



## **TOURISTS' PERCEPTION ON FACILITIES AND REVISITATION: A STUDY OF CULTURAL HERITAGE TOURISM AT SIGIRIYA WORLD HERITAGE SITE**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This research intends to understand tourists' perception on basic facilities and service elements of UNESCO world heritage archaeological site of Sigiriya in Central province, Sri Lanka with special emphasis on effect of the perceptions for intention of re-visitation. The results of the study would make a contribution for upgrading facilities and services based on visitor oriented approach. Visitor survey was conducted using a questionnaire at the site to obtain data with participation of 156 international tourists and 71 domestic tourists marking the total figure of 227 respondents. Accidental sampling method was applied for the survey. In addition to that, interviews and observations were used as data collection methods. Data was analyzed by simple statistical method of percentage comparison and qualitative content analysis. 37% of tourists had a view that the basic facilities and service elements of the heritage site is at a poor level. Only, 25% rated it in good level, while 28.5% of the tourists stated those are in moderate level. Although, considerable percentage of tourists' perception on basic facilities and service elements was negative, it was found that 90% of tourists intended to visit the site again in future. This contradictory phenomenon, may be a result of high value of uniqueness and heritage experience of the site.*

**KEY WORDS:** *Cultural heritage tourism, Cultural resource management, Sigiriya, World heritage, Tourists' perception*

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Cultural heritage tourism, sometimes, simply referred as cultural tourism is conventionally, accepted as one of the fast growing segments of global tourism market (Poria, Butler and Airey 2003; Richards 1996; Issac 2008). And archaeological heritage sites, specially, the sites designated as world heritage cultural properties by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO] play pivotal role as major cultural tourist attractions throughout the world.

Sigiriya is a famous cultural heritage archaeological site situated in Matale district, Central province of Sri Lanka which is a royal fortress built by king Kasyapa I in 5th century AD. According to the tourist statistics, this archaeological site can be recognized as the most visited cultural attraction of the country in international tourism with 594,917 international visitors in 2018 (Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority [SLTDA] 2019). It also claims the distinction of the most visited non-religious domestic tourism attraction of Sri Lanka based on the available data with 766,815 domestic tourist arrivals in the relevant year (SLTDA 2019). The heritage site is demonstrated as a symbol of Sri Lankan identity in world tourism market in most of destination promotion and marketing campaigns for the country.

The importance of cultural tourism and cultural tourism planning and promotion in world heritage sites have been given attention in number of international studies and number of guidelines are available in global level (UNESCO



2002; Pedersen 2002; Tourtellot 2010; Rifari 2010; Brooks 2010; Garrod & Fyall 2000; Poria, Butler & Airey 2003; Richards & Munters 2010; ICOMOS international tourism charter 2002; The Malta declaration of cultural tourism). In contrast to that, Sri Lankan scholar community has not given adequate emphasis on cultural tourism planning and promotion although the country has very rich cultural heritage and huge potential to promote it for tourism. Only, few studies have focused attention on the relevant issues and in-depth studies are hard to find (Bandara 2003). Similar to that phenomenon, in the case of Sigiriya, lack of tourism research is evident which may have caused to the problems related with visitor management and tourism planning. According to Pederson, world heritage sites provide ideal locations for research in to heritage and tourism management (Pederson 2006).

The present research attempts to make a contribution in order to fill the research gap in cultural heritage tourism of Sri Lanka and the findings would be able to use for improving tourism planning and management at Sigiriya.

## 2. OBJECTIVES

The current study, expects to meet following objectives.

