

**RURAL TOURISM NICHE-MARKET AS A DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY
ON RURAL COMMUNITY: REFERENCE TO HIRIWADUNNA VILLAGE
TRACK, MEEMURE AND HEELOYA KNUCKLES VALLEY TOURISM
VILLAGE, SRI LANKA**

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Abstract

Tourism is one of the main economic sectors as well as a foreign exchange earner to Sri Lanka. Rural tourism is one of the niche markets catered to rural lifestyles and events. The study investigated the rural tourism destinations; Hiriwadunna Village Track, Meemure, and Heeloya Knuckles Valley village, which conduct rural tourism activities on a regular basis as one of their main livelihood. The objectives are to identify the impact of destination attributes on visitor satisfaction and assess the contribution of rural tourism initiatives on the household economy and socio-culture of tourism stakeholders. Purposive sampling method was conducted with dual sets; 100 foreign and local visitors and 12 tourism stakeholders from a rural community. Data were gathered through the survey, and structured interviews and study adopted mixed methods; descriptive and multiple regression with destination attributes (6A's) model as quantitative analysis and thematic analysis as the qualitative analysis method. Findings exhibited a significant influence on the visitor satisfaction of all destination attributes (6A's), and ancillary services have highlighted as the most influential attribute on rural tourism destinations. Further, the thematic analysis revealed, rural tourism is positively influenced by socio-economic benefits on residents' livelihood. As recommendations, (a) promoting sustainable tourism concepts catering to the niche market of "rural tourism", (b) folk culture with the rural tourism experience, (c) mechanism on safety and security of the rural tourism destinations, (d) strategies to popularize the events catering rural lifestyle and activities and (e) marketing programmes on sustainable tourism segments, are provided.

Key words: Rural tourism, Destination attributes, Tourists satisfaction, Destination Management, Tourism

Introduction

Tourism is ranked as the number one industry in the world as compared to its proportion in the world economy. Tourism is the only service industry to represent a positive balance of trade with the flow from first world countries to developing countries exceeding those in the opposite flow by US\$66 Million(Dipietro and Condly, 2007). It is identified as one of the largest and fastest-growing industries in the globe, and it is high growth and development rate, a considerable volume of foreign currency inflows, and infrastructure development actively effect for the various sector of the economy. Besides, it will be affected by the socio and economic development of the country (Nayomi and Gnanapala, 2015). Currently, Tourism is one of the booming industry and a major economic contributor in many developing countries, including Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka is known as a major traveler destination with a variety of resources. Its unique characteristics and strategic placement play a vital role in tourism development. According to the Sri Lanka tourism development authority (SLTDA), Tourism arrival to Sri Lanka during the year 2017 amounted to 2,116,407. It was the third-largest foreign exchange earner in 2017 amounted was 598,356 Million. In the current scenario, new tourism concepts are far beyond traditional tourism concepts, while tourists' preferences have moved from mass tourism to niche tourism. Rural tourism is an emerging trend in Sri Lanka, one of the niche tourism sectors.

According to the Household Income and expenditure survey (2016), the majority of the Sri Lankan population is in rural areas (16.1%) highlighting the opportunity on niche areas related to rural tourism. Scholars Aslam and Awang (2015), stated the inadequacy of rural tourism destinations to cater to the opportunity. Perera (2016) has identified Lakegala, Meemure, Hiriwadunna, Dambulla, and Heeloya as the popular rural tourism destinations in Sri Lanka and Weerasinghe (2018) conducted a case study at Hiriwadunna track. Tourism creates many employments direct and indirect to poor and unskilled as compared to the other industries, due to the low usage of technology in terms of labour intensively. Further, scholars pointed out that the tourism that catered luxury travel needs cannot always be the best strategy (Muhanna, 2007), highlighting the importance of catering to the rural segment. Economic and social impact on the local community depends on how much of the income generated by the tourists go to host communities. When comparing, more than 80% of the benefits of all-inclusive package tours accounted for the airline services, accommodations, and other international companies, while lesser benefits to the local business and community. Thus the Destination attributes of the rural tourism destinations should be highlighted by catering to visitor satisfaction on the rural tourism niche market. Therefore the research questions formulated by highlighting

selected rural tourism destinations were identified as (a) what is the impact of tourism destination attributes on visitor satisfaction in rural tourism destinations? (b) whether there is a community contribution to rural tourism initiatives? The research objectives have been formulated by catering to the selected rural tourism destinations; Hiriwadunna village track, Meemure, and Heeloya Knuckles valley tourism village.

