

The Prospects of Developing Kashmir as an Adventure Tourism Destination

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ABSTRACT

Kashmir is the “Ultimate Adventure”! In fact, adventure tourism in Kashmir is one of the major draws for the tourists. The endless scope of adventure tourism in Kashmir is largely because of its diverse topography and climate. Kashmir offers ideal conditions and great scope for undertaking a range of adventure sports activities. Kashmir offers the tourists to choose from a plethora of adventurous sporting events of trekking, mountain climbing, mountain biking, river rafting, horse polo, golf, para-gliding, fishing, skiing, hunting, backpacking, kayaking, bicycling, canoe trips, snow skiing, cross-country skiing, heli-skiing, ski-mountaineering, water skiing, camping, rock climbing, hiking, snowboarding and trans-Himalayan jeep safaris. Kashmir is marked by four seasons and all seasons are permissible to take up any adventure activity in Jammu and Kashmir. With this huge potential for adventure tourism, Kashmir is one of the most sought after tourist destinations of India for both domestic as well as foreign tourists and adventure seekers all through the year. Be it winters or summers, there is always something that will keep you engage. Apart from natural beauty, the unique landscape of Kashmir also encourages one to find out one's inherent sporting caliber. The wide variety of sporting events of Kashmir enables the tourists to experiment with their latent sporting zeal and sportsman spirit. The place is perfect for tyro as well as veteran adventurers as there are spots of minimal difficulties for learners and areas that are hard nut to crack even for the professionals. Adventure in J&K is an experience that nothing else can compare up to. The Jammu and Kashmir adventure tourism offers the tourist to enjoy their sojourn into the exotic landscape coupled with unlimited fun and frolic. One of the most exciting and thrilling experience,

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the Jammu and Kashmir adventure tourism fills the tourist with unlimited enthusiasm and vigour. In terms of attractions, Kashmir as an adventure destination is a strong tourism product for both international as well as domestic tourists. The mountainous regions offer umpteen scope for mountaineering, rock climbing, trekking, skiing, skating, mount biking and safaris while the rushing river from these mountains are just perfect for river rafting, canoeing and kayaking.

Key Words: Adventure tourism, veteran adventurers, sojourn, potential, tourist destinations, landscape, umpteen, typography.

OBJECTIVES:

Adventure tourism is perceived as a fastest growing segment and turned out to be an immense business opportunity for Kashmir region. The vast and endless scope of adventure tourism in Kashmir is largely because of its diverse topography and of its climate. It could be a 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 purpose and focus of this present study attempts to examine and determine the existing capacity and future potential for adventure or extreme adventure travel in the Kashmir region 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 huge potential for development in the valley. The study explores the following objectives:

1. To analyze the contribution of tourism in economic development of the Kashmir.
2. To take the current stock of adventure tourism industry in Kashmir.
3. In-depth study of the basic adventure tourism elements of Kashmir valley.
4. Recognizing the potential of adventure tourism as a niche tourism product for attracting both International and domestic tourists.
5. To position Kashmir as a year round destination and to develop multiple tourism products to attract all segment of tourists round the year.

6. To evolve a road map for formulating strategies for development and promotion of Adventure tourism in Kashmir.
7. To review the plans and policies of J&K tourism and other related agencies in context of present and future development of adventure tourism and infrastructure regarding adventure tourism at various destinations.
8. To assess market potential for adventure products in the Kashmir Valley.
9. To provide a critical assessment of adventure tourism viability in the area.
10. To determine the level of tourism stakeholder support for adventure tourism activities
11. To determine what resources exist or can be developed to support tourism activities
12. To study whether the development of tourism is in line and harmony with the environment i.e.; conservation and preservation of ecology and environment.
13. To study the socio-economic and environmental dimensions for developing new sports and adventures destinations.
14. To analyze the typologies of tourists and the forms of tourism that contributes to the nature of experiences gained by the tourists and determine the effects on the host society and environment.
15. Finally, to conduct the study on the development and scope of sports and adventure tourism in Jammu & Kashmir.

