



## Tourism after Corona (COVID-19) and Recovery Strategies: Market diversification, Nature-based, and Geotourism potentialities in Sri Lanka

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### Abstract

Tourism counts as one of the most significant global economic sectors which could cross cultural boundaries, influence economies, open up an avenue for leisure and relaxation motives, and unite people globally. Despite being a massive contributor to the global economy, tourism promotes millions of direct/indirect employments and cross-cultural mobility. In the post-pandemic era, tourism has become a premier part of the economic boom in Sri Lanka, as the peaceful state and hereditary beauty mingled to attract visitors around the globe. This paper attempts to discover post-pandemic recovery strategies identifying post-pandemic tourism behavior within the economy and potential tourism markets. The study objectives have been reached through a comprehensive secondary data analysis and industry stakeholder survey conducted during September-October 2024. Administered Questionnaires among the respondents to gain an in-depth understanding of (1) nature-based tourism during the present post-pandemic, (2) demographic features of the target market, (3) Geotourism as a potential market to develop, (4) Possible geosites which would be promoted and (5) potential tourism markets. Data was qualitatively analyzed through the Thematic analysis method for a deeper understanding of the concept. The paper provides directions on sector development through sustainable solutions by uplifting the nature-based tourism cluster, geotourism development, market diversification and specifically linking Ramayana Trail with geosites to attract Indian tourist market.

**Keywords:** COVID-19, Geotourism, Nature-based tourism, Socio-economic sustainability, Tourism

### Article History

Received Date: 16.11.2024

Revised Date: 26.12.2024

Published date: 31.12.2024

## 1. Introduction

Global tourism, a critical segment in the global market, can cross boundaries, address diverse cultures, control economies, and unite people globally. Each year millions of tourists visit places all around the globe from the medieval city of Rome to the markets of Dubai to the pristine beaches of Indonesia and the modern avenues of America. This trade of culture and information flows helps to build up these economies and helps to build understanding and appreciation of different societies with diverse cultural traits. The estimated international tourism arrival by 2023 reached approximately 1.3 billion and the gross contribution to the economy through tourism receipts accounted for USD 1.4 trillion (UNWTO 2024) by highlighting the massive contribution to the global economy. Not only does this sector provide income but it is also the key promoter of understanding between the nations, sustaining millions of employments both direct and indirect, and contributing to the renewal of local economies of the worldwide destinations. Over the recent past, global tourism has undergone dramatic changes in tourist flows. Modern tourists are generally in high appreciation of qualitative experiences seeking challenging, cultural, adventurous, or nature-based tourism (Kuenzi, 2008; Silva, 2023; Yari, 2024; Chijioke, 2024; Raihan, 2024; Esparza-Huamanchumo, 2024). This changing demand has thus influenced mobility in the different geographical areas and tourist attractions that were not very popular beforehand. The past few years have witnessed quite a volatility in international travel; however, arrivals are experiencing a gradual increment since the industry is trying to innovate to suit the changing demand with diverse travel motives. This is specially true since the trend in international tourist flows is an important reflection of the state and health of the travel industry and at the same time can be considered as an important indicator of shifts within globalization processes, which are marked as significant milestones for an economy.

