



Assessing Entrepreneurial Strategic Capabilities in Export-Oriented Tourism SMEs: An Empirical Study from Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Tourism is valued as a key contributor to economic performance from the perspective of an emerging economy. The revenue generated from the tourism industry was 1.71 billion USD through export revenue in the initial quarter of 2025, which signifies an approximately 17.2% increase compared to the previous economic year. This study aims to address the strategic concerns grounding tourism entrepreneurship, benefiting the socio-economic context of Sri Lanka from an export-focused viewpoint. The study falls under qualitative research, using an inductive approach and a multiple-case study design. Data collection was conducted through a purposive sample targeting 6 cases representing the tourism-related field of operation. The responses were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis, with inclusion of narrative and descriptive forms. The investigation is informed by the theories of innovation, capabilities, and the resource-based view. The findings of the study reveal that the growth of the tourism sector is determined by entrepreneurial innovation and unique value-creation capabilities, strategic market expansion, collaborative networks, contingency planning, and financial impacts, as applied from theoretical perspectives. In addition to the theory implication, the study emphasizes critical success factors such as digitally driven solutions, tourism-focused entrepreneurial innovation, and global market integration within a culturally aligned context. In addition, the barriers to entrepreneurial advancement, such as ineffective digital adoption and application, lack of entrepreneurial education, financial and resource constraints, and the absence of an actionable policy framework and hurdles in building global ties, have been identified. Thus, the study suggests an economically friendly framework to be adopted and practiced by tourism entrepreneurs and all stakeholders, based on the criteria for constructing a resilient economic framework for Sri Lanka.

Keywords: Tourism entrepreneurship, Entrepreneurship Strategies, Export Orientation

Introduction

The growing recognition and global acceptance of Sri Lankan tourism are a vital component of GDP, contributing 6.5% to the construction of a better economic framework (Devadas & Jayasooriya, 2024). The emerging tourism sector acts as an economic engine, driving infrastructure development, energising complementary industries, providing employment, and driving export income via currency accumulation (Gamage, 2015). Properly implemented entrepreneurial strategies have the capability to strengthen, expand, and sustain the tourism sector. Tourism is the main driver of Sri Lanka's export revenue, and its focus on local services used by foreigners indicates a better position in worldwide value chains (Research & international relations divisions, 2024). Entrepreneurs in the field of tourism are forced to adopt a client-centric approach due to increased global competition, variations in customer demand, a desire for international offerings, and entrepreneurial market rivalry (Arachchi & Gnanapala, 2020). The dual sources of Sri Lanka's economic growth are exports and tourism (CBSL, 2024). The integration of both drivers would promote sustainable economic growth, boost foreign-exchange revenues, and increase competitiveness. Exports of goods and services accounted for 20% of the GDP contribution to the Sri Lankan economy in 2023 and 19% in 2024, accounting for clothing, textiles, and apparel-related sectors. The tourism sector adds nearly 8% to economic resilience annually, and approximately 430,000 jobs were created from 1.48 million tourists to Sri Lanka (Tourism Bureau, 2024). The presence of tourism-focused entrepreneurs, and the effective adoption and implementation of such strategies are highly essential to stimulate tourism-driven export roots in the economy of Sri Lanka (Jayasooriya & Perera, 2019). The tourism sector consists of adventure-led eco-tourism, community-centred tourism activities, cultural heritage experiences, and hospitality-driven tourism, and is driven by entrepreneurs who pave the way for niche markets for eco-lodges, boutique hotels, organised sightseeing tours, and indigenous craft markets. There is a set of highlights from emerging studies on the global tourism industry in the contemporary context.

- More than 300 million global tourists travelled internationally, which represents a 5% rise compared to 2024 (Badri, Narayanan, 2020).
- The spending rate of international tourists will reach 2.1 trillion USD and stands as 11% of global GDP in proportion (Deshapriya, Padmakanthi, 2022)
- As global reinforcing nations, France attracts approximately 90 million international tourists. Spain recorded 84 million tourist arrivals in 2025 (Arachchi & Gnanapala, 2020)

- In 2025, the international tourists' arrival in the Asia-Pacific context, reached approximately 296 million, which is 5% rise compared to the previous year (Research and international relations divisions, 2024)
- The Asian countries Malaysia, China, Japan, Indonesia, and Vietnam accounted for more than 68 million international tourists collectively as a record note in the history (World Bank,2025)

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to evaluate the enterprise-level strategic actions used in export-oriented tourism and their practical impact on Sri Lanka's economic development. The investigation can address the research gap and provide insights for tourism-based entrepreneurs and policymakers in constructing a standardized framework for tourism-entrepreneurship to promote the economic stability of the country. Further, the study explores the current entrepreneurial practices performed in the sector and the obstacles encountered by the entrepreneurs in formulating and accomplishing action-friendly tourism-driven entrepreneurial activities and the suggestions for betterment in building a resilient tourism-entrepreneurial model

Background of the study

The resilience of Sri Lanka's tourist business depends on entrepreneurial adaptation and innovation due to the uncertainty in the local and international context, the range of global risk, the sector's susceptibility to shocks, which range from the Easter assaults in 2019 as a local shock to the COVID-19 pandemic as a global crisis in 2022 (CBSL,2025). Thus, consistency and strategic execution are crucial to understanding how entrepreneurs use innovation, market orientation, and sustainability to boost long-term growth as a strategic solution to Sri Lanka's recovery.

- In the initial quarter of 2025, tourist earnings were recorded at 1122.3 million, representing a 9% rise compared to the previous year in Sri Lanka. (World tourism organization,2024)
- Sri Lanka recorded the arrival of international tourists around 1029803 in 2025 and 896779 in 2024, which stands for a substantial rise in the economic contribution (Department of Census and Statistics, 2024)
- Predictions state that the tourism sector of Sri Lanka can reach over 3 million visitor arrivals and stand at 4.3 billion USD in earnings in 2026 (CBSL, 2025).

