

Tourism Law in Pakistan: Challenges and Prospects

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Abstract

Pakistan's tourism sector is endowed with unparalleled natural, cultural, and historical assets, positioning it as a latent economic powerhouse capable of contributing significantly to national GDP, employment, and foreign exchange earnings. However, the sector's development is stimulated by a fragmented and antiquated legal framework, particularly following the 18th Constitutional Amendment of 2010, which devolved tourism responsibilities to provinces without establishing robust coordination mechanisms. This article provides an in-depth analysis of the multifaceted challenges in Pakistan's tourism law, encompassing bureaucratic inefficiencies, security impediments, infrastructural deficiencies, environmental vulnerabilities, and regulatory gaps. Concurrently, it explores promising prospects for reform, including legislative modernization, digital integration, public-private partnerships (PPPs), and niche tourism promotion. Drawing upon a comprehensive review of policy documents, scholarly literature, judicial precedents, and statistical data up to September 2025, the study aligns these elements with global benchmarks such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Key findings reveal that tourism contributed 5.9% to Pakistan's GDP in 2022, supporting 4.2 million jobs, with projections estimating a rise to PKR 1 trillion (US\$3.5 billion) by 2025 and an annual growth rate of 11.31% through 2030. Nevertheless, systemic legal reforms are imperative to mitigate risks and harness opportunities. Recommendations advocate for a centralized tourism authority, updated legislation incorporating sustainability mandates, streamlined visa regimes, and enhanced security protocols. This research advances scholarly discourse in Q1 Scopus-indexed journals by offering evidence-based policy insights for fostering sustainable tourism in developing economies amid devolutionary shifts.

Introduction

Pakistan's tourism sector presents a unique juxtaposition of immense potential and systemic neglect. The country is endowed with diverse geographical landscapes, from the towering snow-capped peaks of the Himalayas and Karakoram ranges in Gilgit-Baltistan to the fertile plains of Punjab and Sindh, the ancient ruins of Mohenjo-Daro and Taxila, and the coastal belts of Balochistan along the Arabian Sea. These natural and cultural riches position Pakistan as a prospective global tourism hub, comparable to regional competitors such as

India and Turkey, which have successfully leveraged similar assets for economic prosperity (World Travel & Tourism Council [WTTC], 2025). Despite this potential, Pakistan's tourism contribution to GDP stood at only 5.9% in 2022, considerably below the global average of 10.4% (Statista, 2025).

The trajectory of tourism in Pakistan has historically been constrained by political instability, inadequate infrastructure, and underdeveloped legal frameworks. While the country gained international recognition in recent years, including its designation as a top global travel destination by the United Nations World Tourism Organization

(UNWTO) in 2023, structural weaknesses in governance and regulation continue to undermine progress (United Nations World Tourism Organization [UNWTO], 2023). Although social media and improvements in national security after 2015 significantly enhanced Pakistan's international image, enduring challenges such as bureaucratic hurdles, inconsistent visa regimes, and environmental vulnerabilities prevent the sector from achieving its full economic and socio-cultural potential (ResearchGate, 2025).

A pivotal development shaping Pakistan's tourism governance was the 18th Constitutional Amendment of 2010, which devolved the subject of tourism from the federal to provincial level under Article 270AA. This constitutional restructuring led to the abolition of the federal Ministry of Tourism and the transfer of responsibilities to provincial governments. While the devolution aimed to strengthen local governance, it inadvertently created fragmentation in tourism regulation and policy-making. Provinces developed their own legal and institutional frameworks, often with conflicting priorities and standards. For instance, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Tourism Act of 2019 emphasizes eco-tourism and adventure tourism, while Balochistan continues to rely on outdated instruments like the Travel Agencies Act of 1976, with limited focus on sustainability or digital integration (Arshad et al., 2024). The lack of a robust inter-provincial coordination mechanism has resulted in governance vacuums, policy silos, and missed opportunities for unified national branding.

Outdated statutes further exacerbate the situation. Key federal laws such as the Tourist Guides Act 1976 and the Hotels and Restaurants Act 1976 remain largely unchanged, focusing on taxation and licensing rather than modern imperatives

such as sustainability, digitalization, and safety regulations. Similarly, the Antiquities Act 1975, though amended in 1992, is ill-equipped to address contemporary environmental pressures such as overtourism, climate change, and glacier melting, which threaten Pakistan's fragile northern ecosystems (International RASD Journals, 2025). Judicial precedents, such as the Sindh High Court's 2020 ruling on inefficiencies within the Sindh Tourism Development Corporation, further highlight governance lapses within existing frameworks (Sindh High Court, 2020).

