



## Exploring the Potential to Promote Ayurvedic Tourism Post-COVID-19 Pandemic in Western Province, Sri Lanka

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### Abstract

*This study explores how the COVID-19 pandemic might influence the potential for Ayurvedic tourism in Sri Lanka. Our research primarily draws from insights provided by stakeholders. We collected data from 14 respondents, including those affiliated with the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority, Ayurveda centres, Ayurveda practitioners in the Western Province, and selected Ayurveda hotels. We utilised purposive sampling and structured interviews to gather data, which was then transcribed and analysed using qualitative content analysis. Our findings indicate that Sri Lanka possesses the essential components for the growth of Ayurvedic tourism, including attractions, readily available packages, accessibility, amenities, activities, and support services. The study also identifies challenges, such as issues related to Ayurvedic treatment, doctors, government assistance, fraud, and advertising, which may hinder the promotion of Ayurvedic travel. The report concludes with recommendations for enhancing Ayurvedic tourism, including cross-country promotion, staff training, introducing new Ayurvedic-related offerings in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and expanding government support.*

**Keywords:** Ayurvedic tourism, Covid-19 pandemic, Tourism industry, Promotion, Potential

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Many market segments need to be developed to expand the overall tourism capacity of Sri Lanka. Based on data from the survey of departing foreign tourists in 2015, it recommended ten niche market segments for international tourists. Among them, health and well-being is one of the niche markets identified as a potential segment to promote in Sri Lanka (Ministry of Tourism Development and Christian Religious Affairs, 2023). The Export Development Board of Sri Lanka also recognised health and wellness as a critical component of the National Export Strategy (EDB, 2020). Earlier, it was identified as a significant sector in foreign exchange. In 2014, a new segment called 'Health' was introduced for tourists visiting Sri Lanka. Initially, it was 0.53%; in 2019, it increased to 0.6%. There are 74.2% of tourists arrived for health tourism from Western Europe. Furthermore, out of health travellers, the highest amount of tourists, 53.1%, came from Germany (SLTDA, 2019). Accordingly, the number of tourists visiting Sri Lanka for Ayurvedic tourism has gradually increased, but only a tiny percentage.

In the post-pandemic, there is a responsibility to handle existing and emerging markets efficiently. They should adequately plan to supply tourism products and services to captivate post-COVID-19 travellers. Therefore, an aggressive marketing campaign must be followed for maximum benefits (Samarathunga, 2020). Further, in Sri Lanka, there are many potential areas to promote, and Ayurvedic tourism is one of the niche markets in Sri Lanka. Ayurveda tourism, health and wellness tourism, and healing centres are identified as potential areas for the hotels with Coronavirus. Also, after recovering from the Corona outbreak, Ayurveda and indigenous medicine have a good chance of being seized (Ranasinghe, 2020).

Furthermore, Sri Lanka is the best location for Ayurveda activities besides Kerala state in India (De Alwis, 2008). Therefore, studying the potential

to promote Sri Lanka as an Ayurvedic tourism destination is essential. In finding the literature on the topic, “Promotion of Ayurvedic Tourism in Sri Lanka,” little information was found. So, there is a lack of information to promote Ayurvedic tourism after the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, this study identifies the potential to develop Ayurvedic tourism during the COVID-19 pandemic and the barriers and challenges to promoting Ayurvedic tourism in Sri Lanka. Hence, this study's research objectives are: 1). identify the potential to develop Ayurvedic tourism post-COVID-19 pandemic, and 2) identify the barriers and challenges to promoting Ayurvedic tourism in Sri Lanka.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

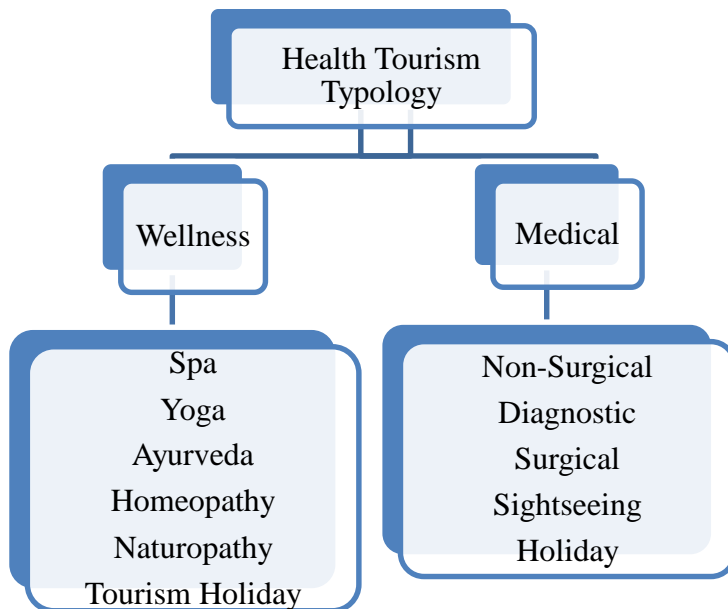
### **Health Tourism**

Health tourism is a specialised sector that includes the professional and controlled use of natural healing factors and physical therapy to maintain and enhance health and living standards. Barca et al. (2013) define health tourism as people who travel to other countries for treatment, not less than a day and no more than a year, to improve health or access health services in parallel with exploring the tourist landscape. Helmy (2011) mentioned that health tourism focuses on healthcare, health assessment, surgery, beauty, healing, plastic surgery, spas, healing, rehabilitation, and healing with relaxation and recreational activities. It focuses on a wide range of topics. Today, there is a significant increase in the demand for healthcare tourism.

