

Analysing the strategic service vision and its' performance implications: A case of two eco-resorts

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Abstract

The paper uses Terry Hill framework and strategic service vision concept to analyze two eco-resorts. And recommend possible operational solutions using the four things i.e. Service Offerings, Funding Mechanism, Employee Management & Customer Management, the service business must get right. And its implications on its' performance.

Keywords: Service Operations, Eco-Resorts, Strategic Service Vision

Introduction

"Tourism continues to play an important role as the foreign exchange earner for the country. In 2012, foreign exchange earnings (FEE) from tourism were US\$ 17.74 billion as compared to US\$ 16.56 billion in 2011, registering a growth of 7.1%. Number of domestic tourist visits in India during 2012 was 1036.3 million (Provisional) as compared to 864.53 million in 2011, with a growth rate of 19.9 %. There has been a continuous increase in domestic tourist visits, with the compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of domestic tourist visits to all States/UTs from 1991 to 2012 being 13.96%. The foreign tourist visits too have been increasing over the years, though there was a decline in the years 1992, 1998, 2001, 2002 and 2009. The foreign tourist visits to all States/UTs during 1991 to 2012 witnessed a CAGR of 9.39%" (National Tourism Statistics, 2012). However, India's share of world tourism has remained stagnant at 0.38 per cent (National Tourism Policy, 2002). Tourism in India includes Heritage tourism, Golf tourism, Rural tourism, Beach tourism, Cruise tourism, Adventure tourism, Wellness tourism, Religious tourism as well as wild-life tourism which is synonymous to Eco-tourism. The wild-life tourism industry in India has been growing in tremendous pace, it being the fastest growing sector of tourism, the largest service industry in the world at large with the potential to generate huge employment

opportunities. But the wild-life tourism is seasonal in nature as the national parks & sanctuaries are closed for around 3 ½ months during the monsoon, usually during 1st July to 15th October every year. These are closed due to bad road conditions because of heavy monsoon, the most important reason being that of avoidance of disturbance or human interference of the breeding season of most of the animals. Hence, the wild-life resorts have business for 8 ½ months in a year. Again, the summer seasons are less visited because of the extreme heat in tropical jungles of India, though this period is the best season for wild-life encounters/sightings due to thin forest cover and gathering/congregation of animals in and around water holes/bodies, mostly artificially created due to scarcity of water during the summer season. In case of birds sanctuary, the migratory season is the time of business usually for 4 months from the October end to February end. But with most of the holidays and festivals falling during the period, the wild-life tourism has been flourishing since turning of this sanctuary with the co-ordinated centre and state policies and effort of forest, transport, fisheries and tourism departments. The Hon'ble Supreme Court of India's restriction that bans tourists and commercial activities from "core" areas of tiger reserves, the number of safaris inside the wild-life national parks, that includes most famous and most travelled destinations like Kanha, Bandhavgarh, Ranthambore, Tadoba, Pench, Panna National Parks, have been reduced drastically by around 50% since the year 2012, from 250-280 safaris to around 140 in a day. With this background of the wild-life tourism industry and the growing demand and opportunity for wildlife resorts, we have studied two eco-resorts in service business to compare their business objectives, operations, business strategy, flaws, if any, using Terry Hill frame-work of operation strategy and recommended possible operational solutions to complement their respective business objectives and enhancement in their operational efficiency and effectiveness using the four things i.e. Service Offerings, Funding Mechanism, Employee Management & Customer Management, a service business must get right. The study becomes interesting with the fact that one resort is a government initiative with social motive and the other is a private initiative with motive of profit maximization while striving for inclusive growth of the local populace. At last we have tried to analyse their possible performance enhancement in line with the changes recommended. In the next section, description of the two eco-resorts is provided.

