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Tourism sector of Jammu & Kashmir - prospectus and challenges

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Abstract

The tourism sector is playing a tremendous role in the overall development of Jammu & Kashmir State of India. With its backward and forward linkages with other sectors of the economy, like accommodation, transport, telecommunication, handicrafts etc., tourism has the potential to not only be the economy driver, but also become an effective tool for poverty alleviation and ensuring growth with equity. Infrastructure development holds the key to sustained growth in the tourism sector. Therefore, Ministry of Tourism made consistent efforts to develop quality tourist infrastructure at tourist destinations and circuits. The development of any sector in the economy needs more and more investment. Tourism sector is not an exception; it certainly needs continuous and huge investment. Jammu & Kashmir being a developing state with limited infrastructure and lack of accumulated capital seriously requires huge investment in tourist infrastructure. This paper tries to assess the existing situation of tourist infrastructure quality in Jammu & Kashmir.

Keywords: Tourism, Infrastructure, Investment, Growth and Development.

1. Introduction

In the current period, tourism has become a big business and has been considered as a fastest growing industry. This is primarily a service industry because it does not produce goods but extends services to various classes of people. Tourism can play an effective role in integrating the entire universe. Tourism opens up a new window for resources, both investments and generation, leading to employment generation as well as socio-economic development of the local populace at large. The tourism industry is identified as an important 'tiger' industry for the first decade of the current century. India's share in international tourist travel is low. Reasons are many but the main factor is that the geography and history of India are little known outside South Asia and, therefore, remain insignificant for international tourists.

The year 1846 marks the beginning of modern tourism industry in Kashmir. Prior to 1846 in ancient and medieval times tourism industry did not exist in Kashmir yet the region was thronged by a lot of sages, seers, missionaries, traders, pilgrims, adventurers etc. The year 1885 marks a turning point in the history of Kashmir as it was from this year that the British Rulers got sufficient powers to make direct intervention in the policies of the government and in tourism industry many revolutionary developments took place like the development in the means of transport and communication such as the pathway between Jammu and Srinagar was built, telephone connection was setup, aircraft was landed at Srinagar airport in 1925 etc. The State Government made concerted endeavors to develop Kashmir as an international resort. However, these efforts were thwarted due to the political developments during 1989-90. In 1987 India received 1.164 million tourists out of which Jammu and Kashmir accounted for 7.21 lac and valley alone 5.11 lac of it thereafter the tourist inflow started dwindling and the tourism almost came to a grinding halt from 1989-90 onwards. Those who depended on this industry in one or the other way suddenly found themselves without an occupation and no means of livelihood. From a total of 5.5 lac tourists in 1989, the number had diminished to 8.52 thousands in 1995, 9.98 thousands in 1996 and 16.13 thousand in 1997 due to the political developments in the valley.

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As per the data compiled from Economic Survey-2014-15, the number of tourists visited Kashmir Valley during the years 2012, 2013, 2014 was 13.09 lakhs, 11.71 lakhs and 11.68 lakhs respectively.

Tourism plays the crucial role for national economies throughout the world. The growth of tourist infrastructure is prerequisite for the development of Jammu & Kashmir economy. The tourists are attracted to the destinations not only because of the natural resource or natural beauty of the place, but because of the returns they get on the expenditure they do in the tourist place. These could be satisfaction of psychological needs like proper, safe, hassle free and affordable accommodation, good transport facilities, in and around the tourist place, good water, and hygiene and sanitation facilities. Infrastructure represents bundles of services, which are important for regional development, but are not provided sufficiently, or not at all, by a private sector, due to high degree of cost. Because of that, most infrastructure provision is determined by local government authorities. It is a well appreciated fact that tourists are highly sensitive to political instability which could threaten their personal safety & security. So apart from developing the physical tourism infrastructure in Jammu & Kashmir, political stability must be cultivated as an important factor in influencing tourism. During the second-quarter of 2012, Centre has sanctioned 14 tourism mega projects of Rs. 73.50 crore for Jammu & Kashmir. The projects are meant for creation of tourist related infrastructure, development of potential spots and conservation of heritage sites in the State. The tourist infrastructure is poor in Jammu & Kashmir. Poor tourist infrastructure impedes the expansion to tourism in two ways. First, the absence of some types of infrastructure – such as roads – provides an effective block to tourist development. Second, the absence of other types of infrastructure does not preclude tourism, but makes achieving and maintaining service standards more difficult and expensive. The failure to provide adequate bulk services to the tourist sector is alarming. Tourism infrastructure and facilities are the main priority in planning and development. The Jammu & Kashmir government has tried to invest in building basic infrastructure such as railways, highways, roads, electric power plants, water supplies, and other related facilities. With the support of central financial assistance, some basic physical infrastructure has been constructed but this is still at a very low level.

2. Objectives

The main objective of this paper is to explore possibilities for tourism prospects and challenges in J & K state and accordingly suggest measures to initiate developmental activities in the state that will step towards growth and prosperity of tourists in the entire state.

3. Methodology

The present study is descriptive and is based on the secondary information and primary information is also used as supplementary in the form of comments, interviews, observations, opinion etc. The secondary information has been collected from journals, periodicals, magazines, newspaper, books, newsletters and other available sources. The present study highlights the problems and impact of development on tourism of Jammu and Kashmir.

3.1 Tourism Sector in Jammu and Kashmir and Its Opportunities

The Jammu and Kashmir State 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 State is considered a home to famous Hindu pilgrimages, 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.

3.2 Problems Faced By Tourism Sector

The growth of tourism in Jammu & Kashmir State shows that the industry has registered an all round substantial development in the state during the last two-three decades, most of the potential, for its growth has not yet been exploited and much more is left to be desired. The limited, and rather unsatisfactory, growth of this sector in the State has been due to a number of problems it is beset with and various difficulties it has been facing. The important factors, which have limited the growth of tourism in Jammu & Kashmir, are mentioned below:

- Inadequate airline capacity, particularly during the peak tourist season, bad conditions of our airports, delays in getting the bookings, flight cancellations and delays render air travel in India nightmarish for foreign tourists.
- Due to appalling conditions of traveling by vehicles in J&K, tourists prefer to avoid unless unavoidable.
- Lack of hygienic and comfortable accommodation for the tourists, in general, but reasonable good accommodation for low spending middle class tourists in particular, render tourism unattractive. Absence of this hampers the smoothness, of long distance travels.
- There is absence of an upto date information systems with quick retrieval facilities thus causes inconvenience to tourists.

- Another major factor inhibiting the growth of tourism is the seasonality of the industry with the busy season being limited to few months.
- Lack of an integrated tourism promotion programme during the plan periods has hindered the growth of tourism.
- Next factor is the failure of the mandarins of tourism to quickly adopt to the changing environment, for example the temporary closure of Jammu and Kashmir to tourists and socio-political in other northern states of the country rendering them unattractive to tourists, by developing and promoting alternative tourists destinations in South India.
- A lukewarm attitude towards the domestic tourism due to the emphasis placed by the authorities on foreign tourism has been another limiting factor. It cannot be forgotten that domestic tourists have its own importance and its development provides a sound basis for the growth of international tourism.

3.3 Tourism Sector-Need to Review

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 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 centers 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.

4. 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.

5. References

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