

Study on Tourists' Perception on Selecting Local Food Restaurants – Especial Reference on Backpacker Tourists to Ella, Sri Lanka.

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Abstract: Contribution of food industry highly effecting to the decision making of tourists. Backpacker tourists can be defined as budget tourists who are willing to visit nature and culture while travelling. This study investigates the perception of backpack tourist on selecting local food restaurants based on the data concerning fifty (50) international backpacker tourists who visited Ella. Thematic analysis method employed in accordance with qualitative approach for the data, collected by in-depth interview around Ella backpackers' destinations. 98% of backpackers are satisfied with Sri Lankan food. According to the perception of backpackers' price, nutrient value and food safety are most influencing factors that affect the decision of selecting Sri Lankan restaurant. Backpacker tourists are concerned on information in menu and product knowledge of food servers. Physical environment of restaurant attract backpacker tourists in local restaurants. Keeping traditional outlook and simple features of restaurants gives unique experience to travelers which generate opportunities for gastronomy tourism concept. Rice and curries, hoppers, roties and thosai are more popular Sri Lankan food among backpacker tourists. Unique taste, textures, simple attractive garnishing and eco-friendly packing systems are reasons that backpackers are attracted to Sri Lankan food. Price gaps of food creating disadvantages to local food restaurant in Ella. With proper marketing approaches Sri Lankan restaurants can promote among international travelers. Government contribution on pricing is necessary to control price gap. Further this study discuss practical approaches and provide necessary information to attract backpacker tourists to existing restaurant operators as well as people starting restaurant business.

Key Words: Backpacker tourists, Ella, Sri Lankan restaurant

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I. Introduction

Tourism industry offers number of concepts which created opportunities to the host community. Tourism industry and food industry are intervenient industries and it has created concepts such as gastronomy tourism, bed and breakfast concept, full board concept, half board concept, buffet concept, a la carte concept and more. According to the United Nation World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) tourism has contributed to 10% of world GDP and one out of ten job in the world related to tourism. According to UNWTO world tourism generate 1.4 trillion in export earnings (UNWTO, 2017). With the reason of above factors most of the country in the world try to produce tourism product to attract people and earn a revenue to the country.

With the popularization of alternative cultures in western countries in 1960's and 70's a new travel class emerged. They consist of mainly young people and became popular for traveling in public transportation usually individually or in small groups and for caring a backpack fill with belongings. They were aptly named backpackers, pro poor or free independent travelers (FIT). With the globalization and advances in transportations this method became increasingly popular. Studies suggest that at least one in five travelers is a backpacker. After the civil unrest was over Sri Lankan tourism experienced a huge boom. Most of the serge can be attributed to backpackers.

Sri Lankan tourism industry is growing rapidly and it has maintained the third place as the foreign exchange earner of the country behind foreign remissions and apparel industry. Even though it has been maintaining the third place its contribution proportion is continuously increasing. Sri Lanka tourism has surged to a new high recode of 2116407 arrivals in 2017 (Annual statistical report, SLTDA, 2017). SLTDA expect to grow annual inbound tourism arrivals to 4.5 million by the year 2020.

Ella is a popular backpacker tourist destination in Sri Lanka. This destination was discovered few years ago by tourist, especially backpacker tourists. It still continues to be a very powerful magnet attracting backpacker tourism all over the globe. Although the vast majority of tourists who visit Ella are backpackers,

many tourism stakeholders do not have a clear and precise idea about what they are attracted by or what they expect at the destination.

This study aims to identify perception of backpack tourist on selecting local food restaurants. This research will be important for number of parties. Except hospitality small scale business owners can identify how they can develop their business such as local restaurants and homestay food providing facilities base on the research findings. The people who are planning to start their own business regarding local food they can have a clear picture on characteristics of their target market. People who have started their own business regarding supportive services for local food restaurants also get indirect benefits from this study. This research contributes to the scholars since more studies can be employed on this topic by identifying the gaps of the research. This will gain more economical benefits for the Ella area community. In addition, this research will be important for the maximum utilization of the available resources in Ella. Furthermore, it will provide necessary information to academic people to identify the nature of backpacker tourists and local food restaurant operations.

