Nature-Based Tourism Plan

Sinharaja Forest Reserve Complex

Submitted to: Ecosystem Conservation and Management Project, Ministry of Mahaweli Development and Environment

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Acronyms

CBO  Community-based organisation
CBT  Community-based tourism
FRC  Forest Reserve Complex
FD  Forest Department
UNESCO  United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
Introduction

The following Nature-Based Tourism Plan provides a comprehensive set of strategic objectives and subsequent actions for developing tourism in the Sinharaja Forest Reserve Complex (FRC) and surrounding communities. Along with a vision statement and guiding principles, these strategic objectives and an action plan make up the Sinharaja Destination Development Strategy.

The Nature-Based Tourism Plan is the second overall report from the consultant in relation to tourism development in Sinharaja, and it follows the “Tourism Assessment Report” that was a situational analysis of current tourism conditions and activities in Sinharaja. The Tourism Assessment Report, which is the foundation upon which this report is based, assessed a number of existing tourism conditions in Sinharaja, including: market demand, attractions inventory, infrastructure and services, supply and competitiveness, human and institutional capacity, socio economic considerations and environmental considerations.

Sinharaja Forest Reserve Complex (FRC)

Covering an area of 8,864 ha and located in southwest Sri Lanka, the Sinharaja Forest Reserve Complex is the country's last viable area of primary tropical rainforest. More than 60% of the trees are endemic and many of them are considered rare. There is much endemic wildlife, especially birds, but the reserve is also home to over 50% of Sri Lanka’s endemic species of mammals and butterflies, as well as many kinds of insects, reptiles and rare amphibians (UNESCO, 2017).

The Sinharaja forest was declared as a National Forest Reserve in 1875, an International Man and the Biosphere Reserve in 1978 and a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1988 (Rathnapura Divisional Forest Office, 2018).

Unlike other nearby protected areas like Yala and Udawalawe National Parks – Sinharaja FRC is less-known for its large mammal viewing and more for its high-quality birding, stunning landscapes and overall rich biodiversity.

Sinharaja’s landscape encompasses a series of ridges and valleys that are crisscrossed by an intricate network of rivers and streams. Faunal endemism is particularly high for birds with 31 (94%) of 33 species recorded in Sinharaja being endemic to Sri Lanka. A number of threatened, endangered and rare species occur within Sinharaja including: leopard (Panthera pardus), Indian elephant (Elephas maximus), endemic purple-faced Langur (Presbytis senex), Sri Lanka wood pigeon (Columba torringtoni), green-billed Coucal (Centropus chlororrhynchus) and Sri Lanka white-headed starling (Sturnus senex)…amongst others (UNESCO, 2017).

The Sinharaja Forest Reserve Complex is divided into three districts: Rathnapura, Matara, and Galle. The majority of visitation occurs in the Rathnapura and Matara districts. This assessment therefore focuses on these areas, but also includes information on Morning Side (a remote destination in the eastern corner of Sinharaja) and Kurulugala (a destination in the Galle district where new tourism development and activities are being considered).
Methodology

Literature Review & Desk Research

Initial desk work was conducted that included a review of background documents and historical tourism data provided by the Forest Department, as well as internet research of various websites dedicated to tourism and conservation issues related to Sinharaja FRC.

Stakeholder Workshops & Individual Interviews

Upon arrival to Sinharaja in March 2018 (see program below), the consultant conducted a series of workshops with various focus groups in order to collect data related to the Tourism Assessment and Nature-Based Tourism Plan. These groups included Forest Department managers and staff, guide associations, private sector representatives and community members. Workshop activities included mapping and inventory of tourism attractions and infrastructure, visitor profiling, and visioning exercises to identify both tourism needs and opportunities.

In addition, individual interviews were held with a number of participants including community leaders, business owners/managers, and various Forest Department personnel. These interviews covered topics more specific to particular tourism issues such as training and investment needs as well as more sensitive issues such as conflicts and concerns.

Sinharaja FRC Tourism Assessment Program

![Program Image]
Destination Development Strategy

A destination development strategy is a tourism planning and management tool that helps to guide a destination, such as a protected area, in the various steps and considerations involved in establishing a successful tourism destination. A good destination development strategy should illustrate how to enhance the destination as a whole – from increased local jobs to improved visitor experience (see graphic). In destinations such as protected areas – and possibly most importantly - the strategy also needs to illustrate how tourism can be developed in a way that not only minimizes its negative impacts to the environment, but also directly contributes to biodiversity conservation efforts as well.

The following destination development strategy for Sinharaja FRC contains:

1. **A vision statement** that defines what the destination hopes to achieve in the future if its plans for tourism development, management and marketing are realized.
2. A set of guiding principles (e.g. sustainability, community participation, focus on quality) that act as the foundation for all tourism development activities.
3. A set of strategic objectives for tourism in the protected area, which in turn provide the framework for specific actions that follow. The three main functional areas to consider for objectives and actions are:
   - **Development Objectives:**
     - Product development/improvement, training and technical assistance, infrastructure development, etc.
   - **Management Objectives:**
     - Protected area tourism planning and management, tourism management policy, training for tourism managers/technical staff, etc.
   - **Marketing Objectives:**
     - Online activities (e.g. destination website, social media) and offline activities (e.g. partnerships with tour operators, media and public relations).
4. **Action Plans** that outline the specific tasks, in chronological order, that will be completed to develop or improve tourism in the destination. Action Plans define the following:
   - **Action:** What is the specific actions that must be completed to realize the objective?
   - **Lead:** Who responsible for completing each action? Who is accountable?
   - **Supporting:** Who is providing additional support to complete each action?

**Vision Statement**

The following vision statements represent the intended status of tourism in Sinharaja FRC in 2022:

- Sinharaja FRC will be a world-class nature-based tourism destination and the country’s top birding location with a variety of high-quality tour, food, lodging and transportation services.
- Sinharaja FRC will effectively balance tourism development and growth while also conserving the region’s natural and cultural resources.
• Sinharaja FRC managers will have a positive and collaborative relationship with a variety of tourism stakeholders, including local communities, the tourism private sector and government.
• A Sinharaja tourism management plan will be developed that guides Forest Department managers in implementing tourism activities in Sinharaja FRC.

