

An overview of Pakistan Tourism Sector, potential hindrances, and Impact of COVID-19-a review

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SUMMARY

Tourism has emerged as a leading industry in modern times with expected growth from 1.4 billion (2020) to 1.8 billion in 2030 and is equally affected by the COVID-19. Tourists hit diverse parts of the globe, advertise the message across the board, and promote local industries. This study highlights the historical background, potential, and opportunities for harvesting the unexplored tourism industry's potential in Pakistan. It also presents background information about various tourism options, including ecotourism, culture and sports, and access to unique geographical landmarks present in Pakistan. Tourism can help generate economy and infrastructure and lavishly contribute to the national gross domestic product. Pakistan can emerge as a global leader and the most favored destination of regional and international visitors due to the vibrant biodiversity, distinctive geographical landmarks, rich cultural diversity, ancient historical background, and people's hospitable nature. It provides a wide range of tourism options, including but not limited to the spectacular natural beauty, ancient archeological sites, and multi-religion sacred sites to promote religious tourism. Our investigation illustrates an exponential growth in the local and foreign tourists arriving at famous and novel spots across Pakistan, particularly in the northern areas. In short, the visitors would essentially appreciate the manifolds of unique experiences, trout fishing from glacial waters, traditional polo competitions in the world's highest polo ground, paragliding, climbing, trekking, desert safari, and several others. We also report a significant shift in the positive steps taken by the local and federal governments to boost the industry and facilitate the tourists at all stages.

Keywords: Ecotourism, Cultural diversity, Infrastructure, GDP, Tourism sector

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INTRODUCTION

Tourism has emerged as a fast-growing industry in modern times, with projected growth from 1.4 billion (2020) to 1.8 billion in 2030. Robust tourism pursuits richly contribute to any nation in higher job openings, enhancing average income, attracting heterogeneous investments, favorable tax collection, and improved gross domestic product (GDP). It also offers peremptory contributions to economic growth at various levels, from local to national, individuals to communities, and formal to informal sectors. It actively strengthens foreign exchange earnings and triggers manufacturing industrial growth and a consistent boost of hoteling and transport sectors. On the other hand, rapid and visible economic growth attracts foreign travelers for business, leading to growing foreign reserves of the developed economies (Kulendran and Wilson, 2000). In general, a developing tourism industry reflects developing nations with substantial contributions to national economic growth and reputation.

An estimated 0.7 million tourists visit Pakistan, which is nearly twice as compared to the preceding decade tourists who visited Pakistan. Pakistan is home to diverse cultures, customs, and traditions of people living in Pakistan. Pakistan has great diversity in culture with strong historical background and historical monuments spread throughout the country. Tourists are attracted to visit Pakistan because of the cultural heritage sites, religious tourism, and historical monuments. According to a World Economic Forum (WEF), Pakistan ranked among 25 percent of the world's most visited places in 2009 based on its world heritage sites (Ahmed and Hussain, 2016).

Pakistan is gifted by distinctive features: cultural/historical monuments, natural/human-made forts, and most importantly, the public with a high aspiration of hospitality. As cited by the Tourism Development Corporation of Punjab (TDCP), these blessings of nature can be visualized in Punjab province as found in other areas. It is estimated by keeping in view the geographical characteristics, blessing of four different seasons, and Pakistan's historical sites is a popular tourist destination. These areas could provide a tremendous fount for foreign exchange earnings and a source of employment to bring economic stability (Khan, 2004). Currently, the collective economic outputs of tourism are not remarkable. More efforts are required to promote tourism to multiple folds to harvest its potential compared to the current condition. Increasing tourism will improve cultural values and the importance of historic sites located in Pakistan.

Tourism plays a vital role in enhancing the economic status and improves and boosts global harmony and peace by connecting different cultures. International tourism helps improve the economy of linked families, although at a minor level in two ways. Firstly, it promotes an advantage by increasing competition between the companies working for tourism; secondly, it helps increase the local production rate. Progresses in tourism indirectly maximize employment chances that improve the concerned country's formal and informal economy. Tourism can be considered a sector that can support the economy by decreasing several families' poverty (Zortuk, 2009). Tourism provides support to middle and lower-level economic communities. In this way, it takes part in the economy's growth and development (Aloysius *et al.*, 2020). However, comparatively, this development is not substantial in developed countries (Eugenio-Martin *et al.*, 2004).

From the start of civilization, journey and traveling have been outstanding features of human societies. Still, in the mid half of the 20th-century, mass tourism has been an essential world industry (Ayres, 2000). The purpose of traveling is to visit various locations, see festivals and events, view diverse climates, and enjoy nature, cultures, customs, arts, foods, languages, and old ancestral historical buildings and monuments. Pakistan has sufficient potential in the tourism field with its different cultures, hilly mountain ranges, beautiful lakes, rivers, deserts, gorgeous seashores, hospitable and courteous people. People of Pakistan have positive thoughts and energy in tourism because they have diverse cultural values, attractive landscapes, beautiful beaches, and fascinating sites to fulfill domestic and international tourists' requirements.

For the first time in Pakistan, this study explores the main sectors of the tourism industry and a plethora of challenges and hindrances it is facing to thrive and stand out among the vibrant and established global tourism destinations. Furthermore, this review investigated the impact of COVID-19 on this industry.

