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Development Strategies for Rural Tourism in Mishkhas Village

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Received: 04 February 2015,

Accepted: 14 November 2015

Abstract

Rural tourism is a factor in multidirectional development of rural areas and its most important consequences are population stability, unemployment problem alleviation, and immigration reduction. The present survey was set to investigate the strategies of developing rural tourism in Mishkhas Village in Ilam Province using the SWOT technique. A questionnaire was used as the data gathering instrument and the sample size was determined to be 368 based on the Krejcie and Morgan table. The Cronbach alpha coefficient was used to show the reliability of research instrument which came out to be 0.87. In this research, the internal (strengths and weaknesses) and external factors (threats and opportunities) of the region were ranked by the SWOT technique. It was indicated that the amount of advantages with the obtained value of 5.87 (strengths and opportunities) was higher than limitations rate of weaknesses and threats (4.531). Thus, according to the results, the strategy of developing rural tourism was applied in this region.

Keywords:

Rural Tourism, Rural development, SWOT

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INTRODUCTION

Rural tourism is defined as activities and different kinds of tourism in different rural environments and their outskirts which entail positive and negative effects for village environment (Motiei Langroodi, 2006). The most important objective of promoting tourism is to socially and economically develop tourist-attracting regions which plays an important role in empowering local people, adding diversity to economic growth, and creating new job opportunities (Sharifzadeh and Moradnezhadi, 2003).

Rural development program is a major part of the developmental programs in all countries. Rural textures have historical, cultural, natural, and architectural values due to their wide connections with natural and historical context. Furthermore, as a part of human heritage, national capital and historical and cultural identity of a community, their maintenance and protection is of great importance. Developing tourism in villages, in a sense, is actualizing values and architectural attractions of that village and introducing them as a tourist place. Therefore, providing services, facilities, and producing and developing required infrastructures for tourists' visit and stay is necessary. So, exploiting rural tourism potentials to attract tourists and develop these potentialities requires meticulous planning (Hanachi and Kosheshgaran, 2013). Tourism and tourism industry as an effective catalyst have already produced more than one million job opportunity and have constituted the basis for considerable socioeconomic changes throughout the world. Thus, considering the prominent feature of rural tourism can be expected that this industry would enhance economic growth and diversity in rural activities on the one hand, and would lead to job creation and income generation for the inhabitants of the village by employing human resources on the other hand. Consequently, it is viewed as an opportunity for multidirectional development (Saghaei and Masoudi, 2014). Tourism industry requires activities such as providing residence and welfare facilities and launching underlying services; also, it requires managers and executors to have enough knowledge and familiarity with effective

and modern methods for developing this industry. Development needs particular changes that should occur in the economic, social, and cultural conditions. All factors that are important in enhancing development would be effective under a particular condition. One of the most important factors influencing development is human resources because other factors that are necessary for socioeconomic changes are dependent on human resources. In this regard, tourism industry is no exception and in addition, the necessary socioeconomic conditions require effective management of executors who should have enough knowledge as to the basic strategies and techniques for developing this industry.

Although Iran is one of the ten major countries in the world in terms of natural resources and tourism attractions including cultural heritage and natural and environmental landscapes, all statistics of world tourism organization during past years indicate a very slow trend in attracting tourists and thus this industry has a small share in gross national income (Kargar, 2008). Ilam Province with an area constituting 1.2 percent of geopolitical territory of Iran enjoys different natural, cultural, and historical attractions. It is located in a mountainous region on the side of the Zagros Mountains having great potentials in developing tourism industry. Tourism in Ilam Province is a developing sector which is expected to grow, and rural tourism is one of the attractive sectors of tourism whose development is an essential factor in eradicating poverty from villages and reducing immigration and socioeconomic problems. Mishkhas has a population of about 9177 and is located to the southeast of Ilam city. Tourism potentials of this region are unique; it is a mountainous region and is a destination for a great number of tourists in the first half of the year because of its ideal weather in summer and spring, its nearness to Ilam. Furthermore, it has been known as a tourist-attracting region since 2005 (Nouri, 2012). Although Mishkhas has an excellent geographical position and enjoys many capacities for rural tourism, they have not been exploited to attain stable development yet. Consequently, the overall objective of the present research was studying the strategies for

developing rural tourism industry in Mishkhas village.

