



Research on the Tourism Potential in Poonch District of UT Jammu and Kashmir

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Abstract: *In this study, we look at the tourism potentials in Jammu and Kashmir's Poonch District and offer recommendations for how to grow tourism there. Due to its tremendous tourism potential, India's Jammu and Kashmir area is one of the most well-known travel destinations. Five border districts—Poonch, Rajouri, Baramulla, Bandipora, and Kupwara—share Indian international boundaries with Pakistan, Afghanistan, and China at the moment, out of the 20 districts that make up Jammu and Kashmir. Border towns in Jammu and Kashmir are well-known for their numerous historical sites, mountain peaks, scenic beauty, wildlife, local cultures, religious sites, etc. The Poonch district has excellent potential to draw both domestic and foreign tourists. The purpose of this study was to identify the key tourist destinations in the area and to investigate the potential of tourism for employment opportunities, financial gains, and the eradication of poverty. Finally, recommendations are made for enhancing and using these tourist attractions. Despite having strong tourism potential, it was discovered that border regions of Jammu and Kashmir are generally economically underdeveloped. It was determined that there is a critical need to build a fundamental tourist infrastructure in the study region as well as to encourage locals to become more knowledgeable about tourism.*

Keywords: *Border Tourism, Border Destinations, Jammu, Kashmir Valley, Poonch.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Poonch is frequently referred to as "Mini Kashmir" because to its stunning natural surroundings, glamorous tourist attractions, and morally upright populace. It has been blessed with incredible natural beauty; snow-capped mountains, dense forests, lush green meadows, natural lakes, waterfalls, etc. enhance the beauty and draw in nature-loving visitors. Because



Poonch has such a strong religious past, a lot of pilgrims from all over the world come here every year. It is a border district located along the Line of Control in the Jammu and Kashmir area that stands out on the map due to trade across the LOC and a crossing point in the Poonch Jammu region at Chakan-da-Bagh.

The massive Pir Panjal range, with its highest peak TATAKUTI rising at 15560 feet, separates the border district Poonch of the Jammu region from Kashmir valley, while the famous Mughal Road connects district Poonch with Kashmir Valley. Poonch district has significant historical value since it has been under the control of several local and foreign rulers throughout history. A well-known Chinese traveller named Hiuen Tsang described the Poonch district in the sixth century as being known for its great tea called Musloom, and good horses. Before modern politics got involved, the huge expanses, rivers, deserts, lakes, and mountains in the Jammu and Kashmir region served as the region's borders and provided free access to neighbouring provinces. According to Sofield (2006), a border in the modern political landscape is simply a line dividing administrative divisions, countries, or other areas. This line may be conceptual (latitudinal and longitudinal geometrical lines on a map), physical (such as the Great Wall of China or the Berlin Wall), or even man-made. Global borderlands gained significant political, social, and cultural significance. The boundaries are the physical separations between nations or states that either serve as a check on the movement of people and goods across borders or as a sign of an ever-evolving entry point for communication and exchange (Hageman *et al.* 2004: 2). The term "border tourism" refers to travelling to border regions to experience the various cultures, learn about them, conduct business, or even just to visit friends and family that reside near or on either side of the border in issue. As we can see from other countries throughout the world, millions of visitors visit border regions every year in Jammu and Kashmir. J&K occupied 222,236 km² of territory in 1947, of which 78,114 km² were illegally taken by Pakistan and 37,555 km² by China.

In addition, Pakistan gave China 5,180 square kilometres of J&K unlawfully in violation of the Sino-Pakistan Boundary Agreement from March 1963. Currently, Pakistan and the Jammu and Kashmir region share a 665 km long international border (the Kashmir Valley is 460 km long and Jammu is 205 km long). There is a big potential for increased border tourism in Jammu and Kashmir because the border regions of that region are rich in natural resources. Out of the 20 districts in the Jammu and Kashmir area, five are border districts: Poonch and Rajouri in the Jammu region, and Baramulla, Bandipora, and Kupwara in the Kashmir region.

