

Gwadar's Tourism Potential - A Catalyst for Socio-economic Development in Baluchistan

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Abstract

Gwadar is a significant port city and a most critical node point of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project, envisioning sustainable tourism that can add to the peace and security within and beyond the country. The present research exploration registers a positive trajectory of a tourism-led holistic security prism. It evaluates 'why and how' states have developed their coastlines and maritime infrastructure and successfully leveraged them as an asset for the state. The central argument of this paper is that Gwadar has all the essential baseline ingredients: a picturesque coastline fused with human and cultural heritage that needs to be unlocked to be a vibrant tourist destination for the proactive inclusive national peace, stability and security of the country. Therefore, Gwadar is poised to be perceived and pursued as a 'Strategic Tourism Key' for investing in and promoting the Maritime economy to overcome our country's social and economic disparities and security challenges. An integrated theoretical prism, based on inferences from the 'Traditional and Non-Traditional Security' perspective is employed in this study. Here, an indigenous ecosystem that defines the tourism policy perspectives, policies and practices is kept in mind. The dialects of the 'NI (national interest) – NS (national security) – HS (human security)' are incorporated through the contractive lens. In crux, this research is alarmist and futuristic at the same time. On the one hand, it highlights the maritime infrastructure and tourism potential of Gwadar and its significance for Pakistan. Parallel to this, the study notes the development gaps in existing tourism policies and limitations in previous policies. In short, Gwadar as a 'tourist' destination must be seen as a means for inclusive and holistic national security aspirations. Sustainable peace and stability through 'Tourism' is an innovative practice that needs to be cultivated to the maximum in Gwadar's case based on the balanced 'state and society's equation.

Keywords: *Gwadar, Tourism, National Security, Socio-Economic Development, Pakistan.*

Introduction

Baluchistan is the largest province of Pakistan by area and smallest by

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population. It occupies land of 34.7 million hectares (44% of Pakistan's total area) and a population of 8 million approximately (*PDMA Balochistan - Balochistan Profile*, n.d.). Gwadar is the port city in Baluchistan with a population of approximately 85,000 and a geographic area of 12.637 sq. km (*About Gwadar*, n.d.). Archaeological records show that it used to be inhabited for thousands of years as a fishing community but was least developed. Historically, it was part of Oman from 1783 to 1958 and was purchased by Pakistan on 8 September 1958 for 3 million US Dollars (Iqbal, 2015) for expanding and capitalizing maritime capabilities of Pakistan. Since then, the focus has been on the development of its port infrastructure, but China's CPEC investment hugely enhanced and transformed the infrastructure in Gwadar to leverage its economic and military potential.

The strategic importance of Gwadar lies in its geographical location due to several reasons. Firstly, it is located alongside the shores of the Arabian Sea, at the mouth of the Persian Gulf facilitating the energy flow via the Strait of Hormuz and connecting South Asia with Central Asia. Secondly, the importance of Gwadar port lies in its economic potential as an important component of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) via the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). For that reason, it holds significance for trade and transportation at lower costs and less transit time from China and the Indian Ocean to the rest of the world, again providing a gateway to European and African markets with the potential to handle logistics, manufacturing capacity, service controls, etc. Thirdly, the port is close to Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs) and is planned to become a free zone or special economic zone that's why crucial for maritime security and naval operations against military threats, piracy, smuggling, and security of international waters.

Several initiatives for infrastructure development in Gwadar have been taken to cash its strategic location and enhance connectivity with other national and international regions such as the M-8 motorway, Makran Coastal Highway and soon-to-be-completed Gwadar International Airport. Proper initiatives for the development of Gwadar started to be taken in the late 1990s with the Chinese vested interests. The construction of the port started on 22 March 2001 and was inaugurated in 2007 with a total cost of \$248 million (Rizvi, 2008) through China's technical and financial assistance. Later in 2015, the BRI project and CPEC initiative further provided development opportunities for Gwadar port with the perception of China's presence on the Indian Ocean being eased by the projects in Gwadar. It was also assumed that it is because of "Beijing's increased economic and political presence in the Middle East, where its interests do not always converge with those of Europe" (Grare, 2018). The projects in Gwadar under CPEC include transportation infrastructure, economic free zones, industrial parks, port terminals, hospitals, schools, colleges, and various electricity and water supply projects, etc. According to federal minister Ahsan Iqbal, since 2022, 18 projects have been completed in Gwadar and Balochistan such as "Gwadar Power Plant, Distribution of 2000 Boat engines to fishermen of Gwadar, Khuzdar-Panjgur Transmission line (via Nag-Basima) which connect Makran with National Grid, New Gwadar International Airport Project, the China-Pak Friendship

Hospital, China-Pak Technical and Vocational Institute in Gwadar, the Gwadar East-bay Expressway Project, Gwadar Free Zone, and Gwadar Port" (Ministry of Planning Development and Special Initiative, 2023).

