A Study on Destination Image of Kerala as an Ayurvedic Healthcare Destination

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Abstract

Travel and health are complimentary to each other. Recently there is a demand for stress relieving holidays as people preferred to go for particular holiday destinations where their health was also looked after and where they could rejuvenate themselves. Kerala identified this need and projected itself as a healthcare destination .The Present study concentrates mainly on Kerala's holistic healthcare system-Ayurveda. Ayurveda plays a major role in Kerala's round the year tourism. The study is based on the fact that the growth in the health tourism definitely provides sustainable benefits to the Kerala tourism market. Destination image is generally considered as an important attribute in successful destination marketing. This paper aims to identify various destination features which contribute to build a positive destination image about Kerala as a healthcare destination and to understand the relationship between tourist perception and satisfaction. The study explores the destination image enhancement opportunities that exist between the tourist preferences and satisfaction in the desired healthcare service delivery.

Keywords: Ayurveda, destination image, tourist perception and satisfaction

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Introduction

Many countries redesign their economic strength and weaknesses in the competitive global market this also forced the countries to identify novel products or services in which the nation can benefit. One such product which evolved in the global tourism market is Health tourism. In India Kerala is one of the pioneer states to promote health tourism. Ayurveda is a significant economic contributor for Kerala Tourism. Kerala's USP is the ABC acronym-Ayurveda, Backwaters, and Culture and Cuisine. There was a demand for stress busting vacations as people prefer leisure markets where they can rejuvenate also. Kerala identified this need to tap the leisure market and established ayurvedic resorts. An ayurvedic resort combines relaxing resort holidays with ayurvedic treatments and massages. Ayurveda supports round the year tourism in Kerala there by helping in the sustainable tourism development of the state.

In the past few decades, tourism has experienced sustained growth around the world. Presently more and more areas of the world were disclosed for tourism. Frequent emergence of new destinations where also mushroomed in the world. This called for an effective positioning of the destinations in the global tourism market. "In order to be successfully promoted in the targeted markets, a destination must be favorably differentiated from its competition, or positively positioned, in the minds of the consumers" (Molina et al, 2010). An appropriate destination positioning process is the creation and management of a distinctive appealing perception or image of the destination. (Calantone, Di Benetto, Hakam & Bojanic, 1989). "Destination image plays an important role for destination marketers so as to differentiate their destination in this highly competitive market" (Yilmaz et al., 2009). The present study tries to evolve a linear relationship on customer perception and satisfaction with the destination image of Kerala.

Scope of the study

The study is based on the fact that the growth in the health tourism may definitely provide several benefits to the Kerala tourism market.. Thus, the researcher has studied Kerala tourism with

ayurveda which otherwise is a synonym for Kerala. Ayurveda plays a vital role in promoting perennial tourism in Kerala. Moreover, monsoon tourism is fast getting greater attention among health tourists in Kerala because of Ayurveda's monsoon applicability. It indirectly encourages round the year tourism in Kerala.

The significance of ayurveda in tourism promotion of Kerala is of immense potential in lieu of the health tourists. The Present study concentrates mainly on Kerala's holistic healthcare system – Ayurveda. An attempt was made to examine the customer perception and satisfaction of health tourists on destination image of Kerala as a healthcare destination.

Literature Review

"Preference is the positive attitude of a customer towards a particular service, mainly the choice of the tourists for a particular service, whereas customer perception is certain beliefs about service that function as standards or reference points against which performance is judged. This is done, because, customers tend to compare their perceptions of performance with these reference points when evaluating service quality" (Zeitaml & Bitner, 2000). Thus, customer preference and perceptions are some of the most important attributes in quality service delivery. Quality services can lead to customer satisfaction, and satisfied customers can be retained and only retained customers can become loyal to the service providers.

Customer satisfaction is a post-purchase evaluation of a service offering. Hence, expectations and perceptions together with motivation are the factors often used to navigate satisfaction (Lovelock et al., 1999). "Satisfaction is a response to a perceived discrepancy between prior-expectations and perceived-performance after consumption". (Oliver, 1993). Similarly marketing managers need to understand the lacunae between prior expectation and perceived performance for effective service delivery and also to achieve maximum customer satisfaction. Thus achieving visitor satisfaction is the most important critical step in any successful tourism business. (Yi, 1990) To measure customer

satisfaction effectively, understanding about how satisfaction works is an important function of the tourism industry.

