

The Impact of Tourist Harassment on the Quality of Tourist Experience: A Case Study of Hikkaduwa Beach Site

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Tourism industry is one of the largest and growing industries in the world. It has become one of the major income generation industries around the globe and it is the third highest foreign exchange earner in Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka has become a renowned tourist destination of the world because of its natural and man-made attractions and scenic beauty. Especially Sri Lankan beach sites are the major spots that tourists visit. Among the beach sites, Hikkaduwa beach is one of the main tourist destinations in the country. Therefore, many tourists who visit southern Sri Lanka make sure not to miss Hikkaduwa. Yet, the tourists are unable to get leisure experience as they hope due to harassment by locals at the attraction. Therefore this study investigates the types of harassments faced by tourists at Hikkaduwa and how harassments impact on destination experience of tourists. The data for this study were collected at Hikkaduwa itself. A total of 100 survey questionnaires were collected from tourists and 14 interviews have been conducted including the interviews from 8 foreign tourists, 2 tourist guides, 3 community members and 1 security officer. The mixed methods approach has been used. The study is conceptualized using the tourist harassment (independent variable) and destination experience of tourists (dependent variable). The first objective of the study was to identify the nature of tourist harassment at Hikkaduwa beach site. Findings of the study show that 66 percent tourists have experienced some form of harassment. They were harassed mainly by different parties like vendors, tuk-tuk drivers, some beach boys etc. The study also reveals that the major tourist harassments are exorbitant charging, cheating, begging, vendor persistence, sexual harassment etc. The second objective of the study is to identify the impact of harassment on destination experience of the tourist. According to the results, the tourist harassment had significant impact on the destination experience of the tourist. The tourist harassment conduces to dissatisfaction among tourists and also diminishes the image of the destination as well. This will reduce the future arrivals of tourists due to negative word-of-mouth. The study also observes the possible and pragmatic suggestions to overcome the tourist harassment and most of the local respondents' opinion was that the involvement of responsible parties is necessary for issuing IDs for tuk-tuk drivers, beach boys and beach sellers for recognizing them as important stakeholders in the value chain by making them aware to become tourist-friendly service providers.

Keywords: destination experience, tourist harassments, beach tourism, Sri Lanka