

Experiences of the Tourists in Buddhist Circuit Destinations

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Abstract

The Buddhist cultural heritage has a long and special history of dates back more than 2,500 years and actually unites most of south, south-east and east-Asia. The influence of Buddhism can be seen across all Asian countries in terms of history and culture. Buddhism is a religion, which arose in and around ancient Magadh (Bihar), India and is based on the teachings of Siddhartha Gautam, who is widely known as Gautam Buddha. The Buddha (Awakened one) was a historical figure who is generally believed to have lived from about 563 to 483 BC. The Buddhist Circuit includes all high significant holy sites of Buddhism religion; where Lord Buddha was born, attained enlightenment, preached first sermon and reached at Nirvana. Bodhgaya, Sarnath and Kushinagar are the primary pilgrimage places of Buddhist Circuit in India associated with the life and teachings of Lord Buddha. There are numerous other sites where Buddha travelled during his life. Today, visitors can travel through this Buddhist Circuit to savour the splendid beauty and great appeal of Buddhism religion. Around six million people practice Buddhism religion in India, fewer than either follower of Christianity or Sikhism religion. There are thousands of historically and spiritually important established destinations turned to become the great centres of national and international tourists. The present research paper attempts to discuss the experiences of the interviewed tourists mainly their satisfaction on quality of used services at the selected Buddhist Circuit destinations.

Keywords: Buddhism, Religion, Buddha, Buddhist Circuit, Tourist

Introduction

The Buddhist cultural heritage has a long and special history of dates back more than 2,500 years and actually unites most of South, South-East and East Asia. The influence of Buddhism can be seen across all Asian countries in terms of history and cultural. Buddhism is a religion, which arose in and around ancient Magadha (today's Bihar) India, and

is based on the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama (born in Lumbini, Nepal), who is popularly known as Buddha (literally the enlightened one or awakened one). It is a philosophy encompassing a variety of traditions, beliefs and practices largely based on the teachings attributed to Lord Buddha. There are two major branches of Buddhism: Theravada ("The School of the Elders") and Mahayana ("The Great Vehicle"). Theravada is mostly followed in Southeast Asia and Sri Lanka. Mahayana is the largest body of Buddhist tradition. It is practiced in broader East Asia and followed by over half of World's Buddhists. Initially, Buddhism remained one of the many small sects in India. The main breakthrough came when King Ashoka converted to Buddhism. He not only organized the spreading of Buddhism throughout India, but also beyond, most importantly to Sri Lanka. Buddhism is based on the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, who was born in a wealthy family near the border of modern India and Nepal in 563 BC. Confronted by the reality of ageing, begging, sickness and death, he left his rich home at 29, and spent seven years while travelling in different parts of India as an ascetic. Substituting meditation for physical self-punishment, he was sitting under a sacred fig tree (Peepal Tree or Bodhi Tree) when he had his first three enlightened revelations. Buddhists have no belief in higher deities, but propose a path towards freedom from suffering or individual enlightenment, through deep reflection on the nature of existence. This focus on self-redemption makes it qualitatively quite different from other belief systems which base themselves around concepts of divine mercy or grace. After enlightenment, Buddha taught for the next 45 years of his life. His adherents taught more adherents to spread the thoughts of Lord Buddha. The Buddha's teaching (dharma) is the cornerstone of Buddhism. Two hundred years after Gautama's death (253 BCE) a thousand monks worked

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for nine months to classify and write down the traditions that had only existed orally. This work, called the Pali canon, is the foundational teaching text for the Theravadic Buddhists. Different Buddhist groups recognize other authoritative texts. Under pressure from Hindu religion growth, the Buddhist presence in India eventually began to decline from about the 7th Century AD. Buddhism flourished in many other parts of Asian continent, notably in China and Japan. Today, there are about 488 million Buddhists worldwide, representing 7% of the World's total population as of 2010. China is the country with the largest population of Buddhists approximately 244 million or 18.2% of its total population. It is estimated that there about 244 million Buddhists living in countries outside of China (Pew Research Center 2012).

