

KASHMIR FLOODS CAUSING A MAJOR BLOW TO THE TOURISM INDUSTRY



What looked like a place straight from the heaven now seems a dirty swamp. This has been going in the mind of every person who has ever been to the city of Srinagar in Kashmir, and visited the iconic Boulevard Road or the Dal Lake.

Although the flood water that hit the region at the beginning of September has started receding, it has caused unimaginable damage to houseboats, hotels and restaurants. Moreover, the stink and slush it left behind is expect to stay for many months. **There's no doubt that the floods have caused a major blow to the tourism industry in the region.**

Since the floods hit the valley, boats have been ferrying people on the Boulevard Road. It is located just 1.5 km away from Chief Minister, Omar Abdullah's residence on Gupkar Road. This year's floods were a major catastrophe for all the restaurants and hotels in Srinagar's main tourist district. Most establishments were submerged in water, and millions of tourists were deserted in the Valley for days without water, medicines or food.

Besides horticulture, tourism industry is one of the economic mainstays in Kashmir. In the late 1980s, the tourism industry noted record numbers. The increasing number of tourist arrivals had been close to touching the record number of a long-gone era.

In the current season from 2013 to 2014, Kashmir was estimated to have earned Rs. 1,520 crore from hotels, restaurants, and trade services. Before the floods, Kashmir had a shortage of hotels to accommodate the increasing number of tourists. More than 1500 hotels and restaurants were damaged. According to industry experts, tourism won't be revived anytime soon now.

The September-November season has always been crucial to the Valley's economy. **According to reports, hotel and airline booking cancellations reach 100% until the middle of October.** The state has suffered an estimated loss of around Rs. 5,700 crore. Even people who had booked flights and hotels for the winter are closely watching the situation.

The Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (Assocham) reported that the biggest worry for Kashmir is the confidence among the tourists, since it will take long time and effort to win back the tourists to the Indian state.

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