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**ASSESSING TOURISM
DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL
IN THE RATHGAMA
DIVISIONAL
SECRETARIAT**



Assessing Tourism Development Potential in the Rathgama Divisional Secretariat

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1. Executive Summary

This report assesses the tourism development potential of the Rathgama Divisional Secretariat (DS), a coastal region located in the Galle District of Sri Lanka's Southern Province. Despite its rich natural and cultural endowments and proximity to established tourist hubs like Galle and Hikkaduwa, Rathgama remains underutilized as a tourism destination. This study aims to identify the existing tourism infrastructure, assess spatial distribution, and propose strategies for sustainable tourism development in the region.

Rathgama's attractions are multifaceted, including scenic beaches (Pitiwella, Boossa), the Gin River, Rathgama Lake, historical temples (Parappudoowa, Jayawardhanaramaya), vibrant cultural festivals, and eco-rich sites like mangroves and turtle hatcheries. Its favorable climate, environmental cleanliness, and calm atmosphere provide strong foundations for eco and nature-based tourism. A heritage of spiritual and traditional significance further supports the potential for cultural, wellness, and culinary tourism experiences.

Primary and secondary data were collected through stakeholder interviews, field observations, and spatial mapping using GIS tools. A SWOT analysis revealed Rathgama's key strengths, such as its strategic location, natural beauty, community hospitality, and affordable tourism options. However, several weaknesses hinder its progress, including poor waste management, limited recreational infrastructure, safety concerns, and lack of skilled personnel and coordinated promotion.

Spatial analysis using Nearest Neighbor techniques showed that most tourism infrastructure is heavily clustered along the coastal belt, with inland areas lacking services. Although some components, such as entertainment venues and money exchange facilities, are more dispersed, their overall numbers remain insufficient.

The report identifies five priority areas for tourism development: eco and nature-based tourism, cultural and spiritual tourism, culinary and craft-based tourism, transportation, accommodation and accessibility enhancement, and international collaboration through volunteer tourism. Key recommendations include infrastructure improvements, community capacity building, better marketing, and development of integrated tourism packages.

In conclusion, Rathgama possesses the natural assets and cultural depth to become a sustainable and inclusive tourism destination. Realizing this potential requires strategic investments, policy support, and active community involvement. A coordinated, multi-sectoral approach will not

only elevate Rathgama's tourism appeal but also foster local economic growth, environmental stewardship, and cultural preservation.

2. Introduction

Tourism stands as a cornerstone of Sri Lanka's economic growth and socio-cultural enrichment. As a small island nation situated in the Indian Ocean, Sri Lanka is globally recognized for its rich cultural heritage, tropical climate, stunning landscapes, and diverse biodiversity. The tourism sector has emerged as one of the fastest-growing industries in the country, contributing significantly to national income, employment generation, infrastructure improvement, and regional development (Fernando, 2017). From ancient cities to lush tea plantations, from sacred religious sites to pristine beaches, Sri Lanka offers a multi-dimensional tourism experience that appeals to a wide array of travelers. According to the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA), the sector accounted for over 12% of GDP in pre-pandemic years and continues to be a key driver of post-crisis recovery (SLTDA, 2021).

One of the key regions that has benefited from this expansion is the Southern Province, particularly the coastal stretch comprising the districts of Galle, Matara, and Hambantota. The Southern Province is renowned for its sun-kissed beaches, colonial architecture, marine biodiversity, and spiritual landmarks, making it a popular choice for tourists seeking both relaxation and cultural enrichment. Within this province, the Galle District stands out for its blend of heritage and nature-based tourism. Galle Fort has emerged as a central node in Southern Province tourism, providing not only economic benefits to the region but also resilience opportunities through diversified tourism flows (Ruzaik, 2021). The Galle Fort, Unawatuna Beach, and Hikkaduwa Coral Sanctuary have long dominated the regional tourism narrative (Edirisinghe et al., 2019). Furthermore, the tourism-related potential in the surrounding area of the Galle district is one of the key advantages, providing a positive platform for the future development of the Rathgama coastal area, where each has a kind of connectivity that fosters the industry's flourishing.

However, with the growing need for spatial equity in tourism development, attention is gradually shifting toward relatively unexplored areas, such as the Rathgama Divisional Secretariat (DS) Division, which lies adjacent to more popular destinations but has not yet reached its full tourism potential. Rathgama DS, located within the Galle District, encompasses a diverse range of coastal and inland attractions, historical villages, and ecological features.

Rathgama is a coastal town situated in the Southern Province of Sri Lanka, within the administrative boundaries of the Galle District. It is situated approximately 12 kilometers

northeast of Galle city and around 120 kilometers south of Colombo. The town is situated along the Colombo-Matara coastal road and lies near other well-known tourist destinations, such as Boossa and Hikkaduwa. Rathgama benefits from good regional connectivity via the Southern Expressway (E01), railway line, and public road networks. Its location along the southwestern coastline of Sri Lanka provides easy access to both inland and marine features.

Rathgama is a historically significant village, formerly known as Rajgama, which has deep-rooted cultural and royal associations. According to regional historical sources, the name "Rajgama" is believed to have originated due to its royal connections. It is said that a noble named Devapathiraja once resided in the area, and the presence of a royal stable field ("Thuraga Pitiya") added to the place's prestige. The Mahavamsa, the ancient chronicle of Sri Lanka, refers to Rajgama as a "Rajagrama" during the reign of King Parakramabahu IV of Kurunegala. Moreover, historical sources also mention that King Parakramabahu II had a connection to this area. The king is credited with establishing a temple named Sri Ghananandarama in the village then known as Kapumulugoda. Along with the Sri Ghananandarama temple, many other temples were also constructed with the patronage of Devapathiraja. Furthermore, literary works from the Gampola period, such as the Thisara Sandesha, describe the region as "Pivithuru Sirin Sarahana Rajgama Ganaya," indicating the cultural prominence of the village during medieval times (Resource Profile, 2023).

