

## Explorative study of the travel agency contribution to promote spiritual tourism in Sri Lanka

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### Abstract

Sri Lankan tourism industry is reaching to million tourist arrivals since end of terrorist activities. The country is exploring and trying to initiate new products including spiritual tourism to the Sri Lankan tourism industry to attract more tourists with benefit of sustainable development. Spiritual tourism is a valuable tourism product to people who are seeking inner peace during their vacation and engage to personal spiritual development. Meditation, yoga and pilgrimage tours are vital in spiritual tourism in Sri Lanka. There are about 20 registered meditation centers can find in Sri Lanka. The purpose of this research aims to find the contribution of travel agencies to promote spiritual tourism in Sri Lanka. The technique of data collection utilized interviews and personal observation methods for collect data to achieve objectives. There are ten numbers of travel agencies, eight numbers of Buddhist and Hindu venue, five yoga and meditation centers and 50 spiritual tourists participated in this research. The research carried out in Colombo, Kandy and Anuradhapura district. The finding of research indicates that there is a huge investment and poor motivation barrier to promote spiritual tourism in Sri Lanka by the travel agencies. Recommendations are country needs huge marketing campaigns with travel agencies to attract the right clientele while developing the spiritual tourism as a product of tourism industry in Sri Lanka.

**Keywords:** spiritual tourism, travel agency, tourism industry

### 1. Introduction

Sri Lankan tourism industry is coming to twofold digits of million vacationer landings since end of fear based oppressor exercises. The nation is examining and endeavoring to present new items including spiritual tourism to the Sri Lankan tourism industry to pull in more sightseers with advantage of supportable improvement. Religion and spirituality are still among the most common motivations for travel (Dallen, 2006 and Gallagher, 2009). However, there is no huge attention of the respective authorities and the tourism services to develop sustainable tourism through spiritual tourism.

#### 1.1 Spiritual Tourism in Sri Lanka

Spiritual tourism is a valuable tourism product to People who are seeking inner peace during their vacation and engage to personal spiritual development. Meditation, yoga and pilgrimage tours are vital in spiritual tourism in Sri Lanka. There are about 20 registered meditation centers can find in Sri Lanka. Most of centers are located in outside Colombo. Those centers can provide opportunity\_for the travelers who are on an expedition to see the reality of life. The improvement of infrastructure is major prerequisite to development of spiritual tourism in Sri Lanka. As well as, another prerequisite is providing basic facility to people who are engage with yoga, meditation program and personal spiritual development.

Spiritual tourism is termed as religious heritage tourism and pilgrimage tourism. Spiritual tourists are not looking for luxury but arduous journeys to meet the divine goal or simple life.

A spiritual tourist is also a tourist who visits to any place of

their personal interest with a motive of spiritual growth concerned with his/her personal faith, there may or may not be any other religious and non-religious compulsion. (Biswajit satpathy & Debendra mahalik 2010).

It's seems to be a newer academic concept to Sri Lanka, but it is certainly not a new trend. The term spiritual tourism has attracted many researchers globally in past. This increasing interest is not because of its spiritual perspective, but for the potential it carries to become the largest segment within the industry.

#### 1.2 Travel Agencies current contribution

Travel agencies are playing a minor role to promote spiritual tourism in Sri Lanka. They have less motivation to invest money for the new product. But travel agencies are coordinating with spiritual destinations to provide services according to the customer expectation. Such as, pilgrimage tour, meditation and yoga programs, etc.

Therefore, travel agencies have some way to go in comparison to some of its most mature regional neighbors', but early steps in the right direction have been taken by Government with the view to support the sustainable growth of the sector. Sri Lanka enjoys a great variety of landscapes and rich diversity of natural, cultural and social heritage. Therefore, it will become increasingly more appealing to the affluent, discerning traveler looking for an 'authentic experience'.

There are still challenges to overcome, including the need for a clear vision, strategy and follow-on implementation, more effective and more extensive industry engagement, reforms of an antiquated labor law and fiscal system, and active environmental protection. As well as financial issues are

major problems for travel agencies.

