

DARK TOURISM AND ITS POTENTIAL IMPACTS ON TOURISM INDUSTRY IN SRI LANKA

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Abstract:

This study aimed to find the likelihood of improving dark tourism and its impacts on the tourism industry in Sri Lankan context using the methodology of descriptive analysis from the secondary sources of written materials and web based documents. The main qualitative independent variables used in this study were the real and commoditized mortality of human body, the natural disastrous sites experienced and fated by the people and atrocities of genocide. There was a direct relationship between the dependant variable of dark tourism and the identified independent variables. The preservation and continuation of dark tourism potentials were instrumental in Sri Lanka. As a result, not only the present generation but the future generations as well could visit and understand how the world could never again allow a place of such hatred experiences and such persecution of existence hereafter. There were the considerable sources of improving and developing dark tourism attracting not only the inbound tourism but outbound tourism as well in Sri Lanka. Unfortunately the institutions operating within the tourism sector in Sri Lanka could not find this new trend of tourism potentiality that could be improved to increase the relative contribution of the tourism sector to Gross Domestic Product of the country. As such, the policy makers, the officials, institutions and the businesses concerned with the development of tourism sector in Sri Lanka could be made aware of the likelihood of the upliftment of tourism industry channelled through this new trend of Dark Tourism.

***Keywords:** Dark tourism, mortality, atrocities, disaster, Gross Domestic Product*

Introduction

Dark tourism is a relatively new area of tourism research. It is defined by Foley and Lennon (1996:198) as the phenomenon which encompasses the presentation and consumption (by visitors) of real and commoditized death, disaster sites and atrocities of genocides. Tarlow (2005:48) defines it as having the dimension of the interaction between supply and demand as visitation to places where tragedies or historically noteworthy death has occurred and that continue to impact our lives. Stone (2006) defines dark tourism as depending on the intensity of the interest and the actual motive to travel to see the site. His concept presents the difference between the actual sites of dark tourism and the sites which are associated with dark tourism. An instance for the former is Auschwitz and an instance of latter is the Holocaust Museum in Washington DC. He notes that places which are the sites of dark tourism are darker than the places which are associated with an actual

phenomenon. Hardly any research related to the dark tourism phenomenon takes into account recent conflict and the views of those communities involved in the conflict.

Sites associated with relatively recent conflict and their openness to tourism has an impact on a community within the area where the site is located. The early work of Smith (1998) and Liesle (2000) acknowledges the impact of conflict has on a society. Their research illustrates a strong link among war, atrocities and disastrous sites and tourism in Sri Lankan experiences. They depict conflict as heritage. Weaver (2000) presents the influence which war has on a tourism area life cycle (Butler 1980), explaining that some phenomena related to war are relatively popular with the tourists and therefore influence the tourism area life cycle. Inherently, the consequence of a long-term conflict is conceptualized as a dark tourism phenomenon. Since the end of the war, tourism to Sri Lanka has more than [doubled](#), and a new wave of internal tourism has started. The government and army are attempting to capitalize on this trend by opening luxury resorts (also here) and encouraging tourists from the South to visit the North and East. As well, Government development work is proceeding at a rapid clip. Many roads are being rebuilt in Mullaitivu.

Objective of the study

To find the likelihood of improving dark tourism and its impacts on the tourism industry in Sri Lankan context

Methodology of the Study

This study prominently consists of the descriptive approach by collecting the information required to analyze the objective of this study. The information gathered from the appropriate literatures and web based sources to fulfill the objective of this study. Thus, mostly the secondary sources are used in every aspect and element of this study.

Potentiality of Dark tourism in Sri Lanka: Deadly Civil War

In early January 2007 two regional buses were bombed and dozens killed. It was a depressing development – and a depressing sight: on our way back to the airport in Colombo we passed the charred wreck of one of those buses. But as I said - these threats now seem to be over and even the north has opened up for travelers and has remained peaceful since the end of the civil war. Since the end of the Civil War in Sri Lanka, the areas in the north and east of the country, which previously had been too dangerous for tourism, have opened up. It is now quite safe to go and a tourism infrastructure is developing.

As far as war sites are concerned, there are still plenty of scars from the brutal final phases of that war – ruins, wrecks of tanks and ships, ghost towns, as well as several new war memorials celebrating the victory of the Sri Lankan Army (SLA), i.e. the government side (with too much glorifying pomp, as usual). Less developed, obviously, but still to be found are relics from the defeated opponents, the Tamil

Tigers or Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), to give it its full name. In terms of internal tourism, a thriving "dark tourism" trade already developed not long after the end of the fighting – i.e. Sri Lankans flocking to these places to see them with their own eyes (mostly for the first time). It caused somewhat of a stir in the (Western) media – in the usual "moral panic" fashion. The media tend to see any such development as "problematic", dismissing any genuine interest in such recent history as nothing but plain voyeurism. Admittedly, given the recentness of that history, it is a bit controversial to touristify these war sites so soon already (see ethical issues). But it is a reality. Furthermore, the nascent tourism developments also channel much needed funding into the region. So it is at least economically to be welcomed! Some also see it as dubious that the SLA itself is involved in setting up tourism accommodation, for instance.