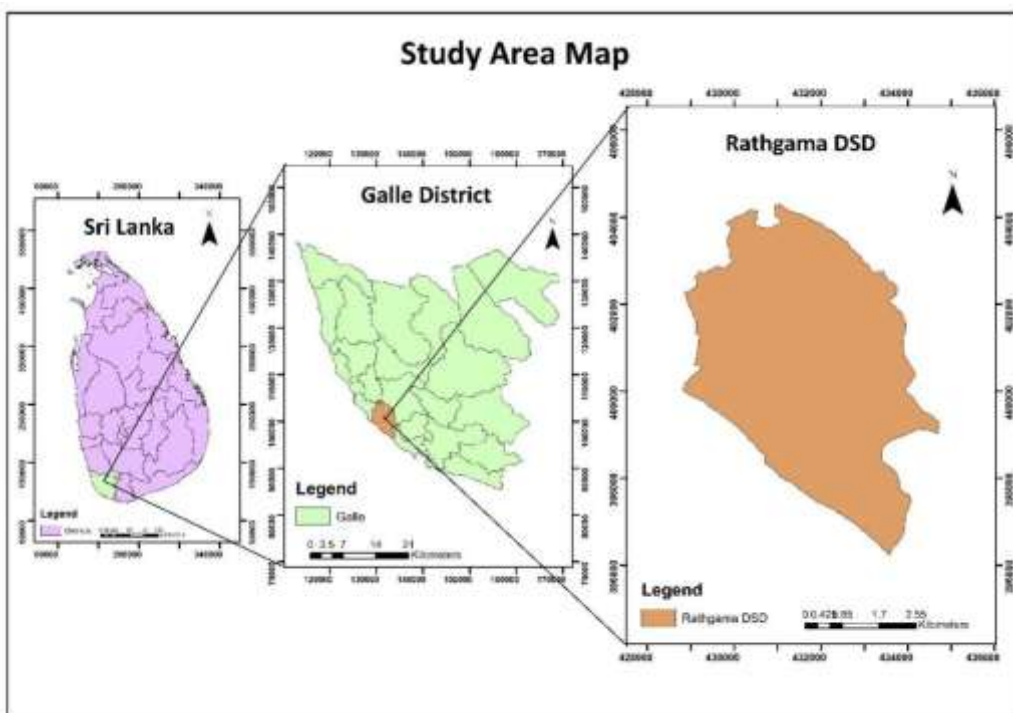
Despite this heritage and geographic advantage, Rathgama's potential as a tourism destination remains untapped mainly due to limited infrastructure, low visibility in national tourism campaigns, and a lack of community-based tourism models (Ushantha & Wijesundara, 2016). As Sri Lanka seeks to diversify its tourism offerings and promote regional development, the strategic identification and enhancement of underutilized areas are essential. Therefore, this research aims to explore the existing conditions, resources, challenges, and opportunities for sustainable tourism development in the Rathgama Divisional Secretariat, with the objectives of developing and promoting tourism experiences focused on Rathgama Division, identifying the existing tourism infrastructure of the division, and contributing to inclusive growth, cultural preservation, and community empowerment through sustainable tourism.

3. Methodology

3.1 Study Area

The study was conducted in the Rathgama Divisional Secretariat Division, located in the Galle District of Sri Lanka's Southern Province. The division consists of 32 Grama Niladhari (GN) divisions and is situated along the southwestern coastal belt. Rathgama is characterized by a mix of coastal, lagoon, and lowland ecosystems, with livelihoods traditionally centered on fishing, small-scale agriculture, and tourism-related activities (Resource Profile, 2023).

Figure 1:
Study Area Map



Source: Prepared by the authors using Survey Department data, 2025

The absolute location of Rathgama can be defined using the following four corner coordinates, marking the geographical boundaries of the study area:

- Northern Part:

Latitude Coordinates

Between $6^{\circ} - 8^{\circ}48'$ and $6^{\circ} - 13^{\circ}50'$

Longitude Coordinates

Between $80^{\circ} - 80^{\circ}12'$ and $80^{\circ} - 5^{\circ}54'$

- Southern Part:

Latitude Coordinates

Between $6^{\circ} - 3^{\circ}58'$ and $6^{\circ} - 5^{\circ}58'$

Longitude Coordinates

Between $80^{\circ} - 7^{\circ}54'$ and $80^{\circ} - 10^{\circ}18'$

3.1.1 Climate of Rathgama DS Division

The Rathgama Divisional Secretariat experiences a tropical climate with moderate temperature variation throughout the year. The maximum average temperature in the region is approximately 28.4°C , typically recorded in May, while the minimum average temperature drops to around 25.5°C in November. Although climatic reports indicate noticeable variations in humidity across the broader Galle District, such fluctuations are significantly less pronounced within the Rathgama Divisional Secretariat. This suggests a relatively consistent and moderate microclimatic condition in the region. The area falls within the wet zone climatic belt and experiences a tropical monsoonal climate, characterized by significant rainfall during the southwest monsoon season throughout the year. It receives an average annual rainfall of approximately 430 mm. Geographically, Rathgama spans an area of around 26.64 square kilometers. It is bounded to the north by the Badddegama and Hikkaduwa Divisional Secretariats, to the southeast by the Galle Four Gravets Divisional Secretariat, and to the west by the Indian Ocean. The town is located approximately 12 kilometers from the Galle urban center, providing convenient access to major regional infrastructure and services (Resource Profile, 2023).

3.1.2 Geomorphological Aspect in Rathgama DS Division

The physical landscape of Rathgama is predominantly coastal, shaped by the dynamic interactions between marine and terrestrial processes. The coastline features gently sloping sandy beaches composed mainly of medium to fine-grained quartz sand (Dassanayake et al., 2019; Nayanthara et al., 2020). These beaches extend in a relatively straight alignment, occasionally interrupted by rocky headlands and natural formations. The Gin River, which flows into the Rathgama Lagoon, also plays a crucial role in shaping the coastal geomorphology by contributing freshwater inflows and sediment loads. The area also includes small offshore and onshore rock outcrops, which are believed to be remnants of ancient geological activity. These rocks are mainly composed of Precambrian metamorphic formations such as gneiss and charnockite, which are widespread in the Southern Province (JICA Group, 2006).

Further, the coastal geomorphology includes features such as wave-cut platforms, marine terraces, estuaries, and beach ridges, which indicate ongoing marine erosion and deposition processes (Adikaram et al., 2018; Lin, 2017). The presence of small sea caves along the rocky shorelines reflects the erosional action of waves over time in tropical settings (Adikaram et al., 2018). Additionally, the lagoon system in Rathgama plays a vital role in shaping the inland physical environment. These brackish water bodies are fringed by mangrove vegetation and act as sediment traps, supporting the development of mudflats and estuarine features (Silva, 1990; Daily News, 2006).

3.1.3 Geology of Rathgama DSD

The geology of the area primarily consists of high-grade metamorphic rocks from the Highland Complex of Sri Lanka's Precambrian shield. The land surface is covered by lateritic soil profiles, formed due to intense weathering under tropical climatic conditions (Gunatilaka et al., 2013; Jayawardena et al., 1982). In low-lying areas, alluvial deposits are found, especially along the edges of the lagoon and near estuarine environments (Gunatilaka et al., 2013). The topography is gently undulating, with elevation levels generally between 0 and 20 meters above mean sea level (FAO, 1995).

3.1.4 Demographic Features of Rathgama DSD

The Rathgama Divisional Secretariat Division (DSD) is home to a total population of 47,023 individuals, comprising 24,130 females and 22,891 males. The majority of the population belongs to the Sinhala Buddhist community, with approximately 46,878 individuals identifying as such (Resource Profile, 2023). In addition to this dominant group, smaller communities following Islam and Christianity also reside in the area, contributing to its cultural diversity.

