CENTRE FOR A SMART FUTURE

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BACKGROUND AND SCOPING REPORT

How Tourism and Nature Interact:
Studying Perceptions in Three Sites in Sri Lanka

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In 2024, the Centre for a Smart Future (CSF) conducted a study on how local stakeholders perceive the interactions between tourism and nature in three destinations: Kalpitiya, Maskeliya, and Yala National Park.

This Background and Scoping Report outlines the rationale, objectives, and the methodologies used for this study and can be used as a reference alongside the research outputs published from this study.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CSF	Centre for a Smart Future
DS	Divisional Secretariat
DWC	Department of Wildlife Conservation
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
KITRP	Kalpitiya Integrated Tourism Resort Plan
LKR	Sri Lankan Rupees
SLTDA	Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority
SNR	Strict Nature Reserve
SSM	Soft-Systems Methodology
UDA	Urban Development Authority
USD	United States Dollars
YNP	Yala National Park

1. INTRODUCTION

In 2024, the Centre for a Smart Future (CSF) conducted a study on how local stakeholders perceive the interactions between tourism and nature. The objective of this research was to explore destination-level realities of how tourism activities are taking place in Sri Lanka's nature-abundant destinations.

The subject of the study was inspired in a context where Sri Lanka was beginning to recover from multiple and overlapping crises starting with the 2019 Easter Sunday Attacks, the Covid-19 Pandemic in 2020, and finally the Economic Crisis in 2022. After reaching record tourist numbers in 2018, the tourism industry was heavily impacted by all three crises with many service providers shutting down or downsizing to survive. As a key source of foreign exchange, it was clear that a rapid increase in tourism was at the heart of Sri Lanka's short to medium term economic recovery.

Tourism was seemingly navigating a tightrope. The traditional Sri Lankan tourism brand is overwhelmingly reliant on its endowed natural assets. However, as a biodiversity hotspot facing continued environmental degradation and adverse impacts from climate change, these natural assets are fast depleting. Many observe that Sri Lanka's brand of tourism also contributes to this environmental degradation due to rapid, unsystematic, and unsustainable tourism development. This paradoxical relationship between tourism and nature motivated CSF to take a closer look at how such interactions take place and understand pathways to make tourism truly sustainable in the long run.

This Background and Scoping Report does not discuss research findings, but outlines the rationale, objectives, and the methodology used for this study. The purpose of this report is to be a reference for anyone who engages with the research outputs produced by this study (such as reports, blog articles, and presentations), and wants to know more about the methodologies used and the limitations encountered that shaped the findings and observations of the study.

Chapter 2 consolidates the findings from an initial literature review conducted on the relationship between tourism and nature. Chapter 5 is a consolidation of a subsequent literature review done on the three selected sites for the study. Chapters 3, 4, 6 and 7 outline the methodologies used for various components of the study. Finally, Chapter 8 briefly discusses limitations of the study and lessons learnt during the research.

2. TOURISM AND NATURE: AN EVOLVING RELATIONSHIP

As a first step, a brief literature review was conducted to understand the conceptual and practical dimensions of tourism's relationship with nature both internationally and locally.

2.1 International literature

The conceptual relationship between tourism and nature has rapidly evolved since the late 20th century. In a review of perspectives on the interaction of tourism and nature in the past 40 years, Holden argues that during this period a reassessment of nature as both a social construct and a scientific reality occurred.[1] In a systematic review of 1500 publications on the environmental aspects of tourism Buckley notes that tourism uses nature as a product, it creates environmental impacts, and can sometimes contribute to conservation.[2]

The recent rise in nature-based tourism in destinations of minimal anthropogenic interference can be viewed from a long standing western philosophical tradition from Rousseau to Budiansky of romanticising nature as being devoid of human impurities and the repressions of civilization.[3] Externalising nature as a non-human or 'godly' realm can also lend itself to approaching conservation and thereby conservation-oriented tourism as a way to save nature from humanity.[4] However, from a political ecology lens, as recognised by critics from the global south, such a conception of nature can be a false dichotomy translating to discounting the existence of indigenous communities and concerns of 'eco-opportunistic western exploitation'.[5] Challenging the assumption that eco-tourism is inherently good, the rise in stakeholder-theory and participatory approaches to eco-tourism is seen as a reaction to exclusionary forms of tourism practiced in protected areas and other areas of natural significance.[6] Though tourism was predominantly driven by western ideologies in the past century due to colonisation and the industrialisation of tourism by euro-centric societies, Holden recognises that ecotourists consists of many cultural profiles since

[1] Andrew Holden, "Evolving Perspectives on Tourism's Interaction with Nature during the Last 40 Years," *Tourism Recreation Research* 40, no. 2 (May 4, 2015): 133–43, https://doi.org/10.1080/02508281.2015.1039332.
[2] Ralf Buckley, "Tourism and Environment," *Annual Review of Environment and Resources* 36, no. Volume 36, 2011 (November 21, 2011): 397–416, https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-environ-041210-132637.
[3] Holden, "Evolving Perspectives on Tourism's Interaction with Nature during the Last 40 Years."
[4] Anne Törn et al., "Local People, Nature Conservation, and Tourism in Northeastern Finland," *Ecology and Society* 13, no. 1 (2008), https://www.jstor.org/stable/26267913.
[5] Amanda Stronza, Carter Hunt, and Lee Fitzgerald, "Ecotourism for Conservation?," *Annual Review of Environment and Resources* 44 (October 10, 2019), https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-environ-101718-033046.
[6] Ralf Buckley, "Tourism and Environment," *Annual Review of Environment and Resources* 36, no. 1 (November 21, 2011): 397–416, https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-environ-041210-132637.

domestic eco-tourism has rapidly increased in developing countries across the global south.[7]

The rapid advancement of scientific and technological capabilities of humans have radically changed nature as a real concept.[8] This heralded the Anthropocene, whereby humans have become a force that can materially change ecosystems through globalised consumption of resources.[9] Tourism too has evolved with commercial airlines and globalised travel amplifying its capability to impact ecosystems and communities.[10] Many countries now rely on tourism as a major contributor to their national economies.[11] However, such technologies also establish that nature is a finite resource through the ability to track and quantify byproducts of economic activity such as emissions of greenhouse gases, soil quality, and Carbon Dioxide.[12] Major environmental impacts from tourism as highlighted in literature include greenhouse gases by airlines, liquid wastes by cruise ships, water and energy use by urban hotels, vegetation clearance and wildlife displacement by rural resorts.[13] This shifts the perspective of tourism being a 'smoke-less' industry as thought of in the mid-20th century.[14] These considerations also place tourism against other economic activities and industries, competing for finite natural resources prompting a closer look at opportunity costs.[15] Holden attributes these factors to the placement of tourism in many sustainable development agendas of international organisations, countries and development agencies.[16] Tourism has been observed to displace industries with higher impacts on the environment, and so even though tourism itself creates impacts, a change to tourism may represent a reduction in impacts otherwise occurring from farming, forestry, fisheries, or, occasionally, the oil or mining industries.[17]

[7] Holden, "Evolving Perspectives on Tourism's Interaction with Nature during the Last 40 Years."
[8] Peter Jones, "Tourism and Biodiversity: A Paradoxical Relationship," *Athens Journal of Tourism* 9, no. 3 (August 25, 2022): 151–62, https://doi.org/10.30958/ajt.9-3-2.
[9] Jones.
[10] Hogne Øian et al., *Tourism, Nature and Sustainability*, TemaNord (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2018), https://doi.org/10.6027/TN2018-534.
[11] María Bahamonde-Rodríguez, Giedrė Šadeikaitė, and Francisco Javier García-Delgado, "The Effects of Tourism on Local Development in Protected Nature Areas: The Case of Three Nature Parks of the Sierra Morena (Andalusia, Spain)," *Land* 12, no. 4 (April 17, 2023): 898, https://doi.org/10.3390/land12040898.
[12] Buckley, "Tourism and Environment," November 21, 2011.
[13] Qadar Bakhsh Baloch et al., "Impact of Tourism Development upon Environmental Sustainability: A Suggested Framework for Sustainable Ecotourism," *Environmental Science and Pollution Research International* 30, no. 3 (2023): 5917–30, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11356-022-22496-w.
[14] Holden, "Evolving Perspectives on Tourism's Interaction with Nature during the Last 40 Years."
[15] Jasper Hessel Heslinga, Peter Groote, and Frank Vanclay, "Using a Social-Ecological Systems Perspective to Understand Tourism and Landscape Interactions in Coastal Areas," *Journal of Tourism Futures* 3, no. 1 (April 3, 2017): 23–38, https://doi.org/10.1108/JTF-10-2015-0047.
[16] Holden, "Evolving Perspectives on Tourism's Interaction with Nature during the Last 40 Years."
[17] Cristiana Păvăluc et al., "Analysing the Relationship between Tourism Development and Sustainability by Looking at the Impact on the Environment. A Study on the European Union Countries," 2020.

Impacts of changes in nature on tourism is recognised with theoretical models of tourism such as Butler's destination life-cycle model[18] and tourism as a complex system by McKercher highlighting the dependence of the growth of tourism on the sustenance of nature.[19] Overcrowding and overuse of natural assets through tourism was increasingly a concern prompting the use of regulation and market-based instruments to ration and sustainably control the tourist use of common and protected natural assets. However, the efficacy of this type of regulation has been brought into question. For instance, Buckley notes that Eco certification as a tool of self-regulation in tourism is largely ineffective.[20]

Tourism is increasingly linked to environmental conservation, as a source of financing, and a tool to attribute value to nature and raise awareness.[21] Tourism can generate conservation funding for public parks and help create private and communal land for conservation.[22] Emerton et al recognise that the revenue from park entry fees and other tourism activities within protected areas form a significant revenue stream.[23] Though Buckley notes that there is no evidence that taking tourists to areas of high conservation value converts them to conservation advocates,[24] Diallo et al links nature affinity from tourism towards social engagement for conservation.[25]

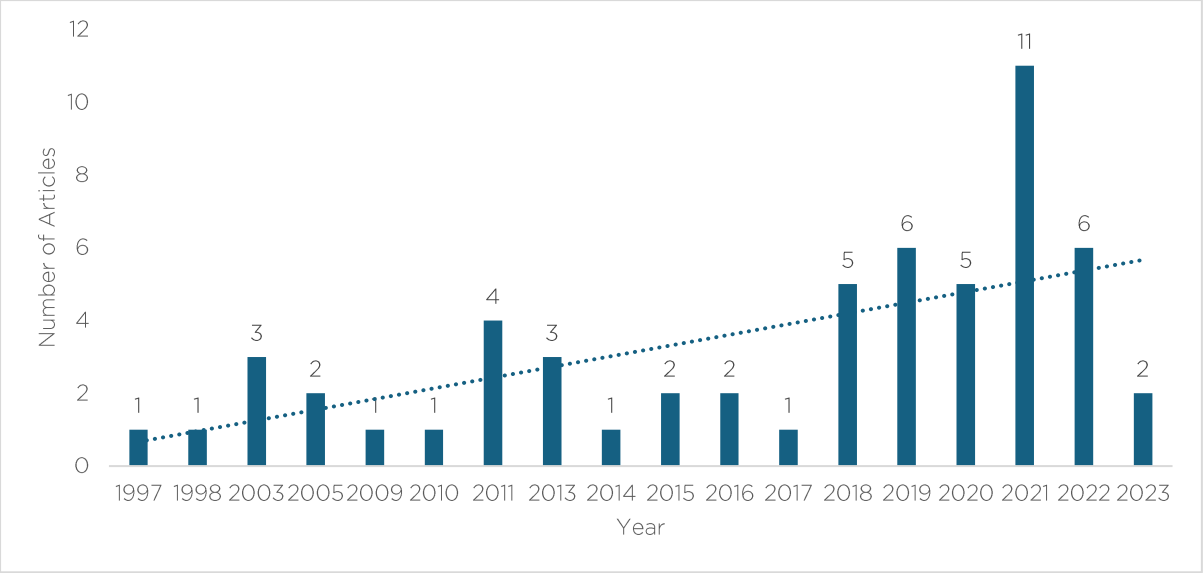
2.2 Local literature

The following insights are from a literature review done using the keywords "tourism" "environmental" and "Sri Lanka".[26] A total of 329 hits were generated, out of which 57 were selected as relevant to the study. The full list of studies is included in Annex 1.

There is an increasing trend of literature analysing environmental aspects of tourism in Sri Lanka (see Figure 1).

[18] Edward Norman Berry, "An Application of Butler's (1980) Tourist Area Life Cycle Theory to the Cairns Region, Australia, 1876-1998" (James Cook University, 2000), https://doi.org/10.25903/5BEBAE108228C.
[19] Bob McKercher and Bruce Prideaux, *Tourism Theories, Concepts and Models*, 1st ed. (Goodfellow Publishers, 2020), https://doi.org/10.23912/9781911635352-4280.
[20] Buckley, "Tourism and Environment," November 21, 2011.
[21] Stronza, Hunt, and Fitzgerald, "Ecotourism for Conservation?"
[22] Lucy Emerton, *Sustainable Financing of Protected Areas: A Global Review of Challenges and Options* (IUCN, 2006), https://doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.CH.2005.PAG.13.en.
[23] Emerton.
[24] Buckley, "Tourism and Environment," November 21, 2011.
[25] Mbaye Fall Diallo et al., "How Do Tourism Sustainability and Nature Affinity Affect Social Engagement Propensity? The Central Roles of Nature Conservation Attitude and Personal Tourist Experience," *Ecological Economics* 200 (October 1, 2022): 107503, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolecon.2022.107503.
[26] The Bodleian Library Database was used to conduct this analysis.

