

Assessment of Environment Quality of Rural Tourism Destinations Case Study: Asara County, Karaj Township

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Extended Abstract

Introduction

Environment quality is one of the main issues in development; In fact, many of the behavioral abnormalities -with many historical, cultural or economical sources- have been resulted from the quality of residential and work spaces. A high quality environment gives the residents a sense of welfare and satisfaction through its physical, social or symbolic attributes. Thus, the quality of environment of human settlements and especially rural areas of tourism destinations depends greatly on the quality of infrastructures and well management. Tourists consider different points as tourism destinations, from natural original regions to historical and cultural sites, fairs and festivals. Each of these destinations has its own specific environment, which is supported by population of its functional and distributional area; two mentioned natural and human environments are influenced by development of tourism activities. However, tourism destination attributes affect the perceived quality by tourists, and the perceived quality relates to tourists' satisfaction and their behavioral tendencies. The relationship between satisfaction and behavioral tendencies has been confirmed. Therefore, environment quality is one of the effective factors of rural tourism development that plays an important role in local residents' and tourists' satisfaction. With the importance of environment quality and its various components in the way of rural tourism development, this paper is to evaluate the environment quality of rural tourism destinations in Asara County in the province of Alborz, to answer these questions: 1. how is the level of environment quality of rural tourism destinations in Asara? 2. Is there significant difference between the viewpoints of local residents and tourists about environment quality of studied villages? 3. Is there significant relationship between tourists' viewpoint on environment quality and attracting tourists?

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Methodology

This paper is an applied research whose method is descriptive. The required data has been gathered through library studies and field work. The basis of field work is questionnaire whose questions organized in nominal, ordinal and interval scales. Statistical population is the villages with more than 50 households in Asara County; based on some criteria such as population, distance and local reputation in tourism. Five villages including Velayatrud, Nesa, Shahrestanak, Aderan and Tekye-Sepahsalar were selected. In this paper, the unit of analysis is heads of households and tourists. Sample size was calculated by Cochran's test (confidence level of 95% and significance level of 0.05). This led to selection of 296 heads of households from 1299 local households in the five villages, and 322 tourists. Based on library studies and content analysis, it selected 40 criteria within 7 indicators including structural and functional quality, quality of tourism attractions, visual quality, environmental quality, quality of texture and transportation network, social environment quality, and environment dynamism. Analysis of attracting tourists was conducted through studying the indicators of the attractiveness of the village, willingness to visit again, stimulating others to visit village, and tendency to tourism development. Descriptive and Inferential statistics were applied for data analysis.

Results and Discussion

Results show that among studied criteria, maximum and minimum amount of total mean are related to the "beauty of rural landscapes" from the set of quality of tourism attraction criteria and "parking facilities" from structural and functional quality indicator, respectively. From the viewpoint of population, maximum and minimum amount of total mean are belonged to the criteria of "accessibility to financial services" and "construction harmony". Results of tourists' viewpoint analysis show that the criteria of "beauty of attractions" and "local guides' cooperation" have gained the maximum and minimum amount of mean, respectively. Besides, analysis of the viewpoints of local residents and tourists in the level of total indicators show the significant difference just in "the quality of tourism attractions" and "environmental quality". In the level of detailed criteria, Mann-Whitney test show significant difference between local residents' and tourists' viewpoints about some criteria such as "host services", "basic curative facilities", "leisure facilities", "place palatability", etc.

Conclusion

In the way of achieving sustainable development of tourism in rural areas, it is necessary to recognize assessment and promotion of the environment quality of tourism destinations. Therefore, the present study has evaluated the environment quality of rural tourism destinations located in Asara County in Alborz Province. The results of this research also showed that environment quality of studied villages is upper than average from the viewpoint of two mentioned groups. It is notable that the tourists' assessment of environment quality is more proper than those of the

local residents. The results also show that among septet total indicators, indicator of “structural and functional quality” has more effect to attract tourist.

Overall, based on the findings of the study, the following issues can help planners and tourism beneficiaries create more sustainable and high quality tourism villages: these suggestions are development and implementation of practical projects aiming at promotion of environment quality using the viewpoints of tourists and local residents, arrangement of rules and regulations for protecting and improving the quality of various aspects of the rural environment, developing a sense of responsibility among residents and tourists about rural environmental quality, and finally, construction and development of appropriate recreational facilities for daily tourists.

Keywords: Asara County, Environment quality, Local residents, Rural tourism, Tourists.

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