

Perception of Foreign Tourists on Dual-Pricing of Entrance Fees: Case of Sri Lankan Tourists Destinations

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Dual-pricing is a strategy used in a number of avenues with respect to consumer pricing. Adopting this pricing policy on the entrance fees for tourists' destinations is a heavily argued concern among travelers and industry critics. Rationales to reject and embrace dual-pricing have been highlighted, while the matter is more prominent in the global south countries in comparison to the western nations. Previous studies on dual-pricing have often adopted a contingency valuation method or a prospect theory to determine willingness to pay. This study is based on a qualitative approach to understand the perception of foreign tourists on the dual-pricing policy for entrance fees at tourists' sites in Sri Lanka using a thematic analysis. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data. Themes of; Agree to pay a higher price, Transparency and visibility of information, Extremely high should not be charged, Dual-pricing gap should be reasonable, The invested amount should go into a sustainable initiatives – infrastructure, were derived with balanced opinions on the issue at hand. It was deemed that the findings of this study is helpful in strategizing future pricing policies with regards to the tourism sector in the country.

Keywords: *Dual-pricing, Perception, Foreign-Tourists, Entrance-Fees, Sri Lanka.*

Introduction

Global travel and tourism industry was valued at 7.5 trillion USD in 2017, making it one of the world's largest industries with an overall economic contribution of over 7.5 trillion USD. According to the data from (Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority, 2017) Europe had received the most number of tourists by region. While the highest expenditure on international travels and tourism was done by the Chinese and the United States of America in second place. Given how lucrative the industry by itself is, the attractions around the world are primarily divided in to two geographical areas based on the economic strength of the countries, namely, Global North countries and Global South countries, out of which the case of 'DUAL-PRICING' on entrance fees at tourist attractions is a current and a widely discussed scenario in the latter. Public park and recreation organizations are challenged to balance political pressure to raise nontax revenues and alleviate users' resentment (Crompton & Jeong, 2016). Dual-pricing or differential pricing is one such strategies public parks and recreation providers use to help ensure a steady income from entrance/user fees without arousing protests from the local community. The term 'Dual-Pricing' in tourism, at a glance is not very familiar to any of the visitors, especially to the foreign visitors since this concept does not operate in almost all or most of the developed western nations, and neither do the locals know much about this policy, except the fact that they are charged a lesser fee to enter the various tourist attractions

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in Sri Lanka. Further, dual pricing is not just based upon the classification of residents and non – residents, but can be implemented via a practice of charging two separate prices for different markets – for the same product or service. Although, one might think that the exchange rates would cancel-out any unacceptable effect from a dual-pricing policy, it is also the perception of the visitors that encounter this discrimination, that could build criticisms and scale down Sri Lanka from being positioned a top tourist’s destination. The existing academic literature clearly shows a shortfall of research in terms of dual-pricing in the field of travel and tourism, hence the tendency to explore this void to understand the subject matter in depth.

Table 1: Dual-pricing in global context

Country	Tourist Destination	Locals	Foreigners	Percentage difference
India	Taj Mahal	0.4	14	3500%
Peru	Machu Picchu	25	49	196%
Thailand	Bangkok Seashell Museum	3.5	7	200%
Iran	Persepolis	0.5	12	2400%
Zimbabwe	Victoria Falls	7	30	428%
Ecuador	Galapagos Park	6	100	1666%

Source: Apollo (2014)

Table 2: Dual-pricing in Sri Lanka

Destination	Locals	Foreigners	Percentage difference
Sigirya Rock Fortress	50	5250	10400%
Pinnawala Elephant Orphanage	110	3000	227%
Temple Kandy	-	1500	150000%
Peradeniya Botanical Gardens	110	2000	1718%
National Zoological Garden	110	3000	2627%
Horton plains - Nuwara Eliya	200	3000	1400%

Source: Sennema (2019); Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (2017).

Literature Review

Dual Pricing

Dual-pricing refers to the practice of setting much higher prices for foreigners than for domestic visitors. (Apollo, 2014) This practice is commonly seen in Asia, Africa, Latin America (Dallen & Boyd, 2003) and the United States (Crompton, 2016). An in-depth analysis of past literature shows that cases titled, Fairness of prices, User fee policy and willingness to pay among visitors to a national forest, has been carried out in the United States, An Analysis of adopting dual-pricing for museums, has been tested in Iran in the past years. A dual-pricing structure can be outlined either as a discount to local residents or a surcharge to nonresidents where both presentations are logically and economically the same, but nonresidents’ judgment

of a price has been found to be strongly influenced by how is it framed (Chen, Monroe & Lou, 1998).

