

VISUAL LANDSCAPE CHARACTERISTICS AND TOURISTS' SATISFACTION: A STUDY WITH REFERENCE TO NUWARA-ELIYA, SRI LANKA

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Abstract: The power of the landscape to draw tourists seeking spectacle has a long tradition and landscapes are prone to the tourism industry. Sri Lanka is well-known as a popular tourist destination, because of the country's unique natural landscape characteristics. Even though the country's landscape is the main tourist attraction, there is no proper identification of the major characteristics that attract tourists and what meets their satisfaction in a landscape. With aiming that, the primary purpose of this study was to understand the impact of the visual landscape characteristics on the tourists' satisfaction and the study was conducted in Nuwara-Eliya urban context. Study referred to various visual landscape characters and their quality by a visual landscape quality assessment which focuses on visual landscape qualities derived from visual concepts related to the field of study. The study highlights the inherent features of visual concept and the significance of the visual landscape characteristics of selected landscapes based on a theoretical framework, which can benefit in design improvising in such landscapes. The finding revealed that the visual characters of landscapes are a subjective measure taken by individuals based on their perception and the link between tourism and the visual landscape is unbreakable and vital to the tourism industry.

Keywords: *Visual Landscape Characteristics, Tourism, Visual Landscape, Tourist Satisfaction, Visual Concepts*

1. Introduction

Sri Lanka has always been a popular tourism destination for foreign visitors because of the country's unique natural landscape characters and resources, which draw visitors to the island. Sri Lanka also features a variety of tourist sites with natural visual beauty, such as mountainous terrains, beautiful beaches, agricultural landscapes, waterfalls, and areas with varying climatic conditions, reservoirs, and rivers. As a result, visitors from all over the world flock to the country to achieve their vacation goals and expectations. The tourism industry is the third-largest foreign exchange earner in the Sri Lankan economy. (Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau, 2021) But as the world is facing an unprecedented global health issue with the Covid-19 pandemic, the country's tourism industry is highly affected, and it needs to be recovered fast.

Despite the fact that a country's landscape is the main tourist attraction, there is no proper identification of the major characteristics that attract tourists and what meets their satisfaction in a given environment. When talking about significant factors, the landscape component plays a major role. Among them, visual landscape character is the best satisfaction of tourists, what they need to seek. (Urry, 1990) So, a proper investigation of visual landscapes will help to develop this segment along with a proper knowledge basis. So, the primary purpose of this research is to understand the impact of the visual landscape character on the tourists' satisfaction in a landscape.

Visual landscape characters affect human satisfaction on a landscape. The proper usage of this characters in a landscape provides the physical and psychological connection between the human and visual landscape. (Terkenli, 2008) The behaviour of the human being in an environment relies on the information, and the immediate landscape must be able to deliver much of this information. (Terkenli, 2008)

When it comes to landscape architecture, this field can be considered as a practice that incorporates in designing outdoor spaces, and structural environments to accomplish the aesthetical results. In recent times, so many outdoor spaces and environments are situated in the cities, and most of the landscape designs are designed in a way that is unable to attract people, and those designs do not seek the visitor's satisfaction. This leads to an impact on the people who come to visit those spaces. So, the study is based on identifying and investigating the visual landscape characters

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in a particular space that has an impact on the satisfaction of visitors, who come to those places to experience the environment. Also, the visual aspect of the tourism landscape has been widely emphasized and propagated, especially based on the notion of the “tourist gaze”. (Urry, 1990) Gazing is critical to understanding the context of the environment since it is emotionally charged, in contrast to seeing, and is therefore fundamental to tourist-related activities. Imagery is one of the most researched aspects of tourism marketing. (Terkenli, 2008)

2. Characteristics of the Visual Landscape & Tourists’ Satisfaction

2.1 THE VISUAL LANDSCAPE CHARACTERISTICS

Visual landscape characters affect human satisfaction on a landscape. The proper usage of those characters in a landscape provides the physical and psychological connection between the human and the landscape. (Terkenli, 2008) According to Bucheckere et al. (2007), The spatial features, structure, and pattern in the landscape are visually expressed in the visual character of the landscape. A visual landscape assessment is a method of analysing the visual landscape character of landscape features, spatial pattern, and human significance. (Buchecker et al., 2007) It has been argued that, in terms of scientific manner, and thus its significance as an analytical tool for landscape design, defining the visual character, which is based on human perception, and so visual landscape character assessment, might be called into question. (Sang et al., 2006)

