

An Exploration of Visitor Satisfaction and Loyalty with Nature Based Tourism Product in Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT. Sri Lanka's future development identifies a significant contribution from tourism industry. Nature based tourism being the pivot of Sri Lankan tourism product; rich vegetation, wild life and rich bio-diversity have a unique opportunity to capitalize on the growing tourist interest in nature-based tourism activities (NBTA). Contrarily, visitor satisfaction is of pivotal to operators of tourism businesses to generate loyalty, with no exception for nature-based tourism attractions. This presents a range of challenges to the NBTA supply sector, whose role is now shifting from environmental stewardship and education to one of customer service agent. Against this background this study addresses the issue of quality product/service provision in satisfying nature based tourists in Sri Lanka. The perceive-performance theory was identified to be more appropriate for this analysis. The study area was seven nature-based tourism attractions in Sri Lanka, where convenience sampling was used for the selection of the attractions. Primary data for this research was collected through a questionnaire using the on-site survey method. Out of 300 questionnaires, 276 were usable. Statistical analyses such as frequencies, descriptive statistics, t-test and regression analysis were used to meet the respective objectives. The overall visitor satisfaction with NBTA in Sri Lanka was satisfactory according to the findings of this study. Further, findings illustrate a high degree of satisfaction with the natural resources and tangible aspects of the product. Contrarily, price factor, communication and empathy of staff showed lesser satisfaction as per the analysis. Based upon the factors that are critical to the sample population in terms of explaining and predicting both satisfaction and future behavioural intention, recommendations were made to increase visitor satisfaction with the nature-based tourism attractions. In particular, tangibility of the product to be improved to make visitors satisfied with the price while maintaining the standards of the other five areas under the study.

Key words: Customer Satisfaction and Loyalty, Nature-Based Tourism Activities, Perceive-Performance Theory.

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