

Visitor Experiences and Responses to Vandalism at Heritage Sites: A Study in Kandy, Sri Lanka

U.M.K.G.R.S. Kumari^{1,*} and D.M.C. Dasanayake²

*Department of Tourism and Hospitality Management, Faculty of Management Studies,
Rajarata University of Sri Lanka, Mihintale, Sri Lanka^{1,2}*

*Corresponding author: shiyamaliruk@gmail.com

Abstract

Tourist vandalism at heritage-rich sites like Kandy, Sri Lanka, has emerged as a growing concern, undermining both visitor experience and long-term sustainability of cultural tourism. Despite enforcement efforts, limited research explores how acts such as graffiti, littering, and property damage affect tourists' perceptions and experience. This study investigates visitor experiences and responses to vandalism at key cultural sites in Kandy, including the Temple of the Tooth Relic, Kandy Lake, Ambuluwawa, and the Peradeniya Botanical Garden. A qualitative approach using in-depth, semi-structured interviews was employed with purposively selected local visitors who personally encountered vandalism. Thematic analysis revealed three dominant themes: emotional impacts, perceived cultural degradation, and the role of demographic variables in shaping perceptions. Findings indicate that vandalism significantly reduces the quality of tourist experience, generating emotions such as disappointment, frustration, and reluctance to revisit or recommend. Visitors with strong cultural or spiritual ties to the sites reported the highest sensitivity. The study recommends implementing awareness campaigns, enhanced surveillance, and community-driven conservation strategies to mitigate vandalism. Promoting cultural respect and enforcing sanctions are essential to preserving site integrity and fostering sustainable tourism. The insights offer valuable guidance for policymakers and heritage managers confronting similar challenges in Sri Lanka and beyond.

Keywords: cultural heritage, sustainable tourism, tourist experience, vandalism