

Exploring the Potentials and Challenges of Developing Anuradhapura as a Wellness Tourism Destination

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Abstract

The focus on physical, mental, and spiritual well-being that characterises wellness tourism presents major potential for areas with abundant natural and cultural resources. Anuradhapura, a UNESCO World Heritage City, rich in natural, cultural, and spiritual resources, remains underexplored as a wellness tourism destination, highlighting a notable gap in integrating heritage and wellness tourism development. This study aims to investigate the potential and obstacles of establishing Anuradhapura as a wellness tourism destination. A purposive sample of ten key informants, comprising community members, Ayurvedic practitioners, tourism operators, and government representatives, was selected. The sample size was limited by data saturation in this exploratory investigation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted as part of a qualitative research design, and the data were analysed using thematic analysis. The study revealed Ayurvedic treatments, yoga-based wellness practices, mindfulness-oriented relaxation and meditation programs, and spa services as key wellness opportunities, whereas inadequate infrastructure, insufficient human resources in wellness, limited and ineffective marketing efforts, and low stakeholder awareness emerged as major barriers. Strategic planning and stakeholder participation have become essential for sustainable development, particularly through improved infrastructure, practitioner training, targeted marketing, and strengthened public–private collaboration. By examining a new destination context in Sri Lanka and emphasizing how wellness tourism can strengthen heritage tourism and simultaneously contribute to cultural preservation, economic growth, and community well-being, the findings add to the existing body of tourism literature.

Keywords: Anuradhapura, heritage integration, potentials and challenges, sustainable development, wellness tourism