

ATTRACTIVENESS OF GAMBELLA AS A TOURIST DESTINATION: AN IMPORTANCE - PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS

Sukarn Sharma*, Lake Abebe**, Shimekit Kelkay***

Abstract Ethiopia was selected the World Best Tourist Destination for 2015 by the European Council for Tourism and Trade (ECTT) however there are some places within Ethiopia that still lag behind in being attractive tourist destinations. One such place is Gambella and therefore, in this study an attempt was made to understand the issues because of which Gambella has not been a preferred choice of tourists. Consequently, after going through number of researches regarding destination competitiveness 28 attributes were selected for the study to understand competitiveness of Gambella as a tourist destination. Only international tourists above the age of 18 years were selected for the study so as to avoid bias, to have reliable results and to know the issues in depth as usually international tourists are well travelled. A total of 78 international tourists participated in the study who visited Gambella during November 2016 to April, 2017. Census survey was deployed as the number of tourists coming to Gambella was very low despite of being the peak season there at the above mentioned time. The main technique used for analysing the data was importance performance analysis keeping in view its popular usage in such types of studies. It was found that though Gambella can boast of natural beauty, distinctive local feature, churches and behaviour of host community still it needs to immediately concentrate upon water services, wildlife, signposts, security, information centres activities for children to attract more number of tourists.

Keywords: Tourist Satisfaction, Importance Performance Analysis, Destination Attractiveness

INTRODUCTION

Economically tourism can be very important for the nation as it contributes to a nation's income and employment. However, to succeed, tourist destinations must ensure that their overall attractiveness to visitors must equal or surpass that of competing destinations (UNWTO, 2004). Destination attractiveness has been mostly defined as the perceived ability of the destination to deliver individual benefits and satisfy potential tourists (Hu and Ritchie, 1993). Taplin (2012) defined destination attractiveness as the destination's ability to attract and satisfy potential tourists. Competitiveness of tourist destination is a determinant factor to attract many visitors and to maximize its benefits (Crouch & Ritchie, 2005; Navickas & Malakauskaite, 2009).

According to Ferrario (1979) the tourists will naturally, have expectations from tourism destinations, in terms of attractiveness and sources. Some of the essential elements

of tourism which highlight the attractiveness of an area can be a pleasant climate, friendly people, low cost of living, favourable rates of exchange and ease of accessibility.

With one of the richest histories on the African continent, a land of contrasts and surprises, of remote and wild places, home to cultured and friendly people who are descended from some of the world's oldest civilizations, Ethiopia is a land of wonder and enchantment. Ethiopia was selected the World Best Tourist Destination for 2015 and favorite cultural destination for 2015 by the European Council for Tourism and Trade (ECTT) based in Romania, unanimously on 25th June, 2015. Ethiopia has obtained the award in recognition for its tourism potential, acumen reform of tourism industry and indelible cultural and historical patrimony among several countries. As per the press release of the Council, the recognition was awarded after a report entitled "Ethiopia: the perfect cultural destination; the land chosen by God!" by President of the Council (MoCT, 2015).

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

** Lecturer, CTTI, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Email: lakeabebe6@gmail.com

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

In comparison to other parts of Ethiopia, Western Ethiopia is undisturbed and seldom visited, yet it's one of the most beautiful regions in Ethiopia. Rain forests, coffee plantations and muddy agricultural towns share the landscape with savannah grasslands, wildlife-infested swamps and high plateaus carpeted in fields of tef (an indigenous grass cultivated as a cereal). The Southwest corner of Ethiopia: Gambella is boasting for culture and nature tourism. It is located at the tip of South West Ethiopia along the border of Sudan. The Baro River, the Gambella National Park, the Agnuak, and the Nuer people are mainly visited. The region is rich of coffee, tea plantations, and oil.

This paper basically attempts to find out destination competitiveness of Gambella based on perceptions of foreign tourists. For analysing the responses of the said tourists the research undertakes the importance performance analysis model.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Destination attractiveness allows researchers to assess destination competitiveness, which enables the comparison of competing destinations (Enright & Newton, 2005). The main components, that influence and determine tourists' choice and as well as their buying motivations are destination attractions. They include natural resources, human-made attractions, and hospitality (Gartner, 1996; Gunn, 1994; Inskip, 1991; Middleton, 2001; Ritchie et al. 2001). The attractiveness of a travel destination can be described as 'the feelings, beliefs, and opinion that an individual has about a destination's perceived ability to provide satisfaction in relation to his or her special vacation need (Hu and Ritchie, 1993).

