

Tourism: Potentials and Problems

POINTS TO DEVELOP

1. Tourism one of world's largest industries.
2. Advantages of tourism.
3. Disadvantages of indiscriminate tourism.
4. Problems challenging the beneficial development of tourism.
5. India's position- despite great potential as a tourist destination, the industry has not been as successful as it could have been – reasons and ways to improve the situation.
6. Economic condition of India requires tourism to be developed.

Tourism has emerged as one of the world's largest industries. Growing rapidly in the last two decades, today it accounts for more than 7 per cent of world output and employs some 150 million people around the globe. Since the end of the Second World War, it has developed immense revenue and development potential and stands today as a unique natural renewable resource industry.

Tourism- the travel- based recreation- provides people with a change of place and a break from the monotony of daily life. It brings people of different nations together, allowing them to come into close contact with each other's customs and other aspects of life. It reveals the scenic beauty and past heritage of a country to people belonging to other nations. The knowledge and experience gained in the process can lead to greater understanding and tolerance and can even foster world peace.

The contribution of tourism to the economy is striking. A study conducted by the United Nations has shown that developing countries, in particular, can reap handsome benefits out of tourism which greatly boosts national income. Tourism also helps in healing the balance-of – payments situation. To ensure a circulation economy, even countries not relying on tourism to a great extent promote internal tourism. Tourism generates employment, and adds to the entrepreneurial wealth of a nation. While tourism has several advantages, it also has some undesirable side effects.

Tourism can cause social, cultural or environmental disruption. Of the greatest concern is the damage to the environment. In order to attract more tourists, sprawling resorts are built which take neither the local architectural styles nor the ecology into consideration. Natural systems come to be destroyed as a result of indiscriminate construction and efforts to provide water and waste disposal facilities and recreational arrangements to tourists. Overuse of

environmental wealth disturbs the ecological balance. Tourist overuse of Himalayan trails, like the Nanda Davi trail, has reduced them to a sad plight. The way to the Himalayan peaks strewn with empty food tins. This picturesque hill station of Shimla in Himachal Pradesh is pale shadow of its erstwhile pristine beauty. The flood of tourist and the ever-growing avarice of the builders to construct more and more hotels/lodges to accommodate visitors has deface the landscape. In fact, Shimla has now become a concrete jungle and is slowly 'dying' with the passage of time. But unmindful of this, the local administration and the greedy hoteliers operating in the area are busy damaging the ecology and beauty of this place to make money. Unfortunately for tourism, the concretization of Shimla is fast Turing away the discernible tourists. Damage is most discernible in wildlife parks which remain the foremost sites of tourist attraction. Tourist vans and the visitors' feet destroy the ground vegetation, thus affecting the feeding habits of the animals and the landscape as well. Overcrowding brings about congestion, leading to environmental and health hazards. The site finally loses its attraction. Monuments, too, have suffered from tourists. The Taj Mahal, one of the seven wonders of the world, and the majestic Khajuraho temples have suffered a lot of wear and tear from the trampling feet of tourists.

Some socio-cultural effects of tourism have been damaging. Tourism often ushers in new life styles; arrangements as desired by tourists are provided in order to make them feel at home. The emergence of this 'other' culture in various places has caused dissatisfaction among the local people. The local people tend to imitate foreign values, breaking away from their own traditions. For monetary gains, the poor locals are sometimes tempted to present themselves. Making matters worse is the fact that they offer themselves as 'objects of desire'. Thailand, a beautiful country, has become better known as a 'hot' destination amongst tourists round the world for 'sex tourism'. That this may hurt the pride of the sensitive people of the nation is of no concern to the state authorities, and those who use sexual attraction to make a fast buck. Though this problem is not so widespread in India, here too there have been disturbing reports. Under the guise of 'health resorts' providing massage, several tourist spots make available sexual services to the wealthy tourists on demand. Even aging and young female tourists demand and get such dubious services. However, nothing is done to stop it for fear of turning away the tourists. It is worse when, for money's sake, even child prostitution is encouraged.

In some cases, the governments encourage tourism even at the cost of incurring damage in order to increase their national income. This attitude can have disastrous consequences. In the island of Maldives, efforts to boost tourism are destroying its priceless resource of coral reefs. As these safeguard the island from mounting sea levels, their destruction is bound to open up dangerous possibilities.

Tackling problems posed by tourism is necessary, for once the natural resources and historical monuments are lost, tourism itself will collapse. The world tourist industry has awakened to this fact and has begun considering tourism-related environmental issues. 'environment friendly' or 'green' tourism has been stressed in the Alps, a tourist attraction that accounts for a quarter of the World's avenue form tourism but which has been heavily degraded due to overuse. To prevent overuse, tourism must be conducted within planned limits, keeping in mind factors like ecological balance and health safety.

Tourism cannot be allowed to play havoc with traditional cultures in sheltered societies. To contain the socio- cultural set backs of tourism it is necessary to realize that cultural decline, which has already set in due to new technologies and communication, is encouraged in a degrading way once the locals set themselves up a sculptural showpieces for visitors. The Haryana government, of late has been aggressively promoting tourism by showcasing state culture and traditions. Nothing wrong with that, but what is disturbing is that in its zest to attract more and more tourists, the state tourism department is destroying the unique earthly culture of the area. Its Mhara Gam tourist campaign where foreign tourists are invited to stay with the locals in their homes to have a 'feel' of the local cuisine and culture is a noteworthy step. But this has also started to tell on the overall lifestyle and culture of the local people, as they get infected by the tourists 'way of life and culture, even the most of these tourists bring crude materialistic outlook towards society and life.

