

TOURISM PROMOTION IN PUNJAB AND HARYANA: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

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Abstract: Tourism, a service – oriented industry, has emerged to be a revolutionizing phenomenon, especially in the second half of the present century, outpacing the manufacturing and extractive industries as a catalyst of the development process at the national as well as the global levels. Emergence of tourism as a leading growth industry is a part of a gradual process involving the displacement of manufacture from its dominant position and the transition to a service- oriented economy. In fact, it has come to weigh significantly in the growth strategies of the developed countries as also the developing ones. Accordingly, the modern day world especially developing countries tend often to over emphasize tourism promotion in their developmental efforts, taking it as a quick and easy means to the end being sought. In certain economies, it is the foundation of the economic, socio –cultural and even human pyramid, while in most others it is contributing extent in the general development process and in the solution of their basic problems by exploiting their historic-societal – cultural and environmental resources. The operation of the tourism industry is not as simplistic as the term might seem to connote per se. A superficial view of tourism activity may elaborate it as simply movement of people from one place to another, inspired by any of the purposes but, underneath, it is rather a complex of various inter-linked and interacting processes. The multi – faceted nature of tourism makes it an intricate phenomenon, encompassing a whole gamut of issues, problems and challenges to be encountered both in the present and in the times to come. Besides, the impacts are irreducibly multi –dimensional, and there is often a tendency to club one aspect or type of impact with one or more of others. The present study also deals with the various problems and their prospects being faced by the Tourism in Punjab and Haryana. Both these states being Agriculturist dominant, the awareness for Tourism development and its advantages for the state are not clearly defined in the minds of a large number of people. In this paper we will discuss some of the problems being faced and how can they be overcome.

Keywords: Global Village, Infrastructure, Religious and Cultural Tourism, Skilled Manpower, Eco Tourism, Law and Order, Human Resource, Economic Development, Social Development.

I. INTRODUCTION

In today's world where due to development in information technology, the whole world has become a "GLOBAL VILLAGE". Tourism has become a major social phenomenon of modern society. Today tourism is not just about sightseeing and entertainment but also an agent of social and economic development of the country. Tourism as an industry is the largest in terms of revenue generation as well as an employer to a large number of skilled and unskilled work forces in the world. It plays a very significant role in accelerating the pace of economic development by generating employment opportunities, enhancing social progress and strengthening communities, encouraging the protection of environment and culture of the country thus contributing actively to preservation of it. Tourism also helps in promoting global understanding as people get to know about each other and many inhibitions are broken. The whole approach of the people gets a good exposure. As such if proper infrastructures are built and access to the State is made easier then tourism can bring millions of people to the region.

II. ROLE OF TOURISM IN THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF PUNJAB AND HARYANA

Tourism gives an impetus to State income. International, national as well as domestic tourists contribute a significant share as it constitutes a demand for goods and services that would otherwise not be produced before such as demand for accommodation, modern airports, hotels, lodges, etc. This would not only contribute to the revenue of the government but shall also encourage investment.

Tourism can play a very significant role for leveraging scarce foreign exchange earnings for not only the developing countries of the third world but for many developed countries of the world. It offers employment to millions of both semi skilled and unskilled people. As such its role in the development of Punjab and Haryana with immense tourism potential cannot be ruled out. The benefits that accrue to Punjab and Haryana because of tourism are immense in the sense that it leads to a rise in the per capita income in the area where tourist visit and therefore gives tremendous thrust in the State where agriculture is predominant and Ecotourism can help in giving a new breather to these states. If tourism is developed through careful planning, it is sure to bring revolutionary transformation in the whole economy. Tourism is job oriented and provides more employment opportunities in comparison to normal manufacturing industries without disturbing the environment. Several types of business such as hotels, restaurants, tour operators, handicrafts, transporters, travel agents, etc, can get benefit from it. Other allied businesses such as cab drivers, photographers, adventure sports organizers, food and beverage suppliers can also have profitable earnings. Employment in tourism sector is very much important for Punjab and Haryana where there is so much potential due to NRI population living abroad.

III. CURRENT CHALLENGES OF THE TOURISM PROMOTION IN PUNJAB AND HARYANA

Despite immense tourism potential that the region shows especially in terms of religious tourism, it has not been able to cash in on the same failing even in the domestic market. While in case of India, many States have shown the required urgency to promote tourism as a major industry, Punjab and Haryana seems to take a backseat and is unaware of its enormous tourism potential bestowed by RELIGION and CULTURE along with ECO TOURISM. There are, however several reasons for this that can be stated as follows

Inadequate Infrastructure:

Apart from the infrastructural bottleneck, such as less air connectivity, lack of well arranged package tour, less choice of hotels and tourist guest houses, lack of facilities like good hotels and tourist lodges, affordable and reliable communication network conditions of roads, marketing strategies for promoting tourism and most importantly lack of policy on tourism development due to least interest by the respective state governments etc have all been hampering the expected development and promotion of tourism in these states.

