

Prospects and Problems in Promoting Tourism in South Asia: A Regional Perspective

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Abstract

South Asia possesses many valuable tourist resources and attractions, which could be important vehicles for reducing the widespread persistent poverty in South Asia. However, the potential of tourism has remained largely unrealized for several reasons. Recently, several organizations, including the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), have focused on promoting intra-regional tourism by utilizing common resources, shared culture, and common physical infrastructures. This paper examines the progress made in promoting tourism in South Asia and explores the factors that facilitate and constrain the promotion of tourism in South Asia. The analyses show that despite several initiatives, tourism's contribution to regional national economies, in terms of employment generation, foreign exchange earnings, and national revenue, has remained minimal. Complicated travel procedures, inadequate infrastructure and transport facilities, and the poor quality of management and service, together with a negative image arising from safety and security concerns, have constrained intra-regional tourism. This paper argues that inadequate political commitment and bureaucratic meandering are the primary obstacles in promoting tourism and economic integration in South Asia. Recommendations for removing the physical and institutional barriers to intra-regional tourism are outlined.

Keywords: intra-regional tourism, factors constraining intra-regional tourism, complicated travel procedures, inadequate infrastructure and transport facilities, poor management and service quality, South Asia