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## **ASSESSING THE SOCIO-CULTURAL SUSTAINABILITY IN THE HOSPITALITY SECTOR: AN ANALYSIS OF TOURIST HOTELS' WEBSITES IN SRI LANKA**

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### **Abstract**

The concept of sustainability essentially should cover the triple bottom line of people, planet, and profit. The tourism literature provides a huge contribution to analyzing the environmental sustainability in broader aspects, applying to many sectors in the tourism field, albeit socio-cultural sustainability has not been considerably investigated by researchers. The objective of this study was to analyze the contribution of the hospitality industry to ensure socio-cultural sustainability, with special reference to the official websites of the tourist hotels in Sri Lanka. The study was led by two specific objectives. i.e., (i) to examine the current practices conducted by the tourist hotels for promoting socio-cultural sustainability as represented in their websites, and (ii) to explore the undervalued aspects of socio-cultural sustainability approaches in the tourist hotel sector. The study was conducted as a qualitative study, utilizing secondary data collected from the text mining strategy. A sample of 20 hotels' official websites was selected from the Booking.com online platform with the filtering option of 'sustainability certification', based on the purposive sampling technique. Data was analysed using the deductive thematic approach in the thematic analysis method. Based on the definition provided by the UNWTO for 'sustainable tourism' in 2005, the dimensions in socio-cultural sustainability were identified, such as (i) respecting the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities, (ii) conserving their built and living cultural heritage and traditional values, and (iii) contributing to intercultural understanding and tolerance. The findings revealed that the contribution of the hotels in Sri Lanka in ensuring the socio-cultural sustainability is not considerably reflected in the content of the hotels' websites. The findings revealed that many of the hotels conduct village tours as the current practice in respecting the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities. Reflecting the evidence under the element of 'conserving their built and living cultural heritage and traditional values', a few aspects were identified, such as cultural, heritage and religious tours, promotion of traditional industries and traditional arts and crafts, traditional cuisines and culinary promotion, cultural performances, promotion of local architecture and design. Under the element of 'contributing to intercultural understanding and tolerance,' it was

identified that the practices of cultural exchange programs, interfaith awareness, and cultural celebrations. A few undervalued aspects of socio-cultural sustainability were determined as providing a lack of guidelines, a lack of training, and poor collaborations for conservation.

**Keywords:** *Socio-cultural element, Sustainability, Tourist hotels, Websites*

## **1.0 Introduction**

Sustainability has become a fundamental guiding principle for industries worldwide, emphasising the need to balance economic growth, environmental protection, and social well-being for long-term success. ‘Sustainability’, being a buzzword in the 21st century, has grabbed the attention of many industries worldwide. There is no exemption even from the tourism and hospitality industry. Travel, tourism, leisure, as well as hotel industries have been considerably concerned with the promotion of sustainable tourism in different aspects. The United Nations, in its *Agenda for Development* (United Nations World Tourism Organization, 1997) defines sustainability as a comprehensive approach aimed at enhancing the quality of life for all, recognising that economic growth, social progress, and environmental stewardship are interdependent and must operate in harmony to achieve balanced and enduring development. While economic and environmental aspects often receive the most attention, socio-cultural sustainability is equally essential. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), socio-cultural sustainability involves respecting the authenticity of host communities, preserving their built and living cultural heritage, safeguarding traditional values, and fostering intercultural understanding and tolerance (UNWTO, 1997).

Within the hospitality sector, sustainability is increasingly recognised as a critical factor for long-term growth, competitiveness, and operational success. In particular, the hotel industry must adopt sustainable practices to balance guest satisfaction, resource efficiency, and cultural preservation. Tourist hotels no longer provide luxury guest services and comfort zones; their contribution to establishing sustainable practices in all aspects is increasingly scrutinised. The hotels can contribute immensely to socio-cultural sustainability, incorporating preservation and promotion of local culture and traditions, dissemination of cultural awareness, and community engagement and empowerment.

