

Problems and Prospects of Island Tourism Industry in Andaman and Nicobar Islands



Tourism

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Introduction

The global tourism industry has grown about 50% in the past decade, despite setbacks caused by terrorism, pandemics and times of political and economic unrest (UNWTO, 2011). Global tourism was affected by several worldwide disasters in starting in 2008 and reaching full impact in 2009. The economic recession hit first-world countries hard, which had global implications. North America in particular suffered economic instability which compounded with the outbreak of Swine Flu. Most economies echoed the recessionary state but some countries, like China, flourished in the global economic downturn (Newsweek, 2009). As a result countries like the USA and other areas of economic instability generated fewer travellers, whereas China's outbound tourism increased; this could explain the growth of people travelling to countries neighboring on China like the Russian Federation (UNWTO, 2011).

Although global tourism suffered in 2009, statistics from 2010 show that the industry has bounced back to an all time high. Countries recovered at different paces, with economically developing countries like India, China and Brazil leading in growth. Economically developed areas like Western Europe and North America had the smallest growth but still show signs recovery (UNWTO, 2011). Europe's comeback was stunted by weather conditions in the winter that disrupted flights and other transportation. Also, the eruption of the Icelandic volcano, Eyjafjalajokull, interfered with air travel across the region. Although the world is coming out of the recession, many people are still unemployed and the economic outlook remains uncertain. This may especially impact on international travel to countries that are economically advanced; people may still be choosing to travel in their own country or to destinations where there money is worth more which would have a positive impact on tourism in India.

Political upheaval in a range of counties in the Middle East and North Africa starting in Egypt will have numerous implications towards industries, including tourism. Two main effects on tourism are the deterrent nature of political unrest for travellers and petrol prices effecting global economies and transportation costs. People who initially planned holidays in the Middle East have shifted their business to neighbouring countries like Turkey (Hotel & Resort Insider, 2011). Alan Trotter of Conferences and Incentives New Zealand (CINZ) has said that there is currently a global trend towards "safe" travel which even outweighs the previous trends of social responsibility and environmental concern (A. Trotter, Personal Communication, 2011). Ensuring the security of tourists must thus be a paramount consideration for India and the Andaman Islands in the future.

Snapshot of India and the Andaman Islands

India's travel and tourism industry is growing and was one of the developing nations at the forefront of the global tourism recovery of 2010 (UNWTO, 2011). India received 5.108 million international tourists in 2009; 15.72% of which travelled from the USA. The other top sources of international travelers were from the UK at 14.66% and Bangladesh at 8.97% of foreign tourist arrivals. The 2009 statistics show negative growth of -2.2% from 2008 displaying the global impact of the recession and pandemics on international travel to India. However, foreign travel growth bounced back 8.1% to 5.584 million in 2010 according

to the Ministry of Tourism (2010). Domestic tourism is about 130 times the amount of international tourism accounting for 650.04 million travellers. Domestic travel has been steadily increasing at an average of about 13% per year since 2000, when 220.11 million travellers were recorded. Domestic tourism was positively impacted by global issues in 2009 showing that Indian travellers were taking their holidays within the country rather than travelling abroad (Ministry of Tourism, 2010).

India's travel and tourism industry is not its biggest money maker, but still brings in a massive sum of money every year. In 2010 the direct contribution of the industry to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was USD \$31.28 billion and the amount is expected to grow to over USD \$34 billion dollars in 2011. The total contribution to GDP was more than double at USD \$73.312 billion in 2010, expected to increase by over USD \$6 billion in 2011 (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2011). In a land of over a billion people, these large sums become crucial to the survival and growth of the nation.

The Andaman Islands are a chain of 572 islands in the Bay of Bengal stretching 700 kilometres in length and 52 kilometres at the maximum width (refer to Figure 1). The largest islands in the archipelago are North Andaman, Middle Andaman, Lower Andaman, the deceptively named Little Andaman, and Great Nicobar. International tourism is not permitted in the Nicobar Islands and domestic tourism is only allowed if a special permit is obtained. Middle Andaman is the largest island in the archipelago covering 1536 square kilometres (Barefoot India, n.d. & Andaman Nicobar Tourism, n.d.). Most tourists will stay in Port Blair or travel to the paradisiacal Havelock Island for the bulk of their stay with day-trips to the other islands. Wandoor and Niel islands also have accommodation for overnight stay. Surfers will travel to Little Andaman for its reef and exposure to the waves.

The tourism industry on the Andaman Islands is young as they have only been liberated in the past seventy years. The island chain was occupied by the British and used as a penal colony from the mid 1800s. In 1942 it became a Naval Base for the Japanese Military, and finally gained independence in 1945 (Vashishtha, 2010).

Many would argue that the greatest commodity that the Andaman Islands have is their natural one. The beaches and forests as well as the flora and fauna that inhabit them are significant attractions for tourists. However, the Andaman Islands also have a dark historical element stemming from British rule, which attract both international visitors and domestic who want to learn about their history (Soin, n.d.). Accommodation and activities are available for a variety of types of tourism and costs but infrastructure on the islands such as roads, proper waste disposal etc. have not advanced proportionately. The lack of basic facilities and the disregard for the environment that seems to be the norm might put off or in some cases shock visitors.

Domestic tourism is the largest section of the Andaman Islands tourism industry at 142 042 visitors in 2009. Foreign arrivals for the same year was less than a tenth of domestic visitors and accounted for 13 684 visitors. Although the growth was small, there has still been positive growth in tourist arrivals from 2008 which saw 123 914 domestic travellers and 12 512 internation-