

## **Domestic Tourism for a Sustainable Sri Lanka: A Case Study of Uva Province**

**Gayathri. P<sup>1</sup>, D.A.C.Suranga Silva<sup>2</sup>, Krishantha Ganeshan<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> *Lecturer, Buddhist Heritage and Tourism, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka. pgayathri@sjp.ac.lk*

<sup>2</sup> *Coordinator, Sustainable Tourism Unit, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka. drsuranga@econ.cmb.ac.lk*

<sup>3</sup> *Front Office Executive, 98 Acres Resort and Spa, Ella, Sri Lanka. krishanthaganeshk@gmail.com*

### **Abstract**

The content "Domestic Tourism for Sustainable Sri Lanka" discusses the importance of sustainable tourism development in Sri Lanka. The paper highlights the economic and social-cultural approaches to sustainable tourism and the need for fair pricing of tourist services for both domestic and foreign travellers. The negative impacts of tourism on the environment and local culture are also discussed, along with proposed solutions such as the development of staging facilities and the enhancement of service providers and domestic traveller facilities. The paper emphasizes the importance of sustainable tourism in conserving natural heritage and biodiversity, respecting socio-cultural authenticity, and contributing to poverty alleviation. It also discusses the negative impacts of tourism on the environment and local culture, such as pollution and the disruption of traditional rituals. The paper proposes solutions to these problems, such as the development of staging facilities and the enhancement of service provider and domestic traveller facilities. Overall, the paper argues that sustainable tourism development is crucial for Sri Lanka's economic and social development and that it can be achieved through a combination of economic, social-cultural, and environmental approaches. The paper provides several recommendations for achieving sustainable tourism development in Sri Lanka, including the development of domestic

---

tourism programs, the promotion of local resources, and the enhancement of service providers and domestic traveller facilities.

**Keywords:** sustainable tourism, Sri Lanka, economic approach, social-cultural approach, environmental conservation.

## **1.0 Introduction**

The study of domestic tourism for sustainable Sri Lanka is the case study of the Uva province. This study intends to identify sustainable approaches for domestic tourism development. The major problem refers to how to overcome existing problems in domestic tourism when developing sustainably. The study enables us to identify the gaps in domestic tourism, and they can be filled by sustainable development, as this study suggests. Sustainable tourism means tourism that has minimal impact on the environment and culture of the host community. Sustainable tourism is tourism that is economically, socio-culturally, and environmentally sustainable. With sustainable tourism, socio-cultural and environmental impacts are neither permanent nor irreversible (Gateway, 2018).

The gross domestic product (GDP) is affected by various downturns in a country. The most considerable problem can be identified as economic downturns in a country. A small country like Sri Lanka has a very limited portfolio of exports and therefore tends to depend on one or a few key exports to earn its foreign exchange in each timeline. When these limited incomes declined, the government turned into the best option available. While considering the history of Sri Lanka, it started with tea, rubber, and coconut plantations. As the population grew, it was turned into the manufacture of garments and export software industries. Now the situation has changed on a large scale, and we have reached for another specific industry based on travel and tourism (Wickramasinghe, 2016).

However, the existing situation has changed due to the Easter Sunday attack in 2019 and the COVID-19 situation in 2020. In such situations, the total number of tourist arrivals in 2019 was 1,913,702, and it decreased to 507,704 in 2020. The most considerable impact was from April to November of 2020, when tourist arrivals were null in the tourism industry and only 393 tourists visited Sri Lanka during December 2020.