In addition, global perceptions of security continue to influence tourism in Pakistan. Despite significant improvements, the U.S. Department of State's 2025 travel advisory still classifies parts of Pakistan as high-risk due to terrorism and law-and-order challenges (U.S. Department of State, 2025). Visa policies, while partially liberalized through the introduction of e-visas for 175 countries since 2019, remain encumbered by bureaucratic inefficiencies, high processing fees, and Non-Objection Certificate (NOC) requirements for travel to sensitive regions such as Gilgit-Baltistan and Balochistan (Fragomen, 2024). These constraints restrict the flow of international visitors and deter investment.

Nevertheless, the prospects for tourism in Pakistan are encouraging if systemic reforms are undertaken. The WTTC projects an 11.31% annual growth rate in Pakistan's tourism sector between 2025 and 2030, with revenues potentially reaching US\$4.26 billion by 2030 (WTTC, 2025). Tourism already supported approximately 3.88 million jobs in 2022, with expectations to rise to 4.79 million by 2024, reflecting its potential for socio-economic development and employment generation (Statista, 2025). Aligning tourism reforms with global benchmarks such as the United Nations

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and Goal 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), offers a pathway to both economic advancement and environmental sustainability (World Bank, 2023).

Against this backdrop, this article sets out four objectives:

1. To trace the evolution of Pakistan's tourism legislation in the aftermath of the 18th Amendment.
2. To analyze the multifaceted challenges undermining the sector, supported by legal, judicial, and statistical evidence.
3. To explore prospects for reform through modernization, digitalization, public-private partnerships (PPPs), and niche tourism development.
4. To provide actionable, evidence-based policy recommendations that align Pakistan's tourism sector with global best practices.

By drawing upon statutory instruments, case law, government policies, and global indices, this research contributes to the scholarly discourse on tourism law in developing economies. It situates Pakistan's experience within comparative regional frameworks, demonstrating how legal reforms can transform latent tourism potential into a catalyst for sustainable growth.

Literature Review

The The scholarship on tourism in Pakistan reflects a persistent tension between the sector's vast potential and its chronic underdevelopment. A key theme emerging from the literature is the role of legal and institutional frameworks in either facilitating

or hindering growth. Scholars generally agree that Pakistan's tourism remains constrained by outdated legislation, fragmented governance structures, and insufficient security assurances (Arshad et al., 2024; ResearchGate, 2025).

Pre-18th Amendment Perspectives

Before the 18th Constitutional Amendment (2010), tourism governance in Pakistan was heavily centralized. Studies by the Pakistan Business Council (PBC, 2014) argued that federal dominance over tourism policymaking stifled innovation at the provincial level, creating inefficiencies and bureaucratic bottlenecks. Tourism promotion efforts during this period were often inconsistent, with little integration of sustainability or community participation. The Ministry of Tourism largely emphasized promotion and licensing, while international comparative studies suggested that integrated legal frameworks, as seen in Malaysia and Turkey, were critical for sectoral competitiveness (PBC, 2025).

Post-Devolution and Provincial Fragmentation

Post-2010 scholarship highlights the fragmented policy landscape resulting from devolution. Arshad et al. (2024) note that while devolution aimed to enhance local governance, it produced divergent provincial priorities. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), for example, enacted the Tourism Act 2019 to regulate eco-tourism and promote adventure travel, while Sindh focused narrowly on heritage preservation without corresponding legislative modernization. Balochistan's reliance on the Travel Agencies Act 1976 underscores the uneven pace of reform across provinces. Comparative analyses indicate that such fragmentation has hindered unified national branding, reducing Pakistan's

competitiveness in attracting global tourists (World Bank, 2023).

balancing economic benefits with environmental protection.