- To understand perceptions of the tourists on different basic facilities and service elements of the heritage site.
- To recognize overall perception of the tourists on facilities and service elements of the site.
- To identify effect of the tourists' perceptions on their intention to visit the site again in future.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

This research applied mix approach for data collection combining both qualitative and quantitative methods. A visitor survey questionnaire was utilized as the main data collection 'tool' and tourists were asked to fill the questionnaire after they have visited the site. The questionnaire had been designed to obtain perceptions of tourists on thirteen basic facilities and service elements of the site including drinking water facilities, information service and signage, access route, transport facilities, parking space, access to refreshment, sanitation facilities, support of the staff, access to frescoes and palace on the rock summit, handling emergencies, handling disturbances, fair prices and cleanliness. The tourists were given the opportunity to select one out of the four alternatives of good, moderate, poor and no idea as their perception for each of the facility and service elements separately. In addition to that, there was a space to make their special comments on the relevant aspects as well.

Interviews and observations were utilized as other data collection methods for this research. Short unstructured interviews were conducted with number of international and domestic tourists considering their interest to participate the survey. The researcher made observations on tourist facilities and service elements of the site with special attention on quality, placement within the complex and maintenance.

Data were mainly analyzed using simple statistical method of percentage comparison and content analysis was applied to examine the qualitative data of the study.

## 4. SAMPLING DESIGN

Accidental sampling method was utilized for the study considering practical concerns of the visitor survey with interest of individual tourists. The survey was carried out at two locations of the site simultaneously based on different domestic and international tourist routes of exit at the site. Same questionnaire in two versions English & Sinhala languages were used to obtain responses from international and domestic tourists respectively. Tour guide lecturers of non-English speaking foreign tourists volunteered to translate the questionnaire for them and filled it.

The visitor survey was conducted on weekdays in 2011 and therefore, number of domestic visitors was relatively low in comparison with weekends. On the other hand, domestic tourists had less interest to participate the survey affecting the final number of 71 domestic tourists in the sample. In contrast to that, international tourists and tour guide lecturers demonstrated a high interest to support the survey, which enabled to take data from 156 international tourists. All uncompleted questionnaires were removed before the calculation of the above final samples of the study. The total sample for the study numbered 227 tourists.



5. STATISTICAL DESIGN

This study applied simple statistical method of percentage comparison as the statistical analysis method of the study.

6. GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

Sigiriya UNESCO world heritage archaeological site is situated Matale district, Central province of Sri Lanka which is 169 Km north-east of Colombo; the commercial capital of Sri Lanka. The site is located in a central position among the important tourist attraction of the country including hill country, ancient cities of Polonnaruwa and Anuradhapura and Eastern beach area. The archaeological complex encompassed by ancient moats and ramparts covers 160 hectares (Weerakkodi 2001).

The visitor survey of domestic tourists was carried out in the proximity of miniature water garden close to the entrance/exit of the domestic tourist route. Data from international tourists were obtained at foreign tourists’ vehicle park within the site and near Cobra hood cave close to the end of the international tourist route.

7. RESULTS

The results of the survey as percentage of tourists who have rated their perceptions on the thirteen basic facilities and service elements of the site is shown in the table No. 1 given below.

Table No. 1: Tourists’ perceptions on basic facilities and service elements

Basic facility/service element	Good	Moderate	Poor	No idea
Drinking water facilities	-	22.5%	77.5%	-
Information service and signage	27.5%	37.5%	35%	-
Access route	55%	27.5%	17.5%	-
Transport facilities	67.5%	17.5%	15%	-
Parking space	32.5%	20%	17.5%	30%
Access to refreshment	5%	12.5%	82.5%	-
Sanitation	10%	25%	65%	-
Support of the staff	32.5%	37.5%	12.5%	17.5%
Access to frescoes & palace on the summit	12.5%	60%	20%	7.5%
Handling emergencies	10%	17.5%	30%	42.5%
Handling disturbances	12.5%	7.5%	50%	25%
Fair prices	32.5%	27.5%	40%	-
Cleanliness of the site	22.5%	62.5%	15%	-

According to the survey, it revealed that lack of drinking water facility was one of the major problems faced by the tourists. None of the respondents said that there are good drinking water facilities. While 22.5% rated it as moderate and 77.5% has encountered it in a poor state. Some of them specially, mentioned the need of this facility at the summit of the rock and lion’s paw terrace. Both international and domestic tourists have faced to same level of discomfort due to lack of drinking water at the site.

