



A STUDY ON RELIGIOUS TOURISM OF ANDHRA PRADESH IN INDIA

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Abstract

Tourism is a vibrant subsector of India contributing significantly to employment and income generation and foreign exchange earnings. Besides, expenditure on tourism has multiple ripple effects of far reaching nature along its value chain, which conduces economic growth having a favourable impact on poverty alleviation. Tourism is an umbrella concept in which are subsumed sightseeing, holidaying, education, attending important events, business, etc. Apart from its economic ramifications, it has a social purpose of bringing people together from diverse cultures across the globe, promoting cross-cultural relationships and understanding. Pilgrimage is travel inspired by religious reasons towards holy places (elements of the geographic environment holy mountains, sites of revelations or the activities of the religious founders, shrines containing relics of saints or worshipped likeness, and so on). Such a trip can last several months. Special forms of this journey include the pilgrimages of the sick and dying. A pilgrim is one who journey to a sacred place, such as a holy shrine or a holy centre of his on her religion. In Andhra Pradesh there are so many pilgrim destinations such as temples, mosques and churches. This paper is focus on Religious Tourism of Andhra Pradesh in India.

Key Words: *Tourism, Religious, Contributing, Environment, Economic, Ramifications.*

Introduction

Taking into account tourism's combined impact - direct, indirect and induced - on Indian economy its share in 2011 was 6.4 per cent in GDP, 7.8 per cent in employment, 5.1 per cent in investment, and 3.8 per cent in exports. The forecast for next ten years is; rise of 7.7 per cent in GDP, 1.7 per cent in jobs, 5.2 per cent in exports, and 7.5 per cent in investment (23). According to ministry of tourism, the number of foreign tourist arrivals in India in 2011 was 6.29 million with an annual growth rate of 8.29 per cent over the previous year, which is higher than UNWTO's projected growth rate of 4 per cent to 5 per cent for the world and 7 per cent to 9 per cent for Asia and Pacific. The foreign exchange earnings from tourism in 2011 was ` 77591 crores with an annual growth rate of 19.6%, over those 2010(21). Thus, tourism is a substantial contributor to the Indian economy.

Importance of Tourism it is true that tourism stirs brisk activity in various spheres of the economy of the host region. The service sector contributes more than 70% of the Gross Domestic Product of advanced countries. Tourism is the chief basis of income to countries like Maldives, Greece, Bermuda, Italy, Spain, Switzerland, and Caribbean islands. It is the top employer in Australia, Bahamas, Brazil, Canada, France, Hong Kong, Jamaica, Japan, Italy Singapore, the UK, and the USA. Number of tourists who visited countries like Hong Kong, Singapore, and Seychelles has even outnumbered their population¹.

Religious Tourism

Religious tourism is considered to be a specific type of tourism where tourists' motives are many and varied, either partially or exclusively religious-motivated, and are connected with holiday-making. The key aspects of pilgrimage, such as motivation for the trip, and a visit to sacred destinations are used to explain religious tourism, whereas leisure and holiday activities occur as supplementary opportunities. Most theorists opine that religious tourism is multilayered concept and involves multifunctional and multi-purpose trips. Olsen and Timothy identified three broad sub-themes of religious tourism: differentiating pilgrim from tourist or pilgrim-tourist dichotomy, the demographic and travel behavior characteristics of pilgrims, and economics of religious tourism. Religious tourism is usually undertaken for one or more of the following purposes: (a) to perform pilgrimage as an act of worship; (b) to express gratitude, confess a sin, and to fulfill a vow; (c) to achieve social and spiritual salvation; and (d) to commemorate and celebrate certain religious events.



