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# ROLE OF SPIRITUAL TOURISM TO DEVELOP SRI LANKA TOURISM AFTER COVID-19: WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO EXPERTISE PERCEPTIONS BASED ON MEDITATION CENTRES

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### Abstract

The tourism industry has continued to evolve and increase diversification to achieve one of the fastest-growing economic sectors in the world. Sri Lanka has increased to a million tourist entries since the end of fear-based repressive exercises. But, after the Easter attack and COVID-19 disrupted the growth of the tourism industry in Sri Lanka. The present study attempts to examine the contribution of spiritual tourism after the impact of COVID-19 in Sri Lanka tourism and to make recommendations on the tourism recovery process. Asia has taken the focal point of spiritual tourism today. Meditation is a key component of spiritual tourism as least a solid establishment for the internal peacefulness of an individual. Therefore, the country needs to attract more tourists with special paying attention to meditation centers in Sri Lanka.

The main objectives of this study are a) to identify the key contributory factors for spiritual tourism development; (b) to find out the relationship between meditation and spiritual tourism;(c) to examine industry experts' perception of meditation as a core element of spiritual tourism development. Both open and close-ended questions were used and the major source for information was the quantitative tool of in-depth interviews with 80 industry expertise. The collected data has been analyzed with the help of Ms excel software and the chi-square test describes the relationship between theory and observation. So, according to industry experts, the findings of this research indicate that there is a positive relationship with spiritual tourism promotional strategies, rules, regulations, and norms relating

to spiritual tourism and infrastructure facilities to meet the requirements of spiritual tourist to development of tourism in Sri Lanka through the spiritual tourism after the pandemic.

**Keywords:** impact of COVID-19, spiritual tourism, spiritual tourist, meditation

## 1.0 Introduction

The tourism industry is currently more unique and developing than any other time in recent memory, with the improvement of new and up and coming patterns which mirror the adjustments in tourist request is becoming the dominant focal point. Globalization has empowered the tourism industry to arrive at extraordinary lengths with the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2018) detailing that universal the tourism industry appearances developed by a gigantic 7% in 2017, likening to 1,322 million which was quickened by Europe, Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Middle East and the Americas. A solid sign from these movement designs additionally proposes that individuals have likewise been visiting creating countries that are more evident in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. This means that, to a certain degree, tourists have a curiosity to experience other cultures and to engage with people in these destinations.

The COVID-19 pandemic has hugely affected the tourism industry due to the coming about movement restrictions as well as droop popular among travelers (Mubarak & Nuzkiya, 2020). The travel industry has been greatly influenced by the spread of corona-virus, the same number of nations have presented travel limitations trying to contain its spread. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) estimated that worldwide global traveller appearances may diminish by 58% to 78% in 2020, prompting a possible loss of US\$0.9–1.2 trillion in worldwide the travel industry receipts. In a large number of the world's urban communities, arranged travel went somewhere near 80–90%. Conflicting and one-sided travel limitations happened provincially and numerous vacation destinations around the globe, for example, museums, carnivals, and sports venues closed. The most recent information shows a 65% drop in worldwide traveller appearances in the initial a half year of 2020. Sri Lanka tourist arrivals in March 2020 fell by 70.8% year-on-year.

Spirituality has become a significant territory of sociological and business research (Holman 2011). Since the late 1900's, peoples are progressively moving in the direction of Spirituality for different individual and social reasons. Peoples are looking for spiritual answers for the fatigue achieved by their way of life that has gotten more business and individualistic (Blomfield 2009). Although the impact of different organizations on spirituality is developing, there is no mechanically or academically acknowledged technique to create spirituality. Numerous analysts recommend that spirituality is an innate component of the individual. At the end of the day, spirituality implies people's attempt to find and associate with the extraordinary universe to offer importance to their typical life.

