



Adventure- Culture- Eco-Tourism Development in the Sinharaja Tropical Rainforest: A Case Study Based on the Deniyaya Entrance

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Abstract

Sri Lanka is undoubtedly one of the best tourist destinations in the world. Being one of the world's biodiversity hotspots, Sri Lanka has a significant advantage in promoting alternative tourism. Therefore, it is necessary to plan alternative tourism strategies to reveal a more suitable development path that reduces harmful effects and increases positive effects. This study aims at ACE Tourism development based on the Sinharaja Deniyaya entrance. A qualitative methodology follows the case study approach, and this study adopted an inductive approach. According to the interview process, it located nine respondents for data collection. The data was collected through semi-structured interviews using purposive and snowball sampling techniques with nine respondents as the sample. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the collected data. According to the findings, we could identify potential recreation opportunities and market associations under the ACE category. The findings draw attention to identifying community readiness by going through the categories of attitudes, capacity, and commitment, and under that, they have a positive readiness to deliver potential cultural activities. The study findings have practical implications for the tourism industry and local authorities and are crucial to developing ACE Tourism at Sinharaja based on the Deniyaya entrance. Furthermore, this study adds new knowledge to the existing literature. Greater focus on policy, planning, and the responsible participation of stakeholders is essential to establishing an enabling environment for the successful development of ACE tourism.

Keywords: ACE Tourism, Community Readiness, Ecotourism, Recreation Opportunity, Sinharaja Rainforest, Sri Lanka

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INTRODUCTION

The growth of regions and tourist destinations is significantly influenced by the tourism sector, one of the main drivers of the global economy. Successful tourism operations can generate considerable foreign exchange and various community revenue opportunities. Some believe that the grant problem in the travel industry in developing countries is related to group travel. Mass tourism is viewed by many as foreign-controlled, confined, unplanned, short-term, culturally disastrous, and environmentally unsustainable. (බණ්ඩාර සහ රත්නායක, 2022). Sri Lanka can benefit from promoting alternative tourism, involving local communities, and focusing on cultural and environmental sustainability. This approach complements sustainable development, promoting local resources and value-added tourism benefits. Therefore, alternative tourism development emphasises sustainable development. However, alternative means of tourism are a complement to sustainable development, not a substitute.

Ecotourism is a relatively new phenomenon that has generated significant interest and controversy. (Fennell, 1963). Ecotourism is consecrated to preserving and continuing the diversity of the world's natural and cultural environments. According to ecotourism definitions, rainforest walks do not include ecotourism unless they enhance the local ecosystem and its residents. (Iftikhar Hussain, 2022).

The new classification of the tourism sector is where travellers are prepared to pay more for an optimal experience that stimulates their emotions. Visitors are willing to pay more than just for a product; they also pay for the experience of being in a tourist area. (Trauer, 2006). Tourists are increasingly experiential, engaging in various activities and seeking authenticity in their travel experiences. This trend involves self-actualisation, skill development, exercise, and meaningful engagement with history, culture, and the environment. According to Fennell (2008), when they could have specialised their services

based on varying concentrations of culture, adventure, and nature, all operators would not have been able to compete with one another in this context if they had all attempted to offer ecotourism alone the first is that it implies ACE tourism is distinct from these other sorts of tourism. ACE tourism can combine adventure, culture, and ecotourism for a more experiential tour. Specifically, with ecotourism, the programming approach used is such that it would apply to other forms of Ecotourism, including adventure tourism and cultural tourism.

Eco-tourists' arrival to Sri Lanka has been less than 1% over the last decade. (Rangana et al., 2015). The public sector revenue from conservation forests in Sri Lanka is 0.5% (SLTDA, 2018). In ecotourism, the Sinharaja rainforest is Sri Lanka's first natural world heritage site and has been promoted as one of the ecotourism destinations in the Sri Lankan tourism industry. National parks and forest reserves, such as Udawattakele and Sinharaja, with their diverse flora, fauna, and biodiversity, have attracted more excellent tourists; however, they are criticised by pointing out that Sri Lanka has not yet developed its nature-based and ecotourism industries (Buultjens et al., 2005). The repositioning of Sri Lankan tourism products is also a current need of the industry, and it demands potential high-quality resources as alternative tourism depends on them for long-term sustainability (Ratnayake, 2015). Significant information gaps in planning and managing these initiatives necessitate further research to identify the experiential tourism category. Specialised knowledge of current practices is crucial, with the primary contribution expected to be studying the defined problem.

The research explores Deniyaya's potential for ACE Tourism, highlighting its rich natural, cultural, and religious resources. However, Deniyaya has not yet fully realised its potential to attract this ecotourism. It aims to identify unused resources, cultural aspects, and community readiness for cultural activ-

ities and to enhance the Sinharaja Deniyaya entrance's experiential tourism experience.

