

SATISFACTION OF DOMESTIC TOURISTS VISITING GULMARG IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR, INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Gulmarg in Kashmir valley is globally acclaimed round the year tourist destination with extensive natural beauty and impressive snow-covered mountains. Gulmarg host many tourists annually. To maintain and escalate the existing charm of Gulmarg needs combined efforts from all tourism stakeholders of Gulmarg. But the more important thing is to evaluate the tourists' satisfaction, factors affecting their satisfaction, their intention to revisit and willingness to recommend Gulmarg to other people. Consequently, the present study aims to find out the answers to these questions. Study findings are based on the responses of 115 domestic (Indian) respondents from the study area. The study results reveal that tourists are satisfied with destination aspects and they are willing to revisit and recommend Gulmarg to other people as well. However, in some cases, tourists are not satisfied. The concerned service renders must review their existing customer based policies and improve service quality for the sack of their own business and destination image.

Keywords: *Gulmarg, Kashmir, Tourist, Tourist Satisfaction*

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is the movement of travel for leisure and recreation by tourists and refers a range of travel services in support of this movement. Tourists are the temporary travelers who stay in their unusual places of residence for at least one night and not more than one year for leisure, business, health, education and other purposes without any kind of remuneration (United Nations World Tourism Organization, 1991). Tourist destination is a lot meant for any tourist that can be defined as temporary place for getting a travel experience by consuming and practicing the destination's aspects and attractiveness (Leiper, 1979). In other words, tourist destination is a place where the needs of a tourist are in different forms maintained and protected (Hu and Ritchie, 1993). Tourism destination always appeals and pulls tourists, its attractiveness and sources are the main pushing forces and reasons for tourist demand (Uysal, 1998). Every destination is unique in its own way. Some destinations are known for their cultural and historical importance, some are known for adventure activities, other may be known for business and so on. But, visiting a naturally serene and peaceful hill station brings light into dark hearts and a story in blank minds. The tourist satisfaction at a hill station, for a tourist, is to admire and to feel the atmosphere of destination positively as his/her expectations. However, the tourist expectations are playing pivotal role in tourist satisfaction. Sometimes, it becomes challenge to reach out tourist expectations successfully which results tourist dissatisfaction. Therefore, tourist can set low level of expectations for

higher satisfaction and service renders should know the tourist preferences prior his/her travel in order to reach out customer expectations successfully (Liu *et al.*, 2010).

Study Area: Gulmarg (J&K, India)

Gulmarg is a famous hill station and skiing destination in Baramulla district of Indian administered Jammu & Kashmir state at an altitude of 2,650 m AMSL (Mitra, 2013). This hill station is, 56 km away from west of Srinagar, located in the Pir-Panjial range in the western Himalayas (Gopal, 1990). Earlier, it was called Gaurimarg, means "The Fair One" (Mitra, 2013) and in 16th century Emperor Yousuf Shah Chak renamed it as Gulmarg, means "*Meadow of Flowers*" (Chaturvedi, 2008). Gulmarg remained favorite place to British civil servants during summers, and golfing and hunting were their main recreational activities here (Chaturvedi, 2008; Lovell-Hoare, 2014).

This cup shaped small valley, Gulmarg, is filled with natural meadows which remains under snow in winter and lets to grow beautiful wild flowers like butter cups, forget-me-nuts and daises during spring and summer (Mitra, 2013; Chaturvedi, 2008). The meadows are preserved by enclosed small lakes and parks, and fencing forests of green pine and fir all around (Mitra, 2013). Gulmarg is called the '*heartland of winter sports in India*'. It is known for skiing and other snow sports that are carried out on the Apharwat peak (4,267 m AMSL) slopes and where one can see the Harmukh and Nanga Parbat mountains easily (Mitra, 2013). Horse riding, zorbing, sledging etc. are other recreational