3.2 Data Collection

This study aimed to assess the existing tourism services and explore the potential for tourism development within the Rathgama Divisional Secretariat. To achieve this, a comprehensive destination analysis was undertaken, focusing on the identification of available resources, service limitations, spatial distribution of tourism infrastructure, and the prioritization of needs to enhance visitor satisfaction. Both primary and secondary data sources were utilized for this purpose.

Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted with key stakeholders, including tourists (n = 15), tourism service providers (n = 12) and members of the local community (n = 16). Participants were selected using the snowball and purposive sampling techniques to ensure the inclusion of relevant and knowledgeable individuals. Secondary data were obtained using Google Earth Pro 7.3 software, which enabled the identification and mapping of the geographic coordinates of tourism service locations.

Figure 2:
Collecting data from tourists in Rathgama – Conducted on 17.04.2025



Figure 3:
Collecting data from tourism service providers in Rathgama – Conducted on 17.04.2025



3.3 Data Analysis

The analysis centered on conducting a destination analysis, following the guidelines provided in the Manual of Sustainable Tourism Destination Management, published by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2013). The analytical framework consisted of three key components:

- Inventory creation (summarizing the main natural and cultural tourist attractions in Rathgama DS Division),
- SWOT analysis (identifying the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats in the study area), and
- the identification of priority areas based on the destination analysis.

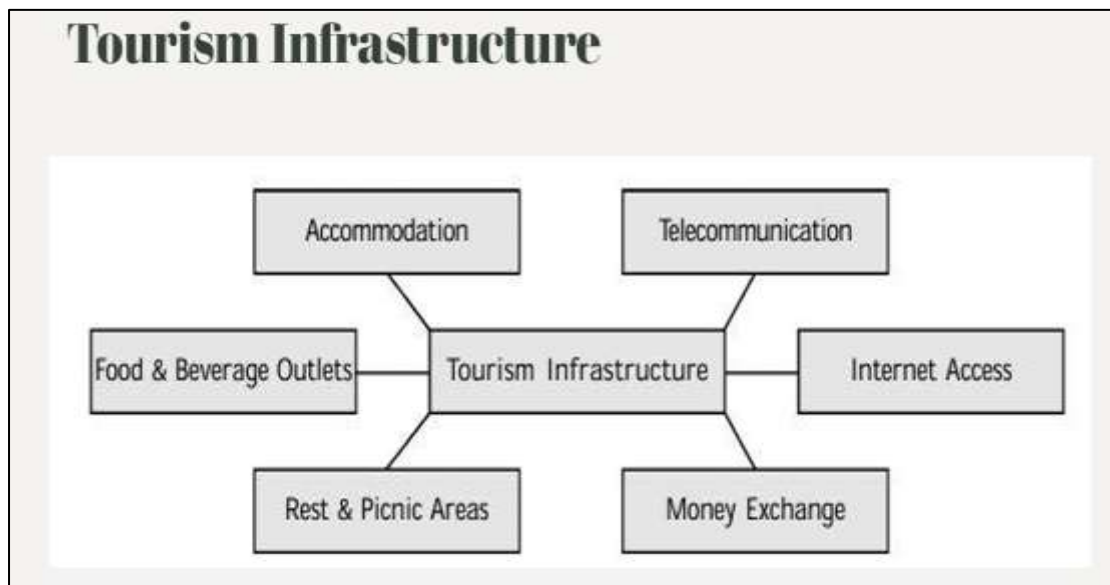
According to the manual, tourism services are categorized into several thematic areas, including:

- **Tourism Resources:** Cultural attractions, industrial sites, cultural heritage locations, and recreational facilities.

- **Community Infrastructure:** Services such as parking, emergency response measures, drainage systems, water supply, and air quality management.
- **Tourism Infrastructure:** Accommodation facilities, communication systems, internet access, currency exchange services, and food and beverage outlets.
- **Tourism Facilities and Services:** Retail shops, guide services, guesthouses, tour operators, security provisions, and emergency services.

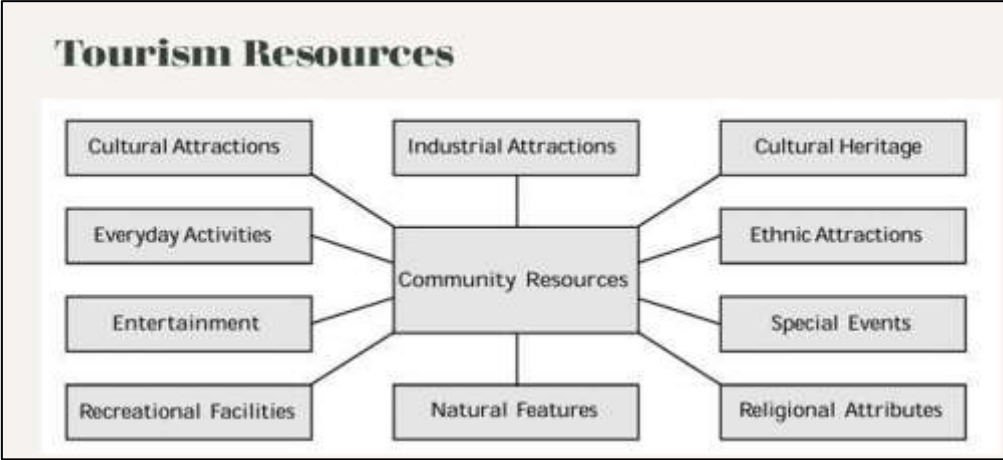
These categories were used to identify and assess the existing tourism-related services within the Rathgama Divisional Secretariat. Furthermore, gaps and areas requiring further development were recognized, providing a foundation for sustainable tourism planning and policy formulation. The thematic areas examined in this study are illustrated in Figures 4 and 5.

Figure 4:
Classification of tourism infrastructure according to the Manual of Tourism Destination Management



Source: Extracted from the Manual of Tourism Destination Management published by the United Nations World Tourism Organization, 2025

Figure 5:
Classification of tourism resources according to the Manual of Tourism Destination Management



Source: Extracted from the Manual of Tourism Destination Management published by the United Nations World Tourism Organization, 2025

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings of the study, focusing on the identification and categorization of tourism development potentials within the Rathgama Divisional Secretariat. The Results section is organized into several key parts: an inventory of tourist attractions, covering both natural and cultural sites; an assessment of the potential for further development of the tourism industry in Rathgama DSD; a SWOT-based strategic assessment aimed at strengthening tourism in the division; and a spatial analysis of existing tourism infrastructure facilities. Each of these components provides valuable insights into the current status and future opportunities for tourism development in the area.

