

## **Impact of International Tourism on Coastal Regions: A Case Study from Sri Lanka**

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### *Abstract*

Since the Second World War international tourism began to play a prominent role in the economies of the less developed countries. Since 1967, Sri Lanka “The Pearl of the Indian Ocean”, has also concentrated on developing the international tourism sector of the island with the main intention of overcoming her acute shortage of foreign exchange, and reaping the other economic benefits of tourism development. The extreme urgency of the government, and the policies adopted to develop this economic activity within the island have finally created an unplanned development scenario in tourism sector, especially within the South and West Coast Tourist Regions of Sri Lanka.

The motives of tourists visiting Sri Lanka, and the freedom of travel within the island have a direct relationship on the existing tourism scenario in popular tourist destinations. It is evident that nearly 90% of the tourists visit this island for pleasure. Therefore beaches have become the major tourist destinations of this island. On the other hand the political instability prevalent within the country since the communal clashes of 1983 has also tremendously reduced the access to the beaches of the East coast. As a result, tourist density on the beaches of the South and west Coasts of Sri Lanka has been increasing creating various problematic situations. Hikkaduwa, Unawatuna and Tangalle are examples.

The present study examines the social, cultural and environmental impacts of international tourism development in Tangalle, an emerging tourist destination in the South Coast Tourist Region of Sri Lanka. This article is based on primary data, collected through four types of questionnaire surveys conducted in Tangalle area during the latter part of 2003. The results reveal, that both positive and negative impacts of international tourism development have been materialized in this tourist destination.