



THE ROLE OF TOURISM IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF AFGHANISTAN**Fayaz Gul Mazloom Yar¹, Majid Yasouri²**University of Nangarhar, Jalalabad, Afganistan¹University of Guilan, Gilan, Iran²

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KEYWORDS

tourism, development, tourism impacts, types of tourism, ecotourism

ABSTRACT

Tourism is recognized as a tool for development and has limitless growth potential. The tourism environment encompasses economic, social, and cultural factors and plays a vital role in the natural environment. Achieving sustainable tourism, which is linked to managing and preserving natural resources, is of utmost importance. This article utilizes credible sources to examine the role of tourism in sustainable development in Afghanistan. Given the significance of the tourism industry, this research aims to draw attention to the importance of tourism in Afghanistan's development. The primary research question revolves around how we can harness the potential of the tourism industry for Afghanistan's development. For this research, a descriptive-analytical method and literature reviews have been employed, with meticulous collection and analysis of reputable sources such as scholarly articles, books, reports, case studies, and relevant databases. The findings of this research indicate that due to Afghanistan's diverse cultural and environmental attractions, tourism can play a crucial role in sustainable development. This industry can contribute to economic growth, increased government tax revenue, enhanced international trade and export of tourism services, infrastructure improvement, job creation, environmental preservation, and cultural heritage conservation. It can also improve the economic conditions of women and promote handicraft industries. In conclusion, this research suggests that adequate measures are necessary to promote the sustainable growth of tourism in Afghanistan. Precise planning, a deep understanding of natural and cultural resources, environmental preservation, education, and employment generation should all be prioritized. Furthermore, promoting tourism requires shared responsibility from the government, local communities, and the tourism industry.

DOI: 10.58860/ijsh.v2i12.129**Corresponding Author:** Fayaz Gul Mazloom Yar**Email:** fmazloumyar@gmail.com**INTRODUCTION**

The growth and expansion of tourism as a significant phenomenon began in the late twentieth century and has continued rapidly into the new century (Lane & Kastenholtz, 2018). Today, tourism holds a special place in countries' economies. It is influential in improving economic, social, and cultural structures, particularly in developing countries (Rush-Marlowe, 2021).

Tourism is now one of the world's most essential and dynamic activities. The number of domestic and international tourists and the revenue generated from tourism continue to increase globally (Dwyer, 2015). However, it should be noted that if tourism development is not accompanied by policies and plans that consider the environment and prioritize sustainability, it may significantly impact the environment and ultimately diminish the appeal of tourist destinations. In other words,

sustainable tourism development requires proper planning and the protection of natural resources (Mason, 2020).

Tourism occurs in a geographical environment with natural and socio-cultural elements (Cavalheiro et al., 2020). Both of these environments impact tourism and are influenced by it. The impacts of tourism can be observed in various dimensions, including social, cultural, economic, political, and environmental. Due to this activity's complexity and broad scope, various negative impacts must be considered (Mason, 2020). In examining the impacts of tourism, there is often an excessive emphasis on the positive effects while neglecting or overlooking the negative ones. However, many studies indicate that the adverse effects of tourism outweigh the positive ones (Sharpley, 2014). In other words, unsustainable tourism growth can harm the environment and local communities (Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2019).

Despite Afghanistan's rich cultural and natural attractions and historical heritage, relevant income and international tourist arrival statistics show that Afghanistan has yet to capitalize on this potential fully. It has a minimal share compared to the global and regional context, yet it carries a negative balance (Badri et al., 2018). Afghanistan, with its rich history, culture, and breathtaking natural landscapes, has suffered from decades of internal conflicts and wars (Tomsen, 2013). Afghanistan possesses all the elements that can contribute to its sustainable development, and one of the critical factors in this regard is the tourism industry. Tourism is recognized as a powerful catalyst for economic and social development worldwide, and Afghanistan can also leverage its advantages (Mortazaei et al., 2019).

In this paper, we examine the role of tourism in the development of Afghanistan from various dimensions, including economic, social, environmental, and cultural aspects. We hope this article can serve as a milestone in determining the path to Afghanistan's sustainable development by promoting the growth of the tourism industry and attracting the attention of policymakers.

