

Identifying Potentials for Improving Tea Tourism in Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT

Even though, tourism industry in Sri Lanka is developing very rapidly, there is a limited evidence of tea tourism. In order to attract potential tourists towards the destinations, existence of required supply components influencing satisfaction and loyalty is vital important. Therefore, the present study aims to assess tourists' interest on existing tea tourism activities, to identify existing tea tourism related supply components and tourists' perception towards these components and to determine factors affecting to willingness to pay (WTP) for supply components at tea tourism destinations. The study was conducted in Central, Uva and Southern Province of Sri Lanka. Primary data were collected from 430 foreign tourists through well designed pre-tested questionnaire, during the period of March to May in 2018. Descriptive statistics, Chi-square goodness-of-fit test and Friedman test were used to analyze data. WTP for supply components was measured by applying Contingent Valuation Method (CVM). An ordinary least square regression model was constructed to determine factors affecting to WTP for supply components. The results revealed that existing tea tourism activities were interested to tourists and the most satisfied supply components were amenities and attractions. Income, civil status and level of satisfaction on supply components were positively impact on WTP. Hence, facilities and services should be provided based on their behavioral variation to keep visitors at highly satisfactory level. Based on the above findings, the study concludes that there is a significant potential for improving tea tourism in Sri Lanka and investment in such projects would lead to bloom-up the tourism industry as well.

Keywords: Contingent valuation method, supply components, tea tourism, tea tourism activities, willingness to pay



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INTRODUCTION

Tourism is viewed as one of the most essential engines of growth and development in Sri Lankan economy, accounting for more than 14.2 percent of foreign exchange earnings and retained its rank in the third level as one of the main sources of foreign exchange earners of the national economy (Anon., 2016). Tourism industry in Sri Lanka is developing very rapidly and tourist arrivals increased from 19,000 in 1966 to 2,116,407 in 2017 (Anon., 2018).

In addition to customary tourist destinations, there are many more potential places in Sri Lanka which have been undiscovered by visitors and could be developed with a little effort to attract them. Tea tourism is recognized as one of the important sectors as per the trade value and integrated contribution marked for the sustainable development in tourism industry (Koththagoda and Dissanayake, 2016). Tea tourism is defined as “tourism that is motivated by interest in the history, traditions and consumption of the beverage tea”. Jolliffe (2013) studied tea history, tea heritage and tea industry in relation to tourism, mainly from the perspective of relationship of tea to travel and tea attraction supply. This includes tea gardens, plantations and factories not originally intended to attract visitors and organized tea museums, exhibits, tours and festivals designed to attract visitors. Tea tourism destinations were identified as exhibiting characteristics of tea related history, traditions, ceremonies, cultivation and production, manufacturing services, festivals and retailing.

Tea plantation is one of the best places to be considered since it has rich resources for supplying tea related tourism experiences as nature walks in tea gardens, character accommodation in former tea factories and tea planter bungalows, tea tasting and retail in café's overlooking tea gardens and tours of producing factories. In addition, some tourism

destinations have potentials to develop as tea tourism destinations by offering high tea, introducing special tea cultures and organizing tea functions. Gunasekara and Momsen (2007) identified opportunities for tea related tourism experiences in Sri Lanka. Premarathna *et al.*, (2006) found that there were a significant number of potential visitors to up country tea estates including foreigners. Another study highlighted ability of upcountry tea plantations in Sri Lanka to convert into profitable ventures through ecotourism and to increase the quality of life of the estate communities (Shyamalie and Rajawardana, 2012).

Although, development of sustainable tea tourism would bring more economic benefits, help to develop market retention and stability of tea industry, less attention has been given to develop this sector. There is a limited evidence of tea tourism in Sri Lanka and only few tea plantations and entrepreneurs engaged in tea tourism. In view of the present status of tea plantations and tourism destinations, the basic resources and infrastructure facilities are available at different capacities. Therefore, the commercial operation of a tea tourism project can be launched with minimum capital investment. Also, amalgamation of two industries, tea and tourism, will generate a wide range of benefits for tea plantations and local communities such as increasing revenue of plantation companies, improving living standards of worker communities specially by generating more employment opportunities and conserving the natural environment (Galagoda *et al.*, 2005).

