

EXPERIENTIAL TOURISM: UNDERSTANDING TOURISM TRENDS TODAY TO PREPARE FOR TOMORROW

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Abstract

This paper explores the possibilities of experiential tourism in the context of Kerala tourism, by comparing the existing tourism initiatives in the state. The concept of experiential tourism has caught attention. Yet, what it means in practice is not always clear. Common phrasing and terminologies such as “Experience”, “Participation” and “Alternative” have been used interchangeably to describe these industry paradigms. This paper examines and discusses the existing practices and future potentials in terms of experiential tourism.

Introduction

Experiential tourism is “...creating experiences that engage visitors in a series of memorable activities, revealed over a period of time, that are inherently personal, engage the senses, and makes connections on an emotional, physical, spiritual, or intellectual level.”

In June 2001, the phrase, “experiential tourism,” was used to describe a “rapidly emerging trend” in a tourism industry report in Australia. The report distinguished the ‘new’ tourism of the 1990s from ‘mass’ tourism of the 1980s. This decade of the 1990s “witnessed the evolution of a more experience-based domestic traveler,” the report continued, especially with respect to self-drive visitors and to a lesser extent, organized tours. Through the late 1990s and into the new millennium, then, “experiential tourism” has begun to appear regularly in tourism practitioner literature around the world.

Simultaneously, in the United States, the work of Pine and Gilmore [7, 8, 9] on “The Experience Economy” was permeating many facets of the service industry, including entertainment attractions, hospitality venues and customer services of all kinds.

Here is a useful quote from their recent work:

“And don’t stop at just one experience - you should create a series of related experiences that flow one from another, creating demand up and down at every level, both generating new forms of revenue and driving sales of whatever you currently offer. In other words: Create a rich portfolio of experiences.”

Richard Florida, in writing about what he calls the “creative class,” estimates that this group has 38 million members, constitutes more than 30 percent of the U.S. workforce, and profoundly influences work and lifestyle issues. He defines this class as those whose economic function is to create new ideas, new technology, and new creative content. In

general, this group shares common characteristics, such as creativity, individuality, diversity, and merit. He then goes on to say that this “creative class” of people “prefers active, authentic, and participatory experiences which they can have a hand in structuring.”

Statement of the Problem

The emphasis in tourism development is changing from quantity to quality. Mass tourism is no longer considered an attractive long time option. The concern for quality focuses on issues such as maintaining an area’s intrinsic appeal, promoting tourism projects at a scale that is suitable and appropriate to an area, and having respect for carrying capacity levels, the way of life, and the cultural traditions of the host community. With the emphasis shifting to quality, the local community must draw more on the potential of the local human resources base if it is to generate the conditions for an ecologically balanced. The first problem to be addressed in this research is that how experiential tourism is different from mass tourism. In addition to the first problem is experiential tourism is tourism product like any other alternative one.

Purpose of inquiry and Inquiry questions

This conceptual paper intended to identify and understand the factors that affects tourism in general and particularly in experiential tourism and its future prospects. Therefore, the inquiry questions for this paper are:

How will you differentiate experiential tourism with mass tourism?

What are the future prospective factors for the development of experiential tourism?

The answer to the inquiry questions will be based on an extended review and analysis of literature.

Significance of Inquiry

This conceptual paper is significant because it will explore a number of factors that affect tourism and its future prospects. Kerala has emerged as one of the prime tourism destinations on the national and international map and is considered as the tourism trendsetter in the country. The availability of plenty of natural resources, skilled manpower, supportive entrepreneurial community, strong local-self-governments, civil society organizations, multitude of micro enterprises, streams of professionals and academicians, responsible media and responsive tourism industry, provide the state an ideal setting to implement and practice 'Experiential Tourism. This paper will examine those factors and make recommendations for future research

Experiential Tourism (Theoretical View)

Postmodern and Cultural approach to understand the new Tourist /Consumer

Consumer society has changed over the past decades due to postmodernism, which has contributed to the emergence of a tourist who has new expectations of products and services. the emergence of a postmodern society and theories of postmodernism such as the Consumer Culture Theory (CCT), which offer a conceptual framework for defining the main characteristics of the new tourist/consumer and postmodernism in tourism studies

Today's consumer society is changing dramatically. New consumption paradoxes and trends related to the omnipresence of digital equipment and the frequent use of new technologies represent an important part of everyday practices. This has influenced the shift in market segmentation from market logic to a consumer-centric approach by taking into account different consumption aspects such as: sociocultural, ideological, symbolic and experiential dimensions.

According to Brown (2006, 1995), postmodernism in its varied manifestations is not a marketing concept but a critique of the dominant ideas and the mainstream research in consumption Furthermore, postmodernism is a pan-disciplinary movement that has marked different disciplines such as anthropology, cultural studies, sociology, philosophy, archaeology, geography, theology, etc

Related studies

- 2004 Wisconsin Governor's Conference on Tourism, Ted Eubanks defined "experiential tourism" as something that attracts people to places and markets to merchandise. He said that experiential tourism is everything visitors touch, feel, see and do, and, people are raving experiential tourism now more than ever.
- 2006 Dr. Sasithara, director general, officer of tourism development, ministry of tourism and sports, Thailand, discussing the sustainable development of tourism, notes that marketing promotion related to experiential tourism gives importance.
- Experiential Tourism Standards: The Perceptions of Rural Tourism Providers, William L. Smith, Emporia State University 2011.
- Experiential Tourism around the World and at Home: Definitions and Standards ,William L. Smith,Emporia State University

Experiential Tourism around the World

Experiential tourism has become the current term that encompasses a variety of tourism and traveler categories, including the following: cultural tourism, ecotourism, educational travel, experimental tourism, heritage tourism, nature tourism,... - where activities are environmentally sensitive, displaying respect for the culture of the host area and looking to experience and learn rather than merely stand back and watch. Experiential tourism involves active participation, involvement, even immersion.

