

Tour Guide Training In India: A Critique

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ABSTRACT

The profession of tour guiding has greatly evolved over a passage of time with the development of tourism sector across the world. With travel and tourism becoming a way of life, many people have started hiring the services of a tour guide to give a more valuable expression to their travel experience. As a result, the job of tour guides has immensely increased wherein they are required to match the expectations of multiple stakeholders' whom they are in touch with including their own expectations. To meet the expectations of different stakeholders', tour guides must be first aware as to what are the various expectations of different stakeholders' from them. Another important issue that we need to address is as to what the tour guides should be trained for so that they can bridge the gap of various stakeholders' expectations with their performance. This paper is an attempt by the researcher to find out as to what are the various expectations of different stakeholders' from a tour guide and then to identify the areas in which the tour guide needs to be trained for.

KEYWORDS: *Tour Guides, Stakeholders Expectations, Roles, Training*

Introduction

Cutting across boundaries and restrictions of geographies and time zones, the world has truly become a "global village" with travelers visiting destinations and cultures far removed both geographically and socially from their homelands.. This rapid expansion of the international travel industry in the second half of the last century has increased the opportunities for intercultural communication and opened new vistas for cultural exchange. Never the less, India too joins the rat race having registered around 6.29 million foreign tourists last year (2011) contributing INR 77591 crores to the foreign exchange earnings through tourism (Ministry of Tourism, Government of India). Tourism industry is witnessing a boom in the country, the role of stakeholders' in the industry (government, tour operators, travel agents, transporters, hoteliers, tour guides etc.) has increased manifold. Being a service and peoples industry, the stakeholders' in the tourism industry are responsible for execution of flawless and personalized services to the tourist at every step. One of the indispensable service providers and stakeholders' of the tourism sector who has a major role to play in the tourism industry is the "tour guide" who is capable of bringing the tourist back to the country

Review of Literature

“Without a guide the Forum of Rome is little more than an accumulation of pillars, stones and rubble. On a tour, however, it becomes a place alive with the imagined footsteps of Caesars, Senators and Centurions” (Mancini, 2001). The issue of tour guides has generated a great interest amongst the researchers always. As also, suggested by Schmidt (1979), the tourism literature acknowledges the importance of tour guides in tourism. However, Holloway (1981) has a slightly different observation when he noted almost 20 years ago that there was a paucity of studies on guides and tours and this observations still applies today. Although there have been few research studies on tour guides (Almagor, 1985; Cohen, 1982, 1985; Fine & Speer, 1985; Katz, 1985; Pearce, 1984) some have identified the roles and functions of tour guides in more general studies of guided tours (Geva & Goldman, 1991; Holloway, 1981; Hughes, 1991; Schmidt, 1979; Whipple & Thach, 1998). Further Mancini (1990) and Pond (1993) provide useful practical-hands on information about tour guiding practice, professionalism and address issues such as the role of guiding, guiding skills and techniques and the problems and issues that a guide may face when leading a tour. Perhaps the most systematic examination was done by Cohen whose framework is frequently cited as a basis for subsequent investigation. According to Erik Cohen (1985), tour guides have two important roles to play. Guides act as ‘path finder’ who ‘provides access to otherwise non-public territory’. According to Cruz (1999) “A tour guide is an individual who leads groups of tourists around a town, museum or other tourist attraction. The guide provides correct and accurate information on the features, events and history of the location; it is given therefore that he has broad knowledge about the destination”. As early as 1960’s, a similar view has been maintained by researchers like Knebel (1960) and Faux (1981) with a special reference to guiding in mountains who maintain that specialised mountain guides lead climbers and trekkers in many formidable mountain areas around the world, such as the Alps, the Andes and the Himalayas. Holloway (1981) and Hughes (1991) too opine about the importance of information giving role of a tour guide. Holloway (1981) notes that information giving is of greatest importance in the tour guides drive for professional status. A similar kind of observation has been given by Leclerc and Martin (2004) when he says “Tour guides provide information and anecdotal stories about sites visited, places photographed and people encountered; they provide a text to the silent panorama passing outside the windows of tour buses”. Hence, to provide the information about the sites visited and create awareness about them is an important role of a tour guide. Also, the guides play a prominent role in mediating the encounter between cultures (Nettekoven, 1979) and they do this by an act of ‘interpretation’. Schmidt (1979) has aptly highlighted the importance of interpretation by mentioning that “a tourist not only views the local sights from a coach, but also interprets the sights through the tour guide’s commentary”. He further expresses this point most poignantly by comparing the guide to a shaman who “...must translate the unfamiliar”. As also suggested by Nozawa (1992);

