



Cruise Tourism in India: A Voyage of New Possibilities

Sailing the waters and rediscovering Bharat

(Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways)

21st April, 2025

Introduction

SEGMENTS UNDER CRUISE TOURISM



- 1 **OCEAN CRUISES** (INTERNATIONAL CRUISES)
- 2 **COASTAL AND ISLAND SMALLER SHIPS
AND LUXURY YACHTS CRUISES-**
INCLUDING FOR EXPEDITION STYLE WITH
DIVING ACTIVITIES (DOMESTIC & REGIONAL
COVERING THE NEIGHBOURING COASTAL
AND ISLAND COUNTRIES)
- 3 **NATIONAL WATERWAYS CRUISES**
(INTERSTATE AND CROSS BORDER AND DAY
CRUISES ACROSS RIVERS, LAKES, CANALS
BACKWATERS, YACHTS & RESERVOIRS)
- 4 **ISLAND & COASTAL & RIVER BANK
ASSETS** (LIGHTHOUSES SHIPPING
MUSEUMS, SEA AND RIVER WATER FRONT
& WALKWAYS)

Cruise tourism is a nature-driven travel experience that unlocks a country's rivers, seas, and canals for themed journeys across all budgets. It offers safe and comfortable access to even remote destinations, promoting inclusivity and ease of travel. By tapping into natural waterways, it boosts both national and international connectivity while driving local economies through job creation in hospitality, entertainment, culture, and beyond.

India has significant capabilities in cruise tourism for coastal & river sector. This is due to the presence of:

- ❖ **12 Major and 200 Minor Ports along the 7500 km long coastline across the west and east**
- ❖ **Network of more than 20000 kilometres long navigable 110 waterways connecting around 400 rivers.**
- ❖ **There are multiple states, union territories and 1300 islands in India which are along the coastline or along the banks of states and interstate rivers or national waterways.**

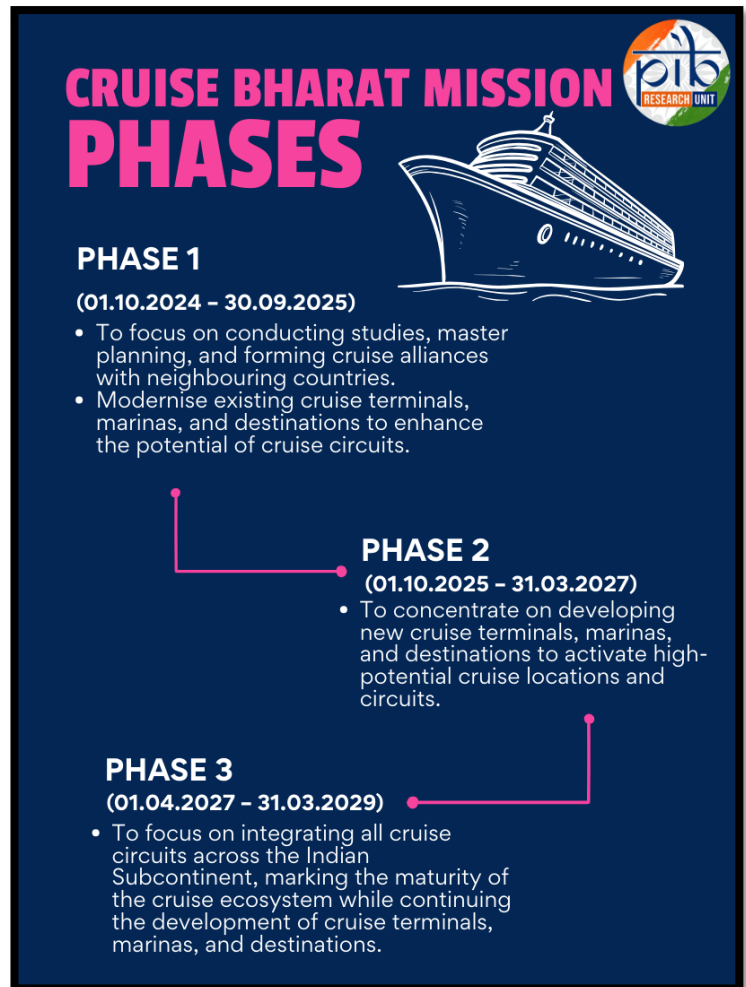
Steps Taken By The Indian Government to Boost Cruise Tourism

