

The Tourism Industry of Goa: Current Status and Future Potential

by

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Introduction

Tourism as an activity or as a phenomenon has been existing since the olden days. The quest travel often quoted as the “travel bug” is apart of human psyche. A result of this psyche is the birth and growth of the all encompassing “tourism industry”. Goa has long been identified as a major tourism destination in India and the world over. The “flower children” of the 1960’s ended up at the pristine and virgin beaches of Goa thus giving the first indications of what was to become of Goa as a tourist destination. Last year i.e., 2004-05 season witnessed a tourist inflow of the magnitude of 2.4 million (Tourism Statistics: Govt. Of Goa) which included more than 300,000 international tourists and 2,100,000 domestic tourists. These figures are being seen in the last few years with the growth in the immediate past three years being in the range of 9% to 27%. This kind of phenomenal growth in a short span is certainly not without its share of issues as far as tourism is concerned. Growth is an essential part of life and tourism industry is no exception. However planning for growth is a prudent activity if one desires to harness its full potential.

Many people have researched destination growth and Miossec(1976) identifies a five-stage pattern in the growth of a destination. The destination witnesses these stages slowly and each stage is indicative of the changes that occur both in the tourists’ perception of the destination as well as in the nature of the reaction of the local community to tourism activities at the destination.

Britton (1982) has argued that the international tourism industry, due to the commercial power held by the foreign enterprises, imposes on peripheral destinations a development mode that reinforces dependency on and vulnerability to, developed nations. This would be seen in different intensities at different stages of the destination’s growth path.

Pearce (1989) observes that tourism is encouraged as a means of increasing the inflow of foreign funds into the economy or pursued for political purposes and not as an end in itself. It is perhaps this focus on tourism as a means that is creating the myopia that destination development activity is suffering from.

Honey-pot areas in Tourism in Goa.

Tourists like to travel and explore different places, people, cultures, traditions etc., and experience them. This penchant for travel in fact is the backbone of tourism so much so that Smith (1995) calls it “geography in action”. Given this nature of tourism it is but natural that most destinations try to showcase their products and product potentials for the tourists so that visitation can be increased. In most resource-intensive destinations where the natural resources of the destination are the most visited attractions, the development takes place rapidly in the early stages of destination development. In fact Butler (1980) identifies the stage as the stage of involvement wherein the local and outside investment is seen for the

growth of the destination. Further stage of development witnesses the loss of local control on investment in tourism as larger investment needs are felt by the destination to accommodate a larger inflow of tourists. In such a situation investments generally find their way to areas that have high resource interactive attractions, thus creating a honey-pot situation where the attraction is the main reason for which tourists come and related activities are planned around it. Over a period of time this leads to either haphazard growth due to ad-hoc decision-making and ad-hoc development or saturation or both. In all the above cases destination resources get depleted in terms of quality as there is tremendous pressure on their capacity to service the tourists. In fact Jeffries (1971) indicates that resources by themselves are not products at a destination but need to be developed *in quite different ways in answer to the needs of quite different markets*. This shows that one needs to showcase the tourism resources at a destination in a manner that is conducive to tourists from a viewpoint of creating a good experience for them. This is possible only when there is an optimum utilization of the resource base. With honey-pot areas this rarely happens as the resource gets degenerated and results in a negative experience for the tourists. Though honey-pot areas at a tourism destination generate higher revenues the concomitant depletion of the natural resources around the area negate the economic benefits arising out of it.

Tourism Experience Development.

Creating tourism experiences for tourists is the central theme of any tourism destination stakeholder. This has to be borne in mind when the developmental platform of tourism is debated. The need for proper planning as far as tourism product development or tourism attraction development could never have been more emphasized than in the process of creating experiences for tourists. One of the most desired experiences for tourists is to get the feel of being welcomed at a place, which she visits. If such experiences are designed then the tourist would certainly involve herself with the experience and create a better tourism experience for herself as well as for others around her. Currently Goa has seen a huge rise in the tourist inflows in the past three years and this is a good indication for the economic benefits to the industry in particular and to the general public at large. However one needs to look more deeply at this issue because there is more to economic benefits than meets the eye. One needs to look as to who benefits and how the benefit percolates in society. Foster (1985) says that “the search for, and developing and launching of new products is essential for the long term survival in tourism. The slow rate of change in demand for tourism products disguises this necessity”. This statement indicates that there is a dynamic activity that is necessary, which can look at the product development process effectively throughout the destination.

