

Women Empowerment through Cultural Tourism: A Case Study in North Central Province of Sri Lanka

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Cultural tourism is one of the fastest growing tourism niche markets in recent years. It has received much attention in developing countries and economically impoverished regions around the world, where it is being promoted and widely adopted as a regional development strategy to contribute to the socioeconomic development of the lagging areas. At the same time, cultural tourism generates income, economic and social benefits for host communities living in rural and remote areas ensuring the women empowerment which is one of the dominated discussions at local and global scales.

The main objective of the paper is to analyse the contribution of cultural tourism for women empowerment with particular reference to the North Central Province of Sri Lanka. Further, attention is given to analysis of women's involvement in cultural tourism activities.

A representative sample of both cultural sites and rural villages with cultural tourism attractions and activities were selected for the detailed study. A 30 percent sample of host communities that are living within 02 km of surrounding areas from selected research sites (villages and towns), were selected from each village using random sample technique.

Given the exploratory nature of the research, various research techniques like, field surveys, questionnaires, interviews, observations, group discussions, have been employed. Quantitative as well as qualitative analysis were used for data analysis.

The overall findings of this study are that cultural tourism has contributed to entail optimal women representation in cultural tourism, women domestic improvement, entrepreneurial development, saving improvements, women representation in business sector, women's right of decision making and the like. The findings of this investigation can assist rural developers in the implementation of community development strategies based on women's empowerment.

Key words: *Cultural and rural tourism, Women empowerment*