

Sri Lanka Association for the Advancement of Science (SLAAS) Section A Newsletter

APRIL-2023

Volume 18 – Issue 01

PRESIDENT

Dr. Thilina Wanigasekera

VICE PRESIDENT

Dr. Dushyanthi
Jayawardene

SECRETARY

Dr. Jeevani Dahanayake

RAPPORTEUR

Dr. Ysaswi Walpita

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Dr. Rasika Ekanayake

Dr. Kasuni Akalanka

Dr. Kaumadi
Karunagoda

Dr. Amirthavarshini
Srikanthan

Dr. Nirmala Senarathne

Mrs. Thakshila
Adikari

This Issue

1. President's Message
2. Sustainable Economy through Medical Tourism
3. Challenges and Prospects of Sri Lankan 'Traditional Medicine' in Health Tourism
4. List of Activities- Section A- 1stQ 2023
5. Group A Photograph

President's message

Dear members, friends and colleagues,

It indeed is an opportunity and an honor to be the president of Sri Lanka Association for the Advancement of Science (SLAAS) Section A (medical, dental and veterinary sciences) for the year 2023. SLAAS is the premier organization of science in Sri Lanka which could link the entire world through the science diplomacy.

This trending buzzword explains how science could make the world a better place for all the living creatures. There are 3 defined areas in science diplomacy; 'science in diplomacy' ensures that science leads the decision-making process in policy development. 'Diplomacy for science' ensures cross country collaboration and facilitates large-scale research opportunities. 'Science for diplomacy' promotes a more peaceful world through scientific cooperation. Science diplomacy has the power of negotiations, collaboration and cooperation across countries. So, I invite you all to find such connections across the nations through the SLAAS, considering the following objectives.

- Enhance the knowledge base of the professionals of SLAAS
- Disseminate scientific knowledge and promote science among all levels of society
- Promote the wellbeing of all the living beings and educate the public
- Connect with the society and address their issues making the country a better place

The year ahead is a challenging year for SLAAS with the economic downturn of the country. So, we need to focus on more entrepreneurial approach in science, getting into science diplomacy across the countries preventing manmade disasters and impacts of the climate change.

Hope you all will take this opportunity as a challenge in Section A to carry out the activities as much as possible through effective science diplomacy. Section A has a key of connecting the society through its newsletter, showcasing the opportunities that scientist have.

I wish to thank all our members personally for their hard work in supporting the organization. Without this active contribution and help it would not be possible to focus on these targets to support and improve the client base of SLAAS. I wish you all a better year ahead connecting the world through scientists and science diplomacy.

Dr. Thilina Wanigasekera
President / Section A – SLAAS
Year 2023



Our theme for this issue:

"Sustainable Health economy through Science Diplomacy and Medical Tourism"

Sustainable Economy through Medical Tourism

Facts:

- According to the Medical Tourism Association, about 14 million people in the world travel to other countries in search of medical care annually.
- The worth of this movement costs between 50 and 70 thousand million dollars.
- Currently, Thailand is the top destination for Medical Tourism, receiving 1.2 million tourists, followed by Mexico, with 1 million tourists. United States is in the third place with 0.8 million tourists. After these three nations, another 1.4 million tourists are distributed among Singapore, India, Brazil, Turkey, and Taiwan, according to statistics of Patients Beyond Borders.
- Medical tourists travel abroad for various reasons. Data from a McKinsey and Company report indicates that 40% of these patients seek advanced technology procedures performed by highly trained personnel. About 32% of the people state that they seek better and more human medical care, attention, and treatment. 15% of the patients go abroad searching for an immediate medical service without long waiting periods. The remaining 13% only consider the lower economic cost as their primary reason for medical travel.
- Satisfied medical tourists can save from 25% to 75% of the costs. This varies depending on the country and the type of procedure that is performed. Below is important statistical data provided by Patients Beyond Borders:
eg: India provides health care services at a cost of 20% lower than that in the United States. In Thailand, the cost is 30% less.
Singapore has 13 hospitals accredited by the Joint Commission International, with services costing 35% less than that in North America.
- Every year, the number of patients who travel to different countries seeking treatments and medical procedures increases. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) estimates that the world's number of medical tourists has reached 50 million, and an annual increase of 25% is expected in the next decade.