## 1.2 Spiritual Tourism

Spiritual tourism as an academic and industry concept is a creative field of tourism that can be evaluated as a sector of special interest in tourism and cultural tourism. It includes different aspects of other forms of tourism, such as religious tourism and pilgrimage tourism. Nevertheless, despite the prevalence of spiritual tourism, there is no generally accepted concept of 'spiritual tourism' in the current literature. Spiritual tourism is a kind of the tourism concept where somebody who visits a particular spot out of his/her usual environment, with the goal of spiritual importance or potentially development, spiritual tourism is a type of tourism where someone who visits a specific place out of his/her usual environment, with the intention of spiritual meaning and/or growth, Without open religious obligation, which may be religious, non-religious, sacred or experiential in intent, but within a divine sense, irrespective of the key purpose for travel (adapted from Weiler & Hall 1992). Spiritual tourists are those who venture away from their normal environment with the aim of spiritual development and prosperity, which is connected to God (Haq & Jackson 2009).

### **1.2.1 Spiritual Tourism in Sri Lanka**

Spiritual tourism is a significant part of Sri Lankan the tourism industry as Sri Lanka is a place that is known for spirituality end claimed with numerous spots of worship, traveller focuses and strict landmarks, and so forth. Buddhist meditation framework and strategies are more crucial pieces of spiritual tourism in Sri Lanka. Since, Buddhist monks, they have a strong understanding of meditation methods in Sri Lanka. Along these lines, utilizing this certified human asset, Sri Lanka can create spiritual tourism through meditation.

Sri Lankan spiritual tourism the most part comprises of meditation, yoga, and pilgrimage tours. There are around 20 meditation centres recognized by Sri Lanka Tourism, arranged outside Colombo, which can give chance to the travellers who are on an endeavour to see the truth of life. The open door for the development of spiritual tourism in Sri Lanka will additionally convert into two-way benefits, just with the satisfaction of two essentials: firstly, the improvement of the framework in places where such Buddhist meditation programs are offered, especially the areas outside the capital city. Secondly, the guarantees of the offered program to the traveller through yoga, meditation, and pilgrimage.

## **2.0 Problem statement**

Spiritual tourism is a significant part of Sri Lankan the tourism industry But, as per the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA) annual statistical report, there is a lower level of rate in tourist visits for religious purposes in Sri Lanka from the year 2006 to 2019. The most elevated level of traveller visit for religious reasons for existing is 4.8% in 2013, however then again least level of tourist visit for religious purposes is 0.00% in 2016 and 2019. Since, spiritual tourism in Sri Lanka has not been given due consideration by the administration, private divisions, and specialists. Meditation is a core element of spiritual tourism and a strong foundation for the inner tranquillity of a person. Sri Lanka has an excessive amount of human resources for meditation when compared with other Asian countries. Therefore, this will be more beneficial to attract spiritual tourists to Sri Lanka for

the development of spiritual tourism. But, unfortunately, the respective authorities are not given much attention through meditation to develop spiritual tourism in Sri Lanka. And also, according to the world health organization state that due to COVID-19 increased adverse economic impacts on people's lives, greater stress due to lockdowns and restrictions, and impacts on those who lost friends and family to the virus. Therefore, due to the above fact, there is a huge potential for Sri Lanka to attract more tourists for personal spiritual development through meditation programs. Furthermore, the path for spiritual tourism has become an untapped tourism product in Sri Lanka and it is not fully explored and the deficiencies and problems are not properly assessed. An in-depth study on the spiritual tourism issues and problems in Sri Lanka will help to develop spiritual tourism in Sri Lanka specifically and the tourism industry in general. This encouragement helps to choose this topic for study.

### **3.0 Objective of Study**

- i. To identify the key contributory factors for spiritual tourism development.
- ii. To find out the relationship between meditation and spiritual tourism.
- iii. To examine industry experts' perception of meditation as a core element of spiritual tourism development.

### **4.0 Literature review**

There was not enough depth in the spiritual tourism development literature to guide this study for decision making. However, the available literature on spiritual tourism offered some theoretical support to establish development concepts such as marketing, community, suppliers, human resources, etc. The purpose of this thesis is product design to find out the factors of the development of spiritual tourism in Sri Lanka.

Jesurajan, S. and Prabhu, V. (2012), "Dimension of spiritual tourism in Tuticorin district of Tamil Nadu in India- A critical analysis" identified thirteen major problems associated with the spiritual tourist centres of the Tuticorin district. They are; pollution / Lack of cleanliness, Beggars' nuisance, exploitation by vehicle operators, undesirable behaviour of local people, poor services of hotels, cheating by traders, high admission/parking charges, inadequate information and lack of good local guidance, lack of sanitary facility, lack of transport facility, lack of parking facility, poor banking facility etc. To identify the most important problems, Garret ranking was applied to the scores given by the respondents to these problems.

