

Unknown Shifting of Tourism Market Segment: A Case Study of Negombo, Sri Lanka

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Tourism has experienced continued expansion and diversification during last six decades to become one of the largest and fastest growing industries in the world. Unexceptionally in Sri Lanka also tourism industry is recognized as a significant emerging sector with its direct and indirect advantages. A tiny island Sri Lanka possesses plentiful natural and man-made attractions right around the country including a large number of beaches, Negombo is one of popular traditional beach destinations close by the international airport of Sri Lanka. However, since recent past tourism industry could observe increasing complains and declining interest of tourists on Negombo beach, even though tourist arrivals at a saturation level. This study intended to investigate how Negombo can maintain still saturation level of tourist arrivals while the demand and purpose of visit for beach is being declined. Negombo has undergone an unknown market segmental shift while remaining the traditional focus as beach destination. Therefore, it is inevitable to bring forth realities and facts in the shifting of tourism market segments in Negombo to streamline the destination marketing. The lack of printed and electronic data led the investigation to adopt qualitative case study approach to uncover the truth through naturalist interpretation of the stakeholders in Negombo. Semi structured personal interviews were carried out with hoteliers, tour guides, tourism related Small, Medium Enterprises (SME), transporters and tourists. This was supported with non-participant observations and the documental review of printed and electronic published and unpublished documents such statistical reports of hotels, previous research findings, visitor comments at the hotels and in social media. Verbatim transcription was used to transcribed interview and observational qualitative data. Interpretive and descriptive data analysis carried out along with the triangulation of data from multiple sources and methods. This led us to categorize and bring forth the thematic findings that there is a drastic decline in beach tourism segment and rapid growth in transit tourism segment for Negombo. However, investigation also elucidate that the major marketing focus of Negombo on beach tourism and no much effort to promote as transit destination. The travel itineraries also include Negombo only as beach destination. This study also reveals that decline of beach tourism can be substitutes or replaced with transit tourism to ensure saturation and sustainability.

Keywords: Tourism Diversification and Segmentation, Beach Tourism, Transit Tourism, Shifting of Market Segments