

Niche Tourism Products of India

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Abstract

This paper critically scrutinises the positioning of niche tourism products in India. The paper will explore the different innovative ideas for improving tourism products. Thus, the paper is going to focus on different forms and positioning of tourism products in India. The benefits of this work to the academic community are the presentation of insights into niche tourism consumers, and an understanding of the challenges destinations face along the niche tourism life cycle. Finally, the practical benefits of this work to industry include a greater understanding of positioning and targeting their products. To illustrate this, our research is driven primarily on following significant niche tourism products: Cruise, Medical, and Film.

Key Words: Niche tourism, Cruise, Medical, Film.

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Niche tourism refers to how a specific tourism product can be tailored to meet the needs of a particular audience/market segment. Locations with specific niche products are able to establish and position themselves, as niche tourism destinations. Niche tourism, through image creation, helps destinations to differentiate their tourism products and compete in an increasingly competitive and cluttered tourism environment. Theoretical literature has paid little attention to the role and positioning of

niche tourism products. Through the use of the niche tourism life cycle it is clear that niche products will have different impacts, marketing challenges and contributions to destination development as they progress through it. Niche tourism is, therefore, seen to be a response to an increasing number of more refined tourists demanding specialist tourism products. It is a means by which destinations can focus their offerings to differentiate their tourism products and compete in an increasingly competitive and cluttered tourism environment (Sharpley and Telfer, 2002). This critical appraisal presents an exploration of various forms of niche tourism i.e. cruise, medical and film. How destinations develop themselves to create unique products and images, which appeal to the tourism market, is a critical component of the research.

Literature Review

Hutchinson (1957) is largely attributed with introducing the idea of 'niche' referring to an optimum location that an organism can exploit against its competitors. A later definition is given by Keegan *et al.* (1992), describing a niche as a smaller market not served by competing products. The term 'niche' was subsequently adopted by the business literature inventing the phrase 'niche marketing'. As Tofton and Hammervoll (2010) state, there appears to be no widely accepted definition of niche marketing. However, a number of similarities have emerged. Existing definitions include, a method to meet customer needs through the tailoring of goods and service to small markets (Stanton *et al.* 1991); 'small, profitable, homogeneous market segments which have been ignored or neglected by others' (Dalgic and Leeuw, 1994, p.42) and a 'process of concentrating marketing resources and efforts on one particular market segment' (Huh and Singh, 2007, p.213). Kotler (2003) also characterises niche marketing as focusing on customers, with a distinct set of needs, who will offer a premium to the company who best fulfils these. Thus markets can be reached and served and products and services matched to people's specific needs and wants. Dalgic and Leeuw (1994) review by stating that

niche firms generally focus their marketing activities to a limited part of the market, with relatively few customers and competitors, through the application of company specialisation, product differentiation, relationship marketing and customer focus.

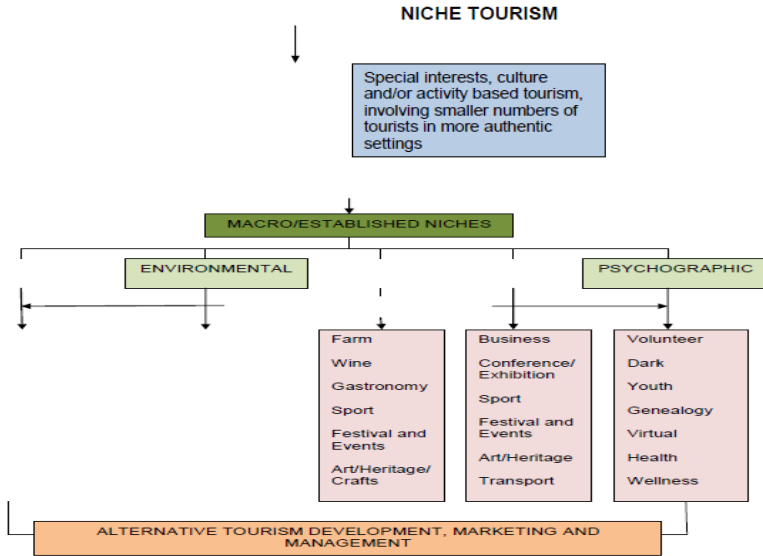


Figure 1. Niche Tourism, Source: Novelli (2005).

