

Sri Lanka, Tourism for a Brighter Future? A Review of the 2011 Tourism Blueprint

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Abstract: Tourism is considered to have the potential to generate foreign exchange revenue, create jobs for all levels, support handicraft and export industries, promote art and subsidise the development of transportation infrastructure; as it's a vector of development, governments try to coordinate planning with national development and objectives (Richter & Richter, 1985). In the case of Sri Lanka, a developing country under reconstruction following a long and destructive civil war, tourism has also been perceived as a tool for post-war reconstruction and reconciliation. Thus, a blueprint document; the 'Sri Lankan Tourism Development Strategy 2011 – 2016', which is a five year master plan, whose objectives are to distribute national economic benefits through tourism to economic development and national social cohesion, was published. Can it really be a bridge for reconstruction? This conceptual paper aims to assess the tourism reality in post war Sri Lanka in the light of the blueprint document. It will review the policy with regards to; firstly public or private tourism development, secondly domestic or international tourism, thirdly special interest or mass tourism and fourthly tourism supply or resources focusing on the distribution of benefits. The paper concludes summarising the key points identified for reviews in the government tourism development strategy. It contributes to the literature on Sri Lankan tourism development post war, notably to review the official five year plan blueprint in its recognition. The discussions in the paper help to build a body of knowledge on understanding tourism policy in the context of national reconstruction and social cohesion.

Keywords: Tourism Policy Assessment, Post War, Tourism Development, Special Interest Tourism, Sri Lanka, Reconstruction

Introduction /Background

Located in the southern part of India, Sri Lanka is an island country blessed with natural beauty consisting of tropical forests, fine biodiversity and varied landscapes, culture and heritage; making it a compact tourism destination. Sri Lanka is also a multicultural island of many ethnicities, religions and languages. The ethnic distribution of Sri Lanka as per census (2011) consists of Buddhist Sinhalese majority (82%), a large minority of Sri Lankan Tamil

(4.3%), Indian Tamil (5.1%) then Muslim moors (7.9%) and smaller communities of Malays (0.3%) and Burghers (0.2%) and others (0.2%). While the conflict in Sri Lanka is complex, it begun with the demand for autonomy by a rebel group of Tamil Hindu minority, the Liberation of Tamil Tigers Ealem (LTTE), a globally recognised brutal terrorist network and the governing Singhalese majority, yet the war was restricted to the north and some parts of the eastern provinces, basically LTTE controlled areas.

