



# MICE TOURISM PROMOTION AND CHALLENGES IN GULMARG IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR AT UNION TERRITORY

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## ABSTRACT

Jammu and Kashmir State has a greater potential to become a major tourist destination in the world. The role of tourism in the economic development of J&K state has been an area of immense interest from policy perspective. To understand the economic impact of tourism in the J&K state, present paper tries to examine various parameters of economic development such as tourist inflow, employment generation, State Gross Domestic Product, development of infrastructure and regional development. The study is based on secondary data. Data has been collected from various sources like Ministry of Tourism Government of India, Jammu and Kashmir Tourism Development Corporation and Directorate of Tourism, Annual Economic survey of J&K, United Nations World Tourism Organization, World Travel and Tourism Council and other published research papers and official reports. We found apart from agriculture sector, tourism sector is the most popular source of income and employment generation for the J&K state economy. In the recent past, tourism industry has witnessed a tremendous surge worldwide and has become an integral part of human leisure and expedition, thus contributing to the growing global economy. Kashmir has often been compared with heaven on earth. It is most attractive destination for tourists not only in India but all over the world because of lush green valley, pleasant climate, Snow-capped Mountains, sweat springs, green meadows. While as places like Gulmarg, Phalgam, Dal Lake, Wular Lake are worth seeing tourist spots in the valley. Besides these, Shri Mata Vashino Devi, Amar Mahal place, Rangunath Temple are most attractive tourist's destination in Jammu region. Ladakh is no less important when it comes to the question of Tourism in J&K. Tourism tag has always placed state of J&K in the limelight of national as well as international scene. Efforts have been made to increase arrival of tourists in the state. However, state has witnessed ups & downs in the last thirty years of turmoil. The start of armed struggle in mid-80's created the sense of fear both within the state as well outside. The state saw worst days in its history and tourism industry was greatly harmed by both armed struggle as well as by counter operations by security forces. There was hardly any tourist who would visit the state particularly valley of Kashmir once lauded as heaven on earth. However, it was only in recent last decade when state saw its revival phenomena of tourist industry. But with the growing violence and turmoil in the Kashmir since 2015 once again have put this industry in backseats. In this background this paper will examine the phenomenal increase and decrease of tourists in the time of turmoil and peace in Jammu& Kashmir. Besides, paper will also try to examine the impact of tourism in shaping the peace and prosperity of the state.

**Key words:** Tourism, Employment, Tourist Inflow, Revenue, Infrastructure, Regional Development, Tourism potential, Business opportunity, Kashmir Tourism, Tourism Development, Tourism Policy.

## INTRODUCTION

Srinagar, April 11 (Scoop News)-Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI) initiated the cluster intervention program in the Tourism Cluster of Jammu & Srinagar (J&K) in 2021 with KPMG and Foundation for MSME Clusters, as the implementing partners in Jammu and Kashmir and launched many programs for the promotion of various activities here. The Chairman & Managing Director of SIDBI, S. Ramann said, "We have been working very closely with the Jammu and Kashmir tourism department in the union territory and

other stakeholders to ensure wider coverage and amplification of impact. The program has been focusing on promoting entrepreneurship, conservation and ecotourism awareness, adventure and MICE tourism promotion, skill and capacity building of personnel engaged in the sector.” He further said that the interventions aim to create replicable and scalable models in the cluster while strengthening the overall cluster ecosystem. We propose to organize a series of events in partnership with the Department to share the key interventions and the learning’s with all the stakeholders and promote cross-learning’s. On the first day, the team of SIDBI met Ski Patrol Guides in Gulmarg who have undergone soft skills training. Later in the afternoon, home stay at Yousmarg was inaugurated by CMD, SIDBI. Yousmarg is recognized as one of the 75 offbeat destinations by the government. Home stay entrepreneurs have been trained and facilitated under the program by SIDBI, for which the Certificate award ceremony was held and felicitated by CMD, SIDBI A formal launch of training Programme of Tour Guides to promote the downtown area of Srinagar in association with the Indian army- the programme will aim at training to provide sustainable livelihoods to the local youth Yousmarg & Srinagar. On Day 3, a formal event was held at SKICC, which was graced with the presence of senior officials from Department of Tourism and several important tourism stakeholders. The event was kicked off by inauguration of Coffee table Book, under the programme to promote MICE tourism amongst corporate and other potential tourist categories. A formal launch of the Training Program of Tour Guides to promote the downtown areas of Srinagar was also held. Felicitations of candidates trained under the capacity building training programme for Hotel staff in Srinagar also took place. The program was wrapped up by a meaningful and interaction session with key tourism stakeholders. Furthermore, unveiling of Stone Plaque to spread the message of conservation and preservation of heritage & history of the Dal Lake at Lalit Ghat, Srinagar, was also done by CMD, SIDBI. The Inauguration of Solar Units by CMD, SIDBI at Shikara Owners Association of Kashmir (SOAK) office at the Dal Lake was also organized. S. Ramann, CMD SIDBI emphasized, the solar units are a pilot intervention to demonstrate the use of renewable energy. Stay Pattern Hospitality Services, Kashmir was the event partner for the event of SIDBI. They are also further associated with SIDBI for holding training programs across the valley. Under SIDBI Cluster Intervention Program, Stay Pattern Hospitality Services will soon kick start the tour guides training program. The peace process was started in 2011 as an attempt to settle that question of ownership over Kashmir. The peace process was a slow moving one but gave some hope to the tourism sector as the number of tourists visiting the state started to pick up since its initiation.

Tourism industry in Kashmir is without its problems like Inadequate capacity, costly travel, poor organization i.e. fragmented market, lack of supportive infrastructure, lapses in security & safety, uneven progress & political instability. Lack of infrastructure has been the greatest challenge for the growth of MICE Tourism in India. The country is in need of additional convention destinations for both large as well as small meeting spaces. Kashmir Valley is one of the top tourist destinations of India. Gulmarg, one of the most popular ski resort destinations in India, is also home to the world's highest green golf course.

Jammu & Kashmir tourism chalks out plans to attract international tourists with focus on Middle East and Southeast Asian countries: In conversation with ET Travel World, GN Itoo, Director, Tourism, Kashmir said that the tourism department has gained strength and confidence after an encouraging tourist season last year as they work out plans to repeat the same success with foreign tourists and travelers from key international markets. He said that a promotional camp.

Jammu & Kashmir progresses towards future with MICE tourism, distances from being a no-go zone the emergence of Jammu and Kashmir as the top most tourist destination in the country has brought it closer to the corporate world. Many big companies are choosing scenic spots in Kashmir as destinations to hold brainstorming sessions to train their employees and deal with their clients. A terrorism-hit region which was no-go zone even for the domestic tourists till August 5, 2019, when the Centre announced its decision to abrogate Jammu and Kashmir special status and bifurcated it into two Union Territories, is fast opening up to host Meetings, Incentives, Conference, and Exhibitions (MICE) tourism. The emergence of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) as the top most tourist destination in the country has brought it closer to the corporate world. Many big companies are choosing scenic spots in Kashmir as destinations to hold brainstorming sessions to train their employees and deal with their clients.

In the past few months, top notch corporate houses have organized Advertisement meetings and events at different scenic locations in J&K and more programs have been planned in the coming months. The government has already come up with a proposal to develop the famous ski resort Gulmarg in north Kashmir on the pattern of Switzerland's Davos, a popular tourist destination which holds the annual World Economic Forum. Officials have already done the groundwork. Of 59 commercial structures like hotels and restaurants in Gulmarg, lease of 58 has already expired. The administration has announced that it would take back the land for which the allotted lease has ended and would auction it by following the Taj Hotel auction process.

Notably, during the past three years Jammu and Kashmir has taken multiple strides in every sector. Industries that were destroyed by Pakistan sponsored terrorism stand revived. Stakeholders and the officials have worked hard to put Jammu and Kashmir back on the global tourism map. For the first time in history in 2022, 1.88 crore tourists visited J&K in one year. Encouraged by the huge tourist influx residents of Union Territory have started investing in the tourism related businesses. They are setting up restaurants, hotels and other ventures to earn good money and uplift their standards of living.

Gone are the days when the separatists and Pakistan stooges active in Kashmir used to call for prolonged shutdown during summer months. During the past three years the Valley has not observed a strike for even one-day nor has witnessed any stone-pelting incident. Pakistan stooges who used to disrupt the tourism season in Kashmir by creating fear psychosis have been put behind the bars and are being dealt with according to the law of the land. When on August 5, 2019, Union Home Minister Amit Shah introduced the Bill for abrogation of Article 370 in Parliament, he mentioned in his speech that this controversial article was the root cause of terrorism and other problems in J&K, and once it's gone, the Himalayan region would turn into one of the most prosperous regions in the country. After Parliament passed the bill to scrap the so-called special status of J&K, Honorable Prime Minister Narendra Modi promised the people of the Union Territory that a new dawn has broken and it's the beginning of a new era of peace and prosperity in the region. Both the leaders have remained true to their words as J&K in the past three years has witnessed unprecedented development in every sector. MICE Definition MICE is an acronym for Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions. The main purpose of MICE events is to create a networking platform for business, industry, government, and academic communities and engage in meaningful conversations. Generally, they bring large groups together for a specific purpose. MICE is also known as the 'Meetings industry' or 'Events industry'. MICE is a sub-segment of business travel, but it can also involve a leisure component. The four elements of MICE are explained below.

