

Satisfaction of Visiting Tourists to Kashmir Division

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ABSTRACT

Tourist satisfaction is crucial to the successful survival and operation of any tourist destination. Many studies have been undertaken to measure the tourist satisfaction at destination level by applying various techniques. But there are many factors which need to be incorporated while measuring the satisfaction level of tourists at the destination level. In this study, an attempt has been made to use the three broad critical attributes of the destination viz; tourist information, tourist infrastructure, and tourist services & facilities to measure the tourist satisfaction. The satisfaction of tourists depends on the overall quality of these three critical attributes at tourist destination. While planning and implementing the strategies for the successful tourism development, it is very imperative that the quality of these three attributes should exceed or at least met the expectations of the visiting tourists to the destinations. Therefore, the aim of this study is to measure satisfaction level of the tourists visiting the Kashmir Valley by evolving a model which will help to incorporate major factors effective in measuring the satisfaction level of the tourists at the destination level.

KEY WORDS: *Satisfaction Level, Touristic Infrastructure and Super Structures, Kashmir Division.*

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the fastest growing industries of the globe and has potential to deal with the key challenges faced by the world countries. International tourist arrivals are estimated to have declined worldwide by 4% in 2009 to 880 million. Growth returned in the last quarter of 2009, after 14 months of negative results, contributing to a better than expected full-year. The 2% uprising registered in the last quarter of 2009 contrast with the decline of 10%, 7%, and 2% felt in the first three quarters respectively (UNWTO, 2010). The predicted growth rate indicates that tourism will remain one of the leading economic activities of the world. The Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) in India during the year 2009 were 5.11 million as compared to 5.28 million in 2008, registering a fall of 3.3%. Tourism sector witnessed a bad year all over the world. The decline in growth rate in FTAs observed in India was lower than that observed for world (4.3%). Tourism is an important sector of Indian economy and contributes substantially in the country's Foreign Exchange Earnings. The Foreign Exchange Earnings (FEE) from tourism during 2009 in US\$ terms are estimated at 11.39 billion as compared to 11.75 billion during 2008, registering a fall of 3.0%. In rupee terms, the FEE from tourism during 2009 are estimated at Rs. 54,960 crore as compared to Rs. 50,730 crore during 2008, registering a growth of 8.3% (Ministry of Tourism, Govt. of India, 2010). Similarly the tourism industry is playing a tremendous role in the overall development of J&K state of India. A large section of the society is directly or indirectly connected with this trade. It is highly imperative that the concerned providers of services therefore need to provide quality tourism products to the tourists visiting valley with better planning and

execution in order to achieve the goal of customer satisfaction. It will in turn help to make tourism industry a significant force for the overall economic development along with the socio-cultural & environmental preservation. Tourist satisfaction is important to successful destination marketing because it influences the choice of destination, the consumption of products and services, and the decision to return (Kozak and Rimmington, 2000). Tourism product has a rather wide definition. Tourism products can be defined as a bundle of activities, services and benefits that comprise the whole tourism experience (Medlik and Middleton, 1973). According to McGrath (1999), a product can be any part of tourism industry like a destination, transportation, hotel, food and beverage, travel operator or an attraction of natural or man-made resources. These include destinations' attractions, facilities, accessibility, images, services, hospitality and prices. In a simpler definition, Kotler (1984) described tourism product could be anything that can be offered to a market for attention, acquisition, use or consumption that might satisfy a want or need like physical objects, services, persons, places, organization and ideas. A biggest problem in managing the quality of tourism product is due to the fact that tourist destination includes a number of attributes. Therefore, "each attribute of destination is important as consumer dissatisfaction with one of its attribute will lead to dissatisfaction with overall destination (Pizam, 1978). Furthermore, Rust et al., 1993 explained that relative importance of each attribute to overall impression should be investigated because dissatisfaction or satisfaction can be the result of evaluating various positive and negative experiences.

The three broad critical attributes of destination are tourist information, tourist infrastructure and tourist services & facilities.