McDonnell (2001) particularly, in cross-cultural settings, tour guides also need to act as cultural translators and interpreters. Gurung et al. (1996) as cited in Dahles (2002) provides more depth in defining the role, tour guides carry out in the cultural tourism system as pivotal in order “to influence the visitors’ impressions and attitudes, as well as enhance their appreciation and understanding of their surroundings”. Another role of a tour guide in the context of ecotourism has been well highlighted by Black, Ham & Weiler (2001). As Cohen (1985), also maintains that the guide is responsible for the provision of services and amenities to his party during the tour, such as refreshments, meals and overnight stays, as well as medical care and other services, in case of emergency. This may involve him in dealings with the local population in remote, non-touristic areas and with various specific touristic facilities, such as restaurateurs and hotels in touristic ally well developed areas. This function may demand considerable skills to ensure supplies and hospitality under unsettled touristic conditions (Cohen, 1982); where a tourist system is well developed, however, arrangements are usually formally institutionalized, but demand some expertise in the proper procedures on the part of the guide. According to Schmidt (1979), a tour guide is responsible for the security, safety and comfort of his party. Ang (1990) too maintains a similar view when she calls tour guides as shepherds of the industry, who attempt to herd tourists around safely and try to ensure that they return with fond memories of their holiday. Schmidt (1979) claims that the tour guide is an ‘instigator of sociability’ and ‘provides integration’ to the group. Further, Holloway (1981) pointed out that he is the “...catalyst who encourages social cohesion in (his) group”. Researchers such as Holloway (1981) and Ryan and Dewar (1995) claimed that tour guide’s communication with tour groups can increase both group morale and social interaction. Based on the review of literature, it would be appropriate to say that a tour guide has many roles to play at the same time.

Research Approach

An exploratory study based on primary data collection was proposed. Using a structured interview protocol an opinion was solicited from the stakeholders’ regarding the role of tour guides. An effort was made by the researcher to allow respondents to talk by asking open-ended questions as to what was the role of a tour guide in their opinion. The researcher planned to interview eight stakeholders’ as domestic tourists, inbound tourists, tour operators/travel agents, tourism authority, managers of monuments/attractions, merchandisers, hoteliers/restaurateurs and tour guides themselves. Each of the various stakeholders’ be it the tour guide or travel agent, inbound tourist or domestic tourist, manager of monuments/attractions or government officials were encouraged to shared their general opinions about the roles of a tour guide.

Summary of Opinions of Stakeholders'

Views of domestic tourists

A matter of great concern for most of the domestic tourists was that a tour guide should provide accurate and right information to the tourists. On interacting with domestic tourists, the researcher felt that many of the tourists were not very happy with the functioning of tour guides. As per their past experiences, some of the domestic tourists felt deceived & cheated by the tour guide. However, according to many domestic tourists explaining about the historical & cultural importance of various attractions was a prime responsibility of a tour guide. Knowledge of different languages was also considered as important by many domestic tourists. Handling inquiries/complaints is also an important responsibility according to the domestic tourists. Many tourists felt that tour guides charge high fees from them and are more interested in foreigners rather than domestic tourists. Some tourists also recommended for a strong regulatory body for monitoring the functioning of tour guides. Taking the tourists for shopping at local areas and taking them to local restaurants for eating were also some of the roles expected of a tour guide.

