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New Product Development in Spiritual Tourism

Case Study: Omalaya Travel Ltd.

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Abstract

Although practised since ancient times, spiritual tourism is a complex phenomenon, which is yet to be recognised as a separate type of tourism. The ever-growing popularity of spiritual practices of all kinds in the Western world and the fundamental lack of academic research on the subject underline the importance of further investigation of this topic.

The purpose of this thesis was to devise a new product for the case company, which is a travel agency that specialises in spiritual tourism and is located in northern India. The thesis was prepared in accordance with the wishes and goals of the case company that acted as a commissioning party. In response to its needs, the new-product strategy was developed and presented in the report as the outcome of the preceding research.

All primary data presented rely on in-depth semi-structured interviews with the owner of the company. This method belongs to observational methodology, namely a case study, which is categorised as qualitative research method. The secondary data consists of academic materials published by other researchers, organisations and journalists.

The report is divided into two parts and begins with a theoretical overview of the tourism product within the framework of spiritual tourism, which is then followed by the description of the newly developed product for the case company. The fully described new product hence represents the final outcome of the study and is evaluated with respect to the development strategy of the case company.

Keywords
Spiritual tourism, new product development, case study, tourism product

CONTENTS

APPENDICES

1 INTRODUCTION

The evidence of the tourism sector evolution since its appearance in the 1950s has become very apparent nowadays with the tourism industry being one of the most rapidly growing industries in the world and contributing 10% of global GDP. The most recent figures from the UNWTO last year's annual report prove this global trend. Notably, 2015 set records with 1,184 million international tourists travelling the world, thus indicating a 4.6% growth from the previous year. (UNWTO 2016a.)

The latest figures also reflect the ever-increasing popularity of the Asian region, which experienced the highest growth, at the 9% increase of international arrivals in the first quarter of this year (UNWTO 2016b). According to the UNWTO Secretary-General Taleb Rifai, the consistent demand for international tourism has remained solid regardless of many continuous challenges in today's global society, demonstrating that the sector has kept its strong position and continues to expand further.

The year 2013 marked the first UNWTO International Conference on Spiritual Tourism for Sustainable Development in Ninh Binh, Vietnam, recognising the importance of the emerging tourism segment and calling for the attention of governments and businesses. Spiritual tourism is a new trend in the booming tourism market, which corresponds to a new consumer demand. This transition was illustrated by travel industry specialist Imtiaz Muqbil. According to the latter, the three "S"s that characterised the old tourism industry, Sun, Sand and Sex, are being replaced by the three new "S"s: Serenity, Sustainability and Spirituality (Bowler 2013). Various scholars have also predicted a persistent increase in this market segment at the turn of the millennium.

Considering the enormous impact that the tourism industry casts on the world economy, even the smallest changes in travellers' moods and preferences can cause considerable changes in our world. While until the 1980s tourism was juxtaposed with work (holidays were perceived as a way to escape from immense workloads and relax from the endless pursuit of money), this attitude began to change during the 1990s. As French sociologist Raphaël Liogier (2009) reports, the journey became more positively viewed and devoted to personal development.

Active tourism took over "all-inclusive getaway deals" with its numerous emerging forms and variations such as ecotourism, adventure travel, voluntourism, experiential tourism, cultural tourism and finally spiritual tourism among many others. For example, in the

modern world of devouring materialism and limitless consumption the need for "spiritual vacations" becomes even more evident. These trends make the subject of spiritual tourism require more analysis and detailed investigation considering the great potential it brings to both travellers and businesses.

In terms of the reasons for choosing this thesis topic, there is first of all, my personal interest in the researched area. This thesis project unites my two big passions, namely travelling and the spiritual quest. Having travelled the world and encountered many different cultures and lifestyles, I decided to work in the travel business myself and gain first-hand experience in travel management.

I was fortunate enough to come across a Franco-Tibetan startup hidden in the Indian Himalaya that offers spiritual journeys in the unique and attractive Himalayan region to Western truth seekers. There I completed my six-month internship working for the agency and learning about its business field – spiritual tourism. My personal understanding and interest in spirituality facilitated my work experience and served as a ground for mutual benefits.

After completing some preliminary research on the topic I discovered that there was actually no single understanding and clear academic definition of spiritual tourism despite the relevance and importance of the topic. As mere theory is only one part of a thesis project, it was necessary to include a practical part to serve as the implementation of the theoretical research. The real company where I did my internship acted as the case company of this research, where the implementation of this thesis work would be a new-product development strategy tailored to the company and current market trends. Ultimately this thesis aims to contribute to anyone interested in the spiritual tourism and to serve as a practical guide for building a new-product development strategy for the case company in this industry.

The main goal of this thesis research is to present the new-product development strategy to the case company based on its needs and requirements. These are revealed through the case study research, and particularly in interviews as its main part. The thesis begins with the introduction of the reader to the subject of spiritual tourism and its reach on the Indian subcontinent. The thesis continues with the theoretical presentation of the tourist product followed by the touristic experiences typology and description of new-product development process. The case company is introduced in Chapter 4 along with its activities. Research objectives, methods and data types used are discussed in the next chapter. Based on the research, both practical and theoretical, the new product

concept is described within the new-product development process in Chapter 6. All the conclusions and discussions are to be found in the concluding chapter. In addition, the reader is encouraged to consult the appendix attached at the end of the report, which contains additional information on the case company.

The practical suggestions drawn in this thesis research are to be applied by a commissioning party within one year of the release of the case study due to the constant changes occurring in their rapidly developing business. Given the emerging nature of the spiritual tourism phenomenon there is a critical lack of multi-disciplinary and even fundamental theory on spiritual tourism, which is why the theoretical background used in this research is very scarce and approximate. The main source of research information is the case company itself acting in its own interests. Therefore, the results provided in the paper are considered reliable and valid as long as they are considered by the commissioning party only.

2   SPIRITUAL TOURISM DEFINED

This chapter is dedicated to defining the term of spiritual tourism in modern context, discussing its increasingly important role in the modern tourism, while differentiating it from religious tourism and providing general characteristics. The concept of spiritual tourism is then specified within the Indian context and followed by discussing cultural and geographical advantages of the country in question.

2.1   Definition of spiritual tourism

To gain a better understanding of the term 'spiritual tourism', I would first suggest defining its two compounds one by one. Many dictionaries largely define tourism as 'the travel activity for pleasure'. However, Timothy and Olsen (2006, 6) argue that tourism should 'not be limited by pleasure-seeking hedonists only'. Leisure is just one of the many other motives that encourage people to travel, amongst which could stand business or volunteering, for instance (Timothy and Olsen 2006, 6-7). Given this reason, the tourism scope must not be restricted solely to one tourist type, but rather viewed from a broader perspective.

Yet when it comes to defining spirituality, one may face difficulties since each and every source suggests their own interpretation with very limited homogeneity (McCarroll, O'Connor, Meakes, Meier, O'Connor and VanKatwykm 2005). Being an indissoluble part of world's history and the main subject of world's religions, there is no doubt that spirituality can be diversely construed. Given the scope of this research, I will consider spirituality within its modern context through its redefinition in the New Age movement.

Post-Christian spirituality is characterised primarily by the deification of the self (conceived as "inner voice" or one's "intuition") and simultaneous rejection of religious tenets and scientific logic. The socialised self (one's "ego", "lower self", "intellect", or the "mind") is opposed to the "inner", "true", or "divine" self, which is unravelled in a lifelong process known as "personal growth". (Houtman and Aupers 2007.) The New Age culture was described as highly eclectic (Bruce 2002) and even compared to a "religious supermarket" (Aupers and Houtman 2003), emphasising its religious diversity (Houtman and Aupers 2007) and the freedom of the individual (Heelas 1996, 26-27).

Spiritual tourism can be seen and observed from many different angles; it does not seem possible to provide just one ultimate, widely agreed definition to this phenomenon. One can view spiritual tourism as a brand new movement that is on the rise. Alternatively, as a centuries-old practice common with traditional world's religions, meaning pilgrimage. Despite the interchangeability of the two terms (Smith, MacLeod and Hart Robertson 2010, 140), spiritual tourism will be considered as a separate entity from religious tourism in this research despite the prominent connections the two share.

2.1.1   Spiritual tourism and pilgrimage

As can be examined in the history of travel, pilgrimage traditions have prominently existed in many religions of the world and shaped the cultures we know today (Park 2005). Thousands of places of pilgrimage exist that annually attract innumerable followers of different faiths, be it the Hajj, an obligatory Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca, or circumambulating Mount Kailash, a sacred mountain to Buddhists, Hindu, Jains and Bonpos (traditional Tibetan beliefs).

Devereux and Carnegie (2006) define pilgrimage as a 'physical journey, which often symbolises and reflects the life journey of the individual's. For centuries tourism and pilgrimage were closely intertwined. Pilgrimage may be even named tourism's oldest form as it has a deep-rooted origin that precedes leisure travel, which emerged with Britain's Industrial Revolution in the 18th century. It is important to highlight that the pilgrimage market includes both particular religious tourists belonging to a certain faith (Jews to the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem) and especially as of late the growing market of spiritual tourists (Santiago de Compostela) (Smith et al. 2010, 141).

Returning to the main subject of this chapter, shall we therefore identify spiritual tourism with pilgrimage? To answer this question one should bear in mind that travellers visiting the same pilgrimage site can belong to different traveller groups. Therefore, the fact of having visited a certain place cannot help identify a traveller's profile with complete confidence. As Norman (2004, 1) puts it in his thesis work, there can be such tourists who have the same perceptions as pilgrims, and pilgrims, those of tourists.

Having said that, we shall draw the line between religious and spiritual tourism to avoid further confusion. While religious tourism concentrates on attending religious sites with the goal to interconnect with or deepen a certain faith, spiritual tourism addresses such aspects of life that are beyond the self and relate to restoring the body-mind-spirit

balance, and are not necessarily restricted to a specific religion (Smith et al. 2010, 143). Thus, it is the purpose of travel and the initial motives behind it that help identify to which group a traveller belongs.

2.2   Motives behind spiritual tourism

The tourism phenomenon cannot be restricted solely to mere leisure activity, for this is only one aspect. The reasons for engaging in tourism activity may involve such motives as the desire to run away from the routine, the urge to seek outer meaning, or eagerness to leave one's cultural centre and join other ethnic and cultural groups to test one's outlook (Norman 2004, 11). The motives can be diverse. Yet, what clearly differentiates a tourist from any other traveller is the voluntary character of their journey, which is expected to bring some change from their ordinary way of life (Norman 2004, 11). Here again the ideas behind tourism and pilgrimage become closely related.

In the modern context, however, spirituality takes on a new form. As moral and social norms have been weakened in the process of secularisation, society is experiencing the need to search for alternative philosophies that will lead to human self-identification. This is indeed a vacancy that offers multiple opportunities for spiritual tourism. The role of spirituality cannot be undervalued in today's world of constant stress coming from all aspects of a life on the go that millions of people are currently living (Cornah 2006, 10). The emergence and rise of the spiritual tourism segment is a result, according to Cohen's typology, of secularisation, as it replaces institutional pressure with the increased self-reliance of the individual on their own spiritual life (Norman 2004, 15).

