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# UNIT 22 EVENTS, ACTIVITIES, INDIVIDUALS

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## 22.0 OBJECTIVES

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After reading this Unit you will be able to:

- appreciate the role of events, activities and individuals in tourism marketing,
- critically analyse the methods being adopted for their promotion, and
- know about the alternatives that are being suggested in this regard.

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## 22.1 INTRODUCTION

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Celebrations have many diverse motivations and purposes. Today, when all celebrations (fairs, festivals, religious ceremonies, sports, cultural events etc.) are being looked at from the point of view of tourism development, the purpose and motive for a celebration can be viewed from the point of view of awakening the interest of the visitor. It is assumed that local visitors have to be motivated, to a greater or lesser degree, in the same way as the international visitor. It is also assumed that without the tourist, the cost of the event will be out of proportion to the event being organised. Thus, events or celebrations are converted into commercial extravaganzas. They have lost or are in the process of losing all symbolic importance to the participants who had a role to play before tourists took over the celebration. For example commercial privilege is given to tourists in the Elephant March organised at Trichur, which many in Kerala feel is taking away from the sanctity of the parade of temple elephants. This example elaborates the point made by David Getz that **"Although the majority of events have probably arisen for non-tourist reasons... there is clearly a trend to exploit them for tourism and to create new events deliberately as tourist attractions."**

Even events like the Republic day, a moment of national identity and pride, have become tourist attractions with providing them the best seats at a cost.

Marketing theory sees events as contributing to the development of positive destination images, and to highlight the role of sponsorship in selling and influencing consumers and participants. The desire to create an experience that can then be sold as a product is supposed to be achieved by researching the market. The result of surveys should indicate the design of events and the creative concepts that should be used to publicise the event. Thus research should:

- segment the market and locate a target group,
- develop an entry strategy to time the event and locate it, and
- identify the marketing mix variables that will help to make the event a success.

The basic problem with the supposed neutrality of research is to ignore the ideology that every research design and questionnaire has built into it. Therefore it is always important to determine the objectives of the research. For instance before promoting an event as a tourist attraction it would be desirable to answer the following questions:

- is the purpose of the research design to locate interesting events for the tourists or is it to retain the integrity of the event for those who have traditionally organised and participated in it?
- how far should we proceed in commercialising our celebrations to attract the interest of tourists, both national and international?
- are these tourists really looking for a celebration to be a part of it, as an alternative centre, or are they mere spectators for whom the organisers and participants are mere actors?

To find solutions to these types of questions, in this Unit we are trying to critique the marketing approach. The attempt is to emerge with our cultural perspective on tourism on better terms related to the role of events, activities and individuals.

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## 22.2 THE MARKETING APPROACH

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The first question that needs to be clarified is: **Should the market segment of tourists be in tune with the event or should the event be staged to meet the needs of the market?** The consumer centered approach demands that the event be tailored to the market even if it alters the nature and the character of the event, as long as the process of segmentation has been followed. (geographic, demographic and psychographic).

The commercial approach would demand a segment which is sizable and has the potential to increase and that the event satisfies some unsatisfied need of the customer.

Neither of these approaches is concerned about the quality of the event which is being turned into a product. Such an approach looks at the competitors model to see how local and national events can be tailored in a similar format. It does not consider the problem of carrying capacity or a variety of negative impacts that tourism as an export oriented industry has on events that have been extended for tourists.

For India, tourism experts have identified our festivals as worthy tourist events, and where such festivals do not fall within the tourist season, the state has sponsored tourist festivals. (See Unit 18 TS-2) Localities and communities are being encouraged to develop such festivals in order to enhance the image of their state or region as a tourist destination. It is expected that for the foreign tourist the length of stay will be increased and for the resident or domestic tourist the range of travel will be diffused and diversified.

Tourism is looked at as beneficial for the tourist in several ways:

- for a change,
- as an escape,
- as an indulgence, being waited upon,
- for understanding,
- for adventure, and
- for companionship, etc.