activities performed in Gulmarg. Gulmarg Gondola is the hottest attraction of Gulmarg which is one of the world's highest chairlifts reaching 3,979 m AMSL on Apharwat Mountain. Though, Gulmarg is flocked by a number of tourists annually, but it is also the prime destination of Bollywood since a long time. So far, several Bollywood movies have been shooting here such as Bobby, Yeh Jawani Hai Deewani, Jab Tak Hai Jaan, Phantom Highway, Haider and so on.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Tourist Satisfaction comes after finding the expectations positively or when destination attributes surpass the predetermined expectation by the tourist (Nageshwar and Das, 2002; Tribe and Snaith, 1998; Chaudhary and Aggarwal, 2012). There are many empirical studies that define the tourist satisfaction (Cheng, 2010; Lin, 2006; Chou, 2011; Yu, 2011). However, there are several studies (Bansal, 1994; Heung, *et al.*, 2001; Huh, 2002; Tosun *et al.*, 2007; Singh, 2009; Aggarwal *et al.*, 2010; Harpal, 2010) in which tourists' satisfaction was measured by taking the destination attributes related to transportation, accommodation, food and beverage, natural and cultural attractions and other tourist facilities and services where authors had used different methods to accomplish their study objectives.

The research finding of tourists' behavior reveals that once the tourists are satisfied during their travel, they may think to revisit to the same destination (Cheng, 2010; Liu *et al.*, 2010). It is studied that tourists' satisfaction and revisit intention are significantly correlated. Higher revisiting intention is the outcome of higher tourist satisfaction (Liu *et al.*, 2010).

In order to measure the tourist satisfaction in a sophisticated way, many tourist satisfaction models have been developed by the several researchers. Oliver (1980) designed expectation-disconfirmation model to examine customer satisfaction. According to this model, customer will show the range of satisfaction after comparing the performance of the product/services with the expectations; if the expectations are met positively then the satisfaction is confirmed, if not then disconfirmation (dissatisfaction) is confirmed. Reisig and Chandek (1980) expanded the Oliver's designed expectation-disconfirmation model by dividing it into 3 phases where a consumer can confirm or disconfirm his/her satisfaction by evaluating the performance of the product/services at the end of the consumption cycle. According to Sirgy (1984) congruity model, satisfaction is a set of emotional circumstances as it directs a

customer to look for optional means to achieve satisfaction in future. SERVQUAL model (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985) is another well known model used for measuring the customer satisfaction. This model contains the various variables related to tourist destination aspects. However, Tribe and Snaith (1998) developed HOLSAT (HOLIDAY SATisfaction) model. It was used at Cuban resort region of Varadero to examine the service quality and holidaymaker's satisfaction. The model compares holidaymaker's expectations and the performance of the destination attributes as a means of measuring tourist satisfaction at any holiday destination.

There are several conceptual studies found in marketing literature that are related to service quality and customer satisfaction (Oliver, 1980; Abdeldayem and Khanfer, 2007; Cronin and Taylor, 1992; Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988); and the evaluation of different tourist satisfaction aspects is continue in tourism and hospitality management (Kozak and Rimmington, 2000).

OBJECTIVES

- To identify the important factors of destination attributes in study area.
- To investigate tourists' satisfaction from the different identified factors in study area.
- To find out the overall experience of the tourists from their visit to the study area.
- To measure the tourists' intention to revisit study area.
- To analyze the tourists' willingness to recommend the Gulmarg to other tourists.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

