Chapter 6
Summary of Findings, Discussion and Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

The study was carried out with the broad objective to understand the international tourists visiting Kerala, in terms of benefits sought, destination quality perception and the nature of their holiday satisfaction developed with various destination perception factors. Apart from contributing to the knowledge of tourism marketing pertaining to an emerging destination in a third world country like India, the study also aimed at providing the relevant information about tourists, which can be an useful input to the destination marketing efforts in the State. Understanding tourists, their perception of destination, are all considered essential inputs in the destination marketing efforts, which also forms the focus of the study. This chapter gives summary of findings and the related implications for destination marketing and development, based on the different analyses carried out under specific objectives of the study.

One of the main objectives of the study was to assess the quality perception of international tourists coming to Kerala. As part of understanding tourists’ perception, this study also attempted to identify the image of the destination in terms of a few quality dimensions and the extent to which these dimensions contribute to their satisfaction with the holiday in Kerala. For understanding the difference in level of tourists’ perception, the study also tried to compare overall trip satisfaction and impression with destination for different tourists groups categorised into country of origin and various socio-demographic groups.
Understanding international tourists’ requirements from the destination experience, in terms of benefits and activities sought by the tourists, was also attempted in this study. This information was used for segmenting the international tourists, which is an important input to the destination marketing efforts. The study also assessed the destination attractiveness, and for this purpose, used importance – performance analysis (IPA). For this study, IPA is used as a descriptive tool to understand the destination attractiveness, so that the outcome of the analysis would reveal the strengths and weakness of the destination on which destination promotion and positioning activities can be based.

Finally, related to understanding the international tourists market better, the study also tried to describe various tourist segments, who are staying more, taking repeat visits and spending more in Kerala.

6.2 Destination Quality Perception

The assessment of tourists overall quality perception ratings, which is related to the first objective of this study, showed that tourists are generally likely to be satisfied, impressed with the destination and intend to recommend it to others. This was revealed by the mean score for overall trip satisfaction level (4.21 in scale of 1-5), recommendation levels (4.32 in a scale of 1-5) and destination rating (72.38 out of 100 points), which were found to be above average. These outcome measures of the holiday experience indicated that overall quality perception for the destination is positive and this can be considered as strengths of the destination. And these strengths can give destination a firm ground to further improve destination promotional efforts in many of the target markets. This also supports the
view that Kerala has the potential to maintain its current position as one of the leading holiday destination in India.

The study also focused on understanding the quality perception of international tourists visiting Kerala. For this purpose, the quality of destination, which is a complex product, is analysed using a set of attributes generated through a step-by-step procedure. A qualitative study was used to generate the relevant attributes, which was followed by an extensive quantitative phase of study, using a survey method. This was for improving the validity of the study. The reliability of the scale items was also verified as part of improving the accuracy of the findings and its interpretations.

Quality attributes generated through the qualitative phase of the study included both controllable and non-controllable items. Destination studies that use only controllable items do so with the purpose of correcting and diagnosing problems for the core destination management activities. But for this study, non-controllable items (culture, environment, climate etc) were included with the aim to provide a better quality assessment of the destination based on tourists' perspective, which is considered as a useful input for destination marketing programmes.

Apart from the descriptive analysis on the quality attributes, a detailed response wise analysis was carried out to reveal the response pattern in terms of similarities and differences between attributes. Average rating for the selected 24 destination attributes showed different ratings. All attributes have rating of 2 or above in a scale of 4. Considering the positive bias in rating of this type, following are the attributes considered with above average rating score: Safety (3.157), local people (3.4948), climate (3.3844),
natural attractions (3.2564), cultural attractions (3.1745), rest and relax environments (3.1342).

The following attributes were with average rating: Accommodation (2.7342), airport services (2.6231), restaurants (2.8760), staff (2.9574), tour operator (2.5986), tour guide (2.6085), beaches (2.8474). And the following attributes were categorised as with below average rating: Tourist information (2.4532), hygiene (2.0902), fun (2.4374), nightlife (2.0672), shopping (2.4675), basic amenities (2.3154), sightseeing (2.7486), historical (2.3478), communication (2.4382), accessibility (2.4652) and local transportation (2.4516).

