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# Is there a Potential for Colombo to Become a Smart Wellness Tourism Hub?

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Abstract: This study examines Colombo's potential to develop as a smart wellness tourism hub by blending traditional wellness practices with modern digital technologies. Wellness tourism, a rapidly growing sector of the global travel industry, promotes holistic well-being across physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and environmental dimensions. Sri Lanka's strong base in Ayurveda, meditation, and indigenous healing makes it an appealing destination for wellness travelers. In the post-2022 economic recovery, the government has prioritized tourism diversification, identifying wellness tourism as a key opportunity. Using a qualitative approach based on secondary data, the paper reviews academic studies, industry reports, case studies, and policy documents to assess Colombo's readiness. Findings indicate that Colombo possesses rich wellness resources and relatively advanced digital infrastructure, including mobile health apps, telemedicine, digital payments, and emerging applications of AI and virtual reality. However, challenges such as data privacy, digital literacy, and maintaining human-centered care remain. The study concludes that Colombo can emerge as a competitive smart wellness tourism hub by strategically integrating technology with its cultural heritage. Achieving this vision requires strong data governance, sustainable development, and preserving the personal warmth that defines Sri Lanka's hospitality.

Keywords: Wellness Tourism, Smart Wellness Hub, Technology.

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# I. INTRODUCTION

Sri Lanka has become a leading destination in Asia, drawing travelers with its beautiful beaches, lush landscapes, historic temples, and rich cultural heritage. Colombo, located near Bandaranaike International Airport and serving as the country's commercial center, plays a key role in supporting tourism by offering a variety of services, including places to stay, dining options, and transportation. As the first entry point for many international visitors, Colombo is in a good position to influence the growth of specialized tourism sectors.

Wellness tourism is among the fastest-growing sectors in global tourism, focusing on improving physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, social, and environmental well-being. In this context, Sri Lanka is especially well-suited due to its long-standing traditions in Ayurveda, yoga, meditation, and local healing practices. These holistic methods are increasingly sought after by international travelers looking for authentic and culturally rich wellness experiences.

The economic crisis of 2022 further underscored the importance of tourism as a recovery strategy for Sri Lanka, with wellness tourism identified as a promising niche. To stay

competitive, traditional practices should be paired with modern innovations. Integrating digital tools like mobile wellness apps, telemedicine, artificial intelligence, and immersive virtual technologies can enhance accessibility, personalization, and engagement. Colombo, with its advanced digital infrastructure and growing ecosystem of health and wellness services, presents a unique opportunity to bring together cultural heritage and smart technologies.

Given this backdrop, Colombo's chances of becoming a smart wellness tourism hub depend on its ability to mix traditional wellness practices with emerging technologies. This integration will not only improve visitor satisfaction and experiences but also support sustainable economic growth and solidify Colombo's role as a competitive regional leader in the global wellness tourism industry..

# II. LITERATURE REVIEW

# A. Theoretical Background

Wellness tourism is defined as travel associated with the pursuit of maintaining or enhancing one's personal wellbeing [1]. As individuals increasingly prioritize holistic health, wellness tourism has become a significant segment of the global travel industryInvalid source specified.. Travelers may

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engage entirely in wellness or include wellness activities as part of a broader journey.

Wellness encompasses multiple dimensions. Physical wellness is associated with diet, sleep, and physical exercise [27]. Mental wellness refers to the maintenance of a positive state of mind. Environmental wellness involves living harmoniously with the community and environment [27]. Social wellness relates to one's interactions with others and access to professional support systems [26]. Emotional wellness is the ability to manage stress and adapt to change [27], with guidance often sought from practitioners and healers [26] Spiritual wellness, involves conditions when a person works to reach spiritual potential and find harmony in life [26]. Spiritual wellness is related to one's need for meaning and purpose in life with spiritual health experiences from Hinduism, Bali, Ubud, and others [26].

Technological advancements are essential for the growth of wellness tourism, allowing places to improve accessibility, personalization, and visitor engagement. Tools such as online booking systems, mobile wellness applications, and telemedicine platforms facilitate seamless planning and allow tourists to access consultations, guided therapies, and personalized wellness programs remotely [28]. Virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) further enrich visitor experiences by offering immersive previews of wellness facilities, treatments, and natural attractions prior to travel. Social media and digital marketing campaigns amplify destination visibility and foster trust through user-generated content and influencer collaborations, while data analytics and artificial intelligence (AI) enable providers to customize treatments and wellness packages according to individual needs [24]. These technologies not only enhance convenience and service but also position wellness destinations as innovative and globally connected hubs in the post-pandemic tourism landscape.