According to Khanal and Shimizu (2019), the main reasons for the popularity of health tourism are the crisis in the healthcare system in developed countries, high prices for healthcare, long waiting lists, and the aging of the population. In addition, trends in world tourism markets predict that lifestyle changes will be the main reason for the continued growth of the health tourism industry. Therefore, health is a primary strategy to attract international and local

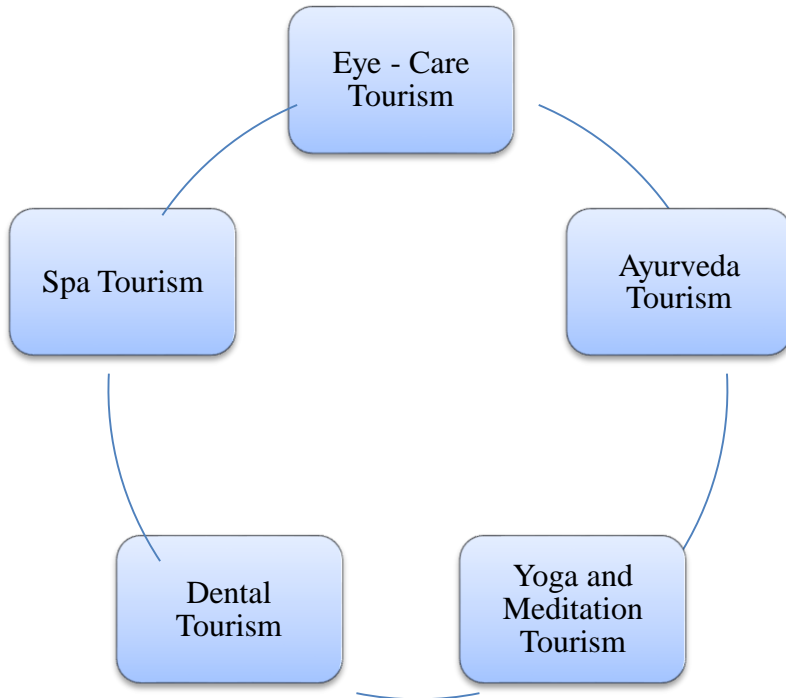
tourists (Smith & Puczkó, 2008). Health tourism is recognised as a business opportunity by many countries such as India, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Brunei, Cuba, Hong Kong, Hungary, Israel, Jordan, Lithuania, Philippines, China, and South Korea (Woodhead, 2013; Heung et al., 2010). Therefore, health service providers always try to attract international tourists with excellent technology and advanced equipment.

According to previous studies (Khanal & Shimizu, 2019; Smith & Puczkó, 2008), health tourism is a concept that includes medical tourism (based on Western medicines) and wellness tourism (based on traditional treatments like Yoga, Ayurveda and Spa). Figure 1 shows the Health tourism typology of medical and wellness tourism, and Figure 2 shows the components of health tourism (Sadekar & Pereria, 2018).



**Figure 1:** Health Tourism Typology

**Source:** Sadekar and Pereria (2018)



**Figure 2:** Components of Health Tourism

**Source:** Sadekar and Pereria (2018)

### Local Trends in Ayurvedic Tourism

Ayurveda is an ancient science that practices holistic healing derived from the Sanskrit words ‘Ayush’ (life) and ‘Veda’ (knowledge or science). Generally, Ayurveda is translated as the Science of Life. It originated in India and can be identified as one of the oldest healthcare systems in the world. Studies conducted by Sathiyaseelan and Gnanapala (2015) indicate that there is proof to prove this system has been practised since 3000 B.C. in the countries of South Asia. According to the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority, Ayurveda soon spread from India to Sri Lanka. The Sinhala kings built Ayurvedic centres in the ancient cities of Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa. Ayurveda is the belief in a combination of five body elements based on three types of energy or Dosha. Those are Vatha (a combination of air and space), Pitha (fire and water), and Kappa (earth and water). Ayurvedic practitioners

believe diseases occur when these Dosha are not balanced. Ayurveda provides physical, mental, social, and spiritual well-being through preventive and promotional strategies and holistic disease treatment (Nesari, 2022). Sri Lanka Export Development Board denotes that Sri Lanka Ayurveda cures diseases through medical services consisting of purification (Shodana Chikitsa) and healing treatment (Shamana Chikitsa). Accordingly, Ayurveda has its own method of treating conditions.

Many people think Ayurveda is a traditional treatment method that uses herbs for treatment. The image of Ayurveda is minimal. But as studied by Joseph and Ramesh (2012) highlight, Ayurveda is a severe medical science with a strong emphasis on diagnosis, examination, disease analysis, diet, medicinal properties, dose, frequency of the medicinal product, and the medium that should be consumed. Ayurveda has become a more comprehensive and practical medical science (Reddy, 2002). It has significantly contributed to medical science by providing many guidelines for discovering natural products drug discovery (Patwardhan & Vaidya, 2009). Further, Ayurveda is gaining acceptance and support from the public continuously.

Throughout the whole life cycle and its different stages, Ayurveda mainly deals with measures for healthy living. It also has developed a range of therapeutic efforts to control the disease. Joseph & Ramesh (2012) emphasise that Ayurveda can be recognised as a complete health science that applies to all phases of life, starting with birth, newborns, infants, childhood, youth, old age, and even before and after death. The reason is that Ayurveda treats not only the symptoms of an illness but also its root causes, which helps people enhance the immune system by curing a person's body, mind, and spirit. Ramesh & Joseph (2012) also state that Ayurveda offers a comprehensive outlook to a healthy life.

According to Joseph & Ramesh (2012), Ayurveda offers excellent treatment for diseases such as intervertebral disc prolapse, frozen shoulder,

insomnia, diabetes, high blood pressure, skin diseases, weight management, etc. Ayurveda also relieves various illnesses ranging from migraines and sinuses to arthritis and paralysis, thus cleansing the body through controlled emesis, purgation, and making individuals sweat. Then, it allows the body to accept further treatment. As a medical method, Ayurveda eliminates the disease from the body without any side effects and ultimately promotes essential health. In addition, Ayurveda implements preventive modalities such as lifestyle modification such as Dinacharya (daily regimen), Ritucharya (seasonal regimens), Nishacharya (night regimen), Yoga, Pranayama (control of breath), and Pathya-Apathya (wholesome and unwholesome) not only prevent disease but also promote health and make the body immune to disease (Nesari, 2022).

Ayurveda follows a different method to cure diseases known as "Panchakarma." It is usually called "five therapies". According to Joseph & Ramesh (2012), Panchakarma refers to the metabolic wastes and toxins generated from the harmful effects of the environment that are gently and effectively disposed of in the tissues and subtle cleansing procedures that eliminate them from the body. This treatment is suitable for sick people as well as healthy people.