The role and the position of villages in the processes of economic development at local, regional, and national scale and the consequences of rural underdevelopment brought the matter of rural development to attention and even made it a priority over urban development (Moradi, 2012). One of the basic strategies for developing rural regions is considering the rural tourism carefully to prevent abandonment and isolation in rural regions and allow a balanced development in the country (Hosseinmohammadi and Hayati, 2010). The basis of rural tourism is integrating the rural environment, farming activities, and particular cultures in order to provide diversity for tourists and creating opportunities for job creation, higher incomes, greater familiarity with different cultures, and communication with people from other places without destroying the environment. Rural tourism entails socioeconomic changes, leads to changes in the population structure and local values, and has a positive effect on protecting cultural heritage. In addition, it keeps open the channels of communication for the local people and thereby provides an opportunity to learn about other cultures (Kuo and Chiu, 2006). Rural tourism can have a major role in increasing economic diversity and promoting stable development and through job creation and income generation leads to the development of underdeveloped regions. Although occupations in this industry are not so specialized or lucrative, it generates considerable profit for villagers.

In a case study, Ghafari and Torki Harchegani (2010) investigated the role of tourism in the socioeconomic development of Chaharmahal and Bakhtirari and indicated that the growth of tourism industry was effective in providing tourism facilities and there were significant relationships between the number tourists, tourism growth, increasing job opportunities, higher income, and the state of cultural and social welfare indices. Similarly, in a case study Mir Lotfi and Sargolzaie (2013) examined the effects of tourism on the sustainable development in Sekooheh Village in Zabol. Investigations carried out in this region indicated that tourism had marked effects on social di-

mensions of this region rather than other dimensions. Data obtained from this study showed that with respect to the economic aspects of developing the village, tourism had major effects on supporting other jobs to make a living and had a minimal effect on increasing the price of lands.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was an applied research in terms of its objective. It was conducted as a survey and, based on data gathering techniques; it was a descriptive-analytical research. All inhabitants of nine villages of Mishkhas district (N=9177) were selected on the basis of stratified sampling method (n=368) according to the Krejcie and Morgan table. Data gathering was carried out through document and field methods. In document method, data are collected from the theoretical foundations and the previous relevant research through library method, referring to scientific documents, searching in the world data web and using the existing documents. In field method, in order to gather the required data and statistics, a questionnaire was utilized. For final determination of data obtained from the questionnaire, Cronbach Alpha test was run which was found to be higher than 0.7 for different parts. Data were analyzed by SPSS software, version 20.

In this research, attractions, facilities, tourism services, the state of tourism and its effects on regional development were investigated. Then, SWOT method was utilized for analyzing data and presenting strategies for developing rural tourism.

SWOT model is one of the strategic approaches to achieve correspondence between weaknesses and strengths within the system and opportunities and threat out of the system. According to this model an appropriate strategy maximizes the opportunities and strengths and minimizes the threats and weaknesses (Movahed and Kohzadi, 2010). Through SWOT method, four groups of strategies are identified:

a. Strength-opportunity strategy

This is the most appropriate and the most

ideal condition for a system which means that the system not only enjoys dependable strengths and capabilities, but it also possesses valuable and dependable opportunities in its interactional environment. Therefore, this kind of strategies demonstrates how to apply the current strengths of the system for the purpose of maximum exploitation of environmental opportunities.

b. Strength-threat strategies

In such a condition, although system has some dependable capabilities, it faces some challenges and threats in its interactional environment and territory. Thus, this type of strategies demonstrates how to make use of the existing strengths effectively to cope with environmental pressures, challenges, and threats.

c. Weakness-opportunity strategies

This state implies that system enjoys several valuable opportunities in the environment but there are weaknesses, inabilities, and serious vulnerabilities that surround the region. Hence, through WO (Weakness-Opportunity) strategies, it is attempted to compensate for weakness through utilizing environmental opportunities.

d. Weakness-threat strategies

This state is the worst and the most difficult

condition for the activities of system because in spite of several inherent weaknesses and inabilities the system has to facing different pressures, challenges, and threats in its territory and environment. So, through WT (Weakness-Threat) strategies, the system tries to redress weaknesses, reduce its vulnerability in front of environmental threats, minimize these threats, and if possible, tries to protect itself against the effects of them.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the current research, 368 people from the villagers of Mishkhas were selected as the study sample. The oldest participant was 80 years old and the youngest was 14 years old; the average age of the sample was 32 years. Men constituted 52.2 percent of the sample; that is, the number of men was more than women. With respect to education, most participants held high school diploma constituting 36.95 percent of the sample. Furthermore, regarding participants' main job, the highest frequency (25.8) was farming.