METHODOLOGY

The primary data was collected from the state of Jammu and Kashmir by stratified sampling procedure using Srinagar, Gulmarg, Phalgam and Sonamarg as various strata. Out of total 300 questionnaires, distributed among the tourists in the above mentioned areas, 273 were useable. The questionnaire was framed from the previous questionnaires earlier framed by various researchers for measuring tourist satisfaction. These include Fick and Ritchie (1991), Reisinger and Waryszak (1994), Arnould and Price (1993), Crompton and Love (1995), Geva and Goldman (1991), Maddox (1985), Ryan (1995), and U.N.W.T.O. (1998). The three broad attributes viz. tourist information, tourist infrastructure, and tourist services & facilities were employed to measure the satisfaction level of the visiting tourists. Using Likerts 5-point, response to items were scored in such a way that a response indicative of most favourable was given the highest score and vice-versa (strongly disagree = 1, strongly agree = 5). The level of agreement or disagreement associated with the constituent items/statements was ascertained in percentage (%age). This exercise was done to identify the specific areas where management/government/authorities need to focus attention on priority. The reliability coefficient of these three components of tourist satisfaction are 0.68 (tourist information), 0.69 (tourist infrastructure), and 0.76 (tourist services & facilities). The overall reliability of the questionnaire of tourist satisfaction measured as a whole was 0.71, well above the prescribed cut-off point (Nunnally, 1978). In addition to it, to examine any significant difference between the two categories of tourists (domestic and international), popular Z tests were performed.

RESULTS

Tourist or Visitor satisfaction is one of the core fundamentals of principles of the management of tourism and to achieve this goal it should be maintained or enhanced (Alipour, 1996).

It received an aggregate mean score of 2.43 with a standard deviation of 0.108.

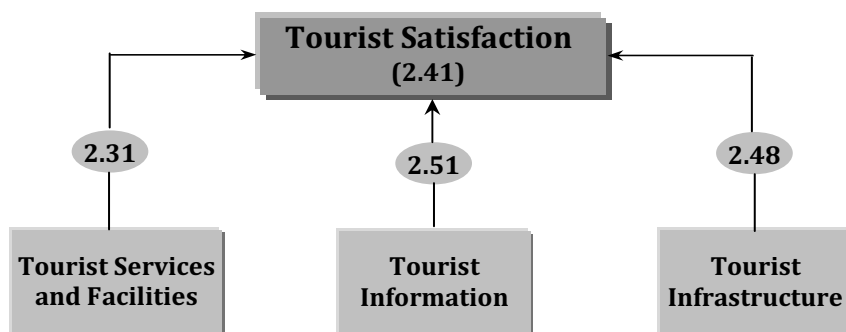


Fig1: Satisfaction of Visiting Tourists to Kashmir Valley

In light of statistical observations, these sub-dimensions of tourist satisfaction are discussed as under:-

a) Tourist Infrastructure

Tourist Infrastructure is an important element to the quality of the tourist experience (Badaruddin & Omar, 2005). The absence or inadequacy of simple and basic infrastructure at the destination will make tourism rarely succeed because it will spoil the enjoyment of visitors.

Table-1: Tourist Infrastructure as perceived by the tourists

	Mean Score	Std. Deviation	%age of Mean Score
<i>Shopping areas are properly managed.</i>	2.55	0.824	51.00
<i>A good no. of accommodation is available.</i>	3.11	0.927	62.20
<i>Roads are in good condition.</i>	1.78	1.083	35.60
<i>Tourist spots are easily accessible.</i>	2.54	1.981	50.80
<i>Tourist spots can be easily located.</i>	2.74	1.051	54.80
<i>Tourism activities are concentrated to larger areas.</i>	2.18	0.871	43.60
Tourist infrastructure Overall mean score	2.48	0.459	49.60