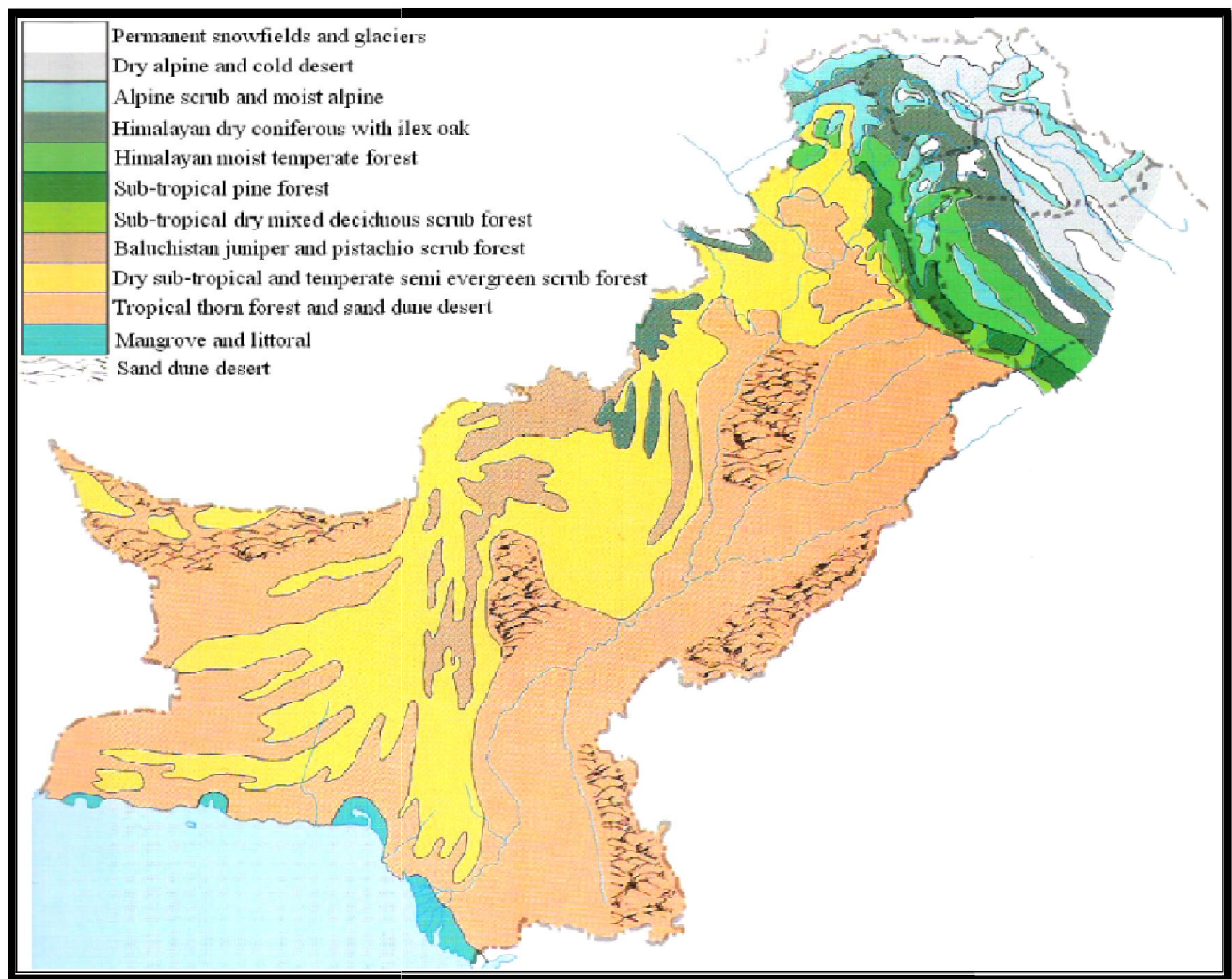


Figure 1: Map of Pakistan with types of forests (Roberts, 1997).

GEOGRAPHY, TOPOGRAPHY, AND CLIMATE OF PAKISTAN

Pakistan has a 796,096 km² area located in 24° and 37° Northern latitude and 61° and 78° Eastern longitude. It is connected to the Arabian Sea at its south-western border; the extensive Himalayas Mountain range has a stable snow landscape of Pamir, which is on the northern edge of Pakistan. A series of beautiful hilly mountain ranges, including Hindukush, Himalayas, and the Karakorum, is situated in the north, northern-west, and west, respectively. Pakistan's climate is arid and semi-arid, with limited forest areas because only 5% of land comprises forest areas (Figure 1). Moreover, the forest cover is rapidly decreasing due to deforestation, water-logging, and arid dry weather conditions (Khan, 2006). As far as the diversity and distribution of fauna and flora are concerned, they are linked to the varying elevation from sea level to the hilly mountain ranges and the climate changes from plain areas to mountains.

The Indo-Gangetic Plain western side connects to Pakistan via the Indus Valley, including northern Punjab and southern Sindh. Compared to neighboring countries, Pakistan's climate is continental because it is located on the monsoon area's western edge side (Khan, 1996). Since sea level elevation causes climate change, temperature and weather are warmer across Indus plain to Baluchistan. However, as the elevation increases from the northern mountain range, it causes mild climate conditions. Higher elevation causes a decrease in temperature, and the temperature goes closer to the freezing point with snowfall. In Pakistan, four major seasons are summer, monsoon, post-monsoon, winter. The winter season runs with the temperature usually less than the freezing point in mountain ranges from December to March. In southern plain areas, temperature runs 22°C, and in northern regions, it ranges approximately 10°C. The summer season prevails from April to June, with high temperatures ranging from 41 °C to 50 °C with prevailing arid conditions. However, in northern mountain ranges, cold climates and snowfall persist throughout the year. From July to September, the monsoon season runs with the vaporized wind that causes rains. From October to December, the post-monsoon season extends the driest duration of the year. In October, the temperature remains close to 35 °C, while in December temperature remains less than 10°C (Khan, 2002).

