

# Reimagining Tourism as a Pathway to Pakistan's Economic Growth

Proceedings from the PBC's Event  
held on the 14th of April 2025





# Reimagining Tourism as a Pathway to Pakistan's Economic Growth

 **14** | APRIL 2025

 12:30 PM  
05:15 PM

 Shalimar C,  
PC, Lahore



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# About the PBC

The Pakistan Business Council (PBC) is a research-based business advocacy platform established in 2005. It is now supported by over 100 private sector local and multinational businesses with significant investment in, and long-term commitment to sustainable growth of the country. The PBC members come from 14 countries, have leading roles in 17 major sectors of the formal economy, generate 40% of Pakistan's annual exports, contribute a third of Pakistan's total tax revenues and employ three million persons.

Their combined sales represent every 6th Rupee of Pakistan's GDP. PBC's major objectives are to advocate policies that lead to the creation of jobs, value-added exports and reduction in import reliance through improved competitiveness of manufacturing, services and the agriculture sectors. It also promotes formalization of the economy. PBC's over-arching theme, "Make-in-Pakistan" consists of three pillars: "Grow More/ Grow Better", "Make More/ Make Better" and "Serve More/Serve Better." Its evidence-based advocacy is backed by over two hundred and fifty studies to date through its full-time research team, supplemented by collaborative research with renowned industry experts and economists.

# PBC Members





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systems



# The PBC Affiliates



# About the CDPR

The Consortium for Development Policy Research (CDPR) is a Pakistan based research and dissemination organization supported by the International Growth Center (IGC). CDPR regularly partners with local universities and research institutes for its research and dissemination activities which include: Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS), Lahore School of Economics (LSE) and Mahbub ul Haq Research Centre (MHRC). CDPR aims to generate public discourse on key policy issues through cutting edge research and policy analysis. It is able to tap into a global network of economists and academics involved in policymaking at the highest level.



# Reimagining Tourism as a Pathway to Pakistan's Economic Growth

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## Overview

The Pakistan Business Council (PBC) in collaboration with the Consortium for Development Policy Research (CDPR) organized an event aimed at the promotion of Tourism in Pakistan. This event held on April 14th, 2025 in Lahore, had three distinct themes relating to the Tourism Potential of Pakistan, these three were:

### **Tourism – A Panacea for Pakistan**

**Authors:** Yasar Rashid & Muneeba Nadeem

A PBC Study done in Collaboration with Road & Story

Available at: <https://www.pbc.org.pk/research/tourism-a-panacea-for-pakistan/>

### **Promoting International Religious Tourism to Pakistan**

**In-House Study done by the Pakistan Business Council**

**Team Leader:** Samir S. Amir

**Lead Researcher:** Farah Naz Ata

Available at: <https://www.pbc.org.pk/research/promoting-international-religious-tourism-to-pakistan/>

### **Potential of Medical Tourism in Pakistan**

**In-House Study done by the Pakistan Business Council**

**Team Leader:** Samir S. Amir

**Lead Researcher:** Shahray Jawaid

Available at: <https://www.pbc.org.pk/research/the-potential-for-medical-tourism-in-pakistan/>

Highlighting Pakistan's overall tourism potential in these three broad areas, the event relied heavily on the experiences of industry participants, in the areas of general, religious and medical tourism. Following presentations of study findings by their authors, key industry participants in panels convened to discuss each of these three themes.

The PBC is grateful to the 65 attendees, the 17 keynote speakers (Minister of Minorities Affairs-Punjab and Director General of Archaeology & Museums -Punjab) and to the thought leaders, economists, multilateral heads, panellists, and expert speakers who shared their views on promoting tourism in Pakistan.

