

# Chapter 4

## Tourism: Practice and Potential

### **Experience Zone Classification**

Experientially, the upper Raikot Valley is classified as a Himalayan Zone for mountaineering and high altitude trekking. Its key features are isolation, solitude, unmodified natural environment, provision of environmentally friendly sanitation facilities, extremely low activity density, and exposure to natural conditions. The normal tourist season lasts six months, from April 1 to September 30.

### **Tourist Profile and Trends**

The tourist community consists predominantly of trekkers, mountaineers, and researchers. Tourism began to pick up in 1988, with the completion of the access road to Fairy Meadows. From 200 in 1988, the number of tourists increased to 600 in 1992, peaking at 1,600 in 1995. There has been a fall-off in 1996, due to heavy landslides across the road. Present trends suggest the visitor population will not exceed 1,000 by the close of the season.

The foreign-to-local tourist ratio is about 60:40. Among locals, there is a predominance of college and university students, with a sprinkling of teachers and businessmen. Foreign tourists consist of professionals, i.e., doctors, engineers, teachers; company employees, i.e., managers and secretarial staff, and a few diplomats and students.

Tourists either drive up the Karakoram Highway, with an overnight stay at Besham or Berseem, or fly to Gilgit and then drive two hours west to Raikot. Their duration of stay is normally one to three days for trekkers who arrive in informal (FITs) or organised groups – the latter are arranged by travel or tourist agencies. Mountaineers, researchers, and mountain trekkers tend to stay for longer periods – up to seven days. Repeaters are limited to researchers and close acquaintances.

Between 1985 and 1995, five mountaineering expeditions have attempted to scale Nanga Parbat via the Raikot Face. The nationalities were Japanese, Korean, Italian, German, and Ukrainian. The last Japanese expedition succeeded in 1995. A number

of research expeditions has also visited the valley from various European (Tubingen, Bonn, Berlin), American (Nebraska), and Canadian (Waterloo) universities. Their research interests were varied, including glacial morphology, geology, seismology, human geography, and sociology.

### **Accommodation Arrangements**

All tourist accommodation is provided locally. The main camping facility, called *Raikot Serai*, is situated in the meadow below the village of Jut. Spread over an area of about two acres, it is enclosed by a wooden fence and can accommodate up to a maximum of 35 two-person tents. Although the complex is architecturally appropriate – and a model which competitors are attempting to replicate in Beyal and Tato – there still remains room for considerable improvement.

The quality of construction is poor. Wooden structures (kitchen, store) are inadequately insulated. Wooden huts or tents firmly grounded on wooden or cement platforms, to guard against seepage, are not an available option. Similarly, cooking and catering arrangements are sub-standard. The food is expensive and poor in both nutrition and hygiene. Differential board and lodging rates apply to foreigners and Pakistanis; intra-category rates also vary depending on the manager's whims, and this often causes resentment. Drainage, sanitation, and garbage disposal arrangements result in above ground disposal of water, waste, and excreta. This is both visually offensive and a source of pollution.

The camp manager networks with about 15 travel and tourist agencies from a rented office in Islamabad. The arrangement is mutually beneficial; the agents ensure tourist flows in exchange for local facilitation.

A shop is located next to *Raikot Serai* which services both tourists and locals. The inventory is limited to necessities. No semi-precious stones, handicrafts, or items that would appeal to tourists are to be found.

A camping facility called *Jilipur Inn* was set up in 1995 for mountain trekkers at Beyal. It consists of four, three-person wooden huts, surrounded by a wooden railing. Water is available from a nearby channel and rudimentary hot water arrangements have been made. Similarly, in Tato, there are basic accommodation facilities in the form of an enclosed camping ground with running water.

The timber contractor, who is also a rich entrepreneur, intends to build a large tourist resort in Fairy Meadows, for which purpose he has already purchased communal land in a closed transaction with a few influential community members. It is difficult to reconcile his propensity for destruction of the environment with the intention of promoting tourism in the same area. The effects are not difficult to foresee, namely: inappropriate style of architecture, loss of income through leakages, competition in transport, import of skilled workers, catering to a class of affluent tourists least disposed to roughing it

out or, by the same token, least sensitive to the environment, and indiscriminate disposal of wastes and effluents.

### Portage and Jeep Transport

Porters charge a fixed rate per camp; there are four camps from Raikot to the Nanga Parbat base camp, designated on the basis of distance-cum-altitude. The rates for high-altitude mountain porters are comparatively higher than those for low altitude porters. Since there is no formal distinction or training, porters also tend to double as guides, for which they charge higher rates. In effect, rates differ widely, based on a scale combining individual whim and tourist ignorance. Such absence of transparency also characterises the rates charged for the jeep drive up to Joel.

Details of rates and charges are given in Table 3.

