

# A STUDY OF CHINESE INBOUND TOURISM DEMAND IN SRI LANKA: AN ANALYSIS OF TOURIST BEHAVIOURAL CHARACTERISTICS

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## Abstract

Sri Lanka is one of the major developing tourist destinations where tourism has huge potential to grow thereby supporting the national economy of Sri Lanka. According to Sri Lankan Tourism Development Authority the tourists arrivals in Sri Lanka is more than 2 million in 2016, which has been drastically increased after end of civil war which was lasted for 26 years.

After analyzing the importance and contribution of the tourism industry to the economy, Sri Lanka has begun an aggressive promotion of the destination on the theme of The Wonder of Asia. Sri Lanka has traditionally branded, promoted, and carried out marketing and promotional strategies aiming at Western & European markets. Now , however, considering the rapidly growing market and the vast potential of the East Asian region, specially Chinese outbound tourism, Sri Lanka has decided to shift its traditional market strategies which will aim at attracting a larger number of tourist arrivals from China than which is presently experienced.

This study is to recognize the tourist Behavioural Characteristics that influence Chinese inbound tourism demands in Sri Lanka. Therefore, the main objective of this research is to achieve sustainability of Chinese Tourism demand for Sri Lanka. When studying Chinese inbound tourism demand in Sri Lanka and analysing tourist's behavioural characteristic there are key questions to be answered, such as what are the tourists behavioural factors that influence Chinese inbound tourism demand for Sri Lanka, what are the current trends and patterns of Chinese inbound Tourism in Sri Lanka and to what extent can tourist's behavioural characteristics be used to attract more Chinese tourists to Sri Lanka?. This research attempts to provide some preliminary insight into these questions.

The study used a descriptive analysis and regression model to determine the influence of social demographic characteristics, Tourism Pricing and destination attributes on Chinese inbound tourism demand. The study results indicated that the tourism pricing, travelling cost, influence were the main economic factors influencing Chinese tourism demand for Sri Lanka. In addition, the tourist's socio-demographic characteristics such as annual household income, age and occupational status were found to significantly influence Chinese inbound tourism demand .

The destination attributes were also important determinants of Chinese inbound tourism demand. Taking into consideration of all these factors affecting Chinese inbound tourism demand, the government and all the tourism stakeholders should work towards making Sri Lanka tourism product attractive by ensuring that the prices remain competitive, expanding tourism by creating tourism products which meets the needs of specific groups. The existing tourism products should also be improved in order to remain competitive, the tourism infrastructure and services should be well established and of good quality. The government should continue to participate in mutual trade. Therefore, all the tourism stakeholders should work towards making Sri Lanka a destination of choice.

**Keywords :** Chinese inbound Tourist , Tourism Demand ,Tourist Behaviour

## 1. Introduction

The below table contains country wise arrivals to Sri Lanka from 2011 to 2015 in Asian countries. As per information given, the main contributors to Sri Lankan tourism are China and India which is 64% in 2015 from total Asian country arrivals. Further, the Chinese arrivals have been improved by 144%, 118% and by 99% in consecutively in years 2013, 2014 and 2015 and it is more than ten multiples as in 2015, when compares with tourist arrivals in 2012. Hence, it can be clearly shown that the Chinese tourists have a major impact to the inbound tourism in Sri Lanka.

