

Recreational potential of the Belihuloya – Pambahinna area: A study of the rational allocation of the geographic resources for Tourism Development

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Abstract

Belihuloya - Pambahinna area has a potential to attract tourists due to the presence of many scenic attractions such as hills, rivers, waterfalls, ancient monuments, cultural ruins, festivals, flora and fauna.

This study was carried out both by data gathering and data analyzing. These include data on the natural and the anthropogenic resources of the area. The natural features included water resources, principal peaks, flora and fauna. The anthropogenic resources included the historic archeological monuments, religious places, festivals and socio cultural attractions of the area.

At present, none of these resources are tapped for the tourist interest and for the economy of the country. This study will be useful in promoting the tourist industry in this region in the near future.

1. Introduction

The island of Sri Lanka has earned a reputation world over for its exotic natural beauty and for its anthropogenic resources linked to a 2500 year old civilization. Sri Lanka, therefore, is unique in this regard when compared to other island nations and many third world countries. As there is an abundance of natural and anthropogenic resources with potential to also offer active forms of recreational tourism, Sri Lanka can be developed as a prime tourist destination if its resource-base is utilized in a rational basis using this comparative advantage.

The latent potential inherent in the natural and anthropogenic resources in providing pleasure and satisfaction to a tourist seeking active forms of recreation activity instead of mere sightseeing has not been exploited. Therefore, it should be noted that the recreational- related tourism remains well below the nascent stage.

Sri Lanka stepped into the development of tourism in the mid 1960s in a planned manner. The Ceylon Tourism Plan (1967) and the Tourism Master Plan (1992) provided the basis for development. Identification of areas and introduction of the tourist industry to such areas has been given priority.

The Belihuloya-Pambahinna area (the location of this study) is one geographical location, which can offer tourists opportunities for participating in active forms of recreational activities as well but which has sadly not been exploited and remains undeveloped. This area, therefore, needs to be identified with the recreational potential it has and priority given with a view to developing a recreational industry.

The Belihuloya-Pambahinna area is situated between 80° 43'– 80° 49' Eastern longitude and 6° 40'–6° 47' Northern latitude. The study area is situated within the Ratnapura district of the Sabaragamuwa Province and is located within

Talapitiya Pattuwa of the Imbulpe Divisional Secretariat, which consists of 14 Gramaniladhari Divisions (Fig.No.1).