Likewise, tourism in Gwadar holds various local and regional benefits for Baluchistan and Pakistan by promoting sustainable tourism practices, reducing economic vulnerability, creating job opportunities, improving infrastructure, community development, cultural preservations, etc. The Further development of the port has the potential for industrial infrastructure, and fisheries lead to economic growth and attracting Foreign Direct investment in the region as a critical industrial and transshipment hub. The unique landscape, beaches and cultural heritage also offer opportunities for tourism in Gwadar. Developing its tourism infrastructure such as resorts, hotels, recreation and entertainment places, parks, cultural amenities, arts clubs, etc. can play a big role in attracting and accommodating national and international tourists.

This research aims to unveil the potential of the tourism sector in Gwadar and its scope underscores the analysis of current tourism infrastructure, development gaps, and its socio-economic impact on Pakistan's national security policy. The study also highlights the need for effective and comprehensive planning to tap the tourism sector for socio-economic growth in Gwadar. The study is conducted based on existing research on tourism, the socio-economic impacts of tourism development, and its various policy frameworks for tourism in emerging and developed regions at global and local levels. It addresses the following research questions:

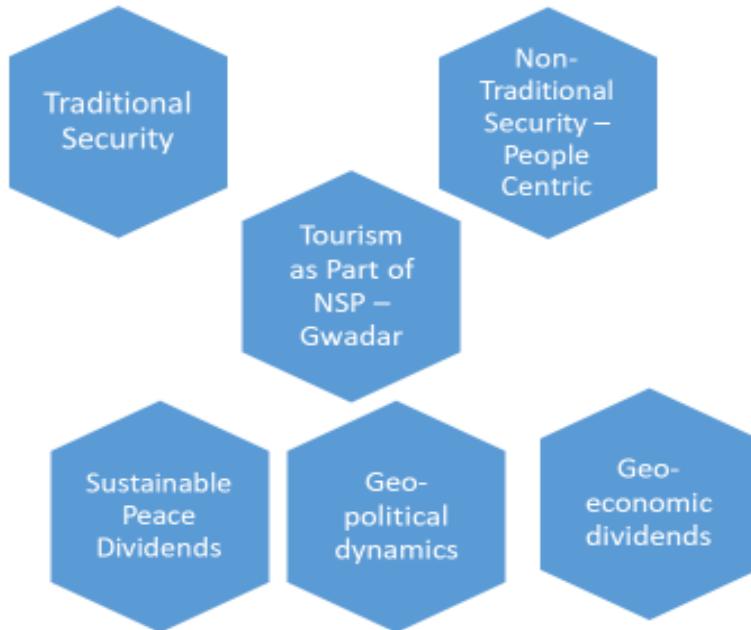
1. How can the potential of tourism in Gwadar be leveraged for the broader socio-economic development of Baluchistan within and beyond the country?
2. What are the challenges and opportunities for the development of Gwadar as a Strategic Tourism Hub?

Theoretical Framework: Tourism as a Catalyst for Inclusive Socio-economic development and sustainable peace & security

Globally, tourism is a well-registered vehicle to foster economic growth and prosperity. According to the Economic Impact Research conducted by the *World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC)*, "Travel & Tourism (including its direct, indirect, and induced impacts) accounted for 10.5% of all jobs (334 million) and 10.4% of global GDP (US\$10.3 trillion). Meanwhile, international visitor spending amounted to US\$1.91 trillion in 2019" (*World Travel & Tourism Council*, n.d.).

Present research study underscores the significance of tapping the potential of tourism for the proactive human development goals and instilling more integrative patterns across the diverse socio-political, ethnic-religious fault lines. The proposed theoretical framework is listed below:

Figure 1: Strategic Framework for Tourism – Gwadar



The proposed framework of this study gives a roadmap for strategically centering tourism as a pathway for Baluchistan's economic uplift and national integration process. Following this prism tourism is poised for a critical role in achieving a more resilient society as we look toward the future. The key arguments are:

- ❖ *Maritime Tourism inculcates progressive and inclusive societies*
- ❖ *Explore opportunities for Maritime Tourism to Contribute to Clean Growth*
- ❖ **Prosperity and Sustainable Growth of the Tourist based Economy with a focus to train resilient maritime tourism workforce**

The proposed framework reflects upon the processes for creating practical entry points to strategize the range of Gwadar's tourism potential that can yield local population to become more economically vibrant and resilient. In doing so, the challenges ranging from geo-political and geo-economies versus the ideas of sustainable tourism are explored. The key point is, maritime tourism's purpose, here Gwadar outlines some of the considerations of people engagement and holds the promise of an inclusive social-economic growth aiding sustainable peace and prosperity.

Tourism plays a critical role in enhancing the national security of a state by various means. Firstly, economic stability is very important for national security. Tourism can play a role in revenue generation, foreign exchange earnings and foreign

direct investment. It can aid in reducing poverty and unemployment in the country, creating job opportunities and hence contributing to social stability by reducing crime rates and insurgent activities. Community involvement, a higher standard of living, and promoting one's culture and values also develop a sense of social cohesion and ownership leading to social stability thus reducing tensions. It can also bring in foreign currency, which can also help to stabilize the value of the domestic currency.

