

A Profile of Tourism Industry of Kashmir

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Abstract

The paper profiles Tourism Industry with special focus on: its composition, salient features, worldwide trends, features and structure of J & K Tourism Industry. The paper also reviews Tourism Policies in general and Tourism policy of J & K in detail. The paper documents concerns, causes and future prospectus of Tourism industry. The employment scenario and future trends are also highlighted. The main objective is to present backdrop information for understanding the main inferences of the present work in proper perspective.

Key Words: Tourism, Employment opportunities, Tourism Policy, Trends & Policy Measures

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Introduction

Tourism has great capacity to create large scale employment of diverse kind – from the most specialized to the unskilled; propel economic growth; and earn foreign exchange for the country (Economic Survey 2015-16). Tourism is such an activity in which all of us have participated at some part of time, leading to manifold increase in its activities and is ever expanding sector. As observed by Lett, J. (1989), tourism accounts for the single largest peace movement of people across cultural boundaries of the world. The industry involves lot of movement of people both within and across international boundaries, lead to economic benefits to all concerned.

According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), Travel & Tourism continued its resilience in 2016, generating US\$7.6 trillion (10.2 per cent of global GDP) and 292 million jobs, equivalent to 1 in 10 jobs in the global economy. The sector accounted for 6.6 per cent of total global exports and almost 30 per cent of total global service exports. The latest World Tourism Barometer of the United Nation's World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) (March,

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2017 edition) also shows that international tourist arrivals reached a total of 1.2 billion in 2016, 47 million more than in the previous year, though the growth rate of 3.9 per cent was slightly lower than in 2015 (4.5 per cent). 9.24 As per the UNWTO, International Tourist Arrivals to India (including NRI arrivals) was 13.3 million in 2015 with a growth of 1.4 per cent, while as per the Ministry of Tourism data Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) (excluding NRIs) during 2015 and 2016 were 8.0 million and 8.8 million with growth of 4.5 per cent in 2015 and 9.7 per cent in 2016. Foreign Exchange Earnings (FEEs) through Tourism, in US\$ terms during 2016 were US\$ 22.9 billion with a growth of 8.8 per cent over 2015. But alas if you think of Kashmir Valley, year 2016 was the worst that could hit us, you are wrong. Tourism-wise, year 2017 has been worse than last year.

Tourism in Kashmir

J&K is the sixth largest state of India occupying 6.76% of the country's geographical area. The state has abundant water resources in view of its blessed riverine geography. The state is surrounded by mountains except in the South-West side. A major portion of the state's terrain is hilly and its height from sea level varies from 3000 feet to 22740 feet. The tourism tag has placed always the State of J&K in the limelight at the national as well as international levels. The tourism products of Kashmir are well known throughout world. The efforts are being made by all stakeholders to increase the tourist inflow in the state as with more the arrival of tourists, more economic activity gets generated which has multiplier effect on the income levels of the large chunk of population dependent on this sector.

The purpose of travel and tourism is manifold like leisure, recreational, holiday, health, education, religion and sports. Kashmir has distinctive importance in world to have all the above forms of travel.

Composition of Kashmir Tourism

Kashmir is famous for its world recognized attractions, climate, scenic beauty, land forms, marine areas, flora and fauna, special environmental features and parks and conservation areas. The components of tourism or four A's are attractions, accessibility, accommodation, and amenities. Lets evaluate Kashmir tourism on said A's. The key attractions are snow covered mountains, hill stations like Gulmarg, Pahalgam, Sonamarg, Yusmarg, Arhbal, Ducksum,

Doothpathri, Lolab, Naranag, SinthenTop, Gurez Watlab, Peer Ke Gali, etc, pleasing view of natural meadows like Lolab Bagus Valley. The Gardens which have become attractions to tourists from decades are mugal gardens (Shalimar, Nishat, CheshmaShahi, Harwan and Asia number one Tulip Garden) etc. The lakes and springs are world famous Dal, Walur, Manasbal, Nigeen, Gangabal, Mansar and KausarNag etc.

The accessibility criterion is partially missing in Kashmir. It ascertains its popularity, but lack of measures by stake holders has shaken this sector. The unorganized mechanism with regard tour and travel has added the problem. The specialized transport facility for tourist is not available. The tourism products are not easily accessible to tourists.

The accommodation in terms of hotels, restaurants, parking area partially suffices the present demand.

The amenities available here in terms of medical aid, foreign currency exchange, safety and security, cafeteria, washroom, sign boards, dustbins, walking paths, and lighting facility are also available only at few places.

The tourism activities at Kashmir are directly related to arrival and type of tourists. The activities provided by all stake holders include boat riding, river rafting, horse riding, trekking and mountaineering, swimming, cultural shows, folk dances, heritage ride and food festivals. Hence more arrival of tourist from multiple destinations have multiplier effect on economic activities in region.