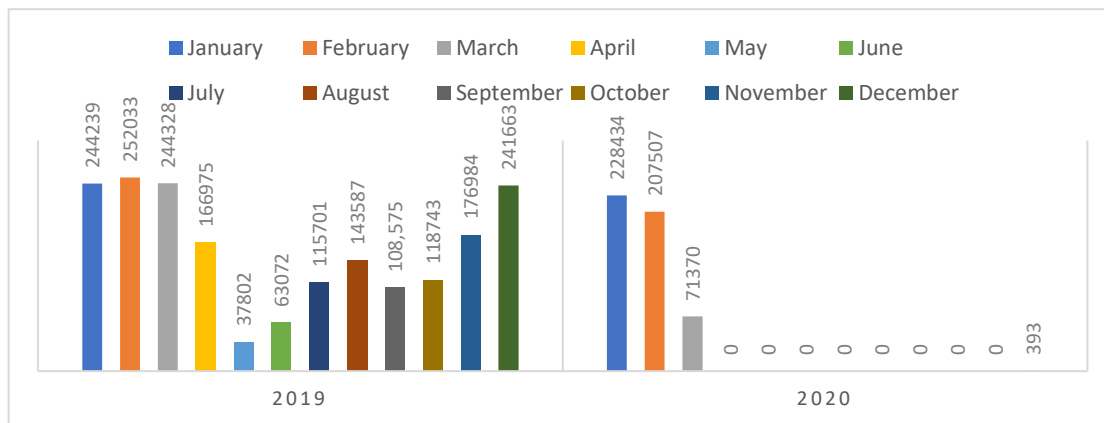


Figure 1: Monthly Tourist Arrivals of 2019 and 2020 (SLTDA, 2020)

An effective and reasonable solution for such a critical situation for a developing country like Sri Lanka is to increase the tourism industry, and the revenues of the country's domestic tourism will be the best. When considering the social, economic, and cultural systems, the nature, value, and extent of international and domestic tourism have changed significantly in recent years. Because of its propensity to get substantial economic benefits like employment, foreign exchange, income, and tax revenues (Nowak et al., 2003), developed countries and developing countries, especially, have embarked upon tourism-related development policies. During the past decade in the tourism industry, tourism researchers have begun to discover the phenomenon of domestic tourism, especially in developing countries.

As per the definition formulated by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), "a domestic traveler is any person residing in a country who travels to a place within the country, outside his or her usual environment, for a period not exceeding 12 months and whose main purpose of the visit is aside

from the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited." (UNWTO, 2018)

The context of domestic tourism, historically speaking, is the first form of tourism that was practiced, and today it continues to account for most of this activity. It is estimated that out of the 4.8 billion tourist arrivals per year (Pieret, 2011), 4 billion, or 83%, correspond to domestic tourism. Likewise, the UNWTO's economists estimate that at the worldwide level, domestic tourism represents 73% of total overnights, 74% of arrivals, 69% of overnights at hotels, 89% of arrivals, and 75% of overnights in other (non-hotel) accommodations (Pieret, 2011).

### **Why encourage domestic tourism in Sri Lanka?**

**Domestic** tourism is about producing social and cultural benefits for the domestic population, which won't be ready to experience the cultural and natural richness of their own countries. Through the opportunities for the exchange of ideas and practices that domestic travelers can bring, residents will also potentially develop a stronger interest in promoting ethnic, racial, and non-secular diversity, a deeper appreciation of the country's natural and cultural diversity, and greater awareness of the achievements of national institutions.

Domestic tourism entitles residents who have growing disposable incomes and leisure time to participate in productive and satisfying experiences. As leisure, disposable incomes, and better levels of education increase, so does the necessity for a broader array of leisure experiences. Domestic tourism is a conceivable contributor to the quality of life of resident populations if it is carefully planned and properly delivered.

Sequentially introducing domestic travel sector organizations to the critical management requirements needed to compete effectively within the international marketplace. Domestic tourism can also encourage public and private travel organizations to create the receptive, accommodation, attraction, and entertainment facilities needed to compete in key travel markets at home and abroad.

Domestic tourism assures retaining the cash that may otherwise leave the country with an outbound travel expenditure when visiting foreign destinations. Without implementing decisively regressive deterrents to the outbound travel sector, the exchange is thus saved by encouraging the spending of the affluent local population to visit domestic locations.

As a result of domestic tourism, it enables the re-distribution of wealth within the nation's boundaries. This will often be targeted to encourage the transfer of currency and other physical and human resources from relatively affluent portions of the country to economically less prosperous regions through the strategically focused domestic tourism program.

Spreading development opportunities into the developing regions using local resources that are natural and human-suited to the domestic market as opposed to the international market. By encouraging the regions to develop events, attractions, and services that are suited to domestic travelers and local, political, social, and business institutions, they will gain an opportunity to hone their organizational and program delivery skills, many of which are suited to the application in a wide variety of development settings.

Domestic tourism brings benefits to sustaining the frequently cyclical and seasonal flows of inbound tourism. By encouraging domestic tourism to occur during the traditionally slow “off-peak” demand periods that are normally associated with international tourism, opportunities exist to fortify the tourism facility and program utilization levels. This strategy can potentially lead to a more stable and sustained level of employment and revenue generation in the domestic destination regions.