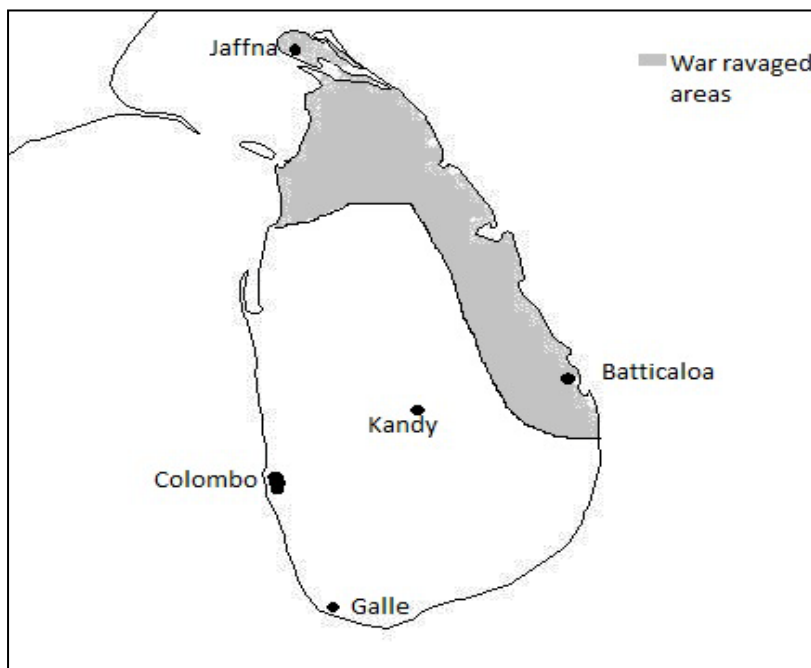


Figure1. War torn regions

Even though the country faced fierce civil war, it did not deter tourists from visiting its centre, west and southern parts. The extensive civil war in Sri Lanka ended in 2009, when the Sri Lankan Military declared the death of the Liberation of Tamil Tigers Ealem (LTTE) leader (Coleman, 2012). The current government in Sri Lanka is from the United People's Freedom Alliance party, where in majority Singhalese, and few Muslims have been represented , however still less Tamil representation. Though, one or two eastern Tamils militants, who surrendered have also been included in the government. Tourism sector in post war Sri Lanka saw increased tourist arrivals in 2010, highlighting it as a significant sector that would aid the country's economic growth. Nonetheless, even during the war, the tourism sector was making its share of revenue though tourism was restricted to the government ruled and protected areas of Sri Lanka. Interestingly, the state of tourism in Sri Lanka during the war was more of a rollercoaster with tourists' inflow picking up in the 1990s, with the effective image building campaigns by the government and the war being confined to restricted areas of the country; then 1995 and 1996 saw terrorist attacks in Colombo affecting two five star hotels in the city, namely Hotel Ceylon intercontinental and Galadari; yet Sri Lankan tourism was successful in picking up well quickly until 2001 with more image building campaigns and the fact that the country had diverse tourism products

to offer; in 2001, LTTE launched an attack on the Colombo international airport, killing many people including tourists and destroying many passenger aircrafts and for tourism to pick after that was a huge challenge even with never ending peace talk attempts between the government and the terrorist group in 2002 (Beirman, 2003). Jenkins (1987) points out that planning is needed at this post war stage, with clear objectives in place, policies can be formulated which will help in avoiding situations where emergency actions have to be taken and provide stability for any future decisions and operations.

Two years, after the war ended in 2009, a blueprint document was published by the government in 2011. The 'Sri Lankan Tourism Development Strategy 2011 – 2016', a five year master plan, wherein the following key areas have been identified and approved by the cabinet as necessary for tourism development: the policy framework, the infrastructure, service standards, right market segments and the potential of cultural, medical and agro tourism or in words diverse niche tourism. The tourism development strategy document also stresses the need to attract the right kind of tourists and poverty alleviation through equal distribution spatially, socially and ethnically. The document derives from vision and philosophy of the larger national development strategy vision developed by the controversial president (President Mahinda Rajapaksha) and called the 'Mahinda Chintana' literally meaning Mahinda's Vision in the Sinhalese Language. Now that the war is over and the country is under reconstruction and tourism development projects are on, the question that arises is; whether state of tourism development is the same across the country? So far until 2009, tourism activities, development and tourist attractions were mostly concentrated in the western, central and southern provinces. What about the northern and the Eastern provinces? Are they benefited from the tourism boom? Are the economic benefits distributed equally considering that the north and east are the war torn areas and consists mostly of the minority Tamils and Muslims?

This conceptual paper aims to assess the tourism reality in post war Sri Lanka in the light of the blueprint document. In order to achieve the aim, the paper will look at three key objectives namely; to demonstrate an understanding of tourism in the Sri Lanka context, to review the Sri Lankan tourism policy blueprint in terms of the tourism market targeted, products offered and tourism development, and lastly to evaluate the equal distribution of tourism benefits in the light of the blueprint. The paper contributes to the literature on Sri Lankan tourism development post war, notably to review the official five year plan blueprint in its recognition. The discussions in the paper help to build a body of knowledge on understanding tourism development policy in the context of national reconstruction and social cohesion. Furthermore it will be useful to students or researchers studying or focusing on Tourism planning and policy in Sri Lanka or South Asia context as a case study. It will critically review the policy with regards to; firstly public or private tourism development, secondly domestic or international tourism, thirdly special interest or mass tourism, fourthly tourism supply or resources and finally distribution of tourism benefits.

