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# KUMBHONOMICS

A study into the scale and  
economic impact of Mahakumbh 2025

A woman with long hair, wearing a red sari and a light-colored shawl, is sitting on a mat on the ground. She is looking towards the left. The background is a warm, golden sunset with silhouettes of a crowd of people. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

# A Spectacle Of Faith Unity And Tradition

Kumbh Mela is one of the largest religious gatherings in the world, attracting millions of devotees, ascetics, and tourists from across India and beyond. Rooted in ancient Hindu tradition, the festival is celebrated at four major locations - Prayagraj (Uttar Pradesh), Haridwar (Uttarakhand), Nashik (Maharashtra), and Ujjain (Madhya Pradesh) - in a cyclical pattern every 12 years. The event's frequency and location is determined by specific astrological alignments. There are four types of Kumbh Mela: the Purna Kumbh Mela, held every 12 years at one of the four locations; the Ardh Kumbh Mela, which occurs every 6 years alternatively in Prayagraj and Haridwar; the **Maha Kumbh Mela**, which **takes place only in Prayagraj once every 144 years**; and the Magh Mela, an annual event in Prayagraj - considered a smaller version of the Kumbh.

The origins of Kumbh Mela are rooted in Hindu mythology, particularly with the legend of the Samudra Manthan (churning of the ocean). As per the legend, drops of the sacred nectar of immortality (amrita) were believed to have fallen at the above-mentioned four sites. Thus, these locations are considered highly auspicious and host the Kumbh Mela. Pilgrims gather to take a ritual dip in the holy rivers - the Ganges in Haridwar and Prayagraj, the Godavari in Nashik, and the Shipra in Ujjain. This act is believed to cleanse sins and facilitate spiritual liberation.

Kumbh Mela is not only a religious congregation but also a socio-cultural phenomenon. The festival receives participation from diverse sects of Hinduism, including revered saints, sadhus, and akharas (monastic orders). It also serves as a vibrant platform for spiritual discourses, philosophical debates, and cultural exchanges. Over the years, it has gained international recognition for its sheer scale and organizational complexity.

**The logistical planning for Kumbh Mela is a testament to India's administrative capabilities.**

Authorities undertake extensive measures in infrastructure development, crowd management, healthcare, sanitation, and security to accommodate the vast influx of visitors. The event has significant economic implications, fostering tourism, commerce, and employment in the host cities.

**Recognized by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity**, Kumbh Mela embodies India's rich spiritual heritage and its tradition of large-scale pilgrimage. Its enduring appeal lies in the ability to unite people across social and geographical boundaries, reaffirming faith and fostering communal harmony. As a confluence of devotion, mythology, and meticulous organization, Kumbh Mela remains a powerful symbol of India's cultural and religious ethos.





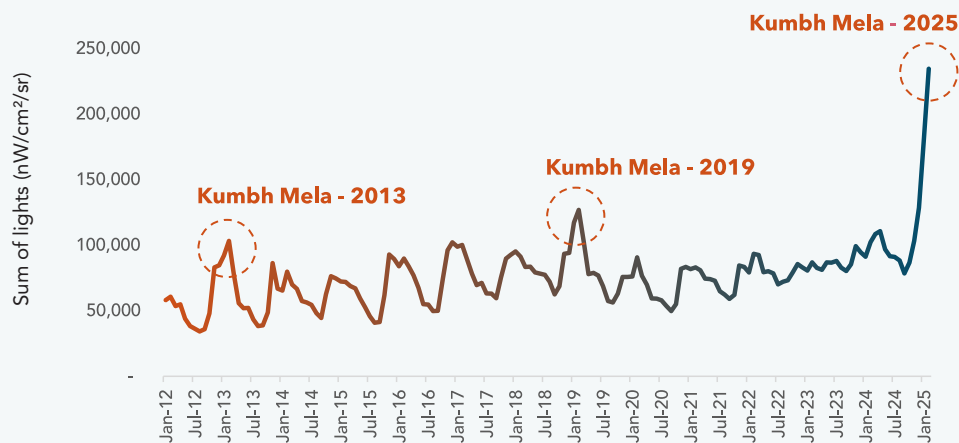
# An Event So Grand That Even The Cosmos Took Notice

The sheer scale of the Kumbh Mela is unparalleled. The **2025 Maha Kumbh Mela** in Prayagraj witnessed an **extraordinary attendance of over 660 million people**, making it the **largest human congregation in recorded history**. To put this into perspective, the **footfall was greater than the combined population of all the 27 European Union (EU) countries**.

