

ABSTRACT

The current situation of tourism and ecotourism possibilities were studied in the Northern Flank of the Knuckles Region, Sri Lanka, to provide information to policy makers, designers and investors to develop ecotourism management plan for the conservation.

The main objective of this study is to investigate the present situation of the tourism activities and to identify the possible ways of developing eco-tourism in the selected area while finding the kinds of benefits which accrue to the guides, house owners and the wider community. The findings of this study would suggest the future format of ecotourism activities, model of lodging facilities and assurance of financial contribution for conservation activities.

The importance of the focal attraction (the natural resource), present situation and the main tourist attractions were examined. Also, a special attention is given for the findings of support attractions, since it is the pivot of most of the financial benefits.

The study was carried out in three villages (Pitawala, Illukkumbura, Mahalakuwa) in the northern flank of the Knuckles Region. Thirty (30) families from three villages, fifteen (15) foreign tourists and thirty (30) local tourists were interviewed to find out their views on Eco-Tourism and future development in the region.

Among the selected sample in three villages, 100% agreed with the eco-tourism industry in the region and 70% agreed with providing accommodation. Seventy two percent (72%) local tourists were unsatisfied with the available facilities for lodging and 84% foreign tourists were not satisfied with the available guiding system.

It revealed two major environmental impacts due to present tourism activities. Sixty percent (60%) of the interviewed villagers commented about improper disposal of polythene and plastics. Fifty three (53%) commented on breaking of glass bottles by the local tourists. These issues were identified as major issues by the local community.

Proposed recommended guidelines for sustainable management of ecotourism practice in selected sites in Knuckles forest range are based on findings from the study. Mitigation of present and future impacts on natural and cultural values is to be considered for its conservation and is discussed.