

Exploring the Potentials, Issues, and Challenges in Developing Buddhist Tourism in Sri Lanka

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Abstract: *Over the years, the tourism industry has continually expanded and changed, making it one of the fastest-growing economic sectors in the world. With a millennium of history, Sri Lanka has been the global leader of Theravada Buddhism. There is a connection between religious tourism and cultural and heritage tourism. However, Sri Lankan religious and cultural tourism receives little attention. The current study was conducted with an eye toward tourism and culture administrative authorities, tourist service providers, and monastery Bhikkus in Sri Lanka because there aren't many studies available about Buddhist tourism growth potentials in Sri Lanka. By analyzing the opportunities, problems, and obstacles in the development of Buddhist tourism in Sri Lanka, this research seeks to close the gap. Convenience sampling was the method of choice for the semi-structured in-depth interviews that comprised the study, which was carried out utilizing a qualitative research strategy. Primary data were gathered in Sri Lanka from Bhikkus monasteries, tourist and cultural administration entities, and tourism service providers. The data was examined using thematic analysis. Promoting concrete and intangible Buddhist resources, increasing brand awareness, developing Buddhist hotspots, and developing experience-based tourism activities are the study's main conclusions. The primary problems and difficulties identified by analysis include a deficiency in language proficiency, a qualified academic staff, issues about the government, and an inadequate understanding of marketing techniques. Providing language training*

programs and processes that are appropriate for trainers, encouraging comprehensive marketing efforts in collaboration with key institutions to attract the right clientele, and proper government involvement were identified as the study's immediate strategies to boost Sri Lanka's rich Buddhist heritage and draw more tourists and boost the country's economy. Policymakers and other stakeholders may create strategic efforts to support sustainable Buddhist tourism with the aid of the insights gained from this study.

Keywords: Buddhist Tourism, Cultural Heritage, Development.

1.0 Introduction

Today, tourists are welcome to Sri Lanka to discover the nation's vibrant cultural tapestry and abundant natural resources [1]. Tourists visit Sri Lanka for various purposes, including pleasure/vacation, business, VFR, conventions and meetings, sports, health/Ayurveda, education, religious and cultural, official, and others [2]. The majority of travellers include visits to places of worship in their itinerary. A unique activity guided by religious culture and made possible by a particular eco-cultural setting is known as religious tourism. It refers to unique travel experiences that both lay visitors and religious adherents engage in, such as sightseeing, study, and worship. [3]. Religious tourism includes pilgrimages, missionary travel, retreats at monasteries or other religious centers,

faith-based camps and activities, religious conferences, and get-togethers [4]. One type of tourism that falls under the category of religious and cultural tourism is Buddhist tourism. Although Sri Lanka is a multireligious nation, Buddhism is highly valued by its citizens. Buddhism is the primary religion Sri Lankans follow, and 70.2% of the population is identified as Buddhist [5]. In the past, Sri Lanka has had a culture greatly influenced by Buddhism. Crucially, Sri Lanka is renowned for its long history of Buddhist religious and cultural practices. Sri Lanka boasts magnificent historic monuments and cultural artefacts in its historic cities. The World Heritage sites of Kandy, Anuradhapura, and Polonnaruwa serve as the Cultural Triangle's demarcation markers. [6]. Numerous Buddhist temples,

sculptures, historic monasteries, and stupas may be found within the Cultural Triangle. Moreover, some of them go back more than 2000 years. Nearby UNESCO World Heritage Sites include the historic cities of Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, Sigiriya, Dambulla, and Kandy. [7]. Nonetheless, there are several problems with the growth of Buddhist tourism in Sri Lanka. Although Sri Lanka has a lot of resources and opportunities, the country hasn't yet fully benefited from this industry. It suggests the unrealized potential in this expanding industry. One of the specialist tourist markets in Sri Lanka that has the most room for growth and promotion is Buddhist tourism, which has not yet reached its full potential. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the potential for Buddhist tourism in Sri Lanka, develop that potential, and add to the body of knowledge and practice surrounding Buddhist tourism in general.

1.1 Problem Statement

Sri Lanka particularly has excellent potential for Buddhist tourism because the country has over 2500 years of excellence in historical and Buddhism-based cultural resources [8]. Buddhism and Buddhist pilgrimages have had a significant impact on the development of Sinhalese culture and the Sri Lankan

people's subsequent goals. As a result, Sri Lanka is one of most important Buddhist pilgrimage destinations in the globe, offering visitors the opportunity to learn about and explore the living witnesses of Sri Lanka's centuries-old Buddhist civilizations [9].

Annually, tourists visit Sri Lanka for a variety of reasons. Among the tourists who come for various reasons, SLTDA has maintained a tourism segment for those who come for religious and cultural reasons. That segment, on the other hand, has seen no significant growth compared to others.

As per [Figure 1.2](#), SLTDA has classified arrivals of tourist to visit. This chart comprises ten categories, according to SLTDA. As shown in the graph, 83.2% of visitors come to Sri Lanka for pleasure and vacation. Furthermore, 0.3% of tourists come for religious or cultural reasons. A smaller number of travellers visit Buddhist tourism out of that 0.3%. We can observe from this graph that the number of tourists interested in Buddhist tourism is negligible in Sri Lanka.