Tourism is one of the fastest growing industries of the world. In the recent past, it has grown as one of the key sectors of the world economy. It is being recognized as one of the largest industries in the world. In fact, the nature has gifted us so many natural beauties like thousands miles of beaches, hills, mountains, rivers, forests, deserts, oceans, seas, islands, waterfalls, glaciers, snowfall, flora and fauna etc. Besides, man has also created several tourism products such as unique cultures, life styles, languages, museums, art galleries, folklores, folk dances, classical dance forms etc. These are turning into important tourist attractions for international and domestic tourists. Tourism is also understood as a leisure activity which involves discretionary use of time and money. Recreation is often remains the main purpose of participation in tourism (Kamra. K. K., 2009)

However, the tourists around the world travel from one place to another keeping several factors in their mind but religion figures the most popular motivational factor for millions of them. People belonging to different religions have been traveling over long distances to appease the Gods and Goddesses. This procedure of worshipping the God, in various forms and incarnations, has been going on since times immemorial. Religious tours or pilgrimage tours are conducted in all parts of the world. Muslims complete Haj at "Mecca Sharif", Hindus undertake "Char Dham Yatra" at four prominent religious shrines. Further, Sikhs travel at "Shri Harimandir Sahib" (Amritsar), Christians visit at Vatican City (Italy) and finally Buddhists travel at important "Buddhist Circuit" destinations.

There are several Buddhist destinations across India, important from pilgrimage perspective. The four holy

places associated with Gautam Buddha in India are- Bodhgaya, where he attained enlightenment, Sarnath in Varanasi, where he preached his first sermon, Kushinagar near Gorakhpur, where he achieved Mahaparinirvana and Vaishali, where he delivered his last sermon. Amongst the various key destinations, majority of the sites come under two states i.e., Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. There are numerous other sites where Lord Buddha and his follower monks traveled during their life, which are also great sites for deep veneration and meditation. Visitors can travel through this Buddhist Circuit today, to savor the splendid beauty and great appeal of Buddhism. The greatest impetus of Buddha's teachings came from the Indian King Ashoka who went on a great pilgrimage, visiting the important sites that are directly associated with the footsteps of Lord Buddha. There are other places of lesser significance on the footsteps of Lord Buddha. The studies conducted from time to time have different findings (Sawarkar K.P. & Mishra S.K., 2009).

Review of Literature

Agapito D., Valle P.O. & Mendes J.C. (2012) in their research stated that all the five senses to be important to tourists in order to have an intensive global experience in the rural area under study. Although importance is attributed to all the senses in their global experience, tourists seem to identify fewer haptic impressions in their experiences than the other senses.

Pine & Gulmore, (1998) experiences have been recognized as a distinct economic offer, occupying a central role in society and holding a premium position on the four-stage-continuum of the progression of economic values, after commodities, goods and services.

Carlson, (1997) the managerial approach considers that although experiences are individual and internal, comprises by a constant flow of conscious thoughts and feelings.

Schmit (1999) postulates that experiences can be characterized by five strategic experience modules; sensory (sense), affective (feel), creative cognitive (think), physical/behaviours & lifestyles (act) and social-identity (social). These modules are circumscribed but are connected and interact with each other.

Ellis & Rossman (2008) alert us about the need to preserve the autonomy of the participant, pointing to the motivational factors that have a pivotal role in the

individual's experience and in its evaluation, which somewhat mitigate the effect of artistic and technological factors.

Trauer (2006) suggested that tourism involves an experiential and emotional nature.

Hood (1983) identified the following six criteria of a desirable leisure experience: (1) being with people or social interaction; (2) doing something worthwhile; (3) feeling comfortable and ease in one's surroundings; (4) having a challenge of new experiences; (5) having an opportunity to learn; (6) participating actively.

Falk and Dierking (1992) indicated that museum visitor's pre-attitude towards the visiting experience is influenced by visitor's expectations, and is a part of personal context. Since visitor expectations significantly influence the visiting experience, and visitor's post-memory is usually related to pre-expectations.

Larsen and Mossberg (2007) suggested that experience is a kind of subjective and personalized process, which is related to society, culture and even different systems.

Joseph and Gilmore (1998) regarding tourist's active and passive experiences, suggested that both experiences are possible.

Objectives

The study has been conducted with the following objectives:

- To know the social profile and the tour programme of the tourists visiting in Buddhist Circuit.
- To understand the feelings and experiences of the tourist visited in Buddhism Circuit destinations.

