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Chief Editors

Prof. S P Bansal

Vice Chancellor

*Maharaja Agrasen University, Baddi
Himachal Pradesh.*

Prof. Sandeep Kulshrestha

Director

*Indian Institute of Tourism and Travel
Management, (IITTM), Gwalior
Madhya Pradesh*



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All Correspondence Should be Address to :

Managing Editor

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4819/24, 3rd Floor, Mathur Lane

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Email: journal.itc@gmail.com, bhartipublications@gmail.com

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Enriching Host and Tourist Experience Through Community Organized Cultural & Food Festivals: A Community Perspective

S.P. Bansal, Sandeep Walia

ABSTRACT

Tourism undoubtedly can contribute to the economic growth of any region. Moreover tourism produces social benefits to the region in terms of creating employment, growth of small and medium sized enterprises and improvement in infrastructure particularly in the undeveloped and remote areas strive towards sustainable development by preserving India's cultural heritage. Tourists are seeking authentic and unique experiences through community organized cultural and food festivals and this brings the tourist closer to the host culture. To this particular rural communities are organizing food and cultural festivals to protect and promote local commodities and differentiate themselves from others. Initiatives in these kinds of events help in enhancing the image of destination when food and culture is seen as integral part of the destination image. A community organized cultural and food festival strategy can equally be used as an important marketing instrument for regional development. It is accepted that cuisine is inescapable and expressive part of every culture and Culture always means differentiating particular destination in competitive global tourism markets. The present study has focused on a case study of community organized cultural and food festival in Sangla Village of Himachal Pradesh focusing on development of culture and food festivals as a tourism product and has potential to draw tourists in future and with these kinds of initiatives organized resulting in improved host and tourist understanding.

Key words: - Community, employment, culture, cuisine

Introduction

Building a good image of destination or tourist product so as to make it different and unique from others is a vital condition now days in competitive Global world. This image can be created by taking advantage of local culture, festivals; traditions and thereby organizing special events and local festivals. Studies showed

that there has been observed a change in tastes of tourists in 21st century. Despite from the traditional forms of tourism the tourists have moved towards the other forms of tourism (Guzman et.al 2011). Studies explored that this could be a result of discovery of new places or destinations or may be due to the knowledge of new destinations, may be of that point

S.P. Bansal, Vice Chancellor, Maharaja Agrasen University, Baddi, Himachal Pradesh
Spbansal_mtahpu@rediffmail.com

Sandeep Walia (Corresponding Author), Assistant Professor, Maharaja Agrasen University, Baddi, Himachal Pradesh
sndp.walia551@gmail.com

unexplored by tourists and may be because of a search for new destinations with greater emphasis on Local Customs, Traditions, festivals ,history, cuisine and the particular culture of destination.

Thousands of grass root, low impact, high sustainable initiatives all over the world struggle to tell tourists that they exist. Very few of these inspirational initiatives have the resources and skills to market themselves in an industry dominated by existing traditional forms of tourism. So in this way cultural diversity can be looked upon as a means of enriching the experience of active tourists who are looking for new experiences and new Horizons in tourism.

On the one hand at the local level opportunities can be observed to develop plans for the participation of new plans and strategies and also for the involvement of civil operations in the development. On the other hand tourism can be linked to a community's hidden culture and natural resources which are on the recurrent factors in fostering the development of the associated/ concerned communities. The World Tourism Organization (2002) points out that sustainable development in certain geographical areas may become a fundamental tool for the economic development of the particular area and the reduction of poverty in certain areas. It is possible to create tourism products and services by means of areas own cultural and environmental resources, offering job opportunities for job creation especially for young people and women of the respective areas.

