Probing the Level of Satisfaction towards the Motivation Factors of Tourism in Kurdistan Region

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Abstract: The Kurdistan Regional Government's (KRG) strategy is to expand tourism industry as a substitute to energy economy. Tourism industry has been flourished in Kurdistan, but the level of tourist satisfaction toward the motives of tourism is still unclear. This study aims to examine the condition of tourism industry in Kurdistan Region. It also aims to evaluate motivational factors that influence tourist decision. This leads to understand obstacles of tourism in the region and helps KRG to formulate a national policy to overcome tourism hampers. The study also identifies the level of satisfaction towards tourism industry in Kurdistan Region which is believed to be the most important condition to secure good position in tourist market destinations. The quantitative method of research has been employed through the use of questionnaire ($N=133$). The findings indicated that Kurdistan is in a good condition to develop tourism sector. The motivational factors such as general treatment of local people, nature, cultural and historical attractions, hospitality, tourism facilities, prices, and destination image are in a good condition. The level of satisfaction is reasonably high among tourists. However, there are still concern about entertainment and recreation activities, tourism infrastructure, and quality of environment and level of noise. The KRG can better manage this industry if it creates a positive distinction image and commercialize the industry.
Keywords: Tourism, motivation factors, destination image, hospitality, recreation.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism involves the short term movement of people to destinations outside the places where they normally live and work. It also involves the activities of people [1], referred to as tourists or visitors, during their visit to these destinations and the facilities services patronized during their stay. The World Tourism Organization defined tourism as activity of people traveling to and spending time in a place which is outside of their original environment for the period of less than a year. However, tourism does not only mean exit from a country to another, but it involves three components including accommodation, locale and transport [2]. Tourist on the other hand is defined as any people on trip between two or more countries or location within the original location which he/she resides [3]. Moreover, anyone traveling for such purposes as recreation, holiday, health, sports, family reasons, business, on a mission or as a delegate at a conference, staying at least 24 hours and overnight, but not more than one (1) year is considered as tourist. On the similar vein, Sharpley [4] indicates that tourism does not only include people who are on holiday, but it can be students studying abroad, people on business

outside their original destination, and religious pilgrimages.

Reindl and Staudinger [5] provided more details regarding the concept of tourism. They have highlighted three criteria of tourism which involves moving out from original environment to the new destination, the purpose of the traveling that should not be restricted but it to be expended to recreation, visiting family, friends, and also includes a large array of activities and purposes, finally the duration of the visit starts from an overnight visit to a year.

In the past years, the KRG was criticized for its reliance on oil revenue. However, the KRG was struggling to diversify its economy and tourism is one of the key sectors that attracted KRG policy makers. The KRG tourism sector was about to flourish before the emergence of Islamic state and the fall of oil prices. However, the KRG was unable to develop this sector as it has to be [6]. Thus, this study aims (1) to evaluate motivational factors and identify factors that hampers KRG vision to develop tourism industry; (2) identify the level of satisfaction towards tourism industry in Kurdistan Region which is believed to be the most

important condition for a good positioning in tourist market destinations [7, 8].

Literature Review

Tourism is an important activity that brings happiness and prosperity for the tourists and the destination [9]. Individuals choose alternative tourist destination based on their preferences, but there are motives that determine tourists' choices [8, 10, 11]. The tourist motivation is portrayed as a condition or a need that drives people towards particular type of action that sought to bring individual satisfaction [12]. The motivation may include: emotional, cognition, events, social and cultural factor [13, 14] physical challenges, and escape from routines [8, 12, 10]. Further, Liu [9] summarized the key motivations as escapism, mental and physical relaxation, experiencing differences, expanding knowledge, understanding and visiting cultural and historical sites, adventure, and attaching to the new culture.

According to the social psychological model, there are two motivational factors that explain leisure behavior includes escaping and seeking [15]. People travel to escape from psychological trauma and stress [12] and engage in certain leisure activities. At the same time, people engage in leisure activities to learn and experience new environment and culture [14].

There are number of alternatives that are considered by the tourists when making decision among alternative factors. For instance, Nicolau and Ma's[4] identified some motivational factors that are among tourist preferences when making decision embraces culture and historical resources, quality and variety of food, rest and relaxation facilities, good shopping, health and fitness facilities. Hsieh [10] on the other hands provided a constructive measurement to examine the impacts of motivational factors which included physical motivations, cultural motivation, and social components. The physical motivations refer to the relaxation, stress avoidance and individual well-being through physical exercise. The author associated cultural motivation to learn and experiencing new things and new places. The interpersonal motivation as he mentions comprises meeting friends and family members, but social component is to meet people in general and socializing through interpersonal interaction that stimulates intellectual enrichment and stimuli avoidance [10].

