

## **Authentic Sri Lankan Experience: Insights from Boutique Hotel Customers**

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There has been increased attention given in the tourism literature to authenticity of destinations and the experiential consumption of tourism via accommodation products. The purpose of this study is to explore authentic Sri Lankan experience in the eyes of tourists who were at boutique accommodations in Sri Lanka. Mainly, study explored the authentic experience of boutique hotels and overall authenticity experience of Sri Lanka. This study adopted the phenomenology research approach to assess the tourists experience in Sri Lanka. These two phenomena were explored in the perspective of boutique hotel customers in order to identify their experiential needs. Total of 10 in-depth interviews were conducted with 14 boutique hotel customers who had visited Sri Lanka within the past 6 months. Findings indicated boutique hotel customers seek authenticity and their choice of accommodation influences the overall authentic experience they receive from the country. This study presents 5 key elements of Sri Lankan authenticity and 6 key influential factors of boutique hotel experience. Boutique hotels are a form of specialist accommodation product, serving a high-end niche group of customers that has become a trend in the world and minimal academic studies devoted to assess the needs and expectations of the customers in these hotels in Sri Lanka. Therefore, this study addresses the lag of knowledge on Sri Lankan authenticity and the experiential nature of Sri Lankan boutique hotels.

**Key words:** *Authenticity of destination, Sri Lanka, boutique hotel experience*