Suri, R. and Rao, J. (2014), "Impact of Spiritual Marketing on Different Segments of Tourists and Their Evaluation of the Site" identified there are four major problems that are helpful for the tourism industry as well as spiritual destinations caretaker to promote spiritual tourism. Lack of advertisement and marketing promotion is there; the spiritual sites did not get enough publicity, the quality of hospitality services in the spiritual destination is not up to the mark. To enhance the experience of tourists and for them to visit again and hard-on effort is required from the side of the government, the quality and quantity of accommodations at spiritual

destination are not good enough, there is poor experience about walking and excursions at the spiritual destination due to cleanliness and some other reasons.

Farooq.M.H.(2011), “Marketing Spirituality: A Tourism Perspective” identified key factors in influence on marketing spiritual tourism. Therefore, the researcher has used the major source for information as the qualitative tool of in-depth interviews with spiritual tourists and tourism operators in Australia and Pakistan. Other sources included secondary data based on public and private tourism records and other travel-related publications and statistics. So, according to the summary list of major categories revealed by the data analysis comprised of three parts. Those are, firstly, categories common to both groups of spiritual tourists, secondly, categories specific to Australians, and thirdly, the category-specific to Pakistani spiritual tourists. So, findings were related to the unfolding of world events, highlighted in the popular media but not adequately emphasized by marketing or tourism sources, indicated a growing market for inclusive spiritual tourism. Hence, developing products for inclusive spiritual tourism is suggested to be more cost-effective and marketable than for any of the exclusive spiritual tourist segments.

Maquet, J. (1975), “Meditation in contemporary Sri Lanka: idea and practice”, identified, Contemporary Sri Lankan Theravada meditation is a method of mental culture. The researcher used, a series of open-ended interviews conducted with forty-five persons who were particularly well versed in Buddhist matters. Also, monks and laypersons, who were said to be seriously involved in Buddhist life, were visited and interviewed. The author also participated as a lay disciple (upasaka) in the life of a meditation monastery for one month. So, according to the research, the finding was, meditation is a living part of the Buddhist heritage. For a Sinhalese, meditation is still the essential and living practice of their chosen path.

Mindfulness is the characteristic of consciousness that can be effectively developed through the practice of mindfulness-oriented meditation, which includes being aware of and sensitive to what is happening in the present moment (in terms of feelings, emotions, and somato-sensory experience) with a non-judgmental attitude of openness and receptivity Chiesa A et al.,2010 ; Didonna F ,2009; Kabat-Zinn J. 2003) Individuals that have been practicing Mindfulness Meditation for a long time influence the concentration of attention. It also influences the non-judgmental mindset of transparency and receptivity. The intentional focus has been enhanced. (Brown and Ryan, 2003; Lutz et al., 2008). according to the gaur,et.l (2005), found that reduction in stress due to the practice of Preksha meditation positive effect on Anxiety, frustration, stress, and the mental health of female prisoners.

#### **4.1 Development theories**

There are many theories when it comes to Tourism Development but I have selected only three theories and the essential things that can help to develop spiritual tourism in Sri Lanka.

##### **4.1.1 Christaller’s theory for spiritual tourism development on meditation**

This theory explained how tourist develops over time. He mentioned that once a spiritual destination developed and changed, different types of tourists will arrive in that place and as time goes by, the experience of the spiritual tourists will change. There will be impacts and involvement on the spiritual destinations and after all these things, there will be new cycles involving new spiritual destinations.

#### 4.1.2 Plog's theories for spiritual tourism development on meditation

This theory explained that spiritual destinations are somehow related to personalities of tourist's and according to them a traveller can be a psychometric (they just want to relax, needs comfort and they are dependable) a traveller can also be on allocentric (they are always ready for the unusual trip, they seek different kinds of activities) and the last one is mid-centric (a traveller that is in between of psychometric & allocentric).

