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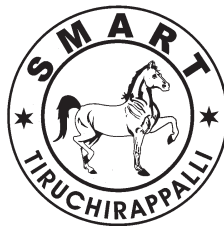
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Dr. M. SELVAM, M.Com., Ph.D.,
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TOURISM BRAND PROMOTION

Rajagopala Nair

Reader, Dept. of Commerce & Research Centre, St. Albert's College, Cochin

Seena Augustine

Research Scholar, Dept. of Commerce, Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam.

Today brands virtually rule our lives. People no longer drive cars. They drive Hyundai and Tata Indica. They eat Kellogg's and drink Coke and Pepsi. People ask for 'Sintex' rather than an 'Overhead tank' They watch the World Cup, not a cricket game. Sometimes a brand is so closely identified with the product, that it forms part of our day-to-day language. A number of studies have confirmed that strong brands create shareholder value in their own right. A study by Harvard University of South Carolina in 2001 observed that ownership of valuable brand enabled companies to yield consistently higher than market average returns to their shareholders and carry a value lower than market average risk profile.

Brand building is one of the most basic functions of any manufacturer of consumer goods and certainly it is one of the finest things that has ever happened to the customer. Without trademark brands, there would be no simple way to know what to reach for and what to avoid. Building a strong brand involves efforts to make the product occupy a prominent place in the prospective minds of the targeted customer.

A cursory check on India's most successful brands reveals a disappointing history for Kerala based brands. Over the years, Kerala neither produced a single brand of global repute nor witnessed branding efforts to match the scale that is undertaken in other states. Kerala tourism and its aggressive brand promotion strategies offer a genuine exception to this trend. Kerala tourism has recorded a remark-

able growth in the last few years. The revenue generated in the economy of Kerala from tourism is estimated to be nearly Rs.4000 crores which is 6.29% of the state's GDP. Tourism has generated employment in Kerala to the tune of nearly 7 lakhs (based on the study by Tata Consultancy Services). Kerala has emerged as the most attractive tourist destination of the country in the recent past.

This article is prepared on the basis of a pilot study conducted as part of a Ph. D Thesis. The purpose of this study is to identify and analyse the key attributes of Kerala Tourism that have been successfully woven into the brand promotion model. The pilot study has been conducted by administering structured questionnaire to tourists, both domestic and foreign. 60% of the respondents were domestic tourists and the remaining 40% were international tourists. The findings of the survey are summarized below:

Table – 1
Information on Kerala as a Tourist Destination

Serial No.	Source of information	Percentage
1	Word of mouth	30%
2	Periodicals	20%
3	Advertisements in T.V	20%
4	Tour operator	10%
5	Internet	10%
6	Personal interest	10%

Source: Survey data

The survey reveals that word of mouth is the most important source of information to the tourists. About 30% of the tourists interviewed said that they got information on Kerala from their friends and relatives. 20% of the tourists pointed out periodicals and advertisements in T.V. as the most important media of information. Hence 'Publicity'

outweighs 'Advertisement' in promoting Kerala as a prominent tourism destination. 10% of the tourists mentioned Tour Operators as the source of providing information on Kerala. Advertisements through web sites also help the flow of tourists to Kerala. About 10% visit Kerala out of their personal interest.

Table – 2
Purpose of Visit

Serial No.	Purpose of visit	Percentage
1	Sight seeing	40%
2	Culture& Heritage	20%
3	Business	15%
4	Adventure	10%
5	Health	10%
6	Religion	5%

Source: Survey data

Majority of the tourists visit the State to enjoy the scenic beauty of the state as well as to study the culture and heritage of the state. Table 2 reveals that 40% of the respondents visit the state for sight seeing while 20% to imbibe the culture and heritage of the people of Kerala.

Health and adventure are other important pull factors for tourists from all parts of the world. About 15% of the tourists visit Kerala for business purpose. Visiting Kerala for religious purpose is another priority of tourists.

