



Tourist's Preference for Cultural Heritage Sites –A Case of Rameshwaram, Tamilnadu, India

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Abstract

This paper aims to investigate the reasons why people visit a site where historic artifacts are located and their activity level preferences of the sites. The study is exploratory and descriptive in nature. Both quantitative and qualitative methodologies are applied. The sample size was 420. Convenience sampling method was adopted to collect quantitative data from tourists. The tour preference does not vary among all the age group of the tourists. Tourists in all age groups had visited the site for heritage, vacation and as jolly trip. The foreign tourists visit this site as a jolly trip. They were unaware about the holy secret of this site Rameshwaram. The tourists felt that availability of transportation to reach the site and the facilities for food and accommodation are important factors for the preference of the site.

Key words: Cultural Heritage Sites, Tourist's preference, Heritage Tourism

Introduction

Heritage tourism has gained increasing attention in recent years. It has nurtured literature of tourism from different perspectives such as tourists' behavior in world heritage sites, visitor management (Johnson, 1999; Herbert, 2001; Waitt, 2000) pricing issues of heritage attractions (Tian *et al.*, 2007), heritage sites and community development (Grimwade and Carter, 2000; Schulz, 1980), marketing of heritage sites (Nuryanti, 1996), motivation to visit (Yan & Morrison, 2007), perception and expectation of heritage sites (Poria *et al.*, 2006; Rojas and Camarero, 2008), and classification of visitors in heritage cities (Espelt and Benito, 2006). A primary benefit of heritage tourism is its long-term economic value, representing one of the most profitable tourist market segments, with high sustainable growth rates.

This study aims to investigate the reasons why people visit a site where historic artifacts are located. It is hoped that such an investigation will contribute to the theoretical understanding of heritage tourism by highlighting whether there is a need to emphasize the link between the tourists' behaviour and the space visited.

Review of Literature

Heritage Tourism – Depicting the Past in the Present: Literally heritage means what we have taken over from our past. From the tourist point of view, this subgroup of tourism is based on consumers' intension and motivation rather than on specific site attributes. The main motivation for visiting a site is based on the characteristics of the place

according to the tourists' perception of their own heritage.

The recent literature on dissonance heritage (Tunbridge and Ashworth, 1996), integrated heritage management (Hall and McArthur, 1998), heritage management (Garrod and Fyall, 2000), heritage visitor attraction (Leask and Yeoman, 1999), clarifying the core heritage (Poria *et al.*, 2003), heritage and post-modern heritage (Nuryanti, 1996), and consuming heritage (Waite, 2000) have shown the growing concern about heritage values and the heritage management context.

The characteristics of tourists are important factors when the researcher analyzes tourists' behavioural intention with cultural/heritage destinations. The socioeconomic, demographic, and behavioral indicators are commonly used in tourism research to profile tourists by age, gender, income, marital status, occupations, education or ethnic background. Yavuz (1994) explained that these indicators are easy to identify and use in marketing decisions.

Yavana Rani *et al.*, (2017), evidently showed that the 'Tourism Development Impacts' constructs shows significant positive relationship with the construct of 'Tourism Support'. It was evident from the empirical data that the younger generation people and elderly people are less supportive for tourism than the middle aged people.

Light (1996) compared the characteristics of tourists visiting a heritage site in South Wales. In this study, tourists' experiences are important attributes in motivating tourists to revisit. Lee (1999) investigated individuals' trip characteristics (trip group types) and past experience with a destination. He analyzed the relationship between past experience and place attachment.

Objectives

- 1) To conduct an exploratory examination how demographic characteristics affect intention to revisit the heritage site.
- 2) To examine the association of demographic characteristics and tour preferences.

Research methodology

The study is descriptive in nature. The study population of this study was the visitors' (tourists') and the objective is to study the intention to visit the heritage sites. The sample size of 420 respondents were willing to turn back with fully filled questionnaire. The response rate was 90%. Convenience sampling method was adopted from identified and independent sample frames to collect quantitative data from the respondents. The study area was Rameshwaram, Tamilnadu, the heritage town of India.

