

Tourist perception regarding tourism and hospitality industry in Kalpitiya region

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Tourists' perception regarding the destination is a major requirement to increase the tourist arrival. Tourist should be satisfied with travel experience and hospitality service that he/she encountered at the destination. Main objective of this research was to identify whether the tourists are satisfied with the above mentioned key components in Kalpitiya region.

Identifying potentials for tourism industry, Tourism Development Authority has commenced Kalpitiya Tourism Zone (KTZ) selecting 4000 acres in 14 islands since 2008. Due to natural and geological significances prevailed in this region both local and foreign tourists are attracted to visit the area.

The sample of the study was 50 tourists who were both domestic and foreign tourists. Following primary data collection methods, the tourists were given questioners while some of them were individually interviewed to identify their personal attitudes regarding the region. During the research it was identified that most of the tourists are satisfied with the accommodation sector especially regarding nature friendly construction methods of the accommodation units. Transportation methods and other infrastructure facilities established in area is not much adequate for a perfect satisfaction of the tourists. Tourists are highly satisfied with the geological landscapes and natural resources within the region while the activities offered by the hotels/resorts and tours operators are highly attracted by the visitors.

Though the government has commenced a sustainable tourism development project in Kalpitiya region, still most of the tourists are not aware of that project. Making awareness among the tourists about Kalpitiya tourism region using tourism promotional programs, establishment of tourist information centers, motivating private sector to offer a satisfied travel and hospitality experience within the region can be mentioned as the suggestions for the better advancement of the tourism industry within Kalpitiya region.

Key words: Tourism Industry, Kalpitiya Tourism Region, Hospitality service, Travel industry, Satisfied tourism experience

Introduction

The objective of this research is to examine the tourist perception regarding the tourism industry in Kalpitiya region. For any tourist destination, the perception of the tourists is much important to create a high demand. The tourist is a person who observes and experience all the aspects of attractions, activities, amenities and accommodations offered at any tourist destination. When above all requirements are satisfied with the tourist' intention, he or she desires to be a repeated visitor for that destination. The tourist would not be a repeated visitor if his or her tourist expectations are not fulfilled. Thus the perception of the tourist regarding any destination or attraction would be an advantage for future tourism development projects and to plan tourist oriented services and facilities at the destination.

The sample of the study was 50 tourists who were both domestic and foreign tourists. Following primary data collection methods, the tourists were given questioners while some of them were individually interviewed to identify their personal attitudes regarding the region. Meanwhile 10 resorts were taken as the

sample for identifying the significances of the accommodation sector in Kalpitiya region. Though there are even 7 star hotels have been proposed to commence in the 14 islands in the Kalpitiya Peninsular, here only unclassified hotels were selected as the sample to collect the data regarding the accommodation sector of the region. Both primary and secondary data were gathered for the study while the field based survey was carried out including field observations, interviews, discussions and structured questionnaires.

Introduction to Tourism Industry

Tourism is atypical activity where the public participate widely and the evidence of travel and tourism can be identified even since the pre-historic era. Inheriting the sense of travelling from the ancestors, people used to travel place to place, especially from their usual habitats in search of foods, shelter, security, even for experiencing novel, exotic environments and landscapes.

The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) defines tourists as people who "travel and stay in places outside their usual environment for more than twenty-four hours and not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes not related to the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited" (United Nations World Tourism Organization, 1980)

International tourism is set to hit a new record by the end of 2014 with over 1.1 billion international tourists travelling the world in one single year. During the first ten months of 2014, the number of international tourists grew by 5% according to the latest UNWTO World Tourism Barometer, rising above expectations. Between

January and October 2014, the volume of international tourists (overnight visitors) reached 978 million, 45 million more than in the same period of 2013. With an increase of 4.7%, international tourism continues to grow well above the long-term trend projected by UNWTO for the period 2010-2020 (+3.8%), and is set to end the year at over 1.1 billion. (United Nations World Tourism Organization, 2014)

Located in the Indian Ocean between 6°-10° N and 79°-82° E, Sri Lanka is spread over only 65,610 square kilometers with 1065km stretched coastal line. Even though the island is quite small in its extent, the abundance of natural resources, historical monuments, unique socio-cultural values, rich biodiversity and prestigious heritage dates back as far as 2500 years, have composed a unique image regarding Sri Lanka as a tourist destination: 'Diversity, Compactness, Authenticity' are the unique phenomena for Sri Lankan tourism.

