregate of economic activities associated with visitors' travel and stay, including accommodation, food and beverage, transport, recreation, and retail. In official statistics, it is often proxied by the "Trade, Hotels and Restaurants" sub-sector, though this excludes transport and includes non-tourism trade.

Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP): The total monetary value of all finished goods and services produced within a state's boundaries in a given period, used as a measure of economic output.

Tourism Multiplier: The ratio of total economic activity generated by tourism to the direct spending by tourists, capturing indirect and induced effects through supply chains and income circulation.

Domestic Tourist Visits (DTV): Visits by residents of India to destinations within the country, outside their usual place of residence, for purposes including leisure, pilgrimage, and business.

Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTA): Visits by non-residents to India for tourism purposes, as recorded at ports of entry and estimated by the Ministry of Tourism.

III. NEED FOR THE STUDY

The need for a rigorous economic analysis of Karnataka tourism during 2010–2019 arises from three considerations. First, the sector's policy prominence has not been matched by analytical rigor. Tourism has been declared a priority sector and has received substantial public investment, yet the CAG audit revealed significant implementation failures, including unexecuted sound and light show projects worth ₹9.36 crore, declining occupancy in state-run hotels, and the absence of identified PPP projects . Understanding whether public investment translated into economic returns is essential for accountability and future planning.

Second, Karnataka's tourism economy is structurally distinctive and requires tailored analysis. The state's heavy reliance on heritage and religious tourism—which accounted for 65% of tourists according to the 2011 Annual Report of the Department of Tourism—means that its tourism economy has different spending patterns, seasonality, and infrastructure requirements than states dominated by leisure or business tourism . Generic national studies cannot capture these specific dynamics.

Third, the period 2010–2019 includes significant methodological and policy transitions. The state's tourism policy evolved from the 2009–14 framework to newer approaches emphasizing digital promotion, sustainable tourism, and community participation . The economic data available also changed, with the Ministry of Tourism revising its estimates and the state introducing new measurement approaches. A study that spans this period must navigate these inconsistencies while providing a coherent narrative of tourism's economic trajectory.

IV. AIMS

The primary aim of this study is to analyze the economic role of the tourism sector in Karnataka from 2010 to 2019, examining its contribution to GSDP, employment, and regional development, and assessing the extent to which policy interventions and infrastructure investments achieved their stated economic objectives.

V. OBJECTIVES

1. To document trends in domestic and foreign tourist arrivals to Karnataka from 2010 to 2019.
2. To estimate the contribution of tourism (proxied by the Trade, Hotels and Restaurants sub-sector) to Karnataka's GSDP during the study period.
3. To assess the employment generation potential of the tourism sector, including direct and indirect jobs.
4. To analyze the implementation and outcomes of Karnataka's tourism policies, including infrastructure projects and PPP initiatives.
5. To identify the structural constraints that limited tourism's economic contribution despite rising arrivals.
6. To examine the regional distribution of tourism activity and its implications for balanced economic development.

VI. HYPOTHESIS

H_0 (Null): There is no significant relationship between tourist arrivals and tourism's contribution to Karnataka's GSDP during 2010–2019.

H_1 (Alternative): Tourist arrivals and tourism's contribution to Karnataka's GSDP are positively related, but the relationship is mediated by infrastructure quality, policy implementation, and the composition of tourist segments.

Operational Hypothesis: Tourism's economic contribution to Karnataka during 2010–2019 grew in absolute terms but declined as a share of GSDP, reflecting both the rapid growth of other sectors and the tourism sector's failure to capture higher-value segments due to infrastructure and policy constraints.

VII. LITERATURE SEARCH

A systematic search was conducted across Google Scholar, Shodhganga, the CAG audit repository, Ministry of Tourism publications, and Karnataka Tourism Department documents. Search terms included "Karnataka tourism economy," "tourism GSDP Karnataka," "Karnataka tourism policy evaluation," and "tourism employment Karnataka." Priority was given to sources covering the 2010–2019 period and providing quantitative or policy-analytic content.

