

Tourists' Perception of Ayurvedic Spa Treatments in Cultural Triangle Hotels in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Ayurveda, a historic Sri Lankan healing tradition, is central to wellness tourism. Growing global demand for health experiences has increased interest in authentic hotel-based Ayurvedic services. However, rapid commercialisation has led to inconsistent service quality and authenticity. There is a lack of empirical research focusing on tourists' perceptions of Ayurvedic spa treatments. This study aims to bridge the gap by exploring how tourists perceive the authenticity, quality, and satisfaction associated with Ayurvedic spa treatments in star-grade hotels located in the Cultural Triangle. The study employs a qualitative, interpretivist research approach using semi-structured interviews with 20 purposively selected foreign tourists who have experienced Ayurvedic spa treatments in six hotels (star-grade) located in the Cultural Triangle. Staff and practitioner observations provided insights into service delivery. This inductive design allows for the emergence of patterns directly from participants' narratives. Thematic analysis revealed key themes of authenticity, service quality, cultural connection, and tourist satisfaction in Ayurvedic treatments. The findings indicate that tourists' perceptions of Ayurvedic spa treatments are influenced by authenticity, staff professionalism, and environment, with skilled practitioners enhancing cultural connection and perceived value. Inconsistencies in service standards, communication gaps regarding Ayurvedic diets and treatment purposes, and a need for continuous staff training and standardisation have been identified as barriers to service delivery. It highlights that authentic Ayurvedic rituals, professional service delivery, and holistic wellness design can strengthen the Cultural Triangle's positioning as a distinctive Ayurveda wellness tourism destination. In conclusion, enhancing Ayurvedic spa experiences requires preserving traditional practices, ensuring professional and standardised staff training, maintaining high hygiene and eco-friendly standards, and providing visitor orientation. Collaborative certification and integration of wellness tourism into hospitality will strengthen Sri Lanka as a culturally authentic wellness destination.

Keywords: ayurveda treatments, service quality, Sri Lankan hotels, tourist perceptions, wellness tourism