
A STUDY ON THE CHALLENGES OF CULTURAL TOURISM IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

With its rich artistic and historical heritage, cultural tourism has always been India's biggest attraction. Even today, with many forms of tourism becoming popular in the country, it is to sample and experience Indian culture that foreign tourists mainly visit the country. It may therefore be inferred here that Indian culture is the lever which has to be used to increase tourist footfalls. This is particularly pertinent, given that currently foreign tourist footfalls in India are less than those of smaller countries like Singapore and Thailand. Obviously there are significant challenges which pre-empt India from leveraging its culture to draw in more tourists. The main purpose of this paper is to understand what these challenges are and what must be done in order to counter them. The quantitative technique was used in this research using secondary and primary data. The secondary data confirms that its culture is indeed India's biggest attraction. Its magnificent monuments, sites of both historic and religious significance, its cuisine and diverse forms of dance, music and handicrafts all combine to offer a unique cultural experience. The primary data revealed the main detractors from this culture include the rampant commercialization of tourist sites, very poor maintenance of monuments, the lack of basic facilities at these sites, unhygienic environment, boorish behaviour of the local inhabitants and the perception of threat to personal safety and security.

On the basis of these findings, this research also makes recommendations which are summarized in the conclusion chapter. If this paper serves to alert the tourism department of the great potential of India's unique culture in attracting tourists to the country and what needs to be done to counter the numerous challenges that detract from its allure, this paper would have served its purpose.

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Introduction

Culture is a multifaceted concept and this is reflected in Andrews (2012)'s definition of cultural tourism as all *those sets of activities that allow visitors to see and experience the diverse lifestyles of other peoples, their customs, traditions as well as all their sites of historical and cultural significance that exist from ancient times*. Gowri Shankar (2011) believes that it is a nation's culture that is the main reason for tourists to visit. This is particularly true in the Indian context. India is home to one of the world's greatest and unique cultures. What makes Indian culture particularly unique is that, despite its being nearly 4000 years old, it is still a living culture, with its current traditions springing directly from its past (Vanniarajan, 2013). Keka (2012) said that another characteristic of Indian culture is its diversity. Himmat (2014) said that so diverse are its cultural offerings that India might be considered to be a sub-continent in itself. Dixit and Shantaram (2012) added to this concept by stating that Indian culture has "*something to offer to everybody*". Despite its undoubted allure however, there exist several challenges that must be effectively countered before the country can effectively exploit its culture to attract tourists. Caprihan (2011) said that these challenges are related to the Indian climate, the facilities offered to tourists – including methods of travelling, hotels and accommodation, food and drink, provision for tourist safety and security as well as for their health and hygiene. Batra (2013) believes that the behaviour of the local peoples and their attitude towards tourists – who often are the source of their livelihood – leaves much to be desired. To the extent these challenges are first acknowledged, understood and countered, to that extent will the risk perception among tourists, who might wish to visit India, gets reduced. Creating memorable cultural experiences for these tourists who then decide to India, results in repeat visits, increased turnover and profitability. How this might be achieved will have to be understood by understanding the challenges confronting cultural tourism in the country.

Aims and Objectives

- To examine whether India's culture is its biggest draw amongst tourists.
- To conduct a survey amongst foreign tourists to understand the challenges they face when visiting sites of cultural importance in India.
- To highlight these challenges to the Department of Tourism and make recommendations on how these challenges may be countered.

Literature Review

According to Sinha (2013), the importance of cultural tourism stems from the fact that on the one hand it is often the primary attraction drawing tourists into a country and on the other spends on cultural tourism exceed those on other forms of tourism. This is validated in the Indian context as well. Mukherjee (2013) said that over the period 2009-2012, tourists who visited India only for its culture, spent upto 40% more and stayed for periods of time

35% more than other tourists. Sinha (2013) indicated that cultural tourists visited the country at least 15% more often than other tourists. Himmat (2014) found that of the 4.8 million tourists who visited India in 2011, half came only to visit the country's monuments such as the Taj Mahal. In states such as Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Rajasthan, cultural tourism accounted for upto 96% of total revenues generated through tourism (Gupta and Kaspekar, 2010). That the Government of India also recognizes the potential of cultural tourism is manifested by the launch of the '*Incredible India*' and the '*Athidhi Devo Bhava*' (Guest is God) campaigns both of which are designed to primarily showcase Indian art and culture.

