# Study of Customer Based Brand Equity in promoting Sri Lanka as a Wedding Tourism Destination - With Special Reference in Southern Region

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## Introduction

Wedding tourism is a recently emerging tourism market which is still in its development phase when compared with sun-sea-sand and culture or nature tourism segments. After realizing the real potential benefits of this niche market, most of destinations commenced promoting wedding based tourism. Destination marketers used to market and branding destinations as perfect places for destination weddings and honeymoons.

As described by Ching, wedding destinations can be defined as the places where newly married couples make visits to feel each other without any disturbance from other common family bonds. It makes them feel very closer to their hearts and gives them lifelong pleasures. Ching further pointed out that the tropical beach is the ideal location sold by the industry for the wedding away because of its own discourse and ideology as an iconic tourist destination.

And also, Ching emphasized that the increasing popularity of the destination wedding demonstrates an attempt by couples to negotiate and even change the meaning and purpose of the wedding ritual; and, as a result, the wedding itself is taking on new meaning. In this context, wedding destinations add new meaning to the newly wedded couples beyond conventional framework. According to Abad & Hossein (n.d.) that many researchers have shown interest in brand equity concept and tried to use different approaches to measure it in various industries.

This is because of the necessity in today's marketplace to develop, maintain and use product branding to acquire a certain level of competitive advantage. Strong brand offers advantages such as competitiveness position in the markets, more brand loyalty and better reaction toward increase in price by customers. A brand could be defined as a "name, sign, symbol or design, or combination of these, intended to determine the goods of an organization and distinguish them from those of competitors" (AMA, 2013).

Hotel guests rely on brand names to reduce the risk associated with staying at an otherwise unknown property (O'Neill & Xiao, 2006). Thus, a brand is something for consumers to feel good about (Vaid, 2003), and successful brand organizations promote themselves as such. This has been further clarified by Clifton, Simonn & Ahmad (2003) and according to them brands offer potential guests the perception of reliable quality service and memorable experience.

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