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Beyond the Borders

Attracting Tourists from Southeast Asia

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BEYOND THE BORDERS

ATTRACTING TOURISTS FROM SOUTHEAST ASIA

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The benefit of tourism to the economy is widely recognized at every level. However, with the development of modern means of communication the international tourism arrival is growing exponentially. India with its immense potential can grow as a major destination on world tourism map. Till now India's share in world tourism traffic remains quite below its capabilities.

It has been noticed that primarily India gets international tourists from western countries. However, gradually this trend is set to change. At this juncture, the government in consultation with non governmental organizations needs to adopt focused strategies to increase the inflow of international tourists.

Given the religious and cultural linkages and presence of a large number of diaspora in Southeast Asia, the region can emerge as a major source for Indian tourism sector. In this direction the condition of tourism infrastructure (both tangible and intangible) should be improved in every state. The importance of educating people involved in the business at every level cannot be overemphasized, as the image creation remains the critical strategy to attract tourists.

To attract more Southeast Asian tourists the 'Buddhist circuit' is a well planned idea. But there are other linkages, which can be exploited to attract more tourists. In addition to that some steps like visa on arrival on a reciprocal basis will be highly beneficial for the sector.

An Overview

"Tourism is a major engine of economic growth in most parts of the world. Several countries have transformed their economies using the tourism potential the fullest...Tourism has great capacity to create large scale employment of diverse kind-from the most specialized to the unskilled and all of us know that generation of massive productive employment and opportunities is what India needs the most."

Atal Bihari Vajpayee

Travel and tourism forms an important sphere of activity in human life. Although the development of tourism as a modern industry is a 20th century phenomenon, but the essence behind tourism has historical roots. In modern times people travel both within their own country and outside the country for purposes related to tourism. In this study the focus is on International tourism. According to the modern definitions of international tourism a tourist is a "foreign person admitted under tourist visas (if required) for purpose of leisure, recreation, holiday, and visits to friends or relatives, health or medical treatment, or religious pilgrimages. They must spend at least a night in a collective or private accommodation in the receiving country and their duration of stay must not surpass twelve months"¹

There are many factors which drive the tourism industry, as the purpose of visit varies from purely leisure activities to health related benefits. With the

¹ Principles and recommendations on statistics of international migration, Revision1,(1998), United Nations.

development of means of communication the world tourism industry has recorded phenomenal growth. According to the World Tourism Organization (WTO) the total international tourist arrival in 2006 was 846 million. Considering the fact that this number was 500 million in 1992, the growth in numbers of arrival is exponential. The WTO has estimated that in 2020 the worldwide International tourist arrival will be around 1.6 billion. The tourism sector is major driver of world economy as it represents around 35 per cent of the world's export of services. It not only infuses money in the economy but also generates employment.

The worldwide receipts from international tourism reached US\$733 billion in 2006. Clearly, the tourism has the potential to become an engine of growth in an economy. With a wide variety of natural, cultural, religious and other attractions, India has the capability to evolve as one of the most attractive destination in the world for tourists. However, India's share in world tourist traffic has not shown significant growth, as it remains around 0.40 per cent of total international tourist traffic. Although in last decade with a vigorous promotion campaign Indian tourism sector has grown at a rapid pace but India still ranks 42nd in international tourism arrivals. The greater economic possibilities have made the tourism market very competitive. To survive and excel in the tourism market demands a coordinated, focussed strategy.

Today the question of 'How you offer to tourist what you have' is as much important as 'what you offer to tourists'. Therefore the role of marketing is becoming very important in tourism sector. It is perceived that India lacks a good marketing strategy to promote its tourism sector. Apart from this, there remain some fundamental problems in Indian tourism industry.

To attract tourists from Southeast Asia in India needs special focus. Because of the nature of tourists coming from Southeast Asia is different from a European tourists. So from the level of policy making to the

ground level an effective coordination is needed. In this direction special packages, like Buddhist circuit have been introduced. But given India's potential the effort and performance remain dismal.