In Sri Lanka, the accommodation sector in the tourism industry is playing a vital role, contributing to the industry with 4390 accommodation establishments and 53,378 rooms in 2024 [Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA), 2024]. In Sri Lanka, most accommodations are concentrated in the Western, Southern, and Central Provinces, which together hold a significant portion of the country's total room capacity. The Western Province leads with 35.1% of all rooms, followed by the Southern Province at 25.7% and the Central Province at 16.4% (SLTDA, 2024).

The contribution of these establishments in promoting socio-cultural sustainability has not been considerably addressed in the context of Sri Lanka, particularly by exploring the hotels’ official

websites. Indeed, as one of the significant elements of the tourism industry, the hospitality sector is increasingly expected to adopt and communicate its sustainability practices (Fennell & De Grosbois, 2023). The hotels' websites are comprehensive sources of information to explore the overall profile of the property. The contribution and dedication of the hotel establishments in ensuring socio-cultural sustainability can be observed through official websites with accurate, genuine, and realistic information. The hotel's websites play a prominent role in educating and providing necessary information for the website's users, particularly potential tourists.

The main purpose of this study is to (i) examine the current practices conducted by the tourist hotels for promoting socio-cultural sustainability as represented in their websites, and (ii) to explore the undervalued aspects of socio-cultural sustainability approaches in the tourist hotel sector. This study contributes to practitioners in the tourism and hospitality sector by providing a deeper understanding of the hotels' current practices in socio-cultural sustainability. Theoretically, the study bridges the gap between the concept of sustainability and its socio-cultural element and the reflection of the practices in the digital platforms. The study findings will expand the current models of suitability by indicating the necessity of reflecting on the sustainability attempts in the online presence.

## **2.0 Literature Review**

### *The concept of sustainability*

Sustainability has been defined as 'meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs', at the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro. Sustainability has become a crucial requirement in the tourism and hospitality industry, emphasising the timely requirements of environmental awareness, social responsibility, and catering to the tourists' requirements. Tourism has been identified as a strategy in approaching the Sustainable Development Goals 8, 12, and 14, considering its capacity to contribute to inclusive and sustainable economic growth, sustainable consumption and production, and the sustainable use of oceans and marine resources (UNWTO, 2016).

The United Nations defines sustainable tourism as 'tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities' (United Nations, 2025). Further United Nations elaborates on sustainable tourism with a broader perspective as follows: Sustainable tourism should

1. Make optimal use of environmental resources that constitute a key element in tourism development, maintaining essential ecological processes and helping to conserve natural heritage and biodiversity.

2. Respect the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities, conserve their built and living cultural heritage and traditional values, and contribute to inter-cultural understanding and tolerance.
3. Ensure viable, long-term economic operations, providing socio-economic benefits to all stakeholders that are fairly distributed, including stable employment and income-earning opportunities and social services to host communities, and contributing to poverty alleviation (United Nations, 2025).

The International Network of Sustainable Tourism Observatories (INSTO), previously referred to as the Global Observatories on Sustainable Tourism (GOST), assists policymakers in developing evidence-based tourism strategies by consistently tracking the environmental, social, and economic effects of tourism. Established in collaboration with local stakeholders, these observatories aim to promote sustainable and resilient tourism development while sharing best practices and enhancing the capacity of tourism-related stakeholders (United Nations World Tourism Organization, 2016).

### ***The relationship between sustainability and the tourism and hospitality industry***

Tourism has been one of the pioneering sectors in embracing sustainability, developing definitions, principles, strategies, and action plans to address its economic, social, and environmental impacts (UNWTO, 1997). Sustainable tourism, as defined by the United Nations Environment Programme and the UNWTO, refers to practices that take full account of present and future economic, social, and environmental consequences while meeting the needs of visitors, the tourism industry, the natural environment, and host communities. This integrated approach ensures that tourism supports both present and future generations.

