

Evaluating the Socio-Economic Impact of Cultural Tourism Development in Anuradhapura District

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Abstract

Tourism is a significant global economic sector, contributing approximately 10% to global GDP. This study examines the socio-economic potential of cultural tourism development in the Anuradhapura District, a UNESCO World Heritage site renowned for its rich Buddhist heritage and cultural significance. The research aims to evaluate the socio-economic impacts of cultural tourism development on local communities in Anuradhapura District and identify the factors influencing sustainable tourism development. Data were collected from 120 respondents using a structured questionnaire, and statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS. Descriptive statistics revealed that respondents' demographic characteristics, including age, gender, education, and DS division, significantly influenced perceptions of cultural tourism's impact. Pearson correlation analysis showed perfect positive relationships ($r = 1.000$, $p < 0.01$) between cultural tourism development and variables such as personal income increase, business growth, infrastructure development, and service improvement. A moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.530$, $p < 0.01$) was found between tourism development and involvement in decision-making, while a weak positive correlation ($r = 0.231$, $p < 0.01$) was observed for job opportunities. Multiple regression analysis highlighted that the perception of benefit distribution in the community ($\beta = 0.942$, $p < 0.01$) and involvement in planning decisions ($\beta = 0.530$, $p < 0.01$) had strong positive impacts on cultural tourism development. Other variables, such as personal income increase, heritage preservation, and quality of life improvement, also showed statistically significant contributions. The findings are consistent with previous tourism studies highlighting the role of cultural tourism in promoting sustainable socio-economic development and heritage conservation.

Keywords: cultural tourism, heritage, religious tourism, community, socio-economic development

Introduction

Tourism is the act of traveling to places away from one's normal environment for a holiday, business, or other activities for a maximum of 1 year and 1 day. Cultural tourism is any tourism that is driven by the interest in the heritage, traditions, arts, lifestyles, and cultural resources of a particular destination (WTO, 2019). Tourism is one of the fastest-growing industries in the world, and it plays a crucial role in the economic development, employment generation, and regional growth of the area. The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC, 2020) estimates that tourism contributes around 10% to the world's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and provides millions of jobs throughout the world. The tourism sector has other social and economic positive and negative effects that affect the local community's well-being (Diaz-Parra & Jover, 2020; Gonzalez-Perez, 2020; Heo et al., 2019; Sequera & Nofre, 2018; Truong et al., 2020).

Sri Lanka's cultural heritage, biodiversity, and strategic position in the Indian Ocean make it an important tourist destination. In recent years, tourism has emerged as one of the leading economic activities and foreign exchange earning sectors of the country (Abeywardana, 2011). Despite several economic and social issues, Sri Lanka is still working towards strengthening its tourism industry and improving the well-being and living conditions of its citizens (Nuskiya & Kaldeen, 2019). Anuradhapura has a special place in the list of cultural tourism places in the country as it is one of the ancient capital cities of Sri Lanka and is also a UNESCO World Heritage Site. This district, known as the “Sacred City of Anuradhapura”, is home to several archaeological monuments, religious sites, and cultural attractions that appeal to domestic and international visitors (UNESCO, 2021).

The development of cultural tourism can be very beneficial for the socio-economic development of local communities. It can increase household income, generate job opportunities, stimulate local business activity, develop infrastructure facilities, and improve public services. Cultural tourism may also play a role in the preservation of heritage, in cultural identity, and in the well-being of the community. But the development of tourism can also pose problems like environmental degradation,

commercialisation of cultural resources, and inequitable sharing of tourism benefits. This means that the socio-economic impacts of cultural tourism development must be understood to make sure that the development of cultural tourism is managed sustainably.

Although cultural tourism plays a significant role in the Anuradhapura District, few empirical studies have focused on examining the socio-economic effects of cultural tourism on local communities as a whole. Studies have concentrated on tourism development and heritage conservation with little consideration given to the impact cultural tourism has on income generation and the growth of businesses, employment opportunities, infrastructure, and community well-being. Thus, the present study is aimed at assessing the socio-economic impacts of cultural tourism development on Anuradhapura District and recommending findings that would assist in fostering the development of sustainable tourism and increasing the socio-economic benefits of the local people in this district from the development of cultural tourism.

Literature Review

Cultural tourism has become one of the most significant types of tourism because of the economic value that it can bring, along with the ability to protect cultural heritage resources. Timothy and Boyd (2003) identified three areas in which cultural tourism can contribute to local economic development: income generation, employment generation, and providing more entrepreneurial opportunities. Also, McKercher and Du Cros (2002) pointed out that sustainable cultural tourism establishes a symbiotic bond between the development of tourism and the conservation of heritage.

