
SIT: A NEW DIMENSION FOR PROMOTING A DESTINATION: A CASE STUDY ON “RELIGIOUS TOURISM IN ODISHA”

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ABSTRACT

The SIT (Special Interest Tourism) tends to generate and cater to the tourist traffic that looks for avenues other than the usual which are likely to give a completely new experience to the tourist. Religious Tourism is no way different from this and can be promoted as a special interest Tourism. Odisha being a land of ancient and sacred temples, the wondrous caves of Jainism & the mystical monasteries of Buddhism and a state where three religions flourished, is thronged by pilgrims throughout the year. Hence to develop these destinations to make them as major places of tourist's interest is the main motto of the research. A thorough research on the various tourist destinations over the diversified regions of Odisha and a clear analysis of the statistical data has really helped to find out certain generous facts about the potential and the scope of Religious tourism in Odisha. According to a confidential survey done by a market research agency, of every 100 tourists visited, only two come to Orissa on pilgrimage. As per the National Tourism Advisory Council, pilgrimage tourism drives the growth of domestic tourist traffic to the country. Hence to increase the tourist traffic, pilgrimage tourism potential needs to be tapped and to achieve it the tourist infrastructure has to be revamped in the identified pilgrimage centres to witness a higher domestic tourist inflow in 2011-12. And finally the implication of the six 'S' in Odisha tourism policy that has been implemented successfully by Kerala would certainly rejuvenate the potential of Religious Tourism in Odisha.

KEYWORDS: *SIT, Religious tourism, Six'S', NTAC*

Introduction

Tourism industry, like all other similar sectors, has been keeping pace with the changing socio-economic situations. Thus what is evident is a continuous search for fresh market. This search begins to look for areas that definitely fall outside of the realm of “conventional”. Such sectors or areas of tourism markets are known as **(SIT) Special Interest Tourism**. As per **S.E.Read (1980)** “Special interest travel is a travel for people who are going somewhere because they have a particular interest that can be pursued in a particular region or at a particular destination”.

On the eastern coast of India, perpetually washed by the blue waters of the Bay of Bengal, lies the many splendour of **State of Odisha**. Endowed with a rich cultural heritage of old world charms and bestowed liberally with the bounties of nature, sometimes tender,

sometimes awe-inspiring, it is a kaleidoscope of past splendours and present glamour, a fascinating state with temples and shrines, unspoiled beaches, sprawling lakes, luxuriant forests, teeming wildlife, superb monuments, exotic handicrafts, traditional tribes, colourful fairs and festivals, scintillating music and dances. It is a land of unforgettable memories and hidden treasures. Many parts of this fascinating land remain relatively unexplored and this is the reason why it is considered to be a best place for developing as a SIT destination. This research is about exploring the scope of Odisha as a major SIT product as far as pilgrimage is concerned. Later the potential of Religious tourism in Odisha is analysed in context with the various statistical data obtained from reliable sources based upon which recommendations are also been made in order to promote Pilgrimage Tourism in Odisha and developing it as a major SIT (Religious Tourism) destination.

OBJECTIVES

1. To bring out the various destinations with the natural resources that can be designed as a Religious tourism Product.
2. To analyse the potential of religious destinations for developing as a Tourism product.

RESEARCH METHODS

I had the following research methodology adopted in order to arrive at the Results while finding out the various tourist destinations over the diversified regions of Orissa,

- a) Primary collection of data were through direct interaction with local bodies at various Destination travelled like Eastern Orissa, Western Orissa, North Orissa, Southern Orissa, Central Orissa etc.
- b) Secondary collection of data were through various books, travel guides, tourism Journals, websites & research articles.

MATERIALS/DATA

Odisha is surrounded by West Bengal on the north east, Jharkhand on the north, Chhattisgarh on the west and Andhra Pradesh on the south while bay of Bengal washes its shores on the east. Owing to its peculiar geographical location and wide range of physical features, Odisha embraces a diversified floristic composition. Its people, temple architecture, shrines, cultural heritages, religions, fairs and festivals, rock caves have always attracted historians, tourists and travellers from all over the world.

