Marketing of Religious Tourism; a Case Study on Ambubachi Mela Kamakhya Temple, Assam

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Abstract

India has been one among the highly spiritual place on earth. Every year millions of people from around the world travel to India seeking penance and salvation, this is leading to booming religious tourism in India. The religious tourism has been currently recognized as the fastest growing tourism industry. A continued increase in this tourism sector has been able to draw the attention towards development of marketing perspectives nationally and internationally. The Kamakhya temple is considered as one of the celebrated religious centers of the world. The Kamakhya temple is situated at the top of the Nilachala hill in Guwahati city of Assam, India. A major attraction for tourists is the Ambubachi Mela which is an annual festival held at the temple during monsoon season. Millions of tourists throng to Kamakhya temple from different states of India and even from abroad to celebrate this four day festival. This paper mainly attempts at:

1. Assessing the present state of tourism scenario during Ambubachi Mela at Kamakhya temple.
2. Identifying religious tourism and marketing strategies that contributes to increase the attractiveness of tourists during the mela.

The study is based on different primary and secondary data, information from board of trustees of Kamakhya temple and Assam Tourism Development Corporation has been taken. An attempt has been adopted to formulate some effective conclusion for development of marketing perspectives of religious tourism in Assam.
1. Introduction

World tourism is considered as a significant factor in the economy of many nations. Today tourism related infrastructure in various parts of the country has improved the quality of life of the local people and helped to promote local arts and crafts. Indian tourism is ranked 11th in Asia Pacific region and 62nd overall, moving up three places on the list of world’s attractive destinations. Religious tourism has been one of the reasons of developing India. India is widely known for its wonderful religious places which are nowhere seen in world. Many places like Kashi Vishwanath, Omkareshwar, Mahakaleshwar, Gangotri, Yamunotri, Badrinath, Kedarnath of lord Shiva are most visited places in India. People from around the globe come to India to visit these places. The Eastern Indian state of Assam has variations of several religions and culture that flourished in its lap over the passage of time. Many temples and monuments are built in this state which reflects different traditions and religious beliefs. Due to very limited government funds made available to the religious tourism sector and hesitation of the private sector to invest due to various issues tourism promotion and marketing activities have always taken a back seat.

1.1 Ambubachi Mela

There are several Hindu temples in Assam, among which, one of the holiest temples of the Hindus is the most famous Kamakhya Temple. This temple is regarded as the Shakti Peeth and is the most visited temple by the Hindu pilgrims in the state. Located on top of the Nilachal Hills, this temple is an icon of belief and has mythological story attached to it. Ambubachi Mela is a fair held in the Kamakhya Temple in Guwahati. This is a Hindu religious festival and is that time of the season when Mother Nature or the mother goddess residing in the temple of Kamakhya menstruates. The Kamakhya Temple is one of the 52 Shaktipeethas and it is believed that the genitals of Shakti had fallen at this place. Thus, every year during the time of Ambubachi, or menstruation of the goddess, a large number of devotees gather here to perform religious rituals. The fair is held for 4 days in the month of June near the Kamakhya Temple. Ambubachi Mela is a fair held in the Kamakhya Temple in Guwahati. Every year lakhs of pilgrims, starting from Sadhus to householders, from all over India, come to Guwahati to observe this festival. They include Sanyasins, black clad Aghoras, the Khade-babas, the Baul or singing minstrels of West Bengal, intellectual and folk Tantriks, Sadhus and Sadhvis with long matted hair etc. Even foreigners from abroad come to seek blessings of mother Kamakhya.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

This paper mainly attempts at:

- Assessing the present state of tourism scenario during Ambubachi mela at Kamakhya temple.
• Identifying religious tourism and marketing strategies that contribute to increase the attractiveness of tourists during the mela.

Figure 1: Map of Kamakhya Temple

Source: google map

2. Literature Review

Rachin Suri, Jitender Rao (2014) studied “Impact of Spiritual Marketing on Different Segments of Tourists and Their Evaluation of the Site”. The study concluded that to fetch more foreign tourist we require a fierce effort to publicize our spiritual sites. Mingzhu Liang, Mingsen Wang, Songjun Xu (2016) studied “The Study of Temple Tourism Brand Marketing—Taking GuangxiaoTemple as an Example” and stated that through the gradual exploration of brand building, the prospects of temple tourism will be better and temple tourism’ development and marketing should not be confined in tangible resources of material level. Raju Kumar Gurung (2016) studied “Marketing religious tourism destination – Case study of Lumbini, Nepal” and one of the major findings was that various kinds of marketing strategies have to be applied by the marketers to attract tourists to
the destination as Lumbini was able to allure tourists due to absence of the right marketing. Mukesh Ranga, Priyanka Pradhan (2017) studied “Pilgrimage tourism marketing strategy: special reference to destinations of Uttar Pradesh” and stated that tourist sector should focus on improvement and application of marketing strategies, according to the marketing mix elements, which will lead to satisfaction of tourists and more visits to tourist destinations.