To promote safe tourism while ensuring that it remains a profitable industry, it is imperative to understand the factors that hamper the growth of tourism and check them effectively.

General instability of the nation is damaging to tourism prospects. Political disturbances, in particular, pose a serious problem. The growing violence in the international scene and increasing threat of terrorism affects the flow of tourists. Countries like Sri Lanka, Israel, Palestine, and Afghanistan have been victims to terrorist threats for long and have therefore suffered setbacks in tourism. In Egypt, where tourism earns the country much more than the earnings from the Suez Canal, the Muslim fundamentalist activities have drastically cut down revenue from tourism. Terrorist activities other violent acts in India recently had enormous detrimental effects on tourism. The communal violence in Ajodhya in December 1992, the Gujarat pogrom sometime back, the Mumbai bomb blasts and violence in other places like Surat resulted in a decline in the number of tourist arrivals and in revenue earnings. The growth in terrorism has also eroded much of the charm of states like Jammu and Kashmir and the northeastern states that were once favorites sports for tourists owing to its scenic beauty. The operation of muggers in places like Florida, Hawaii and Corsica has posed a serious problem to tourism.

Economic factors like rising input costs inhibit growth in demand. Non-availability of adequate resources for tourism leads to a lack of infrastructural facilities. Keeping down costs and consolidating the resource base is necessary while ensuring quality. Emerging regional blocs like the European Union may also pose barriers to the growing tourism industry.

Whatever the problems, India must work hard to reap the benefits from this industry, for the country has everything to attract visitors from far and near.

The monuments of a civilization going back into the hoary past dot the country. Ancient Buddhist stupas and Hindu temples, Mughal and Rajput palaces, forts and victory towers, rock-cut caves and elaborately laid out gardens –there are ever so many things to see in India wherever you go. And the variety is impressive. The beautiful blend of architectural styles and scientific planning of those old buildings is a marvel.

If the snowcapped Himalayas and the formidable desert of Rajasthan do not appeal to all, there are the picturesque hill stations in the lower hills. There are the vast beaches of the east, south and west. There are forests and wild life sanctuaries. And now there are adventure sports for those who action-trekking, and mountaineering, skiing, rafting and canoeing in the turbulent Himalayan rivers, and hang gliding.

There are many cultural diversions to attract the aesthetic sensibility. The cuisine offers enough variety to please diverse tastes. From Mughlai to Rajasthani, from South Indian to Punjabi, India, Perhaps, offers the greatest number of mouth-watering cuisines among the countries of the world. The textiles, arts and crafts offer wonderful glimpses of India and are lovely gifts.

In spite of India's enormous potential the tourism industry has failed to show as good results as could be expected. The share of India's tourism industry in the world at present is very low. On the other hand, Malaysia and even South Africa, which are very small countries with limited tourism potentials, corner and impressive share of the tourism pie of the world. This aspect is difficult to understand, given the country's attraction owing to its rich historical heritage and the mystique of its cultural diversity. Every part of India bears the legacy of ancient eras in the form of monuments and other architectural glories. To add to such attraction is the fact that India is one of the cheapest vacation grounds. Then why does the country fail to utilize the benefits of tourism?

One reason is the meager financial resources available to the tourism sector. In spite of the successive governments' claims, the central budget has hitherto made meager contributions to the development of tourism, and hence there is a

gross shortage of money for developing infrastructural facilities. Inadequate and substandard hotels and problems of hygiene and sanitation deter sensitive tourists from making India their destination of choice. Even spots of cultural interest, such as temple towns, lack basic facilities like safe drinking water. Varanasi is a typical example. The city has tremendous tourism potential. What Jerusalem is to the Jews, Muslims and even the Christians, Varanasi is to the Hindus and those wishing to revel in the spiritual bliss of this great religion. Here, although tourists from various countries can be seen in large numbers, this number can become greater only if the state and city administration take care to make the city more clean and tourist-friendly. The piles of garbage everywhere, absence of good hotels and unhelpful city administration make tourists' stay in the holy city a virtual nightmare.

To overcome the problem of low finances, private sector initiative has been urged. The return on investment in hotel project will make private investment an easy solution. A classic example of the private sector achievement is in the case of Goa. The work of the Tatas and others has converted Goa, which was hardly known to foreign tourists till the mid-1970s, into one of the major attractions in western India.

Tourism has also suffered from poor packaging and promotion. Marketing tactics in India have not been employed to project the outstanding appeal of India in an attractive way. Greater market segmentation and targeted marketing are required to yield greater benefits for tourism.

These problems must be faced and clear-sighted solutions sought to make India an attractive tourist destination. Tourism is undeniably a major source of income –national as well as individual – and its potential to encourage development in various region should be sensibly put to use. It offers employment, it boosts creativity, it makes the world a small place. However, a little individual effort is also needed to encourage tourism. If shopkeepers and taxi drivers resolve not to overcharge the unwary visitors, if the people on the street do not laugh at the dresses and mannerisms of those who came from abroad, if each one of us is warm and helpful to those who are new to a place, if the anti-social elements do not rob and/or terrorize – and in recent times rape-the guests from abroad, then India's image would improve by leaps and bounds, and tourism too would be boosted.