

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

What is the nature and form of the sustainability initiatives in the hotel industry in the Inle Lake region? In Nyaungshwe township of Taungyi district of Shan state in Myanmar lies the second largest lake in Myanmar with an approximated surface area of 116km² (Journeys International, 2018). The freshwater lake is part of the Shan hills with its highest elevation peak at 2900 feet. The average depth of the lake is 7 feet during the dry season with the deepest parts extending to 12 feet. During the rainy season, however, the water can rise to an extra 5 feet. The North and West parts of the lake host the larger section of the watershed area. Despite its relatively smaller size, it is the home to some of the rarest endemic species. Nine species of fish and over twenty species of snails are present in this lake and nowhere else in the world. Another 20,000 brown and black head migratory seagulls add to the already vast ecosystem of the lake (Journeys International, 2018).

The lake occupied by some local inhabitants known as Intha. They have settled in numerous small villages along the shores of the lake. The Inthas dominate the population of this area, with the rest of the population consisting of Shan, Taungyo, Taungthu, Danu, Kayah, Danaw, and Bamar ethnicities. These self-sufficient farmers are devout Buddhists and live in simple wood and woven bamboo houses. The main economic activity of these people is fishing as one would expect. They own small traditional boats while some have somewhat bigger boats with single cylinder diesel engines. The lake is immensely covered by reeds and floating vegetation which makes navigation very difficult. As a result, the locals developed a unique way of rowing through the dense vegetation. Instead of the usual rowing, while sitting, the fishermen row while standing, one leg on the stern and the other around the oar (Gordon, 2015). They got

so used to the style that it became a part of their lifestyle, adding to their unique culture. The style is however only allowed for men, women row in the traditional style.

The most popular fish caught in the area, Inle carp, is used to prepare the local staple diet. The dish usually consists of fermented rice kneaded with fish and/or potato. Apart from fishing, the locals are again involved in a unique form of farming. They grow vegetables and fruits in large gardens that float on the lake and are usually the results of extensive labor. After gathering weeds from the deeper parts of the sea, they bring them back using their boats and build them into floating garden beds supported by bamboo rods. The gardens are resistant to flooding since they are made in a way to rise and fall with the water levels. The nutrient-laden water of the lake makes the garden very fertile and as a result making the gardens favorable for farming. This rare kind of technology possessed by this community is a major tourist attraction site.

Inle Lake forms a major attraction site, not because of its physical structure but the culture of the people and communities living in this area. The culture and activities carried out in Inle Lake are unique to its inhabitants and is yet to be noticed in other parts of the world. The community holds several festivals especially in the period from August to October. The lake is often used as a venue from various activities involved in the festivals. One popular ceremonial event in the area is the 'HpaungDaw U' festival that usually lasts for a total of 18 days. During this celebration the Shan and the Inthas turn out in numbers, dressed in their best clothes to witness the occasion. A famous activity involved with the festival is the boat racing, where a dozen leg rowers dressed in Shan traditional dress compete in teams, with each team on a different boat.

The local tourist economy has also been boosted by the traditional silversmithing. Silver is mined from mines in the hills surrounding the lake and is transported by boat to the village.

Tourists can satisfy their thirst for memorable moments by watching the silversmiths work on the silver. Local silk workshops that operate similarly provide an alternative attraction site for tourists not interested in silversmithing. The community is also involved in making and selling of hand-made tools. The popular products include tools, carving, and other ornamental objects. The selling of these products is set up in the local markets. The shopping day, however, shifts around five different areas in the lake, such that each area organizes the shopping event every fifth day. The markets are situated on the surface of the lake and are commonly known as 'floating markets' (Hotels.com, 2018). These markets attract more tourists and contribute to a great percentage on the tourist trade. The weaving industry also has its roots in this area. Silk weaving carried out by the inhabitants of this area, produces high-quality hand-woven silk fabrics used in making shan-bags and baskets. Tourists fancy buying these unique antiques.

This area being the home to many tourist attraction sites is a destination for many visitors. As a result, there is an increasing need to host and accommodate them whenever they come to visit. The area has therefore enjoyed tremendous investments in the hotel industry in the area. Inle Lake is currently a home to numerous five-star hotels that serve a multitude of visitors trickling in daily from different parts of the globe. The industry has had the experience of interacting with people of different genders, race, and even physical ability. The industry began long before civilization came to the area. The kind and generous inhabitants of this place were used to hosting strangers in their homes providing them with food and shelter for the entire time they dwelt in the place. This is hospitality, an industry that is actually the same to the hotel industry.

Over the years, the hotel industry has attracted the interests of many leading to the advancement in the industry. This development can be attributed to the pursuit for innovation,

which is common in the hotel industry because of competition (Dzhandzhugazova, Blinova, Orlova, & Romanova, 2016). The tourism in the region has been increasing. This was attributed to the increase in business travel into the country to enjoy the leisure presence in the area. Traveling to the area had also been made easier by the establishment of improved infrastructure and transport network. The country has also been able to acquire extra airlines. Visitors from the countries of these airlines' origin were now able to travel directly to Myanmar and satisfy their hunger for leisure activities.