Key sources include: the CAG's 2016 performance audit of Karnataka tourism, which provides the most detailed critical assessment of policy implementation and GSDP data for 2010–15 ; Karnataka Tourism Policy documents from 2015 and 2019, which retrospectively frame the sector's evolution ; a Shodhganga doctoral thesis providing secondary data analysis of tourism growth and economic contribution ; and journal articles examining tourism's role in state economic development, including Thippeswamy (2014) and Gowtham and Shekhar (2019) . The literature reveals a gap: no single study provides a comprehensive, methodologically consistent assessment of tourism's economic role in Karnataka for the full 2010–2019 period.

VIII. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design: Descriptive and analytical, based on secondary data.

Study Area: Karnataka state, with reference to major tourism circuits and districts where data permit.

Period: 2010–11 to 2019–20 (10 financial years). This period captures the implementation of the 2009–14 tourism policy, the subsequent policy transition, and the pre-pandemic peak of tourism activity.

Data Sources: Ministry of Tourism (India Tourism Statistics), Karnataka Department of Tourism, CAG Audit Reports (Report No. 2 of 2016), Economic Survey of Karnataka, and Karnataka Tourism Policy documents.

Variables: Domestic and foreign tourist arrivals; "Trade, Hotels and Restaurants" share in GSDP; tourism-related employment estimates; and policy implementation indicators (project completion, occupancy rates, PPP execution).

Analytical Tools:

1. **Trend analysis** of arrivals and GSDP shares.
2. **Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR)** for tourist arrivals.
3. **Comparative analysis** of tourism's GSDP share against other sectors.
4. **Policy implementation assessment** based on CAG findings and departmental reports.

Limitations: Tourism's GSDP contribution is proxied by a sub-sector that includes non-tourism activities and excludes tourism-related transport. Employment estimates vary across sources and methodologies. District-level tourism economic data are sparse and inconsistent. The study cannot isolate the causal effect of tourism on economic development from other concurrent factors.

IX. STRONG POINTS OF THE STUDY

The principal strength of this research is its integration of arrival data with GSDP contribution and policy implementation evidence. Most existing analyses focus on one dimension—either tourist numbers or policy documents—without connecting them to economic outcomes. By bringing together the CAG's implementation audit,

the Ministry of Tourism's arrival statistics, and the Economic Survey's GSDP data, this study provides a triangulated assessment that is more robust than single-source analyses.

A second strength is the use of the CAG performance audit as a foundational source. The CAG's 2016 report is the most comprehensive independent evaluation of Karnataka tourism policy during the study period. Its findings on declining hotel occupancy despite rising arrivals, unexecuted projects, and the absence of a strategic roadmap are essential for understanding why tourism's economic contribution did not grow proportionally with visitor numbers . Incorporating this evidence distinguishes the study from promotional or descriptive accounts.

Third, the study's attention to the composition of tourism—particularly the dominance of heritage and religious segments—provides explanatory depth. The finding that 65% of tourists were heritage/religious visitors in 2011 has implications for spending patterns, geographic distribution, and infrastructure needs. Heritage tourists may have different expenditure profiles than leisure or business travelers, and their concentration at specific sites creates both opportunities (focused investment) and risks (seasonality, site congestion).

Fourth, the study period captures a full policy cycle. The 2009–14 tourism policy was implemented and evaluated (by the CAG) within this window, and its successor policy was being formulated. This allows the study to assess not just outcomes but the policy process itself, including the gap between stated objectives and implemented actions.

X. WEAK POINTS OF THE STUDY

The most significant limitation is the inadequacy of the GSDP proxy. The "Trade, Hotels and Restaurants" sub-sector includes retail trade that is unrelated to tourism and excludes tourism-related transport services (airlines, buses, taxis). This means the GSDP share attributed to tourism in official statistics is both over-inclusive and under-inclusive, and its movement over time may reflect changes in retail trade rather than tourism activity. The decline in this sub-sector's share from 14.2% to 11.4% between 2010–11 and 2014–15 cannot be interpreted as a decline in tourism's economic contribution without corroborating evidence, because it may reflect faster growth in other sectors or changes in trade patterns.

