

South Asia Buddhist Cultural and Heritage Tourism

Meeting for Revival of Buddhist Circuit

Background

1. Under a Trust Fund, supported by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) of the Government of Australia, the Pakistan Trade and Investment Policy Program (PTIPP) is under way 'to support Pakistan's efforts to increase regional trade and investment, with a special focus on strengthening links to other regional countries'. The PTIPP supports development and implementation of a medium-term trade policy and associated institutional changes. The principal executing agency within Pakistan is the Ministry of Commerce, except in the case of sub-national initiatives to be implemented by the relevant provincial authorities.
2. Tourism is one of the strategic initiatives to promote regional economic and social integration as well as foster economic development of the communities inhabiting areas around cultural and heritage sites. Under the PTIPP, the World Bank is providing a Non-Lending Technical Assistance (NLTA) to government of Punjab for promoting Tourism, as one of its four pillars. The work done so far comprehensively covers multiple tourism circuits. The key studies include; (i) a survey in six South and East Asian Countries; (ii) a survey in UK, USA and Canada; and (iii) Infrastructure Assessment.

Buddhist Circuit

3. All the countries of the region share Buddhist heritage. The Buddhist circuit is a globally important route for over 350 million Buddhists, along the life of Buddha starting from Lumbini (Nepal), where he was born. Buddhist heritage remains are found not only in Nepal but also in abundance in India as well as in Sri Lanka. Paharpur, and Moinamoti in Bangladesh also have numerous Buddhist remains, with former being declared as UNESCO World Heritage Site. Afghanistan as part of Gandhara kingdom but also independent of it has a list of Buddhist heritage sites, including Red City in Bamyan and Mes Aynak.
4. Pakistan is cradle of glory of Buddhist culture manifested in a number of remains, including two world heritage sites (Taxila and Thakt-a-Bhai) and Gandhara art. Taking into consideration the cultural and belief systems as well as the pilgrimage trends of the majority followers of Mahayana, Theravada and Tantric schools, Pakistan has the most unique and the widest range sites. Statistics indicate that the Buddhist trail attracts a small fraction of potential Buddhist tourists each year owing to multiple reasons.
5. Swat, Mardan, Peshawar, Taxila and Mankiala are few of the names that house hundreds of Buddhist heritage sites in Pakistan. Peshawar city alone has more than 500 Buddhist sites¹ but in despair. Korean Buddhism is an off-shoot of Gandhara Buddhism and Pakistan is the spiritual home to all Korean Buddhists. Maranatha the founder of Korean Buddhism travelled from Chota Lahore, in Swabi Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, to Korea in 384 AD and introduced Buddha's Dharma. He is ever since one of the most celebrated personalities in Korea. Thus, Pakistan also has the potential to be one of the most significant destinations for Buddhist pilgrimages.
6. Prior to 9/11, South Asia Buddhist Circuit, which also included adventure tourism, used to be a thriving tourist attraction, especially in Pakistan. The circuit used to start from Pakistan's

¹ <https://www.buddhistdoor.net/news/ancient-buddhist-sites-in-pakistan-in-urgent-need-of-conservation>

northern areas, with a stopover at Lahore. From Lahore the tourists would continue to India, especially Buddha Gya, and from there to Nepal. Lahore Museum was a special attraction, whereas Fasting Buddha is believed to be the only such piece in the world, it is believed that more than half of the Gandhara period statues discovered in the subcontinent are in Lahore Museum.

7. Major clientele for the circuit was from Germany, Switzerland and France. German, Swiss and French tour operators used to offer packages varying from one week to three months, including jeep safaris. Some of the packages would start from China but majority would commence from Pakistan.

8. The economic benefits arising of tourism helped not in only creating jobs, it also resulted in protection and conservation of historical sites as they were rightly perceived as ‘income generators’. Decline in tourism, because of security and other reasons, has affected incomes and has also contributed to neglect of the sites. For example, more than 500 historically-significant sites in Peshawar city require immediate preservation and restoration. Inexperienced contractors and builders given the task of restoration have further ruined such structures². In Afghanistan the 5000 years old city of Mes Aynak needs immediate attention to be saved and put on the map, though under the current security situation access will be an issue.

9. Buddhist cultural heritage, on one hand, has the potential of harnessing tourism potential, and on the other hand, needs immediate attention to protection and conservation. This protection and conservation is not only required from ever-increasing human settlements but also from natural disasters. The 2015 Nepal earthquake not only resulted in heavy losses to human life and property, it also razed a number of historical monuments, Buddhist and Hindu, to ground. The earthquake resulted in heavy damages to 2,900 heritage sites in 20 affected districts with estimated 25% completely destroyed. In Kathmandu valley alone, seven out of ten world heritage sites suffered heavy damages. The following table estimates damages³ caused to heritage sites:

	Damage*	Loss	Total	Private/ community*	Public
heritage sites in 16 districts	7,875	1,409	9,284	-	9,284
monasteries & historic structures (older than 100 years)	5,300	530	5,830	5,830	-
monasteries & historic structures (less than 100 years old)	2,835	283	3,118	3,118	-
temples in remote areas	900	90	990		990
Total	16,910	2,313	19,223	8,948	10,274

**estimates are in NPR Million*

Economics of Tourism and Heritage Sites

10. World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) in its ‘Travel and Tourism Economic Impact 2017’ states, “The total contribution of Travel & Tourism to GDP was USD7,613.3bn (10.2% of GDP) in 2016, and is forecast to rise by 3.6% in 2017, and to rise by 3.9% pa to USD11,512.9bn (11.4% of GDP) in 2027. In 2016 Travel & Tourism directly supported 108,741,000 jobs (3.6% of total employment). This is expected to rise by 2.1% in 2017 and rise by 2.2% pa to 138,086,000 jobs (4.0% of total employment) in 2027. In 2016, the total contribution of Travel & Tourism to employment, including jobs indirectly supported by the Visitor exports generated USD1,401.5bn