This research provides benefits such as potential increased revenue, strengthened intercultural relations, and improved country image, this research is expected to provide a comprehensive view for policy makers, business people, and the public to advance Afghanistan's tourism sector in a sustainable manner.

The aims of this research is to analyze the impact of the tourism sector on economic growth and social development in Afghanistan. The focus of the research involves evaluating the economic, social, and cultural impacts of tourism, as well as exploring efforts for infrastructure development, tourism awareness raising, and environmental protection.

METHOD

To investigate the topic of "The Role of Tourism in Development in Afghanistan," a literature review method was utilized. This method collected and analyzed credible sources such as scholarly articles, books, reports, case studies, and relevant databases related to the research topic. This analysis enables us to leverage previous research and comprehensively understand the desired topic. Additionally, the theoretical foundations related to the role of tourism in development were analyzed, and critical points derived from the research were carefully examined. This research allows us to incorporate and integrate the findings of previous studies and important points into various sections of our article, emphasizing the significance of these valuable resources.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Attractions in Afghanistan:

Despite being directly affected by war, Afghanistan boasts numerous natural and historical attractions. Travelers visiting Afghanistan may have low expectations for recreational purposes due to its significance in tourism and the need to fulfill their leisure needs, but the reality is quite different. Afghanistan has a delightful climate compared to its neighboring and friendly country, Iran. The people of this country share significant cultural similarities with the Iranian people. Afghanistan was a popular destination for foreign tourists in the past, and notable travelers like Marco Polo have explored this country. However, the conflicts of the past few decades have severely impacted the vital tourism industry, and it no longer enjoys the same level of prosperity as before (Mortazaei et al., 2019).

Tourist Attractions in Afghanistan:

The Minaret of Jam is one of Afghanistan's most remarkable tourist attractions. It is located in the mountainous region of Ghor Province. This minaret, built in the 12th century AD, stands at a height of 65 meters. In 2012, the World Heritage Preservation Center of UNESCO requested the inclusion of {text} in the list of world cultural heritage sites. This structure is considered the second-tallest brick minaret in the world, after the Qutb Minar in Delhi, India (Magacho et al., 2023).

Kajaki Dam: Undoubtedly, Kajaki Dam is one of Afghanistan's notable tourist destinations. The enigmatic structure, also known as the Kajaki Dam, is situated on the Helmand River, approximately 161 kilometers northwest of Kandahar. Band-e Amir, Afghanistan: Band-e Amir refers to a series of six natural lakes located in the highlands of the Hindu Kush in the Bamyán Province. These lakes are separated from each other by natural dams and are fed by springs. This region is also Afghanistan's first national park (Breckle et al., 2018)

Shah Du Shamshira, Afghanistan: Shah Du Shamshira is a historical figure from the legend of Leith bin Qais bin Abbas, one of the Arab military commanders against Kabulstan (Chawla et al., 2016). It is said that he was as fierce as a human could be, killing Kabul's soldiers with two swords after the destruction of Kabul's wall by a catapult. After breaking through the tenth wall, this warrior enters the battlefield, wielding two swords until he is eventually slain and laid to rest on the spot. After the Muslims conquered the region, they constructed a mosque adjacent to his tomb, calling it Shah Du Shamshira. The mosque has been destroyed several times (Chawla et al., 2016).

Ghazi Stadium in Afghanistan is considered one of the country's most sacred sites. It is dedicated to Khwaja Abdullah Ansari, an esteemed poet and mystic from the 11th century. Hundreds of people from various parts of Afghanistan visit it daily. The Herat Citadel is a historical structure in the city of Herat that has remained since the time of Alexander the Great. Babur's Gardens, Afghanistan: Babur's recreational and historical garden was built in 1528 in Kabul by the Mughal Emperor Babur. The Sultani Museum was established in 2004 by Ahmad Shah Sultani, a gold merchant in London during the civil wars. The museum houses a collection of ancient Afghan artifacts.

European Cemetery: This cemetery was built in 1879 by the British army to bury the deceased from the Second Anglo-Afghan War. There are approximately 150 graves in this cemetery, most of which belonged to members of the international community in Kabul before the war (Magacho et al., 2023). Kabul Zoo is one of the most popular recreational places in Kabul. This zoo features lions and tigers, making it attractive for animal enthusiasts (Magacho et al., 2023).

