

*Bridging the Gap: Higher Education, Skill Development, and Tourism Employ-ability in India*

Sanjana Singh

Research Scholar, Commerce Department, University of Lucknow

**Prof. (Dr.) Ram Milan**

Head, Department of Commerce, University of Lucknow, Lucknow

**Dr. Rana Rohit Singh,**

Associate professor,

Department of Business Administration,

Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia Avadh University, Ayodhya.

**Priyanka Singh,**

Research Scholer, Department of Business Administration,

Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia Avadh University, Ayodhya.

**Dr. Gajendra Kumar Gupta\***

Assistant Professor, Faculty of Management, Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam Technical University Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh

Corresponding author\* Email: gkgmba@gmail.com

### Abstract

The tourism sector is a significant contributor to economic growth, employment generation, and cultural exchange, particularly in a diverse country like India. Despite possessing vast tourism potential, India continues to face challenges in establishing a strong global presence due to issues such as inadequate infrastructure, inconsistent service quality, and limited integration of modern marketing practices. In this context, the role of higher education becomes crucial in developing a skilled workforce capable of supporting sustainable tourism development and effective destination branding. This study examines the role of higher education in strengthening tourism branding and enhancing employ-ability in India. It focuses on the effectiveness of tourism-related courses, the gap between academic curriculum and industry requirements, and the importance of skill development in improving job readiness among graduates. The research is based on a descriptive and qualitative approach, utilizing secondary data collected from academic journals, government reports, and industry publications. The findings of the study reveal a significant mismatch between theoretical learning and practical industry needs, resulting in a lack of essential skills among tourism graduates. It also highlights low awareness regarding government employment opportunities and the need for improved career guidance. Furthermore, the study emphasizes that the shortage of trained professionals negatively impacts service quality and tourism branding. The study concludes that there is an urgent need to reform tourism education by incorporating practical training, industry collaboration, and skill-based learning. Strengthening the connection between academia, industry, and government can enhance employ-ability and contribute to building a strong and competitive tourism sector in India.

**Keywords:** Tourism, Higher Education, Employ-ability, Tourism Branding, Skill Development, Tourism marketing, MICE, River tourism

### Introduction

Tourism is one of the fastest-growing sectors globally, contributing significantly to economic development, cultural exchange, foreign exchange earnings, and employment generation. It plays a vital role in promoting regional development and creating opportunities across various allied industries such as hospitality, transportation, and entertainment. India, with its rich cultural heritage, diverse geography, historical monuments, and spiritual significance, possesses immense potential to emerge as a leading global tourism destination. The concept of *Atithi Devo Bhava*, deeply rooted in Indian tradition, reflects the country's strong foundation in hospitality and its long-standing cultural values of welcoming guests.

Despite these inherent strengths, India continues to capture only a limited share of the global tourism market when compared to countries such as Thailand, Vietnam, and Singapore, which have successfully leveraged their tourism potential through effective strategies and skilled human resources. This gap highlights underlying challenges that restrict India's ability to fully capitalize on its tourism assets. In recent years, the Government of India has introduced several initiatives, including the Swadesh Darshan Scheme and PRASAD Scheme, aimed at improving tourism infrastructure, promoting lesser-known destinations, and strengthening the country's tourism branding. While these initiatives have contributed positively, issues such as inadequate infrastructure, safety concerns, lack of integrated marketing strategies, and inefficient resource utilization continue to hinder sustainable growth. An important yet often overlooked factor in tourism development is the role of **higher education in building a skilled and competent workforce**. The tourism industry is highly service-oriented, where the quality of human interaction directly influences tourist satisfaction and destination image. Educational institutions offering tourism-related courses are expected to equip students with industry-relevant knowledge, practical exposure, and professional skills. However, there exists a significant gap between academic learning and industry expectations, particularly in areas such as practical training, communication skills, digital marketing, and customer relationship management. This disconnect leads to low employability among graduates and affects the overall service quality in the tourism sector.

Furthermore, limited awareness regarding government employment opportunities and emerging career paths in tourism further restricts students' potential. The absence of industry-oriented curriculum and insufficient collaboration between academia and industry creates additional challenges in developing a competent workforce. Therefore, this study emphasizes the critical role of higher education in strengthening tourism branding and enhancing employability in India. It focuses on tourism courses, skill development, professional competencies, government employment opportunities, and the need for a more practical and industry-aligned education system to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world application.

### Research Gap

- Limited focus on the connection between tourism education and industry requirements
- Gap between theoretical knowledge and practical skills in tourism courses
- Insufficient emphasis on skill-based and industry-oriented learning
- Lack of awareness about government vacancies and career opportunities in tourism sector
- Limited research on employability of tourism graduates
- Neglect of the role of trained professionals in tourism branding and service quality
- Inadequate focus on digital skills and modern marketing techniques in tourism education
- Limited attention to specialized tourism courses (eco-tourism, MICE, digital tourism)
- Weak integration between academia, industry, and government in tourism sector.

