



Analysing the Perception of Tourists and Tour Operators on the Availability of Safety and Security Facilities across Popular Tourism Destinations in Karnataka

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Abstract

The Karnataka government launched its tourism policy 2015-2020 with a vision to make Karnataka one of the top two destinations in India subsequent to a Karnataka government constituted Karnataka Tourism Vision Group (KTVG) presenting a roadmap to revitalize the tourism sector and raise it to international standards. The policy places focus on private investments and promotion of entrepreneurship in tourism. An investment of INR 54,000 crores has been contemplated for the development and maintenance of tourist destinations over the next five years, half of which may be mobilised from the corporate players. The problems that the tourism industry of the state faces can be broadly placed under two heads, namely infrastructural problems and other problems. This classification in itself explains the relevance of infrastructure to the tourism industry.

Keywords: Perception; Tour operators; Security; Destinations

Introduction

Tourism industry has been rising fast in the country. None believed in the past that the industry would emerge as a major revenue generator for the country [1]. If one realises that a good chunk of the revenue is denominated in a foreign currency, one will appreciate even more the role played by the tourism sector in the country's economy. In the circumstances, the governments of India, the various state governments including the government of Karnataka and the agencies or organisations set up by these governments departmentally or otherwise are obliged to focus on resolving the said problems faced by the tourism industry swiftly and effectively. By the very nature of its activity, the tourism industry has to utilise the services of intermediaries too for its operations. Intermediaries complement the tourism industry. To rev up the tourism industry, the infrastructural

problems and other problems faced by the stakeholders have to be identified and a time-bound action plan executed committedly [2].

The researcher pointedly states that Karnataka's tourism policy does not encourage and does not ensure synergies between tourism related agencies. It is necessary to ensure synergies between policies too, for sustainable tourism. Environmental policy, urban development policy and rural development policy are the policies the researcher has in mind while making this suggestion [3]. This leads to complementarities in the programmes governed by the various policies. The unorganised service providers associated with the tourism industry see their incomes fluctuate owing to the very seasonality associated with the tourism industry. The researcher suggests that such unorganised service providers be provided social security under the Pradhan Manthri Jeevan Jothi Bima Yojana (PMJJBY), Pradhan Manthri Suraksha Bima Yojana (PMSBY) and Atal Pension Scheme (APS), etc. [4].

Karnataka's tag line 'one state, many worlds,' reveals the truth about what the state can offer in terms of places of tourist interest. The state can offer a huge basket of diverse tourism products and services like the beaches of Mangaluru, the coffee plantations of Kodagu and the magnificent temples and palaces of Malnad and Mysore. The tag line notwithstanding, the state's tourism promotion efforts have cut no ice with the tourists. Tourists have not been able to gain quality experience of the pleasure and excitement that the said tourism products and services are supposed to generate. Inadequate information and inadequate infrastructure makes travelling a hassle for the tourists. It is argued in informed circles that Karnataka has a lot to do in areas like connectivity infrastructure, experience at the destination, supporting infrastructure and knowledge infrastructure if it is to achieve progress in the tourism space, a la Kerala [5].

Vinay Luthra asserts that the government's role should not overlap with that of the private players. The government should play the role of a mere facilitator in the tourism sector. The government should not invest in hotels, restaurants and lodges. It should leave such investments to the private players. Instead, the government should focus on infrastructure development. It should focus on road laying and provision of basic amenities. Simultaneously, it should ensure that the services of well informed and talented guides are made available to the tourists in a hassle free manner [6].

Research gap

The reviewed literature has provided valuable insight into the nature of problems that could arise in the tourism industry given its heavy reliance on infrastructure to deliver quality service. Another researcher has pointed out rightly that the government's role should not overlap with that of the private players [7]. The government should play the role of a mere facilitator in the tourism sector. The government should not invest in hotels, restaurants and lodges. It should leave such investments to the private players. Instead, the government should focus on infrastructure development it should focus on road laying and provision of basic amenities. However, none of the reviewed studies has examined the functioning of the government agencies which are entrusted with the responsibility of addressing certain infrastructural issues like lodging facilities and boarding facilities. Nor has any reviewed literature suggested adequately how the problems of the associated stakeholders/intermediaries can be addressed in the context of the infrastructural

bottlenecks that characterise Karnataka's tourism industry. It is these gaps that the present study seeks to plug [8].

Scope of the present study

The study confines itself to 30 tourists, 30 tour operators and 30 travel consultants.

Objective of the study

The objectives of the study are to:

- Identify the problems the tourists face.
- Identify the infrastructural problems the tourism industry faces.