### B. Conceptual Framework

The literature review leads to a conceptual framework shown in Figure 1. The model suggests that integrating technologies across the six dimensions of wellness can help establish Colombo as a smart wellness hub, leading to benefits like increased tourist satisfaction, longer stays, better wellness experiences, and enhanced competitiveness of the destination.

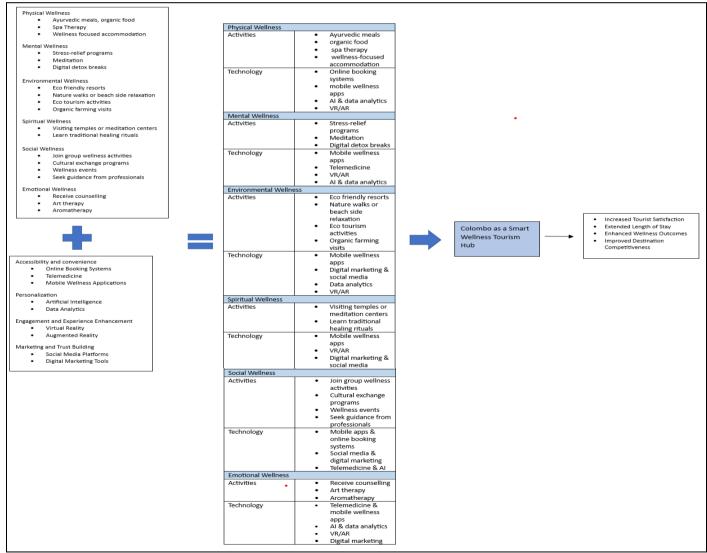


Fig 1 Conceptual Framework

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## > Physical Wellness

Physical wellness promotion includes various structured activities and health-focused practices. Tourists can join yoga, meditation, and fitness sessions offered by wellness resorts and follow nutritious diets, emphasizing Ayurvedic meals, organic foods, or detox programs. Complementary therapies like spa treatments, massages, and therapeutic baths further enhance physical well-being, while maintaining regular sleep patterns in wellness-focused accommodations adds to overall health.

Online booking systems and mobile wellness applications make it easy for visitors to book spa treatments, wellness accommodations, and healthy meal plans. Artificial intelligence and data analytics provide tailored suggestions for spa therapies or dietary plans based on individual preferences. Virtual and augmented reality technologies offer immersive previews of spa treatments and fitness programs, helping tourists make informed decisions and engage more deeply with wellness offerings.

## ➤ Mental Wellness

Mental wellness can be promoted through structured programs and practices aimed at improving cognitive and emotional health. Tourists can join mindfulness and stress-relief programs, participate in meditation and breathing exercises, or attend retreats designed for relaxation and mental clarity. Digital detox initiatives allow visitors to disconnect from technology, reducing cognitive overload and foster mental rejuvenation.

Mobile wellness applications offer guided meditation sessions, mindfulness exercises, and tools for tracking digital detox progress. Telemedicine services provide virtual consultations with mental wellness experts, ensuring timely support. Virtual and augmented reality technologies create immersive meditation and relaxation experiences, while artificial intelligence and data analytics help personalize stress-relief programs according to individual behaviors and needs.

# > Environmental Wellness

Environmental wellness can improve through activities and accommodations that support sustainable living and a connection with nature. Tourists may stay in eco-friendly resorts and engage in nature walks, forest bathing, or relaxation by the beach to foster environmental harmony. Participating in eco-tourism projects raises awareness of conservation and encourages support for local green initiatives, such as visiting organic farms, thus promoting both ecological responsibility and sustainable tourism.

Mobile wellness applications help tourists find ecotourism activities, map nature trails, and suggest environmentally friendly practices. Digital marketing and social media raise awareness of eco-friendly resorts and promote sustainable tourism efforts. Data analytics monitor tourist participation in eco-activities, allowing for better alignment with environmental goals. Additionally, virtual and augmented reality technologies simulate nature walks and eco-tourism experiences, offering immersive chances for

tourists to connect with nature while minimizing environmental impact.

# > Spiritual Wellness

Spiritual wellness can be nurtured through activities that foster inner peace and self-awareness. Tourists might visit temples, shrines, or meditation centers and participate in yoga, chanting, or guided spiritual practices. Engaging in retreats focused on self-discovery aids in developing personal insight and tranquility. Learning about traditional healing rituals and indigenous philosophies deepens visitors' understanding of cultural and spiritual heritage, enriching their wellness experience.