Secondly, tourism and infrastructure development go hand in hand. One cannot be achieved without the other and vice versa. Such as Roads, airports, restaurants, hotels, communication networks, and recreational places promote tourism and tourism can be enhanced by these. It can be leveraged for national security by enhancing connectivity, cooperation, and coordination by reducing threats and improving response mechanisms. Thirdly, tourism promotes soft power, cultural exchange and diplomacy. For instance, it can play a role in shaping the overall image and perception of a state and its society.

Gwadar as a Strategic Tourism Key

Gwadar holds economic, strategic and geopolitical significance and a potential tourism linchpin. Gwadar has the potential to handle trade volume through cargo services via maritime routes facilitated by CPEC. The economic significance of Gwadar has the potential to benefit trade not only in China and Pakistan but also in the Middle East, Africa and Central Asia. Its proximity to the Strait of Hormuz also adds to its strategic location that facilitates global oil supply via seaports. Its importance lies in it becoming an energy corridor controlling gas and energy pipelines for energy trade across the world. The regional connectivity and maritime trade route are further enhanced by port infrastructure i.e. roads, airports, etc., which facilitate and improve tourism in the region as well.

CPEC is further considered to boost tourism with its transportation and communication networks. CPEC airport project is also considered to be the benchmark shortly for tourism in Baluchistan. This fact is well-recognized by the key state holders asserting: "Baluchistan boasts a stunning coastal stretch, and there are ongoing efforts to develop eco-tourism resorts, beach parks, floating jetties, and relaxation spots along this coastline to cater to both domestic and international tourists, including those visiting Gwadar for business reasons (Xinhua, 2023. November 01).

There is a dire need to invest in the tourism sphere as of, one of the WTTC 2019 report, tourism contributes 2.9% of Pakistan's GDP (*Shahbaz Hussain, 2024*) and there is not much change to date. Innumerable think-tank reports that "Gwadar has the potential to heavily transform the economy of Pakistan" (Khetran & Institute of Strategic Studies, n.d.). PTDC has also introduced a National Calendar of Events for the ease of Tourists to plan their vacations. Likewise, the Tourism Education Conference was also PTDC in February this year (Baig, 2024). According to the federal Minister for Maritime Affairs, Qaiser Sheik, "Gwadar will play a key role in the economic development not only of Balochistan but also Pakistan shortly, improving the standard of living of the people of coastal areas of Makran" (Baloch,

2024).

It is important to maintain and develop potential tourist destinations in Gwadar to attract tourists. The idyllic coastline of Gwadar has several turquoise beaches. Kund Malir Beach which is famous for its golden sand and crystalline waters and Ormara Beach offering picturesque views. Other beautiful beaches include Daraan, Asthola Island, Beaches of Jiwani and Guns. Additionally, Hammerhead to enjoy the breathtaking beauty of Gwadar and the Arabian Sea, the commercial hub of Pishukan village in Gwadar, the Princess of Hope statue, Buzzi Pass, Koh-e-Batil, Baba Chandrakup, Gwadar Cricket Stadium, Gwadar Dessert, and The Sphinx are great tourist destinations in Gwadar (Fly Pakistan, n.d.). Likewise, Gwadar Port offers a vast variety of beach activities with holy sunsets. In addition, Hingol National Park, the largest national park of Pakistan situated in Gwadar. It attracts great numbers of visitors due to its plains, forests, deserts, and diverse ecosystem. The park encompasses the Hangul River Tributary and a wide and deep woodland in the north, a mountain range, the Arabian Sea, and the Gulf of Oman in the south. It also occupies wildlife like tigers, ibex, goats, and monkeys. Free Zone Agriculture Industrial Park is also a milestone achieved this year. Meanwhile, the region holds the potential to promote cultural tourism alongside natural tourism (Rafiq, 2022).

It is important to devise a desirable strategy and plan to capitalize on the potential of Gwadar. Balochi culture, cuisines, handicrafts, jewelry, traditional attires, music, and dance are also presented in several events and shows to entertain visitors. Hingol National Park is also famous for its Hindu temple called Mata Hinglaj or Nani Mandir. Annually, 250,000 pilgrims visit the temple for the Hinglaj Yatra, particularly in April (Kakar, 2024). Hingol River, mountains and hills, and marine life of Gwadar port also provide opportunities for hiking, snorkeling, camping, trekking, etc to explore the natural wonders besides enjoying the aesthetic beauty of nature. Currently, Gwadar encompasses six hotels and resorts, including the five-star Zaver Pearl Continental Hotel. Furthermore, ample space exists for the development of parks, dining places, accommodation resorts, and sports facilities (Small & Medium Enterprise Development Authority & Government of Pakistan, 1998).

Government Initiatives to Promote Tourism in Gwadar

The government has taken various initiatives to promote tourism and drive socio-economic development in Gwadar. Gwadar Port Master Plan is the most prominent one. It started in 2006 until the year 2050 for the management and development of operations at Gwadar Port according to the Gwadar Port Authority. This plan encompasses the development of the port, infrastructure development, urban development, and energy sector. Under this plan, Gwadar city has also been given the status of a Special Economic Zone to attract foreign investment in various sectors for development. It also includes tourism infrastructure such as resorts, hotels, and recreational spots. Committees have also been designed and working according to international standards to attract tourism investments and attractive tourist spots in Gwadar under the Gwadar Master Plan.

