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# UNIT 20 TRADE FAIRS AND FESTIVALS

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## 20.0 OBJECTIVES

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After reading this Unit you will be able to:

- define trade fair and travel mart,
- know why and how they are organised,
- understand their importance in tourism promotion, and
- learn about the role of festivals in tourism promotion.

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## 20.1 INTRODUCTION

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In the era of mass tourism, many third world countries have adopted an export led model of development. For most of these countries, which do not have access to foreign markets for their manufactures, tourism becomes an option. In tourism development therefore, strategies replicate the format of sourcing markets for the traditional exports of these countries, and trade fairs or event marketing become typical methods of promoting ones goods and services. However, critics have pointed out that such an approach has reduced tourism to a product. An illustration of this aspect is the demand for western facilities in Asian countries. Is such an approach/demand valid? or When we transfer a conceptual strategy from one sector of the economy to another we must assess if such a transfer is both conceptually and practically valid. Tourism is a complex experience and lifestyle representation. It is in this context that an attempt has been made in this Unit to understand the role of trade fairs and travel marts and critique their role in developing a market for new destinations. Besides this critique this Unit also familiarises you with the role of travel marts and festivals in tourism marketing.

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## 20.2 TRADE FAIRS AND TRAVEL MARTS

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Quite often we find that new trends in the industry are creating impacts on demand and supply structures in the practice of tourism. Even a healthy tourism destination is not free of problems which are generated not only in the origin markets but also in the manner in which the travel trade finds short term solutions to its own problems. For example, Air India offers groups of women travellers a significant discount to Singapore and Hong-Kong, and this generates the demand for special facilities for women travellers from India. Although Air India's discount was operable in the lean season, it creates a new trend.

**Trade Fairs are there fore means by which the practitioners of a particular sector can meet at a rallying point and watch the functioning of their peers, leaders in the sector and their competitors, regulate such a vast and definitionally woolly product like tourism and encourage and develop entrepreneurial freedom.**

**A travel mart is a place where the producers, sellers and buyers (mostly intermediaries) of tourism products and services meet face to face to transact business. It also showcases the**

tourism product of a country or a region whilst also focussing on the concerns of the different sectors of the industry, like

- the issue of tariffs,
- commissions,
- clearances for investment and
- tax incentives, etc.

A trade fair or a travel mart is the combined effort of the seller, the buyer and the State to ensure that tourism prospers and realises the benefits that are possible.

In India, our membership of the Pacific Area Travel Association, introduced us to the concept of a travel mart, when PATA conferences were held in different locations and countries of the region. The country in which the conference was located was showcased for the delegates from the rest of the world, and a particular destination was selected because there was a need to focus on the problems and the solutions required to make that destination play its role in the field of tourism in the region. The PATA mart has been discussed as a case study in Unit 25 of TS-2.

A Trade Fair or Travel Mart also becomes possible when travel agents and tour operators begin to form trade and professional associations, which then can lobby for the particular demands of the sector concerned. The major focus of the trade fair or travel mart is to give and to seek information to promote tourism both to and from the region, country or a group of destinations. Thus such events attract not only the professionals but the public at large.

These events are professionally planned and organised taking into account the infrastructure, operations, and business transactions. For example:

- the sellers buy space in advance,
- appointments are pre-booked, and
- schedules are set for participating organisation, etc.

During face to face interaction various business transactions take place. For example:

- tours are sold,
- commissions are decided,
- volume of business is discussed and decided,
- producers know the intermediaries requirement,
- producers meet new buyers, and
- getting to know exercises are conducted to be followed up, etc.

Holding seminars, lectures by experts, viewing of films, entertainment and organising cultural evenings form part of the travel mart.

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## 20.3 TO NAME A FEW

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Some important **tourism fairs** are The World Travel Market, London, the Salon Mondial de Tourisme, Paris, The International Tourism Bourse, Berlin, FITUR, Madrid and Chicago. These fairs are open to the professionals and the public in the main generator as well as receptor countries. Travel Marts address national requirements whilst Trade Fairs serve the needs of the global industry. They play an important commercial role. Every sector of the international industry is represented by its senior management and buyers since it is an important venue to have an interface between suppliers and managers.

