

# Exploring Tourism Risk at Jaffna Peninsula with Special Reference to Keerimalai Ritual Beach Site in Sri Lanka

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Ritual beach sites are considered as one of the major travel motives for the tourists to visit Sri Lanka. Jaffna is rich with wonderful ritual beach sites including Keerimalai and Villunri areas. Many local and foreign tourists arrive at these ritual beach sites every day. Ensuring safety of tourists in the tourist destinations is considered as one of the important factors which determine the revisit and for remaining the higher number of tourist arrivals. But, the studies about the risks for tourists at the destinations, especially in the ritual beach sites, were very rarely conducted by the researchers. Therefore, a study to explore the tourism risks at the ritual beach site was considered very important. Further, if the tourists feel that the particular destination is risky, the image of the destination shall be affected and also tourists may negatively convey the message to others. Therefore, the main objective of this study is to identify the factors influencing the tourism risk in Jaffna Keerimalai ritual sea site. This study also recommends overcoming destination risks to ensure propensity of the repeat visit and word of mouth communication. For this purpose, the study was carried out by using the mix research methodology. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to carry out the study. Furthermore, the Keerimalai ritual beach site was selected through the convenience sample technique. Primary data were collected through self-administered questionnaires and the observation techniques. The 5-point Likert scale method was used to analyze the data through SPSS Version 20. This study revealed that Keerimalai ritual sea site has risk for tourists and this may affect revisit and word of positive recommendation. Alcohol addiction, theft activity, violations, rocks under the sea water, safety and security signs and polluted water are harmful to the tourist. In spite of all these risks, there are many tourists who still visit Keerimalai ritual area to accomplish their cultural rituals.

*Keywords:* destination image, revisit, tourism risks, word of mouth communication, ritual beach sites

## Introduction

Tourism is a recreational activity of the destination visit. Tourism has many varieties such as eco-tourism, sports tourism, cultural tourism, adventure tourism and religious tourism. In present era, tourism is the most attractive and the fastest growing industry in the world. It has become an economically important sector for both developed and developing countries including Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka had been famous since its ancient time.

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It had also been named from time to time for its different qualities such as “Island for Its Valuable Gem Resources” and the “Tear Drop of the Indian Ocean” (The Irish Times, 2008). The beautiful and artistic shape of the country caused this name. And also Sri Lanka is ranked first in the world for its best and highest supply of quality tea to the world “Ceylon Tea”. The island of Ceylon (Sri Lanka) is a small universe, which contains as many variations of culture, scenery and climate as some countries a dozen times its size. I believe that it is hard to find any country like this which scores so high in all departments and which has so many advantages and so few disadvantages (Clarke, 2017).

Sri Lanka is one of the most sorts for tourist destinations in the world. It is bounded by the Indian Ocean strategically located between West Asia and South East Asia which has been an important stop on the silk route or the Silk Road (Thilakarathna - University of Sabaragamuwa). It has all necessities to be one of the best tourist destinations in the world, as it contains mixture of breathing landscape, misty hills, rare and unique wild life, rich cultural tradition and heritage, tropical weather as well as delightful beaches. In Northern part of Sri Lanka, Keerimalai temple and Villunri both are specially using for ritual activities.

Sri Lanka is a destination which consists with both natural and man-made attractions. Those add value to the country. These kinds of natural and man-made attractions create a high demand for the country as a destination. As a result of that, tourists prefer to get the memorable experience during their tour with these natural and man-made attractions. Because of that, tourist arrivals are increasing dramatically.

Most of the tourists come to Keerimalai temple from worldwide and Island wide for their ritual and religious purposes. There is no cultural and racism barrier to do the ritual activities. The researchers decide to do the research in Keerimalai ritual area.

### **Research Objective**

This paper aims to achieve the following purpose: to identify the risk at the ritual beach destination.

### **Research Question**

We hereby put forward our research question as follows: What factors are perceived as risks at the ritual beach destination?

## **Literature Review**

The Keerimalai Sivan temple is located in Jaffna district 20 km from Jaffna town. King Vijaya basically built four temples inside the Sri Lanka. He built Thiruthambaleswaram for Northern part of Sri Lanka. This temple has other names such as Kantharvanagar, Veenaganapuram (Yazhpanavaibavamaalai). Tourism has been one of the important Sri Lanka's fastest growing industries, and there are many inbound and out bound tourists coming from different parts of the world. In Sri Lanka, most of the tourists come for religious purpose mostly Chinese tourists and Indian tourists (Central Bank Report 2015). The underlying theme of this research is to explore tourism risk at the destinations at Jaffna peninsula with special reference to Keerimalai ritual beach site. This study also aims to identify the tourist's revisit to the destination image and the propensity to repeat. For this reason, this study reviews past literature on topics such as what is tourist harassment, types of harassments faced by the tourists, impact of tourist harassments. “Tourism comprises the activities of persons traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes”. Therefore, tourists travel in many countries to meet their expectations. In any given tourism destinations, there are likely to be some negative impacts