The relationship between tourism and the environment has been an interesting context for the geographers, both physical and human aspects, in which it operates (Butler, 1999). Over the past decades, sustainability has been applied in the hotel industry due to the sensitive demand trends, increase of operational cost, and the pressure on becoming economically, socially and environmentally responsible grows (Bader, 2005). However, the researchers have been reluctant to present critical reviews on sustainable development and the way it has been applied in the tourism sector (Butler, 1999).

Only a small fraction of hotels, resorts, and lodges prioritise sustainability, and this is largely due to their non-mainstream status and limited public and industry awareness of its economic, social, and environmental benefits (Bader, 2005). Even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the studies related to the exploration of sustainable practices of hotels are still limited (Pereira et al., 2021). Many of the contemporary studies in tourism literature have focused on environmental sustainability, focusing particularly on the efficiency of the environmental practices and different perspectives of environmental sustainability strategies (Berezan et al., 2014; Arachchi et al., 2015; Stylos & Vassiliadis, 2015; Bohdanowicz et al., 2001; Han, 2021; Manthé et al., 2025).

Berezan et al., (2013) reveal green practices overall do have a positive relationship with guests' satisfaction levels and return intentions for Mexicans, Americans and other nationalities. Stylos & Vassiliadis, (2015) examine the perceptions and practices of hotel management with respect to the concept of three-dimensional sustainability, where they revealed that hotel star ratings play a significant role in the perceived importance of financial measures of economic viability, as well as in the application of socially-responsible practices by hotel management; the same conclusion does not apply to environmental practices. Bohdanowicz et al., (2001) state that the development and operation of sustainable hotels require ongoing collaboration among experts from various fields, such as architecture, engineering, environmental studies, and marketing, ideally starting from the planning and design stages.

Carter & Rogers, (2008) reveals that sustainability encompasses economic, social, and environmental dimensions while integrating key business factors such as risk management, transparency, strategic alignment, and organisational culture. Sustainability serves as a smart business strategy for hoteliers, offering multiple benefits such as cost reduction, enhanced operational efficiency, encouragement of innovation within the organisation and industry, improved brand image and reputation, long-term competitive advantage, streamlined supply chain management, higher employee engagement, and adherence to regulatory standards (Popşa, 2023).

### ***Socio-cultural sustainability in the hospitality industry***

A limited number of studies (Roberts, 2022; Zhang et al., 2025; Changha et al., 2025) provide evidence of analysing and exploring the socio-cultural strategies practised by the hotels. Changha et al., (2025) clearly revealed that the social sustainability practices have remained underdeveloped compared to their environmental and economic counterparts, and studies on firm-specific factors that enable such practices are even more scanty. Zhang et al., (2025) emphasised that sustainability lies upon four pillars, such as economic, social, ecological, and cultural, while the first three pillars have been discussed extensively and well-established in the literature. Thus, the researchers recognise the cultural component as a separate strand of social responsibility; it still implies that the two pillars should be considered as being inextricably interlinked.

Pereira et al., (2021) studied the environmental and social sustainability practices that luxury hotels are adopting and how their management perceives the benefits and results from their adoption. The researchers revealed that luxury hotels have implemented environmental practices that address energy efficiency measures while addressing the social-cultural practices in relation to charitable institutions, provide consumers with high-quality services, and create a safe and healthy work environment.

Analysing the website disclosures of sustainable practices adopted by star hotels in Zimbabwe, Shereni et al., (2022) revealed that sustainability practices are not widely publicised. The available information on websites visited indicated more reporting of social sustainability issues and a fair amount of reporting on environmental sustainability. Economic sustainability is the least reported.

The existing literature does not provide adequate evidence on the socio-cultural practices in approaching sustainability. The efforts and strategies practised by the tourist hotels in the hospitality industry for achieving socio-cultural sustainability, which is one of the crucial components in the pillars of sustainability, are worth further study. Identifying the existing knowledge gap, this study sheds light on the tourist hotels' contribution to the socio-cultural sustainability from a specific angle of the content of the official websites of such hotels.