(i) Meetings: - A meeting is the coming together of a group of people to discuss or exchange information. Meetings may also be seen as small-scale conferences in some regions. Examples of meetings could include annual meetings, board meetings, sales meetings, product launches, presentations, and trainings. (ii) Incentives: - Incentives are corporate-sponsored trips for employees, distributors or clients. Unlike the other types of MICE, incentives are focused on leisure rather than the business. Often, they include training and motivational session too. Companies use them to reward performance, motivate work effort and create company loyalty. (iii) Conferences: - Conferences are events where the primary activity of the attendees is to attend educational and knowledge sessions, participate in meetings/discussions, socialize, or attend other organized activities. Conferences are large-format meetings where hundreds or thousands of people participate. These people share a common interest, such as their profession or industry, culture, religion or hobby. They are often organized by industry, Government, Non-Government organizations or trade associations. Conferences are also referred to as congresses or conventions. (iv) Exhibitions: - Exhibitions are professionally organized events where products and services are displayed. They are a cost-effective way for buyers and sellers to meet. Most exhibitions take place annually, at the same location. They are usually organized by trade associations, industry bodies, Government organizations and professional exhibition organizations.

**Advantages of developing MICE:** Over the past decades, the MICE industry has been recognized as a significant market segment and an important contributor to national economies. It not only gives a boost to the economy in the form of income generation, but creates huge employment opportunities in related hospitality service providing sectors like accommodation, food and beverage, convention services, transportation, tourism and entertainment. Developing the MICE industry has great advantages for destinations, such as: Other than the economic and employment benefits stated above, MICE tourism offers many other benefits to the economies such as business opportunities, dissemination of knowledge and providing of training, skill up gradation etc. MICE tourism is a year-round business. It is beneficial for offsetting the low season for airlines, hotels, restaurants, travel agencies and so forth when the leisure tourism is not at its peak. Thus, undesirable social effects of seasonal tourism such as migration, temporary employment, and job instability can be avoided. Meetings and conventions offer high value-added in terms of delegate expenditure and also serve the dual purpose of promoting international relations. It is high-revenue generating tourism as most delegates tend to use costly accommodation and plan additional leisure options before and after the event. MICE travelers generally spend more money than leisure travelers. The MICE sector also helps increase local government and private sector investments that result the up-gradation of the general hospitality environment of the destination country. The Converting MICE travelers into leisure travelers. MICE travelers can extend their stay, can be accompanied by their partner or can return with their family or friends.



**International destination:** Increase in tourist footfall in J&K has generated direct and indirect employment opportunities for the people. MICE tourism is an entirely new concept and once it starts picking up it would turn J&K into an international destination. The corporate houses choosing the Himalayan region for its events programs and exhibitions would bring hundreds of top notch businessmen and investment proposals to J&K. According to the officials, in the past one year J&K has received private investment proposals worth Rs 66,000 crore while 1455 industrial units have started their operations.

**Transformation:** The abrogation of Article 370 has transformed J&K into a futuristic, profitable and sustainable ecosystem, leading to livelihood generation, better education, skill development and better quality of life. In the past three years barriers to commerce and trade have also been removed. The people of J&K are enjoying all the rights and benefits that are enjoyed by other citizens of India. People have understood that Article 370 was nothing but an impediment which prevented J&K from moving ahead on the path of peace, prosperity and development for the 70-years. The government has worked hard to establish peace. The good work done by the security forces has instilled a sense of security among the people. Terrorists have been cornered and dealt with. The fear of guns has vanished as people of J&K have developed the courage to call spade a spade and condemn the terrorists and their actions. A common man has joined the peace efforts. He is holding the tricolor close to his chest and is acting as ears and eyes of the security forces.

**Things falling in place:** Peace returning to Jammu and Kashmir after 30-long years of Pakistan sponsored terrorism has led to things falling in place in the Union Territory. J&K has embarked on the mission to become one of the fastest growing regions in the country. During the past three years the government has been able to rebuild trust with the business industry. It has strengthened socio-economic stability. The corporate world is no longer scared of coming to Kashmir. MICE tourism has added a new dimension to the tourism industry in the Himalayan region.

**Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah changed destinies:** Pertinently, till 1989 tourism was considered to be the mainstay of Kashmir's economy but the breaking out of Pakistan sponsored terrorism in 1990 led to tourists vanishing from the Valley. For three decades, the agents of the neighboring country in Kashmir and the terrorists dictated terms and ran a parallel system. They ensured that tourists and big business houses stay away from J&K as they never wanted normalcy to return. Even the mainstream politicians, who ruled J&K after 1990, played into the hands of the separatists and the neighboring country. Had they tried to develop Gulmarg like Davos in Switzerland and worked on establishing peace rather than appeasing Pakistan and its stooges in the Valley, the situation would not have worsened, and Kashmir would have been a better place to live. People of J&K by boarding the wagon of peace, prosperity and development and by turning their backs towards the terrorists and Pakistan have expressed gratitude to PM Narendra Modi and his trusted lieutenant Union Home Minister Amit Shah for merging J&K completely into the Union of India. A common man has become an equal partner in peace and is striving hard to make his life easy.

**Jammu & Kashmir to procure 200 e-buses for environment-friendly public transport in twin capital cities:** For this, Tata Motors has been given land to build the depot whose construction has started, they said. The Jammu and Kashmir government is procuring 100 e-buses each for both the capital cities, the officials said. The Jammu and Kashmir government is procuring a fleet of 200 electric buses to establish environment-friendly and socially sustainable network of public transport in the Union Territory's twin capital cities of Jammu and Srinagar, officials said. For this, Tata Motors has been given land to build the depot whose construction has started, they said. The Jammu and Kashmir government is procuring 100 e-buses each for both the capital cities, the officials said.

**Record 1.88 Cr Tourists Visited Jammu and Kashmir in 2022 Government:** SRINAGAR- For the first time in history of Jammu and Kashmir, record 1.88 Crore tourists visited UT in the year 2022 to enjoy the beauty of various famed tourist spots, a government spokesperson said on Tuesday. "The enhanced tourist arrivals in the Union Territory has generated greatest employment in various regions, highlighting its overall development through a constructive approach, transformative initiatives and inevitable reforms to empower J&K for its people, culture and society," the spokesperson said.

"The Government of India is also making a significant thrust to ensure better infrastructural facilities for the region's people and entice visitors. This has resulted in a fortuitous surge in tourist activities with better law and order, promising security system, and maintenance of peace in addition to infrastructural and connectivity improvements."

J&K administration is also focused on exploring the full potential of pilgrimage tourism by developing various religious tourist circuits across the union territory. Keeping in view the increasing number of devotees coming to visit Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine, facilities and infrastructure is being strengthened. As per the official data, the construction work of Mantalai Wellness Center has been completed at a cost of Rs. 80 crore and the design

of Katra Multi Modal Station has been finalized. Similarly, work on Tawi Riverfront is going on in full swing besides Mansar and Surinsar have made their presence on the tourism map of the country. The Government is working tirelessly to open Sanasar Tulip Garden for local people and tourists this year. Similarly, the work on conservation and renovation of 18 historical-cultural heritage sites in Jammu, Kathua, Ramban, Reasi, Samba and Udhampur will commence shortly. In April this year, Jambu Zoo shall be thrown open to the people. Home-stay Scheme has been launched with a view to foster employment generation and economic prosperity in rural areas.



*Tourists enjoy ride on snow sledge in Gulmarg | KO File Photo by Abid Bhat*

Remarkably, with the launch of the new J&K Film Policy in 2021, Jammu and Kashmir has emerged as the favourite shooting destination for film industry and permission has been granted for shooting of more than 150 films and web series in less than two years. Jammu and Kashmir as a tourist destination that is now being promoted on all possible global forums and that is the reason it witnessed highest-ever tourist footfall and air traffic in recent years. After registering a record tourist footfall this year, mainly in leisure and adventure tourism due to sustained efforts of the Tourism Department and the stakeholders during the last two years, Jammu and Kashmir is now opening to MICE tourism. Over the past couple of months, many corporate delegations have visited Kashmir and many more are planned for the coming seasons. Executives from travel giants visit the Valley with their clients and thus Kashmir is emerging as corporate tourist destination also. Jammu and Kashmir has all adequate infrastructure, services and tourism package required for MICE tourism and Department is working in a holistic manner to attract tourists in all segments through a whole range of promotions, road shows, and events besides the introduction of new adventure activities and destinations to sustain the interest of visitors is also being done by the Administration on regular basis.

