



DESIGNING A FUNCTIONAL AND COMFORTABLE SAFARI WEAR COLLECTION FOR YOUNG FEMALE TOURISTS IN SRI LANKA

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Sri Lanka is globally recognised for its wildlife, creating an increasing opportunity to engage young female tourists through fashion that respects both cultural and environmental aspects. As a result, a safari apparel line has been developed, drawing inspiration from the Sri Lankan leopard (*Panthera pardus kotiya*). This study examines the overlap of fashion and the safari tourism sector in Sri Lanka, concentrating on designing comfortable and modest travel garments for young women aged 25–30 from abroad who visit Sri Lanka as a safari location. The main goal of this project is to create a functional and visually appealing collection of safari clothing suitable for the spring and summer months in Sri Lanka while addressing the needs of fashion without compromising environmental concerns. A customer survey with 105 international female participants, including both past and potential visitors to Sri Lanka, revealed a demand for chic and practical safari clothing and highlighted the lack of a local safari apparel brand. These insights were instrumental in identifying the target demographic and guiding the design process. The theme was selected based on Sri Lanka's prominent position as a popular travel destination and current initiatives aimed at revitalising its tourism sector. By connecting this collection to one of the nation's most significant natural attractions—the safari experience—the project seeks to make a meaningful contribution to both the fashion industry and tourism. The Sri Lankan leopard, a native and endangered species, serves as the central influence, with its textures, rosette patterns, earthy hues, and agility shaping the design's visual and structural features. The collection incorporates breathable, skin-friendly materials like cotton twill to provide comfort in high UV conditions. Ayurvedic textiles are also included to reduce skin irritation and ensure sun protection. Moreover, methods such as screen printing, braiding with reeds, and separable garment components are utilised to enhance the wearer's experience and increase the versatility of the designs. Beyond just fashion, this project aims to foster environmentally friendly tourism and elevate awareness regarding wildlife conservation. By blending design innovation with cultural and ecological mindfulness, this collection not only fulfils the practical requirements of travellers but also honours Sri Lanka's natural legacy.

Keywords: safari wear, Leopard, Ayurvedic textiles, tourism industry

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INTRODUCTION

Fashion and travel are two dynamic sectors that continuously transform. As widely recognised, Sri Lanka is an internationally celebrated destination for wildlife, which presents a growing opportunity to attract young female travellers through fashion that is both culturally and environmentally conscious. Given Sri Lanka's vast biodiversity and the rising number of tourists, there is a prominent gap in the local market for safari clothing designed for young international women that is inspired by safaris, adaptable to the climate, and meets both functional and fashionable needs.

Despite initial research indicating that a majority of foreign visitors participate in wildlife tourism, they often encounter difficulties in sourcing appropriate clothing that meets their demands for modesty, comfort, and durability for outdoor safari experiences. Furthermore, eco-friendly design approaches are largely absent from Sri Lankan culture. This project aims to create a ladies' wear safari line that aligns with the aesthetic, climate, and emotional requirements of young foreign ladies visiting Sri Lanka. Additionally, it serves to honour and reflect Sri Lanka's natural heritage and biodiversity, particularly drawing inspiration from the Sri Lankan Leopard (*Panthera pardus kotiya*) as the central visual and conceptual focus. The integration of elements such as natural ayurvedic fabrics, culturally representative techniques, and eco-friendly values rendered this project both timeless and significant within the ever-evolving landscape of fashion design and tourism.

METHODOLOGY

This project mainly focuses on creating a collection of comfortable and modest safari clothing, inspired by the Sri Lankan Leopard, tailored for young female foreign travellers in aged 25 to 30 who are visiting Sri Lanka. A mixed-methods research approach was conducted, combining both qualitative and quantitative elements to understand consumer needs and guide towards the positive process. Here, the quantitative data were gathered by an online survey or a Google Form questionnaire. The sample group included 105 international female participants primarily from the UK, USA, Canada and Rumania, under the age group of 25–30. They consist of individuals who have already visited Sri Lanka or who are strongly drawn to safari tourism. When handling the questionnaire, it focused on the lifestyle, behaviour, and the preferences of the participants carefully. Not only that it focused on safari tourism trends, climatic considerations, animal symbolism, fashion history, as well as practical design experiments in Sri Lanka. These experiments involved fabric testing

(Ayurvedic Fabric), print development (Screen Printing), braiding technique (Reeds leaves braiding), toile creation, and prototype sampling plus eco-friendly accessories (coconut-based, wooden, natural stone adornments) to provide good comfort, ventilation and aesthetic value for the final collection.

The Safari wear collection, featuring modest style, comfort, and durability for outdoor safari adventures, has received 85% approval from survey respondents. This strong approval rating indicates the collection's potential for market success and lays the groundwork for future development and marketing strategies. A competitive analysis of brands in Sri Lanka revealed insights into trends, customer feelings, and factors like design attractiveness, fabric quality, colour choices, and eco-friendly practices. The research aims to identify gaps in product offerings and areas where traditional Sri Lankan craftsmanship is not adequately represented.

