

Exploring Jaffna: Transforming Sri Lanka's Northern Heritage into a Thriving Cultural Tourism Hub

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Abstract

Jaffna, located in the Northern province of Sri Lanka, has a unique blend of tangible and intangible cultural treasures influenced by centuries of Tamil history, colonial legacies, and multi-religious customs. Due to a lack of infrastructure, inadequate promotion, disjointed stakeholder collaboration, and the results of post-conflict recovery, the region is still under-represented in the national tourism portfolio despite its enormous potential. This study investigates the ways to transform Jaffna into a thriving cultural tourism hub that protects its cultural heritage and encourages inclusive community involvement. To capture the perspectives of stakeholders, a qualitative research design based on an interpretive paradigm was used. The study involved ten participants, chosen through purposive sampling, including locals, government officials, tourism entrepreneurs, tour guides, and tourists, who participated in semi-structured interviews and field observations to gather data. Although the relatively small sample size limits generalisability, it provides invaluable insights about the current state of cultural heritage tourism in Jaffna. Thematic analysis revealed key challenges such as abandonment of lesser-known sites, inadequate preservation, and insufficient government assistance. The findings highlighted significant prospects for utilising colonial architecture, festivals, and traditional and distinctive culinary customs to attract more tourists. The study concludes that the multi-stakeholder approach, including infrastructure improvement, focused promotions, strong heritage conservation, and proactive community empowerment, is necessary to realise Jaffna's potential for cultural tourism. It is expected that implementing these strategies into practice will improve destination branding, encourage regional economic growth, and foster cross-cultural understanding. By addressing both the challenges and opportunities, the research contributes valuable insights for policymakers, tourism planners, and community leaders engaged in post-conflict destination development. Furthermore, it enriches the discourse on sustainable cultural tourism with the preservation of cultural identity.

Keywords: cultural tourism, heritage preservation, heritage tourism, stakeholder collaboration, tourism in Jaffna