

# **Assessing the Socio-Cultural Sustainability in the Hospitality Sector: An Analysis of Tourist Hotels' Websites in Sri Lanka**

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## **Abstract**

The concept of sustainability essentially should cover the triple bottom line of people, planet and profit. The tourism literature provides a huge contribution to analyses the environmental sustainability in broader aspects, applying to many sectors in the tourism field, albeit socio-cultural sustainability has not been considerably investigated by researchers. The objective of this study was to analyse the contribution of the hospitality industry to ensure socio-cultural sustainability, with special reference to the official websites of the tourist hotels in Sri Lanka. The study was led by two specific objectives. i.e., (i) to examine the current practices conducted by the tourist hotels for promoting socio-cultural sustainability as represented in their websites, and (ii) to explore the undervalued aspects in socio-cultural sustainability approaches in the tourist hotel sector. The study was conducted as a qualitative study, utilizing secondary data collected from the text mining strategy. A sample of 20 hotels was selected from the Booking.com online platform with the filtering option of 'sustainability certification', based on the purposive sampling technique. The official website of the property was used to gather data. Data was analysed using the deductive thematic approach in the thematic analysis method. Based on the definition provided by the UNWTO for 'sustainable tourism' in 2005, the dimensions in socio-cultural sustainability were identified, such as (i) respecting the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities, (ii) conserving their built and living cultural heritage and traditional values, and (iii) contributing to intercultural understanding and tolerance. The key finding of the study revealed that the contribution of the hotels in Sri Lanka in ensuring and uplifting the socio-cultural sustainability is not considerably reflected in the content of the hotels' websites. Aligning with the first specific objective of the study, the findings revealed that many of the hotels conduct village tours and educate the guests on cultural guidelines, as the current practices in respecting the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities. Reflecting the evidence under the element of 'conserving their built and living cultural heritage and traditional values', a few aspects were identified, such as cultural performances, promotion of local architecture and design, traditional cuisines

and culinary promotion, and promotion of traditional arts and crafts. Under the element of 'contributing to intercultural understanding and tolerance,' it was identified that the practices of cultural exchange programs, staff training, interfaith awareness and cultural celebrations. Relating to the next specific objective of the study, a few undervalued aspects of socio-cultural sustainability were determined as excessive commodification of intangible heritage, depletion of authenticity of socio-cultural elements, and lack of ethnic and religious inclusivity, which reflect the gap between the sustainable tourism theory and the practice.

**Keywords:** *Socio-cultural element, Sustainability, Tourist hotels, Websites*