METHODOLOGY AND SURVEY DESIGN:

The basic methodology of this study was to collect secondary as well as primary data from different sources coupled with sample surveys and expert consultations. The State of Jammu & Kashmir consists of three regions, all three being distinct geographically and culturally and attracting tourists because of their unique special features. Because this is a small-scale research, thus, the survey was undertaken in the Kashmir region of the state so as to have a fair picture of the status of adventure tourism, requirements for the development of adventure tourism and the potential of adventure tourism, etc. The main focus was to have the firsthand information from the various stakeholders at various levels that are directly or indirectly related to the tourism industry as such. Therefore, the universe of the Study would be the Kashmir Valley only.

The sampling frame constituted all the districts of Kashmir Valley and both Primary and Secondary data been collected from the various stakeholders, directly or indirectly associated with the tourism industry in Kashmir. Such methodology seems to be the most suitable in the context of present research. Therefore, at most endeavor would be made to test the tools and techniques, utilized by the researcher in this study, so as to make the findings more reliable, dependable and objective.

Primary Data collection

Tools used for primary data collection: included field surveys, Questionnaire/Schedules, expert consultations, Postal Survey, Interviews / Discussions, Focus Group Discussions and Content analysis.

Sources of Primary Data Collection

The Primary data has been collected from the following stakeholders in the tourism set up:-

- i) Officials / Staff of hotels and other boarding and lodging facilities like houseboats, huts, etc.
- ii) Visiting tourists in the vicinity both domestic and foreign
- iii) Prospective tourists
- iv) Local inhabitants/ Shopkeepers / Tourist Guides
- v) Artisans, Craftsmen
- vi) Travel Agents / Tour Operators

Secondary Data Collection

The secondary data has been collected through personal visits, and from various sources / departments such as:-

- Directorate of Tourism, Govt. of J & K
- JKTDC, Govt. of J & K
- J&K Pollution Control Board, Govt. of J & K
- Directorate of Youth Services and Sports, Govt. of J & K
- J & K State Sports Council, Govt. of J & K
- Directorate of Economics & Statistics, Govt. of J & K

- Department of Planning & Monitoring, Govt. of J & K
- Directorate of Handicraft, Govt. of J & K
- Department of Fisheries, Govt. of J & K
- J & K Academy of Art, Culture and Languages, Govt. of J & K
- Department of Forests, Govt. of J & K
- Department of Finance, Govt. of J & K
- Wild Life Department, Govt. of J & K
- R & B (PWD) Secretariat, Govt. of J & K
- (P&S) Power Development Department, Govt. of J & K
- Department of Area Planning, Govt. of J & K
- Archaeological Survey of India, Govt. of India
- Lakes and Waterways Development Authority, Govt. of J & K
- Department of Gardens and Parks, Govt. of J & K
- Directorate of Archaeology J&K, Govt. of J & K
- Department of Information, Govt. of J & K
- Ministry of Tourism, Govt. of India
- Tourism Corporation of India

INTRODUCTION:

Kashmir is gaining momentum globally as a paradise destination for adventure tourism. Adventure tourism is perceived as a fastest growing segment and turned out to be an immense business opportunity for Kashmir region. It could be a catalyst factor for positioning of brand Kashmir in the world. The declaration of 2011 as Adventure Tourism Year for Kashmir by the state Government testifies the adventure tourism potential of the region.

The vast and endless scope of adventure tourism in Kashmir is largely because of its diverse topography and of its climate. Having a huge potential for adventure tourism, Kashmir offers the tourists with a wonderful opportunity to explore the vast terrains of the exotic Himalayan mountain ranges, natural scenic beauty, swift flowing rivers and vast stretches of green pastoral land that represents the beautiful state of Jammu and Kashmir. The exotic

landscape of Jammu and Kashmir is blessed with many beautiful places that presents the bounty of nature coupled with many adventurous sports. Kashmir offers the tourists as well as adventure seekers to choose from a plethora of adventurous sporting events of trekking, mountain climbing, river rafting, horse polo, golf, para-gliding, fishing, skiing, hunting, backpacking, kayaking, bicycling, canoe trips, snow skiing, water skiing, heli-skiing, camping, surfing, rock climbing, hiking, snowboarding, trans-Himalayan jeep safaris, and a number of other sports.

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 is in Kashmir”. 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. Today Kashmir is one of the most sought after tourist destinations of India for both domestic as well as foreign tourists and adventure seekers all through the year.

