



**An Analysis of Adventure Tourism Potential in Sri Lanka:  
Opportunities and Barriers**

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## Abstract

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<p>Adventure tourism is a rapidly growing sector within the global tourism industry, driven by the increasing demand for unique, immersive experiences. This study aimed to explore the potential of adventure tourism in Sri Lanka, focusing on the balance between sustainable practices and the preservation of natural resources.</p> <p>The theoretical framework of this research emphasized the importance of sustainability in adventure tourism, highlighting the need for responsible tourism practices that protect fragile ecosystems. It discussed the role of local communities as key stewards of Sri Lanka's natural heritage and the necessity of implementing eco-tourism guidelines and conservation awareness campaigns to mitigate environmental damage.</p> <p>The research employed qualitative methods, utilizing semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, including tourism operators, government officials, local communities, and tourists. Data collection occurred from January to February 2025, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the adventure tourism landscape in Sri Lanka.</p> <p>The findings indicated that Sri Lanka's natural resources, such as its mountains, beaches, and wildlife, are major attractions for adventure tourists. However, challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, environmental degradation, and a lack of regulatory frameworks hinder the sector's growth. Additionally, the shortage of skilled workers in adventure tourism-related fields and the impact of over-tourism in popular destinations were identified as significant concerns.</p> <p>In conclusion, this research provided a comprehensive analysis of the adventure tourism sector in Sri Lanka, identifying key areas for improvement and offering practical recommendations for stakeholders. By addressing the challenges and leveraging available opportunities, Sri Lanka could unlock the full potential of adventure tourism and position itself as a leading destination for adventure travellers worldwide.</p>
<b>Key Words</b> Adventure tourism, Sri Lanka, Sustainability, eco-tourism, community-based tourism.

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## 1 Introduction

This research-oriented thesis aims to analyze the potential for adventure tourism development in Sri Lanka by examining the opportunities and challenges in this niche sector. Sri Lanka's diverse landscapes, rich cultural heritage, and unique biodiversity provide an ideal setting for adventure activities that appeal to both local and international travelers. In 2023, Sri Lanka saw a significant surge in tourism, welcoming 1,487,303 international tourists. Of this 57.3% of tourists visited the country for the purpose of leisure activities such as holidays, recreation and touring. (SLTDA, 2023.) The high percentage of tourists visiting for leisure reflects Sri Lanka's growing reputation as a top travel destination in Asia. With its stunning beaches, rich cultural heritage, and diverse wildlife, Sri Lanka offers something for every type of traveler. Hiking/ trekking/ walking is consistently the top adventure activity across the globe (Adventure Travel Trade Association, 2024). And Sri Lanka, with its diverse landscapes of lush forests, towering mountains, and pristine beaches, offers countless opportunities for outdoor enthusiasts (Buultjens, 2015).

While Sri Lanka boasts substantial potential for adventure tourism, a comprehensive understanding of the specific opportunities and barriers hindering its development remains elusive. This research aims to identify and analyze the key challenges impeding the growth of adventure tourism in Sri Lanka. The development of adventure tourism faces numerous barriers, including infrastructure limitations, environmental concerns, and regulatory challenges (Dwyer, 2019). By exploring current offerings, resources, and obstacles, this research intends to provide insights that can help stakeholders leverage adventure tourism to foster sustainable economic growth and environmental preservation. Ultimately, this study aspires to offer strategic recommendations that promote responsible and sustainable development within Sri Lanka's adventure tourism sector. (Buultjens, 2015).

Recognizing the considerable potential of adventure tourism in Sri Lanka, this study seeks to investigate the research question:

*What are the primary barriers hindering the realization of sustainable adventure tourism development in Sri Lanka?*

To address this question, the primary objective of this thesis is to first identify and then analyse both the key opportunities presented by Sri Lanka's adventure tourism sector, as well as the barriers that impede its sustainable growth. By employing qualitative-methods approach, this research will gather qualitative data from various stakeholders, including local communities, tourism operators, and government officials, to gain a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play.

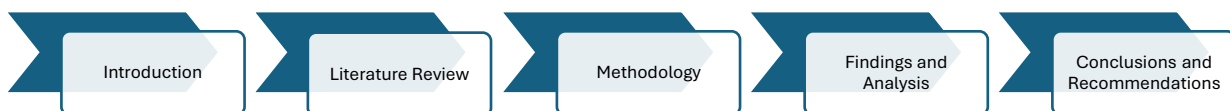
Sustainability is a crucial aspect of adventure tourism development, particularly in a biodiverse and ecologically sensitive country like Sri Lanka. However, it is essential to ensure that this development occurs in a manner that preserves the environment and supports local communities.

The relevance of sustainability to adventure tourism lies in its dual focus on fostering economic growth while safeguarding natural resources. Adventure tourism often takes place in pristine environments, and unsustainable practices can lead to environmental degradation, loss of biodiversity, and negative impacts on local communities. Therefore, understanding and integrating sustainable practices into adventure tourism strategies is vital for achieving long-term viability in this sector.

This study will delve into the environmental sustainability aspect, examining how adventure tourism can be developed responsibly to minimize ecological footprints. It will explore the scope of sustainable practices that can be adopted, such as eco-friendly infrastructure, conservation efforts, and community engagement initiatives. Additionally, the limitations of current practices will be assessed to identify gaps and challenges that need to be addressed for sustainable development.

By focusing on sustainability, this research aims to provide a framework that not only promotes adventure tourism as an economic driver but also ensures that the rich natural and cultural heritage of Sri Lanka is preserved for future generations. This approach aligns with the overarching goal of fostering responsible tourism that benefits both the environment and local communities, thereby enhancing the overall travel experience while mitigating adverse effects on the ecosystem.

This thesis is structured into five chapters to systematically address the research objectives. The organization of the study follows a logical progression, beginning with foundational concepts and culminating in actionable recommendations. As illustrated in *Figure 1* this structure, highlights the interplay between chapters and their alignment with the research goals.



**Figure 1. Structure of the thesis**

The Introduction provides an overview of the research topic, objectives, and significance, along with the thesis structure. The Literature Review examines existing research on adventure tourism, focusing on global trends, challenges, and opportunities, with a specific emphasis on Sri Lanka. Methodology outlines the research design, data collection methods, and analytical approaches used to investigate barriers and opportunities in adventure tourism development. The Findings and Analysis

chapter presents the study's results, analysing key barriers and opportunities for adventure tourism in Sri Lanka. Finally, the Conclusion and Recommendations summarize the findings, provide strategic recommendations for stakeholders, and suggest areas for future research.

The overlay matrix functions as a key analytical framework in this study, systematically evaluating Sri Lanka's adventure tourism sector. This methodological approach enables visual comparison between developmental opportunities and existing constraints, providing stakeholders with actionable insights. Structured around core themes including infrastructure capacity, sustainability practices, and evolving market demands, the matrix reveals critical interrelationships between these factors.

**Table 1. Overlay Matrix**

Investigation Question	Theoretical Framework (Chapter)	Results (Chapter)
1. What are the main opportunities for adventure tourism?	2.1, 2,3, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4	6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.4
2. What role does sustainability play in tourism?	4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4	6.1, 6.2, 6.3
3. What barriers hinder the growth of adventure tourism?	2,4, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4	6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.4
4. How can stakeholders leverage the findings to improve adventure tourism strategies?	7,1	6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.4

*Table 1* presents that maps key questions about adventure tourism to their corresponding chapters in the analytical framework. This matrix highlights critical themes such as opportunities for adventure tourism, the role of sustainability, barriers to growth, and stakeholder strategies for improvement. By organizing these questions and their respective chapters, the matrix provides a structured approach to analysing Sri Lanka's competitive advantages—including its diverse natural assets and cultural heritage—while also addressing current limitations in policy implementation and physical infrastructure.

The overlay matrix serves as a foundational tool for evidence-based decision-making, enabling stakeholders to identify practical strategies for sectoral improvement and targeted areas for future research. When implemented effectively, the findings derived from this framework can guide balanced tourism development, optimizing economic benefits while preserving environmental and cultural resources.

## 2 Foundations and Potential of Adventure Tourism in Sri Lanka

This chapter explores the multifaceted dimensions of adventure tourism in Sri Lanka, focusing on its geographical, cultural, and economic foundations. It begins by contextualizing Sri Lanka as a destination uniquely suited for adventure tourism due to its diverse landscapes, rich biodiversity, and historical significance. The chapter then examines the core elements of adventure tourism globally and their application in Sri Lanka, supported by market trends and stakeholder insights. Subsequent sections analyze the country's potential across water-based, land-based, and air-based activities, alongside cultural-historical experiences. Key challenges—such as infrastructure gaps, environmental concerns, and workforce shortages—are critically evaluated, followed by opportunities for sustainable growth. Visual aids, including maps and revenue charts, supplement the analysis to highlight Sri Lanka's current standing and future prospects in the global adventure tourism market.

### 2.1 Sri Lanka as a Destination for Adventure Tourism

Sri Lanka, often referred to as the "Pearl of the Indian Ocean," is a tropical island nation located off the southeastern coast of India. Its geographical positioning and diverse landscapes make it an extraordinary destination for travelers seeking a mix of natural beauty, cultural heritage, and adventure.



**Figure 2. Sri Lanka's position on the world map (Holt McDougal Online 2009)**

As depicted in Figure 2, the island's strategic location in the Indian Ocean and its compact size (65,610 square kilometers) create remarkable ecological diversity, encompassing pristine beaches, lush rainforests, rolling hills, and towering mountain ranges. This geographical variety provides the perfect setting for a range of adventure activities, making Sri Lanka a hub for tourism enthusiasts. (Adventure Travel Trade Association 2024).

Historically, Sri Lanka holds immense significance due to its ancient civilization and its strategic location along historic trade routes. The island's cultural legacy is enriched by centuries of Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, and Christian influences, reflected in its temples, forts, and festivals. Its historical landmarks, such as the ancient cities of Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa, the Sigiriya rock fortress, and the Galle Fort, provide a backdrop of cultural exploration that complements its natural attractions. Additionally, Sri Lanka's biodiversity is unparalleled, with numerous national parks, wildlife reserves, and marine sanctuaries offering habitats to endemic species like the Sri Lankan leopard, Asian elephant, and blue whale. (Buultjens, 2015).

The combination of geographical diversity, cultural richness, and ecological uniqueness positions Sri Lanka as an ideal destination for adventure tourism. Whether it's hiking through the Knuckles Mountain Range, diving in coral reefs, or exploring historical ruins, the island offers a blend of experiences that cater to a wide spectrum of adventure seekers. (Dwyer, 2019).

## **2.2 Foundations of adventure Tourism**

Adventure tourism is a niche segment of the travel industry that emphasizes exploration, physical challenges, and cultural exchange, often in remote or exotic locations. It encompasses a wide range of activities, including trekking, climbing, diving, and cultural immersion. Historically, adventure tourism traces its origins to ancient explorers and travellers who sought to discover new lands and cultures. Over time, it evolved into a more structured form of tourism, with organized activities and guided experiences. The advent of modern transportation and communication technologies in the 20th century significantly broadened its accessibility, making it a prominent component of global tourism today. Travelers are increasingly drawn to adventure tourism for its ability to provide authentic, transformative experiences. (Castro, 2007).

Adventure tourism is defined by three core elements: physical activity, cultural exchange, and interaction with nature. Unlike traditional leisure tourism, it often involves a degree of risk, personal challenge, and engagement with local communities. Its appeal lies in offering unique and memorable experiences. Key characteristics include active participation in activities such as hiking, rafting, or wildlife exploration; a strong connection to natural landscapes like mountains, rivers, forests, and oceans; and meaningful interaction with local cultures and traditions, which adds educational and immersive value to the experience. (Buultjens, 2015).

The adventure tourism market has experienced significant growth in recent years, fuelled by a shift in consumer preferences toward experiential travel, the global market is projected to expand substantially, with hiking, trekking, and wildlife experiences leading demand. (Adventure Travel Trade Association 2024) Post-pandemic trends highlight an increased focus on safety, sustainability, and

personalized experiences. Technology also plays a pivotal role, with apps and platforms simplifying access to adventure activities and destinations. Millennials and Gen Z travellers are key drivers of this growth, seeking adventure as a means of self-discovery and connection with nature. (Chun, 2021).

Resource-based adventure tourism relies heavily on natural and cultural resources. Natural landscapes such as mountains, rivers, forests, and beaches provide the setting for activities, while cultural elements like heritage sites, local traditions, and festivals enrich the experience. The availability and quality of these resources significantly influence a destination's attractiveness to adventure tourists. (Buultjens, 2015). Attractions that combine natural beauty with unique cultural or historical elements are particularly appealing. These can be categorized as natural, such as national parks and scenic landscapes, or cultural, like archaeological sites and heritage landmarks. Such attractions not only draw tourists seeking unique experiences but also generate economic benefits for local communities. (Díaz-Pérez, 2016).

Sustainability remains a critical concern in resource-based tourism, where poor management risks causing irreversible resource depletion, environmental damage, and cultural erosion (UNEP & UNWTO, 2019). Effective mitigation strategies include implementing visitor caps, encouraging low-impact activities, and empowering local communities in conservation efforts (GSTC, 2022). Such measures are vital for achieving equilibrium between tourism growth and long-term preservation of natural and cultural assets (World Bank, 2021).

