

The Story of Pre-Historic and Proto-Historic Hominids of Sri Lanka: An Underexploited Resource for Inbound Tourism Promotions

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Abstract

Heritage has always been one of the major products of Sri Lanka tourism since its initial stage. In addition to the intangible heritage attractions, the industry is inclined to promote the monuments and sites which majorly belong to the historic period. In this process, one of the country's finest cultural assets has been overlooked by the tourism practitioners. This resource is nothing but the abundant pre and pro-historic sites scattered around different parts of the island. Hence, this research was carried out to fill this gap with the objectives of understanding the potentials of pre and proto-historic sites to be developed as tourism sites, recognizing the possible barriers and consequences of doing that, and seeking means of benefitting archeological sites and tourism industry mutually. The sample of the study which was obtained via purposive sampling technique included twenty-nine members representing nine archaeologists who engage in pre and pro-historic archaeological work and officers-in-charge of such sites, two representatives from SLTDA and SLTPB, representatives from six leading destination management companies, five tour guides and seven tourists who are interested in pre and proto history. Researchers adopted the exploratory qualitative method as the study aimed at unfolding something almost unexplored. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to extract primary data. Secondary data were collected from reliable publications. Content analysis was carried out with the assistance of NVivo software. The findings of this study indicate that there is a visible gap in an essential holistic approach between archaeologists, tourism authorities, DMCs, and tour guides. There is a substantial special interest tourist group traveling the world to explore pre-history and proto-history who could be drawn to Sri Lanka if the country can package these sites well. It was also found that archaeological sites and tourism could be mutually benefited as the sites get fame and protection when developed as tourism sites while the tourism industry can reach out to a profitable special interest traveler group. The archaeologists who have contributed to the excavation over the course of time could be appreciated too.

Keywords: Archaeological Sites, Inbound Tourism, Pre-history, Proto History, Sri Lanka

Introduction

Background of the Study

The world tourism industry saw the emergence of several new tourism destinations during the past two decades owing to the possible socio-cultural and economic benefits generated by the industry (UNWTO, 2020). This has led to the creation of an intense competition for all the tourist destinations demanding them to look for essential differentiation. The heritage of a country is one of its most valuable assets as it helps to make that given country distinctive among others; which is ideal to serve the purpose mentioned above related to tourism competition (Almeida et al., 2020). Supporting this fact, Kurtuluş Kivanç (2016) states that traditional 3S; Sea, Sun, and Sand tourism is restricted by seasonality and because of that, heritage tourism becomes more attractive to visitors and destination managers.

However, usually, the cultural attractions promoted in heritage tourism are mostly from classical periods. This also causes other cultural heritage attractions to remain in the shadow of classical period attractions. This other cultural heritage necessarily encompasses the story of human life before the historic period (Kurtuluş Kivanç, 2016).

Sri Lanka inherits numerous archaeological sites and artifacts which can be dated back to the Paleolithic, Mesolithic, and Iron Ages. These phases mainly cover pre-historic and proto-historic time periods of Sri Lanka (Deraniyagala, 1992). In spite of that fact, excessive emphasis on Classical ruins of historical period in tourism promotions overshadows archaeological sites dated to much earlier times. Domestic tourists visit some of these pre and proto-historic sites usually, but somehow domestic travel is not even done in a systematic way.

Inbound tourism is an ideal way of spreading the word about these untapped resources around the world as inbound tourism is about non-residents traveling to and in a given country. It also supports the foreign exchange earnings and increased attention for the conservation of these sites. There are tourists who are genuinely interested in visiting pre and proto-historic sites in different parts of the world and

learning more about them (Prehistoric Tourist, 2021). Hence, these heritage values could be promoted well for the eagerly waiting inbound tourists if planned and managed well.

Heritage has been an integral part of Sri Lanka tourism since its beginning, especially with the presence of a large sum of monuments belonging to the Early and Middle Historic periods. Nevertheless, there are two time periods of the country's past that have been neglected during the span of Sri Lanka tourism. These are namely pre-historic and proto-historic periods. The story of pre-historic and proto-historic man is overlooked in the practice of tourism promotions even though the same story bears a great untapped potential. The archaeological excavations conducted in the country reveal an abundance of data belonging to given two time periods and only one or two sites are being officially promoted by Sri Lanka Tourism currently (Sri Lanka Tourism, 2021).

