

EXPLORING THE POTENTIALS AND CHALLENGES OF DEVELOPING ALCO-TOURISM IN SRI LANKA: INSIGHTS FROM THE SOUTHERN COASTAL BELT

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ABSTRACT

Sri Lanka has a rich and diverse cultural heritage, including a rich culinary tradition filled with flavors and aromas enriched by a wide array of spices. Although Sri Lankan cuisine has gained significant attention from tourists, beverage culture, particularly alcoholic beverages, remains underexplored. This study examines the potential to develop alco-tourism in Sri Lanka, with a special focus on the Southern Coastal Belt, and explores how local alcoholic beverages can be developed as tourism products. The objectives of this research are to identify the potential for developing alco-tourism in the Southern Coastal Belt of Sri Lanka, to examine the challenges and barriers limiting the development of alco-tourism in the Southern Coastal Belt, and to explore strategies for promoting and marketing local alcoholic beverages in the Southern Coastal Belt, adopting a qualitative research design rooted in an interpretivist philosophical stance. This study employed purposive and snowball sampling methods to select 15 industry professionals for the in-depth interviews. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, ensuring rigor and trustworthiness by applying credibility, transferability, and dependability checks. This study examined the potential applications of local alcoholic beverages based on tourist interest in local beverages, including their popularity, appeal, and demand for locally inspired cocktails. It also explored ways to enhance the tourist experience through integration with culinary tourism and cultural immersion. Challenges and barriers to developing alco-tourism include cultural sensitivity and religious considerations, such as perceptions of alcohol in local culture and balancing tourism with cultural values. Regulatory and legal barriers, including stringent alcohol regulations and compliance and enforcement issues, were also identified. Another limitation is the quality perception of local beverages, including comparisons with international brands, and opportunities for quality improvement. This study identified strategic implementations for marketing local alcoholic beverages and enhancing tourist awareness. Strategies include targeted marketing campaigns and collaboration with the hospitality sector. The study concludes by proposing strategic recommendations including targeted marketing campaigns, infrastructure development, and community involvement. Collaboration between stakeholders, regulatory bodies, and industry experts is crucial for positioning the Southern Coastal belt as a unique alco-tourism destination. Theoretical implications include contributions to the literature on tourism development in culturally sensitive contexts, while managerial implications suggest practical pathways for developing sustainable alco-tourism.

Keywords: Alco-tourism, tourism development, potential barriers, strategic recommendations.