

# Problems and Prospects of Peace Tourism in Post-War Sri Lanka: A Policy Challenge in The Millennial Era

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## ABSTRACT

Peace tourism is becoming an emerging trend in the millennial era. It produces new dimensions of peace as well as tourism. Therefore, the concept of peace tourism is considered as a very broad concept with multiple aspects and there is no common agreed definition of peace tourism. The numerous facets of peace tourism are designed to lead “positive peace”, a term coined by Johan Galtung (1996). Post-war Sri Lanka is in a position of achieving positive peace through reconciliation. In this theoretical and empirical background, this paper is going to examine the problems and prospects of peace tourism in post-war Sri Lanka. What is peace tourism in the millennial era and how can it help achieve positive peace in Sri Lanka? These questions will be addressed in this paper while examining the relationship between peace tourism and reconciliation policies in post-war Sri Lanka. The research design of this study is based upon the Hermeneutic approach, a post-positivist research methodology. Other research methods of the study include key Informant Interview (KII) and content analysis methods.

Key Words: Peace Tourism, Positive Peace, Post-war Sri Lanka, Reconciliation, Tourism in Millennial Era, Development.

## INTRODUCTION

### Background

The World Travel & Tourism Council (2006) has proclaimed that the world’s most peaceful countries enjoy increasing levels of peace and prosperity, while the least peaceful countries are

spiraling into violence and conflict. The Institute for Economics & Peace reported in the Global Peace Index 2018: Measuring Peace in a Complex World that per capita growth between 1948 and 2018 has been three times higher in highly peaceful countries when compared to countries with low levels of peace. The

report also highlighted that in 2017, the global economic impact of violence was \$14.76 trillion PPP, which is equivalent to 12.4 per cent of global GDP, or \$1,988 per person in 2018 (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2018). The most developed nations have enjoyed an exceptional period of both peace and economic expansion. However, the rest of the world has been less fortunate, although the post-war era has brought beneficial changes, notably decolonization and self-determination (Bramwell, and Lane, 2010). With regard to Sri Lanka specifically, from 1983 to 1987, Sri Lanka experienced negative growth rates in tourist arrivals (between minus 6% and minus 21%), reducing the number of tourists arriving in Sri Lanka to the 1978 level. With the end of the JVP conflict in the late 1980s and conflict with the LTTE mainly confined to the less tourism-oriented north and east areas, tourists soon regained confidence (Alluri, Leicher, Palm and Joras, 2014). In most cases, travellers search for safe and interesting places to visit. The absence of safety within a destination region often overrides the quality of experiences and attractions these regions offer the visitor, and so an alternative destination is sought (Boyd, 2000). These indicators suggest that peace is highly important to tourism-supported development. However, the tourism industry's capacity to generate

both positive and negative impacts on destination areas creates a challenge in describing the relationship between tourism development and peace (Levy and Hawkins, 2010).

Traditionally, the term "tourism" has included a diverse range of themes, however, recently, a concept called 'Sustainable Tourism' has emerged. It has been defined by the World Tourism Organization (2005) 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". The term "sustainable tourism" has come to represent and encompass a set of principles, policy prescriptions, and management methods which chart a path for tourism development so that a destination area's environmental resource base (including natural, built, and cultural features) is protected for future development (Hunter, 1997). At the same time, a sustainable tourism approach can provide a higher quality tourist experience, an improved quality of life for local residents, justification for environmental protection and enhancement of cultural pride (Levy and Hawkins, 2010). The United Nations General Assembly established 2017 as the "International Year for Sustainable

Tourism for Development”, thereby setting an ideal stage for the tourism sector to reflect on its role in the global community and to embark on a common journey towards the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations World Tourism Organization, 2018).

Aligned with sustainable tourism, peace tourism has been emerging as a growing concept of the millennial era, especially post-war situations. In this theoretical and empirical context, this study will explore peace tourism and its impact on achieving positive peace in post-war Sri Lanka as a part of broader reconciliation initiatives.

