

Tourism in Qeshm: Roots, Trends and Respects¹

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Abstract

Tourism industry is one of the biggest and most efficient economic activities in the world which creates the highest amount of value added and directly or indirectly influences other economic and cultural activities. Tourism development is one of the approaches for creating socioeconomic development in the world regions that has always attracted the attention of the researchers and planners. Hence with respect to the significance of free zones development in the economy of the country, a glance to the tourism position in free trade zones specially Qeshm due to having potential resources of tourism, regional strategic and geopolitical location seems to be necessary. By specifying the tourism position in development of Qeshm, in this research it has been tried to enhance the present potentials and opportunities and convert the available shortcomings in the region into opportunities by planning and formulation of strategies and provide a ground for economic, social, cultural and political development of the region and the country. In the present research the research methodology applied is descriptive- analytical and the data gathering method is library documents based and according to field observations and statistical analysis. The results achieved indicate that Qeshm in spite of enjoying unique potentials, strategic position, vast and diverse natural, historical and cultural resources and attractions, specific ecosystem, geo-parks and mangrove etc. suffer from shortcomings such as tourism infrastructures shortages, weakness in marketing and advertisement, management instability etc. Therefore this research tries to assist the tourism development in this region by providing some strategies.

Keywords: Tourism, Roots, Trends, Qeshm, Respects

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Received Date: 21 May 2016

Accepted Date: 21 August 2016

Date of Print: Summer 2016

1. The present article is extracted from unpublished M.A.. Thesis titled: Tourism Position in Policies & Plans for Development of Free Zones, Case Study: Qeshm, in Islamic Azad University, Science and Research branch, Tehran, Iran.

Introduction

Today we have tourism as one of the major economic/commercial factors of the world. Most of programmers of tourism industry consider it as the fundamental base of economy. In fact, in most countries tourism is one of the most complex businesses with multi-aspects and applications and positive consequences as well. (Zahedi, 2006:39). Some of the positive effects of tourism are as follows:

Entrepreneurship, obtaining income, foreign currency, Enriching social infra structure, cultural upgrade and etc. (Kazemi, 2008:1). At the beginning of 20th century and with regard to major incomes, tourism was changed into one of the most important parameters of international trade with an annual investment more than \$ 550 billion and annual entrepreneurship of 750000 jobs (Sarvar, 2007, 12).

According to the statistics of world organization, Tourism industry includes %12 of gross domestic production of the world and second income resource in more than 49 countries (Gharreh Nejad, 23: 2009). The number of world tourists will reach to 1 billion and 6000 million persons in 2020 and including %10 of world incomes (2007, untwo). This activity may create 1000 jobs against \$ 1, 000, 000 of produced income (Shalin, Cloud, 1994:39). Therefore instead of a direct job opportunity there is a one and half indirect job opportunity and some other major economic activities (servicing, industry and etc) at destination. (Ranjbaran & Zahedi, 2009:146) (Alvani et al., 1994:75). By the way Tourism has different applications (economic, social, cultural and ecological) accompanied with different consequences (Positive & Negative) which should be considered in all programming processes in order to prevent from development of negative effects as much as possible (pearce, 1999:18).

Today with considerable capabilities for increasing of export, entrepreneurship, absorption of foreign investment, attraction of domestic & foreign tourists, all commercial free zones have a great role in state's economy. Furthermore the governing economic, political and social structure governing on them may provide a

suitable situation for development of tourism as well. Therefore any evaluation of tourism position at free zones especially at **Qeshm** will play a great role in further programming and making suitable decisions in compliance with capabilities of these areas as well. Although the basic nature of creation such free zones are economic parameters, but any investment in infrastructures and benefiting from potential abilities are also very important (Sabbagh Kermani, 2000, 58).

Research questions

This paper intends to answer to the following questions?

- 1- What is the role of tourism at **Qeshm** free zone?
- 2- What are the potentials and facilities of **Qeshm** free zone for tourism promotion?

