

# **Community perspective of rural tourism: A thematic analysis**

**S.T.W.M.G.W.C.P.K. Thilakarathne and D.M.C. Dassanayake**

*Department of Tourism and Hospitality Management, Faculty of Management Studies,*

*Rajarata University of Sri Lanka*

*Corresponding author: chathurithilakarathne@gmail.com*

## **Abstract**

Rural tourism is one of the fast-growing forms of tourism today. It gives the traveler a unique experience on different cultures and different life patterns which are blended with natural environments. The community involvement is one of the key aspects in successful implementation of this kind of tourism. Hence, understanding the perceptions of local community on the rural tourism is utmost important in planning a successful rural tourism destination. Given that, the aim of this research was to develop a set of concepts on the views and attitudes of local community towards participating in the rural tourism which can eventually benefit not only the host community but also all other stakeholders in rural tourism field. Heeloya village in Knuckles Mountain range in Sri Lanka was selected for the study. Based on constructivism stance of the research, a qualitative approach was adopted in the inquiry. A total of twenty semi-structured interviews were conducted with the villagers and data was analyzed manually adopting thematic analysis techniques. According to the results, the community reflects their perceptions towards rural tourism as a collection of different aspects such as trust, awareness of tourism, attitudes of tourism, preservation, benefits of tourism, and sharing. Furthermore, awareness and the attitudes were found to be highly associated with the effective participation of community in the rural tourism. Sharing and preservations of the natural resources and culture were the prominent reasons to the community to continuously taking part in the tourism related activities. These contextual concepts can be considered as key areas in developing rural tourism in Sri Lankan context in the areas of policy making and managerial decision-making. Moreover, the themes discovered through this particular study can definitely advance the existing body of knowledge in the respective area and the rural tourism practitioners can gain many insights from the findings of the research for the use of their business strategy formulation and implementation.

**Keywords:** *Rural tourism, local community participation, local community engagement in tourism*