

## POTENTIALITY OF DEVELOPING MOUNTAIN TOURISM IN SRI LANKA: CASE OF CENTRAL PROVINCE SRI LANKA

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### **Abstract**

There is a rising trend in increasing the number of arrivals to mountain tourism. The key reason behind such is the growing demand to engage with nature and culture to avoid stress and to increase physical and mental wellness. Most of the South Asian countries have become potential destinations for mountain tourism and these destinations are using this rising influx to develop economic conditions. Sri Lanka tourism is recovering after three main crises and now focusing to develop with wider tourism product portfolio. Adding to this, Sri Lanka exists with a wide range of biodiversity and geographical uniqueness. The key aim of this research is to identify the financial and non-financial potentialities of developing mountain tourism as a tourism product to increase the revenue of tourism. The methodology of this study is a qualitative approach and data were gathered using in-depth interviews with stakeholders of the tourism industry. A total of 28 interviews were carried out. During the analysis, the applicability of diversity, ease of access, aesthetics, and how to add recreation and development activities were analysed in relation to the data set. Additionally, more, it was further evaluated with the behavioural expectation of hikers, backpackers, mountain climbers, and general visitors. A conceptual framework was developed and proposed as the implementation framework to gain financial and non-financial benefits from mountain tourism in Sri Lanka. Adding more, the proposed framework assists in identifying suitable mountains to implement mountain tourism and planning as well.

**Keywords:** Mountain Tourism, Sustainable Tourism, Destination Development

### **Introduction**

#### **Background**

Mountain tourism, which includes a wide range of activities that take place in mountainous terrain, is a fast-expanding subset of the worldwide tourism business (Río-Rama et al, 2019). Hiking, trekking, mountain climbing, and fully immersing oneself in another culture are some of these pursuits. The appeal of mountain travel is its ability to give visitors the chance to interact with untouched natural settings, push their physical limits, and engage in-depth with local cultures (Río-Rama et al, 2019).

#### **Mountain Tourism Activities Worldwide**

A worldwide phenomenon, mountain tourism draws visitors from all over the world. Mountain vacation spots are popular because of the variety of activities they provide. Intense hikes and treks, mountain biking courses, or simply taking in the spectacular splendour of high-altitude scenery are all options for tourists. The rich fauna and flora that thrive in these areas attract wildlife enthusiasts. Additionally, mountainous areas frequently have a rich cultural legacy, giving visitors the chance to participate in authentic cultural encounters.

#### **Central Province Tourism in Sri Lanka**

Despite being a small country, Sri Lanka has a great variety of scenery, including a central region filled with rocky terrain and grand mountains. Particularly in the Central Province of Sri Lanka, scenic mountains with distinct natural beauty and cultural value, like Adam's Peak, the

Knuckles Range, and Horton Plains, are well-known. The potential for the growth of mountain tourism in these mountains is enormous (Ranaweera et al, 2019).

The tragic Easter Sunday assaults in 2019 and the far-reaching effects of the COVID-19 epidemic are only two of the recent difficulties that Sri Lanka's tourism industry has encountered. There is a growing understanding of the need to expand the country's tourism offers beyond the well-travelled routes of sun, sand, and sea as it works diligently to recover and rebuild its tourism economy. A possible route to achieve this diversification and tapping into fresh sources of income and growth is through mountain tourism.

At the centre of the island country, Sri Lanka's Central Province is a popular destination for mountain travellers. Stunning panoramas, lush forests, and immaculate rivers make up its landscapes. The area is an ecological treasure trove since it is home to a variety of plants and wildlife, including many indigenous species. The Central Province's rich cultural legacy, which includes historical buildings, temples, and customs waiting to be discovered, adds another level of interest. Both domestic and foreign travellers find the province to be an appealing destination. However, the mountain tourism opportunities in the area have not yet reached their full potential.

### **Mountain Tourism in Sri Lanka**

Despite Sri Lanka's enormous potential for mountain tourism, its existing offerings fall far short of what it could provide. Sri Lanka needs to take a diversified approach to fully realise its potential.

1. Identification and development of new mountain sites as tourist destinations with an emphasis on preserving their aesthetic value and cultural importance.
2. Developing the facilities and infrastructure required to make mountains accessible and comfortable for visitors is the process of turning mountains into tourism destinations.
3. The development of a varied range of mountain tourism activities to accommodate various tastes and interests.
4. Promoting and assisting companies and service providers that cater to the mountain tourism industry.
5. Working together to effectively advertise mountain tourism products both domestically and beyond through destination management companies (DMCs).

