

Potentials and Problems of Ecotourism Development in Maduganga, Sri Lanka

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Tourism industry is one of the major economic activities as well as one of the major sources for earning foreign exchange that contributes to the economic development of countries around the world. Currently tourism market has been diversified due to increasing of tourist demands and various tourist objectives. Ecotourism is one alternative sub sector which needs to be developed to achieve this purpose. Ecotourism can be defined as responsible travel to natural areas, which conservers the environment and sustains the well-being of the local people. The main objective of this research is to explore the potentials and problems of ecotourism development in Madu ganga in Sri Lanka.

In this research Madu ganga wetland ecosystem was selected as the study area. Maduganga wetland is situated in Balapitiya divisional secretariat division. So that, the whole area of Balapitiya divisional secretariat division was selected for the study. 08 owners of tourist boat services and 20 boat riders (representation 20% boat riders of whole boat services) as well as 20 local tourists and 20 foreign tourists (representation 10% of tourists visit by maduganga per day) were selected as the sample. Primary data were collected through questionnaires, semi structured and non-structured Interviews and field observations.

The finding revealed Kothdoowa raja maha viharaya, mangroves islands, cinnamon chopping centers and fish therapy centers are the major ecotourism destinations of maduganga and tourists spend two and half hour boat ride for this visit. The findings also revealed that maduganga has lot of ecotourism potentials for development, because basically they are doing tourism without an ecotourism perspective and also the majority of the major boat services, tourist companies and tourist guides get more benefits than locals and can identify on going competitiveness between major 08 tourist boat services. According to the overall findings government institutions (especially Sri Lankan Tourist Development Authority and Balapitiya Divisional

Secretariat) must pay attention to ecotourism development in this area. Especially, the need to establish an information center to get information for tourists easily and a ticket counter to reduce on going competitiveness between major tourist boat services are identified. Further, this research revealed that 90% of the sample of boat riders is able to speak more than two languages and there is potential to develop their skills as a professional tourist guide in this tourist area.

Key words: *Tourism, Ecotourism, Potentials, Ecotourism Development, Maduganga.*