

Paper ID: IRCUWU2023-405

Tourists' expectations on willingness to visit Agri-Tourism destination (Special reference to Nuwara Eliya Agro-Ecological Zone)

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Agri-tourism combines agriculture and tourism, giving visitors the chance to participate in agricultural activities, connect with nature, learn about sustainable farming practices, and experience local cultures. It provides immersive experiences, generates economic opportunities, and contributes to the development of the agricultural and tourism sectors. To fully capitalize on the potential benefits of Agri-tourism, it is crucial to identify and understand the expectations of tourists. By recognizing what visitors seek in their Agri-tourism experiences, destinations can tailor their offerings to effectively meet these expectations. The study targets the Nuwara Eliya agroecological zone and employs a quantitative research approach that incorporates questionnaires as data collection methods. Through the implementation of stratified sampling methods, a total of 160 tourists have been selected as respondents. The study is based on the “Evolving Tourists Expectation Model” (ETEM), which aims to identify the changing expectations of tourists regarding their concerns about Environmental-friendly Sustainable Operation (ESO) in the tourism products and offerings they choose to purchase. The findings revealed that more than 76% of tourists expressed their willingness to visit destinations focused on Agri-tourism. Through the exploratory factor analysis, the study identified five factors that influenced tourists' decision-making: flexible pricing, entertainment options for tourists, opportunities for tourists to participate actively, availability of high-quality products, and the overall environmental condition. Further analysis using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) indicated that among these factors, the basic environment, quality of products, and flexibility in pricing had a statistically significant impact on tourists' expectations and their willingness to engage in Agri-tourism activities. However, it was noted that tourists also emphasized the need for improvements in farm entertainment activities, including a wider variety of options, in order to enhance the overall environmental experience. Additionally, upgrading the quality of farm products and ensuring proper hygiene and sanitation facilities were identified as crucial factors for enhancing tourists' willingness to visit Agri-tourism destinations.

Keywords: Agri-tourism; Willingness; Tourist expectations; Nuwara Eliya; Ecological zone