

# Sikh pilgrimage tourism in Pakistan: Obstacles and the way forward

## Turismo de peregrinação Sikh no Paquistão: Obstáculos e o Caminho a Seguir

UMAIR ABBAS \* [umairabbasali14@gmail.com]

KHURRAM SHAHZAD \*\* [khurramshahzad@mul.edu.pk]

ANUM JAVAID \*\*\* [anumjavaid13@outlook.com]

**Abstract** | Being the origin of Sikhism, Pakistan has a massive potential of tourism regarding Sikh Pilgrimage. However, Pakistan has failed to make this sector a full-fledged tourism industry. This study explores the potential and existing infrastructure of the Sikh Pilgrimage in Pakistan. It also aims to find the impediments in blooming of this sector and the problems faced by Sikh pilgrims during their pilgrimage (Yatra) in Pakistan. A mixed-method approach; qualitative as well as quantitative is used in this study and the data was collected through questionnaires, visits, and interviews with pilgrims and govt. officials. The findings showed that the Pilgrimage sector is facing many problems, including Indo-Pak bilateral tension and strict visa policy, lack of advertisement campaigns, poor law and order situation, infrastructural & transportation issues, etc. Therefore, to make the Sikh pilgrimage sector a multi-million-dollar industry; these issues must be addressed accordingly.

**Keywords** | Sikh pilgrimage, religious tourism, Sikhism, PSGPC, ETPB, Pakistan

**Resumo** | Sendo o berço do Sikhismo, o Paquistão tem um enorme potencial turístico relacionado com a peregrinação Sikh. No entanto, não conseguiu fazer deste setor uma indústria impulsionadora. O estudo explora o potencial e a infraestrutura existente da Peregrinação Sikh no Paquistão. Além disso, visa encontrar os impedimentos deste setor e os problemas enfrentados pelos peregrinos Sikh durante a sua viagem de peregrinação (Yatra) no Paquistão. O estudo utilizou uma abordagem de métodos mistos, qualitativa e quantitativa. Os dados foram recolhidos por meio de questionário, visitas e entrevistas com peregrinos e funcionários do governo. Os resultados mostraram que o setor de peregrinação enfrenta muitos problemas, incluindo tensão bilateral Indo-Pak e uma política rígida de vistos, falta de campanhas publicitárias, má situação de lei e ordem, problemas de infraestrutura e transporte, etc. Por

\* **Lecturer**, School of Economics & Management Sciences, Minhaj University Lahore, Pakistan

\*\* **Assistant Professor**, School of Economics & Management Sciences, Minhaj University Lahore, Pakistan

\*\*\* **Lecturer**, School of Economics & Management Sciences, Minhaj University Lahore, Pakistan

consequente, para fazer do setor do turismo Sikh uma indústria multimilionária, estas questões têm de ser abordadas.

**Palavras-chave** | Peregrinação Sikh, turismo religioso, Sikhismo, PSGPC, ETPB, Paquistão

## 1. Introduction

Religious tours are often referred to as *Pilgrimage*, is one of the most common forms of tourism and this industry is known as Pilgrimage Tourism. It deals with people traveling to sacred places either; to perform religious activities, pray to cure illness, seek forgiveness of their sins, do acts of devotion, fulfillment of their vows, take part in religious ceremonies, or pay homage to the religious saints; which also brings mental and spiritual peace, good fortune, and pleasure (Lazaridi, 2013). Religious attractions e.g. temples, shrines, and sacred memorial places attract millions of tourists every year (Linda, 2023; Meyer-Arendt, 2004). As Pilgrimage is considered the most sacred journey and is highly practiced in major religions like Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Sikhism; the pilgrimage tourism has an edge over all the other forms of tourism as it generates revenues in such a way that no other form of tourism does. According to Gloria Guevara Manzo, the President, and CEO of the World Travel & Tourism Council, "Inclusive growth and ensuring a future with quality jobs are the concerns of governments everywhere. Travel & Tourism, which already supports one in every ten jobs on the planet, is a dynamic engine of employment opportunity" (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2018). The word 'Pilgrim' is derived from the Latin word '*Palma*' meaning '*palm tree*' (Lazaridi, 2013).

Pakistan possesses great potential for religious tourism, especially for Sikhs and Buddhists as the sacred religious places such as mosques, shrines, and temples scattered across the country make Pa-

kistan an attractive place for religious tourism for Hinduism, Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism, etc. Resultantly, every year a number of devotees from different religions turn in to visit or to perform religious obligations.

The evolution of Sikhism goes back to the end of the 15th century. Baba Guru Nanak (1469-1539) who was born in Talwandi (now called Nankana Sahib located in Punjab, Pakistan) is said to be the founder of Sikhism. Consequently, only Sikh and Buddhist religious tours can earn Pakistan up to PKR 20bn and generate 40,000 jobs per year (Gallup-Pakistan, 2019).

The Sikh Religion is based on the teachings of 10 religious saints and the Holy Book which compiles the words and teachings of these saints. The saints are called '*Gurus*'<sup>1</sup> of which Baba Guru Nanak is the first one while his successors include Guru Angad Dev, Guru Amar Das, Guru Ram Das, Guru Arjun Dev, Guru Har Gobind, Guru Har Rai, Guru Har Krishan, Guru Tegh Bahadur, and Guru Gobind Singh. The Holy Book of Sikhism '*Guru Granth*' is considered to be the Eleventh, the last, and the eternal Guru of Sikhism (Khan, 2000).

### 1.1. Sikh Pilgrimage Tourism in Pakistan

Pakistan hosts about 50,000<sup>2</sup> Sikhs on average, every year who come to perform their religious obligations as Pakistan is known as the 'Cradle of Sikhism' being the birthplace of the Sikh religion. For Sikhs, this nation is as sacred as Mecca and Madina for Muslims, Jerusalem for Jews, and

<sup>1</sup>Guru literally means teacher. In Sikhism, it is used for spiritual leader or saint

<sup>2</sup>Source: Caretaker Gurdwara Dera Sahib Lahore & Representative of Evacuee Trust Property Board (ETPB)

River Ganga for Hindus.

Several pilgrims come from India and other countries of the world to take part in different festivals often called 'Mela'. These festivals are broadly

categorized into two major types: *Gurpurabs* (festivals associated with Gurus) and other festivities. Major Sikh festivals that are celebrated in Pakistan are given in the table below.

