School-Stay as Seasonal Accommodation for Particular Travelers

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Abstract

Accommodation is the single most essential part of any stay in a destination. Accordingly, accommodation is available everywhere and forms the foundation of tourism industry. Regarding to their travelling patterns and trip characteristics, travelers choose luxury hotel with variety of services to budget hotels with limited facilities. During two main school holidays in Iran, New Year and summer, lots of families travel to different part of the country. Schools can be considered as one of the accommodations options for particular travellers. Due to the length of those holidays and since during school holiday, schools are not occupied with students; they can be available for groups of domestic travellers to stay overnight. The reason behind uniqueness of this type of accommodation is long school holiday in Iran which let the education department use the school buildings for travelers’ accommodation. There is no such a thing as school for accommodation in literature at present. This paper is going to find the condition of this unique kind of accommodation as well as available service provided for travelers. Qualitative analysis was done by interviewing a service provider to find the available services as well as the improvement of this particular type of accomodation, school stay, during last years.

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1. Introduction

Accommodation is an imperative component in tourism conception, and plays a key function in tourism industry. It is not only “the major and most ubiquitous subsector within the tourism economy” (Cooper et al., 1998, p. 313) but also include the most part of travelling cost for both domestic and international tourists. Travelers with different profiles prefer to stay in different accommodation from very low budget accommodation to 5-6 stars luxury hotels and penthouse. Having taken the importance of tourist attraction as pull factor for potential tourist to travel, Iran is famous with its numerous tourists’ attractions. Religion cities, historical monuments, nature varieties and etc. welcome different tourists during Nowruz holiday. In this regards, varieties of domestic travelers are asked for different accommodations regarding to their budget and trip characteristics. In order to provide facilities for Teachers and Education Staff, ministry of education came up with the plan to prepare un-occupied school classes during Nowruz holiday for their staff in order to accommodate them with a lower expences.

The plan was started with idea of opening schools doors to travelers in order to stay overnight to decrease their travelling cost. Accordingly, their plan develops to the new type of accommodation that in this paper the writer calls it “school-stay”. Lately schools provide some conveniences for travelers to provide a safe and more comfortable place to stay. Initially, this type of accommodation is available for “Teachers and Education Staff” and their families, but in a case of vacant places other travelers can also use them. The main purpose of this paper is to give an introduction of this new type of accommodation and the development has been applied to facilitate travellers in recent years.

2. Introduction to Tourist Accommodation

Victor et.al (2009) defined tourist accommodation as “all establishments offering overnight accommodation on a commercial or ‘quasi-commercial’ basis to all categories of visitor. The definition does not cover the use of privately-owned accommodation for weekends and holidays, such as second homes, caravans, chalets, boats and wholly-owned apartments in condominiums – unless they are commercially rented through a marketing agency”. They explained about ‘Quasi-commercial’ which “refers to the many tourist accommodation products outside the commercial sector, for which a charge is made to contribute to cost” (P. 364). Concerning this definition for accommodation, school stay can be included in the list of accommodation.

Indeed, most of developing countries are now tourist targets and many “regard tourism as an important and integral aspect of their development policies” (Jenkins, 1991, p. 61). Hence, “the choice of accommodation reflects, by and large, the needs and expectations of the tourist and, as a result both the qualitative and quantitative characteristics of the study of accommodation service directly influence the type of tourism/ tourists attracted to destination area” (Shapley, 2000, P. 275). Supporting this view, tourism researchers have declared six main sectors of tourism as accommodation; food and beverage; transportation; travel trade; adventure tourism and outdoor recreation; as well as attractions (CS/RESORS Consulting, Bird and Emery, 2003). As shown in the list the first sector as well as the main one could be accommodation in tourism sectors.

Different types of accommodations were defined in literature, which vary from destination to destination. Course Preparation Team TS-01 in Indira Gandhi National Open University (2011) divides the various categories of accommodation into eight types. His list includes; five star deluxe hotels, first class hotels, none-star hotels, resorts and lodges, tented camps, heritage hotels, guest houses, and alternative accommodation.
On the other hand Victor et.al (2009) divided accommodation service into two types as service and none-service accommodation. They believe that “an important distinction in accommodation for visitors is the split between serviced and non-serviced types. Serviced means that staffs are available on the premises to provide some services such as cleaning, meals and bars and room service. The availability of such services, even if they are not in fact used, is included in the price charged. Non-serviced means that, the sleeping accommodation is provided furnished on a rental basis, normally for a unit comprising several beds, such as a cottage, an apartment or caravan. While services for the provision of meals, bars and shops may be available on site on a separate commercial basis, as in a holiday village, they are not included in the price charged for the accommodation” (P. 364).