Hypothesis proposed to be tested

The study proposes to test the following hypothesis: Inadequate online booking facility is a problem the tourists face.

Materials and Methods

This is a descriptive study, involving investigations and adequate interpretation. It is a fact-finding study. Data has been collected from authoritative sources like the government departments and the financial press of the country [9].

Sources of data

Data required for the research has been collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data has been collected from tourists (numbering 30), tour operators (numbering 30) and travel consultants (numbering 50) [10]. Secondary data has been collected from the offices and web sites of entities like KSTDC, the financial press, associations representing tourism industry stakeholders like the Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO), the Association of Tourism Trade Organisations, India (ATTOI), Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI), the Federation of Associations in Indian Tourism and Hospitality (FAITH), ministry of tourism and web sites of the government of Karnataka and the government of India and the portals of various medical tourism players. Since secondary data is sourced from authorised and reliable agencies/entities, the Researcher is confident it will be closest to being accurate. Inaccuracy, if any, will be too insignificant to impact the findings of the study [11].

Sampling plan

Tourists, tour operators and travel consultants represent the sampling universe.

Tourists

Simple random sampling under the probability sampling method has been undertaken to select the tourists since it gives each element an equal and independent chance of being selected. Accordingly, interview schedules were administered to 100 tourists. The first 30 interview schedules received from the tourists, duly completed, were selected for the study [12].

Tour operators

Given the rather limited number of tour operators operating in the vicinity where the Researcher lives and the time constraint, purposive or judgement sampling under the non-probability method has been deployed. Applying a minimum exposure of five years to the business as the criterion, the Researcher selected 30 such tour operators. This criterion, according to the Researcher, is the most appropriate one for the present study. What is important is the typicality and the relevance of the sampling units to the study and not their overall representativeness to the population. Thus it guarantees inclusion of the relevant elements in the sample. Probability sampling plans cannot give such a guarantee.

Travel consultants

Given the rather limited number of travel consultants operating in the vicinity where the researcher lives and the time constraint, purposive or judgement sampling under the non-probability method has been deployed. Applying a minimum exposure of five years to business as the criterion, the researcher selected 30 such travel consultants. This criterion, according to the researcher, is the most appropriate one for the present study. What is important is the typicality and the relevance of the sampling units to the study and not their overall representativeness to the population. Thus it guarantees inclusion of the relevant elements in the sample. Probability sampling plans cannot give such a guarantee.

Data collection instruments

Structured interview schedules were drafted and administered to the respondents for collection of primary data. The interview schedules featured open questions and closed questions. Open questions were incorporated to identify opinions, ascertain the level of exposure to the topic and seek suggestions.

Data processing and analysis plan

Non-parametric statistical units were used to test the association between qualitative characters. Conclusions were arrived at on the basis of formation of H_0 and H_1 . To be specific, *Chi-square* test was applied to test the association. (The reason is that a nonparametric test does not require the population's distribution to be characterized by certain parameters. For example, many hypothesis tests rely on the assumption that the population follows a normal distribution with parameters μ and σ . Nonparametric tests do not have this assumption and hence useful when the data is strongly non-normal and resistant to transformation).

Results and Discussion

Data analysis

Infrastructural problems faced by the tourists: As already explained, tourists face problems of the infrastructural kind. Hence the researcher sought to know from the respondents the infrastructural problems the tourists face. Their replies to the query appear in the following (Table 1).

Infrastructural problems	Number of respondents
Inadequate online booking facility	27
Inadequate surface transport/flight connectivity	26
Inadequate parking slots for vehicles	25
Inadequate or little availability of quality accommodation at or near the tourist spot	19

Table 1: Infrastructural problems faced by the tourists.

27 respondents cite inadequate online booking facility as an infrastructural problem the tourists face. 26 respondents cite inadequate surface transport/flight connectivity as an infrastructural problem the tourists face. 25 respondents cite inadequate parking slots for vehicles as an infrastructural problem the tourists face. 19 respondents cite inadequate or little availability of quality

accommodation at or near the tourist spot as an infrastructural problem the tourists face.

Other problems faced by the tourists: Tourists face other problems too apart from problems of the infrastructural kind. Hence the researcher sought to know from the respondents the other problems the tourists face. Their replies to the query appear in the following (Table 2).

Other problems	Number of respondents
Security for tourists, particularly women tourists, inadequate	25
The tendency to rip off foreign tourists through discriminatory pricing	17
Absence of information in local and international languages on the internet	12

Table 2: Infrastructural problems faced by the tourists.