Pilgrim Services in Religious Tourism

Pilgrims' socio-economic characteristics, and the specific time and purpose of pilgrimage determine their needs for transport, accommodation, food, catering, etc., during their visits to the pilgrimage destinations. Thus, pilgrimage destination and religious centres should have and offer all such facilities meeting the pilgrim's religious and spiritual needs as well as their secular needs to retain their desire to visit the destination time and again. Provision of pilgrim services is a continuous process of planned action for the development, improvement, maintenance, monitoring, assessment and control of such services. Such an effort becomes very challenging and demanding due to bouts of pilgrim flux, and heavy and ever changing nature and extent of needs backed up by their burgeoning purchasing power and conceptual reinterpretation of the pilgrimage tourism.

Pilgrims being from different socio cultural backgrounds should be satisfied with quality services which should be regularly evaluated and improved upon based on customer feedback. Issues relating to the internal and external provisioning of pilgrim services should carefully address present service strategies be carefully adjusted to meet the changing needs of the pilgrims. In the light of the aforesaid discussion, the major focus in religious centers' service strategy is on pilgrim satisfaction with respect to pilgrimage-related products and services like religious services, accommodation, food, transportation, infrastructure facilities and information dissemination. There is a vague feeling that the pilgrim services at pilgrim destinations fall short of pilgrim requirements and expectations. Since the assessment of pilgrim service quality in religious organizations is an under-researched area, the present study has been undertaken to evaluate the quality of services provided by Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams to pilgrims. Capturing their present experiences in availing various services, improvements can be suggested in the delivery of pilgrim services by TTD in order to make their trip a pleasurable and memorable one. The remainder of this chapter is divided into the following sections. First, the literature on service quality in general, and pilgrim service quality in particular is reviewed. Next, the methodology adopted for the study is presented².

Religious Tourism in Andhra Pradesh

Andhra Pradesh is still, up till now, the central focus of attraction for pilgrims and visitors. That proves what it contains of religious places and archaeological sites were the destination of an intellectual who was eager to know history. Moreover, there are several and numerous ways to develop the cultural tourism in Andhra Pradesh None the less, tourism was still one targeted in the last decades. Yet the tourist utilities hadn't been developed nor the cultural environment had been exploited to attract new types of tourists beyond the religious tourism Due to occupation, the investors of the tourist sector could not well invest, in, Andhra Pradesh where the religious traces of tourism were maintained. Several tourists to the Andhra Pradesh territories ignore the nature of the local Community and they didn't know much about it.³

The religious tourism to the holy places has been known long ago. It reached its climax during the three last decades, due to the remarkable surplus in the field of world tourism. Great part of it is classified, in the field of cultural tourism because tourist programs which were prepared for those pilgrims, included, in addition to visiting holy places, a visit for various monuments and historical features. Sometimes, the local community participated in cultural ceremonies in the religious feasts and seasons. It was an important type of participation not only for its economic development but it also ensured an opportunity for 'the Andhra people to introduce a true picture, for its history, civilization, society and heritage. In such programs, the tourist, not only prayed and worshiped, but he also visited the religious sites, and the historical and monumental places, and took part in the various festivals as well⁴.

Nowadays, the religious tourism has become a mixed tourism because it ensures visiting both religious place- and cultural features. Several tour operators, which organize pilgrim trips to the holy places, incorporate in their programs, various cultural activities. Various types of pilgrims come to Andhra Pradesh because the religious places, for these religions, are available throughout the country. So, there should be appropriate programs for these cultural, religious and social diversity and provide services suitable for all the ages or the nature of each group; The religious tourism in Andhra Pradesh has a collective quality and takes place in all seasons



