
Regional Integration of Pakistan Tourism: Exploring Prospects

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Abstract

Globalization offers phenomenal opportunities for Pakistan tourism industry. The country is rich in all types of tourist destinations including; adventure, business, education, cultural, sports, dark tourism and the religious tourism. Despite several tourism initiatives its contribution to Pakistan national economy in terms of employment generation, foreign exchange earnings and national revenue, has remained minimal. Tourism reorientation towards destinations having attractions of shared culture and religious infrastructure for the tourists of South Asia has a great but missed opportunity so far. The SAARC platform can help develop a suitable mechanism, kick start mobilization of resources, and facilitate operationalization of this idea. Foregoing background in view, the paper attempts to explore the Pakistan tourism potential existing in the market of SAARC region and suggest ways and means to make best use of this potential to achieve sustained socio-economic development of the area on one hand and pave the way for socio-political harmony and understanding on the other. . The ensuing cooperation would also set the grounds for more solid cooperation in other Socio-economic, geo-political, geo-strategic, geo-climatic, and other issues affecting the region since long. The article argues that inculcating adequate political commitment and removing the physical and institutional barriers to intra-regional tourism shall be the start point.

Keywords: Pakistan Tourism, Regional integration, South Asia, Religious tourism

Globalization has become a buzz word, all embarrassing concept that is a byproduct of many forces such as, communication, technology, multinational corporations, and international regime of competition that are moving to interdependency and borderless market.(Ohmae,1999). According to Levit (1983) the changes in technology and social behaviors allows businesses to market their product without any regard for differences in national or regional preferences. The plethora of scientific inventions, and rapid growth in information and communication technology has brought different regions and communities closer by shrinking the time and space differences,

overcoming the cultural and language barriers, uniformity of government regulations and business terms and the systems and integrating their economic system. Therefore, Hill (2008) refers ‘globalization’ as a shift towards a more integrated and interdependent world economy that includes globalization of market¹ and globalization of production².

Tourism is the single sector of a business that is all-embracing fields of service and industrial activities touching almost all spheres of activities in a country. MacCannell (1992) assumes that international tourism has the power to change the nature, culture and traditions to its own need. When the globalization of market concept is applied on the tourism in South Asia then it represents a huge segment of the globe that serves nearly 2 billion customers. Globalization of production in any tourism related industry when sourced out amongst SAARC countries as per inherent advantages of cost and quality then the return on investment is likely to be unprecedented. This assumption has already been proved right when one observes the speed and rate of the sustained economic development amongst the members of various trading blocs such as; EFTA³, NAFTA⁴, ASEAN⁵, SAARC⁶, Gulf Cooperation Council etc.

Tourism has been one of the fast driving and unstoppable force global integration and economic recovery over the years, surpassing over US\$ 1245 billion in receipts and over 1.35 billion international tourists (overnight visitors) at the end of 2014 (UNWTO, 2014). According to United Nations (2015) “Tourism generated \$485 billion for developing countries only in exports in 2013, and it ranked fourth after fuels, food, and clothing and textiles” (p.43). South Asian’s share of international arrivals in 2014 reached to 17108000 tourists, and \$ 27191 million equal to 7.2 world share (UNWTO, 2015). Despite of the substantial growth in South Asians tourism, Pakistan has failed to grasp share of arrivals and receipts in proportionate to its potential.

1. Globalization of markets refers to the merging of historically distinct and separate national markets in to one huge market place.

2. Globalization of production is the sourcing out of the goods and services from location around by taking advantages of national differences in the cost and quality of factors of endowment.

3. EFTA- European Free Trade Association composed of Iceland, Switzerland, Norway and Liechtenstein set up in May 1960. .