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF TOURISM IN PAKISTAN

Pakistan is like a hearth of the prehistoric archeologically researchable area. It has various ancient civilization data and traces, such as Gandhara Civilization of Buddhists, Takht Bhai and Pushkalavati, Indus Valley Civilization like Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa in Mughal Empire. The Gandhara name was linked to an ancient kingdom (Mahajanapada) located north of Pakistan, close to eastern Afghanistan. In the statement of Zend Avesta, Gandhara is counted as the sixth beautiful area on earth. Major cities of Gandhara Civilization were Purushapura (currently known as Peshawar called the city of men), Varmayana (recent Bmayan), and Takshashila (current Taxila). Samples, antiques, and collections obtained from the Gandhara Civilization were placed in different museums of Pakistan. The Indus Valley Civilization is linked to the Bronze Era, established on a 1.2 million km² area with an estimated population of 5 million as estimated by historians. Harappa was a central city area surrounded and bordered by large bricks wall. In this way, Pakistan depicts

many heritages, customs, and festivals to amuse tourists. The archeological sites, historical sites of the Mughal empire, and colonial-era monuments attract many visitors (Table 1) (Fakhar, 2010; Ahmed, 2020).

Table 1: Important historical places in Pakistan (Ahmed, 2020).

Famous Tourist sites	Date of construction	Constructed by	Location
Begum Shahi Mosque	1611 -1614	Emperor Jahangir	Lahore, Punjab
Minar-e-Pakistan	1960-1968	Government of Pakistan	Lahore, Punjab
Mazar e Quaid	1970	Government of Pakistan	Karachi, Sindh
Mohenjo-Daro	2500 BCE	-----	Larkana, Sindh
RohtasFort	1541	Sher Shah Suri	Jhelum, Punjab
Taxila	3360 BCE	-----	Taxila, Punjab
Wazir Khan Mosque	1641	Emperor Shah Jahan	Lahore, Punjab
Katas Raj Temples	700	-----	Chakwal district,
Badshahi Mosque	1671	Emperor Aurangzeb	Lahore, Punjab
Lahore Fort	1566	Emperor Shah Jahan	Lahore, Punjab
KotDiji	1785-1795	Mir Sohrab Khan Talpur	KotDiji, Sindh
Takht-i-Bhai	1 st century CE	-----	Mardan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa
HiranMinar	1606	Mughal Emperor Jahangir	Sheikhupura, Punjab
Ranikot Fort	17 th century	-----	Jamshoro District, Sindh
Nagarparkar Jain Temples	12 th -15 th centuries	-----	Karoonjhar Mountains, Sindh
Harappa	2600 BC -1900 BC	-----	Sahiwal District, Punjab
Tomb of Jahangir	1637	Mughal Emperor Jahangir	Lahore, Punjab
Baltit Fort	8 th CE	-----	Hunza, Gilgit Baltistan
Gandhara	750 BCE		Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Note: CE (Common Era), BCE (Before Common Era)

RELIGIOUS TOURISM SITES IN PAKISTAN

Religious tourism involves visiting holy and consecrated places or buildings specified for worship purposes and linked visual scenes for satisfaction and spiritual pleasure. Religious tourism-based traveling is connected to one's faith or religious knowledge obtained from others. In Pakistan, worshippers of three different religions and civilizations are present i.e., Islam, Hinduism, and Sikhism. Pakistan has a tremendous ancient Islamic heritage and history and has a religious heritage of other religions. For instance, Gurdwaras' holy place, located in Nankana Sahib and Hasan Abdal, is the most crucial persuasion site for the Sikh community worldwide. In

Pakistan, shrines of different saints and Sufi are located that attract a large number of believers from Pakistan and other countries. These shrines include Shah Abdul Latif Bhattai, Lal Shahbaz Qalandar from Sindh, Data Ganj Bakhsh Ali Hujwairi, Hazrat Baba Fariduddin Ganj-e-Shakar, Mian Mir, Shah Hussain, Bahauddin Zakaria in Punjab (Rasool *et al.*, 2020).

Some religions, like, Kalash inhabitants are animist and have faith that places things, and living beings have their specified natural qualities. The culture of Kalash is ancient, considered to be of Albanian roots from Europe, and their dramatic festivals are watchable because of their color patterns, songs, and dancing is worldwide fascinating. Kartarpur Corridor occupies a 4.1 km (2.5 miles) area connecting the Dera Baba Nana shrine in northwest India's Gurdaspur to Gurdwara Darbar Sahib Kartarpur, Pakistan. The Sikh temple known as Gurdwara of Darbar Sahib is believed as a place of Sikhism foundations; Guru Nanak lived there and died in the early 16th century. November 9, 2020, has great importance for the Sikh community, as for the first time since of two states known as India and Pakistan, and pilgrims had a chance to trip between two temples (Table 2)(Nizami, 1955; Rizvi, 1978; Lal, 1992; Hanif, 2000; WBM, 2000; Jacobsen, 2005; Gandhi, 2007; BBC, 2014; Hasan, 2016; BBC, 2017).

Table 2: Islamic and other religious places for tourism in Pakistan (Nizami, 1955; Rizvi, 1978; Lal, 1992; Hanif, 2000; WBM, 2000; Jacobsen, 2005; Gandhi, 2007; BBC, 2014; Hasan, 2016; BBC, 2017).

