

## Exploiting the Potential of Coconut Tourism; Market Analysis from the Stakeholders' Perspective

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Tourism has witnessed significant growth and evolution, embracing new concepts to engage diverse stakeholders. Niche tourism, which tailors specific products to cater to distinct tourist segments have emerged as a notable strategy. Sri Lankan coconut industry holds immense importance, serving as a crucial source of foreign exchange, employment, and sustenance in rural livelihoods. Exploiting the potential of coconut-related activities, coconut tourism can be developed as a niche tourism segment, encompassing sustainable, nature-based, and eco-friendly practices. Market analysis plays a pivotal role in creating successful tourism products, this study aims to identify the prospects and conduct a market analysis for the development of coconut tourism in Sri Lanka, considering the perspectives of key stakeholders involved in the coconut and tourism industries. Thus, primary data was collected through semi-structured interviews with 06 tourists in Ella, employing convenience sampling, and through the snowball sampling technique with 13 other key stakeholders. The qualitative approach and thematic analysis were applied to examine the transcribed data. The findings of this study based on SWOT analysis, a map of stakeholders and their role, value chain, and marketing mix under the 7p's to developing coconut tourism as a niche tourism segment in Sri Lanka. Further, the findings encompass that there are a number of strengths and opportunities rather than weaknesses and threats to developing coconut tourism as a niche tourism segment in Sri Lanka, with significant interest and power of the key stakeholders of Government Bodies and policymakers, Tourists, Travel agencies and tour operators, Accommodation providers, Coconut manufacturers, and exporters. Moreover, the findings of the study revealed the way private sector companies work with the government and civil society to add value to the development of coconut tourism in Sri Lanka with a clearly defined and clarified marketing mix for coconut tourism with significant components for each mix. Additionally, this study provides recommendations and technical insights to foster the growth of coconut tourism, harmonizing the coconut and tourism industries in Sri Lanka. The analysis of the market and optimal resource utilization facilitates the creation of new tourism products that cater to niche categories of tourists, offering a viable solution for the sustainable development of tourism in Sri Lanka under the concept of re-thinking tourism.

**Keywords:** Coconut Tourism, Niche Tourism, Market Analysis, Stakeholder Perspective, Sustainable Development

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