

Importance of ecotourism in Sri Lanka: A case study of Mirissa

Extended Abstract

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Background

Ecotourism is defined as 'responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people involves interpretation and education' (TIES 2015; The International ecotourism society). Sri Lankan ecotourism is a growing niche the general tourism sector. It gives tourists the opportunity of enjoying multifaceted attractions such as the high mountains and the warm and broad sea beaches. In addition, they can also appreciate the co-existence of world's greatest religions (Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity and Islam), magnificent traditions of glorious ancient civilizations such as artistic monuments and the incredible diversity of landscapes, climates, flora and fauna with unparalleled bio-diversity. Among them, the beach is the main focus which can be used for tourism. It is possible to use the 4R approach including the sun, sea, and hospitality all along the beaches particularly around Mirissa, Hikkaduwa, Jaffana.

Objectives

The main purpose of this study is to find about the tourism in Mirissa area and to understand how it happens. To understand why tourists are visiting this area increased significantly in recent times. In addition to find about the progressive change in life style of local persons who interact with tourists. This would pave the way to and identify the environmental, social economic and cultural significance growing eco-tourism.

Methodology

Collecting data for this was approached in two ways. They are divided as primary and secondary sources.

Under primary sources, a questionnaire survey was conducted with about 50 families in the study area along with 5in-depth interviews. Available official documents, publications and Web sources were used as secondary sources.

Results

When one examines information and data available at tourist development authorities it is clear that some 575,000 tourists have visited the Island in 2015. It has increased significantly around Mirissa area primarily due to the attraction for whale watching. It was found that nearly 70% of tourists who come to the Mirissa area are Europeans. In particular an increment of Russians (98%). About 80% percent of tourists come in groups and most of them are couples. Local residents say that most of tourists come to this area in December, January, and February. It was also found that some 58% of tourists prefer to enjoy sea food in beach side hotels. The boat fee for a sea safari is around Rs. 1000 and it has decreased recently. This is one of the reasons for increasing tourist arrivals. It is also reflected by the widening of facilities of them in Mirissa area. According to the legal requirement of tourism in Mirissa, a tourist should pay Rs. 5000 Government tax.

Conclusions & Recommendations

The study shows that tourism increases in Mirissa mainly during December, January, February months that mark the winter season in Europe. Most of tourists come to Mirissa beach to enjoy the beautiful beach and to see Whales. Seeing Whale is the main purpose of most tourists from European countries. Most of local residents earn money that also contributes to economic development in this area. It is suggested that use of tax revenues must be utilized for further development of tourism.

Keywords: Ecotourism, civilization, whale watching, taxes for development

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