

A Stakeholder-Centric Approach to Strengthening Marine Sustainability and the Blue Economy

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Abstract

Sri Lanka's unique ecosystems and virgin coastal regions offer significant potential for the growth of a flourishing underwater tourism industry as part of the nation's blue economy framework. This study investigates the techniques that help to enhance tourist experiences and overall fulfillment in Sri Lanka's expanding underwater tourism sector, that supports the long-term development of the country's blue economy. The study aims to identify key factors impacting underwater tourism experiences and the steps that are necessary to develop them. This study utilized qualitative data collected through interviews in order to identify three main areas that require focus for development. The data was collected from industry stakeholders who were involved in the underwater tourism sector. The findings are categorized into three main areas: environmental conservation measures, infrastructure development, and targeted marketing strategies. Based on the results, recommendations are proposed to enhance underwater tourist experiences and implement effective marketing campaigns. Additionally, the study points out the existing gaps in underwater tourism and the blue economy framework in Sri Lanka, recommends strategies that need to be implemented to close this gap. Moreover, the research gives a broader understanding of underwater tourism and offers practical implications for coastal communities, researchers, and industry professionals who want to maximize the sector's potential within the blue economy Framework.

Keywords: Underwater Tourism, Blue Economy, Sri Lanka, Tourist Experience, Tourist Satisfaction.

1. Introduction

In numerous coastal area countries Tourism industry plays a crucial role in order to developing economic growth, contributing significantly to creating job opportunities, infrastructure development of the country, and cultural exchange. In recent years, the blue economy has gained prominence as a sustainable framework for leveraging marine and coastal resources while ensuring environmental conservation. Underwater tourism, which includes activities such as scuba diving, snorkeling, and shipwreck exploration, serves a new market sector within this framework, that helps economic opportunities while promoting marine conservation efforts.(MP Turschwell *a et al.*, 2022)

Sri Lanka, an island nation renowned for its rich marine biodiversity and pristine coastal landscapes, holds significant potential to expand its underwater tourism industry and strengthen its blue economy. The country's oceans are home to vibrant coral reefs, diverse marine life, and historical shipwrecks, making it an attractive destination for marine tourism (Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority, 2022). Although, considering these advantages, Sri Lanka has yet to fully utilize its underwater tourism sector opportunities. Numerous challenges, including poor infrastructure, lack of tourism marketing, environmental concerns, and absence of research on tourist satisfaction, which become a barrier to the growth of this sector (Bari, 2017).

Across the world the expansion of the blue economy has led to the rapid growth of marine-based industries such as coastal mariculture, offshore wind energy, and underwater tourism (Aarflot *et al.*, 2024). However, this change, Sri Lanka has not effectively utilized its marine resources to enhance its blue economy. Based on the previous research suggests that human activities which become harmful and risk marine ecosystems, which leads to the need of the establishment of strict marine resource protection rules and regulations (Viana, Halpern and Gaines, 2017). In the Sri Lankan the concept of understanding the balance between economic benefits and environmental sustainability is essential for the long-term success of underwater tourism.

This study analyze the component that impacting the tourist satisfaction and experience in underwater tourism in Sri Lanka, which highlights the key problems that were faced by tourists, and investigate the strategies to boost the overall experience. The study aims to close the existing research gap by examining the potential of underwater tourism as a pathway to strengthening Sri Lanka's blue economy. The outcomes from this study will contribute valuable strategies for industry stakeholders, policymakers, and local communities, guiding efforts to improve infrastructure, conservation initiatives, and promotional strategies to attract more tourists (Pathirage Kasun Udara Perera and A I Wanathunga, no date).

This study aims to get a better understanding of the underwater tourism industry in Sri Lanka, in conclusion of this study that aims to suggest strategies recommendations for stable tourism development. The research aims to support Sri Lanka to accomplish the positioning itself as a world

class global destination for underwater tourism while ensuring the long-term sustainability of its marine ecosystems(Schadeberg *et al.*, 2024).

2. Literature Review

Tourist satisfaction in underwater tourism is becoming an expanding research area in recent times, notably in the view of enhancing blue economy in the country. There is a well noticeable gap that influencing tourist experiences and satisfaction with the given facts that the research conducted globally (Uzama, 2009; Lakmali, A.A.I and Warnakulasooriya, N.B.F, no date). This section evaluates the existing literature on tourist Experience within the context of underwater tourism. It specifically examine factors that shape these themes with the principles of the blue economy for sustainable development . in this study there is a noticeable gap in studies that deeply explore the qualitative aspects of tourist experience in underwater tourism, particularly in Sri Lanka. This study evaluates the existing literature on tourist experience, the effect of technological improvement, and the link between underwater tourism and the blue economy.