“The serviced sector ranges from first-class and luxury hotels providing full service on twenty-four hours a day basis at relatively high cost, all the way down to homely bed and breakfast establishments, which may only operate informally for a few weeks in the year. The non-serviced sector, which is known in Britain under the unattractive label of ‘self-catering accommodation’, comprises a wide range of different units, including villas, apartments, chalets, cottages and caravans. These units are rented on a fully furnished and equipped basis but with no personal services included in the published price. Some of these new units, e.g. in converted historic buildings, may be furnished with antiques and may cost more per person night than four-star serviced accommodation. The bulk of self-catering units, however, still cater for a budget-priced market and the cost per person per night is very much less than it could be obtained in the serviced sector” (Victor et.al, 2009, P. 365). In order to understand the nature of service and none-service accommodation Victor et.al (2009) provides the table (1.1) to elaborate about each dimension by detail.

Table 1. Principal serviced and none-serviced accommodation used in tourism, by market-segment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Market segment</th>
<th>Serviced sector</th>
<th>Non-serviced sectors (self-catering)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>At Destination</td>
<td>On Routes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business and Other non-leisure</td>
<td>City/town hotels (Monday-Friday) Budget hotels Resort hotels conferences, exhibitions Educational establishment</td>
<td>Budget hotels Motels Apartments Inns Airport hotels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisure and holiday</td>
<td>Resort hotels Guest houses/pensions Farm houses City/town hotels (Friday-Sunday) Budget hotels Some educational establishments</td>
<td>Budget hotels Motels Bed and breakfast Inns Apart hotels Condominia/time share Holiday villages Holiday centers/camps Caravans/chalet parks Gites Cottages Villas Apartments/flats Some motels</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Victor et.al (2009)
3. Accommodation Service for Teachers and Education Staff

According to the long New Year holiday in Iran, people’s desire to travel increases rapidly. In domestic division, the number of hotels is not sufficient for domestic tourists and most of the time they are fully booked even prior to the beginning of holiday. In this matter, ministry of education brought a plan to use unoccupied school classes for New Year traveler. The plan is essentially for the usage of Teachers and Education Staff but it welcomes other travelers in a case of having vacant places.

3.1 History

There is not a clear literature about this type of accommodation but according to the interview had been done in ministry of education, one of the authorities mentioned that previously ministry of education paid travelling expenses to their employment every year which was around 20-50 dollars. This caused displeasure while some staffs traveled while others didn’t. The program started in the year 1996 with providing very simple facilities. Classroom stuff such as tables, and chairs were kept in the classroom and they were only moved to the corner in order to make space for travelers to put their carpet and belongings. Travelers suppose to bring all their necessities by themselves as far as it was not provided in schools. The program continued with the same pattern for years but lately it is improved to a better condition. Recently schools have been nominated themselves for this program and by reaching the expectation of ministry of education they can be in the list of accommodation provider. Two classes consider as store rooms in different schools to keep the classroom stuff in them during holiday. The provided facilities vary regarding to the level of schools as group A, B, or C.

3.2 Services

Abdulahian (2011a.) stated that 120, 000 classrooms in 12,000 schools across the country and by arrangement in three groups of "A", “B” and C" are intended with appropriate facilities to accommodate “Teachers and Education Staff” during their Nowruz trips. He added that schools in group "A" provide facilities such as blankets, carpets, fridge, TV, bathroom while schools in group "B" with similar facilities as group “A” have shared bathroom. In addition, schools in group "C" probably only provide carpet and blanket. Figure 1 shows the condition of one school classroom used as accommodation.

![Figure 1 Classroom condition after preparation for accommodation](source: Tabnak (2012))
Abdulahian (2011b.) said schools in group "A" and "B" allocated 60% (30% by each) and school in group "C" 40% of the whole accommodation capacity. After 100% completion of the capacity of schools in group “A”, travelers will be directed to other two school groups. He has decreed that the yards close to schools, pilgrimage places as well as tourism spots, will be available for “Teachers and Education Staff” as parking lot and they won’t have problem in this regard. Figure 2 shows the parking lot of a school for passengers.

