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SWOT Analysis Of Religious Tourism: A Case of Sikh Gurdwaras in Pakistan

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Abstract: Pakistan has a diverse variety of monumental buildings which includes mosques, tombs, shrines and Gurdwaras. Every year, thousands of Sikh pilgrims are attracted to their Gurdwaras to satisfy their religion which is located mostly in southern Punjab, Pakistan. These monumental Gurdwaras reflect the Sikh culture and heritage in terms of religious tourist margins. These historical assets have firm potential that could serve for tourism development, conservation and preservation of these and thus moving toward sustainable solutions. The objective of this research is to analyze the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of Sikh religious tourism in Pakistan. The research methodology adopted for this research was qualitative and data was collected through formal interviews of officials of the Evacuee Trust Property Board (ETPB), Government of Pakistan. The results showed that Southern Punjab, Pakistan has a strong potential for religious tourism and if promoted can help in the socio-economic development of a country.

Key Words: Religious Tourism, Gurdwaras, Darbar Sahib, Punja Sahib, Rorri Sahib, Janam Asthan

Introduction

Religious tourism is actually visiting attractions in a city of religious importance. It is a particular form of activity that is completely and strongly motivated by religion. (2022). It can be defined as an activity specifically oriented towards a religious culture with the help of a definite eco-cultural environment and activities such as worship, research and visits carried out by religious followers and tourists. Religious tourism has undergone continuous development and expansion in the modern tourism industry. About 40 per cent of the world's tourism revenue is generated from religious tourism, and Pakistan has just begun to develop this market with enormous potential. Religious tourism is an important reason of income source and means of

employment in the country.

Pakistan is a country endowed with many tourist attractions, especially religious ones. (Alaverdov & Bari, 2022) It houses several cultural heritage sites associated with Hinduism, Sikhism and Buddhism. The major holiest sites of Sikhism are located in the Southern Punjab of Pakistan and are considered the most important sites to be visited by Sikh pilgrims. These cities of Pakistan host religious centres not only have a cultural landscape but also promotes industrial and trade activities in the form of marketing and local business. (Kalim, Majeed Khan & Syed, 2022). Millions of tourists' visit these religious sites from Pakistan and abroad. The Sikh community is attracted yearly to perform their religious obligations worldwide. Among many other sacred sites of

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Sikhism, the Gurdwaras of Nankana Sahib, Narowal and Hasanabdal are a great fascination for Sikhs. ("Religion: why faith is becoming more and more popular", 2022). The international visitor visiting Pakistan are then attracted to the natural splendour of Northern areas and other holiest places of diverse religions like Sufis Shrines and other historical sites.

Pakistan has a significant potential for religious tourism with a number of historic sites. But, due to a lack of policy framework, their perspective is not yet fully realized. The objective of this research is to analyze the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of religious tourism in Pakistan and suggest more standards in the development of this sector so as to make a significant contribution to the tourism market.

Research Methodology

The research has been carried out through a set of descriptive approaches to explore the importance of Sikh Gurdwaras in Pakistan. The literature review was carried out through reconnaissance surveys, interviews of concerned officials and analysis of journal articles. The research also analyses the statistical data of visitors attracted to these holy setups indicating their tourist potential. The SWOT analysis was done to evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of Sikh religious tourism in Pakistan.

Literature Review

Religious tourism is important as it is done to fulfil religious compulsions and commitments. The general essence of religious tourism denotes travelling with the prime motive of undergoing religious deeds. Religion and tourism are interlinked with each other as both have similar effects on the specific area like, the products they bring such as traditions, culture, art and architecture. (Singh, 2019)

Religious tourism can be depicted initially in Islam, Christianity and Jews as their pioneer form of tourism were in the form of visiting pilgrimages visiting such as Mecca and Jerusalem respectively. They have always been one of the leading factors to set an example for others to travel. In history, religious tourism was in the form of spreading the word of religion to different parts of the world and for this purpose, people travelled far across. This resulted in spreading knowledge areas as well as economic growth. Pakistan has renowned religious tourism sites of Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, and Buddhism. Among these, the major holiest sites of Sikhism lie in the Southern Punjab area of the country. People of the Sikh community visit these cities to satisfy their religious commitments. About four hundred and eighty inbound locations have been identified by Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation (PTDC), specifically encompassing the religious tourism potential of Pakistan, where one hundred and six are of historical significance, one hundred and twenty religions, and twenty-six religions and history. (BeBe Sumra & Alam, 2022) (Table1).