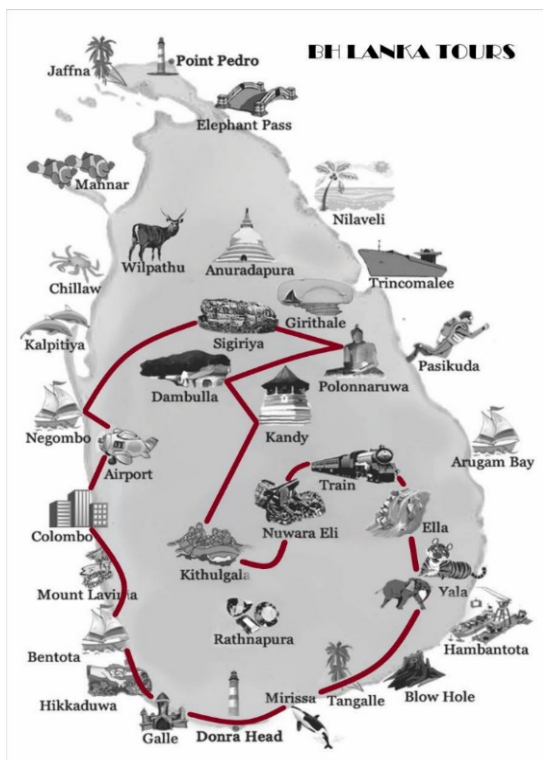
Infrastructure forms the backbone of adventure tourism, enabling safe and sustainable visitor experiences (World Bank, 2019). In rural areas where adventure tourism thrives, adequate transportation (e.g., roads, airports) and facilities (e.g., eco-lodges, safety stations) are essential (UNWTO, 2022). Sri Lanka's underdeveloped rural infrastructure particularly limits accessibility to adventure sites, demanding urgent investment (UNDP, 2021).

Enhancing accessibility is essential for making adventure tourism inclusive and appealing to a diverse range of visitors, including families, older travellers, and individuals with disabilities. This requires careful planning and the implementation of inclusive design principles. In Sri Lanka, improving access roads to remote adventure sites is a pressing need, as poorly maintained routes increase travel time and deter potential tourists. (SLTDA, 2023.) Providing facilities that accommodate varying needs, such as wheelchair-accessible pathways, safety measures for older adults, and family-friendly activities, can significantly broaden the appeal of adventure tourism. Reliable public transportation connecting major cities to adventure hotspots can also reduce travel costs and promote inclusivity. By addressing these accessibility challenges, Sri Lanka can position itself as a destination that welcomes all types of adventure enthusiasts (Buultjens, 2015).

Diversifying adventure tourism activities can attract wider visitor demographics. Introducing innovative experiences like night safaris, eco-tours, and wellness-adventure combinations helps broaden market appeal while supporting sustainable sector development (UNWTO, 2017). By strategically implementing such initiatives alongside addressing existing challenges, Sri Lanka can maximize its adventure tourism potential for long-term growth.

### 2.3 Adventure Tourism Potential and market of Sri Lanka

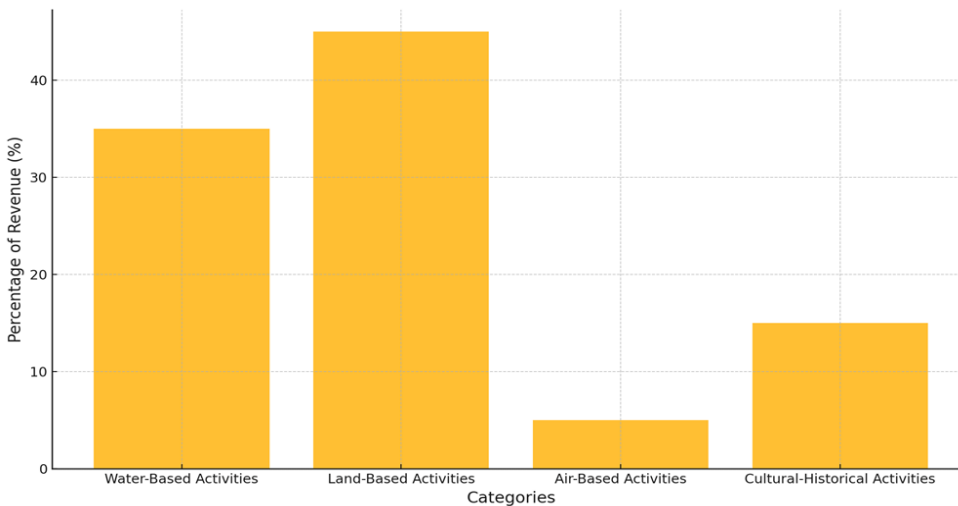
Sri Lanka possesses a unique competitive advantage in adventure tourism due to its diverse geography (coastal, mountain, and rainforest ecosystems), exceptional biodiversity (hosting over 30 endemic wildlife species), and rich cultural heritage (including 8 UNESCO World Heritage Sites) (SLTDA, 2023). This section will examine Sri Lanka's adventure tourism potential, highlighting opportunities in water-based, land-based, air-based, and cultural-historical activities, supported by relevant data and visual aids.



**Figure 3. Grand adventure tour of Sri Lanka ( Capital Lanka Tours,2025)**

*Figure 3* highlights the geographic distribution of adventure tourism activities across the country, showcasing the diverse regions that cater to different types of adventures. From the central highlands offering trekking and hiking opportunities to the coastal areas ideal for water-based activities like

surfing and diving, Sri Lanka's natural and cultural assets are strategically spread across the island. This spatial distribution not only underscores the country's potential to attract a wide range of tourists but also emphasizes the need for targeted infrastructure development and sustainable management practices to maximize the sector's growth. ( Capital Lanka Tours, 2025).



**Figure 4. Revenue contribution of various adventure tourism activities in Sri Lanka (SLTDA, 2023)**

*Figure 4* illustrates the revenue contribution of various adventure tourism activities in Sri Lanka for 2023. Key insights reveal that Land-Based Activities dominate the market, contributing the largest share at 45%. Water-Based Activities follow closely behind, accounting for 35% of total revenue. Cultural-Historical Activities, reflecting the appeal of Sri Lanka's rich heritage, contribute 15%. Meanwhile, Air-Based Activities, though currently limited, make up 5% of revenue and demonstrate significant growth potential for the future. This data highlights the economic significance of each activity category and identifies areas with the highest contribution and growth potential. (SLTDA,2023).

**Water-Based Adventure Activities** in Sri Lanka offer a thrilling way to explore the country's stunning coastlines and rivers, with options ranging from surfing on world-class waves to white-water rafting through lush jungles. The island's unique geographical features make it an ideal destination for various aquatic activities, catering to both thrill-seekers and those looking for tranquil experiences amidst nature. This sector of adventure tourism has grown significantly, contributing about 35% of the total adventure tourism revenue in 2023 (SLTDA, 2023).

**Arugam Bay** (eastern coast) is a world-class surf destination (Top 10 globally) offering consistent waves May-September. Its laid-back vibe and reliable breaks attract international surfers while supporting broader leisure tourism. Apart from surfing, Arugam Bay's serene beaches and vibrant

local culture make it a hub for leisure and adventure tourism alike. **Kitulgala**, located in western Sri Lanka, is a hotspot for white-water rafting, with the Kelani River offering rapids suitable for all skill levels. The stunning backdrop of rainforests enhances the adventure experience. Additionally, Kitulgala is historically significant as the filming site of *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, making it a unique destination for thrill-seekers and culture enthusiasts alike. On the northeastern coast, **Trincomalee** is famous for its clear waters and diverse marine life, while **Hikkaduwa** on the southwestern coast is known for its accessible coral gardens, attracting divers of all levels. These coastal towns are not only popular for diving and snorkelling but also promote marine conservation, appealing to eco-conscious travellers who wish to support sustainable tourism practices. (SLTDA,2023).

Water-based tourism in Sri Lanka has significant potential but faces several challenges, including environmental degradation, inadequate infrastructure, and climate change impacts. Coral bleaching and pollution threaten marine ecosystems, while some areas lack the necessary facilities to accommodate increasing tourist numbers. Addressing these issues through sustainable tourism practices and government support is essential for the sector's growth. (SLTDA,2023.)

In conclusion, Sri Lanka's water-based adventure activities highlight the island's natural beauty and thrilling experiences. From surfing in Arugam Bay to rafting in Kitulgala and exploring the underwater wonders of Trincomalee and Hikkaduwa, these activities are central to the country's adventure tourism appeal. By focusing on sustainability and community involvement, Sri Lanka can continue to thrive as a premier destination for water-based adventures.

**Sri Lanka's Land-Based Adventure Activities** are a testament to the island's diverse topography and rich biodiversity. From misty mountains to expansive plains and dense forests, the island offers a variety of experiences that appeal to adventure enthusiasts and nature lovers alike. For those seeking a more leisurely adventure, safaris in national parks offer the chance to spot elephants, leopards, and other wildlife in their natural habitats. Sri Lanka truly has something for every type of adventurer, making it a must-visit destination for outdoor enthusiasts. In 2023, land-based adventure tourism accounted for a substantial 45% of the market share, making it the most significant contributor to the adventure tourism sector. (Rajalingam, 2024). Among the most popular destinations for hiking and trekking are:

- **Horton Plains National Park**, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is one of Sri Lanka's most spectacular protected areas, famed for its cloud forests, rolling grasslands, and the dramatic World's End viewpoint, which offers a sheer drop of 880 meters (Lonely Planet 2024). The

park's moderate hiking trails provide opportunities to spot wildlife such as the Sri Lankan sambar deer and endemic birds (Lonely Planet 2024).

- **Adam's Peak (Sri Pada)**, a spiritually significant site, is a pilgrimage destination as well as a hiking hotspot. The ascent involves climbing thousands of steps, and hikers are rewarded with a stunning sunrise view at the summit (SLTDA, 2023).
- **Knuckles Mountain Range**, named for its resemblance to a clenched fist, the Knuckles Range offers rugged trails that take hikers through lush forests, waterfalls, and remote villages. It is a biodiversity hotspot, home to numerous endemic species. (Williams,2024).
- **The Pekoe Trail**, a recently developed long-distance hiking route, spans over 300 kilometers through the scenic hill country, connecting tea plantations, forests, and rural villages. This trail not only showcases Sri Lanka's stunning landscapes but also supports local communities by promoting sustainable tourism . With its well-marked paths and diverse terrain, the Pekoe Trail has quickly become a favorite among hikers seeking both adventure and cultural immersion. ( The Pekoe Trail Trekking 2025).

Sri Lanka's national parks provide unique opportunities for wildlife enthusiasts to witness the country's rich biodiversity in its natural habitat. Key destinations include:

- **Yala National Park** -Famous for its leopard population, Yala is one of the best places in the world to spot these elusive big cats. The park also hosts elephants, sloth bears, and a variety of bird species (UNDP, 2024).
- **Udawalawe National Park** - Known for its large herds of elephants, Udawalawe offers a safari experience that is both thrilling and educational (SLTDA, 2023).
- **Wilpattu National Park** - Characterized by its "villus" (natural lakes), Wilpattu is a quieter alternative to Yala, offering sightings of leopards, deer, and other wildlife in a serene setting.

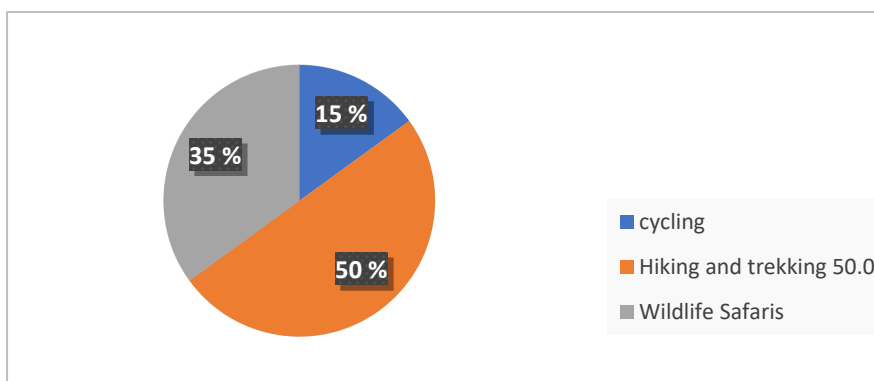
These safaris not only offer excitement but also contribute to wildlife conservation efforts and promote eco-tourism (UNDP, 2024).

**Cycling** is another land-based activity, offering an immersive way to experience Sri Lanka's picturesque landscapes and culture. Cycling tours often include stops at cultural and historical sites, providing a blend of physical activity and cultural immersion. Notable regions for cycling include:

- **Ella** -With its rolling hills and tea plantations, Ella is a favorite among cyclists looking for scenic routes and moderate challenges (Williams,2024).
- **Nuwara Eliya** -Often referred to as "Little England," Nuwara Eliya's cool climate and charming countryside make it ideal for leisurely cycling trips.
- **Galle** - Cycling through the coastal city of Galle allows visitors to explore its colonial-era architecture, bustling markets, and nearby beaches.

Land-based adventure activities are crucial for Sri Lanka's tourism economy. They create employment opportunities for local guides, naturalists, and accommodation providers while encouraging sustainable tourism practices. Additionally, these activities promote cultural exchange, as travelers interact with local communities during their adventures (UNDP, 2024).

While land-based tourism has seen significant growth, challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, environmental degradation, and the lack of trained personnel persist. Addressing these issues through investments in infrastructure, training programs, and conservation initiatives can help the sector realize its full potential (UNDP, 2024). With growing global interest in eco-tourism and sustainable travel, Sri Lanka is well-positioned to capitalize on its natural and cultural assets. Strategic marketing and improved accessibility to remote adventure sites will further boost the appeal of land-based activities.



**Figure 5. Revenue contribution of land -based activities adapted from (SLTDA, 2023)**

*Figure 5.* above illustrates the revenue contribution of different land-based adventure activities in Sri Lanka for 2023:

- Hiking and Trekking account for the largest share at 50%, reflecting their popularity among adventure tourists.

