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International Tourism and Tourism Policy for Pakistan

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By

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The main question this study endeavors to answer is whether tourism policies in Pakistan have anything to do with the decline of international tourism in Pakistan. To build country's economy it is important to make investment in tourism as it emphasizes on the importance of a proactive international tourism policy to bring peace to Pakistan. But Pakistan is not exploring its tourism capacity to attract international tourists. The motive of writing this brief is by implementation of a policy, tourism can be revived in Pakistan and terrorism can be curbed by involving locals at the grassroots level, by making them aware of the benefits of disposable income that tourists bring with them. By providing them with an atmosphere which would change the mindset of the people by letting them experience other civilizations and cultures and challenge closed-mindedness of the Pakistani society.

Pakistan may have great potential in building up its economy and generate revenue if it taps its potential in tourism and explores ways of investing in it. Tourism can create jobs, build revenue, and promote itself as a healthy destination for tourists from around the world. Direct contribution of the travel and tourism industry to Pakistan's GDP is 2.9%, supporting approximately 4 million jobs in 2017 directly and indirectly which are also 6.5% of country's total employment¹.

Policies and strategies need to be articulated to address ecologically sustainable tourism and the influx of domestic tourism. Without adequate safeguards and strategic management of the destinations, tourism could lead to environmental degradation, social disruption and damage to cultural and historical sites. To address these issues, creating the mindset of a 'conscious traveler' can play a key role in overcoming these problems. The provincial policy draft for Punjab has no emphasis on promoting responsible tourism which cannot happen without easy access to dustbins, strict sanctions by the government and educating people.²

Pakistan has also been benefitting from tourism as it contributes to the economy and culture. Pakistan, by investing in tourism may be able to create more wealth and provide some economic

¹ World Economic Forum, *The Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report 2017*, Online <https://reports.weforum.org/travel-and-tourism-competitiveness-report-2017/country-profiles/#economy=PAK> (Accessed 15th January, 2021)

² Government of the Punjab, *Draft Provincial Tourism Policy, 2017*. <https://ptegp.punjab.gov.pk/system/files/Draft%20Provincial%20Tourism%20Policy%202014.12.2017.pdf> (Accessed 22 January, 2021)

hope to people as tourism is connected with various other subsectors such as transportation, hotel accommodation and transfers, involvement of local tour operators and a demand for local tourist shops and crafts, increase in international flights and also build on its international relations. Tourism is a big industry and it means big business. Worldwide, it is continuously evolving and getting bigger and better getting more competitive.

However, the road travel to northern locations can be up to eighteen hours from Islamabad. The local authorities have inadequate road maintenance equipment thus limiting the season for visitors and restricting private sector growth³.

The country is expected to see an increase in domestic and international visitors in the coming years. More specifically the following measures through a composite of policy, programmatic and behavioral interventions are suggested to prevent environmental damages and overexploitation of culture and space.

a) Policy and Upstream Level:

- An emphasis on an ecologically sustainable national tourism policy is needed to recognize the potential of this sector in Pakistan to attract international tourists, so locals can be empowered by the benefits of disposable income that tourists bring with them as well as experience mingling with people of different cultures and challenge close-mindedness in the Pakistani society.
- A specific regulatory framework should be promulgated for national interest to increase international tourism traffic and create the mindset of a conscious traveler.
- There is a need to easy access to dustbins reinforced with sign boards to encourage people not to litter accompanied with heavy fines.
- Strong advertisement is needed to raise awareness about tourism places and spots in and outside Pakistan to attract international tourists.
- Infrastructure is weak. The local authorities have inadequate road maintenance equipment. There are few roadside facilities such as hotels and restaurants, fueling stations, rest areas with no dedicated amenities for women and disabled. Hygienic toilet should be built with easy access for the disabled and restaurants with pure/organic food services should be encouraged.
- Protection of minorities with strict implementation of law and order needed to be implemented to target cases of forced conversions and unjust killings, kidnappings, especially of the Kalasha as they are a major source of attraction for international tourists.