Tirupati in Andhra Pradesh

Tirumala and Tirupati in Chittoor district of the state of Andhra Pradesh are considered to be the most sacred and world renowned pilgrim centers. The sacred place on the seven hills where the temple of Lord Venkateswara is existing is known as Tirumala and the town at the foot of the hills is known as Tirupati. The abode of the Hill Shrine of Lord Venkateswara is the most famous and sacred of all places on the earth. Lord Vishnu manifested Himself as Lord Venkateswara in the shrine. “Venkatadri Samam Sthanam Bramhanda Nasti Kinchanaha” means Tirumala is the holiest place in the universe. Tirumala and Tirupati are the holy places which pilgrims visit in large number. Probably no place of worship anywhere in the world would attract as many pilgrims and receive as much revenue as the temple of Lord Venkateswara in Tirumala. Over 1,00,000 pilgrims visit Tirumala and Tirupati everyday in general and the visiting number of pilgrims increases more during the peak days like Tirumala Srivari Brahmotsavams, Vaikunta Ekadasi, New years day, summer holidays, etc. TTD is taking utmost care of the visiting pilgrims and to facilitate the ever growing number of pilgrims to Tirumala and Tirupati, the TTD has been providing a number of amenities at Tirumala and Tirupati. Among multiple functions of TTD, providing amenities to the devotees who visit Tirumala and Tirupati is one of the important functions. Tirupati town is easily accessible by road and train and is about 144 kilometres from Chennai by road. Renigunta junction (on the way to Tirupati) is on the Chennai-Mumbai section of the southern railway. There is also a railway station Tirupati-East which is next to Renigunta junction. For those who prefer to go by air, Tirupati boasts of an airport linking it to major cities like Chennai and Bangalore. The flight from Hyderabad to Tirupati takes about one hour and thirty minutes and from Tirupati to Chennai it takes half-an-hour. The airport is at a distance of 12 kilometres from Tirupati town.⁵

Religious Tourism in India

The world tourism market is no longer about “one shoe fitting all”. Each region of the world is seeking to project its major attractions. India’s major advantage in the religious tourism lies in its unique religious heritage and culture. India is a land of pilgrimage, and travel for religious purposes has been inherent in its culture from the ancient times. All the religions - Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism - have major and minor religious centers in different parts of the country. Famous Hindu pilgrimage centers are Vaishno Devi (Jammu and Kashmir), Varanasi (Uttar Pradesh), Shirdi (Maharashtra), Tirumala (Andhra Pradesh), and Shabarimala (Kerala).

Contribution of Religious Tourism in India

The Domestic Tourism Survey conducted in 2002–03, by the Ministry of Tourism, brought out that travel for religious purpose and pilgrimage formed the most significant component in domestic tourism with more than 100 million people travelling to various religious events, temples and pilgrimage sites. Further, it revealed that the short-term trips by middle- and upper-income groups contributed a substantial share of travel to sacred sites nearly 50% of package tours, and almost 20% of one-day trips are for religious and pilgrimage purposes(22). This clearly demonstrates that religious tourism has a major role in the Indian tourism industry.⁶

Conclusion

The topic of research study “A Study on Religious Tourism in India with special reference to states of Andhra Pradesh” was undertaken by the researcher as a comprehensive study covering the states of Andhra Pradesh. It required extensive travelling in 13 districts of Andhra Pradesh in order to collect primary data from pilgrims and temple authorities. Every effort was made collect secondary data relevant to this study. Each region of the world is seeking to exploit its strength. India’s competitive advantage lies in the area of religious tourism because of its religious heritage and culture is unique. India is richly endowed with ancient temples and religious festivals. Religions originating in India, be it Hinduism, Sikhism, Jainism or Buddhism, have a vibrant culture and spiritual philosophy. Thus, it provides excellent opportunities for pilgrimage tourism. In this regard, the present study is an attempt to identify demographic and travel pattern of religious tourists, to identify level of satisfaction and difficulties of religious tourists pertaining to facilities like temple darshan, transportation, accommodation, and boarding. And to identify the expenditure patterns of pilgrims, to identify difficulties faced by pilgrims during pilgrimage.



Andhra Pradesh has abundance of religious centers spread across the states. Hence, the necessity to generate either specific or general products is not a priority. Of immediate concern is the need to explore and develop ancillary products. However, considering the prevailing situations and divergent issues that are specific to a particular destination, the task will not be simple. To the zealous faith and cultural observer, Religious tourism in Andhra Pradesh, can boast of providing a unique experience. Hence one should plan and implement strategically along with professionalism regarding the development of tourism products to enhance the growth level of tourism sector.

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