

## Behavioural Nudges: Sri Lankan Heritage Hotels Encouraging Hotel Guests to Adopt Eco-Friendly Practices

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### ABSTRACT:

Heritage Tourism, a branch of tourism which focuses on exploration of places with natural, cultural, and historical heritage sites has expanded globally and the global demand for heritage tourism has resulted in a boom in the number of heritage hotels operating inside / within the near proximity of heritage sites. The heritage hoteliers operating in natural heritage sites have been subjected to many criticisms from its patrons due to the identified negative impacts on the natural environment. With the increased pressure due to raising environmental concerns and the changing consumer preferences to adopt Eco-Friendly practices many hoteliers have adopted eco -friendly approaches. The study examines the influence of eco- friendly practices adopted by Sri Lankan heritage hotels in nudging the behaviour of hotel guests to adopt more eco – friendly practices. A qualitative multiple-case study based on two natural heritage hotels operating in the proximity of the two natural heritage sites of Sri Lanka was conducted by the researcher, where one hotel was chosen from each heritage site using purposive sampling. The research findings highlighted that eco-friendly architecture and interior of the hotels, sustainable waste management, water conservation practices, adoption of eco-friendly daily operations, provision of eco- friendly products and services to the guests, awareness campaigns on sustainability and eco-friendly behaviour as main eco – friendly practices adopted by the Sri Lankan Heritage hotels. Further, the research findings establish that eco-friendly practices of heritage hotels nudge tourists to alter their behaviour and adopt eco-friendly practices through triggering intuitive thinking, engaging reflexive thinking, and by building in automatic adjustments in the mindset of the guests who visit the heritage hotels.

**Keywords:** *Behavioural Nudges, Hotel Guest Behaviour, Eco Tourism, Natural Heritage Sites, Heritage Tourism*

### INTRODUCTION

Prominent scholars claim that heritage tourism, which includes both natural and cultural tourism, serves a broad spectrum of travellers who are curious about the cultures and natural features of different countries (Timothy, 2021; Poria, et al., 2003; Pedersen, 2002). According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), world cultural heritage sites are unique landmarks that have historical, cultural, scientific, or geographical value for people. Sri Lanka is home to two natural heritage sites and six cultural heritage sites, out of the more than 1000 world heritage sites spread over 167 nations. Given that many visitors are eager to learn about the history of the places they visit, Farid (2015) found a positive correlation between a nation's number of tourist arrivals and the presence of its

heritage monuments. Tourism is the third largest export earner to Sri Lanka following Remittances, and Textiles and Garments (Munasinghe et al; 2018). The salient researchers have established the presence of the heritage sites as a key contributing factor to the number of tourist arrivals to the country ((Kularatne, et al., 2019). The salient literature has established that tourists harm tourist destinations in many different ways (Neta et al., 2023; Gomes & Lopes, 2023; Weerasekara & Jayasinghe, 2020). The relevant literature in the area further highlights several detrimental effects of natural heritage tourism that have been brought up by the concerned stakeholders including increased foot print in natural heritage sites, increased pollution, soil erosion, loss of biodiversity, and loss of natural habitat (Shahzadal, 2016; Aref, et al.,

2010). The issues pertaining to Sri Lanka's natural and cultural heritage have also drawn the attention of Sri Lankan stakeholders. Also, many Heritage hoteliers have adopted eco – friendly practices to address the growing concern for Sri Lanka's natural conservation (Kularatne et al., 2019). However, as established by Weerasekara and Jayasinghe (2020), there exists limited research to establish whether the expensive efforts of Sri Lankan hoteliers in adopting eco - friendly practices have influenced the behaviour of the tourists. Hence, it's worthwhile to evaluate whether the eco-friendly practices adopted by the Sri Lankan heritage hoteliers operating in natural heritage sites nudge the behaviour of the guests to adopt eco – friendly practices. This study primarily aims to identify the impact of eco-friendly

practices adopted by the Sri Lankan heritage hoteliers operating in natural heritage sites on nudging the behaviour of the guests to adopt eco – friendly practices. Henceforth, the following research objectives are derived and answered in this study.

