Chapter 18

The Travel Trade Business in Garhwal Himalaya of India: Opportunities and Challenges

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ABSTRACT

The changing travel attitude of globetrotters and their travel demand amid diverse, fragmented travel trade businesses is shaping each approach towards the business dramatically. Entrepreneurs of the trade are undoubtedly facing a different wind of change in every now and then. The Himalayan state of Uttarakhand is no different from the rest. Entrepreneurs of the state are grappling for their survival amid the cut throat competition and unpredictable environment. The deductive findings of this piece of research address challenges and opportunities confronted by travel trade entrepreneurs of Garhwal region of the state Uttarakhand. The thrust area of the discussion has also brought forth the policy related issues into the discourse.

INTRODUCTION

For majority of the developing countries tourism is considered as one of the most promising development opportunity which has the potential to foster economic growth and participation in the global economy. For some developing nations, it may in fact be the only feasible way of invigorating development. Tourism development and its potential benefits to the local are increasingly viewed as a catalyst of change. The prospective benefits of tourism such as increased income, economic diversification, employment generation, foreign exchange earnings and social bonding among the guests and hosts strengthens socio-economic foundation of the destination. Since the past half century, tourism has developed into one of the world’s most dominant socio-economic force. As ever larger numbers of people have attained the capability, means and freedom to travel, both the scale and scope of tourism have grown relentlessly.

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According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization report 25 million international tourist arrivals were recorded globally in 1950, which reached a record 1133 million by 2014. Moreover, if the statistics of domestic tourism is included, the total global volume of tourist trips is estimated to be between six and ten times higher than that figure. Tourism contributes to 9% world Gross Domestic Product (GDP), 1 in 11 jobs and 6% of total world’s export (UNWTO, 2014). Driven by a convergence of socio-economic and technological advancements, the proliferation of travel business continues worldwide. Today, travelers have a myriad of choices in terms of transportation, accommodation, activity, and destination which has simultaneously resulted in the growing demand for travel related products and services making the travel industry ever more competitive. However, of particular relevance to developing nations, the characteristics of tourism demand has also altered and evolved over the past two decades. Although the regular package tour remains the most sought after form of tourism, at least among tourists from the developed Western world, there has been a dramatic growth in demand for the more individualistic, active/participatory forms of tourism providing a broader or more fulfilling experience. An example of this is the growth in demand for cultural tourism, adventure tourism, heritage tourism, and ecotourism and, more generally, expansion of long-haul tourism. This, in turn, suggests that tourists have become more experienced, discerning and quality-conscious, and more adventurous in the practice of consuming tourism experiences.

In Uttarakhand state of India, especially Garhwal region enjoys ‘tourism magnetism’ par-excellence and has the potential to attract more or less all major interest groups of tourists ranging from pilgrimage, leisure, mountaineers, trekkers, wild life lovers, to history, art and culture lovers. This area is endowed with a rich cultural heritage and natural beauty. In order to make tourism as an all season as well as purpose activity in the state of Uttarakhand, it is necessary to develop as well as promote adventure tourism like river rafting & skiing, sport tourism, wild life tourism, in addition to pilgrimage tourism. The efforts should also be made to combine and encourage spiritual tourism in the form of yoga; meditation etc along with religious/pilgrimage tourism. A great number of foreign tourists visit Rishikesh for the purpose of yoga and meditation. This kind of activity should be promoted with much interest among domestic tourists alike foreign tourists so as to have unique experience for domestic tourists. Rural tourism, eco-tourism, wildlife tourism, heritage tourism, adventure tourism, conference and convention tourism alongside pilgrimage tourism must arguably pay long term dividends. For this travel agents play a major role. Planning a vacation or a business trip is a difficult and a time consuming task. Travelers therefore, seek the assistance of the travel agents. Travel agents make the best possible travel arrangements, in accordance with the traveler’s preference, budget and other requirements. Hence travel trade business both domestic and international is flourishing and has vast potential in Uttarakhand especially in Haridwar, Rishikesh and Dehradun.

Travel service providers in the study area are engaged in a limited type of business. Besides railway ticketing, most of them provide services for domestic tours, hotel bookings and automobile services or coach services. Other value-added services are not as popular, mostly due to lack of innovative product development and lack of knowledge or skill of the service providers. When buying travel there are a number of distribution channels available to consumers. They are increasingly researching and booking their trips using a combination of online and traditional distribution options. There has been an increase in the usage of the Internet to research and gather information for travel - a trend that is expected to continue. The distribution of travel product in Garhwal region of Uttarakhand is fragmented and predominantly retail based. There are a few national companies; however most of the agents are small, independent businesses. Large travel agencies take reservations from consumers through their own retail networks as...

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