

Determinants of Tourist Length of Stay in Debre Markos

Atsede Tadele Wudi*, Sukarn Sharma**

Abstract

From the tourism perspective for economic development of a country the length of stay of tourists at one destination is important for the destination as well as the service providers. Debre Markos (also called Mankorar) is a city and woreda in east-central Ethiopia. It is a town that is located in north-western Ethiopia, in Amhara National Regional State East Gojjam zone, at a distance of 300 km from the capital Addis Ababa. In Debre Markos town there is a flow of tourists from the different corners of the world. The town is also endowed with a number of attractions including Choke Mountain, Dimagiorgis, Sentera Meadows and others. However even with good attractions the town is not able to extend the stay of the tourists for more than one night (in most cases) therefore; the objective of this study was to assess the determinants of tourist's length of stay in Debre Markos Town. To achieve the objective of the study, the researcher employed Judgmental sampling. A sample size of 40 respondents was taken for the study. The study was conducted from March, 2017 to June 2017. The result illustrates lack of capital, mismanagement of tourist sites, under developed infrastructure and non-standardisation of services as the main issues confronted by Debre Markos, the tourist destination.

Keywords: Length of Stay, Tourists Satisfaction, Destination Determinants

INTRODUCTION

According to UNWTO World Tourism Barometer (UNWTO, 2016) international tourist arrivals grew by 4.4% to reach a total of 1,184 million in 2015. It is estimated that around the world some 50 million more

tourists (overnight visitors) travelled to international destinations as compared to 2014. By region, Europe, the Americas, Asia and the Pacific all recorded around 5% growth in 2015. Arrivals to the Middle East increased by 3% while Africa, (limited data available) points to an estimated 3% decrease, mostly due to weak results in North Africa, which accounts for over one third of arrivals in the region. The international arrivals are increasing by 4% or more every year since the post-crisis year of 2010 and the year 2015 is the 6th consecutive year of above-average growth.

In relation to tourism income length of stay is a variable of special interest for any tourism destination (Barros and Machado, 2010; Martinez and Raya, 2008). More business is generated for the destinations where tourists stay longer as they tend to visit more attractions (Barros and Machado, 2010; Martinez and Raya, 2008). High occupation rates, maximization of profits along with reduction in fixed costs are the biggest advantages for hotels, at destinations where tourists increase their length of stay (Barros and Machado, 2010; Peypoch et al., 2012). Apart from this tourist's decision-making process regarding selection of destinations is also highly influenced by the length of stay, and hence it is one of the key aspects in destination planning and management (Alegre and Pou, 2006; Salmasi *et al.*, 2012).

The length of stay also determines the number of possible experiences that can be undertaken by the tourists at a destination (Davies and Mangan, 1992; Legohere, 1998; Saarinen, 2006; Gokovali *et al.*, 2007). It is imperative to know the determinants of length of stay so that marketing policies that promote longer stays, associated with higher occupancy rates and revenue streams can be designed.

* Lecturer, Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Jimma University, Ethiopia. Email: atsedetadele1@gmail.com

** Assistant Professor, Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Jimma University, Ethiopia.
Email: sukarnsharma@gmail.com

An enterprise can become ever more valuable given the longer lengths of stay (Alegre and Pou, 2006).

Keeping in view the advantages of length of stay of tourists this study was conducted to identify those determinants that hamper the tourist's length of stay at Debre Markos town. Debre Markos (also called Mankorar) is a city and woreda in east-central Ethiopia. It is located in north-western Ethiopia, in Amhara National Regional State East Gojjam zone, at a distance of 300 km from the capital Addis Ababa. The city is named Debre Markos after its principal church, which was constructed in 1869 and dedicated to St. Markos. Until the reorganization of the provinces that followed the adoption of the 1995 constitution, this city served as the capital of the province of Gojjam.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

One of the most important holiday characteristics to be decided when someone plans to take a trip is the length of stay. If its effect on the income to be generated in tourism destinations is considered this variable has received a little attention in literature (Alegre and Pou, 2006).

In Ethiopia, to increase the number of tourist arrival is getting good attention of different stakeholders. Accordingly, the number of tourists visiting the country is increasing. These tourists are staying only in few places, which have good services and facilities in the country. Debre Markos, also is one of the tourist destinations in Ethiopia and is receiving a number of tourists. The town is endowed with a number of attractions including Choke Mountain, Dimagiorgis, Gozamen Hotel, Sentera Meadows and others to be visited that can extend the length of tourist stay. However, a majority of these tourists are not staying in the town for a long period of time. Instead, they are using Debre Markos for an overnight stay or as a transit point to travel to other surrounding places, especially to northern part of Ethiopia. Thus, length of stay is minimum (one or two nights usually). Therefore, it is pertinent to know that "What are the determinants that contributed to tourist's short stays in Debre Markos Town?"