**Govt promoting MICE tourism in Kashmir:** The State Government is making efforts to promote Kashmir as Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE) tourism destination which can boost economy of the State. After 2014 floods Kashmir tourism was the worst hit and it feels hosting conferences and congresses of big business groups will help in revival of tourism. A major MICE Conference organized by Leisure Corps for HDFC and the guests were mesmerized by famous singer Daler Mehndi. Naveen Kundu, founder and Managing Director of Leisure Corps, said that Kashmir is the best destination for MICE tourism. “Kashmir needs no introduction. MICE tourism is a new thing and making Kashmir its destinations will help to revive the economy of the State,” he said. “We are one of those key players of tourism industry who aim to develop, promote and expand tourism, nationally & internationally, with an offering of an unprecedented services and domains in the related sphere”, said Kundu. Kundu hailed the role played by Tourism Department, Secretary Tourism, Farooq Ahmad Shah and Management of SKICC. So far, Leisure Corps has

held three conferences in the last three months and next conference is scheduled in March. Managing Director of Mascot Travels, Yaseen Tuman, said that they are focusing on MICE tourism because conference tourism was ignored sector till last year. He said Mascot travels has been promoting and managing high end tourism in Kashmir for decades. Farooq Shah said that the state has some of the best venues in SKICC, Clubs at Pahalgam, Gulmarg and Sonamarg which have the capacity to host national, international standard conferences and events.

**Gulmarg:** Known as Gulmarag (Kashmiri pronunciation in Kashmiri, is a town, hill station, popular tourist destination, popular skiing destination and a notified area committee in the Baramulla district in the Indian union territory of Jammu and Kashmir. It is located at a distance of 31 km (19 mile) from Baramulla and 49 km (30 mile) from Srinagar. The town is situated in the Pir Panjal Range in the Western Himalayas and lies within the boundaries of Gulmarg Wildlife Sanctuary.

**Etymology:** Kashmir has many summer retreats suffixed with the word -marg: Sonamarg, Tangmarg, Gulmarg, Khilanmarg, Yousmarg, and Nagmarg. Gulmarg is one of the Margs that has historical importance for Kashmiris. Gulmarg is a compound word or portmanteau of two Persian words Gul and Marg. Gul means flowers and Marg means meadow. So, Gulmarg is a meadow of flowers. The credit for discovering the charms of Gulmarg first time in history has been given to Yousuf Shah Chak, the last Chak ruler who reigned from 1579 to 1586 AD.

**History:** Yousuf Shah Chak, who ruled Kashmir from 1579 to 1586, frequented the place with his queen Habba Khatoon and renamed it 'Gulmarg' ("meadow of flowers"). Wild flowers of 21 different varieties were collected by the Mughal emperor Jahangir for his gardens in Gulmarg. In the 19th century, British civil servants started using Gulmarg as a retreat to escape summers in the Indo-Gangetic plains. Hunting and golfing were their favorite pastime and three golf courses were established in Gulmarg including one exclusively for women. One of the golf courses survives and at an altitude of 2,650 metres (8,690 ft) is the world's highest golf course. In 1927, British established a ski club in Gulmarg and two annual ski events were hosted one each during Christmas and Easter. Central Asian explorer Aurel Stein also visited Gulmarg during this period. After the end of British rule in India, Gulmarg became a part of the independent princely state of Kashmir and Jammu. Pakistan planned an invasion of the state called Operation Gulmarg. One of the routes used by the invading militia of Pathan tribesmen, armed and supported by Pakistani regular troops, passed through the Haji Pir pass and Gulmarg onto the state capital Srinagar. Gulmarg fell to the invading army, but the Indian army led by the 1 Sikh Regiment, which had been airlifted to Srinagar only after the Dogra ruler of the state Maharaja Hari Singh had signed an Instrument of Accession with India on 26 October 1947, successfully defended the outskirts of Srinagar. Thereafter, Indian counterattacks pushed the tribesmen back and many towns including Gulmarg were recaptured. In 1948, Indian Army established a ski school in Gulmarg which later became the High Altitude Warfare School of the Indian army specializing in snow-craft and winter warfare. On 1 January 1949, the war ended under UN supervision and a Ceasefire line (CFL), which was rechristened the Line of Control (LOC) by the Shimla Agreement of 1972, came into being close to Gulmarg. After Indian Independence, Indian planners sought to develop a destination for Winter sports in India. The Department of Tourism of the Government of India invited Rudolph Matt, in 1960 to select a suitable location for such purpose. Matt zeroed in on Gulmarg as a suitable location for the development of a winter sports destination in India. In 1968, the Institute of Skiing and Mountaineering was established in Gulmarg to train ski instructors. Over the next decade, Indian planners invested `30 million (US\$380,000) to transform Gulmarg into a world-class ski destination. Gulmarg became a centre for skiers from Asian nations. In mid-1980s, heli-skiing was introduced in Gulmarg in collaboration with the Swiss skier Sylvain Saudan of Himalaya Heli-Ski Club of France. In the 1990s, the rise of militancy in Jammu and Kashmir affected tourism in Gulmarg. With the abatement of terrorism in the area, tourism started to recover in late 1990s. Work on the cable car project between Gulmarg and Agharwat Peak, which was commissioned in 1989 by Government of Jammu and Kashmir but was subsequently abandoned due to militancy in 1990, was resumed in 1998. In May 1998, Phase 1 of the project, between Gulmarg and Kongdori, began its commercial operation. In May 2012, Phase 2 of the project was also inaugurated, making it one of the longest and highest ropeways of Asia. The chairlift installed as a part of Phase 3 of the project began its operations in 2018. The National Winter Games were held in Gulmarg in 1998, 2011 and 2015. In 2014, Government of Jammu and Kashmir drafted a Master Plan-2032 for Gulmarg. The plan includes development of a solid-waste treatment plant on 20 acres of land close to Gulmarg.



**The problem of attributing a location to disrupted meetings:** In the case of a hybrid event our expectation is that the location of the in-person element is described as the “location” of the meeting for our purposes. In the case of a planned in-person event which was ultimately held as online/virtual the issue becomes more complicated. Our default approach is that an online meeting with no specified host locale is then attributed to the home office city of the Yearbook organization. For this reason, some traditionally minor cities have risen in the rankings because they host an especially active organization. For example, Piscataway NJ (USA) is home to the meeting-intensive IEEE's headquarters. This reflects the economic aspect of how the event technology is contracted or organized. In other cases, we have seen that the planned locale for an in-person meeting takes on the role of technology partner for the online meeting, thus retaining the geographical credit for the meeting. Neither of these approaches is perfect, but they are sufficient for our purposes of describing what took place in the life of an individual international association. They are less elegant in describing how the local committee may have played the greatest role in making the event happen (reviewing papers, organizing break out groups and so on) or where the technology provider was based. As more meetings are deliberately planned as hybrid or online we will see a reduction in these ambiguities, and we will adjust our approach as needed.

As time passes we will know more about what happened in 2020, 2021, and 2022 (which has also been a year of disruption and changed plans). What follows below is a presentation of what we know now, with an expectation of an increase in quantity and range as we move ahead.<sup>6</sup>

What is not displayed in the geographic tables:

- postponed meetings
- cancelled meetings
- identifying / differentiating between in-person / hybrid and virtual meetings

| Events in the International Congress Calendar currently marked with meeting-status information |           |           |         |        |
|--|-----------|-----------|---------|--------|
|  | Cancelled | Postponed | Virtual | Hybrid |
| 2020   | 1071      | 2153      | 3822    | 199    |
| 2021   | 188       | 801       | 4356    | 989    |
| 2022   | 78        | 144       | 1102    | 1421   |
| 2023   | 11        | 9         | 80      | 295    |

Source: *64rd International Meetings Statistics Report*

This 2022 report takes 499,498 meetings into account, organized in 268 countries, in 12,110 cities, by 28,733 international organizations.

## Objectives

- To analyze MICE tourism promotion and challenges in Gulmarg in Jammu and Kashmir at union territory.
- To explore possibilities for tourism prospects in J & K state & accordingly to initiate development activities in the state that will step towards growth and prosperity of tourists in the entire state.
- To evaluate the government's tourist growth and development strategy for the Kashmir valley.
- To study on the Information Technology and Service Standards in MICE Tourism
- The general objective of this research is to assess the challenges and opportunities of MICE tourism development in Gulmarg in Jammu and Kashmir.

## Methodology

In the present study, secondary has been used. Secondary data has been collected from the tourism department and economic survey of J & K. Author gathered, computed & codified the data in order to find out the impact of tourism on the economy & its problems & prospects. In order to find out the result of peace & disturbance on tourism regression method is used. This conceptual research investigates the tourism potentials, visitor flow, and tourism strategy of the Jammu and Kashmir area. To achieve the goals, data was gathered from diverse published and unpublished papers, journals, textbooks, journals, newspapers, and websites, among others.

It is based on both primary and secondary data. As the primary source is concerned I collected unpublished materials from various departments. However, most present study is based on secondary data. And secondary data has been collected from tourism department and economic survey of Jammu and Kashmir authors gathered, completed & codified the data in order to find out then tourist arrivals in valley of Kashmir and

percentage change of tourists over previous years and impact of tourism on economy and its problems and prospects.

The study examines a destination branding strategy to gauge its effectiveness and extent of collaboration and to elaborate on the link between stakeholders. It aims to develop a conceptual model of destination branding that integrates MICE and heritage tourism. An altered conceptual model of destination branding will explain how a destination can effectively make use of both MICE and heritage offerings to better meet visitors' needs and to eventually better perform destination branding equity.

