

Demand for eco-tourism: estimating recreational benefits from the Viharamahadevi National Park in Colombo

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The **Viharamahadevi Park** is a public park located in Colombo, Sri Lanka. It is situated exactly in front of the beautiful colonial style Town Hall building. The park is named after the mother of famous king Dutugamunu. The park was built during British rule of Sri Lanka, named as the Victoria Park after Queen Victoria and it is still referred to as the Victoria Park amongst some of the city's dwellers. The park features include a huge Buddha statue and a series of water fountains. It also includes a mini zoo, and a children's play area. The Viharamahadevi Park is the only public park in Colombo, and is maintained by the Municipal Council of Colombo.

This study, attempts to value recreational benefits to the people and, estimates the benefits of establishing and managing the Viharamahadevi National Park near Colombo. The study examines how much park visitors are willing to pay to visit and enjoy the park. Annual benefits from the Park are considerable—the total annual consumer surplus or economic benefit obtained from recreation in the Park is approximately Rs. 12 million (US\$ 0.12 million). Various factors influence the value visitors obtain from the park — these include travel cost, household income, and the quality of the park. Improvements in the quality of the park are likely to increase recreational benefits significantly by 35%. The study recommends that a Park entrance fee of Rs. 20 per person be introduced, which could be utilized for park Management. This would generate nearly Rs. 36.5 million in revenue annually, a sizable amount of money that represents about 2% of the annual budget allocated to the Environment Sector in Sri Lanka.

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