

Perceptions and Preferences of Potential Visitors to Use Up-country Tea Plantations in Sri Lanka as Sites of Nature-Tourism

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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to examine the perceptions and preferences of potential visitors to use up-country tea plantations in Sri Lanka as sites of nature-tourism. A questionnaire based survey was carried out with 280 respondents at the entrance of 12 tourism sites which were classified as Urban recreational sites, National parks, Beaches and Resorts and Historical / religious sites from June to August 2006. This paper presents the outcome of quantitative data analysis, where the descriptive statistics were used predominately. The outcome of the analysis show that about 24 percent of respondents had the experience of using up country tea plantations as sites of nature tourism while the majority of respondents to the survey (i.e. 60%) wished to visit such a site as an alternative to the traditional sites of tourism in the near future. The rest of the sample indicated that they did not want to visit these sites. Pearson Chi-square test was conducted to find out the association between visitation pattern and demographic characters of the respondents. Visitation pattern had associated only with age, gender, civil status and level of education of visitors. Underdeveloped roads were the major problem for the visitors (local 53.8% foreign 66.7%) and also the development of sanitary and security facilities in the sites would attract more visitors. The visitors should be able to visit the tea factory and the scenic beauty around the estate and also to get knowledge about tea processing. The paper concludes that there is significant number of potential visitors to up country tea plantations and provision of more information sources would lead to bloom-up of the sector.

KEYWORDS: Nature-tourism, Tea Plantations in Sri Lanka, Visitation Patterns.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is an important and growing industry in Sri Lanka. It is one of the most important contributors to Sri Lankan economy, representing forth largest foreign exchange earner and creating new employments. The total earning from tourism including earnings from visiting non-resident Sri Lankans was US\$ 329 million and it provided 52,085 direct and 72,919 indirect employment opportunities in 2005 (Anon, 2005). Total arrivals of tourists in 2004 was 566,200 and it is 13.1 percent increment compared to the year 2003 (Anon, 2004).

Nature-tourism is closely associated with ecotourism which is defined as, "Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well being of local people" (Anon, 2003), it is one of fastest growing segments of tourism industry. In simple terms, ecotourism can be described as tourism that involves traveling to relatively undisturbed areas to study, admire and enjoy the scenery and its wild plants and animals, as well as the human culture of the area (Vidanage *et al.*, 1995).

A more comprehensive definition given by Ziffer (1989) was cited by Wickramanayake (1995) as follows;

Ecotourism is a form of tourism inspired primarily by the natural history of an area, including indigenous cultures. The nature tourist visits relatively undisturbed areas in the spirit of appreciation, participation and sensitivity. The eco tourist practices a non-consumptive use of wild life

and natural resources and contributes to the visited area through labor or financial means aimed at directly benefiting the conservation of the site and the economic well being of the residents. The visit should strengthen the eco tourist's appreciation to conservation issues in general, and to the specific needs of the local. Ecotourism also implies a managed approach by the host country or region which commits itself to establishing and maintaining the sites with the participation of local residents, marketing them appropriately, enforcing regulations and using the proceeds of the enterprise to fund the area's land management as well as community development.

Nature-tourism holds great potential for Sri Lanka as a means of conserving biological diversity and promoting the sustainable use of biodiversity, generating income but at present such activities are mainly confined to the visitation of well known natural parks such as Yala, Udawalawa, Sinharaja *etc.*

Some potential nature tourists that can be attracted to Sri Lanka would include; (1) Visitors whose interests are focused on a particular group of animals or plants, as examples bird watching and butterfly interest groups, a particular activity such as nature photography, rafting, canoeing, scuba-diving *etc.*; professional interests such as scientific tourism; (2) tourists whose interests are more diverse and include an array of outdoor activities such as trekking and hiking to bird-watching, *etc.* These will be visitors "who want to just get out to enjoy and experience nature"; (3) others may want to visit

a national park or reserve as part of a general tour (Wickramanayake, 1995).

There are many more potential places in Sri Lanka which have been undiscovered by visitors and can be developed with a little effort to attract visitors. The tea plantations which are located in hill country is one of the best places included in above category. In the case of plantation sector, there are few plantations (for example, Pussallawa, Bogawanthalawa) that have developed their plantations as nature-tourism sites. Considering the present status of tea plantations, the basic resource and infrastructure are available within estates in different capacities. Therefore, the commercial operation of a nature-tourism project can be done with minimum capital investment. Integration of the two industries, tea and tourism, will generate a wide range of benefits for the plantation companies and local communities (Galagoda *et al.*, 2005) such as increasing the revenue of plantation companies, improving the living standards of the labor communities specially by generating more employment opportunities and also conserving the natural environment. There are several potential nature-tourism activities available within tea estates as nature watching, tea factory visiting, tea field tours, bird watching, mountain climbing, biking, golf, fishing, overnight camping, kabana etc. And also for the well being of the tourists visiting the tea plantations, there are so many facilities available within estates, such as vacant bungalows, staff quarters, and well established factories. Even though there are specialized visitors who have already been to those plantations, there are many more potential visitors who are visiting other places and still not visiting tea plantations. This analysis was carried out to examine perception and preferences of these visitors and the extent of expectations of visitors fulfilled by tea plantations.

