

ABSTRACT

Ratnapura Gem tourism in Sri Lanka is considered as an untapped market as there's a demand for a product or service that isn't being supplied by any party yet. In the outer world it attracts creatively the tourists who interested in purchasing gem, then influenced them to travel among different destinations. Go beyond the mere transactions of gems this has expanded the demand of traveling to experience within gem regions as a tourist activity. The ability to influence travel of tourists depends on the potentials of the certain region and it is shaped by internal and external environment factors. Gem tourism can be considered as niche market where a huge contribution can be given to the economy of Sri Lanka as it is a developing country but bearing good reputation for Ceylon Gems. In this qualitative study identified the potentials to promote gem tourism in Sri Lanka giving special consideration to the Ratnapura. Further the stakeholder perspectives were explored to see the weakness/challenges to recreate this city in to a major tourism destination. With the intention to have higher contextual understanding rather than generalizing the findings the research adopted qualitative approach and conducted qualitative interviews and derived findings through thematic analysis. Abundant potentials and preventatives have identified to promote gem tourism within Ratnapura considering major challenges and benefits can derive to the destination through the Gem tourism. Through research findings, current situation of the tourism, potentials and major challenges are identified to include them in a strategic plan than can be further developed to recreate the destination as a major tourism hub. Finally, recommendations are provided from the perspective of stakeholders of this study.

Key words: Gem tourism, tourism development, recreate destination, tourism hub