

Comparison of Eco-Tourism Practices in Sri Lankan Eco Resorts from Customer and Supplier Viewpoint

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Abstract

Ecotourism is potentially the best growing segment in the international market. Many hoteliers in Sri Lanka promote the sustainable use of this concept as a new market oriented concept. However, arrivals of eco tourists to Sri Lanka have been less than 1% over the last decade.

A comprehensive case study research approach was used to conduct this research. Interpretive paradigm and the social constructionists' philosophical stand of the researcher provided the opportunity to explore or describe a phenomenon in context using a variety of data sources. In the sample, managerial level staff were selected to conduct in-depth interviews to explore the meaning of the term of eco resort.

Analysis of in-depth interviews and observations showed that the practice of the eco resort concept has been misused by the hoteliers in Sri Lanka. They have been unable to classify the eco tourists and identify the market and customer segment clearly.

Key words: Eco tourism, Eco resort, International Standards, Eco resort components, Sustainability

1. Introduction

Tourism is currently one of the most important contributors to the Sri Lankan economy. Tourism continued as the third largest earner of foreign exchange earnings in Sri Lankan economy. Attitude of tourists have gradually changed from one that emphasized beach tourism to one that demands more, natural, cultural and social interactions. He further emphasized the new phenomenon, which is broadly termed as "Alternative Tourism". As a result, the concept of Ecotourism emerged with the collaboration of cultural, rural, nature tourism, and its related activities as a niche market (Silva, 2004).

The term 'Ecotourism' was first coined in July of 1983 by Hector Ceballos-Lascurain, an architect, environmentalist and ecotourism consultant from Mexico (Planeta). The original definition was as follows, "Ecotourism is environmentally responsible travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas, in

order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features - both past and present) that promotes conservation, has low negative visitor impact, and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local populations” Being a good business opportunity and the fastest growing segment in the tourism industry, Sri Lankan tourism is changing its outlook to sustain this new product. Since Sri Lanka is rich with much cultural and natural diversity, it has the potential to develop the eco-tourism concept better than other destinations for the benefit of the Sri Lankan economy and community (SLEF, 2001). Therefore, applying the eco-tourism concept to Sri Lankan hotel industry will encourage close interaction with the natural and cultural environment and give more economic benefits to the country.

Ecotourism provides many benefits to the society, which includes the protection of eco system, increase the foreign exchange of the country and living standards of the people, swift regional development, reduction of waste, minimize the negative impacts to the environment etc. Since Ecotourism is potentially the fastest growing segment in the international market and it holds great potential for Sri Lanka as a means of conserving biological diversity and promoting the sustainable use of bio diversity, many hoteliers tend to practice the concept as a novel market oriented concept. Therefore, global coordinated marketing campaigns launched to attract eco tourists focusing their needs and wants profitably (Mid-term strategic plan for Sri Lanka tourism 2002-2004). Achieving genuine eco-tourism may be viewed as either a difficult technical challenge or an impossible task. Some observe that those who hold the reins of power and money will always prevail and, that eco-tourism will never genuinely offer benefits to local people and customers (Boo, 1990). When comes to eco-tourism, hoteliers have to practice it as meeting the expectations of the customers. It is the practice of eco-tourism in customer-oriented perspective. If the hoteliers fail to apply the customer orientation concept properly, they will not be able to achieve the customer expectations. multinational hotel chains, resorts, tour operators, and powerful foreign owners often engage in unfair trade practices in eco-tourism that allow them to squeeze economic control from local communities where the tourism activities take place (Mastny,2002).Therefore, Eco tourists are trapped in their misleading the eco concept.

Based on these findings, the researcher try to identify the issue of practicing the concept of genuine eco-tourism and meeting the customer expectations. Then it is important to explore this phenomenon in Sri Lankan context to find out whether there is an impact of eco-tourism practices in eco resorts to the arrival of eco tourists. Therefore, researcher will do some short preliminary interviews over the telephone with both eco-tourism professionals and eco resort hoteliers to get an idea about the hoteliers’ practices.

