

# The analytical study of branding strategies for Special Interest Tourism (S.I.T.) in Maharashtra.

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## Abstract

Special Interest tourism (SIT) is 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. Special Interest tourism is a prime force in the expansion of tourism in the next decade. After understanding brief & preliminary research in studying this type of niche tourism, it was found that not much has been written or explored in the chosen area of SIT in Maharashtra or even at the National level, though at international level, contribution for this type of tourism is immense & interesting. The aim of this study is to venture in this new area with a task to bring out all such niche potential sites to light & thereby contributing to giving a new dimension to SIT in Maharashtra. With the rapidly growing tourism industry and the increasing no. of unconventional tourist every year the chances for the growth & development of this kind of niche tourism are very favorable.

Key words: Special Interest Tourism, destination, niche tourism.

## I. INTRODUCTION:

The new tourism policy could contribute to Maharashtra state's vision of becoming a Trillion dollar economy by 2025. As per many industry surveys, one tourist approximately can create jobs for 16 people. Tourism industry in Maharashtra has the potential to create 10% of that target.

## MAHARASHTRA STATE VISION:

Sr. No.	Industry sector	Vision
1	Manufacturing	50.6 Billion U.S.\$ budget allocation
2	Agriculture	Promotion of Agri business through PPP, technology enabled integrated agri development, fair pricing for crop produce
3	Infrastructure	6026 km National Highway projects, developments of ports worth U.S.\$ 2.4 Billion
4	Skill Development	Establishing technical universities, scholarship for professional courses
5	<b>Tourism</b>	<b>Promote Heritage, religious, &amp; Adventure tourism. Training workers in the organized &amp; unorganized sectors related to tourism industry.</b>

Source: Confederation of Indian Industry

Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation (MTDC) is currently engaged in promoting destination Maharashtra effectively using the punch line "Maharashtra Unlimited." This brand image of Maharashtra builds upon the international corporate image of Maharashtra & goes further to suggest that, in addition to the business & industry gamut, Maharashtra offers all the tourist products from beaches to mountains, hills, rivers, adventure, & heritage that is unique & unparalleled.

However despite the World Heritage monuments like Ajanta, Ellora, Elephanta, virgin beaches, vast coastline & natural beauty, brand Maharashtra unlimited has not been able to attract the tourists like Rajasthan & Kerala.

The reason is generally pointed by tourism experts is ineffective marketing & lack of branding. There is no effective destination marketing to attract more inbound tourists. Neither does the state govt. nor MTDC really market these prized possessions to the world. Maharashtra state Government's last priority in tourism hence any budget for marketing never found favor with the policy makers.

On the contrary, states like Rajasthan, Kerala have used all kinds of dynamic branding, innovative marketing strategies to sell their tourist products & have been successful. Though we have the best tourism products, Rajasthan & Kerala have carved a niche for themselves & have become market leaders. Unless we brand our tourism products & design aggressive marketing strategies, we will just remain followers. Due to limited no. of tourists, the economical benefits of tourism are lost to the states, resulting in moderate or inadequate revenue that has impacted the business & employment prospects in the state.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW:

Tourism Policy of Maharashtra, 2006 & 2016 were studied minutely to understand the tourism development plans for Maharashtra for the next 10 years. The Policy was drafted in 2006 & 2016 by Govt. of Maharashtra.

The study report on preparation of 20 years perspective plan for development of Sustainable tourism in Maharashtra was also referred. The draft report specifically refers to need of brand image for Maharashtra's tourism and strategy for its marketing. The draft was prepared in 2003 by Joint Director General (MR), Dept. of Tourism

The earliest Literature on **Special Interest Tourism (S.I.T.)** was written by S.E. Read, Hawkins, and Shafter in 1980, where there is mention of Special Interest Tourism as an emerging trend for coming decades.

The book written by A. K. Bhatia, The business of tourism - concepts and strategies highlights the tourism development strategies.

Another book under the title Special Interest Tourism by Norman Douglas also highlights the importance of Special Interest Tourism.

