

Changing Lifestyle on Tourism: Special reference to Ratnapura District

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Abstract

This research study investigates the influence of changing lifestyles on tourism in the Ratnapura District, Sri Lanka. The research methodology employs a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. Primary data is gathered through interviews, surveys, and observations to capture the perspectives of both residents and tourists. Secondary data from academic papers, government reports, and tourism industry statistics are also utilized for in-depth analysis. The major objective of this study is to, identify the fluctuating nature of the tourism industry of the people who depend on the tourism industry. And the sub-objectives are, to study the present situation of the tourism industry in the study area, to identify the challenges to the employment/s, income generation, and lifestyle of the people who are involved in tourism, and to identify strategies to overcome the challenges to the employment/s of the people who are involved in tourism. The findings indicate that the changing lifestyle of Ratnapura District's inhabitants has led to various shifts in tourism demand and preferences. As the local community adopts modern lifestyles, there is a gradual departure from traditional cultural practices and attractions, affecting their representation in tourism offerings. Additionally, increased urbanization and westernization have influenced tourists' expectations and preferences, prompting a demand for more modernized and contemporary experiences. The study identifies key factors contributing to these lifestyle changes, such as increased internet connectivity, access to media, globalization, and economic growth. Furthermore, the paper explores the challenges faced by the tourism industry in adapting to these lifestyle changes and identifies potential strategies for sustainable tourism development.

Keywords: Tourism, Changing Lifestyles, Ratnapura, Problems, Solutions.

Introduction

As a tourism destination, Sri Lanka can compete positively with other destinations partly because of its crucial geographical position. Its strategic location in the Indian Ocean on the main air and sea routes between Europe and the Far East is an advantage to the country's positioning as a global logistics hub (Fernando, 2015). The pearl of the Indian Ocean, Sri Lanka, is situated in the middle of the ancient "Maritime Silk Road". As a result, Sri Lanka has played a significant role in overseas trade and tourism. When we move on to talk about the tourism of Sri Lanka the earliest tourist arrivals recorded in the history of tourism were mainly related to religious tourism such as worshipping shrines in the ancient capital of Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa or pilgrimage to Adam's peak (Fernando, 2015).

Sri Lanka is home to eight UNESCO World Heritage Sites, including several Buddhist and Hindu temples. According to the World Tourism Organization, Sri Lanka has the advantage of having 49 sites classified as unique attractions, 91 as rare attractions, 7 world heritage sites, and 6 of the 300 ancient monuments in the world (Silva C. d., 2000). These include the central highlands area comprising the Horton Plains National Park and Knuckles Conservation Forest, the Sinharaja Forest Reserve, the Dutch Fort in Galle, the Golden Temple of Dambulla, the Temple of Tooth in Kandy, and the Nallur Kandaswamy Temple in Jaffna (Fernando, 2015). Ratnapura district is one of the top-ranked tourist destinations located in Sri Lanka. Ratnapura is one of the major cities of Sri Lanka. The place is famous for being the gem trading center of Sri Lanka and hence derives its name 'Ratna' (gems) and 'Pura' (town). Ratnapura is home to many picturesque locations, temples, and gem mines. Those places are Sinharaja Forest Reserve, Udawalawe National Park, Boptah Ella Falls, Adam's Peak, Kitulgala, Maha Saman Devalaya, Bambarakanda Waterfalls, Gem Mines, Batadombalena and National Museum Of Ratnapura, etc. As a third-world developing country, tourism is uncertain and unstable. Especially because of this, there is a tendency to be exposed to external and internal shocks. Climate and weather factors, terrorist activities, and health

hazards (especially epidemics) have a direct impact on the economy of the people who live in the tourism industry.

