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Energy Procedia 16 (2012) 1295 – 1299

Energy
Procedia

2012 International Conference on Future Energy, Environment, and Materials

Research on the Development Strategies of Rural Tourism in Suzhou Based on SWOT Analysis

XueMing Zhang

Department of Education and Human Sciences, Suzhou Vocational University, Suzhou, China
zxm@jssvc.edu.cn

Abstract

Rural tourism can make full use of tourism resources in rural areas to adjust and optimize rural industrial structures, extend the agricultural industrial chain, develop rural tourism services, promote nonagricultural employment, increase the incomes of farmers, and create a better economic base for the new rural construction. This paper uses the method of SWOT analysis to make a comprehensive evaluation and analysis on strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in the development of rural tourism in Suzhou. Through the combination of internal resources and external environment, this paper clearly determines the advantages and disadvantages of Suzhou rural resources, comprehends the opportunities and challenges to be faced, and also proposes the corresponding countermeasures. At last, this paper hopes to provide a decision reference for the development of rural tourism in Suzhou, and promote the sustainable development of rural tourism in Suzhou.

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Keywords: rural tourism, SWOT, development strategies

1. Introduction

Originating from Europe in the mid-19th century, rural tourism is a new form of tourism, which takes the nature and humanities objects with the rurality as tourist attractions, depends on the beautiful landscape, the natural environment, architectures, culture and other resources in rural areas, and expands and develops projects such as meeting affairs, holiday-makings and leisure activities based on traditional rural leisure travels and experience tours. In China, rural tourism began in the 1950s. During the middle and later period of the 1990s, the rural tourism model began to be introduced, and obtained its rapid development, which also had a broad market prospect. In recent years, under the right guidance of the government, the development of rural tourism in Suzhou gives full play to the main role of the agricultural production operators, gets active support from all sectors of the community, and obtains participation and

interaction of related industries. Currently, Suzhou has more than 300 new rural tourist attractions and 14 national agricultural tourism demonstration sites. It develops 316 “pleasure-in-farmhouse” tourism areas and sites with the Moon Bay of Xishan as the representative, and forms more than a dozen brands of agricultural festival tourism activities. In the continued expansion, the rural tourism market in Suzhou is moving to maturity.

SWOT analysis (also known as TOWS analysis, Dawes matrix) was put forward by the management professor Weihrich at the University of San Francisco in the early 1980s, and is a method which can objectively and accurately analyze and study the current state of a unit. The four letters of SWOT respectively represent: Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, Threat. Overall, SWOT can be divided into two parts: the first part is SW, mainly used to analyze the internal conditions; the second part is OT, mainly used to analyze the external conditions. With this method, we can find out those factors to our advantage and worth promoting from the development status of rural tourism in Suzhou, and avoid those unfavorable. We can also discover problems, find out solutions, and then make clear the future development direction.

2. SWOT analysis on rural tourism in Suzhou

2.1. Advantages of rural tourism

- Resource-rich rural tourism

Suzhou rural areas account for 75% of its administrative region, where water area accounts for 42.5%. Its tourism resources are not only very rich, but also have three distinct characteristics:

High grade resources—a batch of high grade rural tourism resources has formed a brand.

In the whole city, there are 22 national agricultural tourism demonstration sites, 6 historic and cultural towns of China, 7 provincial-level historic and cultural towns, 2 historic and cultural villages of China, one 5A state-level scenic spot, 7 4A state-level scenic spots, one national tourist resort, and 3 national forest parks.

Category diversification—including all the six main categories.

It includes rural natural landscape, rural scenery, the landscape of architectural heritage, agricultural products and rural crafts, human activities and folk culture, and the artistic conception of rural landscapes (bridge, water, people).

The rich cultural deposits—a long history of Wu culture.

Suzhou has rich cultural deposits, with a history of 2500 years. Wu culture formed from the history is an important component of the traditional Chinese culture, and is an important element in the development of rural tourism in Suzhou, highlighting in its intangible cultural heritage. At present, Suzhou has two world-class tourist attractions and 16 state-level tourist attractions, and still many are listed in the provincial and municipal protection lists.

Excellent geographical position

Suzhou is located in the center of the hinterland of the Yangtze River Delta urban agglomeration, adjacent to Shanghai, and is easy to receive a large city’s radiation, which thus has an active tourist market.