In the current study, we analyse the tourist attractions in Jammu region's border district Poonch and, in the end, provide recommendations for the development of tourism in border Poonch. We find several studies on border tourism in the literature. It was discovered that borders are the obstructions between the states where the control of cross-border trade and the movement of people is exercised, or to denote the developing entryway to facilitating interaction and interchange (Hageman *et al.* 2004: 2). As a result of political unrest, the surrounding areas acquire a bad reputation, which is the primary cause of visitors' avoidance of border regions, which they view as untrustworthy travel destinations due to the presence of



large populations (Timothy, 2001). Numerous studies (e.g., Palomaki, 1994; Tenhiala, 1994; Timothy, 1999a; Wachowiak, 1994; Butler, 1996; Krakover, 1985; Timothy, 95b; Timothy, 2000; Timothy, 2001; Greer, 2002; Timothy and Tosun, 2003) have revealed that the growth of border tourism is significantly influenced by improved relations between two states. Additionally, in their studies, Scott (1995), Wilson and Donnan (1998) extensively covered the psychological factors that determine conduct in both tourists and locals in relation to the border tourism concept. According to reports (e.g., Getz, 1993; Stansfield and Rickert, 1970), Europe's borderlands are exploited for commercial advantage and have turned into well-liked tourist destinations for leisure and enjoyment. According to a study (Hageman *et al.* 2004, 2004), where there are no boundaries for trade and development, there has been a revolution in global trade. Border tourism is difficult to promote due to restrictions on cross-border travel, according to past studies in J&K (Bhat & Bhat, 2006; Yusuf, 2007; Ashraf, 2010). There are a number of lovely sites in the Poonch district that can be developed for the intended tourism development purpose in order to raise the living standards of those who reside there.

2. METHODOLOGY

The majority of the data used in this study was gathered from secondary sources. The researchers' primary sources include field trips, conversations with locals or visitors who shared their knowledge and experiences with them. Additionally, the government websites with their online resources were used to gather the data for this study. The information was also gathered through newspapers, articles, and journals.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The two geographical regions of Jammu and Kashmir are significantly distinct from one another. These two regions are Jammu and Kashmir, and they have quite varied and fairly distinctive cultures, languages, climates, and other characteristics. The potential for tourism is enormous in all of J&K's border districts, including Poonch, Rajouri, Baramulla, Bandipora, and Kupwara. This study discusses the district of Poonch's potential for both natural and manufactured tourism. Poonch, a remote district of Jammu and Kashmir, is bordered on the north, west and south by the Line of Control. The Poonch district was split in two during the 1947–1948 war; one portion is now under Indian administration, and the other is now a part of Pakistan.

Poonch is a district managed by the Indian government, and the city also contains four tehsils. According to the 2011 census, there are 476,820 people living in the Poonch district. The major ethnic groups in Jammu and Kashmir's Poonch district are the Gujjars, Kashmiris, Bakerwals, Rajputs, and Paharis. District Poonch has the following tourism potentials:

1. Poonch Fort:

Raja Razak Khan laid the groundwork for Raja Rustam Khan to build this fort in 1751. In the centre of the dilapidated Poonch district stands this significant fort. Government offices are

located in one area of the fort. Due to neglect, even grass and plants have grown on the walls of this stunning fort, which blends Islamic, Sikh, and European architectural elements.



Poonch Fort

2. Ram Kund:

One of the holiest ancient Hindu temples, was built by Raja Lalitaditya between 724 and 761 AD and is situated in Mandhir, Poonch. It is also thought that the temple was erected during Lord Rama's visit to Kashmir. According to Kalhana in Raj Tarangni, there is proof that Bagwan Shri Ram Chandra Ji built the temple.

3. Buddha Amaranth Shrine:

After Amarnath Ji, which is located at Rajpoura, Mandi in District Poonch, the Buddha Amaranth Shrine is the second most revered Hindu holy site in Kashmir. In addition, the Shive Ling was founded here. This shrine is older than the Amarnath Ji in Kashmir. The Plush River flows nearby, and it is located in the Pir Panchal Mountain Range's foothills. The temple's four doorways serve as a visual representation of the fact that it is open to all four Hindu castes.

4. Nangali Sahib Gurdawara:

The largest Sikh shrine in J&K and one of the largest in north India is located close to the banks of the Dranguli River in Poonch and is known as Nangali Sahib Gurdawara. In the year 1803, it was built by Thakur Bhai Mela Singh Ji. There, devotees can access the free Langar, which has 70 guest rooms and a communal kitchen.

5. Noori Chammb

Noori Chammb, which is named after the Mughal Queen Noor Jahan, is renowned for its natural beauty and water fall. It is located 45 kilometres from Poonch town in Surankote Tehsil, close to Behram Galla. As the stream falls, thick clouds of water vapour form, covering the environment and spreading everywhere. In honour of his adored queen Noor Jahan, whose name the Emperor Jahangir adopted, he gave the autumn the name Noori Chammb. The Mughal queen liked to come here to unwind. After taking a bath, she used to do her makeup in front of the mirror that had been attached to the mountain wall next to the

fall. Noori Chamb is uninhabited oasis is 45 km from Poonch, the region's largest town, in the Surankote valley. According to legend, the Mughal King Jahangir was so moved by the area's beauty that he decided to name it after his beautiful wife Noor Jahan. Since then, this area has been referred to as Noori Chammb. Additionally, there is a stunning waterfall nearby where Queen Noor Jahan once had a dip.