- In the first half of 2025, foreign exchange revenue of 1.7 billion USD was generated from the tourism sector, a figure that is higher than 2024's 1.4 billion USD (Export Development Board of Sri Lanka, 2025).
- Growing line of tourists' entry is captured in Sri Lanka due to increased connectivity of international bonds and flights, and effective promotional approaches and campaigns taken by the tourist development authority, Sri Lanka (Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority, 2025)
- Export revenue from apparel was 25600 million USD, and tea exports recorded a significant rise of 8.16% compared to the previous year (Exports Development Board of Sri Lanka, 2025).
- High export revenue was earned through transport and logistics-related services, with a 14.33 % rise from the previous economic period and year-on-year to 179 million USD in 2025 (CBSL, 2025).

Tourism-driven entrepreneurship is highly valued in an emerging economic setting, such as Sri Lanka, to foster economic growth and improved living standards (Dedunu, Weerasinghe, 2017). Sectorial growth leads to other sectors, such as transportation, handicrafts, regional agriculture, and entrepreneurial endeavours, which indirectly support income sources through lodging, food, travel, and logistics (Gunawardene, 2020). Tourism-driven exports support national economic resilience and contribute to foreign currency inflows (Fatoki, 2024). According to empirical evidence, tourism-based entrepreneurial initiatives have influenced rural structural transformation, including changes in living patterns, increased income-earning capability, and cultural progress in peripheral tourism regions in Sri Lanka (Devadas, Jayasooriya, 2024). further, it attributes to generating employment, involving local supplier engagement and skill development among the generation in the regions. Forming effective entrepreneurial strategies based on export-centered tourism and executing them systematically would upgrade the tourism industry and further advance it (Tourism bureau, 2024). basically, the SMEs in tourism-entrepreneurship serve as a foundation for transformation to enhance productivity through digitally driven solutions, tourism-oriented innovation, and successful tourism entrepreneurship practices (Rathnayake, 2025). while international transport routes and modes are advanced strategically and international aid & trade are in effective operation, the tourism field in Sri Lanka is adding value than before. Since the visibility of the Sri Lankan tourism market is satisfactory, entrepreneurs are increasingly adopting more technology, such as creating websites, booking and lodging platforms, online promotions, and tech-based support services, to gain competencies. This makes international target tourists have travel faith and rationale in cost consciousness (Badri & Narayanan,2020)

The influence of entrepreneurial tactics in Sri Lanka's tourism industry is further highlighted by sustainability-focused entrepreneurship (Ministry of Tourism, 2025). Significant risks for entrepreneurs are also posed by political unpredictability, economic volatility, and market volatility, especially in emerging nations like Sri Lanka (Paramanathan & Premaratne, 2022). Enhancing entrepreneurial success and fostering economic growth require addressing these obstacles through targeted government assistance, talent development, and infrastructure upgrades (Rathnayake, 2025).

Research problem context, questions, and expected outcomes

There are entrepreneurs in diverse industries and sectors in Sri Lanka (CBSL, 2025). Though the number of entrepreneurs is satisfactory in established and emerging industries, the tourism field still lacks entrepreneurs. The quality of entrepreneurial performance in the tourism industry is insignificant (Priyantha et al, 2022). This downplays the real outcome of export revenue and underperformance. Therefore, the tourism sector requires effective entrepreneurial strategies for adoption and application to maximize tourism-driven export earnings to Sri Lanka. This results in fewer context-specific studies and literature in the emerging field of tourism-driven entrepreneurship. Similarly, there has been less empirical investigation in the field of tourism from the perspective of adopting standardized tourism-driven entrepreneurship strategies and practices to sustain tourism-driven export income to Sri Lanka. However, the study draws attention through a set of questions in facilitating the strength of the insight through,

- What entrepreneurial strategies are currently adopted by Sri Lankan export-oriented tourism firms?
- How do innovation, market orientation, and sustainability practices shape the performance and competitiveness of tourism enterprises in Sri Lanka?
- How are these entrepreneurial strategies perceived to contribute to attracting international tourists, generating foreign exchange, and supporting local communities?

The overarching goal of this study is to investigate the effectiveness of tourism-driven entrepreneurial strategies adopted and implied by export-oriented entities in Sri Lanka. The expected outcomes of the study are

- To explore the entrepreneurial strategies adopted by Sri Lankan export-oriented tourism firms.
- To understand how innovation, market orientation, and sustainability practice influence the performance and competitiveness of tourism enterprises.

- To investigate the perceived contribution of these strategies to attracting international tourists, generating foreign exchange, and supporting local communities.

Literature Review

Strategies on entrepreneurial capability on tourism:

To achieve success in tourism-driven endeavors, having a vision and an attitude towards innovation are highly important. In recognizing the market dynamics and development, entrepreneurs need subject-specific knowledge, insights from experience, and a business network in the field of operation. These elements are helpful not only for market recognition but also for allocating resources, executing strategies, and developing actionable practices (Rathnayake & Bogahalande, 2025). Specific to the countries' past experiences, the entrepreneurs should possess strong competencies, including the skills and knowledge to build trust among tourists, distinguish Sri Lanka's offerings, and enter new markets in the tourism sector (Ministry of Tourism & Exports Promotion, 2025). Market-oriented entrepreneurs with a sense of customer responsiveness who actively participate in tourism-strategic planning, continual learning & experience, and are starved for the opportunity are more likely to achieve greater competitiveness and business sustainability in the field of tourism in Sri Lanka, according to empirical data from Sri Lanka and other developing nations (Navirathan, Vijayakumar & Jayarajah, 2023). Visualizing futuristic models and being innovative are among the entrepreneurial capabilities in the tourism field. entrepreneurs should be able to oversee the tourists' profile, compressing the culture, expectations, economic viability, and level of satisfaction as individuals who render the service from the country. than general protocol in identifying market trends and coordinating interrelated functions, they should be well aligned with the strategic framework suited to tourism-driven entrepreneurship (Rathnayake, 2025). Tourism-based enterprises often target niche customers as groups of tourists and charge premium prices by implementing differentiation strategies, such as offering green products or culturally driven experiences that include food, service, entertainment, and surroundings. Tourism entrepreneurs who aggressively embrace the path of technologies and create unique goods have a greater chance of achieving long-term growth and export potential, according to empirical data from Sri Lanka and other developing nations (Sri Lanka tourism development board,2025).