Foreigners going to the same places are still much rarer on the ground, but it is possible to go there. So if we can handle the slightly controversial aspects, then this promises to be a very exciting new territory for adventurous dark tourists. It may even be advisable to go sooner rather than later. The company– Experience Travel Group (sponsored page) – already has one package in their portfolio that includes options of this nature, and they can always tailor trips to fit in travelers' special interests even more. Well, there have already been changes and more have to be expected. In particular, there was the former HQ of Velupillai Prabhakaran, the leader of the Tamil Tigers (who was killed in 2009). This was a three-storey deep bunker of reinforced concrete, which had for a while become a highlight of dark tourism in the area. But plenty of other war-related dark attractions remain in place. However, more parts of what is described below (especially ruins and wrecks) may also disappear at some point or may already have been removed/demolished by now. One of the most dramatic sights to behold in the area is that of a huge shipwreck, called the Farah III – a Jordanian vessel once hijacked by the Tamil Tigers and beached on the north-eastern coast to be stripped for scrap metal. The massive rusting hulk of the ship was still there.

Nearby, a couple of miles south in Mullaitivu there's an intriguing war museum displaying ingeniously adapted war machinery used by the Tamil Tigers including mini submarines and such like. Next to this one of those new kitschy war memorials was set up by the victorious side. Further west inland in Pudukudirippu (one of the last strongholds of the LTTE) many war ruins can still be seen. Also further north, in an isolated location not far from the Farah III wreck, the LTTE swimming pool that the Tamil Tiger leadership had set up for training naval operations has been discovered and could still be seen in its semi-ruined state. Moving further northwards along the main A9 highway, the town of Kilinochchi features another victors' war memorial – this one slightly less kitschy, but still a bit weird. It features a cracked concrete wall with a mock grenade shell embedded in it. A bit further north of this, a large toppled water tower lying on its side by the main road became a much-photographed war ruin. Another overly "grand" war memorial towers above the road where it becomes Elephant Pass – on the narrow isthmus that connects the Jaffna peninsula to the rest of Sri Lanka. Nearby, various rusting wrecks of tanks

and other military vehicles could be spotted, as well as more ruins of houses. Even the palm trees suffered – and many stumps without crowns characterized the area at the end of the war. These are naturally ephemeral traces of the war that will gradually disappear as nature reclaims the former battlefields.

Finally the road leads to Jaffna, the regional capital and largest city of the north. Some war scars may still be found here too – but many others have been repaired or removed. Even a "martyrs' cemetery" of the LTTE has apparently been bulldozed over in a campaign to minimize any propagandistic legacy of the defeated enemy. And last but not least, north-west of Jaffna on a small island near Sri Lanka's northernmost coast opposite the southern tip of India, an old Portuguese/Dutch fort from colonial times called Fort Hammenhiel has been turned into part of a tourist resort. That alone wouldn't be so spectacular as such, but what makes it noteworthy from a dark tourism perspective is the fact that this used to be a high-security prison run by the Navy (Weird – a bit like "turning Guantanamo Bay into a hotel"). In fact, the end of the civil war and the opening up of the areas formerly closed-off to tourism, namely northern and eastern parts of the country, have also given intrepid dark tourists a fascinating new territory to explore.

Potentiality of Dark tourism in Sri Lanka: Natural Disaster

These dark sites will for most tourists remain mere side trips or short stopovers, though. Yala is on the southern coast – we can even see the odd sight of an elephant with the blue sea in the background! And at this beach were a monument and the ruined foundations of a house – swept away by the 2004 tsunami. It's a sudden and sobering sight. Of the house hardly anything remains, just the foundations and a tiny bit of tiled wall of a bathroom with smashed up hand wash basins and toilets. The tsunami of Christmas 2004 hit the entire Indian Ocean region. In Sri Lanka, damage was naturally worst along the eastern and southern coast. A couple of memorial sites sprung up, but not all of these remained in place. The dramatic wreck of the "Queen of the Sea" train near Galle has since been removed, so I've been informed, so it is now in the category of lost places.