Tourism research has focused on the economic impacts of tourism. Alcañiz-Ortega and Segarra (2025) concluded that the development of tourism has a high contribution to regional economic growth, creating jobs, raising the income of households, promoting the expansion of local businesses, and investments in infrastructure. Similarly, Egan and Nield (2003) found that in terms of tourism competitiveness,

improvements in the quality of the services offered, hospitality facilities, and supporting infrastructure are all positive factors.

There have also been several studies that have noted the social effects of tourism development. Deery et al. (2012) contended that tourism affects the well-being of communities, social cohesion, and the quality of life of the residents. They highlighted the importance of the active involvement of the community in ensuring the equitable distribution of the benefits of developing tourism and reducing social conflicts. In the same way, Woosnam and Ribeiro (2023) reiterated that the involvement of stakeholders and active engagement of local communities are essential for sustainable tourism development and a positive attitude of residents towards tourism activities. Heritage preservation is also an important aspect of cultural tourism. Liu, Kim, and Song (2022) reported that sustainable tourism development can help to preserve cultural heritage and provide local communities with economic gains. The authors also highlighted the need for the sustainable development of tourism along with environmental and cultural goals. There is a connection between the revenues of tourism and the financing of conservation actions and raising awareness about the protection of cultural assets. Tourism still has a significant place in the Sri Lankan development sector in both national and regional development. The past research has revealed employment creation, foreign exchange earnings, and infrastructure development as the benefits of tourism. However, there is hardly any empirical study that has specifically explored the socio-economic effects of the development of cultural tourism on the local communities of heritage places like the Anuradhapura District. Hence, this study aims to fill this gap by examining the impacts of cultural tourism development on the economic aspects of income generation, business development, employment opportunities, infrastructure development, and improvement of services, and social aspects such as quality of life, preservation of cultural heritage, community involvement, and distribution of benefits.

Research Design And Methodology

Study Area

The district of Anuradhapura is located in Sri Lanka's North Central Province. It is located between latitudes 7°30'N and 8°30'N and longitudes 79°30'E and 80°30'E. The farming prowess of the district can be owed to the flat terrain and also the high number of historic irrigation dams. The history of Anuradhapura started when King Pandukabhaya took it as the capital city in the fourth century BCE. It prospered as a large metropolitan centre in the period of King Devanampiya Tissa, a supporter of Buddhism in the region. The capital city of Sri Lanka was Anuradhapura up to 1017 CE, after which the threat of invasion from the South Indian subcontinent necessitated its desertion. The estimated population of the Anuradhapura District was 954,000 in 2021, of which 91 percent are Sinhalese, and a negligible proportion of Tamils (1%), Sri Lankan Moors (8%), and others (DCS Report, 2020). Anuradhapura is within the Dry Zone of the island; hence, it is within the seasonally dry tropics (Panabokke 1996). Rainfall in the region is brought by the Northeast monsoon (Dec-Feb). The rainfall is annually received in the study area at a rate of 1700 mm, and the Temperatures range between 28° C and 32° C (Sri Lanka Meteorological Department, 2022).

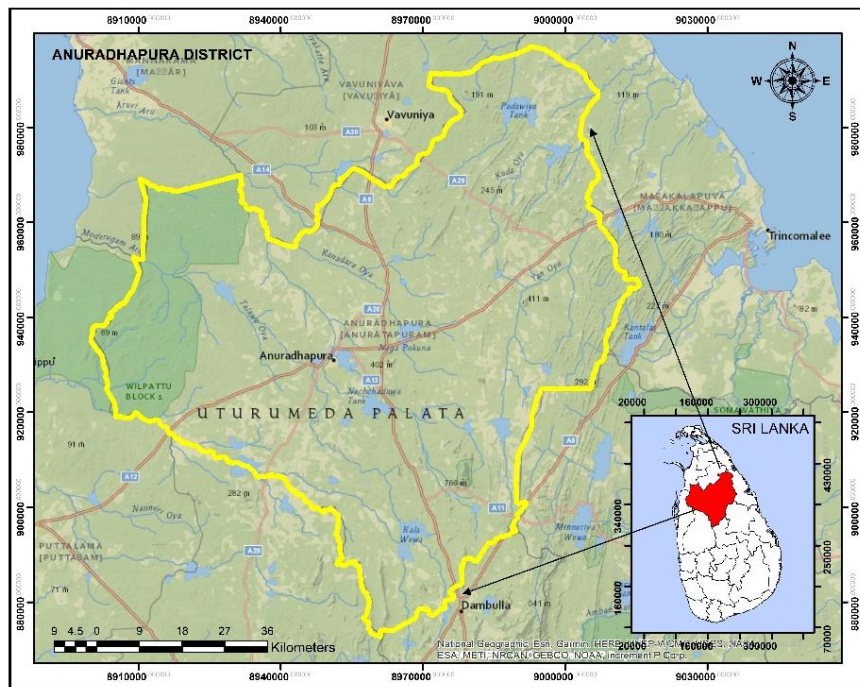


Figure 1: Location of Study Area

Methodology

The main objective of this study was to evaluate the socio-economic impacts of cultural tourism development in Anuradhapura District. Research methodology entailed several systematic procedures of data collection, analysis, and interpretation. A structured questionnaire survey was used to collect Primary Data. To achieve a good measure of perception and opinions of respondents, the questionnaire was structured with closed-ended questions using a five-point Likert scale. Sampling was also done using the Cochran sample size formula. Samples used in the survey consisted of 120 people drawn randomly from the local community in Anuradhapura District.