imposed on tourists while on vacation, whether it is unpleasant weather conditions, lack of food availability, or poor scenery. Criminal activities against tourists while traveling, such as theft, threats, violence, and harassment, have been the most commonly cited negative impacts by tourists (Skipper, 2009). Ensuring safety of tourists in the tourists destinations is an important factor for retaining the higher number of tourist arrivals to the country since it is of great significance to the economy. According to McElroy, Tarlow, and Carlisle (2007), in Northern part of Sri Lanka, the special ritual sea areas attract the tourists most. The primary concern of four out of five visitors to the Caribbean is being the target of harassment. Specifically harassment in tourism concludes the literature review chapter and sets the foundation for this research study. Destination image is defined as a feeling, first impression, opinion and attraction about the specific place which can be negative or positive (Lawson & Baud-Bovy, 1977). “Word-of-mouth is defined as any good or bad opinion or description about the things or destination tell to others or suggest to others for their usages” (Hennig-Thurau, Malhotra, Frieger, Gensler, Lobschat, Rangaswamy, & Skiera, 2010). Arrival of tourists to a destination depends mainly on available safety measurements and tourists’ perception on harassment-free environment which is a key factor to retain the visitors for a destination (Rathnayake & Wijesundara, 2015).

### Research Method

This study was a descriptive and opinion survey which was conducted to identify the tourists’ feeling about the risk level at the destination. There are eight beaches in Jaffna district, and two ritual beach destinations were selected for this study through convenience sampling techniques. In total, 55 tourists were selected. A self-administered questionnaire was prepared and data were also collected through observation and the 5-point Likert scale was used to get the opinions of tourists’ feelings about the six positive statements as shown in Table 1 and the opinions range from 1 = Totally disagree, 2 = Very highly disagree, 3 = Highly disagree, 4 = Somewhat disagree and 5 = Disagree. Data were analyzed by SPSS software Version 20 and the mean values and standard deviation were calculated and displayed in Table 1 and then the results were discussed to evaluate the tourists’ opinion. Further, the percentage of the tourists’ opinions was found through calculating the contribution of the variables to the mean values out of six variables.

Table 1

#### *Data Output from SPSS*

Opinion about the destination	<i>N</i>	Mean	Std. deviation
I feel that this destination seems to have alcoholism usage	55	1.5455	0.76541
I feel that this destination has theft activities	55	1.7818	0.65802
I feel that this destination seems to be violated by visitors	55	2.5455	0.57149
I feel that this destination is a safe place to visitors	55	3.6182	0.70687
I feel that enough warning signals are available to understand the risk	54	4.2963	0.74301
I feel that water is polluted	55	4.2909	0.73718
Valid <i>N</i> (list wise)	54		

## Research Results and Discussion

### Results

Based on the evaluation criteria that is  $\{(0 < x_i \leq 1) = \text{low level of disagreeable} (1 < x_i \leq 3) = \text{moderate level of disagreeable}, (3 < x_i \leq 5) = \text{highly disagreeable}$ , the data were analyzed and the result revealed that there is no tourist who viewed that Keerimalai ritual beach area is not affected by alcohol usage and theft incidents while 50% of the tourists viewed that the destination is not affected by violation and safety is not a problem. In addition, 50% of the respondents view that the particular destination is affected by lack of warning signal and polluted water. After analyzing the mean values and standard deviation, the study concludes as follows.

### Discussion

Alcohol usage is rare at the destination and tourist did not have much fear for the theft. But, the standard deviations pointed out that there are few people who use the alcohol and there is no 100% theft-free area. Further, there are certain levels of violations found and also the standard deviation shows the lack of safety at the destination. Furthermore, during the data collection, it was observed some liquor bottles, no sign boards which highlight the risk areas in sea water and polluted water was mixing with bathing water. Finally, it is concluded that safety warning signal to the tourists is poor at the beach and water quality is poor and polluted. Therefore, a moderate level of positive opinion and image are highlighted and such moderate opinions and image may affect the destination loyalty that the word of positive mouth communication and revisit intention in future through destination image which can be evaluated through the agreeable/opinion as the literature reviews. Therefore, in order to ensure the positive image over the destination, the relevant authority should implement the rules and regulation to protect the destination from alcohol usage, theft and violation. Further, local authority should take necessary actions to ensure the safety of the visitors at the destination. In addition, the warning signal is very important to make sure the safety of the visitors. Finally, it is recommended that water quality must be ensured by the relevant authority.

This paper studies the destination risk, specially, risk for tourists in ritual destination in Jaffna Peninsula. We identify the risks faced by the local and foreign tourists who visit the Keerimalai ritual destination for ritual activities. This study revealed that Keerimalai ritual sea site has risk for tourists and this may affect revisit and word of positive recommendation. Alcohol addiction, theft activity, violations, rocks under the sea water, safety and security signs and polluted water are harmful to the tourist. The study will benefit the tourists who visit the ritual sea beach sites in Jaffna. Furthermore, this study will also be helpful for the tourism developers to extend the destination development and improvement of existing destinations. Finally, this study will be a good theoretical background and other researchers can initiate new studies since there are very limited studies about the ritual destination risk in the past.

Despite the above, this paper also has limitations, for instance, small sample size. We collect the data from only 55 tourists due to time constraints. In addition, there are many ritual destinations in Jaffna Peninsula, but only one Keerimalai ritual destination was considered for the study by using convenience sampling technique. Importantly, tourists were not categorized as local and foreign tourists and even religious differences, age, gender and other demographic attributes were also not considered.

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