

# Exploring Tourist Sites and Evaluating Tourism Potential in Kishtwar: A Comprehensive Study for Sustainable Development

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## ABSTRACT

Kishtwar, situated in the picturesque landscapes of the Jammu Division in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir, is a promising tourist destination. This paper provides a thorough investigation of the various tourist attractions in Kishtwar and assesses their potential for sustainable development. The region's natural beauty, including landmarks such as the breathtaking "Chowgan" and the captivating "Naginshiru" peak, as well as its sacred shrines and the majestic "Chenab" river, make it highly attractive to visitors. However, the lack of sufficient development efforts by the government and the Kishtwar Development Authority (KDA) has hindered the realization of Kishtwar's tourism potential. Through an analysis of existing tourist destinations and an exploration of untapped sites, this study aims to highlight opportunities for sustainable tourism development in Kishtwar. By recognizing tourism as a driver of economic growth, employment creation, and cultural exchange, the research findings aim to guide policymakers and stakeholders in promoting the region's tourism sector while ensuring the preservation of its natural and cultural heritage.

**KEYWORDS:** *Kishtwar, Tourism, Chowgan, Famber, Shrines, Jammu and Kashmir*

## INTRODUCTION

The tourism and hospitality industry in India is a significant contributor to the country's services sector. India has enormous potential in tourism due to its rich cultural and historical heritage, diverse ecological terrains, and natural beauty spots spread across the country. The country follows the principle of 'Atithi Devo Bhava' and is renowned for providing a warm welcome to all visitors, regardless of their origin. The visitor-friendly traditions, diverse lifestyles, cultural heritage, and colorful festivals are the main attractions for tourists.

Tourism refers to the activities people undertake when they travel away from their homes or workplaces to enjoy particular destinations and the facilities that cater to their needs. It is a social activity that has been an essential part of human life since ancient times. People have always felt the urge to explore new places within their own country or outside, seeking a change of environment. In Jammu and Kashmir, tourism is a thriving tertiary sector and a multi-billion dollar industry. It is the right vehicle

for developing the state's economy and has a significant value-added effect. The role of tourism is crucial in the economic development of the state, and it provides employment opportunities, both skilled and unskilled, in the hotel, travel agency, and transportation sectors, including airlines. Additionally, tourism promotes national integration, generates foreign exchange, and encourages cultural activities, as well as the traditional handicrafts sector.

Jammu and Kashmir is considered as one of the most popular tourist destinations in Asia because of the diverse attractions it offers. It has delightful backwaters, hill stations, and landscapes that make it a beautiful tourist destination. The state also boasts of historical monuments, forts, places of religious importance, hill resorts, and more, which add to the grandeur of the place and attract tourists from all over the world.

The Jammu region, located in the union territory of Jammu and Kashmir, is currently under development.

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The region boasts of unmatched scenic beauty, abundant natural resources, and several holy shrines, waterfalls, and springs, making it an attractive destination for tourists. Despite this, over 90% of the state's tourism budget is spent in the Kashmir valley every year, even though the number of tourists visiting the Jammu region is 10 times higher than those going to the valley [1].

### Study Area

Kishtwar is a picturesque town and district situated in the Jammu Division of the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir. It is located between latitude 33°09'55"N to 33°51'56"N and longitude 75°26'28"E to 76°46'03"E, approximately 210 Km from Jammu and 280 Km from Srinagar. During the medieval period, it was an independent hilly state, but in 1821 AD, Maharaja Gulab Singh, the Dogra ruler of Jammu, annexed it. The district was created by separating it from the former district Doda in the year 2007-08. It is the largest district in the union territory of Jammu and Kashmir in terms of area, covering almost half of the total area of ten districts of the valley and one-third of the area of the Jammu region. The district is mostly mountainous like the Himachal or Ladakh region. It shares its boundaries with the valleys of Himachal in the southeast, Doda in the southwest, and Ladakh in the east. The entire district is brimming with mountains, forests, and hills. People from different religions, including Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs, live here in harmony and brotherhood. The district has 11 Tehsils, namely Kishtwar, Drabshalla, Nagseni, Marwah, Warwan, Dachhan Paddar, Chhatroo, Atholi (Paddar), MughalMaidan, and Machail. Almost the entire district receives snowfall during a good winter, and people live at an elevation of up to 9,500ft. Kishtwar is full of hidden charm, stunning sites and spots, health resorts, tourist locations, famous historical and religious places, sacred shrines, and monuments.