Table – 3
Attractive Tourism Product

Serial No.	Attractive tourism products	Percentage
1	Hill station	50%
2	Back water	18%
3	Culture & Heritage	15%
4	Ayurveda	12%
5	Beaches	5%

Source: Survey data

While conducting the survey, a question was included to find out the most attractive tourism product. About 50% of the tourists opined that Hill-station is the most attractive tourist destination. 18% of the tourists cited Backwater as the major attraction in Kerala.

15% of the tourists gave weightage to culture and heritage. Ayurveda and Beaches are other important tourism products. The study reveals that 'Ayurveda' is an upcoming tourism product of the state with potentiality to market.

Table – 4
Means of Booking Air Trip

Serial No.	Means of booking air trip	Percentage
1	Tour operator	40%
2	Airline directly	30%
3	Travel agent	20%
4	Internet	10%

Source: Survey data

It is found that 40% of the tourists book their visit through Tour operator while 30% book their trip through travel agents. About 30% of the tourists book their trips directly with the

airline. Only 20% of the tourists use travel agents for booking their trip. At present there are very few bookings through web sites. Only 10% of holiday travel is booked online.

Table – 5
Opinion about Infrastructure

Opinion	Transportation facilities	Communication facilities	Road maintenance
Good	75%	70%	20%
To be improved	20%	20%	60%
Poor	5%	10%	20%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Source: Survey data

Majority of tourists interviewed are satisfied with the transportation and communication facilities. 20% of the tourists said that the transportation facilities should be improved. Only 5% of the tourists are dissatisfied with the transportation facilities. 70% of the tourists rated the communication facilities as good. 20% said that communication facilities should be improved while 10% gave a poor rating. Of the tourists surveyed, only 20% expressed good opinion about maintenance of roads. About 60% of the tourists feel that the condition of roads should be improved while 20% said that condition of roads is very poor in Kerala.

Kerala is blessed with beaches, backwaters, hill station and wild life sanctuaries. Due to lack of publicity, the tourists are unaware of destinations in the northern parts of the state. The survey revealed that word of mouth is the most influential media among the tourists. Tourists are ambassadors in their own countries. They will be the one to tell others of their experience, good or bad. Mass media also plays an important role in promoting tourism. There are a number of travel magazines that describe tourist attractions. T.V. also influences the tourists through various travel programmes. Tour operators also play an important role in promoting tourism.

Major drawbacks of Kerala tourism pointed out by the tourists are lack of proper infrastructure, inadequately maintained roads, very high rates of air fare, lack of tourist information centers, communication facilities, good middle class accommodation, pollution, unsafe drinking water and non-availability of hygienic food stuff. The deplorable quality of roads creates a negative impression in the minds of the tourists. Particularly unfortunate is the hazardous nature of roads leading to the hill-stations and sanctuaries.

Domestic tourists mostly prefer a hill-station as their holiday destination. There is lack of infrastructure and amenities for tourists in such destinations. A traveller from Gujarat opined that the International Blossom Park in Munnar should be made more attractive to the tourists. He also noted that the famous Tata Tea factory in Munnar should be opened to the public. Tourists are interested in seeing the manufacturing process in tea factories and to buy best quality tea directly from the factory. He also alleged that there is lack of boating facilities in Mattupetty Dam. Only four boats are available and the travellers have to wait for a long time to have a ride on the boat.

A Russian traveller said that Ayurveda is a fashion in their country. Many people come to Kerala for ayurvedic treatment. Kerala has a number of ayurvedic centers. But the only motive behind these centers is business. They will do more harm to the patients and to the credibility of ayurveda. Another drawback pointed out by the tourists is lack of tourist information centers. Brochures and other publicity materials are available to attract tourists to Kerala. But once they reach Kerala they have very little access to useful information. Materials like regional maps and guidebooks for travel are not available. A foreign traveller opined that travelling to India is very expensive. Ticket fare should be reduced. More chartered flights should be arranged to increase the flow of tourists to Kerala.

The development of tourism depends upon the marketing strategies adopted by Government, Tour operators and Facilitators. To develop, maintain and conserve the tourist attractions like Beaches, Backwaters, Hill-stations, Wild life etc., the need for planned development is recommended.