

Study on the Destination Image Improvement of Guangxi Rural Tourism

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Abstract: Rural tourism has become an important part of tourism. Rural tourism in China is developing rapidly, the development of rural tourism in Guangxi has also reached its peak. The number of rural tourism scenic spots in Guangxi has also skyrocketed, and the competition among rural tourism destinations is becoming more and more fierce. Shaping and improving destination image is an important means to enhance the competitiveness of tourist destination. A good image can not only distinguish a destination from its competitors, but also attract tourists and improve its performance. Therefore, it is of great significance study the image enhancement path of Guangxi rural tourism destination for the development of Guangxi rural tourism.

Keywords: Rural tourism; Destination image; Guangxi

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1. Introduction

Rural tourism has become an important part of tourism, and rural tourism in China is developing rapidly. In 2019, there were more than 300,000 operators of leisure agriculture in China, and about 3 billion rural tourists in China, with revenue exceeding 850 billion yuan. In 2020, rural tourism provided 11 million job opportunities. Although the tourism industry in 2020-2021 was not good due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but rural tourism still developed steadily. Guangxi rural tourism is also booming, up to now, Guangxi has a total of 209 Guangxi leisure agriculture and rural tourism demonstration sites. There are 89 star-rated rural tourist areas in Guangxi, including 4 five-star, 18 four-star, 65 three-star, and 2 two-star. In 2021, Guangxi has 9 key towns and 48 key villages for rural tourism. In the first three quarters of 2021, Guangxi's rural tourism received approximately 322 million tourists, which is an increase of 18.4% over 2019; and rural tourism consumption increased by approximately 231.289 billion yuan, which is an an increase of 19.4% over 2019.

2. Related concepts

2.1. Rural tourism

According to the World Tourism Organization, rural tourism refers to “activities where tourists stay, study, and experience rural activities in and near villages (usually traditional villages in remote areas).” British scholars Bramwell and Lane ^[1] believe that rural tourism is not only a tourism activity centered on agriculture, but a tourism activity involving various forms. In addition to agriculture-based holiday tourism, rural tourism also includes other natural tourism showing personal preferences, such as mountaineering,

fishing, recreational picking and other activities. Gannon ^[2], another British scholar of the same period, believed that rural tourism refers to a series of services, activities, and pleasant behaviors that farmers or rural residents provide for specific economic purposes to attract tourists to come and consume. Spanish scholars Gilbert and Tung ^[3] believe that rural tourism is a form of tourism in which farmers provide accommodation and lodging for tourists and enable them to engage in various leisure activities in typical rural environments such as farms and pastures. Japanese scholar Shisei ^[4] defines rural tourism as leisure tourism featuring farmers, humanity, and natural landscape.

In China, scholars have discussed the definition of rural tourism at different levels and angles. For example, Yang ^[5], an earlier scholar, believed that rural tourism is a tourism activity targeted at agricultural biological resources, agricultural social resources, and rural customs. Liu ^[6] believes that rural tourism is a sightseeing method based on rural customs. Lin ^[7] defined rural tourism as leisure, sightseeing, and vacation activities taking place in rural areas with rural customs, agricultural activities, and other natural and cultural landscapes as attractions through a quantitative and qualitative combination. Tang, Yang, and Liu ^[8] pointed out that the definition of rural tourism can be divided into a broad sense and a narrow sense. Rural tourism in a broad sense refers to non-urban tourism, while rural tourism in a narrow sense refers to taking rural areas far away from cities as destinations and taking unique rural natural and cultural landscapes as attractions. It is a kind of tourism that obtains economic and social benefits by meeting the needs of tourists for leisure, seeking knowledge, and returning to nature. Hu ^[9] believes that rural tourism attracts tourists through is a combination of rural culture and beautiful natural environments with unique sceneries and local traditions, giving the urban residents a chance to return to nature and countryside. Zhang states that ^[10] rural tourism destination is a rural area with attractive resources and characteristics, with some form of tourism reception facilities and services, and organized to carry out some rural-oriented tourism activities. It can be a specific rural scenic spot or a village (town). Huang et al. ^[11] pointed out that recreation is also one of the characteristics of rural tourism, which contains four connotations: human nature, attraction, experience, and compound. Human nature means to balance the needs of tourists and the interests of villagers; attractions are elements like rural natural landscape, local culture, production, and so on; experience means to attract tourist participation through sceneries, products, activities, and services. Compound is to highlight the functions of leisure, ecology, culture, health, and research, and finally realize the coordinated development of rural economy and society. Wan thinks that ^[12] rural tourism is a tourism activity carried out by tourists in rural areas where rural resources and culture acts as the core attraction, and at the same time has recreation characteristics. It can not only meet the needs of tourists for leisure vacation, but also drive the sustainable economic and social development of rural tourism destinations.

