



Domestic Tourism Development in Southeast Dry Zone: Stakeholders' Perspective

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Abstract

This paper aims to identify salient features, problems and recommendations for developing domestic tourism in the Southeast dry zone of Sri Lanka from the stakeholders' perspective. The selected area was the Southeast dry zone, the most popular tourist zone among domestic tourists, including Kataragama, Yala, and Udawalawe. The researcher used the qualitative approach, and the data were collected through in-depth interviews as the primary data collection method, using the purposive sampling method, from 20 respondents. The collected data were analysed using thematic techniques. The study found the salient features of domestic tourism, such as visiting for religious and leisure purposes, less length of stay, travelling at weekends and holidays using private transportation, seeking familiar low-cost accommodations with minimal expenses, and less awareness of travel preparation and concern for a leading destination. Lack of adequate sanitation and infrastructure, unavailability of awareness programs, low-cost quality lodges and restaurants, transportation and accessibility difficulties, the effect of prices, less government support and coordination, behaviour and characteristics of domestic tourists are identified as problems to develop domestic tourism. Enhance government intervention to grow facilities, develop programs to create propaganda methods among domestic tourists, and establish recreational activities in addition to the attractions, building relationships among tourism service providers and administrative parties, as well as proper training and awareness for service providers, are emphasised as recommendations for developing domestic tourism in this study.

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INTRODUCTION

Under that dimension, the tourism industry categorises domestic tourism and international tourism. Domestic tourism comprises "the activities of a resident visitor within the country of reference either as part of a domestic or part of an outbound tourism trip" (United Nation World Tourism Organization, 2010). Domestic tourism provides critical support to the tourism industry in several performance areas, including seasonality, regional dispersal, and increased domestic spending. Many developed and developing countries have been taking more economic contributions from domestic tourism than international tourism.

However, domestic tourism is non-existent in many developing regions (Mariki, 2011). Shantha (2008) indicates that the domestic tourism industrial sector can contribute more value to the national economy's growth and development than the international tourism industrial sector. Because domestic tourism supports retaining the hard currency in the home country instead of flowing outside from travel expenses to foreign countries, domestic tourism can bring many benefits to the destination. An increase in the number of people travelling for leisure has a ripple influence on the economy's growth. Domestic tourism tends to lead to a rise in employment, enhance the living standards of the host community, and develop tourist attractions.

Sri Lanka has many public holidays compared to other countries worldwide. A significant domestic tourist segment makes excursions in Sri Lanka. Domestic tourist visitation increases significantly compared to foreign tourist visitation. (Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority, 2020). Domestic tourists take more days, weekends, and annual tours, and domestic tourists in cities are primarily interested in pleasure and long weekends. However, relevant authorities have neglected domestic tourism (Navirathan, 2020). Recently, the tourism industry in Sri Lanka has put most of its resources into attracting international tourists. Hence, domestic tourism has become a detriment (Sunil,

2008).

The UNWTO identified stakeholders in tourism destinations as tourism professionals, public authorities, the press and other media. In addition, different interest groups and individuals, particularly residents and Indigenous groups, also need proper recognition as stakeholders.

Sri Lankan tourism experienced its worst crisis in history, with hoteliers and travel operators reporting little or no business (Miththapala, 2021). Even though the tourism industry in Sri Lanka has depended on most foreign tourists so far, the industry has been disabled due to the obstacles to the arrival of tourists. Therefore, tourism stakeholders faced many hardships.

The vibrant domestic tourism industry can generate visitor spending that contributes substantially to the industry's overall financial resilience, sustainability, and functionality in off-season months. Navirathan (2020) has indicated that the tourism industry in Sri Lanka is giving special attention to international tourism. However, less attention is being paid to domestic tourism, and the industry has been unable to absorb the potential for domestic visitor expenditure due to the lack of necessary facilities.

Tourism Strategic Plan (2017-2020) has indicated, "The government and private sector have not indicated domestic visitor spending habits and visit selections; therefore, current observations are primarily anecdotal". Statistics on the uptake of domestic tourism, especially in Sri Lanka, have received little attention as the focus is predominantly on international tourism, with a significant allocation of tourism budgets and research on promoting global tourism. Annual tours of the country are taken by domestic tourists, although there is no recognised program for them yet in Sri Lanka (Navirathan, 2020). This study investigates stakeholders' perspectives on developing domestic tourism in the Southeast dry zone. The findings of this study are essential to tourism stakeholders as they provide them with more information on domestic tourism. Hence, the study encourages stakeholders to take domestic tourism as a vital

tourism wing. It is helpful for tourism stakeholders who can enlighten the Sri Lankan tourism industry while engaging in domestic tourism. Accordingly, the researchers intend to investigate the salient features of domestic tourism as per the stakeholders in the Southeast dry zone, determine the problems related to domestic tourism as per the stakeholders in the Southeast dry zone, and identify the recommendations for developing domestic tourism in the Southeast dry zone according to the stakeholders.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Tourism Industry

Sri Lanka saw a significant 38.07% increase in tourist arrivals in 2024, welcoming 2,053,465 visitors compared to 2023 (Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority, 2024). However, tourists' arrivals to Sri Lanka during 2019 amounted to 1,913,702, registering a decline of 18% since 2018. The reported number of nights spent in 2019 by international tourists was 19,902,502, showing a drop of 21% with an average duration of 10.4 nights. Foreign exchange earnings of the tourism sector decreased to 13.7% from the total foreign exchange earnings in 2019 compared to 15.9% recorded in the previous year. In addition, the official tourist receipts for 2019 were estimated at Rs.646 362 million compared to Rs.711 961 million in 2018, with a decline of 9.2%. In terms of U.S. Dollars, the total tourist receipts were estimated to be U.S. \$ 3606.9 million in 2019 compared to the U.S. \$ 4380.6 million observed in the previous year, with a drop of 17.7% (Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority, 2020). Figure 2.1 shows the growth of tourist arrivals in Sri Lanka from 2000 to 2019. There is a rapid decrease compared to the other consecutive years.

According to post-war records, Sri Lanka's tourism industry has spectacularly recovered and experienced rapid growth. After the civil war ended in 2009, Sri Lanka, which had been influenced by the war for three decades, began

reviving its tourism business in temperate conditions. The Easter Sunday bomb attack marked this unexpected decline in 2019. Sri Lanka Tourism has experienced its worst crisis in history, with hoteliers and travel operators reporting little or no business. Many smaller companies are in danger of going bankrupt or facing foreclosure. (Miththapala, 2021).

