

# Bollywood Tourism in Japan: Current Challenges, Potential Directions

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**Abstract:** This research note explores the current challenges and potential of Bollywood tourism to Japan. In doing so, it also assesses Bollywood tourism within the context of contents tourism and brings a non-western perspective to the study of film tourism research by shifting focus to Asia as a fertile area for studying Bollywood tourism. As past research has revealed, Bollywood is significant in the global cinematic context. However, studies concerning popular Hindi cinema's role in influencing travel decisions, and consequently tourism flows, are still very fragmented, and they have not yet been undertaken from a contents tourism perspective. Theoretical connections between Bollywood tourism and contents tourism are discussed, with particular reference to Bollywood tourism to Japan and the unique song-narrative format of Bollywood cinema. Finally, the research note reflects on the current challenges facing Bollywood tourism to Japan and potential future directions.

**アブストラクト:** 本研究ノートは、ボリウッド映画やその関連産業・商品の影響で成立するツーリズム実践を「ボリウッド・ツーリズム」と呼び、日本を目的地としたボリウッド・ツーリズムの課題と可能性について論じたものである。同時に本研究ノートは、コンテンツツーリズムの文脈からボリウッド・ツーリズムを評価するとともに、ボリウッド・ツーリズム研究が盛んに実施されているアジア地域に着目することで、従来西欧中心で行われてきたフィルムツーリズム研究の領域に、非西欧からの視座を取り入れることを目指している。既往研究においてボリウッドは、世界的な映画産業という視点からその重要性が論じられてきた。しかし、旅行動機形成における現代ヒンディー語映画の役割と、その結果としての観光流動に関する研究は、依然として断片的なままであり、また、コンテンツツーリズムの視座から行われた研究も目下存在していない。そこで本研究では、日本を目的地としたボリウッド・ツーリズムと、ボリウッド映画の特徴である歌による物語形式に特に着目することで、ボリウッド・ツーリズムとコンテンツツーリズムの理論的関連性について論じる。そのうえで、目下、日本を目的地としたボリウッド・ツーリズムが直面する課題と、今後の可能性について考察を行う。

**Keywords:** Bollywood, filmy songs, Bollywood tourism, contents tourism, film tourism, Japan

## Introduction: trends in Bollywood tourism

‘Bollywood tourism’ can be defined as the act of conducting a touristic visitation under the influence of Bollywood cinema and/or its by-products. The act of associating places and Hindi films is not a new trend. Films like *Sangam* (1964), *Love in Tokyo* (1966), *An Evening in Paris* (1967), and *Silsila* (1981) are early examples of some of the Bollywood films that introduced Indian mass audiences to both global and domestic landscapes. These glimpses of different locations and landscapes, coupled with the appeal of the Hindi film narrative, were instrumental in the development of the audience’s imaginations of a destination. For example, Kashmir, in India, was a preferred choice of filming location given the multiple landscapes it offered. From *Kashmir Ki Kali* (1964), *Bobby* (1973) and *Kabhi Kabhi* (1976) to *Lakshya* (2004), *3 Idiots* (2009) and *Haider* (2014), Kashmir has served as a backdrop for many films. Portrayal of Kashmir in popular Hindi cinema created an awareness amongst people about the place and an interest in traveling to Kashmir. Statistics indicate these films triggered an increase in tourist visitations to the location. For example, by the end of 2011 domestic tourism to the region of Ladakh had gone up by 194.38 per cent in the wake of the release of *3 Idiots* (2009) (Angmo and Dolma 2015). This indicates the power of Bollywood films and their significant role in influencing the decision-making of potential tourists about travel destinations. Similarly, many scholars in the west have argued that films persuade audiences to become tourists and visit the places shown in films (for example, Riley and Van Doren 1992; Beeton 2005; Reijnders 2011).

*Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1995), the film that re-introduced the Indian mass audience to Europe, is regarded as one of the most influential films of the 1990s and is known to have caused an influx of Indian film viewers/tourists to Switzerland. An indelible association is drawn between the Swiss Alps and the movie, courtesy of the representation of the Swiss landscape in the film, especially the song and dance (filmy song) sequences. In 2013, over 4.6 million overnight stays in Switzerland were recorded by tourists from India (Thambehalli 2014). How many of these people are film-induced tourists is hard to tell, but the impact of this film continues. Figure 1 shows a cardboard cutout of the film’s stars on Mount Titlis, next to which fans can have pictures taken.



