

## Adoption of Sustainable Tourism Practices By Hotel Operators in Deep South of Sri Lanka

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### ABSTRACT

In recent decade the attention & interest in green and environmentally friendly business practices increased dramatically. This trend is applicable to tourism and hospitality sector as well. Therefore, this study has taken an effort to reveal the prevailing sustainable tourism practices by Sri Lankan hoteliers. The theoretical background of the study defines related terms such as sustainability, sustainable tourism, and sustainable hospitality practices. The study has been carried out as a case study by employing the mixed method. Both quantitative and qualitative techniques & analysis tools were utilized to conclude the findings. The findings of the study revealed that hotel operators in Sri Lanka have been implementing various sustainable practices in their daily operations. Use of low energy lighting, Limited paper-based marketing and promotional materials, Purchase from local suppliers, Recruit and hire local people for job, Establish the green culture in the work place and Donate funds for green initiations were highlighted as most performing best practices among other sustainable practices. The study concludes by offering recommendations & showing avenues for future researchers.

**Keywords:** Sustainable tourism, best practices, hotel operations

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### I. INTRODUCTION:

Tourism is the world's largest and one of the emerging industries worldwide (UNCTAD, 2007). As mentioned above, tourism is one of the major industries in many countries, including Sri Lanka, with the highest growth potential. Tourism considers as the world's largest employer and also considers as major sources of substantial foreign exchange earner to any country (Blank, 1991 & Richards, 2003). According to Beeton (2006), tourism is one of the major means that helps to development of local community through sustainable tourism practices. International tourism is forecast to reach 1.8 billion tourists by the year 2030, nearly double the current levels. In order to minimize the negative impacts of this growth, it is imperative that sustainability be at the top of the agenda for all tourism stakeholders.

During the past decade, the concern in sustainability and environmentally friendly business operations has increased significantly. The society and customers were also more attentive about the fragile environment and responsible customers are willing to spend more money for services and products which seems to help in protecting the environment. As per Erdogen&Baris (2007) depicts the hospitality industry is the vital element in the tourism industry and therefore, it has a

very important role in protecting and preserving the existing environment due to hotels and other lodging establishments use considerable amount of energy, water and other essential resources. However, sustainable business practices do not only contribute to conserve & preserve the environment, it also contributes to reduce costs. Further, sustainability is not only concerned and focused to the natural environment, it also includes the society and the economy of that particular region.

Today, eco-tourism, sustainable tourism and alternative tourism concepts are well famous and growing segments in tourism industry. In this regard, the question whether sustainable and environmentally friendly tourism products and services exist only to make money or existing tourism and hospitality operators are practicing those best practices remains unanswered. This study was focused to reveal **“The level of adoption for sustainable tourism practices by Sri Lankan hotel operators”**. Therefore, a case study of Hotel operators in Deep South of Sri Lanka has been undertaken.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Defining Sustainability*

The concept of sustainability originally evolved in 1960s and its origin the environmentalism. During that period people concerned at the continuing growth of industrial sector and population critically and it was perceived that these developments force to damage the environment irreversibly (Bramwell & Lane, 1993). Sustainability is the capacity to endure (Chan, 2009). The word sustainability originally derived from Latin language. Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Goodman, 2000).

### *Sustainable Tourism*

As per (UNWTO) sustainable tourism can be defined as *“Any form of tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities”*. Sustainable tourism normally implies applying the ideas of sustainable development in the tourism industry (Weaver, 2006). Sustainable tourism can be also defines as a positive approach which aims at the reduction of pressures which are created by the bonds between the tourism industry, guests, host population, and the environment (Bramwell & Lane, 1993).

