

THE BRANDING OF INDIA

Thailand has one. Singapore has one. So does Malaysia. All these South-East Asian countries are tasting the benefits of single-minded branding. **Amitabh Kant** takes us through a journey to discover a branding idea for probably the biggest brand in the world: India.

Incredible!ndia

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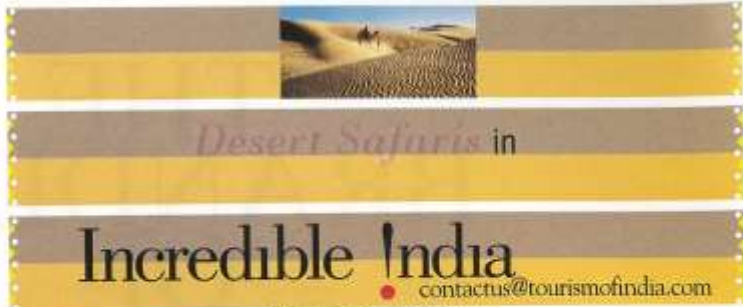
Reflection of Taj, part of international print campaign

! "Buildings age and become dilapidated
Machines wear out
● People die
But what live on are the brands"

Someone said, image is everything. It's true image is what is perceived by those who use or are likely to use your brand and services. It is your 'personality' and it can make you stand out from others who are doing or saying similar things in a crowded market place.

Branding is a sophisticated process

The objective of branding India is to produce a unique and attractive offering that meets both the rational and the emotional needs of the tourists.



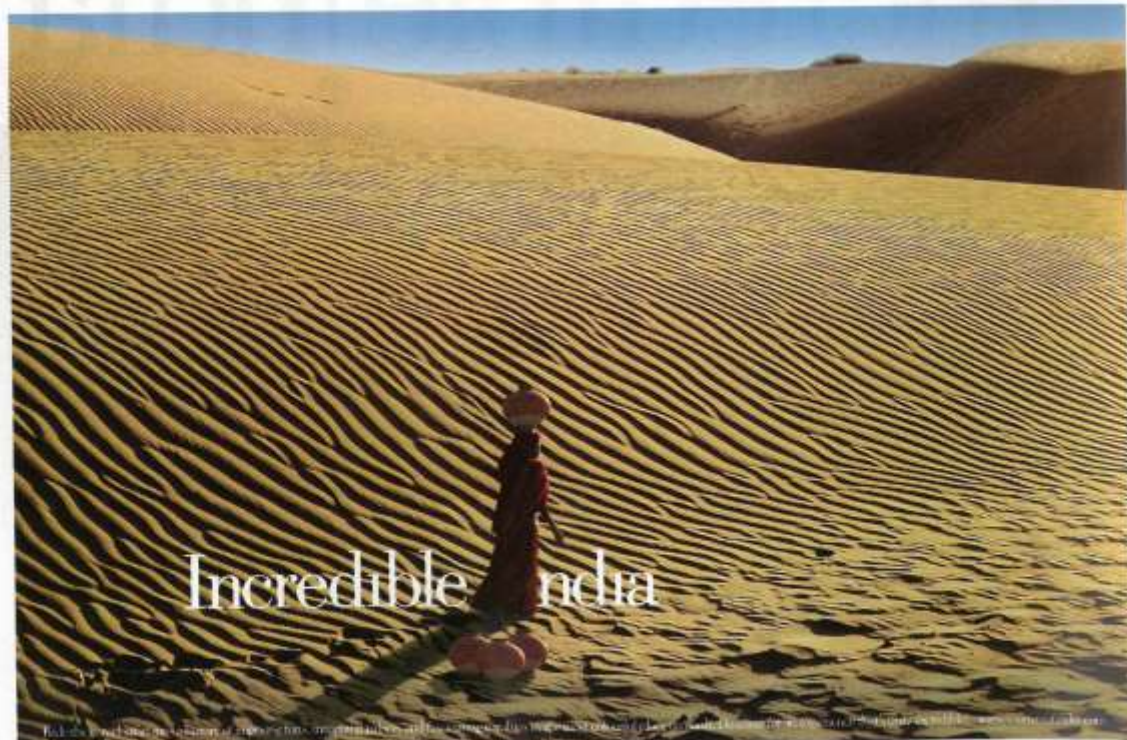
Banner ads on the net

that puts together and sustains a complex mixture of attributes and values, many of which are intangible. The objective of branding India is to produce a unique and attractive offering

that meets both the rational and the emotional needs of the tourists.

Building an India brand is a tall order. My attempt in this article is to set out the vision, values, personality and positioning for the India tourism brand. India Tourism's attempt is to build the visual identity of one of the biggest brands in the market. India or shall we say, Incredible India.

