



Munich Personal RePEc Archive

Tourism policy innovations of an Indian state (Haryana) and their implications

Sharma, Chanchal Kumar

15. January 2005

Online at <http://mpa.ub.uni-muenchen.de/167/>

MPRA Paper No. 167, posted 07. November 2007 / 00:50

Tourism policy innovations of an Indian state (Haryana) and their implications

Chanchal Kumar Sharma

Maharaja Agrasen P. G. College, Jagadhri, India

SUMMARY

Haryana was established in 1966 by getting carved out from the heart of the Indo-Gigantic plains. Roughly the size of Belgium, Haryana has a track record of innovative tourism policies. Way back in '70s it was the first state to pioneer highway tourism. It went on to experiment with cultural and pilgrimage tourism in 80s and adventure and golf tourism in 90s and then farmhouse tourism at the turn of the century. While an emphasis on expanding markets for tourism is a praiseworthy move, devising strategies for promoting and protecting local culture, values, heritage, lifestyles and local natural resources and environments is also critical for sustenance of tourism.

The paper looks at the socio-cultural dimensions of various tourism strategies adopted by the state of Haryana, in order to underline the importance of ensuring effective planning and management for guaranteeing protection and preservation of cultural heritage, values, local environments and social well-being. It is thus a call for a mature response on part of the government for ensuring sustainable development of tourism. There is a need to develop a strategic framework involving coherent partnership between all the stakeholders, ensuring generation of foreign exchange without creating socio cultural and environmental problems and without having to exhaust assets which cannot be replaced.

Keywords:

tourism policy; highway tourism; adventure and golf tourism; farm house tourism; Haryana; India

INTRODUCTION

When Haryana was carved out of the Indian state of Punjab on 1st November 1966 it was seen as a state without much potential for tourism. This is a state on which nature has not showered her riches. No lush green mountains, no rolling rivers (the only river that passes through Haryana is Ghaggar), and no streams depicting nature's bounty. But if we see the state of tourism in Haryana today, it seems that Haryana has turned the handicap on its head.

The foreign and domestic inflow of tourists to Haryana has been increasing over the past years. The state attracted 6.4 million domestic tourists and 11850 foreign tourists in 2002. Haryana's share in domestic and international tourists stands at 2.4% and 2% respectively. (Intra Brand Equity foundation, CII, 2005). In fact, tourism in Haryana started by the public sector initiative as there was not much private investment in the tourism sector, to start with.

But with infrastructure development which is taking place in the state, government is now receiving a lot of offers for setting up tourist complexes from the private sector as well.

The state government's policy is to focus on the betterment and upgrading of the tourism infrastructure in the state and to encourage private sector participation in its further development. Tourism policy of the government states that the state does not have much to offer as far as the natural resources are concerned, thus destinations would be developed focused on religious, leisure, culture and heritage and rural tourism along with continued emphasis on highway tourism. The government's future strategy is to act as facilitator by providing support infrastructure facilities such as wayside amenities, tourist information centers and facility for holding craft *melas* (fairs), and transportation services. Focus will be on four 'A's of tourism i.e. Access, Accommodation, Attraction and Amenities. Before proceeding further it is pertinent to have an overview of the SWOT Analysis of the state that preceded Haryana's commendable initiative to capitalize on its highway tourism policy.

Strengths

- Geographically, it surrounds Delhi on three sides (North, West and South). This fact makes its location quite strategic.
- The arteries of India pass through Haryana. In order to go to Punjab, Himachal, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh or Madhya Pradesh one has to pass through Haryana. National Highway No. 1, 2, 8 and 10 as they all pass through Haryana.
- The state is peaceful. No terrorism. Excellent law and order situation. There are 36 communities (religion wise, caste-wise and region-wise) all living side by side together, functioning as one unit.
- Good core infrastructure and better environment in comparison to other states.
- Number of important pilgrimage centers.
- Rich cultural tradition and heritage.
- Typical dance/music form of the state.

Weaknesses

- Lack of effective tourism policy.
- Inadequate awareness about tourist spots in Haryana.
- Neglect of traditional arts, craft and culture.
- Ineffective marketing through promotion and publicity.
- Inadequate tourist information centers/ kiosks.
- Inadequate tourism infrastructure.

