The effect of tourism services on the Level of Satisfaction

Applied Study on International Tourists Visiting Libya

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Abstract

The Libyan economy depends heavily on oil revenue, which is volatile and unpredictable. Therefore, it is not sufficient for oil economies to produce and export oil, and to use the oil revenues just to fund domestic development projects and consumption. It has become essential to rise to the challenge of how to achieve sustainable economic development through an appropriate investment of oil revenue.

The revenue generated from oil in the country should be invested to establishing non-oil revenue. The primary aim of economic development plans were based on the diversification of the Libyan economy away from oil. This was due to two reasons: Firstly, the instability of world oil prices; secondly, the lack of formal economic plans to overcome this problem. As a result, Libyan state has introduced tourism as an attractive developmental option to sustain the national economy beside the oil factor.

This paper provides useful empirical data and information that help tourism policy makers in Libya to develop their plans towards exploiting the available opportunities to improve the tourism sector.

Questionnaire was directed at international tourists visiting Libya to examine what image and expectations international tourists have about Libya and to find out the degree of satisfaction with local services and prices level. A total of 282 international tourists were chosen as the survey sample. The Microsoft spreadsheet ‘Excel’ was used to undertake the analysis.

Finally the paper aims to identify the tourism potential, examine the significance of tourism to the national economy and conclude with some recommendations which may help to improve the performance of the tourism sector in Libya.

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Keywords: Tourism services, Level of satisfaction, prices level, Libya, International tourists.

JEL Classification: L83, Q56, Q57, Q58

Introduction

The Libyan economy is dominated by hydrocarbon sector which represents about (92 per cent) of GDP. Libya appears to be one of the less diversified oil producing economies in the world. Government revenues and export earnings represent (93 and 95 per cent) respectively. Also private sector investment in non-oil projects remains weak. Non-oil sector particularly tourism may help to sustain the national economy and contribute by more than (2 per cent) in the country’s GDP. This might be achieved through devoting sufficient budget as well as effective action policies and plans. As cited by Kelly and Rosemary (2011), the tourism sector plays a significant role as a financial source and attracts more of international organisation in this field to invest money (Allen and Gareth, 1998).

The population centers and areas of agricultural wealth are located in two coastal areas, stretching between the border with Tunisia and Misratah in the west and between Ajdabiya and the Egyptian border in the east (The National Libyan Board, 2010).

According to the census of population carried out in 1995, the total Libyan population amounted to some 4.4 million people (51 per cent males and 49 per cent females), with some 85 per cent concentrated in the eastern and western costal plains. In addition, there were an estimated 0.4 million non-Libyan nationals resident in the country at that time. The last census of population carried out in 2001, the total Libyan population amounted to some 5,299,943 people. In 2004 the Libyan total population was estimated to reach 5,882,667 people (The National Libyan Board, 2010).

In comparison to the country’s land area, Libyan’s population is very small, and characterized by a youthful and geographically highly concentrated population. Libya is the fourth largest country on the African continent, the strategic core of Arab Africa, with one of the smallest populations of all African states. In this position Libya links east with west Africa, as well as the middle and southern parts with European countries.
Tourist arrivals to Libya from international tourist markets increased from 27,601 in 1999 to 32,374 in 2003. On the other hand tourist arrivals went down from 27,622 in 2001 to 23,412 in 2002 due to September 11th impacts, which affected international tourist arrivals all over the world. In addition international tourist arrivals witnessed a slight decrease in 2001 compared to 2000, which might be due to the weakening economies of major tourism generating markets. In 2006 tourist arrivals witnessed a high increase compared to previous years and reached 125,400 and due to visa constraints the number of arrivals went down to 35,700 in 2009 (The National Libyan Board, 2010).

Tourism marketing for developing countries including Libya is an important aspect in promoting and selling the tourist products (Edward, 1997). Developing countries usually suffer from a number of problems, the most important of which is the difficulty in marketing the tourism product to the consumer (Allen and Gareth, 1998). This may be due to the lack of expertise and funds allocated for the purpose of marketing, as well as inadequate distribution systems suitable enough for this purpose.