The Data Analysis

Demographic Characteristics of the visitors

In human Survey respondents (visitors') were asked a number of questions including: gender, age, level of education, family size, and nationality, to enable them to be classified by socio-demographic background. Demographic characteristics of the tourists is important not only as a means of classifying respondents but also because previous research has shown that the socio-demographic background and type of visitors might be a factor influencing their perception and views on the environmental impacts of tourism (Liu *et al.*, 1987; Petrosilli *et al.*, 2007).

The respondents comprised male (65.5 %) and female (34.5 %), due to socio-cultural constraints; females were less willing to participate in the survey.

Age groups have been recorded after merging small segments; the results showed that 37.9 % of respondents were aged between 25 and 44 years, followed by age ranges of 45-65 years (26.9%), then 15-24 years (24.0%), and 65+years (11.2%). The results indicated that the majority of respondents (37.9%) were middle-aged (between 25 and 44 years old).

Most visitors in the survey (97.6%) were domestic tourists from India and only 2.4% came from other countries like America, Australia and Africa. Majority (59.5%) of the domestic tourist was from North India and 38.1% were from South India. The fact is, however, that Rameshwaram is attractive to visitors from North India.

Education levels of tourist showed that 48.3% of respondents are under graduate degree holders, 26.0% had post graduate qualification, and 25.7% of the tourists were high school graduates. This implies that the majority of respondents (48.3%) had under graduate degree.

In terms of respondents' employment, it was found that 57.2% of the respondents were full time employees, followed by 21.2% of the unemployed people, and the part time employees were 13.6%. Majority of the tourists were settled in a secured job.

From the family income level of the people, 32.9% have income between Rs 10000 and Rs 25,000 followed by 21.0% in the income level Rs 25,000 and Rs 40,000. Then 20.0% of the people have less than Rs10, 000 and 11.0% of the tourist have no income since they were unemployed.

From a marital status perspective, 67.9% of respondents were married, and 31.7% were single. The widows and divorced respondents would constitute only 0.4% of total respondents. 63.1% of the respondents had their family members 4-6. Family members not more than 3 accounted for 22.6%. Only 14.3%

of the respondents had their family members above six. 76.9% of the tourists have children and only 23.1% have no children.

In terms of respondents' average length of stay in the heritage place, the nominal values revealed that 69.0% of respondents spend less than a week followed by 28.8% of the tourist spent less than 14 days. Only 2.1% of the respondents spent more than 2 weeks in this heritage place. These results revealed that the people spend fewer days in the cultural heritage places.

In terms of tour preference to the tourist spots, 50.7% of the tourists prefer the place for its heritage followed by 35.3% choose this place as a vacation spot and only 13.8 % of the tourists take this as a jolly trip.

Life style measures

The results of the descriptive statistics analysis for the life style measures scale are presented in Table 1 This measurement scale consisted of 6 items reflecting the life style measures. Tourists were asked to provide answers to each item based on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 5=most important to 1= Most unimportant.

Table 1: Descriptive analysis of the life style measures

Life style measures	Mean	Std. Deviation (SD)
Heritage Beauty	4.36	0.801
Conservation of Heritage	4.17	0.800
Cleanliness of Heritage site	4.25	0.903
Popularity of heritage site	4.16	0.951
Gaining of Cultural Experience	4.22	0.899
Mind relaxation in heritage places	4.20	0.909

Based on the descriptive statistical analysis, the mean score of each item shows that the tourists felt that the heritage beauty is important (M=4.36, SD=0.801), followed by cleanliness of the heritage site (M= 4.25, SD=0.903). Additionally, they also felt that gaining cultural experience (M= 4.22, SD=0.899) and mind relaxation (M= 4.20, SD=0.909) as an important factor for visiting the heritage site.

From the Table 2, the tourists felt that availability of transportation to reach the site (M= 4.23, SD=0.924) and the facilities for food and accommodation (M= 4.20, SD=0.881) are important for the preference of the site. It is followed by distance of the heritage site (M= 4.18, SD=0.927) and cheap entrance fees (M= 4.15, SD=0.881). The tourist are not certain about exhibition involving with heritage place (M= 3.83, SD=0.934), Inexpensive than other sites (M= 3.16, SD=0.977) and advertisement about that site (M= 3.09, SD=0.911).

