



An Analysis Of Tourism Trends In Bihar: An Empirical Case Study Of The Anga Plain.

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ABSTRACT

Tourism significantly contributes to regional economic growth. Bihar, with its rich historical and cultural heritage, attracts numerous domestic and foreign tourists annually. The Anga Plain, a region with ancient significance dating back to the Mahabharata era, holds substantial tourism potential. This study analyses tourist arrivals in Bihar and the Anga Plain from 2001 to 2022 using secondary data and statistical methods. Findings reveal a marked increase in visitors, except during the COVID-19 period. However, challenges such as poor infrastructure and low awareness hinder growth. The study underscores the need for investment and promotion to fully realise the region's tourism potential.

Index Terms: Bihar Tourism, Anga Plain, Infrastructure, COVID-19, Economic Growth.

1. INTRODUCTION

The state of Bihar, located in eastern India, derives its name from the word "Vihara," meaning monastery or a place inhabited by monks. Renowned for its rich cultural heritage and historical significance, Bihar attracts a large number of tourists drawn to its sacred sites and ancient civilisations. The tourism landscape of the state is deeply rooted in heritage, culture, and natural beauty, offering a variety of attractions for both religious and non-religious visitors. Prominent tourism circuits in Bihar include the Buddhist Circuit, Jain Circuit, Shiva-Shakti Circuit, Gandhi Circuit, and Eco-Circuit, covering destinations such as Rajgir, Bodhgaya, Nalanda, Vaishali, Pawapuri, and Bhagalpur. Geographically, Bihar is bordered by West Bengal to the east, Uttar Pradesh to the west, Nepal to the north, and Jharkhand to the south. The region enjoys a pleasant climate, with the period from October to March being the most favourable for travel.

The Anga Plain, located in southeastern Bihar, comprises the districts of Bhagalpur, Banka, and Munger. These districts hold immense historical and religious importance and possess significant untapped potential for tourism development. The Anga region is closely linked to traditions of Jainism, Hinduism, and Santhali culture, and is rich in legendary narratives and vibrant cultural practices. The plain features a range of attractive destinations shaped by its natural beauty, including the Garuda Sanctuary, Odhni Dam, Bhim Dam, and the Vikramshila Gangetic Dolphin Sanctuary. These sites captivate visitors with their scenic landscapes

and provide immersive travel experiences. With its blend of historical, religious, and ecological appeal, the Anga Plain emerges as a promising area for expanding and diversifying Bihar's tourism industry.

