

LEISURE TOURISM IN INDIA: STATUS, GOALS, ISSUES AND SOLUTIONS

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Abstract : Tourism in India accounts for 6.8 per cent of the GDP and is the third largest foreign exchange earner for the country. Indian leisure travel can be sub-divided into several areas like beach or hill station tourism, heritage tourism, religious tourism, spiritual tourism, cultural tourism, historical tourism, adventure tourism and wild life tourism.

Tourism sector offers great opportunities and poses several challenges. Even though India stands at 42nd place in the world in terms of the visitors arrival, with holistic efforts by the Government and the Private Sector, India can aim to achieve larger share of the global business of USD 1197 Billion annual revenue.

Keywords:Leisure Tourism , Status, Goals, Issues .

INTRODUCTION

Leisure Travel can be defined as a journey undertaken by persons individually or as a group to destinations away from their starting point, with the main objective of entertainment and / or relaxation in a planned or unplanned manner.

CONSTITUENTS OF TOURISM INDUSTRY:

Tourism Industry comprises of providers of tour planning (actual and virtual), means of transport like air, road, rail, water; cruises, hotels, restaurants; entertainment like shows, theatres, nightclubs, safaris; guides, agencies and individual consultants, foreign exchange conversion, etc. Tourism is traditionally sub-classified into Business Travel and Leisure Travel.

OVERVIEW / STATUS:

Travel and tourism had contributed Rs 2,17,810 crore to the GDP in 2013, tourism in India accounts for 6.8 per cent of the GDP and is the third largest foreign exchange earner for the country as per the sectorial document for 'Tourism and Hospitality Sector' published under the 'Make in India' campaign. "Tourism is a big employment generator. For every USD 1 million invested in tourism 78 jobs are created;. The contribution of travel and tourism to the country's GDP is expected to rise to 7.5 per cent i.e., to Rs 2,34,145 crore this year.

The facts and figures which reflect the status of the Indian Travel and Tourism industry make an interesting reading.

Figures pertaining to foreign travellers visiting India in 2013 :

- Total number of visitors was 6.97 million, there being a rise of 5.9% over 2012; the major contributory countries were the USA 15.58 %, the UK 11.62 %, and about 0.25% tourists were from Canada, Germany, France and Japan.
- Foreign exchange earning from tourism was Rs.10,76,710 Million equivalent to USD 18.45 Billion. The rise in earnings was 14 % over 2012.

•However, in comparison with available global business i.e. 1087 Million visitors, and USD 1197 Billion revenue, with a growth rate of 7.2 %; India's share was only 0.64 %, which was quite low, even though this ratio was better than what it was in 1997 of 0.40 %The growth rate works out to a mere 0.92% per year, which is quite low. Not surprisingly, India's position amongst the countries with inbound tourism and the number of visitors is 42nd, though India ranks 18th being 1.5% in the list of inbound revenue earners, albeit reflecting higher per tourist spending in comparison with some other destinations.

•Domestic Travel by Indian residents has grown in a rapid manner, from 66 million in 1991 to 1140 million in 2013, with Tamil Nadu, UP, Karnataka, AP, and Maharashtra being the major recipients of the visitors. However, these figures do not represent the leisure traveller only as there is no established practice of recording the correct purpose of visit to a place in any records duly maintained by the government departments.

MAJOR DIVISIONS OF LEISURE TRAVEL:

Modern day Indian leisure travel can be sub-divided into several areas, like beach or hill station tourism, heritage tourism, religious tourism, spiritual tourism, cultural tourism, historical tourism, adventure tourism and wild life tourism. Fortunately, unlike some Far East destinations, sex tourism is not a menace in India.

Beach And Hill Station Tourism

Several hill stations like Shimla, Darjeeling, Ooty, Nainital, Mahabaleshwar, Kulu Manali offer destinations with scenic beauty coupled with varied cultural backdrop to a traveller.

India has several exceptionally beautiful beaches located in Goa, Kerala, Maharashtra, Chennai and Orissa. India has the benefit of having eastern as well as western coast, thereby the traveller being in a position to enjoy the beauty of rising as well as setting sun.

