



## Problems Faced by Visitors in Pakistan: A Case Study of Kaghan Valley, Mansehra

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**Abstract:** Pakistan is one of the most beautiful countries in the world and has enormous potential to attract a maximum number of visitors who are eager to satisfy their diverse motivations. Kaghan valley being the northern part of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan, is one of the most beautiful valleys and hill stations in the country. It is an emerging and one of the most significant destinations in the country. Every year millions of visitors visit this valley to enjoy the nature and unique cultural heritage of the area. However, due to unplanned tourism, many problems arise that cause dissatisfaction among the visitors. This paper is an attempt to highlight some of the major problems faced by visitors in the valley and make the relevant stakeholders aware of these issues. This research is the result of authors' field surveys and feedback from the five hundred visitors, collected in the form of questionnaires.

### Introduction

Pakistan is one of the most beautiful and most attractive countries in the world in terms of the natural landscape and cultural diversity. Its natural and cultural tourism resources attract visitors around the globe who travel the world to satisfy their diverse motivations and have lifelong memories. The country is blessed with several beautiful valleys and hill stations that attract millions of visitors. Kaghan valley, located in the north of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, is one of such valleys. It is among the topmost visitors destinations in the country that receives millions of visitors within a very short span of tourist season of three to four months. But due to unplanned tourism in Pakistan, these unique natural and cultural resources are under irremediable threat of destruction. Visitors also face many problems due to this unplanned tourism, and they are

dissatisfied. This paper is an attempt to explore some of the problems faced by visitors in Pakistan by taking Kaghan valley as a case study.

Kaghan valley is the north-eastern corner of district Mansehra where it is bordered on the northern side by Northern Areas of Pakistan, i.e. Gilgit- Baltistan; on the eastern side with the Neelum valley of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) and on the other sides it is bordered with the settled areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province (Masrur and Khan 1973: 4). Its length from south-west to northeast, as the crow flies, is 60 miles. By road from Babusar Pass to Balakot is 159 kilometres. The valley is about under 92 miles (159 kilometres), and its average width is about 15 miles. Balakot town is the gateway to this beautiful valley (Watson 1907: 202).

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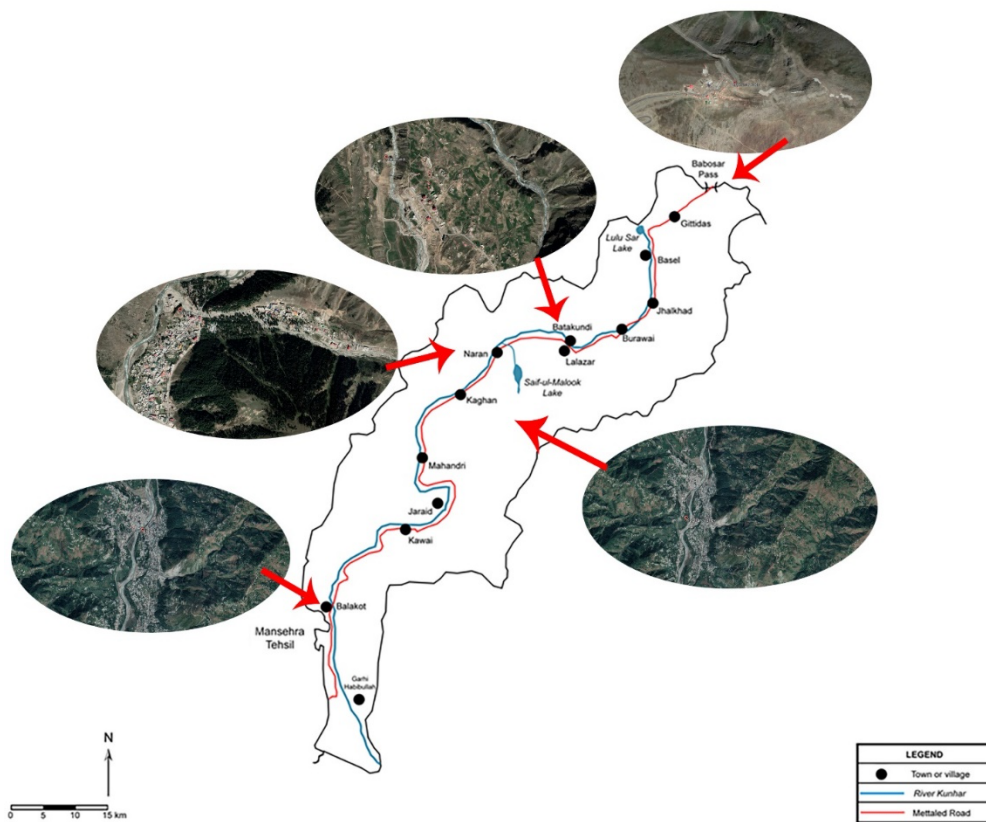


