



THE IMPACT OF SRI LANKA'S ECONOMIC CRISIS ON TOURISM: A STUDY BASED ON TOURIST ACCOMMODATION PROVIDERS OF NUWARA ELIYA DISTRICT IN SRI LANKA

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Abstract

The tourism industry is one of the main sources of income in today's developing countries. The industry contributes greatly to increase the foreign reserves needed by a country. There are various service sectors in tourism. Tourist accommodation providers are one of them. The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of the economic crisis in Sri Lanka on the tourist accommodation providers. Accordingly, data was collected from the people who engaged in this field through the online survey. After analysing them, in the face of this economic crisis, it appears that their industry was affected by the problem of fuel shortage, public transportation problems, sudden power outage problems, and food price inflation. Although various researches have been conducted in Sri Lanka related to the tourism industry, there are few studies conducted on these tourist accommodation providers. Accordingly, through this study, the problems they face have been discussed and the information needed to develop the businesses of accommodation facilities providers related to the tourism industry by avoiding them is contained in this study.

Key words: *accommodation, crisis, economic, Sri Lanka, tourism*

Introduction

Human prefer to move from one place to another even for a short period of time for enjoyment or to fulfill their needs and wants. This act of human is simply known as touring. With the rapid development of technology tourism has become one of the trendiest hobbies in the world as travelling modes have achieved a greater amount of development. Earlier travelling was bit harder than now. The only way to travel to another country which is separated by sea is through ships and yachts. Even that took years and months to reach the correct destination. But now travelling is way easier. Individuals become tourists when they voluntarily leave their normal surroundings, where they reside, to visit another environment. These individuals will usually engage in different activities, regardless of how close or how far this environment (destination) is (Jafari et al., 2002). So no doubt tourism is playing a vital role in the modern era. There are plenty of advantages one can gain by touring. Individuals can learn different cultures through travelling. It also makes the mind relax. People expose themselves to a totally different environment in travelling. So, get the chance to learn and value other humans who are different from them. Travelling can make the individuals think more openly as they get the chance to explore and observe new things. As an island with a significant geographical value, Sri Lanka is a predominant spot for international tourists. Tourists from



different countries visit Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka is a beautiful tropical island in the Indian Ocean, situated at the southern tip of India between 6° and 10° North and 80° to 82° East. It is separated from India by the Palk Strait, which is 32km wide at its narrowest. (Gossling, S, 2016). So it's clear that Sri Lanka is a tourist attraction because of its unique geographical location. Not only that the natural beaches, historical heritages, exciting water sports, rain forests and the rich cultural backgrounds also has attracted the tourists. Tourism has become a highly profitable industry across the globe. Tourism has made a big impact on Sri Lankan economy too. It has also played a significant role in creating employment opportunities and foreign exchange which directly impacts the Gross Domestic Product. So that Lankan government drawn the special attention on promoting the tourism industry in Sri Lanka to get the best out of it. Tourist around the world visit Sri Lanka for many reasons. Among them to see the beauty of the island, visit the historical places, to explore the variety of cultures, to experience better weather and to enjoy the wild life are prominent. Also travelling to Sri Lanka is very cheap for many. Anyone can get accommodations with a reasonable price.

Most popular tourist destinations in Sri Lanka are Nuwara-Eliya, Kandy, Galle, Marissa and Trincomalee. Though Sri Lanka is one of the best travel destinations Sri Lankan tourist industry has faced multiple challenges within last few years. Easter attack, COVID 19 pandemic and the current economic crisis has negatively impacted the Sri Lankan tourism industry. Current Sri Lankan situation has closed all the income gates of the country including tourism. Sri Lanka is facing one of its toughest times ever. Because of the political corruption and the unstable political situation of the country, the most affected sector is the economic sector. Price of the daily essentials are increasing day by day. Because of this fact Sri Lanka is having one of the highest inflation rates of the world. Life of the Sri Lankans has become miserable because of the economic crisis. Wrong decisions of the rulers and following unethical disciplines have paved the path for this crucial economic crisis. Economic crisis can be defined in various ways, economic crisis represents a situation in which the economy of a country passes through a sudden decrease of its force, decrease usually brought about by a financial crisis (Zafiu et al., 2013). As the Lankan government do not have sufficient foreign resources it has failed to fulfill the daily essential needs of the citizens.

