



What is missing is within you!

Tourism in Paradise

Volume 07

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Editorial

We all are beings with empty spaces. Every act of ours tries to fill that emptiness of life. Having a relationship, going for a fancy dinner, acquiring a new house, writing a novel, tasting the finest glass of whisky on the rocks, and so many things we do are for filling the spaces. If you are still feeling alone or nostalgic at a party with all your loved ones, these gaps in your soul have not been filled in the secular world around you. If I connect this notion to some musical lyrics, I would rather listen to *Akon*, which I have seen most Americans, irrespective of race, close their eyes to listen to the echo of their soul when the song below is played on the stage.

*Lonely, I'm Mr. Lonely
I have nobody for my own...*

If you still want to make an effort to fill that state of desolation, try escaping the usual monotonous place of living to wander the World you have not explored before until you find the missing piece of life. Take your body to feel the breeze of the Himalayan mountains, see the life of mountain gorillas in Uganda, and experience the authentic culture in Kyoto or wherever you feel pleasure. But what about your soul? Sometimes, even at the top of Everest, you may feel something is missing. What is missing, then? My dear friend, you are missing yourself when you are in search of a missing piece of life's puzzle in somebody else or something else. What is missing is within you!

In this journey, the place could provide a comfortable atmosphere for you to reach the unexplored areas of inner existential crisis. The boarding house and the creativity of Subath, the girliness of Diduli, Dinithi, Dulmini, and Charithma, and the craziness of Yasith made a darling place to illuminate the seventh volume of Tourism in Paradise (TiP) manifesto like a bright star in auras full of Icelandic sky at Night. This star certainly will navigate you to wander the world of tourism transcendently. During this voyage, you and I will sometimes meet in *somewhere only we know*.

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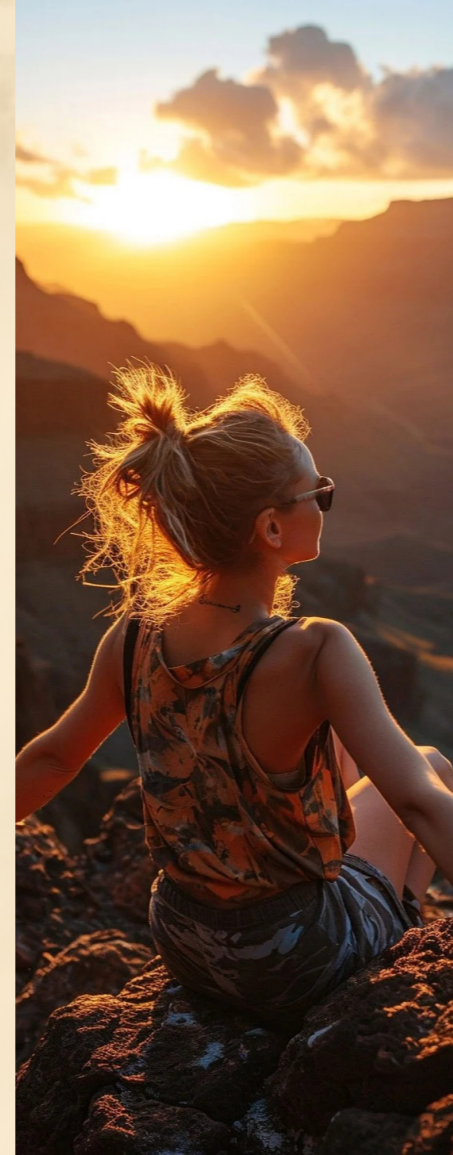
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The Embroidery

- 25. Tourism Education's Role in Sustainability
- 51. Willingness to Pay
- 54. Voluntourism in Fragile Ecosystems
- 61. Creative Tourism and Historical Buildings
- 63. Embracing True Sustainability
- 79. Challenges of Wellness Tourism
- 83. The Barn House Studio

Sustainability and Wellness



Wanderlust

- 01. Alone Above the World
- 09. Silent Tourism
- 91. Be Brave to Be Stupid

- 11. Forbidden Romance of Lavinia
- 17. My Trip to Langkawi
- 21. Q&A with Eksath Wijeratne
- 29. A Day in Malacca
- 42. Gimlette's Elephant Complex
- 45. Q&A with Nalin Malwenna
- 75. An Edu Tour to Gal Oya

Lived Experience

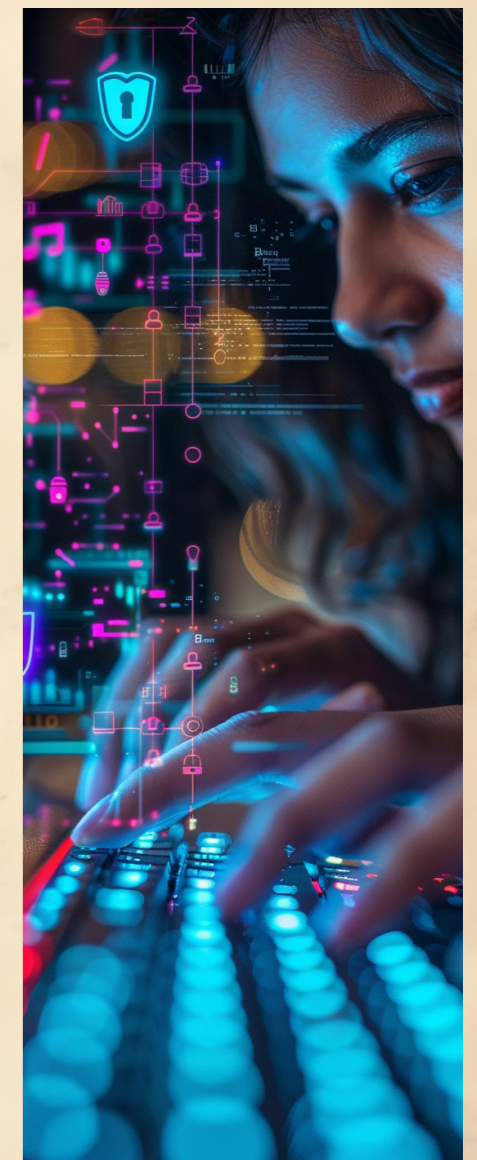


Culture

- 15. Bibliotourism
- 31. Tourism and Peace
- 43. Mid-Autumn Festival in Malaysia
- 67. Katharagama Perahera
- 85. Cultural Tourism in Europe

- 35. Smart Tourism
- 37. Personalised Marketing in Tourism
- 72. Sri Lanka in 360°

Technology





Prof. (Dr.) Athula Gnanapala
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It is with great pleasure and honor that I share this message for the seventh volume of Tourism in Paradise (TIP) Magazine, published by the Department of Tourism Management, Faculty of Management Studies at Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka, under the theme Wanderlust.

First and foremost, I extend my heartfelt congratulations and deepest gratitude to the editorial team for their dedication and consistent efforts in bringing this publication to life. As a state university in Sri Lanka, our primary mission is to produce competent graduates who actively contribute to the country's socio-economic progress. Therefore, we are committed to fostering a diverse environment to develop holistic undergraduates through extracurricular activities at the Faculty of Management Studies. This commitment is reflected in the caliber of our graduates, the scholarly work we produce, and the strong partnerships we maintain with industry leaders. We are proud to be recognized as the leading higher educational institution in tourism and hospitality, a reputation we continue to uphold through our dedicated efforts.

Through this magazine, we aim to share our work with the world, offering scholars, industry professionals, and the general public access to accurate, timely, and high-quality information. The Tourism for Paradise magazine is not just a publication but a valuable platform that highlights our ongoing contributions to the field, keeping you informed and engaged.

I wish the Department of Tourism Management continued success in its invaluable services to the tourism industry today and always.



Dr. Lal Gunasekara
Head
Department of Tourism Management
Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka

On behalf of all contributors and readers, I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to the team behind the successful preparation of the 7th edition of the TIP Magazine. Your dedication to continually delivering high-quality content that delves into various tourism concepts, such as smart tourism, sustainable tourism, ecotourism, cultural tourism, and adventure tourism, is not just remarkable but also crucial. Your work is instrumental in advancing the field and serves as an invaluable resource for students, researchers, academics, naturalists, and other stakeholders in the tourism industry.

The articles featured in this edition provide fresh insights into emerging trends and innovative practices, furthering our understanding of how tourism can adapt to the modern world while maintaining a focus on sustainability and responsible growth. Covering topics like smart tourism technology, the importance of environmental conservation, and cultural preservation in tourism highlights the magazine's dedication to addressing the industry's key challenges today.

We greatly appreciate the editorial team's hard work, vision, and commitment. Your continuous contributions to the advancement of tourism knowledge are vital, and we wish you continued success in your future endeavours. May this effort continue to inspire and guide the next generation of tourism professionals.



Alone above the World

Whenever I'm travelling to a region I'm not very familiar with, I try to climb one of the highest mountains there. This is to prove to myself that, despite my advanced age, I still have the physical endurance to do so, while this is wonderful and healthy training. The most important thing about such a climb is that with every meter of altitude I conquer, I get away from the everyday world and thus from all the noise, the omnipresent advertisements and the countless *Smombies* (a term standing for *Smartphone-Zombies*, which people walking around like Zombies while staring on their smartphones) and *selfie-junkies* (people interacting with their environment by permanently producing selfies). Undisturbed by all these annoying stimuli, up there, I can devote myself entirely to mastering the mountain while getting closer to heaven step by step, both physically and mentally. The more arduous the path, the greater the joy of successfully reaching

the summit, and the more intense the pleasure of solitude in the quiet heights, along with the rocks, clouds, and perhaps a few flowers and birds. Up there, I am filled with a deep sense of satisfaction because I become one with myself, with the mountain, and with the world.

Such arduous challenges stand in contrast to the global consumer culture, in which the most intense enjoyment is achieved with the least possible effort. High mountains are, therefore, also popular with most tourists due to the spectacular scenery around, allowing the creation of impressive selfies and the immediate prove to the social media world that someone was *up here*. However, the key prerequisite for the tourist popularity of such mountain peaks among tourists is that they can be reached by vehicles or cable cars.



In contrast, the goal of a *real* mountain climb is the path itself. At the time I was writing this article, I was in the *Taurus* Mountains in Turkey. As part of my preparations for this trip, I coincidentally discovered a mountain group almost 3000 meters high, which is easily accessible to tourists thanks to a road leading to an idyllic mountain lake. However, behind this mountain lake, where smartphone-loving holidaymakers were bustling, began a no man's land of rocks, rubble and herbs. I couldn't even see a clearly defined path between all the stones. But it was precisely this challenge that made this climb so appealing to me: I had to carefully study the nature of the ground and the mountain side to carve my own path: Where do I find firm, safe footing? How can I avoid loose scree so as not to endanger myself? What gradient of the slope can I manage with my own strength?

For me, mountaineering, especially climbing on natural rocks, reflects the essence of ethics because mountaineering is the confrontation with an unfamiliar situation that must be mastered as well as possible. This means that the route in question must lead to the goal but must not cause any harm in the process: Neither myself nor other people must be put in danger, and animals, plants and soil must remain as undamaged as possible. The careful choice of route, therefore, depends - as in the case of an ethical problem - initially on the existing conditions of the *world* to be overcome, on the nature of the ground, the gradient of the slope, the development of the weather, the position of the sun, the presence of wild animals... But then the choice of route also depends on my available resources: the type and quality of my equipment, the provisions I have, my surefootedness, the length and strength of my legs, my ability to concentrate, and also my level of exhaustion. This is because accidents are particularly

common on mountain tours towards the end, when strength and concentration wane, increasing the risk of a careless step on a loose stone and, thus, a fall. Mountaineering is an excellent exercise that involves attentively observing your surroundings and your body to pave the way in this complex interplay. The more often you go up the mountain, the better this ability to observe and make judgements is trained, and with it, the ability to make *good* decisions, just as in the case of ethical decisions.

When I had guest lectures in Uganda a few years ago, I used my lecture-free days to organise a tour of the *Rwenzori* Mountains. This massif is a magical world close to the equator, rising to almost 5,100 meters. I had hired guides, porters, and cooks from the neighbouring villages for this expedition. The ascent from the village to the highest camp at 3,300 meters took two days on easy paths through a diverse, largely untouched natural landscape of magical charm. The endpoint of the expedition should have been the ascent of a 4,000-meter-high peak near our camp. This final path up was narrow, steep and slippery. The higher we climbed, the more I began to feel the symptoms of altitude sickness: Dizziness. It was also getting darker because the summit was shrouded in thick clouds: a dangerous situation. To avoid endangering myself and my companions, I decided to turn back. My guides tried to persuade me to continue the tour, as we were already close to the summit. However, I assured them they were doing a great job and that selfie-addicted tourists would probably insist on the *summit victory* but that my goal was the *good path*. Given my dizziness and the approaching darkness, it was time for me to turn back to stay on this *good path*. I have never regretted this decision.



My hike to the 3000-meter summit in the Turkish *Taurus* Mountains, past extensive snowfields, went without incident. At the windy summit, I enjoyed the peace and a snack before making my way back. To my great delight, I discovered a sure-footed path that spared me an arduous descent over a steep scree. Back in the valley, I felt infinitely comfortable and content.

One day later, I visited a completely contrasting mountain world: in the immediate vicinity of the crowded beaches of the Turkish *Riviera*, less than an hour's drive from *Antalya*, a city of 10 million inhabitants, a cable car leads up a mountain almost 2,400 meters high. With 60 people crammed into a gondola, we floated up into the air, where visitors could choose between two restaurants, a children's playroom, and a sun terrace with an adventure park. Despite the fantastic view, many of the guests were busy with their smartphones. An incident occurred during the descent: a large Russian tour group had boarded the gondola with too many guests and had exceeded the load limit. The gondola guides' attempts to get some people to get off degenerated into wild insults, as everyone wanted to get off the mountain as quickly as possible after photographing the view to get to the next item on their travel program... As a tourism researcher, I am interested in situations like this. For my personally chosen trips, I prefer my meditative mountain tours away from the *selfie junkies*.



Prof. Harald A. Friedl
FH JOANNEUM, Austria



Wanderlust in a Conservative Country

Ever felt the irresistible pull to leave everything behind and let your impulsive thoughts take over? That is *wanderlust*. Wanderlust is defined as a strong desire to travel or explore, but it is more than just a longing. We crave experiences and seek not only relaxation but also an escape from the routines of real life. This desire for exploration and transformation becomes even more vital in conservative societies where individual freedom is often deprived.

In this modern world, many of us pretend to be someone we are not, adapting to our surroundings while our true selves remain hidden. Have you ever heard the phrase, *You Only Live Once aka, YOLO?* I believe it is a mantra worth following. You only have this one chance at life. Once it is over, there is

no looking back. Combining wanderlust with YOLO creates a powerful call to live fully and authentically.

But the reality often intrudes. In conservative settings, this ideal often clashes with societal expectations. As a young woman in a conservative Asian household, this combination is often a distant dream. We're 25, but still living under our parents' rules. And not to forget about the complexities of cultural expectations. From birth, we are taught to follow the rules and often forget what we are truly capable of. During adolescence, girls are often sheltered and protected, treated like rare flower petals that mustn't mix with society. While this pampering offers comfort, it also limits our exposure to the broader world. Isn't it saddening to think that a girl might leave this world without knowing what lies beyond her immediate surroundings?

Let me quote a statement by Jo March from *Little Women* (2019) movie,

“Women, they have minds, and they have souls, as well as just hearts. And they’ve got ambition, and they’ve got talent, as well as just beauty. I’m so sick of people saying that love is just all a woman is fit for. I’m so sick of it.”

Although Jo lived in the 19th century, her struggle to pursue her dreams despite societal constraints is not far removed from the challenges faced by 21st-century Asian women. Jo’s desire for independence and her frustration with societal limitations reflect a universal struggle; a struggle that fuels wanderlust in many women today. The longing to break free from traditional roles and explore the world is a modern echo of Jo’s own fight for personal freedom and fulfilment.

Some brave women like Jo are thriving despite these challenges, but they too often feel the weight of societal expectations. Take, for example, Malala Yousafzai, who defied the odds to pursue her education and inspire countless others. Women are not just born to please others. They are individuals with their own ambitions. While the world is changing and these conversations are becoming more common, some still hinder women’s progress, which is frustrating.


So, cheers to a world where women can break free from traditional constraints and fully embrace the spirit of wanderlust for their betterment! Here’s to living authentically, exploring the world, and realising our fullest potential, regardless of the societal norms that seek to hold us back.



Manushi Anuradha

Discovering a Beautiful World...
Chandi Jayawardena

Until we wander wide and far,
embracing every vivid thread
of cultures, diversity, and people,
our wondrous, living planet,
we stay blind to its true splendour,
and starve our souls of life's full feast.



Dr. Chandana (Chandi) Jayawardena D.Phil.
Artist & Poet

Chandi's artwork is a vibrant tapestry reflecting a rich, global perspective. The diverse experiences he has gained from living, working, and studying in Asia, Europe, the Middle East, South America, the Caribbean, and North America have profoundly influenced his artistic vision and style. As a global gypsy, his work is a continuous exploration inspired by travels to over 100 countries.



“Home is it just a word? Or is it something that you carry within you?”

Nomadland (2020)

A Cool Welcome at the Swiss Border

On a perfect spring day, I departed Milano,
traversing the historic cityscape.
Blue skies and verdant hills of the Italian countryside
lulled me into slumber on the gently rocking train.

Roused by Swiss customs at the border,
I delight in a contrasting landscape unveiled:
a pristine blanket of white snow,
its beauty calling me back to oil painting.



JOHN URRY

John Urry was a British sociologist renowned for his significant contributions to the study of mobility, tourism, and social theory. Urry served as the Head of the Sociology Department (1984–1988), Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences (1988–1992), University Dean of Research (1992–1996) and Co-Director of the Institute for Social Futures (2015–2016) at Lancaster University. From 2003 to 2015, he was the Director of the Centre for Mobilities Research (CeMoRe), where he played a crucial role in developing the *New Mobilities Paradigm*: a framework that explores how various forms of movement, people, goods, and information interact with social processes in a globalised world. His work on the *Tourist Gaze* and his interdisciplinary approach, incorporating Economic Geography, Epistemology, and Media Studies, significantly advanced the understanding of the Sociology of Tourism and Mobility. Throughout his career, he authored and co-authored over 30 books and more than 100 articles, making considerable contributions to the academia of sociology.

In recognition of his outstanding contributions to the social sciences, John Urry was elected a Fellow of the British Academy and Academician of the Academy of Social Sciences. He received several lifetime achievement awards for his extensive work, including the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Association of American Geographers. John Urry passed away in 2016, shaping academic discourse and contemporary research in these fields.

Few Books of Author:

- **The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies** (1st Edition, 1990; 2nd Edition, 2002; 3rd Edition, 2011)
- **Consuming Places** (1995)
- **Touring Cultures: Transformations of Travel and Theory** (co-edited with Scott Lash, 1997)
- **Sociology Beyond Societies: Mobilities for the Twenty-First Century** (2000)
- **Global Complexity** (2003)
- **Mobilities** (2007)

Hiruni Alahakoon



Not all snakes are venomous, and even venomous snakes will not harm you if you do not disturb them.



Do you feel overwhelmed? You certainly feel that way sometimes, don't you?

We are forced into a hectic lifestyle by society's emphasis on success and productivity, mounting demands, and technological breakthroughs. This rat race is a reality many people secretly live in. Triggering feelings of overwhelming makes us discomfort in everyday situations. Exposure to too much busyness, too much loudness, too much brightness, too much smell would sensory overload the individuals.

How do you feel if you visit a restaurant with too much crowd, loud conversations, strong food smells, and flickering lights? We tend to be sensory defensive in such overwhelming situations.

How do you usually manage to find some peace amidst the overwhelmed? The best way to be at peace is to detach from being overwhelmed. Getting away brings you closer to something more tangible and more grounded. Individuals adhere to various ideologies, sects, religions, philosophies, and ways of living, often referred to as 'enlightenment', in pursuit of an intangible and vague goal.

Have you ever thought of getting away from too much noise?

From the time your alarm goes off in the morning till the time you go to bed at night, there's very little silence. Silence is scarce in today's world. Noise cannot provide the restorative value of silence. Getting away from noise is difficult, but one must intentionally seek out 'silent time' to escape the noise. What I really crave is to spend time in a place where I can just enjoy the silence. This kind of experience might not have been sought out or may not have even been known to many, partly because it's so inconvenient to do so on many levels. It's a kind of intimate experience that can serve as an antidote to

the Content-Brained destruction of the current world.

Disconnecting is a rare opportunity the overconnected should embrace. Silence holds power and can be used to hurt or heal, causing people to respond differently. It may reflect loneliness, isolation, or awkwardness and indicate emotional withdrawal, disapproval, or punishment. In our noisy world, silence is often associated with negative connotations. However, research suggests

minds and being left alone with their thoughts and nature. This has led to 'silent tourism' thriving in some contexts. Silent tourism was pretty much started when the global lockdown ended due to Covid-19. After months of isolation, people were forced to return to the outside world. Everyone did not welcome this transition, and even those who enjoyed their freedom had difficulty re-adapting for a day or two due to the difficult transition from under-stimulation to over-stimulation.

individual as long as it provides a sense of relaxation and rejuvenation.

Silent tourism is a growing trend in the travel industry that offers travellers a unique escape from the hustle and bustle of popular tourist spots. It involves visiting destinations that are untouched by mass tourism, allowing visitors to immerse themselves in natural beauty and peaceful surroundings. Silent tourism offers authenticity and intimacy, allowing travellers to engage with local communities, learn about their traditions, and gain a deeper understanding of the cultural heritage of these unspoiled destinations. It also promotes sustainable travel and supports the preservation of natural landscapes and ecosystems. Silence retreats provide a space for travellers to disconnect from the external world and reconnect with themselves through meditation, mindfulness practices, and reflection. By embracing solitude, travellers can gain clarity and perspective, returning to their busy lives with renewed purpose and energy. Silence retreats offer a reprieve from this digital noise, allowing participants to unplug and enjoy the simplicity of being present in the moment. This experience can lead to a profound sense of calm and mental clarity. Silence retreats also help restore mental and emotional well-being by providing a nurturing environment for travellers to recharge and replenish their inner reserves. Through introspection and self-care practices, they can release stress and tension, creating a greater sense of balance and emotional resilience. It offers a transformative path to finding peace and balance in a world of constant noise and distractions. Travellers can cultivate a deeper sense of self-awareness and inner peace by embracing solitude, unplugging from the noise, and nurturing mindfulness and presence.

If travellers want to plan a silent tourism experience, it is essential to conduct thorough research on the chosen destination and understand local customs, environmental regulations, and available accommodations. Respectful interaction with local communities and environments is paramount in silent tourism, ensuring that travellers minimise their impact on the natural surroundings and engage with locals in a culturally sensitive manner. This emerging form of tourism contributes to conserving pristine environments and promotes sustainable travel.

Shhhh! Embrace silence and stir your travel soul.



that silence is more than just 'the absence of noise'. Spending time in silence can have positive effects on the body, such as reducing blood pressure, boosting the immune system, reducing cortisol, promoting hormone regulation, and preventing arterial plaque formation. Psychological benefits of silence include enhanced creativity, focus, self-control, self-awareness, perspective, and spirituality. Due to constant exposure to sound, many people seek ways to escape for a few hours or days, turning off their

People are increasingly seeking quiet places to escape the hustle and bustle of the world, seeking solitude and connection with nature. Some find this in organised silence retreats, focusing on meditation and breathing techniques, while others prefer a peaceful house in the mountains surrounded by meadows and woodlands, hiking trails in remote wilderness areas, watching the sun rise over a quiet mountain range, or listening to the sound of waves on a beach. The choice of silence tourism is up to the



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Legends, Romance, Mystery, and History: The Great Assets of Old Hotels

I love old hotels, particularly those with historical significance, character, and class that have attracted numerous celebrities and famous personalities over the decades. In my more than half-century-long career in hospitality and tourism, and travelling to over 100 countries, my most memorable experiences have been at old hotels with unique charm. Among these, the following experiences at twenty different hotels in six countries during the first half of my management career stand out:

- **1978:** At just 24, I was chosen as the Manager of **Queens Hotel** (converted to a hotel in 1840) in Kandy, Sri Lanka. Although I was thrilled about this appointment, I declined the offer when my then-employer, the John Keells Group, matched it and promoted me to manage a resort.
- **1979:** I worked and stayed as a Management Trainee at **The Regent Palace** (opened in 1915) in Piccadilly Circus and **The Cumberland** (1933) in Marble Arch, two iconic London hotels.
- **1979:** As part of a management exchange program, for one week, I stayed at **The Grand Hotel** (1891) in Nuwara Eliya, Sri Lanka. I returned there in 1999 for my honeymoon and again in 2014 and 2015 for leadership development programs I led for their management team.
- **1982:** I was the Guest Executive Chef for a week-long Sri Lankan food festival at **Goodwood Park Hotel** (1890) in Singapore. I also had a memorable tea experience at their key competitor, **Raffles Hotel** (1887).
- **1983-1984:** While studying as a graduate student at the University of Surrey, I worked at some of London's oldest five-star hotels: **The Savoy** (1889), **Claridge's** (1899), **The Hyde Park** (1904), **Baily's** (1905), **The Grosvenor House** (1925), and **The Dorchester** (1931), where I served the Queen and the Prime Minister of the UK at a royal banquet.
- **1988:** I shadowed the Director of Food & Beverage at **Le Meridien Piccadilly** (1908) in London.