Taking the circumstances into account, the Ministry of Tourism and the Sri Lanka Tourist Board have taken steps to develop niche markets such as eco-tourism, adventure, and culture in the country. Among the initiatives of SLTB is introducing a new theme for all Sri Lanka tourism productions, "Beyond Beaches... Culture, Nature and Adventure" (Sri Lanka Tourist Board, 2000, 2001 as cited in Ratnayake, 2007).

The sustainable tourism development approach is critical because tourism development is wholly based on an area's natural environment and historical and cultural patterns, and tourists expect a high-quality destination that should not result in the destruction or a decrease in the value of the resources. In the Sri Lankan context, critique by Ratnayake (2015) The industry's position and perspective on alternative tourism are highly insecure due to Sri Lanka's unclear attitude. As a result, tourism development efforts must be reassessed and appropriately adapted. Under that, ecotourism is reimaged by combining adventure and culture to create a new future for a larger and better tourist industry. The ACE concept will help to increase the revenue from conservation forests and help to make ecotourism more experiential. It is a rethinking of the ecotourism in the Sinharaja rainforest to enhance essential elements of ecotourism in Sinharaja through ACE Tourism and give a new meaning to Sinharaja World Heritage.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is in the Deniyaya area, part of the Matara district. Deniyaya is a small village in the Matara District. It is situated between latitude 6.2045.96 and longitude 80.335.39. Wathugala village was selected to identify community readiness and deliver potential cultural activities they can provide. It is next to

the Pitadeniya entrance. There are 47 families in this village, which belongs to the Neluwa Divisional Secretaries in the Galle district of the southern province. Forty guides work at the Pitadeniya entrance and 20 at the Kurulugala entrance (Respondent 01; Personal Communication, July 06, 2023).

We used various steps to improve the validity of our findings. The study primarily employs qualitative methodology and follows the case study research design. Primary data was used for the study. Conducting a pilot study is better for understanding the problem as part of the research validity. It was performed on a purposive sample of community and forest officers and tourist guides for testing and developing the instrument. As a result of pre-testing, there is a potential tourism market opportunity in the Sinharaja Deniyaya entry. The primary data was gathered through nine semi-structured interviews, which were face-to-face and telephone interviews, with an interview duration of around 45 min. Once data saturation was reached, the number of interviews was reduced to nine. In addition to interviews, field notes were taken wherever necessary, and during the field visit, interviewed some guides under semi-structured interviews that were used for the community, tourist guides, and forest officers on a selected sample from each respondent (used only for significant case studies) contributed as primary sources of data collection. This approach allowed us to cross-verify information, strengthening the findings' credibility and dependability.

An interview protocol was developed based on the research questions and background information, including tourism in Sinharaja. Furthermore, the study's validity was enhanced by using purposive and snowball sampling approaches. We first utilised purposive sampling to enter Wathugala village and get data about the potential of ACE tourism through forest officers and tourist guides. We entered the Wathugala village through Gate Keeper "Grama Niladari". When selecting the first respondent among the tourist guides, select the

tourist guide who has more knowledge and experience and is an active participant in the development program in the Sinharaja; through the initial respondent, we will locate further respondents. It contributes to checking and ensuring the accuracy of our interpretations.

The research adopted a systematic and structured approach to data analysis through thematic analysis. It provided detailed information about identifying themes, categories, and sub-categories and generating initial codes, demonstrating a transparent and reliable analysis method. Furthermore, deciding to terminate data gathering once data saturation is reached is a measure that improves dependability. This ensures that we have reached a point where more data collecting is unlikely to yield the long-term reliability of our study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Alternative tourism, a concept in the tourism industry as a solution to mass tourism, offers experience-based experiences that take tourists away from their comfort zones, offering exotic experiences close to nature, culture, history, or religion. To reach the global market, countries should diversify their tourism activities with new segments through special interest tourism, aiming to offer niche tourism products and cater to the needs of tourists.

Ecotourism should prioritise local culture and adventure activities to enhance visitor experiences and attract tourists. These activities should offer incentives and motivations, showcasing the lifestyles of the host community. Ecotourism also improves social capital, sustains local knowledge, and promotes destination tourism, fostering value-addition opportunities for the industry.

Sustainable tourism development is crucial, based on an area's natural environment and historical and cultural patterns. Alternative tourism is essential for reducing adverse effects and ensuring high-quality destinations without causing destruction or resource loss. ACE tourism contributes to making "So Sri Lanka" more reliable and community-ready.

Potential Recreation Activity and Market Associations Under the ACE Tourism.

