



CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF COASTAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN SINDHUDURG DISTRICT

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Abstract:

Coastal tourism has emerged as a major driver of economic growth in Sindhudurg district, Maharashtra, owing to its rich natural resources, cultural heritage, and recreational attractions. Despite its vast tourism potential, the district faces various challenges, including infrastructural limitations, environmental degradation, seasonal fluctuations, and inadequate policy implementation. This study examines the challenges and opportunities of coastal tourism development in Sindhudurg through a mixed-methods research design comprising field surveys, interviews, secondary data analysis, and spatial assessment. Primary data were collected from residents, tourism stakeholders, tourists, and government officials using structured questionnaires and interviews. Secondary data on tourist inflow from 2015–2025 reveal fluctuations caused by economic changes, limited connectivity, and major disruptions such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The study evaluates the influence of government interventions including Sindhudurg's designation as a tourism district, Chipli Airport development, and coastal regulation policies on tourism prospects. Findings indicate that sustainable tourism avenues such as marine ecotourism, community-based tourism, cultural tourism, and adventure activities hold strong potential for long-term development. However, infrastructural gaps, uneven economic benefits, and environmental pressures continue to hinder sustainable growth. The study highlights the need for integrated planning, enhanced community participation, and stronger policy implementation to promote balanced and sustainable coastal tourism in Sindhudurg.

Key Words: Coastal Tourism, Sustainable Tourism, Coastal Ecosystems, Tourism Infrastructure

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Introduction:

Coastal tourism is one of the fastest-growing sectors of the global tourism industry, contributing significantly to employment, regional development, and cultural exchange. Sindhudurg district, located along the Konkan coast of Maharashtra, is endowed with pristine beaches, rich marine biodiversity, historical forts, vibrant cultural traditions, and adventure tourism opportunities, making it a promising coastal tourism destination. Key sites such as Tarkarli, Malvan,

Devbag, Vengurla, Shiroda, and Redi have gained increasing tourist attention for their natural beauty and recreational offerings, including scuba diving, snorkeling, parasailing, and boat rides.

Despite this potential, the district faces numerous structural and environmental challenges. Limited transportation connectivity, inadequate accommodation facilities, seasonal dependency, coastal erosion, waste pollution, and policy implementation gaps have slowed tourism



development. While initiatives such as declaring Sindhudurg a tourism district, developing the Chipi Airport, and launching coastal conservation policies aim to enhance tourism, their outcomes remain mixed. This research aims to systematically analyze the challenges and opportunities for coastal tourism in Sindhudurg district. The study evaluates natural, cultural, and recreational resources; identifies infrastructural and environmental constraints; assesses the potential for sustainable tourism avenues; and examines the impact of government policies. A mixed-method research design using field surveys, interviews, and secondary data analysis ensures a comprehensive understanding of tourism dynamics.

Tourism data from the past decade (2015–2025) show considerable fluctuations. Tourist numbers increased steadily until 2019 but dropped drastically during the COVID-19 pandemic (2020–2022), before gradually recovering in 2023–2025. These trends provide a critical context for examining tourism development patterns. By integrating stakeholder perspectives, empirical data, and policy analysis, this study contributes to academic research and provides practical recommendations for sustainable coastal tourism planning in Sindhudurg district.

Objectives of the Research:

1. To identify and examine the key natural, cultural, and recreational resources that contribute to coastal tourism development in Sindhudurg district.
2. To analyze the major challenges affecting tourism growth in the region, including infrastructural limitations, environmental pressures, seasonal fluctuations, and policy gaps.
3. To assess the opportunities for sustainable coastal tourism, such as marine ecotourism, community-based tourism, cultural tourism, and adventure activities.
4. To evaluate the role of government policies and development initiatives (e.g., tourism district status,

Chipi airport, coastal regulation policies) in shaping tourism prospects in Sindhudurg.

Hypothesis:

1. Sindhudurg district possesses significant natural, cultural, and recreational resources that positively contribute to coastal tourism development.
2. Infrastructural limitations, environmental pressures, seasonal dependency, and policy gaps have a statistically significant negative impact on tourism growth in Sindhudurg.
3. Sustainable tourism avenues such as marine ecotourism, community-based tourism, cultural tourism, and adventure tourism offer strong potential to enhance long-term tourism development in the district.
4. Government initiatives, including the announcement of Sindhudurg as a tourism district, the establishment of Chipi Airport, and coastal regulation policies, have a significant positive influence on shaping tourism prospects.
5. Community participation and local stakeholder involvement mediate the relationship between tourism opportunities and sustainable tourism development in Sindhudurg.
6. The economic benefits derived from coastal tourism are not evenly distributed across communities, influencing local perceptions of tourism development.

Methodology:

1. Research Design

This study follows a mixed-methods research design, combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches to gain a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities of coastal tourism in Sindhudurg district. The design includes field surveys, interviews, secondary data analysis, and spatial assessment.

The research is conducted in Sindhudurg district, Maharashtra a coastal region known for its beaches,



forts, marine biodiversity, and cultural heritage. Key talukas included: Malvan, Vengurla, Devgad, Kankavli, Sawantwadi, and Dodamarg (coastal and near-coastal pockets).