In addition, significant investment has been made in the construction and

development of Infrastructure such as communication networks, roads, and airports to enhance connectivity. Furthermore, tourism marketing and branding are also being used such as Tourism Promotion Campaigns (*GDA Begins Work...*, 2022) to attract national and international tourists by showcasing the natural, cultural, and historical sites in Gwadar. Training Programs have also been started to enhance the hospitable treatments and tourism experiences of the visitors including travel guides, language, emergency response, and other tourism essentials. Sustainable tourism practices (Baig, 2024b) are also promoted under environmental conservation initiatives to preserve the natural environment alongside ecological and tourism integrity and ethical conduct.

Pakistan Army is also encouraging and promoting international sports and other recreational activities in Gwadar for its socio-economic development (*Pakistan Army Promotes...*, 2024). The government has also encouraged private-sector investment and public-private partnerships to develop the tourism industry in Gwadar. Private companies are investing in tourism infrastructure by managing and investing in resorts and other accommodation places. They are also enhancing and enriching the experiences of tourists through tourism services like travel guides, events, and recreational activities. All in all, public-private partnerships along with community involvement in tourism are the key to promoting tourism for socio-economic development in Gwadar and Balochistan.

In the context of the National Security of Pakistan and the Human Development Index in Balochistan, Gwadar tourism can be strategically induced to achieve certain objectives. Firstly, cultural diplomacy can be used as a soft power for national image building at global levels by portraying Pakistan as a peaceful and beautiful nation with a rich cultural heritage through people-to-people interactions and exchange programs. In addition, tourism and its socio-economic benefits and improved human security can bring harmony and peace among vulnerable Baloch people by addressing their grievances and equitable distribution of resources. Hence, insurgency threats could be peacefully addressed or deterred too. People-friendly government policies and support systems are substantial in this regard. It can also lead to enhanced maritime surveillance and security measures.

Let's discuss some of the global and regional case studies where tourism has driven socio-economic development and their success indicators that can be used to promote tourism in Gwadar.

a) Bali, Indonesia

Bali is a province of Indonesia and has experienced a rise in tourism since the 1980s. 86.9% of the population follow Balinese Hinduism as a religion. Bali is famous for its arts and cultural heritage including music, poetry, traditional and modern dance, metalwork, sculptures, leather, etc. Bali also hosts the annual Indonesian International Film Festival. Additionally, it has been designated as the part of Coral Triangle (It's the area with the highest biodiversity of marine species, especially fish and turtles. In this area alone, over 500 reef-building coral species can be found) and it also has the Subak Irrigation System (Water Management and Irrigation system in Bali Island) as

a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Bali's 80% of the economy and GDP is comprised of tourism. It hosts more than 5 million tourists annually generating \$5.9B in revenue approximately (Worldmetrics.org, n.d.).

Bali's economy previously was based on agriculture but later transferred to tourism. It is considered one of the best tourist sites in the world. Tourism in the region played a significant role in promoting local crafts and businesses leading to increased job opportunities, improved standards of living, and enhanced infrastructure and development. Tourism increased after the construction of the Bali Beach Hotel in Sanur in 1963 and Ngurah Rai International Airport in 1970. The tourism industry in Bali also faced challenges like Terrorist attacks in 2005 and 2008 and yet received the Best Island Award in 2010 by Travel and Leisure and from BBC in 2011 (*Bali: Best Island in the World 12 Years Running - Indonesia Travel*, n.d.). Meanwhile, challenges like over-tourism, and environmental degradation also arise ringing the bell for sustainable and environmentally friendly tourism practices.

b) Costa Rica

Costa Rica is the North American Country with its coastlines Caribbean and Pacific. It is a prominent ecotourism destination because of its rich biodiversity. Costa Rican tourism lies all in nature and ecosystem and is known for its rainforests, wildlife and beaches, and animals like monkeys and sloths. It allows tourists to enjoy surfing, snorkeling, fishing, ziplining, hiking, etc. (Mobile, 2024). "According to the Tourism Satellite Account of the Central Bank of Costa Rica, the tourism industry directly accounts for 6.3% of the national economy and 1.9% indirectly, which adds up to 8.2% of the Gross Domestic Product. In addition, 8.8% of the country's total employment comes directly from tourism."

Costa Rica leveraged its tourism potential because of rural development, community-based tourism, conservation of its resources and diversification of the economy. However, it may face challenges with sustainable ecotourism practices and conservation.

c) Dubrovnik, Croatia

Dubrovnik is a city in Croatia, situated in the Balkans. It is famous for its Gothic-style architecture, ecclesiastical churches, monasteries, castles and fortified towns. It was added to the UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1979 (UNESCO: World Heritage Convention, n.d.). After World War II, the city's infrastructure and historic sites were preserved and restored to promote tourism for their cultural significance. Various plans are underway to make Dubrovnik a sustainable tourism destination. According to the statistics, the tourism industry contributes 20% of its GDP, while overnight stays include 4.5 million people in 2023, which is expected to increase tourism expenditures in Croatia from 2024 to 2029 up to \$291.9 million.