In 2018, Sri Lanka was one of the top destinations in the world for foreign tourists, but the Easter bombings in April 2019 dealt a huge blow to the country's tourism sector. Authorities say there was a 70% drop in tourists after the attacks. According to the data, in the five months from May to September tourism fell 44.4% to 468,737 from 843,569 a year earlier (guardian, 2019). Though once again the tourism industry did start rising again the new virus pandemic (COVID-19) has stopped all the forms of transport which would pave no way for tourism. The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) expects a dip of about 25 percent or more in tourism earnings, with at least 50 million job losses worldwide, while Asia will account for about 30 million out of this (Miththapala, 2020). So in such situations what is the condition of people whose sole livelihood is the tourism industry? on the surface, though we see the downfall of the tourism industry has an immediate direct impact on airlines, hotels, restaurants, and retail, the hardest hit will be on the poor community dependent on tourism income in the rural regions of the country. There is uncertainty in engaging with the tourism sector because the Sri Lankan tourism industry has a season from November to April.

Tourism has a strong relationship with small and medium enterprises, providing entrepreneurial opportunities to those in low-income groups. It is also a lucrative channel for the self-employed. What is happening now is the loss of income fast creeping to the fishermen, farmers, local guides, small hotel owners, and three-wheel drivers. What could be the answer for these communities whose livelihood is based on tourism shouldn't there be alternatives? This article does pay attention to bringing out the challenging lifestyle of the tourism industry.

Though the economy of Sri Lanka is on the rise as a result of the tourism industry there is still an unnoticed problem due to this industry. On the surface, the tourism industry did bring about a lot of road developments, hotels, restaurants, developments in the transportation sector, the building of cities, and many more.

But when we look deeply into the impact of this industry, we could witness a larger effect on the people whose livelihood is the tourism industry. Due to several reasons, the tourism industry does go down, or sometimes the income due to this industry is only for a particular season. It is in such situations that problems do arise. When we look into the history of Sri Lanka it is no secret that during the past three decades, the tourism industry had few drawbacks. This was mainly due to the security situation which prevailed in the country. Further, the tourism industry was also affected due to the Tsunami catastrophe which occurred in 2004. Approximately 2/3rd of the coastal area including tourist infrastructure facilities was destroyed. So, in situations like these, the people whose livelihood was the tourism industry were in trouble and changed.

After the war, the tourism industry was on a rapid growth until the last year's incident which took place on the 21st of April. The bombing of churches and hotels had a very big impact on the tourism industry. The industry which was developing after the civil war did fall again. We could only witness a slow revival in the industry after the April 21st incident. But once again the industry does fall due to the breakout of the new coronavirus.

Furthermore, common political factors which affect the tourism industry are revolution, civil war, factional conflict, ethnic violence, religious turmoil, widespread riots, terrorism, nationwide strikes, protests, cross-national guerrilla warfare, world public opinion, repatriation restrictions, bureaucratic politics, leadership struggle, high inflation, border conflicts, high external debt service ratio, and creeping nationalization. Organizing elections frequently also create a threat to the tourism industry because during the election period in some places to control the situation curfews are implemented. These are inevitable problems in a country, which results in the fall of the tourism industry.

Every time Sri Lankan tourism has affected the people whose livelihood is based on tourism cannot be left to their fate. When we consider the aforementioned factors, it is obvious that we need some solutions and strategies. The research problem this

study focuses on is, why the lifestyle changes of the people who depend on the tourism industry due to fluctuation nature.

The major objective of this study is to, identify the fluctuating nature of the tourism industry of the people who depend on the tourism industry. And the sub-objectives are, to study the present situation of the tourism industry in the study area, to identify the challenges to the employment/s, income generation, and lifestyle of the people who are involved in tourism, and to identify strategies to overcome the challenges to the employment/s of the people who are involved in tourism.

Materials and methods

There are several sampling methods to collect primary data. Hence to achieve the target, 50 persons (the main livelihood depends on tourism) were selected through a simple random sampling method. It is collected the necessary data and information by providing a questionnaire to a simple randomly selected sample from the study area.