Tourism Policy Framework in Post War Sri Lanka

Post war, Sri Lanka observed 8% economic growth in 2010 and increased tourist arrivals, prompting the identification and recognition of the tourism Sector as one of the main sectors driving the country's economic progress (Sri Lankan Tourism Development Strategy, 2011). The benefits from tourism highlight the need to develop the sector in sync with national development in the country. Policy assessment is initiated and necessary mainly by establishing how tourism is included in the national development plan which will depend on the potential of tourism to add to the national income, bring in foreign exchange, employment and economic development (Dieke, 2011). Chaudhary (2009) believes that the development of a sector is influenced by the political system of a country, its socio-economic environment and the policy framework. Many have attempted to define the term tourism policy, wherein most refer to it as a statement of intent of a set course of action agreed upon by public body or agency such as the government or a private organisation such as airlines or travel operators with regards to aspects of tourism, which would act as a reference point for accomplishment (Dye, 1992; Wilkinson, 1999; Mason, 2008; Chaudhary, 2009). For developing countries and especially those developing countries that have gone through war or crisis, the policy choice or decisions have usually been made in the middle of acute scarcity, especially with regards to infrastructure, facilities, trained and skilled tourism professional and capital (Jenkins & Henry, 1982). Policy choices made in such countries are by and large different from each other and largely depends on the type of crisis, political and socio economic conditions of the individual country. Nevertheless, as pointed by Liu (2003) the policies need to be well defined, theoretically sound and feasible practically for the purpose of implementation of sustainable tourism plan.

The Tourism Blueprint, a Nation's Project for Reconstruction.

"The development policy framework of the Government of Sri Lanka is committed to a sustainable tourism development strategy", wherein, "protection of the environment and distribution of economic benefits to the larger cross section of the society are key components of this overall vision" (Sri Lankan Tourism Development Strategy 2011 – 2016, 2011, p.4). The blueprint aims at making Sri Lanka a model tourist destination by tapping its natural resources sustainably, yet setting a target of 2.5 million 'high' spending tourists by 2016, since according to tourism statistics maintained by Sri Lankan Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA), 2009 saw 447,890 tourist arrival, mostly under 'low end' with an increase after May when the war was declared over, 2010 saw 650,000, 2011 had 855,975 and lately 2012 saw 1005,605 indicating the increasing tourist inflow. The document intends to achieve the set aim through some key SMART objectives explicitly; to increase tourist arrivals to 2.5 million by 2016; to draw 3 billion US dollars within 5 years as Foreign Direct Investments (FDI); to boost tourism related employment to 500,000 by 2016 from 125,000 in 2010; to ensure that the economic benefits of tourism are equally distributed to larger population and tourism is incorporated to the economy; to enhance foreign exchange revenue to 2.75 billion dollars by 2016 from 500 million dollars in 2010; improve

international trade and place Sri Lanka as 'world's most treasured island' for tourism (Sri Lankan Tourism Development Strategy, 2011). The blue print document was drafted by the Sri Lanka Tourism Authority under the guidance of largely the Ministry of Economic Development.

A Public / Private Tourism Development Policy

According to Richter and Richter (1985) a critical decision that tourism policy makers need to make while planning is to what extent and how should the government be included in development of tourism in the country be it complete ownership in all aspects to a blend of public and private involvement. With the long decade of war in Sri Lanka, complete government ownership may not be practical considering the capital needed to rebuild the country's war torn areas. The Blueprint document outlines that a blend of public and private involvement is envisioned in the tourism development with more involvement of private and foreign direct investments. Richter and Richter (1985) also points out that in most South Asian countries, a blend of public and private involvement is common, yet government involvement is designed in a manner to compete as well as support the private sector. The government's plan and role intends to include; facilitating private and foreign direct investments by developing a 'one stop shop' for investors, simple tax regime, licensing procedures, land bank, concessions for Small Medium Enterprises (SME) and land availability for long term lease and sale for investors ; improving infrastructure, facilities and services through the creation of clean city concept, policies integrating other sectors, improved railways, road access, facilities at key attractions, human resources training for the sector, increase number of rooms and introduction of seaplanes, light aircrafts and boats ; aid in developing tourism products and environment via simple regulations for tourist activities, tourism guidelines, reduced congestions at immigration counters, , tourist police, regularised pricing structure of key attractions; diverse tourism products such as coastal fishing, dolphin or whale watching, Ayurvedic health centres, agro farms, religious festivals, botanical, zoological gardens, conserve biological diversity in the north and eastern provinces and promote Sri Lankan tourism through various campaigns in order to target new markets and draw high spending tourists by simple online visa and improved website communication that is attractive, useful, practical and informative (Sri Lankan Tourism Development Strategy, 2011).