Opportunities

- Promotion of religious tourism.
- Exploring adventure and sports tourism.
- Promotion of rural and highway tourism.
- Promotion of leisure tourism and gaming complexes.
- Promotion of cultural festivals and arts and crafts of the state.
- Tourism accorded industry status.
- Excellent general infrastructure.

Threats

- State being considered as transit area while traveling to the neighbouring states. (The state must ensure that tourists are attracted to visit Haryana and not to use it merely as a passageway).
- Fears regarding safety of a woman traveling alone in Haryana. (The need is to bring focus to the sharp need for a permanent public relations setup to eliminate such fears among visitors).

Since Haryana tourism started as a state enterprise, it would be appropriate to have an overview of what Haryana tourism has done so far. The paper outlines the innovative policies adopted by Haryana tourism which by and large have been successful in attracting

tourists and contributing to the state's income while, at the same time, keeping its negative impacts at the minimum. It is to be noted that, recently, the government has declared tourism as a top priority area. Due to this renewed attention towards tourism development, there is very likelihood that the eagerness to exploit full tourism potential may get translated into an overenthusiastic and uncontrolled response, bringing some benefits in short run but making its growth unsustainable in the long run by damaging not only the cultural heritage but also the social and cultural values of the region. In fact, Haryana tourism can continue to deliver its current benefits and can extend them even more widely only if it remains sensitive to its potential negative impacts.

Thus the major concern of the paper is to attract attention of the policy makers toward those negative implications of tourism policies which are barely noticeable at present but may become more pronounced and distinct if the future strategy is not carefully designed so as to strike a balance between business imperatives and the wider quality of life needs of local communities.

The idea behind exploring the future possibility of surfacing of unconstructive socio-economic consequences of tourism initiatives of Haryana government is not to suggest that tourism should be discouraged but to emphasize that the sustainable development of tourism shall be ensured by not permitting any slaughter mining of tourism resources (its art culture, heritage and other natural resources). Thus it is suggested that the state should introduce a suitable legislation for an orderly and regulated growth of tourism and promotion of culture of Haryana.

HIGHWAY TOURISM OF 1970s

Undaunted by the lack of nature's endowments, the state went on to pioneer the concept of highway tourism in 1970s. This phase saw the initial establishment of the tourism strategy and the infrastructure. With the success of this concept the state was able to milk the tourism trade despite lacking in natural attractions of other states. The credit for making the state of Haryana a 'front runner' in developing highway tourism goes to the then chief minister Mr Bansi Lal, who revolutionized Indian tourism by having tourist complexes named after birds on all highways in the

state. Idea behind this concept of highway tourism was to take full advantage of Haryana's proximity to Delhi and to build tourist complexes at strategic points along the highways passing through the state. The vision fructified exactly as it was visualized. Soon it became fashion for Delhities to drive to these resorts to enjoy these green oases and to have good food and drinks. Further the tourists who pass through Haryana, can always relax for some time during their journey at these roadside resorts that have dotted all the major highways.

Present status of highway tourism

According to a PHDCCI paper on Haryana, today the state has one of the best way-side amenities and highway motels. Some of these places have dormitories and all of them have restaurants. Dabchick tourist resort, Hermitage Huts (Surajkund), Rajhans (Surajkund) Sunbird (a beautifully landscaped tourist resort, 8 km from South Delhi) and Badkal Lake (a splendid lake retreat, only 30 minute drive from Delhi) are on Haryana's stretch of the Delhi-Agra-(National Highway No.2) Karna lake (Karnal), Skylark, Parakeet and Kingfisher (Ambala) are on Delhi-Chadigarh highway. Oasis tourist complex and Chakravarty Lake (Uchana) and Blue Jay resort (Samalkha) are on the Delhi-Ambala stretch of National Highway No.1. Yadavindra Gardens at Pinjore, on the Chandigarh Shimla highway are a must see. Surkhab (Sirsa) Blue Bird tourist resort (Hissar) and Flamingo (Hissar) complexes are on the Delhi-Fazilka stretch of National Highway No 10. Sultanpur Bird Sanctuary (opened in 1972) has guest house facilities for ornithologists, hideouts, watch towers, bird museum and even binoculars for hire. More than a 100 different species of birds have been identified here during the season. Of these, the most outstanding visitors have often winged in from Europe and Siberia. The Jungle Babbler complex lies in the Industrial town of Dharuhera. It caters to highway travellers roving up and down the Delhi-Jaipur National Highway No. 8. The Koel tourist complex is an ideal spot for family outings. It lies on the Kurukshetra-Hisar highway. [Visit Haryana Tourism Official Website. <http://www.haryanatourism.com> for more information on tourist resorts].

