

A Study on Factors Influencing the Decline of Middle East Tourists' Market in Sri Lanka: Stakeholders' Perspective

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Many people used to travel when they have their vacation to avoid the consistency of their lives. As declared by Lonely Planet, Sri Lanka is one of the world's number one destination to visit in 2018. Sri Lanka is a leading travel destination for Middle East tourists. Even though Sri Lanka has paid attention to the Middle East market, it has not been able to achieve a significantly high number of arrivals from the Middle East. Hence, the main objective of this study was to identify the reasons for decline of Middle East tourists' market in Sri Lanka. The researcher adopted the semi-structured interview to gather data about influencing factors of the decline of the Middle East tourist market. A sample of 15 stakeholders was selected using purposeful sampling method in which hoteliers, travel agents, tour and site guides, representatives from Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA) and Promotion Bureau were interviewed. The views and opinions of the respondents were collected through the interviews. The analysis was done through thematic analysis and the researcher identified safety and security, facilities, attractions, marketing strategies, services, and other issues as the main themes. The findings revealed that the dissatisfaction of safety and security, lack of facilities, lack of manmade attractions, limitation of night functions, dissatisfaction of the hotel and guide services, lack of marketing strategies, and other issues such as terrorism and restrictions have attributed significantly to decline the Middle East tourists' market in Sri Lanka. Furthermore, implementing new rules and giving special attention for the Middle East tourists' expectation can turn around the situation and promote the Middle East market.

Keywords: Middle East tourists' market, influencing factors