Views of Inbound Tourists

According to inbound tourists, taking care of their safety was the most important job of a tour guide. Providing accurate and right information to the tourists was again an important aspect of a tour guide's job. Being knowledgeable was considered as critical to a tour guide's job. Taking the tourists to interesting places for sightseeing, introducing the tourists and local community to each other and having a good sense of humour were important from inbound tourists' perspective. Many of the inbound tourists were of the opinion that a tour guide should not be too controlling. They also disagreed on the role of a tour guide in crossselling the other product. Few tourists also reported that a tour guide should refrain from selling drugs to them whereas as some inbound tourists felt that a tour guide should help them in getting foreign exchange.

Views of Tour Guides

Most of the tour guides, on being interviewed revealed, that they were expected to behave like 'living encyclopaedia' wherein they were required to maintain a broader perspective and knowledge on various aspects related to a destination's geography, history, facts, its local culture, tourists culture etc. Creation of a happy experience was important to the overall role of a tour guide. Knowledge of foreign languages was also imperative to the job of a tour guide. Having a contingency plan for itinerary, in case of any deviation, was also reported as important from the tour guide's perspective. Besides, these roles, most of the tour guides agreed that their major objective in this profession is to earn money. Hence, in order to make money, most of the tour guides felt that they had a major role to play in recommending places to tourists for shopping as the tourists had commissions involved with

shopping. Many guides shared a common opinion that only authorized guides should be allowed to guide in the touristic places. Infact, authorized guides expected more recognition and importance from tourists as compared to unauthorized guides.

Views of Tour Operators/Travel Agents

Interviews with the tour operators/travel agents show that, as the employer their major expectation from a tour guide is to help them gain profits for their business. For them, their biggest concerns were 'profits', 'revenue' though 'company's image' & 'repeated guests' were also some of the major considerations. The tour operators/travel agents acknowledged the importance of tour guides in tourism industry. For, tour operators/travel agents tour guides are the representatives representing the image of their company. They act on behalf of the company. Infact their every action reflects the service quality of the company. Through their behaviours and service, they influence the image of the company. They fulfil the company's promise to clients by carrying out their duties. Having knowledge of different languages was also reported as an important requisite by many travel companies. The tour operators/travel agents also felt that tour guides act as representative of city/destination or a country. In this sense they may be called as 'city ambassadors' or 'destination ambassadors'.

Views of Managers of Monuments/Attractions views of Hoteliers/Restaurateurs

Most of the hoteliers/restaurateurs emphasized that a tour guide must have a proper knowledge of good hotels, which offer a reasonable accommodation. Most of them felt that a tour guide should have knowledge of the local restaurants famous for their local and other cuisines. Infact most of them were interested that a tour guide should bring tourists to their hotels and restaurants. Moreover, many respondents emphasized that a tour guide himself must have proper dining etiquettes. He must have knowledge of the cuisines that a tourist likes and recommend food according to the taste of the client. Having knowledge of the local cuisine was also considered important according to many respondents. Many respondents suggested that a tour guide should have knowledge of distance of restaurant from hotel and knowledge of restaurant rates. Infact, some respondents suggested that a tour guide acts as an 'image builder' for hotels and restaurants..

Views of Tourism Authority

Most of the government officials see a tour guide as a propagandists and destination ambassadors. A series of tasks were listed such as Many of them emphasized that an important role of a tour guide is interpreting and making sense of things "Through interpretation, tour guides enlarge tourists knowledge and improve their enjoyment of strange customs....interpretation enlivens mountains and rivers, endows historical sites with renewed spirit...it touches the stone and

turns it into gold (makes everything interesting)” (Li & Li, 2004). Also the authorities persisted that a tour guide should not only know and tell the tourists about the host country’s culture but also should know about the culture of the tourists.