The Legend of Lavinia: A Forbidden Romance



- **1994:** I worked as the Consultant to the Chairman at **The Galle Face Hotel** (1864) in Colombo, Sri Lanka, and later returned for family holidays and to conduct leadership development programs for the managers of their hotel group.
- **1997:** Before departing on a Caribbean cruise, I stayed at **El Convento** in San Juan, Puerto Rico, a former Carmelite Convent opened in 1646 and converted into a hotel in 1903.
- **1998:** I shadowed the General Manager at **Le Royal Meridien King Edward Hotel** (1903) in Toronto, Canada. I returned in 2002 with my wife as mystery shoppers, filling a 1,000-question quality assurance checklist over a week.
- **2000:** I stayed at **The Admiral's Inn** (1788) in Antigua, paying extra to be given the bedroom once used by British naval hero Lord Nelson.
- **2000:** My family and I enjoyed a holiday at **The Grand Orient Hotel** (1875) in Colombo, Sri Lanka.
- **2002:** My wife and I spent a relaxing weekend at the **Royal York Hotel** (1929) in Toronto, Canada.

Hoteliers of such iconic establishments should become storytellers of their hotels' histories, enriching their brochures, advertisements, narrations, and presentations. In a world of cookie-cutter modern hotels, historic hotels stand out with their unique selling propositions related to: Legends, Romance, Mystery, and History.

1964: Love at First Sight

Sixty years ago, I fell in love at first sight. From the first time I saw **Mount Lavinia Hotel** (MLH) during a childhood family walk on the beach, from Dehiwala to Galkissa (deriving from the words: 'gal wissa' or 20 boulders). The waves of the Indian Ocean aggressively breaking on the twenty natural boulders in front of MLH fascinated me. I was captivated by this iconic building. I learned that the central section of the hotel was originally built as a mansion in 1806 by Sir Thomas Maitland, the second British Governor of Ceylon.



Curious about why he built a mansion just six miles south of his official residence in Colombo (King's House), I discovered from my father that the Governor did so to spend weekends with his mixed-race secret lover, Lavinia Aponсуwa. According to legend, it was love at first sight for the Governor, a confirmed bachelor. To keep their romance a secret, a tunnel was built from the mansion to Lavinia's nearby shanty house, allowing her to visit him discreetly every weekend.

The mansion was converted into a hotel in 1866, and both the hotel and the city of Mount Lavinia bear the name of Lavinia, who had been an exotic dancer before falling in love with the Governor. My first visit to MLH as a child was for a wedding, and the stories my father told me during that wedding about this mystical hotel deepened my fascination. He recounted saving money as a young civil servant during World War II to treat himself to occasional Sunday English breakfasts at MLH. He also shared anecdotes about the famous movie director Sir David Lean and the crew of "The Bridge on the River Kwai" staying there in 1956.

Between 1972 and 2024, I worked at MLH on three occasions living there for over three years. After I left Sri Lanka thirty years ago to pursue a global career, MLH became my home away from home. Two of the most memorable events in my life – my homecoming wedding in 1999, and my fiftieth birthday celebration were held at MLH. During my recent three-month stay at MLH, I frequently visited the historic wing and rediscovered sections of the tunnel, sparking thoughts about Lavinia, her love for the Governor, and the folklore hinting at a tragic end.

On a windy night in March 2024, I awoke to the sound of waves breaking on the boulders. As I gazed at the Indian Ocean from the balcony of my fourth-floor bedroom at MLH, lightning, and thunder accompanied heavy rains, and I could not fall asleep back. Inspired, I wrote a poem...



Dr. Chandana (Chandi) Jayawardena
President – Chandi J. Associates Inc.
Consulting, Canada

Mansion built in 1806 on the Mount for Lavinia

The Final Night

Just a few hours left before we part, forever...
At dawn, I will return to my shanty hut, sobbing
through the hidden tunnel you built for me,
our secret passage, concealed from all but
two blind lovers from different worlds.

I will see you, never again.
I have no permission to return to
our palace, our hideout, our sanctuary
by Paradise Beach.
Symbolic of a great empire,
dedicated to the love of your life
until this final night.

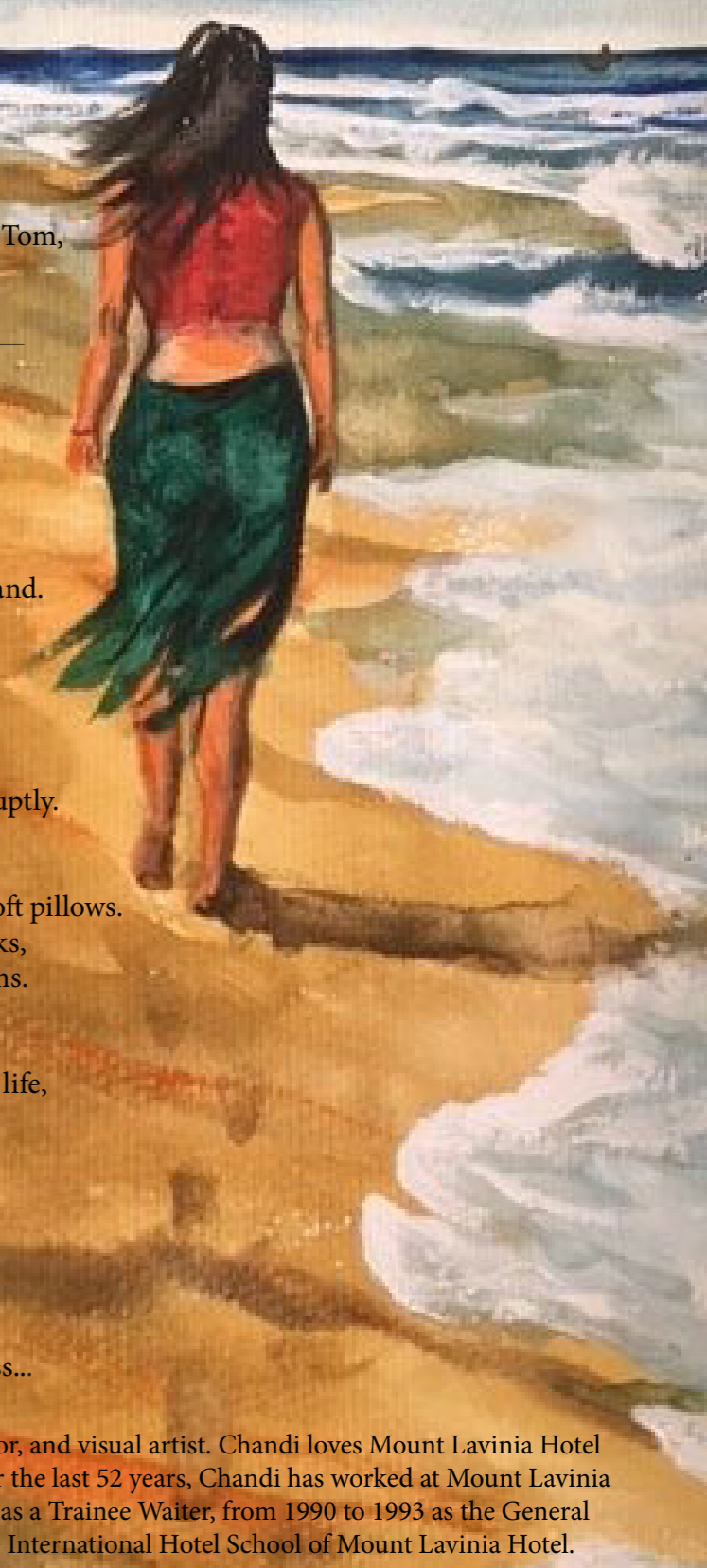
My first glance at a general, a lord, handsome King Tom,
filled me with fear and respect.
Your first glance at a poor gypsy girl,
a mestizo dancer forced to keep her breasts bare—
Your attention made me shy.
It was love at first sight, strangely.

How six years passed so quickly,
a teenager became a woman,
a slave to love, deep as the ocean.
An outcast became the lover of the king of the island.
Now, for one last time, my dear,
hold me tight, kiss me passionately,
make love to me once more
as if there is no tomorrow.

Signs are everywhere, showing the end is near, abruptly.
On this misty night,
tropical raindrops fall on the mansion roof,
loud and noisy, unlike my teardrops absorbed by your soft pillows.
I hear large waves breaking on those twenty rocks,
I feel my broken heart pounding like death drums.

Lightning and thunder, suddenly,
predicting a sad end to our love, your dreams, my life,
unworthy to continue without you.
Please hear my last request:
when your majestic ship sails away tomorrow,
throw a single flower into the sea.
If you see something floating, gently,
wave after wave,
that would be a dedication to you.
No tribute is needed for my soul and body, lifeless...

Dr. Chandana (Chandi) Jayawardena is a published poet, author, and visual artist. Chandi loves Mount Lavinia Hotel and its rich history stemming from the legend of Lavinia. Over the last 52 years, Chandi has worked at Mount Lavinia Hotel on three occasions: during the 1972/1973 tourist season as a Trainee Waiter, from 1990 to 1993 as the General Manager, and from 2023 to 2024 as the Consultant CEO of the International Hotel School of Mount Lavinia Hotel.



Uncovering the Potential of Bibliotourism in Malaysia

Tourism has become one of the significant contributors to the Malaysian economy. As of 2022, the tourism sector has directly contributed nearly 48 billion to Malaysia's gross domestic product, a considerable increase compared to previous years. After manufacturing and commodities, tourism is believed to be the third biggest contributor to the Malaysian economy. In 2023, Malaysia recorded 29 million visitor arrivals, comprising 20,141,846 foreign tourists, 8,822,462 foreign excursionists, and 28,964,308 foreign visitors. Since the pandemic ended, Malaysia has been paying more attention to tourism. This sector helps bring more money to the places tourists visit, which could increase Malaysia's wealth and economy. For example, the rise of many shopping malls with prestigious brand outlets is the trend now, and sustainable tourism spots attract international tourists to spend and help boost the economy. The money tourists spend in local destinations from tourism can be used to build hospitals and schools, generating more employment opportunities.

Among the reasons tourists choose Malaysia as a holiday destination are cultural diversity, wildlife, street food, diving sites, and festivals. Malaysia also offers more attractions like Cameron Highlands, Historical Malacca, Batu Caves, and Langkawi Island, which are hidden gems of Malaysia. These destinations attract more tourists to dive with the uniqueness of the local culture. However, Malaysia is still new in exploring the potential of *bibliotourism* like Korea, China, and other European countries.

Bibliotourism could be the latest tourist trend where tourists experience many amazing libraries worldwide. In short, it is about developing public libraries as a potential tourist destination. It also could be where domestic and foreign tourists will make the library a source of reference and guidance. Thus far, *Perak* has become the first state to introduce *bibliotourism* in its public libraries to attract more domestic and foreign visitors, giving a literary edge to its tourism industry. *The Kuala Kangsar* and *Taiping* libraries were selected due to their rich historical significance, making them key destinations for both domestic and international tourists. *Kuala Kangsar*, known as the Royal Town, pioneered the *bibliotourism* concept, with the *Taiping* Public Library following suit. Currently, this concept is exclusive to these two locations.

Bibliotourism offers visitors a unique opportunity to embark on free city tours highlighting *Kuala Kangsar*'s beauty, including scenic tourist spots, delectable local cuisine, and locally crafted handicrafts. The strategically situated *Kuala Kangsar* Library, near the *Perak* River, a historic water transport route, makes it an ideal spot for content creators, providing ample opportunities for taking photographs and videos for social media.

Additionally, the library offers a variety of amenities and facilities, including reading materials that highlight local attractions alongside posters, exhibitions, and related activities. Tourists can also enjoy complimentary WiFi, electricity, and charging stations, making checking emails, searching for information, updating social media, and charging devices convenient. This innovative concept has transformed the *Kuala Kangsar* Public Library into a must-visit destination for tourists eager to explore Malaysia's rich cultural heritage.

Realising how *bibliotourism* may enhance the destination's image, it calls for more collaboration between local authorities and outsiders to transform the potential of *bibliotourism* in Malaysia into a reality.



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Careless driving puts innocent animals at risk, causing tragic accidents. Stay aware of your speed limits and surroundings to keep both wildlife and yourself safe.





A Touristy Place I Visited in the World: Langkawi

During my post-graduate studies at the University of Utara, I visited the most attractive place in Malaysia, Langkawi. It consists of 99 islands. I read a brochure that provides information on Langkawi. It says that November to April is the most suitable time to visit there because Malaysia's west coast receives the most sunshine and the least rain. However, the first time I heard this name, I decided to visit this tourism destination when I got free time from my post-graduate education. I feel somewhat close to the name Langkawi because the name of my country (Sri Lanka) is the same as Langkawi. Although I needed to visit this destination, going alone was something boring; hence, I was thinking about who should join this picnic. The majority of my class friends were Muslim girls; therefore, due to the religious and cultural barriers, they could not be invited to go there with me.

It was December 2009, and a Chinese friend who pursued his undergraduate education at the University of Utara invited me to join them in Langkawi. It was a big surprise to me. It was a team of Chinese students; the majority of them were girls

like dolls. I did not think twice and confirmed my participation. The important thing is the picnic had to be started just as quickly within an hour. I ran to my room at the University Inn and packed enough baggage for two nights. We reached the *Kuala Perlis* jetty within an hour by several taxi cars. Passenger cruises are operated from this jetty to Langkawi. It was about a 45-minute to an hour sea journey. The ship's journey was full of breathtaking scenery as it passed through beautiful small islands.

Another special thing happened: Since I was the most senior student on the team, I was appointed as the team leader. Since public transportation was not available in Langkawi, we rented self-drive cars. I can remember the car I drove being a Gen 2 car manufactured in Malaysia. The *Sky Bridge*, *Sky Bridge Cable Car*, *Eagle Square*, and *Kilim Geoforest Park* are the most unforgettable places we visited in Langkawi.

The design of the *Sky Bridge* is a marvel of engineering technology. It is a 125-metre curved pedestrian cable-stayed bridge in Malaysia, completed in 2005. The bridge deck is 660 meters

above sea level at the peak of *Gundung Machinchang* on *Pulau Langkawi*, the main island of the *Langkawi Archipelago* in *Kedah* (*Kedah* is one of the states in Malaysia). Since this is located at the top of a mountain, tourists use the cable car to reach this bridge. The total length of this cable car journey was 2.2 kilometres, with a journey time from the base to the top of around 15 minutes. This cable car system was officially launched in 2003.

Eagle Square was constructed in 1996. It boasts a striking 12-metre-high statue of a red-backed Eagle perched on a blue star-shaped base. I can remember that our guide took us to another island, and we witnessed eagles catching the small fish thrown by us into the water when the boat was stopped at one point during the boat safari. These majestic birds are a symbol of Langkawi.

Kilim Geo-Forest Park is one of the three geo-forest parks associated with the Langkawi geopark. The other two are the *Machinchang Cambrian Geo-Forest Park* and the *Dayang Buting Marble Geo-Forest Park*. The beauty of *Kilim* lies in its diverse natural geological, biological, and cultural resources in a heritage value. It is also unique because it's the only place in Malaysia where one can find a coexistence of coastal karst and mangrove ecosystems.

Many tourists are attracted to Langkawi because the infrastructure necessary for tourism is well-planned by the authorities in the country. When I used the cable car to visit the *Sky Bridge*, I remembered that if a cable car route like this had been built through the *Nonperial* to see our *World's End*, it would have brought more foreign tourists to our country, Sri Lanka. It will also support the *Belihuloya* region economically. Tourism income will rise if the tourist industry in Sri Lanka develops by using expert knowledge of the subject accurately is a fact. When I got out of the cable car, I thought.



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A Lonely Fisherman in Weligama, Sri Lanka

Beyond the sunlit shore,
where waves whisper ancient tales,
I pass stilted fishermen in their silent ballet,
and spot a solitary figure,
dwarfed by towering coconut trees,
defying the fierce winds and tempestuous sea.



The Silent Concert of Aurora Lights

As the sun sets below the ocean, the sky in the Arctic Circle starts to fill with stars, blending with the soft green glow that appears on the horizon. This light gradually intensifies and spreads throughout the sky, demarcating the inaugural celestial ballet of auroras across the sky. In the blink of an eye, hints of purple and soft pink begin to weave through the initial green and blue lights, breaking the calmness of the peaceful northern sky. At the climax, the auroras twirl like graceful ballet dancers, scrambling around the icy peaks of mountains, snowy slopes of glaciers and wilderness coming down to the earth from their twinkling sky stage.

As the first light of dawn begins to invade the horizon, these multi-coloured dancers start to soften when the final notes of darkness fade softly into the air. Auroras bow gracefully to the one administering the day on earth, whispering promises of hope, even in the deepest darkness, guiding all these radium dancers silently toward dawn.

Diduli Jayawardene



Memories of my Stay in South East of England

After journeys wide across the continent,
the final leg of my fellowship
brought me to a lovely part of England,
a sojourn with a local family
in the quaint village of Cosham.

Now, memories drift like sea breeze:
the scent of salt air, islets dotting the horizon,
seagulls' cries, boats and ships afloat.
A marvellous ambience enveloped me
as I roamed the storied port of Portsmouth and beyond.



“ It doesn’t matter where you come from, who you are, or your family background. It’s all in your hands. You need to plan and take control of your journey.

What drew you to the hospitality industry, and how did your journey lead you to your current position at Browns Hotels?

My journey into the tourism industry was entirely unplanned. I was born in Pelmadulla, Rathnapura. I grew up as an ordinary kid, with a businessman as a father and a teacher as a mother. I completed my A-levels in Bioscience. During that time, my father asked, “Why don’t you try hotel school?”. Without many other options, I agreed due to the significant political turmoil and competition for limited career options at that time. At first, I had a very different perception of working in a hotel, imagining it to be a mix of work and leisure. However, once I entered the hotel school and completed a four-year higher diploma in front office and accommodation operations, I realised the industry was much more challenging and rewarding than expected.

After completing my hotel school diploma, I joined Eden as a Senior Receptionist in 1996 and became the General Manager by 2010 without any personal connection with the industry experts. Interestingly, I started living in the staff accommodation as a receptionist, then moved to the executive quarters, and eventually to the RM apartment before becoming the general manager and CEO. My approach was simple; I focused on giving my best in my assigned role. Whether it was housekeeping, F&B, or front office, I always aimed to be the best in that position. During strikes, I even hitched rides on lorries to get to work, and I never let anything push me off my path. I didn’t worry about why I was doing



Eksath Wijeratne
Chief Executive Officer
Browns Hotels & Resorts

it or if I should be doing something else. The key is knowing what you’re doing and why. I did my job well and let my supervisors make decisions about me. It is all about the power of determination and a strong work ethic. It doesn’t matter where you come from, who you are, or your family background. It’s all in your hands. You need to plan and take control of your journey.

Especially in management, it’s essential to have a plan. You need to plan your career by asking yourself what kind of life you want. Think about when you want to reach milestones like earning a six-digit salary or starting a family. Setting clear goals helps guide your career path. If you miss a milestone, adjust your timeline, work harder, and keep pushing; reaching your goal later is still an achievement. As you grow in your career and show what you’re capable of, you eventually get to decide your salary. It’s essential to work hard, let others see your value, and then choose your path. This journey taught me that the rest will fall into place if you focus on doing

your part well. Therefore, I planned and tried. That’s what I did, and it works. Go for it; all you need is determination.

I will tell you a story as an example. A king wanted to build a palace and hired many workers. He disguised himself and walked around to see how the work was going, pretending to be just another person. He first met a man who was breaking stones. When the king asked what he was doing, the man replied, “I’m just breaking rocks into smaller pieces. I get paid for it, and it helps me feed my family. But honestly, it’s boring work, and I don’t see much of a future in it.”

The king then met another man who was doing the same task. When asked what he was doing, this man said, “I’m part of building a great palace. My work is crucial for the project. I take pride in what I do because I see the palace taking shape, motivating me to work hard.” This story shows that it’s not just about having a job. Understanding what your company expects from you and working towards the same goals is essential. When you do that, both will succeed together.

Browns Hotels is known for its distinct properties and experiences. Can you elaborate on what differentiates Browns Hotels from other hospitality brands in Sri Lanka?

At Browns Hotels, our success lies in our people. Although I provide direction, my team primarily interacts with guests, and their work is crucial. We conduct thorough research before recruiting people to ensure we bring in the best talent to the correct position because if you want to fly like eagles, you need to recruit eagles, not ducks. We don’t settle for second-best; we aim for excellence and take care of our people. For example, Browns Hotels declared some of the highest bonuses last year, with some hotels offering up to seven months’ worth. We share profits with our team because our success benefits everyone involved. Number two is our location. We believe that we’re on a lease assignment with the environment. The environment has entrusted these properties to us, so we’re committed to protecting them while we conduct our business. I enjoy the beautiful places we have today because of the efforts made by previous generations. If they had damaged these locations, we wouldn’t have them now. It’s our responsibility not to harm or neglect the environment. I think about how this affects me, my children, my grandchildren, and beyond. We must

ensure that what we do today protects these places for future generations. It’s not about finishing up and moving on; it’s about maintaining these beautiful locations for another thousand years and more.

Third, we keep updating our properties to meet current demands. We invest in improvements but ensure they offer an excellent return to cover the costs. It’s not just about building and finishing; we must manage and maintain what we have.

Our people, unique locations, and continuously upgraded properties within the portfolio set Browns Hotel apart from other hospitality businesses.

The Sri Lankan government has implemented a policy that mandates minimum hotel rates in Colombo. What is your stance on this policy, and how do you think it impacts the hospitality sector?

We can’t comment on the specific case being heard in court, but we can discuss the broader context of the tourism industry in terms of supply and demand. For tourism to thrive, it must be a profitable business attracting investment. Our owners invested in hotels because they saw it as a promising business opportunity. However, investors have many options, such as shipping, plantations, manufacturing, or banking. For tourism to be an attractive investment, it needs to offer good returns.

Unfortunately, recent issues in Sri Lanka have made tourism less appealing to potential investors. The industry must achieve at least a 35% Gross Operating Profit (GOP) to sustain the business and attract investment. Without a reasonable rate, tourism will struggle to compete with other industries. Therefore, having a solid rate is crucial for attracting and maintaining investment in this sector.

“ If you want to fly like eagles, you need to recruit eagles, not ducks. We don’t settle for second-best; we aim for excellence and take care of our people.

“ If you miss a milestone, adjust your timeline, work harder, and keep pushing; reaching your goal later is still an achievement.

Sri Lanka attracts tourists from diverse markets such as India, France, China, Russia, the UK, and the USA. What strategies are employed to promote harmony within such a multinational visitor cluster to ensure the industry’s sustainability?

Maintaining harmony among diverse nationalities at a resort has generally not been an issue. For example, we once hosted guests from 70 nationalities in a single hotel out of 204 nationalities worldwide. While travellers usually don’t focus on cultural differences, our managers must create a balanced environment. When guests return home, they share their experiences, which enhances our reputation across various countries.

