



Tourism in Farkhar: Analysis of the Challenges and Development Paths

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Abstract

The Farkhar District is a prominent tourist destination in northeastern Afghanistan, attracting hundreds of domestic tourists each year. However, visitors to Farkhar encounter challenges that, if addressed, could greatly aid in tourism development planning for the district. This study aims to identify these existing challenges and propose strategies for tourism development in the region. The research uses a descriptive-analytical survey methodology, with data gathered through documentary and field studies. The primary data collection tool was a researcher-designed questionnaire, whose reliability was verified using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Analysis of the data through the Friedman test indicated that the most significant challenges and needs of tourists are related to infrastructure and recreational-accommodation services. Therefore, advancing tourism in Farkhar requires tackling infrastructural issues and enhancing welfare services to improve tourist satisfaction and achieve development objectives.

Keywords: Challenges, Development Pathways Tourism, Farkhar, Services.

Introduction

The tourism industry is a vital sector of the global economy (Fletcher et al., 2023) and a significant driver of economic and social development at both national and international levels (Yar & Yasouri, 2023). Afghanistan, despite its wealth of tourist attractions such as pristine natural landscapes and ancient historical sites, lacks the necessary planning and infrastructure for tourism development (Mirehei, Asgari, Bakhtiari, & Mofid, 2024). Decades of armed conflict, political instability, weak governance structures (Yar & Zazia, 2024), and a deficiency of essential facilities for tourists, including hotels, transportation, and other services, are among the primary challenges to tourism development at the national level (Hashimy & Halim, 2023). The first step toward developing tourism in the country is to identify the challenges that impede its growth at the local and rural levels. Certain areas inherently possess significant potential for tourism development, and addressing their

challenges through systematic planning can yield positive tourism promotion outcomes. Furthermore, investments should be directed toward regions with high tourism potential (Vrana, 2023). Farkhar District in Takhar Province is one such area. With its unspoiled nature, rivers, and lush gardens, Farkhar is a key tourist destination in northeastern Afghanistan. However, visitors to this region encounter numerous challenges, making it essential to identify these obstacles and propose scientific and practical solutions to foster sustainable tourism development in the region.

Literature Review: Despite extensive research on tourism at the global level (Rubio-Escuderos et al., 2025), there has been limited investigation into tourism in Afghanistan, particularly regarding rural tourism. A systematic literature review highlights four critical aspects of rural tourism: location, sustainable development, community-based characteristics, and the visitor experience (Rosalina, Dupre, & Wang, 2021). Studies have shown that effective policies and community involvement play a pivotal role in the success of tourism programs (Farid, 2023). In regions such as Bangladesh and Mali, the direct engagement of local communities in tourism development initiatives has created economic opportunities and reinforced cultural identity (Islam & Carlsen, 2023). Furthermore, the implementation of "living heritage" models in Lebanon has demonstrated that this approach can help restore historical identity and foster sustainable tourism opportunities (Osman & Farahat, 2021). Modern infrastructure, exemplified by the Silk Road initiative, has also significantly impacted tourism development and the quality of life in local communities (Mamirkulova et al., 2023). Thus, integrating solutions such as local participation, modern infrastructure development, and enhanced tourism education presents a promising outlook for tourism development in areas like Farkhar. This study aims to analyze the existing challenges and propose data-driven, sustainable pathways to leverage the tourism potential of Farkhar.

Material and Method

Study Area

Farkhar District, which covers an area of 1,460 square kilometers, is situated 37 kilometers from Taloqan, the capital of Takhar Province. It is bordered to the north by Kalafgan and Taloqan, to the east by Kishm in Badakhshan, to the west by Namakab and Chal, and to the south by Warsaj. The district consists of 83 villages of varying sizes (Hanifi et al., 2013). Farkhar lies in a mountainous valley alongside the Khwaja Mohammad mountain range, with the Farkhar River flowing through its center (Rahmati, 1999). The high-altitude regions of Farkhar are home to natural forests and provide habitats for various wild animals and bird species (Bakhtari, 2019). The etymology of Farkhar is debated, with some scholars interpreting it as "the land of pleasant weather" and others tracing its origins to the Sanskrit word "Vihara," meaning a Buddhist temple (Hanifi, 2013; Yamin, 2001).

