

Prioritization of Forms of Tourism in Iran to Formulate National Strategies

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Abstract

Factors like geographical position, climate variety, culture, rich history and etc. Provide a suitable area for emergence of different forms of tourism in Iran but there is no complementary and formulated program to study different forms of tourism, assigning and prioritization of effective forms of tourism in Iran. In this study prevailing forms of tourism in Iran are recognized according to literature review and Delphi model. In the next step by using the same model 5 criteria are recognized to analyze forms of tourism and then are weighted via pair-wise comparison method.

The current study is of applied type. Statistical population which includes all technical managers of tourism companies reported 1000 persons all over Iran by Euromonitor in 2009. Sample size equals to 278 which is calculated by Morgan table. Random classified sampling method is used and one technical manager is selected from each company.

Obtained results show that health tourism due to availability of potential markets and providing high quality services consistent with mentioned markets has the first priority among the forms of tourism in Iran. Religious tourism, cultural tourism, ecotourism, urban tourism and rural tourism are the next priorities whilst proper planning can be the strengths and advantages of tourism industry in Iran.

Keywords: Forms Of Tourism, Iran Tourism, National Strategy, TOPSIS, Prioritization.

Introduction

In the last century, leisure travel moved from an activity of the wealthiest to the inalienable “birth-right” of everyone. Tourism is usually viewed as being multidimensional, possessing physical, social, cultural, economic and political characteristics [1]. Developing and enhancing tourism without guiding framework and pre-determined strategies for achieving development goals and in ad hoc manner is impossible [2]. Tourism industry of any country consists of different forms of tourism for which matching and adaptation of strategies with the nature of destination is necessary.

World Tourism Organization (WTO) used rural tourism concept for defining that tourism product "that gives to visitors a personalized contact, a taste of physical and human environment of countryside and as far as possible, allow them to participate in the activities, traditions and lifestyles of local people." [3]

Although tourism is not a panacea for economic development but it does have some advantages over other sectors for delivering pro-poor growth [4]. Pro-poor tourism (PPT) is defined as tourism that generates net benefits for the poor. Benefits may be economic, but they may also be social, environmental or cultural. PPT strategies aim to unlock opportunities for the poor – whether for economic gain, other livelihood benefits, or participation in decision-making [5].

The emergence of urban tourism through a process when tourism was seen as a danger in 1970 is described by Ashworth (1989) as a defensive approach to tourism in the city [6]. The urban tourism is one of the main factors of economical increase of European cities [7]. The urban tourism is an essential aspect of the correlation of internal and external demands. This is because the tourists are not only visitors, they are equally, parents and friends visiting the locals and of course there are the locals themselves.

Volunteer tourism, coined 'voluntourism', is one of the major growth areas in contemporary tourism. As such, the 1990s saw the 'cultural and adventure tourism rush' and the late 1990s and early 2000s are now experiencing the 'volunteer tourism rush' influenced by an ever increasing 'guilt-conscious' society. Within a short timeframe, volunteer tourism has arguably become a 'mass niche' market. In addition, volunteer tourism focuses on the altruistic and self developmental experiences that participants can gain during their time working on such projects [8].

Political tourism is specifically referred to the temporary use of cities by large number of people on the occasion of major political events and civil society demonstrations. In the past few years, it became increasingly important with respect to the anti-globalization movement. Today's phenomenon distinguishes from the past demonstrations of social moments by the internationalization of the anti-globalization movement, the building of an "informal and flexible networking" among the different local towns to arrange meetings, and the media focus and involvement in providing event related information [9].

Worldwide, events have been recognized as a strong component of sport tourism that draw people from different places [10, 11, 12, 13, 14], and are becoming an integral and major part of tourism development and marketing strategies [15]. "Sport tourism events refer to those sport activities that attract tourists of which a large percentage are spectators ... [they] have the potential to attract non-residents, media, technical personnel, athletes, coaches and other sporting officials" [16], with the primary purpose for travel being participating in or viewing sport [17]. Today sport and tourism is among the 'developed' world's most sought-after leisure experiences and are becoming very important economic activities [18].