- Wildlife Safaris contribute 35%, showcasing the appeal of Sri Lanka's national parks and biodiversity.
- Cycling makes up 15%, offering a growing niche for those seeking immersive cultural and scenic experiences.

### **Air-Based Adventure Activities**

Although still emerging, air-based adventure activities hold significant potential for growth in Sri Lanka (SLTDA, 2023). Air-based adventure activities, although a relatively new segment within Sri Lanka's tourism sector, hold immense potential for growth (ATTA, 2024). These activities provide tourists with a unique perspective of the island's diverse landscapes and cultural heritage, combining thrill with awe-inspiring views. Among the most notable air-based activities are paragliding and hot air ballooning.

Paragliding, particularly in the central highlands of Ella, offers an exhilarating experience for adventure seekers. Ella's favorable wind conditions and breathtaking vistas make it an ideal destination for paragliding enthusiasts. Tourists can soar above lush green hills and tea plantations, enjoying panoramic views of the surrounding countryside. This activity is gaining traction as both local and international visitors seek novel and thrilling ways to explore the island. (SLTDA,2023)

Hot air ballooning is another emerging activity, with destinations such as Sigiriya and Dambulla standing out as prime locations (Genius, 2023). A hot air balloon ride over these areas offers a tranquil yet exciting way to experience Sri Lanka's natural and cultural beauty from above. Tourists can witness the grandeur of the Sigiriya rock fortress, lush forests, and serene villages during these rides. The calm and immersive nature of hot air ballooning appeals to travelers seeking a mix of adventure and relaxation. Despite their growing popularity, air-based activities currently contribute only about 5% to Sri Lanka's adventure tourism sector. However, with improved infrastructure, targeted promotional efforts, and strategic investments, this segment is expected to expand significantly in the coming years. (Rajalingam, 2024.)

### **Cultural-Historical Experiences**

Sri Lanka's rich cultural and historical heritage plays an integral role in its adventure tourism appeal. Cultural-historical experiences in the country offer a blend of physical activity and intellectual engagement, making them a unique subset of adventure tourism. Exploring historical sites such as Sigiriya, Polonnaruwa, and Anuradhapura provides tourists with the opportunity to delve into Sri Lanka's ancient history while navigating through challenging terrains. These sites require a certain

level of physical exertion, as visitors climb stairs, hike through ruins, and traverse expansive grounds. The effort is rewarded with stunning views and a deeper understanding of Sri Lanka's historical significance (UNDP, 2024).

Village tourism is another fascinating aspect of cultural-historical experiences. Activities such as paddy field visits, traditional cooking classes, and interactions with local communities allow travelers to immerse themselves in the country's rural life. These experiences provide a genuine glimpse into the customs and traditions of Sri Lanka, creating lasting memories for visitors. The hands-on nature of these activities, combined with the hospitality of the local communities, adds an authentic and enriching dimension to adventure tourism (SLTDA, 2023).

Cultural-historical activities contribute approximately 15% to Sri Lanka's adventure tourism revenue, reflecting their appeal to travelers who seek more than just physical excitement. By integrating cultural and historical exploration into adventure tourism, Sri Lanka can cater to a diverse audience, including families, educational groups, and solo travelers. These experiences also promote cultural preservation by highlighting the importance of local traditions and heritage sites (SLTDA, 2023).

### **Economic and Environmental Significance**

Adventure tourism is a cornerstone of Sri Lanka's economy, playing a vital role in job creation, foreign exchange earnings, and sustainable development. In 2023, the sector generated impressive revenue of approximately US\$779.4 million, with a projected compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 7.2% through 2034. This growth underscores the increasing importance of adventure tourism as a driver of economic development in the country. The industry supports various sectors, including hospitality, transportation, and local handicrafts, thereby creating widespread economic opportunities (Fernando, 2024). Adventure tourism in Sri Lanka promotes sustainable practices that benefit local communities. Operators are implementing environmentally friendly initiatives such as renewable energy, waste reduction, and wildlife conservation. Community-based tourism models are gaining popularity, empowering rural and underprivileged communities while also instilling ownership and responsibility for the preservation of natural and cultural assets.

**The adventure tourism market in Sri Lanka** is steadily growing, driven by increased global demand for experiential travel and the country's unique offerings. Target market segments for adventure tourism include both domestic and international travelers, with distinct preferences and expectations. International tourists are often drawn by Sri Lanka's exotic appeal, natural beauty, and cultural richness, while domestic tourists seek affordable and accessible experiences within the country (Buultjens, 2015).

Tourist arrival trends highlight Sri Lanka's growing reputation as a premier destination for adventure tourism. In 2023, the country welcomed over 1.48 million international tourists, a significant portion of whom visited for leisure and adventure-related activities. These figures reflect a steady recovery from the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and showcase the increasing importance of adventure tourism as a key contributor to the overall tourism sector (Castro, 2007).

Economically, adventure tourism has a significant impact on local communities and the national economy. Activities such as trekking, diving, and wildlife safaris generate income for tour operators, guides, accommodation providers, and ancillary businesses (Chun, 2021). The sector also promotes job creation, particularly in rural areas where many adventure tourism activities are concentrated. However, to maximize these economic benefits, Sri Lanka must address issues such as seasonality, over-tourism in certain locations, and revenue leakage to foreign-owned businesses. To fully realize the potential of the adventure tourism market, Sri Lanka needs to invest in infrastructure, enhance safety standards, and diversify its offerings. Strategic marketing initiatives that target specific market segments, such as eco-conscious travelers or adventure enthusiasts, can further strengthen Sri Lanka's position in the global adventure tourism landscape (Castro, 2007).

## 2.4 Challenges and Barriers

The development of adventure tourism in Sri Lanka faces several significant challenges, each of which must be addressed to create a sustainable and resilient tourism sector (Castro, 2007).

**Infrastructure gaps** are one of the primary challenges in developing adventure tourism in Sri Lanka, particularly due to the lack of adequate infrastructure in rural and remote areas where many adventure activities are concentrated. For instance, access roads to popular hiking trails and wildlife areas are often poorly maintained, limiting accessibility for tourists and increasing travel times. Furthermore, adventure tourism facilities such as eco-lodges, safety equipment, and trained personnel are often lacking, reducing the overall quality of the tourist experience (Díaz-Pérez, 2016). To overcome these challenges, investments in transportation and tourism infrastructure are necessary to support safe and comfortable access to adventure tourism sites (Buultjens, 2015).

**Environmental Concerns** is another significant issue facing adventure tourism destinations. Adventure tourism activities take place in natural environments that are highly sensitive to human impact. Without proper regulations and management, activities like hiking, diving, and wildlife tourism can lead to soil erosion, habitat loss, and pollution. In popular destinations, increased foot traffic can damage ecosystems and disrupt local wildlife. For example, the influx of tourists into Sri Lanka's national parks has raised concerns about the impact on native species and ecosystems. Addressing

these environmental challenges requires a framework that prioritizes conservation and implements measures to limit the ecological footprint of tourism activities (Díaz-Pérez, 2016).

**Regulatory Issues** like the absence of a comprehensive policy framework for adventure tourism in Sri Lanka poses another barrier to sustainable development. While the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA) regulates the broader tourism sector, specific regulations governing adventure tourism activities, such as safety standards, environmental guidelines, and land use policies, are underdeveloped. This regulatory gap can result in inconsistent practices across different regions and increase the risk of environmental degradation. Establishing clear guidelines and policies for adventure tourism, in line with global best practices, is essential for promoting responsible tourism and protecting Sri Lanka's natural assets (Chun, 2021).

**Lack of Skilled Workforce** in the adventure tourism industry can also pose a challenge. Adventure tourism requires specialized skills, including outdoor leadership, emergency response, and environmental awareness (Chun, 2021). However, Sri Lanka currently lacks a workforce trained in these areas, limiting the quality and safety of adventure tourism services. For example, rafting guides, trekking leaders, and diving instructors must obtain certifications demonstrating their competence in risk management and environmental protection (Adventure Travel Trade Association (ATTA 2023; GSTC 2022)). These qualifications help minimize ecological damage while ensuring tourist safety in sensitive natural areas. The development of adventure tourism in Sri Lanka will therefore depend on investments in training programs and capacity building to create a skilled and knowledgeable workforce (Chun, 2021). These challenges underscore the importance of a strategic, well-regulated approach to adventure tourism that emphasizes sustainability, infrastructure development, and workforce training. Addressing these barriers will be essential for maximizing the benefits of adventure tourism while mitigating its potential negative impacts on Sri Lanka's natural environment and cultural heritage.

### 3 Multifaceted Experience of Adventure Tourism in Sri Lanka

This chapter examines the multidimensional nature of adventure tourism experiences in Sri Lanka through three interconnected lenses: theoretical foundations, authentic engagement, and memory creation. First, it establishes the experience economy framework (Pine & Gilmore, 2011) as the conceptual basis for understanding how adventure activities transform into valued economic offerings. Second, it analyzes how Sri Lanka's unique cultural and natural assets facilitate authentic experiences through community-based tourism and sustainable practices. Finally, the chapter explores the mechanisms through which these curated experiences become lasting memories, supported by empirical data from Sri Lanka's adventure tourism sector. Together, these sections reveal how the island nation has strategically positioned itself within the global adventure tourism market by mastering experience design at theoretical, practical, and psychological levels.

#### 3.1 The Experience Economy: Theoretical Foundations

The emergence of the *experience economy* (Pine & Gilmore 2011,12) marks a paradigm shift in economic value creation, positioning experiences as distinct offerings beyond goods and services. Pine & Gilmore (2011) argue that experiences constitute the fourth economic progression—following agrarian commodities, industrial goods, and service-based transactions—where businesses must "*orchestrate memorable events*" to command premium value. Central to this framework is the *experience realms matrix*, which categorizes consumer engagement along two axes:

participation (passive → active) and connection (absorption → immersion)

This yields four experiential domains: *entertainment* (e.g., guided tours), *educational* (e.g., surf schools), *escapist* (e.g., jungle trekking), and *aesthetic* (e.g., scenic viewpoints)—each critical to adventure tourism design. (Pine & Gilmore, 2011).

Scholars further contend that experiences derive value from *co-creation* (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004, 8), where consumers actively shape outcomes through interaction, a principle evident in Sri Lanka's community-based adventure offerings. The *transformational economy*, an extension of Pine and Gilmore's work, posits that peak experiences can alter participants' self-perception (LaSalle & Britton, 2003), aligning with adventure tourism's emphasis on self-discovery. This theoretical scaffolding underscores why Sri Lanka's sector thrives not merely on activities, but on *staged authenticity* (Mac Cannell, 1973)—where curated natural and cultural encounters satisfy postmodern tourists' craving for meaning (Cohen, 1979).

### 3.2 Adventure Tourism Experience

Building on Pine & Gilmore's (2011) foundational work, Sri Lanka's adventure offerings transcend mere activities to become *staged experiences* - carefully designed encounters that blend physical challenge with meaningful transformation. As this chapter reveals, the country's diverse landscapes serve as a canvas for creating what LaSalle & Britton (2003) term "*transformational experiences*", where tourists don't just participate, but fundamentally reinterpret their capabilities through curated adventure narratives.

The essence of adventure tourism lies in the thrill of exploration and the challenges of physical activities, coupled with opportunities for deep engagement with nature and culture. For many travelers, this form of tourism represents a departure from routine, providing them with the chance to reconnect with the natural world and gain a sense of achievement. Sri Lanka's adventure tourism sector stands out for its ability to cater to these desires, thanks to its diverse landscapes and rich cultural heritage (Macrotrends, 2010-2025).

Tourists visiting Sri Lanka can choose from a variety of activities, such as hiking through misty mountain ranges, navigating the challenging rapids of the Kelani River, or diving into the vibrant coral reefs along its coastline. Each of these activities offers a unique combination of excitement and discovery. The hiking trails in Horton Plains, for example, not only challenge trekkers with their terrain but also reward them with breathtaking views and encounters with endemic species. Similarly, white-water rafting in Kitulgala brings together the thrill of tackling nature's force with the beauty of the surrounding rainforest.

Adventure tourism is not just about physical activity itself. It is deeply tied to the emotions, challenges, and memories that come with stepping out of one's comfort zone and experiencing something extraordinary. Tourists often describe these moments as transformative, providing them with a sense of accomplishment and a renewed perspective on life. (Williams, 2024). In Sri Lanka, these experiences are enhanced by the country's emphasis on safety and professionalism. Tour operators prioritize the training of guides and instructors, ensuring that activities are conducted in adherence to global safety standards. This focus on safety, combined with well-maintained infrastructure, reassures travelers and enhances their overall experience (SLTDA, 2023).

### 3.3 Authentic Experience

Authenticity is an integral aspect of adventure tourism, shaping the experiences that travelers seek and cherish. In recent years, there has been a noticeable shift in traveler preferences toward authentic connections with destinations, cultures, and environments. Visitors no longer want to merely observe; they want to engage, participate, and immerse themselves in the true essence of the places they explore. In Sri Lanka, authenticity is deeply intertwined with cultural traditions, natural beauty, and community engagement, making it a cornerstone of its adventure tourism appeal (Fernando, 2024).

**Cultural immersion** is a key element of delivering authentic experiences in adventure tourism. Sri Lanka's rich cultural heritage offers a wealth of opportunities for visitors to delve into the country's traditions, customs, and way of life. Activities such as visiting traditional villages, participating in local festivals, and learning ancient practices like Ayurvedic medicine allow tourists to connect with the cultural heartbeat of the island (SLTDA, 2023).

