

# Adaptive Reuse of Old Buildings in the Colombo Fort as an Alternative to Enhance the Green Tourism in Sri Lanka

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## Abstract

The tourist industry was a vital sector in the global economy prior to the pandemic. International tourism brought about economic flows that played a critical role in the growth and international economic ties of developing nations. The World Tourism Organization highlighted how tourism contributed to socioeconomic progress through the establishment of new destinations, investments in the tourism industry, infrastructure growth, and export income. It was estimated that tourism accounted for approximately 6% of global economic activity and provided employment for 6% to 8% of direct and indirect jobs worldwide. In 2017, international travel receipts reached USD 1.2 trillion, representing a 4.4% increase from 2014. However, the COVID-19 pandemic caused a significant decline in the tourism sector, with the industry's direct contribution to GDP dropping from USD 9630 billion in 2021 to USD 5812 billion. Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, the tourism sector remained crucial for income and employment, particularly in developing nations where foreign exchange gains played a vital role in economic development. To revive the industry, stakeholders and managers explored sustainable alternatives, such as utilizing existing historic structures and public areas in the Colombo fort to promote ecotourism. This study aims to identify opportunities for adaptive reuse in the fort area, considering its abundance of historic structures and ongoing developments facilitated by the government.

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*Keywords: Economic flows, Global economy, International tourism, Pandemic, Tourist industry*

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## Introduction

The global tourism industry drives economic growth, employment, and international ties (UNWTO, 2018; WTTC, 2019). Pre-COVID, tourism was vital to developing nations, benefiting from traveler flows (UNWTO, 2018). The pandemic halted tourism, causing revenue and job losses (WTTC, 2021). This research explores revitalizing Colombo Fort through adaptive reuse to promote ecotourism and economic growth. It addresses pre-pandemic tourism's significance, challenges post-pandemic, and the unique potential of Colombo Fort (UNWTO, 2018; SLTDA, 2018).

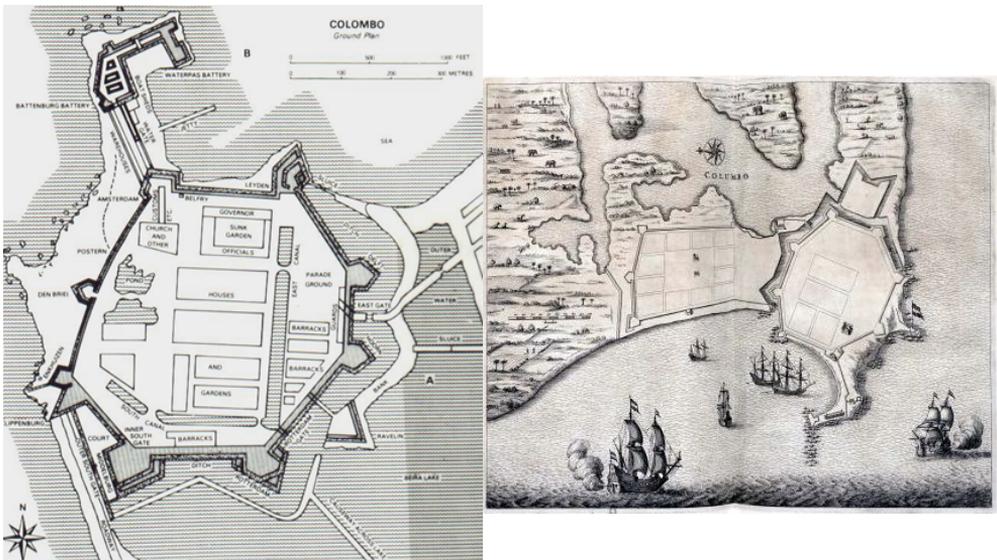
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**Figure 01:** Historical image of Colombo Dutch fort demolition



**Figure 02:** Ancient map of Colombo fort



This research analyses Colombo Fort's tourist destinations (Figure 03) and explores their potential for adaptive reuse. It aims to offer insights and recommendations for policymakers, tourism authorities, and industry stakeholders. By leveraging the region's resources and heritage, this study seeks to revive the tourism sector and promote sustainable practices for a resilient future.

