

MYSTICAL KASHMIR: A PARADISE FOR TRAVELERS AND EXPLORERS

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Abstract

The Kashmir Valley, also called the Vale of Kashmir, is an intermontane valley in the northern region of Jammu and Kashmir, a union territory governed by India. It is a key part of the larger Kashmir region, which has been subject to territorial disputes involving India, Pakistan since 1947, and China since 1962. Enclosed by the Himalayas, with the Pir Panjal Range to the southwest and the Greater Himalayas to the northeast, the valley spans approximately 135 kilometers in length and 32 kilometers in width. The Jhelum River traverses the region, which forms a major part of the Kashmir Division. Recognized as "Paradise on Earth," Kashmir is a prominent tourist destination, attracting global visitors with its breathtaking landscapes, verdant valleys, and snow-capped mountains. This study examines the region's leading tourist attractions, highlighting its natural beauty and cultural significance.

Keywords: *Travel, Attraction, Pleasure, Paradise*

1. INTRODUCTION

Kashmir, sometimes known as "Paradise on Earth," is a renowned tourist destination in India. Its breathtaking scenery, which includes lush green valleys, snow-capped peaks, and calm lakes, attracts visitors from all over the world. For decades, Kashmir has been a popular tourist destination due to its unique topography and rich cultural heritage. Kashmir's tourism industry has enormous potential. The state's capacity for large-scale industrial development is severely limited. As a dynamic industry, tourism offers a varied range of career opportunities in Kashmir. The term "tourism" refers to people's temporary, brief, or extended movement to locations other than their regular places of residence to work or engage in daily activities. Travellers have been lured to the Kashmir Valley since its inception. Travellers from all over the world are lured to its natural beauty and rich cultural heritage. The world's greatest attractions for travellers include bubbling streams, snow-capped mountains, evergreen forests, lush meadows, cool, tasty water, a nice climate, and lakes brimming with lilies. The Mughals accurately dubbed Kashmir "The Paradise on Earth". Tourism accounts for around 15% of the Net Domestic State Product and is also the principal source of income for a sizable percentage of the local Kashmiri community. The industry's service-oriented ethos helps to combat the state's high unemployment rate.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To Explore the popular tourist spots in Kashmir Valley.
2. To mention the both explored and unexplored tourist destinations of North Kashmir, South Kashmir and Central Kashmir.
3. To Provide suggests for the growth of tourism in Kashmir Valley.

3. METHODOLOGY

The current study is descriptive in nature and relies on secondary sources. Secondary data were gathered from journals, periodicals, magazines, newspapers, newsletters, research articles, books, the internet, and public and unpublished records from the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, J&K Tourism Development Corporation, and Directorate of Tourism (Jammu/Kashmir).

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The best time to visit Kashmir is between March and August. Tourists visit Kashmir valley to experience this 'heaven on earth' and everything it has to offer. Kashmir experiences two seasons during this period. Summer (early May to late August), and Spring (March to early May).

4.1 Important Tourist Destinations of Kashmir

- Pahalgam, known as 'Valley of Shepherds' (Aru Valley, Betaab Valley, Amarnath Cave, Chandanwari, Baisaran Lake, Tulian Lake, Sheshnag Lake, Katernag Lake), Achabal, Aharbal, Daksum, Kokernag and Verinag.
- Srinagar (Dal Lake, Nigeen Lake, Nishat Garden, Shalimar Garden, Chashma Shahi, Tulip Garden, Pari Mahal, Dachigam National Park, Zabarwan Park, Iqbal Park, Jhelum River, Hazratbal Shrine, Jama Masjid, Shankaracharya Temple, SPS Museum, Royal Springs Golf Course).
- Wular Lake, Mansbal Lake, Gulmarg (Flower Meadow), Sonamarg (Golden Meadow), Yusmarg, Tangmarg, Charari-Sharief, Baba Rishi, etc. Various adventurous and recreational activities are done at various tourist destinations of Kashmir, e.g., river rafting in Lidar river at Pahalgam; horse riding at Pahalgam; golfing at Pahalgam and Srinagar; visiting of inner parts of Dal Lake, Char Chinari (a small island in Dal Lake consisting of four Chinars) and Wular Lake on Shikaras (traditional boat of Kashmir); visiting different parts of Gulmarg on Gandola, skiing at Gulmarg, and mountaineering at Gulmarg and Sonam.

