

Evaluating the Probability of Foreign Tourists' Return to the City of Mashhad, Iran

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Abstract : The tourism industry will be the most important unlimited, sustainable source of income after the oil and automotive industries by 2020 and not only countries, but cities are striving to apprehend its various facets. In line with this objective, the present descriptive-analytical study, through survey and using a questionnaire, seeks to evaluate the probability of tourists' return and their recommendation to their countrymen to travel to Mashhad, Iran. The population under study is a sample of 384 foreign tourists who, in 2016, arrived at Mashhad, the second metropolis in Iran and its biggest religious city. The Kaplan-Meier estimator was used to analyze the data. Twenty-six percent of the tourists are female and 74% are male. On average, each tourist has had 3.02 trips abroad and 2.1 trips to Mashhad. Tourists from 14 different countries have arrived at Mashhad. Kuwait (15.9%), Armenia (15.6%), and Iraq (10.9%) were the countries where most tourists originated. Seventy-six percent of the tourists traveled with family and 90% of the tourists arrived at Mashhad via airplane. Major purposes of tourists' trip include pilgrimage (27.9%), treatment (22.1%) followed by pilgrimage and treatment combined (35.4%). Major issues for tourists, in the order of priority, include quality of goods and services (30.2%), shopping (18%), and inhabitants' treatment of foreigners (15.9%). Main tourist attractions, in addition to the Holy Shrine of Imam Reza, include Torqabeh and Shandiz (Torqabeh 40.9% and Shandiz 29.9%), Neyshabour (18.2%) followed by Kalat, 4.4%. The average willingness to return among tourists is 3.13, which is higher than the mean 3, indicating satisfaction with the stay in Mashhad. Similarly, the average for tourists' recommending to their countrymen to visit Mashhad is 3.42, which is also an indicator of tourists' satisfaction with their presence in Mashhad. According to the findings of the Kaplan-Meier estimator, an increase in the number of tourists' trips to Mashhad, and an increase in the number of tourists' foreign trips, reduces the probability of recommending a trip to Mashhad by tourists. Similarly, willingness to return is higher among those who stayed at a relatives' home compared with other patterns of residence (hotels, self-catering accommodation, and pilgrim houses). Therefore, addressing the issues raised by tourists is essential for their return and their recommendation to others to travel to Mashhad.

Keywords : international tourist, probability of return, satisfaction, Mashhad

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