As per the Survey of Departing Foreign Tourists of Sri Lanka, they have mentioned three primary purposes for visiting Sri Lanka. They are holiday

purposes, business purposes, and other purposes.

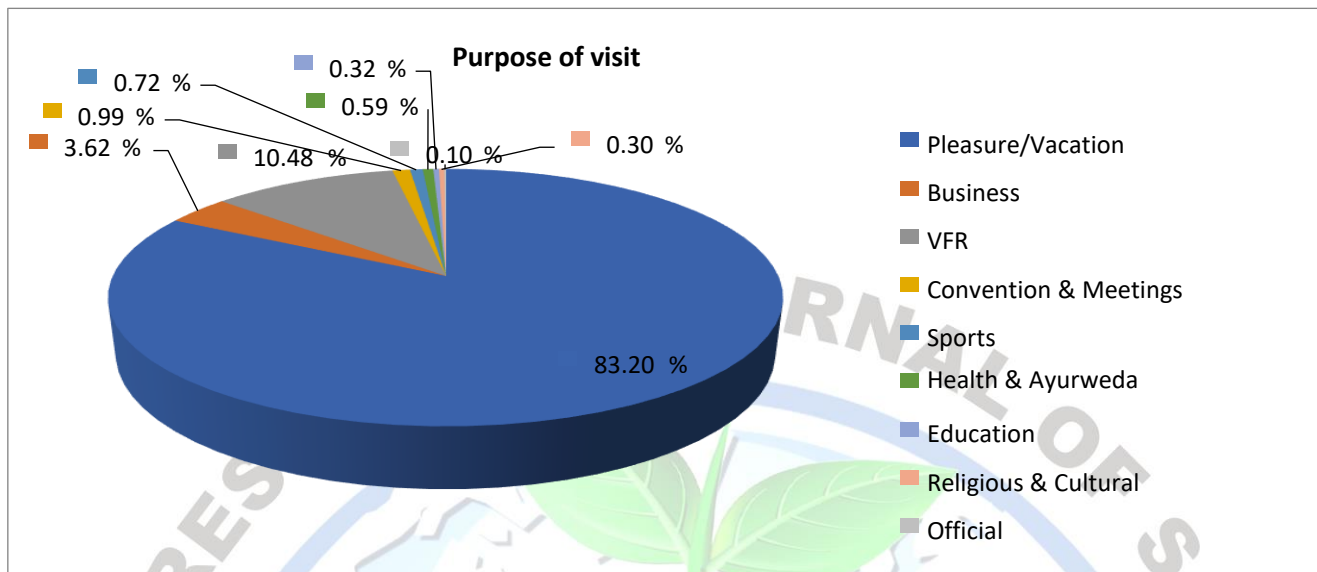


Figure 1. 2 Tourist Arrivals Classified by Purpose of Visit Source: [2]

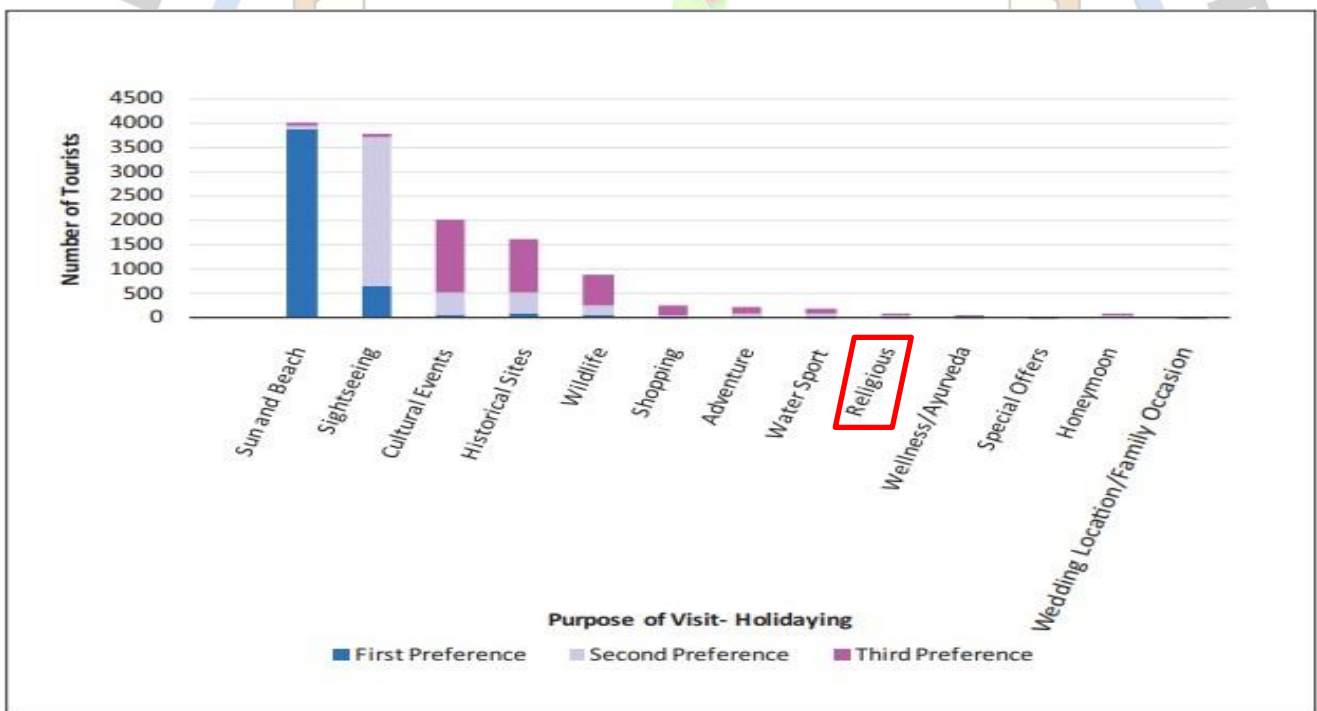


Figure 1. 3 Survey of Departing Foreign Tourists from Sri Lanka Source: [2]

