



Recent Developments In Tourism And Hospitality Industry In India

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INTRODUCTION

Tourism development in India has passed through many phases. At Government level the development of tourist facilities was taken up in a planned manner in 1956 coinciding with the Second Five Year Plan. The approach has evolved from isolated planning of single unit facilities in the Second and Third Five Year Plans. The Sixth Plan marked the beginning of a new era when tourism began to be considered a major instrument for social integration and economic development.

But it was only after the 80's that tourism activity gained momentum. The Government took several significant steps. A National Policy on tourism was announced in 1982. Later in 1988, the National Committee on Tourism formulated a comprehensive plan for achieving a sustainable growth in tourism. In 1992, a National Action Plan was prepared and in 1996 the National Strategy for Promotion of Tourism was drafted. In 1997, a draft new tourism policy in tune with the economic policies of the Government and the trends in tourism development was published for public debate. The draft policy is now under revision. The proposed policy recognises the roles of Central and State governments, public sector undertakings and the private sector in the development of tourism. The need for involvement of Panchayati Raj institutions, local bodies, non-governmental organisations and the local youth in the creation of tourism facilities has also been recognized.

The other major development that took place were the setting up of the India Tourism Development Corporation in 1966 to promote India as a tourist destination and the Tourism Finance Corporation in 1989 to finance tourism projects. Altogether, 21 Government-run Hotel Management and Catering Technology Institutes and 14 Food Craft Institutes were also established for imparting specialised training in hoteliering and catering.

Tourist Attractions

India is a country known for its lavish treatment to all visitors, no matter where they come from. Its visitor-friendly traditions, varied life styles and cultural heritage and colourful fairs and festivals held abiding attractions for the tourists. The other attractions include beautiful beaches, forests and wild life and landscapes for eco-tourism, snow, river and mountain peaks for adventure tourism, technological parks and science museums for science tourism; centres of pilgrimage for spiritual tourism; heritage trains and hotels for heritage tourism. Yoga, ayurveda and natural health resorts also attract tourists.

The Indian handicrafts particularly, jewellery, carpets, leather goods, ivory and brass work are the main shopping items of foreign tourists. The estimates available through surveys indicate that nearly forty per cent of the tourist expenditure on shopping is spent on such items.

Growth

Domestic tourism is as old as the Indian society. According to available statistics, domestic tourism has grown sub-

stantially during the last one decade. It increased to 167 million in 1998 from just 64 million in 1990, thus registering a compound annual growth of 12.8 per cent.

The growth of inbound tourism since Independence has been quite impressive. It was just around 17 thousand in 1951. From this level it rose to 2.36 million in 1998. Tourism receipts on the other hand have grown at a phenomenal rate of 17 per cent to Rs.1 1,540 crore in 1998 from Rs.7.7 crore in 1951.

Economic Impact

Tourism has emerged as an instrument of employment generation, poverty alleviation and sustainable human development. During 1998-99, employment generation through tourism was estimated at 14.79 million.

Foreign exchange earnings from the tourism sector during 1998-99 were estimated at Rs. 12,011 crore. Tourism has thus become the second largest net foreign exchange earner-for the country.

Tourism also contributed Rs.24,241 crore during 1998-99 towards the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Thrust Areas

In order to speed up the development of tourism in the country several thrust areas have been identified for accomplishment during the Ninth Five Year Plan (1997-2002). The important ones are development of infrastructure, products, trekking, winter sports, wildlife and beach resorts and streamlining of facilitation procedures at airports, human resource development and facilitating private sector participation in the growth of infrastructure.

Organisation

The organisations involved in the development of tourism in India are the Ministry of Tourism with its 21 field offices within the country and 18 abroad, Indian Institute of Tourism and Travel Management, National Council for Hotel Management and Catering Technology, India Tourism Development Corporation, Indian Institute of Skiing and Mountaineering and the National Institute of Water Sports.

Boosting Tourism

Some of the recent initiatives taken by the Government to boost tourism include grant of export house status to the tourism sector and incentives for promoting private investment in the form of Income Tax exemptions, interest subsidy and reduced import duty. The hotel and tourism-related industry has been declared a high priority industry for foreign investment which entails automatic approval of direct investment up to 51 per cent of foreign equity and allowing 100 per cent non-resident Indian investment and simplifying rules regarding the grant of approval to travel agents, tour operators and tourist transport operators.