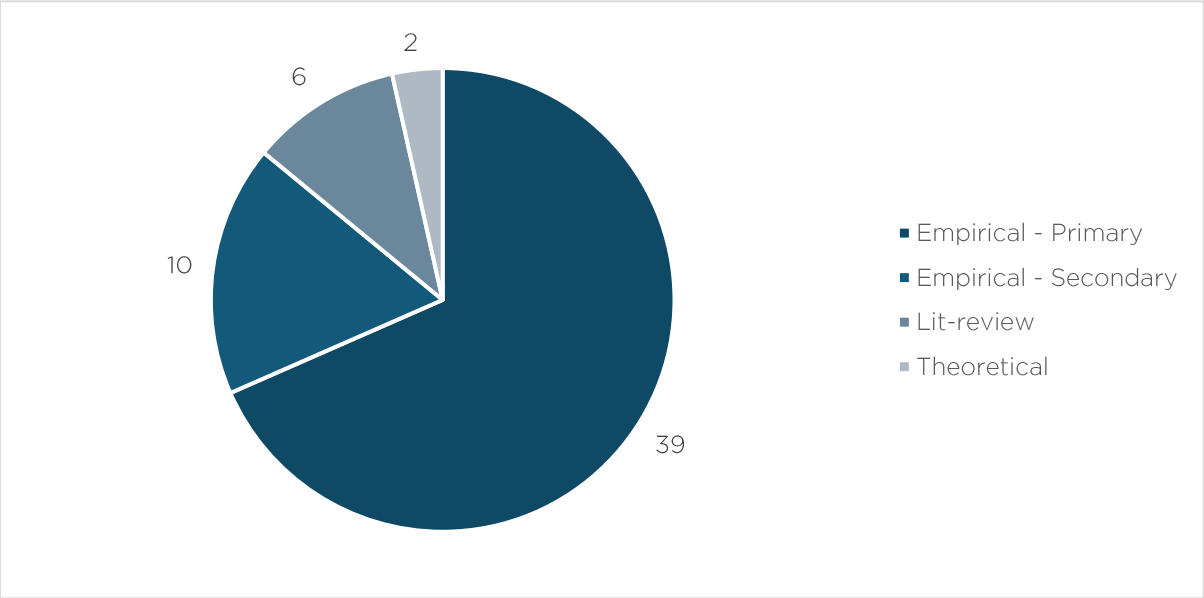
Figure 1: Reviewed relevant literature by year



Source: Author's calculations

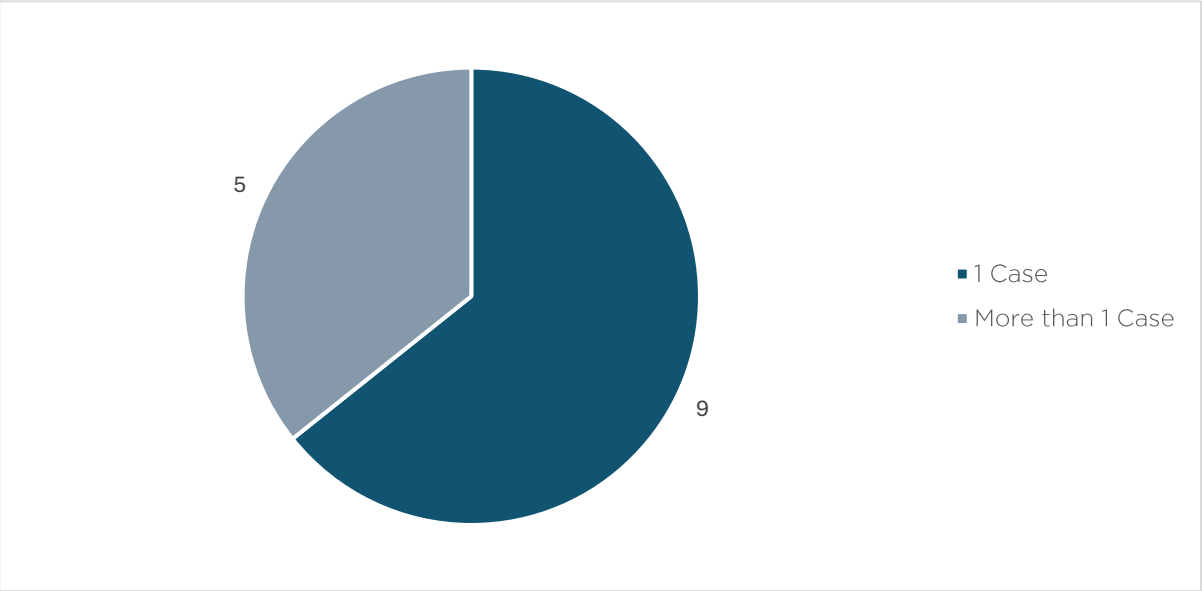
As seen in Figures 2 and 3, varied methodologies were used by reviewed literature with empirical analysis using primary data being the most predominant (39 studies). 14 studies used a case-study approach among which 9 used one case study.

Figure 2: Types of research methodology used among the reviewed local literature



Source: Author's calculations

Figure 3: The use of one or more than one case among case-study based studies



Source: Author's calculations

While none of the reviewed literature exclusively explored the interaction between tourism and nature in Sri Lanka many facets of such interactions were discussed. On the question of if and how tourism activities impacts natural assets, Seneviratne et al recognised that tourism is a key anthropogenic factor affecting coastal erosion and environmental degradation in Unawatuna.[27] Ranaweerage et al. found a close association between behavioural changes in Elephants around Udawalawe National Park and tourist behaviour and activities.[28] Buultjens et al. noted among other impacts, the pollution caused by wildlife and religious tourists travelling in Yala National Park.[29] Fernando and Shariff highlights that eco-tourism in Sri Lanka has negative impacts such as land degradation, air and water pollution, and disturbances to biodiversity.[30] Buultjens et al. notes that the unsystematic development of whale watching in Mirissa is perceived to be stressing the whales.[31] Perera et al. estimated significant environmental

[27] E.M.T.K. Senevirathna et al., "Analysis of Causes and Effects of Coastal Erosion and Environmental Degradation in Southern Coastal Belt of Sri Lanka Special Reference to Unawatuna Coastal Area," *Procedia Engineering* 212 (2018): 1010–17, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.proeng.2018.01.130.
[28] Eranga Ranaweerage, Ashoka D.G. Ranjeewa, and Koun Sugimoto, "Tourism-Induced Disturbance of Wildlife in Protected Areas: A Case Study of Free Ranging Elephants in Sri Lanka," *Global Ecology and Conservation* 4 (July 2015): 625–31, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gecco.2015.10.013.
[29] J. Buultjens et al., "Tourism and Its Implications for Management in Ruhuna National Park (Yala), Sri Lanka," *Tourism Management* 26, no. 5 (October 2005): 733–42, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2004.03.014.
[30] Sudusingha Liyanage Jothirathna Fernando and Noresah Mohd Shariff, "Wetland Ecotourism in Sri Lanka: Issues and Challenges," *Geografia* 9, no. 4 (2013), https://www.proquest.com/docview/2488747706/abstract/CA067B235242483APQ/1.
[31] Jeremy Buultjens, Iraj Ratnayke, and Athula Gnanapala, "Whale Watching in Sri Lanka: Perceptions of Sustainability," *Tourism Management Perspectives* 18 (April 2016): 125–33, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2016.02.003.

degradation on biophysical indicators such as ground and root exposure and soil compaction through both high and low use camp sites within three national parks.[32]

On energy consumption and emissions, Gamage et al estimates that carbon emissions, energy consumption, and tourism development are cointegrated in the long run.[33] In a case study of 5 hotels in Colombo, Abeydeera and Karunasena calculates that each hotel released more than 7000 tons of carbon annually and that purchased energy usage is the prime source of carbon emissions.[34] In a timeseries analysis of four South Asian countries including Sri Lanka, Ahmad et al. estimates that a 1 percent increase in tourism related activities increases Carbon dioxide emissions by 0.16 percent.[35]

On perceptions held by the tourism stakeholders, Heenipellage et al. finds that characteristics such as education, experience and exposure determine how well senior hotel executives perform in managing hotels in an environmentally sustainable manner.[36] Perera et al. observes that Scuba Divers in Hikkaduwa and Unawatuna expressed concern regarding the environmental impacts of increased tourists in marine ecosystems.[37] Sharmini and Bandusena highlight that more than 50% of the community surveyed in Ella were aware of disaster resilience after it became an ecotourism destination.[38] Egresi et al. argue that when local residents around a wetland are involved in the decision-making process, they are more willing to accept inconveniences associated with tourism development and the development of more sustainable tourism plans.[39] A considerable body of literature assess various aspects of perceptions held by tourists including their willingness to pay for more sustainable forms of tourism[40]

[32] Priyan Perera et al., "Profiling of Shelter Campers, Their Attitudes, and Perceptions towards Environmental Impacts of Campsite Use and Management: Evidence from National Parks of Sri Lanka," *Sustainability* 14, no. 20 (October 17, 2022): 13311, https://doi.org/10.3390/su142013311.

[33] Sisira Kumara Naradda Gamage, Ravindra Hewa Kuruppuge, and Ihtisham Ul Haq, "Energy Consumption, Tourism Development, and Environmental Degradation in Sri Lanka," *Energy Sources, Part B: Economics, Planning, and Policy* 12, no. 10 (October 3, 2017): 910–16, https://doi.org/10.1080/15567249.2017.1324533.

[34] Udara Willhelm Abeydeera and Karunasena, "Carbon Emissions of Hotels: The Case of the Sri Lankan Hotel Industry," *Buildings* 9, no. 11 (October 30, 2019): 227, https://doi.org/10.3390/buildings9110227.

[35] Waheed Ahmad et al., "Tourism and CO2 Emissions: A Case Study of Selected South Asian Countries," *Asian Journal of Business Environment* 10, no. 4 (2020): 21–27.

[36] Anushka Hewa Heenipellage, Mario Fernando, and Belinda Gibbons, "Upper Echelon Characteristics and Environmental Sustainability Practices: Evidence from Upper Echelons in the Hotel Industry," *Journal of Cleaner Production* 379 (December 2022): 134618, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2022.134618.

[37] Priyan Perera et al., "Scuba Diver Environmental Orientation and Perceptions of Diving Impact Management on Coral Reefs: Evidence from Sri Lanka," *Tourism in Marine Environments* 17, no. 3 (December 2022): 145–63, https://doi.org/10.3727/154427322X16615179540960.

[38] A A Sharmini and Prathibhani Bandusena, "ECOTOURISM INFLUENCES ON THE LIVELIHOOD OF LOCAL COMMUNITY IN SRILANKA – WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO" 4, no. 2 (2020).

[39] István Egresi et al., "What Affects Support for Wetland Tourism? A Case Study from Sri Lanka," *Sustainability* 13, no. 16 (August 6, 2021): 8802, https://doi.org/10.3390/su13168802.

[40] Rathnayake Mudiyanselage Wasantha Rathnayake, "'Turtle Watching': A Strategy for Endangered Marine Turtle Conservation through Community Participation in Sri Lanka," *Ocean & Coastal Management* 119 (January 2016):

and for conservation outcomes.[41] For instance Suresh et al. finds that tourists are willing to pay significantly more for elephant conservation in Yala through an embarkation tax.[42]

On tourism and conservation, Tisdell provides cautionary notes and considerations that must be addressed for nature-based tourism to effectively contribute towards nature conservation in Vanni.[43] Kariyawasam et al. notes that factors such as a lack of inclusivity have limited local participation in the value chain of Udawalawe National Park and thus impedes local attitudes towards conservation.[44]

On aspects of guidelines and measures promoting sustainability and ecotourism, Bandara finds that surveyed ecotourism providers lacked an understanding and enthusiasm for the ecotourism guidelines set by the International Ecotourism Society.[45] Bandara et al. noted that insufficient budget allocations, government intervention, legal constraints and lack of user awareness and natural conditions impeded the success of green certifications in the hotel sector.[46] Lee et al. found a positive relationship between consumer's perceived value and green certificates and awards.[47] Kularatne et al estimates that environmentally sustainable practices make major hotels more efficient, thus providing them with a competitive advantage.[48]

Relatively fewer studies assessed the impact from nature to tourism. Liyanage et al. observes that the establishment of a man-made analog

199–207, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ocecoaman.2015.10.014; Menuka Udugama et al., "Willingness-to-Pay for Blue Ecosystem Services of Natural Pools in Sri Lanka: A Discrete Choice Experiment," *Water* 16, no. 17 (January 2024): 2437, https://doi.org/10.3390/w16172437.

[41] Salpage Nesha Dushani, Margrethe Aanesen, and Claire W. Armstrong, "Willingness to Pay for Mangrove Restoration to Reduce the Climate Change Impacts on Ecotourism in Rekawa Coastal Wetland, Sri Lanka," *Journal of Environmental Economics and Policy* 12, no. 1 (January 2, 2023): 19–32, https://doi.org/10.1080/21606544.2022.2065364.

[42] Kanesh Suresh et al., "Can a Tourist Levy Protect National Park Resources and Compensate for Wildlife Crop Damage? An Empirical Investigation," *Environmental Development* 42 (June 2022): 100697, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envdev.2021.100697.

[43] Clement Tisdell, *Ecotourism/Wildlife-Based Tourism as Contributor to Nature Conservation with Reference to Vanni, Sri Lanka*, 2003.

[44] Shanaka Kariyawasam et al., "Conservation versus Socio-Economic Sustainability: A Case Study of the Udawalawe National Park, Sri Lanka," *Environmental Development* 35 (September 2020): 100517, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envdev.2020.100517.

[45] Ranjith Bandara, "The Practice of Ecotourism in Sri Lanka: An Assessment of Operator Compliance towards International Ecotourism Guidelines," *South Asia Economic Journal* 10, no. 2 (July 2009): 471–92, https://doi.org/10.1177/139156140901000209.

[46] Chamali Bandara et al., "Mitigation of Challenges in Sustaining Green Certification in the Sri Lankan Hotel Sector," *Built Environment Project and Asset Management* 8, no. 5 (2018): 515–27, https://doi.org/10.1108/BEPAM-10-2017-0102.

[47] Ki-Hoon Lee, Minwoo Lee, and Nuwan Gunarathne, "Do Green Awards and Certifications Matter? Consumers' Perceptions, Green Behavioral Intentions, and Economic Implications for the Hotel Industry: A Sri Lankan Perspective," *Tourism Economics* 25, no. 4 (June 2019): 593–612, https://doi.org/10.1177/1354816618810563.

