

A Study of Strategic Role of Chabahar Free Zone on Tourism Industry Development Using SWOT Model in Iran

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Abstract:

The current research was conducted aiming to study the strategic role of Chabahar Free Zone on Tourism Industry Development. The statistical group of this study is the experts of tourism including the tourism officials and experts of Chabahar Free Zone. The statistical sample in the current study was a group of 20 people that was determined by use Judgmental sampling method. This research is of applied type and the study method is a compound one (quantitative, descriptive and analytical). For this purpose, the internal environment (Strengths and Weaknesses) and the external environment (opportunities and threats) of the tourism industry of Chabahar Free Zone were studied. Then in order to complete the information, a questionnaire was used and its reliability co-efficient was calculated to be 0.927. The comments of the tourism-related experts and officials in Chabahar Free Zone were sought. Considering the collected information, SWOT model was used to analyze the findings. Evaluation of internal and external factors clarified the relative value and priority of each of the factors. The results showed that all the factors had a relative value of more than 0.8. Therefore it was an inevitable necessity to prepare the strategies in order to remove the Weaknesses and threats and use the Strengths and opportunities.

Hence this study tried to describe the strategic role of Chabahar Free Zone on tourism industry development with identifying the effective factors on tourism development in Chabahar Free Zone and preparation of the strategies.

Key Words: Chabahar, Free Zone, Tourism, SWOT

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Introduction:

Tourism industry is considered as the biggest and the most variant industry in the world. Most of the countries find this dynamic industry the main source of income, employment, growth of private sector and development of infra-structure (Parsaiean and A'arabi, 2003).

According to the report of the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), tourism has a substantial role in creating employment. According to this report, more than 210 million people all over the world are actively engaged in this industry. This makes about 7.6% of the international employment (WTTC report, 2009).

The Free and special economic Zones of Iran have many different tourism opportunities. Historical monuments and natural attractions are among the opportunities and facilities that could turn to a treasure for the country and materialize the objectives of the zones if they are planned and used in a correct and timely fashion (Hajipour, 2009).

The law of Free industrial and trade Zones was approved by the Iranian parliament on 29 August 1993. Objectives such as the infra-structural affairs, development, growth and economic expansion, investment and increase of public revenues, creating jobs/entrepreneurship, regulation of the labor market and goods, active participation in the international and regional markets and presentation of public services were set. The Free Zones of Iran, particularly Kish, Qeshm and Chabahar could currently contribute in order to materialize the economic objectives as it was indicated in the law of Free Zones as well as the state economic, social and cultural plan, and extend special assistance to the tourism industry and attraction of tourists. Each of these zones has unique specifications that are quite suitable to materialize the relevant objectives to this effect (Karami, Zakieh, 2013).