Many inherent attractions in the destination received a high proportion of ‘excellent’ rating at an aggregate level. Despite a less overall quality perception gap, the detailed analysis revealed significant gap in quality perception for many of the destination quality elements. Variations in quality perceptions indicated the possible areas were quality improvement efforts need to be targeted. And for those attributes, which are less controllable and have received positive ratings, are aspects to be stressed in the destination promotion activities. Many of the destination facilities elements like accommodations, restaurants, airport, and tourist information services received an average rating with majority of respondents rating these elements as either ‘OK’ or ‘good’. Accommodations and restaurants, for example, have a significant proportion of respondents giving ‘OK’ rating. This showed the need for further destination wide quality improvement in these areas for achieving better quality experience for the tourists. Other travel related infrastructure provisions, such as airport services, tourism information services and local transportations were also perceived overall with average ratings. But a detailed response analysis revealed a further gap
in quality perception for these destination elements, with majority giving an 'OK' and 'good ratings'. With a high level of experience qualities in many of these elements, it is reasonable to expect much higher quality perception for these elements. And the impact of this variation in quality perception, despite an overall high level of perception for the destination, was also revealed in the regression analysis. Majority of these elements are controllable items, and therefore, highlight the areas where corrective actions should be taken to improve quality.

Compared to the destination-facilities attributes, some of the process quality elements like people and the staff attitude received a higher share of rating in 'good' and 'excellent' response categories. The high quality perceptions of these elements exemplify the manner in which tourists are received in the destination and served both by the locals and the staff. These are, as this study points out, the core service quality elements and therefore the strengths of the destination on which destination can effectively differentiate from other destinations.

The major gap in the quality perception was observed for the hygiene parameter, and this is one area destination needs to improve a lot. In comparison with other dimensions, this dimension was perceived most adversely by majority of the respondents. Particularly, a predominant share of respondents giving a very low rating for the hygiene at the destination environment reveals the gap. And as this forms the part of the destination environment dimension, which also has got a high impact in the degree of satisfaction, concerted efforts should be initiated to improve hygiene as far as possible, starting initially with the places attractions and then extending to other areas. Other destination environment dimension like safety and places
to rest and relax, with high levels of quality perception can be further used to highlight the particular quality of destination in the promotional activities.

Difference in the perception between people aspect of the total service (staff and local people) and the service level offered by the core trip service elements indicated that functional element of service quality exceeded technical quality of the services. Improvement of tourism service quality in the level of services provided by the tour operators and guides therefore needs to be encouraged further. At the same time, the functional element of the service quality - the way services are delivered - needs to be maintained.

In the areas of attractions, the destination is somewhat perceived lower for cultural and historical attraction as compared to natural attractions. The availability and range of historical and cultural attractions needs further investment and innovation for enhancing the existing products and developing entirely new products from these attractions. Some of the peripheral attractions like nightlife, shopping and activities of fun and excitement received comparably low rating and should therefore be improved; at the same time, the improvement in these areas also needs to be compatible with the ethos and the culture of the land.

6.3 Destination Quality dimensions

Apart from analysing the quality attributes separately, the study also explored the quality dimensions based on which tourists may have some image towards the destination. This analysis was aimed at addressing the second objective of this study. The findings indicated that some of the quality dimensions were not formed fully, and this possibly is due to a gap in the representation of factors for the quality dimension of the destination.
Still, the factors offered an insight into the pattern of assessment tourists are likely to develop as part of their destination image formation.

To derive a set of factors representing quality dimension for the destination Kerala, an exploratory factor analysis was performed on destination attributes. The generated quality dimensions which were used to investigate tourists' perception of destination in terms of broad factors, were also compared with the destination quality dimensions put forward in the Smith (1994) model of a destination. Generation of broad factors provided useful insights for representing quality of the destination at the aggregate level.

Seven destination perception factors were derived through a principal component analysis method. They are: Factor #1 (destination facilities), Factor #2 (destination- attractions), Factor #3 (relax & beach environment), Factor #4 (destination activities), Factor #5 (destination support infrastructure), Factor #6 (trip service) and Factor #7 (people). The mean factor scores showed that the most satisfactory perception factor items were tourist attractions (3.05), relax/beach environment (3.061), and people dimension (3.01). The less rated perception factors were destination activities (2.52), destination support infrastructure (2.58) and travel service dimension (2.52).

