Changes in Travel Trends

During this period, throughout the world, a change in travel trends was clearly perceptible. With growing levels of affluence in China, India, Eastern Europe and America, people had higher disposable incomes as well as leisure to travel. However, behind these economic variables were a series of underlying social, cultural, political and technological factors that brought about changes in consumer attitudes and behaviour. Various tourism bodies across the world were exploring and analysing the major attitudinal and economic aspects that would affect consumers in key travel markets and shape the future of the global industry by 2020.[12] Besides affluence, individual attitudes and aspirations, the change from a 'purchase economy' to an 'experience economy', sociopolitical evolutions, cultural and environmental concerns, and technology, were all becoming key influences on global tourism.

The changing demography of travellers has led to a growth in demand for various niche products. More and more people are opting for shorter and more frequent holidays. Emerging economies are creating new tourism destinations and increasing competition. Climate change and increasing awareness are leading to eco-tourism and nature-based holidays. With the growth of cheaper worldwide communication, the internet will influence the next generation of travel and tourism product distribution. Although terrorist attacks and natural disasters are becoming a major concern for safety and security, opening up of the skies with new air routes and budget airlines is making more destinations accessible and travel cheaper. Slow, independent travel is becoming the 'in thing' rather than the hectic package tour.

Does this mean the end of mass tourism? While there will be a trend towards diversification and fragmentation driven by affluent tourists seeking specialist offerings, there will still be a demand for less specialized holidays by families and individuals with less disposable incomes. However, even the traditional 'rest and relaxation' beach holiday will need to incorporate educational or cultural elements to meet the new aspirations of twenty-first-century tourists.

Is India ready for this newly evolved international traveller? The country definitely can offer the diversity to meet the 'demand for customized holidays and knowledge-rich experience' (see a tourism expert's viewpoint in Box K).

The challenge to Indian tourism, however, lies in maintaining the momentum of growth. This is dependent on five critical Cs: civil aviation (continued opening of Indian skies), civic governance (improving India. Some of these issues are discussed at length in the chapter 'Poverty Alleviation: Tourism as the Key Catalyst'.

While exploring the developing trends surrounding the branding of countries, Creenagh Lodge, chairperson of Corporate Edge, points out, 'For countries as for commercial organizations, the final element in a successful brand is its ability to inspire. That inspiration is the first step for growing self-esteem. And the confidence thereby produced is the power which drives the brand's success.'[13]

For the inspiration to succeed and to sustain productivity over a long period, countries require brand managers with the vision and ability to execute it efficiently. The Indian tourism sector needs to identify future brand champions and give them the tools to generate fresh ideas, innovate, develop courage to implement their ideas and partner the most competent and creative people.

In the long-term, India's branding exercise will succeed dramatically if the economy achieves constant levels of growth, its infrastructure radically improves, the gains of health and education systems are made widespread and poverty levels decrease. There can be no substitute for growth. Only growth will bridge the gap between the image and reality.