The Department of Tourism, J&K is the main developmental, promotional and regulatory arm of the J&K Government. Its main role comprises of overall planning and execution of schemes for the development, up-gradation and improvement of the tourism infrastructure in different parts of the State. It support to the private sector industry in the form of incentives for setting up various tourist facilities as well as for promotion and marketing of their products and services. It also is nodal agency for promotion and marketing of various tourist destinations and products of the state. It also regulates the travel-trade by enforcement of provisions of J&K Registration of Tourist Trade Act. The commercial activities in the tourism sector from the Government side are looked after by a public sector corporation know as the Jammu and Kashmir Tourism Development Corporation (J&K TDC). It operates and manages Government accommodation in

Tourist Centers at Srinagar and Jammu, and the Tourist Complexes, Hotels, Tourist Bungalows in various resorts. The Corporation also runs a Travel Division, which organizes package tours to various parts of the State and also arranges transport facilities for the tourists. Other related organizations of the Tourism Department are the Jammu and Kashmir State Cable Car Corporation (J&K CCC) and the Sher-e-Kashmir International Convention Centre (SKICC). The Cable Car Corporation operates a Gondola Lift at Gulmarg. It is also planning to set up similar facilities in different tourist resorts of the State. The Convention Centre has Conference facilities of International standards. The Royal Springs Golf Course Society (RSGC) and Jawahar Institute of Mountaineering & Water Sports (GOI organization) are actively involved in tourist related activities too. The revenue generated by them is increasing manifold and reached from rupees 2657 lakh to rupees 4692.92 lakhs in 2012.

The destinations which were covered for exploitation of tourism potential in the last few years by creation of Development Authorities as against the earlier focus on five. The offbeat destination in Kashmir division like Gurez, Lolab-Bungus, Kokernag-Sinthantop, Verinag-Doda, Bhaderwah-Achabal, which are being developed through area specific Tourism Development Authorities will be further developed and promoted so that the tourist footfalls in equitably distributed. The authorities established earlier have given remarkable results, the authorities were Gulmarg, Pahalgam, Sonamarg, Yousmarg, Dodpathri, Verinag, Kokernag, Aharbal and Manasbal. The Master Plans under preparation for the other destination are at several of stages of preparation. BOCA functioning for regulating development/ building construction. The long awaited Tourism Policy has been drafted and has been circulated among the stake holders and the departments for seeking their views and comments, before its adoption.

Recent Development of Infrastructure

The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) estimates, an investment of 10 lakh in travel and tourism industry will generate about 90 jobs which are much higher than its competing sectors like Agriculture and Manufacturing which generate 45 & 13 jobs per 10 lakh respectively. Therefore stake holders especially Government of J & K have taken all investment measures like The reconstruction of Tourist Reception Centre (TRC) Srinagar as Tourist City Centre, taken up for execution at a cost of Rs. 9.76 crore is at advance stage of completion. The construction of TRC at Kokernag at a cost of Rs. 109.60 lac has been completed with main component such as 8

rooms, Hall etc. The development of Bagh-i-Gulistan park at Jogigund Acchabal, Kokernag has been completed at a cost of Rs. 380.00 lac having components such as Huts (4 nos) fencing of garden, landscaping etc. The development of Shrine Complex at Bab Reshi Tangmarg (Phase I) Gulmarg has been completed at Rs. 121.63 lac with main components like Tourist Reception Centre, Toilet Block, Parking Wayside facilities etc. The integrated development of Bosian Bungus-Lolab –Drungyari Reshwari Gurez by Directorate of Tourism Kashmir has been completed at a cost of Rs. 486.90 lac with the components like 2 rooms Guest house (5 Nos), Aarmagah/Shelter Sheds, Tourist information Centre, development of Camping sites (3 Nos) etc. The development of Resort area at Gulmarg has been completed at a cost of Rs. 398.26 lac 146 with main components like 2 Bed Room huts (13 Nos), Toilet Blocks (10 Nos) etc. The societies for Jammu Tawi Golf Course and Lidder Valley golf Course has been set up. The amount of Rs. 4.50 crore for SPS Museums Srinagar has been got released by Ministry of Culture GOI against the agreed allocation of Rs. 6.00 crore. The CFA of Rs. 0.65 crore has been released for Abhinav Theatre and Tagore Hall from Ministry of Culture, GOI. The CFA of about Rs. 35.00 crore has been released by MOT, GOI under PIDDC Scheme for creation tourist related infrastructure. The SRO 21 has been issued in supersession of SRO 88 dated 25th March 2008 has been issued by Government to exempt payment of entry tax leviable under the said Act, goods imported for construction, expansion and modernization of Hotels. The SRO 22 has been issued to exempt payment of entry tax leviable under the said act on furniture, office equipment/good imported into the State by Hotelier(s) as replacement for furniture/office equipment/goods destroyed during unprecedented floods of September 2014.

The hospitality courses under Broad basing scheme sanctioned for six ITI's viz Jammu, Srinagar, Baramulla, Anantnag, Kishtwar and Udhampur by Ministry of Tourism, Govt. of India. The scheme is providing funding for creation of all necessary infrastructures (buildings as well equipments) required for such courses.

