



An Assessment of Foreign Tourists' Perceptions of Darjeeling as A Tourism Destination: A Factor Analytic Approach

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ABSTRACT

The present study has been conducted to look at the destination Image of 'Darjeeling' among the foreign tourists. A descriptive survey among the foreign tourists was conducted with a structured questionnaire. EPI (Latu and Everett, 1999) format (modified SERVQUAL) was used to obtain data from the respondents. A few underlying image dimensions were revealed using an exploratory factor analysis. From the expectation and perception scores, gaps and major satisfiers/ dissatisfiers were also identified. The findings could be useful to marketers interested in branding image of Darjeeling as an attractive destination to foreign visitors.

Keywords : Destination Image, Foreign Tourists, EPI, Factor Analysis

Introduction

International tourism is growing exponentially in recent times. In the year of 2011 the number of international tourists is estimated to be 983 million in the global market. UN-WTO has projected that international tourist arrivals will reach 1.6 billion by the year of 2020. Unfortunately; in India foreign tourists' arrival was only 6.29 million in the year of 2011-12. Even with excellent potential, India has been struggling to become a sought after destination for the international tourists. Indian tourism is unable to attract a huge number of foreign tourists even after desperate marketing and promotional efforts made by the Government of India and other private tour operators associated with the Indian tourism industry. The image of 'India' as a destination has not been properly positioned across the globe. India is viewed as less attractive by the outside world (Choudhury, 2000). Country image plays a vital role while selecting a destination by the foreign tourists. Creating and managing a proper image are critical to positioning strategy which is essential to the marketers of tourism destinations (Echtner and Ritchie, 1993).

Darjeeling city is located in the mountainous area of the district of Darjeeling. The township was set up by the British in the mid 19th century. Later, tea plantation began and production of internationally famous Darjeeling tea transformed the image of this destination. Tourists visit the destination to enjoy the beauty, serenity and tranquility of the Eastern Himalayan region. It is estimated that more than 20,000 foreign tourists visit Darjeeling every year. This study has been conducted to evaluate the destination image of Darjeeling which is known as Queen of hills among the foreign tourists. In this endeavor, we have made an attempt to figure out the destination image gaps associated with Darjeeling as an attractive tourism spot. Efforts also been made to identify major satisfying and dissatisfying destination Image attributes. It is also explored to identify the underlying dimensions of Darjeeling's image by conducting an exploratory factor analysis of attributes frequently included to evaluate the image of a destination. In the field of tourism management, it is commonly accepted that combined image of a destination is measured by cognitive and affective evaluations (Baloglu & Mangalolu, 2001; Hosany et al., 2007; Hailin et al, 2011).

Literature Review

In the year of 1971, Hunt introduced the concept of image in tourism literature. Subsequently, 'Destination Image' became one of the most popular areas in tourism research among the academicians. Destination image may be conceptualized in variety of ways. Researchers considered a destination as an amalgam of individual products and experience opportunities which collectively provide a destination experience. 'Destination' was defined by Hu and Ritchie (1992) as a package of tourism facilities and services comprising of multidimensional attributes. Baloglu and McCleary (1999) and Chon (1990) acknowledged that destination image affects tourists' perception, consequent behavior and destination choice. Fakeye and Crompton (1999) suggested that visitors staying longer have more positive image of a place. Positive destination image leads to higher tourists' satisfaction. Oliver (1999) cited definition of satisfaction as the degree to which one believes that an experience evokes positive feelings.

Evaluation of a destination image of a place requires incorporating too many complex factors. Previous studies pointed out that scenic beauty, culture; security, night life, quality of service etc are the factors responsible for image formation (Andreu et al, 2000; Hailin et al, 2011).

Methodology

During the first quarter of 2013 a survey was carried out among the foreign tourists visiting Darjeeling and adjoining areas. The sample comprised of 82 foreign tourists of different countries who were asked to provide responses to a self administered questionnaire towards destination attributes of Darjeeling

The questionnaire had two sections. First section comprised of 19 destination attribute items measured on 7 point interval scale. In the second section, demographic profiles of respondents were acquired. Modified 'SERVQUAL' principles (EPI Format) advocated by Latu and Everett (2000) was followed to measure and identify the image gaps. EPI format (Expectation, Perception and Importance) facilitated the completion of the three sets for all destination attributes. Respondents also had to conduct a comparison between what they expected and what they essentially perceived about Darjeeling as a tourism destination.

Results and Discussions

The majority of the respondents were men (58.54%). Around 51% tourists were in the age group ranging from 26-44 years, 31.71% were less than 25 years. 17.07% tourists belong to the age group of 45 to 65. Maximum number (19.76%) of tourists were from England followed by USA (10.32%) and Germany (7.32%). Remaining 62.60% were from Ireland, Australia, Japan Bangladesh and other countries of Europe and Asia.

