

## Visitors' Preferences and Willingness to Pay for Conserving a Forest Reserve in an Urban Area: A Case of Udawattakele Forest Reserve, Sri Lanka

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### Abstract

Udawattakele is a historic forest, spread in 104ha, located in the city of Kandy, Sri Lanka. It is rich in floral and faunal diversity and provides diverse benefits to the urban society. Increasing atmospheric temperature is one of the main climate variability at present and an urban society has become one of the main victims. Hence it is important to find out the public awareness and their preferences on conserving the forest reserves and their willingness to pay for future improvements. Therefore, this study mainly focuses to estimate visitors' willingness to pay as an entrance fee on existing and improved situations of conservation of Udawattakelle forest reserve. Contingent valuation method was the theoretical concept applied. Iterative bidding method was used to elicit the local and foreign tourists' willingness to pay. 60 locals and 60 foreign visitors were selected using simple random sampling method. Results revealed that both foreign and local tourists have moderate awareness on the forest reserve and they have positive perception regarding valuation and conservation. Sixty five percent foreign tourists and 79 % local tourists prefer to pay more on improved situation of the forest reserve. They have suggested implementing several activities of forest replanting, conserve wildlife, and removal of invasive plants. The estimated entrance fee values of the existing and improved situations of the local tourists are 51.50LKR and 74.50LKR, respectively. Similarly, foreign tourists are willing to pay 898.20LKR and 1279.16LKR, respectively. Respondents' income is the only significant factor which influenced to the willingness to pay. The study concludes that there is a potential to increase the entrance fee and earn additional income which can be invested to implement the conservation plans of the forest.

**Keywords:** Conservation, Contingent valuation method, Udawattakele forest reserve, Urban forest, Willingness to pay

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