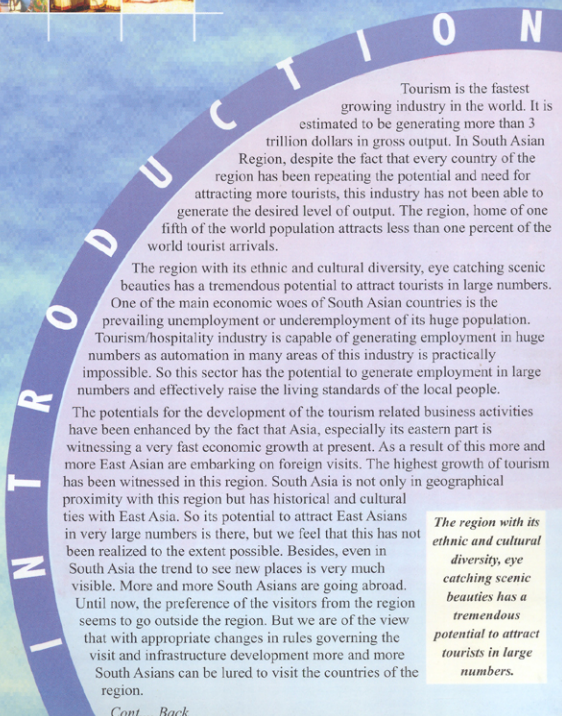




SAARC Tourism Marketing Conference



Tourism is the fastest growing industry in the world. It is estimated to be generating more than 3 trillion dollars in gross output. In South Asian Region, despite the fact that every country of the region has been repeating the potential and need for attracting more tourists, this industry has not been able to generate the desired level of output. The region, home of one fifth of the world population attracts less than one percent of the world tourist arrivals.

The region with its ethnic and cultural diversity, eye catching scenic beauties has a tremendous potential to attract tourists in large numbers. One of the main economic woes of South Asian countries is the prevailing unemployment or underemployment of its huge population. Tourism/hospitality industry is capable of generating employment in huge numbers as automation in many areas of this industry is practically impossible. So this sector has the potential to generate employment in large numbers and effectively raise the living standards of the local people.

The potentials for the development of the tourism related business activities have been enhanced by the fact that Asia, especially its eastern part is witnessing a very fast economic growth at present. As a result of this more and more East Asian are embarking on foreign visits. The highest growth of tourism has been witnessed in this region. South Asia is not only in geographical proximity with this region but has historical and cultural ties with East Asia. So its potential to attract East Asians in very large numbers is there, but we feel that this has not been realized to the extent possible. Besides, even in South Asia the trend to see new places is very much visible. More and more South Asians are going abroad. Until now, the preference of the visitors from the region seems to go outside the region. But we are of the view that with appropriate changes in rules governing the visit and infrastructure development more and more South Asians can be lured to visit the countries of the region.

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Views Shared at Conference



The direct private sector participation and contribution are valuable for the South Asian countries to proceed productively because politicians can only pave the way through policy decisions. Several meetings are to be conducted by the dignitaries of the South Asian countries regarding deliberating issues, constraints, prospects and activities to realise closer cooperation in the tourism sector, all this is brought a goal for moving towards economic and social development within the South Asian countries. South Asian countries should develop and project natural, historic and cultural locations as products with singular identity. When the South Asian region will be projected as single market, unimaginable revenue would be generated. South Asian countries must develop and promote not only intra-region tourism but also tourism for the other countries into the region. Governments of the South Asian countries encourage the SCCI tourism council to carry out its task by acting as a catalyst for the development of tourism in the South Asian region. South Asian nations should activate the right promotional mixtures, joint participation of travel fairs and offers of joint tour packages. All the dignitaries as government representatives of the South Asian nations are in a process of fulfilling the tourism promotional needs. SAARC traveller spends several times more than average tourist and the tourism industry generate higher percentage of support services, thereby increases level of employment.

Arjuna Ranatunga the Hon'ble Dy. Minister of Industry, Tourism, Investment Promotion of the Government of Sri Lanka.