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study will be used as a reference for researchers who want to undertake a similar study in relative topic in the

future. It can also accommodate the knowledge gap on examining the tourist's needs and wants as well as the length of stay and the benefits when the tourists spend more time.

The study may also have national and community related significance. On the basis of the findings and recommendations the tourist service providers and government officials at different levels can make progress towards the achievement of extended length of stay for the tourists at Debre Markos.

LITERATURE REVIEW

One of the important variables of a tourist's decision-making process is the length of stay, that (Salmasi et al., 2012) is strongly related to the rest of the variables that form a part of the tourist experience, such as the type of accommodation used at the destination, destination facilities, accessibility of the destination, images of the destination etc., which is further characterized by their interdependence in that decisions are not taken independently of other considerations, and by their subordination, sometimes to barriers such as those related to financial resources, time, family, etc (Dellaert et al, 1998).

Very few researchers have been interested in identifying the causal factors for length of stay (Alegre et al, 2011) even when many authors have demonstrated the importance of length of stay for tourism-generated income at the destination. It is interesting to note that different dimensions and attributes of destination image influence length of stay differently. Depending on the conveyed destination image the marketing policies may have different effects on length of stay Lehto *et al.* (2004). The two recurrent socio-demographic variables in the studies dealing with length of stay at the destination are age and sex. According to a number of researchers (Alegre and Pou, 2006; Blazey, 1992; Fleischer and Pizam, 2002; Fleischer and Seiler, 2002; Barros and Machado, 2010) age has a positive relationship with length of stay but it begins to have a negative relationship when it reaches a certain level, mainly for health reasons (Fleischer and Pizam, 2002; Fleischer and Seiler, 2002). Some of these authors connect individual's work situation with the tendency in terms of length of stay amongst the elderly. It is considered that, length of stay at the destination increases with respect to those individuals once they

enter retirement, given the greater amount of free time available to them (Blazey, 1992; Fleischer and Pizam, 2002; Fleischer and Seiler, 2002; Romsa and Blenman, 1989; Salmasi et al, 2012). Whereas the sex variable is concerned, it has been seen that men tended to take longer trips than women, this trend also being maintained in adulthood (Barros and Machado, 2010; Meng and Uysal, 2008).

The attractions are the basic element on which tourism is developed (Gunn, Clare A. 1979: 1980a; Lundberg 1980:33-40; Pearce 1981:30-Z) has been agreed by many of the researchers. Primarily promoting and advertising the destination image is important rather than the direct experience of the site (MacCannell, 1976). Travelers who are in transit and are characterized by short visits to many dispersed and poorly integrated destinations aim at touring attractions. These attractions are not of the same quality as of the attractions at destinations with long-term and repeat visitor demands. There are numerous tourist activities integrated around a central point whereas destination attractions are concerned and they are major centers of tourism. From the perspective of a tourism planner, the primary considerations for touring attractions are mobility and access, whereas destination planning centers on providing a mix that offers both variety and stimulation (Gunn, Clare A. 1979).

Motivation is the main area of research concerning travel and tourism (Alén et al, 2010). Push factors and pull factors have been emphasized by many researchers as the two main motivational components. It has been indicated that push factors explain the desire to travel, whilst pull factors explain the choice of destination (Crompton, 1979).

RESEARCH DESIGN

To understand the determinants of length of stay will not only help in extending tourists stay at a destination but would also help in generating more revenue for the destination. In addition the tourists will also have a pleasurable experience during their stay. Therefore, to achieve the stated purpose it was decided to employ judgmental sampling. The reason for judgemental sampling was that only respondents with relevant knowledge would participate in the study. In addition, the method gives full freedom to the researcher to select the

respondents. The researcher chose 40 respondents for the study that comprised of tourists and experts from tourism industry. The research was conducted from March, 2017 to June 2017. A pilot survey was also conducted on 10 tourists who stayed in hotels under study in order to test reliability of each item of the instrument. Among the tourists only those were considered who were above the age group of 18 years. Moreover, in case of tourists the respondent had to reserve a room and stayed at least one night in the hotels to be part of the research. Respondents were given the questionnaire at check in time and returned at check out time. The completion of the questionnaires was entirely based on a voluntary basis. A cover page was attached to the questionnaire explaining the objective and importance of the research so as to inspire the respondents to fill the questionnaire properly and provide genuine response. Data collected were analyzed by using Statistical Package for Social Sciences 16.0 (SPSS, 2001).