II. Literature Review

Food tourism

Food is an important part of tourism because all the tourists seek to consume a wide range of food varieties in the destination. However, the hospitality and tourism sector give less focus on food tourism. Food consumption of tourist has largely been neglected in the hospitality and tourism literature (Cohen and Avieli, 2004). Until recently, the contribution of food to tourism has been largely ignored in spite of its apparent importance and potential (DuRand_Role et al, 2003; Telfer& Wall, 1996; Handszuh, 2000; WTO, 2000) Tourists are spending on food makes up one-third of total travel expenditure which also reflects the importance of food consumption in tourism (Telfer and Wall, 2000). "In recent years, Food Tourism has shown considerable growth and has become one of the most dynamic and creative segments in tourism. Both destinations and tourism companies are aware of the importance of gastronomy in order to diversify tourism and stimulate local, regional and national economic development. Furthermore, Food Tourism includes in its discourse ethical and sustainable values based on the territory, the landscape, the sea, local culture, local products, authenticity, which is something it has in common with current trends of cultural consumption (UNWTO, 2012). It is recognized that the kind of food and drinks on offer for tourists can have major implications for the economic, cultural and environmental sustainability of tourism destinations, with researchers arguing that a focus on locally sourced products can result in benefits for both hosts and guests (Sims, 2009; Boniface, 2003; Clark &Chabrel, 2007; Enteleca Research and Consultancy, 2001; Ilbery, Kneafsey, Bowler, & Clark, 2003; Torres, 2002; Woodland &Acott, 2007)

Gastronomic tourism is as similar as "food tourism" in involving travel to food but also presented as an emerging discipline recognizing both gastronomy and tourism as dynamic cultural constructions reflecting specific histories and contemporary interests (Hjalager and Richards, 2002; Long, 2004). While the role of food in tourism has long antecedents, as a tourism product being deliberately generated by those responsible for marketing destinations, gastronomic tourism is a relatively new form of tourism. The incorporation of the principles of gastronomy, as a subset of culinary tourism previously based upon recipes 'traditional' to given locations, gastronomic tourism is a subset of cultural tourism. This is particularly true when the dining experience on offer is contextualized within attempts to replicate traditions of architecture, hosting and practice, for an example in modes of toasting guests and hosts (Chaney and Ryan, 2012).

Local food and tourism

Most of the tourists are visiting destination for leisure purpose. Those leisure tourists are searching for local cultural things on their tours. Local food is a major component of tourism because it can provide a local culture, values, norms of the society etc. "Any tourism experience in which one learns about appreciates or consumes branded local sources", in this perspective local food is becoming an important part of the cultural character of the destination (Stephan et al. 2008). Apart from satisfying a physical need, consumption of local food also creates an opportunity to learn about local geography, people and culture (Richards, 2002). Further, local food is an essential part of the tourism experience since it can serve both as a cultural and entertaining activity (Hjalager and Richards, 2002). In the sense of creating a destination image via locality of food; considered as an important factor of national cultural identity and destination promotion (McKercher et al., 2008). Local and regional food can add value to destination because visitors tend to prefer the authentic products of a destination. After all people travel for novel experiences (MacCannel, 1976), travelling does not really make sense, if it was repetition of the same activities back home. Moreover, familiarity with local, regional and national cuisine has become a main motivation to travel for some tourists especially gastronomy and wine tasting. Tourists have different choice when their selecting a food, meanwhile, the selection is different from their culture, society, religion, age, social status, health conditions etc. In food tourism, there must be a differentiation among those tourist behaviors who consume food as a part of their travel experience and those

who select destinations solely influenced by their interest of food (Hall et al. 2004). Increasing tourist consumption of local food can generate a multiplier effect that will benefit the local economy (Sims, 2009; Enteleca Research and Consultancy, 2001; Torres, 2002). Destination must develop a range of goods and services to provide than other destinations to attract more visitors. Promoting high-quality cuisine or distinctive local food products is one way of achieving this goal (Sims, 2009; Hage, 1997; Hashimoto & Telfer, 2006; Ilbery et al., 2003; Woodland & Acott, 2007).

