

**TOURISTS' PERCEPTION AND SATISFACTION ABOUT THE SUSTAINABLE TOURISM  
OPERATIONS IN MADU RIVER**

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**Abstract**

The wetland tourism has become one of the most attractive niche market tourism segments in Sri Lanka and, therefore, the tourists' participation for those activities are increased gradually during the last few years specially after ending the terrorism problem in Sri Lanka in 2009. The wetland eco-tourism can define as a niche tourism segment of tourists who have particular favor at attraction, scenery and bio diversity, boat safari and other activities in wetland destinations. The Madu River can be identified as a popular natural wetland destination which use mainly for boat safaris and subsequently for other tourism related activities. The ever-increasing tourist arrivals has created both positive and negative impacts to the destination. Further, the tourists are also has faced various problems and issues at the destination. Therefore, the identification of the tourists' perception and satisfaction about tourism operation in Madu River has become vital important. The main objectives of this study are, first, to identify the tourists' perception and satisfaction about the tourism operation in Madu River and second to discuss the problem and issues related to sustainable tourism development in Madu River. The research has conducted through a questionnaire survey with 170 foreign and local tourists who has participated in boat safari in Madu River. The study is conceptualized using the tourists' perception regarding the attractions and services, quality of boats, price and payments, safety and security, food and beverage, environmental management, guide services and information, service quality, support services as the independent variables and the tourists' satisfaction as the dependent variable. The findings highlight that there is a positive relationship between tourists' perception and tourists' satisfaction. Further, the tourists are mainly satisfied with attraction and services, quality of boats, safety and security and guide services and information and other observed factors are not positively contributed for their satisfaction. Also, the study has identified many problems and issues which affect for the sustainability of the tourism in Madu River. Mainly the contamination of kerosene oil with water which change the taste of fish. In addition to that the price discrimination, unequal distribution of benefits, fast riding of boats, cutting of mangroves and less economic benefits to the locals are the suffering problems and issues in the area. Therefore, the relevant and responsible authorities should intervene to solve the issues and problems which affect for the sustainability of the industry.

**Keywords:** Problem and issues; sustainable tourism; Tourist's perception; Tourist's satisfaction; Wetland eco-tourism.

**Introduction**

Sri Lanka is one of the most wonderful islands in the world that attracts more foreign visitors since early historical times. Tourist arrivals to Sri Lanka have grown up since 1960 steadily over the year. Now a day, tourism has become as one of the popular global leisure activities all over the world. Wetland tourism is a kind of sustainable special interest alternative tourism. In Sri Lanka we can identify more than 63 wetlands over the country and there currently have 6 Ramsar sites as internationally important area.

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Madu River wetland is the most important tourist destination with its attractions. According to Bambaradeeniya et al. (2002) stated Madu River is the 3<sup>rd</sup> site of the Ramsar International Convention of wetland and 2<sup>nd</sup> largest wetland in Sri Lanka and it declared as a protected area (PA) under a relevant Government Conservation Department. This area was declared as a tourism development area by the Ceylon Tourist Board on 21 October 2002. It is one of the last remaining tracts of pristine mangrove forest in Sri Lanka and recently proposed by the Department of Wildlife Conservation as a 3<sup>rd</sup> sanctuary. Madu River is at present managed by the Coastal Resources Management Project of the Ministry of Fisheries and Ocean Resources.

Madu River is a most prominent area in Galle district is renowned historical, cultural and environmental values. According to the officer in charge of Madu Ganga coastal environmental center it attracts about 700000 tourists, including both foreign and local tourists in 2016. The total water body covers about 915ha including 15 islands is 145ha and the water surface is 770 ha. According to Bambaradeniya et al. (2002) there contain 303 of vegetation and in total 248 species of vertebrate fauna. The department of wildlife conservation has gazetted Cobra Island as a sanctuary.