### Objectives of the Study

The present study aims to examine the role of higher education in strengthening the tourism sector in India, with a particular focus on employability, skill development, and tourism branding. The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

- To analyze the role of higher education in the development of the tourism industry in India.
- To examine the effectiveness of tourism-related courses in enhancing students' knowledge and skills.
- To identify the gap between academic curriculum and industry requirements in the tourism sector.
- To study the level of employability among tourism graduates and the challenges they face.
- To assess awareness regarding government job opportunities and vacancies in the tourism sector.
- To evaluate the role of skilled professionals in improving tourism services and branding.
- To suggest measures for improving tourism education and aligning it with industry needs.

### Literature review

Recent studies highlight that tourism is a significant contributor to economic growth, employment generation, and sustainable development. However, the effectiveness of tourism development largely depends on the availability of skilled human resources and the quality of tourism education.

According to Kumar and Khan (2021), tourism education in India faces a **supply–demand gap**, where academic institutions provide moderate theoretical knowledge, but industry professionals report a lack of practical skills among graduates. This indicates a disconnect between curriculum design and industry expectations, emphasizing the need for skill-based education and stronger academia–industry collaboration.

A study by Kumar and Bhinder (2024) examined the impact of curriculum components on students' employability and found that both generic skills and functional skills significantly influence employment potential in the tourism sector. The research highlights that tourism



#### **Source- Promoting Sustainable Tourism Through Employee Skills (MDPI Study)**

education must go beyond theoretical learning and focus on communication, problem-solving, and practical exposure. Similarly, Shyju (2018) analyzed the employability of tourism

#### **Source - Employability of Tourism Graduates (SSRN Source)**

graduates and concluded that placement opportunities depend largely on curriculum quality, institutional support, and students' preparedness for industry roles. The study emphasizes that universities must align their programs with industry requirements to improve job outcomes.

Research conducted in Himachal Pradesh also indicates that tourism education has a **direct impact on employment opportunities**, suggesting that expanding and improving tourism education can enhance job creation in the sector. This reinforces the importance of education as a driver of tourism development.

Furthermore, recent studies on vocational education highlight the importance of internships and experiential learning. **The National Education Policy (NEP 2020)**

(Part of ongoing research)

emphasizes internships as a key tool for making students industry-ready, especially in tourism and hospitality programs. Practical exposure enables students to understand real-world challenges and improves their employability.

In addition, Sreenivasan and Singh (2023) highlighted the role of tourism education and awareness in promoting tourism in India. Their study emphasizes that government initiatives, skill development programs, and specialized institutions are essential for building a competent workforce and enhancing tourism promotion strategies.

Overall, the literature suggests that while tourism has strong potential for economic and employment growth, there is a critical need to strengthen tourism education by integrating practical training, skill development, and industry collaboration. This will not only improve employability but also contribute to effective tourism branding and sustainable development.

## **EMPLOYABILITY OF TOURISM GRADUATES;**

### **STUDY ON THE PERSPECTIVES OF TOURISM SERVICE PROVIDERS OF VARANASI**

**Dr. Shyju P J**

Asst. Professor (Tourism Management), Dept. of History of Art, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, Email: [pishyju@gmail.com](mailto:pishyju@gmail.com).

**Mr. Chandra Shamsher Bahadur Singh**

Research Scholar in Tourism Management, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi. Email: [csbsingh@gmail.com](mailto:csbsingh@gmail.com)

SHYJU & SINGH, 2018

#### **Research Design and Methodology**

The present study is based on a **descriptive research design**, which aims to analyze and interpret the role of higher education in strengthening tourism development, employability, and branding in India. The descriptive approach is considered appropriate for this research as it focuses on understanding existing conditions, identifying research gaps, and examining the relationship between tourism education and industry requirements. Rather than manipulating variables, the study provides a systematic and detailed examination of current trends, challenges, and opportunities within the tourism and education sectors, thereby offering meaningful insights into the subject matter. The nature of the study is **analytical and qualitative**, as it involves an in-depth evaluation of various aspects such as tourism education, skill development, and employment opportunities. The research emphasizes conceptual understanding and critical interpretation of available information instead of relying on quantitative or statistical analysis. Through this approach, the study attempts to develop a comprehensive understanding of the issues affecting the tourism sector and the role of education in addressing them. The research is primarily based on **secondary data sources**, which have been collected from reliable and authentic materials. These include research journals, academic articles, government publications such as reports from the Ministry of Tourism and NITI Aayog, as well as books related to tourism and higher education. In addition, information has been gathered from official websites and international organizations such as UNWTO and WTTC. These sources provide extensive and credible insights into tourism trends, educational frameworks, and employment patterns, forming a strong foundation for the study. The collected data has been analyzed using a **thematic and comparative approach**, wherein key themes such as tourism education, skill gaps, employability, government opportunities, and tourism branding have been identified and critically examined. The comparative analysis further helps in understanding the gap between academic learning and industry expectations, enabling a clearer evaluation of existing challenges. The scope of the study is limited to the **Indian tourism sector**, with a specific focus on the role of higher education in enhancing employability and strengthening tourism branding. It primarily addresses issues related to curriculum design, skill development, and career opportunities within the tourism industry.