Figure 1: Kaghan Valley, Mansehra (showing general view)

To date, very limited studies on the aspect of visitors' problems in Pakistan can be found. A comprehensive work on this aspect, considering Kaghan valley, a case study has been carried out by Arif (2019). Some other basic studies on Kaghan valley, which are in the form of guidebooks, include [Saeed \(1995\)](#), [Khan \(1996\)](#), [Aziz \(1998\)](#), [Mujahid \(1999\)](#), [Maqbool \(2001\)](#), [Raza \(2001\)](#), [Rasheed \(2009\)](#) and [Khan \(2011\)](#). For the present study, data were collected in the form of a survey using a questionnaire consisting of open and close-ended questions. The open-ended questions dealing with probing into the visitors' problems were transferred into an excel sheet, and some common themes were identified. Their responses were entered and analyzed in excel to obtain percentages of the responses and generate charts.

## Discussion of the Results

Results of the present study show that visitors, during their journey and upon their arrival, face a lot of problems, and these problems are very genuine (see Pl. I-IV). The visitors of the Kaghan valley come from very far-flung areas of Pakistan and spend a lot of resources to reach this destination. But due to difficulties, the visitors return with a worse experience. Some of the problems identified by visitors are discussed in the following lines:

### Lack of Infrastructure/ Basic Facilities

Tourism development strategies require investment in the tourism infrastructure itself, i.e., good roads and affordable transportation, good law and order situation, access to safe waters,

availability of efficient banking facilities and provision of a professional and motivated workforce. All these factors, as well as sustainability approaches to business, should be part of a holistic tourism development strategy of a developing country (Saner et al. 2015: 2). If the infrastructure at a destination cannot satisfy the tourists, their visit will turn into a bad experience, and they will be highly dissatisfied.

The same is the problem with the tourist infrastructure of Kaghan valley. Most of the visitors responded that they suffered from the availability of some of the very basic facilities in the valley. Infrastructure is very poor, which creates problems in the enjoyment of their visits. Roads are very poor, narrow and dangerous. Most of the destinations located in remote areas are not accessible. Roads are blocked for several hours due to heavy traffic, and one cannot reach at destination in time. There is no safety along the roads in the form of fencing or barriers, especially on the river sides. So, in case of any mishap, survival is very difficult. Due to snow and glaciers, roads also become slippery and more dangerous. Visitors being unfamiliar with the area, do not know how to drive there. It creates a lot of problems and accidents in the valley, causing the loss of human lives and vehicles. Roads leading to some of the famous destinations like Sharan, Shogran and lake Saif-ul-Malook are also poor and unsafe. Due to accessibility problems, visitors cannot reach Sharan. Some of the visitors complained that the road of Shogran is so poor that their vehicles could not reach the destination. The same is the condition of the road of lake Saif-ul-Malook - the world-famous destination. Due to the poor conditions of the roads, the jeep owners demand high fares. Many of these problems can be resolved if the roads are well maintained.

There are also no traffic rules and regulations followed in the valley. Some of the visitors also complained about the driving skills of the local jeep drivers, who are unskilled and careless. There are very few signboards installed on the roadside to guide the visitors about the locations and the destinations. Visitors have to stop here and there and ask the local community or other visitors about the directions to their destinations. Parking is yet another issue in the valley. There are no public parking lots near the destinations, and even the hotels do not have parking spaces in the valley.

Visitors have to find a space and park their vehicle wherever they find a space. Most of the vehicles are parked on the roads, and due to this unsafe parking, visitors cannot enjoy their trip properly.

Accommodation is yet another problem that most of visitors face in the valley. There are very few hotels in the valley offering online reservations. The rest of the hotels receive walk-in guests only because they do not have any systematic procedure of reservations. Although there are some tent accommodations available at some destinations, they do not have sufficient facilities. These accommodations also have some safety and privacy issues as the tents are installed just next to one another. During the peak season, some tourists spend their nights on the roads in the open air, and some of them seek the help of the local community for a night's stay. The tourists having families do not feel secure in this way and, by dawn, return homes. The high rent of the rooms during the season is one of the most alarming issues. A room normally having a rent of Rs.2000 is sold @ Rs.15,000 to Rs. 20,000 per night in the valley during the season (author's personal observation since last many years and discussion with the visitors in Kaghan valley). So, it is very difficult for middle-class visitors to afford. Similarly, some of the hotels do not provide basic facilities like hot water and generator facilities. The weather in the valley, and especially on nights, is cold, so hot water is a basic need of the tourists. Similarly, load shedding is common in the valley, and there is often electricity breakdown with no alternatives.