4. NAFTA- North America Free trade Area composed of America, Canada, and Mexico since 1994

5. ASEAN-Association of South East Asian Nations established in 1967

6 SAARC- South Asians Associations for Regional Cooperation

Table.1. *Tourists Arrival in South Asia: 2008-2013 (in thousand)*

Country	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008
Bangladesh	148	125	155	303	267	467
<u>Bhutan</u>	116	105	66	41	23	28
<u>India</u>	6968	6578	6309	5776	5168	5283
Maldives	na	958	931	792	656	686
Nepal	798	803	736	603	510	500
Pakistan	na	966	1161	907	855	823
Sri Lanka	1275	1006	856	654	448	438

Source: <https://www.quandl.com/data/WORLDBANK>

Pakistan is constantly facing trade deficit dilemma since 1950 (Baloch, 2009) that has been jeopardizing nation's economic growth and compelling it to net selling of its national & international assets. Resultantly, Pakistan was obliged to remain dependent on the foreign donors, and creditors to pay for the short fall of its balance of payment thereby piling up of external financial liabilities. Hard earned expatriates' remittances have always been swallowed up by the negative balance of payment. The only readily available way out to this trade deficit dilemma is to make use of tourism resource abundantly available in Pakistan.

Pakistan's Tourism Potential

Pakistan is endowed with very rich tourism potential capable of satisfying all kind of tourists. Pakistan's tourism assets are described on its official Web site as follows:

“Stretching from the mighty Karakorams in the North to the delta of the Indus River in the South, Pakistan remains a land of high adventure and nature. Trekking, mountaineering, white water rafting, wild boar hunting, mountain and desert jeep safaris, camel and yak safaris, trout fishing and bird watching are a few activities, which induce the adventure and nature lovers to Pakistan. High Himalayas, Karakoram and the Hindu Kush ranges with their alpine meadows and permanent snow line, coniferous forests down the sub-mountain scrub”.

The diversity of Pakistan's topographical landscape ranges from lush green plans, to mesmerizing scenic beauty spots, snow covered peaks to virgin sea beaches, vast dessert steppes to the wide stretches of plateau and four seasons. Pakistan's religious and cultural tourism potential also offers far better diversity and fortune for the tourists than is generally assumed. Though an Islamic Republic, the local culture is also laced with the customs and traces of over half a dozen early civilizations that have flourished here since the 4th Millennium BC.

This diversity in tourism potential is capable of offering its hospitality to the variety of tourists all over the world in general and people from South Asia in particular. Few glimpses of the tourism potential for different kinds of tourism given below would suffice to portray its true picture.

Adventure Tourism:

Pakistan is well positioned and highly ranked in the adventure tourism essentially because of its northern mountainous regions renowned with Great Himalaya, Karakoram Hindukush, and Pamir, forming the densest conflux of high peaks in the world. Northern Areas of Pakistan are as fascinating as its southern region. Amidst towering snow-clad peaks with heights varying from 1000 m to over 8000 meter, the valleys of Gilgit, Hunza and Skardu recall Shangri-La. For the adventure seeker these heights, snow covered peaks and thrilling gradients and tracks challenge the most daring of spirits of the adventure tourists.

According to Government of Pakistan Tourism web page (<http://www.tourism.gov.pk>) Pakistan's Northern Area houses a large concentration of world highest peaks presenting challenge to the mountaineers' world over. Pakistan is earning lot of foreign exchequer from adventurers' expeditions for climbing these heights/ peaks round the year as follows:

Heights	No of Peaks	Heights Royalty in US\$ up to 05 Climber	Additional Fee@ Per Climber
K-2		12000	3000
8000-8500	5	9500	3000
7501-8000	29	4000	1000
7000-7500	121	2500	500
6000-7000	Large number	1500	300

Source: <http://www.tourism.gov.pk/>

The Eighth wonder of the world, Karakoram Highway, winds up 16,000 feet above sea level connecting Pakistan with People's Republic of China, is also a test ground for the agility and capability of adventure driving and daring spirit. Similarly water adventurers have access to over 2000 km long coastal line and 2500 km long Indus River that originates from Tibet courses through the country and empties into the Arabian Sea. The Choolistan Desert, Thar Desert and Dasht e Loot offer best driving tracks for the Safari drivers interested to test their endurance and thrill in the shifting dunes.

Religious Tourism: It has already been pointed out that in Pakistan religious tourism potential offers far greater diversity and richness for the tourists than is generally assumed. It houses number of sacred places and shrines having religious importance for Muslims, Hindues, Budhs, Sikhs-forming major component of the South Asian and South East Asian population. Pilgrimages from all these religions have lot of religious attraction in Pakistan and a planned effort facilitating their movement across border can generate unprecedented flow of tourists.