The study's objective addresses potential recreation activities and market associations under the ACE tourism at the Sinharaja Deniyaya entrance. The study identified three main categories: The uniqueness of Deniyaya entrance, potential recreational activities under ACE Tourism, and market association. Under the uniqueness of Deniyaya entrance, the four main subcategories of scenery, historically, physically, and culturally, and under potential recreation activities under ACE Tourism, were identified. We have identified the subcategories adventure, culture, and ecotourism; under the market association, we have identified subcategories of openness to the market.

Uniqueness of Deniyaya Entrance

Identifying a destination's unique features is essential for tourism development. Deniyaya's biodiversity, climate, and scenic beauty are key factors, with significance categorised under Scenery, History, Physical, and culture.

The uniqueness of Scenery can be taken as a climate, geography, flora, and fauna. The scenery is a combination of all of the features. Tourists must be physically comfortable with the climate conditions of the destination. Tourists must feel comfortable whether they take part in passive or active recreation. A combination of humidity and wind determines a comfortable, warm climate. During the field observation,

Viharahena Sinharaja Ecosystem has a humidity of 90% and annual rainfall between 3500mm and 5500mm. The average annual temperature in a tropical rainforest exceeds 25 degrees Celsius, while the annual temperature in the Viharahena area is 23 degrees Celsius.

(Field Note, 2023).

Field notes and comments of some respondents confirm the uniqueness of Geologically.

Deniyaya, located over 1000 meters above sea level, shares similar geography and vegetation with Horton's plains, featuring winding streams, windswept trees, and rolling shrub plains.

(Field Note, 2023).

Recent research revealed Sinharaja's significant contribution to the Walawe River. All springs are in a reserve not assigned to Sinharaja, and 48 water sources are through the Sinharaja forest.

(Respondent 06; Personal Communication, Sept 12, 2023).

Those quotations confirmed that this place's geography and vegetation are unique. Because Deniyaya has a lower and Higher elevation range, travelers can experience the land wet zone and go beyond the lowland wet zone at the Kurulugala entrance. The primary forest can be seen at the Pitadeniya Entrance. Those two entrances have different uniqueness. Some respondents indicated,

If you are a bird watcher, it is notable here because there are currently 33 endemic bird species in Sri Lanka, of which 28 have been recorded at the Kurulugala entrance.

(Respondent 06; Personal Communication, Sept 12, 2023).

Another respondent added,

We found the bird called "Aranga" in Kurulugala a few months ago, because we usually see it only in Horton plains, but we have seen it very closely here.

(Respondent 06; Personal Communication, Sept 12, 2023).

Another one is,

When we take a rainforest, there are some kingdoms: the Animal Kingdom, the Plant Kingdom, the Fungi Kingdom, and the Monera Kingdom. We can study such kingdoms in the Sinharaja Rainforest.

(Respondent 08; Personal Communication, Sept 22, 2023).

As a tropical evergreen rainforest, the most unique is the flora and fauna. Because the history of the Sinharaja forest goes beyond 150 years, it has many endemic flora and fauna. One respondent indicated,

We can enter from any Lankagama, Pitadenia, or Watugala entrance and exit from anywhere. Exiting from the entry gate is not mandatory.

(Respondent 05; Personal Communication, July 06, 2023).

Data gathered by field observation,

The location is 04 out of 5 main ticket counters to access Sinharaja.

There are Pitadeniya, Kurulugala, Suriyakanda, Wathugala.

(Field Note, 2023).

These quotations confirm that the Deniyaya side of the Sinharaja Rainforest can be identified as the entrance's location under the Physical attributes' uniqueness. One respondent stated,

Another unique feature of Deniyaya culture is that there are usually multicultural people, each with their cultural elements.

(Respondent 06; Personal Communication, Sept 12, 2023).

Diversity of community is a key component of authentic cultural experiences. In the buffer zone of Sinharaja, many diverse communities and cultures exist. Culture is an inevitable attribute of ecotourism. Deniyaya is rich in diversity of culture.

Potential Recreation Activities Under ACE Tourism

Potential recreation activities identified within the rainforest and buffer zone of the rainforest.

Potential Recreation Opportunities under ACE Tourism

Adventure		Culture			Eco-Tourism
Hard	Soft	Cultural experience	Culture Events	Religious Places & Pilgrims	Ecotourism Activities
Patna Sliding Rock	Canoeing	Kithul tour experience	Getabaru Perahera	Getabaruwa Raja Maha Viharaya	Green desert (Tea states)
Paragliding	Kayaking	Cinnamon process experience	Well Procession (Kovil)	Shiva Shabramaniam	Tree lodging
Waterfall and Mountain Abseiling	Backpacking	Tea tourism	Katina Procession	St. Joseph Church	Dark sky tourism
Rock climbing	Cable car	Indigenous medicine	Sinhala and Tamil New Year experience	Sri Pushparama Temple	View point (Kurugala, Samangala, Gongala)
Cliff diving	Hiking (Gongala and Kurugala mountain)	Handy crafts		Hassan Hussain Jumma Masjid Mosque.	Research expeditions (study about mushrooms, fungus system, and Reptiles)
Tree Tunnel	Camping (Gongala and Kurugala)	Traditional dancing		Sinharaja Aranya Senasanaya	Night trail

