Adoption and Use of ICT in Indian Tourism: Interventions for the top tourist destination of India

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Overview of ICT in Tourism:

Travel and tourism has not only become one of the world's largest industry but also grows consistently every year. Between 1990 and 2000, tourist arrivals worldwide grew at an average rate of 4-3 percent per annum. Travel and tourism represent approximately 11% of the worldwide GDP, according to the World Travel & Tourism Council. World Tourism Organization predicts one billion international arrivals in the year 2010 and has forecasted that by 2020, international tourist arrivals to Asia and Pacific region would experience over 400 percent growth from 105 million in 2000 to 438 million in 2020.

As the world is being ushered into the information age, adoption of the information and communication technology (ICT) is rapidly increasing. Internet has transformed the world into a global village that can be navigated at the click of a mouse. It provides potential tourists with immediate access to textual and visual conformation on destinations throughout the world. The Internet has also become an essential tool in business to business (B2B) and business to consumer (B2C) transactions, the distribution of products, networking of business partners, and is an instantaneous means of accessing knowledge on all kinds of subjects including travel and tourism information. The Internet can be accessed through mobile telephones, cable-television, fixed telephones using traditional personal computers and laptops. Information is readily available 24/7 and the resulting cost transparency enables consumers to make more informed choices (Sinha, 2000).

This ease of access and depth of information has stimulated the emergence of a new breed of travel consumers who are independent and prefer to search for holidays themselves online, rather than through travel agents. And the majority of the people connected to the Internet happen to be from the world's top three tourism spending markets - Germany, USA and UK. The Internet is already the primary source of tourist destination information in these major markets. It has outpaced traditional sources of information on tourist destinations within the short period of its existence. Its audiovisual presentation of information on destinations outdoes the glossiest and most colorful print, and the quality of the presentation plays a decisive role in the end-consumer's choice of one destination over another.

Internet also offers tourism destination and businesses the means to make information and booking facilities available to millions of consumers around the world at a relatively low cost, while at the same time enabling them to cut down drastically on amounts invested in the production and distribution of promotional materials. Travel and tourism are fast becoming the largest category of products sold on the Internet, which must therefore be seen as the new marketing battlefronts for tourism destinations in Asia-Pacific. Apart from the Internet, technological advances gave rise to other electronic distribution platforms such as interactive satellite television and mobile devices. The expected proliferation of satellite TV and m-commerce will gradually intensify competition among intermediaries who will have to reengineer their business processes and evolve new business models in order to survive and remain competitive (Buhalis & Licata, 2002)

It is therefore, in the best interest of the Asia-Pacific region to keep abreast with time and step up its use of ICT to satisfy the thirst for instantaneous tourism information on destinations.

The stage is now set for national, regional, local tourist organizations, intermediaries, and administration and policy framing bodies in the Asia-Pacific region to rise to the challenge and understand, adopt and use the full potential of ICT to satisfy the thirst for instantaneous tourism information on destinations by not only marketing various tourism products and destinations to potential tourists, but also monitor and build a relationship with the tourists in the entire tourist life cycle.

Adoption and Use of ICT in Indian Tourism

Prior to 1995, when internet access wasn't readily readily available in India, a potential inbound tourist (from abroad), had to depend on printed brochures from Indian embassies abroad, a few published guides (e.g., Lonely Planet) and feedback from those tourists who had visited India before. Domestic tourists used to decide their travel itineraries largely based on tourism related articles published in select, local language, monthly magazines during vacation period (i.e., in summer and winter). Sparingly, brochures available at state tourism department offices and feedback from relatives, or presence of some relatives nearer to the tourist destinations, paved the way for a short trip to the relatives alongwith tourism objective getting fulfilled.

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Internet access came to India in August 1995, courtesy VSNL. Though one intuitively understood its importance, internet access was minimally used. A lack of ICT knowledge and a general fear of technology kept people away from its adoption. But, lately, with an increase in broadband internet penetration in Indian homes, people are getting use to visiting websites to look for information.

