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Meaningful Tourism in Asia

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the applicability and transformative potential of the Meaningful Tourism paradigm as a strategic framework for sustainable tourism development in Asia, focusing on Mongolia, India (North and Northeast), and Nepal. Adopting a qualitative multi-case study approach, the research is based on document analysis, policy reviews, secondary statistical data, and comparative interpretation of international project reports and national tourism strategies. The analysis is anchored in the Meaningful Tourism framework, which evaluates tourism outcomes across six stakeholder groups: visitors, host communities, employees, tourism businesses, governments, and the environment through the lenses of shared value creation and stakeholder satisfaction. The findings reveal that Meaningful Tourism offers both a philosophical foundation and a practical governance tool to address key Asian tourism challenges, including overtourism, unequal benefit distribution, cultural commodification, and environmental vulnerability. Case evidence from nomadic tourism in Mongolia, artisan-led and community-based tourism in India, and diversified cultural and nature-based tourism in Nepal demonstrates the framework's capacity to align policy, markets, and local livelihoods. While limited by its reliance on qualitative secondary data, the study contributes conceptually by advancing Meaningful Tourism as an integrative, context-sensitive pathway for resilient and inclusive tourism futures, calling for future empirical research to operationalise indicators and measure long-term impacts.

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1. Introduction

Asia's importance in global tourism has evolved dramatically from 1970 to 2025, transitioning from a marginal player to the world's fastest-growing tourism economy, fundamentally reshaping global dynamics through rapid expansion, intra-regional demand, and infrastructure investments (WEF, 2025).

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In the first half of the fifty years of rapid growth of international tourism between 1970 and 2020, Asia's tourism sector was only slowly developing both in terms of arrivals and as source market. However, in the new millennium Asia's importance increased dramatically, outpacing most other regions, especially because of the rise of China to the position as the dominant global tourism source market.

By 2019, Asia-Pacific accounted for about a quarter of all international visitor arrivals, with more than half of them being intra-Asian travel supported by new Asian low-cost carriers.

After the sharp decline and relatively slow recovery during and after the Pandemic, Asia regained a dominant role in international tourism again in 2025. In the first half of 2025, Asia recorded more than 220 million international visitor arrivals, representing about 93% of the 2019 levels (PATA, 2025).

Similar to other parts of the world, tourism in Asia has developed in the decades before the pandemic in an unsustainable way, based on concentration on a few destinations, ecological and cultural destruction, and a lack of benefits and satisfaction for local host communities and companies. Places like Bali and Angkor Wat suffer from overtourism, while at the same time for example large parts of India see very few international visitors. A lot of initiatives for community-based tourism, homestays, eco-tourism etc. exist, however, they are often small and not well connected to the mainstream of national tourism politics and marketing.

Inner-Asia tourism based on the economic progress especially of China and in ASEAN countries and on the affluent societies in Japan and South Korea is likely to be the driving force for international tourism in Asia. However, the many statements of Asian tourism ministries to start moving from quantity to quality need a solid methodology and tools to become reality. Meaningful Tourism is offering such instruments.

This article looks at different aspects of the development of Meaningful Tourism in Mongolia, Nepal, North and Northeast India.

2. Case Description and Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, multi-case research design to examine the application of the Meaningful Tourism paradigm in three Asian contexts: nomadic tourism development in Mongolia, community- and artisan-led tourism in North and Northeast India, and diversified cultural and nature-based tourism in Nepal. These cases were selected purposively to reflect diverse socio-cultural settings, governance structures, and stages of tourism development, while sharing common challenges related to sustainability, community inclusion, and post-crisis recovery. The methodology is based on systematic document analysis of international organisation reports, national tourism policies, development programme evaluations, and peer-reviewed academic literature, complemented by secondary statistical data. Analytical interpretation is guided by the Meaningful Tourism framework, which assesses tourism outcomes across six stakeholder groups: visitors, host communities, employees, tourism businesses, governments, and the environment focusing on value creation and stakeholder satisfaction. Cross-case comparison is used to identify convergent patterns, contextual variations, and transferable lessons relevant to sustainable tourism development in Asia.

3. Case Analysis and Findings

3.1. A Meaningful Tourism Approach to Nomadic Tourism Development: A Case of Mongolia

Mongolia has an ambitious vision to increase the number of visitors to 2 million by 2030, with a contribution of 3-4 billion USD in in-destination spending. This will lead to increased

job creation and a significant economic boost to the sector, local economic impact, and related industries (Government of Mongolia, 2020; UN PAGE, 2021). To achieve this goal, proper tours and itineraries involving nomadic herders, along with relevant infrastructure and transportation, must be developed. The UNDP/PAGE has conducted a comprehensive study to develop a concept for the Ger and Nature scheme for nomadic tourism in Mongolia (UN PAGE, 2021).