White water rafting	Photography (night sky photography, Micro Photography)	Cane industry experience.			Butterfly watching
	Cycling	Homestay			Meditation
	Swimming	Traditional foods experience			
	Bird watching (Aranga, Kehibella)	Bull cart riding			

Source: Authors' own

Market Association

- **Openness to the market**

Market association is crucial for tourism development in Sri Lanka as it helps identify potential opportunities for both national and international markets. Research findings show that Sinharaja has identified activities with high potential as niche national and international markets, providing a competitive advantage in Sri Lankan tourism. One respondent added,

A banyan tree is formed with a "tinea tree." After that, the banyan tree grew, and the previous tree died, so it has a hole for a 60-foot climb. After ascending, a flat iron plate is formed at the end, providing a waterfall and bird-watching area.

(Respondent 06; Personal Communication, Sept 12, 2023).

It is a new adventure activity run by guides. Another niche market activity is

A Swiss university student visited to see a unique mushroom used in cancer medicine. The rare bird "Aranga" in Kurulugala has also been discovered, attracting visitors in specific categories.

(Respondent 06; Personal Communication, Sept 12, 2023).

Another respondent added,

When we take a rainforest, there are some kingdoms: the animal Kingdom, the Plant Kingdom, the Fungi Kingdom, and the Monera Kingdom. We can study such kingdoms in the Sinharaja Rainforest.

(Respondent 08; Personal Communication, Sept 22, 2023).

Finding through field visits,

Night trails can promote looking for Asian palm civets, frogs, snakes, flying squirrels, and owls.

(Field Note, 2023).

Considering all quotations, Niche markets in the tourism industry represent a specialised segment that caters to the unique interests and needs of a select group of travellers. These markets diverge from traditional mass tourism and focus on catering to a well-defined customer base's preferences and passions. Ecotourism, cultural tourism, adventure tourism. It can be considered a special interest tourism and targets a niche market.

Seasonality

<i>Suitable season for doing ACE Tourism</i>	November to April
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<i>Suitable season for doing cultural activities</i>	Entire year
	Especially:

Getabaru Perahera – September Month

Well Procession (Kovil) – November

Katina Procession – October/ November

Community Readiness to Deliver Potential Cultural Experience Under the ACE Tourism

The study identified three main categories: attitude towards tourism, capacity, and commitment. A community plays a dual role in tourism development, attracting visitors by its unique lifestyle. Attitudes vary based on understanding, experience, and exposure to the industry. Community traditions and resources are essential for tourism development, especially in emerging alternative forms. Focusing on promoting tourism is crucial for maximising potential.

Attitudes

Studying the Wathugala village's tourism readiness is crucial for identifying research objectives and delivering potential cultural activities. The current situation is in the Euphoria stage, indicating the village's readiness for tourism. According to the respondent,

However, I do not have to say much about the negative impacts because this village is still unattractive to guests. Few visitors are coming to our village, and if this number increases in the future, we will be willing to welcome them from our hearts.

(Respondent 03 Personal Communication, July 06, 2023).

During the early stages of tourism growth, locals may not be particularly irritated due to low travel volume. However, they may show signs of inquiry and hospitality, leading to a shift in residents' attitudes towards tourism development, where visitors are welcome. Building relationships and encouraging cultural appreciation depend on understanding the local culture. For example, one respondent stated,

We have a high potential to provide a cultural experience.

(Respondent 02; Personal Communication, July 06, 2023).

Cultural understanding enhances appreciation for norms, values, and traditions, promoting meaningful tourism participation and community interest

in cultural preservation, which is crucial for the future of culture. One respondent stated,

Traditional villages possess a rich culture, which must be protected for future generations. Tourism can provide cultural experiences and help preserve culture.

(Respondent 03; Personal Communication, July 06, 2023).

Accordingly, understanding and preserving culture must be combined to gain sustainable outcomes from local cultural experiences. Being hospitable without expecting payment or reciprocity is being willing to extend hospitality. At one extreme, hospitality is offered in return for personal gain. The tourism industry depends on hospitality offered with pleasure to others and earning remuneration. It should be merged with hospitality and hospitableness. Hospitality creates an impression of guests being hosted and welcomed. One respondent mentioned,

Also, this village is highly hospitable. Our village is Buddhist, and all of us are Sinhalese. Based on our religion, we all practice giving hospitality from the heart.

(Respondent 02; Personal Communication, July 06, 2023).

