

Impact of Ancient Heritage on Ecotourism in Sri Lanka

D.N. Aloysius

Lecturer in English, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities
Rajarata University of Sri Lanka, Mihintale
aloysiusrjt@gmail.com

Introduction

At present, tourism industry in Sri Lanka makes an immense contribution to the national economy of the country. In other words, it has become one of the main foreign exchange sources. Tourism industry is directly related to archaeological history and biological diversity. Of those two aspects, archaeological history is very significant and rich in Sri Lanka and impact of developing archaeological sites can attract many foreigners to the country. The relationship between culture, heritage, the environment and tourism has received a great amount of attention throughout the world. Tourism has emerged as an instrument for employment generation, poverty alleviation and sustainable human development. It promotes international understanding and gives support to local handicrafts and cultural activities. It is an important segment of the country's economy, especially in terms of its contribution towards foreign exchange earnings, generation of additional income and creation of employment opportunities. According to the UNESCO, each member country is required to pledge to conserve cultural and natural sites. The Chamber of Tourism Industry was established with the view of supporting development of Tourism Industry in Sri

Lanka. With the dawn of peace, countries look at Sri Lanka as a country safe to visit. Travel advisories have been removed and international press has rated Sri Lanka as one of the best holiday destinations. Therefore, Sri Lanka can be seen as a country, which can achieve high level of economic growth. At present, 15,270 hotel rooms are available for the visiting guests. Plans are under way to construct a total number of 30-50,000 hotel rooms by the year, 2016. This will support to achieve the Government's target of 2.5 million tourist arrivals by the year 2016. At present, tourism industry is much confined to natural beauty including flora and fauna and related fields. Many archaeological sites in the country remain unexposed and undeveloped, which really can be developed and exposed to the tourists so that more foreign exchange can be channeled to Sri Lankan national income.

Objective of the Study

The objective of the present study is to find out the impact of ancient heritage on ecotourism in Sri Lanka. Offering market-linked long-term solutions, ecotourism provides effective economic incentives for conserving and enhancing bio-cultural diversity and helps to protect the natural and cultural heritage of Sri Lanka.

Literature Review

Ecotourism is fast becoming a popular mode of travel in the world today according to the survey conducted by K. Kris Hirst. The International Ecotourism Society describes it as responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people. Surveys over the past couple of decades indicate that nature and wild-life related travel has been increasing as part of the world-wide travel economy and certainly ecotourism falls into this category.

By increasing local capacity building and employment opportunities, ecotourism is an effective vehicle for empowering local communities around the world to fight against poverty and to achieve sustainable development.

With an emphasis on enriching personal experiences and environmental awareness through interpretation, ecotourism promotes greater understanding and appreciation for nature, local society, and culture.

One approach is through the integration of ecotourism with cultural heritage tourism that means travel directed toward experiencing local traditions, arts, and heritage while respecting the host community and its surrounding environment. Cultural heritage tourism is an important link that should be part of all ecotourism products and tour packages. People travel to see how other people live, to experience their neighborhoods and to understand the natural environments that define their existence. Culture and heritage sums up a community's beliefs and values—shared behavior acquired as the result of living within a group and a defined geographic area.

Ecotourism has become one of the fastest-growing sectors of the tourism industry, growing annually by 10–15% worldwide (Miller: 2007). One definition of ecotourism is the practice of low-impact, educational, ecologically and

culturally sensitive travel that benefits local communities and host countries (Honey: 1999).

Methodology

The present study is based on both primary and secondary data. Interviews and observation were the major tools used for collecting primary data while former surveys, reports relevant to the field, statistics related to the subject were used as secondary data.

Results, Findings and Conclusion

According to the survey conducted by K. Kris Hirst, over the past couple of decades indicates that nature and wild-life related travel has been increasing as part of the world-wide travel economy and certainly ecotourism falls into this category. He does not link ecotourism with the ancient places of archaeological and historical values. It was found that predominantly, at present there is a great tendency to promote ecotourism through two main phenomena, flora and fauna. In other words, natural beauty and wild life attract many tourists to the country. But, the most significant aspect related archaeological value seems to be ignored. It was revealed through interviews and observation that the majority of the tourists visit Sri Lanka for natural beauty, beautiful waterfalls, forests, wild life, attractive beaches and lovely up country scenery. Much less tourists seem to be interested in archaeological sites. Only those, who visit Sri Lanka for their academic purposes are interested in visiting the archaeological sites, which contribute to their research activities. This attitude should be changed. It was further revealed that some tourists are reluctant to visit the historical places of archaeological value as they don't have adequate security in those areas. And, the other disadvantage is that some most significant places are not exposed to them.