2.2. Destination image

Destination image was first defined as an individual's impression of a place other than his residence. Crompton ^[13] improved on the previous concept, believing that tourism destination image is an individual's comprehensive feeling of belief, concept, and impression on a certain destination. This interpretation obviously has deep limitations. Later, as many scholars continue to interpret and study this concept, it has been endowed with more and more connotations. Fakeye & Crowpton ^[14] believed that tourists' perception of destination image is a dynamic process, not a static quantity, their perception of destination image will also change overtime as they visit the place more frequently. Embacher believes that tourism destination image is the inner perception image formed for individuals or the public after the experience of tourism places, including rational part and emotional part. Fakeye believes that tourism destination image is the inner perception image obtained by potential tourists after sorting out tourism destination information before they carry out tourism activities. According to Kim ^[15], the image of a tourist destination refers to tourists' cognition, confidence, expectation, and perceptual understanding of the destination. In foreign

countries; the concept of tourist destination image is mainly from the perspective of individual or the public's perception of tourist destination, and it is believed that this image is derived from a combination of personal cognition, perceptual cognition, and rational cognition. Gartner ^[16] raised the definition of tourist destination image to the behavioral level through cognitive image, emotional image, and ideational image. Foreign scholar Tasci, Cavusgil ^[16] regards tourist destination image as an interactive system of subjective emotion.

China's research on tourism destination image and rural tourism destination image began in the middle and late 1990s, which is also the practical demand generated by social and economic development ^[17]. Zhang ^[18] defines the concept of tourism destination image from the perspective of tourists' perception, believing that it was the impression of tourists' comprehensive experience of tourism resources, activities, projects, degree of development, and other related aspects of the tourism destination. Both Deng and Liao ^[19] generalizes and defines the image of a tourist destination from the perspective of tourists, believing that the image of a tourist destination is a combination of the perceived impression of tourists and potential tourists, that is, the perceived impression before and after visiting the destination. Zhang and Tu ^[20] began to extend the concept of destination image from the perspective of perceived environment. They believe that destination image is the overall impression of the potential tourists towards their destination after obtaining and understanding related information about the place in the planning stage.

3. The image of Guangxi as a rural tourism destination needs to be improved

With the development of Chinese economy and the rapid increase of urban population, the demand for rural tourism is increasing and rural tourism destinations are emerging rapidly. The development of rural tourism in Guangxi has also reached its peak. However, most rural tourism destinations are created by the villagers themselves, therefore lacking unified management, and the overall image is not emphasized enough. Some rural tourism places are rich in resources but they lack of a distinct positioning. Although many rural tourism destinations are highly developed and have diversified tourism products and projects, their local characteristics have not been properly identified. Therefore, to achieve personalized and sustainable development of rural tourism, it is necessary to adopt image building paths and promotion strategies suitable for rural tourism destinations and provide methodological guidance for the design, publicity, and marketing of rural tourism destinations. To provide impetus for sustainable development of rural tourism destinations. Only by deeply understanding the tourist destination, mastering the advantages and disadvantages of the tourist destination, and establishing a good image of tourist destination, can we ensure keep tourists coming.

A good image of a tourist destination attracts tourists, but also influences their travel behavior, especially their post-trip behavior, such as recommendation behavior and re-parade behavior. In theoretical studies, domestic and foreign scholars have verified that tourist destination image has a certain impact on tourists' recommendation behavior, repeat performance, satisfaction, loyalty, and other aspects. From the perspective of management, tourists' post-trip behavior is not only the key to the success of destination marketing strategy, but also provides a basis for the improvement of destination image. Post-trip behavior also plays a positive role in reducing costs and increasing profits for local enterprises in tourist destinations.