It is connected to several different languages and cultures and can be seen as a fundamental and persistent feature of human life. Genuine hospitality, a fundamental human trait, is inherited at birth or self-understanding and cannot be developed over time by others.

Positive attitudes among the community's residents are essential to a community's readiness to deliver cultural activities. The community's attitude changes based on their knowledge, exposure, and experiences with the tourism industry. One respondent mentioned,

One day, guests came to our home and enjoyed traditional foods and tea with a kitul trickle, expressing gratitude for our hospitality. They said they were pleased to have a cultural experience rather than nature

trekking.

(Respondent 03; Personal Communication, July 06, 2023).

According to that, Experience is the primary positive attitude creator in all things. Residents' positive attitudes towards tourism stem from their positive experiences, which foster cultural exchange and understanding between people and cultures. However, a lack of cultural exchange can hinder the proper implementation of cultural tourism. It mentions that

some foreigners were brought to us by guides, and then we provided traditional food and Kithul products as a cultural experience. If not, we do not have a way to showcase that. A smaller number of tourists come to the village. If it develops, we would like to add experience as well.

(Respondent 02; Personal Communication, July 06, 2023).

The openness to learning from visitors brings people into contact with each other. As tourism has an educational element, it can foster understanding between people and cultures and provide cultural exchange between hosts and guests. According to that, one respondent indicated,

The tourism industry offers children new opportunities, fostering curiosity and exploration. Learning English and making guests happy can benefit future generations.

(Respondent 02; Personal Communication, July 06, 2023).

Capacity

The community's capacity and readiness to deliver cultural activities are crucial for tourism and authenticity. Community characteristics define a particular group of people living in a particular geographic area. Moreover, the length of time spent living in a village impacts familiarity with local customs and traditions, affecting the authenticity of cultural activities. For example, all respondents stated,

I have lived in this village since birth.

(Respondent; 02, 03, 04, 05, Personal Communication, July 06, 2023).

According to research findings, all interviewed persons have lived in Wathugala Village since birth. One respondent indicated,

We cannot have cultural experiences without the community. Cultural tourism relies on the diverse community within a village, including homestays, handicrafts, tea cultivation, and gardening, to provide a unique cultural experience.

(Respondent 06; Personal Communication, Sept 12, 2023).

This quotation confirms that diversity in communities, with unique characteristics, resources, cultures, and practices, offers unique and memorable cultural experiences. It is a vital component of community capacity.

The quality of a community's tourism experience is significantly influenced by its proficiency in offering unique attractions and maintaining a welcoming environment. "Hospitality skills" refer to the hospitable and customer-oriented qualities displayed by locals, which are crucial for guests' comfort and pleasure. One respondent added,

Earlier, some foreigners were brought to us by guides, and then we provided traditional food and Kithul products as our cultural experience.

(Respondent 02; Personal Communication, July 06, 2023).

Since it guarantees visitors enjoyable and memorable experiences, a community's capacity to provide genuine hospitality can reasonably drive tourism growth. Again, it is confirmed by another respondent,

One day, guests came to our home and enjoyed traditional foods and tea with a kitul trickle, expressing gratitude for our hospitality. They said they were pleased to have your cultural experience rather than nature trekking.

(Respondent 03; Personal Communication, July 06, 2023).

Creative thinking can be termed as thinking out of the box. One respondent stated,

If someone wants to start a homestay, they know tourism is essential,

providing accommodation and food. However, we want to improve such business by adding value.

(Respondent 03; Personal Communication, July 06, 2023).

It is an important skill that needs to be developed as a person who is involved in tourism. The tourism industry significantly depends on creative thinking, and it will help to identify different tourism types and activities (Special Interest Tourism) and add value. Another respondent added,

If we take every cultural experience, we should add the values together. For example, when we take the Kitul industry, we only show Kitul honey and jaggery, but we can give various experiences about the Kitul industry.

(Respondent 01; Personal Communication, July 06, 2023).

One respondent added,

As a village, we can add bull cart riding as a new experience. It will be suitable for both local and foreign visitors.

(Respondent 05; Personal Communication, July 06, 2023).

Some respondents stated,

We have "Sinharaja sumithuro sanwidanaya" as the organisation; we requested a language and awareness training program.

(Respondent 02; Personal Communication, July 06, 2023).

Villagers have to gather as a team to face difficult situations.

(Respondent 03; Personal Communication, July 06, 2023).

Communities act as hosts in the tourism industry, and their ability to successfully organise and work together is important to their readiness for tourism. Organising becomes an advantage because the villagers can face challenges while implementing tourism. Through that skill, villagers can overcome or make a significant impact, allowing Responsible institutions to gain attention.