Guiding Principles

Tourism planning, development and management activities in Sinharaja should be guided by the following overarching principles that form the foundation of sustainable and effective decision-making:

**Triple Bottom Line Results**
For tourism development activities to be successful in Sinharaja, they must aim to benefit:
1. People: creating local benefits, protecting cultures and traditions, a policy of inclusion
2. Planet: developing tourism in a way that reduces negative impacts and contributes to conservation
3. Profit: supporting tourism products and businesses that are viable and successful

**Local Participation and Benefits**
From job creation and revenue generation to building conservation constituencies around protected areas, the strategy must aim to engage and benefit local residents and build a positive relationship with the Forest Department.

**Market-Driven**
Understanding and reacting to tourism trends and visitor motivations will help to ensure that Sinharaja FRC and surrounding communities and businesses offer what the market actually wants to buy.

**Private Sector Participation**
Private sector partners like tour operators and lodging service providers play an important role in connecting visitors to Sinharaja FRC and should be consulted at every stage of planning and implementation.

**Forest Department Engagement**
In order to be sustainable and not a “one-off” attempt, all tourism planning and development activities should be done with the full participation of Forest Department managers and staff who will be ultimately responsible for tourism development and management, and therefore must be given the tools and knowledge to do so.
Strategic Objectives

1. Development Objectives

1.1 Develop a Corps of Professional Naturalist Guides

1.1.1 Conduct Training with Kudawa & Pitadeniya Conservation Centre Guides
More effective than written trail guides or recorded video presentations, local naturalist guides can bring Sinharaja’s forest to life with dynamic interpretive information and local natural and cultural history stories. Training local guides (and requiring them for all visitors as an overall tourism policy) also helps to create much-needed jobs within local communities and monitor visitor behavior and potential impacts. An intensive interpretive guide training course should take place with guides from both Kudawa and Pitadeniya Conservation Centres, as well as any Forest Officers who guide visitors in the Sinharaja FRC.

In addition, it is important that a designated guide area is established in Mederipitiya in order to avoid guides harassing tourists upon arrival to the area, as well as to develop a guide rotation system so there is not unprofessional competition for clients.

1.1.2 Purchase Basic Equipment Needs for Guides and Forest Officers
Naturalist guides need proper uniforms to appear professional and trust-worthy, and proper equipment to both ensure the safety of visitors (i.e. first-aid kits, extra water) as well as explain/explore the natural world with visitors (i.e. binoculars, field guides). Waterproof boots, jackets and backpacks are recommended as well. The same equipment needs apply to Forest Officers who guides visitors in the Sinharaja FRC.

1.2 Provide Technical Assistance to Improve Surrounding Homestays

1.2.1 Conduct Homestay Management and Marketing Training with Homestay Owners
Increasingly, local homestay lodging providers fill an important role in providing affordable lodging for visitors to the Sinharaja FRC. Unlike the more-established hotels and lodges that also surround the park, homestay owners often have little to no training in providing quality lodging services that meet international standards. They also lack critical skills in promoting their homestays through affordable and effective online marketing channels such as online travel agents (i.e. Booking.com, AirBnB) and social media. A short 3 to 4-day training should be held with homestay owners in both the Rathnapura and Matara Districts to build these skills.

A previous training provided by the SLTDA should be reviewed and considered before any additional homestay training is provided, to avoid replication of efforts.
1.2.2 Assist Homestays in Product Development (i.e. Tours, Cooking Classes, Craft Sales)
In addition to homestay management and marketing training, an opportunity exists to provide technical support and training to homestay owners who aim to offer tour products – from village visits to cooking classes – to their guests that are complementary to a visit to the Sinharaja FRC. In addition, homestays serve as excellent sales points for crafts and other locally produced products which can benefit a greater number of local artisans as well as improve the overall visitor experience.

1.2.3 Identify Crafts & Local Products That Can Be Offered At Homestays & Visitor Centres
Both local and foreign visitors love to purchase local crafts, souvenirs, food and other items from the destinations they visit. Crafts production and sales also expands the benefits of tourism to a variety of local community members, including women’s groups, elders and individuals with physical limitations. Tourism development activities should assess the supply and demand of those local products, provide a basic artisan training program that helps them to refine their products, create a community crafts “brand” that highlights to visitors the items support local job creation, and help establish mutually beneficial relationships between artisans and sales points such as homestays and visitor centres.

1.3 Develop New Tourism Products Within the Sinharaja Forest Reserve

1.3.1 Develop Exclusive Tour Experiences for Overnight Guests in the Sinharaja Forest Reserve
Currently, lodging options such as the dormitories located at the Pitadeniya Conservation Centre are underutilized. One strategy to promote more overnight guests at existing and future Forest Department lodging would be to “package” or combine high-quality, exclusive experiences in the park with the FD lodging. For example, night nature hikes are a wildly popular activity in many tropical protected areas and could be offered to overnight bungalow and dormitory guests as an “added value” experience along with their lodging.

Private sector representatives have expressed interest in such exclusive tour experiences for their guests, and a willingness to pay a price point of $50-60 for a guided night tour.

Regulation changes to allow night tours will need to be considered for the tour concept to become a reality.

1.3.2 Develop Sinharaja Guide Book
Similar to crafts and souvenirs, many visitors like to buy photo/guide books from the places they go as a reminder of their visit. High-quality photos and descriptive text describing the unique ecosystems and species found at the destination is the norm. Such a guide book could be developed and sold at visitor centres and homestays. As a bonus, much of the same information that would need to be collected for a visitor guide book would also serve as teaching material for a training course with local naturalist guides and forest officers as well.
1.4 Improve Tourism Infrastructure in the Sinharaja Forest Reserve Complex

1.4.1 Construct New Ticket Counters at Unattended Entrances
As visitation in Sinharaja continues to grow, it is apparent that additional ticket counters at various points such as Samangala, Denawakkanda and Pothupitiya are needed. The ticket counters should offer guests not only a place to purchase their ticket, but also basic forest reserve information (i.e. maps, attractions, etc.), washrooms, a resting area and car park.

