

Tourism Potential and Constraints: An Analysis of Tourist Spatial Attributes in Pakistan

Razzaq Ahmed & Khalida Mahmood***

Abstract

This study seeks to examine the tremendous tourism potential in Pakistan and the constraints that are hampering its growth and economic development. Tourism is one of the largest and fastest growing industries in the world. As one of the world's largest industries, tourism is associated with many prime sectors of the world economy. The potential impact of tourism is considerable in Pakistan. The major economic activity of northern and western areas of the country is directly or indirectly related to tourism. Since the country possesses a diverse physical and cultural landscape, it offers a variety of tourism opportunities to boost local economy in these areas. Despite the importance of tourism for the economy, it is relatively low among national priorities. The study also focuses on the social development level of these tourism potential areas using multivariate data base.

Introduction

The tourism industry is now considered as an important form of productive activity. Beginning from 1950's and 60's, tourism has been accepted as an important economic activity.¹ There is growing tourism management importance of local destinations. In this regard the role of both private and public sectors is important. In most parts of the world the role of the public sector is massive in this area. The land-use planning regulations, building control regulations, provision of infrastructure, investments and influx over demand are major management tools to be taken care of by the public sector/local

* Dr Razzaq Ahmed, Post-Doc Research Fellow, Lancaster Environment Centre, Lancaster University, Lancaster, UK

** Dr Khalida Mahmood, Professor, Department of Geography, University of Karachi, Karachi.

¹ G.E. Mitchell, *Eco-tourism Guiding: How to Start Your Career as an Eco-tourism Guide*, (Florida: G.E. Mitchell Institute of Travel Career Development, 1992).

government where as private sector tools are product, price, promotion, distribution and people.²

Pakistan possesses a diverse physical and cultural landscape and offers variety of tourism opportunities to boost the local economy of the tourism potential areas of the country. Despite importance of tourism for the economy, it is still relatively low among national priorities in Pakistan. Nevertheless, the private sector is fairly quick to seize some opportunities for profitable ventures. On the whole, social attitudes of the country are not constructive to develop some type tourist resorts, like mass beach resort, which is common throughout most of the world such as Copacabana, Florida, Los Angeles, Maldives, Phuket etc. Hence, Pakistan needs to capture the specialized segments of the tourism market and check the obstructions.

Though Pakistan has tremendous resources of tourism, it is a fluctuating industry in the country, dependent on uncertain influences such as natural hazards (floods, land sliding, earthquake) and political stability. Another dilemma facing stockholders is the possibility that a tourism program may not attract sufficient visitors, or quickly enough, to generate the right quantities of revenue when needed to meet the economic expectations of the community until a strong program is finalized.

Being at the junction of the world's highest mountains of Himalayas, Karakoram and Hindukash, Pakistan's occupies a unique geographical position. The entire region has exceptional beauty with high, lofty and snow capped mountains, gigantic glaciers, deep gorges, beautiful passes, lush green valleys, high altitude flowering meadows, magnificent winding rivers, dazzling streams, serene lakes and watersheds and amazing terraces. The north south running mountain belt of Sulaiman-Kirthar is like a back-bone on the map of Pakistan. The mountain ranges and hills of west represent another unique spatial distribution of parallel valleys and depressions especially around Quetta, Ziarat, Zhob and Kalat.³ All these mountains provide a distinctive ecological setting for flora and fauna.

Having wide bio-diversity these mountains also represent an amazing variety of climate and soil conditions. This has created striking vertical zones in natural vegetation and forest types ranging from tropical

² V.T.C Middleton and R. Hawkins, *Sustainable Tourism: A Marketing Perspective* (Oxford UK: Butterworth-Heinemann, 1998).