The study “Changing Lifestyle on Tourism” was done by using 50 persons randomly selected from the persons that were engaged in tourism-related occupations. Accordingly, this gathered data represent information about the lifestyle of tourism people. This is essential data for identifying challenging lifestyles in the tourism industry. Mainly, the research consists of both primary and secondary data, which is used to carry out the research. Primary data was collected by using survey and observation methods. Used questionnaires and direct interviews as techniques to collect primary data. As secondary data, research articles, books, magazines, newspapers, and the internet were used to collect secondary data.

Results and Discussion

The barriers faced by the people who depend on the tourism industry

As per the field survey conducted what I could witness is that the Ratnapura area contributes a lot to the industry of tourism. Furthermore, it could be said that many who are engaged in other forms of employment are also engaged in tourism alternatively. Though the tourism industry has developed there are many barriers faced by the people who are engaged in this field, and as a result, this results in the reduction of their income. The below graph shows the barriers of the people.

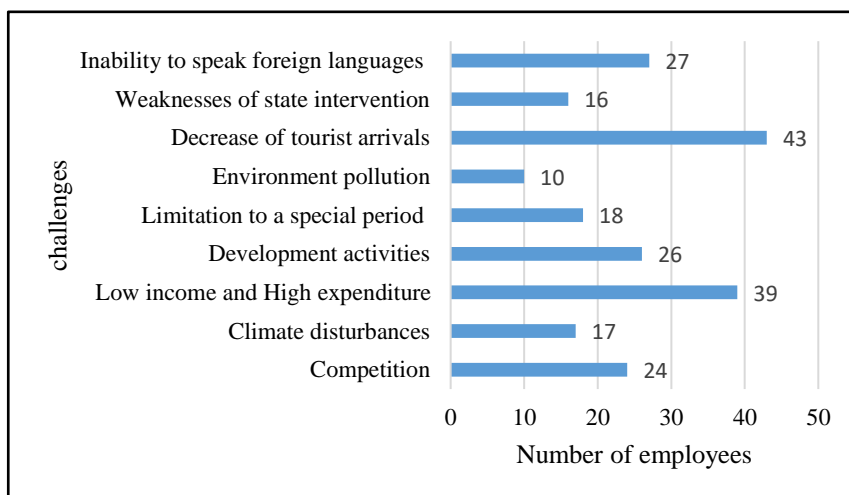


Figure 01: Barriers faced by the tourism people

Source: Compiled by Author, 2023

It was analyzed that the employees do not only have one barrier but they have more than one in many instances. One of the many barriers they are facing is a decrease in tourist arrivals. While 43 of them mentioned that the decrease in tourist arrivals is a barrier, 27 of them told that their barrier is the inability to speak foreign languages, 26 of them declared the weakness in the intervention of the state as a barrier, 10 of them thought that environmental pollution is a barrier, 18 of the employees regarded that as the tourism is only during a particular period it is also a barrier, development

activities were also considered as a barrier by 26 of them, moreover, low income and high expenditure considered as a barrier for 39 people, 17 employees mentioned that climate disturbances as a barrier, and for 24 of them competition is the barrier. The biggest barrier to the tourism industry is the decrease in tourist arrivals.

Steps that can be taken to uplift living standards and develop the tourism industry by minimizing the challenges

When we consider the above-mentioned factors it is clear that there are a lot of barriers which are faced by people in the industry of tourism. because of this, there need to be some solutions which have been studied as conducted by the survey. so about that one of the solutions given or suggested was the development of the use of foreign languages or opening institutions for learning foreign languages. As we witnessed in the earlier graph that language was one of the greatest barriers having institutions for the use of languages would result in a good development towards the improvement with the development of the tourism industry.

