

Centre for Temple-Based Economy

***CATALYSING ECONOMIC GROWTH
THROUGH TEMPLE-LINKED ECOSYSTEMS***



Entrepreneurship Development Institute of India
Ahmedabad

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as on September 15, 2025



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Dr. Sunil Shukla
Director General
Entrepreneurship Development
Institute of India (EDII)
Ahmedabad



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Message from

Director General

For centuries, temples in India have stood as living powerhouses of faith, economy and culture. They have shaped local economies and inspired arts, crafts and social welfare. Today, as the nation reclaims the strength of its temple ecosystems, we are not merely preserving heritage; *we are unlocking* a dynamic model of economic growth and sustenance known as **Temple Economics**. The Government of India, through visionary initiatives such as the *PRASHAD Scheme* (Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Augmentation Drive) and Swadesh Darshan 2.0, has also underscored the importance of developing pilgrimage destinations while promoting sustainable livelihoods and inclusive growth.

EDII, attuned to evolving socio-economic realities, believes that temples can serve as catalysts for sustainable development. Insights from our studies across India's revered temple towns – **Ayodhya, Varanasi, Mathura-Vrindavan and Gorakhpur** – highlight immense potential within the religious tourism ecosystem. These sacred towns can evolve into thriving centres of entrepreneurship and tourism-led growth with strategic focus on skill integration and institutional synergy.

The Institute seeks to institutionalize this belief by launching a dedicated **Centre for Temple-Based Economy (CTBE)** to advance research, promote innovation & strengthen entrepreneurship rooted in India's spiritual and cultural heritage. It aspires to unlock the economic potential of temple ecosystems by fostering enterprise, building local capacity and aligning traditional wisdom with modern-day practices. With this renewed awareness, we are poised to witness a remarkable revival of temple-linked ecosystems.

I am confident that the centre will pave the way for a paradigm – one that encompasses economic interactions originating from temple ecosystems and extending beyond the realm of religion into the broader social and national fabric. Together, let us strive to make India a global exemplar of faith-led economic growth and community well-being.

- Dr. Sunil Shukla

Entrepreneurship Development Institute of India, Ahmedabad: An Overview

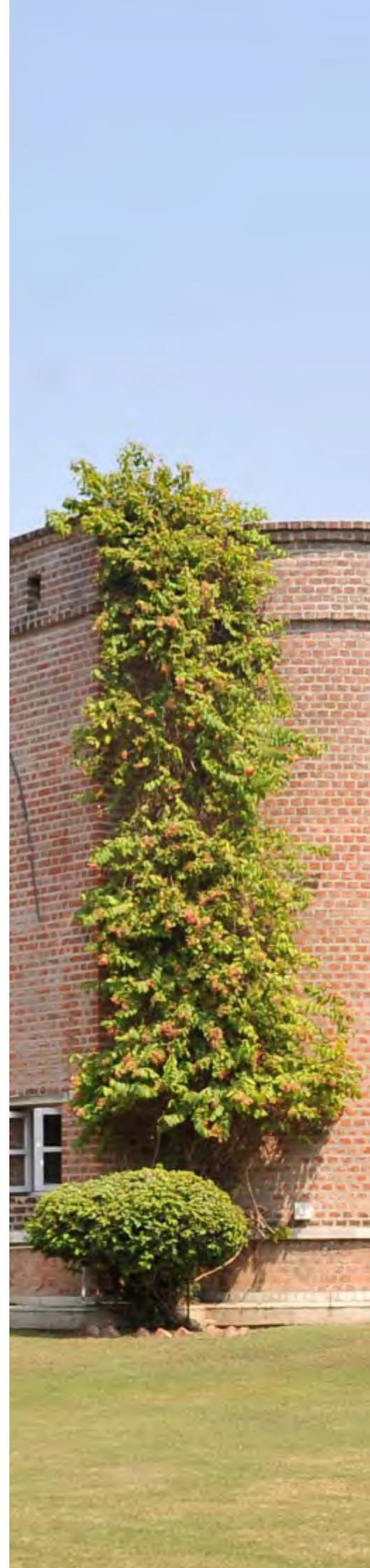
Launched in 1983, EDII is a National Resource Institute in entrepreneurship education, research, training, capacity building, institution-building, MSME growth and startup incubation. The Institute has been set up with the support of premier financial institutions, viz; the IDBI Bank Ltd; ICICI Ltd; IFCI Ltd; State Bank of India and with the backing of the Government of Gujarat.

EDII has successfully established the potential of entrepreneurship as a development tool and is recognized as the CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE by the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, Govt. of India. The Institute is engaged in institution building by setting up entrepreneurship development centres in several states/UTs, e.g. Goa, Uttarakhand, Chhattisgarh, Ladakh. This effort extends to developing economies abroad; it has established Entrepreneurship Development Centres in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam, Uzbekistan and Rwanda.

The Institute has chosen some priority themes and set up centres for concentrated work on these. These include the centres for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion; Family-Managed Businesses; National Education Policy – 2020 Implementation; School Entrepreneurship; Rural Entrepreneurship; Skill Development; Temple-Based Economy; Foreign Languages and Business Practices; MSME Artificial Intelligence (AI) Lab; and Business Incubation.

EDII now works in a collaborative mode with Government Ministries / Departments as well as leading corporate on the design and implementation of mega projects with remarkable results in terms of New Enterprise Creation and generation of livelihood.

The Institute is committed to the goal of boosting entrepreneurship across segments and sectors through innovative models, projects and programmes, thus effectively contributing to the realization of Viksit Bharat mission.





Introduction

India has approximately 4,50,000 religious and cultural heritage sites (KPMG study, August 2024), many of which are regarded as locations of enormous faith and miracles, attracting followers from all over the world. Temples have traditionally been centres of economic activity, fostering local development and influencing the broader national economy.

The sheer volume of devotees is staggering: Tirumala Venkateswara Temple alone sees approximately 27-33 million visitors annually, Siddhivinayak Temple sees 18-22 million visitors while Golden Temple attracts around 30-35 million visitors annually.

