

Customer Satisfaction on Eco-tourism Practices in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Tourism is presently one of the most crucial contributors to the economy in Sri Lanka. Tourism is one of the largest earners of foreign exchange in Sri Lankan economy. It accounts for Rs. 132,427 million of foreign exchange earnings in 2012 (Tourism and Development Authority, 2012). Many hoteliers in Sri Lanka promote the sustainable use of alternative form of tourism concept as a new market oriented concepts. Being a good business opportunity and the fastest growing segment, Sri Lankan tourism is changing its outlook to sustain new concepts like eco-tourism. Since Sri Lanka is rich with much cultural and natural diversity, it has the potential to develop the eco-tourism concept as an alternative form of tourism better than other destinations for the benefit of the Sri Lankan economy and community (Authority, 2012).

The research was done with the intention of providing a thick description to the concept of eco-tourism with the customer satisfaction. Sri Lankan eco resort hoteliers construct the meaning of eco-tourism in various ways. They are more towards nature based tourism, wild life tourism and environment conservation tourism. They were unable to target eco-tourism market and attract eco tourist. Because the hoteliers' practice of the eco concept differs from international practices and standards, they could not meet the expectations of eco tourists. Even though the eco resort hoteliers' main market is eco tourist market, they cater and address to other type of tourists. Comparing to the international standard components, Sri Lankan hoteliers consider only few aspect as an essential components of an eco-resort. It has created a gap between the needs of eco tourists and the services of eco resort hoteliers.

Based on these findings, the researcher tried to identify the quality of practicing the concept of genuine eco-tourism and meeting the customer expectations. Then it is important to explore this phenomenon in Sri Lankan context to find out whether there is an impact of eco-tourism practices in eco resorts to the arrival of eco tourists. The finding of the present study indicates that the positive

relationship was observed among eco-tourism strategies and customer satisfaction.

Keywords: Customer Satisfaction, Eco-tourism

Paper Type: Research Proposal

Introduction

Eco tourism is a vast industry because it has huge trend. It means, when people having more money they try to enjoy their lives. Today most of people like to enjoy with natural environment. When considering the eco-tourism and customer satisfaction, should not forget that the tourism sector has considerable economic weight to a country. With tourism, hotel industry does big job. The future of the hotel industry will be shaped by a number of major forces, including the ability to attract investment to meet growing capital needs, the use of state-of-the-art information technologies (mainly the internet as a distribution channel) and marketing based on the accurate identification and analysis of customers' needs and expectations through the use of adapted Customer Relationship Management techniques. ((Dumas et al., 2010)

Customer satisfaction is a term frequently used in marketing. It is a measure of how products and services supplied by a company meet or surpass customer expectation. Ecotourism is now defined as "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education (TIES, 2015)

Bareithwie, (2001) Ecotourists' satisfaction is influenced by physical attributes including tangible and intangible factors of the tourism site including facilities, design and weather.

Followings are the trends in eco-tourism and its customer satisfaction with whole world

1. 96% of Condé Nast Traveler readers think hotels and resorts should be responsible for protecting the environment they operate in.
2. 74.5% says that a hotel's environmental policies can influence their decision to stay there.
3. In 2005, an analysis found that more than 2/3 of US and Australian travelers and 90% of UK tourists believe that within the hotel's responsibility should be considered the active protection of the environment and the support of local communities.

4. 46 % of the German's think 'it is an added value to stay in an environmentally friendly accommodation
5. 80 % of the Dutch want information on ethical issues in their travel information.

As we are students in Sri Lanka, should have to know about current situation regarding to the eco-tourism and customer satisfaction,