The management of tea plantations or entrepreneurs, those who expect to engage in tea tourism, has to consider availability of supply components of tourism destinations including attractions such as natural beauty, hand-made beauty, artificial buildings, and special events, accessibility to transportation system, terminals

and vehicles, amenities such as catering, accommodation, retailing and other tourist services, available packages such as pre-arranged packages, activities could be done by tourists while they are in the destination and ancillary services such as banking, telecommunications and hospitals, *etc.*

In order to attract potential tourists towards the destinations, enhance the revisiting choice of tourists towards the destinations and the sustainable development of tea tourism, existence of required supply components influencing satisfaction and loyalty at destinations is vital important. Therefore, the present study aims to assess tourists' interest on existing tea tourism activities, to identify existing tea tourism related supply components and tourists' perception towards these components and to determine factors affecting to willingness to pay (WTP) for supply components of tea tourism destinations.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Since most of the tea tourism destinations and tourism destinations are located in Central, Uva and Southern Province of Sri Lanka, this study was conducted in the above three regions.

The study was based on the secondary and primary data. Secondary data were collected from annual reports of Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority, websites and journal articles. Primary data on interest on tourism activities, existing supply components, satisfaction on supply components and willingness to pay for tea tourism were collected from selected tourism destinations and tourists through well designed pre-tested questionnaire, during the period of March to May in 2018.

Based on the total number of international tourists to Sri Lanka in 2017 (2,116,407 tourists arrivals), the sample size at the 95% confident interval and 4.74% margin of error was 430. In

order to achieve this target, 600 international tourists were chosen for the survey. It was aimed to interview 200 international tourists from each tourist attractive areas such as Nuwara Eliya, Ella and Southern coastal areas and seven tourist hot spots consisting tea tourism destinations and tourism destinations were purposively selected from the tourist on line reviews regarding Sri Lanka tour experience to gather primary data.

In this study, two stage stratified sampling design was applied. At first stage, Time Location Sampling (TLS) was used which is purposeful combination of places and time followed by random sampling (Cantis and Ferrante, 2012). TLS technique was chosen in order to overcome practical difficulty due to a mobile target population. The main problem in sampling these kinds of mobile population is absence of complete lists of units (Cantis and Ferrante, 2012). Therefore, tourists were chosen at the selected places and the time (the peak arrival was taken as the time). At the second stage, first respondent was randomly selected from the tourists arrived at first to the hot spot and then enumerators systematically approached every 3rd international visitor arrived to the same place, making equal probability of selecting each tourists to the sample. Number of tourists selected to the sample from three tourist attractive areas was given in the Table 1.

Table 1. Number of tourists selected to the sample

Destination	Respondents
Hill Country Region (3 tourists destinations situated around Nuwara Eliya)	235
Hill Country Region (2 tourist destinations situated around Ella)	114
Southern Coastal Area (2 tourist destinations situated in Galle fort and Hikkaduwa area)	81
Total	430

Analytical framework

In the present study, descriptive statistics and chi-square goodness-of-fit test were used to identify profile of sample and existing components of tea tourism destinations. Interest on tea tourism activities was evaluated using 5-point Likert scale, 1 means strongly not interesting, 2 means not interesting, 3 means not sure, 4 means interesting, and 5 means strongly interesting. Supply components were also grouped in to five dimensions, namely awareness, accessibility, attractions, ancillary services and amenity (Table 2). The same procedure was followed to assess the tourism activities in selected tourism destinations. Interest on tourism activities and perception on supply components were analyzed using the Friedman test.