In addition, tourism has also significantly reduced unemployment rates in the state. Meanwhile, the socio-economic benefits for Croatia from the tourism industry include the development of urban infrastructure, restoration of cultural sites, and international visibility and acknowledgment. While the challenges include the preservation of cultural heritage, along with the problems of over-tourism.

d) Thailand & Vietnam, Southeast Asia

Thailand's tourism industry is well and well-established mainly focused on its infrastructure and diversity of entertainment and tourism sites. Although it faced setbacks due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, it revived itself and in 2022, the tourism industry contributed 7.24% to the national GDP (Statista, 2025).

While the Vietnamese tourism industry is emerging and developing fast with a focus on its natural landscape, biodiversity and cultural sites, both are located in Southeast Asia along with the sustainable practices of tourism. They have devised the "Vietnamese Tourism Marketing Strategy", "The country aims to welcome 35 million international visitors, with a growth rate of 13 - 15% per year, while serving 160 million domestic tourists, with a growth rate of domestic tourists at 4-5% per year" (Vietnam+, 2023b).

e) Caribbean Region

Countries in the Caribbean Region like Jamaica and Dominican Republic depend upon the tourism industry for their economic well-being. According to the World Bank Report, tourism accounts for 30% of Jamaica's GDP and heavily creates job opportunities. The Dominican Republic has 15-16% of its GDP from the tourism industry according to 2019 statistics (*Tourism Doing Business Investing in Dominican Republic*, n.d.).

f) Sub-Saharan Africa, Kenya

Kenyan Tourist places are famous for their wildlife. Masai Mara National Reserve is famous for its Big Five (Big Five includes: Lions, African Elephants, Rhinoceros, Cape buffalo and Leopards) and is marked as the 7th wonder of the world (Habari et al., 2022), attracting millions of tourists every year with various job opportunities and also improving rural infrastructure. The tourism industry contributes 10.4% of Kenyan total GDP and creates 5.5% of employment opportunities (Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife & Heritage, 2022).

g) Dubai, UAE

Dubai, UAE transformed its entire infrastructure and developed its economy through tourism beyond deserts and oil markets through luxury tourism, huge and tall buildings and tourist attractions, mega projects, lavish entertainment industry, etc. Travel and Tourism industry in UAE consists primarily of 11.7% of its total economy and contributes AED (Emirati Dirham, abbreviated as AED) 236B to its GDP by the year 2024, according to the statistics given by WTTC. Julia Simpson, WTTC President & CEO stated, "The UAE's Travel & Tourism sector has not only recovered; it soared to new heights, establishing itself as a cornerstone of the nation's economic landscape" (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2024).

The comparative analysis of regional tourism success stories provides us the opportunity to understand the different dynamics, challenges, opportunities and policy measures of tourism in different regions that could be incorporated and utilized for successful tourism and its socio-economic development in Gwadar, Pakistan. It helps us to unravel that the tourism industry and its respective strategies slightly differ on geographical demographics and regional dynamics. The European tourism industry is

promoted by cultural and historical heritage such as festivals, architecture, and culinary, etc. For example, in Italy and France. Europe also leads the world's tourism industry with half of the global tourism revenue being generated by one billion tourists visiting Europe annually (Rasool et al., 2021).

On the contrary, in Asia cultural diversity and natural landscapes, marine infrastructure, and natural beauty have been leveraged to attract tourists. For instance, Japan, India, Pakistan, etc. Likewise, Singapore offers urban tourism with global tourism sites, infrastructure, events, etc. But Malaysia is focused more on its natural environment such as beaches, highlands and resorts for tourism. The potential of tourism in Asia-Pacific is rising rapidly.

In addition, North American tourism infrastructure also differs slightly from South American tourism. North America focuses more on urban tourism with mega projects and tourist destinations to attract visitors. Such as New York and Los Angeles. Meanwhile, South American tourism is based on community involvement and eco-tourism practices, i.e. Brazil.

Above all, the commonalities that exist in tourism sectors of all regions for marking their success stories are based on some principles. The foremost thing for the success of the tourism industry is inclusive and comprehensive government policies and support initiatives. Secondly, what makes the tourism industry substantial is the tourism infrastructure and its crucial development according to the advanced standards. Thirdly, in the current century of environmental degradation and climate change, there is a need for sustainable tourism practices alongside the preservation and conservation of tourism infrastructure, historical sites and natural resources. Fourthly, there should be diversity and variety in tourism sites, products and related infrastructure to attract tourists large number of visitors. Finally, strong and effective tourism branding and marketing are also essential for image building and cooperation beyond borders.

Current Tourism Infrastructure and Development Gaps

According to the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) reports, Pakistan's GDP has an annual 0.1% (\$ 300 million) share of coastal tourism. However, the potential can rise to \$5 billion with well-established coastal tourism infrastructure (Agencies, 2023).