Colombo Fort in Sri Lanka is a historic fortified city that played a crucial role in the region's development (UNESCO, n.d.). Built by the Portuguese and expanded by the Dutch and British, it facilitated trade and thrived as a commercial hub (Silva, 2013). The city's architectural heritage is preserved today, and it serves as a bustling commercial and administrative center (UNESCO, n.d.).

## **Literature Review**

### ***Sustainable Tourism***

Sustainable tourism balances economic, environmental, and socio-cultural aspects while preserving cultural integrity, ecosystems, and biodiversity (UNWTO, 2011; WCED, 1987). The three pillars ensure true sustainability in the industry (GBCSL, 2018). Strategies involve local involvement, integrating with existing policies, and considering ecological and sociocultural capacities (Murphy, 1985; UNWTO, 2018).

- Social inclusiveness, employment, and poverty reduction.
- Resource efficiency, environmental protection, and climate change.
- Cultural values, diversity, and heritage.
- Mutual Understanding, peace, and security.

Colombo might serve as the Asian example for such a tourism policy. The Port City Development, Colombo Fort, and the projected Beira Development should all be taken into account for the tourism development in order to attain the intended results. The Urban Development Authority has already created proposals for the Beira Development that include a key recreational area (Wijeratne, 2022). The government cannot act alone to develop the natural world. While the Port City has already been assigned a developer, the government must enlist the assistance of stakeholders from the general public for the development of other locations.

1. Low skill and local requirements in all tourist activities in the Port City and Colombo Fort can be linked to national facilities for reducing poverty.
2. Tourism may encourage sustainable agriculture by boosting local product sales to tourists and production supply to hotels. The demand for agriculture and farm products rises in Colombo as the number of tourists increases. Additionally, tourists leaving the Marina in the Port City would need to restock on food.
3. Sustainable tourism can involve the local populace and all other stakeholders in the industry's growth and help other areas of Colombo's economy recover.
4. The requirement for tourism-related investment in utilities can play a critical role in achieving access to potable water, security, hygiene, and sanitation for both visitors and the local community. This is especially true for the large public spaces that will be made available in the study area.
5. By encouraging clean energy investments, tourism can help reduce greenhouse gas emissions, mitigate climate change, and improve energy access. These promotional activities can help to promote recycling, energy efficiency, and water conservation, as well as biotic components like flora and fauna. A thorough examination and application of our forefathers' traditional methods can aid the cause, particularly during the planning stages.
6. Sustainable tourism can help conserve and preserve biodiversity while also generating revenue for
  - a. local communities in the study area and beyond.
7. Tourism should have an impact on public policies aimed at upgrading and retrofitting infrastructure to make it more sustainable. These can be gradually extended to the surrounding buffer zones.
  2. Sustainable tourism can, for example, promote urban regeneration, preserve cultural and natural heritage, and encourage local governments and property owners to support the development of the areas surrounding this tourism belt.
8. Tourism development can aid in the preservation of land and marine eco-systems, as well as the preservation of marine resources and archaeology.

9. Tourism can promote multi-cultural and interfaith tolerance and understanding, as well as peace, in Sri Lanka's post-conflict societies.
10. Tourism can strengthen public-private partnerships (PPPs) and bring all stakeholders together to achieve the set goals for sustainable development. This is especially important in a place like Colombo Fort, where the private sector owns and occupies the majority of the land.

Colombo Fort can be developed with a new theme to complement the Port City and transform its commercial aspects (Wijeratne, 2022). Its cultural and heritage significance should be considered in development proposals. Unlike other historic cities, limited capacities won't be crucial due to the absence of a residential community, minimizing conflict situations (Wijeratne, 2022).