Cochran's Sample Size Formula

$$n = \frac{(Z^2 \times P \times (1 - P))}{e^2} \quad (1)$$

$$(0.089)^2$$

Substitute Values

Step 1:

$$(1.96)^2 = 3.8416$$

Step 2:

$$(0.089)^2 = 0.007921$$

Step 3:

$$n = (3.8416 \times 0.5 \times 0.5) / 0.007921$$

$$n = (3.8416 \times 0.25) / 0.007921$$

$$n = 0.9604 / 0.007921$$

$$n = 121.24$$

Therefore, the required sample size is approximately 121 respondents. Considering field constraints and data completeness requirements, 120 respondents were selected for the survey.

These respondents have been selected as a sample of how the community views cultural tourism and its social and economic implications. The SPSS package was used to analyze the collected data. Some of the statistical methods utilized to analyze the data are Descriptive Statistics, which was used to summarize and explain the demographics and answers of the participants. To understand relationships between the independent variable (Cultural Tourism Development) and the dependent variable (Socio-Economic Development and its dimensions). Pearson Correlation Analysis was used. Lastly, multiple linear regression Analysis was applied to the evaluation of

the degree to which socioeconomic factors impacted cultural tourism development. To test the relationships among variables, hypothesis testing was conducted. The findings were presented in a hypothesis testing table, revealing significant relationships between cultural tourism development and different socio-economic factors. The methodology created an effective way to thoroughly examine the role of cultural tourism in promoting socio-economic advantages in the Anuradhapura District.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework was developed based on previous studies examining the relationship between cultural tourism development and socio-economic outcomes. Cultural tourism development is considered the independent variable influencing economic and social dimensions within local communities. Economic dimensions include personal income increase, business growth, infrastructure development, service improvement, and employment opportunities. Social dimensions include improvements in quality of life, heritage preservation, community participation, and equitable distribution of benefits. The framework proposes that cultural tourism development contributes positively to socio-economic development in the Anuradhapura District.

Formulation of Hypothesis

H0: Cultural tourism development has no significant relationship with socio-economic development in the Anuradhapura District.

H1: Cultural tourism development has a significant relationship with socio-economic development in the Anuradhapura District.

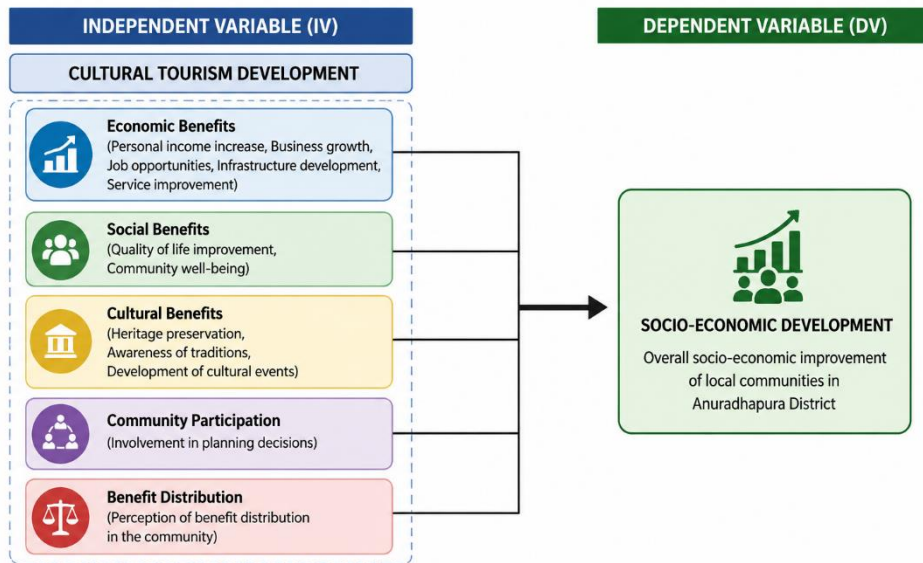


Figure 2: Variable Factors

The framework illustrates how cultural tourism development influences both economic and social outcomes. Improved income generation, business opportunities, infrastructure facilities, and social well-being collectively contribute to overall socio-economic development within the local community. When the results of the analysis are found to be less than 0.05, H0 will be rejected, and H1 will be accepted. If the analysis results are greater than 0.05, then H1 will be rejected, and H0 will be accepted.

