

## An Exploratory Study Of Religious Tourism In Pakistan- Stratagem For Sustainable Interfaith Relations

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### Abstract

*Religious tourism signifies the travels to sacred places to meet religious obligations (like pilgrimage) and spiritual requirements. A follower is supposed to get spiritual motivation by visiting the sacred place of his religion. Almost every religion such as Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Sikhism and Buddhism has holy places of its own. Religious tourism has been a significant part of civilizations since ancient times. Pakistan has a rich history that made it the cradle of many civilizations, religions and dynasties. So, houses of worship, Buddhist temples, chapels, gurudwaras and archaeological sites of many civilizations are among the tourist destinations that strongly influence any visitor to Pakistan to attend his religious destination. This article aims to highlight religious tourism drivers and their effects in the case of Pakistan by applying qualitative and explorative research methods. Pakistan has always been expediting its minorities with their basic rights and assisting the followers of different faith in performing religious tours such as Pakistan provided Sikhs with the Kartarpur corridor. Cases like this will be highlighted in this article concerning interfaith relations. Pakistan, as a home to momentous religious and historical places, can pave the way to interfaith harmony. Facilitating the followers of different faiths in religious tours can be a highly beneficial strategy for sustainable interfaith relations and harmony.*

**Keywords:** Religious tourism, Pakistan, Interfaith relations, Harmony, Sustainable.

### Introduction

Traveling beyond one's typical area for recreational, commercial, or official reasons is regarded as tourism, and it is a societal, artistic, and industrial activity. An essential element of the industry in Pakistan is tourism, particularly religious excretions. It is known as special interest tourism as well. Moreover, religious tourism is typically connected to pilgrimages made by adherents to revered sites. Due to its cultural, architectural, and religious value, it is not merely limited to visiting religious sites but also by non-religious visitors. Financial volatility has a serious influence on the most commercial segment of the tourist sector, while religious tourism is comparatively lesser influenced since these motivations for going are so compelling and have such a significant impact on the community. The primary type of tourism, which dates back practically to the origin of humanity, is religious tourism. Ever since commencement of time, religious sites have contributed to the media zeitgeist as well as local sales promotion and the economic health of the host state.

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Religious tourism has played a vital role to thrive interfaith and interreligious relations. Islam, as a comprehensive religion has been motivating all the factors which pave the way to

### **Importance of Research**

This research is important in the field of religious studies as well as interfaith studies as religious tourism has been a part of major civilizations of the world. Religious tourism provides an exceptional experience to explore and pave the way to interfaith relations on national and international level.

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study are as follows;

- To Explore the Religious tourism in Pakistan, highlighting the sacred places of Sikhism, Buddhism, Jainism and Christianity
- To provide a stratagem for sustainable Interfaith Relations endorsing religious tourism

### **Research Methodology**

In this research paper, qualitative and descriptive research methods have been applied. A variety of chronicles, reports, books, magazines and reports have been consulted. For referencing Chicago Style has been used. "Mendeley software" has been utilized to manage the references in this research paper.

### **Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage**

A pilgrimage is any journey that includes a religious perspective. This excursion to religious sites can easily be categorized as religious tourism as they associate religious expertise and commute. Religious tourism meaning solely based on the terms "religious doctrine" and "tourist industry" is of slight assistance in comprehending the concept of religious journey. Such trips are a mixture of perception and spiritual commute.<sup>2</sup>

Nowadays, Trips and tours are becoming anticipated to include more than leisure time, with both physical and psychological renewal becoming required. The demand for spiritual renewal is now also expanding. The rate of increase of religious tourism is exceptional.<sup>3</sup> It is the reason that religious tourism is being popular in today's world.

### **Significance of religion and religious tourism**

Religion is a significant element as a collective measure in today's changing geopolitical surroundings, with the comorbidity of erectile and reasons that affect traditions and values. So, when there is no solitary or simple categorization of a complicated system of belief, it consists of a framework of acknowledged concepts and appearances that identify the resilience of fellow humans, enabling individuals to address today's challenges without heading any further.

