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AN EXPLORATORY STUDY ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM AND THE DOMESTIC TOURISTS TRAVEL BEHAVIOUR

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ABSTRACT

This paper studies the development of tourism in India. It also studies the domestic tourist's travel behaviour in terms of major influencers for his/her destination choice.

Exploratory research through secondary data analysis traces the stages of development of Indian tourism. Focus group interviews reveal the important parameters for the destination selection as well as the trip characteristics.

KEYWORDS : Domestic tourism, development, destination selection.

INTRODUCTION

India's economic reforms have led to increased standards of living and a significant social and lifestyle changes, which has also fuelled demand for travel. Holidays have moved up in spending priority, with Indian tourists mostly spending on hotels, shopping, food and leisure. Millions of tourists travel across India to experience its charms as its domestic tourists. Domestic tourism involves people visiting destinations within their own country's boundaries. It is recognized as one of the three major categories of tourism, the others being inbound tourism (international visitors travelling to a country other than their own) and outbound tourism (residents of a country travelling to other countries). UNWTO has forecast that the Travel & Tourism Industry in India will grow by 8% per annum, in real terms, between 2008 and 2016. The total foreign tourist arrivals in India in 2010 were 5.58 million, registering an annual growth rate of 8.1% over the previous year. The foreign exchange earnings from tourism during 2010 was US\$ 14.19 billion with a growth 24.6% over previous year.

Tourism as a business has grown into one of the largest income generators worldwide, representing more than 9.1% of world GDP and more than 258 million industry jobs worldwide (World Travel and Tourism Council - Economic Impact 2011). The Indian Government places importance to tourism and sees it as an important growth driver.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the study are as follows :

- 1) To explore the development of domestic tourism in India.
- 2) To study the domestic tourist's vacation travel behaviour in terms of major influencers for his destination choice.

With reference to the above stated objective, the rest of the paper is organised as follows: Post the review of the related literature, the next section elaborates on the research methodology. In the later part findings are discussed and the last section states the limitations of the study and discusses scope for further studies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature on tourism ranges from general studies, economic, geographical or policy-related focus to descriptive case studies of sociological and psychological perspective. Tourism literature also focuses on the vast employment and foreign exchange earning potential.

Balaguer and Cantavella-Jorda (2002) examine the role of tourism sector in the longrun economic development of Spain. Durberry (2002) also provides the evidence of the tourism-led economic growth

for Mauritius. Similarly Dritsakis (2004) shows that tourism has a longrun economic growth effect for Greece.

Successive five year plan highlight the tourism development stages for India. The UNWTO (United Nations World Tourism Organisation) also publishes periodic information about its member countries.

Tourist choice behaviour is one of the most important area of tourism studies. Crompton (1979) states that destination choice is influenced by an elaborate and complex combination of consumer needs and destination perceptions. Beerli & Martin (2004a) assert that the destination attributes can be grouped under nine broad areas: natural attractions; general infrastructure; tourist infrastructure; leisure and recreation; art, history and culture; politics and economics; the environment; social issues; and atmospherics. They argued that the above attributes can act as a pull factor for the tourist in destination selection.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

Exploratory research design in form of secondary data analysis and focus group interviews has been used for this research. Secondary data analysis of UNWTO, World Travel and Tourism Council, Government of India-Ministry of Tourism's documents and working papers have been carried out. Study of developmental efforts in tourism has been done through understanding the efforts of successive governments via the five year plans. On the tourist side, the domestic tourists travel behaviour has been explored through conducting focus group interviews. Five rounds of focus groups were conducted in the month of May 2012 to gauge the Indian domestic tourists travel behaviour. The first group consisted of young professionals in the age group of 23-29. The second group consisted of housewives. The third group consisted of citizens aged 55 and above. The fourth group comprised of self-employed people (who employed less than 10 employees). The fifth and final group was made of MBA student in the age group of 21-25. Thus efforts were made to cover a range of segments. Respondents were probed on the parameters of destination selection, average amount spent per person on a domestic tour and other trip related characteristics.

FINDINGS

Findings can be classified into two parts. The first part traces the development of domestic tourism in India-particularly post independence. The second part throws light upon the Indian tourist's travel behaviour.

