



## International Journal of Management and Commerce

www.managementjournal.in

Online ISSN: 2664-6854; Print ISSN: 2664-6846; Impact Factor: RJIF 5.46

Received: 26-05-2020; Accepted: 12-06-2020; Published: 27-06-2020

Volume 2; Issue 2; 2020; Page No. 16-20

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### Managing information needs of tourists- strategies and approaches

**Shacheendran V**

Assistant Professor, Department of Commerce, GPM Govt College, Manjeswar, Kerala, India

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#### Abstract

Tourism is one of the dynamic and promising industries in any economy. The multiplier effect of the tourism industry demands proactive measures for its optimum utilization. Understanding information needs of tourists assumes great significance in this direction. Tourism since provides enormous potential for development in multifaceted areas, it is inevitable to cater to information needs at various levels effectively and efficiently. It is in this background the present paper looks at various information needs of tourists along with effective strategies for providing the same.

**Keywords:** *tourist, information, tourism attractions*

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#### 1. Introduction

Tourism is travel for recreational, leisure or business purposes. The World Tourism Organization defines tourists as people "traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes". Theobald (1994) suggested that "etymologically, the word *tour* is derived from the Latin, 'tornare' and the Greek, 'tornos', meaning 'a lathe or circle; the movement around a central point or axis'. This meaning changed in modern English to represent 'one's turn'. The suffix *-ism* is defined as 'an action or process; typical behaviour or quality', while the suffix, *-ist* denotes 'one that performs a given action'. When the word *tour* and the suffixes *-ism* and *-ist* are combined, they suggest the action of movement around a circle. One can argue that a circle represents a starting point, which ultimately returns back to its beginning. Therefore, like a circle, a tour represents a journey in that it is a round-trip, i.e., the act of leaving and then returning to the original starting point, and therefore, one who takes such a journey can be called a tourist.

In 1976, the Tourism Society of England's definition was: "Tourism is the temporary, short-term movement of people to destination outside the places where they normally live and work and their activities during the stay at each destination. It includes movements for all purposes." In 1981, the International Association of Scientific Experts in Tourism defined tourism in terms of particular activities selected by choice and undertaken outside the home.

In 1994, the United Nations classified three forms of tourism as

1. Domestic tourism, involving residents of the given country traveling only within this country.
2. Inbound tourism, involving non-residents traveling in the given country.
3. Outbound tourism, involving residents traveling in another country.

#### 2. Literature Review

Hunziker and Krapf (1941) defined tourism as people who travel "the sum of the phenomena.

and relationships arising from the travel and stay of non-residents, insofar as they do not lead to permanent residence and are not connected with any earning activity." Considering the multidimensional facets of tourism, the following features can be highlighted.

#### 1. Tourism is a service industry

Tourism industry consists of several services such as hotels, food, accommodation and travel agency and so on. It is intangible, lacks storage value and even susceptible to faltering in quality as the change occurs in service centre. Hence it is highly personalized.

#### 2. It consists of numerous stakeholders

Unlike an ordinary industry, tourism consists of numerous, variety of stakeholders. Right from the tourists, travel agent, it has a wide spectrum of players such as accommodation providers, travel agents, owners of different types of vehicles, owners of several forms of entertainment centers, artists, providers of sources of cultural interest, local people at tourist centers, government and so on.

#### 3. It is a mix of tangible and intangibles

While service of a tour guide or a folklore team etc are offered to tourists are intangible in nature, food supplied, hotel room provided etc are tangible in nature. A mixture of tangibles and intangibles, provides plenty of marketing opportunities

#### 4. It has economic perspective

Tourism provides revenue to government authorities and other stakeholders in it. It is a major source of foreign exchange for the economy. It provides revenue in the form of taxes, excise duty and other duties/ cesses to government. Like in any other industry tourism also works on rules of finance. Earning reasonable return on the goods & services provided to the tourists is very important. The costs and revenues should be matched to earn a profit margin for the providers.

### 5. Tourism has socio-cultural perspective

Tourism influences cultural and social values, attitudes, and practices of tourists, the community in the host country. It can change their living practices and even the perceptions about the people in different parts of the world.