- 1). Identify the impact of destination attributes on visitor satisfaction in rural tourism destinations.
- 2). Identify the community contribution of rural tourism initiatives.

Rural tourism is one of the emerging research areas as the popularity is growing globally as well locally. Since lesser research studies conducted within the Sri Lankan context by focusing the rural tourism, the results of this study would fill the empirical research gap. Further, as a community booster, the findings would cater more towards rural entrepreneurship in the tourism sector as well highlighting how well a rural community can market their hospitality and other natural resources towards sustainable tourism strategy. Therefore the study findings would be beneficial to a larger segment of stakeholders in the community as a winning strategy for future tourism development, both international tourism, and domestic tourism.

Literature Review

World Tourism Organization (WTO) defines tourism as activities of persons traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business, and other purposes. The tourism industry is identified as one of the largest and fastest-growing industries in the globe. Further, high growth and development rate, a considerable volume of foreign currency inflows, and infrastructure development affect the various sectors of the economy. Tourism in Sri Lanka has a long history, whereby, formally entered in 1960 and playing a significant role in the global tourism market (Ministry of Finance and Planning, 2010). Despite the diverse nature, tourism is one of the leading foreign exchange providers to the economy, while identified as one of the best nature-based tourism destinations from ancient time. In addition to the main benefits, the sector is highly affected by the socio and economic development of the country (Nayomi and Gnanapala, 2015). Particularly, top tourism destinations in developing countries such as national parks, wilderness areas, lakes, and cultural sites are generally located in rurality (Okech et al., 2012).

Rural tourism as a niche-market

Tourism is the generic term to cover both demand and supply and has been adopted in various forms and used throughout the world. Niche tourism highly vital in the sector, as a destination with specific niche products, will be able to establish themselves as a niche tourism destination. Among the niches, rural tourism is a niche market based on visitor preferences and needs especially focusing on experiencing rural livelihood (Novelli et al., 2005). Further, tourism in rural areas will increase the benefits for rural residents from rural tourism activities and ensure the relationship between rural tourism development and biodiversity conservation (Aziz, 2018). According to the broader definition of rural tourism, its range of activities, service, and amenities provided by farmers and rural people attract tourists to their areas in order to generate extra income for their business. The niche segment, cover not only farm tourism which is touring in rural areas, but also accommodation plus events, festivals, gastronomy, outdoor recreation products and sales of handicrafts and agricultural product (Aslam and Awang, 2015);(Fernando, 2015). Past literature related to rural tourism (Verbole, 2000; Wilson,2001) suggested rural tourism should be initiated in rural landscapes by the rural community incorporation with other stakeholders in rural areas. According to Buhalis (2000), travelers desire to go back to nature and experience some authentic agricultural process, and agricultural facilities are transformed into leisure activities. Tourism is considered as the development strategy where agricultural activities decline steadily. Scholars Alipour and Kayaman (2011), Randelli et al (2014), Eruera (2008) discuss that rural tourism takes place within the socio-culture and environment of the rural community. According to Okech et al (2012) rural areas are heterogeneous with; spaces where human settlement and infrastructure occupancy only small patches of the landscape. Further, dominated by fields and pastures, woods and forests, water, mountain and desert, places where most people spend on farms, abundance and relative cheapness of land, high transaction costs associated with long-distance and poor infrastructure and geographical conditions that increase political transaction costs and magnify the possibility of elite capture of urban bias. Therefore, the novel tendency among tourists to experience nature and traditional livelihood might create the avenue for this niche market, both foreign and domestic tourism.

