

# Consequences of Covid-19 Pandemic on Tourism Industry in Galle Fort-Sri Lanka

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## Introduction

The Galle Fort in Sri Lanka was inscribed as a World Heritage site in 1988, however, it was declared as a historical heritage and special regulatory zone in 1978. This has become a cause for development of tourism and tourism-related activities in this area. The Covid-19 outbreak in the first quarter of 2020 in Sri Lanka affected tourism and hospitality services in deadly manner in terms of financial income. This has resulted a decline in the services sector significantly to 2.3% in 2019, compared to the growth rate of 4.6% in 2018. The Easter Sunday attacks on tourism related activities, which has led to negative results (i.e. -17.39%) on tourist arrivals in 2019 (CBSL, 2019). While Government was in the process of uplifting this situation, the tourism industry experienced various brunt situations; particularly unsteady political situation, subsequent presidential election in November-2019 and COVID-19 outbreak in China in December-2019. This has caused drawbacks in service sector including tourism industry for the second time in recent past in a massive level, after the civil war situation in the country. Soon after the end of inland civil war in 2009, the tourism industry shown a gradual progressive trend in Sri Lanka and tourism arrivals was recorded as 0.7 million in 2010 and it reached to a peak of 2.3 million in 2018. This figure was reduced to 1.9 million in the end

of 2019 (CBSL, 2019), as result of April incidents. In 2020, a drastic decline (-66.1%) was recorded in revenue term of tourism industry, since it was not recorded any tourist arrivals during the period of April-October 2020 (Ruzaik, 2020). In addition, the overall downturn in the global economy and the pandemic distresses in the countries, from where Sri Lanka has been traditionally attracting tourists, such as Europe, China, India and Maldives were hindered the recovery of the tourism sector as expected in the end of 2019 (CBSL, 2019. pp 17-53). Unfortunately year 2020 has become a bad year for tourism sector in Sri Lanka, recording its cumulative earnings at US dollars 956 million as of October 2020, compared to the corresponding period of 2019 (US\$ 3,000), which was estimated based on the tourist arrivals (CBSL-ERD 14.12.2020). Government of Sri Lanka has already commenced applicable measures to reverse this disaster situation in terms of economy, and social status of general public and the country as well, while maintaining public health. The consequences this pandemic situation was equally felt by all the geographical region in Sri Lanka. Galle fort has no exception, since it was identified as one of the major tourist destination in Sri Lanka by the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA), due to its geographical location and historical value.

### **Background of the Galle fort**

The Galle has a long history from 1506 with the arrival of Portuguese, under the leadership of Don LORENZO D'ALMEIDA. Galle harbour was first known as 'Punta de Galle' by them and this name was subsequently changed as 'Point of Galle', under the British administration after 1796. Galle was popularized trading destination for correlating east and west international traders (majorly from India, China, Persia, Arabia and a few west word countries) to exchange cinnamon, ivory, gemstone trade and other valuable spices, during the medieval period due to its location closed to the world sea route with

a natural harbour. Historical information revealed that the fifth Abbasid caliph, Haaron-Al-Rasheed of Middle East Ruler, created the popular court in Baghdad (Capital city of Iraq) and said event was commemorated by thousands of people in one night in the Galle port in 8<sup>th</sup> century AD and thereafter engaged in business with Chinese traders. In 1518, Albergaria-Portugal Governor has visited Galle port to meet King of [Kotte-Dharma Parakkrama Bahu](#) ([www.urlaub-sri-lanka.info/galle-sri-lanka](http://www.urlaub-sri-lanka.info/galle-sri-lanka), retrieved 18.02.2021).