Most of the government departments (including tourism departments) took about five years, to become computer savvy and be able to host, and, more importantly, maintain their departmental websites. The ministry of tourism annual report 2007-08, under its two IT initiatives (page 34), (i) has provided computers to its officers up to the level of Asstt. Directors, internet and email access and project monitoring systems to officers for quick disposal of information and other works, and (ii) providing quality tourist information, facilitation and services to the tourists, tourism promotional agencies, media and others in India and abroad. Currently, http://www.incredibleindia.org serves as the main promotional portal of the Ministry of Tourism, and http://tourism.gov.in/ (or http://www.tourism.nic.in/) provides all the organizational activities/ policies of the Ministry of Tourism. Annexure-1 provides 10-year trend for Indian Tourism.

As of 12th Feb, 2007, the various state and UT tourism internet website links are given in Table-1 below (http://tourism.gov.in/rel_links/statlinks.htm)

Looking at the Table 2 we find that considering the foreign exchange collection as the parameter, Agra is the most prominent tourist destination of India. This gives us a fair idea of the tourism scenario of India from an economic perspective.

AGRA District Profile[1]:
Origin and Development

Agra is the city of the inimitable Taj Mahal. The story of Agra begins much earlier then the Taj, However it finds mention in the epic Mahabharata when it was called Agrabana are Paradise. Ptolemy, the famous second century A.D. geographer, marked it on his map of the world as Agra. Tradition and legend ascribe the present city of Raja Badal Singh (around 1475 A.D.) whose Fort, Badalgarh, Stood on or near the site of the present Fort. However, the 12th century A.D. persian poet Salman, too, Speaks of a desperate assault on the fortress of Agra, then held by one King Jaipal, by Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni.

Economy

Primarily the Economy of the Agra district is agriculture based while the economy base of Agra city is Small Scale Industries, Commerce and Trade. Major crops are Wheat, Paddy, Bajra, Mustard, Potato etc. About 40% of the total economy of Agra depend on industry (Directly or Indirectly). Over 7200 Small Scale Industrial Units are spared all over the district. Agra city is famous for the Leather Goods, Handicrafts, Zari Zardozi, Marvel and Stone carving & inlay work. Agra is also welknown for eats sweets (PETHA) and Snacks (DALMOTH AND GAJAK).

Main Industries of District Agra

There are 12 units in the district those comes under major & medium scale industries.

1. Electrical Goods
2. Fans
3. Pipes
4. C.I. Casting
5. Floor
6. Leather Goods and Shoes
7. Steel Rolling
8. Packing
9. Milk Products

[1]Source: agra.nic.in (April 13, 2008)

Table 1.

STATE & UT TOURISM LINKS: http://tourism.gov.in/rel_links/statlinks.htm

Last Updated On 12 February 2007

State / UT Tourism	http://indiaimage.nic.in/tourism.htm
Andaman and Nicobar Islands	http://andaman.nic.in/
AP Tourism	http://www.aptourism.com/
	http://www.andhrapradesh.com
	http://www.apinfrastructure.com
Arunachal Pradesh	http://www.arunachaltourism.com/
	http://arunachalpradesh.nic.in
Assam	http://assamgovt.nic.in/
Bihar	http://bihar.nic.in/
	http://www.nic.in/ptdc/
Chhattisgarh	http://cgtourism.nic.in/
Chandigarh	http://www.citcochandigarh.com/helpline/
New Delhi	http://delhitourism.nic.in/
Goa	www.goacom.com
	http://goagovt.nic.in
	http://goatourism.nic.in
	http://www.goatrip.com
	http://www.goahub.com/goa/travel_guide
	http://ruralbazargoa.nic.in
	http://goamuseum.nic.in
Gujarat	http://www.gujarattourism.com/
Haryana	http://www.nic.in/htc/
Himachal Pradesh	http://www.hptdc.nic.in/
Jammu and Kashmir	http://www.jktourism.org/
Jharkhand	http://www.jharkhand.nic.in/tourism/tour.htm
Karnataka	http://kstdc.nic.in/
Kerala Tourism	http://www.keralatourism.org
Lakshwadeep	http://lakshadweep.nic.in/lakislscvr.htm
Madhya Pradesh Tourism	http://www.mptourism.com/
Maharashtra	http://www.maharashtra.gov.in
	www.mumbainet.com
Manipur	http://manipur.nic.in/
Meghalaya	http://meghalaya.nic.in
	www.meghalayatourism.com
Mizoram	http://mizotourism.nic.in/
Nagaland	http://www.nagalandtourism.com/
Orissa	http://www.orissa-tourism.com/
Pondicherry	http://www.tourisminpondicherry.com
Punjab	http://ptdc.nic.in/
Rajasthan	http://www.rajgovt.org
	http://www.rajasthantourism.gov.in
Sikkim	http://sikkim.nic.ind
	http://www.sikkimtourism.org
Tamil Nadu	http://www.tamilnadutourism.org/
	http://www.tidco.com
Tripura	http://tripura.nic.in
Uttar Pradesh	http://www.up-tourism.com/
Uttaranchal	http://www.gmvnl.com/
West Bengal	http://www.wbtourism.com/
Daman and Diu	http://www.damantourism.com/
	http://www.diutourism.com/
Dadra - Nagar Haveli	http://www.silvassatourism.com/

