

Drafting A Conceptual Marketing Framework For The Growth Of Ayurveda Wellness Tourism

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Abstract

Ayurveda is a well-established traditional alternative healthcare system popular in South Asian countries, and Kerala is considered to be the Mecca of it. This has made Kerala the primary tourism hub for Ayurveda. Even though Kerala is in an advantageous position, it lacks a proper marketing and promotion framework for Ayurveda tourism. This article explores the marketing strategies currently employed by the Ayurveda wellness tourism sector in India, with special reference to Kerala. With this aim in mind, the relevant theoretical literature was analysed and the prominent gaps in marketing strategies were identified. The results showed that the growth of Ayurveda tourism is attributed mainly to word of mouth, medical professionals' opinions and suggestions, and other organic ways of marketing. Hence, this sector requires an urgent initiative to develop a holistic marketing strategy involving all the stakeholders in this field. Therefore, understanding the factors that influence the formulation of a conceptual marketing framework for the promotion of Ayurveda wellness tourism is considered worthwhile. Four pillars - Tie-ups and Collaborations, Diversification and Integration, Blending of Online and Offline Marketing Avenues, and Government and Policymakers of the marketing sector- have been identified and a conceptual marketing framework has been drafted.

Keywords: Ayurveda, Ayurveda wellness tourism, Marketing Strategies

1. Introduction

Indigenous medical systems are opening up huge opportunities in the fields of healthcare, tourism, culture, and tradition. Ayurveda is one of the oldest indigenous healthcare systems that has been practiced for more than 5000 years. Ayurveda originated from two Sanskrit terms – 'Ayu' meaning 'life' and 'Veda' meaning 'knowledge', and is considered to be a way of life towards holistic wellness. Ayurveda is the most comprehensive medical system in the world which is practiced traditionally in India (Ahmed, 2020). Ayurvedic medical treatment has no side effects and is getting international acceptance as a science of healing and rejuvenation. Ayurveda provides robust healthcare to people and has the potential to transform multi-dimensional sectors like health, tourism, hospitality, etc. This has made people visit countries like India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bali, etc., in search of Ayurveda treatment and wellness programmes. Thus, a new tourism segment was born “Ayurveda Tourism” (Sugathapala, 2024).

Ayurveda tourism provides soothing relief, and physical, mental, and psychological balance to people who are suffering from several lifestyle diseases due to a stressful fast-paced world (Poonam and Naila, 2018).

Ayurveda and tourism complement each other leading to a lucrative wellness tourism segment causing a wellness revolution. Post-COVID-19, people have started looking for enhanced wellness activities that are provided by traditional wellness therapies and treatments. This has led to a paradigm shift in the choice of tourism destinations and packages (Priya and Johnson, 2021). Holistic healing and wellness are provided by Indian wellness streams such as Ayurveda, Yoga, Siddha, Unani, Naturopathy, etc (Avijit, 2024). European Hospital and Healthcare Federation (2015) reported that health tourism destination leaders may not be the ones with the world's best doctors, technology, facilities, and prices, but with the most successful marketing strategies. This observation signifies the relevance of well-framed marketing efforts for the

promotion of health tourism. Ayurveda tourism is a popular wellness tourism avenue that has high growth prospects, but there is a need to actively market and promote its advantages to people (Neepa, 2020).

The main aim of the study is to contribute to the literature mainly in three main ways: exploring the existing marketing strategies followed in Ayurveda wellness tourism, visualizing the improvements that can be made in the existing marketing strategies, and understanding the key players in the sector. The article encompasses a literature review focusing on Ayurveda, Ayurveda Tourism and Ayurveda Tourism Marketing to understand the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of Ayurveda wellness Tourism in Kerala. This is followed by explaining the fundamentals of the conceptual framework, the stakeholders in Ayurveda wellness tourism, the tourist travel life cycle, and existing marketing strategies in Ayurveda wellness tourism.

Ayurveda tourism is a relatively new sector which has witnessed exponential growth in recent times. This growth is attributed mainly to word of mouth, medical professionals' opinions and suggestions, and other organic ways of marketing. Since, not much attention has been given to the marketing aspect of Ayurveda tourism, a fundamental question arises about the need to develop a concrete marketing plan that can appeal to domestic as well as foreign Ayurveda wellness seekers (Sivesan, 2021). This review article integrates the current marketing strategies followed in the Ayurveda tourism sector and tries to find the lacunae in it. The study also tries to understand the marketing strategies that can be adopted for the growth of Ayurveda wellness tourism which would pave the way for building a conceptual framework for this sector. The conceptual framework is derived by taking insights from the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM model).

2. Review of literature

Ayurveda and related tourism activities are novel areas of research and the marketing of Ayurveda tourism needs to be explored further to propose a conceptual framework for the promotion of Ayurveda tourism. For this purpose, an extensive survey of previous studies on Ayurveda tourism, wellness tourism and Ayurveda tourism marketing

is undertaken to get maximum data. Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) flowchart endorsed by the Cochrane Collaboration (Prayag, et al., 2018) is adopted to do the literature review systematically.

2.1 Ayurveda

The Indian systems of medicine - Ayurveda, Yoga, Panchakarma, Rejuvenation Therapy, Siddha, Unani, etc., are among the most ancient systems of medical treatment in the world and have become part of general healthcare and also for wellness and preventive purposes (Bodeker and Cohen, 2008). Ayurveda follows four elements namely soul, mind, senses, and body which have a direct impact on one's mental, physical and spiritual health (Mukherjee, et al., 2017). Ayurveda concentrates on treatment and care for the entire body of an individual, promotes the health of healthy persons and cures diseases of sick persons (Renu and Rameswori, 2021).

Ayurveda is the science of longevity that teaches about the dos and don'ts for leading a healthy and peaceful life, both physically and mentally. Ayurvedic treatment and wellness therapies purify one's body, help to boost immunity, act as stress buster and maintain the overall balance of the body. Ayurveda is not only used for wellness therapies but also for the treatment of diseases like body aches, allergies, diabetes, heart diseases, skin problems, etc., (Rastogi, et al., 2020).

