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Hiking to Well-being: Leisure Benefits for Personal and Social Development

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Abstract. In recent years, hiking has developed rapidly, but research on the leisure benefits of hiking is still ignored. This research takes the Ancient Tea-Horse Road in Pu'er Yunnan Province as an example, and adopts a qualitative research method to conduct in-depth interviews with 21 interviewees. On this basis, the paper analyzes the motivation of the Ancient Tea-Horse Road hikers and reveals the main significance of hiking. The results show that the Ancient Tea-Horse Road hiking is a valuable option for an economical and enjoyable activity. High popularity, low-cost consumption and being able to meet the participants' experience demand are the key factors to attract the hikers. Two key themes related to leisure benefits emerged. Firstly, for the person, hiking can bring the participants relaxation, challenge oneself, identify cultural quality, enhance interpersonal feelings and develop social relations as well as other positive effects. Secondly, for the society, hiking can enrich tourism leisure products, inherit historical and cultural heritage, and improve the quality of tourism and leisure industry. Finally, the leisure benefits generation mechanism model of the Ancient Tea-Horse Road hiking and implications are discussed.

1. Introduction

Hiking originated in Nepal in the 1860s. It is a leisure activity for participants to enjoy the natural or cultural landscape while walking[1]. In recent years, with the aggravation of social competition, the rapid development of urbanization and the proposal of the national health strategy, people's demand for outdoor sports and leisure has also increased significantly. Since then, hiking has become a new fashionable and personalized leisure activity and has gradually evolved into a strategic option for development in many territories[2]. With its rapid development, hiking has got many scholars' close attention. Scholars have studied the hiking tourism community[3], the satisfaction of hiking activities[4], and the development history, market research, social cognition as well as the motivation of hiking[5] et al., but the research on the leisure benefits of hiking is insufficient. At present, although some studies have recognized the economic benefits of hiking and considered it pure environmental protection and ecological tourism, there is a lack of consideration for other benefits such as social benefits[6]. Therefore, it is difficult to fully reveal the development trend of hiking leisure.

The tea-horse ancient road is a commercial road, which was gradually developed with the trade of tea, horse and other means of livelihood between the inland agricultural areas and the remote nomadic region in Chinese history. It is mainly divided into two routes. The south one Yunnan-Tibet Route starts from Xishuangbanna Autonomous Region and Pu'er areas in Yunnan province, goes through Lhasa to Nepal and India, with a length of 3,800 kilometers in China. The north one Sichuan-Tibet Route originates from Ya'an, Sichuan province, and goes through Lhasa to Bhutan, Nepal, and India,



with a length of 3,100 km in China. There are a lot of cultural heritage and natural landscape resources along the route, but also exist some difficulties, especially along the Yunnan- Tibet Route[7]. Therefore, the Ancient Tea-Horse Road is different from the ordinary hiking route in product design, product connotation, and other aspects.

The district around Pu 'er is the original area of Yunnan-Tibet Route, the place with the longest history of tea production in Yunnan Province. Pu'er is the hub of tea distribution and is known as the Source of World Tea. This area is inhabited by Hani, Lahu, Wa, and other 23 nationalities. So the national culture is rich and attracts the masses to go hiking here. Pu'er is one of the representative hiking destinations in China. This study selected the route from Simao district (the city proper) to Nakeli(a courier station) in Pu'er to conduct an in-depth and systematic analysis on the leisure benefits, hoping to provide a scientific basis for the development of Ancient Tea-Horse Road hiking and accumulate basic materials for the theoretical research of related disciplines.

2. Research design

This study mainly adopts the in-depth interview method. The main questions include: (1) please talk about your hiking experience in detail. (2) Why did you choose the Ancient Tea-Horse Road hiking? (3) Do you think this hiking is attractive? Why? (4) What's the best, or most interesting or memorable in the hiking? Why? (5) Do you have any new ideas or changes after the hike? What is it?

The interviewees must be hiking participants. The author contacted them through personal relationships and friend recommendations. The interview starts from November 2018 to March 2019, including face to face interviews, telephone interviews, etc. The place is in a relaxed and quiet environment and suitable for conversation, such as a park, coffee shop, campus, etc. When no new information appears, it is regarded as information saturation and the interview is concluded. A total of 21 people were interviewed, including employees, businessmen, tea artists, tour guides, students, teachers, clerks, and doctors. The interviewees were aged between 21 and 48 and their name is replaced by the number as interviewee 1 indicates the first interviewee.

3. Research results

3.1. Attraction of hiking

Attraction of the Ancient Tea-Horse Road hiking are shown as:

3.1.1. High Popularity

Popularity is a key factor in attracting hikers. In the interview, popularity was mentioned by many interviewees. For example, interviewer 2 (male, doctor) said, "the main reason for organizing the Ancient Tea-Horse Road hiking is its fame. Many doctors in our hospital are not local. Most of them have heard of the Ancient Tea-Horse Road, but they have not gone hiking. Besides, the route of Pu 'er four kilometers away is very interesting, original and has historical significance and feeling." Interviewee 16 (female, staff) also said, "If it is just a steep mountain road, it may not be discovered, because there is no fame. But the Ancient Tea-Horse Road is different. It is famous, so it is more meaningful. Many people want to see it in person."

