

**A STUDY ON CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF TOURISM
INDUSTRY IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR
(RESEARCH ARTICLE)**

*Naseem ul Gani

** Showket Mohd Mir

ABSTRACT

Tourism consists of the activities undertaken during travel from home or workplace for the pleasure and enjoyment of certain destinations, and the facilities that cater to the needs of the tourist. Travel and tourism have been important social activities of human beings from time immemorial. The urge to explore new places within one's own country or outside and seek a change of environment has been experienced from ancient times.

Therefore this paper is an attempt to find out the major concerns in Tourism industry in Jammu and Kashmir. This paper is divided into three parts. Part one represents introduction, and objectives of the study. Part two review the major concerns about tourism industry in Jammu and Kashmir. This study is based on information obtained from secondary sources.

KEY WORDS Tourism industry, concerns, study, services, J&K.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism consists of the activities undertaken during travel from home or workplace for the pleasure and enjoyment of certain destinations, and the facilities that cater to the needs of the tourist. Travel and tourism have been important social activities of human beings from time immemorial. The urge to explore new places within one's own country or outside and seek a change of environment has been experienced from ancient times.

Tourism has outshined traditional industries to become one of the world's largest and fastest growing economic activities. According to the estimates from the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) in 2011, tourism generates around 270.7 million jobs worldwide and accounts for over 10% of global Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Apart

from economic benefits, tourism plays a vital role in cross-cultural exchange of the two cultures. It helps to learn about different languages, life styles and tradition. It provides opportunities to adopt the qualities of different cultures vice-versa, as tourists are also bound to cause tension among the local population by introducing new life styles and progressively promoting social, cultural and religious disruptions. Tourism provides opportunities to local people to raise their living standards by increasing employment opportunities. Tourism serves as a means of conserving the cultural heritage of the local area which otherwise might be lost due to development. It provides scope for conserving local dance, art, craft, music, drama, dress and old historic monuments.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

To provide introduction about tourism industry in J&K.

To understand potential of tourism industry in J&K.

To find out the major challenges and opportunities of Tourism Industry in J&K.

To provide need to review for the full exploitation and development of Tourism Industry in J&K.

TOURISM INDUSTRY IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR

Jammu and Kashmir is known for its scenic landscape, beautiful valleys, lakes, snow capped mountains, cool climate, skiing, trekking and fishing opportunities, archaeological, historical, cultural and religious places all over the world. The state of Jammu and Kashmir has three distinct regions, viz, Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh. All the three regions have immense potential for tourism from both domestic as well as international tourists. While mountainous landscape of Kashmir valley has attracted tourists for centuries across the globe. Some notable tourist places in Kashmir valley are Dal lake, Mughal gardens, Nishat Bagh, Gulmarg, Yeusmarg, Phalgam etc. Kashmiri's natural landscape has made it one of the popular destinations for adventure tourism in South Asia. Marked by four distinct seasons, ski enthusiasts can enjoy the exotic Himalayan powder during winters. Jammu is known for its ancient temples, Hindu shrines, gardens and forts. The Hindu holy shrine of Amarnath in Kashmir attracts millions of Hindu devotees every year. And Vaishno Devi shrine in Jammu region also attracts tens of thousands of Hindu devotees every year. Jammu's historic monuments feature a, unique blend of Islamic and Hindu architecture styles. Ladakh, the third and

important region of the State has emerged as a major hub for adventure tourism. This part of Greater Himalaya called “Moon on Earth” comprising of naked peaks and deep gorges was once known for the silk route to Asia from subcontinent. Tourism is one of the State’s major industries. It has played an important role for developing the economy, particularly in the valley and Ladakh. Being a labour intensive industry, it has given different jobs to a very large number of people and generated economic activities in the primary, secondary and tertiary sectors in the state, which owes large dependence on this industry. Kashmir has been a center of attention for different people for different reasons all over the world. There are various places of tourist attraction in the state visited by the tourists. However, most of the places with ample tourism potential are untapped. The state is blessed with a varied topography that is an unusual mix of rugged mountains, green hills, holy caves and rocky deep water fjords. It is said to be a treasure house of geological information due to the diversity of its geographical features. It represents century’s old heritage of culture, religion, language, traditions, architecture and art forms. All these provide immense potential for developing a fabulous variety of tourist attractions. Its strategic location within India enhances the scope of dual or multiple destinations tour package promotions. Overall the photographic and verbal stimuli in promotions amplify the geography, nature, culture, life and historical importance of the place. Moreover, the tourist brochures assure world-class hotel facilities, transportation, communication and site-seeing arrangements. At present, the State receives more than half of its guests as pilgrims. Srinagar, the state capital, is the most famous tourist destination in the state. An ancient city, there are many attractions that can attract even the most unwilling of tourists to this magical land. Dal Lake, Nishat Bagh, Shalimar Bagh, and Chashme Shahi are some of the best-known tourist spot in Srinagar. The temple of Maha Kali (better known as Bahu or Bawey Wali Mata), located in the Bahu Fort, is considered second only to Mata Vaishno Devi in terms of mystical power. The temple was built shortly after the coronation of Maharaja Gulab Singh in 1822. Other temples in the city include the Gauri Kund Temple, Shudh Mahadev Temple, Shiva Temple, Peer Khoh Cave Temple, Ranbireshwar Temple, and the Parmandal Temple Complex. Ladakh is home to the minority Buddhist community in the state. They have preserved their unique culture for the past hundreds of years. Leh is the headquarters of

