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**PERCEPTION OF TOURISTS TOWARDS THE HOUSEBOATS IN KASHMIR**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Kashmir is "Paradise on the Earth" due to its attractive and mesmerizing natural beauty. In Kashmir valley, there are several other famous fabricated tourist attractions as well which motivates tourists nationwide and across the globe to visit valley in which Houseboats have unique place. The houseboats are the special form of accommodation in Kashmir valley that originated in Indian administered Kashmir by the coming of Britishers to Kashmir. These houseboats became unique attraction to the tourists of their unique experience in Kashmir valley. However, this houseboat heritage is representing the pure craft, culture and architecture in water bodies (lakes and river) of valley. The study aims to know the tourist perception towards houseboats as attraction and to examine the tourist satisfaction after consuming services in houseboats. In order to get the results of this study, extensive literature review based questionnaire was administered, later on, which was filled by 60 respondents in which 44 were Indian and 16 were foreign tourists. A 5 point likert scale was used to get the resonances for tourists and. However, before visiting Kashmir houseboat was in mind, food quality, behavior of staff, room service, communication services and so on were the statements asked to the tourists; the results of this study indicates that houseboats are the tourist attraction and tourists are satisfy with regard the services rendered in houseboats of Kashmir valley; but still there is need of improvement in houseboat services as results showed several tourists are neutral and dissatisfy. This study could be a good tool for the houseboat owners and service providers in understanding how to conduct or modify the existing houseboat services in future for making the loyal customers.*

**KEYWORDS**

Dall Lake; houseboats; houseboat accommodation; Kashmir valley; tourists.

**INTRODUCTION**

**T**ourism industry is a service industry which plays a pivotal role in the all-round development throughout the globe. Efforts are made to attract the tourists from each corner of the globe to meet the needs of every tourism stakeholder. When talking about 'tourist' as the stakeholder, it is difficult to satisfy the needs of tourists because of service product of tourism industry. The tourist expectations at destination is affected by several factors, such as the tourist demographic profile, life style, events, climate, culture, scenery, history, entertainment, uniqueness of destination etc., a tourist is accordingly setting his/her expectations at the destination prior visiting to it and after experiencing the services, the perceptions comes in mind (Williams and Buswell, 2003:65). But tourists are not always waiting till the last moment to judge the services; they perceive the services during the service delivery also (Zeithaml, 1988). The tourist satisfaction is the outcome of expectation and perception equilibrium. If the tourist expectations are not met at the destination, it will dis-satisfy the tourists, while as if the tourists experience is above his/her expectations, it will turn tourist a loyal customer and the positive expectations and perception is one of the prime travel motive to the tourist (Bennett (2000). The positive tourist perception is most important aspect of any destination, because without consistency in customer loyalty, a destination cannot survive in present competitive global market. The destination image should always be depicted in the mind of tourist for repeat visits at the same destination in future.

**HOUSEBOATS IN KASHMIR VALLEY**

Houseboat is a place in a water body which can be moored, used to be as a home after the payments paid by the guest. It can be said that a houseboat is a flat-bottomed, barge like boat fitted for use as a floating dwelling but not for rough water or to travel or live on a houseboat.

The history of houseboats is an interesting one that has relied on humankind's consistent fascination with the idea of living a life afloat. Originally, the evolution of houseboats occurred in the region of Kashmir of India during the nineteenth century traces back to nearly 140 years (Abrar M Shah and Dr. Shabana Ali, 2012) and was made mostly from cedar. The living in these houseboats became the recreation and leisure activity for the tourists throughout the world. However, how a permanent nomad boat dweller is feeling about the houseboat life, is different as the tourist is feeling in houseboat.

The Kashmir is considered the motherland of Houseboats, which are, nowadays, founded in different waters in different countries. Houseboat in Srinagar is counted as one of the key tourist's attractions of the Kashmir valley. Large numbers of tourists are attracted to Kashmir by the mesmerizing charm of houseboats, which provides ethereal experience of living on the water in a wooden paneled bedroom, with all modern amenities of a luxury hotel. Kashmir Houseboats are with all aspects of comfortability, modernity, beauty and elegancy for the tourists.

**REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

As for as the tourist perception and satisfaction are concern, the researchers have worked a lot over them on different destinations, hotels, food outlets, airlines, railways, cruises, road transport etc. it was founded that the customer satisfaction depends on the quality of services provided to tourists (Oliver, 1980: 460-469; Abdeldayem and Khanfer, 2007: 303-309; Cronin, Taylor, 1992: 55-68; Parasuraman et al., 1988: 12-37) and today, the tourist satisfaction is increasing by providing sophisticated services in hospitality, travel and recreation to the tourists (Kozak, Rimmington, 2000: 260). Loyal tourists are very important for receiving new tourists; the satisfied tourists will act as ambassadors of the destination through 'Word of Mouth publicity' (Akin Aksu et al.2010), furthermore, the tourist satisfaction plays an important role in destination survival and development anywhere (Phuong Giang Quach, 2013). Boltan (1998) and Bitner (1994) argued that customer satisfaction is the outcome of understanding the customer behavior before serving the customer(s) according to his/her likes, dislikes and need better than the competitors. Fornell and Anderson (1996) stated that customer satisfaction is the main factor of customer loyalty in the hospitality industry which's product is tangible as well as intangible and it's satisfaction depends on level of services, food & drink, value for money, cleanliness & hygiene and other service which customer experiences at a particular time. Tijani Nasiru et al. (sources: <http://www.jthca.org/Download/pdf/V4%20IS3/chap%201.pdf>) concluded that professional and experienced staff of a firm and prior knowing the guest expectations is important to satisfy the customer.

The tourist perception has been discussed by the several scholars. Perception is based on sensations (Seaton & Bennett, 1996, p.73-74). It was discussed that perception is a process of selecting, organizing, and interpreting stimuli into a meaningful picture of the world (Seaton & Bennett, 1996, p.74). Moreover, tourist perception is a process in which tourist information is transmitted into the internal mental world from the external that each of us experience (Pizam & Mansfeld, 1999, p.104-106). Echtner & Ritchie (2003, p.41) and Hübnera & Gössling (2012, p.48) stated that the destination image and elements of personality may influence to the tourist perception. In addition to this, the perception is affected by the personal characteristics of the people (Reisinger & Turner, 2003, p149). While studying the tourist perception and expectation, Cheang (2011) says that tourists have experienced the local culture, friendliness of local people, and local hospitality facilities beyond their expectations. Henderson (2011) mentions that foreign visitors have perceived tourism infrastructure of Philippine negatively to choose a destination, he added that political insurgency and safety & security issues also influences on Philippine international tourism. Hsieh & Kai Li (2008) examined organizational brand is iconic factor in consumer's perception while thinking about company product, moreover, Hankinson (2004)

highlighted that tourism brand image is directly related with history, people, cultural heritage etc of a destination. Muhammad Sabbir Rahman (2012) used structural modeling equation and concluded that internet, destination brand image and customer satisfaction played a significant role in influencing tourist's perception in selection of a destination for travelling in Bangladesh.

**OBJECTIVES**

1. To analyse the tourist perception towards the houseboats as an attraction
2. To examine the tourist satisfaction after using the services in houseboats of Kashmir Valley

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This is an empirical study. The aim of this study was to know tourists' perception about houseboats and their satisfaction after staying in houseboats of Kashmir valley. In order to get the results of this study, the 60 questionnaires were filled by the domestic and foreign tourists in which 47 tourists are India and 13 tourists are foreigners who stayed in houseboats in Kashmir and used all the services provided in the houseboats to them. The questionnaire was divided into two parts in which Part-I was related to demographic profile of the respondents and Part-II was related to objectives of this study. In Part-II of questionnaire, a 5 point Likert scale was used to get the responses from the respondents in which 1= Highly Satisfy .....and 5= Highly Dis-satisfy was considered. The results are measured by percentage technique by the SPSS 16.0 version software.

**DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS**

**TABLE 1: DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF THE RESPONDENTS**

Age in years	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 25	14	23.3
26 – 40	18	30.0
46 – 55	17	28.3
56 +	11	18.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Income/Annum in Lakh (₹)		
less than 1.5	20	33.3
1.5 to 3	18	30.0
3 to 4.5	9	15.0
4.5 to 6	9	15.0
Above 6	4	6.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Education		
up to 10+2	3	5.0
UG	11	18.3
Graduate	23	38.3
P.G	21	35.0
Above P.G	2	3.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Occupation		
self-employment	8	13.3
Govt service	19	31.7
Business	19	31.7
Agriculture	12	20.0
Study	2	3.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Sex		
Male	47	78.3
Female	13	21.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Marital Status		
married	47	78.3
unmarried	13	21.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Nationality		
domestic	44	73.3
foreigner	16	26.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The *Table-1* is the clear about the demographic profile of the respondents. The highest respondents (30%) are from age group of 26 to 40 years followed by age group of 46 to 55 years (28.3%), less than 25 years (23.3%) and of above the 56 years (18.3%). Mostly, the budget class tourists have used the houseboat services as the 33.3% respondents have annual income less than Rs 1.5 lacs followed by the annual income Rs 1.5 to 3 lacs of 30% respondents, Rs 3 to 4.5 lakh of 15% respondents, Rs 4.5 to 6 lacs of 15% respondents and only 6.7% have more than Rs 6 lacs annual income. The highest percentage of respondents is of postgraduates (35%) while as only 3.3% having more than P.G qualifications. 38.3% are graduates and 18.3% are undergraduates, moreover, 5% respondents have up to 10+2 level qualifications. Talking about the occupations of respondents, majority of respondents are involved in government service (31.7%) and in business (31.7%) activities followed by agriculture (20%), self-employment (13.3%) and study (3.3%). In this study, the male respondents are 78.3% and only 21.7% are females. In addition to this, 78.3% respondents are married and 21.7% are unmarried. The percentage of domestic respondents (73.3%) is high as compare to foreign respondents (26.7%) in this study.