Null Hypothesis-H1: There is no significant difference between north Indian tourists and

South Indian tourists with respect to intention to visit the site again.

Activity level preferences

Table 2: Descriptive analysis of the activity level preferences

Activity level preferences	Mean	Std. Deviation(SD)
Cheap Entrance fees	4.15	0.739
Facilities for food and accommodation	4.20	0.881
Availability of transportation to reach	4.23	0.924
Inexpensive than other sites	3.16	0.977
Distance of the Heritage site	4.18	0.927
Advertisement about that site	3.09	0.911
People accompanying like the place	4.02	0.907
Exhibition involving with heritage place	3.13	0.934

Table 3: Nationality with respect to intention to visit the site again

Nationality	Respondents	Mean	SD	t value	p value
North Indian	250	4.09	0.699	-0.825	0.410
South Indian	160	4.15	0.593		

Role in Table 3, reveals the mean score and standard deviation between the two groups North Indians and South Indians based on intention to visit. Since P value is greater than 0.05, the null hypothesis- H1 is accepted at 5 percent level of significance. Hence it was concluded that there is no significant difference between North Indians and South Indians with respect to intention to visit Rameshwaram again. Both North Indians and South Indians had same intention to revisit the site.

The association of demographic characteristics and Tour preference

The Chi-square statistic was used to test the statistical significance of the association between the demographic characteristics and the tour reference of the tourists.

Null Hypothesis-H2: There is no association between age of the tourist and their tour preference.

Table 4: Chi-square test for association between age and tour preference

Age Group	Tour preference			Total	Chi-square Value	p value
	Heritage Tourism	Vacation Trip	Jolly Trip			
15 – 24 years	10.0%	11.2%	2.9%	24.0%	8.014	0.237
25 - 44 years	21.0%	11.2%	5.7%	37.9%		
45 - 65 years	13.8%	9.3%	3.8%	26.9%		
> 65 years	6.0%	3.8%	1.4%	11.2%		
Total	50.7%	35.5%	13.8%	100.0%		

The Since P value (0.237) is greater than 0.05 (Table 4), the null hypothesis-H2 is accepted at 5 percent level of significance. Hence it was concluded that there is no association between age group of the tourist and their tour preference. The tour preference does not vary

among all the age group of the tourists. Tourists in all age groups had visited the site for heritage, vacation and as jolly trip.

Null Hypothesis-H3: There is no association between Nationality and their tour preference

Table 6: Chi-square test for association between Domestic tourist and Tour preference

Nationality if Domestic	Tour preference			Total	Chi-square Value	p value
	Heritage Tourism	Vacation Trip	Jolly Trip			
North India	113 (32.4%)	89 (21.7%)	28 (6.8%)	250 (61.0%)	0.724	0.696
South India	80 (19.5%)	58 (14.1%)	22 (5.4%)	160 (39.0%)		
Total	213 (52.0%)	147 (35.9%)	50 (12.2%)	410 (100.0%)		

Since P value (0.696) is greater than 0.05 (Table 6), the null hypothesis – H4 is accepted at 5 percent level of significance. Hence it was concluded that there is no association between domestic tourist and their tour preference. 32.4% of the north Indians prefers the site for its heritage, followed by 21.7% prefer the site for their vacation and only 6.8%

of the north Indian tourist as a jolly trip. Only 19.4% of the south Indian tourists prefer the site for its heritage.