### **Potential of Mountain Tourism in Sri Lanka**

Sri Lanka, sometimes known as the "Pearl of the Indian Ocean," has a special combination of scenic beauty and cultural diversity. Although the nation is well known for its immaculate beaches, beautiful rainforests, and historical landmarks, its middle mountainous region nevertheless remains a hidden gem that has yet to be fully discovered (Ranaweera et al, 2019). Sri Lanka is positioned to become a prime location for mountain tourism thanks to its tropical climate, abundant biodiversity, and breathtaking mountain ranges (Ranaweera et al, 2019).

The Central Province of Sri Lanka offers a variety of hilly landscapes with enormous potential for tourism growth. A UNESCO World Heritage site, the Knuckles Mountain Range, displays a tapestry of craggy peaks, thick forests, and tumbling waterfalls. Adam's Peak, also known as Sri Pada locally, is well-known for having a "sacred footprint" at the summit and attracts both hikers and pilgrims. Rolling plains, towering escarpments, and World's End, a vertical cliff with stunning views, may all be found in the Horton Plains National Park (Ranaweera et al, 2019).

Each of these alpine regions has a distinct appeal that offers visitors a range of experiences. The highlands of Sri Lanka provide a variety of activities, including strenuous hikes, tranquil nature walks, cultural exchanges, and pleasant respites from the rush of urban life (Ranaweera et al, 2019).

The mountains of Sri Lanka are not only beautiful to look at but also important ecologically. Many of the plants and animals found in these areas are endemic and in danger of extinction. Birdwatchers will enjoy viewing species like the Sri Lanka blue magpie and the Sri Lanka whistling thrush. Sambar deer, leopards, and even the elusive and endangered Sri Lankan leopard call the verdant forests home.

This biodiversity needs to be protected, and promoting sustainable tourist practises is not only morally right, but also competitive. Responsible eco-tourism activities can result in a win-win situation where visitors enjoy themselves while also helping to preserve these important ecosystems. The tourism industry in the mountains draws a wide variety of visitors, including adventurers and lovers of the outdoors. The central region of Sri Lanka provides opportunity for exhilarating excursions, difficult climbs, and tranquil nature walks. A further draw is the temptation of viewing magnificent sunrises or sunsets from high vantage spots like Adam's Peak (Ranaweera et al, 2019).

Mountain biking, rock climbing, and paragliding are thrilling possibilities for adventure seekers. Along with promoting active and healthy lifestyles, these activities also cater to adrenaline junkies, following the worldwide wellness tourism trend (Río-Rama et al, 2019). Adopting mountain tourism as a specialist product will significantly boost Sri Lanka's economy and promote long-term tourism development (Río-Rama et al, 2019). Infrastructure, hotel, and service investments should be boosted for the central region's advantage. Local communities can discover work and business opportunities, particularly in guiding, lodging, and traditional crafts.

Additionally, mountain tourism has appeal outside of Sri Lanka's borders. Destinations like Sri Lanka's central mountains are becoming more and more popular with international travellers looking for uncommon and off-the-beaten-path experiences. This interest can encourage an even distribution of visitors throughout the year, lessen the seasonality of tourism, and assist diversify the tourism industry (Río-Rama et al, 2019).

### **Research Objectives**

This research aims to:

1. Identify the financial and non-financial potentialities of developing mountain tourism in Sri Lanka.
2. Analyse the applicability of diversity, ease of access, aesthetics, and recreational activities in relation to mountain tourism.
3. Evaluate the behavioural expectations of various types of mountain tourists.
4. Propose a conceptual framework for the successful implementation of mountain tourism in Sri Lanka.

### **Literature Review**

The core of this study is the literature review, which provides a thorough examination of key ideas and theories that support the investigation of contemporary visitor behaviour, niche

tourism, and theoretical frameworks pertinent to mountain tourism. Understanding the changing demands and preferences of today's tourists, the crucial role of niche tourism in influencing strategic tourism development, and the practical implementation of theoretical models to improve the mountain tourism experience all depend on these insights.

### **Modern Tourist Behaviour and Expectations**

Traveller behaviour and expectations have undergone a significant transition in the modern travel environment (Río-Rama et al, 2019). Today's travellers are not just looking for vacations; they are also searching for real, engaging experiences that allow them to form lasting bonds with people and the environment. This change in preferences shows a greater desire to go on excursions that are more than just for sightseeing and make a lasting impression (Bonadonna et al, 2017).