Local can be understood either in terms of a bounded region within which products are produced and sold, or in terms of “specialty” or “locality” food which are intended as value-added products for export to other countries or regions. (Sims, 2009; Morris and Buller, 2003). Local and regional food is a feature that can add value to a destination (DuRand_Role et al, 2003; Telfer & Wall, 1996; Handszuh, 2000), and furthermore may contribute to the sustainable competitiveness of a destination (DuRand_Role et al, 2009; Crouch & Ritchie, 1999).

Local food holds much potential to enhance sustainability in tourism, whereby the tourism planner and the entrepreneur should work hand in hand to satisfy the consumers; contribute to the authenticity of the destination; strengthen the local economy; and provide for the environmentally-friendly infrastructure, including the ways and means by which food resources, both local and imported, are handled (DuRand_Role et al, 2003; Handszuh, 2000).

Factors Influencing Local Food Consumption

There are different factors affecting the consumption of local food. Determination of different needs of various tourist segments would create a better design of local food products. According to the previous research findings, scholars have created various factors affecting local food consumption in destinations ranging from personal motivators to personal traits. Investigation of food consumption are mostly concerned with understanding the determinants of various food-related behaviors, including liking, preference, choice and intake (Giesen et al. 2010). Food liking refers to ‘the palatability or pleasure obtained from tasting a given food’. Quality and taste are the major factors affecting restaurant choice (Duarte Alonso et al. 2013). There are primarily five factors associated with local food consumption; cultural and religious factors, socio-demographic factors, motivational factors, personality and past experience (Mak et al. 2012). Various studies proved that food choices are affected by cultural and religious backgrounds, e.g. kosher food. A model of local food consumption containing three main factors (Kim and Scarles, 2009); which divided into sub-factors; motivational factors – exciting experience, escape from routine, health concern, learning knowledge, authentic experience, togetherness, prestige, sensory appeal and physical; demographic factors – gender, age, education; physiological factors – neophilia or neophobia (Mak et al. 2012).

Based on the findings of these studies, it is evident that a distinct set of factors may influence tourist food consumption behavior. These potential factors can be classified into four main categories: socio demographic factors, Motivational Factors, cultural and religious influence, physiological factors.

Backpacker tourism

Backpacker tourism is a significant niche now in tourism marketing and it is rapidly expanding all over the world (Niggel & Benson, 2006). Backpacker tourist can be define as “A tourist who tend to be young and travels without spending as much as conventional tourist by using public transportation and alternative accommodation establishments. They usually carry backpacks and travel individually or in small groups (MATTHEW KNEALE, New York Times). The term backpacker has developed from before budget travelers (Riley, 1988).

Backpacker characteristics that have been relied on in creating a social definition are provided by (Pearce, 1990 cited in Ateljevic & Doorne 2004) that included the following criteria: A preference for low cost/budget accommodation; A preference on meeting other travelers; An independently organized and flexible travel schedule; Longer rather than very brief holidays, and An emphasis on informal and participatory holiday activities. The characterizing attributes of explorers serve not exclusively to distinguish them as a group of travelers, but also to differentiate them from other tourists (Welk, 2004). The expanded idea of backpacker travel, the propensity to visit multiple destinations in one trip, the budget-minded travel that influences accommodation and the individually planned nature of travel were again emphasized (Loker-Murphy and Perce, 1995).

Backpacking has generally been regarded as an undifferentiated phenomenon, backpacker seem more diverse and multifaceted than ever, engaging in a variety of social and recreational activities and not being similar in motivations, national and cultural background, age, gender, and class (Maoze, 2007). Therefore, backpacker tourism concept is massively increasing all over the globe. The people those who have no longer money as conventional travelers are stimulated to travel, because of backpacker concept (Sixaba, Z. 2013).

Confirmed by his study that “one of the ways that provides evidence on the forever increasing mobile world is the backpacker”. Backpackers can found in all over the globe, ranging from rural areas to urban center.

The individuals, who like to travel, turn out to be the traveler. Therefore the individual who like to travel individually and with planned money, become the backpacker. The individual has some particular motivation to travel from one destination to other destination, Also backpackers have some particular inspiration variables to venture out one place to other.