### 3. Importance

Tourism has become a popular global leisure activity. Indian tourism industry contributes to around 5.9 percent of the country's GDP and it provides employment to around 41.8 million of inhabitants. In 2010, there were over 940 million international tourist arrivals worldwide, representing a growth of 6.6% when compared to 2009. International tourism receipts grew to US\$919 billion (€693 billion) in 2010, corresponding to an increase in real terms of 4.7%. Tourism is the second biggest industry in terms of providing of employment. The importance of tourism can be summarized as follows;

#### 1. Provides employment opportunities

Tourism is one of the biggest providers of employment opportunities in India, only next to agriculture. It opens up entrepreneurial opportunities in different segments such as hotels, accommodation, and transportation, artists etc. In a country like India where unemployment is burning issue, tourism provides plenty of avenues

#### 2. Educates people

Tourism educates traveler and the host community. It enables people to know each other, learn socio-cultural practices at different parts of the world. It enlighten minds to become more matured and emotionally balanced

#### 3. Provides Economic benefits

Tourism enables government to earn foreign currency to meet its external payment obligations. It is a source of revenue for various intermediaries. It provides revenue to various local people, artisans, artists etc

#### 4. Brings socio-cultural harmony, National Integration, International understanding and peace

Tourism enables people to know each other. It facilitates exchange of ideas, views, and opinion among people. It coordinates cultures, entities, nations and thereby promotes international understanding.

### 4. Methodology

The potential of tourism industry can be successfully exploited by managing information element. Hence the present study provides a theoretical framework as to ways of managing information needs in tourism industry. The paper is conceptual in nature. Observation has been used as the method of data collection for gaining input for the suggestions.

### 5. Objectives of the Study

The following are the objectives of the study

1. To understand the information needs of tourists at different levels of a tour
2. To suggest approaches for providing the information needs of tourists

### 6. Role of information in Tourism

Tourism is an industry with immense potential. However the existence and growth of the sector depends in the arrival of the tourists at various destinations and utilizing the facilities/services

offered. Tourists, present/potential decide to conduct and execute tour programme based on the information that they have about tourist destinations and other facilities.

The decision to conduct a tour, inter alia, depends on the following factors- availability of disposable income, willingness to travel, availability of time, knowledge about tourist centres/facilities/opportunities etc. Among them, the issue of availability of disposable income is solved in several ways such as sponsored (by employer) tours/ economy class tour etc. People tend to travel even with savings which are accumulated over a longer period. However all other factors including willingness to travel and managing time factor can be very well managed with help of providing adequate information to tourists. Like in any promotional campaigns including advertising & publicity, supplying relevant information to the prospective customers assume the key to win. Hence satisfying the information needs of tourists, present and potential, assume great significance.. Tourism as product to be marketed invariably calls for availability of sufficient information about various aspects associated with it.

### 7. Types of Information needs for tourists

Tourists, present and potential, need various types of information. They are classified as follows;

#### 1. At the Planning stage

During the planning stage several types of information are needed for a potential tourist. The availability of timely and adequate information determines whether a potential tourist will turn to be a actual tourist or not. The needs are classified as follows;

##### 1. Information about tourist centers- In general

Tourist centres are the places proposed to be visited by a prospective tourist. They are primary reason for any tour programme. Various information needed about tourist centres are as follows;

- a. Various areas that are attractive to view/experience
- b. Major and minor tourist attractions in the selected areas
- c. Uniqueness(historical/Monumental/natural/others) of the tourist centres
- d. Socio-Cultural importance of the places
- e. Availability of tour guides, escort staff etc at the centres
- f. Seasonal features, climatic conditions etc.

##### 2. Information about accommodation

Accommodation constitutes another important ingredient of any successful tour programme. At each of the tourist centres, the following information is needed about the accommodation facilities available

- a. Different types of accommodation facilities available – It may be luxurious, economy class or least expensive. It consists of Hotels, motels, stay homes, YatriNivas, Dormitories and so on
- b. Comforts and facilities available at each of the type of accommodation. Normally room tariffs will be proportional to the facilities offered in the accommodation
- c. Types of food available at the accommodation points especially with regard to vegetarian non-vegetarian, Indian/Chinese, Southern dishes/northern dishes and so on.
- d. In case of people belonging to lower income category, information about food at subsidized rates, canteen facilities etc assumes importance