The brand image of a destination



India's colourful desert, a visual from the international campaign



Branding of the Indian wildlife

serves to differentiate it from competing destinations. Several brands compete for the attention of tourists deciding on a destination for a holiday or a business conference. A strong brand, differentiated from other has several strong advantages and has an attractive appeal to consumer. In tourism, while factors

such as cost of travel, convenience and quality of facilities are important, the strongest impetus is provided by "image". It is image which places a destination on the consumers' "shopping list" and creates an emotional appeal, which enhances a destination's chances of being chosen over others.

Strong branding represents one of the best defences against adverse economic and market conditions. During the recessionary period of the 90's, none of the powerful brands in Asia fell. In the early 80's, when gasoline prices rose dramatically leading to a collapse of several car manufacturing units, Mercedes Benz

“The one land that all men desire to see and having seen once, by even a glimpse would not give the glimpse for all the shows of all the rest of the globe combined.”

— Mark Twain on India



Backwaters, part of poster campaign

increased its sales on the strength of its brand entity. Strong brands are enduring and have powerful recall value. A powerful brand also cuts across national boundaries and cultures. In reality, a destination is like any other product or service which needs to gain global recognition, access

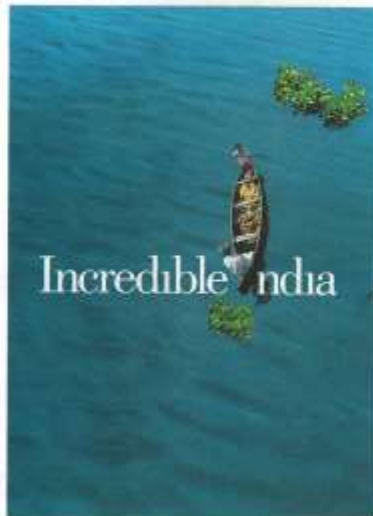
* 38 per cent of doctors in the US are Indians
 * 36 per cent of NASA employees are Indians
 * 34 per cent of Microsoft employees are Indians
 * 12 per cent of scientists in the US are Indians

Closer home, God's Own Country—Kerala—has emerged as the fastest growing and the highest yielding tourism destination in Asia. Indian image hitherto had remained unfocused and unclear. As a destination, India has had difficulties in competing



and penetrate new markets, break parity and stand out from the crowd. India as a tourism destination needs to create, develop and market itself by building its equity. This alone would increase its brand recognition and brand power.

In recent times, tourism has emerged as one of the major industries for many Asian countries, creating employment and stimulating economic development. In 2000, "Amazing Thailand" attracted 10 million tourists, "Malaysia Truly Asia" 8.5 million tourists and "Live it up Singapore" almost 7 million tourists. India's tourist arrivals have remained stagnant at a mere 2.6 million.



Backwaters, part of poster campaign

with images from competing countries and its advertising promotion and public relations had failed to correct the negative perceptions as a tourism destination.

Developing a strong image for India Tourism required a carefully planned brand strategy based on:

1. A well defined and unique brand personality
2. Selection of the correct positioning strategies
3. 'Themed' product development
4. Consistent and appropriate advertising and promotion
5. Careful brand guardianship

All this had to be built on a thorough



understanding of consumer needs. A survey commissioned by the Malaysian Tourism Promotion Board has revealed that tourists viewed Singapore as “clean, modern and safe”, China’s dominant image and attraction was “culture”. Malaysia was seen as “multicultural”

much more.

- It is a journey of five senses.
 - It is a journey of mind and soul.
 - It is a journey of self-discovery.
 - It is a journey of self-fulfilment.
- What was so different about India? The fact that it offered a myriad of experi-

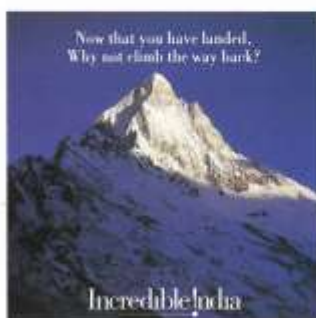
branding process which aimed to create a unique identity for India as a tourism destination and differentiate it from competition. The strategy is to reposition India as a premium destination for upscale tourists with all communication sharply focussed to attract



and Thailand had a brand image of “exotic, fun and friendly people”.

