

The Prospects of Developing Kashmir as an Adventure Tourism Destination

MOHAMMAD FAROOQ LALA* and ANISA MANZOOR BHAT**

*Dr. Mohammad Farooq Lala, Head of Department, Humanities and Social Science, National Institute of Technology (NIT), Srinagar (J&K) India.

**Anisa Manzoor Bhat, Research Scholar in Humanities and Social Science, National Institute of Technology (NIT), Srinagar (J&K) India.

ABSTRACT

Adventure tourism is perceived as a fastest growing segment and turned out to be an immense business opportunity for Kashmir region; it could be catalyst factor for positioning of brand Kashmir in the world, but there is little documentation of the factors that leads to the success of sustainable adventure tourism. The present paper attempts to examine the scope of adventure tourism in order to formulate the guideline for future tourism planning growth in Kashmir valley. The study indicates that adventure tourism is still in the early phases of development, and is viewed by the respondents as having great potential for development in the valley. The study explores the following objectives: (i) To establish the current extent of adventure tourism and considerations for the future of adventure tourism activities in the Kashmir valley. (ii) To take the current stock of adventure tourism industry worldwide. The study therefore, recommends various measures in tune with the future demand so as to widen the base of tourist arrivals on one hand and sustain the growth on the other hand.

KEYWORDS: *Adventure, multi segmented industry, virgin peaks, water rafting, aerial adventure.*

INTRODUCTION

Adventure tourism is an outdoor leisure activity that generally takes place in an unusual, exotic, remote or wilderness setting, sometimes involving some form of unconventional means of transportation and tending to be associated with low or high levels of physical activity. As the name suggests it entails an element of risk and can range from getting wet to getting high to getting faster. Adventure is an evocative term. "Adventure speaks of beginning, boldness and power. Adventure connotes participation and active involvement in the life. An adventure, a quest, begins because of a human desire, a drive to experience which is hidden and unknown." (Quinn, 2003, pp. 149) Adventure has been romanticized in literature, and suggests an element of exploration and even discomfort. Adventure tourism is more than the experience of an adventure based activity, but also the related services required for the experience to take place. While adventure may be the desired and peak event for the tourist, it may not be possible without the basic services, amenities and experiences produced by the tourism industry. Adventure tourism is a special form of tourism. It involves risk and excitement, and is taken in conjugation with nature. Moreover the unpredictability of nature adds to the thrill and un-expectancy of the adventure activities. Adventure tourism in the world is growing 10% annually, and is one of the fastest growing segments of the travel industry in the world. Adventure, outdoor recreation and sports are the most rapidly growing component of modern tourism. Wight (2002) argued that with the increased awareness of global environment degradation, individuals tend to gain a deeper appreciation for nature and are increasingly likely to spend their leisure time visiting and recreating in natural areas. Adventure tourism in India is still at a nascent stage of development but the country has huge potential and the segment is now becoming a point of focus with the Ministry of Tourism and

various state tourism boards. Soft adventure is rapidly gaining popularity in India and is valued at approximately Rs. 300 crores according to the Adventure Tour Operators Association of India (ATOI). There are a number of tour operators who have made this niche segment as their sole business and their numbers are proliferating by the day. According to an analysis by industry chamber, adventure tourism is growing at 20 per cent and will emerge as one of the biggest foreign exchange earners generating US \$20 billion by 2010, provided proper policy initiatives are undertaken by state governments. The analysis further underlined that with improved and enhanced infrastructure and connectivity at adventurous spots, India could achieve the target of 5,000,000 tourist's arrivals per year in the coming years.