### 3.0 Methodology

The study was designed as a descriptive, cross-sectional study to examine the sustainability practices of the socio-cultural aspect, followed by the tourist hotels in Sri Lanka at present. The study was conducted as qualitative research employing secondary sources of websites. Secondary data were gathered from the official websites of the tourist hotels in Sri Lanka. The population was considered as the tourist hotels located in Sri Lanka, while the study population was framed as the tourist hotels that are available on the Booking.com online booking website. The official website of each hotel establishment was recognised as the unit of analysis in the study. The sample was determined based on two inclusion criteria: (i) being categorised as a sustainability-certified hotel on the Booking.com website, and (ii) the star classification of the property should be four-star or five-star. The 'sustainability certification' serves as an indicator to demonstrate the sustainable practices and strategies of the tourist hotels. The star classification of the property provides insights into the hotel's scale, quality, and standards, and a well-established reputation in the hospitality industry.

A sample of 20 hotels was selected from Booking.com with the filtering option of 'sustainability certification', based on the purposive sampling technique. This non-probability sampling technique was utilised in the study to ensure the sample consisted of the hotels that met the requirements of sustainability certification. Table 01 below indicates that the sample of 20 hotels was selected from the major travel destinations in Sri Lanka.

Table 01: Distribution of the sample hotels

Major travel destination	Number of hotels
Central highlands	07
Southern coastal belt	05
Western coastal belt	05
Heritage cities	03
Total sample ( <i>n</i> )	20

*Source: Research findings*

In the next stage, each official website of the 20 hotels was thoroughly examined, and the content was explicitly understood by the researchers. The most relevant phrases were extracted from the web content and included in separate thematic tables. The gathered data were analysed by the thematic analysis, utilising the deductive thematic analysis approach. The parental themes were determined based on the concept (definition) provided by the UNWTO for

‘sustainable tourism’ in 2005, where the dimensions in socio-cultural sustainability were introduced as (i) respecting the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities, (ii) conserving their built and living cultural heritage and traditional values, and (iii) contributing to intercultural understanding and tolerance (United Nations, 2025). The sub-themes were determined after segregation of the relevant web content into the major themes. The sub-themes recognised in the study are presented in the table below.

Table 02: Major themes and sub-themes of the study

Major theme	Sub-themes
(i) Respecting the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experiencing the host community lifestyle</li> <li>• Cultural, heritage, and religious tours</li> <li>• Educating the guests on cultural guidelines</li> </ul>
(ii) Conserving their built and living cultural heritage and traditional values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cultural performances</li> <li>• Promotion of local architecture and design</li> <li>• Traditional cuisines and culinary promotion</li> <li>• Promotion of traditional arts and crafts</li> </ul>
(iii) Contributing to intercultural understanding and tolerance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practices of cultural exchange programs</li> <li>• Staff training</li> <li>• Interfaith awareness</li> <li>• Cultural celebrations</li> </ul>

*Source: Research findings*

## 4.0 Findings

This section presents the findings of the study carried out to examine the current practices of the tourist hotels that have been identified as sustainability-certified hotels on Booking.com for promoting and ensuring the socio-cultural sustainability through the content of their official websites. The objective of this study was to analyse the contribution of the hospitality industry to ensure socio-cultural sustainability, with special reference to the official websites of the tourist hotels in Sri Lanka. The study was led by two specific objectives. i.e., (i) to examine the current practices conducted by the tourist hotels for promoting socio-cultural sustainability as represented in their websites, and (ii) to explore the undervalued aspects of socio-cultural sustainability approaches in the tourist hotel sector.

