

Wildlife Tourism and Local Community Development: A Case Study of Minneriya National Park in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

This study explores the role of wildlife tourism in promoting local community development in the Minneriya area of Sri Lanka. Wildlife tourism is a significant recreational and economic activity in many countries, providing substantial income-generating opportunities for local communities. This study focused on the Minneriya area due to its unique concentration of wildlife attractions, such as Minneriya National Park, Kaudulla, and Hurulu Eco Park. This study employed a qualitative, inductive approach to explore the social, economic, and environmental effects of wildlife tourism on surrounding communities. As the total population around the conservation areas is unknown, a purposive sample of fifteen residents, those who actively engage in the tourism industry, was selected. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, which allowed for rich insights into the participants' experiences. Thematic analysis was employed to identify key areas of impact, generating seven themes. The findings reveal that wildlife tourism contributes to community development through several dimensions, including economic and social empowerment, environmental conservation, infrastructure and educational development, employment generation, attitudinal transformation, and the creation of new income sources. Consequently, this study emphasises the potential of wildlife tourism to foster sustainable and inclusive community development.

Keywords: community development, economic empowerment, environmental conservation, social empowerment, wildlife tourism