4.2 Tourist Spots in North, South and Central Kashmir are: .

Sr.NO	North Kashmir	Central Kashmir	South Kashmir
1	Gulmarg	Shankaracharya Temple	Betaab Valley
2	Apharwat Peak	Dal Lake	Aru Valley
3	Sinthan Top	Indira Gandhi Tulip Garden	Amarnath Cave
4	Gurez Valley	Sonamarg	Martand Sun Temple
5	Tulial lake	Nigeen Lake	Chandanwari
6	Baba Reshi	SP Museum, Srinagar	Baisaran
7	Ancient Stupa Parihaspora	Pari Mahal	Achabal Garden
8	Fruit Mandi Sopore	Doodpathri	Pahalgam
9	Baba shukur din	Thajiwas Glacier	Verinag
10	Lolab Valley	Kheer Bhawani Temple	Kukernag
11	Bungus Valley	Yousmarg	Peer ki Gali
12	Tithwal Tangdar	Hazratbal Masjid	Aharbal waterfall
13	Reshwari	Jama Masjid Mosque	Dachan
14	Sultan Arfeen shrine, Tujer Sopore	Badamwari Garden	Aalwi Maidan
15	Pandow Park, Patan	Burzohama	Inshan Top
16	Bhadrakali Mandir	Pratap Park	Margan Top
17	Nishat Park Bandipora	Iqbal Park	Fambar Nallah
18	Detha Mandir	Zabarwan Park	Aashmuqam
19	Gurudwara Thara Sahib, Baramulla	Takdeer Park	Avantaswami Temple
20	Rani Temple	Nishat	Tarsar lake
21	Drung Waterfall	Shalimar	Avantishwar Temple
22	Shrunz water fall	Harwan	Hunder Monastery
23	Eco Park	Srinagar Archives	Payer Temple
24	Gulnar Park	Chare Sharif Budgam	Asar Sharief Pinjoora Shrine
25	Kishanganga	Pakhalpora	Namblabal
26	Wular lake	Manasbal lake	Kausar Naag lake

Source: www.google.com and field work by Scholar

4.3 Impact of Tourism

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Tourism is crucial to Kashmir's economy. It produces jobs and contributes to the region's development. However, in order to preserve Kashmir's natural beauty, it is critical to encourage sustainable tourism. Tourism has both positive and negative effects on the sociocultural, political, economic, environmental, and psychological aspects of a place.

4.4 Significance of Tourism in Kashmir

Tourism is an important industry in Kashmir, contributing significantly to the state's GDP. It offers a plethora of job opportunities for residents, including hotel and restaurant services to unique Attractions. The Dal Lake, famous for its houseboats, the Mughal Gardens, which show Persian architectural splendor and Gulmarg, a world-renowned skiing destination are among Kashmir's unique attractions. The Amarnath Cave, an established pilgrimage destination, is highly popular with tourists.

4.5 Impact of Political Instability

Despite its natural beauty, Kashmir tourism has been impeded by political instability and bloodshed. Tourist numbers have repeatedly dropped due to safety concerns, affecting the local economy.

Decline in Tourist Arrivals

- **Perception of Danger:** Tourists frequently regard Kashmir as unsafe due to frequent stories of violence, curfews, and military clashes. This bad perception lowers the number of domestic and foreign visitors.
- **Frequent Travel Advisories:** During periods of instability, countries frequently issue travel recommendations telling citizens not to visit Kashmir, resulting in trip cancellations and an overall decrease in foreign tourism.

4.6 Future Prospects

The government's efforts to restore and promote tourism in Kashmir include infrastructure improvement, enhanced connectivity, and promotional activities. To protect the region's natural beauty, renewable and ethical tourism methods are being promoted.

4.7 Geographical Splendor

Kashmir is a geological wonder, with its snow-capped mountains, quiet lakes, lush green valleys, and beautiful gardens. This region may have some of the world's tallest peaks, including the majestic Himalayas. Dal Lake is a sight to behold, with its shimmering waters and famous houseboats. The Mughal-era gardens, with their intricate designs and vibrant flowers, testament to the region's historical prosperity.

