

# Trincomalee: A Visitor Flow Assessment



In 2018, Australia's Market Development Facility, operating under Sri Lanka's Ministry of Tourism Development, carried out a Visitor Flow Assessment in the Eastern Province. The findings for the three main areas selected – Trincomalee, Batticaloa and Arugam Bay – present a look into one of Sri Lanka's most promising emerging destinations for tourism, and what could be done to help it reach potential.

## What is a Visitor Flow Assessment?

A Visitor Flow Assessment analyses the composition of visitors to a destination, categorising them by granular features such as preferences and behaviour (for example, mode of travel, activities engaged in and spending patterns), as well as by country/region.



## Purpose of Study

The Eastern Province is an 'Emerging Destination' with high tourism potential. MDF is working with provincial bodies and businesses to improve destination management in the region, and the first step is understanding the need and the gaps. This is where the Visitor Flow Assessment comes in.



Trincomalee is one of the three key destinations in the East (the other two are Passikudah/Batticaloa and Arugam Bay). The analysis looks at key visitor flows to the destination, barriers to tourism growth and broad recommendations for improvement.

## Destination Profile



**Main tourist season:**  
July and August



**Arrivals:**  
Estimated at 80,000 visitors annually



**Visitor perceptions:**  
A relaxing destination, with mostly natural attractions



**Key groups:**  
Domestic tourists, international backpackers, Indian pilgrims, flashpackers and diaspora tourists



**Accommodation options:**  
A mix of budget and upmarket



## Key Visitor Flows



### **INDEPENDENT DOMESTIC TOURISTS (HIGHER-SPENDING):**

Groups of friends/families visiting the beach. Peaks in March, May, September and December. Typically spends USD80-150 per person per day.



### **LOCAL TOURISTS (LOWER-SPENDING):**

Groups of families, traveling on public holidays/weekends. Visits friends/family, religious sites. Typically spends USD10-50 per day.



### **BACKPACKERS:**

People below 30, alone or in groups. Visits beach, snorkels and dives, goes whale-watching. Peaks in July and August. Typically spends USD20-40 per day.



### **DIASPORA:**

Sri Lankan Tamils now living in Canada, the US and Europe. Visits for family/friends and beach. Typically spends USD100-150.



### **FLASHPACKERS:**

People aged 35-50, mainly from Europe, alone or in small groups. Visits for the beach, whale-watching, water sports and culture. Typically spends USD80-120 per day.



### **CHINESE GROUPS:**

Groups, organised by Chinese tour operators and local partners. Visits for the beach and whale-watching. Visits through March to October, peaks in July and August. Typically spends USD80-120 per day.



### **DIVERS:**

People aged 25-50, mainly European. Visits for the diving, uses one of the 20-plus dive shops present. Travels through the Dry Season, peaks in July and August. Typically spends USD100-150 per day.



### **CORPORATES AND OFFICIALS:**

Predominantly males, 35-50 years of age. Visits on work. Typically spends USD50-80 per day.





### **WESTERN GROUPS:**

Groups touring through Sri Lanka, organised by international travel agents and local counterparts. Visits for the beach. Peaks in July, August and whale season. Typically spends USD150-200.



### **WHALE WATCHERS:**

Mainly from Asian countries such as Thailand, China, Taiwan and Malaysia, or from Europe. Visits for the whales and other wildlife. Peaks in March and April. Typically spends up to USD200 per day.



### **BEACH & RELAX:**

People of 50 and above, close to retirement, mainly Australian or European. Visits for beach and relaxation. Remains in upmarket hotels through stay.



### **SCHOOL GROUPS:**

Insignificant in terms of number and spending, with not more than 10 groups per year.



### **HONEYMOONERS:**

Newlyweds, mainly European and Australian, but also Indian and Russian. Visits for upmarket resorts in a warm climate near a beautiful beach. Typically spends USD150-250 per day.



### **INDIAN PILGRIMS:**

Pilgrims over 50, mainly from South India. Visits Koneswaram Hindu Temple. Typically spends USD40-60 per day.



### **MEETINGS, INCENTIVES, CONFERENCES AND EXHIBITIONS (MICE):**

Limited, mainly due to difficulties in accessibility to destination and MICE infrastructure.



### **CRUISE SHIPS:**

Almost non-existent, with only 2-3 ships anchoring per year. Typically spend up to USD200 per day, but this stays primarily with the cruise ship company.







## Recommendations



### INTRODUCE NEW ACTIVITIES

Trincomalee has abundant room inventory, therefore setting up new hotels would only drive down prices. Introducing new, different activities to the destination would engage visitors better and result in longer stays.



### FOCUS ON VISITOR FLOWS WITH DIFFERENT PEAK TIMES

Visitor flows differ according to season, with multiple peaks. Identifying these and marketing activities accordingly would ensure strong business revenues throughout the year.



### IMPROVE ACCESS TO INFORMATION

There is a lack of information online and offline on activities/experiences available, prices and how to book. Filling these gaps would increase tourist footfall.



### PROVIDE COST-EFFICIENT TRANSPORT SERVICES

The long distance from Colombo, as well as the distances between hotspots, is a key barrier to visiting Trincomalee. Providing private/public transport options that can be easily accessed and booked could address this.



### DEVELOP ACTIVITIES/ EXPERIENCES TARGETING HIGHER-SPENDING VISITOR FLOWS

Flashpackers, diaspora tourists, divers and Western groups are among the highest-spending visitor flows; exploring and further developing activities targeted at these groups would increase revenues in the region.

Market Development Facility (MDF) is Australia's flagship private sector development program. In Sri Lanka, MDF's focus is on diversifying tourism with new products and services and supporting authentic Sri Lankan products. MDF is implemented by Palladium in partnership with Swisscontact.

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