

Himachal Tourism : A Swot Analysis

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Abstract

Himachal Pradesh is a land which is bestowed with natural grandeur at its best - picturesque locations, snow capped mountains, lush green valleys, a cool climate and hospitable people. It is indeed the very lap of nature. It is therefore a fact that Himachal Pradesh has immense tourism potential; a potential that it must leverage and sustain. Tourism has its benefits which Himachal Pradesh must cash on without getting affected by its shortcomings.

To leverage on this tourism potential, it is necessary for Himachal not only to sell itself but also analyse the needs, the perceptions, the preferences, the satisfaction of the customers that it can provide. Hence the study aims to analyse these very tourist responses with the help of a questionnaire.

The study revealed that although Himachal has unique natural offerings it is not able to cash upon them due to lack of various facilities. Most of tourists' expectations were met with but they depended on the presence of good necessities like amenities, food and water and proper infrastructural facilities like accommodation, transport, accessibility, etc which were found lacking in certain cases. A majority of the respondents believed that they would come again based on the fact that the natural beauty of Himachal draws them towards it but provided it develops the necessary facilities which may be lacking currently. The tourists believed that Himachal does have the potential of becoming one of the world's top tourist destinations, if it can overcome its deficiencies and market itself well so as to position itself uniquely in the minds of tourists.

It was therefore suggested that Himachal must develop its infrastructural facilities and promote its offerings in a sustainable manner. It must explore newer avenues in relation with nature and open up its unexplored areas.

Introduction

'Tourism: The organisation of holidays and services for tourists.'

– Oxford Dictionary.

Tourism revolves around novelty-seeking, and modern technology has made it talismanic for the tourist to seek out white virginity of the polar regions, to fly into space, and to discover the exoticism of the 'other'. Tourism results in expansion of the mind and adventure of the soul; it promotes peace and amity in this strife torn world; it is an exercise in deontology to conserve the resources; an environmental pilgrimage; and can also work for the benefit of the poor and the destitute. Tourism today offers a strange world of experiences that needs to be studied thoroughly.

"... Tourism is a basic and most desirable human activity deserving the praise and encouragement of all people and all Government."

This statement made at the XXI United Nations General Assembly in 1967, acknowledges the importance of the tourism industry. Tourism's contribution to the world economy is second only to that of oil and is set to better it in another few years. It is therefore a small wonder that many countries in the world are concentrating on the tourism sector to boost up their economies. It was after the second world war that tourism emerged as an industry pushed along by rapid advancements made in the field of communications and transport. This makes tourism the fastest growing industry worldwide. This "smoke-less" industry acts as a catalyst for socio-economic development and also encourages mutual understanding by bringing into its fold a large variety of activities and individuals which include trades,

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businesses, shopping, lodging, catering, transport arts and crafts, religion etc.

The tremendous positive impact created by this widely accepted and flourishing industry has stimulated various nations to channelise their efforts in developing their tourism industry and gear up to meet the ever escalating demand.

Contributions of Tourism Industry

- Economic development
- Infrastructure development
- Employment generation
- Community development
- Restoration of culture
- Environmental preservation
- Promotion of harmony and understanding

Need and Significance of the Study

Himachal Pradesh has immense tourist potential. It has got the natural beauty, the climate, etc. This potential has not been tapped effectively. Though absence of infrastructural facilities is a major drawback for exploiting this potential, lack of well coordinated and properly directed efforts in marketing is also a reason behind the inability of the Himachal tourism industry to mobilise a good number of tourists from within and outside India.

Past studies on the tourism industry in India have focused mainly on how to sell the tourism product. But it is more important to view it from the tourist's point of view. This study will help to understand their perceptions and needs and thus aims to-

- Exploit the full potential of Himachal tourism
- Improve the image of "Himachal"
- Increase tourist arrivals
- Combat the competition by newly developing tourist destinations
- Attract tourists best suited for Himachal conditions

Nature of the Study

This is an exploratory study which attempts to analyze various factors that effect tourism in the state of Himachal Pradesh with the help of a questionnaire.

