

KASHMIR: PEACE ATTRACTS TRAVELERS



For the second year in a row, tourism to Kashmir is increasing. Although this trend has surprised some experts, it seems likely to continue for years to come.

Why are tourists suddenly streaming to Kashmir, a region that is subject of disputes among India, Pakistan and China? There are several reasons. One of them is that Kashmiri rebel groups no longer have the support of the public as they did in prior years. In fact, no mass demonstrations have happened in the area since 2008.

In order to discourage demonstrations, the government of the region has stepped up police patrols and now monitors anti-government activities. This seems to have quelled the uprisings and established peace in the area. It has been said by many that the peace experienced in the region is definitely a government enforced peace.

Experts on tourism are cautiously optimistic. In the past tourism was a significant source of income for the region. When the uprisings began, tourism dropped off significantly. **According to estimates, over 1 million people have visited the area in the past year alone.** A small portion of the number were international tourists. However, this may be changing.

Right now, there are packaged tours available from New Delhi as well as Jammu. Because these packaged tours show tourists the sites outside the region, Kashmir does not get a lot of inbound tourists who prefer using packaged tours.

Another factor that affects the region is that many of the tourists visiting the region are Hindu. Because of this, they do not eat in the Muslim owned restaurants. Many Hindu pilgrims visit the cave shrine in Amarnath. However, the pilgrims do not tend to spend a lot of money on food or on handicraft items.

Many Indians believe what they have read about the area in their school textbooks or what they have heard from friends or relatives. These things may not actually reflect the truth of the current climate in the region at all.

Although the situation in the region is now somewhat calm and relatively safe, it may change any time. **For those who wish to visit Kashmir, now is the best time to do so.** Of course, it is wise to practice some safety measures during the trip. For example, tourists are not advised to confront local Kashmiri citizens. Tourists may also do well to frequent the areas known to welcome outsiders like the houseboats in Srinagar or many of the lakeside hotels.

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