1. Cruise Bharat Mission

The 'Cruise Bharat Mission' was launched on September 30, 2024, from the Mumbai port. Aimed at the boosting the tremendous potential of cruise tourism in the country, the programme aims to propel country's cruise tourism industry by **doubling cruise passenger traffic** within five years; i.e. by **2029**.

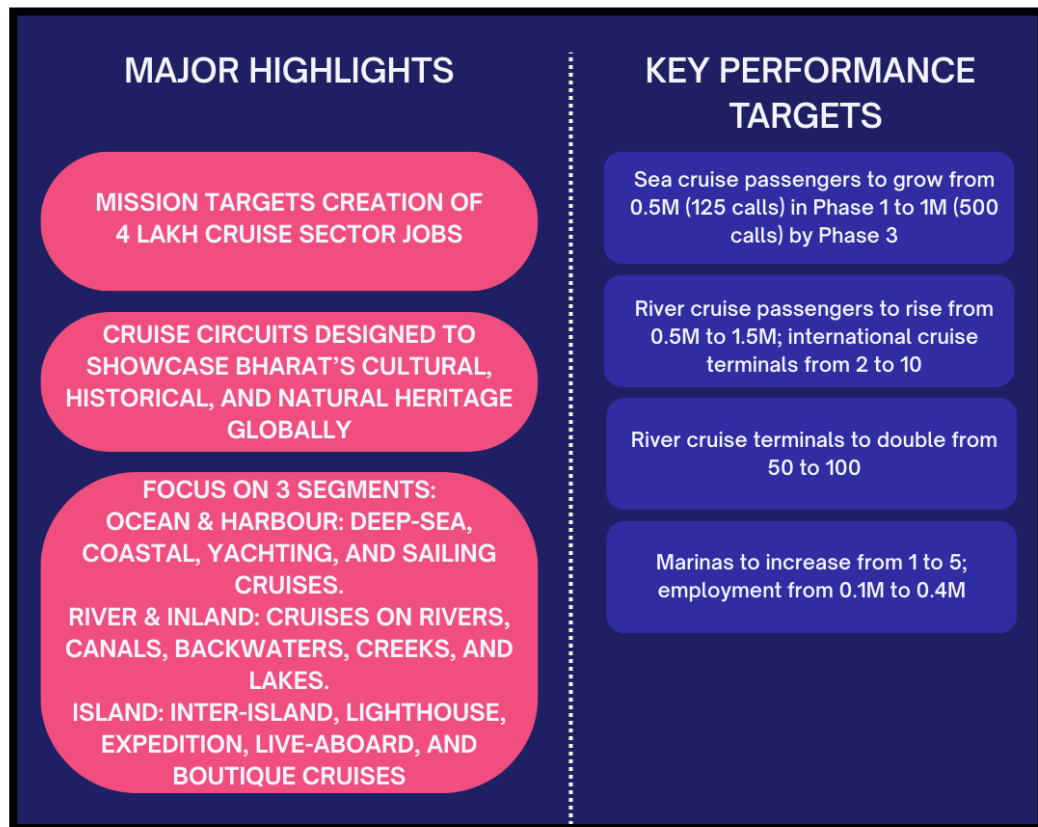
In FY 2023- 24, the number of cruise passengers was **4.71 lakhs**.

