

Covid-19: Tourism, issues and challenges in Galle district of southern Sri Lanka

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Abstract

This paper is to evaluate the impact of COVID-19 on the Sri Lankan tourism industry and to understand the issues and challenges faced by the people who depend on the tourism sector. The study is going to cover how the imposed international travel ban affect the tourism industry mainly apart from that the study discusses the short and long-term problems faced by the people in the tourism industry and examine the practicality of the health rules to be followed when returning to international travelers. The present paper was review based and content analyses was made to focus on how the collapse of the tourism industry affected the Sri Lankan economy and compare how the collapse of the tourism industry affected small businesses such as travel vendors, small hoteliers restaurant, owners, and large scale tourism hoteliers.

Keywords: business, economy, employment, livelihoods, problems, tourism

Introduction

Sri Lanka was the most famous and attractive tourist destination in 2019 according to “lonely planet.” Sri Lanka raked top country for travel because of to better transport links, new hotels and a growing number of activities one centered with the beautiful environment, diverse of geographical features and mixed religions together with cultures added extra beauty to the country. After 30 years of civil war between Sri Lanka government and Liberal Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) the country stepped into a golden era with huge tourism attraction. Rich beaches, incredible wildlife and warm hearted hospitality made Sri Lanka as a memorable tourist destination in the world. With the unexpected terrorist attack on April 21, 2019 the condition of Sri Lanka tourism got worse. The Easter attack was targeted tourists and Christians. World believed that ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) was the responsible hand behind the attack. However the consequences of the Easter attacked buried Sri Lankan tourism industry once again for more or less one year. With the experience of 30 year civil war Sri Lanka was able to recover from the attack within 6 months. As a country Sri Lanka faced number of issues since decades even so tourism was at the top level. Tourism is one of the main income methods of Sri Lanka. Since the end of the war, the Sri Lankan tourism industry has recorded double-digit growth in both international tourist arrivals and tourism revenue. This rapid growth was disrupted after last year's Easter Sunday attacks, which cost the industry \$ 1.5 billion in tourism revenue. However, due to the continuous efforts of the government, the security forces were able to revive the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA) and the Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau (SLTP). As a result, Sri Lanka could attract 1.9 million tourists by the end of 2019, despite the unfortunate security breach of debt. Year 2020 turned into a bad dream for each and every person in the world due to COVID-19 pandemic.

People lost the faith about their future. The COVID-19 epidemic has far-reaching effects on how people earn living and meeting critical needs. Corona virus changed human life style from travelling to stay home. Work from home concept was introduced to the world and all the travel plans were canceled suddenly. COVID-19 changed our way of life and staying at home means travelling tomorrow. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO 2019), international tourist arrivals are expected to fall by 20% to 30% by 2020 compared to 2019. This means that tourists lose between 290 million and 440 million (UNWTO 2019) in a single year. Accordingly, UNWTO warns that this could be read as a loss of \$ 300 to \$ 400 billion in international tourism receipts, or at worst, as high as \$ 1.5 trillion (Daily FT). This study investigates the impact of COVID-19 on tourism sector and its allied livelihoods sectors in in Galle District of Southern Sri Lanka.

The objectives of the present study are:

Objectives

- To understand the perception of tourism management on the COVID-19 pandemic
- To evaluate and analyze the consequences of COVID-19 on the tourism sector
- To evaluate the impact of COVID-19 on the livelihood of local vendors

Methodology

The present paper has been developed on the impact of COVID-19 on tourism and its challenges in Galle District of Southern Sri Lanka using primary and secondary source data. Some knowledgeable and aged persons from tourism sector were interviewed for eliciting information on the adverse effect of COVID-19 on tourism sector and livelihoods of people rely on tourism. The present study has been designed to be purely descriptive and narrative.

The Impact of Covid-19 on Tourism in Galle District of Southern Sri Lanka

With the year 2020 approaching, the COVID-19 virus was able to bring the world to a very dormant state. The deadly virus, which originated in a big market of animal food stores in Wuhan Province, China, is now spreading rapidly in more than 95% of the world's countries. The virus is one of the most dangerous diseases in the world in the 21st century. With the introduction of the first patient by the end of 2019, the virus is now spreading to a large part of the world's population. With the spread of the virus, the daily activities of all the people of the world began to deteriorate severely and all the young and old had to carry out their daily activities and livelihoods in a healthier manner. The spread of the virus also hit the livelihoods of many people. The deadly virus was able to shut down the world completely in as little as three months after the discovery of the first patient in the city of Wuhan in late 2019. In a very short time all the schools in the world were closed. The disease has crippled economic conditions at all levels, from the United States, the world's most powerful country, to South Asian countries, African countries and Latin American countries. In fact, migration to a country where there was uncertainty about the future that existed in the eyes of the world was strictly forbidden. All countries closed their state borders with immediate effect after it was established that inter-state immigration was the root cause of the spread of the disease. This was a blow to every tourist destination around the world and to the countries where tourism is their main source of income.

