

Social and environmental factors in the promotion of eco-tourism in Knuckles forest range

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Keywords : Eco-tourism, environment, development, infrastructure

Eco-tourism is a recent global trend which has a high potential to contribute to the economy. The Knuckles range is rich in scenic, environmental, sociological and cultural resources. Local and foreign tourists enjoy panoramic views of mist-capped mountains, stunning valleys, impressive rock formations, crystal clear streams, hilly terrain, lush forests, waterfalls and cliffs. Even though many people visit this place, there are no proper interpretations or guidance to get the real experience in this area and to contribute to the development of the area. The objective of this study is to identify the social, institutional and environmental factors in the promotion of ecotourism development in Knuckles range. The data were collected using a field survey and informal meetings with stakeholders and field observations. The survey was conducted within the Meemure, Corbet's Gap and Riverston.

The field research showed the lack of awareness about Knuckles and lack of proper information are the most common causes for the poor tourism arrival to this area. The majority of the visitors are local tourists who come in small groups. These visitors expect develop and increase the facilities for accommodation, develop and increase nature trails for walking, provide facilities for bird watching, improvement of infrastructure and facilities for camping and strengthening of the institutional capacity to enable the environment of local people to interpret the ecological and social heritage.

Based on the research findings of the study the most important issues that should be taken into consideration in promoting eco-tourism in Knuckles are: strengthening the institutional capacities of relevant stakeholders, publicize Knuckles range in the media, encourage villagers to participate in tourism activities and nature base tourism should be promote to the extent that it does not damage the eco-system and insofar as it provides benefit to the local community.