This study has three dimensions of significance, namely, theoretical, empirical and significance at the policy level. In terms of theoretical significance, the study associates two distinct paradigms: tourism and peace. It brings together theoretical insights from sustainable tourism and from the concept of positive peace, and produces new paradigms of peace tourism in the millennial era. The study will then examine how it is possible to build up peace culture through tourism, especially sustainable tourism.

Empirically, the study will identify possibilities and challenges which are encountered by tourism industry in Sri

Lanka. This is significant because it may help to develop livelihood and entrepreneurship among the rural and urban citizens of the country.

At a policy level, this study is important because it highlights the need for peace tourism as a part of mainstream tourism. In addition, this study acknowledges the importance of achieving positive peace through reconciliation policies and non-tourism sectors.

## RESEARCH METHODS

The 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed three major developments within the social sciences. The first was the establishment of the hegemony of positivism in all branches of the social sciences. The second was the emergence in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century of hermeneutics and phenomenology as alternatives to positivist social sciences. The third was the emergence of an array of radical social sciences perspectives, such as Marxism, critical theory, radical humanism, feminism, post-structuralism and postmodernism; all of which were also critical responses to positivism (Uyangoda, 2015:147). The research design of this study is based upon Hermeneutic approach under the post-positivist research methodology. According to Gadamer (1977:22),

hermeneutic research methodology helps to bring something close which is quite far from the researcher. It helps to overcome a certain strangeness. The researcher finds the hermeneutical approach exceedingly relevant to understand 'human experience' in depth, as opposed to 'human behaviour' at the surface level (Uyangoda, 2015:147). That is why the hermeneutic paradigm was applied in this research. A content analyzing method is also used as research method of the study.

### **What is 'Peace Tourism'**

'Peace tourism', in a narrow sense, is the travelling of tourists to peace sites, monuments, museums etc. in order to learn from the experience that these places reveal (Wohlmuther and Wintersteiner, 2014). However, in this study, the meaning of 'Peace Tourism' is not confined to that simple idea. Rather, it is established upon the much broader and holistic concept of 'Positive Peace'.

Tourism and peace is not a new phenomenon. As early as 1925 at the opening of the 'International Congress of Official Associations of Tourist Propaganda' in The Hague, Netherlands, Professor Wim Treub (as the Dutch host) stressed the need for "encouraging travel so that different peoples could understand and become better acquainted with each

other, thus collaborating to the peace so earnestly desired among peoples, who had just survived a prolonged and deadly war". In 1929 the British Travel and Holidays Association declared 'Travel for Peace' as the theme for its inaugural meeting (Wohlmuther and Wintersteiner, 2014).

Then, in 1967, the UN had its 'International Tourism Year' and this was given the optimistic slogan 'Tourism: Passport to Peace'. Next followed the 1975 Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) and the 'Helsinki Final Act', mentioned tourism as an important means of achieving increased cooperation and better understanding between cultures (Wohlmuther and Wintersteiner, 2014).

The 1980 Manila Declaration on World Tourism described tourism as a 'vital force for peace and international understanding. This was followed by the Tourism Bill of Rights and Tourist Code that was adopted at the World Trade Organisation's General Assembly held in Sofia, Bulgaria in 1985, and cited tourism's contribution to '... improving mutual understanding, bringing people closer together and, consequently, strengthening international cooperation' (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2003).

A conference on 'Tourism – a Passport to Peace', held in 1987 in Shannon, Ireland, was followed by the first 'Global Conference on Tourism – A Vital Force for Peace' in Vancouver 1988. This conference resulted in the first publication on 'Peace Through Tourism' (edited by Louis 'Amore, who founded the International Institute for Peace Through Tourism' in 1986 and Jafar Jafari). The Global Summit on Peace Through Tourism, held in Amman, Jordan in 2000, then produced the 'Amman Declaration on Peace Through Tourism', which became an official document of the United Nations (Wohlmuther and Wintersteiner, 2014).