- *Sikhism:* Nankana Saheb (located near Sheikhpura Lahore, Pakistan) is the most sacred Sikh place which is not only the birthplace of Guru Nanak (the founder of Sikh religion) but also houses eight other very high ranking 'Gurdwaras'- worship places of Sikhism. Other shrines for Sikh pilgrims include; Shrine of Guru Aryan Dev at Lahore, Dehra Sahib and Panja Sahib. Kartarpur, Chuharkana and Patti Sahib.
- *Hinduism:* There are number of places in Pakistan where many Hindu deities made their quarters and taught the locals the Hindu religions. The Hindus religious heritage includes; the ruins of Mohen Jo Daro, Old Shiv temple of Clifton Karachi, Asthan of Hinglaj Matajee in Lasbella, temple of Baba Bankhandi near Sukkur, the temple of Karsaraj at Chakwal, and many others.
- *Budhism:* The city of Taxila, Swat Valley and the area across Karakoram Highway have been the centers of Gandhara civilization for almost over one thousand years. A Budh pilgrim today finds hundred of **the** ruins of great Buddhist stupas, monasteries and statues in and around these areas.

Historic & Cultural Tourism: Being the birth place of half a dozen of ancient civilizations Pakistan offers plenty of excavations, museums and artifacts for historian and culture lovers. The excavations of Moenjo Daro and Harappa present the traces of the 5000 years old Indus Civilizations and hold lot of knowledge for the archeologists. Taxila and up North to Hazara, Malakand, Dir, Swat, Chitral and Northern Areas are full of the remains of Gandara Civilization and Kelash culture in Chitral has its no match world over for the dark tourism. The historic town of Thatta and Makli in Sind are the most frequently visited historic and archeological destinations. The legendary figures for Afghans like Rehman baba, Khushal Khan Khattak, and Shinwari Baba still hold lot of attraction for Afghan people to visit them.

Educational Tourism: Though Pakistan's literacy rate is not that much impressing for many members of SAARC but still it has a lot to offer for educational tourists of the region. Pakistan's over 160 seats of higher education, medical colleges, engineering institutions and different professional & skills development centers have been grown to such an extent over the last one decade that they can accommodate thousands of knowledge seekers across the region. The countries like; Afghanistan, Bhotan, Nepal, Bangla Desh and Sri Linka can be extended with the opportunities to send their students for acquisition of knowledge at affordable cost and in culture similarity environment. This gesture of Pakistan would not only generate lot of foreign reserve but also cultivate carriers of Pakistan's love and affection to their respective homelands. These graduates can later as the focal persons to bring these nation in more closer and friendly ties with peace and stability.

Nature Tourism: For the nature lover, Pakistan is a land of unending spellbinding beauty with four seasons round the year. The long list of such tourist destination having scenic beauty includes; Muree Hills, Sawat, Kalam, Malam Jaba, Dir, Chitral, Naran, Shoooran, Saif – ul- Malook Lake, Dusai plans, Gilgat Baltistan and surrounding , Fort Minro, Ziarat, Lal Suhava National Park, Changa Manga, Neelum Valley and Jehlum valley in the Azad Jamu and Kashmir, so on and so forth.

Pakistan Tourism's Performance Analyses

Throughout the world, the tourism is contributing positively in socio-economic development of the country, but situation in Pakistan is other way around. Pakistan, the second largest country of South Asia has very low performance in its tourism sector in comparison to its colleague nations in the SAARC. Table-1 above reflects very dismal picture of Pakistan tourism arrival when seen against the arrivals figures of India, Maldives, Nepal, Bhutan and Sri Lanka. Pakistan's tourists' arrivals and receipts put it in a category of very small players in global tourism and even amongst the South Asian Nations. It is obvious from the tourists' numbers that Pakistan is not fully realizing its potential.

