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PILGRIMAGE TOURISM- VALUE ADDITION IN CONVENTIONAL TOURISM

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ABSTRACT

Positioning tourism as a major engine of economic growth and harnessing its direct and multiplier effects on employment and poverty eradication in a sustainable manner by active participation of all segments of the society is the main objective of the tourism policy of Government of India. Tourism sector is one of the largest employment generators in the Country and plays a very significant role in promoting inclusive growth of the less-advantaged sections of the society and poverty reduction. Apart from marketing and promotion, the focus of tourism development plans is now on integrated development of tourism infrastructure and facilities through effective partnership with various stakeholders. The role of Government in tourism development has been redefined from that of a regulator to that of a catalyst.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism has emerged as an important sector of the industrial economy; It is an economic bonanza which may contribute a lot to the development processes; if the managerial decisions are creative, innovative, sensitive and effective. This in a natural way necessitates excellence which can't be possible without professionalism, especially when the services are of perishable nature. Our success rate is, of course, governed by excellence. The marketing experts feel that to excel-competition, it is impact generating that the organisations engaged in promoting tourism make efforts to activate the measures found effective in transforming the potential tourists into actual tourists. This would help organisations in paving ways for their prosperity and leadership. The developed countries have been found successful in initiating qualitative improvements, especially with the help of the innovative marketing practices. In a few cases, they have also preferred aggressive marketing practices. The developing countries like ours should adduce examples from them and should make possible alignment of tourism with marketing.

TOURISM MARKETING-AN ATTITUDINAL CHANGE

A clear perception of tourism marketing requires a brief analysis of marketing. We are well aware of the fact that there have been some fundamental changes in the traditional concept of marketing which, of course, have been influenced by the changing environmental conditions. A transformation in the attitude, desire, taste, needs and expectations can't be denied; if the social, cultural, political, legal and economic conditions keep on moving, Professionalism paves ways for excellence and this opens doors for competition, Almost all the organisations producing goods or generating services thus find it safe to assign an overriding priority to customers' or users' satisfaction, This necessitates a change in the concept of marketing which in a natural way expands its functional areas, Thus consumers' or users' satisfaction become the focal point. While clarifying the perception of tourism marketing, it is essential that we assign due weight age to the social considerations since the holistic approach concentrates on sub serving the social interests.

The application of marketing concept in the tourism industry is greatly simplified as part of the process already completed by the desire for travel. This is clarified with one example that a person may or may not choose a tangible product which has been introduced by a manufacturer in a market depending upon his ability to afford it or his ever changing likes and dislikes, when we align the concept of marketing in the tourism business; it is known as tourism marketing.

RELIGION AS A MOTIVATOR

Travel for religious purposes assumed a significant importance during the middle Ages. The practice of travelling for religious reasons, going on a pilgrimage for example, became a well established custom in many parts of the world. By the end of the middle Ages large number of pilgrims was travelling to the main shrines in Europe, and travel again assumed an interesting character, however, travel was still dominated by religious motivations. Very little actual pleasure travel was undertaken. The adoption and spread of Christianity subsequently led to numerous pilgrims making their way to the Holy land. So deep and strong was the hold of faith that the ritual of pilgrimage flourished over the centuries. Religion was a great unifying force. Pilgrimages strengthened religious bonds. It provided the impetus for a 'stay-at-home' agrarian society to break out of its narrow geographical confines. It also exposed people to new manners and customs, different kinds of food and modes of dress. It encouraged exchange of ideas and also fostered trade. It served as a powerful means of forging unity and understanding between people from widely different regions.



PILGRIMAGE TOURISM – AN ATTRACTIVENESS

Increasing number of people are visiting different lands specially those places having important historical or cultural associations with the ancient past or those places holding special art festivals, music festivals, theatre and other cultural events of importance. Curiosity has been one of the major reasons for tourism. There has always been curiosity in man about foreign lands, people and places. In the present day world technological developments in the area of mass media have made it possible for people to read, see and hear about different places. The increasing interest shown by many in architecture, art, music, literature, folklore, dance, paintings and sport, of other people's culture or in archaeological and historical remains and monuments is but another aspect of man's curiosity to seek more knowledge. This curiosity has been stimulated by more education. International events like Olympic Games, Asian Games, national celebrations, exhibitions, special festivals, etc. attract thousands or tourists.

