

# THE GODLINESS OF SIMPLICITY

## Small funds can work if the focus is big

### THE BEEF

THERE'S A DELIGHTFUL LITTLE STRIP OF land at the southwestern tip of India that, for all practical purposes is a world of its own. Kerala, better known today as God's Own Country, has the highest social development indices in India – 100 percent literacy, lowest infant mortality, highest life expectancy, lowest pollution levels, and the highest physical quality of life index. All these have made Kerala an often-quoted example for development in the global context.

But today, Kerala is better known the world over as the hottest tourist destination in India. In the last five years, foreign tourist arrivals have increased 100 percent and domestic arrivals by 300 percent. This translates to almost a million foreign tourists and five million domestic tourists a year. And especially after the National Geographic Traveller picked Kerala as one of the ten paradises of the world, and one among the fifty destinations of a life time, the numbers have been increasing steadily.

But what's so special about Kerala? She's not footloose and fancy-free like Goa. Nor is she clothed in regal splendour like Rajasthan. Her lovesick emperors chose to compose songs rather than build marble monuments. Yet today, no destination in India commands as much attention as she does. Her dazzling natural beauty and her simple delights have conquered the global tourist who is increasingly shying away from loud, artificial destinations. As the Financial Times, London, said in its January 2001 weekend cover story on Kerala, "It's a green Venice, but unlike Venice, where man has created most of the glory, in



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Kerala nature rules." Kerala is a treasure trove of backwaters, hill stations, beaches, rejuvenating ayurvedic regimens... all set amidst unbelievable greenery. Backwater houseboat holidays, monsoon ayurvedic rejuvenation packages and ethnic holidays that showcase exotic art forms like Kathakali and Theyyam are the key attractions.

Kerala's slow and steady climb to the top has been propelled by a formula that stands out for its simplicity. Focused, long term planning based on carrying capacity studies – and the determination to put the plan into practice. The plan called for a clear focus on upmarket tourists in specific domestic and international markets. It was a move that called for sacrificing quantity for quality in order to spare the destination from the ravages of mass tourism. It also involved a concerted effort to sustain public-private partnership at all levels of operation. Focused, target-based promotion in key emerging markets in India and abroad. Inspiring promotion techniques backed by innovative media presence. And a never-ending cycle of trade fairs, road shows, one-to-one meets, presentations, familiarisation tours, press and television campaigns, web-based promotion and contests.

All these have helped build a powerful brand. In less than a decade, Kerala has established itself in a major way. Ample proof that a simple marketing strategy shorn of all jargon and high flaunting mumbo jumbo, pursued with determined, unwavering dedication can produce results like nothing else can.

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