The Forest Department is already successfully implementing an impressive model in Knuckles (at Pitwala Panthana) in which a local community-based organization (CBO) manages the ticket counter – generating revenue for the Forest Department but also for the community as well. This excellent example of a public/community partnership that produces goodwill should serve as a collaborative management model for all new ticket counters if and when possible.

1.4.2 Improve Existing Forest Department Lodging
Although the Forest Department has a number of overnight lodging facilities in Sinharaja - many of them require repairs to safety features such as railings (see photo). In addition, investments should be made to improve/upgrade washroom facilities with private areas for both men and women, western-style sitting toilets in addition to squatting toilets, comfortable furniture for relaxing and decorations made from local handicrafts.

1.4.3 Improve Basic Amenities (Bathrooms, Water Fountains)
Most washroom facilities throughout Sinharaja are limited to “squatting” toilets, which although the norm for most Sri Lankans, are quite foreign to many visitors. Developing new washroom facilities that offer both sitting as well as squatting toilets (see photo from Yala National Park) is advised. Hygienic water fountains at the main visitor centres are also recommended.

1.4.4 Improve Safety of Attractions
One of the most popular tourism activities in Sinharaja FRC is its network of walking trails that lead to rivers and waterfalls. Many of these popular attractions lack any kind of safety infrastructure such as handrails across bridges or railings at steep and slippery drops. In addition, some basic signage in Sinhala, Tamil and English should also be constructed at attractions where swimming, rock climbing or hiking may be dangerous, not recommended or illegal.

1.4.5 Improve Network of Hiking Trails
There are a number of sections of Sinharaja Forest Reserve where hiking could be a popular tourism activity with local and foreign visitors, as well as researchers. For example, developing walking trails that connect Morning Side to the proposed Kurulugala ecolodge site via the Rainforest Ecolodge would create new recreational options for a variety of visitors in that section of the forest. Basic trail signage with maps of the routes, distances and other pertinent information in multiple languages is also recommended.
1.4.6 Improve Road Access
If tourism is to be expanded in Sinharaja, particularly to relatively undeveloped sections of the park like the 8.5 km from the highway to Morning Side, road repairs and/or improvements must be made. In addition, the road to the Pitadeniya Conservation Centre is currently only passable by 4x4 vehicles. Although improving the road would make the centre more accessible to staff and visitors, it would also make increased development (homes, farming, illegal activities) more likely as well. One option to consider would be to make improvements but maintain it as a 4x4 road (no buses, no regular cars – crossing a shallow river required) to limit development.

1.4.7 Improve Regional Road Signage
In order to assist visitors in finding key protected area points of entry and tourism facilities, the erection of large Information and directive boards along access roads in major townships is recommended. All signage should be multi-lingual in Sinhala, Tamil and English.

1.4.8 Construct Observation Towers or A Canopy Walk at the Kudawa & Pitadeniya Conservation Centres
The existing trail networks centred around the Kudawa and Pitadeniya Conservation Centres are popular tourism attractions yet could be even more improved with the construction of forest observation towers or “canopy walks” that are popular in other rainforest destinations around the world. Free-standing observation towers may be preferred as they require less infrastructure, are less obtrusive and are less likely to have any kind of negative visual or animal behaviour impact.

Note: Staff & Administration Quarters
Although the improvement of staff and administrative quarters are certainly needed in many areas of the park, it falls out of the scope of this report, which is dedicated exclusively to tourism products, services and infrastructure. However, Forest Department staff are well aware of the staff and administrative quarter needs.

Rathnapura District

1.4.9 Convert the Research Education & Extension Centre Into an Ecolodge
The Research Education & Extension Centre (REEC) is a well-intended but rarely used facility designed for school groups and awareness-building activities. A much better use of the centre would be as an exclusive ecolodge targeting the high number of local and foreign bird watchers (and the tour operators who service them) who visit the Kudawa Conservation Centre every year, many of which would embrace the opportunity to overnight in the forest reserve. The new ecolodge can currently accommodate from 6-12 guests and is perfectly situated in a somewhat remote and pristine location perfect for birdwatching and nature discovery. In addition, the ecolodge could offer night hikes and other exclusive experiences that would make the ecolodge in high demand.
1.4.10 Demolish and Rebuild Dorana Ela Ticket Counter
The Dorana Ela Ticket Counter could be improved with a number of upgrades, including the expansion of the interpretive information/panels (in multiple languages), cafeteria services, and CBO “sales center” where visitors could buy all of the current items for sale plus local handicrafts, food items, etc. In addition, the CBO sales center would be the ideal location to promote the various community homestays and other lodging, tours and other community-based tourism products and services in the surrounding area.

Finally, if the Research Education & Extension Centre is converted to an ecolodge, then the Dorana Ela Ticket Counter facility could also be repurposed to provide the education and extension services instead of the REEC.

1.4.11 Construct Bird Hides
Secluded and well-camouflaged “hides” where bird watchers can observe species is a recommended improvement that will enhance the visitor experience both in Kudawa and Pitadeniya Conservation Centre areas.

Matara District

1.4.12 Construct an Ecolodge at Kurulugala
With high-quality rainforest bordering a vast valley below and a refreshing temperate climate, the Kurulugala region of Sinharaja is an ideal location for an upscale ecolodge catering to foreign visitors. With conditions similar to popular (but unfortunately overrun) tourism destinations such as Ella and Nuwara Eliya, an ecolodge could offer private cabins that blend into the surrounding landscape and take advantage of panoramic views. An ecolodge could also offer a restaurant and conference facilities. Such an initiative has direct conservation benefits as well, as it would create jobs and support for a local CBO that contributes to fire suppression and fire-fighting activities in the area.