Thus Haryana is a state that blazed a trail of holiday traditions, with its highway tourism policy. The bird named complexes of Haryana Tourism dot the five

national highways passing through the state where the travelers and tourists can relax with pampered treatment. The resorts provide a wide range of tourist facilities such as hotel, motels, restaurants, bars, fast food centers, health clubs, conference halls and recreational facilities such as lakes for boating, tennis and billiards facilities, golf courses, picnic hides, bath complexes and children's parks.

Policy for future and its implications

Haryana government's policy for future is to build more tourist complexes and holiday homes by active involvement of the private sector keeping in view the resource crunch in the public sector.

The government however must tread the path cautiously, because attracting private initiatives for tourism development will require tax concessions, exemptions, soft loans and other relaxations for hotels and construction of other tourist draws, leading to diversion of resources from the social budget with negative implications for social services.

It is to be noted that private sector participation requires not only public sector participation (in form of development of infrastructure, promotional support and fiscal and financial incentives) but also availability of loans. As in any commercial activity, the availability of loans on suitable terms is an essential catalyst for sound tourism investment. But switching of loans away from agricultural production can lead to the displacement of domestic agricultural sector. Ultimately, the displacement (crowding out effect of concentrating on tourism) can lead to deindustrialization or a significant contraction in the agriculture sector that potentially reduces welfare to groups of citizens. Overenthusiastic tourism policy can alienate local residents as they begin to perceive that scarce capital resources are being spent on what they consider low priority areas like tourism.

This is not to suggest that tourism brings no benefits to the residents. In fact tourism supports the creation of community facilities and services that otherwise might not have been developed. This can bring higher living standards to a destination. Benefits can include upgraded infrastructure, health and transport improvements, new sport and recreational facilities and restaurants as well as an influx of better-quality

commodities and food. Yet, as Indira Gandhi (late PM of India) while speaking at a conference¹ in Stockholm in 1972 warned, "The higher standards of living must be achieved without alienating our people from their heritage".

Thus the bottom-line argument is to play safe without forgetting that aggressive tourism privatization can lead to erosion of social and economic safety nets and successive alienation of the farmers of Haryana.

CULTURAL, HERITAGE AND PILGRIM TOURISM OF 1980s

World Tourism Organisation defines cultural tourism as the movements of persons for essentially cultural motivations, which include study tours, performing arts, cultural tours, travel to festivals, visits to historic sites and monuments, folklore and pilgrimages (WTO 1985).

The tourism potential hidden in pilgrim, historical and cultural traditions of Haryana began to receive a serious consideration from the state government in 1980s. It has remained a top priority area for tourism promotion since then as it invariably attracts maximum number of tourists to the state.

The destinations

Whenever Haryana is considered as a tourist destination from cultural and historical heritage point of view Kurukshetra is the place that figures out most prominently. Kurukshetra is a great pilgrimage for Hindus where 860 places of pilgrimage related to the Mahabharata exist today. The important sites are the Brahma Sarovar, Sannihit Sarovar, Gurudwara Sadbhiti, Thanesar Tirtha, and Rajghat. Tourists from all over visit the venue of Mahabharat war and the birth place of Bhagwat Gita. The Brahma Sarover is a sacred water tank that is revered as the cradle of civilization. Massive renovation plans that began in 1980s have returned it to its formal glory as a major center of pilgrimage. Light and sound show at Brahmsarovar is a recent development. Sthaneshwar Mahadev Temple at Thanesar is another holy center. It was here that the Pandvas prayed to Lord Shiva and received his blessing for victory in the battle of Mahabharata. No pilgrimage of Kurukshetra is believed to be entirely complete

without a visit to this Holy Temple. About one and half miles from Thanesar on Kurukshetra-Pehowa road lies a tank named Narkatari. It is here that Bhishma Pitamah of Mahabharata epic lay on a bed of arrows.

