



MARKETING STRATEGIES OF AYURVEDIC HEALTH TOURISM PRODUCTS IN KERALA: A STUDY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO ALAPPUZHA DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

Health Tourism not only creates direct employment but it provides numerous possibilities of indirect and induced employment opportunities. Many other counties too, stated marketing this traditional, sustainable model of treatment keeping in view the various possibilities in this sector. With the advent of stiff competition both at domestic and international level, the state of Kerala has to focus more on the innovative strategies to promote Ayurvedic Health Tourism Products.

KEYWORDS:

Health tourism: It is the amalgamation of wellness and health care by adopting traditional ayurvedic therapeutic practices provide relaxation body as well as mind.

Health tourism products: The transaction of any product depends on the needs of its customer. Hence health tourism products are different from everyday retail product. This may include physical goods such as pharmaceutical drugs, crutches, transplanting material, surgical equipments, etc. In the case of health tourism the product can be wellness check-up along with other medical services such as rejuvenative therapeutic practices, massage and spa visit.

INTRODUCTION

The role of tourism as one of the pillars of economic development and a key sector in the field of employment has been gaining momentum in recent years. In the economic scenario worldwide, it has become a major crowd puller or source of attraction and interest. Tourism has been identified as the largest export industry in the world (Ghosh Biswanath, 1998). This low capital, labour intensive industry with economic multiplier paves the way for earning foreign exchange at low cost. The social as well as economic changes in a very positive direction on account of this industry make it much demanded. Ayurvedic Health Tourism industry is a case in point in this regard. It facilitates investment and employment while reinforcing economic development. Marketing or promotional activities have become inevitable in the process of initiating Ayurvedic Health Tourism in the countries across the world. Ayurvedic Health Tourism not only creates direct employment but it provides numerous possibilities of indirect and induced employment opportunities. Many other counties too, stated marketing this traditional, sustainable model of treatment keeping in view the various possibilities in this sector. With the advent of stiff competition both at domestic and international level, the state of Kerala has to focus more on the innovative strategies to promote Ayurvedic Health Tourism Products.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Sunanda,V.S (2008), the result of the study indicates that the marketing strategies and systems developed after careful analysis and studies by the service providers have influenced the ayurvedic health care tourism sector favourably. Many variables such as penetration strategy, marketing prospects, initiative for concept development were



selected, tested and proved to be effective strategies in improving the standards of health tourism. It has also been proved that strategies adopted by the companies have so far been productive and useful in marketing product and services.

Ramesh U, Kurian Joseph (2011), the study discusses health tourism in India in its emerging scenario. It also analyses the key factors which make Kerala as one of the hot spot tourism destination for Ayurvedic therapeutic practices. Many international as well as domestic tourists visit Kerala as wellness seekers and their ideas, concepts and views about this venture is studied in detail while giving suggestions to improve and promote India as an attractive health tourism destination internationally. Marketing strategies any type including the field of health tourism have to be customer centric to promote its products and services for long term benefits. To achieve a proper marketing strategy a well laid plan or marketing plan is very essential. It includes a set of targeted activities to implement their strategy at different levels or stages. There are three stages mentioned in the study. During the first stage, the trends in market is thoroughly analyses including resources available, competitors, overall environment pertaining to business etc. In the second stage identifies the strategic choices of market segmentation, fixes the sectors to be targeted and positioning of products. The last stage is taking a decision of marketing mix. Marketing mix includes determining the price of products, its distribution, placing, giving publicity channelising the flow of products to consumers.

Vaibhav S Kale and K R Nerkar (2017), the study reveals multiple factors which made the state of Maharashtra as a much sought after destination for medical tourism. Furthermore, the article highlighted the need for framing appropriate strategies to improve Maharashtra's identity as an attractive destination for medical or health tourism. Also the study focuses on the techniques, strategies and policies adopted by Indian medical tourism to improve its efficacy.

