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ASSESSMENT OF OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES OF TOURISM INDUSTRY IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR

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ABSTRACT

Travel and tourism have been important social activities of human beings from ancient times. Tourism has become one of the world's largest and fastest growing economic activities. Its growth has impact on employment, foreign currency earnings, balance of payments, and the economy in general. Jammu and Kashmir is known for its scenic landscape all over the world. Tourism forms an integral part of the state's economy. The state of Jammu and Kashmir has immense potential for tourism from both domestic as well as international tourists there are a number of locations which are untapped and can be developed as major tourist destinations. Tourism being one of the state's major industries has played an important role for developing the economy, particularly in the Valley and Ladakh regions. The industry has given jobs to a very large number of people and has generated economic activities in the primary, secondary and tertiary sectors in the state, which owes dependence to a large extent to this industry. The present study is an attempt to assess and analyze the opportunities, challenges and other related issues of Tourism Industry in Jammu and Kashmir. The study also identifies the need of a well balanced and effective policy of the state government towards the sustainable tourism development in J&K.

KEYWORDS

Balance of payments; Economy; Employment; Foreign exchange; Sustainable tourism.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism consists of the activities undertaken during travel from home or workplace for the pleasure and enjoyment of certain destinations, and the facilities that cater to the needs of the tourist. Travel and tourism have been important social activities of human beings from time immemorial. The urge to explore new places within one's own country or outside and seek a change of environment has been experienced from ancient times.

Tourism has outshined traditional industries to become one of the world's largest and fastest growing economic activities. According to the estimates from the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) in 2011, tourism generates around 270.7 million jobs worldwide and accounts for over 10% of global Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Apart from economic benefits, tourism plays a vital role in cross-cultural exchange of the two cultures. It helps to learn about different languages, life styles and tradition. It provides opportunities to adopt the qualities of different cultures vice-versa, as tourists are also bound to cause tension among the local population by introducing new life styles and progressively promoting social, cultural and religious disruptions.

Tourism provides opportunities to local people to raise their living standards by increasing employment opportunities. Tourism serves as a means of conserving the cultural heritage of the local area which otherwise might be lost due to development. It provides scope for conserving local dance, art, craft, music, drama, dress and old historic monuments.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The present study has following specific research objectives:

1. To study the potential and employment opportunities of Tourism Industry in Jammu and Kashmir
2. To assess the impact of tourism on Jammu and Kashmir's economy and environment
3. To find out the major challenges and problems of Tourism Industry in Jammu and Kashmir
4. To provide suggestions and recommendations for the full exploitation and development of Tourism Industry in Jammu and Kashmir

METHODOLOGY

The study is mainly based upon the collection of secondary data. The secondary data was collected from various sources of publications such as Magazines, journals, Research articles, Internet and published and unpublished records on J&K tourism.

TOURISM INDUSTRY IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR

Jammu and Kashmir is known for its scenic landscape, beautiful valleys, lakes, snow capped mountains, cool climate, skiing, trekking and fishing opportunities, archaeological, historical, cultural and religious places all over the world.

The state of Jammu and Kashmir has three distinct regions, viz, Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh. All the three regions have immense potential for tourism from both domestic as well as international tourists. While mountainous landscape of Kashmir valley has attracted tourists for centuries across the globe. Some notable tourist places in Kashmir valley are Dal lake, Mughal gardens, Nishat Bagh, Gulmarg, Yeusmarg, Phalgam etc. Kashmiri's natural landscape has made it one of the popular destinations for adventure tourism in South Asia. Marked by four distinct seasons, ski enthusiasts can enjoy the exotic Himalayan powder during winters.

Jammu is known for its ancient temples, Hindu shrines, gardens and forts. The Hindu holy shrine of Amarnath in Kashmir attracts millions of Hindu devotees every year. And Vaishno Devi shrine in Jammu region also attracts tens of thousands of Hindu devotees every year. Jammu's historic monuments feature a unique blend of Islamic and Hindu architecture styles.

Ladakh, the third and important region of the State has emerged as a major hub for adventure tourism. This part of Greater Himalaya called "Moon on Earth" comprising of naked peaks and deep gorges was once known for the silk route to Asia from subcontinent.