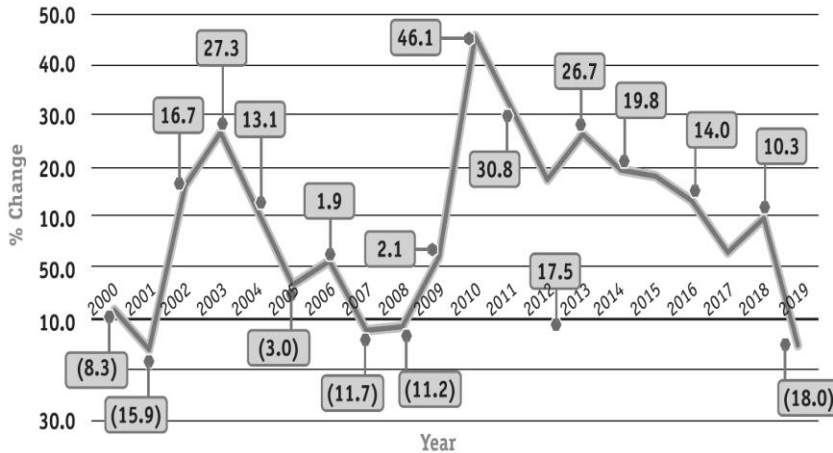


Figure 1: Tourist Arrivals Growth Change from 2000 to 2019
Source: (Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority, 2020)

The researcher has indicated that international tourist inflow can decline due to unexpected situations like the pandemic and economic crisis. Therefore, domestic tourism development within Sri Lanka is significant.

Domestic Tourism

Domestic tourism can benefit the destination in several ways. An increase in the number of people travelling for leisure has a ripple effect on the economy's growth (Joram N., 2011). Tourism development decreases regional inequality. However, domestic tourism has helped to reduce regional disparities (Luiz, 2023). Domestic tourism tends to lead to increased employment, enhance the living standards of the host community, and develop tourist attractions. Recently, Domestic tourism has been considered the primary source of financial

income from tourism activities (Nurov, 2021). Domestic tourism is an essential element of the country's economy since, as is well known, domestic tourists spend money in their own country, resulting in a money flow. Domestic tourism is critical for developing sections of the country that lack manufacturing resources and facilities. As a result, it is vital to raise awareness of the country, both among the local population and on international markets, to improve domestic tourism and, more importantly, to increase the number of international tourists. For the most part, domestic tourists want the same items that international tourists wish to. The correct development of domestic tourism would aid in promoting and positioning tourist products in the country's target tourist markets (Jerenashvili, 2014). Due to the over-dependence on international tourism, developing countries have not developed strategies to encourage and tap into the vast potential of the domestic tourism market (Joram N., 2011). In addition to domestic tourism, it is a strategic tool for the tourism sector to recover from crises (Bama, 2023).

Domestic Tourism in Sri Lanka

Domestic tourism in Sri Lanka has a long history of large halls for sleeping and resting. They are called "Ambalams." Since the Sri Lankan domestic tourism sector is currently informal, it contributes very little to its economy (Navirathan, 2020). Madura et al. (2023) have emphasised that the priority given to domestic tourism in Sri Lanka was very low. A possible explanation by Shantha (2008) has indicated that Sri Lanka's domestic tourist sector has grown ad hoc. Domestic tourists make annual tours throughout the country, although there has yet to be a recognised program. Even the provision of essentials for domestic tourists appears to have been neglected. Institutions and industries' capacity in the tourist attraction regions throughout the Island has been underutilised. Shantha (2005) has revealed three reasons for underestimating the role of domestic tourism in Sri Lanka.

- International tourism's role and contribution to economic growth in foreign exchange earnings, job creation, government income, and multiplier effects are considered higher than domestic tourism.
- International tourism services are highly established, and institutional establishments cater to international tourists, but domestic tourism occurs haphazardly.
- Information services on domestic tourism and related activities are insufficient. It does not imply that local people do not engage in travel or tourism. However, relevant data has not been acquired and examined to assess the county's total tourist product.

Chandana (2013) indicated in their study how domestic tourism in Sri Lanka might develop, which is key to the future success of tourism in Sri Lanka. However, the researchers have not found any studies about domestic tourism development from stakeholders' perspectives. Nurov (2021) have revealed that domestic tourism ensures that revenue generated is used within the country, and various stakeholders stand to benefit from this. A better understanding of the relationship between tourists' future behavioural intentions and their antecedents allows tourism stakeholders to manipulate their products to optimise customer satisfaction (Priyan P., 2013). Domestic tourism has enormous potential in developing countries and regions where traditional economic activities are no longer viable. Empowering key stakeholders in the tourism industry is critical to ensuring long-term viability (Ranasinghe, 2018). Political shifts and the 30-year civil war, tsunami, terrorist attacks (known as the Easter attacks), and COVID-19 are the major natural and artificial disasters that have interrupted the development of the economy. These challenges have directly and indirectly impacted tourism in Sri Lanka. The industry has more scope to improve its structure and tap into domestic tourism (Shameena F., 2024). Therefore, this study focuses on domestic tourism development in the Southeast dry zone from

the stakeholders' perspective by identifying salient features of domestic tourism, problems, and recommendations for developing domestic tourism in the Southeast dry zone.

Characteristics of Domestic Tourists

A domestic tourist is an individual who travels from place to place within the domestic country for business, religious activities, entertainment, recreation, health, cultural activities, education, sports, or any other purpose for not less than 24 hours (Navirathan, 2020). Domestic tourists know the destination, language, customs, laws, climate, and cultural context. Through those, they are more demanding when they meet the quality of the products. According to Federici (2010), he has revealed that discovery and encountering others are the prominent factors among domestic tourists. Domestic tourists seek a wide range of destinations and event activities. Especially for the range of products offered, they like to stay in the same place as they visit. Tourist travel decisions reflect travel behaviour, and they maintain and improve the status of the tourism industry. Tourists' travel behaviour assists in product development, improves marketing strategies, enhances service delivery approaches, and creates a competitive advantage for stakeholders (Slabbert, 2011). Travellers affected by sociopsychological and political antecedents were found to have higher tourism ethnocentrism and higher travel anxiety due to the pandemic (Haeok L., 2024). Therefore, Haeok (2024) has suggested strengthening the country to activate domestic tourism. Various researchers have discovered elements that influence tourist travel behaviour, such as characteristics driving the tourist to travel, attitude, situational aspects, and environmental factors that affect the tourist's significance (Venkatesh, 2006). Slabbert (2011) has indicated that understanding and knowledge regarding tourists' travel behaviour can increase the number of visitors. Therefore, it is significant for tourism stakeholders.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The researcher has selected the qualitative, inductive approach to conduct the research. In this study, the researcher attempts to find in-depth ideas from tourism stakeholders in the Southeast dry zone and contributes factors to identify salient features, challenges, and recommendations to domestic tourism development in the Southeast dry zone from the stakeholders' perspective. The study has taken a case study research design. In the case of this study, the researcher only stays as an observer and collects the experiences and opinions of the people who directly interact with the subject phenomena. All the stakeholders who engage with the tourism industry in the Southeast dry zone have been selected as the population for the study. The researcher categorises them as stated in Figure 2 of this study.