NEED AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Strategies for marketing are based on a set of objectives and it is formulated by following a comprehensive plan to achieve a desirable output. It suggests the ways and means to increase profitability and customer satisfaction. These strategies help the service providers to put to use their scarce resources the best to open up more opportunities and increase the sales. The marketers of products and service sector in Ayurveda have been facing multitude of challenges that too of various nature as compared their counterparts in the other sectors. Other than following the 4 Ps of marketing mix, Ayurvedic Health Tourism industry makes use of an addition of 3Ps for attaining maximum results. Therefore appropriate steps have to be taken to improve the standards in the Ayurvedic Health Tourism industry to attract more and more domestic and foreign customers.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The following are the objectives of the study:

- i. To assess the marketing strategies of Ayurvedic health tourism products adopted by Ayurvedic health tourism centres in Alappuzha
- ii. To ascertain the level of satisfaction of the Ayurvedic health tourists of centres in Alappuzha.

DATA SOURCE AND METHODOLOGY

Data for the study has been collected from both secondary and primary sources.

a. Secondary data

Secondary data has been collected from the published sources like Text books on Ayurveda health tourism sector, State Planning Board of the Government of Kerala, study reports and thesis.

a. Primary Data

Primary data for the study has been collected from the respondents by using an interview schedule specifically developed for this purpose.

Sample Design

Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling technique is used for the selection of the respondents

Selection of Respondents

A sample of 50 respondents (both domestic and international tourists) from among the selected ayurvedic health tourism centres in Alappuzha District visited more than one time by using **Purposive Sampling Technique**.

SOCIO ECONOMIC PROFILE OF THE RESPONDENTS (V₁)

The socio-economic profile of the respondents of Ayurvedic Health Tourism Industry in Kerala as evidenced empirically. The parameters in socio-economic profile considered in this study are: (1) Age; (2) Gender; (3) Occupation; (4) Nationality; (5) Purpose of visit; (6) Duration of Stay; (7) Source of Knowledge.

1. Age

The age is an important aspect which determines the effective marketing strategy of the ayurvedic health tourism industry in Kerala. The respondents belong to the age between below 20 years and above 60 years.

TABLE 1: AGE WISE CLASSIFICATION

Sl No.	Age	Number	Per cent
1	Below 20	5	10
2	20-40	10	20
3	40-60	20	40
4	Above 60	15	30
Total		50	100

Source: - Primary Data

It is noticed from Table 1 that 5 respondents (10 per cent) below 20 years, 10 respondents (20 per cent) in between the age group of 20 and 40 years. It is clear that a majority of the sample respondents belong to the age group between 40 and 60 years and 15 respondents (30 per cent) followed by the age group of above 60 years.

2. Gender

The gender is an important aspect which determines the effective marketing strategy of the ayurvedic health tourism industry in Kerala. The gender wise classifications of respondents are shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2: GENDER WISE CLASSIFICATION

Sl No.	Gender	Number	Per cent
1	Male	18	36
2	Female	32	64
Total		50	100

Source: - Primary Data

As is seen from Table 2 that out of the 50 respondents in the Sample, 18 (36 per cent) are male respondents and 32 respondents (64 per cent) are female respondents. It is clear that the majority of the stake holder respondents are Female respondents.

3. Occupation

Respondents are selected on the basis of occupation such as those who are students, government employed (salaried), professionals, businessmen, and others categories. The classification of respondents on the basis of Occupation is given in Table 3.

TABLE 3: OCCUPATION WISE CLASSIFICATION

Sl No.	Occupation	Number	Per cent
1	Student	2	4
2	Business	10	20
3	Professional	14	28
4	Government	16	32
5	Others	8	16
Total		50	100

Source: - Primary Data

It is noticed from Table 3 that of the total, 50 respondents in the sample, majority belongs to government employee with 16 respondents (32 per cent), professionals and businessmen together 24 respondents (48 per cent), only 2 respondents (4 per cent) belongs to student category and 8 respondents (16 per cent) from other group.

4. Nationality

This is yet another personal variable taken for knowing the background of the respondents in the sample. This helps in knowing the tourists visited in ayurvedic health centres in Kerala are from India or from abroad. The classification of respondents on the basis of nationality is depicted in table 4.