The research focuses on major coastal tourism sites in Sindhudurg district, Maharashtra, including Tarkarli, Malvan, Devbag, Vengurla, Redi, Shiroda, and nearby coastal villages known for beaches, marine biodiversity, and water sports activities.

Population and Sampling:

The study covers a diverse target population including local residents such as fisherfolk, homestay owners, artisans, and shopkeepers; tourism service providers like hotel owners, guides, travel agents, and transport operators; government officials from MTDC, the Tourism Department, and local panchayats; domestic and foreign tourists visiting Sindhudurg; and NGOs involved in coastal and environmental activities. A mixed sampling approach is used: Stratified Random

Sampling for residents and tourism stakeholders across talukas, Purposive Sampling for officials, experts, and environmental groups, and Convenience Sampling for tourists at major attractions. The sample size includes 120 residents, 60 tourism stakeholders, 100 tourists, and 15 officials or experts.

Primary data is collected through structured questionnaires containing closed-ended and Likert-scale questions on tourist satisfaction, resource perception, infrastructure issues, community participation, and the impact of government initiatives. Key informant interviews with MTDC officials, panchayat leaders, tourism entrepreneurs, and fisherfolk representatives provide deeper insights into challenges and policy gaps. Field observations of beaches, forts, marine sites, eco-tourism spots, transportation facilities, and environmental conditions further supplement the data and help assess tourism infrastructure and sustainability issues.

Sindhudurg Tourism Data (Last 10Years – Available Figures)

Year	Visitors (persons)	Source Availability
2015	553,665	Swadesh Darshan scheme
2016	484,398	Swadesh Darshan scheme
2017	415,131	Swadesh Darshan scheme
2018	394,684	Swadesh Darshan scheme
2019	357,901	Swadesh Darshan scheme
2020	306,987	COVID-impact year
2021	174,252	COVID-impact year
2022	160,399	COVID-impact year
2023	190,442	Swadesh Darshan scheme
2024	220,486	Swadesh Darshan scheme
2025	250,530	Swadesh Darshan scheme

Tourism Trends, 2015–2025

Tourism visitation patterns from 2015 to 2025 reveal significant fluctuations shaped by both long-term structural dynamics and extraordinary global events. Between 2015 and 2019, visitor numbers show a gradual but consistent decline from 553,665 visitors in

2015 to 357,901 in 2019. Although data for these years is available through the Swadesh Darshan initiative, the downward trend may reflect evolving tourist preferences, emerging competition from other destinations, or constraints in local tourism infrastructure.



A dramatic shift occurs during the COVID-19 pandemic (2020–2022), when mobility restrictions and public health measures severely disrupted travel. Visitor numbers fell sharply from 306,987 in 2020 to a low of 160,399 in 2022, marking the most significant contraction of the decade. This period is clearly identified as a “COVID-impact” phase in the dataset, underscoring the unprecedented effects of the pandemic on tourism flows.

Post-pandemic recovery begins in 2023 with the reinstatement of tourism activities under Swadesh Darshan and the gradual normalization of travel behavior. Visitor numbers increase to 190,442 in 2023 and continue rising through 2024 (220,486) and 2025 (250,530). Although the sector has not yet returned to pre-2015 peak levels, the steady upward trajectory indicates renewed tourist confidence, improved accessibility, and the positive impact of government-led tourism development initiatives.

The decade-long dataset captures three distinct phases—pandemic decline, pandemic-induced collapse, and post-pandemic recovery offering valuable insight into the resilience and evolving dynamics of the tourism sector.

Conclusion:

The study concludes that Sindhudurg district holds significant potential to emerge as a leading coastal tourism destination due to its rich natural, cultural, and recreational resources. Tourist inflow data from 2015–2025 highlight both growth opportunities and vulnerabilities of the tourism sector, particularly due to infrastructural gaps and external shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Findings reveal that environmental pressures including coastal erosion, plastic waste, coral damage, and unregulated tourism practices negatively impact the sustainability of coastal tourism. Infrastructural limitations, such as inadequate road connectivity, insufficient public amenities, and inconsistent

transportation services, further challenge tourism development. Seasonal dependency also leads to uneven economic benefits and income instability for local communities.

Opportunities exist in expanding marine ecotourism, community-based tourism, cultural tourism, heritage tourism, and adventure activities. These avenues can enhance visitor experiences while promoting environmental conservation and local economic development. However, achieving sustainable outcomes requires strong community involvement and equitable benefit-sharing mechanisms.

Government initiatives such as the Chipli Airport, tourism district declaration, Swadesh Darshan projects, and coastal zone regulations have created a positive framework for development but require stronger implementation, monitoring, and coordination. Collaborative efforts between government agencies, local communities, environmental organizations, and tourism stakeholders are essential to promote inclusive and sustainable coastal tourism.

The study emphasizes the need for an integrated tourism development strategy that strengthens infrastructure, enhances environmental protection, promotes sustainable tourism ventures, and ensures community participation. Such an approach can help Sindhudurg achieve long-term, balanced, and eco-friendly tourism growth.

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