Earlier studies had also proved the influence of destination image on tourist behaviour. (Pearce, 1982) It is proved that destination with strong positive image will be more frequently opted by the tourists. (Woodside & Lysonski, 1989). Thus destination image plays a vital role in travel decision making. (Echtner and Ritchie 2003) Studies on destination image proved that visitor satisfaction greatly depend on comparison of expectations based on previously held images and the actual experience encountered in the destination (Chon, 1990). Crompton (1979) defines destination image as the "Sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions that a person has of a destination", (sited by Echtner & Ritchie 2003).

The combination of health and tourism seems to be a promising and relatively new type of paradigm in India. Henderson (2004) differentiates between health tourism and medical tourism as; in health tourism, the primary objective is health and rejuvenation mainly with alternative therapy, whereas in medical tourism it is more curative therapies which involve hospitalization, health screening, surgery etc. Carrera and Bridges (2006) also distinguishes health tourism as general health and well being in other words preventive healthcare while medical tourism as crucial medical interventions and surgical treatment to restore the health.

The review of literature brings out the need for customer oriented service delivery in health tourism, the present study was undertaken to bridge the gap and provide customer oriented marketing strategy for health tourism marketing in Kerala. With this backdrop, the present study is an attempt to prove the rationality of health tourists with perception, preferences, and satisfaction and its significance with the destination image

Analysis and Inference

Customer Survey in the Ayurvedic Health Resort is the prime research instrument employed in this study. This primary data collection was supplemented by a spate source of secondary data.

An attempt was made to examine the customer perception and satisfaction of health tourists in some of the leading ayurvedic health resorts of the state. For the present study the researcher has identified 8 Ayurvedic resorts in Kerala. The present study was based on the feedback of 360 health tourists. Based on the literature review the following objectives and hypothesis has been formulated.

Objectives

1. To study about the tourists perception on Kerala and Ayurveda.

2. To find out the destination image of Kerala as an Ayurvedic Healthcare   destination.

3. To understand the relationship between overall perception and satisfaction with the destination image.

The Tourist's Perception on Kerala and Ayurveda

Using all the ten statements namely views on heath tourism, factor analysis is performed in order to simplify, condense, and group the statements on health tourism on priority basis based on the strength of inter-correlation between them called 'Factors' and cluster these statements into the factors.

Table 1.1(a). Kmo and bartlette's test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin	Measure of Sample Adequacy	.836
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approximate Chi-square	908.047
	Degrees of Freedom	45
	Significance	.000

The SPSS output of KMO and Barlett's test of sphericity is relevant to validate the adequacy of sample for the factor analysis. The high values of the KMO statistics indicate that there is a high correlation between the pairs of variables. Table –1.1 (a) represents the results of KMO and Barlett's test of sphericity. The value of the KMO

statistics, as it is shown in the table is 0.836 (for greater than 0.5). Thus, it is proved that the sample is adequate to run the factor analysis for the reduction of variables into homogeneous groups.

Table 1.1(b). Overall reliability of coefficient

Cronbach's Alpha	Number of items
.685	10

The test of reliability explains the internal consistency of data relevant to be used for the analysis. The result of Cronbach's Alpha indicates that the value ranging between 0.7 and 0.08 is an acceptable variance for social and management science research. Table – 1.1 (b) presents the overall scale reliability of co-efficient and the Cronbach's Alpha is 0.685. This reliability result is a good indicator of internal consistency of the variables and it is representing the health tourism services.

