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Present Status and Future Prospects of Tea Tourism in Nuwara-Eliya Area

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Abstract

Although the demand for "Ceylon Tea" is high, the tea plantations of Sri Lanka are continuously enjoy a less profit due to high cost of production and low productivity. Consequently, tea plantations are forced to diversify their revenue generation activities while ensuring sustainability of tea production. Tea Tourism has being identified as vital option for plantations to increase their profits. Since, tea plantations in hilly areas of Sri Lanka have diversified tourist attraction sites with prosperous natural and man-made resource. This study was intended to identify the present status of tea tourism in tea estate, to examine the perception of the estate community on tea tourism and to analyse the future potential of tea tourism in Nuwara-Eliya. Pedro estate and Poopani estate in Nuwara-Eliya area were selected as the study locations. Three samples were selected form estate community, estate staff and staff of nearby hotel. Primary data was collected by using three separate pretested questionnaires through field survey. Tourism Potential Index (TPI) was calculated for the locations of Pedro estate and Poopani estate by using collected primary and secondary data. TPI was developed based on natural resources, man-made attractions, infrastructure, community resources and their skills. The results revealed that the tourists experienced tea tourism as a part of their whole tour and they were mostly attracted by the colonial image of the tea plantations. At present, tea factory visits and tea tasting were the highest demanded activities by tourist. According to the results, engagement levels of the estate community in the tea tourism activities were low. However there is a potential to improve community participation in tea tourism by introducing nature walks, cultural performance and local foods. Further, it was revealed that knowledge level on eco-tourism of the estate communities were average (mean value=3.19 out of 5 point Likert scale). While, estate communities were lacking of entrepreneurial skills and resources in order to take part in tea tourism activities. Around 60% of the estate community members were willing to start traditional business related to tea tourism but their knowledge level on novel business was very low. The study revealed that plantation of Pedro had comparatively more resources than Poopani estate. According to the TPI, Pedro plantation obtained 37 marks and Poopani plantation obtained 31 out of 47 points. It depicted that both estates have potential to implement tea tourism projects in their plantation. However, restrictions due to management practices of plantations, seasonal fluctuations of tourist, limited access to natural resources and lack of trained labours were identified as the main barriers to implement tea tourism projects in Nuwara-Eliya area. It was interested to note that community required having environmental and cultural conservation committees when go to implement tea tourism in that area. The study concluded that there is potential to implement tea tourism as alternative revenue source of tea plantation with better participation of estate community.

Keywords: Community perception, Tea tourism, Tourist potential index