METHODS

Data Collection

A structured questionnaire based survey was conducted with 280 potential visitors to tea plantations in Sri Lanka June to August 2006. The pilot survey was conducted using small sample (n=23) in Temple of Tooth, Kandy and Royal Botanical Garden, Peradeniya. The questionnaire was prepared in both Sinhala and English, because both local and foreign visitors were selected as respondents. The potential visitors to the sample were selected from entry points of the 12 sites (Table 1), by using stratified random sampling method according to the age, gender, income, education and nationality.

Even though equal number of respondents (25 each) was firstly targeted for each location, it was unable to meet 25 respondents from some locations due to practical problems such as seasonal changes of visitation pattern and time constraint.

Table 1 - Potential sites for data collection:

Description	Sites	Sample Size
1. The recreation facilities established in urban areas	Colombo	25
	Kandy	25
	Nuwaraeliya	25
2. National parks and forest reservations	Yala	22
	Udawalawa	21
	Wasgamuwa	21
3. Beaches and Resorts	Unawatuna	22
	Hikkaduwa	20
	Tangalle	25
4. Historical / religious sites	Anuradhapura	25
	Seegiriya	25
	Kataragama	23

Data Analysis

The respondents were firstly divided into two categories as local visitors and foreign visitors and again they were classified as “already visited”, “hope to visit” and “never visiting” to up country tea plantations as nature tourists.

Descriptive statistics were taken for all three categories separately for local and foreign visitors using SPSS 13.0 tools. The descriptive statistics were derived on visitors’ preferences, problems they experienced, facilities they are expecting from those nature-tourism sites, etc.

Pearson Chi-square test was used to find out the significance of the association between demographic factors and visitation pattern of the visitors to up-country tea plantations and also to other tourism sites (for example: historical sites, nature tourism sites, beaches) apart from upcountry tea plantations.

$$\chi^2 = \frac{\sum (X_{ij} - M_{ij})^2}{M_{ij}}$$

Where,

χ^2 = The Pearson’s chi-square statistic value

X_{ij} = Stands for observed cell count

M_{ij} = Expected cell count in i^{th} and j^{th} column

Significant probability value was taken by 95 percent confidence interval and selected demographic characters were categorized as 1) Gender; Male and Female 2) Family income; Less than Rs 20,000.00 and More than Rs 20,000.00 3) Family members; Less than 2 members in family, 2 to 4 members in family and More than 5 members in family 4) Age; 18 to 45 years old and More than 45 years old 5) Education level; Grade 0 - 11 (O/L) and Higher than O/L 6) Residence; Rural and Urban 7) Civil status, Married and Unmarried.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Sample Description

As study was mainly targeted on visitor preferences and visitation patterns of local visitors, it was very important to get an idea about the demographic characters of the respondents, to carry

out the study. Even though few respondents were reluctant to answer for the questions such as age and income level, many had given correct figures as much as possible. Out of the sample, 64.7 percent were male perhaps because most female, kindly refused to answer the questionnaire. There were 80.3 percent of respondents who were in between 18 and 45 years of age and the rest was greater than 45 years. Proportionately the number of respondents greater than 45 years was very less compared to the former. When the educational level is concerned, 49.8 percent of respondents had an education lower than the Ordinary Level (O/L) while the rest (above O/L) consisted with some respondents who had completed the postgraduate studies. Majority (50.2%) had an income greater than Rs. 20,000.00 per month while 36.9 percent were having less than Rs. 20,000.00 per month. The rest was reluctant to answer for this question as it might expose their high income. Only 7.5 percent of respondents belonged to families with less than two members. Majority 56 percent belonged to families with 2 to 4 members and the rest was from families consisted with more than four members. Out of the sample, 51 percent was rural and the rest was urban visitors. There was 58.5 percent married respondents while the rest was unmarried (Figure 1).

For the easiness of description, the data were classified into two subsets namely; "local visitors" and "foreign visitors". Then they were sub grouped as "already visited", "hope to visit" and "never visiting". The results indicated that 23.9 percent of respondents

had already visited up-country tea plantations as nature-tourists and 59.9 percent were with the hope of visiting in near future. Only 16.2 percent of respondents indicated that they would never visit those up-country nature-tourism sites.