In tourism there is are two common factors that influences individuals to make their decision regarding the destination of their preference known as push and pull factors [16-18]. The push factor is described as the influence in which convinces people to make their initial decision regarding the selection of the destination, and pull factor is portrayed as a factor that effects people in their choice of particular type of vocation [14, 19].

Culture and heritage are among the underlying determinants of tourists' behavior and stimulates individual tourist choices [12, 20, 21]. Other than cultural factors, prestige, kinship enhancement social interaction is also studied by the scholars as motivational factor that influences tourists to make their tourist decision. Visitors are sometimes seeking a connection with their roots and cultural heritage [22]. Social interaction of tourists enhances knowledge and tourist behavior. Even though, one of the major purpose of tourism is happiness and leisure [9], but self-esteem and search for knowledge seen as a motive. Sometimes, people make decision to go on vocation for the sole reason of learning and search for knowledge. Tourism can expand tourist knowledge and forms understanding of particular culture or system.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed quantitative method to provide constructive solution to the problem. This method facilitated the data collection process from a large number of population through quantitative method which mainly relied on survey. The sample population selected for this study classified into categories. The first categories were national (56.4%) or domestic tourists mainly from other parts of Iraq. The second category was inbound or foreign tourists (43.6%) from 16 different nationalities. The sufficient sample size as Fink (2002) referred to the number of units required to obtain the right result, administered. The total of 153 questions were administered and out of this number, 133 questions returned ($N=133$). For the data analysis the descriptive statistics used through the use of Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistic is important tool describes features of data and helps to manage, measure, compute, synthesize and systematically interpret data through simple display of the data summary [23]. The background of the respondents classified based on their age, gender, education and type of tourism. The age of the respondents ranged from 18-25 years (35.3%), 26-45 years (51.9%), and above 45 years (12%). The male respondents accounted for nearly 60% with 40% for women. On the other hands, in terms of education, respondents with degree and diploma equally accounted for 25.6 percent for each, and 9.8 percent for respondents with postgraduate degree.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In the below table items, mean and standard deviation of the data are presented. The first column presents the items. The second column is the number of the respondents. The third column represents the given mean for each item and the last column is the standard deviation of the data.

Table-1: Descriptive Statistics

Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
General treatment of local people	133	3.9023	.92822
Nature and scenery	133	3.8797	1.13510
Cultural and Historical Attractions	133	3.8421	1.03603
Hospitality	133	3.7744	1.04168
Restaurants and pubs	133	3.7368	1.14743
Safety and Security	133	3.7218	1.23309
Local foods	133	3.6767	1.16482
Price of local transportation	133	3.6241	1.17164
Destination Image	133	3.6165	1.19799
Price of food and beverages	133	3.6090	1.12030
Price of products	133	3.6015	1.13445
Size of accommodation	133	3.5564	1.16394
Atmosphere	133	3.5564	1.18330
Preservation of environment	133	3.5489	1.19002
Price of accommodation	133	3.5338	1.15830
Language and communication	133	3.5263	1.15849
Quality of accommodation	133	3.5113	1.17174
Level of noise	133	3.4361	1.22074
Hot springs and quality of environment	133	3.4135	1.20685
Amusement	133	3.4060	1.22498
Infrastructure	133	3.3910	1.30752
Entertainment and Recreation Activities	133	3.3158	1.15055
Valid N (listwise)	133		

According to Table 1, the highest tourist level of satisfaction belongs to the general treatment of local people with mean score of 3.90. This could be interpreted in the way that local people are friendly and open for tourists. In fact, the treatment of people is very significant for the tourists and creates a positive image for the given destination. The natural beautify of Kurdistan is also a positive aspects of tourism industry that fulfills tourists' preferences (*M=3.87*). The availability of beautiful natural environment and scenery is also another factor of tourism development in Kurdistan Region. Large number of domestic tourists from other parts of Iraq travel to the region to see natural beauty of the country, waterfalls, mountains and lakes especially during the hot season.

The historical attractions, the hospitality of the local people are also matter for tourists [24]. It was not surprising that cultural and historical attractions achieved a very high mean score (*M=3.84*) as the region has several ancient and historical sites such as Shanadar Cave, Erbil Citadel which dates to the 5th millennium BC and it has been inscribed on the UNISCO World Heritage List since June 21, 2014. Inscribing in the World Heritage Site by UNESCO ensures the preservation, identification and transmission of the site to the future generation and thus give a high universal value from historical, aesthetics and conservation perspective [25]. However, the availability of historical sites does not solely determine the level of satisfaction, but there are other factors such as services provided by the government

and viability of the local community for tourism stimulation in their areas [26]. This region is actually having priority to be the future spot for international tourists. The region was the birthplace of some of the ancient civilizations like Assyrian and Median. Also, the findings indicate that the heterogeneous and rich culture of Kurdistan plays an important role in attracting tourists to the region. There are museums with the large collection of antiques, status and some of the museum as in Duhok displays the Kurdish folklore and heritage [25].