According to the report, 90% of tourists visit Sri Lanka for holiday purposes. Sun and beach tourists, sightseeing tourists, wildlife tourists, adventure tourists, and honeymoon tourists are among those who visit Sri Lanka for

holiday purposes. Religious tourism is another sub-category of holiday-purposed tourists. The percentage of visitors that come to Sri

Lanka for religious purposes as their first and second preference is 0.18%.

The third preference, on the other hand, is 0.44%. As a result, the above percentages from the total of 90% of tourists visiting Sri Lanka for holiday purposes are negligible. Even though this report includes a religious tourism category, we can observe that it is underdeveloped and poorly promoted.

Sri Lanka has a lot of opportunities for the development of successful methods for religious tourism. Nonetheless, in contrast to other Buddhist nations, Sri Lanka's corresponding government, corporate sectors, and experts have not adequately considered Buddhist tourism. Sri Lanka has an abundance of human capital and a high level of Buddhist appeal. By drawing more visitors to the nation, this will also help Sri Lanka's Buddhist tourism industry grow [8]. Regretfully, the growth of Buddhist tourism in Sri Lanka receives less attention from the relevant authorities. Additionally, there has been insufficient research done on the potential of Buddhist tourism in Sri Lanka, and the problems and shortcomings have not been sufficiently evaluated [9]. Buddhist tourism in Sri Lanka will be improved, as will the tourist sector, with a thorough analysis of the challenges and issues surrounding it. This reward contributes to the choice of this research subject.

Therefore, Sri Lanka has a lot of opportunities for developing successful methods for religious tourism. Furthermore, there hasn't been any current study conducted in Sri Lanka on this subject. The purpose of this research is to close some of these unidentified gaps to support the tourist sector in Sri Lanka.

1.2 Research Questions

What are the potentials for developing Buddhist Tourism in Sri Lanka from tourism and cultural administrative bodies, tourism service providers and monastery Bhikkhu's perspective?

What are the issues and challenges in developing Buddhist Tourism in Sri Lanka from tourism and cultural administrative bodies, tourism service providers and monastery Bhikkhu's perspective?

1.3 Research Objectives

To identify the potential for developing Buddhist Tourism in Sri Lanka from tourism and cultural administrative bodies, tourism service providers and monastery Bhikkhu's perspective.

To identify the issues and challenges in developing Buddhist Tourism in Sri Lanka from tourism and cultural administrative bodies, tourism service providers and monastery Bhikkhu's perspective.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Spiritual Tourism

Spiritual tourism is an investigation of life beyond oneself and a quest to find one's life's purpose. It may or may not be connected to religion, but it aids in preserving the equilibrium of the body, mind, and soul [10]. Ravel allows people to take a break from their everyday routines by participating in leisure, recreational, religious, or spiritual activities. However, in today's fast-paced world, these concepts collide in a variety of ways, and religious and spiritual travel is gaining popularity around the world [11]. Numerous scholars have examined spiritual tourism within the framework of religion. With its many places of worship, tourist attractions, and revered landmarks, among other things, Sri Lanka is known for its spirituality, making spiritual tourism a significant part of the nation's tourism industry. Buddhist meditation techniques and frameworks are starting to play a significant role in Sri Lankan spiritual travel. Given that Buddhist monks in Sri Lanka are well-versed in meditation practices. Sri Lanka may take advantage of this confirmed human resource to encourage spiritual tourism through meditation. The most popular types of spiritual tourism in Sri Lanka

are yoga, meditation, and pilgrimage trips [9].

2.2 Religious Tourism

Religion has been a driving force behind human migration from prehistoric times and people have travelled for fervour and religious goals throughout human history [12]. Cultural, traditional, and spiritual values interact to influence travel decisions, which in turn stimulate religious tourism [12]. Religious and holy sites are visited by curious tourists rather than spiritual pilgrims; as a result, they have been packaged and sold to all travellers [13]. According to researchers, the economic potential of religious tourism has increased public and government interest in the industry in recent years [14]. Promoting and growing the market share of religious tourism has several benefits, such as more travellers and likely higher tourism earnings, education about our culture and heritage, greater respect for the many religions that worship here, improved interfaith understanding, and improved world peace and religious dialogue. [15].