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Ayurvedic tourism is to visit a destination to improve health and well-being. George (2012) explains the global trend going back to nature to the revival of the traditional holistic methods of medicine against artificial. Symptomatic treatments have led to the improvement and resurgence of conventional medical techniques such as Ayurveda. Ayurvedic services are a growing business with a high probability of achieving success and satisfying

patients by providing high-quality services.

Since the beginning of this millennium, the number of medical tourists travelling from rich countries to developing countries to experience high-tech treatments and healthy body and mind rejuvenation. India is a favourite destination for this increasingly visible part of Ayurveda tourism (Bookman, 2007). According to Bode (2008), today, Ayurveda has become a middle-class urban phenomenon and focuses on fast-moving consumer goods offered for the treatment of urban middle-class diseases such as stress, obesity, impotence, as well as enhancing body beauty health consciousness. Further, Ayurveda provides a complete package of travel experiences with psychological, physical, and spiritual well-being.

During the last decade of its 5000-year history, Ayurveda has passed a critical stage because of medieval invasion and growing demand for Westernization. However, Ayurveda has developed over the past years due to its potential in healing and tourism. Nowadays, Ayurveda is combined with other traditional practices, such as yoga, which increased the recognition of the Ayurvedic healing system and the expectations of the Ayurvedic tourism industry (Muralidhar et al., 2006)

Sri Lankan Ayurveda practices can be identified as a unique heritage with its authentic treatment methods. They have been passed down from generation to generation as a family tradition known as “Paramparika Helawedakama” (Binari, 2022). Sri Lanka is famous for Ayurveda due to the availability of natural herbs and its traditional background. Therefore, the government of Sri Lanka has identified the medical tourism industry as a developing industry. According to the annual statistics report of the Tourism Development Authority (2016), “Health” has been introduced as a new category of tourist travel to Sri Lanka since 2014. Initially, it was 0.53%, and in 2015 it was 3.2%. However, there was a rapid 2.6% fall in arriving tourists for health purposes; in 2016, it was 0.6%.



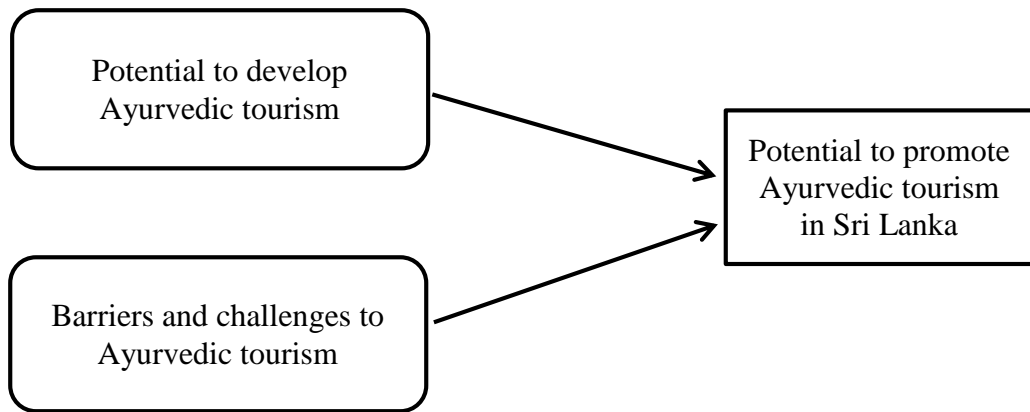
This segment has been identified as a priority in the national export strategy. According to the national export strategy of Sri Lanka from 2018 to 2022, government efforts will be made to achieve the strategic objectives as a newly developed strategy. Through that strategy, they have covered allopathic medicine, traditional medicine, and wellness. Those objectives are to improve the coordination of traditional and allopathic health tourism through the segmentation and improvement of stakeholder corporations and to develop a quality assurance system by standardisation while building information on the Sri Lanka Health Tourism sector by collecting the most compelling statistics and information.

In Sri Lanka, Ayurveda is practised harmoniously with Sri Lankan Traditional Medicine, which evolved from the pre-historic eras. Sri Lankan Ayurveda is different from the type of Ayurveda that can be seen in other countries in the world. It focuses on the unique healing practices of Buddhist philosophy as well as accepted in other religions.

Sri Lanka is getting advantages by introducing the actual values of Ayurvedic and indigenous medicine to the hospitality industry (Jayasooriya, 2010). Sri Lanka is well known for holistic package services and treatment through affordable rejuvenation therapy through Ayurveda and yoga at reasonable prices (Sri Lanka Sustainable Tourism Development Project, 2009). However, Sri Lanka is not yet famous for Ayurvedic tourism like India.

Ayurvedic hospitals in Sri Lanka are much like many other Western-type hospitals. However, the treatments used for this facility are based on Ayurveda. Some Ayurvedic resorts offer Ayurvedic treatments and specify the minimum length of stay in the facility to affect the treatment. In the 2013 government budget announcement, Rs.300 million was allocated to developing indigenous medical systems and Rs.250 million to support the research of academics and medical professionals (ITC, 2013). However, the government should provide more facilities and assistance to promote the Ayurvedic tourism

industry. Furthermore, several traditional "paramparika" Ayurveda centers are available in Sri Lanka (International Trade Center, 2014). However, Moorthy (2015) highlighted that Sri Lanka is not yet known as a wellness destination, and (Kusumaratne, 2005) when comparing the last two decades, Ayurveda has lost to Western healthcare demand. Figure 3 shows the conceptual indicator model of the study.