27 respondents cite that security for tourists, particularly women tourists, being inadequate, as one of the other problems. 17 cite the tendency to rip off foreign tourists through discriminatory pricing as one of the other problems. 12 cite the absence of information in local and international languages on the internet as one of the other problems.

Data analysis-tour operators

Infrastructural problems faced by the tourists: As already explained, tourists face problems of the infrastructural kind. Hence the researcher sought to know from the respondents the infrastructural problems the tourists face. Their replies to the query appear in the following (Table 3).

Infrastructural problems	Number of respondents
Inadequate online booking facility	27
Inadequate surface transport/flight connectivity	26
Inadequate or little availability of quality accommodation at or near the tourist spot	24

Table 3: Infrastructural problems faced by the tourists.

27 respondents cite inadequate online booking facility as an infrastructural problem the tourists face. 26 respondents cite inadequate surface transport/flight connectivity as an infrastructural problem the tourists face. 24 respondents cite inadequate or little availability of quality accommodation at or near the tourist spot as an infrastructural problem the tourists face.

Other problems faced by the tourists: Tourists face other problems too apart from problems of the infrastructural kind. Hence the researcher sought to know from the respondents the other problems the tourists face. Their replies to the query appear in the following (Table 4).

Other problems	Number of respondents
The tendency to rip off foreign tourists through discriminatory pricing	27
Absence of information in local and international languages on the internet	26
Security for tourists, particularly women tourists, inadequate	25
Tourism department and the district administration do not work in tandem	23

Table 4: Other problems faced by the tourists.

27 respondents cite the tendency to rip off foreign tourists through discriminatory pricing as one of the other problems. 26 cite the absence of information in local and international languages on the internet as one of the other problems. 25 cite the security for tourists, particularly women tourists, being inadequate, as one of the other problems. 23 cite the tourism department and the district administration not working in tandem as one of the other problems.

Data analysis-travel consultants

Infrastructural problems faced by the tourists: As already explained, tourists face problems of the infrastructural kind. Hence the researcher sought to know from the respondents the infrastructural problems the tourists face. Their replies to the query appear in the following (Table 5).

Infrastructural problems	Number of respondents
Inadequate surface transport/flight connectivity	26
Inadequate online booking facility	25
Inadequate parking slots for vehicles	24
Inadequate or little availability of quality accommodation at or near the tourist spot	22

Table 5: Infrastructural problems faced by the tourists.

26 respondents cite inadequate surface transport/flight connectivity as an infrastructural problem the tourists face. 25 respondents cite inadequate online booking facility as an infrastructural problem the tourists face. 24 respondents cite inadequate parking slots for vehicles as an infrastructural problem the tourists face. 22 respondents cite inadequate or little availability of quality accommodation at or near the tourist spot as an infrastructural problem the tourists face.

Other problems faced by the tourists: Tourists face other problems too apart from problems of the infrastructural kind. Hence the researcher sought to know from the respondents the other problems the tourists face. Their replies to the query appear in the following (Table 6).

Other problems	Number of respondents
Security for tourists, particularly women tourists, inadequate	26
Absence of information in local and international languages on the internet	24
The tendency to rip off foreign tourists through discriminatory pricing	23
Tourism department and the district administration do not work in tandem	22

Table 6: Other problems faced by the tourists.

26 cite the security for tourists, particularly women tourists, being inadequate, as one of the other problems. 24 cite the absence of information in local and international languages on the internet as one of the other problems. 23 respondents cite the tendency to rip off foreign tourists through discriminatory pricing as one of the other problems. 22 cite the tourism department and the district administration not working in tandem as one of the other problems.

Hypothesis: As already explained, the study proposes to test the following hypothesis:

“Inadequate online booking facility is a problem the tourists face.”

Hence H_0 and H_1 are as follows:

H_0 : Inadequate online booking facility is not a problem the tourists face.

H_1 : Inadequate online booking facility is a problem the tourists face.

On the basis of the primary data collected from the respondents, a *Chi-square* test was applied to ascertain the association, if any, between the two variables (Table 7).

Observed values			
Category	Yes	No	Total
Tourists	27	3	30
Tour operators	27	3	30
Travel consultants	25	5	30
Total	79	11	90
Expected values			

Tourists	26.33333333	3.66666667	30
Tour operators	26.33333333	3.66666667	30
Travel consultants	26.33333333	3.66666667	30
Total	79	11	90
	Yes	No	-
o-e	0.6667	-0.6667	-
	0.6667	-0.6667	-
	-1.3333	1.3333	-
(o-e) ²	1.0000	1.0000	-
	1.0000	1.0000	-
	1.0000	1.0000	-
((o-e) ²)/e	0.0380	0.2727	-
	0.0380	0.2727	-
	0.0380	0.2727	-
CV	0.1139	0.8182	0.9321
TV	-	-	5.991464547
p	-	-	0.93

Table 7: The computation made using MS-Excel.