For instance, spending time in a rural village provides an intimate look at the daily lives of Sri Lankans. Visitors can engage in paddy field activities, such as planting or harvesting rice, under the guidance of local farmers. These hands-on experiences are not only educational but also foster a sense of appreciation for the hard work and traditions that sustain rural communities. Additionally, participating in traditional cooking classes, where tourists learn to prepare Sri Lankan dishes using age-old recipes and techniques, creates a memorable and deeply personal connection with the culture (Fernando, 2024).

Festivals also offer a vibrant avenue for cultural immersion. Events like the Kandy Esala Perahera, a grand Buddhist procession featuring traditional dancers, drummers, and elaborately adorned elephants, provide travelers with an immersive experience of Sri Lanka's spiritual and cultural identity. By participating in these celebrations, tourists gain insights into the island's values, beliefs, and communal spirit (SLTDA, 2023).

The authenticity of Sri Lanka's adventure tourism experience is further amplified by the country's commitment to preserving the natural and cultural integrity of its destinations. Unlike mass tourism that can sometimes erode the authenticity of a place, Sri Lanka emphasizes sustainability and respect for its heritage. This approach ensures that tourism activities resonate deeply with visitors, offering them a genuine and unfiltered experience (SLTDA, 2023).

One of the best examples of this ethos is the Knuckles Mountain Range, a UNESCO World Heritage Site known for its biodiversity and cultural significance. Trekking through this uninhabited area, tourists are accompanied by local guides who share their knowledge of the region's ecology, history, and folklore. These guides often recount stories of how the mountains have influenced local traditions, adding a rich narrative dimension to the adventure. The treks not only provide physical challenges but also offer an educational journey into the interplay between nature and culture (Williams, 2024).

Preserving natural beauty is a critical component of maintaining authenticity. Sri Lanka's adventure tourism operators have implemented eco-friendly practices to minimize their environmental footprint. For example, many trekking and wildlife safari tours now emphasize leave-no-trace principles, ensuring that the natural habitats remain undisturbed. Similarly, efforts to protect marine ecosystems, such as coral reefs in Trincomalee and Hikkaduwa, reinforce the island's commitment to authentic and sustainable tourism (SLTDA, 2023).

**Community engagement** is another pillar of authentic adventure tourism in Sri Lanka. Involving local communities in tourism activities not only enriches the visitor experience but also empowers residents by providing economic and social benefits. Tourists often find that their most meaningful experiences come from interactions with the people who call these destinations home (SLTDA, 2023).

Programs that train locals to become guides, hosts, or cultural ambassadors help bridge the gap between visitors and communities. For instance, village tours led by residents allow tourists to learn firsthand about local customs, crafts, and agricultural practices. These tours often include activities like pottery-making, weaving, or traditional dance performances, giving travelers a chance to participate and learn from the locals (Macrotrends, 2010- 2025).

Initiatives such as community-based tourism models ensure that the economic benefits of adventure tourism are distributed equitably. This not only improves the livelihoods of local communities but also fosters a sense of pride and ownership in preserving their heritage and environment. Tourists who engage in these community-driven activities often develop a deeper appreciation for the destination, which can lead to repeat visits and positive word-of-mouth promotion (Macrotrends, 2010-2025).

Statistics highlight the growing demand for authentic experiences in adventure tourism. According to the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA), cultural and eco-tourism activities, which are closely tied to authenticity, contributed approximately 15% of adventure tourism revenue in 2023. Additionally, surveys conducted among international travelers indicated that 78% of visitors considered cultural immersion and local interactions to be a primary reason for choosing Sri Lanka as a

destination. These figures underscore the importance of authenticity in shaping the island's tourism appeal (Fernando, 2024).

While Sri Lanka has made significant strides in promoting authenticity, challenges remain. Over-tourism in popular destinations, such as Sigiriya and Ella, can dilute the authenticity of the experience if not managed properly. Additionally, balancing the needs of tourism development with the preservation of cultural and natural assets requires careful planning and regulation (Fernando, 2024).

To address these challenges, Sri Lanka can invest in infrastructure that supports low-impact tourism, such as eco-lodges and sustainable transport options. Marketing campaigns that highlight lesser-known destinations can also help distribute tourist traffic more evenly across the island, ensuring that all regions benefit from tourism while maintaining their authenticity (SLTDA, 2023).

Authenticity is at the heart of Sri Lanka's adventure tourism offerings, enriching the experiences of travelers while preserving the island's cultural and natural heritage. Through cultural immersion, respect for natural integrity, and community engagement, Sri Lanka creates authentic adventures that resonate deeply with visitors (Fernando, 2024). By addressing challenges and leveraging opportunities for sustainable growth, the country can continue to position itself as a premier destination for travelers seeking genuine connections and transformative experiences. Authenticity not only enhances the quality of tourism but also ensures its sustainability, making it a cornerstone of Sri Lanka's future in adventure tourism (Adventure Travel Trade Association, 2024).

### **3.4 Memorable Experience**

The ultimate goal of adventure tourism is to create memories that linger long after the journey ends. Memorable experiences combine elements of exhilaration, learning, and personal connection, leaving travelers with stories they cherish and share. In Sri Lanka, the memorable aspect of adventure tourism often arises from the interplay between its stunning landscapes and unique cultural encounters (SLTDA, 2023).

Consider the experience of a hot air balloon ride over Sigiriya at sunrise. Floating silently above the countryside, tourists can take in panoramic views of the Sigiriya rock fortress, lush forests, and serene villages. The tranquility of the experience, combined with the awe-inspiring scenery, creates a moment of pure wonder. Similarly, an evening spent at a village home, sharing a meal prepared using traditional methods, allows visitors to connect with the community on a personal level. These interactions, characterized by warmth and hospitality, leave a lasting impression (Rajalingam, 2024).

Memorable experiences are often shaped by attention to detail. Personalized itineraries, seamless coordination of activities, and thoughtful touches such as welcome gestures or surprise elements

can elevate an adventure from ordinary to extraordinary. Sri Lanka's adventure tourism operators understand the importance of these details, ensuring that every aspect of the journey is carefully curated to exceed expectations (SLTDA, 2023).

The memories created through adventure tourism in Sri Lanka are not just about individual moments but also about the overarching narrative of the trip. The sense of achievement from reaching the summit of Adam's Peak, the joy of spotting a leopard in Yala National Park, or the serenity of snorkeling in the coral-rich waters of Hikkaduwa all contribute to a cohesive and unforgettable story. These experiences often inspire tourists to share their adventures with others, spreading the word about Sri Lanka's unique offerings and encouraging repeat visits (Macrotrends, 2010-2025).

The adventure tourism experience in Sri Lanka is a rich tapestry of thrill, authenticity, and lasting memories. By prioritizing safety, preserving authenticity, and focusing on creating unforgettable moments, Sri Lanka has positioned itself as a premier destination for adventure enthusiasts. The diverse range of activities, coupled with the country's natural and cultural wealth, ensures that every traveler finds something extraordinary to take away from their journey. As the sector continues to grow, maintaining this commitment to quality and sustainability will be key to ensuring that adventure tourism in Sri Lanka remains a source of inspiration and joy for generations to come (Fernando, 2024).

## 4 Sustainability in Adventure Tourism in Sri Lanka

This chapter examines the critical dimensions of sustainability in Sri Lanka's adventure tourism sector through the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) framework (Elkington, 2000). First, it explores socio-cultural sustainability, analyzing how community-based tourism preserves cultural heritage while empowering local stakeholders (UNWTO, 2021). Second, it investigates environmental sustainability, focusing on ecosystem protection and climate-resilient practices in key adventure destinations (UNWTO & UNDP, 2017). Finally, the chapter evaluates economic sustainability, highlighting strategies to ensure equitable revenue distribution and local entrepreneurship (UNWTO, 2019). Supported by case studies and empirical data from Sri Lanka, this tripartite analysis demonstrates how balanced sustainability practices can mitigate tourism's impacts while maximizing its benefits for communities, ecosystems, and the economy.

### 4.1 Understanding Sustainability in Adventure Tourism

Sustainability is a foundational principle for the responsible development of adventure tourism, ensuring that tourism activities meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs ((Holtage ,2009). This aligns with the **Triple Bottom Line (TBL) framework** (Elkington, 2000), which emphasizes the interdependence of three pillars: environmental, socio-cultural, and economic sustainability. These pillars work together to create a balanced approach that protects natural resources, respects local cultures, and fosters equitable economic growth.

The **United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)** further defines sustainable tourism as tourism that "takes full account of its current and future economic, social, and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment, and host communities" (UNWTO 2017). This holistic perspective reinforces the need for integrated strategies in adventure tourism, particularly in destinations like Sri Lanka where fragile ecosystems and vulnerable communities are involved.

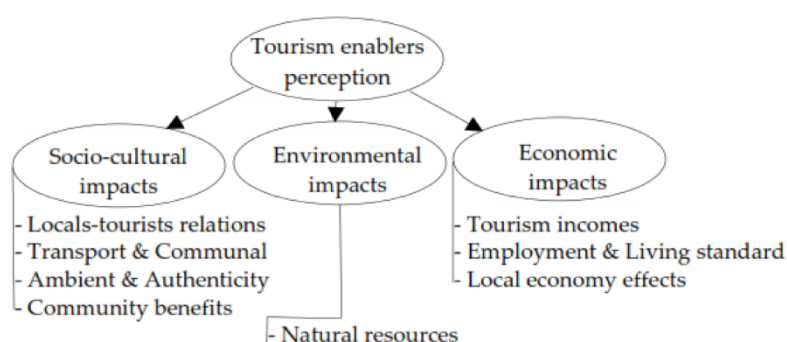


Figure 6. Tourism Enablers Perception (SLTDA, 2025)

The provided *figure 6*. illustrates the interconnected impacts of tourism through the lens of "Tourism Enablers Perception." It categorizes these impacts into three key domains: socio-cultural, environmental, and economic. Each of these domains highlights the intricate relationship between tourism and the communities and environments it influences. Below is an explanation of the key aspects presented in the image.

The socio-cultural dimension of tourism focuses on the interactions between locals and tourists and the influence these interactions have on communities. Key aspects include;

- **Locals-Tourists Relations**-Tourism fosters cultural exchange, promoting mutual understanding and appreciation. However, these interactions need to be managed to prevent cultural misunderstandings or exploitation.
- **Transport & Communal Infrastructure**- Tourism can lead to improvements in local transportation and communal facilities, benefiting both residents and visitors.
- **Ambient & Authenticity** -The preservation of the unique ambiance and authenticity of a destination is crucial for sustainable tourism. Over-commercialization can erode cultural heritage.
- **Community Benefits** -Local communities benefit through job creation, cultural preservation, and opportunities for economic growth. Initiatives such as community-based tourism help distribute the benefits of tourism equitably.

Environmental impacts highlight how tourism interacts with natural resources and ecosystems. Sustainable practices are essential to mitigate negative consequences. The two primary concerns in this domain are (SLTDA, 2025).

- **Natural Resources** -Tourism often depends on natural attractions such as beaches, forests, and mountains. Unsustainable tourism can deplete these resources, while responsible tourism ensures their conservation.
- **Environmental Protection**- Tourism can drive initiatives to protect and rehabilitate ecosystems, such as marine conservation projects or reforestation programs.

The economic domain highlights the significant financial contributions of tourism to both local and national economies. Key factors include tourism incomes, which generate substantial revenue that supports infrastructure and community development. Additionally, the sector enhances employment opportunities and living standards by creating jobs in hospitality, transport, and retail. Furthermore, tourism stimulates local economies by fostering entrepreneurship and increasing demand for regional goods and services, thereby strengthening broader economic growth. (SLTDA,2025)

This framework underscores the need for a balanced approach to tourism development. While it can drive socio-cultural enrichment, economic growth, and environmental conservation, careful planning is essential to mitigate potential negative effects. By considering the perceptions of tourism enablers and adopting sustainable practices, destinations like Sri Lanka can maximize the benefits of tourism while minimizing its downsides (SLTDA, 2025).

## **4.2 Socio-cultural Sustainability**

Socio-cultural sustainability is an essential pillar of adventure tourism, focusing on the need to respect and benefit local communities while preserving their cultural heritage and traditions. In Sri Lanka, where diverse cultures and rich traditions coexist with stunning natural landscapes, socio-cultural sustainability is key to ensuring the long-term success of the tourism sector. This approach emphasizes ethical practices, community participation, and fair labor standards to promote harmony between tourists and host communities (Rajalingam, 2024).

Respecting the cultural identity of host communities is a fundamental aspect of socio-cultural sustainability. Adventure tourism in Sri Lanka often involves visits to rural areas, traditional villages, and culturally significant landmarks. To ensure that these interactions are meaningful and respectful, cultural sensitivity training for tourism operators and guides is crucial. This training helps professionals understand and communicate the importance of preserving local customs and traditions, thereby avoiding practices that might commodify or trivialize cultural heritage. For example, traditional dances, religious ceremonies, and indigenous crafts are vital components of Sri Lanka's cultural fabric (Genius, 2023). When these elements are presented authentically and respectfully to tourists, they serve as both an educational experience and a means of cultural preservation. Ethical tourism practices ensure that these traditions are not exploited for profit but celebrated as integral aspects of the community's identity (Rajalingam, 2024).

Community-based tourism (CBT) initiatives play a pivotal role in socio-cultural sustainability by directly involving local residents in the tourism industry. These initiatives empower communities to take ownership of tourism activities, ensuring that the benefits are distributed equitably. In Sri Lanka, CBT has proven successful in promoting inclusive development and fostering a sense of pride

among locals (SLTDA, 2025). One notable example is the use of local guides for adventure activities such as hiking and wildlife safaris. By employing individuals from the community, tourism operators create job opportunities and enable guides to share their intimate knowledge of the area, including its history, ecology, and folklore. This not only enriches the tourist experience but also strengthens the connection between visitors and the host community (Williams, 2024). Sourcing materials from local artisans and businesses is another way to support community-based tourism. Adventure tourism often involves souvenirs, equipment, or accommodation, all of which can be provided by local producers. This practice boosts the local economy and ensures that tourism dollars remain within the community. Additionally, involving locals in decision-making processes related to tourism planning fosters a sense of responsibility and ensures that the community's needs and concerns are addressed (SLTDA, 2025).