Tourism acts as a catalyst in the development of valley. The development of tourism will lead to the progress in rural / backward regions (Smith Stephen, 1989). It is often seen that most of the scenic and beautiful destinations of a valley are located in the rural areas which have a significant contribution in the economic development of these areas. Therefore further infrastructure is needed to such areas.

Problems in Kashmir Tourism

The present times witnessed Kashmir tourism in grim, even though it is accepted fact that incidents took place all around the world yet tourism survives and flourishes. Kashmir has both internal and external challenges to its tourism sector. Media has maligned Kashmir's over all images. The situations are created to periodically to destroy peaceful atmosphere here.

Tourism failed in 1990's, after Kargil war, due to uprising in 2008 & 2010, and after devastating floods of 2014 followed by unrest in 2016. This happened due to both internal and external forces. The internal threats include damage caused by touts, cheating by local facilitators, dishonest trading, unhealthy competition, inadequate capacity, costly travel especially lack of supportive air traffic in peak season, lack of supportive infrastructure, lapse in security and safety and uneven developmental progress.

A quality and sufficient quantity of water is essential for keeping alive the tourist industry. The use of water required for washing, drinking, sewerage and sanitation goes on increasing as the number of tourist's increases especially in Dal Lake. The pollution of water adds to the prevailing insanitary conditions and the diseases in densely populated Srinagar.

The tradition of escapism and debris kept lying for long time for developmental activities here in Kashmir distract the tourists to valley, national highway is living example. A great quantity of fish raised in the Dal lake which has become polluted water body to meet an increasing demand in houseboats, restaurants and hotel on Dal banks suffered huge loss in past and seems no immediate measures from authorities.

Future Prospectus and Policy Suggestions

The business of tourism is constantly changing and evolving. It keeps on reinventing itself as per the needs and desires of tourist. Tourists who came here are highly influenced with kind behaviour of local people; most of them expressed that Kashmir is safest place for women.

The sector has potential to generate more employment; foreign exchange brings people closer together and has a great impact upon area development within the country. The prospering tourism sustains the revival of traditional skills, local arts, craft work, activities of the performing

folk artists. The tourism, traders and all other associations concerned must unite for common good and adopt a mutual strategy to fight back media engaged in damaging the interest of Kashmir. As we know the business impact of tourism has been tremendous on travel, trade and hospitality, handicrafts, carpet, paper Mache, and over all horticulture.

The tourism related activities available here in Kashmir is shikara boat ride, night in houseboat, skiing, golfing, rafting, mountain bikers, trekking, Para-gliding, horse riding etc. Hence a complete package, but involving maximum number of tourists in these activities, the special schemes need to be taken up by stake holders for air, road and railway transport which will definitely add on tourism sector in Kashmir.

The urgent need is to explore special environmental features, unusual geological forms, caves and springs. The schemes should be introduced for road expeditions, trekking and camping from all stake holders. The need arises to explore new tourist places and connecting them to main tourist centres of valley, thus saving mass tourism to few selected places. The cultural resources in terms of archaeological, historical and cultural sites need to be explored and linked with art, dance, music, drama and painting etc. Tourism need to link with major economic activities like horticulture (especially apple, dry fruits), saffron, apiculture, handicrafts, carpet weaving etc. This is well established fact that tourism provides impetus to allied sectors like handicrafts, handlooms, horticulture and transport. The religious tourism needs to be explored and more professionalism is required in it, as we know it has immense scope either from Amaranth yatra or Hazratbal shrine. The urban tourism in Kashmir had great scope ahead; township in valley is enriched by heritage building, water bodies, old sculptures, shopping etc. There is immense scope for adventure tourism in valley. A national policy has to aim at a balanced spread of the culture of tourism in place of a few scattered islands of developed tourism. The encouragement of interstate package tours inclusive of the provision of budget accommodation at the wayside prime halting spots becomes obligatory. A regional policy has to take up a number of measures to avoid overcrowding at tourist places and saving them from deterioration even by co-opting private enterprise in the form of investments in socio-religious voluntary services. The charging a nominal fee for cleansing the sites or for visiting ancient monuments in place of anytime anywhere free access is as much justified. The practice of innovative tourism by keep on finding out its new types is a bold step to let not allow any single tourism reach its saturation point.

Conclusion

The world has distinctive characteristics in the form of physical and cultural features, therefore gives a unique character to the place and also helps to distinguish one place from other. Environment remains a source of tourist attraction as long as it is not damaged beyond control. But it needs a greater care in Kashmir to protect all its components from the harmful effect of mass tourism. So balance need to be created among all stake holders to think in terms of sustainable tourism. Economic benefits of tourism are always welcomed in valley, but its social effects are not easy to digest. They arouse reaction among the people living in valley, so balance need to be created. The government made all possible efforts to overcome the damage created by political uncertainty and floods. The revival of tourism sector in valley needs holistic approach from all stakeholders and government had to lead from front.

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