Destination attributes on visitor satisfaction

According to scholarly findings, tourists' decisions of "where to travel" determined by the destination attributes and extrinsic motivational factors (Dann,1981). The destination is comprised of various attributes catered for the destination selection that represents a favorable image for the visitors. Moreover, visitor satisfaction and future behavior such as revisit and word of mouth publicity are determined by the destination attributes (Shulb, 2015). Leiper (1995) identified

destinations as places where people travel and choose to stay for a while in order to experience certain features or characteristics a perceived attraction of some sort. As Buhalis cited Cooper et al. (1998), define destination as the focus of facilities and services designed to meet the tourists. Successful destinations combine diverse services, which can be structured as the 6 A's of tourism destinations: Attractions of natural (e.g. mountains, lakes, beaches), artificial (theme parks, amusement parks), or cultural (ritual places/events). Accessibility refers to both the transport to the outside and within a certain destination. Amenities characterize all services facilitating a convenient stay, accommodation, gastronomy, or leisure activities and Available packages refer to the availability of service bundles to direct the tourists' attention to certain unique features of a respective destination. Activities refer to the tourists' travel motives available within the destination both active (hiking, swimming, skiing) and passive (sunbathing, wellness). Ancillary services are not primarily associated with tourism (Opaschowski, 2002; Althof, 2001; Buhalis, 2000). According to Chi (2005), destinations showcased a mix of attractions and support services with a number of common features. Destination components categorized into four A's Such as natural and artificial sites or events, amenities including accommodation, food, and beverages. Accessibility such as local transportation and transport terminals, ancillary services informs of a local organization. Elements of the tourist's destinations classified into primary and secondary sources. Climate, ecology, cultural traditions, and architecture are identified as primary sources and developments, such as hotels, catering, transportation, and amusements identified as secondary resources (Chi and Qu, 2008).

Tourism satisfaction and destination management

The satisfaction of a customer is the major objective in the profit-oriented business. In the tourism and hospitality industry, satisfaction, or perception regarding the destination has been decided based on various factors. Therefore, if a visitor is not satisfied with the service, security, reliability, and credibility, that will result in reducing the potential visitors and repeating visitors. Tourist satisfaction plays a vital role in destination selection, as tourist satisfaction linked to destination choice (Ahmed, 1991) and consumption of products/services and revisit (Stevens 1992 Kozak & Rimmington 2000; Ritchie and Crouch, 2010). Bernini & Cagnone (2014) suggested attributes level conceptualization is desirable for analyzing tourists' satisfaction with the destination. Destination attributes play an essential role in visitor satisfaction and evaluation of attractiveness image. The overall tourists' satisfaction as a function of destination attributes. The studies suggest destination attributes and motivation could have integrated or impact on visitors' satisfaction (Meng et al., 2008). According to Chi and Qu (2008), the quality of the attribute acts as one of the determinant factors to visitor satisfaction and provide a positive influence on overall satisfaction. According to Chi and Qu (2008), attributes satisfaction has also shown to be an antecedent of destination loyalty. Many scholars (Fernando and Wei,

2012; Fernando, 2012) have shown the positive relationship between tourists' satisfaction, revisit intention, and destination attributes, while less number of studies on the negative relationship between destination attributes and visitor satisfaction (Boit and Doh, 2014). Further, staff hospitality and friendliness, activities offered in the area, and natural attractions influenced visitor satisfaction positively. According to Ghose and Johann (2019), tour package features show a positive impact on visitor satisfaction and high impact attractions; culture, and monuments. Further, nature and countryside show a negative effect as a result. According to the Chi, (2005), destination attributes consists of sightseeing (Attraction), price of accommodation (Accommodation), variety of entertainment (Activities), cleanliness, availability of parking (Accessibility).

