AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE ECOTOURISM DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL IN
ILLUKKUMBURA AREA IN THE KNUCKLES RANGE

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Knuckles National Heritage Wilderness Area is approximately 155 km² and is located in
the Central Province of Sri Lanka. Knuckles forested area has high endemic biodiversity
and possesses a rich cultural history. It falls under the administration of the Forest
Department. The area has been separated into three different zones, for systematic
implementation of ecotourism activities. Illukkumbura is one such ecotourism zone of the
Knuckles forested area.

Objectives of the study are to explore the ecotourism development potential of
Illukkumbura area, promotion of local community participation in ecotourism and
recommendation of strategies to promote Illukkumbura area in the global tourism market.
Comprehensive literature survey was conducted to gather secondary data, with regard to
ecotourism and its subject matter. Primary data was collected initially through a
reconnaissance survey, to demarcate the study site, familiarize with key decision makers of
the villages and provided the basis to select the study area and participant for the
Participatory Rural Appraisal as well as decide on the time duration of the Participatory
Rural Appraisal. To gather in depth primary data Participatory Rural Appraisal was
conducted in the selected villages, with a questionnaire assisted interview process. The
respondents were selected using random sample techniques, which comprised of 50
participants. Field observations were carried out in all ecotourism attractions at
Illukkumbura area. Specific attention was given to the site selection for suitable ecotourism
activities, especially suited for various ecotourists.

Study revealed that Illukkumbura zone is patronized by tourist both domestic and foreign
at present mainly for trekking, swimming and camping. Study resulted in evaluating the
importance of the each nature trail for ecotourism, exploring other ecotourism sites in the
area, exploring the potential of community participation in ecotourism, developing a
communication strategy for the area and drawing up proposed guidelines for a ecotourism
development plan in the Illukkumbura area. Recommendations were made in line to
promote continuous research with relation to ecotourism and adapt better management
ecotourism practices for sustainable development.