Integrated Approach for Sustainable Tourism Development in West Bengal, India: A Study on Stakeholders' Role in the Hospitality Industry

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Abstract

This paper investigates the multifaceted dimensions of sustainable tourism development in West Bengal, India, with a particular focus on the pivotal role played by stakeholders within the hospitality industry. Recognizing the growing significance of sustainable practices in the tourism sector, this research employs an integrated approach that combines environmental, social, and economic perspectives to assess the current state and potential avenues for sustainable tourism in the region. The study begins with an in-depth analysis of the existing tourism landscape in West Bengal, identifying key challenges and opportunities for sustainable development. It adopts a comprehensive framework that considers the diverse stakeholders involved, ranging from government bodies and local communities to private enterprises within the hospitality sector. This study seeks to provide a detailed picture of the complex web of interactions that is determining the future of tourism in the area by including the views of a wide range of interested parties. A critical aspect of this investigation is the examination of the hospitality industry's role in fostering sustainable tourism. The paper evaluates the current practices, policies, and attitudes of hospitality stakeholders toward sustainability, exploring their impact on environmental conservation, social inclusion, and economic viability. Additionally, the study delves into the challenges faced by stakeholders in aligning their business objectives with sustainability goals, offering insights into potential strategies for overcoming these obstacles. In addition, the study uses a mixed-methods strategy, conducting case studies, questionnaires, and qualitative interviews to collect diverse and rich data from stakeholders throughout the tourist value chain. Not only will the results be useful for academics, but they will also educate politicians, companies, and communities on how to make West Bengal's tourist industry more sustainable. Ultimately, this paper aspires to offer a holistic understanding of the integrated approach needed for sustainable tourism development in West Bengal, shedding light on the crucial role that stakeholder within the hospitality industry play in shaping the future of tourism in the region..

Keyword: Start-Ups, Unicorn, Startup Ecosystem, Startup India scheme.

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's world, tourism growth is depending on sustainability. The same applies in India and in West Bengal also. Without suitability in tourism, proper growth is not possible. If we say about sustainable tourism, then the responsibilities would include- 1. Being careful with the planet's ecosystems, its resources, and its animals.2. Communities residing in tourist locations should experience socio-economic advantages as a result of sustainable tourism.3. It has to preserve cultural assets and provide genuine experiences for tourists.4 It need to unite locals and visitors for the benefit of both.

Furthermore, it is its duty to make accessible and inclusive tourism possibilities a reality. There are seventeen objectives for both humans and the earth in the SDGs. All 193 member states of the United Nations ratified the 17 Sustainable Development Goals in 2015 as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, a 15-year blueprint for their realization. The following are included:

A. Ensuring poverty eradication, B. Achieving zero hunger, C. Promoting physical and mental health, D. Providing high-quality education, E. Fostering gender parity, F. Ensuring access to hygienic drinking water and sanitation facilities, G. Promoting clean and affordable energy, H. Facilitating fair employment opportunities and improving living standards, I. Encouraging business innovation and infrastructural development, J. Reducing deprivation, K. Promoting sustainable consumption and production practices, L. Enhancing community and city sustainability, M. Protecting the environment and conserving marine and terrestrial life, N. Ensuring peace and fair treatment for all individuals, and O. Promoting cooperation towards these objectives.

While some areas are making headway, the global effort to achieve the Goals is still falling short of expectations. Initiation of a robust and ambitious effort to achieve the Goals by 2030 must occur in 2022.

But, to make this sustainability in the tourism industry successful, we need a huge propagation about it among the people in the tourist destinations. Otherwise, holistic growth is not possible. Several organizations are currently involved in the tourism sector like hotels, resorts, restaurants, catering establishments, tour aggregators, homestay owners, etc. These organizations are also catering to the hospitality industry and especially tourism destinations. All the organization is striving their level best to cater to the tourists in different areas. All the organizations are doing marketing for their room sales, and restaurant sales, and also operating as tour guides to help the tourists. All the organizations are spending money to generate revenues through their businesses. They are also propagating about tourist destinations, trying to attract wanderlusts so that they can pay a visit there. But is it enough for the sustainability of the tourism industry? Is this creating good for the local community? Is this developing the life of the wild life? Are our natural resources and the environment being protected? Do locals in popular tourist spots get any societal or economic advantages as a result?

So, My research will be all about how the hospitality industry, food aggregators, and tour aggregators contribute to getting sustainability in tourism destinations. To fill the gap so that the hospitality industry can engage themselves for sustainability in tourism destinations. In my opinion, fulfilling this gap is more important after the Covid-19 pandemic as the hospitality industry was shattered during the Covid – 19 pandemic.

