iJRASET
International Journal For Research in Applied Science and Engineering Technology

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL FOR RESEARCH

IN APPLIED SCIENCE & ENGINEERING TECHNOLOGY

Volume: 9 **Issue:** V **Month of publication:** May 2021

DOI: https://doi.org/10.22214/ijraset.2021.34351

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International Journal for Research in Applied Science & Engineering Technology (IJRASET)
ISSN: 2321-9653; IC Value: 45.98; SJ Impact Factor: 7.429
Volume 9 Issue V May 2021- Available at www.ijraset.com

The Effect of COVID 19 pandemic to the Tourism Industry in Sri Lanka

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Abstract: ***When carefully analyzing the time periods from history the tourism industry has played a major role towards the development of Sri Lanka. The tourism industry has gradually developed with the contribution of governing bodies, public sector, private sector and the general public. This study has focused on the fluctuation in the tourism industry during the post war period whilst paying more attention on the period of year 2019-2020 due to the effect of COVID 19 pandemic. When analyzing the data collected deeply it has revealed that the political stability, war, pandemics and crisis have negative relationship with the development of tourism industry. To control and mitigate this issue, policy measures have to look at both micro level in terms of positive attitudes and the active contribution of tourists as well as macro level at institutional factors such as policy formulated by the governing bodies and practical implementation according to world accepted guide lines. This research contributes to fill the gap between the disaster occurred due to COVID 19 pandemic and how to regain the tourism industry with the normalized situation which leads to live with COVID 19 and other future pandemics or crisis in Sri Lanka.***
Keywords: Bio Bubble, colonization, covid, Tourism Strategic Plan

I. INTRODUCTION

Sri Lanka has a good reputation and long history as a tourist destination since it is a tropical island in the Indian Ocean blessed with the Mother Nature. In tourism industry so many booms and slumps can be seen due war and terrorist activities. Sri Lanka has suffered thirty years of war and ended it in 2009. Then the bloom of the tourism industry has arose and within the short period of time and ranked as a best tourism destination in the world. The tourism sector has developed gradually with the support of the governing bodies of the country. As a result of that the tourism sector has diversified by nature of the industry and have attracted more people in to the sector. Adventure Tourism, Community Based tourism, Nature Tourism, Eco Tourism, Culture Tourism and Agri Tourism are developed with the participation of general public. These sectors were empowered by the National Tourism Development Strategy. In 2019 the tourism industry has went down slightly due to Easter Sunday Attack of Islamic extremists. Without giving much room to redevelop the sector the COVID 19 pandemic came in to the picture by turning the life styles upside down all over the world. This has resulted negative impact to Sri Lanka and tourism sector has declined drastically. Through this study I have paid more attention on the effect of COVID 19 pandemic to the tourism industry in Sri Lanka.

The economies of most of the developing countries depending on tourism. Tourism is one of the largest industries in the world and one of the fastest growing economic sectors. It has noted that the expected growth in the tourism sector and the increasing reliance of many developing countries. Since the nature of tourism is associated with the environment, need to pay special attention to the relationship between environmental conservation and protection and sustainable tourism. The tourism can be simply defined as a business of providing services to tourists who are travelling from one place to another for the different purposes on their own. The word “tour” is derived from Latin and means a circle. The meaning of tourism is the movement around a central point or axis (Theobald 1994). Therefore tourism is the movement around some places. According to the world Tourism Organization tourism is defined as “the activities of persons traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes.” It defines the tourist as a visitor staying at least one night in a collective or private accommodation in the place visited. Tourism is inherently based on curiosity and interests of the individual. Tourist attractions are varied and multifaceted which are also basically dependent on the comprehension and the attitude of the respective individual. There are countries which are attracted by its natural beauty, some are for its historical value and some are gleaned with leisure opportunities and so on, which construed that tourism, essentially, based on purpose of travel. Purpose of travel could be broadly categorized into following segments such as pleasure, education, pilgrimage, archaeological sites, cultural heritage, sports, world renowned heritages, business and family visits.

