

Enhancing Community Involvement in Wildlife Tourism - A Focus on Challenges and Issues (With Special Reference to Wasgamuwa National Park)

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Tourism is a sector that can contribute to the economic growth of any region. Sri Lanka has proved to be one of the fastest growing tourist destinations for many types of tourism and specially wildlife tourism. This research mainly focuses on the challenges & issues faced by host community leading to limit their involvement in wildlife tourism. The study aims to clarify and enhance community involvement in wildlife tourism in economic, rural livelihood and social cohesion perspectives. The study also identifies the expectations of community members in order to enhance their involvement in wildlife tourism. Research site is Wasgamuwa National Park, one of the famous wildlife park in Sri Lanka, mostly locals and foreigners visit to experience the wildlife tourism activities such as safari, camping, photography. The extensive review of literature on wildlife tourism, protected areas, community involvement in wildlife tourism, hosts perception on wildlife tourism, barriers to satisfactory host engagement with wildlife tourism and the way forwards for hosts and wildlife tourism have enhanced the theoretical background of the study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect primary data from the community members. Local service providers, government officials and host community around Wasgamuwa National Park were interviewed and their views and opinions are used as the basis for analysis from which findings are elucidated and recommendations made. Qualitative data have analyzed through thematic analysis using NVivo11 pro software. By using thematic analysis method researcher identified the themes in the data set. The findings show that a huge current involvement of the community in wildlife tourism. Researcher showed Maintaining access to resources, Complimenting and boosting livelihood, Active participation not just involvement, Cooperation with the private sector, Exploiting the market through ecotourism label as the recommendations.

Keywords: Wildlife tourism, Host community, Community involvement, Wasgamuwa national park, Challenges & issues