

Spiritual & Yoga Tourism: A case study on experience of Foreign Tourists visiting Rishikesh, India

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Introduction

According to the definition of WTO 'Tourism Statistical Consultation', "Tourist" is a person in another country, with various purposes not forbidden by the given country, from 24 hours to one-year period, not performing any paid activity in the country or place of arrival, who in the lodging of collective or single distribution has slept at least once and who travels. The word tourism derives from the verb tour meaning "travel." Tourism offers tremendous opportunities of generating revenues, earning foreign exchange and providing employment. Today all countries of the world are striving to develop tourism in a big way. Besides economic, the social and environmental gains of tourism are also significant. It is considered as an ambassador of peace and international brotherhood. It brings better understanding between different nations and civilizations. Likewise it helps in protecting environment, old monuments and cultural heritages and religions. Tourism serves as an important means to increase economic growth, raise the quality of life, create employment and improves the overall balance of payments by helping to offset deficits in other sectors.

World Tourism

Forecasts for the years are generally optimistic, based essentially on positive signs of recovery in the economies of US, Japan and Western Europe and the moderation in conflicts. The large pent-up demand for travel is bound to express itself as soon as circumstances allow according to the leading decision-makers and analysts.

Table 1.1

	Base Year	Forecasts		Market share (%)		Average annual growth rate (%)
	1995	2010	2020	1995	2020	1995-2020
	(Million)					
World	565	1006	1561	100	100	4.1
Africa	20	47	77	3.6	5.0	5.5
Americas	110	190	282	19.3	18.1	3.8
East Asia and the Pacific	81	195	397	14.4	25.4	6.5
Europe	336	527	717	59.8	45.9	3.1
Middle East	14	36	69	2.2	4.4	6.7
South Asia	4	11	19	0.7	1.2	6.2

(Source: World Tourism Organization)

Prospects of Tourism in Asia

The increase in demand for travel has created new marketing opportunities in tourism. Since Asia region covers a great diversity of cultures, lifestyles and preferences, more innovative and creative marketing strategies have to be designed for each market segment of visitors. With the increasing sophistication, the Asian visitors also require travel products to offer quality, comfort, convenience, relaxation, independence and unique learning experiences that maximize the value of their leisure time.

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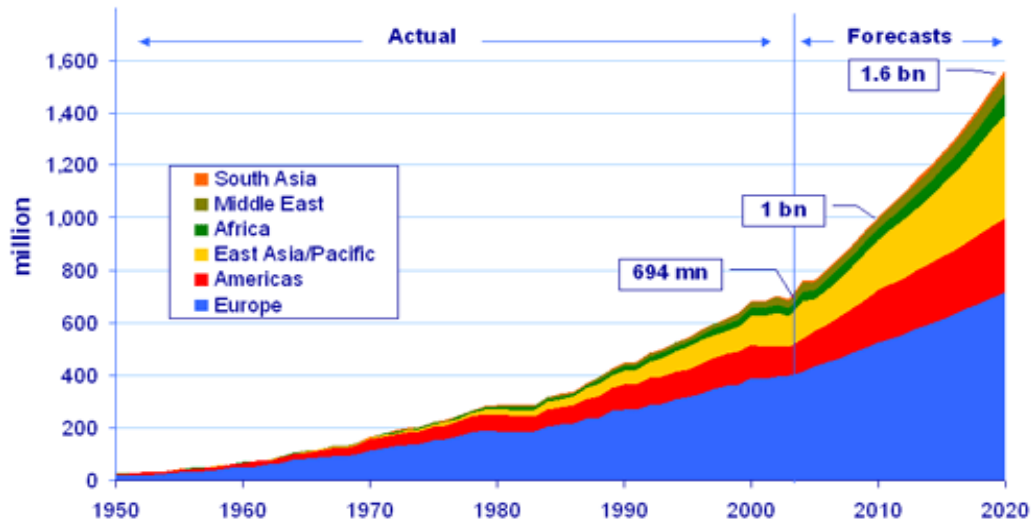


