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TOURISM IN THE MEDITERRANEAN REGION: CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES AHEAD

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Abstract:-Since last decade Mediterranean region has recorded the highest growth rates in inbound world tourism. In the same duration, domestic tourism in this region also increased rapidly, in spite of security threats, natural calamities, rises in oil prices and economic uncertainties in the Mediterranean region. Even the 2008 global economic crisis had no serious impact on this growth. It has been confirmed that the flexibility of tourism and the huge potential in this region. Despite of the economic crises in the main source market European Union, it resumes gradually democratisation process. Year 2011 was the magical year for Tourism industry in the Mediterranean region and registered approx 306 million international tourist arrivals. It was one third of the international tourist flow world wide.

This paper looks at whether this trend will continue in coming years. The paper will also explore the opportunities for tourism in this region. This paper tries to examine the tourism impacts, especially in an economic, social and environmental perspective. Secondary source is the prime source for collecting the relevant information this paper.

Keywords: Mediterranean Sea, destination, climate, challenges, International arrivals.

INTRODUCTION

The Mediterranean Sea is a large sea that is located between Europe, northern Africa and south-western Asia. Its total area is 970,000 square miles (2,500,000 sq km) and its greatest depth is located off the coast of Greece at around 16,800 feet (5,121 m) deep. Due to the large size and central location of Mediterranean Sea, it borders 21 different nations on three continents.

Figure No. 1 Map of Mediterranean region



Source : William G. Kepner

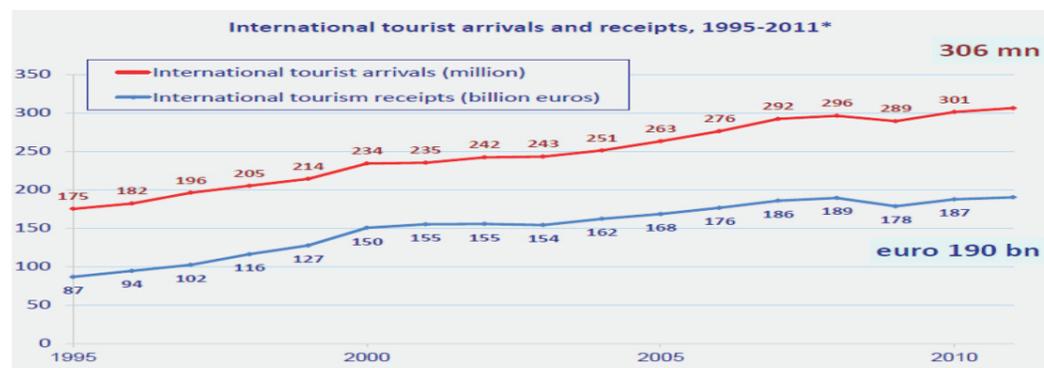
There are 21 nations with coastlines along the Mediterranean sea. The Mediterranean consists of 29 tourist destinations in Europe, Middle East and Africa. It shares a similar climate, geography, and historical as well as cultural links dating back to ancient times. It is a unique combination of mild climate, exceptional natural resources, rich tradition and culture. The biggest advantage of this region is the proximity to major source markets.

Table No:1 Countries around Mediterranean sea

Continents	Country	capital	Area	Population
Africa	Algeria	Algiers	919,595 sq miles	34,994,937
	Egypt	Cairo	386,662 sq miles	82,079,636
	Libya	Tripoli	679,362 sq miles	6,597,960
	Morocco	Rabat	172,414 sq miles	31,968,361
	Tunisia	Tunis	63,170 sq miles	10,629,186
Asia	Cyprus	Nicosia	3,572 sq miles	1,120,489
	Israel	Jerusalem	8,019 sq miles	7,473,052
	Lebanon	Beirut	4,015 sq miles	4,143,101
	Syria	Damascus	714,498 sq miles	22,517,750
Europe	Albania	Tirana	11,099sq miles	2,994,667
	Bosnia Herzegovina	Sarajevo	19,767 sq miles	4,622,163
	Croatia	Zagreb	21,851 sq miles	4,483,804
	France	Peris	248,573 sq miles	65,312,249
	Greece	Athens	50,949 sq miles	10,760,136
	Italy	Rome	116348 sq miles	61,016,804
	Malta	Valletta	122 sq miles	408,333
	Monaco	Monaco	0.77 Sq miles	30,539
	Montenegro	Padgorica	5,333 sq miles	661,807
	Slovenia	Ljubljana	7,827 sq miles	2,000,092
	Spain	Madrid	195,124 sq miles	46,754,784
	Turkey	Ankara	302,535 sq miles	78,785,548

