



*God's Own Country*

### Market

The land of coconuts, God's Own Country, was an untapped beauty in the southern tip of the subcontinent. Tourism in India then meant only the Golden Triangle of Agra-Jaipur-Delhi, or at best the Himalayas. Fifteen-years ago, Kerala woke up. The state, spearheaded by Kerala Tourism, decided to seduce the tourist with its natural beauty, grace and charm.

Now, Kerala attracts 5.8 million tourists, a large number of them foreigners. It generates an income of Rs. 49,310 million and attracts more than 50,000 visitors from the United Kingdom. French and Germans find it alluring. In the first half of 2003 (January - July) Kerala recorded a 27% increase in arrivals – arrivals from France shot up by 22.8%, from Germany by 18.61% and from the UK by 8.64%. The enchantment of Kerala ensured increasing tourist flow despite September 11 and the SARS threat. While India suffered a fall in tourist arrivals by 11.14% across 2000/02, Kerala achieved an impressive growth of 10.78% during the same period.

Kerala's beauty has proved enticing to Western Europe. The message is spreading across Russia and CIS countries. Tourists from Singapore, Malaysia and UAE find the state an attractive destination. The state, thanks to the vigorous efforts of Kerala Tourism, has now emerged as one of the top travel destinations in the world.

### Achievements

Kerala is the preferred destination for celebrities – Paul McCartney and Heather Mills have been here. Paul summed up his experience – "Truly God's own country". Heather was certain that they would visit again. The deluge of acclaim is overwhelming. National Geographic Traveler called it "One of the ten paradises of the world". Weekend FT – London, said that this is "Where the smart traveller goes". Travel and Leisure –



UK, classified it as "One of the hundred great trips of the 21st century". The New York Times said that this is "Where India flows at a relaxed pace". Time magazine was succinct, "Kerala is worth the trip".

Kerala was the first state in India to receive the status of Partner State of the World Travel and Tourism Council in 2000. Along with Hawaii and South Carolina, Kerala has joined the exclusive club of sub-national economies that have implemented Tourism Satellite Accounting (TSA). Kerala Travel and Tourism demand is expected to grow by 11.6% per annum over the coming decade. This is the highest expected growth rate in the world.

Kerala is not just the number one tourist destination in India, it is also the country's most up-market tourist destination. The shift from mass tourism to quality tourism is one of the key achievements of Kerala Tourism. Realising that only a refined, mature audience can ensure the sustainability of this nature-dependent destination, the focus shifted about a decade ago to quality tourism. The aim was to dissuade the backpacker-hippie culture that invaded Kovalam

in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Kerala Tourism added new destinations like Kumarakom and Munnar, launched innovative products like houseboats, tree houses and ayurvedic rejuvenation. It enticed up-market tourists through the tourism-trade in strong emerging markets abroad – London, Paris, Berlin, Frankfurt and the Middle East. The rapid increase of excellent tourism infrastructure gave further impetus to this drive.

Kerala Tourism has won many international awards. To name just a few, the PATA (Pacific Association of Travel Agents) International award for marketing; the PATA Grand award for Heritage; and India Tourism's award for the best performing State in India three times in a row.

### History

Tourism in Kerala developed through government-led private enterprise. The early 1980s saw large numbers of Keralites going abroad to work. This exodus resulted in many travel agencies mushrooming all over the state. The emerging travel trade spotted the opportunity in in-bound tourism and thus started rolling the wheels of fortune. Successive governments, irrespective of ideology differences sensed the tremendous potential of tourism and went all out to promote the destination, attract investments and create the right environment for this industry to grow and flourish. Tourism secured industry status in 1986. Today, tourism has emerged as the most stable and best performing industry in the state, which generates over 1 million skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled job opportunities. The sector attracted an average of Rs. 5,000 million every year for the last five years.

### Product

Right from the start, Kerala made steady progress. A unique mix of inherent advantages,







innovative products, a dynamic tourism-trade community and sustained government support have made Kerala the number one destination in India in a very short time.

Kerala is a highly advanced society, often compared with California in terms of development indices. Kerala has 100% literacy, excellent health care facilities, a healthy male-female ratio, lowest pollution and a peace loving, friendly, environment-conscious people. English is easily understood. All these inherent advantages worked like magic when Kerala wooed select domestic and international markets.

Out of its diverse portfolio of nature-based tourism products, three – backwaters, ayurveda and culture – all unique to Kerala, attract most of the tourists. Beaches and hill stations come next in the order of preference. The one great advantage that Kerala offers is that the traveller can move from one theme destination to another in just a few hours. Enchanted, the traveller ends up spending more time in Kerala than he would in any other destination.