2. Problem Statement

Many eco resorts in Sri Lanka are Trojan horse marketing tourism as environmental friendly, but in fact destroying the every eco system they claim to protect (SLEF, 2001). As a result, customers are dissatisfied with the service of the eco tourist hotels. It can be proved through the mid-term strategic plan for Sri Lanka tourism (2002-2004). It states that Sri Lanka had 400,414 tourists in 2000 out of which 1% percent was eco tourists. They were identified based on the purpose of arrival that they mentioned at the airport.

Comparing to Sri Lanka, other Asian, African and European countries are having many demand for eco-tourism and eco resorts. Some facts mentioned in the Eco tourism statistical fact sheet (2000) and Global eco-tourism fact sheet of TIES (2006) clearly shows it. For example,

- In Dominica, in the Caribbean, tourists using small, nature-based lodges spent 18 times more than cruise passengers spend while visiting the island
- In Indonesia, 80% of money for all-inclusive package tours goes to airlines, hotels, and other international companies. Eco-lodges hire and purchase locally, and sometimes put as much as 95% of money into the local economy.

- In US, UK and Australian market, More than two-thirds of U.S. and Australian travelers, and 90% of British tourists, consider active protection of the environment and support of local communities to be part of a hotel's responsibility.

These facts obviously illustrate that if the eco-tourism service providers practice the concept properly, customer demand is very high.

As mentioned earlier, in Sri Lanka, arrivals of eco tourists are less than 1% over last decade. Therefore, Sri Lankan eco-tourism market is not enjoying the benefits of it such as conservation of culturally and environmentally friendly areas, earning more foreign exchange, getting employments, regional developments (infrastructure, superstructure), increasing the living standard of community etc. (National policy of eco-tourism- SLTDA, 2003)

3. Research questions

- How do the eco resort hoteliers in Sri Lankan eco-tourism sector construct the meaning of eco resort?
- What are the differences between the Sri Lankan eco resort hoteliers' interpretation and the international standard?

4. Objectives of the study

- To explore the construction of the meaning of eco resort concept by Sri Lankan eco resort hoteliers.
- To investigate differences between the Sri Lankan eco resort hoteliers' interpretation and the international standard.

5. Significance of the study

Since the contribution of tourism sector to foreign exchange earnings and the development of the society, marketing and implementing the tourism concepts properly to the customers is very much significant. While tourism being our third largest foreign income generator world tourism trend is moving from generic or bulk tourism to more of specific sectors like eco-tourism. And it serves the purpose of both high profitably as well as larger social benefits. Therefore, it is important to understand the whether the implementation of eco-tourism concept in eco resorts is successful enough to meet the customer expectations. Then it will provide a clear picture whether the hoteliers really look at the customer orientation or sales orientation.

6. Literature Review

6.1 Eco tourism and misuse of the originality

Tourism is widely believed to be the most rapidly growing global industry. According to World Tourism Organization ecotourism is believed to be the fastest growing tourism segment (Buckley, 1994: Deardon and Harron, 1993). However, there is considerable debate over what ecotourism really means.

The term 'Ecotourism' was first coined in July of 1983 by Hector Ceballos-Lascurain, an architect, environmentalist and ecotourism consultant from Mexico (Planeta). His definition was later revised in 1993 to move the focus to conservation and the role of the tourist from passive observer of nature to participant with a responsibility for its preservation,

"Ecotourism is environmentally responsible travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas, in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features - both past and present) that promotes conservation, has low negative visitor impact, and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local populations"

The main problem that has stemmed from this is that often the term is misused or misinterpreted for developments which do not hold true to the original meaning of eco-tourism (Ross and Wall, 1999). This is usually attributed to the vagueness of its definitions. With the many meanings and redefinitions over the years it is hard to regulate it (Font, 2002). It is not only tourism developers that are culprits of redefining the concepts to suit their own purpose, authors of journals and books on the subject are constantly churning out new definitions each of which are slightly different, concentrating on one or more of its aspects. As ecotourism has grown in popularity, sometimes resembling traditional mass tourism, its definitions have been expanded to incorporate ideas about eco tourist responsibility; environmentally friendly destination management, profit linkages to conservation efforts, and the sustainable development of local human populations (Campell, 1999). There are many definitions of ecotourism. Some of the definitions can be tabled as follows.