The key finding of the study revealed that the contribution of the hotels in Sri Lanka in ensuring and uplifting the socio-cultural sustainability is not considerably reflected in the content of the hotels’ websites compared to the concern of environmental sustainability. One of the specific objectives of the study was to examine the current practices conducted by the tourist hotels for promoting socio-cultural sustainability as represented on their websites. The current practices were determined based on the three parental themes, which were derived from the UNWTO definition of socio-cultural sustainability.

Table 03 below presents the evidence for the parental theme of ‘respecting the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities’, as depicted in the hotels’ websites.

Table 03: Contribution of the hotels for respecting the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities

Respecting the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities		
Sub-theme	Examples	Location of the Hotel Property
Experiencing the host community lifestyle	Hiriwadunna village safari	Habarana
	Heel-Oya village trail	Kandy
	Puranagama village tour	Dambulla
	Catamarans and Seine fishing experience	Negombo
	Visit to the local market (weekly fair)	Negombo

Source: Research findings

The sub-theme ‘experiencing the host community’s lifestyle’ is related to the practices followed by the hotels to give an exposure for the guests regarding the unsophisticated and genuine way of life of the host community. The village tours conducted by the hotels, such as Hiriwadunna, Heel-Oya and Purangama, reflect that the guests are encouraged by the hotels through their websites to allocate reservations for those excursions organised by the hotels, particularly for the in-house guests. Experiencing the rural lifestyle is an interesting excursion for many of the tourists who visit Sri Lanka. Hotels in Negombo highlight local market visits and the fishing experience to offer a remarkable experience of the host community lifestyle. The village tours provide the opportunity for the tourists not only to enjoy and experience the simplicity of the host community’s lifestyle but also to interact with the community.

The hotels’ websites’ content illustrates a low level of consideration for the guidelines to be practised by the tourists during the excursions to the cultural sites. The guidelines regarding being responsible for the cultural site visits, and especially when interacting with the host community, are not properly demonstrated on the websites. Educating the guests on responsible guidelines at cultural excursions is a crucial requirement in ensuring the responsible and respectful behavior of the guests towards the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities.

Table 04: Contribution of the hotels in conserving their built and living cultural heritage and traditional values

Conserving their built and living cultural heritage and traditional values		
Sub-theme	Examples	Location of the Hotel Property
Cultural, heritage and religious tours	Kandy excursion	Kandy
	Cultural tours to Gadaladeniya, Ambekke, Lankathilake	Kandy
	Excursion to Dambulla Rock Temple	Dambulla

	Visit to historical cave	Dambulla
	Polonnaruwa excursion	Polonnaruwa
	Anuradhapura excursion	Anuradhapura
	Excursion to Fort Fredrick	Trincomalee
	Excursion to Koneswaram Kovil	Trincomalee
	Visit to Dambadeniya	Dambadeniya
	Visit to Churches	Negombo
	Sightseeing and expeditions at Dutch Canal	Negombo
	Visit to Munneswaram Kovil	Negombo
Promotion of traditional industries and traditional arts and crafts.	Stilt fishing	Hikkaduwa
	Excursion to the Masks Museum and participation in workshops on mask production.	Ambalangoda
	Paddy Harvest and local traditional farmers	Anuradhapura
	Visit to cinnamon peeling centres, demonstrations and hands-on experience	Galle
	Visit to crafts stalls in the streets	Kandy
	Visit to Tea Museum	Nuwaraeliya
	Visit to tea estates	Ella
	Visit local spice suppliers and witness the preparation and processing of spices	Wellawaya
	Lellama Fish Market	Negombo
	Clay Tile Factories Visit	Negombo
	Local craftsmanship	Tangalle
Traditional cuisines and culinary promotion	Sri Lankan Rice and Curry Experience	Habarana
	Joining in crafted menu	Weligama
	Organic Gardening and Cookery Demonstration -	Wellawaya Kandy
Cultural performances	Cultural dance show	Kandy
Promotion of local architecture and design	Replicas of traditional wood carvings, statues, and paintings. Usage of traditional architectural features in the interior.	Habarana, Dambulla. Kandy