4. Suggestions on improving the image of Guangxi as a rural tourism destination

4.1. Focusing on tourists' needs

To better attract target tourists, more emphasis should be given to tourists' preference and encouraging recommended behaviors. Guangxi rural tourism should be promoted on multiple platforms for better publicization, pay attention to the evaluation of tourists on online platforms, and timely discover and solve problems. Short video platforms such as TikTok can be used to promote tourism packages and attract tourists. Besides, unique product design and innovation can also be a selling point. Nowadays, cultural and

creative products are popular, thus, tourism products can be created by taking the image of longevity of Bama, forest health, water, minority culture and other representative scenery as inspirations. The memories of tourists and the unique tourism products are the motivation for tourists to revisit this place and promote the image of Guangxi as a rural tourism destination by recommending them to others.

4.2. Strengthening Guangxi rural image positioning and promotion

A branding or positioning of “Guangxi, the most beautiful countryside,” which can be easily remembered, can be used to market the tourist attractions by tourists through the publicity and reports on various platforms. In order to highlight the “Guangxi, the most beautiful countryside,” image, a beautiful travel environment and good travel experience needs to be provided; secondly, Guangxi rural tourism needs to be highlighted, showing “the most beautiful” image, to create “internet famous” places; lastly, unique tourism experience activities or products need to be offered at the tourism attractions.

4.3. Protecting Guangxi’s rural tourism environment and resources

The tourism resources and tourism activities in Guangxi is relatively well-recognized, and this should be maintained that way. The local government should protect Guangxi’s rural tourism resources and keep their authenticity and localism. Government supervision and public supervision shall be exercised over major polluting factories, and industrial wastewater shall be properly treated to protect the rural environment. The cooperation of the local government with the media needs to be strengthened to publicize the Guangxi countryside and attract tourists. Local villagers can take the initiative to learn singing folk songs, dragon and lion dances, and other activities.

4.4. Constantly improving infrastructure and tourism services

The government should increase capital investment, increase the number of public toilets and garbage cans, and clear signs to direct tourists to their destinations. Besides, more cleaners should be allocated to ensure timely cleaning of tourist attractions, and the quality of the environment should be improved. In the process of improving infrastructure, we should not blindly pursue luxury and modernization. The homestay, shops and restaurants in the village should have a rural look and characteristics of the local culture, which can attract more tourists. In order to improve service quality and cultivate rural tourism developers, relevant policies can be formulated to attract young people from other regions of Guangxi to return to their hometown, bring new ideas and concepts, and promote the development of local rural tourism. In terms of catering, accommodation, shopping centers, and other business, health and safety would be the main focus as well as the rationality of the prices. Rural tourism operators should invest more financial resources, manpower, and material resources to develop tourism products to make tourist souvenirs unique and avoid shoddy production and monotony.

4.5. Strengthening the emotional resonance with tourists

A relaxed and light-hearted atmosphere is especially important for tourists who visit Guangxi to relax, relieve stress and get away from the hustle and bustle of the city. In order to improve the tourists’ emotional image evaluation of Guangxi rural tourism, we should utilize characteristics of Guangxi rural tourism and create a relaxed tourism atmosphere. Firstly, the utilization of tourism resources, the construction of infrastructure, and the level of tourism services should be improved, and a relaxed, orderly and beautiful tourism environment should be created. Secondly, the sense of participation of tourists and the sense of identity of local customs needs to be strengthened, the interaction with tourists needs to be increased, and a good atmosphere needs to be created. Lastly, smart tourism needs to be integrated into the rural tourism of Guangxi. Through technologies like Internet navigation, virtual tour guide, explanation and shopping

guide, travelling is made much easier.

In short, by improving the cognitive image elements of rural tourism in Guangxi, the emotional image of rural tourism in Guangxi can be enhanced, making tourists feel happy and relaxed after visiting Donghe Village. Consequently, the tourists' review and impression of Donghe village will improve and the image of rural tourism destination in Guangxi can be improved.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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