The Future

The increase in tourism arrivals heralds with it the imminent need for increased resource usage. This is evident from the requirement of increased beds per tourist in terms of hotels in all categories. At the current level of Tourist arrivals in Goa in 2004 of 24,48,959 the total bed requirement is 39,183 beds. If we fit a trend to the tourist arrivals then the tourist arrivals for the year 2016 are projected at 42,80,000, which needs a phenomenal increase in bed requirement of 69,400, which is almost twice the amount for 2004. This is only one area of resource development need and one can imagine what kind of resources are needed in terms of basic resources such as water, electricity, garbage disposal, land, roads etc.

Furthermore one needs to look at the kind of resources on the primary demand side of tourism such as increased demand on attractions, natural as well as man-made. Viewed from this point one is compelled to take a hard look at the honey-pot areas such as Calangute, Baga, Candolim, Palolem etc., and then incorporate the tourism attraction demand from tourists in future. This would certainly lead to the development of hinterland areas of Goa and most of this would be in the realms of Heritage and Culture. This is where the destination managers and stakeholders need to come together to create strong policies that are conducive to better tourism experience creation. Till recently tourism has been viewed as an economic activity that creates and distributes wealth at the destination. One needs to look deeply into this phenomenon and realize what impacts this has on the phenomenon of tourism itself. Most people call the traditional approach as the demand side approach in the sense that tourism is looked at from the benefits of demand for tourism. However the supply-side aspect is not taken with equal vigour. There are many organizations and stakeholders who are eager to market their product to the tourists but not many of them would get together and spend time, efforts and money in designing the tourism products that are offered to the tourists. The future of Tourism in Goa will certainly depend on how this is created. Economic benefit dispersion and resource generation, maintenance and dynamic evaluation alone will help Goa retain its pristine nature and benefit both the hosts as well as the guests.

Tourism dependent economies generally create products and services keeping in mind the tourists. However it would be prudent to view the local economy and population as the main demand sector and tourism as an add-on economy. The reason for this is the involvement of all sections of the local economy. Tourism products created and distributed to the tourists have a built in risk factor of competition, market backlash by way of tourism activities not occurring in the region due to exogenous factors. If the tourism products are a part of the local economy then there is lesser fluctuation as far as the demand is concerned and hence price stability is relatively ensured. This in itself is a great relief for investors who seek a stable business environment to enable them to take better investment decisions. This in turn would lead to a sense of stability for investors thus boosting their confidence in terms of bringing in new investments to bolster the supply side of a destination.

Robustness of a Tourism Destination.

A tourism destination is as robust as its weakest link or weakest spot. As such creating a destination growth path that includes growth and stability of resource utilization is the need of the hour. At current levels of resource strength Goa will reach saturation point in terms of Carrying Capacity in the year 2018. This is indicative of how fast the tourism scenario is growing in comparison with the resource development process. Unless priority is given to the development of resources there is no hope for Goa to keep creating better tourism experiences for the tourists. The level of resources needed for tourism development is large and individual organizations may not be able to marshal them. Since most of the firms that are functioning at a tourism destination are small and medium enterprises it becomes all the more imperative that larger investments come in from the state itself or are outsourced through other means such as joint ventures, alliances, specifically created organizations that have access to larger funds, etc.,

In terms of creating an image for the destination and in terms of ensuring that the effects of tourism are spread throughout the destination strong cooperative environment needs to be

created. Co-operation can exist in the form of alliances, joint ventures, Co-operatives for specific purposes etc.,. Most resource specific activities could use these forms to foster the growth and development of tourism as well as that of the resource.

One such example is of the heritage tourism in Portugal, which is created out of a strong co-operative organization to rejuvenate the hinterland tourism. Rural tourism is fostered through this Co-operative organization called TURIHAB and its success in restoring cultural and heritage tourism is quite astounding. One can safely say that the future of tourism in Goa will depend a lot on how the different stakeholders of the destination will co-operate and build a significantly strong Goa from the viewpoint of tourism.

Conclusion

Goa Undoubtedly is one of the most important destinations of India. International and domestic tourists have a special place for Goa in their hearts and it might be difficult for Goa to sustain that place in future unless it organizes itself for the delivering better tourism experiences to those visiting its wonderful locales. The forms of intervention to achieve this have to be designed by the stakeholders themselves and the future certainly is in the co-operative domain as well as in the development of tourism throughout the destination rather than at honey-pot areas.

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