Virtual and augmented reality applications offer immersive experiences like virtual temple tours and guided meditation sessions, allowing tourists to engage deeply with spiritual practices. Mobile wellness applications provide structured schedules for spiritual activities and reminders to support consistent participation. Furthermore, social media and digital marketing enhance access to spiritual wellness initiatives and cultural experiences, encouraging broader engagement among visitors.

## > Social Wellness

Social wellness can be supported through participation in group activities and community interactions that create meaningful connections. Tourists can join group wellness programs like yoga, dance, or cultural workshops while engaging with locals through cultural exchange initiatives. Attending wellness events, seminars, or group retreats provides further chances for social interaction and shared experiences. Seeking help from professionals, such as therapists or wellness coaches, can help improve interpersonal skills and overall social well-being.

Mobile applications and online booking systems enable visitors to easily join group wellness sessions or cultural activities. Social media and digital marketing facilitate connection with wellness communities and events, fostering meaningful social interactions. Additionally, telemedicine services and artificial intelligence applications offer access to professionals, including virtual group therapy, supporting interpersonal well-being and collective wellness experiences.

# > Emotional Wellness

Emotional wellness can be enhanced through strategies designed to support psychological balance and resilience. Tourists can access counseling or therapy sessions as part of wellness packages and engage in creative activities like art therapy, journaling, or workshops. Stress-relief treatments such as aromatherapy and sound healing also support emotional restoration. Participating in resilience-focused workshops helps individuals manage stress and build emotional strength, contributing to overall well-being.

Telemedicine services and mobile wellness applications provide virtual counseling and therapy sessions for timely professional support. Artificial intelligence and data analytics help customize emotional wellness programs based on user feedback. Virtual and augmented reality technologies offer

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immersive experiences, while digital marketing informs tourists about available emotional wellness services, increasing awareness and participation.

## III. METHODOLOGY

Before you begin to format your paper, first write and save the content as a separate text file. Keep your text and graphic files separate until after the text has been formatted and styled. Do not use hard tabs, and limit use of hard returns to only one return at the end of a paragraph. Do not add any kind of pagination anywhere in the paper. Do not number text heads-the template will do that for you.

Finally, complete content and organizational editing before formatting. Please take note of the following items when proofreading spelling and grammar: This study uses a qualitative research design based on secondary data to explore Colombo's potential as a smart wellness tourism hub. The methodology involves systematically collecting, analyzing, and synthesizing existing literature, reports, and case studies related to wellness tourism and technology integration.

### ➤ Data Sources

- Academic literature: Peer-reviewed articles on wellness tourism, smart cities, and technology use in hospitality and healthcare.
- Industry reports: Publications from the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority, Global Wellness Institute, World Tourism Organization, and World Bank.
- Case studies: Examples from regional hubs like Kerala to identify best practices.
- Government documents: National tourism strategies, wellness tourism policies, and smart city development plans for Colombo.

# > Data Collection

Relevant secondary data were gathered using databases like Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, as well as official government sites and industry websites. A purposive sampling approach selected literature and reports specifically focused on wellness tourism, technology, or Colombo's urban development.

# IV. DATA ANALYSIS

The content analysis of secondary data uncovered several recurring themes. First, Colombo already has various wellness resources, including Ayurveda, yoga, spas, and meditation centers that match international definitions of wellness tourism. Second, technological readiness is evident through the widespread use of mobile connectivity, digital payments, and social media marketing, which are essential for improving accessibility and visibility..

# ➤ Wellness Components Available in Colombo

Colombo has several wellness components that correspond with the six dimensions of wellness:

- Physical wellness: The city features well-known Ayurvedic spas like Siddhalepa Ayurveda Spa, luxury hotel spas at Shangri-La [2] and Cinnamon Grand [3], and yoga studios like Prana Lounge that blend exercise with holistic treatments. Many hotels also provide organic and locally sourced dining options that promote healthy lifestyles.
- Mental wellness: Meditation centers, such as the Sri Sambodhi Viharaya, and mindfulness workshops organized by wellness collectives in Colombo offer spaces for stress management. Retreat-style programs combine traditional Buddhist practices with modern therapeutic techniques.
- Environmental wellness: Urban parks like Viharamahadevi Park [4] and Galle Face Green [5] provide open spaces for relaxation. Eco-friendly boutique hotels in Colombo increasingly focus on sustainability, while initiatives for recycling and tree planting support greener urban living.
- Spiritual wellness: Religious sites such as Gangaramaya Temple [6] and Kelaniya Raja Maha Vihara [7] offer chances for spiritual reflection, meditation, and yoga sessions. Visitors can join cultural rituals that deepen their spiritual connections.
- Social wellness: Colombo provides vibrant cultural exchange through festivals, wellness communities, and professional counseling services. Hospitals like Lanka Hospitals and Durdans [8] also have mental health and counseling units that combine social wellness with healthcare.
- Emotional wellness: Travelers can access therapies like sound healing, reiki [9], and relaxation programs at spas. Wellness resorts and therapists in Colombo provide personalized consultations that assist visitors.

# > Technologies Available in Colombo

Colombo has a relatively developed digital infrastructure compared to other Sri Lankan cities. Examples include:

- High internet penetration and mobile connectivity: Internet penetration in Sri Lanka has grown; in the "Digital Transformation in Sri Lanka" report, it is noted that internet penetration reached about 50%, and mobile phone subscriptions are very high (mobile subscriptions ~28.4 million.
- Mobile Apps: Health apps in Sri Lanka include online pharmacy and medicine delivery platforms like Flash Health [10] and MedPlus Mart, telemedicine and appointment booking platforms like Hemas Health App and Practo, and health and fitness tracking apps like MyFitnessPal and Strava. More advanced options include Healthify, a digital platform for preventive care, and Dialog's AI-powered health scan app for monitoring vital signs.
- Telemedicine platforms: Hospitals like Asiri Health (Doctor Appointment, 2025) and Lanka Hospitals provide e-consultations with doctors, which could extend to wellness consultations.

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- Digital payment systems: E-wallets such as FriMi [11] and mobile banking apps are popular, enabling cashless transactions for tourists. The national QR code payment system, LankaQR, serves as a digital payments backbone in Sri Lanka, allowing cashless payments across merchants (LankaQR, 2025). The government launched GovPay in 2025 for digital payments for government services, further integrating e-payments into public sector workflows [12].
- Social media marketing: Wellness providers like Siddhalepa and Spa Ceylon [13] actively promote their services on Instagram and Facebook, targeting international tourists.
- AI and Data Analytics: In March 2025, Nawaloka Hospitals PLC introduced South Asia's first AI-powered MRI scanner to improve diagnostic accuracy and efficiency. They also introduced AI-driven OPD chatbots for patient support, including symptom checking and appointment scheduling ([14] [15]. Similarly, Radisson Hotel Colombo adopted a multi-channel conversational AI system to manage bookings, provide facility information, and personalize services based on guest preferences [16].
- VR/AR technologies: The platform 360View.lk offers a large collection of 360-degree virtual tours and videos of heritage sites, temples, natural landmarks, waterfalls, and scenic views in Sri Lanka [17].

# ➤ Integration of Wellness and Technology

The combination of wellness components with Colombo's emerging technological landscape offers significant opportunities for positioning the city as a smart wellness tourism hub. Colombo's relatively advanced digital infrastructure, which includes high internet penetration, broad mobile connectivity, and a growing array of digital health applications, creates a solid foundation for integrating technology into wellness tourism experiences.

Physical and Mental Wellness: Mobile wellness applications already present in Sri Lanka, like MyFitnessPal, Strava, and Healthify, can support physical wellness through personalized fitness tracking, nutrition monitoring, and preventive care. Mindfulness and meditation features included in apps or virtual platforms can enhance stress relief and digital detox programs. Hospitals like Asiri Health and Lanka Hospitals also provide telemedicine services that can expand beyond traditional healthcare to facilitate mental wellness consultations.

Environmental Wellness: Colombo's eco-tourism offerings can be enhanced using digital platforms that promote eco-friendly accommodations, sustainable tours, and visits to organic farms. Social media marketing by providers such as Siddhalepa and Spa Ceylon helps raise awareness of sustainable practices, while data analytics can track tourist preferences for environmentally friendly activities. Cashless digital payment systems like FriMi and LankaQR encourage seamless eco-tourism participation without logistical hurdles.

Spiritual Wellness: Virtual and augmented reality technologies, utilized by the Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion

Bureau for destination promotion, can be tailored to create immersive spiritual experiences. This may include VR-based temple visits, online yoga classes, and guided meditation sessions, allowing international tourists to engage in spiritual wellness even before they arrive. Mobile platforms can also connect visitors to traditional healing rituals and cultural workshops.