Availability of food and meals in time is also a big problem during the season. Visitors must wait for a long time at the restaurants to get food thus, waste a lot of time. There are two main problems associated with food in the valley. One is the high prices of food items. Every food item is sold at a very much costly, and the other problem is the quality and variety of food items. Visitors are also of the opinion that the quality of the food is poor and there is no variety in the food and beverages. There are mostly chicken and cold drinks available at most of the tourists' destinations. Visitors demand the variety in food and beverages and demand some traditional food of the valley.

The availability of shopping malls and traditional souvenirs and gifts is another problem for tourists. Nothing special is available for the

visitors at many destinations to buy, which is the speciality of Kaghan valley (due to lack of patronage and marketing), and if something is available, it is so costly again, which is sometimes beyond the reach of visitors.

The non-availability of public washrooms is another major problem that visitors face in the valley. Some of the visitors highlighted that there is no clean drinking water available in the valley and in the hotels. In short, visitors are of the opinion that in Kaghan valley, there is no planning and management from the government, and if this situation continues, it will destroy the tourism and tourism resources in the near future, and there will be no attraction in the valley.

### **Cleanliness and Hygiene**

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Cleanliness is another major issue highlighted by the visitors and the host community. The heap of garbage filth spread by the visitors in and around the tourists' destinations not only deteriorates the resources and beauty of the valley but may also cause stomach pain, gastrointestinal vomiting, cholera, diarrhoea, skin diseases, and respiratory allergies. There are no dustbins and other arrangements made by the local administration to dispose of and recycle the garbage.

World-famous destinations like Kaghan, Naran, Lake Saif-ul-Malook, and Shogran are constantly losing their attraction due to the spread of garbage. All the waste of hotels and restaurants and drainage is directly thrown into the Kunhar River, which causes irremediable problems to the marine environment and the local community residing riverside, as they fetch drinking water from the same river. The cleanliness problem in some of the hotels and restaurants has also been highlighted by the visitors. These hygiene issues are raised due to the nonprofessional staff, irresponsible attitude of the visitors and negligence of the local administration.

### **High Prices/ Rents**

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Tourism activities in Kaghan valley are limited to the summer season. Due to this seasonal tourism, the prices remained high in most tourist destinations. Due to ordinary services/facilities and high prices of accommodations, meals, petrol, and transport fares, most of the visitors are very much disappointed, and some of them also cut

short their visits. There is no check and balance for the prices by the local administration. Both visitors and the local population suffer due to inflation. Visitors have to face an extra problem when they do not carry with them as there are no proper services from banks and ATMs. Payment through cards is not acceptable in hotels and restaurants, which also increases the dissatisfaction level of the visitors.

### **Personal Safety & Security**

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Safety and security are the *conditio sine qua non* for the development of a country's tourism. Visitors never prefer to go to areas where they do not feel safe and secure. Rather they prefer to visit destinations where they feel secure both physically and psychologically. There is a number of factors due to which visitors feel unsafe and insecure during their visits to Kaghan valley. One of the factors for unsafety is dangerous and poor roads, and there are no safety measures on the roads and near the rivers. Due to the non-availability of parking areas, visitors also feel insecure regarding their cars. One of the visitors also highlighted the theft in his hotel, so due to theft, visitors feel insecure. Hotels are considered the second office for business tourists and the second home for leisure tourists, so their safe environments are the prime responsibility of hotel administration. Hotels should be safe, especially after the terrorism surge in the world. Hotels safety issues could be categorized into safety, security and privacy ([Alananzeh 2017: 1](#)). So, the hotels in the valley should keep these issues in mind and provide their level best facilities to tourists.

Some of the visitors also shared their bad experiences due to the bad attitude of some of the local community and other tourists. Few of them also complained about the negative role of the police. This attitude of the locals, tourists, and the police creates insecurity among some of the visitors having families with them specially. Most of the visitors have pointed out the non-availability of public washrooms, especially for females.