**Table 1 | List of Sikh Religious Festivals in Pakistan**

Sr. #	Date	Name of Festival	Festival type
1.	14th April	Baisakhi (The Khalsa Birthday)	Holy Festival
2.	16th June	Martyrdom day of Arjan Dev	Gurpurab
3.	29th June	Death Anniversary Maharaja Ranjeet Singh	Commemoration
4.	16th Sep	Death Anniversary Guru Ramdas Jee	Gurpurab
5.	22nd Sep	Death Anniversary of Guru Nanak	Gurpurab
6.	9th Oct	Birthday of Guru Ramdas	Gurpurab
7.	15th Nov <sup>1</sup>	Celebration of Birthday of Guru Nanak	Gurpurab

Source: Report of Planning and development division, Govt. of Pakistan

<sup>1</sup> As of 2022. The birthday is celebrated on full moon of lunar month 'Kartik'.

Among these festivals, the most significant are Baisakhi and the Birthday of Baba Guru Nanak. These festivals attract more pilgrims as compared to the other festivals. Religious pilgrimages cause development of local economy (Linda, 2023; Antunes et al., 2017). During their journey, Sikhs take part in different religious and economic activities, which turns out to be a source of generating employment for both skilled and unskilled labor as well as hefty earnings for the government. Different sectors, such as; local transportation, hoteling, airlines, handicrafts, etc. can benefit a lot from religious tourism. It is also a source of cultural expansion and national integration (Bhat & Iqbal, 2013).

According to the World Economic Forum's Travel and Tourism Competitive Report, Pakistan is the least competitive country in the world in terms of travel and tourism. Despite having massive tourism potential, Pakistan has failed to achieve a decent ranking in overall tourism worldwide. Pakistan was ranked 83rd (out of 117 nations) in 2021, and it has improved the most from 2019 (121 out of 140). China, ranked 12th, has the

greatest Travel & Tourism Economy in the area, whereas India, ranked 54th, is in the top position in South Asia<sup>3</sup>. As a result, the neighboring countries China and India have significantly improved their rankings in terms of Travel & Tourism Competitiveness as compared to Pakistan<sup>4</sup>.

To make the most out of Sikh Pilgrimage and to make it a boosting industry in Pakistan, the problems faced by Sikh Pilgrims are needed to be addressed. The objective of the study is to identify the problems, their nature and the root causes of these problems. Moreover, the study also aims at finding the potential of existing infrastructure related to the Sikh Pilgrimage in Pakistan since this will highlight what Pakistan has to offer to the Pilgrims.

## 2. Review of Literature

According to Timothy and Olsen (2006), pilgrimage can be traced back to many centuries ago as the earliest form of tourism mobility. Despite

<sup>3</sup>Asia & Pacific

<sup>4</sup>WEF\_Travel\_Tourism\_Development\_2021.pdf (weforum.org)

modern tourism being considered a newer phenomenon with its roots deeply connected to the old pilgrimage practices. The understanding of the tourism development necessitates a thorough understanding of ancient pilgrimage practices. In recent decades, both Pilgrimage Tourism and its relationship with tourism at large have undergone significant transformations, and this process continues to unfold (Collins-Kreiner, 2016).

Before 1990s, 'Pilgrimage' as a research concept had very limited recognition. However, its foundations can be found in the ideas and theories formulated by anthropologists and sociologists of 1970s and 1980s. The focus of the theories was the 'visitor experience' and psychological dynamics shaping different forms of tourism including pilgrimage (Collins-Kreiner, 2020). Since early 21st century the scope of pilgrimage got the expansion from conventional religious to the secular journeys. Researchers started exploring the contemporary notions of pilgrimage within the framework of 'spiritual motivations' and related actions, instead of purely religious ones (Hyde & Harman, 2011).

Although religious tourism is an emerging and fertile area of research, it is one of the least explored topics compared to some of the other forms of tourism, more so in the case of Sikh Pilgrimage tourism. However, there have been a few studies related to tourism or Pilgrimage Tourism and its related aspects in some other regions. A brief review of some of the studies has been given as under.

Ullah et al. (2021) explored the role of tour operators in promoting sustainable tourism in Pakistan. They used qualitative techniques by conducting semi-structured interviews with 15 registered tour operators in Pakistan. Based on the criteria given by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC), thematic analysis of the responses was made. Findings showed that the tourist operators do realize the significance of the environmental, social, and economic effects of tourism on the communities, however, there is a serious lack

of a management system to cater to such things. Furthermore, tourist operators have no incentives from the govt. to devise and implement such systems. They further explained that the selection of tourist destinations is mostly demand or profit-driven rather than the GSTC criterion.

Irfan and Ali (2021) examined the scope and obstacles of religious tourism in Pakistan. Their study focused at choosing the most favorable strategy and form a set of strategies that could best remove the obstacles. Meanwhile, they treated obstacles as a means of forming criteria for their decision-making model, and strategies as various alternatives. The data was collected using a questionnaire from 50 experts and professionals in religious tourism. They also used the fuzzy-TOPSIS technique to solve multi-factored decisions by weighing the alternatives. The study concluded that ensuring strong political ties with the neighboring countries, especially with India, is the best strategy to overcome the obstacles of religious tourism in Pakistan. The reason is that Pakistan is home to several Hindu and Sikh Temples.

Kalim, Khan, and Syed (2020) analyzed the role of Pakistan's religious sites in promoting religious tourism and as a result, boosting socioeconomic growth. They used a qualitative approach to examine the significance of the neglected religious sites located in various regions of Pakistan. The study concluded that religious intolerance, past trends of militancy, lack of a tourism-friendly environment, poor planning, and cultural issues are the key factors responsible for the current dismal look of the religious-tourism in Pakistan.

Akhter, Jathol, and Hussain (2019) explained the role of religious tourism concerning Kartarpur Corridor in regional peace-making. Referring to the recent openings of corridors such as, China-Pak Economic Corridor and Kartarpur Corridor; the authors argued that peace-making in Pakistan will have a significant impact on the South-Asian region. Opening of Kartarpur Corridor will

not only increase the number of tourists but also boost Pakistan's soft image around the world and its economic activities.

A. U. Khan, Zaman, and Baloch (2019) investigated the prevalent gaps in Pakistan's marketing strategy for religious tourism. They used the Explanatory & Confirmatory factor-analysis, and Multiple Regression Model by obtaining data of a five-point Likert-scale questionnaire from 357 Sikhs. Finding illustrated that product and price have a significant positive relationship, promotion have a significant negative relationship, whereas, placement was found to have an insignificant negative relationship with pilgrim satisfaction.

Karnan and Pargunan (2014) explored the infrastructural issues, opportunities, and challenges faced by Pilgrimage Tourism in Pudukkottai. The study pointed to key pilgrimage destinations in Pudukkottai, facilities, the potential of the destinations, issues, and problems faced by the tourists as well as tourism. The study concluded that the tourists were satisfied with the peaceful atmosphere and the friendly behavior of natives. However, dissatisfaction was found in other factors, such as; drinking water, sanitation, and exploitation by the local transportation system. The recommendations included intensive publicity by the tourism department, more attention to tourists' inconveniences, a licensing mechanism for transporters, improving hospitality as well as the quality of other services, and tourist-friendly values for the local people.