Source: Survey data collected for the present study

The tourist infrastructure was measured by employing the six statements and scored a mean of 2.48 (< 50%) with a standard deviation of 0.459 (table-1). The item wise analysis indicates that most of the statements scored the mean score ranging from the poor to moderate. The statistics of table-4 reveal that from 59 to 89 % of the respondents disagree or are not certain that shopping areas are properly managed; a good number of accommodation is available; roads are in good condition; tourist spots are easily accessible; tourist spots can be easily located; and tourism activities are concentrated to larger areas. The two statements which ranged poor on the scale scored a mean of 1.78 and 2.18 respectively (table-4).

b) Tourist Information

A tourist visiting the destination wants information related to the various attractions, facilities, services and various modes of accommodation offered by it. So the provision of information is one of the primary functions of the tourist information centres. The information is to be provided at the convenient location where the intending tourist may ask certain questions and ask clarifications about the services offered.

Table-2: Tourist Information as perceived by the tourists

Tourist Information	Mean Score	Std. Deviation	%age of Mean Score
<i>Information is easily and readily available.</i>	2.78	0.713	55.60
<i>Information Centres are easily accessible.</i>	2.63	0.893	52.60
<i>The setting and structure of information centres are attractive.</i>	3.29	1.133	65.80
<i>Information is provided round the clock.</i>	1.75	1.037	35.00
<i>The Staff providing information is friendly and cooperative.</i>	2.08	1.104	41.60
Tourist information Overall mean score	2.51	0.604	50.20

Source: Survey data collected for the present study

Tourist information being one of the components of visitor satisfaction measured an overall mean of 2.51(table-2). While making item wise analysis, barring last two items in table 2, the mean score of the most of the items are almost skewed to the centre of the 5-point scale. Hence, it is quite evident that there is lot of scope for improving activities aimed at tourist information. From 64 to 93 % (table-4) of the respondents are of the opinion that information is not easily and readily available; that information centres are not easily accessible; do not agree that the setting and structure of information centres are attractive; are not certain that information is provided round the clock and the Staff providing information is friendly and cooperative. Therefore, all the three areas deserve the management's attention, so that the problems faced can be rectified at the earliest. The two statements which ranged poor on the scale got a mean score of 1.75 and 2.08 respectively (table-2).

c) Tourist Services and Facilities

In the context of integrated tourism approach, it is necessary to know the potential uses and the type of facilities that will be required to meet the appropriate standards. The various tourism facilities and services hold an important key to the success of a tourism destination (U.N, 1999).This is true in the way that they contribute to the image of the destination which may induce visitors to stay longer or return for a repeat visit.

Table-3: Tourist services and facilities as perceived by the tourists

Tourist Services and Facilities	Mean Score	Std. Deviation	%age of Mean Score
<i>Rooms are properly managed</i>	2.29	0.485	45.80
<i>Attitude of local people is friendly.</i>	3.06	0.881	61.20
<i>The tourist spots and areas are properly managed.</i>	2.35	0.681	47.00
<i>Tourist spots are not congested.</i>	1.86	0.963	37.20
<i>Service is provided by professionals</i>	1.67	0.382	33.40
<i>Shopping facilities are good.</i>	2.55	0.945	51.00
<i>Road side facilities are available.</i>	2.32	0.708	46.40
<i>Diverse recreational facilities are available.</i>	2.40	1.006	48.00
<i>Basic amenities are available at tourist spots.</i>	2.26	0.879	45.20
Tourist services & facilities Overall mean score	2.31	0.394	46.20

Source: Survey data collected for the present study

This sub-dimension of tourist satisfaction scored a mean of 2.31 (< 50%) with a standard deviation of 0.394 and ranged moderately on the scale (table-3). The item wise analysis

shows a grim situation of services and facilities offered to the tourists and the mean score received by these statements is skewed to the left of 5-point scale. Therefore the need of hour is to improve the overall situation which will result in both satisfied and loyal tourists. From 61 to 93 % of the respondents totally disagree or are not certain that rooms are properly managed; do not consider the attitude of local people friendly; do not agree that the tourist spots and areas are properly managed; do think that tourist spots are congested; do not agree the fact that service is provided by professionals; shopping facilities are not good; do not perceive that road side facilities are available; do not think that diverse recreational facilities are available; and do not agree that basic amenities are available at tourist spots (table-4). Comparatively the weakling is more evident in the services and facilities provided to tourists.

