

STUDY ON CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES OF CULINARY TOURISM DEVELOPMENT: SPECIAL REFERENCE TO HATTON AREA

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The Hatton region in Sri Lanka has been identified as a tourist destination among domestic and foreign pilgrims and tourists, which has abundant tourism resources but has not yet been discovered as a separate area for tourism development. Culinary tourism presents fresh prospects for communities to seamlessly blend tourism with local food systems, thereby fostering economic growth, meeting the rising appetite for high-quality culinary experiences, and enriching the cultural heritage of the region. This research aims to analyze the key challenges and potential opportunities of tourism development in the Hatton region. The qualitative research approach was employed, and direct in-depth interviews were conducted with a sample of twenty tourism service operators, including divisional authentic food producers, food vendors, the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority, tea estate owners, and the divisional secretariat office in Hatton, a tourist destination. Thematic analysis was adopted to achieve the research objectives, using Nvivo version 11 for statistical data analysis of the study. The findings of the research highlight community willingness to involve in tourism operation, skillful residents making foods related to Indian Tamil and Sinhala mixed culture, natural and cultural tourist attractions related to Tamil and Sinhala culture as potential opportunities. Furthermore, a lack of community awareness and motivation on tourism, lack of government involvement, middle-income community lifestyle, and social media-addicted, unemployed young generation have been identified as challenges to developing culinary tourism in Hatton. The data was gathered during the COVID-19 pandemic period and economic crises, which limited the number of respondents expected to be interviewed. The study recommends that Sri Lankan policymakers promote tourism awareness programs, culinary trails, collaboration of local food vendors and government, quality assurance, and hygiene standards for the tourism development in the Hatton region, not only as a pilgrim destination but also as a destination of culinary vividness utilizing the “Culinary Tourism” concept.

Keywords: Challenges and Opportunities, Culinary tourism, Tourism Development

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