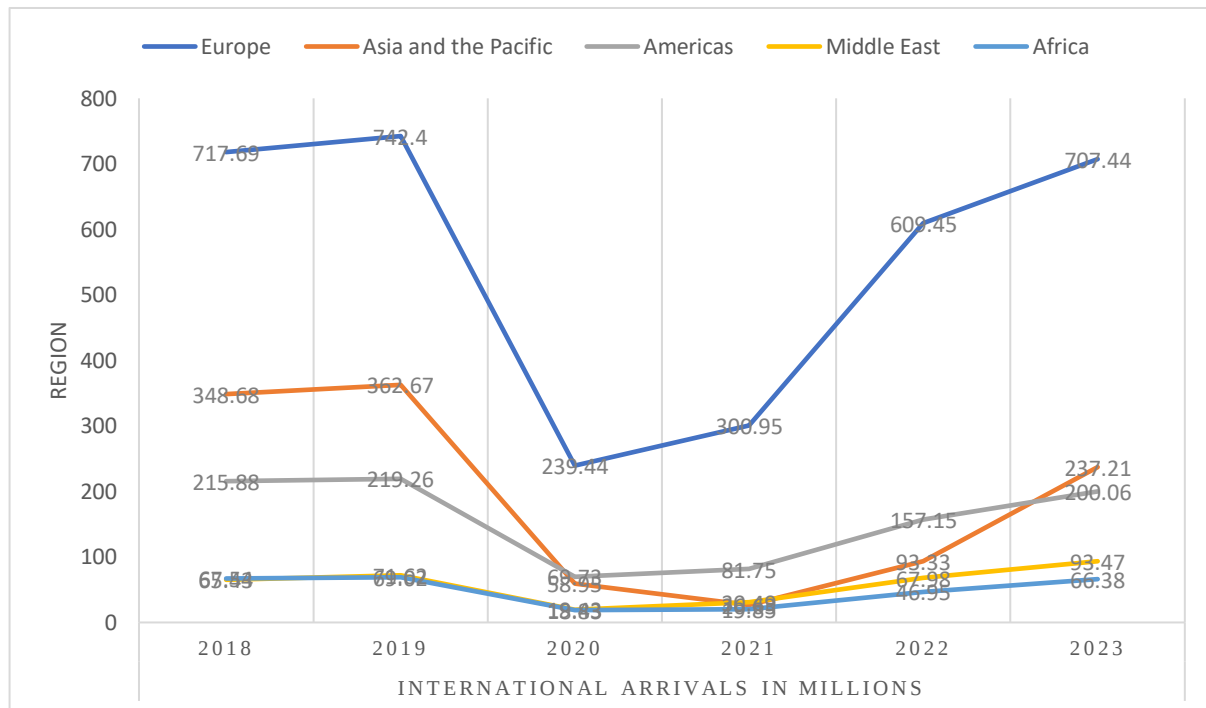
### *1.1 Global Tourism as a vital economic force*

Global tourism has grown tremendously during last two decades and in 2019 international tourists arrived at 1.4 billion which is regarded as the record for international market (World Tourism Barometer, 2024). According to UNWTO, total receipts were accounted as approximately 1.5 trillion USD becoming a significant landmark for the global economy. There are several causes for this spate, such as the growth in disposable income in the emerging economies that enabled people to travel more or relaxed more; upgraded access to transport infrastructure with alternatives mode of travel; and last but not least, the development of organizational and planning technologies of the web and social media. According to the UNWTO (2024), Europe and Asia-Pacific were the most famous regions that received the highest percentage of international tourist arrivals. The increase in arrivals was fueled by many destinations attributes; cultural and historical attractions, culinary tourism, and adventure travel, testifying to the versatility of the sector in meeting users' shifting demands around the world. Global tourism in the year 2020 virtually came to a halt with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic all over the world which highlight a significant breakthrough.

According to UNWTO (2024), a massive decline in international tourist arrivals by 70% was recorded due to the travel bans, social distancing policies and lockdowns early in the COVID-19 pandemic; these nosedived to about 400 million. Decreased drastically to estimates of about USD 0.4 trillion due to an approximately 60% loss of tourism income (UNWTO 2024) and this led to the increased openness of the vulnerabilities of the sector hence challenging stakeholders to look for ways on how they would rebound or build resilience. The pandemic also revealed the necessity of improving safety measures in travel, increasing focus on environmental concerns and the value of the domestic tourism market during a crisis. This underestimation of the domestic tourism market was visible in many tourism destination, where pandemic brought a silver line within it to most parts of the global economy.

However, travelers' spirits did not die, and people continued travel behavior with much safety and health precautions. As measures were relaxed globally by World Health Organization, the number of foreign tourists improved through the following year. When considering tourist arrivals, in 2021 arrivals remained slightly better soon after lifting the lockdowns and social distancing policies, the numbers were 72% below what they once were pre-pandemic (UNWTO,2024). In 2022 a sharp recovery took place as people book travel to get back on track with their lives after being cooped up indoors for so long resulted to uplift the industry again, and tourist arrivals reached up to 917 million which amounted to 68% of pre COVID-19 level. This was driven by the fact that people had not been able to travel as often as they wanted to due to various reasons such as the pandemic and lockdowns and people now want to get out and explore the world they have missed for two years. In 2022, tourism receipts were increased to 1.4 trillion USD, representing about 93% of the receipts from 2019 signing the recovery of the industry and in 2023, International tourist arrivals for the year totaled 1.3 billion an increase of 87% from the year 2019 (UNWTO 2024). International arrivals are expected to be more than 2.3 billion surpassing previous records and tourism receipts will reach more than USD 1.5 trillion according to UNWTO in 2024 (UNWTO 2024).