Table - 4: Percentage response to 20 items of tourist satisfaction

Statements	Disagree	Not Decided	Agree	Mean Score
a) Tourist Information				
1. Information is easily and readily available.	55	09	36	2.78
2. Information centres are easily accessible.	57	19	24	2.63
3. The setting and structure of information centres is attractive.	27	18	55	3.29
4. Information is provided round the clock.	81	12	07	1.75
5. The staff providing information is friendly and cooperative.	68	15	17	2.08
Average of percentages and of averages	60	13	27	2.51
b) Tourist Infrastructure				
6. Shopping areas are properly managed.	62	21	17	2.55
7. A good no. of accommodation is available.	33	26	41	3.11
8. Roads are in good condition.	72	12	16	1.78
9. Tourist spots are easily accessible.	54	30	16	2.54
10. Tourist spots can be easily located.	49	23	28	2.74
11. Tourism activities are concentrated to larger areas.	67	22	11	2.18
Average of percentages and of averages	56	22	22	2.48
c) Tourist Facilities and Services				
12. Rooms are properly managed.	76	11	13	2.29
13. Attitude of local people is friendly.	39	22	39	3.06
14. The tourist spots and areas are properly managed.	71	12	17	2.35
15. Tourist spots are not congested.	74	19	07	1.86
16. Service is provided by professionals.	77	16	07	1.67
17. Shopping facilities are good.	63	17	20	2.55
18. Road side facilities are available.	78	08	14	2.32
19. Diverse recreational facilities are available.	64	24	12	2.40
20. Basic amenities are available at tourist spots.	74	10	16	2.26
Average of percentages and of averages	68	15	17	2.31
Overall Tourist Satisfaction	62	17	21	2.41

Source: Survey data collected for the present study

$$\text{Average of averages (X)} = 2.41 \text{ (overall Tourist Satisfaction)} \frac{48.19}{20}$$

To measure any significant difference in the opinion of the domestic and international tourist about the three critical attributes of tourist satisfaction, Z-test was conducted. The statistics of table-5 has revealed some noteworthy findings. An overall significant difference opinion on all the components of tourist satisfaction is found between domestic tourists and international tourists visiting the valley of Kashmir. The highest variation is on 'tourist infrastructure' (a difference of 16%, Z=4.37, p value<0.0001), followed by 'tourist information' (a difference of 14%, Z=3.18, p value<0.01). The lowest variation on 'tourist services and facilities' signifies the fact that it is somewhere at the implementation level where the problems are coming in the way of success. Overall gaps are so wide and significant that perceptual gap even within the three components seems to be appealing to analyse.

Table-5: Tourist satisfaction & a perceptual gap between domestic and international tourists

