

# Buddhist Heritage & Tourism Symposium 24<sup>th</sup> August 2023

## Sri Lankan Buddhist Festivals and Rituals as Tourism Events and Products



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# Introduction

- Sri Lanka is a center of *Theravada* Buddhism with thousands of Buddhist temples and majority population of Buddhists.
- Rich heritage of Buddhist festivals and rituals with higher level of authenticity forming valuable tourism asset for domestic and international tourism.
- Some carry potential to be designated as ICH properties.
- Intends to discuss importance of Sri Lankan Buddhist festivals and rituals as tourism products with insights to develop meaningful and sustainable Buddhist tourism.



Events/rituals at the four Buddhist Cultural WH sites



# Contexts of Sri Lankan Buddhist Heritage events

- In Sri Lanka ; all around the island
- In some foreign countries with involvement of SL Buddhist diaspora and SL citizens in aboard
- As a tourism product for outbound Sri Lankan pilgrim tourists



Event of Mahamevna  
Monastery in  
Melbourne

# Events and rituals for SL outbound Buddhist pilgrim tourists in India & Nepal

- Live in a 'SL pilgrim tourist bubble' & home country events/rituals are part of it.
  1. General pilgrim tour packages – rituals/small events
  2. Special event/festival packages – *Katina & Vesak*
  3. Combined packages of round tour and festival experiences - *Katina & round tour*
- Rituals - sermons, sound offerings, medicine offering, *Kapruk puja*, observing *sil* (percepts), meditation etc.

# Most important Buddhist festivals and events for tourism in Sri Lanka

- *Vesak* – shared festival heritage with local identity encompassing colorful decorations and spiritual practices
- *Poson* – SL heritage festival to celebrate the introduction of Buddhism in 3 CBC
- *Esala* festival in Kandy – Annual festival of sacred temple of tooth relic with thousand of years old tradition & unique performing arts





- *Duruthu perahera* – annual procession of Kelaniya monastery
- *Navam Perahera* – Gangarama monastery in Colombo
- *Katina* festival with processions – shared heritage & most meritorious event for contributors
- *Pirith* Chanting (Full night)
- Number of other rituals/events – *Theva* (daily routine ritual), *Kancuka Puja*, specific flower festivals, alms giving, *Bodhi puja*, sound offering, light offering, offering of food and drinks, combined events etc.



*Kancuka puja at Kiri vehera, Kataragama*



Traditional dance at *Duruthu procession*



# Types of tourists for the Buddhist events & rituals in Sri Lanka

- Buddhist Pilgrims ( 'hard core' Buddhist tourists)
- Other Buddhist religious tourists ('soft core')
- Spiritual tourists
- Non-religious cultural tourists
- 'Spectator tourists'/'sightseeing tourists'

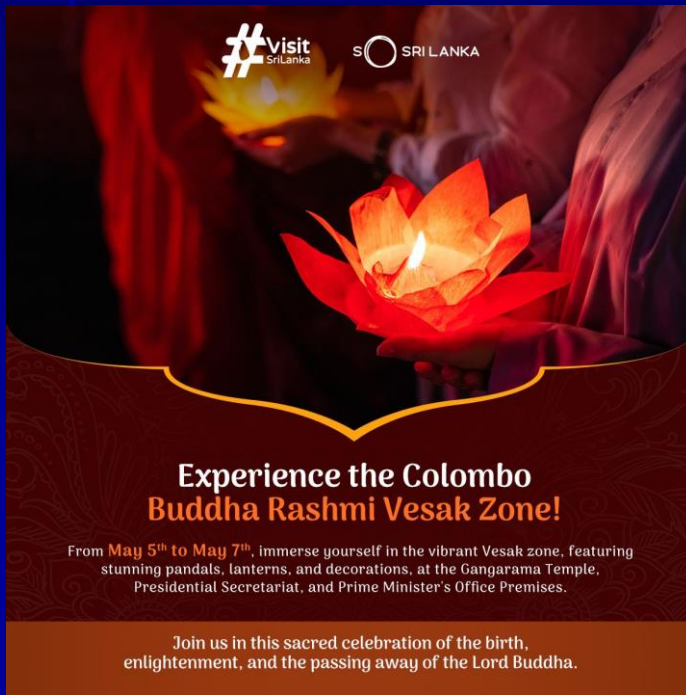


Tourists waiting to witness *Esala* procession, Kandy



# Sri Lanka as a destination for Buddhist Events and rituals

- Large no. of monasteries provide meditation programmes for spiritual tourists with temple stay
- Initiatives to develop Buddhist tourism - International Buddhist tourism center at Ridi vihara, Kurunegala and marketing of related products





- Three categories of Buddhist event tourism packages;
  1. Buddhist tours with opportunity to attend selected rituals/events
  2. Short event excursion tours (*Vesak* etc.)
  3. Buddhist or leisure tour packages with witnessing an event
  
- Domestic tourists' (in the context of Buddhist event tourism) visits to;
  1. Attend a festival
  2. Conduct their own special ritual/small event.
  
- Hotels celebrate some festivals with decorations and lantern completions for employees.



Mahaweli  
Reach hotel,  
Kandy

# Impact of the Buddhist festivals

- Attract large no. of domestic and international tourists (some cases) – peak tourist season of the destination area
- Increased demand and income for tourism businesses (supplement at hotels)
- Seat at a viewing gallery generates 50\$ - 125\$ per day
- Generation of income for local economies & creation of income opportunities for locals
- Preservation of intangible cultural heritage
- Spiritual experience and connecting with Buddhist teaching
- Community bonding and creation of collective identity/heritage



# Development of meaningful sustainable Buddhist event tourism

- Identification of SIT niche markets and design products.
- Buddhist event tourism packages with combination of related cultural experiences - volunteering at events, creative tourism experiences, elephant volunteering etc.
- Celebrating an event with local family at a home-stay.
- Main focus to develop products around non-major events.
- Address invisible burdens (energy, waste etc.) with some solutions from Buddhist teachings
- Consider authenticity, religious sensitivity & Buddhist event pilgrim packages



Staying like family members  
– Blue Mountains View,  
home-stay in rural SL

**Thank You**