Contingent valuation method (CVM) was used to elicit WTP value that tourists place on supply components in tourism destinations. Open-ended elicitation format was used in obtaining the bid variable. However, there are two potential problems associated with such measurement of WTP from open-ended responses. One is the possibility of the presence of a few extreme responses that have a large impact on the mean WTP. Another problem is the possibility of the presence of large fraction of zero responses in the bid variable (*e.g.* protest response). In this study, the questionnaire was designed objectively to minimize these problems during the data collection stage as well as by providing clear information with pictorial presentation about the supply components in tea tourism.

An ordinary least square regression model was constructed for the respondents' response related to the WTP. Several socio-economic and demographic variables were included as independent variables. Therefore, Pearson correlation matrix was used to examine the

multi-collinearity between independent variables. Many functional forms were attempted and the best model was selected based on level of significance of the coefficients and R^2 value and consistence with the economic theory. Data were analyzed using SPSS version 16.0.

Empirical model

The utility model for tea based tourism is characterized by a continuous dependent variable willingness to pay (WTP), and multiple independent variables representing the characteristics of the respondent. The variables included to the model were age, educational level, income, gender, satisfaction on supply components, marital status and tea drinking habit.

The empirical model used in this study was given below.

$$Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_{1i} + \beta_2 X_{2i} + \beta_3 X_{3i} + \beta_4 X_{4i} + \beta_5 X_{5i} + \beta_6 X_{6i} + \beta_7 X_{7i} + U_i$$

where,

Y_i - WTP (USD)

X_1 - age (year)

X_2 - educational level (year)

X_3 - income (USD/year)

X_4 - gender (Dummy variable; if Male =1, Female=0)

X_5 - satisfaction on supply components (Scale developed)

X_6 - marital status (Dummy variable; if married =1, unmarried=0)

X_7 - tea drinking habit (Dummy variable; if yes =1, No=0)

β_i 's - Unknown parameters to be estimated

U_i - Error term

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Profile of the sample

Valuable information on tourists could be obtained by tourist behavior analysis and it will be useful for future development plan of tourism sector. Profile of tourists (age, gender, education, and occupation), source of tourists arrivals, tourists' preferences, modes of information received, purpose of visit and interest on tourism activities were analyzed and presented in the next section.

The sample consist of forty-five nationalities and for the easiness of description, the respondents were classified into five subsets namely; Asian, European, Australian, American and other. Tourists from Asia continued to be the main source of tourist arrivals to Sri Lanka in the year for 50.3 percent of the total share. Number of arrivals from Europe continued to be the second main source of tourism with a share of 39.3 percent (Anon., 2016). Similarly, majority of respondents selected for the study were Asian visitors (53.9%) and European, Australian, American and other visitors represented 34.3

percent, 4.4 percent, 5.3 percent and 2.1 percent, of the sample respectively (Figure About 43 percent of the sample tourists were male. Of the total sample, 62.8 percent were packaged tourists and the rest was free independent travelers. Married and single tourists in the sample represented 47 percent and 53 percent, respectively.

Test statistics, provides the actual result of the chi-square goodness-of-fit test and test statistic is statistically significant: $\chi^2 = 1.584E2$, $p < .0005$. Therefore, we can reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there are statistically significant differences in the proportion of respondents' age, with less portion of respondents "older than 65" (N = 39) compared to other age groups (Table 2). The majority of the respondents were in between 25-35 years age group (N=166).