Bhat and Iqbal (2013) analyzed the importance and need for privatization in the tourism industry and its other related issues in Jammu and Kashmir. They used secondary data to find out potentials; employment opportunities; privatization impact on the tourism industry; and other challenges related to tourism in Jammu & Kashmir. The study concluded that the tourism sector is the lifeline of Jammu & Kashmir as it opens new opportunities for resources in terms of investment, revenue, employment, and socio-economic well-being

of the residents. But it is facing numerous challenges, such as; poor connectivity with other regions, accommodation facilities, lack of resources with the Kashmir govt., poor public-private partnership, etc.

Elumalai and Rajendran (2013) examined the marketing issues and challenges related to pilgrimage tourism in Tamil Nadu, a state in South India. Their study used both primary as well as secondary sources of data collection. Primary data was collected from residents engaged in pilgrimage activities whereas the secondary data was based on the number of tourists and the earnings it generated in Tamil Nadu from 2001-11. The findings of the study explained the income generated through pilgrimage tourism has an increasing trend, however, this tourism is facing several problems related to; infrastructure, environment, investment, law, and order, etc. that are to be addressed.

Moghadam, Nejad, and Karimian (2013) identified a few destinations for religious tourism in the Sistan area for tourism development regarding religious tourism. The study used Heuristic-Factor analysis technique, KMO Index and Bartlett Test, and a primary source of data collection i.e., questionnaires. Findings highlighted the development of infrastructural and residential facilities for tourists can lead to the development and progress of the Sistan area.

Vijayanand (2012) identified the socioeconomic impacts of Pilgrimage Tourism in Pondicherry, India. Secondary sources such as; brochures, pamphlets, newspapers, the internet, advertisements, etc. were used for data collection. The results concluded that pilgrimage tourism has a significant impact on the economy. Its positive impacts comprise increased employment (especially for unskilled labor), rise in GDP, improved living standard, reduction in poverty, increased exports, etc. Its negative impacts include a rise in the local price level, a rise in the municipal budget on tourism arrangements, a rising cost of the property, a change in the lifestyle of the residents,

and an exodus of poor residents of the area, etc. The author suggested that increasing awareness of tourism development in local communities will improve the implementation of tourism strategies, therefore, more benefits can be achieved.

Suleiman and Mohamed (2011) studied the significance of pilgrimage tourism in Palestine and the effect of the Israel-Palestine conflict on religious tourism in Palestine. The paper also indicated the factors affecting the pilgrimage tourism market in Palestine. Results showed that the impact of conflict on the Palestinian tourism industry is likely to be lower at different times. The conflict and violence have resulted in a decreased number of visitors which in turn has led to low tourism revenues, increasing poverty, environmental damage, etc.

Haq, Jackson, and Wong (2008) conducted their study on the marketing of spiritual tourism in Pakistan. Using the qualitative approach, from 2007-08, they conducted in-depth interviews with those 26 private tour operators who offered spiritual experiences as part of their traveling plans. The tour operators were asked about the experiences, behaviors, attitudes, and preferences of the pilgrims regarding their spiritual visits. The study concluded that the spiritual tourists in Pakistan prefer traveling with families and friends. Moreover, these tourists are strongly influenced by historical and spiritual leaders.

Religious/Pilgrimage Tourism is an emerging but not a new topic of research in literature. All the studies mentioned above address different dimensions of religious tourism such as; cultural aspects, privatization, political, socio-economic, etc. These studies were carried out on different regi-

ons/countries and religions. Although this topic is fertile and multi-dimensional and offers a vast area of research, there has not been much done in this field specifically regarding the Sikh Pilgrimage profile in Pakistan. Therefore, this study addresses the research gap.

### 3. Sikh Destinations, Pilgrimage Profile, and the Management Structure

#### 3.1. Sikh Destinations

There are about 150 *gurdwaras* in Pakistan, located in different cities across the country, however, *gurdwaras* located at Nankana Sahib, Lahore, Hasan Abdal, and Narowal hold key importance for Sikh pilgrims (Govt. of Pakistan, 2006). Out of these 150, a large number of *gurdwaras* have been ruined, closed, or turned into schools/dispensaries, etc. while some are still open for visitors. These *gurdwaras* host different festivals throughout the year, which are participated by foreign Sikhs. It is to be noted that pilgrims coming from other countries are allowed to attend only a few of them. The table given below enlists some of the key Sikh destinations and their importance.

During a pilgrimage journey, Sikhs visit most of these *gurdwaras*. Besides Sikh holy places, they visit historical places like Badshahi Mosque, Lahore Fort, Minar-e-Pakistan, Sikh Gallery, Lahore Museum, and other key sites. Moreover, they also shop at famous markets like Anarkali Bazar, Shah Alam Market, Liberty Market, Naulakha Bazar, etc.

Table 2 | List of Few Major Sikh Destinations in Pakistan

Sr. #	Destination	Location	Historical Importance
1.	Gurdwara Dera Sahib	Lahore	- Samadhi <sup>2</sup> of Maharaja Ranjeet Singh - Death place of Guru Arjun Dev
2.	Gurdwara Shaheed Ganj Singh Singhanian		Martyrdom place of 250,000 Sikhs
3.	Gurdwara Shaheed Bhai Taru Singh		Martyrdom place of Taru Singh
4.	Gurdwara Bebe Nanaki		Birth place of Bebe Nanaki <sup>3</sup>
5.	Gurdwara Janam Asthan <sup>4</sup> Guru Ramdas		Birth Place of Guru Ramdas (4th Guru)
6.	Gurdwara Darbar Sahib Kartarpur	Narowal	- First gurdwara ever built - Death Place of Guru Nanak
7.	Gurdwara Janam Asthan	Nankana Sahib	Birth place of Guru Nanak
8.	Gurdwara Patti Sahib		The village school of Guru Nanak
9.	Gurdwara Mal Ji Sahib		The place where Guru Nanak's buffaloes used to graze
10.	Gurdwara Sacha Sauda <sup>5</sup>		The place where Guru Nanak offered food to starving mystics
11.	Gurdwara Panjvin & Chhevin <sup>6</sup> Patshahi		Shrines of 5 <sup>th</sup> Guru Arjun Dev and 6 <sup>th</sup> Guru Har Gobind
12.	Gurdwara Punja Sahib	Hasan Abdal	Hand prints of Baba Guru Nanak on a rock