With the dawn of peace Sri Lankan government is driving away a rival economic development recognizing the vast potential for tourism industry. To achieve the above mentioned targets, the government has identified several regions within the country as tourism development zones. Benthota, Dedduwa, Kuchchaweli, Nilaweli, Arugam-Bay, Pasikudah, Jaffna, Yala and Kalpitiya are among those newly established tourism development zones.

Kalpitiya Region in Sri Lanka

Placed 150 km north of the capital, Colombo, the **Kalpitiya region is one of the most beautiful coastal areas located in the North Western Province** of Sri Lanka, by being a famous destination for

the beach tourists and also is like a heaven for a rich bio diversity including various species of flora and fauna. Kalpitiya is a peninsula which separates the Indian Ocean by West from the Puttalam Bay by East which is consisted of two bays namely as Dutch Bay and Portugal Bay. Geographically, Kalpitiya is located between 08°10'0"N 79°43'0"E in Western Province.

The potential of natural resources spread in both lagoon area and coastal area have opened huge potential for the tourism industry. Hence, thousands of tourists annually visit this area to join the water based activities including kite surfing, whale watching, dolphin watching, snorkeling, deep sea fishing, and diving etc. The other excursions are Alankuda Beach, Wilpattu National Park, Talawila Church and Puttalam Lagoon. Simply, Kalpitiya area is an ideal destination to feel the bliss of nature and experience the thrill and adventure staying amidst of the Indian Ocean and Puttalam Lagoon. 4000 acres in 14 islands have been identified as the centers of the proposed tourism zone, by the Sri Lankan Tourism Development Authority since 2008, giving opportunities for tourism developments schemes in that area.

Tourist Arrivals and Tourist Markets in Kalpitiya Region

Here 10 hotels were observed regarding the tourist arrival during the off season and peak season period. Here off season is regarded as the period between May- October, while peak season is regarded as November-April. The foreign tourists' occupancy rate at the hotels is usually exceeds 60% during the Peak season while 30% of hotels record 70% of foreign tourists occupancy during the peak season. During the off season, the hotels acquire only 40% of foreign tourist arrival at the resorts in-house guests. All of the hotels indicate fluctuation in foreigner's arrival during the off

season, and apparently it is between 20%-40% from the tourists' arrival of the peak season. More than 60% of local tourist arrival is reported during the peak season which prevails from November – April. During off season the local arrival is reported between 25%-41% out of the total arrival of the local tourists. Here only the tourists are considered, but not the one day visitors.

Without any disturbances, Kalpitiya is attracted by various types of Nationalities including Asian, Middle East, European and Far Eastern. The mostly visited tourists are German, as it bears 25% out of the total arrival of tourists by their market. Other major markets in Kalpitiya tourism area are UK, Russian, France and Middle East which indicate the arrival of 15%, 13%, 13% and 12% respectively. India, Australia, China and Switzerland are the other minor attractive markets for Kalpitiya destination.

Purpose of Visiting Kalpitiya

Purpose of the tourists' to visit a tourist destination would be highly important fact for the promotional strategies to be taken in the future. 39% of foreign tourists and 28% of local tourists have visited Kalpitiya on the purpose of leisure. They have arrived at this beach destination to join water based activities, to have relaxation in the beach and to enjoy the coastal environment at the vicinity of Puttalam Lagoon. 10% of locals and 5% of foreigners have arrived at Kalpitiya due to the purpose of pleasure where the visitors expect enjoy and excitement during the tour at Kalpitiya. 7% of locals have visited Kalpitiya as their first visit in order to feel the variety in this area specially, after the introduction of the new tourism development projects within the region. Meanwhile 3% of foreigners have visited this area as a first visit after having information about the area via internet and other Mass Medias. 5%

of locals and 3% of foreigners have visited Kalpitiya with the purpose of education as per the following figure.