Data collection took place in 2017 in New Orleans, Louisiana. New Orleans is one of the most popular MICE destinations in the USA, while simultaneously being recognized for its rich cultural heritage assets, yet it is meagerly studied from a creative destination branding perspective. The study focused on the 2017 NRPA (National Recreation and Parks Association) annual conference (representing MICE tourism) held at the New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center in September of that year. The study population was the conference attendees, which numbered more than 7000, from other states and countries.

The survey was developed in English for both domestic and international participants. A pilot study was conducted offsite, recruiting people who had participated in MICE tourism before through the researchers' personal networks. A total of fifteen participants, including university students and faculty/staff members, government officials, private business owners and retirees participated in the pilot study. Based on pilot responses and comments, some wording and survey contents were adjusted to be more appropriate. Following the pilot study, the survey was sent to three tourism scholars for further scrutiny to strengthen the veracity of the survey.

The nature of this research is collective and analytical. An exhaustive literature survey was conducted and thereafter the report was compiled on the basis of the collected secondary data. Numbers published by various organizations were analyzed, which include Directorate of Tourism (Jammu/Kashmir), Tourism Ministry of the Union Government (GoI), United Nations World Tourism Organization, World Travel and Tourism Council, Jammu and Kashmir Tourism Development Corporation and Economic Surveys from Union Government (GoI). Moreover, books, journals, newspapers, economic survey of Jammu and Kashmir and other online sources were also analyzed to obtain desired data. Overall, the present research reviews and analyses a large volume of un-organized data from secondary sources to project upon the impacts of tourism on the sensitive environment of the Kashmir valley.

## 2. Literature review

Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE) tourism has gained significant attention as an effective means of promoting tourism in various destinations around the world. This review aims to explore the existing literature related to the potential of MICE tourism in promoting tourism specifically in the region of Jammu and Kashmir. MICE tourism involves attracting business events, conferences, exhibitions, and corporate gatherings to a destination, which not only brings economic benefits but also helps in showcasing the cultural and natural heritage of the region.

1. **The Role of MICE Tourism in Destination Promotion:** MICE tourism offers a unique opportunity for destinations to showcase their infrastructure, facilities, and local attractions to a diverse group of visitors. Kim and Chon (2017) emphasize that MICE events can create a multiplier effect on a destination's economy, as attendees often extend their stay for leisure purposes. This has the potential to expose participants to the scenic beauty, cultural richness, and adventure opportunities that Jammu and Kashmir has to offer.
2. **Economic Impact of MICE Tourism:** Numerous studies have demonstrated the positive economic impact of MICE tourism on destinations. Sharma and Dabas (2019) highlight that MICE events attract high-spending participants, leading to increased revenue for local businesses including hotels, restaurants, and transportation services. In the context of Jammu and Kashmir, this could contribute significantly to the local economy, supporting livelihoods and fostering growth.
3. **Showcasing Heritage and Culture:** MICE events often include cultural components such as site visits, gala dinners, and cultural performances. These activities can help participants experience the rich heritage and culture of a destination. Jamal and Robinson (2012) argue that MICE tourism can contribute to the preservation and promotion of local traditions and customs. This could be particularly valuable for Jammu and Kashmir, given its unique cultural identity.



- Infrastructure Development:** MICE tourism necessitates advanced infrastructure, including convention centers, meeting facilities, and accommodation options. Nisha and Singh (2018) highlight that investments in such infrastructure not only benefit MICE tourism but also other forms of tourism. The development of modern infrastructure in Jammu and Kashmir could enhance its overall attractiveness as a tourist destination.
- Challenges and Sustainability:** While the potential benefits of MICE tourism are evident, it also brings challenges related to environmental sustainability and cultural preservation. Gössling et al. (2020) discuss the importance of adopting responsible practices in MICE tourism to ensure minimal negative impacts on the destination. This resonates with Jammu and Kashmir's fragile ecosystem and the need to balance tourism growth with environmental conservation.
- Government Initiatives and Stakeholder Engagement:** Effective collaboration between the government, private sector, and local communities is essential for successful MICE tourism development. Gupta and Chauhan (2016) emphasize the role of government policies and incentives in attracting MICE events. It is crucial for Jammu and Kashmir to create a conducive environment for MICE tourism through supportive policies and infrastructure development.

The reviewed literature provides a compelling basis for the hypothesis that MICE can indeed be used as a tool for the promotion of tourism in Jammu and Kashmir. The potential economic, cultural, and infrastructural benefits, along with the challenges that need to be addressed, collectively suggest that a well-planned MICE strategy could contribute significantly to the region's tourism growth while preserving its natural and cultural assets. Further empirical research and practical implementation are necessary to validate and fully realize the potential outlined in the literature.

## **H1: Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE) is a tool for promotion of tourism during the lean season in Jammu and Kashmir**

Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE) tourism is a specialized form of tourism that can bring substantial economic benefits to destinations. This review aims to examine the existing literature on the relationship between effective planning and promotion strategies and the influx of MICE tourists to Jammu and Kashmir. Effective planning and strategic promotion are crucial in attracting MICE events and participants, fostering economic growth, and enhancing the overall tourism experience.

- Strategic Destination Branding and Positioning:** Effective planning and promotion strategies often start with establishing a unique and compelling destination brand. Wang and Ye (2018) highlight that a well-defined brand identity helps differentiate a destination and attract specific market segments. In the context of Jammu and Kashmir, showcasing its cultural richness, natural beauty, and unique offerings through branding could significantly impact MICE tourist inflow.
- Infrastructure Development and Accessibility:** Infrastructure plays a pivotal role in attracting MICE tourists. Vanhove (2016) stresses the importance of accessible transportation, modern convention centers, and quality accommodation. Jammu and Kashmir's connectivity improvements, coupled with purpose-built venues, could enhance its attractiveness as a MICE destination, thereby positively impacting visitor numbers.
- Stakeholder Collaboration and Engagement:** Effective planning requires collaboration between various stakeholders, including government bodies, local communities, and the private sector. A study by Neuhofer et al. (2012) emphasizes that successful MICE tourism development involves aligning interests and creating synergies among stakeholders. In the context of Jammu and Kashmir, involving local communities and ensuring their support could lead to a more holistic and sustainable tourism approach.
- Targeted Marketing and Promotion:** Customized marketing strategies that target specific MICE segments are essential. Huh et al. (2019) highlight the significance of tailoring promotional efforts to the preferences and needs of MICE organizers and attendees. Jammu and Kashmir could benefit from tailored marketing campaigns that emphasize its unique offerings and cater to the interests of different MICE groups.

5. **Digital and Online Presence:** In today's digital age, an effective online presence is crucial for attracting MICE tourists. According to Xiang et al. (2017), destination websites and social media platforms play a pivotal role in disseminating information and engaging potential visitors. Developing an informative and user-friendly online presence for Jammu and Kashmir could facilitate decision-making for MICE organizers and participants.
6. **Measuring Impact and Continuous Improvement:** Ongoing assessment and adjustment of strategies are important for sustained success. A study by Buhalis and Costa (2006) underscores the need for destination management organizations to monitor the impact of their strategies and adapt to changing market dynamics. Jammu and Kashmir could benefit from a dynamic approach that incorporates feedback and insights from MICE organizers and participants.

The reviewed literature strongly supports the hypothesis that effective planning and promotion strategies indeed have a positive impact on the influx of MICE tourists to Jammu and Kashmir. The importance of destination branding, infrastructure development, stakeholder collaboration, targeted marketing, digital presence, and continuous improvement is evident. Implementing a comprehensive and tailored approach that encompasses these factors could position Jammu and Kashmir as a competitive MICE destination, attracting steady stream of MICE tourists and contributing significantly to its economic growth and overall tourism development.

## **H2: Effective planning and promotion strategies positively impact the influx of MICE tourists to Jammu and Kashmir.**

The growth of Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE) tourism is contingent upon a conducive environment that includes well-developed infrastructure, seamless connectivity, and robust security measures. This review seeks to explore existing literature pertaining to the hypothesis that challenges in these areas significantly impede the growth of MICE tourism in a given region.

1. **Infrastructure Challenges:** Infrastructure is a cornerstone of MICE tourism, encompassing convention centers, hotels, transportation, and other facilities. Weaver (2006) emphasizes that inadequate infrastructure can deter MICE organizers from choosing a destination. Insufficient or outdated facilities in a region can lead to scheduling conflicts, capacity issues, and decreased event quality, hampering the region's attractiveness to MICE organizers.
2. **Connectivity Limitations:** Effective transportation networks, including air, road, and rail connectivity, are crucial for the success of MICE tourism. Buultjens and Ratna (2004) underscore the significance of convenient access for event participants. Poor connectivity can lead to logistical challenges, higher travel costs, and longer travel times, making the region less appealing to both organizers and attendees.
3. **Security Concerns:** Security is a top priority for MICE events due to the high-profile nature of attendees and the potential economic impact. Ritchie (2008) highlights that concerns about safety and stability can deter event planners and participants. Regions with a history of security issues or a perceived lack of safety measures may struggle to attract MICE events, as organizers prioritize the well-being of their participants.
4. **Perception and Reputation:** A region's reputation, both domestically and internationally, plays a significant role in attracting MICE tourism. Kim et al. (2018) stress the importance of a positive image that reflects safety, hospitality, and professionalism. Negative perceptions about infrastructure, connectivity, or security can discourage MICE organizers from considering the region for their events.
5. **Economic Impact:** Infrastructure, connectivity, and security challenges can impact the overall economic benefits derived from MICE tourism. A study by Hesam et al. (2020) highlights that inadequate infrastructure and security concerns can limit attendee numbers and spending, thereby reduces the economic impact on the local economy.
6. **Government and Stakeholder Engagement:** Government support and stakeholder collaboration are essential for addressing these challenges. Jamal and Getz (1995) emphasize the role of public-private partnerships in mitigating issues related to infrastructure, connectivity, and security. Active involvement of government authorities and relevant stakeholders is crucial for creating an environment conducive to MICE tourism growth.