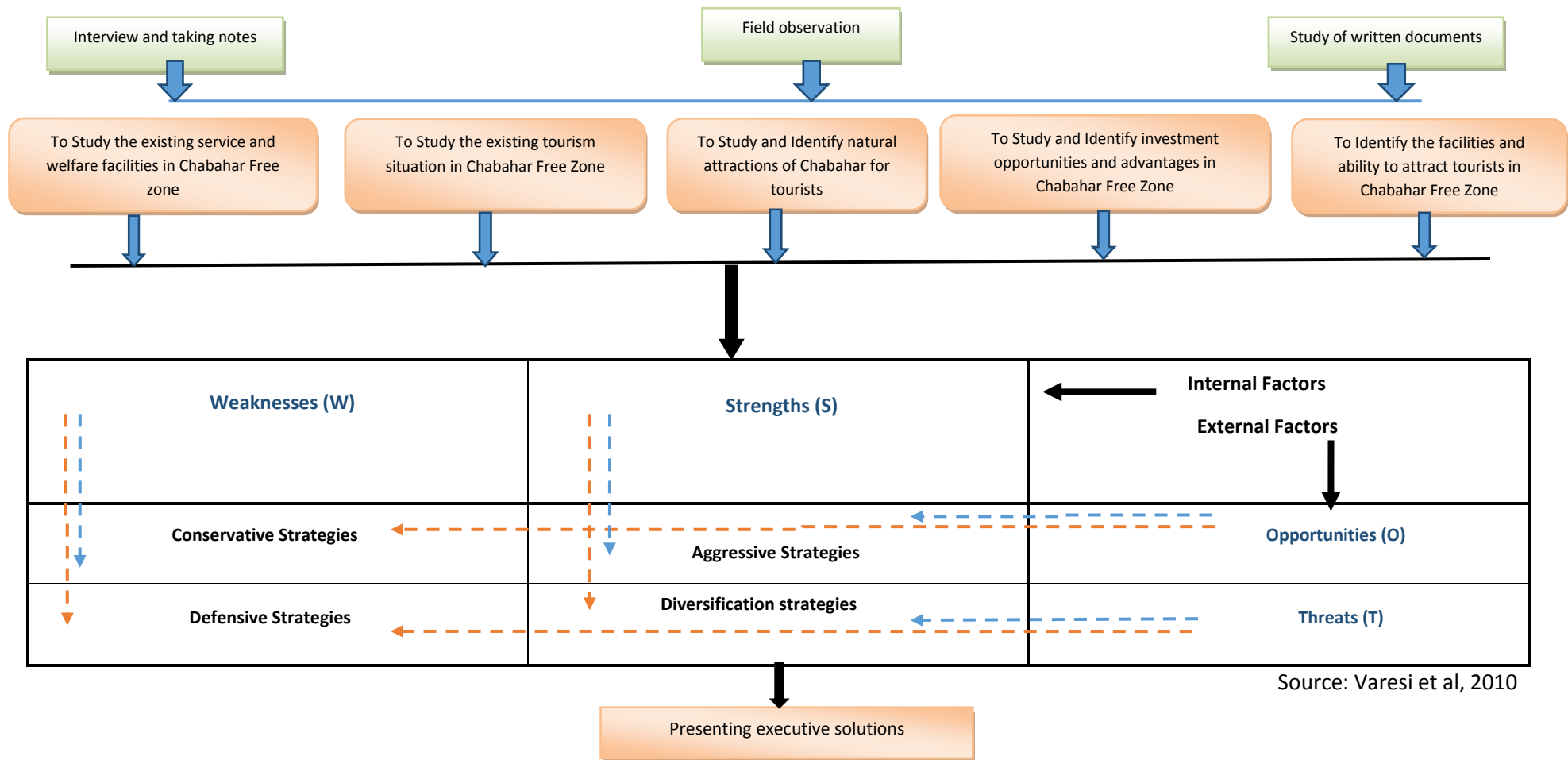
Since Chabahar Free Zone organization is one of the most important organizations of Iran and one of the objectives to establish it is "to create healthy and productive employment", it has many entertainment and tourism attractions. Chabahar Free Zone could play a significant role to develop the tourism industry in this region by doing strategic planning in the field of tourism industry development.

Hence this study has tried to describe the role of Chabahar Free Zone in development of tourism industry with the assistance of strategic planning.

2. The framework of the study:

To discuss the theoretical framework of the study, firstly the research process will be presented in form of a diagram. Then tourism will be defined. since this study deals with the strategic role of Chabahar Free Zone on tourism industry development, it seems necessary to introduce Chabahar Free Zone.

figure 1: Work Process and Research Perspective



2.1. Tourism Industry:

Tourism is a French word that comes from 'tour'. 'Tour' in French has the following meanings: rotating movement (rotation), travel, travelling around, revolving, wandering. From the viewpoint of Pier Larous, tourism is travelling for fun and entertainment and tourist is the one who travels to enjoy himself/herself and make fun (Mahalati, 2001).

"Nowadays, the importance of tourism from economic and job-creation/entrepreneurship point of view is so much that it could be considered as the motor power of economy in every country. Tourism has many advantages and could be an important source for employment because employment in this industry does not require high skills and training and the local people who are minimally-skilled could provide services in the relevant jobs" (Hezarjaribi, 2011). Therefore, considering the important role of tourism industry in the state economic development, investment in tourism is inevitable, and investment in this field requires strategic planning in this area.

2.2. Introduction of Chabahar Free Zone:

In May 1991 and according to the resolution approved by the cabinet of ministers, the lands on the east side of Chabahar Gulf, 14,000 Hectares in area was recognized as Chabahar Free Zone and it was opened on 11 February 1993 by Mr Hashemi Rafsanjani, the Incumbent president. Chabahar industrial trade Free zone is one of the six Free Zones in Iran that was established in line with the state economic objectives and is situated in the vicinity of Chabahar in the margin of Oman Sea for more than one decade (rules and regulations of industrial trade Free Zones, 2002).

