

Socio-Cultural Impacts of Tourism Development: Empirical Evidence from Ella, Sri Lanka

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Tourism being a multifaceted industry extends into every sector of an economy covering economic, social, cultural, and environmental concerns. Sri Lanka being a small island, the tourism impacts are significant both in positive and negative terms. Ella is salient as an attractive destination in Sri Lanka for its location, attractions, and free social context. Major accommodation service in Ella being homestays, the interaction of the tourists with the host community is comparatively high. This study analysed the social & cultural impacts of the development of the tourism industry in Ella area to find out how tourism has influenced society & culture and community perception towards tourism development. Data were collected from schoolers, residents, government officials, social activists, and tourism stakeholders in Ella through in-depth interviews, employing accidental sampling technique. Qualitative in-depth analysis and thematic analysis were incorporated where data were analyzed under sub-themes. Findings disclosed that tourism development in Ella had both positive and negative impacts on society and culture but, results conclude that the negative impacts overrun the positive ones. Results pinpointed women's employment, living standards, cultural awareness, technology literacy, and language ability were high, while the negative socio-cultural impacts marked as a low tendency for education, drug addiction, over-dependence on tourism, displacement, materialistic community and damaged the traditional way of life and social values. Thus, the study recommends training and awareness programs on sustainable tourism for Ella tourism & hospitality workforce, to mitigate the negative socio-cultural impacts which damage the authentic lifestyle of the Ella community. Strict regulations, close monitoring, and quality control are recommended to make sure Ella to offer expected tourism services to tourists.

Keywords: Tourism development, Social impacts, Cultural impacts, Qualitative research