Development Strategies for Sustainable Tourism – Tourist Operator's Perspective

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Abstract

Tourism stands as one of the world's most rapidly expanding industries, serving as a vital contributor to foreign exchange earnings and employment opportunities. It maintains a close association with the overall well-being of numerous nations, particularly those in the process of development, encompassing the social, economic, and environmental dimensions. The primary objective of the current study is to assess the collaboration and goodwill among participants within the tourism sector and various business agencies, all in pursuit of advancing sustainable tourism and also to the study endeavors to pinpoint the obstacles encountered by both tourism operators and business agencies in their pursuit of sustainable development. Purposive sampling technique was employed to select 58 tourism operators. The majority of these operators have implemented effective business policies, providing specialized training and education to their employees and affiliates. Nonetheless, they have identified several significant barriers to their operations, including deficiencies in skills, training, and education, as well as inadequate infrastructure, limited government support, competition from non-compliant products, and sustainability concerns. The findings of this study conclude that the tourism sector in India, particularly in the state of Tamil Nadu, is experiencing remarkable growth, attracting both domestic and international tourists. In addition to destination promotion and marketing, operators expressed the need for increased support to meet the rising demand for tourism products. The author recommends that the key to successfully establishing a unique destination with a positive reputation and the right level of care lies in implementing Customer Relationship Management (CRM).

Keywords: Sustainable Tourism, Sustainable development and Customer Relationship Management

1. Introduction

Tourism is considered as world's largest legitimate service industry. A growing realization that tourism along with information technology holds the key to the future economic growth of the state. Employment - generating activities and income earning capacities are associated closely with the potential tourism development strategies. Since the tourism industry has been emerging as one of the thrust sectors, the Government has already initiated steps to encourage the private sector to invest in tourism infrastructure.

Viewed from various perspectives, the tourism industry serves as a catalyst for creating rapid and substantial employment opportunities, educating future generations, and facilitating the accumulation of cherished life experiences.

In essence, there is no equivalent to the multifaceted benefits offered by tourism. A clear indication of the significance and influence of tourism lies in the fact that it contributes to over ten percent of the worldwide gross national product. In an era characterized by pervasive globalization, intense competition, core competency, and outsourcing, for many developing nations, tourism experiences may represent the sole viable option to share their unique offerings with the global market.(Jaura, 1997).

In the current landscape, the tourism industry has become exceptionally competitive, placing tour operators in the midst of mounting challenges to distinguish their offerings. Similar to businesses, tourist organizations need to identify their marketable assets, assess their sales potential, and employ effective strategies to engage an evolving customer base. Consequently, effective tourism marketing demands a well-thought-out plan, proper organization, staffing, and monitoring to secure a rightful place in the market.

Previous research suggests that after meeting the primary holiday criteria, which include location, facilities, cost, and availability, clients tend to base their choices on ethical factors like working conditions, environmental impact, and charitable contributions (Gordon, 2001). Therefore, the pivotal responsibility of management lies in the determination of a marketing strategy. Tourist operators have endeavoured to create an assessment framework for their marketing strategy, drawing inspiration from the resource-based view (RBV) of the firm to gain a competitive edge. This approach seeks to pinpoint the most crucial marketing-specific resources and capabilities through the application of a multiple criteria decision-making (MCDM) method. The Aqaba Tourism Marketing Strategy for 2010-15, developed with the assistance of USAID in June 2009, placed significant emphasis on the establishment of an visually captivating, cutting-edge tourism website. The primary aim was to convey brand values effectively and harness the full potential of online connections. The central focus revolved around shaping the brand image and raising awareness about the destination. To achieve this, numerous activities were recommended, including awareness campaigns, fostering trade relations, and hosting travel journalists to promote the destination.(Chin-Tsai Lin and Chuan Lee, 2010).