TABLE 4: CLASSIFICATION BASE ON NATIONALITY

Sl No.	Nationality	Number	Per cent
1	Domestic	32	64
2	International	18	36
Total		50	100

Source: - Primary Data

It is noticed from table 4 that of the total 50 respondents in the sample, 32 respondents (64 per cent) are Indian nationals and the remaining 18 respondents (36 per cent) are of foreign nationals visited in Kerala for ayurvedic health centres.

5. Purpose of Visit

The purpose of visits made by respondents is also valuable in assessing marketing strategies of ayurvedic health tourism centres. The classification of respondents in the sample according the purpose of visits is given in Table 5.

TABLE 5: CLASSIFICATION BASED ON PURPOSE OF VISIT

Sl No.	Purpose	Number	Per cent
1	Pilgrimage	4	8
2	Business	6	12
3	Beauty of nature	9	18
4	Ayurvedic Medicare	23	46
5	Others	8	16
Total		50	100

Source: - Primary Data

It is seen from table 5 that a large majority 23 respondents (46 per cent) are of opinion that they visited the centre basically for ayurvedic treatment followed 9 respondents (18 per cent) for enjoying beauty of nature, 10 respondents (20 per cent) for pilgrimage and business purpose. Only 8 respondents (16 per cent) visited to Kerala for other purpose. It is clear that the main purpose of visits made by respondents is for ayurvedic health treatment.

6. Number of Days of Stay

This is yet another personal variable taken for knowing the marketing strategy followed by ayurvedic health tourism centres in Kerala. The classification of respondents based on duration of stay is shown in table 6.

TABLE 6: CLASSIFICATION ON THE BASIS OF NUMBER OF DAYS OF STAY

Sl No.	No. Of Days	Number	Per cent
1	1-5	5	10
2	6-10	8	16
3	11-15	7	14
4	16-20	8	16
5	21-25	12	24
6	26-30	10	20
Total		50	100

Source: - Primary Data

It is noticed from table 6 that majority of the respondents in the sample are of the view that they are stayed in the centre in between 21 to 25 days by 12 respondents (24 per cent). Only 6 to 10 days by another 8 respondents (16 per cent), 11 days to 20 days by 15 respondents (30 per cent), more than 25 days or one month by 10 respondents (20 per cent) and less than 7 days stay by another 5 respondents (10 per cent).

7. Source of information about the centre

The customers' visit depends on the knowledge of the centre and its facilities. The customers gain knowledge about the centre from different sources namely, friends and relatives, web, advertisement in news papers, Travel agents, and from Television/Radio. The classification of respondents on the basis of source knowledge gathered from a centre is depicted in table 7.

TABLE 7: CLASSIFICATION BASED ON SOURCE OF INFORMATION ABOUT THE CENTRE

Sl No.	Source	Number	Per cent
1	Friends/Relatives	18	36
2	Web	8	16
3	TV/ Radio	5	10
4	Travel Agent	9	18
5	News paper	6	12
6	Others	4	8
Total		50	100

Source: - Primary Data

It is seen from table 7 that of the total 50 respondents in the sample, 18 respondents (36 per cent) reported that they got information about the centre from their relatives and friends. Another 9 respondents (18 per cent) got information from Travel agents. 8 respondents (16 per cent) got it from official website of the centre. 6 respondents (12 per cent) got it from news paper and 5 respondents (10 per cent) gain knowledge about the centre from TV/Radio. Only 4 respondents (8 per cent) collect information from other sources. It means that majority of the respondents obtained information about the centre from their own experience and also from friends and relatives (36 per cent).

ANALYSIS ON MARKETING STRATEGIES (V₂)

For knowing the marketing strategy of ayurvedic health tourism sector, **Ten (10)** variables are identified. They are: (1) Product differentiation (2) Product positioning (3) Market segmentation (4) Availability of information (5) Pricing Strategy (6) Publicity (7) New product development (8) Package (9) Brand Image (10) Marketing Mix. The obtained views of respondents for assessing the marketing strategies of Ayurvedic health tourism industry in Kerala:

1. Product differentiation

Product differentiation is the process of marketing of similar products with slight variations for consumers when making a choice. For the purpose of meeting the specific needs of the customer the ayurvedic practitioners are prepared the product with minor variations.

