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ABSTRACT

Wedding tourism is one of the latest developments so far as the various emerging forms of tourism is concerned. Weddings can be conceptualized as falling into the arena of events tourism. Weddings are recognized as planned events and belong to private events domain, together with parties and social events (Getz, 2005, 2008). Wedding tourism comprises of first time marriages, re-marriages, commitment ceremonies and same sex marriages, each distinguished by their features and motivations.

Wedding tourism continues to grow and contribute billions of dollars to the tourist places like, Carribean, Dubai, South Africa, USA, UK, etc. Different countries have come up with various measures to become more friendly towards this form of tourism like, creating infrastructure, framing legislation, building resorts etc. as per the estimates; Every year an average of 2.4 million weddings are performed in the U.S., \$29,858 is the average amount spent on a traditional American wedding. The wedding market in India is a multibillion industry with thousands of weddings taking place in the country throughout the year. The industry has flourished since time immemorial and is probably the only one that thrives even in the face of recession. The wedding industry is flourishing at a growth rate of 15% per annum and is pegged at an estimated 250,000 crores or \$40 billion. Indians spend 80% of their wealth on weddings. The sector has proved to be a great contributor to GDP.

Taking into consideration the above facts and statistics regarding wedding tourism, there lies a huge opportunity for the Valley of Kashmir. Being rich in nature, culture and archeology, Kashmir can prove to be an ideal destination for wedding tourism. In this regard the study is being done to discuss and analyze the present scenario of wedding tourism, to study the potential of Kashmir as a Wedding tourism destination, to discuss some challenges for Kashmir as a Wedding tourism Destination and to put forward some measures that are needed to be taken for overcoming the challenges for developing and promoting Kashmir as a wedding tourism

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destination. For this study, qualitative data collections methods are utilized. The methods include semi-structured interviews, documentary and visual methods.

Keywords: Destination, Wedding, Honeymoon, Kashmir, Challenges, Opportunity

Developing Kashmir as a Wedding Tourism Destination: Opportunities and Challenges

Wedding tourism is one of the latest developments so far as the various emerging forms of tourism is concerned. Weddings can be conceptualized as falling into the arena of events tourism. Weddings are recognized as planned events and belong to private events domain, together with parties and social events (Getz, 2005, 2008). There are various reasons which influence people to have these planned private events out of their usual surroundings. Convenient travelling option is one of the major reasons of growing popularity of destination weddings and wedding travel (Schumann and Amado, 2010). The emergence and growth of Low Cost Carriers has further made air travel more convenient and affordable. Couples know-a-days also combine their wedding ceremony with honeymoon travel (Del Chiappa and Forteza, 2013) which is again another very important reason for wedding tourism. Emergence of new trends like, civil marriages, and or second time marriages due to decrease in religious wedding ceremonies (Major et al., 2010). Tying the knots of Wedding in unique, exotic and memorable settings is turning out to be an important wish of most of the couples. (Del Chiappa and Forteza, 2013). Today travel agencies provide numerous tourist packages for couples with an intention to get married (Maira et al, 2011). Performing wedding ceremonies is now also becoming cost effective due to less number of guests and availability of all wedding related services at one point (Seebaluck et al., 2015). Besides there are many more reasons which have led to the growth of wedding tourism.

Wedding tourism, also known as Wedding-based tourism, is defined as international travel to get married or to celebrate the wedding (Durinec, 2013). Also defined as tourist flows that arise from the participation to a destination wedding that is held in a place that is different from where both the bride and groom's, or just one of them live (Del Chiappa and Fortezza).

