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Opportunity and challenges in Educational Tourism for SMEs in India

Anup Kumar
ankumar@imtnag.ac.in

Dr Santosh Srivastava
sksrivastava@imt.edu

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Opinion paper




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Author #1

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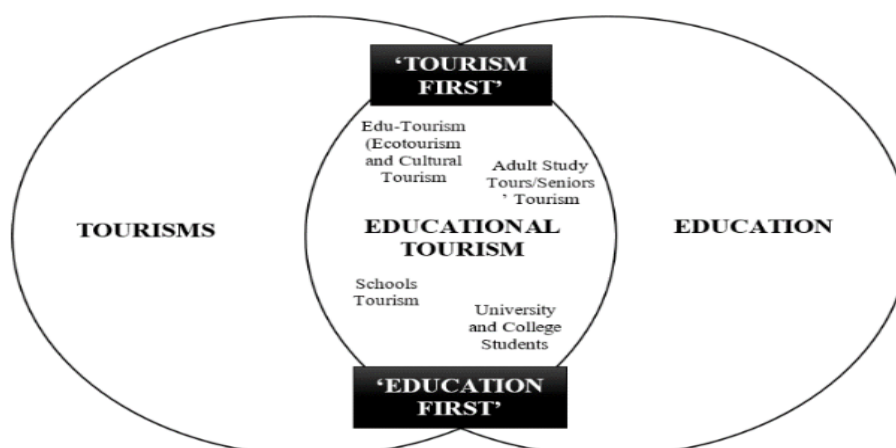
Opportunity and challenges in Educational Tourism for SMEs in India

Levering untapped opportunity of education tourism

It is heartening to know that the tourism sector has been given the status of the industry in most of the states of India. There may be a scope and potential for exploring a new dimension of tourism by way of finding out various aspects of educational tourism. The educational tourism supply chain may provoke a new opportunity for SMEs in India.

Educational Tourism is one of the fastest growing areas of travel and tourism and is too often overlooked by tourism professionals and marketers. As tourism has been given the status of an industry, it is important to explain the scope and potential of educational tourism in India. The last few decades have witnessed a proliferation of tour operators and travel agencies offering educational tour packages to school groups and university or college students. The rise in life-long learning and the growing cohort of healthy retirees with disposable income has added further to its growth. The demographics range of educational tourists from pre-school children to senior citizens provides endless opportunities for the development of educational tourism in India.

Some of the states of India has bestowed with a natural gift that can be leveraged for educational tourism like eastern states of India, Himalayan states of India, Western and Eastern Ghats as well as Gondwana region. It will be important to capitalize on this unique advantage that the state has over the others. Also, India has bestowed with demographic dividend among Saarc countries that have a huge opportunity for fulfilling the education tourism supply. Educational tours play an important role in educating learners in a practical and interesting manner. Keeping this aspect in mind, institutions like IIMs , IITs and some reputed organization have started offering international immersion courses to leverage the potential of educational tourism.



Two Main Component of Educational Tourism Sources: Abubakar et al., (2014) and Ritchie et al., (2003, p. 13)

There are two components of education tourism as shown in the figure . The synergy effect of these two sectors may create an ocean of opportunities for SMEs.

International Status & National Status

The main objective of the tourist is acquiring new knowledge about culture or history from other countries or cities. It is a trending type of tourism in many world regions, particularly in

Europe. The travel market aimed at learning a foreign language is a remarkable example of this type of tourism. This segment is steadily growing, especially in those destinations that can offer a language that is widely used internationally. While the current revenues of language schools are only 15 million euro, it is estimated that there is a potential market of 375 million people who want to travel to learn a language, especially if this experience is combined with other activities that are based on the local culture (ALTO, 2008). Some state of India like Uttarakhand, Kashmir, and seven sister states are already into the tourism of Yoga, Meditation, values of ethics and leadership and it is widely accepted.

The following educational tourism activities are already very popular in some states of India:

- School trips: It pays the community to create reasons for school children to visit. While these trips rarely translate directly into overnight stays, they can help promote tourism industry in two ways: (1) children may bring their parents back for a longer visit and (2) they aid the local restaurant business and shops.
- Study abroad experiences: Major universities around the world promote some form of foreign travel for their students. Study abroad experiences provide students with anything from 6-week intensive study sessions to a full year of cultural and linguistic immersion. US universities that have long seen themselves as student-exporters have now come to realize that non-English speaking students seek US study abroad adventures too. Students often travel not only within their destination country of choice but throughout that country and even to neighboring lands. The goal here is to widen the educational experience so that university students do not only know their own culture but also that of at least one other nation.
- Seminar Vacations and senior citizen seminars: These types of travel experience especially appeal to those who have recently retired. Programs such as elder hostel provide senior citizens with everything from a chance to learn about the arts to physics lectures or astronomy. They are conducted at camps and on campuses around the world. Closely related to seminar vacations are “hands-on enhanced experience” vacations. For example, each year thousands of people travel to Israel to learn something about an archaeological dig and then pay to participate on such a dig.
- Skill enhancement vacations: These are trips that range from learning how to build houses to how to protect the ecology. Nations such as Costa Rica have been extremely successful with eco-tourism in which they combine lessons on how to protect the world’s ecology with the travel experience.
- Educational cruises: These cruises combine all of the fun of a cruise with lectures on specific subjects. Educational cruises have the advantage that people who take them tend to have a common interest and therefore have a greater possibility of making new friends while acquiring new knowledge.

Opportunities for SME in Educational Tourism:

1. Cost and Quality: High-quality education is available in India at a low price.
2. Demographic and environmental Impact: India has the opportunity of demographic dividend in environmental factors like a natural landscape, sea and beach, favorable climate and weather conditions.

3. Regulatory factors: In the education sector, India has achieved flexible credit based examination systems as well as it is easy to get an education visa and get admissions in Indian universities and institutions.
4. Cultural: India has a multicuisine and secular country. It is a home of almost all regions and cultures and the English language is now a binding factor for all regional languages.
5. Political and Safety factor: Since a decade, India has got strong leadership and stable political environment which is free with terrorism and anti-social activity.

Challenges for SMEs in Educational Tourism:

1. Perceived risk of discrimination and race among neighbor countries students.
2. Most of the neighboring countries have their native language other than English. There may be fear to learn the second language in students.
3. There is a lack of opportunities for immigrant students, to have a part-time job while doing education or post-graduation employment or emigration opportunity.

Ending remarks:

Ray Kroc, McDonald's founder once said: "None of us is as good as all of us." Even if we are capable to do all the work alone, the benefits of the effort of two or more people working together to achieve the same goals will always be greater. Synergy brings the combined resonance at its top level, therefore, it gives the opportunity to leverage the combined effect of education and tourism. SMEs must leverage this untapped ocean of opportunity.

Authors:

Anup Kumar, Institute of Management Technology, Nagpur and Santosh Shrivastava, Institute of Management Technology, Nagpur

Author Details



Anup Kumar, Assistant Professor (Operations and Analytics), Institute of Management Technology, Nagpur.



Santosh Shrivastava, Assistant Professor (Business Analytics), Institute of Management Technology, Nagpur.