Conducting a research involving major stakeholders' opinions is the ground-most step to be taken if these sites are to be developed, managed and promoted through inbound tourism. Despite this need for research, no published studies could be found to address the given situation through a multidisciplinary approach. Therefore, this present study was designed and carried out to fill the given research gap and give insight for the relevant parties, especially the tourism practitioners to highlight the dire need to give the pre and proto historic attractions the recognition they deserve in heritage tourism in Sri Lanka.

By conducting this research, researchers wanted to fulfill three objectives. Those objectives were understanding the potentials of pre and proto-historic sites of Sri Lanka to be developed as tourism sites, recognizing the possible barriers and consequences of doing that, and seeking means of benefitting archeological sites and the tourism industry mutually.

This present study, by fulfilling its objectives contributes to the existing knowledge base as a multidisciplinary study which focuses on the different stakeholders involved. The potential role of pre and proto-historic cultural heritage was clearly

identified highlighting its possible contribution to destination differentiation. Hence, the findings of this research support making plans benefiting both tourism and pre and proto-historic cultural heritage.

Literature Review

Pre-history, Proto-history, and History

The journey of humankind is not something that happened overnight. These people have passed different time periods throughout this entire journey. Archaeologists classify the human past into three major phases. Those are pre-history, proto-history, and history respectively. The dating of these three phases could be varied in different regions of the world. Nevertheless, it could be said that the meanings given for the phases share uniformity. Pre-history usually indicates the vast time period prior to the documentation of written records by using different languages. The entire pre-historic period is also known as the stone age given the fact that the dominant objects used by these people had been stone tools. Considering the technological changes adopted within the same era when making stone tools, it is again categorized as the Paleolithic, Mesolithic, and Neolithic phases. The prehistoric period is followed by Proto-history even though many people are not aware of the existence of a phase called such. Proto-history is called by many synonyms like transitional period, twilight period, etc. This is the period in between prehistory when documents were not used and history in which documentation was excessively done. The proto-historic period had seen many hints of human behavior which indicated the ground-level vague state of the development of kingdoms, social institutions, sedentism, boom of languages, and sophisticated agricultural activities, etc. that were later clearly visible in the historic period. The historical period; which usually gets the highest attention encompasses the time phase of documentation and the rise and fall of kingdoms and related human activities.

Archaeological Work on Pre and Proto Histories in Sri Lanka

From the beginning of archaeological work in Sri Lanka, pre-history was subjected to research. In recent times, some researchers started showing their interest in the proto-history of the country as well.

Pre-history of Sri Lanka according to archaeologic findings

Deraniyagala (1992) states that the environmental factors of the island must have well supported the early hominid settlement, facilitating these people in terms of accessibility and exploitable food and water. The Paleolithic evidence is found in ancient coastal sands in the north and southeast of the island which could be as old as 250,000 or even 700,000-500,000 time. Around 125,000 BP time provides certain prehistoric settlements in Sri Lanka. The evidence stems from excavations conducted in coastal deposits near Bundala. These people had made tools of quartz and of cherts in minor scales which are believed to be assignable to a Middle Paleolithic complex (Deraniyagala, 1992). Apart from those stone tools, no other organic materials of their culture have survived due to the tropical weather of Sri Lanka. Somehow, archaeologists guess that these people must have been early Homo sapiens sapiens similar to anatomically modern South Asians. Considering the paleo climatic situations and the vegetation, researchers have made guesses about the population density and formation of families of these humans. It is unlikely that large communities in excess of a couple of nuclear families were the norm, except perhaps along the northern and eastern coasts with their rich resources of marine foods. It is estimated that during specific pluvial episodes in South Asia, around 125,000 BP, the population density in the Dry Zone of northern, eastern, and southern parts of Sri Lanka could have ranged between 1.5 and 0.8 individuals per square kilometer, while the Wet Zone in the west would have had densities of 0.1 or less (Deraniyagala, 1992).