The tourism industry has undoubtedly been identified as one of the worst-hit areas by the new COVID-19 epidemic around the world. Many businesses in the tourism sector, especially airlines and hotels, have collapsed. It is estimated that the loss to the tourism industry will be in the billions of US Dollars and the number of jobs lost will be over 73 million. The collapse of this global tourism industry has dealt a severe blow to Sri Lanka, which had hoped to make tourism its main source of foreign exchange earnings. Sri Lanka's tourism industry, which was rebuilding after the Islamic State terrorist attack last year, has collapsed again due to COVID-19. The closest example is the 207,507 tourist arrivals in February 2020, from 71,370 in March 2020. It is unknown at this time what he will do after leaving the post. It is also a question of how to solve the social problems caused by the jobs lost through it. However, some experts in the field are of the opinion that this future tourism industry needs to undergo some creative change to suit the sustainable future. The livelihoods of many, including hoteliers, tour guides, souvenir makers and transportation providers, have been paralyzed by the crash. Travel has now reached a level similar to that of a basic human need. About 1.7 billion people in the world travel for leisure. Sri Lanka's economy cannot be built without tourism.

Ruwan Ranasinghe (2020) ^[2] emphasized that the Sri Lankan economy is worth US \$ 84 billion, of which 5% comes from the tourism industry and this 5% community sensitivity is extremely strong compared to some economic activities. It is estimated that more than 2 million people out of a population of 22 million are directly or indirectly involved in the tourism industry, which is the reverse of the economy. The current epidemic has challenged the global networks of interdependence that are pushing globalization

and countries towards self-sufficiency. This is indeed a myth and global business operations must continue after successful restriction of COVID 19 in the near future. In addition, the other two major sources of income in the Sri Lankan economy, the foreign remittance and textile industries, are also at high risk. Thus, the global operations of the tourism industry and the tourism industry are expected to move forward in a strong manner after COVID 19. It is time that Sri Lanka re-communicates, restores and builds a strong destination image by demonstrating our strong human, social and rich values of hospitality leading the post-COVID 19 tourism industry before global competition.

Not only did the Corona novel bring the global epidemic to entire socio-economic structures. The globalization and global operations of enterprises have been challenged. Paradoxically, the potential consequences and alternatives are still unstable. However, employment and business sustainability are essential for the rapid recovery and recovery of the economy. For the worse, most economies need a fresh start. Traditionally, groups at risk of infection were used to attacking food, health care insecurity and their lifestyle, and they were generally the poorest in society. Ironically, the corona infection hit international tourists for the first time and the epidemic spread through tourism, causing the affluent social class globally. As the tourism industry is the largest and fastest growing industry globally; it is expected to play an important role in restoring socio-economic stability after the COVID 19 pandemic. It is a major contributor to the island economies and is one of the most important foreign exchange generating industries in the Sri Lankan economy. As a result, international tourism and tourism operations, including the tourism industry, are under increasing pressure to carry the virus around the world. Quanta's recently confirmed that a large number of its crew have been infected with the virus, challenging global air operations. Travel agencies, Tourism, Hotels and MICE (Meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions). Industry as an umbrella Industrial operation is currently facing enormous challenges. According to World Health Organization (2020), by June 2020, COVID-19 had infected more than 10 million people and caused more than 500,000 deaths worldwide. Globally, the spread shows no sign of decline. Although the number of patients per day is declining in Europe and the western Pacific, they are increasing in the Americas, Southeast Asia, and Africa. In response, many countries have closed their borders to visitors and tourists. The United Nations World Tourism Organization reported for the first time in the second quarter of 2020 that it had introduced 100% travel restrictions on global destinations. As a result, the international tourism industry has been almost completely suspended, and domestic tourism has been restricted due to locking conditions imposed in many countries. While some destinations are starting to open slowly, many are afraid of international travel. Tourism is a crucial sector of the international economy. In 2019, the tourism sector accounted for 29% of world service exports and about 300 million jobs globally. It is an important source of income and a source of employment for both developed and developing countries. As some developing countries become heavily dependent on the tourism industry, the global contraction of tourist arrivals could have devastating economic consequences. In some countries, such as the

Small Island Developing States (SIDS), tourism accounts for more than half of GDP.

It is estimated by the World Tourism and Tourism Council (2020) that 100 million jobs are at risk and have revenues of \$ 2.7 trillion. The COVID-19 epidemic could be lost globally by 2020. Global tourism and tourism revenue has been around since 2000 three times. By the end of 2019, the contribution of this sector was 10% of global gross domestic product (GDP) one in 10 jobs worldwide equals 296 million employments. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO 2020), by May 2020, 100% of destinations worldwide would have COVID-19 associated travel restrictions in place. Never before has international travel been so severely restricted. COVID-19 affected all sectors of the tourism and tourism industry. This included airlines, transportation, hotels, restaurants, attractions (such as national parks, protected areas and cultural heritage sites), travel agencies, tour operators, and online travel agencies. Microfinance, which includes small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and the large informal tourism sector, make up about 80% of the tourism sector, and many will not be able to survive the crisis without significant support. This will have a domino impact on the livelihoods of agriculture, fisheries, creative industries and other services throughout the tourism supply chain. The loss of tourism jobs affects women, youth and aborigines unequally. According to the most recent second edition of the Global Report on Women and Tourism (2019), 53% of hotel and food service workers in the Asia-Pacific region are women. Women-owned and run tourism businesses are often small and lack the financial resources to withstand the crisis. Leading staff positions in the tourism industry are held by women, such as housekeepers and front desk staff.