this region. The major points of attraction are the Leh Palace, Namgyal Tsemo Gompa, Sankar Gompa, Shanti Stupa, and Soma Gompa. Tourism in Kashmir depends greatly on the natural resources that this place has to offer for economic profitability. Tourism provides good sustenance to the local population and revenue to the State exchequer. The visits from domestic and international tourists provide a valuable source of earning. Visitors spending generate income for both public and private sectors besides effecting wages and employment opportunities. Till the year 2010 there was a negative growth rate in the tourist arrivals. But during 2011-12 there was a significant increase in volume of domestic as well as foreign tourist arrivals in Kashmir.

POTENTIAL OF TOURISM SECTOR IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR

Jammu and Kashmir has tremendous potential in tourism sector. The scope of large scale industrial development is very limited in the State. Tourism being a labour intensive industry provides a very vast scope for employment opportunities in Jammu and Kashmir. The employment opportunities provided by this industry are comparatively higher than other industries. Tourism is regarded multi-segmental industry; therefore, it provides different types of jobs like hotel managers, receptionists, accountants, clerks, guides, travel agents, chefs, transport operators etc.

The positive economic benefits of tourism industry in Jammu and Kashmir are
Contribution to State's income generations

Expansion of employment opportunities in the State

Tax revenue.

Generation of Foreign exchange.

Transformation of regional economy.

Social and Cultural effect.

Up-gradation and expansion of basic infrastructure.

TOURISM PRODUCTS OF JAMMU AND KASHMIR

The State of Jammu and Kashmir offers a very large number of marketable products. While looking from tourist point of view, each district of the State has so much to offer such as: Vast Natural Resources, Adventure Tourism (River Rafting, Mountain climbing), Numerous Trekking routes, Pilgrimage Tourism (Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist),

Wildlife Tourism, Heritage Tourism, Springs, Festivals and Cultural activities, Handicrafts etc.

OPPORTUNITIES OF TOURISM INDUSTRY IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR

HERITAGE TOURISM

The State of Jammu and Kashmir is full of history. Under the Antiques Act, any article that is more than 75 years old is to be declared heritage property. Jammu and Kashmir is a land with more enormous potential for heritage tourism. The land is full of natural beauty that is unique to the state. It is also bestowed with a variety of cultural forms and manifestations that has their distinct flavor. It has diverse practices in religion, rites and rituals, fairs and festivals, landscape and people, language and culture. The valley of Kashmir offers sparkling streams, high mountains and verdant land that has the classic beauty and attracts people from every corner of the world. The Kashmir valley has been the chosen place for many film makers and artists in India. The history of the state still lives in the forts, museums, ancient buildings and other heritage spots within the State. Jammu and Kashmir is home to famous Hindu pilgrimages in India, where thousands of Hindu community people visit the shrine of Amarnath cave and Mata Vaishno Devi every year. Jammu and Kashmir is blessed with both tangible and the intangible heritage which should be incorporated into the wider tourism circuit. The need is to treat heritage tourism in this region as the function of the tourism only then it can thrive in the true tourism sense. First, the heritage tourism assets of the region should be identified and then a proper documentation mechanism has to be devised so that a proper inventory is developed which can be integrated into a well defined tourism product by employing the proper marketing strategy with the help of the multidisciplinary approach of the varied professionals, who can constitute task force for the application of the mechanism developed from this integrated process. Once this procedure is brought into action it will lead to the heritage tourism development model that will lead to the bright prospects of the overall tourism business in the region.

PILGRIMAGE TOURISM

The State of Jammu and Kashmir has been a seat of reference to all major religions of the world. This state is full of holy sites and most of these sites are located in between the

scenic surroundings of great Himalayas. This aspect is responsible for attracting large number of tourists every year, which has ultimately led to a boom in the tourism industry of the State. This way, tourists not only just explore the spectacular landscapes but have the opportunity of worshipping at the respective religious shrines. Jammu & Kashmir has various mosques and temples which are just marvel creations. The state stands as an epitome of religious tolerance. Visiting Hari Parbat Pilgrim Center where a temple, a gurudwara and a mosque stand side by side gives a feeling of pure brotherhood in between of major religions of Jammu and Kashmir.