To gauge the impact of this massive influx, we turned to satellite imagery. Night-time luminosity, a well-established proxy for economic activity, provides a clear signal of economic dynamism. **The average nighttime luminosity in**

**Prayagraj during January and February 2025 (when the 2025 Maha Kumbh Mela was held) was more than twice the level recorded in the same period the previous year.** Given the strong correlation between luminosity and GDP, this indicates a substantial economic boost. The surge in brightness reflects increased commercial activity, with hotels, transport, retail, and informal markets witnessing a spike in demand. The spillover effect extended to other religious hubs such as Ayodhya and Varanasi, where a noticeable rise in tourism and economic activity was observed.

### Nighttime Luminosity - Prayagraj



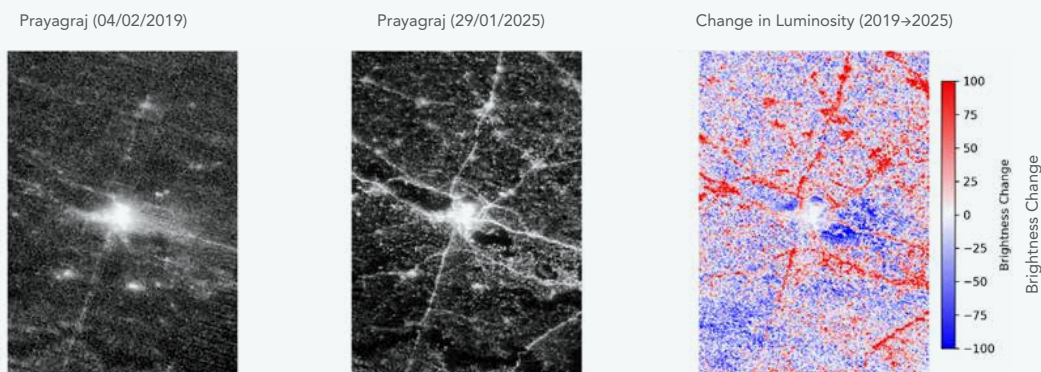
Note: Sum of Lights is the aggregated radiance from nighttime satellite imagery over a defined area, used as a proxy for economic activity

Source: Dun & Bradstreet

The numbers tell a compelling story: the Kumbh Mela was more than just a spiritual phenomenon, it was an economic juggernaut. It momentarily transformed Prayagraj into one of the most

economically vibrant cities in the world – one that not only captivated human consciousness but also left an imprint visible from the space.

### Prayagraj Luminosity change on Mauni Amavasya in 2019 to 2025



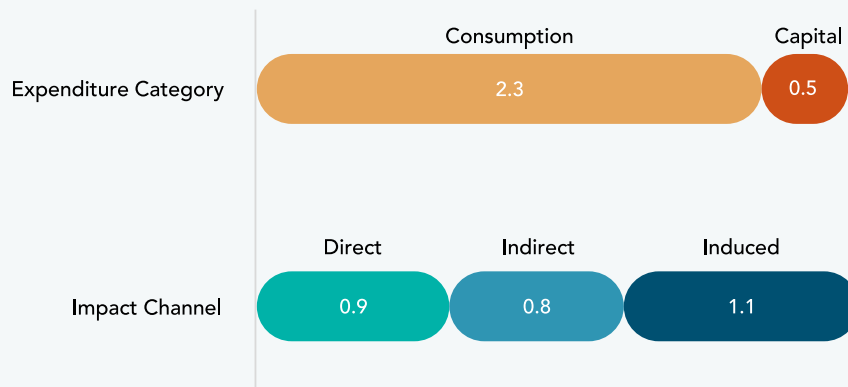
# An Unprecedented Hub Of Economic Activity



The Kumbh Mela catalyzes economic activity on an unprecedented scale, with its 2025 edition estimated to have facilitated ₹2.8 trillion in economic output through direct (₹900 billion), indirect (₹800 billion), and induced (₹1.1 trillion) channels. Direct impact encompasses expenditures incurred by attendees, including transportation, accommodation, food, tourism services, and local commerce, among others. The indirect impact stems from the supply chain's response to the increased demand in the directly impacted sectors. For instance, the surge in hotel occupancy could have driven demand for high-quality linens, with cotton potentially

sourced from Gujarat, dyed in Rajasthan, woven in Tamil Nadu, and ultimately supplied to hospitality hubs across Uttar Pradesh. The induced impact includes the amplified economic activity, as increased income from these sectors drove higher consumption in local economies, with workers reinvesting in housing, education, healthcare, and daily essentials, fueling further expansion. These economic interlinkages underscore the ways in which the Kumbh Mela transcends its immediate geography, embedding itself deeply into India's broader economic framework.