The book titled Wine Tourism around the world written by Colin Michael Hall gives an overview of niche tourism like wine tourism in global perspective

Another book titled Marketing for Hospitality and tourism written by Philip Kotler highlights the Marketing development for service industries viz. tourism and hospitality

The course material for IGNOU - MTM - 7, 2005 refers to managing sales and promotion in tourism industry

The detailed Budget Estimates of Expenditure of Tourism & Cultural Affairs Department, Govt. of Maharashtra was studied minutely to understand the Budget allocation for Tourism for the year 2018 – 2019.

### Purpose of visits by the tourists in the state of Maharashtra:

Purpose	% if overnight domestic visitors	% of domestic day visitors	% of foreign overnight visitors
Business	20	19	19
Holidays,leisure,recreation	13	9	20
social activity	26	23	24
Pilgrimage	10	8	9
Adventure activities	23	30	19
Medical tourism	3	4	4
Shopping	5	7	5

Source: Ministry of Tourism, Govt. of India.

## III. METHODOLOGY:

As the study is still in progress, the study is been done using secondary data. This includes related books, research journals, magazines, periodicals, newspapers, Reports, projects & related dissertations as well as internet websites of related agencies. Important literature in marketing will also be reviewed.

Both Qualitative & Quantitative research strategies will be adopted in future for collecting & disseminating information about Special Interest Tourism in global perspective but in the context of Maharashtra.

## IV. HYPOTHESIS:

1. The concept in Indian context is relatively new & still untouched & seeing the rising trends in niche tourism, this tourism can be introduced for that special segment.
2. The interest component in special interest tourism is always the key determinant.
3. The total experience to the tourist includes this interest & extends beyond instead of focusing on it.

**V. OBJECTIVES:**

1. The main objective is to find out, search & tap the neglected & hidden potentials of Special Interest Tourism in Maharashtra
2. To gain an insight into S.I.T. format as a whole.
3. To investigate into Special Interest Tour packages, offered by trade intermediaries such as Travel agents & Tour operators.
4. Promoting S.I.T. under exclusive package for special interest tourists.
5. To study the types of special interest tourists & segregate them into categories.
6. To find out what motivates a special interest tourist to undertake these tours
7. Imparting knowledge & skills of jobs at management or semi-managerial levels which will include prospective entrepreneurs in this area of niche or special interest tourism.
8. Benefitting the other constituents of travel industry for Ex. Travel agents, hoteliers or tour packaging companies & other players in the field of tourism in providing adequate information & exposure to this field of study.
9. The knowledge gained in undertaking this research will be utilized in understanding the impact of S.I.T. on the social system & the negative or positive derived there from.
  
10. To offer suggestions & recommendations so as to accelerate the pace of promoting S.I.T. in Maharashtra.

In all aspects this research will try to investigate the topic under the broader subject area, right from the point of inception to the final conclusions in a thoroughly measured in a subjective & objective manner.

**SCOPE OF THE STUDY:**

Geographical scope: The geographical scope of study pertains to Maharashtra.

Operational scope: The study will be limited to destinations having unique & special interest in Maharashtra with relevant examples of prominent international destinations.

**BENEFITS OF TOURISM:**

- Simulation of business activity
- Increase in business diversity
- Increase in Taxes collected
- Increase in of Goods & Services
- Increase in community development
- Improvement in standard of living
- Pride of history
- Promote culture, attractions & artifacts
- Conservation & restoration of historic sites & attractions
- Conservation of natural resources as a tourist attraction
- Increase in direct & Indirect employment

**Identification of Special Interest Tourism areas:**

Tourism Maharashtra should identify special interest tourism spots as Tourist hubs. These could be pristine konkan strip, the beaches of Sindhudurg, Mumbai, mountains, valleys,