**Figure 3:** Conceptual Indicator Model

**Source:** Authors' own

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative research methodology to determine the obstacles and difficulties involved in marketing Ayurvedic tourism and explore the potential for expanding Ayurvedic tourism in Sri Lanka after COVID-19. The selection of qualitative research was based on its capacity to provide a thorough investigation by delving deeply into the topic (Dewasiri et al., 2018). Interviews were the primary method used to collect data for this study since qualitative research is excellent at obtaining information that cannot be quantified. The study focused on the Western area of Sri Lanka, which serves as a primary entrance point for tourists via the Bandaranaike International

Airport (BIA) (Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority, 2019). The interviewees were selected based on their experience or knowledge of Ayurvedic tourism in this area. Purposive sampling, a popular method in qualitative research that aims to find cases with a lot of information while effectively using the resources at hand, was used to calculate the sample size (Patton, 2002). The study included a total of 14 respondents. The sampling method employed was purposive sampling, specifically selecting participants affiliated with the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority, Ayurveda centres, Ayurveda practitioners in the Western Province, and selected Ayurveda hotels. This targeted approach was chosen to ensure that participants had relevant expertise and experience related to the study's focus.

Each structured interview lasted between 20 to 30 minutes. This duration was deemed appropriate to maintain participant engagement while allowing for a comprehensive exploration of participants' perspectives and experiences. All interviews were recorded with the explicit consent of the respondents. Ethical considerations were a priority throughout the research process, and participants were informed about the purpose of the recordings and gave their consent before the interviews commenced. Researchers acknowledge the importance of a robust research design. The choice of purposive sampling was deliberate, aligning with the qualitative nature of our study. By selecting participants with specific expertise in the areas of interest, we aimed to gather in-depth and targeted insights. Additionally, the structured interview format was chosen purposefully to maintain consistency and allow for systematic data collection, ensuring a rigorous and organized approach to gathering firsthand information.

Content analysis was used for data analysis. This approach works well for concluding qualitative data, especially regarding people's beliefs, knowledge, experiences, and values. The recorded interviews yielded

transcripts, which served as the foundation for compiling and combining the data. The transcripts contained every word and sound, including hesitations, giggles, extended pauses, and forceful declarations. To comprehend how words and word patterns were employed in context, a thorough analysis of the data was carried out, which included a word frequency analysis to determine the most often cited terms, which frequently indicated severe issues. After that, these data were coded to create subcategories and categories.

## **FINDINGS OF THE STUDY**

The primary objective of this study was to identify the potential to promote Ayurvedic tourism post-COVID-19 pandemic. Based on the primary goal, the following are the two main questions designed to achieve the research purpose: 1). what is the potential to develop Ayurvedic tourism post-COVID-19 pandemic? 2) what are the barriers and challenges to promoting Ayurvedic tourism in Sri Lanka? Structured interview guidelines were developed based on these central questions, and qualitative data were collected through 14 structured interviews. Then, respondents were assigned numerically to represent the respondents who were initially interviewed. Fourteen respondents participated as research interviewees, and all participants are currently engaged in Ayurvedic activities. Out of these 14, five participants (36%) were managers of Ayurvedic hotels that have an experience of more than ten years in the hospitality industry. Further, four Ayurvedic centre owners, four Ayurveda practitioners, and one participant from SLTDA participated in the interview. Interviews lasted from 30 minutes to 40 minutes to gather relevant data. Initially, the researchers asked all the interviewees, “What is your awareness of Ayurvedic tourism?” and all had an idea about it. Some of them define Ayurveda as follows.

*“Ayurveda is the science of learning about our body. The main thing in Ayurveda is to eliminate the factors that cause the disease.”*

*(Participant 01, Personal interview, 2020)*

*“Ayurvedic tourism is the practice of spending time away from home while on a tour and to take Ayurveda.”*

*(Participant 08, Personal interview, 2020)*

According to the respondents, Ayurveda is the science of learning about life. There are many reasons tourists come to Sri Lanka for medical treatment. Based on data, tourists expect pure Ayurveda treatments from service providers. Furthermore, some factors must be included in Ayurvedic treatment places to follow proper Ayurveda. Following are some statements made by the respondents.

*“Several things need to be done to provide complete Ayurvedic treatment. There should be a doctor, medicine, and a therapist, and they should know what foods are suitable and unsuitable for the disease. All these four points should be included in order to practice proper Ayurveda.”*

*(Participant 14, Personal interview, 2020)*

*“Tourists do not come only to take medicine for the disease. They come here to find out the causes of the disease.”*

*(Participant 01, Personal interview, 2020)*

Respondents stated that many tourists visit Sri Lanka for Ayurvedic tourism and consider Sri Lanka one of the best countries with Ayurvedic treatment facilities. However, it is not statistically significant compared to other countries like India. Medicines, therapists, doctors, and foods are identified as that need to be included in Ayurvedic treatment places in order to follow proper Ayurveda. The biggest problem in Sri Lanka is the complete absence of these four factors.

### **Objective 01: Identify the potential to develop Ayurvedic tourism post-COVID-19 pandemic**

The first research question addresses the potential to develop Ayurvedic tourism during the post-COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, the potential to establish has been taken as the first code that addresses the study's first objective.

Furthermore, it divided it into six categories. The categories are as follows: attraction, available packages, amenities, access, activities, ancillary services, and attraction

### ***Attraction***

The first category of the potential to develop Ayurvedic tourism was the attraction. The researcher asked all the interviewees whether there is a tourist attraction for Ayurvedic tourism post-COVID-19 pandemic. All participants (100%) stated that there was an attraction to Ayurvedic tourism. During the interview, the researcher identified the key factors that attracted the tourists to Ayurvedic tourism.

### ***Quality***

Quality is crucial to satisfying the customers and maintaining their loyalty so that they will return in the future. If the destination has quality services, that will attract the visiting tourists. 6 out of 14 participants (43%) mentioned the quality of Ayurveda as one of the main reasons for the tourist attraction.

According to the findings, frequent customers visit Sri Lanka due to the quality experience the Ayurvedic service providers provide. Usually, tourists travel to see what the destination offers them. If the goal provides quality service, customer satisfaction will increase, and customer attraction will grow. According to the findings, the main reasons for attracting tourists to Ayurvedic tourism are the quality of Ayurvedic treatments, services, resources, and facilities.