### **Lack of Health Facilities**

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Healthcare is important to the visitors who get ill; accidents and emergencies do arise during travelling. Health care centres are thus needed to diagnose, treat and manage different types of

diseases. Visitors travel from far-flung areas of the country who get tired and ill due to changes in environment and climate as well as travel fatigue. But in the valley, there are no worth mentioning healthcare centres. Some of the visitors get emergencies, and some of the visitors are asthmatic and diabetic, so they need emergency services, and in the valley, no such services are available. In some cases, accidents happen, and patients need first aid services. In any case, the patient is referred to Tehsil Headquarter Hospital Balakot, where after first aid, the patient is referred to Mansehra or Abbottabad for further treatment if needed. So, in the whole valley or in the whole tehsil, there are no worth mentioning healthcare facilities. The availability of hospitals and doctors is not only necessary for the visitors but is also important for the local community as well. Thus, due to the non-availability of health facilities, some of the visitors also cut short their visit.

### **Public Washrooms**

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Washroom facilities are essential to every destination to increase positive hygiene. A lot of visitors are highly dissatisfied with washroom facilities. There are very few public washrooms in the valley from Balakot to Babusar top. While travelling, females and children face a lot of washroom problems. During their visit to different destinations, people use open areas for washrooms and, in crowded places, seek shelter at nearby water resources and river sides. So contaminating the water as well as the natural landscape. In such places, the smell is also produced, which disturbs the environment and the people going there. Some of the visitors have also shown their dissatisfaction with the washrooms of the hotels.

### **Unpredictable Weather**

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Due to unpredictable weather in the entire valley, it is difficult for the visitors to plan and make necessary arrangements in advance. The weather of Kaghan valley, generally and in monsoon especially, is unpredictable. Heavy rainfall creates a lot of problems, not only for the tourists but also for the local community. The lower Kaghan valley is in the range of heavy monsoon rains, and sometimes heavy rains in the upper parts of the valley cause floods in the rivers, streams and rills and land sliding as well. Roads are usually blocked

due to floods and land sliding. In early winters, sometimes these rains are backed by snow or land sliding, resulting in the blockage of the roads. The weather becomes intense cold creating great problems during winter. So, sometimes army helps the victims by providing safe passages. In such conditions, tourists who are unfamiliar with the area suffer a lot. Visitors should check the weather forecasts, and government should also cooperate.

### **Personal Reasons**

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Some of the visitors of Kaghan valley also got some personal problems and returned to their homes, cutting short their visits. These personal problems include a shortage of vacation for the children/ students, business engagements, sudden illness, and emergencies at home. Some of the visitors mentioned that they got a boring travel because their children were in their laps, and they suffered a lot. Some of these problems like illness may be overcome in the valley by providing healthcare facilities, and some of the problems may be overcome by the visitors themselves by well planning their visits. Other problems like the emergency or death of someone near and dear are natural and thus cannot be overcome.

### **Lack of Recreational Facilities**

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Recreational activities are also essential at any destination to engage the visitors in various healthy activities. According to some of the visitors, there are no recreational facilities available in the valley for children well as for elders. There are no playgrounds or play lands, parks, zoos and other places for recreational activities. They also propose activities like rafting and paragliding. There exists a rafting facility in Naran, but the price is not affordable for most of visitors. There are two national parks in the valley declared by the government, but there is no single recreational facility available in these parks. Facilities like camping sites, bird watching towers or places, treks and fishing points, swimming pools, hunting areas, biking treks and shopping malls do not exist the entire valley.

### **Overcrowding**

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Over tourism, which is also known as mass tourism, does not only lead to the destruction of tourism resources but also creates problems for

both the visitors and the local community. Overcrowding is one of the burning issues of many tourist destinations in the valley, thus, creating many unavoidable issues such as changes in visitors' behaviours, dissatisfaction of the visitors, a sudden decline in tourist number, poor working conditions, high prices, environmental impacts like noise, waste and pollution, undesirable economic effects such as unilateral benefits, leakages and crime, corruption as well as safety issues. Along with these, it may also lead to aesthetic impairment, overuse of infrastructure, traffic problems or inadequate implementation of tourism strategies (Weber et al. 2017: 199).

During the summer season, thousands of tourists visit the valley and during the *Eid* days, especially *Eid ul Fitr* (after the fasting month), the number of visitors reaches its climax, due to which tourism turns into coercion. These days, hotels' rooms are occupied all the time, there is a shortage of meals and fuel, and dust and dirt can be seen in the bazaars and at destinations. On the lake's surfaces, garbage is seen floating. This over-tourism creates problems for the visitors (especially families and the locals). Some of the local communities residing in Naran have to move to less disturbed areas due to overcrowding and disturbance in daily life. Most of the mishaps between locals and tourists happen during this overcrowded season. The overcrowding on weekends during the season results in high prices, garbage production, lack of police and locals' cooperation, insecurity, theft and destruction of resources. People have to sleep on the roads or seek help and accommodation in nearby houses. Most of the tourists, especially the families, cut short their visit and return in distress. Thus, many of the visitors have travelled from different parts of the country, cannot enjoy their trip and never plan to visit such destinations again.

