



Travel Walji's



Travel Walji's Limited (TWL) — a tour operator based in Pakistan — offers tours in Europe, India, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia,

Singapore, Thailand and the United Arab Emirates. It specializes in adventure tours, mountain trekking, jeep-camel safaris, white water rafting and tours on the silk route. Its customers — about 8 000 in 1999 — come from France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States.

TWL's policy is to preserve traditional culture, protect environmental assets, promote local art and handicraft, and encourage local inhabitants to be self-sufficient.

TWL efforts have been concentrated on Karimabad in the Karakorum region of Pakistan (see box). TWL was the first organization to arrange tours in this area.

Description of good practice

TWL has provided the following support:

- interest-free loans to build hotels;
- taking tourist groups to the Karakorum Handicraft Development Project, which now provides jobs and extra income for many local people;
- guide training conducted in collaboration with the Town Management Society for Karimabad, whose main objective is to protect the physical and cultural environment of Karimabad;
- the development of tourism which has increased demand for cultural shows and thus helped revive local music and traditional activities such as sword dancing; and
- hiring of guides, assistant managers, drivers and trekking guides from the Hunza Valley.

Development

Before TWL provided support to the region, most Hunzakurts were living below subsistence level, with many young people leaving the area for cities such as Islamabad, Lahore and Karachi. The Hunza valley was annexed to Pakistan in 1974. Over a period of 11 years, the Pakistan government built the Karakorum Highway, a 750-km road that runs along the

Karimabad and Baltit Fort



The Hunza Valley, in northern Pakistan close to the border with China, is part of the dramatic terrain of the Karakorum Mountain Range. Prior to the late 1960s, there was no access to the region, and trekking overland on foot from Gilgit used to take up to four days. The Karakorum Highway, which was constructed up to the Chinese border with Chinese help, has now made the region easily accessible.



Baltit Fort is located at the top of a natural amphitheatre formed by terraced slopes. Baltit village, now re-named Karimabad, was the seat of the Mir (the ruler) of the Hunza Valley. The fort is 700 years old.

old silk road. TWL has used local transport and brought in its own buses, vans, cars and jeeps to encourage economic growth.

TWL has been collaborating with other institutional donors working in the area, in particular with the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (see box overleaf).

Results

Some 30 percent of TWL's tourist traffic going to and from China through the Khunjab Pass now visit Karimabad. They visit Baltit Fort, purchase local handicrafts, and watch traditional Hunza dance and listen to traditional Hunza music. As a result of the activities of TWL and other donors :

- There are now 27 shops selling handicrafts, trekking equipment, food, postcards, local

The Aga Khan Trust for Culture in Karimabad

After the opening of the new highway, local occupations and employment patterns began to change in radical ways. The process was speeded up by the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme in 1979 which led to the creation of village organizations. The new trades and occupations now supported by tourism include retail commerce, hotels and restaurants, guides and tour agents, and transportation of visitors in all-terrain vehicles and mini-buses.

The Aga Khan Historic Cities Support Programme helped create the Karimabad Planning Support Services (KPSS). This gave rise to a development plan that stressed orderly physical growth, the development of Karimabad and the maintenance of environmental and cultural assets.

The Aga Khan Trust for Culture engaged a team to develop proposals to save Baltit Fort from further decay and to preserve the complex.



A KPSS planning session (above) with representatives of the community. Photo on the left shows the individual character of the local built environment, with which new roads and infrastructure have to be harmonized.

embroidery, carpets and gems. Traders have set up an organized Bazaar committee as a registered society.

- The restored Baltit Fort had a direct revenue of about US\$40 000 in 1999 from sale of tickets to foreign tourists and indirect revenues of around US\$160 000 benefiting central Hunza.
- By mobilizing local handicraft production through the Karakoram Handicraft Development Programme, 78 women have been given direct employment, 1500 households have gained additional income and a rehabilitation centre provides work therapy for 53 disabled males.
- Stone quarries in the area now employ 20

people and earn an income for the Town Management Society.

- A community-managed system for the daily collection and safe disposal of garbage has been put into operation.
- Traditional wood-carving — which has a long history in northern Pakistan — has been revived with a training scheme and the creation of a wood-carving enterprise.
- The environment and cultural assets are being preserved through the continued use of small gardens, fruit trees, and maintenance of the traditional irrigation and water supply.
- More than 70 small family-owned hotels provide income for local people.

Benefits

The successful preservation of the local environment, the area's cultural heritage, and traditional music and dance has encouraged surrounding villages, many of which are now beginning to duplicate these efforts.

TWL has benefited from the changed attitudes of local people, many of whom have gained employment or extra income from company activities in the area. The company and its clients are therefore treated more sympathetically by local people. Throughout the Hunza Valley, local communities have expressed their satisfaction with the work of TWL.

Comments

The danger of degradation of traditional farmland as a result of the influx of visitors was the greatest concern. The hillsides surrounding the bowl of Karimabad became dotted with new buildings erected on traditional terraces and centuries-old orchards. The situation has now been effectively controlled by the Town Management Society.

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