In 1995 the Charter for Sustainable Tourism was drafted by the World Conference on Sustainable Tourism held in the Canary Islands. It was recognized in its preamble that '... tourism affords the opportunity to travel and to know other cultures, and that the development of tourism can help promote closer ties and peace among peoples, creating a conscience that is respectful of diversity of culture and lifestyles'. The Global Code of Ethics for Tourism was then presented to the WTO's General Assembly meeting in Santiago, Chile in 1999. It asserted that 'firmly believing that, through the direct, spontaneous and non-mediatized contacts

it engenders between men and women of different cultures and lifestyles, tourism presents a vital force for peace and a factor of friendship and understanding among the people of the world'(Higgins-Desbiolles,2003).

'Responsible tourism' has its origin in the 'Cape Town Declaration' (2002), which recommends guiding principles for economic, environmental and social responsibility in tourism development. The Cape Town proclaimed "It is not a brand or type of tourism, the term encompasses a framework and a set of practices that chart a sensible course between the fuzziness of eco-tourism and the well-known negative externalities associated with conventional mass tourism" (Wohlmuther and Wintersteiner, 2014). It is an ethical approach that addresses all stakeholders involved in the tourism development process, from the planners and managers to the host populations, local governments and businesses to the outbound tour operators and tourists visiting the destination. The guiding principles of responsible tourism are in accordance with sustainable tourism (Wohlmuther and Wintersteiner, 2014).

Tourism is, according to one definition, the voluntary movement of persons whose aim is business, pleasure or

leisure (Satani, K. 2003:38). In achieving peace through tourism, two methods can be applied such as; one track diplomacy and two track diplomacy (Pratt, and Liu, 2016). One track diplomacy is essential to achieve negative peace (absence of war), while two track diplomacy mainly serves for positive peace.

Track one diplomacy is the diplomatic relationships between two or more states at the international level. It also refers to policies and programmes taken by governments to mitigate violence and promote peace. Track two diplomacy refers to unofficial, person-to-person relationships. It has been said that “Tourism operates at the most basic level of track two diplomacy by spreading information about the personalities, beliefs, aspirations, perspective, culture and politics of the citizens of one country to the citizens of another” (D’Amore, 1988). This type of cross-cultural personal relationship can be developed through tourism. In that sense, each and every citizen can become ‘Peace Ambassadors’.

This notation of tourism transformed the concept of ‘tourism as an agent for dispute, inequality, and exploitation of the poor’ into ‘tourism as an agent for peace’. It helps to achieve and preserve peace and harmony both within a

society as well as between societies (Wohlmuther and Wintersteiner, 2014).

In this sense, as an operational definition of this study, ‘Peace Tourism’ can be likened to Positive Peace, a term coined by Galtung (1996). A broad definition of peace refers to peaceful relationships not only between nations, but also between groups or communities, between individuals, and between people and nature (Salazar, 2006). ‘Peace tourism’ in a narrow sense is the travelling to peace sites, monuments, museums etc. in order to learn from the experience that these places reveal. It is tourism about peace and for peace (Wohlmuther and Wintersteiner, 2014). This study extends the concept of peace tourism to not only the involvement of human beings but also all other living organism and environment. Then the concept of peace tourism can be defined, as coined by Satani (2003:37), ‘holistic Gaia peace’. It is tourism about peace and for peace (Wohlmuther and Wintersteiner, 2014).

### **Peace Tourism in Post-war Sri Lankan context**

In this study, as an operational definition, peace tourism in post-war Sri Lankan context implies five areas, such as;