Tourism is one of the State's major industries. It has played an important role for developing the economy, particularly in the valley and Ladakh. Being a labour-intensive industry, it has given different jobs to a very large number of people and generated economic activities in the primary, secondary and tertiary sectors in the state, which owes large dependence on this industry.

Kashmir has been a center of attention for different people for different reasons all over the world. There are various places of tourist attraction in the state visited by the tourists. However, most of the places with ample tourism potential are untapped.

Tourism in Kashmir depends greatly on the natural resources that this place has to offer for economic profitability. Tourism provides good sustenance to the local population and revenue to the State exchequer. The visits from domestic and international tourists provide a valuable source of earning. Visitors spending generate income for both public and private sectors besides effecting wages and employment opportunities. Till the year 2010 there was a negative growth rate in the tourist arrivals. But during 2011-12 there was a significant increase in volume of domestic as well as foreign tourist arrivals in Kashmir. [See table 1]

TABLE 1: TOURISTS' ARRIVAL FROM 2004 TO 2010 IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR

Year	Amarnath Ji	Kashmir Domestic Tourists	Foreign	Jammu Domestic	Ladakh Domestic	Foreign	Total
2004	400000	358000	19000	6100000	13000	22000	7724000
2005	388000	585702	19680	6251998	13781	24665	8315654
2006	265000	412879	20009	6950573	17822	26078	8434149
2007	213565	417264	24576	7222318	22102	28477	8634286
2008	498075	550100	22000	6576000	39000	33000	8860350
2009	373419	520454	20809	7657000	48127	30446	9643517
2010	458046	698564	24376	8239474	54684	21371	10753556

ECONOMIC BENEFITS AND POTENTIAL OF TOURISM SECTOR IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR

Jammu and Kashmir has tremendous potential in tourism sector. The scope of large scale industrial development is very limited in the State. Tourism being a labour intensive industry provides a very vast scope for employment opportunities in Jammu and Kashmir. The employment opportunities provided by this industry are comparatively higher than other industries. Tourism is regarded multi-segmental industry, therefore, it provides different types of jobs like hotel managers, receptionists, accountants, clerks, guides, travel agents, chefs, transport operators etc.

The positive economic benefits of tourism industry in Jammu and Kashmir are:

1. Contribution to State's income generations
2. Expansion of employment opportunities in the State
3. Tax revenue
4. Generation of Foreign exchange
5. Transformation of regional economy
6. Social and Cultural effect
7. Up-gradation and expansion of basic infrastructure

FOREIGN EXCHANGE EARNINGS FROM TOURISM

From tourism perspective, Jammu and Kashmir has always been one among the favorite places of visit not only for domestic tourists but for the foreign tourists as well. There has been an upward trend in terms of the number of foreign tourists visiting the State since last five years and the trend is expected to continue to boost the economy of the State.

Tourism is an important sector of Indian economy and contributes substantially in the country's foreign exchange earnings (FEEs). Foreign exchange earnings from tourism, in Rupee terms, during 2011, were Rs 77591 Crore, with a growth of 19.6%, as compared to the foreign exchange earnings of Rs 64889 Crore during 2010. [See Table 2]

TABLE 2: FOREIGN TOURIST ARRIVALS AND FOREIGN EXCHANGE EARNINGS DURING 2004-2011 IN INDIA

Year	Foreign Tourist Arrivals (in Nos.)	Foreign Exchange Earnings (Rs. Crores)	Foreign Exchange Earnings (Millions US\$)
2004	3457477	27944	6170
2005	3918160	33123	7493
2006	4447167	39025	8634
2007	5081504	44360	10729
2008	5282603	51294	11832
2009	55167699	54960	11394
2010	5775692	64889	14193
2011	6309222	77591	16564

Source: Ministry of Tourism, Govt. of India (2011-2012 Annual Report)

During 2011, foreign tourist arrivals in India were 6.29 million, with a growth rate of 8.9% over 2010. Foreign tourist arrivals in India during 2010 were 6.29 million, with a growth of 8.9% over 2010. Foreign tourist arrivals in India during 2010 were 5.78 million as compared to the foreign tourist arrivals of 5.17 million during 2009, showing a growth of 11.8%.

TOURISM PRODUCTS OF JAMMU AND KASHMIR

The State of Jammu and Kashmir offers a very large number of marketable products. While looking from tourist point of view, each district of the State has so much to offer such as:

- Vast Natural Resources
- Adventure Tourism (River Rafting, Mountain climbing)
- Numerous Trekking routes
- Pilgrimage Tourism (Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist)
- Wildlife Tourism
- Heritage Tourism
- Springs
- Festivals and Cultural activities
- Handicrafts etc.