One of the most revered of holy centers of Kurukshetra is Jyotisar. Renovations began in 1980s and continued throughout nineties while retaining its sanctity. The light and sound show at Jyotisar is the latest improvement. A vat (Banyan) tree stands on a raised plinth under which Lord Krishna delivered the doctrine of Karma to Arjun. A marble chariot depicting Lord Krishna delivering to Arjun was placed here during early eighties. In one secluded section of this center an old Shiv temple can also be seen. Hundreds of years ago, a holy water tank was built here. Kurukshetra Development Board renovated the site in late eighties. A mango shaped lake has been constructed here. Covered bathing ghats for the ladies have been provided. Cement parapets and enclosures have been built for protection. A restaurant and accommodation wings of Yatries has been built here. The area has been landscaped with flowering bushes and eucalyptus trees.

In mid-1980s Haryana Tourism first ventured into the sphere of cultural tourism on a national level with launching the Surajkund Crafts Mela, where rural ambience and the fine handlooms and handicrafts traditions of the country were highlighted. Over two decade old today, Surajkund Crafts Mela has earned an identity of its own. On somewhat similar lines of promoting national cultural heritage, Haryana Tourism brought before its patrons the Nahar Singh Mahal Kartik Cultural Festival in November 1996. The event celebrated fort architecture, martial arts, instrumental music and vocal recitals in classical music traditions of the country.

Shri Krishna museum was established in 1987 to present and preserve the multifaceted personality of Lord Krishna, the episodes of his childhood, his *rasalila* (*'ras'* means dance of Lord Krishna with female companions and *'lila'* means sportful acts of Lord Krishna), philosophy and teachings in the form of rare manuscripts, paintings, sculptures and other artistic creations as well as archaeological material unearthed in Kurukshetra and its neighborhood. Awakening the people ethically, morally and culturally through the ideas and ideals of Krishna, is the aim of this museum. It was shifted to the present building in 1991.

Museum continues to grow with additions of new artistic representations of the Krishna theme and archaeological finds.

Implications: Cultural commodification Vs cultural preservation

With the exception of 'museum policy' other strategies of promoting cultural tourism have serious negative implications. One straightforward negative implication of adamant and overenthusiastic promotion of cultural tourism is that sites that are sacred to the indigenous people and other places of spiritual significance are being destroyed or invaded by tourists. So called developments to suit the tastes of tourists is like tempering with the sacred. When cultures and lands are destroyed or changed they rarely revert back to their original uses of forms. Tourism can turn local cultures into commodities when religious rituals, traditional ethnic rites and festivals are sanitised to conform to tourist expectations. Ethnic groups can begin to utilize their traditions, both as commodities to be sold to tourists, and as rhetorical weaponry in internal dealings (MacCannell 1992). A phenomenon that Mac Cannel (1973) termed "reconstructed ethnicity".

Thus the development projects at spiritually and historically sensitive sites must not come at the cost of the sanctity of the site itself. Similarly government should strive to promote 'responsible tourism' which is the essence of eco tourism. A responsible tourist has low impact on environment and culture, respects local people, supports the economy, refuses to exploit and contributes to well being of local communities.

Propensity to adapt to tourist demands has also implications for local art and craft. As is evident from Surajkund Crafts Mela, local craftsmen seem to have responded to the growing demand, and have made changes in design of their products to bring them more in line with the new customers' tastes. Further the crafts mela attracts tourists and generates revenue for the state. But the question is where does the money go? Certainly not to the local craftspeople and merchants, who sell their wares, often hand crafted over many weeks, for a fraction of the actual worth of their work. Very often we hear a friend or relative boast about how he got a beautiful piece of art so cheap from the crafts mela (fair).

