



## Challenges and opportunities for ecotourism in District Jaffna, Sri Lanka

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### ABSTRACT

As tourism is one of the fastest growing industries today, events are becoming more and more relevant within the tourism industry. People have become much more interested in all sorts of activities and are going to move far away to take part in events they find interesting. Events can provide destinations with various economic and social benefits, so destination managers can and should effectively employ events in a tourism role. In this study with the multitude of publications, case studies, guidelines, lessons learned, and best practice examples SWOT (Strengths, Limitations, Opportunities and Threats) analysis and descriptive statistical analysis were used for the outcome of eco-tourism that currently occurs. Research findings show that the Jaffna district can benefit far more than the tourist industry's present sense. A great deal of tourism potential has been found that can improve regional development. If Jaffna focuses more on tourism, it would support the tourism industry without endangering its cultural, social and environmental values. A well-designed questionnaire was used consisting of 30 questions and data were collected on a convenient basis from 150 international and 150 local tourists. The purpose of the research was to study on challenges and opportunities in Ecotourism in the post-war context in Jaffna, Sri Lanka. The Jaffna has many attractive ecological, historical, and cultural tourist spots to further enhance the tourism industry. Lack of identification of those tourist spots and lack of management result in poor growth and development in tourism in Jaffna. Hence, this research identified the tourist centers in Jaffna and analyzes proper development activities that can expand tourism in Jaffna in Sri Lanka.

**Keywords:** Tourism industry, Professional tourism, Social benefits, Sustainable tourism, Strategic approach

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### INTRODUCTION

The relationship between human beings and nature began when human beings were created millions of years ago. During the hunt and gathering, their

interactions were enhanced and more intense. Many people have historically viewed wildlife as only some game animals (almost exclusively mammals, birds and fish) that have been hunted (Amare, 2015). The type of tourism that fosters, encourages, and serves as a catalyst for environmental conservation is ecotourism. Moreover, eco-tourism policies must pay attention to: (a) economic growth; (b) environmental protection (c) social development (d)cultural protection and (e) political development (Gouvea, 2004). Ecotourism is the worldwide travel and tourism industry's fastest growing sector. For the last few years, there has been a new theme in the global tourism industry: tourism in any form or shape should be environmentally sound, should be sustainable (Tyler and Dangerfield, 1999). Ecotourism provides countries with an alternative and productive way to incorporate their economies into the global economy and provides incentives for sustainable development strategies (Aronsson, 2000). Ecotourism is currently one of Sri Lanka 's main foreign exchange-generating industries and almost 150,000 individuals depend directly or indirectly on the industry for their livelihoods (Fernando and Shariff, 2017).

Sri Lanka is indeed one of the world's richest biodiversity nations, and Sri Lanka was declared by Lonely Planet as an ideal destination for tourists in 2019. The overall contribution (both direct and indirect) of the tourism sector to the economy of Sri Lanka is substantial and increasing, amounting to 11.1% of GDP in 2014. In 2015, this was equivalent to LKR 1093.6 billion, which is expected to rise to LKR 1979.2 billion by 2025 (Deyshappriya, 2018).

However, Sri Lankan eco-tourism history shows decline in each period due to lack of planning, lack of participation of private sectors and local communities, poor management in sharing the responsibilities among the Tourism Ministry and other organizations related to tourism, shortage in manpower, and lack of coordination between organizations to improve the foreign investments in tourism. Especially, Northern Province of Sri Lanka had poor tourism history compared with other provinces in last thirty years due to the uncertain political situation and abnormal conditions caused by the civil war. After the civil war, Sri Lanka's Tourism shows a rapid growth since 2009. However, compared with other provinces of the country, Northern Province seems to have lack of development activities. Northern Province has many attractive ecological, historical, and cultural tourist spots to further enhance the tourism industry. Even though, Jaffna, Mullaitivu, Kilinochchi, Mannar, and Vavuniya districts in Northern Province have many attractive tourist spots, lack of identification of those tourist spots and lack of management result in poor growth and development in tourism in Northern Province. Thus, a clear research is needed to build up ecotourism in Jaffna. Jaffna is one of the districts of Northern Province of Sri Lanka. It has more tourism potentials to develop the province, which was untouched for the past thirty years. It is vital for Jaffna to adopt the concept of going green as it is the appropriate time to develop ecotourism throughout the country (Mathivathany and Sasitharan, 2012).