Madu River is a nice attractive area for boat tour. Mainly Tourists attract to Madu River for visit Mangroves and experience boat safari. It includes many attractions which connect with the nature, community, culture and heritage. There are many attraction places to visit and have to do many recreation for visitors. Such as fish therapy, visit mangroves and their caves, kothduwa temple, watching birds and other animals (fish, Kind of reptiles like crocodile, snakes, lizards, monitors, etc.). Recreational users of a destination have produced great pressure to natural resources. According to Bambaradeniya et al. (2002) this wetland is now being threatened by various human activities, including the nature-based tourism and as a sustainable ecotourism site due to its ecological, cultural and scenic value, it is important to conserve the area. Considering the current operation of Madu River there are lots of ideas about that on customer who have done safari in Madu River and tourists have not positive perception about Madu River. Researcher found some comments about Madu River safari through trip adviser virtualtourist.com and news paper articles and past studies.

According to that researcher identified some problem and issues related to tourism operation in Madu River. There are increasing pollution in area, have not reasonable and fixed price structure to river safari and its recreation, cheating for customer, All ways try to grab money and donation in everywhere and some behaviors of stakeholder. Considering those problems researcher expected to conduct this research on Madu River. Objectives of the research are to identify the tourists' perception about the current tourism operations in Madu River and its effect on their satisfaction and to identify the problems and issues related to the sustainable tourism development in Madu River. When conducting this study researcher identified some limitations to conduct the research. There are about 12 boats operator companies in Madu River area but data collected base of 3 boat tour Operator Companies because of limited time and unequal distribution of tourists for safari companies. As well as there is a limited number of existing studies base on tourist satisfaction about wetland tourism destinations and there is not any official data or statistics which connect with tourism operation in Madu River. In this research consider both local and foreign passengers who have done boat safari in Madu River. The entire relevant data should be collected within a limited time period. After the doing safari many tourists are not waiting and leave here. Furthermore, many tourists come as a group, though a travel agency and some travel agent do not give a chance to contact tourists. Some tourists do not know English and some do not give accurate data about the destination. As well as meeting some interviewees difficult to appoint for interview dates.

### **Literature review**

Base on existing knowledge related to study, researcher organized literature review under some main topics. There are,

#### *Tourism*

Tourism is a one of the largest industry in worldwide. There is not easy to provide comprehensive and very clear definition, particularly some consider tourism as an activity which connect with the all

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other sectors of life, economy, social, culture, political and environmental. Fennell (1999) defines tourism as the interrelated system that includes tourists and the associated services that are provided and utilized (facilities, attractions, transportation and accommodation) to aid in their movement. Tourism creates by short term movement of people from one place to another for a specific purpose or purposes. Before the beginning of journey, tourist makes decisions about their tour.

#### *Wetland Ecotourism*

When considering niche tourism and tourists, we cannot forget nature base tourism. Now a day there is different types of niche tourism in broader tourism industry. Nature tourism is responsible travel to natural area and it is a vast tourism area, including eco-tourism, green tourism, Geo tourism, adventure tourism, wildlife tourism, etc. Nature tourism destinations can provide considerable economic gains to host communities and tourism businesses (Naidoo, Ramseook, & Seegoolam, 2011). Sri Lanka has vast potential for natural resources and opportunities to develop tourism with healthy climate changes and divers nature attractions according to demand of tourists. Since 2005, ecotourism sector has been developed under the policy decisions and legal coverage of tourism and at present tourism industry with ecotourism sector is a major foreign exchange generating industry in Sri Lanka (Fernando & Shariff, 2013). As well as eco-tourism is a tourism activity that reduces environmental degradation in the process of economic development, environmental education, social justice, and support environmental conservation as its major principles (Wang, 2015). The wetland is a remarkable biodiversity hot spot with the direct economic and environmental importance in the ecosystem and can be used in a sustainable way to contribute to the development of ecotourism (Fernando & Shariff, 2013). According to Ramsar conservation on wetland (2012) described that Wetlands are amongst the most productive of the world's ecosystems, providing services such as water, food, construction materials, transport, and coastline protection, as well as important opportunities for tourism and recreation, which are also defined as ecosystem services.