Results And Discussions

Descriptive statistics is the portion of statistics based on summarising and structuring data so that they become easier to comprehend and interpret. Measures of central tendency like mean, median, and standard deviation are considered measures of descriptive statistics. My questionnaire's descriptive data on the demographic variables is given in the table. Age, gender, education, and DS division are based on a sample of 120 respondents. In the case of age, the minimum value lies between 1

and 5, the average is 2.79 with a standard deviation of 1.296. The coding of gender is between 1 and 2, with a mean of 1.41 (mean) and 0.494 standard deviation. The education variable includes a low of 1, a high of 5, a mean of 2.57, and a standard deviation of 1.288. All these descriptive statistics will give an idea about the central tendencies and variation among the demographic groups that comprise the sample. The highest mean value is 2.90, and the lowest mean value, according to the table, is 1.41.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Sum	Mean		Std. Deviation	Variance
	Statistic			Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Statistic
Age of the respondent	120	1	5	335	2.79	.118	1.296	1.679
Gender of the respondent	120	1	2	169	1.41	.045	.494	.244
Education	120	1	5	308	2.57	.118	1.288	1.659
DS Division	120	1	6	348	2.90	.163	1.789	3.200
Valid N (listwise)	120							

Table 1: Descriptive table for demographic variables

Pearson Correlation Analysis

The correlation between cultural tourism strategic development and personal income increase is perfectly positive at 1.000. It is the dependent variable; hence, it implies that personal income increase is highly correlated to cultural tourism strategy development. The significance value of 0.000 confirms that this relationship is

statistically significant, just the same way there is a perfect positive correlation of 1.000 between cultural tourism development and business growth. Thus, as cultural tourism strategies develop, the growth of business follows. The significant value here is 0.000, once more indicating that this relationship is significant.

Cultural Tourism development	Personal income increases	Business Growth	Increase in job opportunities related to cultural Tourism	Infrastructure Development	Service Improvement
Correlation	1.000 ^{**}	1.000 ^{**}	.231 [*]	1.000 ^{**}	1.000 ^{**}
Significant Value	.000	.000	.011	.000	.000
N	120	120	120	120	120

Table 2: Economic Variables

The culture tourism strategic development and its association with the rise in personal income is also ideal and has a value of 1.000. This is the dependent variable; therefore, the implication is that the growth of personal income is closely linked with the ever-developing cultural tourism strategy. The significance value of 0.000 also shows that this is indeed a statistically significant relationship, the same way the finding clearly shows a perfect positive relationship of 1.000 between cultural tourism development and business growth; in other words, as cultural tourism strategies are developed, business growth is induced. The significant value here is again 0.000, which shows that this relationship is significant.

Cultural Tourism development	Quality of life improves	Heritage Preservation	Involvement in Decision	Perception of benefit distribution in the community
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Correlation	1.000 ^{**}	1.000 ^{**}	.530 ^{**}	.942 ^{**}
Significant Value	.000	.000	.000	.000
N	120	120	120	120

Table 3: Social Variables

There is a perfect relationship between them, with a correlation value of 1.000 with cultural tourism development. It implies that the rise in the quality of life is directly connected to the creation of cultural tourism strategies. The statistical significance is proved by the 0.000 significance value. The resultant correlation of 1.000 between cultural tourism development and heritage conservation implies that heritage conservation is in perfect harmony with the development of cultural tourism strategies. The value of 0.000 significance proves the significance of this correlation even more. The correlation in this case is 0.530, which translates to a moderate positive association between cultural tourism development and participation in decision-making. This implies that increasing the role in decision-making is likely to contribute to cultural tourism strategy development. This relationship is statistically significant since the p-value is 0.000. The correlation coefficient 0.942 is indeed very high, which implies that there is a strong positive correlation between the perception of benefits of cultural tourism and cultural tourism strategy development. There is a very high statistical significance in this correlation, as its significance value is 0.000.

According to these tables, it may be seen that the strategic development of cultural tourism has a close connection with economic factors and social ones. Other variables such as personal income rise, increase in business, development of infrastructure and service, and improvement of quality of life and preservation of heritage have outstanding and near-excellent positive relationships with cultural tourism strategy development. Also, participation in decision-making and benefit distribution felt in the community draws close positive relations with the dependent variable as well,

which shows the importance of each of these factors in the development of cultural tourism.