Another parameter that pointed out the change in the travel industry was the way traveling consumers chose to travel, focusing on service deliveries like eco-tourism, cultural tourism, adventurous tourism, and several nature-based tourism segments specially in novel or unpopular tourism destinations. Figure 1 elaborate the international tourist arrivals in different regions within the years 2018-2023 highlighting the downturn in COVID-19 Pandemic and recovering later.



**Figure 1.** International Tourist Arrivals Worldwide from 2018-2023

Source: UNWTO (2024)

### 1.2 Tourism in global regions and post-pandemic recovery

Tourism can be discussed from a regional perspective because the kind of tourism present in one region may be completely different in another region due to various destination attributes; diverse attractions, economic development, various travel motives, and world trends. Depending on the capacity of a region to attract tourists as well as the revenue generated from other related areas; this appropriateness could explain a lot concerning its place in the ladder of the global tourism.

International tourist arrivals continue visiting Europe as the world's leading region at 58% of the global market in 2023 (UNWTO 2024), where massive attractions like Paris, Madrid, and Rome still attract millions of tourists each year. Europe received the biggest share of international tourists revenue, earning approximately USD 1 trillion in tourism receipts or almost one-fifth of the region's Gross Domestic Production (GDP) (UNWTO,2024). Such strong results can be underpinned by more offerings of cultural, historical, and leisure interests and a green light on post-pandemic resilience. The Asia-Pacific nations have been steadily coming back to normal and are roughly at 65% of their pre-pandemic state by 2023 (UNWTO,2024) and interestingly, South Asia has risen to contribute 95% towards its pre-existing tourism rates by showcasing a strong underpinning. Tourism constitutes a major proportion of the region's revenues through international arrivals and key source destinations include Thailand, Japan, and Australia. For instance, before the COVID-19 pandemic, Thailand received about 20% of its GDP from tourism affirming the role of this sector (UNWTO 2024)

by highlighting the prominence of the sector. Middle Eastern countries has risen by 22% in visitor arrivals in 2023 compared to the pre-COVID-19 including Saudi Arabia & UAE (Dubai). Travel and tourism play a major role in the diversification of the economy within the Middle East countries, specially for those in receipt of a large percentage of GDP from oil exports. This was on the back of tourism receipts which hit an estimated \$80 billion in the year 2023 as the sector gained ascendancy. Both North and South America regained 90% of arrivals before the pandemic by 2023, with arrival trends emphasizing the recovery from the pandemic. Interestingly, the most popular vacation and travel properties are Mexico, the United States, and the Caribbean for both holiday and business purposes, where the region raised almost USD 600 billion in tourism earnings in 2019 (World Tourism Barometer, 2023; UNWTO,2024). The economic impact is significant since tourism creates millions of working opportunities involving accommodations, transportation, and several companies in all regions, and its remarkable to witness that global tourism is regaining its share in the post-pandemic and sector would be remarked as a prominent socio-economic contributor in the future (Yari.2024; Chijioke, 2024; Raihan,2024) .