Darul Aman Palace, Afghanistan: The Darul Aman Palace is one of Afghanistan's most historic buildings. This structure was built in 1925 during the reign of Amanullah Khan in the 14th District of Kabul, previously known as Afsharatapa. During its construction, there were good political relations

between the governments of Afghanistan and Germany. Twenty-two German engineers were involved in urban development and construction work, including the construction of Darul Aman in 1925 (Boostani et al., 2018).

Chihilsitoun Palace, Afghanistan: Chihilsitoun Palace, located in Kabul, was considered one of the most magnificent palaces in Kabul before its destruction. This palace has four facades and is known by various names. In 1210 Hijri Shamsi (equivalent to 1796 AD), a structure known as the "World View Palace" was situated atop the Hindu Kush hill. Then, the western part of the same hill was called "Koh Chilisitoun" (Magacho et al., 2023).

Marjan Hill, also known as Nadir Khan Hill, is a prominent location in Kabul, adjacent to the Presidential Palace. It is also known as Nadir Khan Hill and Martyrs' Hill, as it is the final resting place of King Mohammad Nadir Shah, the former king of Afghanistan, and some of the members of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan who lost their lives. It is worth noting that during the reign of Amir Amanullah Khan, Afghan delegations sent some precious Afghan stones, including the "Naranjana" stone, to India (Chou, 2013).

The National Archives of Afghanistan, which houses over 15,000 documents dating back to the late 19th century, was established by Abdur Rahman Khan for his son. This archive contains significant documents, including some original and precious copies (Magacho et al., 2023).

Castle in Dahaneh, Bamiyan: Dahaneh is a collection of ancient ruins in Afghanistan that were obliterated by Genghis Khan's army in 1222 AD. **The Jam Mosque and Mausoleum:** The Jam Mosque in Herat was initially constructed by the Ghurids and underwent subsequent renovations by various rulers, such as the Timurids, Safavids, Mongols, and Uzbeks, each contributing to the architectural features of the building.

Khaja Shirza's Shrine is a holy site located in Kandahar, Afghanistan. It is one of Afghanistan's tourist attractions, situated near the Kandahar Mosque and facing the Governor's Office building (Boostani et al., 2018). **Chihil Qadam, Qandahar:** Chihil Qadam is a small historical tower located on a hill in the old city of Qandahar. This historical landmark on the landscape is one of Afghanistan's tourist attractions.

The **Baba Wali Shrine**, located along the Arghandab River, is a sacred site in Kandahar, Afghanistan. Gola Agha Sherzai, a former governor and military commander, spent millions of dollars to build this shrine in honor of a revered tribal leader (Magacho et al., 2023). The **Eidgah Mosque**, one of the largest mosques in Afghanistan, is located near Kandahar University. It was built with funding from Mullah Omar and has become a popular tourist destination (Boostani et al., 2018).

The **Shrine of Hazrat Ali (RA)** is a popular tourist attraction in Afghanistan. It is located in Mazar-i-Sharif and is characterized by its twin blue domes. People from all over the country come to pay their respects to him at the Mazar-i-Sharif shrine (Chawla et al., 2016). **Bamiyan Buddha Site:** The Buddha statues in Bamiyan have long been towering symbols of Buddhism, showcasing the grandeur of the Bamiyan Valley in Afghanistan. The more enormous Buddha, Vairocana, stood at 53 meters. In contrast, the smaller one, Shakyamuni, stood at 35 meters. Unfortunately, most of these statues have been destroyed.

The **City of Dahaneh** is located at the entrance of the Bamiyan Valley, above the cliffs, and along the Bamiyan River in Afghanistan. It is a historic site. The Ghurids constructed this area, dating back to the 6th century. It is the place where the grandson of Chingiz Khan was killed, resulting in the devastation of this valley due to his anger (Magacho et al., 2023).

Qala-e-Qazi: Just a 20-minute walk from Bamiyan, you will come across the remains of the last Ghurid stronghold in Bamiyan. **Qala-e-Qazi** is the most famous defensive castle in Bamiyan and is one of Afghanistan's top tourist attractions. **Ajdarha Lake:** Located five kilometers west of Bamiyan,

Ajdarha Lake, also known as the Dragon Lake, is said to be the site where remnants of a monstrous creature that once terrorized the region can be found, according to local legends (Boostani et al., 2018).