Security and Investor Confidence

Security concerns are a recurrent theme across the literature. ResearchGate (2025) links the legacy of terrorism in the early 2000s to a decline in foreign direct investment (FDI) in tourism infrastructure. Investor confidence was further undermined by inconsistent legal protections for tourism-related contracts, as highlighted by arbitration cases involving Pakistan in other sectors, such as *Dallah v. Pakistan* (2010). Although not tourism-specific, such cases illustrate broader challenges in contract enforcement, deterring global investors from entering Pakistan's tourism market. Judicial decisions, such as the Sindh High Court's 2020 ruling on employment disputes within the Sindh Tourism Development Corporation, emphasize persistent governance lapses within state-owned tourism entities (Sindh High Court, 2020).

Environmental and Sustainability Dimensions

The literature also critiques Pakistan's weak environmental regulatory framework. The Antiquities Act 1975, amended in 1992, continues to serve as the primary legislation for heritage protection, yet it inadequately addresses issues of overtourism, environmental degradation, and climate-induced risks such as glacier melting (International RASD Journals, 2025). Studies highlight that tourist influxes in northern Pakistan, particularly in Gilgit-Baltistan and Hunza, have exceeded the carrying capacity of local ecosystems, contributing to waste mismanagement and habitat disruption. Unlike countries such as Bhutan, which imposes sustainability-focused entry fees, Pakistan lacks legislative mechanisms for

Emerging Prospects: Modernization and Niche Tourism

Contemporary scholarship points to the urgent need for legal modernization and the exploration of niche tourism. The PBC (2025) advocates the establishment of a centralized coordinating authority, modeled on Malaysia's integrated tourism framework, to ensure alignment across provinces. Niche markets such as halal tourism, estimated to grow globally to USD 410.9 billion by 2032, are seen as particularly promising for Pakistan given its Islamic heritage and cultural assets (Halal Times, 2025). Similarly, the Kartarpur Corridor project is often cited as a model for religious tourism, though scholars stress that success depends on strong bilateral agreements and supportive legal frameworks.

Digital Integration and Visa Reforms

Legal scholars also underscore the role of digital reforms in expanding access. Fragomen (2024) documents Pakistan's introduction of e-visas for 175 countries and visa-on-arrival for 120 countries, marking a positive step towards accessibility. However, implementation flaws, such as high processing fees and Non-Objection Certificate (NOC) requirements, continue to discourage potential visitors. Literature suggests that simplifying visa regimes and aligning them with international best practices would significantly boost tourist arrivals (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2025).

Identified Research Gaps

Despite growing attention, notable gaps remain in the literature. Few studies systematically integrate judicial precedents

into analyses of tourism law, leaving questions about legal enforcement underexplored. Similarly, the intersection of climate change and tourism regulation remains underdeveloped, despite Pakistan's vulnerability to floods and glacial melt. Post-2024 scholarship is particularly limited, failing to capture recent reforms, global market shifts, and security improvements. This study seeks to bridge these gaps by providing an updated, legally grounded analysis of tourism challenges and prospects up to 2025.

Methodology

This study adopts a **qualitative systematic review design**, appropriate for examining the complex interplay between tourism law, governance structures, and socio-economic outcomes in Pakistan. Legal research in this domain is inherently interpretative, drawing on statutes, constitutional provisions, judicial precedents, and policy frameworks. To ensure comprehensive coverage, the study integrates doctrinal legal analysis with socio-legal perspectives, thereby bridging black-letter law with empirical socio-economic data (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The data for this research was drawn entirely from secondary sources, organized into four primary categories. The first category included legislation and policy documents, such as the *Tourist Guides Act 1976*, *Travel Agencies Act 1976*, *Hotels and Restaurants Act 1976*, and the *Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Tourism Act 2019*. Constitutional provisions, particularly Article 270AA of the 18th Constitutional Amendment, and policy reports like the *Pakistan Business Council's Tourism Panacea Report (2025)* and the *World Bank's Responsible Tourism Report (2023)* were also examined. The second category comprised judicial precedents, including rulings from superior courts that shaped

tourism governance, such as the *Sindh High Court (2020)* decision on the Sindh Tourism Development Corporation and the *Peshawar High Court (2024)* ruling on Tourism Corporation disputes. Although not directly tourism-specific, cases like *Dallah v. Pakistan (2010)* were also considered for their implications on contract enforcement and investor confidence. The third category included scholarly literature from peer-reviewed journals such as the *iRASD Journal of Social Sciences (2025)* and *Remittances Review* (Arshad et al., 2024), alongside grey literature from ResearchGate, SSRN, and institutional reports. The final category consisted of statistical and market data from the *World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC, 2025)*, *Statista (2025)*, and official government reports, which provided insights into tourist arrivals, employment contributions, and GDP impact.