### ***Sustainable Practices for Hotels***

Hotel sector and other accommodation establishments are becoming the most prominent example that depicts sustainable practices within a lodging establishments are crucial for its long-term success (Bader, 2005). Due to costs for energy, water and other resources are continuously rising, hotels and other lodging establishments are more and concerned to act economically, environmentally and socially responsible way (Cavagnaro&Gehrels, 2009). They further argued that hotel industry is commonly don't have much understanding about sustainability. Bader (2005) said only lesser number of hotels and lodging establishments implementing sustainable practices in their daily business routines. Hoteliers started to implement sustainable practices since the end of 1990s. The objective of such practices were saving costs, promote themselves and some other operators wanted to set an ethical statement (Cavagnaro&Gehrels, 2009)

Switching to the sustainable best practices will definitely contribute for the hotels to carry long-term existence in the market and make sure the continuous profitability (Bader,2005). Further, Chan (2009) especially the investors see the corporate sustainability as a more crucial factor for the success of the business project. Furthermore, hotels can build-up concrete positive public relationship through communicating their sustainable practices to the general public. It will help to attract new market proportion such as green customers, increase the demand and also thinking about repeat visitors (Bader, 2005). Nowadays, there are many hotels and other lodging establishments that incorporated with sustainable practices in their daily business activities.

Sustainable practices of a tourist's hotel can be mainly categorized to three divisions namely "Environmental responsibility", "Social Justice" and "Economic feasibility" (Bader, 2005). Even though, there are three categories of sustainable hotel practices, many practices are focused to environmental sustainability. Lui (2003) revealed that if any hotelier incorporate sustainability to their daily practices, they must concern on "Recycling of materials", "Use green products for business activities", "Use of low impact practices in natural environment", "Composting of waste" and "Establish a green culture in the workplace". As per Erdogan&Baris (2007) depicts "Use renewable energy sources", "Donate funds for green initiations", "Establish environmental education programme for visitors", and "Limiting visitor access to sensitive areas" are must concerns for hoteliers when they initiate sustainability in their properties. "Recruite and hire local people for jobs", "Purchase from local suppliers", and "Grow or raise organic foods" will helpful for any hospitality operator to add social justice to their operations ( Chan& Wong, 2006; Sharpley, 2000; Viken, 2006; Yin, 2003). "Use of low energy lighting", "Limited paper based marketing materials", "Purchase green building materials" and "Establish a green team inside the

organization” are also some of the best practices for sustainable business operations (Font, 2002; Gossling, 2006; Hunter, 1997).

### **III. METHODOLOGY**

Data were gathered from the selected hotels which are operating in Deep South of Sri Lanka. Data were gathered by using both self-administered questionnaires and Interviews. The questionnaire was consisted with sixteen statements which represent sustainable hospitality practices. The respondents were advised to mark the benefits statements on five point likert-scales, starting from “Not at all concerned” to “Extremely concerned”. The researcher conducted a pilot survey on a sample of 10 respondents Deep South hotels. It was conducted to verify the validity of the set questionnaire & its content to check whether respondents can understand the questions included to the questionnaire. Only minor adjustments were done for the questionnaire after the pilot survey. Required data gathered by the researcher by physically attending to the selected region Deep South. By staying within the region, needful interviews were also made.

Even though this study has its roots to the wide range of previous scholars’ works as it appeared under the literature review, it will be more thorough and complex study, and it further tried to carry together and inspect empirically “Level of adoption for sustainable tourism practices by tourists’ hoteliers” in Sri Lankan hospitality industry. Due to the complexity of the study, it was designed to utilize a combination of questionnaire and interviews for data gathering in order to address the major research questions successfully.

To gain a better understanding of the central theme and the research questions, the study employed a case study approach. This particular approach was selected due to its ability to explore and create a holistic, in-depth investigation and thorough knowledge about a certain matter (Saunders et al, 2000). Further, the case study approach enables to gather in-depth information about a certain matter and gain a solid understanding about that specific matter within the research context.

### **IV. RESULTS**

This segment will reveal “To what extend have hoteliers concerned on sustainable practices for their business operations”. To find out that aspect, respondent were advised to fill the questionnaire which consisted with sixteen questions with five point likert scale to show their level of concern with said statements. The quantitative data relating to this matter has analyzed first and related qualitative data will be discussed after analyzing the questionnaires.

