

TEA TOURISM LANDSCAPE DEVELOPMENT THROUGH A SUSTAINABLE ALTERNATIVE LIVELIHOOD APPROACH: A CASE STUDY OF PEDRO TEA ESTATE, NUWARA ELIYA, SRI LANKA

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Abstract: Tea tourism has gained traction in the tourism industry around the world as a sustainable and eco-friendly niche in agro-tourism. Sri Lanka, a significant tea-producing nation renowned for its “Ceylon Tea” brand, has the opportunity to harness tea agro-tourism as a sustainable alternative income source. This research focuses on the case of Pedro Tea Estate in Nuwara-Eliya, Sri Lanka, to examine the sustainable alternative livelihood approach in tea tourism landscape development and its impact on both the tea tourism industry and community empowerment. Tea tourism offers immersive experiences to eco-conscious travellers seeking authentic encounters with the tea production process. By integrating sustainable practices, tea tourism fosters environmental responsibility and contributes to economic development in tea-growing regions. Aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals, tea tourism demonstrates its potential to foster economic growth, social inclusion, cultural preservation, and environmental stewardship. This study aims to demonstrate how responsible practices and community engagement can enable the tea tourism industry to thrive while safeguarding the cultural and environmental heritage of tea-growing areas. The research endeavours to inspire other tea-growing regions to adopt sustainable landscape development and community empowerment strategies, fostering a more responsible and sustainable global tea tourism industry.

Keywords: *Tea Tourism, Tea Landscapes, Sustainable Landscape Development, Sustainable Alternative Livelihood Approach*

1. Introduction

The world tourism industry is a vibrant and dynamic sector that plays a crucial role in contributing to global economies, cultural exchange, and socio-economic development. With millions of travellers exploring new destinations each year, the industry presents an opportunity for sustainable growth and responsible practices that leave a positive impact on local communities and landscapes. Recently, it has been dynamically changing into low-impact tourism models such as Nature-based Tourism, Agro Tourism, Cultural Tourism, and Ecotourism to minimise the significant negative impacts of mass tourism on the environment, economy, and socio-cultural elements of society (Silva, 2008).

Sri Lanka is a tropical island, and it has been one of the major tourist attractions for a long time. It is predominantly known for its mountains, beaches, heritage, and culture-oriented destinations. According to Waas (2020), Tourism in Sri Lanka plays an important role in the maintenance of financial stability and is ranked as the fourth largest source of foreign exchange earner in the country. From the alternative tourism markets, the Agriculture sector in Sri Lanka has a large potential which can incorporate with the tourism industry; from that, there is more potential to promote the tea tourism industry due to the prominent Sri Lanka brand image for the Ceylon Tea around the world as the world’s finest tea and being the fourth largest tea exporter to the world (Jolliffe & Aslam, 2009). The 140-year tea agricultural history, traditional practices, and Hill Country’s unique climatic and geographical features, as well as its perfect setting for cultivating aromatic, delicious tea, are all unique features that can be explored to develop tea tourism in the country. In Sri Lanka, the tea industry plays an important role in the economy as it is the third largest foreign exchange earner and a source of employment (Sri Lanka Export Development Board, 2015). Tea covers 20 % of the total agricultural land area in the country while employing about 10 % of the national workforce (Koththagoda & Dissanayake, 2017). The country’s main tea-growing landscapes can be found in central highlands, which have an average elevation of 1500 meters above sea level with narrow hills and deep green valleys with a rich diversity of flora and fauna. In addition to the elevation categorisation, the country has demarcated seven tea-growing regions, namely Nuwara-Eliya, Ruhuna, Sabaragamuwa, Kandy, Dimbula, Uva, and Uda Pussallawa (Halpe Tea, 2022).