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People are travelling with different expectation. And they always try to maximize the utility of their tour. Most of the governments are heavily depend on the tourism industry since it generates more revenue in flow to the country. In order to minimize the conflicts and to promote tourism as an industry many countries all around the world have taken different types of steps and followed many strategies. The tourism sector has fallen due to this COVID 19 pandemic. The people who were associated with that sector felt deep in to the well known as poverty. The several dimensions of tourism such as psychological, sociological, economic and political travel impacts have turned negatively and every country is suffering due to consequences. Most of the countries in the world have locked down and have imposed restrictions for internal mobilizations and external mobilizations have restricted to control and mitigate the effect of COVID 19 pandemic situation. As a result of that following types of tourism industries identified by the WTO have been limited.

1) Domestic tourism involves 'residents of the given country traveling only within this country'
2) Inbound tourism involves 'non-residents traveling in the given country'
3) Outbound tourism involves "residents traveling in another country"

The main objective of research is to identify, analyze and formulate strategies to control and mitigate the effect of COVID 19 pandemic whilst developing the tourism industry to capture competitive edge among other industries towards the economic development of Sri Lanka.

II. SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

A. To find out the pros and cons of the existing health policy framework with relevance to the tourism sector to meet the unexpected medical issues and pandemics.
B. To develop solutions and remedies to overcome the unfavorable effects to the tourism industry due to COVID 19 pandemic and to take necessary corrective actions to rectify the tourism policies to be beneficial to all the related parties.
C. To research on how and what are strategies and tools which have been used to develop the health indicators for the tourism sector at a positive and favorable level to mitigate the effect of pandemic.
D. To find out what sort of strategies to be implemented to face the future pandemics and crisis which can be affected to the tourism industry.
E. To study how to gather the ideas and the feedback of foreign and local tourists in order to develop the tourism policies to maximize the attraction and economic benefits and to find out how those can be applied to Sri Lanka.

In this research collected secondary research publications to understand the current the drawback in the tourism industry in Sri Lanka due to COVID 19 pandemic. For this research primary data has not been used due to the outcomes of pandemic such as lock downs and mobilization restrictions. The secondary data has been used to identify the necessary reforms in tourism sector and health indicators to mitigate and control the effect to the tourism industry due to COVID 19 pandemic and strategies to be introduced to implement the same in the tourism sector of Sri Lanka. The data relevant to this research have collected from secondary sources such as books, existing published written documents gathered from official documents, administrative circulars, publications, journals, national and international instruments, research papers, reports and abstracts and Information on electronic sources.

1) *History of Tourism:* During the past it was a new phenomenon for people to travel away from home regularly for different purposes. As time passed, people have learnt to travel for religious purposes, to obtain health facilities and for other purposes. With the social and economic development in Europe and North America, people were given more wages and more non-financial benefits. With the industrial revolution, the transport systems developed and facilitated people to move away easily and got access to the new information about upcoming trends and changes around the world. There was a rapid growth of international tourism around the world during the1950s (Nordstrom, 2005). As a result of that rich people started to travel one country to another. With the invention of air crafts traveling was stimulated. However traveling was limited to people in developing countries due to income inequalities. Even in the developing countries domestic mobilization was developed and established. After the Second World War, tourism was expanded in developed countries. That was largely due to the introduction of jet aircraft for civilian transport. (May and Hill, 2004) With higher income levels, cheaper and better transport, more time off holidays continued to lengthen and tourism expended. Countries become prosperous with the revenue generated through substantial flows of outbound tourists.

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2) *Global Trend in Tourism:* Travel and tourism is the world's largest and most diverse industry and it accounts for around 10.4% of world gross domestic product in 2019 and decreased up to 5.5% in 2020 due to ongoing restriction to mobility due to the burden of the pandemic situation. People travel for many reasons. As transportation has become more affordable and accommodations are found in various budgetary categories tourism has expended in almost all over the world in major cities as well as in rural areas. Most of the countries depend on tourism as it generates revenue, employment, infrastructure facilities and private sector growth. The world Travel and Tourism council (WTTC) estimated that in 2019 it generated more than US$ 9.2 trillion in economic activity and created 334 million jobs, directly and indirectly, around the globe. Due to pandemic the travel and tourism sector has reported a loss of US$ 4.5 trillion and generated only US$ 4.7 trillion in 2020, this industry has contributed foe the loss of 3.7% GDP decline of the global economy. In year 2020 due to the mobility restrictions and other related reasons the job market fallen down at a rate of 18.5% resulting a loss of 62 million jobs. (https://wttc.org/Research/Economic-Impact)The influence of travel and tourism has dropped rapidly as more people experiencing drastic reduction in their income level influenced by globalization unfavorable trends due to COVID 19.

