

# Cultural Tourism in the Main Stream of Higher Education in Sri Lanka

**Rohanadeera**

*Professor of History, University of Sri Jayawardenapura*

**C. K. M. Deheragoda**

*Senior Lecturer, University of Sri Jayawardenapura*

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## **Introduction**

Tourism is in need of a comprehensive framework within which to design and deliver education and training programmes in a more effective manner. As the world's largest single industry, it has attracted considerable attention as a major social force not only in developed countries, but also in developing countries. In the context of tourism in Sri Lanka, this dimension of strength relates directly to the industry's past record of job creation and its perceived potential for continuing to offer new openings for employment at a time when more traditional sectors are faltering. In the past, tourism has had the image of an industry which provides only unskilled or low quality seasonal employment. While many jobs in tourism are of this nature, the growing sophistication and magnitude of tourism related undertakings is increasingly opening up careers which are both economically and professionally rewarding. Jobs within the airline industry, hotel sector, government tourism departments, and the newly emerging area of mega - events and attractions of sightseeing tours (Cultural Tourism & Ecotourism) are as demanding, sophisticated, and complex as any other specialized branch in the economy.

As a result of this growth and development across the entire range of employment spectrum, there are increasing demands to support this evolution of the industry with an equally sophisticated education and training infrastructure (Umbreit 1987). Due to lack of availability of well constituted education and training facilities in Sri Lanka, the possibility of managerial careers in tourism has never been raised.

While such industries as banking, accounting, marketing, and computing recruit the cream of the qualified young talent and the university graduates, the tourism industry in Sri Lanka (and perhaps elsewhere) has had little or no access to the future leaders. At the other end of the educational spectrum, it is only recently that the need of systematic and broad based training programmes for those jobs which are typically regarded as requiring minimum skill levels has been duly recognized. As a result the quality of the tourism service at the 'Front Line' are often subject to be unproductive and disastrous in the context of socio, economic, cultural, and environmental perspectives. Therefore the weakening of the competition capacity of Sri Lanka's tourism product, in the international, regional and domestic market is inevitable.

## **Tourism Education in Sri Lanka**

Nevertheless some educational institutions have recognized the problem for some time. Eventually some isolated attempts to promote tourism education have been taking place. i.e. Diploma in Tourism Management and Diploma in Hotel Management at the Senior Technical College at Maradana in 1972 - 1979, and part time Diploma course on Tourism at the University of Kelaniya during the same period. Unfortunately none of them sustained. The only area of tourism education which could secure a continuous success in Sri Lanka is the Diploma in Hotel Management course and other Certificate Courses on hotel and catering specialities sponsored by the Ceylon Hotel School since 1966 to date. Many other private fee levying institutions also offer short courses relevant for accommodation and

catering sectors, tapping the market potential for training. Also the Open University of Sri Lanka offers a Course on Tourism under its distant education programme which has failed to produce any positive breakthrough.

Unfortunately, until late 1980s tourism has not been included into any formal university curricula despite its very positive contribution to the national economy on one hand, and its controversial social, economic, and environmental impacts, possibly appeal very much for research by academics on the other. However breaking that barrier the Department of Geography of the University of Sri Jayawardenepura included a new subject Recreational Geography, into its geography honours curricula, which has become very popular since 1987 to date. Later in 1991, again the same university took the responsibility of introducing Diploma Courses on: Travel & Tourism Management, and Cultural Tourism at their Affiliated University Colleges in Sabaragamuwa (Samanelawewa) and North Central Provinces (Anuradhapura) respectively.

#### Academics in Tourism

The academics in Sri Lanka are gradually, but positively involving themselves in tourism education as well as research. Nevertheless, the gap between the industry and the academics is still very wide and reasons for this need careful study.

Tourism has not appealed to many academics as they have not been exposed to any tourism subject either at the secondary or at the university level formal education in Sri Lanka. Thus, very few academics are available in the country who have specialized in any tourism discipline. However many academics, especially in the University of Sri Jayawardenepura have shown strong interest in research on tourism related issues in different perspectives.