Ayurveda is practiced most traditionally and authentically in Kerala, supported by renowned Ayurveda centres and brands. Ayurveda, yoga and meditation are considered to play an integral part in attaining well-being. Many people across the world have started to recognize the value of Ayurveda medical practice as it provides a permanent cure for many chronic illnesses. Though Ayurveda is internationally recognized as an alternative system of medicine, less than 10% of the world population is currently using it. So 90% are left out of reach of Ayurveda and other alternative medicines and hence there exists a huge growth potential. Ayurveda has grown as a wellness, and health tourism attribute across the world due to its natural way of renaissance. Essential steps need to be taken by authorities and policymakers to promote the use of Ayurveda and other alternative systems of medicine by people (Malik, 2014., Ramesh and

Kurian, 2012).

2.2 Ayurveda Tourism

The desire for healthy living, improvement of lifestyle, disease prevention and rejuvenation fuelled the birth of wellness tourism. Mueller and Kaufmann (2001), defined wellness tourism as the act of travelling for health-sustaining or enhancing activities, including physical fitness, healthy nutrition, as well as relaxation and meditation. Wellness tourism is linked with indigenous medicine, nature, culture and traditional values. Globally wellness tourism has been growing almost twice as fast as general tourism, due to people's

growing desire to adopt a wellness lifestyle (Bodeker and Cohen, 2008).

Wellness tourism activities include Spa, Thermal Baths, Yoga, Panchakarma, Ayurveda, etc. Most of the Western and European countries focus on Spas and other traditional practices, whereas Eastern countries emphasise on traditional Medicine, Meditation, Yoga, and Ayurveda (Bishnu and Tetsuo, 2019). Wellness tourism is different from health tourism as wellness tourism concentrates on prevention and wellness whereas health tourism is more curative and surgical (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Comparison between Health and Wellness Tourism

(Adapted from Poonam and Naila, 2018)

Ayurvedic tourism, a branch of health tourism is emerging as a viable solution for the overall wellness of humans who have suffered a toll due to the fast-paced lifestyle. Ayurveda-related tourism activities integrate traditional healing practices, providing preventive healthcare through natural therapies and Panchakarma treatments. It aims at the overall enhancement of physical, mental, psychological, and spiritual well-being (Shailesh and Gurjar, 2025).

2.3 Ayurveda Tourism – Global Scenario

Ayurveda tourism activities are mainly offered by South Asian countries. It mainly focuses on rejuvenation, revitalization, quality treatment, healthy food, lifestyle and leisure (Shanthi and Sampad, 2012). Ayurveda treatments are different from other medical sciences due to their long-lasting effects and healing powers. This attracted people towards Ayurveda which gave birth to

Ayurveda wellness tourism (Ashutosh, et al., 2013). India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Bali are considered to be pioneers in the field of Ayurveda wellness tourism. Buddhist saints played an important role in spreading Ayurveda throughout the world, especially in Asian countries like Cambodia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore, Thailand, Sri Lanka, China and Tibet. The amalgamation of various Ayurvedic principles and treatments with other traditional systems of medicine is done, especially in traditional Chinese medicine, Tibetan medicine and early Greek medicine (Xuan and Thi, 2023).

Foreign allopathic doctors have understood the significance of Ayurveda and have started to prescribe Ayurvedic medicines (Agnives, 2002). Still, common people are either unaware or ignorant of the incredible worth of Ayurveda therapies due to a lack of proper standardization and marketing. The trend is changing as people worldwide are moving towards chemical-free

treatments and therapies leading to the revival and growth of traditional holistic methods like Ayurveda resulting in a surge in Ayurveda wellness tourism worldwide (Edward and George, 2008).

2.4 Ayurveda Tourism – Indian Scenario

India is the pioneer in the Health tourism sector especially Ayurveda Tourism in the world (Anoop and Lakshmi, 2024a). India offers specialized treatments, operations, alternative forms of medicine, and wellness services at approximately one-fourth the cost in developed countries and this acts as a bonus for India, making it one of the most preferred destinations for health tourism (Barnwal, 2024). Indian Ayurveda has received international acclaim and has brought a new dimension to vacationing in India (Muralidhar and Karthikeyan, 2016). India can become the Mecca of wellness tourism as it offers unique services in alternative systems of medicine. India is rich in culture, tradition, and biodiversity with beautiful landscapes including the great Himalayas, making it the epicentre of Ayurveda wellness tourism. Every year tourists visit the country to experience these alternative medical services (Kirti and Hafizullah, 2022). Well-established hotels and resorts in India such as Taj (Hotels, Resort and Palaces), Oberoi (Hotels), and The Leela (Palaces, Hotels and Resorts), have realized the potential of Ayurvedic wellness heritage and have incorporated it into their establishment for tourists (Manhas and Kour, 2014).

Himalayas are closely associated with the concept of Ayurveda, as many destinations like Dharamsala, Haridwar, Ladakh and Rishikesh are famous for Ayurveda tourism. These locations have a huge amount of natural medicinal plants, ayurvedic herbs, and different kinds of natural oils, which are conducive to administering Ayurveda treatments and therapies. The Himalayas is also a spiritual destination spot, consisting of many sacred temples, ashrams, monasteries and yoga centres (Anita, et al., 2014). Goa is an ideal place for those who want to relax and rejuvenate. “Sun, Sea and Sand” are considered to be the prime attractions in Goa and recently Ayurveda has been added to it. The tourists are pampered and energized with the use of Ayurvedic wellness therapies. The demand for Ayurvedic wellness tourism is increasing in Goa from both domestic as well as foreign tourists.

This trend has made the tourism stakeholders diversify their tour packages from previous 'beach-centric tourism avenues' to “Ayurveda-integrated packages”. Domestic tourists are usually weekend tourists who stay less than a week, while international tourists stay for longer periods in Ayurveda wellness centres (Vijaykumar, 2019). Kerala has the tradition of Ayurveda rooted in its culture and is emerging as a major hub for Ayurveda-based wellness services. Ayurveda has a huge potential in this era of fast-paced lifestyle and these prospects need to be tapped to develop the tourism aspect of this sector (Anoop and Lakshmi, 2024b).