Sang et al. (2008) defined characteristics of a visual landscape with ideas of vistas, prospects, refuges, or views of land scenery. These ideas have accompanied the landscape development and appropriation of Panorama views, distinctive landscapes, the ephemeral, picturesque, perspective, and other landscape ideas and models common to the tourism business, photographic memories, commercials, and, more broadly, tourism marketing iconography. (Urry, 1990)

2.2 CAPTURING VISUAL LANDSCAPE CHARACTERISTICS USING INDICATORS

By breaking down the entire visual experience of the actual landscape into quantifiable components, visual landscape characters provide a more objective basis for identifying landscape characters. Compared to indicators for other landscape functions, visual landscape indicators are less developed. By splitting the whole of our visual perception into quantitative characteristics, visual landscape indicators provide an objective basis for characterizing the landscape character. (Sang et al., 2006)

Sang et al. (2006) present that the indicators developed from nine theory-based landscape perception concepts can be used to capture the visual character. According to this definition, a "distinctive, recognized, and consistent pattern of landscape elements that separates one landscape from another, rather than better or worse," constitutes the visual landscape character. The framework is made up of nine visual landscape character concepts that are pertinent to literature on landscape aesthetics, and the addition of indicators for these varied visual landscape elements makes it easier to identify which features are impacted by a change in the landscape. The framework enables the identification of the type of landscape change as well as the impact of changes on the landscape's visual characteristics. According to Sang et al. (2008), This theoretical framework is separated into four levels of abstraction that connect indicators to landscape aesthetic theory: concepts, dimensions, landscape attributes, and indicators. When it comes to portraying the visual essence of a landscape, indication selection is crucial.

According to the theoretical framework developed by Sang et al. (2008), these nine visual concepts have the capability of describing the landscape character under different terminologies. Nine visual concepts that consist in this theoretical framework are Complexity, Coherence, Disturbance, Stewardship, Imageability, Visual Scale, Naturalness, Historicity, and Ephemera. Each of these visual concepts is based on a theory or a few theories developed by different scholars. Table 1 represents these nine visual concepts, related theories, and the respective references regarding these visual concepts.

Table 1, Nine visual concepts, Related theories, and the Respective references (Source: Sang et al., 2008)

Concept	Theory	References
Complexity	Biophilia	Kellert & Wilson (1993)
Coherence	Information Processing Theory	Kaplan & Kaplan (1982,1989)
Disturbance	Biophilia	Kellert & Wilson (1993)
Stewardship	Aesthetic of care	Nassauer (1995)
Imageability	Spirit of place/ genius Loci/ vividness Topophilia	Lynch (1960); Litton (1972) Bell (1999) Tuan (1974)
Visual Scale	Prospect and Refuge Theory Information processing theory	Appleton (1975) Kaplan & Kaplan (1982, 1989)
Naturalness	Biophilia Restorative Landscapes	Kellert & Wilson (1993) Kaplan & Kaplan (1989)

		Ulrich (1979, 1984)
Historicity	Topophilia Landscape heritage/ historic landscape	Tuan (1974) Lowenthal (1979, 1985) Fairclough et al. (1999)
Ephemera	Restorative landscape	Kaplan & Kaplan (1989) Ulrich (1979, 1984)

2.3 TOURISM AND VISUAL LANDSCAPE

The power of the landscape to draw tourists seeking spectacle has a long tradition. Thanks to the expansion of tourist studies in all directions over the past ten years, the landscape has not only taken on a more significant role in tourism but has also subtly crept into many sorts of tourism study. "The tourist gaze" embodies several different ways of looking at landscapes. Urry (1990), suggests that tourists can be classified according to the experience they seek.

Many landscapes are prone to tourism pressures and environmental, economic, social, and aesthetic impacts. Among them, the Visual landscape is one of the most important variables in research of interactions that emerge between tourists and visited locations because of its both tangible and ethereal nature. (Shafer et al., 1969) One of the main reasons why a tourist comes to a place is its landscape. Landscape can be divided into major parts; among them, Visual Landscape is one of the most important parts discussed in the tourism sector. (Gkoltsiou & Terkenli, 2012) According to the literature survey, the relationship between tourism and the aesthetic landscape has previously been suggested to be irreversible and vital to tourism. However, most tourism research has neglected to mention visual landscape variables, focusing instead on social scientific viewpoints.

