AVAILABILITY OF INFORMATION FOR BACKPACKER TOURISM IN SRI LANKA
(A Case study :Trincomalee District)

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ABSTRACT: The present study aims to identify the sources and availability of information for backpacker tourists and the possible reasons for visiting Trincomalee which can help to construct and implement proper marketing plan and strategy for the industry. The study revealed that Sri Lankan tourism industry has not fulfilled the information requirement for the backpacker tourism adequately. Backpackers use various information resources to get the information on Trincomalee tourist area. Among them, 'words of mouth' plays a significant role in distributing the information. The Second information source was 'Internet' and the Third was 'leaflets/ travel guides'. Mass media; Television and Radio, are giving less contribution to distribute of information for the tourists. The findings concluded that information on 'places' and 'accommodation' are available in Trincomalee district, Sri Lanka but there were less information on 'medical advices and sanitary facilities' and 'transportation'. The main reasons for visiting Trincomalee by the backpackers were 'whale watching', 'visiting sites' and 'beaches'.Furthermore, it is revealed that Trincomalee was rather a short trip stays than a destination for a longer period.

KEY WORDS: Backpackers, Diffusion of Innovation theory, Information, Tourism, Trincomalee

I.   INTRODUCTION

Tourism is considered as the world's largest and rapid growing industry of modern business world. It has a vital influence on economic development of a country. "Tourism is a social, cultural and economic phenomenon which entails the movement of people countries or places outside tourists have to with their activities, some of which imply tourism expenditure" (United Nation World Tourism Organization, 2000). There are different categories of tourism in tourist industry such their usual environment for personal or business purposes. These people are called visitors and as Adventure tourism, Winter tourism, Business tourism and Backpacker tourism. Sri Lanka has enormous potential to develop tourism because of its natural beauty and rich cultural heritage. Tourism industry becomes a source of income in Sri Lanka and has been developed in rapidly. The natural beauty and rich cultural heritage in Sri Lanka have been more attractive for the tourists. Some cities in Sri Lanka developed as tourism cities such as Kandy, Galle, Anuradhapura,Hikkakuwa, Polonnaruwa, NuwaraElliya, Trincomalee, etc. Backpackers or budget travelers are becoming very much noticeable in tourism industry. They are flexible and personalized to organize their own schedule that they are interested in. Their purpose for traveling is to have more interactive experiences with locals and explore more about cultures in the world. Because of this reason, there are more and more people become backpackers to have amazing travel experience. Thus, the backpacker market is one of important travel markets. However, this industry fails to reach its destination due to lack of awareness, lack of facilities and adequate marketing practices.

Backpacking is a form of low-cost, independent travel which includes the use of a backpack that is easily carried for long distances or long periods of time, the use of public transport, inexpensive lodging such as youth hostels, often a longer duration of the trip when compared with conventional vacations and often an interest in meeting locals as well as local sightseeing. Backpacker represents the special segment of travelers who possess the characteristic of high mobility. They travel on a limited budget and follow their own travel itinerary. Among the various traveler segments, backpacker tourism involves a strong interaction with the local community at any destination (Sorensen, 2003). The difference between the term 'tourist' and 'backpacker' has been debated through years and it is still not clear yet. Cohen (2004) stated that a tourist is "a voluntary, temporary traveler, travelling in the expectation of pleasure from the novelty and change experienced on a relatively long and non-recurrent round-trip".Tourism is an industry which deals with the information in significant ways. The literature says that in the tourism industry, information availability is one of the most crucial factors for their industries' sustainability. According to Om and Crompton (1992) potential tourists frequently have limited knowledge about a destination that they have not previously visited. This knowledge often is confined to symbolic information acquired either from the media or from their social group.

Communication is used as a tool to facilitate the participation of people in development activities. Knowledge and information are essential for people to successfully respond to the opportunities and challenges of social, economic and technological changes. But to be useful, knowledge and information must be effectively communicated to people.Buhalis (1998) and Lou and Li (2009) found that Internet information in tourism is significant and claimed that information searching behavior on Internet network is the most powerful tool for travelers. Tourist information can be served in following forms (S. Choi, X.Y. Lehto, A.M. Morrison: 2007, R. Ziółkowski: 2007, D. Buhalis: 2005, E. Cohen: 1985):

- Traditional (Physical) – by means of points and service system, by employees of tourist information centers and points, travel agencies, guides, residents
- Modern (Electronic) – by means of electronic media, especially the Internet (including special internet portals, websites of territorial self-government units) and global distribution systems (GDS) and television, radio, mobile telephony, etc.
- Supplementary – especially editorial, namely press, catalogues, guides, folders, maps, specialized literature, encyclopedias.