The Mesolithic period of the country provides an adequate amount of evidence and thereby archaeologists have been able to create a complete picture of the Mesolithic pre-historic man including his culture, human anatomy, and environment

(Deraniyagala, 1992; Adikari 1994 and 2012, Perera, 2014). The Mesolithic Man has been exposed from a number of cave excavations in the lowland Wet Zone mainly Fa Hien Cave near Bulathsinhala which dates back to 34,000-5400 C14 BP, Batadomba-lena near Kuruwita around 28,500-11,500 C14 BP, Beli-lena at Kitulgala over 27,000-3500 C14 BP, Alu-lena at Attanagoda near Kegalle as old as 10,500 C14 BP. Other than these cave sites open sir sites had also been seasonal camp-like homes to Mesolithic Man. These open sir sites include Bellan-Bandi Palassa near Embilipitiya. The human remains of these humans who had been anatomically similar to modern humans have been subjected to detailed physical anthropological research. It has been revealed that the genetic continuation from at least as early as 16,000 BP at Batadomba-lena to Beli-lena at 13,000 BP to Bellan-Bandi Palassa at 6500 BP to the recent Vadda aboriginal population is remarkably interrelated (Kennedy 1974; Kennedy et al. 1987). The Mesolithic period is believed to have been stable for a longer time period without invasions. Above mentioned anatomically modern prehistoric humans in Sri Lanka are called to as Balangoda Man (Deraniyagala, 1992). The bones had been robust with thick skull bones, prominent brow-ridges, depressed noses, heavy jaws, and short necks. The teeth are conspicuously large.

The Balangoda man seems to have settled in practically everywhere on the island ranging from the damp and cold High Plains such as Horton Plains to the arid lowlands of Mannar and Vilpattu to the steamy equatorial rainforests of Sabaragamuwa.

The camps were without exception small, rarely exceeding 50 sq. m in area which indicates accommodation by not more than a couple of nuclear families at most (Deraniyagala, 1992). These are identified as nomads who engaged in hunting and gathering for a supply of food. Therefore, they would have been moving from place to place on an annual cycle of foraging for food. The well-preserved evidence from the cave sites and Bellan Bandi Palassa indicate that these hominids had utilized a large array of flora and fauna. Floral evidence indicates a prominent consumption of canarium nuts, wild breadfruit, and wild bananas. In addition to that, they have

probably consumed *Dioscorea* yams, such as *Dioscorea spicata*, *D. pentaphylla*, and *D. oppositifolia* as a staple food. It seems that they have consumed meat and fish in different varieties. Mainly due to the availability of those animals they have consumed smaller animals the most, middle-scale build animals to some extent, and larger animals rarely (Ambamwala, 2018). This diet would have been well balanced as attested by the robusticity of the human skeletal remains (Deraniyagala, 1992).

The tool kit that was produced and used by Balangoda Man is quite phenomenal. It can be clearly distinguished by the occurrence of geometric microliths, comprising small which is usually less than 4 cm long, flakes of quartz and rarely chert fashioned into stylized lunate, triangular, and trapezoidal forms (Deraniyala, 1992). The earliest dates for the geometric microlithic tradition in Europe are around 12,000 BP. Therefore, it was surprising for archaeologists when such tools were found as early as 28,500 C14 BP at Batadomba-lena, 28,000 BP at two coastal sites in Bundala, and over 27,000 BP at Beli-lena. It implies that Sri Lanka has yielded evidence of this sophisticated technological phase some 16,000 years earlier than Europe. In addition to the stone tools, artifacts of bone and antlers are quite common from 28,500 BP onwards, notably small bone points (Deraniyala, 1992).

Beads of shells have also been discovered from these early contexts and the occurrence of marine shells in inland sites such as Batadomba-lena points to an extensive network of contacts between the coast and the hinterland (Deraniyalaga, 1992; Adikari 2010; Somadeva, 2017).

Beli-lena provides evidence that salt had been brought in from the coast at a date around 27,000 BP (Deraniyagala, 1992).

The art of the prehistoric people of Sri Lanka still lacks substantial evidence. However, a recent study conducted in Kurulanngala, Badulla by Thanthilage et al. (2016) suggests the possible existence of Stone Age cave art.

Archaeologists have found evidence of ritualistic behaviors of Mesolithic people. Balangoda Man has followed a norm in which his dead are disposed of as secondary burials within the camp floors, having selected only certain bones for this purpose.

Apart from that, in Ravanalla cave, Alawala Pothgul Lena and Fa Hien cave and red ochre had been ceremonially smeared on the bones (Deraniyalaga, 1992; Adikari, 2010).