**Table 1: Country wise tourist arrivals to Sri Lanka in Asian region**

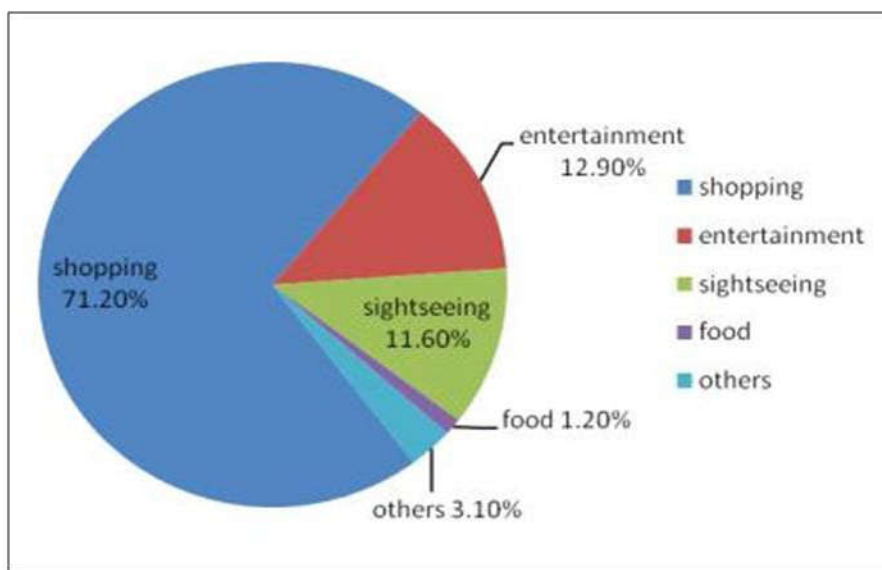
| Country   | 2011    | 2012    | 2013    | 2014    | 2015    |
|-----------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| China     | 17,013  | 21,220  | 51,704  | 112,867 | 224,210 |
| India     | 178,359 | 191,281 | 229,674 | 238,951 | 278,017 |
| Indonesia | 2,011   | 2,812   | 11,161  | 26,786  | 19,182  |
| Japan     | 20,951  | 23,421  | 33,506  | 42,136  | 45,418  |
| Korean    | 5,965   | 6,133   | 11,700  | 13,543  | 15,727  |
| Malaysia  | 15,915  | 29,181  | 20,914  | 22,120  | 21,771  |
| Maldives  | 43,926  | 45,321  | 78,726  | 82,342  | 95,248  |
| Pakistan  | 15,857  | 14,543  | 24,095  | 24,657  | 18,975  |
| Singapore | 10,666  | 15,453  | 15,020  | 17,643  | 16,647  |
| Other     | 23,611  | 33,569  | 46,053  | 54,336  | 46,362  |

Sources - Statistical Report 2015 | Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority

As stated in the Annual Report of China Outbound Tourism Development 2009-2012, there have been 70.25 million Chinese tourists traveling abroad just in 2011, with an increase of 22%. According to its quantity, China's outbound market has already been one of the biggest markets on the globe, 1.2 times the US market, and 3.5 times the Japanese market. Then again, China has already surpassed Japan and become the No.1 outbound tourism market. According to World Travel Organization, and there will be an estimate of 100 million Chinese people travelling abroad by 2020.

According to the data in 2011, Chinese tourists have become the most generous spending tourists in the world. From the chart below, it can be shown that most of the money spent abroad by Chinese tourists is on shopping. AC Nielsen and Pacific Asia Travel Association also pointed out that the expense of Chinese outbound tourist is close to ¥21,000 (\$3,300).

**Graph 1: Chinese outbound tourists' spending pattern**



Source: China Tourism Academy (CTA), 2016)

The Chinese can be generally divided into two groups: tourists from North of China and those from the South. According to the Nielsen China Outbound Travel Monitor, most Chinese tourists are from the south. In 2008, 10% of the residents from South of China have visited a foreign country, much higher than that in the North. The better economic base can probably explain the higher outbound travel frequency of Chinese tourists from the south. Another possible reason is the convenience. Most travel agencies capable of outbound travel organization are from the south. Geographic convenience also accounts for the difference of travel frequency between tourists from north and south.

Most Chinese people travel outbound for two reasons such as business or leisure. Amongst all the outbound tourists from China, business travelers contribute to 46% and another 31% is from leisure tourism, as China news reports. And these two kinds of tourists have quite different factors that foreign industry needs to be aware of. Business travelers care much more about business-related service of hotels such as internet access, 24 hour food delivery, ticket booking service, efficiency of hotels service etc.

Whereas leisure tourists care more about entertainment and recreation facilities, luggage service, TV programs in Chinese etc. All of them are about personal entertainment and relaxation, which is what leisure tourists are looking for.

Sri Lanka is a better tourist destination for the Chinese who are more concern on entertainment and pleasure activities as Sri Lanka has diverse landscapes range from rainforest and arid plains to highlands and sandy beaches. It's famed for its ancient Buddhist ruins, including the 5th-century citadel Sigiriya, with its palace and frescoes. The city of Anuradhapura, which was Sri Lanka's ancient capital, has many ruins dating back more than 2,000 years. These places are more attracted by tourists.