Source: Smart Community Ecosystem

<sup>2</sup> Memorial Place; <sup>3</sup> Elder sister of Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism; <sup>4</sup> Janam Asthan means 'Birth Place'; <sup>5</sup> In Punjabi 'Sacha Sauda' means 'A true/profitable bargain'; <sup>6</sup> Punjabi words meaning 5th & 6th respectively

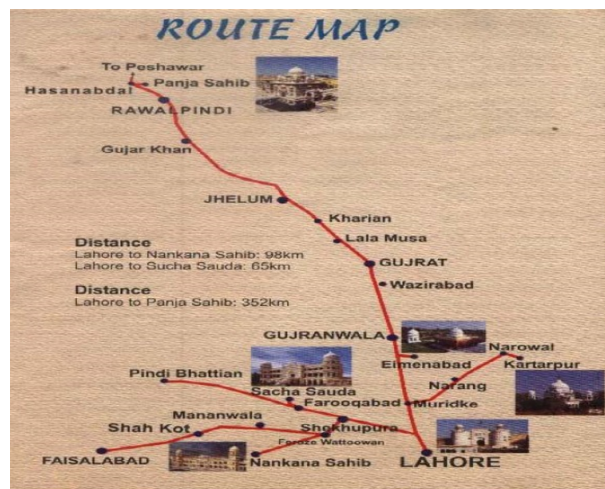


Figure 1 | Route Map

Source: Planning &amp; Development Division, Govt. of Pakistan

### 3.2. Pilgrimage Profile

The Sikh pilgrimage market in Pakistan can be divided into 3 segments:

1. Domestic Participants/Pilgrims
2. Indian Pilgrims
3. Diaspora Sikhs (Pilgrims from other countries e.g., UK, USA, Australia, Canada, etc.)

#### 3.2.1. Domestic Participants/Pilgrims

Domestic pilgrims represent the largest segment. Majority of Sikhs come from different regions of the country e.g. interior Sindh, Peshawar, and Punjab. They arrive by specific trains operated by the Pakistan Railways during the festival days. The majority of them belong to the low-income group and prefer to stay at the *gurdwaras* as food and accommodation are provided at no cost. This segment not only includes Sikhs but also the Hindu minority. Since there are several 'Bona Sikhs' from

various religions in Pakistan, the number of domestic participants, including pilgrims and non-pilgrim visitors, fluctuates between 20,000 and 30,000.

### 3.2.2. Indian Pilgrims

The most important of the three is the Indian pilgrims. A bilateral convention (also known as the Nehru-Liaquat accord) agreed upon by the Indian and Pakistani governments in 1955 governs the number of pilgrims. Sikhs from India are granted 10-days visas and are permitted to attend four

festivals. Table 3 illustrates the number of Indian pilgrims permitted at each of the four festivals.

Although the visa quota is pre-defined between Indo-Pak governments, there have been a few occasions where Pakistan has hosted 3500-4000 pilgrims from India<sup>5</sup>. The Indian Sikhs arrive at Wahga Railway Station Lahore via '*Samjhota Express*' or other specific trains run by the Government of Pakistan. They are usually not allowed to stay in hotels and are accommodated in Gurdwara, nearby schools and colleges, due to security concerns.

Table 3 | Visa Quota for Indian Sikh Pilgrims

Sr. #	Festival name	Place of Festival	Visas
1.	Baisakhi	- Panja Sahib – Hasan Abdal - Janam Asthan – Nankana Sahib	3000
2.	Martyrdom of Arjun Dev	Dera Sahib – Lahore	1000
3.	Death Anniversary of Ranjeet Singh	Dera Sahib – Lahore	500
4.	Birthday of Guru Nanak	Janam Asthan – Nankana Sahib	3000

Source: Evacuee Trust Property Board (ETPB)

The total number of pilgrims in this section varies with festivals e.g., 2000-3000 for Baisakhi and the Birthday of Baba Guru Nanak, 500-1000 on the Martyrdom of Arjun Dev, and 200-500 on the Death Anniversary of Ranjeet Singh. After completing their religious journey (Yatra) they move to India via Wahga Railway Station, Lahore. The average spending per person in this section is approximately PKR 3,500/day i.e. PKR 35,000 per person per visit (Govt. of Punjab, 2018).

### 3.2.3. Diaspora Sikhs

This is the smallest segment in terms of the number of pilgrims which belong to countries other than India. The number of pilgrims is regulated by Pakistan's Sikh organization Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (PSGPC). Sikh organizations from different countries present a list of pilgrims to this committee, which, after compiling it while taking accommodation availability into

consideration, approves it. These pilgrims usually arrive at Lahore Airport from where they are taken to Gurdwara via special busses arranged by Evacuee Trust Property Board (ETPB). The stay usually lasts for 15 days.

The majority of this section belongs to the upper-middle- and high-income groups. Some of the pilgrims of this segment prefer staying in Gurdwara due to security concerns while most pilgrims prefer hotels and lodges. They also prefer traveling on privately hired transport. This is the segment with the most spending power. The average spending per person in this section is approximately PKR 10,000/day i.e. PKR 150,000 per person per visit (Govt. of Punjab, 2018).

The total number of foreign pilgrims, especially those coming from India heavily depends upon the prevailing situation and stability between both countries in line with the Indo-Pak relationship, as safety is a major concern for travelers.

<sup>5</sup>Source: Caretaker Gurdwara Dera Sahib, Lahore.

#### 4. Management and Governance Structure

According to Hussain, Haley and Fusté-Forné (2022), the coordination among the stakeholders plays pivotal role in ensuring sustainable tourism. The Sikh Pilgrimage market's current administration and governance structure is extremely bureaucratic and tightly controlled. As crucial service providers ranging from transportation to lodging, several governments, as well as non-governmental bodies and ministries, are active in overseeing and regulating the Sikh Pilgrimage business. These stakeholders include the ETPB; the Ministry of Tourism; the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; the Ministry of Interior; the Ministry of Minorities and PSGPC, etc. However, we will just briefly cover the roles of two stakeholders, PSGPC and ETPB, because they directly oversee the majority of Pilgrimage matters.

##### 4.1. Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (PSGPC)

PSGPC, (formerly known as Pakistan Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee) is the authoritative custodian at the operative level. It was established by the Government of Pakistan on the 11th of April 1999. Lt. Gen. (Rtd.) Javed Nasir was appointed as its founding chairman. PSGPC, like the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee in India, is responsible for the upkeep of Sikh religious organizations and sacred places (*gurdwaras*) in Pakistan. It acts as a link between government and Sikh pilgrims. Its present headquarters are located in Lahore and Ameer Singh is the organization's current president. The Sikhs themselves govern and operate the PSGPC, which makes it an autonomous/independent entity.