1. Local and international tourists in war effected area

2. Establishment of War-museums
3. Heritage Tourism
4. Peace Ambassador
5. Holistic Gaia peace

### **Local and international tourists in war effected area**

Sri Lanka has been beset with two interlinked conflict lines since the 1970s. The conflict between the Sri Lankan Government and the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) emerged in 1971, when a group of primarily young Sinhala men protested against limited socio-economic opportunities in the southern and central provinces. There was renewed fighting between 1987 and 1989 which took the lives of about 60,000 people before the Government brutally crushed the insurgency. Since 1994, the JVP has been a political party representing Sinhalese nationalist views. The civil war between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the Sri Lankan Government was also triggered in 1983 with the killing of 13 Government soldiers by Tamil men in the north, which led to anti-Tamil pogroms. The conflict is commonly interpreted as an ethno-political conflict between the Sinhalese majority and the Tamil minority, although conflict dynamics and causes have altered over time. After five unsuccessful peace

negotiation attempts, the Sri Lankan Government defeated the LTTE in May 2009 by military means (Alluri, Lei Cher, Palm and Joras, 2014).

Due to the thirty years of protracted war, there was a division between citizens living in two geographical parts of the country: The Government controlled areas and the LTTE controlled areas. As the result of cease fire agreement in 2002, the divergence line was marked by two checkpoints which were established at *Omanthay*. One of them was created by LTTE (Liberation of Tamil Tigers for Elam) and other was constructed by Military Forces of Sri Lankan Government. The distance between the two checkpoints was approximately 1km. During the war time, no one could pass *Omanthay*. However, following a cease fire agreement, general people can move through *Omanthay*, after undergoing security clearance. At the time of Cease fire agreement and post-war period, larger number of local tourists as well as foreigners visited war effected Northern and Eastern province of Sri Lanka. *Kilinochchi*, *Jaffna*, and *Mulative* were their primary destinations in Northern Province of Sri Lanka. In particular, the 2003 ceasefire agreement raised tourist confidence and the 'magic threshold' of

500,000 arrivals was surpassed (Alluri, Leicher, Palm and Joras, 2014).

Travel is not a recent phenomenon and it is not exclusively rooted in European societies (Bianchi, 2006). Tourist experiences will reduce the perceived differences between tourists and hosts, improve the negative ethnic attitudes, and strengthen the feeling of togetherness. However, it would be an overstatement to say that tourism is the one and only way to increase harmonious relations and worldwide understanding (Satani, K. 2003:37). Tourism can help foster peace and secure a more harmonious world (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2003). As pointed out by the literature, mutual cross-border tourism that pays attention to the narratives of 'the other side', can eventually decrease opposition between the two 'sides' (Wohlmuther and Wintersteiner, 2014). Furthermore, local and international tourists in war effected areas can open up new economic opportunities, such as businesses between Colombo and Jaffna, reopening hotels and home stays. New trade relationships were built up between Sinhalese and Tamil communities following the ceasefire while during the war time, these relationships were hidden by brutal war. Hence the post-war situation established free movement among civilians and it encouraged mutual

understanding between localities. Over time, it may lead to positive peace through the two track diplomacy or multi track diplomacy.

### **Establishment of War-museums**

'*War tourism*', or '*dark tourism*', is defined as the commercial use of the desire to make exciting but morally doubtful 'real life' adventures in conflict or war zones. When visiting a historic battlefield today, for example, this can be done in the spirit of pacifism, to learn from history, or can be driven by an interest in arms, warfare, and military strategy. Thus, it is important to look more closely at how the events are presented by (state or private) tourism agencies (Wohlmuther and Wintersteiner, 2014). It is labelled as 'Military Tourism' or 'Dark Tourism' (Hartmann, 2014). In 1955, Hiroshima and Nagasaki opened a peace museum and peace park ('Hiroshima Peace Park Guide' 2005). In the following years many renovations, extensions, and additions have made both cities a veritable place of pilgrimage for peace people (Van Den Dungen, 2014). The Hague officially describes itself as an 'international city of peace and justice'. Likewise, in post-war Sri Lanka, there is an established war-museum at *Mulative*, in the Northern part of Sri Lanka called '*Deyata Kirula*'. There

the negative side of warfare displayed in an effort to demonstrate the necessity of peace and harmony.