Table 1. Number of Religious Tourism Sites in Pakistan

Building Type	Number of Buildings
Historical significance	106
Religions	120
Religions and history	26

Source: (BeBe Sumra & Alam, 2022)

The Historical significant Gurdwaras located in Southern Punjab Pakistan are an indispensable fragment of the Sikh community and depict the history of the Sikh religion. The Sikh religion was in fact originated and established in the Punjab areas that lie in Pakistan now.

Presently Pakistan Sikh religious tourism has significant potential. Recently, the Kartarpur border has also been opened for the Sikh pilgrimages to get easy access to their religious destination site of Gurdwara Darbar Sahib, Narowal (2022). The government of Pakistan's initiatives include




the introduction of a mobile app to ease the travel constraints for the visitors facilitating the restaurants, hotels, roads and service stations guide to the visitors. (Saher, Tharwani & Ahmad., 2020).

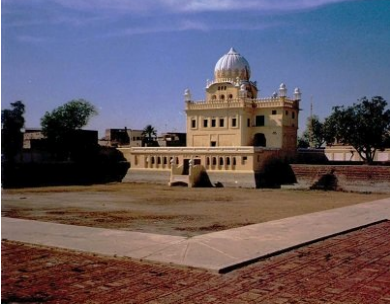


Another significant historic site for the Sikh religion is Nankana Sahib which is considered to be the birthplace of Guru Nanak who was the founder of the Sikh

religion. There are around 195 gurdwaras across Pakistan. The research will be highlighting the few important ones among these significant structures. Table2





There are almost eight important cities where lies the protected Gurdwaras according to the entrusted organizations that deal with the non-Muslim religious sites i.e., Evaccu Trust Property Board (ETPB).




Table 1.

Building Location	Name of the Site / Building	Nature of site	Ownership	Status
1. Nankana Sahib	 <p data-bbox="333 828 580 855">Gurdwara Janam Astha</p>	Religious	ETPB, Government of Pakistan	Protected
	 <p data-bbox="348 1112 579 1139">Gurdwara Patti Sahib</p>			
	 <p data-bbox="348 1392 606 1419">Gurdwara Tambu Sahib</p>			

Building Location	Name of the Site / Building	Nature of site	Ownership	Status
	Gurdwara Bal Lilah Sahib			
	Gurdwara Panjvi Chatti Patshahi			
	Gurdwara Malji Sahib			
	Gurdwara Kiara Sahib			

Building Location	Name of the Site / Building	Nature of site	Ownership	Status
2. Farooqabad, Sheikhpura	 <p data-bbox="333 578 584 604">Gurdwara Sacha Sauda</p>	Religious	ETPB, Government of Pakistan	Protected
3. Eminabad, Gujranwala	 <p data-bbox="333 991 571 1017">Gurdwara Rorri Sahib</p>	Religious	ETPB, Government of Pakistan	Protected
4. Lahore	 <p data-bbox="333 1306 571 1332">Gurdwara Dera Sahib</p>  <p data-bbox="231 1628 674 1654">Gurdwara Shaheed Ganj Singh Singhnian</p>	Religious	ETPB, Government of Pakistan	Protected

Building Location	Name of the Site / Building	Nature of site	Ownership	Status
	 <p data-bbox="317 546 588 569">Gurdwara Guru Ram Das</p>			
	 <p data-bbox="326 888 579 911">Gurdwara Bebe Nanaki</p>			
5. Narawal	 <p data-bbox="327 1233 585 1257">Gurdwara Darbar Sahib</p>	Religious	ETPB, Government of Pakistan	Protected
6. Hasan Abdal	 <p data-bbox="331 1561 572 1585">Gurdwara Panja Sahib</p>	Religious	ETPB, Government of Pakistan	Protected

Building Location	Name of the Site / Building	Nature of site	Ownership	Status
7. Peshawar	 <p data-bbox="310 511 592 536">Gurdwara Bhai Joga Singh</p>	Religious	ETPB, Government of Pakistan	Protected
	 <p data-bbox="310 826 592 851">Gurdwara Bahi Beba Singh</p>			
8. Sialkot	 <p data-bbox="330 1190 572 1215">Gurdwara Babe Di Ber</p>	Religious	ETPB, Government of Pakistan	Protected

Source: http://www.discoversikhism.com/sikh_gurdwaras/gurdwara_sri_patti_sahib.html

Prominent Gurdwaras Cities

Among the existing Gurdwaras, the major priority and most willingly visited ones by the Sikh community are the Gurdwara Janam

Asthan-Nankana Sahib, Gurdwara Rorri Sahib-Eminabad, Gujranwala, Gurdwara Darbar Sahib- Narowal and Gurdwara Panja Sahib Hasanabdal. Fig.1.