Tourists had mix attitude about the level of information service and signage. While 27.5% became satisfied about it, 37.5% has rated it as moderate. 35% of tourists stated that the facility is in a poor state. It can be recognized that majority of them are foreign tourists. This perception may be a result of relatively high level of information requirements of the international visitors and their comparison of the facility with comparable facilities in their home countries. Although, there are is a tourist information center at Sigiriya museum, most of foreign tourists specially, group visitors handled by tour operators don’t visit it due to the off location of the attraction away from the foreign tourists’ route and exclusion of it in tour packages.

Majority of respondents (55%) had the opinion that access route to the site is good and 27.5% believed that it is in an average level. Majority of foreign tourists and minority of domestic tourists belonged to the first category and nearly, all tourists who are dissatisfied about the access route are local visitors. And few of them stated that domestic



tourists are discriminated by the setting of access routes in comparison with foreigners. Domestic tourists have to walk from Sigiriya new town to reach the main entrance and repeat same way at their departure. But, international tourists are allowed to reach the entrance of the site by their vehicles and then, they can board their transport within the main site, at Moragahamula Vehicle Park at the end of the visit.

Tourists' perception on transport facilities which can be used to reach the site is more positive than other factors indicating percentage who rated it as good up to 67.5%. While only 17.5% stated that it is in normal level and only 15% are dissatisfied about it. This situation may be influenced by the fact that generally, both local and foreign tourists do not expect to travel to the site by public transport. I was found that only one foreign tourist was interviewed during the survey has used public transport. Therefore it can be assumed that transport facility is not a problematic issue for those who visited the site.

Parking space is also considered as an important facility of any heritage site with large number of tourist arrivals. In the case of present study, 32.5% tourists fairly satisfied about the prevailing facilities and 20% thought that it is in a moderate level. The percentage of tourists who didn't satisfy was 17.5%. It is noteworthy, 30% of them haven't an opinion on this issue. Reason for that is the place where interviews of some foreign tourists were conducted. They were asked to answer the questionnaire near Cobra hood cave before reaching to Moragahamula Vehicle Park due to some practical issues.

Tourists pointed out that the non-availability of refreshment facilities within the site as a major problem confronted by them. 82.5 % of them indicated this and only 12.5% had the idea that relevant facility is in a moderate level. Only 5% was satisfied on this issue. There is a low standard 'canteens' near the western entrance, but away from tourist routes and eye sight of tourists. And a tea boutique can be seen at Moragahamula Vehicle Park catering for business people and site employees. Domestic tourists don't come to this place since it is away from their tourist route and the standard is well below to cater for international tourists.

According to the survey, lack of sanitation was identified as another main problematic issue. 65% of tourists told that this facility is in a poor level. And 10% and 25% of them stated that it is in good and moderate status respectively. Both categories of tourists probably, may have visited the site museum where good sanitation facilities are available. The facility in front of the western entrance area is in bad condition as expressed by some international tourists in their comments.

When it is analyzed, the perception of tourists on staff support, 32.5% tourists had the opinion that it is in good level and according to another 37.5%, it is in moderate level. Only 12.5% was dissatisfied on this issue. 17.5% was unable expressed idea on this probably, due to lack of contact with the staff.

Being most important and attractive elements of the site, access to frescoes and palace on the summit is vital factor for tourism. 12.5% said that access facilities are in a good condition. Opinion of majority was moderate and 20% of tourists expressed that those are not up to adequate level. Some tourists noted the requirement of renovation of the staircases leading to the summit and the frescoes.

Occasionally, handling emergencies specially, wasp attacks at Sigiriya heritage site has become a hotly debated controversial issue and the site has been closed for the public sometime following the incidents. And number of tourists were injured and hospitalized for treatments. On the other hand, due to the geomorphologic nature of the site, always there is risk for visitors at the site. Therefore, some sort of disaster and emergency handling plan and required instruments should be readily available at Sigiriya. The survey revealed that considerable percentage (42.5%) of tourists was unaware whether there is a procedure to handle emergencies or not at the site. 30% of the respondents participated to the survey believed that handling this issue is in a poor state. 17.5% tourists expressed that the site has a moderate level facilities for that. Only, 10% stated, it is in a good standard.