1. To identify the eco – friendly practices adopted by Sri Lankan heritage hotels.
2. To identify how the eco- friendly practices adopted by Sri Lankan heritage hotels nudge the tourists to alter their behaviour.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Heritage Sites and Heritage Tourism

According to the pertinent research, world heritage sites are places, whether man-made or natural, that have been recognised as having international significance and, as such, need special preservation in order to be used by future generations (Timothy, 2021; Garrod & Fyall, 2001; Brett, 1996). According to the leading experts in the field, heritage tourism is a subsector of tourism in which the primary tourist activities take place in heritage sites and natural and cultural heritage assets. Outstanding scholars in the field have also found that nations with a greater number of global heritage sites have a greater ability to draw in heritage tourism-interested travellers. (Pedersen, 2002; Farid, 2015). Furthermore, the existing literature has emphasised that heritage tourism can have both beneficial and detrimental effects on a nation's natural and cultural legacy. Existing literature has identified several detrimental effects, including increased traffic, increased pollution, soil erosion, natural habitat loss, cultural commodification, and hybrid cultural elements displacing traditional cultural aspects. Prominent scholars in the field have determined that heritage tourism

improves local communities' quality of life, builds institutional infrastructure, and boosts the economy overall (Shahzalal, 2016; Mihalić, et al., 2012; Aref, et al., 2010; Wall & Matheison, 2006). According to Blake (2007), many governments and practitioners worldwide have acknowledged the urgent need to protect heritage in light of the growing number of documented instances of heritage harm.

### Eco- friendly practices adopted by heritage hoteliers

The significant literature also contends that the tourism industry and its major players were compelled to embrace eco-friendly practices in order to maximise the positive effects and reduce the negative ones on its triple bottom line due to the increased attention given by stakeholders and the increased impact of tourism on the environment, society, and governance (Hysa et al., 2021; Parte, L. & Alberca, 2021). According to Peters (2022), hoteliers operating in heritage sites safeguard the natural heritage of the heritage sites through following local, national, and international laws on nature, educating guests about the significance of the site's nature and expected behaviour, minimising the hotel's carbon footprint, and adopting eco-friendly practices in their daily operations. Hoteliers most frequently adopt designing of eco-friendly premises, eco- friendly waste management systems, locally sourced eco-friendly sourcing systems, efficient energy and water conservation systems as the most prominent eco- friendly practices as per the salient literature (Chandratilake & Dias, 2013; Kasimu, et al., 2012; Mihalić, et al., 2012; Bade, 2005).

### Heritage Hoteliers nudging the behaviours of Tourists

Weerasekara &

Jayasinghe (2020) establishes that a hotels' green initiatives have a major impact on travellers' behavioural intentions. Further, it establishes that nudged tourists in addition to becoming more eco-friendly after staying in a hotel that is eco-friendly often recommends eco-friendly hotels to other, revisit the same hotel, become more willing to pay premium prices and visit eco-friendly hotels, and often spreads positive word of mouth regarding eco-friendly hotels. As per Gomes & Lopez (2023), the availability of trustworthy information about the sustainability of travel destinations has a beneficial impact on travellers' adoption of pro-sustainable behaviours and changes their behaviour by introducing them to environmental sustainability principles. Additionally, travellers who support sustainable travel and tourism practices also have a tendency to choose more ecologically friendly travel destinations. Furthermore, the salient literature suggests that Behavioural Nudges vary according to the type of intervention. They can be informative, heuristic triggers (outcome orientated, activating mental shortcuts to a desired aim), or heuristic blockers (process orientated, preventing cognitive errors by stopping or deleting their rational operation of mental shortcuts) (Barton & Grüne-Yanoff, 2015). According to Beshears & Gino (2015), nudges can be used in three different ways. Through triggering intuitive thinking, which involves arousing emotions, utilising biases, and simplifying processes has been identified as the first way. The second way identified is through engaging reflexive thinking, which involves the use of joint evaluations, opportunities for reflection on a decision, planning prompts, inspiring broader thinking, increasing self-accountability,

encouraging the consideration of disconfirming evidence, and using reminders. The final identified way bypasses both first and second ways of thinking and covers setting default options or incorporating automatic adjustments to behaviours.