2.5 Ayurveda Tourism – Kerala Scenario

There are several Ayurveda wellness centres spread across Kerala that offer Ayurveda wellness services like rejuvenation, detoxification, weight loss, stress relief, skin, eye and hair care. They also provide treatments for arthritis, asthma, back pain, diabetes, neurological disorders and other lifestyle-related diseases. Tourists from different countries visit Kerala for Ayurveda wellness therapies and usually spend a minimum of two weeks which might go up to months (Haseena and Ajims, 2014). Thornton (2015) noted that sun, sea, and culture are the major themes of Kerala tourism, but Ayurveda tourism has given a new dimension to tourism in the state, and further stated that the introduction of Ayurvedic wellness centres in backwater tourism spots has started to attract more tourists than before.

Aswathy and Kumar (2025) opined that Kerala Ayurveda Tourism has to expand its landscape by integrating Ayurveda with other tourism avenues like eco-tourism, spiritual tourism, culture, and heritage experience. This blended approach can help tourism providers to offer nature-based wellness healing activities that can appeal to diverse groups of tourists. Further, tourists visiting other tourist spots in Kerala often show interest in trying out rejuvenation therapies and wellness care, which can indirectly help the Ayurveda tourism sector. Kerala as a tourist destination has geographical charm, cultural attractions, beaches, eco-tourism spots and wellness tourism centres. The combination of nature, tradition, hospitality, and tourism has helped Kerala in an unprecedented way to become a preferred wellness

tourism destination in the world. Tourists from ~~European, American and Middle East countries~~ visit Kerala, and Ayurveda wellness tourism is one of the most compelling reasons for them to make the trip. The practice of wellness-focused travel is not a new phenomenon in the world as people make trips due to the ever-increasing hectic lifestyle and stress (Bipithalal, 2019).

The unprecedented lock-down and struggle created by the Covid-19 pandemic has adversely affected the mental and psychological health of people and hence, there is a mounting demand for wellness tour packages from older to younger generations for self-optimization, to regain physical fitness, rejuvenate and de-stress., and to synergize the mind, body and spirit. At this juncture India and especially Kerala has an important role to play in attracting tourists. However, there is stiff competition in this field from countries such as Sri Lanka, Nepal, Thailand, etc., and hence there is a need to develop a proper promotion and marketing strategy to target the right audience.

2.6 Ayurveda Tourism Marketing

The busy lifestyle has led to an increase in lifestyle diseases among people of all age groups. This has triggered the importance of well-being, both physical and mental. Ayurveda wellness tourism activities act as one of the best means which help this cause (Anoop and Lakshmi, 2023). The pandemic acted as a wake-up call as it significantly disrupted the lives of people and took a toll on their well-being due to increased depression, stress, and irritability which in turn have increased the importance of Ayurveda and other related tourism activities (Aruditya and Parvinder, 2023).

2.7 Ayurveda Tourism Marketing – Global Scenario

João, et al., (2022) noted that Asian countries are the hub for wellness tourism and reputed hotel and resort chains in Asia are promoting Ayurveda and other wellness treatments extensively. Ayurveda and Indigenous traditional Thai Medicine attract lots of tourists to Thailand (Anthony, 2017). Malaysia mainly offers wellness services like beauty treatments, spa services and spiritual retreats in addition to Ayurveda. Malaysia is promoting Ayurveda and other wellness tourism avenues by collaborating with various destination

stakeholders and by involving local players in achieving its tourism potential (Idrus, et al., 2020).

Ayurveda tourism is a niche segment that has a lot of prospects as people have realized the importance of wellness and well-being and the desire to interact more with nature. On understanding this potential, all leading tour operators in South Asia have included Ayurveda wellness tourism in their tour packages. The Sri Lankan Tourism Development Authority has drafted a special marketing strategy for Ayurveda wellness tourism to attract international tourists. This tourism segment has shown tremendous growth in the country and private players are also playing a crucial role in it. Dedicated Ayurvedic resorts and centres have come up in the country and also spas, beauty clinics, fitness, and yoga centres have started to provide Ayurvedic wellness treatments and therapies. They are combining conventional tourism avenues in Sri Lanka such as beaches and eco-tourism with Ayurveda wellness programmes to attract international tourists (Arachchi and Kaluarachchi, 2019). Budiawan, et al., (2020) noted that Ayurveda wellness tourism in Bali can be promoted by highlighting the importance of wellbeing, and the role Ayurveda wellness plays in providing holistic wellbeing. Bali also has the opportunity to combine an Ayurveda wellness package with a beach stay or mix up an Ayurveda wellness package with a stay in a rainforest resort.

Bishnu and Tetsuo (2019) noted that wellness centres need to cooperate with tour companies in different countries to promote wellness tourism by conducting exhibitions and trade fairs within the country to attract domestic audiences, participate in international seminars, exhibitions and explore the use of social media and online platforms. According to Kazakov and Oyner (2021), the travel and tour operators in Nepal need to create customized Ayurveda wellness packages for domestic and international tourists based on their needs and wants.

2.8 Ayurveda Tourism Marketing – Indian Scenario

The Tourism Ministry in India is taking initiatives to create awareness of Ayurveda tourism by conducting exhibitions, road shows, seminars and trade fairs within the country and abroad. They have also extended the Market Development

Assistance (MDA) scheme to wellness tourism service providers and have started accrediting Ayurvedic wellness centres (Shalini, 2017).

By understanding the relevance of Ayurveda and other alternative systems of medicine, the Government of India started a new ministry, AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga, Unani, Siddha and Homeopathy) in 2014. The main vision of the AYUSH Ministry is to spot AYUSH systems as the ideal health system to "Accomplish A Well India" (Jaiswal and Williams, 2017). The government is taking initiatives to promote and encourage the AYUSH system in the country by providing funds for infrastructure development and training of human resources. AYUSH ministry has signed MOUs with Cuba, Guinea, Japan and Bolivia and collaborated with institutes in the USA, Austria and Tajikistan for research innovation in the AYUSH field. The Ministry is promoting AYUSH in European and American countries by taking part in international fairs and events (Bhargavi and Shivani, 2020).