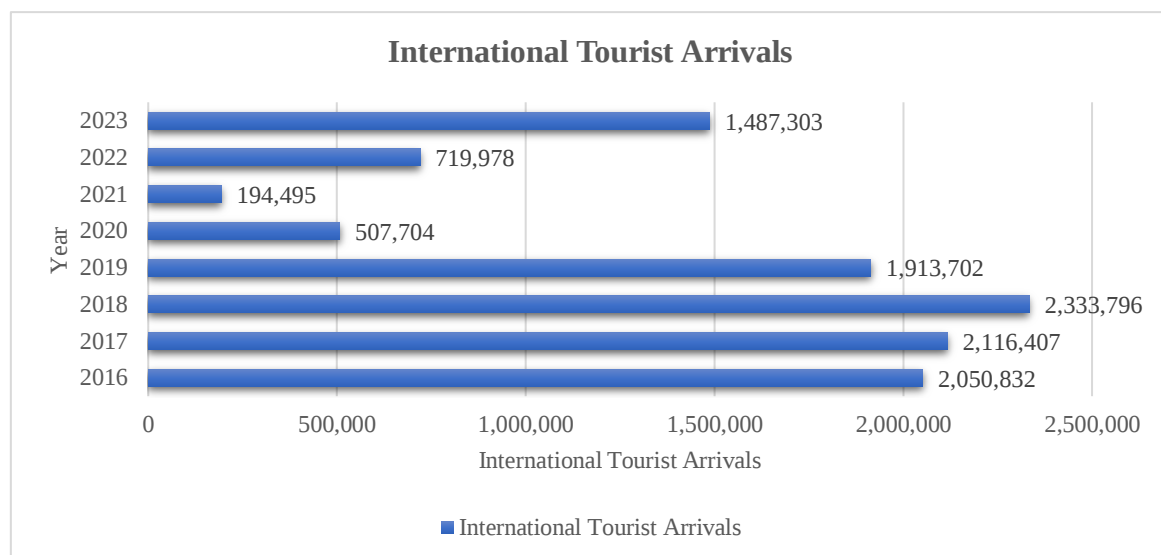
### *1.3 Sri Lankan Tourism: post-pandemic recovery*

As a country in the Indian Ocean, with different geographical features, and ecosystems, Sri Lanka provides many tourism activities for people who want to interact with nature and culture. In the present scenario, the tourism industry has become a premier part in bringing about the economic boom in post-conflict, post-pandemic Sri Lanka, as the peaceful situation and its hereditary beauty mingled to attract many visitors around the globe. As the contribution for foreign exchange earnings, tourism counted as fourth place in the year 2022 and significantly enhanced its position as the third contributor in 2023 by contributing 8.7% of total foreign exchange earnings for the country (Annual statistical report, SLTDA,2023). With this positive situation with the industry boom, international investors have begun to expand the domestic market to cater to the potential growth of tourist arrivals in the recent by investing in major accommodations with Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs) and searching for trending global niche market segments which are targeting demand.

As for the year 2018, Sri Lanka attained a record high tourist arrival of 2.38 million campaigns and development of tourism products and facilities, later in 2019 reduced to 1,900,000 mainly as a direct result of the Easter Sunday Bomb attacks on April 21, 2019, which deeply affected the country's tourism safety image. This tragedy not only cut down visitors immediately but also directed Tourism Marketing and tourism Security for the long term (SLTDA 2019). Thereafter pandemic dragged the tourist arrival figure down further, due to border closures; bans on travel, social distancing measures taken and global health concerns. As a result, tourist arrivals recorded a drastic decline to 507,704 in 2020 which was 1,405,998 lower than to the previous year. Furthermore, the tourism figures dropped further to 194,495 arrivals in 2021. These recent couple of years (Pandemic era) only proved how vulnerable the industry is to fluctuations on the international level and that tourism must be reactive and resilient (SLTDA 2020; SLTDA, 2021).It was remarkable to see the sector recover

significantly in the first few months of the world's gradual recovery from the pandemic. Tourist arrivals were recorded to be 719,978 in 2022 because of the lifting of restrictions, demand for international travel due to stay-at-home periods, and incentives to create that confidence again worldwide. (SLTDA,2022). Tourism arrivals of the year 2023 showed a significant increase of 106.6% compared with the year 2022 indicating a positive trajectory within tourism, and the trend further heightened in 2024. This upwelling replicates the heightened interest of Sri Lanka as a preferred tourist destination within the global market. During the year 2023, total tourism arrivals were recorded as 1,487,303 with an estimated total revenue of 2,067.96 USD Million, which further expanded during the year 2024 to the destination (SLTDA,2023).

Figure 2 highlights the international tourism arrivals to Sri Lanka from 2016-2023 recognizing the fluctuations with lockdowns during COVID-19 and a severe downturn in 2021 due to the Easter bomb attack and regaining the tourism arrivals by 2023.