Mayo and Jarvis (1981) incorporated the idea of destination attractiveness by relating it to the traveller's decision-making process and the specific benefits derived by travelers. They have suggested that destination attractiveness is 'a combination of the relative importance of individual benefits and the perceived ability of the destination to deliver individual benefit.'

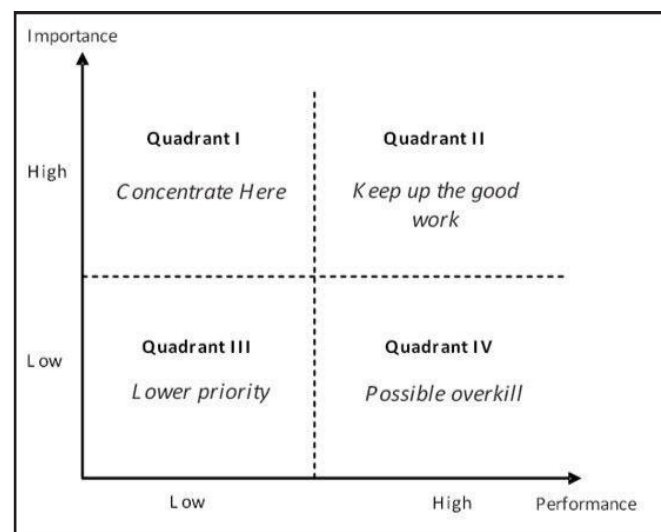
It is essential that research should be undertaken regarding the attractions of a destination for drawing tourists. Hu & Ritchie (1993) found out the attributes resulting from the data analysis include (1) climate (2) the availability/quality of accommodation, (3) sports/recreational opportunities, (4) scenery, (5) food, (6) entertainment, (7) the uniqueness of local people's life, (8) historical attractions, (9) museums, cultural attractions, (10) communication difficulty due to language barriers, (11) festivals, special events, (12) accessibility, (13) shopping, (14) attitude towards tourists,

(15) availability/quality of local transportation, and (16) price levels. For measuring destination attractiveness two ways can be adopted. The first can be achieved by studying the attractions and second by exploring the attractiveness perception of tourists who are attracted by them (Hu & Ritchie, 1993).

Destination's attractiveness in international markets could well vary when considering specific tourist products, such as wellness tourism or business tourism. In the similar way, the relative importance of the destination's attributes is expected to be different, on the basis of the type of travel selected by potential visitors (Enright and Newton, 2004). Hence it is interesting to undertake empirical studies that could generate results and conclusions on tourism destination attractiveness over a variety of tourist products.

IMPORTANCE-PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS MODEL (IPA)

Importance-performance analysis has been applied as an effective means of evaluating a firm's competitive position in the market, identifying improvement opportunities, and guiding strategic planning efforts (Hawes and Rao, 1985; Martilla & James, 1977; Myers, 2001). Importance performance analysis, first introduced by Martilla and James (1977), identifies which product or service attributes a firm should focus on to, enhance customer satisfaction (Matzler et al., 2004a). The means of performance and importance, commonly utilized in practice, divide the matrix into four quadrants. Please see Fig. 1 below.



Source: Importance-performance Analysis framework adopted from Martilla (1977)

Fig. 1: Importance Performance Quadrants

Quadrant I

Attributes are perceived to be very important to respondents, but performance levels are fairly low. This sends a direct message that improvement efforts should be concentrated here.

Quadrant II

Attributes are perceived to be very important to respondents, and at the same time, the organization seems to have high levels of performance on these activities. The message here is to Keep up the Good Work.

Quadrant III

Attributes are with low importance and low performance. Although performance levels may be low in this cell, managers should not be too concerned, since the attribute of this cell is not perceived to be very important. Limited resources should be expended on this low priority cell.

Quadrant IV

This cell contains attributes of low importance, but relatively high performance. Respondents are satisfied with the performance of the organizations, but managers should consider present efforts on the attributes of this cell as being over utilized.

