



Environmental Challenges in Ecotourism Development in Jaffna District, Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Sri Lanka is one of the fastest growing nations in tourism sector and ranked within the top ten countries. Government of Sri Lanka has taken initiatives to promote the tourism sector from time to time. As a result, tourism related facilities are well established in southern and central part of the country and tourism plays a vital role in the economy. As far as Jaffna District is concerned, development of tourism sector gained more attention from 2009 after the end of 30 years of ethnic unrest. Many development activities are accelerated and more priority is given to tourism sector. Study area has untapped potential for ecotourism development. However, there are many challenges hindering proper utilization of these resources for ecotourism development. At this juncture, this study has been carried out to study the environmental challenges associated with ecotourism development. Thematic analysis method have been used to analyze the data obtained from focus group discussion, in-depth semi structured interview, field visit, and secondary sources. The ecotourism principles, stake holder theory have been used as the basis to conduct this study. Challenges could be identified on biodiversity conservation and protected area management, utilization of resources, environmental friendly practices, environmental concern and interdepartmental Coordination among the tourism stakeholders. Challenges resulting from the perusing scenario have been taken in to consideration in formulating the strategies for enhancing environmental conservation practices. Ecotourism development is new and novel to all stakeholders in the study area. Properly implementing the strategies for ecotourism development in the initial phase of tourism development, will help to enhance the socio-economic and welfare of the local people, environmental conservation and also regional development.

Keywords: *Ecotourism, Challenges, Environment, conservation and stakeholders*