Purchase Intention

Purchase intention is a kind of decision-making that studies the reason to buy a particular brand by consumer (Shah et al., 2012). Purchase intention as a situation where consumer tends to buy a certain product in certain condition (Morinez et al., 2007). Purchase intention represents to what consumers think they will buy (Blackwell et.al, 2001). According to Brown (2003), consumer with intentions to buy certain product will exhibit higher actual buying rates than those customers who demonstrate that they have no intention of buying. The variables of product quality, and brand advertising and name had the highest impact on customers' purchase intention, but the two variables of packaging and price didn't have a significant impact on customers' purchase intention, Previous studies have shown that price is an important variable, but other variables such as product and service quality are important in the process of customers' purchase decision (Giovanni's et al., 2013). The purchase reduction of these appliances due to conditions such as economic downturn and the decrease of people purchase power, as well as the efforts of these companies to make their own brands distinctive in the minds of consumers, professional marketers should realize that how change the variables affecting on brand loyalty in order to change to impact on the repurchase intention of brand (brown et al. 2003). Creating valuable products and inducing the desired brand image are recognized as the basic requirements of customers' behavioral intention (Herman et al., 2006). Purchase intention may be changed under the influence of price or perceived quality and value. In addition, consumers are affected by internal or external motivations during the buying process (Gogoi, 2013). Customers always think that purchase with a low cost, simple packaging and little-known product is a high risk since the quality of these products is not trustable (Gogoi, 2013). There is a significant relationship between brand equity and the willingness to recommend brand purchase to others (Azizi&Ajini, 2012). Most of previous studies tested the influence of brand image on consumers' purchase intention and showed a significant relationship between these variables (Arslan&Altuna, 2010; chi et al., 2008; Tariq et al., 2013). Brand image has a significant effect on the purchase intention of men (Zeeshan, 2013).

Product quality is a key factor in assessing purchase intention. It is a continuous process of improvement the continuous changes increase product performance and consequently the satisfaction of customers' needs. It's concluded that if a product has a better quality, customer will be more inclined to purchase it (Chi et al., 2008). Also, their study emphasized that product quality has a positive impact on customers' purchase intention. Investigated the higher quality product creates higher purchase intention toward lower quality products. (Tsiots. 2005, 2006). Jalilvand et al. (2011) investigated the effect of product quality on purchase intention. Price is one important factor in customer purchase, thereby it has a significant impact on customer satisfaction. (Hermann et al, 2007).

III. Research Methods

Primary data has been used for the study. Data was collected by conducting in-depth interviews among fifty travelers who visited Ella tourist destinations. The in-depth interview is a technique used to identify the true perception of the respondent regarding the studying topic. The qualitative research method is used for the research because the research is having a descriptive approach. The main characteristic of descriptive research approach method is that the researcher has no control over the variables and he can only report what has happened or what is happening. Population of the study was all tourists who visit Ella tourist destinations including domestic tourists and international tourist. Sample was international backpacker tourists who visited Ella tourist destinations. Sample size was fifty and convenient sampling technique employed for collecting data of the study. Data collected at Little Adam's Peak, Ravana Falls and Ella rock which are most popular tourist destinations in Ella. Un-structured questioner used to collect data from international backpacker tourists. Questioner included twelve questions which address international backpacker tourists' previous experience on Sri Lankan food, factors consider when selecting restaurant, especial factors consider when selecting Sri Lankan food restaurant, favorite Sri Lankan food and reasons, tourists' perception on Sri Lankan food and their suggestions to develop Sri Lankan restaurants to attract more backpacker tourists in Ella.

Methods of Analysis

Under a phenomenological research design, content analysis will be used in order to achieve the objective of this research. The phenomenological method helps to identify the meaning behind the human experience as it's related to a phenomenon or notable collective occurrence (Creswell, 2009). It aims at attaining

a deep understanding of the nature or meaning of our daily experiences (Crotty, 1998). It is based on discussions and reflections of direct sense perception and experiences of the researched phenomenon. However, participants can describe their lived phenomenal experience which can be used to analysis of data in a phenomenological study.

According to this study, qualitative data which is gathered through direct interviews is analyzed through thematic analysis using Microsoft Excel 2016.