The misunderstanding and contradiction between the Portuguese and Kandyan king at that time lead to commence the first fortress in 1588 at Galle by Portuguese and subsequently converted into strong structures as defensive measures. Dutch government sent their 2000 soldiers in 12 ships to the Galle, under the headship of Commander Jacob Koster in 1640 and captured the port of Galle ([www.urlaub-sri-lanka.info/galle-sri-lanka](http://www.urlaub-sri-lanka.info/galle-sri-lanka), retrieved 18.02.2021). Galle was the administrative city of Sri Lanka, under the Dutch administration. In 1796, the British took over the administrative power of Sri Lanka and Colombo port was developed and declared as the capital of Sri Lanka. Thereafter, all the goods such as tea, rubber, coconut were exported from Colombo harbour. Gradually, Galle has become a major tourist attraction location in the southern province at present, due to its historic value and aesthetic beauty and has provide potentials to generate the income to the people in Galle by way of tourism and support services ([www.urlaub-sri-lanka.info/bentota-to-galle](http://www.urlaub-sri-lanka.info/bentota-to-galle), retrieved 18.02.2021).

### **Galle Fort**

Galle Fort has a long history, since the first half of the 1500s as stated above. Although Galle fort was first constructed by Portuguese, the Dutch ruler completely removed old Portuguese fortification and established a very sophisticated fort with all the facilities as existed today. However, it has multiple historical evidences to exhibit the colonial rulers-Portuguese, Dutch and English's interest on Galle fort.

The first Catholic Church in the island was established in 1543 in Galle fort by Portuguese ([www.urlaub-sr-lanka.info/galle-sri-lanka](http://www.urlaub-sr-lanka.info/galle-sri-lanka), retrieved 18.02.2021). The front view and architectural buff of Galle fort, churches, and houses adorned by Dutch are still available without much change. Hence, it is one of the seven world heritage sites on the island and UNESCO declared as world heritage site after discovering several hidden bunkers in the Galle Fort, under the clock tower. Galle Dutch Fort's structure and lighthouse added more value to this destination. Further, the tourism related development activities have majorly been accelerated, after declaring Galle Fort as a historical heritage and special regulatory zone by the extra ordinary gazette notification no 987/12 dtd.7.8.1997 in term of sec 23 of the UDA act number no 41 of 1978 (Wijayapala, 2006). Thereafter, more alterations and changes were taken place within the Galle fort area in terms renovations, refurbishment and tourism development, during the recent past. Accumulation of all above significant icons and values, Galle fort is one of the [major tourist attraction point, providing income generating avenue to the dwellers by way of tourism and ancillary services.](#)

#### **Location of Galle fort**

Galle is the capital city of the southern province and it is a largest and most beautiful city, which was located approximately 145 Km away from Colombo in the southwest coast and extreme southwest corner of the Sri Lanka. The Galle Fort is also known as the Dutch Fort or the "Ramparts of Galle". It was situated in between latitude 6.026 N and longitude 80.217 E. Galle Fort was built on a small rocky peninsula, belonging to the sea. It covers an area of 128.495 acres (52 ha) with the population of 1,071. The fort are is denoted by Municipal Council as Ward-1 and it has multi-ethnic and multi-religious population. Visitors can reach to Galle fort within one hour travel time, driving 96-km long distance *via*. expressway from Colombo, which made the city of Galle more accessible for both locals and international tourists (Survey Department, 2007).

**Figure-1: Location of Galle Fort**



Source: <https://www.gallefort.lk/galle-fort-map>, retrieved on 18.03.2021.

### **Tourism infrastructures in Galle fort**

Within four walls of Galle fort, the more potentials are available to attract tourists, such as first and foremost its historic value, aesthetic beauty and beautiful beach strips. In addition, Galle Fort has multifarious tourist attractions; such as fort walls, old houses, ancient buildings, several museums, antique shops, lighthouse, bell tower, Jewellery workshops, church and mosque (table-1). Further, a large number of houses are converted in to rest houses, small hotels and lodges to facilitate with accommodations at reasonable price. In addition, many luxurious hotels are also available and private service providers facilitate to visits tourist attractions points out side Galle fort, such as Koggala lagoon, Unawatuna beach, Madol duwa and Gan duwa *etc.*, existed around/closed to the Galle fort. The tourists in such areas constantly visited to Galle Fort to buy necessary things and to exchange money and to buy pharmaceutical items and seeking medical assistance.