Heritage And Cultural Tourism

Heritage Tourism involves traveling to the destinations to have direct experience of the place, its topography, unique geographical facets, its bio-diversity, monuments, structures artefacts and activities that authentically represent the stories, legends, mythology and people of the bygone era.

Cultural tourism (or culture tourism) is the subset of tourism concerned with a country or region's culture, specifically the lifestyle of the people in those geographical areas, their history, art, architecture, religion(s), and other elements that help to shape their way of life and includes tourism in urban areas, particularly historic or large cities and their cultural facilities such as museums and theatres; in rural areas it showcases the traditions of indigenous cultural communities (i.e. festivals, rituals), values and lifestyle; as well as niches like industrial tourism and creative tourism.

India has several hundred places of interest like the Agra Fort , Ajanta Caves, Buddhist Monument at Sanchi , Champaner-Pavagadh Archaeological Park, Chhatrapathi Shivaji Terminus, Churches, Elephanta, Ajanta, , Ellora Caves, Fatehpur Sikri, Chola Temples, Monuments at Hampi,, Mahabalipuram Humayun's Tomb, Delhi, Khajuraho Temples, Mahabodhi Temples, Mountain Railways of India, Qutb Minar and its Monuments, Rock Shelters of Bhimbetka, Sun TempleKonârak, Taj Mahal.

Religious And Spiritual Tourism

Religious Tourism /'faith tourism' comprises of tours to places with religious significance for seeking mundane or esoteric benefits or for performing penance, religious duties or rites. India with its rich spiritual history is the place of origin of Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism, and Jainism; and has an unparalleled array of places and destinations which could attract a tourist seeking religion related pursuits like Golden Temple, Varanasi, Prayag, Rameshwar, Jyotirlingas, Ranchi, Kundigram, Nalanda, Vaishnodevi, Nathdwara, Vraj, Mathura, Durgahas of GuribNawas, Salim Chisti and Haji Malang, etc.

Under Spiritual Tourism individuals cross the boundaries of faith and religion to seek emancipation and solace through several activities like yoga, meditation, vipaschana, etc. India has several schools of spiritual endeavour, like the dvaita and advaita schools, Kriya Yoga by Yoganda, Transcendental Meditation (TM), Art of Living Foundation (AOLF), Satya Sai Ashram Prasanthi Nilayam that teaches unity of religions, Ram Krishna Math, Vivekananda Mission, the Osho Ashram, NisargDatta Maharaj, Bhakti Vendanta School founded by Prabhup, da, and alike.

Wild Life Tourism

India has a policy of complete ban on hunting, and so the Wildlife Tourism is restricted to a humane and well-guarded concept of viewing wild animals in their natural habitat (forest).

India has the widest spectrum of wild animals like the Lion, Tiger, Elephant, Gaur (Indian Bison), Rhino, Panther, Snow and Clouded Leopard, Wild Dogs, Bears, Deer, Python, King Cobra, Monitor Lizards, Turtles, Marine Creatures like Sharks and Dolphins, the Sea Snakes and Crocodiles, and hundreds of birds from the great Eagle to the tiny Humming Bird. Several bird species visit India on migration during the western winter. India had 112 national parks, encompassing a total of 39,919 kms (15,413 sq miles), comprising 1.21% of India's total surface area. Many of them allow wildlife safaris, which give everlasting memories to the travellers.