Qualitative data have been analyzed through “Thematic” analysis using “Microsoft excel 2016” software. Thematic analysis is a qualitative analytic method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes data set in detail. However, frequently it goes further and interprets various aspects of the research topic (Braun & Clarke, 2006). “A theme captures something vital about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set” (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

IV. Result and Discussion

There were three close ended questions in the questioner for identify awareness about Sri Lankan food restaurant of international backpacker tourists and their previous experiences about Sri Lankan food and willingness to come Sri Lankan food restaurant. According to figure 1 there were 40 percent of tourists who are aware of Sri Lankan food before they plan their trip to Sri Lanka while 60 percent tourists had no idea about Sri Lankan food before they plan their trip to Sri Lanka. There were only 32 percent of tourists have experience on Sri Lankan food before and 68 percent of tourists didn't experience Sri Lankan food in their life. Moreover there were 98 percent tourists who are willing to experience Sri Lankan food again while 02 percent of tourists commented for don't purchase Sri Lankan food again.

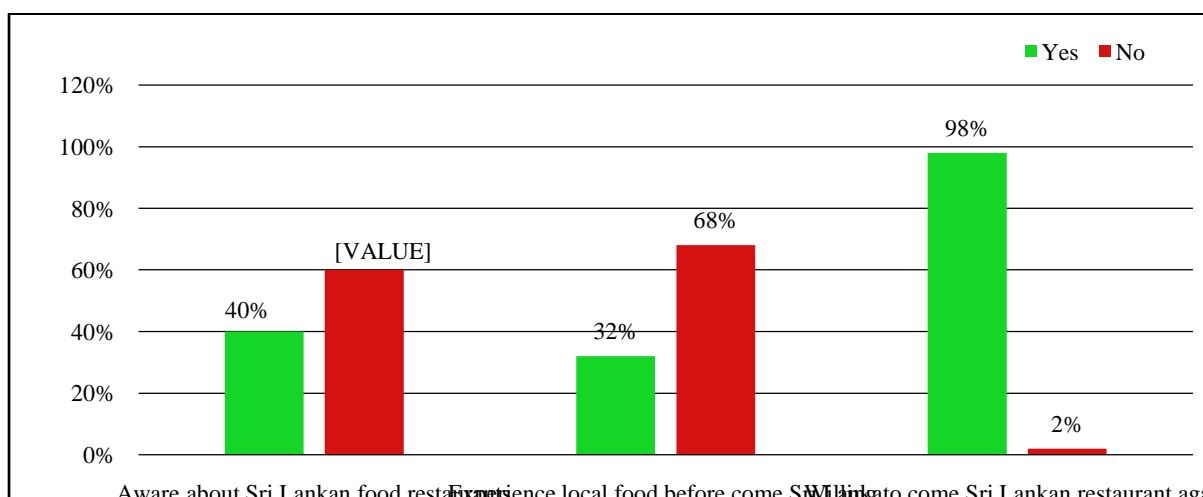


Figure 1: Awareness and experience on Sri Lankan food

Source: Field survey (2018)

From second question researcher identified factors which are considered by backpacker tourists when selecting food in a restaurant or a hotel. According to the backpacker tourists' perception accessibility, price, nutrients and safety of the food, cleanliness of the place, ingredients, size of portions, variations of the menu, related services, visual cooking, foodie images, location attraction, experience new food traditions and the recommendations of guide books/friends or waiters and the people who travel already to the destination are the factors backpacker tourists consider selecting a restaurant. Among all above factors more responders mentioned that price and nutrient factors are the factors that they highly concern when they travel.

“I would like to have different food experience but I consider about my budget all the time and I can't be sick while I'm travelling so I concern about cleanliness of the place and food safety standards the restaurants have followed. And also I like to have more energy from food because I have to use more energy with my travel activities.”

(Respondent 06)

Out of twenty six from fifty responded had to pay different price for same food in different places they have visited.

“I travelled Mirissa, Udawalawa and Ella. I saw different price for same food in three places. I bought hoppers from three cities but for three different prices. It is really feel bad for me. Why I should pay higher price for same food?”

(Respondent 32)

International backpacker tourist plan their tours by referring internet information sources and guide books regarding Sri Lanka because they are independent travelers and they are not having any assistance from tour operators or guides. So they have enough knowledge on Sri Lankan food restaurants. When they select local food restaurant they consider on atmosphere of the restaurant, designing and amenities.

