

## **Accessibility as the missing link in religious tourism**

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Being one of the most ancient civilizations of the world, India provides a rich kaleidoscope of cultural and religious diversity and is home to several indigenous faiths and beliefs. India has been ranked the 18th most religious country in the world with over 81 percent citizens claiming to have religious beliefs, according to a latest survey.

Due to deep rooted faith and spiritual devotion, there is always an urge among people to visit religious destinations for seeking divine blessings, irrespective of their age and disability. As most of the sacred places in India are located in mountainous/uneven terrain coupled with steep steps, slopes and irregular paths, these often fail to welcome visitors with diverse needs.

Elderly and persons with disabilities are keen to travel to religious sites in their quest for solace and harmony even at the cost of personal discomfort. Lack of access provisions and enabling environment at religious places prevents people with reduced mobility from participating to the extent that they desire.

Accessibility is critical in bringing the religious/pilgrimage sites within the reach of the disabled and ageing population to ensure they do not feel isolated from the mainstream. Efforts should be made to provide an inclusive environment to enable all who come as devotees for the once in lifetime trip.

The paper aims to highlight two case studies of prominent religious sites in Himalayan region of India and suggest possible access improvements that need to be undertaken while maintaining the intrinsic value of each location.