Cultural tourism is the fastest growing segment of tourism industry due to trend toward an increased specialization among tourists. Because of people's inclination to seek out novelty including that of traditional cultures, heritage tourism has become a major new area of tourism demand [19]. The movement of persons to cultural attractions in cities in countries other than their normal place of residence, with the intention to gather new information and experiences to satisfy their cultural needs and all movements of persons to specific cultural attractions, such as heritage sites, artistic and cultural manifestations, arts and drama to cities outside their normal country of residence is known as cultural tourism [20].

Religious Tourism nowadays is considered as a common motivation for travel, as Jackowski (2000) estimates that approximately 240 million people travel every year because of the religion, including Christians, Muslims and Hindus [21]. Nowadays, there are thousands of different holy places around the world which have enough attractions to develop and provoke movements among the population. Those holy places have a different meaning for each group of people (cultural, religious, mystic, etc.), depending on the aim of their trip [22].

Ecotourism has been defined variously "as responsible travel to natural areas that conserves natural environments and sustains the wellbeing of the local people" [23]. More specifically, 'ecotourism' refers to tourism to areas of natural and cultural heritage that is planned and managed with the objective of: minimizing negative social, cultural and environmental impacts, maximizing the involvement in, and the equitable distribution of economic benefits to the host communities, maximizing revenues for re-investment in conservation, Educating both visitors and local people as to the importance of conserving natural and cultural resources and delivering a quality experience for tourists. These five 'principles' of ecotourism have underpinned the development of the National Ecotourism Strategy since its inception [24].

The rise in interest towards activity-based tourism known as 'adventure tourism' has allowed many players to enter what is now a highly specialized and lucrative market characterized by an enormous variety of products, ranging from whale watching trips to guided ascents mountains, from cycling trips to surfing holidays, from canoeing to heli-hiking. Adventure levels can be based on the personal perception of risk and the type of travel which is perceived to be adventurous; and this will be inherent to the traveler, his/her background and previous life experiences [25].

Geotourism, if not named as such has been considered a form of 'special interest tourism', an actively growing tourism market. It has some overlap with 'eco-tourism', 'sustainable tourism' and 'alternative tourism' and potentially much overlap with 'educational travel', 'environmental', 'nature-based' and 'heritage' tourism [26]. Hose defines ecotourism as: "The provision of interpretive and service facilities to enable tourists to acquire knowledge and understanding of the geology and geomorphology of a site (including its contribution to the development of the Earth sciences) beyond the level of mere aesthetic appreciation [27].

Nostalgia tourism, is rooted in the influx of circular migrants who return periodically to their communities of origin for short periods. Nostalgia tourists are migrants who temporarily return to their community of origin to participate in family, social, and cultural activities that are carried out throughout the year. The influx of nostalgia tourism increases during holidays and religious festivities. Nostalgia tourists are native to the community, and for them, the main touristic attraction lies in the possibility of recreating identity-defining elements and strengthening family and communal bonds [28].

Business tourism is one of the most lucrative, yet least well acknowledged components of our tourist industry. Over the past ten years, there has been a significant growth in all business trips, exceeding the overall tourism growth rate. Business tourism is a sector of the wider tourism industry which encompasses conferences and meetings, exhibitions and trade fairs, incentive travel, corporate events, outdoor events [29].

Recreational tourism is a means by which people seek psychological benefits that arise from experiencing new places and new situations that are of a temporary duration, whilst free from the constraints of work or normal patterns of daily life [30]. The demand for recreation and tourism facilities is likely to grow because of increasing personal incomes, leisure time, mobility and an overall trend towards more active and healthy lifestyles.

Health tourism, with a focus on good health, wellbeing and its pursuit, is not a new phenomenon [31]. Like most of the other forms of tourism, the flows of people are from more developed to less developed countries, but the recent trend is for western travelers to seek solace in Eastern therapies (e.g., Chinese medicine, Buddhist meditation, Indian Ayurveda and Thai massage)[32].

Adopting strategic planning to tourism development is necessary, because most of the times after observation of tourism development and emersion of undesired social and environmental effects, it takes a long time to alleviate the effects or control the process of development. There are several examples of tourism destinations affected by negative and undesired effects of tourism development. Negative effects are usually because of the lack or inappropriateness of tourism development plans. So preparing tourism planning is necessary to compensate negative effects of tourism in destinations [33].

Tourism is becoming an increasingly popular way to boost economic growth in developing countries. Iran is a case in point and this study attempts to address different forms of tourism in Iran and prioritize them to formulate national strategies. This prioritization help government associates in having a sustainable development. Likewise it helps the government to understand the importance of tourism industry in Iran. Delphi model, TOPSIS method, and pair-wise comparison are the methods and materials used in this study to prioritize forms of tourism.

