

Kashmir Tourism – An Unexplored Economic Goldmine

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ABSTRACT

Every country has a set of states that contribute to its economy in a unique way depending upon their natural resources, infrastructure, geology and an array of other factors. In this research paper, Kashmir the northern most Indian state is under consideration. The beautiful landscape of Kashmir, its lakes and other natural features give it a tremendous tourism potential given the right destination marketing. Contemporary poets have compared the state to paradise and has a rich heritage associated with it. Given the multi-dimensional tourism aspects, the state is still lingering economically. Where do the flaws lie, is it all because of the tense political situation or is there something more to it? It is true that the political unrest is responsible for the tourism lag but is it only that and the answer is NO. The factors that affect its tourism in the positive ways and the factors that affect it negatively will be studied in this paper and a logical conclusion will be interpreted to help the state improve its tourism and boost its economy.

Keywords: Destination marketing, tourism, place marketing, tourism economy.

INTRODUCTION:

Kashmir has been frequently visited by travellers who desired to gain knowledge, as it has been a place of great learning, and attracted scholars, sages and savants from all parts of India and neighbouring countries. In the Buddhist period, even people from Greece and Egypt decided to take long journey for the same purpose (Mohammad, 2006). Kashmir is popularly known as "Paradise on Earth". The state is bestowed with beauty & rich forests, natural lakes, fresh water. The state of Jammu & Kashmir is known all over the world for its beautiful valleys, lakes, snow-capped peaks, invigorating climate, valleys, cool climate, opportunities for trekking fishing, skiing & number of archaeological, historical, cultural & religious places, cool climate & hospitable people. Among all industries, tourism is an important industry in the state (Bilal Ahmad Khan, 2013). The state of Jammu and Kashmir has seen a lot of ups and downs in the past both politically and naturally. The times when there was political unrest especially during the recent years of 2008 and 2010, there still was a surge in the number of tourists visiting the state which leaves us with the question of what are the factors that affect the tourist activities in the state? Because the general perception of the political unrest affecting it in the negative way does not prove to be true according to the data provided by the Jammu and Kashmir tourism department. The answer is that the unrest publicised the image and it led to a curiosity about the state and the number of people visiting the state increased in numbers. This shows that the destination is not marketed well by the government, if it was so, the monetary returns from the state would increase manifold. The landscape and geology that the state possesses is unmatched throughout the entire country and also the weather of the state is a treat in the summer. Tourism contributes 9% to the global GDP and also creating employment percentage of 8.7. Kashmir being blessed with its natural beauty also is famous for its handicrafts and spices like saffron. Despite all these natural resources the state has not realised its true economic potential which relates to bad marketing efforts from the state. It is now widely acknowledged fact that it is the responsibility of the state to provide essential infrastructure and other facilitate for tourism development (Bilal & Raja, 2015). If those efforts are being made or not we will come to know as we proceed in this paper.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

The review of literature showed that the political unrest and other insurgencies are blamed for the loss of tourist potential in the state, a little research work has been done in illustrating the failure in place and destination marketing. The youth was frustrated due to unemployment, income earning hand were putting guns for Azadi(freedom) and nowhere there was a bit for prosperity (Hussain & Bhat, 2012). Problems like these are the main factors that are blamed in the barriers of tourism. Despite being a leading industry of J&K, concrete steps of its economic impact on state are still lacking (Mir, 2014), one of these steps being the right place marketing and media image. The correlation between tourism and terrorism is undeniable in the modern era due to the strength of the industry and the fact that tourist sites are an ideal target place for terrorist attacks in order to cause large amounts of economic and social disruption (Habib & Fatima, 2017). The research shows that terrorist activities and lags in infrastructure to be the main causes of the underperforming state tourism which has a booming potential. As the review of literature suggests the said factors to be the cause of the problem, there is a battle within the country of publicising the destination image positively and negatively which is yet to be addressed and the purpose of this paper is to address that very issue. Further research papers were reviewed to study the consequences and influence of the tourism on the state. Tourism has played an important role in the employment generation from past with a great potential to increase it further in the coming decades (Mir,2014). Tourism in India has a wider impact on other economic sectors through both backward and forward linkages such as on agriculture, horticulture, handicrafts, transport, construction, etc. It also leads to additional income generation, generation of employment and poverty eradication (Ganai & Sachdeva, 2017). The literature review laid the emphasis on how the tourism holds its importance in different developmental aspects. The review thus undertaken shows the area of place marketing is the area of focus when it comes to overhauling the conditions of the state of Jammu & Kashmir and the purpose of this paper is to serve just that.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