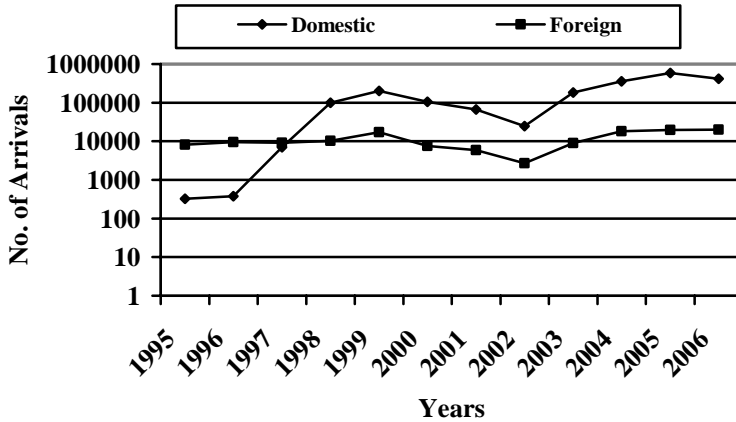
ADVENTURE TOURISM IN KASHMIR: PARADIGM SHIFT FROM TRADITIONAL TO MODERNITY

The state of Jammu & Kashmir is known all over the world for its beautiful valleys, lakes, snow capped peaks, invigorating climate, valleys, cool climate, opportunities for trekking, fishing, skiing and number of archaeological, historical, cultural and religious places, cool climate and hospitable people. Tourism is an important industry in the state. Tourism is considered to be an economic bonanza for J&K state because the industrial development is very limited due to the hilly terrains. Being a labour-intensive industry, the scope of employment is very vast. Tourism is regarded as multi-segmented industry therefore provides different types of jobs like hotel managers, receptionists, guides, tour operators, travel agents, photographers and many other jobs which are required to strengthen the tourism. For centuries Kashmir has been a centre of attraction for different people for different reasons. There are various places of tourist attraction in the state visited by the tourist's. However, most of the places are untapped. Tourism in Kashmir depends greatly on the natural resources that this place has to offer for economic profitability. Aharbal waterfall, lush vegetation and snow covered mountains have come to symbolize what the tourism industry in Kashmir can offer. Operators in the industry should realize how much they depend on the environment, and so as to guarantee continued prosperity and ensure protection and preservation of natural resources. The growth rate in the tourist arrivals from 1995-2005 has recorded a highly fluctuated erratic trend. In the year 2000, 2001, 2002, there was a negative growth rate of (-) 92.37, (-)54.16, (-)165.35% respectively, and thereafter there was a significant increase in volume of domestic as well as foreign tourists arrivals in Kashmir till 2005. During 2006 the increased trend went down to a negative growth i.e. (-)40.13%. The reason was the attacks on tourists in the Kashmir valley.

**TABLE 1. Domestic and Foreign Tourist Arrivals in
Kashmir valley from 1995-2006**

YEAR	Domestic & foreign tourist arrival (No.s)			%age change over the previous year
	DOMESTIC	FOREIGN	TOTAL	
1995	322	8198	8520	----
1996	375	9592	9967	14.51%
1997	7027	9111	16131	38.21%
1998	99636	10247	109883	85.31%
1999	200162	17130	217292	49.43%
2000	104337	7575	111912	-92.37%
2001	66732	5859	72591	-54.16%
2002	24670	2686	27356	-165.35%
2003	182205	8959	191164	85.68%
2004	358095	18234	376729	49.25%
2005	585702	19680	605382	37.77%
2006	412879	20009	432888	-39.84%

Source: Jammu and Kashmir Tourism Department.

FIGURE 1. *Tourist Arrivals in J&K from 1995-2006*

Tourism products in Kashmir can be divided into various segments, along which we can identify the opportunities. Adventure tourism is one of the segments of tourism in Kashmir which has tremendous scope to growth. Within the industry, adventure tourism has been identified as one of the fast growing segments, with the number of operators and tourist increasing worldwide. Within the Himalayan range of India, Kashmir is an area with great tourism potential, with adventure tourism at the leading edge of development “the enchanting geographical landscape and range of ecosystems leaves a lasting impression on the tourist in Kashmir”. The vast and endless scope of adventure tourism in Kashmir is largely because of its diverse topography and of its climate. However, in the field of international tourism, the segment of adventure tourism in Kashmir is getting only a fraction of such traffic. The trend has been showing an increased movement year after year with the development of facilities and greater awareness about adventure tourism option. Kashmir offers both international and domestic adventurer a wide choice of adventure.