One of the characteristics of modern tourists is their fixation with authenticity. In contrast to prior generations who may have been content with surface-level interactions, modern tourists aspire to delve deeper into the core of their chosen locations (Hsu et al, 2010). They see these interactions as essential parts of their travel experiences and actively seek out opportunities to interact with the local people, cultures, and traditions (Río-Rama et al, 2019). The focus is on real, unfiltered interactions whether it be taking part in traditional festivities, enjoying regional cuisine, or learning indigenous crafts. Modern travel has made personalisation one of its pillars. Nowadays, tourists look forwards to experiences that are carefully catered to their unique interests, values, and preferences (Hsu et al, 2010). One-size-fits-all travel plans are becoming less common as personalised tours that take into account each visitor's particular goals take their place. The creation of full trip experiences is also individualised, in addition to the choice of attractions and lodgings (Río-Rama et al, 2019).

Modern travellers have a fundamental and unwavering expectation of sustainability. Travellers are making more ethical decisions as a result of increased environmental awareness around the world (Bonadonna et al, 2017). They give top priority to travel destinations and experiences that have a low impact on the environment, benefit local populations, and enhance the sociocultural fabric of the areas they visit (Hsu et al, 2010). Sustainable tourism strategies have evolved from being specialised concerns to essential standards for choosing vacation itineraries (Hsu et al, 2010). This includes environmentally friendly housing options, accountable tour operators, and a dedication to eco-friendly practises throughout the tourist supply chain (Bonadonna et al, 2017).

### **Niche Tourism and Its Role**

One of the best examples of niche tourism is mountain tourism, which is distinguished by its specialised and distinctive features. The ability to cater to specialised traveller groups with shared interests, preferences, or motives is what defines niche tourism segments. When it comes to mountain tourism, these visitors have a deep respect for the untamed beauty, spirit of exploration, and tranquilly that are inherent to mountainous settings (Bonadonna et al, 2017).

Creating experiences that appeal to certain, well-defined subsets of the travelling public is the essence of niche tourism (Novelli et al, 2022). These groups have grown more important in influencing the current tourism scene since they are frequently distinguished by their distinctive interests or motives (Novelli et al, 2022). These are the people who, in the context of mountain tourism, fervently seek consolation in the tranquilly of mountain summits, desire for the rush

of mounting difficult slopes, or savour the chance to immerse themselves in the cultural tapestry woven into these high-altitude worlds (Bonadonna et al, 2017).

Niche tourism is a deliberate approach that takes use of the variety of traveller motivations, not only a replacement for mass tourist. A broad and generalised audience is frequently the objective of mass tourism, which is driven by sheer visitor numbers (Bonadonna et al, 2017). Contrarily, niche tourism consciously focuses on specialised niches, crafting experiences that are specific to their own preferences. By doing this, it changes the tourism industry into a kaleidoscope of options that may satisfy all the different traveller goals (Novelli et al, 2022). The importance of speciality travel extends to the broad level of national travel policies. These tactics are now expected to promote sustainability, increase competitiveness, and reduce dependency rather than just increase tourist numbers. In this situation, niche tourism plays a crucial role. Countries may build a strong and diverse tourist portfolio by locating, fostering, and utilising particular segments. Through diversification, the risks of relying too heavily on a particular market or product are reduced (Bonadonna et al, 2017).

Mountain tourism serves a specific market niche and advances the overarching objectives of national tourism policies (Novelli et al, 2022). By providing something distinctive and alluring, it strengthens a destination's competitive edge by differentiating it from rivals. The alignment with modern travellers' preferences for authenticity, adventure, and nature-based experiences also positions a place as trend-aware (Moss and Godde, 2000).

### **Theoretical Framework for Mountain Tourism**

Delivering excellent experiences requires a deep understanding of and a commitment to meeting the requirements and expectations of mountain travellers. To do this, it is necessary to apply the right theoretical frameworks that illuminate the dynamics of visitor experiences, service excellence, and destination management within the special mountain tourism setting. The Tourist Experience Model is a thorough framework that acknowledges the multifaceted nature of travel experiences and how they are influenced by a wide range of variables, such as motivation, emotions, and general satisfaction (Nepal and Chipeniuk, 2005). This concept contends that a tourist's journey is a comprehensive interaction with a destination rather than just a series of activities. Applying the Tourist Experience Model to the field of mountain tourism provides important insights into how visitors view and interact with mountainous surroundings (Nepal and Chipeniuk, 2005).

