

Government's tourism policy in India

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ABSTRACT

The Government policy was found to be, by and large, demands led and unfamiliar with the larger social, cultural and even economic issues at stake in the development of tourism in a traditional society. These policies suffered typically from biases of macro-economists, and their ambitions to be 'scientific', which made them naively innocent of the related social forces involved in the process of economic change. These policies further reflected the planners' view of reality, in a way that suited their convenience and the entrenched vested interests in society with whom they were aligned. Thus, the strong ideology of planning that exists in the Government is of the 'top down' variety.

Key words : Tourism policy, Revenue generating sector

Tourism in Asia is in a thriving condition. Every country is involved in promoting tourism in a big way. Tourism has become a top priority of the economic agenda of all the countries. For example, if in Malaysia tourism is the top revenue generating sector, in India tourism is slowly getting due focus taking into account the country's rich heritage and cultural tradition. However, a review of the tourism trends in Asia clearly indicates that while economic considerations have reigned supreme, the social aspects are not being given due importance as far as the strategic tourism considerations are considered. Tourism it appears is developing an elitist bias as broadening of its social base with participation from all sections of the society is clearly not visible. The important role of participatory and community based organisations like cooperatives in promoting tourism has yet to be recognised. As a result, the concepts like "sustainable tourism", "peace through tourism", "poverty reduction through tourism", 'community tourism', etc. which can best be implemented through participatory institutions have yet to be popularized in a big way. India is environmentally and culturally so diverse that it is not feasible to focus on a single destination or tourist experience to understand the effects of tourism on culture. It was therefore, decided that this study should look at least three different tourist sites, which together could put across the nature and dimensions of the issues being examined.

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The conscious and organized efforts to promote tourism India were made in 1945 when a committee was set up by the Government of India under the Chairmanship of Sir John Sargent, the then Educational, and Adviser to the Government of India. The major terms of reference of the committee were, among others:

- Examine the scope for increasing the existing tourist traffic, both from within the country and from overseas;
- To suggest ways and means of creating, both in India and overseas, the desire for touring, including visits to holiday resorts, good climate stations, scenic places, places of pilgrimage, of historical, and of archaeological interest in India;
- To suggest what facilities should be provided at places to be developed and advertised for Indian visitors, and foreign visitors . . . etc.

The Committee's interim report submitted in October 1946, recognized the potential to substantially augment both direct and indirect revenues through tourism and therefore identified the need for a separate organization to take initiative in such matters. Amongst the other major recommendations were the need for a 'chain of first class hotels of international standard for the convenience and comfort of foreign tourists', and starting publicity bureau in 'important' foreign countries. The seeds of the present two-tier tourism policy were laid by the Sargent Committee in 1946, apparent in its emphasis on increasing foreign exchange earnings and the setting up of separate 'first class hotels of international standards'. The policy also identified the importance of 'cultural tourism', and this has been the main plank of the post-independence tourism policy until the recent NAPT, 1992, when we see a purposeful shifting emphasis towards 'recreation and