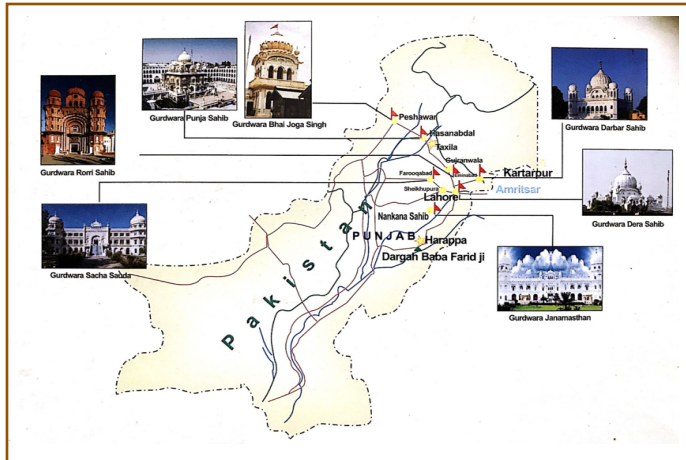


Figure 1: Significant Sikh Gurdwaras in Southern Punjab, Pakistan
Source: Student thesis report (Akhter, 2021)

Darbar Sahib Narowal

Gurdwara Darbar Sahib, Narowal (Fig 2) also known as the Kartarpur corridor is significant regarding religious concerns of the Sikh community as is the last resting place of Guru Nanak Sahib, the religious leader of Sikhism. ("Why the tourism industry has failed in Pakistan | eTurboNews | eTN", 2022). Thus it holds a pilgrimage worthy of significance for the followers of the Sikh religion. It got caught in the middle of the Hindu-Muslim divide, during the partition of India. Negligible Head was given to Sikh sensitivities until the 21st century, during the Indo-Pak Relationship.

In its history, Guru Nanak founded Kartarpur in 1504AD and after his death in

1539AD, after a long time span in 1925 Kartarpur complex was built. After extensive conflicts between Indo-Pakistan governments, finally, in 2012 Indo Pakistan foreign ministers discussed a visa-free corridor to facilitate the Sikh pilgrims and finally, in 2018 Kartarpur corridor inauguration was through which Punjabis of both states can come closer and contact as well. (Awasthi, 2022)

It is now considered a case study of how the best facilities can be provided in the best interest of enhancing Sikh tourism potential in Pakistan. (Fig 3). It is further now required to extend this route of Sikh pilgrim sites in southern Punjab so as for the best interest of Pakistan's religious tourism enhancement.



Figure 2: View of Darbar Sahib, Narowal
Source: <https://www.etpb.gov.pk/kartarpur-corridor/>



Figure 3: Layout plan of Darbar Sahib, Narowal
 Source: <https://www.etpb.gov.pk/kartarpur-corridor>

Punja Sahib Hasanabdal

Pakistan had religious importance in Sikhism and considers Hasanabdal as a significant one due to the presence of the Gurdwara Punja Sahib. (Fig 4) It is located about 48 km from Rawalpindi. It's an attractive, calm and convenient halting point. Hasan Abdal is a historic town located in northern Punjab. There are diverse symbols of historical periods of Buddhist, Mughal, Sikh and British invaders in this town. The existence of Gurdwara Punja Sahib and the natural exquisiteness are the factors that attract tourists from all over the world. The

Gurudwara is located in the central zone among the other historical structures from Mugal and Hindu time periods but reflects its own worth. The magnificent setup includes the main prayer chamber in the centre with a water pond with fishes, the sacred hand print of Baba Guru Nanak for the Sikh community, some residential rooms, the administrative offices and the dining hall with a kitchen area. (Qaisar, 2001) The rapid population growth and haphazard planning of the residential and commercial units have shattered the spiritual essence of monuments disturbing the urban face of the town. (Khilat, 2021)