While the boundaries between the religious and spiritual tourism may seem tenuous and the product may be actually the same (the act of pilgrimage), these two segments differ in terms of customer base and mode of consumption. To illustrate this difference, one should look at the concepts of religion and spirituality. Unlike religion, which is part of different cultural and collective perspective, spirituality is more personal as it is part of a search for meaning, involvement and peace as well as a quest for the self. (Norman 2011.)

While religious tourists by definition represent followers of a particular faith who are in search of pilgrimage, the spiritual tourism market attracts travellers seeking spiritual experiences in order to reap the benefits in terms of personal development in their daily lives. While it is relatively easy to label and estimate the number of religious travellers

according to the nature of their faith, this task gets more complex with spiritual tourists as their motives are not at first clearly identifiable. For instance, the majority of pilgrims carrying out the Hajj to Mecca are expected to come from Muslim-dominated societies. In contrast, spiritual travellers, given their secular motivation, can be of any country origin, including those with a large proportion of irreligious persons (Smith et al. 2010, 140).

Spiritual tourists are likely to get involved in visiting religious sites or buildings, spiritual landscapes, pilgrimage centres, ashrams, retreats or gurus (Smith et al. 2010, 143). Examples of their activities include practising meditation, chanting, breathing, visualisation and yoga exercises. For the most part, New Agers' activities are likely to be adopted and merged from different religious traditions such as Buddhist meditation with Hindu mantras (Smith et al. 2010, 143). To illustrate this attribute, Hamilton (2000) referred to modern spirituality as "pick-and-mix religion".

The bottom line here is that religious and spiritual tourism must be distinguished even though their differences may seem not that clear at first due to the modern reshaping of religion. This process can be analysed as the substitution of traditional religious practitioners with individuals who build their own faith in the context of the global religious offer.

2.3   Aspects of modern spirituality

According to Lipovetsky and Sebastien (2005), the hypermodern era does not imply the cessation of the need to turn to sacred traditions, but rather its reorganisation through individualism, dissemination and the emotionalisation of beliefs and practices. This reorganisation is visible in the transformation of religiosity into spirituality and is, as a substantial change, reflected in the consumer demand and the following market adjustment.

In this age of individualism, spirituality perfectly responds to the hunger for ideas and experiences transcending the material. The central focus of modern spirituality is placed on attaining self-realisation, well-being and inner happiness as well as sense of purpose or meaning in life (Norman 2011). According to Heelas, Woodhead, Seel, Szerszynski and Tusting (2005), spirituality can be outshining religion in Britain, a phenomenon that can also be applied to the rest of the Western society (Norman 2011).

According to Pew Research Center Report, Americans have become less religious but

more spiritual by 2014 compared to 2007 (Masci and Lipka 2016). Feelings of spirituality have risen in both religiously affiliated and unaffiliated groups (Masci and Lipka 2016). As many as 30 million American religious "nones" stated to hold "some type of spiritual belief and practice" regardless of their religious autonomy (McLeod 2016). This trend has also been discovered in the UK, where one fifth of the population fit the "spiritual but not religious" (SBNR) category (De Castella 2013).

Can modern spirituality then be called a new religion of the 21st century? It seems that personal development will be the religion of the 21st century" as the title of the Liogier's (2009) article suggests. The beginning of this process dates back to the late 19th century with the questioning of traditional ideologies and the favouring of secular ideologies such as liberalism and communism (Liogier 2009). The following collapse of the latter resulted in a religious void in which modern spirituality perfectly fit.

What are the influences that shaped post-Christian spirituality? These can be global factors such as the previously stated processes of secularisation and individualisation in Western societies, decreased cost of travel and the broader range of services available, increased openness and awareness of other religious movements, development of communications and information technologies, and increased stress levels as well as the effects of modernity and postmodernity (Norman 2011).

The values associated with spirituality, ethics, personal development, holism, and wholeness of humanity are being sought in consumption. According to Jean Baudrillard (1970), "consumers do not consume the product but rather the sense of these products". Consumption is, therefore, tightly concerned with "the creation and production of a sense of self" (Todd 2012). Recognizing this, one can possibly conclude consumption has been influenced by the values of modern spirituality with the focus on the tourism sector since holidays create perfect time for introspection and personal development.

What kind of spirituality responds to this demand? Indeed, spirituality, if not necessarily explicitly religious, draws from ancestral traditions and peoples' traditional practices (Frazer 1926). Buddhist spirituality has particularly attracted and continues to attract Westerners (Berzin and Chodron 1999), likely for being linked to the two characteristics of spirituality need.

First, it is important to note that post-Christian spirituality relies not only on old traditions and practices (Tabish 2008), but also on scientific research on the body and the mind. Interestingly, the heart of the increasingly popular Buddhist philosophy in the West lies in the scrupulous study of the mind and its different levels of consciousness. In contrast to many other religions, Buddhist practice implies working on both the body and the

mind. Researchers at the University of Wisconsin-Madison have recently conducted a set of scientific studies that revealed compassion meditation could dramatically change the brain circuits of meditators so that their empathy towards others would grow (Land 2008).

Secondly, spirituality is indeed difficult to dissociate from the experience. While faith, from Latin *fides*, implies confidence and trust, personal development can only be achieved through the experience of the self and the world. Buddhist spirituality falls perfectly within the category of a "religion of experience". This idea is illustrated in the words of the founder of Buddhism, Siddhartha Gautama, who said that all his teachings must be individually and thoroughly checked and experienced before being believed (Berzin and Chodron 1999).

2.4   Spirituality in the consumerist era

Thus, as tourism demand has evolved towards wellness and spiritual tourism, the industry adjusted and brought about a new offer with a new form of marketing. In particular, the development of spiritual tourism can be traced back to early 2000s with the emergence of tour packages revolving around different civilisation, traditions and world's spiritualities such as Inca, Buddhist, Hindu, and Sufi.

This particular tourism offer is accordingly based on a new type of marketing. As it has been already specified in this chapter, modern New Ageist spirituality exhibits a strong emphasis on subjective experience as the primary means of cognition, unlike religion. On this account, experiential marketing strategy is the most evident strategy to be implemented. While tours used to be mostly contemplative, with the emergence and rise of spiritual tourism they have been redesigned around activities and experiences leading to individual growth and development, which are also presented as the highlights of the trip. So the development of spiritual tourism concurs with one of experiential marketing.

Spiritual tour operators swiftly picked up the trend, which were reflected in their slogans and taglines. For example, Oasis Voyages, a leading spiritual tour operator in France, has adopted *"expériences en conscience"* as their tagline meaning 'experiences in consciousness', while Omalaya Travel (formerly Tendrel Travel) used to have "the experience of the moment" as their slogan.

Millennials, who are about to enter their earning prime, are expected to become the largest consumer group in the US hotel industry in two years, if not in one (Gonzalo

2016). And this generation, which is largest by population in the US, largely (78%) prefers to invest their income in a desirable experience to buying a material possession (Harris/Eventbrite 2014). This demand is not unique to Millennials as it is happening across all generations (Harris/Eventbrite 2014). Interestingly, while Millennials are more likely to be attracted to experiential and adventure travel, Generation X feels more inclined towards health and wellness tourism (Cosgrove 2015).

Experiential marketing forms part of the new approach to consumption that no longer considers consumption as destruction, but also as the production of the sensory image, values and identities. As such, the consumer is increasingly seen as an emotional entity looking for sensory experiments that can also be expressed commercially.

In practice spiritual tourists' activities do not only include visiting a spiritual place but also practising meditation, doing yoga and participating in different rituals to name a few (Owen 2006, 24). Adequate guidance plays a very important role too since it facilitates the dialogue, exchange and encounter, which in turn give life to the experience allowing progress on the spiritual path (Cohen 2006, 84). The spiritual tourism market is therefore the first market where the emphasis is also put on the companion, guide, and their potential to connect the client with spirituality. Some tour providers are turning to Western tour leaders, while others, like the client company Omalaya Travel, offer local guides and spiritual figures of the communities travelled.

2.5   Spiritual tourism in India

According to Norman (2011), while it may first appear that tourists travelling with a spiritual purpose visit a spiritual place by mere chance or out of interest, in reality their desisions are finely tailored. It is the hope of getting the desired experience at the certain destination(s) that drives them to travel there. What are the motives behind spiritual travellers choosing India as their number one spiritual destination?

As pointed out by Bevir (1994), India has experienced a considerable increase in Western spiritually-oriented tourists, beginning in the twentieth century. Being the cradle of four of the world's major religions, namely Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism and Jainism, and home to the followers of many others, there is little surprise that India ranks among the top spiritual destinations that the world has to offer (The Economist 2003). Therefore, it logically houses the most sacred places of its religions combined with lively religious celebrations, emanations of millennial spiritualities.

Religious practice is indeed omnipresent in India. According to the Global Index of Religion and Atheism published by Win-Gallup International in 2012, 81% of Indians describe themselves as religious, putting India among the world's twenty most religious countries, in contrast to decreasing religiosity in the Western world (WIN-Gallup International 2012).

Affordable lodging rates, a relaxed overall atmosphere, the spreading popularisation of Indian gurus, philosophies, culture and practices in the West, and the influences of Western writers, musicians and celebrities who travelled to India can all be considered as factors that shaped India's image as one of the spiritual magnets of the world. No wonder India can be easily found included in any top ten spiritual destination lists compiled by tourist advisor platforms. Such a highly acclaimed travel guide book as Lonely Planet mentions two spiritual locations in India in the world top ten: the Source of the Ganges (#1) and the Golden Temple in Amritsar (#5) (Bain 2012).

Taking the country's age-old spiritual traditions in advantage, the Indian Government launched the 'Incredible India' campaign promoting the country as a high-end tourist destination with a special emphasis on wellness and spirituality in 2002. However, the official data on spiritual tourism in India is extremely scarce and the number of respective tourists remains unknown. Overall, one can see an evident growth in foreign tourist arrivals in India over the last fifteen years in the chart below (Figure 1).

FIGURE 1. Foreign tourist arrivals in India, 1999-2005 (India Tourism Statistics at a Glance 2015)

It is clear from the bar chart shown above (Figure 1) that the number of foreign tourist arrivals in India has increased by almost four times over the last fifteen years. While there was only 2.2 million foreign tourist arrivals registered in 1999, last year India welcomed as many as 8 million foreign tourists – the fact that speaks for the increased

demand in this destination.

Once in India, one can find oneself overwhelmed with a dazzling variety of spiritual places to visit and activities to undertake. For instance, Original World travel agency, formerly known as Spirit of India, offers a broad range of spiritual tours such as pilgrimages to religious ceremonies and festivals, yoga retreats or visits to restricted areas (Sharpley and Sundaram 2005). Indeed, Indian spirituality can be witnessed not only at events or specialised courses but also experienced through daily practices at an ashram or shrine and life in the country itself (Sharpley and Sundaram 2005).