Eco tourism in Sri Lanka is a huge trend right now. The country has wide and vibrant source of ecotourism. Because, of Sri Lanka's climate, natural resources, and its' animals, plants, ancient kingdoms etc... It gives the opportunity of enjoying multifaceted attractions for the visitors (tourists). Sri Lanka has tropical climate with monsoons. Most temperature variation in the country is determined by elevation rather than season, with cooler temperatures at higher elevations and hot temperatures with lower elevations. Not only that, talking about its' natural resources, minerals of commercial value, highest mountains, the longest sea beaches, rivers, tanks we can't ignore. The natural vegetation of Sri Lanka varies according to climate zone and elevation. Its' animal life including 88 species of mammals, 21 of which are threatened with extinction. The Asian elephant, cheetah, leopard, and several species of monkeys are officially protected. And Sri Lanka has nice culture because Sinhalese, Tamils, and Muslims in a one country. And they have religious beliefs in Buddhism, Catholic, Hindu and Islam. Sri Lanka is one of the few countries with a very vast and rich cultural diversity. The culture is itself very unique and thereby contributes to the Sri Lankan identity. Sri Lankan culture includes a lot of customs and rituals, which date to more than 2000 years which were handed down from generation to generation. The most prominent feature of the Sri Lankan is its colorful festivals (SRI DALADA PERAHERA), which is one of the main tourist attractions.

We can't neglect term of **hospitality in Sri Lanka**. Hospitality means the relationship process between a guest and a host. And it also refers to the act or practice of being hospitable, that is, the reception and entertainment of guests, visitors with liberality and goodwill. Hospitality is also one of the prominent characteristics of the culture, making Sri Lankans one of the friendly nations in the world.

So there are some ventures and hotels in Sri Lanka which consent to eco-tourism. E.g.:- Eco tourism Lanka, kandalama hotel, cinnamon lodge, Jetwing lighthouse etc

Talking about Practice in Eco tourism of Sri Lanka, there is lack of understanding about the true policies of ecotourism. The majority of operators seem to practice more of nature-based operations, whilst others have a combination of nature and adventure-based tourism, but not proper ecotourism. (Bandara, Ranjith, 2013)

Problem Statement

Ecotourism is now defined as "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education" (TIES, 2015).

Such business accounts for a substantial portion of the modern global tourism industry, and generates significant amounts of money--not to mention controversy--in many parts of the world.

On behalf of eco-tourism world conformances are there. 20th February 2014, 350 local & international tourism professionals, managers & administrator will set foot on the idyllic island of Cebu, Philippines for the 5th world ecotourism conference. The 5th world ecotourism conference under the theme "Marine and coastal ecotourism: Oceans of uncertainties, waves of opportunities.

When considering the current status of Sri Lanka Eco tourism which is growing niche sector. There are some ventures and hotels which consent to eco-tourism.

Research problem of R.S.S.W Arachchi, M.S Ab.Yajid & Ali Khatibi is how do the eco resort hoteliers construct the meaning of eco-tourism? & what are the differences between the Sri Lankan eco resort hoteliers' interpretation and the International standards? So there findings are

1. Practice of eco resort concept has been misused by the hoteliers in Sri Lanka. It is due to lack of understanding of the concept.
2. unable to classify market and customer segment clearly

Research problem of E. Robinot & J.-L. Giannelloni, Annecy-le-Vieux, France,' is how "green" attributes contribute to hotel customers' overall satisfaction? And its finding is the results show that the environmental attributes were evaluated as "basic", which

Research problems of Claudia Torres-Sovero, José A. Gonzalez, Berta Martin Lopez, and Christopher A. Kirby, are characterize the typology of tourists visiting the Tambopata National Reserve (Madre de Dios, Peru), determine the

main social and ecological variables that influence tourist satisfaction. Their findings are

1. At the highest coefficient of dissimilarity, two different clusters were found: the first cluster is represented by older visitors who have the highest income, and the second cluster is represented by younger tourists.
2. Measuring the level of satisfaction of ecotourists is important as it can serve as a barometer of the “quality” of the service offered and it is a useful tool for designing more efficient conservation and management plans.
3. Most of the tourists visiting the lodges located in the TNR showed a relatively high satisfaction with the activities conducted, but the satisfaction level was highly influenced by the typology and characteristics of the tourists, and by a set of ecological and socio-economic variables that interact in a complex manner

This study seeks tourists’ feedback on Langkawi’s Kilim mangrove forests ecotourism tour services and to discover the contributing factors and their related elements leading to tourists’ satisfaction. The four hypothesized factors having probable influence on tourists’ satisfaction are business ethics, environmental management, and marketing

Yong-ho Roh, Sang-ho Kim, Korea these two person did a research named by The Determinant Factors of Eco-tourists’ Satisfaction and Behavioral, and also their research findings are,

