(ID 137)

Investigation into the Environmental Sustainability Actions Adapted by Small and Medium Enterprises of the Accommodation and Tour Operator Sectors of Sri Lanka

Weerasinghe, M.A.M.T.*, Rathnapriya, K.P.P.V., Guruge, T.P.G.W.D., Liyanage, H.N.

University of Colombo, Colombo 03, Sri Lanka
**mamtweerasinghe@gmail.com*

Abstract

Tourism is a key driver of development for many countries, including Sri Lanka. In 2018, it generated USD 4.38 million in foreign exchange, contributed by 4.9 percent to the GDP, and generated over 380,000 direct and indirect employment opportunities. The contribution of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) to this industry prevents economic leakages and increases the multiplier effect. The tourism industry also can destroy the very environment it depends on for sustenance, through heavy emissions from energy use and waste production. Research has highlighted the importance of the quality of the environment as a pull factor for destination profitability in the long run. The tourism transport-related emissions for Sri Lanka are high, the accommodation sector's GHG emissions at 3 percent is more than the global average of 1%, indicating major areas for improvement. With the accommodation sector's energy consumption predicted to surpass that of the industrial sector, the attention given to sustainable tourism practices by the SMEs that make up the industry must be investigated. In that context, this research aims to investigate the energy-saving and waste-reduction practices towards emission reduction, adopted by the Tour Operator (TO) and Accommodation Provider (AP) SMEs in the tourism industry of Sri Lanka. To do so, a qualitative methodology was adopted with a narrative inquiry over a virtual platform with 06 TOs and 17 APs identified through convenience sampling, and data analysis performed through thematic content analysis technique. Notable results for AP revealed that 12 APs consume electricity off the grid, with solar energy utilization still being limited to obtaining hot water for guest bathrooms for 5 APs, due to the high initial cost involved, and lack of adequate technical know-how in solar battery maintenance (3Aps in Tissamaharama). Poor government support towards renewable energy discouraged 17 APs from adopting the same. Energy use for TO is minimized through the use of hybrid along with conventional fossil-fuel-powered vehicles for tours. Single-use plastic items reintroduced during the COVID-19 pandemic for AP are gradually being replaced by reusable glass bottles, wooden/ metal cutlery, and paper/metal straws. All AP practice waste segregation, and the 3R concept (reduce, reuse, recycle). 4 TOs provide reusable metal bottles that are refilled during the tour using larger water cans and a handheld pump. As the sustainable practices of TO are currently optional, it is recommended to include sustainability criteria into registration process with the SLTDA. For AP it is recommended for the government to play a more active facilitating role in the renewable energy sector and to ensure the skills requirement for device maintenance is promptly met.

***Keywords**:* Small and medium enterprises, Sustainable tourism development, Energy saving practices, Waste reduction