In words of Pera and McLaren (1999), "For the recipients [host countries and regions], the tourism industry creates dependency upon a fickle and fluctuating economy beyond their local control. Local economic activities and resources are used less for the benefit and development of communities and increasingly for export and the enjoyment of others."

The above arguments do suggest that cultural erosion may occur due to the commodification of cultural goods but this argument is not to be used against promotion of cultural tourism. In fact there is also a positive side to it, as the interest shown by tourists contributes to the sense of self-worth of the artists, and helps conserve a cultural tradition. Cultural tourism can also boost the preservation and transmission of cultural and historical traditions, which often contributes to the protection of local heritage, and a renaissance of indigenous cultures, cultural arts and crafts.

Thus the only thing that is required is to put better policies in place to make cultural tourism more pro-poor and less exploitative to locals, to craftsmen and to the thousands of native guides who have given up farming for their families in exchange for trivial earnings from miserly tourists and demeaning jobs playing the simple foreigner to visiting tourists. Government should aspire for increased tourism development, with full participation, management and ownership of indigenous people.

ADVENTURE AND GOLF TOURISM OF 1990s

Adventure tourism is the fastest growing segment world over. While World Travel Mart figures peg the global growth of the segment at 35 per cent compared to 12 per cent for cultural tourism, adventure tourism in India according to the Adventure Tour Operators Association of India (ATOAI), is valued at Rs 300 crore. Realizing the potential for adventure tourism, Haryana Tourism took another leap in 1990s and began the process of adding another facet to its tourism products by promoting adventure tourism which has become an integral part of the state's tourism promotion policy since then.

The destinations

Panchkula district has Morni Hills, the only hill station of Haryana. This was the spot identified to promote

adventure tourism facilities. An adventure park has been built by the Haryana Tourism in the surroundings of Tikkar Lake. The adventure park called Hosh and Josh Thrills Adventure Park at Morni lies at the foothills of the Shivaliks and is a picnic paradise. The park is developed at a cost of Rs one crore. The adventure activities at Tikkar Tal include camping, boating, river-crossing, para-sailing, biking, trekking, rifle shooting, rock climbing and rappelling. The lake is also used for various water activities like kayaking and angling. The adventure park has been designed keeping in view ecology of the land. There are no mechanical or other rides found in most amusement parks. Hosting adventure camps in this area has been a regular feature and the place is reported to have received approximately 3,500 visitors between the months of September 2003 to April 2004.

As the number of golfers worldwide began to show a rapid increase (in the decade from 1986 to 1996, the number of golfers in USA jumped from 19.9 million to almost 25 million, according to the National Golf Foundation in Chicago.) countries around the world began to promote golf tourism. Mirroring the global trend, golfing began to catch up in India too. In 1990, there were approximately 140 golf courses. By the end of the decade there were about 202 golf courses in the country. Haryana, always looking forward to try newer means of promoting tourism embraced the idea of golf tourism in 1990s to attract the tourists. Aravalli Golf Course Situated on Delhi-Agra (National Highway No.2) was set up by Haryana Tourism in the Faridabad town in 1988. Its 12 holes play plan is upgraded to 18 holes. It is spread over 110 acres. The Karnal Golf Course is 9-hole and is spread over 13 acres of land on either side of flyover of NH1.

Policy for future and its implications

Development of adventure tourism especially at Morni Hills is high on Haryana's tourism agenda in addition to encouraging private investment in projects for development of golf courses. In fact, adventure and golf tourism is rooted in the dynamics of colonialism and dependency. This is the fundamental pattern on which the relationship between the developed and developing countries was constructed and continues to evolve. As Chachage (1999) and Naipaul (1978) noted, early nineteenth century tourism focused on exploration, hunting and trading in colonial territories. But even the 'adventure tourism' and 'golf tourism' of 1980s and 1990s carry echoes of the past.

These forms of tourisms are difficult to control and regulate and they deplete and extract natural resources. More visitors mean greater toil on local infrastructure with implications for the lives of the local people. Golf courses not only utilise arable land but also divert water from agriculture and local consumption. Further, privatization and land speculation to establish golf courses or other tourist attractions results in the commodification of land. This raises the price of existing real estate and creates inequality in access to common property resources.