Strategies on Differentiation and Innovation:

The application of differentiation strategies in tourism focuses on developing distinctive offers that signify an enterprise away from its rivals; innovative, driven solutions entail launching new services, procedures, or business models in demand to attract tourists (Beck, Rainoldi & Egger, 2021). Selling overseas simply means assigning a monetary value to the value added to goods and services with a novel and aesthetic sense. Specially the export-oriented enterprises follow technology driven manufacturing and logistics, digital marketing & promotion, eco-tourism, e-commerce, digital currency transactions, well-ness initiatives, and novel service provision service are examples of innovative tourism practices that improve customer satisfaction and draw in foreign tourists for enterprises and entrepreneurs to be competitive in the tourism sector require distinctive entrepreneurial traits and uniqueness and entrepreneurial novelty (Nagendrakumar, Lokeshwara, 2024).

Strategies for Exporting and Market Expansion:

Enterprises and entrepreneurs operating in export-oriented industries imply a sensory exploration of the market through their insights, which contribute to economic growth and enable them to compete globally. Performing outstandingly in addressing concerns of market expansion and actionable export plans are crucial (Doran, Carthy, 2018). There are some key highlights from emerging studies that emphasize the concurrent entrepreneurial practice and application in real terms.

- Recognition for the goods and services in line with global demand and implication of easy conversion of monetary value to the economy of the enterprises and sector (World Tourism Organisation, 2025).
- Continuous quantity measures and development in meeting the global standard quality requirement and international regulations on the goods and services on exports (Felix, Garcia & vera, 2020).
- Ensuring the logistics and dispatch of trading operations and auxiliary services within a sustainable development framework and adding green value to the economy (Loss, 2019).
- Concern on digital transformation for pre-trading and post-trading operation on exports of goods and services for international client ease, transparency, and flexibility on digital quality assurance (Priyantha et al, 2022)

- Amplifying and adding value to the goods and services sold overseas, such as the emblem of culture, ancestral values, and eco-innovative initiatives based on the socio-economic context of Sri Lanka

Emerging into new markets and attracting international clients, export-focused travel agencies use strategic branding, multinational alliances, and market research to anticipate the dynamics of the tourism sector. Tourism-related SMEs and entrepreneurs explicitly share their experiences with local markets and cultural norms, and match their products to global demand trends, thereby seeing increased export performance and long-term growth, and stimulating economic growth and sustainable development.

Strategies on networking and cooperation:

Considerations of market reach and recognition of active global networking and collaboration are essential strategic foundations for tourist field entrepreneurs to adhere to (Loss, 2019). entities tied to tourism and exports can exchange resources, gain access to expertise, and collaborate to create innovative services through tourism-industrial networks among countries, international strategic collaborations, and global stakeholder involvement (Ranatunga, 2025). In the tourism industry, market access, capacity building, and operational efficiency are facilitated through global strategic partnerships (Karunaratne, Ranasinghe & Sammani, 2021). According to empirical research from South Asian regions, businesses and entrepreneurs foster alliances with suppliers, foreign agents, and governmental organisations, and see aid and tied benefits in resilience and market performance beyond the national level. The enterprises engaged in export-focused tourism endeavours; social capital development and networking also facilitate reducing market gaps, adopting best practices, and responding to shifting market demands (Yamuna, Kimari & Nawarathne, 2022). As a result, networking and cooperation stand as essential elements of entrepreneurial strategy, promoting sustained expansion and financial contributions in countries like Sri Lanka (Ranatunge, 2025).

Strategies on risk management:

In building a resilient economy, risk identification and systematic contingency planning to manage the risks of national and global markets are essential during international trade, especially in export-oriented endeavours (Gamage, 2015). Crisis management for tourism is highly inclusive, involving organisational-based risk and resilience, creating tourism-resilient plans, and recognising possible threats, all components of effective risk management. drawing the special reference to Sri Lankan

tourist sector seasonality-based commodities, demand fluctuations, political unpredictability, regulatory changes, and natural disasters are among the hazards facing the tourism industry that can have a significant impact on the economic performance of Sri Lanka (Deyshapriya, Pathmakanthi, 2022). the tourism related Entrepreneurs who proactively evaluate risks, diversify markets with risk averting, and stand in with contingency plan more likely to experience stability and long-term success, according to empirical data from developing nations like Sri Lanka. The strategy formulation for a tourist-centred export plan should focus on absolute advantage, economic feasibility, and the effectiveness of the policy framework in addressing legal and political issues, as well as national and global crises (Nagendra Kumar, Lokeshwara, 2024). To remain competitive and quickly adjust to external shocks, combine risk management with innovation and collaborative methods. Thus, risk reduction strategies in tourism operations are crucial to maintaining tourism businesses focused on exports and guaranteeing a favorable outcome for steady economic growth (Dewitt, 2018).

Strategy for Economic Contribution:

Formulation of tourism-centric export approaches aligned with enterprises and entrepreneurs, focusing on how tourism-related entrepreneurship generates income, jobs, and other socio-economic benefits (Sri Lankan tourism development authority, 2025). For a country like Sri Lanka, its geography, climate, and cultural context provide advantages in acting as a mechanism for generating concern among tourists, stimulating a source of income and global recognition. export-oriented tourist endeavours not only immediately influence foreign exchange revenues but also stimulate local economies in multiple ways. Tourism entrepreneurs who strategically combine innovation, market development, and collaboration generate higher economic returns while generating jobs and improving local livelihoods in the regional-rural context of Sri Lanka (Priyantha al.et, 2022). Generally, the tourism sector of Sri Lanka contributes to economic development in the following ways.