# Key Note Speakers



**Sardar Ramesh Singh Arora**

Minister for Minorities Affairs  
Government of the Punjab



**Zaheer Abbas Malik**

Director General Tourism, Archaeology  
and Museums Department  
Government of the Punjab

# Thought Leaders & Expert Speakers



**Ghazi Taimoor**



**Nazish Afraz**



**Usman Khan**



**Haseeb Gardezi**



**Nasar Qureshi**



**Brig. Asif Khalid Shaikh**



**Yasar Rashid**



**Saima Rasheed**



**Malik Mehmood Ahmed**



**Suleman Ghani**



**Ch. Anees Iqbal**



**Dr. Sabir Ayaz Malik**



**Dr. Farrukh Sher Khan**



**Kashif Mustafa**



**Dr. Adnan Abdul Majid**



**Dr. Shaikh Moeen ul Haq**



**Mian Ahmed Farooq**

# Agenda

<b>Hosted by:</b>	The Pakistan Business Council and The Consortium for Development Policy Research		
<b>Date:</b>	14th April 2025	<b>Venue:</b>	Shalimar Hall C, PC, Lahore
		<b>Time:</b>	12:30 to 5:15 PM
<b>Registration/ Lunch</b>		<b>12:30 – 13:20</b>	
<b>Introduction</b>			
<b>Opening Remarks - Ehsan Malik (CEO, PBC)</b>			
<b>Session 1: Presentation of the Findings by the PBC</b>		<b>12:30 – 13:20</b>	
Tourism – A Panacea for Pakistan Presenter: Yasar Rashid Presentation on the Religious Tourism Report Findings Presenter: Farah Naz Ata Presentation on the Medical Tourism Report Findings Presenter: Shahray Jawaid Keynote Speaker Zaheer Abbas Malik (Director General, Tourism, Archaeology and Museums Department, Government of the Punjab)			
<b>Session 2: Panel Discussion - Tourism - A Panacea for Pakistan</b>		<b>14:45– 15:30</b>	
<b>Moderator</b> Ghazi Taimoor (CEO, The Learning Group) <b>Penalists</b> Haseeb Gardezi (Executive Director, Hashoo Group) Yasar Rashid (Chairman & CEO, Road & Story) Nasar Qureshi (CEO, 5th Pillar Takafful) Brig Asif Khalid Shaikh (Director Policy & Regulations, Green Tourism) Saima Rasheed (Director Operations & Finance, Road & Story)			
<b>Session 3: Panel Discussion - Religious Tourism</b>		<b>15:30– 16:15</b>	
<b>Moderator</b> Nazish Afraz (Adjunct Faculty, LUMS) <b>Penalists</b> Suleman Ghani (Former Civil Servant) Ch. Anees Iqbal (CEO, My Universal Travels) Malik Mehmood Ahmed (Sikh Heritage Tours) Mian Ahmed Farooq (Virsapur)			
<b>Session 4: Panel Discussion - Medical Tourism</b>		<b>16:15 – 17:00</b>	
<b>Moderator</b> Usman Khan (Investment and Climate Financing Expert, ReMIT) <b>Penalists</b> Sabir Ayaz Malik (Farooq Hospital, Executive Director) Farrukh Sher Khan (Deputy Administrator, Bahria International Hospital) Kashif Mustafa (Managing Director/CEO, OMI Hospital) Adnan Abdul Majid (Assistant Medical Director, Hameed Latif Hospital) Sheikh Moeen ul Haq (Consultant Palliative Medicine, St John's Hospice) <b>Key Note Speaker</b> Sardar Ramesh Singh Arora (Minister for Minorities Affairs, Government of the Punjab)			
<b>Concluding Remarks- Taimur Dawood (Chairman, Descon)</b>		<b>17:00 – 17:15</b>	
<b>Hi-Tea</b>		<b>17:15</b>	

# Opening Remarks



**Ehsan Malik**  
(CEO, PBC)

## Key Takeouts

- Welcomed the Distinguished Guests, Moderators, Panellists, and the Audience.
- Highlighted the fact that the PBC has conducted several events in Karachi and Islamabad. This event in Lahore is expected to be followed by many others in the city.
- Lahore is very relevant to tourism and especially religious tourism.
- He introduced the Pakistan Business Council, as a business advocacy body established in 2005 which has grown rapidly. Today the PBC has over 100 of the leading cooperates including both large local companies and the larger multinationals.
- PBC member organizations collaborate with the PBC in advocating policies which are good for Pakistan. What is good for Pakistan should lead to job creation, sustainable growth of exports, create sensible import avoidance, and promote the formal economy.