Colombo has a history of foreign presence since the 10th century, with Arab Muslim traders and subsequent colonial powers settling around the natural harbor (Wijeratne, 2022). The area had housing, warehouses, churches, and other infrastructure necessary for military and trading purposes (Wijeratne, 2022). The development of the harbor in the 19th century further expanded Colombo's trading post (Wijeratne, 2022).

**Figure 03:** Tourist destinations in Colombo fort



Colombo Fort has historically attracted tourists, but it now receives less promotion due to arrivals at Katunayake Airport. To revive water-based tourism, there are proposals for cruise ship arrivals and 1500 yacht berths in the Port City Marina.

The transformation of Colombo Fort's built environment over the years has shaped its unique character. From Dutch period structures to neo-classical designs influenced by local materials and climate, its heritage is rich (De Silva, 1995; Siriweera, 2004; Pieris, 1918). Preservation of this shared history is crucial, aligning with UNESCO's cultural diversity declaration (UNESCO, 2001) and the International Finance Corporation's sustainability standards (IFC, 2012). Colombo Fort's exceptional building stock and green spaces, like Galle Face Green, provide a foundation for tourism development (Government of Sri Lanka, 2019). The Sri Lankan government's plans for Colombo Fort, combining 'Colonial Colombo' and the 'New Port City,' offer potential for tourism growth (Ministry of Urban Development, Sri Lanka, 2013). Green tourism, rooted in cultural and natural landscapes, can be a sustainable development source (Buckley, 2012).

To avoid negative impacts on heritage and authenticity, sustainable development strategies must be employed. These include adaptive reuse of historic buildings (Guruge, 2008), pedestrian-friendly streets, sustainable transportation (Bandara, 2013), and cultural preservation (Singh & Sigala, 2018). Private sector involvement is key, with policies supporting conservation and responsible development (Bandara, 2019). Cultural and culinary tourism, leisure activities, and garden tourism can thrive in Colombo Fort (Cooray, 2004). Unique attractions like the planned garden and marine activities will enhance visitor experiences (Colombo Port City Development Project, n.d.). The balance between development and cultural integrity, including safety and community empowerment, is essential (De Alwis, 2011).

Tourism's socio-economic benefits should be widespread, benefiting locals, women, and vulnerable populations (United Nations Development Programme, 2016). Responsible promotion, capacity control, and respect for local values prevent adverse effects on communities and sites (Guruge & Senaratne, 2012). Colombo Fort's integrated open spaces offer diverse attractions, from gardens to cultural showcases (Kuleli, 2021). Medical and educational tourism, textile and event-based tourism, and religious tourism can also contribute to Colombo Fort's growth (Weerasinghe, 2014). Recognizing the intersection of tourism and culture, and promoting local medical expertise and indigenous practices, add depth to the experience (Rathnayake, 2019). Colombo Fort's evolution into a sustainable tourism hub depends on holistic planning, community inclusion, and diverse attractions (Heir & Pereira, 2020). Balancing economic growth with cultural preservation is paramount (Fernando, 2019). By fostering responsible tourism, Colombo Fort can become a model for harmonious and impactful development (Ramanayake, 2012).

## **Methods**

This study reviews recent government policies, action plans, relevant literature, and research publications to explore green tourism options through adaptive reuse in Colombo's old port. A mixed-methods approach combines qualitative and quantitative research to understand and revitalize tourism in Colombo Fort.

### ***Literature Review***

Examine tourism, adaptive reuse, and sustainable practices literature, including academic journals, reports, and online sources. This establishes the study's theoretical foundation and identifies key concepts.

### ***Data Collection***

a. Qualitative Data: Interview stakeholders like policymakers, heritage experts, and local communities. Insights into Colombo Fort's tourism, reuse potential, challenges, and sustainable strategies will be transcribed for analysis.

b. Quantitative Data: Gather tourism-related statistics from secondary sources, analyzing them for trends, revenue, employment, etc.

### ***Site Analysis***

Evaluate Colombo Fort's structures, spaces, and reuse potential through site visits and mapping. Cultural value, accessibility, and suitability for ecotourism will be considered.

