

Visitor Experiences Generated through Intangible Cultural Heritage: With Special Reference to Sri Lanka as a Tourist Destination

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Abstract

The Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) of a tourist destination is increasingly being recognised as an allure for visitors. However, studies related to visitor experience of ICH are scant, presenting a dire need for more theoretical and empirical studies. To this end, this study aims to explore visitor experiences generated through ICH. Adopting a phenomenological approach, it includes a preliminary study that used a quantitative content analysis of 86 blog posts, and a main study that used an interview inquiry that included 21 semi-structured one-on-one focused interviews. Data analysis was done through thematic analysis and the theoretical lens of the experience realms. Results revealed that ICH generates different types of visitor experiences in the form of educational, entertainment, escapist and esthetic experiences, with some categories of ICH creating 'sweet spots' for visitors. The study also recognised that visitors exhibit six different visitor behaviours during such experiences. The paper concludes by outlining the study's theoretical and practical implications together with suggestions for future research.

Keywords: Intangible cultural heritage (ICH); Visitor experience; Experience realms; Sweet spots

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