In fact, it is expected that anyone travelling to India is 'going to find themselves there', notably through such practices as yoga and meditation (Norman 2011). Alex Norman, the author of the only ever-written book dedicated entirely to the in-depth research on spiritual tourism, has undertaken an investigation with the purpose of identifying the most popular spiritual destinations in India in the mind of a Western spiritual tourist. After having researched all sorts of guidebook materials, popular culture, various media, and Internet forums, Norman concluded Varanasi, Dharamsala, Rishikesh and Goa to be leading spiritual harbours for Western seekers in India (Norman 2011).

Varanasi is largely viewed as the spiritual capital of the entire India given its supreme sacredness revered in several religions. According to Hinduism, the death in the city puts an end to the cycles of rebirths and therefore brings salvation, the ultimate goal of every Hindu. Furthermore, Varanasi is considered as one of the oldest steadily inhabited cities in the world. (Appendix 1.)

Another religious and spiritual Indian giant, Bodhgaya is famous as the city where the Buddha attained the enlightenment 2,500 years ago. Nowadays it is the most important pilgrimage site for Buddhists from all over the world. It is included on the Buddha's Path itinerary among three other major attractions. (Appendix 1.)

Largely promoted by the Indian government as the world capital of yoga, Rishikesh is a spiritual marketplace at the gateway to the Himalayas on the banks of the Ganges River. Dharamsala is widely known as the seat of the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan Government in exile as well as the largest community of Tibetan refugees. Given its religious background and mountainous location, it is little surprise Dharamsala is flooding with all sorts of spiritual pursuits offered to Westerners. (Appendix 1.)

All things considered, India perfectly corresponds to the Western demand in terms of well-being insofar as such traditions as yoga, meditation and Ayurveda. These holistic practices meet the shortcomings of Western spirituality that largely neglects the

importance of corporal well-being. These kinds of activities are practiced with the aim of achieving a better self (Norman 2011). Moreover, India fits as a perfect destination in terms of the Western notion of educational and transformative travel. Thus the rediscovery of these well-being practices is central to the spiritual tourism market and travel reasons for Westerners.

3   TOURISM PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

This chapter represents the foundation of the theoretical part of this thesis work since it cites different existing theories on tourism product, which are going to be implemented in new product creation that is presented in Chapter 6. The reader will be first introduced to the definition of the tourism product followed by the description of touristic experiences typology and will lastly learn about the stages in new product development.

3.1   Defining the tourism product

While it seems very challenging to provide one unanimous definition of the tourism product given its composite nature, all scholars agree that the term 'tourism product' implies the involvement of multiple components. During their tour, a tourist consumes necessary components such as accommodation, transportation, nutrition, recreation, admission to visitor attractions (which form integral products altogether), 'free' or 'public' goods (weather, landscape), and complementary services that are not marketed separately (Koutoulas 2004). Therefore, it can be drawn that the tourism product, according to Middleton (1988, 79), is a collection of both tangible and intangible elements that are consumed while on tour. However, the same term 'tourism product' can be conceived differently according to the party involved. Thus the tourism product can be analysed using two concepts – from the perspective of both a seller and consumer (Mak 2004). For a consumer, the tourism product is associated with the total travel experience, based on an activity at a destination (Koutoulas 2004).

The importance of a tourist experience as the tourism product was reflected in the model of the tourism product proposed by Smith (1994, 587). In the following model (Figure 2), the tourism product is understood as consisting of five elements, which, represented in concentric cycles, enable the synergic interaction between them.
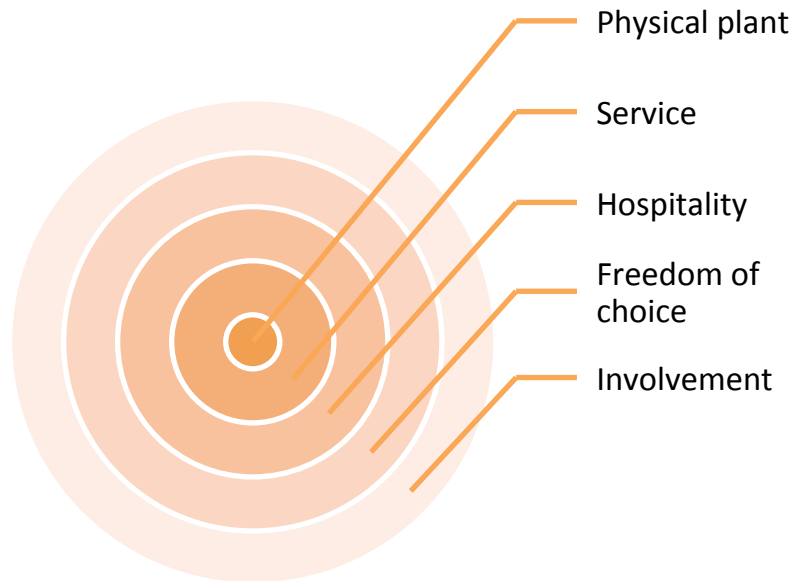
FIGURE 2. Tourism product model (Smith 1994, 587)

The tourism product is formed out of five constituent parts that extend from the centre of the product – its physical plant – to the outer shell 'Involvement'. The physical plant represents the core of any tourism product. The physical plant encompasses a site (mountain peak), cultural or natural resource (land), or facility (resort). It is also related to the weather, infrastructure, area, and supplies conditions. To present the physical plant to a consumer, the input of service is needed. Here, 'service' is determined as the execution of tasks demanded by tourists. However, it is not enough just to perform the task, it is crucially important to highlight the approach of the task performance, which is referred to as 'hospitality'. The last two layers help the traveller form their experience, which is often equated with tourism practices themselves. These are freedom of choice and involvement. The first one implies the essentiality of adequate degree of freedom of choice for the tourist to have a reasonably good experience. Finally, tourism products imply the traveller's participation, to some extent, in their production. Participation covers not merely the physical aspect, but rather a feeling of being engaged in the featured activity. All things considered, a desirable tourism product can be achieved when all the product elements have met the necessary requirements based on the product type and are successfully interconnected. (Smith 1994, 588-591.)

The "component view" of the tourism product has been acknowledged by some other prominent scholars in the research area such as Middleton, Fyall, Morgan and Ranchhod (2009, 120) and proved to be in frequent use worldwide. Thereby, the tourism product is again being defined as a bundle or a package of constituent parts grouped together to match client needs. Such products can be understood from two different

perspectives, that of the overall tourism product and that of the product of individual tourism businesses. The first one covers the total tourist experience gained during the whole journey and, therefore, represents the horizontal dimension from customers or tour providers' perception. However, the second understanding of the tourism product demonstrates that, as any other service product, the tourism product can be split into a sequence of different service delivery operations such as hotels, transportation enterprises, restaurants, car rentals, attraction, etc. This product view of individual tourism businesses holds the vertical dimension, as every producer organisation in the industry will concentrate on the services they provide. (Middleton et al. 2009, 120-121.)

The idea of the tourist product as a bundle consisting of different components has helped to distinguish five principal components in the overall tourism product. They stem from a prospective buyer's view of the tourism product as "an experience available at a price, based on the ultimate activity" and are subdivided into:

- Destination attractions and environment;
- Destination amenities and services;
- Accessibility of the destination;
- Images of the destination;
- Price to the consumer. (Middleton et al. 2009, 122-123.)

Destination attractions consist of natural, built, cultural and social attractions, which, combined, form the so-called environment. This tourism product component is the main determinant of the buyers' preferences and motives. Destination amenities and services are everything that the destination offers to make the tourists' stay comfortable and enjoyable. Accessibility of the destination implies the way a customer can get to a specific destination, thus defining the cost, speed and convenience. Not necessarily based on facts or direct experiences, images of the destination will cast a substantial impact on the consumers' buying decisions. Lastly, given the segmented nature of the tourism product, it is safe to state that the total price in the travel and tourism industry is the sum of many other included costs. (Middleton, et al. 2009, 122-125.)

Due to the multi-component nature of the tourism industry and internal dimensions of any product, for the individual tourism businesses' view, Middleton et al. (2009, 128-129) suggest using the product levels model, which was originally designed by Kotler (1999, 540). This model (Figure 3) can be applied to virtually any product and represents three-

product levels: the core product, the formal product and the augmented product (Middleton et al. 2009, 128).
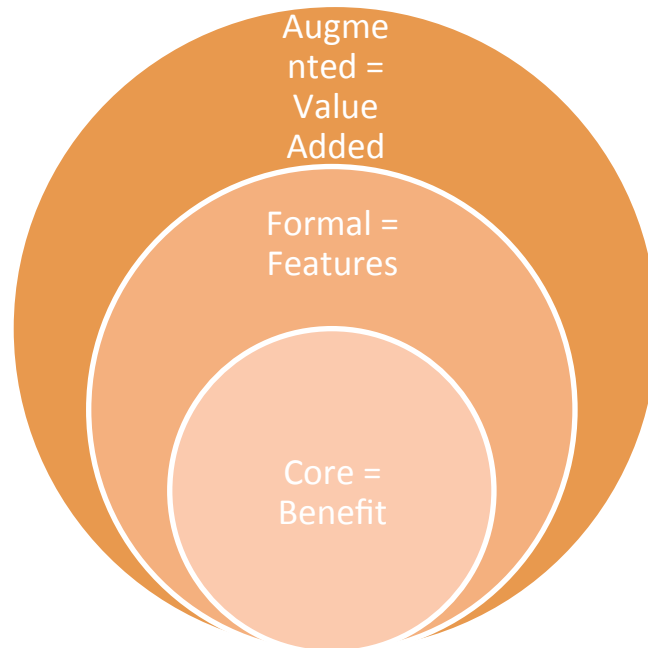
FIGURE 3. Three product levels (Middleton et al. 2009, 128)

The core product signifies the very core benefit of the product that is sought by the customer and, therefore, reflects their needs. The marketing interpretation of the core product creates the formal product, which is a specific offer sold to the customer for their investment. To differentiate the product from those of competitors, the added value is attached, which comes in the form of augmented product. (Middleton et al. 2009, 128.)

All in all, the tourism product is surely combined of many heterogeneous goods and services, perceived as an experience by the customer and, therefore, assembled in accordance with the wishes of the latter. As Middleton et al. (2009) highlight, when developing a new product in tourism, prior to deciding on all the three levels of the product, the recurring research into the perceptions and purchasing characteristics of segments should be carried out.

3.2   Touristic experiences typology

For the time being there has been no product or experience-based typology exclusively devised for spiritual tourism segment except for Haq and Jackson's (2006) attempt to combine four different typological models into one, specifically adapted for spiritual

tourism peculiarities. However, this model will not be used in this thesis given the model's absence of clarity and conglomeration of numerous ideas.

Instead, from the author's perspective, it seems best to adapt Cohen's general phenomenological typology of touristic experiences in the context of spiritual travel. Cohen argued that the pilgrim and the modern tourist are converse in their motives for travelling, as one of them journeys, both in space and in their mind, from the periphery towards the cultural centre, while the other journeys away from the cultural centre to the periphery (Cohen 1979, 183). The pilgrim sees the destination they are travelling to as the sacred centre of the world outside of their immediate life-space. The perception of the destination as the religious "cosmos" in pilgrimage hence contradicts with that in modern, particularly mass, tourism, where travellers see their usual "world" as spiritual, cultural or even religious centre and travel away from that to discover the environment of others.