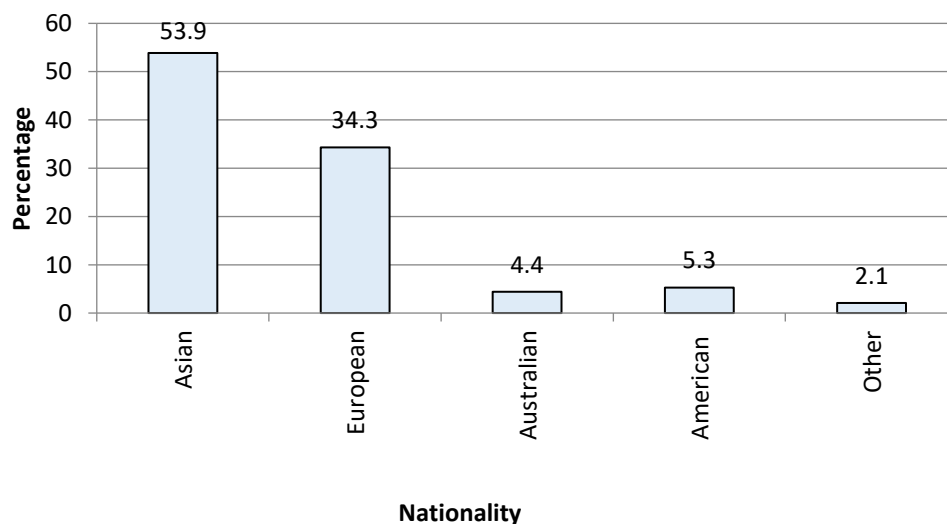


Figure 1. Distribution of respondents according to Nationality

Table 2. Age profile of sample respondents

Age group	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
25 or younger	50	71.7	-21.7
25-35	166	71.7	94.3
36-45	62	71.7	-9.7
46-55	43	71.7	-28.7
56-65	70	71.7	-1.7
Older than 65	39	71.7	-32.7
Total	430		

According to the Tea Statistics ($\chi^2 = 1.699E2^a$, $p < .0005$), there are statistically significant differences in the proportion of respondents with regards to educational level. As presented in the Table 3, the least proportion of respondents had doctoral degree (N=34) and the

The purpose of respondents' travel to Sri Lanka was also studied and given in the Figure 2. Majority of the respondents visited Sri Lanka mainly for sightseeing (85%), sun and beaches (66%) and watching wild life (62%). This shows the potential of converting tea gardens as a

largest proportion was categorized in to education level of master degree (N=185).

About 92 percent of the sample tourists visited Sri Lanka once and the balance tourists visited Sri Lanka more than two times (varied from 2 to 17 times).

Table 3. Respondents' educational level

Education level	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
Secondary	47	107.5	-60.5
College	164	107.5	56.5
Master	185	107.5	77.5
Doctoral	34	107.5	-73.5
Total	430		

tourist hot spot since tea areas are rich in natural beauty. Moreover, the results revealed that 39% of the sample had an interest on tea culture. Therefore, including more cultural events with tea tradition will be advantage to make tourism destinations more attractive.

