A Study on Tourism Logistics in the Spiritual Sites of Haridwar and Rishikesh in Uttarakhand

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Abstract—Globally number of Spiritual tourists has been on the rise in the recent years. India being one of the most preferred spiritual destinations has witnessed the impact, particularly, in the holy places like Haridwar and Rishikesh in the Northern India. However, there have been few characteristic changes in the logistics requirements of the spiritual tourists. These changes are attributed to the technology driven social changes. The present study highlights on some of the important logistics features in the two important spiritual cities of Uttarakhand- Haridwar and Rishikesh. A questionnaire based survey was conducted to collect data from the important stakeholders - the tourists, the hoteliers, the travel agents etc. Analyses of the data revealed that while domestic tourists had preferred hotel accommodation, the International tourists are more attracted by Dharamsalas. Further, more personalized mode of transportation was found to be preferred by the tourists while mobile phone dominated the mode of communication. Consequently, a shift in the logistics paradigm could be observed through this study.

Keywords—Spiritual tourism, logistics, customer’s preference, survey.

I. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the largest industries in the world. According to the World Travel and Tourism (WTW) Council, tourism and travel have become a global industry and is widely considered to be one of the fastest growing industries (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2006). India is fascinating with its ancient and complex culture, dazzling contrasts and breathtaking natural beauty. With the great potential available and the development initiatives taken by the government, Indian inbound tourism has shown a substantial growth in the last decade which has been the best in the history of Indian tourism. India has become one of the major international tourist destinations because of its series of marketing initiatives including the current and highly successful ‘Incredible India’ campaign. In this context Uttarakhand state is a unique tourist destination with excellent opportunities for development of a diverse range of products involving nature, spirituality, adventure, leisure etc. to satisfy a tourist’s desire. Uttarakhand state promotes ‘spiritual tourism’ through its religious diversity and heritage.

Spirituality, in general, has recently become an important subject of research in social and business areas. This has added a new dimension to the tourism industry, called ‘spiritual tourism’. Consequently, there has been an increase in the awareness and research interest in the thematic field of spiritual tourism. The present research work is concerned with an investigation of the marketing aspects of the spiritual tourism in Uttarakhand state of India vis-à-vis its logistics, infrastructure, destinations and economical implications. Uttarakhand, one of the youngest states in India, fortunately, has many reasons to become one of the natural destination choices for the tourists. The state possesses unmatched natural locations for holidaying, sports, adventures, and, in particular, several places for spiritual activities. Uttarakhand is considered as the spiritual capital of India.

II. SPIRITUAL TOURISM AND LOGISTICS

In India, Uttarakhand, which is a hilly state and home to many spiritual activities, is considered a tourist’s paradise. The state offers a number of unmatched destinations to the tourists for quenching their spiritual thirsts, for holidaying and for sporting thrills. The mid Himalayan region of Garhwal and Kumaon, which was called by the name Kedarkhand and Manashkhand in the Purans, is known as Uttarakhand today. This entire hilly region covers an area of 53,483 square kilometer, which is 1.63 percent of India’s area, comprises of 16,828 villages in 13 districts. Uttarakhand extends from 28° 43’ N to 31° 27’ N longitude and 77° 34’ E to 81° 02’ E latitude. This new state in the northern part of India is surrounded by Nepal in the East, China in the North, Himachal Pradesh in the west and U.P. in the South.

Spiritual tourism is also termed as religious heritage tourism. It includes all the religions, religious places associated with, emotional attachment to these centers and infrastructure facilities for the tourists. This can also be referred to as pilgrimage tourism, as clients are not looking for luxury but arduous journeys to meet the divine goal or simple life. The essence of spiritual tourism is inner feeling through love.
Globally, mental strain of the people is increasing. Consequently, people are looking for solace in spiritual reading, meditation and moments of divine ecstasy. India has been known as the seat of spiritualism, and its cosmopolitan nature is best reflected in its pilgrim centers. India is not only known as a place rich in its culture with varied attractions but also for many places of worship. She presents herself as embodiment of compassion where one gets peace of mind. Globally, India has been respected as a destination of spiritual tourism. However, India is yet to exploit the potential of this industry of the future. A scientific study on spiritual tourism in India is expected to generate considerable interest and would carry immense scope.