The readiness and image ability of a visual landscape to vary human involvement turns it into a veritable theatre for play and amusement. (Terkenli, 2008) Visual depictions of travel destinations can attract people's attention and pique their interest. The importance of the visual aspect of tourism has been widely stressed and popularized, particularly through the concept of the "tourist gaze." (Urry, 1990) In the context of the landscape, gazing is crucial; unlike seeing, it is emotionally charged, and hence central to the tourist nexus of activities, as imaging is one of the most explored parts of tourism marketing. Tourists, on the other hand, are typically very strict in their assessment of whether the surrounding landscape elements suit a location or not. (Urry, 1990) As a result, for them, the appearance of a landscape is most important. According to Buchecker et al. (2007), tourists particularly appreciate the visual landscape, which corresponds to their image of how such a landscape should be. Tourists, for the most part, agree on their impressions of a location's visual qualities. As a result, their potential conflict over a location appears to be rather minor at first glance. (Terkenli, 2008)

2.4 FACTORS THAT AFFECTING THE TOURISTS' SATISFACTION

Satisfaction in the tourist industry, like in other sectors, is the result of several variables, and it has some positive consequences for the industry. (Alegre & Garau, 2010) Originally, satisfaction is a physiological result of exercise. (Terkenli, 2008) The Destination image and tourist expectations on tourist satisfaction are some of the major factors that affect Tourists' satisfaction on a landscape. (Gnanapala, 2015) According to Alegre & Garau (2010), the destination image has been shown to have a direct impact on tourist behaviour on numerous occasions. They defined a person's mental representation of their information, feelings, and overall perception of a certain destination as their knowledge, feelings, and perception of that particular destination as a whole. The image that tourists have of the destination influences several aspects of their tourist behaviour, such as their expectations and value perception from the discussion, it is clear that the tourist's pre-travel expectations can be shaped and influenced by the image of his or her location. Tourist expectation is also one of the major factors that affect Tourists' satisfaction. (Gnanapala, 2015) Tourists' expectations of a destination might be shaped by the image they have of it before they travel. (Alegre & Garau, 2010) According to several authors, tourist expectations have a direct impact on both perceived value and satisfaction. Tourist expectations, on the other hand, have a direct influence on tourists' feelings of satisfaction.

3. Methodology

3.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Nine important visual themes have been discovered based on a literature review: Stewardship, Coherence, Disturbance, Historicity, visual scale, Image ability, Complexity, Naturalness, and Ephemera. (Sang et al., 2008) For this study, six concepts have been selected out of nine. They are Complexity, Coherence, Disturbance, Image ability, Visual Scale, and Naturalness. The reason is that each of these principles focuses on multiple factors that play a part in landscape visual quality. The selection criteria of these visual concepts were done by considering how the natural landscape elements can generate a variety of experiences in the user's mind regarding their landscape composition.

3.1.1 Key Visual Concepts, Related Theories, and their Definitions

The diverse aspects of visual landscapes are described using a few fundamental visual notions. (Sang et al., 2008) For this study, six concepts have been selected out of nine key visual concepts are identified: Complexity, Coherence, Disturbance, Image ability, Visual Scale, and Naturalness. As shown in Table 3, for each Key Visual Concept, Several Visual Indicators were identified to analyse the visual landscape characteristics of the landscape.

Table 2, Key Visual Concepts & Visual Indicators (Source: By author)

Visual Concepts	Visual Character	Visual Indicators
Complexity	Interest, Diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The richness of landscape elements • Spatial organization of landscape attributes • Variations and contrast
Coherence	Pleasing, Picturesque	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The spatial arrangement of water • The spatial arrangement of vegetation
Disturbance	Disturbing, Confusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presence of disturbing elements • The visual impact of disturbing elements
Imageability	Memorable, Uniqueness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Iconic elements • Viewpoints
Visual scale	Openness, Visibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The proportion of open land • Depth/ breadth of the view • Obstruction of the view
Naturalness	Naturalness, Mind relaxing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Naturalness of vegetation • pattern in landscape • Proportion of water

3.2 CASE STUDY SELECTION

Because the study is based on the urban tourist landscapes in Sri Lanka, the selection of the landscape of Nuwara-Eliya urban context as the case study area was considered due to the availability of sufficient sceneries with a variety of natural elements, hard and soft landscape features, and the combination of historical and aesthetical backgrounds. The town of Nuwara-Eliya is considered to be one of the country's most appealing urban tourist landscapes. This town is located in Sri Lanka's Central Province, and it is frequently referred to as "Little England" by the Sri Lankan tourist industry due to its stunning scenery and cool climate, where thousands of people visit to see and experience the pleasant environment, breath-taking views of valleys, mountains, and diverse natural landscape characters including geographical features with endemic flora and fauna, beautiful waterfalls, tea plantations, ecological zones, and a pleasantly cool climate all year. (Nuwara Eliya Info, 2016) Nuwara-Eliya can be considered a city with multi-functional spaces. During the seasons, most of the public places perform outdoor functions through-out the day. When selecting a case study, Visual appreciation was the major concern that came up within the selection process.