CBM provides for a framework for inter-ministerial approach for crafting interventions along policy, regulatory, and other aspects governing cruise sector and enable responsible involvement of all regulatory agencies, such as Customs, Immigration, CISF, State Tourism Departments, State Maritime Agencies, District Administrations, and local police.

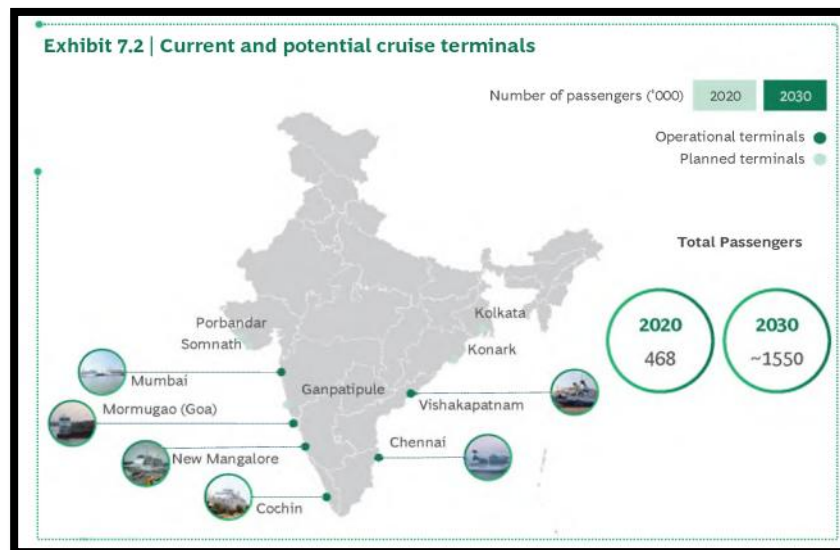


Cruise Bharat Mission will also result in over **1.5 million river cruise passengers** over more than **5,000 Kms** of Operational Waterways in India.

The initiative aims to excel India's vision to become a global hub for cruise tourism and promote the country as the leading global cruise destination. The **Cruise India Mission** will be implemented in three phases, beginning from **1 October 2024 up to 31 March 2029**.



2. **Maritime India Vision 2030:** The Government of India's vision is to make India a significant player in the global cruise market, both for ocean and river cruises. Indian cruise market has the potential to grow by **8X over the next decade**, driven by rising demand and disposable incomes.



In order to promote India as the global destination for cruise tourism under MIV 2030, interventions have been identified across three key areas:

- Oceanic and Coastal Cruise

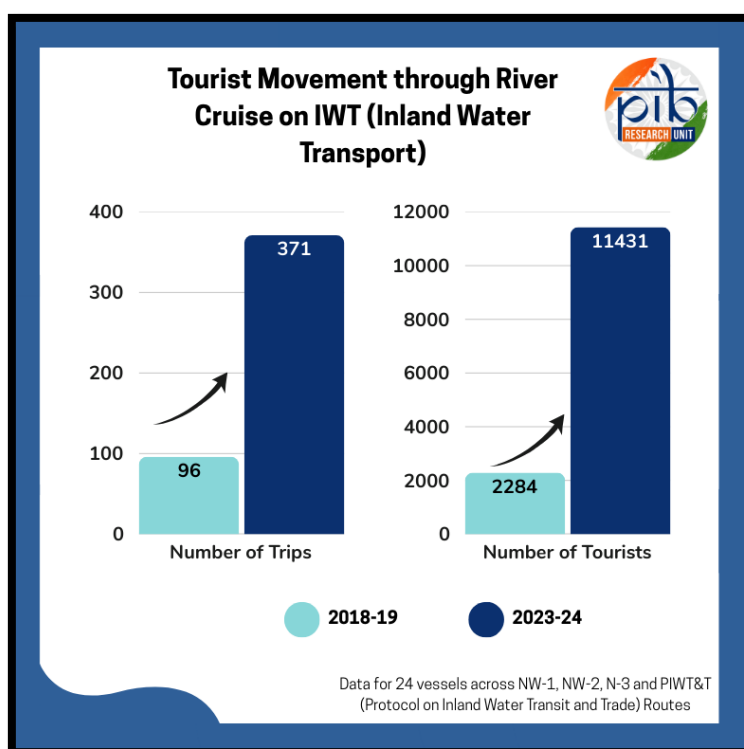
- Island and Infrastructure Development
- River and Inland Cruise