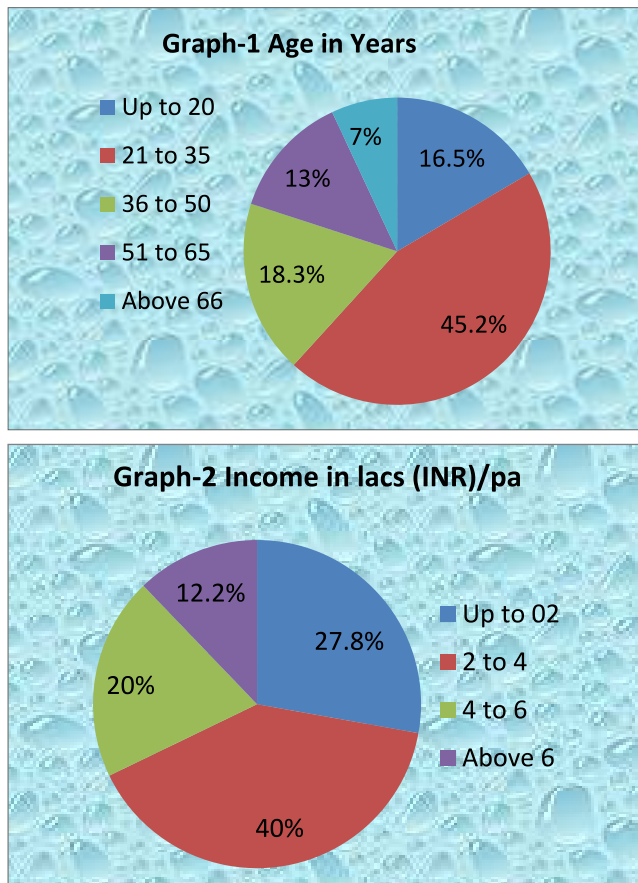
This is an empirical study in which data was collected personally from the domestic tourists visiting to study area (Gulmarg) by using structured questionnaires. The questionnaires that were used, consisted of 6 demographic items and 28 items related to general destination attributes, tourist services and facilities in Gulmarg based on 5-point Likert scale. A total number of 125 domestic respondents responded to the questionnaire, but only 115 questionnaires were founded authentic for the study. Data was analyzed with the help of SPSS 16. Exploratory factor analysis with varimax rotation was used to extract important destination attributes and tourists' satisfaction in the study area. Moreover, simple statistical techniques like Mean and Percentage were used to measure the overall

tourists' experience, revisiting intension and willingness to recommend Gulmarg to others.

Demographic Profile of respondents (N=115)

Graph-1 represents the age groups of the respondents. It is exhibited by those 21 to 35 years age group which constitutes the maximum (45.2%) number of respondents which is followed by 36 to 50 years (18.3%), up to 20 years (16.5%), 51 to 65 years (13%) and above 66 years (7%) age groups orderly. The income status of respondents is shown in Graph-2. According to the graph, respondents mostly from middle class society as 40% respondents have annual income from 2 to 4 lacs, 27.8% having up to 2 lacs, 20% having 4 to 6 lacs, and 12.2% having above 6 lacs.

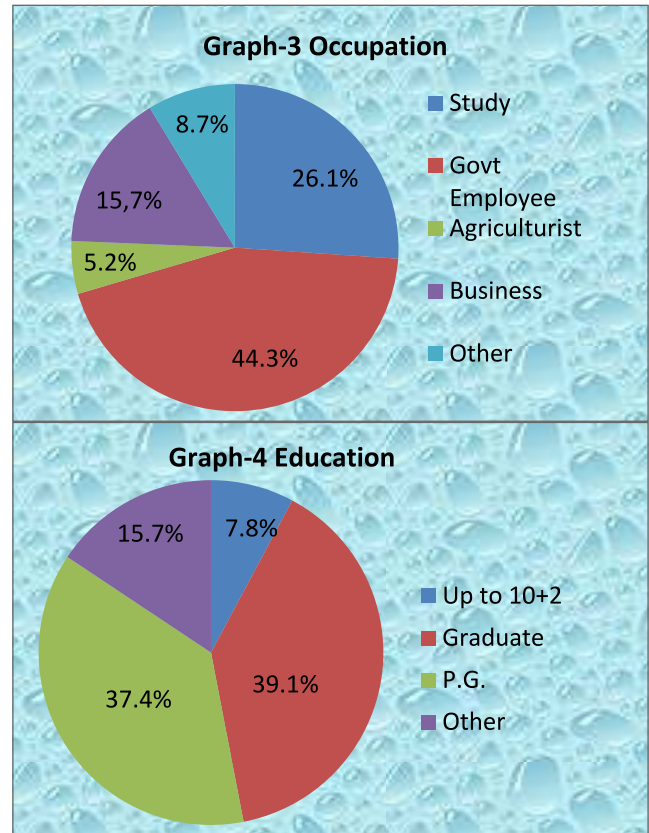
Figure 1: Age and Income of the Respondents



