

KEY LOCATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS THAT INFLUENCE ON ATTRACTING TOURISTS TO SRI LANKA

ABSTRACT

This research was conducted to assess the existing locational characteristics of Sri Lanka which could influence on attracting tourists to the country. The major problem of the study is identifying the critical locational characteristics that cause to attract more tourists to Sri Lanka. It has been observed that there are three major locational characteristics such as Natural attractiveness, Cultural attractiveness and Climate which have discussed by the scholars and applicable to the Sri Lankan context. The main objective of the study is to identify the most important characteristics which help to attract tourists to Sri Lanka. The secondary objectives are determining the impact of the influence of the characteristics on tourist attraction & exploring the influence of the characteristics for future tourist attraction. The research coverage areas are Colombo District and Hikkaduwa Narigama area. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire. The findings are based on the primary data collection and, they have been analyzed with Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 16.0 and the SmartPLS (Partial Least Square) 3.0. There were 62 sample size and whole sample responded for the questionnaire. Findings of the study exposed all three characteristics are important for tourist attraction. According to the result of Path Coefficient, all the three variables are statistically significant and natural attractiveness (0.454), cultural attractiveness (0.247) and climate (0.213) are a significant moderately strong relationship with tourist attraction. Therefore, all three variables positively impact to the tourist attraction and natural attractiveness is the major among them. It is also found that there are specific things to be taken into account for the accomplishment of attracting the expected group of tourists to the country.

Keywords: Natural Attractiveness, Culture Attractiveness, Climates, Tourist Attractions

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism, the largest service industry in the global economy [1]. [2] declared 11% of GDP and 200 million employments as the global contribution of tourism to facilitate 700 million tourists.

Introducing and maintaining the beauty of a country is the idea of tourism. Tourism is favourable for developing countries which seek for opportunities similar to Sri Lanka. Employment creation and raising the standard of living of rural community are some of the roles of tourism [3]. Tourism has been identified

as a course of development [4]. The economic benefits which can be generated through tourism have been reported by [3] as the ability to generate foreign exchange inflows, employment opportunities [5, 6, 7] which can enhance the individual income and increase the living standard with the improved economic structure [8, 9]. Ability of tourism to undergo complicated situations of an economy by enhancing the tourist visit makes the industry stronger [10]. The connection between location management and tourism were pointed out by [11]. Thereby, the locals can arrange the locations in a manner that can attract more tourists.

Influence of locational characteristics is 69.9% of agro-tourism attractiveness in the coastal area of Bantul regency out of which 68.9% of dominance is due to natural attractiveness [12]. Scholars have analyzed the natural attractiveness with other locational characteristics of infrastructure, playing grounds, cleanliness, shopping facilities, praying facilities/shower, security, hospitality and parking. Natural attractiveness could be a dominant factor only where there is a geographic based tourism.

1.1. Locational Characteristics: Why tourists select a destination

Location means a specific territorial area with steady relationship residents and resources [11]. Cleanliness, ease of access, natural attractiveness, hospitality, facilities were the locational characteristics identified in Indonesian Laws on Tourism [13] which was reported by Saroyo and Mulyati [12]. [14] detailed the inability of tourists to give specific reasons on why they have selected a destination as there could be many characteristics.

1.1.1. Natural Attractiveness: Why tourists select a destination

Natural attractiveness is the experience of enjoying and examinations of nature with a lower impact to the resources [15]. Laarman and Durst [16] highlighted nature-oriented tourism as the experience of adventure, education and recreation. The degree of enjoyment with nature will depend upon nature-related travel experience they gain [17]. A location rich in natural beauty can attract tourist for that characteristic, but there should be no or minimum harm for the resources. [18] analyzed that the developing countries which depend on natural attractiveness indicate its fullness with natural capital.

