

Strategic Planning for Development of Rural Ecotourism (Case Study: Bisheh Station Village)

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Extended abstract

Introduction

Achieving sustainable development depends on the attention to the economic, social, cultural and environmental factors in a community. Tourism as an effective element in development requires further research. The complexity and density in urban life make many people to regard the nature and the areas with valuable natural capacity. Thus, flows of tourism are formed in order to enjoy the peace and beauty of nature. Tourism has different forms that are different in regard to environmental conditions. It is believed that tourism is a green activity and, therefore, it does not damage the environment. Urban areas in terms of natural and historical circumstances, highland areas with beautiful perspectives, lush gardens, environmental characteristics, altitude, beautiful topography and landscapes and landmarks in villages provide a good ground for development of rural ecotourism with planning, proper management, and suitable investment. Rural ecotourism is one of the most important approaches of tourism in line with the optimal productivity of natural resources and rural ecosystem. Protection and retention of environment and natural resources are essential. Although Bisheh station village has many potentials for attracting visitors for natural environment, e.g., Cezar River, but there is no planning for tourism in this village. Bisheh village and Biesheh waterfall can be used for water sports and fishing, but no research were conducted on the area yet. Attractive places should be paved for visitors, but they are still bumpy. Understanding, planning and attention to ecotourism potentials of Bisheh can attract tourists and promote the rural economy through creating jobs and increasing income and income distribution. Promotion of village ecotourism can be effective in sustainable development and elimination of rural deprivation. This study not only gives strategies and helpful tips for planning rural ecotourism, but it can also enrich the literature of ecotourism, promote education, and introduce the culture and attractive places of this village.

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Methodology

In this study, attractions, facilities and services of rural tourism in Bisheh have been identified according to the sources, documents, and field surveys. A list of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of rural ecotourism has been identified through investigation of the internal and external environments. Then, these factors were weighted through opinions of people, tourists and officials using questionnaires and targeted interviews. The internal and external strategic factors as bases to adjust strategy have been identified as SWOT matrix for analysis of rural ecotourism. Based on the matrix, the quantitative strategic planning was prioritized for analysis of rural ecotourism. Finally, the strategies for ecotourism development in the village have been identified. It is worthy to note that this study has three groups of samples: 127 people in the village, 140 tourists and 44 officials have been selected randomly by Cochran.

Results and discussion

In analysis of the internal environment, natural attractions and particular ecosystems including Bisheh waterfall, oak forests, Cesar River, beautiful valleys, and special plant and animal species, are known as a major strength with the mean value of 4.45 from the viewpoint of officials, 4.3 from the viewpoint of people, and 4.5 from tourists' perspective. The consistency in responses of these three perspectives for identification of the most important strengths of the village indicates that these strengths are such clear that all the three groups identified it at first. From the perspective of people and officials, two factors of pollution of natural resources by garbage and lack of proper sewage disposal system have mean values of 4.18 and 4.25, respectively. From tourist's viewpoint, inappropriate and dangerous road from Khorramabad to Bisheh was identified the most important weaknesses of the village ecotourism with 3.96 mean value. In analysis of the external environment, the most important external opportunities are including providing more and better services to visitors, compared with recreational areas like Gerrit village, with the mean of 4.39 (from the officials view point), strengthening the rail traffic and design of wagons for tourists with the mean value of 3.81 (from the people perspective), and convenient and safe access to rural areas through Khorramabad road (from tourists viewpoint).

Increase in facilities and services for competition with other recreation areas such as Gerrit village (from the officials perspective), increase in the tendency of tourists to travel to these regions instead of traveling to the Bisheh village with the mean value of 3.95, and pollution of Cesar River and Bisheh waterfall, loss of plants and the extinction of fish because of hunting (from the perspective of people and tourists) with the mean of 4.11 and 3.8, respectively, are the most important external threats.

Conclusion

It can be stated that the three groups believed that the most important strategies are formulation of special standards and rules for sound use of the attractions to avoid devastation and pollution in order to prevent degradation of the environment and attractions of the village.

Keywords: strategic planning, rural ecotourism, rural development, SWOT analysis, Bisheh station village.