1. Relationship of the expectation factors and satisfaction, expectation factors did not influence satisfaction
2. Most of the perceived performance factors except accessibility significantly influenced satisfaction
3. The expectation factor of accessibility was significantly related to disconfirmation.
4. The performance factors of physical attributes, eco-interpretation, usability, accessibility, and eco-experience significantly influenced disconfirmation

P. Perera, .R. Vlosky, both of these people did The Case of Forest-Based Ecotourism in Sri Lanka. According to this journal research problem is How Previous Visits Shape Trip Quality, Perceived Value, Satisfaction, and Future Behavioral Intentions”? And its findings are

1. The direct influence of trip quality was found to be much stronger than the indirect influence through perceived value and satisfaction.
2. With ecotourism being a unique and knowledgeable form of tourism that demands more for nature experience and less for facilities, one can expect quality attributes to be less important

In Sri Lanka, Eco tourism researchers conducted research related to managerial perception up to now only. Therefore our research gap is related to customer perception in eco-tourism.

Research Questions.

- Are Sri Lankan hoteliers apply internationally accepted eco-tourism standards in their practice?
- Does eco-tourism practice affordable for local tourist as well?
- Are customers health & safety measures enforced in eco-tourism in a satisfactory manner?

Objectives

- To Sri Lankan hoteliers are apply internationally accepted eco-tourism standards in their practice.
- To eco-tourism practice affordable for local tourist as well.
- To customer health & safety are measures enforced in eco-tourism in a satisfactory manner.

Literature Review

Tourism is a collection of activities, services and industries that delivers a travel experience, including transportation, accommodations, eating and drinking establishments, retail shops, entertainment businesses, activity facilities and other hospitality services provided for individuals or groups traveling away from home. The World Tourism Organization (WTO) claims that tourism is currently the world's largest industry with annual revenues of over \$3 trillion dollars.

Mathieson and Wall (1982) created a good working definition of **tourism** as "the temporary movement of people to destinations outside their normal places of work and residence, the activities undertaken during their stay in those destinations, and the facilities created to cater to their needs."

According to Macintosh and Goeldner (1986) **tourism** is "the sum of the phenomena and relationships arising from the interaction of tourists, business

suppliers, host governments and host communities in the process of attracting and hosting these tourists and other visitors."

Midterm strategic plan for Sri Lanka tourism (2002-2004) states that Sri Lanka had 1% percent of eco tourists. It is in a very low level comparing to other destinations. Based on these literature and preliminary findings, researcher identified there is an issue of practicing the concept of genuine eco-tourism and meeting the customer expectations.

Tourism is widely believed to be the most rapidly growing global industry. According to World Tourism Organization ecotourism is believed to be the fastest growing tourism segment (Buckley, 1994) (Harron & Deardon, 1993). However, there is considerable debate over what ecotourism really means.

The term „Ecotourism“ was first coined in July of 1983 by Hector Ceballos Lascurain, an architect, environmentalist and ecotourism consultant from Mexico (Planeta). His definition was later revised in 1993 to move the focus to conservation and the role of the tourist from passive observer of nature to participant with a responsibility for its preservation,

Ecotourism is the newly originated concept which is one of the fastest growing segments within the travel and tourism industry. They believe that by doing their business ecofriendly, profit will increase because of customer attraction on green concept.

Comprises about 20 percent of all tourist arrivals. This rapid global growth in ecotourism illustrates an increasing interest in nature and the environment. According to Arlen (1995), ecotourism grossed over \$335 billion a year worldwide, and attracted millions of interested tourists. In Malaysia, ecotourism is also a major revenue earner and had benefited the country, its natural areas, and local communities (TIES, 2015).

According to “The international Ecotourism society” (TIES), Why we want to more emphasize on ecotourism.

1. Conservation

Offering market-linked long-term solutions, ecotourism provides effective economic incentives for conserving and enhancing bio-cultural diversity and helps protect the natural and cultural heritage of our beautiful planet.

2. Communities

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.

3. Interpretation

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

Ecotourism is now defined as "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education" (TIES, 2015). Education is meant to be inclusive of both staff and guests.