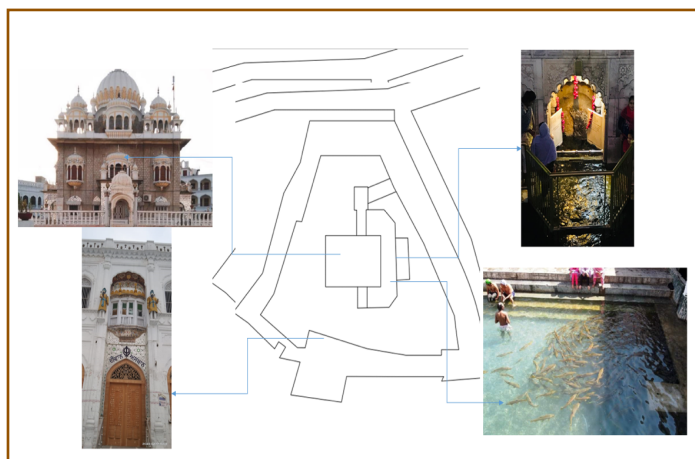


Figure 4: Layout plan of Punja Sahib, Hasanabdal
 Source: Author

Gurdwara Rorri Sahib, Eminabad, Gujranwala

Gurdwara Rorri Sahib is situated two kilometres to the southeast of present-day Eminabad. The gurdwara complex comprises various structures. (Fig 5) The beautiful synchronization of overlapping petals, arches,

lettering in Gurmukhi style, columns, minarets and domes make this building a unique and fantastic architectural masterpiece. The actual Gurdwara was just a small domed square structure dated back to the 17th century where it stood alone and is a huge structure made of moulded bricks representing a stylized form of the oak plan

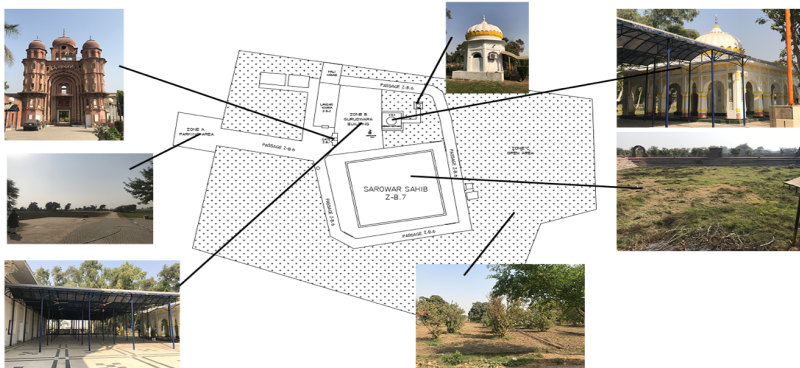


Figure 5: Layout plan of Gurdwara Rorri Sahib, Eminabad, Gujranwala
 Source: Student thesis report (Zainab, [2021](#))

Gurdwara Janam Asthan, Nankana Sahib

Nankana District is famous because of the born place of Guru Nanak Dev Ji and Sikh-era buildings. It is located 8911 km from Lahore. Some of the buildings of Sikh have a very strong influence on the Sikh community. There are some important Gurdwaras like Gurdwara Bal Lila Sahib, Gurdwara Patti Sahib, Gurdwara Kiara Sahib, Gurdwara Maal Ji sahib, Gurdwara Tamboo Sahib, Gurdwara 5th & 6th Patshahi etc, but most important

building in Sheikhpura is Gurdwara Janam Asthan. (Fig 6) The total area of the Nankana sahib estate is 17675 acres out of which 1749 were occupied by the peasants' officials (Ali, [2016](#)). Gurdwara Janam Asthan is considered another important religious site for the Sikh community because marked as the birthplace of Baba Guru Nanak and where he spent his early childhood days. This makes it an important visiting place for Sikh pilgrims during their visit to Pakistan.