Religious tourism accounts for nearly 60% of domestic travel in the country.

It is expected to generate a revenue of 59 billion by 2028 and grow at a CAGR of 16%. This will eventually create 140 million temporary & permanent jobs by 2030.

Right from the Kumbh Mela held at the auspicious sites of Prayagraj, Haridwar, Nashik and Ujjain, patterned after the Mahabharata epic, to the regular holy dips at Varanasi, Haridwar and Rishikesh, such spiritual sites bring billions in revenue every year.

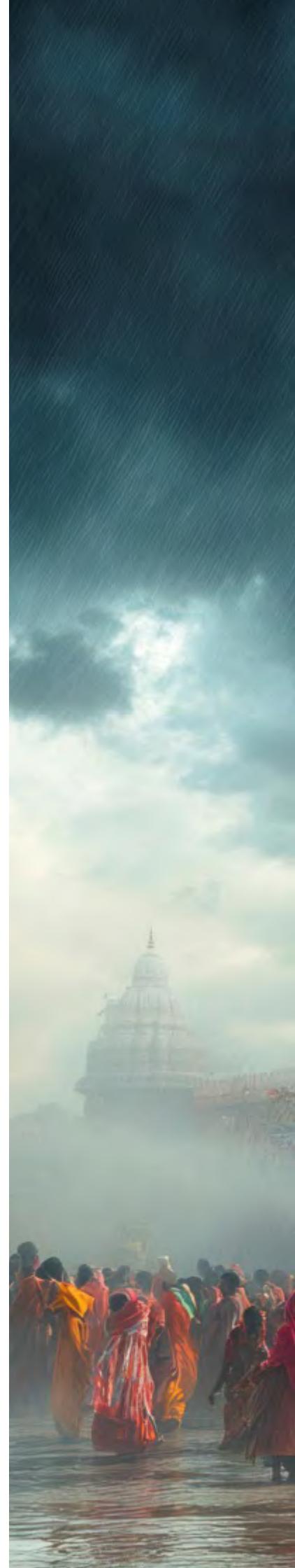
EDII, aspires to make a significant contribution to strengthening temple economies. Hence, the centre for Temple-based Economies.

The Institute is uniquely positioned for this role, with

- Extensive experience in identifying and nurturing entrepreneurial potential;
- Proven expertise in conceptualising and executing development plans for leading religious destinations such as Varanasi, Ayodhya, Mathura–Vrindavan and Gorakhpur.

EDII has been appointed as consultant to Travancore Devaswom Board, a socio-religious autonomous body for Sabarimala temple. After an indepth review, the Institute has submitted a Detailed Project Report for streamlining activities, with focus on prasadam services.

Let us provide an overview of the temple ecosystem before we outline the objectives and functions of the proposed centre.

