

TOURISM STRATEGY ON A REALISTIC PATH FOR PROGRESS

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Abstract

Tourism Strategy is based on expectation and perception. In the present scenario of pandemic all over the world one industry which had come to the bottom most is the “Tours and Travels”, the least expected to be at this stage by any person, country or the world perse. India is one among the countries which has seen the worst of tourism during the last fifteen months and the trauma is continuing. The revival is also considered tough given the chance of less of foreign travelers and business people visiting this country in the near future. Hence designing a strategy of sustainability in terms of UNWTO norms and also in the literal meaning is an essential need of the day. This article analyses the requirement of new innovations by Destination Management Organizers (DMO) to attract the tourists and see the alternatives of revenue generation in the absence of highend and foreign visitors touring in India. The strategists need to have a relook at their mental mathematics. An analysis on the strategy perse with a wider horizon is essential to have a relook at the present position.

Keywords : Sustainable Tourism, Tourism Strategy, Destination Management

Introduction.

Tourism Industry has become a priority sector in most of the countries. Countries like Spain, France who top the list of Tourism Index has been welcoming tourists with different type of strategies and also by carrying out periodical review of the target, by analyzing and reviewing the road map for the future. In the last two decades there had been a tremendous growth in this sector. During the year 2019 close to 1.5 billion people have visited various countries generating a huge sum of \$8.9 trillion to the world's GDP. In real sense the tourism revenue surpasses the oil exports, food products and automobile industry.

Present Profile

The tourist strength has gone up from mere 527 million in 1995 to 1.5 billion in a matter of 25 years. Almost threefold increase. Countries like Srilanka which had never planned for the tourism has seen major opportunity in this sector and has started strategizing on the tourism

with a “A story of untapped potential” with strategy 2017-2020 targeting 2025 to “Identify Srilanka as a place of memorable, authentic and diverse tourism experience”. Over the years tourism industry has proved the potential to create job opportunity of 10-12% at any time and also rewards with 12% return progressively without any looking back. While the tourism has come up in a big way it comes with other factors and also evils which has affected the society, the culture and the living style. Hence UNWTO the mentor and advisor on tourism has designed guidelines to follow and the goals to be achieved by every country who are involved in tourism. The sustainable tourism covers three major aspects like Ecological, Environmental and Social. If these factors are considered at every state with the goal of UNWTO for tourism, then the growth will be progressive and will be in the right path for the overall development.

The industry which has been growing at a very faster pace during the last three decades, especially in the Asian region has suffered the most during the pandemic. Indian Tourism industry was adding about Rs.1.82 lakh crores to the GDP, growing at about 10% per year with creation of the job opportunity of about 12% has been battered. “Be Vocal with the Local” is one alternative and to see the avenue of encashing other alternatives including medical tourism at this juncture is the need of the hour. Alternative jobs for the people in this industry is to be created or with thought of Skill Development wherein the employees in these industries are utilized for making revenue for their livelihood. While strategies of tourism are long term visions of the country state/ region/local they also come with a mission of execution for progress and existence.

Strategy

Whether it is personal life or business one has to have a plan of action. Depending upon the periodicity it can be long term or short term, rather tactical or strategic based on the target. While planning for a strategy of even a small business one need to consider whether you can sustain with all other factors. Strategy includes vision, sustenance, marketing, management and the reason for the strategy. Strategic process considers these five factors like leadership & planning, staff & training, nature of work, performance and facilities. The management follows with a process of vision & mission and a periodical review, allocation of resources, performance evaluation and resetting the target & control.

This is the system approach of the strategy and it is very rare while planning one also considers the total collapse of the industry. Though this pandemic happened after 100 years

it gives an alarming signal to the planners to not only think of progress for future but also a reality check of survival in case of eventuality. The problem persisting for more time has also made us to think that it is not a shortterm problem, it may be a long term one. Hence Planning of the target, achievement and milestones need to take the hurdles enroute and overcome them to achieve the desired goal. Part of the strategy becomes mission along with vision which states the need or existence of the organization. In simple terms actually it is what we do, how we do and to whom we do and finally combining the strategies and tactics into a manageable plan. When the plan goes wrong, we consult people, put new brains, try to pool in resources from all areas, push it through and manage for the time being before something else happens.

Strategy Planning & Why Sustainability ?

