Abstract
This paper proposes to analyze the tourism attributes that are perceived as important and their performance as perceived by domestic Indian travelers to Kerala based on the Importance Performance technique developed by Martilla and James. A questionnaire was developed that solicited data regarding activities of importance, as well as the level of satisfaction with the same. Understanding what the Indian domestic tourists perceive as important and their evaluation of the same could be a very valuable resource for tourism planners to better determine how best Kerala could be positioned and promoted to the domestic Indian travelers visiting Kerala. It would provide an insight to destination managers and developers to better attract and accommodate them. Marketing strategies, resource allocation as well as operational changes could be effectively implemented that better attract the Indian domestic traveler. The study resulted in some major findings that could have managerial implications.

Keywords
Indian Domestic Tourists, Importance Performance Analysis, Kerala, T Test

I. Need for the Study
The travel characteristics, travel motives and travel behavior changes over time. Change in travel motives results in a change in what travelers perceive as important in their holiday. Their choice of holiday destination depends on how best the destination attributes meets their holiday requirements.

Understanding the domestic Indian tourists’ preferences and their perception of the destination are considered essential inputs in tourism planning and marketing efforts. (1) asserted that it is important to measure consumer satisfaction applying as many destination attributes as possible. They also asserted that dissatisfaction with one of the attributes leads to dissatisfaction of the whole tourism destination.

Assessing the perceptions of the Indian domestic tourist towards Kerala as a tourist destination would help identify the important attributes and their performance as perceived by the tourist and the areas of intervention to improve tourist quality. Towards this end, the study employs the Importance-Performance technique to evaluate the destination attractiveness of Kerala, as perceived by the domestic tourists visiting Kerala.

II. Objectives
The study aims to analyze the destination attributes that are perceived as important among Indian domestic travelers to Kerala.

The study also has as its objective to analyze the perceived level of performance on the attributes perceived as important in Kerala.

III. Hypothesis
A. Hypothesis 1
There is no significant difference in the mean importance of destination attributes as perceived by domestic tourists to Kerala.

B. Hypothesis 2
There is no significant difference in the mean performance of destination attributes as perceived by domestic tourists to Kerala.

IV. Introduction: Tourism Development in Kerala
Kerala is a prime high-end tourism destination in the Indian sub-continent and has been rated as “one of the fifty destinations to be visited in one’s lifetime” by (2). Moderate climate, rich art, colorful festivals, diverse natural and cultural attractions are causing tourism industry to flourish in Kerala. Compared to the other states in India, Kerala is unique for its interesting geographical diversity it possesses within the smallest area possible. This diversity offers tourists a range of attractions and experience such as beaches, backwaters, wildlife sanctuaries, evergreen forests and diverse flora and fauna of Kerala. It is often projected as the “Green Gateway” to India.

During the last decade, tourism in Kerala has made a spectacular performance. Some of the main tourism development initiatives taken by Kerala which enabled it to become one of the leading destinations are:

- Focused marketing efforts within a limited budget, developed in active partnership with private sector, leading international travel firms and agencies.
- Early lead in formulating comprehensive tourism policy, guiding and setting long term vision and goals for the tourism sector growth.
- Successful differentiation of the destination using effective positioning strategy, and benchmarking the performance with the neighboring leading international destinations, in the process, developed a distinct image as a stand alone destination from India and the rest of the states.
- Development of an array of tourism products of world class appeal mostly based on resources available locally.

V. The Importance-Performance Technique
Service quality is being increasingly viewed as a means of gaining competitive advantage, and researchers have developed more techniques aimed at measuring customer perceived service quality within the services sector (3,4). The most popular is of (3) and the development of their SERVQUAL instrument. Despite its popularity, SERVQUAL instrument has limitations of assessing expectations and performance separately (5,6). (4) developed the SERVPERF technique to evaluate service quality based on performance alone.
Another direct measurement technique is the Importance-Performance analysis (IPA) technique. IPA was developed by (7) as a tool to ease management decisions. The Importance-Performance technique allows simultaneous comparison of performance rating quality to the importance rating given by customers for the various quality items being measured. In IPA, customers perception and importance values are plotted on a grid that is divided into 4 quadrants, formed based on the mean scores of the importance perception ratings. The values are then assessed according to its position in the quadrant on the grid. Each quadrant suggests different response from a marketing strategy point of view. Attributes that are rated high in importance and high in performance score suggest that service providers keep up the ‘good’ work and increase resources directed towards these areas. In contrast, attributes having low importance rating and a low performance rating suggest that investing resources to these areas may offer only little advantage. Attributes that are rated high in importance and low in performance are areas that the providers should pay particular attention for improvement. Lastly, attributes rated low in importance and high in performance are areas providers should continue to maintain the level of effort. The beauty of IPA is that it can help a business understand what its customers feel is important to it across a number of relevant variables.