## **2. Problem Statement**

China is currently the highest outbound tourism generating country in the world. The number of outbound tourists reached 122 million in 2016, an increase to 4.3 % over 2015. China has become the top source of tourism for many countries including Thailand, Japan and South Korea. In 2016, there were 8.77 million Chinese tourists to Thailand, which is an increase of 45% over 2015, the tourists to South Korea increased up to 8.04 million. In addition, there were about 6.0 million outbound tourists to Japan, an increase of 63% over 2015.

Sri Lanka has experienced a minimal growth in Chinese tourist arrivals over the last few years whereas the actual Chinese outbound tourism has increased on a massive scale during this period. As a popular tourism destination, Sri Lanka expects a higher growth of Chinese tourism demand in Sri Lanka but there is still a significant gap between expectations and reality where Chinese inbound tourism demand is concerned when compared to other destinations in the region. Therefore, it is apparent that the maximum market potential has yet to be exploited by Sri Lanka. The prevailing issue is that in recent years Sri Lanka tourism industry has experienced problems of lower than expected growth in relationship to Chinese inbound tourism and hence, it is vitally important to identify the gap between Chinese tourists demand and the characteristics and the key impact of variables in Sri Lanka that affect the Chinese tourists demand for Sri Lanka.

Therefore it is important to examine the behavioural characteristics of the Chinese tourists and identify the factors which restrain full potential growth. This will make a significant contribution for the policy makers and managers and operators of the industry to design novel strategies which will lead to enhancing Chinese tourist arrivals to Sri Lanka.

Hence it is important to analyse the question as to what are the behavioural characteristics of Chinese tourists and what are the reasons and factors which are responsible for preventing the realisation of the full potential of Chinese inbound tourist demand in Sri Lanka?.

## **3. Objectives of the study**

### **3.1 Major Objectives**

This study is to examine the influence of Chinese tourist's behavioural factors on their demand for Sri Lanka. Therefore the main objective of this research is to analyse the Chinese inbound tourism demand for Sri Lanka, in order to recommend strategies to gain a significant market share from the Chinese outbound market.

### 3.2 Specific Objectives

1. To examine the current trends and patterns of Chinese Tourism demand for Sri Lanka.
2. To assess to what extent tourist's behavioural characteristics can be used to attract more Chinese in bound tourists to Sri Lanka.
3. To propose fruitful recommendations for the decision makers to develop tourism strategies and plans, to enhance the Chinese in bound tourism to Sri Lanka.

## 4. Literature Review

### 4.1 Tourism Demand

Tourism demand is a fundamentally vital subject to examine. Several scholastics and destination managers are interested in the economic assessment of tourism demand for many circumstances in tourism developing regions. According to the Ngugi (2014) and Pearce (1995) referred to tourism demand as the relationship between person's motivation to travel and their willing to buy at specific price and during some specific time period. . The Main microeconomic factors influence with tourism demand are disposable income, employments, government revenue, the environment of choice destination. Song and Witt (2000)The main measurement of tourism demand is the amount of tourist products that the tourists are willing to acquire during a specific period of time and under certain conditions which are controlled by the explanatory factors used in the demand equation. Ngugi (2014)The overall demand for tourism is considered to consist of three basic components which include actual demand, suppressed demand and no demand (Cooper, Fletcher, Fyall, Gilbert & Wanhill, 2008; Page & Connell, 2006). The no demand component constitutes the category of those who do not wish to travel or are unable to travel. Suppressed demand refer to the section of the population who do not travel for some reason while actual demand refers to the aggregate number of tourists recorded in a given location or at a particular point in time. Page and Connell further noted that actual demand depended on the specific features and characteristics of those product and service alternatives that the customer evaluates to make the final purchase decision. This includes choosing the destination, the time and duration of travel, the activities are an undertaken at the destination, and the amount of money spent for the holiday. The study focused on actual demand.

Demand for tourism is segmented and is illustrious through a number of different markets. Tourism demand can be analyzed for groups of countries, individual countries, regions or local areas. Demand can also be disaggregated by groups as types of visits and types of tourists. Tourism visits can take place for various reasons including holidays, business trips, visits to friends and relatives (VFR), conferences, and religious purposes among others (WTO, 2010). International tourism demand is usually measured in terms of the number of tourist visits from an origin country to a destination country, in terms of tourist nights spent in the destination country or in terms of tourist expenditures by visitors from an origin country in the destination country. The number of tourist arrivals is most frequently used as the measure of demand, followed by tourist expenditure or tourist receipts Ahamed ,(2005).