The main objective of the project study was to develop and propose the most suitable concept for the “Ger and Nature” (G&N) scheme for nomadic tourism. This would be accomplished by conducting tourism market assessments and applying new trends in sustainable tourism for nomadic culture-based eco-tourism (UN PAGE, 2021). Additionally, the study aimed to identify the potential impacts of the G&N scheme on the environment, the domestic economy, engagement with key stakeholders, primarily herder families, and the social inclusion of local community groups.

What is needed are improvements in the offerings, organization, sustainability, business volume, and profit of nomadic tourism activities in Mongolia. To achieve this goal, the Meaningful Tourism approach should be used to develop nomadic tourism in Mongolia. The first step is a planned study which specifically aims to evaluate the stakeholders involved in nomadic tourism, their respective roles, and to identify the challenges that the Meaningful Tourism approach may encounter.

3.2. Mongolia as a Nomadic Tourism Destination

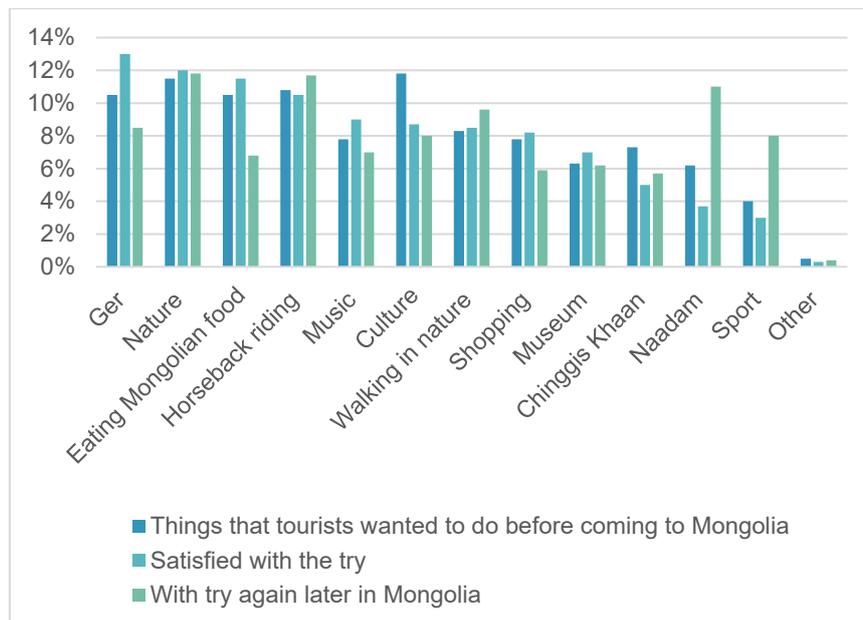
Tourism in Mongolia continues to be a significant contributor to the national GDP, with indications that this contribution will only increase as the service industry continues to grow. Tourism’s contribution to GDP (excluding mining) has grown by approximately 20% since 2019, reaching around 2% of GDP and employing 83,000 people (Mongol Bank, 2019). While this signals positive momentum, further investment and structural improvements are needed to accelerate growth and meet long-term targets.

The industry supports 83,000 jobs, with tour operators (27%) and hotels (22%) being the largest employers. Other key segments include restaurants and cafes (21%), tourist camps (13%), and additional tourism-related services (17%). This employment footprint reflects the sector’s broad economic impact, spanning accommodation, food services, and travel operations (Mongol Bank, 2019).

Mongolia offers a unique value proposition with its diverse natural beauty, breathtaking landscapes, authentic nomadic way of life, rich Mongolian culture and festivals, historical heritage associated with Genghis Khan, and thriving sports and adventure tourism activities (UNWTO, 2018).

The international visitor surveys from 2009, 2015, and 2019 showed that the most common activities preferred by tourists were directly linked to nomadic tourism services (Mongol Bank, 2019). (Figure 1).

Figure 1. The activities of tourists want and experience level



The 2019 Mongol Bank Tourism Survey shows that nearly 50% of international tourists' satisfaction was related to the beauty and authenticity of the country and/or destinations (Mongol Bank, 2019). The nomadic lifestyle is a unique experience and one of Mongolia's key unique selling points (USP). This is one of the main reasons why travelers are drawn to taking trips to the countryside.

Most tourists who plan on visiting nomadic families have already gathered information beforehand and formed their expectations based on feedback from previous travelers. In fact, 68% of travelers who have requested a nomadic life experience from Mongolian tour operators have a clear image and information in mind before reaching out to tour companies (Gansukh, 2016).

While Mongolia's tourism sector has significant untapped potential, adjustments are necessary to fully capitalize on this opportunity, particularly in improving the quality and diversifying the offerings. The major potential of Mongolia for successful international tourism development lies not only in its unspoiled landscape but also in its rich cultural heritage, particularly the existing pastoral nomadic tradition. The majority of international tourists who visit Mongolia are not just seeking the beauty of the landscape, but also authentic and genuine cultural experiences with rural herders. The meaning of Mongolian nomad life, their daily activities, and the authentic narratives and stories of herders attract many tourists. In addition, the history of the Mongols, myths of Great Chinggis Khan, the combination of concepts and practices between Buddhism and Shamanism, and its spiritual meanings are seen as core attractions and expectations of international tourists (UNWTO, 2018; Bulag, 2014).