Proto-history of Sri Lanka according to archaeologic findings

The proto-historic period of Sri Lanka is explained by archaeologists parallel to the Early Iron Age. The earliest indicators of this phase in the country is radiocarbon dated to ca. 1000-800 BC in locations like Anuradhapura and Aligala shelter in Sigiriya (Deraniyagala, 1992; Karunaratne and Adikari, 1994; Mogren, 1994; Coningham, 1996). Apart from those sites, Kandarodai, Matota (Mantai), Pilapitiya in Kelaniya, and Tissamaharama and Ibbankatuwa are also considered prominent proto-historic sites (Seneviratne, 1984). Yan Oya Middle Basin is also being subjected to research for its proto-historic indications (Dissanayake et al., 2014). During excavations in Develapola, Minuwangoda, clay cists from the protohistoric period were discovered (Katugampola, 2020).

Major characteristics of the Proto-historic Early Iron Age of Sri Lanka include the megalithic burials, primitive agricultural activities like Chena cultivation while engaging in pastoral activities, iron production, and even usage, minimum usage of stone tools (Dissanayake, 2014), strong beliefs about death and possibly about afterlife. Norms and rituals to tribute dead people. These people are known for the material culture known as RBW (Red and Black Ware) pottery. They have shown the signs of early sedentism in which people move from nomadic life and start residing at a given place for a considerable period of time.

Another special characteristic of this period is the usage of symbolic image-like writing even though there is no documentation like in the Historic period. These symbolic image-like indications are mainly found in the material culture on megalithic burials.

Inbound tourism and its advantages for heritage

Inbound tourism comprises the activities of a non-resident visitor within the country of reference on an inbound tourism trip (IRTS, 2010). Inbound tourism consumption is the tourism consumption of a non-resident visitor within the economy of reference and Inbound tourism expenditure is the tourism expenditure of a non-resident visitor within the economy of reference.

Substantial studies have acknowledged tourism as a phenomenon which can be used as a method to educate the public about heritage values which implies, if utilized and planned well, tourism can be used to preserve the heritage values. International tourism continues to be among the leading modes for cultural exchange, providing a personal experience not only of that which has survived from the past, but also of the contemporary life and society of others. It is increasingly appreciated as a positive force for natural and cultural conservation. Tourism can capture the economic characteristics of heritage and harness these for conservation by generating funding, educating the community and influencing policy. It is an essential part of many national and regional economies and can be an important factor in development, when managed successfully (ICOMOS, 1999).

Demand for Prehistoric Tourism

Prehistoric tourism is a special interest tourism type. According to the definition provided by United Nations World Tourism Organization, special interest tourism (SIT) is the provision of customized tourism activities that caters to the specific interests of groups and individuals. In this case, tourism is undertaken to satisfy a special and genuine interest or need. Tourists engaged in special interest travel seek to learn and enrich their awareness. They expect high standards of service and individualized focus. They are usually responsible travelers and prefer to have authentic experience in which they have a positive engagement with the host community (Special Interest Tourism, 2021). Prehistoric tourism engages activities of tourists who travel to educate themselves about the prehistoric periods of different parts of the world. These could be the archaeologists, historians, other

researchers or any other person who are enthusiastic about pre-history. Even though this niche tourism type gets excessive engagement of tourists, the small niche type has sound demand from a specific group of people (Prehistoric Tourist, 2021).

Practices of other destinations in promoting prehistoric and proto-historic sites

Several destinations of the world seem to be keen on adding value to the pre-historic sites, maintaining and managing them properly. Destination Management Companies of those countries have specialized tour packages to cater to the given tourists. In France, one can experience a pre-historic park in which various workshops and demonstrations on the themes of cave art, archaeological excavation, tool cutting, fire lighting and spear throwing using an atlatl (spear thrower) are organized ("The Museum of Prehistory at Tautavel - Tourism & Holiday Guide", 2021). They have provided details in the internet about these activities and other facilities like nearby accommodation and food and beverage outlets. The Cultural Route of the Council of Europe 'Prehistoric Rock Art Trails' also implements several awareness programs for the visitors, tour packages and even pre-history themed competitions (Prehistoric Rock Art Trails, 2015). Archaeological Institute of America also provides tour packages to visit pre-historic attractions in Spain and France. Most significantly a renowned archaeological author Paul Bahn guides these regular tours to disseminate knowledge on the given sites. Tours include archaeological and ethnographic museums with exhibits of prehistoric artifacts, including the Museum of Human Evolution in Burgos, Altamira Museum, Museum of Les Eyzies, and the Musée d'Aquitaine (AIA Event Listing, 2021). These tours invariably include other supporting facilities too. The tours are created as itineraries like attractive packages. Austria promotes the Archaeological Open-Air Site of the Museum of Prehistory MAMUZ; name that combines the Lower Austrian museum of prehistory Niederösterreich Asparn/Zaya and the museum centre Museumszentrum Mistelbach. Museum of Prehistory in Zug, Switzerland operates with a theme called 'Journey to the Past' and gives tourists the opportunity to see permanent exhibition features archaeological finds from Canton Zug, life-like human figures, models of settlements, and stories ("Museum of Prehistory, Zug |