3. Research Method:

This study is of applied type and the method to study it is a compound one (quantitative, descriptive and analytical).

To begin with due to the conducted studies, a list of Strengths, Weaknesses, opportunities and tourism risks were identified in Chabahar Free Zone. Then they were calculated and analyzed through asking for the comments of the experts and tourism officials. Considering the obtained information, attractions, facilities, services and general situation of tourism in the region were studied and then SWOT model was used to analyze the data.

The statistical group in the current study comprised of tourism experts and officials of the free zone and sampling is also made on judgmental basis from 20 people due to the small size of the statistical group.

3.1. SWOT analytical model:

One of the very important instruments in the process to prepare the strategy is SWOT technique by which the information is compared. SWOT is basically an instrument of strategic planning (Hom Haacke, 2001)

SWOT technique or matrix is an instrument to identify the existing threats and opportunities in the external environment and to recognize the weaknesses and internal Strengths in order to assess the situation and prepare strategies to guide and control that system. This method is the direct result of Harvard faculty of commerce (Moradi Masihi, 2002).

SWOT stands for four words, namely, Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats where in this analysis, the strengths and weaknesses are considered as the internal factors of the organization, and opportunities and threats are also considered as the external factors of the organization. The internal Strengths and Weaknesses are part of the controllable activities of

the organization and the organization does them in a very excellent or very weak manner. One of the main and necessary activities of the strategic management is to identify and assess the Strengths and Weaknesses of the departments and units of the organization. The organizations try in this direction to create strategies to strengthen their internal factors and also to remove their internal weaknesses. External opportunities and threats mean the economic, social, cultural, ecological, environmental, political, legal, governmental, technological and competitive events and trends that could inflict profit or loss on the organization abundantly in the future (Abtahi et al, 2008).

2.1. Identifying the effective factors on tourism development in Chabahar Free Zone:

Both the internal factors (Strengths and Weaknesses) and the external factors (opportunities and threats) effective on tourism industry development in Chabahar Free Zone were identified. In this way, 7 factors were identified as Strengths, 10 factors as Weaknesses, 8 factors as opportunities and 6 factors as threats. These were shown in table No. 1.

Table No. 1: Effective Factors on tourism industry development in Chabahar Free Zone

| Item | Internal Factors | External Factors |
|------|---|--|
| 1 | Strengths S1: Pleasant weather in cold seasons | Opportunities O1: To create jobs/entrepreneurship and Foreign currency income for the country |
| 2 | S2: A calm and peaceful environment away from the hullabaloo of big cities | O2: To introduce Chabahar Free Zone as the pilot zone for tourism and its location in the center of regional tourism |
| 3 | S3: Connection to the body of the main land | O3: Government’s attention to creating jobs/entrepreneurship, removal of poverty, creating Foreign currency income, economic and cultural interactions, etc. through tourism development |
| 4 | S4: Variety of natural and virgin environments and different geographical landscapes | O4: To increase incentive and demand for travel and entertainment among the people, particularly in Sistan-Balouchistan province in recent years |
| 5 | S5: Being close to the coastlines of Oman Sea and short distance from the littoral states of the Persian Gulf | O5: To be close to Pakistan, Afghanistan and Persian Gulf region |
| 6 | S6: Suitable geographical and strategic location | O6: To prepare the comprehensive tourism plan and valuable technical studies in form of investment opportunities in the zone |
| 7 | S7: Potential capacity of the zone for investment and tourism planning | O7: To be far from critical regions and tension-creating areas in the Persian Gulf |
| 8 | Weaknesses W1: Shortage of suitable accommodation and reception venues | O8: To turn to a tourism pilot, particularly a medical treatment center for the regional countries |

| | | |
|----|--|---|
| | for different classes of people | |
| 9 | W2: Unsuitable entertainment and sport facilities and equipment | Threats T1: Little foreign investment in the tourism sector of the zone |
| 10 | W3: Weak management including instability in management | T2: Existing incentive to travel to rival tourism regions and subsequent increase of tourists' inclination to travel to those regions |
| 11 | W4: Lack of the least welfare facilities in tourism sites | T3: Lack of tourism development plans and programs in the state Free Zones |
| 12 | W5: High costs to travel to the zone (particularly air fares) | T4: Shortage of welfare facilities for tourism in routes ending to Chabahar (Sistan-Balouchistan province) |
| 13 | W6: Shortage of health, medical treatment and service facilities | T5: Lack of suitable strategic and operational programs to attract foreign tourists to Iran |
| 14 | W7: Long distance between the airport and the zone | T6: Shortage of suitable greeneries and reserves of drinking water in the zone |
| 15 | W8: Shortage of suitable transportation paths, particularly railroad and water routes | |
| 16 | W9: Weakness of promotional activities, public relations and marketing regarding the tourism attractions in the zone | |
| 17 | W10: Unsuitable environmental and organizational infra-structures | |