I TOURISM: ECONOMIC BENEFITS

Multiplier effect: Every tourist spends money in to the host economy. That money is a new currency injected in to local economy. This new currency is spent and respent overtime creating a multiplier effect. Hence with the increasing number of tourists the financial condition of the local economy strengthens.

Employment Generation: Tourism creates both direct and indirect employment opportunities. Being a labour intensive sector, tourism creates jobs of different types and for various durations. According to standard measures "in the tourism and hospitality and recreation industries alone there are 50 categories of employment and approximately 200 classifications of occupations."²

The tourism industry also creates jobs in backward-linked industries. For examples jobs created in industry supplying cutlery to hotels. Further the induced effects generated by the employment in these sectors leads to the creation of more jobs in other areas of economic activity. With the growth of economic activity in a particular area local purchasing power gets a boost and the demand for goods increases in the local economy. To cater to the newly created demands, new industries and business start and with these come new job opportunities. In a nutshell, Tourism leads to job creation in virtually every important sector of the economy.

² "Fraser coast- benefits of tourism", <http://www.frasercoast.holidays.info/membership/benefits> }

Diversification: “Economic diversification is for many communities, an insurance policy against hard time. By offering an additional means of income, tourism can support a community when a traditional industry is under financial pressure, particularly where that community relies heavily on a single industry.”³

Opportunities for Business: The increase in tourist inflow creates demands for specific goods. And that in turn leads to establishment of industries and business, which would otherwise, could not have been sustained on local demands.

Skill Development: The Hospitality and other industries directly engaged in tourism require specifically skilled people. To meet these requirements Skill development becomes a priority. This not only helps in improving the quality of manpower but also provides better economic options for the skilled manpower.

Foreign Investment: The Growth in tourism sector in a particular area attracts foreign investment. The investment occurs both in tourism related industries and business and in backward linked industries.

Non-Financial Benefits

Tourists visit historical buildings and monuments. Many of such structures get the attention of authorities only due to tourism related benefits.

The threat to ecology from tourists in certain areas is widely publicized. There is an element of truth in this belief and one must feel concerned about these ecologically fragile areas. But at the same time it must be highlighted that “how many of these areas would be protected and managed at all, if it were not for their

potential to attract tourists.”⁴ Tourism helps in mutual understanding of cultures and societies. This creates a milieu for a peaceful world. When the communication gap between people is bridged then national boundaries becomes less a hindrance and more an opportunity to build a world society. This is the central thesis behind peace through tourism campaign.

The preservation of culture is another non financial benefit that flows from tourism. To attract tourists interested in experiencing various cultures, local communities and authority make efforts to preserve their culture in different ways, like organizing annual cultural festival. Indirectly the cultural tourism also imparts a sense of pride in local community about their culture.

II INTERNATIONAL TOURISM INDIA'S POSITION

A study of the report of the United Nations World Tourism organization (UNWTO), indicates that India is not a favorite destination in terms of international tourist arrivals. With a total of 4.4 million international tourist arrival in 2006, India is placed at 42nd position in world ranking of countries. Smaller countries like Malaysia, Hong Kong, Ireland, Tunisia, and Bahrain attract more international tourists than India.

Although the Indian tourism industry has recorded growths in two digits in last 4 years, India still only shares 0.38 per cent of total international tourist arrivals. And interestingly this share is static in last 4 to 5 years.

³ “community engagement : how tourism benefits”
www.tq.com.au/resource-centre/community-engagement

⁴ “Parks and recreation: making a case for Tourism – non- financial benefits”.<http://www.findartiles.com/p/articles/mi-m1145/iis-n9-v28>).