FARM HOUSE TOURISM AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY

The turn of the century is seeing Haryana Tourism venturing into village and farm tourism (which earlier failed to take off in mid 1990s). For those who want a holiday in India but are not attracted by the beaches of Goa, natural heritage of Kerala or scenic beauty of Kashmir, farmhouse tourism of Haryana is offering the desired alternative. A visit to the much talked about villages of Haryana is an unconventional choice for those who have no inclination to spend a holiday by shopping, sightseeing or by cosying up in the warmth of a five star hotel bed and are fed up with the hectic city life and its fancy holiday packages. Thus, the farmhouse tourism of Haryana offers an innovative alternative by offering bucolic pleasures of its village life and providing the guests with a unique experience of local food, culture and heritage.

The offer also attracts Indians who want a break from mundane life of cities at cheap rates. Some Indian city dwellers also view this as a learning experience for their children who are ill-acquainted with the village life and do not know about the rural culture of the country. Farm tourism enables domestic as well as foreign tourists to have a glimpse of rural life and agricultural practices. The package includes visiting the local artisans, experiencing festive occasions, participating in village games (such as kite flying and guli-danda) and attending a village council meeting.

In these farm houses tourists enjoy feeding cows and learn to milk them. They go for bullock cart and tractor rides, stay in an ethnic hut, roam in orchards and even enjoy kite flying. They enjoy the ethnic kitchen where food is cooked slowly in earthen vessels. Watching women in traditional dress, grinding flour on a chakki (flour grinder) has its own unique charm.

A bioscope, cinema's forefather is quite a hit with the kids, who crowd around to catch glimpses of bollywood stars through the peepholes.

The concept of farm tourism and its commencement

The concept of farm tourism is a part of village tourism and it seeks to take the modern man back to his roots though at a price. The policy is to tap the tourism potential of the much talked about villages in the state. Its aim is to attract tourists with the concept of village, villager, culture and agriculture and create additional sources of income for the farmers. Some try to equate it with hardship tourism which it is not. If 'sweat factor' is what defines the hardship tourism then it can safely be said that farmhouse tourism has no hardship involved. As Sachidanand Murthy (2003) points out, "The concept is an extension of Delhi's farmhouse culture and the package is carefully devised so as not to muddy hands which rules out weeding the fields and harvesting the crop, though there will be hunts to identify vegetables and flowers". Farmers are trained to conceal their usual rustic and occasionally disconcerting directness. However the appeal of the concept lies in its offer to return to one's roots since all of us have roots in villages.

The concept was launched by the Haryana Tourism Corporation after receiving green signal from the state government by the end of the 2003. Before launching the concept a survey was conducted. NGO's were entrusted with the task of carrying it out. It was found that there were a number of farmhouses in Gurgaon, Faridabad and Sonipat belonging to well established people.

It was also discovered that these farm house owners could provide an educational experience of farm life, the local food, culture and heritage. After an initial survey Haryana Tourism called for applications from the interested farm house owners and identified the suitable farmhouses. The Corporation then prepared some special packages and on the basis of these packages finalized the contract with the some 13 farmhouse owners. A minimum share of profit goes to the Corporation. These farmhouses and the product that they offer are presented in Table 1.

Table 1.
HARYANA FARMHOUSES AND THE TOURISM PRODUCTS THEY OFFER

1.	Surjivan farm (50 Kms from Delhi)	Tourists can educate themselves regarding organic farming, experience the fragrance of the herbal park and take a walk in the orchards.
2.	Golden Dunes Retreat (44 kms from Delhi)	Offers various simplistic pleasures of rural life such as jumping on hay, riding camels and bullock carts.
3.	Kalki Mystic Farm (near Gurgaon)	Relaxation activities like Yoga, Meditation, and stress management are undertaken here.
4.	Herambh Aushadh (village Kanwarsika amidst Aravalli hills)	Imparts knowledge of manufacturing herbal medicines from plants.
5.	Sheilma Farms (50 kms from Delhi)	The pool and swings for the children make it an ideal place for a family holiday. It also offers workshops on painting (different mediums) on rural life and nature, art and craft, Reiki, Yoga and meditation.
6.	Golden Creepers (12 km from Gurgaon)	Activities included in the package are cow milking, kite flying, tractor ride/ Bullock cart/ camel ride/horse ride, games like- vegetable findings, flower finding, adventure sports such as sand volley ball, hurdle clearance, and treasure huts.
7.	YMCA Rural Center (Distt- Faridabad)	It is the lighthouse of sustainable rural development, imparting technical know how of the modern farming techniques, creates awareness through non formal education and to improve the health status of the community.
8.	Prakrit Farm (4 kms from Faridabad)	Activities include village sight seeing, rural rides and fishing.
9.	Wilderness Farms and Resorts (62 kms from Delhi)	Offers the ultimate in leisure and weekend breaks. It combines state of the art facility with the charm of traditional village tourism to create one of the most luxurious relaxing nature health farms in the country.