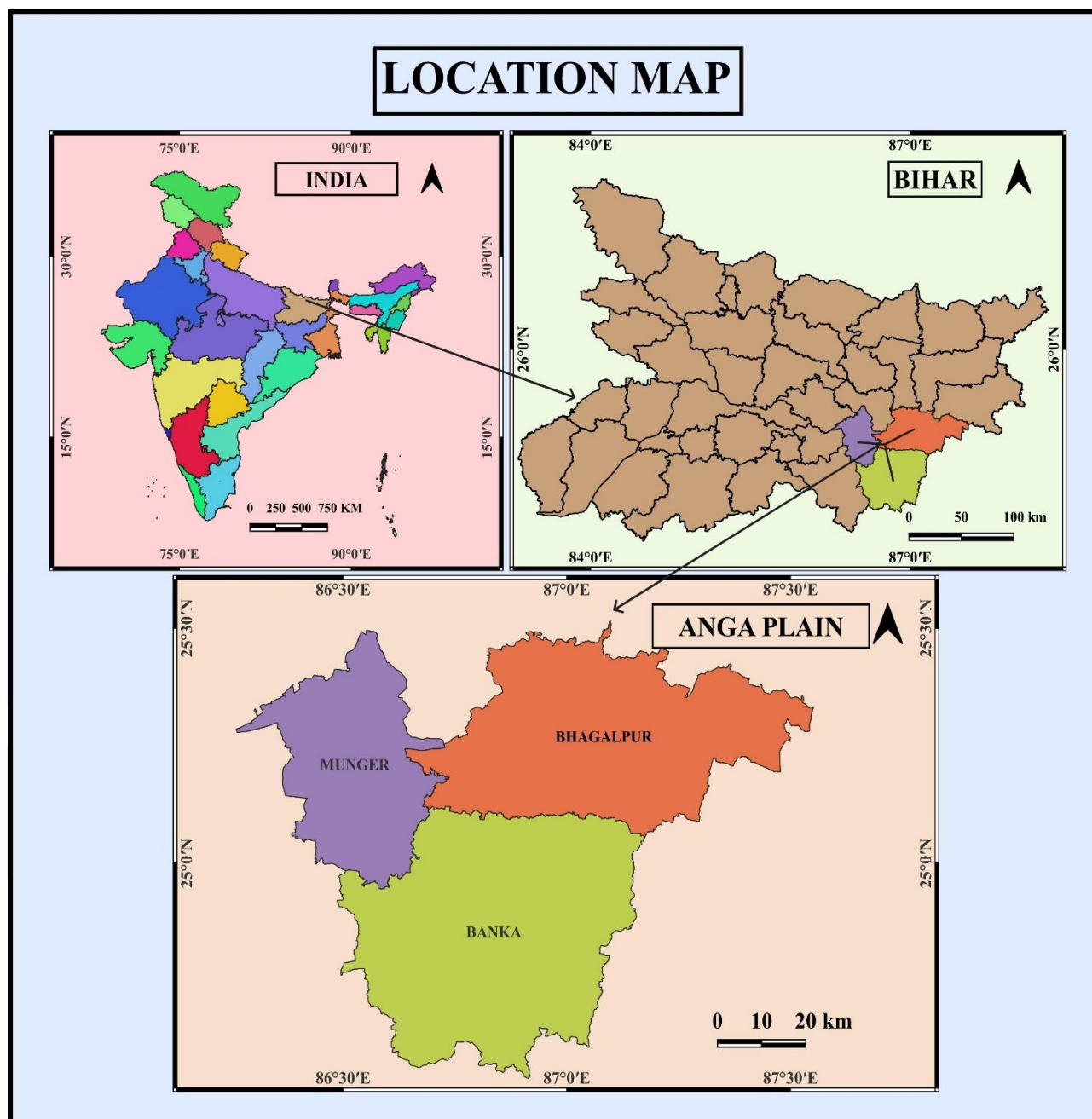


Figure 1: Location Map of Study Area

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Tourism plays a vital role in the economic development of a region by generating employment, stimulating domestic consumption, earning foreign exchange, and contributing to GDP. Numerous studies highlight the multifaceted impact of tourism. Croes and Vanegas (2008) emphasise the role of tourism in heritage preservation, income generation, and economic diversification. Gupta and Bhatt (2009) underline community-based tourism in Uttarakhand as a path to sustainable development. Ray et al. (2011) explore the motives behind tourist visits, while Francois (2011) notes tourism's resilience during economic downturns. Mishra (2012) highlights the potential of eco-tourism for rural employment. Mishra et al. (2016) discuss Odisha's tourism-led economic growth, calling for strategic planning. Ahamed (2018) views rural tourism as

socially transformative. Narasappa (2019) identifies tourism as an alternative revenue stream in India. Upadhyay, Kumar, and Vij (2020) stress the importance of government policy in promoting Buddhist tourism in Bihar. Singh et al. (2021) critique Bihar's tourism management, calling for the development of improved strategies. Roy (2022) analyses tourist arrivals in Bihar between 2010–2019, and Pandey et al. (2023) examine digital tourism services in the state. Varghese and Natori (2024) highlighted the socio-ecological costs of tourism in Wayanad, India, advocating for biodiversity integration in tourism planning, while Ahmed (2025) emphasised the sustainable tourism potential of Cox's Bazar and Saint Martin in Bangladesh, noting infrastructure gaps and ecological risks.

III.OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the study:

1. To analyse the trends in tourist arrivals in Bihar from 2001 to 2022.
2. To identify the changes in the number of visitors to the Anga Plain over the specified period.
3. To assess the scope for attracting tourists to Bihar, with particular emphasis on the Anga Plain.