**Table-1: Population**

Year	Population		Religion/Ethnicity	Population (Galle MC)	Buildings (Fort)	Population (Galle fort)
	Galle MC	Galle fort				
1881	31,473	2,933	Buddhist	65,136	183	432
1971	71,266	2,866	Hindu	1,123	12	14
1981	76,863	2,703	Islam	23,547	193	563
2001	90,934	1,993	Christian	1,780	2	2
2011	110,315	1,589	Foreigners	30	51	60
2020	112,252	1,071	Companies owned	-	16	-
<b>Total</b>				<b>93,118</b>	<b>457</b>	<b>1,071</b>

Source: Department Census and Statistics, (2012), Wijayapala, 2006 and www.galle.mc.gov.lk - 31.03.2021

## Conceptual frame work

“COVID-19” is an emerging acute respiratory infectious disease, which will spread through the respiratory tract, by droplets, respiratory secretions and direct contact for a low infective dose (Guo, Y. et al., 2020). This virus can spread primarily through direct contact with an infected person, while they are coughing, sneezing and touching a surface or objects that has the virus on it and then touches their eyes, nose and mouth (Baker & Rosbi, 2020). The 2019 novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) was first identified in December 2019 in Wuhan, the capital of Hubei Province in China. Since then, the outbreak has significantly expanded across the borders, leading the World Health Organization (WHO) to declare COVID-19 as a pandemic on 11 March 2020 (Ruzaik, 2020). The world has experienced similar epidemic/pandemic during last four decades, such as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS-2002/2014), Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS-2012), Zika virus epidemic (2015), H<sub>1</sub>N<sub>1</sub> influenza virus (2009), Ebola (2014/2016) and other infection diseases; however, none of them had a such as severity, devastating the global economy as the COVID19 pandemic (Gossling et al., 2020).

According to Samal, (2014), the pandemic is the form of epidemic that spreads through human population affecting large numbers of people of the different geographical region of the world. The frequent pandemics are one of the most impactful events of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Zenker & Kock, 2020). The difference between an epidemic and a pandemic is an epidemic that travels and spreads over multiple countries or continents and endemic is a disease, which belongs to a particular people or country that affects a large number of people within a community, population, or geographical region (Intermountain Health Care, 2020).

Tourism is one of the largest and fastest growing industries in the world (Neto, 2003). Tourism is a social, cultural and economic phenomenon, which represents the set of movements generated by the search for places and activities that are different from usual and have no economic motivation, which underlines the “mobility” as essential to tourism (Rocca, 2015).

Mensah, (2020) stressed that the tourism industry is a main sector that was impacted in hardest way, due to the pandemics in the past. Zenker and Kock (2020) argue that the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on tourism industry is tremendous even in its early stage. Tourists are typically risk averse and thus, any actual or perceived threat to their health, safety or security is likely to influence their decision to visit a particular destination (Speakman & Sharpley, 2012). The ripple effect of this pandemic has reverberated through every corner of the globe, causing lives and jobs of many (Mensah, 2020; Menegaki, 2020). A key success factor is the ability to provide a safe, predictable and secure environment for visitors in the destinations (Speakman & Sharpley, 2012). In the contemporary world, the adverse circumstances of environmental and health factors highly effected global economy in immense manner, including travel and tourism industry and tourism sector contribute for major potions in its economy, especially in the South Asian Countries.