WASHINGTON, DC -- Effective January 1, 2015, The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) has revised its **definition and Principles**, created by the founding members in 1990. Leading up to the 25 year anniversary celebration in 2015, ecotourism experts from around the world connected to re-evaluate TIES principles of ecotourism as an initiative led by Hitesh Mehta, Judy Kepher-Gona, and Dr. Kelly Bricker. TIES has implemented small changes and additions to both the principles and the definition to provide more clarity, eliminate the ambiguity, and therefore reduce the green washing and wrongful interpretations being practiced by in the tourism industry. It has been 25 years since TIES was started, it was important to re-visit three principles found in the literature – that ecotourism:

1. Is non- consumptive / non-extractive
2. Creates an ecological **conscience**
3. Holds eco-centric values and **ethics** in relation to nature

Ecotourism is about uniting conservation, communities, and sustainable travel. This means that those who implement, participate in and market ecotourism activities should adopt the following ecotourism principles:

Principles of Ecotourism

1. Minimize physical, social, behavioral, and psychological impacts.
2. Build environmental and cultural awareness and respect.
3. Provide positive experiences for both visitors and hosts.
4. Provide direct financial benefits for conservation.

5. Generate financial benefits for both local people and private industry.
6. Deliver memorable interpretative experiences to visitors that help raise sensitivity to host countries' political, environmental, and social climates.
7. Design, construct and operate low-impact facilities.
8. Recognize the rights and spiritual beliefs of the Indigenous People in your community and work in partnership with them to create empowerment. (Rangana, 2007)

"Ecotourism is environmentally responsible travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas, in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features - both past and present) that promotes conservation, The main problem that has stemmed from this is that often the term is misused or misinterpreted for developments which do not hold true to the original meaning of eco tourism (Wall & Ross, 1999). This is usually attributed to the vagueness of its definitions. With the many meanings and redefinitions over the years it is hard to regulate it (Font, 2002). As ecotourism has grown in popularity, sometimes resembling traditional mass tourism, its definitions have been expanded to incorporate ideas about eco tourist responsibility; environmentally friendly destination management, profit linkages to conservation efforts, and the sustainable development of local human populations (Campbell, 1999). There are many definitions of ecotourism. Has low negative visitor impact, and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local populations"

Satisfaction of Eco Tourists

Factors Influencing Satisfaction Reynolds and Braithwaite (2001) claimed that ecotourists' satisfaction is influenced by physical attributes including tangible and intangible factors of the tourism site including facilities, design and weather and also planning, protected nature areas, financing & understanding. The guide's interpretation and role, variety and uniqueness of eco-experiences are also important factors in determining ecotourists' satisfaction.

Planning

Proper planning guides to be the success in all the cases. Here also customer can satisfy as well as possible when having a proper planning since it guide to more convenience and quality service.

Protected nature area

Natural environment has given a better opportunity to the tourism industry since most of the tourists are willing to travel to see the natural beauty. In the case of having a protected natural area, the tourists are automatically attracted to those suitable hotels to have fun as well as for the protection.

Financing

Most of the tourists are willing to pay additional charges also for having eco friendly environment to travel by them.

Understanding

When one party implements the eco friendly practices, it guides to others also to follow the same practice. In this case also when tourism industry use this practice, other parties also aware about the value of having this kind of environmental friendly practice and they also motivate to act as that.

Another study by Wight (1996) found that the guide's ability and/or interpretation and eco-experience programs are important factors for satisfaction. Pizam and Rachel (1978) tested tourists' satisfaction with an expectation-disconfirmation paradigm. They found that ecotourists' satisfaction was influenced by physical and biological characteristics, as well as accessibility and usability of the sites. Geva and Goldman (1992) confirmed that a tour guide's quality was an important variable in tourists' satisfaction. Ecotourists also evaluated the presence of animals and plants as important factors. The various results showed that tourists' satisfaction could contain factors determining whether one recommends or revisits a site. There have been few empirical studies about tourist satisfaction and the intention of recommending or revisiting a site. Mazursky (1989) showed that the intention to recommend and revisit a site was influenced by tourists' satisfaction. Fridgem (1991) found that satisfied tourists revisited sites and produced more tourists. Baker and Crompton (2001) showed that the higher satisfaction tourists had, the more they intended to revisit a site and promote it by word-of-mouth. Pearce (1988) claimed that tourists who were satisfied recommended the sites and revisited them. However, unsatisfied tourists did not recommend sites, nor revisit them, and consequently spread negative word-of-mouth about them.