Table 2. Circle-wise Revenue from Sale of Entry Tickets at Centrally Protected Ticketed Monuments in India (2002-2003 to 2004-2005)

Circle	Number of Ticketed Monuments	Revenue Earned During Each of the years (in Rupees)		
		2002-03	2003-04	2004-05
Agra	8	132192992	173609595	238314568
Aurangabad	16	29807617	29829344	164188749
Bangalore	7	8335861	11311428	15356834
Bhopal	10	10756139	23033785	24860947
Bhubaneswar	6	12178309	12070241	12826173
Chandigarh	4	565567	663416	347237
Chennai	8	22913849	13228390	17217470
Dharwad	6	7967615	8663324	9055013
Delhi	10	65390949	92745897	134754351
Guwahati	5	876587	695755	56675
Hyderabad	8	5411961	11367259	12870196
Jaipur	3	2816659	3764347	4789281
Kolkatta	2	2599360	2561795	2994905
Lucknow	4	2657243	2650466	2929303
Patna	9	8379397	7888158	13720565
Srinagar	4	82718	235831	210791
Thrissur	2	946429	1134699	1097724
Vadodara	6	1593000	1943000	2158000
Total	118	315472252	397396730	657748782

(Source: Indiastat.com)

Small Industries: In this category, 7200 units are working at Agra, those produces
1. Cotton and Textile
2. Wood Paper Products and Stationery
3. Leather Goods and Metal Products
4. Auto and Engine Parts
5. Electrical Goods etc.
6. Handicrafts Works

In Handicrafts, Zari Zardozi, Marvel, Stone carving and Inlay work, Carpets about 13000 people are working.

