

Tourism Development in Afghanistan

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Received: 09-04-2025	Revised: 10-05-2025	Accepted: 15-06-2025	Published: 20-07-2025
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ABSTRACT

In order to support economic growth and improve the standard of living for local residents, the study aims to understand and investigate the development of tourism in Afghanistan by utilizing the nation's breathtaking landscapes, historical landmarks, and rich cultural heritage. The data collected from thirty respondents through the snowballing technique, among whom twenty were tourism experts and tourist, and ten were academics who had knowledge regarding the development of Afghanistan through tourism, was analyzed using thematic analysis, transcribed, initially coded, searched, reviewed, and defined the themes. Like Cultural Heritage and Historical Significance, Economic Growth and Job Creation, Infrastructure Development, Challenges and Barriers to Tourism, Sustainability and Responsible Travel, Government Policies and Support, Education and Capacity Building, Market Perception and Awareness, Community Involvement and Empowerment, and Future Prospects and Vision highlight the varied nature of tourism development in Afghanistan, so stressing its potential to drive economic growth while also addressing important challenges that need to be tackled to create a sustainable and vibrant tourism sector. From cultural legacy and economic development to infrastructure and community involvement, the diverse themes of tourism development in Afghanistan demonstrate the sector's capacity to drive economic progress. Developing a vibrant and sustainable tourism sector that helps local businesses and the general economy depends on tackling important obstacles. Infrastructure development must be given first priority if Afghanistan's tourism industry is to be dynamic and sustainable. We must also strengthen government assistance and invest in community capacity-building projects. Also, very important will be addressing security issues and supporting ethical travel policies

Keywords: *Tourism Development, Tourism challenges, Tourism Policies*

INTRODUCTION

In the 1970s, Afghan tourism was at its magnificent best. From all around the world, over thousand visitors came to Afghanistan to observe the special beauty of the nation and enjoy the hospitality of one of the friendliest people groups. Despite decades of turmoil, Kabul is a magnificent city that embraces both the past and the present. Modern architecture has been incorporated into Kabul, giving the city hope for a prosperous and peaceful future as the international community continues to expand and reconstruction efforts continue.

The beautiful city of Balkh, also called the Mother City of all Cities, the lakes of Band-e Amir, the tomb of Hazrate Ali (the son-in-law of Prophet Mohammed p.b.u.h. and the fourth caliph of Islam), and the more than two thousand-year-old famous Buddha statues are just a few of Afghanistan's many historical

sites and attractions. The striking contrast between the plain tones of the nearby mountains and the vibrant lapis lazuli blue of the waterways is striking.

From Genghis Khan to Alexander the Great, Afghanistan has also been very strategically significant for invading armies. These troops have left amazing traces behind that we have yet to find despite decades of conflict. Rebuilding Afghanistan's war-torn infrastructure is under government control; a major initiative to create national telecommunication lines between Kabul and the other provinces has been started as well as transportation links.

Additionally, the government aggressively encourages and fully supports private sector investment in the tourism industry, thereby bolstering Afghanistan's travel industry. Given the steadily growing global tourism industry, the Afghan tourism industry has enormous potential to become very profitable. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Afghanistan is prepared to support any effort that aims to improve the nation's travel industry.

Kabul, Afghanistan's capital since 1776, is a rapidly expanding city where bustling bazaars and tall modern buildings coexist. The city's broad avenues are adorned with a variety of handsome faces, gaily striped chapans (cloaks), and multicolored flowing turbans. The mountains that surround the city are a sight to behold, with their verdant green hues in the spring and their pristine whiteness in the winter. In the summer, their attractiveness is ever-changing, transitioning from a deep purple hue to a brilliant pink hue as the sun rises and sets. Two craggy ranges, each crowned with ancient bastions, divide the city. The Kabul River flows through a narrow pass between them to meander through the city's center. For centuries, travelers have praised Kabul in their writings, and its allure continues to captivate contemporary visitors.

