

Mahakumbh Mela: Tourism Arrivals Impacting Socio-Economic Development in the City of Prayagraj, 2025

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ABSTRACT

Mahakumbh, the sacred event, is one of the largest mass gatherings, attracting massive numbers of people from all around the world for the holy dip in the amritSnan, which removes the sins & blockages accumulated since many births. An unforgettable experience which took place in the city of Prayagraj from 13th January to 26th February, 2025, where India's deep traditions were blended with technological innovation for its smooth conduct. Approximately 400 million people participated, representing both a profound cultural tradition and a significant economic engagement. This study examines its socio-economic impacts, including economic stimulation, tourism arrivals, employment generation, infrastructure development, social dynamics and government implication.

Keywords: Mahakumbh, Mass Gathering, Amritsnan, Socio-Economic, Prayagraj.

Introduction

The Mahakumbhmela, held every 12 years, is a major bathing ritual (holy dip) in Hinduism, focusing on soul purification, removing sins & curses, seeking serenity, contentment & peace by the people. 2025 had witnessed a massive tourist influx in the city of Prayagraj at the holy Sangam (confluence of the 3 sacred rivers Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati). It was not just a holy dip but a major Hindu pilgrimage which is being recognised as one of the world's largest peaceful congregations, drawing people from all over the world.

This massive tourist arrivals during the event created extensive economic opportunities, influenced employment patterns and accelerated infrastructure development. Whenever such a large-scale event occurs, it is well understood that the local economy gains a massive boost, whether for formal or informal workers. It works in an integrated manner, a vicious cycle where growth in one sector leads to growth and development in other sectors also. This study addresses this vicious cycle only and highlights its impact.

Objectives of the Study

- To examine tourism arrivals patterns during Mahakumbh 2025.
- To analyse the impact of tourism arrivals on employment and income generation.
- To evaluate the contribution of Mahakumbh 2025 to infrastructure and local business development.
- To identify challenges and policy implications for sustainable socio-economic growth.

Research Methodology

This study is based on secondary data analysis:

- Government of Uttar Pradesh reports
- Trade bodies (CAIT estimates)
- News reports and academic journals
- Tourism and economic impact studies

Table 1: Tourism Arrivals during Mahakumbh 2025

Category.	Estimated Numbers
Domestic Pilgrims	60-65 crore
International tourists.	10-15 lakh
Daily peak footfall.	1.5 - 2 crore
Duration of event.	45 days

Source: Government estimates and trade body projections

Socio-Economic Impact Analysis

Table 2: Estimated Economic Impact of Mahakumbh 2025

Indicator	Estimated Value
Total economic output.	2-4 lakh crore
Contribution to national GDP.	1%
Rate of increase in local growth trade	200-300%

Source: reports & indices from Google

Mahakumbh significantly boosts religious tourism, benefitting hotels, dharamshalas, homestays, transport services and local markets. During the mela, numerous hotels, homestays, dharamshalas, and accommodations were booked, their prices shot up, and around 40,000 crores of revenue was generated by this sector. The food & beverage industry earned around 20,000 crores of revenue, whereas the transport & logistics industry earned around 10,000 crores. However, temporary infrastructure like tents, toilets and pandals also earned a surplus amount from everyday commotion.

It can be very well said that such transactions cause a multiplier effect where primary expenditure catalyses additional economic flows, like hospitality increases local consumption, like conveyance facilities, which require taxi, bus services, etc. Simultaneously, local street vendors earn a good amount with the influx of tourists.

Employment Generation

Mahakumbh 2025 created large-scale direct & indirect employment opportunities. Over 8-10 lakh jobs were created as a result of preparation and event activity, like in hospitality, transportation sector, construction and retail sectors.

Large-scale temporary jobs were generated:

- construction and maintenance
- security and crowd management
- sanitation and waste collection
- medical and emergency services
- local vending and artisan crafts
- Infrastructure and urban development :

The Uttar Pradesh government allocated approximately 7500 crore for the event, focusing on roads, sanitation, accommodation, security and public utilities. Public toilets, water stations, and medical centres were built, and tent accommodation (pandals, etc) was built to accommodate numerous people coming from all around the world. Large investments like capital and infrastructure development were also undertaken, such as the construction of new Roads & Flyovers, Bridges and Riverfront development, as well as Sanitation & waste management, which enhanced Prayagraj's long-term tourism

and urban capacity. Smart signage boards were laid down all over the city for the smooth conduct of traffic throughout the event.

