

Chapter 8

Strengthening the Bilateral Relationship Between India and Thailand Through Tourism

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ABSTRACT

India and Thailand have a long-term relationship. Both countries geographically are in extended neighbourhood and share a maritime boundary. Both countries taken together constitute 18.6% of the world's population. They have deep rooted similar history, cultures, philosophies, and religions. They share the same link of Buddhism. Even Hinduism has some reflection on Thai architecture, arts, names of cities, sculpture, dance, drama, and literature. In this chapter, Thailand has been chosen due to physical proximity, cultural, and ideological similarities with India. India and Thailand have celebrated more than 70 years of bilateral diplomatic relationship. In the past two decades, with regular political exchanges of growing trade and investment, India's relationship with Thailand has grown into a comprehensive partnership. India's 'Act East' policy has been complemented by Thailand's 'Act West' policy in bringing the two countries closer. Both countries are important regional partners under BIMSTEC linking Northeastern Indian states with Southeast Asia.

INTRODUCTION

India has been associated with Thailand historically in many ways - by missionaries, trade, sea route and commerce (Rodbamrung, 2021). India and Thailand, both countries taken together constitute 18.6% of the world population (Worldometer, 2021). They have deep rooted similar history, cultures, philosophies, and religious beliefs based on Hinduism and Buddhism. Hinduism also has some reflection on Thai architecture, arts, sculpture, dance, drama, and literature. The Thai language has influence from Pali

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and Sanskrit languages (Brief on India - Thailand Relations, 2018). In this chapter, Thailand has been chosen due to physical proximity, cultural and ideological similarities with India. India and Thailand have celebrated more than 70 years of bilateral diplomatic relationship. In the past more than two decades, with regular political exchanges, growing trade and investment, India's relationship with Thailand has grown into a comprehensive partnership. India's 'Act East' policy has been complemented by Thailand's 'Act West' policy in bringing the two countries closer.

Both countries are important regional partners linking South and Southeast Asia. They cooperate closely in the ASEAN, East Asia Summit (EAS) and BIMSTEC groupings as Mekong Ganga Cooperation (MGC), Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD) and Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). The India-ASEAN Agreement on Trade in Goods was implemented in January 2010 and the India-ASEAN FTA in Services and Investments was signed in September 2014 and came into force in July 2015 (Brief on India-Thailand Relations, 2018). Of course, relations between India and Thailand are not new. Religious, cultural, linguistic, mythological and trade links have been coexisting for more than two millennia (Sajjanhar, 2017). This chapter has analysed different types of tourism sector of the two countries and identified how tourism has been contributing to their respective economies. Recommendations have been provided on the prospect of two countries potential areas to improve their economies by strengthening bilateral relationship.

India introduced 'Look East Policy' in 1991, though it was confined to Southeast Asia only, but it brought important changes at the national and international level. Look East policy was implemented with the purpose of rebuilding its economic relations with Southeast Asia to diversify trade away from its main trading partners in North America and Europe (Pande, 2020, p. 69). The Act East Policy (AEP) introduced in November 2014 by the Prime Minister Modi included within its ambit a wider geographical area (extending up to the Pacific Island countries, and within India, greater attention to hitherto neglected North-eastern India which border ASEAN's Myanmar). This multi-faceted policy incorporated different other aspects such as, greater engagement in all spheres, defence cooperation, promotion of infrastructure and development of North-eastern States. Several new initiatives were taken, and earlier projects were sought to be put on a fast track.

Given this, the objective of this chapter is to understand the prospects of enhancing different branches of tourism between India and Thailand. A Literature review has been done on publications on business, trade, tourism and economic relations between India and Thailand that identifies the potentiality of economic growth from bilateral relationship of the two countries. Analysis has been done on no empirical findings but based on historical papers. It will act as a catalyst to strengthen relationship of two countries. Development of this sector will not only stimulate activities in the tourism sector but will also influence other directly or indirectly related sectors. Finally, this will result in the growth of both the economies and improvement in GDP.

The aim of this chapter is to examine and evaluate the prospect of tourism in economic growth of India and Thailand. This chapter is structured as follows. The introductory part introduces the background of two countries Look East Policy and Look Act Policy, Export/Tourism as an Engine of growth, Literature review and Economics benefits and opportunities from Tourism, Challenges facing Tourism industry in two countries, finally relevant recommendation has been provided that would strengthen the relationship of these two countries in terms of economic growth.

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