

## **Analyzing the Potentials of Promoting Rail Cruise Tourism in Sri Lanka: Special Reference to Up-country Rail Line**

K.W.P. Kapugeekiyana<sup>1\*</sup>, N.P.R. Deyshappriya<sup>2</sup> and A.A. Idroos<sup>1</sup>

*<sup>1\*</sup> Department of Tourism Studies, Uva Wellassa University, Badulla, Sri Lanka*

*<sup>2</sup> Department of Management Sciences, Uva Wellassa University, Badulla, Sri Lanka*

This study attempted to identify the potentials of promoting luxury rail cruise tourism as a novel tourism strategy in the up-country rail line to attract more tourists. Apart from that, the study also examined what were the main challenges of implementing rail cruise tourism in Sri Lanka. There are many tourist destinations such as Nine Arches Bridge, the Damodara Railway Loop, Nanuoya-Idalgashinna station which are located along the up-country railway track. Therefore, the initialization of such rail cruise itinerary will attract many tourists to those cities and that will generate thousands of revenues to the Sri Lanka Railway as well as to the GDP of Sri Lanka. Both the empirical and knowledge gaps are filled by this research. The study used explanatory sequential mixed method. Data were collected through key informant interviews and a survey was conducted for 100 tourists using a convenient sampling technique. Mainly, descriptive statistics and thematic analysis were used to accomplish the objectives of the study. The database was developed in the SPSS software interface. The result of the study revealed that Sri Lanka has the potentials to promote rail cruise tourism and tourists had a positive perception of rail cruise tourism in Sri Lanka. However, the study also emphasized that there are several barriers related to infrastructure, organizational and technological barriers in relation to promoting rail cruise tourism in Sri Lanka. In conclusion, the study highlights the possibility of promoting rail cruise tourism in Sri Lanka, and hence government intervention to resolve the barriers related to rail cruise tourism is highly recommended.

**Keywords:** Rail-cruise tourism, Niche tourism, Sri Lankan railway, Sri Lanka tourism