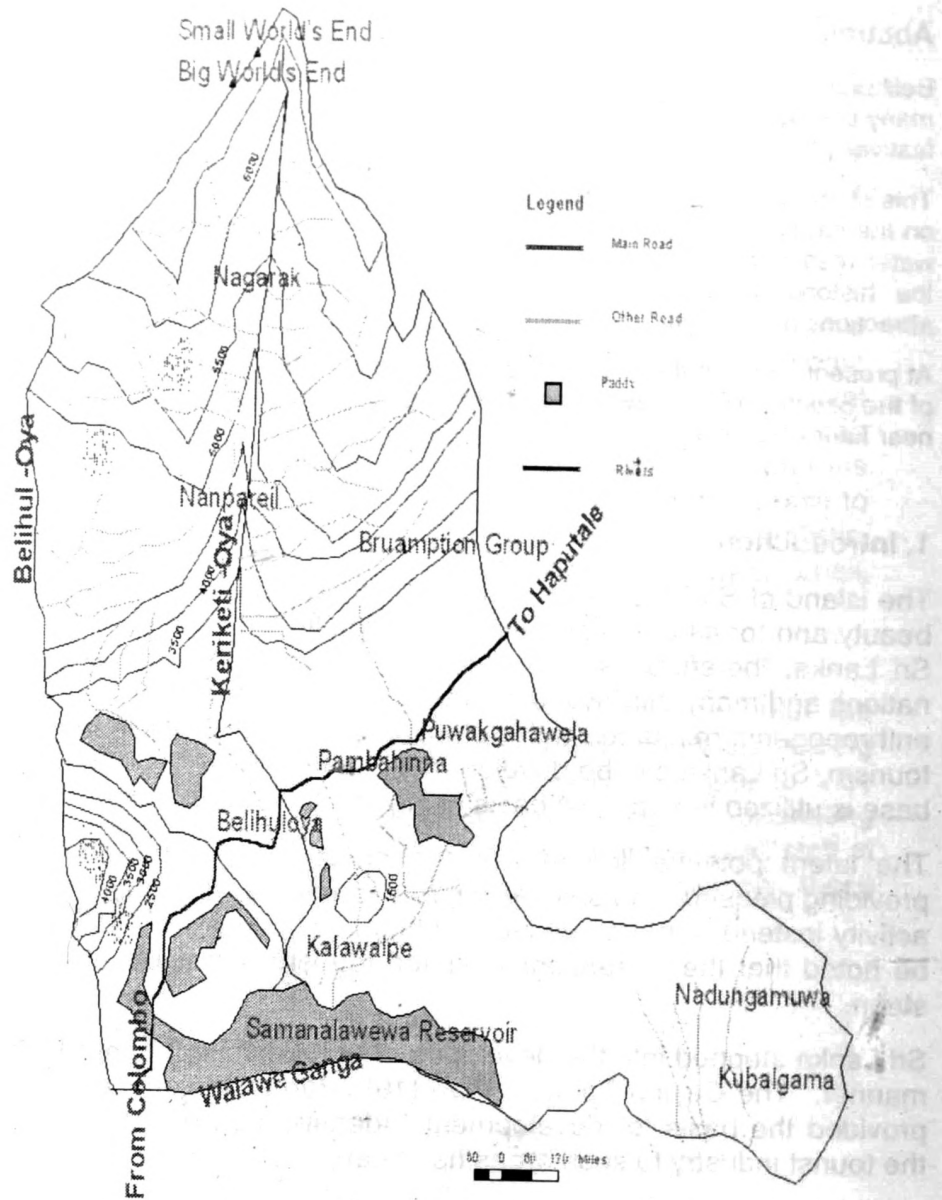


Fig.No.1 Location of the Study Area

Source: One inch Topographical sheet - Haputale

2. Objectives

The main objective is to examine the rational allocation of resources in the Belihuloya-Pambahinna area for recreational tourism and regional development.

Specific objectives are:

- 1) To identify the natural and anthropogenic resources of the area
- 2) To assess the overall recreational potential of the area for regional development
- 3) To identify constraints to the development of the recreation industry in the region
- 4) To make recommendations to overcome such constraints to help further the recreation industry in the area which in turn will contribute to regional development
- 5) To make suitable overall recommendations in the light of the specific objectives

3. Methodology

This study entailed the gathering of primary and secondary data during the month of July 1997.

Primary data

Primary data was gathered through:

- direct self-assessment to establish status of infrastructure facilities
- questionnaire surveys

Secondary Data

Secondary data was gathered through literature surveys.

4. Results and Discussion

Findings

4.1 Relief features in the Belihuloya Pambahinna Area

The Belihuloya - Pambahinna area consists of a series of ridges and 'V' shaped valleys. Topographically, this area rises from 456 m to 1981 m and lies in the eastern part characterised by savannah, scrubland. Dense forests and conserved pine forests. The ridges are in the northern and eastern parts. There are several prominent peaks in the southwestern and northeastern parts.

Mountain peaks, cliffs, valleys offer lots of opportunities for mountain-based recreational activities. The Belihuloya - Pambahinna area has a lot of scenic peaks such as Hawagala, Papulagala, Paraviyangala, Gomalee etc (Table 4.1). These medium range mountain peaks can be used for recreational purposes such as mountain climbing, hiking, back packing etc. At present they remain unexploited (fig.No.2).