3.1.2. Low-cost Consumption

Compared with other tourism and leisure activities, there is no ticket for the Ancient Tea-Horse Road hiking, and other expenses are relatively a little and the cost is low. So it attracts a large number of participants. This is especially true for students who are often with less income and more leisure time. Interviewer 5 (female, student) expressed, "Compared with other scenic spots that charge fees, hiking are more attractive." The same is true for small business employee groups. Interviewer 9 (male, manager) explained: "hiking is the most suitable because the entrance fee alone can save a lot from the expense."

3.1.3. Experience Needs Satisfied

The Ancient Tea-Horse Road hiking can meet the consumers' needs of both natural scenery and human history experience. With the improvement of social living standards and the development of leisure, consumers' demand for leisure experience has changed from traditional sightseeing to participatory experience. At the same time, consumers pay great attention to experience quality. As the interviewer 10 (female, student) said: "To go hiking, we can not only see the scenery but also understand the folk customs along the ancient road and experience the hardships of the caravan in those days. This is what we want."

3.2. Personal Benefits

The Ancient Tea-Horse Road hiking has many positive effects on individuals, mainly including:

3.2.1. Relax

The Ancient Tea-Horse Road hiking is a leisure activity, which can relieve physical and mental stress and to make the participants happy and relax. This positive effect was confirmed by a large number of respondents. As interviewee 8 (female, nurse) said: "The pace of life is relatively fast now, we are busy with study or work in daily life, and the pressure is too great. Only on the holiday can we come out and relax, and then be more efficient into the work".

3.2.2. Challenge Oneself

The Ancient Tea-Horse Road hiking route is long and there is no signpost, being with certain challenges, so it needs certain endurance, perseverance, and intelligence and requires participants to constantly challenge themselves. As interviewee 11 (male, tea merchant) said, "It is still a great challenge to complete the hiking. First, you should know some basic survival skills. For example, prepare enough water before the start because there's no water on the way. Besides, you'd better have explored the road. Also, you need to continue encouraging yourselves for being lack of sports, physical labor in daily life. To overcome a kilometer by kilometer and finally be able to walk finish the whole route. Besides, some interviewees mentioned that the Ancient Tea-Horse Road can bring great joy after completing the self-challenge. For example, interviewee 7 (female, tour guide) said, "After guiding the tourists to finish the whole journey, the number of steps on the mobile phone has exceeded 30,000, ranking the first among friends. Honestly, I can't believe I can do more than 30,000 steps. On that day, I also sent the screenshot of the route to the WeChat Circle and got a lot of friends' praise. I got a kick out of it." Another interviewee said: "when I feel to give up, but when I see other partners keep trying to move forward, I know what I can do is only to keep going, to challenge yourself."

3.2.3. Identify Cultural Quality

For some hikers, the Ancient Tea-Horse Road hiking is also the embodiment of their cultural values pursuit. As interviewee 11 (female, teacher) said, "The hiking reflects our cultural taste to some extent. As far as I am concerned, I don't choose other hiking routes because of the historical and cultural value of the tea-horse route. In the past, it was an important trade route, which played an irreplaceable role in guaranteeing the life of the people in ethnic areas, inter-ethnic exchanges and unity, and social development. This is an integral part of our culture, and we should remember it and appreciate it."

3.2.4. Enhance Interpersonal Feelings

The Ancient Tea-Horse Road hiking usually occurred out in groups. During hiking, interpersonal communication and interaction are frequent, so the interpersonal relationship is naturally enhanced, such as care from partners. Interviewee 18 (male, freelance) described: "My girlfriend and I saw several elderly couples taking care of each other when hiking. They must be in very deep love. We really hope to be able to have true love and company in our lifetime." Some organizations also recognize hiking as a tool to enhance the friendship and cohesion between team members. For

example, interviewee 6 (male, student) "We students from the chess association do not see each other often and are not solidarity enough. If we just go out for a tour, we will not achieve the desired effect. By hiking, we communicate with each other, help each other and know each other better."

3.2.5. Develop Social Relationships

In addition, hiking can also create opportunities for communication and understanding among unfamiliar individuals to enhance interpersonal feelings, and build new connections between individuals. For example, interviewee 20 (female, staff) said, "Usually, we seldom have the chance to meet our boss. We always think the boss is very serious so dare not make a joke. However, in hiking, we know that our boss is easygoing and humorous. If it used to be just a relationship between a supervisor and a subordinate, but now we are also friends." Another interviewee 21 (female, tour guide) described it as "Hiking provides an opportunity to meet new friends. For example, nearly 500 people from all over the country participated in this hiking, many people didn't know each other. But when assigned to the same team, we would take turns to look after each other. At the same time, we would also finish some team activities. When the team members communicated with each other, they became friends."