"Promotion and marketing" represent a crucial element in the advancement of the tourism industry. Additionally, factors such as product costs, tourist satisfaction, and the quality of services provided are pivotal considerations in the realm of tourism development. Given the increasing recognition of the environmental, social, and cultural impacts of tourism activities, sustainable tourism has become a subject of significant debate. Tour operators are duly recognized as essential gatekeepers and custodians responsible for ensuring the sustainability of the overall tourism experience. It is imperative for tour operators to embrace and incorporate eco-tourism, responsible tourism, and community-based tourism within a broader, more integrated framework. This approach includes the development of enhanced competencies in areas like intercultural mediation, community empowerment, and tourist education (Galuppo L, Anselmi P, and De Paoli I, 2020). As such, the present study aims to uncover the strategies employed by tourist operators and agencies to promote and sustain the tourism sector.

2. Objectives
- To examine co-operation and goodwill among tourism industry operators and business agencies so as to accelerate the tourism/ regional / sustainable development.
- To identify the barriers faced by the tourism operators and business agencies for sustainable development.

3. Methodology
The present study is descriptive and empirical. To attain the objective of the study both primary data, as well as secondary data were used. The Questionnaire is well monitored/prepared and issued to the people who are connected to the travel and tourism sector and a direct interview was also conducted with selected personnel in the same sector to get first-hand information. Taking the objectives into account, a study has to be conducted on important places in Tamil Nadu as the principal tourist destinations. Sampling is conducted with the aim of acquiring information about the population. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to initially and precisely define the population. It is very

important to determine how researchers will choose their samples. For the present study, 58 tourist operators and agencies were selected as a sample size. The Purposive Sampling technique is used to collect data from tour operators and agencies.

4. Data Analysis and Interpretation
The qualitative data were analyzed with help of appropriate statistical tools such as Simple percentage analysis and Descriptive Statistics.

4.1 Size of Company

Table No. 1 Size of Company

Size of Company	Frequency	Percentage
Large >100,000 tourists per year	24	41
Medium 5,000-100,000 Tourists per year	27	46
Small <5,000 tourists per year	7	13
Total	58	100

Source: Primary data
The above table shows the size of the tour operator companies. The result reveals that 46 per cent of the operator's company size is medium, 41 per cent of the operator companies are large in size and 13 per cent of the operators are small size company.

4.2 Usage and Benefit from Local Communities
Sustainable tourism is defined as travel that benefits local communities, the environment, and the economy more than it harms them.

Truly sustainable and responsible tourism should improve the quality of life for locals as well as tourists. Along with its socio-economic benefits, sustainable tourism helps preserve cultural heritage, safeguard the environment, and produce genuine visitor experiences for the populations residing in popular tourist locations. It is all about bringing together tourists and local people for mutual benefit.

Table No. 2 Usage and Benefit from Local Communities in Marketing Products

Usage and benefit to local communities	Frequency (58)	Percentage
Local services are used	43	74
Trust of operator by local groups	56	97
Local products are purchased	51	88
Long-term partnerships with local groups	34	59
Local people are employed	49	84
Operator's understanding of destination	58	100
Tourists can spend money locally	45	78
Informed clients with good attitudes to local people and environments	56	97
Government support for responsible operators	34	59
Interesting and commercially viable products	49	84
Good communication with local groups	53	91
Contribute to local conservation	56	97
Customers stay in locally-run accommodation	44	76

Source: Primary data

The above table shows that usage of local communities in marketing tourist's products. The result reveals that 100 per cent of the tourist operators are very well understood about the destination, 97 per cent of the tourist operators have local people trust, informed client's with the good attitudes to local people and environments and provide contribution to the local conservation. 91 per cent of the tourist operators have good communication with the local groups, 88 per cent of the operator's purchases local products to the tourists, and 84 per cent of the employ local people for selling and sell interesting and commercially viable products to the tourists.

The table also reveals that 78 per cent of the operators want tourists to spend their money locally, 76 per cent of the operators make their customers to stay in locally-run accommodation and 59 per cent of the operators have long term partnership with the local groups for selling tourist products and getting government support for the local operators.

