Prospects in Tourism Marketing: A Study with Reference to Kerala as Tourism Destination

B. Udaya Bhaskara Ganesh and P. Jagadeesh

Abstract--- Tourism has become a popular global leisure activity. Tourism is important, and in some cases, vital for many countries. It was recognized in the Manila Declaration on World Tourism of 1980 as "an activity essential to the life of nations because of its direct effects on the social, cultural, educational, and economic sectors of national societies and on their international relations." Tourism is a growing service industry which earns a substantial foreign exchange in many parts of the world. In India, Kerala is the most important destination for the international tourists with its unique and enchanting land abounding in scenic beauty, rich in flora and fauna. To make the tourism a great success one has to take advantage of the modern technology to full extent.

Many countries are promoting tourism and it has become a source of major income for countries like India, Singapore and Malaysia. Tourism is, of course, big industry in most developed countries like the US, the UK, France and Switzerland. Tourism industry is one in which there is high competition. The tourism should not only concentrate on promoting and selling packages for foreign tourist but should also induce domestic tourists to use the services. The price of the tourist package is the main criteria for people in India to consider making a trip. Tourists can be divided based on their socio-economical status, geographic differences, demographics and psychographics. The marketing mix elements of tourism industry help in creating an image of the tourist destination, building awareness of the services.

Tourism is a service sector which earns a substantial foreign exchange to developing countries. In India, Kerala is one of the important destination for the international tourists with its unique nature beauty with backwaters, mountains and beaches. Kerala is often referred to as 'God’s own country', because of its extraordinary natural beauty resembling the heaven. Present paper is an attempt to market tourism by adapting the service marketing approach for achieving great success. This paper discusses services marketing mix concepts, its application in promoting kerala tourism and the strengths and problems of tourism in kerala.

Keywords--- Tourism marketing, Tourism Vision 2020, Ecotourism

I. INTRODUCTION

Tourism in recent times has shown phenomenal growth. This has emerged as flourishing industry with bright prospects. Tourism has indeed been a rapidly growing sector and wide-sweeping socio-economic phenomenon with broad economic, social, cultural and environment consequences. It is likely that tourism will continue to dominate the international scene for many years to come. In the eyes of many decision and policy makers tourism has magic potential. It generates income and is based on the indigenous resources of the tourist areas concerned. Tourism is one of the fastest growing sectors of the global economy, which account for about 11 percent of the Global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employ about 200 million people worldwide. There are about 700 million international travelers per year. Tourism and travel related sectors have become dynamic sources of income and a major strategic sector for development in many countries. Tourism businesses operate globally and many have opted for a competitive advantage of internationalization. Tourism has become one of the most crucial sectors in a large number of emerging countries. Moreover, the tourism industry in such markets is forecasted to keep increasing in the next decade. Hence, understanding and accurately forecast tourism trends in the industry are essential in order to manage this sector effectively. In this paper it is discussed about the emerging trends in tourism with special reference to Kerala tourism.

1.1. Tourism Marketing

Travel and tourism have been considered as an important industry in the service sector. The service sector consists of various kinds of industries such as financial services, health care services, and information sector services. Among these

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industries, tourism is one of the most important indicators of economic contributions for both developed and developing countries. Tourism is today emerging as a leading sector in the world and is now considered by some as the number one industry. International tourism in emerging & developing markets has grown at an average rate of 6-8% over the past decade.

1.2. Components of Tourism

Tourism has many components comprising

- Travel experience
- Accommodations
- Food
- Beverage services
- Entertainment
- Aesthetics and
- Special events

1.3. Marketing Mix for Tourism

The marketing mix for any service industry is discussed as 8Ps. They are,

1. **Product:**

Product in Tourism is basically the experience and hospitality provided by the service provider. In general the experience has to be expressed in such a way that the tourists see a value in them.

2. **Process:**

The process in Tourism includes, trip planning and anticipation, travel to the site/area and recollection, trip planning packages. The trip planning packages include, maps, attractions enroute and on site, information regarding lodging, food, quality souvenirs and mementoes.

3. **Place and Time – Location and Accessibility:**

The place and time in tourism is providing directions and maps, providing estimates of travel time and distances from different market areas, recommending direct and scenic travel routes, identifying attractions and support facilities along different travel routes and informing potential customers of alternative travel methods to the area such as airlines and railroads.

4. **Productivity and Quality:**

This is similar to other service industries. The quality is assessed by time taken for a service, the promptness of the service, reliability and so on.

5. **Promotion and Education:**

Like other services, the promotion should address the accurate and timely information helping to decide whether to visit target audience, the image to be created for the organization, objectives, budget, timing of campaign, media to be selected, and evaluation methods.