Eco-tourism complex, Barakhandia (Debrigarh sanctuary)

Debrigarh Sanctuary is situated in Bargarh District in Odisha, adjoins the Hirakund Dam reservoir, which is Asia's largest earth dam encompassing 335 square kilometres comprising of Lohara and Debrigarh Reserve forests, locally famous as the "Barapahad" hills. Debrigarh means "*Abode/Fort of the Goddess*". The winter season from November to January is the best time to visit the sanctuary as this is the time of congregation of migratory birds including thriving forest with wild-life. The summer-time from April to mid-June is also good for animal sighting. The sanctuary remains close during rainy season from 16th June to 31st October. Although well connected by road, there is no boarding and lodging facility in the immediate periphery. Looking into the potential of good tourist inflow and with the motive of employment generation for the local populace who were dependent on the forest products and on occasions used to poach of wild animals and birds, more for the need than fun, the state forest department built an eco-tourism complex inside the forest in the buffer zone at the bank of the reservoir with six cottages with double accommodation capacity in each cottages. The construction of cottages are in cement and concrete is quite modern with ethnic amenities inside the cottages. The facilities were built by the funding of the Odisha Government and were inaugurated in the year 2008. It is

run under a society in the name of “*Debrigarh Eco-Tourism & Eco-Development Society (DETEDS)*” under the supervision of the Forest Department. The society under the supervision of the state forest department has been operating the resort with the motive of maximising the benefit to the local community, by way of providing employment and promoting the importance and consciousness of forest, wild-life and aqua-fauna, in the society at large in a self-sustainable way.

Service operations processes at Debrigarh

- a) The service includes a pleasant stay in the resort with complementary breakfast, lunch, and dinner with fixed menu.
- b) All the six cottages are made of RCC with A.C. As there is interrupted and infrequent power supply, they are having a D.G. for emergency power supply. But in case of long hours of power failure, they are unable to supply uninterrupted power to the boarders due to cost factor to the dis-satisfaction of the boarders.
- c) The visit inside the sanctuary from 6 A.M. in the morning to 6 P.M. in the evening for the boarders only, whereas there is restriction of vehicles as well as timing for the outside visitors. The flexible timing and lack of awareness by the most of the visitors encourage them to relax and some serious wild-lifer enter the sanctuary early in the morning demanding support facilities like tea, packaged break-fast early in the morning.
- e) The visit inside the sanctuary is allowed by the visitors own vehicles and left on their own to roam inside in an ethical way to the rules and norms prescribed for a protected sanctuary though there are forest officials inside the sanctuary to check that.
- f) There are many nature-trails built inside the sanctuary, but lack of information or guides do not allow the boarders to avail the facility.
- g) The visit inside the reservoir to watch Crocs habitats or migratory birds is not assured, but depends on the availability of the forest department boats which is also insufficient to the boarder capacity.
- h) Lunch time starts from 1:00 P.M. and runs till 2:00 P.M. against restaurant dining with buffet arrangement. Similarly, the evening time is generally without any activities, with dinner time from 8:30 P.M. to late in the night though the dinner is buffet and boarders coming for dinner at will without any norms forcing the staff to wake up late night affecting their service in the early morning for serious wild-lifers.
- i) The room tariff is Rs.2,500/- per room with double occupancy with breakfast, lunch and dinner.

All variable expenses are on cottage occupants only. Any other expenses like booking, advertisement, etc. are done by the State Government only without charging from the society's account.

Godwit eco-cottage at Manglajodi, Chilka

Chilka is the largest coastal lagoon in India and the second largest lagoon in the World. It is the largest wintering ground for migratory birds on the Indian Sub-Continent. Generally, the migratory birds do come over here towards the end of September, i.e. beginning of winter, and stay till the end of February, flying away flock by flock till the end of March. This has established Chilka as a tourist destination especially for bird lovers, bird watchers, photographers, researchers and ornithologists, designating it “Destination Fly-way” by U.N. The

migratory season has been generally of 4 to 5 months i.e. from October to February, which also coincides with winter holidays, during which a constant flow of such tourist is definitely expected. Then in the summer and rainy season, the inflow thins out due to hot and humid weather and intermittent rain of monsoon. But the breeding season of some of the residential birds are good for researchers and enthusiasts having special interest in it. A large congregation of these migratory birds and residential birds happens to be at the Chilka side near a village in the name of “Manglajodi”. From there all variety of migratory as well as residential birds can be watched closely by travelling in rowing boats. In this village, the earlier poachers turned protectors have formed a society in the name of “*Shree Mahavir Pakshi Suraksha Samiti*” and play the role of guides and provide boat which they themselves row and take the visitors inside the Bird’s Paradise. This has given wide publicity of this village and attracted many a visitors. Though this place is well connected through road, there was no lodging and reasonably good eateries nearby. For bird-watching, the early morning and evening time are best when their activities are at a high, requiring night stay a must for the same. Looking into the potential of good tourist inflow and business opportunity, three partners decided to venture into the eco-tourism business by building eco-cottages for stay at “Manglajodi” providing all the basic facilities of lodging and food. They have pooled in a total of Rs.38,00,000/-, equally contributing for the same. The construction of 11 eco-cottages made of bamboos and clay with ethnic design having thatched roof with all modern amenities inside have been done on a lease-hold land for 15 years at a lease rent of Rs.10,000/- per annum. The construction also included an open restaurant and kitchen with all facilities for dining. The cottage for tourist is open since 1st November, 2012 and the response has been very good.