Huh and Singh (2007) highlight how most studies published since the 1990s have emphasised new segmentation within existing marketplaces rather than identifying new or niche markets. They attribute four key criteria by which these markets are segmented: socioeconomic/demographic; geographic; psychographic and psychological and behavioural. The limited academic literature available has mainly focused on market specific factors centring on the characteristics of what a niche is and what causes it to exist (Tofton and Hammervoll, 2010; Jarvis and Goodman, 2005). Dalgic and Leeuw remark how ‘despite its growing interest and increasing popularity there seems to have been limited research’ and existing research is ‘...predominantly from a practitioner’s point of view’ (Dalgic and Leeuw, 1994, p.39). What lacking are studies focusing on internal issues such as

the strategic capabilities, in terms of skills and resources, which can differentiate companies from their competition (Tofton and Hammervoll, 2010). Dalgic (2006) also comments on the international aspect of niche marketing. No longer confined within national boundaries, it is an opportunity for companies to develop their internal strategic capabilities. A niche market strategy has the potential to help a company identify its most profitable market segments and hold off import competition (Parrish, Cassill and Oxenham, 2006).

Parrish, Cassill and Oxenham (2006a; 2006b) also conducted illuminating research into niche markets in the international textile and apparel industry. The industry currently faces many challenges from the increased predominance of China and other skill producing nations; an overcapacity of goods and a deflation of world market prices. Linneman and Stanton (1991) comment that there are 'riches in niches' and decreasing profits is a key reason for companies to adopt a niche marketing strategy. In depth interviews with leading US textile and apparel executives revealed niche marketing to be a critical rejuvenation strategy alongside other importance factors such as focused customer communication; market size and value; differentiation and brand image and reputation.

Objectives of the Study

In order to achieve this aim, several objectives need to be fulfilled. These include:

- An evaluation of the critical role of niche products, such as cruise, medical and film, in developing tourism destinations.
- To identify the positioning level of tourism products and to explore it.

- To exaggerate different novel ideas to improve niche tourism.

Research Methodology

It is constructive to analyse our research methodology against the development of current research in tourism. Tribe (2007) observes that there have been three to five key paradigms – positivism, post-positivism, interpretivism, critical theory and constructivism – which have informed tourism research. The approach that our research journey has taken is one that is underpinned by pragmatism, with a belief that mixed methods (i.e. the use of both qualitative and quantitative methodologies), or cross-method triangulation, allows for a more in depth investigation of some of the key issues that are reflected in the highly interdisciplinary and multi-disciplinary nature of tourism (Botteril, 2001).

The use of a case study is highly relevant and illuminating when exploring key issues and seeking to introduce new research areas and explain or determine research findings. The research voyage initiated with a focus on existing data accessed through industry and governmental publications, policy documents and academic journals.

Positioning of Niche Tourism Products

Academic literature has paid little attention to the positioning of niche tourism products. Novelli considers ‘the notion of an increasingly experienced group of tourists demanding specialist holidays to meet their specific desires’ (Novelli, 2005, p.7), and how this has provided the conditions necessary to facilitate the growth of niche tourism. Sharpley and Telfer (2002) reflect on how tourist behaviour has produced a more segmented and sophisticated consumer market, and how niche tourism is a response to these specialised consumer needs and preferences. The development of niche tourism products has been a response by the

tourism industry to diversify their product base to capture new, emergent tourist markets and build a more diverse customer base. Therefore, establishing very defined and individualised niches has allowed smaller independent tourism operators to compete in the highly price sensitive and competitive tourism marketplace.

The Ministry of Tourism has taken the initiative of identifying, diversifying, developing and promoting the nascent/upcoming niche products of the tourism industry. This is done in order to overcome the aspect of 'seasonality' to promote India as a 365 days destination, attract tourists with specific interests and to ensure repeat visits for the products in which India has comparative advantage.

The following Niche Products to be identified by the Ministry of Tourism for development and Promotion:

1. Cruise Tourism
2. Medical Tourism
3. Film tourism

Cruise Tourism

'Cruise Shipping' is one of the most dynamic and fastest growing components of the leisure industry worldwide. It is fast emerging as a new marketable product. India with its vast and beautiful coastline, virgin forests and undisturbed idyllic islands, rich historical and cultural heritage, can emerge as an attractive tourist destination for cruise tourists. With the Indian economy developing at a steady pace, middle class growing in number and increasingly possessing disposal incomes for spending on leisure activities.

- With a purview to attract world tourism and to make a foot print India is focusing in elimination of its Achilles heel in tourism industries to this extent ministry of shipping have initiated Cruise Shipping Policy.

- With segment focus and state-of-the-art packages as objectives in general and infrastructure in particular.
- Major initiative of Ministry of Tourism to promote the cruise tourism a Steering Committee was constituted under the chairmanship of Secretary (Shipping) to act as a nodal body to address all issues regarding Cruise Tourism.