Rank	Country	Number of FTA in Millions in 2005	Number of FTA in Millions in 2006	Change (in per cent) 06/05
1	France	75.9	79.1	4.2
2	Spain	55.9	58.5	4.5
3	United States	49.2	51.1	3.8
4	China	46.8	49.6	6.0
5	Italy	36.5	41.1	12.4
6	United Kingdom	28.0	30.7	9.3
7	Germany	21.5	23.6	9.6
8	Mexico	21.9	21.4	-2.6
9	Austria	20.0	20.3	1.5
10	Russian Federation	19.9	20.2	1.3
14	Malaysia	16.4	17.5	6.8
18	Thailand	11.6	13.9	20.0
39	Indonesia	5.0	4.9	-2.6
42	India	3.9	4.4	13.0
48	Vietnam	3.5	3.6	3.3

Table 1: Country wise data of foreign tourist arrival (FTA) in 2005 and 2006 with the percentage increase in arrival (Source: UNWTO World Tourism Barometer)

And interestingly this share is static in last 4 to 5 years. However there is one fact to rejoice for India in terms of international tourist receipts. India ranks 21, above some important tourists'

destinations of Asia, like Indonesia and Japan in terms of total spending by tourists in host countries. This indicates that tourists coming to India spend more.

Rank	Country	2005 (in US \$,billion)	2006 (in US \$,billion)	Change(in per cent) 06/05
1	US	81.1	85.7	4.8
2	Spain	48.0	51.1	6.6
3	France	42.3	42.9	1.5
4	Italy	35.4	38.1	-0.7
5	China	29.3	33.9	15.9
6	United Kingdom	30.7	33.7	8.7
7	Germany	29.2	32.8	12.3
8	Australia	16.9	17.8	5.8
9	Turkey	18.2	16.9	-7.2
10	Austria	16.0	16.7	4.0
13	Thailand	9.6	12.4	22.0
19	Malaysia	8.5	9.6	9.2
21	India	7.5	8.9	21.3
41	Indonesia	4.5	4.4	-1.6

Table 2: Country Wise data of international Tourism receipts in 2005 and 2006 with percentage increase in receipts (Source: UNWTO World Tourism Barometer)

However, in last 6 years the total foreign tourist arrival in India has almost doubled (see fig.3). Both the government and the private sector must be commended for their efforts in this direction. “While the government plays a crucial role in making provisions for tourism infrastructure and skill development, such initiatives catalyse private enterprises to come forward and invest in this sector” (Annual Report 2007-08, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India). Ministry of tourism is the nodal agency of government of India to formulate policies and coordinate the various programmes and players engaged in tourism sector. National Tourism Policy formulated in 2002 is a comprehensive guide for India’s tourism sector. The policy aims at positioning “India as a global brand to take advantage of the burgeoning global travel trade and the vast untapped potential of India as a destination.”⁵. The policy not only put forwards some goals to be achieved but also devises some broad plans to achieve these goals.

However the specific strategies were to be formed later according to the need. The policy envisages the creation and development of integrated tourism circuits. The concept of Buddhist circuit can be seen in this light. Apart from the 2002 policy document the ministry of tourism unveils several schemes from time to time to boost the tourism sector in India. Some of the important current schemes are, Scheme of rural tourism, scheme for product /infrastructure development, destination and circuit and so on. In recent times the government machineries has led greater stress on the advertisement and promotional campaigns. The ‘Incredible India’ tourism promotion campaign has not only bagged many awards for innovative tourism promotion but has also proved to be an important strategy in attracting foreign tourists.

⁵ Ministry of tourism” government of India”,www.tourism.gov.in

Year	Tourist Arrival(in million)
2001	2.54
2002	2.38
2003	2.73
2004	3.37
2005	3.9
2006	4.4

Table 3: Foreign Tourists Arrival in India Source: Ministry of Tourism India

III SOUTHEAST ASIA IN INDIA’S FOREIGN TOURIST INFLOW

A major portion of the foreign tourist arrival in India is from US and other Western countries. However in recent times India is witnessing an increase in number of tourist from Asian countries. According to the available data, in 2005 the total number of tourist arrival from Southeast Asia into India was less than half million. In 2005 the total population of Southeast Asia stood at 557 million in that the population Indian diaspora in Southeast Asia was around 4.7 million people. Given these facts, the inflow of Southeast Asian tourists in India remains insignificant.