The search strategy was conducted between June and September 2025, using databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, HeinOnline, and ResearchGate, along with policy repositories like the World Bank and Pakistan Business Council. Search queries included terms such as “tourism law Pakistan challenges prospects 2025,” “judicial precedents tourism Pakistan,” and “post-18th Amendment governance Pakistan tourism.” To ensure reliability, only sources that directly addressed legal, policy, or governance aspects of tourism in Pakistan, and that provided empirical or judicial evidence, were included. The time frame of 2010–2025 was chosen to capture post-devolution developments. Non-academic commentaries, outdated reports, and anecdotal travel blogs were excluded from the review.

The analysis employed a thematic content approach, coding data into two overarching categories: challenges and prospects. The challenges included

fragmented governance, outdated laws, security concerns, environmental vulnerabilities, bureaucratic hurdles, and infrastructural deficiencies, while the prospects involved legislative modernization, digital integration, public-private partnerships (PPPs), niche tourism promotion, and alignment with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The coding framework was refined through triangulation, which ensured internal validity. For instance, findings on visa restrictions were cross-verified between Fragomen (2024), U.S. Department of State advisories (2025), and Statista datasets.

Despite the breadth of secondary sources, the study acknowledges certain limitations. Reliance on published materials meant that localized experiences of tourists and communities, which could provide more nuanced insights, were not directly captured. Moreover, provincial tourism data is often inconsistently reported or unpublished, limiting comparability. Although the use of 2025-focused data reduced the risks of outdatedness, the dynamic nature of Pakistan's security and political conditions means that future projections may evolve rapidly. To address these gaps, future research could adopt mixed-method approaches, combining doctrinal legal analysis with empirical fieldwork, such as interviews and surveys, to deepen the understanding of tourism law and its practical implications.

Challenges in Tourism Law

Fragmented Legal Framework after the 18th Amendment

One of the foremost challenges to Pakistan's tourism sector stems from the constitutional restructuring following the 18th Constitutional Amendment (2010), which devolved tourism from federal to provincial jurisdiction under Article 270AA. The

abolition of the federal Ministry of Tourism and the transfer of authority to the provinces created a patchwork of legal and institutional arrangements. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, for example, enacted the *KP Tourism Act 2019*, which established a provincial authority with mandates for eco-tourism and adventure travel. By contrast, Balochistan continues to rely primarily on the *Travel Agencies Act 1976*, which focuses narrowly on licensing rather than sustainability or digital modernization (Arshad et al., 2024). This disparity in legislative development has resulted in a fragmented national landscape, impeding coherent branding and policy harmonization. Judicial interventions further underscore these gaps; in a 2024 ruling, the Peshawar High Court highlighted administrative and financial irregularities in the provincial Tourism Corporation, underscoring weaknesses in regulatory oversight (Peshawar High Court, 2024).

Outdated and Inadequate Legislation

Pakistan's federal tourism laws, many of which date back to the 1970s, are ill-equipped to regulate a sector that has evolved dramatically in the 21st century. The *Tourist Guides Act 1976* and *Hotels and Restaurants Act 1976* were primarily designed to regulate licensing, taxation, and service standards, but they fail to incorporate provisions on sustainability, digital platforms, consumer rights, or climate resilience. Similarly, the *Antiquities Act 1975*, though amended in 1992, is largely confined to heritage preservation and overlooks contemporary threats such as overtourism, pollution, and glacier degradation in northern Pakistan (International RASD Journals, 2025). Legal scholars argue that without significant updates, these antiquated statutes cannot respond effectively to the demands of global tourism markets or align with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Bureaucratic Hurdles and Restrictive Visa Policies

Despite recent reforms, including the introduction of e-visas for 175 countries and visa-on-arrival for 120 countries, Pakistan's visa system continues to pose significant obstacles. High processing fees, technical inefficiencies in online systems, and the continued requirement of Non-Objection Certificates (NOCs) for sensitive areas such as Gilgit-Baltistan and Balochistan discourage many potential visitors (Fragomen, 2024). Anecdotal evidence from travel forums suggests that applicants often face arbitrary rejections or unexplained delays, which further tarnish Pakistan's reputation as a tourist-friendly destination. These bureaucratic inefficiencies directly undermine efforts to increase inbound tourism, particularly when neighboring competitors like India and Sri Lanka offer streamlined digital visa systems with fewer restrictions (WTTC, 2025).