## **Consequences of Covid-19**

### **General outlook**

Covid-19 pandemic brought a large drawbacks to the current world in terms of socio-economic, environmental, human health related devastations irrespective of the status of the country. According to UNWTO (2020), the world tourist sector loss 850 million to 1.1 billion international tourist, loss of USD 910 billion to USD 1.2 trillion in export revenues from tourism and 100-120 million people at risk in terms of employment as of end of 2020. The numbers, volume and risk level of this global negative economic status and number of impacted/death cases reported could be varied, according to the responsive capacity of individual country. However, WHO (2020) recognized Sri Lanka as the best responsive country, among the top-ten in the world; although there are more than 216 countries affected with 109 million impacted cases and 2.4 million deaths as of 14.02.2020. This has been considered, as a “biological weapon of the nature” after the Second World War. Although a very few countries may not impact, however they too had to face with global economic disadvantages. Sri Lankan government has quickly drafted a rapid responsive mechanism to encounter this deadly situation in right time; enforcing shutdown, lockdown, isolation, curfew, and subsequent implementation of health guidelines, under the provision of quarantine and prevention of diseases law no. 12 of 1952 with the intention/motto of “public safety first”. This precautionary measure has provided a room for minimizing health risk at a massive rate, however it impacted other sectors; such as manufacturing, agriculture and service sector including tourism industry badly. Considering the urgency of the situation, Sri Lankan Government did not follow “contingency approach” to fight against this deadly virus and to maintain sustainability. This is a learning curve for Sri Lanka to have a proper mechanism in the context of preparedness, contingency and disaster recovery to combat such situation and to minimize possible losses in the future.

## Analytical approach of Covid-19 pandemic on tourism performance in Galle Fort

Tourism was the third largest foreign exchange earner for the country in 2019, preceded by worker's remittance, textiles and garments to the Sri Lankan economy. Foreign exchange earnings from the tourism sector decreased to 13.7% in 2019, compared to 15.9% recorded in the previous year (SLTDA.2019). This situation was further worsen in the year 2020, as the tourist arrivals were not recorded from April-October 2020 (SLTA, 2019). According to filed investigation, an average of 95% of respondents of Galle Fort confirmed that no new foreign tourists arrived, during the second half of 2020 and a few foreigners existed with poor financial position, since they could not depart from the island, due to non-availability of flights. Further in 2019 in the fort area, approx. 52.5% of the residential property have been converted in to small hotels and lodge and then again 1/3 of it re-converted as a boutiques and shops, during the COVID pandemic periods to earn alternative income in 2020. Further, 4.15% of residential property completely abandon from dwelling and were sold/rented for tourist service providers. Below table-2 shows the year-to-year change on fort population and residential property.

Table-2: Population and residential buildings

Religion/Ethnicity	Population		Residential houses	
	2019	2020*	2019	2020*
Buddhist	432	422	183	183
Hindu	14	12	12	8
Islam	563	536	193	183
Christian	2	2	2	1
Foreigners	60	42	51	51
Others	-	-	16	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,071</b>	<b>1,014</b>	<b>457</b>	<b>438</b>

Source: Department Census and Statistics, (2012).

\* Estimated figures

The causes for the population decline (-5.3%) are, they migrated to Colombo (Capital city of the island) and a few to overseas. Residential property were utilized as stated above to generate alternative income at least to pay salary and rent. Revenue level analysis of business entrepreneur and domestic households reveal that one-to-one opposite situation in the year 2019 and 2020, when comparing the income category of LKR 10,000-50,000 and LKR 50,000-100,000 (table-3).

Table-3: Revenue generations

Income/month (LKR)	Business (%)		Domestic (%)	
	2019	2020	2019	2020
>10,000	5	15	12	18
10,000-50,000	17	35	42	58
50,000-100,000	53	38	29	15
100,000-500,000	15	5	12	7
500,000<	10*	7*	5**	2**
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Prepared by Author, based on the field data, 2020.

\*Hotels \*\*engage in gem and jewelry business

This investigation test the respondents' perceptions on multiple factors, which could become a cause for decline in tourism industry in Galle fort area. Accordingly, every factors had a declining trend compared to the previous year. An average-91% of the respondents replied that the income level of shops and hotels, households and tourist guides has been come down. Entrepreneurs had great difficulties in paying rent and salaries and 47% paid their first six month rent and salaries in the second half of the year, after revising the agreed rental pay to a lower rate and also 75% of employees agreed to work at a reduced monthly pay. Only 17% were able to pay rent and salaries of the second half from July–December 2020 at a revised rate. Most of the Entrepreneurs (68%) reduced their staff during fourth quarter of 2020 with the second wave of Covid-19 commenced during October 2020 (table-4). The 99.9% of respondents said that they could not exist in the tourism industry, unless otherwise Government allows overseas terrorist to Sri Lanka at least by second quarter of 2021.