Especially government has failed to import the fuel which has negatively affected many fields. As a result of this Sri Lankans are facing a daily basis power cuts which led their life more complicated. People had to step down and demand their needs. Young generation who should be spending their time productively are now at the roads demanding their basic needs. Long fuel queues can be seen around the country. People spend days and days to get their fuel. Some died waiting in the queue. Some died out of hunger as they could not afford their meal. So the current Sri Lankan situation is heartbreaking and devastating. Above mentioned current Sri Lankan environment is not at all friendly and supportive for tourism. Tourists want to come and enjoy. They do not want to come and suffer here. So recently the amount of tourist who visit Sri Lanka have been reduced. This has worsened the economic crisis as tourism is one of the major keys to foreign resources. Some European countries have put Sri Lanka in their red list for the travelers' number of Sri Lanka' top source markets namely, the United Kingdom, Canada and New Zealand have already issued Sri Lankan travel advisories to their citizens. (A custom data analyzing report, April 2022) This has resulted as Sri Lanka could not fulfill tourists' demands such as a peaceful environment and basic needs.



It's crystal clear that in order to attract the international tourists who bring foreign resources to the country, we must first get out from this economic crisis. As a country with massive natural resources it is not hard to get over from this crisis. So creating a pleasant environment for the tourists is essential if we want to uphold the tourism industry of Sri Lanka. Large scale or small scale accommodation providers also playing a vital role in developing the tourism industry of Sri Lanka. One of the prominent reasons for the international tourists to visit Sri Lanka is the reasonable price range of the accommodations. Sri Lankan accommodation providers are popular in worldwide for their welcoming nature. Because of the current economic crisis, the accommodations providers are facing difficulties in providing a quality service for the tourists.

Research problem

This research attempts to identify whether there is an impact towards tourist accommodation providers due to the economic crisis in Sri Lanka.

Research Objectives

There are various objectives that are aimed to be fulfilled through this research. They are as follows;

- To identify whether the tourist accommodation providers faced obstacles due to the economic crisis in Sri Lanka.
- To identify how did they face the obstacles due to the economic crisis in Sri Lanka.

Methodology

Under this study, an elaborative research has been accomplished on the impact of the economic crisis in Sri Lanka on tourism in the Nuwara Eliya district using the mixed method of quantitative and qualitative. And stratifies random sampling techniques was used for the data collection. This study has been conducted by contacting the people and employees involved in tourism services in Nuwara Eliya District. Moreover, a special structured questionnaire related to the impact of the economic crisis on tourism was created by using the Google form. It was sent for two weeks (from July 9 2022) via WhatsApp and Email for the particular employees in tourism sector. In order to accomplish the research, those employees were given questionnaires and received back 280 responses within a period of two weeks. In addition, the data collected through the google form was analyzed for descriptive statistics using SPSS 27.0 Version. Furthermore, literature reviews were done based on many books, international review reports, research articles related to impact of economic on tourism in various conferences and reputed journals.

Literature Review

Due to its instability, tourism reflects dynamic trends over time. While some tourist locations around the world are growing more rapidly or are even shrinking, others are expanding steadily or quickly. Tourists can be impacted by a variety of factors when deciding where to travel, including destination perception, national brand, country of origin, and general tourist behavior (Albu, 2013). Tourists have many options, and their expectations are changing daily. Due to the high level of industrial competitiveness caused by unpredictable human behavior, the tourism industry might be regarded as risky.



A study by Anushan K. Y. M. (2017), *An Analysis of Tourism Profile of Sri Lanka Towards Sustainable Tourism Industry and Policy Making in the Future*, reveals that the 2009 end to Sri Lanka's civil war has become the primary driver behind the revival of all of the nation's economic activities, including tourism. An excellent increase in foreign visitors gives the economy a new optimism for a prosperous future. The foundation of the industry's growth and the process of creating higher value for the economy are its policy and strategy. The study's conclusions persuade that the two primary factors that could prohibit the business from growing in terms of volume rather than stagnating are unrelated to the state of the tourism market at the moment. One of the two is the absence of the country's bad security condition, which had caused long-term fluctuations in tourist arrivals and earnings. The second factor is the seasonality of visitor arrivals, which would have led to short-term swings.