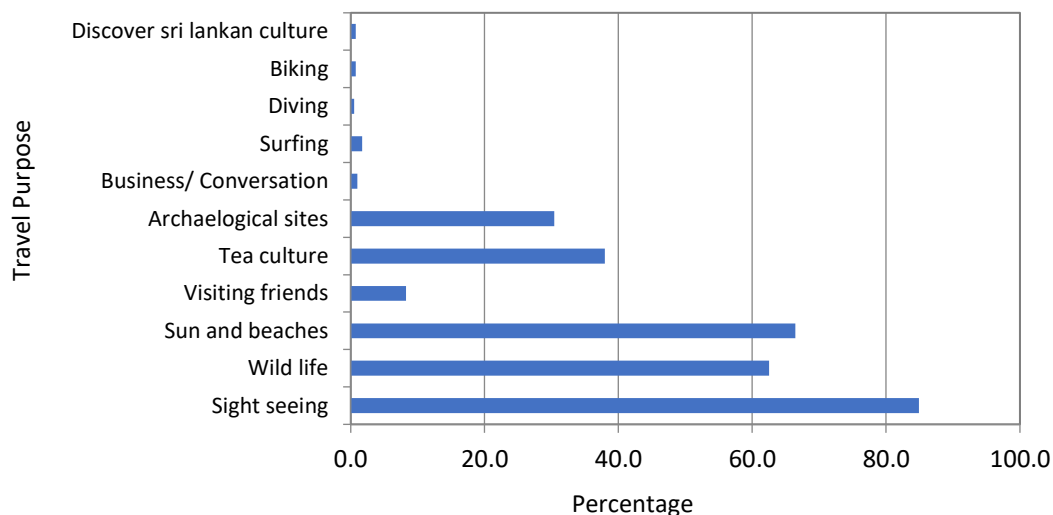


Figure 2. Purpose of respondents' visit to Sri Lanka

The result of the chi-square goodness-of-fit test ($\chi^2 = 3.174E2^a$, $p < .0005$), concluded that there is a significant difference in proportion of respondents' experienced on Ceylon tea.

Majority of sample tourists (N=310) have tasted tea as a beginner and few of them (N=15) have tasted Ceylon tea as an expert (Table 4). It could

be noted that majority of the sample have very small experience on Ceylon tea (71% of the sample). One of the important market strategies can be implemented is promotion of Ceylon tea effectively to increase share in the world market. Making arrangements to supply high-quality pure Ceylon tea at main tourist destinations will also be helpful to popularize Ceylon tea.

Table 4. Respondents' experience on Ceylon tea

Education level	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
Expert	15	143	-128.0
Intermediate	105	143	-38.0
Beginner	310	143	167.0
Total	430		

Majority of the sample (93%) preferred to drink hot tea than cold tea and the preference for different types of tea (black tea, green tea, oolong tea and flavored tea) was also studied and given in the Figure 3.

Knowing income level of the tourists who visit tea tourism destinations is important to get an idea about the required supply components. However, some respondents (35% of the sample) were not willing to give information on their income.

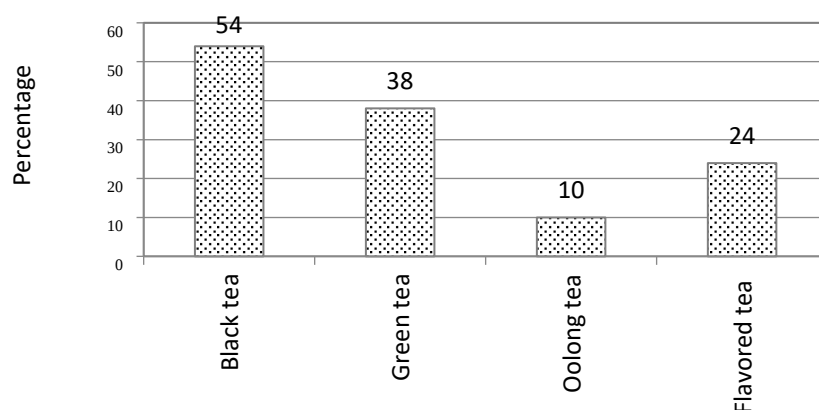


Figure 3. Respondents' Preference for different types of tea

The result of the chi-square goodness-of-fit test ($\chi^2 = 3.021E2^a$, $p < 0.0005$) showed that proportions of the respondents based on the income levels were significantly different. The largest portion of the respondents belonged to annual income category USD 85,000 or more (N=52). It can be noted from the Table 5 that the

considerable portion of the respondents' income level (N=47) was below USD 20,000. The main reason for low income category is some students have also been selected for the survey.

Various modes have been used by the respondents to get the information on tea (Figure 4). They have mainly received information on Ceylon tea through travel experience (23%) and travel guide/brochures (20%).

Majority of the sample had no aware on tea tourism and few had experience on tea tourism in Sri Lanka (31 tourists) and other countries such as Malaysia (10), Vietnam (03), India (09), Japan (01), Taiwan (01), China (08), Thailand (02), Portugal (01), Madagascar (01).