Tourist Behavior on Eco-Tourism

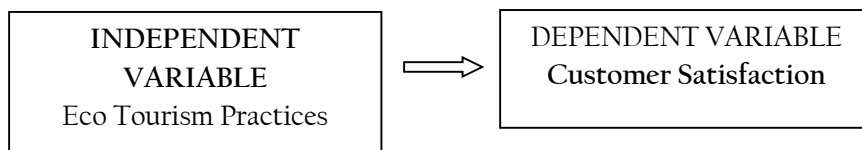
Tourist behavior consists of several stages which include pre-visit decision Making, onsite experience, experience evaluations, and post-visit's behavioral

intentions and behaviors (Williams,D.R , Buswell,M.E. & Roggenbuck, J.W, 1992). Tourism experience is also an aggregated term that encompasses pre-visit, travel to, destination/on-site, travel from, And post-visit (Yuan,J. Morrison,A. Liping,A., Cai,L.A. & Linton,S., 2008). Hilgard and Bower (1981) Proposed the notion of “generalization phenomenon” or the “carryover effect” in Responding to similar or related stimuli by humans. Applying this notion to tourism Context, Pearce (1982) showed that tourism experience is not limited to a particular destination and instead, the entire experience has an impact on pre-visit, on-site visit and post-visit stages.

Conceptual Framework

The most important thing to understand from conceptual framework is about the primarily a conception or model of eco-tourism including what is plan to study.

Customer awareness about the eco-tourism is basically can identify under two areas. Those are environmental awareness and protection and conservation of wild life. Tourism has the potential to increase the public appreciation of the environment and spread awareness of the environmental problems when it brings people into closer contact with nature and the environment.



Eco tourism practices includes planning, Protected natural areas, Financing and Understanding. As well as customer satisfaction includes Attraction, Attention, Additional charges and Knowledge. The level of the Customer satisfaction is depends on the nature of those Eco tourism practices.

When conducting a research, it is important to build the conceptual framework for the study. Customer satisfaction on eco-tourism will depend on eco-tourism practice. Under that comes planning of eco-tourism, protection of environment, Price of maintenance (finance), understanding the vital role of environment to the world. Above four independent variables effect to changes in attraction to the industry, attention to stop pollutions that can affect environment balance, additional charges require from customer for additional satisfactions and enhancement of feeling in customer mind set related importance of natural environment.

For the purpose of this research, researchers are about to undergo two independent variables which are protection of natural areas and Understanding.

Methodology

Research design

When conducting a research, it is important to identify the framework for the study. Here, the researchers are going to use the qualitative research approach to conduct this research.

Data collection method

Researchers are going to collect data in both methods, through primary data and secondary data. In the case of primary data researchers got through questionnaires to visitors, interviews with hoteliers, semi-structured questioners and managerial interviews. As secondary questioners researchers used news papers and articles.

Population, Sample size and Sample Selection

The target population for this study will be eco resorts which were registered under the Sri Lankan tourist Board and about 150 visitors love eco-tourism. Samples will be selected from 10 hotels in Sri Lanka purposively. Those 150 visitors include 10 people from the management of the hotels.

Data Collection Instruments

As data collection methods, the researchers used followings. Semi-structured questioners used to gather data from visitors and Interviews used to gather from management of the hotels.

Data analytical techniques

The researchers are going to apply four data analysis methods to study the research issue. They will in-depth interview analysis of eco resort hoteliers, analysis of questionnaires from visitors, observation analysis of eco resort components and document analysis of eco resorts. Researchers hope to identify main themes like, customers' attitudes on eco-tourism and their satisfaction, practicing the eco concept in hotels.

The Expected research outcome

Researchers are planning the research under the topic of customer satisfaction on ecotourism practices in srilanka. At before there are no any researchers have

conducted a research under the consideration of customer satisfaction on ecotourism in Sri Lanka that have done under the managerial perspective only.

As per our view this is such a useful research because researchers are the only people firstly conducted this kind of research in srilanka and also in current situation in ecotourism is very fastly improving green environment in srilanka and also there many industries desired ecotourism such as hotel industry, travel industry. So according to our research people will get good knowledge about ecotourism practices in srilanka. As per our knowledge if we develop this research for a long time researchers can get a good improvement of ecotourism in Sri Lanka.

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