Table 1
Variations of eco-tourism definitions

Black, R. (1996)	“An experience with a focus on the natural and/or cultural environment, and ecologically sustainable activity, an activity with a predominant educative and interpretive program, and an activity that contributes to the local community groups and projects and to the conservation of the surrounding environment.”
Che, D. (2006)	“Ecotourism has been portrayed as a form of sustainable development, primarily in Third World “pristine settings” as a means of using natural resources to support economic activity without compromising economic growth, the environmental carrying capacity, or social equity.”
The International Ecotourism Society (2005)	“Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people.”
Wunder, S. (2000)	“1. Minimal physical and social impacts on the visited area 2. Ecological education of the tourist at the natural site 3 Notable economic participation by local residents”
Clarke, J. (1997)	“As the position of convergence, whereby large-scale tourism seeks to adopt the policies and guidelines of sustainability. In short, large business thinks small scale.”
The Ecotourism Society (1991)	“Purposeful travel to natural areas to understand the culture and natural history of the environment, taking care not to alter the integrity of the ecosystem while producing economic opportunities that make the conservation of natural resources beneficial to local people”
Shanklin, C. W. (1993)	“Trips taken in which travelers learn about and appreciate the environment or trips taken to advance the cause of conservation.”
Boyd and Butler (1996)	“A form of tourism which fosters environmental principles, with an emphasis on visiting and observing natural areas. The emphasis on tourism, as much as this can be separated from recreation, is deliberate.
(Lindberg, Furze, Staff & Blank, 1997).	Ecotourism is usually defined as” responsible travel to natural areas that conserve the environment and improve the welfare of the local people”

6.2 Eco tourism practices in eco resorts

Eco resort is an establishment where providing hospitality services to the eco tourists while practicing eco-tourism principles. All eco resorts reflect the creative initiative and entrepreneurialism of business

pioneers, rather than large multinational corporations. Found in nature tourism destinations around the world. Eco resorts frequently contribute towards maintaining official protected areas, because they are often quite dependent on proper management of government-controlled reserves. These eco resorts may actively contribute to trail maintenance, volunteer research programs, clean-up days, or the monitoring of visitor use, depending on the local situation. (TIES, 1993)

In addition to TIES, green globe 21standarads has guidelines of practicing eco-tourism concept. There are eight principles.

- Focus on giving visitors the opportunity to personally and directly experience nature (Natural Area Focus)
- Provide opportunities to experience nature in ways that lead to greater understanding, appreciation and enjoyment (Interpretation)
- Represent best practice for environmentally sustainable tourism (Environmental Sustainability Practice)
- Contribute directly to the conservation of natural areas (Contribution to Conservation)
- Provide ongoing contributions to the local community (Benefiting Local

Communities)

- Be sensitive to, interpret and involve the culture/s existing in the area

(Cultural Respect)

- Consistently meets consumer expectations (Customer Satisfaction) and

- Be marketed and promoted honestly and accurately so that realistic

expectations are formed (Responsible Marketing).

Hotel industry definitely can contribute towards protecting the environment following these guidelines. There are many organizations that help in formulating the concept of environmentally friendly hotels. There are various areas in the hotels where these concepts can be incorporated conveniently and smoothly without adversely affecting normal operations or guest satisfaction (SLEF, 2001).

6.3 Social constructionism

Social constructionism is a term that is used almost exclusively by psychologists (Burr, 2002). It challenges the view that conventional knowledge is based upon objective, unbiased observation of the world. Social constructionist arguments concerning the nature of personhood, the role of language in identity, subjectivity and social life and the historical and cultural specificity of traditional psychology and social psychology, it becomes evident that the aims and practices of social inquiry use to be radically transformed.