3.3. SWOT analysis of tourism industry development in Chabahar Free Zone:

As it was shown in table No. 1, 7 internal strengths against 10 internal weaknesses and 8 external opportunities against 6 external threats were identified and studied.

This way, the total number of 15 Strengths and opportunities as advantages and 16 weaknesses and threats as restrictions and limitations on the way of this region were identified in line with expansion of tourism. Hence in a simple conclusion and analysis, it could be said that this region needs a review and presentation of suitable policies to remove the weaknesses and threats and to use the strengths and opportunities.

Now taking table No. 2 into consideration, each of the Weaknesses and Strengths, opportunities and threats were studied and analyzed as far as the participating group in the study was concerned.

Table No. 2: Effective internal factors on tourism industry development in Chabahar Free Zone

| Item | Internal Factors | Total values | Average values | Relative value | Rank/ Priority |
|------|--|--------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| 1 | Strengths S1: Pleasant weather in cold seasons | 99 | 4.95 | 0.990 | 1 |
| 2 | S2: A calm and peaceful environment away from the chaos of big cities | 93 | 4.65 | 0.930 | 1 |
| 3 | S3: Connection to the body of the main land | 89 | 4.45 | 0.890 | 2 |
| 4 | S4: Variety of natural and virgin environments and different geographical landscapes | 87 | 4.35 | 0.870 | 2 |
| 5 | S5: Being close to the coastlines of Oman Sea and short distance from the littoral states of the Persian Gulf | 87 | 4.35 | 0.870 | 2 |
| 6 | S6: Suitable geographical and strategic location | 87 | 4.35 | 0.870 | 2 |
| 7 | S7: Potential capacity of the zone for investment and tourism planning | 86 | 4.30 | 0.860 | 3 |
| | Weaknesses | | | | |
| 1 | W1: Shortage of suitable accommodation and reception venues for different classes of people | 93 | 4.65 | 0.930 | 1 |
| 2 | W2: Unsuitable entertainment and sport facilities and equipment | 93 | 4.65 | 0.930 | 1 |
| 3 | W3: Weak management including instability in management | 92 | 4.60 | 0.920 | 1 |
| 4 | W4: Lack of the least welfare facilities in tourism sites | 92 | 4.60 | 0.920 | 1 |
| 5 | W5: High costs to travel to the zone (particularly air fares) | 92 | 4.60 | 0.920 | 1 |
| 6 | W6: Shortage of health, medical treatment and service facilities | 91 | 4.55 | 0.910 | 1 |
| 7 | W7: Long distance between the airport and the zone | 87 | 4.35 | 0.870 | 2 |
| 8 | W8: Shortage of suitable transportation paths, particularly railroad and water routes | 86 | 4.30 | 0.860 | 2 |
| 9 | W9: Weakness of promotional activities, public relations and marketing regarding the tourism attractions in the zone | 85 | 4.25 | 0.850 | 3 |

| | | | | | |
|--------------|---|------|-------|-------|---|
| 10 | W10: Unsuitable environmental and organizational infra-structures | 84 | 4.20 | 0.840 | 3 |
| Total | | 1523 | 76.15 | 15.23 | |

Table No. 3: Effective external factors on tourism industry development in Chabahar Free Zone

