

TOURISM VALUATION IN ANDAMAN AND NICOBAR ISLANDS OF INDIA: A PRE & POST TSUNAMI ANALYSIS



The Andaman & Nicobar Islands of India are the paragon of beauty and present a landscape with scenic and picturesque extravaganza. The tsunami of December 2004 completely dislocated the life-style of the islanders and the tourism sector suffered a serious setback. Due to untiring efforts of local administration, the tourism sector not only regained its lost ground after four years of tsunami; the islands registered a higher tourism value in terms of more numbers of domestic and foreign tourists as well as number of tourist spots visited in interior areas.

Tourism in the islands

Tourism began in Port Blair, the capital city as well as a bustling commercial hub, in the late 1970s with the opening of a hotel called Andaman Beach Resort. In the 1980s and 1990s, more hotels came up in Port Blair. For about 20 years, until 2000-01, tourism grew at a slow pace. It was limited to lower & middle class and backpack tourists. Until 2000-01 the majority of the tourists roamed in and around Port Blair with the main tourist attractions being the Cellular Jail, Mahatma Gandhi Marine National Park (MGMNP) near Wandoor, Ross Island, Chatham Saw Mill, Corbyn"s Cove Beach, Mini Zoo and various museums in the city. The MGMNP remained the most important spot as this Park could provide a single platform for viewing tropical flora and fauna of the islands including marine diversity. Before 2001, if someone said that it would be difficult to locate a tourist coming to these islands and not paying a visit to this Park, then he was absolutely right. The number of tourists visiting the Park at that time would approximately be the same as those coming to the islands.

Pre-tsunami tourism

Two Indian researchers, Chaudhry and Tewari, from Arid Forest Research Institute, Jodhpur estimated the recreational use value of MGMNP during 2001-02 using travel cost methodology and different states of India as zones in the study. The annual tourism recreational value of the park was estimated around Rs. 25 million. Since the travel costs incurred by the domestic tourists in visiting MGMNP are the actual travel costs for arriving in A & N islands Rs. 25 million represents mainly the annual tourism recreational value of the islands before tsunami. This estimate however seems to be on conservative side as foreign tourists were not included in the analysis.

Post-tsunami tourism

The annual tourist arrival in the islands, which was below 50,000 in the late nineties started growing continuously in the years just before tsunami and the tourist arrival figure was around 110 000 in

2004. The tourism sector suffered a serious setback in 2005 due to tsunami and barely 30 000 domestic tourists visited the islands. Due to the intensive efforts of A & N administration, a tourist boom is underway in the islands at present with Port Blair as the fulcrum.

Prior to tsunami, hardly 10% of the tourists used to visit tourist spots outside Port Blair city. Earlier tourists used to visit the islands mainly between Oct. to Feb months, but now they are arriving throughout the year, thanks to the wider publicity and campaigns by the Directorate of Tourism, information and publicity of the islands. At the same time tourists are arriving in droves at Port Blair and more than two thirds of them are traveling out to the outer places of tourist interest in these islands. Tourist arrivals are gradually increasing after tsunami and have touched the annual figure of 146 000 in 2007.

The travel costs to these islands from mainland India have remained almost constant after tsunami in comparison to the years 1997-01, in spite of world wide upsurge in fuel charges. Main reason for this miracle seems to be better availability and stiff competition among various airlines operating at present and the concept of apex fares, which was not available before 2002-03. The point to be emphasized here is that the travel costs remaining almost the same whereas the average number of tourists increasing to almost three times during the calendar years of 2006 and 2007 in comparison to the years 1997-2001. Therefore annual tourism recreational value of the islands which was estimated as Rs. 25 million during 2001-02, might be safely pegged at Rs. 75 million in the year 2007-08 i.e. three times than that estimated before tsunami.

Number of tourists visiting A & N islands

Pre-tsunami period:

2003: 98 180 tourists

2004: 109 582 tourists

Post-tsunami period:

2005: 32 389 tourists

2006: 127 625 tourists

2007: 146 545 tourists

(text shortened)

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