2.1. Tourist Satisfaction in Underwater Tourism

Numerous research has been conducted in order to explore the factors that contribute to tourist satisfaction in general tourism, including infrastructure, hospitality, attractive destination, and pricing (Alegre and Cladera, 2009; Viana, Halpern and Gaines, 2017). When a tourist chooses a traveling destination the person always prioritizes scenic attractions, quality accommodation, food and beverage services, and safety when selecting travel destinations. Primarily, for underwater tourism, elements such as marine life, state of the coral reef, and shipwreck sites significantly enhance the tourist experience (Viana, Halpern and Gaines, 2017).

For underwater tourism, the experience is uniquely shaped by specific environmental and activity-related elements. Furthermore, the satisfaction level always depends on pricing and service quality, which directly affects satisfaction levels. Uzama (2009) mention that food and beverage availability, cleanliness, and cost of the food play a crucial role in how the tourist perceptions regarding the of hospitality. Another satisfaction level deciding element is Political stability since tourists prefer destinations with minimal political unrest, ensuring safety and security during their visits (Abraham Pizam and Yoel Mansfeld, 1999; Scheyvens, 2011; Maunier and Camelis, 2013). The overall effect of these factors influences tourists' high probability of returning to the same destination(Alegre and Cladera, 2009).

2.2. The contribution of technology involvement in enhancing tourist satisfaction

The tourism industry has changed as per the improvement of the latest technological improvement by offering novel opportunities for enhancing the tourist experience.. Yuxiang and Yue (2023) evaluate the improvement of smart tourism technologies on underwater tourism, identifying security, informativeness, accessibility, interactivity, and personalization as key attributes influencing satisfaction. Their research, which analyzed 445 questionnaires, emphasis that digital tools such as virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and mobile applications enhance the overall experience of underwater tourists.

However, a primary limitation of current study is the preference on quantitative data with limited geographical applicability. Zheng and Wu (2023) mention that the need for qualitative approaches to evaluate the emotional and psychological aspects of tourist satisfaction. In Sri Lanka, incorporating smart tourism technology could prominently improves the underwater tourism experiences by offering virtual guides, marine ecosystem simulators, and enhanced safety monitoring systems.

2.3. Underwater Tourism vs the Blue Economy

The blue economy emphasizes sustainable economic growth derived from ocean resources, prioritizing environmental conservation and ecosystem health(Bari, 2017)Although Sri Lanka's coastal areas have historically been used for fishing and logistics, expanding into underwater tourism could create new economic opportunities (Upali Karunaratne, 2024).

The Blue Flag Certification, is the certificate that issue to recognized eco-label for sustainable marine tourism, has been considered for several Sri Lankan beaches, including Hikkaduwa, Trincomalee, and Mirissa (Thirukeswaran, S. and Jayawardena, N.K.R.N., 2024). However, Sri Lanka has not yet obtained an official certification due to the limitation of Sri Lanka's management. The lack of proper conservation efforts, as seen in the case of the Hikkaduwa National Marine Park, has led to declining marine biodiversity and tourist dissatisfaction (Tourism and Biodiversity Conservation, 2024). Addressing these issues through sustainable tourism practices could enhance Sri Lanka's competitiveness in marine tourism.

Even though the underwater tourism has become more popular these days there is a few studies that are conducted related to the marine tourism, research specific to Sri Lanka remains limited. Multiple research projects has examine mass tourism, but considering niche tourism sectors, such as underwater tourism, require further investigations. Current challenges include environmental degradation, limited infrastructure, and a lack of specialized services for underwater tourists (Wasantha Rathnayake, no date).Moreover, misleading marketing strategies have led to tourist dissatisfaction, as expectations often do not align with actual conditions (Abraham Pizam and Yoel Mansfeld, 1999)(Devos, 2024).

Building upon the reviewed literature, there remains a significant research gap in understanding the nuanced, qualitative elements of tourist experience within Sri Lankan underwater tourism. While factors influencing satisfaction are broadly understood, a deeper exploration of how specific environmental, technological, and socio-cultural factors shape the holistic underwater experience in this unique regional context is lacking.

