

Religious Perception of Foreign Tourists at Ancient Kelaniya Temple

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Kelaniya Raja Maha Viharaya, is one of the most sacred religious sites among both domestic and foreign devotees. Domestic pilgrim groups and devotees annually worship this sacred place in their thousands. Located closely to Colombo City, most of the foreign tourists visit the Kelaniya Temple as a major attraction during their tour. This situation has created a more emphasis on tourism aspect rather than on devotion.

Most of the foreigners visit Kelaniya Temple, as they are guided at this site and they do not possess a sound knowledge about the religious or historical value of the site. Kelaniya Temple has been highlighted since ancient times with the third arrival of the Buddha to the island. The legend regarding the Princess Viharamaha Devi and her sacrifice to save the island from the natural oceanic hazard adds to historical value while Kelaniya paintings are another significant attraction that enhances the aesthetic and cultural value of the site. In all aspects, cultural, religious, historical and aesthetic, Kelaniya Temple has more potential to attract both devotees and tourists.

The major objective of this study was to identify the religious perception of foreign tourists regarding this site. Concerning knowledge on religious, historical, and cultural value woven around the Kelaniya Temple, 50 foreigners were interviewed with a structured questionnaire on their ideas on religious perception of the site. Tourist guides also were interviewed regarding their explanations of the religious value of the site. Both quantitative and qualitative research methods were used in the analysis of primary and secondary data.

The study found that most of the visitors were not fully aware of the Kelaniya Temple before their arrival at the site and even the explanations and information they received from the guides are not adequate to build an overall image regarding the site. The religious information given to the foreigners should be improved as this is one of the most sacred and reputed Buddhist religious sites in the world.

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