Table 1- Direct and total contribution of travel and tourism to GDP worldwide from 2006- 2020 (Billion US$)

Year	Direct Contribution	Total Contribution
2006	1629.02	5160.35
2007	1809.37	5765.03
2008	1928.47	6259.57
2009	1794.88	5803.03
2010	1911.51	6108.56
2011	2157.06	6925.29
2012	2207.37	7094.29
2013	2304.81	7432.19
2014	2388.31	7674.79
2015	2320.93	7444.04
2016	2381.10	7650.17
2017	2567.88	8240.74
2018	2750.65	8810.96
2019	2892.94	9258.29
2020	1394.52	4462.90

Source:https://www.statista.com/statistics/233223/travel-and-tourism--total-economic-contribution-worldwide/

3) *Tourism Industry in Sri Lanka:* "Tourism Industry" is defined as the set of enterprises, establishments and organizations providing goods and services for satisfying tourists' needs as their principal activities. (Cooper, 1998: Theobald, 1994). When we look at the different types of industries which generate more income to any type of a country we could see the deviation among the countries. As same as the other industries even in the tourism industry the leader ship has taken by the Western developed countries. But some developing countries with full of natural beauties could caught a competitive edge in the world tourism industry. Endowed with a unique mixture of favorable climate, golden beaches, abundant wildlife, and rich cultural heritage, Sri Lanka is one of the most popular tourist destinations in the region. According to the World Tourism Organization, Sri Lanka has the advantage of having 49 sites classified as unique attractions, 91 as rare attractions, and 7 world heritage sites, and 6 of the 300 ancient monuments in the world (de Silva, 2000).

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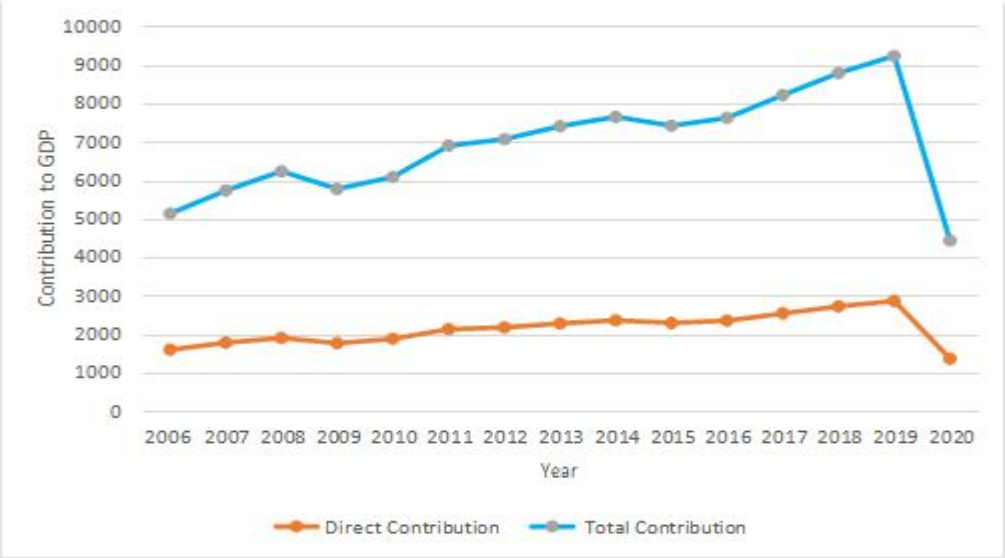

Source - https://www.statista.com/statistics/233223/travel-and-tourism--total-economic- contribution-worldwide/
Figure 1- Direct and total contribution of travel and tourism to GDP from 2006- 2020 (billion US$)

Sri Lanka has identified as a tourism destination because of its geographical position. Its strategic location in the Indian Ocean on the major air and sea routes between Europe and the Far East is an advantage to the country's positioning as a global logistics hub (Sri Lanka Info, 2011). As a result of this geographical location of Sri Lanka became colony of three western powers in the past. The colonization was imposed by the Portuguese (1505-1656), the Dutch (1956-1796) and the British (1796-1948)

Thirty years ethnic conflict of the country has made negative impact to the development in the tourism sector. After the war the governments of the country have taken many positive movements against the development of the tourism industry to make Sri Lanka the best tourist destination in the world.