Through the lens of this model, it is possible to analyse the numerous aspects of a mountain tourist's journey. It dives into what inspires people to go on mountain expeditions, whether it's the rush of reaching the top of a difficult peak or the need to commune with untainted nature (Musa et al, 2015). The awe-inspiring views that elicit amazement and the sense of accomplishment after finishing a challenging walk are just two examples of how emotions play a crucial role in this situation. In the end, the model emphasises that these aspects have an impact on how satisfied people are with their whole experience (Nepal and Chipeniuk, 2005). The Tourist Experience Model is a useful tool for destination administrators and service providers in mountain tourism to improve the visitor experience. Managers may strategically create and adjust products to suit traveller expectations by identifying critical touchpoints along the tourist journey, from trip planning and arrival to on-site activities and post-visit evaluations (Nepal and Chipeniuk, 2005). For instance, recognising that visitors to mountain areas frequently want both adventure and cultural enrichment can result in the development of guided cultural experiences in addition to physical activities (Musa et al, 2015).

By focusing on the aspects of service quality that directly affect visitor happiness, the Service Quality Model complements this viewpoint. Service excellence goes much beyond the standard hospitality features of lodging and transportation in the mountain tourism industry. It includes companies that offer adventurous activities, safety precautions, cultural encounters, and environmental stewardship (Musa et al, 2015).

This model provides a methodical way to evaluate the efficiency of service provision in alpine destinations. Mountain tourist service quality includes making sure that adventure activities are carried out safely, that guides are informed and empathetic, and that cultural interactions are polite and genuine. As maintaining the pristine mountain landscapes is essential to the long-term survival of mountain tourism, it also calls for a commitment to environmental sustainability.

Destination managers can methodically assess each dimension of service quality and pinpoint areas for improvement by adopting the Service Quality Model (Musa et al, 2015). Regular safety inspections of adventure tour operators, for instance, can boost visitor confidence, and cultural sensitivity training for tour guides can increase cross-cultural relationships. The perception of service quality in mountain locations is also influenced by eco-certifications and sustainable practises.

### **Leveraging Destination Image and Branding in Mountain Tourism**

Strategies for promoting mountain tourism should be shaped by theoretical perspectives on destination image and branding (Hosany et al, 2006). It goes beyond simple marketing to create a captivating and genuine picture of mountain places; it becomes a potent magnet that draws in visitors looking for interesting and fulfilling experiences (Hosany et al, 2006).

**Destination Image:** The perception that potential tourists have of a destination is referred to as its image. This picture has the potential to evoke strong emotions in the context of mountain tourism (Hosany et al, 2006). Travellers may be drawn to a destination by a strong mental image created by the untamed grandeur of towering peaks, the tranquilly of alpine lakes, and the friendliness of the local people. Theoretical insights imply that a favourable and resonant location image might arouse travellers' wanderlust and influence their decision-making (Qu et al, 2011). By highlighting their natural and cultural features, mountain destinations may carefully craft their image. Examples of important components of this picture are the promise of pristine natural beauty, heart-pounding experiences, and genuine interactions with mountain communities (Qu et al, 2011). Tourism authorities may effectively communicate what makes mountain tourism unique by matching the destination's image with the objectives and wishes of target travellers (Qu et al, 2011).

**Branding:** By encasing the destination image in a unique identity, branding goes beyond the destination image. This identity captures the essence and promise of the place and goes beyond a simple logo or tagline. According to theoretical viewpoints on branding, a skilfully developed brand can build a strong emotional bond with customers. It communicates not simply what a place has to offer but also why it's important. Branding for the mountain tourism industry can highlight sustainability, authenticity, and the power of the mountains to transform people (Konečnik 2010). It can convey that travelling to these places is more than just a vacation; it's a journey of discovery of oneself, a connection with nature, and an absorption in fascinating cultures. Mountain locations are promoted as places where visitors may embrace the unusual and transcend the ordinary by having a strong brand (Konečnik 2010).

The Tourist Experience Model and the Service Quality Model, two theoretical frameworks that can be used to better understand and improve the nuances of mountain tourism, have also been introduced in this review. In the context of mountain destinations, these frameworks clarify the varied character of tourist experiences, the aspects of service quality, and the importance of destination management.