Name	Religion	Life span	Qualities	Location
Shah Abdul Latif Bhattai	Islam	1689-1752	Sufi scholar, philosopher, mystic, poet	Hala, Sindh,
Lal Shahbaz Qalandar	Islam	1177- 1274	Religious poet	Sehwan Sharif, Sindh
Data Ganj Bakhsh Ali Hujwiri	Islam	1009- 1077	Preacher, mystic, and theologian	Lahore, Punjab
Hazrat Baba Fariduddin Ganj-e-Shakar	Islam	1173- 1266	Preacher and mystic	Pākpattan, Punjab
Mian Mir	Islam	1550- 1635	Sufism	Lahore, Punjab
Shah Hussain	Islam	1538- 1599	Punjabi Sufi poet	Lahore, Punjab
Bahauddin Zakariya	Islam	1170- 1262	Sufi saint and poet	Multan, Punjab
Guru Nanak	Sikh	1469-1539	Founder of Sikhism	Gurdwara Darbar Sahib Kartarpur, Punjab

Sports Tourism

Sports have an outstanding functional worth in Pakistani culture. Some sports are played at the regional and provincial levels; however, cricket is the favorite sport. The other sports include field hockey, polo, squash, and kabaddi. In 1962, the Ministry of Education established the Pakistan Sports Board (PSB) to enhance competition in sports, maintain standards comparable to the international level, and manage sports in Pakistan. Now PSB is controlled by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism,

regulating nearly 39 federations. Pakistan Sports Trust, under the PSB, helps players and associations so they can take part continuously in sports (Abbott, 2015; PSB, 2020). Sports tourism in Pakistan is at the national level. However, field hockey, cricket, kabaddi, and squash attract international tourists as well.

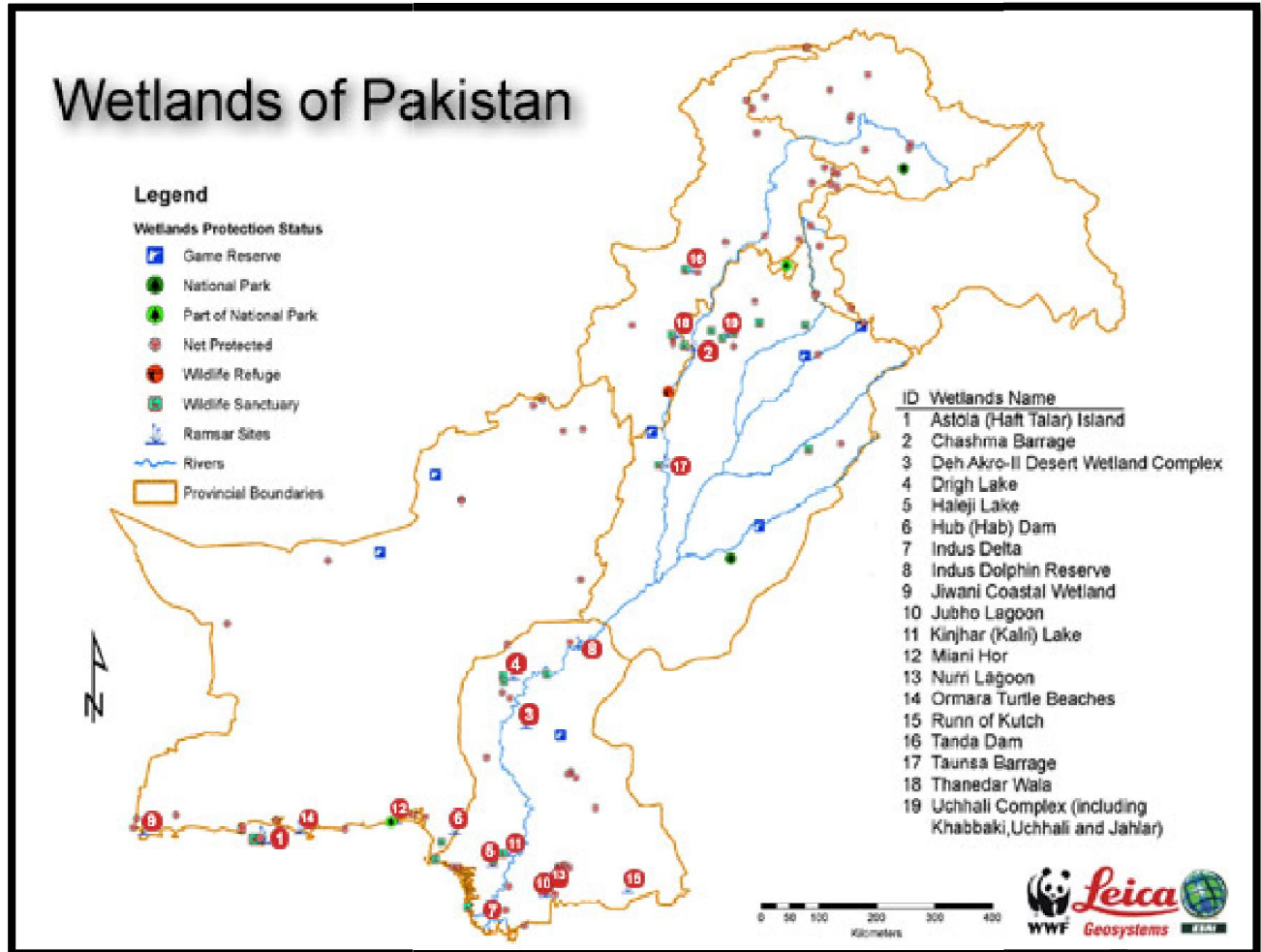


Figure 2: Ramsar sites of Pakistan (Chaudhry, 2010).