### Data and Methodology

The present study is based on secondary sources. Information has been gathered from various official sources, including the Ministry of Tourism Government of India, Jammu and Kashmir Tourism Development Corporation, the Directorate of Tourism, the United Nations World Tourism Organization, and the World Travel and Tourism Council. Additionally, data has been collected from reliable online sources such as articles, journals, and newspapers.

### Analysis and Discussion:

#### Geographical Context

Situated at an elevation of approximately 1,638 meters, Kishtwar boasts a diverse landscape with

rugged mountains, dense forests, and meandering rivers. Its geographical seclusion has helped maintain its unspoiled natural surroundings, making it a magnet for adventure enthusiasts and nature aficionados.

### Historical Significance

With a history spanning centuries, Kishtwar has been a crossroads of cultures and civilizations. The region has witnessed the ascendancy and decline of numerous dynasties, including the Dogras, Mughals, and Rajputs, each leaving behind traces of their architectural and cultural legacy. Historical landmarks like Qilla Kishtwar and ancient temples stand as testaments to Kishtwar's storied past.

### Cultural Heritage

Kishtwar's cultural fabric is woven from a tapestry of diverse influences, including Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam. The area is home to a vibrant array of ethnic communities, each contributing to its distinctive cultural mosaic. Celebrations such as the Machail Mata Yatra, Urs on shrines of Sufi saints, and local fairs spotlight Kishtwar's cultural diversity and religious fervor.

### Key Attraction

#### 1. Chowgan

In the center of Kishtwar, there is a large grazing field and playground known as Chowgan. It covers an area of approximately 263046 square meters or 165 acres, and is surrounded by a variety of trees, including Chinara and Deodar. This location is a major attraction in the Kishtwar district. To the north of Chowgan lies a large temple called Gori Shanker Mandir, while to the south is a shrine known as Bun Astan or shrine of Asrar-Ud-Din-Bagdadi. The ancient name of this location is Goverdhansar, which was once a beautiful lake. However, due to natural crises, all of its water flowed down, after which it was converted into a playing and grazing field. This ground has been modernized with electric lights and different types of flowers all around it. All livestock, including goats and cows, in the Kishtwar area depend on this ground for grazing. There is also a small helipad/airport on its north. Several villages surround this playground, which adds to its beauty.

#### 2. Kishtwar High Altitude National Park

Kishtwar National Park, also known as Kishtwar High Altitude National Park, covers an area of approximately 2190 sq km and is a great destination for wildlife enthusiasts and trekkers alike. This wildlife reserve boasts a rich diversity of flora and fauna, drawing visitors with its varied wildlife and offering exciting trekking opportunities. Kishtwar National Park was officially designated as a national park on February 4, 1981. Its elevation, spanning

from 1,700 to 4,800 meters above sea level, provides a unique habitat for iconic species such as the Kashmir stag and the elusive snow leopard, contributing significantly to its appeal as a tourist destination. Moreover, the park's popularity for trekking, notably along the Kishtwar-Kailash Kund route, underscores its potential to attract adventure-seeking tourists. Cultural immersion opportunities within the park further enrich the visitor experience, offering insights into local traditions and heritage. As efforts to enhance infrastructure and promote sustainable tourism continue, Kishtwar High Altitude National Park emerges as a key player in realizing the tourism potential of Kishtwar, offering a gateway to the Himalayas' natural and cultural wonders.

### 3. Jamia Masjid Kishtwar

The Jamia Masjid in Kishtwar holds significant religious and cultural importance, serving as a representation of the area's rich Islamic heritage. Its construction was initiated by Shah Akhyarud Din (RA) approximately 110 years ago. As the largest masjid in Kishtwar, it has the capacity to accommodate around 5000 worshippers at a time. Adhering to traditional architectural styles, the mosque serves as a central gathering point for the Muslim community to engage in prayers, religious activities, and social interactions. Its strategically central location in Kishtwar ensures easy accessibility for visitors, augmenting its appeal as a tourist attraction. The Jamia Masjid in Kishtwar presents visitors with a distinctive opportunity to immerse themselves in the blend of religious devotion, architectural magnificence, and cultural diversity that defines both the town and the broader Jammu and Kashmir region.