- e. Additional facilities available at each type of accommodation should be provided such as Restaurant, Conference Hall, Coach/Car Parking, Laundry, Tourist Information Office, Transport, Tours and Travel Counter.
- f. In case of group travel, availability of facilities for the entire team should be informed

### 3. Information regarding travel

A tour invariably involves mobility of persons from one place to another. Since travel and tour coexist, the prospective tourist should fully informed about travel related aspects. They are as follows;

- a. Different types of travel facilities available for use such as Rail, Road, Water and air services
- b. Costs and benefits of each travel facility should be duly informed in advance
- c. Availability of special travel facilities, economic modes of transportation etc should be provided.
- d. Availability of facilities for onsite visit, local travel etc should be provided

### 4. Information about other relevant aspects

In addition to information about tourist centres in general, additional information about various other matters are also welcome. They include the following;

- a. Special entertainments, Shows available at tourist centres
- b. Possible threats/dangers at tourist centres (so that suitable precautions can be planned)
- c. Help numbers to be contacted in case of emergencies. It includes quickly accessible contact numbers of police, hospitals and other urgent sources of help
- d. Specialties in customs/practices at the centres especially in Hindu temples etc

Providing the above information will bring in the following advantages;

- a. They will convert tourist into a real tourist
- b. They will motivate a sleeping traveler to be an active and learned traveler
- c. They will make travel/tour a more interesting and encouraging experience
- d. They will make tourists cautious, careful and adept in conducting his tour

### 2. At Execution Stage

Though tour is an activity that can be planned and carefully scheduled, certain things are likely to be different in the execution stage. There are several types of information that are to be provided to the tourist during the execution of tour plan. They are related with the following aspects;

- a. Changes occurred in the travel timings say due to the delay in expected train arrival, break down of the vehicle, any other contingency leading to a severe blow to the original plan
- b. Changes occurred at the tour centres after the initial planning
- c. Fresh developments, regulatory changes,, natural calamities occurred etc
- d. New facilities emerged, existing facilities lost etc

### 3. At the post tour Stage

After completing the tour, a tourist might be interested to post a feedback about the centres visited. He would also be interested in keeping the contact with those centres for continued relationship.

In case of any problem occurred at the centres, the tourist would also look for follow up and remedial measures

## 8. Strategies & Approaches for providing tourist information – a critical review

Various types of tourist information can be provided in different ways. They are analysed below with their relative merits and demerits

### 1. Printed Documents

Several printed documents are available providing different types of information to present and potential tourists. They include the following

1. Brochure, Pamphlets, notices issued by travel agents, tour sponsors, marketing wing of tour operators/ companies
2. Advertisement in newspaper, books, journals and other periodicals
3. Tour plans prepared and posted by travel agents to various potential clients

### Merits of printed Sources

- a. They are simple and easy to understand.
- b. They can be referenced any number of times in future.
- c. They can be printed even in mother tongue of the potential tourist for attracting to the destinations.
- d. They are cheaper forms of information source

### Demerits

The demerits of the printed documents include the following;

- a. They are not appealing to those who cannot read due to illiteracy/ other reasons
- b. They cannot bring strong visual images when compared to TV etc
- c. Since printed material is static in nature, musical or dynamic impacts of tourist attractions cannot be conveyed
- d. They can be accessed only those who are staying in the areas where they are published/circulated

### 2. Audio-Visual Sources

Audio-Visual sources of information include radio, TV, video clips and other recorded programmes. They are highly powerful to influence eyes, ears and other senses. Various TV channels, professional creative agencies are engaged in providing powerful pieces of information to targeted audience

### Merits

Merits of Audio visual sources include clarity in presentation, multimedia impact, live exposure to real things etc. People can access them from any part of the world

### Demerits

However the Audio visual sources are costly for the providers of information. They have only limited life to eyes of the viewer. They might escape the eyes if the power is off or tuning to other channels/programmes, when telecasted,

### 3. Online sources

In the present digital age, online sources such as websites, online databases, online advertisements etc are very popular. Online booking of hotel rooms, e-ticket for travel, electronic booking of other facilities have modernized the options available for a tourist. Online sources can be highly customized. It can give impacts of both printed and audio visuals. Several travel and tour operators, hotels and other commercial establishments are Maintaining Websites. At government level, Indian railways, Air India etc are promoting online channel for advanced booking of tickets.