- He also mentioned that to promote best business practices, CERB (Center of Excellence in Responsible Business) was established about 7 years ago. The center works on promoting gender balance, environmental responsibility, and other desirable social objectives.
- To achieve the broad objectives being pursued by the PBC, there is a “Make-in-Pakistan” thrust, which has three pillars: “Make More/ Make Better, Grow More/ Grow Better, and Serve More/ Serve Better”. Tourism falls under the last pillar, where the objective is to promote the production of services from Pakistan.





# Session 1: Presentations of the Findings by the PBC



Presentation on "Tourism- A Panacea for Pakistan"

**Yasar Rashid**

Chairman & CEO, Road and Story

## Key Takeouts

- When efforts are put into driving tourism, it will be a panacea for Pakistan's economic, and social growth.
- Globally, Tourism touched \$11.0 trillion in 2024, which highlights the sectors importance. The share of tourism is 10% in the global GDP and this is growing. A \$1 increase in revenue due to tourism leads to a 37 cents permanent impact on the GDP.
- Pakistan ranks 101 out of 119 countries globally. For a developing country like Pakistan which does not have oil or any other natural resource to export, tourism is the low hanging fruit.
- Top International Influencers like Forbes, Lonely Planet, etc. are all talking about Pakistan's potential for tourism, especially in the last 5-7 years.
- Pakistan is an ideal place for tourism, it has beaches, valleys, desserts, the highest mountains and highest plateaus. Home to 6 UNESCO Heritage sites with a rich culture and the oldest civilization in the world. Pakistan has a favourable currency, it has roots to the major religions of the world, and is ideal for halal, adventure, and medical tourism.
- In the 60s and 70s Pakistan was a part of the Hippie trail, after which Tourism suffered due to security concerns. Now with security concerns addressed, Tourism is returning to Pakistan.



- There are about 62 different types of tourism, Pakistan is ready to extract over a trillion dollars by focusing on the types of tourism Pakistan is capable of.

### **Key Recommendations:**

- A central federal authority should be present to govern and promote tourism in Pakistan, currently this authority is divided amongst provinces. There is also a need to create bylaws which are required to facilitate tourism.
- Development of accessibility, connectivity, electricity, and residence in areas with tourism potential is the immediate responsibility of the government.
- We need to promote a better international image and perception of Pakistan. Pakistan should be promoted as a brand.
- Investment initiatives are required in infrastructure, where the concept of infrastructure finance is important.





## Presentation on “Promoting International Religious Tourism to Pakistan”

**Farah Naz Ata**

Economist, The Pakistan Business Council

► [Presentation access](#)

### Key Takeouts

- Religious tourism: \$16.1B global industry (2024), 26% of 2018 tourism. Includes faith-based and culturally interested visitors.
- Pakistan’s 2024 religious travel exports: \$3.5M (27% CAGR since 2019), peaks in Q1/Q2 (Vaisakhi Mela- Sikh Religious Festival).
- Pakistan underperforms despite similar religious diversity to India (having 6-10% potential global share).
- Key issues hindering growth: visa issues, government interference, restrictive policies for Indian diaspora, security, narrow religious focus, lack of tour operator support, poor infrastructure, inadequate planning, limited public-private partnerships.



### Key Recommendations:

- Government as facilitator: empower communities, sponsor operators, provide insurance.
- Create year-round religious events to boost investment.
- Improve embassy performance.
- Enhance sites with research, infrastructure, and reactivate dormant ones.
- Develop marketing material (documentaries, materials, FAM trips).
- Reform pilgrim visas for all religions, ease Indian PR holder restrictions (no police reporting, no fee, 24-hour issuance).
- Introduce privileged “Pilgrim Tourist Visa” (instead of Sikh Pilgrim Visa) with incentives.
- Facilitate arrivals: transit visas, dedicated air corridors.
- Encourage public-private partnerships in policy, renovations, infrastructure, etc.