ECOTOURISM

Ecotourism is catering to those who spend their free time in the natural environment without harming and disturbing the natural habitats of organisms. Ecotourism involves ancient, fragile, and less disturbed natural environment sites designated for controlled and limited tourism to minimize adverse impacts as an alternative to standard commercial mass tourism. It includes a trip to natural sites to conserve the natural habitats and the environment and promote local people's benefits. Ecotourism has been counted as a critical endeavor by environmentalists since the 1980s so that subsequent generations can face the natural environment affected by human interruption (Honey, 2008). The ecosystems are linked with natural and cultural resources, counted as a single object. Ecotourism's primary cultural resources include

festivals, occasions, museums, handmade crafts, art, and local food items. Ecotourism also impacts natural resources (Umair, 2018).

Many ecosystems or habitats and linked biodiversity are present in Pakistan because of its unique climate and geographical situation. In Pakistan, a wide range of ecosystems includes beautiful dunes, barren mountain ranges, deserts, hills peaks covered with snow, temporary and permanent snowy field, forest areas, riverine tracks, fields for cultivation, and coastal sites. Protected areas have been established to conserve and protect natural habitats and biodiversity, including national parks, wildlife sanctuaries, game reserves, and community-controlled hunting areas. For *ex-situ* conservation and to raise awareness, various zoos, wildlife parks, and safari parks have been established. Moreover, in Pakistan, under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, 19 wetland sites of international importance have been designated as Ramsar Sites (Figure 2) (Roberts, 1997; Altaf *et al.*, 2014).

According to a calculation, 9042 species of birds are reported worldwide (Sibley and Monroe, 1990; Sibley and Monroe Jr, 1993); however, more than 668 avian species have been reported in Pakistan (Grimmett, 1998; Mirza and Wasiq, 2007). The striking natural beauty provides nature-based tourism activities, including trekking, mountain biking, mountain climbing, whitewater rafting, jeep safari in forests and mountain areas, trophy hunting, fishing trout, and a safari yak and camel, and wildlife watching. Cultural festivals and fairs provide excellent tourism opportunities, including Shandur Polo, Silk Route fair, Kalash dance festival, Khanpur water sports festival, and various food festivals. Shandur Polo is a traditional game played and held every year on Shandur Pass location at the world's highest polo ground, nearly 3700m high from sea level. On the festival, a village of camps is formed with folk music and dancing programs.

The northern part of the country includes some of the world's most beautiful scenic areas, including Swat, Kalam, Malam Jaba, Shangla, Balakot, Ayubia, Murree, Chitral, Gilgit Baltistan, Hunza, Kaghan, Naran, and Neelum valley. These areas have beautiful valleys, lakes, rivers, glaciers, and hilly mountains that link the four highest mountain ranges, i.e., Himalayas, Hindu Kush, Pamir, and the Karakoram. These areas offer a distinctive look and are sources of attraction for mountain climbers, mountaineers, trekkers, and hikers worldwide. The Karakoram and West Himalayas Mountain range at the border edges, the world's highest plateau, known as the Deosai Highland.

An inordinate diversity of animals and plants is found in Pakistan. From the top 14 highest peaks globally, the five highest peaks are present in Pakistan, including K-2, the second-highest peak globally with 8,611 meters. Nanga Parbat, located in the Himalayan Mountain Range, has 8125m height, Gasherbrum-I have an altitude of 8068m, Broad Peak with 8047 Peak; Gasherbrum II has 8035 m height. These selected heights are part of the Karakoram mountain range other than Nanga Parbat, part of the Himalayan mountain range (Roberts, 2005b, a; Khalil *et al.*, 2007; Iftkhar *et al.*, 2018).

PAKISTAN SHARE IN TOURISM

Recently, Pakistan was ranked as the 3rd most favorite tourist destination for 2020 in the world. With an improved security situation in the country, tourism has risen in the

past two years by more than 300 percent (EurAsian-Times-Desk, 2019; Torres, 2020). According to a competitive index released in 2019 by World Forum, countries were ranked according to the trip, journey, and tourist visit ratio variation in 140 countries. Pakistan was placed at the 121 positions. According to the report, Pakistan was one of the lowest competitions for traveling and tourism in South Asia. The lowest rank in the index depicted that Pakistan required improved attention and development in tourist service, essential requirements, and exploration opportunities to attract international tourists. This was also significant to sort out issues linked to openness, safety, security, healthy environment, and other World Economic Forum (WEF) index requirements.

According to the report, Pakistan has been added to the countries making remarkable progress in human resources and the labor market linked to the traveling field. Therefore, Pakistan is also nominated as the most rapidly developing country in tourism facilities and tourists rising interest. The authors also stated that Pakistan has price affordability. According to the list from Asia, Japan was marked 4th in the index and was nominated as the most competitive earning and economic support from tourism. However, China was ranked 13th globally on the list and had the most tourist economy in the Asia-Pacific.