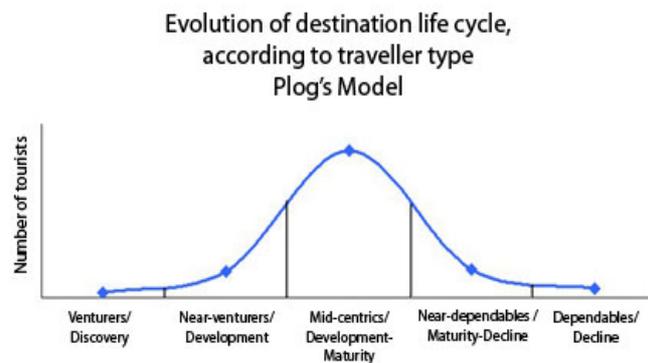


Figure 4.1: Plog's model (source: plog,2001)

#### 4.1.3 Butler's Theory for spiritual tourism development on meditation

According to this theory, the useful model concerned with the evolution of a spiritual tourist era which is the Spiritual Destination Life Cycle and it goes with exploration-involvement-development-consolidation-stagnation (rejuvenation or decline)

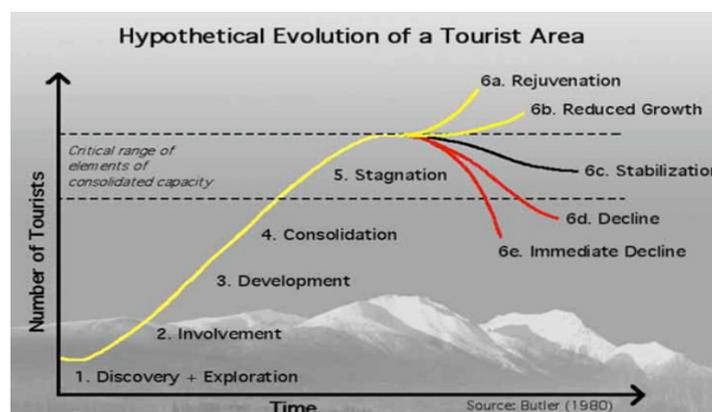


Figure 4.2: The Butler model (source: Butler,1980)

## 4.2 Conceptual Framework

To analyse the contributory factors that affecting to develop spiritual tourism in Sri Lanka

it is important to understand the major requirements for it. The conceptual framework of contributory factors to develop the spiritual tourism model is presented in figure 4.3. the conceptual framework of this thesis is based on the literature review.

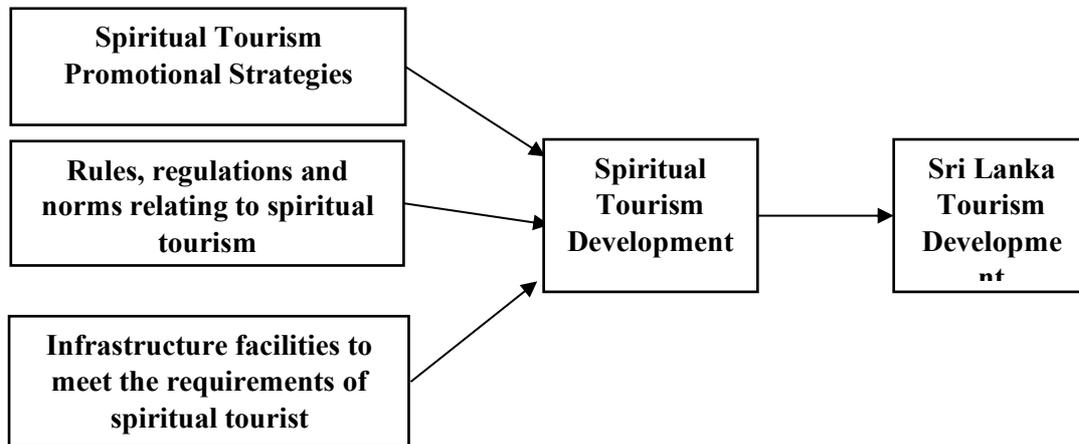


Figure 4.3: Conceptual Framework for Contributory Factors Affecting to Develop Spiritual Tourism in Sri Lanka.