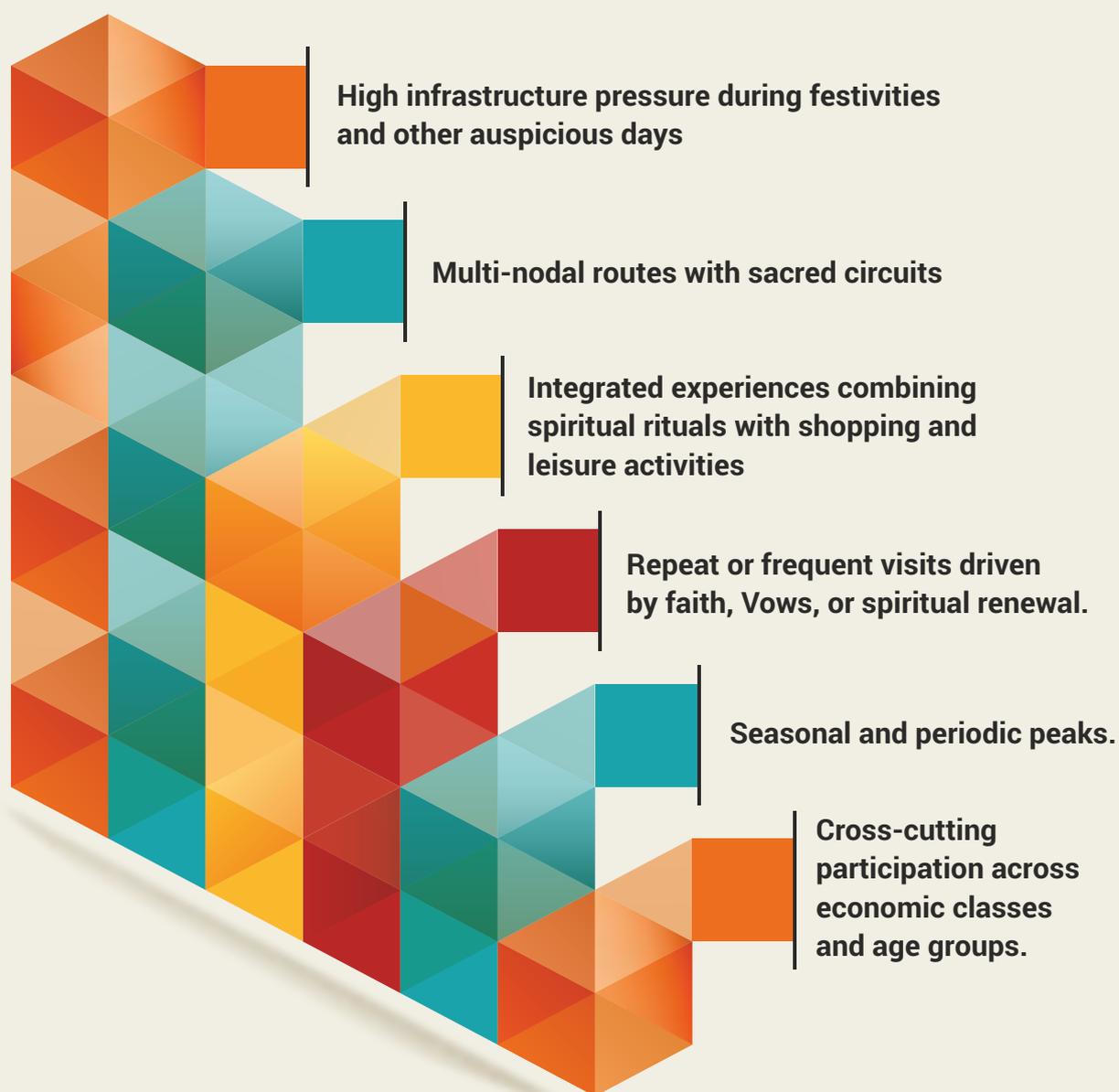




Concept of Pilgrimage

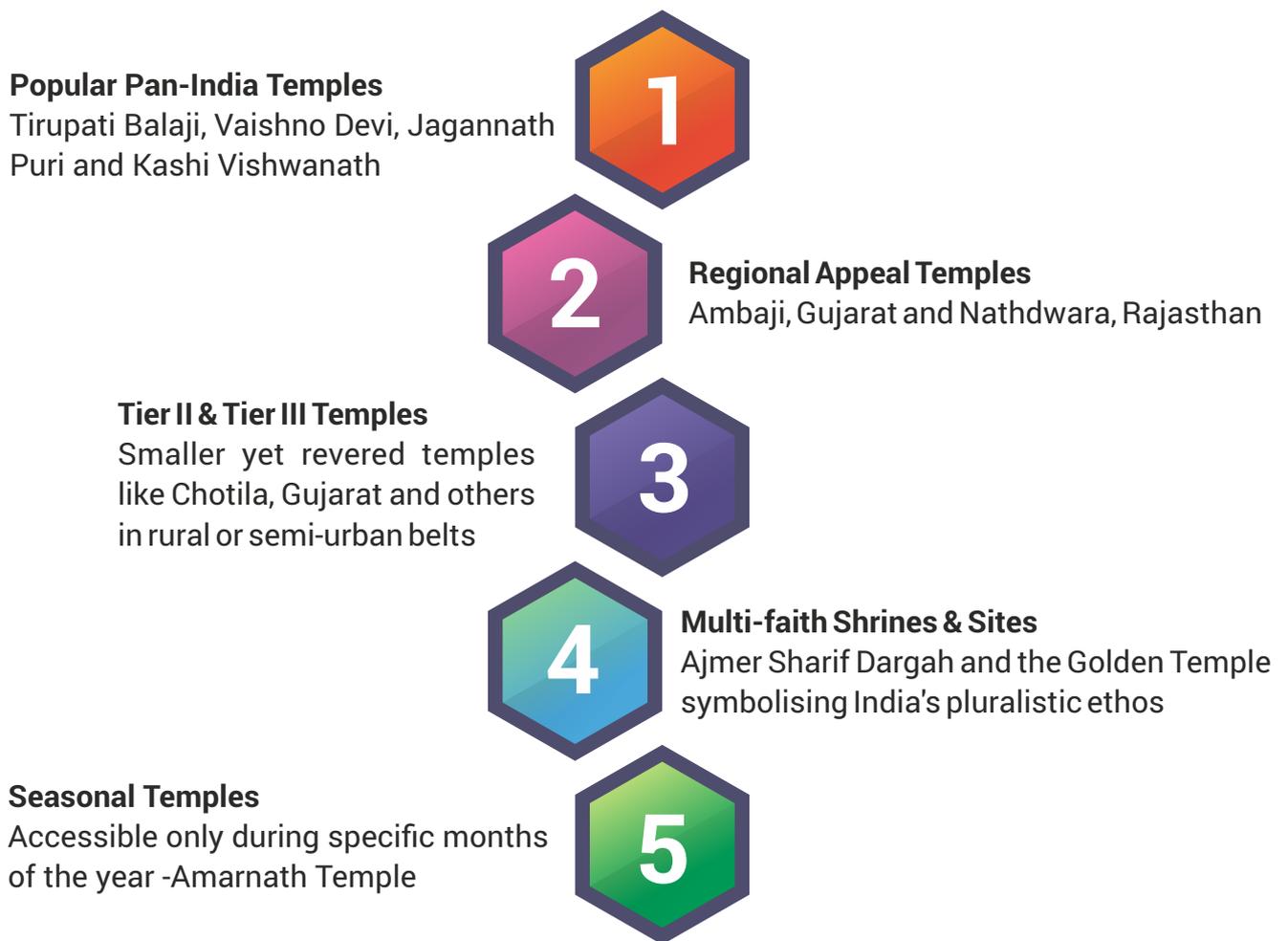
The concept of pilgrimage in India transcends religious boundaries, encompassing temples, churches, mosques, gurudwaras, monasteries and stupas—sacred spaces revered by Hindus, Christians, Sikhs, Muslims, Jains, and Buddhists alike.

Distinctive Features of Pilgrimage Flow



Nature of Appeal

Broadly, temple appeal can be categorised as follows.