In a simple logic when you widen the road or make a new building or infrastructure etc you bring in new business, but along with it you also have disturbed the life of people who were living there or working in the agricultural fields. Their life is spoiled. When the project starts the investor considers the rehabilitation or to take social responsibility. In reality most of these social responsibilities are more on paper and get ignored in the process of making profit and as the business expands. As the pressure builds up for cost reduction increase the profit margins the compromise on social responsibility or concern for ecological factor drops. Some of the Multinational Companies have just given the lowest level jobs to the people who were disturbed and denied of their daily bread with the business or tourism coming to their place.

To overcome this UNWTO addresses the management vision and to make tourism policy a priority, to lead the knowledge creation, enhance capacity and better value to its member along with poverty alleviation. The five pillars of UNWTO are smarter tourism, more competitive and promoting investments, creating more & better jobs, building resilience and safe travel and protecting cultural and natural heritage to support economically & socially. Basically promoting tourism with economic growth, inclusive development and environmental sustainability. Countries like Spain had planned for sustainable tourism in their plan “Sustainable Tourism Spain 2030” with sector participation. They also identified the growth of sports tourism and concentrated on that due to high earning of this tourism.

India stands 10th on the tourism map of the world and has moved from 36th position in 2003 to the present stage at a gradual growth rate of 6.7%. Tourism strategically is for

economic development and UNWTO the guiding body has made the latest motto as “Tourism & Jobs Better Future for all”. The tourism in India is guided by India Tourism Policy 2002 by Ministry of Tourism, Government of India. India’s share is a about 1% of the world revenue of tourism. It is about 1.85 lakh crores in 2019. It is just closer to 1% of the global revenue on tourism and the government intends to reach to about 2% by 2025 by positioning tourism as a priority sector.

In earlier days of this decade Andhra Pradesh was leading on the tourism revenue before their division into Andhra & Telangana. Presently two of the states Maharastra and Tamilnadu are sharing almost 40% of the tourism revenue of the country. Strategically Maharastra concentrates more on rural tourism and agricultural tourism along with other areas and would like to create 1 million additional job by 2025 whereas Tamilnadu enjoys good return on Heritage tourism and Medical tourism. Tamilnadu is the hub of medical tourism in Asia region. The state has concentrated on good services, modern hospitals and professionals from the medical fraternity to take care of the patients visiting. Notwithstanding this they also have taken the alternative route of rejoicing and rejuvenating the patients and their attendants for a tourism trip around the state with image of culture, heritage, good service of food and facilities. The same is done in Kerala “The Gods own Country” with the nature and the ayurvedic treatment with the adaptability of all local community accepting the foreigners in their land giving them a healing touch. The social needs as well as their economical needs are fulfilled without any issues. One of the admirable aspects of Kerala Tourism is the adaptability of locals in treating and mingling with the tourists for a common cause. The positive/ negative community support is considered to see as to how to please the tourist to make it a success. Kerala has the highest literacy rate, low per capita and low urbanization level. Karnataka still has a long way to reach the level of the strategies of these states. As of now Karnataka gets a mere 5-6% of the tourist revenue of the nation. It gets about 9500 crores out of tourism which is about 14.5% of the SGDP. The state has mainly utilized the wildlife tourism and heritage tourism for the revenue. It is more of a conventional pattern and need new ideas and innovations to enhance the revenue. If the medical tourism and yoga tourism is explored it can increase its revenue on tourism. Though the state aimed to reach to 20% of SGDP and to generate 65 million jobs out of tourism by 2025,

with the disaster hitting the tourism industry this target is still a dream. Dasara remains one of the major tourist attraction for the state. Only a handful of few places are frequently visited by tourists and there is a lot of potential destinations unknown to tourists

which are yet to be explored. Unlike Tamilnadu which has Tourism offices in each districts, various cities, airports and information centres at other prominent locations outside the state, Karnataka has a lot more things to do. The main agencies of this state for tourism is KSTDC and Jungle lodges. Financially sustaining the institution and its employees is a difficult task given the ideology of this industry being like a perishable item. If the hotels are open rooms are occupied they get money otherwise its nil and cost to incur for the maintenance of infrastructure and manpower is a literal loss.