Based on this analysis, particular improvement opportunities are determined. For example, researchers commonly suggest that major weaknesses (Quadrant I) should be top priority and targeted for immediate improvement efforts (Martilla and James, 1977). Conversely, attributes deemed major strengths (Quadrant II) should be maintained, leveraged, and heavily promoted (Lambert and Sharma, 1990).

Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA) acts as a framework for overcoming many of the identified difficulties implicit with the SERVQUAL and SERVPERF scale. IPA, like SERVQUAL, maintains that quality is a function of customer perceptions of performance and the importance of the attribute.

The importance a customer places on any given service attribute is a principle dimension of IPA. Thus the important service attributes with the SERVPERF scale can then be combined with the performances attributes to form an IPA. The IPA model has been used in hospitality and tourism research for years (Qu and Sit, 2007). It has been proven by many researchers as an effective quantitative research tool. Sethna (1982) proposed that the IPA provided a clear direction for action, identifying areas where scarce resources should be concentrated. Lewis (1984) used the IPA as a competitive analysis technique to identify visitors' perceptions of the hotel industry. In 1989, Lewis and Chambers reported the effective use of the importance-performance technique in

the monitoring of customers' satisfaction by Sheraton Hotel Corporation. While Evans and Chon (1989) used the IPA to formulate tourism policy, Almanza, Jaffe, and Lin (1994) used the IPA matrix to determine means for improving customers' satisfaction. The ease of application and the appealing methods of presenting both data and strategic suggestions seem to be the factors, among others, that contribute to wide acceptance of the IPA technique (Martilla and James 1977).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Gambella in Southwest corner of Ethiopia receives few international and domestic tourists every year such as 3837 and 18933 respectively in the year 2015 (MoCT, 2015) even after when its numerous attractions have the potential of attracting a lot of tourists.

Keeping the above in view and to understand the attributes which can help increase number of tourists to Gambella research was conducted. This research was of descriptive type since it described the attitude of the international tourists towards the destination attractiveness attributes of Gambella. According to Kothari (2004) for descriptive research, survey design is appropriate. Cross-Sectional survey design (also known as one-shot) is best suited to studies aimed at finding out the prevalence of a phenomenon, situation, problem, attitude or issue, by taking a cross-section of the population at one time. Hence, taking this into account, the research employed cross sectional survey design.

For achieving the purpose of the study the researchers approached the international tourists. Only the responses from international tourists were taken up for this study because they are more experienced travelers and in addition their responses were totally unbiased.

Primary data for the study was collected from participants by administering close ended questionnaires which measure the items on a five point Likert scale. International tourists who visited Gambella during November, 2016 to April, 2017 (peak tourist season) formed the target population for this study. The numbers of attributes for the study were based upon the researches regarding destination marketing in the last five years and upon the opinions of officers of the tourism department and managers and experts from the industry. A pilot survey was also conducted on 10 random international tourists visiting Gambella during the study period in order to test reliability of each item of the instrument. The instrument was developed in English because the target of the research was international tourists.

Only the people who were above the age group of 18 years were considered as the respondents in the research. The sample technique employed for this particular research was

judgmental sampling. Only the tourists who were staying at Gambella for more than one night formed the part of respondents for this research. The researchers had to resort to census survey, as the number of international tourists coming to Gambella is small. A total of 78 respondents had participated in the research.

Data collected was analyzed by using Statistical Package for Social Sciences 19.0. Mean ratings for the responses of the respondents' on the attributes were calculated and used for Importance Performance Analysis (IPA). The cross-hairs (vertical and horizontal lines) were calculated to separate the attributes into four identifiable quadrants. As Martilla and James (1977) suggested, the mean is preferred to be used as the dividing point to avoid discarding useful information. The data was then presented on a grid, where each attribute was plotted according to its perceived importance and performance level. The two-dimensional grid then displayed the importance of attributes on the vertical axis from high (top) to low (Bottom), and the performance of attributes on the horizontal axis from high (right) to low (left).

