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A study on interpretation differences of the meaning of eco resorts by Sri Lankan hoteliers

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Tourism plays a major role in Sri Lankan economy. It accounts for Rs. 42,519.3 million of foreign exchange earnings in 2007 (Annual Statistical Report-SLTB 2007). Eco tourism is one of the alternative tourism concepts which involves environmentally responsible travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas, in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features - both past and present) that promotes conservation, has low negative visitor impact, and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local populations” (Lascurian, 2005).

Mid-term strategic plan for Sri Lanka tourism (2002-2004) states that Sri Lanka had 1% of eco tourists. It is in a very low level comparing to other destinations. Based on these literature and preliminary findings, the researcher identified there is an issue of practicing the concept of genuine eco-tourism in Sri Lanka compared to the international standards. Therefore, the researcher’s major objective of this study was to investigate differences between the Sri Lankan eco resort hoteliers’ interpretation and the international standards.

Here the researcher did a qualitative case study with the intention of providing a thick description to the concept of eco resort. In the analysis, the researcher found that Sri Lankan eco resort hoteliers construct the meaning of eco resorts in various ways. They are more towards nature based tourism, wild life tourism and environment conservation tourism. Because the hoteliers’ practice of the eco-tourism concept differs from international practices and standards, they could not meet the expectations of eco tourists. Even though the eco resort hoteliers’ main market is eco tourist market, they cater and address to other type of tourists. As a result, customer orientation concept has been dishonored for eco tourists. Therefore, it has created a gap between the needs of eco tourists and the services of eco resort hoteliers.

Key words: *Eco tourism, Eco resort, Customer expectation, Alternative tourism*