

# Rural Tourism in India and Pakistan

## Abstract

Tourism in India and Pakistan is an emerging industry. It provides revenue as well as jobs to the people of this region. Tourism sector has become an important tool for the development of a country. Rural tourism in India and Pakistan is in a developing stage. Real India or Pakistan lives in villages as about seventy per cent population of India and Pakistan lives in rural areas. A country to be called as a developed country has to develop its urban sector as well as its rural sector. Rural tourism provides opportunities to the countryside people to develop their skills in the field of rural arts and crafts, preservation of environment and heritage, knowledge of new techniques of entrepreneurship and development of basic infrastructure of the region. Against this backdrop the present paper focuses on potential and prospects of rural tourism in India and Pakistan. In the end, the author has also discussed some of the issues and challenges of rural tourism and has suggested few solutions.

**Keywords:** Rural Tourism, Tourism in India, Tourism in Pakistan, Incredible India, It's beautiful-it's Pakistan, Terrorism, Cultural diversity, Heritage.

## Introduction

Since the dawn of civilization, man's wanderlust has taken him to various places. Travel for pleasure is tourism. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) tourism comprises the activities of "persons travelling to and staying in place outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes". "Tourism" comes from the old Aramic word "Tur" and was used for the first time when Moses began his expedition to the lands of Canaan, according to the French school, led by A. Hoult.<sup>1</sup>

The United Nations has declared 2017 as the International year of Sustainable Tourism for Development. Both India and Pakistan has completed seventy years as independent sovereign nations and seventy years is enough time to evaluate and review the progress done by both countries in the tourism sector. The guiding motto used by the Indian Tourism to lure millions of tourists from across the globe is "Atithi Devo Bhavah" when translated in english means 'The Guest is equivalent to God.' India with its slogan of "Incredible India" attracts tourists from all over the world. Indian tourism industry contributed \$ 234.03 billion in 2017, 7.4 per cent of Indian GDP and supported 42.67 million jobs 8.1 per cent of total employment.

Whereas, tourism in Pakistan has not received enough limelight as much as it deserves. Whenever we think of Pakistan, all that comes to our mind is terrorism, extremism, sectarianism and corruption. Amidst all these negatives, Pakistan is full of historic places and stunning tourist spots to highlight the positive image of the country. To attract tourists from all over the world the logo of Tourism Pakistan is "It's beautiful - it's Pakistan." Tourism in Pakistan is a developing industry and it has contributed Rs 930.9 billion in 2017, 2.9 per cent of GDP of Pakistan<sup>2</sup>.

The tourism industry has emerged as a major income driving industry in many developing and underdeveloped countries in the world. There are examples of countries like Finland, Hungary, Slovenia, Netherlands, Japan, France and Switzerland that show how the thriving tourism sector can have a positive impact on economic growth and development of the country. Pakistan is blessed with natural beauty, cultural diversity and rich historical background. Pakistan's main tourist attractions include adventure tourism in the Northern Areas, cultural and archaeological tourism found in Taxila, Mohen-jo-daro, Harrapa and early Muslims and Mughal heritage at Multan, Lahore, Thatta, Peshawar and Swat<sup>3</sup>. Besides this, desert safaris, trekking, mountaineering and birds watching is also available for the tourists.



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The Pakistan government under Prime Minister Imran Khan has now started promoting tourism in Pakistan. It has announced a new visa policy to make it easier for travelers to visit Pakistan. This is a leap forward to turn Pakistan into a heaven for tourists. The government of Pakistan has also decided to open the first international tourist corner in Belgium to introduce Europeans. These efforts of Pakistan government are not enough, it should focus more on this high potential sector and integrated approach should be adopted for using the tourism sector as an engine of economic growth and employment generation. Pakistan can learn from India, which has given priority to its tourism industry as major sector of economic growth.<sup>4</sup>

Pakistan, having similar geographical, demographic and historical traits as India, can develop tourism products such as adventure tourism, culture tourism, ecotourism, green tourism, rural tourism following the strategies undertaken by the Government of India. The rich hospitality, unique culture and a variety of cuisines that each place offers adds to the tourism experience. India offers all types of tourism opportunities to the global tourist and attracts tourists from all over the world. Indian tourism industry has various things to offer to all the tourists coming here.

#### **Rural Tourism**

Rural tourism or countryside tourism takes place usually in rural areas attached with big cities. This is developed as a means of 'feel at home' or 'a break from work' for the urban people to relax and rediscover their roots. Rural tourism provides closeness with nature, eco-friendly environment and fresh organic food to the weary, tired and stressed urban people coming from within the country as well as from foreign countries.

The main source of income for the rural people is agriculture. By developing rural tourism people will start getting extra source of income and by this extra income the living standard of rural people will improve. Thus, rural tourism reduces employment load on the agriculture sector and opens new sector of earning money and generation of employment. Rural tourism not only helps in promoting rural arts and crafts and infrastructure development but also inspires rural people in preserving environment and cultural heritage.