Lack of Coordinated Efforts:

There is a palpable lack of coordination among several agencies like Department of Tourism and Department of Archaeology in handling the demands of the tourists in places of both historic and religious importance. There is virtually no coordination between various public industries and private sectors like eco farms on one hand, and Punjab Tourism Development Corporation as well Haryana tourism Development Corporation, on the other. This is definitely a major bottleneck on the way of tourism industry.

Absence of Tourist Guides:

Punjab and Haryana virtually do not have any trained guides placed in important places of tourist attraction. Consequently, as the tourists arrive at such a place there is hardly anyone to satisfy the inquisitiveness of the tourists. The Department of Tourism initiated a programme to train tourist guides. The effort did not yield good result as most of the trainees left the job. Some of them found other means of livelihood while others found it to be less paying because of the poor inflow of the tourists to the state.

Perception about Law and Order:

The media often tends to focus on the ethnic conflicts and under development of the State neglecting the pioneering development efforts made in the region. It has been engraved in the minds of the general populace by the media that nothing significant is happening in the region other than law and order problems, unsafe environment for tourists specially

foreign tourists and women. The foreign and the domestic tourists consider it risky to visit this part of the country, in view of the prevailing law and order situation. The general impression is that any foreign or domestic tourist could be a soft target of the insurgents. The most effective way of removing this negative impression is to make the tourists visit the region by assuring them full safety and cooperation by local administration and also protection from local thugs and explore this unexplored tourist paradise.

Under-developed Human Resource:

The tour operators, hoteliers, transporters, tourist guides etc are not trained enough to provide detailed information to the tourists regarding the region which obviously is a barrier in the path of development of tourism industry in both the states.

Thus despite abundance of religious places, cultural and historical places, the flow of incoming tourist has been marginal for the reasons of the lack of infrastructural and other related facilities in various tourist spots in the region.

IV. STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING TOURISM IN PUNJAB AND HARYANA

Projecting these States as a tourist heaven, the Union Tourism Ministry has been releasing enhanced Central assistance for tourism development. The Government has also encouraged the youths to enter this sector. However, the Government's repeated claim to convert State into a visitor's paradise has not been realized yet. The bold steps introduced by the Government from time to time have to be taken and implemented in a more systematic and organized manner. There should be transparency and accountability in the substantial budgetary grants being made to Punjab and Haryana Tourism sector because without accountability, there will be no responsibility and without responsibility, there will not be proper implementation of policies and programmes. Initiatives should, therefore, be taken by the government to accelerate the rate of investment in tourism facilities for building new industrial parks, special economic zones, airports, etc with all infrastructural facilities.

Improving Infrastructure:

The basic civic amenities and infrastructure such as road networks, pure drinking water, food stuff, restaurants and knowledgeable and skilled guides must be made adequately available at tourism sights and spots. The tourist guides should be acquainted with more than one foreign language to provide adequate knowledge and information to the tourists. Adequate measures should also be taken by the government to provide tight security to the visiting tourists against terrorism and local thugs. Measures should also be undertaken by the concerned authority to provide sufficient medical facilities to handle any emergency situations along with trained Para-medical staff so that patients could be taken to the nearest hospital with minimum complications.

Role of the Media:

The media can also be utilized extensively for publicity through newspapers, magazines, internet, advertisements, seminars, press meets, write-ups in various national and international journals and TV channels to attract the prospective tourists. Well planned and attractive websites updated from time to time can also be of great help. It is pertinent to mention that Punjab and Haryana has to market tourism aggressively. One will have to go out and sell, instead of waiting for the customers to come and buy in a market of stiff competition. The Directorate of Tourism and the Punjab and Haryana Tourism Development Corporation should take steps even by purchasing space in the national dailies focusing on the attractive places of these states at least once in a year just before the onset of the peak period of tourism in the state.