Human Capital in West Bengal

There were 8.02 billion people living in West Bengal in the 2001 census, but by 2011 that number had risen to 9.13 billion. There are 91,276,115 people living in West Bengal as of the 2011 census. Of this total, 44,467,088 are female and 46,809,027 are male. Males numbered 41,465,985 and females 38,710,212 out of a total population of 80,176,197 in 2001. This decade had a total population increase of 13.84 percent, lower than the 17.84 percent rise seen in the preceding decade. In 2011, 7.54 percent of India's population lived in West Bengal. The figure was at 7.79 percent in 2001. Literacy rate in West Bengal has seen upward trend and is 76.26 percent as per 2011 population census. Out of that, 81.69 percent of men and 66.57 percent of women are literate. West Bengal had a literacy rate of 68.64% in 2001, with 77.02% of males and 59.51% of females being literate. The real number of literate people in West Bengal is 61,538,281. Out of this total, 33,818,810 were male and 27,719,471 were female. In comparison to the rest of the country, West Bengal has a densities of 1,028 per square kilometre, which is much higher. There were 903 people per square kilometre in West Bengal in 2001, compared to 324 people per square kilometre nationally. The state of West Bengal has a lower sex ratio than the rest of the country, with 950 females for every 1000 males (as of the 2011 census). The West Bengal sex ratio in 2001 was 934 females for 1000 men.
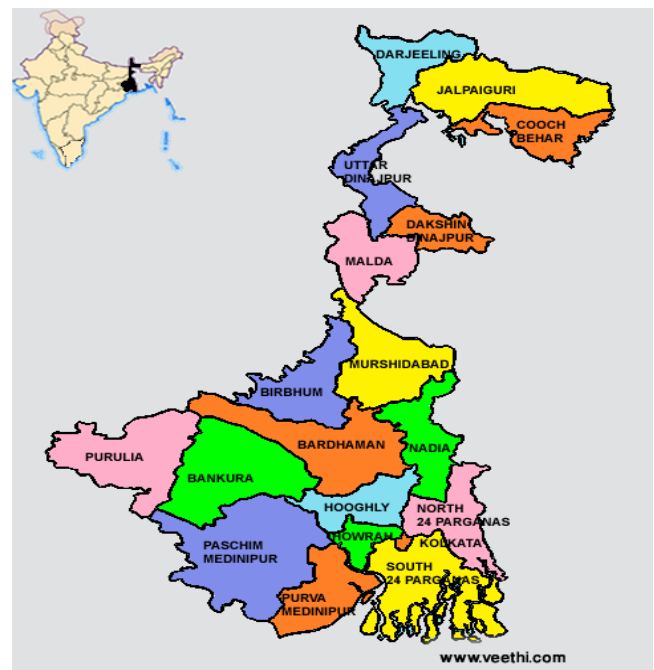
Map of West Bengal

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Sustainable Tourism Development: The literature on sustainable tourism development emphasizes the need for a holistic approach that considers environmental, socio-cultural, and economic aspects. Scholars such as Butler (1999) and Gössling et al. (2006) argue that sustainability in tourism involves balancing the interests of tourists, host communities, and the environment. The concept encompasses responsible resource management, community engagement, and the preservation of cultural heritage.

2. Key Concepts, Theories, and Models: Concepts like carrying capacity (Cifuentes- Faura et al., 2018) and the triple bottom line (Elkington, 1997) are essential in understanding sustainable tourism. Carrying capacity establishes limits to tourism growth to prevent negative impacts, while the triple bottom line framework considers economic, social, and environmental dimensions for sustainable development.

3. Stakeholders in the Hospitality Industry: Stakeholders in the hospitality industry play a crucial role in shaping sustainable tourism. A key finding of the study by Bramwell and Altenburg (2009) is the significance of public, private, and community participation in tourist planning and decision-making. According to the stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984), which states that different stakeholders' interests are closely related to an organization's performance, this makes sense.

4. Stakeholders' Role in Sustainable Tourism: Studies by Gursoy et al. (2017) and Jamal and Getz (1995) highlight the influence of stakeholders, particularly local communities and businesses, in achieving sustainability goals. The active involvement and empowerment of local communities contribute to the long-term success of tourism initiatives. The importance of collaboration and communication among stakeholders is emphasized by various scholars (Buckley, 2012; Dredge, 2017), emphasizing the need for a collective effort to address sustainability challenges.

5. Challenges and Opportunities in Stakeholder Engagement: While stakeholder involvement is critical, challenges such as power imbalances, conflicting interests, and lack of awareness may hinder effective collaboration (Leung et al., 2019). Addressing these challenges and leveraging opportunities, as outlined by Scheyvens and Biddulph (2018), can lead to more sustainable tourism outcomes.