Spending Pattern

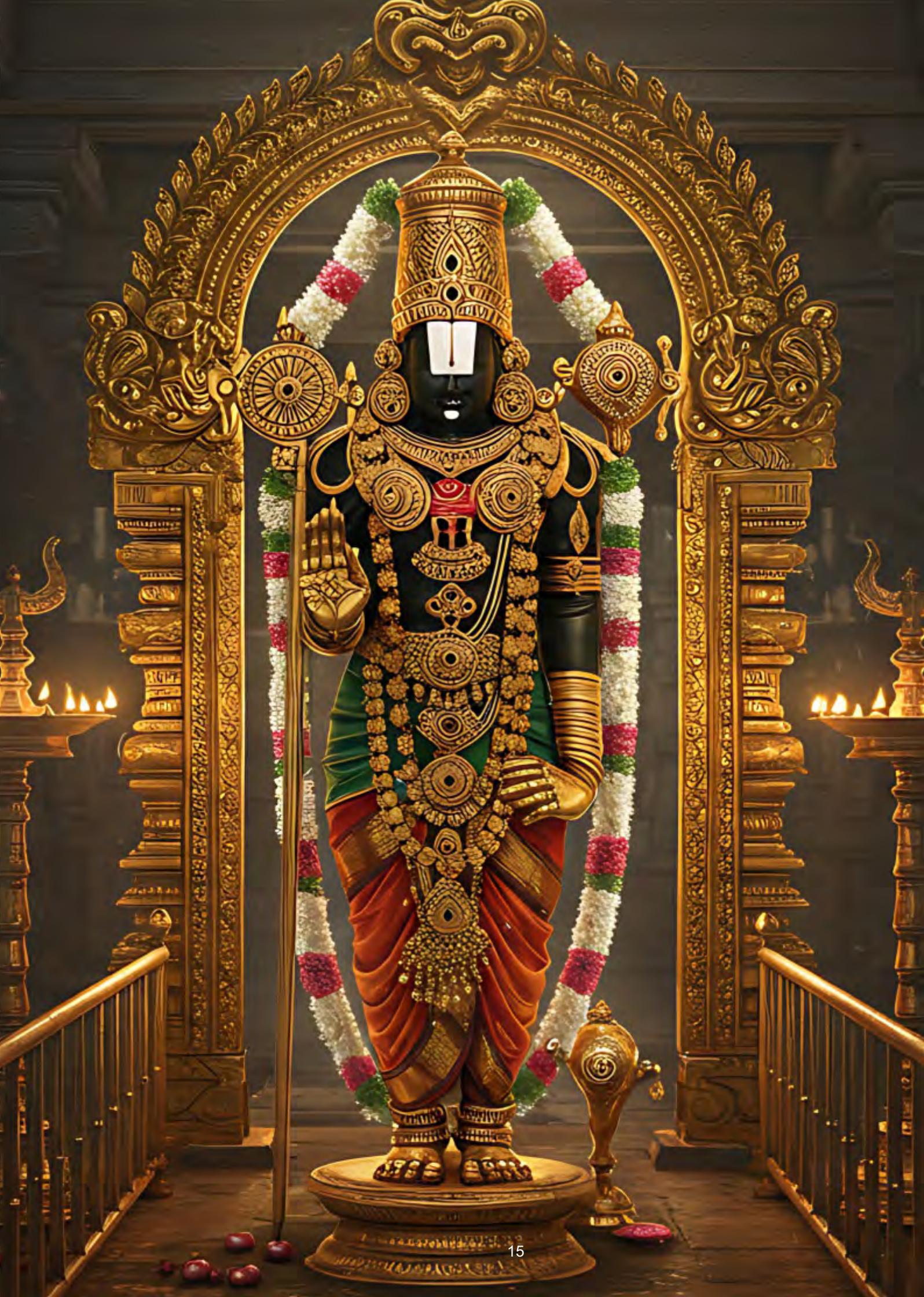
Category	Spending Focus
Individual Devotees	Donations, offerings, rituals, travel, accommodation, food, shopping local souvenirs, transport, recreation.
Charitable/Religious Trusts	Temple maintenance, infrastructure upgrades, charitable meals (annadan), schools, hospitals, and pilgrim amenities.
Government (Central/State/Local)	Infrastructure development, road and transport facilities, sanitation, security, digital management systems and tourism promotion.

The Scale and Impact of Temple Economy

TIRUPATI

Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) which manages the world-renowned Sri Venkateswara Temple in Andhra Pradesh, exemplifies the economic depth, institutional scale and community reach that a major temple ecosystem can achieve.

Indicator	Details / Impact
Annual Budget (2025–26)	Rs. 5,258.68 crore (among the highest for any religious body in India)
Temple Investments & Deposits	Total cash and fixed deposits - Rs. 18,817 crores Gold deposits - 11,329.67 kg
Employment & Livelihoods	Directly employs 14,000-16,000 people; indirectly supports livelihoods through hospitality, retail, and logistics.
Visitor Footfall	25 million visitors annually
Social & Educational Outreach	Runs hospitals, schools, and universities; funds welfare and development projects across Andhra Pradesh.
Infrastructure & Tourism Linkages	Drives robust tourism-linked investments in accommodation, roads, transport, and temple-town amenities.



Management

Several state governments in India have established special boards, trusts, or development authorities to manage, regulate and develop pilgrim centres within their states.

The list of notable state-level boards and authorities managing pilgrim centres is as follows.

Faith	State	Board / Authority	Major Centres
Hindu	J&K	Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board	Vaishno Devi Temple
	Uttarakhand	Shri Badrinath–Kedarnath Temple Committee	Char Dham Temples of Uttarakhand
	Tamil Nadu	Hindu Religious & Charitable Endowments Dept (HR&CE Dept)	46,318 Temples of Tamil Nadu
	A.P.	Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams	Tirupati
	Odisha	Shree Jagannath Temple Managing Committee (SJTMC)	Shree Jagannath Temple, Puri
Muslim	Rajasthan	Dargah Committee Ajmer / Waqf Board	Ajmer Sharif
	Telangana	State Waqf Board	Masjid
Sikh	Punjab	Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC)	Golden Temple
	Delhi	Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee (DSGMC)	Gurdwaras in Delhi
Buddhist	Bihar	Bodh Gaya Temple Committee	Mahabodhi Temple
	U.P.	Sarnath Dev. Authority	Sarnath
Jain	Bihar	Sammed Shikharji Authority	Parasnath Hills
	Gujarat	Shatrunjaya Tirth Trust	Palitana Jain Temples
Christian	Tamil Nadu	Velankanni Basilica Admin.	Velankanni Shrine
	Kerala	Syro-Malabar Trust	Malayattoor, St. Alphonsa Shrine
Multi-Faith	Maharashtra	State Pilgrimage Dev. Board	Hindu, Jain, Sufi Circuits
	Gujarat	Pavitra Yatradham Vikas Board	All Religious Sites

(This list is not exhaustive but illustrative of major state-level boards managing key pilgrim centres across faiths.)

Challenges

The management of large temples in India involves complex administrative, financial, legal and social challenges. Here are the key issues commonly observed:

Tension between government control and the autonomy of temple management bodies, often leading to bureaucratic delay and litigation.