Each nationality has its own distinct culture and way of thinking, whether Sri Lankan, Indian, Russian, or German. While we can’t change these differences, we can manage them effectively in guest-host relationships. Our approach ensures that no single nationality dominates employment at Browns Hotels. We set parameters, decide how much representation each nationality should have, and stick to these limits. A wide range of nationalities is ideal because it broadens our global reach. Managing and welcoming a diverse range of nationalities is vital for any organisation. It not only enhances our global recognition but also strengthens our business growth.

Given your extensive industry experience and understanding of modern tourists’ evolving needs and preferences, do you believe Sri Lanka is prepared to attract and accommodate this clientele?

Sri Lanka is one of the top potential destinations for tourism. If asked whether we are ready, the answer is yes. However, there’s clear room for growth when considering the bigger picture. Globally, over a



billion people travel yearly, yet after 50 years, Sri Lanka still aims for just 2.3 million tourists. I believe that number should be much higher.

One of the challenges we face is implementing decisions. We’re good at making plans but need to improve our follow-through. It’s crucial that, regardless of who governs the country, we establish a long-term policy lasting 5 to 10 years. Everyone must be involved and committed to following this strategy.

Tourists typically plan their trips well in advance, and as an island nation, we can’t rely on people simply driving here. The aviation industry is crucial to our business. Without strong flight connections, people won’t be able to visit, no matter how much we promote Sri Lanka. They can’t just swim across the sea to get here. Booking a flight isn’t as simple as renting a car; it’s all about plans scheduled for months, or even a year, in advance. Therefore, we need to align our tourism plans with this reality. We can’t afford to change strategies at the last minute and expect everything to work out. Sri Lanka must commit to a clear plan and ensure everyone knows where we’re headed.

In such a dynamic situation, what message would you pass to educational institutions and their students in the tourism and hospitality sector in Sri Lanka?

What I understand is that more babies are born each day than people who pass away. The desire to travel constantly grows, so the tourism industry will never die off. There will always be demand, and since tourism is a global industry, we must prepare our people for Sri Lankan tourism and the industry’s international standards.

Many international universities are shifting away from traditional exams. The questions aren’t about memorisation but about understanding the core concepts. Our educational institutions should focus more on practical experience than book knowledge. Books alone won’t give you the insight that real-world expertise provides. I believe that in Sri Lankan universities and educational academies, at least 75% to 80% of the curriculum should be practical, with the rest being theoretical. Students should work more on assignments, especially group projects with 4 to 5 members. In these assignments, they work in different groups each time.

Unfortunately, today, we tend to focus more on individual study, reading alone at home rather than returning to complete tasks. They shouldn’t be judged entirely on written exams because that’s not what will help them succeed in the industry. Because when they step into the real world, that’s not how things work. It’s teamwork and collaboration on common assignments that matters.

We aren’t just training people for the local market; the tourism industry is global, with about 80% of our clients being foreigners, not just Sri Lankans. Therefore, our focus is mainly international. It’s essential to prepare our students for this global landscape. We need to train our students to meet international expectations. Exposing them to diverse perspectives and encouraging interactions with international students is crucial. Currently, our universities lack this exposure. Students only interact with peers from their own country and don’t have the opportunity to understand different international viewpoints until they enter the industry. Ideally, they should receive at least six months of international training to shape their careers effectively. They must plan their jobs based on industry requirements for future success. If students don’t get the proper exposure, taking them out and showing them the world is essential.

However, the current economic crisis makes it challenging. Therefore, we need to find smart solutions since our competition is international. We should enhance our system and make students more interactive to stay competitive. This approach will better prepare them to meet the current and future demands of the tourism industry. Without it, catching up will take a long time.



Browns

HOTELS & RESORTS

This interview was conducted with Mr Eksath Wijeratne at Browns Hotels and Resorts, Corporate office in Colombo on 12th June 2024.

A Middle-Way Approach to Sustainability in Tourism: How Tourism Education Can Contribute

The COVID-19 pandemic brought us to a temporary pause, giving us time to delve deeper into many aspects of life. Whilst some people wanted to return to normal as soon as possible, some started questioning the *normal*. The same discourses occurred in tourism.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, some scholars asserted the need to view the pandemic as an opportunity to reform the tourism industry, focusing more on long-term sustainability (Gössling et al., 2020; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2021; Lew et al., 2020). Meanwhile, others argued that the focus should be on recovery, perhaps returning to normal, to business as usual. Indeed, a speedy recovery was necessary to address immediate economic needs, especially for those who lost jobs and income. However, the scholars who advocated the need for reform or transformation also seemed not to be neglecting people's economic hardships but critically looking into the entire phenomenon of tourism that involves not only economic growth but also the ecological and sociocultural impacts, particularly the negative ones (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2021).

As an academic, I can relate to both schools of thought. I initially supported the de-growth concept, emphasising the limits to development, specifically concerning finite ecological systems. During the pandemic, news about reviving the natural environment, such as wildlife and air quality, highlighted the importance of sustainable living. However, the economic hardships left little room for such reflections.

Now, people are enjoying the *normal* again. With the unleashing of pent-up demand and the reopening of all the source markets, international tourist arrivals in 2024 are expected to exceed pre-pandemic levels, reaching 1.5 billion. This resurgence has already led

to over-tourism complaints in some destinations like Spain. The pandemic revealed the capitalist trap many people are in, making it difficult to escape the global socioeconomic system. After recognising this, I began to rethink my role as a tourism scholar, and that led me to a middle-way approach; while focusing on transformation, we should support people to survive this vicious circle.

Let's look at this approach with a spotlight on tourism education. Higgins-Desbiolles (2021) states that "the recent drive by universities to prepare graduates to be job-ready for the industry risks transforming universities into vocational-training colleges" (p.559). However, we cannot deny that young people are also entangled in the above-mentioned capitalist trap. This leaves us with the question; what should we do as tourism academics?

It is obvious that theoretical knowledge is a must. Along with the theories, students should be provided with the knowledge to review the world around them. This means supporting them in understanding tourism and its connection with socioeconomic conditions, culture, ecological systems and politics in a larger context. (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2021 also discusses this point). There will surely be a difference between those employed in the tourism industry with this knowledge and those without. It affects the sustainability endeavours in tourism since those young people can be the active transformative power in the industry without any doubt.

Though practical knowledge and skills are also necessary, what students absorb should go beyond mere vocational training in service provision, marketing or technology use. As a tourism scholar with a sustainability focus mainly on the local community and planetary boundaries, I always try to create opportunities for students to connect with the local people. Through collaboration with local governments and stakeholders, we conduct field activities that unfold tourism's potential to support sustainability within the local areas.

I will briefly introduce one such activity. *Yamanobe-no-michi* (*Yamanobe Road*) is the oldest residential road in Nara Prefecture, Japan. There are old shrines, small agricultural lands, local restaurants and other supporting facilities for tourists along the trail. However, similar to other rural areas in Japan,

Yamanobe-no-michi also faces the issues of depopulation, and more precisely, the lack of successors to the heritage and the nature of the traditional agricultural livelihood of current residents. Having learned these facts through a pilot field study, students came up with the idea of organising an event with the local community. It was a gastronomy tourism event centred on *persimmons* to promote the area with newly invented *persimmon menus*. It started with the dream of a young *persimmon* farmer who wanted people to connect *Yamanobe-no-michi* with its brand, eventually supporting sustainability in agriculture and tourism. In 2023, the event was a success and the community is rendering continuous support to organise it annually. Another major concern in *Yamanobe-no-michi* is welcoming more international tourists without harming the existing residential area or natural environment. In this activity, students exchange thoughts with the prefectural government to find sustainable solutions.

These kinds of activities can provide students with firsthand experiences of tackling tourism-related issues at the ground level with the knowledge of placing tourism in a broader context as a tool for sustainability and community well-being. Once they gain theoretical and practical insights into sustainability in tourism, they will indeed contribute to human resource development for a sustainable tourism industry and beyond. This is the middle-way approach that I have put into action so far. I continue to stand on the side of pro-degrowth, however, I strive to discover an effective way towards this transformation since it is an enormous challenge in this capitalist world.



To conclude, regarding the COVID-19 pandemic as a potential catalyst to transformation, we might have missed that opportunity. Nevertheless, some stakeholders in the industry took this temporary pause to restart their business, emphasising sustainability and resilience, and governments started to make significant efforts towards sustainable tourism. For instance, in Japan, while targeting the acceleration of tourist numbers, priority is placed on promoting a healthier tourism for the industry and the local community. Hopefully, the young people nurtured at the universities will take the lead in that sustainable tourism journey. Also, they will rethink their own travel behaviours and aim to become responsible travellers, meaning those who perceive travel as something beyond a mere leisure pursuit.



The activities with the local community offer us valuable insights into tourism and sustainability...

We are members of Professor Ranasinghe's seminar at Nara Prefectural University, where our research focuses on various tourism-related issues. For example, we explore how to use gastronomy tourism to revitalise rural areas, how to apply the concept of *retail therapy* to wellness tourism, how to leverage inbound tourism for sustainable economic development in Japan, and what promotional tools are effective for attracting more tourists to rural areas.

Beyond our research, we are also deeply interested in learning the practical aspects of tourism, particularly its relationship with local people. In 2023, we conducted several field studies and activities at *Yamanobe-no-michi, Nara*. During the spring semester, we carried out pilot research to understand the current situation, issues, and perceptions of local stakeholders. The discussions with the local community led to the creation of the *first persimmon* event at *Yamanobe-no-michi*. Our goal for this event was to increase the recognition of *Yamanobe-no-michi* and its *persimmon* brand to support local *persimmon* farming.

It was our first time to collaborate with the local community and we were overwhelmed by their support and enthusiasm. The event was joyful and impactful, offering valuable insights into tourism and sustainability. Additionally, few students have chosen *Yamanobe-no-michi* as a case study for their research. Our goal for activities in 2024 is to attract more travellers to *Yamanobe-no-michi* through the *persimmon* event and the tour we are planning with a focus on sustainable travel practices.



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Nirmala Ranasinghe, PhD
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Students' comments

Name: Fuuna Kobayashi

Our activities were more effective because we had a basic knowledge of tourism. All seminar members discussed the event's content, advertising strategies, and ways to convey its attractions. During the event, many visitors who enjoyed our menu.

We learned the benefits of working with our local communities through this experience. By collaborating with local people, we could hear their thoughts and ideas about their community and appeal to what they find attractive about the area. We worked with a local *persimmon* farmer to create the menu for our event. Thanks to what they taught us about the characteristics of *persimmons*, we could produce a more appealing menu. We hope to apply what we learned to this year's event also.

Name: Shiori Sato

The event we organised at *Yamanobe-no-michi* created opportunities to interact with local people and learn more about the area's charm, including the warmth of the community. Additionally, I made discoveries by engaging with those walking on *Yamanobe-no-michi*. The entire field study underscored the importance of interaction and collaboration.

Name: Honoka Takekawa

The activities on *Yamanobe-no-michi* involve university students, the local community and stakeholders such as farmers, restaurant owners, and tourism operators. Such collaborative events create opportunities for people to build an emotional attachment to the local area. Personally, I also felt that I should cherish my hometown even more.

Moreover, such events provide a rare chance for university students to confront the core issues faced by the community. We discovered that *Tonewasegaki*, the *persimmon* brand in *Yamanobe-no-michi*, is facing the problem of low recognition despite being a high-end product. By promoting *persimmon* sales led by the farmers themselves, I understood the event's sustainability is also important. That's why we are committed to continuously organising these activities.



A Day in Malacca: Journey Through Time and Taste

Are you ready for an unforgettable adventure? Experience the magical blend of history, culture, and culinary delights in Malacca - a UNESCO World Heritage Site. In just 24 hours, immerse yourself in the rich tapestry of this historic city as you wander through ancient streets, explore iconic landmarks, and savour the mouth-watering flavours of local cuisine. Let me tell you, Malacca holds a very special place in my heart. It's not just a destination for me; it's a treasure trove of history and culture that dates back centuries. Walking through the same streets my father once walked and visiting the landmarks he knew as a child adds a deeply personal dimension to my visits. It's like taking a step back in time and experiencing the past through the eyes of my ancestors. Every corner of Malacca resonates with memories of family stories and ancestral roots, making each trip a nostalgic journey filled with love and connection. So, come along with me, and let's explore this enchanting city together!

Fortified Dutch Adventure (8.00 a.m)

If you're looking for a fantastic spot to start your day, check out the *A'Famosa!* This Portuguese fort is the oldest in Southeast Asia, built over 500 years ago. It's been through a lot since then - the Dutch and British tried to take over the city, and they ended up tearing most of the fort down. But there are still two parts worth checking out: the *Porta de Santiago* gateway and the *Middelburg Bastion*. They're both super cool and will give you a good idea of what life was like back in the day. From the top of *St. Paul's Hill*, you can walk down to the Dutch Square, a remnant from the Dutch colonial era in the 17th and 18th centuries. The vibrant red buildings, called *Stadthuys*, were once the Dutch administrative buildings. Queen Victoria's Fountain is at the centre of the square, built in 1901 to celebrate her Diamond Jubilee. This place is located in *Parameswara, Banda Hilir*.



Dutch colonial era
Image courtesy by Nur Syifa' Binti Razali

Pedas Feast: Asam Pedas Melaka (10.00 a.m)

Asam Pedas, translating to 'sour' and 'spicy' is a Malaysian delight originating in coastal villages like Malacca. Traditionally made with sour tamarind and fresh chilli peppers, it offers flavour. A famous rendition is a sour curry chilli soup served with rice and saltwater fish, often accompanied by fresh herbs and chilli dip. *Asam Pedas Selera Kampung* at *Pahlawan Walk, Melaka*, is renowned for this dish.

Explore Magic of Malay Culture (Noon)

Exploring the *Malacca Sultanate Palace Museum* sounds like an enriching experience! It is a famous museum of Malacca. Malay heritage is rich and diverse, offering a glimpse into centuries of cultural, artistic, and historical evolution. The Malacca Palace provides a unique opportunity to immerse oneself in the legacy of the Malay civilisation and gain a deeper understanding of its influence on modern-day Malaysia. The museum, replicating the Malacca Sultanate's palace from the Malay Annals, showcases traditional costumes, weaponry, and trade

ship models. It highlights Malacca's historical significance as a trading hub through interactive displays and dioramas, offering insights into its vibrant culture and governance. Overall, it was a fascinating and profound cultural experience that is a must-visit for anyone interested in Malaysia's historical and cultural heritage.



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Malacca Sultanate Palace Museum
Image courtesy by Nur Syifa' Binti Razali

Dodol Delight: Malay Famous Sweet (8.00 p.m)

Dodol is a sugary confection made from glutinous rice flour, palm sugar, and coconut milk. It has a chewy, sticky texture and comes in various flavours, such as Durian, Coconut, and Banana, as Malacca is known for its rich culinary heritage. *Dodol Asli Melaka Panas* by *Pak Lan MSD* stands out as the best version, particularly when served warmly. The stall is located in *Ikan Bakar Muara Sg Duyung*, one of the perfect spots for dinner!



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Sea urchins are common in rocky coastal areas, and stepping on their spines can be very painful. Take in the local knowledge before stepping onto the beach.





Uncovering Higher Purposes of Tourism

Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness, and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts - Mark Twain

As the world's most significant and rapidly growing industry, tourism facilitates billions of human interactions and fosters cultural and multicultural exchanges. This inherent aspect of tourism highlights its potential to create a nexus between tourism and peace for leveraging national development.

Historically, noteworthy initiatives have been aimed at using tourism to foster human connections. In 1906, German teacher Richard Shirmann launched the youth hostel movement, envisioning hostels as *homes of peace* for young people worldwide. He encouraged travel beyond national borders to meet people from diverse backgrounds and learn from their experiences. Following World War II, French educator Jean Burnard organised trips for French students to Germany to bridge the gap between French and German youth, whose families had been adversaries. These efforts aimed to create spaces for young people to exchange ideas and enhance mutual understanding, ultimately leading to the formation

of the *Federation of Youth Travel Organizations (FYTO)* in 1950, dedicated to promoting international understanding through travel.

These historical examples underscore the benefits of tourism that extend beyond mere economic gain. Despite its current focus on economic aspects, the *Manila Declaration* of 1980 highlighted the broader potential of tourism. It asserted that tourism could be a powerful force for global peace and a foundation for international understanding and interdependence (UNWTO Manila Declaration, 1985). This pivotal moment marked the first official acknowledgement of tourism's role in fostering peace.

Global leaders have also recognised tourism's peace-building potential. After the 1986 *Geneva Summit*, U.S. President Ronald Reagan and Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev emphasised the importance of increasing travel to foster understanding between nations. Pope John Paul II observed that tourism exposes individuals to diverse

lifestyles, religions, and worldviews, facilitating personal and communal discovery. U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has called tourism a fundamental element of global peace and cultural understanding.

The notion of tourism serving a *higher purpose* was first introduced at the *Vancouver Conference*, advocating for tourism's role in promoting international collaboration, cultural appreciation, and conflict resolution.

For conflict-affected Sri Lanka, this higher purpose of tourism is particularly relevant. The country has endured significant ethnic and religious strife, leaving deep wounds that need healing for true mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence.

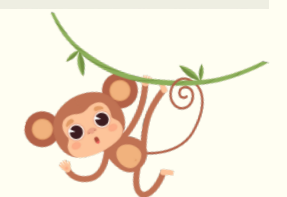
Embracing the concept of peace through tourism, primarily through promoting domestic tourism, could be a powerful tool for fostering a culture of peace and supporting national development. By leveraging tourism as a means to bridge divides and promote reconciliation, Sri Lanka can work towards a more harmonious and unified future.



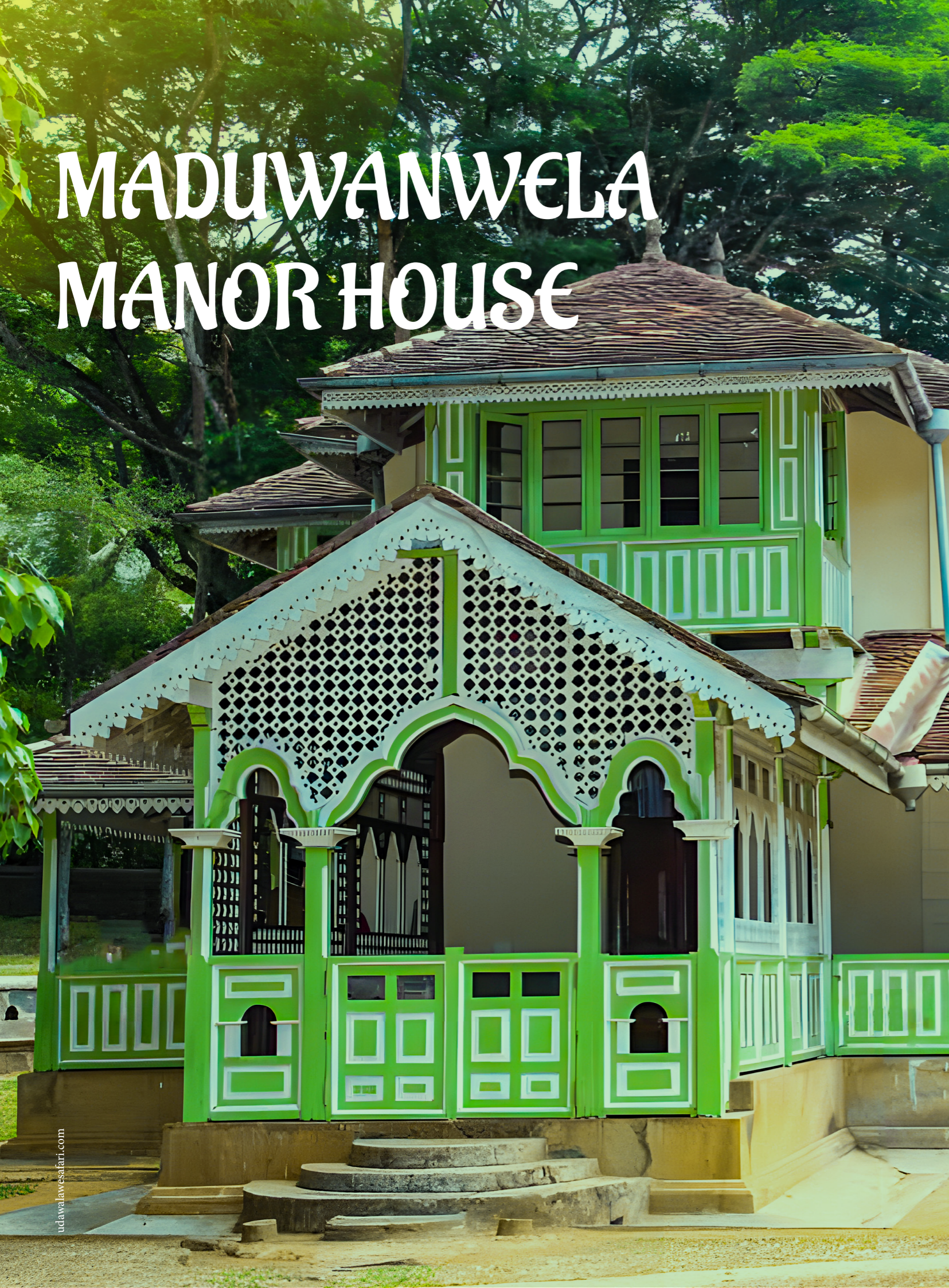
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The Kumbuk trees cool the land and guard it from erosion. Let's raise awareness of the value they bring to our ecosystems.



MADUWANWELA MANOR HOUSE



Maduwanwela Manor House is an old mansion in the quiet village of Maduwanwela, within Sri Lanka's *Kolonna Korale* region, between Embilipitiya and Suriyakanda, approximately 207 km from Colombo. This historic manor's architectural beauty offers a glimpse into the lavish lifestyle of its former residents.

The manor's origins date back to the 17th century, when *Maduwanwela Maha Mohottala* initially built it. Over the centuries, the mansion underwent multiple expansions and renovations for generations of the Maduwanwela family. The final transformation came at the beginning of the 19th century, under the watchful eye of *Maduwanwela Maha Disawe*, the provincial ruler of the area, leaving a legacy of this grand manor house across 80,000 acres.

The *Disawe* intentionally crafted the low doorways of the manor to force, especially the taller Western colonial rulers, to dismount and bow as they entered, embedding respect for the estate into the architecture. The floors were designed in intricate mosaic designs, forming patterns mixed with pictures of Queen Victoria and colonial emblems from chipped tiles imported from the Netherlands. They were a silent but steadfast expression of the *Disawe's* anticolonial attitudes, echoing his resistance against foreign rule. The gracefully designed arch above the door frame, adorned with complex decorative engraved stonework and doors and staircases crafted from tamarind, jack, and satinwood exhibit the gentle craftsmanship of the era, symbolising the wealth and power of the Maduwanwela family.

Every brick and beam of Maduwanwela Manor House whispers the power and resilience of a glorious past, even as time has turned the grand manor house into crumbling walls and remains. Today, it stands as a living monument to Sri Lanka's colonial heritage legacy, hidden under a mysterious charm that fills every dark corner and silent hallway.

Adithya Dewmini

Wine, Food, and Art at St. Catharines, Canada

At the 13th Street Winery
amidst the province's finest vines,
a sculpture garden so divine,
plein-air artists brush in hand,
dynamic galleries, art so grand,
and those butter tarts—sweet and fine!

I am a tourist in my own hometown,
with joy and laughter all around,
wine, food, and art abound,
in this vibrant space, life's treasures found.

Life is good in every part,
surrounded by happy hearts,
savouring wine, food, and art.



Smart Tourism to Cities

Smart City is a destination that delivers access to the hospitality industry, its services, the venues, and the stakeholders' experiences via ICT-based approaches. It is a dynamic relationship between human experiences and smart technologies to enhance and strengthen visitor engagement and sustainability. With the smart tourism concept, the word Smart Cities emerges, which uses technology to boost urban infrastructure and inhabitants' quality of life. Hence, it closely connects to the development of smart cities and coincides with technological advancements that involve artificial intelligence, big data, the Internet of Things (IoT), etc. (Canorea, 2022).

