

IDENTIFYING THE ISSUES AND CHALLENGES OF COMMUNITY-BASED WELLNESS TOURISM PRACTICES: A CASE STUDY BASED ON DOWN SOUTH, SRI LANKA

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Spa and wellness tourism is a global phenomenon where almost all tourist destinations promote spa and wellness tourism as their marketing and economic strategies. Sri Lanka as a popular tourist destination caters to this trending market too. There are only 15 registered spa and wellness centers in the southern province which is quite controversial to the real count of the existing centers along the Southern coastal line starting from Hikkaduwa, Galle, Unawatuna, Weligama to Mirissa where it provides a considerable density of the spa and wellness centers in Sri Lanka. Therefore, this study identified the issues and challenges faced by spa operators in the selected area. The qualitative research approach was used and a case study research design was chosen as the research design. The primary data were collected through nine semi-structured interviews with spa and wellness center operators employing the judgmental sampling technique. The thematic analysis highlighted the challenges in five different areas such as lack of government involvement in regulating the spa and wellness centers, difficulties in recruiting female therapists, the bad community image towards the industry, unprofessional operators, and negative expectations of local customers as the existing issues. Finally, the researcher recommended strategical and effective solutions to protect and enhance spa and wellness tourism in Sri Lanka.

Keywords: Down south, issues and challenges, spa centers, wellness tourism