Tourism Industry in Sri Lanka : Since tourism has become an important sector of the economy, Sri Lanka is committed to develop its tourism industry. The Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA) established in 2005 to promote strong relations with the local and international tourism industry. The positive effect of tourism on a country's economy include the growth and development of various industries which are directly linked with the tourism industry, some of them can be identified as transportation, accommodation, and entertainment. Sri Lanka has been a tourist destination for the long-distance past. Sri Lanka is separated into different tropical climate zones and it has four seasons that are not equally the same in the west or east. Sri Lanka has a tropical and humid climate in the whole year. Many travelers believe that due to the attractive nature and the different cultural background of the island is leading to this situation. Sri Lanka offers a great variety of hotels and guest houses.

Trincomalee District : Trincomalee district is one of the district belongs to the East Coast Resort Region. This resort region extends from Kuchchaveli in the North to Pothuvil in the South. Arugam Bay, Trincomalee, Pasikudah and Nilaveli are main tourism zones in this region.Trincomalee is an anglicised version of the Tamil word "Tirukonamalai". Historically, it is referred as "Gokanna" or "Gokarna". It has been a sea port that has played a major role in maritime and international trading history of Sri Lanka. Trincomalee, is often just called as 'Trinco' is famous for its nice beaches in the nearby Uppuveli (6km) and Nilaveli (12km) North of the city. The beaches are used for recreational purposes such as surfing, scuba diving, fishing and whale watching. Because of the religious significance, harbor and rare hot spring wells, Trincomalee become a major tourist attention in Sri Lanka.

Diffusion of Innovation Theory : Diffusion of innovation theory which was developed by E.M. Rogers in 1962 is one of the oldest theories in social science. It was originated in communication to explain how, over time, an idea or product diffuses or spreads through a specific population or social system. The end result of this diffusion is that people, as part of a social system, adopt a new idea, behavior or product. Adoption means that a person does something differently than what they had previously (Boston University,2016). All the parties involved in tourism should participate in efforts to sustainable tourism development. Tourism practices can be considered as a new type of innovation in the tourism industry. Without this type of information, that is limited in the ability to design tools that will work in the future to mitigate barriers and increase motivations tourism businesses to adopt sustainable tourism practices in their activity. Many countries are developing tourism because it has the potential to contribute positively to the socio - economic development of the country.

Information has plays a major role in the tourism industry. It is needed to diffusion of information among tourists. Tourists get information in different resources. This information is updated within a certain time period. In tourism industry, commercial sources, mass media, social media and peer groups hugely contributes to diffuse the information among the tourists.

II.   PROBLEM STATEMENT

The tourism sectors in Sri Lanka do not fulfill the information requirements for the backpacker tourists. Even though a certain amount of information is available from different sources, they are either incomplete or not updated regularly. Therefore, most of the backpacker tourists do not seem to have a clear understanding about the available routes, accommodation and the places, etc. This research seeks to find the answer whether the available information for backpacker tourism is adequate or not.

III. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

General Objectives
• To find out the availability of information for backpacker tourism in Sri Lanka.

Specific Objectives
• Identify the tourists' information access for backpacker tourism in Sri Lanka.
• Determine the adequacy and availability of information resources.

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

The academic interest in backpacker tourism research has grown in recent years.Kravanja, B (2016) states that Sri Lanka is not famous for backpacker tourism and it is positioned in backpackers' imagination as a destination in itself, where diversity is stressed as a specific feature that makes it worth visiting.Study of Information Research in Leisure: Implications from an Empirical Study of Backpackers (Ju L. Chang) places the backpackers' search for travel information in everyday life information seeking (ELIS) perspective. The search for information by backpackers can be seen as a three-stage information search process. In each stage, depending on the type of task, backpackers use various information resources for different purposes. Such sources may be used for more than one purpose and in more than one information search stage. However, their relative importance varies depending on the characteristics of the source of information and the information search stage in which the source is being used. In this study, to explore the information search behaviors of backpack and budget travelers within the context of everyday life information seeking, with particular reference to leisure activity search behaviors. They explore how backpackers go about collecting and searching for the information they need to make travel plans and/or to make their travel experiences worthwhile.

The study of Bormann, F, Asimah, V and Ahiave, E (2016) investigates the Sources and Availability of Information for Tourists in Ghana.The study found that tourists use travel agencies and published visitor guides to learn about Ghana before visit. It was noted that obtaining valuable information about the Ghanaian tourism sector is mixed. Ghanaian tourism marketers should consider doing more by constructing and implementing more robust marketing plan and strategy for the tourism sector. Secondary and primary forms of data were used. This suggests there are still issues with the availability of information about tourism in Ghana.Backpacking Tourism in Tampere (Rodriguez, R. 2011) done to understand why youth travelers are visiting Tampere and the possibilities of Tampere for being a backpacker destination. The findings indicate that backpacking in Tampere is increasing due to a new hostel and also new routes offered by low-cost airlines that are spreading out the word about Tampere as destination.Nabi, N., &Zaman, S. (2014) examine The Sources and Availability of Information for Tourists: A Study on Tourism Sector of Bangladesh The study shows that tourists uses travel agent and various newspaper and magazines to know about Bangladesh before visit. And, most of the tourists agree that they get valuable information about Bangladeshi tourism sector more easily.