These observations will serve as a springboard for the research paper's succeeding sections, which will examine the financial and non-financial prospects of promoting mountain tourism in Sri Lanka's Central Province. It will look at how the special qualities of this area can be used to give travellers life-changing experiences while promoting Sri Lanka's tourist industry's sustainable growth.

## **Methodology**

### **Data Collection**

In order to acquire a thorough understanding of the possibilities for growing mountain tourism in Sri Lanka's Central Province, this study uses a qualitative research methodology. Because it enables a thorough investigation and interpretation of the data, qualitative research is particularly well suited for examining complicated and context-dependent phenomena, such as the development of the tourism industry.

32 people who were closely connected to the Central Province tourism industry were interviewed in-depth as the main technique of data collection. These participants were carefully chosen in order to offer a well-rounded representation of various perspectives and levels of competence within the mountain tourist business. This diverse group of participants includes representatives of local, national, and international mountain tourists in addition to representatives from the destination management companies (DMCs), which are in charge of marketing and logistical aspects, and the tourism industry in the Central Province. Furthermore, the presence of academic academics with relevant expertise broadens the range of viewpoints used in this study.

### **Study Area Selection**

Due to its excellent qualities and outstanding potential for the development of mountain tourism, Central Province was chosen as the best study area. This area is unique due to its stunning natural scenery, extensive cultural legacy, and undeniable sense of authenticity, making it the ideal location to assess Sri Lanka's Mountain tourist potential. Popular mountain ranges like Adam's Peak, Knuckles Range, and Horton Plains are located in Central Province, adding to its attraction. These highlands provide enticing possibilities for future tourist destinations because of their stunning natural beauty and significant historical and cultural value.

The Central Province was chosen in line with the study's objective, which is to assess the financial and non-financial potentialities of mountain tourism in Sri Lanka. By concentrating on this area, the research seeks to offer particular insights that can direct future development initiatives, ensuring that they are tailored to the particular qualities and requirements of the hilly terrain of Central Province. This deliberate selection increases the study's findings' relevance and applicability to the wider context of Sri Lanka's tourism business.

The findings from the in-depth interviews will be discussed in more detail in the following sections, along with their implications for the growth of mountain tourism in Central Province and, indirectly, Sri Lanka.

## **Findings**

**Research Objective 1:** Identify the Financial and Non-financial Potentialities of Developing Mountain Tourism in Sri Lanka

### **Thematic Finding 1: Economic Opportunities**

Several financial opportunities for mountain tourism in Sri Lanka were mentioned by interviewees. They emphasised the potential for higher revenue generation for the tourism industry due to an increase in visitor numbers. Numerous economic opportunities could be generated by the growth of mountain tourism, particularly for local residents in the Central Province. It can also encourage tourism-related businesses like adventure tour operators, resorts, and restaurants, which will boost the economy.

### **Thematic Finding 2: Cultural and Environmental Preservation**

Potentials focused on preserving culture and the environment rather than money. Respondents emphasised the potential for mountain tourism to protect the Central Province's delicate ecosystems and rich cultural heritage. It can help with the preservation of indigenous customs and biodiversity by encouraging responsible tourism practises and involving local populations. This is in line with Sri Lanka's larger objectives of environmental sustainability and cultural preservation.

**Research Objective 2:** Analyse the Applicability of Diversity, Ease of Access, Aesthetics, and Recreational Activities

### **Thematic Finding 3: Diverse Tourist Interests**

Various tourist interests in mountain tourism were shown by interview data. Respondents emphasised the usefulness of diversity, pointing to the potential to appeal to outdoor enthusiasts, environment lovers, and cultural explorers. The availability of activities like trekking, animal viewing, cultural experiences, and adventure sports reflects these diverse interests. A big lure for travellers was thought to be the variety of offerings.

### **Thematic Finding 4: Access and Infrastructure**

Accessibility turned out to be a key element in the viability of mountain tourism. The need of enhancing infrastructure, such as road systems and lodging, was raised by respondents as a way to make alpine areas more approachable and comfortable. They emphasised the necessity of visitor centres, well-kept paths, and safety precautions. Mountains that are easily accessible were thought to be more appealing to tourists and conducive to a good experience.

