



Tourism in Pakistan, Challenges and Opportunities

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Abstract: *The tourism sector in Pakistan has tremendous potential and is linked to some of the tallest mountains, lakes, and natural sceneries in the country, and it is a well-liked attraction for visitors from both inside and outside the nation. In addition to generating cash, tourism also helps to promote a particular country's culture; hence, it should be seen as an essential component of Pakistan's growth plan. The diversity of its cultures, civilizations, and customs has tragically prevented Pakistan from realising its full tourism potential. To become the most well-liked tourist destination in the world, Pakistan would have to overcome several difficulties in the tourism industry. This essay examines the difficulties the tourism industry faces using research from Pakistan. According to the report, Pakistan's security and counterterrorism issues have negatively impacted travel and tourism. But it is now generally acknowledged that Pakistan is transforming into a welcoming and secure environment for everyone. This essay also includes explanations of suggestions for the tourist industry.*

Introduction

It is the largest trading and fastest-growing sector of the global economy. Apart from creating income, tourism also aids in the promotion of a specific nation's culture and civilization. Tourism has evolved because of increased interest in vacation, business, sports, health, religion, culture, and education travel. Tourism's objective is to visit a place without having an impact on the people who live there or the environment while also enhancing the local community's economy and social structure. All travel-related activities, such as staying in hotels, going out to eat or drink, or shopping, are considered to be part of tourism. It might be for a vacation, a business trip, or a journey with friends or family. (Arshad, 2018)

The global tourism industry generated USD 1.7 trillion in exports in 2018, while the number of visitors increased by 4% to 1.5 billion in 2019. The

COVID-19 epidemic in 2020 has been regarded as the largest disaster to affect global travel since records began in 1950. Up until August 2020, 700 million fewer visitors represented a loss of USD 730 billion in tourism-related trade earnings. Foreign visitors are down by around 70%, and the crisis is anticipated to cause an annual reduction of between 60% and 80% compared to 2019.

Pakistan has a great deal of tourist potential, but it has sadly remained elusive because of its diversity of cultures, civilizations, and customs. In addition, Pakistan is home to several historical, religious, archaeological, and adventurous attractions that might draw numerous visitors from all over the world. More than two million foreign visitors came to Pakistan before the pandemic, mostly in the northern regions.

In recent days, the need to promote tourism in Pakistan has become quickly obvious. It is a bit of a stretch to compare Pakistan to various popular tourist sites, including Turkey, Italy, and Malaysia. Over the past few years, there have been a lot more tourists travelling to Pakistan. In Pakistan, obtaining a tourist visa is now simpler. A statement by the government stated that people travelling from 30 different countries would not need a visa to enter Pakistan.

People from all over the world are aware of Pakistan's stunning peaks, lakes, lovely valleys, sacred sites, magnificent structures, traditional delicacies, dining options, and warm friendliness. Furthermore, international visitors are aware of activities such as paragliding, desert safaris in vehicles and camels, hunting, rock climbing, and fishing at a variety of tourist destinations. Pakistan launched programs such as "Emerging Pakistan" and "Amazing Pakistan" to improve the country's image as a tourism destination. Pakistan is presently placed 124th in the "World Economic Forum's tourism" and competitiveness rating.

There is no doubt that Pakistan's tourist sector could use some assistance. Pakistan is a breathtakingly gorgeous nation with old civilisation relics, Mughal architecture, snow-capped mountains, frozen lakes, peaceful valleys, and enticing beaches. There are also Sikh and Hindu pilgrimage sites nearby. Tourism is a major contributor to a country's economic success. Many people visit ancient Hindu and Sikh sites, particularly the Guru Nanak shrine. To increase tourism, Pakistan must make the most of the "China-Pakistan Economic Corridor" (CPEC).

As part of the CPEC program, Pakistan is developing several tourist-friendly electricity and infrastructure projects. Furthermore, since Chinese people travel a lot, visiting Pakistan is not difficult for them. Sad to say, Pakistan has not been able to compete with or surpass the world's top tourist destinations due to several obstacles as well as problems.

Significance of tourism in Pakistan

As we all know, tourism is vital to Pakistan's economy and contributes significantly to the country's foreign exchange revenues. According to its natural and human resource base, economic, political, and governance conditions, as well as the general scope of its progress, each nation chooses its own. Social, cultural, ideological, archaeological, natural resource and educational contributions are needed. Increased infrastructure, service quality, and cost-effectiveness are all elements that might affect demand as a whole. (PTDC, 2019)

This study is referred to extracting new knowledge from existing knowledge. It explores and grabs new concepts about the tourism sector. These studies would benefit academicians, researchers and policymakers.

The majority of studies on tourism-related businesses in developing nations emphasize the sector's opportunities and advantages. There was also a shortage of data regarding the problems that affect tourism and recommendations for how to address them.