**Figure 2.** International Tourist Arrivals to Sri Lanka 2016-2023

Source: SLTDA (2023)

The oscillation of the number of tourists during the past five years reveals the important relationship, which exists between the external restraints and the tranquility of the sector to these jolts. The overall safety perceptions need to be managed and enhanced by developing this trend and catering adequately to segmented markets that look for meaningful interactions with destinations.

#### 1.4 Study Objective

This paper attempts to discover post-pandemic recovery strategies for the Tourism sector in Sri Lanka through the primary data gathered from tourism stakeholders in leading Organizations and published secondary data sources in Tourism;

- Recognize post-pandemic tourism behavior within the economy
- Identify potential tourism markets within the post-pandemic era

## 2. Methods and Materials

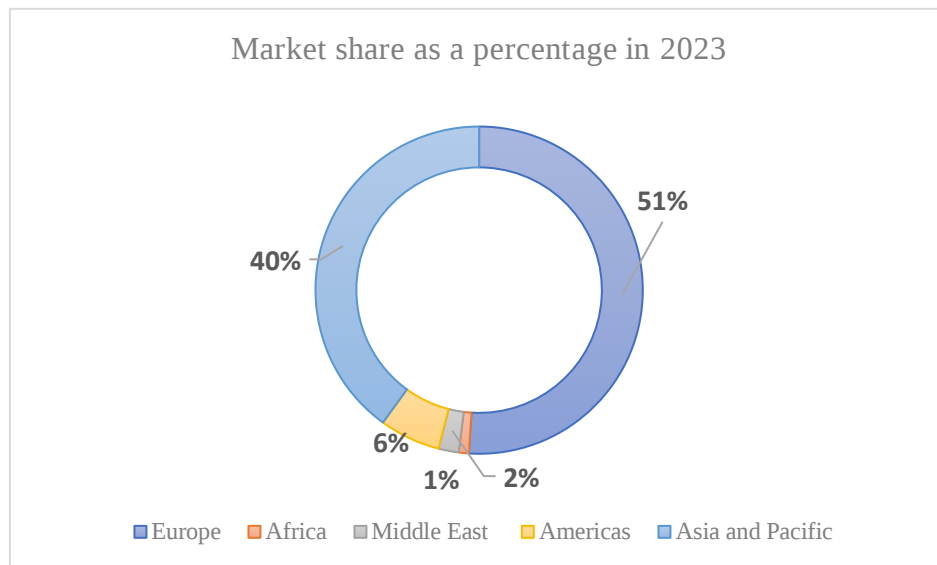
The study objectives have been reached through a comprehensive secondary data analysis and industry stakeholder survey conducted during September-October 2024. Previous literature sources have been demonstrated and stakeholders' views were identified on; potentiality towards nature-based tourism within post-pandemic Sri Lanka, avenues for Geotourism, possible demographic market segments to identified clusters, and potential geotourism sites and nature-based tourism activities with promising market opportunities. Until the data saturation, 25 industry expert opinions from various tourism Establishments were gathered, qualitatively reviewed, and triangulated through literature sources. We have administered Questionnaires among the respondents which consists of Expertise in Tourism and the survey conducted during September-October 2024. To avoid potential bias, it was made clear to the respondents that the data collection was for academic research only, without any affiliation to the government authority or any other administrative setup. The questionnaire contained open-ended questions to gain an in-depth understanding of (1) nature-based tourism during the present post-pandemic, (2) demographic features of the target market, (3) Geotourism as a potential market to develop, (4) Possible geosites which would be promoted in post-pandemic and (5) potential tourism markets to promote in post-pandemic. Informal group discussions were held to probe deeper into the insights and perspectives within the context. Data was qualitatively analyzed through Thematic analysis method for deeper understanding of the concept. Based on each five main segments, thematic analysis method adopted and recent literature sources were supported on data triangulation.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 *Tourism revenue fluctuations in the Post-Pandemic era*