Here, the argument is given in consumer benefit terms, rather than pointing out the income-employment or economic benefits. From this classification, the ideal segment for event based or activity based tourism should be:

- discerning and confident,
- experiential but fairly passive,
- like creature comforts,
- food and wine oriented,
- having a strong sense for authenticity and heritage,

- interested in ideas and creativity,
- environmentally conscious, and
- having indulgent and impulsive spending habits.

This list describes a tourist of the elite type who likes to have personalised hospitality in a friendly native environment, with a demand for quality and value for money. While value for money is determined by the disposable income one is willing to use on tourism, quality is a classification that embodies many issues and experiences. Within the elite classification the degree of comfort may be sufficient but across categories quality can assume different proportions and the weightage given to the characteristic listed above may not be equal or in that order of priority. To use one example: what is heritage, and to which heritage do we refer when we turn the visitors, attention towards authenticity? For example is the placing of Kerala furniture in a Rajasthani Haveli authentic? But this is the kind of constructed chic that passes for heritage in most destinations. Another in style authentic approach to the heritage movement is the privileging of antiquity, even where it is in-authentically reconstructed, or ethnicity as viewed by a designer orientation.

We can also see this construction in the timing of events. A visit India year is a 12 month long event, which is stretched beyond the means of the destination because the concentration of tourist movement tends to follow the strength of the infrastructure and the availability of creature comforts that correlate with such strengths. Given the seasonality of tourism to India, most community events are shifted to coincide with the tourist season, which often defies the logic of the event to the community. When such events are priced to earn the tourist dollar they are further alienated from the community and its cultural needs. Such cultural needs are closely linked to the history of civilisational development in a particular ethnic or climatic zone. In mono-cultural situations perhaps it is possible to adopt an event based approach to seasonal and volume problems, but where cultures are distinct, even when related, such an extension is inappropriate and unwarranted.

Today we also have another category known as **Hallmark events, special events or Mega events which are a one time performance at a destination** (Olympics, International film festival, etc.). Different definitions and motives have been assigned to such events. Bonnemaïson has opined that:

**"a city wanting to upgrade its infrastructure or political image would use a large-scale event as a tool to generate funds from higher levels of government and corporations".**

It has been argued that the main objective for organising a hallmark tourist event is to achieve a prominent position in the tourism market for the host destinations for a specific period of time. Such an event provides a different appeal to the tourists from the usual attractions of a destination. This is because it does not fall in the category of normal attractions but has the virtue of attracting national and / or international attention to the destination. Getz has defined a special event as a **"onetime or infrequently occurring event outside the normal programme or activities of the sponsoring or organising body"**. Further he added that from the customers view point, **"it is an opportunity for a leisure, social or cultural experience outside the normal range of choices or beyond everyday experiences"**. Here we must differentiate between festivals and special events. Festivals are held annually whereas a special event is usually a one time performance at the destination. Moreover, **festival provides the public to participate in the experience where as in a special event the public is an observer or a spectator to the experience of the performers.**

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## 22.3 MARKETING MIX

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Product, Promotion, Price and Place are the four cornerstones of the marketing mix which is a formula many tourism agencies apply to events and activities specifically created for tourist consumption. Morrison has added another set i.e. **people, packaging, programming, and partnership** and today we have another added aspect - **positioning**.

The issue that these approaches raise is how can event tourism raise specialist interest to a broad level, no matter how great is the appeal of a festival to visitors at large?

The general approach is to mount special exhibitions and add to the specific interest, for example, expressionist art, a multi-media show and souvenirs like tee-shirts or bric-a-brac commemorating the event. You could also add fringe events to the mainstream event which reflect the more avant-garde aspects of culture. Just as major conferences have made a space for dissent through an NGO forum, this is seen as a methodology to broaden the appeal of a particular event.

This multi-pronged approach is also reflected in the promotion which uses both media and word of mouth publicity. The very fact that a travelogue today has to be the representation of an eyewitness account for legitimacy is an indication of the value of a personal endorsement, regardless of the bias of the writer. Consequently writers criticise a destination and its tourism infrastructure by standards which need not necessarily apply to that destination.

