

**RELIGIOUS TOURISM IN KATRA- A GAP ANALYSIS OF SKILL REQUIREMENTS OF
HUMAN RESOURCES OPERATING AT VARIOUS LEVELS**

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Abstract

India is a land of intense spirituality and religious faith. It is no wonder that most of the tourists-both domestic and foreign- are pilgrims. It has perhaps the oldest continually operating pilgrimage tradition in the entire world. Reasons include deeply ingrained religious philosophy in every walk of life of the people, existence of numerous religious destinations and an array of religious festivals and fairs organized round the year. Religious tourism is especially important as it is one thing which is not effected by recession. The Jammu and Kashmir state of India is also much known for its world famous and historical shrines of different faiths. Buddhist tourism in Leh- Ladakh, shrines of Vaishno –Devi and Baba Amarnath, Hazratbal Dargah are the ones to name a few. Out of these , the subject of this study is Holy shrine of Shri Mata Vaishno Devi situated in Katra which attracts lot of tourists from around the country, and the pilgrim visit to this place has crossed the mark of 1 crore in 2011. The place will soon be accessible by a direct train service also, which will further increase the no. of pilgrims visiting it. The burden now lies on the various people involved in tourism industry in Katra to satisfy these increasing no. of pilgrims. It has been found in the present study that the human resources involved in various segments are deficient in the required skills , so a gap analysis has been done to identify the gap in the skills . On the basis of these gaps, certain suggestions have been made which will help in reducing the prevailing gaps.

1. INTRODUCTION

India has a host of religious places stretching from Kashmir to KanyaKumari. This spawns religious tourism. A no. of important destinations are Tirupati, Varanasi, Amarnath, Vaishno Devi, Badrinath-Kedarnath etc. Tourism in India contributes 6% to GDP, has 9% of the employed population.

As India is a land of ancient civilization, intense spirituality and religious faith, it is no wonder that most of the tourists-both domestic and foreign- are pilgrims. India has perhaps the oldest continually operating pilgrimage tradition in the entire world. Reasons include deeply ingrained religious philosophy in every walk of life of the people, existence of numerous religious destinations and an array of religious festivals and fairs organized round the year. Religious tourism is especially important as it is one thing which is not effected by

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recession. The Jammu and Kashmir state of India is also much known for its world famous and historical shrines of different faiths. Buddhist tourism in Leh- Ladakh, shrines of Vaishno –Devi and Baba Amarnath, Hazratbal Dargah are the ones to name a few. Out of these , the subject of this study is Holy shrine of Shri Mata Vaishno Devi situated in Katra which attracts lot of tourists from around the country, and the pilgrim visit to this place has crossed the mark of 1 crore in 2011. The place will soon be accessible by a direct train service also, which will further increase the no. of pilgrims visiting it. The burden now lies on the various people involved in tourism industry in Katra to satisfy these increasing no. of pilgrims. What has been found in the present study that the human resources involved in various segments are deficient in the required skills , so a gap analysis is done to identify and fill the gap in the skills .

Sub –segments of tourism Industry-Hotels- Tour Operators and Travel Industry

No. of hotels in Katra- 4000 hotels 109, there are about 6-7 five star hotels like The White orchid, The Atrium, country Inn, Hotel Asia etc. and rest are 3-star, 2-star, guest houses etc.

Tour operators – there are 50 travel agents or tour operators in Katra like Kalika Libra Tours and travels, Hari tours and travels, Krishna tours and travels to name a few.

Travel industry in Katra- Mainly buses and taxis operate in Katra.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In spite of the importance of religious tourism , scholars have not researched much in this area especially the areas like pilgrim satisfaction, human resource skill gaps in tourism industry, marketing and branding of religious destinations etc. A study by Sridhar et al (2008) has tried to measure pilgrim satisfaction by exploring key factors influencing pilgrim satisfaction. National skill development corporation has also prepared a report on skill requirements and gaps in human resources involved in different sectors of tourism. Another study by Dr. Muthukumar (2009) has tried to reveal the impact of tourism on socio-economic development of Tamil Nadu by doing an analysis of tourist arrivals in the last 10 years. A study by D.C. Gilbert (1990) examines Government's role in the marketing of tourism products. Government intervention varies with the economic value placed on tourism. National Tourism Offices are the key agents of intervention; their role becomes more important as competition in the tourism marketplace increases and consumers become better informed and more demanding. Activities may include: collection and control of visitor data, creation and maintenance of trade contacts abroad, provision of literature and expert advice for the travel trade, and regulation and co-ordination of an industry characterised by diversity and fragmentation. An important study by Gavin Eccles (1995) Reviews the journal Tourism Management over a six-year period, from 1989-1994. Focuses on five prominent themes in the tourism field: destination planning; marketing and promotion; new products; sustainable tourism; transport. Determines major themes and trends evolving in the tourism industry and reports, both in tabular and written form, on research and industry developments affecting both tourism organizations and their environment. A study in Indian context by C. Manikanda Muthukumar (2009) studies the impact of tourism on socio-economic development of Tamil Nadu by doing SWOT analysis of Tamil Nadu as a destination and presenting data from 1995-2004 of tourist arrival in Tamil Nadu from India and Abroad. According to Rodoula Tsiotsou (etal),(2010), a no. of marketing activities can be developed to attract customers of different demographics and different countries like developing countries. This paper is based on the literature review of different papers and has a global