Research method

The researcher has appointed different methods and finally analytical-explanatory and comparative type in this research in order to find better results accordingly. All mentioned information in this research are documentary, library form and by the use of written resources and internet sites and some statistical information and field observations of the concerned area.

The important and necessity of research:

Due to the special structure and nature and also current communications, free zones could provide fruitful interactions for further development especially in the field of tourism.

The other preliminary conditions for promotion of tourism at free zones including **Qeshm** free zone are recognition any potentials, capabilities, tourism attractions and also benefiting from tourism facilities and services and further programming for promotion.

- 1- Presence of valuable attractions in this area and their inevitable role in inviting of tourists
- 2- Economic & Touristic nature of this area due to have the role of entrance gate to country

Research history

In a research under the title of “Evaluation the role of free zones in increasing of national per capita” in Civil & Aerial researches International Magazine, No. 4, Xiangming Chen has evaluated theoretical bases of free trade.

Nicolas Papadopoulos has also evaluated the role of free zones in world strategy. The result is as follows:

The under –developing countries which are intending to create a free zone believe that free zone may enable them to release from poverty and back warded.

Ghasemi (2004) in his paper under the title of “Free trade cross roads” has pointed that free trade zones are generally formed according to their real meaning of free trade and created a space at Iranian Free Zones with more than %80 of governmental companies. Therefore there is not any theoretical agreement about its nature and applications.

Karimi Amiri (2002) has made a research in his thesis under the title of “Evaluation of potential capacities of Iranian Free trade zones for applying the export promotion guideline at Tehran University.

In her thesis under the title of “Entrepreneurship effects of free zones on state’s economy”, Rahmani (1997) has evaluated any effects of entrepreneurship at trade zones on state’s economy along with a comparative and compliance study between the operation of free zones at selected countries (Morris, Dominican, Singapore, Taiwan) and free zones of country at Faculty of economy- Alzahra University.

Theoretical basics

Firstly free zones of the world were attractive for socialist countries with closed economy. In fact the real purpose of founders of free zones in the world was providing a theoretical experience of free economy at different parts of a country bearing some development potentials. There were some free trade zones in Iran also in compliance the mention idea of governmental economic theorists in order to find a release from closed governmental economy. It is impossible to speak about free trade zones without considering it as one of the fundamental basics of state’s economy and /or ignoring any competition principles and free market. In fact, free trade zones

formed basically with their public meaning of this term (Ghasemi, 2004:20).

Iranian free zones have been established in a space with more than %80 of governmental economy. Therefore, Iranian free zones are like a foreign creature without any theoretical agreement for its nature and applications (Ghasemi, 2004:11). All developing programs of free zones should be applied by the use of exterior policies and for applying modern elements and further economic growth with injection of foreign resources and increasing the output and continuous growth of products and further investment. It is possible to have fixed economic development by repeating this circle and finally by optimized utilization of facilities as well (Sarraf, 1998:101).

Komijani (1995) in his book titled "industrial and free trade zones' financial evaluation" refers to this matter that how Iran free zones are formulated and analyzes them in his book.

Renovation & democracy viewpoints have also close relation with development of tourism industry. Tunise (1995): There was a renovation change when the relevant law of renovation changed into an official tradition and custom.

For this purpose it is impossible to have tourism development whether by a lawful social structure. There are different problems for tourism industry development without considering democracy principle with many doubts for its activities. This is because without democracy most part of behaviors of tourists would be limited and would be resulted a standstill in tourism industry. Liberal democracy is one of the special success reasons in attraction of foreign tourists. Globalism and Tourism are important discussion in tourism development. Globalism means any increase in economic, social and civilization integration. It means a greater phenomenon than internationalization. This is because we may see reconstructions in all fields of human being life (Matthjalager, 2006, 437).

Qeshm from landscape of tourism development

Qeshm was selected as a trade-industrial free zone in 1990. The real goal of Islamic Republic of Iran from appointing of **Qeshm** as a free zone was to benefit from its excellent position in the area and changing it into a great economic, industrial pole and easy

development of export/ import and absorption of investment and advanced technologies (Integrated plan of **Qeshm**, 1994:15).