In conclusion, the existing literature on sustainable tourism development provides a foundation for understanding the complexities of achieving sustainability in the hospitality industry. Recognizing the interdependence of stakeholders and their roles in planning and decision-making processes is pivotal. The proposed study in West Bengal aims to contribute to this body of knowledge by investigating the integrated approach for sustainable tourism development, specifically focusing on the role of stakeholders in the hospitality industry.

3. METHODOLOGY

Research Design:

This study uses a mixed-methods research strategy to examine the stakeholders' roles in the hospitality sector as part of an integrated approach to sustainable tourism development in West Bengal, India. For a more complete picture of the interplay between all parties involved, an integrated strategy combines qualitative and quantitative approaches.

4. TOURISM LANDSCAPE IN WEST BENGAL:

The tourism landscape in West Bengal is marked by a rich cultural heritage, diverse natural attractions, and historical significance. This paper aims to analyze the current status of tourism in West Bengal while identifying key challenges and opportunities for sustainable development.

West Bengal, with its capital Kolkata, serves as a gateway to Eastern India, attracting tourists with its vibrant festivals, artistic expressions, and architectural marvels. The state boasts UNESCO World Heritage Sites like the Sundarbans and Darjeeling Himalayan Railway, making it a potential hotspot for domestic and international tourists. However, the current tourism scenario faces several challenges that hinder its sustainable development.

One significant challenge is the inadequate infrastructure, particularly in remote tourist destinations. Poor connectivity, lack of quality accommodation, and insufficient amenities deter potential visitors. Additionally, issues related to waste management and environmental degradation in popular tourist spots pose a threat to the region's ecological balance.

Political and social unrest in certain areas further contribute to the challenges faced by the tourism sector in West Bengal. These factors can discourage potential tourists, impacting the industry's growth and sustainability.

Nevertheless, amidst these challenges, numerous opportunities exist for fostering sustainable tourism development in West Bengal. The state can capitalize on its cultural richness by promoting heritage tourism, encouraging responsible tourism practices, and preserving historical landmarks. Strengthening infrastructure through public-private partnerships and community involvement can address connectivity and accommodation issues, enhancing the overall tourist experience.

Moreover, leveraging the potential of eco-tourism in the Sundarbans, Digha, Murshidabad and Darjeeling can contribute to both economic growth and environmental conservation. Collaborative efforts between the government, local communities, and private enterprises can play a pivotal role in achieving sustainable development goals in the tourism sector.

Also, five West Bengali commodities have been recognised for the geographical indication (GI) badge, which is great news for the state in 2024. Natural honey from the Sundarbans, Kalo Nunia rice from Jaipaiguri, Garad sarees from Murshidabad, and Tangail sarees from Nadia and east Burdwan all have the label of the Centre's department for development of industry and internal commerce. Darjeeling tea, Malda's "Laxmon Bhog," and "himsagar mangoes" are just a few of the 22 West Bengali products that have been granted GI tags so far.

The tourism trade has received the status of an industry in West Bengal in 2023. On Wednesday, under the leadership of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, the cabinet met and made the crucial decision. This decision will immensely benefit the sector, persons involved in tourism felt. They also said that recognition of this sector before the Bengal Global Business Summit (BGBS) which will boost the sector. Bengal stands third in the in flow of foreign tourists in India. UNESCO has recently awarded the status of global heritage site to Santiniketan.

Following the initiative taken, tourism in the districts is coming up in a very big way. Home stays in both north and south Bengal have become popular and people have started visiting the districts like Jhargram, Bankura, Purulia, West Midnapore in south Bengal where many home stays have come up. In north Bengal, in Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Kurseong home stays have become very popular.

It was recently reported that Kiriteshwari, located in the Murshidabad district of West Bengal, has been chosen as the Best Tourism Village of India by the Ministry of Tourism,

Government of India. The Best Tourism Village Competition, 2023 has chosen a winner from 795 entries submitted by 31 different states and territories. The prizes were presented in New Delhi in September by the MoT and the GoI.

While West Bengal holds immense tourism potential, addressing existing challenges is crucial for ensuring sustainable development. By investing in infrastructure, promoting responsible tourism, and mitigating environmental concerns, West Bengal can transform its tourism landscape, fostering economic growth while preserving its cultural and natural heritage. This paper provides insights into the current state of tourism in West Bengal and offers recommendations for a sustainable and thriving future in the sector.