#### **4.2 Tourist Behavioural analysis using theory of Motivation and models of consumer behaviour.**

Motivation refer to individual variables that specifically influence the individual and are called as tourism desire and choices. The Motivations can be impacted by internal factors (e.g., tourist's perceptions) and external factors (e.g., culture, age, and gender orientation).

Bukart and Medlik (1981); Ahamed (2005) considered the impacts of tourism demand into two divisions, in particular, determinants and motivations. Determinants are the internal or external elements that apply the general demand for tourism within a society or a specific population. Such elements have a tendency to be common to all world regions. The identification of such a factors vary to country to country according to their tourism plan. For example, the economy in a country has great or lesser impact on inbound and outbound tourism.

Understanding the motivational factors of the potential tourist will contribute significantly to preparing strategies to attract tourists to the destination. At the same time, assist to have better conclude relevant to tourists. According to page and Connell (2006) stated that motivation acts as produce which stimulates the chain of events in the tourism process. Motivational knowledge will always enhance understanding of underlying patterns of tourist behaviour thus helping understand the reasons why people travel. The Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory developed in 1943 is the best-known theory of motivation.

The purpose of consumer behaviour model is to attempt to give a simplified to the relationship of the various factors that influence consumer behaviour. (Horner & Swarbrooke, 2007) Various models have been developed to describe consumer behaviour with the intention of trying to control the behaviour patterns.

Tourist behaviour is related to gender, age and education, (Mcintosh and Goeldner, 1986). Six factors are recognised as required to create barriers for travel even though different motivations exist. These are the direct factors, which involved with the tourist destination choice. The main six factors are time, cost, health and family life cycle constraints as well as level of interest or risk perception. Cost led decision-making is a regular theme in the literature.

1. Cost - This is straight forward as travel competes with the purchase of other products and available funds.
2. Time - People are constrained by responsibilities to business or home.
3. Health - Poor health or handicap may restrict travel arrangements.
4. Family - Parents with small children are said to often find travel inconvenient.
5. Interest - A lack of interest is associated with unawareness.
6. Fear and safety - Because the world is unfamiliar and crime and unrest exist, potential travellers fear for their safety.

Tourist destinations are creating more expectations in the mind of the tourist. As it has been mentioned before, a tourist's destination selection has been understood as a sequential process to determine the final destination. Cooper et al. (2008) explained by the mathieson and wall model (1982),

this model offer a five stage process of travel buying behaviour namely the felt need or travel desire, information and evaluation, travel decision, travel preparation and travel equipment and travel satisfaction evaluation.

**Table 2: Five Stage process of tourist buying behaviour - Mathieson & Wall model (1982)**

|                                       |  |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| Felt need or Travel Desire            | A desire to travel is felt and reasons for   |
| Information & Evaluation              | Potential tourists utilize travel intermediaries, brochures and advertisements as well as friends, Relatives and experienced travellers. This information is evaluated against both economic and time constraints as are factors such as Accessibility and alternatives. |
| Travel Decision                       | Stage advancement occurs with destination, mode of Mode of travel, accommodation and activities being selected.  |
| Travel Preparation & Travel equipment | Travel takes place once bookings are made and & Travel confirmed, budgets organised, clothing and equipment are arranged,  |
| Travel Satisfaction Evaluation        | During and post travel the overall experience is evaluated and the results influence subsequent travel decisions.  |

Source: Cooper et al. (2008)