Research on recent changes in Sri Lankan tourist trends and implications for alleviation of poverty was conducted in 2009 by Karin Fernando and Arunika Meedeniya. The Centre for Poverty Analysis (CEPA) performed this analysis for the ADB's poverty network project. The impact of the global economic slowdown on poverty and sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific was discussed during the Asia-wide regional conference, which took place in Hanoi, Vietnam, from October 29 to 29, 2009. This study investigates if the global recession has altered Sri Lanka's tourism sector and how, if at all, this alteration is influencing poverty. Seems to have the financial crisis had an impact on tourism in Sri Lanka is the research topic that this study will attempt to address. If so, how much of an impact did it have on low-income households, and what protective measures were taken to keep the sector afloat. In order to test the theory of cause and effect, the article first investigates the macro environment that defines current tourism patterns. It next seeks to break down these trends at the micro level to determine whether or how they have affected poverty. It will also investigate if domestic tourism has contributed to reducing the effects of changes in international tourism. The information for this study was collected through exploring secondary data including official statistics, journal and newspaper articles as well a series of Key Person Interviews.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a serious crisis in global tourism, according to research by R.S.S.W. Arachchi and Athula Gnanapala on *COVID-19 and Tourism: Crisis and Challenges of Tourism Industry in Sri Lanka* (2020). The pandemic has significantly affected everyone's quality of life, especially Sri Lankans. The pandemic has caused the entire shutdown of practically all economic operations, which has ruined Sri Lanka's economy. One of the main industries that has been severely impacted by this pandemic is tourism. The Easter Sunday attack in 2019 left the Sri Lankan tourism business in shambles, but COVID 19 broke out in 2020 and entirely shut down the sector. The two main goals of this review are to first determine how the COVID 19 epidemic has affected Sri Lanka's tourism sector and, second, to determine what obstacles must be overcome for the sector to recover. The impact of the COVID 19 epidemic on the tourism industry was examined utilizing a variety of approaches and data sources. The results showed that the industry is severely impacted by zero tourist arrivals, a reduction in foreign exchange revenues, an increase in unemployment, an industry-wide financial crisis, and the loss of source markets. The sector anticipates aggressive government intervention in this crucial circumstance to assist them with attractive concessions, relief packages, and a reduction in tax burden, and beneficial policies to restore the business, such as the



Tourism Resilience Plan (TRP). In the short term, nevertheless, it won't be simple in the economies and society that the pandemic affected. As a result, it must confront the difficulties of restoring the sector.

A study on *The Effect of the Current Economic Crisis in Sri Lanka on Tourist Arrivals* a custom data study conducted in 2022 noted that the tourist business is extremely vulnerable to crises, and the economic, social, environmental, political, and health characteristics of a location have a significant impact on travel demand (and source markets). The tourism sector has faced enormous obstacles throughout history, the most recent of which being the COVID-19 epidemic, which virtually brought the sector to a stop. Beginning in September 2021, overseas arrivals to Sri Lanka gradually increased again after two years of slow recovery. The most recent economic crisis has nonetheless begun to affect this recovery. To assess the potential effects of the economic crisis on visitor arrivals, the following document analyzes arrivals to Sri Lanka from August 2021 to April 2022. The economic crisis' effects have begun to spread, causing serious problems for how Sri Lanka's tourist sector operates and provides for the needs of travelers. The current foreign exchange crisis, price increases, and lack of necessities like gas and petrol present yet another obstacle for Sri Lanka's tourism sector to overcome. Businesses struggle to maintain their everyday operations as a result of the disruption to the industry's whole supply chain. Import restrictions put in place as a result of the foreign exchange crisis have further disrupted the supply chain and the capacity of tourism firms to provide visitors with goods, services, and experiences. Prices for necessities have increased significantly as a result of inflation brought on by a lack of supply and excessive consumer demand. The problems are made worse by the rolling power disruptions. Another negative outcome of this situation is the very potential harm to Sri Lanka's international tourism brand.