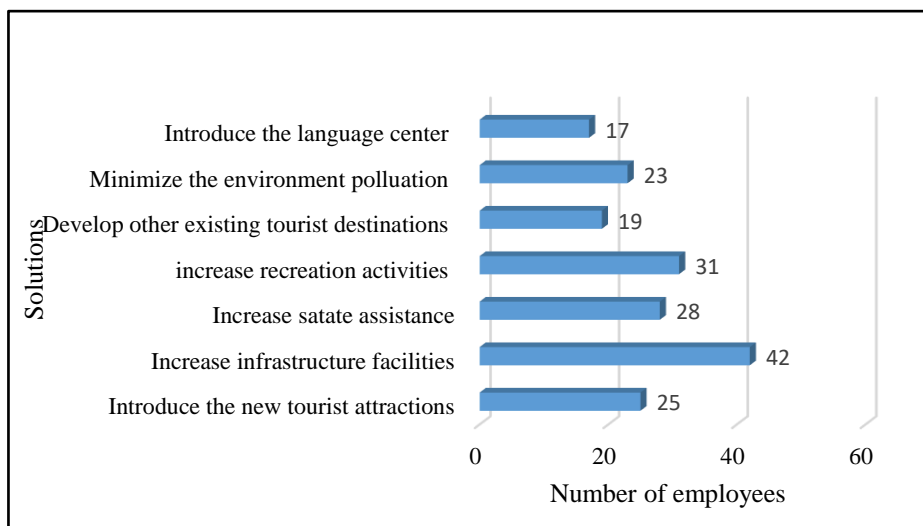


Figure 02: Solutions for uplifting the livelihood of employees

Source: Compiled By Author,2023

Furthermore, another solution is just given out in developing the infrastructure facilities. infrastructure facilities include factors such as road development and also it includes facilities such as Wi-Fi connections the electricity and water .so if there are good infrastructures facilities the barriers faced by the people would become reduced because as a result of the development of interest accessorizing tourism itself starts building up an is on developing side.

An increase in tourist attraction areas would be one of the greatest solutions for many of the problems which are mentioned in the above graph. On the contrary, environmental pollution should be resolved for the attractions of the tourists and the development of the tourism industry also the state intervention must also be increased so that the tourism industry could be developed in an easier way than predicted.

Conclusion & Recommendations

In conclusion, the research on the changing lifestyle's impact on tourism in Ratnapura District has shed light on several important insights. The findings indicate a significant correlation between lifestyle changes and the evolution of tourism in the region. As the lifestyles of both locals and tourists continue to transform, the tourism industry must adapt and cater to these shifting preferences and needs.

Firstly, the rapid urbanization and modernization of Ratnapura District have led to changes in the lifestyle of the local population. As traditional customs and practices are being replaced by contemporary trends, tourists are increasingly seeking authentic and immersive experiences that reflect the local culture. Therefore, there is a growing demand for sustainable and culturally immersive tourism activities, such as eco-tourism, community-based tourism, and heritage tours. Secondly, the rise of technology and social media has transformed how tourists engage with travel experiences. Social media platforms have become powerful tools for influencing travel decisions, and tourists are now seeking "Instagrammable" destinations and unique experiences to share with their online communities.

Furthermore, the research highlights the importance of sustainability in tourism development. As lifestyle changes drive higher environmental awareness, tourists are increasingly favoring destinations that prioritize eco-friendly practices and responsible tourism initiatives. Embracing sustainable tourism principles can help Ratnapura District preserve its natural and cultural heritage while attracting responsible and conscious travelers. In conclusion, the changing lifestyle patterns in Ratnapura District present both challenges and opportunities for the tourism industry. By aligning tourism offerings with the evolving preferences of tourists and the local population, the district can create a sustainable and thriving tourism sector. Collaboration among local communities, government authorities, and private stakeholders will be vital to ensure that tourism development in Ratnapura District is inclusive, environmentally responsible, and culturally enriching for both tourists and locals alike. As the district continues to evolve, ongoing research and strategic planning will be essential to keep the tourism sector resilient and adaptive to future lifestyle changes.

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