



## ABSTRACT

## Visitor expectations and Stakeholder involvements in eco-tourism sites in Sri Lanka.

By

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I do hereby certify that, research thesis on " Visitor expectations and Stakeholder involvements in eco-tourism sites in Sri Lanka" carried out by Mr. K.H. Ranjith Wijayawardana (PGDM/ 2001/141) under my supervision.

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## ABSTRACT

Over the past few decades, tourism has become an outstanding source of foreign exchange in Sri Lanka. Opening up of new tourism markets in Asia made the tourism industry a highly competitive within the region. Recently, Sri Lanka has recognized the need of diversifying tourism markets and the need in developing eco-tourism sites in Sri Lanka as a strategy to attract tourists for unique ecological resources while generating income.

In Sri Lanka, tour operators and hotel groups also organize various types of activities for tourists in selected locations and is getting popular. Understanding the current needs, the Government of Sri Lanka has identified several locations to develop as eco-tourism destinations. Sinharaja forest, Horton plain, Mutturajawela wetland and Ritigala forest are some of the locations identified for this purpose. However no study was done on the suitability of these sites to develop as eco designations. Therefore, this study aims at evaluating four designated sites from the green marketing perspective.

Considering the total number of visitors arrived at each location on the day of study was considered as the population. A random sample of 200 visitors were interviewed at all four locations in this study. A structured questionnaire was used to gather information from the visitors. In addition to that, observations were also made in order to supplement the information gathered through the survey.

The Sinharaja, a popular destination for nature lovers has not developed yet in a way to attract both foreigners as well as local tourists. Lodging facilities provided by the Department of Forest Conservation at Siharaja is inadequate to satisfy visitor demand for lodging. Further, quality of lodging facilities available there is substandard. Providing opportunities to the community in the buffer zone of Sinharaja to provide food and lodging to tourists would enhance the trickle down effect of the money invested in this industry. However, efforts taken to control visitor damages and to provide tour guide services yet to be improved.

Horton Plain is a location where visitors prefer to stay near the park reserve. However, inferior quality accommodation available at present has failed to retain foreigners. Furthermore, capacity of accommodation available there is not adequate even for local

tourists. Cafeteria service, resting facilities, toilet facilities are the most affected needs, according to visitors. Since there is no inhabited area in the close proximity impact of the reserve as well as the impact of tourism on the community found to be negligible.

Ritigala forest and archeological reserve is another location where visitor facilities are ignored at present, due to absence of a proper plan to develop the site. Either Department of Wild Life Conservation or Department of Archeology should take actions to provide basic needs such as drinking water, toilets and cafeteria facility by implementing a ticketing system at this site. Concept of eco-lodges for foreigners and dormitory type accommodations for locals in the buffer zone would satisfy the desires of visitors while furthering the community's involvement in sustainable development of tourism.

Muthurajawela 'Marsh' found to be the only location where the concept of eco-tourism were satisfactorily adapted under the management of a voluntary organization. Community there is interested in organizing eco-tourism activities. The level of conservation, community involvement, community benefits, stakeholder interactions, visitor facilities and provision of information are relatively developed at Muthurajawela than at other locations studied.

In general, accommodation facilities existing in the buffer zones at all sites need to be improved. On the other hand, improving guiding and educational facilities need to receive greater attention of the officer in-charge at Ritigala a potential eco-destination. In addition to the above at Ritigala, accommodation facilities should be developed in the nearby village in order to enhance community participation. The most crucial determinant of the future of all these sites is the strong links between key stakeholders. So relevant authorities should take necessary steps to establish such links at there earliest convenience. However the Ceylon Tourist Board should pay more attention to develop these sites in future.

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