Table 5. Income level of the respondents

Income range (USD/Annum)	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
20,000 or less	47	45.3	1.7
20,000 – 29,999	36	45.3	-9.3
30,000 – 44,999	50	45.3	4.7
45,000 – 59,999	42	45.3	-3.3
60,000 – 84,000	45	45.3	-0.3
85,000 or more	52	45.3	6.7
Total	272		

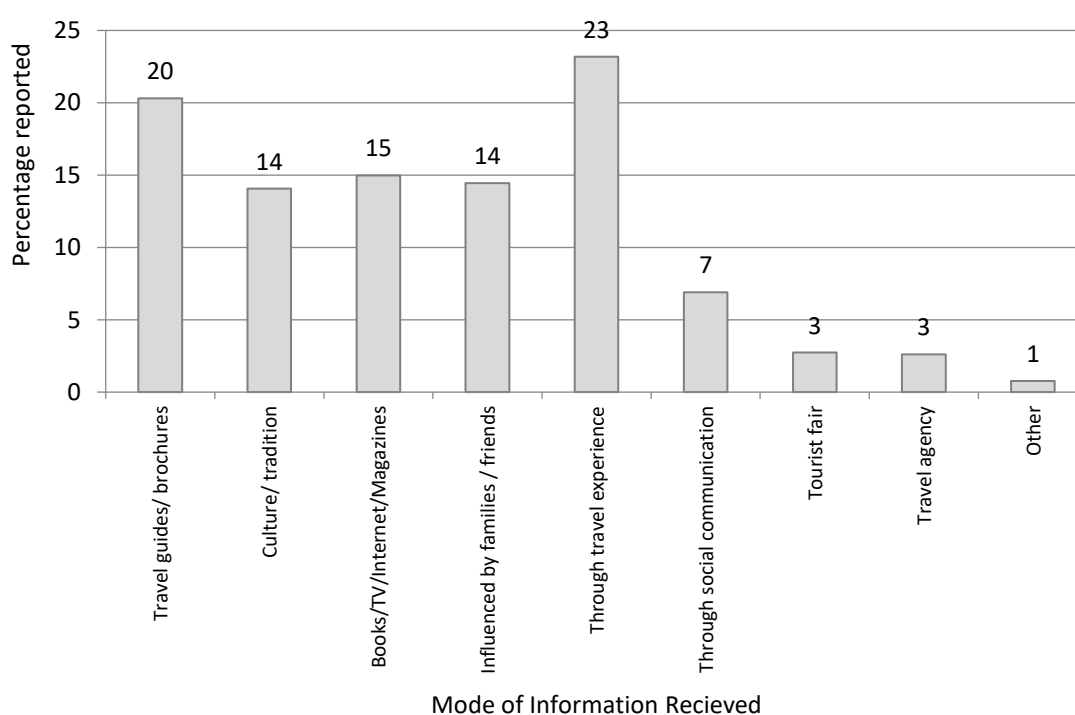


Figure 4. Types of modes used to get tea information

Interest on tea tourism activities

Interest of respondents on tea tourism activities was assessed and presented in the Table 6.

Table 6. Respondents' interest on tea tourism activities

Tourism activities	Mean rank
Tea garden viewing tour	6.68
Experience in tea plucking tour	6.24
Lodging near tea gardens	5.43
Visiting tea museum	4.54
Listening to tea processing information	5.96
Visiting tea factory	7.24
Attending tea ceremony	5.88
Tea tasting	7.51
Tea festivals	4.91
Buying tea products	5.56
Experiencing high tea	6.04

A Friedman test indicated that interest on tourism activities were rated significantly different ($\chi^2 = 414.65$, $p < 0.05$). The mean ranks differ a lot in favour of tea tasting (7.51). In order of ranking the most interested tourism activities were tea tasting (7.51), visiting tea factory (7.24), tea garden viewing tour (6.68), experiencing high tea (6.04), listening to tea processing information (5.96) and attending tea ceremony (5.88).