The respondents' view in this aspect is collected and is presented as item number V_{2.1} of Table 8. In this case, 28 respondents (56 per cent) recorded a level at 40 per cent and less. Only 11 respondents (22 per cent) recorded a level between 50 per cent and at 60 per cent. Another 11 respondents (22 per cent) recorded a level between 80 per cent and at 100 per cent. The mean recorded level in this case is 45 per cent with a standard deviation of 30 per cent and a co-variance of 66. This shows that the product differentiation strategy of the centre needs a lot of improvement.

2. Product positioning

The respondents' view in this regard is collected and is presented as item number V_{2.2} of Table 8. In this case a large majority of 19 respondents (38 per cent) recorded a level at 20 per cent and less. Only 17 respondents (34 per cent) recorded a level between 40 per cent and 50 per cent. But 14 respondents (28 per cent) recorded a level of above 60 per cent. The mean recorded level in this case is 40 per cent with a standard deviation of 28 per cent and a co variance of 69. This shows that the product positioning from the part of the centre is not appreciable.

3. Market segmentation

The views of respondents on market segmentation are depicted as item number $V_{2.3}$ of Table 8. In this case 10 respondents (20 per cent) recorded a level at 50 per cent. 18 respondents (36 per cent) marked a level at 40 per cent and less. 7 respondents (14 per cent) and 10 respondents (20 per cent) recorded a level between 60 and 80 per cent. But 5 respondents (10 per cent) recorded a level at 100 per cent. The mean recorded level in this case is 52 per cent with a standard deviation of 29 per cent and a co variance of 55. The high recorded mean level makes it clear that the market segmentation strategy of the centre is good according to respondents in the sample.

4. Availability of information

The respondents' view on it is presented as item number $V_{2.4}$ of Table 7. In this case 10 respondents (20 per cent) recorded a level at 20 per cent and less. Only 8 respondents (16 per cent) recorded a level at 40 per cent. A large majority, 18 respondents (36 per cent) recorded a level between 50 and 60 per cent. But 14 respondents (28 per cent) recorded a level at 80 per cent and 100 per cent. The mean recorded level in this case is 53 per cent with a standard deviation of 26 per cent and a co variance of 49. This shows that the ayurvedic health tourists got information in time to time.

5. Pricing strategy

The views of respondents on pricing strategy are depicted as item number $V_{2.5}$ of Table 8. In this case 26 respondents (52 per cent) recorded a level at 40 per cent and less. 49 respondents (11 per cent) marked a level at 40 per cent and less. 5 respondents (10 per cent) and 6 respondents (12 per cent) recorded a level between 50 and 60 per cent. Whereas 13 respondents (26 per cent) recorded a level between 80 per cent and 100 per cent. The mean recorded level in this case is 48 per cent with a standard deviation of 30 per cent and a co variance of 62. The recorded mean level indicates that the pricing strategy of the centre must be improved.

6. Publicity

The respondents' views on publicity are presented as item number $V_{2.6}$ of Table 8. In this case, 9 respondents (18 per cent) recorded a level at 20 per cent and less. Another 11 respondents (22 per cent) recorded a level at 40 per cent and 50 per cent. 7 respondents (14 per cent) recorded a level of 60 per cent. Yet another 23 respondents (46 per cent) recorded a level at 80 per cent and above. The mean recorded level in this case is 62 per cent with a standard deviation of 32 per cent and a co-variance of 52. This shows that the customers are satisfied with publicity about the centre.