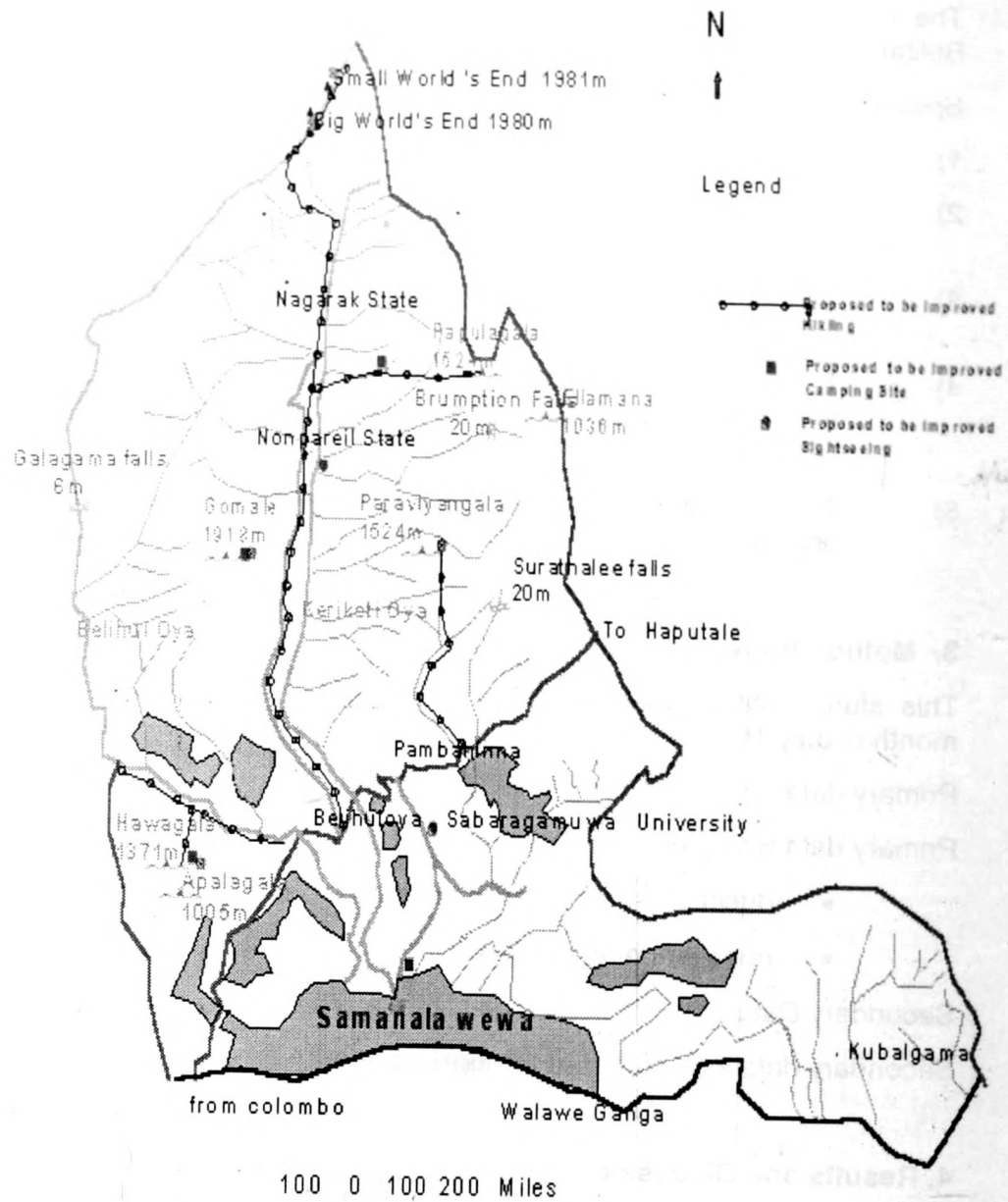


Fig. No.2. Hiking, Camping, Sightseeing sites in the Study Area

Source : One inch Topographical sheet : Haputale

Areas in the vicinity of peaks will be most popular and are highly suitable for recreational purposes, for example, Kuttapitiya (609m) in the Pelmadulla Divisional Secretarial Division (DSD), Haputale Gap (1980m) in the Haputale DSD, World's End (1981m) and Horton Plains in the Nuwara Eliya DSD.

The evaluation of the relief of areas in the vicinity of the Belihuloya-Pambahinna such as Ratnapura, Rakwana, Haldummulla, Haputale shows that they are highly suitable for tourism and recreation.

Table No. 4.1 - Principal peaks in the study area

Name	Height	Location**	Status
Hawagala	1371 m	West	Not used
Paraviyangala	1524 m	Northeast	Not used
Papulagala	1676 m	North	Not used
Gomalee	1981 m	Northwest	Not used
Ellamana	1036 m	Northeast	Not used
Ettric	1036 m	Northeast	Not used

** of the study area

Source: Field study 1997

4.2 Climate of the Belihuloya-Pambahinna area

The climate is of immense importance for recreational activities. No outdoor activities like hiking, camping or sightseeing can be done comfortably if an area experiences incessant rainfall or if an area is too hot and arid or experiences winds of strong proportions.

