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Eco-lodge Patrons in Sri Lanka: A Comparison of Asian and Non-Asian Markets

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Abstract

Tourists around the world have become more environmentally conscious, and the demand for green holidays and green accommodation has experienced a rapid growth. In this background, the form of accommodation known as “eco-lodges” have gained a huge popularity, especially among those who are seeking environment friendly wilderness experiences. Extensive studies on characterisation of visitors seeking accommodation in eco-lodges have been documented in the tourism literature. However, empirical studies conducted on understanding attitudes, perceptions, preferences and characteristics of visitors staying in eco-lodges in the Asian destinations are lacking. With Asian tourists gaining a greater share of Sri Lanka’s tourism market, a better understanding of such information on tourists is vital in ecotourism planning and development.

This study aimed to develop and compare visitor profiles of Asian and non-Asian eco-lodge patrons in Sri Lanka’s eco-lodges. Visitors stayed one or multiple nights in 13 eco-lodges comprised the sampling framework for the study. Out of 450 questionnaires, there were 362 valid responses which accounted for 69.0% response rate. Both Asian and non-Asian eco-lodge patrons were well-educated. However, they differed in terms of age ($\chi^2=3.639$, $p=0.048$) with more than 50% of the non-Asian segment belonging to age groups over 35 years. In terms of trip characteristics, both groups showed fairly similar length-of-stays. Non-Asian segment seems to prefer travelling with family, spouse or a partner ($\chi^2=5.682$, $p=0.021$). Some key differences were observed between the two groups in terms of travel motives and eco-lodge attributes that influenced their accommodation choice. Key differences in demographic characteristics, attitudes, perceptions, and preferences between the two visitor profiles are discussed along with implications for management.

Keywords: Eco-lodge patrons, Visitor profiles, Demographics, Attitudes, Perceptions