³ R. Ahmed, *Economic Regions of Pakistan: An Integrated Geographical Approach*, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Geography, University of Karachi, 2013.

thorn to coniferous and alpine forest. A number of significant types of vertebrates and endangered species like the snow leopard, marcopolo sheep, musk deer, brown bear, wooly squirrel and markhor are found here. Markhor or Ibex, the national animal of Pakistan, is a wild Himalayan goat having a reddish-brown to black coat and spirally curved horns. The word markhor is derived from Persian word *mar*, meaning snake, and *chor*, meaning eater. A large variety of plant species of great economic, medical and environmental conservation values are also found in these areas. Ziarat and Harboi areas of Balochistan are famous for the unique species of juniper. Balochistan has the largest cover of such forests anywhere in the world.

Objective of the study

This study attempts to assess the spatial attributes of tourism in Pakistan, especially in northern and western areas. The study also focuses on the social attributes of the districts having tourism potential in the country. Traditionally this field of geography has not attracted much attention of researchers and scholars in the country. There is paucity of such work on the potential of tourism in Pakistan. Few researchers such as Qureshi and Malik,⁴ and Talet and Khan⁵ etc. have emphasized the significance of tourism research in the country. The present study will certainly fill the gap found in this field of tourism in Pakistan.

Methodology

Methodologies include:

- Field survey and data collection done by using survey techniques such as interviews and perception from tourists, to analyze the problems being faced by them, at various tourist resorts of the country.
- Secondary data like tourism data, population census data and international tourism data and their analysis.
- Calculate the Z-Sum for ranking the economic level of tourism potential districts.

The Z-Sum is the simplest statistical method to summarize and standardize the multivariate data set. To assess the social development

⁴ Z. Qureshi and M.K. Malik, 'Tourism and Geography: Introducing Methodologies for Research in Pakistan', *Pakistan Geography Review*, 57:1 & 2 (2002), pp.67-84.

⁵ B. Talet and S. Khan, 'Tourism Potential and Problems in Mountains of Pakistan: A Case Study of Hazara Division', *Grassroots*, Vol. XXXIII, 2004-05, pp.54-60.

level of the tourism potential areas and compare it with the rest of the country, this statistical method has been employed on the basis of eleven selected indicators using the following formula:

$$(Z\text{-score})_j = \frac{x_{ij} - \bar{x}_i}{s_i}$$

The $(Z\text{-score})_j$ represents Z-score of j th district, \bar{x}_i shows to the mean value of i th variable, s_i is the standard deviation of i th variable whereas x_{ij} indicates the value of i th variable in j th district.⁶ The positive Z-score value depicts that observation is above the mean and negative Z-score value shows the observation is below mean value.⁷ Hence the high positive values represent those districts which have good social conditions and significant development, while the low negative values indicate the depressed and economically poor districts.

The indicators selected for this research study have been extracted from different latest available secondary sources such as *Provincial Census Reports of 1998*, *Socio-economic Indicators at District Level Balochistan, NWFP* (former Khyber Pakhtoonkhwa), *Punjab and Sindh 2002*, *Economic Survey of Pakistan 2009-10* and *Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement Survey 2010-11*.

Tourism in Pakistan

Pakistan presently ranks very low in terms of world tourism income. Out of global tourism income of US\$ 1,075 billion, the share of South Asia is US\$ 24,156 million including Pakistan's share of only US\$ 341 million that is 0.1% of global and 1.41% of South Asian share.⁸

The large physical multiplicity and the latitudinal extent of the country make it home to a wealthiest of ecosystems. These ecosystems have become the major resources for tourism. Pakistan is less developed country and needs to identify strategies to achieve a higher stage of development. For this purpose a rigorous eco-tourism plan could be initiated in several areas especially in Khyber Pakhtoonkwa and Balochistan. Areas like Chitral valley in Khyber Pakhtoonkwa and Ziarat

⁶ J. Levin and J. Fox, *Elementary Statistics in Social Research* (New York: Longman, 1997).