4.3 Sustainable Development Strategies on Local Natural and Cultural Environment

The emergence of tourism as a phenomenon during the latter part of the 20th century and the early years of the current one make it one of the few impositions of the modern period. Sustainable tourism is an emerging economic sector that has great potential and demand, and it has to play a significant role in the world economy. As a component of the national economy, the tourism subsystem interacts with other subsystems and influences their growth in turn. Travel and tourism is known for its potential to grow into a significant industry in the country when conditions are right and it can help the country reach its targets for growth in this area, despite its current low GDP share.

Tourism activity demands a regional approach for sustainable planning. This fosters and develops tourism industries that benefit the local population and calls for community involvement in planning and development. If they gain from the growth of the tourism industry, they will be more inclined to support the industry's expansion while preserving the industry's resources.

Table No. 3 Development Strategies on Local Natural and Cultural Environment

Impact on local natural and cultural environment	Frequency	Percentage
Conservation of natural areas	45	78
Energy saving	38	66
Conservation of wildlife	20	34
Use of renewable energy	23	40
Water conservation	39	67
Environmental education	44	76
Waste recycling	34	59
Conservation of buildings	29	50
Conservation/restoration of historical sites	26	45
Support for keeping local art forms alive	17	29

Source: Primary data

The above table shows the development strategies of tourist operators on local natural and cultural environment to sustain on their business. The result reveals that 78 per cent of the tourist operators contribute for conservation of natural areas, 76 per cent of the operators provide environmental education to the local people and it also reveals that 67 per cent and 66 per cent of the operators have water conservation and energy saving at the tourist destinations respectively. 59 per cent of the operators are maintaining waste recycling in the destinations, 50 per cent of the operators have conservation of buildings in tourist destination, 45 per cent of the operators have conserving historical sites, 40 per cent are using renewable energy, 34 per cent and 29 per cent of the operators conserve wildlife and support local arts respectively.

Table No. 4 Factors influence to contribute cultural and natural environment

Factors	Frequency	Percentage
Information about options to improve the local environment	47	81
Support from conservation area management	39	67
Projects to support	49	84
Government support	36	62
Support from conservation groups	35	60

Source: Primary data

The above table shows the factors influence to contribute for cultural and natural environment by the tourist operators. The result reveals that 84 per cent of the operators needed support for their project for developing natural and cultural environment, 81 per cent of the operators need information about the options to improve the local environment, around 60 to 70 per cent of the operators needs support from conservation area management and government for conserving water and nature environment.

Table No. 5 Selection of suppliers for Marketing Tourism

Selection of Suppliers	Frequency	Percentage
Star-graded	55	95
Approved by Ministry of Tourism	45	78
Approved by an environmental body	40	69
Environmental friendly	54	93
Locally based	45	78
Socially responsible	36	62
Have their procurement rated by a agency	39	67

Source: Primary data

The above table shows the selection of suppliers by the tourist operators for marketing services. The result reveals that majority of the operators around 90 to 95 per cent of the operators using star-graded and environmental friendly suppliers for selling their services. The result also reveals that around 70 per cent of the respondents also using local based suppliers and those who approved by the ministry of tourism, around 60 per cent of the operators using suppliers those who approved by the environmental body, socially responsible and procurement rated agency for marketing their services.

Table No. 6 Reasons for Practice Tourism Policy

Reasons for Practice Tourism Policy	Frequency	Percentage
Integral to principles of the company	35	100
Pressure from NGOs	12	34
To educate tourists	26	74
Pressure from tourists	12	34
Reaction against mainstream tourism	18	51
Remind staff of company principles & values	35	100
To show suppliers strength of policies	34	97

Source: Primary data

The above table shows the reasons for practicing tourism policies by the tourist operators. The result reveals that 100 per cent (35 out of 35) of the operators' have tourist policies has an integral principles of the company for rigorous and vigorous working environment and also reminds the employees to know about the principles and values of the company in rendering services . 97 per cent of the operators frame policies to show suppliers strength of policies for the end users, 74 per cent of the operators frame policies to educate tourists, 51 per cent of the operators frame

polices for reaction against mainstream tourism, 34 per cent of the operators framed polices by pressure from tourists and NGOs.