Celebrations

During the Golden Jubilee celebrations of India as a Republic, the Ministry of Tourism made special efforts to pub-

licise the tourism potential of India. The first-ever Indian Tourism Day was celebrated on January 25, 1998. Baudha Mahotsav was organised from 24th October to 8th November 1998. The Year 1999 was celebrated as Explore India Millennium Year by presenting a spectacular tableau on the cultural heritage of India at the Republic Day Parade and organising India Tourism Expo in New Delhi and Khajuraho. The Wong La Millennium was held from April 1999 to January 2001. A special calendar of events has been formulated for highlighting - contributions to Millennium events by various places in all the States. An official website of the Ministry of Tourism has also been created for facilitating dissemination of information on tourism.

Constraints

The major constraint in the expansion of international tourist traffic to India is nonavailability of adequate infrastructure including adequate air seat capacity, accessibility to tourist destinations, accommodation and trained manpower in sufficient number.

Poor visitor experience, particularly, due to inadequate infrastructural facilities, poor hygienic conditions and incidents of touting and harassment of tourists in some places are factors that contribute to poor visitor experience.

To sum up, Indian tourism has vast potential for generating employment and earning large sums of foreign exchange besides giving a fillip to the country's overall economic and social development. Much has been achieved by way of increasing air seat capacity, increasing trains and railway connectivity to important tourist destinations, four-laning of roads connecting important tourist centres and increasing availability of accommodation by adding heritage hotels to the hotel industry and encouraging paying guest accommodation. But much more remains to be done. Since -tourism is a multi-dimensional activity, and basically a service industry, it would be necessary that all wings of the Central and State governments, private sector and voluntary organisations become active partners in the endeavour to attain sustainable growth in tourism if India is to become a world player in the tourist industry.

Potential of Tourism in India. India is well known, all over the world, for its ancient civilization and the artifacts recovered and being excavated till today, prove the genuineness of the claims.

The ancient history of our culture has left behind exquisite monuments and temples together with archaeological finds for the tourist who is interested in them. Besides this, our country has been blessed with natural scenic beauties, right from the coast lines and beaches to the majestic mountains and hill stations.

Tourism is a high potential industry the world over and there are several economies which are totally based on the tourism industry for their survival. The amount of money involved and high value returns could be mindboggling but India has not been able to successfully develop an infrastructure conducive to the promotion of the tourism industry.

Hospitality and Tourism industry is still at infantile stage in our country with tourist arrival, in the global context, a meager 0.3% of the total tourists arrival worldwide. This meager input is inclusive of the visitors from neighboring countries, business travelers and friends, relatives on a visit to their homeland. If this percentage is discounted then we are left with barely nothing but looking at the other side, domestic tourism potential is enormous in volume.

This industry has long been misunderstood as big, glamorous and highly profitable, which is not quite correct. This is in actuality a highly capital and labour intensive industry where the gestation period is unusually long, totally de-

pendent on facilities like connectivity, law and order situation, proper roads, air-connections, railway stations and other tourist favorable situations. Human Resource management plays a prominent role in this labour intensive industry.

The conversion of heritage buildings into hotels and adoption of monuments are the top priority scheme which has been taken up by the Tourism Ministry in the recent past. The move has been the saviour of several palatial buildings of former kings and nobles which were lying in a dilapidated state due to lack of fund and maintenance. The move has been made possible with the invitation to private sector enterprises to invest in these properties. This will not only restore the previous glory of these fabulous buildings but also be a big boost for tourism.

Several of them have already been converted into resorts and five star hotels. The foreign tourists are attracted to these heritage buildings, where they can have the same ambience used by royalty, an experience to be treasured a life time.

The destinations which have attracted the maximum foreign and domestic tourists due to their uniqueness are monuments like Taj Mahal, Konark Temple, Varanasi Temples and Ghats, Sarnath, Bodh Goya, higher altitude locations and hill stations for their scenic beauty and skiing facilities, coastal beaches and islands. These are places which do not need any special efforts to attract tourists, what needs to be packaged is the rest of the country, its unique civilization and culture, its religion and teachings. This is a far more difficult proposition.