The area lies within the intermediate zone and a narrow band lies between the wet and the dry zones with parameters of rainfall, temperature and winds that are well suited for outdoor recreational activities.

This area can be developed for climate treatment and is extremely health – friendly and parallels the health –friendly reputation of the climate in Bandarawela, which is 30 km away from the study area. Moreover, areas in the vicinity of the Belihuloya – Pambahinna area such as Balangoda, Kalawana, Pelmadulla too boast of a favorable climate well suited for tourism and outdoor recreational activities.

4.2.1 Rainfall

The annual rainfall in the Belihuloya–Pambahinna area is most similar to that of the dry zone.

It will be seen that the area is subject to a minimum rainfall of around 1400 mm per year with a maximum of over 2000 mm per year. The period of June, July and August is generally considered a dry period with rainfall averaging 96 mm

per month. A wet period commences in the month of September and peaks in December registering an average rainfall of 267 mm per month. There is a drop in rainfall from January to March (average 144 mm per month) but peaks again during the months of April and May registering an average of 290 mm per month.

An average wind speed of 31 km/h has been recorded during the months of June to September. It checks earth warming, humidity levels and prevents the prevalence of a high air temperature. Although at times winds may appear somewhat gusty it will not impede any recreational activity like hiking, camping or sightseeing. The wind blows in from the north west of the study area.

Low humidity and a non-polluted atmosphere with well tolerated temperature levels go to make the air characteristics of this area which is well suited for outdoor activities.

4.2.2 Temperature

The average annual temperature is 26^c deg, with a low of 18^c deg during the months of December and January. The humidity factor is negligible. Overall, the temperature in the area does not create any discomfort and is well suited for outdoor recreational activities.

4.3 Water resources in the Belihuloya-Pambahinna Area

The Belihuloya - Pambahinna area has fresh water resources in the form of waterfalls, reservoirs, rivers and streams that are pollution free and situated in environmentally pleasant surroundings. Recreational activities like fishing, rafting, swimming and hiking along watercourses in picturesque surroundings is possible.

4.3.1 Waterfalls in the Belihuloya-Pambahinna Area

There are beautiful waterfalls in the area all of which are not fully used for recreational purposes. These waterfalls are situated within the Imbulpe DSD. It provides one with interesting hiking and sightseeing opportunities (Table.4.3.1).

Table 4.3.1 - Waterfalls in the study area

Name of Waterfall	Height	Location**	Status
Galagama Fall	6 m	Northwest	Used moderately
Surathalee Fall	20 m	East	Used moderately
Brumpton Fall	9 m	East	Not used
Apalagala Fall	6 m	Northeast	Not used

** of the study area

Source: Field study 1997

4.3.2 Waterfalls in the vicinity of the study Area

There are two beautiful waterfalls in the vicinity of the study area, which provide opportunities for hiking, picnicking and sightseeing (Table 4.3.2).

Table 4.3.2 - WATERFALLS IN THE VICINITY OF THE STUDY AREA

Name of waterfall	Location**	Status
Bambarakanda Fall (263 m)	Northeast	Moderately used
Diyavini Fall (30 m)	Southeast	Not used

** of the study area

Source: Field study 1997

4.3.3. Rivers and streams in the study Area

A large number of rivers and streams could be found in the Belihuloya-Pambahinna area. The main rivers are the Kiriketi Oya, Belihul Oya, Denagam Oya, Walawe Ganga and the Weli Oya. These rivers and streams are suitable for rafting, boating, bathing and fishing which activities are freely indulged in by those living in the area. Kiriketi Oya and Belihul Oya go to form the headwaters in the area and start from the Horton Plains.

These two major tributaries flow down 'V' shaped valleys from Horton Plains and cover areas like Nonpareil Estate, Amunumulla, Kumburuteniwela, Assaddunwela, Belihuloya, Karagastalawa, Bibile, Olitenna etc. and meet at a point called Kalawalpe.

4.3.4. Reservoirs

Reservoirs, tanks and other man made water bodies have the elements of both, natural and anthropogenic characteristics. Though the origin and structure may be attributed to man, their affinity with the natural environment is no doubt natural and not man made. They are, therefore, considered natural resources.

