

Islands of Jaffna District: Best potential for promotion of nature-based ecotourism

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Abstract

Ecotourism is responsible travel to natural areas, which conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people. Jaffna District includes seven islands, all of which are associated with the Jaffna Lagoon. They possess large extents of mangroves, birding grounds, salt marsh areas, and beaches that have a high potential for promotion of ecotourism. The potential of these islands has never been evaluated probably due to the three decade long civil war. The objective of the present study was to evaluate the ecotourism potential of the islands of Jaffna District. Ecotourism potential analyses were done based on a study carried out from 2013 to 2017. Multi Criteria Decision Method and its criteria ranking method in GIS were used. The evaluating process for ecotourism site conducted based on six chosen criteria including bird species diversity, tourist preferences, proximity to residential areas, proximity to accommodation, distance from roads, and scenic beauty. These factors were selected based on the literature and professionals' opinions. From whole of the Jaffna sites' ranking analysis, potential status of island areas was derived. Suitability analyses were based on four categories such as greater flamingo, other waterbirds, mangroves and beaches. Based on these four categories, mangroves of Mandaitivu, Sirudivu and Kuruchaditivu come under high potential areas. Areas such as Mandaitivu, Allaipiddy, Mankumban, Araly junction and Saravanai come under high potential areas based on flamingos and other common waterbirds. The study areas have 55 species of waterbirds and at least 2451 individuals of greater flamingo. Beaches such as Chatty, Casuarina, and Delft also represent high potential status. Lack of accessibility, ecotourism promotional activities and other infrastructure facilities negatively impact on ecotourism development of the Islands. There is also a great potential for the participation of local people for promotion of ecotourism in islands of Jaffna peninsula, elevating their standards of livelihood.

Keywords: *Ecotourism, Greater flamingo, Islands, Waterbird divers*

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