With a strategic position at Persian Gulf & Hormoz Channel is located between Hormoz, Great/ small Tonbs, Abu moosa, Siri, Hengam and Lark islands with a central position among the mentioned islands. (Mahdavi, 2008:70).

It is possible to classify all resources and tourism attractions of **Qeshm** in three general levels as follows:

First group: Natural attractions (For those people with great interests in nature, environment, sea & beach sports, land researchers, animal sciences researches and ...) including Salty cave, Chah Kooh Channel, Stars valley, Tandis valley, **Qeshm** Geo-park, Kase Salkh dessert, Harra jungles and ...

Second group: Cultural & Historical attractions (For any tourists interested in culture, art, traditional customs) including: Khorbas historical caves, traditional architecture, Air traps, Tala & Laft wells, Historical castles (**Qeshm**, Laft, Lark, Hormoz), Traditional native music, Shoosh traditional theater and etc.

Third Group: Commercial attractions (Purchasing from traditional & modern markets), including **Qeshm** & Dargahan traditional shopping centers, Native Handicrafts (Such as: brocaded silk, durrie rug and etc).

Primary goals of appointing **Qeshm** island as a free zone was entrepreneurship and attracting of foreign investment, obtaining foreign income, export and merchandise processing. Although tourism was not the major goal of **Qeshm** free zone, but due to reducing any industrial and production investment there was a little interest in investing in servicing sections and increase of absorption of tourism. According to the relevant statistics, there were about 662 servicing companies from among 1313 registered companies at the end of 2008. (The report of operations of Iranian Commercial –Industrial free zones 2005-2008).

After about 20 years from establishment and start up of **Qeshm** free zone and in spite of all costs and efforts, again there is a lack of required infra structures for providing a ready and organized model of development in compliance with international standards. As a result

there is not any considerable domestic/foreign investment in spite of great natural and economic potential resources as well.

All state's free zones were successful in attraction of lower than \$ 2 billion as foreign investment within a 9-years period from 2001-2009 which is directly based upon current infrastructures.

Table 1: Foreign investors' statistics within 2001-2009

| Foreign Investment (million dollar) | | | | | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------------|
| Total | 2009 | 2008 | 2007 | 2006 | 2005 | 2004 | 2003 | 2002 | 2001 | Area |
| 7.1195 | 24 | 0 | 8.12 | 0 | 9.23 | 300 | 302 | 315 | 218 | kish |
| 9.665 | 8.4 | 29 | 5 | 2 | 2.5 | 100 | 217 | 143 | 160 | qeshm |
| 30.97 | 4 | 8.25 | 8.1 | 9.3 | 6.9 | 5.53 | 2.1 | 2.1 | 3 | chabahar |
| 55.6 | 3.4 | 44.1 | 65 | 6 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | anzali |
| 37 | 12 | 0 | 0 | 25 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | arvand |
| 13.10 | 3.5 | 0 | 9 | 26.2 | 67.1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | aras |
| 71.2022 | 4.50 | 24.56 | 15.21 | 22.33 | 47.40 | 5.453 | 2.520 | 2.459 | 3.378 | Year total |

Resource: The report of operations of Iranian Commercial –Industrial free zones 2009

The share of **Qeshm** Island was respectively %42. 3, %31. 1, %41. 7, %22. 1, %12. 8, %6, %23. 6, %51. 5 and %9. 5 in the same period of time. This is a sign of falling process of investment in this area. High political weak points in Iran are the major reasons of this problem accompanied with economic embargo of Iran. There is a non-suitable domestic investment while most of domestic investments are in the field of import of goods and further sale at domestic markets (Komeijani, 1995:10). The major reason is issuance a rule in 1995 about this area. According to the mentioned rule, only the industrial goods and raw materials are exempted from custom house share and made products are subject to custom house payments (Plan & Budget Organization, 2001:10). This is a real sign of more interests of domestic investor in importing of goods against producing investment.