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

This collection features the endemic and endangered Sri Lankan leopard (Figure 1: (a)), inspired by its solitary habits, camouflage, and versatility. The collection incorporates the leopard's unique fur pattern, muscular skin, and earthy colour tones into fabric prints and garment silhouettes.



Figure 1: Concept, design & product development steps: (a) Inspiration: “Sri Lankan Leopard”, (b) concept & design development pages, (c) Handmade eco-friendly accessories (coconut-based, wooden, natural stone adornments, reed accessories)

The Google survey included 105 foreign female participants, with most of them belonging to the 25–30 age group, who had previously visited Sri Lanka or were interested in visiting Sri Lanka revealed that 64.8% have been on safari at least 1-2 times in their life, and over 96.2% prefer jungle safari locations in Sri Lanka. Earthy-tone fabrics were preferred for safari outfits. Lightweight, breathable fabrics such as cotton and linen were the most preferred, with over 75% of participants favouring clothing silhouettes as trousers and jackets for safari travel to ensure free body movement and a sense of body protection. The survey also emphasizes Sri Lanka’s strong appeal as a safari destination.

A collection of six safari outfits was developed considering practical travelling requirements in Sri Lanka, incorporating eco-friendly natural materials. Final range of six outfits was included with cargo pants, cotton utility jackets, leopard-printed safari shirts, wide-leg shorts, wrap skirts, crop tops, raincoats, and belted pleated dresses. Materials like cotton twill, PVC, and artificial leather were chosen for

comfort, durability, sustainability, and skin protection. Sustainable practices were reflected in the accessories and trims. (Figure 1 (c)).

Techniques Used

The collection combines innovative and traditional methods, using screen printing for custom leopard rosette prints and braiding techniques for accessories. The use of indigenous reed leaves promotes local artisanal practices in Sri Lanka and supports the struggling industry. Ayurvedic fabrics, made from cotton twill and dyed with herbal treatments, offer skin-soothing properties and UV protection. Many garments feature separable elements like zip-off sleeves and detachable pants, allowing for adaptability to changing weather and modesty preferences. Figure 2 shows the two main techniques practised to develop collection as ayurvedic fabric dyeing and Reed braiding practices, to develop fashion accessories.

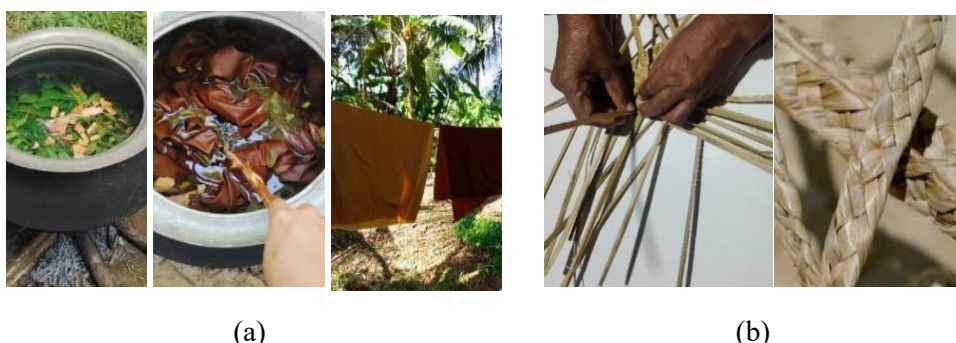


Figure 2: Value added areas to fashion collection (a) Ayurvedic fabric dyeing process, (b) Reed braiding practices

Toile Development and Final looks of the fashion collection

In this stage, the toile development was crucial for evaluating the silhouettes and practical features of each garment prior to reaching the final design. Comprehensive technical drawings were created to illustrate the journey from concept and inspiration to the completed collection to start the final production. Patterns were created using CAD design software and modified multiple times to guarantee the desired fit while ensuring both functionality and aesthetic appeal (considering walking, sitting, ventilation, and appropriate coverage for cultural sensitivity, among others). Consequently, each outfit was treated as a feasibility study, utilising muslin for testing shape and volume before being produced in the final fabric (Cotton Twill) with the addition of dyes, prints, and trims (Figure 3).



(a) (b) (c) (d) (e) (f)
Figure 3: Live modelling for the final six designs outfits: (a-f: six looks).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This project significantly contributes to the Sri Lankan fashion industry by introducing a niche safari wear collection that integrates ecological principles and cultural identity. Addressing a gap in the local market, it promotes eco-friendly tourism and supports wildlife conservation. The collection offers commercial potential for garment makers, tourism stakeholders, and traditional industries. It also serves as a global reference for fashion educators and professionals in eco-design, biodiversity, and cultural research. With an 85% customer approval rate, further enhancements are recommended, including expanding colour choices, sustainable materials, customisation, improved marketing strategies, customer feedback systems, and strengthened research and development.

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