

TOURISM INDUSTRY AND PILGRIMAGE TOURISM IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

Travel and tourism is the fastest growing industry in India. Tourism is a growing market and is showing tremendous growth in the current scenario. Tourism makes an enormous contribution to local economies through job creation and sustainable development. Tourism in Jammu and Kashmir is one of the most important sectors of the economy. Being the largest service industry, tourism is a significant contributor to the state GDP, earns foreign exchange for the country, provides widespread employment, yields tax revenue etc. Jammu and Kashmir has immense potential for Pilgrimage tourism also. Therefore, it attracts large number of pilgrims from various parts of India. Pilgrimage tourism thus provides an extra boost to the state's economy.

The present study attempts to study the contribution of tourism industry to the state's economy and also the potential and impact of pilgrimage tourism as well as challenges which the tourism industry is facing in Jammu and Kashmir.

Keywords: Foreign exchange; Economy; Employment; Pilgrimage tourism

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 is the most vibrant tertiary activity and a multi-billion dollar industry in Jammu and Kashmir. Tourism is the right vehicle for a developing the state's economy. The value-added effect of tourism is increasing. The role of tourism is essential in the economic development of the state. Tourism industry employs a large number of people, both skilled and unskilled. Hotels, travel agency, transport including airlines benefit a lot from this industry. Tourism promotes national integration. It generates foreign exchange and promotes cultural activities as well as traditional handicrafts sector.

Jammu and Kashmir is one of the popular tourist destinations in Asia. The tourism in Jammu and Kashmir offers a wide array of places to see. The delighting backwaters, hill stations and landscape make J&K a beautiful tourist destination. Historical monuments, forts, places of

religious importance, hill resorts, etc. add to the grandeur of the state. Thus, they attract tourists from all over the world.

Jammu and Kashmir especially Kashmir valley offers various categories of tourism. These include adventure tourism, medical tourism, water rafting, skiing, religious tourism, etc. Jammu and Kashmir has a composite culture. There is a harmonious blend of art, religion and philosophy. Religions like Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, and Sikhism etc. has co-existed in J&K since hundreds of years.

Tourism has now become a significant industry in J&K, contributing enormously to the state's economy and providing employment to a large number of people. Additionally, J&K is also likely to become a major hub for medical tourism if timely steps are taken by the government authorities to exploit this opportunity as well.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The present study has following specific research objectives:

1. To study the potential and employment opportunities of Tourism Industry in Jammu and Kashmir
2. To assess the impact and challenges of pilgrimage tourism in Jammu and Kashmir
3. To assess the impact of tourism Industry on Jammu and Kashmir's economy and environment
4. To find out the major challenges and problems of Tourism Industry in Jammu and Kashmir
5. To provide suggestions for the full exploitation and development of Tourism Industry in Jammu and Kashmir

METHODOLOGY

The study is mainly based upon the collection of secondary data. The secondary data was collected from various sources of publications such as Magazines, journals, Research articles, Internet and published and unpublished records of Ministry of Tourism Government of India and J&K tourism.

Potential of Tourism Industry in Jammu and Kashmir

Travel and tourism have been important social activities of human beings from ancient times. Tourism has become one of the world's largest and fastest growing economic activities. Its growth has impact on employment, foreign currency earnings, balance of payments, and the economy in general.

Jammu and Kashmir is known for its scenic landscape all over the world. Tourism forms an integral part of the state's economy. The state of Jammu and Kashmir has immense potential for tourism from both domestic as well as international tourists there are a number of locations which are untapped and can be developed as major tourist destinations.

Tourism being one of the state's major industries has played an important role for developing the economy, particularly in the Valley and Ladakh regions. The industry has given jobs to a very large number of people and has generated economic activities in the

primary, secondary and tertiary sectors in the state, which owes dependence to a large extent to this industry.

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.

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. (See Table 1)

Table 1. J&K's Share in Foreign Arrivals to India

Year	India	J&K	Percentage Share
2004	2537282	7806	0.31
2005	2384364	24330	1.02
2006	3457477	41000	1.19
2007	3918160	44345	1.13
2008	4447167	46087	1.04

Table 1. J&K's Share in Foreign Arrivals to India (Contd....)