[17] studied four nature-related tourists activities as fishing, whale safari, hiking and camping when evaluating their study. Wildlife viewing safaris is the major tourism activity in East African countries even though the 81% of participants have stated they have gained experience from non-wildlife attractions [2]. Marine and coastal tourism is a part of the natural environment where there could be choosing patterns of domestic and international tourists [19].

The three dimensions [15] used for measuring natural attractiveness were experience, style and location.

1.1.2. Cultural Attractiveness: : Enjoying and examining cultural heritage

Javidan et al. [20] gave a wider definition to culture by stating is as a part of environment specifically which is developed by man. Taras et al. [21] have recognized some common features of a culture; stable concept, formed over a long period, shared among group members in a multi-level construct. When tourists are attracted to culture, they visit on seeing cultural sites or experiencing the heritage of a location [22]. Cultural attraction conferring 'Report WTO 2012', defines tours to experience the area and unique events associated with the cultural heritage and historical values [23].

Megehee and Spake [24] characterized eight attractions in their typology using food, event, disaster, destination, religion, music, historical and sports. Few of them have been used as the sub-variables of culture for this study. Food- the food prepared on a specific local recipe for special seasons or celebrations has been termed as a traditional food by [25]. Experience of traditional food helps to keep tourists loyal to a particular destination and effect on their revisiting intention [26]. Food is one of the greatest attractions of tourists [27, 28]. [29] measured this sub variable with five dimensions, for instance;

cultural experience, excitement, interpersonal relation, sensory appeal and health concern. History-historical attractiveness can be generated with the historical heritages existing in a country. Heritage can be used on attracting tourists since its dependency over historical symbols of a realm and via sustaining the unique identity of a nation [30]. Heritage tourism is depicted through the relationship between the attributes of the heritage site and the relevant tourist [31].

Municipal services and behaviour of local people, history, nature and cuisine and prices are the three categories of indicators [32]. Religious- visit the places which are important due to its religious values either for leisure or for religious needs can be implied as religious-based visits [33]. Some scholars argue that the most prominent form of religious visits is pilgrimages and missionary travels. Motivation, journey and destination were the three dimensions suggested by Turner and Turner in 1978 to measure the religious aspect and this was used by Rinschede [33].

Festivals- [34] reports the features of a festival as stated by [34] in 2012, they could be varied, unusual, derived on a religious basis, comprise with the community's art and culture and celebrations. [48] spotted festivals as a long-lasting mean and thereby play a role which goes beyond a tourist attraction Reverte and Izard [35] identified three dimensions of festivals. Economic success, event management and event potential were those measurements.

1.1.3. Climate: Typical weather conditions

The typical weather condition of a place can be defined as the climate according to the 'Cambridge Dictionaries'. Even though a specific area encounters different weather conditions the most common condition during the period will consider as the climate. Tourist's willingness to feel relaxed with warmth or cold is important in international tourism [36]. [37] showed the importance of warmth and bright weather for tourism. [38] argued, since the climate is uncontrollable it has a lesser part in tourism. Changing climates could change the trend of tourism [37]. Tourists looking for warmth will not travel long ways in the future [38]. Temperature, precipitation & wind are the three most important measurements of climate and aerosols, atmospheric composition, cloud cover, humidity and insolation are the indirect measurements.

[1] argued, it is tourists' behaviour, which makes them visit the new tourism areas. Knowing the available attractions and the strengths and weaknesses of each of them lead to a successful tourist destination [2].

1.2. Tourist Attraction: A site tourists willing to visit

Expectations of tourists are changing to quality, experimentation and active motivation as figured by [10]. Attention given to the destination and how it has positioned in target tourist' mind is important to promote tourism effectively. 'Cambridge English Dictionaries' claims tourist attraction as a site which generates enjoyment and a place people willing to visit. Attractiveness includes amusement, atmosphere and time together with quality and cost [14]. On the word of [2] countries full of natural resources and which use them for tourist attraction could over-exploit them for the success of the industry similar to Tanzania. Nonetheless international terrorism, economic crisis and destination quality could make the industry either favorable or unfavourable [2].