### **Thematic Finding 5: Aesthetics and Natural Beauty**

The aesthetics of mountain tourism were highly alluring. Respondents praised Sri Lanka's hilly terrain for its beauty, describing it as both aesthetically pleasing and culturally significant. These mountains are popular with tourists because of their natural beauty, cultural heritage, and pristine environs. Aesthetics were supposed to foster a deep emotional connection to the location.



### **Thematic Finding 6: Recreational Diversity**

Diverse leisure options were thought to be essential for mountain tourism. The importance of offering a wide variety of activities to satisfy the varied preferences and interests of tourists was stressed by the respondents. Trekking, hiking, mountain riding, wildlife viewing, and cultural immersion were all mentioned as activities. This variety of experiences was thought to be essential for ensuring that mountain tourism was inclusive and appealing to a wide range of people.

**Research Objective 3:** Evaluate the Behavioural Expectations of Various Types of Mountain Tourists

### **Thematic Finding 7: Diverse Tourist Segments**

A variety of tourist groups, including hikers, backpackers, mountain climbers, and casual tourists, were acknowledged by interviewees. Each component displayed certain expectations for behaviour. While cultural explorers were interested in immersing themselves in the local culture, adventure enthusiasts sought out difficult terrain and physically demanding activities. All segments shared a common expectation for convenience and safety, emphasising the necessity of well-marked paths, emergency response systems, and trained employees.

### **Thematic Finding 8: Safety and Convenience**

Among all different sorts of mountain tourists, safety and convenience emerged as universal behavioural expectations. The necessity of feeling secure while exploring mountainous places was emphasised by respondents. Clear signage, quick access to emergency aid, and competent employees were all included in this. The need of ensuring visitors' comfort and safety was emphasised, not only for luring tourists but also for raising their level of pleasure.

## **Discussion**

### **Objective 1: Identifying Financial and Non-financial Potentialities**

Finding the financial and non-financial potentialities of growing mountain tourism in Sri Lanka was one of the study's main goals. The data collection procedure revealed a wealth of both economic and non-economic prospects for the nation that mountain tourism holds. The study emphasises the potential for mountain tourism to generate income, which is fuelled by an increase in visitors, the creation of jobs, and the growth of tourism-related businesses in the Central Province. The tourism industry's diversification of revenue sources has the potential to greatly boost Sri Lanka's economic stability and prosperity.

The study emphasises the cultural and environmental advantages that mountain tourism might have on a non-financial level. The country's natural and cultural riches may be preserved and displayed on a large scale in Sri Lanka's mountainous regions, which are renowned for their rich biodiversity and cultural legacy. Mountain tourism can also strengthen local communities' sense of pride and community while promoting the preservation of these vulnerable ecosystems. Therefore, it is clear that mountain tourism in Sri Lanka has both financial and non-financial potentials that are consistent with the country's overarching objectives of economic development and cultural and environmental preservation.

**Objective 2:** Analysing Applicability of Diversity, Ease of Access, Aesthetics, and Recreation  
Analysing the relevance of diversity, accessibility, beauty, and recreational activities to mountain tourism was another important goal of this study. The study's conclusions show how diverse Sri Lanka's mountainous regions are in terms of both natural elements and cultural experiences. This variety appeals to a wide range of tourist inclinations, drawing adventure seekers, nature lovers, and cultural explorers alike. Tourist decisions are significantly influenced by how easy it is to reach these alpine destinations. According to the study, increasing accessibility through infrastructure growth can greatly increase tourist arrivals and improve their entire experience.

The visual appeal of these landscapes is a primary pull for travellers, and aesthetics are crucial in mountain tourism. The mountains of Sri Lanka have the power to enthrall visitors with their beautiful scenery, cultural value, and pure habitats. The study also emphasises the value of leisure pursuits, which provide visitors with a variety of experiences like trekking, hiking, mountain biking, animal viewing, and cultural immersion. Because there are so many different things to do, there are also many different kinds of traveller interests, which makes Sri Lanka's Mountain tourism both alluring and welcoming.

**Objective 3:** Evaluating Behavioural Expectations of Mountain Tourists

Another important research goal was to comprehend the different types of mountain tourists' behavioural expectations. According to the survey, various mountain tourism subgroups, such as hikers, backpackers, mountain climbers, and casual visitors, have distinct expectations and preferences. For instance, whereas culture explorers are interested in becoming fully immersed in the local culture and traditions of the alpine regions, adventure enthusiasts seek out difficult terrain and physically demanding experiences. The research aids in customising the mountain tourism experience to fit the unique preferences of each group by assessing these behavioural expectations.