The main functions of this committee are as follows:

- i. Arrangement and Management of Langar

(community kitchen) during festivals

- ii. Provision of other amenities to the pilgrims inside *gurdwaras*

- iii. Look after *gurdwaras* as well as their properties stated as trusts

- iv. Serving the pilgrims and solving their problems during their stay in Gurdwara

- v. Preparation of a list of Sikh pilgrims coming from other countries

- vi. Supervision of all development and construction works in *gurdwaras*

- vii. Arrangement and Management of accommodation of pilgrims

##### 4.2. Evacuee Trust Property Board (ETPB)

ETPB is a government department and is a subpart of the Aukaaf Board, located in Lahore. The foundation of this organization goes back to 1960. It is a corporate body empowered with acquiring, holding, and disposing of moveable and immovable properties. At present, the governing board has 23 members of which 7 are official while 16 are non-officials. The 7 officials include; senior board members of various other departments, such as; the Board of Revenue, Federal Investigation Authority, Ministry of Finance, and Ministry of Religious Affairs.

The main functions performed by the Board are as follows:

- i. The custodian of the property declared as trust

- ii. Maintenance and up-gradation of temples and religious places declared as trust

- iii. Holding the visits of Hindu and Sikh pilgrims from India and the rest of the world

- iv. Administration of the arrival of Pilgrims

- v. Arrangement of transportation for the movement of pilgrims
- vi. Taking care of the pilgrims
- vii. Making schedules and planning for the visit of the pilgrims

The board is also performing a few other roles which do not come under the sphere of its charter such as; the management of festivals, making the necessary arrangement for the traveling of the Sikhs, etc.

#### 4.3. Government Contribution

In Pakistan, Sikh Pilgrimage is a very high-profile matter therefore, the government pays close attention to it. It is managed by the joint coordinative efforts of the PSGPC and ETPB. Most of the government contribution is done through this board, however, it is also joined by a few other departments to facilitate the pilgrims during the festivals.

A train is sent by the Pakistan government to receive Pilgrims from Atari Railway Station in India. Government arranges a warm welcome called '*Ji Aayan Nu*' for the pilgrims coming from India upon their arrival. They are usually welcomed by the Chairman and officials from the ETPB as well as the management of the PSGPC. The government also serves free food to Pilgrims during the clearance process of immigration and customs authorities. On the free transport, the pilgrims are brought to Gurdwara Dera Sahib.

The government also arranges a special ceremony for the pilgrims in a grand hotel and the prime minister or other government representative welcomes the Sikh Pilgrims. Before the festivals, the government spends on rehabilitation and modification of residential blocks, dispensaries, and other auxiliary services. During this year's Baisakhi celebration, rooms in Panja Sahib and Dera

Sahib were restored.

The government also spends money on upgrading and expanding the run-down *gurdwaras* as new buildings were built in Gurdwara Singh Singhanian and Gurdwara Guru Ramdas in Lahore, a residential complex and Sarowar Sahib in Nankana Sahib, in 2003-04. In addition, future projects such as; a new hospital, the refurbishment of more *gurdwaras*, new roads, and so on are also planned. Moreover, the government also adorns the *gurdwaras* with decorating and lighting during the festival days.

The government's first goal, though, is safety, so pilgrims are protected by a high-level police force and before the festivals, walk-through gates and metal detectors are established on an operational level.

#### 5. Research Methodology

Rifa'i, the secretary of UNWTO is of the view that:

"trips for religious reasons and purposes have multiplied over the past decades for pilgrimage, including; the fulfillment of pledges, religious celebrations, and visits to notable buildings or monuments of a religious nature and offerings to divinities, among others" (Muqbil, 2007).

Based on the above citation we can conclude that religious tourism has become a complicated field of research. Accordingly, to meet the requirements the research methodology must be sophisticated to a great extent. In research methodology, we study various steps adopted generally by researchers while studying research problems backed up by some logic (Rajasekar, Philominathan, & Chinathambi, 2013).

The study employed a combination of quanti-

tative and qualitative methodologies to investigate the issues/problems of Sikh pilgrims and the pilgrimage sector. This study drew on both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data was collected through the questionnaire survey, interviews, and visits to *gurdwaras*, whereas, the secondary sources included; Pamphlets, Books, and different national and international reports.

This study drew on both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data was collected through the questionnaire survey, interviews, and visits to *gurdwaras*, whereas, the secondary sources included; Pamphlets, Books, and different national and international reports. A survey is not only a very good way but many times, the only way of having a clearer image of the current situation of; an organization, a group of people, etc. (Janes, 1999).

Questionnaires are the most frequently used tool for collecting data. Much effort is required to create a good questionnaire that can attract a good number of respondents and give you the data that could answer the research questions (Rowley, 2014). Several points need to be pondered upon while constructing a questionnaire, e.g., questions' length, structure, sequence, type (open/closed-ended), etc. Initially, the questionnaire was only in the English language. But during the initial stages of the study, it was realized that the majority of the target population would be from India and might not understand English that well. To address this issue, the questionnaire was translated into Hindi as well so that the pilgrims can properly understand the question and provide answers in a better way. It was divided into 4 categories; demographics, spending on pilgrimage, and the satisfaction level against various services assessed on a 5-point Likert Scale. The target population was Indian Pilgrims and Diaspora Sikhs. The profile of both have already been discussed above (See 3.2.2 and 3.2.3). Keeping in view that very few would respond to the questionnaire, a sample size of 130

Sikh pilgrims was selected using a mix of convenience and snowball sampling techniques.

Qualitative approach included interviews, site visits and various reports. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with Sikhs, ETPB officials, the caretakers, and *Granthis*<sup>6</sup> of different *gurdwaras*. The questions were focused on the understanding of Sikhism, Sikh Pilgrimage Profile, its management, and the contribution made by the concerned bodies i.e. ETPB and PSGPC.

Overall, this study addresses the following questions: what are the scope and existing infrastructure of the Sikh Pilgrimage Sector in Pakistan and what are the key issues being faced by the Sikh Pilgrims during their *Yatra*?

## 6. Results and Discussions

### 6.1. Results

This study results are based on questionnaire survey. Figure 2 comprises if the respondent had any idea about 'Religious or Pilgrimage Tourism' (Dharmik Parayatna in Hindi) or what comes to their mind when hearing the word 'Religious Tourism'. Many of the respondents had absolutely no idea while some had quite good knowledge about religious tourism.

