

APPRAISAL OF TOURIST SATISFACTION TOWARDS MARINE MAMMAL TOURISM (WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO WHALE AND DOLPHIN WATCHING AT TRINCOMALEE)

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ABSTRACT

Marine tourism is a niche tourism product, and it can be identified as a sustainable alternative to tourism. During the last few decades, marine mammal-based tourism has experienced rapid tourism growth. Significantly, watching Whales and Dolphins have enjoyed phenomenal growth and is one of the fastest-growing tourism products in the world. Utilization of the true potentials of Whale and Dolphin watching tourism has to be developed and promoted within Sri Lanka. The study focuses on appraising tourist satisfaction towards marine tourism, specifically Whale and Dolphin watching at the Trincomalee area. The objectives of this study were to identify the profile of tourists who are visiting for Whale and Dolphin watching, appraising the relationship between destination attributes and tourist satisfaction on Whale and Dolphin watching and discover the innovative practices which tourists will expect from the service providers of Whale and Dolphin watching industry in marine tourism at Trincomalee area. The study mainly depends on the primary data collected by the researcher through questionnaires and structured interviews. The purposive sampling method was used as a sampling

technique to collect data from the 100 both local and foreign tourists. Quantitative and Qualitative data analytical method was employed in analysing the data using descriptive analysis, correlation analysis and thematic analysis. Findings reflect a significant affiliation between all the destination attributes(6A's) and tourist satisfaction towards marine tourism. Moreover, findings have been discovered innovative practices expected by tourists from their service providers in Whale and Dolphin watching industry. Findings suggest implementing expected innovative practices of tourists and rules and regulations for sustain the Whale and Dolphin watching tourism in Sri Lanka.

Keywords: marine mammal tourism, marine tourism, tourism, tourist satisfaction, whale and dolphin watching

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is an essential driving force for regional economic development since it contributes to the employment generation and the enrichment of many related industries (San Martin & Del Bosque, 2008). Marine tourism is a kind of tourism essentially referring to the sea potential. It takes place in a certain area or region dominated by water or ocean, according to the studies of (Farid, Soemarno & Setiawan, 2013). Sri Lanka is an island that consists of nearly 1600km of coastline belt with very attractive natural surroundings; marine tourism should be and can be as essential and a much more significant revenue earner than land-based tourism. Sri Lanka is situated within the international whaling commission's protected zone in the Indian Ocean. Sri Lanka has become a substantial spot for watching whales, highlighted by (Illangakoon, 2006) in his studies. Sri Lanka is rapidly gaining a reputation for being the most reliable site globally for seeing the difficulty and desired blue whale.

Furthermore, blue and sperm whales, dolphins and turtles can be viewed in Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka water is very rich in cetacean species with 27

species of migrant and resident whales. There are three key sites Mirissa on the South coast, Trincomalee on the Northeast coast, and Kalpitiya peninsula on the Northwest coast for watching whales and dolphins in Sri Lanka. Whales and Dolphin is a seasonal activity in Sri Lanka available on the west coast in locations from Kalpitiya and along the southwest coast from December to April. The east coast off Trincomalee is preferable from June to September revealed (Nanayakkara, Herath & De Mel, 2014). Due to calm seas between December to April, there is an outstanding window of opportunity to observe blue whales and sperm whales close to the shore highlighted by (Ilangakoon, 2006).

Sri Lanka is blessed with plentiful and diverse coastal and marine resources with a high potential tourism value. Therefore, Sri Lanka, as an island rich in the marine ecosystem, can position itself as a marine tourism destination. Hitherto, the marine tourism sector has not fully captured its true potential and thus has not reaped the expected benefits. Although the research was conducted regarding Whale and Dolphin Watching and other sea mammals in the Sri Lankan context for scientific purposes only. Many researchers were researching Whale and Dolphin watching in marine biology, but not with the marine tourism industry. There is no sufficient evidence in the Sri Lankan context, researches related to the tourist satisfaction towards marine tourism with particular reference to Whale and Dolphin watching. This research seeks to fulfil research gaps identified and contribute to the Sri Lankan Tourism Industry.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Tourism and Niche Tourism

According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), over the decades, tourism has experienced continued growth and deepening diversification to become one of the fastest-growing economic sectors in the world. A niche is a specialized corner of the tourism market in tourism, usually developed around visitors' particular interests or needs. Novelli (2005) defined niche tourism as how a specific tourism product can be tailored to meet the needs of a particular audience or market segment.