Graph-3 reveals the occupation of respondents. It is noted that majority of the respondents (44.3%) are govt employee's other respondents are doing study (26.1%), business (15.7%), other (8.7%) and agriculturists (5.2%) hierarchically. Graph-4 highlights the educational qualification of respondents. As per the graph, 39.1% respondents are graduate, 37.4% are post

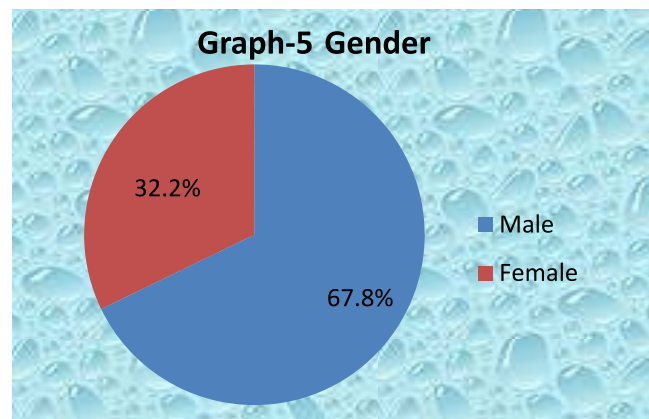
graduate, 15.7% have other and 7.8% respondents are with secondary level qualification.

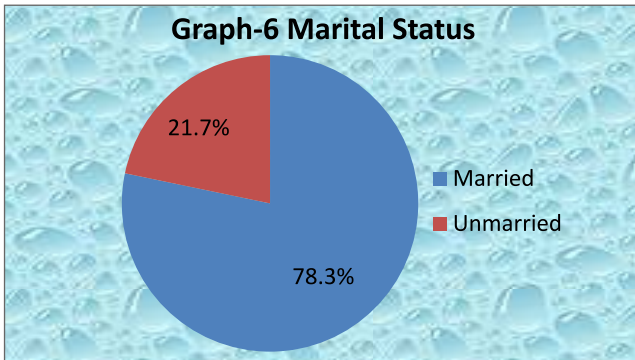
Figure 2: Occupation and Education of the Respondents



The gender profile of respondents is indicated in Graph-5. The number of male respondents (67.85) is bigger than the number of female respondents (32.2%) in this study. On the other hand, graph-6 represents the marital status of respondents in which it is identified that 78.3% respondents are unmarried and 21.7% are married.

Figure 3: Gender and Marital Status of the Respondents





Factors affecting Domestic Tourists' Satisfaction in Gulmarg

Table 1 exhibits data collected from the study area (Gulmarg) is suitable for application of factor analysis as value of KMO (0.503) is good and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity is significant at given level of degree of freedom.

Table 1: Goodness of Fit Test for Factor Analysis of Data (KMO and Bartlett's Test)

Kaiser- Meyer Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		0.503
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx.-ChiSquare	918.667
	df	325
	Sig.	0.000

When factor analysis was applied to the data gathered from the study area, five factors were extracted as shown in Table 2. The first dimension has three variables namely *accessible destination (0.781)*, *clean and hygienic destination (0.728)*, and *beautiful destination (0.702)*. The Eigen value and percentage of variance of this dimension are 3.496 and 13.445% respectively.