The Nine-Domed Mosque, also known as the Haj Piyada Mosque, is one of Afghanistan's famous tourist attractions in Balkh. Initially, it was a Buddhist temple that later transformed into a mosque with the arrival of Islam. This historical mosque is currently in poor condition, with its domes collapsed and its columns broken.

Bala Hissar, Balkh: Bala Hissar in Balkh is another tourist attraction in northeastern Balkh. It is said to have been built by Alexander the Great in the 3rd century BC and was once magnificent. However, this fortress has now turned into a mound of dirt.

The tourism industry in Afghanistan

In today's world, with modern management practices, tourism plays a significant role in the economic development of countries by serving as a source of income and job creation. Tourism development leads to economic growth, increased financial resources, and the promotion of human interaction. Furthermore, individuals' expenditure of additional income during their travels and global tourism activities has various impacts (Chou, 2013). However, this situation can pose challenges and cost cities and countries. Scientific management and proper planning are essential to generate more revenue in the tourism industry and diverse attractions should be utilized. Additionally, it is essential to emphasize the preservation of cultural and natural resources and catering to the needs of tourists. In summary, developing the tourism industry requires active management and rational long-term planning (Mortazaei et al., 2019).

The status of the tourism industry in Afghanistan has a tumultuous history marked by numerous ups and downs. In the past decades, the country has managed to attract tourists with its abundant cultural, historical, and natural attractions. Travel companies emerged in the 1930s and 1940s, offering accommodation, transportation, and guided tours to tourist attractions. A period known as the "Golden Age of Tourism" occurred from the 1950s to the 1970s, accompanied by political stability and increased tourism infrastructure in the country. During this period, luxurious hotels, restaurants, and tourist companies primarily catered to Westerners. Archaeological and skiing tours were also trendy during this era (Mortazaei et al., 2019).

Moreover, Afghanistan was renowned as a stop on the famous Hippie Trail. The Hippie Trail started in Europe, passed through Iran and Afghanistan, and continued to India and Thailand. Hippies were a group of Western youths with distinct behaviors and beliefs who traveled extensively to Afghanistan during the 1960s and 1970s. However, this route stopped after the September 7, 1978, coup in Afghanistan (Breckle et al., 2018). The importance of the tourism industry in Afghanistan should also be emphasized. Tourism is globally recognized as a significant source of income and economic development. According to global statistics, the tourism industry generated over \$1 trillion in revenue in 2021. This industry is considered a direct and indirect source of income for countries. It can create many jobs in Afghanistan (Magacho et al., 2023).

Afghanistan's neighboring countries continue to show keen interest in developing the tourism industry. Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, and other countries are attempting to attract tourists by leveraging their natural and cultural assets. These countries have successfully positioned themselves as international tourist destinations through substantial investments and extensive advertising. Afghanistan boasts a plethora of historical, religious, and natural attractions that can attract tourists. This includes historical regions such as Nangarhar, Bamiyan, Herat, and Ghor; religious attractions like Mazar-i-Sharif and Balkh; and diverse natural landscapes, ranging from mountains to plains.

However, the tourism industry in Afghanistan faces various challenges. Establishing security and social order, managing natural and historical resources effectively, and developing advertising and tourism infrastructure are key issues that need to be addressed for Afghanistan to be recognized as a popular tourist destination.

The Role of Tourism in Development in Afghanistan

Tourism as an Economic Growth Driver: Tourism, being one of the world's largest industries, can significantly boost Afghanistan's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and generate increased tax revenue for the government. Additionally, the foreign exchange earnings generated from tourism can be invested in various sectors, further enhancing economic growth (Pablo-Romero & Molina, 2013).

Enhancing International Trade: The tourism industry can boost international trade in Afghanistan and increase the country's foreign exchange income. Increasing exports of tourism services to other countries can enhance Afghanistan's standing in the global market (Lin et al., 2021).

Attracting Foreign Investments: Investing in the tourism industry can provide an opportunity to attract foreign investments to Afghanistan. This industry ranks second globally in terms of foreign investment growth rates. It can contribute to developing tourism-related infrastructure and services (Rush-Marlowe, 2021).

