An Analysis of the Role of Cultural Tourism on Regional Development of the North Central Province of Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT

Tourism is generally considered to be a positive agent in the economic and regional development process of developing countries. It is an economic activity that provides numerous opportunities for people in the peripheral regions in these countries to earn a living. It enables them to acquire wealth and stimulate their socio-cultural and economic development. As the tourism sector accelerates the development of the other sectors too, it has the potential to solve the problems arising from inter and intra-regional disparities. Hence, the link between tourism and regional development has been recognized as a novel approach in the field of regional development studies. During the last few decades, many new forms of tourism have emerged in mass tourism and these have now been introduced as regional development strategies. Cultural tourism which is one of the above new forms is the fastest growing segment of the industry which can be used to accrue more benefits to peripheral regions where cultural and historical resources are abundant.

The main objective of this study was to analyze the present role and the potential contribution of cultural tourism to the development of the NCP. The secondary objectives of the study were to identify challenges to the development of the NCP; examine the extent to which cultural tourism has contributed to the regional development process of the region, identify the existing cultural tourist sites that attract tourists; discover untapped resources such as cultural activities; beliefs and customs in traditional villages that have the potential to promote cultural tourism; review the existing cultural tourism policies and strategies of developing countries; using the experience gained in other developing countries, explore the benefits that have already been accrued.
accrued to the host communities in the region from cultural tourism; identify the current negative impacts of cultural tourism, and problems that would arise in future and recommend appropriate measures to weaken negative impacts and strengthen positive ones.

The methodology of this research comprised a number of steps; a) a preliminary survey to select the study area, b) a pilot survey to test questionnaires, c) data collection and d) data analysis. After a preliminary survey, Anuradhapura historic city, Mihintale and Tantirimale sacred cities and twenty nine traditional villages in the vicinity of the sacred sites were selected for the in-depth study using the judgment sampling technique. A thirty percent sample of host communities was selected from each village using the stratified random sample technique. The total sample selected for the survey was 480, which comprised 290 villagers; 100 tourists; 30 hotel managers and 60 key informants. Given an exploratory nature to the research, various research techniques like, field and questionnaire surveys, interviews, observations and group discussions have been employed. Both quantitative and qualitative analytical methods were used in combination for analysis the collected data.

The overall findings of this research are that cultural tourism of the NCP has contributed to the development of the region playing a major role in generating employment opportunities and sources of income; development of agriculture and livelihood; empowerment of women; multiplier effects; infrastructure development and development of small and medium scale industries. The findings of this investigation can assist rural developers in the implementation of community development strategies based on women’s empowerment.

**Key words:** Cultural Tourism, Regional Development, North Central Province
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