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Floral Tourism in India: A National and International Perspective

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Abstract

Floral tourism, a niche within ecotourism, revolves around the appreciation of natural and cultivated floral beauty. Globally, it has emerged as a vital sector, contributing to both economic growth and conservation. Countries like the Netherlands, Japan, and the USA have successfully capitalized on their floral resources to attract millions of visitors annually. In India, with its vast floral diversity—home to over 17,000 species of flowering plants—floral tourism is gaining prominence. Iconic destinations like the Valley of Flowers, Srinagar's Tulip Garden, and Lalbagh Botanical Garden draw significant tourist interest, with notable economic contributions at the regional and national levels. India's floriculture industry, valued at 15,700 crore (\$1.9 billion), is expanding rapidly, supported by flower festivals and increased domestic and international demand. The country's unique biodiversity hotspots and the deep cultural significance of flowers give it a competitive edge in the global market. However, challenges such as seasonality, poor infrastructure, and environmental concerns must be addressed. By adopting sustainable tourism models and increasing global marketing, India can position itself as a leading destination in floral tourism, balancing economic development with environmental stewardship and cultural preservation.

Keywords: *Floral tourism, Floriculture, Biodiversity, Ecotourism, Cultural tourism, Sustainability, Flower festivals*

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1. Introduction

Floral tourism, or floriculture tourism, is a specialized segment of ecotourism that revolves around visiting destinations known for their natural and cultivated floral beauty. This serves as a confluence of environmental appreciation, economic development, and cultural expression. Globally, floral tourism is growing in importance, particularly in regions where biodiversity is high and flowers hold cultural or economic significance. In India, this form of tourism is gaining momentum thanks to the country's vast floral diversity, cultural practices, and increasing interest in ecotourism.

2. Floral Diversity in India

India is home to over 17,000 species of flowering plants, making it one of the most florally diverse countries in the world. The country's agro-climatic diversity, from cold Himalayan regions to tropical wetlands, provides an ideal environment for a wide range of endemic and exotic species to flourish. Major floral tourism destinations include the following.

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Valley of Flowers, Uttarakhand: A UNESCO World Heritage Site with over 500 species of flowers visited by 10,000 tourists annually.

Kaas Plateau, Maharashtra: A UNESCO World Heritage Site that transforms into a colorful flower bed during the monsoon season.

Tulip Garden, Srinagar: The largest tulip garden in Asia, which attracts over 200,000 tourists during the annual Tulip Festival.

Lalbagh Botanical Garden, Bengaluru: Renowned for its biannual flower shows. This historic garden attracts both tourists and botanical experts.

3. Floral Tourism from a Global Perspective

Countries such as the Netherlands, Japan, and the United States have capitalized on floral tourism as a significant part of their tourism industry.

The Netherlands: With its famous Keukenhof Gardens, the Netherlands attracts over 1.5 million visitors annually, contributing significantly to the economy, with the floriculture industry generating over €6 billion.

Japan: Japan's Sakura (Cherry Blossom) festival attracts over 63 million tourists annually, generating ¥650 billion (approx. \$5 billion) in terms of tourism revenue.

United States: The Pasadena Rose Parade sees over 700,000 visitors in person and millions more via global broadcast. Additionally, botanical gardens across the U.S. welcome millions of tourists annually, contributing to the floriculture economy.

These countries have transformed floral tourism into a structured sector that balances conservation, tourism, and economic growth.

4. National Overview: Floral Tourism in India

India is emerging as a global destination for floral tourism because of its rich biodiversity and cultural associations with flowers. Below is an overview of floral tourism from an Indian perspective:

4.1. Economic Contribution

The Indian floriculture industry is valued at around 15,700 crore (\$1.9 billion) and is growing at a rate of 7-8% annually. The cultivation of ornamental flowers, driven by both domestic and international demands, has led to the flourishing of floral tourism in many regions.

India's Flower Production: India produces over 3.2 million tonnes of flowers annually, with key regions being Uttarakhand, Karnataka, Maharashtra, and Jammu & Kashmir.

Exports: India exports cut flowers worth 5,000 crore annually, with major markets including the UAE, Germany, and Netherlands.

4.2. Regional Impacts

Specific regions have experienced substantial economic benefits from floral tourism.

Valley of Flowers, Uttarakhand: Contributes over ₹20 crore annually to the local economy through tourism.

Srinagar's Tulip Garden: The number of visitors has increased by 300% since 2007, and in 2022 alone, the garden generated significant revenue for the region, employing hundreds of locals.

4.3. Key Festivals

Flower festivals in India are important tourist attractions.

Tulip Festival, Srinagar: Attracts thousands of tourists annually and boosts regional tourism.

Lalbagh Flower Show, Bengaluru: Generates 5-10 crore in revenue and supports over 200 nurseries and florists.

Rose Festival, Chandigarh: An annual event showcasing over 1,600 varieties of roses, drawing tourists, horticulturists, and botanists from around the world.

5. India's Competitive Edge in Global Floral Tourism

India's unique biodiversity and cultural traditions offer a competitive advantage to the global floral tourism market.

5.1. Biodiversity Hotspots

India is home to four global biodiversity hotspots: The Western Ghats, Himalayas, Indo-Burma region, and Sundaland. These areas are rich in endemic plant species, making them ideal destinations for ecotourism and floral tourism. Floral tourists can experience a range of plant lives unavailable in other parts of the world.

5.2. Cultural Significance

Flowers hold deep cultural and religious significance in India, where they are integral to festivals such as Onam and Holi. Floral tourism, when combined with cultural tourism, creates unique experiences for tourists.

5.3. Cost-Effective Destination

India remains a relatively affordable destination for domestic and international tourists. Compared to high-end floral destinations such as the Netherlands or Japan, India offers a cost-competitive advantage, with the average expenditure per floral tourist being 2,500-3,000 per day.

6. Global Comparison: India vs. International Leaders

India has the potential to compete with global leaders by leveraging biodiversity, cultural appeal, and cost competitiveness.

| Country | Main Floral Attraction | Annual Visitors | Economic Contribution |
|-------------|-------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Netherlands | Keukenhof Gardens | 1.5 million | €6 billion from floriculture |
| Japan | Sakura (Cherry Blossom) | 63 million | ¥650 billion during Sakura season |
| USA | Pasadena Rose Parade | 700,000 (in-person) | Multimillion-dollar event |
| India | Tulip Garden, Srinagar | 200,000 | 15,700 crore from floriculture |

7. Challenges and Opportunities

7.1. Challenges

Seasonality: Floral tourism is often restricted to specific blooming seasons, which limits tourist flow during off-peak periods.

Infrastructure: Many floral tourism destinations in India, particularly in remote regions, have poor infrastructure and connectivity.

Environmental Impact: Over-tourism can lead to environmental degradation, particularly in sensitive areas such as valleys of flowers.

7.2. Opportunities

Sustainable Tourism Practices: India can adopt eco-friendly and community-based tourism models that prioritize conservation while promoting tourism.

Diversification: Expanding floral tourism to include other forms of ecotourism (such as birdwatching and trekking) can ensure year-round tourist inflows.

Global Marketing: Increasing India's visibility in international floral tourism markets through strategic marketing can boost tourist numbers.

8. Conclusion

Floral tourism in India has vast untapped potential. With the rich biodiversity, deep-rooted cultural significance of flowers, and growing floriculture industry, India is poised to become a global hub for floral tourism. However, to achieve its full potential, there is a need for better infrastructure, sustainable tourism practices, and stronger global marketing.

Learning from the successes of countries such as the Netherlands and Japan, India can develop a thriving floral tourism sector that contributes to both conservation and economic development.

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