From the pages of history, for centuries, religious tourism has been an essential part of faiths. A pilgrimage is a sacred expedition with a ritual intent. Every phase of this process stands to reason. Pilgrims are aware that travelling is challenging and fraught with danger. A Pilgrimage is not a vacation. The path of transition, where major shifts are taking place and ideas are being offered. A profound comprehension has been achieved. New and old mental locations are on their way. He is showered with blessings. Rehabilitation is taking place. When the pilgrimage gets back, life will be viewed in a new light.

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<sup>2</sup> Daniel H. Olsen, *Pilgrimage and Tourism to Holy Cities: Ideological and Management Perspectives*, *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, vol. 14, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1743873x.2018.1556833>.

<sup>3</sup> Kevin Griffin, Razaq Raj, and Shin Yasuda, *Religious Tourism in Asia, Religiuos Tuourism in Asia: Tradition and Change through Case Studies Narratives*, 2018.

### **Religious tourism-A driver to Interfaith relations**

Pakistan promotes religious travel with the aim of fostering spiritual comprehension, concord, and tranquility.

### **Religious Tourism-An exploratory study**

Pakistan is located in an area where three of the world's most important religions have coexisted for three centuries: Hinduism, Buddhism, as well as Sikhism. Besides the ancient Sikh Gurdwaras, South Asia provides travelers with the chance to explore the cultural legacy of world's ancient societies and attend a splendid compilation of religious sites, Hindu sanctuaries, Buddhist cloisters, and Christians chapels.

The Kartarpur Vessel, a Pak-India collaborative operation in Punjab, is connecting Gurdwara Darbar Shahab to the international border of India. The potency of sacred sites in Pakistan, particularly which are associated with Sikhism, Christianity and Buddhism, is expected to grow, necessitating additional initiatives. Today, Pakistan is at a crossroads for many different religions.

Punjab is a sanctuary to five of the most important Sikh pilgrimage sites. They encompass Baba Guru Nanak's place of birth and many more sacred places. A great number of devotees assemble to ancient Hinduism and Sikhism temples, particularly Gurdwara of Guru Nanak Sahib . The beginning of Kartarpur passageway (Narowal) has increased the number of religious tourists visiting Pakistan.

### **Sikhism Religious Sites**

Sikhism, the fifth largest religion of the world, has its main holy sites in Pakistan, especially Punjab. Sikh devotees plan to travel to several sacred spiritual locations in Pakistan. They want to go to Gurdwara Nankana Sahib and Gurdwara Panja Sahib. Sikhs take into account Pakistan to be a sacred place for all Sikhs because it is where their religion did begin. The Punjab province in Pakistan is rich in Sikh holy places and temples.

- Nankana Sahib (Guru Nanak Janam Asthan)
- Gurudawara Panja Sahib, Hassan Abdal
- Ranjit Singh's Samadhi
- Gurudawara Dera Sahib
- Gurudwara Bal Lila (Nankana Sahab)
- Gurudwara Patti Sahab (Nankana Sahab)
- Gurudwara Sacha Sauda- Farooqabad
- Gurudwara Darbar Sahib, Narowal
- Kartarpur sahib

### **Sahib Kartarpur**

The Kartarpur sahib intends to start providing pilgrims touring the shelter with informal access. Gurdwaras of Pakistan and India are connected through this corridor and Sikh pilgrims gain entry without visa after valid identification. Guru Nanak Sahab decided to settle in Kartarpur and expanded the fire of God's and man's love throughout Punjab. Guru Nanak's facial expression radiated the elegance and solace that came from his virtuousness. He was a worker, a soil lifter, and social leader. His Kartarpur span was an assortment of inclined exertion and devotion, adoration and mission, solitude as well as melody. On the 550th birthday of Sikhism creator Guru Nanak, Pakistan offered to host multitude of Sikhs from all over the world. On the same day they commemorated their anniversary celebrations, November 9 marked the beginning of a most awaited visa-free hallway to the sacred shrine in Pakistan's boundary town of Kartarpur, Narowal, which guarantees Indian pilgrims a rationale for happiness.

