

DEVELOPMENT OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL, RELIGIOUS AND ECOTOURISM IN SINDH: LESSONS FROM THE SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS

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ABSTRACT

This study examines various aspects of the tourism industry in the Sindh province of Pakistan. The perspectives of these facets comprise archaeological, historical, religious, cultural, and natural attractions. In this context, Sindh stands out as a key destination for tourists offering a blend of attractions. Tourism is a vital component of the global economy and a significant source of revenue generation. The rich history, diverse culture, and picturesque landscapes stimulate domestic as well as international tourist attractions. Two UNESCO World Heritage sites Mohenjo-Daro the oldest civilization in the world (district Larkano) and Makli Necropolis (district Thatto) exist in Sindh. However, tourism industry of Sindh has remained underdeveloped. The Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Antiquities, Government of Sindh along with Private Public Partnership (PPP) could play an effective role in boosting tourism by taking lessons from many of the Southeast Asian countries like Malaysia and Indonesia. Pakistan, Malaysia, and Indonesia are Muslim-dominated countries whereas Hinduism is the largest minority. Both Malaysia and Indonesia have developed their religious, cultural, and ecotourism, which attracts millions of domestic and international tourists. Therefore, the collective resolve would exploit better potential for the development of tourism in Sindh for yielding financial benefits by applying successful strategies as employed by the Southeast Asian countries.

Keywords: *Tourism, Archaeological, Religious, Sindh, Oldest civilization, Comparison, Southeast Asia*

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INTRODUCTION

According to the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO 2024), tourism is a “social, cultural and economic phenomenon, which entails the movement of people to countries or places outside their residence for personal or business/professional purposes” (UNWTO, 2024). Moreover, the UNWTO estimated revenue generation through tourism worldwide at USD 1.9 trillion in 2024. The UNWTO has also estimated that 1.4 billion people have travelled for tourism in the last year as well. Moreover, Pakistan was ranked in the UN Travel and Tourism Development Index 2024 at 101st out of 119 countries. Whereas, in the same rankings Indonesia stands at 22, while Malaysia 35 position. However, the two neighbouring countries of Malaysia and Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines stood at 47th and 69th positions respectively.

According to Ducharme (2024) "People engage themselves in reading, listening to music, taking walks, exercising, gardening, spending time with family, playing games, watching movies, cooking, crafting, or simply relaxing with a cup of tea to get away from worries and uncertainties." Moreover, Walter Hunziker and Kurt Krapf, in their theory of tourism describe tourism as “sum of the phenomena and relationships arising from the travel and stay of non-residents, in so far as they do not lead to permanent residence and are not connected with any earning activity” (Lickorish & Jenkins, 2007, p. 34). Therefore, travellers spend money at tourist destinations, which provides locals economic benefit tourism has been defined as a global economic activity that comprises travel behaviour, management, and marketing to meet consumer demands (Ranasinghe et al., 2021). The tourists undertake adventures and experience the cultural and traditional effects of host communities (Walton, 2024). Therefore, tourism contributes to the economy and generates additional jobs, which affect the lives of the public around the tourist spots (Yang, & Fik, 2014; Zurick, 1992).

According to Makhdoom, Baloch, and Kumar (2021), the tourism industry is highly beneficial for the labour of all classes. It provides

ample choices in thoughtful appreciation between different cultures and compels countries to develop places for tourist attraction (Hohl & Tisdell, 1995).

Malaysia is one of the most important tourist attractions. The role of the Malaysian Tourism Promotion Board is detrimental to promoting tourism (Mosbah & Khuja, 2014). According to Sivalingam (2007), the tourism sector in Malaysia contributes 10 percent to the GDP. There has been a great surge in Chinese tourists to Malaysia owing to cultural linkages (Cao et al., (2023). While better healthcare services have increased medical tourism (Ratnasari et al., 2022). Moreover, a friendly attitude and atmosphere are the main reasons tourists select Malaysia as a tourist destination (Ariff et al., 2022).

The tourism policies and strategies have increased tourism in Indonesia (Kawuryan et al., 2022). The tourism sector contributes five percent to Indonesian GDP annually (Jian & Afshan 2022). This growth is an essential element of tourism, which increases the potential for cultural diversity and economic growth (Moslehpour et al., 2023). Nevertheless, tourism in Pakistan is also thriving. Pakistan had generated USD 3 billion during the year 2023 (The Express Tribune, 2024). Mostly, the revenue from tourism is generated through foreign visitors who prefer Gilgit-Baltistan for sightseeing, mountaineering, and exploring cultural treasures.

It has been opined that many avenues remain untapped in Sindh for generating tourism revenue. The Express Tribune (2023) has emphasised that Sindh has 369 cultural sites including temples. Tourism became a subject of positive potential in Pakistan in the 1970s when the Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation (PTDC) was established (Makhdoom, Baloch & Kumar, 2021). Moreover, the first dedicated National Tourism Policy was formulated in 1990. However, with the eighteenth amendment to the constitution of Pakistan, tourism became a provincial subject.