Security Concerns and Global Perceptions

The persistent association of Pakistan with security risks remains one of the most significant impediments to its tourism sector. Although overall security has improved considerably since the mid-2010s, international advisories continue to paint a cautious picture. For instance, the U.S. Department of State's 2025 travel advisory continues to classify several regions of Pakistan as "high risk" due to terrorism and insurgency (U.S. Department of State, 2025). This perception discourages not only tourists but also foreign investors in tourism infrastructure. The absence of a dedicated legal framework for tourist protection, such as specialized policing or insurance mechanisms, exacerbates the problem. Without statutory safeguards ensuring visitor safety, Pakistan struggles to reassure international travelers that risks are adequately managed.

Infrastructural Deficiencies

Inadequate infrastructure further compounds the legal and policy challenges. Despite the expansion of projects under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), road and air connectivity to many tourist destinations remains underdeveloped. For example, access to Gilgit-Baltistan and Skardu is hindered by poor road networks and limited flight options, discouraging both domestic and international travelers (World Bank, 2023). Legal provisions mandating infrastructure development for tourism are virtually absent, leaving such projects dependent on broader economic initiatives. The lack of a coordinated legislative framework to integrate infrastructure with tourism growth objectives creates persistent bottlenecks in accessibility.

Environmental Vulnerabilities

Pakistan's fragile ecosystems, particularly in the northern regions, face mounting pressures from both climate change and unregulated tourism. Rising temperatures and accelerated glacier melting threaten long-term sustainability of the country's most iconic natural attractions. Yet, existing laws such as the *Antiquities Act* and provincial policies lack mandatory provisions for environmental impact assessments (EIAs) tailored to tourism projects. This regulatory vacuum allows unchecked construction of hotels, roads, and other infrastructure in ecologically sensitive areas. As the International RASD Journals (2025) emphasize, such weak environmental governance risks irreversibly damaging Pakistan's comparative advantage in eco-tourism.

Lack of Professional Standards and Human Resource Development

Another pressing issue is the absence of professional standards in tourism services. The *Tourist Guides Act 1976* only requires licensing of guides but does not mandate

training or certification in areas such as safety, sustainability, or cultural sensitivity. Studies highlight that many guides and hospitality workers remain uncertified, leading to substandard services that diminish visitor experiences (LUMS, 2023). The lack of legal provisions mandating professional training or accreditation prevents the development of a skilled workforce, a necessary condition for competing in global tourism markets.

Weak Marketing and Digital Integration

Finally, Pakistan lags significantly in digital integration and global marketing. While initiatives like the “Salam Pakistan” campaign were launched, they received limited promotion and failed to achieve international visibility. Unlike countries that embed digital marketing strategies within their legal and institutional frameworks, Pakistan’s policies remain piecemeal and ad hoc. The absence of statutory mandates for digital platforms, data-driven promotion, and partnerships with international booking agencies reflects a broader lack of legal vision in leveraging technology for tourism growth (Pakistan Business Council, 2025).

Prospects for Tourism Law

Establishing a Centralized Tourism Authority

One of the most widely recommended reforms is the establishment of a centralized tourism authority at the federal level. While the 18th Amendment devolved powers to the provinces, the absence of inter-provincial coordination has created a fragmented landscape. A federal coordinating body could serve as a hub for standardizing policies, ensuring compliance with sustainability benchmarks, and promoting a unified national brand. The Pakistan Business Council (2025) has argued that a hybrid model—retaining provincial autonomy while introducing a central authority—would

improve governance without undermining devolution. Comparative insights from Malaysia demonstrate how centralized tourism governance has facilitated harmonized regulation and more effective marketing campaigns, significantly boosting international arrivals (World Bank, 2023).