2.2. Disadvantages of rural tourism

- Obviously inadequate infrastructure. Due to the relatively short time for the development of rural tourism and insufficient capital investment, there are large differences among some rural tourist spots in transportation, accommodation, health and so on, which restricts the further development of rural tourism.
- Weak market consciousness. Although the scalization, branding and marketization of rural tourism are prevailing, most of the rural tourism operators do not have strong market awarenesses,

lack their initiatives in active promotion and participation in collective marketing, which leads to its low market share.

- Lack of planning and management talents. The severe shortage of professionals in rural tourism planning, packaging design and other fields leads to the unscientific and unreasonable layouts in some rural tourism regions. The lack of training for rural tourism practitioners results in non-standard services and a lack of long-term and overall points of view, or even the emergence of the phenomena of importuning and swindling money out of customers.
- Low-quality tourism products. Tourism products are very single, and many still remain just a flying visit, far from enough in content mining in the farming culture, participation, etc.

2.3. Opportunities of rural tourism

- Positive guidance and boosting of the government

2011 is the beginning year of the 12th five-year plan of China. In the context of speeding up the new rural construction, vigorously developing the service industry and actively implementing the development strategy of comprehensive tourism, the opportunities and challenges coexist in the development of rural tourism in Suzhou. We should actively transform the mode of development, adjust the structure and benefit people's livelihood, making it the most dynamic pillar industry in the whole city's tertiary industry. Developing rural tourism is a new act to boost the socialist new rural construction, and speeding up the integration of urban and rural areas is a new opportunity to promote the rural tourism to upgrade its quality. Through agricultural science and technology, culture mining, regional characteristics, green ecology, lived experience and other means, we should actively develop the rural tourism focusing on leisure, vacationing, sightseeing, sports, folk customs, food, etc.

- Vigorous growth in market demand

With the development of China's economy, people's incomes continue to be improved, and the needs from urban residents for short-term holidays grow rapidly. Considering the advent of high-speed railway which shortens the relative distance between regions, upgrading of East tours for outlanders and the accelerated growth in the number of the public, rural tourism in Suzhou faces strong development opportunities. Under the conditions of limited time and economic capacity, the traditional city tours and appreciation of Chinese mountains and water are attracting fewer people. On the contrary, rural tourism will not exceed the economic capacity of the public, and can also meet people's needs to return to nature. Compared with the traditional tourism, rural tourism has the stronger participation, which thus leads to great reduction in the attraction of the traditional tourism to the public.

2.4. Threats of rural tourism

- Conflicts between the traditional culture and the modern culture. Modern culture has entered the period of the industrial culture and the post-industrial culture, while traditional culture still remains in the period of agriculture culture. The two periods have big differences in material life, spiritual life or social consciousness, and the most prominent and intuitive is the rich material and spiritual life in the modern culture period. This is an irresistible temptation for those people in the closed and backward environment, and those who have enjoyed this kind of life do not have the right to prevent or restrict people who just opening up their visions to pursue the outside world. In such a state of yearning for happiness for the public, many traditional cultures are gradually disappearing due to no successors. Tourism is a window when a culture meets another culture, and rural tourism is at the forefront of the interaction of modern culture and traditional culture. The conflicts between the two cultures become a major threat to the development of rural tourism.
- Conflicts between development and protection. Rural tourism is a tourism activity which has the dual responsibilities of protecting the natural environment and maintaining the lives of local

farmers, which lays stress on the protection of agricultural production, the original ecological agriculture and natural tourism resources, so it is also a tourism activity with the sustainable development. However, developing means more pressure on the original fragile ecological environment in rural areas. Due to the overdevelopment of the rural tourism resources, the overload of tourists, and the lagging of the concept of protection and related measures, many tourist spots are facing the danger of being destroyed.

- The outstanding phenomenon of homogeneous competition; disconnection between product and market. For a lack of knowledge on the development of rural tourism, and backward concepts and theories, rural tourism in Suzhou is still in the stage of extensive development, with single types of products. Many rural tourism activities still mainly stay in the business of country food, resulting in a lack of competitiveness. We do not really recognize the significance of rural tourism, and lack the awareness of making a rural tourism brand.