1.4.13 Construct Research Facilities at Morning Side
Researchers represent a strong niche market with great potential for the Morning Side region. However, the lodging facilities at Morning Side require considerable improvements to its kitchen and dining areas, updated sleeping quarters, and the construction of a dormitory-style sleeping and research facility designed for this niche market.

1.4.14 Construct Cafeteria and Dining Area at Pitadeniya Conservation Centre
Adding cafeteria/food services to the Pitadeniya Conservation Centre would help to improve the visitor experience. This is particularly true in the Matara District, where most visitors walk into the forest via a network of trails and the nearest private food services are relatively far away. An outdoor dining deck with tables and chairs overlooking the river is also recommended.
2. Management Objectives

2.1 Improve Collaboration Amongst Stakeholders

2.1.1 Form Community Tourism Associations
Forming community tourism associations would facilitate much of the tourism development work the Forest Department hopes to implement in the coming years. By having an organized group of local community members working in tourism (i.e. lodging, food, tours, transportation), it becomes that much easier to deliver training and technical assistance programmes “en mass” to a large number of beneficiaries.

In addition, it provides an opportunity for the Forest Department to identify an organized group of people who are receiving the benefits of tourism development activities (i.e. training, funding, support), and a group who can – in return – be asked to invest their time and effort in supporting collaborative conservation activities in Sinharaja.

2.1.2 Identify Conservation Activities that Tourism Stakeholders Can Support
Sustainable tourism should not only reduce negative impacts to natural and cultural resources, but it should and could directly contribute to biodiversity conservation efforts in Sinharaja FRC. And the upcoming period in which the Forest Department will be benefiting local community tourism stakeholders (via training, funding, etc.) is the perfect time to identify ways in which those beneficiaries can support the Forest Department’s work in Sinharaja. Whether it’s posting visitor “codes of conduct’ in homestays or guides abiding by best practices during tours or contributing time to support environmental education, reforestation or monitoring activities...it’s up to the Forest Department to identify opportunities in which local community stakeholders can and should participate in conservation activities.

2.1.3 Form Sinharaja FRC Tourism Working Group
Increased communication and collaboration between the Forest Department, Sinharaja FRC managers, local and national tour operators, press and tourism organizations (i.e. SLTDA) in Sri Lanka is clearly needed. During the course of discussions that took place in the development and review of this Nature-Based Tourism Plan, private sector representatives provided highly valuable input on the proposed tourism products and services, as well as remarked on the need for more information about Sinharaja in order to help promote the area with their clients.

Therefore, the formation of a Sinharaja Tourism Working Group that includes a variety of members and meets a few times a year to discuss tourism development in the forest reserve is recommended.
2.2 Improve Forest Department Tourism Planning & Management Capacity

2.2.1 Conduct Tourism Planning & Management Training for Forest Department Managers

Building the capacity of Forest Department managers in tourism planning and management is one of the most important steps to ensuring that the recommendations included in this plan are implemented. In order to do so, a focused and strategic training program is needed. Unfortunately, most international short-term training programmes are too theoretical and lack a focus on the practical responsibilities that Forest Department managers will have in developing and managing tourism in the coming years.

The following graphic includes the proposed overall structure of a specially designed training course that could be delivered to Forest Department managers in Sri Lanka over the span of 4 weeks. Throughout the course, participants would build both their capacity to manage as well as the actual contents of a tourism management plan for their respective forest reserves.

The course would be delivered in partnership with the George Washington University’s International Institute of Tourism Studies – one of the world’s most prestigious tourism training programs – from which participants would receive an official certificate.

2.2.2 Produce Tourism Management Plans for Rathnapura & Matara Districts

As stated above, one of the results of the Tourism Planning and Management trainings would be the creation of an actual tourism management plan for both the Rathnapura and Matara Districts. The document would act as a “road map” for implementing tourism development and management activities in Sinharaja FRC, define detailed quarterly and annual work plans to guide tourism activities, and help to ensure the comprehensive implementation of the recommendations found in this Nature-Based Tourism Plan.

2.2.3 Update Tourism Regulations & Requirements

An important step for the Forest Department to take would be to update the rules and regulations that apply to tourism activities in its forest reserves. This may include revising user/entrance fees and the guidelines that apply to certain tourism activities.
3. Marketing Objectives

3.1 Improve Tourism Marketing of Sinharaja FRC

3.1.1 Develop a Tourism-Specific Sinharaja FRC Promotional Website
It is recommended that the Forest Department develop either park-specific information under their main umbrella website, or develop an individual “destination” website for visitors to Sinharaja FRC that includes the following information:

- An introduction/description of the park, its ecosystems and signature species (including high-quality photos)
- An overview of the tourism services offered by the park, including visitor centres, lodging options, food services, hiking paths, wildlife viewing areas, etc.
- Maps of the parks (ideally as downloadable/printable PDFs)
- Codes of conduct that guide visitors on how to reduce their negative impacts while in the park (i.e. proper wildlife viewing practices, trash management, etc.)
- Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) about the park (i.e. when’s the best time of year to visit, temperature and precipitation averages, etc.)
- Local, recommended tourism service providers such as tour operators, nearby hotels and homestays, restaurants, etc. – ideally those are supporting Sinharaja’s conservation objectives in one form or another.
- A reservation system or contact information for forest department overnight lodging.

3.1.2 Develop Sinharaja FRC Social Media Pages
In addition to a website (which is somewhat “static” and whose information doesn’t change frequently) establishing Sinharaja FRC social media pages on websites like Facebook and Instagram allow park managers to share up-to-date information, projects, photos, videos, special events and other dynamic content that would allow the forest reserve to build a large audience that could follow current news in Sinharaja.

3.2 Improve Marketing of Local Tourism Service Providers

3.2.1 Conduct Online Marketing Training for Local Tourism Service Providers
One of the greatest tourism development needs that exists in all of the communities surrounding Sinharaja FRC is the training of local tourism service providers (i.e. homestays, restaurants, guides, etc.) in how to effectively use online marketing to improve their sales and revenues. Online marketing – from creating low/no-cost websites to social media to using free online sales platforms like Booking.com and AirBnB – is the primary way all tourism businesses (even those in rural, remote areas) promote themselves in 2018 and beyond.

