

## Article

# Profiling of Shelter Campers, Their Attitudes, and Perceptions towards Environmental Impacts of Campsite Use and Management: Evidence from National Parks of Sri Lanka

Priyan Perera <sup>1,2,\*</sup> , Shashini Tara Mallikage <sup>1</sup>, David Newsome <sup>2</sup> and Richard Vlosky <sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Forestry and Environmental Science, University of Sri Jaywardenepura, Nugegoda 10250, Sri Lanka

<sup>2</sup> Environmental and Conservation Sciences, College of Science, Health, Engineering, and Education, Murdoch University, South St., Murdoch, WA 6150, Australia

<sup>3</sup> Louisiana Forest Products Development Center, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA 70803, USA

\* Correspondence: priyan@sjp.ac.lk

**Abstract:** There is a dearth of research describing the campsite user segment and in assessing campsite users' perceptions of the bio-physical impacts of campsite use in Sri Lanka. Using a structured questionnaire, we evaluated campsite user characteristics, visitor motivations, behaviors, and how visitor experience is affected by visible biophysical impacts at campsites. Based on underlying visitor motivations derived through a Factor Analysis and Cluster Analysis, we identified three distinct segments of campsite users: Eco-tourists, Prestige seekers, and Adventure seekers. Results indicate that the overall cleanliness of the campsite is an important attribute that affects the visitor experience. The Ecotourist segment reported environmentally desired motives, attitudes and behaviours. However, majority of campsite users belong to the Prestige-seeker and Adventure-seeker segments. Prestige seekers in particular demand better facilities and proper maintenance of campsites. Additionally, Prestige seekers are more attractive as a market segment to target because they are high-income, well-educated individuals with pro-environmental attitudes and behaviors. Recommended management actions include increasing visitor awareness, monitoring, zonation of activity areas, and enforcement of park campsite user policies to ensure enhanced visitor experience.

**Keywords:** shelter camping; rustic camping; biophysical impacts; motivations; visitor segments; campsite impact management



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## 1. Introduction

As negative environmental and socio-cultural impacts of mass tourism become apparent, the appeal for alternative forms of tourism such as nature-based tourism and ecotourism has gained momentum globally [1–4]. Nature-based tourism is now considered a large and dynamic segment of the contemporary tourism industry [5–7]. Concurrent with the growing demand for nature-based tourism, the demand for liminal experiences in nature and alternative accommodation options is also rising [8–11]. In the context of outdoor pursuits, camping has become a significant component of the nature-based tourism domain [12–15].

Camping is a form of recreation that includes activities and accommodation outdoors [9]. Over the years, the scope of recreational camping has expanded from basic tenting in nature to activities such as visiting natural areas in caravans and the use of recreational vehicles [9,16,17]. A more recent trend in outdoor recreation—“glamping”—which combines luxury and nature while respecting the natural environment and providing exclusive and unique nature-based tourism offerings is gaining popularity amongst environmentally conscious tourists [12,18,19]. The growing number of visitors to natural areas who are seeking camping experiences has prompted the nature-based tourism industry

and academia to explore their diverse motives, attitudes, behaviors, and factors influencing satisfaction with camping experiences [20,21].

Although there is some ambiguity in what constitutes ‘camping’, Brooker and Joppe [9,16] describe camping as “the activity of living in a tent for a short period, whether in a campground or wilderness setting”. However, much of the published literature on motivations, behaviors, environmental orientation, and satisfaction of campers are associated with caravanning, camping in recreational vehicles, and, more recently on luxury camping [12,13,16,17,22–26]. Surprisingly, the rustic shelter camper segment has received scant scholarly attention, and limited studies have attempted to describe their motivations, behaviors, attitudes, and satisfaction [21,27,28].

Irrespective of the form of camping, the literature suggests that a person’s motivation to engage in outdoor camping is predominantly ‘pushed’ by the need for escape, to connect with nature and foster socialization, freedom, and discovery, and ‘pulled’ by destination attributes such as infrastructure, services, and product offerings including environmental features [12,17,29,30]. These push and pull factors influence the decision-making process of an individual additionally affecting the degree of satisfaction derived from a camping experience [31]. Brooker and Joppe [9] further described the demographics and motivations of campers. However, recent studies conducted exclusively on shelter campers [21] suggest that this unique visitor segment needs further research to better understand and inform visitor management at nature-based destinations.

At the same time, camping activities can induce significant and often localized environmental impacts that can affect soil (compaction and erosion, ground exposure, changes to the hydrology of site), vegetation (loss of ground vegetation and seedlings, trampling, change in species composition, spread of invasive plants), wildlife (habitat alteration, disturbance to wildlife), and water quality (increased turbidity, contamination with human fecal matter). The severity of such impacts is also variable depending on the level of use [3,15,32–36]. The size of a user party can also influence the area of damage, with larger parties often causing a disproportionate amount of damage [33]. Long-term degradation of campsites due to biophysical impacts can negatively affect visitor experience [37]. The literature further suggests that recreation experiences can positively influence environmentally responsible behaviors of visitors [38]. Nonetheless, how visitors perceive their own impacts on the environment is not well understood. Hence, understanding environmental impacts from the perspective of campsite users is essential in planning recreational activities in protected areas. On the other hand, understanding visitors’ environmental orientation and their perceptions of the environment have implications for the identification of unique market segments [39].

The growing global demand for nature-based tourism and camping in natural areas has significant implications for biodiversity-rich tropical countries like Sri Lanka [40,41]. Before COVID-19 halted international tourism, visitors to Sri Lanka’s National Parks (NP) were showing exponential growth [41]. For instance, visitation to NPs peaked in 2018 with 1,100,435 foreign tourists and 1,610,788 local visitors. This is a 668% and 231% increase in foreign and local visitations, respectively, compared to post-war 2010 [42]. These NPs provide ample opportunities to observe the country’s charismatic fauna such as the Asian Elephant (*Elephantus zeylonicus maximus*), Leopard (*Panthera pardus kotiya*), Sloth Bear (*Melursus ursinus*), and Saltwater crocodile (*Crocodylus porosus*) as well as diverse avifauna and landscapes [43,44]. Concurrent with the visitation growth, campsites occupancy in NPs has also shown steady growth.

Some 51 campsites in 13 NPs of Sri Lanka currently offer camping facilities to visitors [45]. Yala, Udawalawa, Horton Planes, and Wasgamuwa are among the most popular NPs for camping. According to statistics from the Department of Wildlife Conservation (DWC), Sri Lanka [46], campsite bookings increased by 4% in Udawalawa NP, 13.89% in Wasgamuwa NP and 35.62% in Yala NP from 2015 to 2016. Total campsite bookings in NPs have shown a 28.5% growth within the same period [46]. Camping in Sri Lanka’s NPs provides unique and exciting opportunities for close interactions with nature and wildlife [15].

This has positioned Sri Lanka's NPs and natural areas in a favorable position to exploit the growing demand for camping in natural areas and alternative accommodations [11].