Mongolia has an ambitious vision to increase the number of visitors from about 630,000 in 2019 and about 850,000 in 2025 to two million by 2030, with a contribution of \$3-4 billion in in-destination spending (Government of Mongolia, 2020; UN PAGE, 2021). This will lead to increased job creation and a significant economic boost to the sector, local economic impact, and related industries. To achieve this goal, proper tours and itineraries involving nomadic herders, along with relevant infrastructure and transportation, must be developed.

3.3. Nomadic Tourism

Nomadic Tourism is a type of tourism that introduces tourists to the lifestyle of nomadic people, who change their location in response to seasonal movement between rangelands (Gansukh, 2016).

Gansukh (2016) defined “nomadic tourism as any activity or business that links nomadic lifestyle and culture with products, services, and experiences in tourism. (Gansukh, 2016). Nomadic Tourism is associated with nomadic people, their lifestyle, and travel on horses, camels, etc. That’s a type of tourism proposing “authentic” experiences of traditional nomadic lifestyles: lodging in a yurt, typical cuisine, horse and camel riding. Most of the tourism offers include nature experiences, visits to cultural heritage, participating in traditional arts and crafts-making, while others would also propose falconry and shamanist healings.

Most sources would refer to Nomadic Tourism in connection with tourism in Mongolia. Some sources (including many Russians) use the term “Djailoo Tourism” referring to nomadic tourism in Kyrgyzstan, as this country is claimed to be the motherland of Djailoo Tourism (Kantarci et al., 2014). Djailoo is a Kyrgyz name for a traditional housing – the yurt.

A “yurt experience”, proposed by tour operators, is not technically Nomadic Tourism, as it is a stay in a permanent yurt camp. However, most of the offers include horse riding, sightseeing, traditional food, etc. Yurt Tourism is spread in many countries, which might not necessarily have nomads, as for instance, one can find yurt camps in France and Portugal offering nomadic lifestyle experiences. However, yurts offer mobility, and it is possible to offer to move small yurt camps on yak or camel carts, while clients walk or ride a horse.

The “yurt experience” demonstrates public interest to nomadic culture and experiencing the nomadic lifestyle (Tiberghien, 2014). The countries actively promoting Nomadic Tourism are Mongolia, Kyrgyzstan, and some of the Russian regions. Kyrgyzstan is branding the country as a “Country of Heaven Mountains” and calls its nomadic tourism Djailoo Tourism.

Some academic research on the topic of Nomadic Tourism has been done, in most cases connected with anthropological research of nomadic people facing urbanization and migration to cities. Some examples are:

“Tourism in Central Asia: Cultural Potential and Challenges,” edited by K. Kantarci, PhD, M. Uysal, PhD, V.P. Magnini, PhD, is an academic publication addressing tourism in Central Asia (Kantarci et al., 2014). Among the articles, there is one focusing directly on the Silk Road, “Clustering Silk Road Countries Based on Competitiveness Factors in Tourism Industry” by Kazim Develioglu and Kemal Kantarci.

Uradyn E. Bulag, reader in social anthropology at the University of Cambridge, was a speaker in the seminar “Nomadic Culture and Tourism in Mongolia: Revitalization of Community through Sustainable Tourism” organized by UNWTO Asia Pacific Office in 2014 in Japan (Bulag, 2014). He also researched the Kalmyk people, “Kalmyk Cultural Heritage Documentation MIASU” (Bulag, 2014).

Guillaume Tiberghien, a lecturer in tourism, School of Interdisciplinary Studies, University of Glasgow, has written his PhD thesis on “Authenticity and Tourism in Kazakhstan: Neo-nomadic Culture in the Post-Soviet Era 2014” (Tiberghien, 2014), at the University of Auckland, New Zealand. He is also an associate program leader for the development and launch of a Tourism and Hospitality program at KIMEP University in Kazakhstan. He conducted several consulting projects in the fields of Tourism Marketing and Sustainable Tourism Development in Central Asia and New Zealand.

Hassan Bakhshizadeh “Nomad Tourism Planning in Iran: A Case study of Shahsevan tribe in Ardabil”, University of Tehran, Faculty of Social Science (Bakhshizadeh, 2017).

Many local tour operators in Russia, Mongolia, and Kyrgyzstan, alongside international operators, offer varied organized tours to explore the nomadic lifestyle.

In Mongolia, the majority of tour operators offer nomadic tourism products and services. For example: Black Ibex Expeditions¹ invites to visit real Mongolian nomad families in Mongolia. The company positions itself to be owned and operated by locals.

As one of the first countries to adopt the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Mongolia has developed a Long-Term Development Policy Vision 2050, which was approved in 2020 for implementation. It recognizes tourism as a priority sector of Mongolia's economy. Conceptualized through a sustainable tourism approach, the “Ger and Nature” (UN PAGE, 2021). (G&N) concept scheme will contribute to achieving the long-term goals of the SDGs-2030 and Mongolia’s Long-Term Development Policy Vision 2050. One of the main objectives (1.2) of the Vision for Mongolia is “to become a leading country with preserved nomadic civilization, based on the national mentality, heritage, culture, and mindset and centred around the creativity of Mongolian citizens”.