While others claimed breathtaking locales, the mysticism of the East, the draw of the civilisation, the call of the wild... India is that and

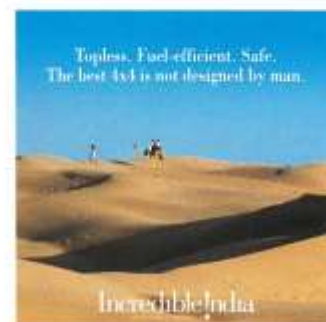
India Tourism’s attempt is to build the visual identity of one of the biggest brands in the market. India or shall we say, Incredible India.



Airport translite

ences—an enlightened holiday that enabled the tourist to go back as a better human being. The fact that in its sheer size diversity and experience it was larger than 21 countries of western Europe put together with 25, 874 kilometres to spare.

Our aim was to develop India into a global brand, with worldwide brand recognition and strong brand equity. Thus was born the Incredible India



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“If we were to look over the world to find out the country most richly endowed with all the wealth, power and beauty... I should point to India”

— Max Mueller

the upmarket clientele, that is the early adopters who lead the way to the rest of the markets. Markets are deferential and responsive to the views and requirements of upscale tourists, which in turn have a positive impact on the nature of development itself.

The “Incredible India” campaign was launched in the backdrop of a series of crises that had afflicted India



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Tourism: the September 11 incident, travel advisories, attack on Parliament and tension on the Indo-Pak borders. However, every crisis is also an opportunity. The campaign was launched with

a well synchronised integrated communication strategy on the prime generating markets. In partnership with the Experience India Society, India Tourism rolled out a powerful television commercial on prestigious worldwide channels including CNN, BBC, Discovery and Travel. In sync with this was the print media campaign released in leading publications like

Condé Nast Traveler, Vogue, Tatler, Geosaison, Financial Times and leading in-flight magazines. The entire print and electronic media plan was detailed by India's leading advertising agency;



Positioning Himalayas, international campaign

Ogilvy and Mather.

Integrating with the electronic and print media was the online marketing campaign through some of the visually most powerful banner ads. The aggressive online campaign provided a complete digital experience to meet the requirements of the travellers. The campaign linked with a series of contests was featured on all leading portals like Yahoo, MSN and Google. The electronic, print and net campaign was vigorously pursued with a fortnightly online newsletter to almost 25,000 tour operators and travel agents worldwide.



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A global media meet comprising some of the finest travel writers worldwide was also organised. Travel writers were exposed to the new initiatives in India tourism which converged ele-

“A masterful evocation of the country’s spiritual heritage combined with the sensuous images, creates a kind of *nirvana* that can be surpassed only by a journey to India itself”

— *Cond Nast Traveler*

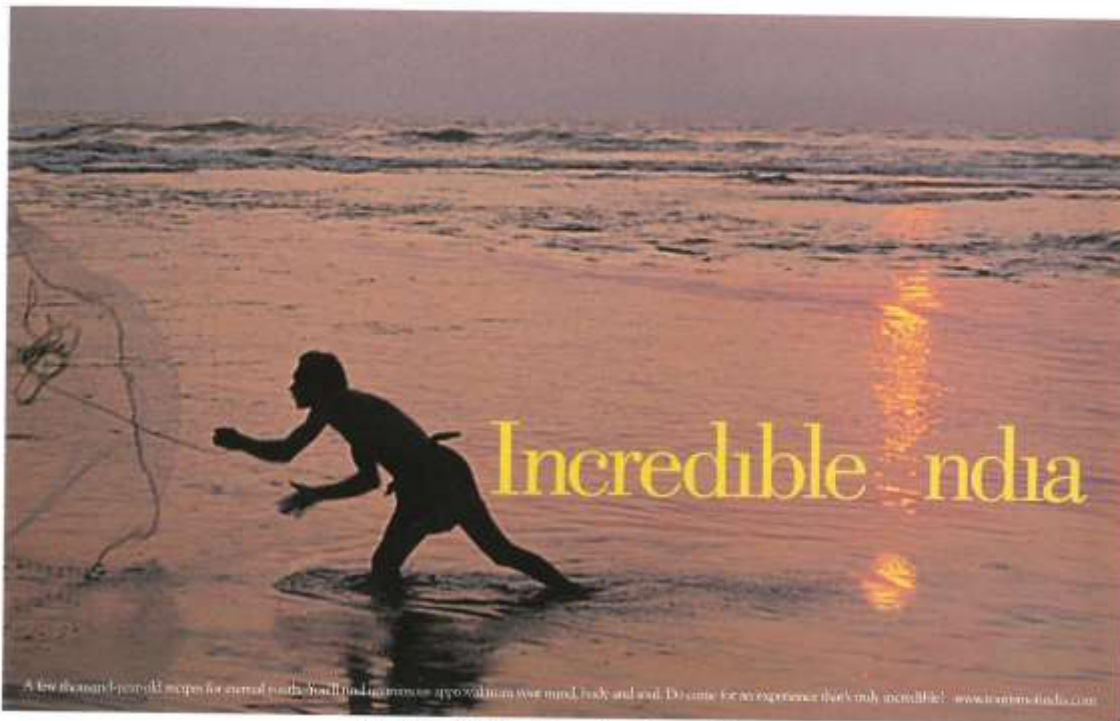
ments of tourism, culture, civic governance and the new developmental strategies that have been pursued in Ajanta-Ellora, Red Fort, Fort Cochin, Kurukshetra, Chittorgarh and other destinations. They were also taken on familiarisation tours to some of the new products and destinations. This public relation exercise has led to an