[48] Thamarasi Kularatne et al., "Do Environmentally Sustainable Practices Make Hotels More Efficient? A Study of Major Hotels in Sri Lanka," *Tourism Management* 71 (April 2019): 213–25, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2018.09.009.

forest in Galle increased the potential for nature-based tourism in the region.[49] Through a contingent visitation study, Salpage et al. estimates that ecotourism at Rekawa wetland is at risk due to climate change impacts with domestic visitors more likely to reduce visitation.[50]

Finally on the potential for tourism post-pandemic, Sumanapala and Wolf highlights opportunities to increase sustainable tourism through management tools such as visitation controls and education.[51] Perera et al notes that the industry recognises a need to use the pandemic as a window of opportunity to rethink tourism strategy.[52] They particular focus on Protected Areas as they were under heavy stress due to high visitation until the overlapping crises.

[49] W.K.D.D. Liyanage et al., "An Assessment of the Contribution of an Analog Forest as a Sustainable Land-Use Ecosystem for the Development of Rural Green Economy in Sri Lanka," *Journal of Tropical Forestry and Environment* 3, no. 1 (April 24, 2013), https://doi.org/10.31357/jtfe.v3i1.1118.
[50] Nesha Dushani Salpage, Margrethe Aanesen, and Oscar Amarasinghe, "Is the Sri Lankan Ecotourism Industry Threatened by Climate Change? A Case Study of Rekawa Coastal Wetland Using Contingent Visitation Approach," *Environment and Development Economics* 25, no. 3 (June 2020): 226–43, https://doi.org/10.1017/S1355770X19000391.
[51] Daminda Sumanapala and Isabelle D. Wolf, "The Changing Face of Wildlife Tourism during the COVID-19 Pandemic: An Opportunity to Strive towards Sustainability?," *Current Issues in Tourism* 25, no. 3 (February 1, 2022): 357–62, https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2021.1960281.
[52] Priyan Perera et al., "Challenges and Opportunities for the Resumption of Nature Tourism in Post-Pandemic Sri Lanka," *International Journal of Geoheritage and Parks* 11, no. 2 (June 2023): 234–46, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijgeop.2023.03.001.

3. RESEARCH PARAMETERS FOR THE STUDY

Inspired by the findings and gaps highlighted from the above literature review, the researchers established three parameters to study the interaction between tourism and nature: a destination-level focus, a focus on supply-side tourism actors beyond the value chain, capturing perceptions and beliefs.

3.1 A Destination-level focus

The review emphasised the existence of problematic interactions between tourism and nature which have persisted over time. Some interactions are specific to individual locations (feeding wild animals) and others are general (pollution). This is amidst a landscape of increasing but inconsistent national policies and regulations on tourism and sustainability.[53] Therefore, this study adopted a destination-level focus to understand if there is a disconnect between national tourism policymaking and local realities. While some studies focused on individual destinations, to capture diverse idiosyncrasies in interactions and to facilitate generalisability of findings, this study decided to analysis three destinations that would consist of different tourism and environmental characteristics.

3.2 A focus on supply-side tourism actors beyond the value chain

While tourists visit a destination for a short time span, supply-side actors engage in long-term interactions with a destination. Existing literature extensively feature sentiments of tourists. Perceptions of industry stakeholders are less explored. While non-tourism stakeholders such as residents of a destination were featured, less attention is given to other stakeholders such as local government authorities, religious leaders and transportation providers who also impact tourism in a destination. Furthermore, given the multiple and overlapping crises, supply-side actors were heavily affected and the post-crisis pathways for tourism depend critically on their activities.

Therefore, this study focused on supply-side actors in tourism at a destination-level. Therefore, tourists were not included as a stakeholder group. To understand how tourism in the chosen destinations interacts with nature, the study did not limit itself to stakeholders within the tourism value chain and nature protection domains. This is to capture stakeholders that

[53] Senith Abeyanayake, "Re-Defining Destination Identities for Sustainable Tourism in Sri Lanka," Re-defining Destination Identities for Sustainable Tourism in Sri Lanka, accessed December 18, 2024, https://www.csf-asia.org/re-defining-destination-identities-for-sustainable-tourism-in-sri-lanka/.

may not be recognised in the above spheres such as religious leaders who still exert considerable influence over both systems.

3.3 Capturing perceptions and beliefs

Exploring perceptions held by tourism stakeholders on factors related to environment and sustainability is a nascent but growing focus in Sri Lankan tourism literature. This study aimed to understand perceptions and beliefs held by tourism stakeholders. This was for three reasons. Firstly, such notions may translate into how said stakeholders interact with nature. Secondly, they can be a critical determinant of success and failure of policy implementation. Thirdly, perceptions and beliefs of a few stakeholders with large influence may be crucial for system-wide change.

These considerations led the study to not adopt quantitative methods such as surveys, which elicit only average sentiments of chosen stakeholder groups. Instead, interviews with minimal structure were conducted using laddering as a method to uncover perceptions and beliefs. A feature of perceptions is the existence of multiple truths and causal claims.[54] Fact-checking statements made by stakeholders is beyond the scope and objective of the study. However, the study highlighted contradictory observations wherever they arose.

The study supplemented the findings from the field research with a scraping of online accommodation and review platforms such as Booking.com, Google Map reviews, and TripAdvisor.com.

[54] Cory, "Perceptual Truths Vs Existential Truths," *Spiritual Secrets* (blog), August 6, 2021, https://medium.com/spiritual-secrets/perceptual-truths-vs-existential-truths-79970704ed3f.

4. SELECTION OF SITES

A case-study approach strives to obtain in-depth insights grounded in their real-life contexts.[55] Using a case (in this study a destination) as a unit of analysis provides the opportunity to explore the same unit from multiple perspectives. In this study, since there are multiple perspectives on tourism, environment, and the interplay between the concepts, basing the questions on a single destination helps in contextualising the questions. An advantage of using multiple case-studies to analyse a single phenomenon is the ability to see how the same phenomenon behaves in different conditions. However, for the above benefits to materialise, the case study site selection must be robust, and the three sites must not possess tourism and environmental characteristics that are significantly similar. Therefore, the following multi-step selection process was conducted to select an optimal combination of case study site.

Step 1: Creating a longlist of tourism sites based on existing literature, brainstorming with experts, and reviewing government policy considerations

Step 2: Selection of tourism and environmental indicators to be used to compare sites

Step 3: Shortlisting sites based on tourism and environmental indicators

Step 4: Constructing optimal options of 3 study-sites and finalising the best option

4.1 Creating a longlist of tourism sites

Every tourism destination mentioned in the initial literature review and recent SLTDA annual reports, statistical reports, and surveys were included into a long list. Naturally, this list contained destinations ranging from entire districts to individual tourist attractions such as protected areas, mountains, and lakes. Thereafter, during an initial brainstorming of 6 experts in tourism and environment related fields,[56] the experts were asked to suggest study sites and indicators relevant for selection. As shown in Table 1, a longlist of 123 sites covering all 9 provinces and 23 out of 25 districts was compiled (see Annex 2 for the long list).

[55] Sarah Crowe et al., "The Case Study Approach," *BMC Medical Research Methodology* 11 (June 27, 2011): 100, https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2288-11-100.

[56] In this brainstorming, the experts were asked to suggest potential case study sites, key stakeholder groups relevant to tourism and nature at the destination-level, and other considerations relevant when designing the field research.

Table 1: Distribution of longlist sites by province and district

Province	District	Number of Sites	Total number of sites
Central	Kandy	6	19
	Matale	6	
	Nuwara Eliya	7	
Eastern	Ampara	8	15
	Trincomalee	4	
	Batticaloa	3	
North Central	Anuradhapura	6	16
	Polonnaruwa	10	
North Western	Puttalam	9	10
	Kurunegala	1	
Northern	Jaffna	3	10
	Mullaitivu	2	
	Mannar	5	
Sabaragamuwa	Kegalle	3	8
	Ratnapura	5	
Southern	Galle	15	30
	Matara	6	
	Hambantota	9	
Uva	Badulla	5	6
	Monaragala	1	
Western	Colombo	1	9
	Gampaha	5	
	Kalutara	3	

Source: Authors' compilation

4.2 Selection of tourism and environmental criteria for site comparison

Based on existing literature and perspectives obtained from the expert interviews, 9 categories of tourism and environmental indicators were initially selected to compare and assess the diversity of the longlist of tourism destinations (see Table 2).

Table 2: Categories of tourism and environmental criteria used for shortlisting

Metrics	Indicator	Indicator type
Approximate size of the site	Area (ha)	Continuous
Geographical diversity	Landscape – Terrestrial, Marine, or Mixed Climatic zone – Dry, Semi-arid, Intermediate, or Wet Seasonal variations	Categorical
Tourist metrics (site specific or district)	Footfall Domestic tourists Foreign tourists Vehicle revenue Total revenue Average length of stay	Continuous

Tourist service provider metrics (site specific or district)	Room distribution Occupancy rate Number of SLTDA registered F&B retailers Number of tourism sector operators Visitor Satisfaction rate	Continuous
Governance metrics	Custodianship – State, Community, or Other	Categorical
Tourism cycle	Established or emerging	Categorical - Binary
Type of tourism development	Organic or planned	Categorical - Binary
Tourist demographic	Local, foreign, or mixed	Categorical
Ecological metrics	Availability of research	Categorical - Binary

Source: Authors' compilation

Though for some destinations, tourist and tourist service provider metrics were available at a site level, for most destinations, such data was not available. So, district level data for both categories were used to obtain consistent variation across all sites.

4.3 Shortlisting sites based on tourism and environmental indicators

The shortlisting of sites was done by using the categorical and continuous variables to create variation among the sites and sort them into groups. Firstly, sites which were entire districts[57] were eliminated since it was decided that an entire district as a unit of analysis would be too large for the scope of this study.

Secondly the three binary variables and the indicator for tourist demographic (Recorded 1 for local, 0 for foreign, and 0.5 for balanced) was used to assign a score between 0-4 for all sites (see Figure 3). The assigning of values was subjective, guided by literature, expert insights, and personal knowledge of the researchers.

[57] Where the site name = District name.

Figure 3: Example extract of assigning binary and categorical values to each site

Site	District	Tourism Cycle	Type of tourism development	Tourist Demographic	Ecological metrics	Total Score
		Established v. Emerging (0= emerging)	Organic v. Centrally Planned (Planned = 1)	(Local = 1, Foreign = 0, Mixed = 0.5)	Availability of Research (1 = available)	
Arugambay	Ampara	1	0	0	1	2
Kumana National Park	Ampara	1	1	1	1	4
Passikudah	Ampara	1	0		1	2
Gal Oya National Park	Ampara	0	1	1	1	3
Lahugala National Park	Ampara	0	1	1	1	3
Okanda	Ampara	0	0	1	0	1
Pottuvil	Ampara	1	0	0	1	2
Panama	Ampara	1	1	1	1	4
Habarana	Anuradhapura	1	1	1	1	4
Kala Wewa National Park	Anuradhapura	0	1	1	0	2
Horowpothana National Park	Anuradhapura	0	1	1	0	2
Anuradhapura	Anuradhapura					0
Ritigala Strict Nature Reserve	Anuradhapura	0	1	1	1	3

Source: Extract from authors' compilation

Thirdly, each district was grouped based on tourist footfall which was taken as a proxy of overall tourism activity in the district (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Categorisation of districts into 4 groups based on footfall data

Group	Site	Footfall
1	Mannar	0
	Mullaitivu	0
	Kegalle	1,847
	Kurunegala	7,120
	Ampara	8,629
	Moneragala	10,688
2	Ratnapura	14,515
	Jaffna	20,019
	Polonnaruwa	20,852
	Badulla	33,289
	Trincomalee	39,123
	Matara	69,923

Group	Site	Footfall
3	Batticaloa	79,375
	Anuradhapura	79,484
	Puttalam	102,068
	Nuwara Eliya	116,411
	Hambantota	138,616
	Matale	172,103
4	Gampaha	202,528
	Kalutara	279,231
	Kandy	172,103
	Galle	612,158
	Colombo	659,077

Source: Extract from authors' compilation

Thereafter, all the sites were arranged by the two dimensions mentioned above (assigned score and assigned groups) and one site per score in each group was shortlisted. Figure 5 provides the extract of Group 1, where one site per score category was shortlisted (green highlight) and another may be selected as a backup (orange highlight). The selection of sites per score-group combination was at the researchers' discretion.[58] Each exercise was similarly conducted for the other 3 groups.

Figure 5: Example extract of site shortlisting in Group 1

Group	Sub-Group	Site	District	Province	Governance metrics	Tourism Cycle	Type of Tourism Development	Tourist Demographic	Ecological metrics	Total score
					Custodianship	Established v. Emerging (0= emerging)	Organic v. Centrally Planned (Planned = 1)	(Local = 1, Foreign = 0, Mixed = 0.5)	Availablility of Research (1 = available)	
Group 1	1	Okanda	Ampara	Eastern	0	0	1	0	1	
	2	Arugambay	Ampara	Eastern	1	0	0	1	2	
		Passikudah	Ampara	Eastern	1	0		1	2	
		Pottuvil	Ampara	Eastern	1	0	0	1	2	
		Walaswewa	Kurunegala	North Western	0	1	1	0	2	
		Madhu Road National Park	Mannar	Nothern	0	1	1	0	2	
		Vankalai sanctuary	Mannar	Nothern	0	1	1	0	2	
		Vidathalthive	Mannar	Nothern	0	1	1	0	2	
		Giants Lake Sanctuary	Mannar	Nothern	0	1	1	0	2	
		Ellawala Falls	Monaragala	Uva	0	1	1	0	2	
	3	Gal Oya National Park	Ampara	Eastern	0	1	1	1	3	
		Lahugala National Park	Ampara	Eastern	0	1	1	1	3	
		Chundikulam Bird Sanctuary	Mullaitivu	Northern	0	1	1	1	3	
		Kitulgala	Kegalle	Sabaragamuwa	1	0	1	1	3	
		Padawigampola	Kegalle	Sabaragamuwa	0	1	1	1	3	
	4	Panama	Ampara	Eastern	1	1	1	1	4	
		Pinnawala	Kegalle	Sabaragamuwa	1	1	1	1	4	

Source: Extract from authors' compilation

[58] In the above example in Figure 5. Okanda, Arugambay, Kitulgala, and Panama were selected per each assigned score of 1, 2, 3, and 4 respectively within Group 1. Vankalai Sanctuary and Gal Oya National Park were selected as backups for the assigned score of 2 and 3 of Group 1.

