ISSRA
INSTITUTE FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES, RESEARCH & ANALYSIS

National Seminar

Tourism Development and Progress in Pakistan

Thursday, 3 September 2026



Conversations



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Tourism Development and Progress in Pakistan

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Disclaimer: The discussion and report have followed Chatham House rule. The statements, facts and opinions by speakers do not constitute the official policy of ISSRA/NDU.


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CONCEPT NOTE

Tourism has emerged as a strategic driver of economic growth, employment generation, cultural diplomacy, and regional development. Endowed with diverse geographical landscapes, rich cultural heritage, archaeological treasures, and religious tourism sites, Pakistan possesses significant untapped tourism potential. Recent improvements in security, infrastructure, and government initiatives have created new opportunities for positioning Pakistan as a competitive tourism destination. Nevertheless, maximizing these opportunities requires coherent policy coordination, sustainable tourism practices, effective destination branding, and enhanced collaboration among federal and provincial stakeholders.

In this context, the Institute for Strategic Studies, Research and Analysis (ISSRA) organized a one-day National Seminar on "Tourism Development and Progress in Pakistan" to provide a national platform for dialogue among policymakers, provincial tourism departments, development partners, academia, and industry representatives. The seminar assessed the current state of tourism across Pakistan, examined the legal and regulatory framework underpinning tourism governance, highlighted provincial experiences and best practices, identified key challenges and opportunities, and developed policy recommendations to strengthen tourism as a catalyst for sustainable economic development, national integration, and Pakistan's international image.



Key Takeaways

- Tourism is not merely an economic activity; it is a complete ecosystem. It enables host communities to participate through handicrafts, guiding, accommodation, food services and small businesses. Their share in tourism income also supports conservation and local ownership.
- Tourism performance cannot be judged by visitor arrivals alone. Visitor spending, length of stay, repeat visits, satisfaction, local employment, and environmental conditions better measure whether tourism creates sustainable economic and social value.
- Pakistan has abundant tourist attractions, but weak product development has constrained their conversion into organised and marketable visitor experiences. Tourism promotion therefore needs to sell complete experiences rather than simply advertise places.
- Domestic tourism continues to dominate Pakistan's tourism market, while international tourism remains comparatively limited. International growth requires clear packages around religious, heritage, medical, coastal, cruise and adventure tourism, supported by visa facilitation, direct connectivity, regular events and sustained destination marketing.
- The 18th Amendment has placed tourism responsibility with provinces, while visas, immigration, aviation, security, national highways and maritime access remain federal responsibilities. A common operating arrangement is therefore required for access, promotion, standards and investment.
- Accessibility remains one of the main barriers to tourism growth in Pakistan. Limited direct international air connectivity, poorly facilitated land borders, road closures, fragile mountain routes and inadequate supporting services increase both the cost and uncertainty of travel.
- Unplanned development is damaging the natural and cultural assets on which tourism depends. Weak enforcement of land-use planning, zoning and building regulations has allowed haphazard construction in several destinations. Stronger destination planning and climate-resilient infrastructure are therefore necessary.

- Tourism and security should not be treated as an either-or choice in areas facing security problems. Tourism can support local ownership, economic participation, interprovincial contact and a different public narrative. However, access, visitor protection, emergency response and rescue capacity must be assessed realistically.
- The government's dual role as policymaker and tourism operator through entities such as the Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation (PTDC) may create a conflict of interest between its regulatory and commercial functions. A clearer separation of roles can improve transparency and encourage private-sector participation while maintaining government oversight of standards and conservation.
- Digitalisation is becoming part of basic tourism infrastructure rather than only a promotional tool. Integrated portals, destination apps, digital maps, booking links, live travel information, tourist helplines and AI-assisted trip planning can improve both visitor facilitation and tourism management.