This study mainly focuses on close the research gap by focusing on the qualitative elements of tourist satisfaction in Sri Lankan underwater tourism. By identifying key factors that influence satisfaction and addressing existing challenges, the research will contribute to sustainable tourism improvement and the ways to improve blue economy growth. Furthermore, this study leveraging technological advancements and global best practices can enhance tourist experiences while ensuring marine conservation.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore sustainable growth strategies for Sri Lanka's underwater tourism sector through a stakeholder-centric approach. To gain an extensive understanding of their perspectives, the research focused on the insights of key individuals involved in the underwater tourism industry. Since the research depends on the number of stakeholders who were involved in the underwater industry, provide an extensive understanding of their perspective. The study adapts the Research Onion Model proposed by Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2019) to organize the research process in a systematic way, adopting an interpretivist philosophy in order to capture the complex and dynamic interactions among stakeholders. was chosen as the ideal framework for understanding stakeholder-driven sustainable tourism strategies because it enabled the examination of stakeholder experiences influencing underwater tourism from a constructive viewpoint (Abraham Pizam and Yoel Mansfeld, 1999)

Instant of testing predetermined theories, an inductive research approach helps to create themes and patterns from stakeholders insights. As conducting an inductive study, it make the research easier to figure out new strategies and implementations based on qualitative data, especially considering the lack of academic research conducted in the underwater tourism. Semi-structured interviews were used in this research as to collect data providing an organized approach to obtaining data from the stakeholders point in order to examine the important factors. Interviews were conducted with stakeholders involved in the underwater tourism industry to gather their viewpoint.

3.2. Population and Sampling

Convenience sampling was employed to select participants based which helps for the practical assess for the data collection process which is based on the individual's availability to the researchers. This methods helps to select participants depend on their availability and wiliness to participant in the data collection process. By focusing on key stakeholders, the study aim to capture a holistic view of the challenges and opportunities in achieving sustainable underwater tourism growth, as well as their perspective on enhancing tourist experience. The sample size was determined by the principle of data saturation, ensuring that additional interviews do not introduce new themes or insights.

Specially the stakeholders interviewed included with dive instructors, dive center operators , marine conservation group representatives a total of 15 stakeholders were interviewed.

3.3. Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were parameters in ensuring participant rights and data integrity. Before the interview, all participants who gets involved in this research were informed about the purpose of the study and assured of the privacy and confidentiality of their involvement to this study. Personal identities and responses were maintained confidentially to protect participant privacy, and data was securely stored to prevent unauthorized access.

3.4. Data Collection Process

Interviews from 15 stakeholders have provided comprehensive insights into plans for sustainable growth and the enhancement of tourist experience. From the various perspectives of stakeholders gives the idea of balancing economic growth with environmental conservation which reflects the challenges and opportunities identified by industry stakeholders. The study provides an in-depth understanding regarding the opportunities and challenges that were faced by industrial stakeholders who were involved in underwater tourism.

The study collected data from in-depth semi structured interviews conducted in the key area of underwater tourism which is Unawatuna region. The interview takes place for around 45-60 minutes, which helps to receive in-depth information about the study in order to achieve the goal. The interviews were recorded with the permission of the individual participants and the interviews were transcribed, and created emerging themes were identified. Throughout the data collection the study able to develop a strategic framework that helps to improve the blue economy of the country and improve the environmental conservation from the point of stakeholder's engagement. Thematic analysis is used to examine the qualitative data, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework. The process involves familiarization with interview transcripts, identifying patterns, and coding responses to categorize themes related to conservation efforts, regulatory frameworks, and economic sustainability, and factors enhancing the tourist experience.

4. Results and Discussion

The section analysis and interpretation of the qualitative data information gathered from participants in Sri Lanka's underwater tourist sector which are presented in this chapter. With the focus of identifying vital components that impact the tourist satisfaction and expectation through a stakeholder-centric approach. Stakeholders participated in in-depth semi-structured interviews in order to accomplish these goals, and theme analysis was used to analyze the data.

The data collected from the stakeholders were analyzed, leading to the generation of themes and identification of codes were also partially completed out of the interviews conducted by the stakeholders. This chapter focuses on analyzing the results of the data and giving a perfect strategy for the development of the blue economy.

"For detailed data, please refer to Annexure 1 and 2."