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Domestic Tourists (%age of mean score)</i>	<i>International Tourists (%age of mean score)</i>	<i>Perceptual Gap (in %age)</i>	<i>Z value</i>	<i>Probability (P value)</i>
I-Tourist Information					
<i>Item No. 1</i>	57.80	53.40	4.40	0.72	0.483 ^{ns}
<i>Item No. 2</i>	61.80	43.40	18.40	4.12	0.048 ^{***}
<i>Item No. 3</i>	83.20	48.40	34.80	3.92	0.000 [*]
<i>Item No. 4</i>	36.20	33.80	2.40	0.98	0.367 ^{ns}
<i>Item No. 5</i>	45.80	37.40	8.40	0.89	0.392 ^{ns}
Overall	56.96	43.28	13.68	3.18	0.010^{**}
II-Tourist Infrastructure					
<i>Item No. 6</i>	66.60	35.40	31.20	11.32	0.002 ^{**}
<i>Item No.7</i>	66.00	58.40	7.60	1.65	0.115 ^{ns}
<i>Item No. 8</i>	42.60	28.60	14.00	2.44	0.043 ^{***}
<i>Item No. 9</i>	52.60	49	3.60	0.97	0.231 ^{ns}
<i>Item No. 10</i>	67.60	42	25.60	5.22	0.000 [*]
<i>Item No. 11</i>	52.20	35	17.20	4.24	0.002 ^{**}
Overall	57.33	41.4	15.93	4.37	0.001^{**}
III-Tourist Services & Facilities					
<i>Item No. 12</i>	51.20	40.40	10.80	2.01	0.105 ^{ns}
<i>Item No. 13</i>	62.60	59.80	2.80	0.78	0.101 ^{ns}
<i>Item No. 14</i>	49.60	44.40	5.20	1.72	0.432 ^{ns}
<i>Item No. 15</i>	38.00	36.40	1.60	1.98	0.542 ^{ns}
<i>Item No. 16</i>	36.40	30.40	6.00	1.37	0.721 ^{ns}
<i>Item No. 17</i>	57.40	44.60	12.80	0.75	0.983 ^{ns}
<i>Item No. 18</i>	57.20	35.60	21.60	3.28	0.043 ^{***}
<i>Item No. 19</i>	57.80	38.20	19.60	6.05	0.044 ^{***}
<i>Item No. 20</i>	61.80	28.60	33.20	6.37	0.000 [*]
Overall	52.44	39.82	12.62	0.82	0.035^{***}
Overall (I+II+III)	55.58	41.50	14.08	3.87	0.004^{**}

Source: Survey data collected by the scholar for the present study.

* < 0.0001; ** < 0.01; *** < 0.05; ns = not significant (>0.05).

Note: The numbering of the items in the above table corresponds to the serial number of the statements given in the table 3.

The analysis of data within 'tourist information' reveals that there exists highest variation on 'item no.3' (a difference of 35%, $Z=3.92$, $p \text{ value} < 0.000$), followed by 'item no. 2' (a difference of 18%, $Z=4.12$, $p \text{ value} < 0.05$), and the lowest, however non-significant difference in the opinion appears in 'item no. 4' (a difference of only 2%, $Z=0.98$, $p \text{ value} < 0.05$). The picture emerged out of the analysis of tourist infrastructure indicates that there exists a significant perceptual gap between the two segments of the tourists. The four statements out of six received a significant difference. The widest gap appears on 'item no. 6' (a difference of 31%, $Z=11.32$, $p \text{ value} < 0.01$), followed by the 'item no. 10' (a difference of 26%, $Z=5.22$, $p \text{ value} < 0.000$). The lowest non-significant variation appears on item no. 9 (a difference of 4%, $Z=0.97$, $p \text{ value} > 0.05^{ns}$). Only few of the statement of 'tourist services & facilities received significant difference, which is evident from the fact that out of nine statements used to measure the above mentioned component of tourist satisfaction, six statement got non-significant difference. The highest significant difference appears on 'item no. 20' (difference of 33%, $Z=6.37$, $p \text{ value} < 0.000$), followed by 'item no. 18' with a difference of 22%, $Z=3.28$, $p \text{ value} < 0.05$ and the lowest but with a non-significant difference appears on 'item no. 13' (a difference of only 3%, $Z=0.78$, $p \text{ value} > 0.05^{ns}$). The overall results so far highlights the fact that the concerned authorities need to improve and maintain the standards of the above stated component of tourist satisfaction up to the international level, so that the levels of expectation of both categories of the tourists visiting valley can be met in order to bring this part of the world on the competitive tourist map.