4.1 An inventory of tourist attractions – Natural

Table 1: Inventory of Natural Attractions

Category	Site	Features	Event
Natural	Topography	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pitiwella, Boossa beach • Galapatha rock • Gin river mouth • Galapatha caves, Rejjipura mountain 	No specific event
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beaches • Mountain and Rock • River mouth • Caves 		
	Climate	Favorable climate variation	No specific event
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temperature • Sunshine • Wind 		
Natural	Hydrology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rathgama lake • Gin river 	No specific event
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lakes • Rivers 		
Natural	Wildlife	Sea wave turtle hatchery, Pitiwella coral area, Gin river	Daily release of sea turtles as part of the

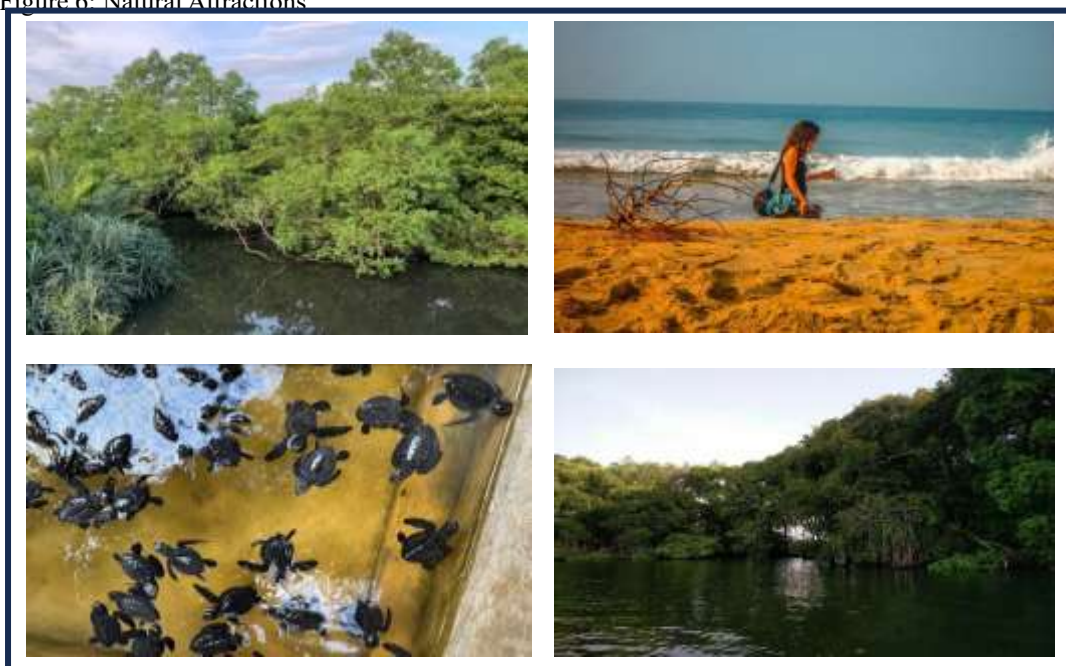
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coral • Mangroves • Birds • Fishes • Turtles 	mouth, Rathgama lagoon, Rathgama lake	conservation program
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Source: Prepared by Researchers, 2025

Rathgama DSD offers a rich array of natural tourist attractions, blending scenic landscapes with ecological diversity. Visitors can explore the stunning beaches of Pitiwella and Boossa, the dramatic terrain of Galapatha Rock, and the unique formations of Galapatha Caves and Rejjipura Mountain. Hydrological features such as the Gin River and Rathgama Lake contribute to the area's serene beauty, while the river mouth and lagoon areas provide a haven for diverse wildlife. Notably, the region supports a vibrant array of marine and coastal ecosystems, including coral reefs, mangroves, and turtle nesting sites. The Sea Turtle Hatchery at Pitiwella offers daily sea turtle releases, providing both educational and conservation value. These natural elements, combined with a favorable climate characterized by pleasant temperatures, sunshine, and coastal breezes, make the destination an ideal retreat

for nature enthusiasts.

Figure 6: Natural Attractions



Source: Field observations, 2025

4.2 An inventory of tourist attractions – Cultural

Table 2: Inventory of Cultural Attractions

Category	Site	Features	Event
Cultural	Prehistorical	No specific event	No specific event
	Historical	Parappudoowa,	Katina perahara
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ancient Temple 	Jayawardhanaramaya, Ghananandaramaya, Rajaramaya	
	Contemporary Culture	Buddhists, Catholics, Muslims, Tamil	Perahera Festival
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ethnic neighborhoods 		
	Economic	Cinnamon,	No specific event
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Crops 	Coconut, Paddy Lands	
	Recreational	Movie nights, Traditional dancing events	Asiri Yoga, Galapatha Elephant Riding, Bara beach, Regay bar
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yoga Classes DJ nights 			
Food	Seelawadichichi (locally known fruit punch or a mocktail)	No specific event	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local drinks 			
Retail	No options available	No specific event	

Source: Prepared by Researchers, 2025

Cultural richness further enhances the appeal of the region, with layers of history, tradition, and contemporary practices woven into its identity. Both prehistorical and historical landmarks,

such as the ancient temples of Parappudoowa and Jayawardhanaramaya, stand as testaments to the area's enduring spiritual and architectural heritage. The Katina Perahera, held at Parappudoowa and other Perahera functions in the area throughout the year, are vibrant celebrations that draw devotees and tourists alike. The area's multicultural fabric is reflected in its diverse ethnic neighborhoods, comprising Buddhists, Catholics, Muslims, and Tamils. Economic activities such as cinnamon and coconut farming, along with expansive paddy lands, provide insight into traditional livelihoods. Recreational opportunities abound, with yoga classes at Asiri Yoga, beach parties at Bara Beach, Regay Bar, and events like DJ nights and traditional dance performances enriching the visitor experience. The local gem fair adds a retail dimension, showcasing regional craftsmanship and commerce.

Figure 7:
Cultural Attractions



Source: Field observations,2025

4.3 Strengthening Tourism in Rathgama Division: SWOT-Based Strategic Assessment

As part of this study to explore the potential for further development of the tourism industry in the Rathgama Divisional Secretariat Division (DSD), both tourists and residents were surveyed using semi-structured interviews. The information collected helped identify key strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats associated with the local tourism sector.

4.3.1 Strengths

Rathgama's centralized location, nestled between the well-known tourist zones of Hikkaduwa and Galle, provides easy access and convenience for travelers. This positioning increases its potential to attract tourists who already visit these popular areas. The availability of low-budget facilities makes Rathgama an attractive destination for backpackers and budget-conscious travelers, creating a competitive edge for affordable tourism in the region. The area offers an authentic vibe with a calm and quiet environment, providing a peaceful escape for tourists seeking relaxation away from crowded destinations. Rathgama is supported by good transportation facilities, including both bus and train access, which enhances connectivity and convenience for domestic and international travelers. The rich environmental diversity, ranging from beaches, mountains, rivers, lakes, and varied climatic conditions, makes Rathgama suitable for eco-tourism and nature-based tourism experiences. Environmental cleanliness is another asset, as a clean, well-preserved environment increases the attractiveness of any tourist destination and supports sustainable tourism. Volunteer services, such as conservation projects and community initiatives, can enhance the tourism experience by appealing to socially conscious travelers. Unique attractions, such as the turtle hatchery and Rathgama Lake, offer educational and recreational opportunities, supporting wildlife and water-based tourism in the region.