## 5.0 Methodology

In this study, an effort had been taken to examine the contributory factors affecting developing spiritual tourism in Sri Lanka. This study covers the spiritual venue operator, tourism stakeholders, professionals in the tourism industry, and the local community of the area. The primary data for this study were collected using a structured questionnaire from 80 industrial experts who visited Kandy, Colombo and Badulla district meditation centres in Sri Lanka. The target population was age above 25 years old male and female in May 2019 to End of December 2019. Convenience and judgemental sampling technique used for data collections. Both open and close-ended questions were used, the major source for information was the quantitative tool of in-depth interviews with industry experts in the tourism industry. Most significantly the study used secondary data sources such as previous studies i.e. books, journals, reports, magazines, and online data sources. Statistical analysis can be performed using the SPSS software. Statements are measured on a Likert-type scale (strongly agree =5, strongly disagree=1). The collected data has been analyzed with the help of the chi-square test describes the relationship between theory and observation.

The chi-square value is calculated as below,

$$\chi^2 = \sum (O-E)^2/E$$

All the tests were carried at the 5% level of significance.

**Reliability and Validity of Promotional Strategies Items**

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.739	2

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.500
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	34.136
	Df	1
	Sig.	.000

**Reliability and Validity of Infrastructure Facilities**

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.721	4

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.615
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	90.764
	Df	6
	Sig.	.000

**Reliability and Validity of Rules, regulations and norms**

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.792	6

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.832
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	223.023
	Df	15
	Sig.	.000

**Relationship between Promotional Strategies and Spiritual Tourism Development**

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	9.736 <sup>a</sup>	2	.008
Likelihood Ratio	13.630	2	.001
Linear-by-Linear Association	.294	1	.588
N of Valid Cases	80		

a. 3 cells (50.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.00.

According to Chi-square tests, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is an association between promotional strategies and spiritual tourism development at 0.05 significant level.

## Symmetric Measures

		Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	.349	.008
	Cramer's V	.349	.008
N of Valid Cases		80	

Since the value of Phi coefficient is 0.349 when the level of promotional strategies increase in one unit, the possibility of spiritual tourism development increases in 0.349 times.

**Relationship between Infrastructure Facilities and Spiritual Tourism Development**

## Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	8.105 <sup>a</sup>	2	.017
Likelihood Ratio	12.037	2	.002
Linear-by-Linear Association	.031	1	.861
N of Valid Cases		80	

a. 3 cells (50.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.60.

According to Chi-square tests, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is an association between infrastructure facilities and spiritual tourism development at 0.05 significant level.

## Symmetric Measures

		Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	.318	.017
	Cramer's V	.318	.017
N of Valid Cases		80	

Since the value of Phi coefficient is 0.318 when the level of infrastructure facilities increases in one unit, the possibility of spiritual tourism development increases in 0.318 times.

**Relationship between Rules, Regulations and Norms and Spiritual Tourism Development**

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	9.048 <sup>a</sup>	2	.011
Likelihood Ratio	12.247	2	.002
Linear-by-Linear Association	.781	1	.377
N of Valid Cases	80		

a. 2 cells (33.3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.85.

According to Chi-square tests, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is an association between rules, regulations, norms and spiritual tourism development at 0.05 significant level.

Symmetric Measures

		Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	.336	.011
	Cramer's V	.336	.011
N of Valid Cases		80	

Since the value of Phi coefficient is 0.336 when the level of rules, regulations and norms in one unit, the possibility of spiritual tourism development increases in 0.336 times.

## 6.0 Finding and Suggestion

The first objective of this research is to identify contributory factors to develop spiritual tourism in Sri Lanka. Therefore, mainly three major factors are identified to develop spiritual tourism in Sri Lanka through the analysis of quantitative methods. Quantitative methods were used to identify the relationship between the following independent variables using SPSS tools of simple indices, Chi-square test, and Phi coefficient.

