

“Innovation and Sustainability as the New Normal”: Setting a new Paradigm for Mass Tourism in Sri Lanka

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Introduction

Tourism had thrived despite a three-decade war which ended in 2009 and became the third highest foreign exchange earner of the economy. A testament to its resilience, Sri Lanka’s tourism again challenged the devastating Easter attacks faster than expected which were occurred during the first quarter of year 2019. While the industry was setting its targets high, the unprecedented challenges of COVID-19 global pandemic has taken everyone by surprise and setting new paradigms to look at for the resilience of this industry.

Mass tourism can be identified as the most famous form of tourism in the world that involves movement of large number of tourists (usually tens of thousands) to the same destination at the same time of year (Cooper, Fletcher , Fyall, & Wanhill, 2005). This is more popular due to the lower prices and these tourists only seem to be after sun, sea, sand and booze and their demands are few even though the collective spending power, is large. Due to a constant overwhelming demand, the tour operators, Destination Management Companies (DMC’s), hotels, airlines, cruise lines and other service providers make large scale economies and provide tourism products and services at a cheaper price (Samarathunga & Gamage, 2020). According to Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority, more than 1.9 million tourists have visited the country during year 2019, however, with the present social distancing concerns Sri Lanka has to rethink of mass movement of people as it could impose greater health risks to both the ‘host and guest’.

Due to less number of empirical studies in this area this paper was intended to identify the potentials to substitute mass tourism post global pandemic. This research demonstrates prolific opportunities for industry practitioners, entrepreneurs and the regulators to set incremental impacts.

Methodology

This research takes qualitative approach with inductive reasoning and the data derived from semi-structured interviews conducted for top managerial level employers (n = 25) of Tour operating and Destination Management Companies were analyzed using thematic analysis method.

Findings

Results reveal that, ‘Innovation and Sustainability’ could be the new normal, substituting mass tourism with the niche tourism concepts. Sustainability has been an area of its own in tourism industry but, pragmatic approach to success would be

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connecting ‘innovativeness’ to bring out authentic product to the visitors. It is expected that the first people to travel will be the young and risk takers, hence we postulate the emergence of ‘experience’ and ‘emotion’ which will focus on the ‘quality’ rather than the ‘quantity’.

Conclusion

Sri Lanka has become one of the few countries who has controlled a global pandemic successfully, hence there is an impenetrable advantage to promote as a post COVID destination. Innovative and sustainable tourism will support the economy, society and the environment and rebranding of Sri Lankan tourism product while addressing the suitable platforms will be essential.

As the limitations, the access to the respondents amid current situation can be mentioned yet, researchers believe that study will set directions towards developing ‘innovative and sustainable’ tourism concepts in the future.

Key Words: *Mass Tourism, Innovation, Sustainability, COVID-19, Sri Lanka*

References

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