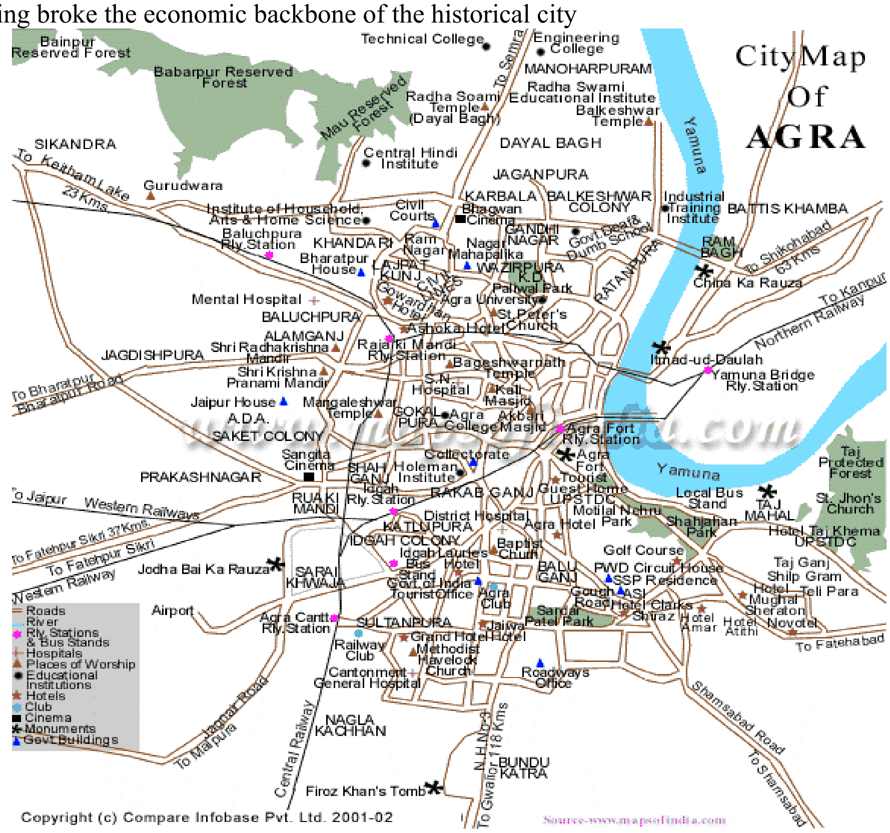
Shoes Industry

Above 1.5 Laks pairs of shoes per day manufactures in agra by the cottage, small scale and medium scale footwear units.There about 60 organised footwear units, 3000 tiny manufactureing units and about 30000 house holds artisans units. There are a large number of ancillary industries, supporting footwear industries in Agra. (About 20 small scale machinery manufacutes and 100 various kinds of footwear component manufactures). About 65% of total domestic requirement of shoes in india is supplied from Agra.
There are around 70 export units in Agra in which two golden cards holders and three silver card holders units. Total export turn over agra about Rs. 450 crore.

Monuments in Agra

Only city in the world to have three UNESCO recognised world heritage monuments (Complete list of 851 sites can be accessed at http://thesalmons.org/lynn/world.heritage.html). List of monuments include: TajMahal, Agra Fort, Fatehpur Sikri, Sikandra, Dayalbagh, Itmad- ud-daulah, as main monuments. Others include Chini ka Roza, Marium Tomb, Jama Masjid. Agra was at the centre of attention due to the landmark case which was initiated in the Supreme court by advocate M.C. Mehta. It is necessary to know the judgement to peep into the socio economic condition of the once famous city of Taj. Based on the (Taj Trapezium Case) India -- M.C. Mehta v. Union of India, WP 13381/1984 (1996.12.30) Writ Petition (C)

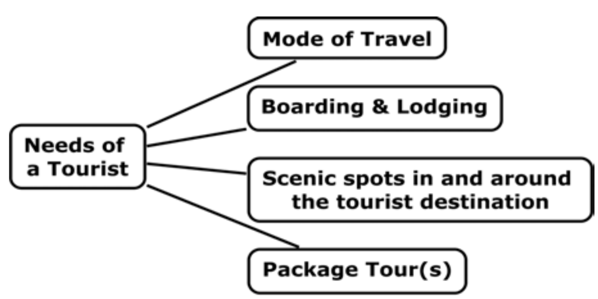
No. 13381 of 1984 by advocate, M.C. Mehta, and a historic judgement was passed by the Supreme Court on 30.12.1996. As per the court order hundreds of manufacturing units as well as the two power generation units were closed on the pretext of pollution causing damage to the Taj. This sudden closure which was preceded by the tragic impact of USSR disintegration on the prominent cottage industry of Agra i.e. shoe manufacturing broke the economic backbone of the historical city



Source: http://agra.nic.in/images/agra-city-map.gif

Classification and Needs of a Tourist

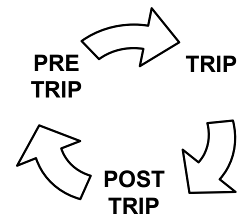
There are three kinds of tourists – inbound, domestic and outbound. Inbound tourists are those that visit India from foreign countries. During the year 2007, the number of inbound(foreign) tourist arrivals is estimated at about 5 million, which represents a growth of about 12% as compared to the corresponding figures for the previous year (Ministry of Tourism Annual Report 2007-08). Domestic tourists are the Indian residents who are vacationing during summer, winter or during other holidays, utilizing leave travel concession (LTC) or are self financed. The number of domestic tourist visits is estimated at 462 million in 2006, showing a growth of 17.8% as compared to the year 2005 (Ministry of Tourism Annual Report 2007-08). Outbound tourists are the resident Indian who opt to visit foreign countries. In this paper, we are focusing only on inbound and domestic tourists.