Limited accountability in handling temple donations and assets, leading to reduced public confidence.

Mismanagement of temple lands and properties, including encroachments and poor documentation of assets.

Poor working conditions and unstandardized remuneration for priests and temple staff, affecting morale and efficiency.

Inefficient crowd management and safety arrangements during major festivals, often leading to overcrowding, stampede and casualties.

Slow adoption of technology for record-keeping, donations, and administration, leading to inefficiencies and corruption.

Prolonged legal disputes over asset ownership, administration, and interpretation of religious and traditional rights.

Social exclusion in temple access based on caste, gender, or community, contradicting constitutional values.

Poor environmental management practices causing pollution, waste accumulation, and damage to temple surroundings.

Lack of professional management practices and trained administrators, leading to inefficiency and poor visitor experiences.

Visioning, strategy and dedicated implementation can make a difference. The Vaishno Devi case study is often cited as a successful model of temple management reform in India.

The Vaishno Devi case study

Background

Before 1986, the Vaishno Devi shrine in Jammu & Kashmir was managed by local priests (baridars), with poor infrastructure, unhygienic surroundings, and little accountability in managing the massive influx of pilgrims.

There were frequent complaints of exploitation, overcrowding, lack of safety and facilities.

Transformation through Vision and Strategy

Establishment of Shrine Board (1986):

The Government of Jammu & Kashmir enacted the Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Act, 1986, creating the Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board (SMVDSB) to professionally manage the shrine. The Governor became its ex-officio Chairman.

Vision:

To provide pilgrims with safe, hygienic and spiritually uplifting facilities while preserving the sanctity of the shrine and ensuring transparent management.

Strategic Reforms:

- Infrastructure Development
- Technology Integration
- Environmental/Waste Management
- Pilgrim Safety
- Financial Transparency
- Community Development

Outcomes and Impact

- ✔ Vaishno Devi became one of India's most efficiently managed and safest pilgrimage sites.
- ✔ Annual Visitor Flow (2024): 95 lakhs
- ✔ Pilgrim satisfaction, safety and convenience improved drastically.
- ✔ The model inspired replicable frameworks for other temples in India.
- ✔ The Shrine Board became financially self-sustaining, funding its own welfare and infrastructure programs.



Government Initiatives & Resources for Temple / Pilgrimage Infrastructure

PRASHAD Scheme (Pilgrimage Rejuvenation & Spiritual Heritage Augmentation Drive)

The Ministry has sanctioned 54 projects at an estimated cost of Rs.1726.74 Crores.

Pilgrim Assistance: Gujarat - Shravan Tirth Darshan Yojana

75% subsidy on bus fare for senior citizens (60+).
Pilgrim groups can travel up to 2,000 km and stay up to 72 hours (3 days / nights).
Small daily allowance on food.

Swadesh Darshan 2.0 Scheme

The Ministry has revamped this scheme and sanctioned 34 projects worth Rs. 791.25 Crore.

Shakti Corridor for New Facilities and Better Connectivity: Ambaji (Gujarat)

The Gujarat government has approved Rs. 1,632 crore mega master plan to transform Ambaji into "model temple town."

Mechanisms for Improvement

The governments and philanthropists are making an active contribution to tone up the temple ecosystem. There are however, other avenues whose potential is not fully realised. This is explained below.

Corporate Engagement in Managing and Developing Pilgrim Centres

One of the activities which may be included by companies in their Corporate Social Responsibility Policies as per the Schedule VII of the Companies Act, 2013, includes protection of national heritage, art and culture including restoration of buildings and sites of historical importance and works of art; setting up public libraries; promotion and development of traditional art and handicrafts. The companies can contribute to the temple economies. The following illustrates this.

- **Infosys Foundation:**

- Supported restoration and conservation of ancient temples in Karnataka and Odisha (e.g., Someshwara Temple, Lakshmi Narasimha Temple).



- **Tata Trusts:**

- Engaged in cultural preservation, rural tourism, and craft-based livelihood development around religious and heritage sites.



- **ONGC & IOC:**

- Invested in heritage site restoration, sanitation, clean fuel, and amenity improvement under CSR and Swachh Bharat initiatives.
- Example: Supported Ganga rejuvenation and temple town cleanliness drives.



NRI Engagement in Enhancing Temple Economies

The opportunities are enumerated below.



Strong cultural and emotional connect with India's spiritual heritage.



Opportunity to invest in infrastructure, amenities, and digital services at pilgrim centres.



Support for heritage restoration, conservation, and temple management.



Promotion of Indian religious tourism through diaspora networks and global outreach.



Creation of Diaspora Heritage or Devotee Funds for sustained temple-town development.