Standards for Experiential Tourism

This list is in the form of objective sentences. Each can be a consideration for further research.

1. People create meaning through direct experience.
2. The experience includes the people met, the places visited, the activities participated in and the memories created.
3. The experience includes pre-departure trip planning and post-trip follow-up.
4. Experiential tourism draws people into local nature, culture and history.
5. Experiential tourism is low impact, low volume, and high yield.
6. Experiential tourism is very personal, unique and individual for each visitor.
7. Quality, memorable visitor experiences are a shared outcome between the visitor and the experience provider.
8. Experiential tourism opportunities allow for personal growth and reflect the values and interests of the individual visitor.
9. Experiential tourism provides diverse experiences that match the visitor's interests and provide a sense of personal accomplishment, thereby creating their own unique memories.
10. The desired outcome of experiential tourism is to achieve a complete participatory experience that provides new knowledge and authentic experiences.
11. Experiential tourism opportunities encourage the meeting and coming together of different cultures, their problems and potential.
12. Cultural elements are shared in an atmosphere of traditional ways of life.
13. Experiential tourism shows rather than describes.
14. Experiential tourism opportunities expand personal horizons.
15. Experiential tourism opportunities should provide personal enrichment, enlightenment, stimulation, and engagement as motivators.
16. Experiential tourism attracts people to places.
17. Experiential tourism attracts markets to merchandise.
18. Experiential tourism engages all five senses.
19. Experiential tourism opportunities include learning a new skill or engaging in a new activity.
20. Experiential tourism includes "the story of the place."

Experiential Tourism in India and Kerala

India as a whole is developing as a choice tourist destination because of its uniqueness in many areas like heritage, history, culture, flora and fauna, natural attractions and the very people of the country. India has set an objective of promoting tourism and to double the tourist inflow during this planned period. Many measures are taken by the ministry of tourism, Government of India supportive of inbound tourism.

South India also is benefited by all these measures initiated nationally. It is a self-contained destination region with good connectivity. It has so many attractions unique in nature. It has beaches, backwaters, wildlife, cultural sites, history, heritage, art, plantations, hill stations, vibrant cities and towns, and serene villages. South India is ideal for cruise tourism as it has good ports on the eastern and western sides. Kerala Tourism has always been in the forefront promoting tourism in the state from the 90's. The brand 'Gods Own Country' is well established as a popular destination brand.

Success of Kerala Tourism is primarily because there is a willing government that understands the need for developing tourism in the state and a very active and vibrant private sector tourism industry operating in the state. There are clear policies pronounced by the government namely 'Kerala Tourism Policy' as to how the tourism in the state has to be developed. There is a great amount of interactions and interfacing between the government and the private sector. Kerala is a pioneering state that advocated and implemented responsible tourism, which is an absolute sustainable model of tourism. The natural attraction of the state, good weather, educated public, high literacy rates, resorts, hotels and other facilities developed across the state are components for the growth of tourism in the state.

Research Observations & Findings

- i) Paradigm shift: Destination tourism to Consumer based Tourism
- ii) Global movement toward experiential learning
- iii) There is considerable concern over Length of stay

Initiatives Required for growth of experiential tourism

1. Place infrastructure and landscapes are to be improved, such as building more toilets and rest areas, information centers with telephone/internet services, ATM machines, post offices, roads, direction signs as well as boards telling the history of the communities or products, parking areas with shuttle vehicles (may be carts or bicycles) from the parking areas to tourism sites.
2. Products and services are to be diversified and elevated standards such as demonstrating producing process, folk cultural performance, delivery services, massage and much more.
3. Human resources are to be developed such as increasing skills in working, language, product design, work safety, providing services, administration in finance, marketing, environment.
4. Planning and management, systematic planning, clear targets and indicators, integrated implementation among governmental, nongovernmental and local authorities should be developed.

5. Presentation legends of villages and products are to be presented, displaying product designs and packaging, in an atmosphere of traditional ways of life.
6. Promotion marketing such as public relations on tourism sites, promotion to attract tourists to purchase more through travel agents or tourists themselves or even through advertisement.

Future Potential

Our focus would be to further develop and promote niche products like Rural Tourism, Wellness and Medical Tourism, Cruise Tourism, Adventure and Wildlife Tourism, Film Tourism, Sports Tourism and MICE Tourism, Nature tourism, Resource-based tourism, Adventure tourism, Heritage tourism, Eco tourism.

Conclusion

Experiential tourism is an outgrowth of a global movement toward experiential learning, where people create meaning through direct experience. Experiential tourism is also tied to the evolution of mass customization and the experience economy. For the tourist, the experience includes, among other aspects, the people one meets, the places they visit, the accommodations where they stay, activities participated in and the memories created. Experiential tourism encourages visitors to participate and promotes activities that draw people into communities, cultures, and the outdoors. Our effort should be to give and promote experiential tourism and show case true India. The visitors to India should be compelled to come again and again and revisit the experience because of its rich diversity.

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