Summary Of Proceedings

- Pakistan has taken several measures to support tourism, including the National Tourism Strategy 2020-2030, the Salaam Pakistan initiative and an online visa facility for citizens of 126 countries.
- A new federal tourism policy is awaiting final approval. Green Tourism Pakistan is working with federal and provincial institutions on tourism investment and data-related initiatives, including preparing international tourist-arrival data with the support of the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics.
- Pakistan has only six sites on the UNESCO World Heritage List, while the tentative list has expanded through recent provincial submissions. No new site has been inscribed for almost three decades, which increases the importance of preparing new nomination dossiers.
- Cultural institutions are being linked with tourism through museums, performing arts, festivals and heritage circuits. The Department of Archaeology and Museums, Lok Virsa, and PNCA are part of this effort, along with Gandhara, Mughal, Sufi, and Buddhist heritage circuits.
- Cultural calendars and recurring events can make these institutions a regular part of visitor itineraries. The annual National Heritage Festival attracted more than 500,000 visitors last year, while further cultural exchanges with foreign countries are planned.
- Public-private participation in heritage conservation includes ideas such as "adopt a heritage site". Private or corporate partners can improve visitor facilities, interpretation, and promotion, while the government retains oversight of conservation.
- Medical tourism is being developed through partnerships among hospitals, diagnostic centres, hotels and overseas-Pakistani organisations. Combined treatment and accommodation packages can connect visitors with medical services during their stay in Pakistan.
- Religious tourism initiatives include state-level programmes for Sikh and Buddhist visitors, supported by wider travel itineraries rather than visits limited to religious sites. Visa facilitation for visitors from Buddhist-majority countries is also under consideration.
- Tourism-related skills remain a constraint on service quality. About 30 hospitality-training institutes produce more than 20,000 graduates annually, but more trained human resources are needed to improve standards and visitor services.
- Punjab is shifting from isolated tourism sites towards circuit-based development. Eight

proposed circuits cover Lahore Heritage, Sacred Punjab, Northern Potohar, the Salt Range, Cholistan, South Punjab, Harappa and rural/agricultural tourism.

- The Punjab Heritage and Tourism Authority provides an apex arrangement for tourism and heritage functions. A tourism force is also planned for major sites, while integrated tourism zones and formal outsourcing arrangements are being prepared for private participation.
- Punjab is spending Rs 28 billion annually on tourism and heritage development. Public investment focuses on conservation, museums, resorts, and visitor facilities, while the next phase will focus on operating and monetising these assets.
- Heritage-led development does not always require large-scale investment. Gali Surjan Singh in Lahore shows how a relatively small conservation intervention in a historic settlement can encourage wider interest and investment.
- Conservation around Wazir Khan Mosque and Lahore Fort has helped create a broader visitor circuit. Visitor numbers at Lahore Fort have increased from around two million to more than six million annually.
- Punjab's digital tourism platform includes 176 mapped heritage sites with trip-planning and service information. Lahore's designation as the SCO Tourism and Cultural Capital for 2026–27 also provides an opportunity to showcase Punjab and other parts of Pakistan.
- Sindh's coastline and ports remain underused tourism resources. Karachi Port and Port Qasim receive substantial international shipping traffic, but foreign crew members no longer have the shore access that earlier allowed them to visit the city.
- Maritime tourism remains weakly addressed in national policy. The 2002 maritime policy remained largely unactioned, while the new draft contains only limited provisions on cruise tourism, port-based visitor access and other maritime-tourism opportunities.
- Sindh's heritage and religious tourism assets include Mohenjo-daro, Makli, Chaukhandi, Bhambore, Hindu pilgrimage sites and Jain temples. Access to Mohenjo-daro remains difficult because of weak air and rail connectivity, and underused airports require privatised operation.
- Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) has developed a decentralised tourism structure under the Tourism Act 2019 through development authorities responsible for major destinations. A provincial coordination mechanism under the Chief Minister is also planned to manage overlap between

tourism, forests and other departments.

- KP has introduced digital payments, the 1422 Tourist Helpline and a tourism control and monitoring system for visitor-footfall data. An ecotourism zone at Thandiani has also reached an advanced stage before practical work begins.
- Procedures for tour operators, guides and foreign tourists in KP are under review. The Home Department is examining existing SOPs for foreign visitors, including possible facilitation on the pattern followed in Gilgit-Baltistan.
- Unplanned development along rivers and weak enforcement of laws and building regulations in environmentally sensitive areas are affecting the natural and cultural character of several tourist destinations. KP has started land-use and master planning to improve destination management and address these challenges.
- Balochistan has prepared its first provincial tourism policy through consultations with tourism operators, hoteliers, public institutions and other stakeholders. The policy aims to replace ad hoc development with a more continuous framework for infrastructure, investment and destination management.
- Balochistan possesses diverse tourism assets, including its coastal areas, historical sites, cultural heritage, religious destinations and adventure tourism opportunities. The province's coastline, Mehrgarh, Hingol National Park, Hinglaj, Ziarat and other destinations offer potential for developing diverse tourism segments.
- Security challenges remain an important consideration for tourism development in Balochistan. The Jhal Magsi Rally showed how local community participation and support for visitors can help create a secure and welcoming environment despite security concerns.
- The large geographical spread of Balochistan, limited tourism infrastructure and destination development gaps remain important implementation challenges. Addressing these challenges requires strong coordination between government institutions, private stakeholders and local communities.
- Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) has developed its tourism framework through a tourism policy, Tourism Promotion Act, Hotels and Restaurants Act and Travel Agencies Act. Heritage mapping has documented 81 sites, while a land bank of about 500 kanals and 22 feasibility studies are available for investment.

