

Integrated Marketing Communication as a Tool to Promote Heritage Destinations in Sri Lanka; With Special Reference to Anuradhapura Ancient City

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Heritage tourism is one of most prominent areas of tourism in the country. Heritage destinations of Sri Lanka face ever increasing competition from other South & Southeast Asian countries. Integrated marketing communication is selected as a potential promotional method for heritage destinations and it will be able to gain a competitive advantage over other competitors. Integrated marketing communication is the process of combining all the marketing communication method to send a consistent message to end consumers with using most effective methods. Anuradhapura was the first capital of Sri Lanka with a history close to 2500 years. Recent tourism growth of the area was much slower compared to other heritage destinations in the country. Hence, the purpose of the study was to identify existing IMC channels influencing heritage destination promotion, to identify most effective IMC channels for promotion of heritage destination and to examine IMC as a tool to promote heritage destinations in Sri Lanka. Primary data was collected by the author from 100 foreign tourists using convenient sampling technique and 10 tourism stakeholders were interviewed using purposeful sampling technique in Anuradhapura ancient city. Explanatory Sequential Mixed Method was employed and descriptive statistics and thematic analysis were used in analysing of the data. The findings of the study revealed that integrated marketing communication can be used as a promotional tool for heritage destinations in Sri Lanka. However it has to be conducted sensibly with fixed set of goals. Clear tourism strategies, increase the use of new media platforms and promotional methods, decrease the use of conventional methods of promotions and implementation of private & public partnership were essential for an effective use of integrated marketing communication.

Keywords: Heritage destinations, Integrated marketing communication, Anuradhapura