The followings are the main projects sanctioned for development of River Cruise during 12th Five Year Plan:

- Development of Circuit on rivers Godavari and Krishna in Andhra Pradesh for Rs. 42.595 millions in 2007-08
- Ministry of Tourism has sanctioned an amount of Rs.204.235 millions and released Rs.102.118 millions for development of Ganga Heritage River Cruise in West Bengal in 2008-09.
- Ministry of Tourism has sanctioned a mega project for integrated development of infrastructure for Heritage and Hinterland Tourism in Goa including Mandovi and Zuari rivers with CFA of Rs. 430.991 millions to the State Government of Goa in the financial year2008-09.

Positioning of cruise tourism marketing based on our study we endorse that tourism in in socio-cultural like India plays a multi facet economy booster, it is good to centre on cruise tourism and to take measures like attract the right segment of the foreign tourists to cruise shipping in India. Popularize cruise shipping with Indian tourists make India an attractive cruise tourism destination with state-o f-the-art Infrastructure and other facilities

Medical Tourism

Medical tourism (also called medical travel, health tourism or global healthcare) is a term used to describe the rapidly-growing practice of travelling across international borders to obtain health care. In particular, India is legendary for high end surgeries hip replacement, cardio, plastic surgeries; dental etc. In recent time, the study envisages that India is an emerging hub for medical

and health tourism. Virtually every type of health care, including psychiatry, alternative treatments, and convalescent care is available in India.

Besides India, there are several Asian destinations like Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, etc. that are offering Medical care facilities and promoting Medical Tourism. India stands out amongst there for the following reasons:-

- State-of-Art Medical facilities
- Reputed health care professionals
- Quality nursing facilities
- No waiting time for availing the medical services
- India's traditional healthcare therapies like Ayurveda and Yoga, combined with allopathic treatment, provide a holistic wellness

The steps to be taken for promoting India as a Medical and Health Tourism Destination include the following;

1. Medical and health tourism has been specifically promoted at various international platforms such as World Travel Mart London, ITB Berlin, ATM, etc.
2. A new category of 'Medical Visa' to be introduced for foreign tourists coming to India for medical treatment.
3. Brochure, CDs and other publicity materials have been widely circulated for publicity in target markets to promote medical and health tourism.
4. Yoga/Ayurveda/Wellness to be promote in the print, electronic, internet and outdoor medium under the Ministry of Tourism's "Incredible India Campaign".
5. Brochures & CDs on Body, Mind and Soul covering the traditional system of medicine to be produced and circulated extensively.
6. Road shows focussing on Medical Tourism to be conducted in India to induce tourism.

Film Tourism

Film tourism is a growing phenomenon worldwide, powered by both the growth of the entertainment industry and the increase in international travel. This article proposes how the films can exploit tourism marketing opportunities. It also identifies the optimum marketing factors that encourage film tourists to visit destinations that appear (or are depicted) in the movies.

Bollywood is a world renowned film producing centre in the world after Hollywood. There are more than 800 films produced in different languages in India every year. Bollywood produces the most popular Hindi films. The story of this film industry has spanned over nine decades. From its early old movies to its present state-of-the-art movies, it has produced thousands of documented short films and 27,000 feature films. Its success story has drawn filmmakers and foreign delegations from outside India. They have explored the possibilities of culture exchange programs and joint ventures.



Figure 2. Scope of Film Tourism

To promote film tourism, the Ministry have to look for the following measures;

- To impose marketing activities in which destinations can engage to promote film tourism, proactive efforts to

encourage producers and studios to film at the location, efforts to generate media publicity around the film and its location, marketing activities that promote the film location after production, and peripheral marketing activities that leverage film tourism potential.

- Ministry of tourism has started to focus on film tourism as this may open the gateway for a link between Hollywood and Bollywood.
- We recommend initiating any global movie awards similar to golden globe, BAFTA and academy awards in India.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the purpose of this critical appraisal is to demonstrate our contribution to academic knowledge and understanding of the role of niche tourism products in destination development. This critical appraisal has contributed to knowledge and understanding in tourism theory, practice and policy across niche tourism.

Hall challenges the role and importance of niche tourism as a major driving force in tourism growth and the regeneration of destinations posing the questions ‘is it a healthy sign that the industry should appear to be driven by niche tourism? Or is it actually the case that this is an overhyped, politically correct and convenient delusion?’ (Hall, 2003, p.24). Through the research presented in this critical appraisal, we would challenge Hall’s view and argue that niche tourism offers destinations a valid opportunity to reinvent and reposition themselves and has a key role to play in destination imaging and the development of the tourist experience.

Tourism department should encourage and assist different tour promoters to plan and offer tour packages incorporating various niche products and this may be publicised in the international tourist magazines and inflight magazines. This can help sell tourism even in off-seasons. For the development of

tourism in India there is a great need for the promotion of niche products. Hence, India has to position niche products rather than marketing it.

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