Thus, tourism is also considered as a tool in fighting poverty with the initiatives such as the World Tourism Organizations Sustainable Tourism Eliminating Poverty (ST-EP) Program. This would always be

a complementary activity and is never a substitution for primary touristic activities. In this respect that the promoting tourist exploitation of undeveloped rural areas of the developing countries is not good or bad but it depends on different Political, Social Economic, Environmental and Cultural factors. Thus several tourist destinations can be established through the structuring of tourism supply and demand. The new need to break in traditional tourism is observed and the change in monotony has fostered the local initiatives which incorporate the natural attractions and the leisure activities at the local level. The effect of all these activities is that the rural undeveloped areas are undergoing through a phase of transformation and this transformation is changing both the local economic structure on the first hand and their traditional production on the second hand.

And these kind of new initiatives in the field of Tourism, travel and trade have caused a natural repositioning of market destinations in accordance with the fluctuating demands that have led to make a route/way to certain emerging destinations which are becoming more attractive for increasingly specialized markets. Community based tourism initiatives in the region can reap the benefits of the partnership with tourism for sustainable future alternatives and transforming the lives of people in the host communities. Thus it is more evident that there are opportunities for new projects, such as tourist exploitation of natural, local and cultural resources are to be coordinated at local level and it will help to boost local economic structure that is primarily based on agriculture and live stock farming. So this shows that in order to implement a certain tourist product there is a need to establish a suitable regional tourism policy which is based

on the three activities (Bringas & Israel, 2004) first- training of local people and raising awareness. Second- infrastructure and Equipment. Third- Promotion. There should be two essential components which should be taken into consideration firstly the level of involvement of local community and secondly the number and type of the tourists.

This paper presents a study in which the extent of this new form of tourism could generate vast incoming economic resources and create employment. Similarly a revision of the existing literature in this field related to relationship between tourists and local community which is more interesting than it was in case of the traditional tourism (Zorn and Farthing, 2007) mainly because of the involvement of host and contact with other cultures for its own development.

The concept of Community Based Tourism (CBT) can be found in the work of Murphy in his book *A Community Approach* (1985) where aspects concerning tourism and developing communities are analyzed and was a catalyst for the discussion in this area. It provides an important platform for debate and change at a key stage in the development of the tourism industry and the further study by the same author in 2004 (Murphy and Murphy). At that time when leisure travel was expanding in terms of both visitors numbers and the amount of more easily accessible destinations, the emphasis on considerations such as local initiative, a tourism product being in accord with the community and local benefits being integrated into the principles of tourism planning and management was refreshing and stimulating (Blank, 1989; Haywood, 1988). Studies like Guzman, Canizares and Pavon (2001) has also noted that Community Based Tourism is gaining

Prestige all over the world as a major form of Tourism.

The concept paves the way for new lines of investigation and for the possibility of tourism development together with other alternatives such as community benefit tourist initiatives (CBTI's) (Simpsons, 2008) or community based Enterprises (CBE's) (Manyara and Jones, 2007). All these agree that the local community should be a part of the planning and decision making process so that they can easily adapt to the changes and also open their horizons. The most important feature of this type of tourism is to make a healthy relationship between the visitors and the local people, this is why creation of community events favors this type of tourism, because community based tourism is actually based on the active participation of the local community. The community also perceives this form of tourism beneficial for job creation (Guzman et. al, 2011)

The study will take example from Indian perspective. The main aim of study will be to identify some applications of theoretical model of Community Based Tourism and to give appropriate suggestions for the development of Tourism in Harmony with local community, since Batta and Pathak (2009) through their case study, have advocated the models of community based tourism in compare to other small and medium scale enterprises in tourism especially in Himalayan region. Tourism and community shows a close link with each other. Because of tourism development a community gets opportunity to become more attractive and prosperous (Bansal.S.P, 2013). It is more attractive because of community's mysteriously nature to draw and satisfy tourists and perhaps more prosperous because of money spent by the tourists and seeking economic

development with this money spent. The main benefits of community based tourism are that they provide direct economic benefits to the families, socioeconomic developments to the communities and to the respective areas. It also shows sustainable diversification and improvement in the life styles of the communities concerned and the concerned area (Manyara and Jones; 2010, Rastegar, 2010)

Community based tourism is also an effective way of exchanging knowledge, analyzing and implementing policies, establishing coordination and avoiding conflicts among visitors and the local people (Kibicho, 2008). The study tells about that how a community as a whole can play a decisive role in the development of the area as a tourist destination. The attitude of local community can make a base for the perception and evaluation of tourism including the factors involving infrastructure, environment and events.

