



How to boost Pakistan's tourism industry: Lessons to learn from China

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Sino-Pakistani relations have reached a historic-high level nowadays. Under such robust cooperation between the two countries, China, the second largest economy, is a good template for Pakistan that has many merits needed to be learned by Pakistan, especially in terms of tourism. Pakistan has splendid resources ranging from natural resources such as valleys, lakes, beaches, and deserts to cultural resources, for instance, mosques, forts, and heritages, which gives it great potential to benefit its tourism industry and economy. In 2019, travel and tourism contributed 5.7% of the GDP and provided 5.5% of total jobs in Pakistan (WTTC, 2021). Although the tourism industry, an emerging, green, sustainable, and energetic industry, could be an excellent panacea for Pakistan, there are other priorities besides developing the tourism industry for Pakistan's government. The tourism industry faces significant challenges due to poor infrastructure, lack of transportation, security risks, low-quality services, and political uncertainty. On the other hand, China's tourism market has been achieving a high-speed increase and has become one of the most important sectors of its economy. In 2019, the direct tourism GDP in China accounted for 11.05% of its GDP, and tourism's direct and indirect employment-population reached 79.87 million people. China also aimed to advance its tourism industry in terms of ocean tours, rural tours, aviation tours, and e-tours and drew up a specific chapter for tourism development in its outline of the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025) for national economic and social development and the long-range objectives through the year 2035. Benefiting from steadfast Sino-Pakistani ties at both political and nongovernmental levels and the "Belt and Road" initiative, Pakistan should grab the opportunity to realize a long-term increase in the tourism sector by learning from its partners. Most scholars summarized that the significant tourism problems faced by Pakistan include a lack of government consideration, a shortage of infrastructure, and security problems, among others. Those problems are complex, costly, and chronic and cannot be improved quickly. This paper analyzed the most urgent tourism challenges and provided suggestions from the Sino-Pakistani perspective that can be easily implemented and benefit the country.

First and foremost, Pakistan needs systematic tourism statistics. The tourism data is counted by a third party, World Travel Tourism Council (WTTC), and has yet to be officially adopted by United Nations World Tourism Organization and World Bank, which may be integral and inaccurate. Due to the need for a scientific and consecutive statistical system, the progress of market analysis, forecast, tourism research, and even policymaking and investment are hindered, leading to inadequate attention from the government, domestic entrepreneurs, and foreign investors. Secondly, to promote the sustainable growth of the economy, the Pakistani government should focus more on inbound tourists than domestic tourists, and there is still much room for progress in marketing and promotion. In 2019, 48% of inbound tourists came from the United Kingdom and the United States; in contrast, 9% came from India and 7% from China (36% of them came from the rest of the world). However, according to the gravity model, GDP and population in the origin country, short distance between origin and destination, and sharing common religion significantly and positively impact inbound tourism. Populous and adjacent countries such as China and India should be Pakistan's top-origin inbound tourism market, reflecting Pakistan's need to implement more accurate marketing policies to expand its inbound tourism market. Thirdly, studies showed that visa-free agreement greatly benefits the tourism sector, while the accessibility to Pakistan needs to be improved. Pakistan only provides visa-free entry to 5 countries and ETA (electronic travel authorization) to the citizens of 64 countries.

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The coverage of ETA still needs to be more, and Pakistan also needs more exploration of visa-free cross-border tourism regions with its adjacent countries.

Although Pakistan has abundant tourism resources, the development of tourist attractions is insufficient. Most tourist attractions are natural, historical, or religious sites, but those sites need to achieve more exploitation. The local government could not convert its prosperous history and vivid culture to tourism value-added, and the power of its cultural value in the tourism sector needed to obtain more release. In addition, it is expected that natural tourism sites are still at the initial stage, and service facilities need further development; for example, service centres, roads, restrooms, signs, and transportation systems need to be supplemented and updated. Moreover, the lack of high-quality and high-end tourism products such as theme parks, resorts, air tours, and sailing limited the dynamic growth in Pakistan. The Pakistanis are very friendly and hospitable, and there is a fact that the political ecology, security, and stability in Pakistan have been drastically improved, which provides a solid foundation for the tourism industry. However, the government did less work on establishing a steady tourism brand and polishing its, and Pakistan's advertisements, promoting activities, events, and exchanges are rarely seen on the global stage. The industrial chain of tourism includes transportation, infrastructure, accommodations, travel agents, food & drink, crafts, arts, activities, performances, and events. The expansion and fusion in these areas need further efforts in Pakistan. Last but not least, the exploitation of "New Era" applications such as online platforms, big data, New Media, and We Media is deficient in Pakistan. Nowadays, the applications mentioned above have paved a robust way and expanded the supply and demand channel for tourism. Due to some reasons, popular apps such as TikTok used to get banned temporarily or long-term, hampering the tourism promotion process. In short, the problems listed above are critical but easier to improve in the short term compared with other common issues.