Jammu & Kashmir has various pilgrim destinations for Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists. The very famous Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine and the Amarnath Temple are located in this state. These sites are the most valued and sanctified of Hindu pilgrimage sites where thousands of devotees pay homage every year. For Muslims, there is the Hazratbal Shrine in Srinagar where the sacred hair (Moi-e-Muqqadas) of Prophet Mohammad (S.A.W) is preserved and the truthful come to pay homage. The Shahdara Sharief located in Rajouri District of the State is like an emblem of communal harmony. Baba Ghulam Shah, who was born in Rawalpindi, Pakistan, made Shahdara his house and Sikhs, Muslims and Hindus visit this shrine for offering prayers and seeking the blessings of Pir (Saint). Ladakh has a captivating barren landscape and attracts innumerable tourists who are keen to experience the lush atmosphere which forms the background to several monasteries and monastic festivals here.

CHALLENGES OF TOURISM INDUSTRY IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR

INFRASTRUCTURAL CHALLENGES OF TOURISM INDUSTRY

To a greater degree than most activities, Travel and tourism depends on a wide range of infrastructure services- airports, roads, railheads and ports, as well as basic infrastructure services required by hotels, restaurants, shops and recreation facilities (e.g. telecommunications and utilities). It is the combination of tourism and good infrastructure that underpins the economic, environmental and social benefits. It is important to balance any decision to develop an area for tourism against the need to preserve fragile or threatened environments and cultures. However, once a decision has been taken where an area is appropriate for near tourism development or that an existing tourist site should be developed further, then good infrastructure will be essential to

sustain the quality, economic viability and growth of travel and Tourism. Good infrastructure will also be a key factor in the industry's ability to manage visitors flow in ways that do not affect the natural or built heritage, nor counteract against local interest.

If travel and tourism is not managed well, it can have a detrimental effect- it can damage fragile environments and destroy local cultures. The challenge is to manage the future growth of the industry so as to minimize its negative impacts on the environment and host communities whilst maximizing the benefits it brings in terms of jobs, wealth and support for local culture and industry, and protection of the built and natural environment.

ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES OF TOURISM INDUSTRY

As tourism increases, environmental and socio-economic impacts can also be expected to increase. Environmental pollution poses a serious threat to life on earth not only in industrial areas but also in areas where there is a great concentration of tourists. The areas with tourists' concentration are dumping ground for municipal and industrial waste. In the tourist areas various diseases are often transmitted by contaminated food. Locals of the area mainly face the severity of problem as during the peak period the demand of public services reaches saturation point, there is generally shortage of water. Thus unclean environment due to piled garbage and lots of pollution takes place.

Tourism's potential for improving environmental conservation and community well-being is nevertheless considerable. The key to accessing this potential is the direct involvement of local communities within a climate of supportive regional or national policy. Policy makers, non-governmental organizations, and other stakeholders must therefore work in coordination to create opportunities that center on local communities, promote conservation efforts and link conservation with enterprise development.

NEED TO REVIEW TOURISM

Tourism is perhaps the only sector which starts paying off immediately as it has no gestation period. The other developmental activities like roads, railways, construction, mega projects etc take time to complete, function and pay-off. Sometimes these projects are delayed due to displacement, land acquisition, environmental problem etc. But in case of tourism no such delays take place and people are benefited immediately. For instance,

as soon as a tourist steps out of his/her house, the benefits start flowing in terms of his spending on taxi, hotel, shopping, travel agent etc. till he/she reaches back.

Commenting on the estimated growth figures on tourism arrived at in a study conducted by ASSOCHAM (The Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India) and Yes Bank, the survey recommends that Jammu and Kashmir State should gear up itself by putting in place all tourism related activities well in time so that tourists can enjoy their tour to state. The study has made a specific mention of J&K because as Indian tourist and travel industry grows, tourism sector and its allied sectors in Jammu and Kashmir will also grow since Jammu and Kashmir is one of the major tourist centres of India. The Ministry of Tourism, Govt. of India has also launched a special program called “HUNAR SE ROZGAR” which offers short but quality training course covering food and beverages services, food production, housekeeping utility, bakery etc. for creation of employable skill among youth who are in the age group of 18 to 28 years. Recently a program has been launched for imparting skills in driving and stone masonry also.

The central Govt. has already formed various working groups to generate employment, Confidence building measures etc. Hence, both state and central governments are conscious of the prospects of tourism sector in J&K and are therefore working tirelessly to capitalize on this potential sector.

CONCLUSION

Tourism is the life line of Jammu and Kashmir and all possible efforts need to be undertaken for retaining, maintaining and sustaining it. Tourism can play an effective role in integrating the entire universe. Tourism opens up new window for resources, both investment generation and revenue generation leading to employment generation as well as socio-economic development of the local populace. Even though tourism creates jobs and contributes significantly to economic growth, it is not automatically a solution for poverty reduction. Therefore, it is important for government of the state, local investors and other stakeholders to actively participate in tourism and its related activities. The local workforce can also help by engaging and encouraging the use of local companies for the provision of transport, services and food in order to assist in alleviating local poverty. The different terrains of the State coupled with law-and-order problems have contributed to poor connectivity in the region. The rail-road mix of transport in the state

is very low. There is dire need to build alternative roads in some places to ensure better connectivity. There is also a need to upgrade many of the existing roads from two lanes to four lanes. The State, sparsely populated and scattered as it is, needs more airports and better air connectivity as well.

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