Rural tourism is considered as one of the niche tourism sectors (Novelli et al., 2005; Fernando, 2015; Paradopoulou, 2016) to contribute to the poverty alleviation in rural tourism destinations. Since the destination attributes play a vital role in shaping up the destination management, the rural tourism destinations might be experiencing the effects of the destination attributes. Further, these destination attributes within the rural tourism destination might work as an extrinsic motivational tool to attract visitors. When considering visitor satisfaction based on the destination attributes, many researchers revealed that there is a positive relationship between visitor satisfaction and destination attributes. Further, some empirical research literature has found a strong positive relationship between the above two variables (Chi and Qu, 2008; Ghose and Johann, 2019). Therefore, this research catered to three distinct rural tourism destinations in Sri Lanka, with their destination attributes and the perception towards the satisfaction of rural tourism. According to Lewis (1996), Tourism is working as an effective development tool for the rural destination, and there is little empirical evidence to support this claim. Existing researchers have been dealing with impact attitudes and perceptions of tourism in rural areas from the perspective of tourists and the community. As a significant contribution to the economy, the remote areas of a destination could be developed as a rural tourism destination, also as an alternative to poverty alleviation. There have been less empirical studies undertaken to develop an integrated strategic framework on this area highlighted by the research gap and huge space on research related to rural tourism development and poverty alleviation in rural areas (Samarathunga et al., 2015) and a little attention has been paid to the rural tourism development in poverty alleviation in the empirical researches.

The conceptual model has been developed by modeling the destination attributes "6 A's model" aligning with rural tourism destinations. The vacuum of scholarly work based on rural tourism will be filled out by adopting this model. Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual model of the study.

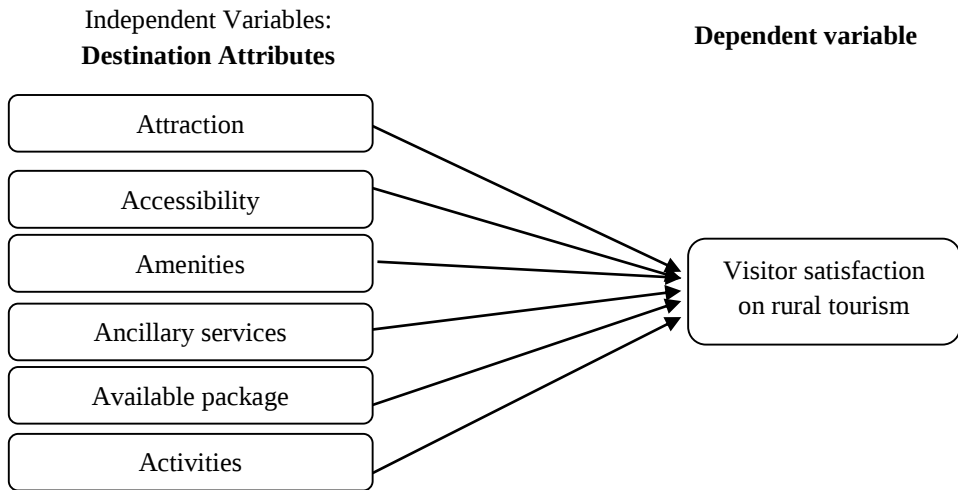


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Source: developed based on the literature survey

Methodology

The study focused on three main rural tourism destinations in Sri Lanka, namely, the Hiriwadunna village track, Meemure, and Heeloya Knuckles valley tourism village. The population of this study is the community and visitors of rural tourism destinations in Sri Lanka. In order to achieve research objectives, 100 local and foreign visitors, and 12 tourism stakeholders were selected purposively for the sample. The study has been conducted during mid-2019, and due to the Easter Bomb attack in April 2019, tourists' arrivals drastically dropped down. Therefore, the sample size was limited to 100 tourists and 12 stakeholders. A pilot test was conducted with a sample of 50 respondents from each destination. The interview was conducted to gain stakeholder's perceptions regarding the economic and socio-cultural impact of rural tourism and thematic analysis used to express stakeholder's perceptions. Primary data was collected through a structured questionnaire filled by the respondents and conducted interview sessions. The questionnaire is comprised of three sections. Demographic analysis, independent variable analysis, and dependent variable analysis, which are based on a five-point Likert scale to capture visitor satisfaction towards rural tourism in Sri Lanka have been used.