The institutional frame work was developed gradually by the governing parties at time to time to develop the tourism sector. The entire responsibility of the tourism industry has vested to the Ministry of Tourism. The responsibility of all the tourism development activities vested to the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority which was formed in 2005 by replacing Sri Lanka Tourist Board which was established in 1966. The Tourism Promotion Bureau is responsible for all the marketing and promotional works of the tourism industry.

4) *Tourism Policy Frame works in Sri Lanka:* The open economy system has introduced to Sri Lanka in 1977 and all the political parties which came in to the power have formulated many policies towards the development of tourism industry. The former president of Sri Lanka Hon. Mahinda Rajapaksha has presented his election manifesto "Mahinda Chinthana: vision for a new Sri Lanka". It was a ten year horizon development frame work for 2006 to 2016. Till 2009 the tourism industry was not that attractive due three decades of war, violence and disasters. During that period of time the sector and the related parties were survived even though that there were comparatively less number of tourists have visited. After the war has ended he has targeted to transform Sri Lanka as a "Dynamic Global Hub" which is strategically important as an economic center of the world. In this proposed dynamic global hub has comprised Naval, Aviation, Commercial, Energy and Knowledge hub serving as a key link between the East and West. In 2015, former president Hon. Maithripala Sirisena has identified the tourism sector to be one of the main sector to develop the country. His election manifesto named as "Compassionate Government, Maithri, and A stable Country" also has highlighted the same. He has developed a "Sri Lanka Tourism Strategic Plan 2017-2020" and it has made a positive impact and recorded the highest tourist arrivals in 2018. The present president of Sri Lanka Hon. Gotabhaya Rajapaksha has paid more attention to grab more foreign exchange up to US$ 10 billion through increasing the annual tourist arrivals to 7 million people and he has include that in his election manifesto " Vistas of Prosperity and Splendors". He came in to power in 17th of November 2019 and in early 2020 the entire country has locked down due to COVID 19 pandemic. As an outcome of that the tourist arrivals and domestic mobilization has declined drastically resulting the collapse of the tourism industry.

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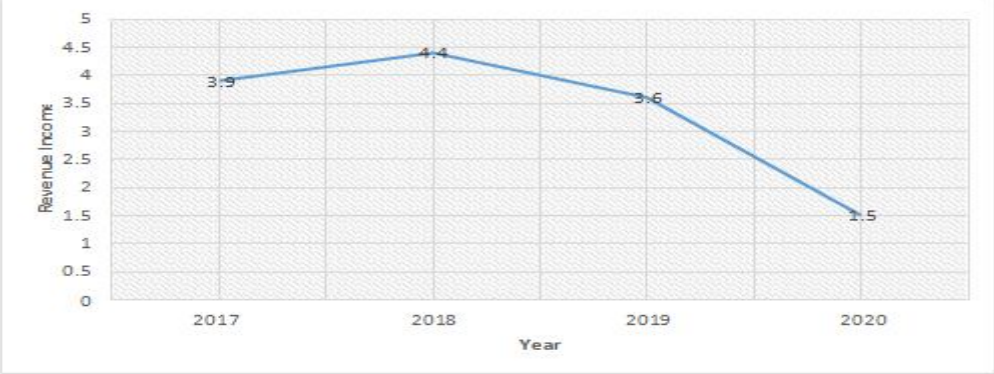
5) *Findings on current status of the Tourism Industry in Sri Lanka:* In current scenario, the whole world is suffering from COVID 19 pandemic situation. The threat enforced by this pandemic has created probably one of the uncountable challenges ever encountered by humanity. As a result of that, day to day activities of the people and their movements have restricted by the rule of law and the negative impacts of the nature. Since this has endangered the world irrespective of social and economic background the nature and the culture of the countries have changed drastically. Therefore the entire world has paid their attention to get rid of the virus and its' effects to the world at large. While the medical experts paid their attention tirelessly and collaboratively to find vaccine against the virus, the others are fully focused on how to upgrade the declined economy and other social problems. Before the pandemic situation the revenue contribution from the tourism industry was significant. In 2017 tourism industry has generated US$ 3.9 billion where as in 2018it has arose by 12% reporting the revenue income of US$ 4.4. In 2019 the revenue generated has reported as US$ 3.6 billion and 50% revenue loss has reported in year 2020 due to pandemic situation. (https://www.sltda.gov.lk)