Wedding tourism comprises of first time marriages, re-marriages, commitment ceremonies and same sex marriages, each distinguished by their features and motivations. Firstly First time marriages are the marriages conducted by the couples who are marrying for the first time, usually held by experienced travellers who are seeking for unique experience of wedding. Re-marriages is an another emerging market segment where couples are getting married for second or third

time with much less guest but in a unique place and settings. Commitment ceremonies and same sex marriages commenced after the introduction of the introduction of Civil Partnership Act (Major et al., 2010). All the above mentioned forms of wedding tourism comprises of one of the distinct component of wedding tourism i.e., Wedding travel or Honeymoon, which been in existence even before the emergence of wedding tourism as a distinct and unique form of tourism. Wedding Travel or Honeymoon, is a trip undertaken by a newlywed couple, immediately after the wedding ceremony, to celebrate their marriage (Lee, Huang & Chen, Winchester, Alvery and Harper, 2011). As the phenomenon of wedding tourism is increasing day by day the potential of wedding travel or Honeymoon which already was in operation has also received a big boost and hence the wedding destinations have now prepared themselves for catering to this ever increasing market.

Global Scenario of Wedding Tourism:

Wedding tourism continues to grow and contribute billions of dollars to the tourists places like, Carribean, Dubai, South Africa, USA, UK, etc. different countries have come up with various measures to become more friendly towards this form of tourism like, creating infrastructure, framing legislation, building resorts etc. as per the estimates; Every year an average of 2.4 million weddings are performed in the U.S., \$29,858 is the average amount spent on a traditional American wedding, Each weekend an average of 44,230 weddings takes place. Only 33% of weddings take place in a religious institution and that number continues to decline, the average number of wedding guests in America is 165, One-third of those getting married have been married previously, Weddings represent a \$50 billion annual industry (<http://honeymoons.about.com>).

The wedding market in India is a multibillion industry with thousands of weddings taking place in the country throughout the year. The industry has flourished since time immemorial and is probably the only one that thrives even in the face of recession. The wedding industry is flourishing at a growth rate of 15% per annum and is pegged at an estimated 250,000 crores or \$40 billion. Indians spend 80% of their wealth on weddings. The sector has proved to be a great contributor to GDP. About 85% of Indians opt for destination weddings for which connectivity and accessibility is the chief factor while choosing locations. Additionally, Thailand hosted 780 Indian weddings last year where the average expenditure on each wedding was 4 crores (<http://www.travtalkindia.com>). Many states in India like, Goa, Rajasthan, Gujrat, Kerela,

Himachal Pradesh, Madya Pradesh, and Utter Pradesh have done aggressive marketing, promotion and branding to project themselves as premier wedding tourist destinations of India. With each passing year, Indian weddings are getting bigger and better offering lucrative business opportunity to players involved. Giving up the basic traditional look, the Indian weddings are donning a more corporate look, these days. Currently, the country has a population of around 1.25 billion and considering an average family with five members, there are around 250 million families in India. With about one marriage per family every 20 years, the country averages roughly 10 million marriages every year. It is also expected that the per capita income will be tripled in a couple of decades and the per capita consumption of gold and other items during weddings is going to increase substantially. With half of India's population being under 29 years of age, the marriage market is set to boom like never before over the next five to ten years. A person, in India, spends one fifth of the wealth accumulated in a lifetime on a wedding ceremony. That means, a tremendous opportunity for retailers to capitalise on. Taking into consideration the above facts and statistics regarding wedding tourism, there lies a huge opportunity for the Valley of Kashmir. Being rich in natural beauty, cultural and archeological resources, Kashmir can prove to be an ideal destination for wedding tourism.

Objectives of the Study:

Keeping into view the above discussion, the study will focus on the following objectives:

1. To analyze the present scenario of wedding tourism
2. To study the possibilities of Kashmir as a Wedding tourism destination
3. To discuss the difficulties for Kashmir to emerge as a Wedding tourism Destination
4. To suggest some measures for overcoming the challenges for developing Kashmir as a wedding tourism destination

Methodology:

For this study, qualitative data collections methods are utilized. The methods include semi-structured interviews, documentary and visual methods. Interviews were conducted with the people linked with wedding tourism at the wedding/tourist spots of Kashmir, hoteliers, wedding planners, and the concerned officials of JK TDC and Directorate of Tourism Kashmir. The semi-structured interviews conducted with these stakeholders covered the aspects like, potential of wedding tourism in Kashmir, state of the requisite infrastructure, its present status, the challenges

regarding it and their suggestions regarding way forward for wedding tourism in Kashmir. Documentary and Visual method are used to analyze the promotional/publicity material and websites of the Department of Tourism Kashmir, websites of private players involved with wedding tourism in Kashmir – like, hotels, houseboats, clubs, event planners, etc., advertisements in newspapers, wedding travel portals, journals and websites of concerned tourist places, documentary videos, etc.