Table 1.1(c). Communalities

Indicators	Initial	Extraction
Perfect blend Kerala (S_1)	1.000	0.598
Ayurveda –better than any other treatment (S_2)	1.000	0.722
Kerala is an ideal place (S_3)	1.000	0.609
Lots more in Kerala (S_4)	1.000	0.618
Ayurvedic healthcare (S_5)	1.000	0.509
Health and hygienic (S_6)	1.000	0.602
Duration of healthcare (S_7)	1.000	0.460
Food choices (S_8)	1.000	0.629
Transit services (S_9)	1.000	0.697
Package price (S_{10})	1.000	0.613

The range of variance shared by a variable with all other variables is returned as communality. The proportion of common variance of a variable is known as the communality. Moreover, it is basically important to find common variance with the data. Table –1.1 (c) presents the output of communalities to find the common relationship of one variable with all other variables. It is seen from the table that each variable shows more than 0.5 common variance with other variables.

Table 1.1(d). Factor loadings, eigen values, variance and cronbach's alpha

Name of the Factor	Variables	Factor loadings	Initial Eigen value	Variance (%)	Cumulative (%)	Cronbach's Alpha
I Destination Image	S_3	.742	2.437	24.366	24.366	.724
	S_4	.720				
	S_5	.633				
	S_6	.696				
II Healthcare Package	S_7	.583	2.331	23.205	47.671	.755
	S_8	.710				
	S_9	.829				
	S_{10}	.779				
III Ayurker	S_1	.554	1.290	12.902	60.473	.749
	S_2	.835				

S_1 – Perfect blend Kerala
S_2 – Ayurvedic any other treatment
S_3 – Kerala is an ideal place
S_4 – Lots more in Kerala
S_5 – Ayurvedic Healthcare

S_6 – Health and hygienic
S_7 – Duration of healthcare
S_8 – Food choices
S_9 – Transit services
S_{10} – Package price.

The first factor 'destination image' has a total variance of 24.366 per cent, followed by healthcare package 23.205 and ayurker 12.902 per cent. The total cumulative variance accounts for 60.473. It tends to explain that 60 per cent of the variance is experienced by the ten indicators on the preference for health tourism in Kerala. However, both destination image and healthcare package explains 47.671 variance of the eight indicators.

The reliability of the first factor is 72.4 per cent, the second factor is 75.5 per cent and the third factor is 74.9 per cent. In the social science research, the results of Cronbach's Alpha are highly reliable. There is high consistency and validity among the three factors to explain about the preference for the selection of Kerala as a health tourism destination. Thus, the factor analysis on tourist's

perception about Kerala has grouped into 3 factors namely destination image, healthcare package, and ayurker. The destination image factor explains the importance of Kerala as an ideal destination for healthcare holidays. The healthcare package reveals the characteristics of healthcare programmes. The third factor Ayurker explains the synonym of Kerala as ayurveda. It is a major drive factor of ayurveda tourism in Kerala. Based on the analysis Figure – .1 exhibits the customer perception of Kerala as an ayurvedic healthcare destination.

Figure 1. Destination image of Kerala as an Ayurvedic Healthcare destination
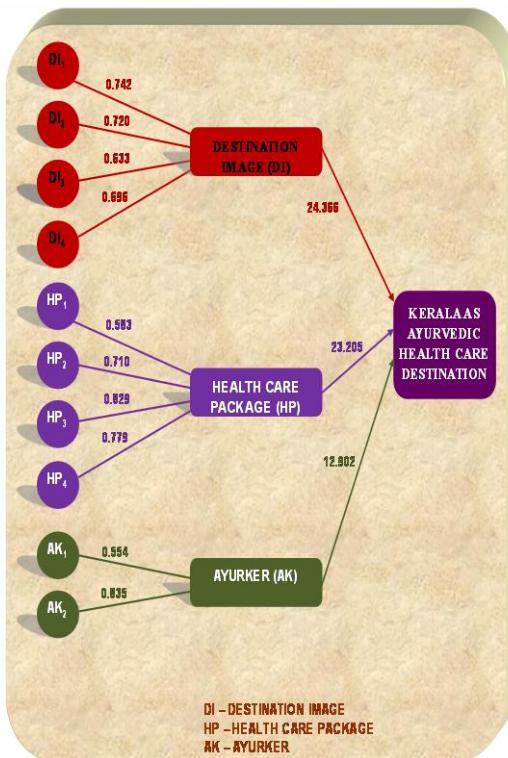
Influence of overall perception and satisfaction with destination image

H_0 Overall satisfaction is not positively influenced by the elements of healthcare package and destination image of Kerala.