Today Mediterranean Sea is the world's leading tourism destination in terms of both international and domestic tourism. In 2011 region received approx 306 million tourists from all over the world and it is one third of total arrivals worldwide. Tourism is a major pillar of Mediterranean economies. Region earned 215 billion euro export earning from international tourism worldwide. It is about 12% of the total export. It is projected that Mediterranean will get 10 million new arrivals per year on average up to 2030.

Figure No: 1 International arrivals & receipts in Mediterranean



Source : UNWTO

Impact of Tourism in the Mediterranean

	Positive Impacts	Negative Impact
Physical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Provides a long-term sustainable preservation of resources, natural or man made including biodiversity - Encourage improvement physical surroundings quality which is available to local people. - Provides an economic good reason for the re-establishment of degraded environments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - collapse natural spaces through new constructions -Excess development puts pressure on fragile natural elements -Disturbs wildlife habitats and ecosystems -produce litter and pollution - Diverts local natural resources (e.g. water and land) for tourism development, create problem for local residents.
Social/Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Creates economic value markets for natural or built environments. direct economic contribution to local community - Produce economic resources that may be used for conservation activities - Motivates small and medium-sized enterprises to carry tourism businesses - Enhance the standard of living for local community - Improves the quality of the life for residents who are able to use the tourist services (amenities & activities) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Basis of making profits out of the environment -Disrupts employment patterns -Affect the local socio-cultural structure -Promote prostitution, sex tourism, drugs and crime - Presents ethical standards of developed countries, into local communities - Generate gap between visitors and residents
Cultural/Educational:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Supports and encourage local traditional culture and art (music, theatre, festival), and creates new markets for local handicrafts -Strengthens local identities and traditions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Underestimate the local arts and cultural traditions of residents by turning them into artificial events - Weakens original local identities and traditions

Challenges

Political uncertainty: Political uncertainties are observed in this region. The evolution of national and regional governance systems is critical to how collective challenges are assessed and managed. Protracted political conflicts have heavily constrained cross-border interactions across the region. From the Western Sahara and the Middle East conflicts to Cyprus, regional politics remain highly fragmented, particularly in the Southern, but also in the Northern Mediterranean region. While there is no conflict between the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean, north-south politics in the Mediterranean have often exposed more signs of fragmentation than cooperation. European initiatives towards the region have largely failed to change this picture. In addition, this political context has negatively affected the region's ability to create momentum around crucial economic and social reforms.

Current Economic situation:

The Mediterranean spans across one of the sharpest divides in GDP per capita in the world. With an average GDP per capita of US\$ 28,283, Northern Mediterranean countries are among the world's richest and most advanced economies. The regional average for Southern Mediterranean countries stands at US\$ 5,426, representing a wealth gap higher than 1:5, slightly above the gap between the United States and Mexico. Recent economic trends, however, indicate a gradual change in regional economic dynamics: fiscal pressures have negatively affected northern Mediterranean growth rates while economic reforms and greater openness to trade have been associated with surging growth rates in several southern Mediterranean countries, before the developments of 2011 again diminished the short-term growth outlook.

The IMF's World Economic Outlook indicates a mere 0.6% annual average real growth rate for Northern Mediterranean countries from 2007-2011, contrasting with close to 5% on average for Southern Mediterranean countries. The developments of 2011, however, diminish the short-term growth outlook for several Southern Mediterranean countries.

Changing image of the region:

Contrary to the classic 'sun, sea and sand' images portrayed in most tourist brochures, the Mediterranean region highly promotes hills. It has its own wildlife and habitats. As a result, the Mediterranean has not only a very rich biodiversity but also a large number of species that exist only in this region. It has 2500 flowering plants which represents 10% of all known plants on this planet.