Ethical tourism practices are integral to socio-cultural sustainability, promoting mutual respect and understanding between tourists and host communities. These practices focus on avoiding exploitative behaviors, such as underpaying workers, misrepresenting cultural practices, or overburdening local resources. Instead, they encourage fair representation and equitable participation of all stakeholders (UNDP, 2024). For instance, tours that include visits to rural homes or cultural events should ensure that the hosts are adequately compensated and that their privacy and dignity are respected. Ethical practices also involve educating tourists about appropriate behavior, such as dressing modestly in religious sites, asking for permission before taking photographs, and respecting local customs. By promoting these values, Sri Lanka can create an environment where both tourists and locals benefit from tourism in a balanced and sustainable manner. Ethical tourism enhances the authenticity of the experience for visitors while safeguarding the cultural integrity of the host community (Fernando, 2024).

Fair labor practices form another cornerstone of socio-cultural sustainability. The tourism industry in Sri Lanka provides employment to a large number of people, including guides, drivers, hotel staff, and artisans. Ensuring that these workers receive fair wages and work under safe conditions is vital for their well-being and job satisfaction (SLTDA, 2025).

Employee welfare programs are increasingly being recognized as essential components of sustainable tourism. For example, offering skill development workshops for tourism workers helps them improve their competencies and advance their careers. Healthcare support, maternity benefits, and provisions for housing can further enhance the quality of life for those employed in the sector (ATTA, 2024). Additionally, adventure tourism operators can set an example by adhering to labor laws and maintaining transparency in their dealings with employees. Ensuring gender equality in

hiring practices and creating opportunities for underrepresented groups, such as women and youth, can also contribute to a more inclusive and equitable workforce (Rajalingam, 2024).

When implemented correctly, socio-cultural sustainability in adventure tourism yields significant benefits for both tourists and host communities. For tourists, it offers an authentic and enriching experience, allowing them to engage deeply with the culture and traditions of the destination. For host communities, tourism provides economic opportunities, preserves cultural practices, and fosters a sense of pride in their heritage (SLTDA, 2025). In Sri Lanka, initiatives such as cultural festivals, traditional craft workshops, and village homestays have successfully bridged the gap between visitors and locals. These activities not only generate income for the community but also create a platform for cultural exchange, enhancing mutual understanding and appreciation (SLTDA, 2025).

Despite its potential, socio-cultural sustainability in Sri Lanka's adventure tourism sector faces several challenges. Over-tourism in popular destinations can lead to cultural dilution, where traditions are altered to cater to tourists' expectations. Balancing the economic benefits of tourism with the preservation of cultural integrity requires careful planning and regulation. Another challenge is ensuring widespread participation in tourism initiatives. In some cases, only a small segment of the community may benefit, leading to inequalities and resentment. Addressing these issues through inclusive policies and equitable resource distribution is essential for sustainable growth (Macrotrends, 2010-2025).

Opportunities for growth lie in leveraging technology and innovation to promote socio-cultural sustainability. For instance, digital platforms can be used to connect tourists with local guides, artisans, and cultural events, ensuring transparency and equitable participation. Collaborative efforts between government agencies, tourism operators, and community leaders can further strengthen the socio-cultural dimension of tourism (SLTDA, 2025).

The socio-cultural dimension of sustainability mirrors the "people" pillar of the TBL framework, which prioritizes social equity and cultural integrity (Elkington, 2000). The UNWTO's Global Code of Ethics for Tourism (2021) similarly underscores the importance of respecting host communities' cultural heritage and ensuring their equitable participation in tourism benefits. Sri Lanka's community-based tourism initiatives exemplify these principles by empowering locals as stakeholders—a key tenet of both TBL and UNWTO guidelines.

In conclusion, Socio-cultural sustainability is a vital aspect of adventure tourism in Sri Lanka, ensuring that tourism activities respect and benefit local communities while preserving their cultural heritage. By promoting cultural sensitivity, ethical practices, community participation, and fair labor standards, Sri Lanka can create a tourism model that is both inclusive and sustainable. These efforts not

only enhance the quality of the tourist experience but also contribute to the long-term well-being and empowerment of host communities. As the adventure tourism sector continues to grow, prioritizing socio-cultural sustainability will be key to ensuring that Sri Lanka remains a destination that celebrates and preserves its unique cultural identity (Genius, 2023).

### **4.3 Environmental Sustainability**

Environmental sustainability in adventure tourism is critical to safeguarding natural resources while enabling their enjoyment by both present and future generations (UNWTO, 2020). This aligns with the "planet" pillar of the TBL framework, which advocates for ecological stewardship (Elkington, 2000). Sri Lanka's diverse ecosystems—ranging from tropical rainforests to coral reefs—require strategies that adhere to UNWTO's recommendations for resource efficiency, biodiversity conservation, and climate action (UNWTO & UNDP, 2017).

Environmental sustainability in adventure tourism is critical to safeguarding natural resources while enabling their enjoyment by both present and future generations. Sri Lanka's diverse ecosystems—ranging from tropical rainforests and coral reefs to misty mountains and expansive plains—make it an exceptional destination for adventure tourism. However, the popularity of these activities necessitates responsible tourism practices to minimize ecological impacts. By adopting sustainable strategies, Sri Lanka can preserve its natural wealth while promoting long-term tourism growth (Macrotrends, 2010-2025).

Minimizing the environmental footprint of tourism activities is a priority for Sri Lanka's adventure tourism sector. One key initiative involves the promotion of eco-friendly accommodation. Many operators are now incorporating green building designs, renewable energy sources, and water conservation measures into their properties. For example, eco-lodges near the Knuckles Mountain Range utilize solar panels and rainwater harvesting systems to reduce dependency on non-renewable resources (Genius, 2023).

Visitor management in fragile ecosystems is another vital strategy. National parks such as Yala and Horton Plains, which attract thousands of visitors annually, have introduced measures to regulate visitor numbers. These measures include limiting vehicle access, establishing designated trails, and employing rangers to monitor activities. Such practices reduce human-induced stress on wildlife and natural habitats, ensuring their long-term sustainability (UNDP, 2024).

Waste management systems are equally important in reducing pollution. Adventure tourism hotspots like Kitulgala and Arugam Bay have implemented community-led initiatives to manage waste effectively. Recycling programs, beach clean-up campaigns, and proper disposal facilities are

examples of how local communities are working to maintain their environments. These efforts not only protect ecosystems but also foster a sense of environmental responsibility among tourists (Fernando, 2024).

Sri Lanka's rich biodiversity is a cornerstone of its adventure tourism appeal. Protecting this biodiversity through conservation and preservation efforts is essential. Habitat restoration projects, such as reforestation programs in areas like Sinharaja Forest Reserve, aim to rebuild ecosystems that have been degraded by deforestation and human encroachment (SLTDA, 2025). Species protection programs are also crucial. Marine conservation initiatives, such as those in Trincomalee and Hikkaduwa, focus on safeguarding coral reefs and marine species like turtles and reef sharks. On land, efforts to protect iconic species such as the Sri Lankan leopard and Asian elephant include anti-poaching patrols, wildlife corridors, and community-based conservation projects. These initiatives not only enhance biodiversity but also create unique opportunities for eco-conscious travelers to engage with conservation activities (SLTDA, 2025).

Transportation is a significant contributor to the carbon footprint of tourism. Promoting sustainable transportation options is therefore a priority for Sri Lanka. Cycling tours, particularly in regions like Ella and Galle, offer low-impact alternatives for exploring the countryside. Public transport systems are being upgraded to encourage tourists to opt for buses and trains over private vehicles. The Colombo-Badulla railway line, which passes through scenic hill country, is an example of a sustainable and immersive travel experience (Fernando, 2024). Low-emission vehicles are another area of focus. Electric tuk-tuks and hybrid cars are increasingly being used for tourist transportation, reducing greenhouse gas emissions associated with travel. By integrating these sustainable options, Sri Lanka can align its tourism sector with global environmental goals (SLTDA, 2023).

### **Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation**

As a tropical island nation, Sri Lanka is particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Rising sea levels, extreme weather events, and shifts in biodiversity patterns pose significant risks to its adventure tourism sector. Adopting both mitigation and adaptation strategies is essential for ensuring resilience (Williams, 2024). Low-carbon tourism practices play a pivotal role in mitigation efforts. Energy-efficient accommodations, renewable energy use, and carbon offset programs are being promoted across the industry. Several hotels and resorts have partnered with international organizations to achieve carbon neutrality, setting benchmarks for sustainable operations (Rajalingam, 2024).

Adaptation strategies are equally important. Developing early warning systems for natural disasters such as tsunamis and floods can help protect both tourists and local communities. Educating communities about climate risks and integrating climate resilience into tourism planning ensures that the sector can adapt to changing conditions (UNDP, 2024).

### **Economic Benefits of Environmental Sustainability**

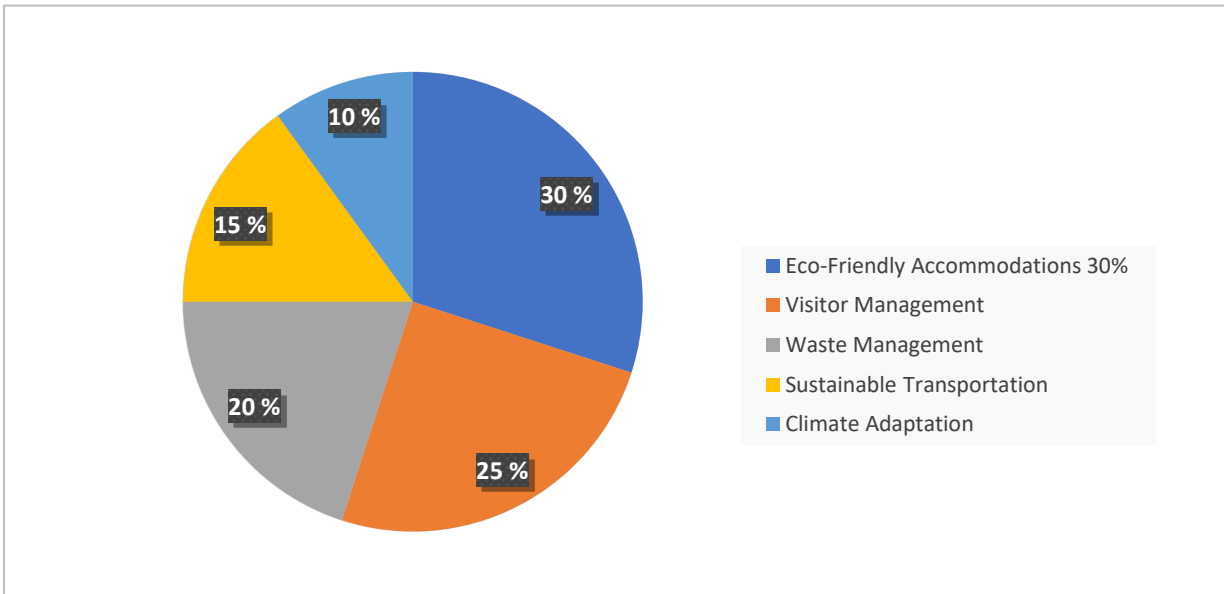
Investing in environmental sustainability not only protects natural resources but also drives economic benefits. Eco-tourism activities, such as wildlife safaris, birdwatching tours, and marine conservation programs, attract high-value tourists who are willing to pay a premium for sustainable experiences. The revenue generated supports local communities and funds further conservation efforts, creating a positive feedback loop (Macrotrends, 2010-2025).

Data from the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA) indicates that adventure tourism contributed approximately **US\$779.4 million** to the economy in 2023. A significant portion of this revenue came from eco-tourism activities, reflecting the growing demand for sustainable travel options. With a projected annual growth rate of **7.2%**, the economic potential of environmental sustainability in tourism is immense (Macrotrends, 2010-2025).

### **Challenges and Opportunities**

Despite progress, challenges remain. Over-tourism in popular destinations can lead to habitat degradation and reduced visitor satisfaction. Balancing accessibility with conservation is a delicate task that requires effective planning and regulation. Additionally, limited awareness among some stakeholders about the importance of sustainability can hinder implementation efforts (Genius, 2023).

However, these challenges present opportunities for innovation. Technologies such as artificial intelligence and geospatial mapping can enhance visitor management and conservation efforts. Collaboration between government agencies, private operators, and local communities can create synergies that amplify the impact of sustainability initiatives (Macrotrends, 2010-2025)



**Figure 7. The contribution of various environmental sustainability practices to Sri Lanka's adventure tourism (SLTDA, 2025)**

*Figure 7.* illustrates the contribution of various environmental sustainability practices to Sri Lanka's adventure tourism sector in 2025. The adventure tourism industry in Sri Lanka has made significant strides in sustainability, with various initiatives contributing to its eco-friendly transformation. Eco-friendly accommodation led the way, accounting for the highest share at 30%, reflecting the industry's strong focus on sustainable lodging options. Visitor management practices followed closely at 25%, underscoring the importance of regulating tourist activities in fragile ecosystems to minimize environmental impact. Waste management initiatives made up 20% of efforts, highlighting the critical role of addressing pollution in popular destinations. Sustainable transportation contributed 15%, showcasing the industry's commitment to reducing carbon emissions through greener travel options. Lastly, climate adaptation strategies accounted for 10%, ensuring the sector's resilience against the growing impacts of climate change. Together, these efforts demonstrate a comprehensive approach to promoting sustainable adventure tourism in Sri Lanka.