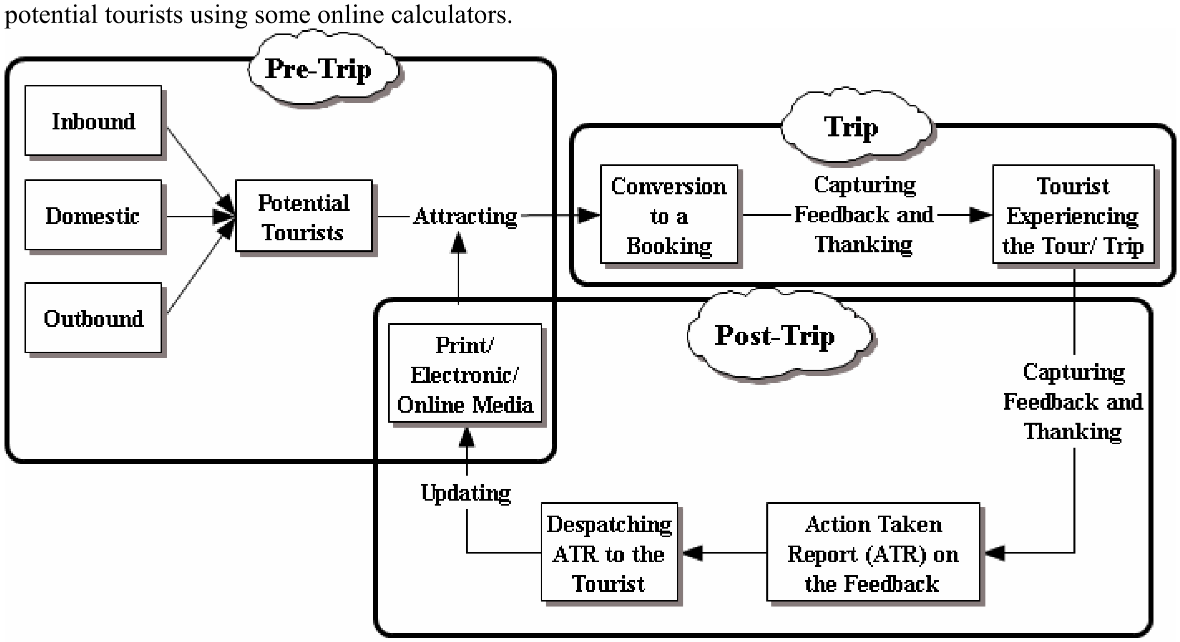
The number of inbound tourists peaks during October to March and reduces by half during April to September (Annexure-2). There has been an increase in domestic as well as outbound tourists which is a healthy trend, as the WTO data shows that countries, whose residents spend more on tourism (whether domestic or outbound), have also received more inbound tourists. The reason for this could be partially attributed to the familiarity with Indian people and customs that foreigners gain from Indian tourists visiting their countries. After their trips abroad, the experience of these outbound tourists, if captured, can help plan, improve, and promote better tourism facilities in India. In a way it conveys that with more experience one has of foreign lands, more and more people get interested in you if you are interested in knowing them.

A tourist needs to know the best mode of travel (road, rail, air or sea) to a destination. Suitable boarding and lodging are the next items on its agenda. There were 1437 hotels with 84327 rooms on the approved list of the Ministry of tourism upto December 2007. Break up of these hotels is given in Annexure-3. Thereafter, information on attractive tourist spots available in and around the destination hold its attention and then any package tours that provide the best value for money (or at least increase the perceived usefulness in the eyes of a prospective tourist)

5ICT interventions in the Tourist Life Cycle:
A tourist life cycle(see fig.) can be classified into three phases - pre-trip, trip and post-trip. Pre-trip (or planning) is the phase during which a potential tourist is considering tourism travel. In this planning phase, tourism intermediaries (travel agents, tour operators, hotels, airlines, etc.) play a vital part in forming the opinion of a potential tourist.



There are some similar pre-trip requirements for the three kinds of tourists (inbound, domestic and outbound). These include information about the destination, boarding/ lodging, mode of travel & package tour(s), advance payment mechanism and security concerns, etc. Additional pre-trip requirements specifically for inbound and outbound tourists, include documentation for visa, currency conversion issues, local travel synchronization with international travel, etc. During pre-trip, a potential tourist seeks reliable and current information on the tourism alternatives available. Information about mode of travel, budget trip prices, budget accommodation and its prices, distance of the accommodations from the tourist spots, availability of any package tour that may take care of the boarding/ lodging with additional local site seeing. Approximate costing of the proposed trip can be provided to potential tourists using some online calculators.