Service operations processes at Manglajodi

- a) The service includes a pleasant stay in the resort with complementary breakfast. The lunch, dinner and snacks on order which is not included in the room-tariff.
- b) The management has been operating the resort with the motive of maximising the profit, but in a socially responsible way, by way of a business model of inclusive growth with the local people i.e. the society “Shree Mahavir Pakshi Suraksha Samiti”, a society of local poachers turned protectors, by providing them with the livelihood. So, they have an agreement with the Society to make available guided visit inside Chilka in their rowing boats to the borders of the resort at the price fixed by the Samiti.
- c) Though, there is no restriction of time of visit inside the Chilka, the best time to visit is the early morning and evening when the sighting of birds is highest. So, there is a need of make the borders prepared with necessary provisions like morning/evening tea, packaged breakfast, water bottles and snacks, by the resort. Apart from that guided walks in nearby Dhani hill is provided on request.
- d) Lunch time starts from 1:00 P.M. and runs till 3:00 P.M. against restaurant dining in the “JACANA” restaurant as well as room service. Evening time is generally extended with relaxing and taking dinner in leisure, served on order against a menu with wide choices without any other engagement or entertainment facility.
- e) The room tariff is Rs.1,100/- per room with double occupancy with complementary breakfast.

All the variable expenses are on room occupancy only. Breakfast is complimentary for resident guests who further avail the facility for taking launch, dinner and snacks and beverages on order. From the last few months business, it has been calculated that on an average Rs.300/-

is the revenue from each occupant guest where the cost of direct materials comes to Rs.110/- per guest and Rs.20/- is the cost against fuel and washing and cleaning detergents per guest, making total variable cost at Rs.130/- per person. There is no other cost involved as all other expenditure are common as for the establishment as a whole.

Analysis of strategic service vision by using framework of terry hill

Strategic service vision of eco-tourism complex, Barakhandia (Debrigarh sanctuary)

The strategic service vision of maximising the benefit to the local community is given in the Table 1.

Table 1: Strategic service vision for Debrigarh (Adapted from Hill, 2000)

Corporate Objective	Marketing Strategy	Competitive Priorities	Operations Strategy	
			Operations Design Choice	Infrastructure
1.Social Welfare	Giving employment & livelihood to locals & protection of forest, wild-life and avian-fauna.	Identification with social cause and continuous supply of labour in a cost-effective way.	Trade-off analysis, proper system of Hiring.	Involving locals for support service like transport, boats and labours. Giving proper training.
2. Survival (with no-loss-no-profit business)	To make it a destination with diversified experiences.	Low pricing, more experiences with optimum service personnel.	Service Model of more delightful service encounters and value-added services.	More local hiring, service encounters specific training.
3. Wild life & Environment Protection	To look at the environment as to cherish, not to exploit.	Giving varied experiences of wild-life and the lessons for the importance of environment and wild-life protection,	Standardized wild-life tours like guided visit, nature-walk & film shows etc.	Training, Coaching and establishment of library & video centre.

Strategic service vision of Godwit eco-cottage at Manglajodi, Chilka

The strategic service vision of maximising the profit, but in a socially responsible way is given in the Table 2.