ISSUES / PROBLEMS:

- Airlines like Air India, GoAir, Indigo Air, Jet Airways, SpiceJet, JetLite providing air services in India. The passengers carried by domestic airlines during Jan 2015 were 62.45 lakhs as against 51.47 lakhs during the corresponding period of previous year thereby registering a growth of only 21.33%. Several cities in India do not have air connections yet, and consequently, the traveller has to use surface transportation. During Jan 2015, a total of 1197 passenger related complaints had been received by the scheduled domestic airlines; however as per report 1116 were closed. The number of complaints amongst 1,00,000 passengers carried for the month of Jan. 2015 has been 19, the majority of complaints pertaining to flight problems. In January 2015, the number of passengers affected by delays was 1,89,491.
- Indian railways operate 7000 passenger train services per day, however, the services, except for the Rajdhani Express, The Duranto Express, Shatabdhi Express are quite slow in comparison with countries like Japan, France, China, and Europe. The retiring / waiting room facilities are below par.
- Though Indian road network of 33 lakh Km. is second largest in the world and consists of Expressways (200 kms.), National Highways (92,851.07kms), State Highways (1,31,899kms.), Major District Roads (4,67,763 kms), Rural and Other Roads (26,50,000 kms), the fact that except the major portion of the National Highways and the State Highways in some states like Gujarat and Goa, the overall condition of the road network, the driving conditions and the lack of driving discipline is pathetic, making road journey extremely hazardous. The number of major road accidents in 2012 was 2,66,450, and the death toll was 85131.
- The most disturbing problem faced by travellers in general, and foreign travellers in particular are crimes against them, like cheating, molestation and rapes. Unfortunately, the overall inability of State in controlling crimes more particularly manifests against the traveller, as the offenders often are aware that with the limited time and money at the disposal of a traveller, redressal is not usually attempted by him or her, unless the crime is of great magnitude. It will not be wrong to state that except the elite travellers booking through top notch travel agents and as such using star hotels and luxury resorts and the travel arrangements like transport, sightseeing, safaris, shopping; incidences of cheating, overcharging, teasing, and even racial remarks is very common.
- Water transport / cruise is not at all well developed in India and needs development of infrastructure and marketing efforts to gather momentum.

THE SOLUTIONS:

The expected Role of the Government:

1. Provide basic infrastructural facilities including local planning and zoning arrangements.
2. Plan tourism development as a part of the overall area development strategy.
3. Create nucleus infrastructure in the initial stages of development to demonstrate the potential of the area.
4. Provide the required support facilities and incentives to both domestic and foreign investors to encourage private investment in the tourism sector.
5. Rationalise taxation and land policies in the tourism sector in all the States and Union Territories and in respect of land owned by Government agencies like Railways.
6. Introduce regulatory measures to ensure social, cultural and environmental sustainability as well as safety and security of tourists.
7. Ensure that the type and scale of tourism development is compatible with the environment and socio-cultural milieu of the area.
8. Ensure that the local community is fully involved and the benefits of tourism accrue to them.

9. Facilitate availability of trained manpower particularly from amongst the local population jointly with the industry.
10. Undertake research, prepare master plans, and facilitate formulation of marketing strategies.
11. Organise overseas promotion and marketing jointly with the industry.
12. Initiate specific measures to ensure safety and security of tourists and efficient facilitation services.
13. Facilitate the growth of a dynamic tourism sector.

The expected role of the Private Sector:

- i. Build and manage the required tourist facilities in all places of tourist interest.
- ii. Assume collective responsibility for laying down industry standards, ethics and fair practices.
- iii. Ensure preservation and protection of tourist attractions and give lead in green practices.
- iv. Sponsor maintenance of monuments, museums and parks and provision of public conveniences and facilities.
- v. Involve the local community in tourism projects and ensure that the benefits of tourism accrue to them in right measure.
- vi. Undertake industry training and man-power development to achieve excellence in quality of services.
- vii. Participate in the preparation of investment guidelines and marketing strategies and assist in database creation and research.
- viii. Facilitate safety and security of tourists
- ix. Endeavour to promote tourism on a sustained and long term perspective.
- x. Collaborate with Govt. in the promotion and marketing of destinations.

Thus, to conclude, the 'National Tourism Policy' has laid down ideal norms for the Government and Private sector for the development of tourism in India. If the public sector and the private sector jointly take up the responsibility of revamping the tourism industry, the economy would become more vibrant, as international and domestic tourism could get a big boost. This in turn would improve our country's image and generate tremendous employment opportunities and generate national income, sizeable foreign exchange earnings as well.

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