The tourism policy of the India 2002 is still the basis of Indian Tourism. Different states have made different long term and short term plans and policies and periodical changes. None has catered for the disaster in their plan, in other words the vision had no slot for a major disaster for the industry in this pandemic. When we talk about the strategy invariably the plan is chalked out with the frame work with all variables taken into account. One factor not given much importance is the Destination Organization Manager. It is wrongly construed that if the marketing is done his job is done. The manager plays the major role. His job is much beyond marketing. In a very attractive and competitive business of tourism one need to compete, innovate and make new brand identity for the destination. The manner in which he attracts the tourists, engage and keep them satisfied, he can make sure that the tourists are back again to again to his destination and also with new visitors. After all the best form of marketing in this industry is “Word of Mouth” and it has to be positive for progress.

Each destination manager has to work out his own strategy of his property and carryout a SWOT analysis in tune with the changing ideology and position. He also needs to bridge with the nearby destinations and places which will be a value addition for the visitors with extended stay.

The tourist's idea of a travel has changed in the last three decades from mere visit to a place for entertainment or business. The visitor looks much beyond the stay and visit to a place. With the changed concept he looks for brand, attraction, accessibility, skill development, facilities, utilities, avenues, service and safety, comfort, value for money and beyond that some social responsibilities and commitments to the society. It is also a tendency to see that the status of stay in big hotels are of old concept and in present day the middle class travelers are making their own independent travel plan with stays in places like Airbnb, homestay etc or even with locals or in undisturbed remote places. The strategy today needs

to be more virtual and technology driven. With the expansion of tourism more people are keen to go to smaller and unknown places for their visit. They avoid heavy traffic, too much crowd and good comfort at less cost. The involvement of local community as stake holders is essential and while involving them one has to cater to the need of engaging them as part of the work. Simultaneously giving them economical comfort without they being exploited or harassed and the culture not having been disturbed becomes a mandatory ingredient to survive in the business of tourism. The agenda of each member of different age group and perception needs to be satisfied.

Strategy & Destination

Strategy per se reveals a frame work with achievable objectives and schedule of plan with high degree of achievability duly monitored and implementation, fully considering the resources availability. With this the task of the execution falls in the hands of the destination manager in case of tourism.

A destination manager needs to be a leader and to perceive, plan, develop, adapt, innovate, co-operate and accelerate the system. In real sense the policies are mere paperwork and the manager has to exercise his mind depending upon the situation. Each destination will have different pattern and process to follow to achieve the result.

Sustainable tourism development mainly governs

- (i) optimum use of environmental resources by maintaining ecological processes conserving biodiversity
- (ii) Valuing traditions and culture of the host community and by respecting the social / cultural authenticity
- (iii) To provide socio economic benefit by providing stable employment to the stake holders in the long term thereby alleviating the poverty.

Sustainable tourism as per UNWTO should maintain high level of tourist satisfaction with a meaningful experience and right tourism practice. The UNWTO also has a goal of 20 aspects concerning tourism for sustainability. Without effective planning and coordination it is difficult to financially make the industry a viable venture taking care of eco and social requirements.

Effect of pandemic

When Covid-19 hit India none has estimated that it will have so much of effect on the tourism and for such a long time. Some of the countries and states have made their revival plan only to see that there is no use of such strategy since pandemic had planned its second innings. The pandemic has affected almost 215 countries around the world. The estimated financial impact was to the tune \$1.2trillion as loss of revenue. In the first quarter of 2020 tourists around the world had come down by 35%, it was 64% in the second quarter and 98% in the third quarter. It was one of the worst crisis compared to SARS in 2003, Global economic crisis in 2009 and 9/11 in 2001. The revival took from 11 month to 42 months in these cases. USA had reported about 12 million insurance claims. Travel outbound. In Italy out of 23 million work force 4 million work for tourism and the heavily overcrowded Venice had no visitors. In countries like Spain, France Italy and Greece almost one fifth of the jobs are with people linked to tourism industry. Though Europe is hit hard by pandemic UNWTO has requested Europe to collaborate the revival and has appreciated the Digital Green Pass for restart of tourism. With vaccination reopening the borders they are looking for benefits beyond tourism.

In the present situation we are yet to get away from the pandemic even after 16 months of its effect. As Suman Billa Director Tech Cooperation and Silk Road of UNWTO says “ This drop is unprecedented for any government to hand hold their industry without any pay and a contingency plan for it”. He further insists the Ministry of Tourism and Ministry of Health to have a harmonized approach of bringing all the states together and a synergy with the aviation.

