

Regaining the Dumbara Laaksha Industry through Tourism: Challenges and Pathways to Authenticity

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Abstract

This study examines the cultural significance, contemporary challenges, and tourism potential of Laaksha craftsmanship in the Dumbara Highlands of Sri Lanka. The industry currently faces a critical decline due to limited youth engagement, inadequate market visibility, scarcity of raw materials, and weak institutional support, threatening the survival of this centuries-old heritage. Grounded in the frameworks of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) and Community-Based Tourism (CBT), the research investigates how Laaksha artisans sustain ancestral craftsmanship while adapting to modern socio-economic transitions. Data were collected through 14 semi-structured interviews with artisans, cultural stakeholders, and community members, supplemented by extensive non-participant field observations in key Laaksha-producing villages. Purposive sampling ensured the inclusion of experienced artisans and local leaders. Interview transcripts and field notes were systematically coded and analyzed using qualitative content analysis to integrate both narrative insights and observed practices. The findings identified seven major themes: traditional knowledge and techniques, artisan identity and heritage, tourism and cultural experience, market and visibility challenges, institutional and training issues, youth participation barriers, and environmental concerns. Results highlight that Laaksha production is deeply embedded in religious symbolism, family-based knowledge transmission, and local identity, while also showing the structural challenges threatening its continuity. The study concludes that revitalizing the Laaksha industry requires multidimensional interventions such as the modernization of training centres, enhanced policy recognition, digital visibility, environmental stewardship, and the promotion of artisan-led tourism initiatives. Emphasising artisans as key custodians of intangible heritage, the research proposes sustainable and culturally sensitive pathways to ensure the continuity of Laaksha craftsmanship while advancing community-based tourism in Sri Lanka.

Keywords: authenticity, challenges, community-based tourism, intangible cultural heritage, laaksha industry