Kashmir and Wedding Tourism:

Kashmir is a premier tourist spot of south-east Asia. It is blessed with an innumerable number of natural and built tourist attractions in the form of snow covered mountains, mesmerizing streams, lakes, gardens, valley, meadows, springs, artistic and architectural, cultural, heritage, adventure spots and what not. The valley offers different charm and attraction in four different seasons, spring, summer, autumn and winter. Tourists with different taste and interest visit the valley as per their wishes. In addition to the known and highlighted tourist spots there are still lot of tourist spots which are not properly highlighted or explored so a big portion of the tourism attractions is still not known to the tourists who are interested in different types of tourism spots.

Various couples feel interested in destination weddings at the destinations of their likeness and while as some prefer to do wedding in unique or exotic places unlike the traditional wedding ceremonies, like, getting married in an underwater ceremony or in a hot air balloon etc. it means that the couples have to travel to some special destinations, which will offer some unique kind of facility for conducting their wedding.

Couples have been travelling to Kashmir for the purpose of Honeymoon or wedding travel from very early times, infact, the valley was the most preferred destination for Honeymoon of most of the domestic tourists or in other words it can be said that the first place to travel to which couples in India could think about after getting married used to be Kashmir. So Kashmir was in the top priority list regarding wedding travel or Honeymoon for domestic tourists and for some international tourists as well. But the scope of Kashmir regarding wedding travel was neither explored not highlighted or marketed and no step was taken to add one more dimension to the tourism of Kashmir.

Kashmir can prove to be a very excellent Wedding tourism destination for both the destination weddings and for conducting some unique or exotic wedding ceremonies. For the couples interested in conducting destination weddings, memorable wedding can be conducted in

Pahalgam, Gulmarg and Srinagar. These three destinations have infrastructure set in place for conducting weddings of any magnitude. Besides other tourist spots like, Sonmarg, Yousmarg, Dodhpatri, Verinag and some other tourist spots, can also be used for destination weddings after making proper arrangement of infrastructure which can be easily done.

For conducting some unique or exotic wedding ceremonies, various new and unique concepts for conducting wedding ceremonies can be done in Kashmir. For example; getting married inside world famous Dal Lake or Nigeen Lake or in a Houseboat or a Donga with in Kashmiri cultural settings, or getting married in snow covered Gulmarg Valley in an open air venue created by world renowned Khyber Himalayan Spa and Resort, or getting married at an altitude of 14000 feet on the top of Apharwat mountain in Himalayas, or getting married in snow carpeted Valley of Shepherds - Pahalgam, and many more themes can be added to this list.

Present Status of Wedding Tourism in Kashmir:

Although the Valley of Kashmir is blessed with the beauty of nature in the form of different tourist spots which are ideal for different types of weddings but the state tourism department as well as the private players had done little till now to promote and welcome wedding tourism in Kashmir. Hardly any website of state government or private players in tourism keenly focuses or highlights wedding tourism. Websites of very few private hotels like, Lalit – Grand Palace, Vivanta by Taj, and Khyber Himalayan Resort & Spa and a travel agency like, Kashmir travels, mention wedding tourism services but not much has been done to target this special form of tourism for which Kashmir offers an ideal destination.