Sources: Patients Beyond Borders, Medical Tourism Association, OECD

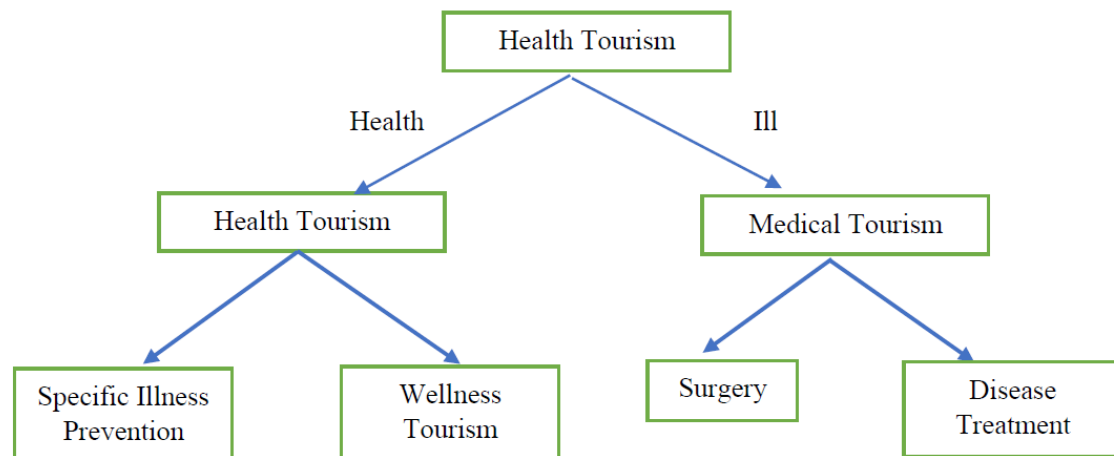
Challenges and Prospects of Sri Lankan 'Traditional Medicine' in Health Tourism

Dr. RHSK de Silva
Senior Lecturer
Faculty of Indigenous Medicine
University of Colombo

According to reports from the Central Bank, tourism in Sri Lanka contributes to nearly 12 percent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) and is the third largest source of foreign exchange reserves. The recent triple hit: Easter attacks, COVID pandemic, and fuel crisis collectively marked the collapse of the tourism industry and placed Sri Lanka as one of the most economically vulnerable countries in the world. Therefore, the time has come to revive Sri Lankan traditional medicine related health tourism industry, which has a huge potential and prospect for the extremely challenging deficit of the country's foreign exchange reserves. However, these situations have made everyone appreciate, physical, mental, and spiritual aspects of health which also has become a unique feature to search for, when choosing destinations by the tourists. Even amidst many obstacles and the vast diversity that the world tourism industry has to offer, Sri Lanka has a unique product related to traditional medicine which would cater perfectly to this new trend.

Understanding the terminologies related to health tourism

There are frequent misperceptions between the concepts of medical tourism and health and wellness tourism. In the travel and tourism industry, "Health Tourism", "Medical Tourism", "Wellness Tourism" and "Spa Tourism" are terms which are frequently used interchangeably. In 2008, USAID gave typology of tourism in relation to health, medical and wellness tourism clearly mentioning that medical and wellness tourism are both considered as subcategories of health tourism (USAID, 2008).



Source: Adapted from USAID (2008, p. 18).

In relation to the international context, the scenario in which people who travel to another country other than their mother country, intending to receive health-related services is called health tourism and the travelers are called health travelers. Diverse categorizations are recognized under the umbrella term of health tourism as stated previously. In some instances, health professionals claim that patients getting involved in emergency or critical care travels should not be considered under medical tourism and instead they use the term medical travel or treatment abroad but according to the UNSD & UNWTO (2008) definition, a medical traveler is a tourist.

Understanding these terminologies helps to identify the potential and prospects of Sri Lankan traditional medicine in health tourism. Tourists who have issues with their health, and travel to receive medical or surgical care can be addressed by Ayurveda medical tourism. People travel for the purpose of improving their physical, mental, and spiritual wellbeing, could also be addressed through traditional wellness tourism. Sri Lankan traditional medicine is the most suitable approach providing a wider platform to achieve all dimensions of health for better longevity, while maintaining the Sri Lankan destination authenticity. Spa tourism is very close to wellness and the term comes from the Latin acronym of 'sanus per aquam', or 'health through water'. At present, spas are broadly defined as water based and non-water facilities applied for enhancing overall physical and mental well-being, through a variety of professional services and treatments. Spas are a significant part of wellness tourism, but wellness is much more than just spas. Due to many malpractices of this valuable therapy, the complete image of the tourism industry is threatened, and prospects of the Sri Lankan traditional medicine in health tourism is impacted.