Current Tourism Infrastructure in Gwadar comprises primarily of accommodation and tourist facilities, Transportation, healthcare, and safety. Although Gwadar has good resorts and hotels ranging from budget-friendly, small-scale to mid-range accommodations, there are no large international standards and luxury hotels creating big flaws in tourism infrastructure in Gwadar unable to handle many tourist's influxes. Similarly, transportation facilities have largely been improved with CPEC development, but the local taxis, bus services, and air connectivity are still limited in numbers. A significant achievement in infrastructure development is the Makran Coastal Highway (Wikipedia contributors, 2024) from Gwadar Port to Karachi, ML-1 railway infrastructure and various urban centers. Additionally, transportation barriers such as check post-security are also associated with limited movement within

the area and province. The security in the face of strategic challenges and insurgency threats in Balochistan is managed but the perception of security needs to be changed along with the improved citizen's and tourist security measures. However, Gwadar International Airport is under construction and will also bring international visitors in large numbers. Furthermore, the number of restaurants and cafeterias is also very small in number. Trained tourist guides are also very few along with the Tourist facilitation or information Centers. The limited or smaller number of both is also limiting recreational activities at beaches and other tourist destinations. Basic healthcare infrastructure likewise demands comprehensive facilities.

The Gwadar Master Plan is also going to be revisited with some important policy changes in the tourism sector by August 14, 2024 (Rafiq, 2022b). According to that, major developments are expected for tourism at the west bay of the Arabian Sea coast. The revised plan will incorporate urban planning, sustainable tourism practices, adoption of renewable energy, and smart technologies. New port development will also be promoted under the Gwadar port business model. The airports are also updated and extended for international connectivity to China, Central Asia, and the Middle East. Besides that, intrastate connectivity is also needed to connect with other regions of Pakistan i.e. Sindh, Punjab, KPK, Gilgit Baltistan, and Kashmir for commerce, trade and cultural integration.

The lack of such infrastructure compromises the connectivity and security of tourists in Gwadar and hence presents development gaps that lessen the visitors' interest in the region. These development gaps demand world-class facilities such as luxury hotels, eco-lodges, sports and cultural clubs, large-capacity resorts and restaurants, aesthetic dining places exhibiting the cultural tastes of Gwadar and Balochistan, airports, and local busses, taxies, and boating transport systems along with trained tourist guides and tourists' facilitation centers, emergency response systems to mitigate any problem faced by tourists. The tourism development strategy could be benchmarked against the world's successful tourist destinations, guided by the world's top tourism policies because Gwadar holds all the potential for it. For instance, recreational, healthcare, and safety activities in cities like Bali, Thailand Dubai, etc. could be studied to be incorporated into the Gwadar Tourism Plan. Dubai-style-bling-based model is also soon going to be started to emphasize, promote, and preserve Gwadar's cultural heritage and natural ecosystem. "The similarities between 1950s Dubai and current-day Gwadar provide us with some aspirations for Gwadar's economic development and insights into how to leapfrog into the future" (Shabbir et al., 2023). Tourism in Gwadar and other underdeveloped areas alongside the Arabian Sea is already a rational part of the CPEC Long-Term Development Plan. The other notable thing particular to Gwadar is the limited branding and marketing of tourist sites. The acknowledgment and promotion of Gwadar tourism are limited at the domestic and local levels too. The government should start promoting and developing the Gwadar tourism industry first through nationwide campaigns to make it more effective on global pages.

Socio-Economic Impacts of Tourism in Gwadar

The terms CPEC, Gwadar port and Socio-Economic Development in Balochistan are interlinked. Similar is the case with Gwadar. Gwadar port development encouraged tourism, and it was further facilitated by CPEC. “Leveraging Gwadar’s unique geographical position to promote regional cooperation and connectivity can foster greater economic integration and stability (Mehdi, 2024)”. Also, the tourism sector is encouraging further infrastructure development in the region. The best example of it in Gwadar could be understood in the form of basic utilities such as water supply, electricity, waste management, mobile networks, internet, etc. The improvement of these utilities is necessary for a better quality of life and improved experience of tourism in Gwadar. Tourism in Gwadar also enhances the healthcare and safety systems in the city to provide better quality services to visitors. The improved connectivity at Gwadar port also optimizes logistics and boosts both inbound and outbound trade (*Infrastructure Development in Baluchistan: Assessing the Role of Gwadar Port and CPEC*, 2023). Social welfare can be further promoted by revenue generated from trade taxations, tariffs and port charges. Above all, environmental conservation is also necessary in Gwadar Tourism. Eco-tourism or sustainable tourism practices can help generate and promote policies for environmental conservation and protection in the region.

Tourism in Gwadar brings a huge variety of Socio-economic development to the region. Tourism brings a diverse job market. Tourism creates both direct and indirect employment opportunities in fact in the education sector, as well. The tourism infrastructure like hotels, restaurants, transportation, tour operations, transportation, recreational activities, etc. to maintain and promote the tourism industry. Meanwhile, sectors like agriculture, retail, trading and construction for building tourism infrastructure demand a skilled and trained workforce. In this sense, the education sector plays an important role in educating and training people in the field of tourism. This brings the whole of social stability, cohesion, harmony and peace to society by eradicating social inequality, poverty and unemployment.

