

Research Paper

Analysis of the Factors Affecting the Willingness of Tourists for Tour-based Rural Trips: A Case Study of Rural Tourists in Maragheh County

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ABSTRACT

The tourism industry is a complex issue which encompasses various components. Tour operating is one of these components which can play an important role in the development of tourism industry because of its connection with residential centers, restaurants, transportation as well as experiences and learnings on tourism destinations. This research aimed to identify the factors affecting the willingness of tourists for tour-based rural trips in Maragheh county. In this study, the data were collected using a questionnaire. The statistical population of the study included the tourists that had traveled to the villages with a high tourism capacity in Maragheh county in 2016. Of these, 200 people were selected using a convenience sampling method. The results of the exploratory factor analysis indicated that people's willingness for tour-centered rural trips is influenced by certain factors sequenced in terms of importance as follows: "a safe environment for family and proper nutrition", "entertainment and security during the trip", "discipline and explicit and appropriate travel plans", "appropriate vehicles and their on-time service", "incentives and privileges of the agency", "an environment for the unmarried". These six factors explained 65.17% of the variance of willingness of tourists for tour-centered rural trips.

Key words:

Rural tourism, Tour operation, Maragheh, Factor analysis, Tourist safety and security

Extended Abstract**1. Introduction**

One of the essential components of the tourism industry is tour management. Tour management is more important in certain branches of tourism, such as rural tourism. This is because rural tourism destinations are varied and have a wide geographical

distribution in the countries. Access to them is more difficult than to urban tourism destinations, and they are less recognized by the general public. In addition, with regard to the importance of rural tourism, studies ever done on tourism have not paid due attention to rural tourism. In other words, no study has provided insight into the factors affecting the interests of people toward tour-based rural trips. It is very important, therefore, to find a right answer to the question "what factors affect people's willingness for tour-based traveling to rural areas?". Thus the main

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purpose of this study is to analyze the factors affecting the willingness of tourists for tour-based rural trips with a focus on Maragheh county.

2. Methodology

The study population included the tourists that had traveled to the villages with high tourism capability in Maragheh county in the summer of 2016. The main research tool was a questionnaire. In order to examine the factors of effect on the willingness of tourists to take rural journeys on tours and their preference to take individual trips. Based on the scale of DAILYSERVE and SERQUAL, 35 items were used. In fact, 35 items were presented to the respondents to rate according to their importance in preference to travel individually or on tours. In this regard, the applied scale had ten scores from 1 to 10 (Table 3). In other words, each item was measured by 10 degrees. To determine the sample size, due to lack of a specific sampling frame, the available sampling method was used. Based on the factor analysis as done in other studies, the sample size was decided to be 10 to 20 people per variable. Totally, 200 tourists were studied. Prioritization of the affecting items was done by using the coefficient of variation, and the factors affecting preferences of taking tours or individual trips were analyzed through the exploratory factor analysis.

3. Results

The results showed that about 104 tourists (52%) who had traveled to tourism destinations possessed private cars, and 96 persons (48%) of them were without a car. Also, on rural tours, 175 tourists (87%) tended to travel by private car, and only 25 persons (13%) chose to take tours to travel. Perhaps, tourists feel comfortable when they use a private car. The data obtained from the coefficient of variation showed that tourists had a great consensus about the effect of the variables on a rural tour. The respondents sequenced the variables as follows: "observance of traffic rules by drivers", "vehicle safety", "order on the implementation of the travel plans" and "insurance and secure tourism in destination". They had the lowest consensus about the effect of the variables "the first-aid kit to help possible victims", "having heating and cooling facilities", "presence of a television in the vehicle for movie playback", and "granting freedom out of the norm and the people on the tour". The results of the exploratory factor analysis showed that people's willingness to take tours on rural trips is influenced by "family safe environment and proper nutrition", "entertainment during the trip", "orderly, transparent and fair travel plan", "good vehicle", "incentives and privileges agency" and "appropriate en-

vironment for the unmarried". These six factors explained 65/17% of the variance of intentions to travel on a tour.

4. Discussion

In examining the demographic characteristics of rural tourism in the county of Maragheh, it was found that only 13 percent ($n = 25$) of the studied tourists chose a tour to travel to rural tourism. As many as 87% of them believed traveling by private car is comfortable. In any case, the current situation may be a major obstacle for rural tourism to thrive in the country. Rural tourism can be a profitable industry because tour management is an essential component in generating income. The results of ranking the affecting variables in preference of tours for travel to rural tourism destinations showed that tourists consider it important to have safety of vehicle, discipline, and strict implementation of commitments made by tour presenters.

5. Conclusion

The results of the exploratory factor analysis indicated that people's willingness for tour-centered rural trips is influenced by certain factors sequenced in terms of importance as follows: "a safe environment for family and proper nutrition", "entertainment and security during the trip", "discipline and explicit and appropriate travel plans", "appropriate vehicles and their on-time service", "incentives and privileges of the agency", "an environment for the unmarried". These findings are in contrast with the findings of Wang et al. (2007) and Caber and Albayrak (2016). They have offered a more diverse structure. The reason for getting different results in different studies may be attributed to the differences in the substrates; previous empirical studies have evaluated quality of tours at the international level, while this research is the first one which did a survey on the quality of tours in the field of rural tourism. This study contributed to the current understanding of how tourists prefer tour-based rural trips to individual rural trips.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declared no conflicts of interest