SWOT analysis model can be designed for a particular region or a problem that one is involved with. In fact, its main use is determining an effective strategy to improve the conditions. To do so, at first internal factors (Weaknesses and Strengths) and external factors (Opportunities - Threats) influencing tourism in Mishkhas were

Table 1: Internal factors influencing tourism in Mishkhas village

Strengths (S)	Weaknesses (W)
The existence of investment capacity in tourism	People unwillingness to invest in tourism sector
The existence of local products	Lack of organized local mini-malls to supply local products
Provide facility for investors	Little opportunities for women employment in tourism sector
Diversity of agricultural and livestock products	Cultural differences between tourists and villagers
The presence of local handicrafts	Low level of literacy between villagers
People cooperation in social activities in villages	Substituting gardens and farms with commercial and residential buildings
Local traditions to attract tourists	Neglecting ancient monuments and destroying them
Using local clothing by villagers	Lack of awareness of behavior with tourists
Willingness of villagers to the admission of tourists	Lack of trained people in the field of tourism
The existence of beautiful natural landscapes and views	Wasting the water of the springs in the region
Enjoying fine weather	Desiccation of the main river
The presence of high mountains suitable for climbing	Lack of public transportation facilities
Enjoying a calm environment without any noise	Lack of firefighting services in the village
Settlement of tourism campus in the villages	Changing the texture of traditional buildings into modern ones
Asphalting roads, and alleys and labeling them	The disregard to personal beautification façade

Table 2: External factors influencing tourism in Mishkhas

Opportunities	Threats
Non-native people willing to invest	Land trade
The nearness to Iraq boundary which can help attract foreign tourists	Increase inclination to foreign travels
Having common borders with Kermanshah, Lorestan, and Khouzestan provinces	Increase the costs of travel
City dwellers' willingness to spend part of leisure time out of city	Refusal to give land to strangers
Reinforce thought of travel and tourism in province	Inclination to immigration
Being away from factories	Lack of villagers' interest in strangers' investment
The importance of the region as a pole of tourism	Loss of environment and vegetation
Nearness to the center of province	Environmental pollution
Developing rural communication systems	Improper expansion of communicative ways
Constructing and mending the roadway of Ilam-Darehshahr	Lack of coordination between state offices and organization in developing tourism facilities and services
Providing firefighting services	High level of road dangers because the region is mountainous
Expansion transferring gas in the area	No access to internet in the region

investigated, the results of which are presented in Tables 1 and 2, respectively.

The criterion for the measurement and classification of each factor was a five point response scale (1 represents extremely important, 2 represents very important, 3 represents important, 4 represents less important, and 5 represents slightly important). Then, the collected data were analyzed according the sum of values and ordinal mean. Following that, the value of primary coefficient, secondary coefficient or weighted mean, rank, and final coefficient were calculated separately for each part, the results

of which are presented in Tables 3, 4, 5, and 6.

According to Table 3 having fine weather had the highest final coefficient (0.272), and beautiful natural landscapes (springs, valleys, and so forth), high mountains, and a calm environment without clamor for tourists had a final coefficient of 0.264. The remaining factors had lower final coefficients. Altogether, the final coefficient for strengths in Mishkhas Village was 3.114.