This exercise shortlisted 15 sites and 13 backups (see Figure 6). All the sites were then categorised into the three types of landscapes: Marine, Terrestrial and Mixed.

Figure 6: The 15 selected sites for the shortlist (left) and the 13 backup sites (right)

Short List		
Site	Landscape	District
Arugam Bay	Marine	Ampara
Delft National Park	Marine	Jaffna
Hiriketiya	Marine	Matara
Vankalai	Marine	Ampara
Chilaw	Mixed	Putlam
Okanda	Mixed	Ampara
Yala National Park	Mixed	Hambantota
Dedduwa Lake	Terrestrial	Galle
Digana	Terrestrial	Kandy
Ella	Terrestrial	Badulla
Heelaoya	Terrestrial	Kandy
Horton Plains	Terrestrial	Nuwara Eliya
Kitulgala	Terrestrial	Kegalle
Maskeliya	Terrestrial	Nuwara Eliya
Peak Wilderness	Terrestrial	Ratnapura

Backup		
Site	Landscape	District
Kalpitiya	Marine	Putlam
Panama	Marine	Ampara
Wilpattu	Mixed	Putlam
Gal Oya National Park	Terrestrial	Ampara
Diyaluma	Terrestrial	Badulla
Koslanda	Terrestrial	Badulla
Haputale	Terrestrial	Badulla
Minneriya National Park	Terrestrial	Polonnaruwa
Wasgamuwa National Park	Terrestrial	Polonnaruwa
Sinharaja Forest Reserve	Terrestrial	Ratnapura
Meemure	Terrestrial	Matale
Ohiya	Terrestrial	Nuwala Eliya
Knuckles	Terrestrial	Matale

Source: Extract from authors' compilation

After considering possible combinations, Yala National Park and Maskeliya were picked from the selected sites and Kalpitiya was added from the backup sites due to the variation it provided. Table 3 provides an overview into the dimensions of tourism and environmental diversity across the three selected sites.

Table 3: Dimensions of diversity across the selected sites

Dimension	Yala National Park	Kalpitiya	Maskeliya
Administrative Boundary	Southern and Uva Province	Central Province	North Western Province
Tourism maturity	High	Medium	Low
Tourist demographics	Balanced	Mostly Foreign	Mostly Local
Natural features	Dry and semi-arid, low country	Peninsular and islands	High altitude and rainfall, montane
Nature stewardship	Government	Mixed	High private stewardship

Source: Authors' compilation

5. PROFILES OF THE SELECTED SITES

This section provides the geographical boundaries of the 3 selected sites defined for this study (see Table 4) along with selected insights from a literature review conducted prior to field research.

Table 4: Geographical boundaries of study sites defined for this study

Study site	Administrative Boundary
Yala National Park	The boundaries of the Yala National Park as defined by the Department of Wildlife Conservation excluding Lunugamvehera National Park which was declared as Yala Block VI in 2022.
Kalpitiya	Kalpitiya Pradeshiya Sabha Wards 1-7 of and the surrounding islets. The wards are Palliyawatta, Anawasala, Mandalakudawa, Kandakuliya, Musalpitiya, Thalawila, and Ettale.
Maskeliya	A region comprising of 7 Grama Niladhari (GN) divisions around Maskeliya GN. The GN Divisions are Moray, Mocha, Seethagangula, Maussakale, Brownslow, Brownswick and Norwood, in addition to Maskeliya GN.

Source: Authors' compilation

5.1 Yala National Park

Yala National Park, situated in the southeastern region of Sri Lanka, is a prominent conservation area renowned for its rich biodiversity and varied landscapes.

5.1.1 Geographical Features

The park's geographical coordinates are 6°22'22"N and 81°31'01"E.[59] Covering an extensive area of 978 square kilometres[60] Yala is the second largest national park in Sri Lanka, surpassed only by Wilpattu National Park. The park is divided into five administrative blocks, each with distinct geographical characteristics. Spanning across 40,775 ha, Yala Block III is the largest administrative block within the park whereas Block V is the smallest block, with an area of 6,656 ha. Blocks I, II, and IV consist of 14,101 ha, 9,931 ha, and 26,418 ha, respectively.[61] In addition to these blocks, Yala National Park also includes a Strict Nature Reserve (SNR) of 28,905 ha, where entry is strictly regulated and permitted only for authorised personnel, to ensure the protection of its sensitive ecosystems. Yala National Park shares its borders with Kumana National Park to the east and Lunugamvehera National Park to the west, creating a contiguous protected area that enhances biodiversity conservation efforts. The park straddles two

[59] Malinda Waruna, "Yala National Park," accessed February 18, 2025, https://www.yalasrilanka.lk/.
[60] Suresh et al., "Can a Tourist Levy Protect National Park Resources and Compensate for Wildlife Crop Damage?"
[61] M Hellen, "Top 10 Remarkable Facts about Yala National Park," *Discover Walks Blog* (blog), August 29, 2022, https://www.discoverwalks.com/blog/sri-lanka/top-10-remarkable-facts-about-yala-national-park/.

administrative districts, with blocks I and II belonging to Hambantota district in the Southern Province and Blocks III, IV, and V belonging to Monaragala district in the Uva Province.

5.1.2 Tourism Development

Since the end of Sri Lanka's civil war, Yala National Park has witnessed a substantial increase in tourism. This surge can be attributed to reduced concerns over safety and the post-war development initiatives, including the construction of the Southern Highway, which has significantly improved accessibility to the park.[62] In 2000, Yala National Park recorded 154,000 tourist visits, with a predominant 80% of these visitors being of domestic origin. These tourists were transported by a total of 20,061 vehicles, comprising jeeps, buses, and trucks.[63] By 2023, the number of tourist arrivals had escalated to 466,437, marking a balanced distribution of tourists, with 54% being local visitors and 46% being foreign tourists.[64] Despite all blocks being open for tourism, except for the Strict Nature Reserve (SNR), most tourist activity is concentrated in Block I. This block alone accommodates 80 percent of the jeeps operating within the park, indicating a significant concentration of tourism pressure in this area.

In addition to wildlife tourism, Yala National Park also serves as a destination for religious pilgrims. The Sithulpauwa temple, located within the park, attracts numerous pilgrims annually. Furthermore, Hindu pilgrims undertake a traditional two-month-long pilgrimage on foot, known as the Pāda Yātrā, which involves traversing through Kumana National Park and Yala Blocks I and II. This pilgrimage, which begins in Jaffna and concludes in Kataragama, saw over 30,000 pilgrims completing the final leg through Yala National Park in 2004. By 2024, this number had increased to 32,000.[65] It is important to note, however, that these pilgrims are not typically classified as tourists in the conventional sense.[66]

5.1.3 Ecological Profile

Yala National Park is situated within the dry and semi-arid zone categories of Sri Lanka. The blocks that belong to Monaragala and Hambantota districts receive an average annual rainfall of 550-775mm and 400-500mm, respectively. The park receives rain predominantly from the north-eastern

[62] Suresh et al., "Can a Tourist Levy Protect National Park Resources and Compensate for Wildlife Crop Damage?"
[63] Buultjens et al., "Tourism and Its Implications for Management in Ruhuna National Park (Yala), Sri Lanka."
[64] SLTDA, "Annual Statistical Report 2023," 2023, https://www.sltda.gov.lk/storage/common_media/Annual_Statistical_Report_2023.pdf.
[65] Venessa Anthony, "The Pada Yatra's Perilous Path," Latest in the News Sphere | The Morning, August 7, 2024, https://themorning.lk//articles/LYRfvhf1gYj7lrF4D3us.
[66] Buultjens et al., "Tourism and Its Implications for Management in Ruhuna National Park (Yala), Sri Lanka."

monsoon between December and February. The months of May to September are typically dry. The average annual temperature in the park is approximately 27°C, although during driest months of the year it may escalate to 37°C.[67] The park boasts a rich mosaic of habitats including moist monsoon forests, dry monsoon forests, semi deciduous forests, thorn forests, grasslands, marshes, marine wetlands, and sandy beaches. About 300 species of trees and plants have been identified within Block I alone. These habitats host 44 species of mammals, including a population of 400-500 elephants dispersed across all blocks within the park, leopard, sloth bear, and deer, among others.[68] Yala National Park is renowned for its high density of leopards, with an average of one leopard per square kilometre recorded in Block I.[69] The park also boasts an impressive avian diversity, with 215 species of birds recorded. Of the avifauna found in Yala, 133 species are endemic birds, and 27 species are migratory birds.[70] Other species found in Yala National Park include 47 species of reptiles, of which 6 are endemic; 18 species of amphibians, of which 2 are endemic; 21 species of freshwater fish,[71] and 40 species of butterflies.[72]

5.1.4 Nature Protection Status

Yala National Park holds the distinction of being the oldest wildlife sanctuary in Asia, having been declared a wildlife sanctuary in 1900.[73] This significant milestone was pioneered by the Ceylon Game Protection Society, now known as the Wildlife and Nature Protection Society, which played a crucial role in elevating Yala to its protected area status. The formal designation of Yala Block I as a national park occurred on 25 February 1938.[74] Since then, the area under Yala National Park has been expanded with Block I added to the park in 1954, Block III added to the park in 167. Block IV added to the park in 1969, and Block V added to the park in 1973.[75] Yala National Park has been under the administration of the Department of Wildlife Conservation since its establishment in 1949.

[67] Chandra Jayawardana, "An Introduction to the Yala National Park," 2004, https://www.jetwingeco.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Leopard_book_part_01.pdf.
[68] Ministry of Wildlife and Forest Resources Conservation, "Episode 4 – Yala National Park," accessed February 18, 2025, https://www.mwfc.gov.lk/2022/03/05/episode-4-yala-national-park/.
[69] Dinesha Senarathna, "Managing Protected Area Tourism for Sustainable Community Development: The Case of Ruhuna National Park (Yala), Sri Lanka," 2023, https://openrepository.aut.ac.nz/items/1357f877-c023-4e32-9c75-590b3f2c7f0c/full.
[70] Ministry of Wildlife and Forest Resources Conservation, "Episode 4 – Yala National Park."
[71] Yala Leopard Diary, "Yala Leopard Diary," accessed February 18, 2025, https://yalaleoparddiary.com/about-yala.
[72] Senarathna, "Managing Protected Area Tourism for Sustainable Community Development: The Case of Ruhuna National Park (Yala), Sri Lanka."
[73] Senarathna.
[74] Buultjens et al., "Tourism and Its Implications for Management in Ruhuna National Park (Yala), Sri Lanka."
[75] Yala Leopard Diary, "Yala Leopard Diary."

5.1.5 Tourism interactions and local communities

Tourism centred around Yala National Park has enhanced the wellbeing of the local community by creating diverse employment opportunities and fostering economic growth.[76] Among employment opportunities fostered are safari jeep driving, accommodation service provision, selling souvenirs to tourists that visit Yala, and selling local products – including vegetables, fruits, and curd – to domestic tourists.[77] A more secondary – yet important nonetheless – impact of tourism has been strengthened market linkages between local farmers and hotel in the vicinity, as farmers have been able to directly sell their produce to hotels, providing them with a stable income source. The tourism boom and the resultant increase in self-employment and small-scale entrepreneurship has been particularly beneficial for the local youth who are now diverting from environmentally damaging agricultural practices such as chena cultivation to more lucrative job opportunities in the tourism industry.[78]

5.2 Kalpitiya

Kalpitiya is a low-lying peninsula situated in the Northwestern Province of Sri Lanka famous for tourism activities ranging from kite surfing and whale watching to island camping and religious pilgrimages.

5.2.1 Geographical Features

The Kalpitiya peninsula is located approximately 150km north of Colombo and is uniquely positioned, with the Indian Ocean to the west and the Puttalam Lagoon to the east. It extends 48km in length and 7km in width, lying between the coordinates 79° 40'– 79° 50' East longitude and 8° 20' – 8° 90' North latitude.[79] The peninsula comprises 23 islets, although, the exact number of islets is a subject of debate. The Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA) has recognised and gazetted 14 islands as suitable for tourism development.[80] Kalpitiya's distinctive geographical features make it a unique destination, attracting various tourism

[76] Athula Gnanapala and Nipuni Jayalath, "Socio-Economic Impact of Wildlife Tourism On Local Community With Special Refernce To Yala National Park, Sri Lanka," *Tourist Conference: Sustainable Tourism: Shaping a Better Future*, January 1, 2020, https://www.academia.edu/83443312/SOCIO_ECONOMIC_IMPACT_OF_WILDLIFE_TOURISM_ON_LOCAL_COMMUNITY_WITH_SPECIAL_REFERENCE_TO_YALA_NATIONAL_ABSTRACT_PARK_SRI_LANKA.

[77] Senarathna, "Managing Protected Area Tourism for Sustainable Community Development: The Case of Ruhuna National Park (Yala), Sri Lanka."

[78] Senarathna.

[79] Samanmali Matharaarachchi, Ranjana U. K. Piyadasa, and Deepthi Wikramasinghe, "Vulnerability of Ground Water Quality to Changing Climate: A Case Study from Kalpitiya Peninsula, Sri Lanka," in *Geostatistical and Geospatial Approaches for the Characterization of Natural Resources in the Environment*, ed. N. Janardhana Raju (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2016), 213–20, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-18663-4_34.