In the past, Sikh community had to face a long procedure to get visa for visiting Kartarpur Sahib (the death place of Gur Nanak). Now the corridor is a blessing for Sikh community as it has provided Sikh with ease to do their religious tour, Tejpal Singh has entitled this corridor “Bridge of peace”<sup>4</sup>

At Wagah, a joyful frontier separating two warring countries, crowds of Sikh pilgrims assemble each year. The joyful travel sensation that millions of believers routinely relish while making the religious trek to Pakistan is reflected in the happy faces of those pilgrims. A number of the guests have indeed been observed to publicly exclaim that their experience was just as enjoyable and they felt like home. These initiatives have encouraged interfaith relations in social, cultural and economic perspective.

### **Churches**

Most faiths, not just Christians, have historically valued pilgrimage in their life. Catholics have consistently been present to commemorate their faith in holy locations and significant events in early Christianity across antiquity. People proceeded to the monastery to pay respects to the individuals who had carried on the Apostles' and the Virgin Mary's examples. Her journey was one of transformation, a yearning for closeness with Lord, and a self-assured pull toward her worldly demands. In various ways, travelers have always represented blessings of mercy to the gospel. Christians had a long reign on sub-continent spanning on centuries, so Pakistan has many historical sites which are sacred for Christians. Some of these sites are as follows:

- Saint Lawrence Church
- Sacred Heart Cathedral
- Saint Patrick Church
- Holy Trinity
- Christ Church

Pakistani government is trying to preserve these churches and they are visited by Christians. These churches have European style buildings and provided by funds for their maintenance. For interfaith relations on national level, Christians from these churches are invited on various functions and Muslim usually attend their festivals to greet them.

### **Temples**

Hindus are Pakistan's second largest minority who also worshipped the water of a Katas Raj temple after Christians, believing that the lake was loaded with the tears of Shiva, one of Hinduism's most important divine beings. The two most visited Hindu religious places in the world are the Sadhu Bela temple (Sukkur) and Katas Raj temple (Chakwal).

- Kali Mata Temple
- Karishna Temple
- Shri Dev Mata Temple
- Shri Karishna Temple
- Shuda velly
- Jagan Nath Temple
- Nandi Temple
- Vishnu Temple
- KatasRaj

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<sup>4</sup> Tejpal Singh Baniwal, “Religious and Political Dimensions of the Kartarpur Corridor: Exploring the Global Politics behind the Lost Heritage of the Darbar Sahib,” *Religions* 11, no. 11 (2020): 1–20, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11110560>.

- Shiv Temple

In Pakistan, the architecture of Jain temples is still being investigated. Ground level field evaluations to the Jain legacy and memorials in various portions of the state are planned on a regular basis. Following the exploration, in-depth record is produced. A distinct landmark dataset is being formed, which would enable us to analyse the key features of the architecture style that the Jain community in Pakistan tried to introduce or embraced.

### **Religious sites in Taxila**

Jandial temple, Jaulian convent and Dharma Rajika are some of Taxila's major attractions. The Taxila Museum displays artefacts related to Taxila's Buddhist legacy in chronological order. Every year, majority of visitors flock to discover the Buddhist inheritance. Takht-i-Bhai is a scenic city 160 kilometres from Islamabad that is popular with Buddhists. Pakistan has a lot of historical religious sites in northern areas such as Gilgit-Baltistan, Chitral and Hunza that are replete with religious-cultural legacy places.