6. **People:**

People are the centre for Tourism. It is more a human intensive sector. For hospitality and guest relations it is very important to focus on people. It also plays a vital role in quality control, personal selling, and employee morale.

7. **Price and other user costs:**

The price of the tourism services depend on business and target market objectives, cost of producing, delivering and promoting the product, willingness of the target, prices charged by competitors offering similar product/service to the same target markets, availability and prices of substitute products/services, and economic climate.

8. **Physical Evidence:**

In Tourism the physical evidence is basically depends on travel experience, stay, and comfort. Here, the core product is bed in case of stay.
1.4. Kerala Tourism: The “GOD’S OWN COUNTRY”

Kerala is often referred to as ‘God’s own country’, because of its extraordinary natural beauty resembling the heaven. “God’s own country” has been recognized as an official slogan even by the State Government’s tourism ministry. Kerala, the pioneer tourism state in the country, has got a number of unique distinctions in the tourism front among the states in the Indian union. The state’s tourism has bagged many awards and recognitions, both at national and international levels. These include the following:

Kerala has got one of the largest developed tourism destinations, among all states in the Indian union.

- The state is the only tourism destination selected for ‘Super brand’ in India. The state has got the nomination as one of the three finalists at the WTTC (World Tourism & Travel Council).
- The state has won the ‘Tourism for Tomorrow’ award in the destination category in 2005.
- Kerala has won three Awards from Government of India in 2005, viz. (i) Best Performing Tourism state, (ii) Best Maintained Tourist-friendly Monument, and (iii) Best Publishing.
- Kerala has been pioneering in among the Indian states in health and medical tourism. Kerala and Ayurveda have become synonymous with each other. The state has been making concerted efforts to promote health and medical tourism in a big way, particularly Ayurveda-based health tourism. This has resulted in a substantial rise in the rate of tourist arrivals.

1.5. Impressive Performance of Kerala in the Indian Tourism

The performance of Kerala’s tourism in the Indian union has been observed to be impressive both in absolute and relative terms. As shown in Table, it may be noted that there has been a generally increasing trend in respect of foreign tourist arrivals to Kerala over the years and also the share of Kerala’s share in the total for the Indian union. As is evident from Table 1, it may be noted that as in the case of international tourist arrivals, there has generally been a commendable improvement in respect of Kerala state in respect of domestic tourists arrivals as well. There has been positive growth rate at about 5 percent throughout the period, except for one year viz. 2011 when there was a small negative growth rate. All these point to the prominent position of Kerala in India’s tourism map and hence its promising future as an important tourism destination in the whole India.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>India (Nos)</th>
<th>Percentage Change</th>
<th>Kerala (Nos)</th>
<th>Percentage Change</th>
<th>Kerala’s share in Indian tourism (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>2537282</td>
<td>(-03.31)</td>
<td>208830</td>
<td>(-0.53)</td>
<td>08.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>2384364</td>
<td>(-06.03)</td>
<td>232564</td>
<td>11.37</td>
<td>09.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>2726214</td>
<td>14.34</td>
<td>294621</td>
<td>26.68</td>
<td>10.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>3457477</td>
<td>26.82</td>
<td>345546</td>
<td>17.28</td>
<td>09.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>3915324</td>
<td>13.24</td>
<td>346499</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>08.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>4447000</td>
<td>13.58</td>
<td>428534</td>
<td>23.68</td>
<td>09.63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Department of Tourism, Government of Kerala.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Tourists Arrivals (Kerala)</th>
<th>Percentage Change over the Previous Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>5239692</td>
<td>04.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>5568256</td>
<td>06.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>5871228</td>
<td>05.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>5972182</td>
<td>01.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>5946423</td>
<td>(-0.43)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>6271724</td>
<td>05.47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Department of Tourism, Government of Kerala.

1.6. The Strength Areas of Kerala Tourism

It has been observed that there are a few areas wherein Kerala has got a comparative advantage over other countries in respect tourism development. The unique socio-economic and geographic profile of the state has added significantly towards making it one of the sought after tourism destinations of the entire world. The lengthy coastal belt, peculiar geographical location, lusty backwaters, a large number of beaches, serene hillocks, moderate climate throughout the year, highly literate populace etc. are some of the factors. Health tourism (Ayurveda fame) and Medical tourism (cost effectiveness) have got excellent prospects in Kerala. Whether it is based on Ayurveda or modern medicine, Kerala has got an excellent brand either because of reputation or cost effectiveness. Besides, Kerala has got immense potential for
being developed as the best ecotourism destination in India. Thenmala in Kerala (near to the capital city, Thiruvananthapuram) is the first ecotourism project in the country.

