

Promoting Spiritual Tourism in Sri Lanka

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Abstract: Tourism in Sri Lanka is growing at a double digit rate since the end of three decades of terrorist activities. The country is investigating and trying on new product development including Casino tourism to attract more tourists that encompasses unimaginable socio-cultural, economic and environmental negative effects. The success of any tourist destination depend on how well they have identified the motives of tourists and how well tourists' needs and wants are looked after by that destination. Tourists even look the same, but they have different motives of how to experience their vacations and the destinations they visit. Some come to the tourist destination for relaxation, others come for pleasure, and some come to experience spirituality. Religion and spirituality are still among the most common motivations for travel (Dallen, 2006 and Gallagher, 2009). However, the true potential to develop Sri Lankan tourism sustainably through spiritual tourism has got little or no attention of the respective authorities and the tourism service providers in Sri Lanka. Thus, this research aims to:

- a) Disclose the potential of developing Sri Lankan tourism through spiritual tourism;
- b) To forecast the challenges in doing so;
- c) To make suitable recommendations to promote spiritual tourism in Sri Lanka.

The researcher used explorative research methods in collecting data to achieve the aforementioned objectives. Interviews, personal observations, and distribution of questionnaires were the main research techniques utilized. Twelve numbers of spiritual leaders managing Buddhist temples, Hindu temples and yoga and meditation centres were interviewed and thirty five (35) numbers of spiritual tourists participated in this research. The research was carried out in Colombo, Kandy and Kurunegala districts. The findings of this research indicate that there is a huge potential to develop spiritual tourism in Sri Lanka through Buddhist and Hindu monuments and practices. However, the country needs aggressive marketing campaigns to attract the right clientele while developing the spiritual tourism as a product. The research passes recommendations to the relevant authorities, travel agents, spiritual tourism service providers in developing and marketing of the spiritual tourism product of Sri Lanka.