Many countries in the region face scarcity in terms of food, water, agricultural land and/or energy, exacerbated by rapid population growth rates in southern Mediterranean countries. How the region as a whole manages access to and use of scarce resources could have significant impacts on economic growth and social stability.

The climate challenge

The climate is characterised by very hot & dry summers along with cool winters. These climatic conditions have a deeper effect on the wildlife and vegetation of the region.

So does its varied and contrasting topography – the Mediterranean Region offers an ever changing landscape of high mountains, rocky shores, impenetrable scrub, semi-arid steppes, coastal wetlands, sandy beaches and a myriad islands of various shapes and sizes dotted amidst the clear blue sea.

Preserving natural heritage

Mediterranean eco regions are vulnerable to degradation by human activities such as logging, overgrazing, and the introduction of exotic species. Some of them are also rarest on the planet. The eco regions around the Mediterranean basin and in California have been particularly affected by degradation due to human activity, suffering extensive loss of forests and soil erosion, and many native plants and animals have become destroyed or endangered.

Increased competition

In compared to other region, such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) region, the competitiveness index of the Mediterranean lagging behind, besides size, innovation, labour market efficiency and financial market etc.

OPPORTUNITIES

Innovative system of distribution

Tourism in the Mediterranean region is still highly dependent on tour operators. Price competition is strong. Tourism development projects have been created as coastal resort complexes and all-inclusive package tours, providing a range of on-site services controlled by some international tour operators. Due to this reason, standardised tourist services of this kind do not provide visitors with direct contact with local culture and can be easily interchangeable with other destinations. This may change with a distribution system utilising e-tourism. Ideally, it needs to go for alternative sources of higher added value and more information-based tourism. They should look for more unique selling propositions by the destinations, based on culture and nature, creating innovative products.

New destinations and products

New destinations may emerge, mainly in North Africa, with the opening of Algeria and Libya for the development of coastal tourism. However Cruises tourism growth may be reduced in future because of its negative impacts on the coastal environment. It is predicted that Cultural and religious tourism will increase significantly in rural Mediterranean areas. It will be boost for cultural heritage. Now the national govt can adopt aggressive Marketing strategies towards emerging markets - mainly China, India, Russia and other Asian Muslim countries.

New business Model:

National government in Mediterranean region could adopt suitable visitor management models. Among the most popular model are LAC (Limits to Acceptable Change) used by the USDA Forest Service and the TOMM (Tourism Optimisation Management Model) which is being tested in Australia. However none of these models provides all the answers but useful planning tools.

RECOMMENDATION

All the Mediterranean governments at a national level design proper legal framework that can provide the tools for implementing all measures which is related sustainable tourism activities and the protection of the environment. Special consideration should be committed to the regulation and enforcement of land-use plans, minimisation of pollution, and proper management of freshwater resources and guideline of the prohibited trade of wildlife.

Provide adequate incentives and deterrent for the implementation of measures related to the impact of tourism development on the environment. It is important that a sufficient part of the existing taxes paid by tourists are used for programmes which mitigate the environmental damage of tourism activities.

Encourage and promote awareness and information programmes on sustainable tourism and on the conservation.

Tour operator should construct partnerships with local or regional authorities and NGOs to develop and promote sustainable tourism destinations.

Tour operator should publicize the ethics of responsible tourism and the links with environmental conservation through catalogues, magazines, brochures and other means of communication.

CONCLUSION

The bulk of the tourism market in the Mediterranean region is controlled by a small number of large companies that are capable of influencing the market and the behaviour of local decision makers. It is easy to see how, through their activities, these companies can shape the development of new tourism areas and the management of existing ones. This situation creates both threats and opportunities. By putting pressure on local authorities and businesses large tour operators can push for the opening of new areas for tourism or modify land use plans. They can also push for the application of stricter environmental laws which may add to customer satisfaction.

In essence, there should be a change of attitude towards land-use planning. The creation of protected areas and buffer zones should no longer be considered only as a means of mitigating impact, but also as offering increased opportunities for recreation and attracting visitors.

Effective strategies should combine top-down and bottom-up approaches to promote sustainable development, taking into account elements of supply and demand. Such a comprehensive approach will certainly require significant resources and a well defined work programme.

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