⁷ R. Ahmed and K. Mahmood, 'Spatio-temporal Changes in Economic Development: A Case Study of Sindh Province', *Karachi University Journal of Science*, Vol.40, 2012, pp.25-30.

⁸ *UNWTO Tourism Highlights* (Madrid: World Tourism Organization 2013).

in Balochistan have a great potential for model development of eco-tourism.

While the government has a national policy for the environment, it is essential that there exists an appropriate institutional framework to support its implementation. The government should also discourage those activities that do not meet sustainable development objectives.

Potential of tourism in Pakistan

According to 1998 Census, Pakistan is predominantly an Islamic country with over 97% Muslims, 1.5% Hindus, 1% Christians and 0.5% other minorities. Due to diverse physical structure it has a mixture of peoples, cultures and languages. This region has served as cradle of diverse civilizations since the 4th millennium BC. Because of this rich cultural heritage, its cultural diversity ranges from Kalash (Chitral) in the north to Thar (Sindh) in the south. Further it has expanded and multiplied into sub-cultures which are now found throughout the country.

All parts of Pakistan have their distinct tourist appeals, ranging from the high mountains, lush green valleys, huge glaciers and thick forests in the north to the lovely beaches in the south, along the Arabian Sea. The best known tourist areas have traditionally been in the northern parts of the country with their high mountains. The three mountain ranges, the Hindukush, Karakoram and Great Himalayas meet in Pakistan and form the densest concentration of high peaks in the world. Though Balochistan also possesses good tourist sites with unique scenery, its tourism sector is totally neglected.⁹ The archaeological sites and rich cultural history in other provinces is also relatively unknown outside Pakistan, which needs special attention. The great Thar desert of the country represents exclusive desert ecosystem that has fascinated tourists throughout the world.

The wide geographical assortment provides opportunities for a number of outdoor and adventurous sports activities for every level of experience ranging from the soft adventures to the fast paced thrills. It includes motor biking, trekking, hiking and skiing in the mountain ranges and desert safari and jeep rally in Thar.

Forty five of the world's 50 highest mountains are located in Pakistan. It has seven of the 16 tallest peaks in Asia. In Baltistan, over 45 peaks touch or cross the 20,000 feet mark, while in Gilgit within a radius

⁹ R. Ahmed and K. Mahmood, 'Process of Development and Future Prospects: A Geographical Analysis of Balochistan Province', *Pakistan Geographical Review*, 62:1 (2007), pp.15-30.

of 65 miles, there are over two dozen peaks ranging in height between 18,000 and 26,000 feet.¹⁰

The northern and western Pakistan is profusely dotted with scenic spots and thick forest. The abundance of glaciers, lakes and valleys have combined at places to produce holiday resorts, including Gilgit, Hunza, Shigar and Yasin, Chitral, Dir, Kaghan and Swat. Numerous streams and rivulets, glistening silver in the slanting, meander through the valleys. Deosai plateau located at 13,400 feet above sea level is like a floral basket of exotic colors during summer.

Hospitality to visitors is an ancient Pakistani tradition. The people's lifestyle of the country is varied. Life is full of culture, fairs and festivals, colors and spectacle. Pakistan is a land of folk, fairs and festivals. Shandur Polo festival, Silk Route festival, Mela Maveshian (Sibi), Horse and Cattle Show (Punjab), Babusar festival and Kalash Mela are some of the important and attracting events in Pakistan.

Each area of Pakistan has its exquisite culinary art such a *biryani*, *bihari kabab* and *nehari* of Karachi, *saji* of Quetta, *chargha* and *paya* of Lahore, *lassi* of Punjab, *trout* fish of Swat and Chitral and *Yak* of Hunza are the best cuisine for taste seekers. Pakistan is also a treasure trove of handicrafts.

A detailed survey by the authors was done in Ziarat, Nathiagali, Ayubia, Khanspur, Changlagali and Gilgit-Baltistan to investigate the prospects and economic and cultural values of tourism in these areas. Based on the survey conducted by the author, following constraints have been identified for the development of tourism in Pakistan.