Based on the findings presented in Table 4, lack of trained people in the field of tourism had the highest final coefficient (0.276) and people's unwillingness to invest in the tourism

Table 3: Rank, primary, secondary, and final coefficients regarding strengths

Factors	Primary coefficient	Secondary coefficient	rank	Final coefficient
The existence of investment capacity in tourism	1345	0.064	3	0.192
The existence of local products	1284	0.061	3	0.183
Provide facility for investors	1214	0.057	2	0.114
Diversity of agricultural and livestock products	1226	0.058	2	0.116
The presence of local handicrafts	1174	0.055	2	0.110
People cooperation in social activities in villages	1281	0.060	4	0.240
Local traditions to attract tourists	1282	0.061	3	0.183
Using local clothing by villagers	1276	0.060	3	0.180
Willingness of villagers to Admission tourists	1326	0.063	3	0.189
The existence of beautiful natural landscapes and views	1393	0.066	4	0.264
Enjoying a fine weather	1442	0.068	4	0.272
The presence of high mountains suitable for climbing	1407	0.066	4	0.264
Enjoying a calm environment without any noise	1405	0.066	4	0.264
Settlement of tourism campus in the villages	1223	0.058	3	0.174
Asphalting roads, and alleys and labeling them	1247	0.059	3	0.177
Total	19525	0.986		3.114

Table 4: Rank, primary, secondary, and final coefficients regarding weaknesses

Factors	Primary coefficient	Secondary coefficient	rank	Final coefficient
People unwillingness to invest in tourism sector	1421	0.074	3	0.222
Lack of organized local mini-malls to supply local products	1249	0.065	4	0.260
Little opportunities for women employment in tourism sector	1239	0.065	3	0.195
Cultural differences between tourists and villagers	1235	0.065	3	0.195
Low level of literacy between villagers	1211	0.063	3	0.189
Substituting gardens and farms with commercial and residential buildings	1214	0.064	2	0.128
Neglecting ancient monuments and destroying them	1207	0.063	1	0.630
Lack of awareness of behave with tourists	1248	0.065	2	0.130
Lack of trained people in the field of tourism	1321	0.069	4	0.276
Wasting the water of the springs in the region	1332	0.070	2	0.140
Desiccation of the main river	1319	0.069	2	0.138
Lack of public transportation facilities	1226	0.064	2	0.128
Lack of firefighting services in the village	1151	0.060	1	0.600
Changing the texture of traditional buildings into modern ones	1197	0.063	2	0.126
The disregard to personal beautification façade	1306	0.068	2	0.136
Total	18967	0.987		2.386

Table 5: Rank, primary, secondary, and final coefficients regarding opportunities

Factors	Primary coefficient	Secondary coefficient	rank	Final coefficient
Non-native people willing to invest	1336	0.086	2	0.172
The nearness to Iraq boundary which can lead to attracting foreign tourists	1221	0.078	3	0.234
Having common borders with Kermanshah, Lorestan, and Khuzestan provinces	1330	0.085	3	0.255
City dwellers Willingness to spend part of leisure time out of city	1308	0.084	4	0.336
Reinforce thought of travel and tourism in province	1231	0.079	3	0.237
Being away from factories	1250	0.080	2	0.160
The importance of the region as a pole of tourism	1309	0.084	3	0.252
Nearness to the center of province	1374	0.088	3	0.264
Developing rural communication systems	1306	0.084	3	0.252
Constructing and mending the roadway of Ilam-Darehshahr	1310	0.084	3	0.252
Providing firefighting services	1127	0.072	2	0.144
Expansion transferring gas in the area	1302	0.084	2	0.168
Total	15478	0.988		2.726

sector had a final coefficient of 0.222, and the rest of factors had lower final coefficients. Totally, final coefficient for weaknesses in Mishkhas village was 2.386.

According to Table 5, the willingness of city dwellers to spend part of their leisure time out of city had the highest final coefficient (0.336) and its nearness to the center of province had a final coefficient of 0.264. Other factors had lower final coefficients. In total, the final coefficient of opportunities in Mishkhas was 2.726.

As shown in Table 6, villagers' refusal to give their land to strangers had the highest final co-

efficient (0.316) and increasing inclinations towards foreign trips and improper development of communication routes had a final coefficient of 0.237 and the rest of factors had lower coefficients. All in all, the final coefficient of threats in this region was 2.145. Considering the sum of coefficients obtained for each section, following diagram is drawn which indicates the state of strategies in this region (Figure 1).