The study basically concentrates on analyzing a tourist's needs, preferences, perceptions and satisfaction.

Objectives of the Study

- To analyze Himachal tourism using the Porter's model.
- To analyze perceptions and satisfaction of tourists to Himachal Pradesh.
- To develop customer profiles of tourists.
- To develop some strategies to develop tourism in Himachal Pradesh.

Scope of the Study

- The study is confined to the development and marketing of tourism in Himachal Pradesh.
- The study analysis responses provided in the questionnaires by the tourists who have visited Himachal Pradesh.
- The study analyses perceptions, preferences, satisfactions of respondents.

Limitations of the Study

- The sample size may not be very large to generalize the results.

- The sample may not be a true representative of the entire population.
- It is limited to information provided both by primary and secondary data
- The proportion of foreign tourists in the analysis was very less.

Review of Research and Literature

A thorough study was done on information available about tourism from various research papers, journals and literature. The literature surveyed can be classified as shown below:

- Tourism marketing
- Sustainable tourism
- Tourism trends
- Other related articles
- News articles

One interesting article is by Rakesh Kapoor. Rakesh Kapoor, in his ‘Measures To Promote Tourism In Himachal’ gives various methods and suggestions to improve tourism in Himachal. According to him, each tourist place in the world, whether it be Switzerland or Kerala, have over the years developed a BRAND NAME for themselves. While Switzerland is known for its European Splendour, Kerala is known as God’s own country. In fact, Himachal is Switzerland of India. However, it requires to be marketed smartly, especially when Uttaranchal is competing with Himachal.

Similarly, one can market the tourist destinations of Himachal by creating a Brand Name. Brand Name emanates out of USPs (Unique Selling Points). Suggestions to create brand name (Brand Name Contest) could be invited from intellectuals, college students, employees from within the State. Marketing Professionals could also be consulted on this point.

5 to 10 minutes Film depicting the most important scenic spots; snow clad mountains; cultural heritage; popular Religious Institutions; traditional dance performances; International Melas/festivals; Trekking Routes; Angora Farms; Shawl Weaving; Apple orchards; Floriculture etc. of International Quality be produced for showcasing the BEAUTY OF HIMACHAL.

Such a Film should be screened in all the Duty Free Shops, Air India Flights and Lounges of International Airports within the country as well as other Countries, where it is feasible and also in TV channels devoted to Travel and Tourism.

A large percentage of the Tourists who come to Himachal Pradesh travel by road following by rail and air. Although the road network in HP is by far better than several other states, a Tourist enjoys only when the Road on which he is traveling is good without any bumps. Roads are the lifelines of Tourism Industry in H.P. The author suggests various methods with a view to improve the quality of the road network.

He goes on to say that some of the best scenic spots in Europe, where the Indian Film Directors visit for shooting have such flower bearing trees, offering out of the world beauty for the visiting tourists as is in Himachal. The Horticulture Wing of Public Works Dept or the Forest Dept. should plant such flower bearing trees on either side of some select roads, where the tourist traffic exist. This will prove immensely attractive to the tourists. Moreover, even the Directors of Films also may be attracted to shoot such beautifully attractive places.

* A Study may be conducted about the tourist arrivals in all the important tourist destinations in the State. In fact, most of the Tourists flock to places like Simla, Manali, Dalhousie, Dharmasala, although there exist more beautiful places in Himachal. The study should focus on the following:

* Identify the virgin places in the State where Tourists could travel (In fact, tourists would like to witness Apple fruits hanging from Apple trees), such as some

important/notified Orchards; Deep Forests with excellent scenic beauty; Snow Points; Lovers' Points;

* Promote facilities such as Road Network, hotels and other facilities.

* Publicise such tourist destinations

* Most of the Star Hotels in Mumbai and Bangalore have recently established facilities such as SPA, where the tourists release their tensions and get relaxed.