### 4. Sinthan Top

The Sinthan pass is a road that connects Anantnag with Kishtwar and is the only route that connects the people of Warwan and Marwah in Kishtwar district to the district headquarters in Kishtwar town. It is located on the Anantnag–Kokernag–Kishtwar section of NH 244, 80 km from Kishtwar town, 130 km south of Srinagar, 73 km from Anantnag and 48 km from Kokernag. The pass is situated at a height of 12,500 feet (3,800 m) above sea level and remains snow-capped for most of the year.

Sinthan Top, a mountain pass located between South Kashmir's Breng Valley and Kishtwar, is one of the most popular tourist attractions in the region. It offers a stunning 360° view of both Jammu Region and Kashmir Region and draws in many tourists. It is quickly becoming one of the top tourist destinations in Chenab Valley. To reach Sinthan Top, one has to drive around 37 kilometers from Daksum, which is a

snaky and uphill drive, making it an adventurous journey. The spot is emerging as a popular destination for mountaineering, trekking, and skiing.

### 5. Qilla Kishtwar

The hillock known as Qilla Kishtwar, located to the southwest of Kishtwar town, used to be the site of a fort and palace during the rule of the Rajas of Kishtwar. According to local legends, these structures were built by Raja Kahan Paul. Although the house and fort have vanished over time, the stone throne still remains. The stone slab seat is 15cm thick and is supported by four greenish-coloured stone pillars that are 42cm high. It is important to preserve this heritage site to ensure the stone slab is not lost in the future. Additionally, two guns known locally as "TOPE" have been preserved and are on display at the office of Deputy Commissioner Kishtwar. From the 'Qilla' site, visitors can enjoy a panoramic view of Kishtwar town and the tall mountains that surround the valley of Kishtwar.

### 6. Bhandarkoot

Bhandarkoot is situated at the confluence of the Marusudar tributary with the river Chenab, approximately 12 kilometres from Kishtwar town on the Kishtwar-Sinthan-Anantnag road. This location is known for hosting a large fair annually on Baisakhi, attracting thousands of pilgrims. Visitors participate in rituals such as taking a dip in the 'Sangam' and paying their respects at two revered religious sites: the shrine of 'Shah Zain-ud-Din' on the left side of Chanderbhaga and the ancient 'Neelgangeswar' pond, along with the temples of other deities on the right bank of the river. These religious sites draw pilgrims throughout the year. The area symbolizes mutual brotherhood and communal harmony.

### 7. Mughal Maidan

Mughal Maidan, located around 12 kilometers from Kishtwar town, is a picturesque spot graced by the meandering Chatroo River. It is home to a bustling marketplace and various government structures that add to the region's charm. Currently undergoing development as a tourist destination, it is renowned for its Trout fish rearing. The Fisheries Department of Jammu and Kashmir has set up a Fish Hatchery here, and the push for fish trade holds the potential to enhance the economic landscape and create new opportunities for residents. With its tranquil surroundings and promising economic prospects, Mughal Maidan is an evolving destination that demands exploration.

### 8. Chingam Valley

The Chingam Valley, located in Block Inderwal, is just 40 kilometers from Kishtwar city and is home to the charming village of Chingam, known for its



beautiful natural scenery. This picturesque valley is famous for its lush paddy fields and stunning landscapes. Adding to its natural beauty, the valley also houses the revered Bal Ashtadash Bhujia, Parna Mata Temple, adding a spiritual significance to the area. Every year, in July or August, a pilgrimage to the temple of Mata Ashtadash Bhujia is organized. The Chingam Valley is a perfect getaway for nature lovers and those seeking spiritual fulfillment, offering a peaceful atmosphere and breathtaking views.