The IPA is a tool in line with the expectations-performance approach to the measure of quality perceptions and it is well documented in the marketing literature (8,9,10); it is commonly used to provide directions for making strategic marketing decisions. The IPA model has been used in varied service settings including hospitality (11) and tourism (12). (13) argued that Importance—performance analysis can be a very powerful tool for marketing tourist destinations.

VI. Review of Literature

(14) applied the IPA in analyzing the holiday importance and satisfaction among first time and repeat travelers in Penang. The components analyzed were natural resources, culture and heritage, entertainment, shopping, cuisine, transportation, accommodation and local community activities. The first time travelers and repeat travelers were found to have distinct demands and requirements. For first time travelers, accommodation, shopping and cuisine were of prime importance and for repeat visitors, natural resources, shopping, accommodation, cuisine, culture and heritage were important.

(15) employed the IPA to analyze tourist satisfaction in the whale shark tourism industry in Mexico. The IP analysis identified key issues with false advertising, lack of educational information, crowding and tour cost.

(16) used the IPA in Texas on spa goers and the results showed what each segment identified as escapists, neutralists and hedonists perceive as important and how well the hotel spas meet expectations. The results of the paper supported the effectiveness of the use of IPA with benefit segmentation.

(17) employed IPA in analyzing the competitiveness of sea side tourism destinations of Qingdao and Dalian. The results showed that there were significant differences between importance and performance for the influencing factors of the destination competitiveness.

(18) used the IPA technique in analyzing the destination attractiveness of Kerala as an International tourist destination. The attributes considered were beaches, wildlife, climate, ayurveda, cuisine, heritage sites, art and craft forms, hill stations, back waters, shopping, nightlife, adventure and fun, relaxing environment, accommodation standards and local culture. They found that climate, backwaters, cuisine, relaxing environment and local culture fell in the first quadrant representing high importance and high performance. Beach, arts, craft, heritage attractions were important but were low on performance.

(19) analyzed the levels of importance and satisfaction with regard to budget accommodation users in Scotland.

(20) employed IPA in analyzing Ireland’s image as a tourist destination. They examined the importance of certain destination attributes for French tourists and how they rate the importance of certain destination attributes and its performance post visit.

(21) developed an instrument called HOLSAT, which uses the expectations/performance analysis and was tested in Cuba. The variables analyzed were restaurants, bars, nightlife, shopping facilities, hotel meals, prices, heritage and culture, pollution and service quality.

The IPA framework has been widely used in tourism and hospitality studies (21,22,23,24,25). Specifically in tourism, IPA has been used to assess service-quality attributes of tour operators, accommodations, and experiences (26,27,28,25), destination image (29,30,31,20), and niche markets, such as wellness and culinary tourism (32). Researchers have used IPA framework for service quality research in travel and tourism (22,23). In these studies, IPA provided useful information to enhance tourism services, develop marketing strategies, and make managerial decisions.

The expectations out of each destination would vary between destinations and individuals. But some commonality has been observed, that people might want to enjoy natural beauty, good climate (33). While traveling to a country, a tourist would also look for richness of cultural heritage (33,34) and scope for exchange with local people (21). (35) considered sightseeing,(36) considered attractions and (37) considered recreation experiences. More sophisticated tourists would prefer to experience the life, atmosphere and culture (38), relate himself/herself close to nature, explore opportunities for excitement like trekking, forests and waterfalls or take a keen interest in a variety of landmarks like museums, galleries and leisure facilities (34). A tourist may be keen on sight seeing (33) or spend time in a resort enabling relaxed leisure time (37).

(39) analyzed the dimensions of service quality in tourism in India. They suggested that there was scope for doing an Importance performance Analysis on the importance attached by tourists to various items in a destination and the performance of each item at the destination.

Based on the above literature this paper, applies the Importance-Performance Analysis and seeks to develop implications for destination marketing by analyzing what is important from the tourist’s perspective and its perceived performance. The IPA is represented in terms of various tourist attractions and experience elements identified in the review of literature. Attributes like safety, access, transportation, information provisions were not included in this study, as the SERVQUAL is a better measure on these attributes.