In addition, social constructionist perspective is now becoming increasingly influential in organizational and management studies (Gold and Holman, 2001). With the emphasis in management education on language use, attention becomes focused on the types of discursive activity that managers might use in reflection, re-conceptualization and action, both intra-and interpersonally (Geogakopoulou and Goutsos, 1997). From a social constructionist perspective, people always have the potential to re-construct their identities, their capabilities and their lives. Especially qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed; how people make sense of their world and experience (Lindergen and Packendorff, 2009). The existing constructed meanings of eco tourist hotels are based on the foreign countries perspective. No Asian country has constructed the meaning of it from their perspective. They have just adopted that concept to their country. Therefore, it is important for Sri Lankan eco-tourism sector to construct the meaning of it with the view of better customer-oriented practices.

7. Data and Methodology

When conducting a research, it is important to identify the framework for the study. Here, the researcher will use the qualitative research approach to conduct this research. The researcher believes that he can become closer to the actors perspective through detailed interviews and observations. Interpretive paradigm was the based paradigm for this research. Here the researcher focuses on what eco resort means to eco resort hoteliers and check their eco practices customer oriented or not. Therefore, social constructionists' philosophical stand of the researcher was more helpful to conduct this research.

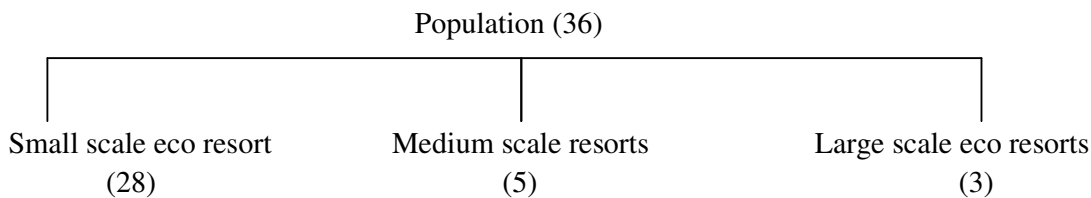
The researcher did a qualitative case study with the intention of providing a thick description to the concept of eco resort and its customer orientation focus.

The target population for this study was self-declared eco resorts, which are registered under the Sri Lanka Tourism and Development Authority. 36 Eco friendly resorts were identified based on the accommodation guide of the Sri Lanka Tourism and Development Authority. Those selected resorts were confirmed as eco-friendly resorts, after verifying their web sites. When selecting the cases for the study, scales of number of rooms were used to categorize the resorts according to their size. It is the international scale to classify the hotels in relation to their size. The scale provides following standards to classify the hotels

- Small scale hotel - Number of rooms (0-50)
- Medium scale hotel - Number of rooms (50-100)
- Large scale hotel - Number of rooms (more than 100)

As a result of categorization, following continuum was obtained through the identified population

Figure 1 – Continuum of resort classification



Out of 36, thirty two (32) resorts were selected for the study based on the Krejcie and Morgen scale of sample selection. These resorts were selected randomly proportionate to the size of the hotels.

$$23/36 \times 32 = 20 \text{ small eco resorts (= RANDBETWEEN (1, 23))}$$

$$8/36 \times 32 = 7 \text{ medium eco resorts (= RANDBETWEEN (1, 8))}$$

$$5/36 \times 32 = 5 \text{ large eco resorts}$$

In-depth analysis of each resort were done using various data collection methods. Samples were selected purposively. Therefore, purposive-sampling strategy was used in this study. In the sample, resort staff was selected representing the top level of the employees (General Managers and AGM) to conduct in-depth interviews to explore the meaning of the term of eco resort. There were 53 top level managers in the selected 32 resorts. Here, the researcher initially conducted 10 in-depth interviews and continued it until it reached the maturation level. Finally, there were 15 in-depth interviews. In these interviews, the researcher paid more consideration to the top level management since they are the implementers of the eco-tourism concept to the hotel. Besides the interview methods, the researcher also utilized the observation method.

The main objective of conducting an observation was to confirm the consistency of data collected through the in-depth interviews. The researcher employed an observation guide with checklist points to check the

components of an eco-resort. This checklist was prepared covering the major components of an eco-resorts mentioned in the Green globe 21 standards and The International Eco-Tourism Society standards. All 32 eco resorts were observed here and analyzed them using the ranking analysis method. Values have been given for each component according to the five point likert scale as follows;

Very good (5), Good (4), Average (3), Poor (2) and Very poor (1)

Here, average value (3) was taken as the boundary of the analysis (Scale mean). If the components mean values are higher than the average, it is considered as a good practice. If the mean values are lower than the average value, it is considered as poor practice of the concept.

Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews in the research. Interviews were conducted in a semi- structured manner and expected to run for 1-2 hours. Interviews were conducted with the managerial levels of employees of ecoresorts. In addition to the interview method, the researcher used observation method. Here, the researcher utilized an observation guide to check the components of an eco-resort.

Apart from in-depth interview and observation analysis, customer web blogs analysis was also conducted to get the views of customers (eco tourists) relating to the practices of these eco resorts. In the customer web blogs analysis, the study selected two popular and independent customer blogs to get the comments of customers relating to the selected eco-resorts. Those customer review web blogs were the 'travel pod and the trip advisor'. The main purpose of the selecting these two customer blogs was the impartiality of them. Thus, it gave a clear picture of the customers' comments on the eco resort practices. In the analysis, the researcher identified 41 common customer comments relating to 15 eco resorts and selected all of them to the analysis.

8. Analysis and Discussion

In the analysis of eco-tourism concept as a main theme, the researcher identified that Sri Lankan eco resort top level managers define the concept of eco-tourism in four various ways such as;

- Nature related tourism
- Environment conservation tourism
- Wildlife related tourism
- Nature and cultural related tourism

These findings show that there is no standard way of understanding the eco-tourism concept. The hoteliers looked at the concept in different manner. Sri Lankan hoteliers believe that the concept of eco-tourism is equal to the above mentioned concepts. But in the international context, the above concepts are totally different from eco-tourism. As a result, Eco tourism concept practiced in the eco resort are also different from the global standards. Eco tourists' look at the concept of eco-tourism in global standards but the practice in Sri Lanka is different from it. Then, there is a mismatch of the practice and the expectations of eco tourists. Even though Eco resort hoteliers have used the term "eco" in their resorts, they actually practice nature tourism, wild life tourism, environment conservation tourism and combination of nature and cultural tourism. This is one of the reasons to dissatisfy the real eco tourists who visited to Sri Lanka.

As the researcher pointed out earlier, if a resort wants to use the term 'eco' in a resort, they have to satisfy eco-tourism components. They are natural area focus, interpretation, environmental sustainability practice, contribution to conservation, benefiting local communities, cultural respect, customer satisfaction and responsible marketing.

After, analyzing all these components, the researcher found that respondents have not considered about some aspects that are internationally accepted in eco resorts such as cultural respect, responsible marketing and customer satisfaction. Even though they have mentioned about the practices of other components under

their in-depth interviews discussions, they could not recognize them as major components of an eco-resort except the conservation of environment. Therefore, the researcher found some deviations of them with international requirements.

For example some hoteliers identified that launching Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities under the local community benefits component. In the eco resort concept, providing well-being of the local community means activities which develop the living standard of the local community and involve them in the business process as a stake holder. Then only they feel as a part of the business and work for the development of the area. Therefore, CSR cannot be considered purely under the component of local community benefits. It is only a one way process rather than a participative effort of both community and the business owners.

In another case, many hoteliers are launching awareness programs and interpretation programs to their stakeholders about the environmental conservation practices of the resorts and the hotel facilities. Therefore, they believe that they satisfy the interpretation component of the eco resort. But, here they consider about the awareness programs of the conservation practices. It is not about the eco resort and eco-tourism concepts. Therefore, they could not achieve the main purpose of their program. The interview analysis also proved that almost all the levels of the eco resort staffs in the selected resorts are having a rather poor knowledge on the eco concepts. That is mainly due to the failure of launching correct awareness programs on the eco concept. That is why they are having improper practice of the concept. In case of responsible marketing, there were a lot of issues in those resorts such as providing wrong information to customers, wrong data in the web, sending inappropriate customers, coordination errors etc. It clearly showed that they were unable to pay their attention on the marketing aspects of the eco resorts as a main component.