Challenges faced by Pakistan's tourism

So, let us look at some of the challenges Pakistan may undergo on its journey to being the world's most popular tourist destination.

Depleted infrastructure

A limited hotel business, poor road accessibility, underdeveloped tourist routes, and a shortage of visitor services are some of the most significant problems Pakistan's tourism industry is now dealing with. Quality infrastructure is crucial for boosting tourism, including airports, access to roads, vehicles, trains, aircraft, services, dining establishments, lodging options (hotels, motels), and local tour operators.

For instance, Pakistan has some of the world's most picturesque landscapes and landmarks in its northern regions. They can attract millions of

tourists from around the world. Unfortunately, these undeveloped northern regions have not been able to capitalize on their tourist potential. (Arif, 2019)

Underdeveloped hospitality sector

According to international standards, the hotel industry is still undeveloped because of inadequate facilities, a lack of government programmers, and security-related problems. Currently, several of the country's operating hotels and restaurants have not put in place sufficient certification criteria that provide excellent services. The regulations' application guarantees innovative services, which are essential to upholding the standards of the hotel business, which in turn reflect changes in the travel and tourism sector.

Unexplored religious tourist sites

Pakistan is home to several religious sites, particularly those that are devoted to "Buddhism, Sikhism, and Christianity". The earliest Buddhist sites in Pakistan date from between 300 BC and 200 AD. Sirkap, Jindal Temple, and Jaulian Monastery are some of Pakistan's most well-known Buddhist landmarks (200–600 AD).

One of the most well-known and revered religious landmarks in Pakistan is the tomb of "Baba Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh religion", which is also the largest. Another three of Pakistan's most well-known Gurudwaras are "Gurdwara Panja Sahib in Hasan Abdal, Gurdwara Rori Sahib in Eminabad, and Gurdwara Darbar Sahib in Kartarpur", Narowal. Pakistan never completely explored or developed the industry on this sustainable basis, despite its diversity and appeal. (Arshad I. &, 2018)

Terrorism in Pakistan

The Pakistani tourist industry has suffered greatly as a result of terrorism. After 9/11, there was an increase in terrorism, which led to the worldwide designation of Pakistan as "unsafe"

and eventually damaged its reputation. The regular bomb explosions, targeted assassinations, drone attacks, and carnage across the nation continued to be a hindrance to the expansion of Pakistan's tourism sector and economy. Therefore, despite the fact that visitors from all over the world desired to visit Pakistan, Many were apprehensive about doing so due to the country's existing law and order issues. (Baker, 2020)

Negligence to Tourist Places

The country office's blatant carelessness is the fifth element contributing to Pakistan's dismal tourist situation. In the past, successive governments ignored the construction of hotels or other potential locations for tourist routes that could attract both residents and visitors. Most of the time, travellers are forced to camp or cook for themselves, and not everyone appreciates it. In order to transform stunning locations into popular tourist attractions, hotels or resorts are needed.

Consider "Tolipeer", one of the most famous tourist spots in Pakistani Kashmir. The location itself is an example of poor government work. The area is frequently littered, the roads are in bad shape, and there are not any hotels or other accommodations for travellers. These factors all point to government carelessness.

Social Challenges

The Pakistani community is honourable, welcoming, and compassionate. However, this is not always the case. For instance, if you travel alone to the north, you may encounter locals who will make every effort to overcharge you for their services. The second issue is how people behave in specific places, like Murree, where there have been numerous instances of tourists being beaten by locals on social media. What impression is Pakistan giving of its society to the rest of the world? Would it tempt or discourage visitors from Pakistan? (Arshad I. &, 2018)

Negative Role of Pakistani Media

Finally, the media's influence has fueled the flames. The way the media has portrayed Pakistan by just emphasizing the accidents, bombs, killings, and other social concerns has damaged Pakistan's reputation across the world. There was a stage where Pakistan's breathtaking scenery was shown on television programs for the rest of the world to see. But at that time, the media was governed by the government. The media began to advocate for anything they pleased without considering the effects that would have on the state's reputation.

Opportunities for Tourism in Pakistan Here is a brief overview of these opportunities:

Pakistan is increasingly becoming Peaceful

As we previously said, Pakistan's security and terrorist problems have had a severe influence on tourism. However, it is now widely accepted that Pakistan is increasingly becoming a pleasant and secure environment for everybody (thanks to the security forces of Pakistan).

As a result, Pakistan is no longer considered a dangerous location, and the world has accepted this. The tourist destinations that were previously dangerous, particularly those in the north, are now safe for women and international visitors, as well as males and locals. A female foreigner named "Eva Zoo Beck" recently travelled the entire length and width of Pakistan by herself. She did it safely and soundly, and she departed the nation with many happy memories that she shared on her social media pages. Without a doubt, her tourism-related stories have inspired others to travel to Pakistan and see its breathtaking scenery.