- It is observed that there is scarcity of a number of tourist related facilities along the major roads such as proper resting areas, hygienic food and public toilets except few places like hotels, PTDC motels, motorways etc. but they are very few and far between.
- The poor road conditions at majority of the places and frequent landsliding are the major hindrance for road transportation. Traffic jam is also observed at many places especially in tourist seasons due to lack of proper planning and management such as Jhika Gali to Mall Road and Kaldana to PGO, Murree.
- The paucity of public transport is an important hindrance in the accessibility of tourist resorts, except some services like Daewoo Pakistan.
- Although the tourist resorts of Pakistan are connected with the rest of the country through major highways and expressways, still much

¹⁰ A. Masood, 'Mountain of Pakistan', Sunday Magazine, *The Dawn*, 23 September 2001.

room for improvement as far as the condition of these highways are concerned.

- The weather dependent flight operation to Gilgit, Skardu and Chitral create a major hindrance for the tourists who have no choice but to spend at least two days to travel by road. Helicopter service for such remote and inaccessible areas is a dire need to many resorts of Himalayas – Karakorum region.
- Security for the tourists in Pakistan is a big issue. Some of the recent incidents like murder of people: foreign tourist at Nanga Parbat base camp and local passengers at Babusar top, devastation of Malam Jabba Skiing Resort and Ziarat Residency etc. create a very negative image for the entire area nationally and internationally that adversely affect tourism industry, stakeholders and livelihood of locals of the areas.
- The unplanned development of infrastructure for tourism and unregulated inflow of tourists without proper regulations and systems in place resulted in unplanned and grubby resorts, which has lost all natural beauty with haphazard concrete buildings.
- The natural scenery of entire Galiyat is damaging by massive tourist pressure. Murree; the queen of beauty, is now converted into concrete jungle instead of pine forest especially at Mall Road. Now the enchanted and peaceful whispering of wind through the pine trees is very rear in Murree. The rotting garbage, choked sewerage system, exhausted fumes and greasy smoke, are the identity of Murree, which is turning this famous tourist resort into an environmental disaster that is rapidly getting out of hand. If this unchecked development process continues un-stopped it will swell the whole of Galiyat rapidly.
- Tourism development is closely related with competitiveness and attractiveness of tourist destination along with a proper and solid marketing strategy.¹¹ An appropriate planning strategy and identification of tourism potential is essential for selling any product in competitive markets. In Pakistan coordination between the stakeholders and overall marketing strategy is lacking. Though there is a tough competition from other countries and regions like Switzerland, Turkey, Singapore, Thailand etc. These counties are selling similar products with the help of an attractive and modernized marketing strategy.

¹¹ I. Nestoroska, 'Identifying Tourism Potentials in Republic of Macedonia through Regional Approach', *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, Vol.44, 2012, pp.95-103.