Step wise multiple regression analysis of Y- Overall satisfaction was performed with perception variables – Perfect blend (X_1), Ayurveda superior than other treatment (X_2), Kerala is ideal place (X_3), Lots more in Kerala (X_4), Ayurveda is preventive (X_5), Health and Hygienic needs (X_6), Duration of treatment (X_7), Food choices (X_8), Transit services (X_9) and Ideally priced (X_{10}) and the following regression model is fitted for performance : $Y = b_o + b_1 X_1 + b_2 X_2 + b_3 X_3 + b_4 X_4$…………………….Where b_1, b_2,……. .are partial regression coefficients; bio-constant and the results are presented in Table –.1.2(a)

Table 1.2(a). Regression model for y-overall satisfaction

Variables	Régression Coefficient	Standard Error	Beta Value	t- value (d.f = 355)	R^2
Constant	85.06	1.67		50.89	
Food choice (X_8)	3.63	0.96	.213	3.77**	
Kerala is ideal place (X_3)	2.77	1.03	.146	2.69**	
Ideally priced (X_{10})	2.51	0.85	.157	2.95**	0.68
Perfect blend (X_1)	2.03	0.99	.112	2.06*	4

* Significant at 5 per cent level

** Significant at 1 per cent level.

Regression Fitted: $Y = 85.06 + 3.63 X_8 + 2.77 X_3 + 2.51 X_{10} + 2.03 X_1$

Table 1.2(b). Model summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Standard Error of the Estimate
	0.827a	0.684	0.681	5.878

a Predictors : (Constant), Food choice (X_8) ; Kerala is ideal place (X_3) ; Ideally priced (X_{10}) ; Perfect blend (X_1)

Table 1.2(c). Analysis of variance for regression

Source	Sum of Square	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Square	'F' Calculated Value	'F' Table Value
Regression	26489.19	4	6622.298	191.67**	3.36
Residual	12265.15	355	118.3296		

** Significant at 1 per cent level.

The step-wise multiple regression model indicated that out of the 10 explanatory variables 4 variables such as on perception, food choices, Kerala is ideal for ayurveda, and price, perfect blend for a holiday have significantly contributed to Y-overall satisfaction. The analysis of variance of multiple regression models for Y-overall satisfaction indicates the overall significance of the model fitted. The coefficient of determination R^2 value showed that these variables put together explained the variations of Y to the extent of 68.4 per cent.

The results of multiple regression analysis are shown in the model summary. The 'R' square for their regression model is 0.684. 'R' square figure shows the percentage of variation in one of the variable that is accounted by another variable. In this case perception factors about destination image and healthcare packages account for 68.4 per cent of total variation on overall satisfaction of health tourists.

The ANOVA table shows the f ratio for the regression model that indicates the statistical significance of the overall regression model. The F ratio is calculated in the same way for regression analysis as it was used for ANOVA techniques. The variance in overall satisfaction is associated with perception dimension destination images and healthcare package is referred to as explained variance. The total variance in overall satisfaction is not associated with perception attributes as it is referred to as unexplained variances.

The F ratio is the result of comparing the amount explained variance to as unexplained variance. The larger the F ratio the more variance in the dependent variable that is associated with independent variables. F ratio is significant at 0.000 levels.

Hence it is inferred from the test that perception factors 'Destination Image' and 'Healthcare Packages influence on overall satisfaction of health tourists. The destination image dimension comprises perception factors 'Kerala is an ideal destination' and Kerala provides perfect blend of health and holidays. The healthcare package dimension comprises of features of healthcare packages food choices and price. Thus it is clear from the test that perception dimensions destination image and healthcare package directly contribute to the overall satisfaction. Thus, it is proved that there is positive relationship with these perception factors and satisfaction. Based on the regression analysis a conceptual model has been designed.

Figure –2.illustrates the influence of the overall perception and satisfaction with Destination Image.