Country	Number of Arrivals	%
US	520,531	15.5
U.K	499,997	14.8
France	133,445	4.0
Canada	134,902	4.0
Sri Lanka	129,401	3.8
Germany	102,112	3.0
Japan	98,446	2.9
Malaysia	83,963	2.5
Australia	80,315	2.4
Italy	66,197	2.0
Others	1,518,664	45.1
Total	3367980	100.0

Table 4: Top 10 International Markets for India During 2004. Source: Ministry of Tourism India

III IMPORTANCE OF SOUTHEAST ASIA

The Indian Diaspora: Cultivating links with overseas Indians has always remained an important goal of Indian foreign Policy. However in recent times this goal has been pursued with more vigour and with proper policy directions. This has led to an increasing interaction with the Indian diaspora. And the growing linkages have resulted in increase of visits both in number and frequency of overseas Indians. Apart from fulfilling the economic and foreign policy objectives, this trend has also helped in boosting the tourism in India. Around 20 per cent of total Indian diaspora population lives in Southeast Asian countries. In countries like Malaysia and Singapore they constitute one of the major ethnic groups.

Buddhist Linkages: The Buddhist population in Southeast Asia is 216,615,239. They make up 36.5 per cent of the total population of Southeast Asia. In Vietnam, Thailand, Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia Buddhist are more than 90 per cent of the population. India is land of Buddha thereby a natural attraction for Buddhist pilgrims all over the world. Almost all the holy places related to the life and teachings of Buddha are in India. Bodhgaya, Nalanda, Rajgir, Shravasti are some of the important places, which every Buddhist wish to visit. Hence, the Buddhist religious-cultural angle can be made a base to focus on potential Southeast Asian tourists.

The influence of Indian Islam: Islam is a prominent religion in Southeast Asia. Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei are Islamic majority states. The total number of Muslim population in Southeast Asia is 239,566,220, which is 41.93 per cent of total population of Southeast Asia Interestingly; the Southeast Asia Islam has Indian roots. India has the potential to attract the religious and cultural tourists who want to experience the grandeur of Islam in a different set up. The unique South Asian Sufi culture, the grand mosques built

by Mughals and other rulers and the Islamic institutions (like Deoband) developed over a long period of time can be showcased.

Geographical Proximity: The Indo –ASEAN car rally in 2004 has demonstrated the geographical proximity between India and Southeast Asia. This obviously provides an opportunity to potential tourists to visit a country at lower costs. The development of proper infrastructure can boost the inflow of tourism in India’s northeast.

Growing Economies in Southeast Asia: The Southeast Asian economies have recovered fast from the 1997 financial crisis. And now there is addition to the list of growing economies in Southeast Asia. For example, the growth and potential of Vietnamese economy has attracted the attention of people world over. The economic growth has created a burgeoning middle class population in Southeast Asian countries. They have the extra money to spend on activities like travel and tourism. Tapping this leisure and fun oriented tourism can be an opportunity for India with its natural and historical tourist attractions.

Region of Origin	Number
Americas	804,394
Europe	1,434,983
East and Southeast Asia and Oceania	584,753
Southern Asia	841,969
Western Asia	86,450
Region not Specified	35,308
Africa	130,753

Table 5: Foreign tourist arrival in India (by region of origin) in 2005. Source- UN data, <http://data.un.org/data.aspx?d=UNWTO&f=srID%3A28310>

Increasing the Foreign Tourist Inflow: General problems and Prescriptions

Before dealing with the Southeast Asia specific measures, it is pertinent to highlight some general problems of the Indian tourism sector, which hinders its growth. Tourism is a multidimensional sector with a cross connection to every social and economic aspect of the national life. Hence, it would not be an exaggeration to say that tourism is just not an economic sector rather a holistic activity of human beings. Very nature the problems of tourism sector might emanate from other peripheral areas. Addressing these problems will help tourism sector in general and create a better environment for foreign tourists to experience India.

