

V.G. Girish

Identifying the Perspectives of Domestic Tourists Visiting Puducherry of India During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Fishbone Diagram Analysis

Abstract

A fishbone diagram was used in this study to identify the perspectives of domestic tourists who visited Puducherry during the COVID-19 pandemic. The main problems encountered by the tourists who visited Puducherry were personal problems and issues related to food and accommodations, transportation, lockdown after effects, government regulations and territorial restrictions. Tourism authorities and local governments should consider and solve the problems identified by the tourists to boost the local economy to attract domestic tourists during the ongoing pandemic.

Keywords: COVID-19, fishbone diagram, lockdown, Puducherry, India

1. Introduction

In different phases, India experienced a 68-day lockdown in the year 2020, which halted nearly all the industries in the country, including the tourism industry (Singh, 2020). Lockdown reopening (unlocking procedure) was implemented in four phases, and during the fourth phase, the central government announced that state governments could no longer impose lockdown measures outside containment zones without prior consultation with the central government (Indian Express, 2020a). Domestic tourism activities geared up after the fourth phase of the reopening, which paved the way for people's gradual social mobility within the country.

Puducherry (formerly known as Pondicherry), which is a tiny union territory in the southern coastal region of India (which was under French occupation until 1954), is surrounded by the Tamil Nadu state of India. The other territorial regions of Puducherry are Mahe (surrounded by Kerala), Yanam (surrounded by Andhra Pradesh) and Karaikal (also surrounded by Tamil Nadu). Puducherry is a famous tourism destination for domestic and international tourists. As of October 2019, the union territory of Puducherry has attracted one million four hundred fifty-four thousand nine hundred ninety-four domestic tourists and one hundred thirty-nine thousand three hundred fifty-nine foreign tourists (Nair, 2019). Lockdown owing to the COVID-19 pandemic completely jeopardized the inflow of tourists to Puducherry. After the lockdown (i.e., June 2020), tourism in Puducherry increased gradually, with limited restrictions, and the arrival of domestic tourists demonstrated a rising trend (Indian Express, 2020b). This study aims to understand the difficulties encountered by domestic tourists who visited Puducherry during the COVID-19 pandemic. In this context, fishbone diagram analysis is employed to record the views of the tourists. To the best of our knowledge, this study may be the first to use a fishbone diagram in tourism studies.

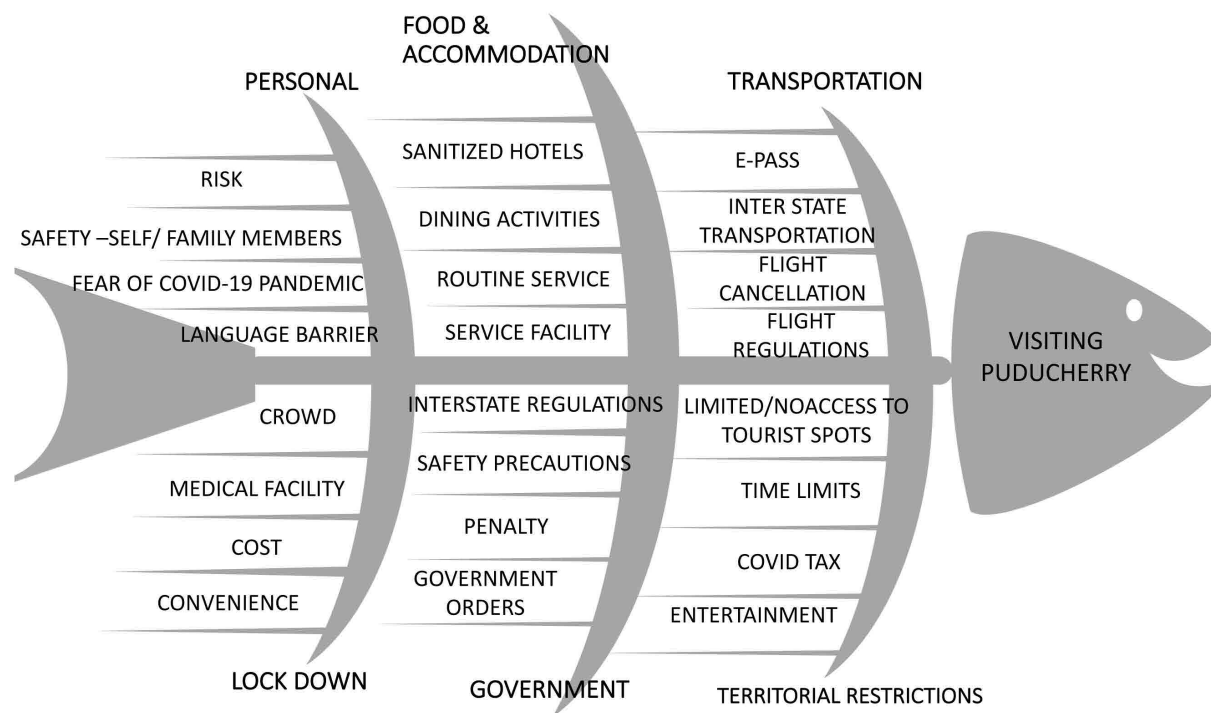
2. Methods

Kaoru Ishikawa was the proponent of the Ishikawa diagram (fishbone diagram) in the 1960s, which is a graphical technique and tool for analyzing the characteristics of the output quality of work (Shinde et al.,