2.3 Buddhist Tourism in Sri Lanka

Since more than 90% of Sri Lankans identify as Buddhists, Buddhism is fundamental to the country's culture. Their flag's four leaves also symbolize

the four pillars of Buddhism: equanimity, kindness, happiness, and the holy Bo tree [16]. Millennia have passed since Sri Lanka's founding as the global epicentre of Theravada Buddhism. The Sri Lankan tourism sector is heavily reliant on Buddhist tourism, given the nation's reputation for spirituality and its abundance of temples, tourist destinations, and revered landmarks. Buddhist tourism in Sri Lanka also includes Buddhist philosophy and heritage as significant elements [8]. Buddhist tourism is a significant part of the Sri Lankan tourism industry. Sri Lanka has a very long history dating to over millennia as the flag bearer of Theravada Buddhism in the world. Being a close neighbour of India, Hindus also has left their mark in the country. There are numerous locations identified by using Sri Lanka tourism, arranged outdoor Colombo that may supply to the tourists who're on an enterprise to peer the reality of life [9]. There is a shortage in the literature on Buddhist tourism development potentials. However, the available literature on Buddhist tourism provides theoretical support for defining development concepts such as promotions, infrastructure, human resources, and many more [9].

3.0 Methodology

The qualitative, inductive strategy has been chosen by the researcher to carry out the investigation. To identify potentials, problems, and obstacles in growing Buddhist tourism, the researcher in this study looks for detailed proposals from tourism and cultural administrative organizations (SLTDA, SLTPB, CCF, Provincial council), travel agencies, tour guides, and Bhikkus. A case study research approach has been used in this study. In this instance, the researcher only observes the phenomenon being studied and gathers the viewpoints and experiences of others who have firsthand contact with it. The Bhikkus monastery in Sri Lanka, governmental entities, tourism service providers, and the tourism and cultural sectors made up the study's population. They have been classified by the researcher as the following subjects in this.

The researcher used purposive sampling and convenience sampling to collect the data. Primary data was used to analyze this study. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were used to collect detailed information. Three interview protocols were used to collect data: one was to collect data from tourist and cultural organizations, travel agencies, and Bhikkus monasteries.

Table 3.1: Data Sample

Sample			
Tourism and Cultural Administrative Bodies			
Place	Referring Person	Population	Sample
SLTDA	Director- Planning & Development	1	1
	Director- Domestic Tourism & Community Relations	1	1
	Assistant Director- Standard & Quality Assurance	3	2
SLTPB	Assistant Director-New Product Development	1	1
	Junior Manager- New Product Development	1	1
Provincial Council	Director-Ministry of Tourism (NCP)	1	1
CCF	Senior Archaeological Officer	1	1
Tourism Service Providers			
TA	Tangerine Tours Ltd.-Senior Tour Executive	1	1
	Jetwing Travels- Deputy General Manager	1	1
Hotelier's Association	President- Tourism & Hoteliers Association	1	1
Tour Guides	National Guide-National Guide Association	Unknown	1
Monastery Bhikkus			
Bhikkus	Senior Lecturer/instructor of monasteries	Unknown	1
	Senior Lecturer/ instructor of monasteries	Unknown	1

4.0 Results

4.1 Potentials in Developing Buddhist Tourism in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka is a charming tropical island where the locals have studied Buddhism for hundreds of years. Sri Lanka is known as a "Buddhist heaven" because of its more than two thousand years of Buddhist history. In Sri Lanka, there are hundreds of Buddhist temples and Buddhist architecture, most of which are historically significant.

As a result, Sri Lanka offers an abundance of Buddhist locations to promote Buddhist tourism (Jayasinghe, Factors that Affecting to Develop Buddhist Tourism in Sri Lanka, 2020). Potentials in developing Buddhist Tourism were analyzed in 4 aspects: Developing experience-based tour trails, creating Buddhist hotspots, raising brand awareness, and marketing material and immaterial Buddhist resources.

4.1.1 Promote Tangible and Intangible Buddhist Resources

The main tangible and intangible Buddhist resources that were investigated under the archaeological values, spiritual values, heritage sites seen, monument values, meditation, learning Buddhism, and festivals.

Archaeological value

Sri Lanka is a country rich in Buddhist archaeological sites. As a result, Buddhist archaeological sites may be found in practically every island corner. These memorials tell the story of the islanders and their triumphs and tragedies. They are silent but steadfast witnesses to Sri Lanka's history and identity.

"We can sell our Buddhist archaeological values as a new product for Buddhist tourists. Some tourists visit some countries because of the Buddhist archaeological values they have."

One respondent from CCF stated that, out of most of the archaeological monuments and sites in Sri Lanka, a vast majority are Buddhist. In a country like Sri Lanka, one cannot ignore the Buddhist heritage as Buddhism is not a thing of the past; it is a living legacy. Therefore, archaeologists should respect the religious sentiments of the people. However, at the same time, they should

take measures to protect and promote these sites and monuments as they are. Otherwise, the antiquity of Buddhism in this country would be questioned in future.

Spiritual values

All are mentioned spiritual well-being has become an essential part all around the world. Sri Lanka has the greatest potential for the capture market with our spiritual practices because not only Buddhist tourists most of the people in the present world are with a lot of mental disorders, chronic illness, and some kind of stress due to the pandemic and other reasons. One respondent stated that,

"Due to Sri Lanka's abundance of Buddhist spirituality and its many temples, pilgrimages, and other religious sites, Buddhist tourism plays a significant role in the country's tourism industry. Buddhist monks' knowledge and experience have led to the rise in popularity of Buddhist meditation methods and practices as significant elements of spiritual tourism in Sri Lanka."