Like other tourism business, an adventure tourism enterprise will rely heavily on the specialist interest, experience and skill. Therefore, the specialist understanding required for adventure activities, is a critical area of experience for a would-be adventure tourism entrepreneur. Adventure tourism related products having potential in Kashmir could be classified into three categories:

- Aerial adventure.
- Water adventure.
- Land adventure.

Land adventure

- Trekking
- Mountaineering
- Climbing
- Skiing
- Golfing
- Angling

There are several mountain ranges through the state of Jammu & Kashmir among them Pir Panjal, Great Himalayas, Zaskar, Ladakh, Karakoram. Climbing in these Himalayas can be very stimulating and typically an expedition can take a month, Srinagar to Srinagar. Rich in flora and fauna, the summits of most peaks are an exhilarating experience and from a top them, one can look beyond to neighbouring countries Pakistan and Tibet. Off Sonamarg are the lesser peaks. Kolahoi (5,425m) and Harmukh (5,148m). These are peaks one can get to

quickly making an alpine ascent. Similarly the peaks in the Kishtwar region are not too high but offer technically difficult climbing with many challenging faces and ridges. Some are still virgin peaks. The popular peaks are Sickel Moon 6,575m, Riger 6,001m, Brammah-I 6,416m, Crooked Finger 5,630m, Arjuna 6,230m, Katori 6,138m and Flat Top 6,100m. In the Zaskar region are the famous peaks of Nun 7,135m and Kun 7,077m. Around these are White Needle 6,500m, Pinacle 6,930m and Z-1 6,400m. These peaks are located at the head of the Shafat glacier. More recently peaks in the restricted area of the Nubra valley in the Indian Karakoram have also been opened to foreigners and Indian. Other land adventure activity in Kashmir valley is trekking. No special permit are required. New trekking routes are opening from Doodpathri to Yusmarg. Another trek from Dangwathi to Aharbal, Sonamarg to Naranag and Gurez are the best trekking routes in Kashmir valley. Putting these new routes and place to map will help to improve the economic condition of the local people. With a network of rivers and streams as well as high altitude lakes all abounding in trout fishing, Kashmir has been rightly called the paradise for anglers. This type of adventure is far cheaper than other parts of the world. If the tourist is more adventurous he goes for angling in high altitude lakes which are reached by the trek. One of the trek starts from the Sonamarg and goes on to Vishansar, Kisansir, Satisar, Gadsar and Gangabal all alpine lakes.

River rafting in Kashmir is quite unlike anywhere else in the world. It provides the best opportunity to enjoy and experience the natural beauty of the spectacular landscape with deep gorges, towering snow-capped peaks, hillside villages, and glimpses of the unique wildlife. Kashmir offers a range of rafting options on the Indus, Chenab, Sind and Liddar. Kisen Ganga in Gurez, Jehlum in Uri. The rivers used for water rafting are graded according to the degree of risk involved in manoeuvring them. Grading IV to VI offers challenges even to professional rafters and almost all the Himalayas Rivers give this challenge. Grading is being done by experts. A few Himalayan rivers and their grading are given below:

Name	Grade
Chenab	II +IV
Indus	VI+III
Lidder	III

The above mentioned locations, with investment, strong marketing strategies and environmental planning can make Kashmir one of the best tourist destinations in the world. Kashmir is undiscovered, however once tapped into, only success and profitability will follow. Adventure tourism has received little attention at both the levels private as well as government level in Kashmir valley. In Kashmir we have only few adventure tourism entrepreneurs. In Pahalgam there are six agencies conducting adventure tourism commercially. These are:-

1. Highland
2. Adventure call
3. Mountain call
4. Thrill factor
5. Possible adventure
6. Internal Pahalgam travel agency.