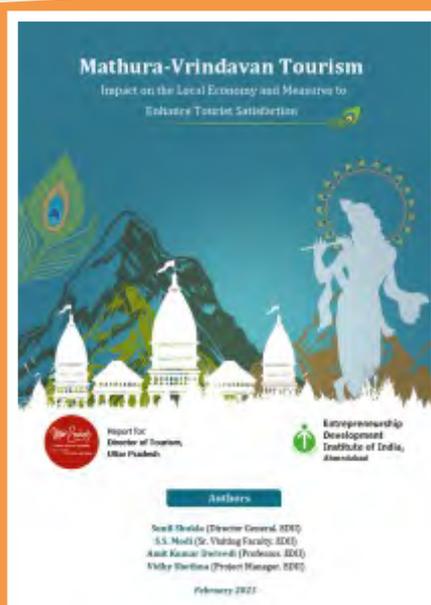
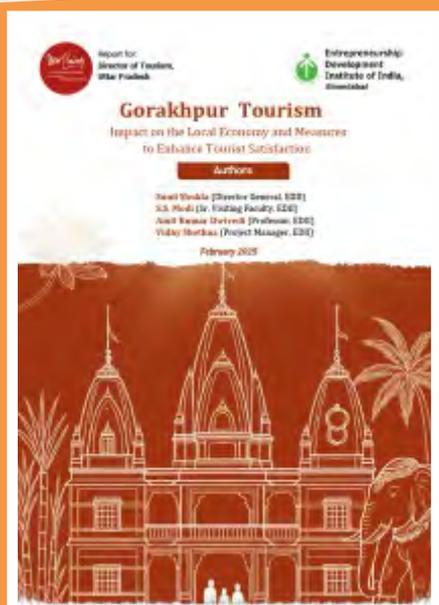
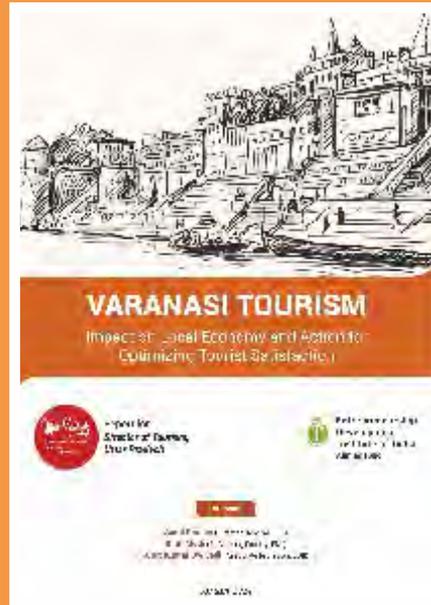
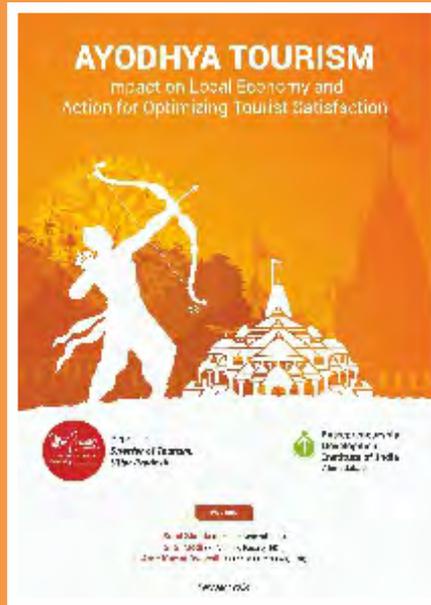
Facilitation of smart, sustainable, and tech-enabled pilgrimage models using global expertise.



Government can enable participation through simplified FCRA norms, heritage investment incentives, and engagement via Indian missions abroad.

Temple-Based Research Studies undertaken by EDII

The Institute was assigned temple based research studies by the Uttar Pradesh State Tourism Development Corporation (UPSTDC). The studies focused on analysing the tourism dynamics in the cities of Ayodhya, Varanasi, Mathura-Vrindavan and Gorakhpur. The mandates included understanding tourist flow, assessing tourist engagement with attractions and activities, measuring tourist satisfaction and evaluating the impact on the local economy.



EDII Learnings and the Way Forward

Our previous work around the religious tourism economy – in **Varanasi, Ayodhya, Mathura–Vrindavan and Gorakhpur** – has highlighted key challenges and opportunities within the pilgrimage and tourism ecosystem.

- There is considerable scope to extend the average stay length of visitors beyond short-duration trips.
- Documentation of tourism facilities is inadequate; for example, Mathura–Vrindavan shows 1,650 properties on Google compared to only 257 in official records.
- Major public projects like corridors, airports, expressways, and catering facilities will improve pilgrim convenience and enhance overall flow.
- The flow of visitors varies regionally across destinations.
- Smart mobility and timed entry systems can ease congestion during peak pilgrim periods.
- The Stakeholder universe is vast. It includes,
 - Hotel/Guest House Owner/Managers
 - Dharamshala/Ashram Owner/Managers
 - Homestay Owner/Manager
 - Priests and Temple Authorities
 - Boatmen
 - Restaurant/Eateries
 - Autorickshaw/Taxi Driver
 - Tourist Guide
 - Artisan/Craft Shopkeeper
 - Street Food Vendor
 - Guides
 - Govt. agencies-tourism, local authority, infrastructure development
 - NGO's
 - Cultural Organisations
 - Hotel Management Institutes
 - Trade Associations
- Cultural Organisation work is silos (Example- ASI, Tourism dpt., Cultural Academy., KVIC, etc.)
- Shopping contributes substantially to tourism income, accounting for about 30.6% in Mathura–Vrindavan.
- Women share in tourism sector employment is sub-optimal, underscoring scope for capacity-building and policy action.
- Local person share in employment varies, impressive at Varanasi and Mathura-Vrindavan but below-the-desirable mark at Ayodhya. There is a need for incentives in this regard.
- Tourism can lead to real estate development, particularly demand for second home. The potential for retirement home is not sufficiently harnessed.
- The profiling of tourist flow-volume, origin, stay-length, purpose, etc. is unsatisfactory. Thorough documentation of existing accommodation facilities is a precondition for estimating overnight flow.

- Entrepreneurship is thriving but certain streams remain underexplored. Business opportunities within temple economies must be identified and supported through suitable policies.
- There is a greater scope for enlarging the range of souvenir articles-tee shirts, caps, scarves, duffle bags, purses, mugs, coasters, pens, pencils, school bags.
- Homestays need capacity-building and marketing support for better scalability.
- MICE and destination wedding segments present untapped potential for growth.
- There is a vast potential for imaginative promotion of religious destination through music, art and immersive experiences. Encouraging thematic concerts by leading/emerging artists—across Indian metros and select international cities is one way of doing it.
- Industry–academia collaboration can significantly enhance research, capacity building and innovation in destination management.
- Several individual and organizational resources are capable of envisioning and steering tourism development. An imaginative and inclusive leadership can unify these diverse stakeholders into a cohesive and effective platform.
- Women's inclusion in tourism-linked enterprises needs targeted interventions.
- A segment of mid/high-end tourists seek immersive stays within private temples—participating in darshan, puja, and temple routines while enjoying modern comfort. Selected temples may be encouraged to develop such facilities.
- A dedicated mechanism is required to register, train and regulate tour and rickshaw operators.
- Public toilet upgradation and upkeep through PPP or community models will ensure hygiene and satisfaction.
- The local population must be trained to identify and convert business opportunities into viable enterprises.
- Pilgrims should be actively engaged with the central theme of mythology. Interactive kiosks with short quizzes, small prizes for winners, mythological character dressing contests for children and other participatory events can make the pilgrimage experience more engaging and memorable.
- Awareness of other attractions remains limited as there is little information to encourage tourists to explore beyond the temple. Information centres should be established to provide creatively designed literature and maps highlighting such sites and activities. These centres can be complemented by 24/7 interactive digital kiosks offering engaging and easily accessible content for visitors.
- Strengthening artisan clusters with design innovation can enhance authentic local souvenirs.
- Promoting traditional Braj cuisine through festivals can enhance visitor experiences and livelihoods.
- Thematic guided tours can diversify offerings and deepen visitor engagement.