Research Methodology

The present study is descriptive in nature in which attempt has been made to cover Indian Buddhist Circuit centers such as Bodhgaya, Sarnath, Vaishali & Kushinagar only, keeping in mind that these are important destinations. Besides, in order to supplement the information from the primary sources based on the experiences of the tourists, visiting Buddhist destinations, decision has been taken to select 100 tourist respondents from these Buddhist destinations for final interview during peak season.

It is hoped that the size of the selected destination and respondents will be a fairly good number to speak about the overall features and experiences of all the Buddhist Circuit destinations in India.

Profile of Selected Buddhist Circuit Destinations

Attraction and its attractive features determine the direction and dimension of tour and the tourist's motivation in the tour. Accordingly the interesting area and the priority of the tourists contribute a lot in finalizing the attractions to be visited by the tourists. Keeping these points in mind, in this part of research paper an attempt has been made to highlight the major features of Buddhist tourist destinations covered under the study. These are disclosed as under:

Bodhgaya

Bodhgaya is one of the most important and sacred Buddhist pilgrimage center in the world. It is a religious site and place of pilgrimage associated with the Mahabodhi Temple complex in Gaya district in the Indian State of Bihar. It is famous for being the place where Gautam Buddha is said to have obtained enlightenment under a sacred Bodhi tree.

Vaishali

Vaishali district is situated in the Indian state of Bihar. It lies at a distance of approximately 60 kilometers from the capital city of Patna. The place gains significance from the fact that it is here Lord Buddha announced the imminence of his Mahaparinirvana. Vaishali also witnessed one of the eight great events in the life of Lord Buddha.

Kushinagar

Kushinagar is a town in the Kushinagar district of the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. It is the city of beautiful stupas and temples. It is located about 53 kilometers from Gorakhpur; the place is famous for its close association with Lord Buddha, who is believed to have attained "Mahaparinirvana" (the highest stage of salvation) after his death. It is one of the important pilgrimage center for the followers of Buddhism religion because Lord Buddha is known to have preached his last sermon at Kushinagar. The city kept flourishing till about 12th century A.D.

Sarnath

Sarnath is located just 10 kilometers from the Hindu religion holy city of Varanasi. Sarnath is one of the most important and revered places of Buddhist Circuit. It is believed that after attaining enlightenment in Bodhgaya, Lord Buddha came to Sarnath to deliver his first sermon more than 2500 years ago. It is the site of deer park, where Gautama Buddha first taught the Dharma after attaining his enlightenment. Sarnath is one of the four holy Buddhist sites sanctioned by the Buddha himself for pilgrimage.

Profile and Experiences of the Tourists

In order to know the brief social profile and experiences of the tourist respondents visited Buddhist destinations, they were interviewed with the help of structured interview schedule specially developed for them, along with this personal observation of the researcher has been recorded. These collected information have been compiled and presented below:

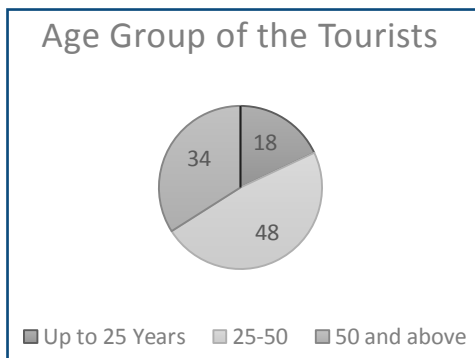


Fig. 1: Age Group of the Tourists

It is clear from the Fig.1 that high age 48 percent of the tourist respondents belong to 25-50 years age group, another 34 percent 50 and above year's age group and remaining 18 percent below 25 years. The figure above makes it clear that the tourists between 25 to 50 years age group have more interest in visiting the tourist destinations in comparison to other discussed age group of the tourists visiting the tourist destinations. This may be because of the fact that the mature tourists may be getting higher education and others who wish to know more about Buddhist destination have greater interest in visiting the Buddhist destinations.