A smart tourist is a crucial component of a smart tourism city. In the digital age, smart cities with networks linking throughout the city have progressed due to the greater development of information and digital technology. Global competitiveness necessitates the development of smart tourism cities from a macroeconomic aspect. It is vital to recognise that the scope of key global elements often drives the convergence of smart cities and tourism.

During the previous decades, Sri Lanka has become one of the leading tourist destinations in the world. Several websites and books have identified Sri Lanka as one of the best places to gain a superior tourist experience. However, developments in smart tourism directly affect the safety and quality of tourism in Sri Lanka, which is a timely requirement in this digital era.

We should create a *Smart Experience* for technology-mediated travel by adding three characteristics: personalisation, uniqueness and real-time monitoring. Further, Matos (2019) has discussed the six pillars for smart cities outlined by the European Commission, including the Smart Cities project in the European Agenda: Opportunities for Portugal. These features are smart economy, smart mobility, smart environment, smart people, smart government, and smart life.

We can identify several examples of smart tourism destinations in the real world. Digital technologies like smart devices, information technology, tourism portals and websites influence the tourist service package from the planning phase to after the service. Moreover, tourist services leverage cutting-edge technologies such as augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), and IoT to provide smart experiences to tourists. In addition, free Wi-Fi and near-field communication are used to make payments through mobile apps, location-based services, beacon technology, and other technological components involved in a smart tourist city.

There are three smart cities in Korea: Seoul, Busan and Jeju. In Seoul, an official website and application management system provide quality and accurate services to tourists. The city contains an ecosystem



based on the IoT. Busan also possesses IoT-based technologies such as smart parking, streetlights, and buildings (Mirando & Kumarasinghe, 2022). Helsinki, the capital of Finland, has developed an innovative, intelligent public transportation system that has gained widespread appreciation. They hope to establish an *Uber Boat* system as public transportation and autonomous buses are being tested. Copenhagen, the capital of Denmark, has made significant progress in digitalisation. It has established a visitor service that allows travellers to view everything in the city using moving billboards, robots, and virtual reality. *El Hierro*, Spain, has become the world's first smart island to achieve energy self-sufficiency while reducing pollution levels by generating electricity from garbage (Canorea, 2022).

There are various advantages of smart tourism cities. Firstly, it can manage the consequences of climate change on the tourism industry, resulting in the greatest revenue and the preservation of biodiversity. Secondly, it increases the competitiveness and performance of tourism businesses by utilising technology and innovation. Then, it enhances travellers' experience by giving them access to shared information on famous tourist routes, attractions, and domestic festivals. Lastly, smart tourism allows enterprises to utilise social media platforms to effectively meet stakeholders' needs.

It has the potential to develop tourist destinations in Sri Lanka, such as Colombo, Dambulla, Galle, Ella, ArugamBay and Trincomalee, as smart tourism cities, as these destinations currently contribute a significant amount to the national GDP. The smart tourism city concept will be a great opportunity to increase revenue levels from each city and enhance the guest experience during their journey to the destination.

Considering the prevailing situation, we have to focus on human resources, infrastructure development and information when establishing a smart tourism city. We need to hire experienced people with high technological knowledge to implement smart tourism cities. The government has a major role to play when adopting smart tourism, as it should focus on providing fibre networks throughout the whole smart city area. In addition, in 2014, Singapore commenced the Smart Nation Initiative project, spending \$1.6 billion on the development of a national system of sensor networks.

So, the Sri Lankan government should expand funding, especially for research & development purposes and smart city applications. All public services in Sri Lanka need to convert from manual and paper processes to digital processes as well (Joshua et al., 2017).

ICT adaptation into regular life and industry operations is still arguable in Sri Lanka. The most challenging matters are maintaining specific policies for ICT and the current town planning of Sri Lanka. Focusing on the Smart City concept is very important because it enriches value for the overall value chain of numerous industries in urban areas. Smart tourism concept should be followed in the Sri Lankan Tourism industry in a good and effective manner in future (Liyanage & Dissanayake, 2017).

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The Good, the Bad, and the Creepy of Personalised Marketing in Tourism

Have you ever received an email or advertisement for a tour package that makes you feel like it is tailor-made just for you? It probably features information about tourist activities you adore or destinations you have long dreamed of visiting. This is the real power of personalised marketing, which is rapidly gaining traction in the tourism industry. Personalised marketing is a strategy that tailors marketing messages and offerings to individuals based on their interests, preferences, and behaviour. Given tourists' unique preferences and expectations for their travel experiences, personalised marketing enables industry practitioners to forge meaningful and impactful connections by tailoring marketing messages to match each tourist's interests, preferences, and behaviour.

Although tourists value personalised marketing efforts, simultaneously, they may often encounter complex and conflicting dynamics with these tailored offerings, creating tensions. For instance, despite tourists feeling that personalised marketing is appealing, they may simultaneously be concerned about how their data is collected and used to personalise such offers. These mixed responses to personalised marketing prompt tourism practitioners to question whether personalised marketing is truly beneficial or intrusive, raising concerns about when it might cross the line and become perceived as creepy.

The fine line between the good and creepy side of personalised marketing in the tourism context is quite nuanced. Tourists tend to be exceptionally tolerant of personalised and even hyper-personalised marketing in some instances, provided that it genuinely informs them or reduces friction in their travel experiences. However, be cautious—irresponsibly collecting or using excessive personal



data can alienate tourists and potentially result in permanently losing them.

So, what can tourism practitioners do to reap the full potential of personalised marketing while avoiding potential customer backlash? Here are four key recommendations from tourism practitioners for practising personalised marketing while avoiding being creepy.

Be transparent and clearly communicate the data collection process

The first step to avoiding a creepy perception of personalised marketing is to inform tourists about the data collection process and be transparent. It is vital to let tourists know about the types of data that will be collected and the purposes for which it will be used. Additionally, always seeking tourists' approval before collecting and using their data is vital. Rather than hiding the data collection policy on a privacy page, a straightforward banner at the top or bottom of the webpage can alert tourists that their browsing patterns and purchasing behaviour will be monitored to offer them a more personalised travel experience. Tourists may be likelier to view personalised advertisements when the data policy is clearly disclosed.

Be mindful of the acceptable limits of data collection and usage

Informing tourists about how their data will be collected and used is essential. Still, it is equally crucial for tourism practitioners to understand what

levels of personalized marketing are acceptable for tourists. Although it is evident that tourists' preferences evolve with time, many tourists today seem to appreciate less personalised offers than most industry practitioners assume. For instance, not all tourists may appreciate constant personalised travel packages. While some tourists may be excited by such offers, others are particularly concerned about how their data is collected and whether they were adequately informed about the data collection process in advance.

Use only a portion of the available data for personalised marketing

Recent observations indicate that while tourists generally respond positively to most personalised marketing efforts, they can be put off by excessive personalisation. For instance, seeing their first name in an email is usually well-received, but encountering their name in an advertisement for a tour package on a website may feel intrusive. Therefore, it is always essential to understand the boundaries and recognize where to draw the line between acceptable and excessive personalisation. Accordingly, only relevant data should be used for personalised marketing, avoiding the temptation of utilising all available data.

Formulate personalised marketing strategies without personal details

Tourism practitioners can think about formulating innovative, personalised marketing strategies that enhance the overall tourist experience without using personal identifiers. For example, a hotel website



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could tailor its content to show discounts and exclusive deals to existing customers while presenting information about brand reputation and loyalty programs to new visitors. Although it might seem that using less data could be less effective, avoiding the creepiness factor altogether can often yield the best results.

All in all, personalisation is undoubtedly the next frontier for tourism marketers seeking to enhance value creation in today's rapidly evolving technological landscape. Tailoring one-on-one market offerings can effectively boost awareness and drive customer engagement. However, tourism practitioners must be aware of the associated risks. Excessive personalisation can be perceived as intrusive, potentially deterring tourists from engaging. While finding the right balance between leveraging personalised marketing and avoiding creepiness is challenging, tourism marketers should carefully formulate thoughtful, tourist-first personalised marketing strategies to enhance their reputation.



Monkeys are adept at scavenging and are often attracted to food. To ensure a pleasant experience, keep your belongings secure and maintain a safe distance.

Jaya Sri: The Rhythms of Global Souls

Jaya Sri is the iconic twin musician duo of Rohitha and Rohan Jayalath. They were born in Sri Lanka and nurtured by reggae, rock, and various fusions with their multi-national musical band. They have gained popularity worldwide, especially in Europe and beyond, including the home country, Sri Lanka. Jaya Sri isn't only a musical act; they are a living example of the journey with a lifestyle that harmoniously blends with performing and exploring the world, constantly on the move with rhythms, melodies, and beats, sharing their soul-stirring sounds in every corner of the globe. Travel allows them to break the ice of musical and cultural boundaries, resulting in a fusion of global styles that form the essence of their music.

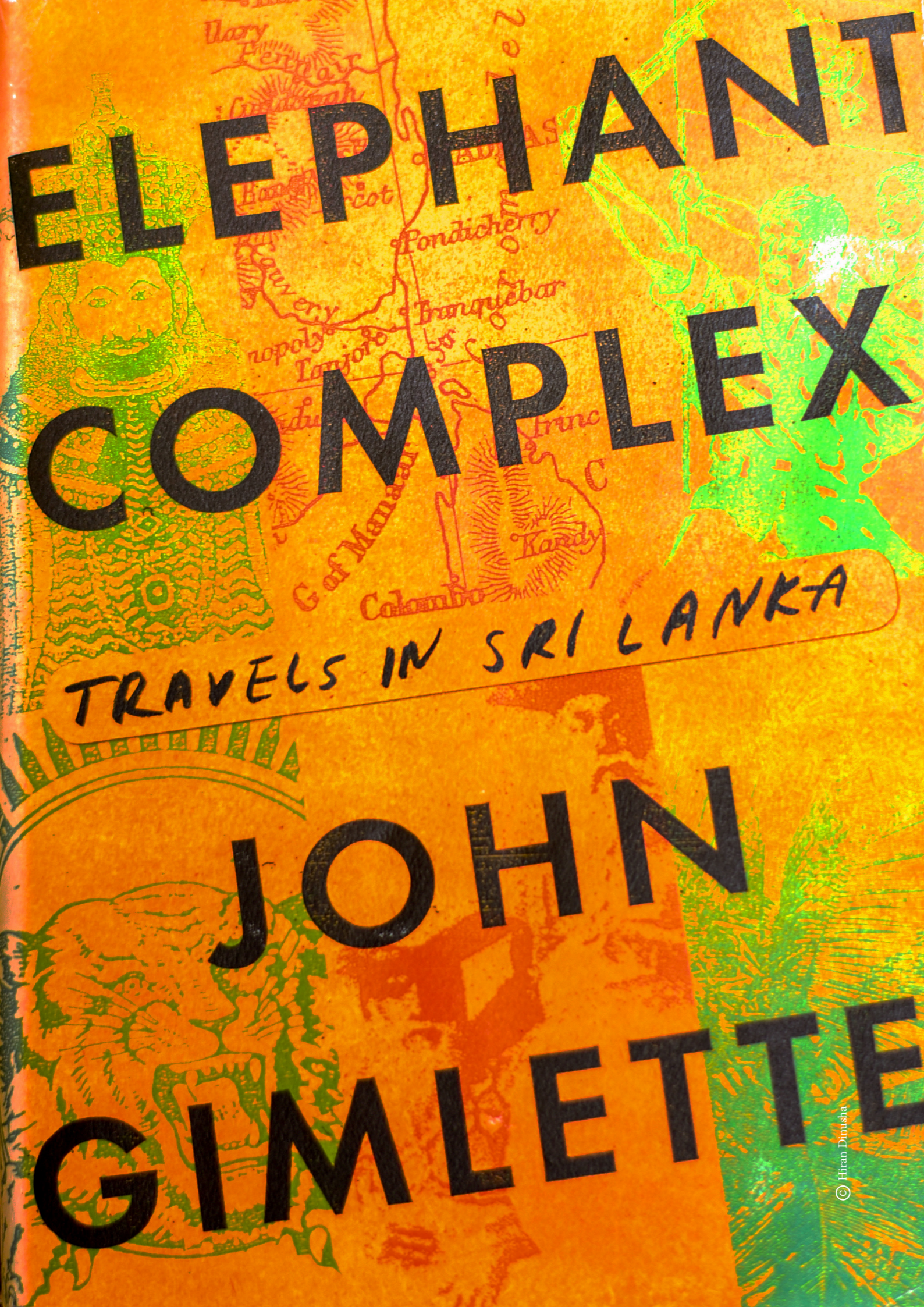
As they move from place to place, their journey is not confined to a stage; they collect fragments of life from every street they visit, the cities and towns they explore, and the strangers they meet. The rhythms of different cultures are absorbed into their art, inspiring their lyrical content and melodies. *Walikatare* and *Pita Rata Wisithara* are some of the masterpieces that serve as an ode to the world beyond their homeland; transforming personal experiences into shared emotions that connect audiences everywhere is evidence of how travelling leaves an imprint on their sound, making them storytellers to narrate the world through music.

Jaya Sri believes music is a true language that everyone can understand. They said, "We've seen it when we play; it doesn't matter if the audience speaks our language or not. The music bridges the gap, and we are all connected suddenly."

They always strive to bring the world closer through their soulful music. This realisation became the foundation of their journey, not just as musicians but as wanderers. Their lifestyle isn't all about playing music; it's the essence of their being.

Sachini Sewwandi





Doing a Disservice to Sri Lanka: John Gimlette's *Elephant Complex*

Before engaging in long-distance travel, prospective sojourners often seek out information and advice from books, websites, and personal narratives related to the place they intend to visit. At present, several well-known companies (such as Lonely Planet and DK Eyewitness Travel) produce traditional Sri Lankan travel guides for the North American English language market. However, the selection of commercially published travelogues that chronicle the personal experiences of foreign travellers in Sri Lanka is much more limited.

In the United States, one of the most widely available Sri Lankan travel narratives is *Elephant Complex: Travels in Sri Lanka* by John Gimlette, a London-based lawyer who is also a well-known author of several other travel books. Originally published in 2016, *Elephant Complex* tells the story of Gimlette's journey throughout Sri Lanka. Each of the book's chapters is anchored in a particular city or distinct geographical area and shares stories of the people Gimlette meets and experiences that he has at these locations.

In North America, *Elephant Complex* is consistently one of the top results returned when doing a web search for Sri Lanka tourism literature and is essentially impossible to miss. The book's English language reviews are overwhelmingly positive and suggest that Gimlette's work provides an honest and accurate depiction of Sri Lanka that goes beyond the gross overgeneralisation, problematic objectification, and quiet condescension that are so often central themes of Asian travelogues written by white westerners.



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However, my students and I have had quite a different reaction to this book. From our experiences deeply engaging with Sri Lankan communities across the island, we have found that Gimlette does a poor job of accurately depicting the country's complexity and providing insight into what travellers to Sri Lanka might reasonably expect. Throughout the book, Gimlette is culturally insensitive and displays poor judgement in ways that produce unnecessary challenges and uncomfortable situations for himself. Rather than respectfully incorporating authentic Sri Lankan perspectives, he frequently traffics in unflattering stereotypes and personal caricatures. This may make the book a superficially entertaining read for some, but it does little to treat the island and its diverse people with the amount of dignity they so rightly deserve. In his travels, Gimlette not only makes a fool of himself but also of the people and places he is attempting to chronicle.

Gimlette begins the first chapter with a tale of being defrauded by a dishonest tuk-tuk driver in Colombo. Not only does this anecdote provide the reader with a poor first impression of Sri Lanka, but it also demonstrates Gimlette's ignorance at the outset of his journey (as he falls for one of the most widely known tourist scams in Colombo). When visiting Sigiriya, his disrespect for Sri Lanka's history and cultural preservation is put on full display, as he acknowledges the sign directing people not to sit on King *Kashyapa's* throne, yet gleefully does so anyway. In Negombo, Gimlette paints a picture of a depraved city, visits a private home serving as a brothel, and ultimately finds himself being solicited by young boys.

Gimlette's exploration of the *Batticaloa* area (which he refers to as "The Wild East") is particularly rife with stereotypes and mischaracterisations. My students and I found his depiction of Batticaloa town ("truly horrifying or just a little strange", he writes) to be completely unfair—we have always had wonderful experiences during our visits there—the waterfront of the town itself is quite inviting, and the beaches of *Kalladay* are breathtaking. Yet, Gimlette's depiction suggests a grimy and threatening place that made him "not sure if [he] was being welcomed or despised." His treatment of the *Vanni* is similarly superficial and negative. Rather than explore Jaffna's rich history and cultural treasures (such as the Jaffna Public Library, *Nallur Kandaswamy Kovil*, and the ruins of the Jaffna kingdom), Gimlette's attention is

focused on the aftermath of the civil war, and he unflatteringly describes the city as “not quite as great as, once, it nearly was.”

Near the book's end, Gimlette does provide a surprisingly honest assessment of his travels, stating that following his time in and around *Vellamullivaikal*, he had been “riding along, empty of thought, and enjoying the cruel beauty of someone else's world, smug in the knowledge that I was only passing through.” In many ways, this self-assessment sums up *Elephant Complex*, as it is indeed the chronicle of a foreigner who lacks cultural humility, self-awareness, and genuine respect for the places and people he encounters along the way.

Like many depictions of Sri Lanka by Western authors, the book places a central focus on the civil war and its aftereffects. Although there is no question that understanding the civil war is critical to gaining an informed comprehension of Sri Lanka, Gimlette allows the war to cast an unnecessarily large shadow over the entirety of his travel narrative. Perhaps nowhere is this more apparent than the cover of *Elephant Complex*, which features a photo of the wreck of the *MV Farah III* in *Mullaitivu*.

Professionals within the Sri Lanka tourism industry need to be aware of the *Elephant Complex* because Western travellers may arrive having read this book and utilised it as one of their primary sources of information about Sri Lanka. It is unfortunate that English language travelogues written from the personal perspective of Sri Lankans are not more widely available. As long as narratives of travel in Sri Lanka are primarily written from the viewpoint of materially affluent white Westerners, the problematic narrative lensing of South Asian travel that is present throughout *Elephant Complex* will continue. This will perpetuate harm toward the people and communities of Sri Lanka, which deserve so much more than to function as the objects of detached and uninformed condescension from foreign tourists.

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Mid-Autumn Festival: A Chinese Ethnic Heritage in Malaysia

The Mid-Autumn Festival, often called the Mooncake Festival, is a significant observance of Malaysia's ethnic Chinese community. The Mid-Autumn Festival is the foremost festival, second only to the Chinese New Year in China. Although it is not a public holiday, malls are adorned with decorations and offer special food items during this period. Celebrated on the 15th day of the 8th month of the Chinese lunar calendar, the festival coincides with a full moon, typically falling in late September or early October. This year, the festival was celebrated on September 13.

Mooncakes are unique and traditional Chinese bakery products used during the Mid-Autumn Festival, a celebration focused on lunar honours and months of observance. Considered an indispensable speciality, mooncakes are shared among friends and family during festive occasions. Moon cakes filled with sweet bean paste, lotus seeds, or a classic pastry with salted, baked egg yolk at its centre are the traditional treats for this holiday. Linked initially to moon god offerings for a bountiful harvest, the festival's focus has shifted, though the moon-shaped cakes remain symbolic. Today, buying pre-made, packaged moon cakes is much more common, although some people still hunt out traditional hand-made ones. Traditionally, Malaysian families of Chinese descent would make various types of moon cakes, enjoy festive family dinners, gather to gaze at the moon and participate in nighttime lantern marches. Traditionally, these lanterns used during this celebration are made of paper and illuminated by candles, but recently, plastic and inflatable lanterns with light bulbs inside have become popular. Wooden lanterns are also part of the modern tradition.

In conclusion, this festival is a celebration worth enjoying and with families. Even if you're not of Chinese descent, it's the spirit of Malaysia to celebrate it together and bring Malaysia much closer



to integrity for Malaysians of various races, religions and cultures. If you've missed the mooncake festival, it's time to make a change and see the difference we can make as individuals for the rich diversity of Malaysia.



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Wonders of Rio, Brazil

After my conference in Brasilia,
I seized the time to roam,
from São Paulo's vibrant heart,
to Rio de Janeiro's gleaming dome.

Grateful for this serendipity,
I strolled along Copacabana's shore,
wandered through the urban forest,
where nature and city adore.

I ascended hills by cable's grace,
to touch the sky's embrace,
and ended my journey with reverence,
before a statue, standing amaze.



“ The tourism industry in Sri Lanka can be one of the most rewarding places to build a career with incredible opportunities if someone has the qualities of patience, hard work, and commitment to constant learning.

Who is Nalin Malwenna, and how did he end up in tourism?

First, I will tell you how I got into tourism. It all started in 1990 after I completed my O/Ls at Trinity College. Our entire family moved to the Emirates, as my father got a job there. Within two days, my father lost his job due to the Iraq-U.A.E. war, but I continued my studies in the Emirates for three years, completing the CBSE Indian syllabus.

Then, I returned to Sri Lanka but didn't immediately start working because we don't take our lives seriously at young ages. Around 1999 or 2000, I decided to take a holiday back in the Emirates. During this trip, I reconnected with some old schoolmates, a few were working in the tourism industry. Although I had no experience or interest in tourism, I got a job there as an executive at a company handling incentive tours for high-profile clients. Through this, I connected with Kuoni, a well-known company specialising in MICE and other tourism services. I spent about 8 or 9 years in the Middle East, later promoted to Head of Groups and MICE for the region.

After working for nearly 18 years, I felt it was time to do something of my own. In 2012, I returned to Sri Lanka and started HOT, initially on a small scale with just 2 or 3 staff members. The first year was truly challenging, as none of the hotels didn't give not only the travel agents' rate but also the walk-in rates.



Nalin Malwenna
Managing Director
House of Travels & Tourism

We ran with zero business at all. However, we gradually built trust with agents and tour operators, like FTI, and the business began to grow. As a result, we got more support from hoteliers than before. We handled 10,000 to 20,000 guests annually, burning the midnight oil at the office in return and making lots of sacrifices from our personal lives, which wasn't easy. But it is worth it; as the business grows, we are attracting more tour operators to work with us.

Talking about myself, I am a bit of a risk-taker. I might gamble a little, always do my best, and push myself, but within my capability. I love doing unique things. I also have the first immersive digital restaurant in Park Road, *7 Degrees*, among the 10 such restaurants worldwide and the first in Asia. Tourism was never a part of my original plan, but instincts and opportunities led me here. We are doing well now and among the top five tourism companies in Sri Lanka due to our dedication to offering our partners and clients what we promised.

We're straightforward, pay the government what we owe, and run a genuine business. I can sleep peacefully, knowing I haven't done anything wrong. Being truthful to yourself is all it takes. It allows you to achieve a lot. So, I'm grateful for the journey and excited about the future of HOT and the tourism industry.

As one of the top tourism companies in the country, what product does HOT offer to the market?

Like any company, we strive to offer something unique and productive. We focus on bulk business and manage 120-200 arrivals daily, increasing to 500-600 during the peak season. Our offerings mainly consist of standard round tours and approximately 15 to 30 core programs for different agents, allowing us to manage our resources efficiently. We offer specialised services such as tailor-made experiences upon specific requests, especially from repeat guests who like to experience something different rather than being part of our standard offerings. But we don't push them to choose anything beyond what we have available. This is a simple fact: we stick to what works.

What is the secret of the success of HOT?

My primary goal has always been to ensure that the people I work with know everything about the tourism industry. Many people work in companies for the sake of having a job, but I believe that passion is the key to success. It's about loving what you do and giving your best effort. That's something I've worked hard to encourage within my staff.

At HOT, we foster a family-like environment. My staff has direct access to me at any time. This open-door policy has helped to build a motivated team, and they start to give their 100% back to the company. In this industry, nobody can work at an 8 to 5 scheduled time because we have tourists to cater to. Therefore, our fundamental principle is to support employees by promoting work-life balance as our employees work under constant stress. I always say, 'If you finish your work by 4 o'clock, go home, spend time with your family, and enjoy yourself as long as your work is done.' If our employees are not happy at home, it's hard for them to be productive at work.

