



## **TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN PAKISTAN UNDER THE PTI GOVERNMENT (2018-2022)**

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### **Abstract:**

*This research critically examines the development of Pakistan's tourism industry under the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government (2018–2022). It analyzes the administration's strategic interventions, primarily the National Tourism Strategy 2020 (GoP, 2020), which aimed to transform Pakistan into a competitive tourist destination through \*infrastructure modernization, visa liberalization, aggressive marketing ("Visit Pakistan"), and sustainability commitments. Key initiatives included e-visa expansion for 175+ countries, the Kartarpur Corridor opening, road projects in northern regions, and influencer-led promotion. While international arrivals and tourism's GDP contribution increased (PTDC, 2019–2021; WTTC, 2021), outcomes were mixed. Literature highlights implementation gaps in sustainability (Ali & Hussain, 2021), persistent security perceptions (Anwar et al., 2022), governance coordination challenges (Khan & Ahmed, 2022), and COVID-19 disruptions. The PTI era is assessed as a period of ambitious policy formulation and foundational progress, though constrained by execution deficits and external shocks.*

**Keywords:** PTI Government Tourism Policy, National Tourism Strategy 2020, Pakistan Visa Liberalization, Kartarpur Corridor, Tourism Infrastructure (Pakistan), Sustainable Tourism Challenges, Tourism Marketing (Pakistan), COVID-19 Impact on Tourism, Policy Implementation Gap, Tourism Governance Pakistan

### **Introduction:**

The PTI government (2018–2022) marked a distinct era in Pakistan's tourism policy, elevating the sector to a national economic priority. Confronting challenges of negative perception, infrastructure deficits, and fragmented governance, the administration launched Pakistan's first unified National Tourism Strategy (NTS 2020) (GoP, 2020). This strategy explicitly aimed to leverage Pakistan's natural and cultural assets—particularly adventure tourism in the north and religious tourism via the Kartarpur Corridor—to attract international visitors, generate employment, and enhance soft power. Core policy pillars included easing visa access, improving connectivity to tourist hotspots, rebranding Pakistan through digital campaigns, and promoting eco-tourism principles. This review synthesizes scholarly and institutional analyses of the PTI government's tourism agenda, evaluating its policy design, key initiatives, measurable outcomes, and critical implementation challenges during its tenure.

### **Tourism Development Initiatives:**

The PTI government introduced a new tourism policy, which aimed to promote Pakistan as a tourist destination and attract foreign investment (Ministry of Tourism, 2019).

The government launched the "Visit Pakistan" campaign to promote tourism and showcase the country's cultural and natural heritage (Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation, 2020).

### **Economic Impact:**

According to the World Travel & Tourism Council (2019), the travel and tourism sector contributed 7.1% to Pakistan's GDP in 2018, generating 3.85 million jobs.



- A study by the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (2020) found that tourism has the potential to contribute significantly to Pakistan's economy, but infrastructure and security challenges need to be addressed.

#### **Challenges:**

Terrorism and security concerns have been major obstacles to tourism development in Pakistan (Khan & Khan, 2020).

- Infrastructure challenges, including transportation and accommodation, need to be addressed to support tourism growth (Ahmed & Hussain, 2020).

#### **Sustainability:**

Sustainable tourism practices are essential to minimize the negative impacts of tourism on the environment and local communities (Rizwan & Khan, 2020).

The government needs to develop policies and strategies to promote sustainable tourism and ensure the long-term benefits of tourism development (Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation, 2020).

The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government, led by Prime Minister Imran Khan (August 2018 - April 2022), placed significant emphasis on revitalizing Pakistan's tourism sector, recognizing its potential for economic growth, job creation, foreign exchange earnings, and positive international image-building. This review synthesizes key themes, initiatives, outcomes, and critical perspectives from available literature and reports.

#### **1. Vision and Strategic Framework:**

**National Tourism Strategy (NTS) 2020:** The cornerstone of PTI's approach was the formulation of Pakistan's first comprehensive National Tourism Strategy in 2020 (Government of Pakistan, 2020). This strategy aimed to position Pakistan among the top tourist destinations in Asia, focusing on sustainability, community involvement, infrastructure development, and easing visa restrictions.

**Shift in Narrative:** Literature highlights PTI's efforts to rebrand Pakistan from a security-risk destination to a hub of natural beauty and cultural heritage (Haq & Jackson, 2020). Slogans like "Pakistan: The Hidden Treasure" and later "Destination Pakistan" were central to marketing campaigns.

**Focus on Eco-Tourism & Sustainability:** Studies note the government's stated commitment to developing eco-tourism, promoting responsible travel practices, and protecting sensitive environments, particularly in the northern regions facing increasing visitor pressure (Ali & Hussain, 2021).

#### **2. Key Policy Initiatives and Interventions:**

**Visa Liberalization:** A widely cited achievement was the significant expansion of the e-visa regime and visa-on-arrival facilities for citizens of numerous countries, drastically simplifying entry procedures (PTDC Annual Report, 2019-2020). This was seen as crucial for overcoming a major entry barrier.

#### **Infrastructure Development:**

**Roads:** Literature reports accelerated work on key access roads in mountainous areas (e.g., Kaghan Valley, Babusar Top, development along the Karakoram Highway) to improve connectivity to tourist hotspots (Ministry of Communications, various progress reports).