The development of tourism in Sindh was assigned to the Sindh Government's Ministry of Culture, Tourism, Antiquities and

Archives (archaeology). Accordingly, the Sindh Tourism Development Corporation (STDC) was strengthened to develop, promote, and advertise to attract international visitors. It runs an international standard hotel at Larkano and rest house at other locations of tourist interest. Sindh has deeper roots in tracing back to one of the world's oldest civilizations, the Indus Valley Civilization. This unique blend of ancient heritage, religious diversity, and natural beauty makes Sindh a fascinating destination for archaeological, religious, and ecotourism.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The humans in the middle Ages migrated mainly to find food, which restricted their movement for a time. Moreover, they focused on survival instead of exploring new places (Zuelow, 2015). The people who took voyages from one to another place were simply described as travellers (Lickorish & Jenkins, 2007). Moreover, tourism was divided into four stages. The first, period is the prehistory of human travels. The second, period covers the time of the post-medieval and industrial revolution with the invention of steam railways and steamships, which transformed travel opportunities. The third, period covers the inter period of two world wars between 1918 and 1939. This period transformed technical development, which provided impetus for new communication lines and development of traveling infrastructure. The fourth is the post-Second World War period, which is considered the “take-of stage”, and marks a revolution in technology and industrial development that revolutionized tourism into an industry. Whereas, Christou (2022) claims that, the ancient history of tourism begins from 9000 BC to 650 AD. When people travelled out from their places of residence for migration and military purposes. Other travel drivers included trade, festivity, and religious reasons. Christians visit Rome, Jerusalem and Muslims visit Makkah. While Hindus perform *the Tirthayatra* pilgrimage to places like Varanasi (Benares, Kashi), Rameshwaram, Kanchipuram, Dwarka, and Haridwar (Eck, 2012).

The post-Second World War period increased means of communication and accommodation facilities provided new avenues to tourists. Additionally, the excavation of archaeological sites, development of eco sites, amusement parks, theme parks, and upgradation of facilities at religious sites increased domestic and international pilgrimage manifold (Christou, 2022). Thomas Cook's packages in the 1840s in the United Kingdom (UK) were a hallmark of the tourism industry. His idea of arranged tours became famous and the development of new destinations became a novel concept of holidays being followed the world over (Lickorish & Jenkins, 2007). However, the satisfaction of the tourists is the main reason for international arrivals (Correia et al., 2013). Therefore, the decisive feature of visiting a destination is influenced by the satisfaction of tourists with their previous stays (Alegre & Garau, 2010).

The tourism industry of Pakistan has great potential to expand and grow. Tourism impact economic growth by creating jobs and reducing unemployment (Andrade & Velonjar, 2020). However, it faces challenges of security, negative impact on international tourists, and inadequate facilities at tourist destinations (Hussain & Kakepoto, 2024). Moreover, depleted infrastructure and negligence towards places of tourist attractions have impacted travel and tourism in Pakistan (Ahmed et al., 2022). However, sufficient literature shows the considerable association between growth in tourist friendliness and infrastructure development. Therefore, these issues require attention for promoting tourism in Pakistan (Abbasi, 2024).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The data is collected through a variety of methods. However, advancements in technology and interpersonal communications have made it quicker and easier with the use of a cell phone to collect primary data (Hoe & Grunwald, 2015). The research articles, weblogs, books, brochures, and newspapers provide secondary information to conduct research. According to Sultan (2021), a non-cooperative attitude restricts the ability of the researcher to collect primary data

and hinders first-hand knowledge, which invariably restricts tourist attraction to the targeted sites.

However, with a qualitative approach in mind, the target participants were; the government's tourism department, the people associated with tour and travel agencies, and the locals from tourist sites. However, government officials, after listening briefly to the aim of this research, avoided talking, which was considered as a denial. Therefore, these people were dropped and the snowball sampling method was applied which, proved efficient and we were able to reach several people who knew the importance and significance of tourism. Therefore, these participants willingly provided their viewpoints about problems, strengths, and weaknesses at tourist sites in province of Sindh. As the data were confined to the province of Sindh, therefore, the selected participants were locals from the tourist places of Sindh. However, some sites were personally visited by the author and witnessed loopholes and inadequacies at the sites. The privacy of the participants was given priority as they asked to remain anonymous owing to their association with tourism-related business. Therefore, confidentiality was up-held for the integrity of the data and the participants (Stewart, 2025).

The primary data for this study was securitized through discourse analysis as it provides understanding and description to reconstruct the views, perceptions, and ideas of the participants (Georgakopoulou & Goutsos, 2004; Fairclough, 2003). The data from Malaysia and Indonesia is based on secondary sources. This data was examined to filter down the relevant information and knowledge. Therefore, content analysis was applied to incorporate appropriate and suitable information. The content analysis replicates valid inferences from the textual form of data. Moreover, it provides new insights, increases a researcher's understanding of a particular phenomenon, and apprises practical actions embodied in the written texts (Bengtsson, 2016; Krippendorff, 2004). Therefore, discourse and content analysis helped enormously in carrying out this study. These analyses were carried out manually without using any computer-

assisted software as the smaller data were analysed for this study.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Tourism in Pakistan

Pakistan is a major tourist destination owing to its rich archaeological, cultural, religious, and ecotourism. The country is geographically and ethnically diverse with several historical, cultural, religious, and heritage sites. Condé Nast, a magazine that publishes information for travellers considered Pakistan as one of the best holiday destinations (The Eurasian Times, 2019; ARY News, 2019). As tourism is a provincial subject, however, the policies, strategies, and guidelines for visiting Pakistan as an honoured tourist are implemented at the federal level for providing Visa facilities and customs clearances. Moreover, reports, briefs, and other documentation are prepared and distributed at the federal level. Keeping the importance of tourism worldwide, nearly a dozen universities offers graduate programs in tourism, food, and hotel management. Therefore, these youth would definitely serve in the tourist industry and would be pleased to satisfy the visitors with their skills, manners, and attitudes. It will also boost tourism and increase tourist satisfaction enormously. Moreover, the federal capital Islamabad was dubbed as the second most beautiful city of the world capitals. The criterion for this ranking "included green areas, population density, planning, infrastructure, and mountain views" (Dawn, 2015).