As a company in the tourism industry, we offer competitive salaries, provide financial support like

interest-free loans, and offer incentives to ensure our staff is satisfied and motivated. As a direct result of this approach, our energetic and young team helps us to grow in an industry where many others have struggled. Therefore, I believe the success of the tourism industry lies in its people, and it's all about how you treat them and how they treat you in return.

What are your insights on the main hurdles that the Sri Lankan tourism industry is currently encountering, such as minimum rates, visa costs and procedures, and other administrative issues?

Honestly, it's a complex topic to comment on. I've been on committees and boards, trying to bring a change, but it is challenging due to the generational gap in the industry. Some senior experts have been in tourism for 40 to 50 years and stick to outdated methods. Sri Lanka's booming tourism requires new concepts in various situations to streamline tourism operations like Vietnam and Dubai. Unfortunately, we have to deal with issues like taxi mafias, VFS procedures, administrative inefficiencies and political matters due to the greed of personal interests.

We previously had zero tax but are losing the business now due to 18% VAT. It's taking a serious toll on our profits, making it challenging to cover essential costs. Since our proposals have already been published, we've been struggling with massive losses in millions since January. These issues stem from poor communication and decisions made without input from industry experts. It's frustrating to see no results, but that's the reality.

Voicing opinions is important in those situations, but it gets cut off before it reaches where it needs to go. There are potential risks, including losing my tourism license for the next year. Therefore, it's best to go with the flow and focus on what we can do on a smaller scale within our capacity.

“ I believe the success of the tourism industry lies in its people, and it's all about how you treat them and how they treat you in return.

“ If you finish your work by 4 o’clock, go home, spend time with your family, and enjoy yourself as long as your work is done.

Further, we’re only tapping into 5% of the industry’s potential. Sri Lanka has great potential for incentive tourism, accommodating up to 5,000 or 8,000 people of a European congress. Just imagine the impact of hosting a major European congress with 2,000 attendees; the revenue and potential are enormous. We need to shift our focus towards utilising these opportunities and capitalising on our strengths to generate more revenue.

However, these ongoing issues hinder Sri Lanka’s huge potential for the tourism industry. To move forward, we must quickly streamline these basic processes and stay committed to the plans that contribute to long-term success. I’m hopeful that a tourism minister with the vision and authority to implement real change will come along.

Are you satisfied with Sri Lanka’s current approach to selecting its tourism markets and managing existing tourism resources?

There are significant challenges in how we manage our tourism resources. During the peak season last year, there was a noticeable struggle. We saw prices increase by more than 100%. Sometimes, hoteliers cancelled our allotments entirely, when they saw an opportunity for greater profit. International hotel chains also tended to raise their prices when they recognised a chance to maximise their earnings. It created significant issues for our clients, who frequently found themselves left in difficulties. As a result, we often have to pay double the price to secure rooms. Nobody can drastically reduce prices during tough times and increase them significantly when business picks up. The industry needs to manage pricing more effectively; there must be balance. Prices should increase gradually, but that’s not happening. It’s frustrating because we can’t compete under these conditions with countries like Vietnam and Seychelles, which offer more affordable rates and more facilities than we do. On the other



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hand, Indians and Russians who come to Sri Lanka drive prices down to the minimum. With such narrow profit margins, any extra service wipes out our gains. I work with Kuoni and could ask for more business, but I can’t afford to run at a loss to remain competitive in the game. I’d rather turn down the businesses that don’t at least cover their costs.

We also face challenges with vehicle availability. We lack enough chauffeur guides and vehicles to meet demand. When we asked providers to secure vehicles, they agreed, but the costs were too high for the average chauffeur to manage. This situation benefits only a few while leaving others behind. Traditional businesses like local arts and crafts are at risk of disappearing. So, where is the balance in supporting others?

Therefore, we’re at a loss here as no new investors are coming in and spending huge amounts of capital without a proper plan. There should be some regulations and standards to streamline the operations and utilise the resources wisely are a fact, but none exists.

With such an ideology, what kind of individuals are best suited to join the tourism industry?

We need passionate individuals like yourself because the tourism industry requires dedication and a willingness to learn and go beyond the basics. I hire experienced professionals and younger, talented ones because they often bring fresh perspectives and

up-to-date knowledge. With the right backing, we can unlock this industry’s full potential by investing in and supporting the development of young professionals.

I often find myself hiring graduates who accept salaries that don’t reflect their qualifications. Qualified young professionals should demand fair compensation for their degrees because they deserve respect and proper pay for their expertise. Today, many young professionals seem content to do their jobs and go home without putting in the extra time to learn something more and grow. Our generation worked 24/7 to get where we are, learning on the go and adapting as we went along. They need to understand that the tourism sector demands continuous learning and an investment of time and effort. The tourism industry in Sri Lanka can be one of the most rewarding places to build a career with incredible opportunities if someone has the qualities of patience, hard work, and commitment to constant learning. Unfortunately, many are leaving for better salaries elsewhere. If you can succeed here in Sri Lanka, you’re in one of the best places in the world. There’s no other country quite like this.

This interview was conducted with Mr Nalin Malwenna at the House of Travels & Tourism in Colombo on the 06th of May 2024.

Icy Pattipola and Warm German Kiss

Good evening! This is Peradeniya Junction Railway Station. The night mail express train from Colombo Fort to Badulla will reach the second platform in a few minutes. This train will stop at all railway stations from Gampola onwards!!!

As the familiar voice resounded through the station, I rushed to the platform to witness the most awaited journey again. The train arrived, and every seat was taken as people settled in to enjoy the cool night air. After rushing for a few minutes, the journey began towards *Pattipola*, the crown jewel of Sri Lanka's railway line, hanging high on the mountains. The night was filled with the cheerful singing of fellow passengers heading to *Badulla*, pushing my cold loneliness away.

After those human radios switched off, the rhythmic sound of the wheels broke the silence of

the late night while two German-made locomotive engines, the M6, worked together to climb the hill. The front engine led the way while the second engine pushed twelve carriages from behind. In the darkness, they silently agreed to carry the weight and overcome the hills ahead. The train moved through thick fog, passing quiet stations and echoing tunnels.

When the train reached *Great Western*, there was still no sign of the morning sun, but the mountain peak stood tall against the grey sky. The train continued and passed *Parakumpura*, where the calm pre-dawn was interrupted only by the gentle flow of the *Elgin* waterfall. Its steady hum hinted that the icy *Pattipola* was near.

Slowly passing through the beauty of the journey, the train finally arrived at *Pattipola* station. I stepped out from this metal lady to feel the cold breeze. After a few moments of enjoying the surroundings, I saw the sun was beginning to rise. Its first light slowly spread over the mountains. Suddenly, the rear engine glided slowly forward along the track towards her, the front engine. I realised the long struggle of the two locomotive engines was over. They were reunited, surpassing difficult times, and met each other in the foggy, isolated *Pattipola* station with a soft, warm metal kiss.

Yasith Nirmal



"A tourist wants to escape life. A traveller wants to experience it."

A Tourist's Guide to Love (2023)



How Much is Your Willingness to Pay for a Wildlife Safari?

Over 238,000 protected areas, including national parks, have been created worldwide for biodiversity conservation. In Sri Lanka, biodiversity conservation is mainly confined to national parks. According to scholars, wildlife tourism can potentially affect the knowledge, attitudes and behaviours of visitors to wildlife areas.

Wildlife-watching is a form of non-consumptive tourism, which can be considered a nature conservation educational activity if a professional interpreter's services accompany it. In a national park, different types of recreational services are available, among which is wildlife safari,

a recreational facility that comes with an attendant interpretive service where an interpreter/guide interprets the wildlife and natural history of the park.

In Sri Lanka, 26 national parks have been declared, and wildlife safaris are the most common recreational service found in these parks. Some of the few activities included in existing wildlife safaris are elephant-watching, bird-watching, general wildlife viewing, leopard-watching, and whale-watching.

In Sri Lanka, visitors to national parks are not offered a choice when they go on safari tours regarding the type of wildlife viewing they are interested in, such as elephant-watching, bird-watching or general wildlife viewing. Although wildlife watching is as much a recreational or educational activity, visitor requirements are often not met at national parks.

We conducted a study at the *Udawalawe National Park (UNP)*, 160 km from Colombo, the capital of Sri Lanka. UNP is a popular wildlife park for elephant-watching, bird-watching and general wildlife viewing.



As mentioned above, in this park also, visitors have no choice in their preference of the wildlife activity during the safari. They will not get a guide compatible with their interest either. As a result, the guide will lead the group based on his preference without considering the requirements of the visitors on board. Furthermore, as wildlife viewing is an educational activity, it can only be accomplished if a guide or an interpreter provides a good interpretive service. Hence, visitor satisfaction also depends on the interpretive service provided at the national park. Moreover, visitor preferences regarding wildlife viewing have to be met. In a safari service, visitors mainly consider options such as elephant-watching, bird-watching, general wildlife viewing, distance to be travelled within the national park, availability of a professional guide/nature interpreter in the safari vehicle, open-hood vehicle facility, at least one stop facility for relaxation and the price of the safari tour in addition to the ticketing price. The duration of a safari tour is four hours.

In this study, four safari tour packages (e.g., elephant-watching (EW), bird-watching (BW), general wildlife-watching (GW), and elephant and bird-watching (EB)) were proposed—the acceptance level for each safari tour package.

The highest acceptance level, 31.34%, was recorded for the elephant-watching safari tour, while the lowest acceptance level was recorded for bird-watching, 16.99%. The acceptance levels for elephant and bird-watching and general wildlife-watching tour packages were recorded at 27.02% and 24.46%, respectively. Accordingly, visitors' highest interest in the UNP was for the elephant-watching tour package and a combined elephant and bird-watching tour package, respectively. On the other hand, a few visitors were interested in the bird-watching tour package.

The 398 interviews represent 4776 cases for purposes of model estimation (398x12 treatments). A mixed logit model was applied in the data analysis. The overall demand (in terms of WTP) for a safari tour package was estimated as LKR 11062.95 per visit, which means that visitors were willing to pay that amount for a safari vehicle to watch wildlife at UNP. The highest WTP value was recorded for the bird-watching safari tour, while the lowest WTP was recorded for the elephant-watching tour. Further, the results reveal that visitors are willing to pay LKR



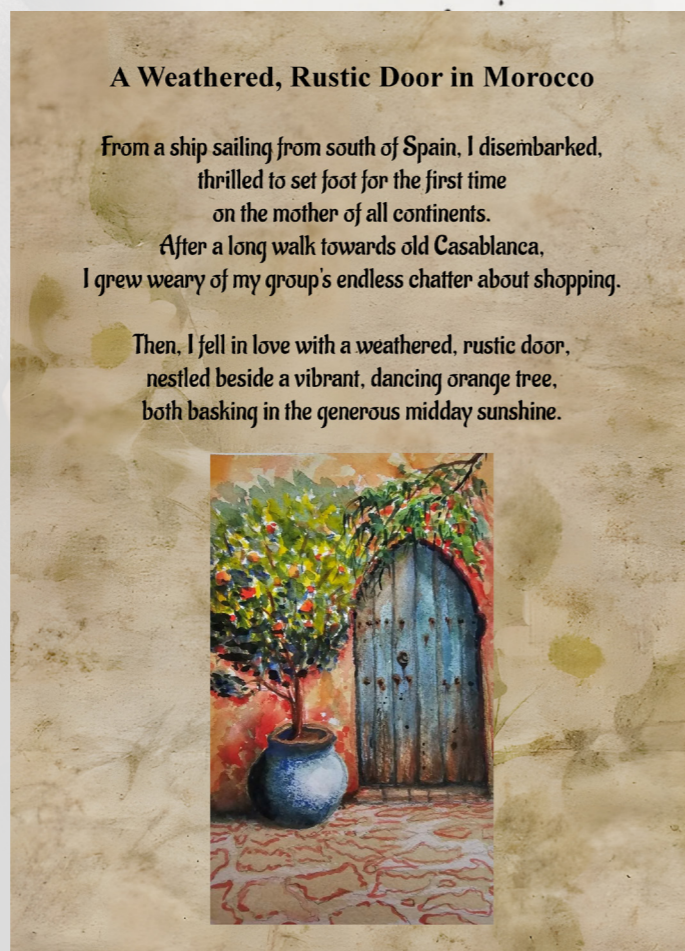
11305.75 for a safari tour that combines elephant and bird-watching. For general wildlife-watching, a WTP value of LKR 10567.85 was estimated.

Accordingly, on average, the respondents preferred the elephant-watching tour package at LKR 9834.25. If a tour package is not specified, their WTP was LKR 11062.95. There was a significant difference in demand for attributes found in tour packages. The majority were willing to pay more for the characteristics of distance to be travelled and the availability of a professional guide in the safari vehicle. The tour package had less demand for the open hood facility and one-stop relaxation service. Generally, those interested in bird-watching mainly demanded the open hood facility.

These values are essential in designing tour packages and for pricing the tour packages available at UNP. The study confirms the potential for offering four types of safari tour packages: elephant watching, elephant and bird-watching and general wildlife watching. At present, different prices are charged from visitors for a safari tour by safari jeep owners without considering visitor preferences, with the amount charged varying from, on average, LKR 7000 to LKR 12000 without a scientific basis for such price variations. There is no consideration of, for example, the vehicle condition, number of visitors in the group, travelling time, and whether the tour group is local or foreign. Hence, the present study suggests ways for park managers and safari jeep owners to design a price structure for vehicle hiring at UNP to operate safari tours properly. In addition, the study will help assign guides based on visitors' choice of tour packages as guides are knowledgeable in different fields such as bird watching, elephant watching, and general wildlife watching. There is also a need for better nature interpretation to meet visitor requirements. Hence, the park management should train their guides to become professional guides who can provide specialised knowledge to visitors in different wildlife viewing fields.



Prof. Wasantha Rathnayake
Vice Chancellor
Ocean University of Sri Lanka



A Weathered, Rustic Door in Morocco

From a ship sailing from south of Spain, I disembarked,
thrilled to set foot for the first time
on the mother of all continents.
After a long walk towards old Casablanca,
I grew weary of my group's endless chatter about shopping.

Then, I fell in love with a weathered, rustic door,
nestled beside a vibrant, dancing orange tree,
both basking in the generous midday sunshine.

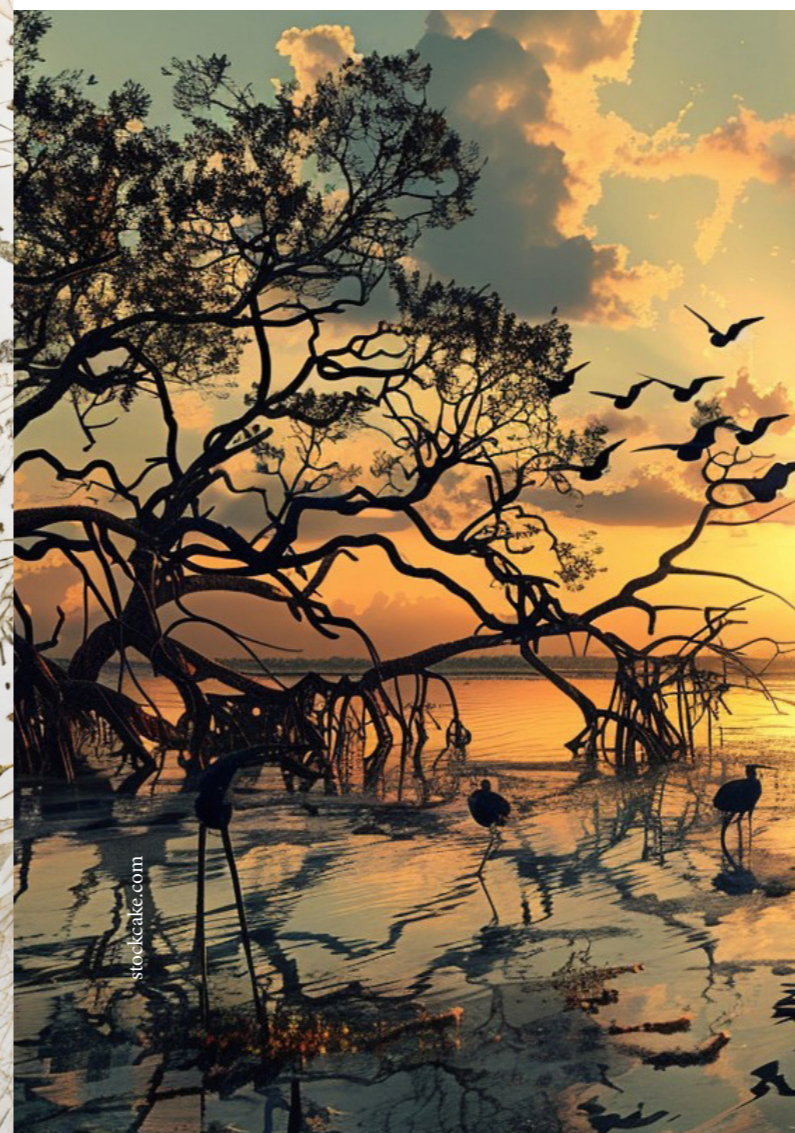
Is It Just Another *Bloody Mary - or Mary on a Cross?*

As the morning sun rises over the lush mangrove forests of *Unawatuna*, Sri Lanka, a group of enthusiastic volunteers equipped with shovels and seedlings begin their day's work. These volunteers, part of the growing trend known as *voluntourism*, have travelled from various corners of the globe to contribute to mangrove conservation efforts. While their intentions are noble, the impact of their work remains a topic of heated debate. Is voluntourism the key to saving our mangrove ecosystems, or does it come with unintended consequences?

Mangrove ecosystems are unique coastal habitats in tropical and subtropical regions, characterised by mangroves and shrubs thriving in salty, tidal environments. These ecosystems are located along coastlines, estuaries, and river deltas, crucial in maintaining coastal biodiversity and providing ecological and economic benefits. Mangroves serve as critical habitats for marine life, protect coastlines from erosion, and sequester significant amounts of carbon dioxide. However, these ecosystems face deforestation, climate change, and urban development threats. In response, Sri Lanka has turned to voluntourism, a blend of volunteering and tourism, as a potential solution to these challenges. Projects like those in *Unawatuna*, run by *Aasha Lanka*, aim to harness the power of volunteer labour to restore mangrove forests.

Voluntourism initiatives have brought several ecological benefits to mangrove conservation. Volunteers contribute directly to the physical restoration of mangrove forests, planting thousands of seedlings and aiding in the recovery of degraded areas. Due to these efforts, some projects have shown measurable increases in mangrove coverage and health. The hands-on work of volunteers often leads to immediate, tangible improvements in the landscape, making it an attractive option for conservationists looking for quick wins.

Another significant advantage of voluntourism is community engagement. Voluntourism raises awareness about conservation issues, encouraging both volunteers and residents to take an active role in protecting their environment. This collaboration fosters a sense of shared responsibility and can lead to lasting change. Volunteers often bring fresh perspectives and innovative ideas, which can inspire local communities to adopt new practices and approaches to conservation. Furthermore, voluntourism facilitates educational and cultural exchange. Volunteers often leave with a deeper understanding of environmental issues and a greater appreciation for different cultures. This exchange can be mutually beneficial, with locals gaining new skills and knowledge from their international counterparts. The cultural exchange aspect of voluntourism can also help break down barriers and build bridges between different communities, fostering a sense of global cooperation and understanding and making the audience feel part of a larger, united community.



Despite these benefits, voluntourism is not without its critiques. One primary concern is the sustainability of these projects. Critics argue that voluntourism often provides temporary fixes rather than long-term solutions. Projects may depend too heavily on the influx of volunteers, failing to build local capacity and resilience. As *Antlers* once sang,

*Travelling on the wind, carrying credentials
Abandoning anything, strangling potential
Galloping, inhabiting nothing inessential
Scattering, wondering, Am I incidental?
Sprout here another year, volunteer.*

When the volunteers leave, the locals often feel abandoned and left to struggle on their own. Despite their efforts, these communities still hope volunteers will return and stay for another year, leaving them vulnerable and uncertain. The lack of continuity and long-term planning can undermine the goals of voluntourism.

Another critique of voluntourism focuses on its socio-economic impacts. Voluntourism can disrupt local economies, potentially displacing local jobs or creating power imbalances. Some community members might feel overshadowed or marginalised by the presence of foreign volunteers, leading to tension and resentment. In some cases, the influx of volunteers can distort local labour markets, driving down wages or making it difficult for locals to find work. The presence of foreign volunteers can also create a dynamic where locals feel they are not capable of managing their conservation efforts, continuing a dependency on external assistance. This can undermine local leadership and discourage community-driven initiatives. Ensuring that voluntourism projects are designed to empower local communities and build their capacity for self-sustaining conservation is crucial to avoiding these pitfalls.

Environmental risks must also be considered. Poorly planned voluntourism projects can inadvertently cause more harm than good, such as introducing invasive species or disrupting local ecosystems. Ensuring proper training and oversight is crucial to mitigating these risks and ensuring ecologically sound conservation efforts. Volunteers may not always have the necessary expertise or knowledge to undertake complex conservation tasks, leading to unintended consequences. For example,



planting the wrong species of mangroves or planting them in inappropriate locations can lead to ecological imbalances and hinder the natural regeneration of the ecosystem. Effective voluntourism programs must incorporate scientific guidance and work closely with local experts to ensure their efforts are beneficial rather than detrimental.

Several best practices can be implemented to balance the benefits and drawbacks of voluntourism. First and foremost, projects must be designed with sustainability in mind. This means creating long-term plans that do not rely solely on the presence of volunteers but instead build local capacity and resilience. Engaging local communities in the planning and execution of conservation projects ensures that their needs and perspectives are considered, leading to more sustainable outcomes. Training and education are also critical components of successful voluntourism. Volunteers should receive comprehensive training on the specific ecological and cultural contexts of the areas they will be working in. This training should cover the technical aspects of conservation work and the local

community's social and cultural dynamics. Volunteers can make meaningful contributions and avoid causing unintentional harm by being well-prepared.

Examining specific case studies can provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of voluntourism. Due to their holistic approach, several projects have succeeded in *Unawatuna*, Sri Lanka. These projects involve local communities from the outset, ensuring their knowledge and expertise are incorporated into conservation efforts. By combining volunteer labour with local wisdom, these projects have achieved measurable increases in mangrove coverage and health. In contrast, other projects have faced challenges. In some cases, voluntourism initiatives have failed to deliver long-term benefits due to a lack of local involvement and inadequate planning. For instance, some Southeast Asian projects struggled after volunteers left, as the local community was not sufficiently trained to continue the work. This highlights the importance of building local capacity and ensuring that voluntourism efforts are not just a short-term fix.

Ethical considerations are paramount in voluntourism. Ensuring that projects are conducted with respect for local communities and ecosystems is essential. This means avoiding practices that could exploit or marginalise local people and ensuring that volunteers are aware of and sensitive to their work areas' cultural and social dynamics. Transparency and accountability are also crucial. Voluntourism organisations should be open about their goals, methods, and impacts, providing clear information to volunteers and local communities. This transparency builds trust and ensures that all stakeholders are informed and engaged. As we consider the complex world of voluntourism in mangrove conservation, we must ask ourselves critical questions:

- Are we truly making a positive impact, or are we merely applying temporary fixes to deeper structural issues?
- How can we ensure our efforts are sustainable and respectful of the communities and ecosystems we aim to help?

Ultimately, the success of voluntourism depends on our collective commitment to ethical, sustainable, and community-driven conservation practices. Just as we question whether our efforts are just another

temporary and superficial *Bloody Mary* or a genuine, lasting commitment like *Mary on a Cross*, we must reflect on these questions and strive to improve. By doing so, we can work towards a future where voluntourism contributes meaningfully to preserving and restoring our precious mangrove ecosystems.



Hasanga Gagalagamuwe



Rangana Shalika, PhD
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In evergreen forests like Knuckles, some plants can cause pain if touched. Stay aware and cautious!



Jaffna Odiyal Kool

Jaffna Odiyal Kool is a traditional Tamil seafood soup, especially from Sri Lanka's Northern Coast. The main ingredient that sets this dish apart is *odiyal* flour, made from the dried tuber of the palmyra tree. Diced coconut pieces are often served alongside the soup to balance the body heat.