Benke (2016) noted that the Government of India has realized that traditional healthcare therapies like Ayurveda, Yoga, Siddha, Unani, etc., can be combined with allopathic treatment to provide holistic wellness for citizens of the country as well as the tourists visiting the country. This motivated the Tourism Ministry to constitute a National Medical and Wellness Tourism Promotion Board in the year 2015 to promote wellness and medical tourism in India. Preji and Sarat (2021) opined that despite India being a prominent player in the Ayurveda wellness tourism segment, the branding and promotion have been weak. Poorani and Jiang (2017) stated that sustainable and steady growth of any tourism segment needs the collaboration of public and private bodies, such as the government, tour and travel operators, wellness centres and the local community. Tourists have started to prioritize spending their holidays focusing on avenues that help them to improve their health and well-being along with leisure. This paradigm shift in the mindset of travellers has significantly contributed to the growth of the Ayurveda and wellness tourism sector (Talukder et al., 2025).

2.9 Ayurveda Tourism Marketing – Kerala Scenario

Kerala has emerged as a well-acclaimed Ayurveda

wellness tourism destination on the wellness map. Kerala is becoming a role model for other states in India in Ayurveda tourism (Anandu, 2024). The presence of good air connectivity, international airports, and direct flights from most Asian countries act as an added advantage for Kerala, as tourist flow never gets hindered (Vincy, 2024). Ayurvedic tourism is the unique selling point of Kerala which needs to be promoted most systematically and effectively (Prakasha and Mahesh, 2024). BusinessLine (2018) suggested the importance of integrating other tourism segments with Ayurveda tourism to attract wider tourists for a longer period. This would increase the duration of stay by tourists in Kerala which in turn will increase the spending.

Jinu (2020) noted that accommodation plays an important role in creating a better ambiance in wellness tourism. The government of Kerala and private hospitality groups are building heritage hotels and are also taking initiatives to convert old traditional buildings (Nalukettu) into Ayurveda wellness centres. It is further stated that to ensure the quality and service standards of Ayurvedic centres, the Kerala government has introduced 'Green Leaf, and Olive Leaf' and also Ayur Silver, Ayur Gold and Ayur Diamond based on the facilities provided by the centres. These certifications help tourists to differentiate authentic wellness centres based on facilities and services and also help the government in maintaining uniformity in Ayurveda practices and the standard of centres.

Ravisankar (2018) observed that despite the quality and abundance of Ayurveda wellness-related resources and services provided by facilitators, Kerala still lacks a proper branding strategy to differentiate itself as an attractive wellness tourism destination to compete in international markets. Kerala is branded as the land of Ayurveda and the BBC travel survey rated Kerala as the most preferred wellness tourist destination among foreign travellers. To maximize the tourist experience there is a need to offer new-age Ayurveda wellness packages by merging with cultural, spiritual, culinary and entertainment attributes. There is a need to provide a pleasant holiday experience to the visitors with a close feel of nature (Kannan and Frenz, 2019). Though, Kerala is offering authentic and traditional

Ayurveda treatments and therapies, it is facing stiff competition from Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bali, Maldives, etc. Hence there is an urgent need for focused marketing strategies promoting Kerala Ayurveda (Shainu, 2023). Ayurveda proposes comprehensive health that includes mental activity, physical exercise, healthy nutrition and diet, beauty care, yoga, meditation, relaxation and nurturing. Hence, Ayurveda tourism stakeholders need to keep in mind these factors while creating an Ayurveda tourism package for tourists (Bargale and Aiswarya, 2023). Shahram (2019) opined that Ayurveda wellness tourism is one of the fastest-growing tourism segments in Kerala. He recommended the need for implementing Telemedicine and E- Medicare facilities in Ayurveda wellness centres so that it can reduce the pre-treatment checkups and can act as an important factor in attracting more international tourists.

Sambhavi (2017) suggested a one-stop app connecting all the Ayurveda wellness tourism providers and stakeholders to streamline the process which can play a crucial role in the progress of this segment. The sector can also utilize the opportunity of influencer marketing in promoting Ayurveda wellness tourism on online and social media platforms. Satisfied customers can be requested to post their reviews and ratings on online and social media platforms in the form of a video (Mitta and Venkatrama, 2021). Anna and Siby (2020) noted that corporate hospital chains in India that are involved in modern medicine should try to collaborate with Ayurveda. Anoop and Lakshmi (2024a) noted that though the Ayurveda wellness tourism segment in Kerala has a lot of strengths, it also has weaknesses like the need for proper business and marketing strategy backed by strong research and development. Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Bali and Indonesia are aggressively marketing their alternative medical treatments. To compete with these countries Kerala requires a coordinated effort from tourism stakeholders, wellness centres, the tourism department and government. Investment in the development of the infrastructure of Ayurveda wellness centres needs to be increased (Uday, 2020). Over the past few years, the concept of wellness has taken a big leap in the world, especially after the Covid-19 pandemic. The Ayurveda wellness tourism market in India is growing at a very rapid pace day by day.

However, it is still regarded as an under-researched area, especially the marketing side of Ayurveda wellness tourism.

2.10 Ayurveda Marketing Efforts – Highlights

Before drafting a marketing campaign for the promotion of Ayurveda-based wellness tourism, there is a need to identify the destination and the factors that can attract tourists. Tourists' preferences need to be prioritized before a marketing strategy is designed. Marketing campaigns must concentrate on both online and offline avenues such as increasing the online and social media presence, attending International trade-travel fairs, wellness conferences and festivals, creating marketing websites and running online paid campaigns (Shaw, 2012). Morrison (2019) noted that pre-trip and post-trip marketing plays an important role in attracting tourists to Ayurveda wellness tourism. Further, destination image and tourist satisfaction have a significant influence on tourist loyalty and revisit. He further stated that marketing Ayurveda just as a massage therapy won't help but, is to be promoted as a new age wholesome wellness package for wellbeing. A collective promotional approach including all stakeholders in Ayurveda wellness tourism will create a synergy for the marketing efforts and a feeling of a unique destination among tourists (Telej and Gamble, 2019).