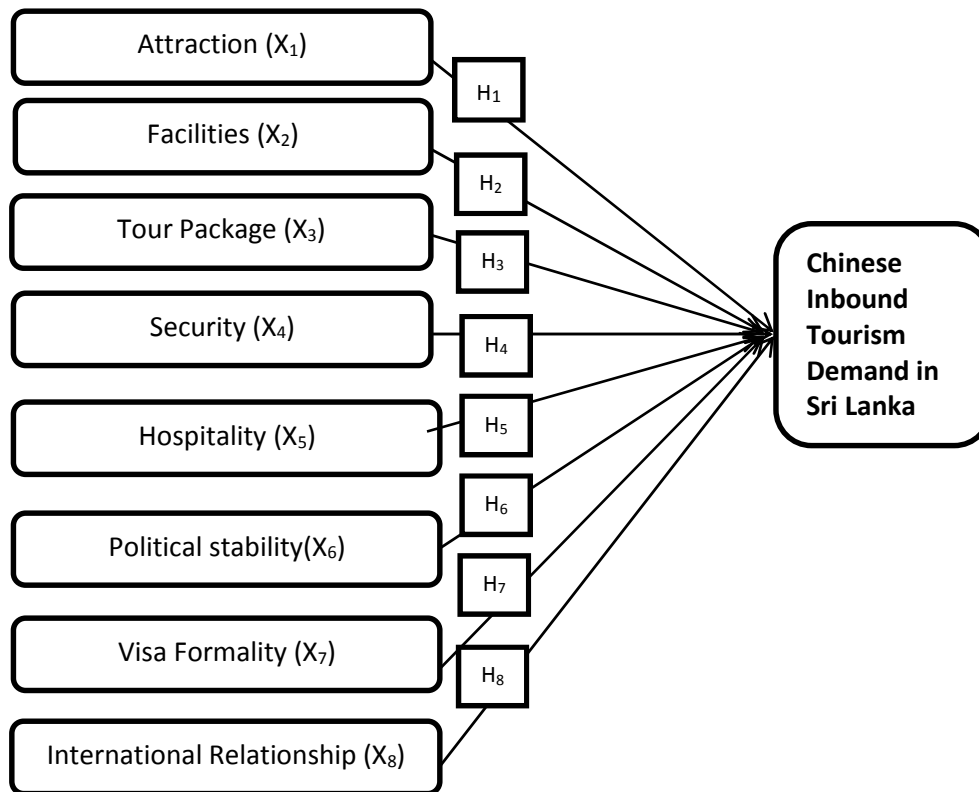
### 4.3 Understanding the Chinese Tourist Behaviour.

Chinese outbound tourism marketing size and structure, Chinese outbound tourism marketing trends, understanding the Chinese tourist behaviour have separately identified because this understand of this element help in order to reduce the risk and enhance the Chinese tourism demand in Sri Lanka.

### 5. Conceptual Framework of the Study

In order to test this hypothesis a conceptual framework has been developed below and this conceptual framework has been developed including both assumed variables by the researcher of this study and adopted variables from previous research publications.

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**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework**

## 6. Hypothesis

This research is conducted based on the hypothesis testing method (Swift 1996, as cited in Sapsford, 1999). The hypothesis has been developed through the research questions, which are actually derived from research objectives. Eight hypotheses that have been used for this research are as follows;

The hypothesis are mainly related with the regression analysis, which is to find out the destination attributes for Chinese inbound tourism demand,

H1: There is a positive relationship between the “attraction of the destination” and Chinese tourism demand in Sri Lanka.

H2: There is positive relationship between “facilities of the destination” and Chinese tourism demand in Sri Lanka.

H3: There is positive relationship between “Tour packages of the destination” and Chinese tourism demand in Sri Lanka.



H4: There is positive relationship between the “security situation of the destination” and Chinese tourism demand in Sri Lanka.

H5: There is positive relationship between “hospitality of the destination” and Chinese tourism demand in Sri Lanka .

H6: There is positive relationship between the “political stability of the destination” and Chinese tourism demand in Sri Lanka.

H7: There is positive relationship between “visa formalities of the destination” and Chinese tourism demand in Sri Lanka.

H8: There is positive relationship between the “international relationship of Sri Lanka and China” and Chinese tourism demand in Sri Lanka

## **7. Methodology**

The methodology considered in this research is Mixed approach and the questions have been strategically prepared taking into consideration the language barrier of Chinese participants. Personal interviews were carried out in associated sectors such as the Foreign Ministry, the Tourist Development Board, Managers of city and rural hotels who have a substantial Chinese clientele and also Travel Agents and tourist guides directly involved in Chinese inbound tourism thus enabling a clear understanding of the subject.

A Chinese language questionnaire was distributed through travel agents who get down a large volume of Chinese tourists’ to Sri Lanka. The randomly selected sample of Chinese tourists completed this with the un-biased help from the interviewer (if required) due to the language problem.

## **8. Findings**

The findings of this research indicate that tourist evaluation of destination attributes is still the most important indicator of overall Chinese tourist Demand. The findings of this study suggest that tourists were mostly satisfied with facilities available in Sri Lanka including the natural attractions and leisure facilities provided by the destination.