3.2.2 Develop Collaborative Marketing Strategy Between Forest Department and Local Tourism Service Providers
For visitors to Sinharaja FRC, the Forest Department is a high-profile and trusted source of information. Visitors come to conservation centers and other park facilities looking for information about the park and the surrounding area. Imagine if those same visitors could find useful information in those same places on local and recommended tourism service providers like homestays, restaurants, tours and transportation providers. By providing this much-needed
promotional support to local tourism service providers, the Forest Department has the opportunity to offer something of real value to those local businesses and can ask those businesses to support the park’s conservation efforts through a variety of collaborative ways.

3.3 Improve Collaboration with Private Sector Partners

3.3.1 Conduct FAM Trips with Targeted Tour Operators
As tourism development activities begin to bear results such as new lodging facilities, exciting new tour options, improved guide services and new or enhanced park infrastructure – it’s critical that the variety of Colombo-based tour operators who frequent Sinharaja are introduced to the new tourism products, services and infrastructure through familiarization or “FAM” trips. FAM trips (which are often paid for, at least in part, by the sponsor – in this case the Forest Department) are a way to “show off” the new features in Sinharaja to these important private sector partners who can in turn begin to promote them to their clientele.

Action Plans
The following pages include detailed, two-year action plans with quarterly tasks that will result in the implementation of the stated strategic objectives for the Sinharaja FRC Destination Development Strategy. In addition to the detailed task, each action also indicates which individual or organization is responsible for leading each task (and who is ultimately accountable for its completion) and which individuals or organizations are to provide support.
### 1. DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVES

#### Strategic Objective 1.1 Develop a Corps of Professional Naturalist Guides

**Action 1.1.1** Conduct Training with Kudawa & Pitadeniya Conservation Centre Guides
- Develop guide training materials
- Select participants
- Conduct guide training at Kudawa
- Conduct guide training at Pitadeniya
- Guide Training Specialist
- Sinharaja managers, SLTDA

**Action 1.1.2** Purchase Basic Equipment Needs for Guides and Forest Officers
- Determine final list of equipment needs
- Purchase equipment needs
- Inventory all equipment and document
- Distribute equipment
- Conduct monthly inventory check of equipment
- Guide Training Specialist
- Sinharaja managers

#### Strategic Objective 1.2 Provide Technical Assistance to Improve Surrounding Homestays

**Action 1.2.1** Conduct Homestay Management and Marketing Training with Homestay Owners
- Develop homestay training materials
- Select participants
- Conduct homestay training
- Provide follow up assistance with homestay marketing
- Lodging Services Specialist
- Sinharaja managers, SLTDA

**Action 1.2.2** Assist Homestays in Product Development (i.e. Tours, Cooking Classes, Craft Sales)
- Identify viable tourism that homestays can offer guests
- Assist homestay owners in developing and marketing tours
- Lodging Services Specialist
- Sinharaja managers, Community tourism associations

**Action 1.2.3** Identify Crafts & Local Products That Can Be Offered At Homestays & Visitor Centres
- Conduct assessment of existing/potential craft products
- Provide artisan training in product refinement & production
- Develop community crafts "brand" and basic packaging
- Facilitate mutually beneficial sales partnerships between artisans and sales points
- Launch artisan product sales
- Crafts Development Specialist
- Sinharaja managers, Community tourism associations

#### Strategic Objective 1.3 Develop New Tourism Products Within the Sinharaja Forest Reserve

**Action 1.3.1** Develop Exclusive Tour Experiences for Overnight Guests in the Sinharaja Forest Reserve
- Identify viable exclusive tour experiences in forest reserve
- Develop exclusive tour experiences
- Train guides in delivery of exclusive experiences
- Promote exclusive experiences with Sinharaja visitors
- Guide Training Specialist
- Sinharaja managers

**Action 1.3.2** Develop Sinharaja Guide Book
- Develop overall structure of Sinharaja Guide Book
- Repurpose & refine guide training materials for Sinharaja Guide Book
- Collect additional information & photos for Guide Book
- Begin production of Guide Book
- Distribute and promote Guide Book at various sales points in region
- Forest Department publications specialist
- Guide Training Specialist, Sinharaja managers
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**Strategic Objective 1.4 Improve Tourism Infrastructure in the Sinharaja Forest Reserve Complex**

**Action 1.4.1 Construct New Ticket Counters at Unattended Entrances**
- Finalize list of new ticket counter locations
- Determine management model (i.e. FD or CBO-operated) for new ticket counters
- Construction of new ticket counters
- Construction of new ticket counters
- Provide training to CBOs in management of ticket counters (if applicable)
- Finalize list of new ticket counter locations
- Determine management model (i.e. FD or CBO-operated) for new ticket counters
- Construction of new ticket counters
- Construction of new ticket counters
- Provide training to CBOs in management of ticket counters (if applicable)

**Lead:** Forest Department infrastructure specialist
**Supporting:** Sustainable tourism specialist, Sinharaja managers

**Action 1.4.2 Improve Existing Forest Department Lodging**
- Conduct in-depth assessment of repairs needed to FD lodging
- Determine improvement to be made to FD lodging
- Repair and improve FD lodging
- Repair and improve FD lodging

**Lead:** Forest Department infrastructure specialist
**Supporting:** Sustainable tourism specialist, Sinharaja managers

**Action 1.4.3 Improve Basic Amenities (Bathrooms, Water Fountains)**
- Assess and finalize basic amenity needs
- Improve basic amenities
- Improve basic amenities
- Improve basic amenities

**Lead:** Forest Department infrastructure specialist
**Supporting:** Sustainable tourism specialist, Sinharaja managers

**Action 1.4.4 Improve Safety of Attractions**
- Conduct in-depth assessment of safety needs at FD attractions
- Improve safety of FD attractions
- Improve safety of FD attractions
- Improve safety of FD attractions

