

The Role of Museums in Cultural and Heritage Tourism for Sustainable Economy in Developing Countries

Kamani Perera

Librarian

Regional Centre for Strategic Studies, 68/1, Sarasavi Lane, Colombo 8, Sri Lanka

Tel: +94112690913/4(O), +94775965252(M), Email: k_vithana@yahoo.com

Abstract

Cultural and heritage tourism is defined as travel directed toward experiencing the arts, heritage and activities that truly represent the stories and people of the past and present. This has taken much attention during the past decade. Developing countries need support from international community in safeguarding their precious heritage. Cultural heritage tourism is one of the best parts of the tourism industry, and is a more powerful economic development tool. It has been revealed that museums are now playing a major role not only in the wider sphere of arts, but also within tourism and leisure. Museums cannot no longer sit back and expect that people will start queuing up. Their roles have changed to attract more audiences.

Keywords – heritage tourism, cultural heritage, new media, role of museum, sustainable economy

Introduction

International Council of Museums (ICOM) (2010) has defined that museum is a non-profit making, permanent institution in the service of society and of its development, and open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits, for the purpose of study, education, and enjoyment, material evidence of people and their environment. “Sri Lanka is recognized as one of the ten most sought after destinations for eco and heritage tourism in the world. Today the 4th century AD world heritage site of the “Sigiriya” rock palace alone nets US\$ 10 – US\$ 15.000per day during the high season. Similarly the 17 century AD world heritage site of Galle Dutch Fort is not only a vibrant multi-cultural hub blending traditions and modernity but also a high-end tourist destination and a portal of convergence for inter natural art and literary activities” (excerpt from Professor Sudharshan Seneviratne – award acceptance speech, Conservation and Heritage Management Award for Excellence 2013, Archaeological Institute of America). Prof. Seneviratne’s speech has given clear evidence for the effect of cultural heritage tourism for sustainable economy in developing countries. At this stage, museum has a big role to play to conserve, research, and exhibit cultural heritage in any country. Heritage and tourism are interconnected and reflect the image of the particular country and its inhabitants.

Heritage Tourism

Heritage is defined as the elements of our inherited past that we value. Heritage tourism is defined as tourism markets and the industry, which have evolved around heritage. There is a vital connection between heritage and tourism (The Travel and Tourism Programme, Ireland). As defined by the Travel and Tourism Programme, Ireland tourists get attracted to the places

rich in cultural heritage. Heritage tourism is that form of tourism whose objective is, among other aims, the discovery of monuments and sites. It has become a more popular tourist activity to make visits to historical cultural heritage sites, in this electronic era. Culture, heritage, environment and tourism are interconnected and taking significant attention in the globe. There is also another group of tourism. Scholars introduced the concept of creative tourism (Richards and Raymond, 2000) by marrying creative and tourism products and services. UNCTAD (2004; 2008) have formulated and broadly classified creative industries into four areas.

1. Heritage – traditional cultural expressions and cultural sites
2. Arts – visual arts and performing arts
3. Media (not including new media) – publishing and printed media and audiovisuals, and
4. Functional creations – design new media and creative services

Heritage tourism, in line with the global trend in cultural tourism, has emerged as one of the most popular tourism categories (Chen and Chen, 2010). The economic contribution of heritage resources is one major means to achieve sustainable tourism development (Apostolakis and Jaffry, 2005). Therefore, a better understanding of heritage tourist behavior in terms of heritage service attributes, specifically tourist preferences, can provide insightful information leading to the ability of heritage managers to create effective sustainable development strategies (Chen and Chen, 2012). Chen and Chen have clearly described the importance of heritage tourism for sustainable economy.

Heritage tourism is categorized into three groups –

- **Natural**
 1. Landforms
 2. Rural Scenery
 3. Flora And Fauna
- **Cultural**
 1. Festivals
 2. Arts/crafts
 3. Traditional practices/products
- **Built**
 1. Historical building
 2. Monuments
 3. Industrial sites (Jun; Nicholls; Vogt, 2004)

As Jun *et al* described, tourists are attracted to natural heritage, cultural heritage as well as built heritage. Therefore, it is very important to protect all these areas of heritage to present and future use. It helps the sustainable tourism of any country. Types of heritage tourism are –

1. Literary tourism – travel to literary places such as writer's birth place
2. Legacy tourism – search for ancestors
3. Historaunts - restaurants
4. Dark tourism – death, disaster
5. Industrial heritage tourism – unused industrial sites