In the current situation in the world, including tourism, everything goes ahead with technology, and people should have significant knowledge about that. In the community research area, some of them have basic technology knowledge, which will be an advantage for them. For example, one respondent stated,

During my field visit, we identified three homestay owners. All properties have Booking.com accounts. They have the basic technology knowledge to enter the industry.

(Field Note, 2023).

Infrastructure can be taken as a prime factor for a successive destination. Accordingly, we identified the difference by developing the main road to reach Sinharaja and adding value to Sinharaja. One respondent stated,

Before the construction of the Lankagama road, the income was about eight lakhs. After the development of the Lankagama main road, the income was around 19 lakhs. The reason for this is road development.

(Respondent 07; Personal Communication, Sept 20, 2023).

Commitment

The commitment of local communities is essential to the collaborative effort of tourism. When a community is involved in tourism, they transform into significant collaborators who enhance their well-being and visitors' experiences. The community's commitment towards tourism is a driving force in the sector's growth. When considering the destination's current situation, it will be a motivation factor to raise commitment/empowerment in the community's mind. One respondent indicated,

In a particular context, the current tourism activities help to improve my living conditions. They helped improve roads and transportation but were inadequate. They should be developed in the future.

(Respondent 02; Personal Communication, July 06, 2023).

People will be concerned about their current situation before entering

tourism, and current tourism practices contribute to improving the community's commitment.

All parties must combine to gain more positive outcomes from the tourism industry. It can be said that tourism is fragmented. When we consider the community in the tourism industry, they also need empowerment from third parties. For example, some respondents stated,

We did a program for the kitul industry because the new generation tends to be backward. So, we opened a committee, gave them equipment and empowered them.

(Respondent 01; Personal Communication, July 06, 2023).

One respondent added,

Tourism in Deniyaya started in 2012. We started a program called "Rhythm of Nature.

(Respondent 08; Personal Communication, Sept 22, 2023).

*There was a project called **ESCamp (Eco System Conservation And Management Project)**, through which we conducted training programs for the guides and communities, constructed the building at the Kurugala entrance, and renovated the conservation centre.*

(Respondent 07; Personal Communication, Sept 20, 2023).

According to that, we have identified some third-party support for enhancing community empowerment.

Self-empowerment is the primary factor influencing commitment. Because it is a characteristic of personality and has a considerable strength rather than another empowerment, through the self, empowerment can do vital things to community readiness to deliver potential cultural activities to the guests. One responded,

I do not have much knowledge of tourism. However, I can provide cultural experience according to my experience. So, I understand that the fundamental goal of tourism is to make guests happy. Furthermore, I

want to learn English, like starting a homestay and learning tourism.

(Respondent 02; Personal Communication, July 06, 2023).

Potential visitor impacts can be one of the ways residents can be empowered and committed. For example, the respondent stated,

Positive impacts include job creation, improved living conditions, infrastructure development, and fostering children's curiosity about the tourism industry.

(Respondent 02; Personal Communication, July 06, 2023).

One respondent added,

Also, if cultural tourism is developed in the village, community pride will increase, and the village will enter the tourism industry.

(Respondent 02; Personal Communication, July 06, 2023).

Tourism also helps raise local awareness of the economic value of natural and cultural sites. It can stimulate pride in local and national heritage and interest in its conservation.

DISCUSSION

Tourism is a fundamental activity involving people in various activities. Sri Lanka is undoubtedly one of the best tourist destinations in the world. Considering the current tagline, "So Sri Lanka," destination branding should prioritise unique, memorable experiences over catchy words and improve competitiveness by delivering value-added products with great hospitality without overpromising or underproducing.

The research uses an inductive approach to develop a development perspective, based on individual and direct observations, to identify potential tourism activities and community readiness.

Ecotourism does not include rainforest walks unless they enhance the local ecosystem and its residents. According to ecotourism definitions, the benefits must go to the local population (Iftikhar Hussain, 2022). The researcher

agrees with those findings and identified Nature trekking, hiking, birdwatching, and waterfall watching as existing activities. Future tourism would primarily be nature-friendly, activity-based, educationally oriented, and centered on learning and admiring nature, among other things. According to research findings, most foreign visitors and a few locals enjoy various activities, including nature viewing and interpretation, soft and challenging adventure, and historically and culturally focused activities. They seek fresh, life-enriching experiences relating to nature, adventure, and culture.

According to the research findings, combining adventure, culture, and ecotourism helps to reimagine tourism at the Deniyaya entrance and will benefit the local community. This attempts to replicate a traditionally successful tourist concept (an old idea in a new setting), ride a new tourism trend (another setting for a new idea), or study a new tourism concept (bold new idea) (Aslam, Awang, 2015). ACE Tourism, which aims to identify unused and unrecognised adventure, culture, and eco resources related to the two access routes of the Sinharaja forest, will increase the things to do in Sinharaja and the surrounding areas. As a result of this research, ecotourism has been re-imagined as integrating adventure with culture to create a new future for a larger and better tourist sector.