| Item | Internal Factors | Total values | Average values | Relative value | Rank/ Priority |
|----------------------|--|--------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Opportunities | | | | | |
| 1 | O1: To create jobs/entrepreneurship and Foreign currency income for the country | 94 | 4.70 | 0.940 | 1 |
| 2 | O2: To introduce Chabahar Free Zone as the pilot zone for tourism and its location in the center of regional tourism | 92 | 4.60 | 0.920 | 1 |
| 3 | O3: Government's attention to creating jobs/entrepreneurship, removal of poverty, creating Foreign currency income, economic and cultural interactions, etc. through tourism development | 91 | 4.55 | 0.910 | 1 |
| 4 | O4: To increase incentive and demand for travel and entertainment among the people, particularly in Sistan-Balouchistan province in recent years | 90 | 4.50 | 0.900 | 1 |
| 5 | O5: To be close to Pakistan, Afghanistan and Persian Gulf region | 89 | 4.45 | 0.890 | 2 |
| 6 | O6: To prepare the comprehensive tourism plan and valuable technical studies in form of investment opportunities in the zone | 88 | 4.40 | 0.880 | 2 |
| 7 | O7: To be far from critical regions and tension-creating areas in the Persian Gulf | 87 | 4.35 | 0.870 | 2 |
| 8 | O8: To turn to a tourism pilot, particularly a medical treatment center for the regional countries | 86 | 4.30 | 0.860 | 3 |
| Threats | | | | | |
| 1 | T1: Little foreign investment in the tourism sector of the zone | 91 | 4.55 | 0.910 | 1 |

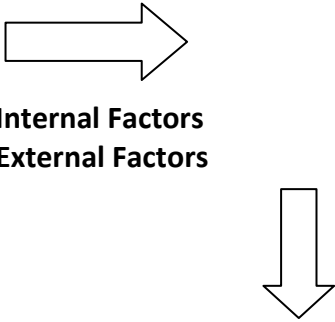
| | | | | | |
|--------------|---|------|-------|-------|---|
| 2 | T2: Existing incentive to travel to rival tourism regions and subsequent increase of tourists' inclination to travel to those regions | 89 | 4.45 | 0.890 | 2 |
| 3 | T3: Lack of tourism development plans and programs in the state Free Zones | 87 | 4.35 | 0.870 | 2 |
| 4 | T4: Shortage of welfare facilities for tourism in routes ending to Chabahar (Sistan-Balouchistan province) | 86 | 4.30 | 0.860 | 2 |
| 5 | T5: Lack of suitable strategic and operational programs to attract foreign tourists to Iran | 83 | 4.15 | 0.830 | 3 |
| 6 | T6: Shortage of suitable greeneries and reserves of drinking water in the zone | 82 | 4.10 | 0.820 | 3 |
| Total | | 1235 | 61.75 | 12.35 | |

The results of SWOT analysis show that from the viewpoint of experts and officials of tourism in the Free Zone, the parameter of good climate in the cold season of the year stands at rank 1 and has the relative value of 0.990 as the most important internal Strength, and shortage of suitable accommodation and reception venues for all the strata is considered as the most important internal Weakness standing at rank 2 and has the relative value of 0.930. Job-creation/entrepreneurship and creation of Foreign currency income for the country stand at rank 1 and has the relative value of 0.940 as the most important external opportunity, creation of incentive in the rival tourism fields and as a result increased inclination by the tourists to travel to those regions stand at rank 3 and has the relative value of 0.910 as the most important external threat. Eventually the matrix of suitable strategies to expand tourism industry of Chabahar Free Zone was completed and some suggestions were presented to the future researchers as well as Chabahar Free Zone.

3.4. Strategies for tourism industry development in Chabahar Free Zone and forming SWOT matrix:

Chabahar Free Zone could play an important role in development of this industry in the region by implementing tourism development strategies. On this basis, table No. 4 presents the strategies for tourism industry development in the study area are presented in:

Table No. 4: SWOT matrix:

| | | |
|---|--|--|
|  <p>Internal Factors External Factors</p> | <p>Strengths: S1: Pleasant weather in cold seasons S2: A calm and peaceful environment away from the chaos of big cities S3: Connection to the body of the main land S4: Variety of natural and virgin environments and different geographical landscapes, and S7: Potential capacity of the zone for investment and tourism planning</p> | <p>Weaknesses: W1: Shortage of suitable accommodation and reception venues for different classes of people W2: Unsuitable entertainment and sport facilities and equipment W3: Weak management including instability in management W4: Lack of the least welfare facilities in tourism sites and W10: Unsuitable environmental and organizational infra-structures</p> |
| <p>Opportunities: O1: To create jobs/entrepreneurship and Foreign currency income for the country O2: To introduce Chabahar Free zone as the pilot zone for tourism and its location in the center of regional tourism O3: Government’s attention to creating jobs/entrepreneurship, removal of poverty, creating Foreign currency income, economic and cultural interactions, etc. through tourism development and O8: To turn to a tourism pilot, particularly a medical treatment center for the regional countries</p> | <p>SO: SO1: Attention to tourism marketing in cold season of the year and attraction of tourism from cold cities to visit Chabahar Free Zone SO2: To host futsal, volleyball, basketball and water sports matches in winter in Chabahar Free Zone SO3: To support the private sector to establish accommodation and welfare facilities through handovers SO4: To use the experienced experts and specialists of tourism in Chabahar Free Zone</p> | <p>WO: WO1: Review of administrative and investment processes in tourism sector in Chabahar Free Zone WO2: Adjustment of zone policies to support free investment in tourism sector WO3: Necessity to review the organizational chart to manage tourism in the Free zone and to create tourism marketing sector</p> |