The UNWTO's **One Planet Sustainable Tourism Programme** (2020) emphasizes the need for sector-wide collaboration to address environmental challenges, echoing Sri Lanka's efforts in eco-certifications and low-carbon tourism. The TBL framework further validates these practices by demonstrating how environmental sustainability can coexist with economic viability—for instance, through revenue-generating conservation projects (Elkington, 2000).

#### 4.4 Economic Sustainability

Economic sustainability in adventure tourism focuses on ensuring long-term growth while benefiting local economies—a core tenet of the "profit" pillar in the TBL framework (Elkington, 2000). The UNWTO highlights the importance of "inclusive and equitable economic growth" in tourism, particularly through SME development and fair wage distribution (UNWTO, 2019). Sri Lanka's diversification into niche markets (e.g., eco-tourism) reflects these principles by reducing dependency on volatile mass tourism sectors.

Supporting local businesses and artisans is a key aspect of economic sustainability. Tourists engaged in adventure activities often seek unique souvenirs, local cuisine, and authentic experiences, creating opportunities for small businesses to thrive. Promoting sustainable livelihoods, such as training local communities to work as guides or eco-tourism operators, ensures that the benefits of tourism are distributed equitably (Dwyer, 2019).

Fair revenue distribution is essential to preventing economic leakage and ensuring that the financial benefits of adventure tourism remain within Sri Lanka. This can be achieved by encouraging domestic ownership of tourism enterprises, providing microfinance support to local entrepreneurs, and fostering partnerships between government agencies and local stakeholders.

The TBL framework underscores that economic sustainability must not come at the expense of social or environmental goals (Elkington, 2000). UNWTO's **Tourism for SDGs** initiative (2018) similarly advocates for policies that minimize economic leakage—a challenge Sri Lanka addresses through local entrepreneurship programs and community revenue-sharing models.

By addressing environmental, socio-cultural, and economic sustainability in tandem, Sri Lanka can create a thriving adventure tourism sector that balances growth with preservation, ensuring that the benefits are shared by all while safeguarding the country's unique resources for generations to come.

## 5 Research Methodology

This chapter outlines the research methodology employed in this study to explore the opportunities and barriers to adventure tourism development in Sri Lanka. It begins by justifying the selection of a qualitative research approach, emphasizing its suitability for capturing the complex social phenomena, stakeholder perceptions, and contextual challenges inherent in the tourism sector. The chapter then details the data collection methods, focusing on semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, including government officials, tourism operators, local community representatives, and tourists. Additionally, it discusses the strategies used to ensure reliability and validity of the findings, such as member checks, triangulation, and reflexivity. The data analysis process, grounded in thematic analysis, is also described, along with the ethical considerations that guided the study. By providing a transparent account of the methodological framework, this chapter establishes the credibility and rigor of the research, setting the foundation for the subsequent analysis and discussion of findings.

### 5.1 Qualitative Research Methods

This study adopts a **qualitative research approach** to investigate the opportunities and barriers to adventure tourism development in Sri Lanka. Qualitative methods are particularly suited for this research as they allow for an in-depth exploration of complex social phenomena, stakeholder perceptions, and contextual challenges that shape the tourism industry (Creswell, 2018). Unlike quantitative methods, which rely on numerical data, qualitative research prioritizes rich, descriptive insights that capture the lived experiences, motivations, and behaviours of key actors in the field (Bryman, 2016; Denzin & Lincoln, 2017).

The decision to employ qualitative methods was guided by several key factors, supported by established methodological literature:

- **Exploration of Subjective Experiences:** Adventure tourism is influenced by diverse perspectives, including those of policymakers, business operators, local communities, and tourists. As (Patton 2015, 45) argues, qualitative research is ideal for examining subjective viewpoints because it captures "nuanced narratives that quantitative data cannot reveal." This aligns with the study's goal of understanding stakeholder motivations and perceived barriers (Kvale 2007, 12).
- **Flexibility in Data Collection:** Semi-structured interviews, the primary data collection tool, allowed for adaptive questioning, ensuring that key themes were covered while leaving room for unexpected insights to emerge (Rubin & Rubin 2012, 28). This flexibility was crucial for

uncovering context-specific issues, such as regulatory constraints or community concerns, which are central to adventure tourism development (Jennings 2010, 112).

- Contextual Depth: Qualitative methods excel in providing thick descriptions (Geertz 1973, 9) of complex environments. Given Sri Lanka's unique socio-economic and environmental landscape, this approach helped analyse how local conditions interact with tourism growth—a perspective supported by tourism scholars (Weaver & Lawton, 2014, 76), who emphasize the need for situated qualitative analysis in developing economies.
- Focus on Meaning and Interpretation: The study sought not just to document trends but to interpret their significance for stakeholders. Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke 2006, 82) was employed to identify patterns in participants' narratives, ensuring findings remained grounded in empirical data while addressing the research objectives. This interpretive approach is well-documented in qualitative tourism research (Jennings 2010, 98; Phillimore & Goodson 2004, 165).

By leveraging qualitative methods, this research ensures a comprehensive, participant-centered examination of adventure tourism, aligning with its goal of informing sustainable and inclusive development strategies. The following sections detail the specific data collection and analysis techniques used to achieve these objectives.

## **5.2 Data collection methods for the thesis**

Semi-structured interviews served as the primary data collection method, balancing structured inquiry with flexible exploration (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). A standardized interview guide (Appendix 1) ensured coverage of key research themes while allowing participants to elaborate on relevant experiences. The guide included: opening questions to establish rapport, core questions addressing research objectives, and prompts for deeper exploration. This approach-maintained consistency across interviews while accommodating emergent themes.

A comprehensive outline of the interview questions and structure can be found in Appendix 1. This instrument directly linked the study's research questions to the data collection process, while the semi-structured format enabled participants to share relevant unanticipated perspectives. The study employed purposive sampling to capture diverse stakeholder perspectives essential for understanding adventure tourism development in Sri Lanka. Four key participant groups were strategically selected:

- Government officials and industry operators (coded S1-S8), who provided policy and operational insights

- Local community members (L1-L4), offering ground-level perspectives on socio-economic impacts
- Tourists (T1-T3), whose experiences revealed market expectations.

This tripartite structure ensured comprehensive coverage of regulatory frameworks (through S-series participants), practical industry challenges (via operators), and community-tourism dynamics (from L-series respondents), while tourist interviews (T-series) completed the demand-side understanding. The coding system (S/L/T) maintained anonymity while enabling systematic analysis across stakeholder categories.

The study conducted 15 semi-structured interviews, reaching data saturation as defined by (Guest et al. ,2006), where no new substantive information emerged from additional interviews. This sample size effectively captured the spectrum of stakeholder perspectives while ensuring methodological rigor. A hybrid approach combining in-person (4) and online (11) formats was adopted to accommodate geographical and logistical constraints, enhancing participant accessibility without compromising data quality. Each 30–60-minutes session followed a standardized protocol. All interviews were audio-recorded with consent, enabling accurate capture of verbal nuances and facilitating thorough analysis. Discussions centered on four research themes:

- Infrastructure and Accessibility
- Environmental Sustainability
- Economic and Community impacts
- Regulatory and safety Issues

The structured yet flexible format allowed for both consistent data collection across participants and organic exploration of emerging topics. This dual focus on standardization and adaptability strengthened the study's reliability while capturing the complexity of Sri Lanka's adventure tourism ecosystem. Interview transcripts and field notes underwent systematic analysis using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic approach, ensuring findings were grounded in empirical evidence.

The data collection process yielded comprehensive insights through 15 carefully conducted interviews. Table 2 summarizes the interview logistics, demonstrating the study's methodological rigor:

**Table 2. Data Collection Summary**

Participant Code	Participant (Title/Position, Company, Years of Experience)	Date of Interview	Duration	Mode of Interview
S1	Executive Officer, Sri Lanka Tourism Board, 15 years	12 Jan 2025	45 min	Zoom
S2	Owner, Adventure Tour Company, 10 years	14 Jan 2025	60 min	Face to face
L1	Local resident and Guide, Ella Region, 8 years	16 Jan 2025	50 min	Teams
S3	Hotel Manager, Eco-Resort, 12 years	18 Jan 2025	40 min	Phone
S4	Representative, Sustainable Tourism Initiative, 3 years	20 Jan 2025	55 min	Zoom
T1	International Tourist, 2 visits to Sri Lanka, living in Finland	22 Jan 2025	30 min	Face to face
L2	Local Resident, Kandy	25 Jan 2025	35 min	Phone
S5	Manager, Adventure Resort in Nuwaraeliya, 5 years in service	27, Jan 2025	40 min	zoom
L3	Local Farmer 54 years old, Near Sinharaaja	29, Jan 2025	20 min	phone
S6	Government official in Tourism Board, 10 years in service	30, Jan 2025	40 min	zoom
S7	CEO, Eco Tourism Hotel, 2 years service	31, Jan 2025	30 min	Zoom
L4	Local Resident, Guide, Arugam Bay ,40	02, Feb 2025	35 min	Phone
S8	Tour Operator, Colombo, 2 Years experience	03, Feb 2025	20 min	Zoom
T2	Local Tourist, Environmentalist, Colombo	04, Feb 2025	30 min	Phone
T3	International Tourist, Living in Helsinki Finland, one visit to Sri Lanka	06, Feb 2025	30 min	Face to face

### 5.3 Reliability and Validity in Qualitative Research

In qualitative research, the concepts of validity and reliability differ from those in quantitative research. Trustworthiness was ensured through four key criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility refers to the accuracy of findings in representing participants' experiences. To achieve this, the study employed member checks, where participants reviewed and validated the researcher's interpretations. Prolonged engagement with stakeholders also strengthened credibility by fostering trust and deeper contextual understanding. Additionally, triangulation—using multiple data sources such as interviews, surveys, and secondary data—enhanced the robustness of the findings.

Transferability, the applicability of findings to other contexts, was supported by providing detailed descriptions of Sri Lanka's adventure tourism sector. This allows readers to assess relevance to similar settings, particularly in developing countries. Dependability, which concerns the consistency of the research process, was maintained through thorough documentation, including field notes, and analytical decisions. Confirmability, ensuring that findings reflect participants' views rather than researcher bias, was achieved through reflexivity and systematic cross-checking of data. These strategies collectively ensured the study's trustworthiness and validity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Data was collected through recorded interviews, field notes, and secondary sources. Interviews were transcribed verbatim to preserve nuances such as pauses and emphases, ensuring accurate representation. Thematic analysis, a widely used qualitative method, guided the data examination (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The process began with familiarization, where the researcher immersed themselves in the transcripts to identify initial patterns. Next, coding was conducted both inductively (derived from the data) and deductively (guided by research questions). These codes were then grouped into potential themes, which were refined through iterative review to ensure coherence and alignment with the dataset. Finally, themes were clearly defined and integrated into the research narrative.

The analysis was conducted manually to allow deeper engagement with the data. While software like NVivo is often used for efficiency, manual coding was chosen to maintain close interaction with the text, reducing the risk of losing contextual meaning. This approach, though time-intensive, facilitated a more reflective and iterative analysis, ensuring themes remained grounded in participants' actual words. Ethical considerations were prioritized, including obtaining informed consent, protecting participant anonymity, and securely handling data.

## 6 Results

This chapter presents the findings from semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders in Sri Lanka's adventure tourism sector, including tourism operators, government officials, local guides, community representatives, and tourists. The data was manually coded and analyzed to identify recurring themes, which are structured into four subchapters: **Infrastructure and Accessibility**, **Environmental Sustainability**, **Economic and Community Impacts**, and **Regulatory and Safety Issues**. Each theme is supported by direct quotations, indented and formatted to distinguish them from the analysis. The chapter concludes with a synthesized summary of key findings.

The analysis process involved several stages. First, the interview transcripts were carefully reviewed multiple times to ensure familiarity with the content and to identify initial codes. These codes were then grouped into broader categories based on their similarities and relationships, which were further refined into overarching themes. Each theme is supported by direct quotes from participants, ensuring that their voices remain central to the discussion. Additionally, the findings are contextualized within the broader literature on adventure tourism, highlighting both consistencies and divergences with existing research. This iterative process allowed for a thorough and nuanced understanding of the data, ensuring that the findings accurately reflect the complexities of adventure tourism in Sri Lanka. *Table 3* below, illustrates the key observations of the interviews.

**Table 3. Key Observations of the Interviews**

Participant Code	Role/Position	Key Contributions
<b>Local Residents</b>		
L1	Local Resident (guide) Ella	Emphasized underutilized hiking trails due to inadequate transportation.
L2	Local Resident, Kandy	Raised concerns about economic disparities in tourism benefits.
L3	Local Farmer, Sinharaja	Proposed community-led ecotourism initiatives.
<b>Tourists</b>		
T1	International Tourist	Highlighted challenges such as lack of eco-friendly transport.