Heritage site seen

The purpose of visiting and admiring a heritage site is to learn about and appreciate the resources passed down from previous generations and the

natural world. Buddhist buildings and sites are famous tourist attractions in Buddhist cultural heritage.

“Sri Lanka is a country with a Buddhist nature, and we have had some of the Buddha’s tangible values for years. Most Buddhist tourists come to visit to explore the cultural diversity with physical resources Monument Values.”

Monument values can be taken as both tangible and intangible resources. According to the interviewees, exploring monuments values and sites are two different potentials for Buddhist tourism in Sri Lanka.

“We identified four magnificent heritage sites with a higher density of monument values in Sri Lanka as Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, Dambulla and Kandy. Meditation Practices.”

Most of the interviewees a state that meditation practices have great potential for Buddhist tourism rather than any other sub-activities. The main facilitator for the tourism sector states that

“We try to promote meditation as our main product in Buddhist tourism because the world trend is now heading toward spirituality, so Sri Lanka is the best place for anyone who seeks their mental and physical well-being.”

Learning Buddhism

Theravada Buddhism has been the predominant religion in Sri Lanka since its formal establishment in the second century BC, making it the oldest continuously Buddhist nation. Many respondents said that understanding Buddhism in Sri Lanka had enormous potential. So many people follow Buddhism without becoming Buddhists *“Lot of people now tend to learn Buddhism and embrace Buddhism in their lives. All over the world, there are 12 Buddhist countries, including Sri Lanka, are practicing learning Buddhism with their Buddhist tourism segment.”*

Festivals

The island of Sri Lanka is small. Nothing pleases it more than a large party. Additionally, Sri Lanka appears to be celebrating something every day due to its diverse population of races and beliefs. Most people follow Buddhism, with about 70% of the population being Buddhists.

“Sri Lanka has great potential to promote festivals we had because compared to India, we must grandly celebrate Buddhist festivals. Those who are interested in Buddhist tourism will love to participate in it.”

4.1.2 Building brand awareness

While Sri Lanka can accommodate a wide range of travel needs, we believe that Buddhist tourism has a lot of untapped potential. Most of the interviews focus on how well-known Buddhist items are as a brand.

“Sri Lanka is 3rd world country with huge potential for Buddhist Tourism with Theravada Buddhism. However, the thing is how we make awareness for the rest of the world. Buddhism can be identified as universal medicine by many countries.”

Product Categories

In Sri Lanka, there are three primary kinds of Buddhist tourist products: learning Buddhism, spiritual practices, and attractions. These three indicate that Sri Lanka has enormous potential to draw many Buddhist visitors from diverse demographics. Other groups fall under these three categories from which the nation may receive significant tourist flow.

“We are planning to launch some festive season with the collaboration of all academics, universities, monks, all relevant government bodies and temples which are in 12 Buddhist countries and make big tourist traffic in Vesak festival with ‘Buddha Bhumi’ brand launching.”

Brand Localization

Interviews showed that Buddhist products should be localized first with pure meaning before going to internationalism. Respondent 04 states that, “Buddhist tourism should promote to locals with real meaning without that the real meanings will hide automatically, and artificial values will add to the originals.”

“Sri Lanka had pure Theravada Buddhism than the Buddha’s Birthplace and the brand name having to Sri Lanka is always helping to develop and promote Buddhist products throughout the world.”

Building Buddhist hotspots

In Sri Lanka, there are no ethnic or religious conflicts, and members of diverse ethnic groups, such as Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim, and Burgher coexist peacefully. All Sri Lankans who are part of a multi-religious culture have the freedom to practice their religion. This is a country with remarkable religious harmony, as seen by Buddhists attending Christian churches and Christians visiting Buddhist temples. As a result, temples, churches, and Kovils are all-inclusive religious centers. *“We may encourage Buddhist tourism in our nation by designating and promoting certain locations as the primary*

Buddhist sites with historical, archaeological, and spiritual significance for Buddhist travellers, such as UNESCO heritage sites.”

UNESCO Sites

Most of the interviewees mentioned UNESCO Sites they consider Buddhist hotspots, including Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, Dambulla, and Kandy.

“Almost all Buddhist tourists visit Anuradhapura and Kandy as major must-visit places when their tour. Duration of stay for Buddhist tourists is 7-8 days, and with that, they want to allocate more days in Anuradhapura and then Kandy.”

4.1.3 Building experience-based activities

Round Tours

“Sri Lanka has great potential for Buddhism, and it can be more promoted through offering effective round tours. It is not one day or a few hours. It should be meaningful and 4-5 days with the knowledgeable party.”

Buddhism and Buddhist tourism have had a significant impact on the development of Sinhalese culture and the concretization of the Sri Lankan people. As a result, Sri Lanka is one of the most important places in the world for Buddhist pilgrimage round trips,

allowing visitors to learn about and discover the living witnesses of Sri Lanka's centuries-old Buddhist civilizations.

Temple Stay

Temple stay is not very popular in Sri Lanka. But some meditation centers and temples are provided with this kind of Buddhist tourism products which search for high spiritual values throughout themselves.

