

Security Tourism Paradox: An Analytical and Comparative Study of Tourist's Influx Post-Pulwama (2019) and Pahalgam (2025) Attack in Jammu and Kashmir

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Abstract

Tourism in Jammu & Kashmir serves as key primary economic driver and a symbolic barometer of regional stability and sustainability. This study investigates the tourism trajectory following two significant security shocks: the Pulwama attack (2019) and the Pahalgam attack (2025). Which left behind a negative impact on the tourism and its associated sectors. By applying a **Tourism Resilience Framework**, the study evaluates the transition from a post-2019 "growth boom" to a post-2025 "structural contraction." It argues that while the region shows high recovery potential, its structural vulnerability to civilian-targeted attacks remains a critical barrier to sustainable stability. Security concerns and tourists' perception with regard to J&K should address in a sustainable and effective way to build trust among tourists.

Keywords: Tourism Resilience, Pahalgam Attack, Security-Tourism Nexus, Sustainable Development, Jammu & Kashmir, Conflict Economy, Pulwama Attack, real-time security management system.

Introduction

In J&K, tourism is key driver of the UT's economy and plays a significant role there. There are various tourist attraction sites with amazing scenic beauty attracting thousands of domestic and foreign visitors. The beautiful valleys, pilgrimage sites, vast natural lakes, snow-clad mountains surrounded by various types of dense pine forest and other temperate vegetation, and perineal rivers running through valleys and gorges have made J&K a highly appealing tourism hub. There are numerous hotels, guest homes, lodges and houseboats that offer housing and boarding to both domestic and foreign visitors. However, due to the J&K tough circumstances, tourist influx has declined significantly during the last decade. Regardless of these issues, the state has significant potential for tourism expansion and development. J&K has three forms of tourism: leisure, adventure, and pilgrimage. The number of domestic and foreign tourists visiting Kashmir valley is steadily increasing. Jammu & Kashmir's tourism sector is the backbone of its local economy, supporting hospitality, handicrafts, and transport. Historically, the sector has been highly volatile, fluctuating with the security climate. The period between 2019 and 2024 witnessed an unprecedented surge in arrivals, reaching record peaks. However, the April 2025 attack in Pahalgam,

specifically targeting tourists, disrupted this narrative. This paper seeks to analyse these two distinct phases to understand the "Security-Tourism Paradox" in conflict zones.

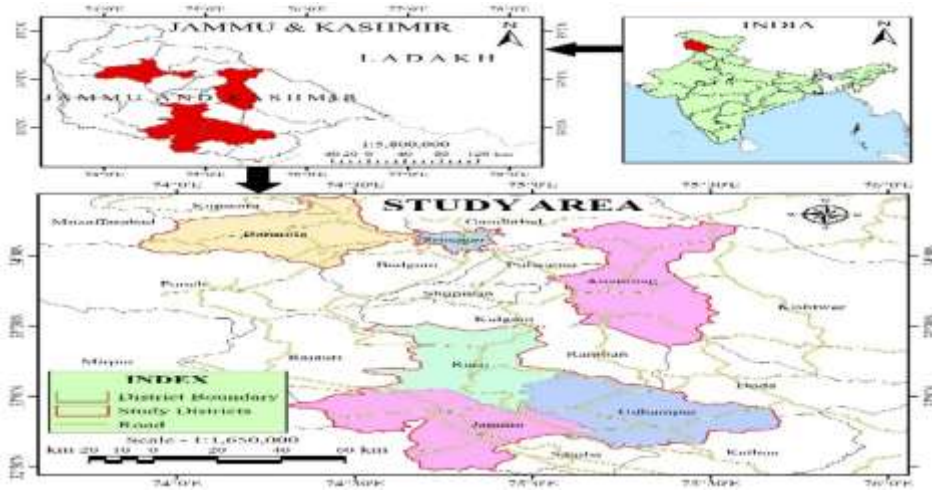


Figure 1. Study Area

Theoretical Framework: The Tourism Resilience Model

The study adopts a Resilience Model to find-out the system's ability to absorb shocks and aftermath recovery.

- **The Resilience Cycle**

The tourism system in J&K moves through a five-stage cycle:

1. **Shock:** The disruptive event (i.e. Terrorist attack).
2. **Impact:** Immediate decline in arrivals and revenue.
3. **Response:** State security measures and promotional efforts.
4. **Recovery:** Rebuilding of tourist's confidence and inflow.
5. **Adaptation:** Structural changes to prevent future fragility.

- **The Tourism Resilience Index (TRI)**

To quantify resilience, this following formula is being used:

$$TRI = \frac{R + A + S}{V}$$

Table 1
Component Variable and Indicators of Study

Component	Variable	Definition & Proxy Indicators
Recovery Rate	R	The temporal velocity at which tourist inflows return to pre-crisis baselines.
Adaptive Capacity	A	Institutional strength, including policy interventions, infrastructure robustness, and digital crisis management.