VII. Research Methodology

The researcher used both primary and secondary sources of data collection. The secondary sources involved analyses of various brochures, interviews with experts from the tourism industry and a preliminary interview with tourists to know the important destination attraction and experience elements relevant to Kerala holiday experience. A structured questionnaire was used to...
solicit information from the domestic tourists who have visited Kerala. 200 responses were obtained and only 165 were used for analysis. Respondents selected were the domestic tourists who have taken a holiday in Kerala in the year 2012. Performance was measured using the same set of attributes so that importance and performance of the destination can be directly compared for each attraction via the IPA plot (or grid). The mean values of importance and performance scores are then used as the crossing point in constructing the IPA grid. Horizontal axis in the IPA grid indicates the tourists’ perception of the performance/experience with the destination attraction. The vertical axis indicates the importance for the same destination attributes. Tourists’ perception rating and the importance rating for the thirty two destination attributes and activities used as input for the IPA is presented in Table 1. The importance ratings were measured through a 7-point Likert scale (7=Extremely important to 1=Extremely unimportant). The performance/experience ratings were measured through a 7 point Likert scale (7=Excellent to 1=Very bad). Tourists’ impression with specific attractions like backwaters, hill stations, and ayurvedic rejuvenation experience, various accommodation options offered at the destination and other destination attributes unique to Kerala like boat race, art, heritage and handicrafts have been included for assessing the destination attractiveness. All Kerala specific tourist attractions and activities are included. This would enable tourism planners decide on how best to promote Kerala on the basis of destination attributes to the domestic tourist on which positioning can be based. One sample t test and paired sample t test was conducted to find if there is any significant difference in the mean importance and performance of destination attributes.

VIII. Analysis and Discussion

Table 1: Importance Performance Means

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Destination attributes</th>
<th>Mean Importance</th>
<th>Mean Performance</th>
<th>I-P Gap</th>
<th>Paired sample</th>
<th>Significant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beach</td>
<td>5.8121</td>
<td>4.2727</td>
<td>-1.53</td>
<td>0.174</td>
<td>0.862</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Backwaters</td>
<td>5.9273</td>
<td>6.1758</td>
<td>0.248</td>
<td>-1.367</td>
<td>0.175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ayurveda</td>
<td>5.1455</td>
<td>5.9697</td>
<td>0.824</td>
<td>-5.99</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mountains/hill stations</td>
<td>5.1394</td>
<td>4.9515</td>
<td>-0.187</td>
<td>1.507</td>
<td>0.135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spa</td>
<td>4.5455</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>0.654</td>
<td>-5.381</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yoga</td>
<td>2.8121</td>
<td>4.2061</td>
<td>1.39</td>
<td>-5.161</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adventure water sports</td>
<td>4.8182</td>
<td>3.0364</td>
<td>-1.78</td>
<td>2.734</td>
<td>0.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trekking and hiking</td>
<td>3.4182</td>
<td>3.1455</td>
<td>-0.27</td>
<td>-0.639</td>
<td>0.524</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical activities</td>
<td>3.4909</td>
<td>2.9576</td>
<td>-0.53</td>
<td>2.482</td>
<td>0.015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yachting and cruising</td>
<td>5.0303</td>
<td>2.8848</td>
<td>-2.14</td>
<td>0.315</td>
<td>0.754</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities for children</td>
<td>6.303</td>
<td>3.7394</td>
<td>-2.56</td>
<td>4.463</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploring nature</td>
<td>5.9818</td>
<td>5.7212</td>
<td>-0.26</td>
<td>3.946</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City walks</td>
<td>3.7455</td>
<td>4.2848</td>
<td>0.539</td>
<td>0.589</td>
<td>0.557</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temples</td>
<td>4.2121</td>
<td>6.0485</td>
<td>1.83</td>
<td>-4.487</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical sites</td>
<td>4.5818</td>
<td>3.5939</td>
<td>-0.98</td>
<td>3.488</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Road drives</td>
<td>5.6182</td>
<td>3.1939</td>
<td>-2.42</td>
<td>6.104</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn heritage and art</td>
<td>4.0242</td>
<td>3.1576</td>
<td>-0.86</td>
<td>1.399</td>
<td>0.165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn handicrafts</td>
<td>3.3818</td>
<td>3.103</td>
<td>-0.27</td>
<td>2.005</td>
<td>0.048</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boat race</td>
<td>3.8182</td>
<td>5.9576</td>
<td>2.13</td>
<td>-2.48</td>
<td>0.015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wildlife</td>
<td>5.8061</td>
<td>4.2061</td>
<td>-1.6</td>
<td>2.314</td>
<td>0.023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shopping</td>
<td>3.5455</td>
<td>4.4424</td>
<td>0.896</td>
<td>0.213</td>
<td>0.832</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nightlife</td>
<td>4.0545</td>
<td>2.7879</td>
<td>-1.26</td>
<td>4.285</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting locals</td>
<td>2.3879</td>
<td>2.8485</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>-2.155</td>
<td>0.034</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating in musical shows</td>
<td>3.097</td>
<td>2.6727</td>
<td>-0.424</td>
<td>0.438</td>
<td>0.663</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience local cuisine</td>
<td>5.4364</td>
<td>5.5152</td>
<td>0.078</td>
<td>2.967</td>
<td>0.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local festivals</td>
<td>4.5394</td>
<td>3.4424</td>
<td>-1.09</td>
<td>-0.128</td>
<td>0.899</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fishing</td>
<td>4.4485</td>
<td>2.8303</td>
<td>-1.61</td>
<td>2.131</td>
<td>0.036</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Museums and galleries</td>
<td>5.1455</td>
<td>3.0545</td>
<td>-2.09</td>
<td>1.712</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local recipie</td>
<td>2.9152</td>
<td>2.9636</td>
<td>0.048</td>
<td>-0.124</td>
<td>0.901</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience rural India</td>
<td>3.697</td>
<td>5.7273</td>
<td>2.03</td>
<td>0.059</td>
<td>0.953</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relaxing environment</td>
<td>5.8545</td>
<td>6.3091</td>
<td>0.454</td>
<td>0.095</td>
<td>0.924</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Various accommodation options</td>
<td>5.2121</td>
<td>5.897</td>
<td>0.677</td>
<td>1.096</td>
<td>0.276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Mean</td>
<td>4.498</td>
<td>4.196</td>
<td>-0.32</td>
<td>2.031</td>
<td>0.015</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The grand means for importance rating was 4.498 and 4.196 for performance rating. This determines the placement of axes on the grid. Each destination attribute is then placed in the quadrant based on the mean scores for impression and performance ratings. The performance ratings are plotted on the X axis and the importance ratings are plotted on the Y axis.