IV. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a descriptive-quantitative approach to analyse tourism trends in Bihar, based on secondary data. The secondary data source is the official Bihar Tourism website (bihartourism.gov.in/data.html), which provided statistical information for the period under review. For data visual representation, tools such as QGIS, MS Excel, and Paint were used to create maps and diagrams. These analytical and visualisation tools facilitated a comprehensive understanding of tourism patterns and regional variations across Bihar.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

➤ TOURIST ARRIVALS TRENDS IN BIHAR (2001–2022)

To fulfil the first objective, the study analysed the total number of tourists visiting Bihar from 2001 to 2022. As shown in Table 1, the data on tourist arrivals in Bihar from 2001 to 2022 reveal significant growth over the two-decade period, with notable fluctuations corresponding to socio-economic and global health events. The data on tourist arrivals in Bihar from 2001 to 2022 reveals a distinct upward trajectory in overall visitation, driven predominantly by domestic tourism. In 2001, the total number of tourists stood at approximately 6.15 million, of which domestic tourists constituted the overwhelming majority. This number gradually increased, with occasional fluctuations, reaching a significant peak of over 35 million in 2019. The domestic tourist segment grew steadily from 6.06 million in 2001 to 33.99 million in 2019, accounting for more than 96% of the total arrivals each year. Foreign tourist arrivals, although comparatively modest, also displayed a gradual increase, from around 85,673 in 2001 to a peak of over 1.09 million in 2019, indicating a growing international interest in Bihar's religious and heritage tourism circuits.

However, the tourism sector experienced a sharp and unprecedented decline during 2020 and 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Total tourist arrivals plummeted to just 5.95 million in 2020 and further dropped to 2.5 million in 2021, with foreign visitors falling drastically to only 1,046 in 2021. This reflects the global travel restrictions and health concerns that severely impacted mobility. Despite these setbacks, the sector demonstrated signs of recovery in 2022, with total arrivals rebounding to over 25.4 million, largely driven by the resurgence of domestic travel. This trend underscores the resilience and significance of domestic tourism

in Bihar while highlighting the vulnerability of international tourism to global disruptions. The overall growth pattern between 2001 and 2019 reflects the increasing appeal of Bihar as a cultural and religious destination, supported by key tourism circuits such as the Buddhist, Jain, and Eco circuits. The post-pandemic rebound also indicates the potential for continued growth, provided there is strategic investment in infrastructure, promotion, and diversification of tourist offerings.

Table 1: Tourists Visited in Bihar & Anga Plain (2001 to 2022)

Year	Domestic Tourists	Foreign Tourists	Total Number of Tourists	Total Number of Tourists in Anga Plain
2001	6061168	85673	6146841	1654740
2002	6860260	112873	6973080	3305694
2003	6044710	60820	6105530	2548802
2004	8097456	38118	8135574	1588767
2005	6880685	63321	6944006	1201671
2006	10670268	94446	10764714	2242420
2007	10352887	177362	10530249	2327171
2008	11889611	345572	12235183	1152698
2009	15788679	423042	16207721	2119901
2010	16042725	540686	16583411	779206
2011	18397490	972487	19369977	3037646
2012	21447099	1096933	22544032	5209788
2013	21588306	765835	22354141	2490822
2014	22544377	829508	23373885	3621885
2015	28029118	923737	28952855	4039779
2016	28516127	1010531	29526658	4214930
2017	32414063	1082705	33496768	4356385
2018	33621613	1087971	34709584	4977198
2019	33990038	1093141	35083179	5578210
2020	5644524	308080	5952604	219249
2021	2501193	1046	2502239	10854
2022	25330364	86829	25417193	3050889

Source: Bihar Tourism Official Website (bihartourism.gov.in/data.html)