Year	India	J&K	Percentage Share
2009	5081504	53053	1.04
2010	5356966	55000	1.03
2011	5167699	51255	0.97

Source: M/O Tourism, GOI

Heritage Tourism in Jammu and Kashmir

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.

Scope of Leisure Tourism in Jammu and Kashmir

The state's leisure tourism potential is well recognized. However, the number of destinations developed has remained practically static for the past few decades. This not only causes congestion and pressure on natural resources of these regions but is also a potential recipe for unbalanced growth. As mentioned earlier, incentives to the private sector are area specific and this list is now being reviewed by the state government which is welcome. Some potential tourist circuits are Mughal Road circuit which will require development of heritage sites along the road, Katra-Patnitop, Sansar-Dessa, Kapran-Pehalgam circuit, lake circuit in Ladakh, Samba-Mansar circuit and development of Srinagar city as a destination. Border tourism provides yet another option to attract tourists and to start with a project has been approved for developing the Suchetgarh border on the lines of the Wagah border. There is a strong case for exploring this in the PPP mode for the locations.

The other strategy that can give quick returns is to attract religious tourists of Jammu to visit Jammu city and also visit Srinagar and Ladakh for leisure tourism. The former requires development of recreational activities within Jammu like investment in water sports, creation of shopping malls, cultural festivals, craft melas and exhibitions as potential tourist magnets. The latter requires faster connectivity which in the case of Srinagar can be through a luxury Volvo bus service to be operated by the state government. While for Ladakh it would mean persuading the activities to introduce a Jammu-Ladakh flight at least 2-3 times a week to begin with. Kashmir could also attract tourists by launching innovative fruit tourism during the periods of harvesting.

Potential of Foreign Exchange Earnings From Tourism

From tourism perspective, Jammu and Kashmir has always been one among the favorite places of visit not only for domestic tourists but for the foreign tourists as well. There has been an upward trend in terms of the number of foreign tourists visiting the State since last five years and the trend is expected to continue to boost the economy of the State.

Tourism is an important sector of Indian economy and contributes substantially in the country's foreign exchange earnings (FEEs). Foreign exchange earnings from tourism, in Rupee terms, during 2011, were Rs 77591 Crore, with a growth of 19.6%, as compared to the foreign exchange earnings of Rs 64889 Crore during 2010.

During 2011, foreign tourist arrivals in India were 6.29 million, with a growth rate of 8.9% over 2010. Foreign tourist arrivals in India during 2010 were 6.29 million, with a growth of 8.9% over 2010. Foreign tourist arrivals in India during 2010 were 5.78 million as compared to the foreign tourist arrivals of 5.17 million during 2009, showing a growth of 11.8%.

Problems of Tourism Industry in Jammu and Kashmir

Tourism industry in Jammu and Kashmir is still hampered by several problems like-

- Poor road connectivity and transportation facilities
- Lack of basic hygienic amenities at halting points
- Non-standardization of rates and fares
- Lack of sound marketing and promotion strategies
- Poor maintenance of heritage sites
- Issues regarding security and harassment
- Lack of passionate and trained professionals
- Inadequate capacity
- Costly travel- soaring fuel surcharges, poor flight management etc.
- Lack of supportive infrastructure- bad roads, improper health and hygiene, communication gaps, etc.
- Gap between demand and supply of manpower
- Lapses in security and safety- incidents of tout and harassment of tourist in some places

- Uneven progress-slow growth of village tourism, lack of information about tourist profile etc.
- Untrained Guides
- Poor administration and management

Tourism problems are more common at tourist circuits besides in rural areas of Jammu and Kashmir. These areas are rich in natural beauty, but they often lack basic infrastructure and accommodation for tourists. It is very essential to promote tourism strategically both at national as well as at the international level. However, the tourism departments are always cash strapped. There is general apathy towards work along with aging manpower which never works in favor of promotional activities. What we need today is dynamic manpower that is committed to take up tourism as a career and workup to make India a safe tourist destination. Thus, privatization of tourism sector can help to fill the gap by providing efficient and highly skilled manpower and develop the necessary infrastructure to exploit the booming tourism sector in Jammu and Kashmir.