A memorial stone explains what happened: "In memory of the forty seven lives taken by the tsunami / as an act of past revenge/ At 9.20 a.m. on the 26th of December 2004 Tsunami waves struck the Yala National Park taking the lives of fifteen Japanese & German visitors, twenty nine local visitors & two foreigners & one local reported missing ". Despite the slightly dubious logic of these lines, it does hammer it in what a ravaging disaster the tsunami was, even though this was but a tiny element of the full scale of the horror. Next to the house's foundations a steel monument representing towering waves has been erected. To get there you'll have to be on one of the safaris in the park – they usually stop at the memorial (otherwise ask for it). The safari is an enjoyable excursion anyway, and the tsunami memorial just a dark addition. Unless you're really not the type for wildlife spotting it's well worth it.

The different disaster categories in Sri Lanka do not seem to be distributed evenly. Sri Lanka seems to be most affected by animal attacks (50%). Although the other disasters do not account for such a high proportion to Sri Lanka's disaster event profile, they make up similar proportions with respect to each other. In terms of time series distribution, animal attacks seem to have increased within the years of 1999-2007, which is attributable to the recent availability of data about wild elephant attacks from the Department of Wildlife Conservation. However, disasters such as floods seem to take place every year. A look at seasonal distributions shows that all disasters appear to occur evenly throughout the year with May being the most affected by disasters. Further, Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa and Kurunegala are the hotspot districts for disaster risk, whereas, districts such as Mullaitivu, Vavuniya and Mannar and Kilinochchi take on a cooler stance. It must be noted here that in spite of the insignificant place occupied by drought in the Profile of Different Disaster Categories compared with the very high places taken up by some other disasters, it should not be underestimated. Drought hazard when occurs affects a very large geographical area causing severe damage to crops and affecting the population (and livestock) adversely.

About 95% destruction and damage to houses are caused by disastrous wind events, Tsunami and floods. Other important disaster types causing damage to houses are landslides and animal attacks. Except in 1978, 2000, and 2004, the general annual rate of damage and destruction appear to be quite low and in the two peaks of 1978 and 2000 most destruction has been caused by extreme wind events, whereas in 2004 high damage is due to Tsunami. In the remaining years the main cause for damage to houses is floods. The seasonal distribution appears to take on a cyclical pattern and most destruction and damage have occurred during the period of November, December, January and in May. The most affected district is Polonnaruwa, whereas, the districts such as Mannar, Vavuniya, Matale and Kandy are the least affected. Most number of deaths caused by disasters in Sri Lanka is due to the extreme wind events, landslides and animal attacks representing 77% of total loss of life (Without Tsunami). Uneven chronological, seasonal, and spatial distribution of recorded loss of life due to disasters is a common phenomenon showing a close link with the weather patterns in Sri Lanka, especially with the monsoon. Further, most deaths due to natural disasters have taken place in the districts of Ampara, Batticaloa, Hambantota and Galle (including Tsunami). During the period of 1974-2008, the highest number of people affected was due to floods and next highest number of people affected has been due to drought, even though it was apparent as very insignificant in the Profile of Different Disaster Categories. Although the incidence of animal attacks is high, people are less affected by it. It is also important to note that people in Batticaloa are most affected by disasters whereas those in Kandy, Matale, Kegalle and Nuwara Eliya are least affected.

Mainly drought (52.2%), flood (38.9%) and Extreme wind events (4.2%) cause damage to agricultural crops. The annual time series distribution with respect to agricultural crop loss takes on a cyclical pattern with three peaks in 1987, 2001 and 2004 and damage appears to be mainly caused by drought and flood. The seasonal

distribution of loss to agricultural crop shows a cyclical distribution with two peaks. One peak takes place in the months of November, December, January and February due to both drought and flood. During this period, most damage is caused by floods which can be attributed to the monsoon rains. The other peak can be seen in August and September mainly due to drought.

Findings and Conclusion

But it cannot be denied that many people are in some way attracted to the dark tourism sites and are interested in such elements when travelling, at least if they travel with open eyes and an open mind in a way that involves engaging with the local history and culture. The grounds of the death camp, relics, documents, works of art, and above all the memory of contemporary civilization's largest cemetery can be preserved as Dark Tourism sites in Sri Lanka. As a result of dark tourism sites, not only the present generation but the future generations as well could visit and understand how the world could never again allow a place of such hatred experiences and such persecution of existence hereafter. There are the considerable sources of improving and developing dark tourism attracting not only the inbound tourism but outbound tourism as well in Sri Lanka. Unfortunately the institutions operating within the tourism sector in Sri Lanka cannot find this new trend of tourism potentiality that could be improved to increase the relative contribution of the tourism sector to Gross Domestic Product of the country.

Recommendations

Post-conflict areas and post disastrous sites are examples of dark sites, as they illustrate the authentic aftermath of a past war and are of great interest to professionals dealing with conflict – social scientists, journalists, conflict photographers and film-makers, policy-makers, practitioners, activists. Conflict professionals have a professional interest in visiting certain post-conflict sites and can be considered a distinct tourist audience under the dark tourism domain, a sub-category of business tourism that is specific to post-conflict areas.

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