Lalit – Grand Palace hotel website (<http://www.thelalit.com/the-lalit-grand-palace-srinagar/meetingsandevents-en.html>) mentions the services for Conferences and Weddings by giving the information regarding the venues where such events can be conducted and talks about the number of guests that can be accommodated in three different halls offered by it. Vivanta by Taj hotel's website (<https://vivanta.tajhotels.com/en-in/dal-view-srinagar>) under its Meet and Celebrate link gives information regarding Conferences, Weddings, Venues and Social Events. Under its Wedding link it talks about Weddings, Honeymoons and Pre-wedding celebrations. It goes on to give detailed information regarding its venues and the number of persons that can be accommodated in its five different venues in different patterns. Khyber hotels website (<http://www.khyberhotels.com/business.html>) under its business section discusses its venues for business related events and wedding by giving their specifications and seating capacity. Kashmir

Travel Planners website (<http://kashmirtravels.in/event-management/wedding-planners/>) a travel agency mentions Wedding planners under its Event Management section. It extensively talks about the different wedding services offered by it like, Venue Management, Designer Invitations, Theme Weddings, Exclusive Catering, Ladies Sangeet, Mehndi Night, Photography and Video, Entertainment, Troussau Packing, Bridal Makeup, Hostess Management, Car Décor, Home Décor, Vintage/Luxury Car Rental, Wedding Gifts, Fire Works, Special Effects, Hospitality, Hotel Booking, and Honeymoon Packages. Except these four private players there is not any information available on the websites of the other tourism players available in Kashmir.

In the recent past, state government to some extent made an attempt to promote Kashmir as wedding tourism destination. In this regard, two high-profile and multi-crore weddings last week were to have been the Jammu and Kashmir Tourism Department's showcase, signature events aimed at attracting the high-value wedding tourism to the State. In a first of its kind, a Gauri business family from Indore had booked the entire five-star Khyber Himalayan Resort in Gulmarg, besides four other hotels at the tourist destination, located at an altitude of 8,000 feet, with snow-capped mountains all around, for around 300 guests. Special rides on the Gulmarg Gondola, Asia's highest cable car, took the guests further to Affarwat at a height of 13,780 feet for a breathtaking view of Gulmarg. Sources said Rs. 6 lakh were spent on the Gondola tickets alone. Celebrating another wedding, a Malhotra family from Delhi had booked the entire five-star Taj Vivanta for 200 guests. The wedding was performed in the perfect manner and all the guests were able to go for sightseeing as normality returned in Srinagar. These weddings carry the message that despite the conflict, weddings of this scale can take place peacefully.

Besides these marriages Non-resident Kashmiri families and Well off families of Kashmir organize the marriages of their dear ones in the premier hotels, resorts and clubs of Kashmir. Celebrating marriage in a hotel, club or resort has now-a-days become status symbol for people outside the state in general and particular for Kashmiri's. The result is that there is now rush of such events at hotels, resort and clubs. In a way it also becomes as avenue where tourists from different parts of the world do visit Kashmir for attending weddings. Hence wedding of some local and Non-Resident Kashmiri's becomes reason for their visiting Kashmir and hence contribute to the tourism economy of the state. The premier spots which are chosen by these families as wedding spots are; Nigeen Club, Lalit Grand Palace, Taj Hotel, Khyber Himalyan Resort & Spa, Ahad Hotel and resorts etc. The information discussed in this section is also verified by some 80% participants of semi-structured interview. Below given data will give us an

idea about the volume of wedding tourism conducted at this stage in Kashmir. The data is only about the wedding conducted by domestic and/or foreign tourists and it excludes the weddings conducted by state subjects of J&K.

Table 1.0 - No. of Weddings conducted at the selected event venues of Kashmir from last five years

S. No.	Place	No. of Weddings*
1	Taj Hotel	Four
2	Khyber	Three
3	Lalit	Four
4	Kashmir Travels	Nil
5	DOT Govt. J&K	Nil
6	JK TDC	Nil
7	Centure hotel	Nil