Government's will to Revive Tourism in Pakistan

The Pakistani government has fresh opportunities to develop the country's mostly undeveloped tourism industry. The potential for tourism in Pakistan has received considerable

attention from the prime minister. The government of Pakistan is dedicated to doing everything it can to promote tourism, including making it simpler to get visas, facilitating tourist entry and providing them with safety and security while travelling.

Power of social media

The value of media in boosting tourism in Pakistan cannot be overstated. People who use social media in Pakistan are rapidly promoting the most alluring and engaging websites in the country.

These days, more individuals are promoting Pakistan's stunning and lovely locations on various social media platforms. Today, a lot of blogs, vlogs, and tourist organizations are highly active in spreading a favourable impression of Pakistan throughout the world and encouraging travel to Pakistan. In fact, the detrimental impact of Pakistan's electronic media that we previously addressed has been overwhelmed by social media.

CPEC: Enhanced Connectivity

We already discussed the issue of inadequate connection infrastructure. The construction of new roads and highways as part of CPEC, which will increase connectivity throughout the nation, would have an impact on Pakistan's tourism industry in a positive way. Rail and road projects will integrate Pakistan's rural areas with the rest of the country. Visits to popular tourist destinations will be easier. In addition, Pakistan's hitherto undiscovered and undeveloped beauty would be brought to the public's attention through the CPEC projects. (Kakar a. K., 2007)

The Introduction of E-governance

Since Pakistan's administration has launched e-governance, also known as the "Pakistan Citizen Portal," it will be useful in reporting any possible social issues and mismanagement across the nation. Economic exploitation instances can be submitted to the authorities with only one click,

as was previously mentioned. As a result, using e-governance can assist travellers in reporting any form of an undesirable situation.

Analysis of Pakistan's tourism

The whole of Pakistan is blessed with top-notch tourist attractions. In an extremely attractive way, historical locations blend with natural scenery. At the confluence of civilizations, Pakistan is a treasure trove for tourists and academics. The 2019 "Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index from the World Economic Forum" placed it at 121st overall. The most well-known American travel and lifestyle magazine, Conde Nast Traveler, selected Pakistan among their top travel destinations for 2020. The British Backpacker Society termed Pakistan "a travel treasure," placing it as the number one adventure travel destination for 2018 and third for 2020. Several recent initiatives, such as the ability to get a visa upon arrival and the rehabilitation of abandoned tourist locations, are seen as genuine beginnings toward the development of a national tourism culture.

Encourage the formulation of policies, plans, frameworks, etc., in order to "create and enhance collaboration between provinces, federal ministers, and private actors, the National Tourism Board (NTCB) develops actions and strategies in the respective areas of cultural, heritage, and archaeology tourism via working groups. A cross-country standardization for hotels is being introduced to ensure excellence in hospitality, in line with the highest standards of tourism marketing. Similarly, programs like Brand Pakistan, a unique tourist portal, a ten-year policy, and a five-year action plan are being developed by the "Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation" (PTDC) to highlight the nation as a distinctive brand throughout the world. The portal will provide easy access to all of Pakistan's tourist resources and the full spectrum of travel options offered by foreign airlines and airports. Through the pandemic, the

implementation phase could need to respond to the uncertain environment. (A K Baloch, 2007)

Numerous jobs in the tourism industry were lost as a result of COVID-19. Additionally, PTDC came under fire for restructuring and departing from the traditional systems of governance. The new structure, however, complies with international best practices. PTDC hotels will be leased out for 33 years to prestigious national and international chains with a track record in the industry in accordance with best practices throughout the world. The organization in charge of managing the country's tourism is called the Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation. It has locations in Karachi, Abbottabad, Islamabad, and Lahore. It creates papers, brochures, and pictures of tourist destinations related to tourism. It offers assistance and guidance to travellers in a number of languages. It also provides tour guides who show visitors around well-known tourist destinations and explain their benefits. (Ali Ahmed & Muhammad Hassan, 2020)

Terrorist attacks against tourists, particularly those from Western countries, have had a significant impact on the tourism industry. Currently, Pakistan is ranked number 103 out of 124 nations that provide tourist services. Popular tourist locations have limited hotel and transportation choices. Then, the general social, political, and economic conditions were not good for the inhabitants either. On tourism and sightseeing, the warlike conditions in Swat have had a big influence.