- i. Promotional strategies to develop spiritual tourism in Sri Lanka.
- ii. Infrastructures facilities to develop spiritual tourism in Sri Lanka.
- iii. New rules, regulations, and norms to spiritual tourism development

According to the industry expert point of view, there are three more remarkable reasons, why visitors started to travel to Sri Lanka for spiritual purpose in the past:

- Pilgrimage
- Cultural and heritage
- Experimental

All of the interviewees agreed about how Sri Lanka start to develop spiritual tourism based on meditation. The significant value of Buddhism and Buddhist philosophy in Sri Lanka attracted many people to the country from history. Due to the new big amount of international people in the region new accommodation and other services were needed. Due to the safety and stability of the region, Sri Lanka has always been known as an unsafe country to visit within the rest of other Asian countries. Therefore, Sri Lanka received less amount of tourists for all sections due to the terrorism conflicts during the period of 1983 to 2009. But, the beautiful rare nature bounding with rich culture, Buddhist temples, mountains, archaeological sites, and lakes have always attracted people from neighbouring countries for a vacation.

According to the finding of the research, there is a positive relationship between meditation and spiritual tourism. Because, according to gathered the information from venue operators, there are 77% of tourist participated in meditation for personal spiritual development. And also, 90% of tourists are satisfied with meditation programmes in centres. Furthermore, 92% of tourists were recommending to meditate for others and their spiritual journeys. Therefore, according to the above facts, clearly identify, there is a positive relationship between meditation and spiritual tourism. As a result of the development of meditation programmes, directly influence the development of spiritual tourism in Sri Lanka and it is the core element of spiritual tourism development in Sri Lanka.

According to the industry experts' point of view, the main reason for the low level of tourist arrivals in Sri Lanka due to the low level of safety and security in Sri Lanka. But, after 2009, the number of tourists increased, as terrorist activities had ended. And another reason is, there is a lack of attention for the development of spiritual tourism in Sri Lanka during the last decades. Further, they advised, this is the right time to take aggressive actions for the development of spiritual tourism in Sri Lanka.

In an interview with academics who are already engaged with the tourism sector, they remarked that tourists face a lot of problems when they want to go to the meditation centre for their meditation purposes. Most of the tourists have to suffer about language barriers, identifying the reality of programs and safety issues.

As well as, they request from the government bodies to make new rules and regulations or regulatory framework to protect Buddhist meditation and centres from the unauthorized organizations and businessmen. As well as, need to measure standards for venue ranking according to the quality service. Further suggestions for spiritual tourism development, to introduce an aggressive marketing campaign to lure prospective tourists, publishing of materials in all major languages (Russian, Spanish, German, Japanese, French etc.), Arrange suitable medical facilities on-site or off-site of meditation centres. Further suggestions for spiritual tourism development, need to facilitate foreign language translators or need to create an opportunity to learn the different language for trainers, preserving and promoting the local heritage and community skills, and need a proper system to protect the rights of international and local tourists', and responsibilities of all stakeholders.

As a further expert point of view, the significance of both personality traits and mindfulness in predicting overall psychological well-being has been successfully demonstrated. The increasing scientific interest in meditation has shown that this practice of mindfulness meditation is associated with positive personality changes. Therefore, meditation programs are highly effected to develop spiritual tourism in Sri Lanka and it will help to use as a recovery plan from the adverse impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic to Sri Lanka.

## **7.0 Conclusion**

The paper is mainly concentrated to examine the key contributory factors to develop spiritual tourism in Sri Lanka. Based on the result of this study, it can be concluded that several recommendations are needed to be concern about spiritual tourism development in Sri Lanka. Promotional strategies, infrastructure facilities, and new rules, regulations, and norms are influencing to develop spiritual tourism in Sr Lanka. Spiritual tourist visit to Sri Lanka because of pilgrimage, cultural heritage, and experimental purposes. But, meditation is the core element of spiritual tourism development in Sri Lanka. However, it is necessary to develop a proper mechanism for a huge marketing campaign to increase tourist arrival for spiritual tourism. The government and private sectors and other respective authorities need to introduce new rules and regulations to develop spiritual tourism and protect the non-profitable meditation centres to develop spiritual tourism. And make a collective decision to overcome the barriers to develop spiritual tourism in Sri Lanka. Thus, this study helps to identify the contributory factors affecting developing spiritual tourism in Sri Lanka. Therefore, spiritual tourism development in Sri Lanka helps to attract more tourist who is affected due to the COVID-19 and further, this will be a benefit to Sri Lanka uplift the image of the country in the world.

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