The reviewed literature substantiates the hypothesis that challenges related to infrastructure, connectivity, and security indeed have a significant negative impact on the growth of MICE tourism in a region. Inadequate facilities, limited transportation options, security concerns, negative perceptions, economic repercussions, and the absence of collaborative efforts collectively hinder the region's attractiveness to MICE organizers and participants. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach involving investments in infrastructure, improved connectivity, enhanced security measures, and strategic efforts to improve the region's image. Only through such efforts can a region create a favorable environment for MICE tourism to flourish, contributing to economic growth and development.

### **H3: The challenges in infrastructure, connectivity, and security significantly affect the growth of MICE tourism in the region.**

The growing significance of Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE) tourism has led hotels to recognize the importance of offering specialized facilities and services to cater to the unique needs of this segment. This review explores existing literature to examine the hypothesis that hotels equipped with tailored amenities for MICE events experience higher occupancy rates and revenue.

1. **Customized Event Spaces:** Customized event spaces, designed to accommodate a variety of MICE requirements, are a key factor influencing hotel choice among event planners. Erbas et al. (2020) underline the role of versatile spaces that can be adapted for different types of events. Hotels offering well-equipped and flexible event areas attract a larger pool of event organizers, contributing to increased occupancy rates.
2. **Technological Advancements:** Modern MICE events heavily rely on advanced technology for presentations, communication, and networking. Lee et al. (2017) emphasize that hotels with state-of-the-art audiovisual equipment and connectivity solutions enhance the overall event experience. Such technological capabilities make hotels attractive venues for tech-savvy event organizers and participants.
3. **Expert Event Support Staff:** Hotels that provide experienced event planners and support staff help alleviate the burden of event coordination for organizers. Oftentimes, as highlighted by Lankford and Howard (1994), the availability of dedicated staff who understands the intricacies of MICE events can significantly influence the choice of a venue. Hotels with skilled event teams offer a level of convenience that resonates positively with organizers.
4. **Ancillary Services and Packages:** Value-added services, including group rates, exclusive packages, and discounted room blocks, appeal to the cost-conscious nature of MICE organizers. A study by Wang et al. (2019) suggests that such offerings can lead to cost savings for both organizers and attendees. Hotels that provide comprehensive packages and incentives are likely to attract a larger share of MICE business.
5. **Networking Opportunities:** MICE events are platforms for networking and social interaction. Martin et al. (2013) highlight that hotels with common areas, lounges, and dining options conducive to networking foster a favorable environment. The availability of spaces that facilitate interpersonal interactions enhances the overall event experience, leading to a higher likelihood of repeat bookings.
6. **Positive Reputation and Word-of-Mouth:** Hotels that consistently deliver exceptional experiences for MICE events tend to develop a positive reputation within the industry. According to Hwang et al. (2017), positive feedback from event organizers and participants influences the hotel's image. A strong reputation contributes to increased trust and recognition, leading to higher demand and subsequently improved occupancy rates and revenue.

The existing literature provides substantial support for the hypothesis that hotels equipped with specialized facilities and services for MICE events indeed experience higher occupancy rates and revenue. The provision of customized event spaces, technological advancements, expert event support, value-added services, networking opportunities, and a positive reputation collectively contribute to the attractiveness of such hotels to MICE organizers and participants. By aligning their offerings with the unique requirements of the MICE segment, hotels stand to gain a competitive advantage, leading to enhanced financial performance, heightened brand visibility, and a stronger position within the MICE tourism market.



#### **H4: Specialized facilities and services for Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE) events result in higher occupancy rates and revenue in hotels.**

Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE) tourism has gained recognition for its potential to stimulate economic growth in various regions. This review aims to explore existing literature that supports the hypothesis that MICE tourism contributes to the economic development of Jammu and Kashmir by generating employment opportunities and fostering growth for local businesses.

1. **Employment Generation:** MICE tourism can lead to the creation of a diverse range of employment opportunities. According to Jamal and Robinson (2012), hosting MICE events requires a workforce skilled in event management, hospitality, logistics, and related fields. The influx of MICE tourists necessitates hiring additional staff for hotels, restaurants, transportation services, and event venues. This, in turn, contributes to reduced unemployment rates and an improved standard of living for local communities.
2. **Direct and Indirect Economic Impact:** Buhalis and Costa (2006) emphasize that MICE tourism's economic impact extends beyond the tourism sector. Direct spending by event participants on accommodation, dining, transportation, and leisure activities generates revenue for local businesses. Additionally, indirect economic effects occur through supply chain interactions, creating demand for various goods and services such as food supplies, audiovisual equipment, floral arrangements, and more.
3. **Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs):** MICE tourism benefits small and medium enterprises (SMEs) that provide specialized products and services. Kim et al. (2018) note that local vendors, artisans, souvenir shops, and cultural performers can benefit from the increased demand associated with MICE events. These enterprises play a crucial role in preserving and promoting the unique cultural identity of Jammu and Kashmir.
4. **Improved Infrastructure and Investment:** The economic prospects of MICE tourism can encourage infrastructure development and investments. Nisha and Singh (2018) suggest that the need for modern convention centers, upgraded transportation systems, and quality accommodation can attract public and private sector investments. Improved infrastructure not only benefits MICE tourism but also contributes to overall regional development.
5. **Increased Revenue and Government Income:** Higher spending by MICE tourists translates into increased revenue for the local economy. Sharma and Dabas (2019) highlight that MICE participants generally spend more compared to leisure tourists due to the nature of their activities. The resulting rise in tax revenue benefits the local government, allowing for investments in public services, infrastructure, and community development projects.
6. **Skill Development and Training:** Hosting MICE events requires a skilled workforce. Gursoy et al. (2010) emphasize the role of training and skill development programs to equip locals with the expertise needed to excel in various roles associated with MICE tourism. These programs not only contribute to improved service quality but also enhance employability within and beyond the tourism sector.

The reviewed literature substantiates the hypothesis that MICE tourism indeed contributes significantly to the economic development of Jammu and Kashmir. The generation of employment opportunities across various sectors, the direct and indirect economic impact, support for local businesses, improved infrastructure, increased revenue, and skill development collectively highlight the positive effects of MICE tourism on the region's economic landscape. By leveraging these contributions, Jammu and Kashmir has the potential to achieve sustainable economic growth and improve the overall quality of life for its residents.

#### **H5: Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE) tourism contributes to the economic development of Jammu and Kashmir by generating employment and boosting local businesses.**

Sustainable development of Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE) tourism involves a comprehensive approach that includes active collaboration between the government, local communities, and stakeholders within the hotel industry. This review delves into existing literature to explore the hypothesis that collaborative efforts among these entities are vital for ensuring the sustainable growth of MICE tourism in a region.

1. **Government Policies and Regulations:** Effective government policies and regulations play a pivotal role in shaping the direction of MICE tourism. Jamal and Getz (1995) emphasize the need for supportive policies that incentivize investments, streamline permits, and ensure environmental conservation. Governments that actively engage in the promotion and regulation of MICE tourism contribute to a conducive environment for growth.
2. **Infrastructure Development:** Collaboration between the government and hotel industry stakeholders is critical for infrastructure development. Weaver (2006) highlights the importance of modern convention centers, transportation networks, and accommodation options. Such developments are often undertaken with government support and private sector investments, creating the necessary foundation for successful MICE events.
3. **Community Involvement and Cultural Preservation:** Local communities play a significant role in the sustainable development of MICE tourism. Gursoy et al. (2010) stress the importance of community engagement to mitigate potential negative impacts and foster positive interactions between visitors and residents. Involving local communities in decision-making processes helps preserve cultural authenticity and create a more authentic destination experience.
4. **Stakeholder Alignment:** Collaboration among hotel industry stakeholders is essential for delivering seamless MICE experiences. Erbas et al. (2020) highlight that coordination between hotels, event planners, and support service providers, ensures smooth event operations. Joint efforts to meet the diverse needs of MICE organizers and participants enhance the overall attractiveness of the region.
5. **Environmental Sustainability:** Sustainable MICE tourism requires a shared commitment to environmental conservation. Gössling et al. (2020) stress the importance of responsible practices that minimize the ecological footprint of events. Collaborative initiatives between the government, hotels, and local communities can lead to the adoption of sustainable measures that protect the natural environment.
6. **Capacity Building and Training:** Collaboration between stakeholders enables the implementation of capacity-building programs and training initiatives. Neuhofer et al. (2012) highlight the need for skill development to ensure the delivery of high-quality services. Government-led training programs supported by the hotel industry enhance the competence of the local workforce, contributing to improved visitor experiences.