Having largely associated touristic experiences with the motivations of tourists, Cohen proposed a five-mode typological framework of touristic experiences, which consists of the following modes:

- Recreational
- Diversionary
- Experiential
- Experimental
- Existential (Cohen 1979, 183-190.)

The gradation of the model spans between the experiences of the most hedonistic traveller, to those of the modern pilgrim, who travels to find meaning at other people's centre. The experience of the recreational tourist would represent just another form of entertainment and not involve any desire for authenticity. In the context of spiritual or religious tourism, the recreational trip lacks the deeper content, comes secularised and is similar to the diversionary that serves as a getaway from the boredom and senselessness of everyday. Alienated from their own cultural and spiritual centres, the experiential tourist travels to experience the authenticity of the life of others. The desire for authentic experience brings the experiential tourist together with the traditional pilgrim. However, the core difference between the two lies in the distinction of the centre. The experiential tourist will always remain aware of the "otherness" and will not associate themselves with the people whose authentic lifestyles they witness due to the

aesthetic and educational aspect of their journey, whereas the pilgrim experiences the sacredness of the centre of his faith and feels kindred with their co-religionists. Yet more profound than the recreational and diversionary modes, the experiential touristic experience cannot amount to authentic religious or spiritual experiences since it does not provide a new meaning. In contrast to the previous three modes, the experimental tourists are no longer attached to the centre of their home society and are actively seeking to replace it with a new one, often switching and experimenting with different traditions and practices. Unlike the experiential tourist, who does not engage in the authentic life of others, the experimental tourist willingly participates in it in but does not commit fully. Thus, he/she can be referred to as a "seeker" type. Finally, the existential mode of touristic experience is the one that is closest to pilgrimage since this type of traveller totally adheres to a spiritual centre outside of a centre they belong to by birth. Existential travellers see the meaning of their life at the newly found centre and their life at home is compared to an exile. The difference between the existential tourist and the pilgrim is in this feeling of exclusion experienced at the native centre. The existential traveller feels alienated each time he or she returns home from the new spiritual centre because of his or her conversion to it, while the pilgrim does not, since his or her centre is not elective, it is given and thus supports normal life outside pilgrimage. (Cohen 1979, 183-190.)

Haq and Jackson (2006) argued in their analysis of different typological models that despite the likelihood of a spiritual tourist coming from all the five categories, the chances are greater they will belong to the last two ones.

To provide a whole picture of the touristic typology in the context of spiritual travel, I shall add here one more typological framework by Smith who contrasted two-sided interests of the religious/spiritual traveller. She placed two polarities on a continuum of travel (Figure 4), most sacred (a) against most secular (e).

PILGRIMAGE	**RELIGIOUS TOURISM**	**TOURISM**

a	b	c	d	e
sacred		faith/profane knowledge - based		secular

a. *pious pilgrim*; b. *pilgrim>tourist;* c. *pilgrim=tourist;*
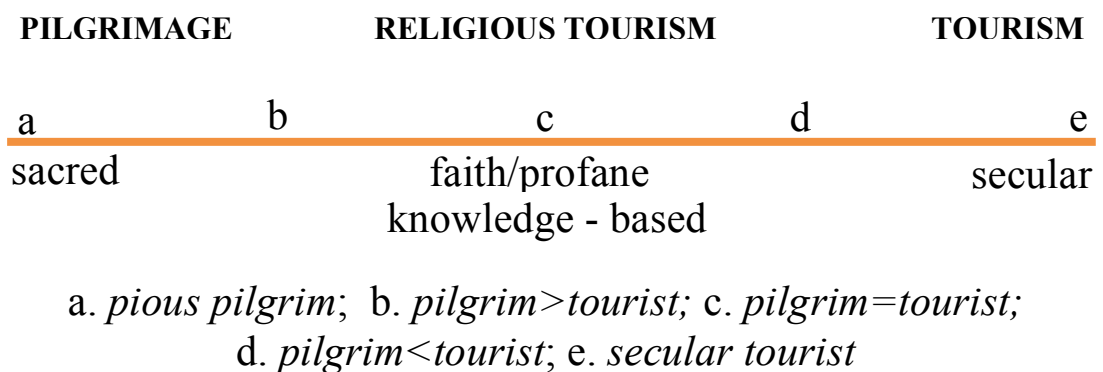d. *pilgrim<tourist*; e. *secular tourist*

FIGURE 4. The pilgrim-tourist path (Smith 1992, 3-4)

The positions of the diagram show the whole spectrum of the traveller's experience that can range from sacred pilgrimage to mere tourism, with Figure 4(c) labeled as religious tourism. Figure 4(b) is more inclined towards pilgrimage than tourism, while (d) the opposite, towards tourism than pilgrimage. (Smith 1992, 3-4.)

Haq and Jackson (2006) sought to adopt the continuum of touristic experiences by Smith for their own typology model to help categorise different types of spiritual tourists.

3.3 Stages in new-product development

To the author's point of view, the universal model of the new-product development process by Kotler, Wong, Saunders and Armstrong (2005, 589) is deemed the most suitable in the context of this case study and will be applied accordingly. Kotler et al. (2005, 589) describe nine principal steps required in new-product detection and growth, namely:

- New product strategy;
- Idea generation;
- Idea screening;
- Concept development and testing;
- Marketing strategy;
- Business analysis;
- Product development;
- Test marketing;
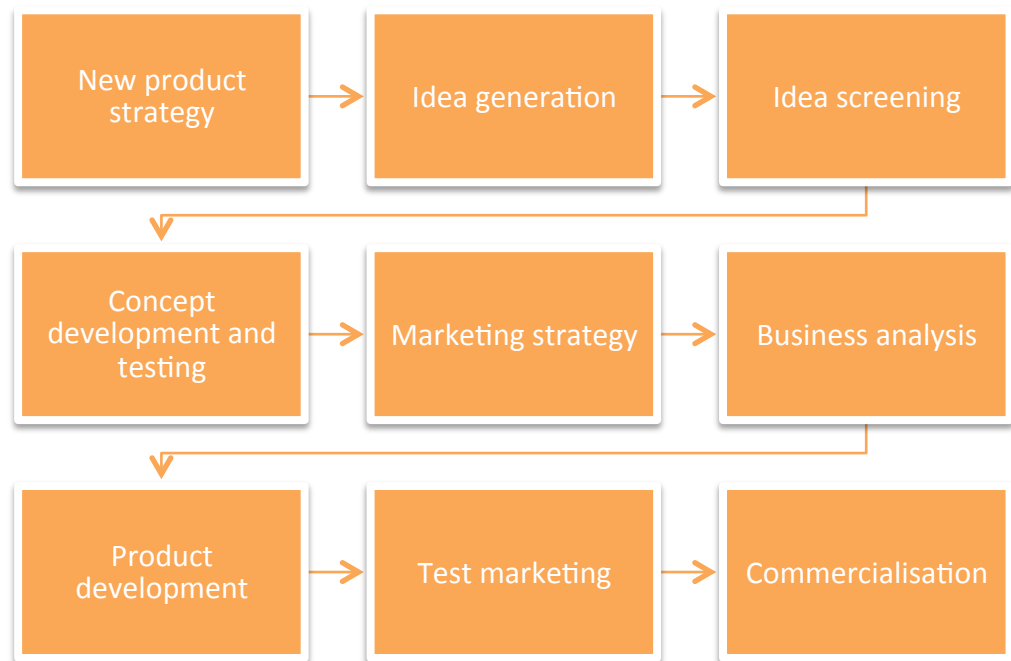- Commercialisation (Figure 5).

FIGURE 5. New-product development process (Kotler et al. 2005, 589)

Once the need for a new-product development has arisen, the company has to precisely define its new-product strategy for the process facilitation. For a successful business, the regular flow of new ideas from various sources is needed. As such, internal sources, clients, competitors, suppliers, distributors and others can be involved in idea generation. However, out of the vast number of new ideas only few are selected. Prospective ideas then go through the stage of concept development. A product idea is thus developed into a product concept, which is tested with a group of target market. (Kotler et al. 2005, 589-595.)

Based on the preceding step, the marketing strategy is then introduced, in which the target market, product positioning as well as the sales, market share and profit goals are introduced in the first part; price, distribution and marketing budget of the product – in the second; long-run sales, profit goals and marketing mix strategy – in the third (Kotler et al. 2005, 595).

The next stage involves evaluation of the product from the business perspective. Sales, costs and profit projections for the proposal are reviewed in business analysis. After the passing of business tests, the product concept is then developed into a real product and tested in more realistic market settings. The process is concluded with the product commercialisation, the final phase when the product is getting actually launched in the specific market at a certain time. (Kotler et al. 2005, 596-602.)

4   CASE COMPANY PRESENTATION

This chapter seeks to represent the core of this research, which functioned as a case company, and its current activities to provide the reader with some insight into the history, identity, structure as well as the product and management of the enterprise. The information presented in this chapter relies on the interviews conducted with the company's founders as well as the author's knowledge gained during the internship together with the publications on the website of the enterprise.

4.1   Emergence and background of the enterprise

Omalaya Travel, Ltd. is a small size travel agency based in Dharamsala, Himalayan India, and specialised in spiritual tourism. Formerly known as Tendrel Travel, the agency was founded by the Franco-Tibetan couple, Stéphanie and Tashi Gyalpo, in 2009 (Omalaya Travel 2016a). At the time, it used to serve solely as a local travel agency providing discovery journeys in the Ladakh region, Tashi's homeland that is located at the northernmost tip of India more than 3,500 metres above the sea level. The unique symbiotic nature of the Buddhist culture and spirituality dominant in the region swiftly led Omalaya Travel to becoming a receptive tour operator for travel agencies specialised in spiritual and experiential tourism such as Oasis Voyages in France, Transformational Journeys in Australia and Spiritual Quest Adventure in England. (Gyalpo, S. and Gyalpo, T. 14 October 2015.)

Omalaya Travel underwent great changes with the introduction of a new business strategy in 2014. The company hence evolves into an issuing agency and positions itself on the market of spiritual tourism. The same year, Omalaya Travel organises a journey to the Kalachakra Initiation, the highest in Buddhism, for a group of one hundred participants (Omalaya Travel 2016b). Omalaya Travel definitely falls under the category of a startup enterprise by many criteria. The agency is currently in their product and identity development phase and is aiming at increasing their online visibility, with the Internet being their main sales mode. In 2015, the new redesigned website was launched as well as the partnership programme. (Gyalpo, S. and Gyalpo, T. 14 October 2015.)

4.2   Identity

The identity of Omalaya Travel is closely intertwined with the Himalayan culture that one of its co-founders, Tashi Gyalpo, belongs to. Born to a nomadic family of exiled Tibetans in Ladakh, he grew up in the immensity of the landscapes of the India's Far North. (Omalaya Travel 2016c.) The region of Ladakh does culturally contrast with the rest of India given its predominantly Buddhist population, which is traditionally associated with Tibet (Gupta 2013). It is therefore the influence of this culture that shaped the company's image.