<b>T2</b>	Local Tourist and Environmentalist	Recommended eco-certifications for operators.
<b>T3</b>	International Adventure Tourist	Suggested improvements like bilingual tour guides and better adventure maps.
<b>Stakeholders</b>		
<b>S3</b>	Hotel Manager, Eco-Resort	Highlighted poor road conditions and accessibility issues.
<b>S6</b>	Government Official, Tourism Board	Advocated for infrastructure investment and stricter safety regulations.
<b>S4</b>	Representative, Sustainable Tourism Initiative	Stressed the need for eco-friendly practices and waste management.
<b>S8</b>	Tour Operator, Colombo	Called for mandatory safety training and certification for guides.
<b>S5</b>	Manager, Adventure Resort, Nuwara Eliya	Suggested diversifying adventure offerings, such as paragliding.
<b>S7</b>	CEO, Eco-Tourism Company	Advocated for the use of augmented reality apps to enhance tourist experi-

The following sections present the key themes that emerged from the data, offering valuable insights into the barriers and opportunities for adventure tourism development in Sri Lanka. These themes include infrastructure and accessibility, environmental and sustainability challenges, economic and community benefits, regulatory and safety issues, and opportunities for growth and development. By addressing these themes, this study aims to contribute to both academic knowledge and practical applications in the field of adventure tourism.

## 6.1 Infrastructure and Accessibility

Infrastructure and accessibility emerged as significant concerns during the interviews, with various stakeholders offering differing views based on their roles and experiences in the adventure tourism sector. These perspectives highlight both the challenges and potential solutions for improving the sector's infrastructure to enhance accessibility for tourists.

Tourism operators were particularly vocal about the challenges posed by poor infrastructure, especially in remote regions where adventure tourism activities are most concentrated.

*"The lack of proper roads is a big issue. Many tourists want to visit remote areas like Kitulgala for rafting, but the roads are in such poor condition that it deters visitors"*  
(S8, 03 February 2025)

This statement highlights the difficulty that operators face in bringing tourists to adventure destinations, particularly in areas like Kitulgala, which are well-known for their adventure offerings but lack the necessary infrastructure to support large tourist volumes. Poor road conditions not only limit access to these areas but also impact on the overall visitor experience, making it harder for tourists to reach adventure spots safely and comfortably.

Government officials, while acknowledging these issues, pointed out the challenges of prioritizing infrastructure development. One government representative mentioned:

*"We are working on infrastructure improvements, but it's a slow process. The focus has mainly been on major tourist hubs like Colombo, not on remote adventure destinations"*  
(S6, 30 January 2025).

This response underscores the difficulty of balancing development between urban centers and rural adventure tourism areas. While the government has made efforts to improve infrastructure in popular tourist cities, more remote adventure destinations still suffer from neglect. The slow pace of infrastructure development, combined with limited resources, means that many key adventure tourism locations remain inaccessible or underdeveloped.

Local guides, who work directly with tourists, also highlighted the challenges related to poor accessibility. One local guide who is also a resident of the Ella area a known tourist destination remarked:

*"Most of the time, we have to carry tourists on difficult trails, but the absence of clear signage and safety measures is a real problem"* (L2, 16 January 2025).

This comment emphasizes the lack of basic infrastructure, such as clear trail markings and safety measures, which complicate the experience for both tourists and guides. Without these essential features, the adventure tourism experience can be more challenging and less enjoyable for visitors, undermining Sri Lanka's potential as a premier adventure tourism destination.

In conclusion, while tourism operators, government officials, and local guides acknowledge the importance of infrastructure in facilitating adventure tourism, their perspectives reveal a gap between the current state of infrastructure and the needs of the sector. To address these issues, Sri Lanka

needs a more comprehensive approach to infrastructure development that prioritizes remote adventure destinations, improves safety measures, and ensures accessibility for tourists.

## 6.2 Environmental Sustainability

Environmental sustainability emerged as one of the most pressing concerns among the interviewees when discussing the challenges facing Sri Lanka's adventure tourism sector. Stakeholders across all categories—tourism operators, local residents, and environmentalists—highlighted various issues related to environmental degradation, waste management, and the broader impact of tourism activities on the country's delicate ecosystems. The opinions shared by these different groups, while aligning in some areas, also diverged based on their perspectives, roles, and experiences in the tourism industry.

**Tourism operators** generally recognized that eco-tourism is the future of adventure tourism in Sri Lanka, but they also expressed frustration with the behaviors of certain tourists that harm the environment.

*"Eco-tourism is the future, but many tourists still engage in harmful behaviors like littering or disturbing wildlife. We need more education for both tourists and operators"*  
(S2, 14 January 2025).

This statement reflects the concerns of operators who feel that despite their efforts to promote sustainable tourism, some tourists' lack of awareness about the environmental consequences of their actions continues to be a significant challenge. Operators acknowledged their responsibility to educate tourists, especially those who engage in activities such as trekking, wildlife safaris, or water sports, about maintaining environmental integrity. However, they also recognized that this responsibility needs to be shared by all stakeholders in the industry, including local communities, guides, and government bodies.

Many operators emphasized the importance of proper waste management and the introduction of eco-certifications for businesses in the adventure tourism sector. They argued that tourists should be encouraged to respect the environment and follow eco-friendly practices, such as carrying reusable water bottles and refraining from leaving waste behind in natural areas. These measures could help mitigate some of the negative environmental impacts associated with adventure tourism.

**Local residents**, especially those living near popular adventure tourism destinations, expressed growing concern about the environmental impacts of tourism on their surroundings. A local resident from a village near a popular trekking site stated:

*"We see the benefits of tourism, but it's harming our environment. The forest around the village is being trampled by tourists, and the waste is increasing"* (L3, 29 January 2025).

This comment underscores the tangible impact that high volumes of tourists can have on the environment. For local communities, the influx of visitors brings both economic benefits and environmental costs. Residents in rural and natural areas are particularly affected by tourism-induced damage to ecosystems, including the overuse of trails, destruction of flora, and increased littering. Local residents highlighted how poorly managed tourism infrastructure exacerbates these issues, as tourists often leave waste in areas that are difficult for local authorities to clean.

Local residents also noted the lack of adequate waste disposal systems in certain adventure tourism hotspots, which has led to waste piling up in vulnerable areas like national parks and trekking routes. The absence of public awareness campaigns, coupled with insufficient infrastructure for waste management, has resulted in significant environmental degradation, reducing the natural beauty that initially attracted tourists to these areas.

**Environmentalists**, with a focus on protecting Sri Lanka's natural ecosystems, expressed even greater alarm regarding the long-term impacts of adventure tourism. One environmentalist who is a local tourist emphasized:

*"Tourism has a significant impact on sensitive ecosystems like our coral reefs. We need stricter regulations and eco-certifications for all operators"* (T2, 04 February 2025).

Environmentalists argued that while adventure tourism offers substantial economic benefits, it often comes at the cost of irreparable harm to ecosystems. They pointed to the increasing pressure on marine ecosystems from activities like diving and snorkeling in sensitive areas like Trincomalee and Hikkaduwa, where coral reefs are particularly vulnerable to human activity. Additionally, the expansion of adventure tourism into more remote areas, such as mountain ranges and rainforests, has led to the destruction of habitats for endemic species.

The environmentalists' call for eco-certifications and more stringent regulations was echoed throughout the interviews. They emphasized that the lack of effective environmental policies to govern adventure tourism activities often results in unsustainable practices, such as unregulated trekking and unauthorized wildlife interactions. They suggested that the government needs to introduce mandatory certifications for adventure tour operators that meet strict environmental standards and that these should be actively enforced to ensure compliance.

The varying perspectives on environmental sustainability highlight a significant disconnect between the different stakeholders involved in Sri Lanka's adventure tourism sector. Tourism operators, while aware of the environmental challenges, are primarily concerned with educating tourists and implementing best practices within their businesses. However, their ability to address these issues is often limited by the lack of a clear regulatory framework that could set industry-wide standards for sustainability.

Local residents, on the other hand, have a more immediate and direct experience with the negative environmental impacts of tourism. For them, the environmental cost of tourism is felt in the degradation of their local environment—damage to trails, increased waste, and the disturbance of local wildlife. They also express frustration with the lack of action from authorities to manage the growing environmental challenges that come with the expansion of adventure tourism.

Environmentalists, while supporting the economic benefits of tourism, emphasize the importance of adopting a more long-term, regulatory approach to protect Sri Lanka's fragile ecosystems. They argue that without robust and enforced regulations, adventure tourism may inadvertently lead to irreversible damage to both terrestrial and marine environments, diminishing the very assets that attract tourists in the first place.

The differences in stakeholder views indicate a need for a more collaborative approach to addressing environmental challenges in the adventure tourism sector. There is a clear need for stricter regulations, eco-certifications, and public education campaigns to ensure that both tourists and operators adopt sustainable practices. The government plays a critical role in facilitating this change by implementing and enforcing policies that protect Sri Lanka's unique ecosystems while fostering the growth of the tourism sector. Additionally, it is important for tourism operators to take a proactive role in promoting eco-friendly practices, such as minimizing waste and adopting renewable energy sources for their operations.

To address these sustainability challenges effectively, Sri Lanka must work toward a more integrated approach where tourism operators, local communities, and environmentalists collaborate on finding solutions that benefit both the economy and the environment. By doing so, Sri Lanka can ensure that adventure tourism continues to thrive without compromising its natural and cultural heritage.

### 6.3 Economic and Community Impacts

Adventure tourism has significantly influenced local economies, generating income, employment, and infrastructure development. However, stakeholder interviews reveal disparities in how these benefits are distributed, with some locals perceiving limited gains compared to larger operators.

Several local guides acknowledged that adventure tourism has created new revenue streams for their communities. As one guide noted:

*"Adventure tourism has brought income to our village, but it's often the large resorts and tour companies that profit most. Locals struggle to benefit equally"* (L4, 2 February 2025).

This sentiment was echoed by other residents, who highlighted that while tourism has increased demand for local services (e.g., guiding, handicrafts, homestays), many small-scale operators lack the resources to compete with established companies.

Tourism operators emphasized their role in providing employment but recognized gaps in equitable wealth distribution. An eco-resort manager stated:

*"We provide jobs to local people, but more should be done to ensure that the wealth generated by tourism stays within the community"* (S3, 18 January 2025).

While larger operators contribute to job creation, interviewees noted that high-paying managerial or specialized roles often go to outsiders, leaving locals in lower-wage positions. Additionally, leakage—where profits flow out of the community through external investors—was cited as a persistent challenge.

Government officials expressed commitment to fostering inclusive growth but faced difficulties in implementation. One official explained:

*"We are trying to promote community-based tourism and create more opportunities for local residents, but it's difficult to balance development and sustainability"* (S6, 30 January 2025).

Initiatives such as training programs for local entrepreneurs and regulations favouring community-owned enterprises were mentioned, though participants questioned their effectiveness due to limited funding and enforcement.

A recurring theme was the concentration of profits among large operators, with locals feeling sidelined in decision-making. Some interviewees suggested that cooperatives or revenue-sharing models could improve fairness, while others called for stricter policies to ensure local hiring and procurement.

#### 6.4 Regulatory and Safety Issues

One of the most significant concerns raised by interviewees across all stakeholder groups was the lack of standardized safety regulations within Sri Lanka's adventure tourism sector. The absence of a comprehensive, national framework for ensuring the safety of tourists participating in adventure activities has created a situation where safety standards are inconsistent, and the quality of service varies significantly across different operators.

For **tourism operators**, the lack of clear and enforceable safety standards presents a significant challenge. As noted by one operator:

*"Safety regulations are inconsistent. We do our best to ensure the safety of tourists, but some operators don't follow the same standards, which is a problem"*  
(S2, 14 January 2025).

This comment highlights a critical issue in the sector: the disparity in safety practices between operators. While some operators go above and beyond to ensure the safety of their clients, others may not prioritize safety in the same way. The lack of a uniform safety protocol not only affects tourists' well-being but also undermines the overall reputation of Sri Lanka as a safe destination for adventure tourism. Many operators expressed frustration that the government has not yet established mandatory regulations, which would help level the playing field and ensure that all businesses adhere to the same safety standards. Furthermore, some operators indicated that without regulations, it becomes difficult to convince tourists of the safety of the activities, which can detract from the overall appeal of adventure tourism in the country.

**Government representatives** acknowledged the issue but emphasized that the implementation of safety regulations faces challenges. One official explained

*"We are working on creating safety standards, but we need more cooperation from the private sector to implement them effectively"* (S1, 12 January 2025).

This response illustrates the gap between governmental efforts and the practical challenges of enforcement. While the government has recognized the need for safety regulations, there appears to be a lack of coordinated effort with private operators. The government's role in regulating adventure

tourism is crucial, yet the reliance on private sector cooperation is critical to ensuring that these regulations are followed consistently across the industry. Furthermore, interviewees from the government pointed out that there are numerous adventure tourism activities, ranging from trekking to diving, each of which may require different safety measures. The lack of a standardized regulatory approach complicates the creation of a one-size-fits-all safety standard, which is likely contributing to the inconsistency seen in the sector.

**Tourists'** perspectives on safety varied, with some expressing surprise and unease regarding the lack of visible safety measures at certain adventure tourism sites.

*"I was surprised by the lack of safety measures at some of the adventure spots. It made me feel uneasy, and I wasn't sure who to trust" (T 1, 22 January 2025).*

This feedback from tourists underscores a significant concern: the lack of transparent safety protocols can negatively impact tourists' trust and comfort levels. Tourists expect certain safety measures—such as safety briefings, protective gear, and clear risk assessments—when engaging in adventure activities. When these measures are absent or unclear, it can result in a sense of vulnerability and unease. Tourists, especially those engaging in physically demanding activities like hiking, rafting, or wildlife safaris, are often putting themselves in high-risk situations. Without a clear understanding of the safety procedures in place, they may feel uncertain about the level of professionalism and preparedness of the operators.

### **Analysis of the Differences in Perspectives**

The varying perceptions of safety and regulatory issues between tourism operators, government officials, and tourists highlight several gaps in the system. While tourism operators acknowledge the need for safety standards, they feel the government's inaction and the inconsistency among other operators create a fragmented experience for tourists. For operators who prioritize safety, the lack of clear and uniform regulations creates an unfair playing field, where less scrupulous operators can operate without accountability.

