

A Qualitative Study on Leveraging Cinematic and Literary Narratives to Revitalize Sri Lanka Tourism

H.A.I.S. Perera^{1,*}, S. Bodhinagoda², and H.A.J.N. Perera³

*Faculty of Hospitality, Tourism and Event Management, Management and Science Institute,
Colombo, Sri Lanka¹*

Faculty of Business Management, Management and Science Institute, Colombo, Sri Lanka²

Faculty of Computer Science, University of Colombo, Colombo, Sri Lanka³

*Corresponding author: pereraimal7@gmail.com

Abstract

Sri Lanka's vital tourism industry requires urgent revitalisation following recent instability and economic challenges. The country holds a wealth of underutilised cultural assets, including a rich history and a setting for celebrated literary works. Addressing the strategic failure to capitalise on these powerful narratives, this study's primary objective is to qualitatively explore how cinematic and literary stories can be systematically used to diversify tourism products, strengthen the national brand, and drive sustainable industry growth. Adopting an exploratory qualitative research design, the study uses a thematic analysis of secondary data. The methodology involved: first, identifying and analysing successful international case studies (e.g., New Zealand's 40% tourist surge post-*The Lord of the Rings*); second, reviewing archival records of iconic films shot in Sri Lanka, such as *The Bridge on the River Kwai*; third, analysing literary works by celebrated authors like Shehan Karunatilaka and Michael Ondaatje. The thematic analysis involved generating focused codes such as 'narrative potential', 'destination imagery', and 'cultural authenticity', which were then synthesised into overarching themes. Findings confirm Sri Lanka has a rich foundation for unique, story-driven travel. The potential lies in creating immersive products, such as themed tours and literary cafes, by combining film and literary tourism. Success is contingent on cultural authenticity, requiring the careful curation of narratives to ensure a respectful representation of local culture. The primary implication is that revitalising tourism through this niche requires a coordinated national strategy involving government agencies, private sector stakeholders, and local communities. By focusing on authentic storytelling, sustainable practices, and proactive marketing, Sri Lanka can move beyond predictable offerings to enhance its brand, foster equitable economic recovery, and build a stronger and more diverse tourism sector.

Keywords: cultural heritage, destination branding, film tourism, literary tourism, narrative tourism