There are some disturbances from site guides for international visitors, from vendors for visitor and sometimes, from wild animals such as monkeys. It became clear from the present study that this is a considerable issue while coping with problems confronted by tourists. Site's facilities and services to handle these disturbances are in a poor state in accordance with the view of the 50% tourists. Another 25% failed to make any idea and 7.5% of tourists believed the ability is in a moderate level. Only, 12.5% had a good perception on this issue.

Prices of goods and services including entrance tickets, food and beverage are important in tourism specially, when dealing with price conscious visitors. It is generally accepted that prices should be fair. Tourists were asked their idea about prices of the site. 40% of tourists expressed that fairness of prices cannot be seen which means those



are too expensive. The percentage of tourists who believed that the prices are moderate is 27.5% and 32.5% had no issue on fairness of prices. Some foreign tourists complained about the price of entrance ticket in comments. A tourist from United Kingdom, who is a minister, commented that it is too expensive even for rich westerners. It was observed that a young student from a western country expressed her frustration about high price of tickets to ticketing staff. Although, international tourists have stated this as a problem, domestic visitors were not taken this as an issue. The reason for these different views can be recognized as the huge gap between the prices of local tickets and foreign ones.

Majority of tourists (62.5%) thought that cleanliness of the site is in a moderate level and therefore, cannot be considered as a major problem according to their views. 22.5% of them rated it as good and 15% stated that it is in a poor state.

Table No. 2: Overall perception of tourists on basic facilities/service elements

Perception	Percentage
Good	25%
Moderate	28.5%
Poor	37%
No idea	9%

As depicted in the above table highest percentage of tourists had a negative perception on basic facilities and service elements of the site representing 37% of the respondents. Another 28.5% rated it in moderate level and only, 25% of them had a view that those are at a good level. 9% of the tourists didn't have a perception on this regard.

90% of tourists stated that they have an intention to visit Sigiriya UNESCO world heritage site again in future. This high percentage of expected visitation is not positively correlated with the tourists' overall perception on basic facilities and service elements of the site. It seems that tourists have placed high value of uniqueness and heritage value of the site than basic facilities and service elements at the site in considering their intention to make future visit to the attraction.

### 8. CONCLUSION

In Sri Lanka, there is a lack of emphasis in cultural tourism research among the academia specially, using visitor surveys in order to make a contribution for visitor oriented tourism development at cultural heritage sites. This study focused to understand tourists' perceptions on basic facilities and service elements at UNESCO World Heritage archaeological site of Sigiriya in Sri Lanka. Majority of tourists had clear negative perceptions on certain facilities at the site such as drinking water, access to refreshments, sanitation and handling disturbances. 37% of tourists rated that the basic facilities/service elements are at a poor level while, only, 25% stated that those are at a good level. However, 90% of the tourists wanted to visit the site in future. This contrast phenomenon can be interpreted that tourists prioritize uniqueness and heritage values of cultural sites with outstanding universal value over quality and availability of basic tourist facilities and service elements at those sites in their decision making on future visitation.

### 9. AREA FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Number of research areas are still open to be explored in cultural heritage tourism at Sigiriya and other cultural heritage sites in Sri Lanka. This study only, focused on tourists' perceptions on basic facilities and service elements of the site. Therefore, it is important to conduct future research on perceptions of other stakeholders of cultural tourism at Sigiriya such as heritage managers, tourist guides, vendors and local community in different aspects of tourism. It may be crucial to conduct research based on an applied research approach in various aspects of cultural tourism in Sri Lanka such as economic and social impacts, marketing, sustainability, planning at Sigiriya and other major cultural heritage sites in Sri Lanka as an impactful initiative to cultural tourism research in the country.



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