Noori Chammb

6. Bufliaz:

39 Kilometres (km) to the east of Poonch town, in the foothills of the Peer Rattan range, is the lovely hillside destination of Bufliaz. The Greek ruler Alexander the Great's horse, named Bufliaz, died here and was interred in this community. As a result, this location is today known as Bufliaz. From here, the lovely Mughal Road also begins.

Bufliaz is a beautiful hill spot situated on the foothills of the Peer Rattan range, 39 Kms east of Poonch town. Bufliaz was the horse of the Greek king Alexander the Great, who died here and was buried in this village, since then this spot is known as Bufliaz. The beautiful Mughal Road also starts from here.



7. LOC Trade Centre (Chakkan Da Bagh Poonch)

It is situated approximately 8 kilometres south of Poonch Town on the 46-kilometer-long cross LOC Poonch-Rawlakote route. Every week, Monday through Friday, loaded trucks from POK arrive and are unloaded for further shipment. Similar to this, Jammu and Poonch's loaded trucks report at the Trade Centre before crossing the LOC to unload on the other side. In addition, passengers from split-up families who cross the LOC from either side are also stopped here for a security check. Following accusations that it was being "misused" by elements from across the border to smuggle firearms, drugs, and counterfeit money, India temporarily suspended cross-LoC trade at two sites along the Line of Control (LoC) in Jammu and Kashmir on April 18, 2019.



Chakkan Da Bagh

8. Mandi

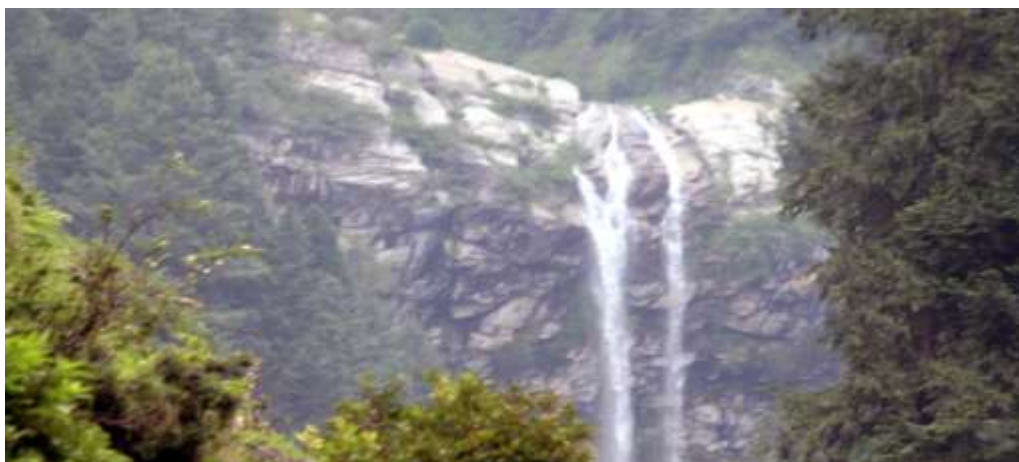
It is a tiny settlement located close to the meeting point of two streams, the Gagri and Pulsta, in a small valley surrounded by low, steep hills covered with grass. It is in this village that Mandir Swami Budha Amar Nath Ji is located. 20 km separate Mandi from Poonch town. Mandi has been a popular destination for travellers to visit in the summer because of its pleasant climate and close proximity to the Poonch town. The majority of people in the Mandi area speak Kashmiri.



Shri Budha Amarnath Ji

9. Nandishool

The lovely Nandishool waterfall is located about 6 kilometres from Sultan Pathri and 12 kilometres from Loran. A glacier receives water that falls from Pir Panchal. The fall is around 150 feet high. The Rural Development Department built one tourist cottage close to Nandishool.



Nandishool

10. Loran

An additional tourist destination is Loran, a small village 35 km from Poonch that is located at the base of the Pir Panjal range's tall mountains. The Loran Nallah, which runs through this picturesque settlement, adds to its allure. Up until 1542 A.D., Loran served as the seat of government for the Hindu-ruled Poonch state. Back then, it was known as Loran-Kote. The Lohar Kote fort, formerly known as the Gateway of Kashmir, is in ruins.



