

Environmental impact of sustainable tourism in Sri Lanka

Arundathie Abeysinghe

ABSTRACT

Tourism and hospitality is a field which involves many sectors including the aviation industry, hotel industry, tourist boards, government ministries and departments as well as national parks and heritage sites. As such, it is a vast field involving many services and products catering to tourists (travellers) and also natural environment. All these have mutually reinforcing objectives to ensure sustainable tourism development. In Sri Lanka, tourism is the nation's third foreign exchange earner and by the end of the year 2015, this figure is expected to be US\$ 3 billion. The majority of tourism activities place extra pressure on environmental resources on which it is based. This is also intensified by present as well as future interests of tourists, tourism organizations and host populations. Without sufficient environmental protection, prospects for development will be weakened. Positive links should be built with the environment while breaching any negative links that may be encountered. There could also be negative links. To overcome this, there should be "trade-offs" between protection or rather conservation and developmental goals. It is the duty of the government and other stakeholders to safeguard the environment while developing necessary infrastructure for tourism. Otherwise, tourism will become a major destructive process destroying natural resources which it is based on. Those responsible for tourism management have a great responsibility for sustainable tourism and they should focus on protecting the environment, a vital factor of tourism development. Sri Lanka being a country rich in natural environment, bio-diversity as well as rich cultural heritage has to protect its resources; the major tourism attractions, while developing necessary infrastructure. In this paper, the focus will be mainly on 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.

Key words: sustainable tourism, tourism development, environmental impact, natural resources, tourism organisations