The survey also acknowledges the significance of ease and safety as fundamental needs shared by all kinds of mountain tourists. This includes elements like clearly defined pathways, emergency response mechanisms, and knowledgeable personnel. Providing for visitors' needs is essential for increasing their overall pleasure as well as drawing in more tourists. By taking into account these varying behavioural expectations, Sri Lanka may create focused plans to cater to the demands of various mountain tourist groups, providing them with distinctive and satisfying experiences amidst the alluring mountain scapes of the island.

### **Strategies for Developing Mountain Tourism in Sri Lanka**

The effective growth of mountain tourism in Sri Lanka requires a diversified approach that integrates a number of initiatives and methods. These tactics are intended to make the most of the gorgeous alpine regions of the nation, protect their aesthetic value and cultural relevance, and give visitors interesting experiences.

#### **1. Development of Mountain Sites**

Finding and developing new mountain sites as tourist attractions is one of the main tactics for increasing mountain tourism in Sri Lanka. The Knuckles Range, the Horton Plains, and Adam's Peak are just a few of the many mountain ranges in Sri Lanka that are endowed with their own special charms and allure. Striking a balance between development and conservation is essential if we are to fully realise these sites' potential.

The preservation of these mountains' natural beauty and cultural significance ought to come first. This calls for sustainable development methods, such as eco-friendly building techniques, effective garbage disposal, and initiatives to lessen the negative effects of tourism on the environment. Sri Lanka can provide visitors with a genuine and untainted mountain experience by protecting the integrity of these areas.

## **2. Transforming Mountains into Tourist Destinations**

It is essential to build the facilities and infrastructure required to make mountains accessible and comfortable in order to draw a variety of tourists. This entails creating visitor centres, maintaining trails and pathways, and building lodgings that can accommodate guests with various needs and tastes. The objective is to make sure that tourists can easily and conveniently explore these mountainous areas.

Furthermore, safety must always come first. This requires putting in place safety precautions like signage, emergency response systems, and staff who are trained to help tourists. Mountains that are safe and easy to reach not only draw more visitors, but also improve their whole experience.

## **3. Creating a Variety of Activities**

To satisfy a wide range of tourists' preferences and interests, diversity is essential. Sri Lanka should create a wide portfolio of mountain tourism activities to accomplish this. These may consist of:

- i. **Trekking and Hiking:** There are trails for both inexperienced and seasoned hikers, with varied degrees of difficulty.
- ii. **Mountain biking:** Specific Mountain biking routes that provide exhilarating rides amid beautiful scenery.
- iii. **Wildlife Viewing:** Tourists have the chance to see and study the abundant wildlife of these hilly areas.
- iv. **Cultural experiences:** Activities that provide visitors the chance to fully experience the local culture, including contact with indigenous groups.
- v. **Sri Lanka can cater to adventurers, nature lovers, cultural explorers, and families by providing a variety of activities, ensuring that mountain tourism is inclusive and appealing to a wide audience.**
- vi.

## **4. Establishing Specialized Service Providers**

Sri Lanka should encourage and assist companies and service providers who specialise in mountain tourism in order to raise the quality of the mountain tourism experience. This comprises companies that run adventure tours, eco-lodges, offer local guides, and sell outdoor gear. Specialised service providers have the knowledge and skills to give travellers safe, interesting, and memorable experiences.

Collaboration with regional groups is also essential. Participating in tourism activities with indigenous communities can help them develop economically and culturally while giving visitors real and interesting experiences.

## **5. Engaging DMCs for Marketing**

To draw both domestic and foreign visitors, it is crucial to market mountain tourism offerings effectively. Promotion and sales of these experiences are greatly aided by destination management firms (DMCs). The awareness of Sri Lanka's Mountain tourism can be greatly increased by partnerships with DMCs that have a significant presence in important source markets. The marketing campaigns should emphasise the special selling characteristics of Sri Lankan Mountain tourism, emphasising its natural

splendour, cultural diversity, and range of activities. Reaching a global audience can be facilitated by participating in targeted marketing initiatives, attending foreign travel trade shows, and utilising digital marketing tools.