Figure 6: View of Gurdwara Janam Asthan, Nankana Sahib

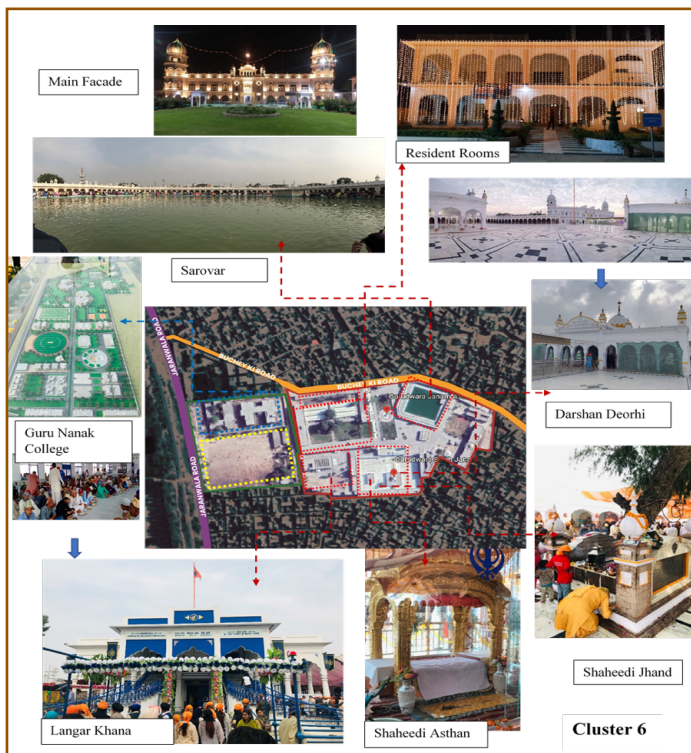


Figure 7: Layout plan of Gurdwara Janam Asthan, Nankana Sahib
Source:(Akhter, 2021)

Last Few Year Data of Religious Tourists

Due to the developmental works at various Gurdwara and the provision of modern facilities for Sikh pilgrims, the number of

pilgrims (particularly Diaspora Sikh) has significantly increased in the year 2018. But due to Covid-19 restrictions and constraints in the year 2020-2021, there was a significant decrease in the number of visitors.

Table 2. Table Last Five-year Data of Religious Tourists

Year	Pakistanis	Indian	Others	Total
2014	38500	4275	1376	44151
2015	48000	5194	1681	54875
2016	65300	4748	2110	72158
2017	60100	3806	2208	66114
2018	61500	5718	4110	71328
2019	80000	7013	6000	93013
2020	8000	602	00	8602
2021	23000	3281	300	26581

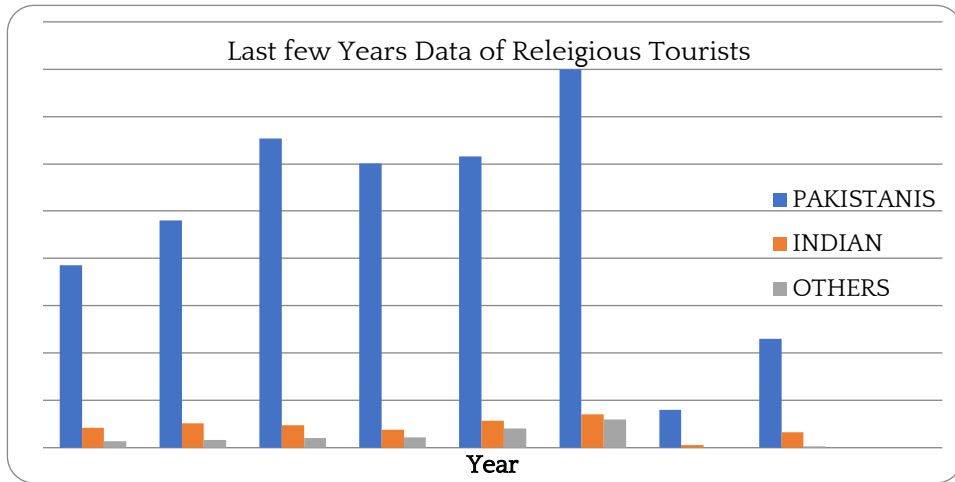


Figure 8: Last Five Year Data of Religious Tourists

Source: ETPB

Agreed Protocol between India & Pakistan Regarding Visit of Indian Pilgrims to Pakistan

As per the agreed protocol between Pakistan and Indian Governments, the following

number of Sikh *Table2* and Hindu *Table3* pilgrims can visit Pakistan on various occasions during a calendar year but have been significantly improved with the provision of required facilities.

Table 3. Detail of Sikh Pilgrims

S.No	Name of festival / Place	Strength	Duration -Month
a.	Baisakhi Festival at Gurdwara Panja Sahib- Hasan Abdal.	3000	10 days - April
b.	Martyrdom of Guru Arjun Dev Jee - Lahore.	1000	10 days - June
c.	Death Anniversary of Maharaja Ranjeet Singh - Lahore.	500	10 days - June
d.	Birthday of Guru Nanak Dev Jee - Nankana Sahib.	3000	10 days - Nov

Source: ETPB

Table 4. Detail of Hindu Pilgrims

a.	Katas Raj Temple District Chakwal	200	5 days - Feb
b.	Hayat Patafi / Sadhu Bela Temple, Sukkur (Sindh).	400	10 days - Oct.
c.	Katas Raj Temple District Chakwal	200	5 days -Dec

The numbers *Table2* relates to annual bilateral agreed 04 Sikh events only however, local Sikh pilgrims visit the Gurdwaras on regular basis. From Nov 2019 to March 2020,

63000 pilgrims from the Indian side and 422000 locals from the Pakistani side visited specifically to Gurdwara Darbar Sahib Kartarpur, Narowal.