In Sonamarg the adventure is commercially conducting by Karakoram Explorers.

The adventure tour operators in Kashmir are offering a wide range of activities like white water river rafting, trekking and mountaineering, skiing, Zorbing, paragliding, Golf, Aero Sports, Backpacking, Fishing, Kayaking, Camping etc. Some river rafters are now operating successfully in Lidder and Sindh Valleys. Jammu and Kashmir State is successfully projected as a destination for white water rafting. Adventure tourism is a profitable option for these tour operators as clients are willing to live under the most basic conditions but end up paying top dollar for the tour operator's expertise and the activity. A survey report was carried out by Karakoram explorers in 2006, which suggested that Manasbal for the potential of paragliding

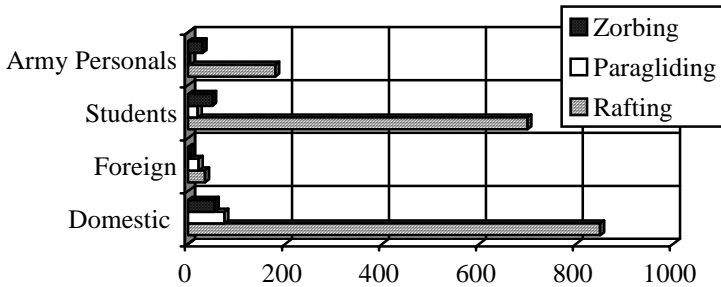
activities. The same company was the first company in Kashmir to start commercial paragliding for the average tourist in Sonamarg.

TABLE 2. Adventure Tourists Arrivals in Kashmir Valley Particularly in Sonamarg by Karakoram Explorers for Two Seasons 2005 & 2006

S No.	Type of activities	Rafting	Paragliding	Zorbing
1	Domestic Tourists	850	75	55
2	Students	700	20	50
3	Foreign tourists	35	22	05
4	Army personnel's	180	05	30
5	Total	2080	122	140

Source: Karakoram Explorers in Sonamarg

FIGURE 3



RECOMMENDATIONS

Following are some of the suggestions offered by the researcher for overall improvement of adventure tourism in Kashmir particularly in the valley. The joint platform of tourism private and public sector, information and communication department should be made for targeting domestic and international travellers for adventure sports.

- ✓ Specific marketing strategies should be derived to help each of the activities recover from their current slow growth in popularity.
- ✓ Emphasis must be placed on the security of the entire tourism network, making tourists feel secure and safe before and after vacations is essential to the international competitiveness of destination.
- ✓ Effective planning, development and marketing programs should be designed for adventure tourism regions to maximize the potential of their attractions and optimize the effectiveness of their resource allocation.
- ✓ Quality assurance is important to attract customers and encourage repeat visits.
- ✓ Aviation facilities along with local convenience should be enhanced and improved for making smooth inflow of tourist who specially comes for adventure program.
- ✓ Subsidy and duty exempted for import of hi tech infrastructure equipments for improving adventure sports should be provided.
- ✓ Promotion and marketing of adventure tourism has the potentially of bringing about an enormous change both in terms of revenue as well as the impact of tourism to sensitive areas such as environment of valley .

CONCLUSION

Within the Himalayan range of India, Kashmir is an area with great tourism potential. Adventure tourism in the state is at the leading edge of development. The enchanting geographical landscape and range of ecosystems leaves a lasting impression on the tourist in

Kashmir. Thus, there are certain structural and institutional weakness like tourism infrastructure and superstructure, the level of development and internet usage being especially significant for tourism development. Development of infrastructure and linkages with the other sector of the economy and promotion of tourism is a vehicle for local development and visitors' satisfaction as well. The political and social instability in the valley is also a serious deterrent to the growth in tourism arrivals.

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