Table No. 7 Training to Staff and Others by Tourism Operators

Training to Staff and Others	Frequency	Percentage
Skills development (e.g. cooking, guiding, first aid etc)	56	97
Health and safety	57	98
Understanding consumers	52	90
Paperwork/licensing	45	78
Customer service	47	81
Marketing	49	84
Product development	42	72
Environment/conservation	34	59
Management skills	38	66
Information technology	55	95

Source: Primary data

The above table shows the tourist operators providing the type of training and skills to the staff members and people related with their business. The result reveals that majority of the tourist operators provide training to their staff and individuals such as Health and safety, skill development,informationtechnology,customers service, paper work licensing, products development and psychological skills to understand consumers. 66 per cent and 59 per cent of the operators provide training related to developing management skills and Environment and conservation respectively. It is concluded that majority of the tourist operators providing effective training to their employees related to personal development and societal awareness for marketing of tourism.

This section evaluate the constraints on the tour operators' sustainable tourism operations, it was discovered that the macro and micro environmental dynamics influencing the sector were causing problems for the tour operators when it came to putting sustainable tourism activities into practice. In general, it can be said that human behaviours, technological advancements, and personal gains conflict with the sustainable tourism endeavours of tour operators. From this vantage point, we can categorize the macro environmental and micro environmental factors that limit tour operators' sustainable tourism initiatives are financial constraints, consumer-induced constraints, state and local government constraints, organizational constraints, and stakeholders from the industry.

4.4 Barriers faced by Tour Operators

Table No.8 Barriers faced by Tour Operators

Descriptive Statistics – Barriers faced by Tour Operators					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Safety	58	1.00	5.00	3.0750	1.01387
Crime/Perception of Crime	58	1.00	5.00	2.0833	.79477
Access/Location	58	1.00	5.00	3.8417	1.00416
Lack Skills/Training/Education	58	1.00	5.00	3.9333	.94142

Lack of products	**58**	**1.00**	**5.00**	**2.5333**	**.98675**
Funds/Investment	**58**	**1.00**	**5.00**	**3.5750**	**1.06639**
Communication	**58**	**1.00**	**5.00**	**3.8083**	**1.07137**
Language	**58**	**1.00**	**5.00**	**2.8250**	**1.08203**
Lack of Experience	**58**	**1.00**	**5.00**	**3.8083**	**.99828**
Lack Community understanding of Tourism	**58**	**1.00**	**5.00**	**3.5750**	**1.03439**
Consistent Quality	**58**	**1.00**	**5.00**	**3.8333**	**1.03982**
Racism	**58**	**1.00**	**5.00**	**3.5917**	**1.04114**
Politics	**58**	**1.00**	**5.00**	**3.5500**	**1.10651**
Money Motivated	**58**	**1.00**	**5.00**	**2.8167**	**1.02886**
Expectations	**58**	**1.00**	**5.00**	**3.4750**	**1.10737**
Beauracracy	**58**	**1.00**	**5.00**	**3.7333**	**1.11673**
Bank Charges	**58**	**1.00**	**5.00**	**2.7333**	**1.14145**
Awareness	**58**	**1.00**	**5.00**	**3.3444**	**.97122**
Lack of Government assistance	**58**	**1.00**	**5.00**	**4.2650**	**.86542**
Lack of Infrastructure	**58**	**1.00**	**5.00**	**3.4566**	**.98978**
Lack of Incentives	**58**	**1.00**	**5.00**	**2.3440**	**1.23908**
Competition with non - fair products	**58**	**1.00**	**5.00**	**4.3440**	**1.23654**
Sustainability	**58**	**1.00**	**5.00**	**4.6550**	**.98951**