This notion is based on different price elasticity of demand between the categories of tourists from different locations and it is also called segment based pricing (Sharifi-Tehrani, Verbic & Chung, 2013). The reason for the afore mentioned can be stated as, that the developing countries believe that the tourists from developed countries have higher household income (Reynisdottir, Song & Agrusa, 2008). It is also noted that while public recreation service providers' justifications for imposing a dual-pricing structure vary from case to case, the underlying rationales for this practice can be summarized into two arguments, although neither is likely to be persuasive to nonresidents. First, adopters of dual-pricing systems can use social equity to justify the differential prices and argue that local taxes collected from local residents are allocated to build, operate and maintain public-funded or government-run recreational facilities or services (Howard, 2009).

Carlton and Perloff (2005) have highlighted the necessary conditions for successful price discrimination. Firstly, there must not be a resale market, in which the ones who buy the product at a lower price re-sell it at a higher price to consumers with a higher willingness to pay. Usually services cannot be resold, and this is why it is easier for service providers to introduce a policy of price discrimination such as case of tourist destinations.

Perception

Perception is the belief or opinion often held by many people and based on how things seem (Cambridge English Dictionary, 2019) or in the simpler form it is the way in which something is understood or interpreted. As for the purpose of this study, the perception is considered to interpret the standpoint or opinion of the foreign tourists in Sri Lanka.

As cited by Chiaravutthi (2019) several approaches have been developed for the purposes of assessing fairness perceptions (Xia, Monroe, & Cox, 2004). Equity and distributive justice theory (Adams, 1965). Theory of procedural justice (Thibaut & Walker, 1975). And the dual entitlement principle proposed by (Kahneman, Knetsch & Thaler, 1986). Moreover, to the best understanding of the authors only (Sharifi-Tehrani, Verbic & Chung, 2013) and (Apollo, 2014) appears to be the only efforts made in studies on 'dual-pricing' in the context of leisure and tourism, with one other addition very recently by Zou & Petrick (2019) to the knowledge base. Out of the three only two focus on understanding the perception of price-discrimination of the victim groups. In addition, Murphy, Pritchard & Smith (2000) elaborates on Price-Value Perception model of tourists which discuss about the determinants that would affect a tourist's intent to return to the same destination again. I.e. Reasonable price, Satisfaction, Value for money, Country of origin, Season of visit.

Past research has demonstrated that customers' perceptions of unfairness are associated with customer dissatisfaction and complaints (Campbell, 1999) and subsequently generates lower profits to the organization (Kahneman, Knetsch & Thaler, 1986). According to Monroe (1973) and Olander (1970) it is suggested that a buyer's price judgment is influenced by his perception of prevailing market prices and his perception of the price most frequently charge.

Considering the perception of tourists on dual pricing, a related that case that elucidates the depth this research issue was recorded in Honolulu Zoo, where local residents were charged 8\$ for entrance while foreign visitors were required to pay a doubled charge of 14\$ for admission. Very interestingly, the price for Locals was stated in the native Hawaiian language, suggesting that the authorities were attempting to cover non-residents' perceptions of unfair

pricing and discrimination (Zou & Petrick, 2019). Another, similar case was explained by Apollo (2014) in his study where more than one-third of the foreign tourists were angry about the dual-pricing system adopted in Nepal, and 84% of the foreign tourists tended to tell their friends and family about the price discrimination they had experienced.

However, it was understood that the perception of locals on this particular pricing policy is built upon the ideology that, local residents already pay their fees indirectly through taxation and are thus entitled to a lower price since non-residents do not pay local taxes (Crompton, 2016). In contrast, nonresidents argue that, local residents are generally heavy users of local parks and recreation facilities, and hence should pay the same price, if not more, to cover the costs associated with the maintenance and operation of facilities (Zou & Petrick, 2019).

Thus, the literature uncovers the tendency for visitors to criticize about the dual-pricing policy in online travel blogs and other platforms that is highly linked with their perception on such pricing encounters as a tourist.