“Simply said, ‘temple stay, implies ‘stay in a temple.’ Under various names in different countries where Buddhist temples exist, this specific type of lodging has long been a traditional choice for religious travellers. Temporary stays at Buddhist temples are commonly offered to foreign practitioners on pilgrimages or mendacity tours, as well as Buddhist followers seeking a temporary respite for religious practice. Temple stays have steadily evolved into a viable choice for normal travellers as Buddhism and tourism have become more intertwined.”

Alms Giving

“One of the most common Buddhist practices is almsgiving. It's a manner of providing nourishment to the monks who study and practice the Buddha's teachings. We learn to give and let go at the same time.”

Most Europeans and others love to get different kinds of experiences, and they also love to participate in it. So, Sri Lankans have great potential to promote our almsgiving process to those who are not familiar with it. From the beginning till the end, they can get an experience throughout the process with spiritual value.

Katina Pinkam

These activities are held only in Sri Lanka, and most Buddhist tourists are looking forward to participating and involving this kind of thing. They are willing to donate more money for those kinds of activities. There are client-based who are coming early only for this Katina Pinkam.

“Some clients are requesting some tours to experience Katina Pinkam. They ask us how to do that and all things. They always love to learn and do things. Getting advice from monks and doing this kind of Katina pinkam is one of the main objectives of the Buddhist tourist.”

Preaching the Dhamma & Pirith

Sri Lanka has several monks within the country, and Preaching the Dhamma is a very normal thing to Sri Lankans. But it is a very valuable and rare thing to other countries. So, the respondent state,

“Some clients are willing to pay more for listening dhamma and pirith by sitting in front of the monk in the temple.”

4.2 Issues and challenges in developing Buddhist Tourism in Sri Lanka

4.2.1 Lack of Language skilfulness

All respondents mentioned this as the main issue and challenge they faced. The lack of language specialists who are knowledgeable about Buddhism is lacking part of our industry.

Almost all the Bhikkus directly active in Buddhist tourism, tourist service providers, and administrative entities related to tourism and culture who were questioned stated that if this could be resolved, we could expand the market for Buddhist tourism and use it "to promote our primary offerings, which are leisure and pleasure travel.

“Main issue when we are creating some events is lack of language specialists. When we have language specialists, they are not familiar with Buddhism.”

4.2.2 Lack of Knowledgeable Academic Crew

Low Research

Sri Lanka has many people who are with Buddhism and tourism, but the very smaller number of research carried

out in this segment in tourism. Most respondents stated that Buddhist tourism-related research is not conducted throughout the interviews even though Sri Lanka is named a Buddhist country.

“Our country is a Buddhist country, and almost all the monks, instructors and all are in the country, but we don’t use our resources.”

Connection with Institutes

There are a lot of institutes that are related to Buddhism and tourism, but no connection with each other. That creates a huge gap in terms of developing Buddhist tourism in Sri Lanka. Interview outcomes said that building connections between institutes and service providers would reduce this gap and open potential for developing Buddhist tourism. Followings are stated through interviews.

“The main challenge is to build up a connection between related industries. Because when we develop connections, we can incorporate the practical world with the academic world.”

Academic crew

Sri Lanka has a lot of industry professionals related to tourism and Buddhism. But the lacking part is they are not connected with the decision-

making process. Lacking part of the country is that. SLTPB has a committee related to Buddhist Tourism Promotion, but it is not connected with any industrial professionals. Lacking part of society is no platform to connect academic professionals with industrial professionals. Interview respondents state that,

“Industry should go with academics without that no right direction to promote those kinds of potentials.”

4.2.3 Government Issues

According to the ideas that come from respondents, the researcher identified that there is a big responsibility on the side of the government. All respondents highlighted that lack of government involvement, directly and indirectly, causes the generating of many issues and challenges faced by service providers and facilitators. So, the researcher induced identified existing government's role in the Buddhist tourism industry. A respondent mentioned,

“No support from government is the main issue for us. Politically they control all the stuff, and we lose our control always when we plan new things, process new ideas and so on.”

Master Plans

Lacking part of the government sector is no master plan for the potential. As a Buddhist country, we have enough potential, but the government takes no action. Every professional in the industry states that they need support from the government with master plans. The government should interfere with this industry for developing potentials.

“We cannot implement our ideas due to political interference, so we need some master plan for Buddhist tourism to develop or at least promote Buddhist tourism.”

Buddhist Festival Management

As a result of political issues, respondents stated that managing Buddhist festivals is challenging for Buddhist tourism development. In the same way, several of the respondents did not see mismanagement of Buddhist festivals or other issues associated with Buddhist festivals as a problem that hinders the development of Buddhist tourism.

“Sri Lanka has many Buddhist festivals, and those should be managed properly. For example, Kandy Esala Perahara has a lot of issues regarding management. Some clients complaint to us regarding various kinds of issues they faced.”

Central Mechanism

According to interviews, Sri Lanka as a nation has comparable issues with types of tourism. Tourism cannot be planned, developed, or controlled by a single entity. That had a negative impact on Buddhist travel. The majority of those surveyed have said

“Lack of central mechanism will lead us to many troubles. SLTDA take some decisions without informing us, and they work independently no connection with any provincial councils.”

4.2.4 Lack of awareness

When growing Buddhist tourism, product awareness is the most important thing to consider. A significant number of respondents, out of all respondents, said that their customers are not aware of the Buddhist tourism goods we offer.