Table 5. SWOT Analysis of Gurdwaras

Gurudwara Name	Strength	Weakness	Threats	Opportunities
DARBAR SAHIB, NAROWAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The shorter access route from the Indian Border i.e Kartarpur Corridor Tourism attraction because of the Last resting place of Baba Guru Nanak. An accommodation facility is provided. Traditional events and festivals throughout the year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Visa facilitation only limited to Darbar sahib Narowal Major funding is supported by donations from the pilgrims. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Security maintenance. Indo-Pak relation constraints. Lack of public awareness of the historic assets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finest hotel accommodation planned. Economic activities planned
PUNJA SAHIB, HASANABDAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Major Tourist attraction for the Sikh community. Sacred stone and water. The natural scenic beauty of the site. Traditional events and festivals throughout the year. Historical monuments of the Mughal and Hindu period adjacent to the site attracts more tourists. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low quality of restroom. Temporary accommodation is arranged at the time of festivals. The market area up gradation is required adjacent to the gurdwara. No integration of management authorities handling the area Major funding is supported by donations from the pilgrims. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Main primary road passing adjacent to the wall and traffic pollution hazardous to the structure. Security maintenance. Lack of public awareness of the historic assets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All historic monuments lying adjacent to the gurdwara are tourist spots for other religions. A single central zone can be created to promote tourism.

Gurudwara Name	Strength	Weakness	Threats	Opportunities
EMINABAD, SAHIB, RORRI, GURDWARA GUJRANWALA, NANKANA ASTHAN, JANAM SAHIB, GURDWARA SAHIB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tourism attraction for Sikh pilgrims. • A cluster of other historic monuments within the city. • Traditional events and festivals throughout the year. • Tourist attraction for pilgrims considered sacred as the birth place of Baba Guru Nanak • The market area up gradation required to promote culture. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of tourism management authorities for the visitors. • The accommodation facility is not good. • Conservation of historic monuments. • Major funding is supported by donations from the pilgrims. • No focus on conservation. • No provision for hotel accommodation in the city. • Public transportation between the gurdwaras located in Nankana sahib. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No business management plan exists for the promotion of historic sites. • No Government support for tourism attractions. • Lack of public awareness of the historic assets. • Rapid Urbanization • Security maintenance. • Indo-Pak relation constraints. • Rapid Urbanization. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The historic city of tourist attraction. • Other gurdwaras located within the city

Conclusions

Pakistan has diverse sets of religious tourism assets in the form of prominent Sikh heritage and religious sites. The only point is to understand their importance at the community and government level to the extent that they should be uplifted to enhance their inbuilt tourism potential. Every year, the Sikh pilgrimages visiting Pakistan to perform their required religious obligations are facilitated with the best possible amenities at the local level. The SWOT analysis shows that

Pakistan has a huge potential for religious tourism with a number of Sikh Gurdwaras sites located in Southern, Punjab, Pakistan. But, their perspective is not yet fully understood due to planning gaps and policy frameworks. To advance tourism, wide extending mindfulness campaign at the national level is required. Promotion of tourism industry by public awareness campaign and provision of five-star hotel accommodation required within the cities of important Gurdwaras accommodating the

social, religious and dietary needs of guests. The mandatorily required facilities for the pilgrims such as hotels should be constructed within close proximity of the major Gurdwaras. Other than that the market areas in close proximity to the Gurdwaras should be promoted to benefit the local economy. Initially, the Pakistani policymakers should work out the possibility of arranging joint approach planning by the Sikh community and the Pakistani concerned authorities. A secure and relaxing environment should be

provided for Sikh travellers, breaking the fear and political pressures between Pakistan and India. The cultural essence of the area is to be heightened and promoted. Thus both the conservation of built and unbuilt heritage is required to be restored and preserved. Conservation of historic towns of religious importance should be done at appropriate times and conditions rather than destroying and waiting for the monument to vanish from the scene.

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