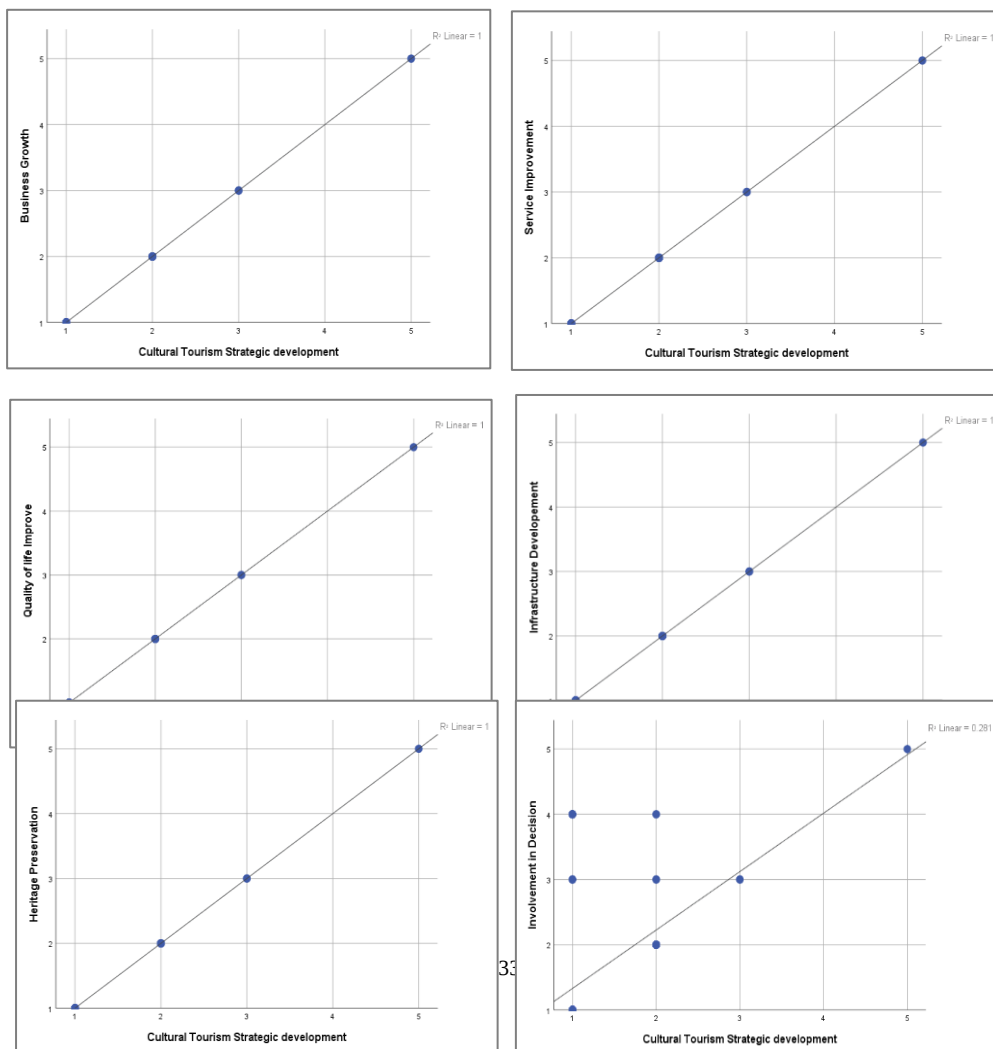
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	P
	B	Std. Error	Beta	
Increase in job opportunities related to cultural Tourism	.000	.000	.000	.231*
Development of new cultural events	.000	.000	.000	0.01
Involvement in Planning Decision	.000	.000	.000	.530**
Perception of benefit distribution in the community	.000	.000	.000	.942**
Awareness of Tradition Increases	1.000	.000	1.000	0.01
Personal income increases	1.000	.000	1.000	0.01
Business Growth	1.000	.000	1.000	1.000
Service Improvement	1.000	.000	1.000	1.000

Table 4: Multiple Regression Analysis

The multiple regression analysis table indicates the relation between cultural tourism development (dependent variable) and several independent variables. The unstandardized coefficients (B) show the direction and magnitude of influence of each independent variable, and the standardized coefficients (Beta) permit the relative significance of the predictors to be compared. Other variables like increased

job opportunities in cultural tourism ($\text{Beta} = .231, p = .01$), participation in planning decisions ($\text{Beta} = .530, p < .01$), have statistically significant positive effects on cultural tourism development. The strongest favorable impact is on the perception of benefit distribution in the community ($\text{Beta} = .942, p < .01$). Several different variables, such as the awareness of tradition, personal income, business development, and the improvement of service, possess perfect standardized coefficients ($\text{Beta} = 1.000, p = .01$ or 1.000) which means that these variables contributed a lot to the dependent variable. The statistical significance is shown by the p-values, which show that values less than 0.05 or 0.01 are enough to prove that the relationships are not an outcome of luck. This highlights the significance of these aspects in enhancing strategic growth within cultural tourism.