Provision of goods and services generating GDP and generating export revenue and resulting in a favorable balance of payment in the country (Ministry of Tourism, 2025).

- Provision of direct and indirect income sources to the owners of factors of production, resulting in minimizing the structural unemployment gap and rising productivity in land, workforce, and capital (Paramanatham, Premaratne, 2022)
- Improves rural development by scaling entrepreneurial capabilities, especially in the rural and post-war context of Sri Lanka (Ranatunge, 2025).

- Uplifting the overall human development index through creating higher business confidence among locals and foreigners to live and enterprise, fostering to minimize gaps in skills, education, and knowledge, and eliminating rural poverty (Ministry of Tourism & Exports Promotion, 2025).
- Acting as a mechanism to maintain resource utilization, attract foreign direct investment, establish more multinational plants in the nation, facilitate resource exchange, and create value to achieve the country's macroeconomic goals of national and global progress (World Tourism Organization, 2025).

The industry's contribution to the expansion of the national economy is further enhanced by its efforts to attract international clients, provide experiences that best showcase local culture, and uphold sustainable standards. Economic contribution consequently progresses on the significance of coordinating firm-level goals with more general developmental objectives.

Tourism entrepreneurship strategies driven by digital transformation

Studies show that the connection between digitalized applications and dynamic capability is limited among SMEs operating in the field of tourism and export-oriented sectors (Eshan, Muhammd & Laura, 2022). Many studies have shown that the adoption and application of digital-driven tools at scale are more common than in SMEs when creating strategies for effective tourism-based exports. (Rendika, 2025). These investigations concern large-scale enterprises in a tech-equipped context leading to a notable gap in inferring the difficulties in resource accumulation, allocation, and utilization in developing economies, on functionalizing digitalization to construct a standardized framework that is actionable and practical to context of SMEs where it lacks the growth in tourism sector in Sri Lanka (Amarasinghe & Wickramasinghe, 2020). This will result in detecting theoretical as well as pragmatic validation of testifying digital tools like AI, Machine learning, the Internet of Things, and blockchain adoption, as well as tourism-driven strategies. According to Furman & Seamans (2018), the digital transformative phase is considered a purposive technology, aided by capabilities that traverse sectors such as tourism-driven exports in Sri Lanka. Digital-driven solutions offer a proportional advantage to the tourism and export fields over rivals in many aspects, including improved operational efficiency, active customer assignment, systematic global tourist and client chains, and data-driven decision-making, which are valid values in digital-driven operations for tourism-related entrepreneurs (Randika, 2025). The apprehensions about propositional advantages are demonstrated in terms of resilient value-building through the following perspectives.

- Operational efficiency: enabling enterprises to foster tourists ‘demand orientation, clients’ methodical prophecy, tourists’ management, and responsible export practices (Jayathilake, 2024).
- Active tourist’s assignment: encourages tourism-driven entrepreneurs to adopt a client-firm orientation, an organized recommendation system, and emotional analysis of tourists to improve global visitors’ retention (Mahagamage & Perera, 2025).
- Data-driven decision: enterprises are able to exploit data-driven facilities, data management, and strategic information systems to minimize risks in competitive markets in the international and tourism sectors (Quadri, 2024).

Digital transformation and the availability of resource-efficient technologies support the emergence of robust business models favoring international traction. These advances empower entrepreneurs not only to achieve financial returns but also to build resilient, future-ready tourism businesses grounded in sustainable tourism, as indicated by a case study by Prihatin (2024).

Theoretical framework

The study underpins grounded theories, the resource-based view (RBV), dynamic capabilities (DC), and institutional and stakeholder (IS) perspectives, in association with the expected outcome. RBV explains how SMEs leverage unique resources to gain a competitive advantage in the field of tourism in the international market. According to Brislin (1970), Dynamic Capabilities theory emphasizes adapting and reconfiguring these resources to enhance resilience in changing economic conditions, thereby attracting and fostering sector and industrial growth, such as tourism and exports. Stakeholder and Institutional perspectives (Saunders, Lewis & Thronhill, 2019) highlight how environmental and societal pressures drive the adoption of tourism entrepreneurship and tourism-business strategies and practices. Together, these theories provide a foundation to examine how Sri Lankan enterprises and entrepreneurs build systematic tourist-entrepreneurial strategies.

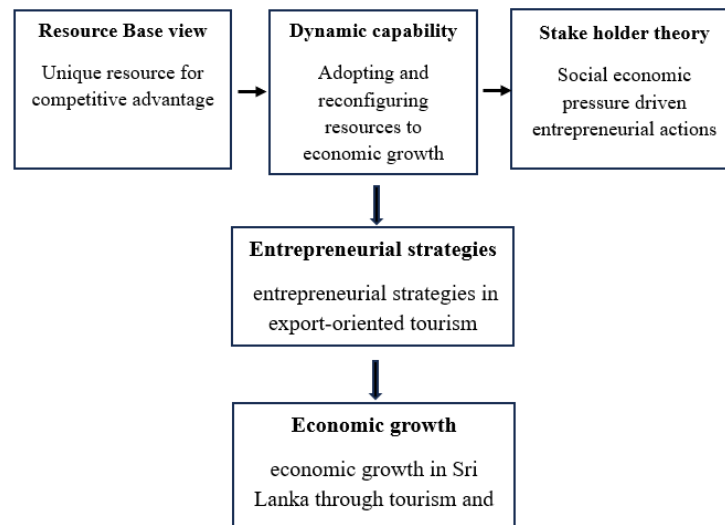


Figure: Theoretical framework

Synthesis and Identification of Research Gaps

A critical analysis of the current literature and empirical evidence reveals gaps in contextual, theoretical, and empirical understanding, as outlined in Table 2.