Ashutosh, et al., (2013) opined that along with wellness, the medical aspect of Ayurveda also needs to be promoted equally. They further suggested that marketing and awareness programmes must be done by Ayurvedic centres, hospitals and streamlined by Government agencies. Though these steps can help this segment, there are chances of unethical practices happening in these areas, hence certification and accreditation of such services are essential (Page, et al., 2017). They further noted the importance of using digital marketing techniques for the promotion of wellness tourism by using Search Engine Optimization (SEO) techniques, paid advertising (PPC) and social media platforms which can reach a wider set of interested audiences cost-effectively. Older generation people are more inclined towards wellness and Ayurveda-related tourism activities, but younger groups have started to pay attention to such avenues, and hotels need to resonate with this

demand by including Ayurveda and wellness therapies in their facilities (Chaojun and Xinjia, 2023).

Kerala and Indian Governments can organize wellness exhibitions and fairs annually. Moreover, setting up an exclusive website about Ayurveda tourism facilities and information centres in foreign countries under the supervision of authorities is required (Ramesh and Kurian, 2012). The usage of online and digital marketing avenues for the promotion of Ayurveda tourism and all wellness tourism centres in the state must have a well-designed website that serves as the face for the services provided. Bowers and Cheer (2017) stated that a change has to be made in marketing as well to shift from mass marketing to personalized marketing using online media platforms.

Ranjan and Bipithalal (2019) stated that there are many celebrities from the showbiz world, sports and politics who have been fascinated by Ayurveda's power to rejuvenate, detoxify and cure. Some of the Ayurveda wellness centres are outsourcing the entire marketing and promotion activities to those who have expertise in the field. Emphasising the availability of natural resources, authenticity, cultural heritage and other leisure activities would help to strengthen Kerala's brand as a unique Ayurveda wellness tourism destination (Rathiha and Nishad, 2016). Johnson (2018) stated that Ayurveda is an age-old tradition in Kerala and has international acclaim and demand. To create confidence in the Ayurvedic treatment and therapies offered by Kerala, a combination of Ayurveda and recent procedures in modern medicine is required (Bhavani, 2021). To translate the awareness created for Ayurveda wellness tourism, there is a need to promote and market it aggressively. Hence, this study tries to look into these factors and attempts to propose a unified conceptual framework for branding and promoting Ayurvedic wellness tourism in India, especially Kerala.

2.11 Research Gap

Kerala is considered to be the hub for Ayurveda and related tourism activities, due to the authentic treatment provided most traditionally. Ayurveda tourism in Kerala has been attracting a lot of tourists from across the globe. In recent times, other countries have started to aggressively market

their alternate medical systems and the threat posed by Sri Lanka in Ayurveda wellness tourism to Kerala is huge.

Knowledge gap

Even though Kerala is in an advantageous position in Ayurveda tourism, only a few studies have been conducted on the marketing aspect, especially online promotion and branding. The studies concentrating on the digital marketing of Ayurveda tourism are minimal.

Conceptual gap

The sector faces strategic weaknesses like outdated marketing strategies, lack of targeted campaigns and online platforms are mostly ignored. Even though there is the TAM model for the service industry, a conceptual marketing framework specifically for the Ayurveda tourism industry is lacking, hence this study is directed towards filling this gap. Hence, there is a need to develop a novel conceptual framework for Ayurveda tourism marketing.

Methodology gap

No comprehensive efforts have been made to combine traditional and digital marketing strategies for Kerala Ayurveda tourism. This study can act as a stepping stone towards this objective and future studies can be concentrated in this direction.

Data Gap

Most of the studies in tourism looked into developing marketing strategies with a general view in mind, without taking into consideration the stakeholders' and authorities' points of view. This study tries to look into this aspect as well with the support of secondary data aiming at conducting primary data research in the future. To achieve the vigour, charm, glory and magnificence of Kerala Ayurveda tourism, strategic marketing and branding are a must. Hence, it is considered necessary to develop a conceptual framework for marketing efforts that will set the foundation for rebranding and repositioning Kerala Ayurveda wellness tourism in the world tourism map.

3. Research methodology

3.1 Rationale of the study

Ayurveda is a holistic form of healing that has no side effects and is the deep-rooted medical system

of India. In India, Kerala has a strong base in Ayurveda, which is practiced most authentically and traditionally. Kerala is emerging as the primary tourism hub for Ayurveda. Even though Kerala is in an advantageous position in Ayurveda tourism, due to the shortcomings in marketing and promotion activities, it is not able to fully utilize this opportunity. So, comprehensive marketing strategies need to be developed for promoting Ayurveda Tourism.

3.2 Steps followed in the selection of research papers for conducting Literature Review

The study is descriptive encompassing secondary data obtained from relevant literature in the research area which was critically examined. Using the PRISMA technique, the steps followed in the selection of research papers for conducting a literature review are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. Steps followed in the selection of research papers for conducting the Literature Review

Steps followed in the selection of research papers for conducting the Literature Review	
Databases Referred	Google Scholar, Research Gate, and ProQuest
Keywords used	Ayurveda Tourism, Ayurveda Wellness Tourism, Ayurveda Tourism Marketing, and Ayurveda Wellness Tourism Marketing
Sorting Criteria	i. Articles published during 2018-2025 were only considered ii. The articles were sorted by relevance, duplicate articles, case studies, reports, and company surveys were excluded iii. Only English articles with full-text research papers were considered iv. Research articles with proper descriptions of quantitative or qualitative methods were only considered.
Exclusion Criteria	Articles were excluded after reading the abstract and full paper. The articles that followed sound methodology with proper aims and objectives of the study and proper use of secondary sources with appropriate citations were only included for the final study.
Cross-References added	5 articles were added after cross-references.
Final Papers considered for the study	Thirty-seven papers were taken into consideration for the study.

3.3 Research Problem

Kerala Ayurveda wellness tourism has great growth potential, but due to stiff competition in this segment globally and lack of a proper marketing plan, it is not able to have a distinct position compared to other destinations. Sri Lanka offers Ayurveda tourism at a much lower cost and provides other add-on services compared to Kerala and is also promoting Sri Lanka as the Motherland of Ayurveda. Day by day this sector is getting more competitive as other countries, especially South Asian countries are aggressively marketing their alternative medical treatments. Hence, it is high time that a proper marketing strategy be created for Kerala Ayurveda tourism to attract and capture the audience. The present study may help in providing an overview of the potential of Ayurveda wellness tourism and also to come up with a marketing plan recommendation to position Kerala as a preferred wellness tourism destination.