Beaches of India, airport translite



Branding India at the airport



Beaches of India, international campaign

In reality, a destination is like any other product which needs to gain global recognition, penetrate new markets and stand out from the crowd.

unprecedented coverage for India Tourism. In the last few months, India has been extensively covered in a special issue of *National Geographic*, *Travel & Leisure* to *Condast*, *New York Times* and *Vogue*. Several inflight magazines have also featured India as

a cover story.

Building a brand cannot be in isolation from the reality on ground. The focus has, therefore, been on improving the infrastructure and providing clean hygienic surroundings at heritage sites and monuments. In the

Tenth Plan, the Ministry of Tourism has moved away from assisting small isolated projects to integrated circuits and developing one tourism and cultural hub in each state of India. The objective was to create islands of excellence from the point of arrival to the point of departure for the tourists. The first seven circuits where emphasis has been laid on developing international standard infrastructure are: (i) Vaishali-Bodhgaya-Rajgir-Nalanda-Varanasi



Discover India, an ad for domestic campaign



An international award-winning poster, promoting Buddhism

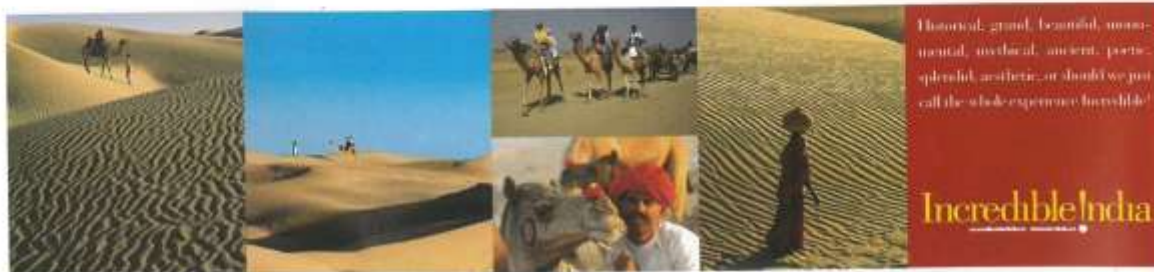
- (ii) Chandigarh-Kullu Manali-Lahaul and Spiti-Leh
- (iii) Gwalior-Shivpuri-Chanderi-Orcha-Khajuraho-Jhansi-Bhopal-

- Sanchi and surrounding Buddhist areas—Bhimbetka-Pachmarhi-Kanha-Jabalpur (Bhdaghat)
- (iv) Mumbai-Alibagh (Mandava)-

- Muradjanjira-Ganapatipule-Vijaydurg Mithibad-Kunkeshwar-Mochetmad-Sindhudurg-Tarkarli-Shiroda-Savantwadi-Amboli-Goa-Coastal Karnataka-Bekal
- (v) Cochin-Kumarakom (backwaters)-Kottayam-Quilok-Trivandrum (Kovalam)
- (vi) Shillong-Guwahati-Kaziranga-Tejpur-Bhalakpong-Tawang (Arunachal Pradesh)-Majuli-Sibsagar-Kohima
- (vii) Jaipur-Jodhpur-Jaisalmer-Bikaner-Shekhawati- Jaipur

What has the brand campaign achieved? It has enabled India to re-emerge as a destination of choice and regain market share. As a consequence of this brand-building exercise, tourist arrivals rose dramatically in 2002-2003 as compared to the same period in 2001-2002—October (+16.8 per cent), November (+16.2 per cent), December (+13.1 per cent), January (+ 22 per cent), February (13.1 per cent). More critically, the campaign has enabled India to focus on its authentic Indian experience and differentiate itself as a spiritually elevating, culturally enriching, physically invigorating and mentally rejuvenating destination.

The author is Joint Secretary, Ministry of Tourism and CMD, ITDC



Discover India, an ad for domestic campaign