Position of Sri Lankan traditional medicine in global health tourism industry – demand & supply

According to the WTO, in 2018 (WTO,2019) over half of the world's travel and tourism was "driven" by travelers seeking leisure, recreation, and holidays (56%); followed by 27% traveling for visits with friends and relatives, religion, and health. Among the 56% traveling for leisure and recreation, beach vacations (whether to the ocean, river, or lake) are the chief attraction for about half of this group, although increasing numbers also seek more authentic destination experiences: nature-based and cultural attractions and activities, and entertainment. Further, these mega trends influence the travel and tourism industry and reflect increased interest in and demand for sustainable products and services including adventure travel tourism, cultural tourism, gastronomy or culinary travel tourism, and wellness tourism which also strengthens environmental and sociocultural conservation and protection. When considering the above facts in the Sri Lankan context, these trends directly and indirectly have connections with Sri Lankan traditional medicine in many aspects. Sri Lankan traditional medicine is considered as an important resource for protection of health and prevention from diseases and for curative purposes. It encompasses a variety of health practices which is indigenous to Sri Lanka and probably the oldest forms of treatment methods used globally. The theoretical basis of Sri Lankan traditional medicine is largely integrated with Ayurveda, which was originated in India.

Sri Lankan traditional medicine has a number of unique and exclusive pharmacological and non-pharmacological approaches for the treatment of various ailments and diseases and specific illness preventive measures which enhance the quality of life by addressing the physical, mental, and spiritual aspects of health.

Prehistoric and historic evidence on Sri Lankan traditional medicine can be introduced as storytelling itinerary in medical tourism. Excavations have shown the world's first and oldest hospital in Sri Lanka showing a high standard health management system. Many other findings indicate that Ceylon was connected to other countries for the benefit of healing purposes. Therefore, Sri Lankan medical tourism has salient features to maintain the Sri Lankan destination authenticity in the competitive market of Asian region, with more than 2500 years old heritage and culture.

To determine the extent of service delivery, practitioners in the Sri Lankan traditional medicinal field should evaluate their service potential within the demand and supply modes across the health tourism and its high time to understand the best mode of supply of Sri Lankan traditional medicine. A huge market for Sri Lanka is rapidly developing after the COVID-19 pandemic and this trend must be recognized as a byproduct of global trends. The development of many products with a local indigenous herbal base is one such trend which also provide a forecast of the innovations that will help to strengthen the economy via high stranded research and development. The main barriers to the development of trade in health tourism product and services includes the lack of financing of care and insurance coverage, uncertainty of outcomes in the framework of modern sciences, the absence of accreditation and standards and foreign exchange requirements etc. The government of Sri Lanka is committed to support the above factors that will enable the sector to increase its resilience, such as internationally recognized accreditations training. If these are fulfilled, based on strong brand image of Sri Lankan traditional medicine backed by the glorious and attractive natural environment and cultural assets, the Sri Lankan tourism industry is positioned to drive sustainable economic growth.

Potential of Sri Lanka and characteristics of different health travelers

In Sri Lanka, healthcare tourism is currently providing cost-effective private medical care in collaboration with the tourism industry, for patients needing different forms of specialized treatment. This process is being facilitated by the corporate sector involved in medical care as well as the tourism industry. Medical tourism is a combination of patients' travelling to a vacation destination for a potential leisure experience and a specific medical intervention. This intervention can be either Sri Lankan traditional medicine or any other medical intervention. Hence, there are three characteristics in health tourism: staying away from home, health being the most important motive and it is done in a leisure setting.