The project, funded by the UN PAGE, aims to develop a “Ger and Nature” (G&N) scheme seeking to integrate and expand opportunities for involvement and participation of local nomadic herder communities in tourism activities at various levels, such as hosting cultural and adventure tourists in Mongolian open pasturelands.

The name “nomadic or nomad” is used as a brand title for marketing in our tourism sector, with more than 20 tour operators having titled their company name with “nomadic” meanings. We could find hundreds of tour itinerary programs that are included with nomadic cultural experiences, adventure holidays, or yurt/ger stay products and services distributed by international and Mongolian online (OTA) or offline tour operators, as well as direct bookings through internet-based engines of tourism supply value chain. It can also be possible to market any travel services assisted by herder households through any single service providers, such as local transport drivers, guides, tourist camps, etc. It is critically important to assess and analyze the types of nomadic-based tour products which are operated in the Mongolian tourism sector; to define the success and failure reasons obstacles, and opportunities to propose a relevant new tourism concept based on the G&N scheme. The main challenges, in this regard, are to understand how to support nomadic tourism development in alignment with current capacities and market demands in a nationwide context.

G&N scheme is a socio-entrepreneurial network which motivates greater participation of herder people in the multi-sectoral development process based on their resources, introduces efficient and innovative interventions, and improves the quality of livelihood through the inclusive nomadic tourism development. It brings resilient and sustainable solutions to rural nomadic development challenges.

3.4. The Concept of Meaningful Tourism

The Meaningful Tourism paradigm begins with the understanding that sustainable tourism development can only be achieved when tourism provides measurable, objective benefits and subjective satisfaction for all main stakeholders in the tourism and hospitality industry.

3.5. The Six Stakeholders of Meaningful Tourism:

1. Visitors/Guests	
2. Host Community	

3. Tourism Employees (including tourism, hospitality, transport, retail, and attractions)	
4. Tourism and Hospitality Service-providing companies	
5. Governments at different levels	
6. Environment (Local and Global).	

All six stakeholders must derive both objective benefits and subjective satisfaction from tourism and hospitality activities to promote the sustainable development of destinations, companies, and organizations. This will help mitigate and adapt to climate change and facilitate successful transformative processes within a rapidly changing world. SMART KPIs (Key Performance Indicators that are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound) are used to measure the sustained improvement in benefits and stakeholder satisfaction.

3.6. The Roles and Responsibilities of The Main Stakeholders of Nomadic Tourism:

Stakeholders	Role/Function	Main interest
ACTORS		
Herder Families	Host	1. more tourists 2. more income
Employee	Local business supplies	1. income 2. sustainable trading
Tourists	Consumers	1. value for money 2. good memory
SUPPORTERS		
Government	Tourism policy coordination, implementation Planning & development Support for SME	1. Sustainable development, 2. Destination management, 3. Brand development
Tour Operators	creates and sells travel packages, manage the logistics of a holiday	1. more herders on nomadic tourism, 2. provision of basic service standards by host families
Environment	Protection of the environment through actions like raising public awareness, advocating policy changes, conserving natural resources and biodiversity, and implementing projects on the ground	1. generate income and promote conservation, 2. minimize negative impacts, 3. advocacy for and development of sustainable tourism

The constraints for implementing the G&N scheme and the need to address them to meet basic requirements are as follows:

Identified constraint in each product/market combination	How could this constraint be solved?
Voluntary certification for G&N scheme	can be solved through a multifaceted approach involving collaboration among stakeholders, financial and policy incentives, and improvements in the efficiency, transparency, and accessibility of the certification process.
Registration and classification	The registration and classification of Ger as accommodation can be addressed through a Ger & Nature approach, involving a standardized digital registration system with clear certification criteria based on factors such as services and facilities and relevant KPIs.