3.3 METHOD OF STUDY

The mixed method employed in this study is two folds, namely the literature survey and case study survey. The literature survey was mainly based on the secondary data gathered by existing literary works done by various scholars on the relevant field and by theories introduced by scholars. The data so gathered in such a manner was used to analyse and discuss the Impact of the visual landscape characteristics on tourists' satisfaction.

The primary focus of research is to investigate the visual landscape characters that attract tourists to a particular landscape, and which meet their satisfaction. Mainly This study's methodology is based on user experience and satisfaction in a landscape with both natural and man-made elements combined. The identification and collection of the data was analysed by considering the visual landscape character and visual quality which identifies by six visual concepts: Complexity, Coherence, Disturbance, Image ability, Visual Scale and Naturalness

The research method mainly consists of three parts, namely Pilot study, a Field work program with Photographic analysis, and a questionnaire survey. The final questionnaire survey was performed by using social media groups which consist of people who are interested in traveling within the selected case study area and it was limited to 80 respondents. When collecting data through the questionnaires survey, the five-point Likert scale was utilized. This led the way to accumulate more accurate answers. This survey investigated the tourist's Experiences, their satisfaction with previous visits to Nuwara-Eliya town, visual quality & the appreciation of visual landscapes of the selected study area.

The study was initiated by identifying multiple locations which most popular in the Nuwara-Eliya urban context for tourism-related activities. When selecting locations, the overall visual landscape character of those locations was mainly considered. After performing the Pilot study, the selected locations were analysed and for the final data collection, seven locations were selected out of all initial locations and moderated the questionnaires survey according to the responses of the pilot study. After that, those selected locations were deeply observed throughout the field work program and the impact of those locations on the overall visual landscape character was investigated through a photographic analysis. Then it has been analysed how each visual concept has been impacted by characteristics of those locations and the tourists' satisfaction level with the overall visual landscape character of the location. Furthermore, Direct measurements using secondary sources were taken and on-site observation was carried out to gather information on the case study and moderate the questionnaire survey's results. The selected locations are mentioned in below:

- Galway's Land National Park, Nuwara-Eliya

- Gregory Lake, Nuwara-Eliya
- Hakgala Botanical Gardens, Nuwara-Eliya
- Lover's Leap Waterfall, Nuwara-Eliya
- Nuwara-Eliya Town Walk, Nuwara-Eliya
- Pedro Tea Estate, Nuwara-Eliya
- Victoria Park, Nuwara-Eliya

After collecting the primary data, according to the result of the questionnaire survey and photographic analysis, data was analysed by using the Interpretive Analysis method. The primary data was analysed and investigated tourists' Experiences, their satisfaction with previous visits, Visual quality & appreciation of visual landscapes of Nuwara-Eliya Town. After that, selected locations were deeply observed throughout the fieldwork program and the impact of those locations on the overall visual landscape character was investigated.