The evidence of war in any given country is often visible in both the natural and cultural landscapes –e.g., in the form of battlefields, and war memorials and museums, respectively – but the material evidence of anti-war and peace is far less known and far less visible (Van Den Dungen, 2014). If these arguments are accepted, it is necessary to promote peace and anti-war sentiments among the people rather than war victories and war tourism because by showing weapons and battle strategies, people may learn to mobilize to initiate war or other forms of conflicts and societal crimes.

### **Heritage Tourism**

Heritage tourism is another aspect of Peace tourism. Sometimes, it is identified as ‘Cultural Tourism.’ It has three aspects.

- *Firstly, tourism as an experience of the ‘other’, and of otherness in general, may open the minds of people and teach them that the world has more to offer than just one model of living: a critically revised and limited version of the contact hypothesis;*

- *Secondly, mutual cross-border tourism to pay attention to the narratives of the other side, and eventually overcome their strict opposition to one another;*
- *Thirdly, peace tourism to learn from the history of war and the history of important peace makers (Wohlmuther and Wintersteiner, 2014).*

However, in this study, the concept of heritage tourism is being applied to denote a very broad concept. Sri Lanka has more than 2500 years of written history and very ancient archeological sites. According to recent findings of the archeologists, there are more than 6000 years of dated archeological sites in Sri Lanka. All of them are proven by radiocarbon dating with scientific technology.

There are so many cultural heritage sites like Buddhist Temples, Hindu Shrines, Hindu kovils and Muslim Mosques in Sri Lanka. People are different in many ways - different language, culture, race, ethnicity, the colour of our skin, how we worship, the way we dance – yet we are all far more alike than we are different. The more people volunteer all over the world and make friends with local people, the more peaceful the world will be (Brown, and Morrison, 2003).

At the time of Thirty Years protracted war between LTTE and Sri Lankan Military forces, except four occasions, not all cultural heritage sites were attacked but some were protected. In that sense, the religious and cultural tolerance of both military sides can be seen positively.

Further, Palliyaguruge and Pannilage (2017) have pointed out that cultural uniqueness, diversity of farming style in cinnamon cultivations and diverse pattern of people's attitude and behavior in Sri Lankan culture and society in the context of globalization. They may be quite interesting for foreigners as tourist as well as cultural explorers.

As the result of this ingrained tolerance, an excellent opportunity has opened up for Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim people to visit a diverse array of cultural heritage sites within Sri Lanka. Since the end of the war, the numbers of local and foreign tourists visiting these cultural heritage sites has been increasing. These visits promote mutual understanding of 'other' cultures and help to develop intercultural relationships, especially during times of cultural and religious celebrations. This empirical situation opens up new grounds to inculcate peace tourism in Post-war Sri Lanka.

### **Peace Ambassador**

There is another potential contribution of volunteer vacationers that must be acknowledged and where the impacts reach beyond simply the guest and hosts. Volunteer travelers can be often seen as ambassadors for peace. This is because, when volunteers visit other places in the world, they have an opportunity to discover not just the things that make us different, but also those similarities that tend to bind people together. If through their journeys, people can gain a better understanding and appreciation for different cultures, religions, and heritage, this may lead to greater understanding within their home communities as volunteers share their insights with their local communities. And if tourism can harness these individual travel ideals, it will certainly be a more positive contributor to world peace. These were the underlying themes at the Second Global Summit on Peace Through Tourism in Geneva, Switzerland, in February 2003. The vision articulated at this event was that every traveler could be a peace ambassador (Brown, and Morrison,2003).

Travelers who are committed to cultivating positive peace in the global society often prioritize inner peace or mindfulness, which is usually obtained through practicing meditation. As many

Sri Lankans are following Theravada Buddhism, the practices of '*Vidarshana*' and '*Samatha*' meditation are quite common throughout Sri Lanka. This poses a very good opportunity for tourists and lay persons to visit Sri Lanka and experience these forms of meditation, thereby attaining a degree of mindfulness. On the other hand, many Sri Lankan Buddhists do not practice meditation. Instead, they are following 'Protestant Buddhism', as mentioned by Gananatha Obesekara (1972). Indeed, other Sri Lankans practice Hinduism, Christianity and Muslim religions and may not routinely engage in meditation. Furthermore, even without engaging in meditation, tourists can see the problems in the places they visit, relate them to their own community and take up action to improve the world in some way as a result (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2003). "In the context of tourism it can be seen to represent the self-realisation of one's desires and identity, through travel, free from politically motivated impediments, and suggestions" (Bianchi, 2006).

