

Environmental Behaviors of Tourists in the Desert Destinations

Case Study: Rural Areas of Khourand Biabanak Township

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Extended Abstract

Introduction

Ecotourism is a kind of tourism and a way of achieving sustainable development in rural areas with high tourism capacities. The distinction between ecotourism and tourism is in the characteristics of ecotourism, that is to say, the positive characteristics of an ecotourism are nature and culture of traveling activities, enhancement of public awareness about the environment, protection of the local environmental sources, minimum impact of tourism, empowerment of local people and maximizing the financial benefits for local communities. Responsible environmental behavior is a prerequisite necessity and an important achievement for tourism sustainable development in rural areas. Environmental tourism destinations are affected directly and indirectly by tourists' behaviors and activities. The researchers are eager to study the tourist behaviors due to their severe impact on the environmental destinations. Study about the tourist behavior at various destinations is priority of researchers and practitioners as main concern. To this end, they adopted different terms such as responsible environmental behavior to describe the behaviors that reduce the negative environmental impacts and protect various environmental tourism destinations. Responsible environmental behavior indicates that the tourists should follow the norms of responsible traveling in various tourism destinations. Based on tourist responsible environmental behavior assessment in tourism destinations, this research aims at measurement of the tourist environmental behavior and the factors that influence these behaviors in the desert ecotourism destinations.

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Methodology

Method of this study was based on a questionnaire survey research. The behavior was a dependent variable and factors such as perceived value, destination image, loyalty, satisfaction and awareness were considered as independent variables. The population of this study was the tourists who traveled to this city and its rural areas in spring. The collected data were analyzed by SPSS software and the tests used in this study were based on the nature of the collected data and the objective as descriptive and analytical data (only the participant personal information was measured in descriptive data). In the analytical results, at first the items of each macro variable affecting the behavior were combined with others and analyzed by one-sample t-test. Then, path analysis was used to understand the influence of each independent variable on the dependent variable (behavior).

Results and discussion

Based on the responsible environmental behaviors and individual characteristics relationship, the results revealed that there is a significant relationship between age and degree of responsible environmental behavior, so that $r=0.363$ and significant level is $\alpha=0.036$. Whereas the calculated error of measurement is less than 0.050, it can be claimed that two variables have relationship at level of 0.050 and there was a relationship between nominal variables of education level, job and degree of responsible environmental behavior. However, gender had no relationship with responsible environmental behavior. The findings indicated that tourists followed the environmental behavior in rural areas of this region. Factors such as degree of awareness, perceived value, and mental image of destination, loyalty and satisfaction of travelling affected the environmental behaviors in rural areas of Khouzestan and Biyabank. Based on the path analysis results, interest in place (loyalty to the destination) had the maximum effect and tourist mental image of destination had the minimum effect on the dependent variable of the study. According to the relationship of responsible environmental behaviors and individual characteristics, the results showed that there was a significant relationship between age, education and degree of responsible environmental behavior. However, there was not any relationship between gender and behavior.

Conclusion

In general, responsible environmental behavior was considered as a prerequisite necessity and an important achievement for rural areas tourism sustainable development. Promotion of responsible environmental behavior can conserve biodiversity and environmental attractiveness of tourism destinations and aid in the growth and prosperity of these destinations. Therefore, responsible environmental behavior should be considered as an important factor in the various tourism destinations and should be adopted in sustainable way. According to the theoretical basis, variables such as tourist awareness, tourist perceived value, total satisfaction, tourist mental image of destination and loyalty to the destination were considered as

the factors that influenced the responsible environmental behavior of tourists. Therefore, the results showed that the tourists followed the responsible environmental behaviors in rural areas of this region. Other findings of this study indicated that among the variables that affected the tourist environmental behavior, only the image of destination had an unpleasant situation. Therefore, the most important concern of tourists about the image of destination was related to electronic reservation of products, low levels of education and local staffs unfriendly behaviors to the customers in rural areas of this region. We used path analysis to understand the contribution of each independent variable on the dependent variable (behavior). The results of path analysis also revealed that loyalty to destination was the most effective factor in tourist's responsible environmental behavior. This means that if the tourists had more loyalty to the destination, they had showed higher responsible behaviors in that destination. After the degree of awareness, the perceived value, image of destination and loyalty to the destination can affect the environmental behavior of tourists directly and indirectly.

Keywords: desert tourism, destinations, environmental behaviors, Khouzestan and Biabanak Township, rural areas, tourists.

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