[80] RMP Bhagya and AMM Mustafa, "Potentials of Promoting Beach Tourism in Kalpitiya, Sri Lanka.," 2019, https://www.seu.ac.lk/seusljm/publication/volume4/no1/Mustafa2.pdf.

development plans over the years. Kalpitiya faces natural challenges such as erosion and accretion, primarily due to its foundation on Holocene limestone deposits.[81] These dynamic geological processes continually shape the landscape, influencing both the natural environment and human activities in the region.

5.2.2 Tourism Development

Kalpitiya has emerged as a hub for activity-based tourism, leveraging its unique geographical features to offer a variety of recreational activities. Visitors to Kalpitiya can engage in snorkelling, diving, dolphin and whale watching, kite surfing, camping, bird watching, mangrove touring, canoeing, and kayaking, among other things.[82] The main purpose of the visit among most tourists – both local and foreign – who visit Kalpitiya is recreation and leisure.[83] While specific data on the number of tourism arrivals to Kalpitiya Peninsula is unavailable, tourism arrivals to the Bar Reef Marine Sanctuary can serve as a proxy. In 2023, the Bar Reef Marine Sanctuary recorded 8,135 local tourists and 1,922 foreign tourists.[84]

Recognising its potential, the SLTDA first declared Kalpitiya a Tourism Development Area in 2008. This designation marked the beginning of several large-scale tourism development initiatives aimed at enhancing the region's tourism infrastructure and appeal. Notable projects include the Kalpitiya Island Resort: Integrated Tourism Development Project launched by SLTDA in 2010, and the Kalpitiya Urban Development Plan by the Urban Development Authority (UDA) for the period 2021-2030.[85] Despite these large-scale tourism development plans, the tourism infrastructure in Kalpitiya remains minimal as the region still lacks adequate facilities and services to fully support and sustain the growing influx of tourists.[86]

5.2.3 Ecological Profile

Kalpitiya Peninsula receives an average annual rainfall of 500-600 mm, predominantly from the Northeast Monsoon between October and January. Despite receiving a limited rainfall, Kalpitiya has abundant groundwater

[81] MAD SAMANMALI, RUK PIYADASA, and DD WICKRAMASINGHE, "Shoreline Changes Investigation during the Last 50 Years in Kalpitiya Peninsula, Sri Lanka," 2015.
[82] Mohamed Aslam, "Tourism Opportunity Assessment - Kalpitiya, Sri Lanka 2022" (Envitonmental Foundation (Guarantee) Limited, 2022), https://efl.lk/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Tourism-Development-Consultancy-under-COLIBRI-Final-January-13-2.pdf.
[83] Bhagya and Mustafa, "Potentials of Promoting Beach Tourism in Kalpitiya, Sri Lanka."
[84] SLTDA, "Annual Statistical Report 2023."
[85] Aslam, "Tourism Opportunity Assessment - Kalpitiya, Sri Lanka 2022."
[86] Bhagya and Mustafa, "Potentials of Promoting Beach Tourism in Kalpitiya, Sri Lanka."

resources,[87] although they do not meet permissible level of Sri Lankan drinking water standards.[88] During dry months, the groundwater quality in Kalpitiya declines further. The temperature in Kalpitiya averages between 20°C and 31°C.

The peninsula hosts a variety of habitats, including bar reefs, flat coastal plains, saltpans, lagoons, sand dunes, mangrove swamps, salt marshes, and vast sandy beaches.[89] Kalpitiya is renowned for its rich marine biodiversity, particularly within the Bar Reef Marine Sanctuary. This sanctuary is a unique marine hotspot, home to over 120 coral species and more than 300 fish species. The reef's high biodiversity includes rare coral species and seagrass beds, which are vital for the health of the marine ecosystem.[90] Additionally, Kalpitiya's waters are frequented by whales, the largest marine mammals. Among whales spotted in Kalpitiya are minke whales, sperm whales, blue whales, dwarf sperm whales, and melon-headed whales.[91] Beyond its marine life, Kalpitiya supports a variety of terrestrial wildlife, including numerous species of butterflies, dragonflies, herpetofauna, and amphibians. The diverse habitats provide critical ecosystems for these species, contributing to the overall biodiversity of the region.[92]

5.2.4 Nature Protection Status

Bar Reef, located west of the Kalpitiya Peninsula, is one of the largest coral reefs in Sri Lanka, covering an area of 30,670 hectares (306.7 km²). Recognizing its biodiversity significance, Bar Reef was declared a marine sanctuary in 1992.[93] The sanctuary is divided into a buffer zone and a core area, each permitting varying degrees of human activity. At the time of its designation, Bar Reef was considered one of the healthiest and least disturbed coral reef areas in Sri Lanka, with live coral cover constituting approximately 80% of the substrate.[94] However, the El Niño-induced coral bleaching event in 1998 significantly impacted the health of the coral reefs

[87] Urban Development Authority, "Kalpitiya Urban Development Plan 2021 - 2030" (Ministry of Urban Development and Housing, 2019), https://www.uda.gov.lk/attachments/dev-plans-2021-2030/Kalpitiya%20Development%20Plan%20-%20English.pdf.
[88] SAMANMALI, PIYADASA, and WICKRAMASINGHE, "Shoreline Changes Investigation during the Last 50 Years in Kalpitiya Peninsula, Sri Lanka."
[89] Aslam, "Tourism Opportunity Assessment - Kalpitiya, Sri Lanka 2022."
[90] Chamathi Jayaratne, Premachandra Wattage, and Prasanthi Gunawardena, "Visitor Perception of the Degradation of Bar Reef Kalpitiya Sri Lanka," *Journal of Environmental Management and Tourism* 15, no. 1 (February 29, 2024): 144–55, https://doi.org/10.14505/jemt.v15.1(73).12.
[91] Koen Cornelis Arthur Bröker and Anouk Ilangakoon, "Occurrence and Conservation Needs of Cetaceans in and around the Bar Reef Marine Sanctuary, Sri Lanka," *Oryx* 42, no. 02 (April 2008), https://doi.org/10.1017/S0030605308006728.
[92] Aslam, "Tourism Opportunity Assessment - Kalpitiya, Sri Lanka 2022."
[93] Anoukchika D Ilangakoon, "Cetacean Species Richness and Relative Abundance around the Bar Reef Marine Sanctuary, Sri Lanka," *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* 105, no. 3 (2008): 274–78.
[94] A Rajasuriya, "Present Status of Coral Reefs in Sri Lanka" (Proceedings of the Colloquium on Global Aspects Coral Reefs: Health, Hazards and History, University of Miami: Miami, 1994), 410–15.

within the Bar Reef Marine Sanctuary.[95] The protection of coral reefs in Sri Lanka falls under the jurisdiction of several departments and ministries, including the Department of Coast Conservation, the Department of Wildlife Conservation, the Ministry of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources, the National Aquatic Resources Agency, and the Central Environmental Authority.[96] Despite the involvement of these multiple government authorities, the management of Bar Reef remains at a primary level.[97] Governance challenges identified for the marine sanctuary include the lack of ownership by the multiple entities involved; the absence of records on transboundary fishers, fish catches, and gear types used around the sanctuary; the issuance of unlimited single-day boat permits for nearshore fishing; and the failure to translate laws and policies into actionable measures. Additionally, there is a notable absence of an easily accessible and concise list of instructions on what is permitted and what is not permitted for tourism operators within the sanctuary.[98]

5.2.5 Tourism interactions and local communities

Tourism has emerged as a significant economic driver in Kalpitiya, contributing 9% to the region's total revenue. This positions tourism as the third highest revenue-generating industry in Kalpitiya, surpassed only by the salt industry and fisheries, which contribute 65% and 17% of the region's total revenue, respectively.[99] Traditionally, the community in Kalpitiya has been primarily engaged in fishing. However, many fishers have diversified into the tourism industry, utilising their fishing vessels for tourism activities, thereby generating additional income.[100]

Tourism development plans for Kalpitiya, such as the SLTDA's Kalpitiya Integrated Tourism Resort Plan (KITRP), recognise the need for employment creation for the local community. KITRP envisions the creation of 15,000 direct and 50,000 indirect employment opportunities in tourism. Despite these ambitious goals, the project has faced criticism for not adequately considering the community's needs during the conceptualisation phase of the plan, nor during its execution.[101] Moreover, tourism development in

[95] A Rajasuriya, "The Status of Coral Reefs in Sri Lanka in the Aftermath," *Coral Reef Degradation in the Indian Ocean*, 2005, 83.
[96] Rajasuriya, "Present Status of Coral Reefs in Sri Lanka."
[97] Jayaratne, Wattage, and Gunawardena, "Visitor Perception of the Degradation of Bar Reef Kalpitiya Sri Lanka."
[98] UNDP, EFL, and GEF, "Bar Reef Marine Sanctuary Management Plan 2019-2023," 2021, https://efl.lk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Bar-Reef-Management-Plan-2018.pdf.
[99] Urban Development Authority, "Kalpitiya Urban Development Plan 2021 - 2030."
[100] The Morning, "Developing Kalpitiya by 2030," October 30, 2022, https://www.themorning.lk/articles/224286.
[101] Law and Society Trust, "Analysis of the Proposed Mega-Development Project and Its Contribution to the Local Communities," February 13, 2015, https://lawandsocietytrust.blogspot.com/2015/02/kalpitiya-integrated-tourism-resort.html.

Kalpitiya has been criticised for instances of elite capture by non-local tourism operators. These operators have purchased land for tourism development, subsequently restricting access to traditional fishing grounds and landing sites for local fishers.[102] This has led to tensions between the local community and non-local tourism operators.[103]

5.3 Maskeliya

Maskeliya is a tea-growing highland region with increasing tourism activity surrounding natural attractions such as reservoirs and waterfalls.

5.3.1 Geographical Features

Maskeliya is located between the Norwood and Ambagamuwa DS Divisions in the Central Highlands of Sri Lanka. The mean sea elevation of Maskeliya is 1,260 meters, with the highest altitude reaching 2,238 meters at the top of the Peak Wilderness Sanctuary. The region receives rainfall throughout the year, with an average of 297.4 rainy days annually, accumulating approximately 2,784 mm of precipitation. The average temperature in Maskeliya is 25.1°C, contributing to its cool and temperate climate.[104] Maskeliya boasts a unique blend of natural landscapes – including steep hills and waterfalls – and man-made features such as reservoirs, tea gardens, and forest plantations. This diverse landscape makes Maskeliya an ideal destination for tourism.[105]

5.3.2 Tourism Development

Maskeliya has benefited from the tourism spillover effects of Sri Pada (Adam's Peak), a site of religious significance to Buddhists, Hindus, Christians, and Muslims of Sri Lanka. Historically, Sri Lanka's early travel has been primarily religious, focusing on a limited number of destinations, with Sri Pada being one of them.[106] To this day, thousands of devotees visit Sri Pada annually between December and May during the pilgrimage season. In 1986, the Maussakele Reservoir was constructed over the old Maskeliya town. During extreme drought periods, the submerged town re-emerges, attracting visitors to witness this rare phenomenon.[107] Recently, the

[102] Aslam, "Tourism Opportunity Assessment - Kalpitiya, Sri Lanka 2022."
[103] Law and Society Trust, "Analysis of the Proposed Mega-Development Project and Its Contribution to the Local Communities."
[104] Ministry of Home Affairs, "Resource Profile Data Sheet Land (Ha) in Central Province, Nuwara Eliya, Ambagamuwa," n.d., https://resourceprofile.gov.lk.
[105] Shamodi Ireshika NANAYAKKARA and Enoka Priyadarshani KUDAVIDANAGA, "Reinforcing Conservation with Faith and Beliefs: The Potential of the Peak Wilderness Sanctuary in the Central Highlands of Sri Lanka World Heritage Site," **世界遺産学研究**, 2018, 17–25.
[106] Sriyantha Fernando, *An Assessment of the Impacts of Tourism in Sri Lanka*, 2017.
[107] Mahil Wijesinghe, "Rediscovering the Old Town of Maskeliya," *Sunday Observer*, April 28, 2024, https://www.sundayobserver.lk/2024/04/28/spectrum/21618/rediscovering-the-old-town-of-maskeliya/.

