Chapter 12

Tourism Destination Competitiveness of India and China: International Tourists’ Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

China and India are the two world’s most populous Asian countries. Together they constitute about 40% of the total global population. Both the Asian countries have remarkable similarities. India and China boast of having a very ancient and rich civilization and they have a strong and growing economy. For developing countries like India and China tourism presents a wonderful opportunity to earn much needed foreign exchange. Compared to China, the ancient and unique Indian culture is still very much alive. In spite of all these attractions and ethnic charm, tourism industry in India is still underdeveloped in contrast to many other neighboring countries. Tourism in India is still in a stage of infancy. China has emerged much ahead of India in terms of tourist arrivals. China has been successfully tapping its rich tourism potential. China is the 3rd most frequented country of the world after France and U.S.A. This paper has tried to explore the reasons of tourists’ preference of China over India by taking into cognizance varied experiences and perceptions of tourists in both the countries and comparing them. A total number of 180 comments of 60 foreign travelers who visited China and India respectively and posted comments on www.virtualtourist.com were studied. It emerged from the study that India and China both the countries thrive on culture and history. People are intrigued by Indian and Chinese philosophies. Although the flying distance between the two countries is no more than eight hours, foreign tourists prefer to visit China over India as India carries a negative image among foreign tourists in terms of hygiene, safety, and infrastructure.
INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a growing industry worldwide. Europe received the maximum international tourist arrival in the year 2013 (52%), followed by Asia and Pacific (23%) (UNWTO). Europe is a continent which is famous for its natural beauty, ancient history, culture and rich heritage. These European attractions draw millions of tourists to this continent. Asia and Pacific are the next sought after regions by tourists. World Travel and Tourism Council has named India and China as the fastest growing tourism industry in the next 10-15 years. The Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report 2007 highlighted the uniqueness of India as a tourist destination. According to WTTC India is a country that is shrouded in mystery. India has competitive advantage over other countries because of her culture, climate, diversity and hospitality. China and India are the two world’s most populous Asian countries. Together they constitute about 40% of the total global population. Both the Asian countries have remarkable similarities. India and China boast of having a very ancient and rich civilization and they have a strong and growing economy. For developing countries like India and China tourism presents a wonderful opportunity to earn much needed foreign exchange. Tourism can prove to be a panacea for many problems that India has to face if tourism is promoted and developed in a proper manner.

Bhatia (2002) has described India as an ancient civilization. He has explained at length the various motivational factors that inspire tourists to visit India. Compared to China, the ancient and unique Indian culture is still very much alive. In spite of all these attractions and ethnic charm, tourism industry in India is still underdeveloped in contrast to many other neighboring countries. Tourism in India is still in a stage of infancy. China has emerged much ahead of India in terms of tourist arrivals. China has been successfully tapping its rich tourism potential. China is the 4th most frequented country of the world after France and U.S.A. China received about 55.7 million tourists in the year 2013 (UNWTO). Incredible India campaign launched in 2002 by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India was appreciated worldwide but till this date India presents a grim picture in the global tourism scenario. To sustain growth of tourism India requires adequate infrastructure. The country received a meager 6.97 million foreign tourists last year (Ministry of Tourism, Government of India).

Many reasons for this can be cited. Images associated with these countries can be one of the major determinants as well as deterrents to visit these destinations. Tourists generally have images of a tourist destination prior to their actual visit. These images are either based on the knowledge that the tourists acquire about the destination (cognitive component) or their own feelings and attachment with the destination (affective component). The cognitive and affective components together influence the future intentions or behavior of the tourist towards a destination (conative component). Inadequate infrastructure can be another major deterrent to visit India besides many other reasons.

Perceptions or image of a tourist destination in the minds of prospective tourists affect their decision making while preferring one destination over other. (Richardson & Crompton, 1988; Woodside & Lyonski, 1989). Uniqueness of tourism product is that unlike other manufactured goods tourist destination products cannot be viewed or tested prior to purchase (Gartner, 1993).

Destinations usually have images associated with them. India and China both the countries have somewhat similar images in terms of being very populous countries. Both the countries are developing economies and both these countries face hygiene problems. India has been projected as an unsafe destination by foreign media, especially for women tourists. Many countries have already issued advisories to their citizens especially female travellers against travel to India. Tourism involves travelling to unknown destinations. Fear of foreign always looms large in the minds of prospective travelers, therefore travel