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The respondent profile comprised of mostly young (age 18-30 years) (46.15%) single (69.23%) male (84.61%) degree holders (69.23%). The possible reason for this is that the government has launched a massive job opportunity program for the recent graduates, and many of them in search of opportunities have found tourism as an apt sector. More males have participated especially on guiding activities related to tourism.

All the respondents felt that the tourist attraction sites in Debre Markos town and around it are good and will help the local economy by giving more number of options to the tourists and subsequently increasing their length of stay. It has also been stated by the managers of Gozamenhotel, Fkreselam, FM international hotel, Shebel and Tillk (Debre Markos) that the service quality is very well maintained.

However, at the same time it is also being felt (53.84%) that there are not suitable opportunities for the service providers to extend the tourists length of stay (For example – lack of finance with locals to develop businesses around attractions). In this context an option regarding easy loans/subsidised loan facilities or a package of incentives (freezing tax rates, leasing govt. land on cheaper rates) if somebody invests in tourism can be explored by the Government.

The respondents (69.23%) also felt that the sites (Dimagiorgis Monastery, Sentera Meadows, etc.) are poorly managed and that is the prime reason because of which the tourists are not staying for long even when the sites themselves are good. Thus, in addition to entry fee at the attractions different funding agencies should be approached so that the attractions can be well managed.

The respondents (84.61%) have stated that there is active involvement to give tourists a better experience such as DMCTO information officers provide trainings for the service providers and for the local communities pertaining to tourism.

It is also interesting to note that the respondents (76.92%) expressed that the tourists have deviated from their intended stay at Debre Markos. (*Note: The reasons for the same were not stated*) The respondents (68.23%) also said that the tourists stay in Debre Markos for a moderate period of time. To extend the tourist stay in the town and around it the destination can be promoted through media advertisements, brochures, magazines, etc. Moreover, keeping the potential of destination in mind numerous activities (adventure, cultural, etc.) may be created which can keep the tourists hooked to it and eventually help in increasing tourists stay at the destination.

Note: The respondents above comprised of tour guides and DMCTO staff

Most of the tourist respondents were young (age 18-30 years) (45%) single (40%) males (55%) with undergraduate degree and above (65%). Though the respondents (85%) had high expectations from Debre Markos but sadly many of them (55%) were not satisfied with the place. They also stated that the service is not standardised. Sometimes it can be good and sometimes it can be bad. Consequently, more number of trainings might be organised not only in the formal sector but also for the informal sector of tourism. It has also been stated that most of them did not stay for more than one night (60%) at Debre Markos.

Most of the tourist sites are not suitable to visit as per the respondents (75%) because of infrastructural issues. Therefore, accessibility may be taken care of and departments responsible for roads may be contacted. However, it has been stated by the respondents (60%) that customer complaints are attended promptly. Apart from this the respondents (65%) also felt that hotels are willing to give good service.

Note: The respondents above comprised of international and domestic tourists

CONCLUSION

Tourism is one of the fastest growing industries in the world with significant economic and social benefits. For maximisation of benefits tourist's length of stay has a vital role. This study implied that young males are more dominant whether it is providing tourism services or as visiting Debre Markos as tourists. The service quality at hotels has been also appreciated by the tourists. However, the destination is having number of issues such as lack of capital due to which locals are unable to venture out in different tourism oriented businesses, mismanagement of tourist sites, under developed infrastructure and non-standardisation of service. According to DMCTO officers and tour guides regular trainings are offered to service providers and for the local communities pertaining to tourism however the benefits of the same have not been experienced by the tourists. As a result the trainings can be conducted after researching the requirements of the tourists so that the trainings are more valuable and help tourists to elongate their stay.

Tourists do not stay in Debre Markos for longer periods of time (i.e. usual stay is only for one night) even when the destination is endowed with good attractions. A contradiction has been seen here because the tour guides and DMCTO staff (68.23%) stated that the tourists stay in Debre Markos for a moderate period of time whereas 60% tourists stated that their usual stay is only for one night at Debre Markos. Staying for one night cannot be termed as moderate amount of stay at a place hence the DMCTO may gather proper data from the hotels regarding the stay of tourists. In future researches it would be interesting to know the length of tourist stay at other destinations of Ethiopia and to investigate the reasons thereof.

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