**Merits**

Digital media are highly powerful. In case of necessity, the potential tourist can view any extent of detailed information by accessing the links provided. They are professionally designed and managed. They can be tailor-made with multi color, design, structure and so on. They remove geographical, spatial and other barriers in accessing information. They treat the whole globe as a single space to live in

**Demerits**

The following are the demerits of online sources of information

- a. They are not accessible where no internet connectivity is available
- b. They are difficult to trace out. If the prospective tourist is not aware of information search tools/techniques, he may never reach the appropriate web page
- c. It is very difficult to distinguish between advertisement and factual information in an online medium
- d. In case a website is not updated or not professionally maintained, gathering right type of information will be a difficult task

**4. Personalised Sources**

In addition to above sources of information, the following personalized sources are available;

- a. Tour/Travel guide- He is a professional providing necessary tour related information
- b. Staff serving front office of tour companies, travel agency, Govt Level information Centres/tourist centres etc
- c. Friends/ relatives, experts who have travel experience
- d. Special campaigns, exhibitions, other awareness programmes like 'tourism Mela' etc conducted by governmental and non-governmental organisations.

**Merits and Demerits**

The personal sources are in fact one of the much depended sources of information by a prospective tourist. Since tourists are human beings, they primarily depend other persons for collecting various types of information. Personal sources have deep influence among potential tourists. Closer the relationship, deeper will be the impact. They provide most customized information, exactly what sought for by the seeker. However the accuracy of the knowledge possessed, extent of depth in information, memory power, ability to convince the listener, linguistic skills, affiliation of the provider etc will influence the effectiveness.

**9. Efficacy of Sources – Strategies and Managerial implications**

In order to promote tourism, it should be ensured that a present/potential tourist is properly informed and served in all respects. Fraudulent practices and healthy treatments should be avoided. Various sources of information that are available should reviewed for their efficacy. In this direction, the following factors assume significance

**1. Accuracy of Information**

False/ less accurate information may discourage a potential tourist to pursue further travels. Misleading advertisements or false offers should be strictly punished. Any complaint from the tourist in this regard should be redressed at an earliest point of time and adequate remedials. Punishments can include even the

cancellation of licence to conduct tour/travel programmes. Considering the 'multiplier' impacts of tourism Industry, there should be an active monitoring agency on serving the information needs of tourists. The promotional campaigns should be strictly monitored and checked independently as a proactive measure, timely provision of information should be ensured for encouraging passive /potential tourist to become an active tourist. Such a mechanism could be brought out at the government level or a joint initiative of private and public stakeholders

**2. Timely information**

While the sole intention is to encourage a person to conduct tour, timely information through the most preferred channel should be ensured. Late or delayed information is as good as denied information and also a lost business opportunity. Quick and positive responses from information provider with real interest to serve will indeed go a long way in promoting the arrivals of tourists.

**3. Adequacy**

The information provided should be adequate to the purpose of tour/ travel. Sufficient details along with summaries and highlight on critical figures should be supplied to the information seeker. Rather than pressurizing a person to become a tourist, it would long lasting if one himself makes a decision to be one.

**4. Unbiased, Impartial information**

Information provided should not be biased/ prejudiced. It should be a mere subjective opinion of the provider rather than impartial, objective view/assessment of the subject about which information is provided

**5. Economical & accessible**

The cost of information should be free or at least nominal. It should be easy to access to everyone who seek for

**6. Integrated approach**

Since there are manifold sources of information, a genuine attempt should be initiated to integrate various sources so that all categories of people (Literate/ illiterate/, rich or poor, rural /urban etc) will be getting enough information. It should be a privilege of the seeker to obtain information at the earliest 24X7, 365 days a year. Both Information overload and dearth of it should be avoided paving the way for sufficient information to all.

**9. Conclusion**

Information is the key in a knowledge based economy. It is the triumph card to turn a passive or potential tourist into an active and regular tourist. Information empowers people to think, decide and act wisely. Better the quality of the information, more will be the satisfaction that the tourist would enjoy. Satisfied tourists are the source of continued revenue in the future. Hence there is a need to integrate different sources of information for a effective overall impact. Promoting tourism by way of ensuring more tourists arrivals is needed not only for earning increased revenue but for promoting socio-cultural and national integration as well.

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