However, there is a huge potential to develop mindfulness with inner peace through the practicing of meditation in Sri Lanka. There are currently few foreigners coming to Sri Lanka to know about mindfulness, which is integral part of the

peace tourism. The use of home stays may help to utilize the potential of using the practice of different religions and engaging with different beliefs to create a degree of mindfulness. But, that is not enough. The government and private sector need to prioritizing formulating new policies to promote wide-scale mindfulness through the mediation.

### **Holistic Gaia peace**

Satani (2003:37) developed the concept of Holistic Gaia peace in his Master thesis. The concept of Gaia was used by ancient Greek to denote the notion of 'Mother earth'. Then, James Ephraim Lovelock brought the concept to the contemporary world to highlight the importance of environment and all living organism in the world. It refers to environmental tourism in a peaceful manner. Currently, tourism is seen as an economic factor, as an ecological challenge, and critically as a (positive or negative) factor of social justice, sometimes also as a menace to the 'authentic traditions' of the indigenous populations (Wohlmuther and Wintersteiner, 2014).

According to statistics (Alluri, Leicher, Palm and Joras, 2014) of the Sri Lankan tourism sector, there is an increasing number of tourists arriving in

the country. Many of them are coming for Eco-tourism, such as whale watching in Mirissa, for example. By participating in these types of activities, the environmental damage caused by tourism can be reduced. Sri Lanka is a very beautiful country with a green environment filled with unique flora and fauna. In such a context, unorganized plans in the eco-tourism sector ultimately damages the local environment. This is an emerging challenge of the post-war, millennial era in Sri Lanka. Therefore, a crucial aspect of peace tourism is that eco-tourism organizers are well-prepared and knowledgeable about the local environment. They must also pay sincere attention towards promoting the concept of 'Holistic Gaia Peace'.

## CONCLUSION

The World Tourism Organization and the World Travel and Tourism Council both enthusiastically promote the opening of new markets, the de-regulation of corporate enterprise, and the inalienable right to travel (Bianchi, 2006). 'Reality tours' have also recently arisen in popularity as the antithesis of conventional tourism, whereby tourists engage in a more realistic experience of the host community (Alluri, Leicher, Palm and Joras, 2014). This may encourage a greater

understanding of 'other' cultures by the tourists. Indeed 'Tourism can reduce prejudices, conflicts and tensions through challenging negative stereotypes (Pratt, and Liu, 2016).

'Peace tourism', in a narrow sense, is the travelling to peace sites, monuments, museums etc. in order to learn from the experience that these places reveal (van den Dungen and Lollis , 2014). It is tourism about peace and for peace. It may also include specific peace education programmes. Theoretically, peace tourism is the opposite of 'war tourism' (Wohlmuther and Wintersteiner,2014). Although "Tourism as a Force for Peace" has been a popular positive message relayed by the industry, consultants and some academics in recent years, the reality is that tourism has very little influence on peace and security issues, at least at the macro level, and that tourism is far more dependent on peace than peace is on tourism (Hall, Timothy, and Duval, 2008). As a conclusion, it can be said that there is two-way or mutual relationship between peace and tourism. The concept of peace tourism implies that positive peace may be attained through two or multiple track diplomacy.

This study attempts to explain the concept of peace tourism by applying a holistic approach or Holistic Gaia Peace

approach. There is scope for peace for all living and non-living organism in the world to be partly achieved through sustainable tourism. However, this form of tourism faces new challenges, as well as potential benefits, in the millennial, post-war era of Sri Lanka.

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