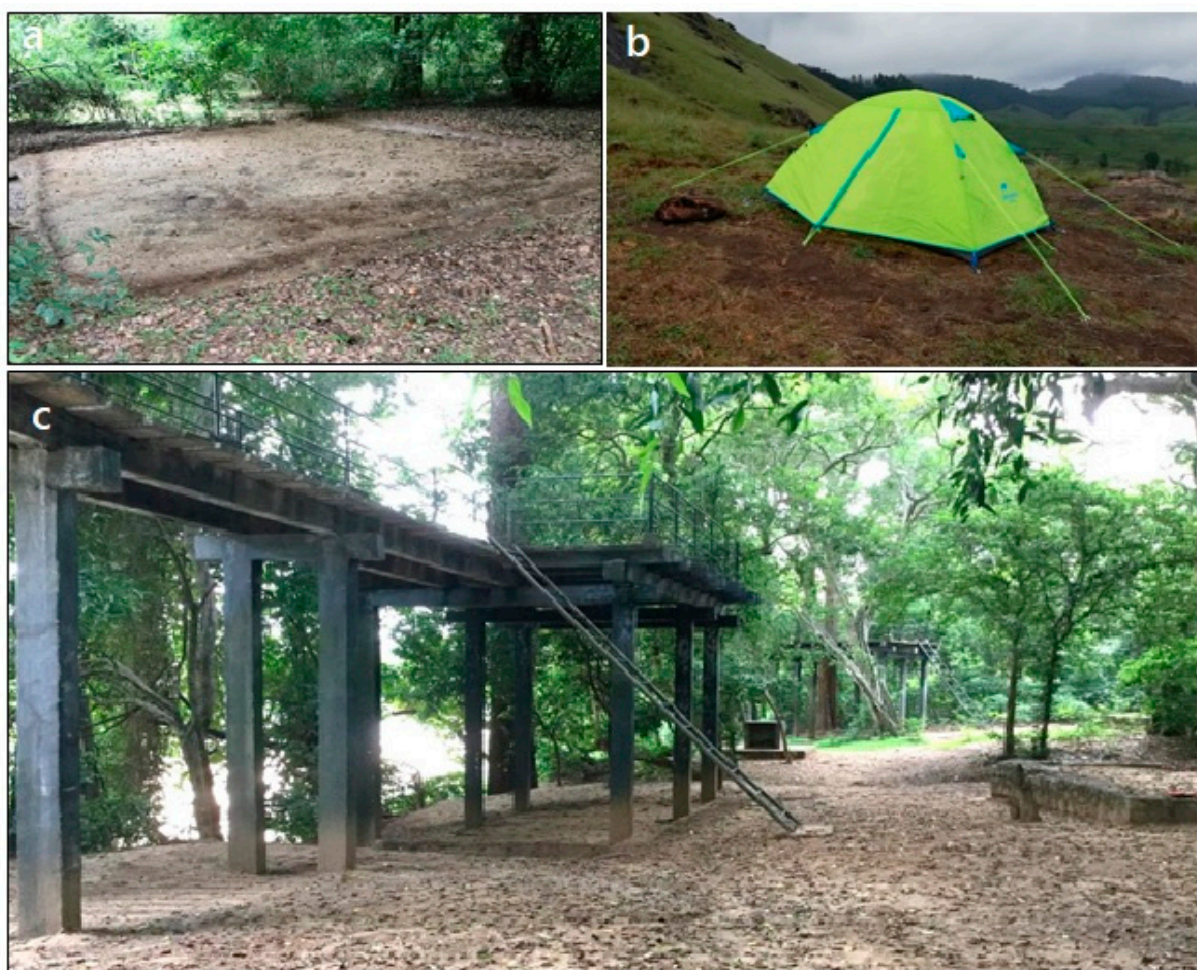
In the regional context, camping is still an emerging sector in Asia, including India, China, Malaysia, and Thailand, but it has significant potential to flourish [9,47,48]. The majority of published studies on camping as a recreational activity and campers have been carried out in the US, Australia and Europe [9,14,17,49]. The pull factors for camping in the tropics can especially depend on unique destination attributes and are thus different from those that have been reported in the literature from temperate countries [9,14,16,17,21,29,50]. As such, there is a general lack of information on rustic shelter camper characteristics, motivations, on-site behaviors, and perceptions of campsite management in the tropics and Sri Lanka. To what extent they align with current campsite user policies and how they would respond to possible changes in visitor policies are important dimensions that need to be considered in visitor management [28,44].

Identifying and describing visitor segments at camping sites, therefore, has important managerial and policy implications. Such studies provide valuable information for park management to tailor their products to different visitor types while allowing policymakers to introduce necessary measures to develop the nature-based tourism sector in a particular location [13,21,40,51]. Brooker and Joppe [9] described three main campsite user segments based on the longevity of the camping: full-time, long-term, and short-term. However, these visitor segments are based on entirely different study contexts and **relate to** campers in North America and Australia [9,52], thus having limited applicability to camping in most tropical settings. In this light, this Sri Lankan study aims to identify key motivations of rustic shelter camping and develop distinct campsite user profiles to examine how their behaviors, environmental attitudes, and perception of campsite management actions differ, thereby bridging an essential information gap in the global context.

## 2. Materials and Methods

### 2.1. Study Context and Setting

Both shelter camping and glamping/luxury camping are practiced in Sri Lanka's natural areas. However, only shelter camping is predominantly allowed inside NPs and therefore, shelter campers were the focal group of this study. The campsites in Sri Lanka's NPs can be categorized as 'developed' and 'undeveloped', based on the type of development and infrastructure facilities available at campsites [15]. Undeveloped campsites are those with basic facilities, including an area devoid of vegetation purposefully cleared by park management, with a toilet provided. Some undeveloped campsites may include slightly elevated tent pads constructed with earth (Figure 1a). Developed campsites include specially constructed formal structures for camping, such as elevated camping platforms constructed on concrete beams or slightly elevated concrete/cement platforms constructed on the ground (Figure 1c), a toilet, a designated cooking area with table-like structures and seating made of cement and bricks. Typically shelter camping in the NPs of Sri Lanka involves activities such as campers setting up temporary tents on developed or undeveloped campsites (Figure 1b), cooking, and setting up a bonfire. Campsites are often located close to a water source. The maximum duration of occupancy of a campsite in Sri Lanka's NPs is two nights and the allowed group size is ten persons [53].



**Figure 1.** Typical campsite settings (a) an un-developed campsite (b) shelter camping in a campsite (c) a developed campsite.

## 2.2. Development of Research Instrument

A structured questionnaire was used as the primary research instrument for this study. The questionnaire was designed to gather visitor motivations, on-site behaviors, visitor perceptions of biophysical impacts in campsites due to camping, and visitor perceptions on the management of campsites. The questionnaire further collected information on trip characteristics and visitor demographics. Our preliminary observations and pilot study suggested that older tourists (over 55 years) are less likely to participate in camping. Hence, in defining age classes, respondents over 46 years were considered as a single age class.