According to World Bank Group, tourists spent US Dollars 16 billion in 2022 in Pakistan, which contributed 5.9 percent to the GDP (WBG, 2023). In the year 2020, Gallup Pakistan cited data from the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics that tourism share to GDP was 2.4 percent (Gallup, 2023). Therefore, the government of Pakistan carries out collaborative efforts to inspire and encourage international tourists to visit Pakistan.

Tourism in Sindh

Sindh, one of four provinces of Pakistan, and a land of immense historical, cultural, and natural significance is situated in the south-eastern part of the country. Its roots trace back to one of the world's greatest Indus Valley Civilization, the oldest civilization of the world and older than the civilizations of Egypt, Mesopotamia, Minoan Crete in Greece, and Caral-Supe in Peru (South America) not only in size and sophistication but the magnitude as well. However, the history of Sindh dates back to 5000-7000 years (Gehani, 2008). This unique blend of ancient heritage, religious diversity, and natural beauty makes Sindh a fascinating destination for archaeological, religious, and ecotourism. There are numerous places to visit from the tourist's point of view. These are enumerated below with importance and reputation.

Archaeological and Historical Places

Mohen-Jo-Daro

A glorious archaeological site and is one of the largest settlements of the ancient Indus Valley Civilization, and one of the world's earliest major urban settlements was discovered in 1922. Owing to its unique structure, the site was designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1980. Mohenjo Daro is a Sindhi language word that means "Mound of the Dead." Many ancient artifacts and various tools such as sculptures, balance measuring scales and weights, jewelry, and toys have been discovered and are on display at the Mohenjo Daro Museum. Tourists can easily reach this site by air, road, and rail at the site. Sindh government's Department of Tourism maintains Sambara Inn, a hotel with a continental food service restaurant in Larkano about 31 km away from the site of Mohen-jo-Daro.

Kahu-jo-Daro

Kahu-Jo-Darro is an archaeological site with an ancient Buddhist stupa located in the district of Mirpurkhas. The site is spread over 30 acres, which was excavated in the early 20th century. The excavations

suggest that Buddhism had been a thriving religion in the region. The experts have opined the stupa could be from the 5th or 6th century. The discovered objects have terracotta artwork. The site was damaged first by the local contractor who used its bricks in laying railway tracts that ran from Hyderabad to Jodhpur (India) during the British era and later by the local villagers until they were relocated by the government (Dawn News, 2007).

Ranikot Fort

The fort is located in the district Jamshoro and is considered one of the top places to visit. It is also called the Great Wall of Sindh. It is the largest fort in the world having a perimeter of roughly 32 km. It has decorative ornaments, carved stones, and floral designs. The fort's whole architecture is made of stone and lime (Siddiqui, 2020). The site can be reached through Motorway M-9 from Karachi and through Indus Highway from Hyderabad. The site has been on the tentative list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Moreover, the site has been placed on the list of historical sites under the Government of Sindh, Antiquities Act, 1975. Sindh Tourism Development Corporation (STDC) has built a resort at the site with necessary amenities where an overnight stay would be comfortable and pleasing. The fort's wall is interspersed with several bastions in semi-circular shape. Its history is unknown but historians believe that it was restored during the Talpur dynasty in the 17th century (Syed, 2003). The marvellous structure of the fort reflects historic beauty and construction architecture.

Kot Diji Fort

This fort is located about 45 km south of the district of Khairpur. Excavations were carried out at the site in 1955 and 1957, which revealed resounding evidence about the site of the fort being closer to the Indus Valley Civilization, which is on the other side of River Indus to Mohen-jo-Daro (Mughal, 1990). The fort was constructed from 1785 to 1795 during the Talpur dynasty. It has three towers roughly 50 feet in height, which provide the most majestic scenic view. Whereas, its

enclosing walls are about 30 feet tall. The fort has a prison, a courtroom, and separate cells for troops (Siddiqui, 2022). The site can be accessed by road, rail, and air from Khairpur Mir's and Sukkur cities easily.

Hyderabad Fort (or Pakko Qilo)

This fort usually known as Pakko Qillo (baked brick/strong) is situated in Hyderabad city. The fort was built on a hilltop adjoining Ganjo Takkar during the Kalhora dynasty by Mian Ghulam Shah Kalhoro in 1768 while establishing a new city of Hyderabad. Later, when the Kalhora dynasty was replaced by Talpurs, one of the Amirs known as Mir Fateh Ali Khan left Khudabad (Jamshoro) and moved his capital to this fort in 1789 (Dawn, 2014). The fort served as a strategic military base and played a crucial role in the city's history. However, the Talpur Amirs were defeated by the British East India Company (The News, 2021) and after a short period of 4 years, the capital of Sindh was moved to Karachi. Within a kilometer distance, another fort was built with unbaked bricks that is why it is called Kachu Qilo (feeble). Both forts present splendid grandeur of Sindhi edifice and great architecture.

Makli Necropolis

The largest cemetery in the world, the Makli Necropolis is spread over 10 km in district Thatta containing between half to one million tombs. The structures are funerary monuments belonging to royalty, various Sufi saints, and esteemed scholars. The site was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1981 owing to its outstanding testament to Sindhi civilization from the 14th to 18th centuries. The architecture of these monuments reflects Muslim, Hindu, Persian, Mughal, and Gujarati influences (UNSECO, 1981). A worth visiting place that captivates visitors from the historical and architectural point of view.

Chuakundi Tombs

This is an early Islamic cemetery with architectural tombs located 29 km away from Karachi, the capital of Sindh. These tombs have elaborate sandstone carvings. These tombs have a similarity with Makli Necropolis. The Chaukundi tombs are a paradise for archaeology and history lovers. Its landmark structure is on the UNESCO tentative list of World Heritage Sites.