**ANALYSIS OF TOURIST PERCEPTION TOWARDS THE HOUSEBOATS**

**TABLE-2: BEFORE VISITING KASHMIR, HOUSEBOAT WAS IN MIND**

Valid	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	25	41.7
agree	26	43.3
Neither agree nor disagree	4	6.7
Strongly Disagree	5	8.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100.0</b>

43.3% respondents are agree with the statement that before visiting to Kashmir houseboat was in their minds followed by 41.7% respondents who are strongly agree with same statement. 6.7% are neutral and 8.3% are strongly dis-agreed with this statement. Overall satisfaction level of respondents is quite high.



**TABLE-3: EFFICIENT HOUSEBOAT ROOMS**

Valid	Frequency	Percent
strongly agree	11	18.3
agree	30	50.0
neither agree nor disagree	14	23.3
disagree	3	5.0
strongly disagree	2	3.3
Total	60	100.0

Maximum number of respondents (50%) is agreeing that houseboat rooms are efficient and 18.3% respondents are strongly agreed with the above statement. The 23.3% respondents are neutral with the same statement and 3.3% respondents are strongly disagree while as 5% respondents are disagree with this statement.

**TABLE-4: BETTER COMMUNICATION FACILITIES**

Valid	Frequency	Percent
strongly agree	7	11.7
agree	29	48.3
neither agree nor disagree	14	23.3
disagree	8	13.3
strongly disagree	2	3.3
Total	60	100.0

The 48.3% respondents are agreeing that communication facilities are better in houseboats followed by the 11.7% of strongly agreed respondents. The 23.3% respondents are neutral in this statement. The 3.3% respondents are strongly disagreeing and 13.3% disagree respondents with the said statement.

**TABLE-5: SERVICES IN HOUSEBOATS WERE PROVIDED IN KASHMIRI STYLE**

Valid	Frequency	Percent
strongly agree	7	11.7
agree	29	48.3
neither agree nor disagree	11	18.3
disagree	11	18.3
strongly disagree	2	3.3
Total	60	100.0

The highest number of respondents (48.3%) are agree with the that they were served in Kashmiri traditional way, while as the 11.7% respondents are strongly agree with the same statement. 18.3% respondents are neutral about this statement. The 3.3% respondents are strongly disagree and 18.3% are disagree with this statement.

**TABLE-6: APPRECIABLE BEHAVIOR OF SERVICE PROVIDERS**

Valid	Frequency	Percent
strongly agree	21	35.0
agree	31	51.7
neither agree nor agree	2	3.3
disagree	6	10.0
Total	60	100.0

51.7% respondents are agreeing with that the behavior of service providers is appreciable and 35% respondents are strongly agreed with the same statement. The 10% respondents are disagreeing and 3.3% respondents are neutral in this statement.

**TABLE-7: EFFICIENT WASHROOM, TOILET, WATER ETC FACILITIES**

Valid	Frequency	Percent
strongly agree	5	8.3
agree	34	56.7
neither agree nor disagree	11	18.3
disagree	6	10.0
strongly disagree	4	6.7
Total	60	100.0

Talking about the efficiency of washroom, toilet points, water etc facilities, the 56.7% respondents are agree and 8.3% respondents are strongly agree with it. The 18.3% respondents are neutral and 10% respondents are disagree, while as 6.7% respondents are strongly disagree with this statement.

**TABLE-8: HYGIENIC FOOD QUALITY IN HOUSEBOATS**

Valid	Frequency	Percent
strongly agree	11	18.3
agree	25	41.7
neither agree nor disagree	19	31.7
disagree	5	8.3
Total	60	100.0

The 41.7% respondents are agreeing with the hygienic food quality in houseboats and 18.3% respondents are strongly agreed with the same statement. The 31.7% respondents are neither agree nor disagree and only 8.3% respondents are disagree with the said statement.

**TABLE-9: REASONABLE CHARGES FOR HOUSEBOATS SERVICES**

Valid	Frequency	Percent
strongly agree	9	15.0
agree	33	55.0
neither agree nor disagree	8	13.3
disagree	8	13.3
strongly disagree	2	3.3
Total	60	100.0

55% respondents are agree that they are charge reasonable for houseboat services and 15% respondents are strongly agree for the same statement. 13.3% respondents are neither agree nor disagree in this case. The 13.3% respondents are disagreeing and 3.3% respondents are strongly disagreeing with this statement.