Tourism has become a competitive industry in the Uttarakhand state of India in the recent years. The location of the region and its richness in biodiversity has become a place of attraction for tourism industry. This state has the state-of-the-art infrastructure so as to develop tourism industry to its best. Uttarakhand being the land of hills, mountains, plateaus, rivers, forest and varieties of exotic flora and fauna attracts large number of foreign tourist to this land. According to a report by Dixin (2005), tourists visiting Uttarakhand can be categorized into three major categories. These tourist classes are: (i) Pilgrims / Religious tourists, (ii) Pleasure tourists / Holiday Makers, (iii) Special interest tourist / Adventure and Nature Lovers. Husain (2007) analysed on the Promotional aspects of marketing strategy of tourism industry in a tourist-rich state, Uttarakhand in India. The study reveals that the tourists are significantly influenced by the package incentives offered by tour operators. Aggarwal et al. (2008) developed various marketing strategies to boost tourism in Rishikesh, India. The work highlights the role of yoga and spirituality in Indian tourism. The authors also attempted to bring out the motives of foreign tourists behind visiting ashrams.

Karar (2010) discussed the importance of Haridwar as a potential spot for attracting tourists to the state. Karar further analysed at length the historical and mythical aspects related to Haridwar and why the place is being considered as a sacred city. Haq et al. (2008) explores the relevance of marketing strategies by Ansoff to the typology model proposed earlier by Haq and Jackson in 2006. Haq also emphasized that ‘market development’ and ‘product development’ strategies are critical for making interested customers involved which is an important part of tourism logistics.

Ryngnga (2011) focuses on the measures needed to be taken by the Government of India to identify tourism as a priority sector and promote tourism in the different regions of the country.

Of the many tourists coming to Uttarakhand a striking figure come for spiritual tourism. The projected forecast for foreign tourist visits by 2012, 2017 and 2020 in Uttarakhand are estimated at 0.227 million, 0.399 million and 0.703 million respectively by a survey conducted by Uttarakhand Tourism Development Board. Thus, it is important to address the logistics issues, particularly related to spiritual tourism in the state, in order to convert these projected figures into reality.

Tourism logistics covers tourism related activities like hotel industry, tour and travel operators and transport like air, rail and road. Other industry/services that act as a support mechanism or facilitate service for this target industry also needs to be included. The tourism activities are multidimensional and can be undertaken only with the help of other goods or services. Travel and tourism activity mainly include:

a. Travelling to destination
b. Accommodation at destination
c. Recreational activities.

Logistics is the process of movement of goods across the supply chain of the company. This process consists of various functions, which have to be properly managed to bring effectiveness, efficiency in the supply chain of the organization. Organizations which are involved in tourism, efficiency are adapted, among other determinants, by the coordination and harmonization of all participants’ efforts from the specific activities chain: tourism services suppliers, tour-operators, travel agencies and tourists themselves. Among these players, a special role is assigned to the tour-operators. Going from certain tourism attractions, they take upon themselves the fabrication of those products that are required by tourists, assembling the different basic and supplementary tourism services that are offered by numerous services suppliers, and further, distributing them to the retailers, or directly to the tourists. The impact of their activity is very strong because through the appreciated products they incorporate different types of tourist services. Analyzing the tourism activity in a similar manner as the material goods manufacturing activity from logistical point of view, it can be said that, successful activity can be achieved when those different Players act like a supply chain system.

The structure of the industry varies according to the linkage parts of tourism activity. Even a single activity is a part of the tourism industry, e.g. booking agents, tour operators, hotels providing only accommodation, etc. Elements of all types of market can be seen at different points of the tourism activity chain. Planning policies are done according to the type of market structure.
Figure 1 presents such a tourism activity chain that incorporates important elements of a common tourism system. It has been observed, however, that hardly there is any structured study addressing this important issue of logistics vis-à-vis spiritual tourism, an activity that brings a lion’s share of the state’s revenue. The present study aims at analyzing few major issues in the logistics while considering two important spiritual locations of the state.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objective of this study is to analyse the existing tourism logistics with reference to spiritual tourism in two locations- Haridwar and Rishikesh of Uttarakhand state of India. The specific objectives include:

1. To examine tourism marketing practices currently being followed in India as a whole, and, the state of Uttarakhand, in particular.
2. To study the tourism logistics in the spiritual sites of Haridwar in Uttarakhand.

IV. METHODOLOGY

A comprehensive study of the available tourism literatures indicates inadequate attention of the researchers towards the marketing efforts in spiritual tourism logistic services.

The purpose of the proposed investigation is to study different aspects of marketing of spiritual tourism and development of marketing strategies in the Uttarakhand state of India. Tourism is a complex phenomenon that involves a number of constitutive elements. Research in such an area calls for careful consideration of different attributes. In the present study, primarily ‘self-administered questionnaire survey’ methodology was adopted. Data were collected through various methods. In order to collect primary data, cross-sectional multiple research design methodology was adopted in which samples were questioned only once as part of the personal survey. Secondary data were collected from the data generated by different agencies and government organizations, other data repositories and published literatures. In the present research 500 samples were surveyed. Samples, both male and female, were selected randomly from the target population of Indian and foreign tourists at the sites. Separate questionnaires were developed to collect data from tourists, hoteliers, travel agents and travel guides; attempts were made to contact each person individually and help them in filling the questionnaires.

V. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

A. Package Tours and Accommodation

In the context of the fact that the package tours are not very popular amongst the spiritual tourists, it was important to explore their preferred mode of travel as presented in Table 1. Accordingly, preferences of the domestic as well as international tourists were acquired through the administered instrument, and the relevant data are illustrated in Figure 2. In the absence of poor air connectivity of the two places of interest (Haridwar and Rishikesh), taxi was the most preferred mode of travel for the international (79%) as well as domestic (32%) tourists. While train is the other mode of travel for the international tourists, many domestic tourists also travel by roadways (30%) and trains (21%) apart from their own vehicles (17%). The fact that the places under study are in the map of limited train network, many tourists of nearby places travel by buses, which is the next economic mode of movement for the low income group tourists. The affluent tourists, on the other hand, travel in their own vehicle which provides them flexibility in time, nearby site seeing and in some cases, shopping (of particularly spirituality related items and/or special souvenirs).
Further, while most of the domestic spiritual tourists prefer to stay in the hotels (~76.4% against only ~23% international tourists), most of the international tourists prefer to have the experience of dharamsalas too (Figure 4).

The mode of booking the accommodation is another important issue for a tourist, particularly in places where the affects of internet revolution are yet to be felt. Thus, a significant 60% international tourists book their accommodation through some local contacts here (their Indian hosts etc.), while almost 74% of the domestic tourists book their accommodation on the spot (Figure 3). Better e-communication services here could reduce a tourists’ anxiety regarding accommodation.

The hotel-going international tourists would perhaps prefer their base to be at the nearby big cities with the readily available international facilities. However, those who stayed in these two places were overall pretty satisfied with the hospitality as revealed in the Figure 5. The data also justify the philosophy ‘atithi deva bhava’ being practiced in the state religiously.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Reasons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Information</td>
<td>a) Lack of proper information about the alternatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>based</td>
<td>b) Lack of contact information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Organisation</td>
<td>a) Lack of professionalism among tour operators/organizers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>based</td>
<td>b) Failing to reach out to the needs of prospective tourists</td>
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<td></td>
<td>c) Lack of proper planning in motivating the tourists</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Security based</td>
<td>a) Tour operators are not properly equipped</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) Failure of the tour operators to instill confidence regarding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>comfortable completion of a tour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c) Fear on the part of the tourists to get cheated</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Table I
Reasons For Not Preferring Tour Packages.

Figure 3 Tourists’ choices in means of accommodation booking.

Figure 4 Lodging preferences of the tourists visiting Haridwar and Rishikesh.

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B. Logistics Information

It is important for any tourist to have ample information regarding the places they target to visit. Moreover, more details regarding timings for visit, booking for special sessions, booking for entries, booking for logistics are other local issues which need to be planned in advance based on the information (Table 2). It is therefore important for the responsible authorities to make such information available in the public domain. The data collected through the instrument reveal that NGOs and the Government should take the major initiative in providing information according to the assessment of the international tourists (Figure 6).

Apart from information providers, tourists prefer few other facilities like hired vehicle for local conveyances for reaching the spiritual sites as well as to go to the nearby spots of tourists attractions; means of communications like internet connectivity, FAX; travel guides etc. Preferences of the tourists for these facilities are illustrated in Figure 7.

VI. CONCLUSION

Spirituality is found to be one major attraction for both domestic and international tourists in the state. Thus, it was logical to undertake some scientific studies in order to investigate different aspects related to spiritual tourism, for example – marketing strategy, logistics and infrastructure. The most popular spiritual destinations in the state – Hardwar and Rishikesh were chosen as the target sites for collection of data. Uttarakhand has outstanding tourism products and has potential to become a major tourism destination. The state has a greater value for domestic tourist because of its spiritual sites. There has been a phenomenal increase in spiritual travelers in the recent years owing to generic changes in the people’s attitude towards spirituality. Ripple effect of this change has also been observed in the state’s economy as well as in academic research. The current study presents a brief review of literatures concerning tourism research, in general, and with a focus on spiritual tourism and tourism logistics. Gaps in the available literature, with reference to Uttarakhand state of India, in particular, have been indicated. No study has been carried out regarding the marketing and logistics aspects of spiritual tourism. Infrastructure has been reported as one of the important aspects in spiritual tourism marketing.
The present study confirms that tourists, today, need quality services. They look for prompt and independent services as reflected by their choice for tour bookings. Communication has been identified as one of the most demanding services. However, the image of Uttarakhand in the international market is weak and hence proper marketing strategies are to be adopted to place Uttarakhand on the tourism map of the world. Case study based investigations will reveal further facts about the specific spiritual activity centers and will help formulating tourism management strategies.

REFERENCES