Bhambore

Bhambore is considered a medieval port city and was an industrial center for trade and business. It had strategic importance, as it was located at the mouth of the Indus River in district Thatto. Major excavations were carried out on the site from 1958-1964. Owing to its archaeological and historical standing the site is on the tentative list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

Sateen Jo Aastan

It is located on the left bank of the Indus River near Rohri district Sukkur. It is the resting place for the seven female friends. According to folklore, fearing the tyranny of the ruler of the time, the girls moved into a cave on the side of a hill. Thus, they became sati. It is a Hindu ritual in which, widows are burnt alive on the pyre of their dead husbands. In that way, the women would become pure not going into the bond of marriage to anyone else (Catherine, 1999; Gilmartin, 1997). However, according to Memon (2011), there are “many stories and myths” that surround the graves at Satiyan Jo Asthan. Whatever, the tales are, the place is a historical landmark and is visited by millions of people around the year. The old ruins of Rohri are a splendid mark of ancient architecture. The place stands overlooking the historical Lansdowne railway bridge on the river Indus. The place can easily be accessed from Sukkur.

Masoom Shah jo Munaro

This Munaro (minaret) was erected at the top of a hill and was completed in AD 1607 by Syed Nizamuddin Shah, commonly known

as Mir Masoom Shah. He ruled as governor of Sukkur during the time of Mughal emperor Akbar. The minaret has four stories with arch-type ventilation on each floor. It is decorated with floral work and poetry of Mir Masoom Shah on the main entrances. The minaret was built with red brick in a conical shape with a vertical staircase access. It has 84 steps to the top. It is about 26 meters in circumference and 31 meters in height. The minaret gives a splendid view of the River Indus and the city of Sukkur from its top (Dawn News, 2015; Mehta, 1979).

Lansdowne Bridge

It is one of the greatest engineering marvels and the longest girder bridge. It was constructed to connect Sukkur with Rohri on the Indus River for rail and road purposes to connect Lahore with the port of Karachi. It is an engineering marvel and worth seeing tourist point. Recently, the government of Sindh renovated the bridge, and a fireworks show was held on New Year's night, which resembled many bridge fireworks throughout the world. Hundreds and thousands of people turned to watch the show at midnight.

Kotri Bridge

This bridge was inaugurated on May 25, 1900, for a rail and foot link between the city of Kotri and district Hyderabad on the Indus River. The bridge has five spans and is 594 meters long. The bridge presents a marvelous view and its structure was designed by the same engineers who constructed Attock Bridge and Lansdowne Bridge. The pedestrians would enjoy walking on the sides. The renovation would give it a greater look and it will attract tourists manifold.

Ecological Places

Karoonjhar Mountains

Karoonjhar Mountains are located in Nagarparkar district Tharparkar. It consists of granite and Chinese clay. Moreover, it is one of the oldest rock formations, approximately 19 kilometers long and 305 meters high dating back billions of years (Rahimoo, 2019). Karoonjhar has been mentioned in poetry by Sindhi and Gujarati

poets. The range was once a stronghold of Jainism in the region as it had many holy sites. According to Hafeez Akhtar, the last Jain family left for India in 1971 (Dawn News, 2020). Karoonjhar has abundant flora and fauna, which plays a crucial role in the ecosystem of deserts. However, owing to its richness, many mafias roam around to snatch the beauty of this extraordinary mountain by removing granite and China clay, which is unique to the area, as no such mountain exists in other deserts of the world. Domestic enthusiasts visit the mountain during monsoon rains and in the winters as in the summers, the temperature rolls around 40-45°C.

Khirthar Mountains

These are spread over Balochistan and Sindh in district Jamshoro that stretches from the Arabian Sea to Sulaiman Mountains in northwest Pakistan. The highest peak of the Kirthar range is Zardak Peak (7,430 feet). It extends 310 km southward and covers an area of about 9,000 square kilometres. The Khasa Hills and Mulri Hills close to the Arabian Sea coast are sub-ranges of the Kirthar Mountains, which extend up to Karachi. The mountains are drained by the Gaj River and Hub River. There are about 21 historic sites which date back from 16th to 18th century. This mountain also stretches to Gorakh Hill Station. The flora and fauna are in abundance. These ranges become pleasant during the monsoon or any other seasonal or non-seasonal rains. The adventurous people love to explore the area and spend their holidays/vacations there. However, there is a greater need for the establishment of resorts resounding the landscape so that the ecosystem is not harmed. The tourist's needs could be catered to by providing them with accommodation. However, utmost care is required to maintain the ecosystem of these mountains.

Gorakh Hill Station

This is located in Dadu district with an elevation of 7,684 ft in the Kirthar mountains range. It has a distance of 94 km from Dadu and 423 km from the capital of Sindh Karachi. The hill is known for its scenery and the rough and tough terrain. It is the highest plateau in

Sindh with an area of 2,500 acres (having a radius of 10 sqkm). Its climate is very cold and the temperature in winters goes down to minus and in summers it remains around 20°C. Sometimes snowfall in winter makes the hill more magnificent. Enthusiasts visit both weathers for fun and enjoyment. However, the site needs more infrastructure and better road access. Therefore, the Government of Sindh could develop the site into a pleasant tourist attraction.

Ganjo Takkar

This is a barren hill formation, as there is no flora in these mountains. That's why these hills are called Ganjo (bald) in Sindhi. It is located in the southern part of the Hyderabad city beyond Hyderabad airport, which stretches further south parallel to the Indus River. In about late 1950s and early 1960s, a cement factory was established in Hyderabad on Tando Muhammad Khan road, which excavates stone from these hills and manufactures cement. It is an adventurous hiking location and a pleasant outing during the rainy season or cold weather. It needs the attention of the tourism department for development into a tourist spot.

