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# THE LATEST TRENDS IN INDIAN TOURISM

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Tourism is travelling for recreation, leisure, or business purposes. The World Tourism Organization (WTO) defines tourists as people "travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure or other business purposes. India's tourism policy (2002) has accorded great importance for tourism product development and diversification to increase the numbers of domestic and International tourists. It goes without saying that India's ancient civilization, cultural diversity, unmatched heritage sites and other cultural manifestations have allured the tourists through

ages and would continue to be its prime USP.

The diversity of India is legendary, presenting writers, marketers and travel agencies (remember them!) with endless opportunities to sell its charms.

From the Himalayas to the desert of Rajasthan, to the natural beauty of Kerala and the cultural intensity of Varanasi. India offers something for everyone.

But in recent years things have shifted. With the growth of the online travel industry, in all its different guises, people now have a lot more information at their fingertips and the research process has become a larger, richer part of holi-



day planning. At the same time, travel industry providers have grown exponentially in India, so visitors now have more options than ever. In turn, this means that India has to work harder to keep up with demand, and demands.

### New destinations

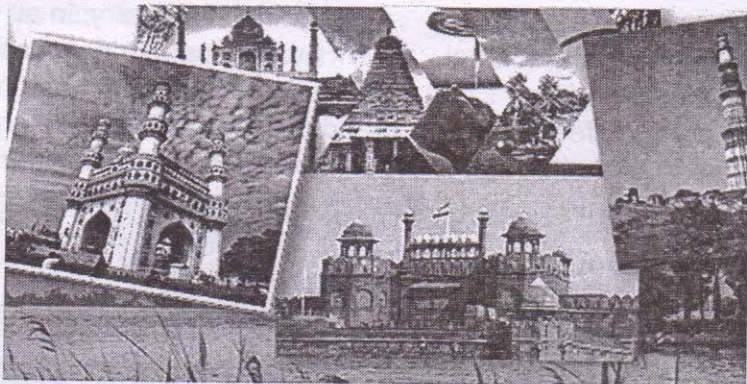
Rajasthan, lesser-known districts like Pali are now hitting the international visitor's radar, boosted by their central locations and proximity to improved airports and, in the case of the above, national parks and safari options.

Also, particularly in Rajasthan, small



One of the clearest trends we are seeing is a willingness to explore new regions, amongst both young upper-middle-class Indians and tourists from overseas. States like Gujarat, the stunning North-East and 'heavenly' Kashmir have seen a lot of growth in tourism, both

rural villages are now gaining popularity thanks to boutique set-ups like Chandelao Garh and Deogarh, both representing authentic, intriguing, safe and relatively accessible off-beat destinations, mostly appealing to Europeans.



domestic and international, as infrastructure improves and more providers come online. In the already famous state of

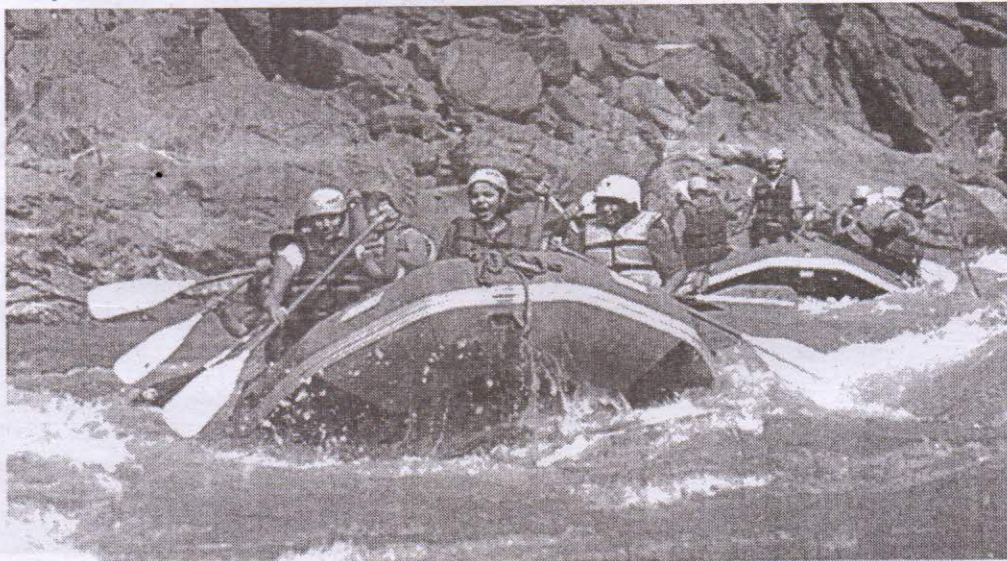
**The growth of boutique hotels**  
Boutique hotels, privately run small hotels, arty hotels with just a few rooms. However you want to define

what a boutique hotel is, and here at Tripzuki we pontificate on this quite a bit, they have undoubtedly increased in number in recent years, particularly attracting foreign tourists at all levels and especially those with deeper pockets. We think boutique hotels should be a key element in India's plans to boost tourism, almost always presenting an opportunity for tourists to be more engaged with their surroundings (and less in a resort 'bubble') while still having a certain level of comfort.

Unfortunately, the 'boutique' tag is severely abused and misused by the ranks of private, old school and often state-supported corporate hoteliers. Quality will always rise, surely, but the lack of any consis-

into its own, but this is also where the planning process gets tricky, even more so in India. We see a large disparity between the tastes and standards of the emerging Indian middle class and those of the established upper-middle class, the former having a huge presence on social media and hotel review sites. The disparity becomes even more acute when western tourists are added to the mix, thus Indian hotels are exposed to a wider mix of tastes than perhaps those of any other country. Pleasing a young family from Ahmedabad, a designer from Mumbai and a couple of grandparents from Denmark is a tricky thing!