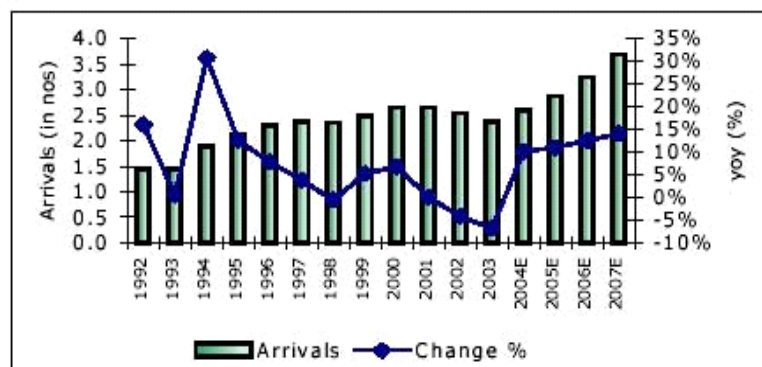
Fig. 1

(Source: World Tourism Organization)

Tourism in India

Tourism provides the second highest net foreign exchange earnings to our economy. Tourism industry is the largest employment generator of the world. It is estimated that, by 2010, this industry will create 7 million new jobs, may contribute Rs. 1,30,000 crore in capital investment and may have 7% share in GDP. Foreign tourist arrivals are at 2.64 millions during 2000. This is the only industry, which requires less or no investment, yet generates billions of foreign exchange to the country's exchequer. Many small nations viz. Singapore, Sri-lanka, Malaysia, Thailand etc. woo millions of foreign tourists and bag billions of foreign exchange. India, albeit, the country houses rich tourism locations, yet, figured in the bottom of the rank table in wooing foreign. Apart from foreign tourist, domestic tourist has emerged as a powerful source for the development of tourism. India can be considered the yoga and spiritual capital of the world. People come to the country to learn yoga and for spirituality. The land of spiritual salvation is the place which gave birth to multitude faiths like Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism to name only a few.

Exhibit2: Foreign Tourist arrivals over the years



Source: Tourism of India India Infoline Research

Fig. 2

Foreign Tourist Arrival In India

Tourism Industry in 2005 and 2006 were exceptional years. According to FHRAI, there has been a consistent growth in international arrivals and travelers from new markets such as South East Asia, China and Russia are increasing their presence. The resilience and opening up of the Indian economy is likely to attract foreign investors. According to the World Tourism Organization (WTO), international tourist inflow in India is expected to grow at 6.5% CAGR, which means increase in the tourist arrivals from the present 2.5mn to 6.0mn in 2010 and 10mn by 2020. In contrast, in 2004 around 3.4m inbound tourists brought in around \$4.7bn or over Rs 21,600 crore in foreign exchange.

Spirituality

Spirituality means having to do with deep, often religious, feelings and beliefs, including a person's sense of peace, purpose, connection to others, and beliefs about the meaning of life. The essence of spirituality is inner feeling through love. Spirituality is one word which puts a human being on the highest pedestal of life. The goal of Spirituality is attaining salvation (moksha in Hinduism). Spirituality is living life as it was meant to be not as we may have desired or wanted living it. It is a certain fact that only the true seekers of Spirituality become the masters of their destiny. Knowingly or unknowingly many people who have a materialistic goal in life travel the path of Spirituality and become successful in life. These highly acclaimed individuals unknowingly tread the path of pure Spirituality and achieved the goal of their life. Spirituality in other terms means that before we ask God the Almighty for material riches to be bestowed upon us we need to compensate by giving something equivalent or more back to the community. In terms of Spirituality we are not supposed to get anything unless we promise to do something in return in the system of God.