Table 02: Content Literature

Theme	Current insight	Thematic gap
economic growth model	Mostly functioning as an interconnecting mechanism in Western nations	Absence of a systematic framework in developing nations
Dynamic capabilities	Applied to large-scale enterprises	Limited evidence adopted in tourism sectors
Innovation in tourism	Applied in a developed context mostly	Innovation through the hospitality industry is only available

Digital-driven tourism strategies	Identified with higher acceptance and flexibility among international tourists.	Narrow focus and application in Sri Lankan context
Tourism-driven entrepreneurship	Multi-dimensional value recognized	Insignificant in the emerging enabled transformation
Regional context	Studies available in the developed context	Few empirical evidences in Sri Lanka

Source: Summarized by author

A critical synthesis of prior literature reveals a significant gap in the literature and in empirical practice. Though the studies are done, they mostly focus on strategy formulation and practice in a developed context rather than in a developing context. Further cultural-economic specific contexts, such as Sri Lanka, are very underrepresented in the literature. Rural entrepreneurial practices in the tourism sector are insignificant and difficult to explore, as the systematic framework practised is unclear.

Methodology

Methodological framework

To investigate entrepreneurial methods in Sri Lanka's export-oriented tourist industry, the following methodological approach is shown in a table.

Table 02: Methodological elements

Methodological components	Application in the study
Research Paradigm	Interpretivism
Research Design	Exploratory
Research Approach	Qualitative
Theoretical underpinning	Resource-based view theory Dynamic capability theory Stakeholder theory

Research Method	Multiple Case Study
Sampling Technique	Purposive Sampling
Sample size	6 SMEs
Data Collection Methods	Semi structured-interviews
Data Analysis	Thematic and Cross-Case Analysis
Coverage of sectors	Adventure & ecotourism, Cultural & heritage tourism, Wellness & Ayurvedic tourism, Culinary tourism, Travel & transport tourism Hospitality services tourism
Validity & Reliability	Triangulation- Secondary data & literature Credibility- data response & literature.
Ethical Considerations	Informed consent and confidentiality were ensured

Data collection method and analysis tools

The investigation uses semi-structured interview methods to gather responses from the chosen entrepreneurs from the Six SMEs attached to the tourism and export sectors. Strategic approaches in practice, decision-making procedures of tourism-based enterprises, difficulties encountered by tourism entrepreneurs, and modes of contribution to economic growth are narrated from the interviews and systematically connected to the literature and theories. The interviews are augmented with secondary sources, such as authorized data and journal findings, to validate credibility and conclusions. The study uses a thematic measurement model in both the data collection and analysis processes. Since the study falls under qualitative and narrative concerns from a triangular perspective,

such as contemporary literature, responses, and theories, the use of the thematic measurement model is essential. A thematic measurement model (Table 01) derived from the existing literature is used through thematic analysis, in which responses are coded, related codes are grouped into more general themes, and the ways in which these thematic concerns and the entrepreneurs' verdicts are compared and contrasted regarding export-oriented travel and economic expansion are examined. The gathered responses are interpreted using narrative and thematic approaches. Secondary data triangulation will be used to enhance the validity and dependability of the findings.

Table 03: Thematic measurement model

Construct	Dimensions / Indicators	Measurement Method
Entrepreneurial capability	Vision clarity, market orientation, and long-term planning	Interview questions and coding
Innovation & Differentiation	Product uniqueness, digital adoption, service innovation	Interview questions and theme frequency
Market Expansion & Export Focus	Target markets, export initiatives, and adaptation to foreign markets	Interview questions and sector comparison
Collaboration & Networking	Partnerships, stakeholder engagement, networks	Interview questions and thematic coding
Risk Management & Challenges	Risk identification, mitigation strategies, and resilience	Interview questions and thematic coding
Economic Contribution	Revenue growth, job creation, sectoral impact	Interview questions and secondary data

Qualitative equivalent of validity and reliability

The study concerns the trustworthiness of the data's validity and reliability, which supports the fair conduct of the study. Thus, the concerns are drawn to reliability, validity, transferability, confirmability, dependability, and measures are shown in the following table

Table 02: Criteria for qualitative trustworthiness

Criterion	Purpose / Description	Methods to Achieve
Credibility	Corresponds to internal validity in quantitative research	Consistent engagement with participants Triangulation using multiple sources/methods
Transferability	Corresponds to external validity/generalizability	Provide rich insights into context where viewers can judge applicability.
Dependability	Corresponds to reliability	Audit trail including detailed documentation of research steps
Confirmability	Ensures participants, not researcher bias shape results	Representative- thematic model usage, Triangulation- Audit trail

Results and discussion

This tourism entrepreneurship context-specific study provides rich, workable insights into the field of tourism, elevating performance by building effective export-oriented strategies for economic betterment (Rathnayake & Bogahalande, 2025). Therefore, the study different industries. In common, entrepreneurs noted that market research, digital platforms, and cooperation with tourism boards were used to identify potential for export-oriented entrepreneurship, underscoring the significance of understanding international visitors' preferences.

Entrepreneurial capacities related concerns in tourism-entrepreneurship

The growing nature of global tourism trends, competitive global positioning, client feedback, and supportive regulatory rules were among the elements that drove strategic decision-making, indicating a proactive approach to service adaptation for foreign markets from the tourism-entrepreneurship perspective. When the question “Can you describe your business vision and how you plan strategically to align with market opportunities?” was raised, respondent A responded, “We always look for ways to ensure our guests are satisfied with the resources we have. Similarly, we have a significant advantage because we operate a digital platform and understand how to operate online. In a similar tone, respondent C responded that, “From the hotelier to the room attendants, every member of the staff needs to be fully aware of what we are doing for our customers.” This statement demonstrates the entrepreneur's emphasis on client satisfaction, the strategic application of digital tools, and the significance of staff coordination and a common vision in providing consistently high-quality services. When the question What unique products or services have you developed, and how have you incorporated innovation or digital tools to stay competitive?” raised, the responded F responded, "Our virtual ratings and the helpful criticism we get are really important in attracting more visitors and keeping our customers engaged." "We occasionally see fewer tourists, particularly during particular seasons, but we always prioritize our long-term objectives over pursuing short-term revenue. We encountered numerous challenges during and after COVID-19, but we persisted in offering our services and have since expanded. From the respondent D, it is expressed that the entrepreneur's commitment to sustainable development, ability to bounce back from setbacks, and steadfastness in upholding customer-focused procedures in a cutthroat travel market.