Figure 1: The author in front of a cardboard cutout of Shahrukh Khan and Kajol, stars of the film *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*. (8 September 2018, Mt. Titlis, Switzerland)

This also tells us more about the impact cinema has on the location itself. A more recent case is the film *Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara* (2011). This film is about three friends traveling across Spain to celebrate the final days of bachelorhood. *Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara* boosted outbound tourism to Spain from India by 32 per cent in the year of its release, especially to its shooting locations (Harjani 2011). Questions on online platforms like Quora (2016; 2018) include ‘How much will it cost to take a tour to Spain as in *Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara*?’ or ‘How much money (₹) do I have to save to plan a trip as shown in the bollywood movie “*Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara*”?’ These user-generated posts also indicate the aspirations people build around cinema and the locations shown therein. Films influence not only where people want to travel, but also people’s aspirations regarding how they should travel. While *Dil Chahta Hai* (2001) created a cult for road trips, *Yeh Jawani Hai Deewani* (2013) started a buzz for backpacking the mountains (see, for example, the blog by Khanna 2017). The film *Dil Dhadakne Do* (2015), meanwhile, made the idea of cruising fashionable for Indian audiences by setting the story on a cruise ship. The cruise company CruiseBay introduced a series of over fifteen Mediterranean cruise trips in Eastern and Western Europe during the release of the film that spanned across the countries depicted in the film. This, again, serves as an excellent example of the influence cinema has on people’s travel choices.

The reverse tendency is also prevalent. Hollywood films are being shot in India given the availability of cheap skilled labour and the diversity of landscapes the country offers. *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008) and its depiction of India invited a lot of criticism, but it also started a new trend of ‘slum tourism’ which cannot be overlooked (Tzanelli 2015). *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012) has a famous prison scene that popularized Mehrangarh fort in Jodhpur. The Academy Award-winning *Life of Pi* (2012), meanwhile, put Pondicherry on the world map by having some key scenes filmed there.

These cases reflect an increasingly popular trend in which film stimulates the tourist’s imagination and induces movement and border crossing in the directions in which cinema leads them. There are now various dedicated domestic and international companies — such as [www.bollywoodtours.in](http://www.bollywoodtours.in), [www.filmymholidays.com](http://www.filmymholidays.com) and [www.bollywoodtourism.com](http://www.bollywoodtourism.com), to name a few — which offer a plethora of Bollywood-themed tours, including slum tours and studio tours. The trend of shooting at scenic locations and cashing in on the aspirations that follow, however, is not only peculiar to some shining examples, but is increasingly becoming a norm. This reflects the increasing economic potential of the Indian middle class audiences and how film fans turn into tourists. In the past decade, the Indian middle class has assumed prominence within the global tourism market given the marked increase in their disposable personal income and a growing need to garner international cultural experiences. A report by Kerschner and Huq (2011) confirms that the fastest growing consumption sector in India is travel and tourism, which adds to the relevance of the study of this increasingly popular trend of Bollywood tourism.

There are many such examples of Bollywood films that have been iconic in their own ways in representing and popularizing locations. The act of travel induced by Hindi films is not new, but it has evaded academic attention until recent times because the focus has largely been on western examples of film tourism. While literature about Bollywood tourism is emerging, it remains rather scanty and typically avoids theoretical complexities (for example, see Laing and Frost 2018; Biswas and Croy 2018). Bollywood tourism is not limited to the journey that an individual takes from being a passive member of a film’s audience to an active tourist. It also encompasses the tourism and Bollywood film industries, the representation of locations in the films, the narratives, pre-travel imaginaries as developed under the influence of films, and the kind of policies and politics involved in these processes. All the elements need close examination to fully understand the phenomenon of

Bollywood tourism. Policies and politics either fuel or deter the film-induced tourism to a particular location. The Bollywood industry, with its impressive export value and appeal, has also found an audience in Japan. In recent years, films such as *PK*, *English Vinglish*, *Ra.One* and *Om Shanti Om* have made ripples among the cinema audiences in Japan, and in 2014, *Dhoom 3* broke out of Bollywood's traditional outlets in independent cinemas and went on nationwide release in Japan (Ramnath 2014).