**Facilities:** Initiatives like the development of tourist facilitation centers, campsites (e.g., "Tourist Facilitation Centers" model in Nathiagali), and public toilets were launched, though implementation speed and scale were often critiqued (Butt, 2021).



### **Promotion and Marketing:**

**Visit Pakistan" Campaigns:** Aggressive domestic and international marketing campaigns were launched, leveraging social media influencers, international travel shows, and high-profile visits (e.g., Prince William, international YouTubers) (PTDC Marketing Reports).

**Branding:** Efforts focused on highlighting diverse offerings: mountains, culture, religious tourism (Kartarpur Corridor), beaches, and heritage (UNDP Pakistan, 2021 - Supporting Sustainable Tourism).

### **Institutional Reforms:**

**Establishment of National Tourism Coordination Board (NTCB):** Created to improve inter-provincial and inter-departmental coordination, a persistent challenge in tourism governance (Notification: Cabinet Division, 2019).

**Provincial Focus:** The 18th Amendment devolved tourism primarily to provinces. Literature notes PTI's push for better coordination between federal bodies (PTDC, MoC) and provincial tourism departments (Khan & Ahmed, 2022).

**Kartarpur Corridor:** The opening of the Kartarpur Sahib Corridor in 2019 is consistently highlighted as a major diplomatic and tourism achievement, facilitating Sikh pilgrims from India and globally (Ministry of Religious Affairs, Annual Reports).

### **3. Reported Outcomes and Impact:**

**Increase in Tourist Arrivals:** Multiple sources, including PTDC and the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) country reports for Pakistan (2019-2021), cite a significant increase in international tourist arrivals prior to the COVID-19 pandemic (2019), with a strong recovery push post-pandemic (2021-2022). Domestic tourism also surged notably.

**Economic Contribution:** Studies suggest a noticeable increase in tourism's contribution to GDP and employment during this period, particularly benefiting local communities in tourist areas through homestays, guiding services, and handicrafts (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, Economic Surveys 2019-2022; Haq, 2022).

**Improved Perception:** Literature analyzing international media coverage and travel advisories suggests a gradual, albeit fragile, improvement in Pakistan's perception as a tourist destination during the PTI tenure (Anwar et al., 2022).

### **4. Critiques and Challenges Identified in Literature:**

**Implementation Gap:** A recurring theme is the gap between ambitious policy pronouncements and on-ground implementation. Infrastructure projects often faced delays, budget constraints, and quality issues (Butt, 2021; Khan & Ahmed, 2022).

**Sustainability Concerns:** Despite the eco-tourism rhetoric, studies raised concerns about inadequate waste management, pressure on fragile ecosystems (e.g., trash on K2 base camp treks, deforestation), lack of effective carrying capacity studies, and insufficient regulation of new constructions (e.g., controversial cable car projects in Swat/Murree) (Ali & Hussain, 2021; ICIMOD reports).

**Skill Gaps and Service Quality:** Literature points to persistent deficiencies in hospitality training, service standards, and tourist facilitation skills, limiting the quality of the visitor experience (Haq & Jackson, 2020).

**Security Perception Persistence:** While security improved in tourist zones, the perception of Pakistan as unsafe remained a significant barrier in key international markets, requiring sustained long-term effort beyond one government's term (Anwar et al., 2022).



**Impact of COVID-19:** The pandemic severely disrupted the sector just as momentum was building, leading to lockdowns, travel bans, and economic hardship for tourism-dependent communities (WTTC Pakistan Report, 2021).

**Coordination Issues:** Despite the NTCB, effective coordination between federal, provincial, and local authorities remained challenging, hindering holistic development (Khan & Ahmed, 2022).

#### **5. Scholarly and Analytical Perspectives:**

**Potential vs. Reality:** Scholars acknowledge PTI's ambitious vision represented a significant shift in prioritizing tourism but emphasize that transforming Pakistan into a mainstream global destination requires sustained, consistent effort over decades, addressing deep-rooted infrastructure, governance, and perception challenges (Haq, 2022).

**Focus on High-Impact vs. Broad-Based:** Some analyses suggest the focus was sometimes skewed towards high-profile projects (mega roads, marketing) rather than equally investing in foundational aspects like waste management, community training, and enhancing the quality of existing attractions (Butt, 2021).

**Laying the Groundwork:** Many sources conclude that the PTI period laid important groundwork: a national strategy, visa reforms, increased marketing, and placing tourism higher on the national agenda. However, the full realization of its potential was hampered by implementation challenges, the pandemic, and ultimately, the government's premature end (Khan & Ahmed, 2022; Haq, 2022).

#### **Conclusion:**

The literature indicates that the PTI government marked a distinct phase of heightened ambition and activity for Pakistan's tourism sector. Its key contributions include the formulation of the first National Tourism Strategy, significant visa liberalization, increased promotional efforts, and infrastructure focus. While measurable increases in tourist numbers and economic contribution occurred (pre- and post-pandemic peak), critiques highlight persistent challenges in implementation, sustainability management, service quality, and overcoming deep-seated security perceptions. The PTI era is generally viewed as initiating a crucial, though incomplete, process of unlocking Pakistan's vast tourism potential, setting a direction that requires long-term, consistent commitment beyond any single political term to achieve sustainable success.

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