

An Assessment of Delft Eco-Village Tourism Potential as a Model for Sustainable Ecotourism in Jaffna District, Sri Lanka

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Ecotourism is travelling to relatively undisturbed natural areas with the objective of studying, admiring, and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals. The Delft Island is one of the seven islands of Jaffna District and is a great destination for the promotion of ecotourism. The present study was carried out to explore the potential of ecotourism and eco-village tourism as a model for sustainable development in the Delft Island. Eco-village is a living model of sustainable ecotourism and traditional or intentional community with the goal of becoming more socially, culturally, economically, and ecologically sustainable. The research methodology employed both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques. Secondary data related to resource potentials were collected from the Delft Divisional Secretariat and focus group discussions with relevant stakeholders were held to identify the potentials and gaps. Additionally, as a natural resource, bird species were studied from September 2016 to 2017 June. A total of 37 species of birds were recorded from Delft during the study period. Among them were uncommon breeding residents including the Indian courser (*Cursorius coromandelicus*) and uncommon winter migrants including the Greater Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus roseus*), both holding high ecotourism potential given their rarity. Other natural resources include Sri Lanka's only population of feral ponies (*Equus caballus*), Palmyra resources, beach, exotic baobab trees, and rich marine life. In addition, the colonial-era fort, buildings, other archaeological monuments, lifestyle of the Delft community, farming, fishing activities, sea food and the fen system are the best culture-based potentials for promoting ecotourism. The Fen system is made from corals which are available in the island. The architecture of the houses is mostly uniform and major foods are sea and traditional food. Art, including folk drama, is being practised with same traditions. The local people of the Delft Island have never been displaced from Delft to anywhere due to civil war or any natural disasters. The lifestyle of the local people is socially, culturally, economically, and ecologically unique. Hence this island may be considered as an eco-village. The lack of infrastructure facilities, accessibility and lack of promotional activities negatively impact on tourism development and economic development.

Keywords: Eco-village, Ecotourism, Natural and cultural resources, Sustainability, Jaffna District