Yoga

The word yoga means 'union', though a more literal equivalent is the English 'yoke'. In fact, the words yoga and yoke have the same Sanskrit root. In fact yoga are practiced in a different manner altogether. While yoga comprises of body postures using hands and legs, meditation is more of a spiritual thing. It involves exercises with your breathing. Most people associate yoga and meditation with the Hindu religion, however it is only after one learns or starts to practice them that one knows that the effect and healing powers transcend the boundary of religion. Yoga and Meditation are just such indigenous twin techniques of self-realization and purification. One incomplete without the other, they help an individual to develop a sense of physical, mental, emotional as well as spiritual well being. Yoga in all its forms tries to create harmony of the body with the mind and soul. It is a very general term that encompasses many different disciplines ranging from the purely physical to the purely spiritual, and is a truly original Indian concept.

Role of Yoga and Spirituality in Indian Tourism

People from across the world now come to India for Ayurveda, yoga and meditation in Rishikesh, Uttaranchal that is practiced since centuries. In fact India has fast emerged as a health tourism destination because of these. Since time immemorial, India has been known for its spirituality, religious and yoga tolerance and its secular character. India is called the "Yoga-Bhoomi" and the gateway to the heavens. India is internationally renowned for its ancient healing practices and alternative therapies. For more than thousands of years now, we have followed our own indigenous healing systems and medicinal practices such as Ayurveda, Naturopathy, and Pranic Healing to name just a few. It is no wonder then that people from all over the world are turning to the Indian sub continent for guidance towards a more spiritually satisfying way of life.

Rishikesh

Rishikesh is where Raibhya Rishi is believed to have done penance to please God who appeared as Rishikesh; hence the name. Rishikesh is located at a height of about 1360 feet above sea level. It is believed that several yogis and sages lived and practiced penance here. Rishikesh represents the site where Vishnu vanquished the demon Madhu. Rishikesh is one of the first choices of tourists coming to India for Ayurveda, yoga and meditation. While yoga and mediation are practiced and taught in ashrams on

riverbanks, there are reputed universities here where Ayurveda is taught. It is a proper subject, is considered as a branch of science and constant researches are conducted in the field.

Modern age life has given too many new things to us. It has made our lives easier in many ways. But more than that, it has also increased the stress levels, the complexities and mental pressure under which we keep going on. What we immediately do not realize is the impact of living such a lifestyle on our health. But those who do care about their lives and want to live it the healthy way, what could be a better way to de-stress from the distresses of life than to relax in the soothing and therapeutic balm of India's Yogic and Meditation practices. Many people believe that yoga and meditation are mystic arts that demand complete devotion to the exclusion of everything else. However, the truth is that Yoga and Meditation are not the hard task masters they are often made out to be. Yoga and Meditation can easily be incorporated into our daily lives, requiring no more than a few minutes, if not more, and everyday. Their benefits on the other hand are wide-ranging and restorative.

Places of Interest:

- ✓ Triveni Ghat
- ✓ Bharat Mandir
- ✓ Lakshman Jhula
- ✓ Nilkantha Mahadev
- ✓ Kaishanand Mission Ashram

Special Activity

International Yoga Festival - The International Yoga Festival is organized every year from February 2 to 7 by Uttarakhand Tourism.

Literature review

A tourist destination can be considered as a complex product of tourism industry consisting of natural resources, distinctive local features, infrastructure, superstructure, services, and cultural attributes (McIntosh and Goeldner, 1990; Inskip, 1991; Kim, 1998).

Most of the studies related to tourism have focused on developing the conceptual framework to create destination image. The image of a tourist destination is an impression that a person holds about a state in which they do not reside (Hunt, 1975). It can be considered as the mental construct developed by a potential tourist on the basis of a few selected impressions among the pool of total impressions (Fakeye and Crompton, 1991). It can be viewed as the sum of the beliefs, ideas and impressions that a person has about a destination (Crompton, 1979).

Studies have been carried out to find out the attractiveness of a tourist destination based on attributes of a destination (Gearing, 1974; Ritchie and Jins, 1978; Tang and Rochananond, 1990). Some studies proposed the image building towards a tourist destination based on the feelings, belief and opinion that individuals have about a destination's perceived capacity to provide satisfaction in relation to their different levels of needs (Hu and Ritchie, 1993). Latest studies emphasize on both multi-attribute approach and holistic impressions of the tourist site to find out its image (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999; Choi, 1999; Beerli and Martin, 2004).