The tourism sector itself generated USD 4.38 billion in the year 2018, which consider is the highest tourism has ever contributed in post-war and that fact shows the significant contribution to the economy. However, revenues drastically reduced to USD 4.4 billion in 2019 and to 1.1 billion USD in 2020 with the existence of the Pandemic. Revenue deteriorated further up to USD 506.9 million in 2021 due to the absence of tourists and the other threads of the unpredictable global economy, including the global economic crisis followed by the pandemic (SLTDA,2023). The number of tourist arrivals and receipts was restored in 2022 to USD 1.7 billion and USD 2.07 billion in 2023 based on the rates of tourism arrivals and bed nights improving accordingly by signaling the recovery from the Pandemic (SLTDA,2023). This growth is a positive signal on the overall health of the industry as well as the efficacy of the various rebound initiatives, of which enhanced security, diversification of attractions that draw tourists, and better target marketing are part. The sector is predicted to reach normalcy with 2.3 million plus tourist arrivals in 2024, as by mid-year recorded over 1.4 million foreign tourists, and through market demand origin from India, Russia, Germany, the UK, and China, among others. These five markets cover about 62 – 65% of total arrivals in the year 2024, approximately 1.5 million from these countries (SLTDA,2023).

Figure 3 illustrates the distribution of the total market share as a percentage value by each region in the year 2023.



**Figure 3.** Tourism market share as a percentage by each region-2023

Source: SLTDA 92023)

According to figure 3, Europe was identified as the largest source market for Sri Lanka followed by the Asia-Pacific region as the second-largest market. All these regions recorded impressive growth in the post-pandemic era. Furthermore, this trend might have resulted from various factors; as such (a) Improved connectivity through diverse modes, enhanced flight routes/ direct flights and diverse travel measures, popularity as a destination with numerous attractions and cost-effective travel plans made travel more convenient for the tourists. Furthermore, fewer travel restrictions, novel target market campaigns, specially nature-based tourism promotions, capturing unpopular micro markets, social media marketing campaigns, and influencer marketing (tourists as influencers) would be vital for sector development, specially with the ongoing economic crisis. Sri Lanka's efforts to resurrect the sector are rather praiseworthy and the complete contribution goes under the banner of digitalization which is also a successful recovery and reviving tourism strategy. As a geography-led sector the more precise localization of tourism, the stronger web impact augmented by virtual tours, and shades of digital marketing have also permitted it to draw global markets.

Despite the positive trends, Sri Lanka's tourism still faces some challenges: while the industry has staged a recovery, issues of political stability in the country as well as other fundamental emerging worth issues as inflation and devaluation of the local currency may militate against the realization of long-term growth. There is vulnerability to reduced international traveler traffic in the future due to a possible slowdown of the economic recovery in major source markets.

#### *4.2 Impact of the Pandemic and Ongoing Economic Crisis*

Until the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic, Sri Lanka's tourism sector was growing progressively (UNWTO, 2019), but due to the outbreak that started in early 2020, international tourist arrivals declined by over 70% (World Bank, 2021) while the sector has shattered overnight. According to an estimate released at the end of the year 2020, the total loss to the tourism industry is more than \$3 billion which had a significant impact on the developmental country's perishing foreign exchange reserve along with other economic constraints besides a decline in collection of remittance and export issues (SLTDA, 2021). Businesses that are indirectly affected mainly those that rely on tourist spending including local tour operators, accommodation providers and souvenir shops among others were not exempted either.

The sector accounted for more than 400,000 direct and indirect employment opportunities before the COVID-19 outbreak, and due to the pandemic, the attrition of employees, reduction in wages, and a drastic pullback of job prospects were observed. Tourism affected the lives of thousands of people in resort-based villages mainly in the Southern and Eastern provinces whose livelihood depends on different trappings like tour guiding, taxi drivers, and hand-made crafts, who operate at the grassroots level on a day-to-day basis, experienced a disruptive impact (Hasna and Sachithanatham 2021). However, the pandemic resulted in many organizations in the world to dismissed, suspending, or cutting workers' wages, and it is believed that between 60 and 70 percent of employees lost their jobs permanently or temporarily in 2020 (International Labour Organization, 2020). These implications were circled towards other economic sectors of the country basically by reducing the purchasing power of the people. To support such post-COVID-19 rebound, domestic tourism was promoted but the outcome was not sufficient to replace vanished foreign tourists.

A further calamitous is that although the country is endowed with beautiful landscapes ancient sites and historical values, it critically relies on beach tourism and is vulnerable to external shocks. Additionally, rapid growth in the sector has been slowed down by political instabilities and economic crises, the situation that developed in Sri Lanka about the state's debt, and the devaluation of the national currency. The IMF and World Bank regretfully note that Sri Lanka must first rebuild its economic base to come out of the crisis unscathed, and the country needs to develop a more sustainable and diversified strategy for tourism (World Bank, 2023).