*Figure 2:* The growing economic significance of Indian tourists is indicated by the presence of signs in Hindi at shops at tourist sites popular with Indians. This example is from a little general store in the Swiss Alps

## **Theoretical framework**

Within a survey of Bollywood-induced tourism to Japan, 'imagination' and 'transnationalism' are key concepts. The cognitive and affective beginnings of film tourism lie in an individual's imagination of a destination and construction of narratives in one's mind. Such imaginaries are often inspired by mediated images and stories. Imagination leads people to places, albeit not physically, but in their minds. As argued by Reijnders (2016, p. 674) the narratives and stories from films create 'a rich associative imagination of the world'. Bollywood films, with their myriad representations and depictions of culture, and the importance they attach to visuals and song and dance routines (popularly known as filmy songs) have the potential to transport audiences into an imaginary make-believe world. To become absorbed into texture and narrative rich media products requires a sound imaginative prowess. The act of deciding the potential tourism destination has its roots in the imaginaries of the location, which in a way has its roots in what representations of it one sees in the media products.

Mediated images create certain notions of place and space in the minds of audiences, which is stored in their imaginative spaces in their minds. This is relevant to the study of how Bollywood is embodied by diasporic audiences (Indians living overseas) and how destinations, such as Japan in this context, are imagined by the domestic Indian audiences, thereby fueling the imagination of the other (world). The various sensory aspects of Bollywood films — like dialogue, narrative, star-power (characters), filmy songs, filming locations and other such affective actors — have an impact on people's imaginations of India and the world. Beyond an understanding of imagination, it is also important to examine the affective changes audiences go through under the influence of popular

Hindi films. Therefore, imagination plays a powerful role in the creation of a diegetic world in an otherwise abstract one.

While theories of the imagination illuminate the processes preceding the act of film tourism, theories of transnationalism are relevant in the case of Bollywood because of the high export value of Bollywood films and the existence of one of the world's largest diasporic communities. The importance of the notion of transnationalism also relates to the creation of a sense of belonging and identity, and the dispersion of cultural artifacts such as films. The transnational flows of finance, images, commodities, ideologies, and people, according to Appadurai (1993), now lead to imaginings that lie beyond the boundaries of the nation-state (Doraiswamy 2003). Transnational theory supports the notions of diffusion of media content across borders and foreign travel. Transnationalism also supports the idea of foreign representation in Bollywood films, something I discuss later in the brief discussion of Japan in popular Hindi cinema.

Powerful media narratives, moving images, and sounds are instrumental in bringing the world to your doorstep regardless of space and time, and at the same time create a curiosity and urge that makes one want to move. Visiting a place gives travelers a certain satiety and a sense of completion to their own curiosities about a place in media ignites their interest. Zimmerman and Reeves (2009) call these film tourism sites 'Stargates', where the travelers can enter the realm of their imaginary spaces in the real geographic sense, thereby making the locations into the real stars. Film tourists can ergo be identified as 'romantic gazers' wanting to immerse themselves in the landscapes idealized by cinema (Roesch 2009, pp. 134-135), which is a high possibility with Indian audiences wanting to be in shoes of the celebrities.

In this context, Appadurai's (1996) contribution to the discussion of ethnoscapas and mediascapas also adds perspective. His assertion that global social flows and cross cultural exchanges are dynamic and fluid — what he refers to as 'ethnoscapas' or 'the landscapes of living persons' — is very appropriate in this regard. Similarly, the mobilities paradigm of Sheller and Urry (2006) proposes that movement is no longer rigid and uni-directional, but is superfluous and dynamic. This is important for providing a theoretical basis for border crossing in the mental or imaginary realm, which is often the first step before a film-tourism visitation. What also aids this argument is Appadurai's (1990, p. 9) concept of mediascapas, or 'image-centered, narrative based accounts of strips of reality', that can be understood in the context of how cinema shapes the 'imagined world' we inhabit, where narratives and images are often the only way one forms an opinion about a place or culture.