Tourist Life Cycle comprising pre-trip, trip and post-trip

The tourism departments/ organizations need to facilitate the tourists in meeting these requirements, which would help improve the tourism business in the country. The promotional portal of the Ministry of Tourism, www.incredibleindia.org, does not have an online financial payment gateway to book hotel accommodation, or air tickets. A potential tourist has to separately visit the airlines and hotel websites to make the reservations. For Agra, the city of Taj, a list of hotels is provided with phone numbers (most landlines), with no links to their respective websites, if any, nor any details about the type of accommodation, and indicative tariffs. Providing email ids would be more effective because of the time-zone differences across various countries. With a 6-13 hrs. time difference India and US/ UK (countries from where India gets the maximum number of tourists), it would be inconvenient for a US/UK national to make a phone call to these hotels for seeking reservations. However, a related website http://www.up-tourism.com, has an option to book hotel accommodation, with indicative room tariffs. Contact details (phone and email ids) of tourism officials who can be contacted in case a tourist needs clarification, should also be made available on line.

For inbound travelers, Indian embassies abroad keep updated printed brochures ready. A foreign national, seeking Indian visa, may be provided a tourism folder, containing the brochures detailing different tourism products and current offers.

All foreign travellers, using Indian airports in transit and flying on Indian Airlines/ Air India, may be optionally granted, on the spot, short-duration visas to visit a few nearby tourist places. For example, in-transit foreign air traveller at New Delhi airport, may be made aware about a short trip to Agra, and with other similar offers.

Once a potential tourist decides to visit India, the 'trip' phase begins. Once in a hotel, the tourist would begin visiting various sites in the destination city. The ticketing process and interaction with local populace be made as simplified as possible. A tourist may be provided with a smart/ credit/ debit card that would have all the details of the sites visited by the tourists, plus it also records the sequence of the visit plu it contains all details about the tourist. A tourist needs to be made aware of the common rules of the land while eating in restaurants and general civic sensibility.

During the last 48-72 hrs. of the trip, again hand-holding is needed. Checking out of hotels and reaching airports needs to be a pleasurable experience. Taking feedback of the trip is also important. Feedback forms needs to be carefully designed so that each aspect of the trip can be carefully captured. Providing feedback shouldn't become a chore for the tourist but the feedback should be captured at every possible point while the tourist is in his/ her trip.

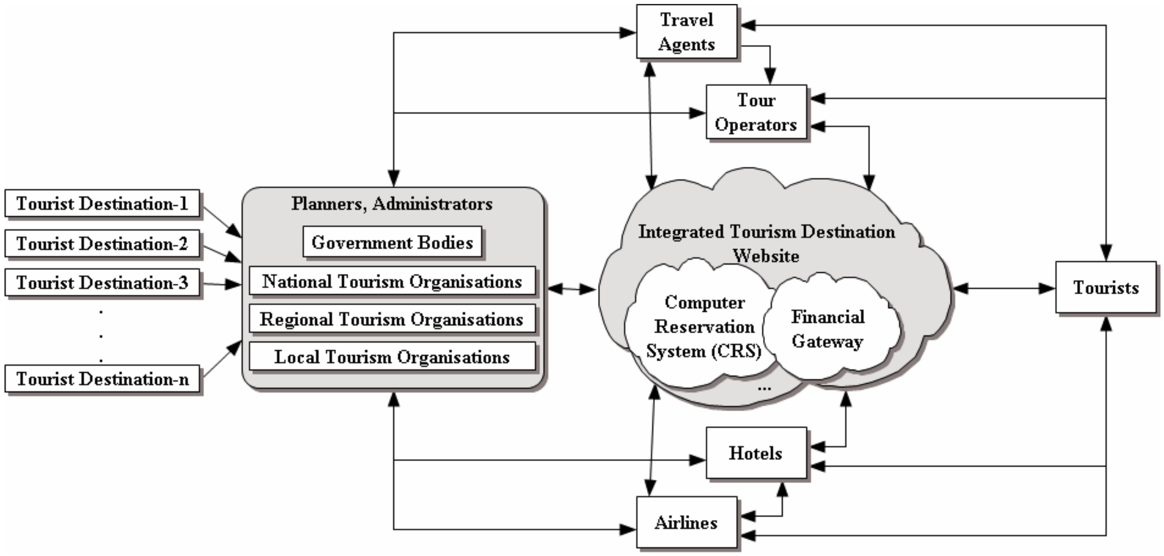
Post trip link with a tourist is very important for many reasons. Once the tourist leaves for his/her home country, after a few days, a feedback can be asked seeking constructive suggestions to improve the situation. The customer should be provided an ATR on the feedback provided by the customer. If the tourist is upset or angry over some issue, someone should sympathetically look into it and try to resolve it amicably.