**Lead:** Forest Department infrastructure specialist
**Supporting:** Sustainable tourism specialist, Sinharaja managers

**Action 1.4.5 Improve Network of Hiking Trails**
- Finalize hiking trails to be improved or developed
- Trail improvement and development
- Trail improvement and development
- Trail improvement and development

**Lead:** Forest Department infrastructure specialist
**Supporting:** Sustainable tourism specialist, Sinharaja managers

**Action 1.4.6 Improve Road Access**
- Finalize roads to be improved or developed
- Road improvement and development
- Road improvement and development
- Road improvement and development

**Lead:** Forest Department infrastructure specialist
**Supporting:** Sustainable tourism specialist, Sinharaja managers

**Action 1.4.7 Improve Regional Road Signage**
- Determine overall locations where road signage will be placed
- Develop road signage content and designs
- Construct new road signage
- Construct new road signage

**Lead:** Forest Department infrastructure specialist
**Supporting:** Sustainable tourism specialist, Sinharaja managers

**Action 1.4.8 Construct Observation Towers or A Canopy Walk At the Kudawa & Pitadeniya Conservation Centres**
- Research potential tower/canopy walk design options
- Conduct Environmental impact Assessment of proposed design
- Prepare site for tower/canopy walk construction
- Construction of tower/canopy walk
- Construction of tower/canopy walk
- Promote new tower/canopy walk with visitors & tour operators
- Research potential tower/canopy walk design options
- Conduct Environmental impact Assessment of proposed design
- Prepare site for tower/canopy walk construction
- Construction of tower/canopy walk
- Construction of tower/canopy walk
- Promote new tower/canopy walk with visitors & tour operators

**Lead:** Sustainable tourism specialist
**Supporting:** Forest Department infrastructure specialist, Sinharaja managers

**Action 1.4.9 Convert the Research Education & Extension Centre Into an Ecolodge**
- Develop business plan for new ecolodge
- Purchase/install new furniture & equipment for ecolodge
- Hire and train ecolodge staff and management
- Promote new ecolodge with visitors & tour operators
- Develop business plan for new ecolodge
- Purchase/install new furniture & equipment for ecolodge
- Hire and train ecolodge staff and management
- Promote new ecolodge with visitors & tour operators

**Lead:** Sustainable tourism specialist
**Supporting:** Forest Department infrastructure specialist, Sinharaja managers
<table>
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<th>TYPE</th>
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<td>Action</td>
<td>1.4.10</td>
<td>Renovate Kudawa Conservation Centre</td>
<td>- Determine final improvements to be made to Kudawa</td>
<td>- Renovation of Kudawa Conservation Centre</td>
<td>- Renovation of Kudawa Conservation Centre</td>
<td>- Train FD staff in management of new Kudawa centre services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action</td>
<td>1.4.11</td>
<td>Construct Bird Hides</td>
<td>- Research potential bird hide design options</td>
<td>- Conduct Environmental Impact Assessment of proposed design</td>
<td>- Construction of bird hides</td>
<td>- Construction of bird hides</td>
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<tr>
<td>Action</td>
<td>1.4.12</td>
<td>Construct Ecolodge at Kurulugala</td>
<td>- Develop business plan for new ecolodge</td>
<td>- Discuss ecolodge with local communities, determine their roles</td>
<td>- Prepare building site</td>
<td>- Construction of Kurulugala Ecolodge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action</td>
<td>1.4.13</td>
<td>Construct Research Facilities at Morning Side</td>
<td>- Conduct in-depth analysis of researcher needs with national universities</td>
<td>- Determine research/lodging facilities design</td>
<td>- Conduct Environmental Impact Assessment of proposed design</td>
<td>- Prepare building site</td>
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<tr>
<td>Action</td>
<td>1.4.14</td>
<td>Construct Cafeteria and Dining Area at Pitadeniya Conservation Centre</td>
<td>- Determine cafeteria and dining area design</td>
<td>- Conduct Environmental Impact Assessment of proposed design</td>
<td>- Prepare building site</td>
<td>- Construction of cafeteria and dining area</td>
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## 2. MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

### Strategic Objective 2.1 Improve Collaboration Amongst Stakeholders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1.1</td>
<td>Form Community Tourism Associations</td>
<td>- Identify community tourism stakeholders for associations</td>
<td>- Conduct quarterly meetings with community tourism associations</td>
<td>Sustainable tourism specialist</td>
<td>Community members and leaders, local tourism service providers, Sinharaja managers</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Conduct community meetings to discuss purpose/benefits of associations</td>
<td>- Conduct quarterly meetings with community tourism associations</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Formalize community tourism associations</td>
<td>- Conduct quarterly meetings with community tourism associations</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.1.2</td>
<td>Identify Conservation Activities that Tourism Stakeholders Can Support</td>
<td>- Determine conservation opportunities for community support with FD managers</td>
<td>- Include conservation support commitments within tourism association agreements</td>
<td>Sinharaja managers</td>
<td>Sustainable tourism specialist, Community members and leaders, local tourism service providers</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
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<td>- Discuss conservation opportunities with community members</td>
<td>- Conduct ongoing conservation activities with community stakeholders &amp; tourism associations</td>
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<td>- Conduct ongoing conservation activities with community stakeholders &amp; tourism associations</td>
<td>- Conduct ongoing conservation activities with community stakeholders &amp; tourism associations</td>
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### Strategic Objective 2.2 Improve Forest Department Tourism Planning & Management Capacity