Source: Data compiled by the author

* Weddings conducted by non-residents of J&K state in Kashmir

It can be analyzed from the table that the trend of conducting wedding at these spots in particular and overall in general is increasing with the passage of time. Taj hotel has hosted only four weddings where majority of the families/guests have come from outside state, from the time of starting its operations. Khyber hotel which is about four years old has been the host for three weddings among which one discussed above was a high profile wedding. Kashmir Travels, a new entrant in the field of event management and particularly Wedding events had started doing wedding related business in 2014 but due to floods that very year and some untoward incidents in 2016 the agency stopped its business as it could not recoup the losses interms of severe damage to its equipment's and business. Lalit hotel, the premier brand of hospitality in Kashmir also hosted four wedding from last five years. JKTDC has not been able to host any wedding event from last five years. Directorate of Tourism Kashmir has not been able to host any big wedding at its venues except that local weddings are taking place at Nigeen Club but the department has realized the emerging scenario of wedding tourism and has facilitated two high profile weddings in Kashmir as discussed above. Besides there are many Event Management Companies which cater to the demands of event business in Kashmir but none has the specialization in conducting wedding related events or are equipped enough in terms of equipment's/infrastructure to cater to the demands of national and international weddings which can take place in Kashmir.

Infrastructure regarding Wedding Tourism in Kashmir:

Destination wedding sector comprises of various suppliers, which include venue and accommodation providers, caterers, photographers, make-up and hair artists as well as wedding planners and travel agencies that help to organize the celebration (Kim and Kim, 2013). In addition to the above given suppliers of this sector, different infrastructure has to be made available in the form of transportation, religious service, flowers, jewelers, etc. for these weddings. Hence, several types of businesses get involved in the provision of various types of goods and service for the smooth conduct of the weddings.

For smooth and proper conduct of the wedding ceremonies in Kashmir there is no dearth of infrastructure which can cater to the demand of several weddings. But there is less number of wedding planners who are involved in conducting weddings in Kashmir. Quality transportation service, accommodation, and venues are available at almost all the leading tourist destinations of Kashmir which can act as host for weddings. Some of the prime wedding venues of the valley and their event spaces are discussed as under.

Table 1.1 - Vivanta by Taj Hotels Space for Events and Seating Plan

	Theater	Circular	U - Shaped	Boardroom	Classroom	Reception
Board Room	-	-	10	-	-	-
Agenda	-	-	10	-	-	-
Lower lawns	800	200	0	0	0	1200
Tango I	130	70	50	52	120	100
Tango II	130	70	50	52	120	100
Upper Lawns	50	20	0	0	0	80

Source: <https://vivanta.tajhotels.com/en-in/dal-view-srinagar/event-spaces/venues/>

Vivanta by Taj Hotels offers ideal space for conducting a big wedding of around 1500 people.

The Lalit Grand Palace Srinagar has created three hall for managing all events and functions at its place i.e., Durbar hall, South Hall, and North Hall and at times its spacious gardens are also used (<http://www.thelalit.com/the-lalit-grand-palace-srinagar/meetingsandevents-en.html>). Durbar Hall is designed in a palace style with high ceilings and elegant carpeting. It is 1975 sq.ft hall and accommodates up to 200 guests. North Hall is perfect for private parties, corporate events and social gatherings. It is 1175 sq.ft Hall and accommodates upto 100 guests. South Hall, modern banquet hall is equipped with the latest amenities for private parties, small gatherings and meetings. It is 1175 sq.ft and accommodates upto 100 guests. The Palace's expansive

gardens offer settings for outdoor functions of up to 20,000 guests. Lilat Grand Palace also offer a big space for conducting weddings of any magnitude in Kashmir.

The Khyber with its more than 10,000 square feet of meeting, banquet and event space including the gardens and an amphitheater offers a unique setting round the year for different types of events.