*Source: Research findings*

Table 04 indicates the contribution of hotels in conserving their built and living cultural heritage and traditional values. As depicted in Table 4, a diverse range of activities contribute

to conserve built and living cultural heritage and traditional values of the host communities. Even though the hotels have limited access to conserve the built heritages with advanced conservational strategies, those establishments can promote awareness of the historical monument sites, ruins, and heritages among the guests by offering diversified cultural tours or excursions. The hotels extensively promote the city tour excursions to the cultural, heritage, and religious sites in famous travel destinations in the country, such as Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, Kandy, Dambulla, Negombo, etc. The attractions have not been limited to a single culture, but a multi-cultural and religious experience is offered in the tour packages. Explicit and attractive explanations are presented for each excursion on the websites, with photographs. The hotels provide considerable support in promoting the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities.

Activities such as Stilt fishing in Hikkaduwa, demonstrations at the Masks Museum in Ambalangoda, paddy harvesting at Anuradhapura, demonstrations at the cinnamon peeling centre in Galle, tea museum and tea estate visits in Nuwara Eliya and Ella, and clay tile factory visits at Negombo are worthy experiences for foreigners to explore the traditional industries and livelihoods of the host community. Significantly, the excursions to the mask and the handicrafts production centers provide great provision for the tourists to have firsthand experience of the manufacturing process of such traditional arts and crafts, which stimulates the tourists' interest and awareness of living cultural heritage.

Traditional cuisines and culinary have a dynamic association with tourism and hospitality in Sri Lanka. Identifying this strong bond, the hotels have intentionally promoted traditional cuisines and culinary experiences on their websites, with diversified packages. Sri Lankan Rice and Curry Experience at Habarana, joining in crafted menu Weligama, and organic gardening and cookery demonstration at Wellawaya and Kandy are some of the examples found from the websites of the tourist hotels, explored in this study. Interestingly, the websites have included original and attractive photographs to convince the readers regarding the authentic quality of the Sri Lankan cuisines.

The cultural show performed at Kandy is one of the popular attractions for the foreign tourists who visit Kandy. Reflecting the authentic features of traditional dancing and other performing arts in Sri Lanka, the cultural show is highlighted on several hotels' websites. The traditional performing art, which can be regarded as a living heritage of the country, will be transferred from generation to generation due to its attractive nature as a touristic element in tour itineraries in Kandy. This performance provides the provision for the foreign tourists to explore more of the traditional performing arts in Sri Lanka, if they are interested in.

The hotels located in Dambulla, Habarana, and Kandy have featured the traditional wood carvings, statues, and paintings as decorative elements in their property premises. The photographic evidence can be observed in the hotels' websites, proving the fact that those properties have given significant attention to promoting the traditional architecture and the arts and crafts in the interior decorations. The physical atmosphere of the hotels makes the in-house guests to feel enthusiastic enjoyment.

Table 05: Contribution of the hotels in enhancing intercultural understanding and tolerance

Contributing to intercultural understanding and tolerance		
Sub-theme	Examples	Location of the Hotel Property
Practices of cultural exchange programs	Village walk and enjoying	Wellawaya
	Enjoying lunch with villagers	Kandy, Habarana, Dambulla
Interfaith awareness	Excursion to Kataragama	Kataragama
Cultural celebrations	Celebrations of Paddy Cultivation	Wellawaya
	Joining the religious and cultural celebrations at temples	Tangalle

*Source: Research findings*

Table 5 presents the efforts of the tourist hotels in contributing to intercultural understanding and tolerance, as depicted on their official websites. The element of ‘enjoying lunch with villagers’ and village walk exchanges the cultural understanding and tolerance. This activity offers a great opportunity for foreign tourists to enjoy the traditional meals together with the villagers while ensuring the cultural integrity between the host and the guest. The guests are escaped from their comfort zone for a few hours, and will be exposed to the unsophisticated yet authentic way of life, particularly, cuisines and dwellings.