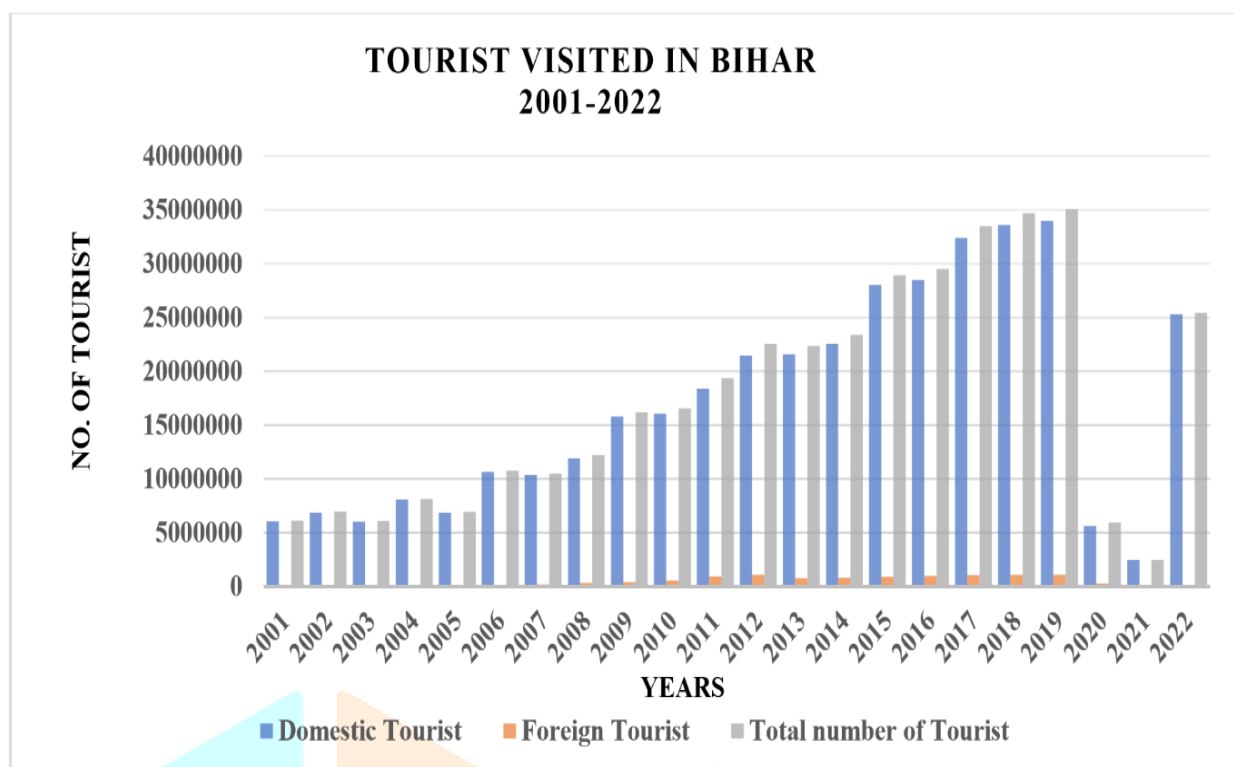


Figure 2: Domestic & Foreign Tourists Arrival in Bihar (2001-2022)

➤ TOURIST ARRIVAL TRENDS IN THE ANGA PLAIN (2001–2022)

The tourist arrival data for the Anga Plain, comprising the districts of Bhagalpur, Banka, and Munger, reflects significant fluctuations over the two-decade period from 2001 to 2022, as shown in Table 1. In 2001, the region attracted approximately 1.65 million visitors. This number showed substantial growth in the following years, reaching over 3.3 million in 2002 and fluctuating thereafter due to various socio-economic factors. A notable dip occurred in 2005 (1.2 million), followed by a gradual resurgence peaking at 5.57 million in 2019. The sharpest rise was observed between 2011 and 2012, with arrivals increasing from 3.03 million to over 5.2 million, indicating a growing interest in the region's religious, cultural, and ecological attractions during this period.

However, similar to the overall tourism trends in Bihar, the Anga region witnessed a dramatic decline during the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020, the number of tourists dropped to 219,249, a staggering fall from pre-pandemic levels. The decline continued in 2021, with only 10,854 visitors recorded, reflecting the impact of prolonged travel restrictions and safety concerns. Despite this setback, the Anga Plain began to recover in 2022, attracting over 3 million visitors, which signals a strong potential for resurgence.

Overall, the data reveal a positive long-term growth trend in tourism in the Anga Plain, punctuated by short-term disruptions. The steady rise in tourist numbers until 2019 demonstrates the region's emerging appeal as a heritage and eco-tourism destination. The post-pandemic recovery further reinforces the significance of targeted infrastructure development, promotional efforts, and heritage conservation to unlock the full potential of tourism in this historically and culturally rich region.