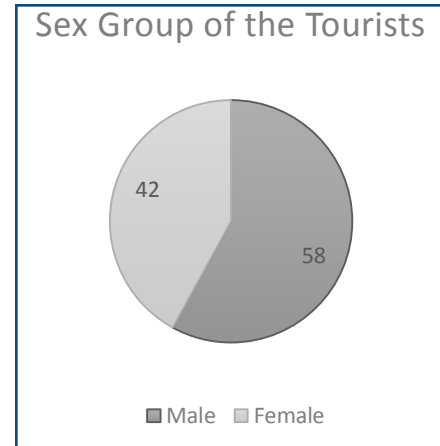


Fig. 2: Sex Group of the Tourists

The Fig. 2 reveals that high as 58 percent of the tourists visited Buddhist destinations are male and remaining 42 percent are female visitors. It means male tourists have more interest, motivation and time to spare for visiting the Buddhist tourist destinations in comparison to female tourists.

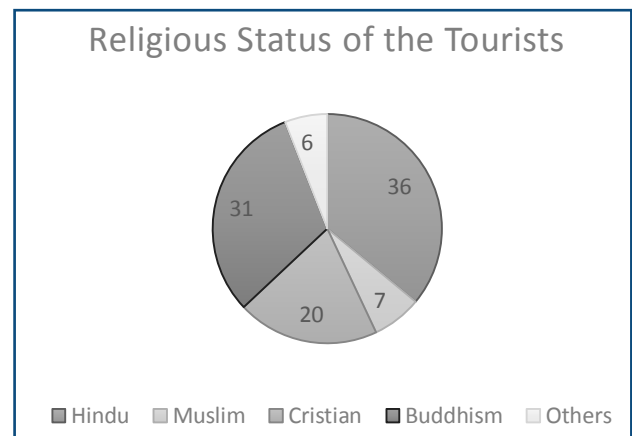


Fig. 3: Religious Status of the Tourists

Fig. 3 describes that the highest percentage i.e. 36 percent of the tourists visited Buddhist Circuit follow the Hindu Religion, the second highest group of tourists i.e. 31 percent having faith in Buddhism, 20 percent in Christianity and remaining 07 and 06 percent in Muslim and Jain respectively. It means the highest number of Hindu tourists visiting the Buddhist destinations. This may be because of the fact that the study has been conducted in Indian Buddhist destinations surrounded by Hindu population. The figure also depicts majority (67 percent) of the tourists visiting the Buddhist destinations either belong to Hindu or Buddhism religion.

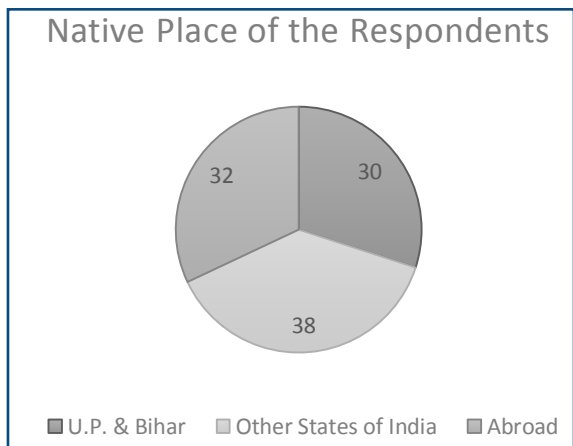


Fig. 4: Native Place of the Respondents

It is clear from the Fig. 4 that maximum 38 percent of the tourists come from Indian states except Uttar Pradesh & Bihar, 32 percent from abroad specially Buddhism religion following countries and remaining 30 percent from Uttar Pradesh & Bihar States of India. It means majority of the tourists i.e. 68 percent come from Indian states to Buddhist Circuit tourist destinations and remaining 32 percent which is also good in number from abroad particularly from Buddhism religion following countries have more interests in knowing the circuit and its surroundings.