Tourism + Culture + Heritage = Sustainable Economics

Types of Cultural Heritage

1. Non-physical (intangible)
2. Physical (tangible)

Non-physical Cultural heritage

- Signs and symbols passed on by oral transmission
- Artistic and literary forms of expression
- Languages
- Ways of life
- Myths, beliefs and rituals
- Value system
- Traditional knowledge
- Know-how

Physical Cultural Heritage

- Monuments
- Archaeological sites
- Movable heritage collections
- Historic urban areas
- Vernacular heritage
- Cultural landscapes

The historic towns in developing countries make every effort to be dynamic heritage sites of regional development attracting cultural tourism and preserving tangible and cultural heritage. Preservation of cultural heritage sites is costly and needs support from the government and other cultural heritage funding organizations. Tourism is one of the most important sections of the developing country economy. Cultural and heritage tourism has become one of the highest growing sectors of the tourism industry in Sri Lanka.

Barry Lord defines cultural tourism as visits by persons from outside the host community motivated wholly or in part by interest in the historical, artistic, and scientific or lifestyle/heritage offerings of a community, region, group or institution. In comparison to other tourism activities such as eco-tourism, heritage-tourism, edu-tourism, adventure-tourism, agro-tourism, cultural tourism offers authentic resources to the community. Authentic resources are defined as sites, services, or events that reflect local, regional or national heritage (Lord, 2002).

The Role of New Media in Museums

Digital technologies are being used in museums worldwide for day to day activities and provide information on exhibitions, museum products, events, opening hours, ticket availability and prices etc. Some museums use social media tools such as blogs, portals, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube etc. to interact with their audiences. Social media tools help museum professionals to provide efficient service to their customers and at the same time attract more visitors. The

museums that are maintaining websites interact more time with their audiences and with the whole world. They are networked not just within a geographical area or community but globally through international contacts, special interests, different cultural communities, and social networks. In brief, museum websites provide facilities to global connectivity. In this way visitors come to know world heritage sites and they can plan their physical visits. More tourists are drawn into the heritage sites as never before due to the rapid change in museums in this electronic era.

Heritage tourism is a solid factor in the tourism industry in developing countries and there is a significant growth of economy in this sector. Research has revealed that heritage travelers spend longer time in heritage sites compared to other tourists. In this context, museums facilitate a dynamic network of travel attractions and visitor services to the heritage tourism industry. Heritage tourism also facilitates other types of visitation such as travel to experience natural heritage, agri-tourism, eco-tourism, cultural tourism (art museum and theaters).

Sustainable Heritage Tourism

Tourism can bring both economic and quality-of-life benefits to communities. Rooted in historic preservation, one challenge is ensuring that the very places that contribute to heritage tourism are enhanced and not inadvertently altered or destroyed (Nebraska Heritage Tourism Plan, 2011). Nebraska Heritage Tourism Plan has described clearly why we preserve heritage tourism and how it affects sustainable economy. Further it describes five principles for successful and sustainable heritage tourism.

1. Collaborate
2. Find the fit between the community and tourism
3. Make sites and programs come alive
4. Focus on quality and authenticity
5. Preserve and protect irreplaceable resources

The Role of the Museum

Museum audiences have a strong link to tourism, since tourists are a part of the audiences and for some museums even a large part of the total number of visitors (Kotler and Kotler). The diversity of culture that tourists can consume at any destination essentially makes 'Cultural Tourism' difficult to define. It can be argued that all tourism activities contain some element of culture, ranging from visits to specific cultural sites such as museums, art galleries, or cathedrals, to experiencing the 'atmosphere' of the city nightlife (Steyn, 2007). Previously, cultural tourism largely represented a 'high culture', whereas today many new meanings of cultural and heritage tourism exist and cover tangible as well as intangible aspects of culture (Richards, 2001). The general mandate of most museums is to educate their visitors about the history, cultural and natural heritage of a city, region or a country or about a chosen subject of special interest, while also preserving these elements for future generations. The presence of museum is commonly understood to indicate the presence of something valuable and relevant to be shared with the public (Pekarik, 2003). Pekarik has described that the main role of the museums should be to protect cultural heritage and attract more tourists.

Conclusion

Heritage or cultural tourism is considered to be a form of tourism where participants “may learn about, witness and experience the cultural heritage of a destination” (Li, 2003). This type of tourism is said to provide a tangible motivation for conservation (Yuen, 2006), but in order to be successful in tourism context, heritage and history require more than preservation: its significance (should be) conveyed to the visitor, leading to enriched understanding in the context of the present (Nuryanti, 1996). As Nuryanti points out the priceless value of cultural heritage should be conveyed to the tourists and it is our collective responsibility to protect our heritage for sustainable economy and for our present and future generations.

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