Social Wellness: Colombo's social wellness opportunities, like cultural exchange programs and group activities, can be enhanced through digital platforms and social networks. Tele-consultation services such as Practo and Hemas Health App provide access to professional support, fostering stronger community bonds. Social media platforms like Instagram and Facebook, widely used by wellness providers, continue to build networks that promote group participation and social belonging.

Emotional Wellness: Emotional well-being can be supported through digital counseling services and AI-driven mental health tools. Hospitals in Colombo are starting to use AI in patient care, which could extend to emotional wellness through stress management chatbots, personalized relaxation suggestions, and virtual therapy platforms. These tools complement spa treatments, reiki, and aromatherapy, bridging traditional methods with smart digital support.

## V. DISCUSSION

Although Colombo shows a relatively advanced digital infrastructure with high internet access, mobile connectivity, and a growing range of health and wellness applications, the use of technology in wellness tourism is uneven. Accessibility and convenience are relatively strong, aided by online booking systems, telemedicine platforms, and mobile wellness applications that streamline service delivery. However, aspects of personalization and engagement remain underdeveloped. While artificial intelligence and data analytics are emerging in private hospitals and selected hotels, their use to customize individual wellness experiences is still limited. Similarly, engagement and experience enhancement through virtual reality and augmented reality technologies are in early stages, mainly used for promotional campaigns rather than fully immersive interventions. Marketing and trust-building, especially through social media platforms and digital marketing tools, show stronger integration, as wellness providers actively promote their services online. Thus, while Colombo has a promising technological foundation, gaps in personalization and immersive engagement indicate areas needing more development to enhance its position as a smart wellness tourism hub.

# ➤ Challenges and Considerations

One main challenge with technology-driven health and wellness tourism is protecting travelers' privacy and data security (Brown & Chancellor, 2021 as cited in Bentley, 2024). Storing, sharing, and transmitting this sensitive data raises concerns about privacy breaches, data leaks, and unauthorized access by third parties (Chen & Wang, 2019 as cited in). A critical challenge in advancing technology-driven

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health and wellness tourism in Sri Lanka is ensuring strong data privacy and security. Although the country has introduced the Personal Data Protection Act, No. 9 of 2022, aimed at regulating the collection, processing, and storage of personal data, its implementation is still in early stages. Institutional capacity, enforcement, and sector-specific guidelines for health and wellness tourism remain limited, indicating a relatively low level of maturity in data governance. As a result, weaknesses in privacy protection may reduce international tourists' confidence in using digital wellness services in Colombo.

Another challenge in technology-driven health and wellness tourism is the ethical issue of becoming too dependent on digital tools, which may risk making the experience less personal. While technologies can enhance personalization, engagement, and efficiency (Kumar & Singh, 2023 as cited in Bentley, 2024), excessive reliance on them can lessen human interaction and empathy, undermining the holistic and human-focused nature of wellness (Lee et al., 2022 as cited in Bentley, 2024). Sri Lanka is well-known for the warmth and hospitality of its people, which boosts its attractiveness as a tourist destination. Ranked among the top ten friendliest countries by the Condé Nast Traveller Readers' Choice Awards (2022), the nation is recognized for the generosity and welcoming nature of its citizens (News First, 2022). Locals often express hospitality through community and cultural engagements, reinforcing friendliness as a competitive advantage in Sri Lanka's tourism and hospitality sector (Travel Voice, 2022; OneVasco, 2024; Sri Lanka Ecotour, 2023). While technology provides significant benefits in personalization, engagement, and efficiency, its use in health and wellness tourism must be approached carefully to maintain the humancentered and holistic elements of the experience. Overdependence on digital tools can risk dehumanizing interactions and reducing empathy, so thoughtful integration is vital to enhance wellness services while preserving the personal touch (Kumar & Singh, 2023).

### VI. **CONCLUSION**

Colombo has great potential to become a smart wellness tourism hub by combining its rich traditions in Ayurveda and wellness with its advanced digital infrastructure. The city offers a broad range of wellness components that cover physical, mental, spiritual, environmental, social, and emotional aspects. With access to mobile apps, telemedicine, AI, and digital marketing, Colombo can merge technology with wellness offerings to create unique visitor experiences. However, challenges like cost, digital literacy, and sustainability must be addressed to ensure success. By strategically combining its heritage with modern innovations, Colombo can position itself competitively as a regional leader in smart wellness tourism.

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