Even though the Tea industry plays a vital role in our economy, the present industry is facing challenges to earn profit and maintain the sustainability of the sector while managing the high cost of production, land use efficiency and labour productivity (Central Bank Report of Sri Lanka, 2015). The engagement level of the tea plantations and local community activities is very low, and restrictions on the plantations, seasonal fluctuations, and limited access to natural resources can be identified as the main barriers to the field (Prasath & Wickramaratne, 2019). Also, the communities residing in tea estates rely on tea plucking as their primary source of livelihood. Difficult working conditions, strenuous weather, poor housing conditions, lack of access to safe water and safe sanitation, and

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poor health care services have caused serious consequences in the estate community (Senanayake & Wimalarathna, 2012). The industry's growth and sustainability depend on the well-being and empowerment of these estate communities as they are a major part of the tea industry, so the efforts to address the socio-economic challenges and promote sustainable development in the tea estates are crucial to ensuring the long-term resilience and prosperity of both the tea industry and the estate communities.

In Sri Lanka, there is a huge gap when compared with other tea-producing competitors. Other competing countries that have already implemented tea tourism business models in their estates, mainly India and China, are developing their unique experiences using geological, natural, and climatic conditions to attract tourists (Sri Lanka Export Development Board, 2015). Recently, Tea Tourism has been identified as the best option to increase the sustainability of tea lands, but as the fourth largest tea exporter of the world tea market, Sri Lanka has not yet fully identified this tea tourism potential for the country's development (Pearce, 2021). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to identify and expand the true potential of Sri Lanka to become a tea tourism destination through a Sustainable Alternative Livelihood Approach. Focusing on Pedro Tea Estate in Nuwara-Eliya, Sri Lanka, this research examines how integrating sustainable practices and community engagement can enhance the tea tourism landscape, drive economic development, and empower local communities. By demonstrating the benefits of responsible tourism practices, this study seeks to inspire other tea-growing regions to adopt similar strategies, fostering a more sustainable and inclusive global tea tourism industry.

2. Tea tourism Landscapes with Sustainable Alternative Livelihood Approach

2.1. TEA TOURISM INDUSTRY

"Tea tourism is all about the cultural & traditional practices related to the tea plantations & getting real experience related to the tea plantation & it is making process" (Silva, 2008). It involves attracting tourists to tea-producing regions, providing them with insights into the cultivation and harvesting of tea leaves, and offering opportunities to participate in tea-related activities (Fernando et al., 2016). Within the broader context of tourism, tea tourism emerges as a fascinating niche that caters to the growing interest in authentic and immersive experiences that connect with responsible, sustainable and eco-friendly tourism. As tourists seek to engage with tea plantations, understand the intricacies of tea production, and experience the tranquillity of lush landscapes, the potential for empowering local communities through this sector becomes apparent (Sultana & Khan, 2018).

Tea tourism is increasingly recognised as an important scope, as per the trade value and integrated contribution that are marked for the sustainable development of the tourism industry. At present, most tea-growing countries are practising tea tourism as a diversified concept alongside its mainstream (Wipulasena, 2020). Sustainable and eco-friendly practices have become central in the industry, with many tea estates adopting organic cultivation methods and eco-certifications to promote environmentally responsible tourism (Sita et al., 2021). Tea tourism contributes significantly to the economic development of tea-producing regions by generating income and employment opportunities for local communities. Socially, tea tourism facilitates cultural exchange between tourists and local communities, fostering mutual understanding and appreciation (Sultana & Khan, 2018).

2.2. TEA TOURISM AND SUSTAINABLE LANDSCAPE DEVELOPMENT

Sustainable tourism development involves meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. (Bohannon & development, 2018). In the context of sustainable tea tourism landscape development encompasses the creation of sustainable, aesthetically pleasing, and culturally meaningful spaces within tea-growing regions. It involves the integration of tea plantations and their surrounding landscapes to offer immersive experiences to tourists while preserving the ecological and socio-cultural heritage of the area (Yan et al., 2021). By harmoniously blending the natural beauty of tea plantations with well-designed infrastructure and amenities, tea tourism destinations create inviting places that captivate the senses and cater to diverse visitor interests. (Fernando et al., 2016).