The study of film tourism, although relatively new, has grown steadily in the past two decades. Often touching upon various disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, the study of film tourism tries to unravel and understand the act of traveling under the inspiration of the medium of film. While the general idea remains similar, other theoretical nuances and discussions further enrich the relationship between film and tourism. While 'film-induced tourism' (Beeton 2005) refers to the act of traveling to locations under the influence of moving images, 'media tourism' (Reijnders 2011) brings under consideration all other media outlets that the idea of 'film tourism' may overlook. 'Contents tourism' (Seaton *et al.* 2017), meanwhile, delves into the tourism generated under the influence of the contents, such as locations, narratives and characters, without placing much emphasis the media format and simultaneously stressing the multi-use of contents in the contemporary media mix.

Accordingly, Seaton *et al.* (2017, p. 3) define contents tourism as 'travel behaviour motivated fully or partially by narratives, characters, locations, and other creative elements of popular culture forms, including film, television dramas, manga, anime, novels, and computer games'. They also discuss how the journey from mental visitation to a mediatized 'narrative world' via a film, for

example, can ultimately lead to bodily visitation to a location in the real world related to those mediatized contents, and this qualifies as an act of contents tourism. This theoretical framework of contents tourism can be applied to Bollywood tourism in general due to its unique format and its potential reflections in many mediums, for example, Bollywood Theme Parks, Dubai. Bollywood cinema has a distinctive characteristic in comparison to other film formats globally. Apart from the film narrative itself, a typical Bollywood film contains filmy songs throughout the film, which may or may not be in continuation with the current narrative and location. These songs often become a selling point for the films, and hold power independent of the film to move audiences to the locations showed therein, thereby boosting tourism to that location. Filmy songs are also used as standalone entities, and that also makes a study of them peculiar. A contemporary example that can be discussed in this light is the case of the song *Gerua*, which boosted Indian tourism to Iceland. There was a tripling of total arrivals (5,517 to 17,414) and overnight stays (9,658 to 29,581) in Iceland by Indian tourists in the period 2015-2017 following the release of the song in 2015 (Statistics Iceland 2018).

### **Bollywood tourism to Japan: current challenges, potential directions**

As discussed earlier, Bollywood cinema has contained significant transnational elements for a long time. It introduced the Indian audiences of popular culture to different landscapes abroad. Narratives from Hindi popular culture helped steer audiences' imaginations towards other 'foreign' cultural settings and familiarized the domestic Indian audience with different countries. In 1955, during the golden era of Bollywood cinema, the film *Shree 420* had a hit song *Mera joota hai japani* (My shoes are Japanese), which was an early cinematic introduction to Japan for Indian audiences. Eleven years later came another film, *Love in Tokyo* (1966). This was a blockbuster hit from the 'Love in...' trilogy, which consisted of three films titled *Love in Shimla*, *Love in Tokyo* and *Love in Bombay*. *Love in Tokyo* strongly influenced the image of Japan in the eyes of Indian audiences (Figure 3). The film was shot primarily in Japan at locations including Tokyo (Ueno, Ginza, Tokyo Tower and Haneda International Airport) and Hiroshima (Prabhune 2015). Both the song from *Shree 420* and the film *Love in Tokyo* were instrumental in developing a cinematic connection between India and Japan. More recently, films such as *Youngistaan* (2014) and *Tamasha* (2015) also very briefly showed parts of Japan, although they precipitated no remarkable spikes in tourism numbers in the years following their release.



*Figure 3: Tokyo Tower*





*Figure 4: Love in Tokyo (1964) screenshot*  
Watch on YouTube (the official channel of Ultra Bollywood):  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a6cfOvwHVDw>

The opportunity of a trip to Tokyo in June 2018 to participate in a conference enabled me to conduct fieldwork at sites related to these locations I had known of through these cinematic sources. I visited the Tokyo Tower with the intention of doing participant observation and conducting interviews at the place which is perhaps the most iconic symbol of the relationship between Bollywood cinema and Japan. However, on the day I visited, perhaps as expected, there were visibly no Indian visitors. This could have been due to the fact that it was not a holiday season in India. Nevertheless, it also communicated something. The lack of visitors seemed to indicate that Japan has yet to become a conventional holiday destination for Indian tourists in the way that Switzerland or even Iceland have become in the recent years. This trend is perhaps also reinforced because Japan has an image of being relatively expensive, or not typically a part of main-stream touristic choices made by Indian tourists, who often consider European holidays as their ‘foreign’ and culturally different experience. Barring the aforementioned film and song from the golden era, Bollywood cinema has barely picturized Japan and the Japanese. Two recent films were partially shot in Japan, *Youngistaan* (2014) and *Tamasha* (2015), but as discussed above, they were not potent enough to make a case for Japan as a touristic destination due to lack of screen-time given to the Japanese city-scape. Furthermore, while some films or songs were a one-off references, the others are relatively dated and lack a steady focus on Japan.