In fact, Himachal is the right place for establishment of such SPAs, some of the HPTDC units should be selected for providing such SPAs.

* A Band of educated unemployed could be selected from within Himachal and train them to be Excellent Professional Guides who can speak in fluent English and Hindi. Their services could be utilized by the Tourists. It is understood that presently some of the employees of HPTDC are acting as Guides from the Transport Wing. Tapping the talent from Private Sector would be desirable.

* Leh in J & K is an important tourist circuit for attracting tourists to Manali, HP. Suitable packages must be developed to attract them.

*Although some of the important trek routes have been identified and hosted on the Web site of Tourism Dept. yet, there is a need to take the Local People into confidence in various districts such as Kangra, Chamba, Kullu, Simla, L&S, Kinnor to identify the TRADITIONAL TREK ROUTES, which have been used by people for generations and offer them as a package to tourists. The Trekking Associations, if any, in the districts concerned needed to be consulted while formulating a package.

*The Tourism Dept. in collaboration with the Dept. of Art, Language and Culture should organize "Talent Hunt" on the lines of "INDIAN IDOL" by appropriately naming the event (Himachal ki shaan....suggestion only) and identify the best artistes of Himachal Pradesh. These best Artistes of Himachal could be exposed to the visiting Tourists in various Hotels. This will not only help in identifying the new talent and enabling them acquiring new means of livelihood, but also help promote our culture.

*Some of the most important and exquisitely beautiful scenic spots like NADDI Point near Mcleodganj, Dharmasala having been located in a Panchayat area, were completely spoiled due to haphazard construction of hotels/motels. Such unregulated activity requires to be checked and planned development of hills should take place, in order to protect the fragile ecological balance.

The Tourism Dept. in collaboration with Town and Country Planning Dept. should locate such places in the State for regulated and orderly development.

Strategic Public and Private Partnerships with the Indian Corporate Sector for promotion of Tourism Related Activities as already initiated by the Tourism Dept. in the form of Tourism Conclave should be intensely followed up. The suggestions in this regard are as under:

a) Invite Himachali NRIs for investment like in Jwalaji Temple

b) Non-Himachali NRIs interested in investment be encouraged.

c) The Business/Industrial Houses within the country who have already evinced interest in setting up their units in the State, could be encouraged to adopt one or two Tourism villages. The concept of Tourism Village can be developed based on certain criteria that may be conceived such as proximity to the main Internationally known tourist attractions; access to Snow Points; access to communication including road transport; friendly and cooperative Panchayat; This will be the partnership between the community and the Corporate World.

d) The cost of acquiring a piece of land in Himachal is increasingly becoming prohibitively costly for even Govt. of India projects and the Private Sector also must be sharing a similar experience. Ways and means have to be developed to identify suitable lands in important tourist destinations which could be given on a reasonable cost. This aspect has to be viewed in the context of incentives being offered by Uttranchal and J & K.

A study may be conducted to ascertain from which of the countries in the world tourists are visiting India and especially Himachal Pradesh. Aggressive marketing of Himachal as a Tourist Destination should be done in those countries from where the tourist arrivals are substantial. The Private Tour Operators/Travel Agents in those countries may be tapped for enhancing tourist arrivals.

International/National/Regional Painting Competitions may be organized in memory of late Roreich, in Himachal Pradesh.

The Painting Competition should be held at important Landscape Points for On-the Spot-Painting like Roreich. This will bring all the painters from all over the world.

The Tourism Policy of a state encompasses the Transport Policy; Hospitality Policy; Health Policy; Forestry Policy; Public relations Policy and Culture Policy. At the State govt. level, there is an immense need to co-ordinate the programmes of Tourism Promotion in a concerted manner.

It is, therefore, suggested that the Administrative Secretaries of all the Departments concerned may meet periodically under the chairmanship of the worthy Chief Secretary to provide the necessary impetus to tourist promotion.

All Centrally Sponsored Schemes under the Ministries of Tourism, Surface Transport, Health, Water Resources, Rural Development, Forests should be collectively tapped for promoting tourism in the state of H.P.