Investment in tourism infrastructure and tourism related services must be addressed as soon as possible as it is a core factor for tourism development. This cannot be achieved unless the provision of physical infrastructure is completed. Developing a new tourism-related product or service, requires intensified efforts at the initial stages in order to gain an adequate proportion of the international tourist market share and then to maintain this position in the medium to long-run. In Libya, where tourism is viewed as an economic alternative for gaining economic growth, the government should make investment as easy as possible for prospective investors. Consequently, this could lead to an increase in the tourism market share and enable Libya to compete more effectively.

Tourism Attractions in Libya

The attractions for any tourism destination can be categorised as: climatic, scenic, cultural or historical and they exercise a gravitational influence on non-residents. The choice of a destination can be influenced by one or any amalgam of attraction (Müller, 1994).

Markets vary in their choices for travelling to, a destination. As a result, the rank of any destination will be in a subordinate of different preferences in these markets (Alejandra and Pabio, 2011).
Libya is the World’s newest and most exciting tourist destination. It has a length of coast-line along the Mediterranean Sea which makes it a productive area for sea sports, diving and all kinds of beach activities. There are ancient archaeological cities and monuments from Roman, Phoenician, Greek and Islamic civilisations. There are also historical mosques and churches, as well as museums with their splendid and fine antiquarian possessions (GBT, 2012). The major tourist attractions of Libya as a destination are illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Map of Libya’s principle tourist attractions
Source: http://www.shati-zuara.de/english/Libya/libya.html

Moreover, there are a variety of natural views along the coast-line, such as sandy beaches, wild palm trees and rocky shores. The beaches extend from Tripoli towards the east about 200 kilometres long characterized by their sandy beaches, which are very popular with local residents (GBT, 2012). The Libyan desert represents over 90 per cent of the land area. There are many attractive areas of the desert, which are of interest to the tourist, such as the extensive wealth of pre-historic art, the agriculture systems and urban fabric of the oases settlement, the desert lakes and the distinct folklore and culture of the oasis towns and the desert. The Libyan desert landscape is a mixture of attractions, which includes spectacular, eroded rock formations, mountains, lakes, oases, stony deserts, wades, areas of volcanic cones and vast sand seas (WTO, 1998).
Age of Tourists visiting Libya

Table 1 presents the age of the respondents. The Table indicates that only 6.8% of the sample was under 25 years. The majority of the respondents were in the 55 – 64 and over 65 age groups that represent 23.5 and 22.8 respectively. The point, which can be drawn, here is that the majority of tourists visiting Libya were senior people.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 25 years</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 – 34</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 – 44</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 – 54</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 – 64</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 years or over</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>282</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From this it can be understood that there is lack of tourism activities for young people. In addition, sea tourism, which includes varied activities such as water sports, is still completely unexploited due to the severe shortages in accommodation and other tourist facilities. This type of tourism activities may find a tremendous appeal by tourists as well, as it is the most significant source for increasing the number of arrivals.

Purpose of visit

In order to determine the purpose of tourists’ visit to Libya, respondents were asked to specify the purpose(s) for their holiday. As can be noted from Table 2, the top three purposes were: Vacation/holiday 65%, visiting historical places 52% and the desert 32%. They were ranked as number one, two and three respectively. At the other end of the table: sunny beaches 1% and value for money 2% were considered the least important purposes for visiting Libya.
The effect of tourism services on the Level of Satisfaction Applied Study on International Tourists Visiting Libya

As a result, it can be observed that a large number of tourists are attracted by the country’s historical and desert attractions. On the other hand, it can be noted that there is a lack of tourism facilities and promotional campaigns for facilities, such as beaches, which was ranked the least important among the other purposes of visiting the country, while in other tourist countries this is considered as a significant tourist attraction for tourists as well as a valuable source for foreign exchange.

### Tourists’ Length of Stay

Tourists were invited to indicate their length of stay in Libya. A breakdown of the answers received is shown in Figure 2. From the chart, it can be observed that a two weeks stay was the favorite for tourists, since the highest proportion of them (53%) spent this period of time in Libya. Moreover, less than one week period came second where 30 per cent of participants indicated that they stayed this period of time.

From the above information it can be understood that the tourist length of stay is quite short. Therefore, different variety of tourist programs should be organized so the visitors will keep busy with their time and spend more money.
To maintain arrivals, more active efforts should be made to prolong the length of each visitor's stay in the country, expend opportunities for visitors to consume, and encourage them to spend more money in the country. Therefore, it is necessary to develop special-interest attractions such as, conventions and conferences, business travels and intensive tours, which may help visitors to stay longer. Also, spending can be encouraged through various aspects, such as tax-free shopping, the provision of proper shopping facilities for incoming tourists, and the development of unique souvenirs and gifts.