Reservoirs (tanks) offer opportunities for water recreation by way of fishing, boating, water skiing etc. The Samanalawewa reservoir located 5 km southeast of the study area and the Udawalawe and Chandrika Wewa in the vicinity of the study area could provide ample opportunities for water recreation.

These places are visited by quite a number of tourists going sightseeing but the potential for camping and water related recreational activities are under-utilized.

4.3.4.1. Samanalawewa Reservoir

The reservoir is situated between 6° 41' northern latitude and 80° 40' eastern longitude and is in the Kumbalgama Gramaniladhari Division (Imbulpe DS Division). The boundary is defined thus: Bibilekanda in the north, Ulpitiya village in the south, Imbulpe village in the west and Kalawalpe village in the east. It lies approximately 05 km from the Pambahinna junction.

This is a 100 m high man made dam creating a reservoir of nearly 350 square kilometers of water at the confluence of the Walawe Ganga and Belihul Oya. The reservoir is accessible by motor vehicle through the Kinchigune road. It is suitable for fishing, boating and swimming and other inland water related recreational activities like water scootering, windsurfing etc.

However, owing to security reasons, mobility in and around the reservoir is presently restricted. Should such restrictions persist when a recreational industry is being set up in the area, measures must be taken by the authorities to ensure that an apt co-existence of security and recreational activities be maintained so as not to compromise their individual values.

4.4 Flora in the Belihuloya-Pambahinna Area

The flora in the study area can provide opportunities for wilderness experience, picnicking, camping and bird watching. The type of vegetation prevailing in the study area can be categorized as follows:

Dense forest

A small area of dense forest is found north of the study area at an elevation of 1500 m, part of which belongs to the World's End wildlife sanctuary.

The dominant species of vegetation are: *calophyllum walkeri*, *c. cuneifolium*, *syzygium rotundifolium*, *Eugenia mabaeoides*, *gordonia zeylanica*, *ternstromia* sp., *symplocos*, *cinnamomum*, *litsea*, *nelitsea* and *actinodaphne*.

The trees have umbrella shaped crowns with twisted branches. Mosses and filmy ferns cover the stem and branches with hanging lichens. The undergrowth in some areas is dominated by the *strobilanthus* species.

Forest plantation

Most of the forest plantation is located on steep slopes in the area. Approximately 75 per cent of the forest plantations comprise *pinus* (*pinus caribaea*). Other species are: mahogany (*swietenia macrophylla*), hawari nuga (*alstonia macrophylla*), toona (*cedrela toona*). Forest plantation covers 1387 hectares in extent.

Scrublands

Species of scrubland found in the study area include: *aralu* (*terminalia chebula*), *bulu* (*t. belarica*), *nelli* (*phylanthus emblica*), *kahata* (*careya arborea*), *katakela* (*bridelia retusa*), *badulla* (*semecarpus*).

Grasslands

The 'intermediate' patana is found in Ihalagalagama in the northwest of the study area and the 'wet' patana in the north and northeast of the study area. The dominant species in the dry intermediate patana are: *mana* (*cymbopogon nardus*), *illuk* (*imperata cylindrica*), *pohong* (*pennisetum* species). The *chrysopogon zeylanicum* predominates in the wet patana.

4.5 Fauna in the Belihuloya-Pambahinna Area

Wild boar, porcupine, sambhur, deer, striped neck mongoose, long clawed shrew, purple faced leaf monkey, spotted wildcat, wild fowl, with a few bird species go to form the fauna in the study area.

4.6 Anthropogenic Resources in the Belihuloya - Pambahinna Area

The anthropogenic resources are the surviving physical man made remnants of the past and present. They include architectural, landscape and archaeological features together with culture, traditional ceremonies, artefacts and other day-to-day objects that have survived from the past.

The anthropogenic resource in the area includes only few religious places and is not rich enough to merit special attention.

4.7 Present state – Belihuloya-Pambahinna Area

The present state is not at all conducive towards promoting a vibrant recreation industry. The latent potential must be translated into a dynamic tangible form by making available resources conducive to tourism. As per field studies, the percentage of foreign tourist arrival to the study area is approximately 21 percent with local tourists accounting for 79 percent. Approximately 97 percent of the foreign tourists register a stay-duration of less than four hours with only three percent staying overnight for a day at most. Eighty five percent of the local tourists register a stay-duration of less than four hours with 15 percent opting to stay overnight (Table 4.7.1).