This information is useful for entrepreneurs who are planning to begin tea tourism and expanding existing tea tourism destinations. Irrelevant to the country of origin, most of the tourists in the sample had willingness to get experience in English high tea. English high tea is trending custom which can be used to attract tea lovers in order to promote Ceylon Tea.

Existing supply components

Supply components of tea tourism destinations were grouped in to five dimensions, namely awareness, accessibility, attractions, ancillary services and amenity (Table 7).

Table 7. Supply components of tea tourism destinations

Dimensions	Supply components
Awareness	Awareness about Ceylon Tea
	Awareness about tea tourism destination in Sri Lanka
	Awareness about tea tourism activities in Sri Lanka
Accessibility	Availability of proper transportation system
	Availability of vehicle parking facilities
Attractions	Peaceful atmosphere
	Man-made attraction
	Special events offered by destination
	Leisure activities of destination
Ancillary services	Availability of telecommunication
	Availability of safety and security
	Availability of sanitary facilities
	Instructions and guidance
	Availability of health care
	Availability of bank services
Amenities	Availability of food and beverage outlets
	Availability of accommodation
	Availability of retail shops

Perception on supply components at tea tourism destinations

Findings on perception of respondents on supply components are presented in the Table 8.

Table 8. Perception of respondents on supply components

Supply components	Mean Rank
Attractions	3.68
Ancillary services	3.03
Amenities	3.70
Awareness	1.51
Accessibility	3.07

According to the test statistics of a Friedman test ($\chi^2 = 643.53$, $p < 0.05$), the mean rank of satisfaction for supply components were not rated similarly and they were significantly different. The most satisfied supply components were amenities (3.70) and attractions (3.68), while the least satisfied component was awareness (1.51). This finding highlights the importance on taking necessary action for aware people on Ceylon tea.

The essential component of sustainable tea tourism is the satisfaction of tourists on supply components at tourism destinations. The results of the study highlighted that most of the supply components such as man-made attractions, special events offered by the destinations, availability of telecommunication, safety and security, instructions, guidance, healthcare, shopping experience and awareness on Ceylon tea and tourism activities, road and network and transport system could be converted in to highly satisfactory level with less investment. It was also revealed from the analysis that there should be appropriate awareness programs on Ceylon tea and tourism activities.

Further, the results indicated that 80 percent of respondents were with the hope of visiting tea

tourism destinations in Sri Lanka in near future. This indicates the potentials for attracting visitors again and again to tea tourism destinations in Sri Lanka.

Preferences of respondents for different tea tourism packages

Four different existing packages varied by types of accommodation facilities, and tourism activities were introduced to respondents to examine their preferences (Table 9).

Table 9. Different tourism packages

Packages	Facilities
Package 1	Bungalow+ Tea plantation nature walk + Cycling & hiking + Buy best tea
Package 2	Bungalow + Tea plantation nature walk + Cycling & hiking + Buy best tea + Tea picking tours
Package 3	Bungalow + Tea plantation nature walk + Cycling & hiking + Buy best tea + Tea picking tours + Experiencing "high tea"
Package 4	Bungalow + Tea plantation nature walk + Cycling & hiking + Buy best tea + Tea picking tours + Experiencing "high tea" + Witness of the making of Ceylon tea (Processing) + Tea tasting session

The result of the chi-square goodness-of-fit test ($\chi^2 = 38.526^a$, $p < .0005$) showed that proportion of respondents with respect to preference of tourism packages was significantly different. As shown in Table 10, the most preferred package (N=139) was package 2 while package 3 was the least preferred one (N=61). WTP for packages varied from USD 42.5 to USD 350.

Table 10. Preferences of respondents for different tea tourism packages

Packages	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
Package 1	73	91.8	-18.8
Package 2	139	91.8	47.2
Package 3	61	91.8	-30.8
Package 4	94	91.8	2.2
Total	367		

Model and the variables

In the present study, an ordinary least square regression model was employed for the respondents' response related to the WTP. The respondent WTP variable was regressed with demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the respondent and level of satisfaction on dimensions of supply components.