Chinese Tourists are as a whole, overwhelmed by the natural attractions of Sri Lanka. However, the lowest level of satisfactions was observed with respect to attributes such as tour package , visa formalities , city transportation services, destination information services, health and emergency services. As revealed in the survey carried out, the high percentage of short duration stays of tourists can be directly attributed to the high cost of accommodation and optional leisure activities. Tourists visiting Sri Lanka for the first visit time spent more nights than those who were on a repeat visit. The tourists travelling alone were found to spend more nights in Sri Lanka than those travelling with others or those travelling in groups.

According to the personal interview and survey, when tourism pricing and the cost of travelling increase, the Chinese demand for Sri Lanka is expected to decrease. The word of mouth effect was significant implying that Chinese Tourism demand for Sri Lanka is influenced by tourists’ report to others about their holiday experience.

Tourists are sensitive to political stability, therefore the good relationship between Sri Lanka and China is expected to enhance tourism demand. During the survey, tourist, demographic patterns such as age, gender, socio-economic background (income, marital status, occupation, education) and travel behavioural patterns were examined. There is a strong demand from the young Chinese tourists, therefore Sri Lanka needs to improve leisure facilities and other diverse attractions should be developed to increase young Chinese tourism demand to Sri Lanka. The overall destination image needs to be improved positively.

## **9. Conclusion**

This research is aimed at getting an accurate depiction of the Behavioural Characteristics of Chinese tourists and to identify the key demand factors which will contribute to attracting Chinese tourists to Sri Lanka. This research further expects to determine the key challenges inherent in attracting Chinese tourists and develop tourism promotional strategies targeting the Chinese outbound travelers as increased Chinese inbound tourists demand will enhance the annual tourist arrivals to the country and which in turn will help to achieve 4 million annual tourist arrivals to Sri Lanka by the year 2020 as targeted by the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority of Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka experiences problems of competition due to the relative lack of improvement in Sri Lanka's tourism product. In sum, Sri Lanka has failed to market the country as one that offers a different and unique product. According to the research, more tourists are switching to other countries in the Asian region such as Thailand, Maldives etc. There is need therefore, for Sri Lanka to offer demand driven tourism products that appeal to the Chinese tourist, which thereby ensures that more Chinese tourists are attracted to Sri Lanka as their holiday destination of choice and would encourage longer stays.

In addition to developing destination image, offering quality products and services to satisfy the Chinese tourists' demand will help to lay the foundation to sustainably develop Sri Lanka's tourism industry as a whole.

It is the profound hope of the researcher that the findings of this report will support and assist in the process of effective decision making of the responsible authorities in the Tourism Industry and that these facts will also assist them in developing new and novel plans, policies and strategies to more efficiently maximize the ultimate growth of Sri Lanka's tourism industry.

## **10. Managerial implications**

According to finding most of the rich class outbound tourists are traveling in developed cities for enjoying with shopping, night life with entertainment and tailor-made packages.

The aim of the project is to gain a deeper insight into the Chinese travel market, identify the preferences and unique peculiarities of the modern Chinese travelers and to prepare and implement a marketing strategy based on these insights, thereby vastly improving the chances of gaining and holding the attention of the potential traveler with the end result that they will be more inclined to make Sri Lanka their destination of choice.

The findings of this report will attempt to provide information, particularly to the policy makers that will assist them in making policy decisions regarding marketing strategies for Chinese Inbound tourists. It will also aim to provide some recommendations that need to be considered by Policy Makers, Hotel Managers, Tour Operators etc., when incorporating any future development plans for the tourism industry in Sri Lanka.

## 11. Limitations and directions for future research

There can be several limitations when conducting this research which are attached to the human behavior of the target population and sampling problems.

The main limitation is to understand the appropriate sample of Chinese tourists for data collection from the total population. Further some people might be reluctant to provide the correct feedback to the questionnaires as may be they are afraid to provide information or sometimes they might feel a burden on this.

When gathering tourism statistics, it would be unable to access to Chinese tourism statistics due to country limitations. The private sector organizations would not provide adequate data and information due to company policies.

Although there are numerous factors with influence to Chinese inbound tourism demand in Sri Lanka. This study has mainly focused on tourism pricing, socio demographic characteristics and Destination attribution, it is realized that there are some further research requirements that can be carried out in future.

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