Table 2: Important Dimensions Extracted for Domestic Tourists' Satisfaction in Gulmarg

Factor1: General Destination Elements	Factor Loadings				
	1	2	3	4	5
Gulmarg, accessible destination	0.781				
Beautiful destination	0.728				
Clean and hygienic destination	0.702				
Factor 2 : Personal Experience					
Tourist information		0.816			
Language barrier		0.786			
Friendly local people		0.609			
Sufficient shopping opportunities		0.608			
Pleasant weather		0.640			
Expert local tourist guides		0.488			
Safety and security		0.322			
Factor 3: Transport Services					
Easy to understand and use local transport			0.893		

Reasonable transport charges	0.881	
Timetable of local transport	0.770	
Behavior of vehicular transporters	0.631	
Condition of local transportation technology	0.452	
Sufficient local transport services	0.359	
Factor 4: Food and Beverage		
Diversity of food and beverage	0.916	
Reasonable food and beverage charges	0.634	
Hygienic food and beverage	0.614	
Sufficient food outlets	0.423	
Factor 5: Accommodation		

Factor 2 consists of five variables {Tourist information (0.816), Language barrier (0.786), Friendly local people (0.609), sufficient shopping opportunities (0.608), Pleasant weather (0.640), Expert local tourist guides (0.488), and Safety and security (0.322)} having Eigen value of 2.785 and percentage of variance of 10.712%.

Factor 3 has six variables related to the transport services in Gulmarg namely Easy to understand and use local transport (0.893), Reasonable transport charges (0.881), Timetable of local transport (0.770), Behavior of vehicular transporters (0.631), Condition of local transportation technology (0.452) and Sufficient local transport services (0.359). However, the respective factor is responsible for Eigen value of 2.287 and percentage of variance of 8.796%.

Factor 4 constitutes of four variables {(Diversity of food and beverage (0.916), reasonable food and beverage charges (0.634), sufficient food outlets (0.423), and Hygienic food and beverage (0.614)} related to food. This factor is liable for 1.972 of Eigen value and 7.585% of percentage of variance.

The fifth and last factor consist of five variables {Clean and hygienic (0.825), Ease of accommodation booking (0.810), Behaviour of hotel staff (0.764), accommodation charges (0.703), and accommodation location (0.610)}. All the variables are related to accommodation in Gulmarg. However, the Eigen value of this factor is 1.724 and its percentage of variance is 6.631%.

Table 3: Eigen value and Variances explained by various factors affecting Domestic Tourists' Satisfaction in Gulmarg

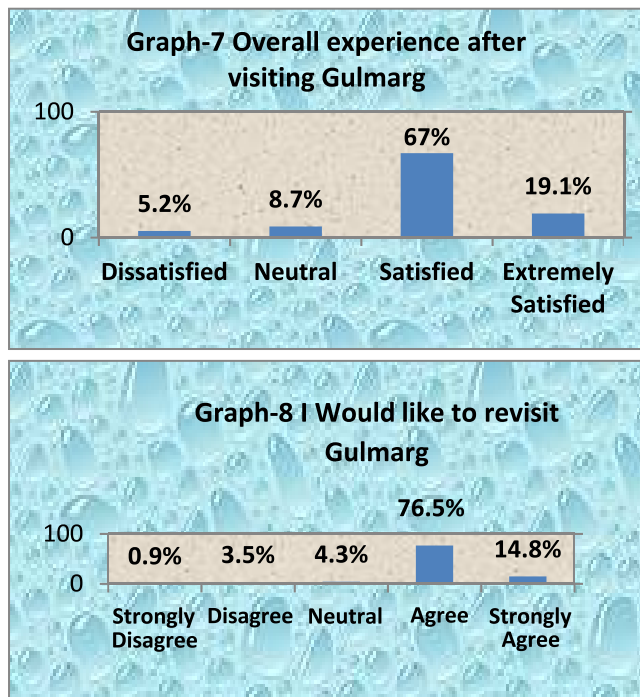
Factors extracted	Eigen Value	Percentage of variances	Cumulative Percentage of Variances
Factor 1	3.496	13.445	13.445
Factor 2	2.785	10.712	24.157
Factor 3	2.287	8.796	32.953
Factor 4	1.972	7.585	40.538
Factor 5	1.724	6.631	47.169