A second weakness is the absence of expenditure-side data. The study can document arrivals and GSDP shares but cannot estimate how much tourists actually spent, where they spent it, or how much of that spending remained in the local economy. Without expenditure data disaggregated by tourist type (domestic/foreign, heritage/leisure/business), the multiplier effects of tourism cannot be reliably estimated. This is a common limitation of state-level tourism analysis, but it constrains the study's ability to assess economic impact beyond crude aggregates.

Third, the employment estimates are inconsistent across sources. The 2019 estimate of "over 30 lakh jobs" is not accompanied by a methodology that allows verification or comparison with earlier years. Direct and indirect employment are often conflated, and the informal nature of much tourism employment (homestays, street vendors, guides) means that official statistics likely undercount actual employment.

Fourth, the study cannot adequately address the distributional question: who benefits from tourism growth? The CAG audit noted that state-run hotels and lodges experienced declining occupancy , suggesting that public-sector tourism infrastructure was not capturing the benefits of arrival growth. But whether private-sector tourism enterprises, local communities, or outside investors captured the gains is not answerable with available data.

XI. CURRENT TRENDS

Several trends characterize Karnataka tourism as it emerged from the 2010–2019 period. The most significant is the continued dominance of domestic tourism. Domestic arrivals reached 215 million by 2018, placing Karnataka third among Indian states, while foreign arrivals of 5.4 lakh placed it eleventh . This asymmetry reflects both the state's strength in accessible heritage and religious destinations for Indian travelers and its relative weakness in international marketing and connectivity.

A second trend is the growing policy emphasis on diversification. The Karnataka Tourism Policy 2010–2029 identifies 25 tourism themes and 44 projects, with explicit goals to develop adventure tourism, MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, Exhibitions) tourism in Bengaluru, and coastal tourism stretches . This represents a strategic shift from the heritage-dominated approach of the earlier period, though implementation remains to be seen.

Third, digital promotion has become central to state tourism marketing. The "One State, Many Worlds" campaign and virtual tour initiatives have leveraged social media platforms to reach domestic audiences . This is consistent with broader trends in destination marketing, but its economic impact—as distinct from its reach—has not been rigorously evaluated.

Fourth, infrastructure development has accelerated, particularly the Bengaluru–Mysuru expressway (reducing travel time from 3.5 hours to under 1.5 hours) and rail tourism initiatives such as the Bharat Gaurav trains . These investments address the connectivity constraints identified in the CAG audit, but their tourism-specific economic returns are not yet documented.

XII. HISTORY

The historical evolution of tourism policy in Karnataka provides essential context. Prior to the 2000s, tourism was a marginal portfolio within the state administration, with limited budget and no dedicated policy framework. The first Karnataka Tourism Policy was formulated in 2002, followed by the more substantive 2009–14 policy, which introduced the "One State, Many Worlds" branding and identified tourism as a priority sector .

The 2009–14 policy period coincided with the early years of this study. The policy relied heavily on Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) for infrastructure development, but the CAG later found that the Department of Tourism had not identified specific projects for PPP development and lacked a "clear road map with suitable time lines" . This implementation gap is a recurring theme in Karnataka tourism history: ambitious policy statements followed by weak execution.

The mid-2010s saw a period of consolidation and evaluation. The CAG's 2016 audit was a critical juncture, documenting the gap between policy aspirations and outcomes. Subsequently, the state began shifting toward a more structured approach, culminating in the Karnataka Tourism Policy 2010–2019, which includes detailed subsidy structures, single-window clearance, and industry status for tourism . The 2010–2019 period thus represents a transitional phase between the ambitious but poorly executed policies of the 2000s and the more systematic (if yet unproven) approach of the 2019.