Marine Tourism as a Niche Tourism

Marine tourism is based on the attractions of marine life and marine-dominated areas (Briandana, Caturida & Sukmajati, 2018). A diverse range of organizations of business forms the marine tourism industry directly associated with marine tourism. It includes charter fishing-boat operators, sea-kayak tour guides and scuba-diving instructors. They also have moderate-sized private companies like whale watch cruise operators and charter-yacht companies and large, multinational corporations such as cruise-ship companies. In addition, there are lots of businesses and agencies that are indirectly associated with marine tourism. Such shops are maintaining boats, resorts established in coastal areas, scuba tank-fill shops, windsurfer rental agencies, fishing equipment suppliers, island ferry services, souvenir collectors, artists and even rubbish collectors (Orams, 2002).

Whale and Dolphin Watching

Whale-watching is potentially sustainable use of cetaceans and an economically viable alternative to whaling and has become a significant

contributor to the tourism sector of many countries (O'Connor *et al.*,2009). Whale-watching also can improve people's attitude toward the marine environment and promote public awareness and support for the conservation issues that targeted species face (Duffus & Dearden,1993). According to the International Fund for Animal Welfare (2015), over 13 million people went Whale and Dolphin watching globally. In addition, the Whale and Dolphin industry generated \$2.1 billion per annum in tourism revenue worldwide, employing around 13000 workers.

Whale and Dolphin Watching in Sri Lanka

Whales and Dolphin is a seasonal activity in Sri Lanka available on the west coast in locations from Kalpitiya and along the southwest coast from December to April. The east coast off Trincomalee is preferable from June to September revealed (Nanayakkara, Herath & De Mel, 2014). Due to calm seas between December to April, there is an outstanding window of opportunity to observe blue whales and sperm whales close to the shore highlighted by (Ilangakoon 2006).

Tourist Satisfaction

Satisfaction is “a person's feelings of pleasure or disappointment resulting from comparing a product are perceived performance (or outcome) about his or her expectations” defined by (Kotler, 2009). Tourism depends on tourist satisfaction; therefore, it finally increases tourist visits. From a practical perspective, especially in the destination context, tourist satisfaction can be affected by the lodging, food, shopping, attractions, activities and events, environment, accessibility, price, culture, climate and image, nature, lifestyle, history, service, tourist facility, sanitation, nightlife, availability of English language and value for money.

Destination Attributes

Destinations as the location that attract visitors with the temporary purpose range from continent to countries, to cities to towns, to resort to areas to the inhabited island (Pike, 2008). It is essential to consider multiple destination attributes to assess destination quality. (Buhalis, 2000) pointed out that destinations comprised a core of some components. From his point of view, destinations focus on facilities and services which meet the tourist's requirements at a satisfactory level. He categorized these components into six headings and called 6A's framework. Attractions represent natural, handmade, artificial buildings, special events. Accessibility refers to the entire transportation system, terminals, and vehicles. Amenities refer to accommodation, catering, retailing and tourism services. Available packages mean pre-arranged packages by intermediaries and principals. Activities represent all the activities that tourists could do while they are at the destination. Ancillary services refer to banking, telecommunications, ports, and hospitals, etc.

Tourist Satisfaction and Destination Attributes

In the tourism context, satisfaction is primarily referred to as a function of pre-travel expectations and post-travel experiences. When it is matched with the visitor's travel experience and the expected level of services, the tourist is satisfied. Therefore, measuring tourist satisfaction is vital to successful destination marketing since it is directly linked to destination choice, consumption of products and services, and repeat businesses

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research has been designed to use both quantitative and qualitative components called the mixed methods approach, where the objectives are achieved through both quantitative and qualitative methods. The target population of this study is both local and foreign tourists who visit marine tourism. The sample consists of 100 local and foreign tourists who visited Whale and Dolphin watching at Trincomalee. Primary data has been used in the study basically and the data collection is based on the intent of achieving the study's objectives. The primary data are decided to be collected through the questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of four parts. Part A addresses the demographic factors of the respondents. Part B and Part C of the questionnaire is composed of Likert Scale questions. The researcher used a five-point Likert Scale, ranging from- Strongly Disagree to -Strongly Agree. In Part B, the researcher collects data related to the destination attributes. Those are Attraction, Accessibility, Amenities, Activities, Ancillary Service and Available Packages.

According to these six dimensions, several sub-questions were investigating each dimension. Part C of the questionnaire leads to collect data which is about the dependent variable. Data will be collected using two dimensions. Happiness and Preference are the dimensions of tourist satisfaction. Further, a structured interview method was used to collect qualitative data from 15 respondents to achieve the third objective of the research.