This research is based on the mixed-method approach by adopting both quantitative and qualitative methods. The theoretical model with 6 destination attributes (6 A's model) with hypotheses was proposed based on the literature. The conceptual model consists of attraction, accessibility, amenities, ancillary services, available packages, and activities as independent variables, and the questionnaire is laid to measure the impact of 6 destination attributes on visitor satisfaction. To assess the impact of destination attributes and descriptive statistics, multiple regression analysis has been conducted towards visitor satisfaction on rural tourism destination.

Further, thematic analysis has been performed to assess the contribution of rural tourism initiatives to the household economy. Therefore, both quantitative and qualitative methods have been adopted to achieve research objectives developed.

Data Analysis and Discussion

The sample consisted of males (63%) than the female respondents (37%) ranging from 26-35 years of age category. The majority of the respondents were from Europe and the main purpose of the visit was pleasure and vacation (69%). Visitors used online sources and Social media to gain information than the word of mouth marketing (WOM) and Travel agents. Unique and novelty experience was the main objective of respondents (36%) on rural experiences, and the majority opted for village house accommodations (41%) as their favorite.

Descriptive analysis

During the data analysis process, descriptive statistical analysis has been conducted for the sample. Therefore, Table 1 and 2 present a summary of descriptive statistics.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics relating to the Destination attributes

Attribute	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Attraction	100	4.0925	.47362
Tickets prices are reasonable for tour	100	3.84	.762
Natural attractions, Historical and cultural attractions are available	100	4.02	.512
Human made attractions are available	100	4.23	.529
the peaceful atmosphere is available	100	4.28	.792
Accessibility	100	3.7533	.39531
Traditional transportation methods available	100	2.83	.378
An adequate level of vehicle parking facilities	100	4.16	.507
Comfortable vehicles are available	100	4.27	.709
Amenities	100	4.8800	.19831
Accommodation facilities with local row materials	100	4.77	.423
Quality catering and hospitality service	100	4.91	.288
shops with local handicrafts	100	4.96	.197

Ancillary Services	100	4.0660	.35851
Considerable amount of banking and financial facility	100	2.94	.371
Availability of Telecommunication facility	100	3.22	.811
Enough safety and security	100	3.22	.811
Information services for travellers	100	4.58	.606
Quality sanitation and drinking water	100	4.75	.597
	100	4.85	.500
Available packages	100	4.1133	.26893
Availability of pre-arranged Rural tour packages	100	4.44	.592
Availability of Tailor-made Rural tour packages	100	2.98	.376
Village guide services	100	4.92	.273
Activities	100	4.9600	.15191
Availability of the number of recreational activities	100	4.98	.141
Eco-tourism activities are available	100	4.95	.219
Cultural activities are available	100	4.95	.219

Source: survey

The results of the descriptive analysis imply that all the destination attributes positively influence on visitor satisfaction towards rural destinations. Accordingly, attraction, accessibility, amenities, available services, ancillary services, and activities accounted for mean value are 4.0925, 3.7533, 4.8800, 4.0660, 4.1133 , and 4.9600, respectively. The visitors have almost agreed with the overall activities of rural destinations with a positive perception of rural tourism destinations.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics related to rural tourism satisfaction

Attributes	N	Mean	S. Deviation
Preferences	100	4.9500	.13711
Village rules and regulations	100	4.90	.302
flexible for tourists	100	4.98	.141
Hope to revisit	100	4.98	.141
Recommended to others	100	4.97	.171
Happiness	100	4.9467	.12282
I am satisfied with a visit	100	4.88	.327
Destinations are clean	100	4.96	.197
Free health and safety facilities in an emergency situation	100	5.00	.000

Source: Survey

Visitors showed a positive perception regarding the destination attributes as the mean value of the dependent variable is 4.6971, which implies an overall positive perception of the visitors with the dispersion of 0.12256 values.

Regression Results

During the data analysis process, to analyze the impact of the destination attributes, the multiple regression has been conducted after testing the reliability of the data and four assumptions. Table 3 presents the summary details of models, Table 4 presents the coefficients of independent variables, and Table 5 presents the summary of the Regression analysis.