The reliability of the measures was examined through the calculation of Cronbach's alpha coefficients, one of the most widely used methods to test reliability of questionnaires. Reliability test is intended to measure the items of the variables in the questionnaire and the internal stability and consistency of a question, through coefficient of Cronbach's alpha. The Cronbach's alpha values for all attributes considered in this research were greater than 0.9. This figure implied that each items in the questionnaires were well understood by the respondents, and also the items measured what they had intended to measure.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

80 questionnaires were distributed to international tourists and 78 were filled properly. The response of the respondents is summarized in the following table. Customers' Importance and Performance rating mean values for the twenty-eight variables used as input for the Importance performance matrix are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Importance Performance (Mean Values)

S.No.	Attributes	Mean Importance (Y)	Mean Performance (X)	I-P Gap
1	Natural beauty	4.11	2.68	1.43
2	Climate	3.71	2.29	1.43
3	Wildlife	3.89	2.32	1.57
4	Accessibility	3.79	2.14	1.64
5	Outdoor activities	3.43	2.14	1.29
6	Activities for children	3.82	2.14	1.68
7	City walks	3.61	2.25	1.36
8	Churches	3.82	2.75	1.07
9	Historical sites	3.79	2.64	1.14
10	Handicrafts	3.57	2.43	1.14
11	Shopping	4.07	2.50	1.57
12	Nightlife	3.43	2.36	1.07
13	Experience local cuisine	3.61	2.36	1.25
14	Local festivals	3.68	2.29	1.39
15	Museums and galleries	3.57	2.29	1.29
16	Relaxing environment	3.68	2.36	1.32
17	Various accommodation options	3.82	2.64	1.18
18	Distinctive local features (Markets, etc.)	3.93	2.64	1.29
19	Information centers	3.82	2.11	1.71
20	Multilingual guide services	3.86	2.46	1.39
21	Signposts	3.82	2.25	1.57
22	Behaviour of host community	4.07	2.61	1.46
23	Currency exchange	3.75	2.43	1.32
24	Security	3.82	2.32	1.50
25	Health services	4.07	2.46	1.61
26	Communication	4.07	2.64	1.43
27	Electricity	4.14	2.50	1.64
28	Water services	4.14	2.25	1.89
Grand Mean		3.81	2.40	

These mean scores were plotted in an Importance Performance matrix as shown in figure 2. The grand means for performance rating ($x = 2.40$) and importance ($y = 3.81$) determines the placements of axes on the grid.

Quadrant 1 (Concentrate here)

The attributes which are holding Gambella back are water services, wildlife, signposts, security, information centres and activities for children. These attributes should be paid top priority by the authorities because without improving them immediately the tourism industry in the region will suffer and would not receive tourists to its fullest potential. Government policy makers, stakeholders and private firms can make joint efforts to improve the situation. Further the local tourism authority to keep itself updated can devise a regular system of feedback from tourists as opinions are subject to change from time to time.

Quadrant 2 (Keep up the good work)

It is quite well known that most of the tourists go to Gambella because of its natural beauty, distinctive local feature, churches and behaviour of host community. This has been confirmed by this research also. Therefore, these are the most important attributes for the destination attractiveness of the region. Further on electricity, health services, shopping, communication, various accommodation options, multilingual guide services has also been positively rated by the tourists. Therefore, Gambella should take the above mentioned attributes as its USP and should promote them heavily in their tourism brochures so as to attract more number of tourists.

Quadrant 3 (Lower priority)

The attributes accessibility, outdoor activities, climate, local festivals, relaxing environment, experience with local cuisine, museums and galleries, city walks, nightlife are in this quadrant.

However, limited resources should be expended on these attributes as the respondents neither think that they are very important for them nor they think that the region is performing very well on the said attributes. In a business situation it is not worthwhile to waste precious resources on something which is not important for its customers.

Quadrant 4 (Possible overkill)

Surprisingly the attributes currency exchange, historical sites, handicrafts are in this quadrant. However, the attributes

in this quadrant would not matter much because the analysis for this quadrant suggests that here are the things which are not very important from customer point of view but are performing very well. Therefore, rather than diverting any of the resources to the attributes falling in this quadrant the organisation should try to take out some resources from there.

CONCLUSION

Almost every country understands the benefits that can be endowed because of tourism. There is a rapid growth in the number of tourists and so is in the destinations around the world. To be attractive a destination should be competitive. Therefore, it is imperative to understand the factors where the destination has to focus immediately and where it is having its strengths which can be shown as its USP.