The problem of accommodation is one of the biggest drawbacks of Indian tourism sector. India has only about 109,000 hotel rooms in 1,980 hotels across the country registered in 2006. Among them five star hotel room constitute 27 per cent, four star 7.5 per cent and three star 7.5 per cent. Comparing total number of hotel rooms in India with China's 900,000, Thailand's 220,000 and Indonesia's 250,000 hotel rooms tells about the unprepared ness of India to face the global competition in tourism sector. The scarcity of rooms leads to many consequences for the tourism sector. Although the hotels are largely concentrated in metros yet there remains a demand and supply gap. Owing to this gap the night charges per room in metros goes up to US\$300 in tourist seasons. The situation in smaller towns and other tourist areas is pathetic. Either there are no hotels or they are very poorly managed and charge exorbitant rates. This makes India a hard choice for Budget tourists in comparison to other Asian countries. Constructing new hotels should be given utmost priority. In this direction a special focus should be given to small towns and near by areas. Here government can give more incentives to private players who wish to construct hotels in small towns. The near by Panchayats can be involved to solve the

problem of accommodation. The involvement of local people through local bodies in the tourism related programmes can help in long term in many ways.

The tourism sector in India is plagued with acute shortage of trained manpower. "According to CRISIL research, each year around 10,500 graduates come out of 25 Institutes of Hotel Management (IHMs) and 150 private institutions in the country. The research firm projects that by 2011-12 when at least 30,000 rooms added to the current stock, around 54,000 employs will be required in the premium segment alone."(The Hospitality Industry Facing Manpower Crunch, Business Line, January 22, 2008) Apart from this there is no good training facility centre available to train the tourist guides and other people involved.

The problem of poor sanitation and the untidy environment surrounding the major monuments in India remains a major dampener for the sector. Generally tourists fear that due to such unhealthy conditions they may get infectious diseases. And they might choose other competitive destinations over India. The easy solution to sanitation problem is 'not making places dirty'. First this can be strictly enforced and in long term a culture of hygiene and sanitation needs to be imparted among the people involved in this sector. Here one must understand that educating an hotelier is different from educating a taxi driver or a guide. So, a multipurpose strategy is needed to effectively handle this issue. The tourism sector can be persuaded for a voluntary code of ethics and sanitation, with the help of local tourist boards and hospitality industry.

Increasing incidents of harassment of tourists, crime against tourists and the problem of touts affect the image of India and Indian tourism sector very badly. An incident of crime against a foreign tourist (like killing of British tourist scarlette) demotivates a number of foreign tourists who wish to come to India. It has been found that at tourist destinations women

are very unsafe in India. To counter the regular incidences of harassment of tourists, the state governments should be persuaded to have special tourists police trained for that purpose. As a short term measure even a section of police force can be earmarked as tourist police and trained for that specific purpose. The people living around the major tourist destinations, especially in small towns and village areas, should be properly educated about the long term benefits of tourism towards their life. And they must be warned that if they will cheat tourists, it can harm their economic benefits that they earn from the tourism.

Southeast Asia specific measures

Culture remains an important link that binds India with Southeast Asian nations. In this direction the government has tried to exploit the Buddhist linkages to increase the inflow of Southeast Asia tourists to India. The conception of Buddhist circuit is a very small step in this direction. The government needs to employ some innovative methods to adequately tap the potential in this segment. The Indian government can think of annual seminars and get together of world known Buddhist scholars at different Buddhist destinations to discuss various matters related to the religion and theology of Buddhism. This will help in reestablishing India as an attraction for Buddhist all around the world.

Indian government should vigorously pursue its plan of linking India's northeast with Southeast Asia. This step has the potential to bring a large number of tourists to Northeast India in particular and India in general. It must be mentioned here that India's northeast and some countries in Southeast Asia, like Myanmar and Thailand share common ethnic linkages. This builds up the case for tourism development in this region of India through the Southeast Asia.

The state of transportation and roads have improved in recent times, still there are many deficiencies in the transportation

sector which hampers tourism prospects. There are many Buddhist destinations for example, where it takes a lot of time to reach. Even the quality of transport is not competitive in the field. The state of international airports is very pathetic. There are many major tourist destinations which are not air linked. The road connectivity and road side amenities in Buddhist destinations are in very bad shape. This needs an immediate attention of the authorities. Developing Patna airport as an international airport with direct flights from major Southeast Asian destinations could be a fruitful step in the long term.

