

Chapter 12

Empowering Local Community Through Festival Tourism: Insights from an Indian Festival

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ABSTRACT

Festival tourism is an emerging form of tourism where tourists travel to specific destinations during particular time period to experience and celebrate the various kinds of festivals more specifically the cultural festivals of the place with local communities. These festivals generate numerous benefits for all stakeholders including the local communities. By reviewing the available literature through various sources, the study investigates the multifarious impacts of festival tourism on local communities and analyses how these festivals contribute to local community empowerment. The current research also adopted case study method with respect to Rann Utsav of Gujarat, India to understand the impact of its success on local communities and how it contributed to their development and empowerment. The study will be useful for the policy makers and destination planners to devise plans for harnessing the potential of their festivals and how they can be better managed in order to make them the prime attraction of the destination.

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INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry is transforming from the conventional form of tourism to the various niche tourism activities in modern day, catering a wide and diverse range of visitors. Visitor travel to various destinations to experience unique environmental and socio-cultural phenomena. Tourists are attracted by many elements of culture, one of the most important of which is events in the form of festivals (Cudny, 2013). Festivals are also manifested as a different form of cultural celebrations (Liu et al., 2018). Travelling to experience the festivals of a place is termed as festival tourism (Holden, 2016). In festival tourism the target group is ready to make long-distance trips to attend the festival occasions (Yancheva, 2015).

Festival tourism is a developing sector, with over 6,000 events held across the world each year. These festivals draw millions of people and produce billions of dollars in income for the cities that host the festivals. By hosting festivals, host locations earn revenue, create leisure activities, and improve festival related venue infrastructures (Liu et al., 2018). Festivals also help in reducing the socio-cultural barriers by bringing people of all races, cultures and religions together (Bakas et al., 2019).

Festivals can be seen as prime manifestations of the experience economy as they curate a multi-sensory experience that engage attendees with music, performances, art, food, and a unique atmosphere. This focus on creating memories aligns perfectly with the core idea of the experience economy. Quinn (2006) argued from the perspective of creating long lasting experiences and memories that festivals can enrich visitor experiences and enhance the authentic cultural value of destinations. Festivals are not everyday occurrences. They are planned events with a distinct theme, location, and duration which stages them apart from ordinary experiences. Festival tourism sparks co-creation as it brings together locals and visitors. Both contribute to the event's energy - locals share their culture, while visitors actively participate, shaping the overall festival experience. Co-creation is not only limited to experiences for generating festival economic exchange or tourist experiences (Mair & Duffy, 2018), but also co-learning through tourist community creative interaction, tourism development and marketing (Qu & Cheer, 2020).

Art and allied events are often initiated by organization's and/or individuals with artistic zeal, well established networks and entrepreneurial capacities. From a population retention point of view, festival and creative industries evidently lure out-migrants, or former residents with a link to the community. Art events also help establish a stage to help retain and reproduce localized knowledges and creative expressions (Quinn, 2006), as well as help expand creative networks (Qu & Cheer, 2020). Tourists love these festival events, but the money from festival tourism sometimes doesn't reach the local people in a way that support their livelihood and give

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