

## **PERSPECTIVES OF RESIDENTS TOWARDS POST-WAR TOURISM DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES IN JAFFNA AREA**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Tourism is one of the leading industries in the global economy, and in Sri Lanka, tourism is the third largest contributor to the foreign exchange earnings of the economy. According to the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (2018), tourist arrivals to Sri Lanka during the year 2018 amounted to 2,333,796, with a year-to-year increase of 10.3 percent. In Sri Lanka, especially in Jaffna, tourism is a fast-growing industry after thirty years of civil war, which ended in 2009. According to Tony and Etienne (2002) and Vannarith (2008), tourist arrivals to countries such as Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Germany, and France have continuously increased. Further, many scholars have stated that many battlefields in Asia and other regions are becoming popular as tourist destinations (William & Keir, 2009; Scheyvens & Momsen, 2008; Timothy & Boyd, 2006). According to Sharpley and Ussi (2014), tourism promotion is a critical component that uplifts the economy and the community. Relevant to that, in Jaffna, this industry has gained more concern. However, the industry in the area faces many challenges as it tries to become a leading tourist destination. The significant challenges are a lack of infrastructure facilities, poor institutional arrangement, ineffective marketing promotion, lack of interaction between tourists and the local community, poor environmental protection schemes, and limited public-private participation. Thus, this study explores residents' perspectives toward post-war tourism development activities in the Jaffna district. As secondary objectives, this study examines the potential pitfalls of developing the tourism industry in Jaffna and residents' perspectives on the impact of postwar tourism in Jaffna. Pusparatnam (2014) mentioned that Jaffna culture, historical background, heritage, and war memories are the best tools to attract tourists. The most famous cultural identity of the Tamil community, Jaffna District (JD), is situated in the Northern Province, 462 km from the capital of Sri Lanka. JD consists of 15 divisional secretariat divisions. The total district population is around 610,640, 78.8% of the population is rural, and the remaining 21.2% live in urban areas.

### **METHODOLOGY**

This study has used the qualitative approach. According to Gomm (2008), Miles and Huberman (1994), and Ritchie and Spencer (2002), this approach is the best for studying social phenomena. It realized that the best way to gather knowledge from people directly and indirectly related to the industry is through interviews in the Jaffna district. This study was developed based on primary and secondary data. Primary data was derived from the interviews and the secondary data from the documents such as annual reports of the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority and Northern Province. The study's sample size was fourteen respondents comprising seven stakeholders of the tourism industry and seven others not in the

tourism industry, which was selected using the convenient sampling technique. Semi-structured interviews were undertaken. This method was used by Lew (2014), Daskon and Binns (2009), and Becken (2013) in order to gain knowledge of different stakeholders. The primary and secondary data were analyzed using the thematic analysis technique.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

When discussing the importance of peace for tourism development in Jaffna, it includes; the three-decade-long civil war ended on 18th May 2009. Many tourist destinations closed during the war are now open to local and international tourists. The initial reaction to this situation was many local tourists visiting the large city of Jaffna in northern Sri Lanka. Shortly after the opening of this area, about 85,000 tourists visited here in the first two months after the war's end. The moment behind this trend is transforming this public motivation into a successful reconciliation process. When discussing the challenges towards the post-war tourism development activities in Jaffna, based on the responses, the researcher found that the main challenge towards tourism development in Jaffna is poor planning. The government should formulate tourism plans in collaboration with the tourism operators to be more responsive.

According to interviewee 2, the culture of Jaffna is another big challenge when developing the tourism sector in this region. Generally, the people of Jaffna always give high priority to their culture. However, most of the people in Jaffna still fear that the tourism development activities in Jaffna will significantly erode the culture of Jaffna. In Jaffna, most of the tourism-related industries and government departments do not consider the actual residents' needs and wants. For example, if they develop a particular area as a tourism destination in the north, they should decide what tourism is essential. The northern tourism bureau recognizes the religion that characterizes the region. They use culture and religion as a tool to promote tourism in the north. According to the residents' responses, the researcher found that the residents of Jaffna are adamant that the post-war tourism development activities in Jaffna should not impact their culture. Considering the residents' responses, the lack of community engagement is another big challenge to developing tourism and related activities in Jaffna. They view a lack of social engagement as a big challenge. Moreover, they said people on the ground do not want to engage in tourism or tourism-related business.

When analyzing the perception of the economic impact of post-war tourism in Jaffna, according to the resident's point of view, the researcher found that the level of tourism-related infrastructure development in Jaffna is not fully satisfied. They mentioned that the basic level of infrastructure development such as road, electricity, and communication facilities are ok here. However, the development of the tourism-related infrastructure is comparably less than the other tourist destinations in Sri Lanka.