#### *4.3 Market diversification and embedding of nature-based tourism*

By the end of the year 2024, SLTDA has projected more than USD 4.6 Billion to be generated from tourism. Competitive advantages are there with improved tourist consumption, where the tourists' daily spending has gone up from the current USD 180 to over USD 200 – 205 (SLTDA, 2023) along with the bed nights (number of nights spent within a destination). Additionally, the annual revenue per foreign tourist visit is expected to rise higher and each tourist spent about USD 2,000 in a single trip in 2024 showing higher spending power and longer length of stay. This would be a green light for new strategies on post-pandemic recovery

by identifying market diversifications from the traditional phase. Because of the quest from the global market for environment-friendly travel and tourism activities, Sri Lanka has encouraged many nature-tourism novelties specially targeting the high-end European market.

The Northern and Eastern provinces were previously off-limits during the war; they emerged as the new zones for the development of tourism. User-customized tourist destinations complement settled tourist-friendly areas such as Jaffna, Trincomalee, Arugambay, and Batticaloa in Sri Lanka that may get sun-tanned, virgin land, virgin nature, and cultures are prominent (Fernando 2016) . Therefore, nature-based tourism to be more diversified by targeting European tourists with high spending patterns would be aligned with more wealth generation. The global tourism market becoming increasingly competitive and customer-oriented, and this context offers great opportunities to tourism destinations with innovatively designed tourism strategies. A carefully designed systematic strategy on tourism should integrate with activities, products, services, image, infrastructure, and investments, while this work in an economy as a vital building block on economic growth, as delegating with the competitive advantage given by global tourism

#### *4.4 Results and Discussion based on Survey conducted in Sri Lanka*

We have administered Questionnaires among the respondents which consists of Expertise in Tourism and the survey conducted during September-October 2024. To avoid potential bias, it was made clear to the respondents that the data collection was for academic research only, without any affiliation to the government authority or any other administrative setup. The questionnaire contained open-ended questions to gain an in-depth understanding of (1) nature-based tourism during the present post-pandemic, (2) demographic features of the target market, (3) Geotourism as a potential market to develop, (4) Possible geosites which would be promoted in post-pandemic and (5) potential tourism markets to promote in post-pandemic. Informal group discussions were held to probe deeper into the insights and perspectives within the context.

According to the respondents' views, Nature-based tourism is the most prominent sector during the post-pandemic with promising economic gains and sustainability. As a country inherits vast natural resources, the potentialities are vital, whereas numerous potential areas were highlighted by the respondents as illustrated by Table 1.

**Table 1.** Nature-based tourism during the present post-pandemic

|                                                       |                                                   |
|-------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| Nature-based tourism during the present post-pandemic | Camping, eco-trails, and adventure tours          |
|                                                       | Birdwatching, wildlife safaris, and Rock climbing |
|                                                       | cycling, jungle trekking, and hiking track        |

Source: Survey data

Identifying the demographic features of the target market which caters to nature-based tourism is vital in Destination Management Organizations (DMO) and policy making. Subsequently, European tourists were the most prominent target market dominated by

Germany, Switzerland, and Austria. Demographic features vary, as all kind of age groups with both genders in any stage of the life cycle would prefer nature-based travels. This would be an ideal situation as most European tourists stay longer bed-nights within the destination as compared to other regions (SLTDA,2023). All respondents were in favor of developing geotourism as a potential market with promising returns within the post-pandemic. Furthermore, Diverse Geological features would be a significant factor in Cultural and natural heritage integration and educational/scholarly visits. Table 2 illustrates geotourism potentialities emphasized by the expertise.

**Table 2.** Geotourism as a potential market to develop

|                         |                                                                    |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Geotourism potentiality | Capacity analysis and extensive promotion of geosites              |
|                         | Sustainability vibes and Educational tours                         |
|                         | Embedding “Ramayana Trail” with geosites targeting Indian tourists |

Source: Survey data

Respondents highlighted possible geosites which would be promoted during the post-pandemic era in Sri Lanka. Geosites identified were covering all regions within the destination as such, Horton plains, Knuckles mountain range, Riversten, Belilena, Ravana cave, Pilikuttuwa Cave Complex, Adams Bridge (Rama-Sethu), Roomassala, Madolsima and Namunukula mountain range. Refer to figures 4, 5, and 6 which highlight a few of the significant geotourism destinations.



