

A Study on Issues and Challenges of Developing Scuba Diving Tourism in Sri Lanka: Special Reference to Trincomalee District

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Abstract

Recreational scuba diving is one of the fastest-growing tourism activities globally and is recognised as a promising segment within the adventure tourism industry. In Sri Lanka, Scuba diving has emerged as a niche market with strong potential to attract young travellers. However, there remains a limited understanding regarding the development of recreational scuba diving in Sri Lanka. Thus, this study was conducted to identify the challenges of developing scuba diving tourism in Sri Lanka. A qualitative, cross-sectional study was conducted focusing on PADI-registered diving centres in the Trincomalee district. Data were collected from eighteen diving centre operators and four tourism and marine government professionals from promotional bureaus and aquatic resource institutions between April and July 2025, using the semi-structured face-to-face interview method. All interview data were transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis, which involved systematic coding and identification of recurrent patterns. The findings reveal several challenges, including institutional issues such as limited government support, community-related issues such as insufficient human resource development and a shortage of industry trainers, as well as negative impacts on fishing activities. Additionally, there are promotional issues, including low public awareness of scuba diving. This study further provides several recommendations, including strengthening government support, establishing clear policies and regulations, implementing capacity-building programmes, promoting adherence to professional standards, raising awareness to address existing barriers, and enhancing the promotion of diving activities through social media and travel agencies. Moreover, the findings of this study are significant for tourism and related authorities in developing, regulating, and formulating policies, while also encouraging future researchers to conduct further studies on scuba diving tourism in Sri Lanka.

Keywords: issues and challenges, scuba diving, tourism development, Trincomalee district