As the hoteliers define the meaning of the eco-tourism concept in a different manner, their practice also differ from the genuine concept. Therefore, the researcher found that the hoteliers did not concern about above components that much. They only address few components in their eco resorts. They do not consider them as a whole. As a result, the practice of eco concept in the resort has been challenged by the eco tourists who visited them. Even though the hoteliers satisfy the other customer segments needs and requirements, they do not pay much attention on the eco tourist needs as the major customer segment. The reason for this is the failure of identifying the true customer segment properly.

In the ranking analysis of observation checklist points, the average values of checklist points under each component were calculated and compared. The results obtained from observations were analyzed using the ranking analysis method. It is a quantitative analysis method that calculates the mean value of each component to identify the priority given to them in the resorts' practices. Mean values for each eco resorts were identified using the formula of mean.

Mean for each eco-resort

$$\frac{\sum_{i=1}^7 X_i}{n} = \bar{X}$$

Σ = Summation of each component(x) values
 n = number of components

Table 2
Collected observations on seven eco-tourism components

	Natural area focus	Interpretation	Environmental sustainability practice	Contribution to conservation	Benefits to local community	Cultural respect	Responsible marketing	Mean \bar{X}
1	4.40	2.00	3.70	5.00	5.00	3.00	3.00	3.73
2	4.40	2.25	3.80	4.60	4.00	2.00	2.00	3.29
3	3.80	1.50	2.80	4.00	4.50	3.50	4.00	3.44
4	4.00	2.50	2.50	4.80	5.00	2.00	2.50	3.33
5	4.00	3.50	1.80	3.80	4.50	3.50	3.00	3.44
6	2.80	1.50	2.90	2.80	3.50	2.00	2.00	2.50
7	2.40	2.25	2.30	2.00	2.00	1.00	2.00	1.99
8	3.80	2.75	4.00	3.20	2.50	1.50	1.50	2.75
9	4.60	3.50	4.70	4.00	4.00	3.00	2.00	3.69
10	4.40	4.00	4.20	4.80	4.00	2.00	1.50	3.56
11	4.80	3.75	4.60	4.60	4.00	3.50	3.00	4.04
12	2.80	1.75	2.10	2.80	3.00	2.50	2.00	2.42
13	2.40	1.00	2.30	2.00	3.50	2.00	2.00	2.17
14	4.20	3.25	4.30	4.60	4.00	2.50	2.00	3.55
15	3.80	2.75	4.00	4.20	4.50	2.50	1.50	3.32
16	4.40	3.75	4.40	4.80	4.50	2.00	1.50	3.62
17	3.80	2.50	3.60	4.00	3.50	3.00	2.50	3.27
18	3.00	2.00	2.40	2.80	2.50	1.50	2.00	2.31
19	4.40	3.00	4.30	4.00	4.00	3.00	2.50	3.60
20	4.00	2.75	3.90	4.40	4.50	2.00	1.50	3.29
21	3.60	2.00	3.10	3.40	3.00	1.50	2.00	2.66
22	4.60	3.00	4.60	4.60	4.50	2.50	2.00	3.69
23	2.20	1.50	3.40	2.40	3.00	1.50	1.50	2.21
24	3.80	2.50	3.90	4.00	4.00	4.00	2.50	3.53
25	3.80	2.50	3.80	4.20	3.50	2.50	2.50	3.26
26	2.40	1.50	2.70	2.00	2.00	1.50	1.50	1.94
27	2.00	1.75	2.40	2.80	3.00	2.00	2.00	2.28
28	4.20	2.50	4.40	4.60	4.50	1.50	2.00	3.39
29	4.00	2.25	3.90	4.20	4.00	2.00	1.50	3.12
30	4.20	3.75	3.90	4.80	4.50	2.50	3.00	3.81
31	3.80	3.50	4.00	4.60	4.50	4.00	3.50	3.99
32	4.80	3.75	4.60	4.60	5.00	3.50	3.00	4.18

Here, average value (3) was taken as the boundary of the analysis (Scale mean). If the components mean values are higher than the average, it is considered as a good practice. If the mean values are lower than the average value, it is considered as poor practice of the concept. In line with the overall mean values ten resorts were identified for poor practice of eco-tourism concept.