### Impact by Expenditure Category and Channel (₹ trillion)



Source: Dun & Bradstreet

Of the total ₹2.8 trillion economic output, **consumption expenditure** - spanning transport, retail, food services, accommodation, and other pilgrim-driven activities - **accounted for ₹2.3 trillion**, while **capital expenditure** on

infrastructure and public services **contributed around ₹0.5 trillion**. These figures reflect both direct transactions and the broader ripple effects across supply chains and local economies.

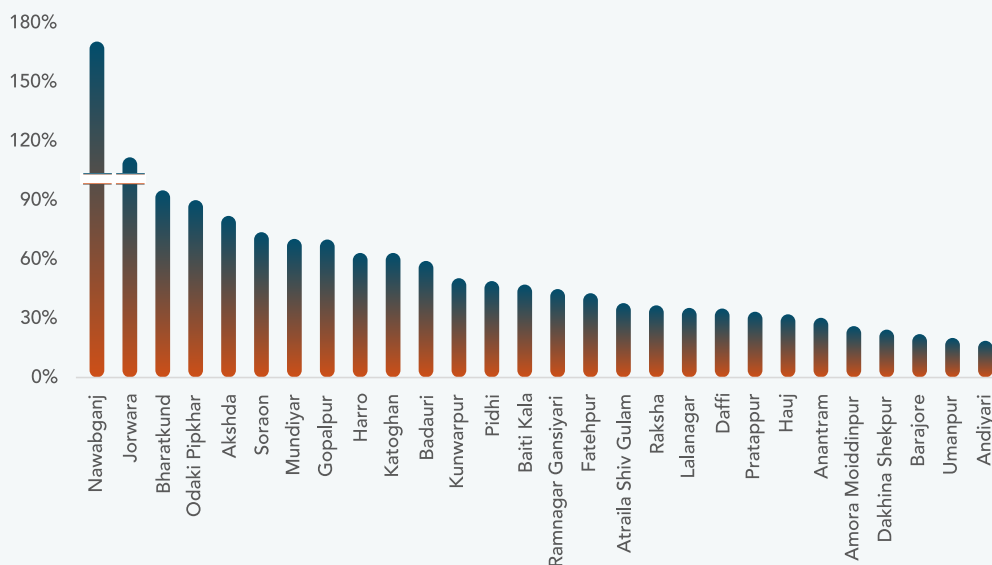


## Transport – Moving millions with seamless connectivity

The scale of transportation during the Kumbh Mela was staggering. Nearly 50% of the direct consumption expenditure or about **₹370 billion is estimated to have gone toward transport.** The Indian Railways operated over 17,100 trains, carrying an estimated 150 million pilgrims - monks, families, and travelers from every corner of the country. To put this into perspective, if each pilgrim traveled an average of 200 km, their **combined journey would be equivalent to traveling from Earth to the Sun more than 200 times.** **The railways alone is estimated to have earned ₹177 billion,** reinforcing its role as the backbone of this colossal movement.

On the roads, over **11,500 buses**, including 7,000 operated by the Uttar Pradesh State Road Transport Corporation, drove through highways packed with devotees, potentially generating **₹151 billion in revenue.** Toll traffic data suggests that **2.1 million private cars and commercial cabs** made their way to Prayagraj, facilitating economic output worth **₹11 billion**, of which ₹1 billion was from commercial cabs. This included entire families packed into shared cars, with taxi drivers reporting some of the busiest days of their lives, ferrying pilgrims across the city.