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Action</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.2.1</td>
<td>Conduct Tourism Planning &amp; Management Training for Forest Department Managers</td>
<td>- Customize tourism planning &amp; mgmt training to FD/Sinharaja managers</td>
<td>- Conduct tourism planning &amp; mgmt training for FD managers</td>
<td>Sustainable tourism specialist</td>
<td>Forest Department leadership, Sinharaja managers</td>
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<td>- Determine FD managers to participate in tourism planning &amp; mgmt training</td>
<td>- FD managers begin implementation of tourism mgmt plans in Sinharaja</td>
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<td>2.2.2</td>
<td>Produce Tourism Management Plans for Rathnapura &amp; Matara Districts</td>
<td>- FD managers develop tourism management plans as part of above training</td>
<td>- Implementation of tourism management plans in Sinharaja</td>
<td>Sinharaja managers</td>
<td>Sustainable tourism specialist, Forest Department leadership</td>
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<td>- Conduct overall review of current FD tourism regulations</td>
<td>- Implementation of tourism management plans in Sinharaja</td>
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<td>- Propose updates to FD tourism regulations to FD leadership</td>
<td>- Implementation of tourism management plans in Sinharaja</td>
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<td>2.2.3</td>
<td>Update Tourism Regulations &amp; Requirements</td>
<td>- Update FD tourism regulations</td>
<td>- Update FD tourism regulations</td>
<td>Forest Department leadership</td>
<td>Sustainable tourism specialist, Sinharaja managers</td>
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# Sinharaja FRC Nature Based Tourism: Action Plan

## 3. MARKETING OBJECTIVES

### Strategic Objective 3.1 Improve Tourism Marketing of Sinharaja FRC

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### Strategic Objective 3.2 Improve Marketing of Local Tourism Service Providers

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### Strategic Objective 3.3 Improve Collaboration with Private Sector Partners

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Sustainability Plan

Environmental Sustainability

- Develop tourism monitoring plan to identify specific indicators of environmental impacts, and their limits of acceptable change. Examples of potential indicators include:
  - Vegetation coverage around camping areas
  - Degree of erosion along hiking trails
  - Level of solid waste pollution near popular swimming areas
  - Reported wildlife sightings near lodging facilities and other tourism infrastructure
- Conduct Environmental Impact Assessments for all infrastructure projects, including lodging facilities, trails, roads and parking areas, and visitor centres.

Operational Sustainability

- Conduct annual “refresher” trainings for training program participants.
- Convene quarterly meetings with program participants to discuss challenges, successes, opportunities and concerns.
- Develop and maintain inventory registries of all new equipment purchases for tourism activities.
- Conduct annual review of the condition of tourism equipment and infrastructure, with an annual repair and maintenance plan as well to address outstanding issues.
- Conduct quarterly review of the condition of hiking trails, with an annual repair and maintenance plan as well to address outstanding issues.
- Conduct annual review of the condition of road signage, with an annual repair and maintenance plan as well to address outstanding issues.

Financial Sustainability

- Develop demand-driven business plans with pro forma financial projections for all new tourism products and services.
- Conduct an annual cost-benefit analysis to determine the viability for all new tourism products and services.

Guidelines & Best Practices

The following set of guidelines (for visitors) and best practices (for tourism service providers) are intended to reduce negative impacts of existing and proposed tourism activities and ensure sustainability in the Sinharaja Forest Reserve Complex.

Currently, the main tourism activities in the Sinharaja FRC are limited to wildlife viewing (particularly bird watching), hiking, swimming and family gatherings. Proposed tourism activities and attractions for Sinharaja FRC include trekking, observation towers, canopy walks and bird hides. The following guidelines and best
practices are designed to apply to both tourism activities and attractions in the forest reserve, as well as the primary tourism service providers (i.e. homestays, restaurants) surrounding the forest reserve.

Visitor Guidelines

- Be aware of protected area rules and regulations that apply to tourism activities.
- Minimize noise and disturbances when in close proximity to wildlife, and nesting, breeding or feeding areas.
- Avoid wildlife handling or feeding as a general rule, and do not try to force particular behaviors from wildlife.
- Stay on designated trails and follow all stated recreational guidelines.
- Take out all trash that you bring into the protected area and pick up trash when possible.
- Do not keep any natural objects found while visiting the protected area.
- Do not light illegal campfires and monitor legal campfires at all times.

Best Practices: ALL Tourism Service Providers

- Respect international or national legal protection of employees and pay employees a living wage.
- Provide employment opportunities for local community members.
- Allow local artists to display and sell their handicrafts and art work at your property.
- Provide information to customers on local attractions and cultural activities.
- Use local goods and services whenever possible.
- Maintain equitable hiring practices. Do not discriminate against hiring women and local minorities, including in management positions, while restraining child labor.
- Actively support initiatives for social and infrastructure community development including, among others, education, health, and sanitation.
- Comply with local zoning and protected or heritage area requirements.
Best Practices: Tour Operators & Guides

Environmental Considerations
✓ Minimize noise and disturbances when in close proximity to wildlife, and nesting, breeding or feeding areas.
✓ Avoid wildlife handling or feeding as a general rule, and do not try to force particular behaviors from wildlife.
✓ If using spotlights to view wildlife at night, commit to use low-wattage lights with red filters and only for short periods of time on particular individual animals.
✓ Limit the number of visitors per guide to 15 or below to provide a better experience for visitors, to decrease impacts and to make the groups more manageable.
✓ Make tourists aware of how they can help protect tropical forest areas (e.g. stay on trails, use equipment appropriately, avoid smoking, carry all waste out) to help prevent accidents and avoid damage to the environment.
✓ Inform and manage visitors by providing pre-tour information on keeping appropriate distances from wildlife, minimizing noise and disturbances, handling and feeding restrictions, and any potential health and safety risks from wildlife. Include the reasoning behind particular actions or precautions.
✓ Collect all waste generated during tours and dispose of this waste outside of natural areas.

Cultural Considerations
✓ Avoid highly sensitive or private sites on the tour and seek local community endorsement in the selection of sites visited.
✓ Keep visitors to defined areas and routes.
✓ Communicate cultural ‘dos and don'ts’ to visitors to increase cultural awareness and minimize inappropriate behavior, activities and communication with hosts and cultural sites during their stay.
✓ Establish guidelines or a code of behavior for visits to culturally or historically sensitive sites, in order to minimize visitor impact and maximize enjoyment.
✓ Not sell, trade, or display historical and archeological artifacts, except as permitted by law.
✓ Contribute to the protection of local historical, archeological, culturally, and spiritually important properties and sites.
✓ Use elements of local art, architecture, or cultural heritage in operations, design, decoration, food, and/or shops while respecting the intellectual property rights of local communities.