A study entitled "Impact of COVID 19 and the Future of Tourism Employments in Sri Lanka: A Route to Recovery and Resilience" was undertaken by R.S.S.W. Arachchi and W.K.A.C. Gnanapala in 2020. The middle of the tourist season was when the COVID-19 pandemic first struck Sri Lanka. While some tourists had already booked their vacations, many tourists were enjoying themselves in Sri Lanka during this time. The COVID 19 global pandemic's effects on the tourism sector led to a total shutdown of the sector not just in Sri Lanka but also globally. China, India, and the UK are Sri Lanka's top three tourist-producing markets, and these nations are severely impacted by the pandemic. This review paper's major goals are to first determine how the COVID 19 epidemic affected Sri Lanka's tourist and hospitality workers, and second, to determine what issues they will likely encounter in the future. The research showed that the sector is severely impacted, and currently, about 12000 tourists are prohibited from entering the nation. More than 400,000 direct and indirect workers in the tourist and hospitality sectors lost their employment or sources of income. Since all of the nation's potential sources of income have been shut off, the local community is currently experiencing a serious financial crisis. Since they demand job security, it will be difficult to keep staff in the tourism and hospitality sectors. Therefore, it is crucial to implement resilience strategies right away, such as providing governments with support for the sector, running initiatives to maintain the positive outlook of tourism employees so they can stay in the industry during this difficult time, and effectively empowering employees. The tourism industry is in a critical situation and is looking to the government to actively mediate to help them deal with it by offering favorable concessions, relief packages, a reduction in taxes, favorable policies and strategies to rebuild the industry, the Tourism Employees Relief Package



(TERP), etc. In the short term, nevertheless, it won't be simple in the economies and society that the pandemic affected. Therefore, it requires strong resilience tactics in order to first keep the workforce with the sector and then restore the destroyed industry.

The above researches are done wholly based on tourism industry. Among them accommodation providers in tourism sector render a significant service in tourism industry. In Sri Lanka, the researches done related to accommodation providers are very few. Therefore, the research gap between the above studies and this study is mainly focused towards the accommodation providers in Sri Lankan tourism industry during the economic crisis situation.

Findings and discussions

The details of the employees who responded to this study and the collected data are given below. Accordingly, out of those 78.6% of the responses were received from male, and 21.4% of responses from female. This implies that male is more involved in the tourism industry more than female.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	220	78.6
Female	60	21.4
Age		
18 - 25	140	50
26 – 32	33	11.4
33- 40	39	14.1
41 – 47	28	10.1
50 – above	40	14.4
Duration Spent in The Tourism Industry		
Year 01	20	7.1
Year 02	26	9.2
Year 03	34	12.3
Year 04	80	28.6
Year 05	20	7.1
Year 05 and above	100	35.7
What type of accommodation service do you offer?		
Guest house	100	35.7
Resort	20	7.1
Homestay	20	7.1
Cottage	26	9.2
Boutique hotel	14	5



Apartment	80	28.6
Suite hotel	20	7.3
Services provided		
Accommodation	260	92.9
Food	220	78.6
Spa	36	13
Laundry	100	35.7
Bar	40	14.3
Travel equipment	80	28.6
Vehicle renting	140	50
Other	60	21.4
Numbers of Staff		
1	80	28.6
2	40	14.3
3	42	15
4	50	17.7
5	45	16.2
Above 5	23	8.2
Countries of the most visited tourists		
Europe	55	19.6
Africa	9	3.2
America	38	13.7
Asia and the Pacific	88	31.5
Middle East	90	32
Feedbacks of tourists arrived during in the economic crisis		
Faced fuel shortage problem	260	92.9
Public transport problem	180	64.3
Electricity power cuts	240	85.7
Expensive foods	160	57.1
Expensive travel guidance	120	42.9
Other	20	7.1
Gross monthly income earned before the economic crisis		
50000 – 100000	20	7.1
100001 – 200000	120	42.9
200001 – 300000	60	21.4
300001 – 400000	60	21.4
400001 or above	20	7.2