BALA HISSAR: For centuries, the citadel (ca. 6th century A.D.) ascended above the plain and hosted the monarchs of Afghanistan. Up until 1880, when it was devastated during the Second Anglo-Afghan War, it was the site of the majority of the nation's thrilling events.

Palace (ARG)

The Bala Hissar palaces were replaced by this citadel, which was constructed by Amir Abdur Rahman (1880-1901). The Dilkosha Palace (Heart's Delight) and the Salam Khana (Hall of Salutation) are located within the Arg. It is currently the residence of the former monarch, Mohammad Zahir Shah, and the Presidential Offices.

Bala Hissar marks the commencement of Kabul's historic city fortifications. Assigned to the Hephthalite period (5th century A.D.), they are 7 meters high and 3 meters thick.

Mausoleums: In 1817, the tomb of Timur Shah, the son of Ahmad Shah Durrani, was constructed. Timur Shah was responsible for the removal of the capital from Kandahar to Kabul.

Mausoleum of Amir Abdur Rahman, one of Afghanistan's most dynamic monarchs, is a charming landmark of the city. As a prime illustration of 19th-century architecture that has survived in Kabul, it is situated in Zarnegar Park, which is the heart of the city. The blue-domed, white-marbled mausoleum of Nadir Shah is situated on the elevation known as Tapa Maranjan, which provides a commanding view of Kabul.

GLEAMING ON A HILL TO THE NORTH OF THE CITY, BAGHE BALA is a graceful palace with numerous

domes. Originally constructed as a summer residence with a massive swimming pool and surrounded by pine trees, it is presently undergoing renovations to serve as a guest house for foreign dignitaries at the Foreign Ministry.

Babur's Gardens: In the mid-16th century, Babur, the founder of the Moghul Dynasty, established the gardens. The gardens feature a summer pavilion that was added by Amir Abdur Rahman Khan, a commemorative mosque that was constructed by Emperor Shah Jahan, and Babur's mausoleum. In 1530, Babur passed away in Agra. However, he was so enamored with these gardens that he requested to be interred here. His Afghan wife, Bibi Mobaraka, fulfilled his wish.

The National Museum, situated in Darulaman, is home to an extraordinary collection of artifacts that serve as a testament to Afghanistan's history, spanning from prehistoric times to the present.

Bazaars: Large numbers of visitors flock to Kabul's numerous vibrant bazaars for both shopping and sightseeing. The most well-known street in Shahr-e-Now is Kocha-e-Murgha (Chicken Street).

The city of Kabul is home to numerous intriguing mosques. The most well-known ones in the city's center are:

The Masjid Pule Kheshti

Shahe Du Shamshira Masjid

Blue Mosque ("Masjid Sherpur")

Eidgah Great Mosque

Masjide Sayed Majnun Shah.

Surroundings of Kabul

Koh Daman: Istalif is situated in the Koh Daman valley, which is surrounded by barren hills and is dotted with villages that are nestled within verdant orchards. It is situated to the north of Kabul. This valley is one of the most ancient, beautiful, and expansive of all. Istalif is famed for its picturesque bazaar and its green and blue pottery. A visit to this location offers an introduction to the life of an Afghan village, in addition to the breathtaking scenery. Part of the Shamali Plains, the region is renowned for its abundance of more than 100 grape varieties.

Afghan Gorges: The Kabul Gorge (Tange Gharu) is the most magnificent of the country's impressive gorges. The gorge is crowned by a substantial pique house, which provides a vantage point from which to appreciate the breathtaking scenery at one's leisure. A three-kilometer switchback road descends to the foot, providing a comprehensive understanding of its ruggedness.

A fascinating historical site from the fourth century is the Guldara Stupa. The niches were originally occupied by statues, and it is set on a platform with a square base and Corinthian columns. Known as diaper masonry, the walls are an example of Kushan craftsmanship. At first, stupas were painted in ochre-yellow with red patterns and cemented.