The tourism policy should focus on two man made lakes namely Pong and Gobind Sagar, the former has already been declared a national wet land and Ramsar site for development of adventure tourism, water sports and developing way side amusement parks and tourist villages to attract large number of tourist ready to visit from peripheral districts of Punjab and Union Territory of Chandigarh on week ends and vacation.

Research Design

The study is basically exploratory in nature. The study attempts to analyze the tourist's responses regarding various factors of tourism in Himachal Pradesh. It was done with the help of a questionnaire analysis.

Data Collection Methods

The collection of data in this study has been through the survey method. The present study has been done based on primary data and secondary data.

The primary data was collected by administering questionnaires to tourists who have been to Himachal Pradesh.

Secondary data was used, to support the primary data. The major sources of information were the various journals, news paper reports, research articles, market research agencies and the World Wide Web.

Questionnaire Design

The primary objective of the questionnaire survey was to obtain an insight into the tourist perceptions about Himachal tourism. The questions asked pertained to various factors that affect their stay in Himachal Pradesh.

The resultant final questionnaire was of an intermediate structured – undisguised type. It contained 24 questions of which some were closed and some were open ended questions.

Sampling Procedure

The sampling procedure followed was a case of convenient sampling. The target respondents were tourists who had been to Himachal Pradesh. About 200 questionnaires were administered, of which only around 155 were returned. The final analysis was done with 150 questionnaires, the others being non-satisfactory.

Data Treatment Methods

The raw data collected from the questionnaires was suitably coded and tabulated to make statistical inference. The data was fed into the 'Statistical Package for Social Sciences' (SPSS). From this structured data, suitable information was extracted, analyzed, tabulated and illustrated with the help of *factor analysis, discriminant analysis* and other tools.

Analysis Using Porter's Model

An analysis was done using the Porter's five forces model, concentrating mainly on the customers. The five forces, according to Michael Porter, which every industry must take care of, are as follows:

- Customers
- Competition
- Suppliers
- Substitutes
- New entrants

(A) Customers

Customers are the most important force to any industry. The industry exists because of them. The industry must therefore try to achieve maximum customer satisfaction. But today's customer is far more difficult to please and even more so in the tourism industry, it being a service. Today's customers have more options to choose from, they are more knowledgeable, more information is available to them, and so on. Hence it is necessary that their needs and preferences are understood so that the tourism industry in Himachal can understand as to where it stands in providing satisfaction to the tourists. This very analysis has been done with the help of a questionnaire.

The findings of the study indicated the following with particular reference to Himachal Pradesh.

- Holidaying is the most common purpose of visit to Himachal Pradesh. This is a fact that must be leveraged to accrue benefits. People who came for religious purposes were mostly from nearby places in North India.
- Hotels are the most used means of accommodation used by tourists while there are few takers for camping and guest houses.
- The average duration of stay was found to 5 days which is not too long nor too short. Himachal should find means to elongate the stay by providing the necessary offerings.
- Most of the tourists used bus for reaching Himachal Pradesh. Railways and airways must be provided to facilitate convenience to the tourists in reaching Himachal.
- Word of mouth was found to be the most effective method of communication in influencing the tourist to choose Himachal as a tourist destination. Other mediums of information also should be used effectively to get across the required message.
- Holidaying in Himachal is done generally with the company of one's family and relatives. Visiting with friends is also an option. Therefore group travel is more preferred in this region.
- Tourist traffic is concentrated to few places like Shimla, Kulu, Manali, etc. A large portion of Himachal is yet to be explored.
- Satisfaction of tourists was found to be concentrated on some variables like scenery, climate, etc. They were not very satisfied with the prices, shopping facilities, water, etc. The various satisfaction variables could be classified under the following factors or components as follows:

1. Infrastructural factors:

- Accommodation
- Transport
- Accessibility
- Shopping facilities
- Informative

2. Services and Safety factors:

- Catering
- Entertainment
- Local people
- Safety

3. Necessities:

- Food
- Water
- Amenities

4. Cost related factors:

- Prices
- Value for money

5. Natural or unique factors:

- Scenery
- Climate
- Overall satisfaction.