Table 2: Table Showing One Sample t Test for Mean Importance of Destination Attributes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>One-Sample Statistics</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mean</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>4.4983</td>
<td>1.06777</td>
<td>.18876</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One-Sample Test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test Value = 0</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23.831</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>4.49830</td>
<td>4.1133</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table shows that there is a significant difference in the mean importance of destination attributes as perceived by domestic tourists to Kerala.
The above table shows that there is a significant difference in the mean performance of destination attributes as perceived by domestic tourists to Kerala.

The IPA matrix reveals that beaches, wildlife, exploring nature, backwaters, Ayurveda, relaxing environment, local cuisine, mountains and hills, spa, temples and various accommodation options available in Kerala falls in the quadrant 1 which represents high importance and high performance. These are the destination attributes which could be could be viewed as the strength of the destination appeal for the Indian domestic tourist market in Kerala. These are the areas where destination marketing activities should focus on. An important observation is that beaches and wildlife have high importance and even though they fall in quadrant 1, they are relatively lower in performance as compared to backwaters or accommodation standards. Since these two attributes have been rated high on importance, destination planners could focus attention on improving them. Local cuisine has been rated as important and furthermore, its significance suggests that this attraction can be further highlighted in the destination promotion activities. Similarly, the rating of backwaters, cuisine, relaxing environment and accommodation options as highest on importance as well as performance, these attributes could be used effectively in destination positioning.

Destination attraction elements falling in quadrant 2 representing high importance and low impression, are nightlife, fishing, yachting and cruising, museums and galleries, adventure water sports, historical sites, learning and discovering heritage and art forms, local festivals, road drives and activities for children. These are the areas where destination development and marketing efforts need more attention to turn them into areas of perceived strengths for the destination. Of particular importance is the perceived lack of activities for children. Though somewhat less in significance, other attractions like art forms and heritage sites, fishing, nightlife and festivals needs further improvement in their development and therefore should form an important part of destination development activities for Kerala to attract specific segments of domestic tourists.