### **Some other Problems**

Apart from the above-mentioned problems, visitors face some other problems as well which turn their visit into anger. Some of the other problems mentioned by the visitors are:

Some of the visitors have mentioned that in the whole valley, there are no professional or educated guides to guide them, and a tourist information centre exists in the region to provide

basic information to the visitors. The government authorities have not been able to provide such facilities. So, some of the visitors mentioned that they faced guide and guidance problems. There is also a problem of lack of signage, and visitors do not know where to go and what to do in the valley.

As many students visit the valley and usually visit with their teachers, so, some of the students mentioned that their teacher teased them a lot and did not allow them to enjoy the valley. Some of the visitors identified that there is no professionalism in hotels and restaurants regarding their services and staff. Some of the visitors also complained that there is no variety in the food and meals in the restaurants of Kaghan valley. Only chicken and cold drinks are available in most of the destinations. The dress and attitude of the hotels and restaurant staff are also not good. Some of the visitors have also complained about the attitude of the bank staff in the valley that they do not respond or guide in a professional manner. Some of the visitors also complained about the attitude and cooperation of the police and some of the local community. Land sliding is also another problem and hazard highlighted by some of the visitors.

ATMs, bank cash, Wi-Fi, internet, and mobile signals are also some of the problems highlighted by the visitors to the valley. Visitors have also complained that due to the unavailability of the internet, it is difficult for them to explore the valley and move around and similarly, they cannot contact back with their families due to lack or poor mobile signals.

Although the Urdu language is a means of communication in the valley in the remote parts of the valley, most of the people do not understand Urdu, so some of the visitors also highlighted the language problem that they do not understand the language of the local community.

Some of the visitors highlighted that there are no facilities in mosques to offer prayers. There are no walking treks in the valley, and crowd walk usually destroys the meadows. Smoke from heavy traffic is also polluting the environment and contributing to air pollution. The temperature might also be increasing in this way (further studies are needed on environmental impacts due to garbage and pollution etc.).

The success of a destination depends upon the satisfaction of visitors. They are likely to revisit

or suggest the destination to their friends and families. And if the tourists are not satisfied, they may not return to the same destination and may not recommend it to others. The worse dissatisfied tourists may comment negatively about such a destination, thus causing a bad reputation for that destination (Bhat and Qadir 2013: 152). So, the government should take a keen interest in resolving the visitors' issues. Otherwise, tourism in Kaghan valley may decline very soon.

### **Suggestions**

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In Kaghan valley, most of the problems are due to a lack of planning and mismanagement on the part of relevant departments. For sustainable tourism in Pakistan, based on the findings of Kaghan valley as a case study, the need is to plan and manage tourism on a priority basis. In this regard, tourism plans need to be implemented on a priority basis, and relevant departments should be directed to work efficiently and carry out their professional responsibilities. The public-private partnership is the need of the day. Government should encourage and facilitate the private sector to invest in the field of tourism and hospitality. This will facilitate and help the government to develop tourism in Pakistan. Packaged tour concepts and guided tours should be encouraged and through the tour operators to avoid these burning issues.

### **Conclusion**

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Pakistan is one of the few countries in the world blessed with a lot of tourism resources. It has the potential to attract millions of tourists, both inbound and domestic, to satisfy their varying needs. The tourism industry of Pakistan can also contribute to national and local development if properly planned and managed. Results of the present survey show that this unplanned tourism is creating a lot of problems that have led to the dissatisfaction of the visitors. This unplanned tourism has also caused the destruction of resources. The majority of the visitors' problems are due to lack of attention and nonprofessional attitude of the concerned authorities/departments. This unplanned tourism is also creating disturbance for the local community as their routine life is very much disturbed due to mass tourism. Government should take serious notice of such issues in the valley and take steps to save the valley from destruction and also to make the visitors' experience memorable. Tourism development plans for the valley should be implemented, and all the relevant departments should start joint efforts to develop sustainable tourism in the valley. Government should also encourage public-private partnerships to overcome such issues.

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**Pl. I:** (Kaghan valley, Mansehra): Improper roads



**Pl. II:** (Kaghan valley, Mansehra): Land sliding



**Pl. III:** (Kaghan valley, Mansehra): Improper accommodations at Naran



**Pl. IV:** (Kaghan valley, Mansehra): Garbage thrown along the river