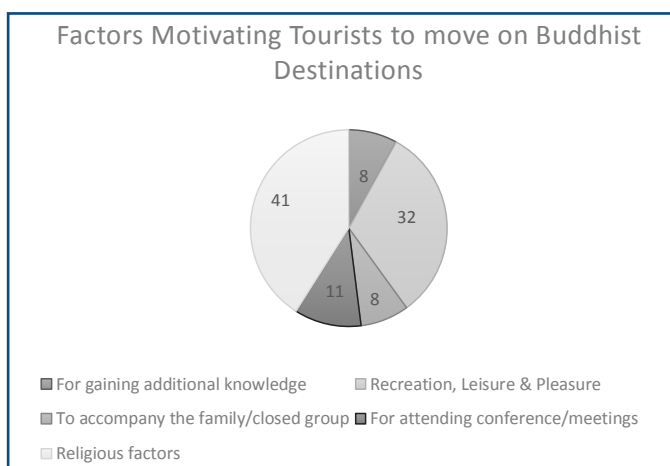


Fig. 5: Factors Motivating the Tourists to move on Buddhist Destinations

It is clear from the Fig. 5 that high as 41 percent of the tourists got motivation from religious sentiments to visit Buddhist destinations, 32 percent from recreational, leisure & pleasure, 11 percent for attending conference and relevant meetings, another 08 percent for gaining

additional knowledge and another similar percentage of the tourists became motivated to accompany their family members and relatives who wish to visit the Buddhist tourist destinations. Finally, it is clear from the Fig. 5 that highest number of tourists arriving at Buddhist centers for religious purposes.

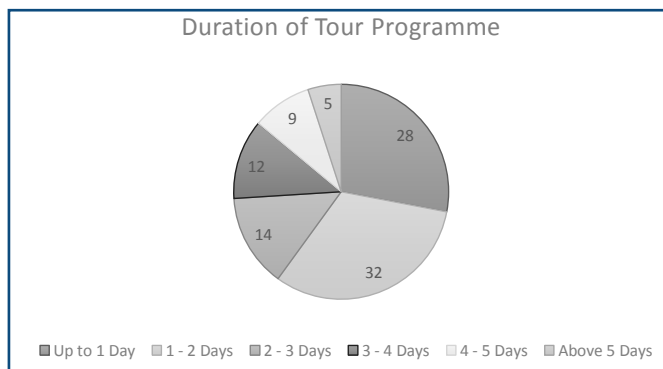


Fig. 6: Duration of Tour Programme

It is clear from the Fig. 6 that high as 32 percent of the tourist respondent's duration of stay at visited destinations was between 1-2 days, another 28 percent stayed just for one day, 14 percent stayed between 2-3 days. 12 percent between 3-4 days, 9 percent 4-5 days and remaining 5 percent stayed above five days at the visited tourist destination. It means the majority of the tourists having 1-2 day's time visiting the studied destinations.

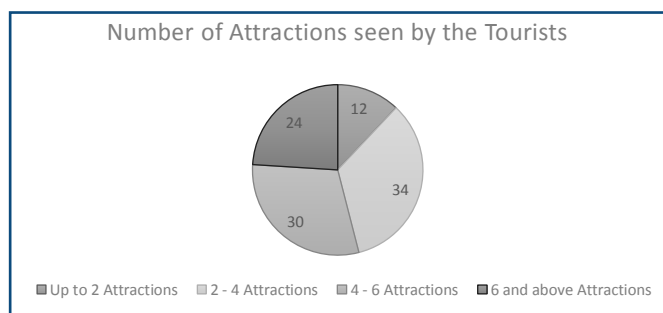


Fig. 7: Number of Attractions Seen by the Tourists

The information classified in Fig. 7 makes it clear that high as 34 percent of the tourists saw 2-4 attractions, 30 percent visited 4-6 attractions, 24 percent more than 6 attractions and remaining 12 percent saw up to 2 attractions only. It means maximum tourists visited Buddhist circuit used to see 2-4 attractions at particular destination keeping the availability of time with them.