V.G. Girish, PhD, Corresponding author, Associate professor, Department of Business Administration, The Catholic University of Korea, Bucheon-si, Gyeonggi-do, South Korea; ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5463-3194>; email: girishcuk@gmail.com

2018). A fishbone diagram (see Figure 1) resembles the form of a fish, with the head representing the effect and the body with bones representing the causes of known problems (Ishikawa, 1990). In a complex situation such as a pandemic, identifying a single and specific root cause may be challenging. Numerous casual factors often form a cluster and contribute to the problem (Slameto, 2016). Focus group interviews with 15 domestic tourists who visited Puducherry on March 6 2021, were conducted. The responses of the anonymous tourists were noted and summarized with the aid of a fishbone diagram, and the respondents approved the selected categories.

Figure 1
Fishbone diagram



3. Results

The results revealed that the important parameters that affected the tourists who visited Puducherry were personal problems, food and accommodations, transportation, the impact of the lockdown, government rules and regulations and territorial restrictions. Among the personal problems, perceived risks related to the pandemic were the worrying factors expressed by the tourists. Their safety and the safety of their family members if infected by COVID-19 whilst on vacation were also major concerns. In addition, the respondents expressed fear of COVID-19 infection. In the case of medical intervention, the language barrier was a concern for the respondents because many domestic tourists cannot communicate in the local language (Tamil). The tourists preferred sanitized hotels and emphasized that cleanliness is a must for hotels in terms of food and accommodations. The tourists reported that dining activities and routine services (e.g. laundry services) were limited, and service facilities (e.g. swimming pools) were restricted. The tourists suggested that the cumbersome e-pass regulation procedures of different state governments be simplified in the future. The low frequency of interstate transportation and high frequency of cancellations and time changes of scheduled domestic flights were also bothering factors. Furthermore, additional preparation is necessary for the new flight regulations for passengers.

Puducherry experienced a surge in the arrival of domestic tourists after the lockdown was lifted. Consequently, tourist spots became crowded, which affected the respondents. The respondents also expressed concerns about medical facilities, owing to the increasing numbers of confirmed COVID-19 cases. In addition, prices are high (e.g. taxi fares), and conveniences for visiting tourist spots were restricted. The different regulations imposed by different state governments also affected the respondents who visited Puducherry. When planning a vacation, precautionary safety measures require additional preparation.

Moreover, penalties for violating safety regulations (e.g. not wearing a face mask) also worried the tourists. The frequent orders issued by the government confused the tourists. Territorial restrictions owing to the pandemic granted tourists limited (e.g. no entry to Matrimandir, Auroville for tourists) or no access to certain tourist spots. Time limits for visiting tourist spots also served as an additional burden for tourists. Furthermore, the imposed COVID-19 tax (e.g. for liquor) and limited or restricted entry to entertainment facilities (e.g. cinemas and theatres) likewise affected the tourists.

4. Conclusion

With a fishbone diagram, six dimensions were extracted based on the opinions of the respondents. The findings offered suggestions to tourism authorities to consider and solve the existing difficulties encountered by the tourists who visited Puducherry during the COVID-19 pandemic. Among the tourists' personal problems, risks, safety and fear of COVID-19 infection were prioritized when visiting tourism destinations. In addition, the language barrier was a bottleneck for tourists in case of an emergency visit to a medical facility. Easy access to medical facilities is necessary to address tourists' personal issues and assuage their fears while in Puducherry. The tourists preferred sanitized hotels and increased dining options and expected the easing of restrictions to be able to avail of routine services and use service facilities. The tourists also expected consistency in the rules and regulations imposed by state governments in the use of road and air (e-pass) transportation systems. The operation of scheduled domestic flights should be punctual, and flight regulations should be passenger-friendly. Moreover, operational procedures for managing crowds in tourist spots should be efficient, and local transportation systems should be reliable to save costs and increase convenience. An efficient medical system and facilities catering exclusively to tourists should be established. Information about interstate regulations and safety precautions should be disseminated through the media and tourism outlets to reach domestic tourists to enable them to plan ahead and avoid unnecessary penalties. The frequent government orders for different aspects confused the tourists' decision-making process and thus should be avoided. Access to all tourist spots and opening and closing times should be returned to normal without violating safety protocols. The COVID-19 tax should be abolished to boost the local economy, which may encourage tourists to visit bars and restaurants frequently. Finally, the tourists recommended lifting restrictions on visiting malls and cinemas, with proper safety measures. This study identified the inconvenience faced by the domestic tourists visiting Puducherry during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study may aid tourism authorities to address these issues in the future.

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