

Environmental impacts of sustainable tourism in Sri Lanka

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Introduction

Tourism is one of world's important industries. It has a great impact as an important way of earning foreign exchange and also has a direct impact on the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of a country, during the last 30 years in the majority of countries where tourism is a key income. As such, tourism is widely recognized as the world's largest generator of wealth and this will continue to grow during the next decades and tourism will be significant for the national and global economies. Therefore, it is the primary target of the stakeholders of the industry to integrate sustainability dimensions, into its development strategies, especially, the environment it is mostly based upon. The modern tourism industry has become an umbrella industry for many businesses such as accommodation, transportation, entertainment, catering, tour operators and travel agencies. Therefore, tourism industry should take efforts to support the restoration, conservation as well as protection of valuable, natural, historic and cultural sites, landscapes as well unique biodiversity of a country while promoting and developing tourism. In this, the governments as well as stakeholders of the tourism industry such as hotels and tour operators have a significant role in protecting the environment. In this paper, I will be discussing in detail the "Environmental impacts of sustainable tourism in Sri Lanka", the problems associated with it and how to overcome such problems in the long term as well as the short term.

Tourism stakeholders' share of tourism's impacts

Tour operators, travel agencies, as well as hotels should indulge in sustainable tourism minimizing the damage done to the environment including environmental pollution. The transportation and accommodation sectors are well advanced in managing direct environmental impacts and the majority of them are engaged in pollution reductive and preventive methods (Budeanu, A.).

At times, enforcements strategies are not very effective. Yet, they set the pathway for developments while showing the commitment of local authorities to look for ways and means to have tourism in their areas in a more sustainable manner (Budeanu, A.).

Travellers' responsibility towards maintaining sustainable tourism

Generally, tourists or travellers are unaware about the impacts of their holiday and tour

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activities as they lack information about their presence in a tourism destination and how they exert pressure on local as well as social environments as they have to compete with locals for many resources including bathing and drinking water and in turn their use of these resources may lead to frustration and negative attitudes from locals, as they feel that using these resources by people who are not from their area may lead to depletion of resources. At times, this might also lead to complete destruction of the area concerned for tourism. At the same time, invasive attitudes of large scale or 'mass tourism', as it is commonly called may also have unnecessary pressure for the local nature and society which will in turn affect the local nature of the destination as it is the homeland of the locals of the area and it may also create negative response from the local community (Budeanu, A).

Although, tour operators were not well-known public figures and they did not come into contact directly with the locals when operating their businesses, the situation has changed during past few years and at present they have to be aware of the image they create among locals as they have to be responsible for their business having any kind of negative impact on the environment they operate. Thus, it is their duty to protect the nature, biodiversity and society (Budeanu, A).

Environmental regulation and tourism as a business

According to research, tourism has a great impact on ecosystems and host communities. Therefore, it is necessary to adopt environmental friendly measures or rather methods of sustainable tourism to promote tourism as well as refrain from harming the nature as well as the local society (jstor.org).

To achieve these objectives, researches of business (tourism) regulation suggest different approaches; a "laissez-faire allocation of resources by the market" or "draconian command-and-control measures through state legislation" (jstor.org).

Although, these practices are good for the tourism industry as well as the environment on which it is based, some consider these are only marketing tools which respond to perceived short-term demand for environmental protection in the market place (jstor.org).

Meanwhile, there are many who argue that voluntary practices of environmental responsibility may be there only to pre-empt imposed regulation or "to legitimize business activities which degrade the environment. At the same time, there are critics who claim that certain organizations have adopted some practices which have certain aspects of sustainable development with a negative view and doubt (jstor.org).

Therefore, voluntary practices of environmental responsibility may be viewed by the majority as a short-term commercial opportunity and if there are genuine practices to protect the environment, it may require government intervention to a certain extent or "legislation to prevent 'free riders' (jstor.org).

Meanwhile, researchers argue that some companies in the tourism sector are generally pessimistic about market demand for sustainable tourism because in the 'mass market', practices of environmental responsibility are not always attractive to tourists. According to researchers, "It is perfectly possible for consumer pressure to turn the tourism industry around". According to this survey, a rise in ethical consumerism which is related to tourism services may not take

down, and a renewed interest in equity have become central to alternative development; its sharper analytical approach is relevant also to alternative tourism" (de Kadt, E.).

Is sustainable development necessary to protect the environment?

"Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, an awareness of the environmental, social and economic limitations we face as a society" (Redclift, M).

As such, living within environmental limits is one of the core principles of sustainable development and in this endeavor the diverse needs of all people in present and "future communities, promoting personal wellbeing, social cohesion and inclusion, and creating equal opportunity should be addressed properly. Therefore, sustainable development is very vital to ensure protection of the environment (Redclift, M).

Meanwhile, the harmful effects of traditional mass tourism have resulted in demands for environmentally sensitive approaches to tourism as well as leisure development. At the same time, increasing environmental attentiveness has led to an increase in travel to destinations which have a host of unspoiled environments (Sisman, R.).

Conclusion

In conclusion, sustainable tourism should be promoted with the idea of environmental protection and this kind of tourism should be done proactively instead of responding to the needs of tourists interested in ecotourism or holidays spent in remote cultures. As Sri Lanka is a country rich in biodiversity and beautiful landscapes upon which the country's tourism is based, sustainable tourism should be promoted. It is the duty of the government, tourism authorities as well as stakeholders in the tourism industry to work towards achieving this target.

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