Modernizing Legal Frameworks

Legal modernization is an essential prerequisite for harnessing the sector’s potential. Pakistan’s outdated statutes, including the *Tourist Guides Act 1976* and *Hotels and Restaurants Act 1976*, require comprehensive overhauls to address contemporary demands such as climate change, digitalization, consumer protection, and safety standards. New legal instruments could introduce eco-tourism provisions, regulate digital booking platforms, and align hotel classifications with international benchmarks. The integration of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 8 on economic growth and Goal 12 on responsible consumption, would also provide a robust foundation for sustainability-focused reforms (International RASD Journals, 2025). Without such modernization, Pakistan risks lagging behind competitors that are already embedding climate resilience and digital adaptation into their legal systems.

Leveraging Digital Platforms and E-Visa Systems

Digital integration offers a promising avenue for expanding Pakistan’s tourism sector. The introduction of e-visas and visa-on-arrival facilities was an important step, but implementation flaws must be addressed to maximize impact. Simplifying visa procedures, reducing fees, and eliminating redundant Non-Objection Certificate (NOC) requirements could make Pakistan more accessible to foreign tourists. Furthermore, statutory recognition of digital platforms for

bookings, payments, and information dissemination could increase transparency and efficiency. Countries such as Sri Lanka and India have demonstrated how streamlined digital platforms can significantly enhance inbound tourism flows. If effectively reformed, Pakistan's e-visa and digital integration systems could increase tourist arrivals by an estimated 30% (Fragomen, 2024; WTTC, 2025).

Promoting Niche Tourism Segments

Pakistan's cultural and religious diversity offers unique opportunities for niche tourism markets. Halal tourism is a rapidly expanding global industry, projected to reach USD 410.9 billion by 2032, and Pakistan is well-positioned to leverage its Islamic heritage for competitive advantage (Halal Times, 2025). Religious tourism, particularly the Kartarpur Corridor initiative, has demonstrated the potential for cross-border faith-based travel, provided supportive bilateral agreements and legal frameworks are in place. Similarly, eco-tourism and adventure tourism in Gilgit-Baltistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa could be regulated through laws that mandate sustainability and safety standards, thereby protecting fragile ecosystems while diversifying Pakistan's tourism portfolio. Legislative reforms in these areas would allow Pakistan to attract a wider range of international tourists while ensuring equitable and sustainable benefits.

Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs)

Public-private partnerships represent another crucial prospect for tourism development. Given fiscal constraints, Pakistan cannot rely solely on public financing for infrastructure and promotional activities. PPPs can mobilize private investment for hotel construction, road development, heritage preservation, and digital platforms. International Finance Corporation (2025) studies suggest that tax incentives and

transparent legal frameworks are essential for attracting private investors. By embedding PPP provisions in federal and provincial tourism laws, Pakistan could replicate successful models from countries such as Turkey, where PPPs have underpinned rapid tourism infrastructure growth.

Strengthening Security Measures

Tourist safety is a cornerstone of sustainable tourism. While broader security reforms have improved Pakistan's image, the absence of dedicated tourism security laws undermines international confidence. Statutory measures could mandate specialized tourist police, insurance mechanisms, and surveillance systems in key destinations. Community-based security initiatives, coupled with international cooperation on travel advisories, would further strengthen Pakistan's reputation as a safe destination. Establishing legal obligations for security protocols could also reassure investors, thereby facilitating greater foreign direct investment in tourism-related infrastructure (U.S. Department of State, 2025).

Sustainable Tourism Policies

Finally, embedding sustainability within the tourism legal framework is indispensable. Current legislation lacks clear provisions for environmental impact assessments (EIAs) specific to tourism projects. A revised legal framework could mandate EIAs, designate marine and mountain protected areas (MPAs), and introduce penalties for environmental degradation. The World Bank (2023) emphasizes that sustainable tourism not only preserves ecosystems but also enhances long-term economic viability by maintaining the appeal of natural attractions. By aligning domestic policies with global environmental commitments, Pakistan can ensure that economic growth through tourism does not come at the expense of ecological integrity.

The analysis of Pakistan's tourism law reveals a paradox: the country possesses unparalleled cultural, religious, and natural assets, yet its legal and governance structures remain inadequate to unlock this potential. The challenges outlined—fragmented governance, outdated legislation, restrictive visa regimes, persistent security concerns, infrastructural deficiencies, and weak environmental protections—are not unique to Pakistan but resonate with broader patterns observed in developing economies. What distinguishes Pakistan, however, is the severity of fragmentation caused by the 18th Constitutional Amendment (2010), which, while empowering provinces, left the sector without a coordinating federal mechanism. This has created a governance vacuum that undermines national branding and weakens foreign investor confidence (Arshad et al., 2024).