The researcher used purposive sampling to collect the data until theoretical saturation was achieved. Because of the choice of participants for interviews, both administrative officers and service providers are often readily available. Primary data was used to analyse this study. Semi-structured in-depth interviews and two interview protocols were used to gather detailed information. One protocol was used for administrative officers and one for service providers. Therefore, the researcher used 18 face-to-face and two telephone interviews to gather respondents' points of view, experiences and feelings.

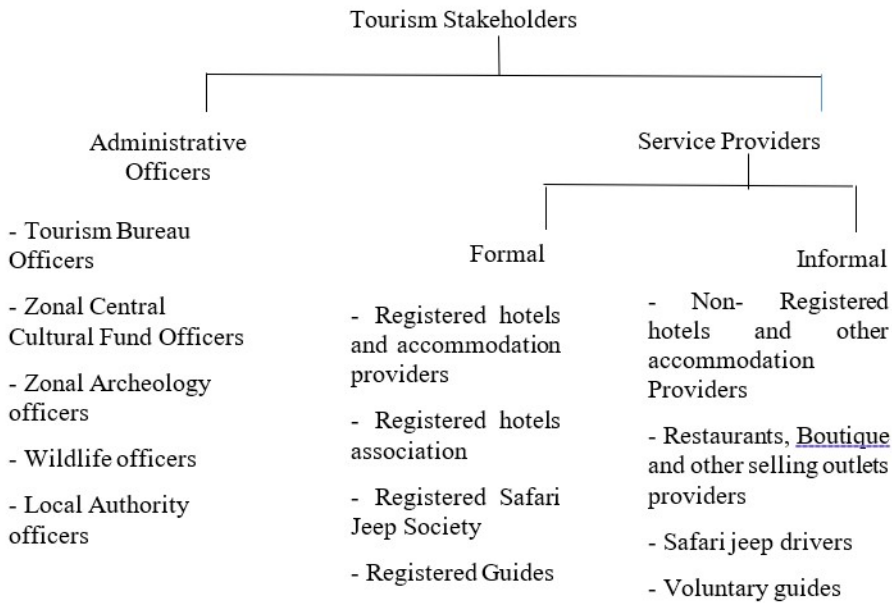


Figure 2: Classification of stakeholders Engage with domestic tourism in the Southeast dry zone.

Source: Developed by the researcher (2024)

Table 1: Respondent profile

Respondent	Designation
Respondent 01	Project Manager of Central Cultural Fund, Buduruwagala zone.
Respondent 02	Project Manager of Central Cultural Fund, Tissamaharama and Kataragama zone.
Respondent 03	Wildlife Officer of Udawalawe National Park.
Respondent 04	Registered guide of Yala National Park.
Respondent 05	Assistant Officer of the zonal archaeology office, Buduruwagala.
Respondent 06	Development officer of Ruhunu Tourism Bureau.
Respondent 07	President of registered safari jeep society, Akurugoda, Tissamaharama.
Respondent 08	Safari jeep driver
Respondent 09	General Manager of Rosen Mandara Hotel, Kataragama (4-star plus hotel).
Respondent 10	General Manager of Lavendish Okrin Hotel, Kataragama (3-star plus hotel).

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- Respondent 11 Front Office Manager of Uga Chena Huts, Yala (5-star luxury hotel).
- Respondent 12 General Manager of OAK Ray Wild Hotel, Tissamaharama (4-star hotel).
- Respondent 13 HR- Executive of Shangri la Hotel, Hambantota (5-star hotel).
- Respondent 14 Administrative officer, YMBA Rest House.
- Respondent 15 Owner of Lake Resort, Weerawila (Non-registered accommodation provider).
- Respondent 16 Manager of Daiya Restaurant, Kataragama (Non-registered restaurant).
- Respondent 17 Manager of Smokey Kitchen restaurant, Tissamaharama.
- Respondent 18 Manager of Red restaurant, Tissamaharama.
- Respondent 19 Voluntary guide, Yala National Park.
- Respondent 20 Voluntary guide, Udawalawe National Park.
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Source: Authors' own

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Data were analysed using thematic analysis. The study's primary purpose was to identify salient features of domestic tourism, problems, and recommendations to develop domestic tourism from the perspective of Southeast dry zone stakeholders. Three parental themes were designed according to the research objectives. Category and coding were constructed in the analysis based on the interview responses. Accordingly, these themes were the information mentioned by the interviewer and were taken from the questions asked by the researcher. Consequently, these themes were constructed based on the questions asked by the researcher.

Salient Features of Domestic Tourism in the Southeast Dry Zone

The first objective of this research was to identify the salient features of domestic tourists who visit the Southeast dry zone. Through the interviews, the identifiable salient features of domestic tourists who visit the Southeast dry

zone are related to the purpose of visit, length of stay, mode of transport, travel time, expectation of lodging, expenditure pattern, travel preparation, and travel pattern.

Purpose of Visit – Religious and Leisure

The Southeast dry zone has plenty of wildlife parks and ancient religious sites. Many attractions are spread across the zone for domestic tourists visiting the Southeast dry zone. This is because religious places of worship are widespread throughout the zone and significant destinations for domestic tourists. It was explained as:

Mainly in this zone, the domestic tourism industry is concentrated in high places of ancient and historical value, such as Tissamaharama, Kataragama, and Buduruwagala. Therefore, many domestic tourists come to this zone mainly for pilgrimage. In addition, many tourists visit the zone in anticipation of attending various religious ceremonies held at religious places of worship. For example, the main ones are the annual Perahera festivals at Tissamaharama and Kataragama. (Respondent 06)

Most domestic tourists visit wildlife parks in this zone, such as Yala and Udawalawe National Parks. Therefore, domestic tourists interested in wildlife frequent the parks located in this zone, and birdwatching, leopard-watching, researchers, and photographers are frequent visitors to the parks. It was explained as:

Many domestic tourists who visit this zone come to pay homage to the religious places of worship. Some domestic tourists come to wildlife parks and turn to other recreational activities in the zone. Therefore, the Kataragama Sacred Area and Yala National Park have become the leading destinations for domestic tourists visiting this zone. (Respondent 12)

Length of Stay - Less length of stay (One night)

The duration of stay for domestic tourists is one of the vital elements for developing domestic tourism. Employees in Asian countries such as Sri Lanka have shorter vacations, reducing the number of stays in one tourist zone. They travel from one zone to another in different zones over a short time. Domestic tourists have a greater preference for differentiation. There is no desire to spend time in one place. However, the average length of stay in the Southeast dry zone is significantly less. It was stated as:

Almost 90% of the domestic tourists who visit the zone stay in the zone for only one night, and their spending is minimal. (Respondent 12)

Mode of Transport - Private transportation

The domestic tourists who visit the Southeast dry zone mostly come as a group. Domestic tourists are expected to spend small amounts of money while travelling and share travel expenses. Therefore, domestic tourists often come in groups to travel and use hired vehicles. It was elaborated as:

Most domestic tourists in this zone do not come by public transport but by car. Meanwhile, some tourists can see motorcycle groups, groups of vehicles, and three-wheelers coming in. (Respondent 01)

Travel Time – Weekends and holidays

Travel time is when tourists travel from one place to another (destinations) for travel (tourism). Travel time is a motivation factor for tourists to travel to the destinations (different attractions). Travel time depends on seasonality and tourists' preferences. Long vacations in Sri Lanka are relatively low compared to other countries. There is no regular travel for domestic tourists. Most domestic tourists get free time from their busy day-to-day life and choose that leisure time to travel to this zone as a group. Often, it is only once a year. It was

stated as:

Many domestic tourists visit this zone for short vacations compared to other tourist destinations. It is a unique feature that some tourists come to this zone as a habit to spend their short holidays, weekends, and long weekends. (Respondent 09)

The Expectation of the Lodging – familiar low-cost accommodation

Domestic tourists usually stay at tourism lodges after visiting different attractions to relieve fatigue. Accordingly, lodging facilities are occupied, intended, or designed for short-term occupancy for dwelling, lodging, or sleeping purposes. Domestic tourists who visit this zone are enticed by the opportunity to stay at a low cost. Domestic tourists probably seek budget rest houses for their stay. It was mentioned as follows:

Many domestic tourists are enthusiastic about seeking affordable accommodation, and their bargaining power is high. Therefore, many domestic tourists who come to this zone are tempted to get accommodation at relatively low prices. (Respondent 09)

Another notable feature is that many domestic tourists find the accommodation they used to stay in earlier for the lodging. It is stated as follows:

Most domestic tourists stay at the same places where they had stayed before. It is also a unique feature to have accommodation based on their acquaintances. (Respondent 08)

Expenditure Pattern – Minimal Expenses Pattern

Tourism expenditure is the total consumption expenditure made by a visitor, or on behalf of a visitor, for and during their trip and stay at the destination—the nature of the expenditure and the amount of expenditure are discussed under the expenditure pattern. Most of the domestic tourists who visit this zone are middle-income earners. In addition, domestic tourists are more

concerned about their travelling spending patterns. Many domestic tourists consider the cost of enjoying a product or service. Many domestic tourists come to this zone as pilgrims and share the trip's expenses in the group. Therefore, most domestic tourists are concerned about the minimal prices of goods and services. Domestic tourists also tend to seek high-quality service on a low budget. It was elaborated as follows:

Overall, one of the main characteristics is that domestic tourists expect more service or something from service providers than they pay. From the point of view of our hotel, most of the tourists buy only packages which are created for domestic tourists. Most domestic tourists who come to our hotel do not use any other facilities, spending extra money available at the hotel and the room facilities. For example, Spa treatment, extra restaurant facilities, extra meals, food, beverages, and goods from other selling outlets. That means they do not like to buy luxury packages. (Respondent 13)

Travel Preparation – Less awareness of preparation

Usually, when travelling, tourists should arrive at those destinations with prior knowledge of the destinations they intend to visit. Therefore, it is more successful in seeking information by looking at the tourist attractions and destinations in the zone intended to visit. However, most domestic tourists do not tour without understanding the zone before travelling. It was stated as follows:

Many domestic tourists visit this zone without prior preparation or planning. (Respondent 01)

Domestic tourists go to very familiar attractions located in the zone. There are no plans for domestic tourists. For example, many domestic tourists visit Kataragama for religious purposes. Nevertheless, there is no going to seek

historical value in this attraction. Usually, domestic tourists visit only for entertainment and do not see a tour with other insights. It stated as follows:

Most domestic tourists who visit this zone do not seem to explore or study the area. It is evident from their behaviour that many domestic tourists only choose this zone for entertainment. Moreover, a domestic tourist's visit to this zone comes without understanding the zone and the existing tourist destinations in the zone and prior study. (Respondent 20)

Travel Pattern – Concerned about the leading destinations

There are many places of interest, such as national parks, religious sites, and beaches, and tourists do not want to visit all these places in the zone. Pilgrims frequent the zone, but most domestic tourists return only after the pilgrimage. On the other hand, the wildlife parks in the zone have become popular tourist destinations for many domestic tourists. In addition, domestic tourists who visit the park do not see religious and ancient sites. Therefore, domestic tourists habitually visit only familiar places to see the attractions. Then, domestic tourists focus more on the same satisfaction from travelling in the zone. It was indicated as follows:

Most domestic tourists who visit this region visit only one destination and, therefore, do not look for other destinations in the zone. (Respondent 04)

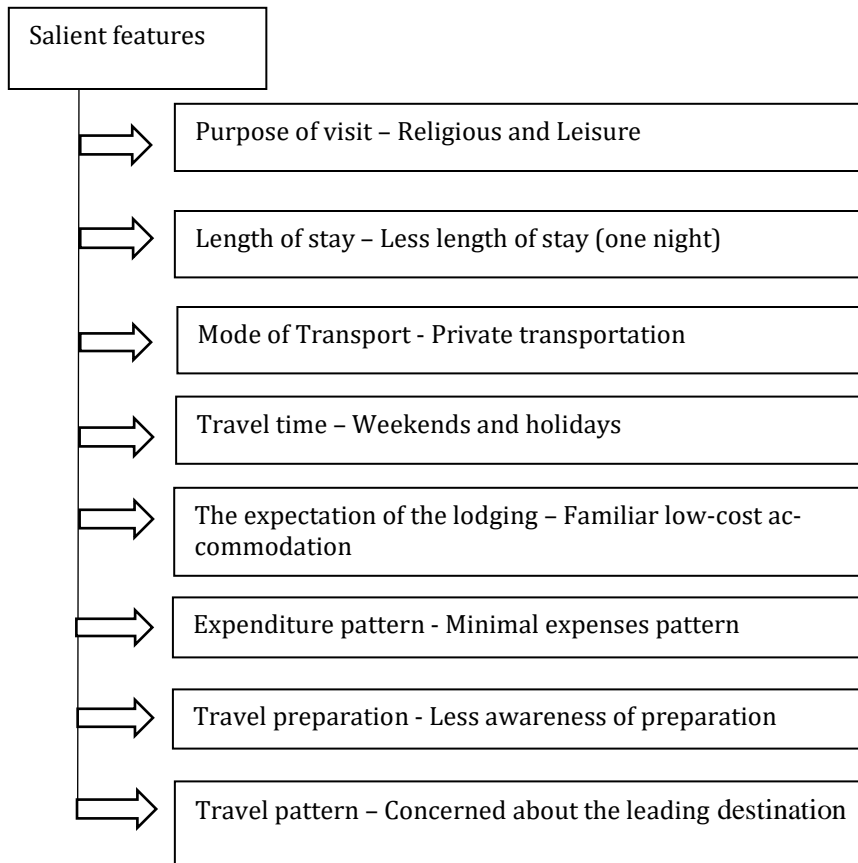


Figure 3: Visualization of salient features of domestic tourism in the Southeast dry zone

Source: Authors' own

Problems Related to Domestic Tourism in the Southeast Dry Zone

According to the study's second objective, the researcher expected to determine the problems related to domestic tourism as per the stakeholders in the Southeast dry zone. By going through all the interviews, the researcher identified similar answers to the issues related to domestic tourism in the Southeast dry zone posed by the respondents. Through the interviews conducted, the most common problems identified are as follows. Lack of adequate sanitation, unavailability of quality-low-cost lodges and restaurants, lack of proper infrastructure, less government support and coordination, unavailability of the awareness

programme, transportation and accessibility difficulties, the effect of prices, behaviour, and characteristics of domestic tourists.