4.1. Tourist Expectations

Tourist experience plays a major role in enhancing the country's blue economy by shaping perceptions and encouraging repeat visits. The initial impression of the tourist experience is often formed by the destination itself, creating a dynamic interplay between expectation and reality. The collected data provided evidence of how tourists are willing to visit Sri Lanka's coastal areas. A diving instructor mentioned that "Some expect to explore the corals, and some look into the hotels, while others come purely for surfing." These different expectations highlight the necessity of market strategy and promotion. Meeting tourists' expectations is for maximizing satisfaction and fostering a positive overall experience (Tourism and Biodiversity Conservation, 2024). "There is not enough coral to explore here in Unawatuna." Which was mentioned by few of the diving master's repeatedly, which has become a crucial point in bridging the gap between proper advertising and promotion of underwater tourism in Sri Lanka to tourists which is the necessity of open advertising and long-term conservation initiatives.. For the tourism industry to grow sustainably and enhance the country's economy, it must align promotional efforts with conservation realities to ensure authentic and satisfying tourist experiences.

4.2. Safety Methods

In the underwater tourism industry safety are a paramount consideration, particularly for diving centers that prioritize compliance with stringent safety standards. The Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI) has rated the diving centers which were located in Sri Lanka which providing the centers a credibility and reputation in the service there provides to the tourist. This helps the centers that the tourist has the trust of they visit the center with the higher worldwide rating leads to the frequent visit of tourists. The dive masters consistently emphasized, "we check the equipment before we go for the dive," explaining that tanks are tested rigorously for safety: "we check for the maximum capacity in

the tank by filling it and if it doesn't burst, we get it certified." This demonstrates the stakeholders commitment towards the safety protocols which having a global standard.

These robust safety measures and continuous advancements are crucial for boosting tourist visits to Sri Lanka. ensuring the safety measures and providing proper training for the diving instructors the country will maintain a standard in global perspective which increase the visit of tourist to Sri Lanka and make the country as the world class tourist destination.

4.3. Diver Experience

Diving centers were observed to offers service with the facilitate accommodation with both experience and in experience divers by providing a basic training session before going to the actual diving. In contrast to beginners, the whole diving process is explained with detailed instruction: "we teach them here, and then go to the shallow and train them practically." Even to the prime diver the diving centres provide a trial dive is performed even before the actual location's prime dive.

On the other hand experience divers, they don't need a training session a diver state that "no need to specifically teach them." These divers have already gone through enough diving experience they have the fundamental ability to dive. While this customized strategy works well, it might be improved even more by providing advanced training sessions or specially designed diving tours for seasoned divers. However, ever tourist who is going to dive will have a training session how to dive with the equipment.

4.4. Tsunami Impact and Coral Degradation

The underwater tourism industry of Sri Lanka has been significantly affected by 2004 tsunami which cause the problem of degradation of coral which is the main attraction point to the tourist in order visit Sri Lanka. The loss of coral biodiversity has left many places unable to recover fully, resulting in a decreased appeal for divers and other marine life enthusiasts. One of the diving instructors highlighted the devastating effects Many coastal areas are not fully recovered by tsunami. A diver mentioned that *"The tsunami destroyed many corals, and there hasn't been much government action for restoration."* The lack of action in this area makes the tourism industry of Sri Lanka into a questionable situation. Despite this, some private centers have initiated coral regeneration efforts, offering a glimmer of hope Even non divers visit Sri Lanka to enjoy the coral through glass bottom boats. Sri Lanka can become more attractive country while increasing Eco-tourism projects. In order to restore Sri Lanka's marine biodiversity and improve as an ecotourism destination, both the public and commercial sectors could work together to make a significant impact.

4.5. Communication Barriers

Effective interaction between tourists is another factor that can affect tourist experience and satisfaction. Language barrier appears when handling international tourists. Most of the tourists cannot speak English language which make the instructors to convey the instruction in an effective way. A dive

master explained, “If there’s a language barrier, we use instructional videos in the tourist’s native language and rely on hand signals underwater. “Even though the new real time technological devices helps to enhance the communication with tourists and could improve communication and make the tourist satisfaction. Despite advances in technology, the language barrier still presents a challenge in providing a seamless experience for international tourists.

However, communication can greatly enhance by the new technologies like underwater communication systems and language translation applications. These technologies can encourage tourists to visit the country. Tourist can fully enjoy their visit through a clear communication, which gives confident in their safety.

The use of more advancement technologies could greatly improve the communication and strength the bond between stakeholders and tourists.