Based on the results, strategies in Mishkhas are mostly aggressive. Aggressive strategies are dependent on internal strengths and external opportunities. Thus, the following strategies are

Table 6: Rank, primary, secondary, and final coefficients regarding threats

Factors	Primary coefficient	Secondary coefficient	rank	Final coefficient
Land trade	1263	0.084	2	0.168
Increase inclination to foreign travels	1187	0.079	3	0.237
Increase the costs of travel	1213	0.080	4	0.320
Refusal to give land to aliens	1195	0.079	4	0.316
Inclination to immigration	1249	0.083	2	0.116
Lack of interest in aliens investment	1225	0.081	2	0.162
Loss of environment and vegetation	1278	0.085	2	0.170
Environmental pollution	1244	0.082	2	0.164
improper Expand of communicative ways	1192	0.079	3	0.237
Lack of coordination between state offices and organization in developing tourism facilities and services	1268	0.084	1	0.084
High road dangers because of the region is mountainous	1243	0.082	1	0.082
Limits access to the Internet	1352	0.089	1	0.089
Total	15025	0.987		2.145

Evaluative matrix of strategic condition and activities

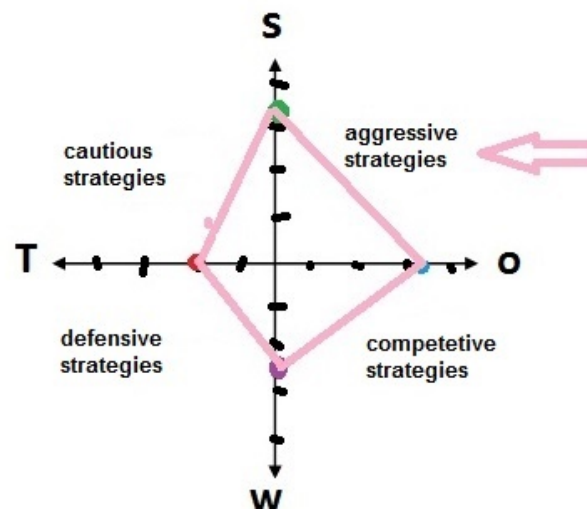


Figure 1: the status of strategies in Mishkhas

presented for Mishkhas Village.

1. Increasing the capacity of investment in tourism sector in order to attract tourists from neighboring provinces.

2. Publishing and distributing booklets in order to increase the knowledge of tourists and local people as to the identity of region.

3. Settling traditional teahouses and facilities near the place of natural attractions

4. Establishing centers offering packaged food stuffs, especially when the region hosts a lot of tourists.

5. Organizing cultural and artistic festivals in the region in order to introduce village's tourism attractions.

CONCLUSION

According to the conducted field studies, in order to represent strategies and approaches for developing rural tourism through SWOT technique, tourism capacities and limitations in this region were identified and some strategies were devised with the purpose of developing tourism. Based on the findings, strategies identified for Mishkhas Village were mostly aggressive and they are dependent on internal strengths and external opportunities. One of the strengths of the region which had the highest final coefficient (0.272) was its fine weather and among opportunities for Mishkhas, willingness of city dwellers to spend a part of their leisure time out of city

had the highest final coefficient (0.336). Therefore, officials in charge should attempt to make full use of strengths and opportunities and move towards these types of strategies. In a study, Ghahremani (2012) indicated that rural renewal reinforces the role of tourism. Moreover, in another study, Shojaie and Rahimi Moghadam (2013) concluded that there were many deficiencies in villages which require reviewing and presenting appropriate policies in order to overcome weaknesses and threats by strengths and opportunities.

Therefore, continuous cooperation and training the host society to perform tourism activities and provide its required services, employing specialist teams to estimate costs and the social, economic, and environmental profits of rural tourism plans and programs, sound investments for developing tourism infrastructures proportional to local needs, fighting social abnormalities and providing tourists with security, encouraging villagers to give their lands to strangers and preventing land trades in the region are suggested.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The participation and cooperation of villagers in the study area is greatly acknowledged.

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How to cite this article:

Eshraghi Samani, R., Malekshahi, S., & Poursaeed, A. (2016). Development strategies for rural tourism in Mishkhas village. *International Journal of Agricultural Management and Development*, 6(3), 257-264.

URL: http://ijamad.iaurasht.ac.ir/article_523926_066613890cecc2ff912e6f10e170afa8.pdf

