



## Pre and Post Convention Tours at the Conference Destinations: Adding Pleasure to Business Tourists in Agra

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### ABSTRACT

It is widely accepted fact that convention tourists look for some leisure activities at the end of their business trips. Sometimes they are accompanied by their friends or families to add on their experience of visiting such destinations. This research paper identifies the benefits which destinations and business tourists can gain while participating in any convention or conference. While the main focus of a business tourist is to attend the convention or business meeting, but the tours offered to the business tourists pre and post convention, can bring benefit to all the stakeholders. The paper tries to find out these benefits and see how these pre and post convention tours can bring economic benefits to destinations. Agra is known world over for its world famous monuments. So the business travelers can be offered a leisure trip along with their work. To analyze the role of these tours on the economic development, the types of tourists who do and do not extend their visit, will also be studied. The role of convention, hospitality, and tourism professionals can be considered in motivating business tourists to extend their duration.

### KEYWORDS

Pre and Post convention Tours, Stakeholders, Leisure, Economic Benefits

### INTRODUCTION

It is a known fact that convention attendees are among the highest- spending visitors to these destinations. Undoubtedly business tourists take active participation in the conventions if they are provided a destination of their choice which they had been long waiting for. Although the main focus is always on business meetings but the role destinations play cannot be minimized. This brings the form of tours which are conducted before or after the convention takes place. Normally, the convention ranges between two to five days. Hence the delegates look for weekend trips or trips which are arranged before the starting of the convention. Destinations which have been developed or are being developed for convention tourism, can definitely boost their tourism revenues by these kinds of pre and post convention tours. The business tourists who are likely to take such tours are either sponsored by their organization or self-sponsored. Sometimes the organizer includes such trips in their itinerary to make them feel relaxed. In case of self-sponsored delegates, the business tourists can be classified in to two categories:

One who wishes to take advantages of the tourism and recreational facilities of the convention destinations and other who do not wish to take part in such tourism and recreational facilities offered at the destinations. Agra, being very close to the National Capital Region of Delhi offers a great scope of arranging pre and post convention tours for the conference delegates attending business meetings at New Delhi, Faridabad, Ghaziabad, Gwalior, Gurgaon, Noida and Greater Noida. With recently opened Yamuna Expressway, the desire to visit Agra by conference delegates has increased and attendees of academic conferences at various institutions go to visit the world famous monument, Taj Mahal and add on their experience of attending the conference.

This paper explores the extent to which convention attendees can provide extra income to cities by adding tourism and recreation activities to their visits before, during, or after the actual event attended. While the linkage between this form of tourism spending and the activities of convention attendees has long been acknowledged and accepted anecdotally, very little research has attempted to demonstrate this important link empirically. A rare and notable contribution to this topic is the research undertaken in the state of Washington by Rutherford and Kreck (1994).

### ATTENDEES' MOTIVATION

Once a working day is over, business traveler becomes a leisure tourist. As Davidson (2003) mentioned, "Leaving aside the hours spent conferencing, negotiating, and generally getting the job done, most business travelers, delegates and visitors to trade shows find themselves with time to spare in the places they are visiting." The degree of their involvement in leisure depends on personal characteristics and preferences and situational variables, but in most cases at new destinations business travelers seek to expand their experience by means of participating in local recreational activities, making use of available sightseeing options, taking part in local events and getting acquainted with culture and people.

It is not difficult to understand why convention attendees should choose to extend their visits. They are often professional people with high levels of disposable income and interest in experiencing new places. Those who have been sponsored by their employers to attend may consider that since they have not personally paid for the "business" aspect of the trip, it is reasonable to fund a tourism extension out of their own pockets. For long-haul visitors in particular, attending a convention may be a once-in-a-lifetime trip which provides an opportunity to enjoy the destination's attractions before or after the actual event.

When attending conferences and conventions, business travelers are often provided with an elaborated list of leisure activities included in the conference program. Occasionally pre-/ post- conference tours are organized for delegates, especially if the conference has a big number of attendees and an international scale. Conference attendees frequently prolong their time at the destination staying a few days longer for leisure activities before or after the conference itself (Davidson, Cope, 2003).

Business travelers tend to return to the destination which they liked when traveling on business. According to research undertaken in this field, around 40% of business travelers tend to return to the destination which they have enjoyed when being on a business trip (BTB, 2007). Moreover, they spread their reviews, both positive and negative, what can either enhance the image of the destination or considerably damage it.

The motivation behind bringing a guest generally varies—and may even be at the guest's own insistence. Many evidence sug-

gests that spouses, for example, may actually encourage potential delegates to attend— accompanied—if the destination appeals to the spouses. Another common motivation is the wish to further involve the guest in the attendee's professional life.