V. METHODOLOGY

In order to gather the data from the tourists, the survey method was used. The sample of 50 backpacker tourists was selected randomly. Four areas (Trincomalee district, Nilaveli beach, Alas Garden and Trincomalee town were covered and issued the questionnaires to the respondents. The questions in the instrument were developed based on a review of related literature (Dann, 1977, Crompton, 1979; Pearce, 1990; Ryan &Moshin, 1999; Scheyvens, 2002; Niggel& Benson, 2007). The questionnaire instrument consisted of three parts, personal information of the respondents, mode of information resources and type of information received. Secondary and primary forms of data were used. Secondary data took the form of analysis of published material on tourism. A semi structured questionnaire survey conducted on 50 sampled respondents.

Table 1: Nationalities of Respondents

Country	No. of respondents
France	19
England	6
Belgium	5
Germany	4
United State	4
Italy	4

Switzerland	3
Romania	2
Poland	2
Netherland	1

VI. FINDINGS

Gender is the first significant characteristic of the respondents. 24 males (48%) provided the answers to the survey questions while there were 26 female respondents. Since the backpackers from 10 different countries, the nationalities of the respondents also varied. Majority of respondents were Europeans especially from France. Backpackers were asked to indicate the main reason for travelling to Trincomalee. It is found out that the backpacker tourists visit Trincomalee for various reasons including Wildlife (especially for Whale watching), Visiting sites, Beaches, Hospitality and Recreation/tour. It is revealed that 23% of backpackers visit Trincomalee for Whale watching, 22% to visit sites and 21% to see the world famous beaches, 15% for both hospitality and recreation. Visiting friends and relatives was the minor reasons (4%) that affected to the backpackers to visit Trincomalee. It is revealed thatTrincomalee was rather a short trip stays than a destination for a longer period. According the findings of the study, the most widely accepted source of information was the 'words of mouth' through their families, friends and relatives (29%). Second, there was a great potential for spreading information via Internet (20%). 19% of tourists used leaflets/ travel guide as their Third information source. Further, they use Social media (twitter, face book, WhatsApp, Viber, Imo) (12%), travel agencies (8%), magazines/ newspapers (4%), TV ads (3%) and used other sources (2%). The least used source is the Television advertisements (2%) and no one got information from the Radio.

Tourists are concerned about number of different factors when planning their tour such as place of visit, accommodation, safety and transportation etc. Majority of information resources consider about providing information on places of visit (20%), accommodation (17%) and food and beverage (16%). They provide least information about the medical advices (7%) and sanitary facilities (6%).According to respondents, 40% respondent's view was that available information is sufficient for backpacker tourists. However, a least number of respondents (14%) do not think information was readily available. Among them, 21% of male respondents and 8% of female respondents were unsatisfied about sufficiency of information. According to foreign tourists, the government should take care of providing sufficient information regarding the tourist spots. Although the information is available, it is still not sufficient to develop this industry. So, the committed efforts are needed to be taken from both the public and private sectors for the development and utilization of the potentials of the Tourism Industry.

Furthermore, the respondents suggested several strategies related to developing the backpack tourism in Trincomalee district as follows;

- Guiding service should be developed in Trincomalee district.
- Tourist information Centre should be established in Trincomalee town.
- Hotspots should be promoted.
- Development of professional travel agencies
- Improvement of information about transport services (bus time table/online bus ticket booking, etc.), accommodation and places in Trincomalee district.
- Information about social, cultural religious environment should be provided of Trincomalee district.

VII. CONCLUSION

Backpacker tourism is developing rapidly in Sri Lanka. It is observed that most of the backpackers were youngsters. It is revealed most of the backpacker tourists visit Trincomalee for 'whale watching' and then for its 'natural beauty of sites' and 'beaches'. They would like be treated well in Sri Lanka. 'Words of mouth' which is one of the most effective communication means to spread any information was the major information resource of the backpackers. Even though the information is available, the backpacker tourists have a less satisfaction.

This study examined about the availability of information in the tourism industry. It is essential for entrepreneurs and tourism promoters know exactly what kind of information should be included in tourist brochures and guides. At the same time, it is also important to analyze the effect of information on tourists' behavior and image. The future research should be emerged the behaviors of backpack tourists and also the impact of the backpacker for the tourism industry in Sri Lanka.

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