Table 1.2 - Venue space for conducting events at Khyber Hotel

Function Venue	Area (sq. ft)				Seating Capacity				
	Area (sq. m)	Clear Height	Length	Breadth	Theatre	Cluster	Class Room	U Shape	Reception/ Cocktail
House Of Sapphire 1	186.63	4	12.138	15.376	200	80	80	60	200
House Of Sapphire 2	140.44	4	9.134	15.376	100	60	60	40	150
House Of Sapphire 1 & 2	328.61	4	21.372	15.376	300	150	150	100	400
Board Room	19.66	3.5	4.27	4.605	X	X	X	12	X
Board Room Extension	21	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Pre-Function Area	117	4	X	X	X	X	X	X	60
Nouf	396	4	X	X	250	100	100	100	400
Lawn	640	X	X	X	X	300	300	X	800
Den	61.75	3.65	9.5	6.5	X	X	X	X	40

Source: <http://www.khyberhotels.com/business.html>

Khyber hotel also offers a good space for conducting a wedding of around 1500 people.

In addition to these top venues for weddings in Kashmir, there are many more hotels and marriage halls which offer limited space for conducting weddings and they mostly host weddings at local level. However they can also host wedding of national or international level as they have also infrastructure set in place for conducting the weddings. Some of these venues are; Hotel Pine Spring Wazir Bagh, Hotel Grand Mumtaz Srinagar, R K Sarovar Portico, Heevan Pahalgam, Hotel Royal Batoo, Hotel Heritage Luxury, Kashmir Residency, For0est Hill Resorts,

Pahalgam Hotel, Senator Pine-n-Peak Pahalgam, 7C's Cafe N Fine Dine, Swiss Hotel Kashmir, Himalaya House, Batra Hotels and Residences, Hotel Silver Star, Hotel Mirage, The Residency Hotel, Hotel The Grand Mamta, Hotel Dar-Es-Salam, Welcome Hotel, Hotel Broadway, Solar Residency, Nikkah Marriage Hall, Hotel Woodstock, Jamal Resorts, Hotel Highlands Park, Heevan Retreat Gulmarg, Four Seasons Banquet Hall, Hotel Junaid and Hotel Centre Point.

Visual and Documentary Method:

Qualitative data collections methods, in the form of documentary and visual methods have also been used for this study, in addition to the already discussed outcomes of the semi-structured interview. After applying these two methods for studying the respective areas, the results which were obtained are as given below.

After going through the website of the Directorate of Tourism, Kashmir, it is found that none of the photographs or video available on the site point towards or highlight wedding tourism. Even there is no link or information available on the website regarding wedding tourism. Same is the case with most of the websites of private players who are stakeholders in wedding tourism, like, houseboats and hotels, except few hotels like, Lalit, Taj and Khyber. None of the local wedding planners have created their website to cater to the wedding tourism except Kashmir Travels which has provided a link under its events section for weddings also. JK TDC is also so far not able to identify this emerging form of tourism and hence yet to address the families who are willing to conduct wedding of their love ones in Kashmir. In other words, the website of JK TDC is also silent regarding wedding tourism.

After analyzing the publicity material of the Directorate of Tourism, Kashmir, there was no published material regarding wedding tourism and there was no mention of wedding tourism in any of the pamphlets or brochures of the department. Same was the case with the published material and literature of JK TDC. The documentaries and CDs made by the Directorate of Tourism regarding promotion of different forms of tourism were also lacking in wedding tourism. Regarding the advertisements given by the Directorate of Tourism, Kashmir in electronic or print media, there was no mention of wedding tourism even. Same was the case with JK TDC. Although Directorate of Tourism Kashmir participates in several tourism events, fairs and festivals but it has not yet made attempts to promote Kashmir as wedding tourism destination through these platforms.

Regarding the press releases, it was found out that the department in the very recent past has made an attempt to promote Kashmir as wedding tourism destination for which they have facilitated two families of Baroda and Delhi for conducting their weddings in Gulmarg and Srinagar respectively, the same was also verified by some of the officials of the department during the semi-structured interviews which were conducted with them. The data regarding wedding tourism collected through the visual and documentary methods is presented in the below given table.