Figure (1) Study Area map

Source: Designed by the authors

Due to its geographical location, Farkhar has lush landscapes and pleasant weather. It is home to tourist attractions such as Bagh-e-Zakhira and Chaman-e-Khoshda, both of which are popular recreational spots. Chaman-e-Khoshda, located 10 Km south of Farkhar, showcases captivating scenery with plane and cypress trees enhancing its beauty (Ghafoori, 2008).

Research Design

The research is applied in nature and employs a descriptive-analytical methodology with a survey approach. Data collection was carried out using field methods, whereas the literature review used library research techniques. The primary data collection tool was a questionnaire designed by the researcher. The face and content validity were evaluated and approved by two academic members of Takhar University. The reliability of the research instrument was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which produced a value of 0.91 for all the questionnaire items, indicating acceptable reliability. The study population consisted of all individuals who had visited Farkhar as a tourist destination at least once. Since precise data on the number of visitors to Farkhar District were unavailable, a sample of 165 tourists was selected through convenience and simple random sampling. After excluding suspicious responses, 130 completed questionnaires were utilized for data analysis. Due to uncertainty regarding the normality of the data distribution, non-parametric tests were employed. A five-point Likert scale was used to measure the evaluated indicators. Data analysis was conducted using non-parametric inferential tests, including Mann-Whitney U, Friedman, and Spearman correlation coefficients, in SPSS software.

Results

In this study, 130 tourists were selected with an average age of 32 years, and the oldest participant was 65 years old. Female participants comprised 22 individuals (17.1% of the sample), while the remainder were male. To analyze the data, normality tests were conducted first. Results from the Shapiro-Wilk and Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests indicated that the data did not follow a normal distribution, as the significance value (sig) for the Shapiro-Wilk test was less than 0.05. Consequently, the assumption of normality was rejected, and non-parametric tests were utilized for analysis.

Challenges Analysis: The findings revealed that the average condition of infrastructure and tourism facilities was below the midpoint on the Likert scale. The lack of adequate tourism infrastructure has emerged as a significant barrier to developing the tourism industry in Farkhar. Observations by the authors confirmed that the necessary infrastructure for this sector remains underdeveloped, and responsible organizations have not given sufficient attention to this issue. These shortcomings hinder the provision of appropriate services to tourists. The ranking of tourism infrastructure challenges in Farkhar, based on the Friedman test, is presented in the following table:

Table 1. Ranking of Major Challenges in Tourism Development in Farkhar

Indicator	Mean Rank	Sig
Quality of roads leading to tourist sites in Farkhar	11.02	0.000
Swimming pools and ponds along the river	9.36	
Parking facilities at tourist sites	8.75	
Quality of communication systems (mobile signals, internet, etc.) at tourist sites	7.79	
Lack of appropriate markets, shopping centers, or supermarkets in tourist destinations	7.76	
Absence of permanent and mobile healthcare centers at tourist sites	7.59	
Lack of accommodations such as hotels, restaurants, or shaded resting areas by the river	6.95	
Lack of vehicle repair shops along the routes to Farkhar	6.48	
Absence of road signs along the routes to tourist destinations	6.19	
Lack of sanitary facilities along routes and at tourist destinations	5.17	

The shortage of accommodation and welfare services remains a significant challenge for the development of tourism in Farkhar. Essential services, including accommodations (hotels, restaurants, and shaded resting areas) and vehicle repair shops along the routes, were found to be in poor condition. The lowest score was given to the availability of vehicle repair shops. The lack of adequate repair facilities along tourist routes, particularly during vehicle breakdowns, presents a serious challenge and creates substantial difficulties for tourists.