Switzerland Tourism", 2021). State Museum for Prehistory Halle, Germany provides similar experience for the tourists who wish to learn country's pre-history.

The important practices of these countries that should be emphasized are adding values to the already available pre and proto historic sites, enhancing the secondary supporting products well, introducing lively opportunities for tourists to learn, maintain museums, fueling up creative interpretation techniques, getting the engagement of well-known archaeologists in tour leading to enhance the reliability of the information provided and preparing specific itineraries. **Sri Lanka tourism practice in the present**

It could be observed from the annual statistical reports and websites contents of many Destination Management Companies that Sri Lanka tourism is giving the undivided focus for the monumental sites belong to the historic period. Abayagiriya, Jethavanaya, Sigiriya Rock and Museum, Polonnaruwa Gal Viharaya, Kandy Temple of Tooth Relic, Dambulla Cave Temple, Galle Dutch Fort are some of those cultural heritage values (Annual Report of Sri Lanka Tourism, 2019). Ibbankutwa is the only exception to this which is being officially promoted through tourism. Usually the tour packages to experience cultural heritage of Sri Lanka is limited within the scope of major historic monumental sites maintained under Central Cultural Triangle.

Methodology

When the research approach is concerned, it took the form of exploratory qualitative mode as exploratory studies are helpful in investigating research problems that have not previously been studied in depth. The researchers wanted to conduct a multidisciplinary study to unfold different opinions of stakeholders. Hence, the sample of the study included nine archaeologists who engage in pre and proto historic archaeological work and officers in charge at some pre and proto historic sites, two representatives from SLTDA and SLTPB, representatives from six leading destination management companies, five tour guides and finally seven tourists. The limit or the size of the sample was decided when the responses to the same

questions started taking the same form and thereby reached the maturity level. This entire sample which was obtained via non-probability purposive sampling technique contained twenty-nine members representing different areas of the community's cross section. Researchers adopted the qualitative method as semi-structured interviews were conducted to extract primary data. Interviews are one of the most suitable methods of collecting primary data as those allow uncovering details of interviewee's experience and perspective on a subject unlike a simple questionnaire or rating scale (Showkat and Praveen, 2017). Given the difficulties in meeting the respondents in person, interviews were conducted majorly via online platforms like Zoom and WhatsApp while few of the members were interviewed after visiting the relevant sites, such as the officer in charge of the Ibbankatuwa site. Primary data collection was done during time period of October to December in 2021. Secondary data were collected from reliable publications. Transcripts were developed referring to each interview and then Content analysis was carried out with the help of NVivo software.

Results and Discussion

The perspective of archaeologists and officers in charge at some pre and proto-historic sites

When asked about the prominent pre and proto historic sites that have the potential of being properly promoted, Pahiyangala, Belilena, Kuragala, Potgul Cave, Miniathiliya, Bellanbedi Pelessa, Batadombalena and Alawala were mentioned the pre-historic sites while Ibbankatuwa, Ranchamadama, KokAbe, Pomparippu, Pinwewa and Yatigalpothana were pointed as the proto historic sites. These also tally with the literature reviews findings.

However, the majority of the sample members stated that they have observed notable issues in current heritage management plans in pre and proto historic sites in Sri Lanka. Financial barriers and weakness of human resources of the field such as lack of subject proficiency, lack of field activists and lack of people with practical experience were majorly pointed out as the reasons for the same. Inadequate

infrastructure, no proper guidance and interpretation, lack of a program to provide awareness to the visitors and lack of promotions to attract visitors the some of the highlighted critical issues.