Encouraging International Arrivals and Promoting Domestic Tourism

Destinations predominantly focus mainly on international tourism volumes and expenditure, yet international tourism is only one part and certainly in number of arrivals, domestic tourism is several times larger than international. On the other hand the challenge with domestic tourism is tracking movements and expenditures. Yet domestic tourism is significant but mostly invisible part of total tourism. According to Eijelaar, Peeters and Piket (2008) ignoring domestic tourists makes it difficult to make dependable policies for sustainable development (e.g. poverty alleviation). Also more movement of domestic

tourists can also create awareness of the various regions, communities and cultures which has the potential to encourage social cohesion. As per a comparative study conducted in 22 countries, people take domestic holidays more than once per year, yet these are normally large rich countries, endowed with plenty of opportunities for domestic tourism (Bigano et al. 2004). The policy from the blueprint is to simultaneously have both international and domestic tourism. While 2010 saw a good inflow of international tourists post war, the rise in income has led to an increase in demand for domestic tourism as well. The policy towards attracting international tourism comprises of; offering diverse niche tourism products such beaches, sports, adventure, heritage, wildlife and nature, mind and body wellness, agro tourism, medical, community based tourism business tourism and religious festivals to suit various tourist interests and aim at high end tourist spenders; promotional campaigns to attract international tourists with the help of embassies and missions abroad, innovative and useful website, a major international advertising campaign to be initiated in late 2012 or 2013, improve global image through building rapport with international journalists and media, increase the frequency of flights to Sri Lanka and attract more airlines to operate to Sri Lanka and focus marketing campaigns on the new target markets such as America, East Asia, Middle East, Eastern Europe and Australasia (Sri Lankan Tourism Development Strategy, 2011). With regards to domestic tourism, the policy includes; to begin with an establishment of the domestic tourism unit to promote and observe change in tourism activities according to age , gender, level of education and wealth of tourists, domestic tourist quotas at discounted prices, setting up of theme and amusement parks, promoting business tourism, bringing in international sports competitions such as cricket, athletics and rugby and creating relaxing environment in main cities (Sri Lankan Tourism Development Strategy, 2011). Whilst tourism has been recognised as major foreign exchange earner, depending too much on it for revenue can be impractical as the sector is seasonal and there is bound to be fluctuations in revenue especially with the changes in fashion, trends, fear of various factors such as health hazards, terrorism and political instability (Dieke, 2011). Thus a mix of international and domestic tourism ensures more balanced revenue with promotions during the low seasons.

Tourism Supply: Special Interest Tourism or Mass Tourism?

“Tourism in less developed countries depends on the resources available within the countries, whether they are physical, human or capital resources; each type, in terms of availability, quality and competitiveness, is needed for a successful tourism development programme” (Dieke, 2011, p. 26). Through the Sri Lankan Tourism Development Strategy (2011), it can be noted that Sri Lanka has diverse tourism potential and attractions and the aim is to develop and promote diverse tourism products, especially SIT products, targeting high spending tourists. In order to cope with the increase in tourism, improved transportation, trained professional, better services, accessibility and increase in more number of rooms is planned. However there is huge dependence on private and foreign direct investments to develop tourism, which might take time, yet there is a huge potential

for tourism in Sri Lanka with so much to offer particularly now that the war is over, the north and east could also be used to tap tourism potential and pave way for development of these war torn areas. Two areas that could have potential in the northern and eastern provinces are tourism and fisheries; the beaches in the eastern province are secluded as well as good for surfing though huge investment is required in terms of hotels, both north and east have rich fishing resources which needs to be modernised (De Silva, 2011). On the other hand, it is important to take into consideration if the residents in the north and east are ready for the increase in tourist flow, since they have suffered and survived through a decade of war, they may find it difficult to co-exist with the visitors who are there for leisure activities. The fact that there are visible differences between tourists and hosts would create resentment amongst the host and may lead to other socio-cultural impacts (Mason, 2008). Yet increase in income and livelihoods would be a welcome.