The information provided through various advertising media arouses lot of interest and expectations in the minds of the visitors about the tourist destination in respect of its key attributes and support services, creating a powerful impression in the minds of the visitors about the destination (Un and Crompton, 1990; Fakeye and Crompton, 1991; Gartner, 1993; Baloglu and McCleary, 1999; Beerli and Martin, 2004).

Objectives of Study

- To study the motives of foreign tourists behind visiting ashrams.
- To study the experience of foreign tourists visiting ashrams in Rishikesh

Research Methodology

Participants

All foreign tourists visiting Rishikesh and Haridwar were considered as the universe and sample unit for the research included any individual foreign tourist who was either visiting Rishikesh or Haridwar for yoga and spirituality. The geographical reason was Rishikesh and Haridwar and method used for selecting sample was judgment and quota sampling technique. The sample size was restricted to 50 foreign tourists. The foreign tourists were interviewed on streets, ashrams, hotels etc. The time period for the research period was one month (the month of January 2007).

Data Collection

Primary data were collected using survey method and instrument used was unbiased, structured and undisguised Questionnaire having 58 questions with multiple choice questions and with open ended questions. Personal interviews were also conducted with the foreign tourists to understand the role of yoga and spirituality in foreign tourist flow at Rishikesh and Haridwar.

Secondary data were collected from various journals, books and internet.

Results and Discussion

1. Motives of foreign tourists behind visiting ashrams.

- Majority of foreign tourists visiting Rishikesh believe that religious places give a peace of mind and they feel spiritually satisfied. That's why they prefer to make their trips to religious places rather than adventurous, historical or exotic sites.
- Approximately half of the tourists believe in Indian religion and customs and enjoy the rituals followed in Indian tradition. They have an urge to learn about the religious importance of Haridwar, ashrams and Holy Ganges.
- Foreign tourists like Holy Ganges, prayers at night at the bank of Ganges, temples, Indian cuisines, sermons and interaction with monks.
- Foreign tourists are likely to celebrate and participate in Indian festivals. They feel very pleasant and more satisfying in their lives.
- Some of the foreign tourists are even eager to visit Satpuris including Ayodhya, Mathura, Kashi, Kanchi, Ujjain and Dwarka.
- They believe that they are not looking for luxury but their arduous journey to meet the divine goal to make life simple and more fulfilling and rewarding.

2. Experiences of foreign tourists visiting ashrams in Rishikesh.

• Drinking water

Water is a necessity for everybody. But the available water at Rishikesh is insalubrious. The visitors had to buy a mineral water bottle every day.

• Assistance offices

The poor availability of tourist offices at Rishikesh was another issue, which cropped up as a problem for the foreign tourists.

• Facility of a tour guide

Poor availability of a guide was yet another problem faced by them (especially by the ones from France and Russia). Unfamiliarity with local language and lack of information were the problems faced by tourist due to the non-availability of a bilingual guide who can converse with them in their language.

• Misguiding tour operators

Most of the tourists complained that the tour operators duped the tourists by misguiding them about the various transport facilities available.

• Accessibility

Rishikesh lacks the accessibility ease. Airline facility is not available and the road infrastructure is also problematic. One-sided lanes for roads and narrow railway gauge make the journey slow and risky.

• Security

Majority of the tourists considered it to be unsafe while traveling in buses or walking on streets because of the pickpockets and thieves.

• Donations seekers

The tourists complained that they were often forced to cough-up money as aids and donation at the ghats by non-authorized people.

- Quality standards at hotels

Accommodation facilities of various hotels were quite dissatisfactory for the tourists.

Quality of cleanliness was found to be really very poor.

- Illiteracy

Illiteracy is also a major hurdle in communication. The language barrier was another problem in communication with the local residents.

- Credit card acceptance

Due to lacks of credit card acceptance facility, tourists have to carry money along with them which is not safe.