4.3.2 Weaknesses

However, several weaknesses hinder tourism growth in Rathgama. Issues concerning safety, especially the poor quality of built infrastructure, may discourage potential tourists. The strong wave conditions (Boossa, Rillamba, Pitiwella, Rathgama) may restrict beach activities and swimming, thereby reducing the usability of certain coastal zones for tourism. The absence of coastal protection structures has further worsened the condition of the shoreline, decreasing beach safety significantly, which stands out as a major weakness for tourism in the area. The

limited kayak capacity (Kayak Adventure Rathgama Lake, Kayak Adventure Rathgama Lagoon) and a few boat riding and water sports activities (surfing at Owakanda and Rillamba) restrict the diversity of recreational options available to visitors, especially adventure-seeking tourists. Here, the frequency of waste management collection is limited to twice a week. However, it should be increased to four or five times per week, as there are plenty of restaurants and hotels in the area, which pose a significant environmental and visual concern, potentially deterring tourists and undermining the area's natural appeal. The lack of nightlife and entertainment options limits Rathgama's appeal to backpackers and other tourists who seek vibrant nighttime activities. A lack of a skilled workforce in the tourism sector can affect the quality of service delivery, customer satisfaction, and overall tourist experience.

Limited collaboration among tourism organizations and a lack of publicity prevent the area from reaching its full tourism potential through coordinated efforts and targeted marketing. Additionally, a shortage of money exchange facilities, ATMs, shopping malls, and supermarkets reduces the convenience for international tourists. Criminal activities, such as robberies and looting, can negatively impact the perception of safety in the area, ultimately harming its reputation among travelers. There are also limited accommodations, few local restaurants, and high ticket rates for transportation, which reduce accessibility in tourist locations. The lack of community collaboration further undermines sustainable development, as inclusive participation is crucial for achieving long-term success in tourism.

4.3.3 Opportunities

Despite the challenges, Rathgama has significant opportunities for future tourism development. Creating diversified tour plans and packages, such as combining eco-nature tourism, spiritual tourism, culinary and craft tourism, and water-based tourism, can attract a wide range of tourist segments. Promoting local cultural events and festivals, such as Esala Perahera and Poson Perahera, would help preserve heritage and attract cultural tourists, while supporting the local economy. Encouraging visits to places like Buddhist temples would attract religious and spiritual tourists interested in cultural exploration and discovery. Although the presence of a police officer and a coastal officer has been observed in the area, their involvement has not translated into substantial benefits or active contributions toward tourism development, indicating a need for more engaged and collaborative efforts.

Culinary tourism can be promoted by showcasing local food traditions, such as Seelawadichchi, offering cooking classes, and providing authentic dining experiences.

Spiritual and wellness tourism, such as meditation retreats or Ayurveda therapy, can be developed to appeal to wellness-focused travelers. The Gin River provides a natural setting for eco-tourism and water-based activities, including boat rides and kayaking. Village tours can provide visitors with insight into rural lifestyles and traditions, thereby enhancing their understanding of local culture and supporting community-based tourism. Organizing traditional dance performances and cultural shows can enhance the tourist experience while providing income opportunities for local artists. Rathgama can also promote local industries such as Raja Canal tourism and the sale of coconut-based ropes and handicrafts, providing authentic souvenirs and supporting rural livelihoods.

4.3.4 Threats


Several threats must be addressed to ensure sustainable tourism development. Coastal erosion and rising sea levels pose a significant threat to the natural landscape and infrastructure of beach areas. Climate change and its associated adaptations may impact tourism flows and compromise the safety of both tourists and infrastructure. Intensifying competition from neighboring regions and internal business rivalry can limit Rathgama’s ability to stand out in the tourism market. The proximity to Boossa Prison may influence tourists’ perception of safety and comfort, depending on its visibility and reputation. Ultimately, conflicts, whether within communities or among stakeholders, can hinder coordinated development efforts and compromise tourism governance.

4.3.5 SWOT Analysis – Summary

Table 3 : SWOT Analysis

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centralized location (Between Hikkaduwa and Galle Tourism zones) • Low-budget facilities • Authentic Vibe • Calm and quiet environment • Good transportation Facilities (Bus, Train access) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor waste management • Lack of coastal protection structures (ex: sea walls, break water and groins) • Limited nightlife and entertainment options • Lack of boat rides and water sports activities

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rich environmental Diversity (Beach, Mountain, River, Lake, Climate diversity) • Environmental Cleanliness • Availability of Volunteer Services for environmental conservation • Wildlife conservation centers and projects (Turtle Hatchery) • Hospitality and tourist-friendly culture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of skilled workforce • Limited collaboration between tourism organizations • Lack of publicity • Poor access to the financial exchange facilities • No shopping malls and supermarkets • Lack of quality accommodation & meals/refreshments • Unattractive appearance of the restaurants and hotels • Lack of communication skills • Lack of skill and trained guides • Poor mode of transportation • Unsafe railway traffic system
<p>OPPORTUNITIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop tour plans with diversified activities on tourism (e.g., Coastal tourism, Eco tourism, Heritage tourism, rural tourism and culinary tourism) • Encourage the police officers and coastal officers to engage actively in supporting tourism development • Availability of local cultural events and festivals 	<p>THREATS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coastal erosion & rising sea levels • Strong wave action (wave strengths and energy) • Climate Changes & Natural disasters • Competition for tourism services (within business & other regions) • Proximity to Boossa Prison • Insufficient services on marketing/publicity of the area locally and internationally

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability of Gem Business • Rich culture along with religious places • Facilities for Culinary Tourism • Facilities for spiritual and wellness tourism • Encourage production based on coconut and ropes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competition from other areas in Sri Lanka / other countries in the tourism and related activities 
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Source: Prepared by researchers, 2025

4.4 Spatial analysis of existing tourism infrastructure facilities

Based on the findings of the SWOT analysis and the tourism inventory, the Rathgama Divisional Secretariat Division (DSD) exhibits significant potential for tourism development, driven by its rich natural and built features. Among the key strengths are the region's coastal beauty, existing service centers, and cultural assets. Opportunities lie in expanding eco-tourism, promoting inland tourism, and diversifying tourism products. However, weaknesses such as the concentration of infrastructure in only a few coastal areas and the limited availability of services in inland and rural regions pose challenges. Addressing these gaps through strategic planning can help minimize potential threats such as environmental degradation, service congestion, and inequitable tourism development. To assess these issues, a destination analysis was conducted using the 2013 United Nations Manual of Sustainable Tourism Destination Management, focusing on Tourism Resources and Tourism Infrastructure.