Tea tourism, when approached sustainably, can act as a catalyst for landscape development that balances economic prosperity, environmental conservation, and social well-being. By adopting sustainable practices, such as organic tea cultivation, Biodiversity and water conservation, waste management, and community engagement, tea plantations can minimise their environmental footprint and contribute to landscape resilience. Engaging in responsible land use planning and landscape design ensures that the natural and built elements of tea tourism destinations coexist harmoniously, promoting a sense of place and cultural authenticity (Yan et al., 2021). Likewise, by emphasising sustainable landscape development, the tea tourism industry can serve as a model for responsible and inclusive tourism, aligning with global sustainability goals and promoting the well-being of local communities.

2.3. SUSTAINABLE ALTERNATIVE LIVELIHOOD APPROACH IN TEA COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The Sustainable Alternative Livelihoods Approach is a pragmatic, evidence-based, participatory approach to Alternative Livelihoods and Conservation (Bohannon & Development, 2018). In community development, this refers to a strategy that seeks to enhance the livelihood options and well-being of local communities by introducing sustainable and diversified alternative income-generating activities. According to Bohannon & Development, 2018,

this approach aims to reduce dependency on a single livelihood source and promote resilience in the face of economic challenges (International Union for Conservation of Nature, 2012).

According to Pearce (2021), the relationship between tea tourism landscapes and community development is symbiotic. Well-designed and maintained landscapes attract tourists, providing economic opportunities and employment for local communities. In turn, empowered communities play a vital role in preserving the landscapes, cultural heritage, and natural resources that form the foundation of tea tourism. This mutual relationship fosters community engagement, a sense of place, and environmental stewardship. Tea tourism offers a diverse array of economic, social, and cultural initiatives that empower local communities (Senanayake & Wimalaratna, 2012). Economic empowerment includes opportunities for community members to become tour guides, artisans, or entrepreneurs, thereby contributing to their livelihoods. Social empowerment involves cultural exchange programs with tourists, promoting mutual understanding and appreciation. Also, the Development of accessibility, accommodation, activities, amenities, and attraction improvements will provide new job opportunities, enhance the quality of life, and specifically empower women (Bohannon & Development, 2018). Additionally, tea tourism facilitates the preservation of cultural practices, traditions, and indigenous knowledge, further empowering local communities. Implementing this sustainable alternative livelihood in tea tourism landscapes brings numerous benefits; however, challenges related to capacity-building, funding, and navigating complex socio-economic dynamics may arise (Sultana & Khan, 2018).

2.4. TEA COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT WITH SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGS)

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a set of 17 global objectives established by the United Nations in 2015. They aim to address various social, economic, and environmental challenges worldwide and promote a more sustainable and equitable future for all (United Nations, 2023). The SDGs cover areas such as poverty eradication, education, healthcare, gender equality, economic growth, climate change mitigation, and biodiversity preservation. Achieving these goals requires collective action and integration of social, economic, and environmental considerations (United Nations Development Programme, 2023).



Figure 1, 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals
(Source: United Nations, 2023)

With the Sustainable Alternative Livelihoods Approach, tea tourism has the potential to contribute significantly to SDGs due to its multifaceted impact on local communities and tea landscapes (International Union for Conservation of Nature, 2012). By promoting responsible tourism practices and community engagement, tea tourism can directly support SDGs related to Poverty Reduction, Zero Hunger, Good Health and Well-Being, Quality Education, Clean Water and Sanitation, Decent Work and Economic Growth, Sustainable Cities and Communities and Life on Land. These Sustainable Development Goals are interconnected, and the success of one goal often reinforces progress towards others, creating a holistic approach to sustainable development in tea tourism destinations. Through sustainable community development, tea tourism can address these challenges and foster economic growth, social well-being, and environmental conservation.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework for the study will be based on the Landscape Resilience and Community Empowerment Model. The Landscape Resilience component of the model focuses on the capacity of tea tourism landscapes to withstand and recover from disturbances while maintaining natural landscape functions and integrity. The Community Empowerment component of the model emphasises the importance of introducing diverse income-

generating activities that complement the tea industry and provide local communities with economic opportunities. Both these models will align with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that go directly with tea tourism and community development to provide insights into how tea tourism landscapes can be designed, managed, and governed in a way that supports ecological resilience and enhances community well-being. The selected SDGs are highly significant in the context of tea tourism and community empowerment because they reflect the shared responsibility of all stakeholders, including governments, businesses, communities, and tourists, in advancing sustainable development.