“When we print images or symbols, it is essential to follow market trends,” the respondent E stated—further responded, A stated that, “We have to offer what foreigners prefer. There are many differences between countries in terms of the materials they prefer, colour psychology, production processes, and packaging styles. If we don’t understand the nature of the market and the psychology of international customers, we cannot survive.” This narrative highlights the entrepreneur’s awareness of international market dynamics, cultural preferences, and the need to strategically adapt to meet diverse customer expectations.

Innovation & differentiation-related concerns in tourism-entrepreneurship

All six entrepreneurs highlighted market orientation and innovation as important components of their export-focused strategy, according to a frequency analysis of coded responses. These conclusions were corroborated through triangulation with secondary data on sectoral performance, which showed that hotels and resorts that embrace market-oriented strategies and well-defined strategic goals play a major role in expanding Sri Lanka's tourism exports. Empirical research highlights the importance of entrepreneurial strategy formation and practice in improving the success of tourism businesses (Ministry of Tourism, 2025). In the field of emerging entrepreneurial paths, the concept of Market orientation is associated with organisational performance in small and medium-sized hotels in Sri Lanka's Southern Province (Yamuna, Kimiri & Nawarathne, 2022). Further, the significance of understanding international client demands and rival dynamics is leading to the expected outcome of SMEs operating in tourist-based villages. The emerging findings showed that sales growth in Sri Lanka's hotel industry is correlated with market-oriented business strategies, highlighting the importance of tourism-driven entrepreneurial strategic planning in accomplishing organizational goals. Additionally, Kumara (2023) found that small and medium-sized tourism businesses in the Eastern Province of Sri Lanka face difficulties that can be overcome through strategic planning and efficient marketing techniques, highlighting the necessity of long-term planning and a clear vision. Together, these results imply that long-term planning, market orientation, and a clear vision are essential for the prosperity and sustainability of Sri Lankan tourism businesses (Navinathan, Vijayakumar & Jeyarajah, 2022).

Market dynamics related concerns in tourism-entrepreneurship

When the question is raised on market expansion and focus measures, “How do you identify and approach target markets, and what strategies do you use to adapt your offerings for international customers?” the respondent expressed their responses in a novel way. entrepreneurs in the tourism-export sector aggressively seek service and experience innovation to set themselves apart in the global market, according to the analysis. Eco-friendly amenities, distinctive local cultural experiences, and internet booking or concierge platforms were all common practices. To attract foreign visitors and maintain a competitive edge, entrepreneurs stressed the importance of leveraging technology and digital marketing. Thematic coding revealed that ongoing service innovation and personalized guest experiences were recurring tactics associated with higher customer satisfaction and greater market

exposure. Entrepreneur F responded, “We have been in this business for more than ten years,” the respondent explained. “Innovation in making our products unique is a key factor in shaping our long-term strategy. Earlier, we only exported organic vegetables and spices, but we realized that innovation and differentiation increase the value of our products. Now, we are recognized for exporting eco-friendly herbs and leaves, which are in high demand in developed countries.” This narrative illustrates the entrepreneur’s focus on product innovation, differentiation, and strategic positioning to enhance competitiveness in international markets.

Further respondent D said, “Sometimes we don’t fully value our culture, and it surprises us to see that culture and tradition are critical to attracting foreign customers to our cultural products,” the respondent shared. “Handloom materials, handicrafts made with seashells and coconut shells, traditional face masks, and brassware are highly demanded by international buyers.” This narrative highlights the entrepreneur’s realization of the importance of cultural heritage for product differentiation and for enhancing market appeal among foreign consumers.

The reply said, "In addition to our physical showroom, we also receive orders online." "We collaborate with some of the biggest online retail channels for distribution and use digital platforms to showcase and advertise our items. Due to the complexity and competitiveness of digital sales and promotion, these operations are managed by a specialized staff. This story demonstrates the entrepreneur's smart use of digital technologies and the organizational steps needed to successfully compete in online markets.

De Silva et al. (2024) address the importance of digital platforms in service innovation and found that social media usage among SMEs in Sri Lanka has a beneficial impact on innovation and perceived company performance in the tourism sector. Additionally, studies conducted in Colombia show that tourism SMEs that use Big Data and train their employees in data science achieve greater success with digital transformation, underscoring the significance of technology adoption for service innovation. Along these lines, the results imply that the success and longevity of Sri Lankan tourism businesses depend heavily on a mix of service innovation, digital adoption, and product uniqueness (Ranatunge, 2025).

Collaboration and networking-related concerns in tourism-entrepreneurship

When the question is asked based on entrepreneurial collaboration and networking, “Can you explain the key partnerships or networks you engage with and how they contribute to your business growth?”

According to respondent E, entrepreneurs use international collaborations, internet marketing, and attendance at travel expos to find and reach overseas markets. Regulatory restrictions, global competition held, and variations in global demand were among the difficulties mentioned. By emphasizing local experiences, customizing packages to regional tastes, and offering multilingual services, entrepreneurs adapt their offerings. Thematic patterns indicated that the key to successful export-oriented growth lies in proactive market research and adaptable service design. Moving to the respondent B. The answer clarified, "Our primary strengths are our food-making procedures and recipes." "We are aware of the increasing demand for our spice powders, curry mixes, and chemical-free dry food packaging. We attend travel expos and exhibitions because they offer excellent opportunities for our items to be displayed. To increase exposure and competition, this story emphasizes the entrepreneur's focus on product quality, market awareness, and proactive participation in promotional events.