XIII. DISCUSSION

The evidence from 2010–2019 presents a complex picture of tourism's economic role in Karnataka. On one hand, the sector grew substantially in volume: domestic arrivals more than quintupled, and tourism became a recognized priority sector with dedicated policy attention. On the other hand, the economic metrics suggest that this growth did not translate proportionally into state income. The declining share of the Trade, Hotels and Restaurants sub-sector in GSDP , combined with declining occupancy in state-run accommodations , indicates that the benefits of arrival growth were either captured by other sectors, leaked outside the state, or absorbed by inefficiencies.

The CAG's findings are particularly instructive. The audit identified that despite a 40% increase in tourist arrivals between 2011 and 2014, occupancy in KSTDC hotels fell from 46% to 38%, and in Jungle Lodges from 57% to 48% . This is a striking illustration of the disconnect between arrival volume and economic capture. Tourists were coming, but they were not staying in state-run facilities. Whether they were staying in private hotels, with relatives, or not staying overnight at all is not documented in the available data, but the implication is clear: public investment in tourism accommodation was not generating returns proportional to the growth in demand.

The dominance of heritage and religious tourism (65% of visitors in 2011) helps explain this pattern. Pilgrims and heritage day-trippers often have lower spending profiles than leisure or business travelers. They may visit a temple or monument, make offerings, and return the same day, contributing to local retail and transport but not to accommodation or higher-value services. If Karnataka's tourism growth was concentrated in these segments, the multiplier effects on the state economy would be correspondingly limited.

The infrastructure constraints identified in the CAG audit further compound this problem. Poor road conditions, inadequate signage, and unreliable internet connectivity at homestay locations reduce the attractiveness of tourism destinations and limit the capacity of local enterprises to capture visitor spending. The unexecuted sound and light show projects represent lost opportunities to enhance visitor experience and extend dwell time, which would have increased spending.

The policy response in the later part of the decade and beyond—diversification into MICE, adventure, and coastal tourism, coupled with infrastructure investment and digital marketing —represents a recognition of these limitations. Whether this response will succeed in raising tourism's economic contribution depends on implementation, which has historically been the weak link in Karnataka's tourism strategy.

XIV. RESULTS

The analysis yields the following principal results:

Tourist Arrivals: Domestic tourist visits to Karnataka grew from approximately 38.2 million in 2010–11 to 215 million in 2018, a CAGR of approximately 24% . Foreign tourist arrivals grew from approximately 3.8 lakh to 5.4 lakh over the same period, a CAGR of approximately 4.5%.

GSDP Contribution: The "Trade, Hotels and Restaurants" sub-sector's share in Karnataka's GSDP declined from 14.2% in 2010–11 to 11.4% in 2014–15, the last year for which consistent data are available in the CAG audit . Broader 2019 estimates place tourism's contribution at 14.8% of GSDP, though these use a different methodology and cannot be directly compared.

Employment: Estimates for 2019 indicate over 30 lakh jobs (direct and indirect) attributable to tourism . Methodology and year-by-year trends are not available.

State Infrastructure Performance: KSTDC hotel occupancy declined from 46% (2010–11) to 38% (2014–15); Jungle Lodges occupancy declined from 57% to 48% over the same period, despite rising arrivals .

Policy Implementation: The CAG found that four sound and light show projects approved in 2008–10 (cost: ₹9.36 crore) were not executed due to approval lapses; PPP projects were not identified; and no clear roadmap existed for achieving policy objectives .

XV. CONCLUSION

Tourism in Karnataka during 2010–2019 was a sector of substantial volume growth and unmet economic potential. Domestic arrivals grew at a pace that placed Karnataka among India's top three destination states, yet the sector's contribution to GSDP, measured through available proxies, did not grow proportionally. The disconnect between arrivals and economic capture is explained by a combination of factors: the dominance of low-spending heritage and religious segments, declining utilization of state-run tourism infrastructure, implementation failures in publicly funded projects, and the absence of a strategic roadmap for high-value tourism development.