The agency was originally named *Tendrel Travel*, which emphasised the interdependence of all phenomena – the key concept in Buddhism. This notion of interdependence and interrelation lies in the heart of the authentic encounters that the company wishes to create for travellers and local communities so that both parties will be benefited from the cultural exchange perspective. (Gyalpo, S. and Gyalpo, T. 14 October 2015.)

Although the concept remained intact, the enterprise was forced to change its name due to some legal disputes in 2015. *Omalaya* is the fusion of the two words *Om*- the universal mantra – and *Alaya* – meaning both "inner home" and "the source of everything", which evokes the sacred Himalaya, the company's area of expertise (Gyalpo, S. and Gyalpo, T. 14 October 2015). Omalaya Travel became the winner of the TED Entrepreneurship Investment Award supported by the Dalai Lama Foundation and the Tibetan Central Administration in 2015 and thus, was identified as the most promising business among up-and-coming Tibetan entrepreneurs (Central Tibetan Administration 2015).

4.3   Structure

The agency, based in Dharamsala, is run by its two co-founders, Stéphanie and Tashi Gyalpo. The general manager of the enterprise is a French employee Flora, whose responsibility covers a wide range of tasks. The rest of the team is composed of interns and occasional employees. The vast majority of the coming interns are logically of the French background owing to the agency's orientation on the French market. Apart from the French prevalence, the other half of the team is very multicultural. The agency also works closely with freelancers, who provide design or IT services, for instance, and employs an average of twenty-five seasonal workers such as drivers, local guides and other intermediaries (Gyalpo, S. and Gyalpo, T. 14 October 2015).

4.4   Concept

Omalaya Travel offers spiritual and initiation journeys whose purpose is to immerse the traveller in the heart of the Indo-Tibetan spiritual traditions that are essentially Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh and Bon (pre-Buddhist religion of Tibet). To meet this objective, all journeys offered by Omalaya Travel are based on the three key elements: *expert guides*, *experiences* and *sacred sites* (Omalaya Travel 2016a).

"Expert guides" element represents a certain specialty of Omalaya Travel within this concept. Thus, Omalaya Travel is the only French agency whose groups are accompanied exclusively by expert guides who are in fact spiritual leaders and key players in their local communities. These include a female shaman, a traditional Tibetan medicine doctor, a yogi and a hermit among many others. Omalaya Travel's expert guides make the traveller experience their spiritual traditions from within, and their knowledge of their communities facilitates the encounter with the local culture. (Gyalpo, S. and Gyalpo, T. 14 October 2015.)

FIGURE 6. The concept of Omalaya Travel illustrated on their website's homepage (Omalaya Travel 2016)

The next element of the agency's concept is experiences that form the foundation of any trip organised by Omalaya Travel. Therefore, the journeys offered by the company are purely experiential in their nature inviting travellers to have a direct experience of traditions and practices. As such, consultations with traditional Tibetan medicine doctors, protection rituals, prayer recitations, meditation practices, shamanic sessions are offered to name a few. All these listed examples of experiences reveal the

transformative aspect of the journeys since they are supposed to provide the traveller with the tools that he or she is going to implement on a daily basis subsequently in his or her inner journey. (Gyalpo, S. and Gyalpo, T. 14 October 2015.)

Finally, Omalaya Travel brings their customers to the places of worship that are regarded sacred such as monasteries, sacred lakes, temples and caves. What makes these sacred sites particularly attractive is the energy of the blessing of the sages who are believed to have once dwelled in them. Omalaya Travel also offers specific journeys like pilgrimages as well as Buddhist initiations like Kalachakra. (Gyalpo, S. and Gyalpo, T. 14 October 2015.)

The concept received further development in 2015. Based on the three constituents of the concept (expert guides, experiences, sacred sites), the enterprise aspires to distinguish three levels of a journey offered to a traveller. The first level will be dedicated to the physical well-being, which, according to the Indo-Tibetan beliefs, affects the mind and mental well-being and will be represented in an Ayurveda treatment. The second is regarded as a personal development tool that will take the form of thematic workshops (on self-confidence, psychology), while the third is desired to result in a true spiritual awakening through a real spiritual journey or pilgrimage. This broadening of the concept of Omalaya Travel should materialise in the classification of the existing products and the introduction of new products combined with the partial redesign of the website. (Gyalpo, S. and Gyalpo, T. 14 October 2015.)

4.5   Product

The preceding concept is applied to three different methods of collecting income used by Omalaya Travel, which are also three in number. The first one concerns working directly with the customers. Essentially, Omalaya Travel organises fixed tours for small groups (8 to 15 participants) led by expert guides. These are thematic journeys (shamanism, traditional medicine), pilgrimages or teachings given by the Dalai Lama; their list is annually renewed and updated. There are also tailor-made tours available, which are fully personalised for the destinations offered. (Gyalpo, S. and Gyalpo, T. 14 October 2015.)

Another way of generating income for Omalaya Travel implies B2B relations, meaning that it arranges spiritual tours for the clients of the issuing travel agency from their name in the Omalaya Travel's regions of expertise. The last method of the Omalaya Travel's

sales strategy uses partnership with activity leaders employed in the well-being and spirituality industry, e.g. yoga teachers, reiki specialists, therapists, nutritionists, life coaches, etc. Omalaya Travel assists in organising a group tour (yoga retreat, personal development course, or thematic seminar accordingly) for the partners and their customers. As a facilitator, the partner enjoys free airfare, housing, meals, the tour programme as well as their commission, which is dependent on the number of travellers they would bring along. All revenues are gathered from the partners' customers. (Appendix 1.)

Originally limited to the region of Ladakh, the range of available destinations offered by Omalaya Travel has gradually expanded. Today, Omalaya Travel operates not only in Ladakh, but in all of North India, in particular in holy cities such as Bodhgaya, Varanasi, Dharamsala, Rishikesh, Amritsar and Haridwar. As the customer base diversifies, more destinations are being offered to the French-speaking world. Nepal and Bhutan tours are presented in both English and French; however, the newly added itineraries to Tibet and South India are restricted to the French-speaking customers only. (Omalaya Travel 2016d.)

4.6   Target market

Essentially Omalaya Travel offers a high quality service with exceptional guides and numerous visits to unique sites and various authentic activities. One of the values promoted by Omalaya Travel is responsible tourism. Understanding the importance of community, the agency is proud to support the communities they live in and works through direct participation and fundraising projects. Practically, it provides a better salary for seasonal employees and ensures donations to its expert guides. In fact, these spiritual leaders of the Himalayan culture perform their rituals for free in the culturally established system of effective donations. Another example of responsible tourism practice of Omalaya Travel includes arranging more than 500 meals with local families each season in Ladakh and supporting a nunnery. (Appendix 1.)

Therefore, the travel agency Omalaya Travel is placed in the luxury travel market segment with the target audience being primarily a wealthy clientele, 70% of whom are French, 20% from the US, and the remaining 10% of various nationalities. (Gyalpo, S. and Gyalpo, T. 14 October 2015.)

Furthermore, the typical consumer profile of the market in which Omalaya Travel operates can be characterised as Buddhism "sympathisers". This term was initially proposed by sociologist Fréderic Lenoir (1999) in the course of his research of Buddhism in France in 1999. He expected that there were up to five million people in France, one of the leading Western countries by the number of Buddhism adherents, who fit the category of "sympathisers". Having polled one thousand "sympathisers", Lenoir found out that Buddhist spirituality attracts more women (60%) than men and people from middle or upper socio-economic groups in the West. This consumer profile sticks perfectly to the price range proposed by the agency (about 2500$/person for 10 days) (Omalaya Travel 2016e).

FIGURE 7. Mapping competitive position of Omalaya Travel (marked with a logo)

The graph above (Figure 7) reflects the competitive position of the case company compared with its selected competitors in the general English-speaking market. To build this graph, the author had to undertake several steps. First, the consumer need for a broad product chain that could possible satisfy it was defined. Second, the competitor analysis was restricted to the English-speaking consumer market only. Third, a typical product of each brand, overlapping with those of the case company, was identified and selected. For drawing the price line the market price of each product was reviewed. Then, the level of primary benefit, in this case the degree of spirituality, of each competitor's product was specified. Despite the explicit overgeneralisation of such mapping, the case company has indeed shown to have a relative competitive advantage given its low price range combined with the soaring spirituality degree on a common scale. Such low prices are conditioned by the absence of intermediaries and the

presence of direct contact with local service providers, whereas the spirituality level is the highest among competitors, thanks to the favouring of expert guides who enable the personal connection between the traveller and the locals and immersion in the Indo-Tibetan spirituality accompanied by the authentic activities included on itineraries.

4.7   Marketing methods

During the repositioning strategy, the sales methods used by Omalaya Travel have evolved and been diversified. At the beginning, the majority of the clients of the enterprise were the result of the network marketing, i.e. marketed by word-of-mouth combined with the clients of the issuing agencies (B2B). As part of its repositioning strategy, Omalaya Travel has diversified its marketing strategy by introducing three new channels, namely the creation of a new and search engine optimised website, the development of relationship marketing (partnership concept) as well as advertising in magazines specialised in well-being and spirituality (Psychologie magazine Belgium, Happinez). According to the testimonials of the management, the last method proved to be the most effective one as it brings direct customers who are the main profit generators. (Gyalpo, S. and Gyalpo, T. 14 October 2015.)

5 RESEARCH METHODS

This chapter will define the main goals and objectives of this thesis. Furthermore, the main research question and objectives and goals of the research will be stated. Moreover, as the name of the chapter indicates the research methods used in this thesis project will be explained. Limitations of this thesis research will also be discussed.

While training at the case company, the importance of discussing strategies for rapid development was continuously highlighted due to the sartup status of the enterprise. Having covered the majority of destinations in northern India, the management of the firm resolved to expand to the south of India, which was revealed in the second interview (Gyalpo 29 October 2016). Thus, the main research question arose: how to develop a new product in South India for a spiritual travel agency? The client organisation commissioned the preparation of the study of the spiritual tourism market and the secondary literature, followed by the formulation of the new-product development strategy in accordance with the company's needs. The latter is therefore considered as the principal goal of the research.

Based on the research objectives set, the spectrum of the thesis covers an overview of the spiritual tourism phenomena and shows the new-product development strategy in the chosen market. The content of the thesis responds to the following objectives of the thesis work:

- Define the term "spiritual tourism" and elaborate on spiritual tourism in India to provide a general understanding of the topic interest;
- Present the theoretical background of tourism product and new-product development process;
- Based on the research results, specify a new-product development strategy for the case company.

According to the objectives of the research described above, the qualitative research method was chosen as the most relevant means for the particular case study. As Denzin and Lincoln (1994, 2) have outlined, qualitative research includes the studied use and selection of various empirical materials such as case study, personal experience, introspective, life story, interview, observational, historical, interactional and visual texts that depict the everyday and troublesome situations and meaning in individual lives.

In this research the qualitative method is applied by conducting a case study with the help of the sequenced in-depth semi-structured interviews with Stéphanie and Tashi Gyalpo, the founders of the enterprise. In-depth interviewing, or unstructured interviewing, is defined as "a type of interview which researchers use to elicit information in order to achieve a holistic understanding of the interviewee's point of view or situation" (Berry 1999). The semi-structured type of interviews involves asking open-ended questions which are freely discussed and prompt further investigation of the topic; used extensively when there is a possibility to hold a set of interviews.