The public should assist the government in eradicating terrorism. The government should take all appropriate steps to strengthen the law and order situation. Then, the government needs to provide a range of services in resorts. Travelling should be easy and comfortable. All of this will lead to a spike (a significant increase) in tourism. The nation's tourism sector must adhere to the strictest international standards. As a result, Pakistan would become a more inviting country for travellers. (Ali, 2021)

Important points about Pakistan tourism

- Prior to travel & tourism, Pakistan ranked 120 out of 141.
- "The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)" promotes a global celebration of World Tourism Day (WTD) on September 27.
- In December 2020, Pakistan's tourism revenue was 765 million USD, down from 992 million USD the year before.
- Tourism supported the creation of 4 million jobs and contributed 5.9% of the nation's GDP in 2019. In 2020, when tourism was predicted to break all prior records, and the globe was struck by a pandemic, Covid-19 had a devastating effect on Pakistan's tourism industry, causing an estimated loss of \$3.64 within the first quarter.
- Covid-19 has caused a 75% drop in overseas travel in 2020.
- The Covid pandemic initially had a significant effect on the economy, leading to a sizable loss in employment and GDP contribution. Tourism revenue fell sharply in 2020 as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Only \$765.00 billion (2019) remained of the \$992.00 billion total. This represents a reduction in Pakistan of 23%. (Pakistan Statistics of Pakistan , 2003)
- Compared to international tourism, domestic tourism is important to every nation. Pakistan is a market for roughly 50 million potential domestic visitors, most of whom travel in their own cars with their families and in groups of, on average, 5, even though there isn't exact information accessible on them.
- In the year 2019, there were 5 million tourists who visited KPK alone.
- There were 1.458 billion foreign arrivals as tourists globally in 2019. 1.225 million foreign tourists visited Pakistan overall.

Conclusion

Tourism is important to the economy of every country, and Pakistan has the potential to rank among the most popular tourist destinations worldwide. Even though Pakistan is a "growing country," the tourism sector has the potential and motivation to turn this deficiency into a strength. Therefore, the government must discover the delights Pakistan's tourist industry has to offer if it hopes to compete on a global scale

The development of tourism in Pakistan will be a process of defining the future of mobility and hospitality through coordination between various stakeholders on crucial issues like branding, marketing, promotion, infrastructure development, and encouraging private sector investments that can draw more foreign tourists who are seeking to visit Pakistan. All roads must inevitably lead to sustainable and inclusive tourism growth in Pakistan after using the finest methods and after taking the necessary actions.

This includes all available options, such as adding authorities at the provincial level to improve tourism organizations, adopting a framework for policy development, preserving current locations, and adding new ones to increase revenue, expand, and provide more to tourists who come to our country. Pakistan will soon be able to realize its great tourist potential by devising comprehensive and original solutions to promote a variety of tourism types.

Recommendations

1. The monitoring of structures and impacts is more crucial because of how quickly and how their shapes are changing. The system must be put together based on a vision and complementing command and control methods.
2. There must be a strict system of checks and balances. All actions, from building infrastructure to offering services, should be carried out in accordance with the regulations set forth by the government.

The rule of law and duties are destroyed by an unrestrained mentality. As a result, an unauthorized building must be monitored. Businesses should only be allowed by registered businesses, and unregistered entities should be punished and forbidden.

3. It is necessary to develop tourism as a subject for academic study and career training. Building national capacity and developing the human resources necessary for Pakistan's tourism to be realized on many levels would be facilitated through vocational training facilities, tourism studies at the appropriate undergraduate and graduate levels, and research.
4. More talent will enter the profession if tourism is promoted through incentives like microfinance, loans, industrial connections with innovative ideas, and local champion competitions. Additionally, the plan can attract sponsors through angel financing and public crowdfunding.
5. Any management approach works best when data collection and analysis are done. Tourist planners, opinion polls, qualitative and quantitative data research and analysis, target market identification, market research, and demand and supply development
6. The sociocultural and environmental effects of tourist laws and practices should be constantly assessed. The protection of natural resources and cultural heritage must be given special care in light of the rise in tourism. Regular monitoring and expert supervision will be beneficial in identifying and correcting issues.
7. The issue of "over tourism" needs to be properly managed. "Infrastructure" is more than just buildings, services, and roadways. The provision of first-rate hospitality, transportation services, and plans for inland travel is also necessary for attracting tourists. In order to ensure facilitation in this regard, a lot of work must be done.

8. Pakistan can develop into a "special interest destination." It's also important to reinstate traditional cultural activities like the Basant festival and cattle shows. Minority religious sites are referred to as sacred spaces rather than public places. Thus, in addition to serving as a popular tourist destination, the sacredness of these locations will be preserved for pilgrims.
9. The state's policies alone cannot bring about the growth of the tourism sector. A societal upheaval is required to create a tourist-friendly atmosphere in Pakistan, based, among other things, on pleasant surroundings, easy travel, unhindered multidimensional transport, high-speed internet, a relaxed and open social environment, easy access to priced accommodation, normal law-and-order conditions, and so on.

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