“I read some books about Sri Lankan history, nature and people before I visit Sri Lanka. I had some hopes on Sri Lankan food and traditional look of Sri Lankan food restaurant. And I expected to have spicy curries.”

(Respondent 18)

Service of local food restaurants and food habits of international backpacker tourists have some mismatches because local food have unique way to consume which is not match with the international backpacker tourists food habits. And also, backpacker tourists requested that spicy level of the food to reduce and size of portions to reduce. Then they can have more experience on Sri Lankan food. And if local food providers can provide fork and knife to consume Sri Lankan food for international tourists it makes them comfortable because they normally don't use bare hands for food consume. Especially when it comes to backpacker tourists they engage with more nature based adventure activities and based on their food habits they might not wash their hands, So it's necessary to provide fork and knife to consume food even though using bare hands for eat food is Sri Lankan culture.

“I use fork and knife to eat food, but when I have food in Sri Lankan restaurants they didn't provide any fork or knife. In two restaurant I had to ask fork and knife from the people done the service. Sri Lankans eat food by their hands, I saw it. But it is very difficult to me because I didn't use to practice it. I feel more taste from food when I use cutleries.”

(Respondent 42)

To accomplish main objective of the study, there were three questions considered favorite Sri Lankan food of backpacker tourists, why they like Sri Lankan food and restaurants and their suggestions to develop Sri Lankan food restaurants to attract more international backpacker tourists.

According to backpacker tourists' perceptions most of the tourists have mentioned rice and curry as their favorite Sri Lankan food. And also backpacker tourists have mentioned reasons as unique taste and texture, combination of the food variety, spiciness and outer appearance (way it serve to the customer).

“I love to eat rice and curries especially lentil curry, chicken curry, baby jackfruit curry and crab curry are my favorite from Sri Lankan cuisine. It has unique features such as gravy, spicy and different textures can be fined in one meal some soft ingredients are there and in the same food there are hard ingredients too. Sri Lankan food serve in attractive way which include traditional features. I got Sri Lankan food with some mud huts and banana leaves I think it created special smell of the food. I got a lot of food there even two people can't finish at once. If they reduce amount of food and increase more curries it will be better because as tourist I can have more experience on Sri Lankan food.”

(Respondent 06)

Other than rice and curry backpacker tourists have mentioned number of local food as their favorite food. Those are string hoppers with curries, deviled meat, sea food curries, fried rice, dhal curry, jack fruit curry, tempered potato, kottu, mango chutney, roti, thosai, salads, curd and treacle and fresh fruit – especially passion fruit. Above food were selected because of taste, and uniqueness of the food especially covering systems and the materials which use to package food (curd covered with coconut leaves, banana leaves).

Backpacker tourists suggested that there should be proper explanations about local food in the restaurants, because international tourists have no much idea about Sri Lankan food so before consuming Sri Lankan food they need to have proper identification about food they going to eat such as cooking methods which apply for cooking, ingredients which have use for food and the way it can eat. Menu description in the restaurants of Ella area was not up to standard level when it comes to local food. According to the data gathered by open ended question backpacker tourists need more information on nutrient values of the portions they are having in the restaurants because these tourists need more energy since they are engaged with more energy consuming tourism activities in Ella area such as hiking and trekking. And also they suggested that the food servers (waiters) should train with proper knowledge with Sri Lankan food for explaining more about Sri Lankan food for backpacker tourists.

“To develop Sri Lankan food restaurants I suggest that all food servers should know about all the food they serve. And they should not mislead us by providing fake information. When I have my lunch in a restaurant, I ordered rice and curry, then I asked from the server about curries and he didn't have clear idea what

they're going to serve to me. He went to the kitchen and then he told me about the curries they have. If servers knows well about food they serve, time will be save and it will be easy to work."

(Respondent 12)

And also, backpacker tourists suggested that menus of the local food restaurants should be improved with more explanations about food, ingredients which are used for the food that should be described on menus and menus should create with more local foodie pictures. Backpacker tourists mentioned that they willing to gain more knowledge about food which they eat at first time in their life.

"Before I come Sri Lanka I didn't have any experience with Sri Lankan food. But I found some pictures from internet. If the menu contain photos of Sri Lankan food I can have correct idea what I'm going to order."