Rural tourism in Pakistan has not been developed so far. Pakistan has the potential to emerge as a significant place of rural tourist sites. Tourists from developed countries who are interested in watching traditional ways of life, costumes, arts and crafts and reminiscence of Indus valley civilization will be attracted to visit rural Pakistan. This inflow of tourists from abroad will result in inflow of income for farmers of Pakistan. The income gap between farmers and urban workers has become a major problem in Pakistan. The situation is likely to get worse in the coming years. To maintain their present standard of living, farmers will have to find new ways of earning money. Rural tourism can become an important source of rural income.

To promote rural tourism Pakistan can learn a lot from the Indian experience. In India, rural tourism initiatives have been underway even long before the advent of the official concept. Initially, it was promoted and mentored by private owners and tour operators. As early as 1980, Rajasthan had heavy inbound traffic which was being run individually and privately. Randhir Singh of Mandawa started home stay in Castle Mandawa in 1980, even when vegetables were not available in that region. Gradually, many royalties who were finding it difficult to maintain their Estates, followed suite and started opening their palaces into high end hotels and resorts. Foreign tourists thronged for a first hand experience of royal life and Maharaja treatment. Rural tourism started at this time where besides the luxurious stay at Samode Palace, villages huts with attached bath come up<sup>5</sup>. This rural experience in village huts, interaction with villagers and rural craftsman and gorging local cuisine makes a unique experience for tourists. The Indian government has identified thirty one villages across the country as tourist spots. This does not mean that India has only thirty one potential tourist spots in rural areas. These have been selected on pilot basis keeping in view available infrastructure<sup>6</sup>.

Pakistan can invest in its age old heritage forts and make them tourist spots. The main destinations of choice for tourists in Pakistan can include, Rohtas Fort in Punjab, Shahi Qila in Lahore, Faiz Mahal, Makli Thatta in Sindh, Chitral Fort and Malakand Fort in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Kalat Fort in Balochistan and five thousand year old cities of the Indus Valley Civilization<sup>7</sup>.

#### **Challenges of Rural Tourism**

For the development of rural tourism there are various types of challenges. Rural people look at it with suspicion and think this as something imposed on them by government agencies. It can spoil village community life and ruin their rural culture. The other challenges faced by rural tourism are :

1. Unskilled Management - There is the lack of management skills among villagers involved in rural tourism projects.
2. Unavailability of Markets – Most of the rural tourism destinations are small and widely scattered. This makes it difficult to market them to potential tourists.
3. Poor Connectivity with Rail and Road Link – Many tourist spots of natural beauty and original landscape are not connected by network of rail and road links in rural areas. It takes too much time to reach at such spots. Tourist starts avoiding such spots.
4. Seasonal Tourism – Rural tourism takes place mostly during the winter season and rest of the year the people associated with it remains sitting idle having no job.
5. Low Return on Money Invested – The money invested in developing rural tourism gets limited return. Comparing this with other commercial investments, it remains lower causing disinterest among the investors.
6. Attitudinal Change – The rural people believes that tourist destroys their local culture and its

authenticity and this leads to endangered cultures. This is known as 'Commodification of culture'.<sup>8</sup>

#### **Suggestions for Promotion of Rural Tourism**

Paul Smith, former British Council Country Director of Afghanistan mentions a banner hung over the entrance of Kabul Museum citing "A Nation Stays Alive when Its Culture Stays Alive"<sup>9</sup>. This is relevant for all countries for promotion of rural tourism and protecting cultural heritage. Rural tourism has manifold economic, environmental and socio-cultural prospects. It acts as a tool for economic development to promote both capital inflow and employment opportunities to the impoverished rural communities. It can help in adding to rural amenities and infrastructure. Some suggestions for promoting rural tourism are as follows:

1. Various Departments of Government and Departments of Hotel, Hospitality, Tourism and Management of the state and Central Universities can provide consultancy in the designing, planning, implementation, management and promotion of Rural Tourism.
2. Co-operation between Government Departments of Health services, local Civic authorities and District Administration is a must for development of concrete motor able roads, provision of safe drinking water, adequate health and sanitation facilities.
3. Capacity building training should be given to the villagers in areas of leadership, language learning, communication skills and tourism management.
4. Rural tourism activities have to be designed, planned, implemented and managed by the rural people themselves.
5. Village Tourism Committee under the leadership of Village Sarpanch should be constituted comprising of women, youth, folk artists, crafts men, artisans and the marginalized sections of the community.
6. Website of village must be developed for promotion of rural tourism.
7. Development of a village museum showing the rural life through photographs, exhibitions and models.
8. The performance of folk artists should be original and pure.
9. Authenticity, distinctiveness, holistic and contextual should be the particularities of the rural tourism experience.
10. An interest should be created among the rural people towards rural tourism so that they can understand its worth in income generation along with agriculture activities.

#### **Conclusion**

India and Pakistan both are known as a tourist paradise and special interest destinations. Every region, state /province and village of India and Pakistan has its own language, culture, tradition, customs, costumes, cuisines which can offer unique non-urban country experiences of a life time. Actually, rural tourism is a journey back to our roots encompassing a wide range of activities and

attractions all set in their natural rural environment. It is also a very important activity from the point of rural development because of its contribution to the economic and social development of the rural people. The rural tourism in India and Pakistan is still in its nascent state but once tapped to its full potential, it can open great vistas of mutual benefit for both the tourists as well as the rural people alike.

#### **Endnotes**

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