Some of the states have been comparatively more positive in their approaches than the others. States like Goa, Himachal Pradesh, Kashmir, Rajasthan and Kerala have been trying to enhance further influx of tourists. The highway tourism of Haryana has been quite fruitful. UP has several of these facilities, in fact the maximum number of tourists have the Taj Mahal at Agra on their itinerary. We have some quality hotels at Agra like the Amar Vilas and Jaypee Palace. The cities of Varanasi, Lucknow and Agra are well connected by rail, road and air. The Buddhist destinations attract tourists from Japans and other Oriental countries. Religion and monuments based centres are the cities which need to be developed on the lines of Shirdi and Tirupati. The country has several such places like the Prayag in Allahabad, Kali Mandir at Bihar, Calcutta, Jagannath Mandir at Puri, Orissa.

Unfortunately, the agencies which should advise tourists in foreign countries including our Embassies and High Commissions do not provide the necessary details on these spots. In fact important places, considered the holiest of holy, like Prayag of the famous Sangam and Kumbh Mela, Bharadwaj Muni Ashram, Naag Basuki Mandir, Anand Bhagwan, Khushro Bagh etc do not exist on the mans of foreign travel agencies. It is obvious that our efforts are lacking somewhere.

Ayurveda Therapy is the latest fad with foreigners. Getting treated permanently for ailments without the use of high concentration medicines by natural therapy is now being sought after by all. Yoga packages are now being included in several tourism packages. This included with Ayurveda holds a lot of promise for tourism in our country. The interest shown by foreign tourists in learning the nuances of Yoga is encouraging. The importance of Yoga and its utility in the present context is now a universal fact. Yoga with Ayurveda is special contribution of our culture inherited from our ancient scriptures. All foreign tourists who plan a tour of our country make these centres their favorite destinations.

All facilities and infrastructures need to be upgraded to international standards if we want a definite increase in the number of days spent by the tourists.

There is a steady growth in respect of Buddhism, worldwide and this is future being popularized by several international celebrities embracing the religion. Infrastructural development in the Buddhist sector has seen much improvement but there needs to be greater effort to tap the increased potential of the market in Japan, South East Asia, the Orient and now the Western countries. Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Nepal have joined hands in cooperative effort to promote their destinations.

Our national Airlines- Air India, Air India and our Embassies in foreign countries should work in tandem, to change the image of our country in the eyes of the prospective tourists in Western countries. Even today a major percentage of citizens in these developed countries have an image of our country, as a nation of naked fakirs, beggars, elephants and rope tricks. This is the projection made by their media, a distorted picture deliberately projected for certain biased reasons, reflecting their attitude.

The younger generation of these countries studying in universities must be invited in groups, to our visit our country and see for themselves, the Modern India with teeming metros, the latest facilities and a conscious effort at further improvement. These are the persons who can be provided discounted package, who will really appreciate our culture, our respect for elders, our traditions and our heredity. All this because, the fast moving life they lead, leaves no scope for the finer nuances of life. These are the people who will go back and the real picture of a developed country with cultural heritage, huge and aesthetic monuments and, truly natural scenic beauty.

We have to develop the facilities to impress them and leave them infatuated with a country which really welcomes them, a country which considers guests as their most revered visitors. But for all this we need to improve our public utilities and keep them immaculately clean. This is itself is a tall order but it needs to be done. Visitors to Singapore are impressed with this factor, the most. Spotlessly clean streets and sparkling facilities clearly depict a high sense of discipline and hygiene. We should put ourselves in the position of tourists. We would like to avail of accommodation and traveling facilities which give value for money, which have comfortable rooms and toilet, warm and cold water running, fresh linen and food and neat atmosphere. This is the general norm in the developed countries, and how can we expect to make them our regular visitors without this level of cleanliness and hygiene.

CONCLUSION

The inglorious projections which our country receives abroad are primarily for lack of these facilities. The tourist who want to tour the country by road is faced with pot holes and shabbily maintained ones. The road leading to Varanasi Airport is the best possible example of this in 2002. Together with this add the problem of beggars, every where it is the give and give more ! Shopkeepers who are out to fleece treble or four times at the glimpse of a fair or yellow skin. Total lack of ethics: Where is the world famous culture of ours, which goes out guests feel at home? Unless there is a change of attitude not be able to cross the turnover beyond decimal point.