Various factors coalesce to make Indian culture one of its kinds in the world. According to Dixit and Shantaram (2012), the sheer diversity of the sights and experiences in the country is the most important. There are nearly 1600 languages and dialects spoken in the country (Batra, 2013). This diversity is also reflected in the diverse architectural styles, forms of music, dance, handicrafts and in Indian cuisine. India is home to all the world's major religions including Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Judaism and Zoroastrianism, each of whose believers have their sacred shrines peppered across the country. These attract large numbers of tourist from East and South Africa, South East Asian countries such as Japan, Thailand, China and Sri Lanka and Europeans as well (Jain and Gurmeet, 2014). The country harbours some of the world's greatest monuments such as the Maha Bodhi temple in Bodh Gaya, the Taj Mahal and other structures pertaining to British rule in India. Keka (2012) said that there are tourists who visit the country solely to sample different music and dance forms. The handicraft emporia located in all major cities showcase the rich array of Indian arts and crafts and serve as means of livelihood to the artisans as well. Kullajit (2012) mention about the spices used in Indian cuisine which make it unique as well as the diversity in cuisines with the country.

Despite the richness of its culture however, the number of foreign tourist arrivals (FTA) into the country is very less. Sinha (2013) said that in 2012, only 4.8 million foreign tourists visited India which is just 0.4% of total tourist traffic for that year. The number of FTA's has annually grown by just 8.8% from 2000 onwards and this is three times less than growth in FTA's in countries such as Singapore, Thailand and Malaysia (Vanniarajan, 2013). According to Sharma (2011) the revenues earned by the tourism sector in India is less than 0.5% of the revenues earned globally through tourism. Despite these statistics however, there is little information on what pre-empts tourists from visiting the country, despite its rich cultural offerings. It is this gap in the literature that this research will close.

Methodology

The quantitative method was used in this research using both secondary and primary data. Secondary data was used to formulate the literature review. An on-questionnaire administered to 100 foreign tourists who had visited India during the period June 2013 to June 2014 was the primary data collection tool. The contacts of these tourists were obtained

from travel agencies in India. The questionnaire could be answered using a four point Likert scale with the results being analysed in excel. The main purpose of the questionnaire was to understand the challenges faced by tourists during their visit to India.

Analysis and Discussion

Table 1 summarizes the main purpose of respondents visit to India.

Table 1: Purpose of Visit

	No. of persons Agreeing	Total No. of Respondents	% Agreeing
To Visit Beaches	6	100	6%
I had come for medical purposes	0	100	0%
I had come for educational purposes	1	100	1%
I had come for adventure, forest trekking & wildlife spotting	3	100	3%
To visit its monuments, palaces, forts & temples	72	100	72%
I wanted to visit the places of pilgrimage	18	100	18%

The majority (72%) of the respondents indicated that they came to India to visits its monuments, palaces, forts and temples, i.e. for cultural reasons. This confirms the findings from the literature where India's culture was found to be its biggest tourist attraction. The respondents were then queried as to the uniqueness of Indian culture and their responses are indicated in table 2.

Table 2: Uniqueness of Indian Culture

	No. of Persons Agreeing	Total No of Respondents	%Agreeing
Yes	2	100	2%
No	98	100	98%

As table 2 indicates, 98% of the respondents agreed that Indian culture is unique and one of its kind. This again underscores the attractiveness of Indian culture. Respondents were asked to opine on the cultural sites they visited during their tour and table 3 indicates their responses.

