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‘DS View’, an academic activity in which students, researchers and faculty are encouraged to write short academic essays on the Development discourse, aims to generate discussion on issues concurrent to the times we are living in. The topical range may include academic debates on issues such as poverty, inequality, gender, conflict and human security. The essay for DS View can be expository, argumentative, persuasive or analytical.

The topic of 15th DS View is **‘Tourism Industry in Pakistan: Potential and Way Forward’** authored by Mr. Zain Ul Abideen (MPhil DS 2019).

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Tourism Industry in Pakistan: Potential and Way Forward

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Tourism is one of the fastest growing industries across the globe. It plays a vital role in economic growth, development and promotion of culture. Pakistan is among those countries which have great potential for tourism and it ranges from historical, archaeological, religious sites to beautiful landscape and heritage. By promoting tourism, Pakistan can not only generate a great deal of revenue to support its struggling economy but also promote its culture, tradition and positive image in the world.

Pakistan is a home to world's old civilization of Indus Valley which consequently gave birth to diverse cultures across the subcontinent. Apart from the Indus Valley civilization, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist and Sikh traditions are also present in Pakistan. In the wake of terrorism and after 9/11, Pakistan has witnessed sharp decline in tourism. Foreign tourists are reluctant to visit Pakistan as it is considered least safe place to visit owing to security threats. Pakistan needs to revive its tourism industry on war footing basis and must map out comprehensive tourism policy to promote the unexplored beauty of Pakistan.

There is no doubt about the fact that Pakistan is full of breathtaking and beautiful landscape and it can draw economic benefits from its tourism industry, if appropriate measures are taken by the government. Several countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, France and America are reaping economic benefits from their tourism industry. Following are some of the suggestions if taken seriously may revive tourism industry in Pakistan.

First of all, Pakistan can boost its tourism industry by developing infrastructure of tourist sites. Furthermore, transport facility and roads leading to different tourist destinations should be developed to pave the way for tourists to access destinations more easily. Developed roads will provide tourists more comfortable and safe journey. Moreover, road clearing and rescue services need to be improved. Tourists face road blockage for many days due to land sliding and heavy snow fall at some destinations. They remain stuck on roads for 2 to 3 days with their families and the same has been reported by media, which resultantly discourage tourists to visit these places.

Secondly, Pakistan can attract international tourists through proper destination marketing. Pakistan had launched a marketing campaign in 2007 under the title "Visit Pakistan". Since then no campaign has been launched so far. Many countries around the world spend billions of dollars on advertisements which attract millions of tourists across the globe and consequently boost their tourism industry. With the advent of different social media applications, Pakistan can spread documentaries, short videos showcasing beauty, landscape, culture and traditions on social media to attract tourists. The World Economic Forum's Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report placed Pakistan in the top 25 percent of global destinations for its World Heritage sites. So Pakistan must also follow the footsteps of those countries that use media as an effective tool to promote tourism.

Thirdly, ease in visa restriction can help Pakistan to revive its tourism industry. Steps taken in this regard by the current government are commendable where it has extended visa on arrival facility to 50 countries and e-visa facility to 175 countries which will consequently boost tourism in Pakistan. In 2013, approximately 0.5 million tourists visited Pakistan contributing only \$298 million, and in 2017 tourists influx has risen to 1.75 million¹, which is a good sign. Further, the tourism department can facilitate tourists by providing services like accommodation, transportation and tour packages which will increase tourism activities in Pakistan.

Fourthly, there is dire need of national tourism policy; Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation (PTDC) needs to chalk out effective strategy in order to give boost to tourism industry in

¹ According to PTDC 1.75m tourists visited Pakistan in 2017 (April 25, 2018. Dawn).

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1403800>

Pakistan. PTDC can promote public private partnership in order to create competitive tourism market at tourist's sites. It should regulate and standardize the quality of facilities and also to monitor these facilities to improve and maintain facilities and services of hospitality industry. After 18th Amendment and devolution of powers to the provinces, multiple issues in tourism department can be addressed on policy front. Legislators must frame such an inclusive policy that may include Gilgit-Baltistan and Azad Kashmir in our national tourism policy to give boost to tourism industry in Pakistan.

Finally, government can invite suggestions and policy measures from community members, think tanks and tourists to promote tourism in Pakistan. Additionally, government should launch a marketing campaign and use electronic and social media as a tool to attract tourists. Brochures or pamphlets of prominent tourist destinations be designed and be made available on internet by tourism department.

Pakistan has great potential for tourism and can reap huge economic benefits. It is estimated that tourism industry will contribute \$9.5 billion (PKR1 trillion) to the economy by 2025. Pakistan can learn from Muslim countries like Turkey, Malaysia, United Arab Emirates which have also developed strategies to boost their tourism industry. The present government has done commendable job by relaxing visa policies. Further, decade long operations against terrorists by army personnel has improved security situation as well. It is a high time for Pakistan to move forward to reap economic benefits from tourism.

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