Appearance of the Ger	can be solved through a combination of design that reflects local culture and sustainability, high standards of cleanliness and maintenance, and innovative technology and amenities.
Guest Beds and Bedding	can be solved through a multi-layered approach involving protective covers, high-quality and easily cleanable materials, and professional housekeeping techniques.
Furniture (table, chairs, etc.)	can be solved by prioritizing durability, comfort, and functionality, using high-quality and easy-to-clean materials, and considering the specific needs of the accommodation through options like modular, sustainable, or custom-designed pieces.
Drinking water	implementing rainwater harvesting, installing water-saving technologies, and using point-of-use water purification systems.
Bathroom facilities	include installing modern, off-grid systems like decentralized toilets and water-efficient fixtures, using technology for smart monitoring and automated cleaning, and implementing better management practices focused on regular cleaning, maintenance, and accessible design.
Heating and Temperature	Solutions often prioritize energy efficiency and renewable energy sources to overcome the high cost or lack of infrastructure common in rural areas.
Lighting	can be solved through a combination of energy-efficient technology, thoughtful design that emphasizes natural light, and a focus on minimizing light pollution.
Sanitation	Key solutions include implementing appropriate low-cost waste and wastewater treatment systems like twin-pit latrines or on-site treatment, separating waste and greywater at the source, and creating policies that encourage water conservation and responsible waste management.
Availability of telecommunications	can be solved by leveraging modern technologies like mobile networks and satellite internet, and by adopting smart tourism strategies that include integrated online booking systems, digital marketing, and partnerships with other local businesses.
Safety, security, and access	can be improved through technology (like GPS tracking and safety apps), collaboration between public and private sectors, and community involvement. Other key strategies include improving insurance systems, developing clear laws and regulations, and focusing on health protocols and hygiene to build trust with guests.
Human resources	Focus on training and capacity building through tailored programs, incentivizing employment, and implementing a community-based tourism model to empower locals. Effective solutions also include public sector support for education and training, creating better working conditions to improve retention, and strategic marketing that highlights local skills and potential.
Information about availability	can be solved by creating comprehensive online booking platforms and by developing smart tourism hubs that consolidate resources.
Rural infrastructure	Improving rural infrastructure, such as water supply and internet access, is also crucial for both providers and tourists.
Transport and accessibility	improving public transportation options like bus lines and shuttles, investing in digital tools such as GPS and digital maps, and encouraging public-private partnerships to develop necessary infrastructure like better roads and essential services.
Provision for children and disabled guests	adapting infrastructure, implementing universal design, developing tailored services, and using technology to provide accessibility information.

Based on the Meaningful tourism approach, there is a need to organize a series of Meaningful There are at least five stakeholders in the concept of the Ger and Nature scheme for nomadic tourism: Herders and communities, state and local government, tour operators, consumers, and other environmental organizations. By understanding the interests and needs of all stakeholders involved in the G&N scheme and nomadic tourism

through the Meaningful tourism approach, we can establish the ideal conditions for implementation Meaningful Tourism Transformational Game workshops at the national level.

No	Workshop Theme	Main participants
1	The need to establish an Institutional body for the G&N network at the national level	Ministry of Culture, Sport, Tourism, and Youth of Mongolia, Mongolian Authority of Standardization and Measurement, Mongolian Tourism Organization and Mongolian Travel Association Aimags Governor's office, Herder's group representative
2	The review and development of the basic criteria for the G&N scheme voluntary certification program	Institutional body for the G&N network
3	The content and training syllabus for herder families	The Consulting team of the G&N scheme
4	Train the trainers and auditors for the G&N scheme network	
5	Marketing and promotion of the G&N network	Ministry of Culture, Sport, Tourism, and Youth of Mongolia, Institutional body for the G&N network

3.7. Meaningful Tourism Development in India: Cultural Diversity and Tourism Context

India is a vast nation, ranking first in population and seventh in land area, and is home to an extraordinary diversity of cultures, ethnic groups, tribal and indigenous communities living together (US Census Bureau, n.d.; Government of India, 2011; UNWTO, 2018). This diversity shapes tourism as a fundamentally human-centric activity, deeply connected to people's identities, aspirations, and ways of life. Because tourism interacts directly with society, culture, and environment, its development must be sensitive, inclusive, and context-specific (UNWTO, 2020). Despite its size and diversity, India has been able to attract only around 20 million international visitors per year, a small number in comparison to the number of inhabitants. Other Asian countries achieve values for numbers of visitors per million inhabitants, which are more than 10 (Thailand) or even more than 100 times (Maldives) higher (UNWTO, 2025).

3.8. Tourism Across Northern Indian States

Himachal Pradesh, a predominantly rural Himalayan state, has strong potential for adventure tourism, eco-tourism, religious tourism, and nature-based tourism (Government of Himachal Pradesh, 2021). It attracts Buddhist pilgrims to Dharamshala and religious visitors to sacred Shakti Peeths (UNESCO, 2019). Jammu and Kashmir is renowned for its scenic beauty, handicrafts, carpets, cuisine, and cultural richness, while Punjab's globally recognised culture and Haryana's regional traditions further enrich Northern India's tourism landscape (Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, 2022). Together, these regions offer extensive opportunities for sustainable and experience-based tourism development (UNWTO, 2020).

Despite its potential, Northern India faces serious challenges, particularly climate change (IPCC, 2022). Himalayan regions are witnessing glacier melt, rising temperatures, flash floods, and landslides, while Punjab and Haryana experience increasing heat and environmental stress (IPCC, 2022; Government of India, 2021). Infrastructure development projects such as roads, railways, and airports have also contributed to environmental degradation (NITI Aayog, 2020). These challenges directly affect local communities and

tourism systems, highlighting the urgent need for sustainable and resilient approaches (UNWTO, 2021).

