

## STAGNATION AND REVIVAL OF SPICE TOURISM: THE CASE OF MATALE, SRI LANKA

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### ABSTRACT

Sri Lanka's tourism industry offers myriad services, with spice gardens being significant contributors because of their role in generating foreign currency. However, the spice garden sector has stagnated without significant development, underscoring the urgent need for revitalization to unlock its tourism potential. Although extensive research exists on spice gardens from an agricultural perspective, there is a notable gap in exploring their potential for tourism. This study addresses this gap by examining the barriers and opportunities to revive spice tourism in the Matale area. The primary objective of this study is to revive spice tourism in the Matale area using a qualitative approach aligned with interpretivist philosophy. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with ten (10) spice garden owners and managers selected via purposive sampling. The interviews, ranging from 15 to 38 minutes, covered topics such as developmental barriers, the impact of COVID-19, promotion strategies, and government support. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed manually. The qualitative content analysis resulted in nine main themes: Natural Environment, Convenient Access, Business Environment, Security Challenges, Operational Challenges, Institutional Factors, Government Support, Collaboration, and Rejuvenation. The analysis revealed several barriers to spice tourism development, including operational challenges, inadequate government support, and security concerns. However, opportunities were identified, such as leveraging the natural environment, improving access, and fostering stakeholder collaboration. The impact of COVID-19 poses significant challenges but also spurs innovation in promotion strategies. Understanding these factors can help stakeholders implement effective strategies to overcome barriers and enhance spice tourism in the Matale Area. This study highlights the barriers to and opportunities for revitalizing spice tourism in Matale. Addressing operational challenges, enhancing government support, and leveraging the natural environment can unlock spice gardens' tourism potential. These insights provide practical guidance for stakeholders to develop strategies that contribute to the growth of spice and shopping tourism in Sri Lanka.

**Keywords:** Content analysis, COVID-19 impact, shopping tourism in Sri Lanka, spice tourism, tourism in Matale