The success of Winter Sports Festival at Gulmarg has provided a signature event for the community to rally around, and has provided increased confidence around community ability to become a well-known adventure destination. Plans are underway to expand many such events and competitions in the future in various areas of Kashmir region. This series of events represents significant potential to Kashmir for increasing its destination awareness, and in stimulating growth in adventure tourism products and services.

Adventure tourism is perceived as a fastest growing segment and turned out to be an immense business opportunity for Kashmir region. It could be a 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 purpose and focus of this present study attempts to examine and determine the existing capacity and future potential for adventure or extreme adventure travel in the Kashmir region 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 huge potential for development in the valley.

Tourism is one of the State's major industries. It has played an important role for developing the economy, particularly in the region of the Kashmir valley. The industry has given jobs to a very large number of people, particularly of the younger generation and generated economic activities in the primary, secondary and tertiary sectors in the State, which owes dependence to a large extent to this industry. Tourism in the state has led to the development of the whole service industry including transport, hospitality, camping, retail shops, horticulture, in the small-scale sectors and many others also earn their livelihood because of this industry.

Tourism sector has tremendous employment potential linked with its handicrafts, handlooms and carpet weaving, which have carved out a niche at the international level. It provides economic benefits to almost all segment of the society like women, educated, uneducated, skilled, unskilled labour forces and it will also provide employment opportunities to the habitants of remote and backward areas. 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.

Strategically located, the valley of Kashmir occupies the topmost position in the map of India. Kashmir, along with the region of Jammu, Ladakh and Gilgit forms the State of Jammu and Kashmir. From the numerous valleys situated in the state, Kashmir Valley is the biggest one, spread over an area of 105 sq km. Located approximately 1730 m above the sea level. The entire State of Jammu & Kashmir lies between 32.17" and 36.58" North latitude and the State lies between 73.26" and 80.30" East longitude. Situated in the northernmost part of India, Jammu and Kashmir is bordered by Pakistan, China, and Afghanistan from West to East. From South to East, the boundary of the state touches Punjab and Himachal Pradesh. On the map of India, the State of Jammu and Kashmir looks like a crown. The state is 640 kms in length from north to south and 480 kms from east to west.

Jammu & Kashmir State has a geographical area of 222,236 sq. Kms. comprising 6.93 per cent of the total Indian Territory. The 101,387 sq. km. area of State is demarcated into 22

districts, 82 tehsils and 148 blocks which are further delimited into 4098 Gram Panchayats, 75 urban areas and 6,417 villages. The 75 towns include 7 urban agglomerations also. As per the Census 2011, the total population of the state of Jammu & Kashmir is (1, 25, 48,926). The State of Jammu and Kashmir is the northern most state of India comprising three distinct Climatic regions viz. Arctic cold desert areas of Ladakh, temperate Kashmir valley and sub-tropical region of Jammu. The state of Jammu and Kashmir has extremes of temperatures with summer temperature at Lakhanpur near Pathankot in south Kashmir recorded over 46 Celsius (118 Fahrenheit) and winter at Daulat Beg Oldi or Drass in the north recording minus 46 degree Celsius (minus 70 degree Fahrenheit). The Kashmir Valley, therefore, lies between the hot plains of the Jammu Province and coldest dry table-land of Ladakh. These territories are, as such, transitional in climate.

Kashmir is famous for its beauty and natural scenery throughout the world. Its high snow-clad mountains, beautiful valleys, pinpointed velvet green plateaus, rivers with ice-cold water, attractive lakes and springs and ever-green fields, dense forests and beautiful health resorts, enhance its grandeur and are a source of great attraction for tourists. Lovers of natural beauty call Kashmir Valley as "Paradise on Earth", "Nature's show-case" and "Switzerland of Asia". Because of the Kashmir's wide range of elevations, its biogeography is diverse. Northwestern thorn scrub forests and Himalayan subtropical pine forests are found in the low elevations of the far southwest. These give way to a broad band of western Himalayan broadleaf forests running from northwest-southeast across the Kashmir Valley. Rising into the mountains, the broadleaf forests grade into western Himalayan subalpine conifer forests. Above tree-line are found north-western Himalayan alpine shrub and meadows. Much of the northeast of the state is covered by the Karakoram-West Tibetan Plateau alpine steppe. Around the highest elevations, there is no vegetation, simply rock and ice. Kashmir is also widely known for its different kinds of agricultural products, fruits, vegetables, saffron, herbs, minerals, precious stones. Rice is the main crop and fruits like apples, pears, apricots, almonds, walnuts, peaches and cherries grow in abundance. The valley is also rich in forests. Mulberry trees grow in abundance and are the mainstay of silk industry in the Valley. Kashmir is the home of handicrafts like wood carving, papier-mâché, carpet, gabba and shawl making and finest kind of embroidery on clothes. Natural

scenery of the valley attracts thousands of visitors every year from abroad. People generally speak Kashmiri and their common dress is phiran, shalwar and a turban or a Kashmiri cap.