Table 1, Selected Sustainable Development Goals for the study (*Source: Author*)

Sustainable Development Goal - 1	No Poverty
Sustainable Development Goal - 2	Zero Hunger
Sustainable Development Goal - 3	Good Health and Well-being
Sustainable Development Goal - 4	Quality Education
Sustainable Development Goal - 6	Clean Water and Sanitation
Sustainable Development Goal - 8	Decent Work and Economic Growth
Sustainable Development Goal - 11	Sustainable Cities and Communities
Sustainable Development Goal - 15	Life on Land

3.2. METHOD OF STUDY

The primary focus of the research is to identify the true potential of Sri Lanka to become a tea tourism destination by integrating strategies to enhance the landscape and community development through a Sustainable Alternative Livelihood Approach. The study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data to gain comprehensive insights into the interplay between community empowerment, sustainable development goals, and tea tourism. The research will utilise a case study approach, focusing on the Pedro Tea Estate in Nuwara-Eliya, Sri Lanka, and it will be conducted using Semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, Questionnaires with both tourists and local community members to analyse their preferences, perceptions, and satisfaction with tea tourism experiences and, on-site observations to gather data on tea tourism activities, community interactions, and landscape practices.

Table 2, Data Collection Method (*Source: Author*)

Data Collection Method	Sample	Purpose	Key Variables
Semi Structured Interviews	Key stakeholders, including tea estate owners, managers, local government officials, tourism operators and community leaders.	To gather in-depth insights about the perspectives, challenges, and opportunities related to tea tourism and sustainable community development.	- Adoption of sustainable tourism practices within the tea estate. - Levels of community engagement in tea tourism activities. - Benefits and challenges related to the economic contributions. - Effects of tea tourism on the social fabric and cultural heritage of the community. - Stakeholder perspectives on future development.
Questionnaires	Individuals visiting the Pedro Tea Estate seeking tourism activities and local community members who are directly involved in or affected by tea tourism activities.	Random sampling for tourists and purposive sampling for community members to ensure diverse representation.	<i>Tourists:</i> - Demographics - Tourism Experience - Satisfaction level - Activities participated in - Reasons for visiting - Awareness and Perceptions of sustainable tourism practices <i>Community Members:</i> - Demographics - Income generation methods - Job opportunities - Economic improvement - Changes in social structures & community well-being. - Levels of involvement in tea tourism activities and decision-making processes.

Data Collection Method	Sample	Purpose	Key Variables
On-Site Observations	Tea tourism activities, community interactions, and landscape development practices in Pedro Tea Estate in Nuwara-Eliya, Sri Lanka	To gather real-time data on the implementation and impact of sustainable practices and community engagement.	- Types of tourism activities offered - Participation levels - Visitor interactions - Engagement between tourists and local community members - Cultural exchanges - Integration of sustainable landscape practices - Biodiversity conservation efforts

The data analysis methods for this study encompass both qualitative and quantitative approaches. For qualitative data, thematic analysis will be employed to identify recurring themes related to sustainable alternative livelihood approaches, community empowerment, and the relationship between tea tourism and community development. For quantitative data, statistical analysis will be conducted to explore the relationships between key variables. The data presentation for this study will include the use of tables to convey the data collected from the surveys effectively. This approach will ensure a clear and comprehensive understanding of the data for readers.