Table 4: Measurement of tourists' experience, revisiting intension and recommending Gulmarg to other people

Variable	Overall experience after visiting Gulmarg	I would like to revisit	Will recommend Gulmarg to my friends & relatives
Mean	4.0000	4.0087	4.0783

The tourists visiting to Gulmarg are mostly satisfied with everything they experienced there. The overall experience of tourists, after visiting to Gulmarg, is positive with the 4.0000 Mean value (Table 4) and according to the Graph 7. 67% respondents are satisfied with their travel experience to Gulmarg which is followed by the 19.1% extremely satisfied, 8.7% neutral and 5.2% dissatisfied respondents.

Figure 4: Satisfied Respondents willing to revisit the place

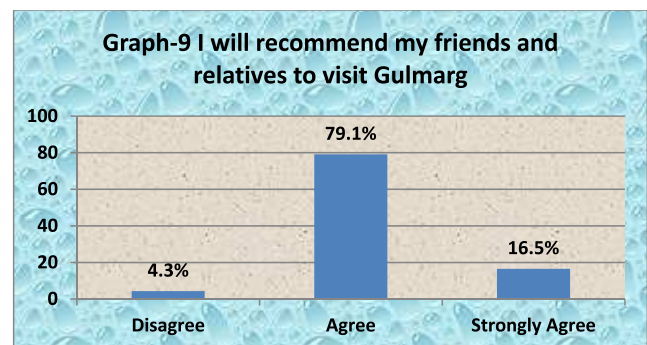


The current travel experience of tourists in Gulmarg generates a desire to visit again to this place in future. As per Table 4, the mean value of statement "I would like to revisit Gulmarg" is 4.0087 which is the positive score for the destination image. On the other hand, Graph 8 reveals the 76.5% respondents who agree to revisit Gulmarg. For the same statement, 14.8%, 4.3%, 3.5% and 0.9% of the respondents are the ones who strongly agree, neutral, disagree and strongly disagree respectively.

The satisfaction of tourists in Gulmarg motivates the respective tourists to hype the Gulmarg by the word of

mouth. The findings in Graph 9 indicates the maximum number of respondents (79.1%) respondents agree that they will recommend their friends and relatives to visit Gulmarg in future, while as 16.5% respondents are strongly agreeing for the same and 4.3% respondents are disagreeing with it. However, according to the Table 4, the mean value for the respective variable is 4.0783 which is a satisfactory mean value.

Figure 4: Respondents recommend friends and relatives to visit Gulmarg



CONCLUSION

According to the findings of the study, there are five main factors affecting tourists' satisfaction while visiting Gulmarg. The first three factors such as *General Elements of Destination, Personal Experience and Transport Services* are affecting tourist satisfaction positively, while as the other two factors like *Food & Beverage and Accommodation* are unable to meet the tourist expectations successfully. The quality of food, accommodation, transportation, their prices and so on are dissatisfying them. Though, there are slightly poor responses of tourists towards some of the destination aspects, but, despite of that, tourists' overall experience is satisfactory, and the most important thing is that majority of the tourists are willing to revisit and recommend the same destination to their friends, relatives and other people. They will act as the brand ambassadors of the Gulmarg and promote it by 'word of mouth' marketing technique.

This research work can be taken as an essential source of information and guidance for future tourism related decision in Gulmarg. There are some limitations of this study. May be these limitations would become opportunities for further research in future. The limitations are 1) less sample (N=115), 2) the study is based only on domestic tourists, and 3) the study survey was conducted only during summer season while as Gulmarg is winter destination as well.

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