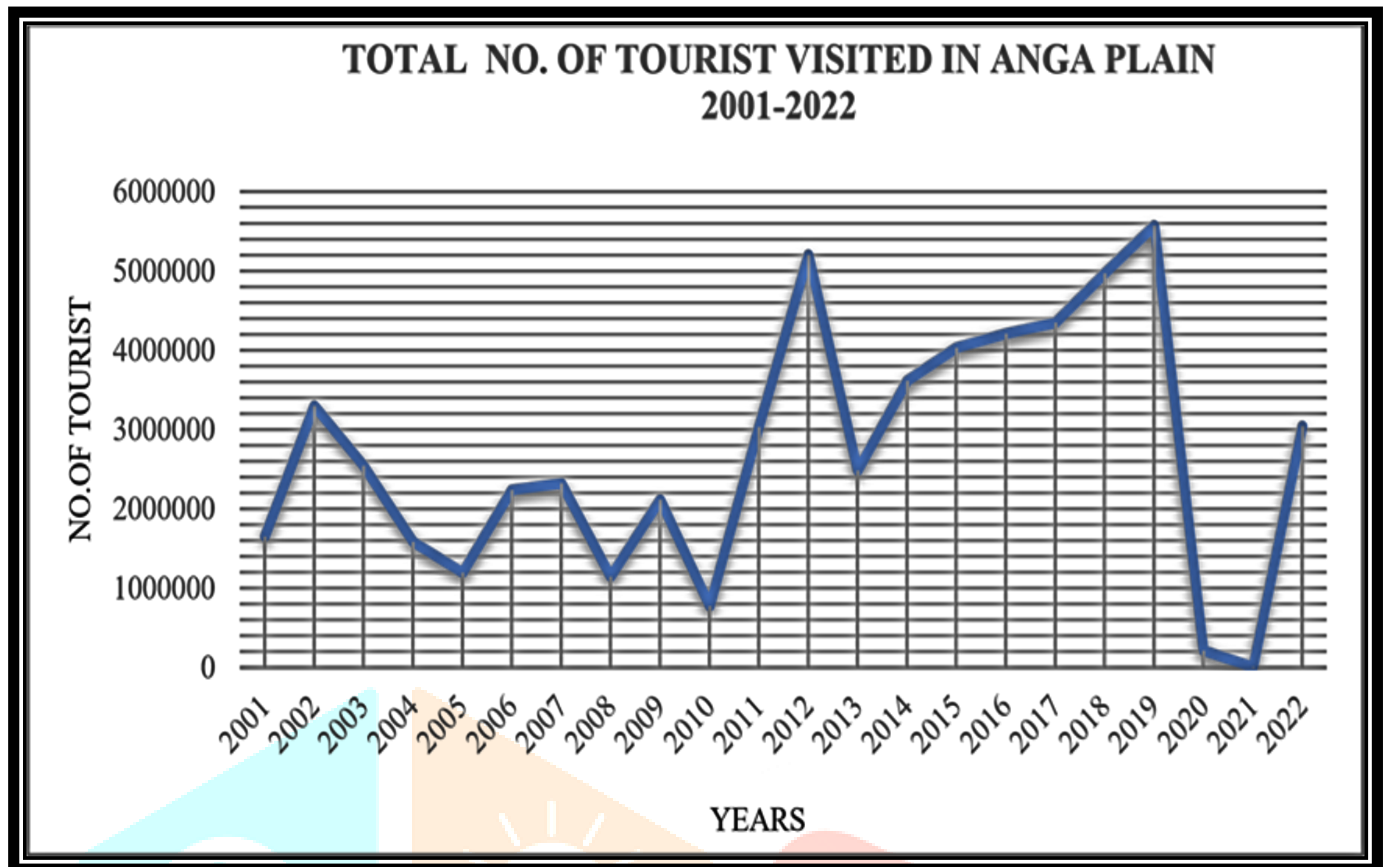


Figure 3: Total Tourist Arrivals in Anga Plain (2001-2022)

➤ ASSESSMENT OF TOURISM POTENTIAL IN BIHAR WITH EMPHASIS ON THE ANGA PLAIN

Bihar possesses substantial untapped potential for tourism development, with a wide range of attractions rooted in its rich historical, religious, and ecological heritage. The state is home to some of the most significant religious circuits in India, including the Buddhist, Jain, Sikh, Ramayana, Shiv-Shakti, Eco, Sufi, and Gandhi circuits. These cater to a diverse set of interests, religious, cultural, historical, and environmental, drawing both domestic and international visitors. Among these, religious tourism remains the most prominent, as the state is associated with key figures and events in Buddhism, Jainism, and Hinduism. Furthermore, the entire stretch of the Ganga River offers immense scope for river-based tourism and eco-tourism, especially through bird sanctuaries, dolphin habitats, and scenic riverfronts.