Gender of the Tourists

Tourism industry is an open industry for all kinds of tourists without regarding the gender of the person. Being a popular destination for water based tourist activities, male is the mostly arriving gender at Kalpitiya because males are interested in water based activities and adventure activities more than the females.

Difference between the arrivals of male and female is reported as 71% out of the locals tourists are male and the rest of 29% are female who have visited the area. When the foreign tourists arrivals are considered, it is 68% of arrivals are reported as males and the rest of 32% of the foreign arrivals is recorded as females. As it is mentioned earlier, the basic motivation for the higher arrivals of the males can be identified as the tourist activities including kite surfing, diving, and 4WD adventure.

Accommodation Sector in Kalpitiya Region

The resorts and hotels located at Kalpitiya region can be identified according to the location because, some of them are located along Alankuda and Kandakuliya beaches and the others are located at Pulltalam Lagoon.

Investors identified the huge potential in both Alankudah and Puttalam Lagoon areas during the early period of 2005. Since then there were beach hotels and resorts were established in the area, but when the war conflict of the country was emerged the entire accommodation sector of the area also began to being collapsed. During the survey 10 beach resorts and lagoon hotels were

observed and according to the data following analysis can be identified.

Hotels in Kalpitiya area are not classified as star hotels due to the lack of infrastructure facilities within the region. But using all the possibilities of the natural environment and resources these hotels have constructed to cater the tourists satisfaction in its best level. According to the gathered data, hotels are consisted of several facilities and attractions.

Due to the geographical features and climatic condition of Kalpitiya, cabana type accommodation is the most ideal way for the guests. Most of the tourists from European region, they are not aware about this eco friendly, thatched house, clay applied and simple kind of accommodation facilities. Instead of that they have experienced the super luxurious, extravagant and star classified accommodationservicesat the other high-end destinations in the world wide.

The hotels and resorts located at both lagoon and the coastal area are consisted of the facilities and amenities including restaurants, swimming pools, bars, spas and they most of the time arrange activities as well.

But offering a unique hospitality and accommodation experience at the guests, Kalpitiya bears more significances regarding the eco typed cabanas and villas. Using natural ingredients and indigenousmaterials mixed with the local construction methods, Kalpitiya tourist destination highlights the high quality and uniqueness of local, traditional and eco friendly accommodation service in Sri Lanka.

These categories can be occupied by the tourists at the hotels which are located in the vicinity of the beach and the Puttalam lagoon. The room categories can be again categorized according to the view of the location, but it totally depends on the variety of the property. According to the data gathered by both local and foreign tourists, their preference for the accommodation types can be identified analyzing the above figure. 64% from the local guests have selected cabanas as their accommodation type while 55% from the foreigners have chosen that type of cabanas. Meanwhile villas have been selected by the locals and foreigners by 20% and 22% respectively. There is a demand for chalets from both locals and foreigners for some extend and that is 20% from the locals and 22% from the foreigners. Suite rooms or higher room categories are the least attracted or selected accommodation type for both local and foreigners.