Travel for spiritual reasons has been taking place since a long time. Visiting religious places has been one of the earliest motivators of travel. A large number of people have been making pilgrimages to sacred religious places or holy places. This practice is widespread in many parts of the world In the Christian world for instance, a visit to Jerusalem or the Vatican is considered to be very auspicious In the Arab-Moslem world, the pilgrimage to Mecca or some other holy centres is considered to be a great act of faith. In India there are many pilgrimage centres and holy places of all the major religions of the world where every year a large number of pilgrims from all over the world come.

GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES

The Ministry of Tourism has taken the initiative of identifying, diversifying, veLoping and promoting niche products of the tourism industry. This is done in order to overcome the aspect of 'seasonality' and to promote India as a 365 days destination attract tourists with specific interest and to ensure repeat visits for the unique products in which India has a comparative advantage. Identifying niche products is a dynamic process. Thus, new products may be added in due course. The Ministry of Tourism has constituted Committees for promotion of Golf Tourism and Wellness Tourism. Guidelines have also been formulated by the Ministry to support Golf, Polo, Medical and Wellness Tourism. Accordingly, the following Niche Products have been identified by the Ministry of Tourism for development and promotion:

- Cruise
- Adventure

- Medical
- Wellness
- Golf
- Polo
- Meetings Incentives Conferences & Exhibitions (MICE)
- Eco-tourism
- Film Tourism
- Sustainable Tourism
- Religious Tourism

Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) in India during 2013 were 6.97 million. The Foreign Exchange Earnings (FEEs) from tourism in terms of US dollars during 2013 was US\$ 18.445 billion with a growth of 4.0%. Substantial growth was observed in domestic tourism sector as the domestic tourist visits during the year 2013 was 145 million (Provisional), showing a growth of 9.59% over 2012,

Visa-on-Arrival (VoA)

In an effort to promote inbound tourism in the country, the government announced Tourist Visa-on-Arrival in 2010. At present, it provides Tourist Visa on Arrival facility (TVoA) to the nationals of 12 countries namely Finland, Japan, Luxembourg, New Zealand, Singapore, Cambodia, Indonesia, Vietnam, Philippines, Laos, Myanmar and South Korea. This facility was initially available at the international airports of Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai and Kolkata. However, with effect from 15 August, 2013 this facility has been extended through Hyderabad, Bengaluru, Kochi and Thiruvananthapuram. During the period January to December 2013, a total number of 20294 Visas on Arrivals (VoAs) were issued as compared to 16,084 VoAs during the corresponding period of 2012 registering a growth of 26.2%. The number of VoAs issued under the Scheme during January to December 2013 was Japan (6,448), New Zealand (3,968) the Philippines (2,967), Indonesia (2,758), Singapore (2,486), Finland (1030), Vietnam (205), Myanmar (148), Luxembourg (145), Cambodia (120) and Laos (19).

During the period January to December 2013, the highest number of VoAs were issued in New Delhi airport (11,046) followed by Mumbai (4,206), Chennai (2815) Kolkata (1,351), Bengaluru (380), Kochi (229), Hyderabad (165) and Trivandrum (102).

STRATEGICAL ISSUES

The application of marketing principles in the tourism industry is meant formulation of marketing mix on the basis of users' behavioral profile. The marketers are here required to study the level of expectations of the actual and prospective tourists. On the basis of their changing needs and requirements, hopes and aspirations and taste preferences: the marketing decisions are to be made. The offering of services needs an intensive care, especially to stimulate the buying decisions. The marketing strategies simplify the task of stimulating demand since the services are generated in the face of users' choice. The management of marketing information helps a marketer in coming to a right conclusion. The tourist organisations identify the market potential of a particular segment and revamp the strategies accordingly. The strengthening of research work is found significant to draw the conclusion. On the basis of information, the sub-mixes are formulated or reformulated. Hence, the need of the how is to streamline the managerial decisions. Here, the responsibility of managing the marketing decisions is found on the marketing managers. The strategic marketing decisions would also be made effective with the help of a marketing manager.

CONCLUSION

Pilgrimage tourism can be an attractive tourist destination if the tourism industry is properly encouraged. The convention travel has made great strides in recent times. Many countries in order to attract more tourists have established grand conventions complexes where all kinds of modern facilities are provided for business meetings, seminars and conventions. This way pilgrimage tourism has got wide scope in these days.

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