## Presentation on “Potential of Medical Tourism in Pakistan”

**Shahray Jawaid**

Senior Analyst, The Pakistan Business Council

▶ Presentation access

### Key Takeouts

- Medical tourism is a growing global industry, and Pakistan has the potential to enter this market due to its low-cost healthcare, strategic location, and medical expertise.
- The global medical tourism market is projected to reach USD 273.72 billion by 2027, with top destinations including India, Thailand, Singapore, Turkey, and Malaysia.
- Popular treatments in medical tourism include cardiology, orthopedics, dental, and cosmetic surgery.
- Pakistan’s medical tourism revenue could grow from \$20M in 2025 to \$500M by 2030, with potential for job creation and economic uplift.
- A SWOT analysis of Pakistan’s medical tourism sector reveals:
  - Strengths: Cost-effective care, skilled professionals, and cultural alignment.
  - Weaknesses: Limited branding, regulation gaps, and infrastructure issues.
  - Opportunities: The Pakistani diaspora, niche treatments, and public-private partnerships.
  - Threats: Regional competition, instability, and travel advisories.

### Key Recommendations:

- Short-term: JCI accreditation for top hospitals, a multilingual healthcare tourism portal, and partnerships with travel agents and insurers.
- Mid-to-long-term: Establishing medical tourism zones, launching international marketing campaigns, and reforming visa and licensing policies for foreign patients.





## Key Note on Promoting Tourism to Pakistan

### **Zaheer Abbas Malik**

Director General, Tourism, Archaeology and Museums Department,  
Government of the Punjab

## Key Takeouts

- The Department of Tourism, Archaeology and Museums has worked extensively on each and every aspect of tourism in Punjab.
- There is a need to promote and facilitate economic activities around the religious sites to engage tourists. The management of sites in Punjab are scattered over different departments and authorities such as Department of Archaeology, PTDC, etc.
- A rapid assessment of more than 600 sites in Punjab was conducted, where 40 were prioritized to be developed which would have all the necessary facilities.
- Taxila, Rohtas Fort, Hiran Minar, Harappa, Derawar Fort, and St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church are among the priorities for improvement/ restoration.
- In Harappa, the plans include the restoration of the houses keeping the tone and the texture of the civilization alive in those houses. These houses will be occupied by locals to boost the economy. Coffee places and other facilities will be constructed near the sites in similar aesthetics as the sites.
- Plans are in place for an astronomical observatory, Indus valley decipherment center for research and building a heritage hotel in the Indus Valley. The facilities will be run by the private sector.
- The government of Punjab has approved the construction of Medical City for the sole promotion of medical tourism.
- Sustainability will be considered and reusable materials will be used.
- Zero Governance Initiative was introduced to minimize interactions with the regulators.
- Collaboration, criticism, queries, and suggestions from the private sector are always welcomed.



# Session 2: Tourism – A Panacea for Pakistan



**Yasar Rashid**  
Chairman & CEO,  
Road & Story



**Nasar Qureshi**  
CEO,  
5th Pillar Takafful



**Haseeb Gardezi**  
Executive Director,  
Hashoo Group



**Saima Rasheed**  
Director Operations  
& Finance,  
Road & Story



**Brig. Asif Khalid Shaikh**  
Director Policy &  
Regulations,  
Green Tourism



**Ghazi Taimoor**  
CEO,  
The Learning Group  
**Moderator**

## Key Takeouts

- Haseeb Gardezi stated that at the forefront of Pakistan's tourism industry is the natural beauty of the country. Technology, connectivity, and road infrastructures are challenges present in the Northern Areas' when it comes to the promotion of tourism. There have, however, been improvements made in the last 11 years.
- The population boom, challenging visa acquisitions for international travel and expensive air travel is promoting domestic travel in Pakistan.
- Green Tourism has restored a number of hotels and areas keeping local aesthetics in mind.
- Locals have to be involved in restorations and improvements in their respective areas. Yasar Rashid highlighted a Road & Story initiative where the locals were empowered through developing their homes through loans and these homes were then promoted for Airbnb.
- Saima Rasheed emphasized that public, private partnerships are necessary to elevate the industry. Tourists should be able to freely travel within Pakistan without requirements of NOCs, security checks and other hindrances. Supporting traditional bazaars and the locals near the main cultural sites will promote tourism around those sites.