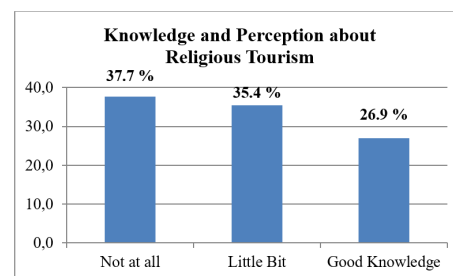


Figure 2 | Knowledge and Perception of Religious Tourism (n=130)

From the sample, 37.7 percent of the respondents said that they have no idea. 35.4 percent

<sup>6</sup>Ceremonial reciter of Guru Granth Sahib (The Holy Book of Sikhism)

knew a little about religious tourism while about 27 percent said that they have good knowledge and understanding of religious tourism. Several pilgrims had been to Lahore earlier as well. Some had come to celebrate religious festivals while some had other purposes.

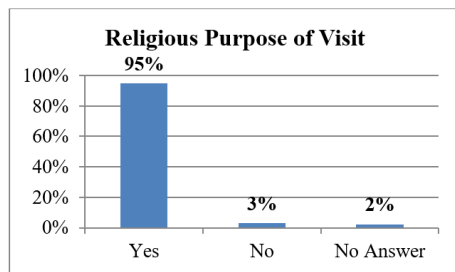


Figure 3 | Religious Purpose of Visit (n=130)

Respondents were asked about the purpose of their current visit to Lahore i.e. if they had come only for religious purposes e.g. to take part in religious festivals only. The responses of the pilgrims have been shown in the above figure, 95 percent of the respondents said that they had come only to participate in religious activities, whereas 3 percent had other purposes as well e.g. meeting their relatives or business purposes etc. While 2 percent did not answer.

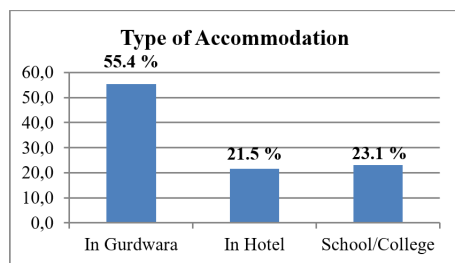


Figure 4 | Type of Accommodation (n=130)

Figure 4 shows that the majority of the pilgrims, especially those coming from India, belong to middle or lower-middle-income groups. So they are provided free accommodation in Gurdwara as per the availability of rooms. Others are accommodated in nearby schools and colleges. On the other hand, higher-income groups prefer staying

in hotels. 80 percent of respondents said that they selected the accommodation for being closer to Gurdwara. Respondents were asked about the pilgrims' opinion about Lahore's potentiality for religious tourism.

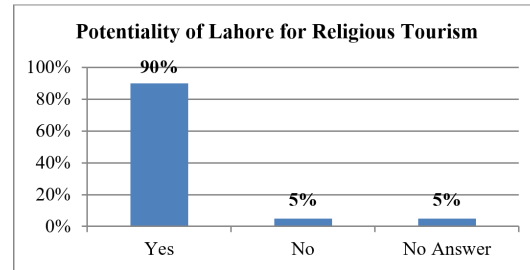


Figure 5 | Potentiality of Lahore for Religious Tourism (n=130)

Figure 5 shows that 90 percent gave the opinion that Lahore has the potential for religious tourism. 5 percent thought otherwise, while 5 percent did not respond to this question. Pilgrims said that there is much to be done, especially the renovation of *gurdwaras* and the construction of new and large rooms that could accommodate more pilgrims. 78.5 percent of the respondents spent from Rs.10,001 to Rs.20,000. Most of the pilgrims living in Gurdwara and schools & colleges belong to this class. About 18.5 percent spent from Rs.20,001 to Rs.30,000. Whereas just 3 percent fell in class Rs.30,001 to Rs.40,000. The last two classes mostly have pilgrims living in hotels (see Figure 6).

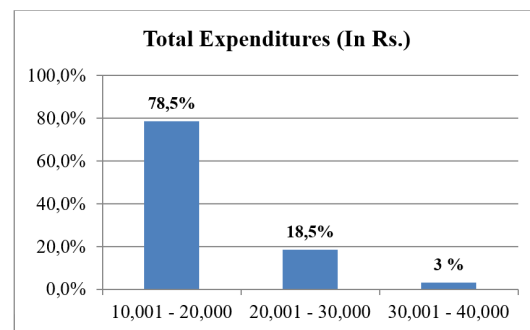


Figure 6 | Total Expenditures (In Rs.)

Pilgrims take part in many economic activities

as well. They prove to be a source of income. Questions were asked about the most earning businesses during festival days. The options were based on different categories among whom the respondents were to choose. The responses of the pilgrims are shown in figure 7.

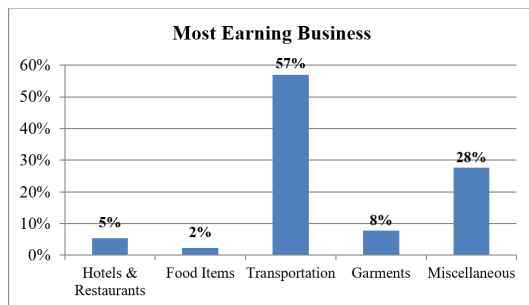


Figure 7 | Most Earning Business during the festival (n=130)

According to pilgrims, transporters earn the most during the festival days as several pilgrims are supposed to travel so the traveling charges are at their peak. Miscellaneous items have already been discussed above. About 28 percent of people think that those businesses are at their peak during festival days. Other business scores include;

garments at 8 percent, hotels & restaurants at 5 percent, and food items at 2 percent.

Overall Satisfaction level of Pilgrims was also assessed and shown in figure 8, the question was based on different factors of pilgrimage tourism and the pilgrims were asked to choose among different satisfaction levels e.g. completely satisfied to completely dissatisfied, against each factor.

The percentage satisfaction scores against each factor are:

- Hospitality, Shopping and Events showed almost 100 percent satisfaction
- Accommodation showed about 97 percent satisfaction
- Nature 88 percent
- Food & Beverages 86 percent
- Information Availability 86 percent
- Transportation 76 percent
- Culture 56 percent
- Prices 39 percent

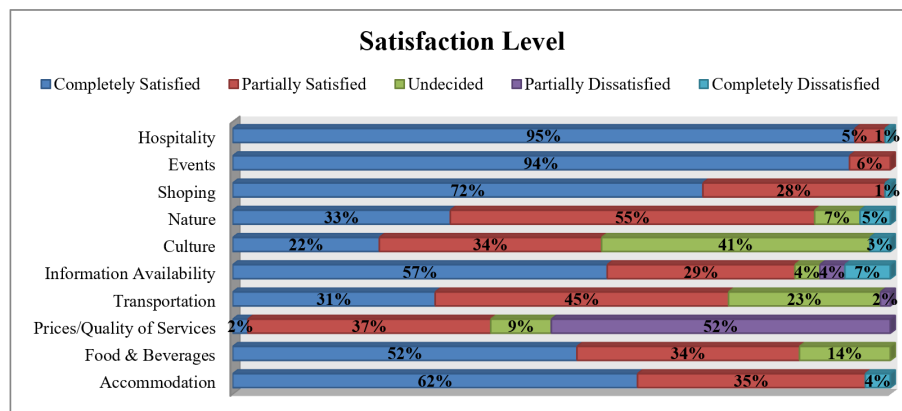


Figure 8 | Satisfaction level of pilgrims against different factors (n=130)

Prices/quality of goods & services turned out to be the most dissatisfying factor as per 52 percent of the pilgrims. The reason was that pilgrims were trying to compare the prices with those of

India and hence ignoring the exchange rate factor. 41 percent of the pilgrims were undecided about the culture. They said that culture has changed a lot and they didn't have enough time to have a

close look at the culture or to analyze the culture.