Domestic and International Awareness

Interviews revealed that the most crucial step is to localize the product initially. Some locals constantly oppose Buddhist tourism, attempt to mislead visitors, and other such actions because they are unaware of it. According to one responder,

“Prioritizing localization above internationalism is important because

without local awareness, a product would never be known to other nations.”

4.2.5 Lack of marketing strategies

The main reason for this problem is inadequate marketing. Contrary to popular belief, marketing has the power to draw visitors at a far greater degree. Based on the results of the interviews, the primary area in need of improvement is the product's local and worldwide marketing.

“Buddhist travel is currently quite popular everywhere in the globe. Even though we have enormous potential, we haven't done as much to market it. Appropriate authorities ought to appropriately concentrate on such types of components. We have authentic Theravada Buddhism, and a lot of people use it nowadays to reduce stress.”

4.2.6 Lack of Infrastructure

According to the respondents, some state that the infrastructure facilities are not accordingly, and some are told accordingly. However, out of those majority will tell, infrastructure facilities are deplorable in Buddhist sites. Some meditation centres purposefully maintain their facilities at the minor level but to some standard.

“When we visit some sites there is not any facilities for even domestic tourist. So, the infrastructure should be up to a standard not only form Buddhist Tourist for all the tourists both domestic and international.”

4.2.7 Lack of adequate information

Throughout the interviews, all are talking about the lack of information availability. Tourists who come with cultural shock will be unsatisfied at the beginning of their travel because of the unavailability of information. There are no proper tourist information centres in Sri Lanka that can obtain all relevant information in one place without any issue. Respondent state,

“There is no place tourists can take information, and always they were frustrated with the services. Finally, they spread bad news regarding their tour, and that will lead to downsizing the market.”

4.2.8 Travel Agency and Guiding Issues

They mentioned that some clients were dissatisfied with some travel agency work during the interviews. Some tours have refused to participate in certain activities without prior notice. However, they planned a schedule that included those activities before they arrived. Travel agents provide notice of activity

cancellations or assign certain dates and hours for specific activities.

“Sometimes we get unpleasant remarks and complaints from some Buddhist travellers about ordering this travel agency to do this and that through mail, complaint management system, or any other means,” it said. In one instance, the activity was abruptly cancelled without warning. The client has also left a poor review.”

Knowledgeable Guides

Interviews reveal that a spiritual trainer's demeanour plays a crucial role in guaranteeing a happy and fulfilling experience for spiritual tourists. Because they have a responsibility as trainers to understand the diverse cultural backgrounds and behaviours of the visitors. Aside from that, spiritual trainers' preaching and communication tactics play a vital role in keeping spiritual practices for visitors. Because different people have varied types of talents when it comes to comprehending a subject, they must utilize diverse ways to communicate knowledge to their consumers.

“When interacting with Buddhist tourists, guides should have self-discipline and attitudes. Buddhist tourists come from many walks of life and have a variety of perspectives.”

Support from the front line

According to the interviews, they mention front-line service providers who directly contact Buddhist tourists. The people who handle and deal with Buddhist tourists can affect to development of Buddhist tourism potential in Sri Lanka. From the main facilitator's point of view,

“There are 6000 monasteries around Sri Lanka with 20 international Monasteries. We called one by one and requested them to come and join us and say we would promote your site with our promotions. Unfortunately, only 300-400 are agreed with us and others are not willing to contribute. They always think of tourism as a headache to our country and Religion.”

5.0 Discussion

With a millennium of history, Sri Lanka has been the global leader of Theravada Buddhism. India is closely neighbored by Hinduism, which has influenced the nation. Another distinctive feature of Sri Lanka is that it follows the lunar calendar, with national holidays observed on each full moon day. Because Sri Lanka is known for its spirituality and has many places of worship, tourist attractions, and holy sites, among other things, Buddhist tourism is an important part of the

country's tourism industry. Essential elements of Buddhist tourism in Sri Lanka also include Buddhist philosophy and heritage. A better place to go if you want to explore Buddhist philosophy in depth is Sri Lanka. To promote and develop Buddhist tourism, it is vital to understand the potential and the issues and challenges of Buddhist tourism. The potentials, issues, and challenges of Buddhist tourism development in Sri Lanka were comprehensively studied by analysing the data collected.

The first objective is to identify the potential for developing Buddhist tourism in Sri Lanka, and after the discussion with the respondents, the researcher identified considerable potential for Buddhist tourism in Sri Lanka. Almost all the respondents state the same potential for developing Buddhist tourism in Sri Lanka.

1. Promote Tangible and Intangible Buddhist Resources
2. Building brand awareness
3. Building Buddhist hotspots
4. Building experience-based activities for Buddhist tourist

Previous research emphasizes Manisa's latest branding initiatives include a focus on increasing the city's religious tourist potential [17]. Rich historical

and religious resources from different eras may be found in Manisa, offering a variety of experiences to tourists who come for leisure and relaxation as well as those who are seeking religious guidance [18]. Numerous opportunities exist for advancing and growing the market share of religious tourism, such as more travellers and likely more revenue from tourism, education about our culture and heritage, greater respect for the various religions that worship here, understanding of other religions, and improved world peace and religious discourse. When we elaborate on the results of interviews, it clearly shows Sri Lanka has great potential for developing and promoting Buddhist tourism. As per both interviewees' responses and literature, the same potentials were mentioned. So, we can identify developing and promoting Buddhist tourism as an essential part of the tourism industry, after analysing all collected data categorized mainly into 3 highest influencing factors to develop potentials in Buddhist tourism according to results.