Centre for Temple-Based Economy (CTBE)

Entrepreneurship Development Institute of India
(EDII)



Vision

The Centre for Temple-Based Economy (CTBE) envisions creating a sustainable framework to harness the potential of temple-based economies through evidence-based research, skill development and entrepreneurial practice that strengthens community development and fosters economic empowerment.



Rationale

Temples in India are living ecosystems that have, for centuries, anchored local economies, cultural identities, and social structures.

Surrounding every temple is a vibrant chain of activities like,

Ritual & Religious Services

Puja, bhajan and aarti-related services.

Retail & Vending

Flowers, coconuts, incense, lamps, offerings, souvenirs.

Food & Beverage

Eateries, prasad counters, tea stalls, sweet shops, dhabas.

Artisan & Craft Work

Idols, ornaments, brassware, textiles, wooden carvings.

Accommodation Services

Lodges, dharamshalas, guest houses, homestays.

Transport & Mobility

Auto-rickshaws, cycle rickshaws and other local transport.

Together, these create a vast yet often informal “temple economy”, which sustains millions of livelihoods across the country.

Despite this scale and cultural depth, the economic potential of temple ecosystems remains adequately untapped. Most temple towns face issues of unorganized entrepreneurship, inadequate infrastructure and limited skill integration, even as they attract millions of visitors annually.

Entrepreneurship Development Institute of India (EDII), with its proven expertise is uniquely positioned to spearhead this transformation. Through the proposed Centre for Temple-Based Economy (CTBE), EDII envisions institutionalizing a framework that links faith with enterprise, heritage with innovation, and culture with community prosperity.

Objectives

To study, organise and model the economic, social, and cultural linkages of temple ecosystems.

To promote entrepreneurship and skill development in temple-linked value chains – crafts, tourism, hospitality, floriculture, and waste recycling.

To strengthen livelihood clusters and enable inclusive growth through local enterprise promotion.

To develop policy frameworks and knowledge resources supporting a sustainable temple-based economy.

Three Pillars

Research



Promote high-quality research to inform knowledge, policy & sustainable practice.

Training



Nurture human capital through skills and training to transform temple-linked traditions into thriving enterprises.

Practice



Translate research insights and training outcomes into on-ground action leading to meaningful impact.

Core Components and Activities

Research, Documentation & Policy

- Develop baseline and impact assessment frameworks for temple-linked entrepreneurship and livelihood initiatives.
- Undertake integrated and multidisciplinary research on temple ecosystems.
- Conduct thematic studies on specific aspects such as livelihood patterns, skill gaps, cluster dynamics, and innovation potential.
- Generate action-oriented outputs to inform policy, enterprise models, and community interventions.

Entrepreneurship & Skill Development



Training & bootcamps, sensitisation & awareness workshops, EDPs and certification trainings.



Vocational training in hospitality, pilgrim management, traditional food processing, craft production and sanitation services.



Development of business profiles for temple-linked enterprises (prasad packaging, devotional merchandise, traditional attire, etc.)



Livelihood & Cluster Development – Support for SHGs, artisans and service providers; marketing & branding of “Temple Town Products.”

Platform for Exchange and Collaboration

Function as a national platform for dialogue among temple boards, state governments, industry, academia, and civil society.

Host conferences, conclaves, and workshops to discuss emerging opportunities, policy frameworks, and innovations.

Innovation, Technology & Digital Engagement

Employ a robust Digital Performance Monitoring System to track performance of programmes and feature an interactive dashboard that consolidates performance indicators such as:

- Number of training programmes conducted and participants certified.
- Employment and enterprises created through temple-linked interventions.
- Districts and temple ecosystems onboarded or streamlined under the initiative.
- Patents, trademarks, FSSAI, and Udyam registrations facilitated.
- Products listed on e-commerce platforms and digital marketplaces.
- Extent of branding, packaging, and marketing support provided to entrepreneurs and clusters.