Digital Governance System

Mahakumbh 2025 used advanced digital tools like GIS-based crowd management, drone surveillance, mobile apps for pilgrim assistance, and smart CCTV networks. Proper GIS mapping & analysis were undertaken, CCTV were installed, and a proper network was laid down along with drone monitoring. The 24/7 control room worked with full capacity, monitoring a huge crowd at every corner. Mahakumbh was not only just an event but a testament to India's monitoring, security and surveillance capabilities.

A well-established multi-agency coordination was seen like police, health, municipal corporations, tourism collaborating well with NGOs, Akharas and community groups providing essential services like emergency medical services, heatwave crowd stampede preparedness etc.

Local participation played a crucial role in managing extreme pressure like local lodging, transport & city services.

- **Social & Cultural Impact**

People from various strata of the society came together for holy dip irrespective of race, religion, caste etc. Such mass bathing strengthens the unity, cultural cohesion and religious expression. Not only just a mela, it was a beautiful gathering fostering the divine spirit and sending a powerful message across the globe showcasing India's rich traditions and societal reflection. Infrastructure development contributed to long-term urban modernization and increased year-round tourism. Foreign participation strengthens India's cultural soft power.

- **Environmental Impact**

Mahakumbh mela, being such a big mass gathering generated enormous amounts of waste and disrupted the ecosystem badly. Plastic waste piled up tremendously causing drainage choking at many places. Not only plastic waste, organic waste, paper/cardboard waste, ritual materials shared a major part. However, this ritual bathing increased pressure on river ecosystems, requiring water quality monitoring, sewage treatment systems and restriction on industrial discharges.

- **Policy Implications**

Mahakumbh indeed was a live test for public-policy implications, state capacity, sustainability commitments and inclusive governance. Effective management enhances India's state capacity like :

- Pushes India towards stricter and more cooperative multi-level agencies integration.
- Fosters the spirit of successful establishment of command centers and e-governance for a safe and sound mass event taking place.
- Sustainable development should be taken into priority then just event-based development for post event asset utilization.
- epidemic preparedness and food safety inspection must be taken at the priority during such massive events.
- Allowing and monitoring environment friendly faith based ritual materials at such areas to avoid littering, choking and water pollution .
- Single-use plastic during such events should be banned and stricter penalties should be enforced on the offenders.
- AI based surveillance, drone & facial recognition, cyber monitoring, multilingual apps, GPS tracking, lost & found portal being the need of the hour for policing and monitoring.
- More participation of students and youth for inclusive public service delivery like gender safety, accessibility for disabled and crowd equity even in the extreme conditions.

Summary

Mahakumbh reflects how cultural events can stimulate significant economic participation while reinforcing cultural heritage. Its socio-economic footprint provides a model for understanding large-scale temporary urbanization.

However, in spite of showcasing and hosting the largest gathering, the need of the hour calls for some key areas to be focussed for a healthy and smooth environmental functioning.

- Tourism and religious travel markets gained long-term traction.
- Local entrepreneurial activity was catalyzed.
- Infrastructure improvements will benefit future development.

It truly represented the intersection of faith, economy and society at a massive scale. The event served as both a cultural landmark and an economic engine. After analysing various estimates and data, it is observed that such a massive event and the progressive planning setup have led to a good substantial financial impact, employment growth and urban capacity development.

Future work should continue empirical research on long-term impacts and sustainable planning. Yet, balancing economic growth with social welfare and environmental sustainability remains essential.

Environment being the nurturing soul, has to be kept at the foremost priority because such massive events create lasting effects on environment like the problem of water pollution especially in the river ganga, growth of microbial infection like adding of fecal bacteria due to mass bathing of people, piling of waste, high BOD from human waste depleting oxygen harming aquatic life, single-use plastic a major concern, high demand of resources impacting earth's regenerative capacity, increasing carbon footprint etc.

These events not only showcase India's Soft Power but also prepares the ground for future development.

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