Paghman is the most visited summer location in Kabul. To honour the War of Independence, King Amanullah built the imposing triumph arch on the centre square in 1919. The road goes by while tea and refreshments are offered in the Baghe Umumi (Public Garden). When returning to Kabul, one may see the Spoghmay (moonlight) restaurant at Kargha Lake and the Kabul Golf Course, which was founded by Amir Habibullah Khan in the early 1900s.

Research Problem

According to the study I have found the gap that further investigates the development of tourism in Afghanistan. Compared to neighboring countries, Afghanistan is a backward country, more underdeveloped and developing a country creating revenue from tourism, but due to a lack of research

and poor policy in the tourism sector, Afghanistan is still backward; that's why the gap is identified to study more.

Significance of the Study

This research is important because it explores tourism's potential in Afghanistan, offering strategies for economic growth and cultural preservation in a country facing significant challenges. It aims to contribute new knowledge and shift perceptions of Afghanistan by highlighting tourism's positive role.

Research Objective

This research objective to understand Afghanistan's tourism development challenges and how to overcome them by creating a sustainable solution. More than the objective of this research is to attract tourists to Afghanistan; the government makes a tourist-friendly policy for it and takes actionable steps for tourist safety and hospitality.

Research Question

- a) How can Afghanistan's rich cultural history and historical importance be used to bring in tourists and encourage cultural education?
- b) What exact changes need to be made to Afghanistan's infrastructure to help tourism grow, and how should these investments be made?
- c) What problems and obstacles are getting in the way of tourism growth in Afghanistan right now, and what can be done to get around them?

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Tosun, C. and Timothy, D.J. (2001), plans for tourism help developing nations strengthen their economy. This paper examines, using Turkey as an example, the shortcomings in these policies. The article comes to the conclusion that good tourism planning, considering particular local characteristics, calls for political stability, solid institutions, decentralization, and international cooperation.

According to Sinclair-Maragh & Gursoy (2015), which emphasizes people's opinions of imperialism, trust, and identity, this conceptual study proposes a tourism development assistance strategy for developing countries. It looks into how these factors influence people's general support of the expansion of tourism as well as their views of its benefits and negative effects. Based on institutional, social, and identity theories, the model proposes relationships among imperialism, trust, and identity. It aims to provide a framework for more research that can direct better policies and choices for governments and travel agents.

According to Ekanayake, E. M. and Long, Aubrey E., Tourism Development and Economic Growth in Developing Countries (2012). The study investigates the link between tourism development and economic growth in developing countries from 1995 to 2009. Using a heterogeneous panel co-integration technique, it finds no strong support for the idea that tourism directly drives economic growth. However, the study indicates that tourism revenue positively contributes to economic growth, suggesting that developing country governments should prioritize policies that promote tourism as a potential economic driver.

According to Tosun and Timothy (2001). Tourism infrastructure is crucial for tourism development and tourist satisfaction. This paper examines the relationship between available infrastructure and tourism development, arguing that future growth depends on infrastructure investment and modernization. Focusing on Southeast Europe, the study analyzes the correlation between tourism competitiveness and the competitiveness of tourism infrastructure, noting that an increase in hotel rooms significantly contributes to higher tourism competitiveness in the region.

According to Telfer & Sharpley (2015). "Tourism and Development in the Developing World" examines the complex relationship between tourism and socio-economic development in less developed countries. It challenges common assumptions about tourism's role in development and highlights the challenges faced by destinations. The book covers key issues like globalization, tourism planning, community relations, demand management, and the environmental, economic, and social consequences of tourism. It also addresses contemporary challenges like climate change and global instability. By combining essential concepts with an analysis of current issues, the book provides a valuable resource for students and researchers in tourism, development, and related fields.

According to Lee & Chang (2008). A study examined the link between tourism and economic growth in different countries from 1990-2002. It found that tourism boosts GDP, especially in developing countries and particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa. Exchange rates also play a role. Tourism drives economic growth in developed countries, while the relationship is reciprocal in developing countries. The findings offer valuable insights for policymakers.