Management Considerations
✓ Employ local qualified guides, staff and management.
✓ Maintain equitable hiring practices. Do not discriminate against hiring women and local minorities, including in management positions, while restraining child labor.
✓ Fund or support your guides and employees in attending language or training courses.
✓ Purchase locally made food, provisions and services and use local facilities.
✓ Encourage visitors to support local businesses by:
  o Recommending local businesses, which offer other tourism related services of interest to visitors such as: accommodation, entertainment, transport, regional food and wine, souvenirs and craft markets.
  o Increasing visitor awareness of other local attractions and sites of cultural and historical interest.
  o Incorporating stops or stays with other local businesses as part of the tour experience can be a good way of creating integrated tour packages and supporting local businesses.
  o Encouraging and having available information on visitor opportunities to participate in community development projects.
Best Practices: Lodging & Food Service Providers

Overall Management Considerations
✓ Only use native species for landscaping and restoration and take measures to avoid the introduction of invasive alien species.
✓ Never hold captive wildlife.
✓ Provide information to and encourage customers to purchase local products and services.
✓ Provide access for persons with special needs.

Energy Management Considerations
✓ Choose local vendors to reduce transportation of items.
✓ Use renewable energy sources such as solar, wind, biomass for lighting, water heating when possible.
✓ Use natural light whenever possible.
✓ Replace existing light bulbs and/or incandescent lighting with energy efficient or compact fluorescent bulbs.
✓ Establish measures to reduce light pollution.

Water Management Considerations
✓ Educate staff on water conservation and best practices.
✓ Track water consumption and adopt measures to reduce consumption.
✓ Use water efficient devices such as low-flow aerators on sinks and shower heads, automatic shut off sinks in common area rest rooms.
✓ Effectively treat and reuse wastewater, including gray water (from dishwashers, laundry, etc.) and rain water to irrigate landscaping.

Waste Management Considerations
✓ Separate recyclable, organic and land-fill waste and dispose of each properly.
✓ Prevent wildlife from accessing trash and food by secure food sources.
✓ Provide alternatives to individual plastic water bottles such as water pitchers and point of use water filters.
✓ Ensure proper disposal of hazardous materials such as aerosol cans, solvents, and other potentially hazardous materials.
✓ Offer reusable products such as glass cups, cotton linens, and refillable condiment dispensers. Avoid using disposable products.
✓ Avoid providing customers with paper napkins and plastic straws.
✓ Eliminate use of Styrofoam (polystyrene) and other difficult to recycle products.
✓ Purchase products, such as condiments, cleaning supplies, and other durable products in bulk and in concentrated form when possible.
✓ Minimize the use of harmful substances, including pesticides, paints, swimming pool disinfectants, and cleaning materials.
✓ Implement practices to reduce pollution from noise, light, runoff, erosion, ozone-depleting compounds, and air and soil contaminants.
Best Practices: Transportation Service Providers

- Avoid sensitive sites during operations including important habitats, breeding grounds and small local communities.
- Stay on designated or defined routes where possible.
- Avoid skidding, rough riding/driving or excessive speed.
- Keep vehicles clean to avoid transfer of weeds, fungi and diseases.
- Use fuel-efficient vehicles when possible.
- Consider fuel consumption when designing tour routes.
- Use sound proof vehicles to minimize engine and exhaust noise.
- Keep vehicle colors neutral to blend with natural environment when possible.
- Maintain low vehicle speeds in and around sensitive sites to minimize levels of disturbance and injury to wildlife and local communities.
- Minimize the use of toxic chemicals for vehicle maintenance, cleaning and protection.

Best Practices: Artisans & Craft Producers

- Never use rare or endangered species or materials in crafts production.
- Involve members of the communities that may have physical limitations in crafts production.
- Represent cultural and traditional customs authentically in crafts production.
Monitoring Plan

Development Objectives

- Compare baseline and ongoing annual protected area visitor numbers and revenue generation to assess impact of expanded ticket counters and improved tourism services.
- Conduct baseline and ongoing visitor satisfaction surveys to assess quality of visitor experience with tourism service providers, tourism infrastructure, and tourism services.
- Develop comprehension pre and post-tests for training participants to analyse level of success for all training programs.
- Collect baseline data of all tourism training participants, followed up by annual comparative data collection, in a variety of areas to assess the impacts of training programs, including:
  - Environmental awareness and attitudes
  - Economic status and sources of revenue
  - Tourism-generated revenue
  - Quality of life considerations

Management Objectives

- Convene quarterly meetings with community tourism associations to discuss challenges, successes, opportunities and concerns.
- Document and compare annual community-based conservation initiatives supported by program participants, including in-kind support as well as financial contributions.
- Develop comprehension pre and post-tests for Forest Department training participants to analyse level of success for all training programs.
- Analyse the degree to which tourism management plans have been developed and implemented.

Marketing Objectives

- Collect baseline data of all marketing training participants, followed up by annual comparative data collection, in a variety of areas to assess the impacts of training programs, including:
  - Tourism-generated revenue
  - Number of sales partners
  - Website visitors (if applicable)
- Document and compare the number of website visitors to a tourism-specific Sinharaja FRC tourism website (if developed)
- Document and compare the number of active participants of a Sinharaja Tourism Working Group to include private sector, organizational and press representatives
- Document and compare the number of program participants that are actively promoting themselves with any of the following marketing activities:
  - Email address and active email account
  - Website or other online presence (i.e. TripAdvisor, Booking.com)
  - Print promotion (i.e. meeting cards, brochures, posters)
- Document and compare the number of private sector or press representatives that have visited Sinharaja FRC as part of a FAM/publicity trip
References