#### **Discussion & Analysis**

**1. Role of Higher Education in Tourism Development:** Higher education plays a crucial role in shaping the tourism industry by developing skilled human resources capable of delivering quality services and enhancing visitor experiences. In India, universities and institutions offer various tourism-related programs; however, their effectiveness remains limited due to a lack of industry-oriented training and practical exposure.

While tourism initiatives such as infrastructure development and branding campaigns aim to attract global visitors, the absence of a well-trained workforce often reduces their impact. This indicates that tourism growth is not only dependent on physical infrastructure but also on the quality of human capital. Therefore, higher education institutions must focus on bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and industry requirements to ensure sustainable tourism development.

**2. Gap Between Tourism Education and Industry Requirements:** One of the major challenges in India's tourism sector is the mismatch between academic curriculum and industry expectations. Tourism courses often emphasize theoretical concepts such as destination management and tourism policies, but provide limited opportunities for practical learning. The industry, on the other hand, demands skills such as communication, customer service, digital marketing, and problem-solving. This gap leads to low employability among graduates and affects service quality in the tourism sector.

Furthermore, the lack of internships, field training, and real-world exposure prevents students from understanding industry dynamics. As a result, employers prefer experienced candidates over fresh graduates, which creates a barrier to entry for new professionals.

**3. Skill Development and Employability Issues:** Employability in the tourism sector depends largely on the development of both technical and soft skills. However, many tourism graduates lack essential competencies required for professional roles.

Key skills required in the tourism industry include:

- Effective communication and interpersonal skills
- Customer relationship management

- Digital marketing and social media promotion
- Cultural awareness and adaptability

The absence of structured skill development programs within higher education institutions results in a workforce that is not fully prepared to meet industry demands. This not only affects individual career growth but also limits the overall competitiveness of India's tourism sector.

**4. Government Vacancies and Career Awareness:** The tourism sector offers various employment opportunities through government bodies and tourism departments. Positions such as tourism officers, cultural coordinators, and travel consultants play a significant role in managing and promoting tourism activities.

However, there is limited awareness among students regarding these opportunities. Higher education institutions often fail to provide adequate career guidance and information about government vacancies in the tourism sector.

This lack of awareness leads to underutilization of available opportunities and restricts the career growth of tourism graduates. Therefore, it is essential to integrate career counselling and job-oriented guidance within tourism education.

**5. Role of Professionals in Tourism Industry:** The success of the tourism industry largely depends on the performance of professionals working at various levels, including tour operators, hospitality managers, and travel consultants. These professionals act as representatives of the country and directly influence tourists' experiences. A well-trained professional workforce can enhance service quality, ensure customer satisfaction, and contribute to positive word-of-mouth promotion. However, the shortage of skilled professionals due to inadequate training and education negatively impacts the overall image of the destination.

This highlights the importance of developing competent professionals through quality education and training programs.

**6. Tourism Branding and Human Capital:** Tourism branding is not only dependent on marketing campaigns but also on the quality of services provided to tourists. A country's image is shaped by the experiences of visitors, which are directly influenced by the skills and behaviour of tourism professionals.

In India, despite strong branding initiatives, the lack of trained human resources often results in inconsistent service quality. This affects international perception and limits repeat visits. Higher education institutions can play a significant role in strengthening tourism branding by producing skilled graduates who can effectively represent the country's culture, values, and hospitality. By integrating digital marketing, communication skills, and practical training into the curriculum, institutions can contribute to building a strong and sustainable tourism brand.

### Suggestions and Future Recommendations

**1. Improvement in Tourism Education Curriculum:** Higher education institutions should revise and modernize their tourism curriculum to make it more industry-oriented. The current system focuses heavily on theoretical knowledge, which limits students' practical understanding. Universities must incorporate case studies, field visits, internships, and project-based learning to ensure that students gain real-world exposure. Additionally, emerging areas such as digital tourism, eco-tourism, and MICE tourism should be included to match global trends.

**2. Focus on Skill Development:** There is a strong need to emphasize skill development within tourism education. Institutions should provide training in communication skills, customer service, problem-solving, and digital marketing. Soft skills and technical competencies are essential for improving employability. Regular workshops, certification programs, and industry-led training sessions can help students become job-ready.