These issues have recently begun to be addressed by Government and the private sector jointly and will continue to require investment of funds, energy and time in order to succeed.

In the meantime, Travel agencies have the opportunity to succeed by building on its current resources. Therefore, travel agencies should have a broader understanding of spiritual Tourism development for a sustainable future of the industry.

## 2. Problem Statement

Spiritual tourism is an imperative part of a Sri Lankan tourism industry as Sri Lanka is a place that is known for spiritual life and is endowed with many places of worship, pilgrim centers and religious monuments etc. But, as indicated by the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA) yearly factual report, there is a lower level of rate to traveler visit for religious purposes in Sri Lanka from year 2006 to 2016. The most significant level of visitor visit for religious designs is 4.8% of every 2013, except then again least level of vacationer visit for religious reasons for existing is 0.00% out of 2016. Because, spiritual tourism in Sri Lanka has not been paid due attention by the government and other respective authorities. Travel agencies are playing vital role to develop tourism industry in Sri Lanka. But their contribution is to promote spiritual tourism deactivate. And also, the path for the spiritual tourism in Sri Lanka are not fully explored and the deficiencies and problems are not properly assessed. An in-depth study on the travel agency contribution will help to develop spiritual tourism in Sri Lanka in specific and the tourism industry in general. This encouragement helps to choose this topic for study.

## 3. Objectives of Study

The purpose of this research aims to:

- a) Disclose the role of the travel agencies operation to promote spiritual tourism in Sri Lanka
- b) To forecast the challenges in doing so.
- c) To make suitable recommendations to promote spiritual tourism in Sri Lanka.

## 4. Literature review

Not enough research has been done in this field and the availability of current literature on spiritual tourism in India is even lesser in quantity, so with a little literature review on the topic, I have conducted study. Following are the literature that I have used to do this study.

Jesurajan, S. and Prabhu, V. (2012), "Dimension of spiritual tourism in Tuticorin district of Tamil Nadu in India- A critical analysis" identified thirteen major problems associated with the spiritual tourist centre's of the Tuticorin district. They are; pollution / Lack of cleanliness, Beggars' nuisance, exploitation by vehicle operators, undesirable behavior of local people, poor services of hotels, cheating by traders, high admission / parking charges, inadequate information and lack of good local guidance, lack of sanitary facility, lack of transport facility, lack of parking facility, poor banking facility etc. In order to identify the most important problems, Garret ranking was applied on the scores given by the respondents to these problems.

Suri, R. and Rao, J. (2014), "Impact of Spiritual Marketing on Different Segments of Tourists and Their Evaluation of the Site" identified there are four major problems that are helpful for tourism industry as well as spiritual destinations care taker to promote spiritual tourism. Lack of advertisement and marketing promotion is there; the spiritual sites did not get enough publicity, the quality of hospitality services in the spiritual destination is not up to the mark. To enhance the experience of tourists and in order for them to visit again and hard-on effort is required from the side of the government, the quality and quantity of accommodations at spiritual destination are not good enough, there is poor experience about walking and excursions at spiritual destination due to cleanness and some other reasons.

Banerjee, M. (2015). "Spiritual Tourism: A tool for Socio-Cultural and Sustainable Development", identified key tools for tourism sustainable development in Rishikesh, India. Therefore, the researcher has used secondary data, current papers on spiritual tourism and current books which formed the theoretical bases for collecting data for the research. So, according to the research methodology, the key finding was for tourist motivations to visit Rishikesh, technology to traveling easier, infrastructure development, marketing and promotions and Government policies. And also, it creates job opportunity for the local people in different sectors of the tourism industry, New fields for commercial activities, attracts new investment in the city, Tourist spending provides the necessary income for preserving and managing places of attraction. Furthermore, it saying, it can be done by presenting Rishikesh as a place of spirituality, meditation and yoga. There is huge potential to attract the foreign tourist who are willing get experience of yoga and discovering their spiritual side.

