

## **Qualitative Analysis of International Backpacker Tourists' Perception towards Local Food Restaurants in Ella, Sri Lanka**

Madhusankha, W. A. I.<sup>1</sup>, Ranaweera, R. A. A. K.<sup>2</sup> and Idroos, A. A.<sup>3</sup>

This study investigates the perception of backpacker tourists toward local food restaurants located in Ella, Sri Lanka. In-depth interviews with fifty international backpacker tourists who visited Ella were conducted and thematic analysis was employed to analyse the data. 98% of the backpackers stated that they are satisfied with Sri Lankan food. As per the backpackers interviewed, price, nutrient value and food safety are the most influencing factors that affect the decision of selecting a Sri Lankan restaurant. Backpacker tourists stated that they are also concerned about the information in menu and product knowledge of food servers. The physical environment of the restaurant attracts backpacker tourists to local restaurants. Keeping traditional outlook and simple features of restaurants give unique experience to travelers and this in turn generate opportunities for the concept of gastronomy tourism concept. Rice with curries, Hoppers, Roties and Dosai are the more popular Sri Lankan food among backpacker tourists. Unique taste, textures, simple attractive garnishing and eco-friendly packing are the reasons that backpackers are attracted to Sri Lankan food. Price gaps of food create disadvantages to local food restaurants in Ella. With proper marketing approaches, Sri Lankan restaurants can be promoted among international travelers. Nevertheless, government contribution to pricing is necessary to control the price gap.

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<sup>1</sup> University College of Matara (madhusankhaishara@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup> Uva Wellassa University of Sri Lanka (amayakaumadi7@gmail.com)

<sup>3</sup> Uva Wellassa University of Sri Lanka (idroosuwa@gmail.com)