Consequently, the lack of adequate and substantial representations of Japan in any current Bollywood productions seemingly translates into a lack of knowledge about the country. Bollywood films do not seem to be contributing much to making Japan a primary touristic destination, yet. It is also understood from the film industry that getting permissions to shoot in Japan can be an arduous process, which might involve a lot of planning and a waiting period, adding to resistance to shooting more in Japan from the production perspective (Betros 2009). It can also be suspected that Japan is not usually on the radar of Indian tourists with peculiar travel habits (for example, traveling in large groups, and or having dietary specifications) due to it being expensive, and the preference of Indian tourists to pay a similar sum to visit multiple countries in Europe. However, in these patterns of group travel to multiple European countries with a film tourism element, some parallels can be drawn with Japanese package tours to Europe, particularly between the 1970s and the 1990s,

in which iconic films such as the anime *Heidi* stimulated the imaginations of Japanese tourists to visit those Switzerland (Yamamura 2018)

Indian tourism to Japan has been consistently low. From 2013 to 2017, the number of Indian tourists in Japan rose from 75,095 to 134,371 (JNTO n.d.). However, this is considerably lower than Switzerland, which had 347,750 Indian tourists in 2018 (swissinfo.ch 2019), where Bollywood is recognized as a key inducer of tourism. For example, making Bollywood star Ranveer Singh a tourism ambassador for Switzerland has been credited with a 25 per cent rise in Indian visitors from 2016 to 2017 (Chandrasekhar 2017). While Bollywood tourism has yet to bring significant numbers of tourists to Japan, therefore, the Bollywood—Japan connection seems to be a potential fruitful area for future enquires into Bollywood-induced tourism. In this light, a recent news report has confirmed a collaboration between the Bollywood director Imtiaz Ali and the Japanese entertainment conglomerate Shochiku studios. They will work on a project titled ‘Love in Tokyo’, the title of which is inspired by the 1966 Bollywood hit (PTI 2017). Films like these, which are planned to be shot entirely in Japan, have immense scope to boost tourism to Japan by giving Japan the required screen time for the audiences to connect with the place and its culture.

While Bollywood tourism might at first glance be primarily seen as a form of film tourism, it could also benefit from study using a contents tourism approach given the significance of filmy songs as both creative elements of a film and also as stand-alone entertainment products, for example the songs or the films discussed above. However, based on the examples of existing representations of Japan in Bollywood, there seems to be little sustainable Bollywood tourism at present. The films are either too old or inconsistent with the images of Japan as produced. However, should a major Bollywood production feature Japan in the future, there seems to be ample potential for a creation of a Bollywood induced tourism route between India and Japan.

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アプーヴァ・ナンジャングッド。エラスムス大学ロッテルダム（オランダ）芸術文化学部講師（PhD Candidate）。欧州研究会議（ERC）助成研究プロジェクト「インド、ブラジル、韓国、ジャマイカ、イギリスにおけるフィルムツーリズムの比較研究」メンバー。現在、現代ヒンディー映画がきっかけとなった国際観光流動について、ディアスポラ研究、映画音楽、テーマパークの観点から研究を行っている。

### **About the *International Journal of Contents Tourism***

The *International Journal of Contents Tourism* (<https://contents-tourism.press>) is an open-access, refereed scholarly journal exploring the phenomenon of ‘contents tourism’, defined as travel behaviour motivated fully or partially by narratives, characters, locations and other creative elements of popular culture forms, including film, television dramas, manga, anime, novels and computer games. IJCT publishes articles of various lengths, from original research papers through to short blog entries. It is based at Hokkaido University, Japan, and the editors-in-chief are Professor Philip Seaton (School of Japan Studies, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies) and Professor Takayoshi Yamamura (Center for Advanced Tourism Studies, Hokkaido University).