Maquet, J. (1975), "Meditation in contemporary Sri Lanka: idea and practice", identified, Contemporary Sri Lankan Theravada meditation is really a method of mental culture. The researcher used, a series of open-ended interviews was conducted with forty-five persons who were particularly well versed in Buddhist matters. In addition, monks and lay persons, who were said to be seriously involved in the Buddhist life, were visited and interviewed. The author also participated as a lay disciple (upasaka) in the life of a meditation monastery for one month. So, according to the research, finding was, meditation is a living part of the Buddhist heritage. For a Sinhalese, meditation is still the essential and living practice of their chosen path.

## 5. Methodology

The purpose of this research is to find the contribution of travel agencies to promote spiritual tourism in Sri Lanka. Therefore, I utilized two methods of data collections to achieve objectives. Those are,

1. Interviews
2. personal observations

There are ten numbers of travel agencies, eight numbers of Buddhist and Hindu venue, five yoga and meditation centers and 50 spiritual tourists participated in this research. The research carried out in Colombo, Kandy and Anuradhapura district. There are different types of 4 questions are used for to collect the data.

### 5.1 Interviews with tourist

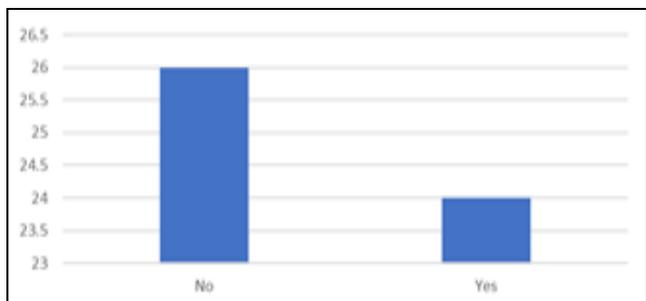


Fig 1: Sum of Tourist by Through Travel Agency.

So, according to the above information, most of the tourist visited spiritual places without through the travel agencies. The most of the tourists have visited yoga and meditation centers direct communicate through the centers or online booking. Therefore, we can understand, the travel agencies are not much promoting spiritual tourist destination in Sri Lanka.

### 5.2 Interviews with Meditation & Yoga Centre

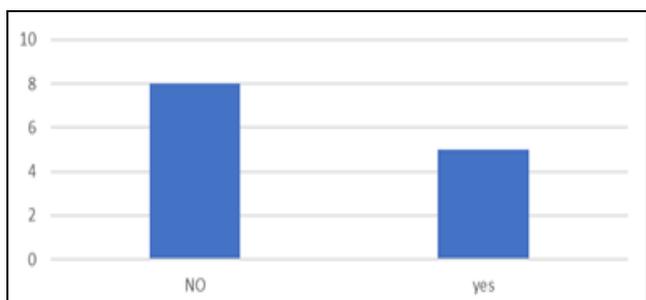


Fig 2: Sum of Buddhist, Hindu, Meditation & Yoga Centre by Tourist Come though travel Agency.

So, according to discussion with yoga and meditation centers, the most of the tourist have visited through the online booking and some are visited through the information of their friends and relations. As well as, there are not running special promotions to attract more customers to their venues. Furthermore, according to their views, they are not conducting programs for business purposes. But indirectly they are supporting to development of economy in Sri Lanka.

### 5.3 Interviews with Travel Agency

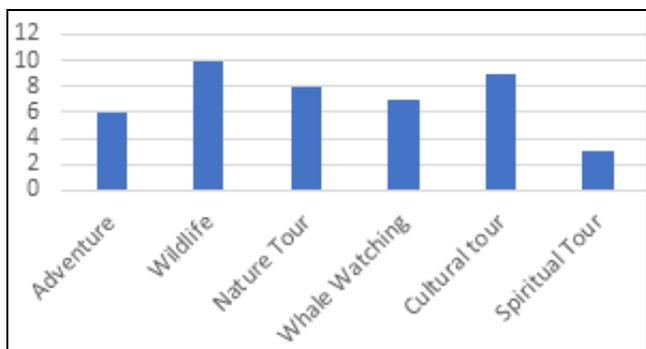


Fig 3: Number of travel agencies.

