

Tourists' Perceptions on Spice Markets: A Guideline to Introduce Spice Market Concept into Sri Lankan Context

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Spice tourism has evolved as a culture rooted and a customer-centric segment of global tourism. Our approach mainly focused to investigate the use of marketing mix elements of the Cochin, Turkey, and Dubai spice markets, to select suited location/s to establish spice market/s in the Sri Lankan context, and to develop guidelines and strategies to thrive the spice market concept within the country's economic, social and environmental framework. Traveller experiences field observations, focus group discussion with local experts were principal data sources. Locations of main tourist attractions within the spice growing areas were considered for spice market positioning. Both qualitative and quantitative techniques were instrumental in data analysis. Traveller review typology identified 85%, 76%, and 75% pro-level reviews respectively for the Turkey, Dubai, and Cochin spice markets. Product strategy varied from raw spices, organic spices, fair trade spices to high end value additions like nutraceuticals. Cochin and Turkey spice markets recognized as reliable sources of high-quality spices with the consensus of 80% and 66.7% of the reviewers. Women cooperatives, Arabian, Egyptian, Indian, Iranian, and Syrian marketing channels were the focal sources of spices. Price skimming, premium pricing to cost plus pricing were common to all market places considered for the study. Pricing strategies of Dubai (94%) and Turkey (74%) markets were less attractive to many travellers. Spice markets were established within the central location of the main tourist hub open up doors for many visitors and considered as a key attraction of the site. Promotional strategies varied from onsite special promotions, public relations, online tools, advertising to branding. Visitor experiences on services offerings were negative. Ethical, customer friendly, caring and trustworthy services were main customer demands. Bentota, Hikkaduwa and Kandy, famous tourist destinations of the country would be promising locations to establish spice markets considering the fact that availability of raw material, centres of spice growing areas that are surrounded by other attractions to make perfect visitor experience.

Keywords: *Marketing mix, Strategies, Spice market*