Excursion to Kataragama is promoted by the hotels located in the southern province, providing an opportunity for the guests to experience the multi-cultural atmosphere of Kataragama, which is renowned as a religious and cultural diversity hub in Sri Lanka. A visit to Kataragama ensures an understanding of cultural diversity at the host destination, while creating a respectfulness in the guest’s mind regarding the host communities’ faiths and beliefs.

A few hotels located in Tangalle and Wellawaya promote the cultural celebrations, such as paddy cultivation celebrations and religious and cultural celebrations at temples. The guests’ exposure to such cultural elements enhances their interest in host communities’ cultural significance and exploring more of them. Further, these excursions emphasize the cultural tolerance of the foreigners, since they are merely strangers to the host cultural atmosphere, which may not be familiar or convenient for some of the tourists.

## 5.0 Conclusions & Recommendations

Aligning with the first specific objective of the study, which is to examine the current practices conducted by the tourist hotels for promoting socio-cultural sustainability as represented in their websites, the findings revealed that many of the hotels conduct village tours as the current practices in respecting the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities. Reflecting the evidence under the element of ‘conserving their built and living cultural heritage and traditional values’, a few aspects were identified, such as cultural, heritage, and religious tours, promotion of traditional industries and traditional arts and crafts, traditional cuisines and culinary

promotion, cultural performances, and promotion of local architecture and design. Under the element of ‘contributing to intercultural understanding and tolerance,’ it was identified that the practices of cultural exchange programs, interfaith awareness, and cultural celebrations. The hotels conduct several excursions and activities to build up the guests’ intercultural understanding, especially through offering interactive, unique experiences with the host communities.

Relating to the second objective of the study, which is exploring the undervalued aspects in socio-cultural sustainability approaches in the tourist hotel sector, the findings revealed that a few undervalued aspects of socio-cultural sustainability were determined. Nevertheless, the hotels’ websites do not provide evidence of providing guidelines for the readers or for the tourists on how to ensure responsible travel behaviour during the excursions they organise. The tourists’ exposure to the host communities’ lifestyle during the village tours might bring adverse impacts to the host communities, such as commercialisation and touristification. The hotels should publish and educate the tourists regarding the travel guidelines for responsible travel behaviour during the village tours, respecting the host communities’ social values and cultural traditions. The hotels’ websites are accessible platforms for an unlimited number of users, who can be educated in how to behave at an interactive excursion of village tour in Sri Lanka, while ensuring the minimum level of demonstrative effect.

The research findings reveal that hotels make a considerable contribution to promoting the built and living heritages in the host destinations, even though the conservation efforts are not sufficiently addressed by the hotels. The hotels can facilitate financially and collaborate with the government authorities for the conservation projects of the built heritages. Particularly, the hotels located in Kandy, Galle, Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, and Dambulla can initiate the public-private-partnership projects for the restoration of the ancient heritages and colonial heritages in such destinations.

As indicated on the hotels’ websites, the hotels have not considered tolerance from the guests’ and hosts’ perspectives. The tourist hotels appear as crucial hubs in creating interaction with the guests and the local communities. The hotels should make the guests aware of the tolerance of social, cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity of the host communities. Additionally, the staff should be well-trained in coordinating the interaction between the guests and local communities. The findings reveal insights into the excessive commodification of traditional heritage, depletion of authenticity of socio-cultural elements, and lack of ethnic and religious inclusivity, which reflect the gap between the sustainable tourism theory and the practice. The hotels should emerge not only as accommodation providers but also as ambassadors of local culture and facilitators in empowering the social life of the host community. The research provides insights for practitioners in the hotel industry to concentrate on digital platforms, such as their websites, not only as a marketing tool, but also as a way of reflecting the commitments of the properties in contributing to sustainable tourism.

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