The involving and participating nature of local communities in community based tourism exerts a strong impression on visitors experience and thus the tourism planning benefits the whole community which is involved. However some negative results of community based tourism can be seen as it may affect the lifestyle of the concerned community or tourism can result or even can destroy the local culture of the community. There can be a loss of Cultural identity of the concerned area. The large number of tourist volumes can affect the development of tourism product and the destruction of natural resources as well (Teye et al., 2002). In this case the local populations of the area have five ways to cope up with the problem and minimize its effect

on the community- resistance, retreat, boundary maintenance, revitalization and adoption (Dogan, 1989).

Community Based Tourism is based on the introduction of new tourist products with the help of community involvement and participation. Community participation (which can mean a level of control, ownership or influence) in a tourism appears to be closely linked to the derivation of livelihood and other benefits from the tourism to that same community (Murphy, 1985; Scheyvens, 2002: world Wide fund (WWF).2001). The aspect related to community strengthening and their sources of income through tourism is very important and requires further investigations; for example how important is community involvement, authority or freehold to the benefits delivered from tourism and what exact role tourists play in transferring and raising benefits to the community? Community Based tourism can also be a best solution to minimize the negative impacts of mass tourism in the developing nations and can also help to attain better standards of living as the visitor tourist also plays the equal role for the exchange of ideas and knowledge sharing with the host community visited. Community based Tourism is projected and promoted by several International Organizations, such as WTO (2002) keeping the view in mind of so many objectives like ownership and empowerment of the concerned community. It also focuses on protection of cultural and natural resources, high quality visitors experience and social and economic development of the community and the area.

Objectives of the study

1. To study residents attitude towards

community organized cultural and food festivals and tourism development.

2. To identify the impact of Community organized festivals on the residents life style

Geographical Description of the Area

Sangla Valley or the Baspa Valley is in the district Kinnaur in the state of Himachal Pradesh and is the major town. Sangla village is situated at a height of 2680 meters from the sea level. The meaning "Sang" meaning torch, "La" meaning pass. The valley is surrounded by forested slopes and offers views of the high mountains. Its location in the greater Himalayan range gives it a milder climate than the plains. Until 1989 outsiders could not enter the valley without a special permit from the Government of India, due to its strategic position on the Indo-Tibet/China border. Besides the natural beauty of Great Himalaya Kamru Fort, Mata Devi Temple & Bearing Nag Temples are the main attractions of the Valley.

Sangla Valley is a part of Kinnaur and inhabited by Kinnauris. The main livelihood is agriculture while apples are a major cash crop here. The most significant achievement of this region which is worth laudable is that this area boasts of growing the world's best quality potatoes. The weather along with the soil is both conducive to its exclusive and superior variety and quality. A part of the population also depends on tourism. The valley remains closed for six months during winter (from December till May) when the snowfall is heavy. As Kinnaur district is a tribal area, the locals are permitted to prepare local wine by using Apple for their own consumption. Apple plantation and Tourism is the major source of income