Null Hypothesis-H5: There is no association between domestic tourist and their tour preference

Table 7: Chi-square test for association between Domestic tourist and Tour preference

Nationality if Domestic	Tour preference			Total	Chi-square Value	p value
	Heritage Tourism	Vacation Trip	Jolly Trip			
North India	113 (32.4%)	89 (21.7%)	28 (6.8%)	250 (61.0%)	0.724	0.696
South India	80 (19.5%)	58 (14.1%)	22 (5.4%)	160 (39.0%)		
Total	213 (52.0%)	147 (35.9%)	50 (12.2%)	410 (100.0%)		

Since P value (0.696) is greater than 0.05 (Table 7), the null hypothesis – H5 is accepted at 5 percent level of significance. Hence it was concluded that there is no association between domestic tourist and their tour preference. 32.4% of the north Indians prefers the site for its heritage, followed by 21.7% prefer the site for their vacation and only 6.8% of the north Indian tourist as a jolly trip. Only 19.4% of the south Indian tourists prefer the site for its heritage.

Findings

Impact of Demographic Characteristics on Intention to visit the site

To analyze the impact of the demographic characteristics on the Intention to visit the site, the researcher has applied student’s t test arrived with the following findings.

a) Impact of gender on Intention to visit the site

It was observed that there is significant difference between male and female tourist with respect to intention to visit the tourism site. Female tourists had more intension to visit Rameshwaram than male tourists.

b) Impact of Nationality on intention to visit the site again

It was concluded that there is no significant difference between North Indians and South Indians with respect to intention to visit Rameshwaram again. Both North Indians and South Indians had same intention to revisit the site.

c) Impact of age group on intention to visit the site again

It was found that there is no significant difference between age group of the tourist with respect to intention to visit the tourism site. The tourists in all age group had same level of intention to visit the site.

d) Impact of Tour type on intention to visit the tourism site.

It was concluded that there is significant difference between tour type the tourist prefer with respect to intention to visit the tourism site. Based on Duncan Multiple Range test, the tourist who visited the place for a jolly trip had less intention to visit again than the tourist who visited for heritage and vacation.

The association of demographic characteristics and tour preference

a) Association between age of the tourist and their tour preference

It was concluded that there is no association between age group of the tourist and their tour preference. The tour preference does not vary among all the age group of the tourists. Tourists in all age groups had visited the site for heritage, vacation and as jolly trip.

b) Association between Nationality and their tour preference

It was concluded that there is association between nationality and their tour preference. More than half (50.7%) of the domestic tourist prefer the site for its heritage.35% of the domestic tourist spent their vacation time in Rameshwaram. Only 11.9% of the tourist

came for a jolly trip. The foreign tourist visiting this site is merely 2.4% and the remaining (97.6%) is domestic tourist. The foreign tourists visit this site as a jolly trip. They were unaware about the sacred of this site Rameshwaram.

c) Association between domestic tourist and their tour preference

It was found that there is no association between domestic tourist and their tour preference. 32.4% of the north Indians prefers the site for its heritage, followed by 21.7% prefer the site for their vacation and only 6.8% of the north Indian tourist as a jolly trip. Only 19.4% of the south Indian tourists prefer the site for its heritage.

Implications

Findings provide some guidance to tourism planners, developers, and policy decision-makers to better evaluate and understand which tourism resources and attractions key stakeholders preferred to see developed (e.g. development of nature-based tourism, development of small independent businesses, and development of cultural or historic-based attractions). These results are likely to help tourism stakeholders and marketers to collect information and plan appropriate competitive strategies based on the tourism attractions they prefer to develop before the implementation stage. For the local communities, rural local official entities, public and private service providers, the anticipated outcomes should offer an insight into the potential for cultural heritage tourism sustainability to help to provide a good experience and offer a good level of service quality.

Conclusion

The vast number of visitors has serious damaging effects on physical and cultural environments of heritage sites. It is a great challenge for the government to cope with the conflict between conservation and heritage tourism and to explore the mutual benefits to be derived from the development of sustainable heritage tourism. However, the method for raising public awareness to understand and conserve cultural heritages is by class education at schools, colleges and

universities. It will be helpful for the students not only to know more about the history and culture of their hometown, their own country and the whole world, but also to set up the concept of promoting conservation and supporting sustainable economic, natural and cultural development. Understanding the visitors' travel behaviour (where, how and why) is not only useful for tourism practitioners, but also useful for improving local sustainable tourism.

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