Tolls Plazas Reporting Large Increase in Traffic (Jan 2025 vs Dec 2024)



Source: IHMCL

Within Prayagraj, the **demand for last-mile connectivity** soared. Over 22,000 registered motor rickshaws, 6,000 registered cabs, and countless cycle rickshaws and motorbikes darted through the crowded streets, earning an estimated **₹14 billion.** Boatmen, many of whom have ferried pilgrims across the sacred rivers for generations, saw a windfall, as over 6,000 boats carried devotees to the Triveni Sangam (the confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna, and Saraswati

rivers), potentially generating **₹9 billion.** Even the skies were busier than ever as Prayagraj airport, which is usually quiet, buzzed with activity, handling around **550,000 passengers during the Mela, translating into a potential ₹7 billion in airline revenue.** From rickshaw pullers multiplying their daily earnings to railway stations transforming into bustling transit hubs, the Kumbh Mela didn't just move people - it moved an entire economy.



## Recreation – Beyond the pilgrimage, a ₹100 billion experience

Beyond pilgrimage, the Kumbh Mela was also a celebration of humanity, with visitors spending an **estimated ₹100 billion on recreation**. From joyrides in helicopters and hot air balloons offering breathtaking aerial views of the Sangam to adrenaline-pumping ATV rides and adventure sports, the festival transformed Prayagraj into a vibrant hub of activity. Amusement parks, yoga sessions, and guided city tours saw unprecedented demand as pilgrims sought moments of leisure alongside their spiritual

journey. The impact extended far beyond Prayagraj and regional tourism surged as devotees made detours to sacred sites such as Chitrakoot, Ayodhya, Varanasi, and Mirzapur. Toll traffic data reveals that these cities witnessed a **30% spike in vehicle movement** compared to December 2024, underscoring how the Kumbh Mela's economic influence rippled across Uttar Pradesh, drawing tourists deeper into India's cultural and religious heritage.

## Retail Trade – From sacred souvenirs to everyday essentials

Retail trade at the Kumbh Mela was a spectacle in itself, generating an **estimated ₹70 billion through over 200,000 vendors catering to the diverse needs of millions of pilgrims**. From religious essentials to mass-market consumer goods, businesses of all scales thrived in this vibrant marketplace. Vendors selling 'Jal Ganga' bottles reported daily earnings of ₹2,500, while stalls offering neem twigs as natural toothbrushes capitalized on their Ayurvedic appeal. Along the riverbanks, camel ride operators made ₹3,000 per day, while artisans selling handmade rudraksha malas and brassware found eager buyers. The demand for clothing, footwear, and travel accessories surged, with pop-up stalls and mobile retailers catering to pilgrims seeking woolen shawls, comfortable walking shoes, and other necessities.

Beyond consumer goods, the Kumbh Mela became a showcase of India's rich artistic and cultural heritage. Painters and artisans sold intricate Madhubani and Pattachitra paintings, while craftsmen from across the country displayed brassware, wooden carvings, and handwoven textiles. The 'One District, One Product' expo focused on regional specialties, from Varanasi's famed silk to Moradabad's metalwork, creating economic opportunities for traditional artisans. Thematic expos added to the vibrancy, seamlessly blending commerce with cultural storytelling, making the Kumbh not just a spiritual gathering but a thriving economic and artistic confluence.



## Food Services – Feeding millions, from street stalls to global brands

Food services at the Kumbh Mela generated an **estimated ₹65 billion in economic activity**, driven by an immense demand for dining and on-the-go meals. Over 1,000 listed restaurants catered to the influx of pilgrims, offering both dine-in and delivery services, while massive food courts featuring brands such as Domino's, Pizza Hut, and Costa Coffee saw continuous footfall. Small vendors, too, found their fortunes in the bustling marketplace - tea stalls reported daily earnings of ₹20,000 to ₹30,000, while humble puri sellers, offering plates at ₹50, made ₹1,500 a day.

Beyond commercial food services, the tradition of Bhandaras - community kitchens serving free meals - played a crucial role in feeding the

masses. An estimated **60 Bhandaras served over 300 million meals** during the event. Though free to pilgrims, these massive kitchens had significant economic implications, requiring substantial spending on grains, vegetables, fuel, and logistics. The scale was staggering with thousands of quintals of wheat and rice sourced from across India, bulk transportation of cooking oil, and an entire ecosystem of suppliers ensuring seamless distribution.

From high-end dining to street-side vendors and philanthropic kitchens, the Kumbh Mela's food economy reflected both commercial and communal aspects, illustrating how the event sustained livelihoods while upholding its deep-rooted traditions of hospitality and service.