Therefore, the researcher analyzes how the above mentioned features of destinations influence the tourists' image and make a way for revisiting in future.

Jaffna includes diversified species of birds, some mammals, scenic landscapes, mangrove forests, sea grass beds and stunning beaches. Mangrove encroachment, sand mining and expansion of farming activities were revealed as the major problems contributing to the degradations of natural resources of Jaffna. The majority of the population in Jaffna is engaged in fisheries and agricultural activities instead of ecotourism activities. The main alternative of income generations is from ecotourism activities which help to minimize degradations pressure on lands, endangered species and fragile environments in Jaffna. In order to make tourism sustainable in Jaffna, this case study attempt to identify the opportunities for development of ecotourism and creating diversified livelihoods for local people. Jaffna has the potential to be a sustainable ecotourism destination which would help to promote livelihood opportunities and protect the environment from natural resource degradations. The overall objective of this study was to define and evaluate the potential for the sustainable growth of ecotourism in Jaffna. Specific objectives are: To analyze the major issues supporting to the development of eco-tourism; identifying the limits of the sustainable development of ecotourism and make suggestions to develop the sustainable ecotourism capabilities and ecotourism activities in that area.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

### **STUDY AREA**

The Jaffna District is situated at the northern end of Sri Lanka's Northern Province, about 410 km from Colombo. The District's borders to the north, east and west are the Indian Ocean, Jaffna Lagoon and Kilinochchi District to the south. The District of Jaffna is divided into sub divisions. They are Islands, Valikamam, Thenmaradchi and Vadamaradchi. With linked channels to store rain water, there are 1,084 ponds and 2,433 ditches spread all over the District. The heights above sea level are Point Pedro 15.24 m, Myliddy 10.8 m, Chankanai 3.04 m and Kokuvil 6.09 m respectively. There are the Scattered during North East Monsoon during April to May. In 2017, the precipitation was 1,231.10 mm, the temperature was usually between 25.05-30.75oC and the average temperature was 28.45C. In the year 2017, the rainfall was 1,231.10 mm.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Given the exploratory nature of the research, qualitative and quantitative analysis used. In terms of primary sources such as baseline data collection, observations, interviews, discussion and field visit will be used wherever possible to limit personal and methodological biases. At the same time, secondary sources such as media, including academic literature, newspapers, government documents, NGO's documents, official documents and promotional materials will be used.

## DATA COLLECTION

Face to face questionnaire used to test legal ethics in local communities, economic, ecological and management issues at community level. A well-designed questionnaire was used consisting of 30 questions and data was collected on a convenient basis from 150 international and 150 local tourists. Semi structured questionnaire used to identify the challenges and opportunities for ecotourism in Jaffna District with local tourism stakeholders, government bodies and travel agents. Email questionnaire used to identify the contribution to conservation through ecotourism with travel agents and government bodies and tourists, in-depth interviews undertaken with 30 conservation experts.