1.3. Sri Lankan Context

Sri Lanka is an island country closely located to the south of India and praised as a tourism destination with its beauty, biodiversity, culture and heritage [4]. In 1966 tourism has become an organized industry in Sri Lanka where the history of visitations runs for centuries [39]. Despite the 26 years of war experienced by the country, the industry could retain and during the post-war received the opportunity to develop the industry at a higher growth rate [4, 39]. Regardless of the terrorist attacks happened in 1995 and 1996 to two major hotels in Sri Lanka, the industry was successful with the industry till 2001. With the attack to Colombo International Airport in 2001 an unbearable challenge occurred [4].

Sri Lanka's former President and the former Minister of Economic Development introduced the Tourism Development Strategy from 2011 to 2016 to accelerate the relevant infrastructure [40] to attract 2.5 million high spending tourists in 2016. In 2012, the opening year of the strategy, Sri Lanka could reach 1 million tourists with a value of 1 billion US\$ where we had 650,000 arrivals in 2010 [41]. Nonetheless the inability of accomplishing the target of 2.5 million by 2016, but in 2018 was verified in some of the studies [41,39]. Creating a conducive environment, attracting the right tourists, the happiness of departing tourists, improving domestic tourism and improving global image of Sri Lanka were the strategies discussed in the Tourism policy. Such strategies are capable of attracting Foreign Direct Investments, generate employment, fair distribution of economic benefits, increase of foreign exchange earnings and ranking the country as the most treasure island for tourism addition to attracting tourists [40]. Tourism Strategy (2011-16) [42] of Sri Lanka discusses different tourism projects, for instance, adventure sports centres, camping sites, eco lodges, heritage hotels, house boats, whale and dolphin watching and many more. Investors are also being encouraged to invest on golf courses, shopping malls, water parks, theme parks, light aircraft services, gaming cities, which are somewhat new to Sri Lanka so on. The way of encouraging the investments for the locational improvements should also be given attention. Besides in a time where few months remaining to the expiration of the policy period, it is worth to give a thought on why we are behind the achievement of 2.5 million tourists.

[3] explained heritage, mountains, natural beauty, pleasant climate and clean air are free resources of tourism development. Benchmarking with Singapore which has an annual tourist arrival of 13 million with a 3.5 nights average stay, Sri Lanka has an average of 10 nights stay in 2012 [41] and 8.6 nights in 2013 [43]. Within a decades time, Sri Lanka would reach to the level of Singapore.

Based on the statistical information published by the 'Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority', there is a upturn in tourist arrivals by 2.1% in 2009 to 26.7% in 2013. Mostly Indian, UK, German and French tourists visit to Sri Lanka. Based on Travel Lanka (June 2015), beaches, ancient cities, national parks, adventure sports, eco-tourism, ayurvedic spas and wellness, shopping centres, wine and dine, museums and festivals are the locational characteristics in Sri Lanka. [50] suggest that Sri Lanka should touch the niche, if they really need to handle the high spending tourists.

Success of tourism is a challenge and it is barely understood [44]. Volatile nature and uncontrollable influences could be a challenge for the industry [2]. The study of [21] suggesting the natural resources can be a tool to overcome such challenges by transforming them to a state of valuable. If the country can provide what tourists value most, the country can win the competition. In Jamaica, the level of host and the guest interaction depends on the attitude of locals [45]. The growing competition in the industry encourages the nation to step on to an innovative strategy as stated [46] and to get an economic advantage. Beaches of both Northern and Eastern provinces have an attraction on surfing [4]. Addition to that the study will look into the other possibilities to attract the targeted high spending tourists to the country.