Attractions and Activities

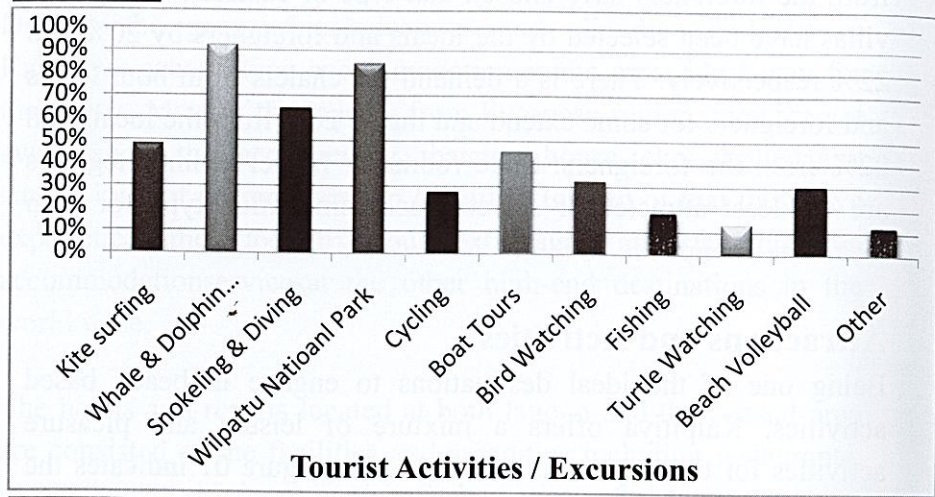
Being one of the ideal destinations to engage in beach based activities, Kalpitiya offers a mixture of leisure and pleasure activities for the tourists and visitors. The Figure 01 indicates the variety of the tourism related activities according to the preference of the tourists in the area with approximate percentage.

Whale and Dolphin watching is the most attracted tourist activity in the area. Approximately 90% of tourists are interested in whale and dolphin watching. Wilpattu National Park is the second popular excursion among the foreigners due to the easily accessibility of the site. According to the research, 84% of tourists are fond in the National Park visit and disregarding the age, gender and other factors, each and every traveler can join this tour.

Kalpitiya is also hot spot for kite and wind surfing due to the geographical features of the coastal line. According to the above

figure kite surfing indicates 48% and it implies an upcoming trend regarding that activity. Though Most of the kite surfers visit this place and organize kite surfing competitions as well. Specially, Kandakkuliya beach is the ideal place for kite surfing and during the kite surfing season, the coastal line is fully from both local and foreign surfers.

Figure 01 Activities and Excursions According to Preferences of Tourists



(Sources: Sample Data, 2013)

Tourists' Perception Regarding Kalpitiya Tourism

It is more important to observe the perception of the tourists' regarding the tourism industry within Kalpitiya region. Both local and foreign tourists are gathered regarding the perceptions or personal attitudes regarding the accommodation, food and beverages, hospitality, Information, and safety at Kalpitiya region. Both locals and foreigners have given their views on Kalpitiya

tourism in different ways according to the different criteria as follows.

- **Accommodation**

The perceptions of the local and foreigners regarding the quality of the accommodation facilities in the destination is recorded as 20% of locals and 18% of foreigners' mentioned accommodation sector is in an excellent condition while 14% of locals and 22% of foreigners considered the accommodation services are in a good condition. 7% of locals and 6% of foreigners considered that accommodation facilities are in an average condition. 9% of locals and 4% of foreigners considered that accommodations are in a poor condition.

- **Food and Beverage**

The opinion of the local and foreign tourists regarding the food and beverages that they had during the journey at Kalpitiya area. Most of the hotels and resorts offer local cuisine and dishes for their guests with best o quality and taste. Here the satisfaction of the tourists on food and beverages consumed at the resorts and hotels during all the tour are considered.

20% of local and 18% of foreign tourists have accepted that food and beverages are in an excellent quality while 14% of locals and 22% of foreigners have admitted that they are in a good quality. In addition to that 7% of locals and 6% of foreigners have given their view reading the food and beverages are in an average quality while 9% of locals and 4% of foreigners have noticed that food and beverages in Kalpitiya are in poor condition. The quality of the foods and beverages depend on the standards of the hotel or the resort.

- **Infrastructure Facilities**

According to the perceptions and views of the tourists regarding the infrastructure facilities within the region were observed. Here the tourists were asked about to decide about the transportation methods and modes, water, accommodation, sanitary, safety, security, privacy, information facilities and accessibility within the destination before they fill the questions of infrastructure facilities section of the questioner. After the introduction of KITRP to the region, the government has paid attention to expand the road network and to reconstruct the damaged roads in the area. But still the road constructions have not completed and they are still in ongoing process. Sometimes, travelers encounter inconvenient issues during the travelling periods, due to the lack of infrastructure facilities including sanitary, safety, information and transportation.