3.4 Research Statement

The research aims to understand the potentials and shortcomings of Indian Ayurveda wellness tourism

with special reference to Kerala – the Ayurveda Tourism Hub, by identifying the marketing gaps in current promotional activities and proposing a conceptual marketing strategy framework.

3.5 Research Question

How can a conceptual marketing strategy framework for Kerala Ayurveda wellness tourism be drafted by understanding the gaps observed in the current promotional activities?

3.6 Objectives

To answer the research question the objectives of the study are framed,

To explore the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of Kerala Ayurveda Tourism from secondary data in the field of Ayurveda wellness tourism.

1. To analyze the current marketing strategies followed in Ayurveda wellness tourism and identify the pertaining gaps.
2. To identify key challenges, the roles of major stakeholders in this sector and understand the tourist's travel life cycle

3. To propose a conceptual framework of marketing strategy for the development of Kerala Ayurveda wellness tourism by transforming traditional marketing methods to innovative integrated marketing techniques.

3.7 SWOT Analysis of Ayurveda Wellness Tourism in Kerala

The SWOT analysis serves as a guide in understanding the external and internal environment that is conducive to Ayurveda Wellness Tourism by assessing the strengths and

weaknesses along with opportunities and threats of this segment. Post-COVID-19, people are in hot pursuit of health and wellness tourism programmes, with the desire to look and feel healthier. All have understood the importance of holistic wellbeing and a shift towards sustainable tourism avenues like ayurveda and wellness tourism are evident (Zhong et al., 2021). This post-Covid paradigm shift gives credence to a detailed SWOT analysis of Ayurveda wellness tourism in Kerala based on secondary data (Table 2).

Table 2. SWOT Analysis of Ayurveda Wellness Tourism in Kerala (Modified from Muralidhar and Karthikeyan, 2016)

STRENGTHS India is acknowledged worldwide for alternative systems of medicine. Kerala is recognized as the hub for Ayurveda wellness. Kerala Ayurveda is the most authentic, with no side effects. Kerala Ayurveda concentrates on providing holistic wellness to increase physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing Good connectivity and Government initiatives to support Ayurveda tourists. GMP-certified manufacturing hub for Ayurvedic medicines and products. Good conducive climate and availability of medicinal plants. Proper accreditation and certifications of Ayurveda wellness centres to ensure quality and service standards. Qualified doctors, Vaidyas (physicians), masseurs, therapists and other supporting staff.	WEAKNESS Lack of the use of modern technologies in operations and a dearth of proper infrastructure. Not connected fully with the mainstream market. Many unlicensed practitioners are offering services misleading customers The potential of Ayurveda Wellness Tourism is not marketed properly. The use of online marketing and branding is limited or ignored. No initiatives to access new markets. Insufficient provision of funds for the development of Ayurveda tourism. Lack of cooperation and coordination between stakeholders like hotels, tour operators, wellness centres, and the government. Lack of community-based tourism and local involvement.
OPPORTUNITIES Demands for Ayurveda Wellness Tourism have increased especially after the Covid-19 pandemic. Affordable and reasonable healthcare facilities compared to other countries. The importance of mental wellness and health is increasing. Diverse attractions and add-ons related to Ayurveda. The aging population is increasing and hence their preference for alternative medicine is rising. Ayurveda wellness tourist is likely to stay for more than a week, compared to an average tourist. Ayurveda tourism is not a one-time business	THREATS Increased competition from alternative medical systems available in other Asian countries with a wide variety of tourist attractions. Sri Lanka offers wellness tourism at a much lower cost compared to Kerala. Non-availability of certain raw drugs and ayurvedic plants. The sector lacks innovation and R&D. Aggressive branding and promotion done by other countries for their medical systems. No standard quality control measures are in place, which makes it difficult to get recognition from world organizations.

and is also non-seasonal.

The mushrooming of Ayurveda wellness centres in Kerala has given rise to concern for quality service.

4. Discussion

4.1 Conceptual Framework: Fundamentals

This study is conducted using secondary data to identify the key problems faced by Ayurveda wellness tourism in India with special reference to Kerala. Proper segmentation, targeting, and positioning are crucial for effective marketing in tourism (Rajeev et al., 2022). Even though there are several general models and frameworks in the tourism sector Utility Theory: The Normative Approach, The Theory of Planned Behavior: The Prescriptive Cognitive Approach, The Choice-Set

Model: The Structured Process Approach, and the TAM model for the service industry, a conceptual marketing framework specifically for Ayurveda tourism industry is lacking, hence this study is directed towards bridging this gap. By taking insights from the TAM model, regarding perceived value, behaviour intention, the authors are looking into the stakeholders in Ayurveda wellness tourism, tourist travel life cycle, existing marketing strategies, and are proposing a modified marketing conceptual framework for the sector by incorporating the latest marketing avenues.

4.2 Stakeholders in Ayurveda Wellness Tourism



Figure 2. Ayurveda Wellness Tourism Stakeholders (Source: Authors)

For the sustainable development of the Ayurveda wellness tourism segment, the active participation of all relevant stakeholders to ensure wider participation and growth is essential (Figure 2).

Achieving sustainable growth of Ayurveda wellness tourism is a continuous process and it requires constant monitoring, introduction of necessary policies, innovative promotional

activities and corrective measures wherever necessary.

4.3 Tourists travel life cycle

The decision to select a tourism destination by a tourist is a multi-phased process and involves various stages. Stakeholders and policymakers need to know these stages in the tourist's life cycle (Figure 3).