Despite its heritage wealth and cultural depth, Bihar's tourism sector remains underdeveloped and largely underutilized. Several factors hinder its growth, most notably inadequate infrastructure, limited connectivity, poor accommodation facilities, and insufficient promotional outreach. These challenges are even more pronounced in sub-regions like the Anga Plain, which encompasses Bhagalpur, Munger, and Banka districts. The Anga region is endowed with historical landmarks, religious sites, tribal traditions, and ecological hotspots like the Vikramshila Dolphin Sanctuary and Bhimbandh Wildlife Sanctuary. However, much of this potential remains unexplored due to a lack of investment, awareness, and policy prioritization.

The Bihar State Tourism Development Corporation (BSTDC) plays a key role in promoting the state's tourism offerings through infrastructure support, tour packages, and information centers. While such initiatives are commendable, a more targeted and region-specific approach is required, particularly for the Anga Plain. Strengthening tourism infrastructure, improving transport and digital connectivity, developing

local hospitality services, and promoting heritage and eco-tourism destinations can significantly enhance the region's appeal.

Thus, the overall assessment underscores that Bihar, especially the Anga Plain, holds considerable scope for attracting a higher volume of tourists. Strategic planning, sustainable tourism development, and effective marketing are essential to unlock this latent potential and position Bihar as a leading tourism destination in eastern India.

➤ FINDINGS, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

❖ FINDINGS

Based on the analysis of data from 2001 to 2022 and in alignment with the study's objectives, the following key findings have emerged:

- Tourist arrivals in Bihar have shown a substantial upward trend over the two-decade period, particularly between 2006 and 2019.
- Both domestic and foreign tourist numbers increased significantly, with domestic tourists consistently comprising around 97% of the total, compared to approximately 4% for foreign visitors.
- The Anga Plain witnessed a marked rise in tourist arrivals from 2012 to 2019, highlighting its growing prominence as a tourism region within the state.
- The majority of tourist inflows are concentrated in approximately ten districts: Patna, Gaya, Bodhgaya, Rajgir, Nalanda, Bhagalpur, Vaishali, Munger, and Banka, collectively accounting for nearly 74% of the total arrivals in Bihar.

❖ CONCLUSION

The study highlights that Bihar possesses vast and diverse tourism potential, particularly in the areas of religious, cultural, and eco-tourism. The steady growth in tourist arrivals, driven largely by domestic visitors, reflects the state's increasing visibility as a heritage-rich destination. However, despite this upward trend, Bihar's tourism sector remains underdeveloped and far from achieving its full potential. The Anga Plain, comprising Bhagalpur, Munger, and Banka, stands out as a region of particular promise due to its historical legacy, sacred sites, tribal traditions, and natural attractions. Yet, persistent issues such as poor infrastructure, inadequate promotion, and insufficient administrative prioritisation continue to hinder its progress. For Bihar to fully harness the socio-economic benefits of tourism, especially in underexplored regions like the Anga Plain, a focused and strategic approach involving policy reform, investment in infrastructure, and enhanced marketing is essential.

❖ RECOMMENDATIONS

To unlock Bihar's tourism potential, especially in lesser-explored regions like the Anga Plain, the following measures are recommended:

1. **Infrastructure Development:** Improve transportation, accommodation, sanitation, and digital connectivity in major and emerging tourist destinations.
2. **Diversified Promotion:** Enhance national and international marketing campaigns focusing on heritage, river-based, and eco-tourism offerings.
3. **Foreign Tourist Attraction:** Develop targeted strategies to increase foreign footfall, including multilingual resources, visa facilitation, and international partnerships.

4. **Capacity Building:** Train local communities in hospitality, guide services, and cultural interpretation to ensure sustainable and inclusive tourism.
5. **Policy and Planning:** Strengthen tourism policy implementation through regional planning, public-private partnerships, and continuous monitoring mechanisms.

By addressing these gaps, Bihar, particularly the Anga region, can position itself as a major tourism hub in south Bihar, yielding broad socio-economic benefits across sectors.

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❖ WEBSITES

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