

THE CHALLENGES AND THREATS TO TOURISM IN PAKISTAN: *Policy Analysis*



Abstract

Pakistan is an agricultural country having tourism as another potentially proliferated industry that can be a game changer for the state. Pakistan has many prominent cultural, traditional, spiritual and entertainment places throughout the country that serve as a good opportunity for potential profits. Although, the denizens of the country are steadily moving their interests towards the field of tourism, that does not alleviate the underlying problems in this industry. Unfortunately, due to weak policy and decision making in this field, people related to tourism industry have to face several problems with each having its own cause and effect. The major effects are loss of generated revenue due to tourist activities and a soft image of the country among foreign countries. However, with an effective and well thought out process, it is possible to devise a policy that could be beneficial for the country's tourism industry. Therefore, this report aims to discuss the three basic rules of reforming any sector including thinking ahead, thinking again and thinking across in order to propose and evaluate a set of effective policy alternatives using certain assessment criteria such as equity, efficiency, welfare, security, liberty, legal feasibility and implementation that could help in the development of the Pakistan tourism industry.

Key findings

The findings illustrated that although Pakistan has potential to earn revenues and repute through its tourism since it has tourist attractions in nearly every part of the country, yet very little attention was given towards the promotion of tourism in Pakistan. Moreover, the poor tourism policy created many problems for local as well as the foreign tourists. According to the survey results, 87% of the respondents reported that they would rather not prefer to visit Sibbi because of improper infrastructure and security issues. However, when the same respondents were given an option to visit Sibbi provided with security from the army and facility of good hotels, around 81% of the respondents responded positively. The analysis further identified some of the significant problems related to tourism in Punjab including fear of being robbed, inadequate transportation facilities, downfall of electricity, gas or telephone signals at many tourist resorts and the road blockages in winters. However, in case of the walled city of Lahore, despite issues of security, cleanliness and encroachments, people liked to visit from all over the country due to the effective communication and marketing campaigns run by the walled city department. In addition to that, the results highlighted a set of causes behind the inefficient system of Pakistan tourism industry including non-exploration of new areas that ultimately hinders the potential growth of economy through tourism, lack of professionals having significant knowledge and skills to run this industry effectively, lack of educational institutions offering courses or degrees in tourism, insufficient planning in the transportation sector, monopolies of locals, in far rural and serene areas, in terms of transportation, accommodation, and food which results in less efficient use of resources, abundant trips to northern areas of Pakistan, inefficient and ineffective use of funds and resources, lack of strict check and balance to ensure the implementation of tourism policy and the conventional mentality of locals that tourism will bring an end to the traditional values and bring in modernity. Besides this, the findings introduced certain policy actors that could influence the policy process including government, owners of the resorts, transport operators, local residents of tourist spots, travel agents/tour operators, attraction suppliers providing tourism related accessories and products to the tourists, trade and industry associations, food and drinks suppliers, political party in charge, bureaucrats, media, tourists, foreign aid givers, NGOs, law enforcement agencies, travel guides and terrorists. Furthermore, it was found that leaving the tourism industry unattended or running it in a traditional way would not be beneficial for the economy of the country in the long-run. Therefore, the study proposed significant policy alternatives for the development of Pakistan tourism industry in the broader context including regular update in the policy, tax relief, creating awareness and marketing tourism, exposure to tourism in academics, continuous training of the related professionals/authorities, better and safe infrastructure and no action analysis. However, there were trade-offs between different alternatives. According to the Policy Delphi results, effectiveness was found to be the most important criteria for assessing a policy about tourism. Similarly, it was found that a policy must ensure an increase in the overall quality of the situation of tourism in the country. This would be evident when the annual number of local and foreign tourists increases due to better facilities (including infrastructure, increased security, and more promotion etc.), therefore, better and safe infrastructure was found to be the best policy option. Consecutively, introducing chapters related to tourism in the syllabus and regularly updating the existing tourism policy would further enhance the effectiveness. Moreover, providing tax rebate on tourism related equipment and training the officials were also found to be important alternatives that would lead to an increase in overall effectiveness, whereas, no-action analysis would halt the effectiveness of this process, hence, it was found to be the most ineffective alternative.

Implications

The study suggests that marketing and promoting the countrywide tourism are less time-consuming strategies and can produce results in a very short time. However, this action plan will act like a fad or a come-and-go trend since if these tourist attractions are marketed through different platforms, the tourist traffic will keep on increasing but if we discontinue promotions, or these promotions get obsolete, they will no longer produce the desired results. Therefore, in order to get continuous results, an effective marketing strategy should be implemented to ensure whether the alternative is producing results. A monitoring and evaluation framework could be used for this purpose. The variables to evaluate the impacts could be the reach of the promotions, percentage change in tourist traffic and tourists' engagement etc. Furthermore, tax rebate for the investors to invest in tourism industry can be another short-term policy plan. Although it would be beneficial for the investors and for uplifting this industry, but this could not be practiced over the long-run since taxes are the main source of income for the state. Therefore, improving infrastructure and securing it by law enforcement agencies can be the most important long term action plan that should be included in the tourism policy of Pakistan. In addition to that, although it would cost a lot to provide better roads and accommodations etc., but it will pay back in the long run, therefore, immediate and special emphasis should be given on improving the infrastructure related to the places of tourism in Pakistan. Furthermore, the results of this action plan can be measured by measuring per annum tourist traffic in Pakistan, new hotels opening in these areas, and number of tourists visiting Baluchistan and Sindh. Similarly, training the related professionals would produce the desired results in the long-run, therefore, the authorities need to train the existing officials who lack the required amount of training due to which many of the opportunities to increase tourism in the country go to waste. If trained properly and continuously, these people would act like a backbone to the industry. In a nutshell, all that is needed is to redefine and update the existing tourism policy in the best of interests of the nation. By formulating effective policies, Pakistan can earn huge revenues which will eventually lead towards economic stability. Moreover, there should be a proper system of monitoring and evaluation of the implemented policies to determine the success or failure. Through this, the tourism industry of Pakistan will not only be able to compete with similar industries of other countries, but also reach the zenith of fame and profitability.

Keywords

Tourism Industry
Entertainment Places
Revenue Generation
Tourist Activities
Tourist Attractions
Foreigner
Tourists
Transportation

SDGs



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