

## **Investigation on Geotourism as a Tool for Tourism Development in Sri Lanka: Special Reference to Ussangoda National Park and Mahapelessa /Madunagala Hot Springs**

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Geotourists are experience hunters seeking knowledge while appreciating earth's geological wonders through exploring myriad topographies. Geotourism can be defined as tourism activity where visitors can witness attributes, abiotic, and biotic (ABC) and culture with more focus on abiotic properties of the natural setting. Geotourism is a wing of sustainable tourism and this study aimed to find out whether the Geotourism application could be used as a profitable tool for sustainable tourism development in Sri Lanka. The study was carried out qualitatively with twenty (20) in-depth interviews from tourism stakeholders including tourists, local communities, and government officers. The transcribed data sheets were thematically analysed by coding and axial coding. The results of the study revealed that lack of awareness towards the Geotourism concept caused Geotourism in Sri Lanka to be in its infancy though Sri Lanka is having an abundance of marketable opportunities for its diversified tourist locations to initiate Geotourism developments. In conclusion, it could be emphasized that Geotourism can be used as a profitable tool for tourism development by addressing certain issues like improper destination management, lack of promotion by examining two excellent geoheritage sites, Ussangoda National Park and Mahapelessa (Madunagala) hot springs. The research recommended new strategies for Geotourism development such as improving proper destination management, propagating awareness programs on Geotourism, an adaptation of geoconservation providing quality geo interpretation. Future studies should focus on diversified geoheritage sites as this investigation was limited to geoheritage sites with geological significances.

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