

Yoga as a Core Tourism Product: A Case Study of its Potential in Rishikesh

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Abstract: *Wellness tourism is one of the most sought after vacations types of the new age tourist. With world population aging gradually, this is projected to gain further momentum. India has huge inventory products to be offered as wellness tourism products like spiritualism, yoga and Ayurveda. This research paper primarily focuses on the view perception of tourists visiting Rishikesh and the standing Yoga has. The study also covers the perception of service providers in Rishikesh for yoga as a priority tourism product. With the outcome we can further develop strategies for the development and promotion of Yoga.*

Keywords: Yoga, Rishikesh, service providers, tourists

1. Introduction

1.1 Tourism Products

The products which satisfy the leisure, pleasure or business needs at places other than normal place of residence are known as tourism products.

They can be a thing, place, person or an event anything that satisfies the need of a tourist. This product should be exchanged with some other value, so that there is a mutual satisfaction among the supplier and the receiver.

According to Medlicks. & VTC, Middleton "As far a tourist is concerned, the product that he buys covers the complete experience from time he leaves home to the time he returns to it."

Tourism products consist of both tangible and intangible components.

The tangible aspects can be measured and evaluated. The intangible aspects however cannot be evaluated in any concrete terms.

They come together to give the tourist the experience and the enjoyment.

1.2 The salient features of tourism products are:

- 1) Intangibility
- 2) Inseparability
- 3) Perish ability
- 4) Absence of ownership
- 5) Mainly psychological in nature
- 6) Stable supply
- 7) Unstable demand.
 - Most literature suggest two dimensions of understanding tourism products –
 - The overall tourism product and the individual or core tourism product.
 - Freyer, Middleton and Tiez have classified tourism products into total tourism products and specific tourism products, (Freyer, 1993:129; Middleton,

1989:573; Tietz, 1980:10)(Medlik, 1973)(Middleton, 1998)

- 8) Total tourism products comprise the combination all the services that a tourist consumes during his trip and
- 9) Specific tourism products are components (Middleton V. T., 1989)of the total tourism products that can be sold as individual offering.

- 10) Core tourism products help the tourists satisfy any specific needs- such as the need for accommodation can be fulfilled either by a hotel just a tented accommodation.

Based on the above studies we can conclude the following as the main characteristics of a tourism product-

- It should satisfy a consumer's need
- The manufacturer or seller should receive something in return from the customers
- There should be a demand for the product.
- Should be able to be packaged to be sold for a commercial purpose.

Through this paper we try to understand Yoga as a specific or core tourism product in Rishikesh and its potential for future. Yoga is practiced here to satisfy the wellness tourist's need for physical, mental and spiritual rejuvenation.

The understanding of Yoga as a core tourism product and analysing its potential will enable us to market and position the product better and develop an effective overall approach for future.

2. Review of Literature

Tourism products have been studied by various authors like Middleton, Freyer and Tiez who classify the tourism product with the point of view of the kind of need they satisfy for the tourist.

Dimitris Koutoulas (2004) in his research paper, understanding tourism products, describe tourism products as products satisfying the needs of tourists and these needs are further classified into primary needs and secondary needs. Primary needs are the primary reasons because of

which a tourist takes up a vacation and the secondary needs are one which arise in the process of fulfilling the primary needs.

There have been several studies in the past by various authors who have tried to understand Yoga as a core tourism product, by connecting it with wellness and new age holidays.

(Litho, Brown, Chen and Morrison TRR vol 31 2006 25:35) describe yoga tourism a subset of wellness tourism, they also suggest that Yoga constitutes the central theme for vacations for many tourists in the western world. Whereas M. Smith and Puczko describe it as activity holiday (Melanies Smith and Laszlo Puczko Health and Wellness Tourism pg 95). Smith and Puczko describe about the various forms of wellness vacations in their book with the help of several case studies and examples. Yoga holidays are perfect form of wellness holidays as they cater to all aspects of wellness. The authors have used the case studies of some Ashrams and Wellness retreats to suggest how, Yoga holidays have contributed towards the development of the wellness tourism concept.

Letho, Brown, Shen and Morrison conducted a study in Oct 2004 in the Midwest, US Resort and concluded that the yoga tourist belong to a more economically well off category. With the increase in Yoga retreats, yoga is fast becoming a popular central theme for conference and conventions too. It is one unique and common phenomenon which can be integrated in both leisure and business holidays.

Risinger (2006) has quoted Muller and Kuffman in his research paper ringing the four fold who suggests that Wellness holidays are the holidays which aim to preserve and promote one's health and Yoga holidays can be the best step in this direction.