### ***Ayurvedic medicine***

6 out of 14 participants (43%) mentioned that Ayurvedic medicine helps to attract customers. According to the findings, there is a considerable attraction

for Ayurvedic medicine with COVID-19. Many Ayurvedic herbs and medicines can potentially increase immunity to prevent and aid in recovery from viral illnesses. According to the findings, Ayurvedic medicines such as ginger, coriander, Pathpadagam, Venivalgata, and Dum muttiya have attracted people's attention during the COVID-19 pandemic. This type of medicine has been identified as essential to boosting the immune system. Furthermore, the Ministry of Science and Technology of Sri Lanka has also found the actual validity of the traditional medicinal herbs Koththamalli (Coriander) and Venivelgeta (Ranasinghe et al., 2020) and developed and introduced immunisation medicines for COVID-19.

#### *New trend*

11 out of 14 participants (78%) state Ayurveda has become a new trend among local and foreign tourists. There was a shift in attention towards Ayurveda. According to the findings, there is a considerable attraction for Ayurvedic tourism with COVID-19.

#### *Available Packages*

The second category of the potential to develop Ayurvedic tourism was available packages. When asked the respondent's opinion about the available packages, the interviewees stated two factors: the sufficiency of the packages and treatment methods in packages. According to the respondents, most Ayurvedic tourists first come to Sri Lanka using hotel packages.

#### *Treatment*

The packages are carefully designed and provide a range of curative, healing treatments and personalised consultations. These packages include a variety of treatments that can be used to draw tourists' attention to the destination. However, the treatment may vary according to the location.

Respondents mentioned that the treatment method varies from place to place and that the package includes the healthier side that should improve a tourist's health. As per the results, all service providers initially do the consultation to diagnose the disease. After that, decide on a treatment plan. Further, they are practising physical and mental well-being, which is in high demand. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, people are mentally and physically depressed. It can be observed that the Sri Lankan Ayurvedic treatment method is attracting the attention of tourists.

### *Sufficiency*

According to the participants' perceptions, they had different opinions about the sufficiency of the packages. Regarding the findings, 09 participants (64%) mentioned that the treatment available in the packages was insufficient to develop Ayurvedic tourism. As per the result, most participants mentioned that the packages' treatments were insufficient to develop Ayurvedic tourism in Sri Lanka. They emphasise that packages should include solutions not found in other countries because India still maintains a market monopoly. Therefore, Sri Lanka should highlight the uniqueness of Ayurvedic services over other countries.

### *Amenities*

The following sub-theme of the first objective describes the availability of amenities to develop the Ayurvedic tourism industry. Tourists expect several features when choosing and travelling to a specific destination. Such features attract people to the destination and contribute to the overall experience of the trip. The findings show that two factors in amenities are essential for developing Ayurvedic tourism.



### *Accommodation*

According to the findings, 8 out of the 14 participants (57%) said there are enough accommodations for Ayurvedic tourists. However, they were stated that the accommodation must be renovated according to Ayurvedic rules. It can be observed that tourists get accommodation mainly from Ayurveda treatment centres and resorts. However, those places are not established according to Ayurvedic rules. Those issues need to be addressed in order to provide a better service.

### *Infrastructure facilities*

Infrastructure facilities are essential to provide the best customer service in any industry and the tourism industry. It can be observed that there is a wide variety of opinions on infrastructure facilities in Sri Lanka. 5 out of the 14 participants (36%) stated that the government has not supplied enough infrastructure facilities to the industry. Few respondents said that Sri Lanka had adequate facilities. However, respondents stated that the facilities are not being used correctly and that knowledge is not applied to the right place. With regard to infrastructure facilities, participants had different opinions. A few of them said they had adequate facilities but needed to be improved, and others said that they did not have sufficient facilities. However, improving the infrastructure facilities in Sri Lanka is essential to provide better service to existing and future customers. Without proper facilities, getting the world's attention is not easy.

### **Access**

Accessibility refers to the whole transportation system that assists in reaching the country, the region, and various attractions. 5 out of the 14 participants (36%) stated that there are enough transportation facilities in Sri Lanka.

*“Real Ayurveda is available in Matale, Badulla, Bandarawela,*

*Mihintale, Galle, Matara, Ambalantota, Hikkadu, Colombo, Horana and Negombo. These are the only areas where Ayurveda works. We can reach our destination very quickly with the facilities we currently have. Also, there is quick access between the two cities.”*

*(Participant 09, Personal interview, 2020)*

*“If tourists are coming, they are pre-booking the property before coming. So, of course, they have access to these frequent destinations. Because, if you do not know, you will not book.”*

*(Participant 10, Personal interview, 2020)*

According to the findings, participants mentioned areas where natural Ayurvedic treatments were available, and they stated that those areas were easily accessible due to the highway facilities. However, 9 out of 14 participants (64%) said that Sri Lanka's transportation facilities were inadequate for tourists.

### **Activities**

Activities generally support attractions. According to the findings, there are certain activities that tourists can enjoy while at the destination. These activities motivate tourists to visit the destination. Therefore, the activities at the destination are essential for developing Ayurvedic tourism in Sri Lanka. According to the findings, Ayurvedic treatment destinations provide various activities other than Ayurvedic treatment. The main types of treatment they provide are as follows.

*“All the treatments in Ayurveda, namely the Shiro Vasthi Panchakarma treatment, are done here. We do not do Raktha and Mokshana treatments. Because it is difficult to do in the hotel field, the other three treatments in Panchakarma are Nassya, Virechanaya, and Wasthi, which are done here.”*

*(Participant 04, Personal interview, 2020)*

*“The people who want treatment regarding diabetes, cholesterol,*

*depression, sleeping problems, arthritis conditions, those people are coming.”*  
(Participant 11, Personal interview, 2020)

According to the findings, in addition to these treatments, they also provide yoga, meditation, garden tours, practical demonstrations, and tours to the guests. Following are some of the participants' statements.

*“Many people show signs of stress. So, Ayurveda is one of the ways to release this stress. Along with Ayurveda, we provide meditation and yoga facilities to our customers.”*

(Participant 05, Personal interview, 2020)

*“In the morning, yoga and evening meditation are done here. During the garden tour, we will also teach how to prepare Ayurvedic food and give them a complete overview of herbs. Tells them a complete description of what a tree is, whether it grows in Sri Lanka or elsewhere, what are the benefits of this tree, and the types of medicines made from it.”*

(Participant 09, Personal interview, 2020)

In addition to receiving treatment, the traveller can enjoy other activities, such as yoga and meditation, which will help to promote other niche markets in Sri Lanka. Therefore, it is essential to provide quality service to tourists.