Table 3: *Opinion on Monuments*

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Weighted Average	Interpretation
	4	3	2	1		
The Places I visited were just like what I had read, heard & imagined	2	17	55	26	20	Disagree
I was disappointed. The Monuments were not maintained	86	14	0	0	3.9	Strongly Disagree
The Places seemed too modernised and commercialised	10	79	6	5	2.9	Agree
I enjoyed my visit, but felt much can be done to make the visit pleasant and memorable	12	86	2	0	3.1	Agree

Table 4: *Liked / Disliked aspects of Tourist Visit In India*

	Most Liked	Liked	Disliked	Most Disliked	Weighted Average	Interpretation
	4	3	2	1		
Climate	2	6	85	7	2.0	Disliked
Food & Drink	28	23	28	21	2.6	Liked
Music, Dance	85	15	0	0	3.9	Most Liked
Cities & Monuments of historical interest	96	4	0	0	4.0	Most Liked
People	26	24	28	22	2.5	Liked
Travelling & Hotel Stay	22	30	38	10	2.6	Liked
Night & Entertainment	0	6	86	8	2.0	Disliked
Cleanliness, Hygiene	0	0	2	98	1.0	Most Disliked
Safety and Security	0	0	86	14	1.9	Disliked
Facilities for tourists	0	0	1	99	1.0	Most Disliked
Courtesy and hospitality	3	10	38	49	1.7	Disliked

As table 3 indicates, the majority of responses are in the negative and express disappointment on the way the monuments have been maintained and their current condition. In addition, respondents expressed their regret at the commercialization of tourist spots which detracts from their heritage value. Respondents were asked to indicate which aspects of their visit they liked and which they did not like. Table 4 summarizes their responses.

From table 4 it can be seen that aspects related to Indian culture, such as cuisine, music, dance forms and monuments have scored a 'Most liked' or 'Liked' status. Other aspects related to the climate, facilities, travel, accommodation, safety and security, courtesy of people and night life have unanimously attracted either a "Disliked" or a "Most Disliked" status. The inference here is that there are several factors that detract away from the charm of Indian culture. That these factors negatively impact tourists decision to visit the country may be seen in table 5.

Table 5: Decision to Revisit India Again

	No. of Persons Agreeing	Total No of Respondents	% Agreeing
I will visit India again to see more of its unique cultural monuments	62	100	62%
I will never visit India again. My visit was unpleasant	38	100	38%

From table 5, it is evident that while 62% of the respondents indicated that they would visit India again, as many as 38% of them said that they would never visit the country again, because of the unpleasantness of their previous experiences. This in spite of the rich cultural traditions in the country

Conclusion

The first objective of this paper was to understand the role culture plays in attracting tourists to India. It was found that its culture is the most important reason tourists want to visit India. This finding is important given that culture potentially forms the lever with which to attract tourists to India. However there are several factors that detract away from the charm of India culture. The commercialization of tourist hot spots has to stop. There has to be adequate infrastructure provided at all places of cultural interest in terms of provision to stow luggage, food and drinking water. Basic standards of hygiene and cleanliness have to be maintained. The current shortfall in hotel rooms has to be bridged. Perhaps the biggest disadvantage is government apathy and ineptitude that results in poor maintenance of sites,

indifference to particular needs of tourists, the discourtesy they encounter and their negative perceptions related to their safety and security during their stay. Another big challenge is sensitizing the people of India to the importance of tourists and to educate them in ensuring that these tourists have a safe, enjoyable and memorable stay in the country. It may seem that these challenges are not related to the experience of cultural tourism itself. However, it was found that these aspects of India, take away or detract away from the whole cultural experience. Indeed, these aspects successfully reinforce negative stereotypical imagery of India and her culture amongst tourists. This accounts for the very poor foreign tourist footfall rate in India as compared to smaller countries like Thailand and Singapore. To the extent that these challenges are effectively countered, to that extent will cultural tourism come into its own in India

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