Table 2: Strategic service vision for Manglajodi (Adapted from Hill, 2000)

Corporate Objective	Marketing Strategy	Competitive Priorities	Operations Strategy	
			Operations Design Choice	Infrastructure
1.Profitable Growth, ROI	To entice & attract Target Segment that of the bird watchers, wild-life photographers, ornithologists & researchers.	Competitive pricing, Quality of service & access to Chilka.	Operations Design that of quick service as well as quality service.	Training for the staff

2.Operation al Excellence	Best training to employees, compensation.	Low price, more Service standardization.	Move towards buffet lunch & dinner, alternatively packaged visit.	Tie-up with local vegetable, fresh lake-food suppliers. tie-up with local samiti guides to create satisfied customers.
3.Social Responsibility	Giving livelihood to locals & partnering with the poachers turned guides, protection of avian-fauna.	Cost effectiveness, identification with social cause	Trade-off analysis, advertisement of the social standing & agreement with the stake-holders.	Involving locals for support service like transport, supplies, and labours. Giving training to guides and awareness amongst the locals for protecting the avian-populace.

Recommendation using the four things a service business must get right

From the analysis of the two business operations using Terry Hill framework, it is seen that there is a need to re-design the service operation of both the organizations to align with the objectives. So, we have used the four things i.e. Service Offerings, Funding Mechanism, Employee Management & Customer Management (Frei, 2008), a service business must get right, so as to plug the gaps.

a) Service offerings

i) Both the organizations have service offerings for experience of wild-life and/or avian-fauna in an eco-friendly setting. They are designed to have a stay in a natural setting and surrounding with easy access to the wild-life/avian-life. The service includes quality food & comfortable stay. But here, the identification of eco-tourism is more with the eco-cottage with the built of the cottage with bamboo, mud and thatched roofing in contrast to RCC built of Eco-tourism Complex, Barakhandia. So, the improvement on this account of Eco-tourism Complex can be done with mud-finish on the outer-wall with the thatching or tile setting of the slanted roof-top to identify with the eco-friendly cottages.

ii) With the dilemma on use of DG Set for uninterrupted power supply in an area where power cut and power failure is frequent, the decision is dicey. So, it can be suggested that no prior assurance of uninterrupted supply should be given to raise the customer expectation, thereby, creating service quality gap creating customer dissatisfaction. Rather, the ability to support scheduled power cut in a cost effective way covered under the variable cost should be a surprise element for the customer in deep inside a jungle, resulting in customer delight. Some alternatives like inverter for every room to support two CFL bulbs and one fan can be installed for long hours of power failure.

iii) The priority of the tourists is that of wild-life/avian-life encounters than to remain inside the cottages. This will create less pressure on the employees of the resorts. In case of Godwit Eco-cottage, instead of lunch and dinner on order i.e. menu-based, buffet lunch & dinner will bring in standardization, making it manageable with the less service personnel, greater service speed and quality in a cost effective manner. That will also enable the employees to attain service requirement of preparing tea, packaged breakfast for the boarders in the early morning to allow them to be amongst the birds which they enjoy the most for which they have come. Similarly, in Barakhandia, more local persons can be hired to be guides with proper training to identify animals and birds, to accompany the boarders for more delightful experience, fulfilling the

objective of the society to give more employment to the local people. Some mechanism, which will be discussed in the Funding Mechanism, should be developed to make available boat-rides by the boarders on regular basis with the involvement of local people that will create variety in memorable experience.

iv) The engagement of the boarders during non-activity time, which appears to be a drag, creates dissatisfaction. Thus, it is very important that boarders are mentally engaged in a task in which they don't notice the passage of time. So, at both the resorts, activities like pictorial identification of animals/birds, photography contest, wild-life/avian-life experience sharing, wild-life film shows may be introduced to engage the customers to make the experience of stay memorable.

b) Funding mechanism

Funding mechanism is related to the mechanism used for paying the increased cost of the excellence, a business provides its customers (Frei, 2008).

i) The change suggested in the cottages in giving eco-look and installing with inverter will be funded by the forest department and that will have strong impact on the visitors' psychology with identifying the cottages with green eco-tourism concept. As regards the guided tour in case of eco-tourism complex, Barakhandia, against six cottages, six local youths can be hired to act as guides for the sanctuary visits and also nature trails. The expenses on this account can be offset by the increase in visitor-flow by combining delighters thus, resulting in their retention, repeat & referral business (as calculated later in subsequent section on performance analysis).