## RESEARCH METHOD

Researchers who identify the existing theoretical knowledge by reading the previously published literature and designing a study based on that knowledge then gather data to test the identified pre-established theories are said to employ the deductive research approach (Saunders et al., 2009). The salient research suggests using a qualitative research methodology involving multiple case studies to research areas of this nature. (Alipour and colleagues, 2019; Tritto, 2019). Therefore, this study uses a qualitative deductive approach since its goal is to investigate how hotels operating in natural heritage sites adopt eco-friendly practices and how these adopted eco – friendly practices nudge the tourists who visit and stay in the hotel to alter their behaviours to become eco-friendly individuals. A multiple-case study based on Sri Lankan hotels located in the 2 world natural heritage sites (Sinharaja Rainforest and Central Highlands) in Sri Lanka were conducted where one hotel operating within the boundaries each heritage site was taken as the sample using purposive sampling. Data was gathered by means of observations of the hotels, semi-structured interviews with heritage hotel managers, staff and local community, referring the content included in the sustainability reports and other hotel reports, and semi-structured interviews with hotel guests (both local and foreign). A content

analysis was conducted on the data gathered through the reports and the data collected from the interviews were subjected to a thematic analysis. Data collected from all the resources were subjected to Data Triangulation to derive at the conclusion.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Eco – Friendly practices adopted by Sri Lankan natural Heritage Hotels

The following subsections separately reveals the Eco – Friendly practices adopted by the selected two heritage hotels.

#### Hotel 01 located in Sinharaja Forest

The observations conducted inside the hotel operating in the Sinharaja Rainforest and the content analysis of its sustainability reports revealed that design of the hotel rooms and common areas to promote the use of natural ventilation and the use of natural sky light, use of re-purposed materials for construction of hotel rooms, use of sustainable materials in daily operations, eco-friendly interior design, water conservation efforts, efforts taken to safeguarding the Biodiversity of the rainforest, Sourcing goods and services from locals, Hiring local tourist guys, The signposts put up in the villages with information about the heritage site, Educating the visitors on the heritage site and the expected behavior, and ecofriendly local excursions are the ecofriendly practices adopted by the hotel. According to the interviews with the hotel management, employees, and villagers, the hotel was built with sustainable materials, it does not impede the rainforest, its operations do not harm the flora and fauna, visitors are informed about the significance of the heritage site, local suppliers provide

goods and services, and there have been no complaints about the hotel's operations from environmentalists or external stakeholders. Given below are a few extracts of the statements of hotel management, hotel staff, and villagers. "Our hotel provides guests with complete peace and quiet by allowing them to escape their hectic daily schedules and rejuvenate in a natural setting. We support running green operations. We take pride in the fact that our chalets are built using sustainable materials, such as leftover bamboo paneling, abandoned railway sleepers, and recycled shipping containers. We do not harm any animals that visit our premises even the monkeys. The largest rain forest in Sri Lanka is next to our hotel, which is surrounded by tea patches. We are glad to state that we have never harmed the rainforest's natural history, beauty, or weather patterns. We buy all of our fresh fruits and veggies from the locals" [Manager of Operations] "Numerous indigenous flora and animals can be found in the Sinharaja Rainforest. As an entity, we have taken steps to embrace responsible tourism principles, such as sustainable development, environmental preservation, community engagement, and environmental awareness promotion. With the primary goal of preserving the natural heritage of this priceless rainforest, we have made sure that everything we do, from our infrastructure and interior to our everyday activities, is done in a sustainable manner" [General Manager] "We were quite concerned that the hotel would degrade the area's natural beauty when it was proposed to be built. However, we haven't observed anything bad happening within the hotel that harms the rainforest. There haven't



been any deforestation or climate changes brought on by the hotel. In fact, by purchasing our crops, this hotel assisted the vast majority of us farmers" (Villager 1: Local farmer). "The hotel has put up so many signposts that describes the value of the Sinharaja Forest and how we should behave. Some of these information even we were not aware before the posters were put up. The hotel educates the visitors also on how to behave and it's very easy to take the guests who stay at the hotel on the forest tour when compare to other tourists as the hotel has properly instructed the guests on their expected behaviour" (Villager 2: Local tour Guide).