of the native residents of the village. From April month till November the villagers work in Apple plantations and tourism related business. Late somewhere around in the year 2005 with the help of Sangla Valley Sustainable Development Society (SVSDS), Shimla-based NGO Himalayan Research Group and the CSK Himachal Pradesh Krishi Vishwavidyalaya (CSKHPKV) of Palampur and FIBL Institute of Switzerland a two days food festival was started. The festival was the initiated by the efforts of Sangla Valley Sustainable Development Society which was formed by the residents of Sangla in order to promote tourism. Around 150 tribals from a dozen-odd villages in Sangla valley of Kinnaur have come together under an umbrella to develop household tourism. They want to cash in the richness of original tribal culture with a bit of value addition in traditional style. The group is preparing to reach out to tourists from India and abroad through a Sangla Valley Household Tourism Festival. They will present the true essence of the Sangla valley by giving tourists a taste of local cuisine, tribal culture and handlooms. Thirty-five tribal households have already applied for registration with the tourism department so they can open their homes and offer other services to the tourists. The two-day Sangla Valley Household Tourism Festival is a promotional drive to invite tourists to relish local cuisine, enjoy folk culture and experience working in the fields and cooking garden-fresh vegetables. The people of Sangla Valley showcase local cuisine, folk culture, handicraft and handloom for domestic and foreign tourists under the home-based tourism initiative.

Methodology

The study was carried out in the state of

Himachal Pradesh and is in Indian context. The study is an empirical study and was mainly focused on community organized cultural and food festival in Sangla Village of Himachal Pradesh focusing on development of culture and food festivals as a tourism product and has potential to draw tourists in future and with these kinds of initiatives organized resulting in improved host and tourist understanding.

The study was carried out with the help of primary data collected with the help of pre structured questionnaire from the local people of Sangla village. The total sample size was 66 which is selected on convenient- cum - judgmental basis. A pre

structured questionnaire was developed consisting of various questions such as social and demographic profile of the respondents in the first part and the second part asked the respondents 12 variables focused to find out relationship between community development and tourism. Likert- type scale values assigned 1 to “strongly disagree”, 2 to “disagree”, 3 to “Neutral”, 4 to “Agree”, and 5 to “strongly agree”. Respondents were asked to give their level of judgment or agreement that most closely corresponds to their perception of 12 statements.

In table -1, we can see the number of foreign tourists visiting Kinnaur district in Himachal Pradesh

Table 1 Foreign Tourists visiting Kinnaur District during 2009-2013

Year	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Tourists	13811	14742	17860	15544	18762

Source: Department of Tourism and Civil Aviation Government of Himachal Pradesh.

According to data provided by the Department of Civil Aviation Government of Himachal Pradesh, There has been observed a gradual increase in the number of foreign tourists visiting Kinnaur District every year. The main reasons for visiting the valley for a holiday and enjoy scenic beauty of the valley. The gradual increase year after year shows that the valley is loved and admired by the foreign tourists. This means that tourism produces more foreign currency income than traditional exports such as apple, which is the major source of income of people of the valley.

The research carried out to determine the perception of local community towards itself and its assessment about the tourism initiatives in the concerned area based upon the natural and ecological resources of the area particularly customs,

traditions, culture and special events. The subject of study was the local residents of the area and a sample designed was carried out by means of randomized sampling. The distribution of population was also taken into account. The survey statistics are listed below in the Table 2.

Table 2 Survey Statistics.

Area	Sangla Valley (Kinnaur District)
Population	2244 people
Sampling	66 interviews
Procedure	Simple randomized sampling
Time Period	May-July 2014

Table 3 indicates the socio demographic profile of the respondents.

Table 3 Socio-demographic profile

Variable	%age	Variable	%age	Variable	%age
Gender		Educational level		Occupation	
Men	60.6%	below matriculate	3.0%	Public sector	10.6%
Women	37.9%	matriculate	7.6%	Private Sector	22.7%
Age		Graduate	48.5%	Businessman	19.7%
Below 30 years	47.0%	Post Graduate	25.8%	Student	37.9%
30 to 45 years	39.4%	Above Post Graduate	15.2%	Any other	9.1%
45 to 60 years	9.1%				
Above 60years	4.5%				

During the study the respondents were asked to rate their experience regarding community organized cultural and food festivals and impact of these kinds of activities on their routine and life style on 5 point scale. See table-4

Table 4 (T-test)