Source: Primary data

The above table shows the barriers faced by the tour operators in the tourism industry. The descriptive statistics result reveals that lack of skills/training/education, lack of government assistance, Competition with non-fair products and sustainability are the major barriers faced by the tourist operators. The tourist operators opines that Safety, Access/Location, Challenges that could potentially hinder the functioning of the tourism industry include factors such as insufficient funds or investment, communication issues, limited experience, ensuring consistent quality, a lack of community understanding of tourism, inadequate infrastructure, instances of racism, political influences, a sole focus on monetary gains, difficulty in meeting expectations, bureaucratic obstacles, and consumer awareness. Conversely, tourist operators believe that concerns related to the perception of crime, language barriers, a primary focus on monetary gains, a shortage of products, and a lack of incentives may not significantly impede the tourism business. It is conclude that lack of skills/training/education, lack of infrastructure, lack of government assistance, and competition with non-fair products and sustainability are the major probable barriers for the tourist operators.

5. Findings

Majority of the operators are marketing their products through local people and concentrating on conservation of the local natural and cultural environment to sustain and to get competitive advantage. Tour operators express the view that the development of natural and cultural environments requires essential factors, including information on strategies to enhance the local environment, assistance from conservation area management, and government support. Majority 60 per cent of the tour operators has set of tourism policies for effective business and they are providing special training and education to employees and other people related to their business. But, they felt *Lack of*

skills/training/education,lack of infrastructure, lack of government assistance, *competition with non-fair products* and *sustainability* are the major probable barriers to do their businesses. It also observed that only few of the tourist operators and agencies are practicing corporate social responsibilities and customer relationship management.

6. Suggestions

The travel mart aims to facilitate the convergence of significant participants, including large, medium, and small entities from various regions, along with the most outstanding contributors from across the states. This collaborative effort is poised to explore destinations, boost business activities, and create fresh employment opportunities for rural communities. Market positioning research also necessitates an examination of the perception customers hold regarding tourist destinations. This analysis assists in identifying the essential components that constitute the overall benefits. Attributes like the allure of a destination, the grandeur of a palace, and the historical treasures within a museum serve as examples of elements that can generate benefits or serve as tangible representations of intangible advantages, rather than being the benefits themselves.

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) is the key to creating a niche destination successfully. To practice it, the following steps are to be adopted with a positive attitude and a proper care: i) The customers or tourists have to be segmented and classified so that targeted service marketing approach can be applied effectively and there should be better understanding of the needs of the tourist so that they can be better responded to; ii) Tourist loyalty can be increased if targeted service offerings are extended; iii) Attempts to get closer to the customer should be made by either trying up with other partners or opening up own offices in the countries for the tourists and iv) Increasing management skills, proper training and education for their employee will improve the marketing products effectively.

7. Conclusion

The economic significance of tourism marketing is that many countries started. In India, the Indian Tourism Development Corporation (ITDC) has emerged as a prominent leader in the country's travel industry, actively competing with each other to attract an increasing number of foreign tourists. This is achieved through the implementation of specific policies, the offer of numerous incentives, and the development of essential infrastructure. The ITDC's pioneering and catalytic role in fostering tourism growth is noteworthy. Notably unique in its approach, it has acted as a catalyst in tourism development while consistently maintaining profitability. The corporation's significant contributions have primarily focused on infrastructure development and promotional efforts. ITDC has set trends in hotel architecture, interior decor, cuisine, and providing visitors with an authentic Indian experience, thereby contributing to the revitalization of Indian arts and crafts and rekindling faith in Indian culture and heritage. The present study reveals that the tourism sector in India and especially in Tamilnadu state is growing at a spectacular pace by attracting domestic tourist and foreign tourist. Besides promoting and marketing the destination, the operators felt lack of assistance for supply to meet the demand of tourism products. So, the Government should actively engage and provide assistance in developing infrastructure. It gives a ray of importance in the thrust areas such as roads, power, telecom and automobiles, which in the long run will facilitate travel. It is felt that the prospects for larger inflows of foreign direct investment in the coming years will translate into more up market travelers coming to India.

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