While tourism is the way forward, it's vital to ensure appropriate tourism forms are used especially in these war torn areas. Shah and Gupta (2000) analysed various case studies from Asia (in developing countries context) and concluded that mass tourism related with luxury hotels has major negative social impacts on hosts and does not bring the best returns. Derrett (2001) also indicate that SIT is seen as an alternative tourism approach to the impacts of mass tourism and encourages sustainable tourism development. Special interests tourists tend to have a desire for authentic and real experiences where they would be able to actively identify with hosts in a non-exploitive way (Douglas, Douglas & Derrett, 2001). However, SIT is a vast term comprising of various forms of tourisms, thus an appropriate choice of SIT forms and activities must be identified and developed. For instance dark tourism, which is a type of special interest tourism, where tourist are lured to visit places that have undergone a tragedy such as war zones, natural calamities like Tsunami, terrorist attacks and genocides. Though the blueprint does not mention if dark tourism would be developed in these regions and the government does not promote these sites attractions domestically or internationally through their websites. Still the war museum was inaugurated by the president after the war in 2009. Whilst the war museum dedicated to the soldiers, there are other dark tourism sites that have come up after the war such as a victory monument (an image of military victory) where the terrorist leader was shot; vehicle graveyard or in other words civilian vehicles that were burnt by the terrorist group in the final stages to create distracting smoke while trying to escape,, remains of a pirated Jordanian merchant vessel by the LTTE and used as bunkers in 2006; the terrorist leader Prabhakaran's bunker; Sea Tiger swimming pool used to train LTTE and LTTE prisons (Unnithaan, 2013). As per the blue print, more focus in Sri Lanka would be on Special Interest Tourism (SIT) as high spending tourists are being targeted and certain tourism projects wherein most of SIT nature is being planned such as adventure tourism, marine tourism, sports tourism, gaming, agro tourism, home stays or community based tourism, fishing, wildlife and nature, shopping, religious tourism, wellness, heritage, culinary, ecotourism and medical tourism. However the diverse nature of the tourism

product, easy hassle free online visa, cheap accommodation could pave opportunity for mass tourism as well.

Mahinda Chintana for all? *Two Years Subsequent to Blue Print: Strong Economic Progress but Social Development Lagging.*

One of the key objectives of the Sri Lankan Tourism Development Strategy (2011), is to ensure that the tourism benefits are equally distributed to a larger cross section of people wherein the according to the '*Mahinda Chintana*', the eventual beneficiaries should be the people of the country namely; fisherman, farmers, craftsmen, guides and people working in the hospitality and tourism sector. As tourism objectives are framed and policies to apply the objectives needs to be devised (Dieke, 2011). Since tourism development will have multiplier effect in the creation of jobs and sharing of wealth, the tourism development strategy document also stresses the need to attract the right kind of tourists and poverty alleviation through equal distribution spatially, socially and ethnically. Considering that its 2013 and midyear of the five year plan, a mid review of the tourism development would be vital.