Table 3. Measurement Model Summary

Figure		Value			
R		.938			
R Square		.880			
Adjusted R Square		.872			
Standard error of estimate		.04389			
Model	Sum of Square	Mean Square	DF	F	Sig.
Regression	1.308	.218	6	113.196	0.000
Residual	.179	.002	93		
Total	1.487		99		

Source: Survey

According to table 3 and 4 model summary, the multiple correlations (R) is 0.938 and Adjusted R Square estimated to 0.872. As the coefficient is greater than 0.7, there is a strong association (87%) jointly with destination attributes (independent variables) and visitor satisfaction (dependent variable). Further, P-value of the model, which is 0.000 ($P < 0.05$), represents that the overall model is statistically significant.

Table 4 Coefficients of Independent Variables

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	P Value
	B	Std. Error	Beta	
(Constant)	1.924	.202		.000
Attractions	.025	.009	.095	.011
Accessibility	.114	.014	.367	.000
Amenities	.087	.030	.140	.005
Ancillary Services	.188	.019	.549	.000
Available Packages	.054	.017	.117	.002
Activities	.169	.032	.210	.000

Source: Survey

Regression Model

$$VS = \beta_0 + \beta_1 (ATT) + \beta_2 (ACC) + \beta_3(AME) + \beta_4(ANC) + \beta_5(APK) + \beta_6(ACT) + \varepsilon$$

$$VS = 1.924 + 0.025 (ATT) + 0.114(ACC) + 0.087 (AME) + 0.188(ANC) + 0.054(APK) + 0.169(ACT) + \varepsilon$$

Table 5 Regression analysis summary

Variable	Coefficient	P Value	Relationship	Status
Attraction	.025	.011	Positive Impact	Significant
Accessibility	.114	.000	Positive Impact	Significant
Amenities	.087	.005	Positive Impact	Significant
Ancillary Services	.188	.000	Positive Impact	Significant
Available Packages	.054	.002	Positive Impact	Significant
Activities	.169	.000	Positive Impact	Significant

Source: Survey

According to the regression analysis (Table 5), the β_0 coefficient of attraction estimated at 0.025 with a positive impact on visitor satisfaction and the P-value of attraction is 0.011 is significant. β_0 coefficient of accessibility is recorded as 0.114 with positive impact and significance while Amenities estimated as 0.087 provides a significant positive impact on visitor satisfaction. Ancillary service estimated as 0.188, available packages as 0.054, and activities as 0.169, all variables are significant and have a positive impact on the dependent variable. The results (Table 5) imply that all destination attributes (attraction, accessibility, amenities, ancillary services, available package, and activities) are highly significant for the model and the ancillary services (0.549) are the most influencing attribute out of the six destination attributes. Therefore, the rural tourism destination attributes will positively effect on enhancing visitor satisfaction on rural tourism.

Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis has been conducted to achieve the second research objective on community contribution from a stakeholder perspective. Table 6 illustrates the summary of the thematic analysis.

Table 6 *Summary of the thematic analysis*

Parent themes	Sub-themes	Sub/Sub-themes
1. Economic	Job creation	Positive impact Self-employment Employment in tourism businesses Negative impact Poor quality job Seasonality of tourism-related business
	Economic growth	Positive impact Income generation Generate supplementary income for people Infrastructure development Introduce a new market for tourism products Reduce migration Negative impact Cost of living
	Women employment	
2. Socio-Cultural	Destination image	Positive impact Improvement of destination image and community pride Protection of culture and local tradition (Lifestyle, traditional festivals, arts, Crafts)
	Culture exchange	Positive impact Social relationship Negative impact Cultural influences Drug abuse Misbehavior
	Living standards	
	Social empowerment	

Source: Survey

With regard to the economic and socio-cultural impact, both positive and negative responses have been provided by the respondents. From the economic impacts (a) economic growth (b) income generation and (c) women employment creation were highlighted. From the negative impacts, the cost of living has been highlighted. According to Scheyvens (1999), the importance of tourism's impact on the economy has resulted in the personal economic benefits from tourism to become one of the most consistent predictors of residents' support for tourism. In addition to economic impact, socio-cultural impacts in both directions have been highlighted.