At the same time, the prospects for reform present a tangible pathway for transformation. Establishing a centralized tourism authority at the federal level, without negating provincial autonomy, would provide the necessary coordination to standardize regulations, streamline visa processes, and promote Pakistan under a unified national brand. Comparative evidence underscores this point. Malaysia's centralized framework, which integrates tourism policy under a federal ministry while engaging states through coordinated planning, has allowed it to achieve consistent growth and global recognition (World Bank, 2023). Similarly, Turkey's model of tourism law, rooted in sustainability and investor-friendly PPPs, demonstrates how legislative modernization can foster resilience and attract international capital (IFC, 2025).

The comparison with India highlights the critical role of liberalized visa regimes. India's e-visa program, accessible to over 160 countries with minimal restrictions, has

substantially increased arrivals and boosted its global competitiveness. Pakistan's reforms in this area remain incomplete, as high fees and Non-Objection Certificates (NOCs) for sensitive regions continue to act as deterrents (Fragomen, 2024). Unless addressed through statutory reform, Pakistan will continue to lose ground to regional competitors despite its stronger natural and cultural heritage base.

Sustainability emerges as another key dimension where Pakistan lags. The Bhutanese model, which imposes sustainability-focused entry fees and mandates strict environmental controls, demonstrates how small states can use legal frameworks to balance economic gains with ecological preservation. Pakistan's reliance on outdated instruments such as the *Antiquities Act 1975* leaves its fragile northern ecosystems vulnerable to overtourism and climate change-induced risks (International RASD Journals, 2025). Incorporating mandatory environmental impact assessments (EIAs) for tourism projects and designating protected areas through legislation could prevent irreversible ecological damage while aligning the sector with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The discussion also underscores the importance of human capital development. While laws such as the *Tourist Guides Act 1976* provide for licensing, they fail to mandate professional training. Comparative studies show that countries with legal requirements for certification and capacity-building, such as Turkey and Malaysia, have succeeded in creating globally competitive tourism workforces. Without legislative reforms to professionalize Pakistan's tourism sector, visitor experiences will remain inconsistent, undermining long-term growth.

Ultimately, the challenges and prospects converge on a central insight:

Pakistan's tourism sector is less constrained by resource scarcity than by institutional and legal weaknesses. The sector's contribution of 5.9% to GDP in 2022, compared to the global average of 10.4%, illustrates the opportunity gap (Statista, 2025). Projections of 11.31% annual growth between 2025 and 2030 are attainable, but only if systemic reforms are enacted. Legal modernization, digital integration, niche tourism promotion, PPPs, and sustainability mandates are not isolated measures but interdependent elements of a coherent reform agenda.

Therefore, Pakistan's pathway to tourism competitiveness lies in embracing evidence-based legal reforms anchored in global best practices while remaining sensitive to local socio-political realities. By adopting a hybrid model that combines centralized coordination with provincial autonomy, updating outdated legislation, simplifying visa regimes, professionalizing tourism services, and embedding sustainability, Pakistan can transform its latent tourism potential into a cornerstone of national economic growth and cultural diplomacy.

Conclusion

Pakistan's tourism sector stands at a critical juncture. Endowed with unmatched cultural heritage, diverse landscapes, and religiously significant sites, the country has the potential to become a global tourism hub. Yet, the sector remains constrained by systemic weaknesses in its legal and governance structures. The devolution of tourism under the 18th Constitutional Amendment (2010), while intended to strengthen provincial autonomy, created a fragmented framework that has undermined coherence, national branding, and foreign investor confidence. Antiquated statutes such as the *Tourist Guides Act 1976* and the *Hotels and Restaurants Act 1976* continue to dominate, failing to address modern imperatives such as

sustainability, digital integration, safety standards, and climate resilience. Coupled with restrictive visa regimes, lingering security concerns, infrastructural deficiencies, and weak environmental safeguards, these legal gaps explain why tourism contributed only 5.9% to Pakistan's GDP in 2022—well below the global average of 10.4% (Statista, 2025).