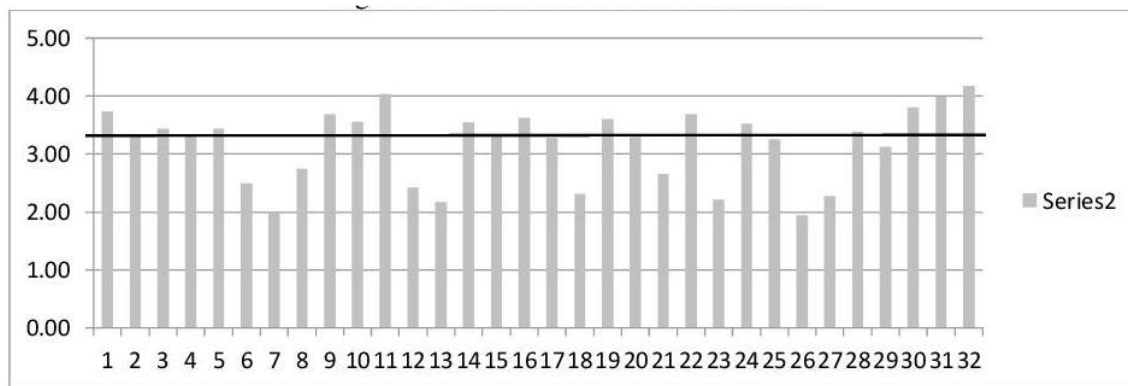
Table 3
Ranking of Components

Component	Overall Mean value
Responsible marketing	2.22
Cultural respect	2.41
Interpretation	2.59
Environmental sustainability	3.54
Natural area focus	3.74
Benefits to local community	3.83
Contribution to conservation	3.86

Table 3 shows the ranking of the components of eco-tourism practice. Contribution to conservation has the highest rank. This means that the contribution to conservation has become the most practicing component in most of the eco hotels. While responsible marketing has the lowest rank which implies that most of the hoteliers are not properly practicing that components in their hotels. In addition to that, cultural respect and interpretation also have the lower ranking showing less practice in Sri Lankan eco-resort hotels. But environmental sustainability practice, benefits to local community and natural area focus have the higher values implying higher usage among the selected components.

The mean values in Figure 2 shows that ten eco resorts from total thirty two, are not following eco-tourism practices in satisfactory level. From those ten resorts, five hoteliers are totally in poor side of practicing eco-tourism practices. However, three eco resorts were identified that practiced all the components successfully. Their values are higher than the scale mean (Average mean). It is a very low percentage of total number of resorts.

Figure 2 - Mean values of 32 eco-resorts



Observation analysis of the eco resorts showed that all the resorts were trying to address the conservation practices of environment, natural area focus, environmental sustainability practice, benefiting local community. Even though the practices of these components were not correct, at least they have tried to launch some programs on those aspects. The researcher identified these facts through the observations of sub components of each major component. In case of observations, the researcher was able to recognize some similarities as well as disparities between the in-depth interview ideas of the hoteliers and the practice of the concept. It is specially relating to the practice of responsible marketing component. For example, in some

resorts, resort is promoted as an eco-friendly resort in their web including some photos taken from the other resorts and activities which are not practices in the resort. It is not responsible marketing. Even though that the hoteliers said that they are satisfying the customers well. Customers have complained about these practices.

The results of in-depth interview analysis and observations showed a clear disparity between the eco tourists' views as the main customer segment and eco tourist hoteliers' views on the practice of eco resort concept. Hoteliers in the eco resorts have a fair knowledge on the practice of the main components of an eco-resort, but they were unable to identify the importance of them to the main market segment. Even though Sri Lanka is having a potential to practice the eco-tourism and eco resort concept, the actual practice of hoteliers are deviating from the international standards. That is due to the variation of the construction of the meaning of eco-tourism concept. It has led to the negative impacts. As a result, hoteliers were unable to meet the customer expectations in order to achieve triple bottom line (economic sustainability, environmental sustainability and socio-cultural sustainability) of the organization and tend to fail their eco resort business near future.