A set of 12 motivational items adopted from the literature [9,17,40] was used with modifications to fit the local context. Tourists' on-site behavioral characteristics were assessed using items developed based on research conducted by Smith and Newsome [37], Perera et al. [40], and Hassell et al. [17]. Motivational and behavioral items were measured using a five-point Likert scale anchored from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. In addition, the questionnaire further collected information on visitor demographics and trip characteristics. The respondents were further asked to indicate the most relevant motivations for engaging in camping. Biophysical attributes influencing the quality of the visitor experience were sourced from Smith and Newsome [37] and Mallikage et al. [15]. These items in the questionnaire were designed to probe respondents to give a numeric rating (1 = very poor, 5 = excellent). The items that examined visitor perception of the management of campsites were measured using a five-point Likert scale anchored from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

The validity of the selected sets of attributes was established following a review by a five-member panel of experts consisting of academics in similar research fields, DWC officials, luxury camp operators, and regular campers. The questionnaire was pre-tested using a sample of 20 visitors and further revised before it was administered to the sample.

### 2.3. Sampling and Data Collection

The sample frame for the questionnaire survey included visitors who camped inside popular NPs (Yala, Horton Plains, Wasgomuwa, Udawalawam Kumana, Bundala, and Wilpattu) in Sri Lanka during the period June 2015 to August 2016. Contact details of campers were collected from the booking center at the DWC. During the period June 2015 to September 2016, these individuals were contacted via telephone to administer the structured questionnaire. The survey period had to be extended due to the practical difficulties in contacting individuals and reaching the desired sample size. A total of 320 campers were contacted. The sample size was determined, desiring a 95% confidence level and  $\pm 5\%$  precision with maximum variability of 0.5. The person who carried out the booking or a member of the camping party over 18 years of age was interviewed. Individuals who complied with the request to participate in the survey were interviewed while those who declined to participate were treated as non-respondents. To eliminate possible 'recall bias' associated with the survey design, all respondents were contacted between one week and six weeks after completing their camping activity [54]. The questionnaire was conducted both in English and Sinhalese (the local language).

### 2.4. Data Analysis

Survey responses were entered into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. Data were cleaned by checking the consistency of responses (identifying contradictory responses) before proceeding to detailed statistical analysis. Incomplete questionnaires with many missing responses were discarded. Data were analyzed using IBM® SPSS® Statistics 20 software (for inferential statistics) and Microsoft Excel (for descriptive statistics). Twelve items were used to identify distinct camper segments based on motivations for camping. A factor analysis with principal axis factoring was used to explore the underlying dimensions of motivations. In order to identify distinct respondent groups (camper segments) based on motivational dimensions, a cluster analysis was performed using factor scores. Ward's hierarchical clustering technique was employed to identify the appropriate number of clusters. Accordingly, distinct visitor segments were derived. ANOVA was used to distinguish the identified visitor segments based on their behaviors and perceptions [40,55]. Factor analysis, Cluster analysis and ANOVA tests were conducted using SPSS® Statistics 20 software.

## 3. Results

A total of 360 individuals who have engaged in camping in selected NPs were contacted over the phone and 202 agreed to participate in the survey. This accounted for an overall response rate of 56.1%, which is considered satisfactory in social research.

### 3.1. General Respondent Profile

Of those who participated in the survey, 180 were domestic visitors, while 22 were foreign visitors. General respondent socio-demographic characteristics are summarized in Table 1. Approximately 81.7% of the respondents had camped in NPs before, while 37 respondents were first-time campers. Out of those who responded, 83.7% were males. Most respondents were in the age group of 46 years or above. Approximately 51% of the respondents had a bachelor's degree or above. This represents the highest level of education completed by respondents when they participated in the survey. The average monthly income for domestic visitor respondents was approximately 378 USD, while the figure for foreign visitors was 7748 USD. Understandably, the mean monthly income of

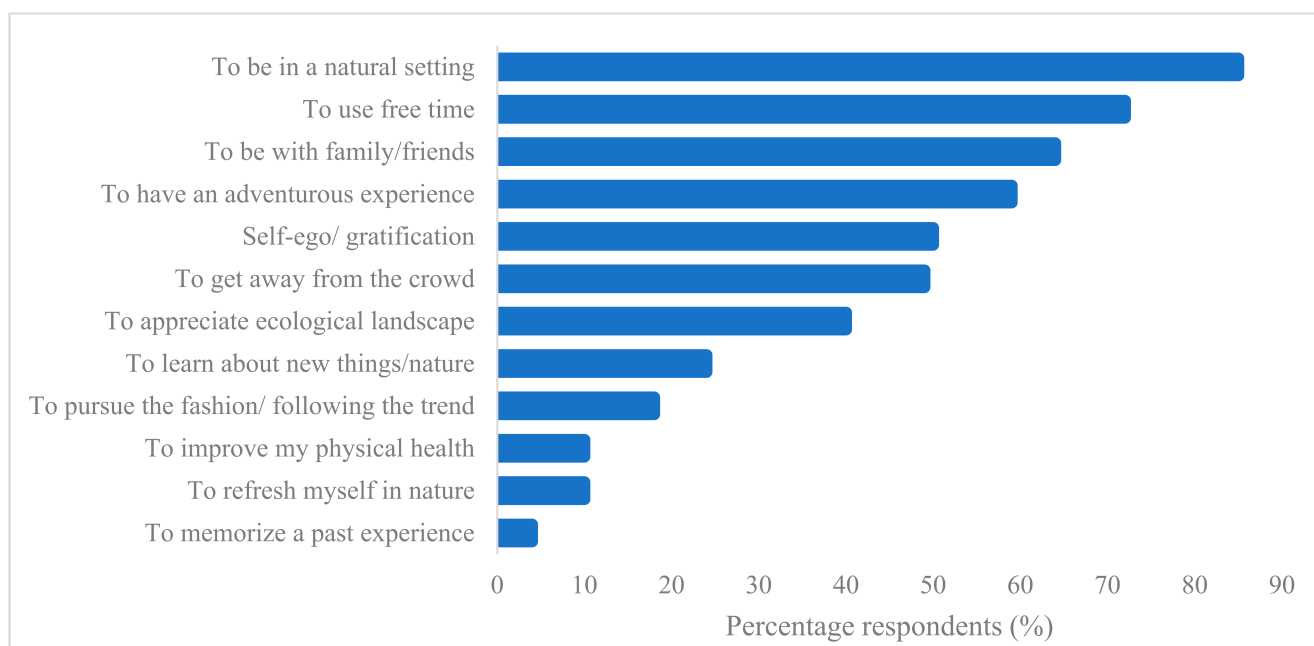
locals and foreigners showed a great disparity as most foreign visitors were from Western European countries.