iii) The facility of boat rides at Barakhandia can be evolved with local participations at a fee decided judiciously by the forest department. The State Government through the Forest Department can arrange finance to locals to purchase boats or purchase boats on their account and use the services of the local fisherman, who are doing illegal fishing, with mechanised boats as well as their own rowing boats to provide pleasurable rides in bird watching or croc watching. That will create employment opportunity for the local without any cost incurred on the operation of the Eco-Tourism Complex, Barakhandia, thus, enabling tourists' inflow.

iv) Further, the change from menu-based restaurant service to standardized buffet service with package tariff of cottage including break-fast, lunch & Dinner in Godwit Eco-Cottage will reduce the cost and increase profitability with better service encounter with limited service providers (as calculated later in subsequent section on performance analysis).

v) Similarly, the suggested measures of engagement of the boarders during non-activity time, life/avian-life experience sharing, wild-life film would be with no or minimal cost incurred as they have all the video display units and cost of prizes against contest will be negligible to the scale of operation and delightment of the boarders resulting in increased customer inflow.

c) Employee management

Any Service Organisation strives for both high efficiency and effectiveness to be the business leader. In the hotel business, as for any typical service business, which is people intensive, the efficiency (Speed) and effectiveness (Quality) of the service is dependent on the employee and employee loyalty results in customer satisfaction resulting in business growth and profitability. The employee loyalty is achieved through a mix of the compensation, motivation and sense of controllability during the service encounters (i.e. behavioural aspect) (Heskett et al., 2008; Chase and Dasu, 2001). This sense of controllability can be achieved through proper training of the necessary skills required for the job, the job design and empowerment to take decisions in case of urgency and ability to refer/consult in case of ambiguity.

i) In case of the Eco-Complex, Barakhandia, as the employees are local natives with **very** less education, they are novice to such service encounters which require some attitudinal, behavioural and lingual adjustments with learning of basic skills required in a hotel business, though not required to that of a city-based hotel. Hence, proper training is required to enable them to satisfy the boarders as well as feel satisfied themselves, being able to deliver the desired service to the satisfaction of the customer, resulting in a sense of controllability and resultant job-satisfaction. Though the restaurant service is basically self-service kind with buffet dinner, lunch and break-fast requiring less service encounters, variability takes place during the room service and while preparing the boarders for early morning visit inside the sanctuary or reservoir. Basic training of animals and birds identification skills from appearance and call requires intensive training for guides. As the compensation is as per the government norms, the other incentive generated through delightful service encounters with customers will definitely act as an impetus to their loyalty.

ii) In case of Godwit Eco-Cottage, Manglajodi, Chilka, there are only two service provider and one cook and a helper and are under constant pressure to deliver speed as well as quality with the menu-based lunch & dinner with room-service facility. This face-to-face service encounters and variability in food can be minimised with the introduction of buffet lunch & dinner resulting in self-service by the boarders, resulting in more agility, quality of service and reduced pressure, with relief from attending late night customers, will enable them to wake-up early and attend to boarders to prepare them with early morning tea and packaged break-fast for departure for birding-life experience for which they have come to this place.

All these changes in the employee management system will definitely result in satisfied & loyal employee, increasing their productivity through efficiency & effectiveness, thereby, satisfying the customers.

d) Customer management

The customer satisfaction is the aim of all service processes and operations which leads to the loyalty of the customers, which in turn results in profitability of the organisation through the three R's- Retention, Repeat Business and Referral, where referral (the word of mouth) plays a big role. In both the eco-resorts, the Customer Management is an important area of the Service Model of eco-tourism, where the priority of the customer/boarder is to visit the wild-life. So, they are to be managed in such a way that their priority need is fulfilled which requires early morning visit to the wild-life/bird-life setting. The early morning visit can be made possible by designing the service operation that facilitates early to bed and early to rise. The self-service method of buffet dinner at both the locations, with early fixed time, ensures an early sleeping time enabling them to rise early. Further, early wake-up call and facility of having tea at a common place together and providing with the packaged break-fast, create an enthusiastic participation in the events preceding the departure for wild-life/bird-life encounters. And again daily rituals in the evening of contests, experience sharing and wild-life video shows will definitely be comforting and memorable experiences to share with others. Customers education with regard to social welfare approach of these both organisations should be highlighted so as to make them co-operate in service delivery as well as make them tolerant to the lack of service skill because of local hiring.