**3. Enhancing Awareness of Career Opportunities:** Students often lack awareness about government vacancies and career opportunities in the tourism sector. Educational institutions and government bodies should collaborate to organize career counselling sessions, seminars, and placement drives. Providing proper guidance regarding job roles such as tourism officers, travel consultants, and hospitality managers can improve career prospects.

**4. Strengthening Industry-Academia Collaboration:** A strong connection between educational institutions and the tourism industry is essential. Partnerships with travel agencies, hotels, and tourism boards can provide students with internships and practical exposure. Such collaboration will help in aligning academic learning with industry requirements and improving employment outcomes.

**5. Role of Government and Policy Support:** The government should promote skill development initiatives and provide funding for tourism education programs. Policies should focus on creating employment opportunities, improving training standards, and supporting innovation in tourism education. Public-private partnerships can further enhance the quality of education and service delivery.

**6. Future Research Directions:** Future studies should focus on empirical analysis of tourism education and its impact on employability. Comparative research between India and leading tourism countries can provide insights into best practices. Additionally, research on digital transformation in tourism education and its role in branding can offer new perspectives.

### Limitations of the Study

The present study, while providing valuable insights into the role of higher education in tourism development, is subject to certain limitations. Firstly, the research is based entirely on **secondary data**, which has been collected from journals, reports, books, and official websites. Although these sources are reliable, the absence of primary data such as surveys, interviews, or field observations may limit the depth of practical understanding and real-time perspectives of students and industry professionals. Secondly, the study is **qualitative and descriptive in nature**, which restricts the use of statistical tools and quantitative analysis. As a result, the findings are based on interpretation and conceptual analysis rather than measurable data, which may affect the generalizability of the results.

Another limitation is that the study focuses specifically on the **Indian tourism sector**, and therefore, the conclusions drawn may not be fully applicable to other countries with different educational systems and tourism frameworks. Additionally, the research does not cover all aspects of tourism in detail, as it is primarily centered on higher education, employability, and branding. Furthermore, the availability of up-to-date and comprehensive data posed certain constraints, as some reports and studies may not fully reflect the most recent developments in the tourism and education sectors. Despite these limitations, the study attempts to provide a meaningful and structured analysis of the topic, offering a foundation for further research and improvement in the field of tourism education.

### Conclusion

The present study highlights the significant role of higher education in shaping the growth and sustainability of the tourism sector in India. It emphasizes that tourism development is not solely dependent on infrastructure, policies, or promotional strategies, but also on the availability of skilled and competent human resources. Higher education institutions play a crucial role in preparing students for the dynamic demands of the tourism industry; however, the current system faces several challenges that limit its effectiveness. The study identifies a clear gap between academic learning and industry requirements, particularly in terms of practical exposure and skill development. Tourism courses are largely theoretical, which restricts students' ability to adapt to real-world situations. As a result, employability remains a major concern, with many graduates lacking essential skills such as communication, customer handling, and digital proficiency. Additionally, limited awareness regarding government job opportunities further restricts career growth in this sector. Furthermore, the research highlights that the lack of trained professionals has a direct impact on tourism branding. Since tourists' experiences are shaped by service quality, the absence of skilled personnel leads to inconsistencies that affect the overall image of the destination. This indicates that human capital is a critical factor in strengthening tourism branding and ensuring customer satisfaction. In conclusion, there is an urgent need to transform tourism education by making it more practical, skill-oriented, and aligned with industry needs. Strengthening collaboration between academia, industry, and government can bridge existing gaps and create better employment opportunities. By focusing on quality education and skill development, India can enhance its tourism potential and establish a strong global presence in the tourism industry.

### References

- Buhalis, D., & Law, R. (2008). Progress in information technology and tourism management: 20 years on and 10 years after the internet. *Tourism Management*, 29(4), 609–623. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2008.01.005>
- Cooper, C., Fletcher, J., Fyall, A., Gilbert, D., & Wanhill, S. (2008). *Tourism: Principles and practice* (4th ed.). Pearson Education.
- Goeldner, C. R., & Ritchie, J. R. B. (2012). *Tourism: Principles, practices, philosophies* (12th ed.). Wiley.
- Gupta, S., & Sharma, R. (2020). Tourism education and employability in India: A critical analysis. *International Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Systems*, 13(2), 45–52.
- Ministry of Tourism, Government of India. (2023). *India tourism statistics 2023. Official Report*
- NITI Aayog. (2021). *Strategy for New India @75: Tourism sector*. Government of India. [View Report](#)
- Singh, S. (2019). Skill development in tourism sector: Challenges and opportunities. *Journal of Tourism and Hospitality Education*, 9, 23–30. <https://doi.org/10.3126/jthe.v9i0.23680>
- World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). (2022). *Tourism and education: Guidelines for sustainable development. Official Website*
- World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC). (2023). *Economic impact report 2023. Official Report*