Barrages (Guddu, Sukkur and Korti)

There are three barrages on the River Indus in Sindh. Sukkur was constructed in 1932, Kotri (near Jamshoro) in 1954, and Guddu (district Kashmor) in 1962. All three barrages are the lifeline of agriculture in Sindh. All barrages have distinct architecture and design which is worth visiting. Moreover, the Sukkur barrage is the natural habitat of the blind Indus dolphin, which is a great natural ecological treasure. There is a greater need to establish some spots from a tourism point of view.

Manchhar Lake

This lake is the largest natural freshwater lake in Pakistan and South Asia. It falls in both Dadu and Jamshoro districts and is located west of the River Indus, which is filled with rainwater from the Kirthar Mountains through small streams. The lake is home to Siberian

migratory birds during winter and home to fishermen, who depend on catching fish. It has an area of 36 sqkm and in monsoon, it extends up to 500 sqkm. The vicinity of the lake is home to ancient archaeological sites that date back to the Indus Valley Civilization. The lake has been drained for irrigation purposes and has been squeezed quickly. The lake over-flooded in the years of 2010 and 2022, which submerged more than half a million population. Moreover, the lake is being polluted by discharging sewerage water. It needs greater attention for infrastructure development and facilities for tourists.

Hamal Lake

This lake is situated in Qambar Shahdaddkot district about 58 km away from Larkano. The lake is 25 long and 10 km wide. This is a freshwater lake filled with small streams from the Kirthar Mountains. The Siberian migratory birds visit the lake in winter. However, there is a greater need to develop the necessary infrastructure for tourists. The lake should environmentally be protected from poisonous pollution and poaching/hunting of birds.

Keenjhar Lake

This lake is the largest freshwater lake and an important tourist site in Sindh, which is an important habitat for internationally important water birds. It is at a distance of 122 km from the capital of Sindh Karachi and about 9 km from the city of Thatto. It possesses species of fish and hundreds and thousands of migratory birds flock in during the winters to enjoy fresh water and has been considered the best place for ecotourism in Sindh (Magan et al, 2012). Lately, many countries are developing their ecotourism and achieving considerable economic contribution to the livelihood of many locals (Macleod, 2005; Isaacs, 2000). Therefore, this lake attracts millions of domestic tourists while international receipts could be in the thousands. The STDC maintains a resort at the side for overnight travellers with delicious food.

Haleji Lake

This is a freshwater lake in district Thatto. It is about 5 square km in size. The British during their colonial rule turned this saline lagoon into a fresh water reservoir for troops during the Second World War. This lake is visited by migratory birds from cold weather areas of China, Magnolia, and Russia. This lake can be accessed from Jungshahi railway station and Thatto via national highway. This lake needs infrastructure to facilitate the tourists.

Shakoor Lake

Located on the border between the Indian state of Gujarat and the Sindh province on the southern edge of Pakistan. Comprising 300 km in total out of which 90 km lies in Taluka Diplo of district Tharparkar, the remaining 210 km lies on the Indian side. It welcomes migratory birds from extreme cold weather areas of the north. Camping enthusiasts visit the site during winter to enjoy the beauty of the lake. The tourism department needs to provide the necessary facilities so that tourists can visit the lake in a peaceful and amicable atmosphere.

Baqar Lake

The lake is located near Chotyarion, which is a reservoir and is filled through the Nara canal of Sukkur Barrage. It is located in the northeast of the district Sanghar. It has a unique ecosystem consisting of six natural lakes. The government of Sindh has developed and constructed a resort that provides twenty-four hours service to the tourists. It is a tranquil place to enjoy and stay for holiday/vacation enthusiasts. The lake can be accessed from Hyderabad within an hour's drive by motorcar. There is a greater need to motivate international tourists to visit the lake for fun enjoyment and adventure.

Islands in the Sindhi Sea

According to famous historian Dr. NA Baloch, the Sindhian merchants established commercial relations with East and Southeast Asia and played a crucial role from prehistoric times. He further

elaborates that “expansion of Arab and Persian merchant's maritime trade routes; Sindh became the focal point and was fully integrated into the inter-Asian trade network” (Baloch, 1990). There are thousands of islands off the 350 km long coastal line of Sindh. Among these, the two were highlighted when the Pakistan Coastal Development Authority through a Presidential Ordinance desired to take over Dingi Bet (Buddo Island) and Bhandar (Bundal Island) for projects related to housing and business centres. Moreover, Buddo island apart from marine life comprises a ruined small Rattu (or Rato) Kot Fort, constructed with red bricks. The historians opine that probably it was constructed during the Arabs' rule in Sindh contemporary to the Debal port for business and trade (Soomro, 2012). According to Article 172(2) of the Constitution of Pakistan, the coastal area within the limit of territorial waters belongs to provinces and beyond to the federal government. The controversy led the Government of Sindh to declare both islands as ‘protected forests’ in 2021 (Dawn News, 2022). Presently there is a small number of tourists' attraction sites like Hawks Bay, Sandspit, Manora, Clifton, and Sea View. Apart from that, the coastline of Sindh including the Indus Delta has tremendous potential for investment and development as the islands are endowed with scenic views, which could increase eco-tourism (Dawn News, 2009). Therefore, maximizing conservation efforts and exploration of ecological, historical, and cultural treasures at the government level with responsible behaviour of tourists and local communities could transform the coastal region into an important tourist destination (Sandeelo, 2018).

