

A study on finding the feasibility of promoting Heritage Tourism concept in Gampaha District, Sri Lanka

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Introduction:

Gampaha district is the second most important administrative district in Sri Lanka, which is located next to the Colombo district. Gampaha district consisted with diverse geographic area which consisted with coastal belt, midland plains with mountain relicts, wetlands, cave sites and forests with rich biodiversity. Moreover, it is rich in cultural diversity which leads to both tangible and intangible aspects. The majority of the religious sites in Gampaha District are related with the historic era. Some of the cave sites are indicating prehistoric evidences as well. The culturally diverse population in Gampaha district provides diverse intangible aspects. As a result, there could be find out many different heritage aspects that have potential to promote as tourist attraction. This study is attempting to find out the feasibilities of promoting heritage tourism in Gampaha district.

The major objectives of this research were, find out the different heritage sites in Gampaha district, identify the currently used heritage sites in tourism and impacts of tourism on them, identify the feasible heritage aspects to promote in tourism and propose a sustainable heritage tourism plan for Gampaha district.

Methodology:

Both primary and secondary data collecting methodologies were used. Interviews, first person observation were the major primary data collecting methodologies used for the research. The sample was selected with the including industrial professionals, religious site authorities, government agents and community leaders. Each person was taken into an interview and forwarded random questions. The qualitative data collected over interviews were taken to consider under the several aspects of this study. The sustainable tourism plan which was proposed at the end is a combination of attitudes and ideas of all the stakeholders which has proposed to reduce the negative impacts while introducing the heritage tourism concept for the development of tourism industry in this study area.

The secondary data collecting methodologies were taken as the supporting data collection methods. Books, journals, previous research papers, statistical reports, previous tourist plans and reports, thesis's and web articles were used to collect the secondary data about the study area. Probably, the previous studies on this area were not focused on the tourism industry other than beach tourism concept. As a result, the primary data became the major aspects considered for the final results.

Experimental results:

The experimental findings could be arranged according to the objectives that mentioned in the introduction. There could be categorized different heritage aspects that find by the research work did in Gampaha district. Those are Historic heritage, natural heritage and anthropological heritage. The category of historic heritage has been included both prehistoric heritage and historic heritage those indicate the aspects of different historical ages passed through. The sites under historic heritage category consisted archeological sites and religious sites such as caves, temples and burial sites. Natural heritage category included the forest reserves and national parks which indicate the aspects on biodiversity. Anthropological heritage included the different aspects belongs to the culture of the community such as casting systems, traditional occupations, art and crafts, technology and different believes and values.

While finding the current use of heritage sites in tourism industry, several tourist attractions could be found within the study area. The Gampaha district has become a tourist's attraction due to the Negombo beach tourism. Negombo beach is one of the famous and ideal beaches for tourists as it is located close proximity to the first international airport in Sri Lanka. As a result, most of the tourists who visit Sri Lanka are selecting Negombo as the first or last destination of their tour. Preethipura beach, Eththukala beach park, Moruwala are ideal beach sites that have been captured the attraction of both international and domestic tourists. Moreover, some religious heritage sites also have been became attractions for tourists. Such as Kelaniya Raja maha Viharaya, Saint. Mary's church, Saint. Sebastian church, Duwa church, Aththanagalla Raja Maha Viharaya. Moreover, Muthurajawela marsh land and Horagolla National Park receive a hand

count of tourists who pay attention on natural attractions. Furthermore, Henarathgoda Botanical Garden receive considerable amount of domestic tourists year around.

In due to this involvement of tourism, there could be find out several issues occurred at the heritage sites and in the vicinity. The major issues were able to categorize under three tracks. Those are socio-cultural issues, environmental issues and economic issues. The socio-cultural issues recorded the highest range of impacts while environmental impacts lead the second. The most of economic issues are directly courses to the local community in indirect manner.

The major attempt of this research was to identify the feasible heritage aspects that have ability to use in a sustainable tourism plan. The full paper of this study included with a proposal for the sustainable use of heritage sites in Gampaha District with diverse tourist products that setup to replace the traditional tour packages offered by current tourism authorities in the island.

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