- To find the factors that affect tourism in kashmir both positively and negatively.
- Suggesting improvements for a better place marketing of kashmir in future
- Finding the scope for economic growth in the tourism sector in Kashmir.

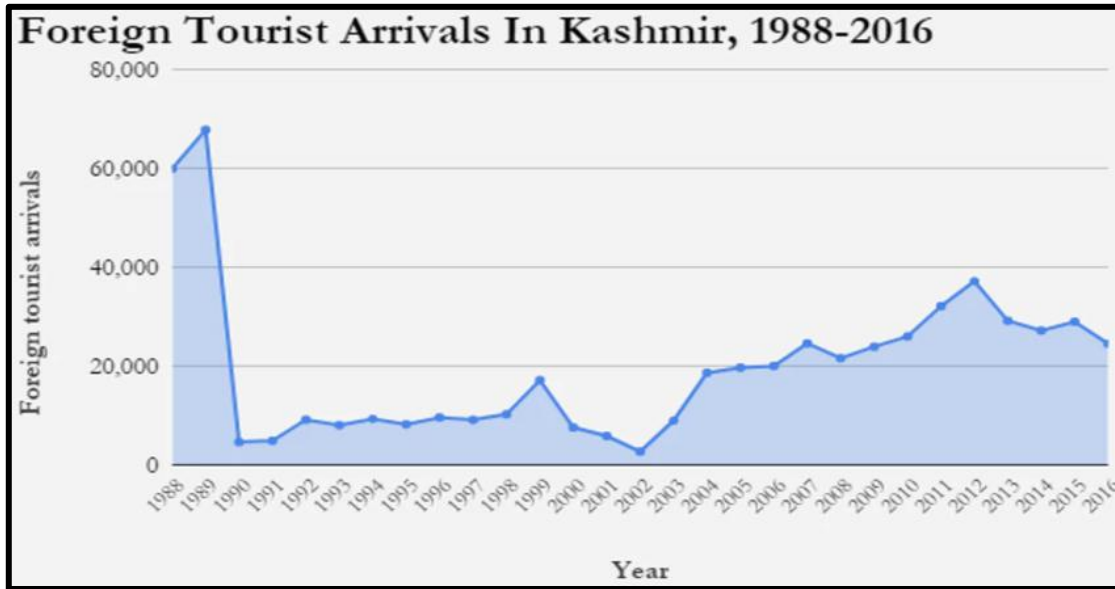
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

The data used in the research paper is of secondary nature, collected from Jammu and Kashmir Tourism Development, Corporation and Directorate of Tourism (Jammu and Kashmir) and other reliable journals and research articles. The data used in the research paper is recent ranging from 2000 to 2015.

Tourism Trends in the Past Years:

In the past years, the bad political scenario has had adverse impact on the tourism sector of Kashmir. Suicide bombings, attacks by militant groups and open fire by security forces are the main reasons for hostility (Aijaz, 2014). These events and the bad publicity given to it by the media has positioned Kashmir in a very negative way. The decline of tourist arrivals is a logical consequence of rising terrorist activities since people choose their holiday destination according to the most benefits and least costs, i.e. risks (Sonmez & Graefe,1998), Even though these antecedents have had very bad consequences on the state tourism but according to the data gathered from Department of Tourism, government of Jammu and Kashmir, the numbers have risen.

These graphs show the increase in the tourist arrivals despite the increase in the conflicts which means that people visited the place even after so much negative publicity, which raises the question if the place was marketed properly what kind of effect it would have on the tourist scenario and the answer is that it would increase manifold.