DATA ANALYSIS

Demographic Profile of the Respondent

Table 1: Demographic Profile of the Respondent

Variable	Group	Percentage
Region	Asia & the Pacific	51%
	America	14%
	Middle East	1%
	Europe	32%
	Africa	2%
Gender	Male	34%
	Female	66%
Age	Below 20 years	7%
	21-30 years	33%
	31-40 years	18%
	41-50 years	24%
	51-50 years	14%
	Above 60 years	4%
Education	Secondary Level	7%
	High School	21%
	Diploma/Degree	43%
	Graduate or above	29%
Occupation	Private Sector	26%
	Government Sector	39%
	Self-employed	17%
	Unemployed	1%
	Other	17%
Average Monthly Income	Less \$500	32%
	\$500-\$1000	17%
	\$1000-\$1500	28%
	\$1500-\$2000	6%
	\$2000 or more	17%
Marital Status	Single	16%
	Married	63%
	Separated	13%
	Widowed	8%

Source: Author's own survey data of the study

The majority of respondents have represented the Asia and Pacific region. Arrivals from Europe and America were 32% and 14% for Whale and Dolphin watching at Trincomalee area. According to the analyzed data obtained from the sample of 100 Whale and Dolphin watching tourists, male (66%) and female (34%). When considering the age level of respondents, most of the tourists who visit for Whale and Dolphin watching were younger and mature age (age between 21-30, age between 41 -50). According to the age factor of respondents, they represented 57% as a percentage out of hundred tourists. Most of the tourists who visit Whale and Dolphin watching are married tourists recorded at 63% and the lowest is recorded as the widowed of 8%. Tourists were well-educated people who visited Whale and Dolphin Watching at Trincomalee area.93% of them have more than secondary level educational level. According to the analyzed data obtained from occupation distribution, most respondents were government sector employees of 39% of the total sample. Then the private sector employees of 26%, the lowest is recorded as the 1% of the unemployed sector—most of the tourist who visited Whale and Dolphin watching at considerable income level.

Descriptive Analysis for Independent Variable and Dependent Variable

Table 2: Descriptive Analysis for Independent Variable

Attribute	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Attraction	100	4.142	0.640
Hospitality of local people	100	4.31	0.837
Authentic local culture with local people	100	4.14	1.025
Consist with attractive scenic beauty	100	4.15	0.880

Rich biodiversity	100	3.97	1.039
Accessibility	100	3.954	0.681
Transports modes and facilities at the destination	100	4.03	1.010
	100	3.93	0.967
Roads are very clean and well-maintained	100	3.84	1.070
	100	3.58	1.165
Enough facilities to park vehicles	100	4.39	0.931
Enough facilities and access for differently abled persons			
Effective and efficient transportation services for whale and dolphin watching			
Amenities	100	4.486	0.575
Availability of food outlets	100	4.58	0.819
Enough standard accommodation facilities	100	4.48	0.882
	100	4.40	0.910
Number of shopping places and great variety of choices			
Ancillary Services	100	4.340	0.547
Whale and Dolphin watching is safe journey	100	4.39	0.827
	100	4.33	0.933
Enough health services are available for the emergency situation	100	4.37	0.812
Bank facilities within 24 hours in nearby the destination	100	4.27	0.930
Well -established sanitary facilities are available			

Activities	100	3.933	0.758
Trincomalee is best place to see natural sceneries	100	4.40	0.804
More enjoyed the Whale and Dolphin watching trip	100	4.33	0.943
Get experience with enjoying a variety of recreation activities such as fishing, snorkelling, and diving	100	4.33	0.900
Available Packages	100	4.010	0.825
Tour guides are well qualified and they provide friendly reliable services	100	3.90	0.948
Well-arranged tour packages provide by travel agents	100	4.12	0.946

Source: Author's own survey data of the study

Table 3: Descriptive Analysis for Dependent Variable

Attribute	N	Mean	Std.Deviation
Happiness	100	4.24	0.494
Price of tourism products are very reasonable	100	4.23	0.886
Most of the destination places are very attractive and clean	100	4.52	0.717
Living Costs can be incurred	100	4.56	0.756
Free health and facilities are available for the emergency situation	100	4.40	0.829
Preferences	100	4.117	0.712

No tough rules and regulations	100	4.36	0.847
Recommend Trincomalee as the best destination to see whales and dolphins to my family members and to others	100	4.04	1.004
More satisfied with this journey and my next journey Trincomalee would be my first choice	100	4.14	0.899
Hope to revisit Trincomalee for Whale and Dolphin watching in my next journey	100	3.93	0.913