**Table 1.** General respondent socio-demographics profile.

Socio-Demographic Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	169	83.67
Female	33	16.33
Age		
18–25 years	29	14.36
26–35 years	58	28.71
36–45 years	53	26.23
46 or older	62	30.69
Education		
High school (A/L) or below	41	20.30
Some post-high school education	58	28.07
Bachelor’s degree	59	29.20
Graduate degree	44	21.80
Nationality		
Local	180	89.10
Foreign	22	10.90
Individual monthly ncome		Average
Local visitors	139	USD 378
Foreign visitors	18	USD 7748

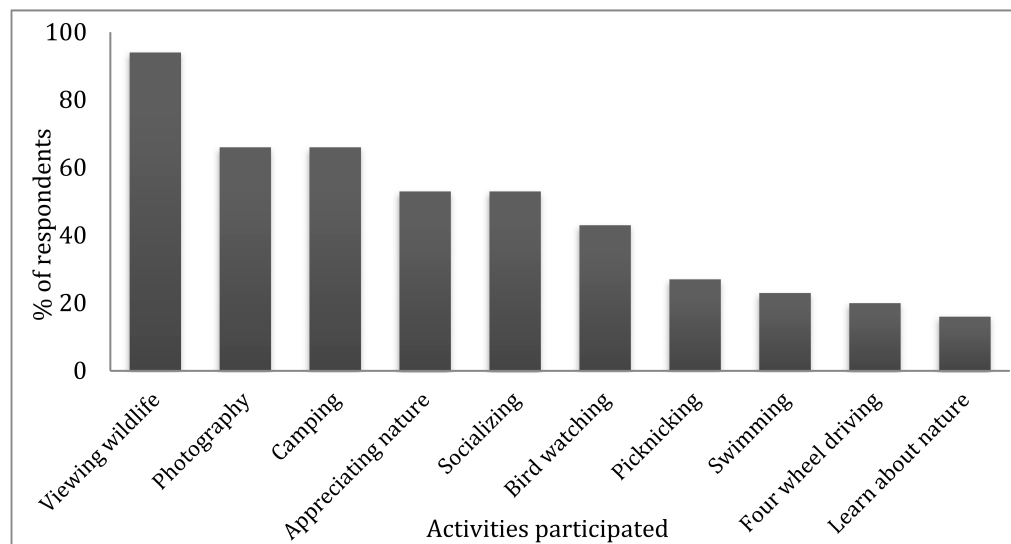
### 3.2. Visitor Motives for Camping

Respondent motives for engaging in camping in NPs of Sri Lanka varied widely. Based on the frequencies, ‘to be in a natural setting’ was the primary motivation for most visitors to visit a forest-based attraction. This was followed by ‘to use the free time’ and ‘to spend time with ‘family/friends’. Motivational items ‘to refresh myself in nature’ and ‘to memorize a past experience’ were the lowest ranked (Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** Visitor motivations to engage in camping (n = 202, multiple responses possible).

The purpose and activities engaged during camping also showed great variability. The most participated activities were viewing wildlife (94%), photography (66%), and camping (66%). ‘Learning about nature’ (16%) was the lowest-rated purpose/activity by respondents (Figure 3).



**Figure 3.** Activities that respondents participated during the stay (n = 202, multiple responses possible).

On average, respondents visited NPs about four times per year to camp. Most of the respondents reserved campsites for two nights (45%), and this was followed by one-night stays (Figure 3). About 2% of respondents stated that they stayed at a campsite for more than 3 nights though it is not allowed by the DWC. About 70% of camping parties comprised 6 to 10 members (groups of friends). Interestingly, 15% of camping parties who occupied campsites had more than 10 members despite 10 members being the maximum allowed number of individuals on DWC campsite.

### 3.3. Identifying Camper Segments Based on Motivations

One of the main objectives of this study was to identify the underlying motivations of shelter camping. Respondents were asked to state their level of agreement with a list of 12 motivational items (Table 2). Based on the mean scores, ‘to be in a natural setting’ was the primary motivation for most visitors to camping. This was followed by ‘to use free time’ and ‘to be with family/friends’. Motivational items ‘to refresh myself in nature’ and ‘to memorize a past experience’ were ranked lowest. Motivational items listed in Table 2 may thus represent different underlying motivational dimensions. To derive the underlying motivation dimension, a factor analysis with principal axis factoring was performed (Table 3). The motivational factors/dimensions extracted from the analysis were named ‘Adventurous socializing experience’, ‘Esteem and escape’, and ‘Nature-based learning’, respectively based on factor loadings derived from motivation items. The Cronbach’s Alpha ( $\alpha$ ) coefficient was used to determine the internal consistency coefficients of the three underlying motivation dimensions/factors derived by the factor analysis. Cronbach’s Alpha over 0.70 for the three motivation dimensions indicates highly acceptable internal consistency reliability (Table 3).

**Table 2.** Means and standard deviations for motivation items.

Motivational Item	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
To be in a natural setting	202	4.41	0.86
To use free time	202	4.39	0.92
To be with family/friends	202	4.36	0.96
To have an adventurous experience	202	4.36	0.98
To get away from the crowd	202	3.77	1.07
To appreciate ecological landscape	202	3.67	1.03
To learn about new things/nature	202	2.73	1.45
To pursue the fashion/following the trend	202	2.72	1.67
Self-ego/gratification	202	2.60	1.98
To improve my physical health	202	1.77	1.10
To refresh myself in nature	202	1.64	1.55
To memorize a past experience	202	0.70	0.65

**Table 3.** Underlying motivational dimensions/factors extracted from Factor Analysis.

Motivational Item	Factor			Cronbach's Alpha ( $\alpha$ )
	Adventurous Socializing Experience	Esteem and Escape	Nature-Based Learning	
To have an adventurous experience	0.79	0.29	−0.32	0.79
To be with family/friends	0.66	0.09	−0.20	
To pursue the fashion/following the trend	0.65	0.36	−0.35	
To use free time	0.54	−0.08	−0.04	
Self-ego/gratification	0.21	0.93	−0.29	0.80
To memorize the past experience	0.21	0.82	−0.27	
To refresh myself in nature	−0.40	0.61	0.07	
To improve my physical health	0.00	0.58	0.03	
To get away from crowd	0.12	0.57	0.16	
To be in a natural setting	−0.33	0.19	0.74	0.80
To appreciate ecological landscape	−0.38	−0.22	0.73	
To learn more about new things/nature	−0.33	−0.02	0.51	