The reviewed literature strongly supports the hypothesis that collaborative efforts between the government, local communities, and hotel industry stakeholders are indispensable for achieving sustainable development in MICE tourism. The alignment of government policies, infrastructure development, community involvement, stakeholder coordination, environmental sustainability, and skill-building initiatives collectively contribute to a holistic approach that balances economic growth with social and environmental well-being. By fostering these collaborations, regions can position themselves as responsible and attractive MICE tourism destinations, ensuring lasting benefits for all stakeholders involved.

**H6: Collaborative efforts between the government, local communities, and hotel industry stakeholders are essential for the sustainable development of MICE tourism in the region.**

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

**Tourist influx to Kashmir:** The flow of tourists to the Kashmir valley doesn't follow a specific trend. However, it can be predominantly dependent on law and order situations prevailing at that specific point of time. The tourist numbers in the valley saw gradual fluctuations till 2023, when law and order situation went sour; the tourist flow witnessed a sudden sharp dip. Table 1 gives an insight into how the tourist arrival numbers (domestic as well as foreign) have varied from 1989 to 2023. The aim of all the stakeholders has been to stabilize a high influx, which comes as a boon to economy for the state as well as employment opportunities to the local population.

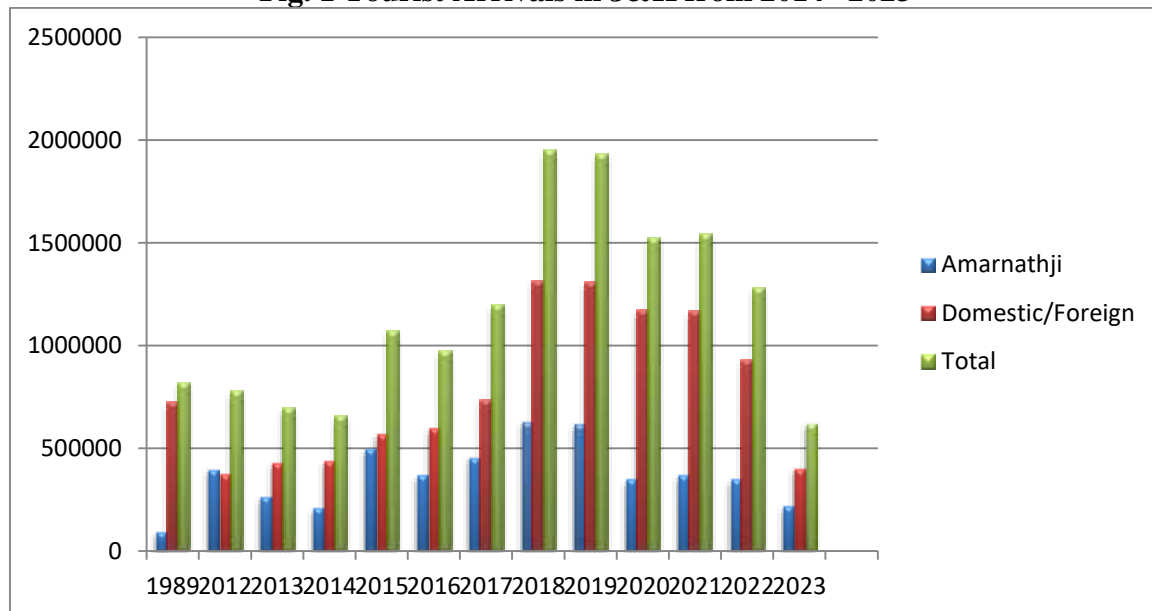
| Year | Amarnathji | Domestic/Foreign | Total   |
|------|------------|------------------|---------|
| 1989 | 96055      | 722035           | 818090  |
| 2012 | 400000     | 377000           | 777000  |
| 2013 | 265000     | 432888           | 697888  |
| 2014 | 213565     | 441840           | 655405  |
| 2015 | 498075     | 572100           | 1070175 |

|      |        |         |         |
|------|--------|---------|---------|
| 2016 | 373419 | 601250  | 974669  |
| 2017 | 458046 | 736448  | 1194494 |
| 2018 | 634000 | 1314432 | 1948432 |
| 2019 | 621000 | 1308765 | 1929765 |
| 2020 | 353969 | 1171130 | 1525099 |
| 2021 | 372909 | 1167618 | 1540527 |
| 2022 | 352771 | 927815  | 1280586 |
| 2023 | 220490 | 403442  | 623932  |

Table 1: Tourist influx to the Kashmir Valley from 1989 – 2022 (Source: Economic Survey 2016-17, 2022-23)

The trends in rise and dip of tourist numbers in Kashmir can be seen from the Table 1. The number of tourist arrivals which was just 818090 in 1989 ameliorated to 1948432 in the year 2018. The numbers following the year 2019 depict the relationship between peaceful and cordial political situation of a region and tourism. Following the disturbances of 2019, a dip in tourist numbers was witnessed which fell further after the summer of 2023. Deterioration of law and order situation has a direct impact on the tourist numbers, which is evident from the Economic Survey of 2023 report tabled by the Finance Minister in the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly. The tourist arrivals including Amarnathji Yatris saw a dip of more than 50% than the preceding year. Most of the tourists who came, visited for the first half of the year until the situation turned sour in July and Kashmir became deserted. The report puts the losses, from July 8 to November 30, 2023, at more than Rs.16000 crore. But such things have been happening in the past too and they suggest that this decrease in tourist arrivals is temporary in nature, and is expected to bounce back as soon as the situation improves. At the same time, it can be found out that Kashmir has a lion’s share in the tourist flow in the state of J&K. The data is provided from the Economic Survey 2016-17, 2022-23 for the state of J&K in the bar graph as given below: (Note that the graph is for entire state of Jammu and Kashmir and not just Kashmir valley).

Fig. 1 Tourist Arrivals in J&K from 2014 –2023



“It is estimated that almost 50-60% of total population of J&K is directly and/or indirectly engaged in tourism related activities. Tourism contributes about 15% to State Gross Domestic Product”<sup>12</sup>. Because of a distinct availability of services in Kashmir, the local population has managed to captivate a high spending potential from tourists. This has resulted in encouragement of local enterprises, craftsmen and agricultural growers.



**Table 2: Revenue earned from tourism in J&K (Source: Economic Survey 2016-17)**

| S.No | Name of the department / Organization    | Revenue generated (Rs. in crores) |         |         |         |         |
|------|--|-----------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
|      |  | 2011-12                           | 2012-13 | 2013-14 | 2014-15 | 2015-16 |
| 01.  | J&K TDC                                  | 16.42                             | 17.96   | 17.65   | 17.63   | 19.63   |
| 02.  | Cable Car Corporation                    | 2.89                              | 7.54    | 6.76    | 7.99    | 8.39    |
| 03.  | Director Tourism Kashmir/<br>Jammu (DGT) | 0.115                             | 0.15    | 0.35    | 0.62    | 0.54    |
| 04.  | SKICC                                    | 0.46                              | 0.49    | 0.52    | 0.64    | 0.71    |
| 05.  | Gulmarg Dev. Authority                   | 0.20                              | 0.22    | 0.32    | 0.48    | 0.51    |
| 06.  | Pahalgam Dev. Authority                  | 0.51                              | 0.91    | 0.99    | 0.19    | 0.13    |
| 07.  | Sonamarg Dev. Authority                  | 0.00                              | 0.14    | 0.36    | 0.32    | 0.45    |
| 08.  | Patnitop Dev. Authority                  | 0.11                              | 0.10    | 0.16    | 0.79    | 0.20    |
| 09.  | Royal Spring Golf Course                 | 0.57                              | 0.35    | 0.35    | 0.50    | 0.46    |
|      | Total                                    | 20.82                             | 27.05   | 26.57   | 29.16   | 31.01   |

**Revenue Generation for the state Tourism induced Infrastructural and Economic Development:** To handle such a traffic flow, the development of infrastructure has to match these projections. The data regarding infrastructural and economic development have been acquired from Ministry of Tourism, Govt. of India. The infrastructure made available in terms of accommodation, transport, etc. is as given below:

**Table 3: Status of tourism infrastructure in Kashmir (Source: Ministry of Tourism, GOI)**

| Type of Infrastructure   | Total No. | Bed Capacity |
|--------------------------|-----------|--------------|
| <b>Registered hotels</b> |           |              |
| 5 star                   | 4         | 1013         |
| 3 star                   | 5         | 786          |
| 2 star                   | 10        | 1060         |
| Class A                  | 29        | 2110         |
| Class B                  | 66        | 3239         |
| Class C                  | 82        | 5585         |
| Class D                  | 21        | 751          |
| Any other                | 18        | 493          |
| Guest Houses (all class) | 112       | 2422         |

|                                       |            |      |
|---------------------------------------|------------|------|
| <b>House Boat</b>                     |            |      |
| Deluxe                                | 324        | 1878 |
| A Class                               | 137        | 645  |
| B Class                               | 124        | 590  |
| C Class                               | 127        | 574  |
| D Class                               | 377        | 1680 |
| <b>Travel Agents/Excursion Agents</b> | <b>192</b> |      |
| <b>Guides</b>                         | <b>81</b>  |      |

On the other hand, a tabular overview of the total number of hotels, guest houses and transport facilities are provided for the entire state of J&K for comparison purposes.