According to the above information travel agencies are very less contribute to promote spiritual tourism in Sri Lanka. They are running their businesses with traditional products such as wild life tourism, adventure tourism, whale watching, cultural etc. therefore they not involving with spiritual tourism. Because they have some barriers to engage with spiritual tourism. But they are conducting Buddhist tours according to the guest request.

### 6. Findings and Suggestions

So, the finding of research indicates that there is a huge investment and poor motivation barrier to promote spiritual tourism in Sri Lanka by the travel agencies.

Furthermore, of this study can serve as one of the platforms for making future strategies in the industry related to promotional and segmentation decisions and also how the revenue creation can augment at these sites and what prerequisite improvements are vital for spiritual destination.

However, the country needs huge marketing campaigns with travel agencies to attract the right clientele while developing the spiritual tourism as a tourism product in Sri Lanka. The research passes recommendations to the travel agencies and spiritual tourism service providers to develop and market to spiritual tourism and add to major products of tourism industry in Sri Lanka.

As a multi ethnic nation Sri Lanka is rich with resources such as Buddhist and Hindu religions, and also with culture to promote spiritual tourism. Therefore, the opportunity for development of spiritual tourism in Sri Lanka will further translate into major five ways.

1. The improvement of infrastructure in places where such Buddhist meditation programs are offered, particularly the locations outside the capital city.
2. Once the basic facilities are assured and the program being offered is differentiated from just yoga, spiritual development or even the general use of the term of meditation.
3. Motivate the venue leaders to promote centers to increase of arrivals of so called 'up market tourists' not only in terms of money, but also the values they represent.
4. Encourage the local authorities, local communities, government and private sector to engage with spiritual tourism in Sri Lanka.
5. Travel agencies can promote pilgrimage tourism as a sub product of spiritual tourism to Indian market. Because Hindus from South India worship at the Temple of Katar agama and more recently, Hindus from Gujarat and Andra Pradesh are enjoying the Ramayana sites in Sri Lanka.
6. Most of the tour guide doesn't have enough qualification and knowledge about spiritual tourism. Therefore, travel agency has to take responsibility to provide proper training with knowledge of destination to their guide.
7. Lack of staff with foreign language skill. Therefore, travel agencies need to arrange basic language program to communicate with their guest.

### 7. Conclusion

In spiritual tourism, a tourist seeks for peace of mind and a sense of spiritual satisfaction. Even though the visitors to the

spiritual tourism in Sri Lanka is satisfied with peaceful atmosphere they experience and the friendliness of the local people, they are dissatisfied with the basic infrastructure like sanitation and drinking water facilities, lack of cleanliness and exploitation by the local vehicle operators. If these problems are addressed properly and enough publicity is given the spiritual tourism venues in Sri Lanka shall be explored to the optimum level.

Travel agencies haven't taken major contribution to promote spiritual tourism in Sri Lanka. So, this is the real time to take part to promote spiritual tourism in Sri Lanka. Therefore, they have to arrange clear communication system with local authorities, Ministry of tourism, spiritual venues, local communities, etc. to promote spiritual tourism in Sri Lanka.

Furthermore, travel agencies need to understand the opportunity for the development and growth of spiritual tourism, supporting industries and the economy/community at large. Improvement in infrastructure through developing roads, railway networks, airlines, hotels, transport, travel agencies, translators, facilitators, tour guides and so on can generate large-scale employment in Sri Lanka.

Travel agencies should encourage and create opportunity for the participation of the local community, which must be involved for the upliftment of the poor economic conditions and create sustainable tourism in the country. Development of infrastructure, product/experience, amenities, connectivity, marketing, and promotion will lead to the development of the circuit as a year-round easily accessible circuit appealing to a wide range of tourist groups. With the fast-growing tourist arrivals and the above-mentioned contributions by travel agencies are gaining more healthy effectiveness to promote spiritual tourism in Sri Lanka.

## 8. Reference

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