Moreover, selling prices for tourists should be carefully considered to be value for money and competitive with other tourist destination in the region which, may encourage actual tourists to spent more time in the country as well as attracting new tourist segmentation markets.

**Tourists’ Satisfaction with Local Services**

Local services play an important role in attracting tourists to visit a tourist destination. When tourists are satisfied with the efficiency and level of services provided they will be motivated to stay longer in the country as their major aim is to seek relaxation. In addition, tourist flows throughout a tourist destination and tourism diversification depends heavily on the competency and the level of services provided (Alejandra et al, 2011).

In order to assess the extent to which tourists were satisfied with local services in Libya, a number of services and facilities should be considered: airport and border services (immigration); airport and border services (customs); restaurants; personal security; attitude of local people; hygiene and sanitation; communication services;
The effect of tourism services on the Level of Satisfaction Applied Study on International Tourists Visiting Libya

These services were directed to respondents, who were requested to rate them using a five-point scale ranging from “very satisfied” to “very dissatisfied”. Moreover a separate label “do not know” was added to the scale for those who may not have had the opportunity to experience such services and facilities.

Table 3 shows the answers of the respondents, which were ranked according to the mean value. The higher the mean value, the better the service was considered by the respondents.

Respondents were shown to be more satisfied with the attitude of the local people, and personal security, while they were quite satisfied with the quality of roads and desert facilities. On the other hand, respondents were particularly dissatisfied with hygiene and sanitation, and communication services.

Most of the respondents seemed to be satisfied with local people. They in fact praised Libyan people. From this it can be understood that the Libyan community generally accepts the idea of tourism. In fact, this provides a successful impression for international tourism development. This demonstrates that most local people, particularly those who work in tourism related services, are highly aware of the international tourism development role in the community’s well-being.

Regarding the personal security of tourists in Libya, the research findings showed that the majority of respondents felt secure during their stay in Libya. This will prove the fact that Libya is a peaceful place for international tourists and reverse the negative perception and image that been held by some of the world tourism generating markets over the last few years, resulting from their own countries’ media.
Moreover, respondents were quite satisfied with the quality of roads, as considered one of the important components of the tourist product of any destination country, since it gives accessibility to tourist attractions and facilities. On the other hand, a few of the respondents complained that roads are lack of signposting that are in a European language rather than Arabic.

In addition, respondents were also quite satisfied with desert facilities, regarded as the major attraction of Libya’s tourist product that appealed to many of the respondents. A few of the participants and their local tour guides complained about the inadequate or poor toilet facilities at the desert tourist attractions. Moreover, some were unhappy about inadequate and unsuitable accommodation close by the desert tourist attractions.
Regarding restaurants, the findings indicate that the respondents were quite satisfied with the services provided. However, there are a few problems which should be considered. Restaurants should be provided with more skilled personnel in order to improve the speed and the quality of service provided; more control is required on hygiene by being rigid on the applicability of the regulations regarding this issue, and increasing the number of good quality restaurants in the tourist places, which currently are lacking the ability to cope with the number of arrivals.

Regarding facilities at tourist centres, some respondents appeared to be unhappy with the service offered. It is the fact that there is a lack of tourist information centres in the tourist attractions areas generally, which make it difficult particularly for independent travellers to visit around. In addition, there are inadequate maps and information signposting, especially in the tourist areas.

Regarding airport and border immigration and customs, some of the respondents were not happy with the service at the border in terms of delay and entrance procedures. Moreover, tourist facilities at the airport should be improved. As a result, the people who are working at the airport and border should be provided with some training about the utilisation that will be achieved from tourism to the society. The purpose of this is to improve their attitude towards international tourists and be more friendly, bearing in mind that the first impression about the country is gained from them.

Finally, respondents generally appeared to be dissatisfied with hygiene and sanitation in Libya. It is the fact that in some places in the country, the standard of sanitation needs to be improved not just for visitors but also for residents. This should be fully acknowledged by the Board of Cleaning Environment and other associated authorities. In addition, most of the participants were not happy with communication services, which are generally regarded as a significant factor of tourism development since it facilitates contacts between tourist attractions places, tour organizers and the tourists’ home country. Therefore, communication services should be improved.