In the analysis of customer reviews blogs, the researcher identified the main theme of customer comments. It described the

- Positive/Negative Customer comments on the service of the staff
- Positive/Negative Customer comments on the resorts practices.

This customer comment theme is similar to the theme identified in the course of in-depth interview analysis of eco resort hoteliers. Nevertheless here, the theme was developed based on the customer comments. That is the main difference comparing to the earlier category. This study was supportive to compare the hoteliers' comments and customer comments on the concept of eco resort to make out any disparity or similarity in their practices and requirements. When analyzed the comments, the study found comments mainly on the following areas.

- Facilities of the resort
- Service quality of the resort relating to the customer satisfaction and responsible marketing
- Knowledge level of the staff and interpretation
- Price of the products available

In line with the eco tourists reviews in the customer web blogs analysis, the study identified that they expect natural area focus, sustainable practices of environment and culture, conservation and local community involvement to the business, proper customer service and responsible marketing from the resort operations. It showed that eco tourists expect international standard components and practices from an eco-resort. But, according to the hoteliers' in-depth interviews analysis, the researcher identified that they were worrying about the conservation practices, CSR activities and few local community beneficial activities. They have not much considered about the satisfaction of eco tourist, responsible marketing, culture, sustainability. The main reason for that was the unawareness of the eco resort concept and the practices. They do not mislead the customers' purposefully. That happened due to the unawareness of the concept. Therefore, it has created a disparity between the way the hoteliers looked at the eco resort concept and customer requirements of the eco resort. As a result, eco tourists could not meet their requirements and the resorts are not eco tourists oriented. They are other type of customer segments oriented. They tried to earn profits through the business without clearly distinguishing the needs of eco tourists. Since they are achieving profits through other customer segments, they believed that they are carrying out the eco resort concept while addressing the

requirements properly. However it is not the truth. When compared to the in-depth interview analysis and customer review blogs analysis, the researcher found that those analyses were similar in the responsible marketing and customer satisfaction concepts point of view. In relation to the both views, they are not in satisfactory level. It showed the negligence of two main components of an eco-resort practices. Especially customer dissatisfaction of eco tourists happens as a result of not providing the needs of eco tourists such as not arranging tours to village areas, not providing local foods, lack of interpretation and study programmes, less involvement of local community in the activities and fewer culture and environmental sustainable practices. In the interviews, top level hoteliers did not mention much about the above activities and arrangements of them. Consequently, the study found that the hoteliers did not think about those practices as major components of an eco-resort. On the other hand customers concerned them as major components.

9. Conclusion

At the end of the research, the researcher found that the practice of eco resort concept has been misused by the hoteliers in Sri Lanka as pointed out by the tourism professionals. But, they are not purposefully doing it. It is due to lack of understanding of the concept. They are unable to classify the eco tourists and identify the market and customer segment clearly. They cater to different customer segments as eco tourists and earn profits neglecting the components of an eco-resort. Further, the researcher found that eco tourists' needs of eco resorts have not been addressed properly by the eco resort hoteliers. When the main guests are dissatisfied, there is a possibility of long term dropping of the business. That is what they are starting to experience currently. It has created dissatisfaction to eco tourists who are moving away from the Sri Lankan eco-tourism market to other destinations.

Attaching the "eco-tourism" label to poorly planned programmes provides local population with little besides social tension and environmental degradation, while leaving the genuine eco tourist dissatisfied and cheated. Most of the big resorts are just concrete jungles and still they claim them as eco resorts. According to the researcher, the issue of failure to practice the eco resort concept happened due to the following reasons.

- Sri Lanka eco-tourism business is not being guided by international principles.
- A "National Policy Plan on Eco Tourism" is yet to be formulated by the tourism authorities in Sri Lanka
- There are few true eco resort operators, those who adhere to the eco resort principles.
- There are few sufficient qualified people to handle eco tourists.
- Non- availability of genuinely planned eco resorts that guarantee the economic benefits to the community living around the eco resort areas.

Therefore, there is a need of eliminating these adverse practices which threaten the healthy development of the eco-tourism practices in Sri Lankan eco resorts.

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