4. Case Study Analysis: Pedro Tea Estate, Nuwara-Eliya, Sri Lanka

Pedro Tea Estate in Nuwara-Eliya, Sri Lanka, has been selected as the case study for this research. The criteria for selecting this estate include its prominence in tea production, unique climatic and geographical features, existing tourism activities, and the potential for community engagement and sustainable development. This estate serves as an ideal representation of tea tourism landscapes and community dynamics in Sri Lanka. Pedro Tea Estate is located in Nuwara-Eliya, which is in the hill highlands of Sri Lanka; it is considered the best-known tea-growing district of Sri Lanka with its impressive lush green tea plantations at an elevation of 6,200ft above sea level. The economy of this area is mainly based on the tourist and agricultural sectors, and nearly 25% of the population is in agriculture, while 32% are engaged in tourism-related services.

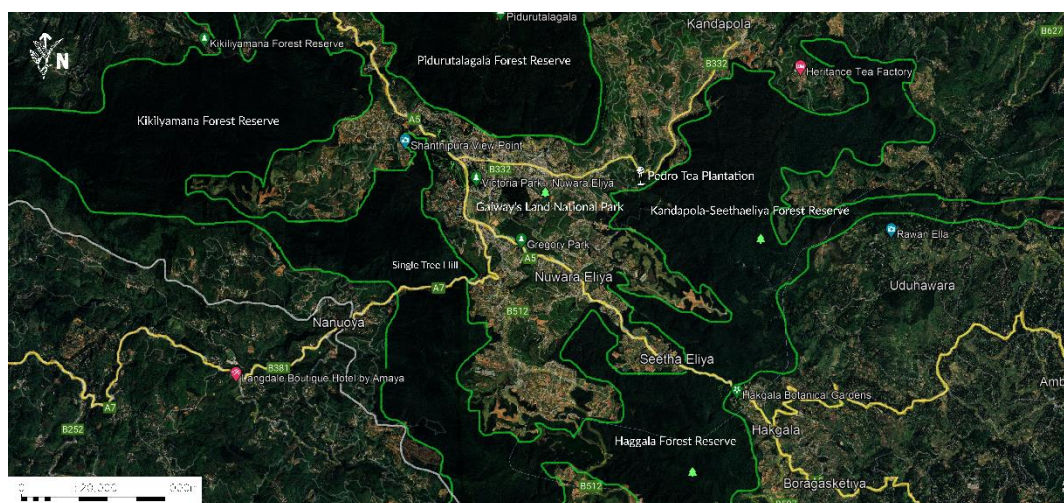


Figure 2, Context Analysis – Nuwara-Eliya
(Source: Adopted from Google Earth, Edited by author)

The Pedro tea estate, which is situated 3.5km from the centre of Nuwara-Eliya town, is a tea landscape with the background of tea estates and cascading waterfalls, and the plantation is surrounded by Pidurutalagala forest reserve, Seetha Eliya Forest reserve, and Bomburu Ella reservoir. This plantation is one of the most iconic Tea estates in the country, and it has a brand image for the most outstanding tea in the Nuwara-Eliya area (Nianthi, 2018). This spot is also where the first tea bushes were planted by James Taylor, giving start to the line of Ceylon tea that followed (Jolliffe & Aslam, 2009). Pedro Tea Estate has embraced tea tourism, welcoming visitors to partake in guided tours that showcase the tea production process. Tourists can witness tea plucking and tea processing and even enjoy tea-tasting sessions. The estate's tea tourism initiatives provide travellers with an educational and cultural experience of the tea industry and Sri Lanka's cultural heritage (Nuwara-Eliya Info, 2023). Its historical legacy, scenic beauty, and commitment to tea tourism make it an essential destination for tea enthusiasts and travellers seeking an authentic experience of Sri Lanka's tea culture and natural beauty.