### 9. Sapphire Mines of Paddar

The Sapphire Mines of Paddar, located in the remote Paddar Valley of Kishtwar district, are renowned for producing some of the world's highest quality sapphires. Situated near the village of Sumcham along the Chenab River in the greater Himalayas, these mines boast a stunning natural backdrop and rich geological compositions. Since its establishment in 1885, the mines have gained international acclaim for their exceptional sapphires. This area combines breathtaking natural beauty with valuable gemstone reserves. Their global reputation for quality ensures they remain a significant point of interest for both gem enthusiasts and general visitors. In addition to its mining reputation, the region also offers opportunities for eco-tourism and educational tours focusing on geology and mining techniques.

### 10. Tata Pani Paddar

Tata Pani Paddar, situated in the picturesque Sub-Division Paddar of Kishtwar district, is a captivating tourist destination renowned for its natural hot springs. These springs, known for their therapeutic properties, attract numerous visitors seeking wellness and relaxation in a serene setting. The natural hot springs at Tata Pani Paddar are the main draw for tourists. Renowned for their warm temperatures and mineral-rich waters, these springs are believed to have healing properties, particularly beneficial for skin conditions and joint ailments. In addition to the hot springs, the area is also home to the stunning Hanswar Waterfall and the revered Sheshnag Temple, both of which provide spiritual solace and are popular attractions for tourists.

### 11. Macchial Paddar

Macchial Paddar, located in the Paddar sub-division of the Kishtwar district, is a popular tourist destination because of its breathtaking scenery, lovely rivers, verdant valleys, and towering peaks. Additionally, the area is home to numerous ancient historical sites, such as Buddhist temples, mosques, and monasteries, providing visitors with the opportunity to explore the region's rich cultural and religious heritage. The revered Machail Mata Temple, located in the village of Machail, is devoted to

Goddess Durga, also known as Kaali or Chandi. Surrounded by the pristine landscapes of hills, glaciers, and tributaries of the Chenab River, the temple has a significant history associated with the legendary exploits of Zorawar Singh Kahluria in 1834. The temple is an essential part of the Paddar Valley, famous for its sapphire mines and outdoor activities. It attracts thousands of pilgrims during the annual 'Chhadi Yatra' pilgrimage in August, which commences in Chinote in Baderwah and concludes in Machail, providing a spiritual experience for many pilgrims.

### 12. Warwan Valley

The Warwan Valley, a tehsil in Kishtwar District, is a Himalayan sub-valley known for its vast grasslands and charming, secluded villages, showcasing an untouched allure. The Valley is located 68 kilometers (42 mi) northeast of Kishtwar and 150 kilometers (93 mi) from Srinagar, the summer capital of Jammu and Kashmir. The Warwan River, formed by the merging Batkot and Gumbar streams, meanders through the valley, adding to its scenic charm. The valley is adorned with quaint settlements like Sukhnai, Margi, Busmina, Aftee, and Inshan, each exuding its unique local charm and tranquility. The Warwan Valley Trek offers a high-altitude Trans-Himalayan journey, traversing expansive grasslands, wildflower-laden meadows, and glaciers.

### 13. Tatapani Marwah

Located just 7 km from the tehsil headquarters of Nowpachi in District Kishtwar, Tatapani is a hidden gem nestled in the serene landscapes of Ranie Marwah. The name Tatapani translates to "hot water," alluding to the therapeutic allure of the natural hot springs found in this area. Individuals seeking relief from skin ailments and rheumatic pains often visit this location to immerse themselves in the warm waters. Situated in Panchayat Ranie B, Tatapani is renowned for its natural hot springs, where warm water gracefully flows from the heart of the mountains, attracting visitors from across the Union Territory and India. These hot baths are believed to offer relaxation and relief from joint ailments, making them a popular destination for individuals seeking the restorative benefits of these unique waters.

### 14. Gori Shankar Temple

The Gori Shankar Temple in Kishtwar is a revered Hindu shrine dedicated to Lord Shiva, situated in the heart of Kishtwar town. Believed to have existed for centuries, the ancient temple showcases traditional Hindu architecture and is set amidst picturesque landscapes. Serving as a symbol of unwavering faith and devotion, the temple attracts visitors year-round, particularly during religious celebrations such as

Maha Shivaratri, to partake in prayer and immerse themselves in the region's profound religious heritage.