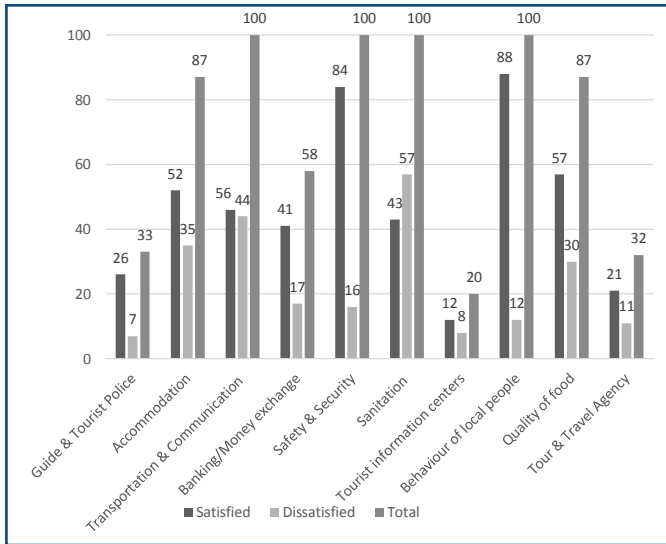


Fig. 8: Experiences & Response of Tourists

It is quite clear from the Fig. 8 that out of 33 tourists who sought the services and support of Guide and Tourist Police, more than 79 percent got satisfactions out of their services whereas remaining were dissatisfied. Similarly 87 percent tourist respondents who stayed in hotel, bungalow, and lodges, other than the houses of relatives and friends, 52 percent got satisfaction out of accommodation services and remaining 35 percent were dissatisfied with it. Accordingly all the tourists who availed the services of transportation, 56 percent got satisfaction out of transportation services and remaining 44 percent were dissatisfied with it. Similarly 58 tourists who used the services of Banking and money exchange, 41 percent got satisfaction out of banking and money exchange services and remaining 17 percent were dissatisfied with it. Accordingly out of all the interviewed tourists, 84 percent showed satisfaction on safety and security provisions whereas remaining 16 percent got dissatisfied on it. Similarly the interviewed tourists were asked about their satisfaction on the sanitation in Buddhist Circuit destinations, 43 percent were satisfied from sanitation of in and outside the places of visited attractions and rest 57 percent got dissatisfied on it. Another 20 tourists who sought the tourist information centers guidance for getting any information, 60 percent of them got satisfied from the information received from tourist information centers and other 40 percent were dissatisfied by the services of Information Centers.

The Fig. 8 also clears that out of all the tourists who observed and faced the behavior of local people, 88

percent tourists were satisfied out of behavior of the local people and remaining 12 percent got dissatisfaction. Another 87 percent tourists who used to eat the local food outside in available hotel and restaurants, 57 percent were satisfied out of the available food at the Buddhist Circuit destination and remaining 30 percent were dissatisfied. Finally, it is also clear from the table 8 that 32 tourists who obtained the services of tour and travel agency, 66 percent got satisfaction and remaining 34 percent were disappointed from the services of tour & travel companies.

Conclusion

On the basis of various facts and figures disclosed and discussed above, it is clear that India is one of the World's great reservoirs of history, cultures, philosophies and religions. Global interest to visit and experience these assets puts India amongst the most desired destinations for tourists and pilgrims. Since the India is the birth place of Buddhism religion and all the important Buddhist tourist destinations are situated in this country. The Buddhist Circuit turns to become an important pilgrimage destination for the Buddhists as well as other travelers interested in history, culture, religion etc.

The findings reveal that people with different social profiles i.e. age, sex, religions, place of birth, living in India and Abroad motivated by several factors such as religious, leisure pleasure, knowledge building and other academic purposes, according to the availability of time varying from 1-5 and above days with them the visiting Buddhist Circuit destinations.

It is further noted that the highest 87 percent tourist respondents who stayed in hotel, bungalow, and lodges, 52 percent got satisfaction out of accommodation services. Accordingly all the tourists who availed the services of transportation, 56 percent got satisfaction out of transportation services. Similarly 58 tourists who used the services of Banking and money exchange, 41 percent got satisfaction out of banking and money exchange services. Accordingly out of all the interviewed tourists, 84 percent showed satisfaction on safety and security provisions, whereas remaining 16 percent got dissatisfied with it. Another 43 percent were satisfied from sanitation of in and outside the places of visited attractions and rest 57 percent got dissatisfied on it. Another 20 tourists who sought the information from the tourist information centers guidance for getting any information, more than

60 percent of them got satisfied from the information received from them.

Accordingly the tourists who observed and faced the behavior of local people, 88 percent tourists were satisfied out of behavior of the local people, another 87 percent tourists who used to eat the local food in available hotels and restaurants, 57 percent were satisfied out of the available food at the Buddhist Circuit destinations and remaining 30 percent were dissatisfied.

However, the majority of the tourists desired to advance the available services qualitatively at par with their demands by the Govt., people or PPP model.

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