

Exploring the Eco-Practices of Sri Lankan Small and Medium-Scale Eco Lodges: A Comparative Study with International Eco-Tourism Standards

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ABSTRACT

Tourism in Sri Lanka is one of the main contributors to the economy as its interconnected and diverse market grows with changing expectations of worldwide tourists, nature explorers, adventurers, and alike. As a result, there is a growing inclination towards nature-centric explorers who value diversity in cultural and social interactions which has given rise to what is commonly known as “Alternative Tourism” which is a collective term that is used to describe all other tourism activities except mass tourism. Ecotourism, therefore, falls under the umbrella of alternative tourism.

In this landscape, though ecotourism has carved a niche within the market to stage Sri Lanka’s biodiversity, elements of multicultural living, the pulse of rural life, luxuries of simplicity, and other social aspects, existing literature suggests a gap in the appropriate execution of the concept of ecotourism when compared to international markets. The major highlight in the literature is its misconception and exploitation for profit which are the culprits of the ineffective implementation. Considering these challenges, as a primary objective, this study aims to explore the current practices of small and medium-scale eco-lodges in Sri Lanka and to understand if these practices are aligned or diverge from the internationally established practices.

Researchers employed a qualitative approach and engaged in semi-structured interviews with 10 representatives of Sri Lankan small and medium-scaled ecolodges, comprising both owners and managers, using purposive sampling. Thematic analysis was applied to the gathered data.

Findings suggest that the majority of the eco-lodge establishments follow practices such as providing access to natural environments, appropriate waste management, and initiatives related to awareness building amongst guests and local communities about cultural and environmental preservations. Moreover, it was evident that few of the establishments were following international standards by maintaining in-house garden areas for cultivation along with basic waste management practices like segregating the garbage in different bins, and remaining practices such as allowing guests to be engaged in nature-centered activities, experiencing natural adventures, consumption of bio-degenerative products, minimal usage of reusable plastics, engaging local communities for employment were not common amongst the participated entities.

Keywords: Ecotourism, Alternative-Tourism, International Standards of Ecotourism, Small and Medium Scale Ecolodges, Sri Lankan Tourism.