Comparison of Open-Ended Opinions of Stakeholders’ With Framework of Chowdhary and Prakash (2010)

Now second part of the study was to identify the various training needs of a tour guide. For the purpose of this research, the researcher decided to compare the various open-ended responses generated from various stakeholders with the framework of Chowdhary and Prakash (2010). In one of the studies conducted by Chowdhary & Prakash (2010), relevant in the context of India where they have evaluated the content of regional guide training programme being delivered in India, the six dimensions suggested by them are practical guiding skills, sensitization, interpersonal/behavioural skills, business/management, knowledge of tourism products and tourism context. The study further reveals that the major focus of the guide-training programme is on delivering lectures on knowledge of the tourism products followed by business/management skills (Table 1).

Table 1: RLGTP Content Loading Across Six Dimensions of Chowdhary-Prakash Framework

	Dimensions	% age distribution of load
1	Practical guiding skills	11.67 %
2	Sensitization	4.17 %
3	Interpersonal/behavioural skills	9.17 %
4	Business/management	14.17 %
5	Knowledge of tourism products	50.83 %
6	Tourism context	10.00 %

Source: Adopted from Chowdhary-Prakash, 2010

During the filling of questionnaires with respondents, various open-ended responses were generated from respondents. These open-ended response was cross tabulated with framework of Chowdhary and Prakash (2010) across six

Results and Discussions

In one of the studies conducted by Sharma and Chowdhary (Unpublished thesis), they have identified five factors that signify the role of a tour guide namely leader, cartaker, manager, salesman and a host. According to them, the role of a leader is to guide and lead through an unknown territory, showing the way to the tourists, connecting them to the context and sensitizing them so as to extract a considerate guest out of them. Therefore, this factor includes taking, leading &

guiding the visitors' around the attractions at a destination, providing accurate information and creating awareness about the attractions of a destination, to make sense of things in the surroundings, to conserve the environment, to provide an interesting and an informative commentary on a site or on a coach, to inform visitors' about destination's local customs and traditions & to help tourists understand rules set by a regulatory body and follow them. Central to the role of a tour guide as a salesman is to keep the customer in good humour by providing personalized care and selling them attractions and products at a destination and facilitating the buy. Hence, the factor included roles like crossselling other products in a destination, helping visitors' in shopping, keeping the group in good humour and providing personalized care to a tourists. As a caretaker, tour guide acts as caretaker of details which include both security and safety of tourists and those related to itinerary including inquires and complaints.

Based on their study, the ranking of factors given by them is as follows:

Table 2: Role of tour guides in order of their preference

Rank	Role
1.	Caretaker
2.	Manager
3.	Host
4.	Salesperson
5.	Leader

From the above table, it is quite evident that the most important role of a tour guide is that of a caretaker where his interpersonal skills/behavioural skills really matter. The current research also reveals that most of the open-ended responses focused on interpersonal/behavioural skills, which also clearly highlight the role of a caretaker as most important according to stakeholders'. Whereas an important observation shared by Chowdhary and Prakash (2010) is that, there is hardly any focus on interpersonal/behavioural skills.

Conclusions

The different expectations of the stakeholders' from a tour guide, a training programme should also reflect and prepare a tour guide for larger roles. Following are the suggestions for conducting guide-training programmes in India.

1. Till now the guide training in India for both fresher and refresher courses focuses on guides as an information disseminator. The focus of all these training programmes is to give maximum knowledge about tourism products rather than on giving inputs on interpersonal skills.

2. The content of training programme must include inputs on sensitizing the tour guides towards the safety and security issues of the tourists, handling of a group in times of emergency situations, learning group dynamics, dealing with sometimes genuine and sometimes unwanted questions of the tourists, managing time effectively so as to complete the itinerary on time as initially promised to the tourists, client complaint handling, modules on the role of a tour guide in promoting responsible tourism, dealing sensitively with host communities etc.
3. The orientation of the training programmes should be made more practical oriented preparing the tour guides to deal better with real life situations. Training programmes should be made more dynamic wherein the dull classroom teaching should be replaced by practical on the site and coach guiding which help the guides improve upon their oratory and presentation skills.

Thus, the focus of the current guide training programmes is to emphasis on developing tour guides as knowledge repositories without much focus on developing the interpersonal/behavioural skills of the guides.

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