As a result, the travelers try to find a place where all three requirements are fulfilled. Sri Lanka has a huge potential in this emerging sector with a holistic approach. Considering the overlap between medical and wellness tourism, there is a risk of customer confusion if these two forms of tourism approaches are combined in the marketing and development strategies. The term wellness originated by combining two words wellbeing and happiness/ fitness. According to the Global Wellness Institute, it identifies two types of wellness travelers:

- Primary wellness traveler: A traveler whose trip or destination choice is primarily motivated by wellness.
- Secondary wellness traveler: A traveler who seeks to maintain wellness while traveling or who participates in wellness experiences while taking any type of trip for leisure or business.

The “rapid assessment of the potential wellness tourism industry in Sri Lanka”, conducted by Linser Hospitality GMBH in 2020 to the Ministry of Tourism identified many important factors. The hotels owned by Sri Lankans, provide the authentic wellness tourism experience that a wellness traveler seeks, founded on the distinctive offers of Sri Lanka. On the other hand, stakeholders believe that Ayurveda resorts and hospitals, as well as wellness hotels in Sri Lanka, are more in line with world health and cleanliness standards. However, an issue was brought up regarding the unrestricted import of Ayurveda products from other countries. In Sri Lanka, there is a perception that it is challenging to locate trained employees for wellness treatments, largely because there aren't any suitable training facilities for vocational staff since wellness tourism isn't adequately incorporated into the tourism studies in the curriculum.

GLOBAL WELLNESS ECONOMY: \$4.5 Trillion Market



Source: The Global Wellness Economy: Looking Beyond COVID (2021)

The support of the main state authority for promotion of Sri Lankan medical tourism, Sri Lankan Tourism Promotion Bureau (SLTPB) is generally perceived as being weak and a local organization called "Tourism Alliance," established following the Easter attacks of 2019, has succeeded in increasing international awareness of Sri Lanka as a travel destination but is run by tourism stakeholders rather than any government organization. Overall, Sri Lanka's safety and security ratings have dropped, which might have a significant negative impact on traveler numbers overall and lessen the appeal of the country as a wellness destination.

Spas also play a big role in wellness tourism, yet spas are only one aspect of wellness. More research is needed to determine how best to use spas for recovery and rehabilitation after medical treatments. It is high time to implement a proper regulatory body to maintain the great image of the industry and reputation of the workers in the field.

Identification of the challenges

Like in other nations, there is no official data on the number of visitors who arrive in Sri Lanka with the intention of engaging in medical or wellness travel. Due to the "authenticity" linked to Ayurveda in Sri Lanka and the country's long history of using the therapy, Sri Lanka enjoys a natural advantage over many other nations despite competition from other nations. But as the "Ayurvedic spa and relaxation branch" is duplicated across many nations, Sri Lanka must not be contended. Setting minimal requirements and developing a star rating system for the Ayurvedic spa could also aid in boosting visitor confidence. Additionally, it would provide travelers with suitable options based on their willingness to spend. Sri Lanka offers excellent opportunities for exporting Ayurvedic goods in addition to luring more medical tourists to undergo Ayurvedic spa and treatments. Education services, i.e., training of international students, doctors, and therapists who could be interested in studying Sri Lankan traditional medicine, is another export possibility that can be taken from Sri Lanka's edge on this.

The poor infrastructure such as inadequate connectivity, absence of a coordinated system, and unreliable interconnection between different components in health tourism in Sri Lanka is one of the main challenge observed. Medical services includes a wide range of medical procedures and treatments such as surgeries, consultations, diagnostic tests, rehabilitation, and other medical services, wellness services focus on promoting physical, mental, and emotional well-being, and may include activities such as spa treatments, meditation, yoga, and other wellness-related activities, while alternative and complementary medicine includes traditional and alternative medical practices such as acupuncture, Ayurveda, and herbal medicine. All these should be coordinated with travel and accommodation which requires transportation arrangements, and tourism activities need incorporating sightseeing, cultural experiences, and adventure activities into the itinerary supported by post-treatment care too.

Secondly, foreign tourists often lack trust in inconsistent pricing of services, and absence of industry standards in Sri Lankan health tourism. It could be improved by networking the relevant policy makers of health tourism to its stakeholders. Pamela Victor (2018) reported that the availability of the high standard medical care facilities and aftercare services especially in the Southeast Asian countries have made those to top medical tourism destinations worldwide, while the most South Asian countries like Sri Lanka are far away of those standards. Many strategies and lessons can be learned from those successful stories from Southeast Asian countries on maintaining high standard in health tourism.