The quality dimensions delineated with the factor analysis reflects the quality dimension based on which tourists can have an overall image of the destination based on their trip experience. Quality of data for factor analysis was found to be moderate, and this is, perhaps, due to inability of including certain quality elements with a sufficient level of detail. The best-formed factor was destination facilities, which encompass five items, viz,
accommodation, tourist information, airport facilities, connectivity/reach, and restaurants. These items can be considered to reflect the quality of the core supply services on which tourists depend to make the trip pleasurable. The formation of this dimension posits quality perceptual criteria tourists can have towards a destination, which can also contribute to an overall image of the destination.

The second dimension interpreted as the core of destination attractions, revealed for the destination, a high level of perception of tourists; this dimension can indicate the strength of the destination with the high factor scores. The third quality dimension, which is closely related to attraction dimension, was also favorably perceived by tourists with a high rating; this also can be counted as strength of the destination. This dimension encompasses items regarding climate, beach, and rest and relaxes environments, and can be a thought of as a less directly perceived dimension of the destination. A positive image of the destination is likely to be represented by these quality dimensions.

Some of the quality dimensions revealed were identified as more controllable than others. For example, the best formed factor, the destination facilities dimension, mainly represented by supply sectors of the tourism like accommodation, restaurants and local transportation when compared to other dimensions like quality of attractions, were found to be rated lower as showed by their factor scores. The conceptualisation of quality as represented by the distinct factors may be valid at a particular level of abstraction and could indicate the broad area relating to the destination image perceived. The difference in the perception level of these dimensions therefore, indicate the destination image areas where the destination is strong at. For example, core attractions dimension with a high score can be
an area of favorable image for the destination, whereas, the destination services dimension, with a lower score, needs further improvement to become a favorable destination image component. This points to the need for improving technical service quality of some of the trip service elements like tour operator and tour guide service, which were found to be perceived lower compared to the people element of service provided in the destination.

6.4 Satisfaction Factors

A multiple regression model was developed for assessing the impact of the destination perception factors significant in explaining the varying levels of satisfaction among tourists. This analysis is linked to the third objective of the study. Among the factors, Factor 1 (core attractions) and Factor 3 (beach & relax environments) were found to have major influence on satisfaction, followed by factor 5 (destination infrastructure) and factor 1 (destination facilities). factor 7 (people), factor 6 (trip service) and factor 4 (destination activities) have relatively lesser influence on the holiday satisfaction.

The Quality dimension found to have the highest impact in predicting holiday satisfaction is destination attractions; and the next dimension, in the order of impact, is quality of beach and relax environments promoting restful mood, and points to the importance to this subtle quality of destination. And in retrospective, this aspect most closely resembles the 'gods own country 'theme, promoted as destination images in the media.

The critical role of the core attractions and the related destination relax environments indicated the potential to highlight these attributes for further achieving a favorable position in tourists mind. The analysis also
suggests the critical role played by destination support infrastructure in influencing the degree of satisfaction in tourists. The other indicators for satisfaction are destination support infrastructure and destination facilities, in that order.

The differential impact of various quality dimensions indicates their importance in creating a favorable impact in the tourists. The presence of beach/environment dimension after the destination attractiveness dimension shows the importance of managing these dimensions in the tourism development activities. This highlights the potential for the subtle quality of environments—which is formed with the combination of climate, beach, and rest and relax environments—to be reinforced further in the destination promotion activities.