#### *Sustainable Tourism Operation*

Tourists consume the environment that consists with resources. The resources of the world are scarce and limited. As well as tourism is a high consumption industry in the world. According to Szczsna and Wojtanowicz (2014) stated sustainable tourism is the currently promoted new stylish tourism as it refers to the idea of sustainable development. Sustainability has become an important policy in tourism and increasing need to understand the limits of growth (Saarinen, 2006). Sustainable tourism requires meeting the needs of all the parties and in this case, bringing together environmental protection with the tourists' needs and social economic development of the local community (Szczsna & Wojtanowicz, 2014). Sustainable tourism is the concept of visiting a place as a tourist and trying to make only a positive impact on the environment, society and economy.

#### *Tourists' Perception*

Perception is a most important psychological variable to study tourist behavior. According to Gnanapala (2015) the tourists' motives, attitudes, and perceptions highly effect on destination selection process. Identification of perception and factor influenced for perception of tourists at destination is critical to investigate in the management plan and conservation of natural destination for durable benefits. Bawa (2014) described perception as the process that translates sensory impressions of people into coherent and integrated view of the world. In a same way perceptions defined reflect the way of consumers organize and interpret data about products (Vogat & Andereck, 2003). The tourist perception about performance, quality and image of the product, service or destination are different from each.

Attributes, quality, product and services of the destination are different. Any destinations have unique feature and them to operate the destination. Measurement of tourists' satisfaction becomes rather complex with it is an intangible composite of many interrelated components (Pizam, Neumann, & Reichel, 1978). Hwang and Han (2014) investigate the perception using eight factors measure the quality of experience, including food quality, service quality, staff/crew attractiveness, entertainment, quality of the ship, ports of call, programs/places for children, and cabin quality. According to

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Ragawan et al. (2014) declared eight dimensions of the destination. That travel attributes, possibly explained with the international tourists' satisfaction. Those are accommodation and food, attractions, climate and image, commodities, convenience, culture, people (service quality), and price. Shuib, Ramachandran and Afandi (2013) examine the visitors' satisfaction towards service and facilities in the kilim cast Geoforest Park, Langkawi. It indicates three main attribute to measure tourists' satisfaction in this destination toward environmental management, services, and facilities provided in the park. Health service facilities, transportation & communication service, accommodation service, safety & security, food services, beauty, environment management, hygiene & sanitation, people's attitude, tour guides and information, sports and recreation facilities, emergency service, night life, relaxation opportunity, presence of beggar and hawker, shopping, wash room and toilet facilities are seventeenth factors that influenced tourist satisfaction about Cox's bazar sea beach in Bangladesh as a destination (Hassan & Shahnewaz, 2014).

#### *Tourists' Satisfaction*

According to Tian-Cole and Crompton (2003), tourists' satisfaction is determined by realizing desired outcomes and benefits of the tourist. Customer satisfaction based on an outcome (Vavra, 1997). Satisfaction is referred to as a function of pre-travel expectations and post-travel experiences and when experiences compared to expectations in feelings of gratification the tourist is satisfied (Chen & Chen, 2010). Tourists' satisfaction based on getting sweet memorable experience and that is positive perception, feeling of tourist. Satisfaction means bearing of desire expectations of individuals. According to Hassan and Shahnewaz (2014) satisfaction is a mixed feeling arising from a combination of product performance, consumer rational judgment, expectation and experience as well as the effective response to the outcomes. That is a feeling of customer about a product or service. Gnanapala (2015) stated satisfaction as a main performance indicator of successful operation of business and is a measure of surpassing and meeting the destination's products and services the customer expectation. Furthermore, it is an important issue in tourism business or destination is the determining successes and failures in an organization or destination (Sapari, Shuib, Ramachandran, & Afandi, 2013). If tourist's perception is higher of the destination, the visitor may be more satisfied with the destination and then tourist behavior will be influenced by feelings (Ragavana, Subramoniana, & Sharif, 2014).