### **Hotel 02 located in Central Highlands**

The hotel has been designed to avoid obstructing the Knuckles mountain range, its operations have not caused any harm to the flora and fauna, it has been constructed using sustainable materials, visitors are educated about the significance of the heritage site, local goods and services are procured, and there have been no complaints from external stakeholders or environmentalists regarding the hotel's operations, according to the interviews conducted with the hotel management, hotel staff, and the villagers. Below are some excerpts from the interviews that were done with the hotel's management, employees, and residents. "Our chalets are constructed from recycled wooden pallets and natural materials including clay and mud, they have natural ventilation, and the hotel is set up to take advantage of natural light. Additionally, we only feed our visitors food that is made locally. We make sure that the mountain range is not harmed, and we have taken steps to stop the use of

plastic" [Manager]. "To satisfy our guests, we buy fresh produce from nearby vendors. We serve water in clay bottles rather than plastic ones. Following a rigorous disinfection procedure, these clay bottles are reused" [Chef]. "We provide vegetables to the hotel, which is really beneficial to us. We get paid more by the hotel than by other purchasers. We were concerned when the hotel was built that it would have a detrimental effect on the environment, altering soil, irrigation, weather patterns, and other aspects that would affect our farms. However, because of the hotel's eco-friendly procedures, nothing of this like occurred" [Villager 01: A local farmer]. "The hotel has taken steps to install notice boards that inform visitors about the value of the Knuckles mountain range and the need for its protection. The hotel visitors always respect the tranquillity of the area and no major conflicts have ever taken place between the hotel, hotel guests, and the villager" [Villager 01: A University student from the area] The researcher's observations and the content analysis of its sustainability reports also showed that the resort's exterior, interior, and infrastructure all blend in with the heritage site's natural features. Additionally, the resort has incorporated natural elements into its everyday operations, provides eco-friendly amenities to the guests, taken steps to educate guests about the heritage site's natural value, and worked to implement eco-friendly elements to the hotel accommodations (natural ventilation, lighting systems).

### **Eco – Friendly practices adopted by Sri Lankan natural Heritage Hotels**

The above research findings when subjected to data triangulation determined that the primary eco-

friendly practices used by hotels operating in Sri Lankan natural heritage sites include hiring locals, using hotel architecture, interior design, and infrastructure that blends in with the site's nature, educating tourists about the significance of the site and appropriate behavior inside the heritage sites, embracing and integrating the natural heritage elements into the hotels' daily operations, using natural ventilation, provision of eco-friendly guest amenities, sourcing from locals, conserving water, protecting biodiversity, lowering emissions, making effective use of natural daylight, using sustainable water technologies, and using sustainable materials when building the hotels. These findings are in agreement with the previous research findings of Chandrathilake & Dias, 2013; Kasimu, et al., 2012; Mihalič, et al., 2012; and Bade, 2005.

### **Eco – Friendly practices adopted by Sri Lankan natural Heritage Hotels nudging the Hotel guests to adopt eco-friendly lifestyles**

The following subsections separately reveals how the Eco – Friendly practices adopted by the selected two heritage hotels has nudged the tourists to adopt eco-friendly lifestyles.

### **Hotel 01 located in Sinharaja Forest**

The interviews held with the hotel guests revealed that the information provided by the hotels on the importance of the natural heritage site and the expected behaviour from the tourists within the proximity of the natural heritage site, the eco-friendly amenities offered by the heritage hotels, the eco-friendly design of the hotel, and other eco-friendly practices of the heritage hotel has nudged the guests to adopt more eco-friendly behaviours