India has recently started the SATTE to focus on the products of the South Asian region. At the 1996 Fair, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka committed themselves to a joint marketing and promotion of the South Asian Tourism product. They stressed the need to foster a positive image for a region plagued by separatist and terrorist movements, and talked of the need for time bound intra-regional movement of tourists. The buyer-seller meet brought in tour operators from 40 countries to meet 150 sellers from the region.

The travel industry is very keen on participating in these trade fairs since they get an opportunity to have their marketing efforts subsidised by the Government. The Government is a big player in the area of tourism policy, an important part of which is to promote foreign investment in the tourism sector. **Understanding the competitors products regarding their strengths and weaknesses is also one of the purposes.**

In India a recent development is the holding of travel marts for encouraging domestic tourism. The state tourism departments and tourism development corporations, Indian Railways, domestic tour operators, etc. dominate the participation in them. **The Association of Domestic Tour Operators of India** has on its agenda giving encouragement to the holding of such domestic travel marts.

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## 20.4 THE CRITIQUE

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As a critique it has been pointed out that many industry representatives go completely unprepared for the commercial possibilities of a trade fair. This is because they are much more adept as handling agents rather than as promoters of the products, which are generally designed by the foreign tour operator to cater to the image of the destination.

Secondly, the politician-bureaucratic-industry nexus ensures that it is not necessarily the most competent person who is delegated to attend the fair, since foreign travel at somebody else's expense is an attraction for most. Thirdly, the government treats the buyer at the fair as a subordinate and is unable to see attendance at the fair as a commercial possibility. The trade associations like IATO attempt to block space for exhibiting the India's tourism product, but the response to their efforts is limited by the cost of promotion both through the print media and audio/visual techniques. Visitors to the fair often find Indian stalls unmanned and the information format unintelligible. This in fact is a critique of the way trade fairs and travel marts are looked upon.

A new feature of the trade fair is the emergence of activists, responding to the fears that present day tourism development has created with regard to the environment, women and children, culture and land use in tourism projects. They are protesting at the globalisation of identity, which PATA has recognised as the most critical issue at its 45th annual conference held in Thailand (1996).

Many in the industry feel that Trade Fairs have become events that you must be seen at, and not much business is transacted. The fact that a larger number of Indians travel out of India for international tourism shows that trade fairs are benefiting other destinations in preference to home destinations.

Areas in which trade fairs are weak include the burning issues in the industry like credibility of standards, use of technology and human resource development. They do however develop methods for the exchange of staff and business by liberalising contracts and service conditions, but primarily for the developed destinations.

**Check Your Progress-1**

- 1) Discuss the relevance of trade fairs and travel marts in tourism promotion.

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2) Make a critical appraisal of trade fairs.

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## 20.5 FESTIVALS

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The Department of Tourism, Government of India listed 72 festivals in its 1995-96 Annual Plan for tourism promotion. South Australia is known as the 'Festival State' because of its deliberate policy of adopting festivals as integral to tourism marketing. In fact more and more countries, through the concept of tourism festivals, are showcasing the cultural wealth of a country, region or a community. The Western countries had encouraged a number of street festivals and cultural events for tourism promotion. Today most of the third world countries are trying to appropriate the same form of cultural representation with the addition of their 'so called' cultural tradition. In India we find a calendar of festivals to be promoted for the purpose of tourism. Hence, the erstwhile local community celebrations are being converted into tourist attractions. This has given birth to another form of tourism. Donald Getz has mentioned that:

"Event tourism is concerned with the roles that festivals and special events can play in destination development and the maximization of an events attractiveness to tourists."

### 20.5.1 Defining Festivals

Before we go further discussing the relationship between festivals and tourism first let us attempt to define festivals. Well, festivals are public celebrations. Based on a theme, they have cultural, traditional or religious meanings for the community. The community celebrates them through public participation and involvement. The key elements in a festival include:

- celebration through special observances at a given time,
- a series of cultural performances like dance, music, drama, rituals, etc. that not just remind of the past traditions but show their living forms,
- a local fair providing the artisans an opportunity to sell their products, and
- a cheerful festive environment, etc.

