
Editorial: Exploring arousal and merriment in social tourism

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Among many categories of tourism, the complex segments include social, economic and anthropological tourism. Social tourism is aimed at living in a neighbourhood that has attractions towards the social systems, values and lifestyle. Such tourism has embedded interests in believing by learning and exploring untapped knowledge. Spending time with rainforest dwellers in Amazon, or living along with the Garo and Khasi tribes in North-eastern India in Meghalaya Province generates touristic arousal to explore the hidden facts in society and branch-out geo-demographic knowledge. Social tourism has remained subtle in the industry for a long time, but it rose into prominence in the twentieth century to shape ideas of social inclusion and welfare rights (Minnaert et al., 2006). Social tourism includes interaction with the diversity of systems and approaches, which scale-up the social learning process and human interface to develop a comprehensive and universally accepted conceptualisation. The major challenge in this tourism sector is to develop adequate social infrastructure, community leadership, and social events that ensure arousal and merriment in this touristic sector. Therefore, social tourism calls for a wider debate concerning the desirability and attractiveness of tourism as social and economic activity and generating collective intelligence on the social and welfare measures. Social tourism requires public policies to systematically support this sector and reconstruct the social tourism industry by diversifying the over-crowded resorts, and cities to remote unexplored social destinations (Cisneros-Martínez et al., 2018).

Social tourism has expanded to anthropological and heritage tourism that attracts tourists interested in human evolution and social history. This sector is growing to be increasingly influential in shaping holiday experience with focus on thematic learning and knowledge building. The anthropological and heritage tourisms provide significant socio-cultural and economic benefits to the tourist and generate arousal and merriment during the touristic experience. Learning with the philosophy of 'knowing-being-doing' in social tourism, tourists are able to experience the contemporary socio-economic development and cultural revitalisation in tourism destinations. The arousal and merriment of tourists in exploring social, anthropological, and heritage tourism can be augmented by a streamline value chain process. However, necessarily, the scale of benefit to the tourist is greatest where there is uptake in business initiatives. Social tourism, being a passive sector, faces motivational challenges to attract tourists and inculcate societal value-based tourism as a long-standing behavior. Reinforcing state-led social tourism policies are motivated by a variety of reasons ranging from exploring

social diversities, to rural lifestyles and ecological restoration, to food and culinary activities, which are less economically driven outside the society (Corlett, 2016).

Social tourism also envelops nocturnal wildlife tourism as a part of the social lifestyle in less explored neighbourhoods in developing economies. It is often cited as a social activity with potential socio-economic benefit resulting from wildlife ecology. Exploring ornithological nocturnal life has been taken up by many nature science organisations like Bombay Natural History Society in India. Tourism industry may align with such organisations to introduce new dimensions in touristic programs to broadly support the social tourism projects. Such business alliance converges the education, economics, and tourism objectives to build an integrated social tourism program by including diverse themes as a package to stimulate arousal, merriment, and learning by knowing on a linear path (O'Rourke, 2014).

Tourism companies focusing on social tourism can develop destination brands by emphasising on geo-demographic and cultural attributes. Social media channels have been a rich repository of experience sharing, touristic ideation, and social interaction, which provide collective intelligence to the tourists to plan and schedule their social tourism destinations away from urban chaos. Tourists develop brand affinity over time with increasingly sharing experiences on social networks. Such destinations are regarded as behavioural brands to gain social, heritage and anthropomorphic experience. Individual experiences contribute to self-image congruence and grow within the industry as psycho-social dynamics. The behavioural brands grow in the marketplace largely through the word-of-mouth experience sharing and value creation (Haenlein and Libai, 2017). The referral-based marketing programs in social tourism enhance the quality of tourism campaigns and help social tourism organisations to develop competitive differentiation and services visibility across the brands in other tourism segments. The referral marketing programs in leisure and tourism services include greater credibility of peers and family member recommendations to attract new consumers (Berman, 2016). Social tourism brands tend to succeed as consumers develop, share their arousal, merriment, and experience by emphasising self-congruence with such destination brands. Social tourism is aligned with the personality traits and provides symbolic meaning or emotional value to tourists that contributes to the overall brand preferences, and can be more enduring than functional attributes. Social brands build perceptual values among tourists, which describes brand attributes and self-congruity leading to form attitude towards brands (Fournier and Alvarez, 2012).

This issue of the journal includes four papers that broadly address heritage tourism, medical tourism, and adventure tourism. The above-mentioned research papers represent study areas of India, the USA, South Africa and Bhutan. These papers discuss contemporary research propositions and attempt to establish convergence between the role of consumers and companies in managing brand awareness, brand knowledge, and brand affinity among competitive leisure and tourism brands in the marketplace. I hope the collection of research papers appearing in this issue will enrich the existing literature on the topic and stimulate future research.

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