There are three major interviews that were recorded and thus have shaped the methodology of this report. The first interview (Gyalpo, S. and Gyalpo, T. 14 October 2015) was conducted in person with the both founders of the case company and covered the general topics such as emergence and background of the enterprise, its identity, structure, concept and product as well as the target market and marketing methods employed. This type of collected data formed the basis of Chapter 4 that introduces the reader to the case company and its operations.

The second interview was conducted in person as well, however, with only one of the founders, Stéphanie Gyalpo (30 March 2016). This interaction helped to identify the company's new-product strategy and understand its needs. These findings contributed to the Chapter 6 and narrowed down the research scope. After having registered and collected the theoretical data as well as conducted the small-scale competitor analysis (Table 1), the need for the third interview arose. Due to the geographical distance, the third interview happened over phone with Stéphanie Gyalpo (29 October 2016) and was dedicated to the new-product strategy precision. The findings formed the most of Chapter 6. The main fruit of the last conversation is the new-product description.

However, the planned analysis implied using the mixed methods strategy for the research. Thus, the author envisioned applying the mixed research technique, combining both qualitative and quantitative research methods in one study to acquire more accurate, diverse and reliable primary data. To explain the benefits of using mixed methodology, Kaplan and Duchon (1988) cite Bonoma (1985) in their work, who states that, "collecting data by different methods provides a wider range of coverage that may result in a fuller picture of the unit under study ".

In fact, quantitative research method was envisaged to be the main research method in this study given its quality of presenting measurable, numerical data (Muijs 2010). The initial plan meant conducting a customer survey for collecting customers' feedback on

the new product and destination along with collected interviews with the company. Yet this plan was not destined to materialise due to the case company's withholding to run the survey, which came as great disappointment to the author. Although the case study is generally seen as the easy and direct method to acquire first-hand corporate and industry information, indeed, it has certain limitations as research activities are enabled by the commissioning party. Given these limitations, the results of this research cannot be trusted with full confidence.

As case studies most often contain qualitative data research methods, the aim of this research is to study the case, not to generalise beyond it. Stake (1998, 120) argues, "the prime referent in case study is the case, not the methods by which the case operates". In the actual case, devising a new-product development strategy for the client company was emphasised. The object of this case study is the case company itself, which is studied as "a specific, unique, bounded system" as defined by Stake (2008, 445).

Given these reasons, the primary data used in this research comes from the client company itself in the form of interviews conducted at different thesis project stages and has been reflected in Chapter 4 and Chapter 6 as well as fragmently in some other chapters. However, Chapter 1, Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 rely mostly on the secondary data collected by the author from various sources such as academic books, publications, articles, papers, reports, various web materials, etc. and represent the theoretical background of the study. The two data types combined underpin each other, resulting in a comprehensive case study research, which is then presented to the client organisation for further action. The information collected throughout research process can be of varying benefit to the general reader, e.g. it can give a more profound insight into the notion of spiritual tourism and its reflection in a real-life business project.

6   NEW PRODUCT DESCRIPTION WITHIN DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

This chapter will describe the process of developing a new product for the case company following the theoretical concept suggested by Kotler et al. (2005, 589), which was brought in earlier in Chapter 3. Some steps were deliberately omitted due to the irrelevance to this case study. The new product is also concretised through the tourist product components model created by Middleton et al. (2009, 122-123) and discussed in Chapter 3 of this thesis. It is here represented within the new-product development process.

6.1   New-product strategy, idea generation and screening

Owing to the fact that the case company is going through its growth stage, it comes as no surprise that they are experiencing the constant need for new ideas relating to development of their products and improving their services to attract more customers. In the discussed case, the main objective of the new product is to expand the product line and by that attract new and keep existing customers as well as increase sales. The new product should align with the company's general product concept (see Figure 6 and Appendix 1).

Omalaya Travel often organises brainstorming sessions among its employees in order to find the most promising ideas and solve current problems. Many ideas are generated, registered and then the best ones are admitted to further development stages. The main sources of ideas for the case company are its internal sources (employees and top management) and competitors. While screening the multitude of generated ideas, certain questions are taken into consideration such as whether this particular product will be useful to our company and will bring benefits to our customers, whether there are the right people and resources to bring this idea to life, and how well it corresponds with the company's goal and values. (Gyalpo 30 March 2016.)

6.1.1   Competitor analysis

A company can use various sources, both internal and external, to encourage the systematic search for new-product ideas. Competitors, an example of an external

source, can be of great help and inspiration when it comes to new-product idea generation and adoption. (Kotler et al. 2005, 590-591.)

To understand, what kind of product is already offered in the market within the new-product idea by the company's closest rivals, the comparative competitor product analysis was carried out. According to Chen (1996, 100), the competitor analysis, above all, aims at "understanding and predicting the rivalry, or interactive market behavior, between firms in their quest for a competitive position in an industry". This formulation relates to the case company's goal.

To form the following database, the tours that resonated most with the company's new-product idea were selected with the help of the search engine tools. This helped not only detect the relevant competitor products but also scan their websites for further details detection (Oasis Voyages 2016; Terre du Ciel 2016; Evaneos 2016; Shanti Travel 2016). Thus, the data source used to compile this table is secondary by its nature as it relies on the information that is available to everyone at any time. The purpose behind this small-scale research was to select already existing common products, not necessarily of the direct competitors of the case company, and combine them in one informational entity so that it is easier to identify the potential of the new-product idea in the current market. Ergo, competitors' activities in southern India are summarised in the table below (Table 1).

TABLE 1. Spirituality-related tours to South India by competitors

Company name	Name of the trip	Duration	Itinerary	Tour price	Guide
Oasis Voyages (located in France)	Inde du sud: les voies de la sagesse (South India: the ways of wisdom)	15 days	Bangalore, Tiruvannamalai, Pondichery / Auroville, Chidambaram, Kumbhakonam, Tanjore, Madurai, Kanyakumari, Poovar, Amritapuri, Alleppey / Marari.	3,085 € (including the airfare)	Dinesh (Indian born with spiritual background)
Terre du ciel	Au cœur de l'âme indienne (At the	17 days	Tiruvanamalai, Arunachala, Pondicherry and Auroville, Thanjavur,	2,600 € (including internat	Madeleine Lacour (French born)

	Heart of the Indian Soul)		Madurai, Amritapuri, Anand ashram, Kollur, Mangalore, Mumbai	ional airfare)	
Evaneos (Prithvi – local agency)	Inde: Voyage spirituel en Inde du Sud (India: A Spiritual Journey to South India)	15 days	Mamalllapuram, Kanchipuram, Tiruvannamalai, Arunachala, Pondicherry, Nataraja, Kumbakonam, Madurai, Cap Comorin, Kanyakumari, Kovalam, Trivandrum	Starting from 840 €	Local Indian (spiritual background not mentioned)
Shanti Travel (located in India)	Bien être et Ayurveda au Tamil Nadu avec Noelline Besson (Well-being and Ayurveda in Tamil Nadu with Noelline Besson)	10 days	Chennai, Pondicherry, Auroville, Nataraja, Gingee - Tiruvanamalai, Mahabalipuram, Chennai	2,900 €	David (French based in South India)

India, even not necessarily spiritual-wise, is, indeed, a very popular destination in the French market, be it for southern or northern tours. Therefore, the competition is tight and travel agents are urged to differentiate their products according to their niche market, offering the best value for the best price to the consumer.

This table is intended to bring together the most similar tours to southern India offered by competitors. The aim was to select the journeys that closely resemble the scope of interest of Omalaya Travel, meaning that the theme of the tour should be related to spiritual discovery of South India. Some tours, such as those offered by Shanti Travel (2016), are focused more on the well-being and healing activities as the main theme of

the trip. The direct competitor of the case company is clearly Oasis Voyages (2016) – like Omalaya Travel, they provide a local guide and offer essentially the same ratio of spirituality/well-being activities. Short daily meditations are included in Oasis Voyages' (2016) tour programme and similar sites are offered for a visit. However, their price range is higher than that of Omalaya Travel, partly due to the inclusion of the international airfare in contrast to the case enterprise (Oasis Voyages 2016).

More or less, the same range of sacred sites is offered throughout the product lines of Omalaya Travel's competitors (Table 1), proving that the sites mentioned in the itineraries are recognised as the true spiritual magnets and are widely known in the spiritual milieu. What makes Omalaya Travel stand out from its competitors is the fact that the agency is located in India and has a direct reach to the tour arrangement, avoiding intermediaries, and can make travelling more authentic by hiring a local guide with some background knowledge in spirituality (Appendix 1). The case company has another advantage in terms of the competitive prices their tours are offered for, which is generally lower than of competitors (Gyalpo 29 October 2016).

6.2   Concept development and testing

After conducting a small-scale research on similar existing products in the market, Omalaya Travel found the new product idea viable and possible to realise given its accessible resources and competences. The product concept was first introduced to partners of the company as potential distributors and facilitators, and it has proven to be successful and well demanded, especially among those related to Ayurveda practices (Gyalpo 29 October 2016).

6.2.1   Product idea

The product idea lies in offering a spiritual journey of initiation with a particular focus on the well-being and self-reflection at the famous sacred sites of southern India. The new product must be in accordance with the company's product concept and brand values. As the company seeks further extension of its product line and enlargement of its customer base, the new-product development strategy was adapted to meet these goals (Gyalpo 29 October 2016).

All the destinations currently offered by Omalaya Travel encompass only the northern regions of India and other kindred areas, e.g. Bhutan, Nepal, and Tibet (Omalaya Travel 2016e). The management decided, as revealed in an interview with the author, to go beyond the usual range of destinations and add a new itinerary to its product portfolio (Gyalpo 30 March 2016).

South India was chosen as the most likely prospective destination and given priority due to the company's presence and knowledge of the country's tourism trends and potential (Gyalpo 30 March 2016). Rich in ancient temples, places of pilgrimage, and home to such practices as Ayurveda and tropical paradise, Southern Indians states have long been a popular attraction for spiritual tourists (Lonely Planet 2016a).

The tour is destined for Western spiritual travellers who are eager to discover the spirituality of the southern part of the Indian subcontinent and indulge in Ayurvedic treatment. These are generally upper-middle and higher income middle-aged groups, predominantly consisting of women who are seeking spiritual healing. (Gyalpo 29 October 2016.) The traveller's target profile falls under the experiential touristic experience category.

The tour will be guided by a professional local Indian guide with a spiritual background, and will be interpreted in French on the spot. The tour is planned and organised to commence in late October-early November in order to take advantage of peak climatic conditions in the chosen area. The trip is optimised for small groups and customised to allow for some space in the schedule for free time discoveries (city strolls, shopping), which will be part of the product range. (Gyalpo 29 October 2016.)

6.2.2 Product components

Five tourist product components offered by Middleton et al. (2009) are discussed in this subchapter, thus providing a detailed view on the new product of the case company.