Lack of adequate sanitation

Sanitation facilities are essential across the tourism zones to which tourists travel, as there are prioritised destinations where sanitation facilities must be improved. According to the study, the sanitation facility includes toilets, urinals, drinking fountains, and service buildings containing units separated for males and females on or near different tourist attractions in the Southeast dry zone. However, domestic tourists face various problems due to the lack of sanitation facilities in the zone. It was stated as follows:

Adequate access to clean water and sanitation is one of many significant problems for domestic tourists in this zone. (Respondent 10)

Domestic tourists are greatly inconvenienced due to the routine maintenance of the existing sanitary facilities. (Respondent 02)

Unavailability of low-cost quality lodges and restaurants

Many registered and non-registered accommodation providers are located around the Southeast dry zone. Domestic tourists hope for quality services at lower prices and have higher bargaining power. It was explained that:

One of the significant problems in this region is the shortage of service providers that provide high-quality services to the local tourism community. Accordingly, it can be pointed out that no lodges and restaurants offer quality accommodation and food for the pilgrims who visit this zone frequently at a low cost. (Respondent 06)

Many foreign tourists visit Yala, Udawalawe, and other wildlife parks in the southeast dry zone. A similar number of domestic tourists also visit the

zone to visit the wildlife parks. However, foreign tourists are the main target of other stakeholders who provide accommodation, food, and other tourism services around the zone. Due to this, there is a tendency to set price ranges based on foreign tourists. It also depends on the level of service delivery. However, the situation is unbearable for domestic tourists who visit the Southeast dry zone. On the other hand, there is a lack of high-quality and substandard accommodations to accommodate the large number of domestic tourists visiting the zone.

Domestic tourists expect a lack of quality and affordable accommodation in this zone. In addition, the room facilities in the existing accommodation establishments are too high for domestic tourists to afford. Difficulty in getting a spacious room for a large group of domestic tourists (religious group). However, spending less on accommodation than they expect to achieve their convenience. (Respondent 17)

Lack of adequate infrastructure

Infrastructure plays a vital role in a tourism zone's tourism industry as it affects tourist satisfaction. Adequate and good-quality infrastructure will reduce the number of negative responses tourists receive. However, there is no formal structure in the Southeast dry zone due to insufficient infrastructure dividends.

Problems arise in providing adequate internet facilities and telecommunication in this zone, such as insufficient signals. There is a lack of shopping malls where domestic tourists can get essential goods and services, and many service providers close their establishments and shops at night. In addition, there is a lack of medical centres to provide medical facilities in emergencies and a shortage of specialist doctors in the area. Failure of

shops and other service providers to be open for services during the tourist season. (Respondent 10)

The lack of tourist signage in the area makes it difficult for domestic tourists visiting the zone to understand its destinations. There is no information centre about knowing the attractions of this zone when accessing it. The different service providers around this region close their service centres and shops early at night. Hence, domestic tourists have faced difficulties fulfilling their needs at night. There is a lack of a tourist police station in the zone to lodge complaints regarding irregularities and other problems local tourists face. (Respondent 18)

Less government support and coordination

The tourism industry coordinates with various government and private parties. The contribution and intervention of the public and private sectors are essential factors for the mere development and survival of the tourism industry. The tourism industry is a significant source of income for many tourist destinations such as Sri Lanka. Many regional tourism-related public institutes are laid around Sri Lanka and the Southeast dry zone. However, despite a foreign tourists-oriented tourism industry, the public sector has shown little inclination towards developing the domestic tourism industry. Although many resources and tourist attractions in this zone are needed to create the domestic tourism industry, no action has been taken by any government or private sector to further develop the tourism industry by utilising them correctly.

Implementing a formal program to develop or encourage domestic tourism has shortcomings. Government support for developing the domestic tourism industry is low.

One of the significant problems in this zone is the lack of proper and concurrent allocation of funds required by the public sector to relevant zonal institutions to develop the domestic tourism industry. (Respondent 02)

Domestic tourists who visit the Southeast dry zone and service providers face problems due to inefficiency and a lack of systematic arrangements with the tourism government agencies. One of the stakeholders mentioned as follows:

The stakeholders who engage with the tourism industry face various problems due to the lack of proper government sponsorship or coordination systems for their institutions and other individuals who provide services to domestic tourists. For example, problems are encountered when registering institutions that provide services to domestic tourists. (Respondent 12)

Unavailability of awareness programs

According to this study, awareness may define as a situation in which the tourists have become aware of the tourism zone before and while travelling to that zone. Awareness is a crucial element in developing the tourism industry and domestic tourism because tourists' awareness of the tourism zone can enhance the visitation of tourists and the length of stay in the relevant tourism zone. Therefore, the development of the tourism zone is possible by improving awareness. However, there is appropriate and correct information to enhance tourists' awareness.

Awareness can raise interest in tourists' travelling and encourage someone to visit a tourism zone. Destination awareness will positively affect tourists' intention to revisit. However, the development of the tourism industry in the zone is hampered because many domestic tourists visit the zone only for one purpose and visit only the leading destinations. Therefore, the domestic tourists

who come to the Southeast dry zone are unaware that they should go to other hidden (non-famous) destinations. There is a lack of a formal awareness system for domestic tourists.

Due to the lack of information providers for domestic tourists visiting this zone, a lack of proper understanding of tourist destinations can be seen. (Respondent 07)

Transportation and accessibility difficulties

When transportation is considered a tourism frame, it refers to carrying tourists' tourist products from their living place. Tourists' travel and tourism experience and the ideas about tourism products start and end with transportation. That is why it is impossible to consider tourism without transportation. The development of transport is essential for the growth and development of tourism. It provides accessibility to tourists so they can reach the relevant attractions. The zone with the least accessibility hinders tourism.

One of the main problems facing domestic tourists visiting the Southeast dry zone is transportation and access to some tourist destinations. Domestic tourists who use mainly public transport services face problems travelling around the zone due to the lack of proper public transport facilities.

Access issues exist for various viewing sites (attractions) in the zone. In addition, domestic tourists face some inconvenience due to the lack of good transportation services to reach each place of interest. (Respondent 14)

Most domestic tourists who come to this zone are not tempted to incur extra expenses as they travel for low-cost costs. Therefore, they visit the major tourist destinations and return. Due to the lack of public transport, domestic tourists do not access rugged tourist destinations.

