

Role of Indian Railways in Tourism Industry



Tourism and Travel Management

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ABSTRACT

Tourism is one of the growing sectors in the world. Tourism is travelling for pleasure. Tourism consists of three major components namely attraction, accessibility and accommodation. The mode of accessibility is very important in tourism. There are different modes of transport in India for the tourists. Among all railways is one of the preferred modes of transport. It offers unique views of the scenic countryside rarely seen by road or air. The Indian Railways offers a number of rail tours for the tourists in order to promote tourism. The railways play a major role in promoting tourism in India.

Tourism is travelling from home to a place for pleasure and returning back home. According to the World Tourism Organisation 'tourists are people who travel to and stay in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purpose not related to the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited.¹ Tourism industry is one of the world largest industries with millions of international visitor arrivals. Today tourism has become a complex activity encompassing a number of relationship and sectors.² Tourism industry is concerned with attracting people to a destination, transporting them there, housing, feeding and entertaining them and returning them to their homes.³

Tourism infrastructure is very much necessary for the development of tourism. Tourism infrastructure consists of the basic requirements and services needed for the successful operation of the tourism industry. Some of the essential ingredients of tourism infrastructure are transportation, accommodation, food, and beverages services. The availability of quality transport, clean hygienic food, accommodation, visitor amenities, guide services, shopping and entertainment of tourists are some factors which gives the strength to the tourism industry.⁴

There are three major components in tourism namely the Attraction, Accessibility and Accommodation. Among all the components of tourism, Accessibility is one of the key components of the tourism industry. Accessibility refers to the way in which a tourist access to a destination. The way may be any type of transport system. A.K. Raina in his book Tourism Industry in Kashmir has said "Transport network is to tourism what veins are to the body system". The technological revolution in transport system has brought about a boost to the tourism industry. A tourists always requires a convenient, comfortable, cheap and safe transport facilities. Travelling by train is one of the best option for this. Not only that, trains are fast, efficient and spacious unlike aircraft and coaches. These can take large number of people in a single trip. However, selecting mode of transport by the tourists depends on some factors like income, status and cost.⁵

Transport is one of the major complex global economic sectors. It not only forms the backbone of national and international commerce by acting as a mechanism for the movement of people, but also for tourism industry. Transport is considered as one of the important element of infrastructure for the growth and development of any region as it provides the linkages. Transport is considered as an index

of progress. Since tourism involves the movement of people from their place of residence to a tourist destination the relationship between transport and tourism development is very important and strong. For the development of any destination, adequate and efficient transportation is necessary. Transport, therefore is one of the basic components of tourism.

Even though rail travel is most convenient and economical, however with the latest technological advances, the advent of speed cars and aircraft has reduced the passenger traffic for railways in many developed countries. At the same time in countries like India, train travel is still the most preferred mode of transport.

HISTORY OF INDIAN RAILWAY

Indian railway is India's largest national undertaking, and also largest railway network of Asia. In India before the first official rail journey, steamed locomotion was in operation from 1830 itself. In 1842, Charles Blacker Vignoles, a professor of Civil Engineer, University of London proposed to construct railways in India.⁶ However the official opening of first railway journey began on 16th April 1853 by the efforts of Lord Dalhousie, the Governor General of British India. Lord Dalhousie was considered as the founder on Indian railway system. It carried 400 people in 14 carriages and flagged off from Bombay to Thane a distance of 32 km. The time taken by this train was 75 minutes. A number of programs for railway construction were carried out after this. Between 1854 and 1860 by the policy supported by Lord Dalhousie contracts for the construction of railways in India were made by the east India company and by the Secretary of State for India with East Indian, Great Indian Peninsula, Madras, Bombay, Baroda and Central India, Sind, Eastern Bengal, Great Southern of India and Calcutta and South-Eastern Railway Companies.⁷ Under these contracts the Railway Companies undertook to construct and manage railway lines. In the beginning the railways was operated by the private companies. Between the years 1925 to 1950 the Government of India took over it.⁸ Thus by the time, India gained independence in 1947, the British colonial government developed 54,000 km of railways. Modern railways are an extraordinary integration of high administrative efficiency and technical skill. Today it is the fourth largest railway network of the world.