- The lack of skilled tourism professionals (e.g. guides, porters, hoteliers etc) greatly affects the tourist industry in Pakistan. Although tourism is a service oriented industry, the quality of services offered to the tourist have major impact on the sector. There is no institution catering to the capacity building of stakeholders in tourism industry. On line hotel booking, proper website and list of hotels with detailed information are totally nonexistent. Upon reaching the resort destination tourists have to deal with porters/hotel agents. It creates a very bad impression on tourists who reach there after covering a long distance for recreation and relaxation.
- It is observed during the survey that large amount of solid and human waste is left behind by the tourist on all sites, trekking routes and base camps. It is not only an eye sore for the tourists, but it is also a serious threat to the natural environment.
- Illegal cutting and burning of trees is very common in the entire region especially in Ziarat and Babusar-Chilas area. Valued flora species in the entire area have been removed from Babusar to Chilas. This distressing activity will ultimately lead to soil erosion, flood and land degradation.
- Cultural events and festivals are held in different parts of the country but they are not properly planned, that is, the dates are not fixed in advance and information about the events is not available to the domestic and international tourists, thus the potential benefits of these festivals are not realized to their fullest extent.
- Little attention is being paid to the protection of the unique archaeological and architectural heritage of Pakistan. The information about archaeological sites is scattered and needs to be collated and compiled at a single place for the convenience of tourist researchers. The world renowned Lahore Fort and Shalimar Bagh show a very depressive picture. The beauty and sparking of these places has been covered by thick layer of dirt and smoke. Mohen-jodaro, a site of an ancient civilization, has a serious threat from waterlogging and salinity. The immediate attention to save these places is a dire need.
- There are no planned efforts to link the cultural heritage to economic benefits for the local artisans with the promotion of activities like sale of handicrafts to the tourists, establishment of art galleries / display centers, museums, arts and crafts festivals etc. The local tourism related businesses, usually do not promote local architecture and food. While the local languages and cultures do not get proper coverage in electronic or print media.

No planning or policy making is possible unless authentic statistics are available. In the absence of such data it is almost impossible to formulate proper policy and planning for tourists in accordance with the tourist preference, because policies have to be made on the basis of actual marked data. The Statistical Wing, Ministry of Tourism, Government of Pakistan, compiles statistics about number of international tourists and expeditions (mountaineering, trekking etc) visiting Pakistan. There is an urgent need for policy formulation, planning and implementation at the grassroot level in consultation with all stakeholders.

The above mentioned constraints would make the visit of tourists to Pakistan difficult and uncomfortable which would ultimately discourage tourists from visiting the area, especially for foreign tourists who can visit alternative destinations offering similar products. This will have serious economic repercussions in the form of loss in tourism revenue and loss of employment for the local people.

Social evaluation of the tourist potential districts

Economic development has been constrained in recent times due to many factors including proper tourist promotion policies, law and order problems, ineffective governance and control and above all corruption and unaccountability. Financial constraints, caused by growing deficit in the domestic budget and decreasing domestic and foreign investments, has stagnated the tourist sector, increased unemployment level in the tourist attracting areas of the country and has encouraged high influx of people in major urban areas like Karachi, Lahore, Rawalpindi etc.¹² The tourist potential districts of the country indicate poor infrastructure and shortage of basic necessities which is contributing to the poverty level of these areas.¹³

Following eleven indicators have been selected to measure the economic development of the country and to analyse the level of tourist potential districts by using Z-score.

1	URBPOP	Urban population (%)
2	METROAD	Metalled road per 100 square kilometer
3	NODOC	Doctor per million population
4	HOSBED	Hospital beds per million population
5	LITRATE	Literacy rate (%)
6	PRIENROL	Primary enrolment rate (%)
7	FEMLIT	Female to male literacy ratio

¹² K. Mahmood and R. Ahmed, 'Inter-Regional Migration and Urban Growth: A Case Study of Pakistan', *Pakistan Perspectives*, 15:2 (2010), pp.157-77.

¹³ R. Ahmed, *op.cit.*

8	UNEMPRATIO	Unemployment ratio
9	HOUSELE	Household with electricity (%)
10	HOUSGAS	Household with gas (%)
11	HOUSPIPED	Household with piped water (%)

Table 1 depicts the score of Z-Sum and the district rank.