Table 2 - Behavior of visitors:

Visitor behavior	Local (%)	Foreign (%)	As a total (%)
Already visited	24.3	21.9	23.9
Hope to visit	61.4	50.0	59.9
Never visiting	14.3	28.1	16.2

a) Respondents Already Visited

Expectations fulfilled by the visitors

Majority (72.7 %) of local respondents indicated that they were involved in "nature watching" in their journey followed by "factory watching" (36.4 %) while majority (57.1 %) of foreign visitors said that they were involved in "factory watching" as they wanted to know how one of their favorite drinks, tea comes to their hands followed by "nature watching" (28.6 %) and "hiking" (28.6 %). Results indicated that only few visitors were fulfilled with some activities like "bird watching" (only locales were accounted for 5.5 % fulfillments), "local festivals" (3.6 % locals), "biking" (5.5 % locales) perhaps because lack of interest or lack of availability of those events (Figure2).

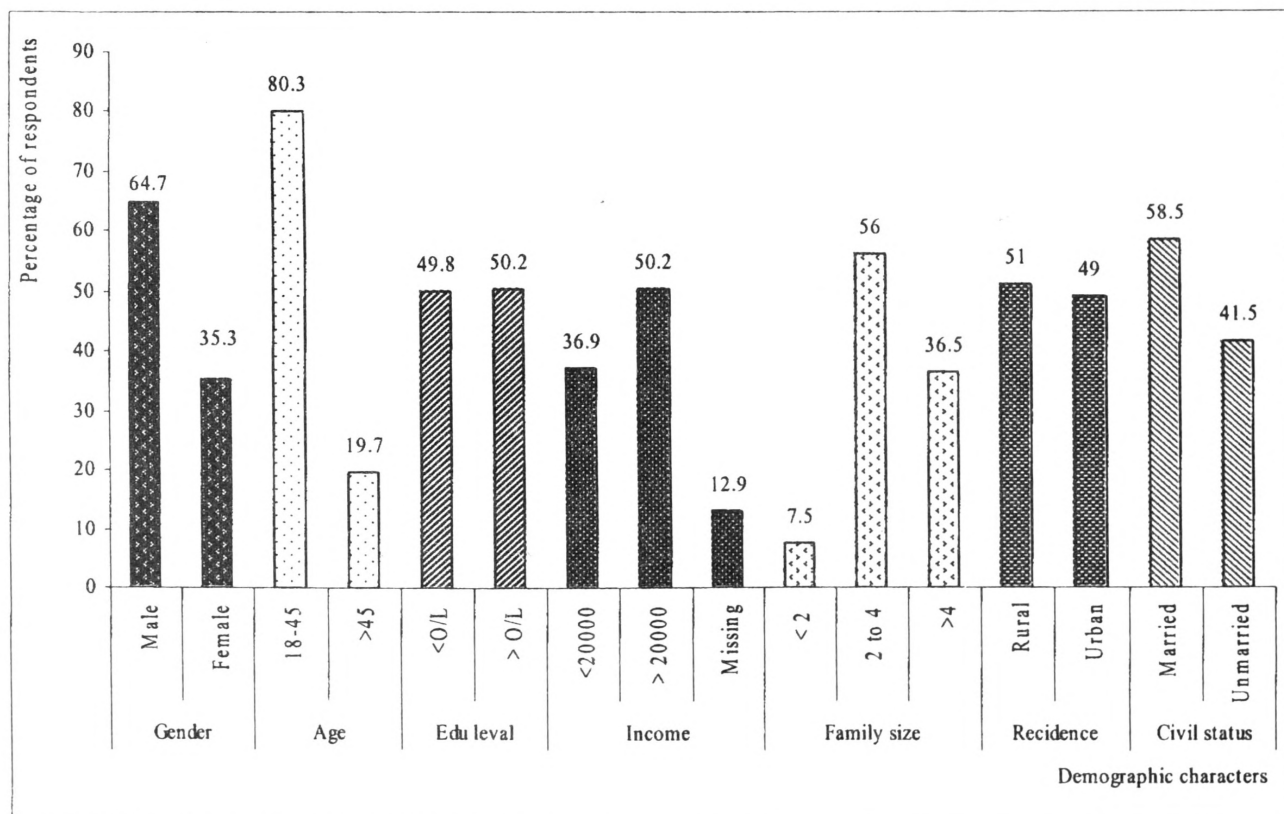


Figure 1 - Description of the sample:

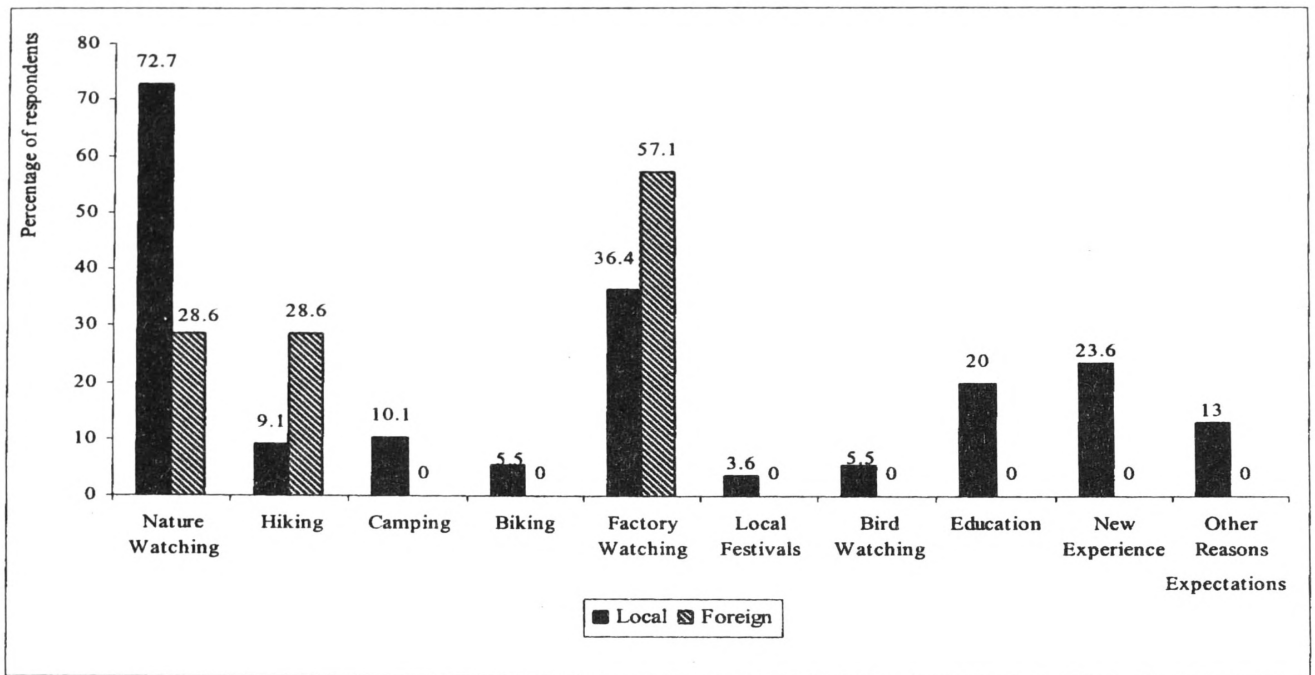


Figure 2 - Expectations fulfilled by the visitors:

Problems identified by the visitors

Results indicated that “poor roads” was the major problem for locals (53.8 %) as well as for “foreign visitors” (66.7 %) as good provisions were very important for maximum usage of travel time. Local visitors were also de-motivated by “high travel costs” where 37.7 % of them were accounted for it. Foreign visitors suggested that they also had faced the problem of “high travel cost” (16.7 %) as well as “high cost of food” (16.7 %). Some foreign visitors said that regardless of any hard conditions they preferred to visit up-country tea plantations because of the environment. Almost all visitors suggested that they were afraid of terrorism problem during their tour. Many foreign visitors indicated that everybody tried to earn something from them which was very unfair for them. The least problem identified by local visitors was the quality of food (5.8 %) perhaps Sri Lankans still concern about price of food but not the quality of food. Thirteen percent of local visitors suggested, that price of food was a problem for them (Figure 3).

visitors again and again and the sector can be developed as nature-tourism sites further.

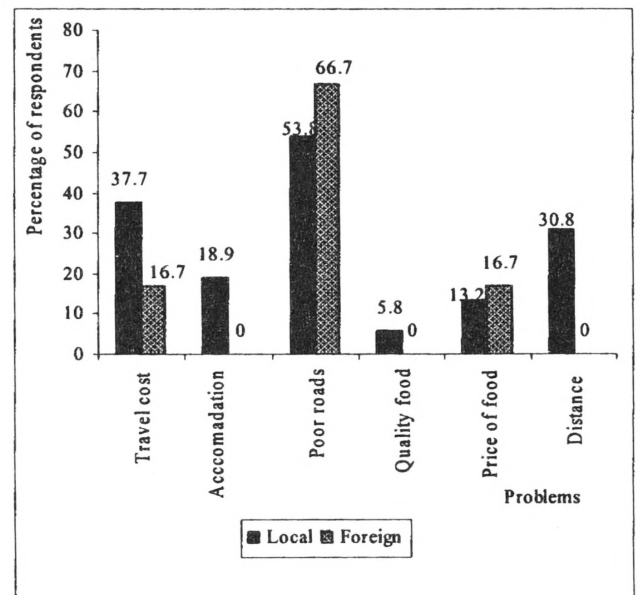


Figure 3 - Problems identified by the visitors:

Facilities expecting by the visitors

Majority of foreign visitors indicated that they need “internet facility” as well as “sanitary” (50 % for each) while least priority (7.5 %) was given by the local visitors for availability of “internet facility”. “Maps and guiding” was the major facility expected by local visitors which was indicated by 55 percent of local respondents (Table 3).