RAIL TOURS IN INDIA

One of the best ways to see India is through the railways. Railways cover most parts of India. It makes the tourist feel the culture of India and not only that it gives a clear

picture of the state. Thus to promote tourism in India, the Indian Railways in collaboration with the State Tourism Development Corporations has introduced a number of rail tours for the domestic as well as international tourists. Some of them are,

Fairy Queen: This is the oldest working Steam locomotive in the world. It was built in 1855. It was overhauled in 1996 and resumed operations in 1997. It was certified by the Guinness Book of World Records as the world's oldest working locomotive.⁹

Palace on Wheels: This was operated by the Rajasthan Tourism Development Corporation, along with the Indian Railways. It started its operation in 1982 as a special heritage tourist train for providing a unique and memorable experience to the tourists visiting India. Earlier the Palace on Wheels was restricted to foreign tourists, but it was later opened to Indians too. It provides a journey reminiscent to the royal kings. It takes the tourists to enjoy the splendor of the Rajputs. The journey begins from Delhi every Wednesday. Cultural shows are organised at every halt of the train.¹⁰

Royal Rajasthan on Wheels: It is a step ahead of Palace on Wheels. Following the success of the Palace on Wheels the Rajasthan Tourism Development Corporation and the Indian Railway jointly launched this train. It is more luxurious than Palace on Wheels.¹¹

Royal Orient: This train takes the tourists to the fascinating state of Gujarat. It travels to palaces and forts. It is equipped with all modern facilities. There are multi cuisine restaurants and also a library.¹²

Deccan Odyssey: The Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation (MTDC) and Central Railway have promoted jointly a replica of palace on wheels in the name of, the Deccan Odyssey. The train has two presidential suites, 48 deluxe suites, two lounge and conference cars, a specialty restaurant and bar, television and cable connections, fax machines, cell phones on demand, foreign exchange facilities, laundry services, 24 hour room services and a valet. It gives an aristocratic travel experience. It travels throughout the destinations of Maharashtra.

Maha Pparinirvan Express: It is a luxury train started in 2007 which covers the Buddhist destinations. This train takes the passengers to a pilgrimage tour to Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.

Golden Chariot: This is operated by the Karnataka Tourism Development Corporation and the Southern Railways. It is the brain child of the Karnataka Tourism Development Corporation. It has restaurants, bar, a compartment with spa and gym. It is a fully air conditioned luxury train with eleven residential coaches. To travel in this train the tourist have an opportunity to start their journey from Bangalore or Goa.¹³

HILL RAILWAYS

Hill Railway refers to rail- lines connecting hill stations. It was initially built by the British for the British settlers. Till 1920's there were four such rail-lines built by different companies in four different parts of British India. These 4 rail- lines were Darjeeling Himalayan Railway, 1879, Nilgiri Railway 1899, Kalka Simla Railway, 1903 and Matheran Light Railway, 1907.¹⁴ At present in order to attract the tourists the government operates a number of hill rails. Not only that there are toy trains that runs only in hill stations.

These toy trains are not fast and they run in a narrow gauge. These trains offer the tourist an unique experience of viewing the mountain and the country side.

INDRAIL PASS

This is aimed at providing better service to foreign tourists. Foreign tourists can buy an Indrail Pass and travel in Indian trains. The concept was derived from the Eurail Pass. It permits unlimited travel in India for a specific time period from half a day to 90 days. Payment for the pass has to be made in US dollar, British Pound or other convertible foreign currencies. It is only available to Foreign Tourists, Indian Nationals residing abroad travelling on valid passport, Indian spouse of a foreign tourists and a guide accompanying the foreign tourists.

In India, Indrail passes are available for sale in Tourist Bureaus at major Railway Stations. Recognized travel agents in India and abroad are also authorised to sell these passes in Delhi, Mumbai, Calcutta and Chennai and they get a commission of 10 percent. These passes are available with a time period of 7, 15, 21, 30, 60 and 90 days with different tariffs. The Indrail pass is attractive even for the transit and short stay visitors. The passes are now available for half day, and four days for the facility of such visitors.¹⁵

CONCLUSION

Tourism industry is not a single industry. It is an industry comprising of many sectors. These sectors play a vital role and one such sector is the transport industry. Transport is a vital component of tourism industry. Though there are various modes of transport in India to view the beautiful tourism resources of the country, railways is one of the cheapest and comfortable mode of transport for the people always. The Indian Railways is taking effective steps to attract the tourists. Thus it can be stated that the Indian Railways play a major role in promoting tourism in the country. It makes tourism industry as one of the income generating industry for the Government of India.

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