4 WR : wellness for Whom, Where and What report on Global Health and Wellness Services by Wellness Tourism Worldwide, which is an international trade alliance comprised of wellness and tourism related businesses, organizations and businesses, has come up with a report on the wellness tourism industry through a detailed research. The key findings in their research are –

Wellness is a state of health which comprises an overall sense of wellbeing and sees a person as consisting of body, mind and spirit. Life style and self responsibility for health are paramount for better quality of life. Wellness is an optimal state of health of individual and groups.”

According to this report there are two focal concerns of wellness:

- The realization of fullest potential of individual's physical, psychological, social, spiritual and economical aspect.
- The fulfilment of one's role expectation in the family, community, place of worship, workplace and other settings long term.

The wellness industry encompasses everything from Spa, food nutrition, complementary and alternative medicine, to

active aging and fitness at work place and Yoga becomes an important aspect of this process of wellness.

Yoga's benefits for the wellness of human beings has been proved time and again by experts and thus the new age vacationer looks for options like Yoga holidays where he can rejuvenate body and spirit.

Aging population is a worldwide phenomenon and almost all nations are experiencing a growth in their aging population.

Deloitte in their recent study: Hospitality 2015: game changers or spectator have suggested that it is the baby boomers aged 45 to 65 which will rule the hospitality markets in the near future and this generation. The report suggests that the key to unlocking this generation is to understand their forever young attitude and develop products to suit their needs. Vacations with Yoga as a central theme will definitely appeal to this segment of tourists as it not only helps them to achieve their forever young attitude but also gives them an opportunity to experience exotic destinations like India.

2.1 Yoga Tourism Potential and Trends in India

As with all forms of tourism, the flows of people are predominantly from more developed to less developed countries. The recent trend, however, is for western tourists to seek solace in Eastern philosophies and therapies (e.g., Chinese medicine, Buddhist meditation, Indian ayurveda, Thai massage). Such alternatives already pervade many Western societies, but tourists are often just as keen to visit the origin of the practice (Melanie Smith and Catherine Kelly). Thus people from all over the world travel to India for ayurveda, yoga, meditation, aromatherapy, unani, siddha, homeopathy, naturopathy, gem therapy, pranic healing etc. It is no wonder then that India has fast emerged as a health and wellness tourism destination because of these indigenous healing systems and medicinal practices.

Though the tradition of Yoga was born in India several thousand years ago but it is practiced all over the world today. The wellness tourists frequently seek locations which are serene. It is no coincidence that many wellness centers are located beside the ocean or on a mountain top (Melanie Smith and Catherine Kelly).

In India the picturesque mountains and warm sandy beaches offer perfect ambience for a great Yoga retreat. The yoga can be studied or practiced by the tourists at following:

- 1) Ashrams-Parmarth Niketan, Rishikesh (Uttaranchal)
- 2) Riverbanks- Ganges
- 3) Universities and Institutes-Gurukul Kangri Vishwavidyalaya, Haridwar (Uttaranchal)
- 4) Resorts- Ananda In The Himalayas and the Glass House at the Ganges
- 5) Hotels- Taj Group
- 6) Special events – International Yoga Festival organized every year in the month of February by Uttarakhand Tourism.

The yogic techniques can best be enjoyed in serene environments of mountains and beaches. The popular

destinations which offer yoga facilities are Rishikesh in Uttarakhand, Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh, Kerala, Goa. The upcoming destinations for yoga are the heritage hotels and palaces of Rajasthan.

It has been found that the yoga packages are offered by the travel agents and tour operators for the above destinations in India. A normal Yoga package is for 5 to 7 days, which consists of accommodation, daily yoga sessions, meals, personalized yoga sessions and spiritual discourses. In Kerala yoga is not popular as a tourism product itself, but is an integral part of Ayurveda packages. Most Ayurveda resorts offer some kind of yoga and meditation elements also as a part of their packages.

Another surprising revelation is that except for the Yoga Ashrams in Rishikesh none of the organizations like the resorts, retreats and the hotels offering Wellness packages offer Yoga as their highlight product. Instead Yoga is offered either as a part of daily activity schedule or some other elements like Ayurveda, Reiki or other alternative therapies are combined to make it more attractive and saleable. It is only the ashrams which have Yoga as the main product.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Objectives of the study

The objective of the study was

- To understand the nature of Yoga as a tourism product.
- to understand whether the tourists are really coming to Rishikesh for Yoga
- And its usefulness for the service providers in the travel and tourism industry.
- Would there be demand for this product in future, looking at the demographic trend.

3.2 Data Collection

For the study primary data was collected from a structured questionnaire which was circulated amongst the travel agents and tour operators of Delhi, NCR and Raipur. A total of hundred Travel agents and Tour operators were surveyed for the study. Most of the Tour Operators and Travel Agents offer packages developed and promoted by the Hotel, Retreat, Resort or the Spas.