On the other hand, government officials recognize the importance of creating safety standards but face significant challenges in implementation. The government's current approach relies heavily on cooperation from private operators, but the uneven enforcement and a lack of clear communication about regulations have led to a lack of confidence in the system. Without a collective effort from all stakeholders, the establishment and implementation of safety standards are compromised.

From the tourists' perspective, the absence of visible and standardized safety measures impacts their perception of the destination's overall safety. Tourists who feel unsure about the safety measures in place are less likely to return or recommend Sri Lanka as a safe adventure tourism destination. This hesitation can have a long-term impact on the reputation of Sri Lanka's adventure tourism industry, as tourists increasingly seek out destinations where they can trust the safety protocols.

## **6.5 Summary of Key Findings**

In summary, the interviews conducted with a diverse range of stakeholders revealed significant insights into the current state of adventure tourism in Sri Lanka, highlighting both the challenges and opportunities within the sector. Key findings indicate that infrastructure and accessibility remain the most critical barriers, as many remote areas, where adventure tourism activities are most prevalent, suffer from poorly maintained roads, inadequate transportation, and insufficient facilities. These issues hinder the growth of the sector, as they deter potential visitors and make it challenging to provide a seamless experience for tourists.

Environmental sustainability was another recurring theme, with concerns raised about the degradation of Sri Lanka's natural resources due to increased tourist traffic. Stakeholders stressed the need for stronger environmental regulations, including waste management practices and limits on visitor numbers in sensitive areas. However, there was a consensus that sustainable tourism practices could be a solution, with several interviewees suggesting eco-certifications for tourism operators and greater investment in green infrastructure, such as eco-lodges and renewable energy sources, as opportunities for growth in this regard.

The economic impact of adventure tourism, particularly on local communities, was also explored. While adventure tourism has brought economic benefits to certain regions, the distribution of these benefits remains uneven. Local communities often do not fully benefit from the tourism boom, with profits concentrated in larger tourism companies or foreign-owned businesses. The opportunity lies in promoting community-based tourism, empowering locals by training them as guides, operators, or artisans, and ensuring that the economic rewards are more equitably distributed.

Finally, regulatory and safety concerns were highlighted, particularly the absence of standardized safety protocols for adventure tourism activities. Many interviewees emphasized the need for clear, enforceable safety standards to ensure both tourists' well-being and the long-term sustainability of the sector. These findings underscore the importance of addressing infrastructure, sustainability, community involvement, and regulation to maximize the potential of adventure tourism in Sri Lanka.

## 7 Discussion

This research highlights significant findings related to the development and challenges of adventure tourism in Sri Lanka. Through qualitative interviews with stakeholders, several key themes emerged that illustrate the opportunities and obstacles faced by the sector. This chapter synthesizes the key findings from the research on adventure tourism development in Sri Lanka, examining both the challenges and opportunities within the sector. The discussion is organized into four main sections: theoretical reflections on infrastructure limitations, environmental sustainability concerns, and economic distribution issues (7.1); policy and practical recommendations for stakeholders (7.2); an acknowledgment of study limitations with suggestions for future research (7.3); and a reflective analysis of the collaborative research process (7.4). By critically analyzing stakeholder perspectives alongside existing literature, this chapter provides actionable insights to enhance Sri Lanka's adventure tourism sector while addressing sustainability, safety, and equitable growth. The findings underscore the need for integrated strategies that balance economic development with environmental conservation and community empowerment.

### 7.1 Theoretical Reflections

One of the primary findings of this study is that inadequate infrastructure and accessibility limitations hinder the growth of adventure tourism (Perera, 2014). Many adventure sites in Sri Lanka are located in remote areas with poor road networks, unreliable public transport, and limited visitor facilities. Tour operators and local guides reported that these challenges deter tourists from visiting lesser-known locations, reducing the overall potential of the sector.

The concerns raised by stakeholders regarding environmental sustainability echo the arguments made by Gunasekara (2015) who emphasizes the importance of responsible tourism practices. He mentioned environmental sustainability is a critical issue in adventure tourism, as activities often take place in fragile ecosystems. The study's findings highlight that unregulated tourism activities can lead to waste pollution and biodiversity loss, reinforcing the need for government-enforced sustainability regulations. This connection illustrates the critical role of policy in safeguarding Sri Lanka's natural resources while promoting adventure tourism

As noted by Fernando (2016), Adventure tourism has the potential to drive local economic growth, yet this study found that economic benefits are not evenly distributed among local communities. Large tourism companies dominate the industry, while smaller, community-run businesses struggle to compete. Local guides and small business owners emphasized the need for inclusive economic policies that support locally owned tourism ventures and provide training for rural communities.

The lack of standardized safety regulations and emergency response measures was another significant concern among interviewees. As Silva (2017) pointed out many adventure sports and activities, such as trekking, diving, and white-water rafting, operate without government-mandated safety guidelines. Tour operators stressed the need for proper certification, training programs for guides, and improved emergency response mechanisms to ensure tourist safety.

Despite these challenges, the research identified several opportunities to enhance adventure tourism in Sri Lanka. Leveraging digital technology, improving sustainability measures, and fostering public-private partnerships were among the top suggestions. These findings align with Karunarathna (2018) assertion that diversifying Sri Lanka's adventure tourism offerings—through the inclusion of eco-friendly, cultural, and wellness-focused experiences—can move the sector beyond traditional activities.

Hettiarachchi (2018) provides empirical support for the policy interventions suggested by these findings, demonstrating their potential to enhance both sustainability and market positioning in Sri Lanka's adventure tourism sector.

While this study reveals critical gaps in adventure tourism governance, Perera (2014) provides evidentiary support for the recommended policy interventions, particularly the establishment of environmental protections, safety standards, and infrastructure development as fundamental requirements for sustainability, along with government-mandated waste management and conservation protocols.

Additionally, regulatory authorities should work toward certification programs for adventure guides, ensuring that operators are trained in risk management, first aid, and ethical tourism practices. These measures will increase tourist confidence and minimize safety risks associated with adventure tourism (Dias, 2019).

Wickramasinghe's (2010) seminar on tourism infrastructure development establishes that strategic investments in physical and digital frameworks constitute a prerequisite for attracting adventure tourism markets. The study particularly underscores the indispensable role of private sector engagement in delivering three critical components: sustainable accommodation solutions, integrated digital reservation systems, and efficient transportation networks.

Moreover, this study highlights the need for inclusive economic policies that empower small tourism businesses. Large tour operators should collaborate with local communities to create fair partnerships, provide skill development programs, and support local entrepreneurs. Such initiatives will help distribute economic benefits more equitably.

From a sustainability perspective, this research emphasizes the importance of balancing adventure tourism with environmental conservation. Implementing strict eco-tourism guidelines, carbon offset programs, and conservation awareness campaigns can mitigate environmental damage. Local communities must also be included in conservation efforts, as they are the key stewards of Sri Lanka's natural heritage (Gunasekara, 2015).

Moreover, community-based tourism should be encouraged to strengthen cultural preservation and economic empowerment. Engaging local populations in tourism planning ensures that their perspectives are incorporated, leading to more culturally sensitive and sustainable tourism development.

## **7.2 Conclusion**

Adventure tourism in Sri Lanka holds immense potential due to its rich cultural heritage, diverse natural landscapes, and unique biodiversity. The country's geographical variety—from pristine beaches to towering mountains—offers a wealth of opportunities for adventure-based activities such as hiking, trekking, water sports, and wildlife safaris. These attractions are complemented by Sri Lanka's historical landmarks, providing a unique blend of physical activity, cultural immersion, and environmental exploration.

However, the development of adventure tourism faces several challenges that need to be addressed for sustainable growth. Key barriers include inadequate infrastructure, especially in rural areas where many adventure activities are concentrated, environmental degradation, and a lack of trained professionals. These issues, coupled with regulatory gaps and the potential for over-tourism, pose significant obstacles to the long-term sustainability of the sector.

To overcome these challenges, strategic investments in infrastructure are crucial. This includes enhancing transportation networks, building eco-friendly accommodations, and improving safety measures for tourists. Additionally, implementing stronger environmental regulations and promoting responsible tourism practices will be vital in preserving Sri Lanka's unique landscapes. The involvement of local communities in tourism development, particularly through community-based tourism initiatives, can help ensure that the benefits of adventure tourism are more equitably distributed.

In conclusion, Sri Lanka has the potential to become a global leader in adventure tourism by leveraging its natural and cultural assets while ensuring that development is carried out in a responsible and sustainable manner. With targeted efforts to address the current barriers and capitalize on the opportunities available, Sri Lanka can foster a thriving adventure tourism sector that benefits both its economy and its people.

### 7.3 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

While this study provides insights into adventure tourism in Sri Lanka, it is not without limitations. Addressing these limitations in future research can further enhance understanding and inform better policies and practices.

This research was conducted using a limited number of interviews (15 participants), focusing on key stakeholders in the tourism industry. While the sample provided diverse perspectives, a larger, more comprehensive sample that includes a wider range of tourists, local business owners, and environmental activists would provide broader insights (Fernando, 2016). Future studies could employ quantitative surveys to supplement qualitative interviews, allowing for statistical analysis and generalizability of findings.

This research primarily focused on adventure tourism in specific regions of Sri Lanka. While the findings are relevant, they may not fully capture regional variations in adventure tourism development across the entire country. Future studies should explore adventure tourism in lesser-known locations, particularly in the northern and eastern provinces, to understand how regional differences affect tourism growth (Karunaratna, 2018).

A major limitation of this study is its snapshot nature, capturing data at a single point in time. Adventure tourism is a dynamic sector, influenced by changing environmental, economic, and policy factors. Future research should consider a longitudinal approach, tracking changes over multiple years to understand long-term trends and the effectiveness of sustainability initiatives (Gunasekara, 2015).

Although this research identified economic benefits and challenges, it did not include a detailed financial analysis of adventure tourism's contribution to Sri Lanka's GDP. Future studies should incorporate economic impact assessments, evaluating how revenue from adventure tourism compares to other tourism sectors and whether economic benefits are equitably distributed.

As digital platforms play a growing role in tourism, future research should explore how technology can enhance adventure tourism experiences. Investigating the role of mobile apps, virtual reality (VR), and AI-driven tourism recommendations could provide valuable insights into how Sri Lanka can modernize its adventure tourism sector.

#### **7.4 Own Learning: Reflections on the Collaborative Research Process**

The collaborative nature of this research project, conducted as pair work between geographically dispersed researchers, yielded significant learning outcomes regarding academic cooperation and remote research methodologies. The authors found that utilizing AI tools such as Deep Seek for language refinement, SciSpace for structural suggestions, and AVIDNOTE for transcription support enhanced the technical quality of the manuscript while maintaining full intellectual ownership of the research design and conclusions. These digital aids proved particularly valuable in maintaining academic writing standards across collaborative documents, though the authors maintained rigorous oversight of all substantive content.

The pair work format offered distinct advantages through complementary skill sets and continuous peer review, which strengthened the study's theoretical framework and data interpretation. However, this approach also presented challenges in coordinating different writing styles and research schedules across time zones. Geographical constraints necessitated reliance on digital communication tools, with Zoom and WhatsApp serving as primary platforms for both researcher collaboration and stakeholder interviews. While these tools enabled effective data collection from tourism operators, they proved less successful in securing government participation due to scheduling limitations. The face-to-face tourist interviews conducted in Finland provided alternative perspectives that balanced the remote interview data.

This experience demonstrated that successful joint research requires careful planning of shared workflows, establishment of clear communication protocols, and flexibility in adapting to technological solutions. The authors found that maintaining a shared digital workspace with regular synchronization meetings proved essential for research continuity. These methodological adaptations not only facilitated the current study but also provided transferable skills for future collaborative academic work in international contexts.

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## Appendix 1. Interview Guide

The interview questions were designed to explore different stakeholders' perspectives on adventure tourism in Sri Lanka. Prior to the interview, the purpose of the thesis—*An Analysis of Adventure Tourism Potentials in Sri Lanka: Opportunities and Barriers*—was explained to participants, along with the study's definition of adventure tourism. Interviewees were assured of anonymity and informed that all collected data would be treated confidentially, with documents destroyed within 90 days of the interview.

### For all Stakeholders

1. What are your favorite adventure activities/places in Sri Lanka?
2. What do you consider the best aspects of adventure tourism in Sri Lanka currently?
3. What aspects of your recent adventure travel in Sri Lanka did you particularly enjoy?
4. What are the biggest challenges facing the development of adventure tourism in Sri Lanka?
5. How can the local community be more involved in and benefit from adventure tourism?
6. What are your suggestions for improving the quality and safety of adventure tourism experiences in Sri Lanka?
7. How can technology be better utilized to promote adventure tourism in Sri Lanka?
8. What role do you think sustainability and environmental protection play in adventure tourism?
9. What opportunities do you see for improving adventure tourism?

### For Local Residents Only

1. What are your favorite adventure activities/places in Sri Lanka?
2. What do you consider the best aspects of adventure tourism in Sri Lanka currently?
3. What are the positive and negative impacts of tourism on your community?
4. How can tourism be made more sustainable and beneficial for the local community?
5. What opportunities do you see for improving adventure tourism?

### For Tourists only

1. What are your favorite adventure activities/places in Sri Lanka?
2. What do you consider the best aspects of adventure tourism in Sri Lanka currently?
3. How often do you travel for leisure/adventure?
4. What motivated you to choose Sri Lanka for your adventure travel?

5. What challenges or obstacles did you face during your adventure travel in Sri Lanka?
6. How can Sri Lanka improve its adventure tourism offerings to attract more visitors?