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context ,so it relevant for all types of studies. Another important study by Arch. G Woodside (etal),(2011), found a significant relationship between tourism destination dominance and website usefulness. The method included creating a multi-item metric to judge usefulness of 40 website destinations. Findings revealed that some destinations with few tourists maintained substantial information on website but some with many tourists did not do so.

3. OBJECTIVES

- a. To ascertain the demographic profile of the human resources engaged in tourism industry in Katra.
- b. To identify the skills requirements and to evaluate the skill gaps of the human resources involved at various levels
- c. To suggest certain policy options.

4. METHODOLOGY

The study is based mainly on the primary data collected from employees with the help of a well drafted pre tested structured questionnaire. The universe of the study included all those employees who were engaged in tourism industry in Katra. For the selection of sample, a multistage approach of sampling was followed. At the first stage a list of all the sub sectors was prepared and of these sub sectors, the two sub-sectors i.e tour operators and hotels were selected randomly on the basis of convenient sampling. At the next stage, a list of all employees working in these organizations was prepared with the help of the administrative staff of the organization. All these employees were grouped into three categories.

- a. Those employed to skilled/ unskilled manual work i.e. guide and waiters.
- b. Employed to do supervisory work i.e front office staff
- c. Employed mainly in a managerial or administrative capacity i.e manager.

At the third stage, the no. of employees from each selected sub-segments was selected in proportion to employees working in the selected sub-segments. Thus the total sample of 150 employees was finally selected and the distribution of sample has been presented in following table:

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Name of the organization	No. of employees
The White orchid	28
The Atrium	25
Country Inn	24
Hotel Asia	22
KC Residency	30
Kalika libra Tours and Travels	6
Hari Tours and Travels	7
Krishna Tours and Travels	8

5. DATA COLLECTION

Data were collected from the sample respondents on the pre-structured and pre-tested questionnaire and personal interview method .Questionnaire consisting of three sections were used to collect the data.

The first section contained the questions designed to extract the demographic profile of the selected respondents such as age, income, sex, occupation, marital status, education, family size and family composition, Job experience etc.

The second section consisted of 13 statements depicting the expected skills of the managers and 8 statements depicting the expected skills of the guide of travel and tour operators. Further 5 statements depicting the expected skills of the hotel managers, 4 statements depicting the expected skills of the waiters and 6 statements depicting the expected skills of front office employees of hotels. These statements were identified through discussion with knowledgeable people in the group, professional advice from academicians and from the available literature. Respondents were asked to rate their perceived satisfaction level toward each of the attribute on a seven point scale ranging from 1(Strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree).

In the third section, necessary suggestions were invited from the respondents based on their perceptions for filling the skill gaps in their organization.

5.1 Analysis of Data

The data were analyzed through various statistical tools, account of which has been given below:

Tabular analysis was carried out to study the employee's demographic profile. Mean scores were used to analyze the skills requirement of the human resources involved at various levels. To analyze the skill gaps prevailing at various levels the following formula was used, $G = E - P$ where G signifies Gap in skills prevailing at various level.

E signifies expected mean score of the skill requirement of employees working at various levels and P signifies perceived mean score of the skill found in the employees working at various levels.

6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table I shows the demographic profile of the respondents and it included sex, marital status, age, family size, education, job experience and income. A perusal of the Table I reveals that largest majority of the

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sample respondents (62%) were male and nearly 70% were married. The largest majority of the sample respondents i.e. 34 % were in the age group of 21- 30 years which was followed in by the age group of 41- 50 years (31.3 %), 31-40 years (22.7%), above 50 years (11.3%) and below 20 years (0.7%). Education- wise it was discernible that the largest majority of the employees were graduates and post graduates and there was no one who was undergraduate.