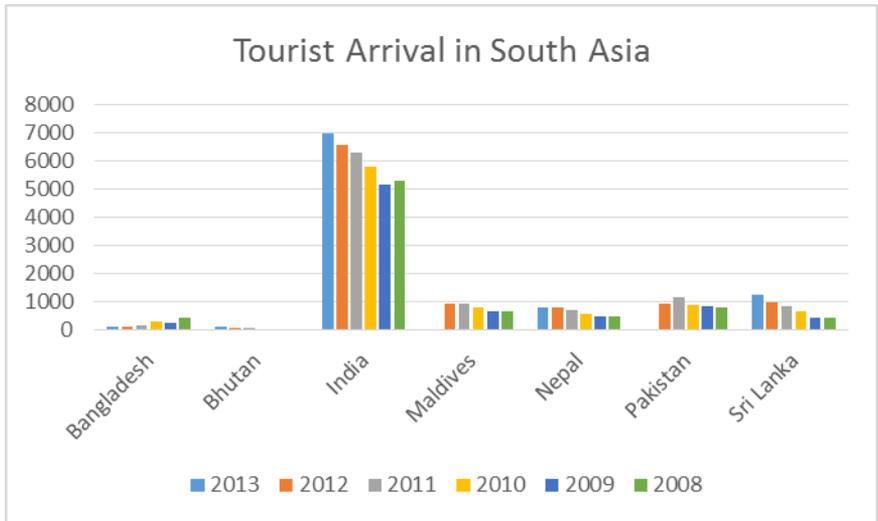


Figure 1. Tourist arrival in South Asia

Pakistan's tourism market share is nearly stagnated as the old beaten track to Gilgat and Baltoro are traversed by the mountaineering and trekking expeditions every year. Chitral which has dozens of peaks above 6500 meters has yet to see any mountaineering expedition or trekking group. The tourists' sites for different kinds of tourism are in abundance but the management to manage tourism resources is

ineffective and inefficient. Pakistan's tourism rich destinations are looking for a management system that could yield some dividends.

The tourism management in Pakistan has failed to meet the challenge probably because of its frequent shifting of its custodianship from Pakistan Railway, than to the Ministry of Commerce and to others (Baloch, 2007). The Ministry in its previous form has not contributed to the development of this sector because it lacked capability and capacity to tackle the problems of tourists and tourist enterprises. It was in 2006 when Pakistan created a separate ministry of tourism, signaling tourism industry has improved its position Pakistan's future planning.

According to Baloch (2007) owing to managerial flaws the tourism in Pakistan is at the mercy of seasonal booms and slumps leading to rapid human degeneration and a sense of insecurity. Baloch (2007) identifies critical deficiency of civic facilities in most of the tourists destinations located in hill sites. Due to the absence of world class tourism facilities, Pakistan is constantly being put on the back foot when it comes to tourism promotion. In addition to a poor tourism infrastructure, the country also lacks standard and competitive hotel rooms at popular tourism sites. World Economic forum's Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report (TTCR) ranked Pakistan at number 110 out of 124 countries, when it came to provision of standard and competitive hotel rooms.

The perception that Pakistan continued to be a hot bed of terrorism, compounded by the attack on the mountaineers' camp in the base camp in Northern Areas, thwarted all efforts of the government to grow the tourism industry in Pakistan. The major concern remained the security concerns for travellers. Further, Pakistan's image which is more of a country where a constant war is going on did not help in the growth of travel and tourism. At a time when other countries in the region such as Maldives, Nepal, China and India provided wonderful tourist options, Pakistan seems to be losing out due to its internal problems.

Recommendations

In the prevailing tourism scenario Pakistan emerges as a favorable tourist destination but present standing as tourist destination is far below then other SAARC countries like India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and even Maldives. Despite possession of such an ideal tourism resource, Pakistan has failed to proportionate gains and attracts desired number of tourists. The benefits of trading block like SAARC are likely to be much more because of their very marginal differences existing in taste, culture, values, habits, and language of their partner nations. Besides, the

commonalities of the customer's characteristics profile, the geographical proximity of the SAARC members presents the region an undifferentiated market that can be served with one product and marketing mix. The promotion and integration of tourism market amongst the SAARC members will not only help alleviate the down trodden populace rather resultant economic interdependency would also lead to interpersonal harmony and peace on this part of the planet as well. The recipe in attainment of this dream rests in increased integration and interdependence of the national economies through conscious softening up of the existing barriers impeding the free movement of people, labour and capital.

