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**Elephant Based Volunteer Tourism in Sri Lanka (On the Perception of Volunteer Service Providers and Volunteer Participants in Elephant Related Activities)**

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**Abstract**

Volunteer tourism is an emerging sector of modern tourism. Elephant based volunteering activities, which means activities related to conservation and protection of animal rights and welfare related to elephants, plays a contemporary role among them, that perceive the aspect of animal conservation and preservation while also promoting tourism which describes both well-being of the elephants and tourism markets. This study is a collaboration to depict these types of contemplating the current profile of elephant-related activities and volunteer tourism in Sri Lanka, while creating and promoting a niche market for elephant-based volunteer tourism that would guide to identify and understand volunteer service providers and volunteer participant's perspective of captive and non-captive elephant welfare. The researcher has selected Pinnawala Elephant Orphanage, Wasgamuwa National Park, Hurulu Eco Park and Minneriya Forest Reserve as the research sites for the study. The population of the study is consisted with all the participants of elephant-based volunteer programs and volunteer service providers related to the elephant related activities of Sri Lanka. As the sample the researcher selected 30 participants who they are both volunteer service providers and volunteer participants from the areas of selected research sites. For selecting the sample, the researcher adopted purposive sampling technique. Qualitative method is adopted for the study and structured interviews were used as primary data resource, while journal articles, research papers, books and online sources were used as secondary data sources and thematic analysis method was utilized in analyzing the data. According to the findings the elephants are using in entertainment purposes which are; elephant back riding, elephant shows, perahara events, elephant seeing safaris, elephant based souvenirs and products and photography. As the data analysis the short comings in elephant-based tourism are lack of awareness about the concepts throughout the country, lack of government involvement and unavailability of strict legal structure, lack of consideration about the animal welfare by the respective organizations and restriction of animal freedom. Major opportunities generated by the elephant-based volunteering activities includes generation of good income through the tourism industry and volunteering is a major tool of self-improvement. When searching for the challenges in promoting elephant-based volunteering activities the following are identified; language barriers, unacceptable human behavior and attitudes, monetary constraints and improper uses of private tour operators. When discussing about promoting elephant-based volunteering activities, based on the research it can be suggested to use social media for promoting, holding awareness programs in forest areas as well as in urban areas, conducting collaborative research studies and taking measures to alter the attitudes of people.

**Keywords:** Volunteer tourism, Elephant-based tourism, Animal welfare, Volunteer service providers