Northern India already hosts several sustainability-oriented tourism initiatives, including eco-tourism, village tourism, heritage conservation, rural and aqua tourism, and community-based tourism (Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, 2022). However, these initiatives require stronger alignment. All management streams finance, human resources, marketing, operations, research, and development must work toward a shared sustainability vision (OECD, 2021). Growth must occur without compromising natural beauty, cultural integrity, or community life (UNESCO, 2019).

Community participation lies at the heart of sustainable and meaningful tourism. Tourism development should add value to local communities by improving livelihoods, employment, and quality of life while preserving traditions and natural resources (Scheyvens, 2011). Models such as homestays, village tourism, mud houses, and eco-friendly accommodations reduce reliance on concrete-heavy development and respond to tourists' growing demand for peace, wellness, authenticity, and meaningful experiences (Richards, 2018).

3.9. Meaningful Tourism in North India

The Meaningful Tourism paradigm is not a one-size-fits-all solution (Arlt, 2025). It must be adapted to regional cultures, aspirations, and environmental realities. While the results of sustainable tourism strategies may not be immediate, consistent and coordinated actions taken today can yield transformative outcomes over the next 10 to 20 years (UNWTO, 2021). Trainers, policymakers, academics, and practitioners can act as change-makers by tailoring Meaningful Tourism approaches to specific regions (Arlt, 2025).

North India has made steady but uneven progress in sustainable tourism development, shaped by strong natural and cultural assets, growing policy attention, and increasing community involvement, alongside persistent challenges. Tourism in Northern India can achieve sustainable growth by preserving culture, protecting the environment, empowering communities, and aligning all stakeholders around a shared vision (UNWTO, 2020). Ideas shape the future, and the Meaningful Tourism paradigm offers both the philosophical foundation and practical framework needed to guide tourism toward long-term resilience, inclusivity, and positive impact for people, communities, and the planet (Arlt, 2025).

3.10. Meaningful Tourism and Artisan-Led Development in India

Northeast India has emerged as a significant region for sustainable tourism development due to its rich biodiversity, indigenous cultures, and community-based livelihoods (UNWTO, 2018). Comprising eight states Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura, and Sikkim the region holds immense potential for tourism models that balance economic growth with cultural and environmental conservation. In recent years, sustainable tourism in Northeast India has increasingly focused on community participation, heritage preservation, and livelihood diversification (World Bank, 2021).

A good example is the support of a Meaningful Tourism approach by artisan-led tourism development in Northeast India as well as in other parts of the country. While working with artisan communities, focusing on productisation and capacity building within the tourism sector is of great importance. Such products are often having a parallel effect of actively supporting women to integrate into mainstream tourism value chains, thereby strengthening inclusive and community-based tourism models, through the tool of women's self-help groups (Government of India, 2022).

North East India has a vast weaving culture, where families choose to weave their own clothes. This culture has now become a source of income for families who are a part of weaving collectives. Such collectives leverage the vast network of hand looms inside each home, up-skill the artisan, and involve them in the value chain of silk textile production. One significant example is the Eri Silk of Meghalaya (also known as the non-violent silk) because it does not kill the silk worm in the process. The collectives primarily use traditional methods of sourcing colours, spinning the yard, dyeing, and weaving on hand looms, floor looms, and back strap looms. By intertwining this into sustainable tourism experiences, the local communities have an additional source of income and exposure to the international tourists. Visiting a community and participating in a weaving activity also elevates the experience of a visitor.

Down south, Kondapalli toys are made from locally available softwood known as Tella Poniki, which grows exclusively in the Kondapalli region of Andhra Pradesh. Attempts to cultivate this wood outside the region have largely failed, reinforcing the justification for GI protection (WIPO, 2020). These toys now serve as cultural souvenirs for tourists, generating livelihood opportunities for artisan households (UNWTO, 2018).

Meaningful tourism emphasizes transformative, immersive, educational, and participatory experiences for visitors while ensuring tangible economic and social benefits for host communities (UNWTO, 2018). By engaging tourists directly in craft-making processes and storytelling, artisans are able to command higher value and foster deeper cultural appreciation (Richards, 2019).

There are many challenges to be overcome while developing these products and while working with the communities to develop them and offering them to the tourists. At the grassroots level, the main challenge is the strong resistance to an active upgrade of the artisan skills. Secondly important, is the fact that at the start of a project there is no proven market demand. Thirdly, the need for digitalisation has to be met, to move away from simply selling products only in local shops in a manual way, which is especially a problem if locally the toys are considered to be very expensive, as they are made in a traditional way.

In another example, the Mangaligiri thought that silk weaving, a sector facing declining participation due to labor-intensive processes and low returns (Ministry of Textiles, 2021), was no longer an option, as weaving is a Herculean task, and they were losing several old master weavers. In this case, the government stepped in, providing them with funding and upgrading skills to give them a livelihood within a three-year project funded by the central government and the state government.

The work in the project included village adoption, loom modernization, and partnerships with corporate brands such as Tata's Taneira, which revitalized weaving livelihoods (Government of India, 2022).