Table 1.3 – Analysis of Documentary/Visual methods regarding Wedding Tourism in Kashmir

Place	Documentary Evidence		Visual Evidence			
	Pamphlets	N. Papers	Advertisements	Videos	Audio	Website Info
Department of Tourism Kashmir	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
Vivanta by Taj	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
Lalit Grand Palace	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes
Khyber Himalayan Resort & Spa	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
Kashmir Travels	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
JK TDC	No	No	No	No	No	No
Centaur hotel	Yes	No	No	No	No	No

Source: Data compiled by the author

It can be analyzed from the data that the service providers in public sector have no documentary and visual evidences for promoting or highlighting Wedding tourism in Kashmir. The private players like Vivanta by Taj, Lalit Grand Palace and Khyber Himalayan Resort and Spa have shown some documentary evidences in the form of published brochure and pamphlets for wedding tourism but they have not done much to promote it through the related magazines and newspapers which also act as strong mediums for promotion. Their visual evidence is satisfactory to some extent because they have also not given due space to wedding tourism in their websites.

Challenges and way ahead for Wedding Tourism in Kashmir:

Wedding tourism is growing and more and more places are projecting themselves as wedding tourism destinations. But there are many challenges before them to fulfill the requirements of this sector. Some of the challenges before Kashmir and their solution to emerge as the premier wedding tourism destination are discussed as under.

Lack of Wedding Planners/professional service providers in Kashmir

The concept of handing over the details of a family wedding to a stranger i.e., wedding planner is a trend now-a-days and the presence of these professional strangers at a wedding destination is considered a positive point for any destination. The valley is Kashmir is in lack of such professional who could conduct wedding in a quality manner. Although there are some wedding planners and event managers available in Kashmir who are making arrangement of some items regarding weddings but they can't handle the weddings in totality as per the needs and requirements of this market as they are not aware about the dynamics of this area of tourism.

As there are very few wedding planners of local stature available here in Kashmir, the state tourism department should identify some leading wedding planners of India and invite them to conduct weddings in Kashmir or the department can facilitate the families by arranging best wedding planners from India. In addition to it, the department should also contact the local wedding planners, access their facilities and rank them so that different types of wedding planners will cater to the demands of different types of weddings. One more step in this direction can be proper training and upgradation of skills of service providers connected with event management business.

Political Instability

Prevailing circumstance in Kashmir regarding political instability is a big hindrance for any form of tourism and wedding tourism is not an exception. Even though the tourist spots remain away from any kind of disturbance due to any kind of political tension but still then the families and tourists avoid any programme to visit Kashmir during a particular year if there is any kind of incident regarding political instability in Kashmir. In the recent past, protests overshadow two signature weddings, which cost several crores (www.thehindu.com, April 18, 2016) but could not be conducted in a proper way. Such kind of incidents convey message that conducting weddings or touring to Kashmir is not safe.

Peace and undisturbed atmosphere is the prerequisite for any kind of tourism activity. If wedding tourism has to be added to the tourism basket of J&K state then peace should be there. Even

though in the present world no place on this globe can be considered to be completely safe but still the long periods of political disturbance can cause damage to the tourism industry of the state. But so far as the state of J&K is concerned it comprises of three distinct geographical divisions, unique and diverse in itself. So wedding ceremonies can easily be switched on to the other region if there is any kind of political disturbance in any particular region but in such situation the state tourism department should be responsible for any excess expenditure that will be required to shift the venue of one region of the state to the other.

Lack of Promotion and Marketing

Kashmir is known for and has been aggressively promoted for various forms of tourism like recreational, adventure, religious, art and culture but Kashmir is little known for wedding tourism. This is due to the fact that Kashmir has not been promoted as a wedding tourism destination. Different marketing campaigns run by the concerned departments of the government all over the world are lacking in properly projecting wedding tourism potential of the state. Even publicity material published by the department of the state is also missing this form of tourism.

The valley of Kashmir is blessed with natural beauty and climate which cannot be matched by any other tourist spot of India. Kashmir is also rich in terms of its art and culture, music and dance forms. Kashmiri hospitality is famous all over the world. Kashmir is one of the premier adventure tourism destination suitable for different form of air, water, land based adventure activities. All these aspects make Kashmir ideal for conducting some unique and ideal destination wedding. The need is to properly highlight and market the wedding tourism potential of the state through various marketing campaigns which are being done the department in the form of participation in tourism fairs and festivals, road shows, promotional material, advertisements in print and electronic media.