As one of the most intimate Pakistan partners, the second largest economy, and a colossal tourism country, China is an ideal tourism development model for Pakistan. To be clear that although there are many good examples of tourism development in China, it also faces some problems, such as over-development, product homogenization, and travel restrictions, and we only focus on the merits. China followed international standards and established a sophisticated tourism statistics system that guarantees a reliable data source for policymaking and investment. For instance, it implements regular tourism surveys, including telephone, face-to-face, and online surveys at the national, provincial, and city levels. It also runs a tourism satellite account to estimate the direct and indirect tourism GDP. Authorities also pursue international exchange and expand their inbound market actively. Each year, national and provincial cultural and tourism departments hold many overseas promotion activities and events, twin tourism cities, and set up tourism year to boost international cooperation and the inbound tourism market. In addition, their targets are those towns or countries close to China or developed. Excluding positively extending its free visa policy, China also setups cross-border visa-free zones with its adjacent countries such as Mongolia, Russia, and Vietnam, allowing tourists to tour, shop, and visit without a visa within a specific period. In 2018, China integrated its tourism department with a cultural department and made great efforts to promote tourism by bestowing more cultural value on it. Cultural elements have been adequately merged into the tourism sector. In order to facilitate the merging between tourism and culture industries, authorities encourage museums, theatres, art galleries, and heritage sites to absorb tourists by developing tourist products and providing tourism services, which raises the satisfaction and experience of tourists. In 2004, China established an assessment framework called Standards for Grade A Tourist Attractions was found (Yanyan et al, 2022), guiding investors in developing necessary service facilities, including multilingual signs and commentaries. It also holds a 6-year "Toilet Revolution" everywhere in China to facilitate tourism. In order to fulfil various demands, authorities keep cultivating high-end products in tourism sectors, such as customized services, aviation tours, ski & snowboarding tours, sailing, sky diving, hot air balloon tours, winery tours, and extravagant camping, among others. In addition, they also provide attractive subsidies and low-interest loans to emerging projects, and Pakistan can refer to such policies. China sets up tourism offices in most countries doing advertisements, promotions, and other marketing activities. It also officially and regularly organizes international summer camps with other countries and sends its tourism envoys to enhance tourism exchange. In the latest Five Years Tourism Development Plan (2020-2025), the authority in China issues a bundle of policies to prolong the tourism value chain. It encourages investors, governmental artists, and acting institutions to supplement performances, intangible heritage shows, and cultural events at tourist attractions. It also supports innovative SMEs to invest or engage in tourism by



providing almost rent-free workshops. It also fuses tourism with agriculture, processing, mining, and other sectors. For instance, entrepreneurs and farmers provide mini-farm programs, the heaviest tour, and idyllic rural accommodations (Liu et al, 2022) to attract city dwellers to have rural travel frequently. Companies convert their abandoned mines into hot spots educating tourists about geology and mining history, which received lots of attention. Noteworthy, entrepreneurs, stakeholders, and internet celebrities play a crucial role in promoting local tourism in this "information era." It is common in China that one internet celebrity famed for one little-known spot one night via live streaming brings millions of tourists and GDP to that region (Qiu et al, 2021). Even some local government leaders signed up accounts to live-stream their homeplace, introduce their landscapes and customs, sell specialties and gifts, and promote their tourism routes and attractions, which also attracted significant responses. In short, China has already explored several effective ways (beyond the abovementioned measures) that Pakistan may adopt to boost its tourism.