The calculated value of X^2 is 0.9321, lower than the table value of 5.991464547 for an alpha of 0.05 at two degrees of freedom. Hence the null hypothesis is accepted. In other words, inadequate online booking facility is not a problem the tourists face.

Conclusion

Properly designed and planned growth of tourism is of paramount significance as it has been one of the bases of Karnataka's economy. However, the growth of tourism results in the progress of recreation resources and tourist's activities to get most favorable benefits in terms of social, economic and ecological objectives and satisfaction of tourists. Nevertheless, the challenge is to deal with the future development of the tourism industry to diminish its negative effects on the climate and nearby networks while amplifying the advantages terms of job opportunity, wealth and backing for neighborhood culture, and security of assembled and natural resources.

Recommendations

The following are the researcher's recommendations:

Security of women tourists in particular is an issue that needs greater attention from the government and its law-enforcing machinery. Women tourists and in particular, women tourists that visit the country singly, are always apprehensive about their security while visiting India. The law enforcement agency is by default reactive to complaints lodged by women tourists against the perpetrators of the crime. By default, the law enforcement agency should be proactive in dealing with complaints lodged by women tourists, in particular. A specially-trained women police force should be entrusted with the task

of providing security to women tourists. The force should be adequately empowered and adequately armed to ensure that crimes against women tourists are swiftly and effectively acted upon, leading to exemplary punishment of the guilty.

Yet another practice or rather malpractice that should be put an end to is the inherent tendency to rip off the foreign tourists through discriminatory pricing. Unbelievably, some of these undesirable practices are endorsed by the government directly or indirectly. For example, the entrance fee at Taj Mahal for a foreign tourist is a whopping INR 1,000, while it is a paltry INR 40 for domestic visitors. Just as our society is divided along caste lines, the tourist community has also been divided on the basis of the geographies the tourists are from. For example, the fee is nominal namely INR 40 for visitors from SAARC and BIMSTEC countries and a prohibitive INR 1,000 for visitors from other countries! And to think it happens in the largest secular democracy in the world!

Tourism department and the district administration lack the much-needed coordination to be of much use to the tourist community. The two must move in perfect lock step. The two often pass the buck instead. Division of labour is resorted to, to ensure accountability and answerability. But ground reality suggests otherwise – it leads to buck-passing! It is necessary for the government to take this issue seriously. A combination of a maze of bureaucracy and a buck-passing community of bureaucrats is the last thing a sunrise industry like tourism can afford!

Online booking facility will go a long way in promoting tourism in the state. The recent relaxation concerning issue of visa has already led to a significant rise in tourist numbers. In the backdrop of this experience, the government is now in a better position to optimise the visa issue regime. For example, it can think of further relaxing the

online visa issue regime even while ensuring that the country's security is not exposed. The industry continues to be plagued by the proverbial infrastructure bottlenecks particularly the road infrastructure. Ironically, cess is collected from the tourists by various governments and various local self-governments, for certain tourism-dedicated projects. But seldom have these projects seen the light of the day! A serious investigation is warranted into this anomalous outcome. Advocating tourism promotion on the one hand and hobbling tourism-related projects on the other is a disturbing cocktail.

Inadequate surface transport/flight connectivity has to be addressed by the government on top priority. Even assuming that ensuring adequate flight connectivity is not entirely on government turf, one cannot forgive the government for its failure to ensure adequate surface transport connectivity. It is not a costly proposition; nor is it an unviable proposition. As said in an earlier paragraph, cess is being collected by the various state governments and local self-governments for investment in certain niche areas of the surface transport infrastructure. Some of the collected funds have been lying idle. Hence all that is required is for the government and other government-run tourism agencies to summon the willpower to address the inadequacy in surface transport connectivity.

If inadequate availability of quality accommodation at or near the tourist spot is addressed, the problems faced by the foreign tourists can be minimised leading to rising tourist numbers. But investing in quality accommodation near the tourist spot may not be financially viable for the investor, whether private or otherwise. If the tourist spot in question is not popular, such investment in accommodation may not find takers. At least in these cases the government can ensure adequate and quality surface transport connectivity between the tourist spot and the nearest city. This is not something beyond the government concerned.

Limitations of the study

Primary data has at times been inferred through frequent topic-oriented discussions with the respondents. This may have influenced the findings of the study. The researcher is however convinced that such influence is too insignificant to affect the accuracy of the findings of the study.

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