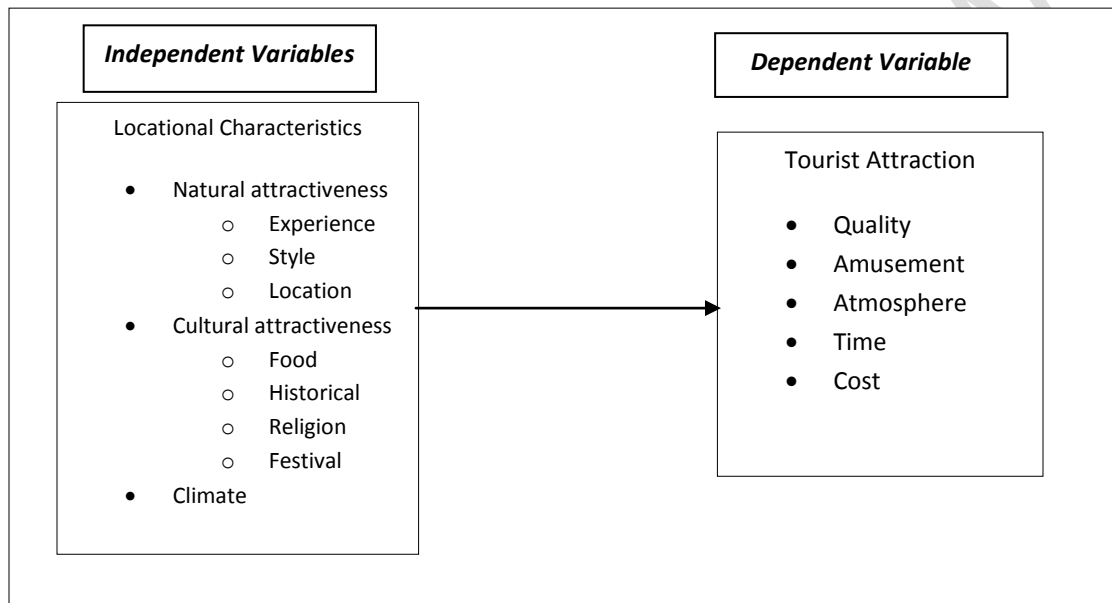
The study was conducted to identify the critical locational characteristics that cause to attract more tourists to Sri Lanka. Identifying the most important characteristics which help to attract tourist to Sri Lanka, determining their impact and influence for future tourist attraction are the objectives of the study. Previous studies have mainly focused on a single destination or a location to evaluate the attractions and some have compared the attraction of few destinations [12].

[2] studied the tourist satisfaction in protected areas of Tanzania and identified wildlife viewing, accommodation, cuisine and personal interactions could satisfy the tourists. Some studies have focused on a selected characteristic such as in the studies of [49], [1]. Therefore developing a conceptual framework for the study was difficult and the characteristics have been combined. For instance marine and coastline attractions have combined with natural attractiveness and cuisine, historical, religious and festivals have taken under cultural attractiveness.

1.4 Conceptual Framework of Study

To understand the strength of each of the characteristic, the conceptual framework was developed (Figure 1) and it contains the independent, dependent, sub-variables and the dimensions of the study. Locational characteristics and Tourist Attraction are the main two main variables of the study. Locational characteristics are the independent variables of the study and to measure the locational characteristics author used the sub independent variables such as Natural attractiveness, Cultural attractiveness and Climate according to the previous researchers. Tourist Attraction is the dependent variable of this study.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



Source: Compiled by the Author based on Literature

2.1.1 Hypotheses of the Study

H1: There is a positive impact between the Natural Attractiveness and Tourist Attraction.

H2: There is a positive impact between the Cultural Attractiveness and Tourist Attraction.

H3: There is a positive impact between Climate and Tourist Attraction.

The main goal of the research is to identify the most important characteristics which attract tourists to Sri Lanka. Second objective is to discover the impact of each of the characteristic on tourist attraction. The third objective evaluates the tourists' perspective of future attractions.