This study clearly depicts the factors which are important for Gambella to become a successful tourism destination. Natural beauty, distinctive local feature, churches and behaviour of host community, electricity, health services, shopping, communication, various accommodation options, multilingual guide services are the strong points and should be positioned on the same lines. It can be clearly seen that water services, wildlife, signposts, security, information centres and activities for children requires strong intervention of the government, private sector as well as of the other stakeholders. Apart from this the authority can also see for means of engaging local engage people in sustainable tourism projects. It was quite surprising to note that accessibility, outdoor activities, climate, local festivals, relaxing environment, experience with local cuisine, museums and galleries, city walks, nightlife, currency exchange, historical sites, handicrafts have been rated on lower importance by the tourists which otherwise are quite popular attributes for the success of a destination.

Further research need to be conducted regarding destination positioning of Gambella as a tourist destination.

REFERENCES

- Almanza, B. A., Jaffe, W., & Lin, L. (1994). Use of the service attribute matrix to measure consumer satisfaction. *Hospitality Research Journal*, 17(20), 63-75.
- Crouch, G. I., & Ritchie, J. R. B. (2005). *The competitive destination: A sustainable tourism perspective*. CABI, Wallingford, UK.
- Enright, M. J., & Newton, J. (2004). Tourism destination competitiveness: A quantitative approach. *Tourism Management*, 25(6), 777-788.

- Enright, M. J., & Newton, J. (2005.). Determinants of tourism destination competitiveness in Asia Pacific: Comprehensiveness and universality. *Journal of Travel Research*.
- Evans, M. R., & Chon, K. (1989). Formulating and evaluating tourism policy using importance-performance analysis. *Hospitality Education and Research Journal*, 13(3), 203-213.
- Ferrario, F. F. (1979). The evaluation of tourist resources: An applied methodology. *Journal of Travel Research*, 18-22.
- Gartner, W. (1996). *Tourism development principles, processes, and policies*. Canada: John Wiley & Sons.
- Gunn, C. A. (1994). *Tourism planning* (3rd ed.). Washington: Taylor & Francis.
- Hawes, J. M., & Rao, C. P. (1985). Using importance-performance analysis to develop health care marketing strategies. *Journal of Health Care Marketing*, 5(4), 19-25.
- Hu, Y., & Ritchie, J. R. B. (1993). Measuring destination attractiveness: A context approach. *Journal of Travel Research*, 25-36.
- Inskip, E. (1991). *Tourism planning: An integrated and sustainable development approach*. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold.
- Kothari, C. R. (2004). *Research methodology: Methods and technique* (2nd ed.) New Age International. New Delhi. India.
- Lambert, D. M., & Sharma, A. (1990). A customer-based competitive analysis for logistics decisions. *International Journal of Physical Distribution & Logistics Management*, 20(1), 17-24.
- Lewis, R. C. (1984). The basis of hotel selection. *Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly*, 25(3), 54-69.
- Lewis, R. C., & Chambers, R. E. (1989). *Marketing leadership in hospitality*. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold.
- Martilla, J. A., & James, J. C. (1977). Importance-performance analysis. *Journal of Marketing*, (Jan), 77-79.
- Matzler, K., Fuchs, M., & Schubert, A. K. (2004a). Employee satisfaction: Does Kano's model apply? *Total Quality Management & Business Excellence*, 15(9/10), 1179-1198.
- Mayo, E. J., & Jarvis, L. (1981). *Psychology of leisure travel*. Boston: C.B.I Publishing.
- Middleton, V. T. C. (2001). *Marketing in travel and tourism* (3rd ed.). London: Butterworth-Heinemann.
- MOCT (2015). Annual report. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
- Myers, J. H. (2001). *Measuring customer satisfaction: Hot buttons and other measurement issues*. Chicago: American Marketing Association.
- Navickas, V., & Malakauskaite, A. (2009). The possibilities for the identification and evaluation of tourism sector competitiveness factors. *Engineering Economics*, 1(61), 37-44.
- Qu, H., & Sit, C. Y. (2007). Hotel service quality in Hong Kong. *International Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Administration*, 38(3), 49-72.
- Ritchie, J. R. B., Crouch, G. I., & Hudson, S. (2001). Developing Operational Measures for the Components of a Destination Competitiveness I Sustainability Model: Consumer versus Managerial perspectives.
- Sethna, B. N. (1982). Extensions and testing of importance-performance analysis. *Business Economics*, (September), 28-31.
- Taplin, R. H. (2012). The value of self-stated attribute importance to overall satisfaction. *Tourism Management*, 33(2), 295-304.
- UNWTO (2004). Sustainable Tourism, WTO, Madrid.