Moreover, there are challenges caused by the government policies such as lack of regulation, taxation discrepancies, and bureaucratic obstacles. Most of the grass root level issues in health tourism in Sri Lanka can be resolved by appropriate regulations by authorities. The policy executing process and procedures must define at each step with responsibilities and tasks.

Furthermore, the health tourism sector in Sri Lanka faces various challenges due to lack of community participation and awareness, inadequate involvement from rural areas and lack of attention to sustainability (Khanal and Shimizu 2019). Insufficient training and development for doctors, nurses, and paramedical staff, and lack of customer-oriented approaches is another challenge. As there are various stakeholders involved in the process of health tourism, it is important to facilitate everyone involved in health tourism to reinforce the Sri Lankan authenticity in health tourism globally.

On the other hand, limited government involvement in promoting Ayurveda tourism, instances of fraudulent and illegal activities in certain Ayurveda centers, language barriers faced by traditional Ayurveda practitioners, inadequate workforce to meet the demands of Ayurveda tourism and shortage of Ayurvedic medicines to meet the needs of Ayurveda tourists have been identified as the concerns with regards to the health tourism in Sri Lanka (Malagekumbura and Biyiri, 2022). Most of these challenges are related to complex policy and administrative procedures, poor attitudes and lack of awareness of the standards of the health tourism in Sri Lanka.

In brief, non-material dimensions of creating inclusive expertise of the art of treatment to tourists' health needs in Sri Lanka is the major challenge (Lokupathirage 2011). When nonmaterialistic components are advanced, it would subsequently reinforce the materialistic components required to overcome the challenges. According to the research findings by Fonseka and Pavithra (2021), Ayurveda treatments and holistic healing were the primary reasons for wellness tourists to visit Sri Lanka. By identifying the expectations of these tourists, service providers can customize their offerings and services to meet the specific requirements. It is also crucial to assess the destination's ability to fulfill the needs of the target customer groups while promoting Sri Lanka as a unique wellness tourism destination overcoming the existing challenges.

The opportunities like the exorbitant expenses associated with healthcare and prolonged waiting periods for specific procedures in other countries could be compared to the convenience and economic feasibility of international healthcare options, premium-grade healthcare, state-of-the-art amenities, availability of advanced technology, customer service and credentials and expertise of the medical staff in advancing Sri Lankan health tourism. Challenges faced by the foreigners in their residence country would be in contrary, an advantage to promote health tourism in Sri Lanka as stated in Weekly Epidemiological Report, 2021- Ministry of Health, Nutrition & Indigenous Medicine. Process, risks, legal concerns, and ethical issues related to health tourism need to be addressed when exploring the answers to the challenges.

At the same time the Sri Lankan traditional medicine related medical tourism industry must compile success tales that can be used to market it internationally. The sector will grow as more people become aware of and advocate the value of Sri Lankan traditional medicine worldwide. Additional financial allocations to support the research of university academics, especially for multidisciplinary research and development of medical professionals of indigenous medicinal systems are also beneficial for long term outcomes in the sector. Finally, it can be concluded that if we practice Sri Lankan traditional medicine related health tourism, it will definitely help to boost community-based tourism and position Sri Lanka as a green destination with high global recognition.

References

1. Fonseka, N., & Pavithra, K. H. (2021). Analysis of The Potentials for Promoting Sri Lanka as A Wellness Tourism Destination.
2. Global Wellness Institute. (DECEMBER 2021). The Global Wellness Economy: Looking Beyond COVID, Global Wellness Institute
3. International Trade Centre (2014). Medical and Wellness tourism: Lessons from Asia,
4. Khanal, B. P.,(2017), Issues and Challenges of Integrative Medical System to the Growth of Health Tourism Industry in Nepal. Travel and Tourism Research Association: Advancing Tourism Research Globally. 16.
5. Khanal, B. P., & Shimizu, T. (2019). Potential of health tourism development in Nepal: Literature review and future view. Journal On Tourism & Sustainability, 2(2), 14-29.
6. Lokupathirage, N. S. (2011). Health tourism and its potentials and impacts on tourism industry of Sri Lanka.
7. Malagekumbura, M. K. N. K., & Biyiri, E. W. (2022). The Challenges and Potential to Promote Ayurvedic Tourism in Sri Lanka During the Post-Covid-19 Pandemic.
8. Ministry of Development Strategies, and International Trade (2021). The National Export Strategy (NES) of Sri Lanka,
9. UNSD & UNWTO (2008). International Recommendations for Tourism Statistics, 2008 (IRTS 2008). In UN department of economic and social affairs statistics division and UNWTO.
10. USAID. (2008). Comprehensive development plan: Jermuk as a destination spa & winter tourism center. Volume 1 —CoreStrategy
11. UNWTO and Global Tourism Economy Research Centre (GTERC)2019. UNWTO / GTERC Asia Tourism Trends 2019 Edition. Madrid, Spain.
12. Victor, P. (2018). The boom in intra-ASEAN health tourism. The Asian Post. <https://theaseanpost.com/article/boom-intra-asean-health-tourism-0>