3. Additional steps taken to boost cruise tourism:

- ❖ Cruise vessels receive berthing priority over cargo ships.
- ❖ A rationalized tariff structure with standard port charges and nominal passenger tax has been introduced, offering 10–30% volume-based discounts.
- ❖ Ousting charges have been removed to attract more cruise traffic.
- ❖ Cabotage (the right to operate sea, air, or other transport services within a particular territory) laws waived for foreign cruise ships, allowing them to carry Indian nationals between domestic ports.
- ❖ E-visa and visa-on-arrival facilities have been extended.
- ❖ Conditional IGST exemption granted to foreign vessels converting to coastal routes, with reconversion required within six months.
- ❖ A uniform SOP has been implemented for all stakeholders involved in cruise operations.
- ❖ A single e-Landing Card is now valid across all ports on a cruise itinerary.

River Cruise Tourism:

River Cruise Tourism is an emerging segment in the leisure industry with a scope for high growth. Several National Waterways constituting major rivers flow through various states and districts, rich in flora & fauna and cultural heritage. Suitable locations at various National Waterways have been identified and are being explored for development of river cruise tourism in India.



Initiatives taken by IWAI towards developing river tourism are:

- Developing the navigational channel on waterways along with navigational aids and carrying out dredging (process of removing sediments), if necessary, in some NWs.
- Construction of vessel berthing, facilities at multiple points along the waterways for ease of movement of tourists.
- Developing an ecosystem for river cruise tourism along with promotion of heritage sites and tourist attractions along the waterways.

The development of river cruise would augment existing revenue generation, employment generation, etc from tourism industry. There are few suitable terminals along rivers which promote cruise tourism. These include cruises plying along a broad stretch of the river **Ganga, Brahmaputra** and houseboats floating in the backwaters of **Alappuzha** in Kerala.

Besides National Waterways, IWAI has jointly cooperated with the Government of Bangladesh to develop river tourism on the IBP route. This will allow Indian cruise vessels to travel through Bangladesh while exploring heritage sites. It is expected that river cruise tourism industry in India would witness exponential growth once required infrastructure is in place.

In January 2023, Hon'ble Prime Minister launched the MV Ganga Vilas, the world's longest river cruise, highlighting the country's thriving river cruise tourism. This luxurious **3,200-kilometer** journey from **Varanasi to Dibrugarh** traversed 27 river systems across five Indian states and Bangladesh. The remarkable expedition garnered global attention and secured a spot in the prestigious 'Limca Book of Records.'



RIVER CRUISE OPERATIONS ON NWS (OPERATIONAL STRETCHES)

NW-1 (Ganga River)	• Kolkata-Varanasi stretch (UP, Bihar, Jharkhand & West Bengal)
NW-2 (Brahmaputra River)	• Dhubri-Dibrugarh stretch (Assam)
NW-3 (West Coast Canal)	• Kottappuram-Kollam stretch (Kerala)
NW-27 & NW-68 (Cumberjua & Mandovi Rivers)	• Tourism Jetty Patto – Chora Island – Old Goa – Divar Island – Tolto Ferry Ghat – Cortalim (Goa)
NW-97 (Sunderbans Waterways)	• Namkhana - Bhagabatpur - Sajnekhali – Hemnagar (West Bengal)
Indo- Bangladesh Protocol Route	• Kolkata-Bali Island
NW-5 (Matai River & East Coast Canal)	• Bhitarkanika-Hukitola-Paradip (Odisha and West Bengal)
NW-8 (Alappuzha-Changanassery Canal)	• Alapuzha and Changanassery (Kerala)