Methods

This study adopted a qualitative approach, the data collection was done through semi-structured questionnaires. Convenience sampling technique was used to gather comments and opinions from 72 foreign tourists in Sri Lanka. A thematic analysis (Template Analysis) was used to discuss and elaborate on the ideas, which have been expressed by the respondents. In this setting - the respondents were asked to present their opinion and comments on the dual pricing concept.

The discussion was based on a pre-determined theme template that was generated after an initial coding followed by line by line coding process using MAXQDA; qualitative data analysis and coding software. After which the emerged codes were categorized in to themes and discussed in contrast with the literature.

As King (2010) defines the principal focus of all thematic analysis approaches is on identifying, organizing, and interpreting themes in detailed qualitative (textual) data to highlight and convey key messages. Themes are 'recurrent and distinctive features of participants' accounts, characterizing particular perceptions and/ or experience which the researcher sees as relevant to the research question'. Template Analysis can be used with any form of written textual data, including participant diaries, observational field notes, and pre-existing organizational documents (King, Brooks & Tabari, 2018).

Findings & Discussion

Demographic analysis of respondents

Table 3: Respondent's profile

	Frequency	Percentage
Region		
North America	5	6.94%
South America	1	1.39%
Western Europe	50	69.44%
Eastern Europe	6	8.33%
Middle East	2	2.78%
South Asia	1	1.39%
East Asia	5	6.94%
Oceania	2	2.78%
Gender		
Male	34	47.22%
Female	38	52.78%
Age Category		
16 - 25	20	27.78%
26 - 35	38	52.78%
36 - 45	6	8.33%
46 - 55	3	4.17%
56-65	5	6.95%
Reason for choosing Sri Lanka as a Destination		
Affordability	8	11.11%
Scenic Beauty	33	45.83%
Culture & Tradition Exploration	16	22.22%
Sea, Sun & Sand	6	8.33%
Other	9	12.5%
Expected spending on a single site entrance fee		
1-4 USD	2	2.78%
5-10 USD	22	30.56%
11-15 USD	20	27.78%
16-20 USD	9	12.5%
21-25 USD	7	9.72%
26-30 USD	5	6.94%
31-35 USD	1	1.39%
36 USD	6	8.3%

Annual Disposable Income

1000 - 5000 USD	8	11.11%
6000 - 15000 USD	7	9.72%
16000 - 25000 USD	10	13.89%
26000 - 35000 USD	21	29.17%
36000 - 45000 USD	8	11.11%
46000 - 55000 USD	6	8.33%
56000 - 65000 USD	5	6.94%
66000 ABOVE	7	9.72%

Source: Survey data (2019)

Thematic analysis

Figure 1: Theme template

1. Agree to pay a high price
2. Transparency and visibility of information
3. Extremely high prices should not be charged
4. Dual-pricing gap should be reasonable
5. The invested amount should go into a sustainable initiatives

Source: Author's Compilation

Agree to pay a higher price

Upon analyzing foreign visitors consent to pay a higher price than the locals to visit the Sri Lankan tourists' sites, a majority of the respondents agreed with the idea to accept a differentiated higher price for entrance. It was observed that they were very understanding on this factor based on several avenues. First they have identified that the Sri Lankan economy is not strong as their own home country economies. Therefore, charging a different (Higher) price from the tourists can be easily justified – as in the respondents rather supportively pointed out that; "I believe that this is a good thing due to the fact that generally the rupee is lot cheaper for foreigners than it is when locals earn, therefore this gets balanced out".

Also in the context of travel and tourism sector – it is also acceptable that in order to strengthen this particular sector – a dual-pricing pricing strategy can be used. The respondents showed their opinion with statements on this; "I understand the need for dual pricing; it benefits and promotes local tourism as well as increasing revenue by tourism. In my opinion it is totally reasonable to accept dual-pricing in a country such as Sri Lanka to help tourism; I fully understand the difference between foreigners and local fares as it is relative to the income/GDP. I also understand that the money generated by tourism will help the growth/development of the attractions/ country in the long run".

Furthermore, considering the fact that the sites should be more open for the local residents, since it is their native land. As such, a majority of the respondents have identified that Sri Lanka is still a developing country and the purchasing parity of its residents is quite low. Therefore, if a higher price is charged on visiting these sites – the locals will not be able to afford such visits. The opinion was positive in this regard: i.e. "Dual pricing is acceptable, so

local people with a lower income can visit and enjoy these places as well; I feel that the locals shouldn't have to pay what tourists pay; Dual pricing gives the opportunity for locals to have access to their culture and historic heritage. It should stay as it is for locals.”