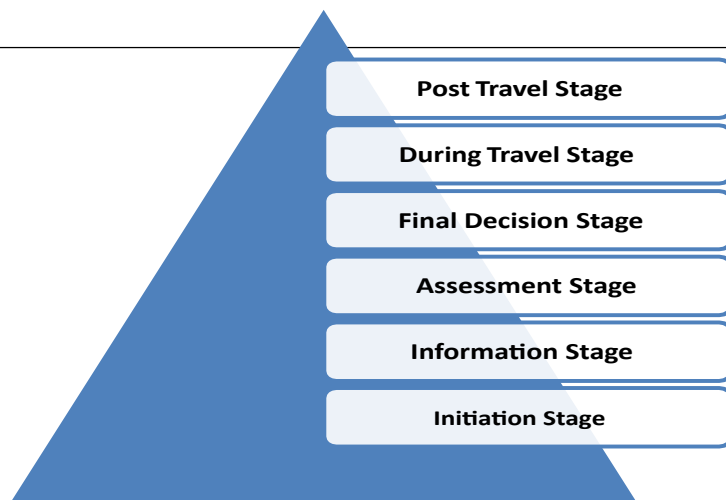


Figure 3. Tourist's travel life cycle (Adapted from Preji and Sarat, 2021)

The marketers and organizations involved in this segment need to understand the tourist travel life cycle carefully and use both online and offline marketing techniques to create a value proposition during all stages of the travel cycle. Moreover, all marketing efforts should concentrate on all the touch points of the Tourist travel life cycle, which in turn would influence the travel intention and tourism destination selection.

Wellness Tourism

Before proposing a marketing conceptual framework for Ayurveda wellness tourism, there is a need to analyse and evaluate the prevailing marketing strategies and promotional activities implemented and followed. The summarized form of existing marketing activities followed in Ayurveda Wellness Tourism based on the literature review conducted is depicted in Figure 4.

4.4 Existing Marketing Strategies in Ayurveda

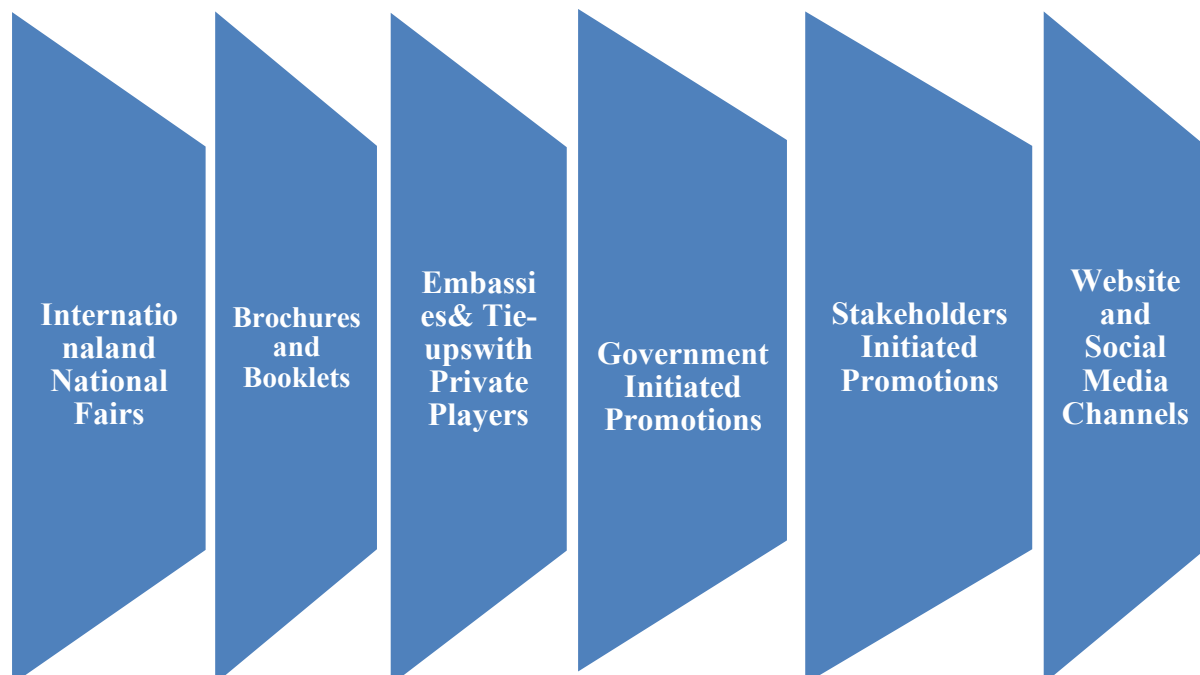


Figure 4. Marketing Strategies Currently Followed in Ayurveda Wellness Tourism Segment (Source: Authors)

We understand that there is already a system of marketing activities followed in the Ayurveda wellness segment. However, the use of social media and digital marketing platforms is less compared to other sectors. Online platforms are used by tourists for information search, initiation, assessment and final decision for destination selection. During the trip and post-trip, they share photos, reviews, and feedback regarding their experience, which might influence peer groups and potential tourists.

4.5 Proposing a Conceptual Marketing Strategy Framework

Ayurveda tourism is relatively new, there is no proper marketing framework in place. Hence, taking insights from secondary data and looking into the current marketing strategies adopted and the gap identified in Ayurveda tourism marketing, the researcher is proposing a conceptual marketing

strategy framework. As the Ayurveda tourism sector lacks a conceptual marketing strategy framework, this would be a path-finding effort for future research endeavours.

For the growth of Ayurveda wellness tourism, there is a need to develop a holistic marketing strategy by understanding the tourist's travel life cycle and involving all the stakeholders by using both online and offline marketing platforms. Keeping these factors in mind; a conceptual marketing strategy framework has been proposed under four headings (Figure 5). These are:

1. Tie-ups and Collaboration
2. Diversification and Integration
3. Blending of Online and Offline Marketing Avenues
4. Government and Policymakers

