

Operational Issues and Challenges of Spa and Wellness Hotels in Trincomalee of Sri Lanka: Perspectives from Managers and Therapists

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Abstract

Spa and wellness tourism has become a growing segment in Sri Lanka's tourism industry, with Trincomalee emerging as a promising destination due to its coastal beauty, cultural heritage, and therapeutic potential. Despite its growing popularity, the spa and wellness hotel sector in Trincomalee continues to face numerous operational challenges that restrict its growth and service performance. This research investigates the key issues and challenges experienced by spa and wellness hotels in Trincomalee, focusing on aspects such as service quality standards, human resource constraints, infrastructural limitations, sustainability concerns, and competitiveness in the market. The study employed a qualitative approach, using in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted based on a pre-prepared interview guide with ten purposively selected hotel managers and senior spa therapists representing leading spa and wellness establishments in the region. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data and identify recurring patterns and insights. Findings reveal that most spa and wellness hotels strive to integrate traditional Ayurvedic practices with modern wellness treatments to create authentic visitor experiences. However, several challenges persist, including a shortage of skilled personnel, limited professional training opportunities, insufficient financial investment, inadequate infrastructure, and weak digital marketing capacity. Environmental concerns such as waste management and energy use emissions also pose difficulties for sustainable operations. In response, hotel operators have adopted adaptive strategies such as personalised guest care, local resource utilisation, employee skill development, and collaborative partnerships with regional tourism networks to maintain service quality and attract clientele. The study concludes that overcoming these challenges requires coordinated action between the public and private sectors through targeted policy support, infrastructure development, and continuous human resource training. Strengthening these areas will promote sustainable wellness tourism in Trincomalee.

Keywords: human resource constraints, operational challenges, service quality, spa and wellness tourism, Trincomalee