### **Sustainable Domestic Tourism Development Approach: A Focus on Uva Province**

Tourism is one of the world’s fastest-growing industries and may be a major source of income for several countries. Being a people-oriented industry, tourism also provides many roles that have helped revitalize local economies. Like other compositions of development, tourism can also induce its share of problems, like social dislocation, loss of cultural heritage, economic dependence, and ecological degradation. Learning about the impacts of

tourism has led many of us to hunt for well-versed holidays. These include various sorts of alternative or sustainable tourism, such as ‘nature-based tourism’, ‘ecotourism’, and ‘cultural tourism’. Sustainable tourism is becoming so popular that some say that what we presently call ‘alternative’ is getting to be the ‘mainstream’ for a decade.

All tourism activities, namely motivational holidays, business travel, conferences, adventure travel, and ecotourism, have to be sustainable. Sustainable tourism<sup>2</sup> is defined as “tourism that esteems both local people and therefore the traveler, cultural heritage, and therefore the environment.” It seeks to provide people with an exciting and academic holiday that’s also of benefit to the people of the host country.

Sustainable tourism, in its purest sense, is an industry that undertakes to have a positive impact on the environment and native culture while also helping to encourage income, employment, and the conservation of local ecosystems. It’s responsible tourism that’s both ecologically and culturally sensitive. Thus, sustainable tourism activities have minimal impact on the environment and culture of the host community.

According to the Planet Tourism Organization, sustainable tourism is tourism that leads to the management of all resources in such a way that economic, social, and aesthetic needs are often accomplished when sustaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity, and life support systems (UNWTO, 2018). On the other hand, the Earth Tourism Organization defines sustainable tourism as tourism that meets the wants of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunity for the long run. Instead of being a kind of product, it’s an ethos that underpins all tourism activities. As such, it’s necessary for all or any aspects of tourism development and management instead of being an add-on component. Sustainable tourism intends to retain the economic and social advantages of tourism development while reducing or alleviating any undesirable impacts on the natural, historic,

---

<sup>2</sup> When it comes to sustainability, there are three “pillars” to consider: environmental, economic, and socio-cultural. Tourism must be sustainable in all three areas to truly be considered “sustainable tourism.”

cultural, or social environment. This is often achieved by balancing the requirements of tourists with those of the destinations (UNWTO, 2018).

The Uva Region, which mostly consists of the former “Uva Wellassa,” was prosperous—a civilization that was supported by one of the foremost sustainable water management systems in the world at the time of the arrival of the British in Sri Lanka. Under colonial rule, the system was neglected, which resulted in the destruction of the Uva Wellassa civilization, making it one of the foremost underprivileged regions within the country today, featuring a high level of poverty, suicide rates, women-headed families, etc.

When Uva was secured by the Portuguese, they burned most of the historical Buddhist sites, and Badulla was completely burned down. During the British period, the foremost significant event was the Uva Wellassa uprising, during which the entire civilization was destroyed and was never recovered (*Kovilathenna, 2015*). It is the second-least populated region in Sri Lanka, which distracts people mainly due to poor infrastructure and income-generating activities. The region is isolated from the remainder of the country thanks to poor road networks and other related infrastructure.

The region also didn't enjoy major capital investments in the past within the surrounding area, like the Mahaweli Development Project. Although the region is bounded by the Eastern, Southern, and Central Regions, it's not well connected to those regions and thus remains an “isolated region,” which is a key issue in development. Further, although several nationally significant resources like Senanayake Samudraya (the largest reservoir within the country), Yala Park, Udawalawa Park, Mahaweli River, Menik River, etc. are located within the Uva Province, their economic benefits extend to other regions. However, it's got tons of potential, which, if harnessed efficiently, can drive high economic development. Particularly, Monaragala district, like other dry zone areas within the country, consists of reddish-brown earth soil, which is more suitable for the cultivation of paddy and grains.

The region consists of two districts, Badulla and Monaragala. Each district contains a definite climatic and topographic system different from one another. Badulla is found within Capitol Hill Country (Fragile Area), within the zone that receives high rainfall and contains high biological diversity.

Mountainous land terrain of a sensitive nature, being the areas capable of retaining rainwater, forms a serious portion of Badulla district and is considered "non-developable."