The effect of prices

Most domestic tourists are price-oriented and travel to the Southeast dry zone with more concern about the expenditure pattern. However, most domestic tourists face problems with high prices. Service providers charge high prices for tourists visiting the zone. They must provide extra money for the regulated amount and the intermediaries to the various stakeholders in providing services, as domestic tourists require. Hence, barriers to accessing certain services in the tourist destinations and the economic potential available to domestic tourists when they travel in the zone. For example, there is a separate charge for entering the park and the required jeeps. In addition, jeeps for that amount can travel only to a limited number of tourists. In addition, lodgers in the zone charge prices based on foreigners, excluding restroom providers. Therefore, there are unaffordable hotels and other accommodation facilities throughout the zone for domestic tourists who visit the Southeast dry zone.

The domestic tourist community cannot afford the high prices of service providers. In addition, the prices of tourists' goods and services have skyrocketed during the peak tourist season in the zone. (Respondent 12)

There is no specific price structure for domestic tourists when providing services. Hence, some service providers change the prices at their discretion and set different prices outside the prescribed prices for their services to domestic tourists. Domestic tourists are inconvenienced by the high prices of various service providers in the zone. For example, high prices range in accommodation and recreational activities (touring jeeps). Also, there is a problem of maintaining and changing the fixed prices for the goods and services provided by the service providers in comparison to the volatile pricing prevailing in the country and the rapid changes in the prices of goods.

Behaviour and characteristics of domestic tourists

Tourist behaviour refers to the context of consumer behaviour in purchasing, using, and abandoning tourist services. Domestic tourists' behaviour can differ from foreign tourists' when travelling and receiving services. The development of the domestic tourism industry in the zone is problematic due to domestic tourists' existing cultural, social, and personal behavioural problems.

Problems faced by service providers in serving domestic tourists due to the prevailing behaviour of domestic tourists. Problems in controlling domestic tourists and non-compliance with the rules and regulations imposed. There are various obstacles to developing the domestic tourism industry, as the waste dumped by domestic tourists is not disposed of properly. (Respondent 03)

When providing services to tourists, the people who provide services to domestic tourists and the services they provide are never appreciated. Service providers are embarrassed by the general attitudinal weaknesses of many domestic tourists. Service providers dislike domestic tourists due to a lack of regular feedback and service appreciation and their inherent attitudinal problems. For example, most domestic tourists who visit the park do not follow the rules and regulations. In addition, they have behavioural deficiencies and are unwilling to provide feedback on the services offered.

Furthermore, there is confusion among service providers in identifying the needs of domestic tourists. Due to the domestic tourists who visit here, the service providers of tourists face many inconveniences and problems. At the same time, the prevailing attitude towards domestic tourists is often influenced by their behaviour's vulgarity, for example, not following the park's rules while going on a safari in the park. They are arbitrarily disembarking from jeeps and screaming to scare wild animals.

Service providers face different problems due to domestic tourists not using services on time. For example, domestic tourists do not visit restaurants

for food and drink during the hotel-categorized timeslot. Domestic tourists are not careful when using goods, facilities, etc. Domestic tourists who come to lodgings and restaurants expect a service much higher than the money they spend. Domestic tourists are reluctant to give them a tip in addition to the money they pay for the service of the people who serve them. They compare the services different service providers provide to domestic tourists with their services to foreign tourists. The stakeholders pointed out the following:

Any feedback or appreciation for their service to individuals in the tourism industry who serve domestic tourists, as well as the existing reluctance to provide tips. In addition, there are existing cultural issues for domestic tourists. Attitudinal problems of domestic tourists and problems inadequately identifying the needs of domestic tourists. The inconvenience to service providers is going to satisfy domestic tourists. (Respondent 18)

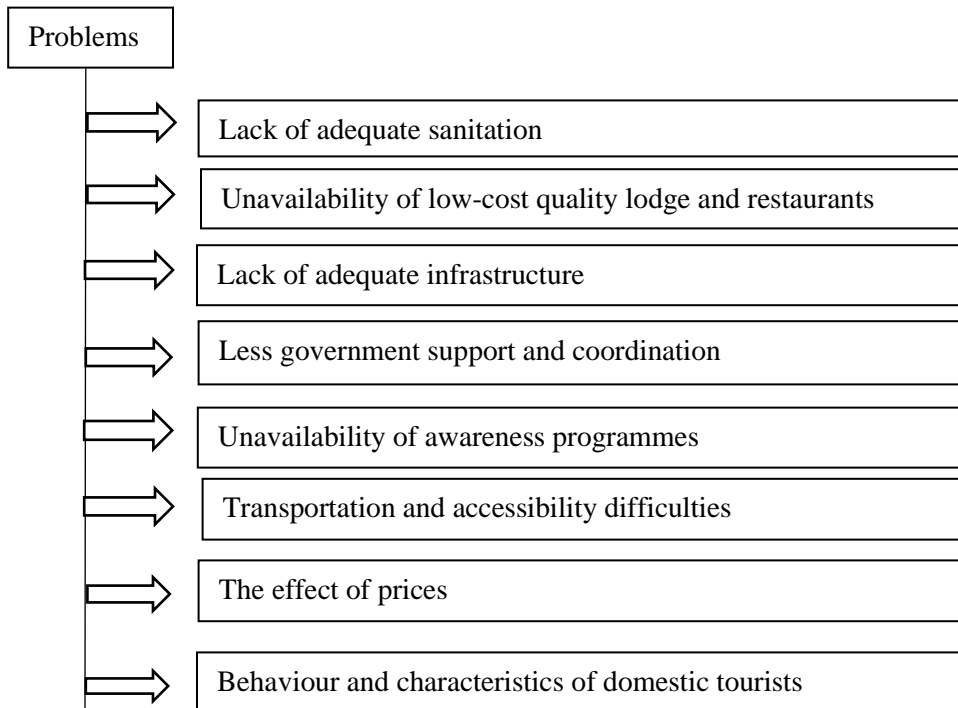


Figure 4: Visualization of problems related to domestic tourism

Source: Based on primary data

Recommendations to Develop Domestic Tourism in the Southeast Dry Zone According to the Stakeholders

Under the third objective of the study, the researcher intended to identify recommendations for developing domestic tourism in the Southeast dry zone according to the stakeholders. So, according to the respondents, different recommendations are recognised for developing domestic tourism in the Southeast dry zone. The recommendations are incorporated as follows. Enhance government intervention to grow facilities, develop programs targeting domestic tourists, create propaganda methods among domestic tourists to promote the zone, establish recreational activities in addition to the attractions around the zone, build relationships among tourism service providers and administrative parties, give proper training and awareness for service providers, building up a mechanism to attest service quality for domestic tourists.

Enhance government intervention to develop facilities.