Table 1: Score of 2-Sum and District Rank

Significant (Z-sum 26.23 to 3.18)	Lahore, Quetta, <u>Rawalpindi</u> , Karachi, Peshawar, Gujranwala, Hyderabad, Jhelum, Kohat, <u>Abbottabad</u> , Faisalabad, Sialkot, Nowshera, Malakand, <u>Haripur</u> , Gujrat, Sukkur, Multan, Toba Tek Singh, Sargodha, Chakwal
Good (Z-sum 3.18 to -0.15)	Bannu, Attock, Mardan, Nawabshah, Sahiwal, Sheikhpura, Charsadda, Narowal, Karak, Khanewal, Lower Dir, Mianwali, Larkana, Okara, Mandi Bahauddin, Khushab, Vehari, Hangu, <u>Mastung</u> , <u>Swat</u>
Moderate (Z-sum -0.15 to -1.85)	<u>Chitral</u> , <u>Bahawalpur</u> , Hafizabad, Kasur, Swabi, Gwadar, <u>Pishin</u> , <u>Mansehra</u> , Naushero Feroze, <u>Ziarat</u> , Pakpattan, Shikarpur, Tank, Dadu, Dera Ismail Khan, <u>Qilla Abdullah</u> , Sibi, Lakki Marwat, Bahawalnagar, Lodhran
Poor (Z-sum -1.85 to -5.27)	Rahim Yar Khan, Lasbela, Khairpur, Leiah, Sanghar, Mirpur Khas, Loralai, Jhang, Bhakkar, Chagai, Jacobabad, Dera Gazi Khan, <u>Zhob</u> , Kech, Jafarabad, Buner, Bolan, <u>Upper Dir</u> , Ghotki, <u>Battagram</u>
Trivial (Z-sum -5.27 to -12.87)	Muzaffargarh, Badin, <u>Qilla Saifullah</u> , <u>Barkhan</u> , Khuzdar, Nasirabad, Dera Bugti, Panjgur, Thatta, Kharan, <u>Kalat</u> , Rajanpur, Kohlu, Jhal Magsi, Musa Khail, Awaran, <u>Shangla</u> , <u>Kohistan</u> , <u>Tharparkar</u>

Underlined districts are those which have great potential of tourism

It has been observed from Table 1 that generally most of the districts with tourism potential and opportunities of tourism have poor level of social development. Most of these districts lies in lower three groups of quintile classification of Z-sum such as Chitral, Ziarat, Qilla Abdullah, Zhob, Upper Dir, Battagram, Shangla, Tharparkar and Kohistan. Unless proper socio-economic infrastructure is not developed, these poor

districts with high tourism potential will not be able to become a magnet to attract large number of tourists.

Conclusion and recommendations

It is concluded that the Pakistan's latitudinal extent provides a wide variety of natural environment extended from Karachi (sea level) to Khunjerab (14,000 feet). The landscape of coastal areas, deserts, valleys, high and lofty mountains, plains and plateau offer a great biodiversity. Pakistan also has a rich and diverse cultural heritage. The regular cultural festivals can be used as marketing tools for culture of any area, resulting in economic benefits to local communities and business.

Currently the tourism infrastructure development is taking place all over the country without any land use planning and zoning, which can result in un-planned and unmanageable resorts and could ultimately destroy the natural beauty of the area, on which the whole tourism sector is based. The tourism flow is un-regulated in Pakistan without any regard to the carrying capacity of particular destination. Carrying capacities have not been calculated for any of the major tourist destinations in Pakistan.

In Pakistan the local communities are not involved in planning and implementation of tourism related projects and programmes, it would lead to lack of ownership and jeopardizing their sustainability. Similarly, if the local communities do not get appropriate economic benefits from the tourism ventures in their area, this would cause resentment against the tourist and could lead to conflicts among tourism industry and the communities that would have serious consequences not only for tourism sector but for the society as whole.

As a less developed country, Pakistan needs to identify strategies to achieve a higher stage of development. For this purpose there is a need for a rigorous tourism plan in tourist potential districts. New themes in tourism such as ecotourism, pro-poor tourism should be initiated to provide economic opportunities and sources of livelihood to the people. Several areas in the country like Chitral valley, Galiyat and Ziarat have good potential to model for the development of eco-tourism. If model ecotourism areas are developed, these can help in natural and cultural preservations and boost the economy. Planners and policy makers can utilize the tourism sector as a contributor to the economy of the country.