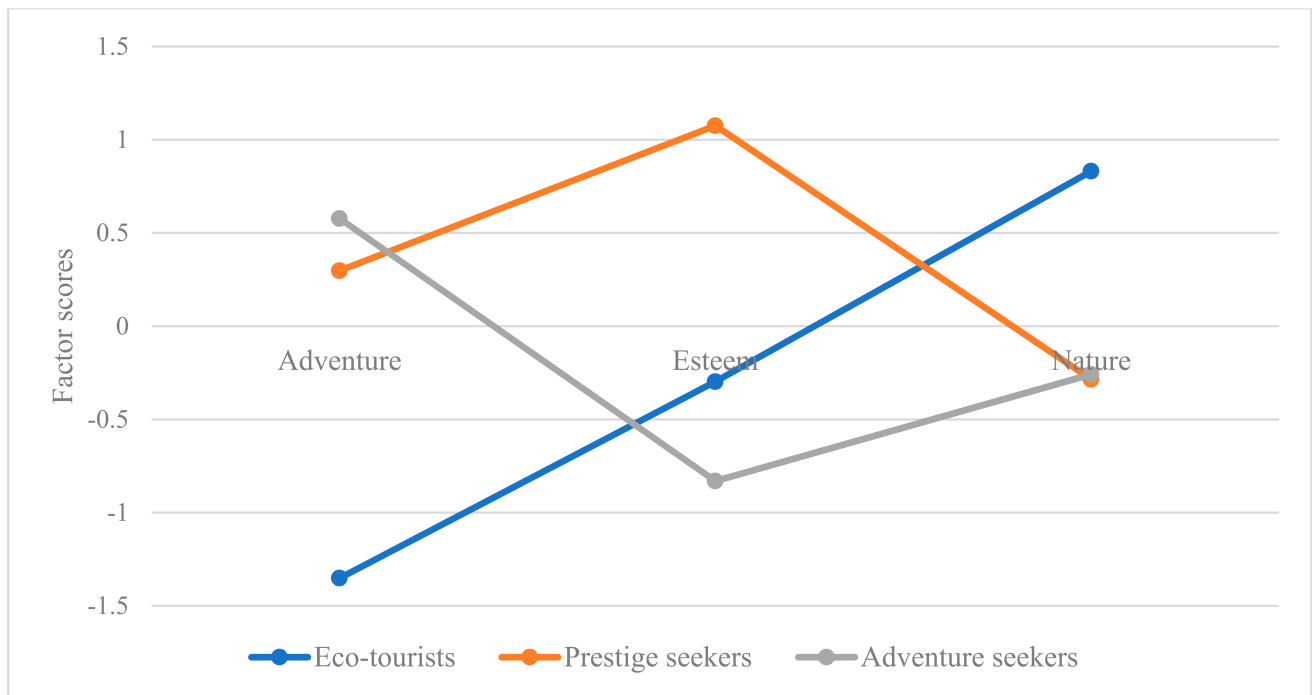
In order to identify distinct respondent groups based on motivational dimensions, cluster analysis was performed using the factor scores. This yielded three clusters which were named based on mean factor scores for motivational dimensions (Figure 4). The three clusters/visitor segments were labelled as 'Eco-tourists', 'Prestige-seekers', and 'Adventure seekers'. Accordingly, there were 79 adventure seekers (39%), 74 prestige seekers (37%), and 49 eco-tourists (24%) in the sample. As illustrated in Figure 4, the visitor segment 'Eco-tourists' scored highest on the motivational dimension of 'nature-based learning'. This dimension is a critical component in defining ecotourism. In contrast, 'Adventure-seekers' scored highest on the 'adventurous socializing experience' dimension. A high positive mean score for 'Esteem and escape' was associated with 'Prestige-seekers'. Motivational differences among visitor segments were further analysed using One-way ANOVA and Scheffe Post Hoc comparisons (Table 4). Results suggest that the three motivational dimensions significantly differ among visitor segments.

**Table 4.** Comparisons of mean factor scores of motivational dimensions between tourist segments.

Motivational Dimensions	Eco-Tourists (n = 49)	Prestige Seekers (n = 74)	Adventure Seekers (n = 79)	F-Ratio	p Value
Adventurous socializing experience	−1.35 <sup>a</sup>	0.30 <sup>b</sup>	0.58 <sup>c</sup>	237.22	0.001
Esteem and escape	−0.30 <sup>a</sup>	1.08 <sup>b</sup>	−0.83 <sup>c</sup>	241.12	0.001
Nature-based learning	0.83 <sup>a</sup>	−0.29 <sup>b</sup>	−0.26 <sup>b</sup>	43.64	0.001

Items with different superscripts (a, b, c) indicate significant differences according to Scheffe's Post Hoc test.





**Figure 4.** Variation of mean factor scores of motivation dimensions across the three tourist segments.

Scheffe's Post Hoc comparisons further explain where the motivational differences lie. Ecotourists scored significantly high on 'Nature-based learning' compared to the other two segments, while Prestige seekers and Adventure seekers did not significantly differ on the motivational dimension 'Nature-based learning'. Prestige seekers scored significantly higher on 'Esteem and escape' as compared to the other two segments. Adventure seekers scored significantly higher on 'Adventure and socializing' while the Ecotourists scored least on this motivational dimension (Table 4).

### 3.4. Socio-Demographic Profiles of Camper Segments

The three camper segments were described in terms of their socio-demographic characteristics (Table 5). The 'Ecotourists' segment is characterized by young males, with approximately 65% below 36 years of age. This segment includes individuals with a comparatively higher education level with 94% having a bachelor's or graduate degree. The individual monthly income for local ecotourists was 290 USD. These visitors on average spent 2.6 nights at the campsite. The segment identified as 'Prestige seekers' was dominated by males (Table 5). Approximately 89% of the Prestige seekers were over 35 years of age, and about 71% of these individuals had an education level of a bachelor's or graduate degree. Their individual monthly income was 486 USD. An individual in this segment on average spent 1.6 nights at the campsite. 'Adventure seekers' on the other hand were dominated by male visitors with over 90% having an education level of high school or below. About 60% of the visitors in this segment were below 36 years of age. The average individual monthly income was 393 USD. On average, they spent 2.2 nights at campsites.

**Table 5.** Socio-demographic profiles of visitor segments.

Socio-Demographic Variable	Eco-Tourists (n = 49)	Prestige Seekers (n = 74)	Adventure Seekers (n = 79)
Gender			
Male	73%	85%	89%
Female	27%	15%	11%
Age			
18–25 years	20%	1%	23%
26–35 years	45%	9%	37%
36–45 years	22%	36%	19%
46 or older	12%	53%	21%
Education			
High school or below	2%	10%	40%
Some post-high school education	4%	19%	51%
Bachelor’s degree	51%	43%	6%
Graduate degree	43%	28%	3%
Individual monthly income of local visitors (USD)	290	486	393
Length of stay (nights)	2.6	1.6	2.2

### 3.5. On-Site Visitor Behaviours

Respondents in general favorably rated behavioural statements that were positively worded (first 8 statements in Table 6). They further rated the negative side of the scale on statements worded to validate inappropriate behaviours, i.e., see the bottom 7 behavioural statements in Table 6. Comparison of behavioural items using One-way ANOVA tests with Scheffe’s Post Hoc test further revealed that the ecotourism segment scored higher on positively worded items and scored lower on negatively worded statements (Table 6). For instance, the Ecotourists differed significantly from other visitor groups on the behavioral items ‘Used only the provided campsite toilet facilities’, ‘Collected firewood (lying on the ground) from the vicinity of the campsite’, ‘Disposed of food waste to nearby forest or water body so that animals can feed on them’, ‘Disposed of food waste in designated areas at the campsite’, ‘Buried organic/food waste’, ‘Used nearby forest to cut and collect firewood’ and ‘Buried non-biodegradable waste (ex: plastic, polythene)’.