One-Sample Test	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Test Value = 3			
Tourism promotes pride of their way of life and cultures among community members	3.957	65	.000
Tourism unites various groups inside the community to work together	5.801	64	.000
Tourism becomes a platform for skill training and learning new ideas for the community	2.310	65	.024
Tourism makes the community well known to outsiders	5.138	65	.000
Tourism promotes cultural restoration and conservation	5.009	65	.000
Tourism can help in curving un employment	5.042	65	.000
I think I could learn a lot from interaction with tourists	2.057	65	.044

Tourism invites other organizations to assist the community	2.026	65	.047
The environment of my community has deteriorated because of tourism	3.794	65	.000
Tourism creates new markets for local products	3.789	65	.000
Most tourists are respectful to the community	1.953	65	.055
Tourism is another form of education for tourists to understand and appreciate the life of the host community	4.457	65	.000

Note- Since the value depicts in the last column i.e. significance value for all the variables or items except one variable that most of the tourists are respectful to the community are less than 0.05 and are significant.

Table 5 : Chi-Square Test

Statements												
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Chi-Square	60.818 ^a	48.262 ^b	40.000 ^c	30.515 ^a	25.212 ^a	34.364 ^c	12.333 ^a	12.333 ^a	24.758 ^a	35.091 ^c	25.061 ^a	20.212 ^a
df	4	5	5	4	4	5	4	4	4	5	4	4
Asymp. Sig.	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.015	.015	.000	.000	.000	.000

Results and Discussions:

Table 2 depicts the survey statistics of the surveyed area like the population of the village was 2244 people and out of them 66 people were interviewed on a convenient-cum-judgmental basis. There were two major constraints in collecting the large sample size. First one is that the concept of CBT is quite new to the people of the area and second is majority of the people are from rural area and are involved in day to day routines activities of agriculture and farming.

Table 3 indicates about the socio-demographic profile of the respondents interviewed. Out of 66 respondents 60.6% were male and 37.6% were female. 47.0% were below 30 years of age while 39.4% were between 30 to 45 years, 9.1% were between 45 to 60 years of age and

remaining 4.5% were above 60 years. Educational level was quite good as only 3.0% were under matriculate, 7.6% were matriculate, 48.5% were graduate, 25.8% were post graduate and remaining 15.2% people were above post graduate. Majority of the respondents interviewed were students 37.9% followed by private sector employees 22.7% and 19.7% people are indulged in business. 10.6% population of the surveyed group was in public sector or Govt. employees and remaining 9.1% are in any other profession.

In table 4 'T' test was applied to conclude data in a significant manner. The test value was tested on 3 because the variables were drafted in such a manner that a higher value than 3 will give a positive score. The data collected from the respondents was analyzed with the help of SPSS. In

the item No 11 the significance value comes 0.05 which is equal to higher value and cannot be accepted. Therefore the item no. 11 which states that most tourists are respectful to the community was rejected as the result become insignificant.

To test the results statistically Chi-square test was applied by making assumption that the responses of all the respondents are equally distributed amongst all the available options. But after applying the test, this assumptions found to be false, which lead to the conclusion that responses of respondents are significant enough to reach on some conclusion.

Conclusions

The study concluded that community is having a positive attitude towards the new initiatives like organizing special cultural and food festivals. The study also showed that community members have shown remarkable interests to organize

such initiatives as a part of learning and development for the touristic activities in the area. The study revealed that the community members have rejected that most of the tourists are respectful to the community, while community have also advocated that tourism promotes pride of their way of life and culture and holds positive attitude towards the facts like because of tourism development new markets for local tourism products like handicrafts will be created and thereby can help incurving unemployment and will give ample opportunities of self employment also. The study also concluded that the development of touristic activities can unite various groups inside the community to work together thereby improving social and economic status of the area. Community events and festivals can attract local, national and international tourists and visitors. Events help to capture attention and promote attractions and infrastructures.

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