

Positioning Anuradhapura Citadel as a Premier Spiritual Meditation Tourism Destination: Opportunities and Challenges

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Abstract

Despite its global renown for Buddhist heritage, Anuradhapura's potential as a meditation and spiritual tourism destination remains underexplored. A significant empirical gap exists regarding its requisite infrastructure, strategic branding, sustainable development, and competitive positioning within this niche market. This study assesses the current status and prospects of meditation tourism in Anuradhapura by examining destination attractiveness, available facilities, and support structures, while proposing strategies to reposition the city as a leading hub for spiritual meditation. This qualitative case study employed an inductive approach, using interviews, focus groups, and participant observation with 25 diverse stakeholders, including religious leaders, community members, pilgrims, tourists, meditation practitioners, service providers, and government officials. Thematic analysis was employed to identify strengths, challenges, and opportunities. Findings reveal that the city's spiritual ambience, Buddhist heritage, and serene environment primarily attract Western tourists, who report high satisfaction derived from the tranquillity, hospitality, and opportunities for spiritual engagement. Meditation centres, accommodation, vegetarian food options, guided tours, and transport facilities enhanced their experiences. However, challenges persist, including inadequate infrastructure, accessibility issues, waste management, sanitation problems, and limited government and community involvement. To strengthen competitiveness, the study emphasises learning from successful international models, improving marketing strategies, preserving cultural integrity, and upgrading infrastructure and visitor services. Spiritual tourism holds significant potential to support the local economy, create jobs, and foster entrepreneurship. This study contributes to the growing literature on sustainable and spiritual tourism, offering recommendations for policymakers, and stakeholders to balance heritage conservation with tourism-driven development.

Keywords: Anuradhapura citadel, meditation tourism, opportunities and challenges, spiritual tourism, sustainable tourism