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A historical analysis of tourism in Jammu and Kashmir

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Abstract

Almost in every economy of the world, tourism sector plays a vital role in the contribution of generating revenue, employment opportunities and in economy's GDP. In Jammu & Kashmir state also, the tourism sector is playing a huge role in the overall development of State's economy. Kashmir has rightly been described as "Heaven on Earth" for its breath taking beauty throughout the world. Tourism sector has a great potential in Kashmir and it also provides immense business opportunities for the people in the Kashmir region. This paper attempts to examine the potential, opportunities and challenges of tourism sector in Jammu and Kashmir.

Keywords: Tourism, employment opportunities, economic development, J&K

Introduction

Tourism industry has become a very fastest growing industry in the modern period. It is recognized as an important "tiger" industry for the first decade of the current century. Tourism does not produce goods, but it is mainly a service industry and extends services to different classes of people. It consists of the activities undertaken through 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 discover new places within one's own country or outside and try to find a change of environment has been practiced from ancient times. Almost in every economy of the world, tourism sector plays a vital role in the contribution of generating revenue, employment opportunities and in economy's GDP. It provides opportunities to local populace to increase their living standards by increasing employment opportunities Sati, N. and Mansoori, I. K. (2012)^[3]. According to the estimates from the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) in 2011, tourism generates around 270.7 million jobs globally and accounts for over 10% of global Gross Domestic Product (GDP). It also plays an key 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 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: The present study has following specific research objectives:

- 1) To provide an introduction regarding Tourism Industry in J&K.
- 2) To identify potential and major challenges & problems of Tourism Industry in J&K.
- 3) To provide suggestions for the full utilization and expansion of Tourism Industry in J&K.

Methodology: The present study is descriptive and is based on the secondary information. The secondary information was collected from various Journals, Periodicals, Magazines, Newspapers, Newsletters, Research articles, Books, Internet and published and unpublished records of Ministry of Tourism Government of India and J&K tourism.

Rationale of the study: Jammu and Kashmir is the Northern most State of the India.

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Geographically it is a unique State with three different regions within the State i.e. Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh. Agriculture, Horticulture, Animal husbandry, Forestry and Tourism are the main source of economy of the J&K State. Among all industries, tourism is an important industry in the state. Tourism is considered to be economic bonanza for J & K state because industrial development is very limited to hilly terrains. J&K is one of the popular tourist destinations in Asia. The tourism in J&K 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. 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. Being a labour-intensive industry, the scope of employment is very vast. Tourism is regarded as multi-segmented industry, therefore provides different types of jobs like hotel managers, receptionists, guides, tour operators, travel agents, photographers & many other jobs which are required to strengthen the tourism. 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. The state is bestowed with beauty & rich forests, natural lakes, fresh water. The state of Jammu & Kashmir is known all over the world for its beautiful valleys, lakes, snow-capped peaks, invigorating climate, valleys, cool climate, opportunities for trekking fishing, skiing & number of archaeological, historical, cultural & religious places, cool climate & hospitable people. J&K 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. The Hindu holy shrine of Amarnath in Kashmir attracts millions of Hindu devotees every year and Vaishno Devi shrine in Jammu region also attract tens of thousands of Hindu devotees every year. The wondrous state of J&K is bestowed with holy spots that make it an ideal pilgrim destination 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 blessed with both tangible and the intangible heritage which should be incorporated into the wider tourism circuit. As stated above, the state of J&K 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. Its impact is visible in the service industry sectors, such as transport, hospitality, horticulture, handicraft and small scale industry. Kashmir is popularly known as "Paradise on Earth". For centuries Kashmir has been centre of attraction. Kashmir is also known as "Switzerland of East" and is famous for its wealth of beauty, its snow-capped mountains, rivers and fresh water lakes offer tourists ample opportunities for trekking, rafting, skiing & mountaineering. Some notable tourist places in Kashmir Valley are Dal Lake, Mughal Gardens, Nishat Bagh, Gulmarg, Yusmarg, Pahalgam etc. Kashmiri's natural landscape has made it one of the popular destinations for