Understanding the Market:

In the case of every country/state there are few sectors of tourism where the possibilities of developing SIT are greater as compared to other sectors. These are called as favoured sectors. The advantage enjoyed by them is in terms of location, accessibility, facilities, services and image. Such a favoured sector of tourism in

Odisha where the possibilities of developing SIT largely exists is “**Religious tourism**”. Flowing through the arteries of Odisha is the living and continuing culture of India, its varied expressions and its rich variety. The very stones speak of the unique history of the nation. The **temple-culture** condenses the quintessence of India. Whether it is the sacred environs of Lord Jagannath temple, or the eroticism of Konark’s Sun temple, the wondrous caves of Jainism or the mystical monasteries of Buddhism, Odisha speaks eloquently of a living past and continuing present. The temple city of Bhubaneswar has always been the centre of attraction being the capital city and a major tourist destination as a carrier of messages from three different religions through sculptures, monuments and heritage sites.

Orissa being a land of ancient and sacred temples, and a state where three religions flourished, is thronged by pilgrims throughout the year. There are a large number of fairs and festivals celebrated in the state. There are festivals relating to each religion, tribal festivals, festivals relating to Lord Jagannath, the presiding deity of the Puri Temple. Naming few major religious festivals of Odisha are Durga Puja , Mahashivaratri , Laxmi Puja , Deepavali , Makar sankranti , Nuakhai , Prathamastami , Raja sankranti , Kartika purnima, Chitrou Amabasya etc. and to crown it all is our universally-acclaimed ‘Rathayatra’ of Lord Jagannath which has now famous all over the world.

The various Religious places around the state that can evolve as a major tourist destination found during the research are,

1. *Srimandir (Temple of Lord Jagannath)* : The majestic temple of Jagannath is a major attraction for the tourists visiting Puri. The Jagannath Temple is one of the four most important Hindu pilgrimage sites or the “Char Dham”. The Jagannath Temple, known as the White Pagoda dates back to the 12th century. This 65-meter high structure was built in 12th century and stands in the Nilgiri Hills. The various sacred places associated with Jagannath temple are Sri Gundicha temple , Lokanath temple , Mahodadhi (Puri beach), Atharnala , Batamangala etc. Puri is strategically located east of the capital city Bhubaneswar within a trotting distance of 65 Kms.
2. *Alaarnath Temple*: Lord Alaarnath is the representative God of Lord Jagannath. Sri Chaityana Mahaprabhu visited this temple during Anabasara period as he couldn’t see lord Jagannath at Srimandir .At this time of the year the devotees flock to Lord Alaarnath to be blessed with a sight. It is located just 22 Kms away from the Historical city of Puri.
3. *Sun Temple at Konark*: Situated 35 Kms from Puri, Konark is home to the Sun Temple, also called the Black Pagoda. Konark is a must visit for its historical and architectural importance. The Konark beach (Chandrabhaga beach) is said to be one of the finest and most romantic beaches on the eastern coast. The Sun temple has been declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO .The other attraction near the sun temple is Ramchandi temple where the river merges

with the sea giving an exquisitely beautiful scenic experience.