As a result, tourism circuits integrating beaches, temples, and craft villages, are conceptualized as "sea, sand, and saris", being developed to enhance visitor flows and experiential value in Andhra Pradesh (Government of Andhra Pradesh, 2022). Similar strategies are applied in Northeast India, where tribal weaving, silk production, and indigenous cuisine are integrated into longer tourism itineraries, providing diversified income sources for communities (UNWTO, 2018).

Unlike the silk weaving and the traditional cuisine in this part of India, the Northeastern states have integrated other products into the for a tour in the Northeast. By productizing these experiences and integrating them into a larger itinerary of two to three weeks, tourism provides a direct income to these communities on the ground. However, local communities are always encouraged to have another source of income instead of becoming completely depending on tourism.

Many challenges in the Northeast are similar to those faced in Andhra Pradesh. Tribal communities in the Northeast face the similar challenge that their younger generation has to migrate to bigger cities, especially Mumbai, Bangalore, and Delhi in search of jobs because for a long time, their traditional arts and crafts had not been highlighted and integrated into tourism.

3.11. Meaningful Tourism in Nepal

Nepal is a South Asian country located between India and China, covering an area of about 150,000 sq km and administratively divided into seven provinces, 77 districts, and 753 local levels (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2023). The country has an estimated population of approximately 30 million, of which around five million are living and working outside of Nepal. Nepal is home to more than 125 ethnic groups, each with its languages, customs, and traditions, reflecting its demographic and cultural diversity (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2023).

Tourism in Nepal is predominantly mountain- and nature-based, largely driven by the Himalayan range, scenic landscapes, and rich biodiversity (ICIMOD, 2021). In addition to natural attractions, Nepal is a major cultural and spiritual destination, offering UNESCO-listed heritage sites, religious landmarks, festivals, and living cultural traditions (UNESCO, 2021). Nepal is globally recognised for adventure tourism activities such as trekking, mountaineering, rafting, and paragliding, which form the backbone of its international tourism appeal (UNWTO, 2018). Community-oriented tourism in rural and ethnic regions plays a significant role in the tourism sector, making tourism a value-driven industry that supports local livelihoods, employment generation, and national revenue (UNWTO, 2020). The tourism sector in Nepal is dominated by SMEs, labour-intensive, youth-driven, and highly dependent on international tourist arrivals, with strong backward and forward linkages to agriculture, transportation, handicrafts, and service industries (UNWTO, 2020).

Nepal's tourism sector is currently at a critical crossroads, shaped by evolving market trends and changing tourist preferences (UNWTO, 2018). Tourism activities are gradually expanding beyond traditional destinations such as Kathmandu, Pokhara, Chitwan, Everest, and the Annapurna region, contributing to spatial diversification (UNWTO, 2018). Domestic tourism is increasing steadily, supported by social media influence and short-haul travel, particularly from neighbouring India (UNWTO, 2020). There is also a growing emphasis on linking tourism with environmental conservation through eco-tourism, protected areas, and community forestry initiatives (ICIMOD, 2021). Additionally, tourism is being integrated with agriculture through agro-tourism and farm-based tourism experiences, reflecting a gradual shift from mass tourism toward community-based, eco-friendly, and meaningful tourism models (UNWTO, 2020).

Despite its significant potential, Nepal faces multiple tourism-related challenges that hinder sustainable development (UNWTO, 2020). These challenges include limited diversification of tourism products, weak international marketing and promotion, and inadequate private sector involvement in heritage conservation (UNESCO, 2021). Poor integration between tourism development and entrepreneurship initiatives further constrains inclusive economic growth. Benefit-sharing from tourism remains uneven among host communities, entrepreneurs, and different levels of government, leading to socio-economic disparities (UNWTO, 2020). Technological gaps, environmental vulnerability, excessive pressure on a limited number of destinations, limited local participation, and threats to cultural authenticity further restrict the long-term sustainability of Nepal's tourism sector (ICIMOD, 2021).

A major earthquake in the Kathmandu region in 2015, the CoViD-19 pandemic in 2020/2022 and violent political unrest in 2025 have constituted additional difficulties for the development of tourism in Nepal.

Nepal has made noticeable, though ongoing, progress in sustainable tourism development, supported by its strong natural and cultural assets, increasing policy attention, and a gradual shift toward community-based and environmentally responsible tourism practices. These developments indicate that Nepal is laying important foundations for a more sustainable and Meaningful Tourism future, although continued policy coordination, investment, and inclusive governance remain essential (UNWTO, 2020).

3.12. Relevance of Meaningful Tourism for Nepal

Meaningful Tourism refers to tourism that creates positive and shared value for visitors, host communities, the environment, and the national economy. It emphasizes authentic experiences, cultural respect, community empowerment, environmental sustainability, and equitable benefits and satisfaction across stakeholders.

Meaningful Tourism' is not just a concept or a trend, but is also a commitment to ensure that every journey to Nepal creates value for travelers, for hosts, and for the land that holds us all together. Meaningful tourism is not just about doing things better, it's about doing things with heart.