The blueprint seems to have generated a strong economic urge. Some visible achievement are translated with easy online visa process, roads being constructed connecting the airport, increase in inflow of tourists, boating facilities, relaxation places in the city, opening of the railway to the East, upcoming projects of harbours and airports in the South, tourism development projects in the North and East. Tourists can visit the North and some 'home stay' tourism has gained popularity. For a region, that was completely restricted, it is now open to investments, tourist and even a lot of Non Government Organisations (NGOs) have also been allowed to work alongside in the North and East. Some of the NGOs are supported by Sri Lankan celebrity cricket players, who even did a lot of charity, organised cricket matches between youth from North, East and the other parts of the country. Such sports events or sport in general have a great role in peace, enhancing solidarity, understanding, team-spirit and even dialogue (Moufakkir & Kelly, 2010). Sri Lanka also had significant increase in international tourist arrival in 2011 through 'Visit Sri Lanka 2011' campaign that successfully promoted Special Interest Tourism products. Other successful promotions as intended in the blueprint are their improved website, e-marketing and the use of social networking sites where they promote a diversified country in Unity. Sri Lanka has also been as No. 1 destination for 2013, by a famous travel guide and media publisher 'Lonely Planet' and also rated under one of the top ten destinations to watch for in 2013 by Conde Nast Traveller, a leading travel Magazine. Even a Hospitality Valuation Services (HVS) report (2011) on tourism development talks positively about the tourism potential that "Sri Lanka has with all tourism projects coming up including the ones in the North and East". The report goes on to predict high demand in tourism in Sri Lanka in the coming years yet also expresses a concern in terms shortage of rooms, skilled and trained hospitality manpower in

the future to meet this demand. There has also been an increase in FDI by many countries such as China, India, Japan and Korea. Currently the government has sorted lands in the north and a few in the east for development of hotels and resorts which aim to create source of livelihood for the Tamils and aid in the development of that region.

The development in the North and East has been relatively slow which the government maintains due to land dispute, landmines from the war still posing a threat and the resettlement of displaced Tamils. On the socio-political aspects, a report (2011) presented to the parliament by a Tamil political party called the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), suggests that the tourism development projects have seen resentments by the Tamils especially the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) who still living in Camps as most of the tourism development lands allocated are given to Southern Singhalese businessmen who are bringing in their own Singhalese labour force from the South to work on these projects, which is robbing them of lands for resettlement, economic benefits from tourism development and livelihoods. Whilst the government assures that the delay in resettling the IDPs is due to clearing landmines in those areas during the war, however there is also the case of over 75000 Sri Lankans Muslim IDPs from north during the 'ethnic cleansing' done by the LTTE. The TNA report also criticises the immense military presence in the north who it claims are also robbing the Tamils of their livelihoods by involving in economic and tourism activities such opening of eateries and small snacks shops on the Jaffna highway, salons and shops. The report also talks of other atrocities some of them sexual committed by the military in the north, however it's vital to critically view their report as TNA is also a pro-LTTE party. There also have been recent reports by media, a UK based TV channel (channel 4) documentary, that sexual torture has been used on Tamil detainees at camps in the North to obtain information. However, these confessions made overseas by Sri Lankan Tamils overseas also need to be investigated for vested interests as its important to note that there is a huge number of refugees living in various countries such as the Australia, United Kingdom (UK), United States of America (USA), Canada, Switzerland and India, who could be asked to return. According to Galtung (1967), positive peace would only be possible when there is an understanding of actual needs, grievances of all sides and there is a progressive and constructive resolution to the conflict that benefits all. In the case of the Sri Lankan conflict, it is more complex and challenging to come to a resolution that would benefit all but a positive step and attempt in that direction would eventually be appreciated. On a tourism development context, such media propaganda controversy because it is not settled between opponents and the reality of the post war situations negatively affects the image of Sri Lanka, tourism marketing efforts, the reality of peace and progress, hence it's necessary to understand that it would draw more tourists especially those segment of tourists who are interested in sustainable tourism and the evidence that the community from that region are benefited through their visit especially in the North and East. An attraction to these regions is also due to the 'War Tourism' interest in these regions hoping to see developments and hear the human stories of war, survival and progress. On the other

hand Sri Lanka also needs to be given time and support to see development through by international communities as it had gone through a decade of war. Thus, it also significant to understand the dichotomy between the plan and the reality. Even if the plan cannot be used as a checklist, it still is a vision guideline that be compared with. Given below is a table that reflects this dichotomy:

Blue Print	Economic Objectives	Ethnic	Regional	Marketing
Mentioned Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase Foreign exchange earnings - Create employment - Contribute towards improving global trade and economic linkages - Attract FDI 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Distribute economic benefits of tourism to a larger cross section of people - Using Tourism for reconciliation and reconstruction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Expand tourism based industry and services all island 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase tourist arrivals by 2016 - Promote Sri Lanka using practical and informative website - Position Sri Lanka as the world's most treasured island for tourism
Progress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased arrivals / revenue - Jobs being created - Upcoming harbour projects and improved relations with China, Pakistan, India, Japan, Korea for trade and economic linkages - Incentives and simpler procedure and hence are attracting FDI's 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Upcoming projects in North & East are invested by the majority ethnic group who have been bringing their own workforce from south - Reconciliation would only be possible if all the minority groups especially from war torn areas are empowered 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lot of infrastr ucture & facilities in the west, central and south, there still needs to be a lot done in the North and East. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Significant increase in international tourist arrival - In 2011, through 'Visit Sri Lanka 2011' campaign - Improved website, e-marketing and the use of social networking sites - Easy Online Visa Process - Sri Lanka has also been as No. 1 destination for 2013, by 'Lonely Planet' & under one of the top ten destinations to watch for in 2013 by Conde Nast Traveller.

Table 1: Blue Print in Progress (2011-2016)

Nevertheless, the policy does not include sufficient regional plans especially in the north and east to ensure economic benefits would be equally distributed predominantly spatially and ethnically. The blue print document covers the essentials of tourism development policy as suggested by Jenkins (1991) that a national tourism policy must include the role of the government, ownership and control, investment and scale of tourism development, international versus domestic tourism into consideration. The policies formulated allow flexibility and scope, yet to achieve equal distribution of benefits; it must include the north and east in the process of reconciliation, reconstruction and tourism development. This has been stressed by De Silva (2011) as well wherein he stresses the fact that Tamil areas in the north of the country and the Tamil and Muslim areas of the east are underdeveloped parts of the country, hence it must be kept in mind while preparing policies. Significantly, Tourism can play role in the encouragement of reconciliation through peace and progress (Moufakkir & Kelly, 2010)

Other than the internal situation, there are also external factors that have an impact on tourism development in Sri Lanka. These include the constant protests and pressure from Tamil Nadu Politicians on the Tamil issue, stirring the sympathetic Tamil Nadu civilian's emotions, sometimes for their own vested political interests. This also damages the image and marketing efforts with Indian tourists to Sri Lanka, especially when post war saw an increase in tourists from India. Nevertheless there is also the issue of the Indian fishermen fishing close to Northern Sri Lankan waters robbing the livelihood of the fisherman in the North. Sri Lankan relationship ties with rest of India is different and more friendly especially with China, Pakistan, Japan and Korea developing closer ties, getting development projects in Sri Lanka, India is cautious and wants to maintain cordial ties.

Conclusion

The economic benefits from tourism are visible especially through the excellent increase in tourist arrivals to Sri Lanka. The marketing efforts in promoting Sri Lanka have paid good dividends. With the diverse tourism products that a small island such as Sri Lanka can offer and the opportunity of more tourism products from the untouched North and East, Tamil majority regions, provide a compact package for tourists and give them value for money. Sri Lankan hospitality sector needs to be developed faster to meet the increasing demand. However, social questions or issues still need to be addressed. Positive peace is the way forward, which must include empowerment of the minority communities that have been driven to poverty because of the war. Such inclusion will bring out the positive benefits and reconcile the divided diverse communities in Sri Lanka, instilling trust in the government and aiding progress. For a country that had been savaged by war for over 30 years, the end of the war has been an emotionally draining moment for all sides. Sri Lanka needs to try to reconcile itself and heal the past through Special Interest Tourism. The increase in tourist arrivals, various investments coming in, its strategic location, infrastructure and development projects all indicate that it has a lot of potential for development, provided that the 'New

Sri Lanka's willingness to integrate, tolerate and mingle. Hence the success of the 'Mahinda Chintana' and the tourism blueprint solely depends on combined efforts of commitment from the government and the various communities.

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