As it was mentioned before, infra structures promotion is one of the major factors of tourism development. Tourism infra structures include reception places, communicative constructions and coming/going and different types of tourism services. Therefore the most focus of tourism infra structures is residing places and guest centers at **Qeshm** Free zone (Pour Ahmad & Tajlli, 2000, 23).

On the other hand according to previous evaluations, total number of residing centers at **Qeshm** free zone is 51 centers (4008 beds) including 14 hotels (2471 beds), 12 hotel apartment (703 beds) and 25 guest rooms (834 beds) without suitable conditions.

According to the statistics, tourism season of **Qeshm** starts from October up to the end of April including about %71 of total entering tourists into the island. The mean number of entering tourists is 700, 000 from which only %60 are interested to reside at hotels and the remained may accommodate at hotel apartments or tents. Most of foreign tourists entering from Dubai and/or Chine for purchasing of cheap products find no more touristic facilities and the number of them is only 2 persons from among 100 tourists. The remained are domestic tourists. The mentioned limitations could be considered as bad advertisement in spite of benefiting from various touristic sites.

According to the statistics of entered tourists into **Qeshm** Island within 2001-2010 shows that **Qeshm** was non-successful in attraction of foreign tourists while from 18, 907, 164 entered tourists only %7 (1, 223, 501 persons) were foreigners and the remained %93 are domestic tourists for making %99 of obtaining incomes out of tourism. The other considerable point is pay attention to reducing any interests of tourists in purchasing of green note. This is in spite of an increase in number of tourists but little number of them are interested in purchasing of green note for purchasing of **Qeshm** produced products. This is one of the reasons for losing any estimated priority of **Qeshm** products in comparison with other areas. Relevant statistics has been inserted in table 2.

Table 2: Statistics of Green Note of products

| Year | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 |
|------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------|
| Tourists* | 1 | 97.0 | 1 | 733.0 | 92.0 | 402.1 | 21.1 | 41.1 | 51.1 |
| Green note | 753578 | 706620 | 635763 | 711633 | 603395 | 386680 | 411055 | 447000 | 42465 |

Resources: Qeshm Free Zone Organization's site - 2007

According to the statistics of tourists and entering passengers by car it is concluded that: great number of entering tourists and passengers (%74) will enter into **Qeshm** Island by automobile with a growth rate of %4.3 in final estimation in 2010.

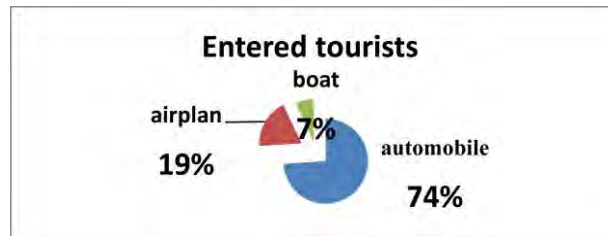


Figure 1: percentage of the tourist entry according to vehicle
Source: Qeshm Free zone 2011

There is an increase in flight numbers and domestic transfer of domestic passengers and tourists with regard to the statistics of the years 2007-2010. Such a %20 growth cause a promotion and development in **Qeshm** airport as well.

We have inserted the statistics of entering tourists according to the automobile in table No. 3 within 2008-2010.

Table No. 3: Statistics of entering tourists according to the automobile within the years 2008-2010.

| Total | By boat | By automobile | By airplan | entering passengers(person) |
|-----------|---------|---------------|------------|-----------------------------|
| 385.789.3 | 818.285 | 786.821.2 | 708.781 | |

Resource: Qeshm Free Zone Organization-2011

The minimum volume of tourists and entering passengers belongs to the boats which is about %7 of total passengers entering into **Qeshm** Island by vehicles. We observed a negative growth in 2010 against last year and about %10 reductions in the rate of tourists and entering passengers into **Qeshm** Island by boat. This is a warning for making correct any jetties and quality /safety of boats and marine buses.