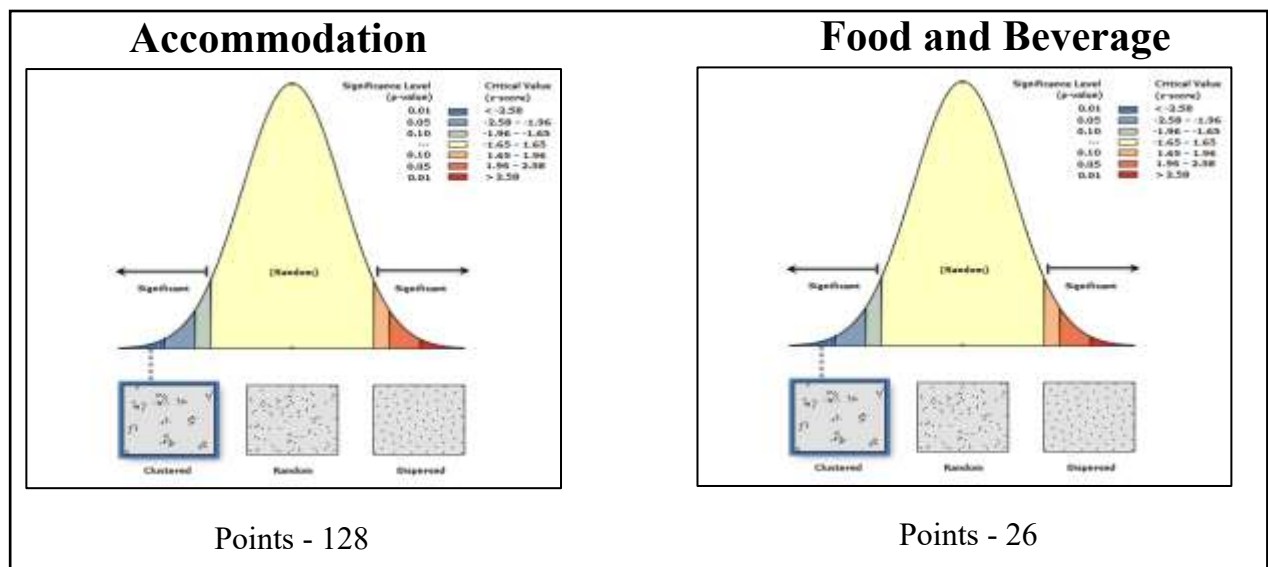
To examine the spatial distribution of these components across the region, spatial analysis techniques were employed, including Nearest Neighbor Analysis and other spatial statistical tools. Nearest Neighbor Analysis is a useful spatial technique to understand how these service centers are arranged in a given area. Based on the results of Nearest Neighbor Analysis, the spatial distribution can typically be categorized into three main patterns: clustered, random, or regular. A clustered pattern ($R < 1$) indicates that service centers are concentrated in specific high-demand zones, such as coastal areas or heritage sites. A random pattern ($R \approx 1$) suggests no deliberate planning or natural influence on their spatial arrangement. A regular pattern ($R > 1$) reflects even spacing, often resulting from systematic planning in organized tourism zones.

Identifying these patterns helps improve service coverage, reduce congestion, and promote balanced tourism development. These methods allowed for the identification of spatial distribution patterns, specifically whether tourism elements were clustered, randomly distributed, or dispersed, thereby supporting a deeper understanding of the strengths and weaknesses related to tourism development within the area.

Although the handbook includes a wide range of categories under tourism infrastructure, this study primarily identified and analyzed the following components prior to the spatial analysis: accommodation facilities, food and beverage outlets, money exchange centers, entertainment venues, recreational activity sites, rest and picnic areas, and transportation facilities.

The results of the Nearest Neighbor Analysis and density mapping conducted for each category of tourism infrastructure and tourism resources are presented below. Figures 1, 2, and 3 illustrate the spatial distribution patterns of these components within the tourism region. Specifically, the figures display the outcomes of the Nearest Neighbor Analysis, which was applied to assess whether the identified tourism infrastructure and resources exhibit clustered, random, or dispersed spatial patterns across the study area.

Figure 8:
Results of Nearest Neighbor Analysis of Tourism Infrastructure and Tourism Resources with Cluster Distribution