NW-9 (Alappuzha- Kottayam- Athirampuzha Canal)	• Alapuzha and Kottayam (Kodimatha – Pallom) (Kerala)
NW-1 (Ganga River)	• Engineering College - Digha Bridge, Patna (Bihar)
NW-14 (Baitarni River)	• Aradi - Nalitpatia – Khola (Odisha)
NW-47 (Jalangi River)	• Mayapur - Kadamtala Ghat (West Bengal)
NW-73 (Narmada River)	• Statue of Unity (Maharashtra & Gujarat)
NW-87 (Sabarmati River)	• Gandhi Bridge – Nehru Bridge, Ahmedabad (Gujarat)
Outside NW	• Barkul - Kalijai - Nalaban - Nairi – Satapada on Chilika Lake

Recent Developments

- IWAI, Delhi Govt MoU to boost Cruise Tourism on River Yamuna:** In March 2025, the Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) and the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways (MoPSW) signed an MoU with various Delhi government agencies to develop a four-kilometre stretch of the Yamuna (NW-110) between Sonia Vihar and Jagatpur into a hub for eco-friendly cruise tourism. The project will deploy electric-solar hybrid boats equipped with bio-toilets and safety features, and install two HDPE jetties to support smooth operations—promoting sustainable, short-distance navigation and recreational tourism in Delhi.
- IWAI's MoU with J&K to boost river cruise tourism:** In March 2025, The Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Government of Jammu and Kashmir to promote river cruise tourism across three designated National Waterways in the region. Among India's 111 national waterways, Jammu and Kashmir is home to three- **River**

Chenab (NW-26), River Jhelum (NW-49), and River Ravi (NW-84). Marking a major push for inland tourism, IWAI has committed approximately ₹100 crore to develop cruise tourism infrastructure and experiences across these routes.

- **IWAI with Govt. of Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh :** IWAI entered into a tripartite agreement with the Governments of Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh to start cruise operations from Kukshi to Sardar Sarovar Dam on 19th April 2024.
- **Conferences:** Stakeholder conference was organized in Kolkata and Kochi in March-April 2024 and in Delhi on 3rd May 2024 for promoting river cruise tourism
- **Significant investment in River Cruise Tourism:** The First Inland Waterways Development Council meeting held on the vessel "Ganges Queen" in Kolkata. The meet, with an objective to enable inland waterways as channels of economic growth and commerce in the country committed an investment **Rs. 45,000 crore** for development of river cruise tourism. Of this, an estimated **Rs. 35,000 crore** have been earmarked for cruise vessels and another Rs. **10,000 crore** for development of cruise terminal infrastructure at the end of Amrit Kaal- by 2047.
- The 'River Cruise Tourism Roadmap, 2047' was launched at the inaugural session of IWDC (Inland Waterways Development Council (IWDC) meeting. This **Roadmap** focuses on four vital pillars, including **Infrastructure, Integration, Accessibility, and Policy** for promoting river cruise tourism. As a part of the roadmap, over **30 possible routes** and tourist circuits along inland waterways have been identified for further development.

Conclusion

India's cruise tourism is charting a promising course, tapping into its vast and diverse network of rivers, coastlines and ports to offer unique travel experiences that blend leisure with cultural discovery. With major initiatives like the *Cruise Bharat Mission and Maritime India Vision 2030*, the government is laying a robust foundation to position India as a global cruise destination. From the tranquil backwaters of Kerala to the majestic Ganga and the pristine stretches of the Yamuna and Brahmaputra, cruise tourism is not only unlocking new economic potential but also enabling inclusive growth by creating jobs and boosting local economies. As infrastructure develops and awareness grows, cruise tourism is set to become a defining pillar of India's travel and tourism landscape, inviting the world to rediscover India.

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