

Tourism Policy of Sabaragamuwa Province

Sustainable development of tourism in Sabaragamuwa Province requires strategic destination management approach to come up with feasible solutions in order to mitigate issues and problems that the industry is experiencing today. Further, to fully realise the opportunities assuring mutual benefits through tourism, capitalise on strengths, understanding shared responsibility of stakeholders and communicate it appropriately expecting strategic commitment from the industry and its many partners are prime objectives of provincial tourism policy and strategy.

Policy Dimensions

The necessity of handling tourism at provincial level with an explicit policy has been recognised by the Ministry of Tourism, Sabaragamuwa Provincial Council. It is also vital to highlight that tourism links with other sectors of provincial and national economies for its existence and growth. The provincial policy for tourism to be proposed and is expected to underlie the following dimensions.

Visitor satisfaction: Tourist satisfaction primarily reflects the service quality and is crucial to the continued viability of any service business, including tourism businesses. Therefore, consideration on this aspect is important to successful destination marketing because it influences the choice of destination, the consumption of products and services, and the decision to return. Consideration should be on local and non-local visitor satisfaction. It is vital to understand the areas such as how do visitors assess their satisfaction with tourist attractions as well as the factors influencing visitor satisfaction. The benefits of visitor satisfaction from destination's point of view are positive word of mouth and repeat visitation. Both stimulate the demand and improve competitiveness of the destination.

Protection and conservation of the environment: Environmental protection and conservation is a practice of protecting the environment, on individual, organisational or governmental level, for the benefit of the natural environment and (or) humans. The emphasis should be given for ecologically sustainable development for advocating and stimulating better design of tourist facilities, develop attractions, establishing Visitor Impact Management (VIM) measures to mitigate negative environmental impacts and over exploitation of natural resources for tourist use that protect (natural) resources while enhancing visitor satisfaction.

Assuring adequate rewards for developers and benefits to the community: It is obvious that the diverse stakeholders who involve in tourism seek numerous rewards for their involvement, commitment, and resources deployed for development. The proposed tourism development within the Province should focus on this aspect and be responsible for delivering such rewards for the stakeholders who actively take part in every aspect of tourism from planning and development to operations.

Provincial Tourism Policy

Expansion of tourism in the Province should be given high priority for its potential to contribute the socio-economic development. Hence, it is essential to establish an explicit policy to enhance quality and harmonious development of tourism enabling its diverse stakeholders to take part in the process successfully in an orderly and disciplined manner. Moreover, tourism development should be an outcome of planned and coordinated effort of public, private, non-governmental organisations, and the community. Considering the above, the provincial tourism policy is presented within the national tourism policy framework of the country.

International Tourism: International tourism should be recognized as the significant foreign exchange earner; possibility to cater high spending tourists; enhancing better understanding of Sabaragamuwa Province in Sri Lanka among international community.

Domestic Tourism: Domestic tourism encourages redistribution of national income strengthening provincial economy that helps awakening regional development; help establishing social harmony; and better utilization of leisure time by Sri Lankans.

Integrated Tourism Development: Stimulates inter-sectoral linkages (such as agriculture, gem mining, cottage industries, indigenous medicine and constructions) and multiplier effects; interactions among guests and host community that leads to share benefits- material, social, and personal.

Public Sector Involvement: Public sector involvement is necessary as political will becomes an important dimension in policy and planning. This involvement lies on the areas such as providing public utilities, facilitation, research & education, destination marketing, coordination, planning, financing, regulation, legislation, controlling and monitoring.

Private Sector Involvement: Provision of tourism investment and services and the search for market are coming from private sector. Mainly tour operations, travel agencies, accommodation, small business, etc. may be efficiently run by private sector.

Community Involvement: Benefits of tourism development should reach local communities. The communities may involve either directly or indirectly in tourism development of the Province. This participation must be encouraged and facilitated as certain communities require capacity improvements. The necessary mechanisms must properly be placed for building awareness on potential impacts both positive and negative of tourism in communities.

Mass Tourism: Mass tourism causes better utilization of existing tourism plant of the Province while helping to sustain the image of the destination. However, it is expected that mass tourism development and growth within the Province should be encouraged within appropriate standards and planning guidelines.

Class Tourism: Appeal for unique and specific tourism attractions of the Province highlighting the social compatibility, cultural acceptability, environmental friendly, economically viable forms of tourism development that encourages better understanding and education through visitation.

Phase of Tourism Development: This is to commit the tourism development to sustain the growth on the long run through gradual development in order to foster better adoptability and optimal utilisation of resources.

Source: Sabaragamuwa Province Tourism Master Plan: Development Policy and Strategy for 2009 and Beyond, Ministry of Provincial Roads Development, Rural Infrastructure and Tourism, Sabaragamuwa Provincial Council. pp. 10-20.