³ Mansoor Malik, "Punjab takes up maiden ambitious tourism policy", Dawn, 22 January 2021. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1499691> (Accessed January 22, 2021)

- State should only register those travel and tour operators for business that they have added environmental protection techniques in their policies in accordance with the UNWTO travel ethics so tourists leave a minimum footprint and a good impression behind for example ‘UNWTO emphasizes on honoring the host and their common heritage, protection of the planet, supporting the local economy, traveling safely, be an informed traveler, use digital platform wisely, make tourism the force for good and set a good example for other travelers.’⁴
- As per the 18th amendment of the Pakistani constitution, the tourism ministry has been handed over to provinces. Now, we can’t go abroad and sell our provinces over or market them separately. It should come under one wing and one constitution.

b) Institutional

- A fully funded Research and Development entity related to travel and tourism industry should be established with the mandate to create the mindset of a conscious traveler to sustain this sector. The R&D entity should also be able to monitor and surveil responsible tourism.
- Ambitious national goals should be set to reduce overexploitation and degradation of culture and space. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals should be adopted to acknowledge integrated nature of the many challenges faced by humanity today.⁵

c) Programmatic Interventions

- Awareness, information, intelligence and education campaigns to raise awareness about responsible tourism should be introduced through social media and organizes set of communication tactics e.g. precautionary approaches to exploitation of land, reducing touristic carbon footprints and avoiding losses by irresponsible tourism. These programs should be tailored keeping in view the potential tourism sector in mind, for instance, Pakistan has great potential in terms of adventure, religious and historical tourism. Aim is to reduce losses by strengthening resilience to threats of irresponsible tourism integrated with Sustainable Development Goals.
- Respect for culture, space and environment should form a part of school curriculum and adult teaching programs to nurture responsible tourism and sustainable development goals. The curriculum should include a general module on protection of

⁴ United Nations World Travel Organization, *Tips for a responsible traveler*.

<https://webunwto.s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2020-07/Tips-for-Responsible-Traveller-WCTE-EN.pdf> (Accessed January 22, 2021)

⁵ United Nations Environment Programme, *Sustainable Development Goals*.

<https://www.unenvironment.org/about-un-environment/evaluation-office/our-evaluation-approach/sustainable-development-goals> (Accessed January 22, 2021)

- environment and reducing carbon footprints. Indeed, responsible tourism guidance should be incorporated in all the government-funded tourism programs.
- The travel and tourism industry should be sensitized to adopt technological upgrade for potential travelers to reduce inconvenience of traveling and information available. Updated and useful information about routes, hygienic hotel accommodations and rest areas should be made easily accessible on social media.
 - Infrastructure should be upgraded with the view to reducing use of concrete in the northern areas. Only preservation of cultural spaces will continue to attract international and domestic tourists.

d) Household Level

- At the household level, people need to be sensitized to adopt sustainable and responsible mediums of traveling. They should be encouraged to travel together in coasters as per their requirement to avoid taking unnecessary amount of vehicles in the northern areas to help reduce carbon emissions. They should be encouraged to take measures that would reduce the impact of their carbon footprint in the northern areas.
- To improve decision making about destinations and their reach, information should be available online to help travelers plan their itineraries as per their required traveling experience.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has thrown the world off balance. We will see the rise of transformative changes in the way daily affairs and businesses are managed and conducted. At the same time, it has shown us the rise of usage of social media. We implore the state, in order to ‘improve the tourist experience, to develop the ‘conscious traveler’ from which there arise opportunities for more responsible tourism.’ It is imperative to acknowledge travelers’ basic needs, exchange of value as well as build social capital through various forms of tourist communal collaboration. Mobile connectivity is going to change the way people will choose to travel in the post-COVID era. Travelers are continuously blending between their offline and online presence and hence easy access to useful information on social media is going to play a key role when international tourists will select destinations in the coming years.