Note: More information available at <http://www.ashextourism.com/village/haryana/index.html>

Mechanics of farmhouse tourism policy

In this novel concept of farm tourism, the state tourism department acts as facilitator and promoter of package tours to farm houses. The owners of the farm houses act as guide and host and provide boarding, lodging, food and other facilities to the tourists. The Haryana Tourism Corporation provides professional guidance and liaisoning services to the farm house owners. The owners take the tourists around the village and introduce them to various agricultural operations. The tourists are also exposed to the socio cultural practices of the rural folk such as Panchayat meetings, local songs, festive occasions such as marriages and local *melas* (fair), dances, art and craft. Tour of the village includes visits to local artisans like carpenters and blacksmiths etc.

The state tourism ministry advertises the farmhouses in return for a share of the rent. It is a win-win situation.

Impacts of village/ farmhouse tourism

Village tourism has brought about new job opportunities for local youth, albeit many jobs that they occupy are at the lower level. It has also encouraged the local youth to retain their traditional culture, environments and handicrafts and to take pride in development of agriculture. Village tourism has contributed towards reinstating the charm of rural life-styles restoring pride among the villagers. It provides opportunities to the farmers to show their achievements to the outsiders and take pride in it. Thus the concept has not only generated employment but has also imparted a sense of dignity among the villagers thereby arresting their migration to the urban areas.

Village tourism does not cause congestion and pollution generally associated with mass tourism where thousands of visitors flock to parks and sanctuaries in motorised vehicles. Further there is no leakage of tourist receipts abroad on imported food and beverages. There is no pressure to import machines and equipments as they are not the selling points of village tourism.

The concept has created cascading effect not only on other villages of the state but also on other states motivating them to turn to their villages to promote tourism. Recently (Aug 20, 2004) the success story of Haryana inspired the Government of India and led it to identify 31 villages across the country to develop as tourism hubs. It has also inspired and excited the imagination of farmhouse owners of other states.

The question of social sustainability

Barbier (1987) defines social sustainability as “the ability to maintain desired social values, traditions, institutions, cultures or other social characteristics.” The concept of village tourism can entail some long term cultural costs which are invisible and difficult to imagine at the present moment for the policy makers and champions of village tourism. But sociologists and anthropologists can see the long term consequences produced as a result of loss of privacy for local communities as tourists come to gape at their living conditions and rituals. The locals may find themselves subject to an invasive and sometimes demeaning tourist gaze.

The disparity between the lifestyle of visitors and those who serve them can also create alterations in local ceremonial or traditional values. For instance in many villages of Haryana, some standards exist regarding the appearance and behaviour of women. Tourists often disregard or are unaware of these standards. They ignore the prevalent dress codes and appear half-dressed (by local standards) in revealing shorts and skirts. Besides creating ill-will, this kind of behavior can be an incentive for locals not to respect their own traditions and religion anymore, leading to tensions within the local community.

There are cultural costs associated with village tourism as local culture may be modified and commodified to sell it to outsiders. According to Pera and McLaren (1999) “Tourists’ quest for ‘authenticity’ often leads to

a prostitution of the local culture for the demand and enjoyment of the tourists.” Thus adapting cultural expressions and manifestations to the tastes of tourists or even performing shows as if they were “real life” constitutes “staged authenticity”.