### **22.3.1 Pricing and Promotion**

Pricing is also an indicator of the changes that tourism creates in the organisation and for participation in an event. An event will be priced only when the cost of organising it on a scale that tourism demands have to be met. Within this broad objective, some sections may have to be subsidised given the general economic conditions and the historical precedents regarding entry and accessibility. Pricing can also be used to ensure that carrying capacity is not exceeded and it is a method of exclusion. Youth discounts, Family price, Advance Booking and Early Bird discounts are popular methods in the west, but in our culture where a community had free access, pricing is a contentious issue. It is disconcerting for the mass of the people to see barricades and ticket booths which symbolise the elite nature of once open festivals and activities.

The nature of activities also transform once tourism gets under way. From archery and Kabaddi or Kho-Kho to Golf, Tennis and Cricket we move away from the traditional sporting encounters in the community to spectator sports which are ticketed. The recent inclusion of football in the priced and elite sporting arena has also distanced the community and working peoples sport, which was the last to be professionalised in India.

Thus we can see that pricing does not necessarily relate to covering costs but can play a role in determining the market that is desirable for a particular event. Pricing is also used as a tool in giving an event or an activity a certain status.

Promotion also requires a budget today, with mailing lists, fliers and a sales force geared to catch the eye of the consumer. It is no longer primarily a word of mouth or local event which every household knows about. This was the case with the famous Onam Boat Race in Kerala, where teams from competing villages determined the timing of the event, before it was co-opted for tourism.

### **22.3.2 The Role of People**

Event and activity tourism is people centered, since the primary attraction is the mass nature of such activity and the mass involvement in its organisation and presentation. In India tourism always tends to turn these spontaneous events into designed presentations since we are always intimidated by the issue of how we image ourselves and our culture to the foreigner. We tend to be apologetic about the amateur nature of our intrinsic culture, because we think it reflects our backwardness. It is high time that we value our culture and self respect.

We have a great deal of emphasis on people centered activities and events, since our rural population still views the family in the private domain and the community in the public domain as a great strength. However a lot of this people oriented culture remains undocumented and perhaps that is why it has survived the onslaught of the event orientation of modern tourism.

The people oriented culture, because of its uniqueness is a strong tourist attraction. However the problem is that aggressive marketing of this culture is bound to affect its uniqueness and authenticity thus shortening its life cycle as a destination.

### 22.3.3 Packaging and Programming

Events and activities are packaged and programmed to ensure that a tourist will be encouraged to extend the length of stay and perhaps become so interested in the items being presented that the tourist might be motivated to return the next year for another experience. That is why events are programmed to include different perspectives on a number of days. However the weakness of such strategies is that the festival loses its uniqueness, its focus and tries to be all things to all people. Events for tourism also become stereotyped and at times sponsorship and advertising create an image that lifts the event on to a plane that takes the event away from the control of the spectator as participant. An example is the Miss World Contest sponsored at very high cost by a Hotel Chain and other consumer items manufacturers, etc. The Government of Karnataka also saw the location of the contest in Bangalore city as an advertisement of the global culture and the reform process that is going on in the Indian economy. Those opposed to the Contest saw it as an attempt by multinational cosmetics and costume firms to make an entry in the Indian market so that consumers will shift their consumption to International brand names at International prices. In such events the control rests with the celebrity, the expert and the professional, who are already commodified and can hasten the acceptability of the process. Thus, whilst proclaiming to showcase India the sponsorer is actually using its credibility to sell Miss World. The critics describe this as an acute sense of loss, even though the earnings are phenomenal and ask questions:

- Is this the price of development?
- Do we and should we have to pay this price?
- Can motivation be generated only through freebies and prizes?
- Is pure enjoyment through knowing and being familiar with the participants is no longer a driving force for recreational activities?

**Check Your Progress-1**

1) What do you understand by Hallmark events?

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2) What type of marketing strategy should be adopted to publicise events.