2. Materials and Methods

The present study is of descriptive research type. It is considered as applied type in terms of objective. The present study is of survey research type in terms of collection of information and data has been made through studying books and documents. For obtaining necessary information at this study, required data have been collected through library-based studies, questionnaire and obtaining data from resources and documents (for provision of study theoretical fundamentals).

2.1. Research Model

In the first phase prevailing forms of tourism in Iran were determined according to literature review and Delphi model. In the next step by using the same model 5 criteria were recognized to analyze forms of tourism and then these criteria were weighted via pair-wise comparison method. In the next step, TOPSIS method is used for prioritization of 15 tourism forms in Iran.

2.2. Statistical Population, Sample Size and Sampling Method

The current study is of applied type. Statistical population which includes all technical managers of tourism companies reported 1000 persons all over Iran by Euromonitor in 2009 [34]. Sample size equals to 278 which is calculated by Morgan table. Random classified sampling method was used and one technical manager is selected from each company.

2.3. Validity & Reliability, Measuring Tools

Provided initial questionnaire was given to university professors and experts in charge, with the aim of presenting their views on validity of questionnaire and whether questions posed at the questionnaire are appropriate or not. Necessary changes were made at questions on the basis of viewpoints of lecturers and officials in charge.

Cronbach's Alpha [35] Test was used for testing reliability of questionnaire of study. For this reason, 278 study questionnaires were distributed among statistical population (individuals set for this study). Then each answer was studied individually and response rate of each question was calculated. In the same direction, Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Test was made through the application of SPSS software package. Generally, test reliability rate was obtained 795% at large.

2.4. Method of Analysis

2.4.1. Delphi

Delphi method starts with identification of the problem and selected experts (Delphi panel) based on their experiment related to the defined problem. A questionnaire is designed and distributed to the Delphi panel. Then data is collected and analyzed to reach consensus in responses. If the respondents have reached consensus a report is developed based on responses, if not, a new questionnaire is developed based on the results of the previous round and again distributed to the panel. This process is repeated until consensus is reached and based on which a final report is developed [36].

2.4.2. Weighting the Criteria

The basic procedure to carry out the pair-wise comparison consists of prioritization of criteria by pair-wise comparison (weighing). Rating the relative priority of the criteria is done by assigning a weight between 1 (equal importance) and 9 (extreme importance) to the more important criterion, whereas the value reciprocal to that is assigned to the other criterion in the pair. The weightings are then assigned a number and averaged in order to obtain an average weight for each criterion [37].

2.4.3. TOPSIS

For ranking and selecting the most appropriate suppliers TOPSIS method is more appropriate due to the following reasons:

In this technique, due to permission of desirability exchange between the attributes, it is possible to improve a supplier performance through its comparative advantage in some areas, despite its poor performance in other cases. In TOPSIS decision making technique, interaction effect of attributes is considered. This technique also considers Conflict and compatibility between attributes [38,39,40]. TOPSIS decision making technique is less sensitive compared to weighting technique. Considering the statistical populations covered in this study, compensating models and its constructive subgroup, TOPSIS technique, is used for evaluating and ranking the suppliers [41].

2.5. Reorganization and Weighting of Evaluative Criteria

Referring to literature review and research background, 5 criteria are recognized for analysis of forms of tourism in Iran and then by administration of questionnaire, aspects and ideas of tourism and geography experts are acquired. Then weight of each criterion is calculated on the basis of pair-wise comparison.

Matrix of pair-wise comparison of decision makers is calculated by using geometric mean as follows:

In this method after completing pair-wise comparison matrix, first geometric mean of each line of matrix is calculated; in the second phase the present column is normalized by dividing each attribute to the sum of present attributes.