Primary data was also collected from the tourists visiting Rishikesh 221 samples were collected and analysed for this research.

Random Sampling method was used for data collection of the tourists where as purposive random sampling was used for travel agents and tour operators.

The questionnaire contained both open ended and close ended questions.

Secondary data was collected from various journals, books and internet.

4. Analysis and interpretation

4.1 Profile of the tourists visiting Rishikesh

- Preferred by both male & female
- Usually FITs
- Age group visiting Rishikesh

Age	N	Percentage
15-24	37	16.74
25-44	45	20.36
45-64	89	40.27
above 65	50	22.62
Total	221	

4.1 Employment status

Employment	N	Percentage
Employed	144	65.158
Retired	43	19.457
Student	34	15.384
Total	221	

4.2 Tourist's reason for visiting Rishikesh t score

Curiosity	-10.542
Tour Package	-15.514
Spiritualism	77.835
Yoga	9.515
Others	-57.973

4.3 Tourist's perception of Rishikesh as a destination t score

Relaxation	-25.885
Stop Over	-72.112
Spiritualism	17.542
Wellness Destination	29.736

he tourists were asked about their reasons for visiting Rishikesh and a t test reveals Spiritualism was the main reason for most tourists to visit Rishikesh. This was followed by Yoga & Curiosity. Spiritualism & Yoga have positive t values where as the rest of the reasons have negative t values.

The tourists were also questioned on their perception of Rishikesh as a destination and it emerges that most of the tourists perceive Rishikesh as a perfect wellness destination. As a Wellness destination Rishikesh offers both Spiritualism and Yoga as Wellness tourism products.

Thus we can conclude that Rishikesh is a popular Wellness destination in India and has tourists coming for Yoga specially. Therefore Yoga is the core tourism product from the tourists' point of view here.

4.4 The travel service providers' perception of Yoga in Rishikesh

Question	Percentage
Has Yoga contributed in revenue in generation	100% agree
Information being sought about Yoga	76% agree
Yoga enhances the commercial viability of a package	80% agree

Rishikesh is the most popular destination for yoga in India	80% agree
Seasonality has no influence on Yoga tourism	72% agree
Yoga is meant for all age groups	76% agree
Yoga festival as contributed in the popularity of Yoga tourism	68% agree

The above analysis of the travel service providers perception help us conclude that yoga is one of the core tourism products in Rishikesh, there is a definite increase in the number of people seeking information about yoga. They also agree that by introducing yoga a tourism product their revenue generating opportunities have increased.

5. Conclusion and Suggestions

Our study clearly indicates that Yoga is popular in Rishikesh and most of the tourists visit Rishikesh to experience Yoga. The study also proves that there is a great potential for this product to develop in future as the travel agents and tour operators have suggested.

Since the product definition says that the seller should also benefit from the product, the travel agents' survey clearly proves that Yoga is a commercially viable product.

There are several factors that can place India as the preferred destination for yoga in the world like Himalayas the place of origin of yoga. Today's stressful life has forced the modern day traveller to look for alternative holiday options where he can not only rejuvenate his mind, body and soul but also carry home positive and life changing experiences. To capitalize this trend, India can use yoga as a core tourism product which can fulfil this new age traveller's need.

This new age phenomena can be encased by the travel service providers by diversifying into Yoga tourism. The study suggests that the service providers who have included yoga in their tourism products have definitely gained in terms of revenue. There is a lot of enthusiasm towards its future and since it is relatively less affected by seasonality it can help them get clientele all the year round

The hard core yoga follower goes to ashrams and retreats which are very few in number, therefore it is important to develop and promote establishments offering authentic yoga practices and environment. Hotels and other establishments can diversify themselves by introducing products like Yoga tourism.

The potential for Yoga as a tourism product cannot be underestimated looking at the future demographic structure of the world population. Our study successfully coincides with the Deloitte study that the market share for products like Yoga tourism belongs to the baby h

The following can thus be concluded from our study regarding Yoga as a tourism product and its potential for future:

1) Tourists visiting Rishikesh are definitely experiencing Yoga apart from Spiritualism which is the main attraction of Rishikesh.

- 2) Most of the tourist visiting Rishikesh is from the baby boomers category (45 to 65 years). The travel agents and tour operators also agree that most of the tourists asking for Yoga vacations are from the baby boomers category.
- 3) They perceive Rishikesh as a Wellness Destination rather than a spiritual destination.
- 4) The potential tourists are seeing information about Yoga holidays in India.
- 5) Rishikesh is the most popular destination for Yoga tourism in India.

The Travel agents and tour operators perceive the following as the prominent characteristics of Yoga as tourism product

- Yoga is a commercially viable product.
- It is for all age groups and
- Seasonality has no effect on it.
- Special promotions like the yoga festivals are beneficial for its promotions.

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