In contrast, Prestige seekers and Adventure seekers preferred collecting firewood from the vicinity of the campsite, and further ventured into nearby forests to cut and collect firewood. They also engaged in inappropriate visitor behaviors such as disposing of food waste in nearby forest or in an adjacent water body and disposing food waste in undesignated areas of the campsite.

### 3.6. Effect of Biophysical Impacts on Visitor Experience

Observations made by respondents during the camping period were used to evaluate environmental impacts on the visitor experience. According to Table 7, ‘overall cleanliness’ was the most highly rated attribute affecting the camping experience. This was closely followed by ‘presence of wildlife at or around the campsite’, and ‘availability of wood for firewood’. This suggests that these attributes are at a moderately satisfactory level at the campsites the respondents visited. However, solid waste disposal, vehicle-related impacts, vandalism and littering were at levels that negatively influenced the camper’s experience.

**Table 6.** Means scores for onsite visitor behaviours of campers.

Behavioral Item	Mean				F	p
	All Respondents (n = 202)	Eco-Tourists (n = 49)	Prestige Seekers (n = 74)	Adventure Seekers (n = 79)		
During the camping period, I ...						
Observed nature and wildlife thoroughly	4.29	4.41	4.30	4.23	1.026	0.360
Collected and brought back all my polythene and plastic waste	4.24	4.31	4.26	4.16	1.628	0.199
Followed the instructions/guidelines provided before the tour guide	4.23	4.37	4.22	4.17	2.346	0.098
Used only the designated areas for camping-related activities	4.12	4.24	4.11	4.06	1.785	0.170
Used only the provided campsite toilet facilities	3.41	3.92 <sup>a</sup>	3.29 <sup>b</sup>	3.18 <sup>b</sup>	10.321	0.001
Used foot trails other than the trails created by the park management	3.41	3.41	3.45	3.39	0.14	0.871
Collected firewood (lying on the ground) from the vicinity of the campsite	3.41	3.06 <sup>a</sup>	3.38 <sup>b</sup>	3.68 <sup>b</sup>	5.357	0.005
Disposed food waste to nearby forest or water body so that animals can feed on them	2.82	2.41 <sup>a</sup>	2.81 <sup>b</sup>	3.12 <sup>c</sup>	5.415	0.005
Disposed food waste in designated areas at the campsite	2.77	3.12 <sup>a</sup>	2.73 <sup>b</sup>	2.64 <sup>b</sup>	3.272	0.040
Buried organic/food waste	2.61	2.22 <sup>a</sup>	2.77 <sup>b</sup>	2.74 <sup>b</sup>	4.12	0.018
Used nearby forest to cut and collect firewood	2.42	1.94 <sup>a</sup>	2.32 <sup>b</sup>	2.84 <sup>b</sup>	12.445	0.001
Fed wildlife	2.12	2.06	2.04	2.25	1.136	0.323
Burnt all polythene and plastic waste items before leaving the site	2.04	1.88	2.18	2.14	1.393	0.251
Buried non-biodegradable waste (ex: plastic, polythene)	1.81	1.69 <sup>a</sup>	2.20 <sup>b</sup>	2.17 <sup>b</sup>	4.467	0.032

Items with different superscripts (a, b, c) indicate significant differences according to Scheffe's Post Hoc test.

**Table 7.** Rating of selected biophysical attributes at campsites by respondents.

Biophysical Attribute Affecting the Camping Experience	Mean				F	p
	All Respondents (n = 202)	Eco Tourists (n = 49)	Prestige Seekers (n = 74)	Adventure Seekers (n = 79)		
Overall cleanliness	3.61	3.22 <sup>a</sup>	3.59 <sup>b</sup>	3.91 <sup>b</sup>	8.336	0.001
Presence of wildlife on or around campsite	3.58	3.73	3.63	3.47	1.856	0.159
Availability of wood for firewood	3.38	3.27	3.36	3.51	1.255	0.287
Poorly maintained walk trails	3.02	3.18	3.00	2.95	1.320	0.271
Signs of vegetation loss	2.99	3.31 <sup>a</sup>	2.95 <sup>b</sup>	2.82 <sup>b</sup>	4.682	0.011
Erosion of trails due to human activity	2.91	2.89	2.92	2.91	0.000	0.999
Erosion of riverbanks due to human activity	2.86	3.06	2.75	2.83	2.599	0.077
Sanitary facilities	2.86	2.78	2.86	2.90	0.222	0.801
Presence of invasive plant species	2.82	2.94	2.79	2.73	0.440	0.645
Trampling of vegetation	2.78	2.87	2.90	2.60	2.339	0.100
Tree damage	2.73	2.69	2.72	2.79	0.180	0.835
Presence of litter	2.69	2.82	2.64	2.70	0.454	0.636
Vandalism activities	2.68	2.78	2.61	2.70	0.911	0.404
Vehicle related impacts	2.54	2.96 <sup>a</sup>	2.50 <sup>b</sup>	2.29 <sup>b</sup>	9.113	0.001
Solid waste disposal	2.52	2.63 <sup>a</sup>	2.61 <sup>a</sup>	2.29 <sup>b</sup>	3.249	0.041

Items with different superscripts (a, b) indicate significant differences according to Scheffe's Post Hoc test.

ANOVA test results showed no significant differences in mean ratings for biophysical attributes among the three visitor segments except for ‘overall cleanliness’, ‘signs of vegetation loss’, ‘vehicle-related impacts’ and ‘solid waste disposal’. Prestige seekers and Adventure seekers rated ‘overall cleanliness’ of the campsite as a key attribute that affected their camping experience. In contrast, they placed less importance on the presence of ‘Vehicle-related impacts’ as an attribute that affected their experience. According to Scheffe’s Post Hoc comparisons, Eco-tourists and Prestige seekers placed comparatively higher emphasis on ‘waste disposal’ issues at campsites as aspects affecting their quality of experience.

### 3.7. Visitor Perceptions of Management Actions of Campsites

Most visitors supported the management activities of a wildlife officer accompanying camping groups during their stay. This is especially the case regarding the taking of management action against those users who engaged in inappropriate behaviour, such as excessive noise and liquor use. At the same time, unchanged campsite user fees, education and awareness for campers on minimal impact use and camping techniques using printed material and interpretation and provision of signs of direction to campsites were all management actions that visitors rated positively (Table 8). Improvements to existing sanitary facilities/toilets were highlighted especially by Prestige seekers and Adventure seekers at all NP campsites. These respondents, however, did not support the construction of a limited number of walk trails around the campsite and the provision of firewood by park management.

