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Investigating the Possibilities of Nature-Based Tourism: Adventure Activities, Fish Therapy and Water Sports in Heenatiyanwaththa Dola, Kalutara District

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Abstract

Tourism is increasingly recognized as a key driver of sustainable rural economic development, contributing to livelihood improvement while promoting responsible natural resource management. This study investigates the potential for nature-based and adventure tourism development in Heenatiyanwaththa Dola, located in the Palindanuwara area of the Kalutara District, an area characterized by cascading streams, dense forest cover, and an unspoilt rural landscape. The primary objective of the research is to assess the feasibility of introducing adventure and wellness-oriented tourism activities such as nature hiking, river trekking, kayaking, river tubing, low-impact water sports, and fish therapy using naturally flowing streams, while ensuring environmental sustainability. A case study research design was adopted, using primary data collected through field observations, structured questionnaires administered to 60 local households, and semi-structured interviews with 15 key stakeholders, including community representatives, tourism officials, and local entrepreneurs. Community consultations were conducted to incorporate local perspectives and participatory planning approaches. The study further examines the socio-economic impacts of tourism development, particularly its potential to generate household income, create local employment opportunities, and enhance community involvement. Based on the findings, a community-based eco-adventure tourism development model is proposed, emphasizing environmentally sensitive product development, provision of essential visitor facilities and services, and the integration of conservation and local governance mechanisms to safeguard ecosystem integrity. The results indicate that tourism development in Heenatiyanwaththa Dola has strong potential to diversify the rural economy, improve livelihood opportunities, and strengthen community stewardship of natural resources while minimizing negative environmental and social impacts. The findings offer practical insights for local planners, tourism authorities, and private investors, positioning Heenatiyanwaththa Dola as a viable nature-adventure tourism destination and reinforcing its role in promoting sustainable rural development and eco-tourism growth within the Kalutara District.

Keywords: *Adventure tourism, Nature-based tourism, Heenatiyanwaththa dola, Rural development, Water sports, Fish therapy, Sustainable tourism, Kalutara district*