Component	Variable	Definition & Proxy Indicators
Security Perception	S	Subjective safety sentiment derived from international travel advisories and real-time media sentiment analysis.
Vulnerability	V	Structural concentration risk; the degree of over-reliance on specific geographic circuits (e.g., the Gulmarg-Pahalgam axis).

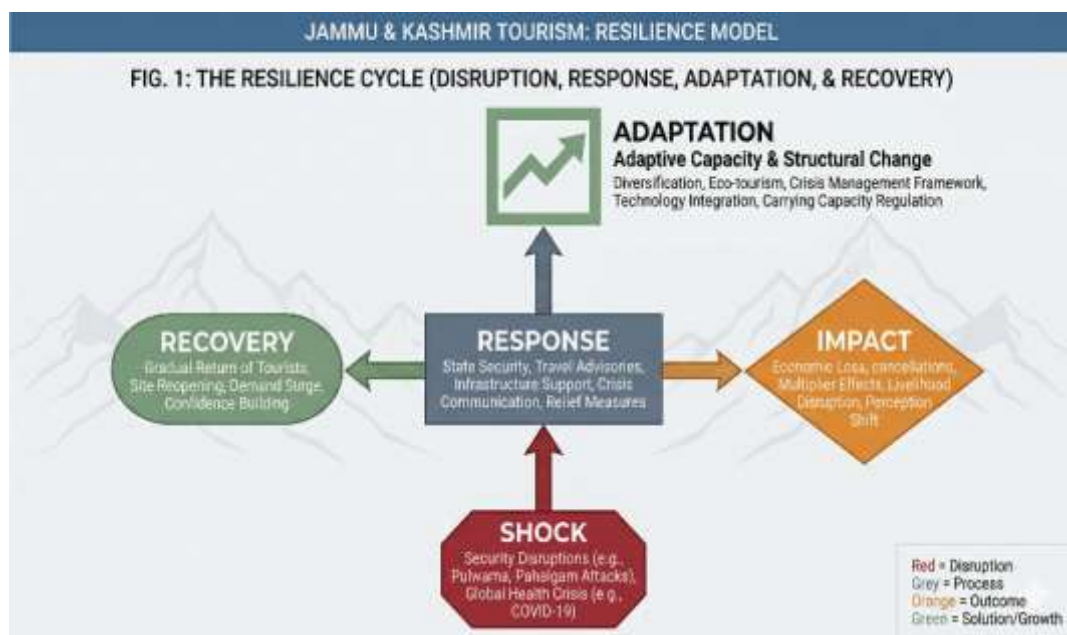


Figure 2. The cyclical flow from Shock to Adaptation.

An Overview on Statistics of Tourists (2018-2025)

The trend of tourist inflow in Jammu & Kashmir from 2018 to 2025 reflects a **cyclical pattern of disruption, recovery, and renewed vulnerability**, closely linked to security conditions and external shocks.

Table 2
Tourists visited in J&K from 2018-2025

Year	Tourists (Number)	Tourists (in Crore)
2018	85,00,000	0.85
2019	60,00,000	0.60
2020	25,00,000	0.25
2021	80,00,000	0.80
2022	1,50,00,000	1.50
2023	2,10,00,000	2.10
2024	2,35,00,000	2.35

Year	Tourists (Number)	Tourists (in Crore)
2025	1,20,00,000	1.20

Source: J&K Tourism Department

In 2018, the region recorded around **0.85 crore** tourists, indicating a stable and normal pre-crisis phase. However, the Pulwama attack in 2019 led to a sharp decline to **0.60 crore**, followed by a further drop to **0.25 crore** in 2020, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. From 2021 onwards, tourism witnessed a **remarkable recovery**, rising to **0.80 crore**, and then surging significantly to **1.5 crore in 2022** and **2.1 crore in 2023**. The peak was reached in **2024 with 2.35 crore tourists**, reflecting improved security perception, mediums of transport, enhanced infrastructure, and aggressive government promotion. This period showed the **high recovery potential and resilience** of the tourism sector. However, the **Pahalgam attack in 2025** reversed this growth trajectory, causing a steep decline to **1.2 crore tourists**. This highlights the **fragility of tourism in conflict-prone regions**, where even a single security incident can disrupt the growth momentum.

Overall, the trend reveals that while tourism in Jammu & Kashmir is capable of rapid recovery but it remains highly sensitive to security perceptions, necessitating a shift towards more **diversified and resilient tourism strategies**.