According to Dogru et al. (2021). A study analyzing tourism competitiveness across 150 countries from 2000 to 2017 found that the most competitive destinations vary depending on whether you look at tourist arrivals (Japan, Thailand, Turkey), tourism revenue (Thailand, Japan), or per-tourist spending (Luxembourg). This suggests countries need to focus on strategies to maximize their specific tourism strengths.

Dogru et al. (2021). This study examines how women's empowerment affects tourism development in Egypt, the UAE, and Oman. Analyzing survey responses from 784 people, it found that perceptions of women's work and entrepreneurship in tourism significantly predict women's empowerment. The impact of women's empowerment on tourism development varied across the countries, with the UAE showing the strongest effect, followed by Egypt and Oman. The findings offer important insights for promoting women's empowerment in Arab and Muslim countries.

Tosun, C. (2000) asserts that these findings are significant. A study examines why participatory tourism development, a concept from developed countries, often struggles in the developing world. It identifies obstacles like social, political, and cultural issues that limit community involvement. The study argues that overcoming these challenges requires major changes in developing countries' systems and support from international organizations.

According to Sharpley, R. (2002), Tourism has exploded in popularity, becoming more accessible to everyone. In 2012, over a billion people traveled internationally, and this number continues to rise. This boom has led to more and more places, even remote and dangerous ones, becoming tourist destinations. According to Bhuiyan, M. A. H., Siwar, C., & Ismail, S. M. (2013). Tourism is a major economic driver in Malaysia, and the government is actively working to promote sustainable tourism through various plans and policies. They aim to be a top 10 global destination for tourists.

Saha, S., & Yap, G. (2014). A study analyzing tourism in 139 countries found that political instability hurts it more than individual terrorist attacks. Interestingly, terrorism can sometimes boost tourism in stable countries, but when combined with high political risk, it severely damages the tourism industry. According to Oppermann (1993), Existing tourism theories don't fully explain tourism growth in developing countries. We propose a new model that takes into account the unique social and economic factors in these countries, dividing tourism into different sectors with varying impacts.

According to Saufi, A., O'Brien, D., & Wilkins, H. (2014). A study in Lombok, Indonesia, found that local communities face obstacles participating in tourism due to ineffective tourism agencies, private sector limitations, poor infrastructure, and negative perceptions of tourism's impacts. The study suggests better training for tourism staff, improved government coordination, and enhanced education for tourism operators to improve local participation.

According to Chou, M. C. (2013), A study of 10 transition countries (1988–2011) revealed varying relationships between tourism spending and economic growth: no relationship in some; tourism driving growth in others; growth driving tourism in others; and a two-way relationship in the rest. The findings were reported by Tosun, C. (2005). The study identifies three stages for participatory tourism development in developing countries: pressure on government, political will, and implementation. It concludes that political will, legal measures, community empowerment, and elite cooperation are essential for success.

Research Methods

Using the snowball method, information was gathered from thirty respondents, twenty of whom were tourism experts and tourist, and ten of whom were experienced academics. The answers were looked at using thematic analysis, which included transcription, initial coding, and theme definition. This study looked at important issues related to Afghanistan's tourism industry, like how to use the country's rich cultural history and historical importance to bring in tourists and encourage cultural education. It also looked at the specific building improvements that are needed to help tourism grow, as well as the smart investments that are needed to make these changes happen. Lastly, the study looked at the present problems that are stopping the growth of tourism and suggested ways to solve these problems.

Data Analysis

Data analyze through thematic analysis the below themes are derived from data:

Cultural Heritage and Historical Significance

The most of respondent stated that the importance of Afghanistan's rich cultural heritage and historical sites as key attractions for tourism. It highlights the potential for cultural tourism to educate visitors and promote appreciation for Afghan traditions.

Job Creation and Economic Growth

The majority of them described how tourism promotes economic expansion and creates jobs in a variety of industries, including local crafts, transportation, and hospitality. The idea that the growth of tourism could improve Afghan residents' standard of living is reflected in this theme.

Infrastructure Development

The Majority respondent addresses the necessity to improved infrastructure, such as transportation, accommodation, and communication facilities, to support tourism growth. Respondents may discuss current challenges and the importance of investment in infrastructure to attract tourists.