This recipe is enough for eight servings,

- ▶ Fish – 1.5kg
 - ▶ Cuttlefish– 250g
 - ▶ Crab – 500g
 - ▶ Prawn– 250g
 - ▶ Cassava – 350g
 - ▶ Jackfruit seeds – 200g
 - ▶ Palmyra flour (Odiyal flour)– 75g
 - ▶ Long beans – 100g
 - ▶ Cooked rice – 100g
 - ▶ Soaked dry red chilli – 75g
 - ▶ Turmeric powder – 1 teaspoon
 - ▶ Salt – As you taste
 - ▶ Tamarind juice – 600ml
 - ▶ Water – 2000ml
- First, soak the palmyra flour for 30 minutes and strain the water. Then, soak it again for another 10 minutes and strain the water. Repeat this process at least three times to prevent bitterness of the palmyra flour. After the final straining, use a clean cloth to squeeze out any remaining water from the palmyra flour.
 - Prepare the crabs, fish, prawns and cuttlefish to cook. Peel and chop cassava and jackfruit seeds into bite-sized pieces. Add the water, turmeric powder and salt as your taste to a spacious earthenware pot and boil until all ingredients are cooked thoroughly under a high flame for 15 minutes. In the meantime, cut the long beans and keep them aside.
 - Grind the soaked dry red chillies and tamarind juice to get a thick paste. Once it starts to simmer, add it to the boiled mixture to taste the unique Jaffna flavour.
 - Then, add the squeezed palmyra flour and mix well. After a few minutes, add long beans and cooked rice to the soup. Simmer it for another 2 minutes under a medium flame. Then, slightly mash the mixture.
 - Pour the soup into the coconut shell and garnish it with grated and diced coconut; serve it with a palmyra leaf as a spoon.

Shimara Zuwaid



Department of Tourism Management



Hin Bus Depot: Revitalising Historical Buildings as Sustainable Hub in the Heart of Georgetown, Penang through Creative Tourism

Hin Bus Depot, located in the heart of Penang, has a rich historical significance as a former bus terminal. However, it fell into disuse and neglect due to changing transportation needs. Recognising its potential, the local authorities embarked on a project to repurpose the depot and transform it into a cultural and educational space. Around 2013, Lithuanian artist Ernest Zacharevic sought a venue for his first solo exhibition. The new owners introduced him to an old bus depot in George Town, Penang, whose dilapidated yet original architecture appealed to him. After minimal repairs, the depot was transformed into an exhibition space for his *Art Is Rubbish Is Art* show. The event's unexpected success and extensive media coverage, particularly on social media, led to the establishment of the *Hin Bus Depot Art Centre* as a permanent creative art space for future public art events and activities.

Surrounding Accessibility

Excellent public transport is a major component of a development plan. Rapid Penang Bus lines 11, 201, 203, 204, and 502 simplify city transit. Strategically placing transport hubs near the station makes travelling easier and encourages people to use the efficient public transport system for their trips. This makes *Hin Bus Depot* a convenient local and tourist hub. In addition to its convenient accessibility, the strategic placement of *Hin Bus Depot* includes many local retail malls and attractions. The *Top Penang*, *Penang Hill*, *1st Avenue*, *Prangin Mall*, and *Gurney Paragon* are all nearby, making *Hin Bus Depot* a great place to explore and relax. The development plan places *Hotel NEO+*, *Sunway Hotel Georgetown*, and *Granite Luxury Hotel Penang* within walking distance for tourists' convenience. This makes accommodations accessible and creates safe environments.

Tourist area pedestrianisation improves safety and encourages exploration. Residents and tourists may stroll safely and comfortably on well-maintained pavements and pathways. The pedestrian-friendly infrastructure creates cohesion and makes *Hin Bus Depot* a pleasant walking destination for visitors to enjoy traditional and heritage foods without paying a dime. This exhibition might serve as a platform for spreading knowledge and educating the younger generation about traditional cuisines.

A Canvas of Possibilities

The transformation of the historical buildings exemplifies sustainability through adaptive reuse and repurposing existing infrastructure rather than constructing anew. This approach contributes to the balance of heritage preservation and economic development of the *Georgetown, Penang*, and *Hin Bus Depot* development by breathing new life into a historical site. The 1947 depot was converted into a modern art space in 2013. This has created an environment that blends history and the present, essential to the development strategy. As *Hin Bus Depot* continues to evolve, the possibilities are endless. With the support of government initiatives and private investment, it has the potential to expand its reach and impact further, positioning *Penang* as a leading destination for creativity, innovation, and sustainable development. What sets *Hin Bus Depot* apart is its commitment to fostering creativity in all its forms. From graffiti-covered walls to avant-garde galleries, every nook and cranny of this space exudes artistic expression. With regular exhibitions, workshops, and events, it has become a melting pot of talent, attracting established artists and emerging artists.

Connecting Communities

The hub actively engages with the local community, offering affordable spaces for artists and fostering a sense of community. This social sustainability aspect contributes to the local population's well-being and establishes a collaborative and supportive environment. *Hin Bus Depot* serves as a platform to bridge the gap between the art community and residents, fostering greater public engagement with art. This aligns with the growing trend in tourism, where visitors seek authentic and community-oriented experiences. The hub becomes a cultural attraction and a catalyst for interaction and collaboration within the local community.



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Guyanese Lights in the Amazon Rainforest

Settled in my new home in Georgetown,
I embarked on hours-long journeys by truck and boat,
through the vast Amazon,
the largest rainforest on Earth,
encompassing half the South American continent.

For the next two years, this adventure became my weekly ritual.
Beyond deep brown rivers and towering trees,
I witnessed a symphony of lights and colours,
As if painted by an abstract artist's imagination.



Embracing True Sustainability

Sustainability has become one of the most popular buzzwords in every industry in recent decades. According to the United Nations (UN), sustainability is meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Moreover, it describes the husbanding of natural capital, harmonising consumption and preservation. Almost 140 countries worldwide are trying hard to achieve the UN's 17 Sustainable Developmental Goals (SDGs). The overriding priority of SDGs is to attain quality lives for all on a vigorous planet by 2030 (UN, 2024).

The concept of sustainability stems from the field of forest engineering. It states that timber harvest should not surpass the growth of new trees, demonstrating that use and conservation should be done simultaneously through forest management (Pisani, 2006). Weak and strong sustainability are the two sub-concepts of the major notion of sustainability (Beder, 1996).

Weak sustainability is the idea that people can use natural resources as they please and degrade the environment. Nevertheless, human skill, technology, knowledge, and man-made capital compensate for the destruction. In simple terms, weak sustainability believes that natural capital can be substituted by human-made capital so that the total capital stock

is maintained or increased, leading to sustainability. For instance, introducing energy-efficient machinery to a particular process diminishes the damage done to natural resources. This approach aims to guarantee that future generations will have an equivalent level of access to resources, albeit not necessarily the same types of resources. This perspective of achieving sustainability pursues economic development reinforced by innovation and technological advancement.

Though weak sustainability is an alternative to achieving sustainability, it could have adverse implications for the natural environment if an adequate combination of man-made resources and technologies is not made. Technological innovation is essential under weak sustainability to ensure a smooth transaction between destruction and compensation. Consequently, there is a tendency to prioritise economic growth and technological development over environmental conservation sometimes in policy preparation.

On the other hand, strong sustainability emphasises that natural capital is unique and cannot be compensated by man-made capital. This branch of sustainability stresses the conservation of natural resources in their original state on the grounds of non-substitutability, irreversibility, equity, and diversity (Beder, 1996). The major focus is protecting and conserving natural capital to certify long-term ecological stability. Strong sustainability confirms that future generations inherit a stock of natural capital that is undiminished or enhanced. Unlike weak sustainability, strong sustainability brings positive impacts on the natural environment. It promotes sustainable management of natural resources. Modifications are required to current economic models and practices to support this notion. Further, the relevant authorities should enforce strict environmental regulations and conservation policies.

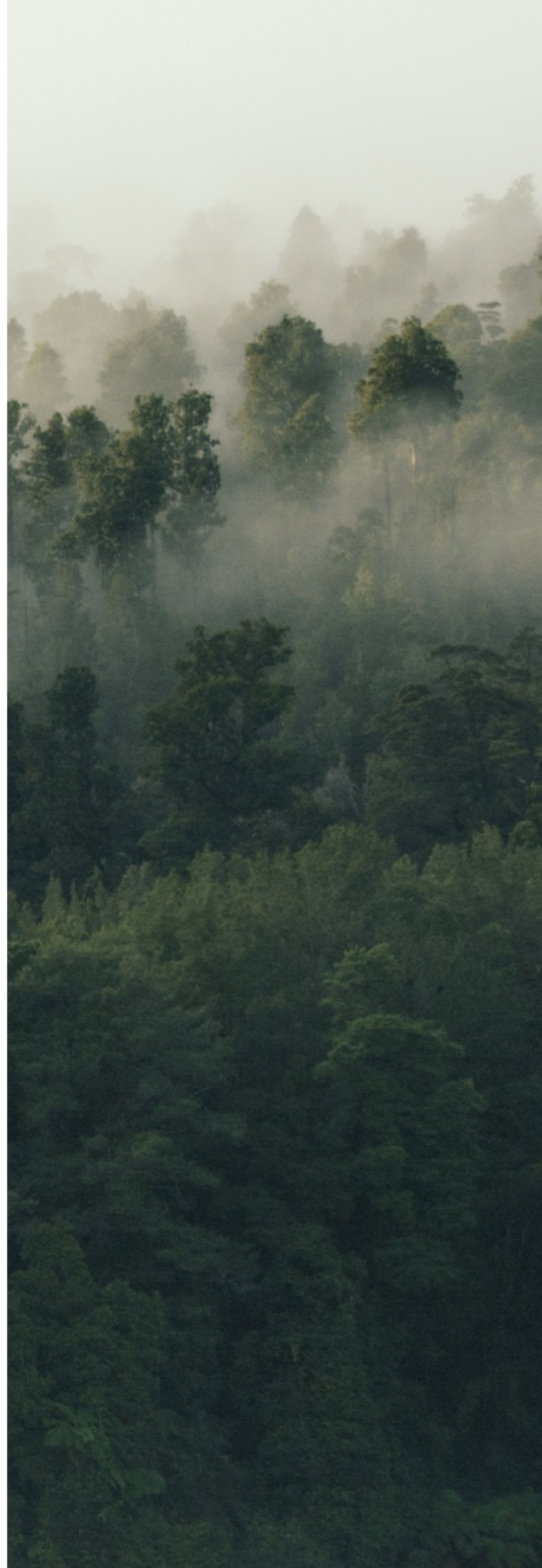
Both weak and strong approaches to sustainability aid in developing various philosophies for achieving long-term sustainability. Weak sustainability relies on technological advancements and economic growth, potentially disregarding the intrinsic value of natural ecosystems. On the other hand, strong sustainability underscores the irreplaceable nature of natural capital and the necessity for conservation, possibly conflicting with conventional economic models. Finding a harmonious balance between these

perspectives is crucial for formulating policies that concurrently foster economic prosperity and ecological well-being for future generations.

The tourism industry is one of the main drivers of economic growth in Sri Lanka. The successful delivery of tourism services relies heavily on the natural environment and local communities. Under these circumstances, striking a balance between economic, social, and environmental factors in the tourism industry is challenging. Achieving true sustainability in the tourism industry should be painstakingly done. Adopting weak and strong sustainability paradigms in the tourism industry would support the creation of more avenues for stakeholders. Weak sustainability in tourism prioritises economic growth over environmental conservation. It consistently endeavours to elevate the tourist experience through infrastructure development, even if it compromises the natural environment. Most mass tourism destinations and high-end luxury resorts built in ecologically sensitive areas promote weak sustainability by adopting new technology, such as energy-efficient buildings, waste management systems, water recycling, etc., to reduce the impact they create. Since economic development is the primary focus, they primarily rely on market-driven solutions such as green marketing and eco-tourism certifications to promote sustainability.

Here, tourism practices embrace weak sustainability, acknowledging that a degree of environmental impact can be tolerated since significant economic and social benefits are sought. Sometimes, adverse environmental impacts could result in social disparities and marginalisation of local communities in the long run.

Facilitating the raw experience of a culture, environment, feeling, experiences, etc., without harming or altering its initial state will lead to embracing strong sustainability. It tries to mitigate or avoid negative environmental impacts and promote conservation at the expense of economic growth. Protected areas, community-based tourism, etc., which limit tourist activities promoting local communities' involvement, are some examples of strong sustainability in tourism. Strong sustainability in tourism requires rethinking economic models to prioritise environmental conservation. This limits conventional tourism but it should also ensure long-term ecological health and economic growth.



It is imperative to ensure that we practice true sustainability, not just greenwashing. Financial perks always drive human beings to follow industry trends. However, rethinking ways to create and deliver untouched tourist satisfaction by truly balancing economic, social, and environmental benefits is a requirement of the century. Trying to convey the authentic experience without distorting its essence and prioritising financial gain simultaneously would be a strong business model for the tourism industry since being a true part of the natural environment and experiencing its serenity has become a luxury in modern times.

Fostering the protection and revitalisation of natural ecosystems, advancing long-term ecological balance and resilience, encouraging social equity and community involvement, and ensuring fair distribution of tourism benefits and preservation of cultural heritage while simultaneously improving economic growth is essential for the tourism industry. These efforts will ultimately lead to true sustainability and positive outcomes for all stakeholders in tourism.


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 Releasing turtles during the daytime is risky because active seabirds prey on them. To ensure turtles' safety, it's best to stick to releasing them from dawn till dusk.





Kalana Jayan Photography

Symbols of Faith to the God

The *Ruhunu Maha Kataragama Devale* is an admired religious site full of traditional rituals. It is the heart of three grand processions: The *New Year Perahera*, the *Esala Perahera*, and the *Ilmaha Kartika Perahera*. The *Kataragama Esala Perahera* is among the glamorous cultural events for those searching for an authentic Sri Lankan experience. It typically occurs annually during July and August, aligning with the *Esala* full moon. The purposes of holding *Kataragama Perahera* are to ward off evil menaces, to receive God's blessings, to bring prosperity to the country, to obtain rain and fertility, and to protect the country from natural calamities. After the festival begins, religious rituals are performed for 15 days, treating God with great devotion.

The procession is initiated by planting a tree called *Kapa*. The people believe that the *Lord Kataragama* resides in *Kapa* during the procession period in the month of *Esala* (July). Therefore, the planted *Kapa* is considered a sacrificial object. The first procession is called the *Magul Perahera* (royal procession). On the day of the *Perahera*, traditional sweets like *Kawum*, *Kokis*, and Milk Rice are prepared, a tradition that dates back to the days of kings. A wonderful procession on the second day is known as *Dewol Perahera* and *Hora Perahera*. This name stems from the legend that God *Kataragama* secretly brought *Valli Amma* to *Kataragama Devale* from *Tevani Amma*.

On that day, the air is filled with the lively sound of *Haro-Hara* chants from the Tamil devotees as they ring bells and sing melodious chorales, which accompany the procession. Illuminated by glowing torches, the procession reveals like a royal display, graced with flowers and the aromatic sprinkle of turmeric, purifying the path ahead.

At the front of the procession, flags representing the Sun, Moon, and Buddhist culture wave proudly, indicating unity and respect. The rich traditional dances feature the graceful movements of *upcountry*, *low country*, and *Sabaragamu* dancers, each

performance a vibrant expression of Sri Lanka's cultural heritage. The *Peacock* and *Kavadi* dances steal the spotlight, charming witnesses with their rhythmic beauty and deep symbolism. Majestic elephants roam alongside, pleasing the majesty of this memorable procession to the eye, symbolising the spirit of devotion and celebration that defines the *Kataragama Esala Perahera*.

Before the procession begins, a layer of pristine white sand is spread across the temple courtyard and surrounding roads as a sacred tribute to God. This unique offering invites devotees to roll upon the sand, representing their vows and deep devotion. A significant highlight of the ceremony is the chanting of *pirith* by the *Maha Sanga*, the revered monks, filling the atmosphere with spiritual energy as they give blessings before the procession commences.

On the sixth day of the procession, the *Athupandalam* ritual takes place. In this ritual, medicinal branches are placed in front of the *Devale*, the sacred worship site, reflecting health and well-being. This day also marks the initial participation of the *Basnayake Nilame*, a high-ranking official responsible for overseeing the procession, further elevating its importance.

Among the rituals associated with the *Kataragama Perahera*, the devotees engage in gruelling feats such as treading on fire, performing rituals, and vowing by rolling on the ground and pricking their bodies with needles to express their devotion to God. Three days before the procession's conclusion, the dramatic ritual of fire treading occurs. A large bonfire is lit before the *Devale*, where devotees step onto the glowing ashes, representing their hopes and wishes through this courageous act of faith.

The water-cutting ritual takes place as the procession draws to a close. This sacred act cleanses any negativity, praying for peace and happiness for the nation while expressing gratitude to the God of *Kataragama*. It is a witness to Sri Lanka's rich cultural heritage, upholding the time-honoured rituals that have been admired since royal times.



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Crossroad: The Dilemma of Romantic Utopia and Truth



We were lost in hope, exhausted from fighting. It felt like our love was slipping away. Then, he did something unexpected. Instead of a random coffee shop in Colombo, he suggested we take a long trip together. He wanted to spend real time with me, to mend what was broken. He decided to take me far away with his lovely girl, the black scooter. Boys and their bikes, right?

He picked me up early one morning, and we set off from Colombo to Hatton. The city faded behind us as we rode through winding roads and lush green landscapes. The fresh air and beautiful scenery felt like a healing touch to our weary souls. We needed this escape!

On the first day, our journey took us to *Aberdeen Falls*. The sight of the water cascading down, surrounded by nature's beauty, was breathtaking. We stood hand in hand, letting the mist cool our faces. It was a moment of peace, a reminder of why we were together.

Next, we visited *Norton Bridge*. The bridge seemed to hang in the air, surrounded by dense forest, with the river below reflecting the clear blue sky. We walked hand in hand, the serenity of the place wrapping around us like a warm embrace. Suddenly, he stopped and picked a small bouquet of wildflowers growing near the path. He turned to me with a smile, his eyes twinkling with mischief and love, and handed me the flowers.



"For you," he said softly, tucking a stray hair behind my ear. I took the flowers, their delicate fragrance mixing with the fresh mountain air. It was a simple gesture, but it spoke volumes. We stood there for a while, the bridge beneath us, the flowers in my hand, and the vast beauty of nature. The view from the bridge was breathtaking, but it was his thoughtfulness that made my heart swell with love. For lunch, we found a quaint Tamil restaurant. The biriyani was incredible, rich with spices and flavours. Over that meal, we talked about our dreams and plans, and slowly, the walls between us began crumbling.

That night, we stayed in a cosy inn, the warmth of the place wrapping around us like a comforting blanket. For dinner, we had a beautiful candlelit meal. He surprised me with a bottle of JP. Chenet. He knows me so well that he remembered how I always smile when I see a bottle of good wine, especially JP. Chenet. The rich, velvety taste of the wine was perfect, adding a touch of elegance to our evening.



As we sipped our glasses, the flickering candlelight cast a warm glow on our faces. We toasted to us, our journey, and the love that had brought us here. The conversation flowed easily, filled with laughter and deep talks about our future. Later, we danced under the stars, the night air filled with romance and the soft sounds of the countryside.

On the second day, we brought even more adventure. We visited *Diyaluma Falls*, one of the tallest waterfalls in Sri Lanka. The hike to the top was challenging, but we helped each other along the way, our laughter echoing through the trees. The view from the top was worth every step.

As we rode towards *Belihuloya*, we found a hidden road that led us to a secluded pond. It was a serene spot, the water reflecting the sky above. We sat by the pond, our feet dipped in the cool water, and shared a quiet moment. It felt like the world had stopped just for us.



For lunch, we had *pol roti* with *lunu miris* and *polos*. The simple meal tasted like a feast in that beautiful setting. Plain tea accompanied our meal, warming us from the inside out. As we ate, we talked about our future, making plans and dreaming big. It was a reminder that prioritising each other could sort out everything no matter how tough things get.

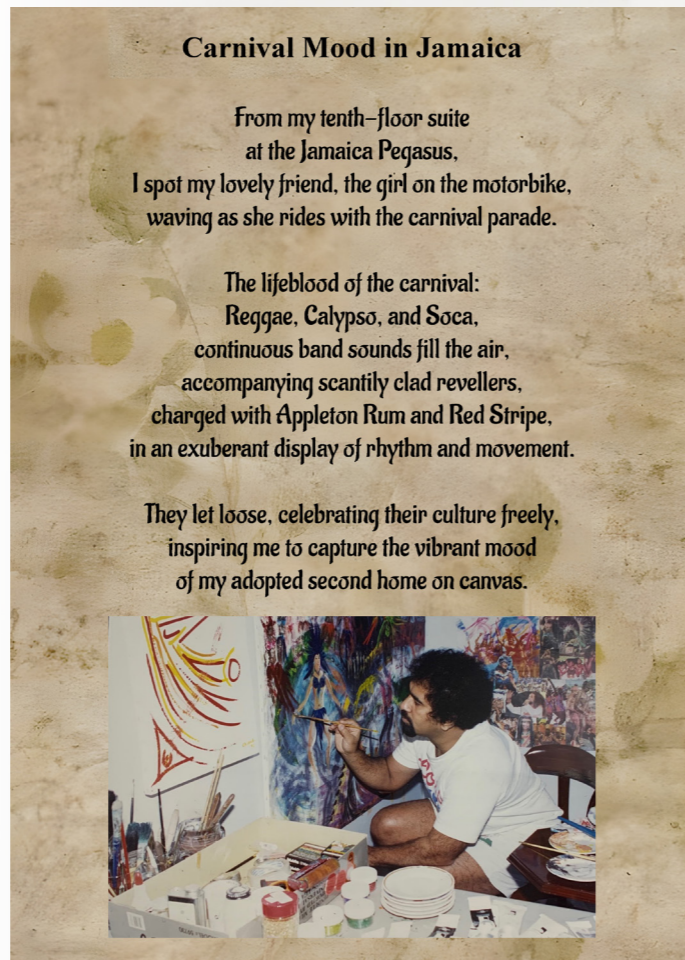
The rain caught us by surprise on our way back. We got soaked, but instead of being annoyed, we embraced the moment. We laughed and danced in the rain, our clothes clinging to us as we moved. When we found shelter, we kissed, hidden from the world. It was a moment of pure joy and love.

Our scooter broke down on a misty road, leaving us stranded for three hours. But even this inconvenience turned into a cherished memory. We sat by the roadside, huddled together for warmth, and talked about everything and nothing. It felt like time stood still, and we were the only two people in the world. When our scooter was finally repaired, we continued our journey back to *Belihuloya*. The sun was setting, casting a golden glow over the landscape. We rode in silence, the sound of the engine and the wind in our ears. We knew this trip had changed us. It brought us closer, healed our wounds, and reminded us why we fell in love in the first place.

As we arrived back in *Belihuloya*, we knew this was a journey we'd remember forever. The roads we travelled, the places we discovered, and the moments we shared had woven a tapestry of memories that would stay with us always. Riding our scooter through the lovely hill country roads was better than we ever hoped, bringing us closer together and filling our hearts with joy. We parked the scooter and sat by a quiet spot, watching the sun dip below the horizon. The silence between us was comfortable, filled with the unspoken understanding that this trip had brought us closer than ever.

We knew this was just the beginning of many more adventures. This trip was not just a journey through the hill country but a journey of the heart, rekindling our love and deepening our bond. With hearts full of love and dreams of the future, we looked forward to the next chapter of our lives, ready to embrace it together. The journey had truly made a deep, loving connection between us, and we were excited to see where the road would take us next.

Charithma Dissanayake



Carnival Mood in Jamaica

From my tenth-floor suite
at the Jamaica Pegasus,
I spot my lovely friend, the girl on the motorbike,
waving as she rides with the carnival parade.

The lifeblood of the carnival:
Reggae, Calypso, and Soca,
continuous band sounds fill the air,
accompanying scantily clad revellers,
charged with Appleton Rum and Red Stripe,
in an exuberant display of rhythm and movement.

They let loose, celebrating their culture freely,
inspiring me to capture the vibrant mood
of my adopted second home on canvas.