Quadrant 3 which depicts low importance and low impression are opportunities for physical activities, trekking and hiking, learning and discovering handicrafts, musical shows and live theatres, meeting locals and learning a local recipe. These destination attraction attributes having low importance rating and a low performance rating suggest that investing resources to these areas may offer only little advantage. Though these elements seem to be unimportant at present, particular segments of tourists with specific needs for trekking or musical shows could be targeted with specific tour packages. Further segmentation studies needs to be done to explore the scope for attracting particular segments of tourists who prefer these activities. But overall, these destination attributes appear less significant for enhancing the destination appeal for domestic tourists compared to other attractions in quadrant 1 and quadrant 2 as of now.

Lastly, Quadrant 4 which represents low importance, high impression are city walks, shopping, boat race, yoga and experiencing rural India. These destination attraction elements are perceived to be good but is not an important destination attraction element. Attributes rated low in importance and high in performance are areas providers should continue to maintain the same level of effort. Since the performance of these destination attraction elements is good, the destination planners should try and generate curiosity and interest in these kinds of holidays through its promotion. Proper positioning of yoga and rural holidays, for example may help in developing niche tourism products in future.

**IX. Conclusion**

This study has significant implications both for tourism planners and for academics. The study reveals what the Indian domestic traveler perceives as important in a holiday in Kerala. It reveals how the important attributes have been perceived in terms of performance. It clearly indicates the areas of intervention from tourism planner’s perspective. Beaches, wildlife, exploring nature, backwaters, Ayurveda, relaxing environment, local cuisine, mountains and hills, spa, temples and various accommodation options available in Kerala are clearly the unique attractions for tourists and should be positioned on those lines. Kerala tourism planners should improve destination elements which are important but have not met the expectations like nightlife, fishing, yachting and cruising, museums and galleries, adventure water sports, historical sites, learning and discovering heritage and art forms, local festivals, road drives and activities for children. As (1) asserted that it is important to measure consumer satisfaction applying as many destination attributes as possible and that dissatisfaction with one of the attributes leads to dissatisfaction of the whole tourism destination. Though yoga, rural experience and boat race has been rated as unimportant by domestic Indian tourists, these destination attraction elements are also unique to Kerala and holds great potential. Rural tourism studies and health tourism studies would be required to be carried out to understand how to promote and position these unique destination attractions also. There could be a market segment waiting somewhere for every type of product: real success lies in identifying it (40). One of the items in the Vision 2025 Document, Kerala, is to innovate and promote at least one new tourism product/ destination every
year. In this context it is interesting to note that promoting the ‘Kerala brand’ in the travel map, the state has been experimenting with new avenues of tourism by opening up avenues for rural as well as responsible tourism in 2008. under the Indigenous Development Programme of the Government of India and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Kerala opened up two villages—Aranmula in Pattanamthitta district and Kumbalangi in Ernakulam district to promote rural tourism. The tourists have an opportunity to live with the fishermen community in Kumbalangi. Tourists can live in their huts, go for fishing with them in the deep sea and have a first-hand experience of their ways of living. Aranmula is famous for its ‘metal mirror’ and boat race. There are also institutions like the Vaastu Vidya Gurukulam, which gives training in vaastu shastra and a school for Mohiniattam dancer. Further, the tourists can learn handicrafts, local cuisines, rural games and mingle with the villagers, enjoy and experiment the local cuisine at the home-stay facilities. Aranmula and Kumbalangi are just a part of the 26 destinations across the country, identified by the programme for rural tourism. The IPA analysis can be combined with studies on tourism motives for effectively segmenting tourism markets.

X. Limitations

The study focuses on the destination attributes in terms of activities and destination attractiveness elements. It has not considered other important elements like safety, information, access, hygiene, connectivity etc. The study has solely focused on domestic tourists in India. Considering the fact that Kerala is a major International tourist destination, tourism planners should not ignore the IPA ratings from International tourist’s perspective too.

XI. Scope for Further Research

Domestic tourist market to Kerala can be segmented on various relevant segmentation variables, and destination attractiveness assessment for specific tourist segments may reveal more information regarding destination attractiveness for Kerala. Therefore, future research should focus on these areas. Future research can also be under taken, exclusively focusing on various destination quality elements such as safety, hygiene, access, tourist information etc to identify destination service quality gaps. As the next step, destination attractiveness assessment should be also done for International tourists visiting Kerala as well. Most importantly, this helps in identifying areas of overlap: these are areas where Kerala can gain more customers with more spending.

References


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