FINDINGS

- The tourists visiting to valley are satisfied to some extent with the basic components like provision of information, tourist infrastructure, services and facilities available. But at the same time, there is still need for further improvement in order to make J&K state a competitive tourist destination on the world map.
- Another reasons for improper contribution of tourism towards state economy is the visitor satisfaction where the expectation of tourists especially foreigners is not being met to the expected level. However the three critical attributes of tourism satisfaction viz; tourist information, tourist infrastructure and tourist services and facilities are slightly satisfactory but at the same time requires due attention by the concerned authorities to enhance satisfaction of visiting tourists.
- The authorities need to concentrate more on modifying the mechanism of providing first hand information system to the tourists. From the results one can make out that information centres and the staff should be more sophisticated and well trained to enhance the delivery mechanism of information system.
- There is need to improve the standards of the accommodation sector to the international level so that the delivery mechanism in these establishments will meet the requirement of not only the domestic but also the international visitors.
- There is need of diversification both in the tourist sites offered to the visiting tourists to the Kashmir valley. The authorities need to think beyond the four prime destinations of the valley viz. Srinagar, Gulmarg, Phalgam, and Sonamarg.
- The tourist destinations of the Kashmir are accessible only through the road network and most of the roads connecting the major tourist destinations are not maintained properly. The authorities need to realise that good road infrastructure plays a vital role in the satisfaction of the tourists and therefore the roads infrastructure needs maintained and upgraded consistently.
- Most of the tourist establishments have recruited non-professional people hence compromising with the quality. There is no such training programmes meant for the up gradation of the existing employees working in the various tourist establishments.
- From the results it can be pinned down that the basic amenities are not considerably available at the tourist spots.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The quality of the state's tourism products and services should be enhanced to such an extent where expectations of visiting tourists is met or exceeded so that new tourists will be attracted and existing ones are retained. This goal can be achieved by adding value to our tourism products and facilities so as to improve their unique selling proposition. The directions in this regard will be:

- ❖ Regular feedback from the tourists need to be obtained about every component of their experience to devise a proper mechanism for quality checks and to correct any deviation.
- ❖ Efforts should be made to provide round the clock quality information at the famous and busy tourist spots which can be facilitated by installing touch-screen facilities.
- ❖ In accommodation centres hygiene, room amenities, and service standards are the areas to be considered and improved. The food and other services should be provided in indigenous style to improve the market for locally available products.
- ❖ Moreover, the tourism infrastructure should be designed and constructed in accordance to local architectural styles assisting planners to camouflage the built infrastructure with natural landscape.
- ❖ Those employees interacting directly with the tourists need to be trained at regular intervals and efforts are required to motivate them in order to improve the service standards.
- ❖ There is need to identify markets that will deliver business in the long term so that viability of tourist destinations and enterprises will be sustainable. The markets need to be developed as per the needs and wants of potential customers where changing market trends, travel patterns and tastes should be considered. In this regard continuous market research should be undertaken for tourism development in the state as whole and realistic market assessment for individual projects.
- ❖ One of the major areas to focus is road network as most of the tourist circuits of the state are entirely dependent on roads due to hilly topographical features of the state. In this regard all the major and minor roads leading to the tourist destinations need to be improved and maintained.
- ❖ To cater to various profiles of tourists and ease pressure on existing tourist sites, it is highly imperative for the concerned authorities to throw open a number of new destinations. In this regard developing various virgin destinations like Bungus, Teel, Gurez, Doodpathri in Kashmir valley, and Zanaskar, Nubra valley, Pangong lakes in Ladakh division is a welcome idea. It will not be out of place to mention here that the development in these areas should be guided by the principles of sustainable tourism, paving way for sufficient returns for any investment along with the better management of the resource base.
- ❖ The concerned authorities need to make provisions for the recruitment of the professional persons in the tourist trade. The owners of the tourist establishments in the valley will be motivated through incentives, recognition, and subsidies to recruit the well trained and professional people. Besides the government can formulate new legislations to check the recruitment of the non-professional people in the tourist trade. This will in turn help to enhance the quality of services provided to the visiting tourist to a greater extent.

The solution to previously mentioned problems can be many and varied. All these problems can only be solved when authorities take appropriate decisions and measures in the light of above mentioned recommendations and see to it that these decisions are properly implemented. Further, the follow up actions are more vital than taking any decision. Finally, if the various stakeholders are firm, it may not be that much difficult to improve the scenario of tourism industry of the state so as to attain the objectives of customer satisfaction.

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