

Future prospects of ecotourism in Kankesanthurai beach in Jaffna

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Abstract

Ecotourism is an emerging concept which creates a huge impact on people about conserving the environment and local culture while undertaking tourism. Hence, this study was conducted to examine the perception of tourists and the local community towards ecotourism and to analyze the future potential for ecotourism activities in Kankesanthurai beach. The study was carried out by a pre-tested questionnaire survey with 60 tourists and 60 local people selected by convenient and cluster sampling methods respectively. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Wilcoxon signed-rank test. The study has shown that the majority of the tourists (78.4%) have a positive perception towards ecotourism. Further, results revealed that the locals' awareness level of ecotourism principles was significant ($p=0.000$) that comprises awareness in creating jobs ($M=1.60$), supporting local business and services ($M=1.18$), increasing demand for local cultural activities & amenities ($M=1.13$), attracting investment into the area ($M=1.03$) and providing natural and environmental protection ($M=1.00$) through eco-tourism. The study implied that the local community agreed that conventional tourism caused negative impacts such as poor sanitation, intrusion of outsiders, loss of native customs, damage to the natural flora and fauna and depletion of natural resources ($p<0.05$). In terms of the future potential for ecotourism activities, tourists significantly agreed that Kankesanthurai beach is an eco-friendly place and they agreed to pay a little more money for an eco-friendlier stay ($p=0.000$). Moreover, 75% of the tourists were willing to revisit the site and 87% of them were recommending the site to others. Both tourists and locals preferred cultural food festivals, local homestay of tourists, local area picnics, local indigenous product exhibitions, beach games clubs and underwater fish watching ($p<0.05$) as the potential future ecotourism activities. Further, locals were anticipating government support to enhance community cohesion, entrepreneurship skills, security and market facilities ($p<0.05$). This study concluded that there is a good potential to introduce ecotourism in Kankesanthurai beach. Therefore, rules and regulations should be strictly defined to eliminate the negative impact and establish Kankesanthurai beach as a more eco-friendlier place for everyone.

Keywords: Community perception, Ecotourism, Future prospects, Tourists perception

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