Linear Scatter Plot Chart For All Variables



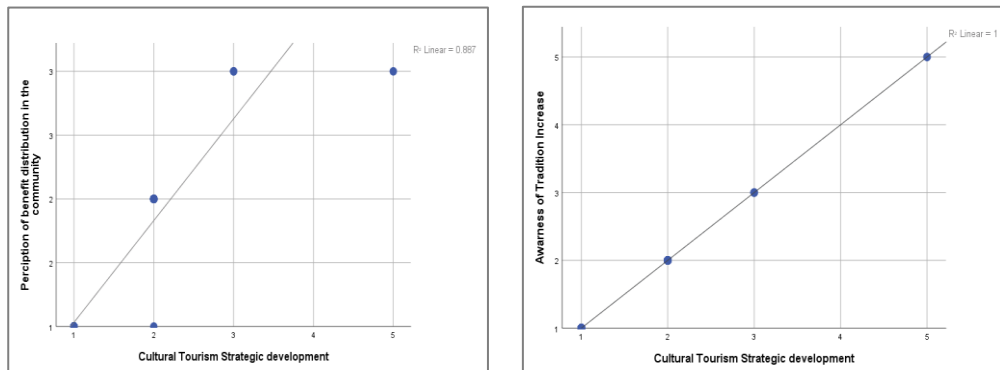


Figure 3: Scatter plot linear graph for socioeconomic variable

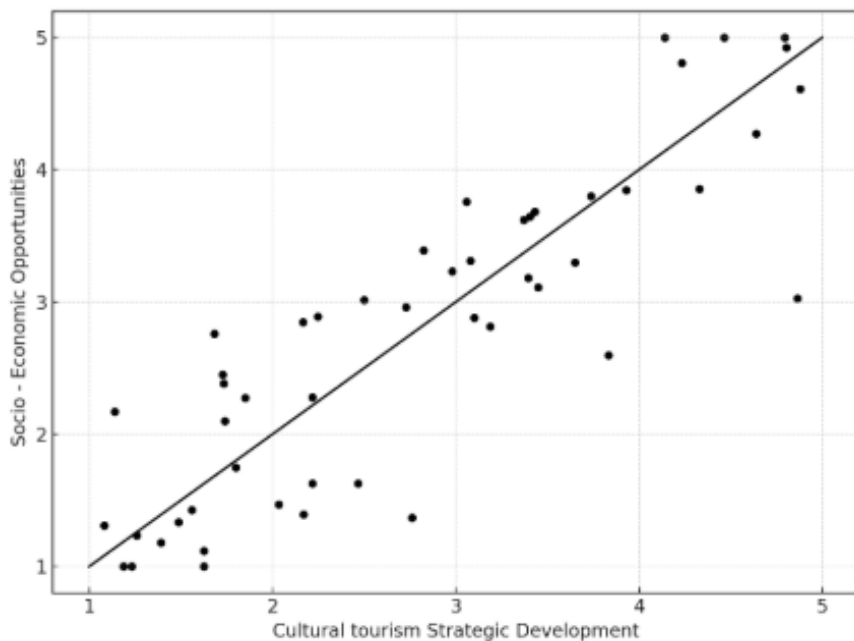


Figure 4: Scatter plot linear graph

The scatter plot graph shows a strong linearly correlated results between Cultural Tourism Development (x-axis) and Socio-Economic Opportunities (y-axis). The upward trend and the line of the best fit show that the more the development of cultural tourism, the higher the rise in socio-economic opportunities. The fact that the points are grouped near the regression line proves the validity of such a relationship. According to the statistical analysis of the study, it has been stated that the Pearson

correlation coefficient (r) has been perfectly positive and significant for various socio-economic indicators, such as personal income, growth of business, growth of services, and the development of infrastructure, equal to 1.000 with $p < 0.01$ (statistically significant). The visual effects of this plot will be linked with the quantitative indicators, proving that strategic investments in cultural tourism are highly correlated with greater economic opportunities of the local community in Anuradhapura District.

Hypothesis Testing

<i>Economic Variable</i>		<i>Correlation (r)</i>	<i>Significance (p)</i>	<i>Relationship</i>
<i>Personal Income Increase</i>		1.000	0.000	Significant Positive
<i>Business Growth</i>		1.000	0.000	Significant Positive
<i>Job Opportunities</i>		0.231	0.011	Weak Positive Significant
<i>Infrastructure Development</i>		1.000	0.000	Significant Positive
<i>Service Improvement</i>		1.000	0.000	Significant Positive

Table 5: *Economic Factors and Cultural Tourism Development*

All economic variables show positive relationships with cultural tourism development. Personal income increase, business growth, infrastructure development, and service improvement exhibit very strong positive relationships, while job opportunities demonstrate a weaker but statistically significant positive relationship.