How to address the problem

Countries with less of foreign visitors and less of business tours post pandemic have adopted to alternative tourism covering the locals and for benefit of the community at large. It is essential for the maintenance of infrastructure by utilizing the existing human power for alternative usage within the organization setting new objectives and jobs of immediate financial outcome. In 2020 the alternative plan of tourism was planned since business tourism was almost nil and very few with domestic travel. It was estimated that South East Asia will recover faster compared to other regions on outbound tourism. The scope on domestic tourism will be high and tourism for the next few months will be “Produce Global and Travel Local”.

Retrieval from Pandemic

In India the hotel and hospitality industry had to bear the major share of almost 80% of the loss being the worst affected by pandemic. In Karnataka alone the loss was expected to be to the tune of Rupees 5000 crores per month since Apr 2020. To revive from the pandemic Kerala Government had made a threepronged approach for revival in short, medium and long term. The short being financial assistance to those who lost jobs in tourism industry, the medium being extending market development assistance by extending loans and long term being aggressive market strategy by depicting Kerala being the safest place to stay. Karnataka made a revival plan in five phases from period of no lock down to the stage of reaching old international travel for leisure/business tours starting with “Love Your Local: while taking into account the other problems of the workers and hoteliers. On post pandemic the UNWTO also has a revival plan “One Planet Vision” for a responsible recovery of Covid 19 taking into account the need of the people of the planet and their prosperity.

Relook on the Strategy for Reality

In the new norms post covid at least for about two years the strategy needs to focus on more of domestic travels. This will be applicable all over the world. Countries like China which has the maximum out bound travel and also India joining the list of more outbound travel need to focus on restrictions on the travel since the business revival is likely to take more time than what was predicted in 2020, the first phase of pandemic. The recovery will be a slow process. The adverse economical impact will have a direct effect the leisure tourism. It is also felt that since people are confined with limited movement for longer period, they all would like to venture out from their place of stay at the earliest. This is a good signal for the revival of tourism with a boom on the domestic tourism which will be the first to find the revival path.

The new trend of tourists is that that they would like to stay in lesser populated and remote places for a longer duration for a change of environment and atmosphere with their family and associates. Also the number of business trips will be less since corporates having got into the video conferencing, zoom meetings and work from home culture. The easy way of cost cutting for big business firms. Additional expenditure is to be borne by the hotel & hospitality industry for hygiene and sanitation also with less number of occupancy due to social distancing norms in restaurants and public gatherings. The one who infuses the

confidence on the tourists will be the master and that amplifies the role of Destination Managers. He needs to change his target towards the new type of visitors.

Health and Medical tourism will find a special place in tourism industry for the next few years. There needs to be a link with medical industry to tie up with tourism for a consolidated growth. During the peak of the pandemic, it was experienced that there were no beds for the patients. Also while the hospitality industry was brought to ground, the hospitals have made a good business and scope for more avenues. If medical tourism had linked with hotels and industry, it would have been a win-win for both the players. As per Indian Medical Tourism Association report 2019 there is a scope of medical tourism to the tune of \$9 Billion and India is preferred due to affordability compared to western countries coupled with attractive tourist spots in India. With everything online, the new innovations and switching over to technologies will deliver result. The industry has to strategize the concept of safety and confidence in the minds of people to return back. The ideal destination of today is not created a few decades ago. It is a place of social responsibility, technology driven and facilities with meaningful experience. The visitor wants to carry a good memory and feeling.

Conclusion

The planners of strategy have to align their perceptions with the everchanging expectations of the visitors and the scenario. “The aim of Responsible Tourism is to inculcate the responsibility of the local populace (hosts) towards fragile eco-system, best practices and caring the guests and also making the visiting tourists more responsive towards culture, conventions and customs to avoid exploitation.(Manickam). Responsible Tourism alleviate poverty with growth. “The growth of tourism is not merely to be on the economic line, it should be giving more emphasis to socio economic aspects and poverty alleviation”(Paul V Mathew). “Experiencing, learning, exploring and promoting destination will address the social factor and also with a participation of locals can engage them directly as a measure of educational tourism” (Akruti Sharma). The revival is not only about the business of tourism. It is sustainability with a cause. It is not about environment and ecology. The money spent by a tourist should reach the society as a source of income. In real sense as per UNWTO only 5% of the amount spent by tourist is with the society. Leaving money in the hands of the community is more essential when so much of jobs are lost and the revival is slow. There are lots of organizations which are organizing tours for the sake of community and benefiting the locals including staying with them and showing way to lead their life in future. Also many high end tour organizers are partnering with charity organizations planning tours for a cause.

New normal of travel is let me go on tour for community to benefit and live while I also enjoy with the growth of society.

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