### 15. Kalamsater

Kalamsater is a picturesque location located approximately 2.3 kilometres northeast of Kishtwar town. It is known for its lush green meadows and serene ambience, making it an ideal destination for eco-tourism. With initiatives to develop trekking trails and camping facilities, Kalamsater can appeal to adventure enthusiasts and nature lovers, unlocking its potential as a sustainable tourism hotspot.

### 16. Devigol

Located approximately 65 kilometres from Kishtwar city, nestled in the serene surroundings of Bunjwah Block of Kishtwar, Devigol is a hidden gem awaiting discovery by travellers in search of tranquillity amidst stunning natural beauty. The revered Devi Ji Temple situated a mere 2 kilometres from Patnazi, stands as a must-see for visitors. Through the prioritization of sustainable tourism practices, preservation of its pristine environment and cultural heritage, and strategic investment in infrastructure development, Devigol has the potential to continue captivating and inspiring generations of visitors.

### 17. Dachhan Valley

Dachhan Valley, located within the Marwah subdivision of Kishtwar District, unfolds as a picturesque landscape adorned with nine panchayats and over 27 charming villages. Enveloped by enchanting peaks like Brahma and Sickle Moon, it offers a blend of spiritual significance and natural splendor. Housing revered sites such as bhramsar and the Kaikut Wooden Temple, it attracts spiritual seekers and adventurers alike. With three scenic Nallas flowing through its expanse and the sprawling Kishtwar National Park nearby, Dachhan Valley presents endless opportunities for nature lovers and trekkers to explore its pristine beauty and rich biodiversity.

### 18. Shrine of Shah Farid-ud-Din

Shah Farid-ud-Din was a highly respected Sufi saint known for his devoutness and spiritual teachings. He hailed from the esteemed family of Syed Abdul Qadir of Baghdad and traveled to Kishtwar from Baghdad to spread the teachings of Islam throughout the Chenab valley. According to historical accounts, he passed away in 1733 AD. His tomb, located in the heart of Kishtwar town, also serves as the resting place for his young son, Syed Anwar Uddin. The shrine dedicated to him, also known as Astaan Baala, is a popular destination for devotees from across the country, particularly those of the Muslim faith. Each year, on the 7th Harh (4th month of the Nanakshahi calendar), his Urs (death anniversary) is observed,

drawing thousands of pilgrims from the across the Jammu and Kashmir and neighboring regions.

### 19. Shrine of Shah Asrar-ud-din

The Shrine of Shah Asrar-ud-din, the son of Shah Farid-ud-din, is located in the southeastern part of Chowgan in Kishtwar town and holds significant reverence in Kishtwar. Known as Darbar-e Asrariya and Astan-e-Payeen, the shrine is dedicated to Shah Asrar, a distinguished figure renowned for his extraordinary abilities and widespread acclaim. His final resting place is a prominent attraction for both tourists and devotees. Annually, on the 25th day of Kartik, his Urs (death anniversary) is commemorated as a momentous occasion in Kishtwar, drawing a large number of devotees who seek blessings and hope for the fulfillment of their wishes.

### 20. Famber Valley

The Famber Valley is located between the Sinthan and Margan Pass, approximately 85 kilometres from Kishtwar town and 5 kilometres from Sinthan top. It is well-known for its stunning natural beauty, numerous small lakes, abundance of fish, and peaceful landscapes. Situated in the remote Himalayan region, this valley lacks connectivity, which results in less attention and appeal.

### Potential of Tourism in Kishtwar

Kishtwar, with its diverse attractions and natural beauty, has significant potential to develop into a major tourism destination. The potential can be analyzed through various dimensions:

#### 1. Nature-Based Tourism:

- **Wildlife and National Parks:** Kishtwar National Park can attract wildlife enthusiasts and researchers due to its rich biodiversity. Conservation tourism can be developed, allowing tourists to participate in conservation activities.
- **Scenic Landscapes:** The dramatic landscapes, including mountains, rivers, and forests, offer opportunities for photography tours, nature walks, and eco-tourism.

#### 2. Adventure Tourism:

- **Trekking and Mountaineering:** The rugged terrain and high-altitude passes such as Sinthan Top and Paddar Valley are ideal for trekking and mountaineering expeditions.
- **Water Sports:** The Chenab River provides potential for activities like river rafting and kayaking.
- **Winter Sports:** Snow-covered areas, like Sinthan Top and Famber Valley, in winter can be developed for skiing and snowboarding.