Adventure tourism is fast gaining popularity world-wide for its uniqueness which is associated with thrills, adrenaline, excitement, daring and challenge. Adventure tourism brings the tourists close to the nature, due to which it is also known as nature-based tourism. This form of tourism enables the tourist or adventure seekers to engage themselves in various kinds of outdoor recreational activities. Adventure has always been an integral part of the tourism. Throughout history it has been common for person having a spirit of adventure to travel great distances for satisfying their hunger for new challenges. In fact, it was the early adventures that explored most of the new world and opened its gates to the people of the other civilizations. These adventure activities attract different types and volumes of tourist traffic around the world and thus give a boost to tourism.

The adventure tourism potential of the Kashmir region needs to be utilized fully. The state government has put in place a multi-pronged strategy to develop and showcase the adventure tourism potential of the state both at domestic and global level. The declaration of 2011 as Adventure Tourism Year for Jammu & Kashmir by the government testifies the seriousness of the state government in this regard. Development of basic tourism infrastructure through private investment, opening of new potential destinations and development of heritage, adventure, pilgrim and eco-tourism form components of the plan. Government has prepared an action plan for the implementation of identified potential development schemes / projects/ products and for development of infrastructure in conformity with the policy objectives & guidelines provided by the concerned state/central agencies/departments and the requirements of national development and funding agencies. Also, the government has put in place a multi-pronged strategy, including strengthening and expanding institutional infrastructure for training and education in order to meet the huge skill gap in the hospitality industry. The state government has formulated a special package for the revival of tourism in the Valley. It has initiated many schemes for the revival and development of tourism. Soft loans will be provided for reactivating tourism units in the private sector and outright investment subsidy for setting up popular units at lesser known areas of the State. The department of tourism, government of

Jammu and Kashmir, will provide interest subsidies and incentives up to 40 per cent to encourage private entrepreneurs to provide infrastructure in new potential tourism areas of Kashmir. To protect the interest of tourists, the state government has enacted a special legislation - J&K Registration of Tourist Trade Act. This vests various officers of the state tourism department with magisterial powers, including the powers of compounding, in case of cheating, over-charging, harassment, pestering, etc of tourists. The department has also introduced some tourist packages. To enable operations of direct chartered flights to Kashmir, the Srinagar Airport has been upgraded to receive all types of aircrafts. The overall situation is gradually improving and with International Air Connectivity as well as opening of a number of surface accesses it is imperative to have this perspective of a long term development instead of ad hoc short term development. With this type of development along with the return of peace, Tourism which is wrongly projected at present as the back bone of our economy can in the real sense become the main pivot of valley's economy. Kashmir, what was once known as "Paradise on Land" is now all set to regain its past glory.

State has suffered from an image deficit since a long time, and the imperative of showcasing the state as a secure, safe and unique destination with innumerable relative merits cannot be overlooked. If the area in question will be projected with a positive image and marketed adequately, it definitely will help to attract more and more adventure tourists to that place but to create this positive image we have to identify the most effective ways by which we can attract the people and in this regard film industry provides a key advertising component, films projects and shows the intricacies of nature in a true, positive and non threatening way. Tourism departments, travel agents, tour operators, airline companies, hoteliers and other service providers have also an important role to play in tourism promotions by advertising and selling their products through brochures, magazines, print and electronic media, however, no matter what mode of promotion strategies is used, it is worth remembering that it is easier to create a positive image of a particular area than to rectify a negative image. While building the positive image of this state which is going through the political crises special attention and care is needed while reporting of any mishap by the media, they have to follow some basic rules in the event of crises like, first verify and then report what really is happening and exactly where it is happening