Source - https://www.sltda.gov.lk
Figure 2- Revenue income Generated (Billion US $)

The revenue income of year 2019 has decreased due to fall in tourist arrivals by 18% compared to the year 2018. This has happened due to the Easter Sunday bomb attack on 21st of April 2019. This has implied that even after three decades of war Sri Lanka is still suffering with the terrorist activities. By increasing that drawback in tourism industry the COVID 19 pandemic has resulted a huge disaster not only to the country but, to the whole world. Therefore, the tourist arrivals in 2020 has declined rapidly.

Table 2- Tourists Arrivals to Sri Lanka

Month	2019	2020*	% Cha. 2019/20
January	244,239	228,434	(6.5)
February	252,033	207,507	(17.7)
March	244,328	71,370	(70.8)
April	166,975	---	---
May	37,802	---	---
June	63,072	---	---
July	115,701	---	---
August	143,587	---	---
September	108,575	---	---
October	118,743	---	---
November	176,984	---	---
December	241,663	393	(99.8)
Total	1,913,702	507,704	(73.5)

Source: https://www.sltda.gov.lk

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Source - https://www.sltda.gov.lk
Figure 3- Tourists Arrivals to Sri Lanka 2019/2020

During the pandemic situation due to the novel systems and methods invented by the government, health service and the public sector with the contribution of private sector have established tourism safety protocols to ensure the safety of tourists as well as the domestic people in later 2020 and open the country for tourists in January 2021. Because of the positive outcome of hard effort World Travel and Tourism Council has awarded "Safe Travel Stamp" in August 2020. In order to find out whether the hotels are following health and safety protocols an independent audit has been appointed by the Sri Lanka Tourists Development Authority. The feedback from tourists on whether the hotels are following health and safety protocols for this "Safe and Secure" certification has obtained from QR code. To facilitate this method a Mobile App called "Sri Lanka tourism Travel App Mobile Version 0" has developed with the support of the Information and Communication Technology Agency (ICTA) and the United Nations development Program (UNDP). This Mobile App has shared some links with the web portal of the Department of Immigration and Migration and it has used to provide travel information for tourists and to maintain information regarding the loyalty towards the health protocols. By inventing and implementing these methods and systems the government has initiated a pilot program to open country for the tourists based on "Bio Bubble" concept. Under this program tourist must stay in approved hotels and visit the tourist destinations within the prior approved time frame by using approved transport facilities. Through this concept tourists don't have to comply with the conventional quarantine process and restricted the contact with local people. This concept has opened the door to 393 tourists to Sri Lanka in 2020.

Table 3 - Direct and Indirect Employments in the Tourism Industry of Sri Lanka

Year	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Direct Employment	135,930	146,115	156,369	169,003	173,592	
Indirect Employment	183,506	189,544	202,846	219,484	229,015	
Total Employment	319,436	335,659	259,215	388,487	402607	

Source: Annual Report -2019; Central Bank of Sri Lanka; 2020; 185

In Sri Lanka, direct and indirect labour force involved in the tourism industry counts to a significant portion of the total labour force. During the post war period lot of people have attracted to the tourism industry due to the increase in the government support given to the sector and the ability to earn an attractive benefits with comparatively higher wages. This pattern was continued till the early months of 2019 with small fluctuations which are not that much significant. The labour force involved in the tourism industry have declined due to Easter Sunday attack and later on in early 2020 lot of employees have lost their jobs due to COVID 19 pandemic.