(Respondent 33)

Not only that, backpacker tourists mentioned that if Sri Lankan food and service providers can arrange action cooking in the restaurants they can have broad knowledge on local food and also they can try it in their home countries, so it there can be a possible chance to popular Sri Lankan food in international countries.

And also, backpacker tourists requested that the place which food is served to tourists should be clean and maintain proper conditions to serve food. And also restaurants should provide other services such as air condition and free Wi-Fi. And they mentioned that food should be in best hygienic level. According to backpacker tourists' comments, backpacker tourists are highly concerned about hygiene and nutrient factors when selecting food for consumption. So, they requested employee best food safety practices in Sri Lankan food restaurants.

And also, backpacker tourists requested to make restaurants cozier. The ingredients such as herbs used for food preparation can be allergic for tourists. Because of that, before serving food there should be proper identification about herbs and should take perdition from the tourists.

Backpacker tourists also suggested that, in Sri Lankan restaurants, traditions should be kept. And if the stories and history about the food can explain by the food servers and if the environment can create a real traditional home's dining room its helps to understand more about the food and the traditions of the food to backpacker tourists. And also it makes real feelings and gives real experience of Sri Lankan traditions to the international tourists.

Further, backpacker tourists mentioned that, by doing marketing programs such as advertisements by using foodie pictures and promotion programs local food can be popular among international tourists. And by adding more information about local food to guide books, magazines and travel websites Sri Lankan food can attract more tourists to Sri Lankan food restaurants. Based on the perception of backpacker tourists it can be identified that tourists are more comfortable of having their own food in every corner of the world but conducting proper marketing activities, nature of tourist can be changed to move Sri Lankan food restaurants. Price gap of local food for the local tourists and international tourists should be reduced. This factor is one of sensitive factor all tourists had mentioned in their answers, most of backpacker tourists faced unfair situations in Ella area. Huge price gap became a factor for dissatisfaction of backpacker tourists' entire tour.

Moreover backpacker tourists commented on local street food. Street local food sellers should monitor to practice more hygienic standards when handling food. Street food should be kept in proper hygienic stores. Food baskets which they carry food for selling and also the food carts should be in proper conditions.

V. Conclusion and Recommendations

The main objective of the study was to identify perception of backpack tourist on selecting local food restaurants with especial reference to Ella. To accomplish that goal researcher conduct a survey based on qualitative method. Data collected by in-depth interview for fifty international backpacker tourists who visited tourist destinations in Ella. Researcher identified most backpacker tourists have heard about Sri Lankan food before but they haven't experienced Sri Lankan food before they visit Sri Lanka. The majority of backpacker tourists who visited Ella are satisfied with the food and beverage service they have got from Sri Lankan food restaurants. Researcher identified factors mentioned by international backpacker tourists when selecting restaurants for having their meals, the factors expecting from Sri Lankan food restaurant, most popular Sri Lankan food among international backpacker tourists and reasons. And also researcher gathered all ideas related to develop Sri Lankan restaurants and improve the service quality of Sri Lankan restaurants. The study was a qualitative study and thematic analysis method employed on analyzing data of the study.

Backpacker tourists are willing to take the experience of local food and all backpacker tourists who visited Ella had experiences in local food restaurants. Backpacker tourists are willing to do adventure activities and they like to explore new things. Therefore, Sri Lankan food become novel to international backpackers because Sri Lankan food is not much popular in all around the world. Because of unique features and diversity of local food international tourists motivated to purchase Sri Lankan food until they left the country.

The environment of Sri Lankan food restaurants and people who are engaging with the service of restaurants have major impact on selecting local food restaurant by international backpacker tourists. Price gap should be eliminated otherwise tourists can dissatisfy and spread negative comments on local food restaurants. Supportive services and amenities should be developed to attract more international guests to local food restaurants. Especially product marketing should be done globally for spread information about local food.

Current restaurant operators can have a clear idea on developing their existing restaurants for attracting more backpacker tourists while people are planning to start new local food restaurants they can identify customer needs related to Sri Lankan food. However, researcher conduct the study only in Ella, it gives opportunities to researchers to address all other tourist destinations and varieties of tourists to conduct studies based on tourists perception on local restaurants.

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