

An Analysis of Tourists Struggles in Sri Lanka (Related to Anuradhapura Sacred City)

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Introduction

Tourism is the movement of people from their usual place of residence to another location for leisure, business, or other purposes for a duration not exceeding one consecutive year (UNWTO, 2008; Cooper et al., 2008; Goeldner & Ritchie, 2012). With rich traditions and warm hospitality, Sri Lanka attracts millions of visitors, making tourism vital for its sustainable development and cultural identity. Anuradhapura, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is a popular sacred city for foreign tourists due to its rich historical, cultural, and religious values. *Atamasthanaya* refers to the eight sacred places in Anuradhapura that are deeply venerated by Buddhists and hold great religious significance (UNESCO, 1982). We focused on the problems facing foreign tourists in the sacred city of Anuradhapura. The main objective of this research was to identify the problem faced by foreign tourists in the sacred city. The sub- objectives were to identify new trends that led tourists to choose Sri Lanka as a tourist destination, identify the demographic profile of foreign tourists visiting the sacred site of Anuradhapura, examine the main purposes of visiting the sacred city, analyze how tourists are informed about the sacred city, and evaluate the adequacy of the facilities provided to tourists.

Methodology

This research was conducted using a mix methodology. Interviews and a questionnaire were used as the data collection tools. Data was obtained

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through questionnaires from a randomly selected sample of 50 foreign tourists with and without tour guides. Data was also obtained through interviews with 7 randomly selected tour guides. This research was conducted entirely based on the Anuradhapura sacred city within *Atamasthanaya*.

Results and Discussion

Data shows that there are no safety issues for foreign tourists in the study area. According to data gathered from foreign tourists and tour guides, it appears that foreign tourists have a positive attitude towards guidance, and tourists who come with a tour guide face the fewest problems.

However, foreign tourists who arrive without a tour guide have faced multiple problems, such as language barrier, challenges to find sanitary facilities and also to find drinking water. Foreign tourists often choose to visit this area because of its historical and cultural value, and the majority of name boards are displayed only in Sinhala, making it difficult for foreign tourists to get a clear understanding. They have a neutral attitude towards the cleanliness of the entire *Atamasthanaya*, and in particular they highlighted the lack of proper waste management. Foreign tourists do not take food from the places around the *Atamasthanaya*. They buy food from places where they reside, and therefore, they have no understanding of the foods around the *Atamasthanaya*. They also do not get drinking water from these surroundings, because due to the language barrier, they do not understand the places where free drinking water can be obtained. Findings also indicate that foreign tourists who were accompanied by tour guides have a very positive attitude towards the transport facilities, while foreign tourists who were not accompanied by tour guides are not satisfied with the transport facilities, especially for the public transport. The majority (48%)

have a positive feeling about Wi-Fi and mobile networks, while a very small number (16%) have a negative feeling.

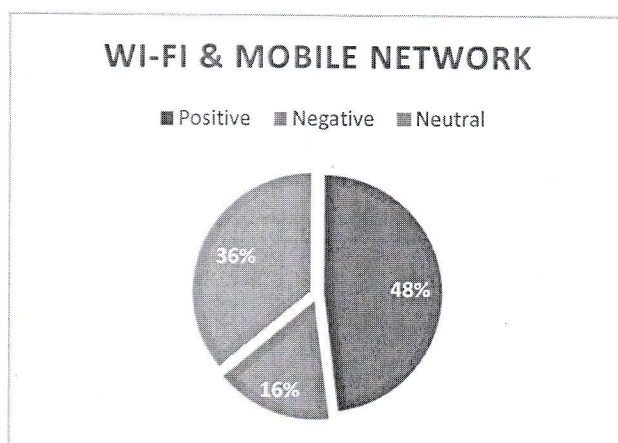


Figure 1: Response about Wi-Fi and Mobile Network. Source: Survey Data 2025

Conclusion

Foreign tourists are attracted to Anuradhapura for its outstanding cultural, religious, and historical significance as one of Sri Lanka's ancient capitals. However, despite its sacred value, many visitors struggle with practical challenges that hinder their experience. Common concerns include language barriers that make navigation difficult, inadequate sanitation facilities, lack of clear information about drinking water safety, and transport difficulties, especially without the support of guides. Although tourists appreciate the hospitality of local people and the city's connectivity, many feel that services provided are not proportionate to the high-ticket prices. Strengthening multilingual communication, upgrading waste management, and investing in better infrastructure can greatly improve satisfaction, ensuring Anuradhapura stands as a sustainable and welcoming world heritage destination.

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