- Stupa of Manikiala
- Takht-e-Babri
- Sleeping Budha
- Religious attraction is Gandhara ruins
- Dharma Rajika Stupa

### **Interfaith relations and Harmony through religious tourism**

It is quite evident that foreign policy has evolved over time, with the establishment of a trade route with other countries of Asia, more recently, a "social" passageway in contradiction of the adverse situations of neighbors of India. The spiritual affection of the Sikhs is unaffected by preconceptions of an Islamic federation. In contrast to India, which has many the construction of the Kartarpur passageway is component of the similar endeavor to endorse spiritual liberty and ethnocultural cohesiveness. Pakistani government is encouraging spiritual tourist industry through the desire for concord, coexistence, and comprehension shared by all faiths around the globe. Pakistan's presidency has made significant exertions to foster a welcoming atmosphere for long-term cooperation with all bordering republics. His initial post-election discourse provides optimism, as he demonstrates a comprehension of Pakistan's troubles and geographic aspects, particularly contentment with India and amity in Afghanistan. The ongoing rivalry between India and Pakistan is one of South Asia's most major obstacles, a tragedy that has harmed the region's advancement and proper improvement. Disputes over cultural background and religious belief every year, Pakistan understands how to regard other religions and acknowledges the need for religious liberty. Article 36 of Pakistan's Constitution which provides that the government will safeguard the lawful entitlements and concentrations of ethnocultural sections. The animosity between two governments propagates all over boundaries, ruining substantial cultural advancement and innumerable trade deals. Everyone in the SAARC region would gain as a result.

Pakistan's tourism sector has not only deteriorated due to security concerns; rather, it has been harmed by policy decisions and a refusal to understand the value of tourism. Even though many other nations, such as France, US, India, Turkey and others, faced insecurity and terrorism challenges, yet did not draw attention to themselves or refrain from attracting visitors.

### **Recommendations**

1. Pakistan government need to assume foremost concerns for realizing the hopes of Sikhs and people around the world. The essence of Pakistan can be strengthened by implementing events actions based on spiritual consonance in the broadest sagacity.

2. The retention of heritage, along with religious acceptance, is critical to reviving pilgrim-tourist trust. Religion, particularly minority religions, should not suffer as a result of societal dominance. Pakistan's current Buddhist population is estimated to be 1492 people. Despite the fact that many expatriates used to travel our country.

3. The state of Pakistan should hire Sikh staff for Kartarpur alongside other Pakistani authorities. Pakistan should develop a system to guarantee the reverence and safety of Sikh sightseers.

4. The lawmakers of Pakistan must devise a settlement plan to deal with any urgent situation or unfortunate incident. The primary aim of ant law calculated by Pakistan officials should be the facilitation of Sikhs and other minorities.

5. Make certain that tourists' ethnic, lingual, cultural, and nutrient requirements are met.

6. Government should be concerned for capitalizing on the state's religious tourism opportunities, constructing plans to safeguard spiritual ancient places, and offering services for visitors visiting holy lands. Sufficient accommodation for adherents, in besides providing income, helps to improve the country's positive image.

The most recent Gallup report from 2014 was published at Pakistan's cultural places, which included a large number of tourists. To draw and promote tourism, these projects can be promoted in other provinces.

### **Conclusion**

Pakistan is blessed by splendid historical and spiritual site in the world, which can help Pakistan boost religious tourist industry. According to the record, Pakistan has six UNESCO World Heritage Sites. They commemorated this year in the Medieval Era by utilizing natural and cultural assets made available by contemporary art. It has compiled a catalogue of the world's amazing sites to trek since 2015. Pakistan is a religious destination for Sikhs, Hindus, Buddhists, gains, and people from all over the world. Visitors discover mosques, Buddhist sanctuaries, cathedrals, and archaeological places of various civilizations that provide a strong impression on visitor to trek relevant holy site of Pakistan. As a result, state should intend to focus on the realm's sacred tourist resources by developing an approach for retaining religious sites and facilitating visitors. Appropriate warmth for people of faith will build nation's good image in addition to generating income. It will build interfaith relations as satisfied religious tours will encourage return tours. Pakistan has it all splendid mountains, remarkably decent and uninhabited beaches, amazing rich heritage, an impressive mixture of cultures, among the world's biggest excursions, and warm and welcoming people. In Pakistan, there is a serious need to investigate the possibilities of such religious excursions to assist in bridging the gap between people of various races, sects, and communities as well as stimulate interfaith relations.