Table1: Demographic Profile of the respondents

Table 1: Demographic Profile of persons employed in Travel and Tour Operators Section

Category	Number	Percentage
Sex		
Male	93	62.00
Female	57	38.00
Marital status		
Married	106	70.67
Unmarried	44	29.33
Age (in Years)		
Below 20	1	0.70
21- 30	51	34.00
31- 40	34	22.70
41- 50	47	31.30
Above 50	17	11.30
Education		
Under Graduate	0	0.00
Graduation	89	59.30
Post graduation	45	30.00
Technical	13	8.70
Any Other	3	2.00

A perusal of Table11 indicates a huge gap in the skill requirements of all the employees operating at various level of travel and Tour agencies. It is discernible that in case of managers, a Gap of 1.32 for the statement "Ability to check the quality of the work of guides as a monitoring mechanism" indicates a huge gap in the monitoring skill of the manager. Almost all the attributes are indicating a huge gap ranging from 0.82 to 1.32 reflecting a clear deficiency in the skills of managers. These deficiency in the skills of managers need to be urgently addressed through trainings, counseling and other H R endeavors to improve the quality of services in Tourism. Similar pattern is observed in case of guides also.

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Table 11: Skill Gaps In the Travel and Tour Industry

Level of employee	Nature of Skills Required	Expected Mean Score	Perceived Mean Score	Gap (E-P)
Manager	1. Ability to build relationship with the clients, especially institutional.	5.77	4.69	0.82
		5.85	4.97	1.03
	2. Ensure all the customer complaints are efficiently handled.	5.54	4.82	1.12
		5.56	4.43	1.03
	3. Ability to promote various travel and tour products of the company.	5.68	4.69	0.99
		5.69	5.01	0.68
	4. Finalising tour itineraries.	5.58	4.64	0.94
		5.57	4.55	1.02
	5. Establishing tie up with various downstream service providers.	5.33	4.37	0.96
		5.69	4.47	1.22
6. Ability to liaison with airline, hotels and local community.	5.60	4.28	1.32	
	5.59	4.64	0.95	
7. Leadership qualities.	5.67	4.69	0.98	
	8. Excellent communication skills.			
9. Being presentable (as the role is customer facing and involves hospitality).				
	10. Well –versed with the functions such as ticketing and passport.			
Guide	1. Ability to interact with airport and ticket staff and coordinate travel	5.84	4.97	1.02
		5.53	4.82	1.11
	2. Good Communication skills	5.68	4.69	0.99
		5.85	4.97	1.03
		5.60	4.28	1.32
	3. Ability to manage customers	5.56	4.43	1.03
	4. Verbal fluency and familiarity with languages	5.33	4.37	0.96
5.54		4.82	1.12	
5. Decision making skills				
6. Problem solving skills				
7. Knowledge/awareness of the places, people and culture				

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A perusal of Table 111 indicates a huge gap in the skill requirements of all the employees operating at various level in hotel industry. It is discernible that in case of hotel managers, a Gap of 1.22 for the statement “Ability to organise parties and functions” indicates poor event management skills of the hotel managers of Katra. Although a score of 0.68 for the attribute “Ability to minimise daily complaints” signifies that the skill gaps of hotel managers are lesser as compared to travel agents. Almost an identical pattern is discernible in case of waiters and Front office employees

Table 111: Skill Gaps In the Travel and Tour Industry

Level of employee	Nature of Skills Required	Expected mean Score	Perceived mean Score	Gap(E-P)
Manager	1. Ability to ensure smooth functioning of hotel	5.33	4.37	0.96
	2. Ability to minimise daily complaints	5.69	5.01	0.68
	3. Interacting with the guest and explaining the speciality of cuisines	5.53	4.82	1.11
	4. Ability to market the hotel, including with institutions/corporate	5.67	4.69	0.98
	5. Ability to organise parties and functions.	5.69	4.47	1.22
Waiter	1. Ability to take orders and serve food in a professional and courteous manner	5.59	4.64	0.95
	2. Ensuring cleanliness	5.67	4.69	0.98
	3. Maintain customer relationship	5.84	4.97	1.02
	4. Being cheerful and presentable	5.53	4.82	1.11
Front office employees	5. Ensure smooth functioning of the department	5.57	4.55	1.02
	6. Adequate problem solving skills	5.60	4.28	1.32
	7. Good communication skills	5.68	4.69	0.99
	8. Ability to Review room availability status and promote sales.	5.54	4.82	1.12

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	9. Co-ordination with F&B, Housekeeping etc.			
	10. People management skills	5.85	4.97	1.02
		5.77	4.68	0.81

6.1 Policy Options

It is imperative from the study that the human resource involved in Tourism sector is highly deficient in both technical and soft skills. So they should be accordingly trained through various skill building initiatives like:-

Conducting Seminars and conferences.

On-Job Training.

Mentoring.

Role playing Techniques.

Job Rotation for High level Managers for gaining general management experience.

Staff exchange programme with the reputed hotels of the country like Taj Group

7. CONCLUSION

It is imperious from the study that the human resource involved in Tourism sector is highly deficient in all the skills. There is a dire need to address the skill gaps as the pressure is going to increase because of rising number of tourist arrivals due to direct railway facility in the near future.

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