4.8 Cultural Heritage

Kashmir's environment is as diverse as its cultural heritage. The region's architecture, food, and ceremonies all reflect the merging of numerous cultures, including Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism. The old temples, mosques, and monasteries serve as reminders of the region's rich history. Another big appeal for tourists is traditional Kashmiri cuisine, which has a particular flavour profile.

4.9 Tourism Industry

Tourism is a crucial component of Kashmir's economy, accounting for a significant portion of its GDP. Every year, millions of people from both home and outside visit the area. The tourism industry employs a large number of local residents, either directly or indirectly. To encourage tourism in the area, the government has organized cultural events, improved the region's infrastructure, and promoted adventure sports.

4.10 Challenges and Prospects

Despite its natural beauty and cultural richness, Kashmir tourism confronts numerous challenges. Political instability and violence have afflicted the region, threatening the tourism industry. However, there is renewed optimism as the security situation improves and the government works to boost tourism. Kashmir has enormous tourism potential. The region has a lot to offer in terms of adventure and eco-tourism, as well as cultural tourism. Tourism in Kashmir may be a significant driver of economic growth and social development if properly planned and managed.

1. Foster stronger links with the local populations that surround popular tourist attractions, giving them the opportunity to engage with governments and other players to improve the overall environmental quality of the destination.

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2. The safety of the entire tourism system must be prioritized. Ensuring visitors' safety and security before and during their journey is critical for a location's worldwide competitiveness.
3. Examine ideas for improving current infrastructure and sanitation in public places and tourist attractions.
4. Banks and insurance businesses can help drive tourism growth by incorporating environmental and social criteria into loan, investment, and insurance appraisal procedures. They can help to finance ecologically friendly technologies and provide incentives for sustainable tourism.
5. Tourist marketing practices contradict sustainable tourism goals. Tourism boards should become more involved in sustainable tourism operations in order to evaluate and increase market sales and purchases.
6. Keep the number of tourist arrivals at various tourist attractions in line with the area's carrying capacity.
7. Participate in and arrange national and international tourism events, like the Gulmarg Snow Festival, the Shikara Festival in Srinagar, the Mughal Rally, rafting contests, golf tournaments, and trekking excursions, among others.
8. Create and maintain a visually appealing website that provides prospective travellers with the information they require.
9. Use social media to promote travel, and make and distribute high-quality short films and advertising that air on major cable and satellite TV networks.
10. Create the Heritage Conservation and Preservation Authority, and incorporate archaeological sites into the tourism circuit.
11. Maintaining a high level of quality will attract customers and encourage repeat business.
12. Promote new trekking routes and provide intermediate and advanced training in climbing, adventure, rescue, and skiing.
13. Establish outstanding master's and doctoral programs in hospitality.
14. Schedule familiarization excursions for tour operators, travel agents, and media representatives on a regular basis.
15. Decide on price for lodging and services, as well as consequences for noncompliance.
16. New tourist spots such as Simthan Top, Baderwah, Tarsar and Marsar Lakes, Litherwath, and others should be promoted so that the overflow of tourists can be diverted to these areas.
17. Remote tourism locations should have improved transportation and development opportunities.
18. A timber subsidy should be provided for the construction and maintenance of houseboats.
19. More wooden structures for tourists should be developed.
20. Peace-building efforts by India, Pakistan, and China resulted in political stability in Jammu and Kashmir.
21. The involvement of all tourist stakeholders.

5. CONCLUSION

Kashmir, celebrated for its breathtaking landscapes and rich cultural heritage, remains a sought-after tourist destination. Despite various challenges, the region possesses substantial potential for tourism revitalization. A collaborative approach among stakeholders can reestablish Kashmir as a premier global attraction. Beyond its scenic mountains and lakes, its cultural traditions and hospitality enhance its appeal. The region offers diverse tourism opportunities, including eco-tourism and adventure tourism. However, sustainable development is crucial to balancing economic growth with environmental preservation. Policymakers must implement structured initiatives to promote tourism, ensuring long-term economic benefits while safeguarding Kashmir's cultural heritage and natural ecosystems for future generations.

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