6.2.2.1 Destination attractions and environment

Since the developed product is the subject of spiritual tourism, the related attractions should be considered. South India is first of all known for its ancient Hindu temples and ruins, lush tropical flora, proximity of the ocean and hot humid climate (Lonely Planet

2016a). In the course of the tour, the travellers will visit the two Southern states – Tamil Nadu and Kerala, which offer numerous sacred sites available for visitation (Gyalpo 29 October 2016). Therefore, the mixture of spiritual heritage and generosity of the tropical nature form the environment of the destination.

6.2.2.2 Destinations amenities and services

Two of the most highly ranked by touristic popularity Indian states (Traveljee 2015), Tamil Nadu and Kerala have multiple touristic facilities offered such as large-scale accommodation and catering businesses. From the well-being spectrum, modern Western travellers are considerably interested in getting such treatments as Ayurveda medicine consulting, Ayurveda massage, yoga and meditation, which are largely offered in the southern states, in particular, Kerala (Lonely Planet 2016b), where Ayurveda originated.

6.2.2.3 Accessibility of the destination

Being the second largest populated country in the world, India possesses an extensive transportation network, which has to serve the population of over 1.2 billion people. International travellers can connect to India by flying in via such hub airports such as those in Chennai, Mumbai and Bangalore, in terms of the South. There are numerous domestic flights and railroad connections of various classes to bring the traveller to the desired destination in the most convenient manner. (Maps of India 2016.)

6.2.2.4 Images of the destination

Needless to say, the general perception of India as a country will be dominant in the mind of a prospective tourist. There are images of all-prevailing mayhem, exasperating pollution, extremities, confronting poverty and unbearable heat, but at the same time of astounding architecture, deep-rooted unique spiritual system, culinary delights and diversity of landscape from sun-washed beaches to snow-peaked mountains. All these images will emerge and coexist at once. (Singh 2016.)

However, let us still focus more on the southern Indian part. The classic images adherent to South India are most precisely described by Lonely Planet (2016a), the world's largest travel guidebook: "magnificent relics of the splendid civilisations, the multitude of sacred sites, spectacular festivals and time-honoured rituals, Tamil Nadu's heaving temple towns, Kerala's lazy backwaters, fertile plains and rolling hills".

6.2.2.5 Price to the consumer

According to all the calculations made by the founders of the agency, the price for the developed tour was set in the total sum of 1,880 euro per person. The price includes accommodation in double room throughout the trip, half board, airfare between Thiruvananthapuram and Chennai, all transfers to/from airport and hotels, consultation with an Ayurvedic physician, Ayurvedic treatments, the presence and teachings of Anant (local Indian guide) throughout the trip, the assistance of a French-speaking guide throughout the trip, all transportation on the tour, donations and entry fees for all sites mentioned in itinerary. The price, however, does not include the international airfare. (Gyalpo 29 October 2016.)

6.2.3 Product levels

The new developing product can be broken down into three product levels (Middleton et al. 2009, 128), as described earlier in the theoretical part of the paper, i.e. core, formal and augmented product levels. The benefit of the product that the client is willing to pay for in this case is the spiritual experience gained in the southern India. Therefore, this value is the core level of the product.

The formal level of the product, which is going to be officially sold in the market, is a 15-day package tour to South India that includes guided visiting of such renowned sites as Mahabalipuram, Ramana Maharshi ashram, Arunachala, Pondicherry, Auroville, Amma ashram, Madurai, Poovar and many others. Thus, the tourists are introduced to the richness of the southern Indian spirituality and its splendid nature and they will be able to contemplate the local life. All internal transfers, accommodation, entry fees and donations will also belong to the formal level of the product. (Gyalpo 29 October 2016.)

The augmented product level includes additional features of the product. In this case it is the professional guidance of Anant (an expert guide) who will teach travellers meditation throughout their journey. He will act as the live personification of Indian spiritual traditions and will guide travellers on their spiritual journey of his home country. (Gyalpo 29 October 2016.)

On these grounds, it can be noted that all the three aspects of the concept of the enterprise are reflected in these three product levels. As such, the core level stands for experiences, the formal level for sacred sites, and the augmented level embodies expert

guides. This approach is therefore applied to all general products of Omalaya Travel (Figure 6 and Appendix 1).

6.3 Marketing strategy

The marketing strategy statement for the new product is described in the following subchapter, which details the target market, product positioning and differentiation, strategic goals and distribution.

6.3.1 Target market

The new product will be targeted at the market that can be identified by using the following categories: age, gender, income, beliefs, education and interests. Generally all products of Omalaya Travel are targeted towards wealthy well-educated middle-aged Western women who are interested in oriental spiritualities and whose lifestyle is similar to that of the New Agers. For this particular trip, those who are especially keen on trying authentic Ayrvedic treatment are targeted. (Gyalpo 29 October 2016.)

6.3.2 Product positioning and differentiation

The new product will be positioned as an ultimately authentic, yet perceivable by a Western tourist, spiritual experience of southern India. The particular advantage of the developed itinerary from similar offers of competitors is the presence of an Indian guide who is knowledgeable in spirituality, letting the tourists to "reconnect with their innate profound nature". Travellers will not only visit southern Indian sacred sites, but also will be given special time to treat themselves with the help of ancient Indian healing systems, like Ayurveda, yoga and meditation. (Gyalpo 29 October 2016.)

6.3.3 Strategic goals

The new tour will sell at the price of 1,880 euro and will be organised once a season (in February and October) bringing a group of 15 participants. The company aims to raise the tour price by 15% every third season. The advertising budget accounts to 1,000 euro per year. (Gyalpo 29 October 2016.)

6.3.4   Distribution

The company will use its website, blog and social media accounts for new product distribution. Customers will be able to book the new trip by email, phone and on the company's website. The new destination will be also offered in and promoted through partnership projects. (Gyalpo 29 October 2016.)

6.4   Product development and commercialisation

The summary of the new itinerary is outlined in this subchapter.

The tour will encompass two southern Indian states – Tamil Nadu and Kerala and will start in Chennai. The tour duration is 15 days and it is scheduled for 4 – 18 February 2017. Accommodation includes a ten-night stay in a 3* hotel, two nights in a hotel or ashram at Arunchala and one night in an ashram of Amma. Transportation is provided in a taxi or air conditioned minibus throughout the itinerary. (Gyalpo 29 October 2016.)

Day one: The tourists arrive in Chennai and are transferred to the hotel for their first night in India.

Day two: The tourists visit Mahabalipuram, the city of the seven pagodas. Located at the edge of the Indian Ocean, the senses will awaken to the rhythm of the waves at the foot of a temple that shows the magnificence of a distant past. This place, so full of energy, already provokes introspection and will offer a time of contemplation, allowing reconnection to the present moment. (Gyalpo 29 October 2016.)

Day three: Tourists take the walk to Arunachala, the sacred mountain in Hinduism, from which a recognised yogi, Ramana Maharshi never departed by more than seven kilometers throughout his existence. The visit to the heart of the ashram of Ramana will be organised in order to meditate in one of the most spiritual places of the country, of even the world. There will be the opportunity to experience a Darshan with an enlightened woman, Shiva Skati. In the evening, the chanting of the Vedaparayanas, devotional songs, will be introduced to help travellers feel the universal love. (Gyalpo 29 October 2016.)

Day four: The travellers climb to Arunachala and join the Skanda ashram, where Sri Ramana Maharshi meditated for seven years, followed by a visit to Virupashka cave, in which the revered yogi kept silence for ten years. Teachings of Anant, the guide, will be offered. At the end of the day, Anant will guide travellers to the largest temple in the world dedicated to the Hindu god Shiva. The discovery of the mudras will be facilitated by Anant, with the day culminating with a ritual dedicated to Shiva. (Gyalpo 29 October 2016.)

Day five: The tourists will leave in the direction of Auroville, founded by Mirra Alfassa in 1968. This one of a kind community was created with the aim of abolishing the notion of private property. The idea is to open its doors to those who believe in the unity of humanity and who wish to collaborate in the advent of this unity. Thus, mutual support and sharing are at the heart of this community. The place will be reserved at the Matrimandir, the temple of Mirra Alfassa, which is thought to be the centre of the town. Then, the tourists will head to Pondicherry, a particularly charming former French county, where they will go to the ashram of Sri Aurobindo, the precursor of Integral Yoga, which combines meditation and breathing in consciousness. After that, the tourists will be offered to explore the surroundings freely. (Gyalpo 29 October 2016.)

Day six: Subject to availability, the tourists will partake to the Matrimandir of Auroville. This sacred building contains 12 meditation rooms (each one representing a month of the year), grouped around the interior room in which the Mother had her vision. Then the tourists will go to the Temple of Ganesh in Pondicherry, the elephant-headed god so adored in Hindu mythology. After depositing an offering, the tourists will receive the blessing of Lakshmi, the mother of the god Ganesh. (Gyalpo 29 October 2016.)

Day seven: The tourists will continue in the direction of Chidambaram, one of the oldest cities in Tamil Nadu. They will visit the temple Thillai Nataraja. In the afternoon, the group will discover the Kumbakonan temples. This city is also renowned for the Naadi divination, whose principles are based on reading one's future on palm leaves. The tourists, thus, will be introduced to this astrological system. (Gyalpo 29 October 2016.)

Day eight: The tourists will visit Madurai, the spiritual hub of Tamil Nadu. The city is one of the oldest in India, which makes it an important pilgrimage site. By joining the many pilgrims, travellers will visit the sacred Sri Meenakshi complex where they will progress further in discovering Hindu culture. Always accompanied by Anant, they will go to the Temple of the Nayaks and the market, a real city in the city, where the colorful charm of the atmosphere will delight all the senses. (Gyalpo 29 October 2016.)

Day nine: In the morning, the group will head to Munnar. Perched at an altitude of 1,600 meters on a mountain range, the city is renowned for its tea plantations, which form the richness and beauty of the region. There will be an opportunity to visit the city of Munnar. The group will then pass through splendid landscapes, between lakes and forests of eucalyptus, to discover a tea plantation. At the heart of this grandiose nature, Anant will be happy to share his knowledge and passion for mindfulness meditation. (Gyalpo 29 October 2016.)

Day ten: Tourists will be driven to Periyar National Reserve, the heart of this mountainous region, which is just on the border between Tamil Nadu and Kerala. During the afternoon, the guide will bring tourists to the Spice Garden Tour, a sumptuous spice garden with aromatic, cosmetic or healing properties that are the wealth of South India and are the basis of Ayurvedic medicine. Travellers will be able to learn various techniques of harvesting, planting or drying used to produce medicinal herbs. (Gyalpo 29 October 2016.)

Day eleven: This day will be a day on the water that in Allepey. Seated at the edge of a gigantic and peaceful lagoon, Allepey is famous for its authentic backwaters and genuine boat-houses that pass gently through the mangroves. A cruise will be organised. (Gyalpo 29 October 2016.)

Day twelve: In the morning, the group will head to Amritapuri, the birthplace of Amma, a recognised humanitarian and spiritual figure. There will be a discovery of her ashram, a true spiritual home where thousands of people mix without distinction of religion or caste. Staying in the Amma Ashram is a true spiritual experience. The living conditions are fairly hardy, and tourists will probably be sleeping on the floor on a small mattress. (Gyalpo 29 October 2016.)