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## 22.4 ALTERNATIVE APPROACH TO MARKETING

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We can see how changes are taking over our city commons and village maidens; how local players are being turned into international puppets, losing their links with a vital and living culture to become prize winning artisans or regulars in the teams that perform at the festivals of India abroad. It is assumed that this structured and positive image of India is what motivates the tourist. However, many tourists are motivated by the unstructured and negative view of a destination, because the bias of the tourist may not be the same as that of the programmed elite.

In trying to retain some of the integrity of the holistic perspective we must recognise that sponsorship tends to back commercial events rather than those where the sponsors products are not likely to be consumed. For example sports goods and sports wear manufacturers will sponsor the Olympics but not the athletic meet of a block or a University. We have to recognise that both these types of events are taking place side by side but the information regarding the commercial events tends to be more publicly known. The amateur is not an attraction for the tourist, unless there is a special interest in a particular event. In trying to evolve an alternative we have to see what values an event or an activity is trying to highlight or to preserve and then see who shares the same ethics before we can look for a wider market. Such research will attempt to ensure that events and activities which are the recreational and social necessities of a group or a community are not misappropriated by tourism.

The role of local bodies and host community is crucial in such situations. Rather than, following the conventional marketing approach of caring for customers needs or wants the destination can have tourism on its own terms and conditions like determining the number of visitors or the type of entertainment and accommodation to be offered etc. Such an alternative approach takes care of the carrying capacity problems (social, environmental, infrastructural).

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## 22.5 INDIVIDUAL AS A PRODUCT

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Individuals, particularly writers, thinkers, artists, sports personalities and celebrities have always been used to promote events and destinations. The historical or celebrity status attracts special interest tourist groups to certain destinations. One can cite a number of examples in this regard. For example:

- places associated with Mahatma Gandhi (Rajghat, Sabarmati Ashram etc.)
- museums built to depict the life styles of individuals like the Teen Murti House which hosts the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library,
- visits to Mumbai (the bollywood of India) with the aim of seeing their favourite heroines or heros in person,
- visiting a sporting event to see the celebrity player in action, etc.

In a similar way individuals have assisted in providing publicity to destinations or events. Often they become trend setters in tourism:

- A celebrity having a vacation at a particular leisure spot brings publicity for the place.
- Using a celebrity to convey the message (in advertising) to the public helps in building the image of a destination, event or tourism service.
- Celebrities are used for creating awareness or raising the levels of public consciousness (socially responsible marketing) etc.

However, a certain amount of caution is required in this regard as too much commercialisation might adversely affect the very simplicity of a place associated with the individual. For example the Sabarmati Ashram still retains the simplicity of Mahatma Gandhi's lifestyle and work. It is this reason that makes it a tourist attraction. But if we apply the marketing approach we are sure to commercialise the experience by introducing restrooms, cafeterias and perhaps a sound and light show to recreate the period feeling of the Ashram. This will ultimately result in a sense of loss. In fact, what is required is an alternate marketing approach which makes events, activities and individual histories

accessible to the visitor in such a manner that they are not objectified but contextualised for their relevance.

**Check Your Progress-2**

- 1) Describe the alternative approach to marketing.

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- 2) What role do the individuals play in tourism marketing?

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## 22.6 LET US SUM UP

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Today different types of celebrations are being marketed as tourism attractions. Event tourism is on the increase and events are staged to increase the seasonality of a destination. To what extent should the events, activities and individuals be commercialised is a question that is being debated upon from different perspectives. The concept of marketing mix in relation to event marketing has to be cautiously applied without compromising the authenticity of the event. Besides events and activities the role of individual in tourism marketing was also dealt with in this Unit. Many individual celebrities or the places attached with their names develop as tourist attractions.

In contrast to the consumer centrist marketing approach the alternative approach for tourism marketing suggests that the host population at the destination should determine the kind of tourism they want to develop and the type of tourists which are welcome.

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## 22.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

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**Check Your Progress-1**

- 1) Read the last para of Sec.22.2.
- 2) See Sub-Sec.22.3.3.

**Check Your Progress-2**

- 1) Read Sec.22.4 for your answer.
- 2) Base your answer on Sec.22.5.