The number of tourists at New Year holidays of 2011 had an increase of %31 in comparison with 2010 according to the statistics of **Qeshm** Free Zone Organization. The rate of costs of investors at private sector and promotion of tourism at first six months of 2011 was more than 44 billion Rls.

The occupation coefficient of residing places at first semester of the year, except for New Year holidays, was %60 and in second semester was %80 and in New Year holidays is %120(Additional services).

In spite of a very important position for tourism in **Qeshm** development, but it has been remained only at explanation step. Tourism &Eco-tourism industry is facing with some fundamental

communicative and transportation, residing, managerial and marketing bottle necks as well.

Occupation & Tourism at Qeshm

Today tourism activities are the greatest economic ones for creation of different jobs throughout the world. For this purpose tourism activities are so much important among developed and under-developing countries as well (Javaheri, 2004 A, 2).

Table No. 4: Tourism occupied people up to 2011

| Occupied people | Activity |
|------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 8200 | Fabrication, industry, mine |
| 13370 | Business and general service |
| 6000 | Agriculture, fishery |
| 10000 | Building |
| 1430 | Tourism and journey |
| 39000 | Total: |

Resource: Qeshm Free Zone Organization-2011

Any development in Tourism may cause an increase in job opportunities, income providing for natives and local people. There are 1430 job opportunities at **Qeshm** Free zone which upon promotion of tourism infra structures at this area it is possible to reduce any installed forces and reducing the inflation rate up to %5. 3.

In reply to the mentioned question we should specify that Tourism was the reason of direct/indirect entrepreneurship and income making at **Qeshm** Free zone. From among 1313 registered companies at this area about %50 of which that means 662 companies are related to servicing sector. This is a sign of high level of Tourism functions and attraction of tourists to this area while the highest rate of domestic tourists have entered into **Qeshm** Free zone within 2001-2998 (A number of 11302164 and about %48 of total tourists of this area). Establishment of residing units like hotels and restaurants has made new jobs and direct incomes for about 451 persons. Creation of 170 jobs at Geo-park of the area is a sign of promotion of tourism industry in this zone (Iranian Statistics Organization, 2008).

Any incomes resulted from entrance charges to the area, amusing places and visiting from attractive monuments, tours and transportation, benefiting from residing & servicing facilities,

purchasing of gifts and handicrafts caused some new job opportunities and income accompanied with a great role in **Qeshm** economy.

Regarding all investigations at previous parts, it was specified that due to benefiting from various potentials (Natural, historical and man-made attractions), **Qeshm** Free zone has a suitable situation for promotion of tourism facilities and services and also required infra structures for tourism like communications, air & marine access etc.

By bearing 26 hotels & hotel/apartment, 25 guest rooms, 7 shopping centers, 20 reception centers, 20 passengers services Offices, 5 Telephone-taxi units, 41 banking unit, 6 insurance offices (Coordination Council of Free Trade Zone & Iranian Special Economic Zone) along with 18 natural attractions, 9 historical attractions and 15 man- made attractions with a complete set of attractions and required facilities and services for tourism and tourists.

This area has a suitable situation at infrastructures like airport and marine access, water, electricity, gas, telecommunications and health constructions.

With regard all above-mentioned items and nature of trade free zone of Qeshm Island we can present this question that there are some other potential facilities for promotion of tourism rather than required potentials and facilities and services in tourism industry.

Following up the current situation, **Qeshm** is not able to compete with other neighboring advanced free zones without a suitable programming. In lack of a complete program, **Qeshm** will face with more damages. But regarding the important situation of **Qeshm** Island and with a complete/ integrated program, it is possible to be changed into a successful free zone at Persian Gulf. It means a program based upon a complete study and only by changing the management for appearance of potential talents.

Conclusion

After evaluation of tourism position though different policies and development programs of **Qeshm** Special Free Zone, it may be concluded any understanding of required infra structures for finding out further goals of Iranian Free trade zone is really necessary as well.