1. Buddhist tourism marketing strategies
2. Role of the qualified human resources to cater to Buddhist tourism.

3. Availability of excessive tangible and intangible Buddhist resources

From the perspective of an industry specialist, there are now three main reasons why people travel to Sri Lanka for Buddhist tourism. such as spiritual experimentation, studying Buddhism, pilgrimage, and cultural heritage. Additionally, the results show that most Buddhist visitors to Sri Lanka go with their families and friends and that the majority of them have a strong interest in shopping. Furthermore, they engaged in Buddhist practices for seven or eight days while in Sri Lanka. The researcher may be able to achieve the study's primary goal by considering every interview outcome. Finding problems and obstacles in the development of Buddhist tourism in Sri Lanka is the second goal. Analysis shows that Sri Lanka has failed to boost this industry despite its enormous potential due to a few problems. After classifying them into many sections, the researcher determined that problems and obstacles might have a significant influence on Buddhist tourism in Sri Lanka. Experts in the field say that Sri Lanka now requires an advertising plan to encourage Buddhist travel. Therefore, to draw in the right kind of customers and build Buddhist tourism as a significant travel industry in Sri Lanka,

the nation has to launch a thorough marketing campaign with the assistance of important organizations. The new strategy for marketing travel destinations must be coordinated with global Buddhist organizations and agencies. Additionally, they suggest the following marketing strategies for the growth of Buddhist tourism in Sri Lanka. Developing Buddhist tourism awareness programs through comprehensive media campaigns targeting increased domestic and foreign travellers. Encourage spiritual places to use e-marketing through specialist websites and other travel portals. Form partnerships with expert tour operators and travel agencies for marketing collaborations. A marketing strategy is aiming at attracting more tourists to the airport by providing a pleasant atmosphere. Plan and promote Buddhist conferences and initiatives around the world. Create high-quality advertising materials like brochures, posters, trip guides, CD-ROMs, YouTube videos, and social media. In the field agree that having qualified human resources is essential to the growth of Buddhist tourism in Sri Lanka. To improve Buddhist tourism in Sri Lanka, spiritual teachers, tour guides, venue operators, and others need to be conscious of their duties and

obligations. On the other hand, spiritual counsellors in Sri Lanka are knowledgeable about their specialized subjects. However, due to linguistic barriers, providing information to travellers presents technological difficulties. Offering language training courses and procedures that are suitable for trainers, however, might lessen this. According to experts in the tourist industry, foreign languages including Russian, Chinese, Mandarin, Japanese, German, French, and Thai need to be arranged and made simpler to learn for individuals in the tourism business, need to be organized and made easier to study for those in the tourism industry so that the country benefits more. To accomplish both short- and long-term goals, an organization's human resources must be recognized and used effectively. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), developing national economies in both developed and developing nations depend heavily on having competent human resources in the tourism sector. It is possible to assemble a dedicated team of specialists from each organization and create an action plan outlining the next measures to be taken concerning religious tourism. Universities may provide resources, facilities, and

experience in teaching, marketing, and publishing, and the Governorship of Manisa can oversee the initiatives. They considered the findings of both earlier research, which led to the identical problems and difficulties that have arisen in this business sector. Consequently, the formation of a dedicated team of specialists from each organization and the development of an action plan to determine the next steps in religious tourism are possible. Effective planning and execution of religious tourism initiatives need close collaboration amongst all parties involved. The implementation process may be overseen by the Governorship of Sri Lanka, and all universities can contribute by offering their facilities, knowledge, and experience in marketing, publishing, and education. Destination managers must comprehend a system of actors and activities, accurately position and brand the destination, and identify the roles and duties of various stakeholders to accomplish the growth of the destination.

6.0 Conclusion and Recommendation

In conclusion, Buddhist tourism holds immense potential for growth in Sri Lanka, a country with deep-rooted Buddhist traditions and an abundance of spiritual and cultural heritage. This

study has highlighted the unique opportunities for promoting Buddhist tourism by leveraging tangible and intangible resources, creating brand awareness, and developing experience-based activities. However, several challenges impede its progress, including language barriers, lack of academic support, inadequate marketing strategies, and infrastructure deficiencies. Addressing these issues through a coordinated central mechanism and more robust government involvement is crucial for positioning Buddhist tourism as a key segment within Sri Lanka's tourism industry. By implementing targeted strategies, Sri Lanka can fully capitalize on its rich Buddhist heritage and play a pivotal role in the global Buddhist tourism landscape. As per the findings of this study, it is recommended that Sri Lanka's government authorities and tourism institutions collaborate more closely to develop a centralized mechanism for addressing the challenges and harnessing the potential of Buddhist tourism. Infrastructure improvements, particularly in key pilgrimage sites, should be prioritized to enhance visitor experiences. Additionally, addressing the language barrier through professional training and partnerships with universities will

improve service delivery. Developing a strong brand identity, such as "Buddha Bumi," and promoting Buddhist tourism as a structured and primary product can further position Sri Lanka as a global hub for Buddhist pilgrims, ensuring sustainable growth in this sector.

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