The "Incredible India" campaign has bagged many international awards, despite this the availability of information about the destinations and facilities in India for tourists in the focus markets remain very limited. Information dissemination in source markets of Southeast Asia is a cause of concern. The recent advertisement campaigns remain focused to developed countries of west. There is a need to open information centres in major cities of Southeast Asia. Even the resources of Indian embassy can be used through various means to showcase the potential of India as a tourist destination, especially in Buddhist countries.

India's Ministry of tourism is mulling over the proposal of 'Visa-on Arrival' (VoA). This could be a big step in the favour of India's tourism sector. Initially it is planned to give such facility on a reciprocal basis. But the government should provide this facility to at least all the Buddhist countries of Southeast Asia. This measure will decrease the procedural hassles for the tourists.

India is world's second largest Muslim populated country. In Southeast Asia Islam went from India. In India there are many famous mosques, Islamic religious and educational institutions, which are world famous. A specific focus on tourists who are interested in visiting these places will be helpful. In this direction countries like,

Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei can be the target source market.

To increase the knowledge about India and Indian destinations, India related quiz competition, essay writing competition, and cultural tours in source markets can be organized. These indirect means help to generate interest and enthusiasm among the possible tourists. Although the direct result of these measures can not be counted, they do pay in long term.

Although the tourist services available in metros and major places are of average standards but the facilities and services in smaller areas and rural type destinations remain very poor. Even these destinations lack the basic facility needed for tourism. Given the fact that major Buddhist destinations are in semi urban and rural areas, this issue needs to be addressed on an urgent basis.

India's newfound strength in medical tourism can be useful in promoting India as a destination in Southeast Asia. Due to availability of good quality medical treatment at cheap rates, India has attracts medical tourists even from developed countries.

CONCLUSIONS

With the future prospects of 1.6 billion tourists per year by 2020, the tourism industry seems to be the sustainable high growth industry. The economic benefits of tourism for the local and national economy is widely known and acknowledged. However tourism being a holistic activity does provides many incentives to society which are non economic in nature. Given its geographical position, history, religions and diversity of cultures, India stands to gain from this phenomenon.

Generating US\$ 11,956 million of foreign exchange and provides employment to 52 million people (directly and indirectly), tourism plays a crucial role in India's developmental goal. "Positioning and

maintaining tourism development as a national priority activity" becomes pertinent today not only due to its economic benefits but also in light of other social and political advantages that it brings with. The WTO and other international organizations projections put India as one of the most favoured destinations and it is expected that by 2010, ten million foreign tourists will be visiting India. However this figure is far below the India's potential. In today's competitive market India needs to address the problem on an urgent basis making it a national mission. The central and state governments needs to work in close coordination and play a role of facilitator in the tourism sector where the driver role will be played by the private sector.

For the purpose of analysis we can identify mainly two types of tourists coming to India from all over the world in general and from Southeast Asia in particular. They are, one, those who wish to specifically visit India, two, and those who choose India among various tourists' destinations due to different reasons. Although the distinction is not very sharp to be identified and there is always overlapping motives and choices, but this distinction might be helpful in better policy formation and programme implementation.

Among Southeast Asia tourists coming to India, the first type of tourists generally are in majority compared to second type of tourists. With the economic growth of Southeast Asian nations and increasing per capita income and pleasure variant of Southeast Asian people, the ratio of type two tourists is also gradually increasing. There are some common problems faced by both these types of tourists like any other tourist coming to India. But India needs to form specific strategies in light of demands and needs of specific segment of tourists. Among the strategies discussed in this paper many for example many are specific towards Southeast Asia. These mainly pertain to exploiting the religious cultural linkages between the two. However distancing from the traditional

viewpoint of only Buddhism focused approach, it demonstrates that in view of the diversity a holistic approach divided into various segments to cater to multi faceted needs would be more beneficial.

The tourists, who must want to visit India, can come to India with proper information and less persuasion. On the other hand, there is a very competitive market to attract the second type of tourists. Here the Indian tourism sector will have to not only offer world class products but also showcase India as world class destination. However, the availability of diverse destinations, ranging from cultural and natural to modern attractions provides India a unique advantage, with which Indian tourism can compete in global tourism market effectively.



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