Achhro Thar

It is an extension of the Thar desert located in district Sanghar. The Thar Desert is divided into Nara, Achhro and Thar. The word Achhro means white. As there is no flora in this area it was named Achhro. This place is best for motor safari, which could be developed owing to the interest of the tourists. There is also a different Rann in Diplo taluka, which could be converted into tourist spots for camping and

desert hiking (Khalid Jogi, personal interview, February 12, 2025). The tourism department could explore avenues for its development and transform it into an adventurous travel/journey location for domestic and international tourists.

Narrieri Lake

Zero point is the end of Pakistan India border in district Badin. There is Narerri Lake, which has almost been linked to the Arabian Sea. The locals are fishermen and rely upon the fishing. Different species of marsh water fish are hunted and sold into the local market and beyond up to Hyderabad. There is a greater need to develop this lake into a tourist spot and motivate visitors primarily for vacations, sightseeing, and fishing experiences. According to Khalid Jogi, this lake has greater potential for development and could attract many tourists domestically and with substantial improvement would become an interesting international destination.

Religious Places

According to the UNWTO (2000 as ref in Raj & Griffin, 2018, p. 1), the global trend for holidays is increasingly adapting to physical and mental rejuvenation. Therefore, religious tourism is growing and flourishing in Asia. The major religious icons of Angkor Wat in Cambodia, the Buddhist temples in Korea, holy mountains in Japan, historical Mosques in Central Asian countries, and Hindu sites in India are increasingly attracting pilgrimage. Moreover, UNESCO has figured out that 60 percent of the world's population adheres to a religion; therefore, these believers form the demographic base of religious tourism and travel to sacred places in search of solace and salvation. Therefore, more than 300 million people undertake religious journeys for spiritual healing which has significantly contributed to the growth and development of the global economy (Mzobe & Nyikana, 2024).

However, Sindh is a central place for visitors of all religions as there are hundreds of places of religious importance. According to Julien Levesque, the Sindhis are Sufis by nature and it has been a marker of

their century's identity (Levesque, 2016). Therefore, Sufism has relinquished much of the casteism and has been advocating interfaith harmony (Hussain, 2022). The people visit Dirgah, Shrine, Masjid, and monuments or memorials of sacred persons like Shah Abdula Latif Bhittai at Bhit Shah, Lal Shahbaz Qalandar at Sehwan, Sachal Sarmast in Daraza, Shah Jahan Masjid in Thatto and may other interested temple, in Nagar Parkar.

Likewise, Hindu sacred religious sites are spread all over Sindh. According to a famous historian and nowadays politician of India Shahi Tharoor opines that Hindus worship the divine in multiple forms with 333 million gods of legend (some versions say 33 million, while many say 330), which reflects the infinity of divinity (Tharoor, 2018). Therefore, Hindu worship is multifaceted. According to Pakistan Business Council (2024) Pakistan has nearly 493 Hindu temples out of them 237 are located in Sindh. While, 202 sites in Punjab, 26 in KPK, and only 11 in Balochistan. However, major sites are Shri Hinglaj Mata Temple, Shri Ramdev Pir Temple, Shiv Mandir, and Churrio Jabal Durga Mata Temple. Whereas, almost all the Buddhist and Jain religious sacred places are in depleted condition and are not visited actively. A brief of the sites has been provided in the succeeding paragraphs.

The Hinglaj Mata known as Hinglaj Devi or Hingula Devi and Nani Mandir, is located in district Lasbela in Balochistan. Every year in April devotees travel to visit the mandir for yatra from all parts of Sindh. The Rama Pir Mandir, dedicated to Ramdev Pir is located in the district Tando Allahyar of Sindh province. The annual Ramapir Melo is the second largest Hindu pilgrimage in Pakistan after the annual Hinglaj yatra, which is held in the month of October each year. Yatrees travel on foot from Tando Allahyar. It presents great dedication and veneration to the *saint*. The Sant Satram Das Temple or Shree Raheerki Saahib is located in village Reherki district Ghotki, which is visited by thousands of devotees to celebrate his birthday in October each year. Moreover, Raharki Sahib is the biggest Hindu temple in Pakistan.

The Jhulelal Shrine in the town of Odero Lal near Tando Adam is a greatly revered place by both Muslims and Hindus. It marks the interfaith harmony and respect between two religions. The Hindus and the Muslims can pray here at the same place simultaneously with a small distance in between them. This is the most revered deity, especially for Hindus in Sindh, Pakistan, and India.

The important Sant Nenuram Ashram is located in Islamkot Taluka of district Tharparkar (Mithi). This an extremely revered temple of the Hindus in Sindh. The devotees celebrate the three-day death anniversary of Sant Nenuram, which is attended by a large number of people from the whole of Sindh. The Durga Mata temple is situated on a hill named Churrio Jabal, located in Nangarparkar Taluka of district Tharparkar. A large number of devotees visit Churrio Jabal for the Durga Mata festival. Devotees also bring the cremated ashes of their loved ones here for immersion. This temple faces the danger of extinction as the lust for money overcomes the religious and cultural importance of the Churrio Jabal. Extraction of granite from this Jabal (mountain hill) could collapse the structure and ruin the area around the temple.

The Shiv Mandir is a highly revered temple situated near Goth Rana Jaageer about 20 km from district Umerkot. There is an opinion that the temple is perhaps the oldest in Sindh. Every year on Maha Shivaratri, a huge three-day festival is organized for visitors. The devotees turn up in hundreds and thousands for the festival.

The highly revered Hindu temple of Sadh Belo is located on an island in the Indus River near Sukkur. The temples are associated with the syncretic Udasi movement of Sikhism. There are eight temples on the island. This site is a blend of religious vis-à-vis cultural and scenic importance, which attracts millions of people around the year. However, during the monsoon researching the places is difficult due to the high tide in the Indus River.