#### POTENTIAL FOR CULTURAL TOURISM

##### Resource Base for Cultural Tourism

Sri Lanka is gifted with a very rich

resource base for cultural tourism. Its cultural heritage has been evolved through two and a half millenium. A tiny Island of 64,652 Sq.Km. off the southern tip of India, Sri Lanka was open to constant cultural waves from the sub-continent, but was able to retain her identity due to her being separated from the Indian mainland. Further, Sri Lanka's natural sea ports all open to the Indian Ocean brought it the fortune of being a compulsory voyage destination status on the traditional maritime Silk Route, connected China with the Arab Seas in the early centuries, and Asian countries with the Western Powers in the post Colombus era. Thus Sri Lanka was a very distinctive travel destination for many centuries, and its culture has been known to, and inspired by interntional cultures through out its 2500 old history.

The cultural heritage of Sri Lanka is well identified and established as its chronological history is well documented ever since 3 c BC. The Ancient Capitals of 2500 years of Sri Lankan history have been identified and their architectural monuments have been examined, and still being brought to light by archaeologists. These ancient sites are full of traditional architectural features and monuments such as ramparts, doorways, moats, royal palaces, gardens and ponds etc., plus a sacred area with religious monuments attached to every ancient capital. Six of these sites are already being declared as the properties of World Heritage, by the UNESCO's World Heritage Sites Conservation Programme since 1980 namely: (1) Anuradhapura – the first capital city, 6th c. BC. – 11c., (2) Sigiriya – the rock fortress, world famous for its frescos, 5c., (3) Polonnaruwa – the second capital city, 11 – 12c., (4) Dambulla – the cave temple with numerous Buddha statues and rock paintings, (5) Kandy – the last capital city, which is highly renowned as the last repository of the Sacred Tooth Relic of the Buddha, venerated by millions of pilgrims around the world, and (6) Galle Fort the best preserved Dutch architectrual monument in South and Southeast Asia.

These sites are under UNESCO sponsored Cultural Triangle Programme, since 1980. The excavation, conservation and research at these sites are being handled by University academics. The undergraduates reading for archaeology are receiving their field training at these sites.

The Sculptural Monuments are well documented and displayed. Among them, the most outstanding is the Buddha Statue with its own identical features. Also some specimens like Avukana, and Samadhi statues are unique in their embodiment of serenity emanating from the wisdom and compassion of the Buddha. Further, stone and bronze images of Bodhisattvas and Hindu gods, and figure groups and decorative frames; like Isurumuniya sculptures, moon stones and guard stones which are still the topics of academic discussions with no conclusions among international art historians, are being visited by millions of enthusiastic cultural tourists annually.

Folk Drama, Social and Cultural Events, and Customs and Manners depicting contemporary life pattern are live topics among the academic circles on one hand, and a very strong tourist attraction on the other. Many other anthropogenic monuments such as gigantic reservoirs, canals, sluices and water gardens of the great Sri Lankan Hydraulic Civilization dated back to 3c BC. add much more to the potential of cultural tourism in Sri Lanka.

#### **Tourism Infrastructure**

The tourism infrastructure at the cultural resource base is rapidly developing in Sri Lanka, since 1960s. Over 22 percent of the accommodation facilities are being located, and one third (over 1 Million) of the foreign guest nights are recorded annually in the Ancient Cities Resort Region of Sri Lanka. Further, a considerable supplementary accommodation and catering base is also available, especially to cater the domestic pilgrim tourists as well as foreign tourists. Thus Sri Lanka is already being ensured with necessary pre

conditions to go for the specialization of cultural tourism in an organized manner. The resources of cultural tourism in Sri Lanka are having easy accessibility by well organized and developed motor and rail tourist transportation including heli-tour service.

#### **Introduction of Cultural Tourism into the University Curriculum**

The vast knowledge about the resource base and the infrastructure for Cultural Tourism outlined above, is readily available at the University level, not under the name Cultural Tourism, but under the traditional subjects such as History, Archaeology, Geography, Sociology etc. This relevant knowledge can easily be transformed into the requirement of the knowledge base for Cultural Tourism.