6.5 Sub-Group Comparison of Tourists Perceptions

Exploring the sources of difference in tourists' perception of destination is related to the seventh objective of this study. Difference in the overall perception towards the holiday and destination were noted for tourists when they are grouped based on demographic, trip and country related variables. This indicated the possibilities of certain socio-demographic, country and trip related variables having an affect on the tourist satisfaction, destination impression and the intention to recommend the destination. Among the socio-demographics variables, the influence of gender, age and education levels on certain trip outcome measures indicates the profile of the tourists for which the destination appeals most. These findings are not conclusive; rather, they are indicative and list the possible sources of difference, which influence the tourists' perception towards the destination. The idea that destination experience can be culturally induced
was also explored, which revealed country wise differences on the tourists perception and satisfaction scores. The influence of trip related variables on the overall trip outcome measures also suggests the travel profile of the tourists to Kerala who is most likely to have higher quality perception towards the destination. The summaries of these findings are:

1) Male tourists were more satisfied and impressed with their holiday experience in Kerala than female tourists.

2) Tourists belonging to high age category (a median split equal to or more than 45) are more likely to have higher impression, satisfaction and intention to recommend for Kerala, than those in lower age category (i.e. less than 45).

3) Significant difference is seen in satisfaction rating between tourists belonging to different educational levels. Tourists with higher educational levels expressed significantly higher overall satisfaction rating than tourist with lower education level.

4) Analysis of trip outcome measures for tourists from the selected major countries shows significant differences, indicating that tourists might be more or less satisfied depending on the countries from which they originate. Tourists from UK are more likely to be satisfied with the trip, impressed by the destination and goes with higher recommendation level compared to tourists from the US and Germany. Another difference is that tourists from US give higher rating for the destination than tourists from Germany and France.
5) Significant difference between first time and repeat tourists was seen for all the three trip outcome measures. Repeat tourists are more likely to be satisfied, impressed and recommend Kerala than first time tourists.

6) Significant subgroup difference for duration of trip in Kerala were seen with tourists staying for duration 7-12 nights in Kerala having higher levels of satisfaction than those staying for 1-6 nights. But the reverse is seen for the impression with the destination, where those staying for 1-6 nights and 13-17 nights are more impressed than 7-12 night's category.

7) Tourists who come without a conducted tour (i.e. FIT) are more likely to recommend the destination than tourists in a conducted tour (GIT). Whereas there is no significant difference in their satisfaction levels and rating compared tourist of GIT type.

8) Tourists belonging to different budget groups also show significant level of difference in the trip outcome measures. Tourists in medium spending level rate the destination high and have higher satisfaction level than the high spending group.

These differences in satisfaction and destination perception levels may reveal the possible match of the destination with tourists of certain profile. As exploratory stage of analysis, these findings revealed the possible sources of variation in tourists' perception towards the destination, and as such, needs further studies to confirm the influence of socio-demographic and trip related variables on the tourists' image and perceived quality levels at the destination. Research hypothesis stating the influence of demographic and
country variables on the tourists destination perception can be put forth which can be tested in more controlled research studies in the future. For some subgroup comparisons, significant differences were not seen for all the three trip outcome measures, and this to some extent, may reduce the ability of that particular grouping variable to influence the perception. Implications of difference noted relates to the different levels of expectations tourists belonging to each group can be imputed to. Again, hypothesis reflecting the relationship between trip related variables like trip spending levels, duration of stay and type of trip type selected on the psychographic profile of the tourists can be explored in further studies. This may help in explaining the difference in expectation tourists has towards the holiday experience in Kerala and the consequent image variation held by different groups of tourists. This observed variation might also point to the possibility of different image perceptions tourists can have based on their actual visit experience.

Another implication of these differences is that Kerala as a tourism destination, with its inherent attractions and qualities, tends to match more with certain groups of tourists, who can be defined based on their demographic, country and other trip related variables. This has implications for the destination planners and marketers to understand the nature of expectation of tourists belonging to different groups and develop packages to match tourists' expectations with their actual experience.

Identifying the differences in perception between groups also has implications for destination marketing efforts. Tourists segments which are attractive for the destination, like high spending group, tourists in a particular age, income and education category, or coming from a particular country, if gives low ratings for the destination and holiday satisfaction are
areas of concerns for the destination development and marketing efforts. It could be a strategy for the destination like Kerala to appeal to wider segments of tourists to increase the share of international tourists. In such case, for a complex heterogeneous product like destination with a potential to attract various tourists segments, relative difference in satisfaction and impression ratings points to the need for enhancement of quality perception of different segments of tourists.