² <https://www.buddhistdoor.net/news/ancient-buddhist-sites-in-pakistan-in-urgent-need-of-conservation>

³ Post Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) 2015

(6.6% of total exports) in 2016. This is forecast to grow by 4.5% in 2017, and grow by 4.3% pa, from 2017-2027, to USD2,221.0bn in 2027 (7.2% of total). Travel & Tourism investment in 2016 was USD806.5bn, or 4.4% of total investment. It should rise by 4.1% in 2017, and rise by 4.5% pa over the next ten years to USD1,307.1bn in 2027 (5.0% of total).” Studies also inform that around 91% of the wealth generated through tourism is retained within the country.

11. As data indicates, tourism is likely to experience substantial increase globally. Benefits of increase in tourism can further be enhanced with regional packages, resulting not only in furthering tourism but also creating awareness on cultures and heritage across countries. Whereas growth in tourism would bring enhanced incomes to communities, it will increase pressure on heritage sites and infrastructure. Therefore, it is important that stakeholders join hands to promote sustainable tourism that helps not only in sustaining economic growth but also preserving heritage sites.

12. After facing a decline in tourism until 2014/15, Pakistan is experiencing increase in domestic tourism as well. PTDC estimates an increase of 38.3 million domestic tourists accounting 30% increase in 2016⁴. WTTC data indicates⁵ that after a continuous decline over years, situation started improving in 2014:

PAKISTAN (PKRbn, real 2016 prices)	2014	2015	2016	2017E	2027F
Domestic expenditure (includes Government individual spending)	1153.1	1127.7	1175.7	1238	2132
Internal tourism consumption	1259	1222.9	1269.5	1334.7	2336
Direct contribution of Travel Tourism to GDP	785.2	764.1	793	833.8	1,432.10
Employment impacts ('000) Direct contribution of Travel & Tourism to employment	1,417.70	1,316.90	1,337.70	1,368.20	1,757.50
Total contribution of Travel & Tourism to employment	3,571.00	3,474.80	3,550.40	3,657.10	4,782.90
Expenditure on outbound travel	231	239.5	256.4	275.5	464.4

SAARC Tourism Round Table

13. On July 25th, 2017, at the SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCI) round table on “Connectivity and Tourism” it was concluded that to start with on regional tourism Buddhist circuit should be focused as it is common heritage for all the countries of the region and is least controversial.

14. It was agreed to organize a meeting of interested tour operators aiming at collaboration for promoting joint cross-countries tourism packages. It is suggested to engage tour operators from across the region, develop mechanisms for offering regional Buddhist circuit packages. These packages will not involve financial transaction but will include coordination for designing of packages, publicity, border to border transfers etc.

⁴ <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-09-27/as-terror-attacks-recede-tourism-in-pakistan-starts-to-thrive>

⁵ Travel and Tourism Economic Impact 2017, Country Report Pakistan

Proposal

15. It is proposed to reach out to historians as well as cultural and heritage conservation experts and tour operators, or their representative bodies, to identify experts and tour operators interested in joining such an initiative.

Experts

16. Two experts on Buddhist history and two on conservation will be invited. The experts will be invited to share information on the cultural and heritage wealth the region possesses, whereas conservation experts will be requested to suggest ways and means to support sustainable tourism that should result in 'zero' harm to heritage sites.

17. Two Disaster Risk Management Experts will be invited to look at possibility of inclusion of Disaster Risk Assessment of Heritage Sites in World Bank Projects and restoration of damaged sites.

18. A tourism expert from the World Heritage Center, UNESCO, Paris

Tour Operators

19. The tour operators will be provided with information on Buddhist attractions in concerned countries. The interested tour operators will be linked with each other via emails.

20. The interested tour operators will be provided with information on the background work done as well specific attractions respective countries offer.

21. The interested tour operators will be invited to participate in a meeting, proposed to be held end November/ early December. The participating tour operators will be facilitated to go through the circuit themselves. The tour operators will start the circuit from Pakistan, then go to Sri Lanka, followed by India circuit and ending at Lumbini Nepal.

22. Eight to ten tour operators from across the region will be invited on cost sharing basis. It is proposed that local hospitality is borne by inviting agency whereas participating operators should bear cost of international travel.

Potential Clientele

23. Keeping in view visa policies within the region, it is proposed to focus potential Buddhist tourists from East Asia then western tourists.

24. Keeping in view growing domestic tourism, it is imperative that domestic tourists visiting these sites are educated and made aware of the significance of preservation and maintenance.

Timeframe

25. In order for the activity to take place as per proposed schedule, it is imperative that the month of October is utilized for identification of tour operators and contacting donor agencies

Hosts

26. It is proposed the World Bank and UNESCO be joint host for the event.

Linkage Punjab Tourism for Economic Growth Project (PTEG)

27. Government of Punjab has signed a US \$ 50 million with the World Bank. The project is likely to commence activities in November 2017. The project will not only support site management, it also will support policy reforms and institutional restructuring.

28. During preparation a number of studies were conducted during project preparation. Salient points of the studies are attached herewith.

29. The proposed activity is expected to contribute significantly to PTEG project, summarized as follows:

1. It will immediately put the project on the regional map
2. Tour operators will have developed linkages to develop cross-country packages
3. The project team will get firsthand knowledge of one of the most potential circuits, identified through PTIPP NLTA