**Figure 4.** Adams Bridge/Rama’s bridge/Rama-Sethu linking India and Sri Lanka

Source: Web sources



**Figure 5.** Horton plains - Sri Lanka

Source: Author



**Figure 6.** Yala national park - Sri Lanka

Source: Author

Potential tourism markets were proposed by the respondents to be highly effective with increasing tourism volumes. Amongst, (a) Spice Gardens as a tourism product, (b) Health and Wellness Tourism, (c) Culinary and (d) Gastronomy tourism, (e) Education and Volunteer tourism were prominent. The sustainability and environmental harmonization regulations need to be strengthened whereas infrastructure development and participatory approach were highlighted. Interestingly, community volunteering on travel experiences was significant while providing a memorable, meaningful, and enjoyable travel experience to the visitor. Ultimately, within the post-pandemic recovery, these could be identified as recovery strategies to the destination. Table 3 provides overall insights into the tourism stakeholders' efforts to improve the sector.

**Table 3.** Recovery strategies

|                                      |                                                                                                                 |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Nature-based tourism cluster         | Novel target markets globally for nature-based tourism                                                          |
|                                      | Geotourism development; Identifying geosites, capacity assessment, and meaningful visitation (Trekking, hiking) |
|                                      | National park development, Wildlife tourism                                                                     |
|                                      | Tea, Gem, Health and Wellness, and other niche markets                                                          |
| Infrastructure development           | Accessibility, road conditions and local transportation                                                         |
|                                      | Sanitation, health and communication                                                                            |
| Water sports/marine tourism          | Snorkeling, Scuba diving and Surfing                                                                            |
|                                      | Whale watching/Turtle watching                                                                                  |
| Destination Management and Marketing | Fostering the Destination Branding/global promotion                                                             |
|                                      | Disaster management and ensuring the safety                                                                     |
|                                      | Standard accommodations, Homestays, and other                                                                   |

Interestingly, this would provide a much-emphasized green light on economic policy development during the ongoing financial crisis. These findings would shed light on a novel paradigm to cope up with the increasing tourism numbers from the global market towards sustainability.

The results of the survey were triangulated with the recent literature and statistics, whereas to propose the recovery strategies in post-pandemic.

## 5. Conclusion

Global tourism has undergone dramatic fluctuations in tourist flows in recent past due to diverse travel motivations, increased demand for relaxation, and perception of embracing the different cultures. This fluctuating demand influenced mobility in the different geographical areas/tourist attractions/destinations that were not much popular beforehand. This paper attempts to ascertain (a) post-pandemic tourism behavior within the economy and (b) identify potential tourism markets within the post-pandemic era. The study objectives have been reached through a comprehensive secondary data analysis and industry stakeholder survey conducted during September-October 2024. The paper concludes by providing insights on developing the sector in the post-pandemic era which would be a sustainable solution to the socio-economic development ; (1) uplifting the nature-based tourism cluster was prioritized and (2) geotourism development through geosites, geoparks, and (3) linking of the Ramayana Trail with geosites to attract Indian tourists was highlighted.

### 5.1 Limitations and future research directions

The study focuses on recovery strategies in the post-pandemic era through tourism stakeholder consultation. Fundamentally, the supply side within the tourism market is considered, whereas the Demand side stakeholder groups might be incorporated. Since the paper has few drawbacks researchers allow future investigators to carry out further scholarly work on both the Demand-side and Supply-side stakeholders. Furthermore, the study signals

more widespread scholarly outcomes on nature-based tourism clusters. Consequently, geotourism, and specifically the Ramayana trail linking with geosites as a novel tourism product targeting a specialized tourism market could be further explored.

### Acknowledgement

This scholarly work is a part of the research project on “Harmonizing the Environment through Geotourism Niche Market in Sri Lanka: Paradigm for Socio-Economic Sustainability” funded by Gamani Corea Foundation (GCF) -2024. Authors are pleased to acknowledge the funding facilities from GCF Research Grant number 05

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