I am happy that we are exchanging views with topic experts and government officials on this important, relevant and timely subject, which while discussing its challenges and opportunities for the future.

Today tourism is the world's largest growing industry with tremendous potential to contribute to the overall socio-economic development of nations. The sector possesses and provides immense income, employment and foreign exchange generation potential to the economy. The potential and benefit of the tourism industry becomes more relevant to developing countries of SAARC region. As a matter of fact, what we have achieved till today is just the tip of the iceberg against the potential that our region enjoys in the tourism sector. While we have woken up to this dismal reality, we have a lot to do to increase our share of the global tourism market for the benefit of our people and economies. The SAARC Head of States in the 12th SAARC Summit in Pakistan announced and designated the year 2005 as "South Asia Tourism Year" and vowed to jointly promote tourism within the region by improving air links and promoting special events. To promote tourism in South Asia, SCCI is introducing a publication, "Destination SAARC", which will be used as a means of promoting tourism in the SAARC member countries. The publication has been published with a tourist perspective, providing them with an insight into SAARC region thus could be used as a tourist guide for the travelers, providing traveler tips about the best touring places in the SAARC region.

Macky Hashim, President, SAARC Chambers of Commerce and Industry.



Tourism is regarded as a major force for socio-economic development and has a very positive impact in foreign exchange earnings and employment generation particularly in developing countries. Tourism represents approximately 7% of the worldwide export of goods and services. More than US \$ 1.5 b is spent by international tourists every single day on tourism. South Asian region despite the blessing of natural beauty fails to attract the tourists. Political uncertainty, inflexible visa policy, inactivation of the SAARC tourists committees, ineffective communication network etc are the barriers for the growth of South Asian countries. Effective implementation plans can be beneficial to promote intra-region and inter-regional tourism.

Tariq Sayeed, Former President, Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce & Industry.

South Asia recorded an impressive increase of 23%, however, this is less than 1% of the world tourist arrival. This is a pointer to the enormous potential that is waiting to be tapped in region which would not only lead to direct income generation but also have a multiplier effect on employment creation and poverty reduction.

Tourism marketing is incomplete without emphasizing upon the need to drastically improve and create infrastructural facilities of international standards with respect to roads, hotels, airports and security. This is an area where the private sector would require the active support and involvements of our Governments.

Onkar Kanwar, President, Federation of Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

9/11 incident has lowered down the rate of tourists from 700 m to 693 m in the year 2003 but now this figure jumps to 763 m. There should be a calculated time at the airports and even the little issues should be checked strictly and developed properly. Cooperation within the South Asian countries and collaboration with the private sector is important for marketing the tourism. Making the life of the tourists easier by the reduction in visa problems, technological improvement, security, development of destinations, low hotel and travelling tariffs etc would boom the tourism revenue.

Pradip Madhavji, Chairman, SAARC Chamber Tourism Council



The global tourism industry is expected to reach 1.6 b i.e. it is expected to double by the year 2020. The cruise tourism is the fastest growing tourism segment with annual growth rates of 8% and the cruise passenger base of 9.6 m. The average income per cruise passenger is high compared to the general tourist at \$ 1341. The cruise fleet which stands at 257 is expected to increase in the coming years. The total revenues that are expected to be generated from world cruise tourism are expected to rise from 12.54 m to 17.5 m by 2007. South Asian countries have the historic and very important sea shores for the international tourists. Various ports were directed by the Governments of South Asian countries to reduce their tariffs and other port charges and they have done so, ranging between 30 to 40%. I think what India has to offer could very well be summed up in the words of the French Scholar Romain Roland "If there is one place on the face of earth where all dreams of living men have found a home from the very earliest days when man began the dream of existence it is India."

Rani Jadhav, Chairperson, Mumbai Port Trust.