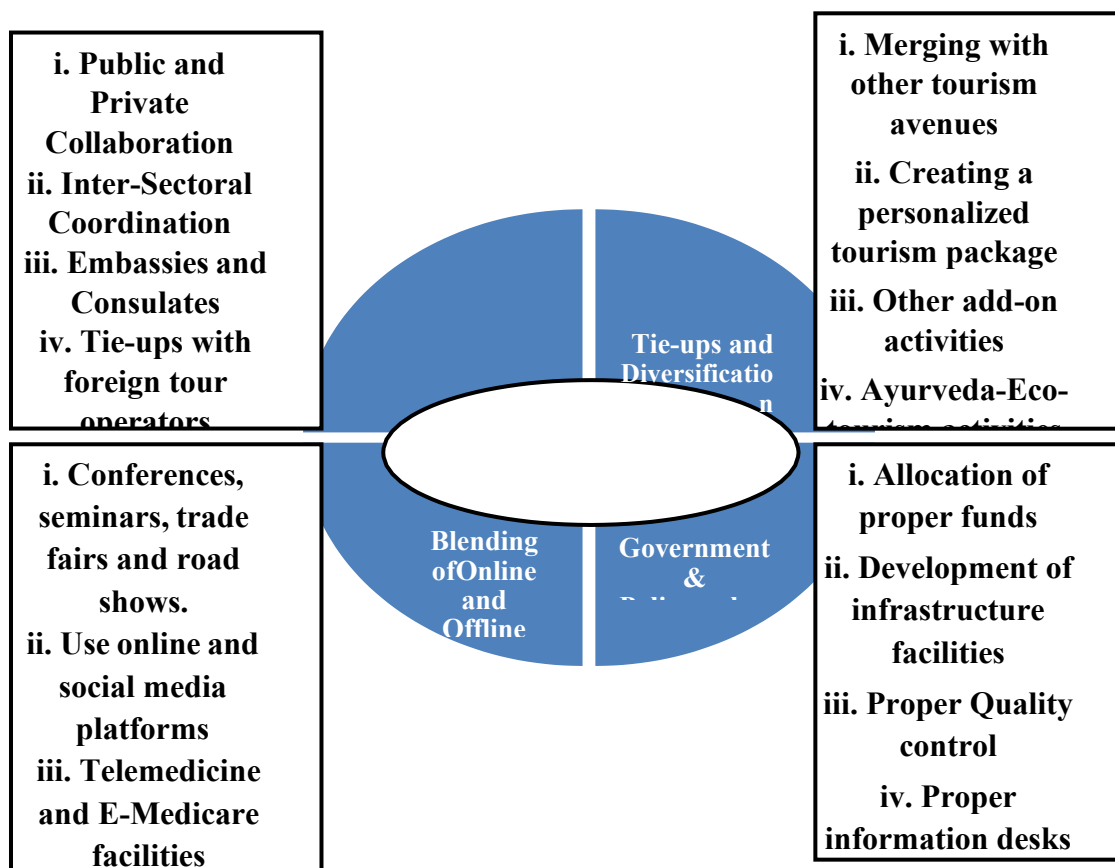


Figure 5. Model depicting the factors to be considered while drafting a marketing strategy for Ayurveda Wellness Tourism (Source: Authors)

The model asserts the need to take an integrative approach blending traditional and digital marketing avenues for the promotion of Ayurveda tourism, also each of the four pillars is interlinked, allowing them to support and enhance each other. Hence, Government authorities' combined with stakeholders' and private players' support could facilitate collaborations and infrastructure development for diversified offerings. There is also a need for a continuous feedback loop to monitor the effectiveness of the strategy and make data-driven improvements. This involves tracking visitor satisfaction, monitoring market trends, and adjusting promotional activities accordingly.

5. Recommendations

This conceptual framework would help to systematically promote Ayurveda wellness tourism, leveraging both traditional and digital marketing techniques, fostering partnerships, and ensuring government support for sustained growth and development.

This study recommends the need for more Public-Private collaborations for the promotion of Ayurveda tourism in Kerala. Government authorities need to act as regulators and facilitators. Also, there is an urgent need to set up a statutory body to oversee the functioning and to ensure proper quality control measures. Policymakers need to ensure local involvement and community-based initiatives to promote Ayurveda tourism. Promotion and achieving world-class status for Ayurveda and Wellness tourism will not be possible by government actions alone. It is also the responsibility of private players and all the stakeholders to develop an effective system for the promotion of Ayurveda tourism in Kerala. Hence, more promotional activities need to be initiated on online and social media platforms and encourage big corporates to invest in Ayurveda-related tourism sectors. The options of merging Ayurveda with other tourism avenues are to be examined as provisions for add-on services. There is a need for timely tracking, monitoring, evaluating, and modifying the marketing strategy based on the latest trends.

6. Future scope and implication of the study

The current study will serve as a baseline for

further studies and the development of marketing strategies for Ayurveda wellness tourism. Future studies must concentrate on primary data collection by conducting qualitative research methods among Ayurveda wellness stakeholders, and quantitative research surveys among Ayurveda tourists, to develop a foolproof marketing strategy. The findings of this study will give a direction for more studies in the Ayurveda tourism marketing arena and will also pave the way for more studies for other alternative medical systems. South Asian countries can emulate the findings from the present study for the promotion of Ayurveda tourism.

7. Limitation of the study

This study is mainly concentrated on Ayurveda tourism in Kerala. So, the findings of the study cannot be generalized. The study was based on secondary data by referring to research articles from databases. There is a need to conduct a detailed study based on primary data to get a wide range of insights regarding this area. The researcher is in the process of collecting the primary data using a mixed research approach (Both Qualitative and Quantitative approaches, such as focus group discussion, semi-structured interview, and questionnaire-based survey) to validate the secondary data obtained.

8. Conclusion

In today's hustle and bustle life, people are suffering from strain, anxiety, and other serious lifestyle diseases. To regain a normal state of mind and well-being, people have started to take up wellness tour activities. India has become a leading wellness tourism destination globally since it is considered the birthplace of many alternative healthcare systems. In India, Kerala has emerged as the hub for Ayurveda wellness tourism. Though there are immense opportunities for Ayurveda wellness tourism in Kerala, it still lacks a clear-cut promotional plan, infrastructure facilities, and coordination among stakeholders to project an image as the best wellness tourist destination.

Sri Lanka offers Ayurveda tourism at a much lower cost compared to Kerala and is promoting the country as the Motherland of Ayurveda. Day by day this sector is getting more competitive as other countries, especially South Asian countries are

aggressively marketing their alternative medical treatments. Hence, it is high time to create a proper marketing strategy for Kerala Ayurveda tourism to attract and capture the audience. Developing an effective system for the promotion of Ayurveda tourism in Kerala cannot be done by Government authorities alone, but also by the participation of private players and all the stakeholders involved in this area. Hence, there is a need for proper coordination and tie-ups of all players in this segment by diversifying tourism avenues and blending both online and offline marketing elements to make Kerala an all-season destination for Ayurveda wellness tourism.

Conflict of interest statement: The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest involved.

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