through increasing the awareness about the importance of being eco-friendly, through triggering emotions to adopt eco-friendly lifestyles, and through triggering emotions to reduce and gradually eliminate all the day to day activities which impact the environment negatively. Given below are a few extracts of the statements of hotel guests. “I always used to buy plastic water bottles whenever I went out as I was lazy to carry a water bottle with me. The glass water bottles given by the hotel instead of plastic water bottles got me thinking about how such a small step could contribute to the reduction of the carbon footprint. I have now decided to buy a glass bottle for my personal use which I can carry with me as soon as I return home” [Local guest 1]. “As an architectural student from a highly industrialized country the architectural design and the nature friendly interior design triggered me to think about how I can incorporate the elements I saw in terms of the sustainable construction material, natural light and ventilation, nature friendly interior into my projects. This trip changed my way of thinking and got me inspired by nature. This knowledge I will take back to my country and share with my professors and colleagues” [Foreign guest 1]. “After seeing the signposts displayed by the hotel all over the heritage site I felt ashamed of myself due to my habit of throwing garbage in public places. This hotel stay was an eye opener for me and I have come up with a personal resolution not to litter around and to dispose waste in a more nature friendly manner” [Local guest 2].

#### **Hotel 02 located in Central Highlands**

The interviews conducted with hotel guests revealed that the hotels' information about the significance of

the natural heritage site and the expected behaviour of tourists near the site, their eco-friendly amenities, their eco-friendly design, and other eco-friendly practices have encouraged guests to adopt more environmentally friendly behaviours. This includes raising awareness of the importance of being eco-friendly, evoking feelings to adopt eco-friendly lifestyles, and evoking feelings to eliminate all daily activities that negatively impact the environment. Given below are a few extracts of the statements of hotel guests. “The natural herbal based guest amenities made me to rethink my entire beauty routine. It got me wondering why am I spending money on artificial beauty shampoos, soaps, and other beauty products that come in plastic cases when I can easily find local Sri Lankan herbs from my home garden that are more effective and budget friendly. I have decided to entirely replace my existing beauty routine with a more natural routine consisting of Sri Lankan herbs that can be found in my garden” [Local guest 3]. “Despite being a regular hiker who explores the mountains I have never given any serious thought about how a small camp fire could result in a wild fire until I read the guest rules and regulations provided by the hotel. I made a personal resolution not to start any irresponsible campfires when I go hiking ever again” [Foreign guest 2]. “The chalet that we stayed was designed to use natural lighting and natural ventilation. This triggered me to rethink how can I be more energy efficient once I return home. I am planning to open my windows during the daytime instead of turning on the Air Conditioner in my apartment once I return back home” [Foreign Guest 3].

#### **How does the Eco – Friendly practices adopted by Sri Lankan natural Heritage Hotels nudge the Hotel guests to adopt eco-friendly lifestyles**

When subjected to thematic analysis the above identified research findings reveal that heritage hotels' ecofriendly policies encourage travellers to change their behaviour and embrace eco-friendly practices by stimulating intuitive and reflexive thought processes and by automatically altering the mindset of those who stay there. These findings are inline with the findings of Weerasekara & Jayasinghe (2020), Gomes & Lopez (2023), Barton & Grüne-Yanoff (2015), and Beshears.

#### **CONCLUSION**

The study examined the influence of eco- friendly practices adopted by Sri Lankan heritage hotels in nudging the behaviour of hotel guests to adopt more eco – friendly practices with the intention of identifying the common eco-friendly practices adopted by Sri Lankan hotels operating in natural heritage sites. The research findings highlighted that eco-friendly architecture and interior of the hotels, sustainable waste management, water conservation practices, adoption of eco-friendly daily operations, provision of eco- friendly products and services to the guests, awareness campaigns on sustainability and eco-friendly behaviour as main eco – friendly practices adopted by the Sri Lankan Heritage hotels. Further, the research findings establish that eco-friendly practices of heritage hotels nudge tourists to alter their behaviour and adopt eco-friendly practices through triggering intuitive thinking, engaging reflexive thinking, and by building in automatic adjustments in the mindset

of the guests who visit the heritage hotels. The research being limited to 02 case studies is a key limitation of the study. The findings of the study can be generalized by expanding the number of hotels subjected to the case study analysis.

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