#### LEISURE-RELATED MOTIVATION FACTORS

Author	Year	Leisure-related motivation Factors
Fortin et al.	1976	Hospitality, Local interest
Var et.al.	1985	Attractiveness of the destination; availability of leisure activities; image of the city; Tourism and cultural activities
Edelstein, Benini	1994	Destination Image, Recreational Facilities, tourist attractions
Rutherford, Kreck	1994	Tourism Activities
Oppermann	1996	Attractive location, City image, weather, scenery, sightseeing opportunities, nightlife, restaurant facilities
Sirakaya et Al.	1996	Nightlife
Oppermann, Chon	1997	Destination Image, pre/post conference activities, time availability
Rittichainuwat et al.	2001	Sightseeing, outdoor recreation, travelling to desirable places, a change of place
Baloglu, Love	2004	Extra-conference opportunities
Jaqo Derry	2005	Interesting, exotic location
Zhang, Leung	2007	Attractiveness ; destination image; climate; sightseeing and leisure opportunities, nightlife and entertainment
Severt et al.	2007	Activities and opportunities; association related activities; travel opportunities and guest program
Yoo, Chon	2008	Destination Stimuli: opportunity to visit destination, extra opportunities at the destination, attractive image
Mair Thompson	2009	Attractive location, visiting surrounding area, available time off work

Extrapolation of decision-making process of conference attendees studied by Tretyakevich, N. (2010)

#### AGRA AS CONVENTION DESTINATION

As stated above, Agra has already a large number of tourist arrivals with three World Heritage Sites which are visited by hundreds of thousands of tourists every year. Looking at the benefits of developing tourism, the state government has also initiated some infrastructural remedies to the infrastructural gaps in the city. Some of them are operational now while some of them have been given a final nod from the state government.

With the inauguration of Yamuna Expressway which has eased the travelling between National capital and Agra, the connectivity between Agra and National Capital Region has improved. Many event planners and organisers have shifted their venues from Delhi to Greater Noida (Like Auto Expo-2013). Hence Agra can also get benefit from developing conference tourists from these venues to go for post-conference tour.

The State government has also started taking initiatives for developing another Expressway between State capital Lucknow and Agra. The journey time is 9-10 hours now which will be reduced to 3-4 hours. This will also boost tourist arrival to Agra.

The Four important national highways namely NH-2, NH-3, NH-11 & NH-93 are passing through the city and catering very heavy load of traffic originating from Delhi & Gwalior and going towards Kanpur, Jaipur & Aligarh. The city has mainly two main roads namely MG Road and Yamuna Kinara Road. Most of the traffic passes through these roads resulting traffic jam and noise and air pollution. To overcome the problem of traffic jam, it is felt for a new six lane (Expendable to eight lanes) excess controlled road for free flow of through traffic connecting NH-2 to NH-3 on the eastern side of the city, which will be called Inner Ring Road. The Government of Uttar Pradesh (GoUP) has appointed Agra Development Authority as Nodal Agency for development of said Inner Ring Road of Agra on Public Private Partnership mode.

The state government has also started working on Taj International Airport which will help tourists to arrive directly. At present few flights are operational but if this airport gets extension approval from Ministry of Civil Aviation, Agra will be connected directly to major destinations of Asia and rest of the world.

Apart from such infrastructural initiatives by state government, many private developers have come up with some new initiatives to present diversified products to tourists. One such initiative is the Kalakriti cultural and Convention Centre which offers cultural shows based on chronicles which depict the legacy behind Taj Mahal. This centre also offers a great place for organising conferences, concerts, product launch and educational films.

No doubt, Agra has a lot of potential as a convention destination but sincere efforts are needed from all stakeholders to develop and showcase it as a world class convention destination. The benefits associated with it are numerous and long-lasting. The earlier it is visualised, the much better it is.

#### CONCLUSION

The benefits to be gained from the market composed of extenders and convention delegates' guests are not in doubt. There are already many conference destinations which are not only fully aware of the benefits for the destinations, but are also working successfully to maximize the economic impacts pre or post conventions.

However, more research is required before we can truly claim to understand the factors that commonly determine how delegates decide whether or not to extend their convention trip and bring guests. This paper has identified a number of characteristics which must form part of that decision-making process. The important work in this field undertaken by Rutherford and Kreck (1994) needs to be continued if we are to arrive at a full understanding of this key market. Looking at the benefits of developing conference destinations, it becomes imperative to go for further research into this aspect of convention tourism.

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