**Table 3: Rates and Charges**

Activities	Locals	Foreigners
<b>Accommodation: Raikot Serai</b>		
1. <u>Tents</u>		
Rented	Rs 250 /night	Rs 70 /night
Own (camping fee)	Rs 350 /night	Rs 70 /night
2. <u>Food</u>		
Dinner	Rs 160 /person	Rs 180 /person
Lunch	Rs 100 /person	Rs 130 /person
Breakfast	Rs 50 /person	Rs 80 /person
Soft Drinks	Rs 25 /bottles	Rs 30 /bottle
<b>Portage and Jeeps</b>		
Guides	Rs 300 /day	
Porters	Rs 160 /camp	
Horses	Rs 700 /day	
Jeeps	Rs 1,400 from Raikot to Jhel and back	
	Rs 700 fo Jhel	

### Tourism Impacts

#### *Environmental Impact Assessment*

Clearly, the environmental impacts of tourism have been minimal. Within existing carrying capacity and infrastructural constraints, up to 3,000 tourists can be accommodated seasonally. As indicated, logging and community activities are primarily responsible for environmental degradation and loss of biodiversity. In particular, local hunters have virtually annihilated many indicator species, numbering among them the markhor, ibex and ram chakor (partridge).

**Table 4: Evaluation of Tourism in Raikot Valley**

Type of Impact	No Impact	Minor Impact	Moderate Impact	Serious Impact
1. Road Traffic	**			
2. Pedestrian Traffic	**			
3. Trail Condition		**		
4. Littering/solid waste disposal	**			
5. Camping/picnicking	**			
6. Visual amenity	**			
7. Wildlife:				
Unique Flora	**			
Birds	**			
8. Drainage Conditions		**		
9. Surface water quality (pollution)	**			
10. Groundwater quality (pollution)		**		
11. Air quality (pollution)	**			
12. Cultural values	**			

The option of setting up a National Park in Fairy Meadows was discussed with the locals. They showed little or no enthusiasm for it. It not only meant a check on the use of forest resources, but also that controls would be enforced by government authorities in whom they had little trust or confidence. They were more open to the idea of a community park. But, essentially, one sensed the proposal was premature. While the immediate financial benefits of tourism are clearly appreciated, there is little awareness of the concept of carrying capacity. This can be inculcated through a process combining education with incentives.

#### *Economic Impacts: Linkages with the Local Base*

Portage (foot and pack animals) is informally regulated to ensure that all able-bodied men secure gainful employment. The camping areas in Jut, Serai, Beyal, and Tato; the tea stall in Jhel; and shops in Jut and Raikot are owned and operated by local entrepreneurs. Jeep transport is a local monopoly, protected by a closed shop arrangement. All jeeps are owned by Raikot Valley locals or by the adjacent valley residents of Muthat. Provisions such as meat, milk, chickens, eggs, grain, and vegetables are provided locally. As a result of these arrangements, the tourist support network operates quite harmoniously and to the community's advantage. However, as indicated, tourist reactions to service quality are mixed. The tendency to over-charge has attracted considerable adverse publicity, detrimental to the local community's reputation.

### **Tourism Policy and Infrastructure**

#### *Regional Network*

Compared to urban centres such as Gilgit, Skardu, and Hunza, the infrastructure and facilities available for tourism in the less-developed rural areas are relatively limited and issues presented which are different from those encountered in the urban areas.

At present, tourist activity in the rural sections of the Northern Areas can be categorised as:

- valleys with moderate levels of tourism activity
- valleys with a relatively low level of tourism activity

Examples of the first type are Raikot, Naltar, Tershing, and Rama, and they are frequented by both organised and independent tourists, averaging at few hundred to over a thousand in a season. Examples of valleys with a low level of tourism are Gor, Darel, Tangir, and Khinar where tourism is practically non-existent. The areas under consideration have, therefore, not reached their carrying capacity limits.

Responsibility for policies, legislation, and regulation of tourism in the Northern Areas rests with the Ministry of Tourism at the Federal level. Permits for tourists in the local areas are issued by the local or provincial authorities. A Tourism Policy was released in 1993, but it has not been implemented and the incentives mentioned therein have not been provided. Essentially, policy experience and capabilities in the tourism area do not exist. The officials responsible for this function have limited tenure and are rotated into other government departments. They have no long-term stake or interest in promoting tourism.

As a result, tourism development programmes -- such as those undertaken by the STC in the NWFP -- have not been developed. There is very limited involvement of the Northern Areas' Administration and other ministries of the Federal Government in tourism programmes because of their inability to design or implement such programmes.

#### *Local Tourism Network: Local Government Officials and NGOs*

The local government officials that are directly or indirectly concerned with tourism consist of the District Administration, police, and the forest department. The Local Bodies and Rural Development (LB&RD) are responsible for small infrastructure projects and provide funds to the Union Councils for implementation. The head of the Union Councils is an elected Councillor. Basically, there are only a few organised NGOs such as the AKRSP, WWF, and IUCN that have an interest in promoting tourism activities. A private company, Hagler Bailly Pakistan, is implementing a high profile biodiversity project in Deosai, as a precursor to its planned involvement in sustainable tourism in Fairy Meadows.

#### *Corporate Bodies and the Private Sector*

Programme managers and implementers are associated with private tour operators; provincial tourism development organisations, such as the STC; and the Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation (PTDC).

In the Northern Areas, the PTDC has established and operates a number of hotels and motels. This organisation has taken a project approach to tourism development. Several

tour operators with experience in programme management and implementation are successfully running tourism-related businesses and have established clientele. The level of knowledge on community and environmental aspects of tourism is currently low.

### Tourism Policy and Infrastructure

Programme managers and implementers are associated with private tour operators; provincial tourism development organisations, such as the STC; and the Tourism Development Corporation (TDC). Compared to such centres as Gilgit, Skardu, and Kohistan, the number of hotels and guest houses in the region is low. The region has a long history of tourism development, several