Figure 2.Influence of overall perception and satisfaction with the destination image
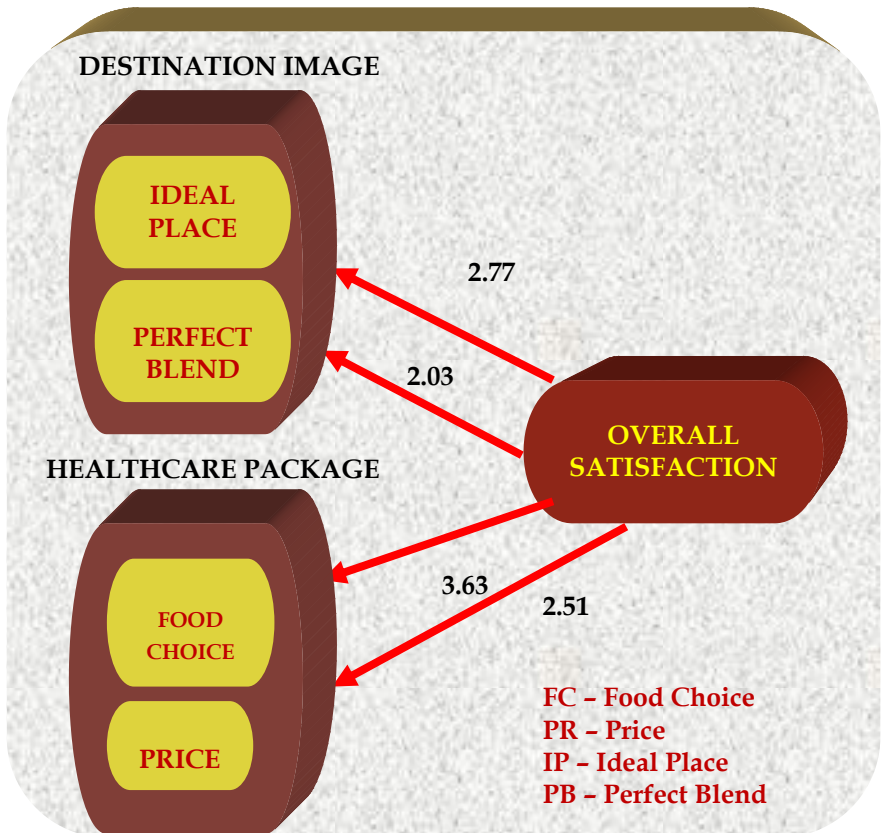
Results and Discussions

The explanatory factor analysis revealed that the perception of respondents consists of three latent dimensions such as destination image, healthcare packages, and Ayurker. The destination image and healthcare package reveal the underlying dimensions of health tourism in Kerala. The third factor Ayurker clearly explains the interrelationship between Kerala and Ayurveda. These results could help in providing marketers for a better understanding of the factors contributing to the perception of health tourists.

The results of regression analysis clearly reveal the influence of perception factors on overall satisfaction. Overall satisfaction is affected by perception factors of destination image and healthcare packages. The destination image factors uncover the perception about Kerala as an ideal destination and a perfect destination for health tourism. The healthcare package describes the features of healthcare programme.

Conclusion and Suggestions

The outputs of factor analysis explain the various factors influencing the tourist's perception. It is seen from the study that destination image Ayurker is widely accepted among health tourists. It indirectly shows that Kerala is an ideal destination for Ayurveda. The regression analysis shows that there is a linear relationship between destination image and tourists perception with the tourists satisfaction. The tourists agree with the destination image of Kerala–as an ideal healthcare destination and the importance of ayurveda treatment in Kerala. Hence, it is also revealed from this study that Kerala can continue to be marketed as a synonym for ayurveda. This will lead to perennial tourism in Kerala as ayurveda is generally practiced in the offseason period. In other words, ayurveda is a panacea for sustainable tourism in Kerala.

Potential for Future Study

The present study proposes the linear relationship of customer perception, satisfaction, and destination image of health tourism

sectors. The study focuses mainly on ayurveda and future study can be undertaken on medical tourism (modern medicine) to find the pre-purchase and post-purchase dimension of medical tourism. The researcher proposed two models from factor analysis and regression. These models can be tested in the future studies for their model fitting by using   effective statistical applications.

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