The new column matrix is the matrix of weight of the indexes of the considered problem. Below the mathematical form of this method is provided:

$$\begin{bmatrix} a_{11} & \dots & a_{1n} \\ \cdot & \cdot & \cdot \\ \cdot & \cdot & \cdot \\ a_{n1} & \dots & a_{nn} \end{bmatrix} \xrightarrow{1} \begin{bmatrix} \sqrt[n]{a_{11} \dots a_{1n}} \\ \cdot \\ \cdot \\ \sqrt[n]{a_{n1} \dots a_{nn}} \end{bmatrix} = \begin{bmatrix} \pi_1 \\ \cdot \\ \cdot \\ \pi_n \end{bmatrix} \xrightarrow{2} \begin{bmatrix} \frac{\pi_1}{\sum_{i=1}^n \pi_i} \\ \cdot \\ \cdot \\ \frac{\pi_n}{\sum_{i=1}^n \pi_i} \end{bmatrix} = \begin{bmatrix} W_1 \\ \cdot \\ \cdot \\ W_n \end{bmatrix}$$

In this research 5 basic criteria are recognized to analyze the forms of tourism in Iran and then were weighted via pair-wise comparison method (Table 1).

Table 1: Matrix of Pair-wise comparison of basic criteria

Criteria	Number of tourists	Amount of expenditure	Length of stay	Second visit	Encouraging others
Number of tourists	1	0.5	1.6	3.5	4.7
Amount of expenditure		1	2.4	2.7	2.2
Length of stay			1	3.1	1.8
Second visit				1	
Encouraging others					1

After forming the model in expert choice and importing the matrix of pair-wise comparison, the weight of criteria and sub-criteria was calculated as shown below. Table 2 shows the weighting of 5 criteria which are determined on the basis of AHP method (expert choice software).

Table 2: Weighting the Basic Criteria

Row	Basic criteria	Weight	Priority
1	Number of tourists	0.292	2
2	Amount of expenditure	0.343	1
3	Length of stay	0.179	3
4	Second visit	0.076	5
5	Encouraging others	0.11	4

In table 3 matrix of decision and in table 4 matrix prepared in the basis of five criteria stated above and 15 forms of tourism in Iran, which are prioritized by TOPSIS (2005) software and Excel are shown.

Table 3: Decision Matrix

Row	Forms of tourism	Number of tourists	Amount of expenditure	Length of stay	Second visit	Encouraging others
1	Rural tourism	35	23.6	27.40	26.3	36.30
2	Pro-poor tourism	33	27.4	32	26.9	31.4
3	Urban tourism	35	25	21.00	27.8	31.60
4	Volunteer tourism	28	33	26.3	30	26.9
5	Business tourism	30.4	27	22.6	32.6	32
6	Political tourism	27.4	31	36.2	42	33.5
7	Cultural tourism	46.7	23.6	33.70	22.65	43.60
8	Sport tourism	65	27	43.00	52	48.70
9	Recreational tourism	22.7	34.7	31.00	37.4	25.80
10	Health tourism	68.3	21	45.00	53	56.30
11	Religious tourism and pilgrimage	52.6	24.7	40.00	43.5	41.20
12	Adventure tourism	24	48	28.00	25	31.00
13	Ecotourism	46.2	29.3	35	32.50	34.70
14	Geotourism	34.6	32.8	36	27.4	33
15	Nostalgia tourism	22.7	45.9	30.00	33.6	27.50

Table 4: Table of normalized decision matrix

Row	Forms of tourism	Number of tourists	Amount of expenditure	Length of stay	Second visit	Encouraging others
1	Rural tourism	0.0612	0.0520	0.0680	0.0513	0.0562
2	Pro-poor tourism	0.0577	0.0604	0.0589	0.0525	0.0657
3	Urban tourism	0.0612	0.0551	0.0592	0.0542	0.0431
4	Voluntary tourism	0.0490	0.0727	0.0504	0.0585	0.0540
5	Business tourism	0.0532	0.0595	0.0600	0.0636	0.0464
6	Political tourism	0.0479	0.0683	0.0628	0.0819	0.0743
7	Cultural tourism	0.0817	0.0520	0.0817	0.0442	0.0692
8	Sport tourism	0.1137	0.0595	0.0913	0.1014	0.0883
9	Recreational tourism	0.0397	0.0764	0.0484	0.0730	0.0636
10	Health tourism	0.1195	0.0463	0.1055	0.1034	0.0924
11	Religious tourism and pilgrimage	0.0920	0.0544	0.0772	0.0849	0.0821
12	Adventure tourism	0.0420	0.1057	0.0581	0.0488	0.0575
13	Ecotourism	0.0808	0.0645	0.0650	0.0634	0.0718
14	Geotourism	0.0605	0.0722	0.0619	0.0534	0.0739
15	Nostalgia tourism	0.0397	0.1011	0.0515	0.0655	0.0616