4.6. Weather Conditions

Weather conditions play a major role in diving experience because it is important to have smooth weather conditions to make the diving feasible and quality of underwater tourism activities. Rough sea can make the diving risk which can impact the diving experience. A dive instructor state that, “*If the sea is rough, we inform tourists in advance so they can decide whether to proceed.*” This indicates that some risk-taking tourists are willing to go diving in a challenging condition but even though the safety precautions are strictly followed. Some travelers find the chance to dive in difficult conditions to be attractive, particularly those who are more adventures. But safety is still the first concern. Strict safety procedures are followed by the diving master’s to guarantee everyone's safety, even under these difficult circumstances.

4.7. Feedback and Tourist Satisfaction

The overall feedback received from tourists has been “*actually good.*” This was mentioned several times by all the stakeholders this rating can increase the visiting of the tourist frequently and acts as a good platform for tourism adverting purposes. The positive comments from the tourist can be a positive indicator for the stakeholders to develop their business. However, improvement in areas such as coral availability and offering high quality service can further boost tourist satisfaction.

This feedback provides a strong basement for future development and gives a solid reputation contribution to Sri Lanka to show itself as a top underwater destination. These nice comments can utilize as powerful marketing tools to improve new tourist visit to the country. Stakeholders utilize this feedback to improve their services and concentrate on areas that want improvement.

5. Practical Implication

The interviews which were taken from stakeholders reveal the critical path of the research study that can be notice a clear-cut mismatch between tourist experience and the actual marine resource in Unawatuna region as most of the stakeholders confirm that significant absence of coral in Unawatuna region. This issue mainly is especially relevant when talking about coral reef because many tourists visit Sri Lanka in the hope of see flourishing coral ecosystems. However, the majority of participants, such as diving instructors and tour operators, stated that there was a notable lack of coral in this area. "There is a significant absence of coral in the Unawatuna region," Alegre and Cladera (2009) state that meeting tourist expectations is crucial for satisfaction and repeat visitation. In Sri Lanka, the slow recovery of coral reefs post-2004 tsunami, has left the region underprepared to meet the growing demand for marine tourism.

In addition, while exploring shipwreck is a popular activity the major shipwrecks are located in western coastal rather than southern coastal tourists who travel to the southern coast expecting to see famous wrecks may be let down. According to previous research diver satisfaction is closely linked to the quality of the underwater experience.(Scheyvens, 2011)

While knowing entry-level training is provided for beginner divers, the study found that the research indicated many dive centers had the potential for much more to diversify their offerings for experienced divers. For instance, dive centers could offer more in-depth training sessions and advanced training courses, or even just curated dive tours tailored for experienced divers. These offerings can take form in technical diving courses, underwater photo/video courses, marine conservation dives, or even exploratory dives to places that few divers have been to before! And so forth, to suit different levels of divers interest, and from different styles of diver space that might entice them to come back more often.

And another factor is how international certification (PADI) influences the tourist visit makes the diving centres most credibility. In Sri Lanka PADI certified can earn the attraction of tourist which the engagement of the safety. Therefore, it is important to make sure that diving centers have these certifications and follow global safety guidelines in order to preserve Sri Lanka as a top underwater destination.

6. Conclusion

The research study concludes that emphasis on the key factors that affecting tourist experience and satisfaction in Sri Lanka's Underwater Tourism Industry. Though the stakeholder's point of view they mentioned Expectation, Safety measurements, communication barriers, weather conditions, plays a huge role in shaping up the overall tourist experience. A primary conclusion of this study is the critical

link between enhancing the tourist experience and boosting the country's economic growth.. Accurate information and promotion regarding the country's tourist destination will maintain a strong reputation which leads to the frequent visit of tourists. Moreover, to match the tourist experience it is very important to offer an effective communication which makes the tourist comfortable. Another important factor is safety measurements so the country's diving centers obtain internationally certified diving center such as PADI (Professional Association of Diving Instructors) that guarantees tourist that they are in a safe place which indicates that the diving center follows proper safety protocols. As per the stakeholders' interviews Sri Lanka's diving centers have excellent reputation which the institutions follow a proper safety instruction which attract the tourist more. Training experience is another consideration factor that affects the tourist satisfaction level. Good feedback and return business are the proof that the institution gives a good service to the tourists. The experience of a diving instructor is very important to guarantee smooth operation, especially during emergency situations. Anyhow environmental issues such as coral degradation is become a problematic for this industry. Most of the stakeholders point out that after the 2004 tsunami the government take few action to recover the corals. By addressing these problems and taking conservations efforts make county's tourism industry more appealing in the long future. The weather conditions play a vital role in the country's tourism industry. The experience of the diving center to able to manage the tourist expectations regarding the changing seasonal conditions and gives accurate information regarding climate change. Taking everything into consideration the study emphasis the urgent need of establishing new strategies to grow Sri Lanka's underwater tourism sector thought identifying the issues and resolving the problems through strategical solutions which make the country's economy strong.