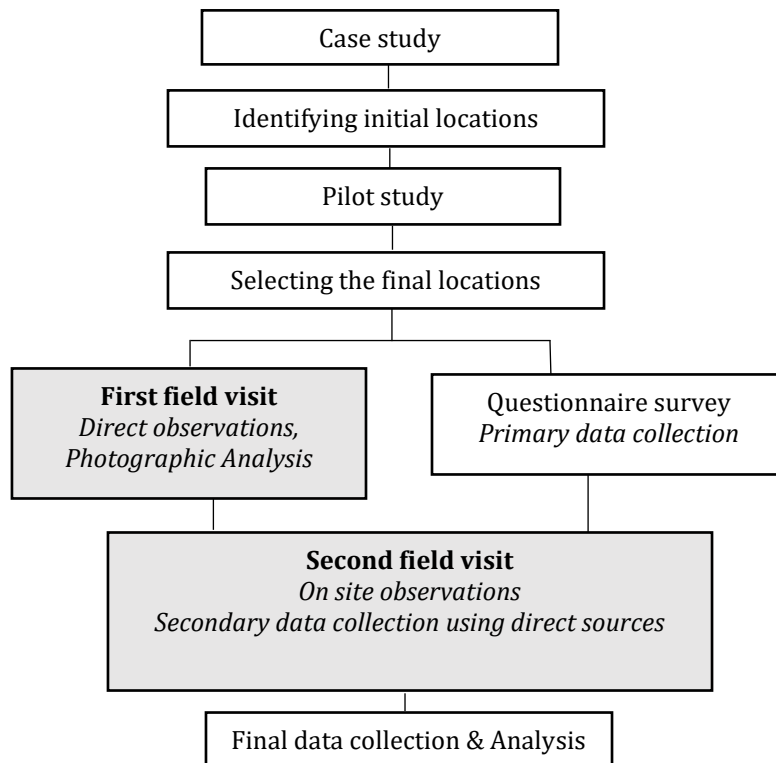


Figure 1, The procedure of the field work programme (Source: By Author)

4. Findings & Discussion

Through the findings of the study, it was understood that the results do not encompass the overall relationship between tourists' satisfaction and visual landscape character because the study was focused only on an urban landscape. The global pandemic situation also influenced the photographic survey because due to lack of public presence, a clear idea about the behaviour was not able to identify. From the results, it can be identified that 87% of the participant in the questionnaire survey was visited the case study more than one time and the reason for that is the unique visual character of the Nuwara-Eliya town-scape. Using the identified locations within the case study area, the overall visual appreciation of respondents on the Nuwara-Eliya Urban context was analysed. Data was collected focused on the following factors: Their most preferred locations within the Nuwara-Eliya Urban context, Fulfilment of destination image & expectations, Satisfaction Level with the case study after the visit, and whether they like to visit the case study area again or not. When considering the respondents' fulfilment of destination image & expectations, 92% were stated that the case study area fulfils their destination image & tourists' expectations. Furthermore, they were asked about their satisfaction level with case study after the visit and 26% were stated that the satisfaction level was very high, 68% was stated as it is high, and no one was stated the satisfaction level as low or very low. It shows that the overall satisfaction level of respondents was considerably high after visiting the case study area and 99% of participants stated that they would like to visit the case study area again.

After the First stage of the questionnaire survey, participants had to select their most preferred location within the given location list, and it must be previously visited by the participant. The selection was based upon their experience & satisfaction of previous visits to Nuwara-Eliya Town. According to the survey, 80% stated the reason for the location selection is visual appreciation & 20% stated the reason as scenery. So, the results clearly show that visual appreciation was the main consideration when selecting their most preferred location within the case study.

Furthermore, the Fluctuation of the visual character of overall selected locations was analysed and participants were asked to explain the visual character of the location scenery with given visual character parameters. From this, it has been investigated, how they feel about the location and its visual landscape character. The majority of participants voted locations as it was very pleasing, unique, interesting, and memorable. In-depth analysis it has been seen, some of the locations consisted with confusion and disturbing elements too. Visibility and openness of the locations were considerably high, and the natural character of some locations was voted as very high. Furthermore, it shows that the visual landscape character of these locations was very high, and it affected participants' satisfaction level in a good way.

Finally, participants were asked to explain the variations of the visual quality of the location scenery with given visual character parameters, and the results are shown in the following figure. From the analysis, the following results were obtained. The richness of landscape elements of locations, and spatial organization of landscape attributes were considerably high and viewpoints, in-depth views, open lands, water resources, and the patterns of the landscape were also mentioned by the survey participants. The overall case study area is rich with several iconic elements, which have a huge impact on Nuwara-Eliya town been a memorable landscape. The finding revealed that the visual character of a landscape is a subjective measure taken by individuals based on their perception and the relationship between Nuwara-Eliya townscape's visual landscape character and the participant's satisfaction was highly connected throughout the study findings.

5. Contribution

In landscape architecture, this field can be considered as a practice that incorporates designing outdoor spaces, and structural environments to accomplish the aesthetical results. In recent times, most landscape designs are designed in a way that is unable to attract people, and those designs do not seek the visitor's satisfaction. This leads to an impact on the people who come to visit those spaces. So, using this study can be identified the visual landscape characteristics that contribute to creating a positive tourism landscape, also this study,

- Can use to identify the relationship between the tourists' perception and the landscape character satisfaction.
- It will help to identify landscape motivations that have motivated tourists to visit a specific location
- Can be used as a design tool in landscape architectural design advancements to ensure the sustainability of tourism landscapes.

