

ECO - TOURISM: AN ALTERNATIVE TOURISM APPROACH FOR DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT; A STUDY BASED ON THAWALANTHENNA, SRI LANKA

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Eco - tourism is an alternative tourism practice that can affect positively on the economic, social and cultural sectors of Sri Lanka. As a biodiversity hotspot and a popular tourism hotspot in the world, Sri Lanka has the potential and the resources to enhance the eco - tourism sector of the country. The objectives of this study are to identify the potential for eco - tourism in Thawalanthenna, Kandy, Sri Lanka and to identify how it can help in destination development in the area. Thawalanthenna is situated at the foot of the knuckles mountain range and is home to large tea plantations, attractive waterfalls and magnificent viewpoints. The study was conducted by using the qualitative research methodology. An exploration of amalgamation of qualitative data that was acquired through both primary and secondary data have been used and analyzed. According to the data obtained in the study, it was settled that the Thawalanthenna has a greater potential for ecotourism development and the potential to upgrade socio - economic life of the residents of the area. The results show that eco - tourism development will bring positive destination development outcomes to the environmental, social and economic sectors. It is expected that the unique rural and ecological features of the area are the main contributor in attracting the nature loving destination travelers, both international and local. Major challenges that were identified during the research are the lack of knowledge and awareness about eco - tourism, the lack of proper initiatives in tourism management in the area, the lack of understanding about the positive outcomes that can achieve by promoting eco - tourism, and the misconceptions about tourism among the residents. The study determined that Tawalanthenna has a huge eco - tourism potential that can be utilized and turn the area in to an eco - tourism hotspot and achieve destination development by practical application of the study.

Keywords: Eco - Tourism, Alternative Tourism, Destination Development

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