### ***Data Analysis***

a. Qualitative Data: Thematic analysis of interviews reveals patterns and perspectives on adaptive reuse and ecotourism.

b. Quantitative Data: Statistical analysis examines tourism's economic impact, growth potential, and key indicators.

### ***Synthesis and Recommendations***

Blend qualitative and quantitative findings to offer insights and recommendations for policymakers, tourism authorities, and stakeholders. The study contributes to informed decisions and sustainable tourism strategies in Colombo Fort.

### **Results and Discussion**

The Tourism Ministry and Urban Development Authority will craft a Master Plan for Colombo Fort, Port City, and environs. Guidelines for conserving structures, infill development, streetscape design, lighting, and traffic management must be included. Safety for visitors is paramount. The Plan should outline tourism strategies, guide adaptive building reuse, and anticipate infrastructure needs. Facilities should match Port City's standards to avoid inconvenience or blight. The proposal must address heritage preservation, urban unity, and cultural vibrancy.

Monitor state agencies' infrastructure plans to prevent harm to heritage. Lessons from the UK highlight irreversible losses due to redevelopment. Colombo Fort's potential as a World Heritage site underscores preservation's value. This recognition could propel Sri Lanka's urban heritage tourism.

## Conclusion

Local and Public Interest Promotions for Sustainable Tourism	Constant Monitoring of Created Products	Local Networking for Success	International Networking for Global Insights	are crucial for historic sites like Colombo Fort. Regulatory and financial treatment	tourism plan benefiting the area's environments and community
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Raise conservation and tourism awareness among locals and visitors.</li> <li>• Begin conservation education for civic groups, schools, etc.</li> <li>• Create corporate heritage trails in historic city core.</li> <li>• Establish heritage trails for officials and visitors.</li> <li>• Persuade local governments to transform open spaces in Colombo into inner-city parks.</li> <li>• Solicit input from local stakeholders for standards and improvements.</li> <li>• Use newsletters and social media to connect with relevant audiences.</li> <li>• Organize street parties to foster community engagement.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continuous oversight of the product is vital. Since it's new, stakeholders may use social media for critique. So, active involvement is key:</li> <li>• Prevent damage to historical sites.</li> <li>• Sustain infrastructure efforts.</li> <li>• Collect socioeconomic data for continuous enhancement.</li> <li>• Periodically monitor programs for value addition.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Constant networking and monitoring are vital to identify positives and negatives. Account for changing trends and values:</li> <li>• Continuously research socioeconomic and environmental impacts.</li> <li>• Advise affected stakeholders.</li> <li>• Promote sustainable tourism through education and monitoring.</li> <li>• Support physically challenged groups.</li> <li>• Encourage professional groups for promotion.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Global networking helps understand trends. Leverage organizations for heritage tourism:</li> <li>• Promote heritage city concept globally.</li> <li>• Highlight challenges and seek support.</li> <li>• Collaborate with international institutions. Conservation Strategies</li> <li>• Conservation Strategies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote government and private sector projects.</li> <li>• Exemplify urban conservation.</li> <li>• Empower property owners for dual role.</li> <li>• Empowering Sustainable Tourism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Foster awareness of tourism values.</li> <li>• Manage stakeholder relationships.</li> <li>• Ensure quality visitor experience.</li> <li>• Involve host communities in decision-making.</li> <li>• Promote responsibly.</li> <li>• [Text]</li> </ul>

In conclusion, Colombo Fort property owners have a significant role in the nation's development, preserving heritage and driving community revenue. They must align with the new Financial District to safeguard identity, warranting economic support akin to new developments. The goal is a sustainable tourism proposal, benefiting local elements and the broader country. This involves all contributors to tourism and empowers the community.

Colombo Fort, alongside the Port City, ensures a sustainable tourism future without compromising the country's integrity. These demands adhering to principles like public awareness, stakeholder management, a rich 'Visitor Experience,' community engagement, and responsible promotion.

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