

DHANUYATRA AND FESTIVAL TOURISM: A STRATEGIC APPROACH FOR ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT IN ODISHA

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ABSTRACT

Festivals have played a crucial role in human history, and in recent decades, festival tourism has gained recognition as a key driver of economic growth. Many regions organize diverse festival activities, yet the challenge lies in establishing unique, brand-worthy festivals. Research and strategic planning for festival tourism can enhance consumer demand and boost regional economies.

This paper evaluates the Dhanuyatra of Bargarh district in Odisha, India, the world's largest open-air theatre, as a potential focal point for festival tourism. The study explores its integration with rural and eco-tourism, emphasizing employment generation, infrastructure development, and branding strategies for sustainable regional growth. Innovative recommendations are proposed for packaging the festival within a comprehensive festival tourism framework.

KEYWORDS:

Festival, Travel and Tourism, Dhanuyatra, Mythology, GDP, Odisha

1. INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry significantly contributes to global economic growth, generating employment and fostering cultural exchange. According to the World Travel & Tourism Council (2015), tourism accounted for 10% of global GDP (US \$7.2 trillion), supporting 7.2 million jobs worldwide. The UNWTO (2016) report highlights tourism as a major driver of international trade in services.

Local festivals increasingly serve as catalysts for regional tourism and economic growth. However, assessing their precise impact remains challenging. Festival evaluations typically focus on economic appraisals, yet they also provide vital demographic, marketing, and visitor

satisfaction insights. Creative festival tourism planning enhances city visibility and drives regional development by leveraging unique cultural traditions.

Festival tourism fosters economic development by integrating local culture, traditions, and industry into tourism-driven celebrations. Community participation plays a key role in this process, strengthening local identity and infrastructure development.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Local festivals contribute significantly to tourism by:

1. Increasing demand for local tourism (Smith & Jenner, 1998).
2. Enhancing destination branding (Kotler, Haider, & Rein, 1993).
3. Extending tourism seasons (Getz, 1997).

Many scholars emphasize the need for systematic planning, development, and marketing of festivals as tourism attractions. Festivals impact society and culture through identity formation, tourism promotion, and management strategies.

- **Tiwari (2015)** highlights the role of the Shilpgram fair in promoting rural economic growth.
- **Durgamohan (2015)** discusses the revival of the Hampi festival, a UNESCO World Heritage site, and its socio-economic benefits.
- **Munjal & Jauhari (2015)** analyze India's challenges in leveraging festival tourism due to infrastructure limitations and policy gaps.
- **Felsenstein & Fleischer (2003)** present a methodology for assessing festival-induced income growth.
- **Mohr et al. (1993)** examine festival visitor motivations and satisfaction levels.
- **Cibinskiene (2012)** studies city tourism competitiveness and the economic impact of events.
- **Bhaduri & Swamy (2012)** explore the role of Odisha's festivals in preserving cultural heritage.

3. OBJECTIVE/SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This paper:

- Defines the characteristics of festival tourism.
- Evaluates Dhanuyatra's potential as a tourist attraction.
- Assesses infrastructure suitability for festival tourism.
- Explores branding strategies for positioning Dhanuyatra within Odisha's tourism framework.

4. FACT FINDINGS: TOURISM IN ODISHA

Odisha, known as "The Soul of Incredible India," boasts a rich tourism heritage. The state hosts UNESCO sites such as the Sun Temple at Konark and numerous Buddhist heritage sites. Tourism contributes 13% of Odisha's GDP.

Table 1: Tourist Inflow to Odisha

Year	Domestic Tourists	Foreign Tourists	Total Tourists
2010	75,91,615	50,432	76,42,047
2011	82,71,257	60,722	83,31,979
2012	90,53,086	64,719	91,17,805
2013	98,00,135	66,675	98,66,810
2014	1,07,90,622	71,426	1,08,62,048
2015	1,17,86,117	66,971	1,18,53,088

Table 2: Festival Tourism Attractions of Odisha

Sl. No.	Festival Name	Location	Ideal Time
1	Car Festival	Puri	June – July
2	Konark Dance Festival	Konark	December
3	Puri Beach Festival	Puri	November
4	DhanuYatra	Bargarh	Dec – Jan

5	Kharavela Mohotsov	Bhubaneswar	January
6	Ekamra Utsav	Bhubaneswar	January

5. TOURISM POTENTIAL IN WESTERN ODISHA

Western Odisha hosts diverse attractions, including:

- **Hirakud Dam** – World’s longest dam.
- **Samaleswari Temple** – A major pilgrimage site.
- **Huma Leaning Temple** – Comparable to the Leaning Tower of Pisa.
- **Gandhamardhan Hill** – Rich in medicinal herbs.
- **Nrusinghnath Temple** – Ancient architectural marvel.
- **Debrigarh Wildlife Sanctuary** – Home to diverse flora and fauna.

6. METHODOLOGY: PROFILE OF DHANUYATRA

Dhanuyatra, an open-air roving drama, portrays the mythological conflict between Lord Krishna and King Kansa. Bargarh transforms into **Mathura**, River Jeera into **Yamuna**, and Amapalli village into **Gopa**. The play is staged across a 10km radius, integrating the local population into performances.

Festival Highlights:

- **Nagar Bhraman:** King Kansa’s royal procession.
- **Cultural Performances:** Traditional dances, folk music, and artistic exhibitions.
- **Trade & Handloom Expo:** Featuring artisans from across India.

7. DISCUSSION ON RESEARCH FINDINGS

Dhanuyatra offers immense potential for festival tourism:

1. **Cultural Significance:** It mirrors the scale of Puri’s Rath Yatra and Kolkata’s Durga Puja.
2. **Economic Opportunities:** Boosts employment in hospitality, transportation, and trade.
3. **Tourist Experience:** Integrates heritage tourism with immersive experiences.

8. SUGGESTIONS

1. **Strategic Media Campaigns:** Nationwide and international promotions.
2. **Festival Branding:** Appointing a brand ambassador.
3. **Enhanced Tourism Infrastructure:** Home-stay programs, model villages.
4. **Local Guides & Student Volunteers:** Multilingual assistance.
5. **Updated Festival Website:** E-brochures linked to Odisha's tourism portal.

9. CONCLUSION

Dhanuyatra embodies a unique cultural experience, deserving global recognition. Its integration into Odisha's tourism strategy can elevate it as a premier festival tourism destination, ensuring economic and cultural sustainability.

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