Above discussion clearly indicates that the negative consequences of tourism can overwhelm its positive consequences if tourism is not practiced and developed in a sustainable and appropriate way. Involving the local population in planning and implementation of tourism is important.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of the paper was to call attention to the probable negative socio cultural implications of various tourism strategies of Haryana government, if stretched too far. Intention however is not to denounce tourism as such but to exert a pull on the policy makers to look beyond short term considerations and to focus not only on the benefits for the people who travel, but also for the people in the communities they visit, and for their respective natural, social and cultural environments.

With this objective the paper has drawn a sketch of various tourism initiatives undertaken by the government and has suggested that a more responsible and mature policy be designed for future so that the said negative implications do not surface. Maximising the gains while averting the pains shall be the motto of the policy making. Government(s) shall not see tourism as ‘a short cut to prosperity’ and development of tourism must not be viewed in isolation. The state must adopt an integrated approach for its development.

Role of the Central government is mainly confined to ensuring financial assistance to the state governments and providing incentives to private entrepreneurs because infrastructural components and delivery systems (such as development of tourist centers, including village and heritage tourism, wayside amenities and refurbishment of monuments) are within the purview of the State Governments. Now Haryana Government’s policy for the future is to call upon the private sector to play more effective role in development of tourism. But it must be remembered that the private sector cannot do it alone. The public sector has a special responsibility to ensure the sustainability of key tourism assets, such as the natural and cultural resources that preserve the attractiveness of tourism

destinations and the competitiveness of tourism companies. In fact, future challenges can be converted into opportunities if a coherent partnership between all stakeholders, public and private is worked out to strengthen industry efforts.

Research is required to develop a new strategic framework for ensuring that tourism works for everyone and it does not produce the unintended consequences while delivering the intended benefits such as generating revenue, increasing employment and improving the infrastructure. Detailed case studies highlighting best practices among public and private sectors in responding to the challenges of tourism can help in evolving such a framework.

Thus the questions the policy makers and researchers must confront are: "How can the tourism industry/tourists become unique partners in enhancing and preserving indigenous cultures for future generations?" or "How to combine the objectives of Cultural Tourism and Community Development?" or "How to generate foreign exchange from tourism without creating the problems related to waste management, land displacement, human rights, unfair labor and wages, commodification of cultures and without having negative impacts on indigenous peoples and other local communities and ecosystems of which they are a part?"

Endnote

¹ The United Nations Conference on the Human Environment at Stockholm (5-16 June 1972) was the first time that attention was drawn to the need to preserve natural habitats to produce a sustained improvement in living conditions for all, and the need for international cooperation to achieve this. The emphasis was on solving environmental problems, but without ignoring social, economic and developmental policy factors.

REFERENCES

- Barbier E. B. (1987) *The Concept of Sustainable Development. Environmental Conservation*, 14 (2), 101-110.
- Chachage C. S. L. (1999) *Globalization and Transitions in Tourism in Tanzania*. Nordic Africa Institute.
- Haryana Tourism Official Website. Available from: <http://www.haryanaturism.com>
- <http://www.ashextourism.com/village/haryana/index.html>.
- Intra Brand Equity foundation (2005, February 11), "Policy Achievements and Recent Initiatives" IBEF, Confederation of Indian Industry, Gurgaon, Haryana (India).
- MacCannell D. (1992) *Empty Meeting Grounds*. New York: Routledge.
- Naipaul R. (1978) *North of South: An African Journey*. London: Andre Deutch.
- Pera L. and Deborah McLaren (1999 November). *Globalization, Tourism and Indigenous Peoples: What You Should Know about the World's Largest Industry (Online)*. Available from: <http://www2.planeta.com/mader/ecotravel/resources/rtp/globalization.html>
- Sachidanand Murthy (2003) *Last Word: Of Mercs and Maize. The Week*, Oct 12, 2003.
- World Tourism Organization (1985), *The State's Role in Protecting and Promoting Culture as a Factor of Tourism Development and the Proper Use and Exploitation of the National Cultural Heritage of Sites and Monuments for Tourism*. Madrid: World Tourism Organization.

Submitted: 01/15/2005
Accepted: 03/31/2005