Thereafter, the tourist should be kept informed (through emails, etc.) constantly about any new package deals, with schemes like discounts for repeat customers etc. This will make the tourist feel wanted and at home. This would increase the word-of-mouth-impacted tourists.

Tourism Value Chain:

The value chain model, since its conception by Porter (1985, 1990), has been extensively used by researchers to map the organizational and industry level linkages and networks and to analyse and describe where value resides at these two levels. It has been argued (Gunn, 1988; Gnoth, 2002) that the tourism product is a rather complex one and is directly associated with the idea of the holiday or vacation 'experience' (Ashworth & Voogd, 1994). Middleton and Clarke (2001:124-125) suggest that "from the standpoint of a potential customer considering any form of tourist visit, the product may be defined as a bundle or package of tangible and intangible components, based on activity at a destination. The package is perceived by the tourist as an experience, available at a price". The overall satisfaction of a tourist depends on the experience of the product (Weiermair, 2000) as well as on the experience from various intermediaries involved in the bundling, packaging and making the tourism product available to the tourist for purchase (Baker & Crompton, 2000). The full range of activities which are required to bring the tourism product from conception and production to the actual experience of the tourist can be defined as tourism value chain. It is a series of transfer activities from product supplier to final consumer, and is constituted by tour product supplier, travel agents and the final consumer.

The proposed tourism value chain is made up of tourist, an integrated tourism destination website (with a financial payment gateway and a global, distributed computer reservation system), tour operator(s)/ travel agent(s), hotel(s), airline(s), national tourism planners, administrators and tourist destinations. A tourist may choose to book a tourism product from any of the five intermediaries, viz., (1) travel agents, (2) tour operators, (3) online destination website, (4) hotel , or (5) airlines. Tour operators can be seen as tourism product aggregators, whereas travel agents act as information brokers, providing the final consumer with the relevant information and booking facilities. The integrated tourist destination website connects the tourist with other intermediaries, with many features such as querying online, online reservations, etc.



Proposed Tourism Value Chain

Conclusions

Tourism is a sunrise sector. Agra being the top tourist destination needs the adequate support to give the best experience to all the tourists, whether domestic or inbound (foreign). Inbound tourists' learning curve about India may be at a very nascent stage. Thus with the help of ICT interventions complete information can be given to the tourists at the pre trip, during trip as well as post trip phases. It will not only create awareness but also instill a positive feeling about India in general and Agra in particular. Post-trip, using ICT, a tourist can be helped to cherish his memories of the trip to Taj and apprised of the latest developments as well as tourism promotion schemes which are currently running. This may enable the tourist to become an advocate of Indian Tourism by promoting it by word of mouth. Overall, ICT interventions will bring in transparency in the system, make the system more swift and customer centric and will help in creating a positive image about AGRA as one of the top tourist destination of the world.

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Top

ANNEXURE-1

INDIA

KEY FACTS AT A GLANCE
THE 2008 TRAVEL & TOURISM ECONOMIC RESEARCH

2008 — 10-year trend

Gross Domestic Product (GDP)

6.1% The contribution of Travel & Tourism to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is expected to stay the same at 6.1% (INR2,859.9 bn or US$73.6 bn) in 2008 to 6.1% (INR9,141.1 bn or US$171.5 bn) by 2018.