- Brig. Asif Khalid Shaikh urged that the brand name of Pakistan should be internationally understood and promoted extensively. Pakistan is much more secure than most countries, it is important to promote this secure image. Lack of reliable statistics leads to a lack of planning and for this the PBS is being engaged to generate the necessary statistics. There is a Buddhist population in Pakistan which has not been statistically identified.
- Nasar Qureshi pointed out that improvements will take place gradually. Hygienic conditions should be offered to the tourists so that they get a good impression of Pakistan when they visit.
- Ghazi Taimoor concluded the session with a note that it is important to promote, visit and advocate cultural sites in order to preserve them.







# Session 3: Promoting International Religious Tourism to Pakistan



**Malik Mehmood Ahmed**  
Founder,  
Sikh Heritage Tours



**Mian Ahmed Farooq**  
Founder & CEO,  
Virsapur



**Suleman Ghani**  
Former Civil  
Servant



**Ch. Anees Iqbal**  
CEO,  
My Universal  
Travels



**Nazish Afraz**  
Adjunct Faculty  
LUMS  
**Moderator**

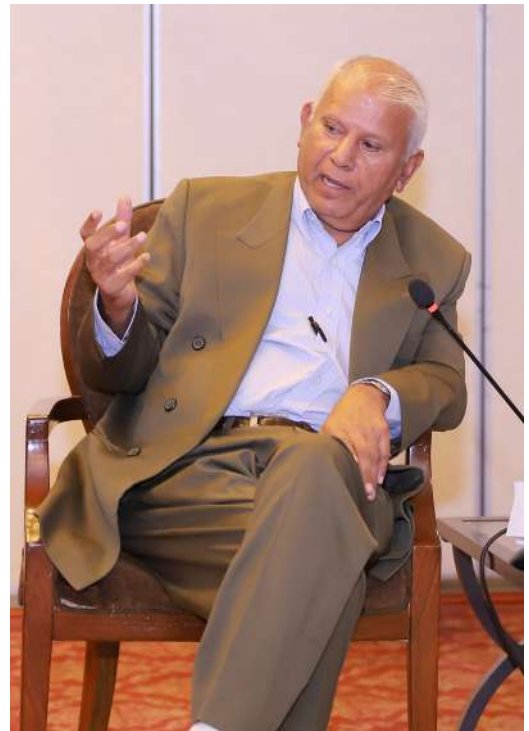
## Key Takeouts

- Nazish Afraz emphasized that boosting religious tourism is not about just the economic benefits but that it is an opportunity for Pakistanis to explore their tolerant roots and aim for cultural integration.
- Suleman Ghani pointed out the sector faces management disconnect, skewed regulatory environment, and the lack of set standards. Religious tourism should be extended to cultural tourism. Central management should have the adequate skills set.
- Ch. Anees Iqbal emphasised that Buddhist tourism potential in Pakistan is not promoted abroad and needs to be promoted. Non-compliance of SOPs especially by the police along with inefficiency of Pakistanis missions abroad are causing major hurdles to the industry.
- The visa policy has been improved in the recent past and visas are now being issued within 24 hours.
- Malik Mehmood highlighted that the tourism model for Pakistan has to be revamped. Malaysia and the U.A.E. models can serve as an inspiration to find ways to establish



and run religious sites through a finance board. Hospitals need to be built in important sites such as Nankana Sahib which the Sikh religious community is willing to finance if the system is transparent.

- Mian Ahmed Farooq highlighted that it is important to raise awareness amongst the public on the importance of preserving religious/ heritage sites. He emphasised that it is important that cultural/ religious integration is not only preached but also practiced.
- The school curriculum should include information about Pakistan's cultural sites and the curriculum should be developed in consultation with experts in the field.
- The constant harassment and inconvenience of tourists by intelligence agencies was raised as a concern and identified as a need to be addressed.