Government intervention and contribution are essential to developing the domestic tourism industry. Further expanding the domestic tourism industry can also strengthen the country's economic potential. Considering the Southeast dry zone, improving the facilities required for the domestic tourism industry is necessary. Therefore, there should be government intervention for that. One stakeholder who engages with tourism in the Southeast dry zone stated it as follows:

They want to take action to develop the zone through government intervention and to implement the necessary plans. Improvement of infrastructure and road systems is required to create this zone as a tourist destination. (Respondent 10)

Stakeholders recommend various government-led initiatives to develop domestic tourism: implementing tourism projects, improving accommodation

and sanitation facilities, establishing tourist information centres, installing signboards, and creating well-equipped parks. Additional services like on-demand sightseeing, direct transportation, and advanced tourist destinations with souvenir shops and shopping malls are also suggested. Furthermore, cultural and natural aspects should be developed, supported by a master plan encompassing infrastructure, accommodation, and information centres. According to stakeholders, enhanced government intervention is crucial for these developments.

Developing Programmes Targeting Domestic Tourists

Despite potential domestic tourist arrivals, the Southeast dry zone tourism industry focuses mainly on foreign tourists. There are no specific programs for domestic tourists, leading to a need for tailored services and affordable pricing. One of the respondents stated the existing domestic tourism situation in the zone. It is expressed as follows:

Due to the lack of proper background for the domestic tourism industry in this zone and the lack of adequate knowledge and training of the domestic tourism industry by the service providers, there is an urgent need to give prominence to the domestic tourism industry. There is a need to develop the tourism industry further in the zone, as the value of the existing tourist destinations in this zone has not gone to the domestic tourism community. (Respondent 12)

The lack of support and training for domestic tourism emphasises the need for its development. Recommendations include creating packages suited to domestic tourists' budgets, improving facilities and food options, and establishing systems to inform tourists about prices beforehand. Enhanced planning and implementation by the public sector and tourism professionals are crucial to making the zone more accessible and attractive to domestic tourists.

Creating Propaganda methods among domestic tourists to promote the zone

Awareness is crucial for attracting tourists to destinations and enhancing their image. Effective formal propaganda methods, such as low-cost social media advertising, can significantly boost domestic tourism by increasing visitor motivation and interest. A stakeholder stated it:

I suggest raising awareness about this zone among tourists through electronic and social media and creating interest in the tourist mind. In addition, for the convenience of domestic tourists visiting the zone and to get an overview of the existing tourist destinations, signboards and easy-to-reach signboards should be placed throughout the area and at critical points of entry into the zone. (Respondent 06)

Despite many educational and cultural attractions in the Southeast dry zone, only a few are popular with domestic tourists. Strategic media promotions and community education about existing destinations are needed to develop the tourism industry.

There should be a need to continue awareness at the school and zonal levels throughout the country to increase awareness of the importance of the zone and existing destinations to people of the zone and the locals interested in travelling. (Respondent 20)

Establishing Recreational activities in addition to the attractions around the zone

Tourists primarily visit the Southeast dry zone for religious purposes and safaris, with limited recreational activities available. This results in shorter stays by domestic tourists. Although the zone has many attractions, developing recreational activities around its lakes and beaches can enhance domestic tourism. One stakeholder stated this need with examples:

To take the necessary steps to provide domestic tourists with an unprecedented zone experience and organise various activities specific to the zone. For example, boat riding, cart riding, village excursions, wildlife safari, traditional food-making shops for locals, bicycle riding, and different recreational activities.
(Respondent 01)

Additionally, promoting endemic food and industries can attract more tourists. For instance, open outlets selling local ornaments and necessities can appeal to visitors. Introducing such activities can lengthen tourist stays, boost the local economy, and increase stakeholders' income. One stakeholder stated this need with examples:

There should be various activities to provide an unprecedented experience to domestic tourists. So, they can create selling outlets for domestic tourists visiting the zone to purchase products that are endemic to the area. For example, Batik, Pottery, Sweets, and Spices outlets. They can also introduce aesthetic cooking for restaurants to enhance domestic tourists' experiences. (Respondent 17)

Building relationships among tourism service providers and administrative parties in the zone

Service providers in the Southeast dry zone should collaborate to ensure high-quality services rather than competing prices. Coordination among stakeholders, including both public and private sectors, is essential for setting standard prices and providing comprehensive services like road guidance, tourist information, and travel timelines. Effective interaction between service providers and administrative parties can enhance service quality. Establishing a monitoring system to oversee service standards from small and medium enterprises will

ensure high-quality food, beverages, and accommodation. Regional Health Officers should regularly inspect and educate service providers on maintaining hygienic and high-quality services for domestic tourists. The respondents stated it as follows:

All the organisations serving the tourists in the zone should work together to organise decision-making and problem-solving societies. (Respondent 02)

There should be a mutual relationship between the existing tourism service providers in the zone and the stakeholders involved in domestic tourism services when providing services to domestic tourists. There should be a systematic procedure and arrangement between the stakeholders to deliver services and pricing to domestic tourists. (Respondent 04)

Giving proper training and awareness to service providers

Proper training and awareness for service providers about domestic tourists' expectations can boost arrivals in the Southeast dry zone. Stakeholders and employees need a solid understanding of the tourism industry. Workshops and expert-led training programs are essential to ensure high-quality service for domestic tourists. It was indicated as follows:

They want to conduct workshops and training programs to improve the quality and attitudes of the employees working in the institutions serving the tourists in this zone. Regional hotel-related educational institutions, such as hotel schools with state sponsorship, should be established to enhance the quality and field training of persons working in the tourism sector in the zone. (Respondent 09)

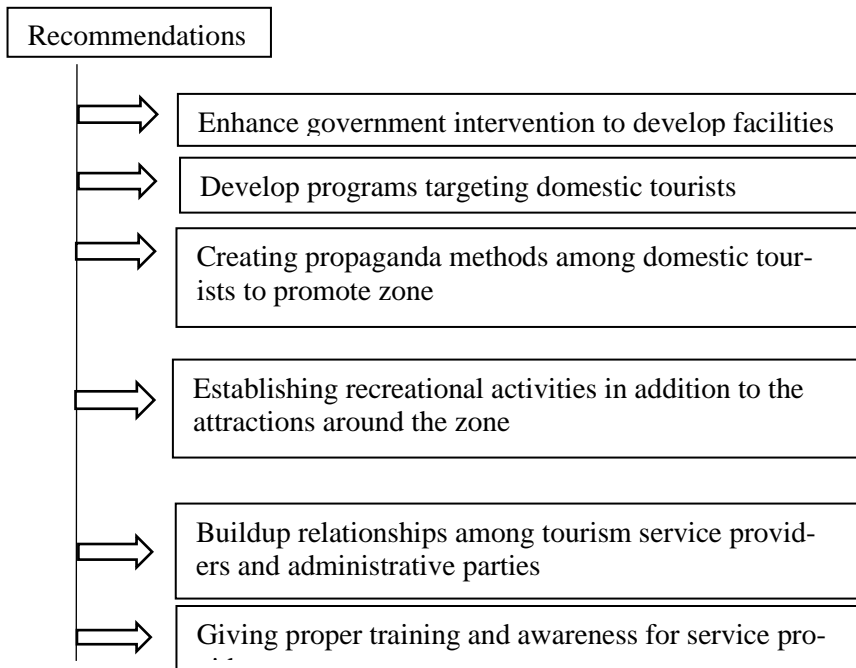


Figure 5: Visualization Recommendations to develop domestic tourism in the Southeast dry zone.

