

EXPLORING THE COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS THE IMPACT OF TOURISM IN HIRIWADUNNA RURAL VILLAGE

K.I. Udayangani^{1,*} and D.D.P. Sanjeewa²

^{1,2}*Department of Tourism & Hospitality Management, Faculty of Management Studies,
Rajarata University of Sri Lanka*

*Corresponding author (Email: ireshau09@gmail.com)

ABSTRACT

The tourism sector plays a vital role in developing local regions by offering a range of benefits to the communities involved. In Sri Lanka, tourism stands out as a key sector of the economy, serving not only as a significant source of foreign exchange but also as a crucial industry for rural development. Rural tourism is a niche market that focuses on experiencing rural lifestyles and engaging in local activities. However, tourism development has both advantageous and disadvantageous effects on the local inhabitants. In the agrarian community of Hiriwadunna, the introduction of tourism has led to transformations and advancements within the community. Thus, understanding the perceptions of the community is imperative to fostering sustainable tourism development in the region. This study explores community perceptions of the impact of rural tourism in Hiriwadunna village, Sri Lanka. Adhering to constructivist philosophy, the research employed a qualitative research design with an inductive approach to examine the case of Hiriwadunna. Hiriwadunna is a rural village with approximately 400 households, primarily comprised of farmers and artisans. The population for this study consists of residents of Hiriwadunna village, specifically focusing on community members engaged in or affected by tourism-related activities. Fifteen community members were selected using purposive sampling and interviewed over phone. Content analysis revealed the positive and negative impacts of rural tourism on the community. The results showed that the community had positive perceptions of rural tourism in Hiriwadunna village in terms of revenue generation, women's employment, growth of the household economy, and social empowerment. However, the local community also has negative perceptions due to the emergence of misbehavior among youth, drug abuse, and cultural erosion. The recommendations for Hiriwadunna village focus on sustainable rural tourism through community engagement, cultural preservation, and economic development. Key strategies include facilitating local decision-making forums, fostering partnerships, providing entrepreneurial training, promoting eco-friendly practices, and ensuring inclusive tourism that empowers marginalized groups while addressing socioeconomic disparities.

Keywords: Community perception, Hiriwadunna, rural tourism, tourism development, tourism impact