### 3. Cultural and Religious Tourism:

- **Pilgrimage Sites:** Temples like Sufi shrines, Machail Mata and other religious sites can attract pilgrims and cultural tourists.
- **Festivals and Events:** Local festivals, cultural events, and traditional music and dance can draw tourists interested in cultural immersion.

### 4. Heritage and Historical Tourism:

- **Historical Sites:** Exploration of ancient temples, forts, and traditional villages can appeal to history buffs.
- **Local Handicrafts:** Promoting local arts and crafts can attract tourists interested in purchasing unique souvenirs.

### Challenges to Tourism Development in Kishtwar

Despite the potential, several challenges need to be addressed to make Kishtwar a viable tourism destination:

#### 1. Accessibility and Infrastructure:

- **Transportation:** Limited connectivity due to poor road conditions and lack of direct flights to Kishtwar is a significant barrier. The rugged terrain exacerbates this issue.
- **Accommodation:** There is a scarcity of quality accommodations that meet the expectations of various types of tourists, from budget to luxury travelers.

#### 2. Safety and Security:

- **Political Instability:** The region's political situation can deter tourists due to safety concerns.
- **Emergency Services:** Limited availability of medical and emergency services, especially in remote areas, poses a risk to tourists.

#### 3. Environmental Concerns:

- **Sustainable Tourism:** Unregulated tourism can lead to environmental degradation, including littering, deforestation, and wildlife disturbances.
- **Waste Management:** Effective waste management systems are lacking, leading to pollution.

#### 4. Lack of Awareness and Promotion:

- **Marketing:** Kishtwar is relatively unknown on the global tourism map. There is a lack of marketing and promotional activities to attract tourists.
- **Information Accessibility:** Limited availability of information about tourist attractions, routes, and facilities can deter potential visitors.

#### 5. Community Involvement:

- **Training and Development:** Local communities are often not trained or equipped to participate in and benefit from tourism activities.

- **Cultural Sensitivity:** Ensuring that tourism development respects and preserves local culture and traditions is essential.

### Recommendations for Developing Tourism in Kishtwar

To harness the full potential of tourism in Kishtwar, a multifaceted approach is required:

#### 1. Infrastructure Development:

- **Improving Connectivity:** Enhance road conditions and consider establishing air connectivity through a regional airport or helicopter services.
- **Developing Accommodations:** Encourage investment in diverse accommodation options, from budget hostels to luxury resorts, to cater to different tourist segments.

#### 2. Promoting Safety and Security:

- **Political Stability:** Work towards ensuring political stability and security in the region to reassure tourists.
- **Emergency Services:** Improve the availability of medical facilities and emergency response systems in tourist areas.

#### 3. Environmental Sustainability:

- **Eco-Friendly Practices:** Implement and promote eco-friendly tourism practices, such as banning single-use plastics, promoting eco-lodges, and developing sustainable trekking routes.
- **Waste Management:** Establish comprehensive waste management systems, including recycling programs and clean-up drives.

#### 4. Marketing and Promotion:

- **Digital Marketing:** Utilize digital platforms, including social media, travel blogs, and tourism websites, to showcase Kishtwar's attractions.
- **Collaborations:** Partner with travel influencers, documentary filmmakers, and travel agencies to increase visibility.
- **Information Dissemination:** Create detailed guides, maps, and apps that provide comprehensive information about Kishtwar's attractions, facilities, and routes.

#### 5. Community Engagement:

- **Training Programs:** Conduct training programs for local residents in hospitality, guiding, and sustainable tourism practices.
- **Promoting Local Culture:** Encourage local festivals, crafts, and traditions as part of the tourism experience.
- **Economic Inclusion:** Ensure that local communities benefit economically from tourism through job creation and local business opportunities.

## Conclusion

Kishtwar has the potential to become a premier tourist destination with its unique combination of natural beauty, adventure opportunities, and cultural heritage. Addressing the challenges through strategic infrastructure development, sustainable practices, effective marketing, and community involvement will be key to realizing this potential. By following these recommendations, Kishtwar can offer a unique and enriching experience to tourists while fostering sustainable development and preserving its ecological and cultural integrity.

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