Source: Authors' own

DISCUSSION

In analysing the collected data, the researcher comprehensively explored the salient features of domestic tourism, identified related problems, and developed recommendations based on stakeholder insights to enhance domestic tourism in the Southeast dry zone.

The research began by establishing the **salient features of domestic tourism** in the Southeast dry zone. This included understanding various aspects such as the purpose of visits, length of stay, modes of transportation, travel expectations, expenditure patterns, and travel preparations. The findings revealed that domestic tourists mainly visit the Southeast dry zone for religious and leisure purposes. Most tourists stay only one night, often arriving on weekends using private transportation and seeking minimal-cost accommodations. This

finding aligns with Shantha's (2008) observation that domestic tourists visit for religious and recreational activities and typically stay for short periods. Shantha (2008) also noted that most domestic tourists prefer hired vehicles over public transportation, a trend confirmed by this study. Additionally, the literature supported the observation of low tourist activity on weekdays and a preference for weekend visits. (Nakkawita, 1992) (Shantha, 2005). New insights from this study included domestic tourists' focus on expenditure and their limited awareness of travel preparation, with most only visiting significant attractions rather than exploring the zone extensively. Haeok (2024) has suggested strengthening people's patriotism and pride in their country to activate domestic tourism.

The study identified several **problems related to domestic tourism**, reflecting both existing issues and new challenges. Common problems included inadequate sanitation, a lack of quality and affordable lodging and dining options, insufficient infrastructure, and poor government support. These findings are consistent with existing literature, highlighting similar challenges, such as water shortages, mosquito issues, and cleanliness problems (Navirathan, 2020; Sunil, 2005). The study also identified domestic tourists' behaviour issues, such as non-compliance with rules and difficulties managing expectations. Although Shantha (2008) mentioned the lack of tour packages, this study did not find this a significant problem. Instead, it highlighted how high prices and a lack of promotions restrict domestic tourism. (Nurov, 2021). Travel experiences have not been widely utilised for domestic tourism development. This is likely due to the lack of awareness among the scientific community and tools for effectively identifying such travel experiences (Vu, 2023). The tourism stakeholders in Sri Lanka did not attract potential to promote Sri Lanka tourism to domestic tourists (Madura P., 2023). These issues stem from the failure to develop and promote the tourism industry in the zone systematically, a gap the study sought to address.

To achieve the third research objective, the study focused on **recommendations for developing domestic tourism**. The findings suggest several strategies to enhance domestic tourism in the Southeast dry zone. Recommendations include increasing government intervention to build infrastructure, creating targeted programs for domestic tourists, and implementing effective propaganda. Haeok (2024) revealed that it should be used as tourism marketing material to promote domestic travel. Navirathan (2020) supports the idea of a comprehensive plan to revitalise domestic tourism, including budget allocations for infrastructure and marketing efforts. The study also recommended expanding the market, raising awareness through print and social media, and developing recreational activities beyond existing attractions. Nurov (2021) emphasised the need for special rates and incentives to attract domestic tourists, suggesting that price discounts and special offers could stimulate interest. The study advocates for using various media for promotion and establishing training programs for service providers to enhance their understanding of domestic tourists' needs. These recommendations align with literature advocating for increased marketing efforts and improved service quality (Shantha, 2005) (Nurov, 2021). Overall, domestic tourism is not an abstract phenomenon; thus, there is a need to take drastic steps to promote the sector because of its importance in economic development, employment creation, and the other benefits that come with this particular sector (Augustine, 2022).

The study effectively met its objectives by identifying key features of domestic tourism, recognising prevalent problems, and proposing viable solutions. The recommendations are grounded in the study's findings and existing literature, offering a robust framework for developing domestic tourism in the Southeast dry zone. By addressing identified issues and implementing the proposed strategies, the study aims to foster a more vibrant and sustainable domestic tourism sector in the region.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

When giving the study's recommendations, the researcher mainly focuses on the government of Sri Lanka. No proper projects target domestic tourism development in the Southeast dry zone. If it has some projects, there is no regular funding process. There is an appropriate procedure for facility and infrastructure development under the development of domestic tourism. A formal method to develop domestic tourism should exist under the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority or Regional Tourism Bureau. Therefore, a charge of authorities, enterprises, institutions, organisations, both public and private, should develop and adopt strategies. It can be considered one of the main responsible parties. This should include formulating formal strategy and procedures to increase investment and savings for service providers in the tourism sector. Introduce those opportunities to the service providers and take the necessary steps to maintain their income level even in a sudden downturn in the tourism sector, so that the strongest can face those problems. There is also a need for proper training and awareness about domestic tourism for tourism service providers.

The tourist spots in this zone spread different ancient and natural attractions. Therefore, they want to take the destinations of the Southeast dry zone to the domestic tourist community and take necessary steps to make them aware. For example, apart from Buduruwagala, Kataragama, and Tissamaharama, other ancient places of worship such as Yatala, Kirinda, Sandagiri Viharaya and Sithulpahuwa. The hidden and lesser-known destinations mentioned above can further develop to retain the domestic tourism community in the zone and extend their stay to more than one night. They can establish resort areas targeting domestic tourists around the beach areas and a part of the wildlife park areas.

Further, there is a need to plan different recreational activities to attract the domestic tourism community to the zone. In addition, an accessible road network with other service facilities will improve all the destinations and make

it easy for tourists to visit almost all the destinations. Ticket fees must reasonably be charged at the entrance to the tourist attractions. Further, there can be necessary steps to implement a formal program to develop this tourist zone with comfortable areas for a higher level of tourism. They can organise activities to educate the domestic tourism community about the major destinations in the zone, and many other tourist destinations, as well as promote awareness programs on social media or other media. If the above recommendations are implemented, there is a bright future for domestic tourism in the Southeast dry zone and Sri Lanka.

FURTHER RESEARCH DIRECTION

Further research and studies should be carried forward to identify the different knowledge gaps in this research study. They should develop different standard solutions and proper plans to develop and promote the domestic tourism industry in Sri Lanka. Many domestic tourists come to this zone, visit a particular destination, and return. For example, domestic tourists visiting Kataragama's sacred city do not visit Yala or Udawalawe National Parks. On the other hand, domestic tourists visiting Yala or Udawalawe National Parks do not visit Kusarigama's holy city. A comparative study can be conducted to identify the reasons for this situation.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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