Sr. No.	Tourism area to be identified	Tourism product	Target market
1	Eco Tourism	Rivers, forest, hills, National parks, wildlife sanctuaries, nature trails	Scientists, nature lovers, wildlife photographers, film makers
2	Beach tourism	Scuba diving, snorkeling, marine parks, sea based water sports	Millennials, adventure tourists
3	Adventure tourism	Safaris, trekking, hiking, mountain climbing, river rafting, parasailing	Millennials, adventure tourists
4	Culture, Heritage tourism	World Heritage sites, monuments, archeological sites, fairs & festivals, handicrafts, museums, art galleries	International tourists, heritage lovers, archeologists
5	Agro/rural tourism	Rural lifestyle, rural cuisine, local food products, local folk dance, music	Urban tourists, foreigners, etc.
6	Gastronomic/Food/wine tourism	Food festivals, regional cuisines, food shows	Food lovers, food critics, chefs
7	Corporate/MICE tourism	Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, Exhibitions, dealer interactions, trade shows & expo	Business tourists, corporate travelers

**Significance & relevance of the study:**

1. The study is important as special Interest tourism in Maharashtra is gaining more significance.
2. With the increase in discretionary & disposable income, the number of more affluent special interest tourist is also on the rise.
3. If tourism trends are carefully plotted, then all forms of Special Interest Tourism such as adventure & sports tourism, ethnic & rural tourism, educational tourism, gourmet & food tourism, fashion tourism, space tourism, health & wellness tourism, film tourism, inclusive tourism, dark or doom tourism all these can be successfully transformed into popular tourist hub.
4. Special interest tourism will help in generating revenue & offer employment opportunities to local population, thereby contributing to the economic upliftment of the destination as a whole.
5. This research will enable special interest tourism in getting recognition at international platform.

**VI. FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- The tourism industry has the potential to change the economic, social conditions of the state by influx of Foreign exchange, employment, infrastructure development. At the moment the industry in the Maharashtra state's vision lacks behind other industries such as agriculture, manufacturing. The state must give tourism industry its due importance & invest in it as its top priority. Subsequently, the budget allocation for tourism industry which is insufficient should be increased manifold.
- Special Interest Tourism products should be packaged so that its use in tourism economy will be enhanced which will be ultimately contribute to commercial viability of tourism business.
- The study will bring about awareness about potential special interest tourist clients of the business i.e. niche market segment, customer base who are interested in S.I.T. destination viz. families, young singles, single woman travelers, high spending professionals, researchers, what motivates such travelers towards special interest destinations & how to connect with them?

- The study would bring a clarity on competitive position of S.I.T. as compared to other traditional forms of tourism.
- The study will find out limitations & offer the suitable suggestions which could assist the special interest tourism industry to inculcate the ideas.
- All the identified special interest tourism products should be aggressively marketed, branded professionally on not just website but all social networking platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, WhatsApp, etc.
- Change is the only constant entity. Today's era is of digital disruption. Tourism being an umbrella industry & its allied Hospitality industry are the recipients & early adopters of digital revolution. Hospitality companies like Airbnb, OYO are changing the face of Hospitality industry making traditional players of Hospitality redundant.
- The following segments & trends would change the face of service industry like Travel & Tourism & SIT products must be incorporated in the same:
- Artificial Intelligence (AI) enabled business.
- Use of cloud based computing in Travel & Hotel business. Cloud based reservation systems are also becoming increasingly popular due to convenience of direct booking which leads to direct revenues.
- Crypto currency & Block chain, although this technology is in its nascent stage hotels, airlines & travel business are improving their service quality, guest satisfaction, & profitability by integrating Block chain technology.
- (IOT) The Internet of things in Travel & Hospitality business are using following trends for business optimization: Guest room automation, Predictive maintenance, Mobile engagement of prospective clients, Hyper personalization, Application Programming interfaces, & third party integrations.

## VII. CONCLUSION:

Although the efforts of state tourism corporation are lauded, there is a dire need to brand special interest tourism products aggressively to compete against other state tourism counterparts. We should take pride in our own glorious heritage & culture & know the pulse of the tourists whether domestic or international. Fortunately there are visionaries at the helm of affairs of Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation (MTDC) who are leaving no stones unturned, but a lot needs to be done. The aim of the study is to further the cause of MTDC's vision to brand Maharashtra Tourism on a global forefront.