## 6.2. Major Problems

Although Pakistan has the potential to promote Sikh Pilgrimage, yet Government of Pakistan has not been able to increase the annual number of visitors to an extraordinary level. There were several reasons found during the study.

Despite being neighbors, bilateral tension between India and Pakistan is the biggest impediment to boosting the Sikh Pilgrimage in Pakistan. Since the majority of pilgrims come from India, the volatile nature of the relationship is hurting Sikh pilgrimage tourism. Moreover, this bilateral tension has led to several instances that have affected the number of visitors to the pilgrimage.

Negative propaganda by some media personnel. Evidence showed that they find pilgrims who had faced some problems during the pilgrimage and present them on TV to portray the backwardness of Pakistan. As a result, potential Pilgrims, having some reservations in their minds, are reluctant to visit Pakistan for their 'Yatra'.

Another major issue is the visa policy for Sikh pilgrims in both countries. The governments of both countries have adapted strict visa policies. The documentation process has become more restrictive, resulting in fewer pilgrims fulfilling the criteria. Furthermore, foreign Sikhs are issued a visa to take part in only 4 Sikh festivals, and, in general, pilgrims are given a visa for only 3-4 cities limiting their travel options. In recent years, no serious efforts have been made to counter this restraining situation.

Little involvement of the private sector while public sector plays the major role in Sikh Pilgrimage. According to an official from ETPB, *"Inclusion of private investors will decentralize the management and decision-making power which would not be good for Sikh Pilgrimage."* Moreover, other

factors like, the rising cost of doing business followed by excessive laws, high taxes, inadequate credit facilities in terms of commercial finance, and so on are impediments to the involvement of the private sector in the tourist industry.

Conflicts between India and Pakistan has resulted in increased safety concerns by potential visitors, which is a major point of concern for the visitors as it has created negative perceptions in the minds of the potential visitors. For example, in 2017 Pakistan was ranked 4th on the list of 136 most unsafe countries for tourists<sup>7</sup>. Though in recent years, the situation has improved and tourist arrivals have increased, particularly in the northern areas.

Lack of tourism advertisement campaigns for the Sikh Pilgrimage. One of the Board officials said, *"We don't need to advertise, everyone knows about the Sikh pilgrimage in Pakistan. Moreover, there are some 'Other Reasons' as well."*

Last but not the least, some of the respondents complained that they faced miscellaneous issues, such as; being overcharging by local transporters and unsatisfactory condition of some of the rooms in the *gurdwaras*.

## 7. Recommendations

To promote Sikh pilgrimage tourism to make it a boosting industry, following recommendations are presented as policy implications:

1. India and Pakistan should try to reduce the tension among them by promoting such activities e.g., more bilateral talks, exchange of delegations, etc. that could bring the two rivals close. The opening of 'The Kartarpur Corridor' in November 2018 is one step toward bilateral friendship as the Govt. of Pakistan has announced visa-free entrance

<sup>7</sup>Source: Travel & Tourism Competitive Index Report 2017.

for Sikh pilgrims on the upcoming 550th Birthday Anniversary of Baba Guru Nanak in November. Such steps on either side will not only help in strengthening the ties between the two neighbors but will also promote Sikh Pilgrimage tourism.

2. Media of either side should play a constructive role in promoting pilgrimage tourism. For this, both countries should design a media policy to discourage any sort of negative propagandas.

3. Visa policy must be reviewed and revised by both India and Pakistan. Documentation should be reduced as much as possible so that more applicants could qualify for a visa. Moreover, both nations should revise the 64-year-old '*Nehru-Liaquat pact*' and increase the visa quota for pilgrims. Govt. should allow visas for more cities so that pilgrims can visit more *gurdwaras*, most Sikh festivals should be celebrated in Pakistan and foreign Sikhs should be issued visas for more festivals.

4. Although Govt. of Pakistan is spending reasonable amounts on the upkeep and management of Sikh tourism, it is not enough. Therefore, the private sector should also play its role by investing in this industry. In this regard, more '*star*' hotels with good facilities should be built closer to *gurdwaras*. To attract more investors from the private sector, govt. should announce some incentives. The surroundings of the *gurdwaras* should also be appropriately developed, so that the pilgrims don't have to travel much to get major facilities such as transportation (bus stands), hospitals, hotels, shopping malls, etc. Moreover, the Govt. should not only expand *gurdwaras* by itself but also encourage private institutions to do so. In addition to it, Govt. should also open more *gurdwaras* in

other cities.

5. Govt. of Pakistan should improve the existing law and order situation in the country. Better security should be provided to the pilgrims. Public awareness campaigns should also be launched regarding respect and love for the guests.

6. Pakistan needs to run tourism advertisement campaigns in different languages featuring the potential of Sikh tourism sites, recent developments, and future perspectives. In this way, more visitors can be attracted.

7. More tourism packages, other than festivals, should be launched. Traveling agencies should launch short as well as extended tours of 20 days, especially for Diaspora Sikhs. Since they have more purchasing power, therefore, it will be more beneficial for Pakistan in terms of revenues.

8. Diaspora pilgrims should be more focused as this section has the highest spending potential and is not much affected by the Indo-Pak bilateral relationship. Better accommodation and other facilities should be given to these pilgrims to increase the annual number of visitors. Resultantly, this section can help generate even more income.

9. Transportation and road networks should also be improved. To discourage overcharging by the local transporters, the government should have a strict check on the transportation fares. Another possible way could be the licensing of the transporters.

10. Since most of the *gurdwaras* have ancient residential blocks with poor ventilation and accommodation facilities; old blocks should be demolished and new multistoried blocks with spacious rooms and better facilities should be constructed to accommodate as many pilgrims as possible.