List of activities conducted by SLAAS Section A from January to March 2023	
January	
12 January 2023	A workshop on “Herbal Drug Standardization” was conducted for undergraduates at the institute of Indigenous Medicine by Dr Dilanthi Herath as the resource person. Activity coordinator: Dr Jeevani Dahanayake
23 January 2023	A Live TV program on “belief and myths related to menstruation” was conducted via the Siytha TV with Dr Kaumadi Karunagoda as the resource person. Activity coordinator: Dr Kaumadi Karunagoda
27 January 2023	A workshop on “Science into economic gain” was conducted for the different category of employees of Ministry of Health with Mr Anuruddh Rathnayaka as the resource person. Activity coordinator: Dr Thilina Wanigasekara
Feburary	
20 February 2023	A Live TV program at Siyatha TV on Ayurveda advice for post-natal period was conducted by Dr Kaumadi Karunagoda as the resource person. Activity Coordinator: Dr Kaumadi Karunagoda
March	
8 March 2023	Women’s Day celebration program was conducted at the Anti-natal clinic of the Ayurveda Teaching Hospital, Borella. A program on “ <i>Nirogi Mawak Supasan Daruwek</i> ” for the mothers and pregnant mothers was organized by Dr.Kaumadi Karunagoda and Dr Nilanthi Senarathne. Activity coordinators: Dr Kaumadi Karunagoda, Dr Nirmla Senarathne
9 March 2023	A Live TV program on “correct preparation methods of Ayurveda medicinal preparations” was conducted via the Shraddha TV with Dr Jeevani Dahanayake as the resource person. Activity coordinator: Dr Jeevani Dahanayake
18 March 2023	Dr. Rasika Ekanayake conducted a guest lecture at the 1 st International Head and Neck Oncology and Esthetics Conference Organized by College of OMF Surgeons of Sri Lanka together with the Faculty of Dental Sciences, University of Peradeniya and GSL Dental College, India. Topic: “Management of metastasis in the management of head and neck malignancies.” Activity coordinator: Dr Rasika Ekanayake
26 March 2023	Dr Rasika Ekanayake conducted a lecture as one of the resource persons in College of Dentistry and Stomatology (CDSSL) Annual scientific session 2023, Symposium III on Developmental dental anomalies.
27 March 2023	Ms Thakshila Adikari was a resource person of the panel discussion on “Empowering Women in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) for the Next Decade” organized by the Sri Lanka National Chapter for Women in Science for Developing World (SLNC-OWSD) Activity coordinators: Ms Thakshila Adikari

College of Dentistry and Stomatology (CDSSL)
Annual scientific session



SLASS- Section A- Committee- 2023



Seated (L to R): Dr. Kaumadi Karunagoda (Past President), Dr. Dushyanthi Jayawardene (Vice President), Dr. Thilina Wanigasekara (President), Dr. Jeevani Dahanayake (Secretary), Dr. Yasaswi Walpita (Rapporteur)

Standing (L to R): Dr. Amirthavarshini Srikanthan, Dr. Rasika Ekanayake, Dr. Nirmala Senarathne, Mrs. Thakshila Adikari, Dr. Kasuni Akalanka (absent)

SLAAS, "Vidya Mandiraya", 120/10, Wijerama Road, Colombo 07, Sri Lanka.

+94-11-2688740 hqslaas@gmail.com

