

## **A Study on Impacts of Unplanned Tourism Development – with reference to Negombo Tourism Hub, Sri Lanka**

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### **Abstract**

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*The specific aim of the research was to find out socio-cultural effects of unplanned tourism development to destinations. The study carried out at Negombo tourism hub. Negombo is one of the famous tourist destinations located in the Greater Colombo area, close proximity to Sri Lanka's first international airport and has been a significant tourist attraction since the 1960s. Currently, Negombo is one of the best places for Beach tourism (Sun, Sea, and Sand), Night life, Water sports, Seafood and traditional fishing. Nonetheless, the government involvement was not sufficient in the early days of tourism development hence much of the development activities surrounding Negombo has been unplanned. This has been caused for many negative impacts as well. Much of these adverse impacts have affected the host community. This study was able to identify these adverse effects through primary and secondary data collecting methods.*

*Key words: Tourism, Negombo, Attractions, Tourism Concepts, Society, Impacts, Government involvement.*

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### **Introduction**

This research attempts to find out the socio-cultural impacts of unplanned tourism involvement in Negombo tourist hub and present suggestions to overcome the negative impacts through an exploratory research.

### **Methodology**

This study has based on a field research and a desktop survey has used as supporting element.

### **Sri Lankan Tourism industry**

Nowadays the world has recognized the necessity of economical growth industry to their economical contretemps. Since Sri Lanka is a developing country, the government of Sri Lanka has taken consider about development of tourism industry to give a boost to the economy.

During the colonial era Sri Lanka became an attraction of foreigners for her evergreen natural beauty and proud heritage. At the same time government of Sri Lanka involved in tourism around 1930ies. In 1937 the "Tourism Bureau" was established by the government. This was not functioned during the Second World War (Ratnapala 1999: 69/ Gunawardane and Saldin 2008: 32). In 1948 another tourism authorized institute was located by the government. Nevertheless it was not much useful to the development of industry (Ratnapala 1999: 69). During the 1953 a branch of Tourism Bureau was located in Colombo harbor to raise the attraction of tourists to the country (Gunawardane and Saldin 2008: 32).

Year 1966 was a red letter year for Sri Lankan tourism industry. Under the Tourism act number 10 and Hotel Cooperation act number 14; the government more efficiently engaged with tourism sector (Gunawardane and Saldin 2008: 32). This was the beginning of the government's concentrated efforts to develop the tourism industry of Sri Lanka. During 1967,

1992 and 2005 the government formulated master plans to develop tourism industry. Although several short term plans were made in required periods of time. Tourism zoning, infrastructure facility development, accommodation development, increasing tourism employment, develop tourism investments, accomplishment of rules and regulations, handling promotional activities were functioned under the government.

### **Negombo Tourist Hub**

Negombo is a coastal area located in Gampaha administrative district. This area is in close proximity to Bandaranaike International Airport, the first international airport located in Sri Lanka.

Negombo Divisional Secretariat Division is 30 square kilometers in size (Hapangama 1999: 50). The population consists of different ethnics groups, such as Sinhalese, Muslims, Tamils and Burger. The most important natural resource situated in this division is Negombo Lagoon which is rich in mangroves. Therefore the major occupation of the people became fishery. They attempt in both fresh water and brine fishing industries. Furthermore, tourism industry plays a vital role in the beach side. Many hotels and other facilitating establishments are located in the coastal area. Traditional fishing catamarans, deep sea fishing, scuba diving, water skiing, Para sailing are major tourists' activities and attractions that could commonly seen in the area.

### **Tourism in Negombo**

#### **Attractions**

The major specification of the area to attract tourists is "Beach". Besides it is located close to Bandaranaike International Air Port. Negombo became a good first or last night stop for majority of the tourists. Although the government mentioned Negombo centered coastal belt as beach resort. By way of Sri Lanka is an island, "Beach Tourism" concept was so popular and world has recognized it as a beach tourist destination. Mainly Maldives, Philippines are competing with Sri Lanka to attract visitors. Since early days of Sri Lankan tourism industry, Negombo became a beach tourist attraction as it has good access to the beach. The proximity to Colombo and the location of way side of Bandaranaike International Air Port to Colombo road became advantages to build up attraction to Negombo Beach Resort. The wide sandy beach in Negombo has become an attraction for water adventure seekers. Surfing, scuba diving, snorkeling, deep sea fishing, water scooting and many more water related activities are presently offering by the facilitators.

It is possible to categorize the attractions in Negombo as Natural attractions, Archaeological attractions and Religious attractions. Archaeological and Religious attractions are taking to consideration at first. As most of the places in Negombo are related with colonial periods the Roman Catholic remarks can be identified than Buddhist aspects in this city. So as there are many churches and colonial related buildings in Negombo. *Duwa* church, St. Mary's church, St. Steven church, St. Sebastian church are some popular churches in Negombo. The passion play in *Duwa* church is famous in all over the country so as among tourists.