The reasons that pre and proto historic sites are not that much popular as historical sites in Sri Lanka could be lack of antiquities at sites, lack of awareness among the public, travel preferences of some, non-religious environment at the sites, reluctance to get rid of well-known attractions and move to new ones as suggested by the respondents.

When inquired about the respondents' view on tourism existence in pre and proto historic sites in Sri Lanka, it was said that it is a considerably lower level and therefore the sites should be introduced to the interested tourist market segments. However, it was said that Ibbankatuwa gets a sound number of foreign tourist arrivals just as it was also supported by the literature review.

“Is at a very low level. Tourist market segments should be introduced.”

(Participant 01: Personal communication, 2020)

The responding archaeologists believe that there are both pros and cons created by the tourism industry for the pre and proto historic sites. Ability to acquire knowledge of ancient heritages for both local and foreign, ensuring site security, ability to earn foreign exchange through tourism, attaining global attention through important human evolutionary phenomena, making public awareness, raising site funds and more indirect job opportunities are some of the potential positive outcomes of tourism activities according to the respondents. They also pointed out that the income earned through tourism at these sites could be re-invested for the excavations and conservation of the pre and proto history sites which currently the government cannot sometimes fail to do, due to financial constraints. This speaks of potentiality mutual benefits. Prospected darker side of tourism on the pre and proto historic sites would be destruction of the natural environment, deterioration of monuments and artifacts, congestion and damage to the archaeological context at the site.

The Perspective of SLTDA and SLTPB Representatives

Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority and Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau shoulder the main responsibility of regulating and promoting Sri Lanka tourism as two of the main governmental bodies. It could be seen that SLTPB with the leadership of Mrs. Kimarli Fernando takes a commendable effort in branding Sri Lanka as a top destination even admits the pandemic outbreak. These two organizations are coming up with plans to promote the island for new niche markets such as digital nomads, wedding couples etc.

However, the interviews conducted with two representatives of the given institutes did not seem to have a clear-cut idea about what really pre and proto history means, their difference and the raw potentials of them. They were familiar with the sites like Ibbankatuwa and Pahiyangala but not of the number of evidences that archaeologists have rescued from other sites. The respondents lacked awareness about the existence of a tourist type called pre-history tourists and the prominent practices of countries in promoting the relevant sites for the given group of travelers.

“We have been working on and looking forward for the diversification of Sri Lanka tourism product as it helps for sustainable slow travel. If we can closely work with the archaeologists of the same field, we can take this as an initial step of introducing a new tourism type based on the pre and proto historic resources. “

(Participant 11: Personal communication, 2020)

Once the researchers of the present study explained the archaeological findings of the prominent sites and about the demand of the pre-history tourists and tourism activities of other destinations, the responding officials got quite interested about it. Therefore, it is not that the tourism officials are ignoring the pre and proto historic story of Sri Lanka in tourism promotion but they lack sufficient knowledge on the same.

The Perspective of DMCs and Tour Guides

Researchers of present study conducted interviews with some of the leading Tour Operators to identify any available tour packages or tourism executions based on pre and proto historic sites of Sri Lanka. This effort resulted in revealing important facts of the current practices.

The main tour packages of the responding organizations include the many major cultural and natural resources in the country. When asked about the heritage tourism products they offer, it could be noted that they mainly focus on the world heritage sites and other prominent sites managed under the Central Cultural Fund. Those sites include Anuradhapura Sacred city, Polonnaruwa Ancient city, Sigiriya Rock Fortress, Galle Dutch Fort, Temple of Tooth Relic and Dambulla Cave Temple. These finding also tally well with the inclusions of the literature review.

“Most unique part of the tour package and especially European clients are loving it, even the locations are absolutely beautiful with greenery / nature and etc. so heritage part is always one of the best parts of our packages.”

(Participant 15: Personal communication, 2020)

Majority of the respondents claimed that they provide tour packages based on the travel preferences of the guests and they do not receive sufficient demand for pre and proto history tourism in particular. When they receive such exceptional inquiries once in a while, Ibbankatuwa is the site they would usually recommend to the guests.

“We don’t do it usually, unless if we have a special request from a client.”

(Participant 13: Personal communication, 2020)

Hence, members of the sample do not necessarily engage in dedicated promotions in offering pre and proto historic sites just as they do with other monuments belong to the early historic time. The government’s inadequate concern on highlighting pre and proto historic sites in key tourism promotions like travel fairs and promotional

videos is believed to be one major reason why tourists do not inquire about the given sites as pointed out by the respondents. If the tourists were made aware about the resources that we have and if they were well featured in the national tourism promotions, the market segment has the tendency of inquiring the same.