Meaningful Tourism Aligns with National Tourism Policies of Nepal. It encourages coordination between federal, provincial, and local governments for inclusive tourism planning, authentic product diversification including Cultural routes, Wellness and Wellbeing retreats, Agro-ecotourism, Adventure and culture packages, Indigenous knowledge experiences and thereby the preservation of cultural heritage & authenticity.

Meaningful Tourism also enhances community participation and sustainable economic development, longer stays, higher-value experiences, and diversified activities, increasing income for local communities. At the same time, it helps to reduce leakage by promoting local products, homestays, local guides, handicrafts, agro-tourism, etc., reducing the overdependence on a few destinations.

For the private sector, product segmentation is supported by offering authentic, socially responsible, and sustainable experiences, matching right products for right markets.

Meaningful Tourism creates incentives for private sectors to preserve local culture, natural resources, and community wellbeing, safeguarding the long-term sustainability of their business while strengthening community collaboration, improving supply chains, and ensuring stable access to local labour, products, and services.

The private sector can gain access to new funding and incentives, to innovation and product diversification and to alignment with global standards and responsible tourism trends. The workforce can be developed, assuring the talent retention which is critical for a country like Nepal which is currently suffering from a severe brain drain.

For host communities, meaningful tourism promotes inclusive economic growth by empowering women, youth, Indigenous peoples, and marginalised groups. It contributes to the preservation of cultural heritage and the protection of fragile ecosystems while enhancing climate resilience through low-carbon and adaptive tourism practices. From the tourist perspective, meaningful tourism offers deeper cultural engagement, improved value for time and money, enhanced health and well-being, opportunities for volunteerism, and experiential learning beyond conventional sightseeing experiences.

Meaningful Tourism is not just a niche concept; it is a strategic necessity for Nepal. Nepal has the potential to inspire the global tourism community by demonstrating how tourism can be meaningful, equitable, and transformative.

4. Conclusion: Implication and Lessons Learned

This article has demonstrated that Meaningful Tourism offers a coherent and timely framework for reorienting tourism development in Asia from growth-centred models toward value-driven, inclusive, and resilient pathways. Through comparative insights from Mongolia, India, and Nepal, the study shows that Meaningful Tourism is not merely a normative ideal but a practicable approach capable of aligning policy objectives, market demand, community aspirations, and environmental stewardship. The cases reveal that when tourism is designed to deliver both objective benefits and subjective satisfaction across all key stakeholders, it can address persistent structural challenges such as overtourism, unequal benefit distribution, cultural erosion, and ecological stress. Nomadic tourism in Mongolia, artisan-led and community-based initiatives in India, and diversified cultural and nature-based tourism in Nepal illustrate how Meaningful Tourism can be adapted to distinct socio-cultural and institutional contexts while maintaining a shared commitment to authenticity, equity, and sustainability. Ultimately, the article concludes that Meaningful Tourism represents a strategic necessity for Asia's future tourism development, offering a robust foundation for long-term competitiveness, social legitimacy, and regenerative impact in an era of global uncertainty and accelerating transformation.

Implications

The findings of this study carry important implications for policy, practice, and governance in Asian tourism development. For policymakers, Meaningful Tourism provides a structured framework to operationalise the often-stated shift from quantity-driven to quality-oriented tourism through stakeholder alignment, measurable value creation, and long-term planning. National and sub-national governments can use this paradigm to integrate tourism more effectively with cultural preservation, rural development, climate adaptation, and inclusive economic policies. For industry practitioners, the framework highlights the strategic importance of designing tourism products that emphasise authenticity, participation, and experiential depth, thereby increasing visitor satisfaction, length of stay, and local value retention. Destination management organisations and development agencies may also apply Meaningful Tourism as a coordination tool to connect fragmented initiatives, such as community-based tourism, artisan-led experiences, and eco-tourism into coherent destination narratives. Academically, the study strengthens the conceptual positioning of Meaningful Tourism as an integrative lens bridging sustainability, stakeholder theory, and experiential tourism, offering a foundation for further empirical operationalisation and comparative research across regions.

Lessons Learned

Several key lessons emerge from the comparative analysis of Meaningful Tourism development in Mongolia, India, and Nepal. First, Meaningful Tourism is inherently context-specific; successful implementation depends on sensitivity to local culture, governance capacity, and community aspirations rather than the replication of standardised models. Second, community participation must move beyond symbolic inclusion toward genuine co-creation, capacity building, and shared decision-making to ensure long-term legitimacy and resilience. Third, institutional coordination and enabling frameworks such as certification schemes, training systems, and stakeholder platforms are critical for scaling meaningful initiatives without undermining authenticity. Fourth, tourism alone cannot serve as the sole livelihood strategy for host communities; diversification and complementary income sources remain essential to reduce vulnerability. Finally, the cases underscore that transformative outcomes require time, consistency, and trust-building, reinforcing that Meaningful Tourism is a long-term developmental commitment rather than a short-term

market trend. Together, these lessons affirm that meaningfulness in tourism is achieved not through isolated projects, but through sustained alignment of values, practices, and outcomes across the entire tourism system.

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