## Accommodation – Staying options for every pilgrim from tents to luxury

Accommodation at the Kumbh Mela was as diverse as its pilgrims, generating an **estimated ₹60 billion in economic activity**. Over 160,000 tents dotted the vast expanse of the mela grounds, ranging from free community shelters to budget stays at ₹100 per night, all the way up to ultra-luxury tents priced at **₹150,000** per night, complete with butler service and curated spiritual experiences.

Beyond the tented city, Prayagraj's hospitality sector saw an overwhelming surge in demand. With around 700 hotels, guesthouses, dharamshalas, and registered homestays operating at near-full capacity, the economic

ripple was undeniable. However, the true impact extended far beyond formal establishments. Thousands of unlisted homestays emerged overnight, with local families transforming their homes into temporary shelters for visiting pilgrims, embodying the spirit of Indian hospitality while also benefiting from the economic windfall.

From makeshift dormitories under the open sky to opulent riverside retreats, the accommodation landscape at the Kumbh was a microcosm of India's economic dynamism -where every budget found a place, and every host found an opportunity.



## Capital Expenditure – Building the backbone for a grand pilgrimage

Beyond consumption expenditure, significant capital investments were made to support the Kumbh Mela's massive scale. **The Indian Railways reportedly spent around ₹50 billion** on infrastructure upgrades, additional train services, and station enhancements to accommodate the surge in travelers (majorly pilgrims). Meanwhile, the **central and state (Uttar Pradesh) governments invested approximately ₹75 billion in roads, sanitation, security, and temporary facilities**. This included constructing new flyovers,

widening of key access roads, and reinforcing embankments to manage the high footfall. A sprawling tent city with water supply, electricity, and sanitation facilities was set up, transforming the riverbanks into a well-planned, temporary metropolis. These infrastructure developments not only ensured smooth operations during the event but also left a lasting impact, enhancing the region's capacity to host future gatherings and boosting long-term connectivity.

## Miscellaneous – Hidden economic engines

Beyond traditional sectors, the Kumbh Mela generated an **estimated ₹95 billion in economic output** through a wide array of activities, ranging from brand sponsorships to telecom revenue, healthcare services, and parking fees.

Major brands strategically integrated themselves into the pilgrimage experience. For instance, ITC's Mangaldeep offered devotional products, Swiggy Instamart provided easy access to everyday essentials, and Hindustan Unilever created meaningful touchpoints with initiatives such as Surf Excel's Easy Bag for wet clothes after the holy dip and Vim's Maha Kadai Bhog with dedicated dishwashing stations.

Telecom providers likely saw a surge in demand as millions of pilgrims relied on mobile data for navigation, live-streaming rituals, and staying connected. Even a modest 6% increase in average revenue per user could have potentially added **₹2 billion** in additional revenue for **telecom service providers**.

Meanwhile, healthcare services played a vital role, with thousands of medical camps, emergency units, and pharmacies catering to pilgrims, driving demand for consultations, treatments, and medicines. Even vehicle parking facilities contributed significantly, as vast designated lots generated steady revenue.



## Methodology

The economic impact assessment of the Kumbh Mela was conducted using a structured, data-driven approach, integrating extensive desk research with proprietary economic modeling techniques.

Direct impact estimation leveraged multiple high-frequency data sources, including satellite imagery to assess luminosity, toll transaction data from the Indian Highways Management Company Limited (IHMCL) to estimate vehicular movement, and vehicle registration records from the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) to analyze transport patterns. Telecom usage metrics from the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) provided insights into average revenue per user. Additionally, tariff sheets from airlines and Indian Railways, pricing data from hospitality and e-commerce platforms, and media reports were utilized to approximate sectoral revenue generation. Social media analytics further served as a ground-truthing mechanism to validate real-time economic activity.

Indirect and induced impacts were quantified using Dun & Bradstreet's proprietary Economic and Social Impact Assessment Model, which is calibrated on input-output tables published by national statistical agencies and multilateral institutions. This model captures intersectoral linkages and spending multipliers, enabling a robust estimation of the secondary and tertiary economic effects emanating from direct expenditures.

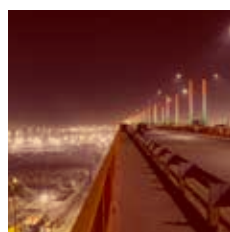
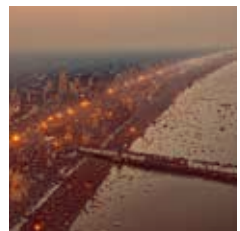




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