# Session 4: Potential of Medical Tourism in Pakistan



**Dr. Sabir Ayaz Malik,**  
Executive Director,  
Farooq Hospital



**Dr. Adnan Abdul Majid**  
Assistant Medical Director,  
Hameed Latif Hospital



**Dr. Shaikh Moeen ul Haq**  
Consultant- Palliative Medicine,  
St. John's Hospice



**Dr. Farrukh Sher Khan**  
Deputy Administrator, Bahria  
International Hospital



**Kashif Mustafa**  
Managing Director/CEO,  
OMI



**Usman Khan**  
Investment and Climate  
Financing Expert,  
ReMIT  
**Moderator**

## Key Takeouts

- Usman Khan introduced the session, highlighting that Pakistan's healthcare is competitive in pricing but the quality assurance, and the credibility of the service and access to it in the country are issues.
- Dr. Sabir Ayaz Malik stated that the Pakistani diaspora abroad is the main market for medical tourism. He suggested engaging international insurance companies which will facilitate medical tourism. Improvement in overall tourism in Pakistan will improve medical tourism. Responsible journalism is also a need in Pakistan, where fake news about hospitals and doctors is televised without verification.
- Dr. Shaikh Moeen ul Haq emphasized that institutional governance is lacking in a number of hospitals in Pakistan. Hospitals should focus on their governance structures, accreditations, and improvement of their





services to attract more medical tourism in Pakistan. The competitive pricing that Pakistan has is an advantage and should be marketed to not only overseas Pakistanis but to hospitals abroad.

- Dr. Adnan Abdul Majid pointed out that there are many hospitals that cannot opt for JCIA accreditations and the hospitals that provide such services with accreditations are expensive. Fertility, cosmetic procedures, and dental procedures are normally not covered by international insurance companies and Pakistan should aim to promote these services as these are cheaper in Pakistan.
- Kashif Mustafa highlighted that other than JCIA, there are other affordable accreditations that can be acquired. There is also demand from African countries and Afghanistan for medical treatments in Pakistan.
- Dr. Farrukh Sher Khan emphasized that Pakistani doctors abroad should be encouraged to advise their patients to visit Pakistan for consultations and services. Marketing of medical tourism is essential to attract more medical tourists and this can be achieved through the overall promotion of tourism.
- Dr. Sabir Ayaz Malik emphasized that medical equipment should be produced locally to curb costs of importing equipment from abroad. Pakistan should devise strategies to bring in foreign medical students to study in Pakistani medical institutions to further boost medical tourism. Bureaucracy and red tape make it difficult to establish medical universities in Pakistan.







# Concluding Remarks



**Sardar Ramesh Singh Arora**  
**Minister for Minorities Affairs**  
**Government of the Punjab**

## Key Takeouts

- The efforts of the Pakistan Business Council were appreciated in executing a successful event for the promotion of tourism in Pakistan.
- Chief Minister Punjab and Senior Minister Punjab have focused on improving tourism in Punjab, where a task force with further committees has been created for its promotion.
- The perception of Pakistan abroad is negative, people perceive Pakistanis to be impacted by poverty, and terrorism. The perception has to be changed through increased tourism.
- Engaging with the private sector is necessity to identify the issues and devise relevant remedies.
- By building adequate facilities, we can expect a significant increase in religious tourism.
- Pakistan's Foreign Office needs to mobilize as well as organize road shows to improve the



image of Pakistan.

- Society as a whole need to be equipped for tourism through increased tolerance, inter-faith harmony and cultural integration.
- Tour operators involved in Sikh tourism need to be regulated to ensure quality services. Not only Sikh heritage, but Buddhist, Jain, Hindu and Christianity heritage sites are being restored and activated.
- Public Private partnership is encouraged in the sector and collaboration in policy making is welcomed.
- The pilgrims that leave Pakistan happy are ambassadors that will further facilitate tourism.





**Taimur Dawood**  
**Chairman of Descon**  
**Director at the Pakistan Business Council**

### **Key Takeouts**

- Negative image abroad, accessibility issues, difficulties in obtaining visas are some of the key issues where there is consensus. Eventually, these issues will be addressed with time.
- Adventure tourism is another facet of tourism that can bring huge benefits to Pakistan. The infrastructure has improved in recent years. Investment in adventure tourism has been rising but needs to rise further.
- The private and the public sector need to work together to improve tourism in Pakistan.
- Religious tourism in particular Sikh tourism has its unique challenges which can be addressed through the private sector collaborating with the Minister.
- Medical tourism is the toughest sell, as it relies on trust. It is up to the private sector to engage with the public sector to develop laws and amendments in the system and to upgrade the medical facilities so that trust can be built. Dental is a low hanging fruit in medical tourism where Pakistan can benefit the most.





- The private sector needs to take the steps first, which would then be followed by the cooperation by the government.








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