### ***Ancillary Services***

During the trip, most tourists need information about facilities and secondary services that support the primary amenities. According to the findings, these services are essential for developing Ayurvedic tourism. These are additional services that are part of the tourists' experience and make them all more comfortable and enjoyable.

*“These services are needed to make any trip complete. Sri Lanka has essential support services such as financial and health care facilities for tourists. These services are essential for a comfortable journey and to be safe and secure outside the usual environment.”*

*(Participant 06, Personal interview, 2020)*

*“There should be supporting services and facilities. There are adequate banking and shopping facilities for tourists in Sri Lanka. These services do not play a direct role in the tourism industry, but they do play a supporting role in providing important and relevant products and services related to core services.”*

*(Participant 09, Personal interview, 2020)*

Ancillary services do not play a direct role in the tourism industry. But play a supporting role and are essential for a comfortable journey. It can be observed that Sri Lanka has enough supportive services and facilities such as shopping facilities, banking facilities, and health care facilities. Furthermore, these services are essential for the development of Ayurvedic tourism.

## **Objective 02: Identify the barriers and challenges to promote Ayurvedic tourism in Sri Lanka**

The second research addresses the barriers and challenges to promoting Ayurvedic tourism in Sri Lanka. The researchers asked all the interviewees, “What barriers and challenges do you face when promoting Ayurvedic tourism in Sri Lanka?” The researcher identified the following barriers and challenges, which respondents highlighted: Ayurvedic medicine, Ayurveda doctors’ issues, government support, fraud, and promotions.

### ***Ayurvedic medicine***

14 out of 14 (100%) participants mentioned Ayurvedic medicine as a barrier and challenge to promoting Ayurvedic tourism in Sri Lanka. Most

participants stated that traditional medicine needs to be evaluated, and some of the participants' statements are given below.

*“Sri Lanka has plenty of resources. Those resources are still hidden today.”*

*(Participant 02, Personal interview, 2020)*

*“Our country is short of resources and decreasing the amount of resources we have. There is a huge shortage of raw materials in production.”*

*(Participant 04, Personal interview, 2020)*

*“Most Ayurvedic medicines, such as turmeric and Pathpadagam, are imported from India. We must start medicine production, and Ayurvedic herbs should be cultivated.”*

*(Participant 12, Personal interview, 2020)*

We identified different opinions regarding the availability of medicine and raw materials. According to the findings, there are still unidentified resources. In addition, most participants stated there was a shortage of raw materials and that most Ayurvedic medicine was imported from India. They argued that imported ingredients and medicines are insufficient for Ayurvedic treatment. Therefore, participants mentioned that cultivation is an important area that needs to be developed in Sri Lanka.

*“They also have a shortage of standard Ayurvedic medicines.”*

*(Participant 05, Personal interview, 2020)*

*“When making oils and medicines, they should be made to the required standard. But now that standard does not exist.”*

*(Participant 08, Personal interview, 2020)*

*“There is a species of medicine called “Ederu” in Sri Lanka, but if you go to a beheth shop and ask for an Ederu root, you will never find an Ederu*

*root. Most of the time, give trunk of a tree. The quality of the roots is different from the trunk of the tree. And then people say these are not in good quality and do not recover after drinking.”*

*(Participant 10, Personal interview, 2020)*

Another important factor highlighted by the interviewee was the standard of Ayurvedic medicine, which is the most challenging issue facing the Ayurvedic tourism industry. With the raw materials and medicines shortage, people tend to produce low-quality Ayurvedic medication.

*“Today, people do not know about medicine, do not know how to store medicine, do not know how to keep it safe, and do not know how to give the necessary medicine for the disease. Some medicines need to be cleansed, but they know nothing about that method. Several types of medicines can cause poisoning if used directly.”*

*(Participant 01, Personal interview, 2020)*

According to the findings, the interviewees mentioned that people do not know much about Ayurvedic medicine. Especially Ayurvedic medicines suppliers do not have adequate knowledge about treatments. Further, the interviewees stated that there was a problem with the standardisation of Ayurveda and Ayurvedic medicine. Following are some statements from the participants.

*“There are different opinions about Ayurveda, Ayurvedic medical profession, products, and Ayurvedic treatments in other fields. Some medicines have been critically criticised, saying they are bad.”*

*(Participant 04, Personal interview, 2020)*

*“There is some traditional medicine which is available with the heavy metals. But we know practically those medicines are very effective for the patient. For European patients, we cannot promote them because the European*

*Medical Council and the authorities are not allowed to take heavy metals for the body. However, we do not have a proper research system here to test it. There, we send our medicine to test various places in Colombo. But those places are costly.”*

*(Participant 08, Personal interview, 2020)*

According to the findings, there is no attempt to increase the validity of the Ayurvedic principle and make it more acceptable to society. Further, the participants stated that there are no facilities for Ayurvedic medicine research. There should be Ayurveda research centres in hospitals or somewhere to test medicines before giving them to the client.

### ***Ayurveda Doctors’ Issues***

Most (86%) of the participants expressed concerns about Ayurvedic doctors in Sri Lanka. Here, we can identify different opinions about Ayurvedic doctors, which is essential to the industry because it reduces the quality of service and standards. Following are some statements from the participants.

*“There are a large number of hidden traditional healers. They can cure incurable diseases, and they also know about medicine.”*

*(Participant 03, Personal interview, 2020)*

*“There are many talented Ayurvedic doctors and hotels. But these must be properly managed.”*

*(Participant 10, Personal interview, 2020)*

Participants stated that several qualified and talented doctors in the industry have not yet been identified. Interviewees argue that those people must be placed, evaluated, and benefit from their knowledge. Another essential thing that was identified was the language problems of Ayurvedic doctors. These are some of the most critical factors Ayurvedic doctors should develop to promote

Ayurvedic tourism.