"International collaboration is something many entrepreneurs overlook," the respondent A noted. "We, as entrepreneurs from five countries, have formed a close network. Since we specialize in organizing spiritual tours for pilgrims, this collaboration is highly advantageous. Sometimes, long trips include multiple religious sites across countries, and we receive valuable support from international mentors." This narrative of respondent F emphasizes the entrepreneur's strategic use of cross-border partnerships and networking to enhance service offerings and strengthen business operations.

Having a strong collaboration and global network is highly potential in making the tourism sector progress. Empirical research highlights the importance of market development and export-focused strategies for rising in the field of tourism-driven export enterprises in industrialized nations. According to Kumar (2025), SMTEs are essential in mitigating the effects of climate change, and to stay competitive, they must strategically internationalize ideas into action. Similar findings were reported by Rendika (2019), who found that institutional distance moderates the favorable effects of adaptation to foreign markets, such as tourism, on entrepreneurial performance, highlighting the significance of customized approaches for global-tourism industrial success. Chishty et al. (2025) identified important drivers of tourism-driven strategies, indicating that understanding global dynamics is crucial for successful expansion of the global tourism market and entrepreneurial development. Together, these results imply that the success and sustainability of tourism businesses in developed nations depend on a mix of planned export operations, focused market identification, and market adaptation.

Risk and uncertainty-related concerns in tourism-entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurs in tourism-driven enterprises were examined through a risk management construct revealed by the question: “What are the major risks or challenges your business faces, and how do you manage or overcome them?” Entrepreneurs frequently emphasized the value of working with tourism-export associations, tourism boards, and government organisations. Co-marketing campaigns on tourism and exports, training courses to modify tourism entrepreneurial traits, and regulatory advice and consultation for the tourism sector were all implemented through partnerships with global clients. According to the report, networking and cooperative strategies are essential for expanding one's credibility and influence in global markets. According to all respondents, strong stakeholder engagement supports the expansion of the tourism industry as a whole and corporate growth.

“Earlier, we sold natural rubber and leather-based products to three or four countries,” the respondent C explained. “Now, we export semi-finished items such as cotton raw materials, rubber sheets, coir rolls, and wood essence to nine or ten countries. After forming a partnership with Italy, we received additional valuable orders from associated countries that produce finished products from our materials.” This narrative highlights the entrepreneur’s strategic use of partnerships and international networks to expand market reach and diversify export offerings.

The answer said by respondent E “The political environment has a big impact on how we do business, even beyond our capabilities.” For instance, our operations have been adversely affected by changes in presidential leadership in certain countries. The political climate and stakeholders' responses in various nations frequently dictate our company's course. We have occasionally had to reroute our shipments to other nations abruptly. The entrepreneur's knowledge of external hazards and the necessity of strategic adaptation in traversing global marketplaces are highlighted in this story.

In the Sri Lankan tourism context, seasonal variations in demand, economic downturns, natural disasters, and competition were among the main hazards to be noted (Ministry of Tourism, 2025). To reduce these risks, entrepreneurs mentioned tactics include investing in digital marketing, keeping pricing flexible, and diversifying target markets. Resilience and proactive risk management are crucial elements of sustainable export-oriented operations in the hotel and resort industry, according to thematic coding. “We face a high risk due to seasonal changes and fluctuating yields,” respondent B explained. “Sea resources, in particular, are affected by time lags, regulations, and seasonal availability. There have been instances where demand increased, but we did not have enough stock of sea

resources to meet export requirements.” This narrative illustrates the entrepreneur’s recognition of operational risks and the challenges of managing supply in a season-dependent industry.

“Since agricultural products are largely beyond our control, we face significant challenges,” the respondent E explained. “We have cashew farms in three locations and peanut and soybean fields in two others, but due to unpredictable climate changes, the yields often do not meet the expected quantity or quality required for export.” changing to another farming mode and adopting to new technology is not easier” This narrative highlights the entrepreneur’s awareness of climate-related risks and the vulnerability of agricultural supply chains in export-oriented operations.

Turtor (2025) found that during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Middle East tourism sector and its enterprises experienced major operational disruptions, highlighting the need for proactive risk assessment and mitigation. Mahembe (2025) presented an Operational Risk Management (ORM) suitable and backup plans enhance enterprise continuity in times of emergency. Additionally, in order to improve the tourism industry's long-term resilience, the World Bank (2020) highlights a Resilient Tourism Framework that incorporates risk assessment, preparedness, response, and recovery measures. The emerging theories imply that an entrepreneurial proactivity and the contextual knowledge of the economy, society, politics, technology, and global law are essential to the sustainability of entrepreneurs. Understanding the concurrent nature of economic and building risks and developing risk-aversion strategies would help entrepreneurs sustain in the global tourism field. Further, external shocks such as financial crises, health crises, and global inflation require valid predictive contingency plans, which are always required by entrepreneurs to sustain in the sector (Research & International relations division, 2025).

Economic concerns related to tourism-entrepreneurship

The economic support measures were questioned by entrepreneurs through the question: “In what ways does your business contribute to revenue growth, employment, and the broader tourism economy?” Every respondent believed that their businesses made a substantial contribution to regional development, foreign exchange profits, and local employment. As concrete measures of impact, entrepreneurs cited revenue growth, increased foreign visitor arrivals, and local supplier participation. In line with national tourist development goals, thematic research revealed that hotels and resorts with strategically driven, export-focused operations are essential for fostering economic growth.

According to the answer of Respondent A, "we make a good living that enables us to provide for our families and participate in certain welfare initiatives." "We occasionally receive invitations to universities, where we have the chance to share our experiences and stories, encouraging students to pursue self-employment and entrepreneurship." This story demonstrates the entrepreneur's dual emphasis on societal and personal effect, as well as their function in guiding and motivating aspiring business owners.

The responder F said, "Being in the hotel industry, we currently employ nearly 48 staff across operations in three venues." In addition to recognizing our colleagues' efforts and the community's support, this demonstrates the success and growth of our business. We offer attractive benefits to our staff, which encourage them to give their best work and attract additional business. This story emphasizes the entrepreneur's focus on community involvement, employee welfare, and corporate expansion as critical factors influencing organizational success.