Ayurveda – practised to perfection only in Kerala – is another major draw. Many travellers spend three weeks here for rejuvenative and therapeutic packages.

The tourism trade in Kerala tracked the subtle changes in the travel industry and responded effectively. Earlier, tourists wanted to see and understand – now they want

to experience the destination. They want to stay in a traditional Kerala 'tharavad' (ancestral home), to sit on the floor and to savour traditional meals from the plantain leaf using their fingers. They want to ride elephants; they want to go out to sea with fishermen on their catamarans. Today, Kerala caters to the 'experience' tourist.



## Recent Developments

In an attempt to turn around the traditionally lean monsoon season, Kerala started promoting Ayurvedic rejuvenation, which follows 5000-year-old texts. It is most effective during the monsoon. In addition to rejuvenation, the romance of the monsoon is also turning out to be a draw. The almost zero occupancy levels during June - July is now history. The Department of Tourism records show a 43% increase in traffic in 2003.

Kerala has also started to successfully tap the MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conventions and Exhibitions) market. Today, many global brands host their corporate brainstorming sessions and conferences here. Medical tourism is also on the rise.

In order to maintain quality, Kerala Tourism introduced classification and branding of products and services like houseboats

and ayurvedic treatment centres. Eco-certification programmes were launched for resorts and hotels. Kerala is also focusing on heritage tourism in a major way – history walks take one around sites that reflect the state's rich culture and heritage.

Kerala was the first state in India to formulate and implement a Conservation, Preservation and Trade Bill to facilitate sustainable growth and quality control.

## Promotion

The growth of Kerala as a brand started with the positioning of the destination as 'God's Own

Country' in the late 1980s. It was during the same period that the first national campaign was released. Initially, the campaigns just depicted the breathtaking beauty of Kerala. As specific products evolved, the campaigns became product specific – houseboat

holidays on the backwaters, ayurvedic rejuvenation etc. Eventually, with the brand having gained tremendous equity in key markets, Kerala Tourism launched one of its most successful campaigns – a campaign that was centred around how Kerala works on you, makes you beautiful, turns you into a poet and gives you a new lease of life. This print campaign was nominated for the ABBY award for creative excellence and the 60 second commercial won the ABBY silver.

Kerala's multi-pronged promotion coupled with healthy public-private partnership and joint participation in all the major international travel and trade fairs have played a key role in building and sustaining the brand. Regular road shows have helped. Kerala Tourism's investments in familiarisation tours for leading tour agents and travel writers have also gone a long way to open up the destination. Celebrity endorsements by people like M F Hussain, who did a series of paintings on Kerala added to the brand value.

Kerala Tourism initiated the first-ever bi-annual



international travel mart focussing on a single state in the year 2000 – the Kerala Travel Mart (KTM). Close on the heels of KTM, Kerala Tourism launched the Malabar Travel Mart,

targeted at promoting the hitherto untapped potential of north Kerala.

In an attempt to convert Kerala into a hub of tourism centric activity, the state launched the India International Boat Show, the only boat exhibition of this stature in South Asia. An annual event,

the Boat Show brought in exhibitors and buyers from all over the world. Kerala Tourism also initiated a 24-hour toll free number; created an informative web site and resorted to web banner advertisements in leading portals.

Kerala was the first state in India to create a strategy document – Tourism Vision 2025. The document serves as a guide for all key tourism developmental activities in a 25-year span.

## Brand Values

Kerala is today the most sought after and most trusted tourism brand in India. It is sought after for its breathtaking natural splendours, the zillion shades of green, endless peace and innovative tourism products; trusted for its transparent quality control systems, eco-friendly practices and a long-term approach to tourism as well as the tourists.

## Things you didn't know about Kerala Tourism

Kerala has the oldest religious footprints in the Indian subcontinent – the oldest church, mosque and synagogue are here. In fact, Christianity is believed to have reached Kerala in AD 52, even before it reached Rome.

Vasco da Gama landed in Calicut, Kerala in 1498 on his voyage to discover America and found a new trade route.

A Kumarakom backwater holiday inspired the Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee to pen the famous 'Kumarakom Musings'.

The Globe Theatre in London has staged the Kathakali version of Shakespeare's King Lear. Kathakali, is the renowned dance drama of Kerala.

UNESCO picked Koodiyattom, another art form of Kerala, as "a masterpiece of the oral and intangible heritage of humanity".

[www.keralatourism.org](http://www.keralatourism.org)