Source: Author's own survey data of the study

According to the data obtained from descriptive statistics analysis, tourists were highly satisfied with the current destination attributes and tourist satisfaction on marine tourism concerning Whale and Dolphin watching in the Trincomalee area. Destination Attributes, including six dimensions (attraction, accessibility, amenities, ancillary services, activities, available packages) have obtained high mean values respectively, were at almost agree level ($3.5 < X < 5$). Finally, it can be concluded that tourists were satisfied with the existing level of destination attributes on marine tourism with reference Whale and Dolphin watching in the Trincomalee area. Also, the tourists were almost satisfied and agreed to revisit, recommend and select Whale and Dolphin watching in Trincomalee as their first choice. Also, tourists were satisfied with the existing free health and facilities, price of tourism and cleanliness.

Karl Pearson Coefficient of Correlation Analysis

Table 4: Correlation between Destination Attributes and Tourist satisfaction

Attributes	Pearson Correlation	P- value
Attraction	0.569	0.000
Accessibility	0.526	0.000
Amenities	0.607	0.000
Activities	0.443	0.000
Ancillary Services	0.487	0.000
Available Packages	0.499	0.000

Source: Author's survey data of the study

Pearson correlation analysis has been used to achieve the second objective of the research. According to the results, all the six independent variables (destination attributes) have been significant at the 95% confidence level. The P-value of all the destination attributes is 0.000, which is less than 0.05. Correlation values of attraction, accessibility and amenities have been recorded greater than 0.5. Hence there is a strong positive relationship between tourist satisfaction on marine tourism with special reference to Whale and Dolphin watching at Trincomalee area. Further correlation values of ancillary services, activities and available packages have been recorded values between $0 < r < 0.5$. It concludes that there is a weak positive relationship between tourist satisfaction on marine tourism with special reference to Whale and Dolphin watching at the Trincomalee area. Correlation values of all the six Destination Attributes have been

recorded as greater than 0. 000. Hence there is a positive relationship between all Destination Attributes and tourist satisfaction on marine tourism.

Qualitative Data Analysis

The collected from respondents provide many interconnected results that inform whale and dolphin watching tourism development associated with the service providers' side. The study participants were asked to describe innovative practices they have been expected from their service providers. According to the research objective, qualitative data analyzed by structured interviews from 15 respondents. The researcher asked the respondents

“What are the innovative practices you expected from your service providers?”

Based on the answers of the respondents' themes were developed by the researcher. Mainly, one parental theme indicates the research's third objective and under the parent theme, sub-themes and sub/sub-themes were developed to achieve the research objective.

Table 5: Themes of the Qualitative Analysis

Parental theme	Sub theme	Sub/sub themes
Objective	Innovations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Affiliation
To discover the innovative practices which will be expected by tourists from the service providers.		<ul style="list-style-type: none">ServicesModification of TechnologyOn-board demonstration

- Souvenirs and Retail shops
-

Source: Author's survey data of the study

Affiliation Services

Affiliation services refer to subsidiary services. From the answers research got from respondents, it is clear that out of the majority of them need affiliation services that are aligned with the whale and dolphin watching industry. Out of 15 respondents, 4 (20%) mentioned that they need innovation practices from service providers in the whale and dolphin watching industry.

“I thought that the boat would have Glass bottom facilities to see seagrass beds, coral and other marine mammals also”

(Respondent 1: personal interview,2019)

“You can give as a raffle draw during your journey. It will create enthusiasm for us”

(Respondent 8: personal interview,2019)

Modification of Technology

According to the findings, out of 15 respondents, 7 (47%) mentioned that technological improvement is needed in the marine tourism sector's whale and dolphin watching industry.

“It is better to have technology like sonar systems, otherwise sometimes we couldn't be able to see Whales so it is unfair for our payment”

(Respondent 11: personal interview,2019)

On-board Demonstration

Demonstrations are important because they provide the experience of the actual event, phenomena, and process. According to the findings, out of 15 respondents, 7 (27%) has been mentioned that onboard demonstration is required during their whale and dolphin watching journey to enhance their visitor experience.

“We would like if we can have a full demonstration about fin patterns, behavioural patterns of Whales and Dolphins”

(Respondent 12: personal interview,2019)

“It is good if we can have the opportunity to see and identify other types of fish during the travel to see Whales and Dolphins”

(Respondent 14: personal interview,2019)

Souvenirs and retail shops

A souvenir and retail shop is a mercantile establishment to sell goods and services from the practical perspective. According to the findings, out of 15 respondents, 11 (73%) were recommended for their service providers to souvenir promotions in the whale and dolphin watching industry.