The tourism department of the state can come up with some special publicity material regarding wedding tourism potential of the state and distribute it among the leading travel agents and tour operators or can conduct some familiarization tours of them regarding this form of tourism. The department should also dedicate some space to wedding tourism on its main website and carry some pictures and video clips regarding it and provide complete information regarding conducting wedding tourism in Kashmir.

Quality infrastructure regarding wedding tourism

When it comes to wedding tourism the family and the couple involved in the marriage ceremony takes due care for each and every arrangement regarding the ceremony. Whether it is venue,

accommodation, catering, photographers, make-up and hair artists, pandal, flowers, chairs, etc. everything should be of high quality. Limited and low quality infrastructure is available which is suitable for marriage ceremonies of some middle income families or local marriage ceremonies. But for families coming from other states and outside India including Non-Resident Kashmiris provision of quality infrastructure has to be done in order to cater to their demands.

The state is having some good venues and accommodation facility for conducting weddings (like, Pahalgam Club, Taj hotel, Lalit Grand Palace, Centure hotel, etc, to name few of them) but still there is need to upgrade some venues to cater to the demand of the big wedding ceremonies. In addition accommodation has also to be made available at such venues so that more people who are accompanying any wedding can be accommodated. For example Pahalgam Club and Nigeen Club of J&K Government can prove to ideal venues for conducting wedding ceremonies provided the venues and the accommodation is upgraded to fulfill the demands of the families conducting wedding at these venues. In addition to it, state government should come up with some more venues at those tourist spots which lack infrastructure regarding wedding tourism or facilitate the private players to invest in creating wedding venues and requisite accommodation for them.

Use of IT and social media

It has been found through the study that the service providers connected with wedding tourism have not given due space to wedding tourism in their IT related support systems. There should be proper use of IT and social media for Wedding Tourism by the concerned departments and service providers. Proper space should be given for promotion of wedding tourism through the websites of the concerned departments and private players. Social networking sites which are an important and strong medium of promotion now-a-days, should be used for informing prospective customers/tourists regarding the infrastructure and attractions for wedding tourism in Kashmir. Like, Venues for weddings open air spaces at different places ideal for weddings, unique and exotic locations for theme based weddings, accommodation and related infrastructure should be properly projected.

Wedding Tour packages

The Department of Tourism Jammu and Kashmir should tie up with some travel agents and tour operators and encourage them to frame some tour packages for wedding tourism initially with the support of state government so that those families who intend to conduct their wedding ceremonies in Kashmir can get some attractive offers for the same. JK TDC should also be

involved in making some attractive, economical and unique tour packages regarding wedding tourism in Kashmir.

Besides Kashmir has many more advantages like, Kashmiri Hospitality, perfect Weather, Luxurious Resort Settings, Perfect Airlift, unique cultural heritage and Perfect Honeymoon spot offer ideal setting for wedding tourism in Kashmir.

Conclusion

Wedding tourism is a fast growing form of tourism all over the world and for a country where 65% of the population is below 35 years of age (United Nations Report on Demographics of India, November 19, 2014) huge opportunities are lying ahead. It had been found that the efforts which should have been taken for projecting Kashmir as a wedding destination has not been taken, even there had not been recognition of this form of tourism in Kashmir. It has been found out that the valley of Kashmir has enough potential for conducting different types of destination wedding and some unique weddings and the same has been verified by the late efforts taken by the department of tourism Kashmir to project Kashmir as Wedding Tourism destination. When it is verified that any destination has potential for wedding tourism, a multi-pronged strategy should be adopted for promoting and developing wedding tourism, which includes, promotion through print and electronic media, websites, documentaries and videos, using social media, travel portals, tourism service providers and making available quality infrastructure.

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