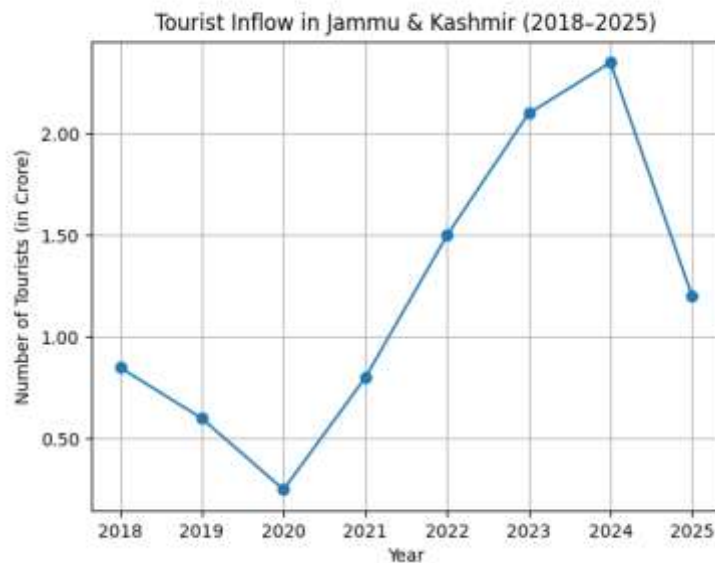


Figure 3. Line graph showing the V-shaped recovery post-2019 and the sharp dip in 2025 (Source: J&K Tourism Department)

Empirical Analysis: Two Decisive Phases

- **Post-Pulwama attack (2019–2024): The Boom Narrative**

1. **The Shock:** The Feb 2019 attack led to immediate mass cancellations and travel advisories.
2. **The Turning Point:** The August 2019 administrative changes and subsequent infrastructure push (Swadesh Darshan, G20 Tourism Meet) shifted the narrative toward "normalcy."
3. **The Growth:** Arrivals surged from 25 lakh (2020) to a record **2.35 crore (2024)**.
4. **Inference:** Resilience was driven by state-led promotion and a shift in domestic travel preferences post-pandemic.

• **Post-Pahalgam (2025): The Crisis of Targeting**

1. **The Shock:** The April 2025 attack specifically targeted civilians/tourists, killing 26.
2. **Immediate Impact:** Unlike Pulwama, this attack created a "Psychological Barrier." Tourist numbers fell by ~50% in 2025 compared to 2024.
3. **Economic Paralysis:** Pahalgam temporarily became a "ghost town," with massive losses in the hospitality and informal sectors (pony operators, guides).

Methodology: The Tourism Resilience Index (TRI)

The Tourism Resilience Index (TRI) is proposed as a composite metric to quantify a destination's capacity to absorb, adapt to, and recover from exogenous socio-political or security-related shocks. Unlike traditional growth metrics, the TRI focuses on the *structural integrity* of the tourism ecosystem.

• **Mathematical Formulation**

The index is expressed through the following functional relationship:

$$TRI = \frac{R + A + S}{V}$$

• **Variable Operationalization**

All constituent variables are normalized on a decimal scale (0.1 to 1.0) to ensure mathematical consistency.



Figure 4. RASV model of Tourism Resilience

In this model, V serves as the critical "erosion factor." Even with high strengths (R, A, S), a high vulnerability denominator can significantly suppress the total resilience score, indicating a "fragile" ecosystem.

Results & Comparative Analysis

This study compares the resilience shift in Jammu & Kashmir across two pivotal timelines: the post-Pulwama era (2019–2024) and the post-Pahalgam era (2025–2026).

**Table 3
Comparative Resilience Metrics**

Phase	R	A	S	V	TRI Score
Post-Pulwama (2019-2024)	0.8	0.7	0.75	0.9	2.50

Phase	R	A	S	V	TRI Score
Post-Pahalgam (2025-2026)	0.5	0.6	0.40	0.9	1.67

Visual & Statistical Interpretation of variables

The Resilience Deficit: The data reveals a 33.2% decline in the TRI score. This indicates that the current security climate has moved the destination from a "recovering" state to a "strained" state. The Security Pivot (S): The most aggressive decline is observed in Security Perception, falling from 0.75 to 0.40. While previous shocks were often perceived as "regional instability," the post-Pahalgam data suggests that shocks specifically targeting the tourism infrastructure have a much deeper impact on global and domestic sentiment. Structural Inertia (V): The constancy of Vulnerability at 0.9 highlights a failure to diversify. The "eggs in one basket" problem remains the primary multiplier of risk; as long as the industry is anchored to a few sensitive circuits, any localized shock results in a systemic collapse of the index.

Discussion & Conclusion from Above Result

The transition from a TRI of 2.5 to 1.67 underscores a shift from a robust "revenge tourism" model to a 'fragile bounce-back' mechanism. While the post-Pulwama phase was buoyed by massive pent-up domestic demand and an aggressive state-led infrastructure push, the post-Pahalgam phase reveals the limitations of physical infrastructure (A) when decoupled from security stability (S). The data suggests that when security shocks target the tourist specifically, the "Recovery Velocity" (R) does not just slow down—it fractures.