<i>Social Variable</i>	<i>Correlation (r)</i>	<i>Significance (p)</i>	<i>Relationship</i>
<i>Quality of Life Improvement</i>	1.000	0.000	Significant Positive
<i>Heritage Preservation</i>	1.000	0.000	Significant Positive
<i>Involvement in Planning Decisions</i>	0.530	0.000	Moderate Positive Significant
<i>Perception of Benefit Distribution</i>	0.942	0.000	Strong Positive Significant

Table 6: Social Factors and Cultural Tourism Development

All social variables demonstrate statistically significant positive relationships with cultural tourism development. Quality of life improvement and heritage preservation show very strong positive relationships, while involvement in planning decisions and perception of benefit distribution indicate moderate to strong positive relationships.

The Pearson correlation analysis revealed statistically significant positive relationships between cultural tourism development and both economic and social dimensions of socio-economic development. The significance values for all variables were below the 0.05 threshold, indicating that the observed relationships are statistically significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_0) was rejected, and the alternative hypothesis (H_1) was accepted. Based on the statistical results, H_1 was accepted, confirming that cultural tourism development contributes significantly to socio-economic development in Anuradhapura District.

Discussion

The results show that the development of Cultural Tourism positively influences socio-economic development in Anuradhapura District. The positive relationships between cultural tourism and income generation reinforce previous studies that have

found that tourism is associated with economic growth and local entrepreneurship. Likewise, the close connection between cultural tourism and cultural heritage preservation indicates the significance of tourism in cultural heritage conservation. The results also illustrate how community involvement and distribution of benefits affect tourism development results. The findings emphasise the importance of inclusive planning approaches to ensure that the benefits of tourism are shared fairly with local people. The results corroborate Alcañiz-Ortega and Segarra (2025), who concluded that tourism is a big sector in enhancing local income generation and local economic growth. Likewise, Egan and Nield (2003) found that tourism development improves the performance of businesses and service quality. The positive relationship between cultural tourism and heritage conservation is in accordance with the emphasis on cultural tourism's contribution to cultural conservation put by Timothy and Boyd (2003). In addition, Deery et al. (2012) noted that community involvement is an important factor in tourism planning, echoing the findings of this study on how important community involvement and benefit distribution are in tourism planning. Thus, to develop sustainable tourism, economic investments must be made, and involvement with the community is necessary.

Conclusion And Recommendations

This study examined the socio-economic impacts of cultural tourism development in Anuradhapura District. The findings revealed that cultural tourism contributes positively to income generation, business development, infrastructure improvement, service enhancement, quality of life improvement, and heritage preservation. Statistical analyses confirmed significant relationships between cultural tourism development and most socio-economic indicators. The study concludes that cultural tourism can serve as an effective strategy for promoting sustainable socio-economic development while supporting cultural heritage conservation in Anuradhapura District, but regardless of these pleasant results, the study has shown certain spheres in which the influence of cultural tourism was not so strong. Job opportunities had a positive correlation with cultural tourism too, albeit with a less pronounced relation, and thus indicating that the job market may not be such a direct market to be affected

by tourism development. In addition, the perception of benefit distribution showed a strong positive relationship with cultural tourism development, indicating that local communities perceive tourism as an important source of socio-economic benefits.

To improve on this, local authorities ought to design mechanisms through which locals may be involved in decision-making. This may include workshops, focus groups, and consultations with the community, so that the local stakeholders are included in the process. Involving the community in planning tourism will make the development process meet communal needs, and it will make the community support tourism activities.

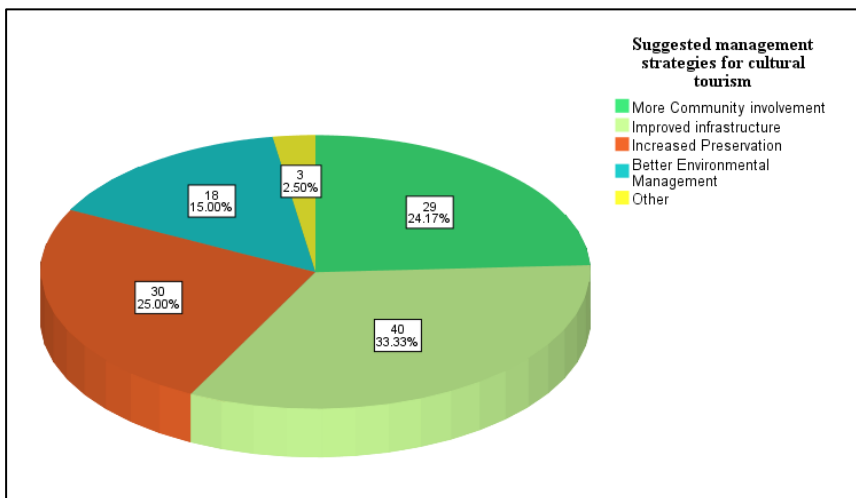


Figure 5: Suggested Cultural Tourism Planning Strategies Questionnaire (2024)

When it comes to making the positive effects of tourism sustainable, one should consider investing in environmentally friendly infrastructures, e.g., transportation services that do not use too much energy and waste systems that are energy efficient. This would lower the harmful effects of tourism on the environment and improve Anuradhapura as a tourist place and a sustainable one.