This has been attempted with the opening of new University Colleges affiliated to main Universities in 1992. The Universities are entrusted with the responsibility of giving academic recognition to these Colleges by providing new academic courses, supervising their progress, and awarding certificates on their behalf.

It was agreed to start with two-year Diploma Courses of a level little lower than B.A. Degree, but with more job orientation. The Senate of the University of Sri Jayawardenepura agreed to offer several Diploma Courses, one among them is the Diploma in Cultural Tourism, now in operation in the AUC – Anuradhapura.

A Syllabus Committee comprised of university academics, expert and experienced personnel, drawn from the Ministry of Tourism, Ceylon Tourist Board, Department of Archaeology, UNESCO Cultural Triangle, and the Private Sector involved in tourist industry, has designed the syllabus.

Approximately one fourth of the content and the duration of the syllabus is devoted for the knowledge of general tourism. In this part: concepts, origins and history of tourism; structure, management, motivations and

attractions of tourism; and planning, marketing, economics and development of tourism are included. Another two quarters of the content and time accommodate the knowledge of resource base explained above. In this section a unit with a heavy weightage is provided for the language skills in Cultural Tourism. A comprehensive and compulsory language programme for English and another one or two foreign languages are included. The remaining quarter is devoted to practicals, training tours, field work, and on the spot job training for three weeks per semester. This will be planned and guided by a special committee comprising teachers and representatives from leading tourist institutions. A new staff has been recruited and the first semester of the first year programme has already been completed.

#### Conclusions and Recommendations

The main objective of this joint paper was to examine the problems, and the constraint of the tourism education in Sri Lanka, with special reference to promote the concept of Cultural Tourism academically, as well as a form of tourism specialization in the industrial development perspective.

Cultural Tourism requires highly professional cadre at every level of its industrial operation due to two main reasons:

Anthropogenic resources which attract cultural tourists would be subject to partial or total destruction, if their carrying capacities are being exceeded by over use. Thus, properly stipulated training should be given to all the persons who are going to be engaged in this particular tourism specialization.

The cultural tourists generally possess high social values, and belong to high educational or knowledge category of people. Therefore, specially trained and educated cadre is required to cater to their interests. Otherwise, the market compatibility of Sri Lanka will be lost to a better prepared destination as continues to happen at present.

Therefore, incorporation of tourism education into the formal education system including the universities in the country is essential, if Sri Lanka seriously wants to promote herself to a tourist destination of high standard.

#### Recommendations:

- (1) The tourism education strategy should encompass all sectors of the industry, and all stages of educational cycle (i.e. From Elementary school to postgraduate levels of training).
- (2) Better use should be made of existing institutions as well as the infrastructure available within the sector. Knowledge bases available in some of the Sri Lankan Universities could conveniently be converted to cater the requirements of the academic interests of the tourism industry, if necessary orientation is given.
- (3) Industry should guide the educational system by clearly identifying competency standards, so that educators can be responsive to the industry needs. If industry wants relevant training, it will need to invest the time, energy, and resources in partnership with educators towards the end, (unfortunately the relationship between the industry and the academic institutions in Sri Lanka is highly compartmentalized, and establishment of integration between them is of vital importance).
- (4) Tourism is a service activity and its development must be based on management principles appropriate to such a segment. Many of the standard management techniques are inappropriate as tourism deals with intangibles.
- (5) Tourism is an interdisciplinary field and education, and training programmes should be designed and delivered by educators from more than one discipline.

- (6) There must be an immediate commitment to the development and testing of teaching of materials and instructors for tourism programmes. It is not adequate to assume that faculties teaching generic business skills, are competent to deliver tourism programmes, without taking the time to understand and master the complexities of this industry.

“Any education system that fails to foster the moral integrity of the ‘Whole Man’ is in danger of producing service technicians, who all too soon, will be replaced by a more efficient, less costly,

and less temperamental robots” (Pollock & Ritchie, 1990).

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