### ***Government Support***

The government can play a vital role in upgrading the Ayurvedic tourism sector. But the industry facing difficulties without having the support of the government. Most participants (71%) agreed that another significant obstacle facing the Ayurvedic tourism industry is the lack of government support. They also mentioned that the government has to give more attention to this. Some of the participants' statements are given below.

*“The support from the government is shallow.”*

*(Participant 11, Personal interview, 2020)*

According to the findings, the government should focus on developing Ayurvedic hospitals and providing training facilities for Ayurvedic doctors. Another critical factor is promoting Ayurveda to increase awareness of Ayurvedic tourism. These factors are significant for the development of the Ayurvedic tourism industry.

*“The World Health Organization (WHO) has prioritised western medicine. Because of the privileges they gain. Ayurveda has made a medicine for Corona. But internationally, it does not give to the world. We cannot oppose it because we receive aid from Western countries.”*

*(Participant 05, Personal interview, 2020)*

*“The biggest obstacle is Western medicine. During the Corona period, an Ayurvedic hospital said, “Give us these people, and we will cure the disease.” We have medicine. However, the problem with Western science is that they did not want to send those patients to the Ayurveda hospital. From there comes a big impact on us.”*

*(Participant 06, Personal interview, 2020)*



According to the findings, the researcher recognised that there is competition between Ayurveda and Western medicine. Participants stated that the authorities do not prioritise the Ayurvedic tourism industry. Moreover, the researcher was able to identify that there was a problem with the hotel classification criteria. Government criteria for hotels do not apply to Ayurvedic hotels.

### ***Fraud***

Another important factor highlighted by the participants was the fraud in the Ayurvedic tourism industry. The researcher found that many people cheat and focus only on making money, the most essential factor that can be identified as a barrier and a challenge in promoting Ayurvedic tourism.

*“There are a lot of Ayurveda treatment centres around the country. If you go to Colombo, you may see some lanes in Thalawathugoda. There are a lot of boards called Ayurvedic treatment centres. But they are fake. They do not provide Ayurvedic treatment, girls' massages, and other businesses happening there.”*

*(Participant 08, Personal interview, 2020)*

*“Ayurvedic massage parlours are fraudulently operating. They name it using an Ayurvedic name but do something different. It is a great loss to the name of Ayurveda.”*

*(Participant 09, Personal interview, 2020)*

In some cases, there can be some issues because of fraud. According to research findings, there are several Ayurveda centres established, and some people in this sector engage in deceitful activities, such as operations in these centres with unqualified doctors and fake medicines. Therefore, that kind of situation affects the future of Ayurvedic tourism.

### **Promotions**

The promotion helps attract potential travellers' attention, change the behaviour of existing travellers, and influence them to visit a destination. According to the findings, many participants stated there were not enough promotions for Ayurvedic tourism. Following are some statements from the participants.

*“A lot of repeat guests come. It would be good to do more promotions. It would be better to teach the values of Ayurveda. The people of Sri Lanka have less knowledge than the foreigners.”*

*(Participant 05, Personal interview, 2020)*

*“Marketing and promotion are not enough. Because a country like ours can bring more tourists, we can bring tourists from various fields and the Ayurvedic side. Because this time, with Corona, we have shown the world a great result.”*

*(Participant 02, Personal interview, 2020)*

Aggressive marketing and awareness programs can build Ayurvedic tourism. However, Sri Lanka does not aggressively market and promote to attract tourists. Tourists are still unaware of the products and services provided by Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka should focus on promoting the uniqueness of Ayurveda. Furthermore, there is a need to communicate with tourists that Sri Lanka has the potential to provide activities, services, and experiences desired by tourists.

### **CONCLUSIONS OF THE STUDY**

The global attention on Ayurveda, particularly in response to the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic, has been noteworthy. Ayurvedic interventions played a pivotal role in disease prevention and symptom

management. Samarathunga (2020) emphasised Ayurveda's significance in this critical context, suggesting an increasing demand for Ayurvedic tourism among Western tourists. Given this heightened interest in Ayurveda, it becomes imperative to identify the potential for promoting Ayurvedic tourism post-COVID-19 in Sri Lanka. This study employed a qualitative research design to address two key objectives: to identify the Potential for Developing Ayurvedic Tourism during the COVID-19 Pandemic and to Identify Barriers and Challenges to Promoting Ayurvedic Tourism in Sri Lanka.

Six categories were used to analyse this objective, revealing that Ayurvedic tourism's potential hinges on factors such as the allure of Ayurveda, available packages, amenities, accessibility, activities, and ancillary services. Notably, Ayurvedic herbs and medicines, including Venivalgata, Coriander, and Ginger, have emerged as influential in attracting tourists, given their immune-boosting properties that are highly relevant during the pandemic. Moreover, Sri Lanka currently possesses the necessary infrastructure in terms of accommodation, transportation, activities, and support services. However, improvements in infrastructure and transport facilities, such as roads, highways, and direct flights, are needed, along with introducing new Ayurvedic treatment methods to align with current needs.

The study identified several barriers and challenges in Ayurvedic tourism, including issues related to Ayurvedic medicines, concerns regarding Ayurvedic doctors, a lack of government support, cases of fraud, and a shortage of promotional efforts. These findings underline the necessity of addressing these factors to promote Sri Lanka as an Ayurvedic tourism destination successfully.

In conclusion, the prospects for Ayurvedic tourism in Sri Lanka post-COVID-19 are promising, and the country possesses the fundamental elements required to capitalise on this opportunity. However, strategic efforts should be

directed toward addressing the identified barriers and challenges to ensure the sustainable growth of Ayurvedic tourism. Recommendations include the improvement of infrastructure and transport facilities and the introduction of innovative Ayurvedic treatments. Moreover, addressing issues related to Ayurvedic medicines, medical practitioners, government support, and promotion can help create a conducive environment for developing Ayurvedic tourism in Sri Lanka.

## **IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS OF THE STUDY**

The following suggestions were primarily drawn from the discussion with the various stakeholders. These suggestions will help pave the way for the future of Sri Lanka in attracting Ayurvedic tourists.