“Government or any private sector promotional video about Sri Lanka they don’t Promote this part as I have noticed, so that’s not something in our client list to tick in Sri Lanka. may be less awareness .so we always give what they request and also easily can reach and promote in our routes.”

(Participant 14: Personal communication, 2020)

Furthermore, the respondents commented more about the lack of awareness of potential tourists on the availability of resources in Sri Lanka which can quench their thirst on knowing the pre and proto history of the island.

“Except the tourists who are interested in pre-historic and proto historic era, other leisure travellers have no idea.”

(Participant 16: Personal communication, 2020)

Insufficient promotional campaigns, lack of proper action to develop those sites with necessary infrastructure and less creativity to attract people of market segment were pointed out when the researchers asked about the possible reasons why Sri Lanka is not that much popular in the sector of pre and proto historic tourism and the reasons for the scant awareness of tourists on the same.

The barriers of promoting these sites in tourism would be rules and regulations of government departments to develop a location as a tourist site, people running behind easy way of earning money from tourists rather than developing such things, lack of right people in right place to take actions with knowledge of this field according to the view point of majority of the respondents.

The researchers of the present study contacted the tour guides as their view point in this matter is also quite important. The tour guides in a way act as the ambassadors

of the country when interpreting the heritage resources to inbound tourists. Therefore, it is vital that this group of facilitators have sound knowledge on the pre and proto historic sites which many of the respondents of the sample seemed to lack. Some of them were not aware of the distinction between pre and proto history and what are the most potential sites of telling story of human evolution of the country. Despite this fact, there were a few number of guides who were actually well aware of these sites even direct their guests to the given sites majorly in the territory of Sigiriya.

“Ibbankatuwa. Located close to Sigiriya (Ibbankatuwa village). It is the best preserved proto-historic burial site in Sri Lanka. Extending over a land area of 13 hectares comprises of stone cist type burial graves of the Megalithic tradition. Pothana/Aligala/Mapagala/Pahangala. Pre-historic caves in dry zone. connected archaeological sites surrounding Sigiriya.”

(Participant 19: Personal communication, 2020)

Majority of the sample members said that tourists are not aware of the relevant sites while few of the respondents stated that tourists with the genuine interest seem to have a good awareness of these sites.

“Only those who are familiar with pre/proto history, like to visit these sites.”

(Participant 19: Personal communication, 2020)

Lack of knowledge dissemination about Sri Lanka pre and proto history, sites not being developed as tourist sites, lack of infrastructure and poor promotions were highlighted as the reasons for the less popularity of pre and proto historic resources in tourism of the country.

Perspective of Pre and Proto-Historic Tourists

By contacting the members of an internet forum called pre-historic tourist helped the researchers to look for the preferences in visiting destinations to pre-historic and proto historic sites and their awareness of the such sites in Sri Lanka. This particular forum is mainly based on European tourists who get together to have recommendations on the tourism activities to cater their special interests. These tourists believe that visiting the pre and proto historic sites is an ideal way of learning human evolution. Since not all the travelling individuals are not interested in visiting such sites, they are genuinely interested tourists about the same to get enough freedom to explore more about the pre and proto history. Moreover, their travel preference does not limit to the European region.

“Humans have a story in common even though we’re dispersed in different parts. All these are ancestors and we would love to learn how OUR ancestors had spent different life styles influenced by then environmental conditions.”

(Participant 29: Personal communication, 2020)

This particular segment of Special Interest Tourists looks three types of attractions mostly. First type is the dwellings of pre and proto historic man including are caves and rock shelters where early humans lived. Second one is the prehistory parks which are outdoor attractions that show recreations of prehistoric life, with first hand activities and workshops and the Finally they look for museums that house artifacts such as artwork, tools, and bones that have been excavated from prehistoric sites. It could be seen that these needs of tourists are influenced and aroused by the tourism facilities available in European countries to experience pre and proto histories.

When asked about the amount of money that this group of tourists are willing allocate for given activities or products such souvenirs, they clearly stated that as long as the destinations are able provide something of worth without fooling them, they are happy spend a considerable large sum for the same.

“what matter to me is a reasonable price. If they provide products of quality, I don’t bargain.”