7. New product development

The respondents' views on new product development made are collected and are presented as item number $V_{2.7}$ of Table 8. In this case 17 respondents (34 per cent) recorded a level at 20 per cent and less. Only 8 respondents (16 per cent) recorded a level at 40 per cent. 9 respondents (18 per cent) and 8 respondents (16 per cent) recorded a level at 50 per cent and 60 per cent. Another 8 respondents (16 per cent) recorded a level at 80 per cent and above. The mean marked level in this case is 43 per cent with a standard deviation of 28 per cent and a co variance of 64. This shows that the respondents are not satisfied with the new product development of the centre.

8. Package

The views of respondents on health tourism package are depicted as item number $V_{2.8}$ of Table 8. In this case 8 respondents (16 per cent) recorded a level at 50 per cent. 22 respondents (44 per cent) marked a level at 40 per cent and less. 10 respondents (20 per cent) and 6 respondents (12 per cent) recorded a level between 60 and 80 per cent. But only 4 respondents (8 per cent) recorded a level at 100 per cent. The mean recorded level in this case is 47 per cent with a standard deviation of 28 per cent and a co variance of 61.

The recorded mean level is low which indicates that there is a need of more attractive health tourism package.

9. Brand image

The respondents’ views on brand image are collected and are presented as item number V_{2.9} of Table 8. In this case, 16 respondents (32 per cent) recorded a level at 20 per cent and less. Only 7 respondents (14 per cent) recorded a level at 40 per cent. Another 6 respondents (12 per cent) recorded a level at 50 per cent. Yet another 21 respondents (42 per cent) recorded a level of 60 per cent and above. The mean recorded level in this case is 46 per cent with a standard deviation of 31 per cent and a co-variance of 68. This shows that the brand image of the centre is not appreciable according to respondents in the sample.

10. Marketing mix

The respondents’ views on marketing mix are presented as item number V_{2.10} of Table 8. In this case, 26 respondents (52 per cent) recorded a level at 40 per cent and less. Only 10 respondents (20 per cent) recorded a level at 50 per cent. Another 4 respondents (8 per cent) recorded a level at 60 per cent. 10 respondents (20 per cent) recorded a level of 80 per cent and above. The mean recorded level in this case is 43 per cent with a standard deviation of 28 per cent and a co-variance of 65. This shows that the marketing strategy adopted by the centre not in the right direction according to the respondents

Table 8
Marketing strategy Variables (V₂)

Sl No.	Sub-variable	No./ %	Level of satisfaction								Statistics all		
			0	20	40	50	60	80	100	Total	Avg	SD	Cov
1	Product differentiation	No.	6	10	12	8	3	5	6	50	45	30	66
		(%)	12	20	24	16	6	10	12	100.00			
2	Product positioning	No.	8	11	9	8	7	4	3	50	40	28	69
		(%)	16	22	18	16	14	8	6	100.00			
3	Market segmentation	No.	5	6	7	10	7	10	5	50	52	29	55
		(%)	10	12	14	20	14	20	10	100.00			
4	Availability of information	No.	3	7	8	7	11	10	4	50	53	26	49
		(%)	6	14	16	14	22	20	8	100.00			
5	Pricing strategy	No.	4	12	10	5	6	7	6	50	48	30	62
		(%)	8	24	20	10	12	14	12	100.00			
6	Publicity	No.	5	4	5	6	7	10	13	50	62	32	52
		(%)	10	8	10	12	14	20	26	100.00			
7	New product development	No.	7	10	8	9	8	5	3	50	43	28	64
		(%)	14	20	16	18	16	10	6	100.00			
8	Package	No.	6	9	7	8	10	6	4	50	47	28	61
		(%)	12	18	14	16	20	12	8	100.00			
9	Brand image	No.	9	7	7	6	9	7	5	50	46	31	68
		(%)	18	14	14	12	18	14	10	100.00			
10	Marketing mix	No.	8	8	10	10	4	8	2	50	43	28	65
		(%)	16	16	20	20	8	16	4	100.00			

Source: Primary Data

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS OF THE STUDY

Out of 50 respondents, only 10 per cent belongs to the age of below 20 and about 70 per cent belongs to the age between 40 and above 60.

