

Developing Mandaram Nuwara as a Rural Tourism Destination; Context, Perceptions and Potentials

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The Tourism sector significantly contributes to the Gross Domestic Production (GDP) of Sri Lanka by enhancing the service sector. The industry is also related to the community lifestyle and a significant amount of community inhabitants of Sri Lanka depend on the tourism industry. Hence, community based tourism has been recognized as an emerging trend in tourism, despite traditional tourism avenues are also important. However, community based tourism has not been paid sufficient attention as such destinations are located remotely with less facilities. The current study was conducted to identify the community perception on developing *Mandaram Nuwara* as a tourism destination and also its potential economic benefits. The required data were collected from 70 residents and 06 officials through conducting a survey and interviews respectively. The collected data were analyzed through a descriptive analysis and a thematic analysis. As the results of respondents it was concluded that, the tourism industry in *Mandaram Nuwara* is in a developing stage and the community perception is at a moderate level. Also, according to the study it is found that there are very few residents and other stakeholders in Mandaram Nuwara who are aware of the tourist resources and their potential. Their knowledge of the tourism industry as well as positive attitudes should be further developed. For that, the public sector should take the lead and build an efficiency mechanism. Also, through that mechanism, all interested parties should be integrated and a system should be built. The study also recommends that the existing resources in *Mandaram Nuwara* should be further promoted. Through that, it has the potential to generate benefits from the natural resources of the destination by attracting local and foreign tourists and attracting external investors. Also, the study emphasizes that *Mandaram Nuwara* could be transformed into a rural tourism destination village through further tourism-centric promotion and regulation of the existing agricultural lifestyle and other small scale industrial entrepreneurship (SME) in the area.

Keywords: Potential benefits ; Community Perception ; Tourism mechanism ; Tourism regulation ; Rural Tourism ; Destination Development