Country wise variation in tourists’ perception tends to reinforce the link between the country of origin and the image towards the destination. For example, higher level of satisfaction and destination perception levels of tourists from UK as compared to other selected countries, points to the role of culture of a particular country as an intervening variable in the destinations image formation. And this may to some extent, explain a larger share of international tourists from UK to Kerala as compared to Germany and France. The higher level of destination perception of tourists from US also has implications for a higher potential of that market to generate tourists for Kerala.

The other major segments explored for variation in destination perception level includes, repeat tourists, tourists staying longer, tourists availing a particular travel arrangement, and the level of spending in the destination. The findings on the presence of repeat tourists with higher levels of satisfaction and perception with the destination indicate the strength of the destination in developing a loyalty in them. This group along with other relevant segments is profiled to discern certain pattern of association between them.
The gap observed in the quality perception between high spending and medium spending groups revealed the possible weakness to be examined as part of destination development and quality improvement efforts. Variation observed between tourists coming with different trip type relates to the possible difference in their expectation levels, which also needs to be examined to reduce that gap. Examining the duration of trip to explain partially the variation on tourists' perception also reveals a possible gap, which highlights a lack of relationship between length of trip and satisfaction levels. This has implication for destination management efforts in enhancing the quality perception of tourists spending more time in the duration.

The study also examined the pattern of relationship between demographic, country and trip related variables which is related to the seventh objective of this study. For example, the relationship between the tourists' country of origin and the trip related variables were explored in this section. The main findings of the cross tabulations carried out to reveal the pattern of association between the aforementioned variables are:

1) Significant differences were observed among tourists from selected major generating countries namely: UK, US, Germany and France for various travel and demographic variables. Tourists from US, Germany and France are relatively more represented in the high budget category than the tourists from UK. Whereas tourists from UK and France compared to Germany and US are relatively more in low budget category. In terms of repeat visits, tourists from UK and Germany have higher percentage in repeat visit group, compared to tourists from US and France, though, all these countries have a high share in first time visits.
2) Another pattern of relationship was observed for travel type; Tourists from US and France are more likely to be seen in FIT group than tourists from UK and Germany. Country-wise difference was seen for duration of stay also, with tourists from US seen more in short duration category than tourists from UK.

3) Another significant association was seen between travel type and duration of stay. Those staying longer in Kerala are more likely to come as FIT type than as GIT type, and those spending more also are more likely to come in as FIT type than GIT type.

4) The study also noted that tourists who make repeat visits are more likely to be staying for longer duration in Kerala, and more in high age category (age greater than 45) than those coming for the first time. But repeat tourists are seen relatively more in medium and low spending category than first time tourists which has a higher share in high budget category.

These findings indicated country-wise variation in terms of trip spending levels, repeat visit pattern and choice of travel arrangements. Relatively high share of repeat tourists or high spending tourists from a particular country highlight the different nature of each generating markets and has implication for adapting marketing strategies targeted at different generating markets. At the same time, further exploration of some favorable markets like UK, and US, may reveal the underlying factors manifesting relationships between variables. In addition to that, some association between the travel type and the budget for the trip points to ways of focusing marketing efforts on high spending tourists.
6.6 Benefits/Activities Segmentation of Tourists

For segmenting the international tourists market which forms the fifth objective of this study, the cluster analysis was carried out. The study revealed the presence of distinct segments seeking unique combination of benefits and activities from the destination. The five clusters identified were named as: relaxation with luxury seekers, rejuvenation with luxury seekers, want it alls, culture with value seekers, relaxation with Value seekers. The segments were differentiated on the basis of their degree of preference for certain combination of push and pull factors related to the holiday elements.

In their holiday, tourists tend to experience a range of attractions as part of the package; at the same time, certain attractions and experiences dominate their itinerary. As far as destination is concerned, the presence of such varied groups indicates the ability of destination to cater to a wide range of segments. The distinction was also noted between the groups for some of the demographic and trip related variables. Between some clusters, for age and education variable, significant difference was observed. These differences indicate the potential to identify those clusters in the target markets. Some of the differences noted for trip related variables like pattern of travel and staying arrangements also suggests the need for promoting different travel options to these segments. These findings, by providing different pattern of benefits and activity preferences for different segments along with the related demographic and trip related variables could be, therefore, useful to destination marketers in their planning of marketing strategies for the destination.