Loran Valley

11. Mughal Road & Pir Ki Gali

The Mughal Road began in Agra (in UP), the Mughal capital. It made its way via Lahore (now in Pakistan), Poonch, and Rajouri before arriving in the valley at Srinagar. Before Jahangir (early 17th century) went on it and changed its name to the Mughal route, the Poonch section of a road was known as the Namak road (perhaps the "salt road"). The Mughal Road is an alternative route to the Kashmir Valley that has shortened the journey for residents of the Rajouri and Poonch districts. From Buffliaz to Shopian, the Mughal Road is 84 kilometres. It also connects with beautiful locations including Buffliaz, Behramgala, Chandimarh, Dugran, Pushana, Chatta Pani, Mansar, and Peer Ki Gali. From this route, one may see the well-known meadows of Sarimastan and Girjan.



Pir Ki Gali

At 1140 feet, Pir Ki Gali is a lovely natural setting. At the exact intersection of Poonch and Shopian, the elevation is above sea level. Pir marg, a meadow surrounded by snow-capped mountains, cool winds, and a tribal way of life, begins at pir gali, the summit of a 240km trail. With the opening of the Mughal road, great hustle and bustle starts at Pir gali, and at the same time, the surrounding natural resort and beautiful valley of seven lakes, Panj tarni meadow, Girjan Doke, Tata kutti, peak, Chatta pani, and Glacier come into limelight, which are ideal for scenic and adventure travel. The 84 km long Pir Panchal Range Mughal Road passes through the heart of Pir Panchal via Pir gali, which is 43 km away from Buffliaz Poonch and 41km from Shopian with the opening of Mughal road.



Pir Ki Gali

12. Than Pir

It is located on a tributary of the Doda Range of Mountains in Tehsil Mandi, 43 kilometres north-east of Poonch town. The panoramic view of Suran Valley, Mandi, Poonch, and Toli Pir in POK is breathtaking from this high vantage point. Around the shrine is a stunning green pasture. Apart from its religious significance, this is one of Poonch District's most picturesque locations that can be utilised for tourism. The civic society of Poonch, together with the Army, celebrates the major annual Urs in the month of November.



Than Pir

Suggestions

The development of border tourist sites in Jammu and Kashmir's Poonch district may benefit from the following ideas:

1. In order to boost tourism in the Poonch district, infrastructure associated to it should be improved. This includes things like transportation, travel services, telecommunications, restaurants, support services, retail, entertainment, and emergency services.
2. Through advertisements on the internet, in TV shows, newspapers, magazines, journals, and other print and electronic media, Poonch district of J&K border tourism attractions should be promoted.
3. In order for the people to profit from tourism and support the growth of tourism in the area, timely tourism awareness campaigns among the host community should be implemented. The promotion of tourism in border regions should be a priority for tour companies.
4. To enhance the number of tourists visiting these areas of J&K, various tourism-related festivals should be held in border regions.
5. The local and national governments should act quickly to assure the security and safety of the envisioned tourists. Additionally, all currently closed historic routes between India and Pakistan inside the Jammu and Kashmir region should be made available in order to facilitate cross-border tourism.
6. The government should preserve and develop the historic structures.
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4. CONCLUSIONS

The northernmost state of India, Jammu and Kashmir, is well recognised for its tourism industry. Along with Pakistan, China, and Afghanistan, J&K shares international boundaries with India with the Indian States of Himachal Pradesh and Punjab. The tourist potential in Jammu and Kashmir's mountainous border regions is enormous. Ancient temples, monasteries, forts, customs and rituals, food, clothing, etc. are all quite impressive and deserving of promotion.

While the Almighty has endowed these regions with mesmerising natural beauty as well, such as lush green forests, scenic and snow-capped mountains, fast flowing and singing rivers, and rich wild life, these should all be adding value to the border tourist destinations of J&K, despite the fact that these areas have rich fabricated tourism potential. Jammu and Kashmir's border tourist spots are well recognised for their adventure and cultural tourism offerings. In terms of temperature, culture, and outward look, there are just a few or no similarities among the regions of Jammu and Kashmir; each area of the state is distinct.

It is essential to develop and preserve Jammu and Kashmir's border regions since they offer significant tourism potential. Additionally, it is crucial to encourage tourist education among the local population in these border regions of Jammu and Kashmir in order to achieve the region's tourism development goals. In addition, Jammu and Kashmir's border regions lack extremely basic tourist infrastructure, which is one of the primary causes of the area's low tourist traffic. Additionally, more marketing efforts are needed for these border locations. Overall, the region is lovely, and the numerous splendors should soon draw a lot of people.

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