

Impacts of COVID-19 on the Destination Management: Case of Ella, Sri Lanka

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The aim of this paper is to explore the impact of COVID-19 in Ella Sri Lanka as one of the growing tourist destinations with the involvement of the informal sector. Travel restrictions for more than 12 months considered an unfamiliar situation for almost all the destinations in Sri Lanka after facing a crisis from the Easter Sunday attack. Ella Sri Lanka is a remote destination that got the highest informal sector attention and social media influencers in Sri Lanka. Ella is an informal sector-based destination and lacking with formal sector involvement in planning and development for long-term survival. This factor led Ella to a crisis with COVID-19 and crashed in all the service offerings. Studying this destination with the impact of the crisis is essential to be a lesson to other informal sector-based destinations and to drive Ella to long-term survival. This is a qualitative case study research followed by eight interviews carried out to collect data from purposively selected stakeholder group participants. It is evident that formal sector establishments are much needed to drive Ella to long-term survival. It was further found the reasons for the crisis during this pandemic are involvement, lack of guest satisfaction, lack of engagement with the domestic tourists. Based on the findings, suitable recommendations were provided to destinations that are mainly focusing on growth. Those were developing a crisis management plan for those informal sector operators, improving the destination image with proper coordination of the work, and paying attention to other target markets.

Keywords: *Crisis management, Destination planning and development, Ella Sri Lanka, Informal sector, Post COVID-19*

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