Infrastructure Improvement: Tourism development can enhance infrastructure in Afghanistan, such as airports, roads, water supply systems, energy, healthcare services, and security. These improvements can also benefit the local community (Hussain, 2019). **Supporting Low-Income and Developing Countries:** Tourism can provide essential foreign exchange resources for low-income and developing countries, aiding their economic and social development. The tourism industry can be recognized as a primary source of foreign exchange income (Rush-Marlowe, 2021).

Job Creation: The tourism industry can potentially create millions of meaningful and impactful jobs in Afghanistan, benefiting youth, ethnic minorities, women, and marginalized groups. These jobs can contribute to reducing poverty and improving economic conditions in various regions of the country (Ralston, 2014). **Facilitating Widespread Economic Growth:** Tourism, as an industry with an extensive supply chain, can promote overall economic growth. It leverages various economic sectors, including transportation, accommodation, food, agriculture, energy, water, tourism attractions, culture, arts, and small businesses (Ralston, 2014).

Strengthening Rural Communities: Rural tourism development can promote economic diversity in villages, create jobs for various segments of society, and contribute to preserving historical buildings and cultural heritage in rural areas (Rush-Marlowe, 2021). **Enhancing Urban Areas:** The tourism industry can stimulate competitiveness in cities and encourage individuals to invest in the development of urban areas. These actions can guarantee infrastructure improvement and improve citizens' quality of life (Cheng et al., 2022).

Leveraging Information Technology: Information technology can enhance Afghanistan's tourism industry. Through online systems and websites, various facilities and experiences can be offered to tourists, thereby increasing revenue (Lin et al., 2021). **Empowering Women Economically:** The tourism industry is one in which women can actively participate. This participation can increase income and economic empowerment for women in Afghanistan (Karimi & Darban Astane, 2022).

Supporting Handicrafts: With tourism development, artisans and artists can earn more income by selling their products to tourists. This initiative can contribute to the development of handicrafts and strengthen the local economy (Rush-Marlowe, 2021).

Environmental Conservation: Preserving the environment in the tourism industry can help safeguard Afghanistan's natural resources and attractions. These efforts can contribute to the country's sustainable development (Rush-Marlowe, 2021).

Cultural Promotion and Exchange: Tourists gain awareness of the culture and history of different nations. This can facilitate cultural exchange and enhance mutual understanding among nations (Lin et al., 2021). To achieve sustainable development goals, tourism planning must be adequately focused. To achieve this, it is necessary to replace small-scale tourism with a larger, more integrated, and resource-dependent form of tourism, shifting policies from focusing on quantity to quality (Malek & Costa, 2015).

CONCLUSION

To achieve sustainable tourism, the initial step involves identifying the natural attractions and potential and the barriers and constraints to tourism development. Effective planning and prediction will be possible with awareness and understanding of each region's potential and actual capabilities. Recognizing each region's economic, natural, and human potential enables researchers and planners to offer improved and more practical solutions for regional tourism development, considering the current situation and the region's capacity. This approach can generate income opportunities, improve the socio-economic well-being of the region, and ultimately promote sustainable development. Tourism plays a crucial role in the development of Afghanistan. This industry can contribute to economic growth and increase government tax revenue. Furthermore, increasing international trade and promoting the export of tourism services can enhance Afghanistan's competitiveness in the global market. Tourism development can also aid in improving infrastructure, creating jobs, and preserving environmental and cultural heritage. This industry can improve the economic conditions of women and promote handicrafts. Additionally, cultural exchange and mutual understanding between nations can be fostered through tourism, increasing awareness of environmental issues, and sustainable development. Ultimately, this industry can stimulate competitiveness in Afghan cities and contribute to urban development.

Given the importance of tourism in Afghanistan's development, taking adequate measures to promote this industry is crucial. Precise planning, knowledge of natural and cultural resources, environmental conservation, education improvement, and employment generation should all be priorities. Moreover, promoting tourism is a shared responsibility among the government, local communities, and the tourism industry. With its abundant natural and historical sites, Afghanistan can contribute to sustainable development and enhance the socio-economic well-being of its people by efficiently utilizing these resources. By collaborating with all relevant institutions and promoting sustainable tourism development, the country can become an attractive tourist destination regionally and globally. This will improve people's quality of life and preserve their natural and cultural resources.

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