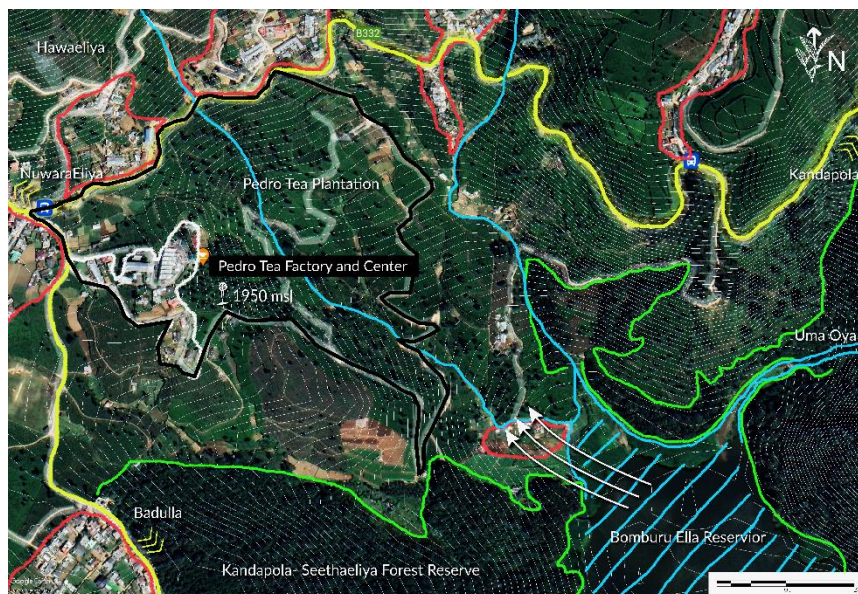


Figure 3, Pedro Tea Estate – Nuwara-Eliya
(Source: Adopted from Google Earth, Edited by Author)

5. Findings and Discussion

The study revealed significant findings and recommendations that can enhance sustainable tea tourism and community empowerment at Pedro Tea Estate, Nuwara-Eliya, Sri Lanka. Key findings highlighted the importance of sustainable practices, the positive economic impacts of tea tourism, and the high satisfaction levels among tourists who value eco-friendly practices. However, challenges such as limited community resources, social cohesion issues, and the need for better integration of community interests were also noted.

According to the questionnaire survey performed on both local and foreign tourists, it was identified that 87% of the participants in the survey had visited the tea plantations before, and the reason for that was to explore the unique tea landscape character. When considering the respondents' destination image expectations, 82% stated that the case study area fulfils their destination image and expectations. Furthermore, they were asked about their satisfaction level with the case study after the visit, and 72% stated that the satisfaction level was very high, 28% stated that it was high, and no one stated the satisfaction level as low. It shows that the overall satisfaction level of respondents was considerably high after visiting the case study area, and 98% of participants stated that they would like to visit the tea plantations again. Furthermore, participants had to select the activities that they engaged in when visiting the tea plantations 97% visited for sightseeing, 84% visited tea shops and tea factories, 53% trekked in tea lands, 87% tested Ceylon Tea, 45% of them have visited to see tea plucking and processing activities by the local community, and 65% have explored and learned about tea culture. Furthermore, the weaknesses of the tourists were analysed, and 74% of them mentioned that the management practices within tea lands need to be improved, 87% stated that the involvement of the local community should be encouraged, and 57% stated that the use of tea lands with sustainable practices should be improved.

According to the analysis, the renowned brand name of "Ceylon Tea" adds authenticity and appeal to the study area, given its global recognition and high-quality status. The local hospitality, expertise, knowledge of tea cultivation, and tea tradition of the estate community provide valuable insights into community perspectives. These strengths collectively enhance the impact of tea tourism in the study area. Also, as weaknesses, one significant weakness is the formulation of slums and shanties in the vicinity, which could negatively impact the aesthetic appeal and overall experience of tea tourism for visitors. Moreover, the study identified a shortage of new innovative ideas when creating tourism products, potentially limiting the diversification and attractiveness of tea tourism experiences. The analysis has identified several opportunities that can significantly benefit the study, such as the adaptive reuse of abandoned areas within the estate, which can be used to create new and unique tea tourism experiences.