Community participation is vital to showcasing the cultural experience in Sinharaja's buffer zone. The primary benefits of cultural tourism are the promotion of cross-cultural understanding and the incentive value of tourism in maintaining local culture and history (Herath & Ratnayake, 2013). According to the findings, the researcher can mention the community's readiness to deliver potential cultural activities positively in this village. Community readiness can be divided into attitude, capacity, and commitment to the local community. Through the research, I can elaborate that there is a positive attitude in villagers like hospitableness, willingness to cultural exchange, and willingness to learn

from visitors, as they can under the culture, their skills, the diversity of the community, and the resource availability. In doing so, we can ensure the authenticity of each cultural activity. Under the community's commitment, the researcher was able to identify ways of empowerment in the community, including self-empowerment and third-party empowerment, and the researcher could identify the positive impact of tourism as a way of empowering the community. As a result of these things, community pride will be increased.

The capacity to develop ACE Tourism already exists at the Deniyaya entrance. Because tourism is still implemented there, there needs to be a proper master plan and government attention in this regard, and there is no need for massive construction. According to that, the Sinharaja Deniyaya entrance needs to be developed and kept as it is because it is a world heritage and environment-sensitive area.

CONCLUSIONS

The tourism industry in Sri Lanka relies heavily on natural resources. The study suggests a high potential niche market for eco-tourism and historical destinations at the Sinharaja Deniyaya entrance. However, the current situation specifically promotes only nature trekking and waterfall watching. Both domestic and international markets perform similarly based on available recreation opportunities. Two factors motivate visitors: recreation opportunities and attractions. Most tourists visit the Sinharaja Rainforest due to its natural attractions, but only a few recreational activities are available at the entrance. The study suggests that ecotourism should extend beyond nature trekking and waterfall watching, focusing on education, excitement, and entertainment. ACE Tourism should cater to niche markets like studying fungi, animals, and their behaviour, and especially the endemic bird in Sri Lanka, "*Sri Lanka whistling thrush*", customarily called "*Aranga*", is now recorded in the Sinharaja Deniyaya entrance and by catering to these niche markets, ACE Tourism can cater

to the future tourism market competitively and cater to the needs of allocentric travellers. The community's readiness for cultural activities can be categorised into three main aspects: attitude, capacity, and commitment. Research shows that communities in Wathugala village have positive attitudes, capacity, and commitment towards cultural activities. Attitude involves hospitableness, willingness to learn from visitors, and willingness to engage in cultural exchange. They possess skills in hospitality, creative thinking, organising, potential activities, and technology. Commitment involves self-empowerment, third-party empowerment, motivation from the current situation, potential positive visitor impacts, and community pride. The readiness of the community depends on a successful empowerment process. The study reveals that community capacity and commitment are subjective and self-oriented, with capacity primarily based on skills and resource availability. We identified community initiatives with outstanding readiness to deliver cultural activities. However, some residents have good attitudes and capacity but low commitment, indicating that these factors can be changed subjectively or through external empowerment.

IMPLICATION AND FUTURE DIRECTION

The researcher emphasises the importance of the Sri Lankan government and the Sri Lanka Tourist Board in regulating the tourism industry in the Sinharaja Rainforest. They suggest that all parties involved should network to benefit from tourism development, establish a strong value chain, and combine human and physical resources. The Sinharaja forest should be a guaranteed tourist destination, promoting culture, agriculture, environment, and community. A proper master plan should be based on the environment, economy, and society. The development of ACE Tourism at the Sinharaja Deniyaya Entrance can help reimagine tourism in the Sinharaja Rainforest, attracting tourists under a niche market. The research findings suggest enhancing responsible tourism and local development and minimising economic, social, and environmental

damage. The community's readiness to deliver cultural experiences and establish facilities and equipment for adventure are also recommended. The research concludes that ACE Tourism will develop new alternative tourism for the Sri Lankan industry.

This study was based on one area as a future direction. Apart from that, for future studies, it is best to identify new special-interest tourism segments in any particular area to better the tourism industry in Sri Lanka. This can be done as another study on the tourism industry in Sri Lanka. Accordingly, this study will help identify experiential tourism opportunities under the special interest segment of any particular destination for future scholars.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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Personal Communication

Forest Officer – Pitadeniya Entrance, Personal Communication, October 16, 2023

Forest Officer – Kurulugala Entrance, Personal Communication, September 20, 2023

Tourist Guide, Personal Communication, September 12, 2023

Tourist Guide, Personal Communication, September 22, 2023

Grama Niladari – Wathugala Village, Personal Communication, July 06, 2023

Resident – Wathugala Village, Personal Communication, July 06, 2023

Resident – Wathugala Village, Personal Communication, July 06, 2023

Resident – Wathugala Village, Personal Communication, July 06, 2023

Resident – Wathugala Village, Personal Communication, July 06, 2023

Field Observation, March 09 and July 06,

APPENDIX INTERVIEW GUIDE (A)

1. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR FOREST OFFICERS AND TOURIST GUIDES

Step 01: Introduction

I am an undergraduate pursuing a BSc. (Hons) in Tourism Management at the Department of Tourism Management and Faculty of Management Studies at the Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka. I am doing this study to complete my degree.