4. *The Lingaraja temple*: The 11th century 'Lingaraja' temple exhibits temple art of several centuries is the largest temple in Bhubaneswar worshipping Lord Siva. It represents 'Nagara' style of traditional Orissan temple designing. The walls have beautiful carvings of birds, animals, flowers, men and women, gods and goddesses. The other temples around The Lingaraja Temple are Rajarani temple, Brahmeswar temple, Mukteswar Temple, Kedargouri temple, Ananata basudeva etc.
5. *Harishankar*: The temple of Lord Hari Shankar (Siva) stands on the Gandhamardan Mountain in the bolangir district. In this district at Patnagarh the temples of Goddess pataneswari and Samaleswari are frequently visited by tourists.
6. *Leaning temple of Huma*: Huma about 32 Kms away from sambalpur and 350 Kms from Bhubaneswar is adorned with a leaning temple dedicated to Lord Bimalaswar. On the river of Mahanadi, it is a scenic spot of great excellence. The Kudo fishes here are believed to belong to lord Shiva and are very friendly to visitors.
7. *Nrusinghanath nath temple*: Famous for the 15th century temple, Nrusinghanath is 164 Kms away from sambalpur via baragarh. This temple is situated at the foot hill of Gandhamardan Mountain. On the other side of which is the location of Harishanakar. On the top of the hill, the remnants of a Buddhist Monastery built by great Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang speaks of about Buddhist centre of spiritual learning.
8. *Kantilo Nillamadhav*: In the district of Nayagarh and around 100 Kms from Bhubaneswar, the temple of lord Nillamadhav is situated at Kantilo on the bank of river Mahanadi. The place is replenished with the beauty of nature. It is said that Nillamadhav was worshipped here by Sabar king Viswabasu later on which was stolen and reincarnated in the form of Lord Jagannath in Puri.
9. *Taratarini*: 32 Kms away from berhampur on the top of a hill the temple of Tara Tarini is situated on the bank of river Rushikulya near the village of Purushottampur, amidst natural beauty. A flight of 1000 steps as well as a concrete road connects the hill top with the foothills. A grand fair is organised on the occasion of Raja sankranti.
10. *Jain Shrine (Khandagiri & Udaygiri)*: The twin hills of Kumargiri are known as Khandagiri and Udaygiri. The ancient caves of Udaygiri and Khandagiri are considered consecrate as this was the place where Lord Mahavira addressed the people of the area. On these hills are archaeologically significant 113 caves, which are nearly 2300 years old. These rock-cut caves were built for the Jain monks around 1st - 2nd century B.C. The Khandagiri hill is about 40 meters high and the Udaygiri hill is about 35 meters high which is situated just within 8 Kms from Bhubaneswar city centre.

11. *Buddhist Shrine(Dhauлагiri)*: In a peaceful and serene environment , barely 6 Kms away from the city centre, very close to N.H 203 , lies the great Buddhist shrine of Dhauли famous for the rock edicts of Asoka. It was here by the foot hills of river daya , the valiant people of kalinga defended their territory and turned the river water in to red with blood . It was here after the kalinga victory The great Asoka terrible transformed in to Asoka the compassionate.
12. *Buddhist Shrine(Ratnagiri)*: By the river Birupa about 100 Kms away from Bhubaneswar , Ratnagiri has a rich concentration of Buddhist antiquities. A large scale excavation has unearthed Buddhist shrines , large monasteries and a big stupa established ways back in 6th century.

DATA ANALYSIS: (*Analysing the Potential*)

As Odisha is a hub of diversified culture and religion and bestowed with more than 250 several religious temples, shrines and Shakti pithas hence its scope for developing as a SIT-Religious Tourism destination truly exists within its compassion. Hence any of the religious spot among these can be considered as the centre stage for developing the Religious Tourism in the form of SIT. As many of these above places are well connected with road and rail routes and accommodation facilities ranging from budget to fine star category hotels, it's potential as a major tourist destination need to be analysed from statistical point of view.

Now let us discuss various statistical figures related to Tourist arrival in Odisha and their characteristics in past few years presented in Table No. 01 at the end of the article.

Table No. : 01 Tourist Visit in Orissa from 1998-2009.

YEAR	Domestic	% Change	Foreign	% Change	Total	%Change
1998-99	28,61,788	1.2	33,101	(-)5.6	28,94,889	1.1
1999-00	26,91,840	(-)5.9	25,758	(-)22.2	27,17,598	(-)6.1
2000-01	28,88,392	7.3	23,723	(-)7.9	29,12,115	7.2
2001-02	31,00,316	7.3	22,854	(-)3.7	31,23,170	7.2
2002-03	34,13,352	10.1	23,034	0.8	34,36,386	10.03
2003-04	37,01,250	8.4	25,020	8.6	37,26,270	8.4
2004-05	41,25,536	11.5	28,817	15.2	41,54,353	11.5
2005-06	46,32,976	12.3	33,310	15.6	46,66,286	12.3
2006-07	52,39,896	13.1	39,141	17.5	52,79,037	13.1
2007-08	59,44,890	13.4	41,880	7.0	59,86,770	13.4
2008-09	63,58,445	6.9	43,966	4.9	64,02,411	6.9
2009-10	--	--	--	--	69,37,194	8.35