More than 11,000 foreign tourists are currently staying in Sri Lanka, unable to leave the country before the suspension of flights. All of them are currently living healthily in Sri Lanka. The ordinary people especially those living in many tourist areas, providing hospitality and food to those foreigners. It is a really good trend. At this moment Sri Lankans' are showing foreigners that they do not miss the other person at any time. Through these people, the world can carry a very positive message about Sri Lanka. The message "Sri Lanka is safe at any time" can be conveyed to the world through them. A proper plan should be created for that and Sri Lanka can do it easily. People who are depressed by 'Covid-19' are inevitably tempted to travel at this moment to get rid of that pressure. Sri Lanka is proving the world about them before they make that decision and move to another country. Instead of inviting the tourists, they should introduce themselves to the world that Sri Lankans' are.

As a country Sri Lanka must take their own new identities that they have identified, especially from the Covid-19 pandemic. The country should remember that this is the best time to prove their capability of promoting tourism. From this moment onwards, the necessary arrangements must be made. Tourist countries such as the United States, China, and France attract more than 100 million tourists, while Italy receives about 70 million. But in the face of 'Covid-19', the health and safety of all those countries collapsed. But Sri Lanka did not do so and was able to ensure the health of the people and tourists. This is how Sri Lanka's tourism brand can be taken to the world. This will enable foreigners to tell whether they are traveling to a country where health care is

deteriorating or to a country where health care is at its best. It can also take the commitment of the health care and security sectors and their humanity to the world at this moment. Through this the brand Sri Lanka can be promoted to foreign tourists. What is really needed at this juncture is to successfully promote the Sri Lankan brand to the world. The government has announced the relief to be provided to those engaged in the tourism industry. Here all loan relief is provided through banks. The problem with providing relief through banks is that the government is unable to influence private banks. Especially here a bank is inclined to issue a loan to an individual at a time when the country is in a position to repay the loan. It is unfortunate that even after the Easter attack, relief was provided to those engaged in the tourism industry and such a backdrop was created at a time when those relief loans could not be repaid. They were the ones who actively intervened in the issue. It could be successful if the government takes steps to provide relief to them in other ways than providing loans through banks.

Conclusion

Travel has now reached a level similar to that of a basic human need. About 1.7 billion people in the world travel for leisure. Sri Lanka's economy cannot be built without tourism and it must not retreat from this breakdown and maintain the relationships country need. Competitive advantage is what is needed to lead any field or career to success. Sri Lanka should have further strengthened that competitive advantage through the COVID-19 influence and think very big about how it should be marketed. Rather than mourning the collapse of the COVID-19 influenced tourism industry, country needs to think about how it can rise through it at this moment. After some control over the country and normalization, the tourism industry generated by it has declined by about fifty percent over the previous years, but now the resources to sustain and recover from the remaining volume. If that this situation will normalize in at least another four months, then work towards the goal of attracting one million tourists in the next twelve months.

It should be kept in mind that the country's economy cannot be built without the tourism industry, for which we must protect the professionals as well as the tourists. Although Sri Lanka earned 4.5 billion rupees from tourism, today there is a problem with its dividends. For example, even star class hotels are run without much profit. Only about 60 percent of Colombo's hotel rooms are filled year-round. It was against this backdrop that investors were motivated to build another 20,000 rooms out of 90,000. Especially after the end of the war in 2009, many people joined the tourism industry thinking that they could make huge profits very quickly. They had no knowledge of the volume of the tourism industry. Sri Lanka's tourism industry had more supply than demand in all sectors. In the face of this situation, many people's businesses collapsed. Many of them tried to revive the business within the tourism industry itself. It also had some of the most essential institutions for tourists. Whether or not COVID-19 was affected, there was more supply than demand. They were able to make up for it to some extent during the growing tourist season in Sri Lanka. Many of them engaged in business only during the tourist season and later joined other investments. If the dividends in the tourism industry are not at the right level, it will not be able to provide a good service to the incoming tourists. It is a well-known fact that when dividends fall, great services and

excellent products cannot be provided. Under the influence of 'Covid-19' some people may leave the tourism industry. It cannot be said that it is so auspicious. But the medium-sized industrialists today can be seen taking business in a new direction with the help of modern technology. Therefore, there is a need for financial assistance like subsidy loans to tourist agents from the Ministry of Tourism and Aviation, Government of Sri Lanka to overcome from the loss due to COVID-19 pandemic.

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