Pilgrimage Tourism in Jammu and Kashmir

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 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.(see Table 2)

Table 2. Tourists' arrival from 2004 to 2010 in Jammu and Kashmir

Year	Amar-nath Ji	Kashmir Domestic Tourists	Foreign	Jammu Domestic	Ladakh Domestic	Foreign	Total
2004	400000	358000	19000	6100000	13000	22000	7724000
2005	388000	585702	19680	6251998	13781	24665	8315654

Table 2. Tourists' arrival from 2004 to 2010 in Jammu and Kashmir (Contd....)

Year	Amar-nath Ji	Kashmir Domestic Tourists	Foreign	Jammu Domestic	Ladakh Domestic	Foreign	Total
2006	265000	412879	20009	6950573	17822	26078	8434149
2007	213565	417264	24576	7222318	22102	28477	8634286
2008	498075	550100	22000	6576000	39000	33000	8860350
2009	373419	520454	20809	7657000	48127	30446	9643517
2010	458046	698564	24376	8239474	54684	21371	10753556

Promotion of Inter-Faith Harmony and Brotherhood

The culture of Kashmir or kashmiriyat as it is known is a synthesis of different religions. And kashmiri society has been a microcosm, reflecting the essence of this beautiful synthesis.

Poonch, one of the smallest districts in the state, is known for promoting inter-faith harmony. This is most visible at the shrine of Sufi Saint Mira Baksh, which is located close to the India-Pakistan border. Sufism has drawn on and influenced the practice of both Hinduism and Islam in India. In doing so, its practioners have attacracted people of all faiths as followers over centuries.

This harmony between different communities is exemplified at the mausoleum of sufi saints, especially during their Urs or death anniversary.

The annual Urs of Mira Baksh is a special occasion that attracts a large number of devotees from different faiths who believe that whoever pays obeisance at the shrine on the occasion would be blessed.

People of all religions Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs visit this place with devotion and trust to offer chadder (holy cloth) and pay obeisance to the saint.

The Shrine symbolizes religious equality and welcomes people from all religions. Forgetting boundaries of faith devotees gather at the shrine under one roof and forge a common bond called humanity.

Challenges of Pilrimage Tourism in Jammu and Kashmir

Katra is the transit point for the famous Mata Vaishnov Devi Shrine but due to lack of any interesting tourist circuit or activities within Jammu, the pilgrims do not generate significant business for the tourism industry there. A number of budget travelers do not even use the hotels or restaurants, preferring to cook their own food and travel by a hired bus. To encourage the pilgrims to stay longer Jammu must develop its potential alternative religious circuits like Shiv Khori- Machail. Kailash Parvat in Bederwah and Pingla Devi in Ramnagar to name a few. Improving the condition of the roads, regular state transport buses, helicopter services and budget hotel would be useful interventions.

In case of Ladakh a Buddhist circuit covering the monasteries would be an attraction to tourists from Japan, China and south Asia countries. Moreover if the Kailash Mansarovar yatra through the Damchuk route could be opened the region would benefit significantly from the tourist influx. This would need diplomatic consultations with China.

Kashmir has a number of Mosques and Darghas located at the sites of great historical significance that need to be developed and promoted. The pilgrim circuits would in addition to other infrastructure also require capacity building of the youth to act as khadims/shrine guides- a potential employment generator.

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 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.

The tourism infrastructure like wider and smooth roads, transport including provision for Airlines and Rail services, up gradation of hotels, development of tourist places in Jammu and Kashmir should be strengthened. There is dire need to build alternative roads in some places to ensure better connectivity. The State, sparsely populated and scattered as it is, needs more airports and better air connectivity as well. Steps should be taken to restore the ancient splendor of the monuments. The religious sites in all the three regions of Jammu and Kashmir need a very special focus for the development of basic infrastructure to attract pilgrims in huge numbers.

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