The above mentioned products could be exploited by means of a well-laid tourism policy. Thus, tourist information offices should be opened in all the major cities of India and abroad, which must provide the information to the tourists about the various tourist destinations in Jammu and Kashmir.

Further, the identified products should be made marketable and attractive to lure tourists. And this is possible only if investments are made in the following infrastructure:

- Up- gradation and expansion of Roads and Local Transport
- Modern International Level Luxury Sightseeing Coaches
- Operation of Air Services to various tourist destinations
- International Standard Hotel Accommodation
- Recreational Facilities
- Amusement Parks, Health clubs, Indoor Skating Rinks etc.
- Setting up of Gondolas/cable cars/ Rope ways in Phalgam, Sonamarg, Patnitop etc.

OPPORTUNITIES OF TOURISM INDUSTRY IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR**a) HERITAGE TOURISM**

The State of Jammu and Kashmir is full of history. Under the Antiques Act, any article that is more than 75 years old is to be declared heritage property. Jammu and Kashmir is a land with more enormous potential for heritage tourism. The land is full of natural beauty that is unique to the state. It is also bestowed with a variety of cultural forms and manifestations that has their distinct flavor. It has diverse practices in religion, rites and rituals, fairs and festivals, landscape and people, language and culture.

The valley of Kashmir offers sparkling streams, high mountains and verdant land that has the classic beauty and attracts people from every corner of the world. The Kashmir valley has been the chosen place for many film makers and artists in India. The history of the state still lives in the forts, museums, ancient buildings and other heritage spots within the State. Jammu and Kashmir is home to famous Hindu pilgrimages in India, where thousands of Hindu community people visit the shrine of Amarnath cave and Mata Vaishno Devi every year.

Jammu and Kashmir is blessed with both tangible and the intangible heritage which should be incorporated into the wider tourism circuit. The need is to treat heritage tourism in this region as the function of the tourism only then it can thrive in the true tourism sense. First, the heritage tourism assets of the region should be identified and then a proper documentation mechanism has to be devised so that a proper inventory is developed which can be integrated into a well defined tourism product by employing the proper marketing strategy with the help of the multidisciplinary approach of the varied professionals, who can constitute task force for the application of the mechanism developed from this integrated process. Once this procedure is brought into action it will lead to the heritage tourism development model that will lead to the bright prospects of the overall tourism business in the region.

b) PILGRIMAGE TOURISM

The State of Jammu and Kashmir has been a seat of reference to all major religions of the world. This state is full of holy sites and most of these sites are located in between the scenic surroundings of great Himalayas. This aspect is responsible for attracting large number of tourists every year, which has ultimately led to a boom in the tourism industry of the State. This way, tourists not only just explore the spectacular landscapes but have the opportunity of worshipping at the respective religious shrines. Jammu & Kashmir has various mosques and temples which are just marvel creations. The state stands as an epitome of religious tolerance. Visiting Hari Parbat Pilgrim Center where a temple, a gurudwara and a mosque stand side by side gives a feeling of pure brotherhood in between of major religions of Jammu and Kashmir.

Jammu & Kashmir has various pilgrim destinations for Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists. The very famous Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine and the Amarnath Temple are located in this state. These sites are the most valued and sanctified of Hindu pilgrimage sites where thousands of devotees pay homage every year. For Muslims, there is the Hazratbal Shrine in Srinagar where the sacred hair (Moi-e-Muqqadas) of Prophet Mohammad (S.A.W) is preserved and the truthfull come to pay homage. The Shahdara Sharief located in Rajouri District of the State is like an emblem of communal harmony. Baba Ghulam Shah, who was born in Rawalpindi, Pakistan, made Shahdara his house and Sikhs, Muslims and Hindus visit this shrine for offering prayers and seeking the blessings of Pir (Saint). Ladakh has a captivating barren landscape and attracts innumerable tourists who are keen to experience the lush atmosphere which forms the background to several monasteries and monastic festivals here.