Gartmore and Moray waterfalls in Maskeliya have gained popularity among hikers and adventure tourists alike. These waterfalls, which feed directly into the Maussakele Reservoir, offer scenic views and opportunities for activities such as abseiling. Another factor contributing to the growing popularity of Maskeliya is the Pekoe Trail, a 300-kilometer curated long-distance walking trail through the Central Highlands of Sri Lanka. This trail provides an immersive hiking experience through Sri Lanka's tea country. Stage 08 of the Pekoe Trail – a 15.3 km hike from Norwood to Bogawantalawa – passes by the Maskeliya valley. Although this stage is not yet very popular, it has the potential to attract more tourists in the future, thereby increasing tourism in Maskeliya.[108] Another popular attraction in Maskeliya is the Martin Air Crash Site in the Seven Virgins Mountain Range where 191 passengers and 9 crew members were killed in 1974 in a tragic plane crash. The site is at the centre of a proposed tourism initiative to promote Maskeliya as a tourism destination.[109]

5.3.3 Ecological Profile

Maskeliya region reportedly has a notably high endemicity of flora and fauna. A biodiversity assessment conducted in the Maskeliya region has identified ten different mini ecosystems that accommodate various floral and faunal species. 293 plant species belonging to 64 families and 183 genera are identified in Maskeliya, of which 27 are distinct wild orchid species. Furthermore, the survey has identified 40 species of mammals of which 8 are endemic; 69 species of birds, of which 12 are endemic, 18 species of reptiles of which 6 are endemic; and 15 species of amphibians of which 12 are endemic. In addition, Sri Lanka's largest moth – the Atlas Moth – is found is Maskeliya.[110]

Evidence shows that there is a population of approximately 30 healthy leopards in Maskeliya, which is a remarkable number for an unprotected area. Given that significant leopard habitats are located within several tea estates,[111] there is a pressing need for conservation efforts in the region. One such initiative is the Peak Ridges Forest Corridor Collaboration Initiative, which aims to preserve an 18-kilometre stretch of land connecting two sections of the Peak Wilderness Forest Area. This corridor facilitates the

[108] The Pekoe Trail, "Hiking in Sri Lanka: Breathtaking Trails at The Pekoe Trail," Hiking in Sri Lanka: Breathtaking Trails at The Pekoe Trail, accessed February 19, 2025, https://www.thepekoetrailsrilanka.com/.
[109] The Sunday Times, "Martin Air Crash Site to Become Tourist Attraction," March 10, 2024, https://www.sundaytimes.lk/240310/news/martin-air-crash-site-to-become-tourist-attraction-551080.html.
[110] H.M.P. Peiris, Chaminda Wijesundara, and D. Wijesundara, "Ecotouristically Sound Biological Resources Survey of the Maskeliya Basin," 2019.
[111] Maskeliya Plantations PLC, "Annual Report 2018-2019," 2019, https://www.arpico.com/contents/pdf/annual_reports/mpl/2019/Maskeliya_AR_201819.pdf.

movement of leopards and other wildlife, and it currently supports around 12 resident leopards.[112]

The rich biodiversity in Maskeliya is threatened by the erosion of natural resources, a consequence of over a century of monocrop tea cultivation and the heavy use of synthetic fertiliser in production. In a bid to reverse these trends, tea estates are increasingly introducing polyculture and are adopting the application of organic fertilisers.[113]

5.3.4 Nature Protection Status

In the early 1900s, the forest reserves in Maskeliya were managed by the Department of Forest Conservation under the Forest Ordinance (No. 16 of 1907). On October 25, 1940, 22,380 hectares were officially designated as the Peak Wilderness Sanctuary through Gazette Notification No. 8,675. This sanctuary, primarily composed of montane forests and semi-natural vegetation, spans the borders of the Central and Sabaragamuwa provinces and is contiguous with the Horton Plains National Park to the east.[114] A comprehensive management plan for the period of 2001 - 2008, including a detailed resource inventory, was developed for the sanctuary under the Sri Lanka Protected Area Management and Wildlife Conservation Project. The sanctuary's management is a collaborative effort involving the Department of Wildlife Conservation (DWC), the Central Environmental Authority, and several notable individuals, including the Chief Monk of the Sri Pada temple. In recognition of the area's ecological sensitivity and biodiversity value, 12,979 hectares of the sanctuary were re-designated as the Samanala Nature Reserve in 2007, where unauthorised entry is strictly prohibited.[115] On July 31, 2010, the World Heritage Committee declared the Peak Wilderness Sanctuary a World Heritage Site, making it the first such site in Sri Lanka since the Sinharaja Forest Reserve was designated in 1988.[116]

5.3.5 Tourism interactions and local communities

Maskeliya's geographical conditions, akin to the rest of the Central Highlands of Sri Lanka, are ideal for tea cultivation. Known for producing some of the finest quality teas, the Maskeliya valleys are often referred to as

[112] The Morning, "A New Model of Collaborative Conservation: The Peak Ridges," February 21, 2021, https://www.themorning.lk/articles/120576.
[113] Maskeliya Plantations PLC, "Annual Report 2018-2019."
[114] NANAYAKKARA and KUDAVIDANAGA, "Reinforcing Conservation with Faith and Beliefs: The Potential of the Peak Wilderness Sanctuary in the Central Highlands of Sri Lanka World Heritage Site."
[115] S.M.D.A.U. De Alwis et al., "Biodiversity Baseline Survey: Peak Wilderness Sanctuary," in *Protected Areas Management and Wildlife Conservation Project* (Department of Wildlife Conservation, Sri Lanka, 2007).
[116] Ministry of Wildlife and Forest Resources Conservation, "Episode 11 - Adam's Peak Wilderness Reserve," accessed February 18, 2025, https://www.mwfc.gov.lk/2022/03/18/episode-11-adams-peak-wilderness-reserve/.

"The Golden Bowl".[117] The tea industry in Sri Lanka has diversified to include ecotourism and agrotourism, with Maskeliya being a notable example.[118] Tea tourism serves as a strategic enabler, enhancing the brand image of Ceylon Tea by offering immersive experiences in Sri Lanka's tea culture. Activities include tea factory visits, nature watching, tea field tours, forest trekking, bird watching, mountain climbing, educational activities, village tours, biking, and Ayurvedic health activities.[119] This form of tourism is believed to positively impact the socio-economic standards of the plantation community and the environment. However, the shift from a tea-centred operational model to a tourism-centred one has faced resistance from the workforce. Workers fear that this change may reduce employment opportunities. For instance, at Gartmore Estate in Maskeliya, workers are concerned that their important personal documents, currently stored in the estate office, may not be safeguarded under new management if the estate's focus shifts to tourism.[120]

[117] Market Development Facility, "Destinantion Mapping Study," 2020, https://www.srilankatourismalliance.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Destination-Mapping-Study-By-MDF.pdf.
[118] Maskeliya Plantations PLC, "Annual Report 2018-2019."
[119] Kosala Koththagoda and Ravindra Dissanayake, "Potential of Tea Tourism in Sri Lanka: A Review on Managerial Implications and Research Directions," 2017.
[120] World Socialist Web Site, "Sri Lanka: Hundreds of Plantation Workers Strike to Defend Jobs and Social Rights," World Socialist Web Site, January 23, 2021, https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2021/01/23/plan-j23.html.

6. IDENTIFYING STAKEHOLDERS AT EACH SITE: AN ADAPTED DELPHI APPROACH

As outlined in section 4, the stakeholder-based approach adopted by this study attempts to capture perspectives of stakeholders who directly and indirectly are at the nexus of tourism and environment in the chosen case study sites. Given the nature of tourism and the diversity of each site, the identification of relevant stakeholders for field research was critical.

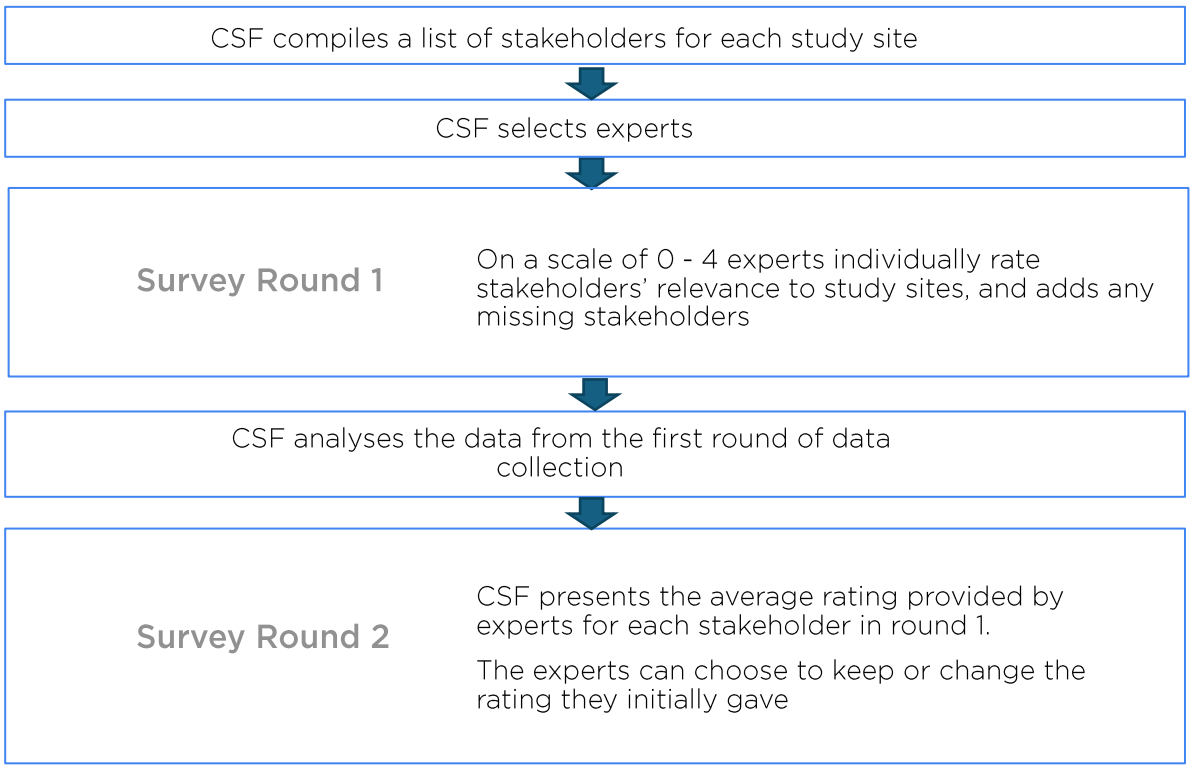
Prior to the field research, relevant stakeholder groups were identified through a two-step process. The first step was to identify initial stakeholder groups per site based on literature and insights from the expert brainstorming. Thereafter, to validate the identified stakeholder groups per site, an adapted Delphi method was utilised.

The Delphi method, which is an iterative, anonymous, structured, group-based communication process and elicitation technique to reach consensus among a group of experts.[121] Questions are asked in written form by a group of experts who are to answer anonymously. Thereafter, the researcher aggregates the answers and provides each expert with their answer alongside the average answer from the entire group. The experts are given the opportunity to revise their initial answer and resubmit. The process is continued iteratively until the group reaches consensus.

Developed by the Rand Corporation to obtain consensus with minimal peer pressure, this process was adapted to this study by conducting an online survey of two rounds where a group of experts representing diverse expertise for each site were asked to rate the relevance of each stakeholder group identified per site and suggest additional stakeholders.[122] Then each expert received their answer and the average rating of the stakeholder group per site with the option of adjusting their answer (see Figure 7).

[121] Susanne Iqbal and Laura Pipon-Young, "The Delphi Method," BPS, accessed February 19, 2025, https://www.bps.org.uk/psychologist/delphi-method.
[122] Dmitry Khodyakov, "Generating Evidence Using the Delphi Method," October 17, 2023, https://www.rand.org/pubs/commentary/2023/10/generating-evidence-using-the-delphi-method.html.

Figure 7: Overview of the adapted Delphi method



Source: Authors' compilation

There were 4 experts for Maskeliya and 5 experts each for Kalpitiya and Yala. As seen in Table 5, the experts represented fields ranging from ecologists, tourism researchers, government officials, plantation workers' rights activists, sociologists, and tourism service depending on the characteristics specific to each site.

Table 5: Profiles of experts who took part in the adapted Delphi Exercise

Kalpitiya	Maskeliya	Yala National Park
Marine Biologist	Wildlife Expert	Wildlife Expert
Member of the Hotel Owners' Association	Former manager of Tea Estate with tourist accomodation	Former Senior Public Sector Official
Kite Surfing Instructor and Accomodation Provider	Sociologist working in the region	Tourist Accommodation Provider
Public Official	Plantation Workers' Rights Activist	Academic in Tourism Management
Fishers' Rights Activist		Tourism and Hospitality Specialist

Source: Authors' compilation

The survey was conducted using Kobo Toolbox. After the end of the adapted Delphi exercise, 29 groups for Yala National Park, 30 groups for Kalpitiya, and 24 groups for Maskeliya were identified (See Annex 4 for the complete list of stakeholder groups per site). The Delphi elicitation results for Kalpitiya is provided in Table 6 as an example.

Table 6: Example Delphi Stakeholder list for Kalpitiya with rating

Initial Stakeholder groups identified	Rating	Stakeholder added by experts	Rating
Department of Wildlife Conservation	2.8	CSOs	1.4
CCD	2.8	Defence forces	2
Forest Department	1.8	UDA	2.6
SLTDA	2.4	Sustainable Energy Authority	2
Puttlam District Secretariat	2.2	Civil Aviation Authority	1.4
Local government authorities	2.2	Local schools	1.4
Hotel owners' Association	2.6	Department of Agriculture	1.4
Small scale accommodation providers	2	DFAR	2.8
Large scale accommodation providers	2.2	NAQDA	1.4
Food and beverage providers	1.8	Dive operators	1.8
Transport service providers	1.8		
Tour activity operators	2.2		
Tour Boat Owners' Association	2.6		
Fishermen's Association	2.6		
Local community	2.4		
Police	1.8		
Development partners	2.2		
Conservationists	1.8		
Religious institutions	1.6		
Financial service providers	1.4		

Source: Authors' compilation

The final lists of stakeholder groups per site were ranked according to their respective Delphi exercise scores to be used for two purposes as outlined in Section 7: firstly, as a base to identify and approach interviewees for field research and secondly, for a stakeholder interaction mapping exercise.

7. FIELD RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND OVERVIEW

The field research methodology consisted of visiting each site for 5 days to conduct semi-structured interviews with local stakeholders. This section provides an overview the interview questions and a summary of the field research outcomes. Details regarding the coding and analysis of field research findings are outlined in each respective research report as they differ across analyses.

7.1 Interview methodology

Due to the exploratory nature of the research and the objective of capturing perspectives and beliefs, the study did not adopt quantitative methods such as surveys which elicit average sentiments of chosen stakeholder groups. Instead, interviews with minimal structure were conducted. Each interview was structured to be 1 hour divided into three segments.

Segment 1 consisted of the introduction and context which aimed to ease the interviewee into the conversation and provide context for the researchers to understand perspectives and ask follow-up questions. The segment consisted of the following questions:

1. Name
2. Profession
3. How long have you been in the present job? [Open-ended]
4. How does your job/institution relate to tourism? [Open-ended]
5. What kinds of tourists come to [the study site]? [Open-ended]
6. What do they come for? [Open-ended]
7. What are the tourism activities in [the study site] and where do they happen? [Open-ended]

Segment 2 explored the perceived interactions between Tourism and Nature through 4 open ended questions, asked in sequential order:

1. What are the impacts of tourism to nature in [the study site]?
2. What are the impacts of nature to tourism in [the study site]?
3. What are your suggestions on tackling the issues you mentioned above?
4. Are there any major plans/initiatives around tourism in [the study site] happening right now/have happened in the past?

The researchers used the laddering technique for each open-ended question. This technique asks follow-up questions such as “why?” and “how?” for first level answers to undercover deeper beliefs and implications.