6. Conclusion

The Tourist-Landscape Relationship, as produced and enacted in landscapes, has attracted an increasing amount of research over the past two decades. The power of the landscape to draw tourists seeking spectacle has a long tradition and among all of them, the visual landscapes are considered as prone to the tourism industry. When conducting the study, it was identified that the Visual landscape characters have a huge impact on tourist satisfaction on a landscape and the main reason why tourists come to a place is its Visual Landscape Character. A landscape's visual character comprises vistas, prospects, refuges, or views of the land's scenery. (Urry, 1990) In the context of human-visual landscape interactions, the relationship between them influences not just how humans use their land resources, but also how they perceive that environment. Also, the immediate landscape has a visual feature that allows users to combine landscape aspects in to a single shot, examining how people perceive and interpret visual landscapes, on the other hand, can disclose a lot about the surrounding environment.

The findings of the research highlighted that personal preferences influence people's interactions with places and humans to gain indirectly from a sense of place since it is an important feature that allows communal action for mutual benefit. Tourists particularly appreciate the visual landscape, which corresponds to their image of how such a landscape should be. Tourists, for the most part, agree on their impressions of a location's visual qualities. As a result, their potential conflict over a location appears to be rather minor at first glance. The destination image has been shown to have a direct impact on tourist behaviour on numerous occasions. They defined a person's mental representation of their information, feelings, and the overall perception of a certain destination as their knowledge, feelings, and perception of that particular destination as a whole. The image that tourists have of the destination influences several aspects of their tourist behaviour, such as their expectations and value perception.

The study highlights the inherent features of the visual concept with special reference to Nuwara-Eliya tourist landscapes and the significance of visual landscape characteristics of those landscapes based on a theoretical framework which to benefit in design improvising in such landscapes. Furthermore, it can be identified that the visual landscape characters of the case study were the main contributing factor that effects when the creation of positive tourism landscapes. From the results of the open-ended questionnaire survey, it can be identified that the participant of the survey was visited the case study more than one time and the reason for that is the unique visual character of the Nuwara-Eliya townscape.

Using the identified locations within the case study area, the overall visual appreciation of respondents in the Nuwara-Eliya Urban context was analysed. Data was collected focused on the following factors: Their most preferred

locations within the Nuwara-Eliya Urban context, Fulfilment of destination image & expectations, and the Satisfaction Level with the case study.

Furthermore, the Fluctuation of the visual character of overall selected locations was analysed and from this, it has been investigated, how they feel about the location and its visual landscape character. The majority of locations were very pleasing, unique, interesting, and memorable. In-depth analysis it has been seen, some of the locations consisted with confusion and disturbing elements too. Visibility and openness of the locations were considerably high, and the natural character of some locations was voted as very high. In addition to that, Variations of the visual quality of the location scenery with given visual character parameters were investigated and from the analysis, the following results were obtained. The richness of landscape elements of locations, and spatial organization of landscape attributes were considerably high and viewpoints, in-depth views, open lands, water resources, and the patterns of the landscape were also mentioned by the survey participants. So, this highlighted that the overall case study area is rich with several iconic elements, which have a huge impact on the Nuwara-Eliya town been a memorable land-scape.

All the findings of the study represent that the different visual landscape characteristics have a huge impact on tourist satisfaction in a particular location. Also, it can be concluded that all the selected visual concepts (Coherence, Disturbance, Visual Scale, Complexity, Image ability, and naturalness) per-form together and those are also influencing each other. Beyond the expectations of the study, the results of the study have proven that the most influential factor to prefer a landscape is it, which is the visual scale of the landscape often spread into the horizon supplemented by rich green, which is also pleasant perusal to the eye. For future considerations, the visual concepts should be studied in parallel with other senses of the body and give more significance to individuality. This study does not encompass the overall relationship between the tourists and the visual landscape, because the research was focused only on the urban landscape. It is better to have more case studies to assess the overall impact and better to increase the sample size using different factors.

Finally, the findings reveal that the visual landscape influences how people experience visual pleasure, the sensuous pleasure of physical contact, and the liking for a familiar place. The finding revealed that the visual character of a landscape is a subjective measure taken by individuals based on their perception and the link between tourism and visual landscape characteristics is unbreakable and vital to tourism industry.

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