Government is responsible to provide firstly required infra structures for any activities in most countries with successful free

trade zones. Then it may compensate any consuming budget through the export and merchandise processing at these areas while in Iran all free trade zones are obliged to provide required costs for civil & infra structure affairs out of export of goods and activities as well. Therefore with a sensitive ecosystem and great wideness (as the greatest Iranian Island), **Qeshm** could be changed into one of the important tourism poles for performing any further development and with regard to its ecologic, economic and social power. Regarding the strategic situation and benefiting from beautiful beaches, natural, historical, cultural and commercial attractions, **Qeshm** has a lot of facilities for attraction of tourists. But regarding all studies about **Qeshm** and bearing various tourism sites and after about 20 years from establishment and start up of **Qeshm** Free Zone and in spite of all efforts and costs, it could not provide required infra structures for a ready situation for any development in compliance with international standards. In spite of great number of natural & potential economic reserves there is no more domestic/ foreign investments (direct investment with required infra structures. This is because infra structures are effective factors in attraction of tourists) and absorption of foreign investing. Some other bottle necks are weak communicative & transportation system, lack of reception centers, managerial & organizing and marketing systems.

Regarding all above-mentioned items, it is possible to conclude that tourism did not find its real position in **Qeshm** Island. Therefore it is unable to compete with neighboring free zones without a correct programming and following us current damages.

Some of the most important guidelines of tourism development are applying of development guidelines and modifying the managerial organizations and applying of special management at different parts of Tourism and further fixed situation of management and better advertisements, agreement among persons in charge of free zones, enrichment of ecotourism, pay more attention to rural tourism, betterment of tourism infra structures and benefiting from all potentials at **Qeshm**.

Some proposals for promotion of tourism at Qeshm Free Zone

At the end of this research and according to the findings and results, we provide some proposals as follows:

- 1- Reducing the governmental responsibilities
- 2- Providing a fixed management system at **Qeshm** Free Zone
- 3- Integration of **Qeshm** free zone is one of the most important factors in the field of tourism promotion in area.
- 4- Issuance of license for establishment banking branches and foreign insurance at **Qeshm** Free Zone
- 5- Preparing some marketing & advertising plans and introducing of tourism potentials at area with both national & international levels
- 6- Increasing the number of standard residing & reception centers accompanied with latest technology which may cause more competition among different centers and increasing the quality and level of services
- 7- Holding of training courses for various active human forces at residing centers for increasing the level of services and entrance of domestic tourists and especially foreign tourists
- 8- Providing a powerful image of **Qeshm** for attracting of tourists at world standard levels
- 9- Providing modern and renovated marine transportation fleet at **Qeshm** free zone as the most important factor for increasing the volume of entering tourists into the area
- 10- Development of Airlines at **Qeshm**
- 11- Providing more supervisions on hotels and pricing by native people on their local homes for renting to tourists
- 12- Facilitating any investment in tourism sector especially for foreign investors
- 13- Providing complete and detailed plans for performing in mentioned area
- 14- Writing new standards for reception centers and residing services by Cultural Heritage Organization
- 15- Strengthening the safety situation and providing a fixed economic-political situation along with cultural programming for visiting of domestic/ foreign tourists
- 16- Modernization of all facilities for further usages of tourists and also updating financial & banking systems
- 17- Providing a good pattern for primary goals at **Qeshm** Free Zone

18- Training and increasing the knowledge level of native people which is so much important in treating the passengers and attraction of foreign tourists

19- Training of native people and hiring them for current jobs in Tourism field

Generally it is proposed to conclude a committee for evaluation and finding out any obstacles for tourism.

It is also necessary to reduce any formalities for obtaining any visas for the abroad, support the private sector and make profits from tourism industry- issuance of required licenses for importing of equipment required for hotels, pay more attention to domestic/foreign advertisements, establish some educational centers and data banks and tourism statistics for developing of tourism culture, providing more safety and welfare for passengers at **Qeshm** Free zone.

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