Furthermore, for questions 1 and 2, if the interviewee only provided only positive or negative answers, the researcher would prompt to consider the opposite.

Segment 3 explored how each interview as a member of a stakeholder group interacted with other identified stakeholder groups. This segment contributed to a mapping of interactions between stakeholder groups. Each interviewee was asked about every stakeholder group identified by the Delphi exercise.

Table 7: Example Stakeholder Mapping Grid for Kalpitiya

Stakeholder	Have you interacted with the following stakeholders when conducting your tourism activities?	If yes, what are the interactions you have had with them?
National govt bodies for tourism	(Yes/No)	
National govt bodies for nature	(Yes/No)	
Hotel owners' Association	(Yes/No)	
Tour Boat Owners' Association	(Yes/No)	
Fishermen's Association	(Yes/No)	
Other national govt bodies	(Yes/No)	
Puttalam District Secretariat	(Yes/No)	
Local government Authorities	(Yes/No)	
Large scale accommodation	(Yes/No)	
Tour activity operators	(Yes/No)	
Development partners	(Yes/No)	
Defense Forces	(Yes/No)	

Source: Authors' construction

7.2 Field visit outcomes

The field visits were conducted in the months of April, May, and July in 2024. The two researchers spent five days in each site. Table 8 outlines the field visit schedules.

Table 8: Field visit schedule by site

Site	Field visit dates
Kalpitiya	15th to 19th April 2024
Maskeliya	13th to 17th May 2024
Yala National Park	1st to 5th July 2024

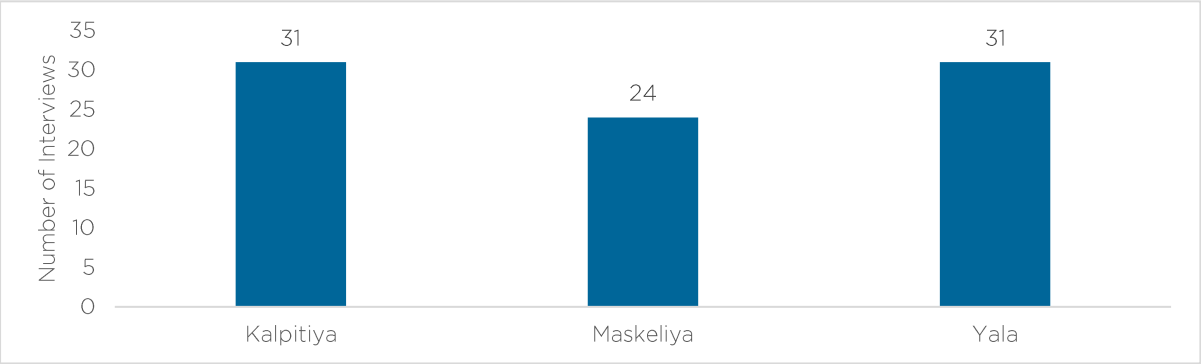
Source: Authors' construction

7.2.1 Overall interview statistics

A total of 86 interviews were conducted across the three sites totalling to 74 hours of interviews. The average interview time was 51 minutes. Figures 8-10 provide a site-wise breakdown of these statistics. Compared to Kalpitiya and Yala, the number and the length of interviews in Maskeliya were lower. This was expected as the tourism industry in Maskeliya is at a nascent stage.

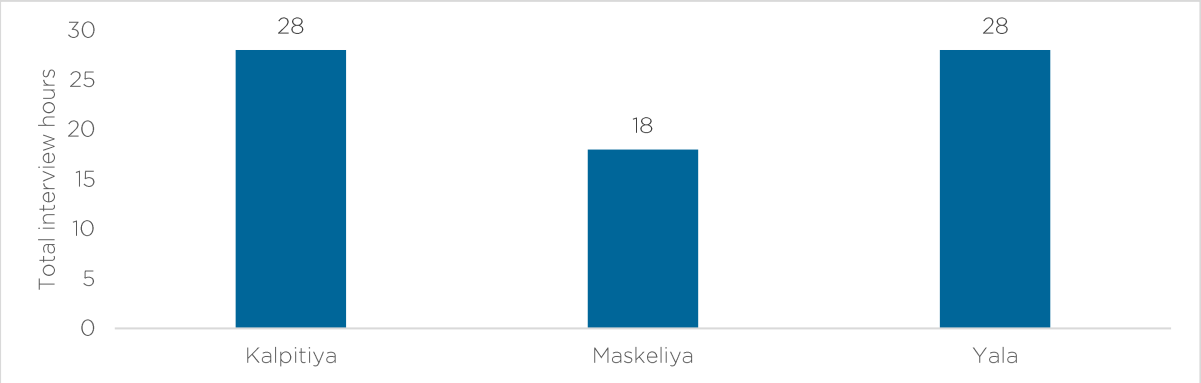
All interviews were conducted in Sinhala or English. The two researchers are native bilinguals in English and Sinhala. Even though a local translator proficient in Tamil accompanied the two researchers during the visit to Maskeliya, native tamil speakers who were interviewed preferred to converse in Sinhala and/or English except when an occasional word was translated from Tamil with the help of the translator. Most interviews were conducted in person and approximately 10 percent of the total interviews were virtual.

Figure 8: Number of interviews by site



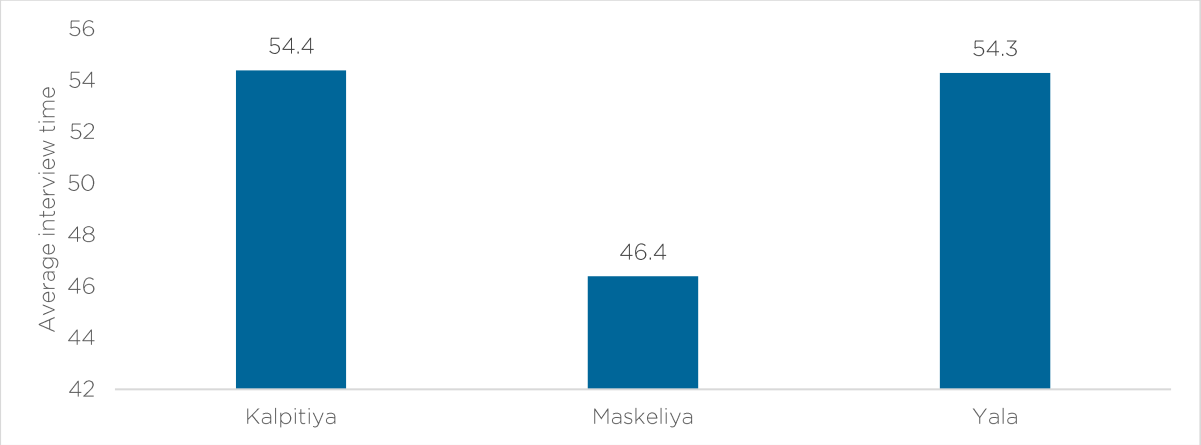
Source: Authors' calculations

Figure 9: Total interview hours by site



Source: Authors' calculations

Figure 10: Average interview time by site



Source: Authors' calculations

7.2.2 Demographics of interviewees

The identification of interviewees was guided by the stakeholder group lists generated through the adapted Delphi exercise. Table 9 outlines the stakeholder group lists per site and groups with atleast 1 interviewee represented are shaded in green.

Table 9: Adapted Delphi stakeholder groups represented in interviews by site

Kalpitiya	Maskeliya	Yala National Park
Government bodies managing nature	Tea estates	Government bodies managing nature
Government bodies managing tourism	Local community	Government bodies managing tourism
Local government Authorities	Government bodies managing nature	Local government authorities
Tour Boat Owners' Association	Government bodies managing tourism	Permanent staff at the park
Fishermen's Association	Local Government Authorities	Tour guides
Hotel owners' Association	Railway department	Volunteer trackers
Dive operators	Tour activity operators	Small scale accommodation providers
Small Scale Accommodation Providers	Police	Large scale accommodation providers
Large scale accommodation	Local politicians	Hotel Owners' Association
Tour activity operators	Trade unions	Food and beverage providers

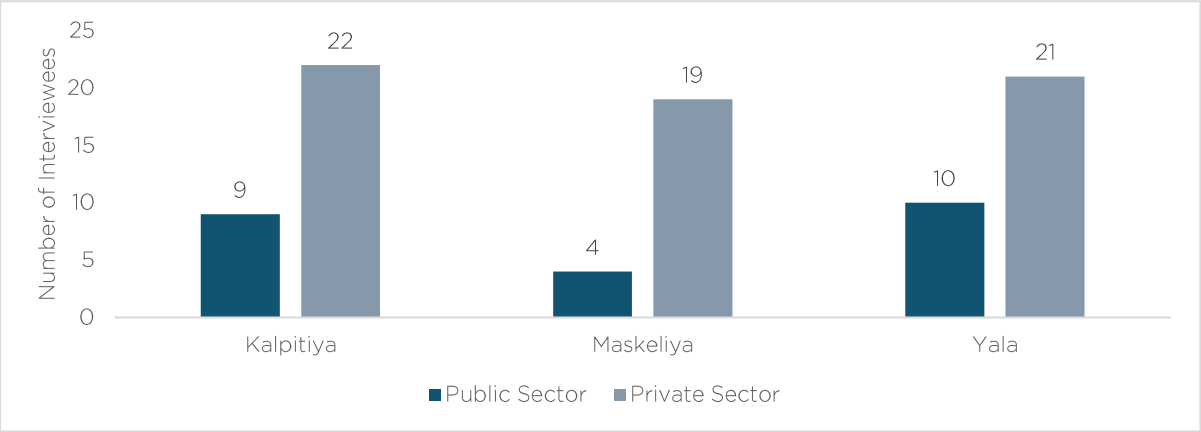
Development partners	Small scale accommodation providers	Safari jeep operators
Defense Forces	Large scale accommodation providers	Tour activity operators
Food and beverage providers - permanent	Conservationists	Camp site operators
Food and beverage providers - Mobile	Religious institutions	Transport service providers
Transport service providers	Planters' association	Conservationists
Financial service providers	Tea estate workers	Researchers on wildlife tourism
Police	Aviation companies	Private sector interested in conservation
Development partners	Development partners	Journalists
Civil Society Organizations	Ministry of Health	Local community
Conservationists	Ceylon Electricity Boad	Development partners
Religious leaders	Road Development Authority	Local and national politicians
Schools	Researchers	Police
	Transport providers	Security forces
		Religious institutions
		Financial service providers

Source: Authors' Compilation

Some interviewees represented more than one stakeholder group and, in such instances, perspectives from all such angles were inquired unless there was a saturation reached for a perspective from one such stakeholder group. The interactions by stakeholder groups no represented through interviewees were triangulated through the interviews.

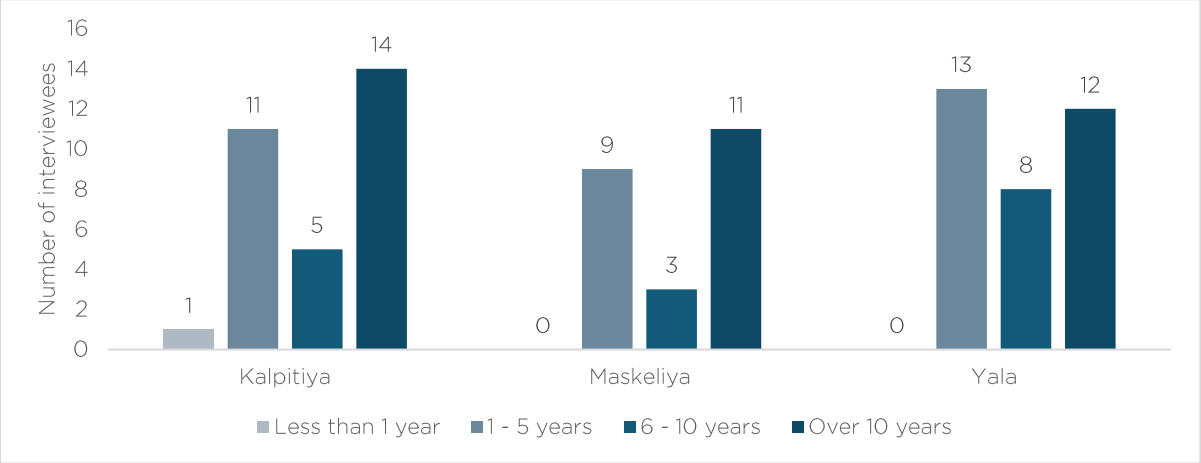
Most of the interviewees were from the private sector (see Figure 11). On average most interviewees have worked in the respective site for at least 5 years (see Figure 12). Only two interviewees from each site were female (see Figure 13).

Figure 11: Interviews by sector (Public v. Private) per site



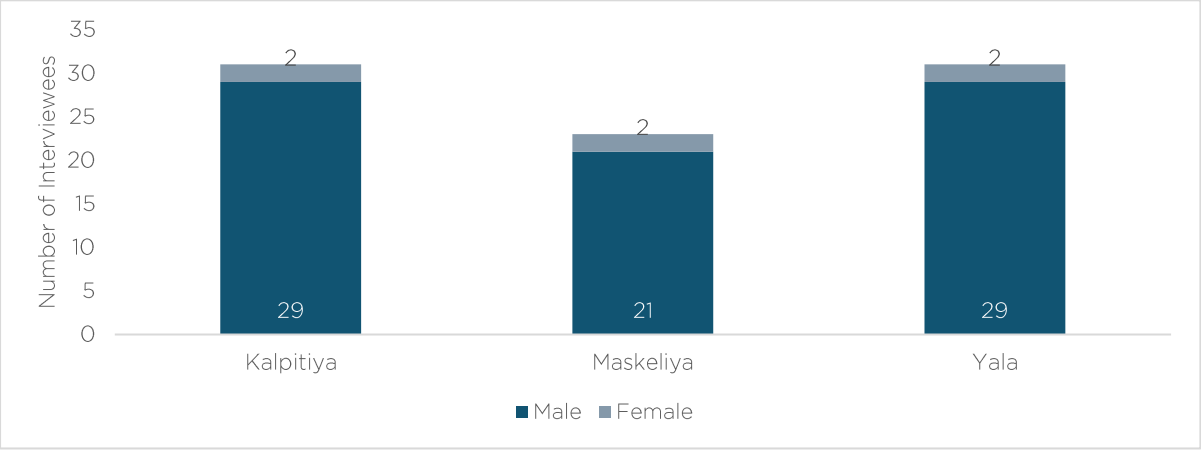
Source: Authors' calculations

Figure 12: Years of operation in location by site



Source: Authors' calculations

Figure 13: Gender of interviewees by site



Source: Authors' calculations

8. METHODOLOGICAL LIMITATIONS AND LEARNINGS

This section briefly discusses the methodological limitations of the study along with several learnings relevant for future research.