Gross monthly income earned after the economic crisis		
50000 – 100000	220	78.6
100001 – 200000	40	14.3
200001 – 300000	6	2.1
300001 – 400000	11	3.8
400001 or above	3	1.2
If the income is less than before, how to cover the losses		
Funds provided from government	40	14.3
Decrease the number of staff	140	50
Apply for loan	160	57.1
Renting the place of service	140	50
Selling the place of service	0	0
Declining from the industry and moving into other options	118	42.9
Do you have any further idea to remain in the industry?		
Yes	140	50
No	40	14.3
Not yet decided	100	35.7
What are the suggestions to uplift the tourism industry which is in a declining stage?		
Solving the problem regarding foreign reserves	140	50
Solving the problem regarding fuel crisis	200	71.4
Controlling the higher inflation	100	35.7
Controlling the price of food items	160	57.1
Solving the problem regarding public transportation	220	78.6
Promoting the Sri Lankan tourism industry	180	64.3
Providing additional facilities for the tourists	120	42.9
Standardizing the tourism industry	180	64.3
Implementing interest free loans	120	42.9
Imposing tax reliefs for the tourism accommodation providers	140	50

Source: Field work 2022

Focusing on the age range of the respondents, 50% of them are between the age of 18-25 years, while 11.4% are between the ages of 26-32, 14.1% of them are between the age of 33-40, and 10.1% are between the ages of 41-47. 14.4% are aged 50 years and above. Considering these data, people aged 20-23 have



given the highest responses of 50%. Thus, it appears that the majority of the people involved in the tourism industry in Nuwara Eliya district are young people.

When it comes to the duration spent in the tourism industry, according to the collected data, 7.1% of them have worked for one year, 9.2% for two years, 12.3% for three years, 28.6% for four years, and 46.4% of them have worked in the tourism industry for five years and more. While it can be confirmed in this data analysis that they stay in the industry for a long time, this implies that the tourism industry is the long-term source of income for the majority of them.

When asked about the services they provide, 92.9% of them provide accommodation while 79.6% provide food. Apart from these services, other services such as vehicle rental (50%), laundry (35.7%), travel equipment (28.6%), bar (14.7%), spa (13%) are also provided. Among these services, it is clear that the most provided service is accommodation. However, through this tourism industry, all the necessary services including accommodation, food and other essential services are provided properly and satisfactorily to local and foreign tourists.

Under this tourism industry, various accommodation facilities are provided to the tourists coming to Nuwara Eliya. According to the data of the respondents, the types of accommodation they provide are guesthouse (35.7%), resort (7.1%), homestay (7.1%), cottage (9.2%), boutique hotel (5%), apartment (28.6%), and suite hotel. (7.3%) and so on. Accordingly, the majority of them offer guesthouses and apartments as accommodation facility.

28.6% majority of them perform the relevant service by themselves. And, 17.7% of such services have four staffs, 16.6% have five staffs, 15% have three staffs, 14.2% have two staffs and 8.2% of those services have five staffs and above.

According to the data given about the countries of the tourists visit to Nuwara Eliya, they come from different countries of the world such as Europe (19.6%), Africa (3.2%), America (13.7%), Asia and the Pacific (31.5%) and the Middle East (32%). And it is clear from their data that among those countries, more tourists come to Nuwara Eliya from the Middle East and the Asian and the Pacific countries than other countries.

In this study, after the economic crisis in Sri Lanka, the feedback of the tourists was investigated. From the feedback they gave, 92.9% have faced fuel shortage problem and 85.7% have mentioned that there is electricity power cut problems. In addition to this, more negative feedback has been given such as Public transport problem (64.3%), Expensive foods (57.1%), Expensive travel guidance (42.9%) etc. And all the feedbacks expressed by tourists are directly related to the economic crisis in Sri Lanka. Looking at their responses, it is clear that foreign tourists are facing many problems and inconveniences due to the current economic crisis in Sri Lanka.