Travel around Sri Lanka in 360°

Standing on the iconic *Sigiriya Rock Fortress*, witnessing the stunning views under the Sri Lankan sky, walking across the historic *Nine Arch Bridge* in *Ella*, with its arching curves, or feeling the refreshing mist of *Sera Ella* in *Matale*, as the waterfall falls into a calming forested heaven, all without ever leaving someone's home. This is the magic of 360° virtual tours, a revolutionary way to explore the world and spark the desire to travel.

Looking into the future of travel, 360° virtual tours create a new narrative bringing the world's wonders only a click away. Sri Lanka, with its rich tradition and natural beauty, is adopting cutting-edge technology to modernise its tourism industry. Emerging virtual reality (VR) Platforms are

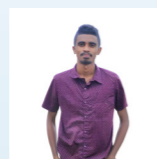
bringing the island's wonders directly to our screens via VR headsets, computers, and even smartphones. VR tours are more than just a digital innovation; they link the island's rich heritage and natural beauty with curious minds around the world.

VR tourism offers a sneak peek into destinations, building anticipation and excitement for future journeys. These immersive experiences provide a compelling preview of what Sri Lanka can offer its potential tourists allowing them to explore attractions virtually before making travel plans. VR tours significantly influence travel decisions allowing viewers to *experience* the destination from afar. They serve as a powerful tool for tourism promotion, giving a taste of what awaits in this island paradise.

Furthermore, VR tourism is a game-changer for differently-abled individuals who may find physical travel challenging. Through 360° video and high-resolution imagery, these travellers can *walk* through vibrant cities, *stand* atop breathtaking mountains, or *stroll* along serene beaches, all while remaining comfortably at home. It serves as an inclusive platform and allows those with mobility challenges to explore Sri Lanka, a tiny spot on the world map in ways they could not have imagined before, expanding the horizons of travel for everyone.

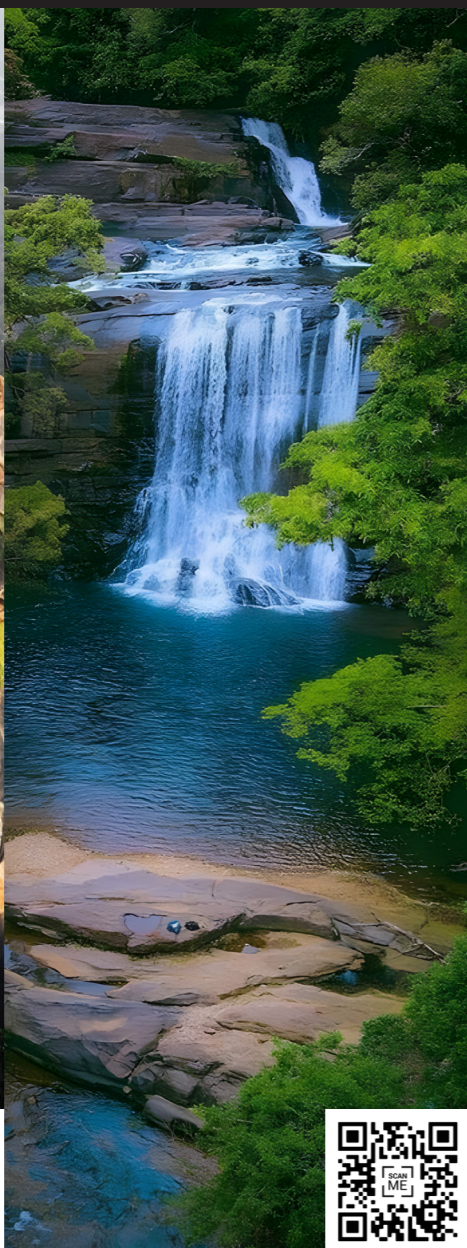
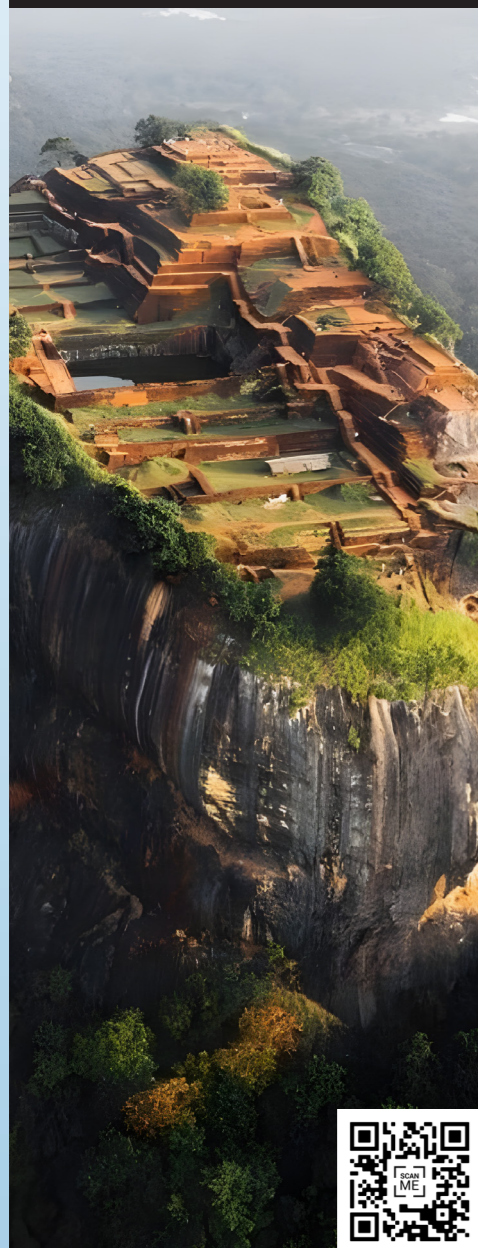
Each virtual tour acts as an invitation, a call to adventure that hints at the fantastic destinations waiting to be explored in person. As they navigate these immersive experiences, their thirst for travel grows with each virtual step, which sparks a deeper desire to experience Sri Lanka's beauty firsthand. It draws travellers into a world where dreams and reality blend.

So, why wait?



Chathura Anuradha Subasinghe
Founder 360view.lk

Explore some glimpses into Sri Lanka's iconic places that are perfect for those wishing to experience them digitally by following the QR codes.



PAINKILLER

Due to its rich, sweet, tangy and slightly spicy flavours, the Painkiller cocktail is a staple in tropical bars around the world. Originating from the British Virgin Islands, this cocktail is perfect for relaxing on a sunny beach or enjoying a laid-back evening.

- 2 oz of Dark Rum
- 4 oz of Pineapple juice
- 1 oz Orange juice
- 1 oz Coconut cream
- A pinch of freshly grated nutmeg
- A slice of pineapple

First, add ice, dark rum, pineapple juice, orange juice, and coconut cream to the shaker. The dark rum provides a deep, complex flavour, complemented by the refreshing, fruity touch of pineapple and orange juices, while the coconut cream adds a creamy texture. Shake well and let the ingredients blend together. Strain the mixture into a glass filled with ice. For the final touch, sprinkle freshly grated nutmeg over the top, adding a hint of spice to the cocktail and top it with a slice of pineapple to add a vibrant tropical touch.

Nimasha Sewwandi



A Symphony of Nature and Culture: Our Journey at Wild Glamping Gal Oya

We chose Wild Glamping Gal Oya (WGGO), a subsidiary of the Thema Collection in Sri Lanka, noting its exemplary sustainable practices in our interdisciplinary collaborative research. After conducting a few interviews with the top management of the head office to analyse the context, we decided to visit WGGO on 22nd May 2024 while the whole country was preparing for the celebration of Vesak.

We reached WGGO by 9:30 a.m. A thatched roof tractor, known locally as a land master, was a moving shelter that refrained us from the extreme sun's heat unique to the area. While we were having short and silly casual conversations, it took us from the car park to the hotel's lobby, surpassing the rough nature of the journey and the terrain of the premises for 15 minutes. Upon our arrival at WGGO, two *Rathugala* Indigenous people welcomed us at the hotel entrance with a unique phrase: *mama kachak hodamai*. It is a greeting derived from the indigenous

language, like the traditional *Ayubowan* or wishing you a long life, which later became a cherished part of our team's communicative interactions. We were first offered a refreshing watermelon welcome drink, perfect for cooling us down on a warm day. While adorning the hotel's surrounding beauty, our communication with the Indigenous people until noon offered us a rare glimpse into their lives and their integral role in the hotel's operations. As the day progressed, we were served authentic Sri Lankan cuisine featuring a delicious spread: jackfruit curry, dhal curry, fried fish, *gotu kola sambal*, chicken, drumstick curry, sinhala pickle, *ambarella curry*, *papadam*, and red rice. Although these dishes were familiar, organic ingredients undoubtedly enhanced the flavours. Following lunch, we were served curd, made from the milk of locally raised cows paired perfectly with honey harvested by the villagers.

After enjoying a delicious lunch, the staff of WGGO accompanied us in a land master to a nearby wild

trail, allowing us to explore the lush greenery of the jungle guided by *Bandila Aththo* (*Danigala Maha Bandaralage Gunasiri*) and the two naturalists of WGGO. During our journey, we stopped at the *Vedda's Heritage Centre* in *Rathugala*, where we explored the ancient caves once inhabited by Indigenous communities. Our Indigenous guide, *Bandila Aththo*, explained how they survived in the cave, which provided ample space for the Indigenous families. He taught us traditional dances and recited beautiful poems, each melody deeply touching and reflecting the peaceful, simple lives of those who once lived in the jungle. We could escape our busy modern lives for a few hours and experience simplicity during our walk.

After exploring the cave, we entered the jungle, choosing the easiest path among the various adventurous ones to save time. As we continued our walk, seeing numerous trees with medicinal properties left us in awe. Some wild leaves with thorns cut Hiran's finger during the walk. *Bandila Aththo* quickly gathered some medicinal leaves, crushed them, and applied them to the wound. Then, the mood turned thrilled when we reached a stream, where Hiran's unexpected slip into the water brought laughter and energy to our journey. A few miles later, we reached a water stream flowing through a rocky plain, providing a perfect spot to sit and rest in the heart of the jungle. We splashed it on our faces to cool off and sat on the stone to relax. As we headed back, *Bandila Aththo* pointed out evidence of wild elephants that had recently been nearby. It was impressive how they could sense this and stay calm, knowing how to navigate safely around those animals. With the fresh jungle air filling our lungs, we exited the forest as the sun set and returned to the WGGO. We walked away with valuable insights and memories that will stay with us.

Our visit to WGGO was more than a research trip; it was a journey into a world where sustainability is a lived reality. The experience highlighted the importance of connecting with nature, culture, and each other. We gained knowledge through the collaboration with the *Rathugala* indigenous people, felt grateful, and were rejuvenated by the beauty of Gal Oya. It also reinforced the lesson that true sustainability comes from understanding and respecting the balance between humans and the environment, something we will carry forward in our work.



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 Bees produce delicious and healthy honey. Their hive is more than just a source of treats. Respect their home, or you may feel their sting instead!





© Iraj Ratnayake

ELEPHANT ROCK

Elephant Rock is located on a secluded coastline 4km away from *Panama*, on the southern corner of Arugambay Beach, Sri Lanka. It is a natural metamorphic rock formation similar to the profile of a giant elephant gazing at the ocean. Elephant Rock is popular among surfers due to the soft breaks of the waves, which create an ideal playground for beginners, allowing them to catch their first waves confidently.

To reach Elephant Rock, travellers must walk along a dusty road surrounded by shrubs, wild bushes, and paddy fields, where elephants, bears, and buffaloes roam freely in their natural habitat, giving hints of

the wilderness in the *Panama* area. This off-the-beaten track quietly paves the path to the beach's edge, where Elephant Rock rises above the lush.

The bottom of the rock is marked with dark grooves scattered here and there, and a little Buddha statue can be seen under a rock overhang halfway through climbing, providing a vantage point to take in the sight of surfers mastering the waves below. After a short climb, a narrow path to the left leads through a small hole in the rock, creating a winding trail that wraps around the entire formation, offering stunning views of the seamless Indian Ocean. Alternatively, to the right, a shorter climb leads to a ledge to soak

in the panoramic scenery of the horizon. The fishing boats are scattered like dotted lines in the view from the top, while fishermen, surfers and palm trees can be seen in the distance.

The view of replication and the light of the orange clouds falling into the ocean, marshes, and lagoons gives the travellers on the top an astonishing vibe, making the evening moments spent at the edge of the Eastern coast memorable until the first stars appear on the sky. But yet the night is young!

Dulmini Senanayaka

Challenges of Wellness Tourism Development

A Show on the Li River, China

After a month of toil in Guilin's misty embrace,
our Chinese hosts, with a touch of grace,
rewarded us with an enchanting sight:
a journey on the Li River, bathed in light.

We glided softly, past mountains grand,
through bamboo groves and villages so quaint,
where water buffalo roamed the land,
and fishing eagles soared with grace.

As day gave way to twilight's glow,
a live show set the river aglow.
boats danced, fireworks bloomed, and lights did trace
the mountains' curves, a breathtaking display.
Before 8,000 eyes, the spectacle did gleam,
a wonder beyond my wildest dream.
The greatest show I ever did see.



The concept of *wellness* has gained significant attention, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, attracting increased interest from tourism scholars and government officials. An increasing number of people seek holidays and even extended periods of leave from work to psychologically rejuvenate and find a balance in life. Many destinations wish to develop and expand opportunities to accommodate this emerging demand. Asian destinations have attracted wellness tourists for a long time with religious and spiritual sites such as Buddhist, mindfulness, yoga and vegan retreats. As wellness tourism is also often viewed as a lucrative market, more destinations offer wellness tourism products and programmes. Many destinations in Vietnam have also been keeping abreast of the wellness tourism trends.

I have been conducting a wellness tourism development project in Hue, Central Vietnam, with local academics at Hue University liaising with some local authorities. Hue is arguably the most Buddhist part of Vietnam and is seen as a peaceful and relaxing place. There is the Monk *Thich Nhat Hanh's* *root* temple, which has been attracting spiritual tourists. As an imperial city, Hue has an abundant wellness history, heritage and resources, including unique culinary cultures, traditional medicine and

healing methods. The surrounding rural villages in the lagoon and mountains also offer idyllic lifestyles and farming and fishing experiences for tourists seeking wellness enhancement. There is much attention and interest from the government and tourism authorities on wellness tourism development for Hue and surrounding rural villages. As a research team, we explored the nature and current practices of food-related wellness tourism to understand the perspectives and challenges those local stakeholders face, the support they would like to receive and to provide recommendations for governments, local authorities, businesses, and communities. We collected 13 qualitative interview data along with informal observations and conversations. Data were collected between July 2023 and June 2024. We visited wellness-related food tourism businesses and establishments in Hue and surrounding rural villages; farm-based homestays and vegetarian restaurants utilising their gardens; a small-scale hotel emphasising *Thai Y* (royal traditional medicine); a larger wellness resort; and local vegetarian restaurants connected to Buddhist temples. After visiting the sites and making conversations with those food-related wellness tourism business representatives, we conducted formal interviews with representatives of government authorities, wellness hotel managers, representatives of travel agencies, small wellness food business owners, an owner of a vegetarian cookery class, a fisherman who ran food tourism businesses, a village head of farm-based tourism programmes, etc.

Based on our data, we learned that most informants were aware of the wellness tourism trend and opportunity and were keen to develop their wellness tourism products and programmes. They knew that heritage and resources are abundant in Hue for developing wellness tourism, including Buddhist culture, vegetarian/vegan cuisine, medicinal teas, etc. The two policymakers we interviewed were also interested in developing more wellness-food tourism products for the province and communities. The informants representing travel agencies and wellness and food businesses expressed that there has been a growing demand for wellness-food tourism products among domestic tourists, especially in the post-pandemic period. Most agreed that there is great potential to develop wellness-food tourism in Hue and the surrounding villages, connecting it to the local heritage.

In Hue and the surrounding rural villages, with the growing demand, there has been a variety of wellness-food tourism products developed, such as Buddhism-based vegetarian restaurants, vegetarian cookery classes, farm-based food experiences and homestays, and fishing-based food experience programmes. There are also explicitly wellness-focused hotels and resorts with gardens for farm-to-table experiences. There is also a hotel themed around *Thai Y*, which offers traditional medicine and services by a medicinal doctor. The doctor mentioned that through this kind of tourism activity, the tradition could gain wider recognition and be revitalised for younger generations. The challenge lies in the scarcity of medical doctors trained in the royal medicinal practices, especially for the younger generation. Similarly, wellness hotel managers mentioned that youth emigration is a problem in running hospitality businesses in Hue, as more trained young people prefer to work in larger cities like *Da Nang* or *Ho Chi Minh City*. Crafting tourism programmes utilising their unique traditions and heritage could bolster tourism in Hue, revitalise the tradition for future generations, and create job opportunities.

Despite the region's rich heritage resources, wellness-food tourism offerings are still not fully developed or operated effectively. While large businesses such as 5-star wellness hotels seemed to attract enough guests by offering differentiated and comprehensive programmes, we encountered several businesses run on a micro-scale, with poor product development, marketing and digital skills. They also do not know how to create wellness products, though they know the demand and their businesses are related to wellness-food tourism. They struggle to develop a proper tourism product due to a lack of education. Small and micro wellness-related food tourism businesses require systematic support and training programmes, including language skills, basic business acumen, fundamental market information, marketing and promotional expertise, etc.

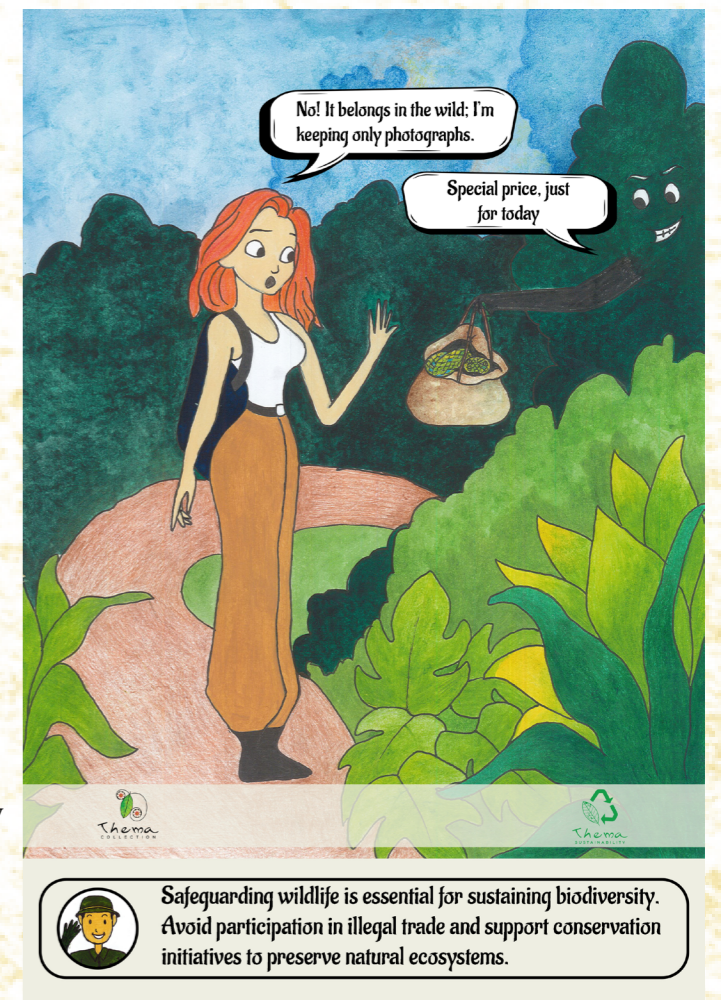
Another challenge is that there are not enough foreign tourists, and they do not stay for a long period. Some small businesses we interviewed had to close their businesses in July 2023 due to a lack of tourist/customer bookings. Foreign tourists often stop by Hue for a day while travelling from the South to North or North to South. Without decent numbers of foreign tourists, wellness-food tourism cannot be

substantially sustained. The government and authorities should work on more aggressive promotion of the region, utilising effective partnerships and creative marketing with influencers, etc. Promoting the region to international markets at a government level would be important for wellness tourism development by creating enough demand.

The authorities should develop a more holistic and comprehensive master plan for wellness tourism development in Hue rather than piecemeal efforts. Many small businesses want to utilise the trend and their traditions but lack guidance on how and what to emphasise in their products and services. It is obvious that there is a growing demand for wellness; it's a lucrative sector. Yet, for many destinations and small businesses, the question of how to develop wellness tourism and meet tourists' demands remains a question mark. We understand why people visit certain places for psychological rejuvenation and spiritual recharging, but from the supply side, knowing how to serve those demands is not easy without proper training and education. More collaborative networks, digitalisation, and joint marketing initiatives are essential for such businesses. Wellness tourism should benefit tourists and large-scale wellness hotels and broaden the benefits to poorer communities and small-scale businesses.



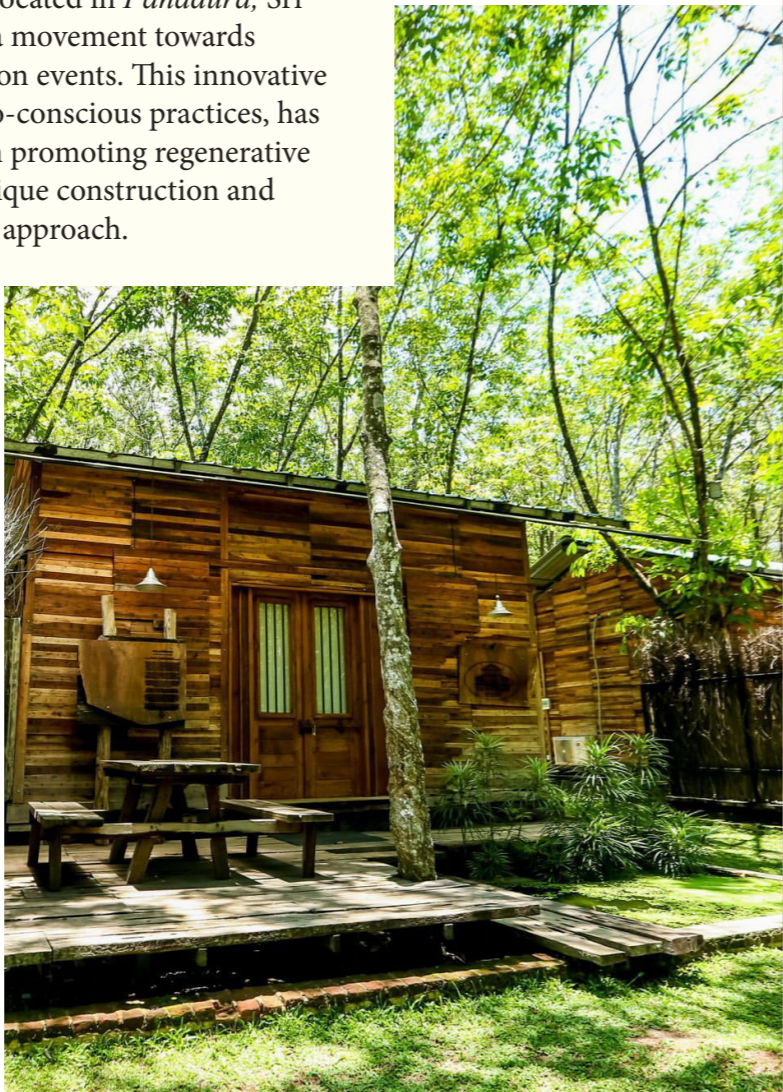
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The Barn House Studio: Leading the Way in Low-Carbon Events

The Barn House Studio, located in Panadura, Sri Lanka, is pioneering a movement towards sustainability and low-carbon events. This innovative venue, which embraces eco-conscious practices, has made significant strides in promoting regenerative tourism through its unique construction and operational approach.



Sustainability from the Ground Up

The Barn House's architecture itself is a testament to its commitment to the environment. Over 80% of the venue's structure is built using salvaged materials, primarily shipping pallets that were discarded after a single use. By utilising these once-discarded resources, The Barn House has saved countless trees from being felled for construction purposes. This eco-friendly initiative soon caught the attention of others, leading to a wider adoption of sustainable construction practices across the industry.