**Table 4: Hotels and Guest Houses in J &K. (Report prepared by Santek Consultants Pvt Ltd, date of access: 13/05/2018)**

|                     | 2012                            |       | 2017                            |       | 2022                            |       |
|---------------------|---------------------------------|-------|---------------------------------|-------|---------------------------------|-------|
| Type                | No. of infrastructural entities | Beds  | No. of infrastructural entities | Beds  | No. of infrastructural entities | Beds  |
| <b>Hotels</b>       |                                 |       |                                 |       |                                 |       |
|                     | 670                             | 30333 | 1028                            | 43039 | 1715                            | 63653 |
| <b>Guest Houses</b> |                                 |       |                                 |       |                                 |       |
| <b>Total</b>        | 530                             | 16438 | 896                             | 58052 | 1607                            | 40108 |

**Table 5: Buses and taxis available for tourists in J&K (Report prepared by Santek Consultants Pvt. Ltd, date of access: 13/05/2018).**

| Type of transport Infrastructure | 2012         | 2017         | 2022         |
|----------------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| <b>Buses</b>                     | <b>20179</b> | <b>27659</b> | <b>38178</b> |
| <b>Taxis</b>                     | <b>8576</b>  | <b>11755</b> | <b>16226</b> |

Besides being attracted to the natural beauty and cultural heritage of a place, tourists also seek fair returns of the money they invest in the place. As such, infrastructural developments become indispensable. These could be satisfaction of psychological needs like good transport facilities in and around the tourist place, proper, safe, hassle free, affordable accommodation, good water, hygiene and sanitation facilities. The others could be related to the attributes of the destination or the tourist place in terms of various sites to visit in and around the tourist place. Some other could be satisfying by their personal tastes like museums, temples, gardens, heritage sites, etc. Or further these could be facilities, which bring in excitement and learning like adventure sports, music, cultural shows, etc. The visitors also come to tourist places to buy the traditional things like handicrafts, jewelry, etc. In a nutshell the tourist destination should have all the things where the tourist can spend their time and money in a satisfying and justifiable manner.

The carrying capacity analysis was done from secondary data sources collected by Gadoo *et al.* Some of the important towns whose data was available have been mentioned here in Table 6 below:

**Table 6: Carrying capacity analysis of some popular destinations in Kashmir**

| Tourist spot            | Existing Load (2017) | Carrying Capacity | Available Carrying Capacity (2018) | Estimated Load (2020) | Predicted Carrying Capacity (2020) |
|-------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------------|
| <b>Srinagar</b>         |                      |                   |                                    |                       |                                    |
| Mughal Gardens          | 1228909              | 2297904           | 1068995                            | 1600622               | 697282                             |
| Dal lake                | 23667                | 16659             | 22980                              | 46248                 | -6963                              |
| Dachigham National Park | 131                  | 342               | 554                                | 248                   | 437                                |
| Hazratbal shrine        | 31204                | 2925              | 37046                              | 48456                 | 19794                              |
| <b>Gulmarg</b>          | 8648                 | 15390             | 6742                               | 22601                 | -7211                              |
| <b>Wular Lake</b>       | 32782                | 52260             | 19478                              | 42246                 | 10014                              |
| <b>Sonmarg</b>          | 6578                 | 17280             | 10702                              | 14398                 | 2882                               |
| <b>Manasbal</b>         | 21323                | 50310             | 28987                              | 29015                 | 21295                              |
| <b>Tangmarg</b>         | 2553                 | 15000             | 117447                             | 6810                  | 113190                             |

The ecological nature of Gulmarg – one of the most popular destinations in Kashmir is quite sensitive and needs to be handled with utmost care and caution. From table 7, it is evident that the existing carrying capacity is almost exhausted and the projected pattern suggests that in 2020 it will cross the sustainable development limit. The negative sign indicates that by 2020, the expected capacity would be exceeded by 7211 people. Hence it is not advisable to allow further constructions in the vicinity of fragile areas and only upgradation of existing infrastructure in standard ways should be encouraged. In case of Srinagar on the other hand, it has a potential to accommodate extra tourist inflow at selected places. This is mainly because of the security situation, poor connectivity and psychological barriers. With the completion of an alternate highway and the proposed railway line from Jammu to Srinagar, better connectivity and rigorous advertisement is expected to boost tourist inflow to the city subject to the stabilization of security situation. The carrying capacity of Mughal gardens, owing to its well established and prominent place in tourism worldwide, has been exhausted in the year 2017. A limiting factor to sustainable tourism in these gardens is the amount of time tourists spend here. The carrying capacity thus can be improved by restricting the dwell time of each tourist to a maximum of one hour. Similarly, carrying capacity of world famous Dal Lake behaves no differently, which is projected to be exhausted by the year 2020. Major contributors to its degrading state are the houseboats and the disposal of untreated sewage from the vicinity. If the western edge of the lakefront is developed on the similar lines as has been done on eastern edge, carrying capacity will be potentially enhanced to allow inflow of more tourists, besides enhancing the overall plight of the lake itself. Thus, by 2020 an additional carrying capacity of 1519 persons could be made possible.

Less known sites like Wular, Manasbal, etc. have excess carrying capacities left that could be exploited if the destinations are put on the tourism radar and consequently infrastructural facilities are improved. These sites have immense tourism potential, but lack basic infrastructure – that most tourists look for in a tourist place. If proper measures are taken by the authorities, overall load of tourists on specific places can be dispersed to newly explored places. The valley of Kashmir is full of other unexplored destinations that can bring a boost to the state economy round the year.

## ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS OF TOURISM

The main centers of attraction in Kashmir are its pristine nature, culture and pilgrimage spots. Increase in the number of tourists over the time in Kashmir has resulted in amelioration of environmental issues and concerns. For example, untreated sewage from small scale industries and hotels has polluted various lakes, rivers, groundwater and other water resources. Encroachment and demand of more hospitality centers have resulted in deforestation, large rush of tourists have resulted in polythene and other menaces. Gulmarg and Shri



Amarnath Ji Yatra are the best examples of how mismanaged and unplanned tourism can hurt the ecological balance of a region. Similarly, Dal Lake in the heart of Srinagar has lost its sheen and attraction because of lack of proper management and social sense among tourists and is now polluted with animal carcass, weeds and leftover food and polythene. The main source of pollution in the Dal Lake is the mismanaged inflow of sewage. Sewage production is directly related to the increasing demand of tourism industry in the vicinity which prompts people to set up new hotels, lodges and houseboats. The sewage emanating from these hospitality infrastructures flows into the lake and hence cause serious threats to its ecosystem. Some broad areas of tourism related threats to environment have been briefly discussed under the following sub-headings: **Solid Wastes and Littering:** One of the key factors responsible to environmental degradation is the production of solid wastes at an unprecedented rate. This is an acute problem faced by almost all the tourist destinations in Kashmir. Untreated and unmanaged solid wastes have become a grave threat to the ecological balance of these areas. Solid wastes enhance pollution of soil and water, besides reducing the attraction of a certain place. Increase in the tourist influx to a particular area consequently imposes more pressure to the tourism related services like hotels, restaurants and retail shops, which in turn produce tons of wastage and dispose it off into the open. The effects of this problem is most serious in pilgrimage areas like Amarnath Ji Yatra, where a large number of people throng the holy stalagmite in a very short span of time. Moreover, indiscriminate littering of plastic wastes and other garbage by the tourists in eco-sensitive places is threatening to the ecosystem and is causing environmental degradation.

**Sewage:** A primary cause of decimation of water resources and its natural flora and fauna is the drastic increase in sewage production from hotels etc. However, tourism alone cannot be held responsible for sewage production. The movement of people from villages to city centers to enhance life standards is also partially responsible for degradation of environment by generating bulk of sewage among other activities. Furthermore, development of tourism industry attracts people for the availability of job and other business related opportunities resulting temporary and permanent settlement of huge population which is also a main reason for rapid urbanization of these areas. Consequently a number of environmental problems including sewage production are generated due to urbanization. Sewage contains organic matter that is rich in nutrients and helps algae and other microbes to thrive, hence increasing Biological Oxygen Demand (BOD) of fresh water. Lidder River among other fresh water sources are a major victim of untreated sewage in Kashmir.

**Air Pollution:** A report framed by The Lancet Commission based on pollution and health puts the worldwide deaths caused by bad air quality in the year 2022 at a staggering 6.5 million where India with 2.51 million deaths held the apex spot. Unmanaged transport and stubble burning significantly enhances air pollution in Kashmir causing a number of respiratory diseases. The air quality of Kashmir is worst in the autumn months when people start burning leaves to prepare for winter. From the tourism point of view, transportation system is the major source of air pollution in Kashmir. Rapidly increasing tourist arrivals to Kashmir have increased the air and road transport over the recent past. This rise in motorable transport has facilitated the emission of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), sulphur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>) and greenhouse gases. As a consequence, the region has witnessed acid rains in the past, hence directly affecting the landscape, natural vegetation and agro-based industry as well. The recently installed Continuous Ambient Air Quality Monitoring Stations (CAAQMS) at various locations in Srinagar city by State Pollution Control Board (SPCB) have only confirmed that the rise of pollution in the city is alarmingly high.

