

ABSTRACT

Cultural heritage tourism is one of the Sri Lanka's most rapidly rising segments. CHT, encompass all aspects of travel that allow visitors to learn about other cultures' histories and lifestyles. Northern Province of Sri Lanka has great potential to attract tourists with its cultural heritage sites. Therefore, developing cultural heritage tourism in Northern Province is very important. Hence, the objectives of this study are identifying affecting factors, challenges and opportunities. The qualitative approach was used for this study. The sample is selected from tourism stakeholders. Primary data was be collected from structured interviews. 15 tourism stakeholders of Mannar district were selected to conduct structured interviews. Content analysis method was used to analyse the data collected. The findings of the study reveal that infrastructure facilities, integration and accessibility, hospitality and treatment, bio-diversity, promotion and diversification, identifying markets and uniqueness, and government support as the major factors that Mannar district has to pay attention in promoting the CHT sector. Moreover, findings identify erroneous promotional activities, Lack of proper planning from the officials, lack of proper awareness among the natives as challenges and enough and more resources, cultural harmony among the populace, and availability of well-educated youngsters as opportunities associated with Mannar CHT promotion. Furthermore, study identifies the importance of having a specific CHT strategy for Mannar district. Long-term planning of infrastructure, Identifying the importance of participation of the necessary parties in the decision-making process, conducting awareness programmes atn all possible level, accepting private sectors in the promotion of CHT, forming information or tourist guiding centres, religious places support of CHT, and promoting unique products and resources by exhibiting them are suggested as recommendations to the CHT industry. The outcome of this study will be very use ful to the government and policymakers, tourism stakeholders, and local residents who are involving in the tourism industry.

Keywords: CHT, Development, challenges, Opportunities, Mannar district