Economic Potential of Tourism:

When we talk about Kashmir tourism there is a big gap in performance and potential. The current revenues produced by tourism are minimal when compares to the potential it carries. Tourism contributes to better income generation (R. Dube, 1987). The rural population of Kashmir is associated with agriculture and the one not in possession of land and the urban people depend on tourism for their livelihood. the amount of revenue generated by tourism mainly in the form of Taxes, Foreign exchange, Export earnings is more than Rs.3000 crore (Expert Group Report-2011,GOI) and contributes about 15%-20% to the State Gross Domestic Product(SGDP)(Choudhary,2002)which is expected to rise further provided the situation in Kashmir remains normal (Hilal Mir, 2014). The parts of Kashmir with rich eco-tourism potential need to be promoted by the state by providing better connectivity, the villages in the upper reaches of Tral are breathtakingly beautiful but they are not even on the tourist map. This can be regarded as the biggest failure of the state in place tourism. Development of tourism will lead to the progress in rural / backward regions (Smith- Stephen, 1989). The existing tourist spots that are famous in Kashmir have contributed to the economy but the potential that the unexplored areas have is exponential. Studies confirm that tourist spending has a positive relation with income, revenue generation & savings i.e. Increase in tourist spending will result in an expansion of income, taxes and savings, speeding up the developmental process(Hilal Mir, 2014). Tourism is not merely an activity for entertainment. It is an enriching an energizing activity. For a developing country like India, which is on the path of growth through structural transformation of economy, tourism is the right vehicle (Bilal Ahmad Khan, 2013).

FINDING AND DISCUSSION:

Flaws in the Place Marketing and Their Remedy:

Focus is on a very few places; since Kashmir is a land of many flavours therefore every region holds its own individuality but it has been noticed that the focus of marketing has only been a very few places. This is one of the reasons the true potential of tourism has not been achieved yet. There are number of unexplored tourist destinations in J&K because of which it is also known as, “Paradise Unexplored” such new unexploited attractive destinations need to be explored more and more (Hilal Mir, 2014). The recent initiatives run by the J&K government like putting pictures of unexplored areas is a good one, this is a good initiative but the problem with this is that it only reaches the people of state itself, kashmir needs to be marketed globally.

Media’s bad portrayal of the destination image; it’s a fact that kashmir is politically disturbed but instead of ensuring safety and focussing on tourist activities the media has been busy worsening the situation, weaving lies and giving fake news which has created a scare among the masses. Instead of doing this, the media should paint the beautiful picture of Kashmir so, that more people flock the place that will also help it economically.

Lack of road connectivity and infrastructure; whenever we think of tourism rich places like Switzerland apart from its natural beauty, its amazing connectivity, the trains and trams come to mind, whenever a person is visiting a place, being able to travel freely from one place to another is his basic requirements and kashmir lags behind in connectivity, some of the amazing places like ‘Tarsar lake’ are not even connected by roads and have to be accessed on either foot or on horses. In the modern day and age, lagging in facilities like this decreases the “tourism satisfaction” of the tourists.

CONCLUSION:

The true potential of tourism as described in the paper is not realised which has had adverse effects on Kashmiri economy. Political issues combined with biased media has positioned it badly in the minds of tourists. Further, the lack of investment by government has led to a miserable infrastructure and connectivity. This though is reversible if the government allocates the right amount of funds towards the sector. The media should also be advised by the government to not present the false image of the state. Given the right marketing and infrastructure the state can realise its true potential which can unleash its economy to the fullest in turn improving the GDP of both country and the state. The political unrest is a fact but with the proper security measures tourist safety can be ensure. Efforts should be made collectively by the government and the people to market the place well globally and attract large flocks of people. Be it heritage tourism, eco-tourism, medical-tourism, science- tourism, the state is a rich hub for all of these and the right place marketing holds the key to its economic potential. To change this outlook both the state and central government have to coordinate with the media of the country to bring out a positive outlook for the state for its political and social betterment.

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