(Participant 27: Personal communication, 2020)

The respondents were well aware of Sri Lanka as tourist destination even though they questioned about the pre-historic tourism promotions of the country. All most all the tourists of the sample stated that they would love to fly down to Sri Lanka, if they can experience pre and proto history story in a commendable way.

Conclusions

Given attention to all the above facts, it could be said that there is a visible gap in an essential holistic approach between archaeologists, tourism authorities, DMCs, and tour guides even though Sri Lanka has an abundance of resources to tell the story of pre and proto-historic man. Knowledge of Pre and proto-historic resources is not yet properly dispersed to all the needed parties as a result of the previously mentioned gap. It can be seen that Sri Lanka is still sticking with the monuments belonging to a historic era when promoting cultural heritage tourism. On the other hand, there is a substantial special interest tourist group traveling the world to explore pre-history and proto-history who could be drawn to Sri Lanka if the country can package these sites well. These two conditions mentioned above clearly point out a market gap and thereby an untapped opportunity that can be successfully turned into a new tourism niche. It was also found that archaeological sites and tourism could be mutually beneficial as the sites get fame and protection when developed as sites while the tourism industry can reach out to a profitable special interest traveler group.

Recommendations

Following recommendations can be made to give life to these valuable assets considering the suggestions made by the stakeholders who contributed for the data collection, practices of other destinations related to this field and researchers’ personal views.

As mentioned in the conclusions too, the tourism policy makers and practitioners in general seem to lack adequate understanding about the pre and proto historic resources that we have. Therefore, it is recommendable to create a platform for the archaeologists and tourism industry leaders meet together to share their knowledge and come up with good initiatives to develop these sites as sustainable tourism sites. The tourism authorities, tour operators and most importantly tour guides should be given this awareness. Emphasis should be placed on promoting lesser-known pre-and proto-historic sites that possess significant potential for tourism development. For example, Dewalapola, a prehistoric site located in close proximity to Katunayake Airport, holds immense potential for promoting tourism among foreign visitors.

As some of the archaeologists believe that these particular promotions might also generate negative impacts on the pre and proto heritage, having coalitions helps to generate plans that everyone can buy into. Coalitions have credibility, because they represent all points of view thereby many segments of the community. This also helps to establish carrying capacity limits of the given sites with the expertise knowledge of archaeologists is also suggested. Furthermore, it is important to identify the sensitivity of these archaeology sites and sites which are resilient enough to be developed. Archaeological Impact Assessments (AIAs) are required where potential conflicts have been identified between archaeological resources and a proposed development.

The mutual benefits can be gained when the tourism earning of these sites have to be re-injected to the conservations and excavations of pre and proto history; mainly in the means of heritage management while the archaeological resources help to attract the pre and proto history tourists. Doing a heritage value assessment is going to be ideal in this matter. Moreover, the archaeologists who have contributed to the excavation over the course of time should be given enough credits during the interpretation.

The sites should be well developed to be offered to the tourists as a worthwhile product. Having the resources does not necessarily make them tourist attractions. For them to be tourist attractions, those should be developed with infrastructure, sanitary facilities and memorable interpretation techniques. The entry tickets prices should also be decided considering the value we offer for the tourists.

It could be suggested for the SLTPB to feature the pre and proto historic attractions in promotion mix as it is much vital to make the potential tourists aware about the pre and proto attractions that the country possesses. What European countries do with their pre and proto historic resources can be taken as an instance here. There is a website called 'Prehistoric Tourist' which is specifically dedicated to help the

tourists in planning their trip if they are interested in visiting pre-history sites in particular. Interested tourists are able find descriptions, addresses, maps, previous visitor reviews, and links for number of sites depicting ice age life and artifacts in Europe. When put together, a more organized and a collective effort.

It is highly recommendable to add value to these resources through innovative ideas. May it be in the form of interpretations or souvenirs production, those have to be an unique experience for the tourists. If the university scholars who worked for the excavations of these sites could be taken as resource persons to do exclusive guided walks according to the pre-planned schedule, such service can be sold for the higher price for genuinely interested special interest tourists.

Finally, it should be kept in mind that pre and proto history tourism is not type of mass tourism but a niche tourism type. Hence, it is quite critical to not distract the focus of strategies from the target audience. Catering to the market segment which fit well with the product characteristics is the most sustainable way of making profits.

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