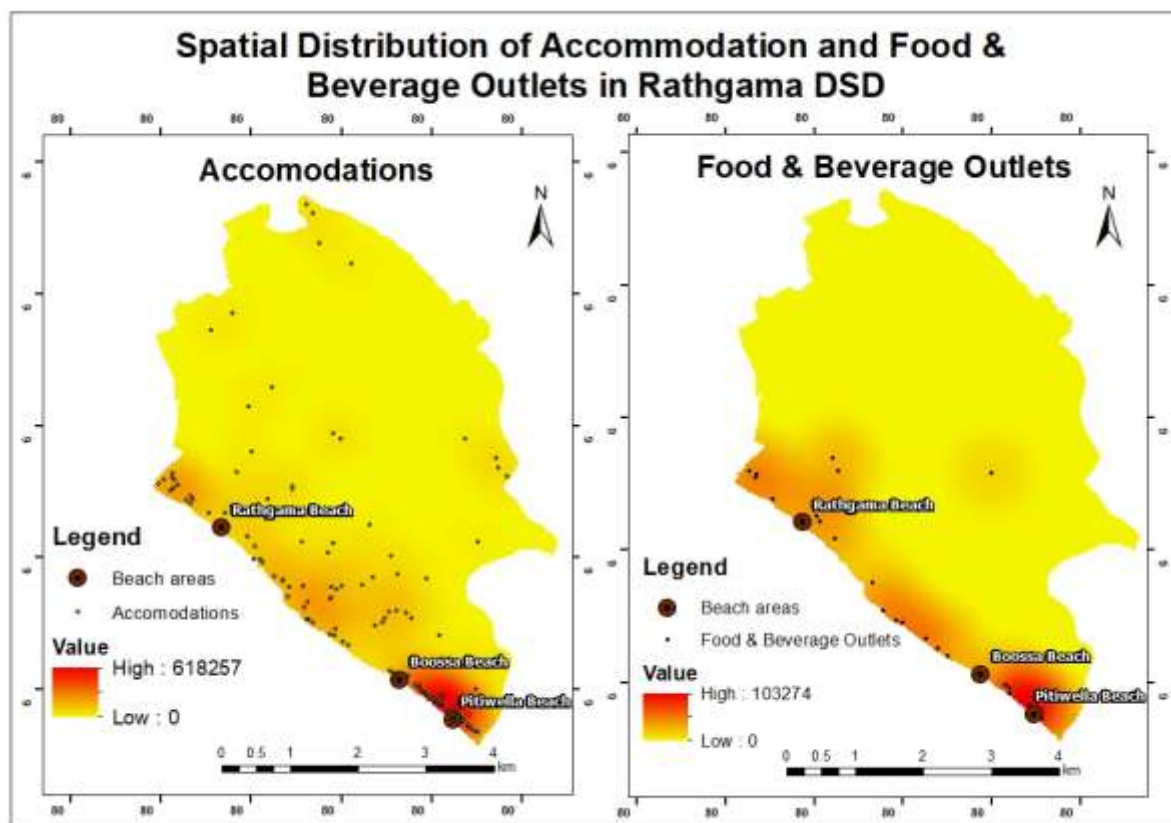


Source: Prepared by using ArcMap 10.8, 2025

The results of the Nearest Neighbor Analysis revealed that accommodation facilities and food and beverage outlets are significantly clustered within the study area. This concentration of tourism infrastructure and resources in a limited geographic area can be considered a weakness in sustainable tourism development, as it may lead to unequal access, congestion, and overdependence on specific zones. Thus, the clustered spatial distribution observed in the Rathgama DSD is not ideal for balanced and inclusive tourism development.

To further examine and visualize this pattern, density maps were generated for both tourism infrastructure and tourism resources. These maps, presented in Map 1: Density Maps, provide a more detailed understanding of the spatial concentration of tourism elements within the region.

Figure 9:
Density map of Tourism infrastructure and tourism resource distribution

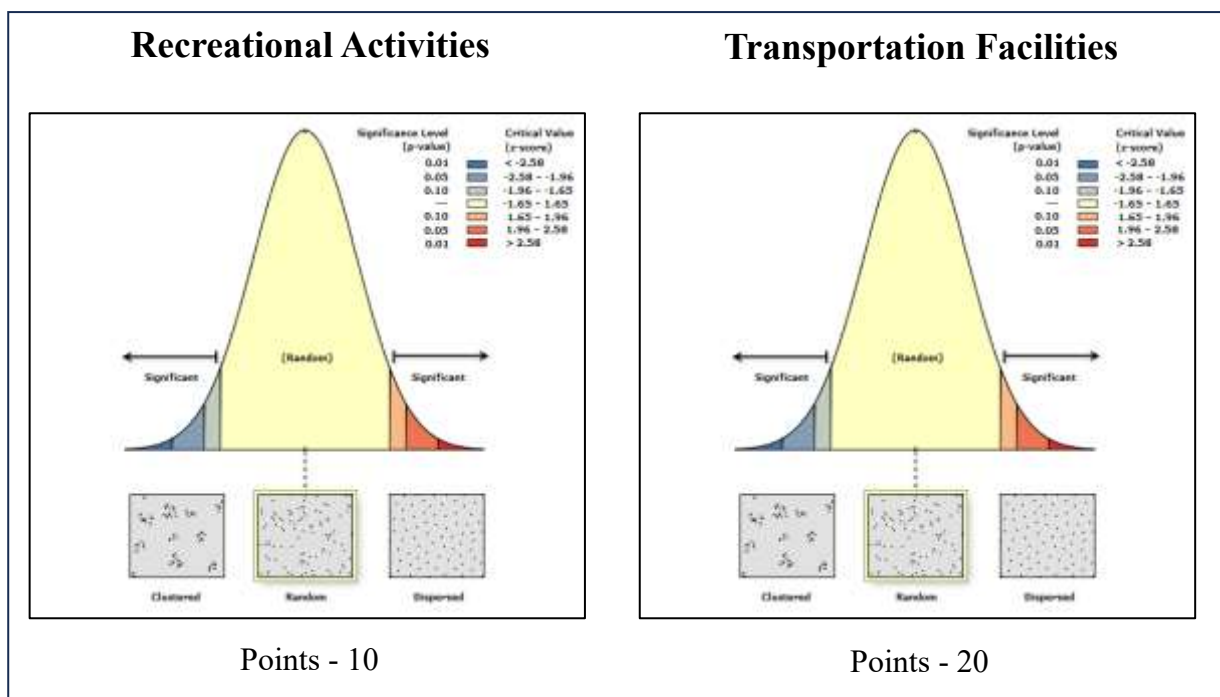


Source: Prepared by using ArcMap 10.8, 2025

A total of 128 accommodation establishments and 26 food and beverage centers were identified within the Rathgama DSD through Google Earth Pro analysis and field observations. As illustrated in the map, the distribution of these facilities is predominantly concentrated in three key areas: Pitiwella, Boosa, and Dodanduwa. Despite the presence of tourism potential in the rural and inland areas of the Rathgama DSD, the availability of accommodation, food, and beverage facilities in these regions remains very limited, indicating a spatial imbalance in tourism infrastructure development.

Furthermore, according to Google Earth Pro analysis and field observations, we identified that entertainment venues, rest and picnic areas, and money exchange centers are very sparsely distributed across the region. Specifically, only three entertainment venues, two rest and picnic areas, and four money exchange centers were found within the study area. Although the scattered distribution pattern may be appropriate, the limited number of these facilities poses a challenge to meeting tourist needs and providing a well-rounded tourism experience.

Figure 10:
Results of Nearest Neighbor Analysis of Tourism Infrastructure and Tourism Resources with Random Distribution



Source : Prepared by using ArcMap 10.8, 2025

Figure 3 presents the results of the Nearest Neighbor Analysis, which indicate a random distribution of specific tourism infrastructure and resources within the Rathgama DSD.

Specifically, recreational activity sites and transportation facilities exhibit a random spatial pattern. A total of 10 recreational activity locations and 20 transportation facilities (Taxi centers, Tour Agencies, and Stations) were identified in the study area. While a random distribution can be considered suitable for supporting tourism by offering services at various accessible points the limited number of such facilities highlights a constraint in fully meeting the demands of a growing tourism sector.

Furthermore, the overall destination analysis revealed a concentration of tourism services along the coastal region of the Rathgama Divisional Secretariat, whereas the inland areas exhibited a notable lack of service distribution.

5. Study Focus Areas

Based on the insights gathered through the SWOT analysis, resource inventory and destination analysis (spatial analysis), several key focus areas have been identified to guide the sustainable tourism development of Rathgama division. These priority areas highlight the unique trends and untapped opportunities of the region, providing a strategic direction for enhancing eco-tourism, cultural experience, local entrepreneurship, infrastructure, and international collaborations.

5.1 Top Priorities for Rathgama Division

5.1.1 Transportation, Accommodation, and Accessibility Enhancement

Strengths leveraged: Good transportation links (bus/train), central location.

Opportunities:

- Design integrated tour packages from Hikkaduwa and Galle, including Rathgama.
- Develop low-budget tour plans using public transport options.
- Provide a variety of accommodation options to promote Rathgama as an accommodation hub.
- Introduce unified and themed tourism packages that combine multiple activities and attractions (e.g., spiritual sites, eco-tours, and local food experiences), offering tourists a well-rounded itinerary.
- Address the signal loss issues caused by Boossa Military Camp in the surrounding areas by advocating for improved mobile network infrastructure to ensure seamless digital connectivity for tourists.