Inle lake region and the country as a whole have observed impressive economic growth during the period of the hotel industry development (Buijtendijk & Tschunkert, 2016). Through accommodation of more visitors, the country has been able to earn more foreign exchange from the hotel industry, thus boosting their economy. The local economy has not been left behind in these advancements. The locals have in fact benefitted the most from this industry. Job opportunities have been created in the areas where this industry has been established hence acting as income generating source for the local community.

The strong bond and relationship resulting from the interaction of the community and the industry have seen both parties join hands for the betterment of both subjects' interests. The industry has provided the community with access to social amenities and exposure, and on the other hand, the community has returned the favor by acting as a resource center for the industry. Inle lake community, for instance, are involved in agriculture producing a variety of food products. The interaction of this community with the industry in the area has seen the locals receive tenders and contracts for supplying the industry with food products. All this are contributors towards the local economy. The industry has particularly been beneficial to the people of Inle Lake and Myanmar as a whole. The issue of sustainability, however, is still an

area of concern. Can the country and the inhabitants manage the industry to ensure the stable economic growth is sustained?

1.2 Problem Statement

With Inle Lake being the second largest Lake in Myanmar, it has not only attracted tourism in Myanmar but also resulted in the springing up of so many businesses that support the art of tourism. Many support industries in the field of tourism have as a result cropped up in order to advance tourism even to greater heights. Travel and hotel industries are ranking high among the supporting factors that have enhanced tourism in the area. The availability of plenty of natural and cultural resources has also become fascinating scenes that tourists have had to enjoy. The factors promoting tourism growth in Lake Myanmar are thus significant subjects of study not only to advance tourism to a higher level but also to ensure many investors in the tourism sector explore all the probabilities before deciding to cast their nets into this sea that generates massive profits to the investors. Transport and luxurious displays have also been significant avenues that reap much profit from tourism in the area (Buijtendijk & Tschunkert, 2016). The standards and measures affecting tourism are therefore key aspects of Myanmar's economic growth thus its study would be of benefit to many investors and economists. The standards help regulate the quality of the services offered in the tourism sector. Improvement in the service thus boosts the economy of the hotel industries around Myanmar due to the expected rise in the number of tourists who consume these types of services. What are some of these measures? How do they contribute to the quality and the magnitude of hotel industry growth in Myanmar? There are some of the questions whose answers would generate massive profit making ideas which if put into use by investors can turn into better sources of revenue. The aim

of this paper is to explore the nature form of sustainability initiatives of the hotel industry in the Inle Lake region.

1.2 Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to examine the nature and form of sustainability initiatives of the hotel industry in the Inle lake region, Myanmar and make recommendations for change.

There are a number of questions that will need to be answered to realize the objectives:

- 1) What are the strengths and weaknesses of the sustainability initiatives?
- 2) Is there evidence of the pursuit of sustainability?
- 3) What are the elements of interest for sustainability for the hotels in the Inle lake region?
- 4) What are the presenting opportunities and threats?
- 5) What are the challenges that need to be addressed?

1.3 Objectives of the study

The main objective of the study is to determine both the positive and negative standards and measures that lead to the development of the economy of the hotel industry around Lake Inle in Myanmar. Other specific objectives would also be of great aid to ensure the study is successful and they include:

- 1) To identify the strengths and weaknesses of the sustainability initiatives?
- 2) To find out whether there is evidence of the pursuit for sustainability?
- 3) To find out the focus for sustainability goals for the hotels in the Inle lake region?
- 4) To identify presenting opportunities and threats, as well as the challenge that needs to be addressed to help the region realize sustainable standards.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The hotel industry is one of the major sources of livelihood for many middle-income families in our world. The hotel industry employs a wide range class of personalities including cooks, cleaners, accountants among many other specialists in the field of hospitality and management. The study of the factors contributing to the expansion and development of the hotel industry is thus a key area of exploration for those who look forward to investing heavily in any lucrative field in order to gain some income at the end of the day.

The hotel industry is also a major attractor of tourists who also find comfort in staying around places of interest for pleasure. During such activities, much revenue is paid to the government which in turn is converted into developmental initiatives that boost the infrastructure and provision of social amenities in any given area. It also boosts the security of the vicinity and attracts foreign investors.

1.6 Research Model and Conceptual Framework

The research model entails a descriptive survey involving the cross-sectional area of a locality in Inle Lake in Myanmar. The survey engages the respondents on the fundamental factors that play a big role in the development of the economy of the hotel industry around Inle Lake in Myanmar. The conceptual framework included factors that played independently, dependently and the varying factors that all ensured the study was a success, and that data was obtained without any form of prejudice or bias.

1.7 Research Hypothesis

The research study was guided by a set of two competing hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: The hotel industry in Inle Lake region is faring poorly in pursuing sustainability standards and a lot needs to be changed.

Hypothesis 2: The hotel industry in Inle Lake region is faring well in pursuing sustainability standards and needs to be commended.

In this case, Hypothesis 1 is featured to represent to represent the concerns that the hotel industry, like other sectors like the pollutant manufacturing industry, is not doing enough to foster different sustainability goals as required. Hypothesis 2, on the other hand, exists to represent the optimistic view that hotel industry in this region is unique and following a positive path in achieving sustainability.