6.1. Limitations and Future Directions

This Research provides invaluable insights with the limitation of Unawatuna region. To give more a fuller understanding of underwater tourism sector future studies could be expand to the other regions of Sri Lanka. Additionally Further investigation into effective coral regeneration would be beneficial for government and Stakeholders. Analyzing how tourist expecting regarding the marine resources may also offer crucial insights for enhancing the sustainability of the sector.

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Annexure 01

Theme	Description	Frequency (Dive Master)	Frequency (Industry Stakeholder)	Total Frequency
Tourist Expectations	The expectations tourists have when they come for diving, including seeing coral or exploring the area.	2	3	5
Coral	Discussion on the state of coral reefs and the challenges related to coral regeneration.	1	2	3
Surfing	Tourists' interest in surfing in Unawatuna and nearby areas.	1	1	2
Safety Measures	Ensuring safety before and during the dive, including equipment checks and procedures.	3	3	6
Equipment Checks	The process of checking and ensuring the safety and quality of diving equipment.	2	3	5

Tank Safety	Specific checks related to the safety and condition of tanks used for diving.	2	2	4
Diver Experience	How the diving center accommodates both experienced and beginner divers.	3	3	6
Beginner Divers	Handling and training for beginner divers, including equipment introduction and shallow water practice.	3	1	4
Experienced Divers	The handling and guidance required for experienced divers, such as less supervision and dive path guidance.	2	1	3
Diving Schedule	The timing of dives, with mention of day dives and special night dives.	1	2	3
External Factors	The influence of factors such as Easter attacks, political events, and external challenges on the business.	2	2	4
Tsunami Impact	The damage caused by the 2004 tsunami, particularly to the coral reefs in the area.	2	1	3
Coral Regeneration	Efforts and challenges related to regenerating coral reefs in Unawatuna.	2	1	3
Government Support	The lack of governmental initiatives or funding to	1	1	2

	regenerate coral or support the industry.			
Tourist Feedback	The positive feedback received from tourists regarding their diving experience.	1	2	3
Positive Reviews	The general positive reception from tourists about their diving experiences.	1	1	2
Language Barriers	Challenges faced when tourists speak different languages, and how the center addresses it.	2	2	4
Hand Signals	Use of hand signals to communicate with divers, especially when there are language barriers.	2	1	3
Weather Impact	The effect of weather conditions on diving, including rough seas and visibility.	1	2	3
Rough Sea Conditions	Specific mention of how rough sea conditions affect the diving experience.	1	2	3

Annexure 02

Theme	Code	Quote	Respondent
Career Shift and Motivations	Transition from Biomedical Science to Diving	"I was looking for a more fulfilling career, and diving gave me the chance to combine my passion for water sports with my scientific background."	Respondent 01
	Career Path and Industry Experience	"My background in biomedical science has been useful, but diving is an entirely different field that requires different skills."	Respondent 02
	Personal Journey and Business Motivation	"The journey from a lab to the ocean was both challenging and rewarding. I started my own diving business to share my love for the ocean."	Respondent 03
	Passion for Water Sports	"From a young age, I've always been passionate about water sports. It was a natural transition from surfing to diving."	Respondent 04
Marine Degradation and Environmental Protection	Marine Degradation	"Marine life has been suffering due to overfishing and pollution, and we as divers see it first-hand."	Respondent 02
	Environmental Responsibility and Challenges	"It's difficult to balance business and conservation. There's always pressure to bring in tourists, but the environment is suffering."	Respondent 03
	Impact on Marine Environment	"Tourism is contributing to coral destruction, even though we try to	Respondent 05