From the socio-cultural impacts, (a) destination image (b) prominence on local culture (c) enhancing living standards and (d) social empowerment were highlighted positively and as negative impacts, (a) social misbehavior (b) drug abuse and (c) social influences were highlighted. The majority of the respondents highlighted that the collaboration between both economic and socio-cultural factors would lead towards a possible loss of negative impacts while maximizing the positive impacts. Tourism strives to preserve the local culture and exchange between tourists and locals leads to enhance positive impact on cultural identity such as improvement of destination image and community pride, social relationship, preserve the culture and local tradition. According to Dipietro and Condly, (2007), positive socio-cultural factors might enhance self-esteem, positive attitudes on culture and customs, and community pride. Gannon (2009), also mentioned pride and sense of place might help to build community infrastructure, promote a team community spirit as the positive socio-cultural impacts. In a summary, most of the respondents are affected positively in economic and social terms from rural tourism than negatively.

There is a high potentiality to eradicate poverty from rural tourism in a developing destination. In village track-Hiriwadunna, the security of the tourists and service quality might be at risk, due to unavailability of safety guidelines, herein, register the tour operational activities under the registered body and programmes for promotion are highlighted. Further, the majority of the community, financially sustain through rural tourism, and positively contribute to enhancing residents' livelihoods. Agro-tourism is one of the main tourism segments that can be successfully operated with agricultural activities, and Meemure is a traditional village where the fresh traditional Sri Lankan life can be seen with a vast variety of activities such as bullock carts riding. Therefore, the collaboration between both Rural and Agro-tourism is highlighted. Heeloya is rich with the many traditional agricultural activities, therefore the potentiality to develop harvesting festivals and camping sites in agricultural fields within the area is highlighted. As a holistic approach, rural tourism would enhance the livelihood of the rural community, as well as positively contribute to tourism development in Sri Lanka as a destination.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study highlighted the rural tourism destinations of Sri Lanka namely, Hiriwadunna village track, Meemure, and Heeloya Knuckles Valley Tourism village as destinations and focused on identifying the impact of destination attributes on visitor satisfaction. The vacuum of less research work on rural tourism might fill out

from this study. Two research objectives have been developed, and a mixed-method approach has been adopted to the conceptual model developed by aligning 6 Destination attributes on rural tourism destinations with visitor satisfaction. The findings endorsed all six destination attributes positively impacting on visitor satisfaction towards rural tourism and ancillary services illustrate the highest coefficient with (0.549), highlighting a clear strategy for policy developers. The study attempts to assess the holistic perception of the residents in terms of economic and socio-cultural benefits from rural tourism. Herein the community contribution of rural tourism initiatives to the household economy and socio-cultural betterment of rural tourism stakeholders is highlighted, and perception leads to positive impacts. Hence, future studies might focus on identifying prominent factors other than the destination attribute.

All three rural tourism destinations are highlighted as places that could be developed further as rural tourism destinations. Safety and security of the tourists, service quality by registering tour operators combined with Agro-tourism with traditional Sri Lankan life, and popularize events such as harvesting festivals and camping sites in agricultural fields within the area had been highlighted.

Therefore the researcher would provide recommendations as;

- Promoting sustainable tourism concepts, especially by catering to the niche market of “rural tourism.”
- Combine the folk culture with the rural tourism experience
- Cater safety and security to rural tourism destinations through proper mechanisms.
- Strategies to popularize the events catering to rural lifestyle and activities
- Market programmes on sustainable tourism segments such as agro-tourism, nature-based tourism, community-based tourism, and religious tourism.

Sri Lanka, as one of the famous tourism destinations, could be more popularized with the image among the global market by catering more to authentic rural tourism experiences by popularizing rural tourism destinations. Further, as the main outcome, rural community livelihoods might economically and socio-culturally enrich on adopting win-win strategies.

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