The first cluster with 72 cases are represented by tourists who give relatively high importance to beaches, climate, resorts and are less cost
conscious. This can be interpreted as a group giving very less importance to cost and more importance to rest and relax, and enjoying nature in idyllic resorts. The next cluster with 45 cases is a small cluster, which has almost same requirements like the first cluster, but gives more importance to ayurveda rejuvenation than other clusters.

The third cluster is a big cluster with 122 cases. What differentiates this cluster from other clusters is the medium to high importance given for most of the activity and benefit items. This group seeks a wide range of attractions and activities from Kerala. But compared to cluster 1 and 2, they are more cost conscious. Cluster 4 is with 68 cases. Though this cluster gives importance to beaches and climate like other clusters, this group gives relatively high importance to knowing local culture, art forms and historical attractions compared to other clusters, and this cluster gives less importance to resort quality, nightlife and activities of fun and entertainment. Cluster 5 is another group with 56 cases; this cluster gives same importance to natural attractions and rest and relax like cluster 1 and cluster 2, but gives very high importance to nightlife and activities of fun and entertainment than any other clusters. This cluster, like cluster 4, gives less importance to resort quality and more importance to knowing local culture. But this cluster is relatively more cost conscious than other clusters.

These distinct groups also were profiled with demographic and trip related variables. Only where, significant difference (p<.05) between clusters for different demographic and trip characteristics seen is taken to profile clusters.

1) There are more males in cluster 1 and cluster 5. For other clusters the proportion is almost same. In terms of age, cluster 5 is represented
relatively more with tourists in less than 24 and 25-34 age category. Cluster 3 has relatively more people in middle age group (35-44 and 45-54 category). Whereas, cluster 1 and cluster 2, compared to other clusters, are high in 55-64 age category, and well represented in age category 35-44 and 45-54. In contrast, cluster 4 has relatively more tourists in 25-34 and 35-44 age category.

2) On the education variable, all clusters have high proportion of tourists in postgraduate categories. Cluster 1 and cluster 2 have relatively high percent in postgraduate category compared to other clusters. Whereas cluster 3 relative to other cluster groups, has more tourists in high school category. Significant difference were observed among the clusters in terms of tendency to revisit also, with cluster 1 and cluster 2, compared to other clusters, having relatively higher share of repeat tourists.

3) Significant differences were also seen between the clusters for the trip type selected, with cluster 1 and cluster 2, having relatively high share of FIT compared to cluster 3 and cluster 4. The difference is less between FIT and GIT for cluster 3 and cluster 4. As far as trip-spending levels are concerned, cluster 1 is having higher percent of high spending tourists, whereas cluster 3 and cluster 4 have more of medium spending tourists. Cluster 5 has more of low spending tourists compared to other clusters.

The results of the study, thus, imply that there are different benefit and activity segments among the international tourist market to Kerala. Learning about the nature of these segments may offer useful insights for travel marketing strategies. Instead of viewing one undifferentiated market,
planners can market destination to a number of smaller homogeneous groups. This could help decision makers plan unique positional messages to appeal to each group. For example, promoting more of the varied resort and restaurant facilities would be more effective for the cluster 1. However, when marketing to cluster 5, it will be more appropriate for the package and promotional strategies to focus on the adventure, fun and entertainment orientation of the trip.

6.7 Destination Attractiveness

Importance-performance analysis is carried out to link tourists' quality perception and their requirements in an understandable way so as to provide some insights on the destination attractiveness as perceived by the tourists. This is related to the eighth objective of this study, which was aimed at assessing destination attractiveness from the demand side. Tourists' impression on the 16 destination attractions are compared with it's rating on an importance-performance matrix to assess the destination attractiveness.