Pathways for Development: Addressing the existing challenges in infrastructure and services is crucial for tourism development in Farkhar. These challenges are particularly evident in areas such as the absence of road signs, insufficient vehicle repair shops, and

inadequate accommodations. Other notable issues include poor road quality, a lack of suitable parking facilities, and weak communication network coverage, all of which complicate the tourist experience. To mitigate these issues, targeted and practical measures are necessary. Installing directional signs and informational boards along roads, as well as establishing small repair shops at key points along tourist routes, can effectively tackle current problems. Additionally, constructing small, local hotels and restaurants and enhancing communication systems, such as providing high-speed internet, can significantly improve the overall experience for tourists.

Figure (2) The development paths for tourism in Farkhar



Source: Designed by authors

Developing local markets and small shops near tourist destinations to cater to the daily needs of visitors and bolster the local economy is among the essential measures. Additionally, reconstructing and improving existing roads, along with creating new routes for better access to tourist sites, holds significant importance. Establishing safe and suitable parking areas near tourist attractions and equipping the vicinity with recreational facilities such as swimming pools and water play zones can also play a vital role in attracting visitors. Finally, enhancing road security through collaboration with local forces and security institutions can provide greater assurance to tourists and contribute to the sustainable development of tourism in Farkhar.

The findings of this research also indicate that tourists' travel experiences to international destinations affect their satisfaction with the tourism conditions in Farkhar. Based on the Mann-Whitney U test, which assesses the significance of the mean difference between two groups, there is a notable difference in satisfaction levels between two categories of tourists: those who have visited international tourist destinations and those who have not.

As shown in Table 2, the average satisfaction ranks for tourists in Farkhar who have traveled to international destinations is significantly lower than for those who have not traveled abroad. An examination of the sample revealed no significant relationship between gender or education level and individuals' satisfaction with the tourism conditions in Farkhar. However, the findings indicate a significant relationship between individuals' age and their satisfaction with Farkhar's tourism conditions.

Table 2. Results of the Mann-Whitney U Test for Comparing the Mean Differences Between Two Groups of Tourists

Indicator	Tourism Experience Abroad	N	Mean Rank	Sig
Satisfaction with tourism in Farkhar	Yes	63	54.47	0.002
	No	67	74.75	

Table 3 illustrates that, according to the Spearman correlation test results, a significant relationship exists between the two variables (age and satisfaction with tourism conditions in Farkhar) at an error level of less than 5%. However, the nature of this relationship is negative. This indicates that as the age of tourists increases, their satisfaction with tourism in Farkhar declines. In other words, middle-aged and older tourists reported lower levels of satisfaction compared with younger tourists.

Table 3. Spearman Correlation Between Age and Tourist Satisfaction

Variables	Significance Level	Spearman Correlation Coefficient
Age	0.001	-0.286
Tourist satisfaction		

Discussion

The findings of this study, compared to related articles, underscore both common and distinct challenges in tourism development in Farkhar and Afghanistan. As highlighted in this research, the absence of essential infrastructure, including poor road conditions, inadequate accommodation facilities, and insufficient health services for tourists, constitutes major barriers. This observation aligns with the study by Dadman and Mirfakhrudini (2021) on Jalalabad, which identified the lack of accommodations, weak communication networks, and insufficient strategic planning as significant issues in Afghanistan's tourism sector. Furthermore, this study specifically points out local challenges in Farkhar, such as the lack of vehicle repair services and road signage along tourist routes, which are critical obstacles to enhancing tourist satisfaction. In contrast, Mohsen's (2018) research addresses broader issues, including the lack of government support for green entrepreneurship (including tourism) and limited public awareness, highlighting systemic deficiencies. Another significant finding of this study is the influence of tourists' prior international travel experiences on their satisfaction with tourism in Farkhar, a topic not covered in the reviewed articles.

Conclusion

The development of tourism in Farkhar necessitates a comprehensive and practical approach that encompasses enhancing infrastructure, establishing essential facilities, and addressing local shortcomings. Resolving issues like accommodation options and improving road conditions will significantly enhance the tourism experience. Furthermore, increasing public awareness and implementing effective promotional strategies to attract tourists are crucial. Achieving this objective requires collaboration between the government and local investors. Such coordinated efforts can yield sustainable economic opportunities and social growth for the region.

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Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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