The Hindu poet Sami (1743–1850) is textualized after Shah Abdul Latif Bhattai and Sachal Sarmat as the third important poet of Sindh.

His full name was Chainrai Bachomal Dattaramani Sami. His shaloks got popular and were well-received among the masses. He is highly revered by both Muslims and Hindus and his *sholaks* (sayings) are referred to as interfaith harmony and integration among peoples of different faiths (Veesrio, 2024).

A number of Jain Temples in Nangarparkar Taluka of district Tharparkar (Mithi) are in depleted condition. The Antiquities Department has undertaken repair and renovation works to restore the famous Jain Temples to their original shapes. The Gori temple, Nagarparkar Bazaar temple, Bhodesar temples, and Viravah temples are significant Jain temples. These temples are historically and culturally unique and have splendid architecture. Unluckily, as there is no Jain population in Sindh, these temples mostly remain closed. Moreover, The Cultural Landscape of Nagarparkar includes Karoonjhar Mountains, Jain temples, and the old stabilized dunes, and the flat alluvial plains, and tidal mudflats of the Runn of Kutchh have been on the tentative list of UNESCO World Heritage Site (UNESCO, 2016). There are other Hindu religious sites as well, which due to paucity of space have not been included here.

Tourism in Malaysia

As we have observed a great inclination towards tourism in Sindh. However, the potential of tourism has not been fully exploited. Therefore, we tend towards Malaysia for drawing lessons for the improvement and development of tourism in Sindh. In 2023, the tourism sector of Malaysia directly contributed US\$ 15.5 billion to the GDP (Tourism Malaysia, 2024). This is the result of effective planning, development, and management of tourist's interests. Moreover, Malaysia has established dedicated faculties and departments in many of its public and private universities to produce graduates to perform their responsibilities in the tourism, food, and hospitality management sectors (Easyuni, 2025). Malaysia has been ranked the 14th most visited country in the world with a receipt of 26.1 million tourists in the year 2024 (Pandas, 2025). Buddhists and Hindus together are the largest minority group in Malaysia and unity in

diversity for the national cohesion is paramount. Therefore, public holidays for all the major religions are celebrated throughout the country (Windows on Asia, 2011). The investments of the Malaysian government towards tourism attract tourists to visit key destinations. Therefore, making available well-connected transport networks, modern accommodations, and a focus on eco-tourism strategically has improved tourism in Malaysia.

Archaeological destinations like Kota Gelanggi in Pahang are a series of ancient caves associated with early Malaysian settlements. Another interesting place is Bujang Valley which is located in Kedah and is associated with Hindu-Buddhist temples dating back over 1,500 years. The religious sites of Batu Caves in Selangor are the significant limestone hill that houses Hindu shrines, particularly dedicated to Lord Murugan. The Kek Lok Si Temple located in Penang is the largest Buddhist temple in Malaysia with a towering Kuan Yin statue. Apart from that there are a number of places that provide scenic views and people enjoy visiting Genting Highlands, which has Theme parks, casinos, and modern shopping malls. Tourism Malaysia in its report of 2023 has mentioned that the highest receipts were from shopping by tourists. Another theme park is Legoland Malaysia. It has family rides, themed hotels, and water parks. Moreover, all around the country chain of beach hotels provides sufficient accommodation to the tourists to enjoy the great ecological and environmental luxury and have fun there. Apart from that, the bustling city of Kuala Lumpur has the famous Petronas Towers, KL Tower, and Bukit Bintang's nightlife. These places attract millions of tourists around the world. However, according to Tourism Malaysia highest number of tourists come from neighbouring countries, South Asia and the Middle East.

Tourism in Indonesia

The largest Muslim country in the world by population and size, Indonesia has become a favourite tourist destination around the world. According to Data Pandas (2025), Indonesia has been ranked 18th most visited destination with around 15.5 million international

receipts. Indonesia has transformed tourism as an important component of its economy being a significant source of foreign exchange and with the passage of time Indonesia is competing for its better international ranking in tourism. The contribution of the tourism industry is 5.5 percent of the Indonesian GDP (Bagci, 2024). As the country is an archipelago consisting of thousands of Islands have great diversity. According to the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the country has more than 87 percent Muslim population whereas Hindus and Buddhists form two percent of the population and stand as the second largest minority after Christians who are 10 percent.

Indonesia has many archaeological, historical, religious, and ecological sites that offer tourists a great sense of peace and tranquillity. Among these are the Borobudur temple, which is located in Magelang, Central Java. The temple is supposed to be the world's largest Buddhist temple with intricate carvings. Prambanan temple is another marvellous site located in Yogyakarta is a 9th-century Hindu temple complex dedicated to the Trimurti gods. A great archaeological and historical as well as cultural site that attracts millions of tourists. The Pura Besakih temples and Uluwatu temple are located on the famous Island of Bali. Peace, culture, history, and architecture are the hallmarks of the Bali. Moreover, Masjid Istiqlal is the largest mosque in Southeast Asia and has been declared a national mosque and symbolizes Indonesian independence. Moreover, a part of Bali, Jakarta city is famous for its modern malls and cultural centres. The Taman Mini Indonesia Indah, theme park in Jakarta displays Indonesian culture and traditions through replicas and performances.

Another fascinating aspect of Indonesian tourism is “village tourism”. It is a new concept that integrates attraction, activity, accommodation, and support to maximize the tourism potential of a specific area. Village tourism is a small level family or community-owned accommodations, boarding houses, guest houses, bed and breakfasts, lodges, and restaurants. It generates the local economy, creates jobs, and empowers the local community. Indonesia has about

2000 such villages, which flourish village tourism mainly in the villages of Java and Bali (Three Hundred Sixty, 2022). Moreover, the importance of tourism in Indonesia has led to a number of universities in Indonesia that offer graduate programs in hospitality and tourism management (Topuniversities, 2025). This is the reason that tourism policies are robust and concerned officials and agencies pay attention in terms of investment and improvement for tourist attraction, which motivates visitors to opt for destinations in Malaysia and Indonesia.

