

# Managing Visitors at Cultural Sites with Special Reference to Dambulla and Anuradhapura World Heritage sites of the Cultural Triangle of Sri Lanka

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This paper attempts to consider aspects of visitor management of Cultural sites and this will be looked at in its total form. In particular two sites will be selected to examine the question of behavioral conflicts within the sites which were discussed in our paper "CULTURAL TOURISM AND VISITOR EFFECTS ON THE LOCAL POPULATION WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE CULTURAL TRIANGLE OF SRI LANKA."

Proper management of visitors at world heritage cultural sites is important for its survival. Every cultural site has its own individuality in nature and interest. Therefore each site must be studied carefully and individually. The site must be analyzed properly in terms of visitor management before a decision is made. We propose the following model to be used in analyzing the Cultural sites for visitor management. Analysis could be divided into following subheadings.

- (a) Analysis to find out whether it is a "live" or a "dead" site as far as the local population is concerned.
- (b) Visitor Demand.
- (c) Type of visitors and their expectations from the site.
- (d) Physical nature and physical dimensions of the site.
- (e) Hierarchy of interest places within a site.
- (f) Time period a visitor would stay at a particular interest place.
- (g) Existing infrastructure facilities and the required new facilities.
- (h) Site presentation method and required improvements.

- (i) Maintenance of the site.
- (j) Visitor charges and control points.

We shall now examine each of the above in detail.

(a) **Analysis to find out whether it is a "live" or a "dead" site as far as the local population is concerned.**

This is the most important factor to be considered. If it is a living site with continued living rituals visitors in these sites must be handled very carefully. Visitors from different cultural backgrounds visiting even as mere observers will have an effect on the local population who will be a part and parcel of the living culture. This will create a religious and social problem which might be of such magnitude that it might even lead to a political conflict.

Rituals performed in a living site must be continued without any hinderance to its performance because perhaps those are the activities which keeps the monument living and thus giving greater importance to the site.

Even if it is a dead site the local population will have historic, social, and religious interest attached. Thus any act causing the slightest damage to its image will create an uneasy situation to the local visitor.

Therefore any management decision must be arrived after analyzing the above factors properly.

As an answer to this problem national level policy plan with regard to monuments might be important. A hierarchical list on the degree of social

and religious sensitivity of the monument can be prepared so that visitor access may be directed accordingly.

As a precautionary measure arrangements could be made to inform the visitors before and about the living monument its nature and its impact on the local population to avoid any conflicting behaviors.

**(b) Visitor Demand**

Visitor demand should be calculated according to the past records and expected increases. The expected demand will depend on the publicity given to the site and the rarity of such sites in the world.

Temporary demands can be expected due to new findings and new world trends. Those movements must be considered separately. If it is a living site the local population might gather for religious or social functions during a particular period of time in a year. These periods or days must be planned ahead to avoid inconveniences to the visitors.

**(c) Type of visitors and their expectations from the site**

Visitors will have different interest with regard to the site as per their interest areas. These could be religious, historic, social, artistic, architectural, leisure, etc. These interest groups and their number of participants must be identified separately. If these groups could be treated separately within a site without interfering in each other would avoid inconveniences from one group to another.

**(d) Physical nature and physical dimensions of the site.**

Each site will have its physical extent which allows a particular capacity of visitors. Visitors will have an effect on physical existence of the objects and ruins. When considering the physical nature of the site it could be a building, cave, vast landscape with ruins etc. Each site must be planned accordingly.

Climatic conditions also must be taken into consideration under this heading.

Facilities for the disabled visitors can also be arranged after considering the nature of the site.

**(e) Hierarchy of interest places within a site.**

The interest visitor groups identified above under (c) will have their own places of interest at a site. These locations will have an hierarchy according to the visitor demand thus the routes and paths can be decided accordingly to avoid any disappointment to any visitor. Visitor guidance must be given at the beginning of the journey to avoid disappointment.

**(f) Time period a visitor would stay at a particular interest place**

The time period must be carefully studied at each interest place to plan the infrastructure and other facilities. Sometimes time restrictions have to be imposed to avoid congestion, to safeguard the artifacts, monuments and ruins, to safeguard the interests of the local population.

Different visitors would have their own time restrictions according to their tour plans. Different visitor packages can be offered to cater to these different needs.

**(g) Existing infrastructure facilities and the required new facilities**

According to the demand calculations as described under (b) above the expected increase of demand should be calculated. The infrastructure and other facilities such as water supply, electricity, roads and paths, hotels, rest houses, pilgrims rests, transport nodes, communications facilities, shops including reproductions sales must be earmarked and developed accordingly. These can be planned with the city, township for town centre developments of the particular locations.

Affordability of these facilities should also be taken into consideration and should be provided according to the economic, social and cultural groups.

**(h) Site presentation method and required improvements**

Site presentation will mostly depend on the particular nature of the site. In this presentation type of visitors their media of communication and the object or the site presented must be taken into consideration. Museums, Audio tapes, Video tapes, Slide shows, visitor guidance could be used as extra methods other than presentation within the sites.

Presentations could be planned in different packages according to the available time period to the visitor.

Feed back from the visitors with regard to the presentation is important to improve the presentation methods.

**(i) Maintenance of the site**

Every site must be maintained properly to avoid any inconvenience to the visitor. Maintenance plans and manuals must be prepared and followed properly to avoid any breakdown of the provided facilities.

**(j) Visitor charges and control points**

Every site to provide the above site management facilities it would require a substantial income. This always could be found within the site by deciding on a visitor charge. Preferably this should be kept low in order to coverup the expenditure yet to increase the affordability to visit the site by the cultural tourist and the local population. Contrary to this also could be used as a means to avoid unnecessary visitors by giving higher charges. Donations also

could be obtained to open new projects and improvements. Control points within a site must be maintained to keep a proper security for the monument and the visitors.

**Case Study 1 – World Heritage Site of Dambulla Painted Caves**

Within the Dambulla world heritage site two areas can be identified as far as living monuments and dead monuments are concerned. The cave temples at the mid level of the rock and four temples clustered into two at the foot of the rock are living monuments. The monastic complex at the foot of the rock and the abandoned caves around the rock are dead monuments.

In planning the whole Dambulla city sacred area has been identified away from the commercial town centre. Two arterial roads are connecting at the commercial centre. The rock being a natural barrier, the sacred city area has been formed naturally.

Two temple clusters being placed at the foot of the rock allows the immediate local community to associate with the temples. The cultural tourists being kept out of these sites by avoiding paths across these temples. But the crucial planning comes in when it comes to the painted cave temple. The Dambulla cave temple being a living monument with so many ritualistic practices is difficult to avoid behavior conflicts between the local user and the cultural tourist. Time framing for cultural tourists would help both parties.