1.7. Tourism Vision 2020

Kerala has drawn up a comprehensive policy document “Vision 2020” in the year 2000. This document gives due consideration to the sustainability aspects of tourism growth along with the economic and feasibility considerations. The new policy seeks to develop tourism as one of the core competencies of the State and also to regulate the tourism initiatives properly taking into account the broader and long-term interests of the State, like, environmental conservation, protection of heritage and culture, development of tourism infrastructure, quality standards etc. In short, it aims at using a sustainable and integrated approach to tourism promotion in Kerala. The Department of Tourism (DoT) of Kerala state has formulated a three-pronged strategy to maintain and further improve the superior position of Kerala in the global tourism map. Accordingly, the three broad strategies are as follows:

1. Product Innovation,
2. Innovative Marketing,
3. Strategic alliance with the Government of Rajasthan.

1.8. Problems of Kerala’s Tourism Sector

In spite of the appreciable growth rates and also tremendous potential of the State in the tourism front, the fact remains that Kerala tourism is at present fraught with its own share of sustainability and other problems. Referring to the problems faced by Kerala from a wider perspective, Oommen (2008) considers Kerala’s ecological problems also in detail, and calls the current scenario as ‘Ecological Overkill’. He points out that the emerging ecological scenario is affected by four major crises. They are as follows:

1. Hydrological cycle is seriously damaged, probably irreversibly. Natural systems like forests and the river systems are irreparably destroyed. Kerala’s abundant wetland’s sometimes referred to as “kidney of the economic system” is fast disappearing. Despite the copious monsoon rainfall, Kerala has the lowest per capita availability of fresh water. Conservation of fresh water is done only at a very modest scale. No worthwhile efforts have been made to conserve the fast disappearing forests.

2. Kerala with its vast coastal system of 580 kms, mountains and undulating terrains has a peculiar geography which has been considerably distorted. Kerala’s rich bio-diversity is being fatally interfered to the leveling of paddy lands, mountain regions and heavy quarrying.

3. Few parts of the world have such a rich and diversified natural base of bio-resources which over the years have been culturally dependent on the people who protected them. Unfortunately, this beautiful matrix of agro-eco system is being badly destroyed. The traditional know-how is virtually vanishing.

4. A consumerist society throws out heavy solid, liquid and medical wastes. The hospitals alone generate around 1.5 lakh tones of solid waste per day. It is estimated that about one million cubic metres of sewage is generated per day in the coastal areas alone.

1.9. Need for Focusing on Health and Medical Tourism in Kerala

The excellent brand equity for Ayurveda treatment that Kerala possess ensures excellent prospects for Ayurvedic health tourism. Similarly, the state has got globally competitive medical facilities in respect of modern medicine also. For cardiac surgery, dental surgery, heart transplantation etc. the charges in Kerala have been observed to be quite low, often in the range of one-fifth to one-tenth of the international tariffs, while the services available are internationally competitive.

II. OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Of late, there has been increased thrust on tourism development in India. While tourism has got excellent prospects for promotion of rapid economic development particularly in respect of the developing nations, as is evident from the experiences of many a developing nation, it may be stated that the sustainability aspect of tourism has not often been given adequate consideration in designing tourism policies of government. This in turn results in excessive burden the nature beyond its carrying capacity adversely affecting its ecological balance. Besides, often there are instances wherein the interests of tourists alone are protected in a bid to garner maximum tourism earnings, unmindful of the consequences of the same on the local people. All these point to the growing relevance of the need for adoption of ecotourism in its true letter and spirit, rather than simply from the point of view of compliance with regulatory stipulations or norms. This in turn necessitates a concerted action from the part of all concerned, for the cause of sustainable tourism development.
Above all, in view of the resource constraints of the government in respect of developing countries like in India private sector participation seems imminent, thus underlining the need for a PPP approach towards a holistic, integrated and sustainable tourism development.

Kerala is emerging as a promising tourist destination in the country for both domestic and foreign tourist and it needs aggressive marketing and support from the state government. District-wise tourist project should be undertaken and a distinct project implementation committee should be formed. The development of micro level database like a Management Information System to capture the number of domestic and foreigners visiting the site, number of people staying in the destination, duration of stay, places visited etc, should be maintained by district level. The main objective for developing various tourism facilities in Kerala is to promote our rich cultural heritage and environment. This, in turn, enhances eco-tourism for sustainable livelihoods. The strategies involved for sustainability of state tourism projects should also include aggressive Marketing Strategies.

REFERENCES


DECLARATION

This is to certify that the article titled “PROSPECTS IN TOURISM MARKETING: A STUDY WITH REFERENCE TO KERALA AS TOURISM DESTINATION” is our contribution. The said paper was not published in any journal or magazine nor is under consideration for publication by any journal or magazine. The said paper was not presented in any seminar and or conference.

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