Day thirteen: After breakfast the group will leave the ashram to head to the island of Poovar, where they will enjoy an Ayurvedic treatment, a time of relaxation and rejuvenation, before the return. There will be time spent relaxing and gazing at the Indian Ocean from the magnificent beaches of Poovar. (Gyalpo 29 October 2016.)

Day fourteen: Participation in an Ayurvedic retreat will allow tourists to open up their well-being and let go of the outside world. The chef of the centre will offer them healthy and vegetarian food based on the culinary traditions of Kerala and Ayurveda. A consultation with a traditional doctor will be organised. The doctor will spend time with

each traveller in order to know their way of life from childhood until today, raising certain points like the rhythm of life, the food and sleep. Thus, the doctor will be able to prescribe the care that will personally suit each traveller, but if a person's health does not require treatment, sure they will still appreciate the quality of the massages, contributing to body awareness and anchoring. During these two days, a yoga class will be offered as well as a backwater ride around the island. Those who prefer total relaxation will be able to relax on the beach and enjoy a last ray of Indian sweetness before embarking on the way back. (Gyalpo 29 October 2016.)

Day fifteen: in the morning, the group will drive to Trivandrum airport for a flight to Chennai, from which during the day they will take their return flight to France. Depending on the time of the return flight, Omalaya Travel can arrange an extra night in Chennai upon request. (Gyalpo 29 October 2016.)

The product is ready to be launched in early January and they will be offering the tour for the first time in February and then in October 2017 (Gyalpo 29 October 2016).

7   CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

The central idea of this thesis revolved around the new-product development for the case company in the business context of spiritual tourism. The main goal of this research was to devise and present the new-product development strategy to the client organisation for satisfying their needs in their business growth and expansion. The format of a case study was selected as the most pertinent research method since the main subject and at the same time the main primary data source is the case company itself. For this reason, the research results are transmitted to the commissioning party only and are to be employed accordingly by it.

As it was detected in the research process, Omalaya Travel has the full potential to offer a new itinerary in South India for its customers. Although it was initially suggested to conduct a customer survey for the most promising destination detection by the author, the client organisation has declined this proposal and resolved to rely fully on their market knowledge and expectations. This is why the risks of the validity of the research are of the case company's responsibility.

Spiritual tourism is an emerging niche market, which requires careful and proper understanding. Many may confuse it with religious tourism for the same choice of destinations, sites and practices. However, the two are to be distinguished by the motives of a traveller. In the case of religious tourism, the traveller seeks to visit the sites that are related to their faith and the whole act of pilgrimage is considered sacred and of great importance. It can also be derived that the religious tourist travels out of their duty. Meanwhile the spiritual tourist does not necessarily associate himself or herself with any religion and will likely be interested in learning about other religions through travel. Most often modern spiritual tourists seek the rejuvenation of their body-mind-spirit equilibrium and travel either for healing or experiment or to undertake a spiritual quest or all of these combined. In fact, spiritual tourists are expected to mix and try different religious traditions and believe in the so-called "universal truth" that can be found reflected through various spiritual paths. All these findings are presented in Chapter 2 and serve as insight into the pillars of spiritual tourism.

Given the complex structure of a spiritual tourism product, different models were reviewed in Chapter 3 to introduce the reader to the components of a product in tourism as well as different stages in new-product development. The detailed description of the case company was provided and the new product was illustrated based on theoretical

models. Thus, the development of the new product for the case company is considered as the core achievement and result of the report.

Through conducted analysis of the new proposed destination, market and company's potential for growth, it seems that it will beneficial for Omalaya Travel to introduce the new itinerary to South India. It is, however, up to the company's management to apply the suggested development strategy or not.

Working on this thesis project has presented numerous challenges of all kinds during the planning, writing and finalising processes. While training at the case company, it became clear to the author that she would work on a case study but it took a considerable amount of time to specify the topic. Once the general research on spiritual tourism has started, the author encountered difficulties finding the right literature due to the novelty of the topic, especially in the business frame. It is hoped that spiritual tourism will be given broader scholarly attention in the future.

Another issue was related with time management and writing consistency, however, it is safe to say that the whole process has greatly contributed to the improvement of these mentioned skills. Much to the author's chagrin, instead of conducting the customer survey, the case company decided to dismiss this option and rely on its market expectations. In the author's opinion, the customer survey would have greatly contributed to the overall picture of new-product development strategy for the reasons discussed in Chapter 5.

The role of this thesis project in the shaping of author's competences and future career cannot be undermined. It is evident that academic writing and research conducting skills have been shaped and developed along with a much deeper understanding of the chosen subject of study. The following thesis project is expected to lead the author on the career path in spiritual tourism. The author's six-month internship prior to the following research has enabled a better understanding of the research subject, being the case company and its operations. Thus, the combination of theoretical background with the antecedent knowledge of the case company resulted in an accurate response to the research task.

All in all, the author is satisfied with the overall research process and outcome regardless of numerous difficulties and challenges, be it information overload or time constraints. Of course, practice makes perfect and the personal progress is present.

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APPENDIX ONE. OMALAYA TRAVEL PARTNERSHIP BROCHURE

PARTNERSHIPS

omalaya

VHave you ever thought about organising a journey with your customers to the heart of the Himalayas?

Organise a group trip, yoga retreat, personal development course, or seminar using our simple formula. As a facilitator, all of your costs are covered, including airfare, housing, meals and transportation. Moreover, you also receive a comission dependent on the number of clients who accompany you.

YOUR PASSION. YOUR EXPERTISE. YOUR CUSTOMERS.

- Choose your theme and dates.

NATURE MEDITATION ACTIVITIES WALKING HEALING SACRED SITE YOGA

- Invite your students, clients, trainees, fans, or readers.

- Share your expertise while travelling through sacred places.

YOUR PEACE OF MIND ON AN AUTHENTIC JOURNEY TO THE HIMALAYAS

OUR PASSION. OUR REGION. OUR EXPERTISE.

- Our years of experience and expertise allow us to help you create the perfect trip. We'll arrange all the logistics, including accommodation, meals, transportation, and activities.

- Let your customers enjoy our competitive rates. The benefit of choosing our locally based agency is that we provide the best possible price by eliminating intermediaries and working directly with drivers, guides, and hoteliers.

- We provide you with the necessary tools to promote the journey by creating a customised brochure.

ABOUT OMALAYA

Omalaya is a local travel designer founded in 2009 by the Franco -Tibetan couple, Tashi and Stephanie. Joined by a motivated, multicultural team, they continue to explore the heart of India's sacred traditions, local people, and their customs

Our company name "Omalaya" is the fusion of the two words Om - the universal mantra -
and Alaya- meaning both 'inner home' and 'source of everything' - evoquing the sacred Himalaya, our region of expertise.

We promote responsible tourism by organising more than 500 meals with local families each season in Ladakh. Because community is one of our core values, we are proud to support the communities in which we live and work through direct participation and fundraising projects.

Clients from all over the world have traveled under the expert guidance and exceptional care of Omalaya!

70% of our guests are French

20% of our guests are from the United States

The remaining **10%** of our guests have joined us from Greece, Thailand, Australia, Spain, Romania, and Finland.

10%

20%

70%

OMALAYA IS A TRAVEL DESIGNER SPECIALISED IN SPIRITUAL JOURNEYS

SACRED SITES

Feel the energy and the wisdom of Indo-Tibetan traditions by exploring the sacred sites of the Himalayas. A unique opportunity to get in touch with yourself and the environment.

EXPERIENCES

We offer our guests a trip based on local learning, resulting in a hands-on, unique, and memorable experience. Enjoy the journey that will continue to provide enrichment long after returning home.

SPIRITUAL EXPERTS

Tibetan doctors, shamans and yogis will share with you their profound knowledge of local traditions and spirituality. They will gladly assist you in your own personal and spiritual development.

LADAKH

Located at the northern tip of India more than 3500 meters above sea level, the "paradise for photographers" is nestled between two of the highest mountain ranges in the world, the Karakoram and the Himalayas. A spiritual land inhabited by Buddhist monks, mystics, gurus, and scholars, its isolation has allowed the preservation of a traditional way of life.

Its desert, scattered oases, and lunar landscapes offer incredible beauty.

Travelling to Ladakh opens the door to a fascinating and rich culture. You will be moved by the kindness and sincerity of the Ladakhi people.

THE HIGHLIGHTS OF A STAY IN LADAKH WITH OMALAYA

- Meet a shaman, a powerful healer and visionary of the ancient Himalayan culture.

- Create your own mandala, an ancient symbol and tool used to illuminate the interaction between the universe and our bodies, and receive a personalised interpretation.

- Participate in a traditional Tibetan ritual performed by a yogi.

- Take in the majestic beauty of Ladakh's alpine lakes.

- Meet Tibetan nuns and join them in their daily activities and prayers.

- Learn how to print Tibetan prayer flags and raise them atop a Himalayan peak.

- Receive a reading from an onpo, or Tibetan astrologer.

VARANASI, BODHGAYA

Dive into the heart of a colourful country where different traditions co-exist harmoniously. Discover India's fascinating cultural diversity and deeply rooted spirituality.

Bodhgaya is believed to be the location where over 2,500 years ago **Siddhartha Gautama attained enlightenment** at the foot of the Bodhi tree, also known as "the tree of wisdom."

Varanasi, also known as Benares or "the City of Lights," is the holy city of Hindus, Buddhists, and Jains. Varanasi claims the title of one of the **oldest inhabited cities in the world** and the oldest city in India.

THE HIGHLIGHTS OF A STAY WITH OMALAYA

IN BODHGAYA...

- Visit the sacred Bodhgaya Temple and the Bodhi tree where Prince Siddhartha attained enlightenment and became Buddha.

- Explore the many temples and monasteries built by Buddhist communities from around the world in the image of their respective countries.

IN VARANASI...

- Participate in the evening Hindu ritual of Ganga aarti and contemplate the thousands of candles given in offering to the river.

- Attend morning prayers with devotees at the sacred ghats of the Ganges River.

- Visit the Ashram of Sri Anandamayi Ma, one of the most important figures of the 20th century, considered as a divine incarnation.

DHARAMSALA. RISHIKESH

Feel inspired by the serenity of Indo-Tibetan spirtuality.

Dharamshala is the place of refuge for His Holiness the Dalai Lama and many other key figures of the Tibetan community. A charming and cosmopolitan village nestled on a ridge, which offers **a sense of unity of mankind.**

Located at the foothills of the Himalayas by the Ganges river, Rishikesh is one of the sacred cities of Northern India. **Discover the capital of yoga** surrounded by a deep forest and **fascinating spiritual atmosphere.**

THE HIGHLIGHTS OF A STAY WITH OMALAYA

IN DHARAMSHALA...

- Participate in a shamanic session.
- Enjoy a discussion about living the Buddhist philosophy with the Dalai Lama's monks.
- Indulge in a Tibetan massage.

IN RISHIKESH...

- Learn about Ayurvedic medicine and receive a holistic consultation.
- Discover life in an Ashram.
- Meditate at the sacred ghats of the Ganges River.

CONTACT US

We would be glad to work together with you and design the perfect journey for your customers!

● ● ●

Ⓢ Connect via Skype
Omalayatravel

● ● ●

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