The expectations (See Table 1) have surpassed perceptions

Table 1 Mean Scores

Destination Attributes	Expectation (E)	Perception (P)	Importance (I)	Anticipation (E*I)	Performance (P*I)	Gap (P-E)	Satisfaction Rating (GAP*I)	Satisfaction Rating
Abundance of Sites	5.55	5.52	6.31	35.01	34.83	-0.03	-0.19	Neutral
Scenic Beauty	5.69	6.07	6.64	37.78	40.30	0.38	2.52	Neutral
Night Life Happenings	3.93	3.12	4.62	18.16	14.41	-0.81	-3.74	Moderately Low
Shopping Facilities	4.14	4.55	5.10	21.11	23.21	0.41	2.09	Neutral
Variety of Flora and Fauna	5.10	5.26	6.14	31.31	32.30	0.16	0.98	Neutral
Cultural Diversity	4.60	3.74	5.40	24.84	20.20	-0.86	-4.64	Moderately Low
Transportation Facility	4.90	2.45	6.02	29.50	14.75	-2.45	-14.75	Low
General Infrastructure at Tourist Sites	5.02	2.19	6.39	32.08	13.99	-2.83	-18.08	Very Low
Political Stability	4.69	5.14	6.31	29.59	32.43	0.45	2.84	Neutral
Protection of Eco System	5.29	2.57	6.55	34.65	16.83	-2.72	-17.82	Very Low
Language Barrier	3.83	3.12	4.52	17.31	14.10	-0.71	-3.21	Moderately Low
Quality of Accommodation	4.95	4.57	6.24	30.89	28.52	-0.38	-2.37	Neutral
Local Cuisine	4.07	4.57	5.26	21.41	24.04	0.50	2.63	Neutral
Reliable Climatic Conditions	4.71	5.29	6.29	29.63	33.27	0.58	3.65	Moderately High
Ease of access to Tourism Information	4.81	6.07	6.36	30.59	38.61	1.26	8.01	Moderately High
Contact with local People	4.95	5.29	6.60	32.67	34.91	0.34	2.24	Neutral
Honesty of Mass	4.69	4.90	6.45	30.25	31.61	0.21	1.35	Neutral
Extent of Safety and Security	5.29	3.43	6.38	33.75	21.88	-1.86	-11.87	Low
Fair Price	4.45	4.54	6.26	27.86	28.42	0.09	0.56	Neutral

The satisfaction rating scores are positive for only ten destination attributes. Tourists are satisfied with 'Ease of Access to Tourism Information' (8.01) and Reliable Climatic Conditions (3.65). In both cases satisfaction level is moderately high. For other attributes like scenic beauty, local cuisine, political stability respondents show neutrality or average satisfaction level. The negative image gaps and poor satisfaction rating on attributes signify that the image of Darjeeling is not being perceived by foreign tourists optimistically. Unavailability of public toilets, waste disposals, resting places near sites create considerable gap in between tourists' expectation and perception concerning General Infrastructure of Darjeeling. Unplanned real estate development, mushrooming of hotels, unfriendly attitude of domestic tourists towards environment is destroying the eco system. Road conditions and unavailability of proper transport facilities are causing inconvenience to foreign tourists. However, attributes having positive image gaps can be used for better positioning of destination image of Darjeeling to the foreigners.

An exploratory Factor analysis was carried out using principal component analysis on 19 destination attributes to determine underlying image dimensions (Table 3). The KMO measure of sampling adequacy is found to be 0.531 and Barlett's Test of Sphericity ($\chi^2 = 375.21$, significant beyond $p < 0.000$) confirm fit of the factor analytic model. Principal Component analysis extracted 4 underlying dimensions. The four latent image dimensions are designated as Basic Tourism infrastructure (Factor 1), Natural environment (Factor 2), Travel environment (Factor 3) and Social Interaction (Factor 4) respectively.

of foreign tourists for only ten destination attributes of Darjeeling. The highest image gap (-2.83) is observed for General Infrastructure Facilities. However, General Infrastructure Facilities are of high importance (6.39) to the foreign visitors. Significant image gaps also can be observed for Protection of Eco System (-2.72), Transportation Facilities (-2.45) and Extent of Safety and Security (-1.86). Extent of safety and Security is also considered as highly important (6.38) destination attribute to the international travelers.

Approximately 56% of total variance has been explained by the four extracted factors.

Table 2 Image Dimensions of Darjeeling

Destination Attributes	Factor Loadings			
	Tourism Infrastructure (Factor 1)	Natural Environment (Factor 2)	Travel Environment (Factor 3)	Social Interaction (Factor 4)
Night Life and Happenings	.468			
Shopping Facilities	.485			
Cultural Diversity	.535			
Transportation facilities	.634			
General Infrastructure at Tourist Sites	.779			
Protection of Eco system	.802			
Quality of Accommodation	.636			
Local Cuisine	.649			
Honesty of Mass	.582			
Extent of safety and Security	.778			
Fair Price	.608			
Abundance of Sites		.652		

Scenic Beauty		.737		
Variety Of Flora and Fauna		.762		
Political Stability			.825	
Reliable Climatic Conditions			.719	
Language Barrier				-.526
Ease of access to Tourism Information				.676
Contact with Local People				.693

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Total Variance Explained

Component	Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	Percentage of Variance Explained	Cumulative Variance Explained
1	4.964	24.818	24.818
2	2.764	13.820	38.638
3	1.985	9.924	48.562
4	1.588	7.940	56.502

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

As depicted in the table 2, factor1 explains 24.81% of variance which consists of mostly tangible attributes that are associated to basic tourism infrastructure and factor 2 is termed as 'Natural Environment' due to loading of items related to natural environment. Factor 3 is associated with travel environment attributes like political stability and reliability of climatic conditions. Factor 4 is comprised of three items which represents the interaction and contacts with local people.

Managerial Implications and Conclusion

Tourists' satisfaction is revealed by the gap between expectation and perceived performance of destination attributes. If perceived performance exceeds the expectation, the visitor is satisfied. A satisfied tourist is more likely to revisit and recommend the destination to others. The findings of this study would help tour operators to uplift the image Darjeeling as a sought after destination among the foreign tourists. It is suggested that the Department of Tourism and other stake holders should take adequate measures to minimize dissatisfaction of tourists. It is imperative to find out the level satisfaction of each of the destination attributes since satisfactory ratings of attributes are likely to persuade the tourist to spread positive word-of-mouth. This would also help tourism stake holders to formulate appropriate marketing and brand positioning strategies.

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