Tourism development in India has passed through many stages. Travel for religious and educational purposes has been always been an integral part of Indian culture. The development of industries and trade also were instrumental in creating various trading routes. These trading routes were well equipped with way side facilities for

travellers. The Moghul rulers introduced pleasure tourism in India. It was, however, during the British rule in India, that domestic tourism received new direction and meaning. Several hill stations like Shimla, Dalhousie, were developed during their reign.

Post independence in 1946, a committee was formed under the chairmanship of Sir John Sergeant, Secretary, Department of Education to advise the Government on the development of tourism. The first few five year plans focused mainly on agriculture, domestic production of industrial products, and heavy industries. Little importance was given to tourism in this era. Domestic tourism was highlighted during the fifth five year plan (1974–1979) for fostering national integration and economic development of backward regions. The plan also saw integrated development of tourist resorts at Kovalam, Goa, Gulmarg and Kullu –Manali and, construction of a number of youth hostels, tourist bungalows & forest lodges, promotion of wild life tourism and cultural tourism. India Tourism Development Corporation (ITDC) also ran many programmes for the development of tourism. This included amongst other things the expansion of hotels, travellers lodges, motels and cottages, duty free shops and strengthening of the transport units. The seventh five year plan, particularly the period of 1986 onwards saw directed efforts being put up towards the industry. Tourism industry has been making good progress since the start of the reform process in 1991. The government allocation to tourism also increased. A substantial amount of tourism investment funds has been invested in building three ranges of hotel accommodations:-5- star, 4 star and 3 star. Meanwhile, during that period, the government had also formulated the opening of the partial sky policy. The National Tourism Policy was formulated in the year 2002. The policy attempted to position tourism as a major engine of economic growth and focussed on domestic tourism as a major driver of tourism growth. Efforts were made to position India as a global brand to take advantage of the burgeoning global travel trade and the vast untapped potential of India as a destination. The Ministry of Tourism has been providing Central Financial Assistance to the State Governments since the 9th (1997–2002) five year plan which resulted in strengthening of the infrastructure and product development. The scheme had been restructured during the Tenth five year plan to meet the infrastructure needs.

In the current 11th Five Year Plan efforts are made to harness the full potential of the tourism sectors by improving the tourism infrastructure and popularizing further the Incredible India Campaigns in foreign countries promoting niche products such as MICE, Health and Wellness, Adventure Tourism etc. Major emphasis was on development of product infrastructure, promotion and publicity and providing assistance to institutes. As can be seen from above, various steps have been taken in a planned manner to foster tourism development in India.

For promotion and publicity to be more effective, it is essential to understand and study tourist behaviour as it affects the way tourism products are developed and marketed.

The consequent part of this paper looks into the Indian domestic tourist's behaviour. Focus is on the choice of destination. Parameters obtained from literature review like good value for money, beautiful scenery and natural attractions, historical and architectural beauty of the destination, religious place, good climate, promotional activities, costs associated, availability of suitable accommodation, accessibility, cuisine, availability of adventure activities, beautiful beaches, infrastructure and cleanliness of the destination were explored.

It has been observed that little work has been done the Indian domestic tourist.

The results of intensive focus groups indicate that across the segments, people selected a domestic tourism basis the natural beauty and the historical and cultural associations of the place. The next determinants were price and promotions. Specially promotional activities of the destination play a very important role in selecting a destination. Moreover, accessibility of the place also played a very important role in destination selection.

Contrary to the popular perception of the elderly selecting only religious places, the segment aged 55 and above placed a great importance on accessibility, cleanliness and natural beauty of the destination. For the students, the favourite destination was the one that had beaches, as the one that gave them opportunity to indulge in adventure activities.

The average amount spent on per person for domestic tourism ranged from Rs5,000 to Rs 35,000. Majority of the respondents still preferred to book through the travel agent. The preferred time for travelling were the vacations.

CONCLUSION

This is an exploratory attempt to study the growth of domestic tourism in India and the domestic tourists travel behaviour and any generalizations should be carried out with due considerations. Impressive efforts have been made to promote tourism and the Indian tourist is clearly impressed with the promotional efforts put in. Important factors that help them to decide on a destination are its natural beauty, historical and architectural beauty of the destination and price/cost associated with the destination.

This study can be extended further with a descriptive research design carried out through structured questionnaires with multi city sampling.

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