Furthermore, the majority of the respondents have clearly identified that there is a need for a justification behind the dual pricing strategy used when visiting the sites.

Transparency and visibility of information

When it comes to dual-pricing – although majority of the tourist have identified the need for this pricing concept to be in operation, they tend to expect better information. Mainly information about the differential pricing mechanism to be shared with the tourists. This is a key area where the respondents could be convinced that they are not being exploited. As few of the respondents have openly discussed: “Dual pricing is okay. But it's better to have more information lockets with all the information about prices. So then there will be no arguments and misunderstanding about prices”.

Particularly the tourists have a feeling that when there are dual prices – it can possibly be a scam, which is considerably common in developing countries. Hence, very rationally their stance is that they too agree upon paying a higher price – but the details and the transparency of these prices should be clearly visible. Accordingly, a majority of responses illustrated this idea with statements such as: “I think it would be helpful if there was more information at each major site, explaining the difference of fees and why. It took me several days to learn that Sri Lankans pay less, and because it isn't explained upfront it can make tourists feel like maybe they are being tricked or cheated. I have not seen dual-pricing in any other country I've visited but if Sri Lanka thinks it will help, you need to at least justify it to the foreigners: However, the gap always has to be motivated. And some way Europeans / tourists can understand from what the difference comes. This isn't always clear (like of the ancient temple site of Anuradhapura); Education on why it is important to give extra money as a foreign visitor is needed”.

Above all, Sigiriya and Horton-plains seems to be one of the most noticed tourist's sites according to many tourists. This detailed opinion from one respondent shows the necessity of dual pricing to be fair and reasonable: “I understand the concept of dual-pricing as my ability to pay more for an attraction is higher than locals in most cases. However, when the price for tourists is more than twice the price for locals, I usually decide to go for the cheaper option that will allow me to do more with my money if the expensive attraction is not a 'must see' for me. I am considering going to Sigiriya but I am unsure if I will do it due to the high cost of this attraction. Dual-pricing can be beneficial for the host country as long as it doesn't discourage the tourists from visiting the attractions”.

Thus as it is defined and discussed in here – the dual pricing is a concept that needs to be elaborated in a more informative way. However, the opinions shown here do not strictly justify that the tourists are willing to accept the dual pricing as it is, but they are more understanding and will be more open if there is specified information available on the matter. Hence there is lesser hassle.

Extremely high prices should not be charges (Negative Perception)

Although the popular statement of the respondents was that they were willing to pay a higher price for the visits – they all inclined that there should not be a massive gap between the prices they pay and what is charged from locals. Specifically, the extremely high prices should not be charged. This is mainly stemmed when it comes to the developed countries – there are no discounted prices for the visitors, be it foreigners or locals – but a single flat rate system is provided. Hence with these levels of standards – even though the tourists are willing to pay a higher price they are not willing to pay an extremely high fee. With great concern, they stated their opinion on this unpopular practice: “I understand there is a gap between local and tourist, but it shouldn’t be too big. However, I do think that some locations like Sigiriya Lion rock are overpriced which makes it less available to the foreign tourists with lower salaries: The large dual-pricing gap has absolutely affected my trip to Sri Lanka. My partner and I had planned to visit Sigiriya and Horton plains, but were not willing to pay \$20 plus just because we are from a foreign country. It does not necessarily mean that we have lots of money to spend. It is off-putting for tourists to see the large gaps in prices for locals vs. Foreigners”.

It was not very surprising for tourists to form a negative perception about the whole country because of the high gap between the two prices: “I think its okay, that the foreigners have to pay more, but it depends on what and how high the gap is. For an example; In Kandy Botanical gardens the foreign visitors have to pay LKR 2000 and the local visitors only 100LKR, which is definitely too high. ; I think it would discourage visitors if the gap was too high as it makes you feel unwelcome and unwanted. A suggested mandatory donations and a guide price on appropriate donations would be more encouraging”.

Drawing conclusions, it is imminent that the gap should be lesser, and not such remain at such a high level of percentages such as 100% from what the local are paying. In converging into a general insight, all the above examples showed a negative perception about the dual pricing concept. As pointed out by one of the respondents; “Foreign tourists are charged around 2500-3000 LKR while locals are charged only around 50-100 LKR. Nearly 40% of the tourists choose to leave, but if the prices are the same or with little difference, more foreigners will visit.”