		educate tourists about sustainability."	
Tourist Expectations and Activities	Diverse Expectations	"Tourists today are more knowledgeable and have higher expectations about sustainable diving practices."	Respondent 06
	Tourist Awareness and Attitudes	"I've seen a shift in tourists' attitudes, where they now care more about the environment and their impact on it."	Respondent 07
	Tourist Satisfaction and Expectations	"Tourists expect a lot more in terms of experience and education on marine conservation now."	Respondent 03
	Tourist Feedback	"The tourists often leave positive feedback, especially when we incorporate environmental education into the dives."	Respondent 06
	Coral Exploration	"Tourists expect to dive and explore coral, but the thing is there is not enough coral to explore here in Unawatuna."	Respondent 01
Safety and Equipment Management	Safety Protocols and Training	"We conduct thorough safety briefings before each dive, especially when divers are new or inexperienced."	Respondent 01
	Equipment Check	"Every piece of equipment is checked twice to ensure safety, as even a small issue can lead to big problems."	Respondent 04
	Beginner vs. Pro	"Both beginners and experienced divers come... for a beginner we teach on the basics... for a	Respondent 04

		professional we only have to guide on the path of the dive."	
	Emphasis on Safety and Professionalism	"Safety is paramount. We ensure that all divers are briefed on emergency procedures before every dive."	Respondent 02
	Safety Check Process	"There are 3 main parts in our scuba diving gear: the tank, BCD, and the regulator. Those are important parts, and we check for the tank safety like I said earlier."	Respondent 01
	Safety Standards, Diving Certification	"We make sure all our divers have the right certifications. If they don't, we offer courses to help them get certified."	Respondent 03
Tourism Impact and Economic Challenges	Tourism During Crises	"The pandemic hit hard. Post- COVID recovery has been slow, but it's starting to pick up again."	Respondent 01
	Post-COVID Recovery	"Tourism is coming back after COVID, but it's not the same. We need to adapt to new tourist behaviours."	Respondent 04
	Foreign Dependency for Revenue	"Many local businesses rely heavily on foreign tourists for income, which makes them vulnerable during economic crises."	Respondent 05
Government and Community Inaction	Lack of Government Support	"The government hasn't done enough to support the diving industry, especially in terms of infrastructure development."	Respondent 02

Environmental Responsibility and Challenges	Need for Government Support	"Government support is lacking in terms of regulatory standards and investment in training programs."	Respondent 03
	Absence of a Diving Association	"There's no official diving association to help standardize practices or provide resources for divers."	Respondent 06
	Conservation Challenges	"There's a lack of awareness about the impact that tourists have on marine life, which makes it harder to protect the environment."	Respondent 07
	Environmental Impact of Diving	"While diving is a great experience for tourists, it also contributes to coral degradation if proper care is not taken."	Respondent 03
	Sustainability Concerns	"We try to implement sustainability practices, but there's only so much we can do without wider industry support."	Respondent 05
Tourism Promotion and Marketing	Digital Marketing and Social Media	"Social media has played a huge role in marketing our dive business and reaching international tourists."	Respondent 04
	Tourism Promotion and Marketing	"Our business heavily relies on digital marketing to attract tourists, especially post-COVID."	Respondent 06
	Price Comparison with Competitors	"We try to keep our prices competitive with other dive shops in the region, but it's difficult to maintain quality at lower prices."	Respondent 02
	Pricing and Market Positioning	"The cost of courses is an issue for many local divers. We need to balance affordability with quality."	Respondent 07

Diver Demographics and Challenges	Foreigners as Primary Customers	"Foreign tourists make up most of our clientele, and their behaviour and expectations are very different from local divers."	Respondent 01
	Evolving Tourist Expectations	"Tourists are now asking about sustainability and eco-tourism initiatives, which they weren't doing a few years ago."	Respondent 05
	Impact of Weather on Diving	"Weather plays a huge role in diving, especially with rough sea conditions during the monsoon season."	Respondent 06
	Operational Factors and Weather Dependency	"We depend heavily on good weather for diving operations. The weather conditions can cause serious disruptions to our business."	Respondent 04
	Coral Degradation	"The major problem is not having enough corals in Unawatuna, due to the Tsunami the corals were destroyed."	Respondent 01
Language Barriers	Communication Issues	"If a Russian comes for a dive, we use hand signals to communicate underwater. We also show instructional videos in their native language."	Respondent 03
	Non-English Tourists	"If a professional diver comes in, we have to use hand signals anyway... for beginners we show instructional videos in their native language."	Respondent 07
Political/Social Impact	Covid-19 Impact	"During the Covid, there were not many tourists... but now it is getting better, a noticeable increase in divers and courses."	Respondent 07