So, with the service process and operation designed with the trained and loyal staff, as suggested, the boarders will definitely be delighted resulting in the three R's, fulfilling the social

and profit-making objective, of Eco-complex, Barkhandia and Godwit Eco-Cottage, Manglajodi, respectively.

Performance analysis using suggested recommendation(s)

Performance analysis of Eco-Tourism Complex, Barakhandia

With closure of the sanctuary from 16th June to 31st October, the resort has annual operating days of 227 days with annual capacity of 1362 cottages or 227 full occupancy cottage days. From the fixed cost and variable cost involved, the break-even cottage occupancy comes to 420 or full occupancy of 70 days. During the last year i.e. 2012-13, the occupancy was for 426 cottages or 71 full occupancy days with 31.27%, just doing break-even business (70 full occupancy days) which is the objective of no-profit-no-loss organization. The other objective of employment generation can be fulfilled with more occupancy rate. With the suggested recommendations and hiring of six more locals, in which fixed cost is involved with hiring which comes to Rs.2,86,395/-, with the occupancy rate increasing to 50% (114 days of full occupancy) will result in profit of Rs.1,78,823/- (11.68%) against break-even business of 97 full occupancy days, giving leverage for more quality services and encounters for increased customer satisfaction.

Performance analysis of Godwit Eco-Cottage, Manglajodi, Chilka

The migratory bird season is from 1st October to 31st March, 2013, having possible full capacity of 150 days and thereafter with remaining days of around 200 days with possible half capacity run i.e. a total of 250 days or 2750 rooms of annual capacity/availability. From the last year run from 1st October to 31st March, after the inauguration, there was business for 40 days of full capacity or 440 rooms (against 150 days capacity/availability) with occupancy rate of 26.66%. From the last year operations with cost involved, both fixed as well as variable, the break-even occupancy was of 66 days of full occupancy. The full occupancy of 40 days in a run of 150 days is quite satisfactory though not resulting in profit. With the recommendations of more standardization of services, resultant enhancement of service quality and standard, and activities for customer engagement for delightful and memorable experiences, there is very much likelihood of increased customer flow. The only change involving cost structure is that of packaged room/cottage tariff that includes buffet breakfast, lunch & dinner. The tariff suggested to be increased from Rs.1100/- to Rs.1900/- per cottage. With the changed structure, the break-even business comes down to 55 days of full occupancy from earlier 66 days. With the increase of occupancy rate to 50% from the previous year of 26.66% i.e. 125 days of full occupancy, the ROI becomes 26.16% which is quite good.

So, it appears from the above analysis that the implementation of the recommendations will result in meeting with the organisational objectives.

Conclusion

Mushrooming of the resort around such national park and sanctuaries more or less commensurate with the then higher number of safaris that was around 250-280 in a day in Kanha National Park. With the reduction of safaris to around 140 in a day, it created excess capacity in different resorts. Further, the bookings of safaris are also allowed to make on-line with advance bookings from months ahead. So, there is no way or control by the resorts to ensure their customers only get the safari bookings. But the occupancy of the existing capacity is directly related to the availability of safaris creating uncertainty. Therefore, now the luxurious wild-life resorts in and

around tiger reserves need to change their strategy of only promoting tiger tourism but to focus on other activities as well like ensuring the development of buffer zone with the forest departments and focusing on cultural and ethnic tourism in and around parks. Further, they should seriously think of diversifying to non-tiger sanctuaries and national parks and for that they should immediately start promotion of such sanctuaries and unique and rare wild-life, flora & fauna there-in with aggressive PR activities and promotional activities. Further they should give more emphasis on the employee management to create a loyal and satisfied team of employees and on the customers' management to delight them with support of the satisfied employee. That way they can create a differentiated value proposition other than their competitors.

In fact, many of such wild-life resorts are hiring the local people for inclusive growth which is in fact giving the impetus to wild-life conservation by way of generating avenues for employment and business to local people. The local aborigines are now less dependent on forest resources and poaching is no more a lucrative livelihood. Rather, the locals have turned into protectors of the wild-life and forest resources and flora & fauna. In fact the scenario can be seen as the resorts are building alliance with the locals in a mutually benefiting way, thus ensuring holistic development.

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