### Adventure sports opportunities



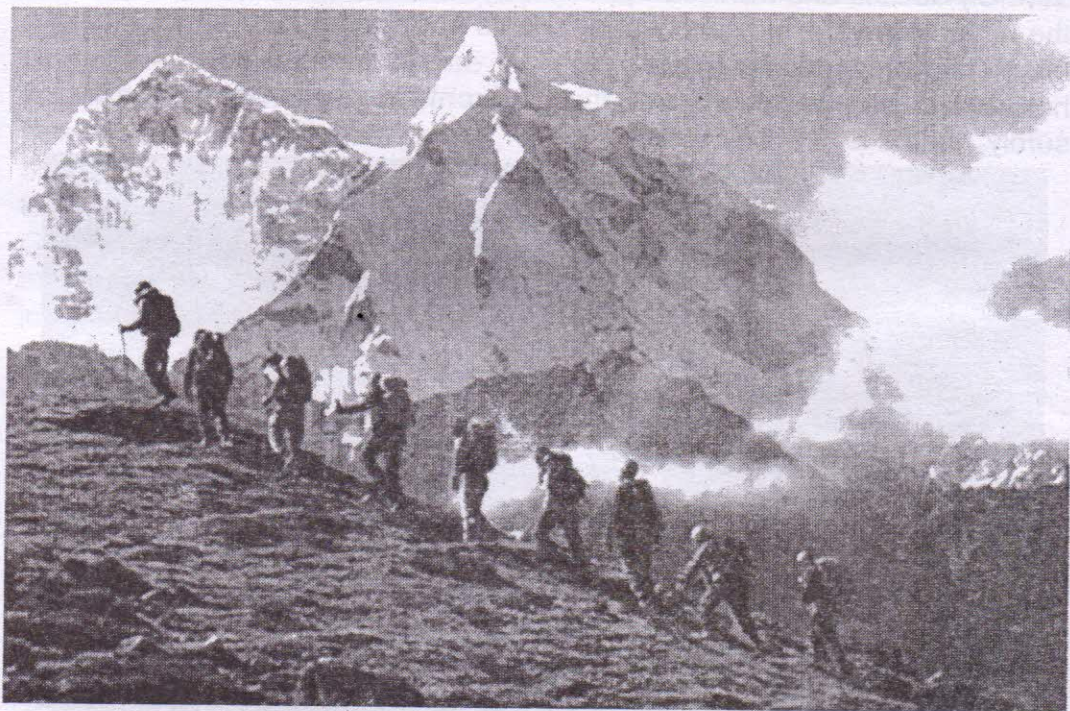
tent and trustworthy starring system remains an obstacle, and probably always will.

Researching accommodation to find quality is where the internet comes

It's incredible really that with the length of India's coastline, the wilderness of its interior and the staggering beauty of the Himalayas, it does not already feature on the adven-

ture/extreme sports locations list. This is, of course, largely to do with the lack of infrastructure, but even that can't stop the passion for adventure sports now apparent in young Indians. Couple that with Indians' famous entrepreneurial drive and what we see now are adventure sports start-ups appearing across the countryside. Educated kids from the cities are spreading their wings, creating their own businesses and setting up shop in far flung corners of the country. Now tourists can kite surf in Rameswaram, ski in Gulmarg,

keted to) international visitors, who are much more likely to visit the Taj Mahal than the stunning mountain regions. Piran Elavia organises socially responsible treks and caving trips in the North East via his company Kipepeo and puts the split as high as "90% Indians and 10% foreigners". Previously, he points out, "Indians were not very adventurous to tread off the beaten path", but the younger generations clearly are. Once the foreign-inbound market catches on, the opportunity for growth is immense.



whitewater raft in Rishikesh and go caving in the North East, the list goes on. So far it seems these opportunities are largely lost on (and undermar-

#### **The visa on arrival**

In a country as bureaucratic and fast developing as India, government policies are, by default, key for the growth of tourism. The visa on

arrival began in 2014 and as of April 2015 applies to tourists from over 40 countries, with a plan to expand this to around 100 nationalities over the next few years.

Though a welcome shot in the arm for Indian tourism, citizens of Djibouti, Fiji, Nauru and Tonga are all included in the program while those of China, Malaysia, UK and France are not. One has to wonder whether politics and business sense can ever really go hand in hand.

### Other changes happening within India

This is to some extent simply the maturation of an industry, but it can continue only with the support of state and national government. The capital, New Delhi, has promoted bed & breakfast and 'homestay' accommodation, but safety for foreigners, rightly or wrongly, is still perceived as an issue. The royal houses of Rajasthan have converted palaces and havelis into hotels, and the increase of B&Bs in Himachal Pradesh is noticeable. But it must be made easier for owners, with better access to liquor licenses, for example, not to mention the bizarrely complex red tape and tax



framework that has plagued India for decades. In Goa, which punches way above its weight in tourist numbers (both domestically and internationally), there has been

a slow shift from grungy/hippy destination to something more family oriented, but low quality tourism (domestic and foreign-inbound) and garbage are still huge issues. The one unavoidable, overarching factor in the whole tourism issue however, is infrastructure, or the lack thereof. The government seems determined to press ahead with spending in this area, a strategy that affects so many facets of life, delivers more bang per buck than probably any other investment of public money and ultimately should win votes. The Delhi metro, new highways and recently opened new airports in Mumbai and Goa are big steps in the quest for foreign visitors.

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