Table 4.7.1 – Tourist arrivals to the study area – June 1997

Tourists	Arrival (%)	Less than 04 hr stay (%)	Overnight stay (%)
Foreign	21	97	3
Domestic	79	85	15

Source: Field study 1997

A significant proportion of the foreign tourists skip the study area after a stay of a few hours to break journey, before embarking to other destinations like Bandarawela, Nuwara Eliya, Horton Plains, Bambarakanda Falls, Kataragama etc. This can be attributed to the lack of awareness about the potential the study area has by way of recreational tourism and owing to the lack of any development to offer tourists tangible opportunities for recreational activities.

The fact that 15 percent of the local tourists opt to stay overnight in the study area is significant as such a presence can be attributed to an awareness to some degree possessed by the local tourists about what the study area and its vicinity can offer.

It is this sort of awareness that must be disseminated among the foreign tourists if the study area is to someday boast of the presence of an abundance of foreign tourists interested in the study area and its environs.

Unfortunately at present, the Belihuloya-Pambahinna area is used only as a transit point for domestic and foreign tourists on the way to the hill country and southern coast destinations.

This all-important awareness is, therefore, a matter that has to be addressed if the study area is to be made popular as a tourist destination.

Table 4.7.2 shows the nature and degree of awareness among the 50 foreign and 75 domestic tourists who were interviewed.

Table 4.7.2 - Degree of Awareness about the study area

Information source	Domestic Tourists (%)	Foreign Tourists (%)
Associate (local)	73	15
Associate (foreign)	-	02
Tour brochure	02	02
Travel agent (local)	-	42
Hotel	-	22
Guide/driver	20	15
Other	05	02

Source: Field study 1997

The table shows that as high as 96 percent of the tourists become aware of the study area only after their arrival in Sri Lanka through a local associate, travel agent, hotel, guide/driver or by other means. Only a meager four percent are aware of the study area through an associate in their country or through a tourist brochure.

Awareness itself will not suffice and must be complemented with appropriate infrastructure facilities to service the needs born out of awareness. Presently, there are hardly any infrastructure facilities in the area to support a tourist recreation industry.

The study area and its environs can offer recreation opportunities by way of hiking, swimming, river bathing, mountain treks, boating, mountain climbing, sightseeing, fishing and water sports.

Creating awareness about the availability of such recreational opportunities in the study area through a consistent overseas tourist propaganda effort and the creation of infrastructure facilities to enable the use of such opportunities will make the study area a popular tourist destination.

Table 4.7.3 shows the recreational activities preferred by domestic and foreign tourists.

Table 4.7.3 - Recreational activities preferred

Recreational activity	Domestic tourists (%)	Foreign tourists (%)
Hiking	9.8	35.3
Sightseeing	10.3	43.7
Bathing	65.8	-
Other (swimming, mountain treks, boating, mountain climbing, fishing, camping and water sports)	14.1	21.0

Source: Field study 1997

The table shows that 79 percent of the foreign tourists were interested in hiking and sightseeing with a further 21 percent willing to participate in more active types of recreation like mountain treks, camping etc. all of which the study area and its vicinity can offer. A high percentage of 65.8 percent of domestic tourists were interested in bathing.

It becomes obvious, therefore, that with greater awareness and proper infrastructure facilities, these high percentages can be applied to a recreation industry that will no doubt prove to be very successful.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

Having thus taken into account all relevant factors relating to the recreational potential in the study area such as the identification of resources, the socio-economic aspects, development needs and the approach towards translating such potential into a tangible recreation industry, the following conclusions and recommendations are made.

5.1 Conclusions

The Belihuloya-Pambahinna area no doubt would prove to be an important transit zone for domestic and foreign tourists who traverse the hill country and south coast areas. This area could be used as a stopover destination or for short holidays. It can be used as a hub from which travel to recreational areas in the vicinity will be possible.

Besides not being given proper recognition, the lack of basic infrastructure that should accompany an important hub area are two reasons for the potential of the Belihuloya- Pambahinna area lying untapped.