The security is one of the key issue in the Middle East that somehow affecting the image of the entire Middle East Region. Destination image plays a substantial role in the development of tourism and competitiveness of the destination and tourist satisfaction [8, 27, 23, 28. Despite the war of ISIS and the geopolitics of the region, the finding shows that tourists are satisfied with destination image (*M=3.61*) the safety and security (*M=3.72*) of Kurdistan. This will bring a better image for the country to develop the industry. Image as explained by Xianyang and Kai [29] is an effective representation of tourist perception about the destination. The level of satisfaction for "safety and security" was also high (*M=3.72*). Safety and security of the tourists is priority to develop tourism industry and people should be convinced that they will not face any security concern if they decide to visit the region. To avoid the confusion by the tourists, the authorities have to provide information sources as a mean for enhancing positive image of destination and

target tourist groups. Thus, public authorities have to provide tourist brochures, tour operator, advertisement through the use of mass media, travel agency, internet, organic sources, autonomous sources such as reports, documentaries and other media related programs [30]. Such campaigns will profoundly give a better image to Kurdistan region and endorse the distinctiveness of the region from the rest of the middle east particularly in terms of security and safety. It's really vital for the local authorities to enhance a uniqueness of the Kurdistan and create a distinct identity as tourist is likely seeking for uniqueness [28].

On the other hands, this study investigated whether tourists are satisfied with the nightlife facilities, restaurants, prices and transportation. As shown in the above table, tourists are satisfied with the availability of restaurants and pubs (*M=3.73*) The number of the restaurants, hotels and clubs have increased in the last few years. It's a booming business in the region; thus, it's not surprising that tourists are satisfied with the number of restaurants and pubs in Kurdistan especially in Ainkawa and other tourist spots. The price of the foods and products along with transportation again does not become an obstacle for the tourists. Overall the respondents satisfied with the prices (*M=3.60*) and the type of foods served for the tourists. Most recently, several restaurants opened and serving Western, Asian, and Middle Eastern food. Also, some brands like Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC), Pizza Hut and several other brands operating in the region, while they don't have their brands in other parts of Iraq. Only between 2007 and 2011, the number of hotels increased from 106 to 199, motels from 49 to 126, tourist villages from 29 to 44 and restaurants from 129 to 305 [31]. Since then, this number has been increased rapidly. These factors are important to develop this important sector of economy.

According to the Table 1, all items scored the mean value of 3 which shows a good level of satisfaction, but there are some items that achieved the least scores. The level of satisfaction for entertainment and recreation activities was lowest (*N=133 M=3.31*) and it's the lowest among other items. Actually, the number of activities takes place in the region is not adequate for the tourists. When Erbil chosen as 2014 Arab Tourist Capital by the Arab Council of Tourism, the city hosted a large number of activities including skydiving, international marathon, traditional Kurdish Dance, other cultural activities, but this number has decreased so far. In fact, the activities are very important to be covered by press and shown to the tourists to improve the competitiveness of the tourist destination and influence tourist choice [23]. The study also indicates that infrastructure (*M=3.39*) amusement (*M=3.40*), hot spring, and quality of environment (*M=3.41*) placed at the bottom of the list. The quality of education, and language are not seen to be a problem, but should be improved in order to increase the number of tourists[32].

CONCLUSION

Tourism industry has been developed in Kurdistan and seen to be the alternative of oil and energy sector. The investment in this sector has been increased as a large number of tourists visiting the region annually. There are several factors that generates tourism to any destination. This study identified factors that are vital to attract tourists to the country. One of the most important motivational factor is the destination image. Tourists are usually travel to the place where it has a distinct identity, safe and stable. Kurdistan is very safe in terms of security and the crime rate is very low. However, being part of Iraq has given the region a bad image especially for the international tourists. It even become a surprise for the foreigner who visit the country and experience no security concern. The government has to show that positive image to the international tourists and motivate them to choose Kurdistan as their tourism spot through press and marketing advertisement. Giving priority to the culture, foods, historical attractions, nature can mark Kurdistan on the world map of tourism. In fact, the domestic tourists from other parts of Iraq has dominated tourism industry in Kurdistan, but it's not adequate enough for this sector to develop. Therefore, the government have to attract more tourists from other parts of the world and provide information sources in order to create awareness regarding the stability and distinctiveness of the region. The beautiful nature, different culture, language, history, heritage, hospitality, and seasonal climate are all supportive to commercialize the industry. The KRG government should encourage investors to invest their capital in this sector and improve the quality of tourist infrastructure. Also, more touristic activities should be organized especially the nightlife activities and entertainment to attract foreign tourists.

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