It can be noticed that overall satisfaction is clubbed with variables like scenery and climate thus suggesting that a tourist's satisfaction depends largely on a place's unique offerings. Here satisfaction of a tourist was related to the prime offerings of Himachal i.e. scenery and climate infrastructural factors, service factors, necessities, cost factors and natural or unique factors.

- Packaged tours have been used by a very small number of tourists. The satisfaction gained in using them are not so significantly different from not using them. But there were factors like catering, food, etc which were more satisfactory for those who had used a packaged tour.
- Most of the people felt that Himachal Pradesh had the potential of becoming one of the world's top tourist destination. Their opinion was based on the fact that Himachal has the natural beauty and climate and if the other facilities could be improved then it certainly could become a top destination.
- People's expectations in Himachal were generally met with but they depend on the presence of necessities and infrastructural facilities.
- Himachal is compared more attractive than similar places in India by most people but it is equally or not so attractive when compared to places abroad.
- Inconveniences faced by the tourists:
- Many respondents did not mention any inconveniences, but those that were mentioned were quite common to most of the respondents. Some of the inconveniences faced were:
 - Lack of transport facilities
 - Water shortage in summer months
 - Bad and zig-zag roads
 - High population concentrated in certain places
 - Expensive (especially in the peak periods)
 - High bus fares
 - Lack of proper information available to tourists

- Land slides
- Locals and coolies occasionally taking advantage of tourists
- Lack of shopping facilities catering to the upper segment
- No diverse culinary (ex: difficult to find catering of South Indian food)

Some of these inconveniences faced may be due to natural factors but most are due to lack of proper infrastructural facilities and necessities, which can be avoided if proper care is taken and planning is done.

- Suggestions from the tourists:

The suggestions were in direct relation to inconveniences faced. Some of them were:

- Provision of required information in tourism centers
- Clean and maintain the environment in certain places
- Improve roads and transport facilities
- Shopping complexes
- Provision for hot water
- More coverage in the media
- More parking space
- Diverse culinary must be available
- Presence of hotels for the lower segment in peak months
- Clinics must be provided
- Non-exploitation by locals
- Parks and play grounds must be provided
- Improve higher education facilities
- Should be well connected and accessible
- More entertainment facilities for tourists
- Display of required information
- Publicize local handicrafts

All the above information is very valuable as it directly provides the attitudes, behaviour, needs, wants, preferences, etc of the tourists, which are very helpful in building marketing strategies to encourage tourism.

(B) Competition

Himachal faces various levels of competition in the tourism industry. Within India itself there is competition from other hill stations like:

- Darjeeling
- Nilgiris (Ooty, Kodaikanal)
- Uttaranchal
- Jammu & Kashmir

It also faces competition at a higher level from other tourist spots in India like:

- Goa
- Kerala
- Rajasthan

At the international mountain tourism level there are big players like:

- Switzerland
- New Zealand
- Alaska

To counteract these various levels of competition, Himachal must find ways to differentiate itself from others with its unique offerings and position itself uniquely in the minds of the people. For this it must build a unique selling proposition (USP). To match international competition it must first benchmark itself with them.

(C) Suppliers

Suppliers in the tourism indicate all the service providers like:

- Airline industry
- Railways
- Travel agents
- Locals
- Hotel industry
- Government

Service, unlike a product, has different characteristics like intangibility, inseparability, variability, perishability, etc. To manage these, the use of the following “3 P’s” will come in handy-

- Physical evidence
- People
- Place

(D) Substitutes

The substitutes to Himachal tourism are any other options that a person would like to do on a holiday like:

- Religious gatherings is gaining ground
- Internet
- Television
- Video games
- Parks

These substitutes although do not directly effect tourism, they can still be a deterrent to it. Instead of traveling to far off distances for a holiday, today’s man finds easy entertainment from the above. Also the concept of an annual holiday is yet to catch up in India. They must therefore be used to one’s own advantage by making them available at the tourist spots.