In addition, economic prosperity in Gwadar is also gained via the tourism industry. As it can bring diverse sources of earnings. Previously, being dependent on fishing and port, the tourism sector provided locals with numerous alternatives to generate income and run their households. Likewise, the business sector also flourished and has the potential to develop further in the form of travel agencies, tour operations, sports companies, handicrafts and cuisines. Local businesses and enterprises, small-scale industries, and seasonal businesses can benefit in Gwadar in numerous ways like increased sales, and greater revenues aiding in business expansions. Local cuisines, textiles and handicrafts also promote and help preserve the cultural heritage. Business models in Gwadar can not only promote local businesses but also industrial and free economic zones in Gwadar can attract foreign investment and foreign currency exchange bringing value to the national rupee. Foreign investment will also bring a transfer of technology, knowledge and expertise creating numerous opportunities for locals besides work costs. Furthermore, the

tourism industry provides opportunities for new business start-ups and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to showcase their work and business ventures. In this context, these start-ups could help promote tourism through marketing, promotion, cultural values and community engagement. Community involvement and community-based tourism are essential to make cultural or natural tourism a success story. This role is further enhanced and promoted by SMEs. Resultantly, it brings socio-economic prosperity with equitable distribution of tourism benefits in the community.

Challenges

The insurgency and lack of development in Baluchistan are the biggest national security threats Pakistan is facing since its independence. It is also further exploited often by other state and non-state actors against the national security interests of Pakistan. The main cause of such conflict is a lack of development and infrastructure also leading to worst human security conditions in Baluchistan. The former chief minister of Baluchistan Jam Kamal stated that the people demand good governance and fulfillment of their basic needs for well-being in Baluchistan (Mohammad.Zafar, 2019). The human development index in Baluchistan as per the UNDP 2019 report, is 0.20% compared to Punjab's 0.57%. 1.2 million children out of 12.4 million in Baluchistan's population are deprived of education (Janjua, 2023). India also exploits Gwadar's problems and its development for its vested interests in regional hegemony, economic and energy security and maritime influence in the Indian Ocean. It fears China's or Pakistan's hegemony via CPEC development initiatives in the face of its geopolitical conflicts with Pakistan and China's rivalry (Shah, 2017).

The biggest challenge that tourism faces in Gwadar is the security threats and political instability in the province. The presence of militant or insurgent groups leads to a reduction in the number of tourists in the region (Ahmad, 2008). 90% of Baluchistan's population is directly or indirectly being influenced by insurgency and 10% of them are exploited by such insurgent organizations. Travel advisories and enhanced security measures further create problems and prohibit tourists from visiting the area. The security issues and conflicts are very much rooted in the history of Gwadar and even strict security measures cannot address the local grievances without grass roots-level long-term strategy. China has also been considered as an adversarial and dominating force in Baluchistan further exacerbating the Baloch problems despite CPEC development initiatives. The attack on the Chinese consulate by militants and protests have hindered the development projects in Gwadar (Akhtar, 2024).

Furthermore, Baluchistan and Gwadar previously have been largely ignored in terms of socio-economic growth and development. However, the focus has been shifted to its development because in the development of Baluchistan lies the development of Pakistan. The unplanned and short-term development measures may again create problems in the future. Also, challenges may arise like a lack of investment and insufficient funds for development. The Gwadar Master Plan has also

numerous flaws because it has been for a very long period since 2050 but lacks a clear path to achieve the goals. Also, the advancement in development initiatives and technological revolutions over the period. Moreover, Gwadar as a tourist destination lacks proper branding and marketing at the domestic and international level.

In addition, the other problem comes with sustainable development and environmental conservation. The World Tourism Organization 2008 report entitled “Climate Change and Tourism, Responding to Global Challenges” states that, The time is now for the tourism community to advance its strategy to address what must be considered the greatest challenge to the sustainability of tourism in the 21st century (Ahmad, 2008).

The lopsided development and lack of sustainable tourism practices, resource management, or eco-tourism can lead to a rise in challenges like environmental degradation, pollution, contaminated water and waste management (Pakistan Council of Research in Water Resources & Ministry of Water Resources, 2022). Locals in Gwadar often protest for the provision of clean water, electricity, gas, and fishing rights and against the Chinese projects and growing influence in the province. The 31-day-long sit-in in December 2021 called as “Gwadar ko Haqq do” movement is a prominent protest for the socio-economic deprivation of the residents (Shabbir et al., 2023). Locals also lack awareness of the sustainability of tourism practices. Meanwhile, social and cultural challenges to tourism in Gwadar also exist. However, the hospitality in Baloch culture (Raisani, 2024) and the principles of locals provide a fascinating experience to the tourists residing there. Still, the cultural norms and values, the primitive dress codes, patriarchal societal structure may stretch a line between tourists and residents of the region. Despite some of the development initiatives post-British Rule and independence, Baloch culture has not modernized itself and they consider their unique language, dress code, and culture as their identity and reason of resistance. Similarly, over-commercialization and overdevelopment can again generate conflict along with threats to Baloch's cultural heritage. On the other hand, the lack of equitable distribution of national resources to Balochistan has already reduced community engagement to comply with the government policies and initiatives, leading to conflict.