Outreach, Advocacy & Global Engagement

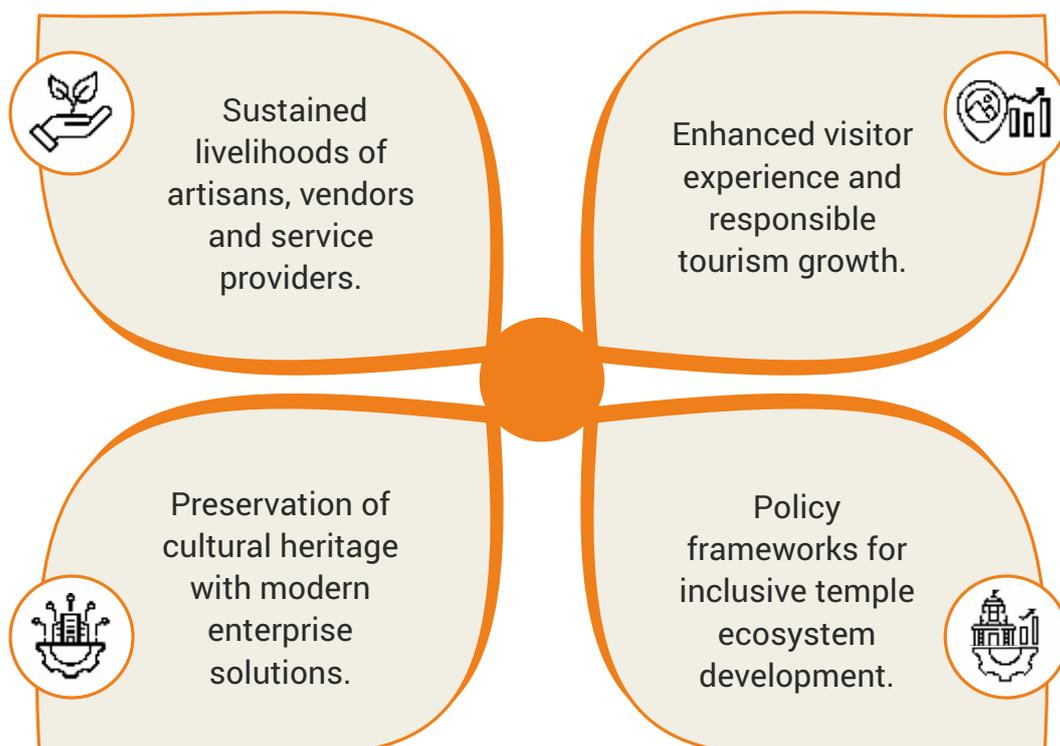
- Hosting Temple Economy Forums, summit and conferences.
- Publishing Temple Economy Reports, newsletters and case studies.
- Collaboration with CSR and international heritage organisations.
- Promotion of India's temple economy at global diaspora and tourism events.
- Partnerships with State Tourism Boards and Devasthan Departments.

Institutional Linkages and Collaborations

CTBE will work in close collaboration with:

- GOI Ministries (Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA), Ministry of Railways, Ministry of AYUSH, etc.)
- State Government Bodies and Boards (Madhya Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation (MPDC), Tourism Corporation of Gujarat Limited (TCGL), Uttar Pradesh State Tourism Development Corporation (UPSTDC), Dedicated Devasthan / Dharmik Boards or Temple Trusts etc)
- Regulatory / Statutory / Financial Agencies (NITI Aayog – policy support for spiritual tourism corridors, etc.)
- Religion based and Inter-Governmental Agencies (Akhil Bharatiya Akhara Parishad, Indian Buddhist Tourism Circuit Council (IBTCC), Gurdwara Management Committees, etc.)
- Relevant Industry and Tourism Promotion Bodies
- Other Education & Research Institutions

Expected Impact





Regional Offices :

Southern : Bengaluru

Santa Monica, 2/2C, 1st Floor, Hayes Road,
Shanthala Nagar, Richmond Town,
Bengaluru, Karnataka-560025
Phone: 080-2311 9360/9361
E-mail: srob@ediindia.org

Central : Bhopal

1st Floor, 50 New MLA Colony,
Behind Canara Bank, Near Depot Chouraha,
Bhadbhada Road, Bhopal-462003, Madhya Pradesh
Phone: +91-755-4260015, 2424015
E-mail: crob@ediindia.org

Eastern : Bhubaneswar

Unit no. 202, 2nd Floor, Tower-1,
NBCC Imperial Commercial complex, New Govt Colony,
Press Chakka, Bhubaneswar, Odisha.751017
Phone: 0674-3512290
Email: ediero@ediindia.org; erob@ediindia.org

Northern-Eastern : Guwahati

1st Floor, Abhiguna Residency, Opp. Radison Blu Hotel,
Gotanagar, Guwahati, Assam-781011
Phone: 0361-3105560, 0361-3514064
E-mail: nerog@ediindia.org

Northern : Lucknow

7, Meerabai Marg, Dady Villa, Hazrat Ganj,
Lucknow-226 001, Uttar Pradesh
Phone: 0522-2209415
E-mail: nrol@ediindia.org

NCR : New Delhi

303, Akashdeep Building, Barakhamba Road,
Connaught Place, New Delhi-110 001.
Phone: 011-40115698
E-mail: ncro@ediindia.org

Western : Vapi

First Floor, Noble Central Complex, Beside Shubham-2,
Daman Road, Chala, Vapi, Dist. Valsad-396191, Gujarat
Phone: 99244 41365
E-mail: wrov@ediindia.org

State Offices :

Chhattisgarh - Raipur

Chhattisgarh Entrepreneurship Development Centre
105, First Floor, Shreeji K Heights, Kalpataru Colony,
Amlidih, Raipur, Chhattisgarh – 492006
Phone: 0771 - 4700463
E-mail: cgedc@ediindia.org

Goa

EDII Goa Centre
5th Floor, EDC Complex,
Dr. A.B. Road, Panaji, Goa 403001
Phone: 91820 02852
E-mail: goa@ediindia.org

Ladakh - Leh

Enterprising Ladakh
Near J&K Bank, University of Ladakh,
Leh Campus, Taru, Leh UT-Ladakh - 194101
Phone: 8707728907, 9906207337
E-mail: enterprisingladakh@ediindia.org

Uttarakhand - Dehradun

Devbhoomi Udyamita Yojana
Secretariat, Faculty Block, Doon University Campus,
Dehradun, Uttarakhand - 248 001
Phone: 0135 – 2974961
E-mail: duy-uttarakhand@ediindia.org

EDII Affiliates :

- Rwanda-India Entrepreneurship Development Centre (RIEDC), Kigali
- India-Uzbekistan Entrepreneurship Development Centre (IUEDC), Tashkent
- Cambodia-India Entrepreneurship Development Centre (CIEDC), Phnom Penh
- Lao-PDR India Entrepreneurship Development Centre (LIEDC), Vientiane
- Myanmar-India Entrepreneurship Development Centre (MIEDC), Yangon
- Vietnam-India Entrepreneurship Development Centre (VIEDC), Hanoi



Entrepreneurship Development Institute of India

Bhat, Gandhinagar (Dist) 382 428, Gujarat

Phone: 079 - 6910 4900 / 6910 4999

E-mail: info@ediindia.org • Web: www.ediindia.org / www.ediindia.ac.in