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| <p>Threats: T1: Little foreign investment in the tourism sector of the zone T2: Existing incentive to travel to rival tourism regions and subsequent increase of tourists' inclination to travel to those regions T3: Lack of tourism development plans and programs in the state Free Zones T4: Shortage of welfare facilities for tourism in routes ending to Chabahar (Sistan-Balouchistan province) T5: Lack of suitable strategic and operational programs to attract foreign tourists to Iran T6: Shortage of suitable greeneries and reserves of drinking water in the zone</p> | <p>ST: ST1: To do marketing activities including holding exhibitions, festivals, media promotions, etc. to introduce the tourism attractions of the Free Zone ST2: To create variety in facilities, services and tourism activities to attract the tourists' satisfaction ST3: To prepare and implement different tourism programs in Chabahar Free Zone</p> | <p>WT: WT1: To introduce the advantages and strengths of Chabahar Free Zone in comparison with the other zones through comprehensive marketing and tourism planning and to promote the promotional activities aiming to create incentive in tourists to visit and travel to Chabahar Free Zone WT2: To support the government to encourage tourism industry of Chabahar Free zone and to grant credits to people to invest in development of sea tourism equipment such as ferries, hotels and water entertainment facilities WT3: To use qualified and efficient management to do tourism planning to increase investment in tourism sector</p> |
|---|--|--|

4. Conclusion:

Considering the theoretical fundamentals of the study and the results from SWOT analysis, the strategies for tourism industry development in Chabahar Free Zone were presented.

The results from this study showed that the current situation of tourism of Chabahar Free Zone does not correspond with the opportunities, capacities and Strengths of tourism in that region. Generally speaking, study of the internal and external factors showed that all the internal and external factors have the relative value of over 0.8. According to this study, the parameter of good climate in the cold season of the year is considered as the most important internal Strengths and shortage of residential and reception spaces suitable for all the strata is considered as the most important internal Weaknesses. Job-creation/entrepreneurship and creation of Foreign currency income for the country are considered as the most important external opportunities and creation of incentive in the rival tourism fields and subsequently the increased inclination of tourists to travel to the region is considered as the most important external threat.

5. Suggestions:

The way out of the existing situation of tourism in Chabahar Free Zone requires practical solutions upon which the Free Zone could play its role on development of this industry. It goes

without saying that the role of Chabahar Free Zone is important for tourism industry development, thus it requires paying attention to the strategic programs.

On this basis, the following suggestions were presented to Chabahar Free Zone organization:

1. To improve the infra-structures of accommodation and restaurants meeting the standards.
2. To try to improve the transportation infra-structures to Chabahar zone, particularly follow up the acceleration of rail road construction project between Zahedan and Chabahar.
3. To do the necessary follow ups to facilitate issue of visa and cancel obligatory visa to enter Iran and to prioritize the friend countries that send the highest number of tourists to the countries of the region.
4. To construct the infrastructures of sea tourism to use the water entertainments of the sea.
5. To support the private sector to invest and create residential infra-structures and centers of tourism services in compliance with the standards in Chabahar Free Zone (hotels and studios looking at the beach, venues to have fun and sea entertainment site as well as a regular beach with multiple piers.
6. To invest for erection of an international sport complex of the Free Zone. In cold seasons of the year when matches and sport activities are limited to covered areas in most of the cities of Iran, the pleasant weather and geographical climate of Chabahar and its unique Gulf enable this region to host a vast spectrum of coastal, sea and covered sports, etc.
7. To pay attention to the marketing researches and allocation of the required credits to identify the target groups and to regulate the marketing activities in order to increase the efficiency of marketing and promotional attempts.
8. To use expert and skilful directors to manage the tourism of Chabahar Free Zone organization.

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