

Tourism industry of sri
lanka hospitality
industry tourism
essay



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This short study attempts to examine the nature and scope of the Tourism Industry of Sri Lanka and evaluate critically, the key factors that may stimulate or deter the growth of the Sri Lankan tourism sector.

Sri Lanka, formally known as Ceylon is situated in the Indian Ocean off the southern tip of India. It is an island nation of 432 km at its longest and 224 km at its widest with a coastline of 1340 km. Its topography is mostly plain all around the coast and the land rises to 2524 metres at the highest point in the central mountainous area. Because of its proximity to the equator, Sri Lanka enjoys warm temperatures all the year round. Sri Lanka being an island and no part of it is more than 72 km from the sea; the average temperature is 30°C in the coastal areas due to the moderating effect of the sea breeze and 28°C in the central highlands consistent with its altitudinal position.

Sri Lanka's rainfall is influenced by the seasonal tropical monsoons from the Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal. During the south west monsoonal period of May to September, the south western part of the country receives abundant rain whilst the north east monsoon brings rain to its north eastern parts during November to January.

The south west receives an average annual rainfall of about 2500 mm and the north east of about 1500mm. The wet weather was ideal for the growth of lush evergreen tropical forests in the south west and the central mountainous region, where the vegetation tends to be of temperate nature for reason of the elevation. These forests and jungles provide a habitat for many species of animals and birds.

The geographical position and features of the island of Sri Lanka were the determinants of the potentials for the growth of tourism in this country as for any other nation. Sri Lanka is endowed with warm sunshine almost throughout the year, hundreds of kilometres of unspoilt beaches fringed with palm trees all around the island, lush green forests with its habitats, miles and miles of green tea and rubber plantations in the hills, its many mountains, forests, rivers and waterfalls of scenic beauty; had all the natural resources to transform it into a tourist haven.

Sri Lanka is an island not only of many natural attractions but also a land of people of diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds such as Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims, Malays, Chinese and descendants of former successive colonial powers. The presence of Buddhist, Hindu, Islamic and Christian faiths amongst this population “ provide a unique opportunity to witness a colourful array of cultures, traditions and customs celebrated round the year”.[1]The people of Sri Lanka are generally friendly, and welcome any foreign visitor with a broad smile, respect and warmth.

Adding to this remarkable combination of sun, sea, beaches, captivating landscapes and friendly people of varied cultures to its tourist’s attractions are the many sites rich in archaeological value and cultural heritage in the north central part of the Island. The ancient cities of Sigiriya, Polonnaruwa and Anuradhapura, the Dambulla Cave Temple, the Sacred City of Kandy and the Ancient City and Fort of Galle have been inscribed by the UNESCO in its World’s Cultural Heritage List. The Central Highlands of Sri Lanka and the Singharaja Forest Reserves in the South West lowland are inscribed by the UNESCO in its World’s Natural Heritage List.

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Traditionally, Sri Lankan economy depended on agricultural exports such as tea, rubber, coconuts and other spices for its foreign exchange earnings and the potential of tourism to its economy was not realised until the mid nineteen sixties.

The Ceylon Tourist Board was established in 1966 and annual statistics on the Island's tourist industry are published by the Board since inception. In the year 1966, the total number of tourist arrivals was a mere 18, 969. It will be seen from Table 1 below that tourist arrivals increased manifold reaching a total figure of 321, 780 in the year 1980. This upward trend peaked at a total tourist arrival of 407, 230 in the year 1982. The following year 1983 saw a decline in the number of arrivals to 337, 530 and the downward trend either continued or saw only moderate increases in the years that followed. Tourist arrivals even recently as 2008 and 2009 remained sluggish at 438, 475 and 447, 890 respectively. The year 2010 saw a sudden surge in the tourist numbers and according to the statistics already released by the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority, the number of arrivals in the first three months of 2011 reached 215, 124. Sri Lanka Tourism expects 700, 000 tourists in 2011 and this appears to be a realistic target for reason that the Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau celebrated the arrival of the 250, 000th tourist to visit Sri Lanka this year on the 21st of April 2011.

The slow growth of the tourism industry in the late sixties and seventies can be attributed to the restrictive practices of the state such as foreign exchange controls and lack of incentives for foreign investment. Relaxation of these fiscal and investment policies by 1977 and institutional publicity promoting tourism in Sri Lanka in the countries abroad led to a sharp

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increase in tourist arrivals by 1980. The communal disturbances of July 1983 dealt a definite blow to the flow of tourist traffic as is evident from a 17.2% drop of tourist arrivals from the previous year. In real terms the drop amounted far higher as the decrease in numbers relates only to the second half of the year after the riots in July 1983. Arrivals in the period 1986 to 1989 were appreciably below the 200,000 mark, however in the subsequent years tourist arrivals showed a modest increase as the conflict zone was confined to the North and East of the country. The ending of the war in May 2009 had a positive impact and in the year 2010, tourist arrivals increased by 54.7% over the previous year.

Apart from the fluctuating trend of tourist arrivals, the statistics from the Tourism Development Authority reveal a seasonal pattern on their arrivals. This pattern is mostly dependent on the climatic seasons of the countries of tourist market and their destination and obviously remains fairly constant. The height of the "Tourist Season" in Sri Lanka is from November to March. This is the winter season in the northern hemisphere, where most of Sri Lankan tourist market lies and people living in those parts want to escape the harsh winter to the exotic tropical countries like Sri Lanka. The south west monsoonal season that brings heavy rains to the central highlands and to the south west of Sri Lanka in May to September is well past to coincide with the tourist season and this serves as an ideal tourist destination. July and August also see an increase and this mid period is often referred to as the "mini tourist season". Nevertheless, the sea, sand and beaches in the east coast, and the ancient cities in the north central region enjoy warm and

sunny weather during the wet season in the South West and therefore, Sri Lanka is an ideal tourist destination all the year round.

The main markets for tourist traffic to Sri Lanka are the European countries, closely followed by Asia. Together, they accounted for 82.7% of the tourist arrivals in Sri Lanka in the year 2009[2]. India produced the largest single tourist market followed by the United Kingdom. The Western European Markets were very much stronger than the East European counterparts and in Asia, Japan and China provided a fair share. The other contributors to the market are Australasia 5.8%, North America 5.6% and Mid East 5.3%. Sri Lanka is a cheap tourist destination for its weaker currency and for India; the geographical proximity may be an added reason for the large number of tourist to visit Sri Lanka.

The major factors for tourists choose Sri Lanka as their destination is its climate, natural scenery, beaches, cultural attractions and friendly people. The Research Division of the Sri Lankan Development Authority conducted a survey of departing foreign tourists at the Colombo Airport between September 2008 and February 2009, the findings of which were published on their website.[3] Nearly 81% of the tourists stated that the main purpose of their visit was holiday. The first choice of the holiday makers were sun and beach, 59% and historic sites for 11%. The most popular places