Natural light and ventilation are integral to the building's design, reducing the need for artificial lighting and air conditioning. The creative use of repurposed materials, such as barrels and glass bottles, adds artistic flair to the space while giving new life to items that would have otherwise been discarded. This philosophy aligns with the venue's goal of becoming a model for regenerative tourism, an approach that not only reduces environmental harm but actively works to restore and revitalise the surrounding ecosystem.

Sherwood by The Barn: Extending the Vision

Sherwood by The Barn, the latest addition to The Barn House Studio, goes the extra mile on the sustainability agenda. The design of this new space eliminates the need for air conditioning, replacing it with a water atomisation system, which drastically cuts down on energy consumption and carbon emissions. Natural ventilation enhances airflow throughout the venue, allowing for a comfortable atmosphere without the energy drain of conventional cooling systems.

The venue is also designed with indoor and outdoor features, allowing guests to host events that utilise natural daylight and minimise electricity usage during the day.

A Holistic Approach to Sustainable Events

The Barn House's commitment to low-carbon operations extends beyond its architectural and energy-saving measures. In the pursuit of further reducing its carbon footprint, the venue offers vegan menu options, as plant-based diets are known to have a lower environmental impact compared to those centred around meat. In addition, The Barn

House has consciously decided to eliminate table linens, thus reducing water and chemical usage traditionally associated with their cleaning.

By promoting the use of locally sourced products, The Barn House minimises the carbon emissions related to transportation and supports local economies. Each element of its operation is carefully considered with sustainability in mind, reinforcing the venue's position as a leader in environmentally responsible event management.

A Beacon of Regenerative Tourism

Through its innovative practices, The Barn House Studio is not just reducing its environmental impact but inspiring a shift towards sustainability across the event industry in Sri Lanka. As more venues follow in their footsteps, The Barn House remains at the forefront of low-carbon initiatives, proving that stylish, functional event spaces can be both beautiful and environmentally conscious.

Incorporating sustainable values into every facet of its operations, The Barn House Studio stands as a living example of how venues can minimise their ecological footprint while still offering exceptional experiences for their guests. This pioneering spirit is paving the way for a future where low-carbon events are not the exception but the standard.



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Innovating Cultural Tourism: The Interplay of Creative Industries and Visitor Experiences in Europe

Cultural tourism has always represented a significant component of the tourism industry in Europe thanks to the continent's vast and diverse historical, artistic, and cultural heritage. In countries like Italy, cultural tourism accounts for about 40% of international tourist flows and related tourist spending. However, tourist demand is currently undergoing a profound transformation - in terms of quality, expectations, and origins - and cultural tourists are also an evolving *species*. They are no longer solely interested in museums and monuments but are looking for new ways to experience culture: they seek authentic and identity-based products, experiences where they can play an active co-creation role, contact with residents, shopping for local and made-in products, opportunities to broaden their horizons and to learn and experiment in an enjoyable way. In this context, cultural and creative industries (CCIs) play a fundamental role in meeting these needs and in innovating the traditional cultural-tourism product, attracting significant flows to the territories. In recent decades,

the interaction between tourism and creative industries has opened new frontiers, transforming and enriching the tourism offer in innovative and sustainable ways, in a process that has gained increasing interest since the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) published the report *Tourism and the Creative Economy* in 2013.

As is well known, creative industries include a wide range of sectors, such as architecture, design, fashion, visual arts, performing arts, film, music, and literature. These sectors not only contribute to the creation of cultural content but also play a crucial role in making tourist destinations more attractive and competitive. In Europe, cities like Milan, Paris, and Copenhagen have leveraged their reputation related to the fashion and design industries also to develop their tourist appeal with new museums and itineraries.

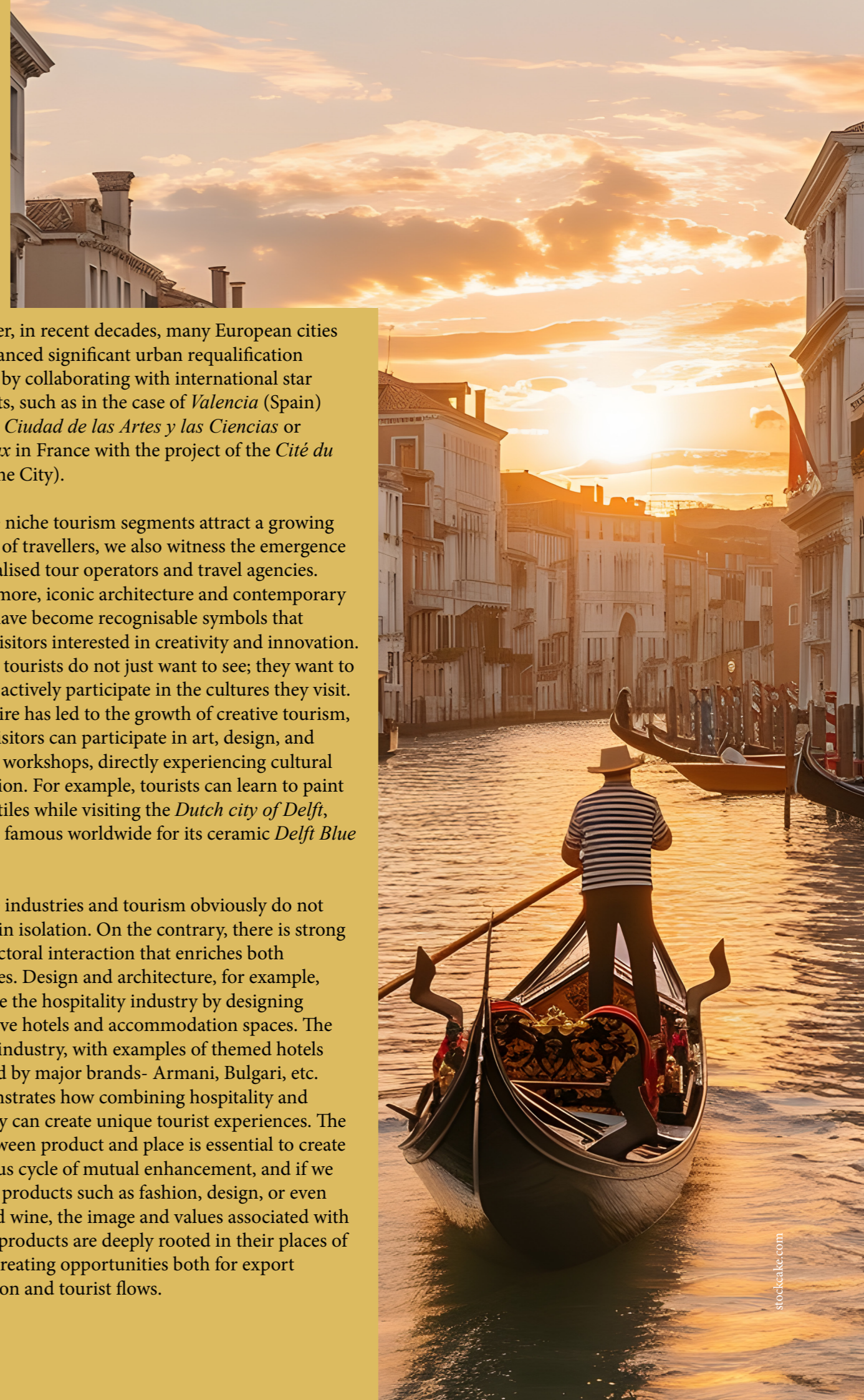
The relationship between the creative film industry and tourism has also proven very fruitful in recent years. For example, the Irish National Tourism Board

has capitalised on the success of TV series like *Game of Thrones* or films such as *Star Wars* by promoting tours to filming locations, thus attracting numerous fans and increasing the territory's visibility. Additionally, cultural events related to cinema, such as the Cannes Film Festival in France or the Venice Film Festival, represent international events of great tourist appeal, not only for industry operators.

Moreover, in recent decades, many European cities have financed significant urban requalification projects by collaborating with international star architects, such as in the case of *Valencia* (Spain) with the *Ciudad de las Artes y las Ciencias* or *Bordeaux* in France with the project of the *Cité du Vin* (Wine City).

As these niche tourism segments attract a growing number of travellers, we also witness the emergence of specialised tour operators and travel agencies. Furthermore, iconic architecture and contemporary design have become recognisable symbols that attract visitors interested in creativity and innovation. Modern tourists do not just want to see; they want to live and actively participate in the cultures they visit. This desire has led to the growth of creative tourism, where visitors can participate in art, design, and cooking workshops, directly experiencing cultural production. For example, tourists can learn to paint famous tiles while visiting the *Dutch city of Delft*, which is famous worldwide for its ceramic *Delft Blue* pottery.

Creative industries and tourism obviously do not operate in isolation. On the contrary, there is strong cross-sectoral interaction that enriches both industries. Design and architecture, for example, influence the hospitality industry by designing innovative hotels and accommodation spaces. The fashion industry, with examples of themed hotels managed by major brands- Armani, Bulgari, etc. - demonstrates how combining hospitality and creativity can create unique tourist experiences. The link between product and place is essential to create a virtuous cycle of mutual enhancement, and if we think of products such as fashion, design, or even food and wine, the image and values associated with specific products are deeply rooted in their places of origin, creating opportunities both for export promotion and tourist flows.



An emblematic case is that of Italian motor companies like Ducati, Ferrari, Lamborghini, and Pagani; these historic brands attract hundreds of thousands of enthusiasts worldwide every year. Creating the *Motor Valley* tourist product in the *Emilia-Romagna* region, coordinated by the non-profit Motor Valley Development Association, has consolidated this attraction. The project *La Via Emilia – Experience the Italian Lifestyle* brings together major motor brands, corporate museums, private collections, circuits, and driving schools, making the Motor Valley one of the main tourist destinations of its kind internationally. There are also interesting examples linked to individual companies.

Swiss furniture manufacturer *Vitra* has transformed its *Vitra Campus* in *Weil am Rhein*, Germany, into a tourist and cultural destination. World-renowned architects like Frank Gehry, Tadao Ando, and Zaha Hadid have contributed to creating an architectural complex that combines commercial and cultural aspects, attracting architecture enthusiasts and cultural tourists from all over the world, and it is included in the *BaselCard* promoted by the Swiss tourist board. Creative industry companies thus play a crucial role in place-branding and facilitating the attraction of visitors interested in so-called *industrial tourism*, which includes visits to production sites, corporate museums, and related events. It is no coincidence that factory open-door events like *Visitez Nos Entreprises en Pays de la Loire* in France and *Open Factory* in Italy demonstrate the public's growing interest in discovering production processes and company activities of creative enterprises, as well as for corporate museums or company visitor centres.

Many destinations are gearing up to build integrated offering systems, both abroad, as in the case of cities like Linz, Paris, and Copenhagen, and initiatives like *Creative Austria* or *Textilland* in Switzerland and Austria, with interesting experiments related to manufacturing and food and wine production districts, such as the already mentioned *Motor Valley*, or the *Food Valley* or *Toscana Wine Architecture* in Italy that enhances wine culture in combination with contemporary architecture and design. Many of these initiatives have arisen from collaborations between the public and private sectors, between companies and Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs).

Furthermore, there is significant interaction between creative industries and tourism at the B2B level, which is linked to the production of new intermediate goods and services for the tourism industry. Design and fashion contribute to hospitality, from glamping innovation to boutique hostels, while publishing and ICT produce tourist and cultural experiences and content. The promotion and marketing of tourist and creative products through common or complementary channels represent an additional level of integration. For Italy, for example, this mainly means promoting and selling Made in Italy products in the main tourist markets and selling the destination Italy in the markets already targeted by Made in Italy products, primarily fashion, design, and wine. Therefore, the challenge for the worlds of tourism and culture is to explore their relationship on multiple levels, identifying cultural and economic opportunities from an integrated territorial and production enhancement perspective. These connections are essential for tourist spending and exports and activating induced effects and sectoral integration, capable of mitigating the *Disneyfication* effects that tourism can bring. It is a complex challenge involving articulated interventions in territory and destination governance, working in a shared vision with a multitude of actors, including tourists, creating new platforms and content for tourist enjoyment, and building highly focused value networks among different sectors and types of actors. The link between creative industries and tourism can support sustainability by enhancing the entire creative production chain. It is a type of tourism that also develops outside the traditional main tourist routes in *must-see* destinations.



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“There’s something special about leaving a place; you discover what you’ve taken with you and what you’ve left behind.”

Where the crowds sings (2022)

Beyond the Whispering Graffiti

Graffiti is a transformative force in an artist's inner world that breathes life into a once-lifeless surface, turning it into a dynamic canvas that speaks volumes beyond mere spray paint. Breaking the mould of traditional arts challenges realism to gain power for an impactful societal metamorphosis. With this perspective, graffiti emerges as a postmodernist artistic revolution. It gathered the artistic abilities of the most talented Graffiti artists like Keith Haring, Banksy, and Lady Pink to enhance the era that still exists today.

The Industrial Revolution created a turning point in the graffiti journey. In the late 1960s, Philadelphia and New York City witnessed the birth of graffiti by writing tags and messages on buildings. Gradually, the simple tagging form of graffiti evolved into a complex form of urban art. This became a medium for individuals in marginalised communities to voice their frustration, political views, and cultural identities.

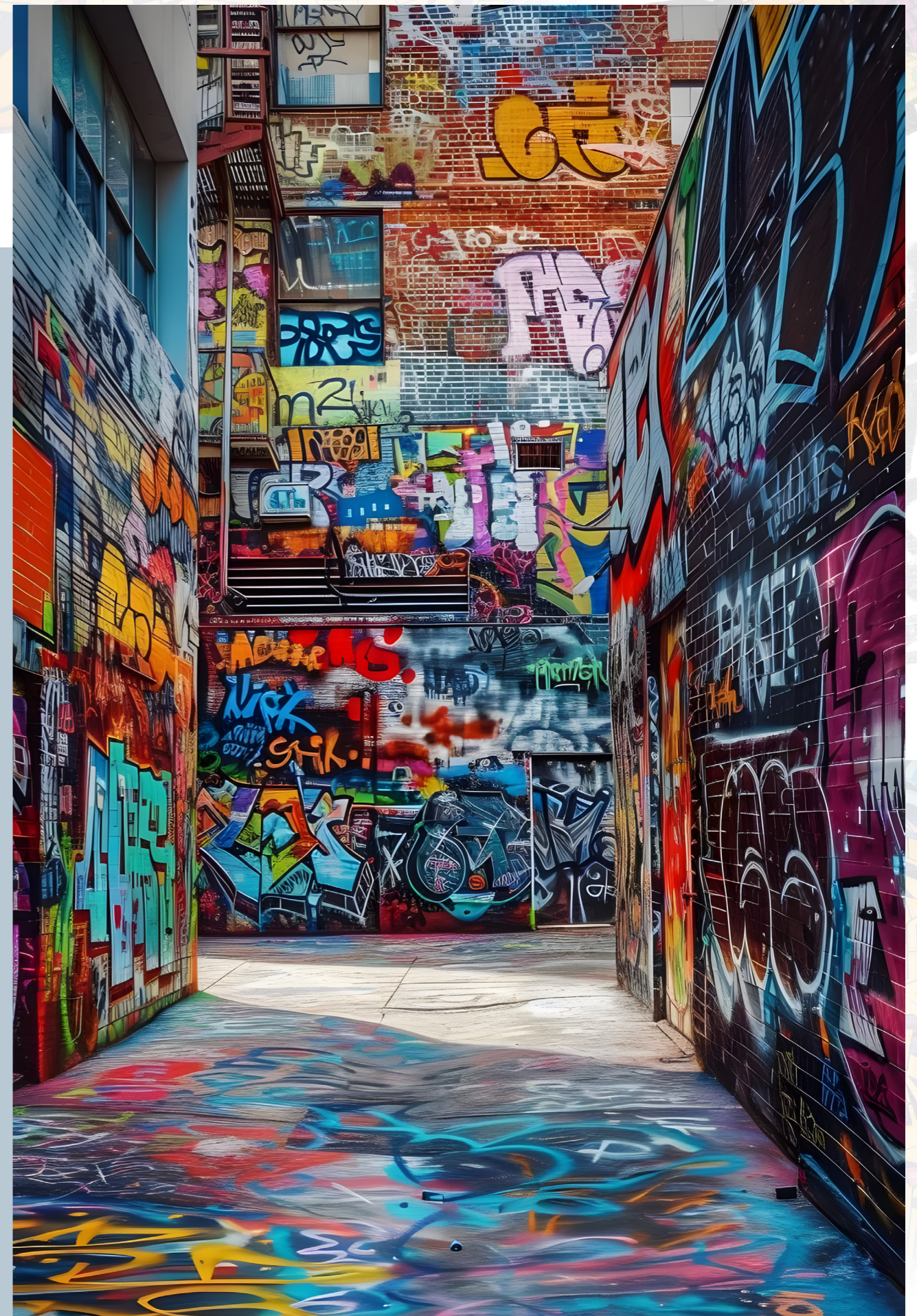
The graffiti subculture has probably been surrounded by a male-dominated space where masculinity manifests in various ways because of the competitive nature of tagging and the bold, risk-taking behaviour of creating energetic art. Graffiti artists often compete to see who can create the biggest, most elaborate pieces in highly visible but dangerous locations. Artists like Shepard Fairey, who started in illegal graffiti arts in the United States, often emphasised boldness and bravery in their work. On the other hand, sociologists like Nancy Macdonald explored graffiti subculture through her research. She argues that the illegality of graffiti constitutes the subculture's backbone because it allows for the construction of a masculine identity or character.

When it comes to the academic stage, graffiti is questioned in front of people like Alison Young, an American journalist, about whether graffiti is art, crime, or both at the same time. For example, *Hosier Lane* in Melbourne, Australia, is a famous street art destination where graffiti is encouraged, and artists regularly update the walls with new pieces. Other than that, artists like Jean Michael Basquiat and Keith Harling became internationally renowned and exhibited their works in prestigious galleries.

According to the above demonstration, graffiti has significant artistic value by attracting local and international tourists to the dynamic art scene. In opposing that, Daric Roseman, Attorney of Arizona US, asserts that graffiti harms the community as vandalism, and their society is committed to fighting against it. This proved that graffiti plays a role as a crime on behalf of artistic value, but in the same society, these two different aspects can be seen together.

But nowadays, the world follows evidence to suggest that this is not the case with vandalism. According to the view of Toby Ten Eyck, professor of sociology, specified in one of his research, people started to believe that graffiti is not something about its rascality surface. That means it is not based on legality or sanctioned and unsanctioned criteria but on its content, composition and overall aesthetic. Therefore, he invited the world to investigate the motivations behind those arts as the essence of his research.

**Ashini Uththara De Silva
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You Have to be Brave to be Stupid: Into the Wild

When it comes to a major life exit from familiar territory to an unknown land, the exit made by *Prince Siddhartha* remains an unerasable memory to me as someone who was born to a Sinhala Buddhist family. *Siduhath* or *Siddhartha Gautama* decided to leave everyone at home to discover himself and the meaning of life. It turned out to be a journey that led to attaining Buddhahood.

From a feminist point of view, this journey can be taken as an abandonment of a woman who loved *Siddhartha* so much and devoted her life to his happiness. But from a spiritual point of view, one can consider that exit as a great sacrifice of a man who wanted to see a world without suffering.

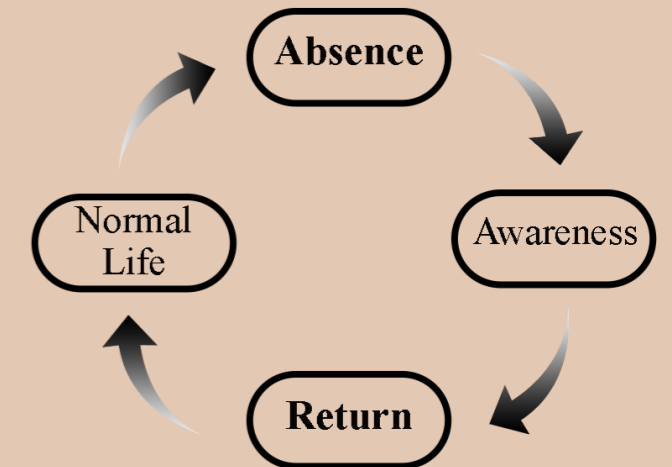
Christopher Johnson McCandless's exit in *Into the Wild* (1999) differs from the familiar legends above. He was disappointed by modern concepts such as human progress and material wealth, family, education, relationships and happiness. Rather, he was deeply fascinated by journeying into the wilderness, a journey he never intended to return to the place where he began.

The global attention to the character Christopher McCandless (Alexander Supertramp) and the fascination of this movie are centred around the nature of his journey. The objective itself is a fatal one, never aiming to return to so-called humanity and its comfort. At the same time, there is no deep hatred towards humanity either, and as a result, McCandless never becomes antisocial.

There is something else that may provoke controversy. Buddha left everyone and everything for a long period and attained Buddhahood. He had doubts whether what he realised during this absence would be understood by others. Then, out of his great compassion for humanity, he made a decisive return to humanity. Similarly, other major religions such as Christianity and Islam also have similar examples,

where their spiritual leaders undergo a period of absence from the community and then, with some new spiritual wisdom, return to their societies and start preaching what they realised. They became great spiritual leaders through this process.

To understand their journeys, we can conceptualise a diagram like the one below. The absence in the first box can be taken as their journey. It is the starting point from which they begin their journey as normal human beings.



A modern tourist may also find the same route as illustrated above. He or she will be *away from home* for a shorter period *for a recreational purpose* and may return to a familiar location. It is true that for such tourists, there may not be any special awareness to share like a religious leader, but maybe they have a *new story* or *an experience* to share. Even a concept such as wanderlust might take the above usual routine as illustrated in the diagram.

McCandless's journey radically differs from the above two categories: spiritual and touristic. Starting from Atlanta, Georgia, he travels to the freezing Alaskan wilderness by taking a zigzag trip line that takes many short stays. He receives many invitations from many individuals to stay with them; sometimes, some people want to adopt him as a child. But nothing appeals to him to stop his deadly and fatalistic journey into the unknown.

The hippie couple wanted him to stay with them. He gave up his temporary job in South Dakota. He stayed with Ronald Franz and then said goodbye to him. He never wanted to stay with the girl who wanted him so much. He was deliberately passing by many people who wanted him to stay with them, opened their hearts to him, and were willing to make sacrifices for him.

At the end of the day, McCandless had no new awareness to share with us, no spirituality to convince us of, and he never dreamt of returning to our society.

He was simply excited by what nature and unknown human beings offered to him during his journey. One can argue that he was joyous about his life from the moment of his radical exit from family and other familiar settings. He was so excited by the *jouissance* of the wilderness, which finally engulfed him. He knew what was coming and never wanted to say no to that.

He was floating with the deadly current of the Colorado River and blowing with the wind with no resistance. He let himself be taken away by nature until his memory of us faded away. He remembered nothing, had nothing to offer and had no story to share. There was an absolute nothingness in his journey and the way he died. He knew there was no survival in this journey, and that was exactly what he was looking for.

From its deepest sense, he was neither a tourist nor a hippie. Rather than a wanderlust, all we could detect in him was the joyous excitement of an exit and a


strong determination of no return. He was just different from an ordinary twentieth-century young graduate with whom we are familiar. He has shown us the deepest drive of a man to be free, to be different and what is meant to be a never-returning voyager.

Many tourists now fashionably follow McCandless's trail towards Alaska, and we are not sure how many of them experience and encounter what he did. But I am sure they all experience one thing: what man is capable of doing once he is depressed and disappointed with modern goals and achievements.


When you follow his trip line, you can feel a degree of stupidity in his journey. Isn't life full of stupid things? Aren't those stupid things finally making our life journey worthwhile?

What we may celebrate when we grow old are those stupid moments which deeply shaped our lives. Somewhere in the movie, Eddie Vedder sings like this...

Such is the way of the world
You can never know
Just where to put all your faith
And how will it grow.
(Eddie Vedder, Rise, Theme Song – Into the Wild)

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 Some human actions, such as deforestation have disrupted the balance of nature, leading to an overpopulation of peacocks and conflicts with communities. Together, let's restore that balance.





LKR 1000