2. MATERIALS AND METHOD

The population of the study is the international tourists visited to Colombo and Hikkaduwa, Sri Lanka during December in 2018. Among them, 62 tourists were conveniently selected. For comparisons with primary data, statistical information, published by the authorized bodies, was used. Structured questionnaires used as a primary data collection method and most of the questions were developed by the researcher with the indicators found on literature there is a high requirement to test the validity of the model and the reliability of the questions. With a pilot survey, the validity and reliability have been affirmed. A mixed-method which contains both qualitative and quantitative has used as the research method. Research setting used for the data collection is natural. For analysis, the collected data SPSS 16.0 and SmartPLS 3.0 have been used.

2.2 Construct Reliability and Convergent Validity

Reliability of the variables can be constructed upon the composite reliability and Cronbach's Alpha exceeding 0.7. A value less than 0.5 AVE (Average Variance Extracted) indicates a lower level of convergent validity. Based on the results (Table 1) all the variables are reliable and the research model is valid.

Table 1: Reliability and Convergent Validity of Variables

Variable	AVE	Composite Reliability	Adjusted R ²	Cronbach's Alpha
Tourist Attraction	.447	.932	.661	.922
Natural Attractiveness	.436	.883		.853
Cultural Attractiveness	.404	.948		.943
Climate	.464	.858		.807

Source: Compiled by the Author Based on Survey Data

Table 2: Multicollinearity Analysis

Model	Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Collinearity Statistics		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	.673	.334		2.018	.048		
	Natural Attractiveness	.441	.120	.444	3.691	.000	.406	2.463
	Cultural Attractiveness	.237	.120	.241	1.972	.053	.395	2.530
	Climate	.215	.093	.232	2.321	.024	.590	1.695

Source: Compiled by the Author Based on Survey Result

2.3 Collinearity Analysis

In order to verify that there is no multicollinearity issue which generates ambiguous errors in the coefficient of variables, the tolerance and the VIF (Variance Inflation Factor) will be tested. Above 0.2 tolerance with a below 5 VIF value affirms that there is no multicollinearity issue in the variables Table 2). As all the independent variables meet both the criteria none of them face a multicollinearity situation.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Descriptive Statistics

62 respondents of the study were selected from Colombo Independence Square, Galleface Green and Hikkaduwa. Majority of them were female and aged from 18 to 79. Respondents represented different nations and their duration of the visit runs from 3 to 1460 days. Summary of the descriptive statistics is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Characteristics of Respondents

Characteristic		Frequency	Valid Percentage
Gender	Male	30	48.4
	Female	32	51.6
Purpose of the visit	Pleasure	51	82.3
	Business	1	1.6
	Religious and cultural	1	1.6
	Visiting relations and friends	7	11.3
	Other	2	3.2
Home country (continent wise)	Asia	7	11.2
	Europe	42	67.9
	Australia	6	9.7
	Africa	1	1.6
	North America	3	4.8
	Missing	3	4.8

Source: Compiled by the Author Based on Survey Results

3.2. Test of Normality

K-S test (Kolmogorov- Smirnov Statistic) and Shapiro-Wilk statistic test gave the following result (Table 4). Climate and tourist attraction are the only variables which are normally distributed with a more than 0.05 result for both the tests where natural attractiveness and cultural attractiveness are not normally distributed.

Table 4: Test of Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Tourist Attraction	.082	62	.200*	.951	62	.015
Natural Attractiveness	.132	62	.009	.904	62	.000
Cultural Attractiveness	.080	62	.200*	.923	62	.001
Climate	.088	62	.200*	.976	62	.258

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.