**TABLE-10: STAYING IN A HOUSEBOAT WAS CURIOSITY**

Valid	Frequency	Percent
strongly agree	13	21.7
Agree	39	65.0
neither agree nor disagree	6	10.0
Disagree	2	3.3
Total	60	100.0

65% respondents are agreeing with the statement that '*staying in a houseboat was curiosity*'. Followed by the strongly satisfied 21.7% respondents, while as 10% are neutral and 3.3% are disagreeing with this statement. Overall, there is sufficient support and positive perception of respondents towards the houseboats.

**TABLE-11: STAYING IN HOUSEBOAT WAS MUCH ENJOYABLE THAN HOTEL**

Valid	Frequency	Percent
strongly agree	16	26.7
agree	22	36.7
neither agree nor disagree	14	23.3
disagree	8	13.3
Total	60	100.0

36.7% respondents are agree that houseboat accommodation was enjoyable than hotels, while as 26.7% respondents are strongly agree with the same statement. The 23.3% respondents are silent about the said statement and 13.3% respondents are disagreeing with this statement.

**TABLE-12: WILL TAKE HOUSEBOAT ACCOMMODATION ON NEXT VISIT TO KASHMIR**

Valid	Frequency	Percent
strongly agree	20	33.3
agree	23	38.3
neither agree nor disagree	9	15.0
disagree	6	10.0
strongly disagree	2	3.3
Total	60	100.0

Only a satisfied customer can wish to take the services of same service provider again and again, that is why 38.3% of respondents are agree with on their next visit to Kashmir they will take houseboat accommodation again and 33.3% respondents are strongly agree with the same statement. Only 3.3% respondents are strongly disagreeing and 10% respondents disagree with the above said statement.

**TABLE-13: YOU WILL SUGGEST HOUSEBOATS IN KASHMIR TO OTHERS**

Valid	Frequency	Percent
strongly agree	28	46.7
agree	25	41.7
neither agree nor disagree	3	5.0
disagree	4	6.7
Total	60	100.0

The maximum percentage of respondents (46.7%) are strongly agree that they will suggest the house boat accommodation to others in Kashmir and again the 41.7% respondents are agree with the same statement, only 6.7% respondents are disagree and 5% respondents are neutral in this statement. The response of respondents shows that tourists are satisfy with services of houseboats hence they want to suggest the houseboats to others.

TABLE-14: IF HOUSEBOATS NO MORE EXIST IN KASHMIR, WOULD HAVE RECONSIDERED DECISION

Valid	Frequency	Percent
strongly agree	4	6.7
Agree	18	30.0
neither agree nor disagree	13	21.7
Disagree	25	41.7
Total	60	100.0

The houseboats are not getting here much positive responses from respondents in the statement 'If houseboats no more exist in Kashmir, would have reconsidered decision'. 41.7% are disagree with this statement and 21.7% are neutral about it; only 30% are agree and 6.7% are strongly agree with same statement.

TABLE-15: SATISFIED EXPERIENCE AT HOUSEBOAT

Valid	Frequency	Percent
strongly agree	19	31.7
agree	25	41.7
neither agree nor disagree	8	13.3
disagree	6	10.0
strongly disagree	2	3.3
Total	60	100.0

The 25% respondents are agreeing that they are satisfied with the experience of houseboat services and 13.7% respondents are strongly agree with the same statement. The 13.3% respondents are neither agree nor disagree with houseboat experience. The 10% respondents are disagreeing and 3.3% respondents are strongly disagreeing with above mentioned statement.

## CONCLUSION

The study is about to know the tourists' perception about the houseboats in Kashmir valley. Both, Indian as well as foreign tourists have expressed their perception as per the statements asked in the questionnaire. It is noted that majority of respondents have good economical background, moreover, mostly the young and married tourists are consuming the houseboat services in Kashmir valley. The respondents are good enough educated persons and are, mostly, involved in the government services and self-businesses. The overall perception of tourists' is positive towards the statements, like before visiting Kashmir houseboat was in mind, friendly behavior of staff, efficient houseboat rooms and so on. In addition to this, several tourists are neutral in some statements, like better communication, traditional serving style, food quality, will take houseboat accommodation on next visit etc. The important thing to take into consideration is that the perception of various tourists' is negative towards the overall performance of houseboat industry of Jammu and Kashmir. Many tourists are not satisfy with the statements, like communication facilities, serving in Kashmiri style, reasonable charges, enjoyable stay, will take houseboat accommodation next time and the satisfied experience.

This study could be a good tool for the houseboat owners and service providers of Kashmir valley in understanding how to conduct or modify the existing houseboat services in future for making the loyal customers, because tourist satisfaction is the outcome of efficient tourism services and best experience of tourism services.

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