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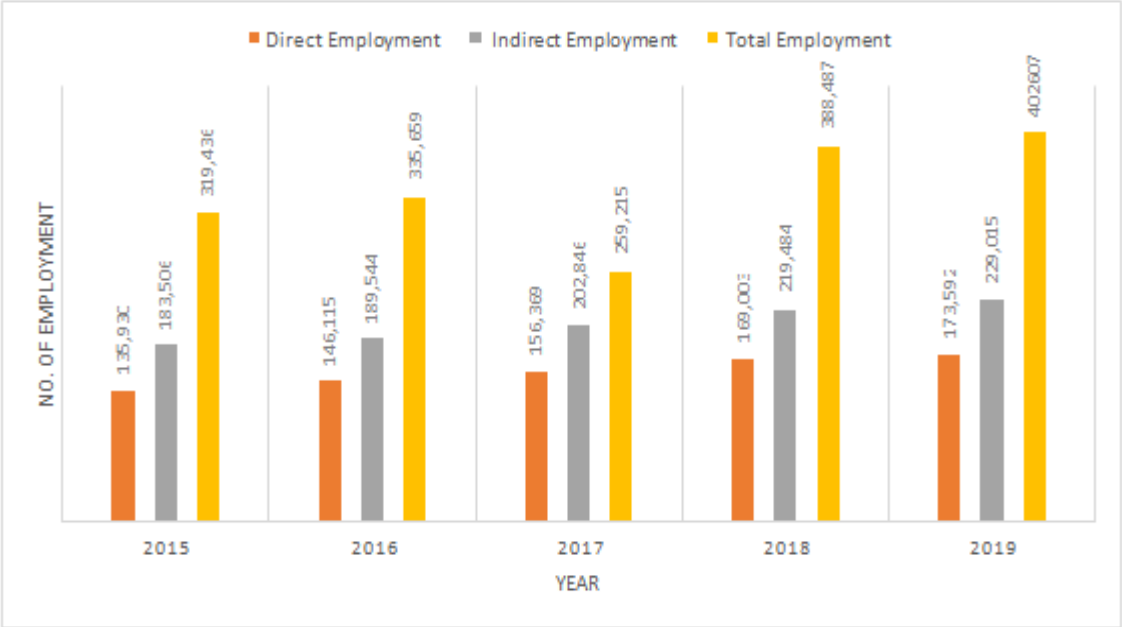

Source - Annual Report -2019; Central Bank of Sri Lanka; 2020; 185
Figure 3- Employments in the Tourism Sector

III. RECOMMENDATION

A. Sri Lankan government should focus about the formulation of strategic plan for tourism world as a whole and about the forecasted future crisis.

B. Should pay more attention on Community Based Tourism, Agri Tourism and Eco Tourism as sub sectors of the tourism industry. Should take necessary actions to provide more infrastructure facilities to the above sectors to upgrade the existing facilities in order to attract more tourists.

C. Should establish sophisticated network system including all the related parties of the tourism industry to facilitate the tracking and providing quality service par with the health regulations and advices.

D. Awareness programs should be conducted to acknowledge people about how to live with COVID 19 pandemic and/or any other pandemic or crisis which can arise in the future.

E. All the other industries which are indirectly related to the tourism industry should be restructured and developed in order to facilitate the tourism industry to be operated in the pandemic situation.

F. Should develop domestic travelling as well as foreign travelling to protect the interest of the parties related to the industry even at the pandemic situations.

G. Tourism industry should be enriched with the psychological touch to upgrade the living standards of the people who are suffering due to pandemic situations. Promotion of short distance travelling with all the high quality facilities at an affordable price would be a good solution to the mobilization restrictions.

H. The administrative bodies of the tourism should be empowered more to execute all the rules and regulations to standardized the tourism sector to be in line with the international standards.