### **Promotion in different countries**

Aggressive marketing and awareness programs can build Ayurvedic tourism during this pandemic. Sri Lanka should focus on promoting the uniqueness of Ayurveda and need to be different from other competing countries. How Ayurveda helps to control COVID-19 should be promoted more. Ayurveda is somewhat famous in Germany, Japan, Switzerland, England, and Europe. It is essential to publish the benefits and details of Ayurveda through international magazines, journals, and websites. During the post-COVID 19, the responsible parties can organise trade exhibitions, conferences, presentations, and workshops in different countries to promote and communicate about Ayurveda. With COVID-19, it is better to hold online meetings and online discussions.

Further, it would be better if books containing information on Ayurveda could be translated into their languages and distributed to other countries. Moreover, tourists should be made aware of why Ayurveda is essential for this pandemic situation. Further, Sri Lankan Ayurvedic tourism was limited to a few

months, and after the season, Ayurvedic hotels were closed entirely. Therefore, it is essential to create clients for the out-of-season.

### **Taking appropriate action regarding Ayurvedic medicine**

There is a shortage of Ayurvedic medicine in Sri Lanka. Therefore, cultivating Ayurvedic herbs is an important area that needs to be developed. Furthermore, manufacturing facilities should be designed to produce medicine in accordance with quality standards. There should be a coordinating system for the protection, preservation, and development of Ayurvedic medicine in Sri Lanka. Furthermore, Ayurvedic medication should be evaluated and developed to give proper recognition and improve its efficacy, safety, and availability. Stakeholders can obtain technical reports, guidelines, benchmarks, and standard operating procedures prepared by the WHO for the production and cultivation of Ayurvedic medicines.

### **Improving the knowledge of the staff**

Study results show that employees do not have adequate training and do not have the opportunity to improve their knowledge and skills. Therefore, even hotel-wise, they should focus on training programs at least twice a year to enhance their understanding of technology and world news. In addition, responsible parties can recruit foreign therapists to train local therapists or provide an opportunity to go abroad for training. The tourism department should come up with Modular Short Training Courses for Ayurvedic staff.

### **Increase government support**

The government needs to take adequate steps to promote alternative health care in Sri Lanka to meet the growing demand for Ayurveda during the COVID-19 pandemic. For that, the government and the tourism industry should work together to improve the health tourism industry. There should be strategic

business alliances in the Ayurvedic tourism industry and impactful engagement of government and relevant vital players. There is a need to draw up plans for future promotions with the COVID-19 pandemic. Governments should hold regular publications and seminars in various parts of the world to explore the potential of developing the field of Ayurveda globally. Ayurvedic practices are often degraded as a form of the massage system. It is essential to formulate a clear strategy for the advancement of Ayurveda. The government should set up more Ayurvedic hospitals, and the treatment provided to patients should be of high quality and standard with modern medical equipment and facilities. The government should be involved in the process of training staff.

With regard to research findings, the training process is at a shallow level, with no training places and no recognized organisations to obtain a qualified certificate. The Department of Ayurveda and various other government bodies should provide more benefits for training in Ayurvedic tourism, institutional training, and university courses. Furthermore, it is imperative to ensure that safety, hygiene, service quality, and quality assurance are the top priorities for Ayurvedic guests, which can be achieved through the introduction of quality standards, registration, certification, regulation, and legislation. The safety and service standards of existing and newly established Ayurvedic centers should be evaluated and classified accordingly. Further, infrastructure facilities and transport facilities such as roads, highways, and direct flights need to be improved.

### **Forming partnerships with Ayurvedic doctors and Western doctors**

It would be great if hospitals in Sri Lanka could be divided into Western and Ayurvedic. That means it would be good if there were both Western and Ayurvedic treatments in the same hospital. It's imperative during this period because Ayurveda can treat illnesses that Western techniques cannot cure. Combining the two methods benefits the people, and India uses this method

extensively.

### **Expand Ayurvedic treatment targeting various diseases.**

According to research findings, many respondents have suggested using Ayurvedic treatments to treat diseases such as dengue, kidney problems, hemorrhoids, and cancer. For that, Sri Lanka has valuable human resources, and Sri Lanka should highlight such a hidden area in the world. Create integrated packages that cater to both local and foreign travelers who are interested in Ayurveda. Therefore, Ayurvedic medicines should be subjected to clinical studies in Sri Lanka, and the validity and use of such medications should be enhanced to curb the spread of new diseases not only in the present but also in the future if conditions appear. Further, the responsible parties should focus on the building of Ayurvedic hospitals for tourists with all other facilities that can be experienced in star hotels.

### **Introducing new Ayurvedic-related products**

Concern for the health and well-being of the people has led to this rapidly growing Ayurveda industry. Due to the high level of competition in the healthcare tourism market, the Ayurvedic tourism provider needs to create a theme for products that differ from other products or services. However, every product should be developed under the concept of Ayurvedic tourism. There should be marketing strategies to promote Ayurveda with modern medicines. It is essential to have confidence in the products that Sri Lanka offers. With the current situation, many more drugs and raw materials can be exported, which could bring millions of dollars to the country. According to a recent report by Kenneth Research, the global immune health supplement market is expected to reach \$ 28 billion by 2027. During COVID-19 time, there has been a significant increase in demand for several immune-strengthening supplements. Sri Lanka can tap into this trend by highlighting the unique healthcare products of

Ayurveda.

### **Increasing the knowledge of the people of Sri Lanka about Ayurveda**

The knowledge of the people of Sri Lanka must be improved. Residents of the area should promote natural Ayurveda and not give false information to tourists. It is essential to promote Ayurveda locally, as this is an excellent opportunity to earn more and advance in a global context. Because if a large local market is established, tourists are tended to trust it. A good offer with reasonable prices should be offered for locals.

### **Research and development**

Ayurvedic tourism is a growing sector of the tourism market. Research on Ayurvedic tourism should be continued to obtain up-to-date information on the industry during this pandemic situation. Improving the data collection system is essential for the Ayurvedic tourism business. Research provisions should be made for Sri Lankan practitioners who wish to undertake research projects. Further, support should be given to developing scientific, evidence-based Ayurvedic modalities.

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### **CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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