3. Research Gap

Though many studies have been done on Kamakhya temple, Assam as a tourist destination but specific study regarding Ambubachi Mela as a tourist attraction has not been done so far. Thus this paper attempts to explore the tourism scenario during the period of Ambubachi Mela.

4. Methodology

The study is based on primary data collected randomly. Almost 50 local respondents related to tourism are interviewed purposively with the help of well structured questionnaire for the study. The analysis is based on respondents who cater to different economic activities in our study area. To evaluate the socio-economic impact of tourism on local community we have taken 4 variables to know the positive impact and 4 variables to know the negative impact of tourism in the study area. A five point Likert scale is used to collect information about the impacts by assigning values as No Impact=1, Low=2, Moderate=3, High=4 and Very High=5. Secondary data has been collected from various sources such as Assam Tourism Development Corporation, government records and available data found in various official and unofficial websites.

5. Results & Discussion

To evaluate the socio economic impact of tourism on local community we take 4 variables each to know about positive and negative impact. A total of 50 respondents were involved in the study
and the respondents’ opinion about positive and negative impacts is presented in Table-1 and Table-2 respectively.

### Table 1: Respondents’ Opinion of the Positive Socio-Economic Impacts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improvement in the Standard of living</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase in Local Resident’s Income</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provision of Market for Local Produce</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creation of Employment opportunities</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>II</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: calculated by researcher from survey data

From the above table it can be noted that the maximum positive socio economic impact was seen in Increase in local resident’s income with a mean value of 3.45, creation of employment opportunities was second highest with a mean score at 3.4, provision of market for local products scored third highest with a mean score of 3.11. The least socio economic impact was seen in Improvement in the standard of living with a mean score of 3.10.

### Table 2: Respondents’ Opinion of the Negative Socio-Economic Impacts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shortage of Drinking water</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excessive Dependence of Local Community on Tourism</td>
<td>3.07</td>
<td>III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem of pollution</td>
<td>3.24</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequencies of crime</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td>IV</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Source: calculated by researcher from survey data

From the above table it can be noted that the Problem of pollution had the maximum negative socio economic impact with a mean score of 3.24. Shortage of drinking water stood at second place with a mean score of 3.12 and excessive dependency of local community on tourism was at third place with a mean score of 3.07. Frequency of crime had the least negative socio economic impact with a mean score of 2.87.

Different tourists have different purposes, and their needs are different too. Since the Kamakhya temple has become a part of tourism of Assam, it should be integrated into tourism, not only preserving its sacred side, but also integrate the marketing aspect. Various marketing strategies has been done for promotion of Ambubachi Mela by the Government as well as PPP model. The Assam Tourism Development Corporation has taken numerous efforts for the promotion and marketing of Ambubachi Mela. Especially in the past two years, a lot of innovative strategies were formulated to market the Ambubachi Mela. A bike rally consisting of group of bikers travelling through major states (i.e. West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Delhi, Haryana, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Jharkhand) conducted road shows for the promotion of Ambubachi Mela. Hoardings were erected in at least 300 religious destinations all over India.

A website kamakhyatourism.com and facebook pages were opened for proper digital promotion of the mela. Cultural Program “Katha Vashak” was organised where cultural shows like bhajans were performed. Prominent artists like Anup Jalota and Anuradha Paudwal performed along with large participation from local artists. Live coverage of the mela was shown in various TV channels like Aastha and other religious channels. Decorations such as illumination of different parts of the city and temple, bus stands, airport were done. Other channels of promotion included advertising in cinema hall, broadcasting jingle in FM radio etc.

6. Conclusion and Suggestion

Ambubachi mela is a prominent festival of the North - east India in general and Assam in particular. This festival has become a huge attraction for religious travellers from not only India but also other countries. Lakhs of tourists turn up for the festival every year. The official figures for 2018 stood at staggering nineteen lakhs fifty eight thousand two hundred twelve people (19,58,212). Among the total religious tourists, a significant number comprised of foreign tourists. An analysis of foreign tourist inflow during Ambubachi Mela is shown in the graph below.
From the above graph we can see that, foreign tourist inflow in the year 2016 was the highest but a significant decrease in the number of foreign tourists is seen during 2017-18. Though some measures have been taken for the promotion of the mela as listed above but a lot remains to be done to make the mela a globally recognized festival. After studying the present scenario this paper attempts to suggest a few measures for further promotion of the mela.

1. Special trains at concessional rates should be provided for transportation of the pilgrimages.
2. Better provision for sanitation facilities should be made including increase in the number of toilets & introduction of eco toilets.
3. A separate township should be set up for the tourists. It should be equipped with adequate number of tents which should include tents for different classes of tourists.
4. Adequate food stalls and drinking water facilities should be installed.
5. About 20-30% of the total spots and 15% of the total impressions in online media could be utilized for promoting the Ambubachi Mela. These would include television channels, besides promotions on local websites in the US, the UK, Canada, Australia, Germany, France and Spain and on portals including TripAdvisor, Expedia, Make My Trip etc.
6. The tourism ministry should organize familiarization tours for overseas tour operators to visit India for the Ambubachi Mela and will promote the event at international travel fairs and exhibitions.

References


www.kamakhyatourism.com