Following the demonstration from China, the Pakistan government must create an integral statistic system first. The government should designate a specific department to manage and conduct tourism surveys and statistics, promote cooperation on data sharing with departments such as transportation, meteorology, fiscal, commerce, and statistics, and provide accurate and integrated data and industrial reports to policymakers, investors, and tourists. It also should establish a Big Data platform to collect and analyze the tourism tendency, preferences, and patterns, monitor the tourism flows, and calculate the carrying capacity of attractions. The government must also encourage research institutions, colleges, and universities to advance tourism research and industrial analysis. In addition, the government need to focus on promotion in primary markets. It's better to gradually expand its free-visa policy to the countries which are members of the Commonwealth of Nations, the Economic Cooperation Organization, Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the Belt and Road initiative, and Islamic nations. Meanwhile, the Pakistan government should explore the cross-border visa-free policy with its neighbour countries, optimize driving license mutual recognition, and set up free trade zone and tourism routes that allow tourists from adjacent countries to enjoy duty-free shopping, self-driving travel, and short-term tour without a visa. A 72-hours visa waiver at international airports for transit passengers needs to be considered as well. One most outstanding resource for tourism in Pakistan is its flamboyant culture. Under religious permission, governments should encourage their sacred place to entertain international tourists, letting tourists understand their cultural merits and engage in cultural ceremonies. They should also introduce their cuisines, performances, arts, and lifestyles and present their traditions and customs to international tourists. The government should also subsidize and motivate filmmakers, actors, artists, and craftspeople to design cultural products associated with tourism, diversifying tourism experiences and services. Prompting museums and tangible and intangible heritage sites to facilitate international archaeology cooperation, design artistic souvenirs, and digitalize their treasures is essential to tourism. The service facilities are fundamental. The government should build standards and ranking systems for hotels, homestays, restaurants, travel agents, and tourist attractions and set up special subsidies to inspire SMEs to upgrade their supplies and services. In the meantime, the government should ensure public facilities such as service centres, restrooms, tourism signs, viewing decks, internet accessibility, and self-driving camps, explore the Public-Private Partnership to draw private capital participating in public constructions, which not only benefit tourism but also improve the local welfare. Pakistan has many breathtaking mountains and valleys, gorgeous beaches and lakes, and fantastic forests and glaciers, which are its advantages, but the development of upscale tourism is weak. Authorities should exploit skydiving and helicopter tours in plain areas, develop camping sites and ski resorts in mountainous regions, cultivate drift and sailing activities, and foster excursion and exploration tours. Although small groups of tourists do such activities, these kinds of businesses are lucrative and can satisfy different tastes. Concertedly promoting its national image is necessary, and tourism is a perfect channel to uphold and strengthen the national picture. Each year, the Pakistani government subsidizes thousands of international students to different countries; it's a good channel for tourism promotion. The government should launch the "Tourism Envoy" program and train its subsidized international students to propagate tourism resources overseas positively. It should also forge a prominent tourism brand, design multilingual tourism guidebooks, found overseas tourism marketing centres in its main inbound markets, and hold international tourism expositions frequently to draw attention and alter the global stereotype. There is vast potential to extend the tourism value chain in Pakistan. Authorities should establish tourism industry bases and launch pilot projects to inspire natives to engage in tourism product innovation and creation, such as gifts, souvenirs, crafts, and arts. In addition, Pakistan is one of the most agriculture-intensive countries, with more than half of the population

and land involved in agriculture. It has comparative advantages to developing agriculture tourism. Government should improve the environment in the rural area and guide peasants to cater for tourists by providing harvest experiences, mini farm tenancy, and idyllic theme homestay. Encouraging the application of new tech is crucial. Nowadays, We Media, New Media and other online platforms have dominated the market, and it lays a foundation for every stakeholder to access the market and promote and sell their products with just a smartphone in hand. Government should motivate stakeholders, especially the disadvantaged groups, to market their tourism products abroad via favourite apps. To be most specific, stakeholders should focus on Chinese markets, cooperate with Chinese net celebrities, output the tourism resources, and export specialties such as jades, gems, and wools which are attractive to Chinese tourists.

To sum up, there are plenty of paths to thrive the tourism sector, but there is no "one size fits all" method for tourism development. By referring to the Chinese approach, this perspective aimed to summarize practical and effective measures which can be quickly adopted and benefit tourism in the short term to enlighten Pakistan authorities to boost its tourism.

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