Additionally, the high demand for non-chemical crops represents a favourable opportunity for Pedro Tea Estate to embrace sustainable and organic cultivation methods, aligning with the global trend of conscious consumerism and eco-friendly practices. Moreover, the world trend for nature-based experiences presents a significant opportunity for Pedro Tea Estate to showcase its lush landscapes, biodiversity, and sustainable practices, appealing to tourists seeking authentic and environmentally conscious travel experiences. The level of education in the tea plantation sector poses a threat to the empowerment of the community, potentially limiting their participation in decision-making processes and the adoption of sustainable practices. Addressing these threats is vital in ensuring the

long-term viability and success of tea tourism, sustainable landscape development, and community empowerment at Pedro Tea Estate.

Table 3, Major Findings & Recommendations (Source: Author)

Key Variable	Finding	Recommendation
Sustainable Practices	Need for organic cultivation, waste management, biodiversity conservation and energy-efficient practices.	Strengthen organic cultivation, waste management, and energy-efficient practices. Promote these efforts through marketing to attract eco-conscious tourists willing to pay a premium for sustainable options.
Community Involvement	The community is already involved in tourism activities. However, challenges such as limited resources and inadequate integration of community interests in tourism planning were noted.	Develop targeted infrastructure improvements to support community involvement. Ensure that community interests are integrated into tourism planning to foster equitable participation and benefits.
Economic Impacts	Tea tourism has led to positive economic impacts. However, there is a need for better infrastructure and training to support sustainable growth.	Provide training programs to enhance skills related to tourism and sustainable practices. Improve infrastructure to ensure long-term economic growth.
Social and Cultural Impacts	While tea tourism has aided in cultural preservation, it has also occasionally strained social cohesion due to the influx of tourists.	Implement measures such as community awareness programs and forums for dialogue between tourists and residents to foster mutual understanding and respect.
Tourist Satisfaction	Tourists expressed high satisfaction with tea tourism experiences, particularly valuing eco-friendly practices and cultural exchanges.	Introduce eco-friendly tourism products and experiences that align with sustainable practices and community empowerment goals. Consider adaptive reuse of abandoned areas and promotion of nature-based experiences.
Community Feedback	Community members acknowledged the economic benefits but raised concerns about social impacts.	Leverage tea tourism to promote cultural heritage by organising cultural events and educational programs that highlight the local traditions and history of the tea industry.
Tourism Activities	High engagement in various tourism activities, such as guided tours, tea-tasting sessions, and cultural events.	The active participation of tourists in these activities highlights the appeal of experiential tourism and the potential for further developing interactive and immersive experiences.
Future Prospects	There was a consensus among stakeholders on the need for sustainable growth in tea tourism.	Develop new eco-friendly tourism products and enhance community engagement to ensure long-term success.

The findings related to community empowerment underscore both the opportunities and challenges present in integrating local communities into tea tourism at Pedro Tea Estate. Findings revealed a need for deeper and more meaningful community engagement in decision-making processes. While some initiatives for community involvement in tourism activities are in place, challenges such as limited resources and inadequate integration of community interests persist. These issues highlight the necessity for targeted capacity-building programs, better infrastructure, and inclusive planning that genuinely considers the community's needs and aspirations. Moreover, the social impacts of tea tourism were mixed, with cultural preservation being a notable benefit, yet social cohesion occasionally being strained by the influx of tourists. To address these challenges, the study suggests fostering sustainable practices and creating innovative eco-friendly tourism products that align with both the environmental goals and the community's well-being. Overall, empowering the local community through equitable participation and sustainable economic opportunities is crucial for the long-term success of tea tourism and the enhancement of community well-being at Pedro Tea Estate.

6. Conclusion

Tea tourism emerges as a niche form of agro-tourism that connects with responsible, sustainable, and eco-friendly tourism practices. Sri Lanka, being a major tea-producing country, has the potential to capitalise on the global recognition of its renowned brand name "Ceylon Tea" and promote tea agro-tourism as an alternative income source. The introduction of tea tourism can enhance the economic growth of the tea industry while preserving the cultural heritage and biodiversity of tea plantations.