Purpose of the study

I am conducting this interview to collect data for my research based on " Identifying the potential and challenges for ACE Tourism (Adventure, Culture, Eco-tourism) development in the Deniyaya entrance of the Sinharaja Rainforest". This research intends to identify potential recreation opportunities in and around the Sinharaja-Deniyaya area. It is like experiential tourism combining

Adventure, Culture, and Ecotourism, and it will increase the revenue from conservation forests by attracting more visitors and adding value to the basic philosophies of ecotourism.

Length of Interview

It will be about half an hour– is that OK with you?

Permission to record

Subject to your permission, I would like to record the interview as it enables me to listen carefully instead of taking notes. I will also take additional notes to remind myself of key points if necessary. If it is not a problem, may I record your interview?

Interview Protocol for Objective;

1. To identify potential recreation activities and market associations under the ACE tourism at the Sinharaja Deniyaya entrance.

Step 02: Reference Information

Date of the interview	Starting time	Ending time	Protocol No

Step 03: Respondent's profiling information

Profile of the person:

- Name
- Occupation
- How long have you worked in your occupation?

Step 04: Interview Questions

1. What are the values / unique features of the Sinharaja deniyaya entrance site?

2. What are the existing tourism activities at the Sinharaja Deniyaya entrance?
3. What activities do local and foreign tourists like to do at the Deniyaya entrance?
4. What are the potential tourism activities in Sinharaja and its Surroundings?
5. What actions have you taken to develop the Sinharaja Deniyaya entrance?
6. In your opinion, what is the general view of the local community regarding tourism?
7. What are the challenges to developing ACE Tourism in Deniyaya?
8. In your opinion, what visitor impacts have you seen in Sinharaja?
9. Do you have any suggestions on how to overcome them?

Step 05: Concluding the Interview

- Would you like to provide any other information?
- A friendly chat.
- Ask about being free to contact him or her at any time.
- Stop the interview.

Thank you for spending your valuable time to face my interview.

INTERVIEW GUIDE (B)

2. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR LOCAL COMMUNITY

Interview Protocol for Objective;

2. To identify community readiness to deliver the potential cultural experience in the Sinharaja Deniyaya entrance.

Step 01: Introduction

I am an undergraduate pursuing a BSc. (Hons) in Tourism Management at the Department of Tourism Management and Faculty of Management Studies at the Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka. I am doing this study to complete

my degree.

Purpose of the study

I am conducting this interview to collect data for my research based on " Identifying the potential and challenges for ACE Tourism (Adventure, Culture, Eco tourism) development in Deniyaya entrance of the Sinharaja Rainforest". This research intends to identify potential recreation opportunities in and around the Sinharaja-Deniyaya area. It is like experiential tourism combining Adventure, Culture, and Ecotourism. It will increase the revenue from conservation forests by attracting more visitors and adding value to the basic philosophies of eco-tourism.

Length of Interview

It will be about half an hour– is that OK with you?

Permission to record

Subject to your permission, I would like to record the interview as it enables me to listen carefully instead of taking notes. I will also take additional notes to remind myself of key points if necessary. If it is not a problem, may I record your interview?

Step 02: Reference Information

Date of the interview	Starting time	Ending time	Protocol No

Step 03: Respondent's profiling information

Profile of the person

- Name
- Occupation
- Educational level

Step 04: Interview Questions

1. How long have you lived in this village?

2. What are your current sources of income?
3. Would you like the tourist attraction in Sinharaja to improve further?
Comment.
4. Have your current tourism activities in Sinharaja improved your living conditions?
5. In your opinion, what would be the expected impacts (positive or negative) if your local area becomes more attractive for tourism?
6. If this option is available, are you able or willing to incorporate tourism into your daily routine?
7. Do you see travelers visiting this village or other tourist attractions in your area?
8. Why is your community involvement low for tourism?
9. What activities can you add if you have the opportunity to showcase the local culture to the tourists?
10. As you can see, what are the challenges to the community involved in tourism in your village?
11. Do you have suggestions on how to overcome them?

Step 05: Concluding the Interview

- Would you like to provide any other information?
- A friendly chat.
- Ask about being free to contact him or her at any time.
- Stop the interview.

Thank you for spending your valuable time to face my interview.