Source: Compiled by the Author Based on Survey Results

3.3 Path Coefficient

Significance of each of the variable can be depicted through the path coefficient and can be analyzed with bootstrapping of SmartPLS. As long as the path coefficient goes beyond 0.1 we can suggest the variable is statistically significant. All the three independent variables; natural attractiveness (0.454), cultural attractiveness (0.247) and climate (0.213) are moderately strong predictors of tourist attraction and the most influencing factor on tourist attraction seems the natural attractiveness with the highest coefficient of 0.454 and cultural attractiveness and climate with coefficients of 0.247 and 0.213 respectively.

[12] concluded natural attractiveness has a 68.9% influence on agro-tourism.

Notably, all three characteristics have a positive impact on tourist attraction. Result emphasizes a positive relationship between each of the three characteristics and tourist attraction and therefore we cannot reject H1, H2 or H3.

Table 5: Path Coefficient

	Tourist Attraction
Natural Attractiveness	.454
Cultural Attractiveness	.247
Climate	.213

Source: Compiled by the Author Based on Survey Results

T-statistic of natural attractiveness and climate is >1.96 they are significant for a two-tailed test with a 5% confidence interval where the cultural attractiveness >0.98 it is significant for the one-tailed test with a 5% confidence interval (Table 5 and 6). Natural attractiveness indicates a statistically significant situation with the highest T-statistic where the other two variables do not imply a statistically significant situation based on collected data.

Table 6: Significant of path Coefficient

	Original Sample	Sample Mean	Standard Deviation	T-Statistics	P Value
CA*> TA*	.247	.265	.150	1.644	.101
Climate> TA	.213	.209	.107	1.999	.046
NA*>TA	.454	.452	.112	4.064	.000

*NA= Natural Attractiveness, TA= Tourist Attraction, CA= Cultural Attractiveness,

Source: Compiled by the Author Based on Survey Result

Further natural attractiveness has a greater impact of 4.064 on tourist attraction with the highest explanatory power of 45% among the other characteristics. Climate discloses the second-highest impact of 1.999 with a 21% explanation of tourist attraction. Locational characteristic with the least impact on tourist attraction has turned to be cultural attractiveness with a T-statistic of 1.644 even it has a more explanatory power of 24% compared to climate.

3.4 Characteristics Influence for Future Tourist Attraction

The characteristic to be enhanced or reduced to make the country more attractive for tourists an open-ended question was asked. Majority of them have not responded for it stating all the aspects were covered through the questions, but few have answered specifically.

Some of them loved to surf in Sri Lanka; some have complained about the cleanliness of the country, some tourists enjoyed the Sri Lankan cuisine where others emphasized the unhealthiness of it. Mid-aged tourists expressed they could have enjoyed the beauty due to the slow moving vehicles on the road. The risk of travelling alone was another complaint made by a tourist. Some have expressed their attraction on ceremonies organized over here. Friendliness and helpfulness of local people were also highlighted by many tourists. Interest on hiking, wildlife and bird watching, water sports, were also elaborated by few international tourists.

3.5 Recommendations

The study has identified the highest influencing and explaining the locational characteristic of natural attractiveness which should be given more attention on when developing the tourism products which has

specified in Tourism Policy of Sri Lanka (2011-16) [42]. In the attempt of attracting high spending 2.5 million tourists' the finding of the third objective could be used as a base.

3.6 Further Research Insights

There were a number of limitations in this particular study such as the limited areas used for data gathering, time limits, so on and so forth. Thereby, if this research could conduct in a place like an international airport, the responses will be received from tourists who came to visit different areas of the country.

4. CONCLUSION

The research was conducted to conduct a contemporary analysis on tourism and evaluate the characteristics which should get more attention on, to accomplish the industrial goals.

The results indicated that the relevant organizations should develop tourism products through, but without harming, the natural attractiveness. However, all three characteristics explain the tourist attraction in different degrees. But only the climate and natural attractiveness could make more impact on the ultimate tourist attraction. Therefore as a nation which can accomplish a high growth rate in the tourism industry should not eliminate the character of cultural attractiveness but give more attention to how to make it more influential on tourist attraction. This could be another direction for further studies.

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