Lessons from Malaysia and Indonesia

The tourism-related revenue of Sindh is very low compared to other regions in Pakistan and neighbouring countries due to challenges in marketing, infrastructure, and international appeal. The exact figure for tourism receipts could not be found. Therefore, ChatGPT, GeminiAI, and DeepSeek artificial intelligence tools were asked about tourism-related revenue generation in Sindh. These tools estimated that PKR 40-50 billion could be generated from tourism in Sindh. Moreover, any country's tourism cannot be compared with that of a province in Pakistan. However, Sindh Tourism would learn from the planning, improvement, and development of tourism in Malaysia and Indonesia. Since 2010, tourism has become a provincial entity and the focus has been to improve existing sites and develop new sites to attract tourism in Sindh. Jaipal Chhabria, a doctor who lived in rural Sindh has since moved to Karachi owing to law and order. According to him, every tourist remains concerned about his safety. He expressed that his daughter and his son-in-law were keen to visit different places in Sindh but owing to worse law and order they moved to Bali, Indonesia for their honeymoon. As the island of Bali is mostly inhabited by Sindhi Hindus for trade and business, so many Sindhis find this place like a home (Myutel, 2019). Moreover, he reiterated the need for allowing Hindus from all over the world to visit their sacred sites in Sindh as Sikhs are facilitated traveling in special trains. Moreover, he proposed that Kartarpur corridor-type entry should be arranged for the Jains to visit their centuries-old

Mandirs in Nagarparkar (Personal interview, February 12, 2025). According to UN Tourism (2025), transport, accommodation economic factors, and safety remain the top risks for tourists. Therefore, law and order is a precondition for anyone to select Sindh as their tourist destination. This is a multifaceted strategy and better results could only be achieved with pre-emptive action from the Sindh government.

The positive point is that Amar Fayaz, a digital and computational expert had undertaken tagging hundreds of sites to Google. More than 750 places were tagged on Google and more than 19000 photos and videos were uploaded which have been viewed by more than 400 million people around the world (Personal interview February 3, 2025).

CONCLUSION

Tourism is usually a wealthy men's activity. This is a social and cultural wonder for people to move out of their residences to visit other places. Moreover, human curiosity drives people for pleasure, fun, sightseeing, and personal satisfaction. Tourism is also defined as a global economic activity that comprises travel, management, and marketing to meet consumer requirements. It contributes to the economy, generates additional job opportunities, and creates a positive impact on the lives of the local people. It provides ample choices in thoughtful appreciation between different cultures and compels countries to develop places for tourist attraction. It also helps in the preservation of cultural heritage and improves local infrastructure. Moreover, the tourism sector in Malaysia and Indonesia has attracted millions of tourists. The year-wise increase in number of tourists is related to their tourism policies and strategies. However, tourism in Pakistan is also thriving. Pakistan has been able to generate a considerable amount of foreign exchange from foreign visitors who prefer Gilgit-Baltistan for sightseeing, mountaineering, and exploration of cultural treasures.

However, Sindh tourism has many untapped sites for revenue generation through tourism. Sindh has 369 cultural sites including temples and stupas of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism, which could attract pilgrimage enormously. Moreover, hundreds of sites and places have been tagged to Google along with a number of photographs and videos. Anyone wishing to visit these sites could click the site on Google Maps and all the details would flush on the screen.

The STDC has been strengthened to develop, promote, and advertise to invite international visitors. It is also striving to entice and motivate international tourists with virtual visualization through its website. It runs an international standard hotel at Larkano and rest houses at other locations for tourists throughout Sindh. Sindh has its deeper roots tracing back to one of the world's oldest civilizations, the Indus Valley Civilization. This unique blend of ancient heritage, religious diversity, and natural beauty makes Sindh a fascinating destination for archaeological, religious, and ecotourism. Sindh Tourism Department could explore and increase its revenue through archaeological, religious, and cultural heritage sites. The safari trains and buses for predesigned locations could be arranged to motivate enthusiasts to visit important tourist destinations as a day trip or for an overnight stay to boost tourism.

Moreover, agro or rural-based tourism has not yet been explored and exploited, which is considered interesting and attracts the urban population to experience rural life. Moreover, it will restrict the migration of rural populations to urban centres and generate revenue for rural folks. The Tourism Department could also enlist tour operators and facilitate them at locations of tourist interest. Moreover, the Pakistan Institute of Tourism & Hotel Management (PITHM) Karachi and those universities that impart graduate education should be integrated into scope-driven outcomes. These graduates should be encouraged by start-ups to explore their entrepreneurial abilities and expertise.

Tourism and Hospitality agencies should forge a consortium with international tourism agencies for propagation and awareness about the potential of tourism in Sindh. There should be plans for the implementation of efficient safety procedures and emergency responses, cooperation between public and private sectors. The major requirement of the tourists is communication link, security, and formidable accommodation. These aspects need special consideration, which would create greater courtesy attitudes for the satisfaction of the tourists.

The Jain temples require a comprehensive renovation in terms of construction and revival of practicing rituals. Therefore, Sindh Tourism Department should recommend to the federal government to construct road links to connect Jain temples with Suigam, a town in the Indian state of Gujrat, and Bhaksar, a town in the state of Rajasthan. It will enable Jains to visit their sacred sites in Sindh. However, it may be a costly affair but would generate revenue on the lines of the Kartarpur corridor.

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