## 8. Conclusion

Being the birthplace of Sikhism, Pakistan holds the key importance for Sikhs residing all over the world. There are about 150 Sikh temples (*gurdwaras*), majority of those are located in Punjab. The most important sites are in the cities of Sheikhupura, Lahore, Narowal, and Hasan Abdal. Sikh pilgrimage tourism holds a reasonable share of Pakistan's tourism industry and is being largely managed by ETPB and PSGPC. Every year, several Sikh pilgrims from all over the world visit Pakistan to take part in different religious festivals. Sikh pilgrims are divided into three categories: domestic Sikhs, Indian Sikhs, and Diaspora Sikhs. Most pilgrims come from India under a bilateral agreement signed between the Indo-Pak governments in 1955. The number of Sikhs from other countries is regulated by PSGPC. Despite its potential, the Sikh pilgrimage tourism sector in Pakistan is faced with several obstacles including Indo-Pak bilateral tension, strict visa policy by both countries, deteriorating safety conditions, lack of investment from the private sector, lack of advertisement, infrastructural issues, etc. To make Sikh Pilgrimage tourism a growing sector, these obstacles need to be removed. In this regard, a more attractive approach is required, mainly by the Govt. of Pakistan.

## 9. Implications

In modern days, several countries are promoting their tourism sector to increase their revenues. Similarly, the Sikh pilgrimage is a source of revenue generation in Pakistan and can play a vital role in boosting the overall tourism sector and the economy. Accordingly, there is a strong need to analyze and improve the economic impact of Sikh Pilgrimage tourism.

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## Appendix

### Questionnaire in English

#### Impact of Religious Tourism (Sikh Pilgrimage): A Survey

It is a survey undertaken by an independent researcher to better understand the potential implications of religious tourism on the local economy. All the information will be confidential and you are requested to provide true and accurate information on the topic. If you could take a few minutes to complete the questionnaire, we would be very grateful. Thank you for your time.

<b>Your Name:</b> _____ <b>(Optional)</b>	
<b>Nationality:</b> _____	
<b>Your Age:</b> _____	<b>Gender:</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female
<b>Your Education:</b> _____	<b>Employed:</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

**1. Do you have any idea of religious tourism?**

- i. Not at all
- ii. Little bit
- iii. Good knowledge

**2. (a) Have you ever been on a religious/pilgrimage journey? [If 'NO' skip (b) ]**

- i. Yes
- ii. No

**(b) How many times have you been on a religious journey?**

- i. Once
- ii. Two to Five times
- iii. More than Five Times

**3. How often do you attend local religious services?**

- i. I don't attend
- ii. Off and on
- iii. Very Often
- iv. I don't like answering

**4. (a) Have you ever been to Lahore earlier? [If 'NO' please skip (b) and (c)]**

- i. Yes
- ii. No

**(b) How many times?**

- i. Once
- ii. Two to Five times
- iii. More than Five Times

**(c) Were your previous visit(s) solely for religious practices?**

- i. Yes
- ii. No

**5. Your mode of arrival?**

- i. By Air
- ii. By Bus
- iii. By Train
- iv. Other (Plz Specify)

**6. Have you come just to take part in the religious activities?**

- i. Yes
- ii. No

**7. Where did you hear about this destination? (Multiple answers are possible)**

- i. I already knew of it
- ii. Friends \& Relatives
- iii. Electronic Media
- iv. Print Media
- v. Fair \& Exhibitions

**8. Length of your stay in Lahore?**

- i. 3 days or less
- ii. 4 to 7 days
- iii. 8 to 12 days
- iv. More than 12 days

**9. Do you have any relative(s) in Lahore?**

- i. Yes
- ii. No

**10. (a) Type of Accommodation.**

- i. With Relatives
- ii. In Gurdwara
- iii. In Hotel
- iv. Guest House
- v. Other (Plz Specify)

**(b) Reason for such accommodation.**

- i. Close to Gurdwara
- ii. Better Food and other Services
- iii. Spacious and Airy Building
- iv. Affordability (Reasonable Prices)
- v. Better transportation and other facilities

**11. Major problem(s) during stay at Lahore. (Multiple answers are Possible)**

- i. Improper Food and Accommodation
- ii. Poor Travelling Facilities
- iii. Poor Health Facilities
- iv. Cultural Differences
- v. Other (Plz Specify)

**12. What is the mode of your travelling in Lahore?**

- i. Private Conveyance
- ii. Rented Vehicle
- iii. Public Transport
- iv. Govt. Transport
- v. Other (Plz Specify)

**13. (a) Traveling alone or in group? (If 'Alone' skip next question)**

- i. Alone
- ii. Group

**(b) How many members are in your group?**

- i. 2 to 5 members
- ii. 6 to 10 members
- iii. 11 to 15 members
- iv. 16 to 20 members
- v. More than 20 members

**14. Do you think Lahore has potential for religious tourism?**

- i. Yes
- ii. No

**15. Did you witness easy accessibility of information and ease of travel arrangements?**

- i. Yes
- ii. No

**16. (a) Which event attracts most number of visitors? [If 'Gurpurb' then answer (b)]**

- i. Baisakhi/Vaisakhi
- ii. Gurpurb
- iii. Death anniversary of Maharaja Ranjeet Singh
- iv. Other (Plz Specify)

**(b) Which Gurpurb?**

- i. Martyrdom of Guru Arjun Dev Ji
- ii. Birthday of Guru Nanak Ji
- iii. Death Anniversary of Baba Guru Ramdas Ji
- iv. Death Anniversary of Baba Guru Nanak Ji
- v. Other (Plz Specify)

**17. What are the approximate total expenditures (in Thousands) on each of the following?**

- i. Food \_\_\_\_\_
- ii. Accommodation \_\_\_\_\_
- iii. Transportation \_\_\_\_\_
- iv. Garments/Clothing \_\_\_\_\_
- v. Miscellaneous \_\_\_\_\_

**18. Total expenditures (Per Person) during your stay at Lahore? (In Pak Rupees)**

- i. Less than 10,000
- ii. 10,001 – 20,000
- iii. 20,001 – 30,000
- iv. 30,001 – 40,000
- v. More than 40,000

**19. What type of business do you think is at boom during religious festivals?**

- i. Hotels \& Restaurants
- ii. Food Items
- iii. Transportation
- iv. Garments/Clothing
- v. Miscellaneous

**20. Are you satisfied with the overall efforts made by Government of Pakistan for Sikh Pilgrimage?**

- i. Yes
- ii. No

**21. Satisfaction with a stay in Lahore.**

	<u>Completely Satisfied</u>	<u>Partially Satisfied</u>	<u>Undecided</u>	<u>Partially Dissatisfied</u>	<u>Completely Dissatisfied</u>
Accommodation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Food and beverage	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Prices / quality of services	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Transportation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Information Availability	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Culture	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Nature	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Shopping	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Events	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Hospitality	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Thank You for Your Time**