- Recreational facilities

Tourists find the Indian culture (traditions, music, dance, etc) fascinating and they carry zest for experiencing our culture.

- Expectations of tourists

Many tourists craved that some local events should be conducted like cultural dances. Some even said that there should have been professional instructors for teaching yoga.

Marketing Strategies to Boost Tourism in Rishikesh

The graph of tourist inflow in India is showing an upward trend. Effective marketing by ashrams to attract the maximum number of tourists include the following marketing strategies:

Product strategies-

- Organizing more events through out the year.
- Conducting short-term classes to teach Hindi language, Indian cuisines, Indian classical music and folk dances.
- Conducting classes to teach Indian traditions.
- Organizing cultural evenings.
- More events throughout the day like some music concerts etc.
- Availability of guides having the knowledge of different languages (Russian, Spanish, German, Japanese, French etc.).
- Proper sanitation.
- Good Hygiene.
- Development of the infrastructure.
- Strict vigil and law to stop and make Rishikesh free from illegal constructions.
- Eco friendly projects.

Pricing strategies-

- Opening up of economical hotels in the region.
- Coming up with more Economical ashrams.
- Economical traveling for the passengers.

Promotional strategies-

- Publishing of materials in all major languages (Russian, Spanish, German, Japanese, French etc.) and providing the same on the various tourism web-sites so that tourists coming for different regions of world find it easy to reach and explore Rishikesh and Haridwar.

Place Strategies –

- Connecting Rishikesh with major tourism circuits.
- Connecting Rishikesh by Rail and Air links with major tourist destinations.
- Building an International Airport at Rishikesh.
- Opening of Tourist help and guidance office at major places like railway station, bus-stand, airport in order to make their stay and journey easy and comfortable.

Tourism – The Path Ahead

Tourism industry is the largest employment generator of the world. India had always beckoned visitors from all over the world to experience its 5000 years old civilization. The country's diversity of culture, faiths, languages, fairs and festivals, majestic monuments and captivating wildlife made for a variety which could take in almost the whole world. All these provide a unique set of opportunities for tourists to enjoy. Still, tourist arrivals are still just a fraction of those in such popular Asian destinations as Bangkok. Even with the recent boom, industry experts say that in order to attract more visitors, India needs to upgrade its airports, roads and other infrastructure to global standards.

The success of tourism industry will be largely determined by the success achieved on all strategic fronts. India needs to change its traditional marketing approach to one that is more competitive and modern. It needs to develop a unique market position, image and brand, which cannot be held by any other competitor. It can be done by presenting India as a place of spirituality, meditation and yoga. Places like Rishikesh and Haridwar which had already been known as the yoga capital of the world, still have a lot of potential to attract the tourists, especially the foreign tourists who are visiting to India for learning yoga and to give a break to their lives.

Conclusion

The paper concludes that there is a continuum of spirituality inherent in tourism, though this is related to tourists' experiences rather than initial motivation. The study identifies some basic features for Spiritual & Yoga Tourism. Most important of them are that foreign tourists are not looking for luxury but arduous journeys to meet the divine goal or simple life & the technology, which makes traveling easier.

An extensive market research programme should be launched in the target source markets and tourism products developed to cater to the interests of each source market. An effective and ongoing market representation presence should be established with the travel trade in each source market and an Internet portal should be set up in various languages to provide information. The government should represent India as a destination of yoga and spirituality. Various policies should be made to encourage the tourists from the various parts of the globe.

Indian tourism should utilize both the Internet and other emerging interactive technologies to avail of the benefits to be gained. The tourism sector needs a national consensus on the role and place of tourism in national development and the early removal of impediments that have hitherto handicapped its growth. An integrated inter-sectoral investment plan that provides effective infrastructural support to tourism through the Ministries of Railways, Surface Transport, Shipping, Civil Aviation, Urban Development, Rural Development and Environment and Forests etc. can be achieved through the preparation of a tourism component plan.

The Government and private sector need to work earnestly and with a commitment to develop India, a most attractive tourism destination in the world.

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