**Degradation of fresh water resources:** Water contamination is another major issue caused by the tourism in Kashmir. The quick tourism development has put a substantial weight on water assets to the expense of the requirements of the nearby community. Although there has been a significant rise in the construction of inns, lodges, hotels, houseboats along the fresh water bodies, but any scientific intervention for proper management of wastewater and water preservation has not been inducted. For instance, sewage from many hotels and residential homes on Dal banks are disposed into the lake harming its natural flora and fauna. Floating vegetable gardens, a portion of Kashmir's greatest vegetable-producing areas and furthermore a focal point of fascination for expansive number of sightseers, are additionally significant polluters. The requirement of fresh water and other local resources in Kashmir is already very high. Accordingly, there have been increasing pressures on these assets so the assets are exhausting at a quick rate.

**Deforestation:** The quick development of tourism is one of the fundamental culprit for uncontrolled decimations of woods, in light of the fact that the developing interest of tourism has prompted expanding requirement for building material i.e. development of lodgings, eateries, lodges, houseboats and for other rural

exercises. Increase in tourist entry has prompted increase in the interest for nearby forest resources by manifolds and this pattern pushes local community to harvest more trees with a specific purpose to produce more crops. Another vital reason of deforestation is the cost of land close to the tourist sites has expanded at a quick rate because of increasing demand for different tourism related activities, which prompt unlawful infringement, logging and chopping down of forest trees. With the rise in unmanaged tourist inflow, there arises a need for land clearance for new constructions, putting pressure on forest land. The report from the Forest Department in 2017 puts the estimate of land encroachment in Kashmir valley at 4877 hectares. According to the forest policy of India around 33% and 60% of the aggregate region of plain and Himalayan areas respectively should be under forest cover, however sadly there is just under 22% of forest cover on national scale and just 20% in J&K. Yet at the same time, the developing competition for the utilization of forest resources is causing degradation of these valuable assets at a high scale. In the meantime deforestation is bringing forth major issues, for example, soil disintegration, loss of biodiversity, environmental change and furthermore affecting water cycle adversely and condition of the locality.

**Land Degradation:** There has been a great pressure on the natural land resources significantly because of rise in construction of tourism and recreational facilities. Constructional processes include mining of sand, soil (for making bricks etc) and other important minerals and can often lead to unchecked erosion and caving. In addition to that, tourists demand better facilities at airports, railways, golf courses, natural parks etc. that leads to unwanted degradation of land resources, loss of flora and fauna, and deterioration of the landscape. Moreover, the plastic wrappers and bags used by the travelers ameliorate the polluted state of land resources.

**Degradation and Loss of Ecosystem** Unchecked development of tourism related facilities (lodging, restaurants, entertainment, etc.) mining of sand and different minerals, deforestation and construction of roads may result in the demolition of biological community. Also, development of air terminals, streets, rail and roads causes loss of wildlife habitats. Besides, presence of visitors in a large number in close vicinity to wildlife habitats and their actions like horse riding, sledging, trampling may responsible for extinction of numerous types of the fauna, soil disintegration, loss of vegetation, decrease in air and water penetrability. Thus, modification of biological systems by visitor's recreational exercises can lead to the degradation of natural habitats and further deteriorate the condition of the environment.

**Change in Climate:** Tourism, being a climate responsive sector, is directly affected by any unpleasant changes in the weather of region, like climate-change inflicted storms, floods, loss of snowfall, excessive rains etc. Globally, tourism cannot be excluded from the list of climate change sources as it involves movement of people and creation of facilities for travelers and is hence a secondary source of climate change. It is been estimated that only movement of people from one destination to other amounts to 50% of the total traffic (road, rail and air), hence contributing substantially to the emission of greenhouse gases and other major pollutants. In the last two decades, the rise in average temperature in Kashmir valley as reported by IMD (Indian Meteorological Department, Ministry of Earth Sciences, Govt. of India), was 1.45°C as compared to 2.32°C in Jammu region.

### **Snowfall imbalance**

Climate change is badly hurting the snowfall balance of Kashmir valley. A large number of tourists are attracted to Kashmir because of adventure sports associated with snow. The recent rise in temperatures, no snow in winter season, torrential rains are a clear symptom of climate change making its presence in the valley. According to the findings of a research conducted by National Institute of Hydrology, Roorkee, Ladakh, Zaskar and Greater Himalayan ranges of J&K have witnessed a decrease in the glacier volume ranging between 3.6% and 97% in the past three decades, with most of glaciers degrading by 17% -25% . The low snowfall amount is not only affecting fresh water sources but also poses a negative image for the tourism industry in the state. Hence sustainable development is required. Another facet of climate change is irregular patterns of rainfall. Therefore, droughts and flood like situations have now become more prominent. The great floods of September 2021 can be attributed to drastic climate change over the recent past.

**State Tourism Policy:** The Ministry of Tourism government of Jammu and Kashmir has drafted a tourism policy to promote and develop tourism in the state. Certain areas have been identified under which tourism will be developed across the Kashmir region, the state in general. Tourism policy includes the development and promotion of new forms of tourism and abiding the sustainable tourism approach in order to protect the state tourism resources. The state government is working hard to promote eco-tourism and offbeat tourist destinations in collaboration with several other concerned bodies. In addition to this, the policy constitutes

development of tourism infrastructure and human resources, ensuring safety and security, and encouraging tourism education within the state.

Table No. State government initiatives for the development of Tourism

| Name of project      | Year | Amount Sanctioned (INR in Crores) |
|----------------------|------|-----------------------------------|
| Eco-Tourism          | 2022 | 2.5                               |
| Promotional Campaign | 2021 | 3.90                              |
| Border Tourism       | 2022 | 600                               |

Source: Different newspapers

## CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to elaborate on the characteristics of MICE tourism and to investigate the prospects and challenges of MICE tourism in India. India is poised positively on the MICE path. According to statistics published by International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA), India has strengthened its ranking significantly in the past few years by hosting 175 meetings in 2017 as compared to 143 in the year 2016, thus leaping and improving its rank by seven positions. A detailed study of the last five year data revealed the country has regained its ranking, which it enjoyed in the year 2013. India still is lagging behind in terms of the number of meetings it organizes in spite of having sufficient MICE infrastructure across the 12 major destinations. There is tremendous potential for MICE segment to grow in the country, but it is under-performing on account of inadequate advertising and merchandising campaign which requires to be re-structured as there is a strong need for proper co-ordination and cohesiveness across different stakeholders for seamless implementation. The good news is that India is exploring and developing new venues wherein MICE events can be organized, thus enabling to pep up the economy of the particular location. What needs to be done is to improve upon the last mile connectivity, upgrade people skills, empower organizations at the micro-level and develop the eco-system in a holistic manner. The Himalayan valley of Kashmir has long been regarded as the „Paradise on Earth“ by travelers and adventurers. The valley is bestowed with natural resources that attract millions of tourists every year. The economic impetus developed by the tourism industry has a substantial contribution to the GDP of the state. However, it is been rightly said that with greater opportunities come greater responsibilities. The nature of most of the tourist destinations of Kashmir is fragile and eco-sensitive. In order to cater to the needs of a large number of tourists, environmental stress on natural resources becomes obvious. This stress often leads to irreparable damage to the ecosystem and causes pollution to the resources that it strives upon. As such, tourism management requires special attention. The natural resources and biodiversity of these areas can be seriously threatened if the inflow of people and subsequent infrastructural development is not overlooked by proper policies. The study concludes that the trend in flow of tourists to the valley has been mainly dependent on the law and order situations in the valley. The maintenance of a cordial and peaceful environment will encourage more tourists to visit. The subsequent stress on the environment will create implications for both; locals and tourists. Therefore, the remedies were analyzed and it was concluded that proper management of resources and limiting tourist flow below the carrying capacity of that particular place can help in safeguarding its resources. Finally some valuable recommendations were provided to assist the policy makers in sustaining the resources of the valley for the present and future generations. As far as the constraints faced in Indian MICE industry are concerned, lack of well-defined policies, the structure of the promotion bureau, lack of government support in the pre/ post-event area are the major bones of contention. Specific guidelines need to be drafted specifically for MICE and to be included in the National Tourism Policy. New tourist destinations may be explored and further developed for offering innovative tourism products or experiences. MICE tourism can be used as an appropriate tool to make India an attractive destination so that foreign tourists keep coming back to the country. In nutshell, India is flexing its muscles in the MICE sector both as a market (domestic and outbound) and as a destination (inbound). The Indian MICE market is growing rapidly with a strong domestic sector and a booming outbound traffic. At the same time, with the country's efforts to increase its inbound corporate travel, hotels, and convention centres are witnessing massive expansion programs to make India into a leading corporate meeting destination and hub. While foreign NTOs are making an aggressive bid for the Indian MICE traffic; state tourism boards, travel agencies, hotel chains, MICE operators, and other stakeholders are also not far behind in growth plans to capture the maximum share.

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