3% of locals and 5% of foreigners have mentioned that the infrastructure facilities are in an excellent level while 17% of locals and 12% of foreigners have accepted that infrastructure facilities are in a good condition. 20% of locals and 18% of foreigners have experienced that the infrastructure facilities are in an average condition while 10% of locals and 16% of foreigners have declared as infrastructure facilities are in a poor level.

Kalpitiya as a Tourist Destination

Regarding all the service, facilities, features and amenities within Kalpitiya area, the tourists (both locals and foreigners) have given their overall attitude on this tourist destination. Here tourists and the visitor are given the questionnaires to gather the attitude regarding Kalpitiya destination.

It is indicated that 34% of locals and foreigners have accepted Kalpitiya as an excellent destination, while 40% of visitors have

admitted the fact that this is a good place to be visited. 20% of tourists have given their idea on Kalpitiya area with an average perception while the rest, 6% of tourists admit that Kalpitiya is under a poor condition as a destination. Here the visitors and tourists are asked to be concerned regarding the infrastructure facilities, information services, safety, security, accessibility, quality of the accommodation facilities and hospitality service etc. Though there is a lack of infrastructure facilities can be seen within the region, about 40% of visitors have admitted that this is good place to be visited due to the quality of the tourism product of the area. Because the toe overall tourism product of this area has been woven around the natural resources, rich biodiversity, varied ecosystem, unique geographical elements etc. More than other factors, both locals and foreigners are attracted by the serene beach and magnificent Puttalam lagoon where the visitor can feel the bliss of being in Kalpitiya.

Conclusion

In the increasing global tourism market most of the developing countries have exposed their economies to the tourism industry. Earning foreign exchange, revenue for the government, direct and indirect job opportunities, foreign investments, development of infrastructure facilities, rural development, and economic stimulation are only few benefits reaped by the governments of the developing countries vi travel and tourism. Hence, there is no exception for Sri Lanka to deny at the emerging tourism industry.

Kalpitiya is not only a tourist destination for leisure and pleasure, and it is consisted of some educational knowledgoin all aspects of religious, historical, socio-culturally and eco-logically. Both local

and foreign tourists visit this area with the major purpose of pleasure. Due to the lack of infrastructure facilities there are none of star class hotels located in Kalpitiya area. But recognizing the huge potential in tourism industry both local and foreign investors have commenced new hotels within the region. Specially there are no sky scraping buildings in this tourist destination, because the area is consisted of huge land extent for establishment of hotels and resorts.

During the research it was identified that most of the tourists are satisfied with the accommodation sector especially regarding nature friendly construction methods of the accommodation units. Transportation methods and other infrastructure facilities established in area is not much adequate for a perfect satisfaction of the tourists. Tourists are highly satisfied with the geological landscapes and natural resources within the region while the activities offered by the hotels/resorts and tours operators are highly attracted by the visitors.

Tourist arrivals at Kalpitiya can be identified differently in the off season and peak season of each year due to the fluctuations and growths of the total tourist arrivals of the entire country. From November to April, a high tourist arrival can be seen in this region especially because of the season for whale watching dolphin watching. In addition to that there is a remarkable significance in the arrivals of the foreigners and the local tourists. More often arrivals in foreigners are higher than the locals'.

Up to present, star classified hotels or resort cannot be seen and all the properties in accommodation sector are unclassified. Disregarding the classification of the hotels, there is a high demand

for those properties by the foreigners more than from the local guests. The established facilities and amenities can be seen in the accommodation properties within the area are not entirely enough to cater the tourists. Still Kalpitiya has not achieved the targets of being high-end tourist destination, but the budget tourists are much more interested regarding the present accommodation sector in the region.

The area should be planned to cater both local and foreign tourists in both categories in budget and high spending tourists. Government should enhance the quality of the infrastructure facilities including road network, sanitation, urban cleanliness, urban designing, and water resources. The responsible individuals including hotel owners. Tour operators, travel agencies and other stakeholders should consider about the perception of the tourists to increase the quality and quantity of the tourism industry in kalpitiya region.

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