If not, there are more prevalence of tourism entrepreneurs to go bankrupt as only few can survive till the end of 2021. Hence, the government and the stakeholders in this phenomenon should address this pathetic situation fast track basis.

**Table-4: Public perceptions to test post-Covid situation**

Details	Business (%)	
	Answers	%
Tourist arrivals	Declined	95
Income (average)	Reduced	91
Shops and hotels	Reduced	90
Households	Reduced	85
Tourist guides	Reduced	98
What is your source of income?	Tourism	72
Reduction of staffs	Yes	68
Is hygienic practices additional cost?	Yes	95
Rent/salary paid 1 <sup>st</sup> quarter 2020	Yes	47
Rent/salary paid 2 <sup>nd</sup> quarter 2020	Yes	17

Source: Prepared by Author, based on the field data, 2020

The stakeholders of tourism industry of Sri Lanka are requested to share their experiences, providing suggestions for managing this catastrophic crisis strategically and mitigate its ramifications during this ongoing COVID-19 pandemic periods. No one could predict a deadline for this revolving pandemic issue, hence it is urgent requirement to carry out a macro level analysis to provide a sustainable solution to survive the economy of individual, small and medium term entrepreneurs and ultimately economy of the country. It is fact that the tourism industry dissimilar to any other businesses sector, since it is a service oriented business product and directly interconnected with environment and tourists' perceptions. Hence, it was mostly fragile, sensitive and frequently get impacted business, due to the most of the negative events in the past and also it takes more time period to recover, but high income yielding business sector.

## Causes for impacts of COVID-19 on tourism industry

Communicable diseases, such as Covid-19 is a biological disaster, which should be managed in a right manner, taking correctly decision in right time by respective states. These decision would impact the socio-economic and service sector status of a country. Tourism as a part of service sector was impacted severely, due to the two forces as depicted below.

1. Internal forces-all the actions that are imposed by the Sri Lankan Government.
2. External forces-Covid-19 combating mechanism that are adhered by the source markets countries, especially travel bans and suspension of flights.

Ministry of Health, Ministry of Defense, Department of import and export control, Central Bank of Sri Lanka, Tax Authority, Aviation Services, Colombo Stock exchange and Presidential Secretariat *etc.* issued frequent gazette notifications, circulars and notices to switch this adverse situation of the country in terms of health and economy to the right channel. Accordingly, approximately 20 extra ordinary gazette notifications ([www.document.gov.lk](http://www.document.gov.lk), retrieved 21.02.2020), 25 circulars by Central Bank of Sri Lanka ([www.CBSL.gov.lk](http://www.CBSL.gov.lk), retrieved 21.02.2020), and 45 notices from Tax Department ([www.ird.gov.lk](http://www.ird.gov.lk), retrieved 21.02.2020), 11 circulars from Presidential Secretariat ([www.presidentsoffice.gov.lk](http://www.presidentsoffice.gov.lk), retrieved on 21.02.2021), and 09 notices by the Colombo Stock exchange were issued, however implementation of these instruction have impacted tourism industry in negative manner.

The combating mechanism that were adhered by the source markets countries also negatively impacts the local tourist industry in an adverse manner. Below table-5 shows a negative figure with regard to the year-to-year statistics.