Dual-pricing gap should be reasonable (Positive perception)

On the other hand, there were discussions where some of the tourist felt that there should be dual pricing with a reasonable gap. They have not developed a negative perception about the country, with reference to high level of gap between the locals and the tourist’s entrance fees for tourists’ sites. They tend to see it in a much more favorable manner as an issue to be addressed in terms of development of the industry. These opinions were voiced in form of: “I feel it should be the same for all tourists regardless of where they travel from. I will pay a high charge but only to a certain extent; Charging 50 - 100 times of the local price can feel discriminatory to tourists, I believe a lesser gap would be a better option; If dual-pricing gap is not so much as \$20+, I think it is acceptable. My opinion is that the dual-pricing gap should be reasonable and should provide facilities required for tourists to set off the high price: To me as a foreigner, it’s totally acceptable to pay more than the locals, especially at religious and cultural sites, which are important for locals. Sri Lankan people should be able to experience and learn their culture and religion of their country no matter what their income is. And as tourists I am more okay to help to ensure this by paying more”

Moreover, it was observed that even though the tourists are charged a higher price – this should be based upon the facilities that are provided. Specifically, a separated sanitary and other facilities for foreigners etc. Also the respondents discussed that when they are to pay a higher price – at least there should be a guide or a government approved personnel, to show the ropes, to avoid being scammed and ripped off by other people for providing guiding services, even after paying a higher entrance fee, to the respective authorities handling the tourists' sites.

The invested amount should go into a sustainable initiative

This was one of the most crucial opinions expressed by the tourists. Considering the demography of the travelers, it was established that they are 'informed travelers'. Hence, paying an extra amount of a money, and adhering to the dual pricing policy – they expect it to be reflected through tangibles. I.e. The revenue generated to be put into maintenance and systematic development of the destinations with time.

As per the opinions stated by the respondents: "I don't mind paying a little extra, two points to consider, 1. Don't make it a huge difference. 2. Tell me where my dollars are going and how it's helping. "I am happy to pay more than locals to places, nevertheless. I'm concerned about how that money is invested"; "Extra fees for foreigners should be used to develop the country and all the Sri Lanka people"; "I would hope that the income from the tourists goes into local organizations which will help locals, especially education". Thus considering different opinions expressed by the foreigners – it is evident that there is a need for the tourists to see that their fees are being used for a sustainable venture. Especially in terms of building the country. One of the most observable traits was that the respondents were not thinking about the individual comfort – but following with the perspectives of even locals – considering that the fees they pay will be going towards the local population's betterment.

Also there are concerns with the facilities of the tourist's sites as cited by one respondent: "I totally agree with dual-pricing of foreign visitors to tourists' attractions in Sri Lanka, if the tourist's money is used to improve the attractions. However, I have seen in my trip; places with big issues: Toilets, security, roads, traffic. All those things must be improved; also understand that the money generated by tourism will help the growth/ development of the attractions/ country in the long run".

Conclusion

In summarizing the essence of this study, firstly, the aim was to understand the perception of tourists on dual-pricing in Sri Lanka. According to literature, two major disadvantages were identified; one is that when informed about these discrepancies – some tourist have boycotted visiting these places. While another significant group of travel bloggers have stated that they particularly refrained from visiting high priced sites such as; Sigiriya rock fortress and Temple of tooth relic, Kandy. Thus the research issue. Based on the findings of this study, the main concerns identified were that while many foreign tourists have understood the fact that they have to pay a higher fee to enter tourists' sites, but if they were to pay the premium prices – in return they would demand for better and quality infrastructure. In order to avoid any unfair judgments, the availability of information and transparency of pricing was a key determinant. However, cot-throat prices and large dual-pricing gaps were driving tourists away, as large gaps were considered discriminatory and unfair. Therefore, the major contributions of this learning is to potentially reduce the negative perceptions of foreign tourists while adopting a

dual-pricing policy, by paying attention to their concerns as visitors. Moreover, to propose amendments to existing differential-pricing system to cancel-out any unreasonable discrimination towards the non-residents to allow them a more satisfying experience within Sri Lanka as top notch tourist destination.

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