“You can have a souvenir promotion after the Whale and Dolphin watching trips like photo printing, postcard and small trinkets.”

(Respondent 9: personal interview,2019)

“You can make documentaries. We like to buy small CDs and DVDs regarding Whale and Dolphin watching in Sri Lanka.”

(Respondent 6: personal interview,2019)

According to the research findings, implementing innovations is necessary to enhance the visitor experience and tourist satisfaction in whale and dolphin watching tourism. Findings noted that especially most of the tourists are seeking affiliation services such as glass bottom facilities of boats, resting places, and reconstruction of facilities. Results have been identified that they are willing to engage in different activities such as raffle draw during their whale watching journey. Moreover, findings reflected that most of the respondents seek technological improvements such as sonar systems, picture capturing tools in boats and GIS programs from their service providers in the whale and dolphin watching tourism. Results have been identified that on-board demonstration is important to enhance the visitor experience to satisfy the tourists in advance. Souvenirs are often items with a character particular to the destination where they are bought. According to the research findings, they especially noted that there are no souvenir promotions relevant to whale and dolphin watching tourism. Finally, the study findings conclude that the innovations are needed to consider by service providers to enhance the visitor experience to increase tourist satisfaction and revisit their intentions to the whale and dolphin watching industry.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Descriptive Analysis has been used to achieve the first objective of the research. According to the results, most respondents were male and in the age group 21-30. The next Highest category age group of 41-50.51% respondents have represented the Asia and Pacific region. The majority of the respondents were occupied in the government sector and 63% of tourists are married and 93% have more than secondary level educational

level. Conclusion relating to the visitor profile on marine tourism special reference Whale and Dolphin watching younger, matured, high educated generation like to have a new experience and Asia and the Pacific was most visited region when observing the demographic information of the tourist. The second objective has been achieved through the Pearson Correlation analysis. According to the study results, all the six independent variables have been significant at a 95% confidence level since the P-Value of all destination attributes is less than 0.05. Correlation values of all the six Destination Attributes have been recorded greater than 0.000. Hence there is a positive relationship between all Destination Attributes and tourist satisfaction on marine tourism.

The third objective of the research has been achieved through thematic analysis. According to analyzed data obtained from qualitative analysis, these data were then categorized under one parental theme with sub-theme and sub/sub-themes. Innovations practices were the sub-theme, under that there were four sub/sub-themes: Affiliation Services, Modification of Technology, Onboard demonstration, Souvenirs, and Retail shops. The study's findings show that tourists seek important innovative practices such as affiliation services like glass bottom facilities, technological improvements, resting facilities after the journey, and souvenir promotions from their service providers compared to the available services. Innovation practices are essential to increase tourist satisfaction of tourists who visit for Whale and Dolphin watching tourism. Therefore, service providers should create innovations in the industry to attract more tourists to the marine tourism sector. The study's findings are more practically oriented. These are more important for the industry suppliers in the Whale and

Dolphin watching industry in Sri Lanka to improve their destination attributes and understand the visitors' potential needs and wants to attract more tourists to the marine tourism industry. Whale watching tourism destination in Sri Lanka has not gained enough publicity and therefore, the visitors to the spots from other regions are less in number. Therefore, it suggested that intensive publicity is a must for promotions. Most of the travel agencies are only focused on the traditional travel route. There is a vast market for marine tourism in Sri Lanka, including Whale and Dolphin watching tourism in Sri Lanka, but anyone did not have a practical plan to improve Whale and Dolphin watching tourism. Promoting whale and Dolphin watching tourism with guided tour packages, including innovations, is the powerful marketing to attract more tourists to satisfy them in advance. Whale behaviour can be affected when too many boats or when the boat approaches too close to whales. Therefore, a powerful and successful regulations system should be adopted as an ordinance and implemented concerning the following regulations criteria to sustain the Whale and Dolphin watching industry also other marine resources.

- Boat approaching directions to whales
- Approaching speed and speed-reducing method when reaching the whales.
- Every whale watching boat should capture messages, information on special whether condition and regulations from an inland centre.
- The certificate awarding for successful followers should be the primary qualification of boat operators and crew to continue their activity.
- Affiliation services given by boat should be standardized and there should be a standardized price range.

Government regulations are the most important things to develop whale and dolphin watching tourism. Therefore, it is necessary to implement the rules and regulations to bring whale watching tourism to Sri Lanka. It will be the most emerging market shortly, which distributes the number of opportunities and benefits to the whole of Sri Lanka in marine tourism.

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