- Destination management organisations have been established in parts of AJK to involve communities, district administration and tourism officials in local management. Their role is important because the tourism department can identify irregular development, but the district administration retains enforcement powers.
- International tourism in AJK remains very limited. Foreign visitors accounted for about 0.5% of total tourist numbers, while movement restrictions near the Line of Control (LoC) limit access to several destinations.
- AJK has introduced mobile applications and online booking services and is working on virtual tourism and digital heritage archives. It also has potential for "heli tourism" where road access is difficult.
- Gilgit Baltistan (GB) is one of Pakistan's major mountain tourism destinations, with high-altitude landscapes attracting trekkers, mountaineers and adventure tourists. However, pressure on established destinations such as Hunza and Skardu requires expansion towards new tourism areas.
- GB is trying to diversify tourism beyond established destinations by opening new areas and managing pressure on major tourist routes. Measures include keeping political and religious protests away from the Karakoram Highway to reduce disruption for visitors.
- Visa-on-arrival arrangements for Chinese tourists entering through Khunjerab are under consideration, along with possible reciprocal facilitation for Pakistani visitors to China. The Chinese market offers access to many visitors already travelling in adjoining areas.
- Infrastructure constraints remain a major challenge for tourism development in GB. Road access to Deosai and adjoining areas remains limited despite their tourism value, while road and sewerage work in Gilgit city has reduced its appeal as a gateway to the region. Hotel operators also face electricity shortages, weak internet connectivity and high generator costs.
- Climate-related hazards and safety challenges require stronger tourism resilience in GB. Floods, landslides and road closures interrupt access to destinations, while mountaineering and trekking safety requires improved rescue capacity, including consideration of dedicated high-altitude rescue arrangements.

Programme

Time	Activity	Speaker
1000 -1030	Registration + Reception	
OPENING SESSION		
1035 -1040	Welcome Address	Director ISS
1040-1050	Remarks by Guest of Honour	Mr. Aftab-Ur-Rehman Rana, M.D. PTDC
1050-1100	Keynote Speaker	Mr. Sardar Yasir Ilyas Khan, Advisor to PM
1100-1105	Group Photograph	
SESSION – I **Perspectives on Tourism Development and Opportunities in Pakistan** **Moderator: Ms. Naila Shuja, Anchor Pakistan TV**		
1105-1115	Coastal, Cultural and Archaeological Tourism in Sindh	Mr. Feyaz Ali Shah, MD, Sindh Tourism Development Corporation
1115-1125	Eco-tourism and Adventure Tourism: Unlocking KP's Tourism Potential	Mr. Saadat Hassan, Secretary Tourism, KPK
1125-1135	Tourism Development in AJK: Opportunities and Challenges	Ms. Midhat Shehzad, Former Secretary Tourism, AJK
1135-1145	Private Sector Perspectives on Unlocking Pakistan's Tourism Potential	Mr. Khawaja Tausif Ahmad CEO, Aga Khan Cultural Service Pakistan
1145-1215	Interactive Discussion	
1215-1225	Remarks by Guest of Honour	Ms. Farah Naz Akbar, Parliamentary Secretary, National Heritage & Culture Division
1225-1230	Distribution of Souvenirs	-
1230-1240	Tea/ Coffee	

SESSION- II Unlocking Pakistan's Cultural and Natural Heritage Moderator: Ms. Ayesha Khan, Development Economist		
1240 -1250	Tourism Development in Punjab: Heritage, Religious and Cultural Tourism	Mr. Socrat Aman, Secretary Tourism, Punjab
1250 -1300	Emerging Tourism Opportunities in Balochistan	Mr. Nawabzada Mir Zarin Khan Magsi, Parliamentary Secretary for Tourism, Balochistan
1300 -1310	Development of Sustainable Mountain Tourism in GB	Mr. Sardar Asad Haroon, Secretary Tourism, GB
1310 -1340	Interactive Discussion	
1340-1350	Remarks by Guest of Honour	Major General Adnan Asif Jah Shad (Retd), MD, Green Tourism Pakistan
CLOSING SESSION		
1350-1400	Closing Address	Mr. Aurangzeb Khan Khichi, Federal Minister for National Heritage and Culture
1400-1405	Distribution of Souvenirs	
1405-1410	Vote of Thanks	DG ISSRA
1410-1415	Group Photo	
1415 onwards	Hi-Tea & Dispersal	

Picture Gallery








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