

# **Identification of potentials to promote gem tourism in Sri Lanka**

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## **Introduction**

Over the past six decades, tourism has experienced continued expansion and diversification, becoming one of the largest and fastest – growing economic sectors in the world. Many new destinations have emerged in addition to the traditional favorites of Europe and North America (UNWTO, 2014). Within the tourism market, it is highlighted that there is a trend towards to the niche tourism from the mass tourism concepts.

In current scenario tourism niche markets such as tea tourism, wine tourism, dark tourism and eco - tourism were addressed. Nevertheless gem tourism is an untapped market for research studies in world and Sri Lankan context. Identifying potentials to promote gem tourism in Sri Lanka was the explained primary objective of the research. To the identifications of the potentials for promoting gem tourism in Sri Lanka, secondary objectives such as identifying profile of potential gem tourists, identifying most influenced destination mix factors and identifying favorable behavior patterns were illustrated.

## **Materials and methods**

The population of this research was based on demand and supply side of gem tourism. From demand side tourists who visit Sri Lanka for gem tourism and suppliers of gem tourism such as persons in charging in gem ventures, Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority and National Gem and Jewelry Authority were taken into the accounts. Therefore, one hundred and five tourists who visit Rathnapura, Colombo and Kandy area for gem tourism activities were consisted in the sample. Convenience sampling was the adopted sampling method and to collect data from tourists, semi structured questionnaire was utilized. Interviewing and observation methods were utilized to collect the data from supply side of gem tourism. Descriptive analysis was adopted to analyze the profile while, the Exploratory factor analysis was adopted to investigate most effecting factor among destination mix. Simultaneously, the Chi- Square test was conducted to measure the relationship between factors of tourists' behavior pattern. For analysis of qualitative data transcript and summarizing method was adopted.

## **Results and Discussion**

When analyzing the profile of gem tourists, it resulted that 61% represented male category and 39% represented by female category. Accordingly 44.8% of the sample was represented by 30 -39 age category and 28.6% were represented in age category of 40-49. It represented that 40% of potential gem tourists were from East Asia and 20% represented South Asia. 20.95% of the sample was earned \$20,000 or lesser amounts in annually. Within the purpose of travel, it resulted that 35.5% were represented in pleasure and 21.9% were represented in special purpose of gem tourism and 15.2% represented in the purpose of business. Simultaneously 1.9% and 8.6% of tourists were consisted with the purpose of gem tourism and other purposes such as pleasure and business. Online sources and word of mouth resulted the same proportion amount of 28.57% and 11.43% were influenced by travel agents. When considering experience profile its preferred 24.8% had never visited and 29.5% had visited gem tourism regions in the world more than three times. Simultaneously 31.4% had never visited and 32.4% had visited more than three times for gem tourism activities. When analyzing destination mix factor, it resulted that five factor groupings. All factors had eigenvalue greater than one. Accordingly, 34.858% were represented location's attractions and attributes (Eigenvalue 6.623), 12.004% were represented supporting services and gem shop related activities, 7.634% were basic tourists' need, 6.182% were gem tourism related activities within selected region and 5.924% were availability special events within the selected region.

Analysis of favorable behavior patterns of tourists results, chi- square value of 0.012 among spending days vs. transport preferences, chi square value of 0.000 among spending days vs. accommodation preferences, chi square value of 0.000 among spending days vs. spending purchasing gems and chi square value of 0.000 among spending days vs. other pleasure activities. It resulted that there is no relationship among Willingness to participate in gem tourism activities and behavior patterns. Chi-square value of 0.247 was resulted among willingness for participates in gem tourism activities vs. spending days in gem tourism region.

## **Conclusion**

When considering potential gem tourists majority of them were male while the age category was 30-39. East Asia was the remunerated region for gem tourism in Sri Lanka. The majority was represented from China, Thailand, Russia, and the United Kingdom. Experience profiles of tourists reflect that majority had visited gem regions in the world and Sri Lanka for more than three times. Madagascar, Burma and Africa were preferred gem regions in world while Rathnapura, Galle, Elehera, Rakwana and Beruwala are the preferred gem regions in Sri Lanka. Most influenced destination mix factor was location attractions and attributes. Accordingly facility for purchasing jewelry with gems and purchasing gemstones were the activities which were highly influenced to travel for selected destinations. Though destination was consisted with gem tourism activities, tourists were attracted. Favorable behavior patterns such as spending days among transport preferences, accommodation preferences and spending patterns resulted relationship. Hence, there was no relationship between willingness to participate in gem tourism activities and spending patterns. Other than attractions for

gem tourism, destination was consisted with nature and man-made attractions. Throughout the travel potential gem tourists had spent more than \$200, preferred star classified accommodations within selected destination. Hence, there were tourists who had a desire for gem tourism, destination was capable for promotion and the highlighted behavior patterns had demonstrated that there is high potentiality to promote gem tourism market in Sri Lanka.

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