Table 01: Mean ranking of “Level of hoteliers concern on sustainable business practices in their daily business operations”

Descriptive Statistics			
	N	Mean	SD
Recruit & hire local people for Jobs	81	4.47	.72
Use of low energy lighting system	81	4.32	.89
Purchase from local suppliers	81	4.16	.82
Establish the green culture within the work place	81	3.92	.87
Limited paper based marketing materials	81	3.78	1.23
Donate funds for green initiations	81	3.06	1.20
Establish Environmental education programme for visitors	81	2.92	1.32
Recycling the materials	81	2.84	1.28
Establish a green team inside the organization	81	2.54	1.26
Use green products for business	81	2.13	1.02
Use of low impact practices in natural environment	81	2.09	1.08
Use renewable energy sources	81	1.99	0.85
Composting of waste	81	1.83	0.66
Grow or raise organic foods	81	1.81	0.82
Purchase green building materials	81	1.69	0.66
Valid N	<b>81</b>		

Above table shows the quantitative findings of the sixteen statements that measure the extent of hoteliers concern on sustainable practices for the hotel operations. The results of each of these statements are ranked according to the mean ranking technique. According to the results, the overall mean score of six out of sixteen statements examined are over 03, and it imply that respondents' level of agreement with those statements was overall, above the average. It further justified that those six sustainable practices namely Recruit& hire local people for jobs (Mean = 4.47, SD = 0.72), Use of low energy lighting system (Mean =4.32, SD = 0.89), Purchase from local suppliers (Mean = 4.16, SD = 0.82), Establish the green culture inside the organization (Mean = 3.92, SD= 0.87), Limited paper based marketing materials (Mean= 3.78, SD = 1.23), and Donate funds for green initiations (Mean = 3.06, SD= 1.20) have been practicing by Hoteliers in Deep South of Sri Lanka. The overall mean score of other remaining five statements examined are below 03 and it implies that respondents' levels of agreement with these statements are below the average. Simply, it means that the ideas of these statements were not supported by the respondents.

As per the above table depicts, the highest mean rank (mean 4.47, SD 0.72) gained by “Recruit and hire local people for jobs”. It confirmed that majority of respondents have agreed that their respective hotels have given prior attention for people from the host community for recruitments.

It says that majority of Deep South hotels have contributed to local communities to reduce their unemployment by opened up prevailing job opportunities for capable local people. It was further proved through majority of the interviewees as well. To justify the answer, few direct quotes have been utilized as follows;

*“When we do the recruitments for our property, we simply look at the local community and first priority always giving for capable young people in the nearby areas”*(pers.comm.hotelier 02).

This shows hoteliers have concerned and they were responsible to offer job opportunities for the host community and through that they could able to reduce the pressure of youth for unemployment.

*“As a policy, we have been practicing to absorb young and capable boys and girls from the village for our prevailing vacancies. Honestly we must say, even though we offer job opportunities for these people, we recruit them mostly for lower category positions. That is due to their level of education and lack of understanding on hotel operations”* (pers.comm.hotelier 08)

Above statement further proved that hotels which are operating in Deep South have incorporated with the best practice of “Recruit & hire local people for Job”. They have concerned about the wellbeing of the host community through offering employment opportunities for community people.

As per the mean rank depicts, the second highest mean rank (mean 4.32, SD 0.89) gained by “Use of low energy lighting system”. It confirmed that majority of respondents have agreed that their respective hotels have given prior attention for protecting the energy by switching to the low energy lighting system. It was further proved through majority of the interviewees as well. To justify the answer, few direct quotes have been utilized as follows;

*“You know.... We have an internal policy to use low energy bulbs and lighting such as LEDs where ever possible. Even we have been entertaining benefits out of it due to it immensely contribute for reduce the electricity bill”* (pers.comm.respondent 05)

*“In our hotel all rooms, public areas such as restaurant, bar & coffee shop....etc and even lobby have illuminated by using LED system. It contributes lot for the sustainability by reducing energy wastage” (pers.comm.respondent 07).*

Above two statements confirmed & showed the hotel operators’ dedication and commitments towards protecting the energy sources. It seems that through these best practices, they also have intention to reduce their operational cost by switching to some of the sustainable best practices.