8.1 Limitations

The sampling methodology was respondent-led through snowballing. This is to capture sentiments of respondents who are considered relevant and influential by local stakeholders. Therefore, the sampling strategy is subject to biases of respondents and can be symptomatic of industry-wide underrepresentations. Both tourism and conservation are male-dominant.[123] Similarly, only 7 percent of total respondents were female. Furthermore, in Maskeliya, most of the respondents were not Malaiyaha Tamils, even though approximately 70 percent of the residents in the Ambgamuwa DS division were Malaiyaha Tamils according to the 2012 Census of Population and Housing.[124]

The field visits were done during the non-tourist seasons in all three sites, which may influence the perceptions and attitudes of the respondents. Some respondents observed that they were more relaxed and could focus on the interview questions better. However, field visits during tourist seasons may have provided increased visibility on problematic interactions between tourism and nature.

Both field researchers are based in Colombo. The three sites are in three different parts of the country with very different cultural and socio-economical conditions that the two researchers are not a part of. Given the short duration of the field visit, the researchers' explorations and observations are bound to be limited in scope. Furthermore, respondents may have conditioned their responses by assuming ideological leanings of the researcher.

Some concepts such as 'tourism' and 'nature' do not have direct translations in vernacular languages and best efforts have been made to express intended meanings in English. [125]

[123] Some estimates suggest that only 10 percent of the tourism workforce are women. See International Development Group, "Recommendations for Proposed New Sustainable Niche Tourism Categories in Sri Lanka," 2023.
[124] Department of Census and Statistics, "Population by Divisional Secretariat, Ethnic Group and Sex," 2012, https://www.statistics.gov.lk/pophousat/cph2011/pages/activities/Reports/District/NuwaraEliya.pdf.
[125] The word 'tourism' has no direct translation in Sinhala. The closest translation is Sanchaaraka Vyaaparaya. Elements of nature is captured through words such as Sobadahama and parisaraya which were used interchangeably by interviewers depending on the context.

As discussed in Section 3, perceptions are subjective and hold multiple truths.[126] Fact-checking the statements made by stakeholders for causal validity is beyond the scope and objective of the study. However, the study notes contradictory observations made by stakeholders, wherever relevant.

8.2 Learnings

The extensive site-selection criteria paid dividends as the different dimensions of variability across the three sites materialised in diverse interactions between tourism and nature.

The adapted Delphi exercise as a method requires a high level of coordination and cooperation with the experts. Especially given that to compute the average score of the 1st round all responses are required, a delay in one expert will result in other experts receiving the 2nd round late as well.

The loosely structured interview format provided rich insight into perceptions and beliefs held by different stakeholders. However, especially during the first segment of the interview, some interviewees would tend to steer the conversation away from the subject matter. Conversely, starting with the personal journey of the interviewee provided an amicable basis for the other segments of the conversation.

When discussing impacts from tourism to nature and vice versa, most interviewees would immediately assume negative impacts. A similar 'knee-jerk' reaction could be seen when interpreting the word 'tourist' where most respondents would assume tourists to be only foreigners.

[126] Cory, "Perceptual Truths Vs Existential Truths," *Spiritual Secrets* (blog), August 6, 2021, https://medium.com/spiritual-secrets/perceptual-truths-vs-existential-truths-79970704ed3f.

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10. ANNEXURES

10.1 Annex 1: List of literature reviewed for the local literature review

Table 10: List of literature included in the local literature review

Title	Year
A Sri Lankan elephant orphanage: Does it increase willingness to conserve elephants? How do visitors react to it?	2011
An 'ecotourist's recent experience in Sri Lanka	2013
An Assessment of the Contribution of an Analog Forest as a Sustainable Land-use Ecosystem for the Development of Rural Green Economy in Sri Lanka	2013
Analysis of Causes and Effects of Coastal Erosion and Environmental Degradation in Southern Coastal Belt of Sri Lanka	2018
Assessing Geosites for Geotourism Development: Case Studies from the Southern Part of Sri Lanka	2021
Balancing conservation goals and ecotourism development in coastal wetland management in Sri Lanka: A choice experiment	2021
Can a tourist levy protect national park resources and compensate for wildlife crop damage? An empirical investigation	2022
Carbon Emissions of Hotels: The Case of the Sri Lankan Hotel Industry	2019
Challenges and opportunities for the resumption of nature tourism in post-pandemic Sri Lanka	2023
Challenges of sustainable tourism in ancient cities: a case study based on Kandy, Sri Lanka	2019
Conservation versus socio-economic sustainability: A case study of the Udawalawe National Park, Sri Lanka	2020
Do environmentally sustainable practices make hotels more efficient? A study of major hotels in Sri Lanka	2019
Do green awards and certifications matter? Consumers' perceptions, green behavioral intentions, and economic implications for the hotel industry: A Sri Lankan perspective	2018
Do Open-Cycle Hatcheries Relying on Tourism Conserve Sea Turtles? Sri Lankan Developments and Economic–Ecological Considerations	2005
Economic values for recreational planning at Horton Plains National Park, Sri Lanka	2016
ECOTOURISM INFLUENCES ON THE LIVELIHOOD OF LOCAL COMMUNITY IN SRILANKA – WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO ELLA	2020
Ecotourism/Wildlife-based Tourism as Contributor to Nature Conservation with Reference to Vanni, Sri Lanka	2003
Effects of Recreational Camping on the Environmental Values of National Parks in Sri Lanka	2021
Energy consumption, tourism development, and environmental degradation in Sri Lanka	2017
Environmental Economics of Coral Reef Destruction in Sri Lanka	1998
Estimation of Recreational Value of Horton Plains National Park in Sri Lanka: A Decision Making Strategy for Natural Resources Management	2011
Forest-Based Ecotourism in Sri Lanka: A Review on State of Governance, Livelihoods, and Forest Conservation Outcomes	2021
Green Human Resource Management: A Proposed Model in the Context of Sri Lanka's Tourism Industry	2018
Human Disturbance on the Land Surface Environment in Tropical Islands: A Remote Sensing Perspective	2022
Is Ecotourism Sustainable? A Case Study from Sri Lanka	2018

Is the Sri Lankan ecotourism industry threatened by climate change? A case study of Rekawa coastal wetland using contingent visitation approach	2019
Marketing forest-based ecotourism in Sri Lanka: predicting the ecotourism behavior and defining the market segment through a behavioral approach	2011
Measuring environmental orientation in hotels: empirical evidence from Sri Lanka	2019
Mitigation of challenges in sustaining green certification in the Sri Lankan hotel sector	2018
Motivational and Behavioral Profiling of Visitors to Forest-based Recreational Destinations in Sri Lanka	2011
Mountainous Protected Areas in Sri Lanka: The Way Forward from Tea to Tourism?	2021
Nature-Based Recreational Experiences at Coastal Wetlands: An Application of Importance-Performance Analysis at Bundala National Park Sri Lanka	2020
Nexus between tourism and environmental pollution in South Asia: a comparative analysis using time-varying and non-parametric techniques	2021
Open-Cycle Hatcheries, Tourism and Conservation of Sea Turtles: Economic and Ecological Analysis	2003
Profiling of Shelter Campers, Their Attitudes, and Perceptions towards Environmental Impacts of Campsite Use and Management: Evidence from National Parks of Sri Lanka	2022
Promoting Nature-Based Tourism for Management of Protected Areas and Elephant Conservation in Sri Lanka	2010
Research note: Estimation of the welfare benefit of boating at Maduganga Ramsar wetland in Sri Lanka	2015
Scuba Diver Environmental Orientation and Perceptions of Diving Impact Management on Coral Reefs: Evidence from Sri Lanka	2022
Assessing Public Perceptions and Solutions to Human-Monkey Conflict from 50 Years in Sri Lanka	2021
Temporal Change of Foreign Tourism in Sri Lanka A Study on Economic Perspective	2023
The changing face of wildlife tourism during the COVID-19 pandemic: an opportunity to strive towards sustainability?	2021
The Impact of Sustainability Practices on the Going Concern of the Travel and Tourism Industry: Evidence from Developed and Developing Countries	2022
The Practice of Ecotourism in Sri Lanka: An Assessment of Operator Compliance towards International Ecotourism Guidelines	2009
The vulnerable context of tourism development: evidence from Sri Lanka	2014
Think globally, act locally: Current understanding and future directions for Think globally, act locally: Current understanding and future directions for nature-based tourism research in Sri Lanka nature-based tourism research in Sri Lanka	2020
Tourism and CO 2 Emissions: A Case Study of Selected South Asian Countries	2020
Tourism and its implications for management in Ruhuna National Park (Yala), Sri Lanka	2005
Tourism-induced disturbance of wildlife in protected areas: A case study of free ranging elephants in Sri Lanka	2015
Upper echelon characteristics and environmental sustainability practices: Evidence from upper echelons in the hotel industry	2022
Using Integrated Coastal Management and Economics to Conserve Coastal Tourism Resources in Sri Lanka	1997
Visitors' reaction to Pinnawala Elephant Orphanage in Sri Lanka: A Survey	2003
Wetland ecotourism in Sri Lanka: Issues and challenges	2013
Whale watching in Sri Lanka: Perceptions of sustainability	2016
What Affects Support for Wetland Tourism? A Case Study from Sri Lanka	2021

WHAT MAKES WILDLIFE TOURISTS HAPPY AND WHAT DISAPPOINTS THEM? LEARNING FROM REVIEWS POSTED ON TRIPADVISOR	2019
Which national park attributes attract international tourists? A Sri Lankan case study	2021
Willingness to pay for mangrove restoration to reduce the climate change impacts on ecotourism in Rekawa coastal wetland, Sri Lanka	2021

Source: Authors' Compilation

10.2 Annex 2: Longlist of tourism destinations

Arugambay

Kumana

Passikudah

Gal Oya

Lahugala

Okanda

Pottuvil

Habarana

Hurulu

Kala Wewa

Anuradhapura

Horowpothana

Ritigala

Mihintale

Wilpattu

Ella

Bandarawela

Vakarai

Kalkudah

Batticaloa

Mount Laviniya

Godahena

Bentota

Galle

Madu ganga

Unawatuna

Hikkaduwa

Kottawa Conservation Forest

Kanneliya Conservation Forest

Koggala

Rumassala

Dedduwa Lake

Balapitiya

Ahungalla

Akurala

Muthurajawela

HoragollaPilikuttuwa

Yala

Bundala

Kataragama

Kudawela

Panama

Ussangoda

Tangalle

Hambantota

Madunagala

Lunugamwehera

Jaffna

Delft National Park

Vellai Islands

Kalutara

Wadduwa

Beruwala

Kandy

Udawattakele Conservation Forest

Rathna Ella

Heeloya

Digana

Pekoe Trail

Victoria

Kitulgala

Pinnawala

Padawigampola

Walathwewa

Mannar

Madhu Road National Park

Vankalai sanctuary

Vidathalthive

Giants Lake

Knuckles

Sigiriya

Dambulla

Matale

Riverston

Hiriketiya

Mirissa

Weligama

Matara

Viharahena

Mediripitiya

Ellawala Falls

Chundikulam Bird Sanctuary

Mullativu

Negombo

Horton Plains

Galways Land

Nuwara Eliya

Haggala

Maskeliya

Kaudulla

Maduru Oya

Minneriya

Polonnaruwa

Wasgamuwa

Angamedilla

Parc National Flood Plains

Somawathiya National Park

Giritale

Kalpitiya

Marawila

Waikkal

Gangewadiya

Ippantive Island

iranawila

Chilaw

Anawilundawa Sanctuary

Adam's peak wilderness

Ratnapura

Vaulpane Lime Cave

Udawalawa

Sinharaja

Trincomalee

Pigeon Island

Kachchaveli

Nilaveli

Wanni

10.3 Annex 3: Stakeholder groups identified and validated by the adapted Delphi process

Table 11: Adapted Delphi stakeholder groups per site

Yala	Kalpitiya	Maskeliya
DWC	DWC	DWC
Forest department	Coast Conservation Department	SLTDA
SLTDA	Forest department	Tea Estate companies
Hambantota District Secretariat	SLTDA	Nuwara Eliya District Secretariat
Local government authorities	Puttlam District Secretariat	Norwood/Ambagamuwa korale Divisional Secretariat
Hotel Owners' Association	Local government authorities	GN Offices
Small scale accomodation providers	Hotel Owners' Association	Small scale accomodation providers
Large scale accomodation providers	Small scale accomodation providers	Large scale accomodation providers
Food and beverage providers	Large scale accomodation providers	Food and beverage providers
Transport service providers	Food and beverage providers	Transport service providers
Tour activity operators	Transport service providers	Tour activity operators
Safari jeep operators	Tour activity operators	Local community
Park warden	Tour Boat Owners' Association	Police
Tour guides and trackers	Tour guides and trackers	Development partners
Camp site operators	Fishermen's Association	Private sector interested in conservation
Local community	Local community	Conservationists
Police	Police	Religious institutions
Development partners	Development partners	Financial service providers
Private sector interested in conservation	Conservationists	Planters associations
Conservationists	Religious institutions	
Religious institutions	Financial service providers	
Financial Service providers		

Source: Authors' Compilation

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We continually engage with a spectrum of stakeholders - from local communities to policymakers - which ensures that our research is relevant and accessible to a broad audience, while also contributing to meaningful policy change.

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