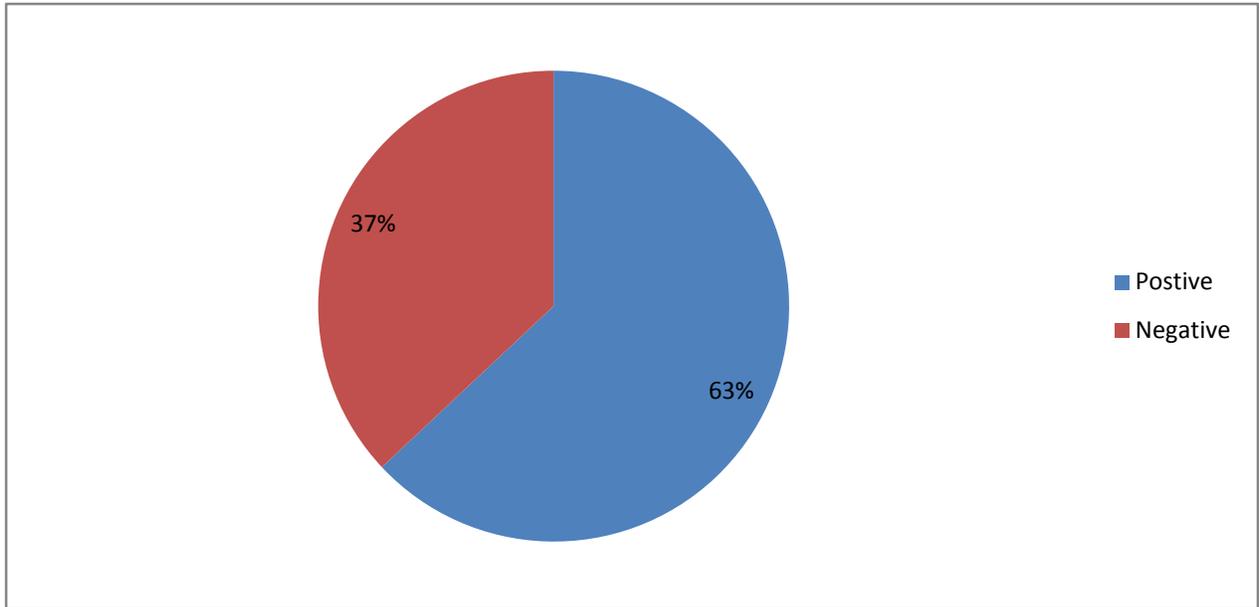
In addition, a field survey was performed for an observational technique with local residents and group debate with a panel of experts, making them more impartial. Discussion organized small scale with conservation experts, government body, travel agents and local community to assess the impacts of ecotourism on environmental conservation, social and cultural heritage preservation, economic development and enhancement of livelihoods. The research conducted 30 key informants at the case-study sites including nature based locations and culturally based locations covering all the part of Jaffna. Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT), descriptive statistical analysis and SPSS Statistics analysis techniques conducted to identify the role of eco-tourism in Jaffna. Further, GIS used to evaluate the land use and natural resources for future sustainable ecotourism site planning. The data was entered in Microsoft Excel 2010 for analysis. The quantitative and qualitative data was combined and triangulated and based on that, the data was interpreted and analyzed.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Jaffna has been promoting as one of the eco tourist destination in Sri Lanka after post-war context. Anyhow, the results of outcome say that there need to more improvement.

### HUMAN BEHAVIOR TOWARD ECOTOURISM

Attitude of the local people towards ecotourism was 63% positive and 37% was negative (Figure 1). Because the most of the people (63%) have replied that ecotourism enhance infrastructure development, employment opportunities, social welfare and public facilities, while some of them (37%) replied that ecotourism negatively impacts on bio diversity, cultural modification and unfavorable for ecosystem.



**Figure 1: Attitude toward sustainable eco-tourism.**

#### A WELL DESIGN QUESTIONNAIRE WITH TOURISTS

There were 18 key eco tourist locations preferred by tourist (Locals and internationals) such as Casurina Beach, Chaatty Beach , Chundikulam national park, Delft national park, Jaffna fort, Jaffna lagoon area, Kayts, Keerimalai sacred water spring, Manatkadu , Parititivu sanctuary, Nagar kovil, Nallur, Navatkuli, Nilavarai underground water well, Point pedro, Sarasali bird sanctuary, Thondamanaru lagoon and Valalai.