The Sri Lanka Tourist Board and the Sabaragamuwa Provincial Council should take constructive steps to promote this area for tourism. Official recognition and intervention by these bodies by the dissemination of tourist information and the provision of basic infrastructure will go to form a platform that would attract private investors - who would then build initial hospitality and recreational

facilities with expansion of the same subsequently as the demand for such needs increases with the increase of tourist arrivals in the area.

When interviewed, The Ministry of Tourism of the Sabaragamuwa Provincial Council stated that they intend making plans in relation to the development of the study area in the year 2004-5 since priority is now being given to other areas such as Bopath Ella, Wavulpane limestone caves, Maduwanwela Walauwa, Uda Walawe National Park, Sinharaja etc.

The inhabitants of the area are largely not aware of the economic potential of the area as a tourist destination. Moreover, the socio-economic conditions prevailing in the area preclude any enterprising venture into the tourist industry - what with low-income levels and average rate of literacy. The apparent disregard by the authorities aggravates the matter.

5.2 Recommendations

In order to transform the Belihuloya-Pambahinna area into an important tourist destination the following requirements must be met:

1. The Sri Lanka Tourist Board in general and the Sabaragamuwa Provincial Council in particular must recognize the importance of the area as a tourist resort. Such recognition will provide the initial awareness among both, the private and the public sectors.
2. Local government and statutory bodies must adopt a comprehensive tourism development plan for the area. Such a plan must cover the development of infrastructure including roads and pathways, tourist accommodation facilities, transport, supply of water and electricity, telecommunications and all other aspects pertaining to resort development. Besides, a plan of this nature should also address conservation issues relating to natural and anthropogenic resources and their management as they will form the basis for tourism development in any region.
3. Apposite recreational activities in the different locations of tourist interest should be developed. Depending on the location and what it can offer, apposite recreational activities can be embarked on. For example, if a jungle area is scenic, fairly accessible with shallow river crossing points and has a fair amount of wildlife, it would be suitable for jungle trekking.
4. Eco-tourism should be developed. Hiking trails should be established, paths for jungle treks should be set out, areas for picnicking jaunts should be identified, tours to places of tourist interest in the area and in the vicinity of the area should be organized.
5. Promoting the handicraft and small-scale industry is very important. The handicraft and small scale industry which is in the doldrums at the moment should be revived to provide indirect employment to many locals who are skilled in turning out handicrafts made of wood, cane and

stone for example or from small scale industries like lacework, handlooms etc. This will keep those unemployed occupied and help generate a mode of income.

6. Initiating a training program so that the locals can become partners in the recreational industry after the passing of time is important. Besides the unskilled workers, manpower will have to be imported initially from neighborhood areas and from the city of Colombo to help organize and manage the recreation industry.

As time goes by and as the industry expands, it will open up opportunities for locals to be absorbed into the recreational industry. Proper training programs must be organized at the very outset so that in time the locals will be able to take over a predominant part of the work of the recreational industry.

7. Training should be provided to tour guides in a professional manner. Locals willing to be employed as tour guides must be trained in all aspects of proper tour guiding, and on the history, importance and peculiarities of places of interest. Tour guide licenses can be issued to make the trade look more professional.

8. The right investment atmosphere must be created to attract private sector investment by way of tax holidays, import duty waivers, incentives etc. One cannot expect the state to invest monies in matters relating to the hospitality and recreational industry proper.

The state can provide the basic infrastructure but the rest must come predominantly from the private sector. This is why the proper investment atmosphere must be created to woo in private investment. Site-specific incentive packages should be offered to attract competitive private investment.

The area must be actively promoted as an important area/hub for tourism in Sri Lanka. Maximum exposure should be given at local and international level. Increased inflow of domestic tourists will help keep the recreational industry running particularly during the off seasons in respect of foreign tourists.

The Belihuloya - Pambahinna area is well suited to play the part of a stopover destination and as a hub from which places of tourist interest in the area and in the vicinity can be reached with ease.

With most parts of the north and east of Sri Lanka presently out of bounds for domestic and foreign tourists owing to the volatile security situation in these areas and taking into account the heavy investment for infrastructure development that will be necessitated to uplift the moribund tourist industry in these areas should the security situation improve, the Belihuloya- Pambahinna area offers an excellent alternative for development.

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