The sustainable tourism development plan for developing domestic tourism in Uva Province mainly discussed three approaches related to sustainable tourism development: an environmental approach, an economic approach, and a social approach focused on domestic tourism in Uva province.

i. Environmental approach

This can be identified as a technique based on resources that focuses on the need to protect nature. Uva province is enriched with annually and daily visited domestic tourist destinations. In this context, it should be protecting these destinations during the season and all through the year. As an example, during the Kataragama Perahera season, we can easily see the large scale of environmental pollution, such as water pollution, air pollution, land pollution, visual pollution, and noise pollution. On a larger scale, the destination is affected by unwanted human behaviors, and traditional rituals affect natural resources in the destination, such as offering puja, tying coins in trees, etc. Especially, the land area is polluted, exceeding carrying capacity during this season. Other domestic destinations can be identified as natural and cultural destinations, such as Muthiyangana Temple, Dowa Rock Temple, and Mahiyangana Temple, which are also affected by these critical problems. On the other hand, national parks are also mainly affected by the development of the tourism industry. It may have affected the natural breeding process of the animals.

While considering these problems when developing domestic tourist destinations sustainably, one should be aware of the environmental value of the destination for domestic travelers. The environmental approach considers mainly the protection and conservation of environmental aspects of tourist destinations. Domestic travelers should be aware of these valuable assets.



ii. Economic Approach

This approach examines a technique based on activity and focuses on the need for the tourism industry to acquire resources. When considering tourist needs and wants, the economic value of tourist services is different for domestic and foreign travelers. In this context, it should be a fair price for the value of the services, according to the foreign travelers. According to that, transportation, accommodation, communication facilities, entrance ticket fees, and other amenities should be favorable. It caused sustainable tourism development in domestic tourist destinations.

iii. Social-cultural approach

This is a technique based on community traditions that focuses on the empowerment of different groups of people in tourism and can be identified as a social approach. Uva province is specially enriched with different social groups. They have different values and norms. Especially indigenous peoples who live in Dambana and Ratugala have different social values. Domestic tourism can sustainably develop these traditions. It can add a huge value while conducting traditional shows and introducing their social behaviors and values to domestic travelers. On the other hand, people who are living in other domestic destinations can promote their products and sell them to domestic travelers. It may cause the empowerment of people's lives around the destination.

## **2.0 Conclusion**

Sustainable development makes optimal use of environmental resources that constitute a key element in tourism development, maintains essential ecological processes, helps to conserve natural heritage and biodiversity, respects the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities, conserves their built and living cultural heritage and traditional values, contributes to inter-cultural understanding and tolerance, ensures viable, long-term economic operations, provides socio-economic benefits to all stakeholders that are fairly distributed, including stable employment and income-earning opportunities and social services to host communities, and contributes to poverty alleviation. (UNEP, 2017).

To address the current situation in Uva Province, it can implement these steps: Preparation of a tourist guide map for domestic tourists; Placing of tourist signage and direction boards that lead to tourist attractions with the assistance of sponsors; Launch of the clean and green campaign at major tourist sites and cities; Setting up of school travel clubs provincial-wide; Develop staging facilities (comfort centers) after identifying the staging places on the main roads leading to major cities. E.g., Kandy, Nuwara Eliya, Katharagama, in association with Provincial Councils, Local Authorities, Co-ops, SANASA, leading business communities in the area, etc. Preparation of an inventory of lesser-known attractions in all the domestic attractions in Uva Province; Compilation of information on religious and cultural events happening in the Uva province; Conducting a sustainable tourism development competition in Uva province. Organize a program to annually measure sustainable domestic tourist development; Enhance the service provider's facilities and domestic travelers' facilities sustainably; However, not regarding the province as a nation, these reliable situations can be activated to overcome critical situations in the tourism industry and the regional and national-level economic system.

## References

Gateway, T. S. T., 2018. *The Sustainable Tourism Gateway*. [Online] Available at: <https://www.gdrc.org/uem/eco-tour/st-what.html> [Accessed 20 December 2018].

Kovilathenna, S. K., 2015. *Use wan hun*. 1st ed. Sri Lanka: Author Publication.

Nowak, J.-J., Sahli, M. and Sgro, P., 2003. Tourism, trade, and domestic welfare. *Pacific economic review*, viii(3), pp. 245-258.

Pieret, F., 2011. *Some points on DOMESTIC TOURISM*, USA: UNWTO.

SLTDA, 2020. *Monthly Tourist Arrivals Report 2020*. [Online] Available at: <https://www.slt-da.gov.lk/en/monthly-tourist-arrivals-reports-2020> [Accessed 30 January 2021].

UNEP, 2017. *Making Tourism More Sustainable*, USA: United Nation Environment Program.

UNWTO, 2018. *UNWTO*. [Online] Available at: <http://www2.unwto.org/content/about-us-5> [Accessed 19 December 2018].

Wickramasinghe, R., 2016. *How Small Countries Compete and Grow A Case for Sri Lanka*. 1st ed. Nugegoda: R and R Associates Consulting.