As per the above table depicts, the third highest mean rank (mean 4.16, SD 0.82) gained by “Purchase from local suppliers”. It confirmed that majority of respondents have agreed that their respective hotels have given enough attention for the wellbeing of local community by purchasing needful rawmaterial from local suppliers”. Through that they could able to create good market for locally made products. To justify the point, few direct quotes have been utilized as follows;

*“Over 50% of hotel purchasing, we purchase from the local suppliers. Especially most of vegetable needs, chickens, and selected fruit items we tend to purchase from local suppliers” (pers.comm.respondent 11).*

*“We have opened up a special counter call **GamataSaviyak** in our hotel premise, any community member who grows listed vegetables and fruits in their lands, can handover their harvest for reasonable price”(pers.comm.respondent 06)*

One another respondent was revealed another avenue that opened-up for the local community to sell their products through hotels in their region;

*“We have given a special space inside our hotel for two selected villagers to display their souvenir products to the in house guests. One person perform wood carving while other one do creations by using ceramics” (pers.comm.respondent 07).*

All above statements proved that exiting hotels in Deep South have incorporated with best practices positively to enhance the quality of local’s life.

According to the table, fourth highest mean rank (mean 3.92, SD 0.87) gained by “Establish the green culture within the work place”. It confirmed that majority of respondents have agreed that their respective hotels have given enough attention for the wellbeing of local community by establishing a green culture within the hotel. Through that they could able to create responsible working environment inside their working place.



*“As a strategy, we have introduced a concept “Ride your bike to work” for all employees who come to work from close proximity. This rule applicable to all employees neglecting their position and involvement with the hotel. Even our Executive housekeeper daily reaches the hotel by his bicycle” (pers.comm.respondent 07).*

Through above practice, they try to minimize and limit the carbon emission through their hotel. Even though the impact of their practice is in neglectable level, their intention and effort towards the sustainability must be appreciated. It was further confirmed by;

*“You know.... We have done our landscaping by using plants which have a kind of value such as medicinal plants, endemic plants....etc. None of the exotic plant we used for our gardening. we have been entertaining this practice since 2010 and most of foreign guests are interesting to learn about these plants, specially the usage of these plants” (pers.comm.respondent. 14)*

The fifth position of mean rank (mean 3.78, SD 1.23) gained by “Limited paper based marketing materials”. It confirmed that majority of respondents have incorporated to use green marketing practices to enhance their contribution for sustainable hospitality industry. It further proved through below statement.

*“We are little bit differ from other hotels through our marketing campaigns. We never practice paper based marketing tactics to attract or stimulate the potential guests. We always switch with E-marketing campaigns. Even we don’t send our rate schedule to the travel agents in printed mode. Instead of that we use emails to distribute our rate schedules to the relevant parties” (pers.comm.respondent.03).*

As per the above table the sixth position of mean rank (mean 3.06, SD 1.20) gained by “Donate funds for green initiations”. It confirmed that majority of respondents have incorporated with the sustainable practices by donating their funds for environment conservation and any other green activities. This was further confirmed by some of interviewees as well.

*“Due to we are involving with an international business and dealing with international clientele, we have to maintain certain standards. So, all the time we unable to switch with some environmental related best practices, but we have contributed lot for green initiations through both financially & physically” (pers.comm.respondent 08)*



*“You know, as an environmentally responsible hotel we have fully funded for one of the environmental conservation project which is initiated by one of the community group in Waduruppa area” (pers.comm.respondent.05)*

According to above two quotes, it further confirmed that majority of hotel operators are highly concern about sustainable initiations and they have positive mindset on this kind of movements.

## **V. CONCLUSION**

Concluding the entire work, it can be said that this study has shown, there are some positive movements and incorporations of Deep South hoteliers towards the sustainability through some best practices. It further confirmed that even though hoteliers showed some positive commitments towards the sustainability, which is not in a very much satisfactory level, because they have incorporated only with six best practices while other ten practices, were in questionable level. The study further confirmed that hoteliers have heavily incorporated with Economic and Social aspects while Environmental concerns were in questionable level.

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