When they were presented with some activities that could be prohibited in the site, to indicate the effect on their visit, 16.3 percent of local respondents indicated that if liquor is prohibited, they will not visit further. But 72.7 percent of local respondents and all the (100%) foreign respondents suggested that the prohibition was not applicable to them (Table 4).

From the respondents who have already visited up-country tea plantations as nature-tourism sites 92.2 percent of respondents indicated that they are preferred to visit their again. This suggests that up-country tea plantations have the ability to attract

b) Respondents Prefer To Visit, But Not Yet

The respondents who have not visit up-country tea plantations as nature-tourism sites, but prefer to

get the experience were also presented with similar set of questions.

Expected activities within sites

As same as the previous case, majority (74.7%) of local visitors indicated that they were preferred with “nature watching” followed by “factory watching” (45.2%) and majority of (50% for each) foreigners suggested that they would like “factory watching and camping”. Only 5.5 percent of local respondents indicated that they would like “local festivals”, most probably Tamil cultural festivals perhaps may be local festivals were not a wonder for them. Least proportion of foreign respondents (18.8%) indicated that they were not expecting to experience a new life style within the sites sometimes, as they had many more opportunities to enjoy new lifestyles all over the world (Figure 4).

Expected facilities by the visitors

Availability of good sanitary facilities was ranked as the major facility expected by local visitors (63.8%) followed by security (57.9%) while majority (66.7%) of foreign visitors were demanded for security followed by sanitary facilities and map/guiding (50% for each). Least demand among local visitors was observed as availability of “internet” facilities while availability of “telephone” facilities and “souvenir centers” were less demanded by the foreigners (Table 3).

In the case of prohibition of some activities within the sites, 75 percent of foreign respondents indicated that it was not applicable for them as they were coming to experience the nature and also 83.3 percent of local visitors had given the same answer.

But, not as the previous case 25 percent of foreign visitors also indicated that they would not like to visit those sites if drinking is prohibited.

Table 3 - Facilities expecting by the visitors:

Facility	Already visited (%)		Hope to visit (%)	
	Local	Foreign	Local	Foreign
	55.0	00.0	45.7	60.0
	15.0	00.0	18.1	13.3
	07.5	50.0	06.3	26.4
	35.0	00.0	26.0	20.0
	30.0	50.0	57.9	66.7
	37.5	25.0	63.8	60.0
	00.0	00.0	10.2	13.3
	07.5	50.0	02.4	06.7

It was wonder that 1.5 percent of local visitors and 6.3 percent of foreign visitors indicated that prohibition of hunting will also be a problem for them (Table 4).

Table 4 - Restriction course reluctant to visit:

Restriction	Already visited (%)		Hope to visit (%)	
	Local	Foreign	Local	Foreign
Liquor	16.3	00.0	11.8	25.0
Fire	07.0	00.0	05.3	00.0
Noise	07.0	00.0	06.8	06.3
Hunting	07.0	00.0	01.5	06.3
Fishing	02.3	00.0	00.0	00.0
N/A	72.7	100.0	85.3	75.0