#### *Impacts of Tourism on Destination*

Any destination in the world can be suffering from some issues. That issue and problem may be in considerable or non-considerable level. Issue and problem of a destination are different between expected situation and the real situation of a destination. Those problems and issues are different from destination to destination. As well as those problems are different from person to person based on various opinions from one to another. Considering problems of the destination are not only faced by tourists but also other stakeholders. Consistency of the destination should have positive impacts than negative impacts. Those impacts can identify as environment, social culture and economy. Those impacts may be change destination to destination.

#### **Methodology**

To conduct this research successfully researcher used mix method research approach. Quantitative research approach used to identify tourists' perception about the current tourism operations in Madu River an Qualitative method used to identify the problems and issues related to the sustainable tourism development in Madu River.

Conceptualization of the study is derivated base on the literature review of the study. There nine dimensions in tourists' perception (independent variable) including attractions and services, quality of boats, price and payments, safety and security, food and beverage, environmental management, guide services and information, service quality and supportive services.

The researcher selected the sample size as 170 tourists who have done safari in Madu River. Because of researcher has limited time period for data collection, research development. Researcher use

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convenience sampling as the sample method of this research. Convenient sampling technic uses for clearly undefined population situation (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010).

In this study, researcher used self-administered questionnaires to gather data from tourists who have done safari in Madu River to identify their perception and satisfaction related to Madu River tourism operation and semi structured interview also use to obtain genuine data from people in the area who are fishermen, boat operators, Gramasewaka, Religious leader, authorized people in Pradeshiya Sabhawa, Coastal Conservation Department and Divisional Secretariat in Balapitiya about issues related to sustainable tourism development in Madu River. To accomplish this goal, visitors will survey in different location around in Madu River.

### **Conclusion**

In order for development of the tourism industry, satisfaction of tourists has been a main purpose of countries which hope to achieve by sustainable development in county with the tourism industry. Satisfaction is the comparison of before expectation and real action after consumption about any service or product. This research provides an investigation on the tourists" perception and satisfaction about sustainable tourism operation in Madu River. The extent of tourists" satisfaction on Madu River tourism operation and problems and issues in Madu River on the tourism has analyzed.

According to the demographic factor about gender composition, 47.3% responders were male and 52.7% responders were female. By considering age composition of the study were mainly 29% belong in 20- 29. Further considering education qualification of tourists in here 35% responders were completed university degree. According demographic factors analysis researcher most tourists are female and they are in age between 20-29. Most of them travel with friends and family and are married people. As well as most of tourists are university degree holders and professionalises. Most of tourists are first time visitors to the destination.

Under this study identifies the nine factors that influence the tourists" satisfaction with the quality of services provided on overall services of Madu River safari. The researcher has discovered that quality of boats, attractions and services, safety and security and guide service and information were significant and major factors effect to the overall satisfaction of tourists about Madu River tourism operation. This study provides the broad understand about tourists" satisfaction with Madu River tourism operation. As well as this all so provide the particular direction to its stakeholders and authorized person to lead whole operation and services of the destination in the sustainable way to increasing tourists" satisfaction.

Furthermore researcher discovered different of problems and issues related to sustainable tourism development in Madu River. Those problems and issues are different according to point of view and specific role of respondents in this area. According to the comments of respondents, the major problem was contamination of kerosene oil with water and changes the taste of fish in River. Other problems are pollution in the River and islands, having not fixed price for safari, unequal distribution of safari businesses, fast riding on safari boats, cutting mangroves and working of outsiders in main safari companies. As well as those respondents give some suggestions to overcome those problems and issues. Most of respondent suggests using petrol engines instead kerosene oil engine and that helps to continue operation of fishery in Madu River. Some suggestion was for equal distribution of safari businesses and issuing tickets for safari though establishing the tourist information center. As well as have some suggestions to establish and implement rules and regulations for fixed price for safari and its services, speed limit for boat, cutting mangroves, free from pollution of the islands and river and the operation of illegal safari and fish massage centers that under relevant government department. Further there should give priority of employment in safari companies for villagers. It figures out that there should be a proper management plan for sustainable tourism development in Madu River.

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