In further boosting this, governments are advised to sponsor more within the field of conservation of historical sites and come up with programs aimed at educating people on the significance of conservation of cultural assets. Partnership with international

institutions, including UNESCO, is also another way through which more sources of conservation of heritage can be brought in. To understand the long term effects of the cultural tourism industry on the socio- economic conditions of Anuradhapura, a sound monitoring and evaluation system needs to be put into place. Constant surveys and data collection must be made to monitor some of the significant socio-economic indicators, including the level of income, employment, and the growth of businesses.

Based on the questionnaire, the community members provided several suggestions to build the cultural tourism in the Anuradhapura district are as follows; 24 % of the community member says there should be more community involvement, 33% of the people say there should be development of infrastructure, 25 % says there should be enhancement of cultural heritage preservation and 15 % of the members are chosen as there should be better environment management. Although cultural tourism has played a major role in assisting the socio-economic development of Anuradhapura, this situation needs to be enhanced further to maximize its advantages. Solving the issue of community participation, employment, and sustainability of infrastructure will enable Anuradhapura to make the most of its cultural tourism prospects, hence no one will grow at the expense of locals. The framework presents the steps of the Cultural Tourism development planning process. The initial phase outlines the research activity of identifying and recording cultural heritage premises. Get the local communities involved in the planning so that they are involved and enjoy it.

Carry out the research and community consultation to assess the tourist potential of identified cultural sites, and develop a holistic plan of tourism development.

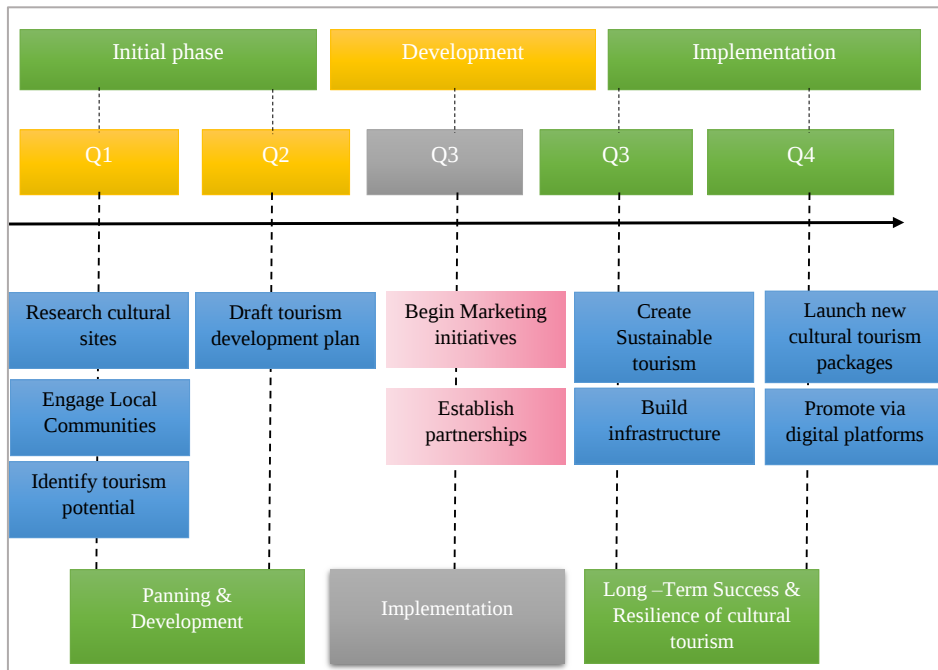


Figure 6: Cultural Tourism Development Planning Framework

The development Phase describes the introduction of marketing strategies to market cultural tourism. Engage partners to help in the development of tourism, which includes the government, non-governmental groups, and the local people. Implementation Phase: The idea would be to have sustainable tourism devised to come up with initiatives that could make cultural tourism sustainable beyond the short-term effects. Put in place the requisite infrastructure to enhance the tourism activities. Provide new and appealing tour packages and market them by using digital channels. This will make cultural tourism systematically developed, which will benefit the local communities and help in the sustainability of the culture and good tourism.

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