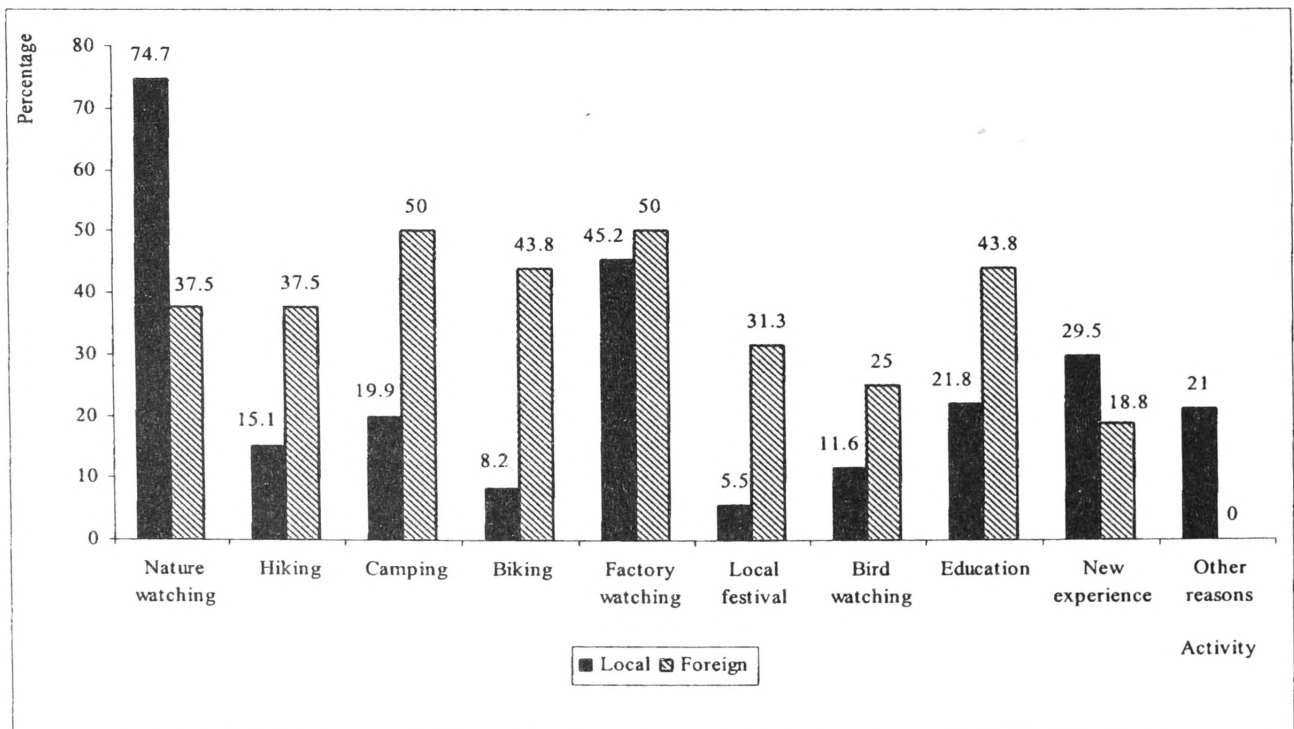


Figure 4 – Expected activities by visitors hope to visit:

c) Respondents Never Visiting

The respondents, who indicated that they would never visit up-country tea plantations as nature-tourists, were presented with set of reasons for their non-visiting.

In this case, majority (43.6%) of respondents said that they did not have a proper and up-dated knowledge about nature-tourism sites, followed by "high travel cost" suggested by 28.7 percent of respondents. "Age" and "no leisure time" were another two reasons suggested by 26.6 percent of respondents those that came under other reasons. Price of food and poor accommodation facilities were not considerable reasons for them for their non-visiting.

Demographic Characters and Visitor Patterns to Up-Country Tea Plantations

The demographic characters of all respondents were compared, with their pattern of visitation (a) Already visit, (b) Hope to visit and (c) Never visit to up-country tea plantations as nature tourism sites, to find out whether an association exists between them. The results indicated that except the age level greater than 45years, majority of respondents hope to visit up-country tea plantations as nature tourists, regardless of any demographic differences (Figure 5). Majority of (42.6%) respondents belong to group >45 yearsof age, suggested that as they are much old they were not able to visit such nature tourism sites. However there were considerable amount (23%) of respondents who have already visited to up-country tea plantations as nature tourism sites. There was 67.7 percent of age category 18-45 who suggested that they hope to visit up country nature tourism sites as soon as possible.

The association between gender difference and visitation pattern was also significant (Table 5) where 28 percent of male had already visited to those nature tourism sites and only 14 percent of female belongs to this pattern. Also 22.4 percent of female suggested that they were not preferred in visiting these sites forever but only 11.5 percent of male were accounted for this pattern. Marital status of the respondents also significantly associated with the visitation pattern as 70 percent of unmarried people suggested that they hope to visit this nature tourism sites in near future and only 7 percent of them indicated that they would never visit while 11.3 percent of married respondents accounted for this issue. Level of education is the next character which associated significantly on visitation pattern where there were 28 percent respondents belongs to education category > O/L who have already been to this sites and only 18 percent from the rest had already been there. Only 6.4 percent of category >O/L indicated that they would never visit but 13.3 percent of <O/L group indicated they would never visit (Table 5).

Table 5 – Visitor patterns to tea plantations:

Category	Value	Significance
Age	31.541	0.000
Gender	4.288	0.038
Civil status	9.893	0.002
Education	12.695	0.000
Income	3.016	0.082
Household size	3.565	0.168
Residence (Rural/Urban)	0.243	0.622