I. Preparation of medical facilities to the tourists such as PCR tests and quarantine processes should be well organized, economical and user friendly to capture the tourists attraction.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

The history of the tourism industry in Sri Lanka has revealed that it is an important sector which can contribute significant portion of the revenue income towards the development of the country. If Sri Lanka can manage and operate by mitigating or eliminating any war experiences, ethnic conflicts, crisis or pandemics then still there is an opportunity to develop tourism industry to reach the development of the country.

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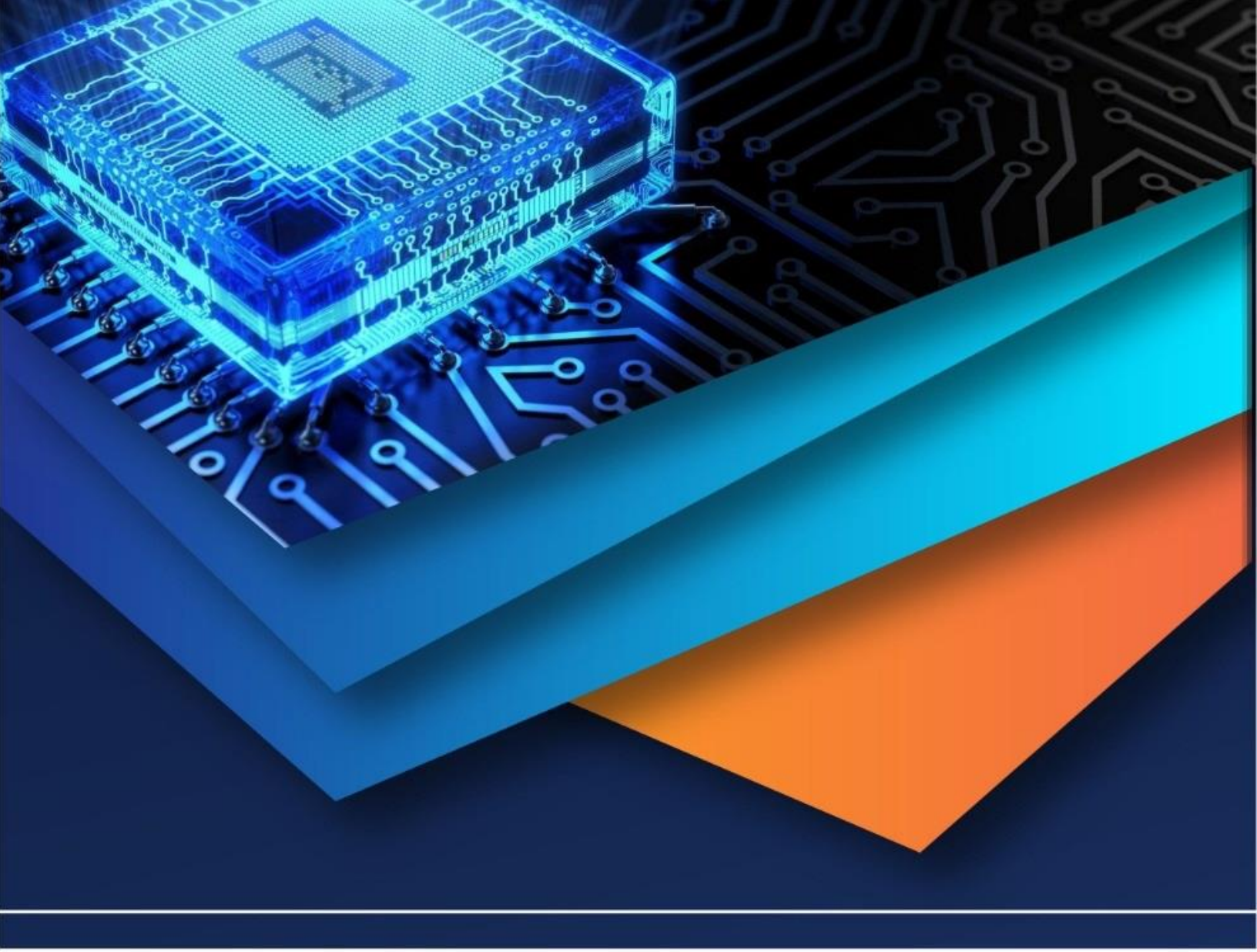

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