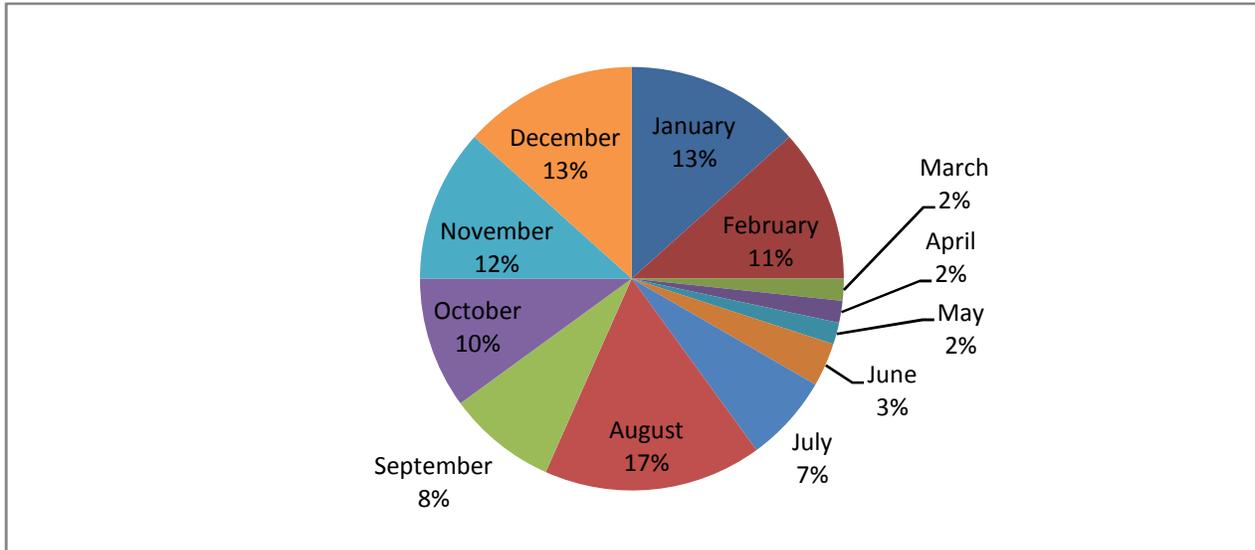
Jaffna lagoon area, Delft national park, Chundikulam national park, Sarasali bird sanctuary and Nallur were selected as mostfive suitable places as eco tourist destinations in the Jaffna region.

Further, there were few reason mentioned by them by an eco-tourist should visit Jaffna region.

- Migrants birds species are easy to spot (flamingo, whimbrel and spotted billed duck).
- Good for very rare birds species (spotted billed duck and black kite).
- Wild ponies are only see in Delft island in Sri Lanka.
- 2276 hectares mangrove vegetation is with more than 10 types of species.
- Breathtaking landscape.
- Unique culture with ancient history.

### SEMI STRUCTURED QUESTIONNAIRE WITH STAKEHOLDERS

The month of August is the peak season in the Jaffna region because of the Nallur festival. September to February is another peak season because of the winter migrants' species and it's the season for North- East monsoon. March to June is the off season in Jaffna (Figure 2).



**Figure 2: Peak season in Jaffna region.**

Three tour operators carrying a European community said that the natural environment is favored by most eco-tourists, but they complain that it is not methodically protected. Further, the tour agents noted that at these locations there are less informative leaflets in English that show the historical importance, eco system, tourism rules and regulations. They noticed that the lack of knowledge, according to their understanding, may lead to negative impressions, resulting in fewer repeat visitors to the same venue.

A government officer responded that, it is very difficult to promote the ecotourism in this region since people are so sensitive with their culture and their tradition. Another tour operator stated that, Jaffna is one of the best ecotourism destination in Sri Lanka but the facilities are very lacking compared with other areas in Sri Lanka such as there is no ecotourism guides in that region, lack of hotels facilities, lack of people participation in eco tourist activities and lack of awareness of flora and fauna of that region.

### IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW WITH CONSERVATION EXPERTS

A bird expert said that, Jaffna is one of best place in Sri Lanka for birding especially for migrant birds and could see 116 species of birds in the Jaffna region. Another conservationist responded, wild ponies, migrant bird species, mangrove vegetation and marine flora and fauna are the assets for eco-tourism in Jaffna. A conservationist said that, eco-tourism is a tool for conservation if we implement in a systematic approach, but it is lacking in the Jaffna region since

loss of bio diversity, human-wildlife conflict, lack of awareness, lack of livelihood opportunities and very few researches done so far relevant to biodiversity and conservation in this region.

In the national level researches in Sri Lanka, in eco-tourism industry, the regional variations can be noticed. For these variations, the geological location, infrastructure, logistics, transportation, natural resources, weather and human resources are the reasons. On the other hand, for the development purpose the government allocation is not efficiently used and inappropriate infrastructure and migration of the intellectuals are also the reasons to slow down the development. The research location is rich in bio diversity and cultural values. Hence the eco-tourism development can be stimulated. However, there are several factors that slow down the development. For example, the lack of government's contribution and lack of regional governments' and private sector's contribution, the lack of transportation, infrastructure and hotel facilities can be mentioned as obstacles for ecotourism development. If the government policies are designed in a way to utilize the resources sustainably, the ecotourism locations/spots can be developed. Otherwise, if the investments on eco-tourism are limited, the growth of the regional eco-tourism will be restricted. Hence the opportunity for eco-tourism will be limited and with time, the eco-tourist spots will be vanished and consequently the resources of ecotourism can be destroyed. Therefore, it is important to utilize the resources focusing on the sustainability of ecotourism in order to achieve the divisional eco-tourism development, and job opportunities and economic growth can be achieved. Hence, the national growth can be developed. To promote Jaffna as a best eco-tourist destination many relevant research has to be done in future.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

From this research it is concluded, the district was identified as lacking in resources to contribute for eco-tourism development. To enhance the eco-tourism development the following recommendation and advices are given below. By developing the eco-tourism industry, job opportunities will be created for the local people. Also, the regional development will be stimulated. Therefore, the livelihood of the people will be developed. Further, the increase in number of international and local eco-tourists will leads towards the development of fisheries industries and cultural food manufactures. Hence the relevant business should be developed locally.

Consequently, the livelihood of the local people will become self-sustained. On the other hand, the Palmyra products, traditional food production, tools, sea food production and other handicrafts will be stimulated which would positively impacts on district's economy. Especially, the Jaffna includes beaches in a remarkable area. Hence, the beaches can be developed, and the sea food production and other related business will provide remarkable number of job opportunities to the local people.

The government's contribution to the research area is not sufficient. Therefore, it is important to develop the infrastructure and the sea and land

transportation by upgrading the standard of roads to A level roads. It is also suggested to upgrade the road between Jaffna and Colombo into a highway. Hence the ecotourism will be secured and efficient. In order to increase the investments in ecotourism, the local savings should be increased, and the private sectors investment should be encouraged. Rather than focusing of long term projects to recover the eco-tourism industry, the short term development projects should be considered in a sustainable way. Therefore, government should contribute to the eco-tourism development through the members of parliament who are selected from the local level and other government sectors.

To overcome the challenges in eco-tourism, new projects should be proposed. Meaning, at regional level there should be an eco-tourism authority to provide service to the eco tourists as well as propose solutions to the government. Consequently, the government and the private sector in collaboration policies should be implemented. While encouraging the investments on ecotourism there should be proper monitoring of implementations and the sustainability. As the beaches can be upgraded, the hospitality and ecotourism management should be taught at institutional level and the investments on it will be increased. Considering the geological location, the sea/ocean resources can be utilized.

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**Authors' contributions:** Aloysius has designed project, collected data and written this article; while Yousaf, Saira and Saba critically analysis this article and approved as final.