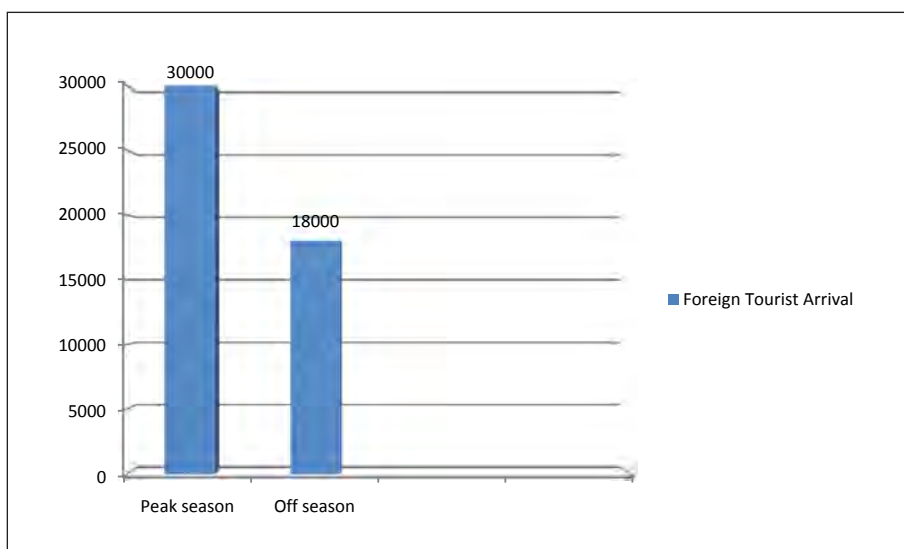
1. As per the statistics on tourists released by the Department of Tourism, there has been a consistent rise in tourist inflow into the State since 2001. During last seven years (2003-10), the State witnessed 86.14 per cent growth in the tourist inflow to the state.
2. The reason for increase in tourist inflow can be attributed to improvement in air connectivity with the capital city of Bhubaneswar. In 2007, about 2.02 lakh tourists entered the State using flight services, which was 104.44 per cent higher than of 2006 figure. And still the phenomena are continuing.
3. Similarly, there was a sizeable growth in volume of tourists using railway services. While 50.23 lakh people came by trains in 2007, the number was 44.29 lakh in 2006. The growth was estimated at 13.41 per cent. Moreover, 1.34 per cent growth was recorded in tourists who used road connectivity.
4. The reason being Odisha has a total rail network of 2287 Kms and that gives around 3077.15 Crore rupees profit in 2008-09 , which shows that its majorly used for travelling purpose in Odisha and more over Odisha has total road network of 2.38 lakh Kms, The total length of National Highway passing through the State is more than 3600 Km, this includes the highway connecting Kolkata & Chennai, a major transport corridor between East & South India and state highways count more than 5000 Kms of connectivity to various parts of the state.
5. As many as 450 new hotels were established in last eight years. In 1998, there were about 684 hotels in the State and now that has reached up to 1134.

Tourist arrival to various Religious destinations:

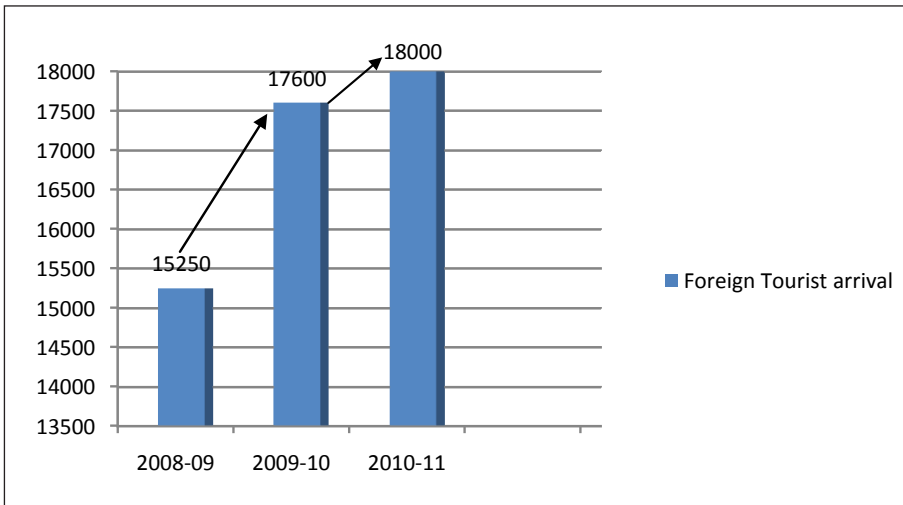
1. Puri district with its unending tourist spots attracted most of the visitors. Puri town itself recorded 17.59 lakh domestic visitors and 14,627 foreign visitors. The day visitors surpassed the 50 lakh mark in 2006.
2. Capital city attracted around some seven lakh tourists in the same fiscal year.
3. Other places like Chandipur in Balasore, Ratnagiri and Udaygiri in Jajpur, Vedvyas in Sundargarh districts saw large inflow of travellers. Places like Nrusimhanath in Baragarh, Harishanakar in Bolangir, Dhableswar in Cuttack, and Kapilas in Dhenkanal districts also proved to be major tourist destinations.
4. The data available with the Tourism Department revealed the occupancy position of hotels in the pilgrim centres other than Bhubaneswar and Puri is barely 50 per cent. The poor hotel occupancy of 33 per cent in Konark stands testimony to it.

Statistics on Purpose of Tourist arrival to Odisha:

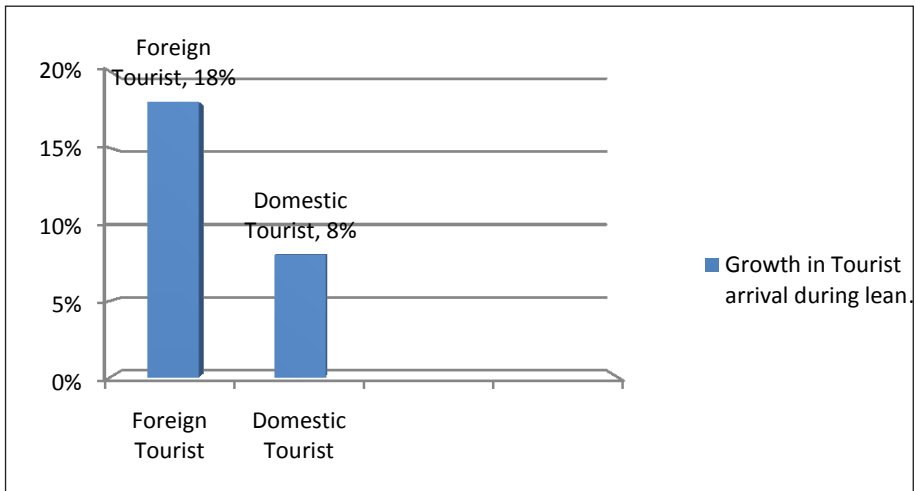
1. According to a confidential survey done by a market research agency, of every 100 tourists visited, only two come to Orissa on pilgrimage. Even the latest survey by the Tourism Department finds more or less the same trend.
2. As per the survey, around 80 per cent of the domestic tourists come to Orissa for the purpose of holidaying, business or on official tours.
3. Destination Orissa is capturing the imagination of foreign tourists. Seven out of ten come to the State for holidaying.
4. The results of a survey conducted by AC Neilson-ORG MARG on the foreign tourist arrivals to Orissa provide an optimistic picture. The survey noted that around 8 % foreign tourists visited the State for pilgrimage where as only 1.7 % domestic tourist visited for pilgrimage in (2009-10).
5. According to MR Patnaik, General Manager , OTDC “this figure is mostly attributed to the inflow of foreign Buddhist tourists. The number could increase further if the State has an international airport and air connectivity to East Asian countries”.