Consider about modern cultural attractions in Negombo, the lagoon plays the main role. The beach which covers the area enhances the beauty of the city. The fishermen in beach are adding much beauty to sea. The majority of tourists' travels for enjoy the leisure in wide

beach with supportive facilitators. Shopping Bazaar, clubbing, gambling are common activities in night life of Negombo. The “Feel Negombo 2009” was among the best events conducted at night by the Sri Lanka Convention Bureau in December 2009. Moreover Sri Lanka Convention Bureau is now undertaking a strategic plan in Negombo to make it as a hot spot for MICE tourism. Therefore we could be able to keep hope on Negombo as Business tourist destination in near future (Annual Report 2009-Sri Lanka Convention Bureau). Consider the natural tourist attractions in Negombo; Muthurajawela Marsh, Preethipura beach, Eththukala beach, Moruwala are the major attractions among the natural attractions.

### **Socio Cultural Impacts of Tourism**

The negative impacts are powerful in influencing the host community and the attraction than the positives. There by negative impacts caused through tourism are about to explain. As the number of negative impacts greater than positives they can be list down as follows.

- Beggars
- Destruction of Cultural Sites
- Sexuality and Drug Addiction
- Child Abuse
- Old and young marriages

Beggars: - Since Sri Lanka was governed under colonial rulers, there is a myth among people that people with white skin are rich. Therefore local people are used to beg for money from them. Children in tourist peak areas beg money from foreigners and even they fall into troubles such as abuse because of that habit. The religious sites in Negombo are full of beggars in the festive seasons.

Destruction of Cultural Sites: - Each and every cultural site has its own archaeological value. Most of visitors are neglects or unenlightened about the worth of the site. In addition they misuse archaeological aspects. Some people write names and bad words on the archaeological monuments. Largely this happens through domestic tourists. Sexuality and Drug Addiction: - This impact is familiar with the beach side as it is hand in hand with beach is much popular for Gays and Lesbians. Among them Gays are much important as it promotes by Web Sites such as [www.utopia-asia.com](http://www.utopia-asia.com). The night clubs are playing main role in sex tourism. There was a university student arrested by tourist police in year 2013 when having homosexual relationship with a Russian tourist. That student explains the reason with police as he needed to have higher education in Russia. The dreams and need of money are making locals to cater tourists in sexual desires (pers comm Wijerathne 2014). The area calls *Wella Weediya* is popular for prostitution as the prostitutes are supplying by the village areas like Duwa (pers.comm Rev. Father Lester Nonis 2014). When considering on Child Sex tourism, most of Beach boys are supplying children for sex. In case of male prostitution Beach boys themselves engaged in those activities without any doubt (pers.comm Perera 2014). There was an Arabic tourist arrested by tourist police for a child abuse in 2013 (pers comm Wijerathne 2014).

Child Abuse: - Most of the unauthorized guides are engaging in dealing with supply of children for sexual activities. Most parents do engage in providing children for economical benefits.

Drugs: - Drug addiction is another burning problem boots by tourism. Though, tourism is not fully responsible for this matter. Hippy culture is much affected for the drug addiction of

youngsters. Hippies are kind of low budget tourists that commonly seen in Negombo. Young and Old Marriages: - There is a trend among young people in Negombo and vicinity to get married with old foreigners. It is probably due to the economical benefits and motivation in creating links with foreign nations. The old and young marriages are much common in Negombo as many young Sri Lankans get married with old foreigners for money and foreigners marry young boys and girls to fulfill their sexual desires. The tourist police received around 10 complains per month that related with sexuality (pers comm. Wijerathne 2014).

### **Minimizing negative impacts**

The government authorities are playing main role on addressing negative impacts courses through tourism. The laws and regulatory actions are most frequently used against adverse behaviors. Correcting misbehavior of tourists and locals would pressure the tourism industry to develop in a better way. Furthermore, develop knowledge about the culture and values of the host community are the most appropriate approach to safeguard the environment and culture of the destination. Both the host community and tourist should educate about the cultures of each other. That would be helpful to improve respect about each other and it may minimize the cultural negative impacts caused through tourism. Most probably the young people who are currently engaged in tourism must educate about values in Sri Lankan culture. These attempts would reduce the misbehaviors such as prostitution, homosexuality, child abuse and drug addiction. Another meaningful approach for better control negatives of tourism is changing the attitudes of the society. Although Sri Lankans are practiced to think white skin is rich and they motivated to make foreigners happy for make some money. This attitude should change for minimize the negative impacts such as sexual misbehaviors and beggars.

### **Conclusion**

The unplanned tourism involvement on Negombo has been impacted on the local community negatively due to the less attention on sensitive areas. More government involvement, tourist education, enhance the local awareness could be the solutions for overcome those sensitive issues.

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