South Asian region despite its great potential is getting less than 5% of the total arrival of Asia Pacific and less than 1% of the world tourist arrival as per the World Tourism Organization. The great tourism potential of our region can turn into reality only by the concerted efforts by the member states to develop necessary physical infrastructure, skilled manpower, effective inter-linkages smooth connectivity and proper positioning, marketing and promotion of the joint products in the international market. Nepal has one of the top most worth seeing destinations in the world. Nepal has world class eco-tourism and adventure destinations and very friendly and hospitable people. Media, collaborative campaigns, and the tourism departments should work together for the positive promotion of tourism. The current policy of the Government of Nepal has very liberal policies as far as aviation, infrastructure and foreign investment are concerned.

Nandini Thapa, the Chief Operating Officer, Nepal Tourism Board

Some analysis is done about the SAARC countries and it is quite bitter. In SAARC, S stands for syndicate, South Asians suspect each other. A stands for Accessibility, South Asians don't make things accessible, they make it difficult. A stands for Action, no action by speeches and intellectual gymnastics. R stands for Regulations; South Asians have over regulated themselves. Roads and railways of the South Asian countries finish at their borders. And C is for Connectivity. A book on poverty eradication and economic development for tourism is written by Mr. Subhash. The only thing SAARC countries have to do is creation of jobs and what are the better ways of creating jobs from tourism. All the South Asian countries need to take corrective actions. South Asian countries should exchange their money directly. South Asian nations should think in terms of the Asian Union, think in terms of a South Asian Airline where all the South Asian countries should be 10% or 15% stake holders.

Subhash Goyal, President, Indian Association of Tour Operators.

Where ever there are challenges, the way I look at it, there are also opportunities. The opportunities in South Asia are tremendous. There is no other area of natural beauty like the South Asia. If you look at the general travel market internationally there is a huge market sitting there in middle and South Asian nations must find a way to tap it. South Asian countries have to think about how to market their places and which type of community to be marketed. South Asian nations are losing out at the moment, there is a huge potential; domestically South Asian countries are very fortunate. South Asia has a large travelling market. I think the opportunities that South Asian countries have are quite unique, and South Asian countries need a platform where private companies and the Governments of the South Asian countries can work unanimously together for marketing of tourism.

Heiner Werdeling the Vice President and General Manager, Intercontinental Mumbai.

Increased flow of tourists will lead to increase in the people to people contacts in the region. These contacts result not only to increased cooperation in the economic arena but increased mutual understanding and thus, reduction of tensions and solution of many of our problems. Having realized the importance and scope for promotion of tourism in the region, the SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI) from the time of its inception has recognized tourism as one of its priority area of action. This is evident not only from the number of seminars and workshops that it has regularly organized for the private sector as well as Government representatives but also from the various publications and policy papers that it has brought out. Recently SCCI introduced a publication, "Destination SAARC", to promote tourism in South Asia in SAARC Tourism Marketing Conference on 19 March 2005 in Mumbai. Conference focuses was to identifying bottlenecks, highlights major policy issues for Tourism promotion, intra-regional connectivity and help evolve solutions for better marketability of the region's destinations.

Tourism marketing is incomplete without emphasizing upon the need to drastically improve and create infra-structural facilities of international standards with respect to roads, hotels, airports and security. This is an area where the private sector would require the active support and involvements of our Governments.

Conference Recommendations

1. Tourism vision and strategy to be developed and put into place.
2. For revenue generation there is need to increase the share of the international visitors arrivals which will consequently help in creation of employment and poverty reduction.
3. Single visa scheme on the lines of European entry visa should be initiated for SAARC region to increase the number of visitors.
4. Civil aviation needs to be opened up and the private sector should be allowed to operate on international routes. Direct air connections to major tourism destinations within South Asia must be developed.
5. Improved tourism infrastructure and services like roads, buses, trains, sea liners, and our complex rules for visitors with lengthy procedures that actively discourage travel by surface transport.
6. The need to focus and be more professional in the marketing arena, identify funds and explore new markets has high importance in tourism.
7. Institutional capacity building, joint publicity through electronic and print media is demand of this century for tourism promotion.



Bangladesh



Bhutan



India



Maldives



Nepal



Pakistan



Sri Lanka



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