According to Falassi:

"Both the social function and the symbolic meaning of the festival are closely related to a series of overt values that the community recognises as essentials to its ideology and worldview, to its social identity, its historical continuity, and to its physical survival, which is ultimately what festivals celebrate."

However, not all festivals are historic in nature in the context of tourism. Certain festivals have come into existence because of tourism where the governments, tourism corporations or the tourism industry assemble the cultural features of a regional as a tourism product to be observed and experienced by the tourists. The Kajuraho, Elephanta, Puri, Konark and Qutab festivals come under this category. The Elephant March in Trivedrum is another example.

## 20.5.2 Promotion and Authenticity

Donald Getz has mentioned about meeting a certain criteria for festivals to be promoted as tourist attractions:

- A multiplicity of roles linked to tourism, conservation, heritage, arts, leisure, community development and other social or cultural goals are fostered.
- A festive spirit is created, especially through the celebration of shared values.
- Basic human needs are satisfied, including physical, interpersonal/social, and psychological.
- Uniqueness is emphasized through infrequency, having appeal to special interests and quality.
- Authenticity is created or preserved, so that the event is culturally important to the host community and does not seek to exploit visitors.
- Tradition is fostered, giving the event community roots and a sense of mystique: In this context "hallmark events" can be defined as those that have a strong enough tradition to indelibly link the event with the image of the host community.
- Flexibility regarding site, schedule, program and markets is maintained.
- Hospitality makes every visitor feel an honoured guest.
- Tangibility brings destination themes alive,
- Theming is achieved through coherent programming, promotions and packaging.
- Symbolism links the event to ideals and values.
- Affordability enables everyone to attend (although not necessarily to the exclusion of merchandising and profit making).
- Convenience and easy accessibility encourages spontaneous attendance and repeat tourist trade.

Festivals have been used as a part of product design or destination attraction by marketing managers:

- to overcome the seasonality issues.
- for promotion or image building exercises,
- for event planning and destination marketing, etc.

Two major aspects that determine the levels of attractiveness are:

- 1) Authenticity,
- 2) Meaningfulness.

While promoting a festival both these aspects should be taken care of. **Authenticity** is to be maintained and this issue should be linked with the entire decision making process when a cautious decision is taken to promote the festival for tourism.

It must be remembered that authenticity is the major motivating force for the tourists that attracts them to a festival. However, the tourism industry has been staging authenticity. D.J. Boorstin in his work on **The Image: A Guide to Pseudo events in America** has observed that:

**"In order to satisfy the exaggerated expectations to tour agents and tourists, people everywhere obligingly became dishonest mimics of themselves. To provide a full schedule of events of the best seasons and at convenient hours, they travesty their solemn rituals, holidays folk celebrations – all for the benefits of tourists."**

The issue of authenticity in relation to events and activities will be further taken up in **Unit-22**.

However, in relation to festivals it must be noted that their attractiveness or life cycle as a tourism product is linked with the notions of authenticity. Growing commercialisation of festivals is a threat to their authenticity. The tourism industry must realise that the moment





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## SOME USEFUL BOOKS FOR THIS BLOCK

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Colin Michael Hall	:	Hallmark Tourist Events, London, 1992.
A.V. Seaton et al.(ed)	:	Tourism the State of the Art, Sussex, 1994.
Khan, Oslen Var (ed.)	:	VNR's Encyclopedia of Hospitality and Tourism, New York, 1993.

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## ACTIVITIES FOR THIS BLOCK

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**Activity-1**

Make a list of attractions of your area that you would highlight to fam group.

**Activity-2**

Interviews 10 friends or relatives regarding the impact of seasonality on their travel plans.

**Activity-3**

Assess the tourism season in your Region/City. What do you propose to extend the season.

**Activity-4**

What measures would you sought to maintain authenticity of a community festival of your region.