Method: Pearson Chi-square Test
Significant at 5% error level

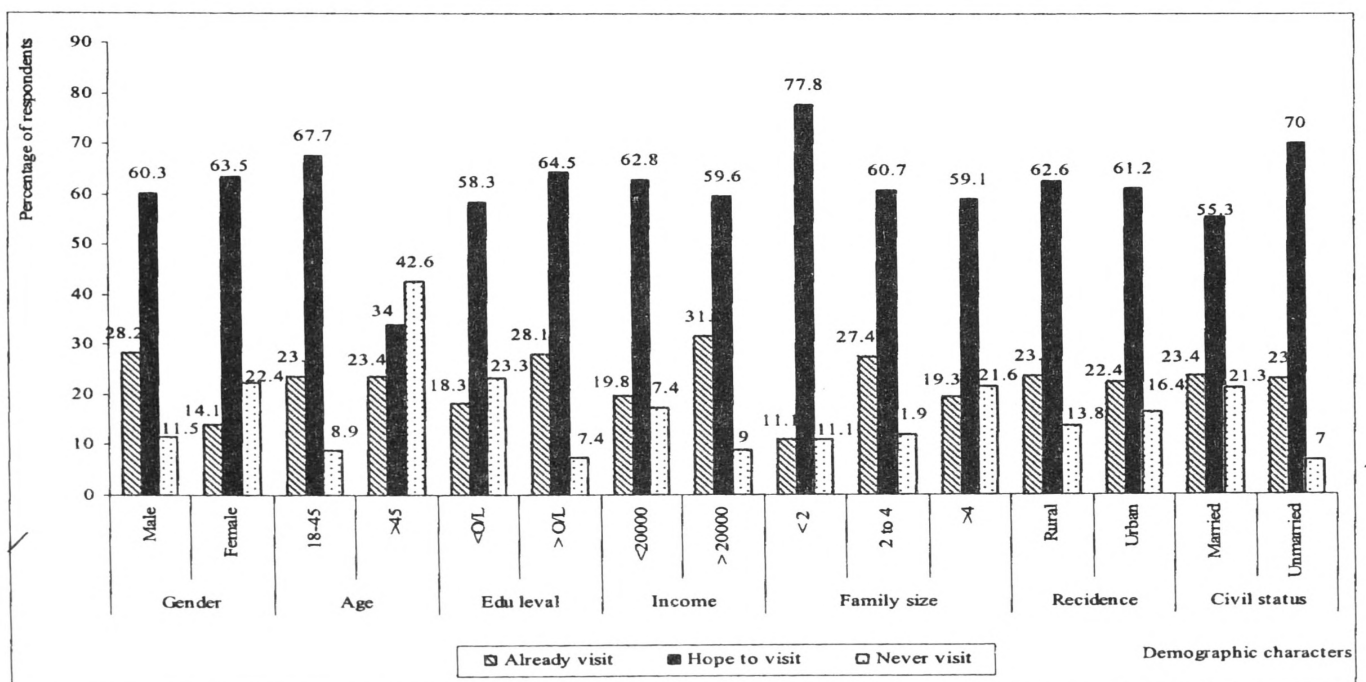


Figure 5 – Demographic characters and visitor patterns to Up-country tea plantations:

Demographic Characters and Visitation to other Tourism Sites

The respondents were presented with list of places, to select the places that they had visited within last three years (WL3) and hope to visit within next three years (WN3), with the objective of exploring the visitation pattern apart from nature tourism. The results indicated that 87.5 percent respondents with education level (i) have been to historical sites (for example; Anuradhapura, Seegiriya, Yapahuwa) WL3 and only 75.2 percent of respondents of education level (ii) had been to historical sites (Table 6). There was a significance difference between levels of education on this issue where results suggested that less educated people (< O/L) had visited to historical sites than others. And also there was a significant difference between those educational levels on visiting to historical sites in the future. Similar to the previous case, less educated people had a higher tendency (60.0% of respondents with education < O/L) to visit historical sites. Not only the visitation to historical sites, but also visitation to beaches (for example; Unawatuna, Pasikuda, Tangalle) WN3 and visitation to urban recreational sites (for example; Nuwaraeliya, Colombo, Trincomalee) WL3 were also significantly associated with level of education. Respondents from the education level (ii) preferred visit beaches WN3 more (21.5%) than the rest (11.7%). More (58.7%) respondents from education level (ii) have had visited to urban recreational sites than the respondents from education level (i) (Table 7).

When the family income was concerned 88.4 percent of respondents belong to category <20,000, indicated that they had been to historical sites with in last three years and 62.0 percent of them suggested that they hoped to visit historical sites WN3 as well.

Visitation to historical sites was significantly associated with level of income (Table 7) where visitation to nature tourism sites (for example; Yala, Bundala, Wasgamuwa) and beaches, WL3 was also associate with the income issue. Respondents belong to income level (ii) had been to those sites (65.2% and 34.8% respectively) more than the other sites. As far as the gender issue was concerned there was a significant difference between male and female on visiting to historical sites as well as to nature tourism sites within next three years. More (68.2%) female hoped to visit historical sites within next three years while more male (49.4%) preferred on visiting to later. The results indicated that regardless of the gender people visited beaches and urban recreational sites, and also regardless of age people had visited historical sites but when the nature tourism was concerned more (47.9%) people from age level 18-45 preferred in visiting the places like Yala, Udawalawa WN3 perhaps because younger generation is more preferred to deal with environment. Visitation to beaches WN3 by the respondents belong to age group (i) was significantly different (Table 7) from the rest which is accounted for 20.1 percent of respondents from group (i) and 2.1 percent from the latter. There are 56.2 percent of respondents in group (i) who had been to urban recreational sites WL3 which is significantly higher from the visitation of group (ii).