According to empirical research in the field of tourism-entrepreneurial studies, tourism-related businesses have a major positive impact on the economy by creating jobs, generating income, and having wider sectoral effects (Arachchi & gnanapala, 2020). By involving rural suppliers, generating employment, and attracting foreign exchange, tourism SMEs, in particular, promote local economic activity, which enhances the day-to-day income of livelihoods. Strategic entrepreneurial practices, including market orientation, innovation, and export-focused strategies, that enable businesses to seize new opportunities and grow globally are frequently associated with revenue growth. further tourism-related businesses stimulate growth in retail, transportation, and agriculture, thereby strengthening their influence on regional and national economies and GDP (Nagendrakumar & Lokeshwara, 2024). These results imply that tourism-entrepreneurial strategies significantly influence sectoral development and economic success in the tourism industry.

Entrepreneurial strategic concerns on export-driven performance

However, in the field of tourism and tourism-driven exports, global market orientation is the main focus of strategies that highlight entrepreneurial competitive skills, and this is accomplished through ongoing market research and analysis. To increase global competitiveness, tourism-driven innovation and differentiation strategies prioritize tourism-entrepreneurial practices, digital adoption, service innovation, and product originality (Research & international relationship division, 2025). To successfully enter foreign markets, market expansion strategies take into account the target audience,

cultural differences, and the global backdrop. Through systematic tourism-entrepreneurial strategic alliances and international clients' networks that facilitate information exchange and resource optimization, collaboration and networking tactics promote sustainability (Ranatunge, 2025). Proactively identifying potential local-global risks and enhancing organizational export resilience to address uncertainty are key components of risk management. Lastly, to reflect the wider socioeconomic impact of tourism-entrepreneurial activity, tourism-driven economic contribution initiatives seek to generate income, create jobs in the tourism and export industries, and enhance local communities and collaborative engagement. Due to differences in timing, intention, and research scope, these findings may not be exactly the same as those of earlier empirical studies of tourism-entrepreneurship, but they do reflect the practical realities of entrepreneurship in the contemporary setting. They offer a thorough foundation for understanding how export-focused business entrepreneurs can create and implement strategies that are both successful and appropriate to the given setting.

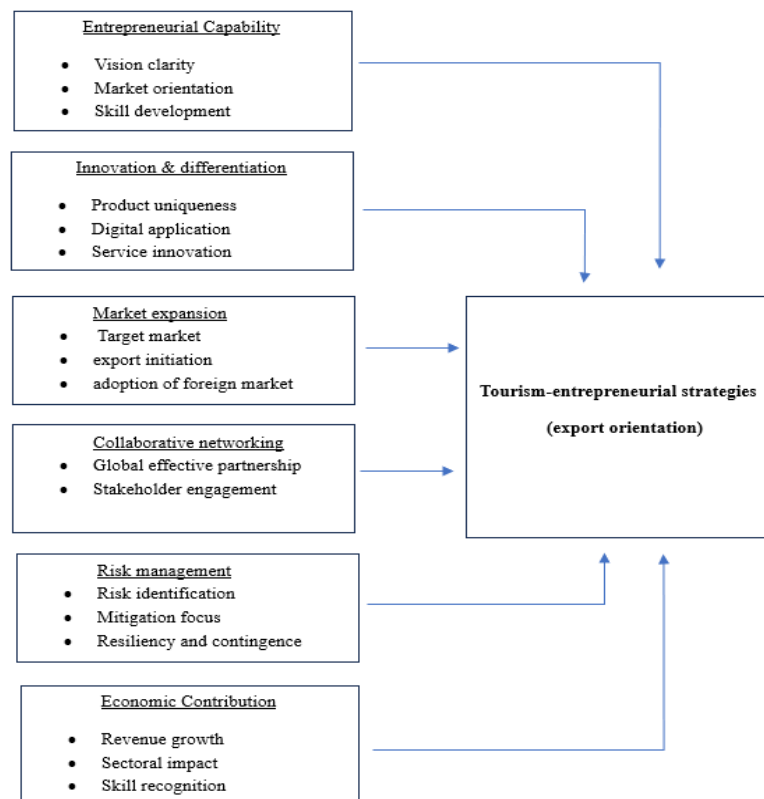


Figure: proposed strategic framework

Conclusion

Despite tourism being noted as the major contributor to Sri Lanka's economy, the study examines the relationship between export-oriented tourism and overall economic growth, as well as tourism-driven entrepreneurial methods, including tourism-driven innovation, tourism-market orientation, and tourism-based sustainability. The majority of existing research focuses on discrete elements or macro-level indicators, which are not effective for establishing a clear connection between enterprise-level entrepreneurial strategy and export performance. This disparity limits knowledge of how business owners can boost competitiveness, attract international tourists, and generate steady foreign exchange. Entrepreneurial techniques in export-oriented tourism and their contribution to Sri Lanka's economic growth have been experimentally evaluated in this study. The study's results verify that innovation and distinction, market expansion, cooperative networks, risk management, and economic contribution are the main factors driving entrepreneurial success in the tourism industry. further, the study emphasizes the growing significance of international integration, eco-innovation, digital adoption, and cultural congruence as new strategic elements. added to that, entrepreneurs face other constraints, such as low levels of computer literacy, limited financial resources, a lack of policy backing, and difficulties in establishing long-lasting global tourist alliances, especially in the field of emerging tourism and exports. These limitations highlight the necessity of focused actions from tourism-based enterprises, export-oriented businesses, tourism-driven entrepreneurs, and the respective policymakers. Adopting a workable tourism-driven entrepreneurial strategy would undoubtedly strengthen economic support and lay the foundation for the sustainable development of the Sri Lankan economy. In the end, tourist entrepreneurship proves to be a crucial driver of long-term, steady economic growth in the country.

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