![Figure 2 Parking lot in school yard](image)
Source: Diyare Mamasani (2012)

General Director of Cooperation and Support in Ministry of Education said that regarding to the special support from Deputy Minister of Education, schools in group “A” with the most facilities were provided service only for “Teachers and Education Staff” as well as their families. Director of Performance and Response to Complaints said that they included serving a hot meal in first day of travelers’ arrivals in schools which located in capital cities of each province.

3.3 Operation

Accommodation is available one day before New Year Eve till one day before the last day of holiday (19th March – 1st April). 70% of schools capacity assigned for online bookings. The websites, www.eskan.medu.ir or www.reserv.medu.ir, is designed to facilitate online booking and make sure that place is available on the date of arrival. It this regards “Teachers and Education Staff” can plan their trip itinerary before holiday. Abdulahian stated that designed front desk will provide the accommodation tariffs upon check-in. The reception area is shown in figure 3.
Abdulahian (2011 b.) refers to the fees for “Teachers and Education Staff” in School group “A” as nine dollars per night for a family of five persons. He emphasized monitoring the health status in relation to school accommodation. The situation in schools will be monitored during holiday and in addition medical teams also are present in each school throughout holiday.

There is length of stay limits as maximum 5 days per family. Online booking is just for “Teachers and Education Staff” and the priority for accommodation is for them followed by governmental employee and normal people.

4. Iran in a Glance

According to Library of Congress (2008) Iran located in Middle East and has border with Turkey, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Caspian Sea in north and Persian Gulf in South. It is kind of large country by nearly 1.65 million square kilometers which is to some extent larger than Alaska. “Iran is divided into 30 provinces. The provinces are subdivided into counties, (321 in 2007) districts, and villages”(Library of Congress, 2008, p 15).

The population of the country is about 70 million according to census 2006. One third of population is rural and the rest are urban. The age groups are 22.3% 14 years old teenagers or younger, and 5.6% 65 years old or older. The median age is 26.4 years. Referring to ethnic, majority are Persian followed by Turks, Kurds, Lurs, Arabs, Balucis, Turkamens and others. The official language is Persian followed by Azeri, Kurdish, Luri, Arabic, and Baluchi (Library of Congress, 2008).

There is significant potentiality of tourism as it has variety of famous attractions and according to (Zendeh Del, 2001) it has also wealthy history and archaeological sites. Ten historical sites in Iran are in the list of World Heritage (UNESCO 2009a). Taking about intangible cultural heritage, Nowruz and Radif also included in UNESCO list (UNESCO, 2009b). Nowruz is Iranian New Year which starts from 21th of March (first day of spring) and Radif is traditional Iranian music (Zamani Farahani, 2010).
Aforementioned reasons make Iran to be in the list of top ten countries in regard to rich historical sites and attractions (Alavi and Yasin 2000). “Iran has a long history of involvement in tourism. There is considerable evidence for hostels that date back to at least 2000 BCE” (O’Gorman et al, 2007 cited in Zamani Farahani, 2010). “Iran offers 729 hotels, 256 hotel apartments, and 1,481 inns and budget accommodation properties in 2009, as well as many homestay facilities” (ICHHTO, 2009 cited in Zamani Farahani, 2010).

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Services and facilities are the facts which cannot be separated from tourism industry since regarding to tourist’s needs and desire, different facilities should be available for them to travel. In recent years, ministry of education’s attention towards Teachers and Education Staff’s accommodation was more than before and make them to provide kind of new accommodation as “school stay”. Recognizing the development of this type of accommodation caused more travelers to be interested in this type of accommodation. Although most travelers consider accommodation for only overnight stay but some more facilities are needed in this type of accommodation. This paper is only an introduction to this new type of seasonal accommodation and further study is on process to compare this specific accommodation with other similar types to see whether it can be included in tourism accommodation divisions. Discussions about this type of accommodation haven’t found in literature but to accomplish broad information, further studies are suggested to find the availability of this type of accommodation in other countries. Moreover, motivation, satisfaction and on-site behavior of travelers staying in this type of accommodation are also suggested.

References