Employment

6.4% The contribution of the Travel & Tourism Economy to employment is expected to rise from 30,491,000 jobs in 2008, 6.4% of total employment, or 1 in every 15.6 jobs to 39,615,000 jobs, 7.2% of total employment or 1 in every 13.8 jobs by 2018. ▲

Growth

7.9% Real GDP growth for the Travel & Tourism Economy is expected to be 7.9% in 2008 and to average 7.6% per annum over the coming 10 years. ▼

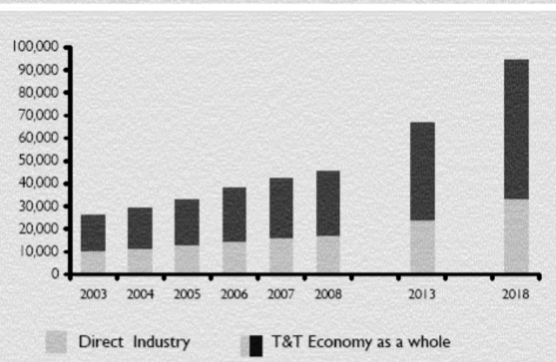
Exports

6.7% Export earnings from international visitors and tourism goods are expected to generate 6.7% of total exports (INR718.2 bn or US$18.5 bn) in 2008, growing (nominal terms) to INR2,750.2 bn or US$51.6 bn (4.4% of total) in 2018. ▼

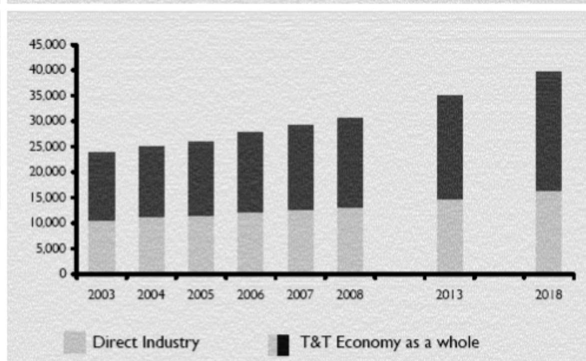
World ranking (out of 176 countries)

16	146	1
ABSOLUTE	RELATIVE	GROWTH
size	contribution to national economy	forecast

INDIA
Travel & Tourism Gross Domestic Product
(2000 constant US$ bn)



INDIA
Travel & Tourism Employment
('000 jobs)



THE WORLD TRAVEL & TOURISM COUNCIL (WTTC) IS THE BUSINESS LEADERS' FORUM FOR TRAVEL & TOURISM WORKING WITH GOVERNMENTS TO RAISE AWARENESS OF THE IMPORTANCE OF THE WORLD'S LARGEST GENERATOR OF WEALTH AND JOBS

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ANNEXURE 2

Foreign Tourist Arrivals in India during 2007 and Corresponding Figures for 2005 & 2006

Month	Foreign Tourist Arrivals			Percentage Change	
	2005	2006	2007@	2006/ 05	2007/ 06
January	385977	459489	532088	19.0	15.8
February	369844	439090	498806	18.7	13.6
March	352094	391009	444186	11.1	13.6
April	248416	309208	333945	24.5	8.0
May	225394	255008	267758	13.1	5.0
June	246970	278370	310104	12.7	11.4
July	307870	337332	377474	9.6	11.9
August	273856	304387	360089	11.1	18.3
September	257184	297891	325893	15.8	9.4
October	347757	391399	440715	12.5	12.6
November	423837	442413	510987	4.4	15.5
December	479411	541571	575148	13.0	6.2
Total	**3918610**	**4447167**	**4977193**	**13.5**	**11.9**

@ Provisional Estimates

(Source: Ministry of Tourism Annual Report 2007-08)

ANNEXURE 3

Star Category	No. of Hotels	No. of Rooms
5 Star Deluxe	100	21100
5 Star	85	10311
4 Star	116	7986
3 Star	482	22028
2 Star	204	6184
1 Star	54	2871
Heritage	78	2333
3 Star Apartment Hotel	2	110
4 Star Apartment Hotel	1	44
5 Star Apartment Hotel	1	100
5 Star Deluxe Apartment Hotel	2	259
5 Star Timeshare Resort	1	62
Silver B&B Establishment	81	216
Gold B&B Establishment	51	180
Guest House	1	40
To be classified	178	10503
Total	**1437**	**84327**

(Source: Ministry of Tourism Annual Report 2007-08)