Obstacles & Difficulties in Tourism

The most of respondent Acknowledges the various challenges facing tourism development in Afghanistan, including security concerns, political instability, and lack of awareness. This theme would reflect the perceptions of experts and academics about the obstacles that hinder tourism growth.

Sustainability and Responsible Tourism

The majority of respondents examine the necessity of environmentally friendly and socially responsible sustainable tourism operations. Respondents might stress how crucial it is to include local communities in tourism planning and make sure that the financial gains are distributed fairly.

Support and Policies of the Government

Some of the respondents described how laws, marketing plans, and international collaborations are some examples of government policies that support tourism. Opinions regarding the efficacy of the policies in place as well as suggestions for enhancement are reflected in this theme.

Learning and Developing Capabilities

The majority of respondents stress the importance of education and training initiatives in enhancing local populations' abilities in the tourism industry. The significance of enabling residents to take part in and profit from tourism efforts is discussed by the respondents.

Market Perception and Awareness

Some of participant Addresses the perceptions of potential tourists regarding Afghanistan as a travel destination. This theme includes discussions on marketing strategies, branding efforts, and the role of media in shaping public perception.

Community Involvement and Empowerment

Few people took part. emphasises how crucial it is to include local populations in the process of developing tourism in order to make sure that their opinions are heard and that tourism efforts benefit them. Respondents may talk about tourism from a grassroots perspective.

Future Prospects and Vision

Some of them highlights what respondents hope for the future of tourism in Afghanistan. They shared ideas about new markets, tourism products, and ways to improve the industry. Many are optimistic about promoting cultural and adventure tourism while ensuring that local community's benefit. The goal is to develop a lively tourism sector that showcases Afghanistan's unique features.

CONCLUSION

There are a lot of important things that go into tourism development in Afghanistan, such as cultural heritage, economic growth, better infrastructure, and community involvement. All of these things show

that tourism has the potential to make a big difference in the country's economic progress. But for the tourism sector to really take off and help local businesses and the economy as a whole, problems need to be fixed. These problems can include security issues, bad infrastructure, and the need for good government policies. Overall, the conclusion stresses how important it is to get past these problems in order to build a strong and long-lasting tourism industry that helps the economy while also giving local communities more power.

RECOMMENDATION

Need to develop targeted marketing campaigns that highlight Afghanistan's rich cultural heritage and historical sites. This can attract cultural tourists and educators, fostering appreciation for Afghan traditions while contributing to local economies. Encourage investments in the tourism sector that create job opportunities across hospitality, transport, and local crafts. Collaboration with local businesses and artisans can enhance the economic benefits of tourism.

Prioritize the improvement of transportation, accommodation, and communication facilities to create a more tourist-friendly environment. Government and private sector partnerships should be sought to fund these essential upgrades.

Need to develop comprehensive strategies to tackle security concerns, political instability, and lack of awareness about Afghanistan as a travel destination. Building trust among international travelers through transparent communication and showcasing improvements will be essential.

Ensure that tourism development adheres to sustainable practices that protect the environment and promote social responsibility. Engaging local communities in the planning process is vital to ensure that benefits are shared equitably.

Review and enhance government policies that promote tourism. This includes creating favorable regulations, effective marketing strategies, and fostering international partnerships to support tourism initiatives.

Establish training programs focused on developing the skills of local communities in the tourism sector. Empowering locals to participate in and benefit from tourism initiatives is essential for long-term success. Collaborate with media outlets and tourism organizations to improve the perception of Afghanistan as a travel destination. Effective branding and marketing will help reshape public attitudes and stimulate interest.

Involve local communities in the tourism development process to ensure their voices are heard and they have a stake in tourism initiatives. Grassroots approaches should be promoted to foster greater community engagement.

Develop a strategic plan that outlines potential markets and new tourism products, focusing on promoting both cultural and adventure tourism. Regularly revisit and adapt this vision to keep it aligned with evolving market trends and community needs.

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