Previously ranked lower than states like Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, Bengal is now the third most popular destination for tourists from outside India. The Union Tourism Ministry's Tourism Statistics 2022 reports that 10.4 lakh visitors, or 12.08 percent of the total, visited Bengal that year. Gujarat and Maharashtra are the only two states ahead of Bengal in terms of FTA, with 17.8 lakh and 15.1 lakh FTA, respectively.
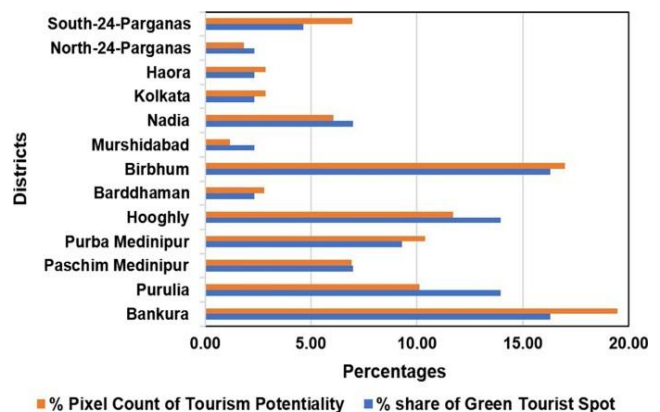
Travel, Tourism & Hospitality
Foreign and domestic tourist arrivals across West Bengal
(in millions)
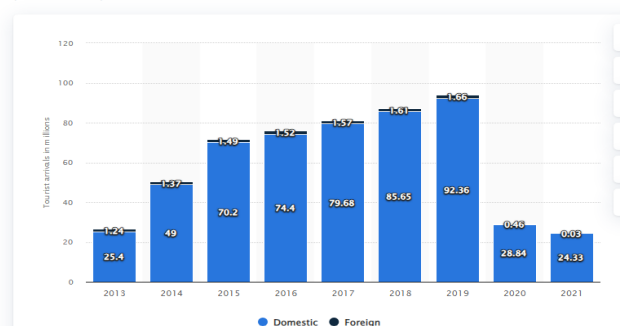
5. CONCLUSION

The prosperity of any organization hinges on its capacity for continual improvement and the delivery of top-notch products and services to its clientele. Achieving this necessitates every member of the organization to possess the essential knowledge, skills, and a positive attitude.

A meticulous delineation of tourist segments, coupled with targeted marketing endeavors facilitated by seasoned professionals, becomes imperative. Sustainable revenue growth, aligning with the expanding capacities introduced by the hospitality industry, is pivotal for overall advancement. Given that tourism activities are intrinsically linked to nature and natural heritage, it becomes paramount to ensure that tourism development adheres to ecological sustainability – preserving ecological processes must be non-negotiable.

Tourism, being a conduit for experiencing a nation's unique culture and the distinctiveness of a state, mandates that development strategies uphold social and cultural sustainability, aligning with the local people's culture and values. The focal points for actionable measures should revolve around community involvement in tourism development and planning, alongside comprehensive training for personnel involved in tourism to uphold service quality without compromising its essence. Striking the right balance in distributing benefits to the community is imperative to ensure that the populace perceives tangible advantages.

Moreover, establishing a legal and procedural framework is crucial to combat social issues such as exploitation, child labor, sex tourism, and the preservation of heritage products. In conclusion, navigating the terrain of accessible tourism poses challenges and bottlenecks that demand attention. While some issues may be surmountable with commitment and earnest efforts, more complex challenges necessitate robust policy mechanisms and heightened inter- departmental coordination. The journey requires a concerted effort from all stakeholders, emphasizing the need for commitment and collaboration to overcome the multifaceted challenges in the realm of accessible tourism.

Suggestions

Effective master plans should be carefully crafted with specific goals integrated into West Bengal's broader economic and social development objectives. Prioritizing infrastructure development, improving tourist facilities, and enhancing communication networks are essential components of this planning.

Inclusivity is key; information, instructions, and suggestions should be made accessible to all. Braille and large print materials must be readily available, with large print materials positioned at eye level. To promote transparency, travel and tourism organizations should create and publicize Fact Sheets detailing the accessibility features in their premises.

A communication strategy for tourism should prioritize making accessible information an integral part of all campaigns. Valuing and preserving the environment, flora, fauna, monuments, and cultural heritage is crucial. Conservation should not be seen as a one-time effort but rather as an ingrained way of life.

At every level of tourist growth, research is necessary to track effects, find solutions, and equip locals to adapt to new circumstances and make the most of possibilities.

Tourism may be a powerful driver of regional development, thus it's critical to set up human resource centres in every area. The availability of trained and semi-skilled human resources in each location should be studied by these institutions.

Lastly, hotels, tourist resorts, and other facilities along the route need to be closely monitored by managers who are both informed and experienced to ensure that the services they offer are of high quality. Simple measures, thoughtfully implemented, can contribute significantly to the success of tourism initiatives in the region.

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