Statistics on Tourist Arrival during various times of the Year:**Chart: 1.1, Foreign Tourist Arrival in the Year: 2010-11**

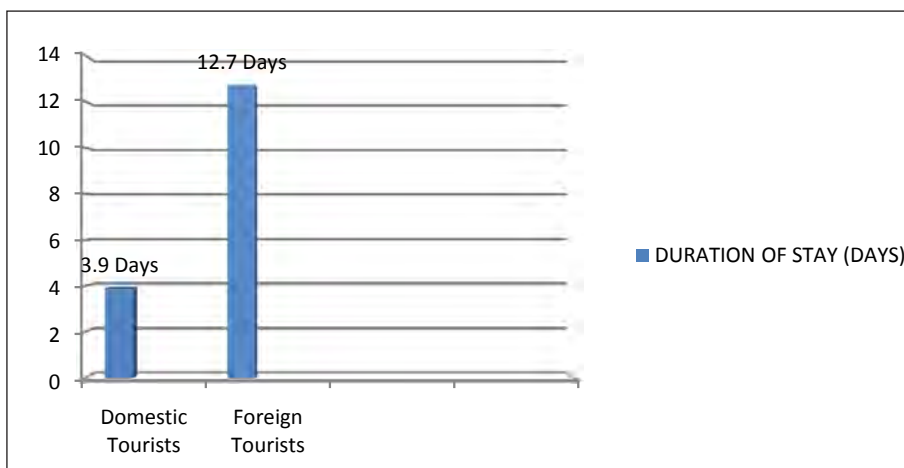
1. As per the statistics presented in Chart:1.1, the number of foreign tourist arrival in the year 2010-11 was found to be 30,000 during peak season and 18,000 in offseason/lean season.

Chart: 1.2, , Foreign Tourist arrival during Lean season

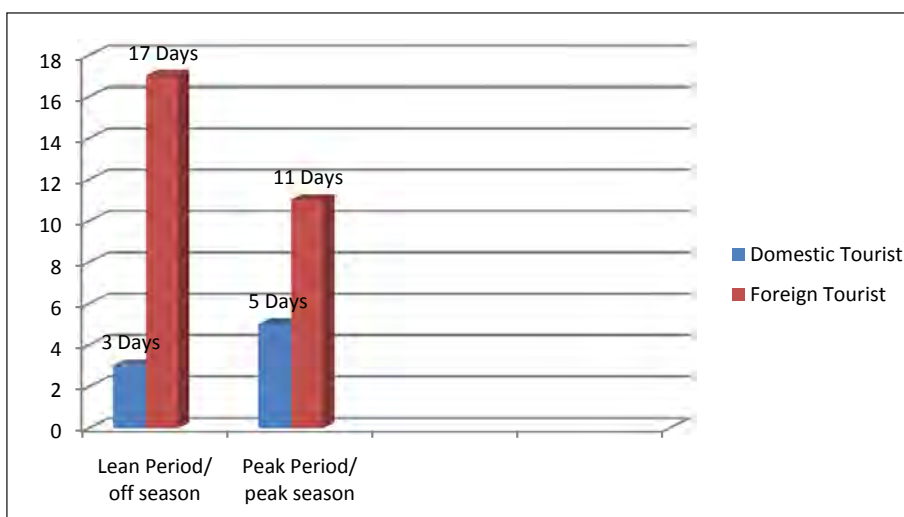
2. The statistic in Chart: 1.2, about the foreign tourist arrival clearly says that there has been a consistent rise in the foreign tourist arrival during lean season that has grown from 15,250 in the year 2008-09 to 18,000 in 2010-11.

Chart: 1.3, Growth in Tourist arrival during lean season (2009-11)

3. As per the statistics presented in Chart:1.3, the growth in foreign tourist arrival during lean season in past three years being 18% where as it lies at 8% in case of domestic tourists.

Statistics on Tourist's duration of stay at various times of the year:**Chart: 2.1, Average Duration of stay by a Tourist**

1. As per the statistics presented in Chart:2.1, the average duration of stay by a foreign tourist in Odisha was found to be 12.7 days where as this figure remains at 3.9 days in case of domestic tourists.

Chart: 2.2, Average Duration of stay by a Tourist in Peak & Lean Period

2. The statistic in Chart: 2.2, reveals about the about the average duration of stay of a foreign tourist during peak and off season which is measured to be 11 days and 17 days respectively. The figure about the average duration of stay for domestic tourist lies at five days in peak season and three days in lean season.