Table 5: Weighted normalized decision matrix

Row	Forms of tourism	Number of tourists	Amount of expenditure	Length of stay	Second visit	Encouraging others
1	Rural tourism	0.0075	0.0039	0.0101	0.0178	0.0179
2	Pro-poor tourism	0.0065	0.0040	0.0118	0.0207	0.0169
3	Urban tourism	0.0065	0.0041	0.0077	0.0189	0.0179
4	Voluntary tourism	0.0055	0.0044	0.0097	0.0249	0.0143
5	Business tourism	0.0066	0.0048	0.0083	0.0204	0.0155
6	Political tourism	0.0069	0.0062	0.0133	0.0234	0.0140
7	Cultural tourism	0.0090	0.0034	0.0124	0.0178	0.0239
8	Sport tourism	0.0100	0.0077	0.0158	0.0204	0.0332
9	Recreational tourism	0.0053	0.0055	0.0114	0.0262	0.0116
10	Health tourism	0.0116	0.0079	0.0165	0.0159	0.0349
11	Religious tourism and pilgrimage	0.0085	0.0064	0.0147	0.0187	0.0269
12	Adventure tourism	0.0064	0.0037	0.0103	0.0363	0.0123
13	Ecotourism	0.0072	0.0048	0.0129	0.0221	0.0236
14	Geotourism	0.0068	0.0041	0.0132	0.0248	0.0177
15	Nostalgia tourism	0.0057	0.0050	0.0110	0.0347	0.0116

Table 6: Prioritization of forms of tourism in Iran by TOPSIS method

Row	Forms of tourism	d-	d+	d-+d+	CL	priority
1	Rural tourism	0.01853	0.0204	0.0389	0.4760	7
2	Pro-poor tourism	0.01421	0.0206	0.0348	0.4082	10
3	Urban tourism	0.01974	0.01918	0.0389	0.5073	6
4	Voluntary tourism	0.01458	0.023	0.0376	0.3881	11
5	Business tourism	0.01697	0.02032	0.0373	0.4551	8
6	Political tourism	0.00403	0.03115	0.0352	0.1144	14
7	Cultural tourism	0.02473	0.00934	0.0341	0.7259	3
8	Sport tourism	0.01938	0.01447	0.0339	0.5726	5
9	Recreational tourism	0.00289	0.03181	0.0347	0.0832	15
10	Health tourism	0.03311	0	0.0331	1.0000	1
11	Religious tourism and pilgrimage	0.02873	0.00514	0.0339	0.8483	2
12	Adventure tourism	0.01092	0.02685	0.0378	0.2891	13
13	Ecotourism	0.02292	0.01304	0.0360	0.6374	4
14	Geotourism	0.01647	0.0223	0.0388	0.4248	9
15	Nostalgia tourism	0.01187	0.02453	0.0364	0.3260	12

2.6. Interpretation of the Table

Prioritization of forms of tourism in Iran shows that health tourism with a weigh equals to 1 is the most proper form of tourism to develop tourism industry in Iran. Religious tourism (0.8483), cultural tourism (0.7259), ecotourism (0.6374) and sport tourism (0.5726) respectively are the best forms to develop. This prioritization shows that recreational tourism (0.0832) and political tourism (0.1144) have no effect on development of tourism industry in Iran.

Conclusion

Geographical position of Iran and its adjacency to newly independent central Asian countries like Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iraq which are considered as health tourism generative countries besides rendering comparatively high quality medical services provide a suitable background to attract health tourists and development of health tourism.

Religious tourism is the next significant form of tourism in Iran. This form of tourism is important because of the existence of internal demands. Rich history and cultural heritage of this country have placed cultural tourism in the third priority among other forms of tourism.

Abundant natural attractions have increased the importance of ecotourism and on the other hand proper infrastructures and existence of local sports has placed sport tourism in the next priority among forms of tourism in Iran. Urban tourism and rural tourism through the existence of unique attractions are the other important effective forms of tourism in development of tourism industry in Iran. Business tourism, ecotourism and pro-poor tourism are less important in compare with other forms of tourism. Recreational tourism due to the lack of suitable social and cultural space and legal restrictions, also political tourism because of lack of political relations with other countries don't have any considerable impact in development of tourism industry in Iran.

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