**Table 8.** Mean preference for campsite management actions.

Management Action	Mean				F	p
	All Respondents (n = 202)	Eco Tourists (n = 49)	Prestige Seekers (n = 74)	Adventure Seekers (n = 79)		
Campsite user groups should be accompanied by a wildlife officer	4.74	4.78	4.71	4.75	0.263	0.769
Legal actions should be imposed on inappropriate behavior (noise, excessive liquor use)	4.42	4.43	4.48	4.35	0.861	0.424
The current user fee for campsite usage is reasonable.	4.15	3.78 <sup>a</sup>	4.22 <sup>b</sup>	4.34 <sup>b</sup>	7.706	0.001
Educate campers about minimal impact use and camping techniques using printed material and interpretation.	4.08	4.04	4.16	4.03	0.583	0.559
Park management should provide directional signage for campers.	3.99	4.10	4.04	3.91	2.008	0.137
Provide minimal structures to stabilize riverbanks.	3.39	3.53 <sup>a</sup>	3.51 <sup>a</sup>	3.23 <sup>b</sup>	4.113	0.018
Fire rings should only be established at an indicated place.	3.35	3.76 <sup>a</sup>	3.33 <sup>b</sup>	3.09 <sup>b</sup>	4.883	0.009
Human-made structures (such as camping platforms, benches & fire rings) should be established within the campsite.	2.98	2.92	3.04	2.95	0.219	0.804
The sanitary facilities provided are satisfactory. (e.g., Toilets)	2.80	3.01 <sup>b</sup>	2.53 <sup>a</sup>	2.92 <sup>b</sup>	2.798	0.048
Limited number of walk trails should be established around the camp site.	2.77	3.24 <sup>a</sup>	2.70 <sup>b</sup>	2.52 <sup>b</sup>	8.577	0.001
Firewood should be provided by the park management.	2.45	2.65 <sup>a</sup>	2.48 <sup>b</sup>	2.25 <sup>c</sup>	5.015	0.008

Items with different superscripts (a, b, c) indicate significant differences according to Scheffe’s Post Hoc test.

A comparison of visitor segments further revealed that Eco-tourists significantly differ from other visitor segments in terms of their preference for management actions of increasing campsite user fees, limiting campfires to designated areas, establishing a limited number of walk trails around the campsite, and provision of firewood by park management (Table 8). Prestige seekers and Adventure seekers were of the opinion that the current user fee for campsite usage is reasonable. These two visitor segments further preferred multiple fire rigs and more walk trails on campsites while disapproving of the idea of park management providing firewood for campers.

## 4. Discussion

Published research on visitors to Sri Lanka's NPs has primarily focused on understanding their demographics, environmental attitudes, on-site behaviors, visitor satisfaction, and visitor willingness to pay for conservation [10,43,51,56,57]. This study expands on previous research by providing visitor data on a little examined dimension by exploring a highly specialized and expanding visitor segment of campers in Sri Lanka's NPs.

### 4.1. Rustic Shelter Camper Demographics

According to Brooker and Joppe [9], the camping and outdoor activity segment appeal to all age groups, except the adolescent category. However, such demographic descriptions are predominantly based on studies in temperate countries. According to the socio-demographic profile of respondents in our study, well-educated middle-aged males appear to dominate the rustic shelter camper segment in Sri Lanka. Perera et al. [40] reported similar demographic profiles for visitors to forest-based recreational areas in Sri Lanka. However, a higher proportion of female respondents have been reported in surveys of campers in Taiwan [28], South Africa [25] and Denmark [21]. These studies have described the camper segment as highly educated and middle-aged. Furthermore, Brooker and Joppe [9] reported the possible ethnic and cultural influences regarding preferences to engage in camping. This may help to explain the male-dominant camper segment observed in our study.

Our results suggest that the 'Ecotourists' visitor segment to campsites in Sri Lanka shares many similarities with the ecotourist segments described in the literature. These similarities include having favorable attitudes towards the environment, ecosystem conservation, and motivation to learn and appreciate nature [58,59]. However, noticeable demographic differences exist in terms of gender composition and income. The demographic profile of the Ecotourist segment described in this study is comparable with that of Perera et al. [40] with male gender dominance, and comparatively high levels of education but also lower incomes, being key characteristics. Though not primarily driven by eco-centric motivations, "Prestige seekers" and "Adventure seekers" are the dominant visitor segments at campsites in Sri Lanka. The Prestige seekers were characterized by being in the middle to older age group, are highly educated with higher income levels, and preferentially engage in camping for self-esteem-related motivations. Adventure seekers on the other hand are young to middle-aged individuals with an average educational level and a moderate income who seek adventurous experiences in nature.

### 4.2. Motivational Factors and Camper Segments

In general, the main motivations of campers reported in this study are comparable with those in the literature, such as escape, rejuvenation, and socializing with family, friends and like-minded people [9,16,17,21,29,43]. Major camping activities are compared further with previous visitor studies conducted in natural areas [40,43]. However, 'self-gratification' and 'adventure' appear to be significant 'push' factors for rustic shelter campers in the Sri Lankan context.

This study identified three distinct segments of campers to NPs of Sri Lanka based on their motivations for camping. Accordingly, the 'Ecotourist' segment is characterized by motivation for a nature-based learning experience, an essential component in defining ecotourists [40]. The 'Prestige-seeker' segment is characterized by motives to escape, along with self-gratification, i.e., they considered camping as an activity to achieve esteem and self-actualization. On the other hand, 'Adventure-seekers' are individuals involved in camping to gain an adventurous experience while socializing with friends/like-minded persons.

### 4.3. On-Site Behaviours

In this study, comparisons were made between visitor segments to determine how they differ from each other in terms of actual on-site behaviour. Not surprisingly, 'Ecotourists' showed the most desired environmentally responsible behaviours while camping [40,60].

Although 'Prestige seekers' engaged in camping mainly for self-actualization reasons, they exhibited acceptable on-site behaviours while having an intellectual curiosity about the natural environment and wildlife. On the other hand, 'Adventure seekers' refrained from physically disturbing the natural environment to a large extent but had little intellectual curiosity about flora, fauna, and ecosystems.

In the context of this study, the camper segment identified as Prestige-seekers shows more or less similar on-site behaviours to 'Ecotourists'. Although they undertook camping for more self-centered motives, they seem to be knowledgeable about the environment and are likely to comply with park policies and follow instructions while they are at the campsite. Hence, this seems to be the feasible market segment to target from both environmental sustainability and nature-based tourism development perspectives in NPs.

On the other hand, Adventure tourists are predominantly young adult males who visit forest-based attractions seeking an adventurous experience. As this camper segment consists of individuals who exhibit the least environmentally desired behaviours, exposing sensitive ecosystems to these types of visitors can further stress ecosystems. Since it is impossible to prevent such campers from entering NPs, it is essential to have strong visitor policies and monitoring mechanisms. By identifying park usage activities that different camper groups are interested in, park managers can allocate different user zones for different activities while the nature-based tourism industry can design tour packages to suit different park usage levels [12,13].