3.3. Social Benefits

In addition to its positive impact on individuals, hiking has the following social benefits:

3.3.1. Enrich Products

The Ancient Tea-Horse Road hiking is one of the tourism and leisure activities. It effectively enriches the variety and choice of tourism and leisure products. As interviewee 17 (female, staff) said, "When my friends come from other places, I should arrange some meaningful activities. I have considered going to the scenic spot or the farmhouse but hesitated to make the decision. It is that my friend proposed to go hiking."

3.3.2. Inherit Heritage

Hikers got to deeply understand the knowledge of tea-horse trade culture and its dissemination through personal experience and achieve the inheritance of national history and culture. Interviewer 10 (male, senior executive) believes that the Ancient Tea-Horse Road is a passage with stories: "There are many moving stories happened on this road, and I have heard no less than 10 of them, all of which are historical stories happened on this road, about love, family and friends." Interviewer 4 (male, tea art master) "During the long journey, just when I felt hard and boring, I suddenly found a stone covered with fallen leaves and marked with deep horseshoes, and understand how hard it was for the caravan. I believe such a stone records a time, a period of history and the strong will of the ancients." Interviewee 2 (female, student) "The feeling of hiking on this ancient road is different from other roads. Tortuous, steep, narrow and so on. The horse gang had to go through hardships to get the materials they needed. We should remember this history and remind ourselves to cherish our life."

3.3.3. Improve Industry Quality

The significance of Ancient Tea-Horse Road hiking in improving the quality of tourism and leisure industry was also recognized by the interviewees. Interviewer 19 (female, accountant) said: "The Ancient Tea-Horse Road is a mysterious trade route with spectacular natural scenery and rich cultural heritage. The hiking is a leisure product deeply integrated with culture and tourism, which has a positive impact on the quality of tourism and leisure products and the improvement of competitive advantages in the region, and also the sustainable development of the tourism and leisure industry."

4. Conclusions and suggestions

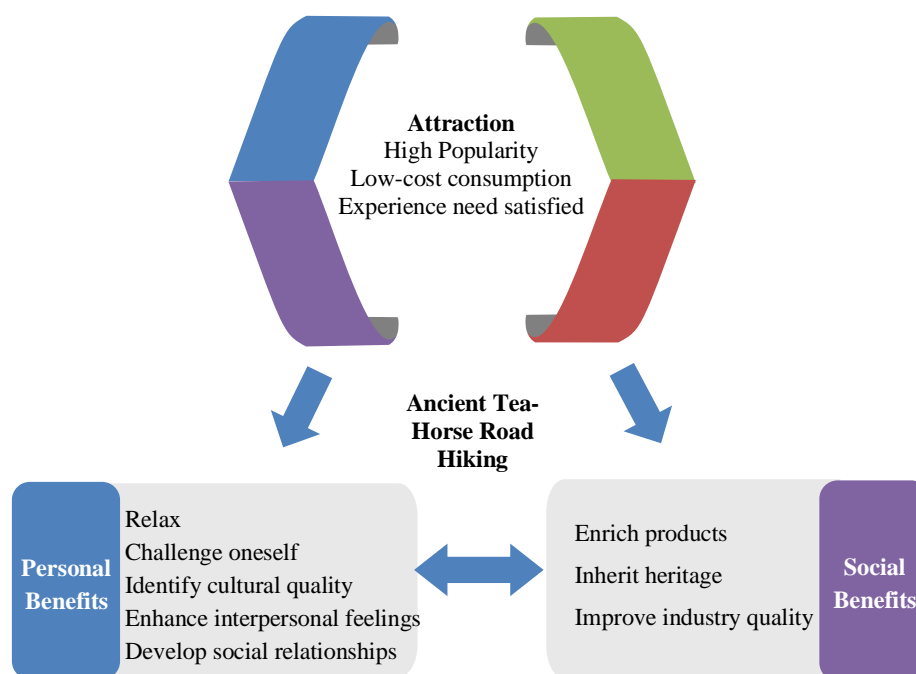


Fig. 1 Leisure benefits generation mechanism of the Ancient Tea-Horse Road hiking

4.1. Conclusion

Take the above discussion into conclusion, we can see the Ancient Tea-Horse Road hiking is an economical leisure activity. Because of the unique attraction, the Ancient Tea-Horse Road hiking has been popular and participated by the majority of hikers and thus has produced both individual and social positive benefits. At the same time, there is a close relationship between personal and social benefits. Therefore, this paper proposed the leisure benefits generation mechanism model of the Ancient Tea-Horse Road hiking, as shown in Figure 1.

4.2. Suggestions

Based on the above conclusions, this paper discusses the development of the Ancient Tea-Horse Road hiking as follows: firstly, the development should focus on excavating the historical value of the ancient road and "cultural interpretation" of the natural landscape. Secondly, ancient road hiking has been popular among many participants, but in the face of diverse visitors, relevant departments should do a good job in information publicity services, such as improving the signpost setting, establishing a website to provide convenience for participants. Finally, due to that the route is long and tough, the relatively long time required, being easy to encounter some accidents, such as sudden rain and wrestling mentioned by the interviewer, it is necessary to remind the hikers to improve their safety awareness and prepare for safety precautions.

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