So the tourism-related businesses and local government in Jaffna need to analyze the opportunities properly, and they can identify the facilities required to implement the plans. These include healthcare, waste management, water management, transportation, and recreation. Access to the above facilities is key to creating a sense of belonging among tourists. According to participants' statements, the diverse population in Jaffna gets various employment opportunities according to their qualifications. Moreover, unemployed graduates have found employment in various fields of tourism in Jaffna. Thus, the tourism industry, which employs many people in this region, is a significant source of employment in Jaffna.

Tourism can increase the cost of goods. This is the current situation in Jaffna. The cost of goods and services is twice the average price. It is a consequence of the tourism industry in any destination. The same can be said of real estate sales. Jaffna is now facing a shortage of land, especially around the city and coastal areas.

As the analyzed data about the perception of the residents on the socio-cultural impact of post-war tourism in Jaffna, it is found that, generally, domestic tourism causes a change in revenue. According to this statement, after the post-war tourism development, more and more domestic travelers are visiting Jaffna. As a result, those who earned low income in the past are now earning a higher income, leading to better living standards, not only it has led to enhancing the infrastructure facilities in these areas. Preservation of the culture is another positive outcome of the post-war tourism development in Jaffna. The tourists visiting Jaffna are spreading the culture of Jaffna to others. Moreover, tourism helps to preserve the art and folk of Jaffna Tamils. The tourism industry organizes many events, such as exhibitions and festivals, to preserve Jaffna's culture, art, and folk arts. Such kinds of dance and folk arts are unique to Tamil culture. Moreover, the monuments of historical significance are preserved by the tourism in Jaffna, such as King Sangiliyan's Statue, Ruins of King Sangiliyan's Minister's Residence, Kantharodai Archaeological monument, Jaffna Fort, Dutch Katchcheri Ruins, etc.

The post-war tourism development activities in Jaffna positively affect the socio-cultural context. It also negatively affects society and culture. Some illegal activities, such as alcohol and drug usage, gradually increase in Jaffna after the post-war tourism development. When analyzing the resident's perception of the environmental impact of post-war tourism in Jaffna, it is found that, due to the post-war tourism development activities, the perception of environmental protection has increased in the community of Jaffna. It is a sign of sustainable tourism development. Residents of Jaffna are interested in protecting the environment, including those directly and indirectly, engaging in the tourism industry. They know that protecting the environment can bring sustainability to the tourism industry and their lives.

Land pollution has become a significant problem in Jaffna because of tourism. The land is highly polluted by garbage. Moreover, Jaffna residents point out that most of the land pollution in Jaffna is caused by local rather than foreign tourists. Most of the local tourists throw trash everywhere.

The constructed themes based on the objectives of the study are as follows in Table 01.

Table 1 Construction of themes

Objective	Parental themes	Sub-themes
Objective 1	Jaffna after the civil war	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The importance of peace for the post-war tourism development in Jaffna</li> <li>• Challenges towards the post-war tourism development in Jaffna</li> </ul>
Objective 2	Resident's perception towards the impact of the post-war tourism activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Residents' perception of the economic' impact of post-war tourism in Jaffna</li> <li>• Resident s' perception of the sociocultural impact of post-war tourism in Jaffna</li> <li>• Resident s' perception of the environmental impact of post-war tourism in Jaffna</li> </ul>

## CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

According to the findings of this study, it can be concluded that peace played a vital role in the development of Jaffna's tourism industry after the civil war. The significant challenges of tourism development in Jaffna include; the strong culture and rituals of the descendants of Jaffna, poor tourism planning, and lack of community engagement in tourism-related activities. Further, the residents of Jaffna have solid cultural perceptions and demand cultural protection to a greater extent. Compared to the other districts, the infrastructure development in the tourism industry in Jaffna is deficient. Additionally, this study examined that the land of Jaffna is highly polluted by the local tourists than the foreign tourists through tourism and related activities. According to Dissanayake and Samarathunga (2021), there is a plethora of tourism potential within post-war Jaffna that includes both cultural and natural attractions: Hindu Kovils and Buddhist temples, colonial heritage, traditional cuisines and way of life, beaches, flora and fauna, and sceneries. The study further identified a lack of professionals, absence of a master plan, remoteness, poor infrastructure, and absence of tourist activities as the main obstacles to tourism development in Jaffna. The suggestions for the betterment of the tourism development in Jaffna based on the findings of this research include; implementing an action plan for tourism development with the corporation of the residents of the area, paying more attention to the development of infrastructure development, safeguarding the culture and unique identity of the Jaffna area while promoting them as attractions for tourism, implementation of the proper laws and regulations upon the use of land for tourism activities, provision of tourism-related awareness programs and educational programs to increase the involvement of residents on tourism activities and prepare a guide plan for the tourism development activities giving special consideration to the culture of the area.

**Keywords:** Community perception, Jaffna tourism, tourism impacts, tourism challenges, tourism development

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