and tourism authorities need to have some spokesperson readily available to the media to emphasize the positive but be honest and straight forward about the negative and when the crises are over use the media to spread the information about the changed situation which will re-establish a positive image and confidence among the travel loving people. Now that the situation is gradually becoming conducive a fresh initiative is required for developing and promoting new tourist destinations as well as bringing more adventure sites on to the tourism map. So that it can be showcased for overseas and domestic visitors. In this direction, the latest advertising campaign launched under the “Incredible India” marketing blitz showcasing the diverse marvels of the state on the leading satellite TV channels is a case in point. Besides, the State Tourism Department is setting up a website and a travel portal on Internet for disseminating all possible information about Kashmir as a tourist destination. This is essential because Kashmir valley needs to be showcased strongly for all of its greatest strengths i.e., nature tourism, snow-skiing, mountaineering, trekking, river rafting and canoeing, heli-skiing, etc. that have already carved out a niche for itself among foreign travelers. If due care and attention is given to this industry it can work wonders for the state’s economy, but at the same time we should keep one thing in our minds that howsoever beautiful the place may be unless ethics, quality services, professionalism and discipline is not maintained, tourists will go back unhappy and disappointed, that causes more negative publicity than anything else, Which is not only the big loss to the industry in particular but to the state in general.

SURVEY FINDINGS:

Kashmir offers opportunities for a wide range of adventure tourism activities. Tourism has existed in this community for many years but recently, more effort has been made to develop the region as a destination for adventure and extreme adventure tourists. This tourism opportunity analysis study was undertaken to determine what resources exist, or can be developed, to support adventure/extreme adventure tourism products, and what the market potential is for adventure products within the region. An assessment of adventure tourism viability was felt to be a

valuable step in sharing information on the possible opportunities for future growth of adventure tourism in Kashmir region.

The study consisted of a review of secondary market research, directed interviews with representatives from tourism recreation associations and inbound tour operators, prospective and visiting tourists in the vicinity both domestic and foreign, a site visit to assess product quality and potential, and interviews with community members and others directly or indirectly associated with the tourism industry in Kashmir.

The goal of this study was to gain a better understanding of the size and characteristics of the adventure tourism market. Adventure travel is a sector of tourism increasingly recognized for attracting environmentally and culturally aware consumers and for its focus on responsible and sustainable development, this market creates economic opportunities for local people in rural and remote communities throughout the J&K state. As the number of travellers grows, the number of destinations has the potential to increase, as well. In this study report, adventure tourism primarily represents domestic or international travel featuring physical activity, nature-based travel and cultural experiences. Survey respondents were asked questions about their past three trips and intentions for future trip. Based on their answers, the study categorized their trips as: hard adventure, soft adventure or "other travel." Activities were categorized into either hard (e.g., Skiing, mountain climbing, trekking, etc.) or soft (e.g., trout fishing, cycling, motor safari's, etc.) adventure activities or "other" tourism activities. The study revealed that 26.3% of people taking the survey took hard adventure or soft adventure holidays.

Extensive surveys have been done on travel encompassing nature, culture and adventure experiences although few have been done at a national or international level. Where they have been undertaken, they were reviewed for information on the adventure traveller- who they are, what they like to do, how they make their travel decisions and their known preferences for accommodation. The detailed results of this review are provided specifically as:

- Adventure travelers tend to be 25-55 years old although there are significant numbers of soft adventure travelers who are 55+.
- Males and females are generally well represented with participation varying by activity.

Those activities that are more strenuous tend to attract younger, male travelers.

- Most are married and will travel with their spouse or friends.
- Adventure travelers are well educated, often having graduate or undergraduate degrees.
- Income for these travelers is higher than average and many come from professional or managerial occupations.
- They often live in urban areas.
- Most popular activities with this group are hiking, skiing, camping, rafting, wildlife viewing, cycling, canoeing and educational tours.
- Accommodation preferences range from tents to hotels, cabins and lodges.
- Reasons for taking an adventure travel vacation revolve around the natural environment i.e. seeing it, experiencing it, having adventures, being away from crowds and civilization, and personal growth through education or challenging activity.
- A destination is chosen most often for the scenery, the presence of certain physical features like lakes or rivers, or the opportunity for new experiences.
- An attractive destination is one that provides:
 - Good services/facilities (do not have to be fancy)
 - A variety of terrain with beginner to advanced levels of difficulty for recreational activities e.g. hiking, biking
 - Natural resources such as wildlife, mountains, rivers and lakes
 - Accommodation preferences are for:
 - Clean rooms
 - Affordable
 - Tented camps (especially if fixed roof is not possible)
 - Hot water for showers, potable water for drinking
- Remoteness or perceived remoteness is important to many adventure travelers
- Scenery is very important
- Outdoor recreationists are willing to travel between 4 to 8 hours from a major airport