Visitation to nature tourism sites and urban recreational sites were significantly affected by the marital status of the respondents (Table 7) where more (59.6%) bachelors were preferred in visiting to nature tourism sites WN3 while more bachelors (63.0%) had been to urban recreational sites WL3. Visitation to any of these four sites was not affected by household size or residence of the visitor.

Table 6 - Demographic characters and visitation to tourism sites other than up country:

Main character	Sub character	Historical (%)		Nature (%)		Beaches (%)		Urban recreation (%)	
		Last	Next	Last	Next	Last	Next	Last	Next
Gender	i) Female	84.7	68.2	43.5	34.1	21.2	11.8	45.9	30.6
	ii) Male	79.5	44.2	52.6	49.4	23.1	19.2	53.2	30.8
Age	i) 18-45	79.4	52.6	50.5	47.9	23.7	20.1	56.2	32.0
	ii) >45	89.4	53.2	44.7	27.7	17.0	2.1	27.7	25.5
Civil status	i) Married	85.1	56.0	49.6	33.3	20.6	14.2	41.8	29.8
	ii) Unmarried	76.0	48.0	49.0	59.6	25.0	20.0	63.0	32.0
Education level	i) < O/L	87.5	60.0	44.2	38.3	21.7	11.7	42.5	28.3
	ii) > O/L	75.2	45.5	54.5	49.6	23.1	21.5	58.7	33.1
Family income	i) < 20000	88.4	62.0	41.3	44.6	14.9	16.5	48.8	30.6
	ii) > 20000	73.0	44.9	65.2	52.8	34.8	19.1	52.8	33.7
House hold size	i) < 2	83.3	61.1	50.0	55.6	11.1	11.1	61.1	16.7
	ii) 2- 4	81.8	47.7	52.3	39.8	21.6	14.6	47.7	27.3
	iii) > 4	80.7	54.8	47.4	45.2	24.4	16.3	51.1	34.8
Residence	i) Rural	85.4	52.8	55.3	41.5	22.0	20.3	53.7	31.7
	ii) Urban	77.1	52.5	43.2	46.6	26.4	12.7	47.5	29.7

Table 7 - Level of significance between demographic characters and visitation to different tourism sites:

Category	Character	Historical		Nature		Beaches		Urban recreation	
		Value	Sig.	Value	Sig.	Value	Sig.	Value	Sig.
Visited WL3	Gender	0.987	0.321	1.797	0.180	0.114	0.735	1.180	0.277
	Age	2.482	0.115	0.515	0.473	0.974	0.324	12.317	0.000
	Civil status	3.195	0.074	0.010	0.921	0.661	0.416	10.476	0.001
	Education level	5.996	0.014	2.596	0.107	0.750	0.784	6.308	0.012
	Family income	8.202	0.004	11.674	0.001	11.415	0.001	0.336	0.562
	House holdsize	0.092	0.955	0.508	0.776	1.677	0.432	1.100	0.577
	Residence	2.697	0.101	3.507	0.061	6.300	0.863	0.926	0.336
Hope to visit WN3	Gender	12.719	0.000	5.188	0.023	2.216	0.137	0.001	0.977
	Age	0.006	0.940	6.312	0.012	8.831	0.003	0.734	0.391
	Civil status	1.513	0.219	15.644	0.000	1.429	0.232	0.135	0.714
	Education level	5.114	0.024	3.097	0.078	4.198	0.040	0.632	0.427
	Family income	6.010	0.014	1.375	0.241	0.234	0.629	0.231	0.631
	House holdsize	1.626	0.444	1.691	0.429	0.560	0.756	3.226	0.199
	Residence	0.002	0.962	0.647	0.421	2.522	0.112	0.199	0.731

Method : Pearson Chi-square Test
Significant at 5% error level.

CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The results reveal that there are a significant number of potential visitors to up country tea estates including foreigners. The management of tea plantations, who hope to develop their estates as nature tourism sites, has to consider mainly on increasing scenic beauty of the estates, allowing visitors to visit the tea factory and improve security, guides and sanitation facilities in the estate. Foreign visitor targeted sites may have to concern specially about improving activities such as hiking, biking, camping and educational facilities within the site.

To improve tourism sector, government can involve in sharing information of nature tourism sites in tea estates, because most of the people who were reluctant to visit, indicated that they did not know about such kind of sites and information were not available.

Most of the local as well as foreign visitors have faced inconveniences due to poor road facilities. Developing the roads to up country making easy access by vehicles, can give greater share to stimulate visitations to tea plantations as nature tourism sites.

Plantations may be free to impose rules and regulations for the well been of the site as it does not affect to the majority of visitors.

The management of the sites should concern to improve the requirements of the young and middle-aged visitors as they are the potential group, and may develop the sites' facilities as several packages which are affordable to different segments of visitors in different income categories.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Authors wish to convey their thanks to the Wayamba university research grant scheme and the staff of the Yala, Udawalawa and Wasgamuwa national parks for providing the facilities to conduct the research project successfully.

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