(E) New Entrants

Each state in India is now beginning to realize the potential of tourism and thus are uniquely positioning themselves like:

- Temples in Tamil Nadu
- Wild life in Assam
- Ayurveda in Kerala

Also there are indirect threats from other entertainments like:

- Theme parks
- Shopping malls
- Internet

Himachal must too build a USP to gain an edge over others and leverage its unique offerings to its own advantage. The internet can be used to its advantage for advertising and communication.

‘SWOT’ Analysis

Strengths:

- Pleasant weather which is ideal for the tourists to come for the annual summer holiday to escape the scorching heat of the plains.
- Scenic beauty of the Himalayas, which draws tourists away from the crowded and polluted towns and cities.
- Terrain is ideally suited for various adventure activities.
- Some very well known tourist hill- stations.
- It can attract tourists all throughout the year.
- Hospitable people

Weaknesses:

- Inadequacy of transport facilities
- Funds constraining the development of regions.
- Inadequacy of information channels.
- Overcrowding of popular tourist centres.
- Some places are inaccessible, especially in winter.
- Inadequacy of marketing.
- Lack of adequate infrastructural support.

Opportunities:

- The concept of holidaying is gaining popularity in India among various classes of people.
- Increased disposable incomes of the Indian middle class.
- Adventure sports and trekking.
- Eco- tourism is gaining popularity.
- Himachal contains many unexplored regions.

Threats:

- Kashmir is being opened up and could divert a large portion of tourists to itself.
- Various other places in India are providing stiff competition.
- Environmental factors also impose a threat.

Recommendations

- Himachal must be able to provide hotels to cater to all segments of the society. It must market its camping facilities more and ensure that they are safe to use. Packaged tours also have to be marketed.
- It must open avenues for business opportunities, could be tourism related itself, and cash on its vast religious backdrop.
- Railways must be given a boost so that long distance travel becomes easy. Low cost airlines and helicopter services also can be used to reach the inaccessible regions depending on the climatic conditions.
- Entertainment facilities must be provided in order to ensure a longer stay by the tourists. They must have a unique thing to take back with them.
- Newer sources of communication like the internet must be used effectively to influence and advertise.
- Family entertainment facilities must be developed. More playgrounds and parks must be made. Schools can also be targeted for excursions.
- Create new planned tourist destination spots from the unexplored regions Which must be opened up atleast in the peak months.
- Basic infrastructural facilities have to be developed further. Roads need to be improved. Parking space must be provided.
- Basic necessities must be provided. Water availability has to be catered to. A diverse range of culinary must be provided to cater to the wants of tourists from various places across India and the globe.
- Shopping facilities need a boost. Shopping malls can be opened up.
- Information must be available to tourists at all places.

- Eco-tourism must be developed and promoted.
- Exploitation of tourists by locals must be minimized.
- Facilities for higher education must be improved.
- Local culture and handicrafts must be promoted.

- Congestion in popular tourist spots must be dispersed.
- It can attract more movie makers since it is endowed with scenic spots. A film city could also be built for this purpose.
- Insurance could be available to tourists, especially for adventurers.
- Private participation in developing tourism must be given a boost.
- Melas and festivals must be held so as to include the tourists.
- Rope cars, skiing and other facilities can be provided.
- Orchards and forests may be promoted as tourist picnic spots.
- Himachal emporiums across India must be able to act as agents for promoting Himachal tourism.
- International cricket matches and other sports could act as marketing agents to tourism.
- Celebrity endorsements could help to market tourism.
- More advertising in media, magazines, etc are needed.
- Guided tours could be improved and promoted.
- Cleanliness and environmental sustainability must be taken care of.
- It could endorse vacations for prize winning lotteries.
- Role of government and travel agents needs to be emphasized.
- Keeping all the stakeholders in mind, a sustainable strategy is needed.

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