According to a recent report by the Economist Intelligence Unit published in Pakistan, the largest city (Karachi) was spotted as the worst and least livable globally. Out of a total of 140 cities of the world, Karachi was spotted at 136 number in the list. Otherworld cities include Harare, Tripoli, Dhaka, Lagos, and Damascus, ranked at the end of the list. Last year, Karachi was at 137 positions out of these 140 nominated cities but had moved one point this year. When talking about the most livable city, the Capital of Austria, named Vienna, is marked as the world's most livable city. However, climate changes have also affected livability, and it was also noted for the first time in the city index. New Delhi and Cairo were positioned at 118 and 12th because of the worst air quality, pollution, unsuitable temperature, and insufficient water availability (Pakistan-Today, 2019b).

INTERNATIONAL TOURIST INFLOW AND COVID-19 IMPACT

We collected yearly data on tourist visits to Pakistan. We noticed that since 2011, nearly 1.161 million tourists have traveled to Pakistan, which showed a gradual increase in Pakistan's tourism industry. In 2012 tourist visits to Pakistan declined by 17%, and the main reason was the dwindling security situation. In 2015-2016, sufficient measures were taken to maintain the national security situation. After concerted efforts, we observed a gradual increase in Pakistan's tourism activities, with 1.9 million tourists visiting Pakistan during 2018 that remained nearly constant in 2019 (Figure 3). This showed the increasing trust and attraction of foreign tourists in Pakistan, giving Pakistan's tourism industry confidence.

Moreover, achievements have been attained with success, referred to as the incumbent government's efforts. This government has taken stringent measures and brought the tourism policy and promote tourism activities. For instance, as a key to driving and enhancing employment and the economy, it has invested Rs. one trillion into the economy until 2025. They have promoted tourism for rapid economic growth

in a feasible and long-lasting manner by following the footsteps and models of Switzerland, Sri Lanka, Maldives, and the Philippines (Pirzada, 2020).

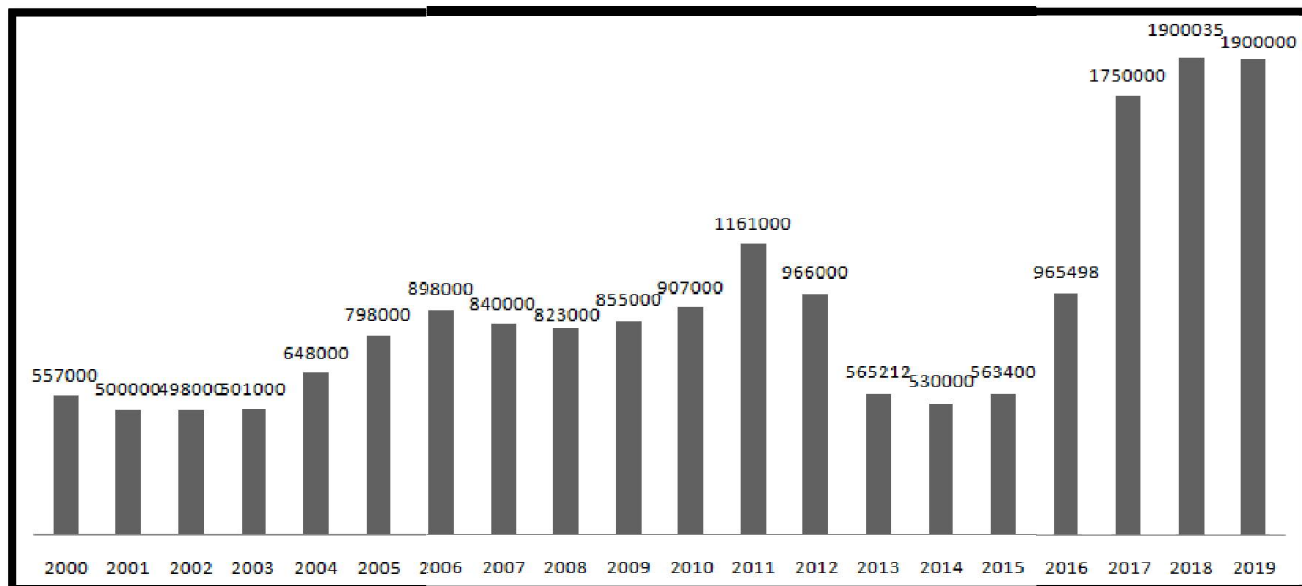


Figure 3: International tourist arrival in Pakistan (Pakistan-Today, 2019a; TWB, 2019; Haq, 2020; Lala et al., 2020).

COVID-19 is a pandemic and zoonotic disease (Altaf, 2020; Adil, 2021; Bilal *et al.*, 2021). The industry of tourism has been badly affected by COVID-19 worldwide. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), nearly 20 to 30 % of tourists would avoid a visit during 2020 that caused economic losses of almost 300-450 billion USD. As projected in the report; these financial losses would be more than the estimated figure because of the pandemic effect worldwide. This was evaluated by the effect caused by SARS on tourism during 2009 and its global economic loss. The affectivity and duration of COVID-19 could not be estimated as its affectivity is non-parallel. Hence, calculations and reports in the meantime need to be updated with changing circumstances. Many airlines, restaurants, and tourism promoting companies reduce staff and deduct salaries to maintain optimum running in this undetermined and unpredicted condition. Emirates, Virgin Atlantic, British Airline, and Lonely Planet had to choose to reduce staff and salaries because of an abrupt halt in their operations. In the previous few decades, Pakistan announced improving its stressed condition in the foreign market, including enhancing tourism. (Ali, 2020). However, the COVID-19 outbreak has severely affected the tourism industry.