More than as a diagnostic tool to support some of the ongoing destination development activities, the observations from this analysis were used for destination assessment. In other words, the strengths and the weakness identified with this method is aimed to support the existing destination promotion and positioning activities. Following are the impression rating for attractions and its importance rating in a scale of 1 to 4 and 1 to 5: beaches (2.83, 4.11), wildlife (2.57, 3.47), climate (3.38, 4.34), ayurveda (3.09, 3.00), cuisine (3.20, 4.04), heritage sites (2.34, 3.66), art/craft forms (2.86, 3.79), hill stations (3.10, 3.02), backwaters (3.47, 3.8), shopping (2.46, 3.14), nightlife (2.06, 2.21), fun/excitement activities (2.43, 2.72), rest
and relax environments (3.13, 4.5), accommodation / resort std (2.73, 3.4), local culture (2.95, 4.40).

The average level of rating with various attractions of Kerala and the average importance of the attractions for tourists were calculated for the whole sample. As part of assessing destination attractiveness matrix, these mean scores were plotted in an importance-performance rating matrix. The grand means for impression rating ($x = 2.95$) and importance ($x = 3.5$) determines the placements of axes on the grid; each attraction is then assessed by locating in the appropriate quadrant. Attractions placed in the top right quadrant are rated very important with the level of rating above average; attractions in the top left quadrant are rated very important, with impression rating below average; attractions in the bottom left quadrant are considered less important and impression rating below average; attractions in the bottom right quadrant are rated above average on impression and below average on importance.

With impression rating below average; attractions in the bottom left quadrant are considered less important and impression rating below average; attractions in the bottom right quadrant are rated above average on impression and below average on importance.

The analysis indicated the importance of certain destination attraction elements like climate, backwaters, cuisine, rest and relax environments, and local culture as strengths of the destination based on which destination promotional activities can be further reinforced. Areas where destination attractiveness gaps observed includes, beaches, art forms, and heritage attractions, and points to need for further emphasis on area specific development efforts to enhance the tourists experience with these attractions. With an array of attractions, benefits provided and the associated experiences, it may be useful to view the destination as a composite product, with certain attractions forming the core and the others at the peripheral, augmenting the tourists’ experience of core attractions. Attractions like
nightlife, shopping and activities of excitements may belong to a peripheral category; these attractions also need improvement efforts, but to a less extent, as compared to some of the core attractions. Overall, findings indicate the need for different strategies for guiding both the product and promotional development activities targeted for different tourism products.

6.8 Conclusion and Future Research Directions

The Quality dimensions of the destination Kerala from the tourist's perspective is what explored by the study. In the process, the study attempted to understand tourists and their perception of destination, which are considered essential inputs in the destination marketing efforts. The major purpose of destination marketing is to build a positive image for the destination in the target markets and communicate the image effectively to differentiate it from the competition. To this end, the study provides insights regarding image and quality perception of tourists towards Kerala as tourism destination. The findings are also utilised for assessing the areas where quality gap occurs and how such gaps are contributing to the tourists' satisfaction with the destination experience. The implication of some of the findings in the destination planning and development efforts are identified and areas where more efforts are needed to improve the overall quality of the destination are suggested. Relative impact of quality dimensions was assessed; the findings of which are related to the positioning and promotional strategies for the destination. From the theoretical standpoint, the study relates to the various dimensions of a total destination product and suggests possible levels of image tourists can have based on their actual experience. This study also sheds some light on the nature of international travel market for Kerala in terms of activities, benefit sought, country and trip profile.
Activities and benefit segments are explored for this study. But to have a better understanding of the tourists market, it is also required to identify the underlying motivational factors driving tourists towards Kerala. So, further research can be carried out in the area of tourists' motivations that influence their choice of a particular combination of benefits and activities.

This would reveal additional information on the nature of tourists market, which can help to formulate better destination promotional strategies. Such information may be critical in adjusting promotional messages and matching the motivations of the travelers to the pull factors of the physical facilities in the destination. For profiling the tourists, this study used only socio-demographic and trip related variables; further studies can profile tourist segments based on the psychographic variables.

This study has focused on the quality dimensions from the perspective of tourists. The significance of the quality dimensions will be more if it has the ability to differentiate the destination from other set of comparable destinations. Future research can focus on these aspects, comparing Kerala with other competing destinations in India and abroad and discern the quality dimensions, which has better ability to differentiate Kerala from other competing destinations.