Table 4
Comparative Study of Post-Pulwama and Post-Pahalgam Attack

Dimension	Post-Pulwama (2019)	Post-Pahalgam (2025)
Primary Target	Security Forces	Civilians/Tourists
Market Status	Pre-growth/Recovery	Post-peak/Boom phase
Economic Loss	Moderate/Short-term	Severe/Broad-based
Psychological Impact	Low for domestic tourists	High due to direct targeting
Recovery Speed	Rapid (V-shaped)	Gradual (U-shaped)
Political Symbolism	"Return of Normalcy"	"Fragility of Peace"

Sectoral Economic Impact

The impact of the 2025 shock was not uniform across sectors. Formal sectors with high overheads (hotels) faced the steepest revenue collapses.

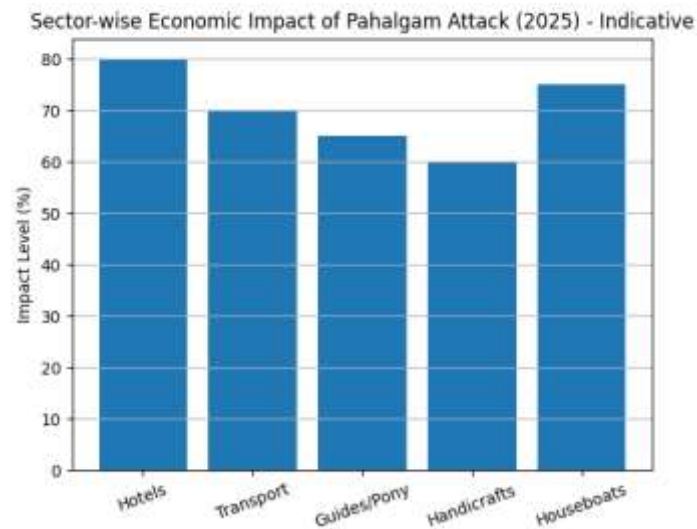


Figure 5. Bar chart showing Impact on Various Sectors (source: J&K Economic and Statistical department)

Discussion: The Security vs. Accessibility Dilemma

A critical finding of this study is that **Militarized Security**, while necessary for safety, can negatively affect **Tourist Perception**.

- **Security Paradox:** Increased checkpoints ensure safety but remind tourists of the conflict, potentially deterring repeat visits.
- **Geographic Overdependence:** 80% of J&K tourism remains Valley-centric (Srinagar-Gulmarg-Pahalgam). This concentration makes the entire economy vulnerable to a single localized incident.

Policy Recommendations

1. **Geographic Diversification:** Shift focus to "Border Tourism" (Keran, Teetwal) and offbeat destinations (Doodhpathri, Gurez) to reduce the impact of localized shocks. It will help to optimize the opportunities for tourists to visit if few notable places have some issues.
2. **Institutional Resilience:** Establish a **Tourism Crisis Management Cell** to provide real-time safety communication and insurance schemes for travellers. It will develop a sense of confidence and security in mind of tourists, so the security phobia can be minimized and tourists' choice to visit J&K without any fear.
3. **Community-Based Models:** Involve local stakeholders (pony wallahs, shikara owners and other associated workers) in security networks to ensure ground-level vigilance and economic protection. It will develop positive vibes among tourists for locals and the tourists will feel more secure with them. Communities should welcome them cheerfully and keep eye on unlawful activities. It will help to abridge gap between tourists and local communities.
4. **Sustainable Carrying Capacity:** Regulate tourist inflow in ecologically sensitive zones like Gulmarg, Pahalgam, Amarnath yatra and other most visited places to prevent overcrowding, which can cause security lapses and complicates security management.

5. **Security in multi-folds layer system:** the security system should be in multilayered to avoid any security lapse. Every crowded place should be sanitized properly and intelligence system should be stronger enough to decode any terror activity.

Conclusion

The comparative study reveals that J&K's tourism is highly **resilient in recovery** but **fragile in stability**. The 2019-2024 boom proved that the region can attract global interest, but the 2025 Pahalgam attack highlighted that growth without structural adaptation is unsustainable. Providing security and tracking tourists' problems in real time should be on top priority despite of focusing on growth-based model. To achieve long-term stability, J&K must transition from a "**quantity-based**" tourism model to a "**resilience-based**" model that prioritizes security perception and geographic diversification. Diversification should be done both in security strategies and tourists places. Which in turn provides stability during such sensitive cases and will enable tourists to have multiple choices to visit and security agencies have multiple ways to cope the security concerns in the region.

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