Overall, Kashmir region meets the criteria of a viable adventure/extreme adventure destination. It possesses the core elements needed to offer an adventure product and in sufficient size to establish itself as a destination for the adventure seeker. Kashmir would appear to offer many of

the activities and settings that adventure travelers have indicated as desirable, or that influence their destination selection, and is well positioned to capture their business. Specifically, the lure elements that Kashmir valley possesses are:

1. An extremely attractive physical setting
2. A protected area that:
 - supports a healthy ecosystem
 - will not be given over to other uses, thus providing stability for tour operators
 - Diverse wildlife populations
 - trails for hiking, biking, trail riding and cross-country skiing at a variety of skill levels and trip lengths
 - Rivers for rafting, canoeing, and kayaking at a variety of skill levels
 - Accommodation suitable for adventure travelers
 - An established group of adventure tour operators
 - A large, well-placed visitor information centre with full time staff
 - A successful special event that has gained recognition internationally like winter sports at Gulmarg
 - A location that is 2.4 hours from an international destination
 - An active association of tourism operators.

Based upon the study findings, it appears that Kashmir contains many of the elements needed for an adventure tourism destination, and that the market characteristics and potential size could provide for a viable product/market match. It is difficult to estimate the potential market size for the study region, although study would indicate that adventure travel is a large market, and India as a country has considerable untapped potential in the adventure travel marketplace. Determining Kashmir valley's potential market size as a destination will depend upon a number of factors such as:

- Success in marketing
- Ability to deliver consistent, quality adventure experiences
- Effect of multiple activities being developed simultaneously

- Competition from other destinations with similar products
- Global economic forces e.g. levels of disposable income, etc.

Kashmir Valley currently has a wide range of adventure products, such as, trekking, mountain climbing, mountain biking, river rafting, horse polo, golf, para-gliding, para-sailing, Ballooning, fishing, skiing, hunting, backpacking, kayaking, bicycling, canoe trips, snow skiing, cross-country skiing, heli-skiing, ski-mountaineering, water skiing, camping, surfing, rock climbing, hiking, snowboarding and trans-Himalayan jeep safaris. Many of these activities are available through tour operators or can be done on a self-guided basis, although equipment rentals are limited. Some activities such as trail riding are provided by a number of operators, others, like hiking, are offered by only few companies. With the market potential that exists, the attractiveness of the activities and the setting, there are many opportunities to increase capacity with appropriate product and market development.

Accommodation is adequate by adventure travel standards, although at times, fully booked. Concerns have been expressed about the quantity and range of accommodation available, but experience shows that the adventure traveler is by nature, more flexible in accepting lower quality supporting facilities if the core experience is unique or well delivered. Thus, the structure currently exists to compete as an adventure destination but there may be opportunities for future development.

With the wide range of activities, it is not surprising that adventure tourism is one of the largest sectors of the tourism industry and is showing some of the highest rates of growth. Adventure tourism encompasses people with a broad range of abilities and interests. In recent years, there has been an expansion to the adventure travel market with the advent of extreme adventure events. Appealing to men and women, participants can compete individually or as members of a team. Extreme adventure events gained international recognition in Kashmir with the launch of heli-skiing in Kashmir that attracted athletes and media attention from around the world. Now several hundred extreme adventure events are being held each year around Kashmir valley.