Research Findings:

The various results or findings of this research process that clearly demonstrates the potential of Odisha as a major religious tourism hub are presented below,

1. There has been a consistent rise in tourist inflow into the State since 2001. During last seven years the State has witnessed 86.14 per cent growth in the tourist inflow due to the improvement in air connectivity with the capital city of Bhubaneswar, an extensive rail network and well connected national and state highways.
2. There has been a major improvement in the hotel sector with the opening of more than 500 new hotels in the state in past few years that shows the improvement in terms of Tourist Infrastructure.
3. Tourist arrival to the three major Pilgrimage destinations (Golden triangle: Puri-Konark-Bhubaneswar) is almost 50 % of the entire tourist arrival to Odisha that is clearly indicated from the occupancy position of hotels in the pilgrim centres other than Bhubaneswar and Puri is barely 50 per cent.
4. Around 80 % of the domestic tourists come to Orissa for the purpose of holidaying, business or on official tours where as in case of foreign tourists it is around 70 %.
5. The tourist inflow to Orissa for the purpose of pilgrimage is very marginal, of every 100 tourists visited, only two come to Orissa on pilgrimage.
6. As per a latest survey, around 8 % foreign tourists visited the State for pilgrimage where as only 1.7 % domestic tourist visited for pilgrimage in (2009-10) which is mostly attributed to the inflow of foreign Buddhist tourists.
7. The growth in Foreign Tourist Arrival during the lean season has been around 18 % against only 8 % growth in domestic tourist arrivals.
8. The average stay of a foreign tourist in Orissa during the lean period is higher than the stay during the peak period and the case is just reverse in case of domestic tourists.

Recommendations

1. As there has been a consistent increase in tourist arrival (86.1%) , the future of Odisha tourism seems very good but a tremendous increase in air traffic (above 103%) with a single domestic airport in the capital is not sufficient enough to handle the crowd.
2. Hence establishing an International airport , and converting few of the major air strips in the state at least for domestic aviation purpose could make the pilgrimage destinations within the easy reach of the tourists.

3. In spite of the increase in hotel sector the lack of star category hotels in the state at major tourist destinations is still a matter of serious concern.
4. As the tourist inflow to Orissa for the purpose of pilgrimage is very marginal, to increase tourist traffic, pilgrimage tourism potential of the state needs to be tapped.
5. Except the golden triangle other religious pilgrimage spots have not yet been spotted by the majority of the tourist hence those identified pilgrimage centres needs to be properly publicised with required infrastructural support in order to witness a higher domestic tourist inflow in coming years.
6. As the number of foreign tourist visiting for pilgrimage purpose is more in comparison to the domestic tourist, the pilgrimage centres to be well developed as per the international standard.
7. Growth in foreign tourist arrival during lean season suggest the intention being other than the usual with some special interest (Religious destination) so these special interest purpose has to be thoroughly measured and strategies to be developed to tap these potential during the lean season.
8. As the average stay of a foreign tourist in Orissa during the lean period is higher than the stay during the peak period, various special interests could be created at the destination in order to give him a complete new experience & added value to the trip along with the religious tourism as a whole.

Conclusion

Despite of the State being an ancient 'Shakti' centre like Assam, a place of three different religions and a state of great history and antiquity still the religious destinations are underdeveloped due to lack of interest and support. If these destinations be regularly publicised in various national and international tourism fairs and events and information are properly communicated with tourism centres of various countries with similar culture and religion then it would certainly attract them to have a look of their religious fervours in the historical land of Odisha. In order to cope with the increase in foreign tourist arrival for Religious purpose the major religious destinations have to be upgraded with facilities of international standard and Odisha has to incorporate the six 's' in tourism policy that has been implemented successfully by Kerala. The six 'S' are: swagat (hospitality), soochana (information), suvidha (facilities), surakshya (security), sahayog (facilitation) and sanrachna (infrastructure development) in which parameters Orissa lags poorly. Then only SIT- a new dimension in promoting a destination, would clearly able to make its hold and its special sector "Religious Tourism" would certainly be of great curiosity for the tourist arriving with a special interest.

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