## **Implementation Model for Mountain Tourism in Sri Lanka**

### **1. Enhancing Accessibility**

**Objective:** To make mountainous regions easily accessible to a diverse range of tourists.

- **Developing Roads and Transport:** Improve Road infrastructure leading to mountainous areas, ensuring well-maintained and safe access for tourists.
- **Public Transport:** Introduce reliable public transportation options, such as buses or shuttles, connecting major cities to mountain tourism hubs.
- **Airport Connectivity:** Promote air travel to nearby airports, followed by efficient ground transportation to mountain destinations.

### **2. Infrastructure Development**

**Objective:** To create essential facilities and amenities in mountainous regions.

- **Visitor Centres:** Establish visitor centres at key mountain destinations to provide information, maps, and assistance to tourists.
- **Accommodations:** Construct a variety of accommodations, including eco-friendly lodges, boutique hotels, and budget-friendly hostels, catering to different traveller preferences.
- **Safety Measures:** Implement safety precautions like signage, emergency response systems, and trained staff to ensure visitor safety.
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### **3. Cultural Experiences**

**Objective:** To offer tourists enriching cultural interactions and experiences.

- **Community Engagement:** Collaborate with local communities, including indigenous groups, to develop cultural activities, workshops, and events.
- **Cultural Immersion:** Create opportunities for tourists to participate in local traditions, rituals, and culinary experiences.
- **Heritage Preservation:** Support initiatives to safeguard and celebrate the cultural heritage of mountain regions.

### **4. Safety and Responsible Tourism**

**Objective:** To prioritize visitor safety and promote responsible tourism practices.

- **Emergency Response:** Establish effective emergency response systems, including medical facilities and trained personnel.
- **Environmental Conservation:** Implement sustainable practices like waste management, wildlife protection, and conservation efforts.
- **Tourist Education:** Educate tourists about responsible tourism practices and the importance of preserving the natural environment.

### **5. Marketing and Promotion**

**Objective:** To effectively market mountain tourism offerings.

- **Destination Management Companies (DMCs):** Collaborate with DMCs with expertise in international marketing and sales to promote Sri Lanka's Mountain tourism.
- **Digital Presence:** Develop a strong online presence through an official website, social media, and digital marketing campaigns targeting key source markets.

- Participation in Trade Shows: Attend international travel trade shows and exhibitions to showcase Sri Lanka's Mountain tourism.
- Targeted Campaigns: Launch marketing campaigns highlighting the unique selling points of Sri Lankan Mountain tourism, including its natural beauty, cultural diversity, and diverse activities.

Sri Lanka may realise the full potential of its mountainous regions as thriving and sustainable tourist destinations by putting this approach into practice. This all-encompassing strategy guarantees accessibility, infrastructure growth, cultural amplification, security, and successful marketing while protecting the natural and cultural legacy of these locations.

## Conclusion

Mountain tourism presents a sizable possibility for Sri Lanka's tourism sector since it offers the promise of adventure, scenic beauty, and cultural immersion. The country, which is endowed with a variety of mountain ranges, provides a fantastic setting for the production of this speciality produce. As the nation rebuilds its tourism industry in the wake of several catastrophes, such as the attacks on Easter Sunday and the global COVID-19 pandemic, diversification is crucial. Mountain tourism could contribute significantly to this initiative if used appropriately.

The numerous techniques necessary to improve mountain tourism in Sri Lanka have been covered in detail in this paper. These tactics cover a wide range of endeavours, such as the creation of specialised service providers, the development of mountain locations while preserving their ecological and cultural significance, the conversion of mountains into easily accessible and secure tourist destinations, and the efficient marketing made possible by destination management firms. When carefully carried out, these tactics have the potential to establish Sri Lanka as a well-known mountain tourism destination, luring a variety of tourists, from thrill-seekers looking for adventure to those looking to fully immerse themselves in the local culture.

Due to their tropical warmth, abundant biodiversity, and tranquil alpine panoramas, Sri Lanka's mountainous regions present a distinctive opportunity. Because of these natural resources, mountain tourism is made even more alluring and serves as a key engine for both sustainable development and economic growth. Sri Lanka may develop a comprehensive plan that balances economic growth with the preservation of its cultural and natural legacy by taking this potential into account.

According to the implementation model, a number of critical elements are necessary for mountain tourism to succeed, including increased infrastructure, improved accessibility, the facilitation of cultural experiences, safety measures, and aggressive marketing campaigns. To accomplish these goals, cooperation between the state sector, private businesses, local communities, and destination management organisations is essential. These initiatives could spark the development of Sri Lanka's mountainous regions into thriving, environmentally sound, and culturally rich tourism attractions.

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