Table-5: Major tourist source market-2018/2019

Country	Tourist arrivals to SL		% change
	2018	2019	
India	424,887	355,002	-16.45
China	265,965	167,863	-36.89
UK	254,176	198,776	-21.80
Germany	156,888	134,899	-14.02
Australia	110,928	92,674	-16.46
Maldives	76,108	60,278	-20.80
Total of top-ten countries	1,592,366	1,301,225	-18.28
Total arrivals of the year	2,333,796	1,913,702	-18.00
Total earnings (USD in million)	4,380.6	3,606.9	-17.78

Source: SLTDA, Annual Report, 2019

Above table-5 shows a drastic decline in tourist source markets to Sri Lanka and the decline was recorded as -18.28 of total of the top ten source countries, due to the reason Covid-19 pandemic. These countries functions were closed down and the majority of airlines were canceled and all tourism activities have been disrupted.

### **Concluding remarks to way forwards to upgrade tourism industry in Galle Fort**

Galle fort is one of the best tourism zones from its sophisticated historic monuments, due to its historic value, geographical features and beaches. However, Covid-19 impacts on Galle Fort area, similar to other geographical region of the island, has recorded adverse results, according to filed investigation. Although, there was multiple occurrences like COVID-19 pandemic in the past, the most of the countries including Sri Lanka have failed to prepare a readymade package, containing sustainable solutions in the context of preparedness, rapid response plan, contingency and recovery. Hence, it is suggested to have fast-track solution to develop terrorism in the country, while adhering provided health guidelines and transforming existing Covid-19 pandemic into an opportunity for sustainable tourism development by monitoring its potential tourism demand of fort area. All stakeholders' contributions are mandatory to establish such plan in

order to be prepared for responding and managing pandemic crisis tactfully. However, with the intention of providing better and quick responsive mechanism to the COVID-19 impacts on tourist industry, Sri Lanka had a plan to resume tourism activities, following the health guidelines as per the gazette notification 2197/25 dated 15.10.2020, of Ministry of Health with regard to hygiene and safety protocols, during the third quarter of 2020. SLTDA has also prepared a guideline on the safety measures for the tourism sector to manage the COVID-19 crisis after the lockdown is eased and businesses have resumed during the end of second quarter 2020.

Airports has started providing permission for international travelers with certain restrictions and rules. These planned activities were slowed down with second wave of infection outbreak in October, 2020 and performance of government on managing the crisis and decreasing consequences of the pandemic seems challenging with the increasing numbers of infection and deaths in the country. At present, Covid-19 vaccination to general public is commenced and in the process of immunize to general public.

The tourism industry will have a hard time in the future, due to the adaptation of health standards to prevent and control diseases spreads. On the other hand, the tourists will also prefer to ensure safety standards of the hotels and hospitality services before reserve a hotel. The pattern of the future tourism industry will be “Safety first and then business”. Accordingly all hotels and hospitality services in the Galle fort area should be re-designed and upgraded to meet the required global standards and to overcome similar occurrence in the future without compromising to the socio-economic status of the dwellers, since 72% of respondents depend on tourism or tourism related ancillary services in the Galle Fort area. Hence, the following measures are recommended to upgrade the tourism industry in the Galle fort.

- Existing quarantine and prevention of diseases law no. 12 of 1952 should be reviewed and amended to meet current and future requirements of the country.
- Suggested to form an organization with the participation of all tourism service provider to promote and market both domestic and international tourism within Galle fort area.
- Proposed organization shall create an on-line platform to extract information of the area, hotel details, hygienic facilities, price, reservation methods and other hospitality services of the all members.
- Proposed to have Insurance scheme to recover actual loss, due to the unforeseen occurrence of any disasters, such as Tsunami, flooding, infection diseases *etc.*
- Recommended to find a mechanism to implement a contact free tourism hospitality services in the hotel industry.
- Suggested SLTDA to introduce a productive and applicable general guidelines on sustainable tourism development plan, while minimizing health risks and promoting tourism products, both locally and internationally.
- It is required to have an extensive trainings program with practical drill to maintain highest standard of operating procedures to tackle the epidemic and pandemic situation in the country and to mitigate the probability of virus transmission in the future.
- Recommended to have a preparedness, contingency, and disaster recovery mechanism to face the similar disaster like Covid-19 in macro level as a country.

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