CHALLENGES OF TOURISM INDUSTRY IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR**a) INFRASTRUCTURAL CHALLENGES OF TOURISM INDUSTRY**

To a greater degree than most activities, Travel and tourism depends on a wide range of infrastructure services- airports, roads, railheads and ports, as well as basic infrastructure services required by hotels, restaurants, shops and recreation facilities (e.g. telecommunications and utilities). It is the combination of tourism and good infrastructure that underpins the economic, environmental and social benefits. It is important to balance any decision to develop an area for tourism against the need to preserve fragile or threatened environments and cultures. However, once a decision has been taken where an area is appropriate for near tourism development or that an existing tourist site should be developed further, then good infrastructure will be essential to sustain the quality, economic viability and growth of travel and Tourism. Good infrastructure will also be a key factor in the industry's ability to manage visitors flow in ways that do not affect the natural or built heritage, nor counteract against local interest.

If travel and tourism is not managed well, it can have a detrimental effect- it can damage fragile environments and destroy local cultures. The challenge is to manage the future growth of the industry so as to minimize its negative impacts on the environment and host communities whilst maximizing the benefits it brings in terms of jobs, wealth and support for local culture and industry, and protection of the built and natural environment.

b) ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES OF TOURISM INDUSTRY

As tourism increases, environmental and socio-economic impacts can also be expected to increase. Environmental pollution poses a serious threat to life on earth not only in industrial areas but also in areas where there is a great concentration of tourists. The areas with tourists' concentration are dumping ground for municipal and industrial waste. In the tourist areas various diseases are often transmitted by contaminated food. Locals of the area mainly face the severity of problem as during the peak period the demand of public services reaches saturation point, there is generally shortage of water. Thus unclean environment due to piled garbage and lots of pollution takes place.

Tourism's potential for improving environmental conservation and community well-being is nevertheless considerable. The key to accessing this potential is the direct involvement of local communities within a climate of supportive regional or national policy. Policy makers, non-governmental organizations, and other stakeholders must therefore work in coordination to create opportunities that center on local communities, promote conservation efforts and link conservation with enterprise development.

NEED OF A COMPREHENSIVE MARKETING STRATEGY

The first important task before policy makers is to develop and adopt a comprehensive marketing strategy for increasing the visibility of Jammu and Kashmir on the World Tourism Map. Besides this, given the competition and the need to satisfy customers with an increasingly broad range of interests, Jammu and Kashmir has no option but to offer a tourism product that is competitive and innovative. Thus, both the development and the organization of the tourism product are instrumental in the successes of promotional strategies.

There is a great upheaval in the world of communications, prompting major changes in consumer behavior, especially noticeable in travel planning and reservations. Jammu and Kashmir will have to adopt a promotional approach consistent with the new tendencies. Focusing the investments on the markets generating huge revenues could lead to the enhancement of Jammu and Kashmir's performance in tourism sector.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To make the State of Jammu and Kashmir the number one tourist destination leading to sustainable socio-economic development of the region by capitalizing on the abundant available natural and human resources following step should be taken:

1. Attracting high spending international tourists to visit Kashmir
2. Developing optimal infrastructure facilities
3. Quicker accessibility, safer maneuverability, large reach, excellence in hospitality and service.
4. Develop tourist destination facilities of international standards
5. Move from seasonal to perennial tourism
6. Make wider usage of information technology to improve means of communication
7. Organize eco-friendly activities
8. Be the facilitator to encourage private entrepreneurship in the industry

CONCLUSION

Tourism is the life line of Jammu and Kashmir and all possible efforts need to be undertaken for retaining, maintaining and sustaining it. Tourism can play an effective role in integrating the entire universe. Tourism opens up new window for resources, both investment generation and revenue generation leading to employment generation as well as socio-economic development of the local populace.

Even though tourism creates jobs and contributes significantly to economic growth, it is not automatically a solution for poverty reduction. Therefore, it is important for government of the state, local investors and other stakeholders to actively participate in tourism and its related activities. The local workforce can also help by engaging and encouraging the use of local companies for the provision of transport, services and food in order to assist in alleviating local poverty.

The different terrains of the State coupled with law-and-order problems have contributed to poor connectivity in the region. The rail-road mix of transport in the state is very low. There is dire need to build alternative roads in some places to ensure better connectivity. There is also a need to upgrade many of the existing roads from two lanes to four lanes. The State, sparsely populated and scattered as it is, needs more airports and better air connectivity as well.

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