The central hypothesis—that tourism's contribution grew in absolute terms but declined as a share of GSDP—is supported by the available evidence, though the limitations of the GSDP proxy mean this conclusion is indicative rather than definitive. The operational hypothesis that infrastructure and policy implementation mediated the arrivals-GSDP relationship is strongly supported by the CAG's findings on declining occupancy and unexecuted projects.

The implications for Karnataka's economy are significant. Tourism has the potential to be a major driver of employment, foreign exchange, and regional development, particularly in districts outside Bengaluru that lack alternative growth engines. But this potential is not automatic. It requires not just marketing and arrival growth, but deliberate investment in infrastructure that captures visitor spending, diversification into higher-value segments, and accountability in policy implementation. The 2010–2019 period demonstrates that without these complementary conditions, rising tourist numbers alone do not produce proportional economic returns.

XVI. SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Implement a Tourism Satellite Account for Karnataka: The state should adopt a Tourism Satellite Account methodology, in collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism, to measure tourism's direct and indirect contribution to GSDP, employment, and tax revenue with greater accuracy than the current Trade, Hotels and Restaurants proxy. This would enable evidence-based policy and investment decisions.

2. Prioritize Infrastructure That Captures Visitor Spending: Investment should focus on projects that extend visitor dwell time and increase spending: quality accommodation in heritage and pilgrimage centers, interpretive

centers at major monuments, sound and light shows (properly executed with ASI approval in advance), and last-mile connectivity to secondary destinations .

3. Diversify Beyond Heritage and Religious Tourism: The dominance of heritage/religious segments limits spending potential. The state should accelerate development of MICE tourism in Bengaluru, adventure tourism in the Western Ghats, and wellness tourism leveraging Karnataka's Ayurveda and yoga traditions . These segments attract higher-spending visitors and reduce seasonality.

4. Reform State Tourism Infrastructure Management: The declining occupancy of KSTDC and Jungle Lodges properties despite rising arrivals indicates a management problem. Options include professional management contracts, rebranding and repositioning of properties, or strategic disinvestment of underperforming assets. Continued operation without reform would perpetuate the pattern of public investment without public return.

5. Strengthen Homestay and Community Tourism with Quality Standards: The CAG found poor road conditions, inadequate signage, and unreliable connectivity at homestay locations . The state should condition homestay registration and incentives on minimum quality standards (connectivity, safety, cleanliness) and provide training and marketing support to help homestay operators capture a larger share of visitor spending.

6. Link Tourism Development to Regional Economic Planning: Tourism investment should be coordinated with district-level economic development plans, particularly in northern Karnataka districts that have significant heritage assets (Hampi, Badami, Aihole, Pattadakal) but limited tourism infrastructure. This would help distribute tourism's economic benefits more equitably across the state.

XVII. FUTURE SCOPE

Future research should address the methodological gaps identified in this study. A primary data collection effort at major tourism destinations, surveying visitors on expenditure patterns, length of stay, and satisfaction, would provide the expenditure-side data necessary for multiplier estimation. Such a survey should be stratified by tourist type (domestic/foreign, heritage/leisure/business) and destination type.

Second, the post-2019 period, including the COVID-19 disruption and the implementation of the 2010–2019 tourism policy, offers an opportunity to assess whether the policy shifts toward diversification and infrastructure investment have altered tourism's economic trajectory. A follow-up study covering 2010–2019 would be valuable.
Third, the regional distribution of tourism's economic benefits requires attention. District-level analysis of tourism employment, enterprise formation, and household income would reveal whether tourism is contributing to balanced regional development or concentrating benefits in already prosperous areas.

Fourth, comparative analysis with other South Indian states—Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana—would help identify Karnataka's relative strengths and weaknesses in tourism economic performance and policy effectiveness. Such comparison could yield transferable lessons.

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