Despite these constraints, the prospects for reform are encouraging. The World Travel & Tourism Council (2025) projects an annual growth rate of 11.31% for Pakistan's tourism sector between 2025 and 2030, potentially generating revenues exceeding US\$4.26 billion and supporting nearly five million jobs. Realizing this potential requires a comprehensive reform agenda anchored in evidence-based policymaking and comparative lessons. Establishing a centralized tourism authority at the federal level, while preserving provincial autonomy, could harmonize regulations and coordinate national branding. Updating outdated statutes to integrate sustainability mandates, digital platforms, and international safety standards would bring Pakistan's tourism law in line with global best practices. Liberalizing the visa regime, particularly through streamlined e-visas and the removal of unnecessary Non-Objection Certificates (NOCs), would significantly increase accessibility. Embedding public-private partnerships (PPPs) within tourism laws could attract private capital for infrastructure and marketing, while introducing statutory mandates for environmental impact assessments (EIAs) and eco-protection zones would safeguard fragile ecosystems.

The comparative experience of Malaysia, Turkey, India, and Bhutan demonstrates that legal frameworks are decisive in shaping tourism outcomes. Malaysia's centralized coordination, Turkey's PPP-driven infrastructure, India's

visa liberalization, and Bhutan's sustainability mandates provide replicable models that Pakistan can adapt to its unique socio-political context. By learning from these examples, Pakistan can balance growth with sustainability, equity, and international competitiveness.

In conclusion, Pakistan's tourism law must evolve from a fragmented and outdated system into a modern, integrated, and sustainability-focused framework. Such reforms would not only unlock economic benefits, including GDP growth and employment generation, but also strengthen cultural diplomacy, environmental preservation, and global reputation. Tourism, if supported by coherent laws and robust governance, has the potential to emerge as a cornerstone of Pakistan's socio-economic transformation in the decades ahead.

Policy Recommendations

Based on the analysis of challenges and prospects, this study advances the following evidence-based policy recommendations to strengthen Pakistan's tourism law and governance:

1. **Establish a Centralized Tourism Authority**
Create a federal coordinating body empowered to harmonize provincial policies, set national standards, and promote unified branding, while respecting provincial autonomy under the 18th Amendment.
2. **Modernize Outdated Legislation**
Overhaul the *Tourist Guides Act 1976*, *Hotels and Restaurants Act 1976*, and *Travel Agencies Act 1976* to incorporate provisions on sustainability, consumer protection, digital platforms, safety standards, and climate resilience.
3. **Streamline Visa Regimes**
Simplify e-visa systems by reducing fees,

improving transparency, and abolishing Non-Objection Certificates (NOCs) for travel to Gilgit-Baltistan and Balochistan. Align visa policies with regional competitors such as India and Sri Lanka.

4. **Embed Sustainability in Law**
Mandate environmental impact assessments (EIAs) for all tourism-related projects, designate ecologically sensitive areas as protected zones, and introduce penalties for environmental degradation in line with SDG commitments.
5. **Promote Niche Tourism Segments**
Enact legislation supporting halal tourism, religious tourism (e.g., Sikh pilgrimage through Kartarpur Corridor), adventure tourism, and eco-tourism. Each niche should be supported by legal frameworks ensuring safety, equity, and sustainability.
6. **Encourage Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs)**
Integrate PPP provisions into tourism laws, offering tax incentives, transparent procurement processes, and investor protections to mobilize private capital for infrastructure, heritage preservation, and digital integration.
7. **Enhance Tourist Safety through Legal Mandates**
Introduce statutory obligations for specialized tourist police, insurance mechanisms, and surveillance systems at key destinations to restore international confidence.
8. **Professionalize Tourism Services**
Amend laws to require certification and training programs for guides, hospitality staff, and service providers, modeled on global best practices in Turkey and Malaysia.
9. **Strengthen Digital Integration and Marketing**
Legislate for digital platforms that support

transparent bookings, payments, and data-driven marketing campaigns. Institutionalize global outreach campaigns under a unified national brand such as “Visit Pakistan.”

10. Judicial and Institutional Accountability

Strengthen judicial oversight and corporate governance in tourism development corporations to minimize inefficiencies, as highlighted in recent High Court rulings (e.g., Sindh High Court, 2020; Peshawar High Court, 2024).

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