The gender wise distribution of tourists shows that more female tourists (64 per cent) preferred ayurvedic health tourism products than male tourists.

The study shows that out of 50 respondents, about 32 per cent of the tourists visiting to the ayurvedic health tourism centre were Government employees. Only 4 per cent belongs to students.

Among 50 respondents, 64 per cent belongs to domestic tourists and rest belong to international tourists.

About 46 per cent of the tourist arrived in the tourist centre with the aim of wellness and Medicare and 12 per cent visited getting attracted by the beaches and backwaters and they were campaigned to avail wellness therapies.

For about 44 per cent, the average days of stay were in the range of 16 to 23 and for about 28 per cent, the days of stay were between 24 to 31 days.

About 36 per cent of the tourists depended on Friends/Relatives to choose the particular ayurvedic health tourism centre and about 18 per cent chose the same with the help of travel agents and only 16 per cent depends on web for getting source of information about the tourist centre.

In the case of the variable product differentiation the average level of satisfaction of customer is 45 per cent with a standard deviation of 30 and coefficient of variation 66. The respondents are not fully satisfied with this variable.

The average level of satisfaction on the variable product positioning is 40 per cent with a standard deviation of 28 and coefficient of variation 69. The respondents are not satisfied with this variable.

In the case of the variable market segmentation the average level of satisfaction of customer is 52 per cent with a standard deviation of 29 and coefficient of variation 55. The respondents are satisfied with this variable.

The average level of satisfaction on the variable availability of information is 53 per cent with a standard deviation of 26 and coefficient of variation 49. It is clear from the mean that the respondents are just satisfied with this variable.

The result of the analysis on the variable penetration strategy reveals that average level of satisfaction of customer is 48 per cent with a standard deviation of 30 and coefficient of variation 62. The respondents are not satisfied with this variable.

In the case of the variable publicity the average level of satisfaction of customer is 62 per cent with a standard deviation of 32 and coefficient of variation 52. The respondents are fully satisfied with this variable.

The result of the study reveals that the average level of satisfaction of customer is 43 per cent with a standard deviation of 28 and coefficient of variation 64 on the variable new product development. The respondents are not satisfied with this variable.

In the case of the variable tour package the average level of satisfaction of customer is 47 per cent with a standard deviation of 28 and coefficient of variation 61. The respondents are not satisfied with this variable.

In the case of the variable brand image the average level of satisfaction of customer is 46 per cent with a standard deviation of 31 and coefficient of variation 68. The respondents are not satisfied with this variable.

In the case of the variable marketing mix the average level of satisfaction of customer is 43 per cent with a standard deviation of 28 and coefficient of variation 65. The respondents are not satisfied with this variable.

CONCLUSION

The ayurvedic health tourism sector requires special attention to the standardisation, grading, packaging and storing of its products. The success of the centre depends on the ability to identify the

requirements of the customers and develop their products in accordance with the needs of existing and prospective customers. The health tourism providers should give more attention to the variable on Market segmentation which helps to attract new customers. The ayurvedic health tourism centres should give due attention to the strategy of market penetration which will increase sales of current products in current market segments without changing the product. Since Kerala is identified as the most attracted destination in the world for Ayurveda, publicity can bring about more favourable results. In order to attract more and more customers, the ayurvedic health tourism centres give attention to new product development, tour package, marketing mix and should propagate a good brand image which will hit on the mind of customers. The study concluded that a good marketing strategy is very essential for achieving the marketing objectives of the organisation which helps an organisation to concentrate its scarce resources on the best possible manners thereby they can increase the sales.

SUGGESTIONS

The following suggestions are made for improvement in the marketing strategy of the Ayurvedic Health tourism products in Kerala:

1. Ayurvedic health tourism centres have adapted themselves to the needs and requirements of the customers from time to time.
2. Customer satisfaction, reliability, interaction etc should be given due importance to achieve desirable results.
3. Consistency with regard to service should be maintained at all levels of marketing.
4. Innovations with regard to product development, brand, tour package, and marketing mix should be effectively used to increase sales.

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