**Tourists’ Satisfaction with the Price Levels**

The purpose of this section is to assess the degree of satisfaction experienced by tourists with tourist services and facilities in Libya. Participants were asked their views on cost of air flights to Libya; local transportation; accommodation; food and drink; package tours to the destination; general prices of trips and shopping. Again, a five-point scale ranging from “very poor value” to “very good value” was used. In
addition a separate column of “do not know” was attached to the scale so as to assess more accurately the opinions of the respondents.

Table 4. shows the answers received from respondents and ranked in order according to the mean value. It is important to note that the higher the mean value, the lower the price of the tourist services and facilities was considered by tourists.

From Table 4, it can be observed that respondents appeared to be satisfied with the prices of food and drink, and local transportation, while they were less satisfied with the prices of accommodation and the general price of trips. In contrast with the price level of the services and facilities shown in the Table, respondents were rather dissatisfied with the price of air flight to Libya and the price for shopping.

Table 4. Tourists’ satisfaction with price level in Libya

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements of perception</th>
<th>Very poor value</th>
<th>Poor value</th>
<th>Satisfactory</th>
<th>Good value</th>
<th>Very good value</th>
<th>Do not Know</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Mean value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Food and drink</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local transportation</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General price of trip</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Air flight to Libya</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shopping</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of total valid responses = 255

The higher the mean value, the more important the reason was considered by the tourist.

Very poor value = 1; Poor value = 2; Satisfactory = 3; Good value = 4; Very good value = 5; Do not know = 0.

The airfare, represents an important factor in the destination selection process. Respondents were not satisfied with airfares to Libya because of the fact that tourists who fly direct to Libyan International Airports have to pay high prices. This is a major reason why several tourists prefer to visit the country via Tunisia and Egypt borders or use other airlines in order to guarantee cheap flight fares. Competition between Libyan and foreign air carriers is the way to achieve competitive airfares to and from Libya.

Regarding shopping prices, which tourists were not satisfied with, this dissatisfaction might be due to the fact that there is little or no control on prices. Traders have complete freedom on making their price decisions, which may result in
high prices especially for those who are not familiar with local market prices. Like many tourist destinations, bargaining on price, is considered a critical issue and an undesirable phenomenon among many European tourists.

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

Tourism development is seen as a way of improving a country’s economy and social well-being, but if this development is not handled carefully, problems begin to emerge. Sufficient funding, and establishing an appropriate atmosphere for investors that might boost confidence among them, is required to encourage local and foreign investment to invest in tourism-related services by treating tourism investment legislation as a special and more distinctive case in order to be more attractive. This might take the form of exempting both domestic and international components from tax for a certain period of time in the full investment.

The development of more tourist accommodation such as small and medium-sized hotels, airports, railways, beach resorts, roadside travel-lodges and guest houses to meet the demand of prospective international and domestic tourists at a competitive price and more “value for-money” facilities could lead to sustainable tourism development and fast promotion of the country as a tourist destination. Similar investment policies in the oil sector, which has been very successful, could be adopted for investment for Libya’s tourism industry.

Encouraging foreign investment (renowned companies in particular) to invest in tourism-related services, could generate employment for Libyans and bring in the highest technology and experience. Also, encouraging charter flights could help to reduce flight fears, which were considered to be a critical factor by the majority of the sample included in the study.

The development of tourism products should be combined with a sustainable focus, which helps to fit in with the local environment and ensure its preservation. The successful formulation and implementation of a tourism development policy is predicated upon the mobilization of human, capital, physical and other resources. These resources spearhead any tourism policy to ensure the identification of the tourism product, organize its marketing and overall control of the sector and its integration into the national economy. If they are inadequate, tourism plans will not succeed. Overall, careful consideration should be taken of the following elements:

- Investment in tourist infrastructure and tourism related services must be addressed as soon as possible as it is a core factor for tourism development.
- Product diversification to increase tourism income.
- Increasing awareness and knowledge about the tourist product among tourism generating markets.
The revenue generated from oil in the country should be invested to establishing non-oil revenue.

Establishing more tourist accommodation such as small and medium-sized hotels, airports, railways, beach resorts, roadside travel-lodges and guest houses.

Encouraging charter flights could help to reduce flight fears, which were considered to be a critical factor by the majority of the sample included in the study.

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