Community empowerment in tea tourism has proven to be a catalyst for positive social, economic, and cultural transformations. Through tea tourism, local communities gain access to additional income sources, improved

livelihoods, and enhanced cultural exchanges with tourists. Empowered communities are actively engaged in decision-making processes, enabling them to shape the direction of tea tourism in a way that aligns with their values and aspirations. Also, Integrated systems, policies, and governance structures are essential for ensuring the sustainability of tea tourism and landscape development. By aligning government regulations, estate management practices, and community involvement, a coherent and sustainable approach can be achieved. Stakeholder collaboration and partnerships play a pivotal role in achieving sustainability goals in tea tourism. Through multi-stakeholder engagement, diverse perspectives can be integrated, enabling the identification of innovative solutions to challenges. The formation of partnerships between tea estates, local communities, non-governmental organisations, and tourism organisations fosters collective action and maximises the positive impact of sustainable practices.

To support communities in achieving sustainability goals while also attaining business value outcomes, tea tourism initiatives should emphasise equitable benefits sharing. Providing fair wages, skill development opportunities, and capacity-building programs for community members fosters economic growth and human capital development. The integration of sustainable practices enhances the environmental value of tea tourism, attracting conscious travellers and bolstering the reputation of Ceylon tea. Based on the research findings, it is recommended that mechanisms for meaningful community involvement in tea tourism planning and decision-making be established. This community involvement can be achieved through participatory workshops, community forums, and regular consultations. Also, continuous research and development are essential to increase sustainability in tea tourism. Embracing current and future methods, technologies, and policies that align with sustainable development goals will foster a dynamic and evolving tea tourism industry. Collaboration with research institutions, government agencies, and international organisations can aid in the exploration and implementation of cutting-edge sustainability practices.

Also, the study aligns with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), reflecting the shared responsibility of all stakeholders in advancing sustainable development. Tea tourism has the potential to contribute significantly to the selected goals in the study by promoting responsible practices and community engagement. SDG 1 (No Poverty) can be achieved by providing local communities with diversified income sources beyond traditional tea plantation activities. This reduces their vulnerability to economic fluctuations and lifts them out of poverty. Tourism-related jobs, such as tour guides, artisans, and entrepreneurs, create employment opportunities and stimulate economic growth in the region. SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) and SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) are relevant due to the potential impact of tea tourism on local food security and water resources. Through sustainable land use practices and responsible water management, tea tourism can support agricultural productivity and access to clean water for both communities and ecosystems. SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being) and SDG 4 (Quality Education) are integral to the well-being of both tourists and local communities. Tea tourism can enhance the access to healthcare services and educational opportunities for community members, leading to improved overall health and educational outcomes. SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) underscores the importance of fostering sustainable practices in tourism destinations. Through sustainable tea tourism landscape development and community engagement, tea tourism can promote environmental conservation, cultural preservation, and long-term resilience in communities. SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) can be achieved by creating jobs, enhancing labour productivity, and promoting sustainable practices. By engaging the local community in decision-making processes and resource management, tea tourism empowers workers and promotes inclusive economic growth. Finally, SDG 15 (Life on Land) can be managed by adopting organic tea cultivation methods and preserving natural habitats in tea-growing regions. Tea tourism landscape development protects terrestrial ecosystems and supports biodiversity conservation. Sustainable practices ensure that tea tourism is aligned with preserving the natural environment and its rich biodiversity. Tea tourism, when aligned with these SDGs, can act as a force for positive change by creating economic opportunities, promoting social inclusion, preserving cultural heritage, and fostering environmental stewardship. Community empowerment and engagement are central to achieving these goals, as empowered communities are more likely to be active participants in sustainable development efforts.

In conclusion, the research identifies the true potential of Sri Lanka as a tea tourism destination and emphasises the importance of integrating strategies to enhance sustainable landscape development and community empowerment. Through responsible practices, community engagement, and collaboration among stakeholders, the tea tourism industry can thrive while preserving the cultural and environmental heritage of tea-growing regions. Ultimately, this research aims to contribute to sustainable landscape development and community empowerment in the context of tea tourism, inspiring other tea-growing regions to embrace a similar approach and create a more sustainable and responsible future for the global tea tourism industry.

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