In obtaining data for this study, respondents were asked about their gross monthly income before and after the economic crisis. The gross monthly income of those who worked in the tourism industry before and after the economic crisis ranges from 50000 LKR to 400001 LKR and above, but according to the collected



data through the questionnaire, it was clear that there have been significant changes in their gross monthly income after the economic crisis.

Before the economic crisis, the percentage of those who earned a gross monthly income of 50000 LKR was 7.1% and after the economic crisis it has increased to 78.6%. Before the economic crisis, those earning 100001-200000 LKR was 42.9% and after the economic crisis, the percentage has decreased to 14.7%. Also, before the economic crisis, the percentage of earners between 200001-300000 LKR was 21.4%, but after the economic crisis, the percentage has decreased to 2.1%. Before the economic crisis, 21.4% of them earned between 300001-400000LKR and after the economic crisis, that percentage has decreased to 3.8%. Also, the percentage of those who earned a gross monthly income of 400001 and above was 7.1%, but after the current economic crisis in Sri Lanka, that percentage has decreased to 2.1%.

Accordingly, the percentage of those who earned income between 50000-100000LKR before the economic crisis has increased by 71.5% after the economic crisis and the percentage of those with higher incomes has decreased significantly after the economic crisis. By comparing these gross monthly incomes before and after, it was further confirmed that the current economic crisis in Sri Lanka has had a negative impact on the income of people working under the tourism industry in Nuwara Eliya.

Through the questionnaire, they were asked how they would cover the loss if the income was lower than before. For this they follow various measures such as they reduce the number of staff (50%), rent the workplace (50%). Receiving funding from the government (14.3%) and another group mentioned declining from the industry and moving to other options (42.9%).

However, it was questioned whether they would continue to stay in the industry in this situation and 50% of the them have responded that they would continue their work and 14.3% of them had no idea to remain in this industry. Further, 35.7 % of respondents are undecided whether to stay in this industry or not. These data imply that a significant number of those who worked in the tourism industry have left their jobs, while others has no idea whether they would stay in the job.

Several suggestions have been made by the respondents to uplift the declining tourism industry. A majority have suggested that problems related to public transport (78.6%) and the fuel crisis (71.4%) should be resolved as soon as possible. In addition to these suggestions, they have presented many other important suggestions, Standardizing the tourism industry (64.3%), Promoting the Sri Lankan tourism industry (64.3%), Controlling the price of food items (57.1%), Solving the problem regarding foreign reserves (50%), Imposing tax reliefs for the tourism accommodation providers (50%), Providing additional facilities for the tourists (42.9%), Implementing interest free loans (42.9%), Controlling the higher inflation (35.7%) and so on.

Many of their suggestions are timely and important because they have a lot of experience in the tourism industry. And they are also trying to protect this industry without allowing it to be destroyed. Moreover, while providing data for this study, they mentioned that these suggestions should be brought to the attention of the relevant parties.



Conclusion

In conclusion, the majority of the people involved in the tourism industry in Nuwara Eliya district are young people and, male are more involved in the tourism industry more than female. Furthermore, the tourism industry is the long-term source of income for the majority. Through this industry, all the necessary services including accommodation, food and other essential services are provided properly and satisfactorily to local and foreign tourists. This study further confirms that majority of tourists come to Nuwara Eliya from the Middle East and the Asian and the Pacific countries than other countries. However after the economic crisis of Sri Lanka, tourists are facing many problems and inconveniences. And their feedbacks are directly related to the economic crisis in Sri Lanka. Not only that, the current economic crisis in Sri Lanka has a negative impact on the income of people working under the tourism industry in Nuwara Eliya. Moreover a significant number of those who worked in the tourism industry have left their jobs, while others have no idea whether they should stay in the job. The employees working in the tourism industry put forward many important timely suggestions to uplift the tourism industry and further they suggest that the relevant officials should take action on it. Through this study, we are emphasizing to the relevant parties that the development of tourism place like Nuwara Eliya district, which shows the beauty of Sri Lanka to the world, and the related tourism industry will not only increase the income of the country but also strengthen the future of Sri Lanka.

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