

**A study of potentials and possibilities in promoting
Rajagala archaeological site for domestic and foreign
visitors as a minor tourist attraction**

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Abstract

The heritage site Rajagala is located at Uhana Secretariat Divisional, in Ampara District, Eastern Province, Sri Lanka. This site is much significant in several aspects of archaeological, religious, cultural and historical value. Though this heritage site is located amidst of several historical and religious sites, still less attention have been focused by the visitors. Even the infrastructure facilities and the visitor related facilities and services, supervision of the site are not conducted in a satisfied condition. Even though the site is authorized by the Department of Archaeology, Sri Lanka as an archaeological site, making awareness and promotions

regarding the site are not considerably focused on. Since Ampara is a tourist destination in the island, Rajagala site also should be considered as a minor attraction to be promoted with the values of archaeological and religious heritage values. With the dawn of the peace in the island, there is a huge possibility to promote this site for both domestic and foreign visitors since the site is also rich with historical value. This attempt is to identify the possibilities and the potentials behind the Rajagalasite, and to examine how to plan and promote the site as a visitor attraction.

Introduction and research problem/issue

The research question of the study is how to promote Rajagala as a minor tourist attraction for both domestic and foreign tourists. The objective of the study is to promote the site Rajagala for the tourists while preserving the heritage value of the site. The hypothesis is still the site Rajagala has not been promoted for the domestic and foreign visitors as a heritage attraction.

Research Methodology

During the research both primary and secondary data were gathered. During the field-based observation which carried out for several days, it was identified the importance of the site as a valued heritage site in religious and cultural aspects. Historical information were gathered through various literary sources which some of them were published and electronic sources. Analyzing the potential and present condition of the site Rajagala, the site promotional plan has been introduced with the strategies which can be implemented practically.

Research and findings

Though Rajagala is extremely rich with archaeological significances, still the visitor arrivals at the site is not at a considerable context. The responsible parties of the country should pay high attention to preserve this heritage and to disseminate the heritage value of the site in national and international levels through the site promotional strategies. *Rajagala* is also known as *Rajagala Thenna* and *Rassagala*. The discovery of places where stone implements were made in and around Rajagala, illustrates that the area had been inhabited from the prehistoric times. The mountain, particularly its western slopes and the rock face of northern side of the range are dotted with hundreds of caves with drip-ledges. This shows that the monastery which originated in the 3rd c B.C. had been in use for a number of centuries and has been spread over 1080 acres with more than 600 of ancient ruins and monuments at the premises. There are several stupas, image houses, alms giving halls, *bodhighara*, monks' residencies, ponds, *Mihindu Seya*, half constructed Buddha statue etc can be identified among the ruins and monuments at

the site. A host of rock inscriptions belonging to various periods are found here. Among them are a large number of drip-ledged inscriptions on caves. The rock inscription regarding the Arahant Mahinda. There is the most valued inscription of archaeological interest found in this sacred area. A stone inscription found nearby bears testimony to this fact, although no excavation or restoration work has been carried out at this site to confirm what's inscribed in the stone inscription. The moonstone here is also different to others where the lotus is the only figure, spreading all over the moonstone. When the visitor related facilities are concerned even the accessibility to the site is not maintained properly. There is a narrow road for the transportations. At the entrance of the site there is a counter with two staff members who manage the site with the authority of the Department of Archaeology, Sri Lanka. There is no guidance service provided at the site and the visitors have to manage themselves by self guiding. Visitor information service provided at the site is extremely not satisfied; even any leaflet or a site map is distributed

among the visitors. There are few signage can be seen at some of the places. Within 200m away from the entrance counter, there are major ruins located and within another several meter unidentified ruins have been spread over. There is a small parking area which is limited to park only few vehicles at once. Drinkable water has been supplied at only two places, no place to buy food and beverages while available sanitation facilities are not in a proper level. At the boundary of the site area, there are several illegal constructions, wild animal hunting, treasure hunting and reforestation are being carried out by the local communities still the responsible authorities have not taken any action against those heritage destruction activities.

Conclusions, implications, and significance

Rajagala is located around several archaeologically and religiously significant places but these sites have not been promoted as minor attraction among the visitors due to the lack of awareness and promotional programs. It is the responsibility of the government party to appoint heritage managers to each site to Rajagala site with

adequate staff members to protect and conserve the heritage. Only few domestic visitors are arriving at the site in present and even they are not provided with informative services and even basic visitor related facilities. It is a timely necessary to plan a strategic plan to promote this site and to implement those strategies with supervision and monitoring. The area is naturally important for the biodiversity, mountains, rocky cliffs, dry zone climate and vegetation which can be attracted by the nature tourists for the activities of trekking, hiking and bird watching and wildlife watching etc. With the usage of information technology, marketing, promotions and a site management plan it is practicable to promote the site through tour packages with the support of the tour operators and travel agencies.

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