

Contribution of Rural Tourism as a Development Strategy for Rural Community (Special Reference to Hiriwadunna Village Track, Meemure and Heeloya Knuckles Valley Tourism Village in Sri Lanka)

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Rural tourism is one of the niche markets of the tourism industry and crucial determinant which mostly deals with the rural lifestyle. Sri Lanka is a country that has the potentials for rural tourism development as an island with rich natural resources and human capital. Yet, there is a few types of research related to rural tourism development in Hiriwadunna Village Track, Meemure, and Heeloya Knuckles Valley Tourism village in Sri Lanka conducted on rural tourism activities regularly as one of their main livelihoods. The main focuses of this study were to identify the impact of destination attributes on visitor satisfaction and determine the contribution of rural tourism initiatives on the household economy and socio-culture of tourism stakeholders. A convenient sampling technique was used to select two sets of respondents such as 100 foreign, local visitors, and 12 tourism stakeholders as the sample. Both quantitative and qualitative research design (mixed methods) was adopted in the research. The information was derived from questionnaires and structured interviews. The study used descriptive analysis, multiple regression analysis, and thematic analysis methods. Findings indicated that attraction, accessibility, amenities, ancillary services, available packages, and activities (destination attributes) significantly influenced visitor satisfaction. The need to improve accessibility and ancillary services through infrastructure development. The benefits of rural tourism have been expressed as direct employment, economic growth, social empowerment, living standard, cultural exchange, and destination image. According to the results, the negative impacts were revealed as poor quality jobs, cost of living, cultural influences, and misbehavior. There is a huge potential to develop sustainable tourism concepts under rural tourism such as agro-tourism, community-based tourism, and nature-based tourism as an instrument of multidimensional poverty in these rural areas.

Keywords: Rural tourism, Destination attributes, Tourists satisfaction, Household economy