

## **Environmental Impact of Local Tourists on Archaeological Sites in Mihintale, A Study of Waste Management and Preservation**

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### **Introduction**

The archaeological sites of Mihintale in Sri Lanka are globally significant, representing the rich cultural and historical heritage of the country. They attract visitors from around the world who are drawn to the charm and natural beauty created by the surrounding lakes, like Kanadara Lake. However, the increasing number of visitors has raised concerns about the environmental impact on these precious sites. This study emphasizes the need for effective waste management and the enforcement of tourism regulations to preserve and sustainably manage these archaeological sites, ensuring their protection for future generations.

This study presents a concise review of the environmental impact of local tourists on the archaeological sites in Mihintale. The information provided is based on a previous research thesis that focused on investigating the effects of tourism on the environment and the preservation of cultural heritage in Mihintale. These studies were based on the significance of Mihintale's archaeological sites and the need to address the environmental challenges posed by local tourists are emphasized. The study focuses on waste management practices and preservation efforts to address the challenges faced in maintaining the integrity of these archaeological sites. This study is to summarize the key findings and insights derived from the original research, as well as my field observations.

### **Methodology**

This study aimed to investigate the environmental impact of tourism on archaeological sites in Sri Lanka. The methodology consisted of two main components: a literature review and field observations. The literature review involved a thorough examination of existing research and scholarly articles related to environmental impacts on archaeological sites in Sri Lanka. The findings from the literature review formed the basis for the study's conclusions. Field observations were conducted at Mihintale and other archaeological sites to gather firsthand information on environmental conditions and waste management practices. Site visits included Mihintala Gala, Katusaya Archaeological Site, Kanadara Lake, and their surroundings. Primary data and insights were collected during these visits. Photographs were taken to supplement the data and enhance the analysis. Internet sources were also used to augment the data analysis process. Overall, this comprehensive methodology provided a basis for understanding the environmental impact of tourism on archaeological sites in Sri Lanka.

### **Results and Discussion**

Field observations conducted at the Mihintale archaeological sites have revealed significant ecological concerns. The presence of plastic waste at the important Mihintala Gala site, as well as the accumulation of plastic, polythene, and glass waste in Kanadara Lake and other

lakes near the Katusaya archaeological site, indicate a pressing issue. Despite efforts by the Mihintale local council to manage the waste, it is evident that it poses a threat to archaeological operations. Additionally, the Rajagiri Caves, another archaeological site, have been destroyed due to tourism-related activities, as supported by photographic evidence.

Preliminary research data supports the conclusion that irresponsible waste disposal by local tourists and inadequate site management pose significant risks to the conservation and sustainability of archaeological sites. Consequently, it is crucial to implement stricter waste management measures and enforce tourism laws in the Mihintale area. Educating visitors about waste management strategies and their responsibility in preserving these heritage sites is of utmost importance. Collaborative efforts between the Mihitalaya Pradeshiya Sabha, government agencies, and the tourism sector are necessary to achieve this.

In conclusion emphasizes the need for robust waste management practices and the enforcement of tourism laws to minimize the environmental impact caused by local tourists visiting Mihintale's archaeological sites. Strict waste management is essential to prevent further damage to these invaluable cultural treasures. The findings underscore the significance of adopting sustainable tourism practices to protect the cultural and environmental integrity of Mihintala's archaeological wonders for future generations. Promoting responsible tourism behavior, enhancing waste management infrastructure, and implementing regulations are vital steps towards safeguarding the archaeological and ecological values of Mihintale.

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