

REVITALIZING SRI LANKAN TOURISM: A POLICY ANALYSIS FOR SUSTAINABLE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

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Tourism plays an imperative role in contributing to Sri Lanka's domestic economy. As an island nation rich in biodiversity and scenic beauty, the country naturally attracts a substantial number of tourists annually. However, the lack of proper policies and guidelines set aside to regulate the tourism industry in the country has been a prominent reason behind the comparatively low growth it experiences. Even though a national policy framework on tourism has been drafted, the industry is still governed under the Tourism Act No 38 of 2005. Refined and updated policies relevant to the country's current economic and social conditions must be introduced, and the study highlights the importance of reforming the current tourism policy by citing examples from a few other countries, including Thailand, Malaysia, and Hawaii. While the current tourism policy aims to create a sustainably developed industry with improved infrastructure and more involvement of the government agencies, the study suggests that attention should be given to improving and introducing new components such as smart tourism with rich digital infrastructure, cultural heritage preservation, improvement of community-based tourism and marketing and promotion targeting a global community. Examples would be drawn from Thailand's tourism tax policies, Malaysia's national ecotourism policy, and the Malama Hawaii program in Hawaii, where local resources have been smartly incorporated into policy formulation to provide a better visitor experience. Accordingly, the study proposes that Sri Lanka implement a policy focusing on community-based tourism for high-value tourism. Local capacity building, niche marketing, and regional connectivity should be given attention. *Meemure*, *Panama*, and *Habarana* are used as model locations to discuss the feasibility of implementing a community-based tourism plan in the country. Moreover, a literature review referring to tourism policy documents and related publications from Thailand, Malaysia, and Hawaii is used to collect data for the research.

Keywords: Tourism, policy, community, development, sustainability