adventure tourism in South Asia. Jammu is also known for its ancient temples, Hindu shrines, gardens and forts. 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, Sudh Mahadev Temple, Shiva Temple, Peer Kho Cave Temple, Ranbireswar Temple and the Purmandal Temple Complex 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. Ladakh is home to the minority Buddhist community in the state. They have preserved their unique culture for the past hundreds of years. The major points of attraction are the Leh Palace, Namgyal Tsemo. Gompa, Sankar Gompa, Shanti Stupa, and Soma Gompa. It has diverse practices in religion, rites and rituals, fairs and festivals, landscape and people, language and culture. 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. 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. 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. Pre 1989, Kashmir was paradise in the true sense. The ongoing armed conflict that erupted in early 1990s has hit hard the tourism sector causing the loss of tourist appetite for this particular destination. By 1991 there was a virtual shut down to tourism sector, which impacted the economy of the entire state and percolated down to every house hold. This state attracted over million tourists in the year 1988. With resurgence of violence in the state, the number of tourists has dwindled considerably over last 2

decades. Tourism, one of the main Kashmir's main industries has suffered tremendously due to violence in the region. The state has lost billions of dollars in tourism revenue. It is estimated that state lost 27 million tourists from 1989 to 2002 leading to tourism revenue loss of us \$ 3.6 billion. 1987, the last big season before the violence started, tourism accounted for approximately 10 per cent of the state's income. During the next 23 years of unrest, tourism contributed virtually nothing to state's economy. As a result of this specific incident negative travel advisories to visit Kashmir were issued by various foreign countries. This adversely affected the tourist revenue generated by foreign visitors. Such has been impact of conflict in the valley that its main city Srinagar was once declared as the most threatened site in India by the World Monuments Fund (WMF), placing it on the 2008 list of Most Endangered sites (Winter and Punjab, 2010). From 8th May 2016 violent incidents certainly deterred people across India and abroad from coming to Kashmir valley, bad mouth about the current situation in the valley to keep the visitors away. 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 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.

Challenges: 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:

1. Costly travel-soaring fuel surcharges, poor flight management etc.
2. Inadequate capacity.
3. Issues regarding security and harassment.
4. Lack of basic hygienic amenities at halting points.
5. Lack of passionate and trained professionals.
6. Lack of sound marketing and promotion strategies.
7. Lack of supportive infrastructure- bad roads, improper health and hygiene, communication gaps, etc.
8. Lapses in security and safety-incidents of tout and harassment of tourist in some places.
9. Non-standardization of rates and fares.
10. Poor maintenance of heritage sites.
11. Poor road connectivity and transportation facilities.

12. Uneven progress-slow growth of village tourism, lack of information about tourist profile etc.

13. Untrained Guides

Need to review tourism industry in Jammu and Kashmir:

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 payoff. 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. The Central and State governments have to form special groups to generate employment and prospects of tourism sector in Jammu and Kashmir and has to work tirelessly to capitalize on this potential sector.

Recommendations of the study: 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 Hans, V.B. (2006). 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. 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. The above analysis reveals that the Tourism sector in Jammu and Kashmir suffered a sudden downfall due to the massive political disturbance which stuck the state in late 1980's. Even though tourism creates jobs and contributes significantly to economic growth, it is not automatically a solution for poverty reduction, 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. Steps should be taken to restore the ancient splendor of the monuments. All it requires is intelligent planning and iron will. Finally, Kashmir is an area with great tourism potential & is a leading edge of

development. Kashmir is considered as a most elite destination in the world. Tourism is the main industry in the state. It is regarded as multi-segmented industry therefore, provides different types of jobs like hotel managers, guides, travel agents and others. The enchanting geographical landscape & range of ecosystems leaves a lasting impression on the tourists in Kashmir. From the above finding it's clear that tourism is an important sector of development for Jammu and Kashmir economy. Following are some suggestions with regard to future development of tourism in Jammu and Kashmir.

1. Development of a strong network among government and various agencies, which would work towards remarketing Kashmir tourism on modern basis.
2. Identifying new tourist spots will go a long way in enhancing tourism potential of the valley.
3. Jammu and Kashmir tourism needs enough measures to provide proper security to tourists so that a sense of safeness will be felt by the tourists.
4. Jammu and Kashmir is one of the best destinations with regard to some new areas which include Adventure tourism, Medical tourism, polo tourism etc., which needs to be explored and thus giving a new sense of hope to tourism.
5. Tourism should be shifted from being a seasonal commotion to all year around activity. Proper tourism marketing of each season can increase the tourist activity manifold.
6. There is scope of development of Pilgrimage, Heritage and Adventure tourism in the region.
7. There are many prospects for development of ecotourism.
8. Training and development program for creation of local skills inventory.
9. There is a need to develop tourism infrastructure.
10. Sensitization program for community participation in tourism activities.

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 socioeconomic development of the local populace.

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