WTP = f (Demographic, socio - economic characters of the respondent and level of satisfaction on supply components by respondent)

The independent variables included in the model are defined in the Table 11. The results of the

Pearson correlation matrix showed that there was no multi-collinearity between independent variables considered for the model.

As shown in Table 12, out of 1398788 of total sum of square, 182851 of variation can be explained by regression. Further, it can be concluded that model is statistically significant at 0.01 level of significance (p-value= 0.000).

Coefficient of determination (R^2) was 36% and it is suggested that 36% of total variation of WTP is described by considered variables in the model.

Results obtained from ordinary least square regression implied that income, educational level, age, civil status, satisfaction on supply components, tea drinking habit had positive relationship with WTP and gender has a negative impact. Among those independent variables income, civil status and satisfaction on supply components were significant at 5% level and 10% level, respectively.

Table 11. Independent variables and their expected signs with definition

Variable	Scale of measurement	Expected sign	Definition
Education level		+	With the increasing level of education, increase the WTP
Income	LKR	+	With the increasing personal income of respondent WTP also increases
Gender	M/F	+/-/0	Impact of respondent's gender on WTP
Satisfaction on supply components		+	Impact of satisfaction of respondents to supply components on WTP
Age	Years	+/-/0	Impact of age of respondents on WTP
Civil status		+/-/0	Impact of civil of respondents on WTP
Tea drinking habit		+	Impact of tea drinking habit of respondents on WTP

Table 12. Analysis of variance for simple linear regressions

Model	Sum of Squares	d.f.	F	Sig.
Regression	182851	7	4.86	0.000
Residual	1215937	22		
		6		
Total	1398788	23		
		3		

The significant coefficients of each of the variables indicate the amount of change in dependent variable could expect for a unit change in the value of that independent variable, considering other variables in the model held constant. Sample tourists who earned higher income were more willingness to pay for tea tourism destinations than lower income tourists. Married tourists are willingness to pay more for tourism destination than unmarried ones. The results further explained that if satisfaction level on supply components is high, willingness to pay on tourism destination is also high.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

In recent years, there has been a rapid growth in tourism industry in Sri Lanka, however, only few evidences are available for tea tourism. This

study revealed that currently available tea tourism activities were interested to the tourists and the most interested activities were tea tasting. Moreover, irrelevant to the country of origin, most of the tourists keen to get experience in English high tea. Therefore, entrepreneurs who are planning to begin tea tourism and expanding existing tea tourism destinations can use this information for their business.

The supply components should be developed to give high satisfactory level of the tourists since it is essential component of sustainable tea tourism. Especially attention is needed for organizing appropriate awareness programs on Ceylon tea and tourism activities. Further, income, civil status and level of satisfaction on supply components were positively impact on willingness to pay. In order to earn higher income from tourism industry, increasing tourists' satisfaction through improving supply components is needed. Integration of tea tourism with other sectors, like transport, marketing may also be useful for improving gap between demand and supply of supply components of tea tourism destinations.

Table 13. Results of regression analysis

Variable	Coefficient	Standard error	Probability
Income	0.001	0.000	0.002**
Education level	2.479	6.417	0.700
Age	4.250	3.758	0.259
Gender	-6.148	10.139	0.545
Civil status	12.975	6.956	0.063*
Satisfaction on supply com	17.469	10.669	0.100*
Tea drinking habit	7.175	30.721	0.816
Constant	-13.992	56.546	0.805

**and * denotes the variables significant at 5% level and 10% level, respectively

In addition, the management must consider the visitors' behavioral variation based on their

attitudes, demographic, socio-economic characteristics. Therefore, the facilities and

services should be provided based on their behavioral variation to keep visitors at high satisfactory level. Also, it can be concluded that there is a significant potential for improving tea tourism in Sri Lanka with less investment and such a project would lead to sustain tea industry and to bloom-up the tourism industry as well.

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