Pakistan's unique location not only connects South Asia, Central Asia, West Asia and China by road, rather its socio-cultural and religious infrastructure binds over 2 billion people of the area. Intra-region movement of Muslims, Buddhists, and Sikhs would not only deliver economic benefits rather personal to personnel contacts would results in to confidence building measures thereby paving the way for socio-political integration in the area. It is to this reason; the tourism is termed as language of peace. So far all emphasis in Pakistan was over adventure tourism and natural tourism. Religious tourism was not given the attention which it deserved in its true sense.

Pakistan needs to work fast on the challenges faced to the industry such as more liberalization of air transportation, visa facilitation, positive image building, overall tourism policy design and diversification of tourism markets and products. Leisure tourism is expected to sustain its growth, while business tourism will recover further. We have to reverse the mountaineers and trekkers flow to Pakistan by incorporating other attractive peaks and tracks in Chitral and other valleys besides, Northern Areas (Baloch, 2007). Introduction and initiation of specialist packaged tours including adventure tourism in Himalayas, Eco tourism, Cultural tourism, Horse Safari Tours and Bird Tours. Art workshops, hiking and trekking tours, hunting packages and rock climbing tours also featured strongly amongst the offerings, as the country hoped to draw in niche travellers. Pakistan needs to vision, develop and benefit the cultural, mountaineering, adventurous, archeological or nature oriented tourism potential of Pakistan by mobilizing SAARC countries tourists.

To tap the economic potential of its tourism industry, Pakistan needs to attract inward movement of intra-regional tourism towards Pakistan. To realize this dream, there is a need for strong political commitment and more coordinated efforts among South Asian countries to create an enabling environment for tourism promotion. Road, rail and air links need to be revamped. Some of the other steps to facilitate tourism with in the region are:

- The visa and administrative procedures need to be simplified. Even prospects of having single SAARC visa and SAARC Air Line for international tourist may be considered.
- SAARC may work out to introduce creation of single currency to be acceptable in all member countries of South Asia, while retaining their national currency as well. Creation of common currency for SAAC region would eventually facilitate/ promote tourism and other economic activities (Banik et al. 2008).

The problem doesn't lie in the potential of the area, rather in ignorance of the tourists and poor planning of tourism management. Our Tourism department has kept focused its attention to the Northern Areas for the adventure Tourism. The research does not intend to under emphasize the potential of Northern Areas; it rather aims to draw attention of the management to include Chitral as well for adventure tourism. This reorientation in managerial approach would create lot of attractions for the mountaineer and trekking parties to unearth new areas Managing Tourism in Pakistan and virgin peaks/ treks.

Further to the above recommendations following short term measures needs to be undertaken simultaneously:

- Our embassies in all countries in general over in general and in SAARC countries in particular put added efforts to create awareness amongst the masses about the variety of tourism potential prevailing in Pakistan. Buddhists and Sikhs shall be the focused target for religious cultural tourism.
- All efforts shall be made to project Pakistan's soft image by keeping religious sites of other religions intact and well maintained. It would help to project Pakistan as a peace loving, tolerant, accommodative and hospitable land, endowed with the spirit of co-existence.
- All efforts shall be made to ensure that tourists are provided with quality service and hygienically fit food of their taste, and other related civics and health facilities.
- Tourism management and marketing shall be introduced as an academic discipline at graduate and under graduate level. It would help to train and develop proper guidance infrastructure and tours operators.
- On the backdrop of China-Pak economic Corridor, guides and tour operators be trained inn Chinese language in addition to English and Urdu languages.
- Public-private partnership initiatives are to be undertaken to bring quality transport on road, punctual and regular in their schedules.

Conclusion

Pakistan is endowed with immense tourism potential which needs to be tapped for the attainment of socio-economic benefits integral to this industry. Pakistan is rich in all kinds of tourism, but socio-cultural and socio-religious tourism is yet to be explored. Similarly, fruits of regional integration through SAARC are ripe for Pakistan. Pakistan is required to reorient itself to South Asia for its tourism market with diversified products of religious, cultural sites. A well knitted strategy with improved infrastructure and softened visa and movement facilities and procedures would strategically position Pakistan. Tourism promotion and growth is a most reliable way out for Pakistan's economic constraints and trade deficit dilemma.

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