Cultural Programmes:

Tourist entertainment is another important factor to attract the tourists and encourage them not only to revisit the region but also to visit throughout the year, not only in the main holiday season. There should be provision for musical entertainment to the tourists staying in the hotels and tourists bungalows in important tourist places so that their evenings become delightful and the tourists are enriched by the cultural contours of the region. Many art forms and cultural festivals like Gurupurab, Baisakhi, Important Fairs and Festivals exhibit a true picture of the ethnic and socio-cultural diversity prevailing in the region. Heritage festivals showcasing the richness of royal cultural traditions must be a regular feature throughout the tourism calendar in order to attract tourists.

Propagating Adventure Tourism:

Eco-tourism industry also calls for adventure tourism. The adventure spirit of the tourist can be uplifted by providing facilities like boating, elephant riding, parasailing, rafting, paragliding, ballooning, bungee jumping, rock climbing, wildlife viewing, nature walk, jungle exploration, etc. which will not only help the tourist to discover the natural heritage of the region but will also convert the region into a hub of eco-tourism or natural tourism.

Improving Communication Network:

The condition of most of the roads, including the national highways in these states, are not satisfactory and are in deplorable condition. Absence of good roads to the places of tourist attraction is a discouraging factor. Efforts should be made to coordinate with the PWD (Roads) to improve the condition of the approach roads to the tourist spots on priority basis. Good communication network with 3G, 4G facilities should be developed. Even remotest area must be well connected.

Tourism Packages:

Tourist packages should be theme based like Religious Tourism, Adventure Tourism, Heritage, Eco-Tourism, Wild Life Tourism. Although both the states have common tour operators but their role is minimum in promoting tourism in each other's state. Lack of awareness among people also discourages tour operators to promote neighboring state.

Fiscal Incentives:

The Government may offer fiscal and other incentives to the private entrepreneurs to take up a host of tourist related services like setting up hotels and restaurants, to purchase vehicles etc. by making provisions for soft loan and reducing tax rates. It may encourage the local youths to set up tents with modern facilities and to make available other related equipments for water sports in areas selected for eco-tourism. In other words, transport, accommodation and other logistics of tourism should be left to the private sector making the way for healthy privatization of the tertiary sector associated with tourism.

People's Participation:

If tourism is to play an important role in poverty alleviation and employment creation, people's participation in planning and benefit sharing should be evolved. It is essential to develop the concept of 'responsible tourism', whereby all stakeholders have the responsibility to reduce the ugly side and enhance the good side. We know that the insurgency problem here is a constraint. But then, which region is free from any problem? The fact is that people, even at the Centre, are not aware of the ground realities here and promote a wrong image on safety issues. The policymakers, therefore, need to take a hard look at the realities and, in association with the private sector, play an active role in promoting tourism – whether it's Agri Tourism, Cultural or Religious Tourism – in the region.

Role of the Government:

Last but not the least the role of Government in the development of tourism in the sector cannot be ruled out. The State government earns revenue in the form of direct and indirect taxes imposed on tourist and service tax on hotels, airlines, tour operators, etc. This gives sufficient reason to the government of Punjab and Haryana to market tourism which can be done through their respective Tourist Development Corporation. The development of the human, social and economic conditions of a state improves greatly where there is effective and pro-people governance. The presence of the government must be felt in the positive sense and within the framework of a welfare state. There may be policies of high order, there may be strategies of unassailable quality, but if there is no good governance, goals set cannot be achieved.

Initiatives taken by State Tourism Department:

However, in the recent years, the State Tourism Department which has completed 50 years of existence has witnessed a considerable success and all round development both infrastructure development and other facilities with the financial help of Government of India as well as the State Government. For the growth of tourism sector, special emphasis has been given on public and private partnership to tap the unexplored potential opportunities. The Department has also undertaken ambitious employment generation schemes like "Hunar se rozgar tak", Highway Dhabas, Farm Tourism in order to provide financial assistance to local educated unemployed youths so that the youths could become self-sufficient and engage themselves in tourism promotional activities like transport, wayside amenities, food kiosk, restaurants, dhabas and cottages for accommodation, etc.

V. CONCLUSION

Tourism in present day does not confine itself to hotels, restaurants and sea beaches. Its broad arena touches upon rural area, health sector and environment. The new approach is to position tourism as a major engine of growth for employment generation and economic development. There is thus an urgent need to position Punjab and Haryana as an international brand like Kerala's "Gods own country" and include the State into the highly successful "Incredible India" campaign. Tourism is the most important of all resources available to man in these states. If tourism is developed through careful planning, it is sure to bring revolutionary transformation in its economy. Initiatives and Incentives by the government will add advantage in promoting tourism in these states which not only will help in economic development but also in the promotion of socio cultural character of the state.

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