TOURISM IMPACT ON NATIONAL GROWTH

In documented figures, GDP was observed through increased and decreased affectivity from a trip to tourist visit ratios in Pakistan. During 2002 and 2006, the GDP was -1.6% and 4.8%, respectively, while the GDP increase during 2005 was 22.9%. According to a survey, the minimum GDP was observed in 2011 with 0.4%

value, and the maximum GDP was noted during this decade as 9.2% in 2013, with 7.4% in 2019 (Figure 4) (Knoema, 2018; Rafiq, 2019).

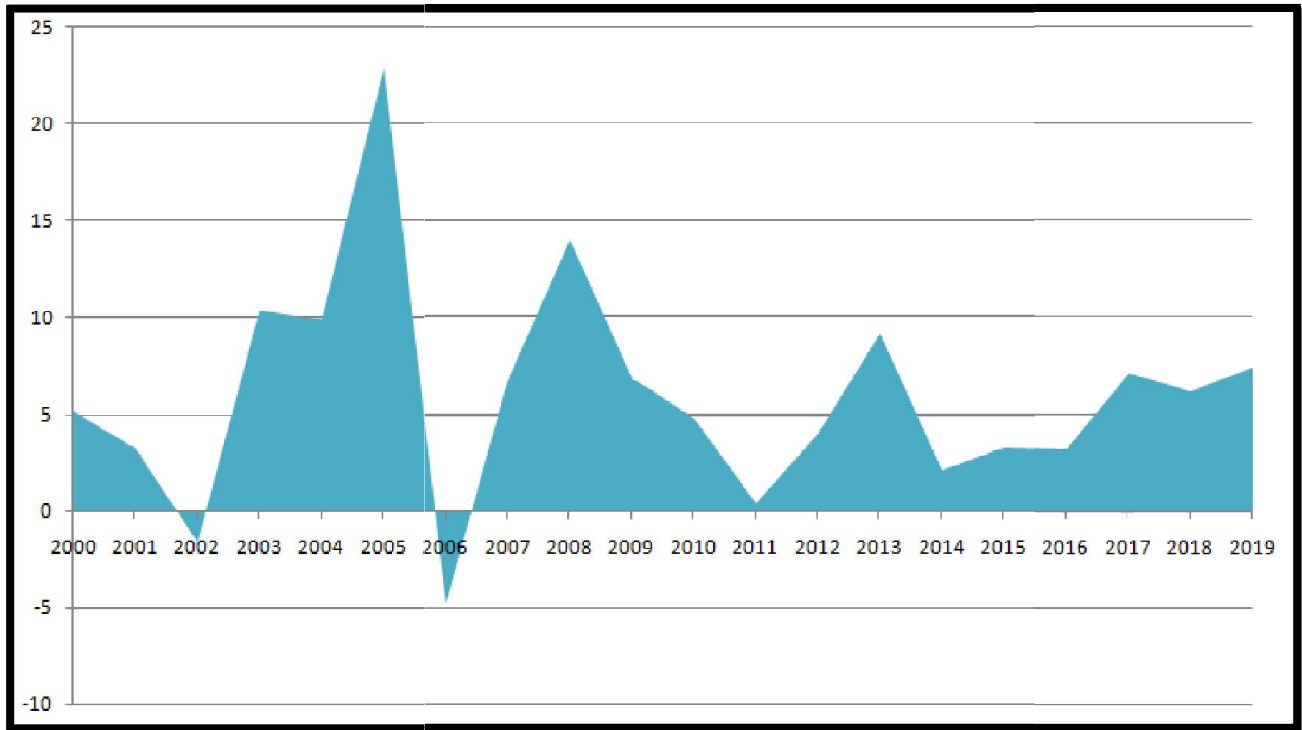


Figure 4: Tourism percentage growth in Pakistan from 2000 to 2019 (Knoema, 2018; Rafiq, 2019).

Pakistan could become a prominent tourist spot as it has been a famous destination for regional and foreign tourism. Efforts have been made to establish and maintain road networks, hotels, and archeological sites. However, the COVID-19 has negatively impacted domestic, regional, and international tourist inflow. The tourism industry contribution was approximately 7.1 percent of the national GDP, which is equal to 20.18 billion US\$ per year. How Pakistan is going to mitigate such losses is a challenge for the upcoming planner and leadership. Till then, we have to learn to survive with COVID-19 (Lala *et al.*, 2020).

TOURISM AND EMPLOYMENT

Tourism is one of the most promising industries developing progressively and playing a vital role in enriching the economy of developed and developing countries. It provides an employment source as well as an effective option to earn money. Those areas that are projected to decline economically can be set by promoting tourism. For the sinking economies of South Asian states, tourism is considered an excellent alternative to compensate for the economic development deficiency by generating money and a skilled workforce. Empirical and theory-based research has depicted that increase in tourist visits directly impacts employment availability. Moreover, tourism and traveling have created positive and productive employment opportunities because of their sparking effect. Overall, the tourism effect on the economy is healthier when the tourism field collaborates with handicraft goods and domestic services (Manzoor *et al.*, 2019).