In general, the 'Ecotourist' segment had the most desired pro-environmental behaviours. They significantly diverged from the 'Prestige-seekers' and 'Adventure-seekers' in terms of sourcing fuelwood and disposing of waste in a more environmentally friendly manner during camping. Although all visitor segments denied feeding wildlife, Prestige-seekers and Adventure-seekers admitted that they dispose of food waste into nearby water bodies or in places it can be acquired by wildlife. This hints at the desire of Prestige-seekers and Adventure-seekers to interact closely with wildlife. At many campsites in dry zone NPs of Sri Lanka, toque macaques (*Macaca sinica*) are becoming nuisance species as they have become habituated to humans and feed on discarded food. Wild boars (*Sus scrofa*) are also attracted to places where food waste is discarded. Such direct or indirect interactions with wildlife may cause harm to wildlife or pose a risk to visitors and are therefore considered undesirable visitor behaviours within the scope of ecotourism [61]. This calls for appropriate management actions such as the application of signage at campsites, visitor education, and monitoring to discourage wildlife feeding [62,63]. Even though current park management strategies prohibit the disposal of waste at campsites, it was further revealed that 'Prestige-seekers' and 'Adventure-seekers' buried biodegradable and non-biodegradable waste on-site before leaving, believing that it is an environmentally desirable practice.

#### 4.4. Impact of Campsite Biophysical Impacts on Visitor Experience

This study further examined the visitor experience of environmental impacts and how such impacts affect the quality of their experience. Most respondents considered overall cleanliness, presence of wildlife, availability of wood for firewood, and sanitary facilities as the most important factors for their satisfaction. Solid waste disposal, vehicle-related impacts, vandalism, and littering were the attributes that were at a level that negatively influenced the camper experience. These aspects need appropriate management attention in order to provide visitors with a higher quality experience [15,64]. This study further indicates that Prestige-seekers and Adventure-seekers desire a cleaner environment. These camper segments can be considered 'soft-core' ecotourists [65] as previous studies report most visitors to Sri Lanka's NPs are on the soft-core end of the spectrum [40,57,66,67]. Thus, any form of camping tourism development in NPs targeting these two visitor segments should pay particular attention to proper waste disposal and maintaining cleanliness. In contrast, Prestige-seekers and Adventure-seekers appeared to be less sensitive to vehicle-related impacts and signs of vegetation loss evident on campsites. The Ecotourist segment was more concerned about these particular biophysical impacts. Thus, appropriate mea-

asures to control and monitor biophysical impacts will be necessary to ensure campsite user satisfaction in the longer term.

#### 4.5. Campsite User Perceptions of Management Actions

Regarding campsite management and policy, visitors generally emphasized the importance of measures to maintain the environmental quality of campsites and acting against those who engage in inappropriate behaviour such as noise and excessive liquor use. At the same time, visitors rated unchanged campsite user fees, education and awareness for campers on minimal impact use and camping techniques, using printed material and interpretation and the provision of signs of direction on campsites as positive management actions. The respondents at all NP campsites highlighted the need for improvements to existing sanitary facilities/toilets.

Survey outcomes suggest that management actions that are more conservation-oriented while accommodating better recreation opportunities for visitors should be favoured [44,58]. The most preferred management action by campers was the provision of a wildlife officer to accompany groups of campers during their stay.

The Ecotourist segment, in general, favoured management actions to maintain environmental quality. 'Prestige-seekers' and 'Adventure-seekers' favoured allowing campfires at multiple places as per their convenience. All visitor segments disapprove of the provision of firewood by the park management, with 'Prestige-seekers' and 'Adventure-seekers' strongly disagreeing. Loss of woody debris in and around campsites is a biophysical impact of concern that may require specific management interventions [3,15,37,68]. Nonetheless, the effectiveness of management interventions such as providing fuelwood is inconclusive. For instance, Smith and Newsome [37] observed less coarse woody debris around campsites despite firewood being provided by the park management. While Smith et al. [68] reported the provision of firewood is an effective strategy to reduce the loss of woody debris.

#### 4.6. Management Implications

The dominance of Prestige seekers and Adventure seekers at Sri Lanka's campsites suggests that these are feasible camper segments to target in developing new tourism products. The sizeable market of Prestige seekers also indicates a growing interest in outdoor experiences and nature among high-income, well-educated people who are camping. This is a plus for park management and the ecotourism industry as this market segment is likely to be more committed to quality experiences and facilities. Adventure seekers further demanded enhanced facilities and a cleaner environment at campsites. Hence, strategies to improve facilities at campsites and maintain their cleanliness are important aspects to consider in developing and managing camping facilities. Campsites with superior facilities could be specifically developed/offered to target these high-spending market segments. As both Ecotourists and Prestige seekers are highly educated and have pro-environmental behaviors, tourism providers and park management can develop marketing and promotional strategies with meaningful messages to reach these market segments. As certain biophysical impacts evident at campsites appear to be concerning specific camper segments, it is necessary for PA management to introduce appropriate management actions and monitoring systems.

#### 4.7. Study Limitations and Future Research

In this study, data collection was carried out through a telephone survey, hence the sample captured in this study represents mainly the domestic visitors to forest-based recreational sites in Sri Lanka. An on-site personal interview method would have yielded a more accurate cross-section of campers to NPs in Sri Lanka. Accurate identification of the characteristics of different camper segments is important in developing and marketing new tourism products and in informing policy. Considering the growing global visitor preference for alternative accommodation and nature-related experiences such as camping, understanding the motivations and characteristics of foreign visitors to campsites is of

critical importance for NPs and forest-based attractions in Sri Lanka, as this can potentially open new revenue generation options. The sampling method used in this study did not capture many foreign visitors, and non-English speaking visitors had to be further excluded. At the time this work was carried out developing questionnaires in multiple languages was prohibitively expensive. Furthermore, foreign respondents' demographic information such as income was not used in describing visitor segments since there were significant disparities between the income of local and foreign visitors. Hence, it is recommended to develop separate visitor profiles for foreign and local visitors using a sufficient sampling approach and size. This will allow a better understanding of foreign visitation to campsites in Sri Lanka, allowing park management and industry to take advantage of new and emerging visitor markets.

## 5. Conclusions

This study identified 'nature-based learning', 'esteem and escape', and 'seeking adventurous socializing experience' as the key underlying motivations of rustic shelter campers in Sri Lanka's NPs. The study identified three distinct camper segments based on their underlying motivations: Ecotourists, Prestige-seekers, and Adventure-seekers. These camper segments differ in their on-site behaviours, perceptions of biophysical impacts of camping and campsite management actions. The Ecotourist segment reported the most desired motives, attitudes and behaviours in terms of environmental conditions. However, most campsite users belong to the identified Prestige-seeker and Adventure-seeker segments. The Prestige-seeker segment appears to be the most attractive market segment to target in terms of new product development and conservation as it includes high-income and highly educated individuals with eco-centric attitudes and behaviors. Prestige-seekers in particular demand better facilities at campsites. The Ecotourist segment displays the most desirable on-site behaviors. Targeted awareness programs and clear guidelines on camping can be beneficial to inculcate pro-environmental attitudes and behaviors in Prestige-seekers and Adventure-seekers. The campsite features desired by the dominant visitor segments may need to be considered by park management and the nature-based tourism industry in regard to new product/service development and campsite management. In general, biophysical impacts had less influence on campsite user experience except for improper waste disposal and overall cleanliness of campsites. This calls for appropriate management actions such as visitor awareness, monitoring, zonation of activity areas, and enforcement of park campsite user policies to ensure enhanced visitor experience while causing minimal impacts on the environment.

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