The review of market research and the telephone interviews suggest a number of issues or challenges that should be considered as product market development occur. Foremost among those would be:

- a) Adventure travel is made up of a wide range of people and activities; marketing to them needs to be focused to be cost effective. A shot gun approach targeting all “adventurers” is unlikely to be successful.
 - b) Customers are price sensitive. Adventure travelers will compare the products and packages from Kashmir against other provinces and possibly against their offerings. Pricing will need to be competitive unless tour operators are able to demonstrate a unique product, for example, expedition trips. An expedition trip allows travelers to be the “first” to do something, or to undertake an activity under challenging conditions not normally open to travelers. Kashmir valley is positioned to offer a number of these trips due to its varied topography. The wilderness setting for adventure activities, along with unique features provide a definite competitive advantage. It is important to orient customers in advance.
 - c) Total growth potential in the Kashmir region is difficult to predict, as it is hard to measure the cumulative impact of all potential product areas being developed concurrently. It can be anticipated though, that a mix of products will make Kashmir more attractive as a destination, than a one tourism-activity town.
- i. Key findings from this assessment are as follows:
- a) Most operators had a good understanding of their markets, but overlooked opportunities to sell their product to international markets. Examples of missed opportunities would be the lack of marketing targeted at tourists driving to Kashmir for adventure seeking.
 - b) Marketing materials for many operators were high quality, showing good brochure and web site development. Others were more rudimentary and in some cases, hard to find. Most operators did a reasonable job of distributing their brochures, often using the Visitor Information Centre, hotels, petrol stations, plus mail-outs to existing customers, etc.
 - c) Tourism providers’ partner together to sell their products. Most providers have participated in some form of cooperative marketing either through the adventure

packages or through promotions. Most refer business to each other, although there were very few situations where commissions were sought or paid for these referrals.

- d) Staging areas for rafting and kayaking are challenging and present significant operating difficulties, which will only be exacerbated if tourist numbers increase.
- e) Businesses have been in existence for many years, however many are supplemented by income from other industries, especially in off-season and slow periods. Business planning is informal, although most operations appear to be well run. Many of the operators could likely benefit from some assistance in developing business or market plans.
- f) Staffing is not an issue. Lack of competition for staff means that securing good people is not problematic and most owners consider training an important part of their business. There are few guides in the area, but those working are certified, appropriate, experienced and well trained.
- g) For those businesses interviewed who operate in remote areas, there appears to be adequate risk management. Guides interviewed, (often the owner), have appropriate certification and first aid training, and have plans in place for bad weather, illness or accidents.
- h) Many of the operators were concerned about the image of the town, and also felt that improved signage was needed, along with a beautification process for the town centre.
- i) Land use concerns seemed to be focused mainly on securing land within the town limits for development. No operators mentioned problems with land use outside the town, except for those operators who had horses. They expressed concern over a lack of grazing areas.

From the numerous conversations held with tourism providers, town representatives, forestry managers, citizens, resource managers, and members of the government, it is possible to assess the existing level of community support. Some general conclusions can be made from the people contacted, and they are summarized as follows:

1. Support for tourism growth is very strong among tourism providers and those people who benefit directly from tourism activities.
2. Government has provided support within basic regulatory requirements, i.e. granting permits, enforcing regulations, in allowing access to staging areas, providing municipal commercial land for sale. While all interviewees felt town council had been good financial stewards, some entrepreneurs expressed concern that town officials did not sufficiently encourage new tourism products or services.
3. Citizens endorse tourism where it brings economic benefits (especially jobs) for themselves or their children as they grow up. Some citizens are concerned about tourism growth if it results in crowding or changes to their own recreation experiences.
4. With regard to potential tourism development or new products, only one concern was expressed about increased volume or new product types. That was stated as a desire to not attract drug-using tourists. The lack of concerns around increased growth may be due to the low capacity utilization currently existing, and the difficulty in visualizing a situation with too many customers.
5. Support for tourism seems high at this time but some of this support may be due to the current lack of other economic activities in Kashmir. Tourism is perceived as an engine for economic growth, but some people admitted that if other economic prospects were available, some people would likely shift their support away from tourism. It was perceived that this shift would be to a mood of apathy i.e, focusing shift to new activity, as opposed to any opposition for tourism development.

While it appears that Kashmir contains many of the elements needed for an adventure tourism destination, and that the market characteristics and size could provide for a viable product/market match. However, for Kashmir to develop successfully, and to realize this market potential, it will need to resolve a number of issues, including capacity development, potential conflicts with multiple land use as utilization increases, and a lack of destination awareness.

Market development will be critical if Kashmir region is to live up to its potential as an adventure tourism destination. With a well-crafted strategy and a concerted effort for implementation, it is possible to develop Kashmir into a world-class adventure tourism destination.

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