3. Countermeasures for the development of rural tourism in Suzhou

A. Establish a scientific and standard environmental analysis system, and properly handle the relationship between environment and economy. The environment is a gift from the nature, and the cultural deposits are bestowed by our ancestors. Tourism should not only focus on economic benefits but also take environmental and social benefits into account. While meeting the needs of the contemporary people, tourism should not harm the development of their capacity which can meet their travel demands, and the greatest benefits should be obtained from tourism at the expense of the minimal environmental costs. Establish a potential environmental threat evaluation index system with the sustainable development, which can in a certain range and to a certain extent reflect the material and energy inputs and outputs in tourism, the tourist capacity and the limits of environmental disturbance. If the upper and lower limits are exceeded, we can change and limit these indicators by some means. For example, we can limit the number of tourists, and judge the optimal tourist capacity and the utmost tourist capacity per day at a tourist spot.

B. Strengthen the rural infrastructure and environmental construction, which provides a security for the development of rural tourism. The backward villages and agriculture are both the result of the poor infrastructure. Meanwhile, due to the relatively short time for the development of rural tourism and insufficient capital investment, there are large differences among some rural tourist spots in transportation, accommodation, health and so on, which restricts the further development of rural tourism.

C. Make clear the profit distribution mechanism, and improve the initiatives of farmers to develop rural tourism. In rural tourism, an important measure to protect the local traditions is to fully take the interests of local farmers into account. It is far from enough when only a tourism company makes a fortune, so we must allow all the people involved, and enable farmers to acquire wealth from the tourism development, so that they may have the initiatives to protect their own culture. The key to the sustainable development of rural tourism lies in the local people's understandings on their culture values, who should become the active inheritors and protector of their own culture. To achieve this, the first is to enable the local people to obtain benefits from the use of their own cultural resources, and then by educating and training to enable them to become the main part in the local tourism development.

D. Pay attention to market segmentation, promote its own brand, and optimize tourist routes. Take a series of folk festival activities for the brand promotion of rural tourism in Suzhou, represented by China Yangcheng Lake Hairy Crab Culture Festival, Biluochun Tea Culture Tourism Festival, Zangshu Goat Gourmet Festival, Xishan Plum Blossom Festival, Yushan Peony Festival, Tai Lake Opening Fishing Festival, Spring Outing on Qingming, etc. Grasp the characteristics of rural tourism, and plan and design the brand travel routes oriented to tourists within or outside the administrative region of Suzhou. Break the boundaries of regions and industries, to string together various brand tourist attractions and associate

with the related scenic spots, so as to enable tourists to experience the unique charm of rural tourism as much as possible.

E. Enhance talent training, and strengthen their services. Extend the service concepts and requirements of star-rated hotels to rural tourism. Set grades and standards for “pleasure-in-farmhouse”, such as the architectural style, food features, accommodation, health requirements, travel convenience, and security, so as to implement quality services. On the other hand, enhance the service skills training for employees, and pointedly carry out skill trainings, such as service skills, service awareness, operation philosophy, room services, food and beverage services, courtesy words, decorum, food sanitation and safety precautions, which can improve the professional competence of employees in rural tourism.

F. Advocate the green consumption of tourists. Green consumption is an overall improvement in their consumption tastes and spiritual and cultural levels, and is a concrete manifestation of the implementation of the sustainable tourism concept. We seek to take effective measures to guide the tourists for green consumption, and promote them to become responsible tourists. On the basis of the minimal negative impacts of the tourism economy, society and ecological environment, we try to achieve a sense of high-quality tourists, which is of great significance to promote the sustainable development of rural tourism in Suzhou.

In short, for agriculture, rural tourism helps to promote the agricultural structure adjustment, attract the steam of people, logistics, capital flow and information flow, break the urban and rural dualistic structure, open farmers’ horizons, update their ideas, expand their employment and increase their incomes. For the tourism industry, rural tourism helps enrich and develop the concept of urban tourism, extend the tourism products, help the interaction between urban and rural areas, enhance the aftereffects of the tourism development, and meet the consumer demands from a majority of tourists. Therefore, the development rural tourism can enrich, innovate and optimize the structure of tourism products, adapt to the personalized tourism development, as well as help meet the diverse needs of tourists, open up the potential tourist market, and develop new incremental points of the tourism economy. Meanwhile, rural tourism is very important in enhancing the rural collective economy, beautifying the rural appearance, strengthening the rural civilization construction, increasing their incomes, reducing the urban-rural gap and building a harmonious society, so as to explore a new road of the rural tourism development, on which tourism is taken to assist agriculture, prosper agriculture and bring wealth to agriculture, and tourism and agriculture interact between each other.

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