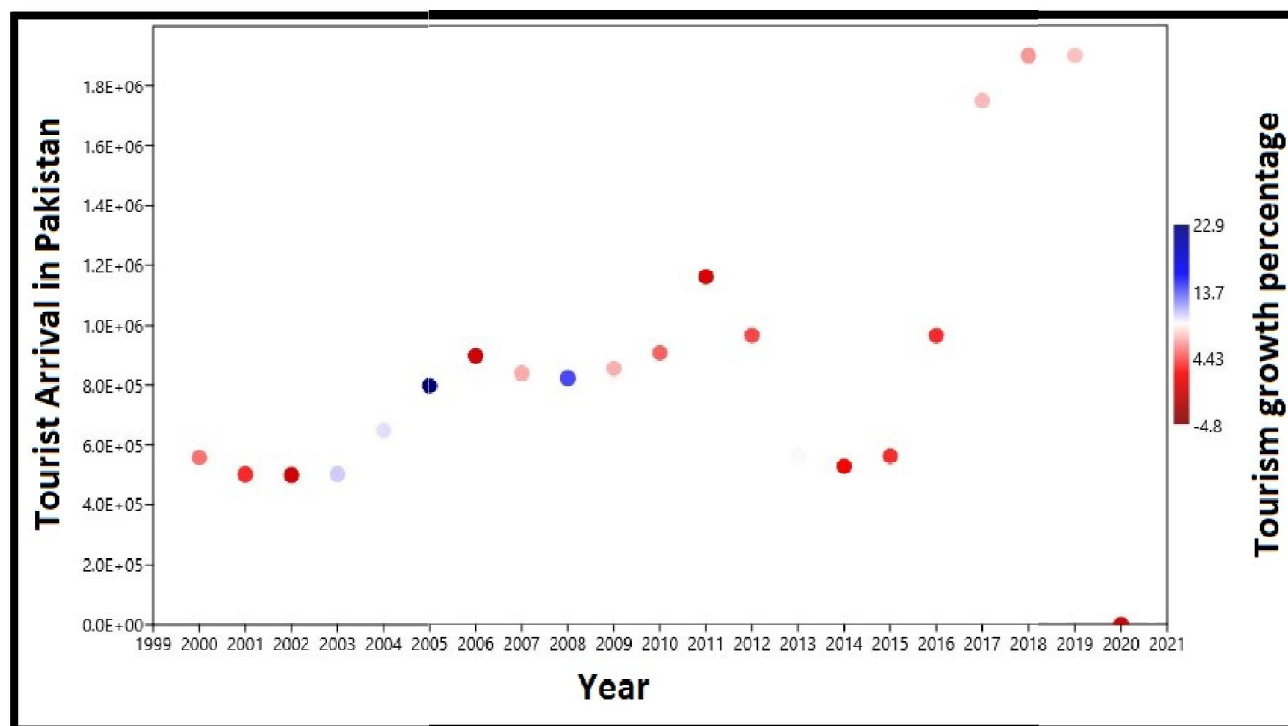


Figure 5: The correlation between tourism growth percentage and tourist arrival in Pakistan from 2000 to 2020.

PAKISTAN TOURISM INDUSTRY

Trip and traveling in the country can play a role in GDP improvement. Figure 5 illustrates comparison between arrival of tourists in Pakistan and concomitant growth of the tourism sector. It clearly indicates that despite enduring the four waves of COVID-19, Pakistan tourism industry is boosting at an exponential rate, and it shall expand to new limits in the future. Providing infrastructure, including roads, railway tracks, airports, water, energy delivery, and medical facilities, can enhance and support its tourism industry. Tourism can offer an imperative role in developing international trade and commerce. Many of the less developed countries are sourcing economic support by earning through international tourism. Because of its excellent dispersion, tourism can help increase the growth rate because it can benefit the population exceedingly. Most of the village communities are supporting themselves from tourist visits to control and reduce poverty. The courteous nature of tourists' urges urban communities to improve and invest in infrastructure development and attract more visitors. Because of tourists, locally made handicrafts are accessible to worldwide markets, providing an excellent employment source. Furthermore, it helps to find cultural ties among various communities. Moreover, it helps promote the blue economy and efforts to protect marine life, as stated by the national television channel (Geo News) Geo (2018).

PAKISTAN TOURISM HINDRANCES

A survey was conducted to understand the views, suggestions, ideas, and responses recorded in a questionnaire by domestic and international visitors to pinpoint the

potential hindrances causing tourism failure in Pakistan. Major problems nominated by tourists included the security problem and the country's resultant negative image depicted by media sources. It was documented that deficiency of supportive infrastructure, rubbish development policies, inadequate facilities and guidance for tourists, a lack of government support and interest, and low investment. The others included the shortage of trained staff, lack of services, insufficient equipment and progressiveness required for traveling in mountainous areas, lack of interest in meeting visitor needs, haphazard and irrational price hikes. Authorities are not playing an earnest role in tourism development, troubling tourists to obtain a visa and relevant information in time. Officers working in the tourism sector should deliberate better management options to steer this industry to alleviate poverty and improve natives' living standards (Fakhar, 2008; Fakhar, 2010; Khan *et al.*, 2020).

CONCLUSION

Pakistan is home to a unique geographical setup, scenic landscapes, biological and cultural diversity, and hospitable people, harboring immense tourism potential. This is the first study that delved deep into the leading tourism sectors of the Pakistan tourist industry and the main challenges to thrive among other global destinations. Tourism can help improve the national economy as a source of foreign exchange and provide livelihood opportunities. In the COVID-19 times, the international economic activities, including tourism, are rapidly declining, and the effects are palpable far and wide. Therefore, it is high time to highlight Pakistan's tourism potential and improve the existing facilities to attract more tourists to Pakistan. However, this can only be achieved with a comprehensive management plan, public and private investments, befitting marketing efforts, and attractive packages for foreign tourists. The other important aspects include the availability of right and first-hand information, well-connected infrastructure, improved security situation, 24/7 emergency support, and a courteous workforce. The provincial and federal governments are actively supporting the recent developments and are facilitating the development of this sector to stand out among the global competitors.

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