Recommendations

Gwadar needs a comprehensive, inclusive, robust plan and practical strategic policy to promote tourism for the greater socio-economic development of the province and wider national security interests. According to Ambassador Naghmana A. Hashmi, “With the right strategies and investments, Pakistan's tourism industry can be a significant driver of economic growth and development for the country” (Hashmi, 2024). Here are a few policy recommendations for effective measures in this regard:

1. Gwadar Master Plan needs to be a comprehensive and short-term strategy with sustainable, and durable benefits of the development initiatives along with technological advancements fully induced and utilized for tourism operations and facilities. Therefore, it must include zoning, land use, sustainable tourism plans and environmental conservation. There should also

be careful and planned commercialization and modernization of existing tourism infrastructure in the region.

2. Public-private partnerships, investment in human development, and institutional reforms are inevitable to promote and manage tourism and build infrastructure for the purpose. Private entities can bring accommodation, dining, and recreation services along with government taxes, subsidies and regulation standards.
3. A committee shall be made to address the unique challenges and tap the available opportunities with necessary measures for tourism development and infrastructure in Gwadar. Likewise, a robust security mechanism for tourism development demands a Tourism Police Force can also be established to provide security and safety for tourists and other recreational, cultural, and sports events, and carry out other tourism-specific operations in Gwadar. Such committees and police forces can go together with other government organizations for coordination, cooperation, and intelligence affairs for the promotion of tourism.
4. The locals and Baloch residents are equal and important stakeholders in decision-making regarding tourism development in Gwadar. Tourism cannot be successful without community involvement in Gwadar. Community engagement can play a crucial role in tourism planning, building infrastructure, and managing and promoting tourism operations. Local cultural heritage, its values and principles could be cashed well to promote tourism by local communities. Moreover, it can play a role in deterring cultural sensitivity, building peace and resolution of conflicts, and bringing socio-economic development with improved standards of living. Community engagement and cultural tourism could be further enhanced by awareness campaigns.
5. Tourism infrastructure must be further developed by enhancing road, land, and air connectivity such as direct flights, railways, taxis or bus services, improved internet networking, etc. Besides that, international hotel chains, world-class resorts, restaurants, clubs, and guest houses are inevitable to attract tourists worldwide. In addition, healthcare facilities and public services shall also be improved to maintain and uplift the quality of life for not only tourists but also for residents. Energy efficiency, clean water and electricity supply shall be maintained.
6. Eco-tourism is a need of the 21st century. There shall be a sustainable tourism plan focused on waste management, coastal erosion and biodiversity conservation addressing the challenges of climate change. Protection of tourist sites and guidelines for sustainable tourism alongside promoting local entrepreneurs and stakeholders to preserve their cultural and natural assets with gender-inclusive policies is also mandatory for eco-tourism. Moreover, renewable sources of energy and sustainable urban development planning can lower pollution and carbon emissions.

7. The comprehensive marketing and branding strategy along with Gwadar's unique selling propositions (USP) is crucial to be maintained because Gwadar has all the potential for it. Dubai's model of development and tourism infrastructure could be followed in this regard. Moreover, effective tourism campaigns and travel exhibitions both at domestic and global levels are inevitable to promote tourism in Gwadar beyond borders. For that purpose, digital social media platforms, online travel and tourism agencies, and travel influences could help to reach the target audience. Cultural, sports, academic events, films, music, and media productions can also showcase the tourism diversity in Gwadar by attracting a huge number of visitors.
8. Tourism can assist in soft diplomacy and can foster cooperation and coordination among various parties within and outside the state at government and business levels for tourism promotion. It will also help to portray Pakistan as a peaceful nation while mitigating the threats of insurgency and terrorism associated with the region. This strategy can also improve the Human security and socio-economic development index in Balochistan.
9. For the success of the tourism industry in Gwadar and to gain the optimum level of socio-economic development from the tourism sector, a skilled workforce, labor and entrepreneurs meeting global tourism standards are substantial. Training institutes, job creation initiatives, education, awareness, and hospitality training programs can promote skill development, and assist in making the tourism industry grow in an innovative style.

Conclusion

The research article concludes that importance of tourism in Gwadar by highlighting the tourism infrastructure in Gwadar, its socio-economic impacts, government initiatives to promote tourism, and development gaps in existing infrastructure. Also, the tourism success stories from different areas of the world have been analyzed to formulate an effective tourism policy for Gwadar. Various challenges are being faced by Gwadar tourism that hinder the infrastructure development and socio-economic welfare of the locals. The paper concludes that Gwadar can act as a vital strategic tourism key for the national interests, national security and human rights in Pakistan. Tourism has all the essential ingredients to carry out such a responsibility with an effective and comprehensive action plan and the participation of all stakeholders. The natural beauty and landscapes, historical and geographical sites, and cultural heritage spots are pivotal and are founding elements in Gwadar tourism. CPEC and port development have further led to the infrastructure for a better life and resources to attract visitors. If promoted and showcased well, it will bring social welfare, cultural harmony, national cohesion and integrity, and economic prosperity not only in Gwadar or Balochistan but also in Pakistan at wider levels.

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