5.1.2 Eco and Nature-Based Tourism Development

Strengths leveraged: Rich environmental diversity (beach, mountain, river, lake), ecological cleanliness, calm and quiet atmosphere.

Opportunities:

- Consider the installation of coastal structures at erosion-prone points along the coast to effectively reduce coastal erosion and preserve beach areas for tourism.

- Utilize Pitiwella Beach, Gin River, and Rathgama Lake for eco- and water-based tourism activities (e.g., surfing, kayaking, bird-watching, boat tours).
- Implement beach conservation techniques to control the coastal erosion (Groynes and beach nourishment).
- Promote beach and nature retreats combining environmental education, volunteer programs, and conservation, such as a turtle hatchery.
- Introduce Triathlon or nature trail events.

5.1.3 Cultural and Spiritual Tourism

Strengths leveraged: Authentic vibe, centralized location, hospitality, and low-budget facilities.

Opportunities:

- Promote Parappudoowa Temple visits.
- Organize traditional dance events, Sri Lankan cultural functions, and village experiences.
- Develop spiritual and wellness retreats with yoga, meditation, and Ayurvedic healing.

5.1.4 Culinary and Craft-Based Tourism

Strengths leveraged: Local authenticity, accessibility.

Opportunities:

- Promote Culinary Tourism (local cooking classes, food trails).
- Encourage the production and sale of coconut-based crafts and gem business as souvenirs.

5.1.5 International Collaboration & Volunteer Tourism

Strengths leveraged: Volunteer services, calm setting, and authentic hospitality.

Opportunities:

- Enhance the collaboration with international NGOs and volunteer organizations, such as Built and funded by Travelteer.uk, for community and conservation projects.
- Use some eco-projects as volunteer hubs.

Table 4: Tourism Development Strategy: Summary Table based on the focused area

Focus Area	Short-Term Targets (0–1 year)	Medium-Term Targets (1–3 years)	Long-Term Targets (3+ years)
5.1.1 Transportation, accommodation and Accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Create budget-friendly tour plans using public transport - Start advocacy for improved mobile network (Boossa area) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promote Rathgama as a low-budget tourism destination with a range of accommodation options - Launch integrated tourism packages with Galle & Hikkaduwa- Improve signage and tourist navigation aids 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Upgrade transport hubs and digital connectivity to support larger visitor volume
5.1.2 Eco and Nature-Based Tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promote Rathgama Lake, Gin River & Pitiwella Beach for kayaking, surfing, boat tours- Initiate beach clean-up and awareness campaigns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Install coastal protection structures (groynes, beach nourishment techniques) - Launch turtle hatchery and conservation/ volunteer programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop triathlons, nature trail events - Establish Rathgama as a regional eco-tourism hub
5.1.3 Cultural and Spiritual Tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promote Parappudoowa Temple visits- Organize cultural dance shows and village tours 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Establish yoga, meditation, and Ayurvedic wellness retreats 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop annual cultural/spiritual festivals to attract international visitors
5.1.4 Culinary and Craft-Based Tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Launch local cooking classes and food trails- Promote coconut crafts and gems as souvenirs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Create artisan markets or pop-ups featuring local products 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Position Rathgama as a culinary and craft tourism destination
5.1.5 International Collaboration & Volunteer Tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strengthen current partnerships (e.g., Travelteer.uk)- Promote eco-projects as volunteer hubs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Attract more NGOs and volunteers for conservation and community projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Build a permanent international volunteer center for long-term engagement

Source: Prepared by researchers, 2025

6. Recommendations

The following recommendations are proposed based on the top priority focus areas identified for the Rathgama Division. These suggestions aim to address the key challenges while enhancing the unique tourism potential of the area, ensuring sustainable economic benefits, community participation, and environmental conservation.

- Diversify and Promote the Tourism sector
 - Integrate physical coastal erosion control structures, such as coastal structures, to stabilize beaches, safeguard eco-tourism assets, and ensure long-term usability of waterfront areas.
 - Eco and Nature-Based Tourism: Capitalize on Rathgama's diverse ecosystems by developing nature trails, lagoon tours, birdwatching, and kayaking activities around Gin River and Rathgama Lake. Expand educational conservation experiences at the Sea Turtle Hatchery.
 - Cultural and Spiritual Tourism: Leverage cultural assets such as Parappudoowa and Jayawardhanaramaya temples. Promote festivals and rituals to attract spiritual and heritage tourists. Organize cultural performances and village life experiences.
 - Culinary and Handicraft Tourism: Establish culinary tourism routes, including local food tastings and cooking classes. Support local artisans in producing and selling coconut rope products, gems, and traditional crafts.
 - Recreational & Nightlife Activities: Introduce more recreational events (e.g., beach yoga, DJ nights, cinema under the stars) to attract younger, active travelers and improve visitor engagement.
 - Promote combined tourism packages that streamline nature, culture, and food-based experiences, increasing tourist satisfaction and economic returns for local entrepreneurs.
- Improve Infrastructure and Accessibility
 - Enhance waste management frequency to maintain environmental cleanliness and tourist satisfaction.

- Improve the safety and quality of the built environment, especially accommodation and transport hubs.
 - Expand transport modes and introduce affordable, integrated tour packages from Hikkaduwa and Galle.
 - Upgrade road signage, tourist information centers, and digital presence (maps, mobile apps).
 - Work with mobile service providers and local authorities to resolve network signal issues caused by Boossa Camp, ensuring uninterrupted connectivity for tourists and digital services.
- Capacity Building and Workforce Development
 - Provide training for local guides, hospitality workers, and small business owners in language skills, service quality, and sustainability.
 - Encourage community-based tourism models that empower local participation and foster pride in heritage preservation.
- Strengthen Tourism Governance and Marketing
 - Facilitate the development of retail options such as supermarkets, convenience stores, and souvenir outlets to cater to the daily needs of tourists and provide spaces for local crafts and products, enhancing both visitor convenience and opportunities for local entrepreneurs.
 - Foster collaboration among tourism stakeholders, including local businesses, NGOs, government agencies, and community groups.
 - Increase visibility through national and international tourism campaigns. Use social media and partnerships with eco-tourism operators to promote Rathgama.
 - Establish a local tourism board or task force to coordinate development strategies and monitor progress.
- Encourage International and Volunteer Engagement
 - Partner with international conservation and development NGOs to expand volunteer-based programs.

- Position Rathgama as a hub for volunteer tourism through eco-conservation and heritage preservation projects.

7. Conclusion

The Rathgama Divisional Secretariat possesses a unique combination of natural beauty, cultural heritage, and strategic location that positions it well for sustainable tourism development. Despite its proximity to established tourist destinations like Galle and Hikkaduwa, Rathgama remains underutilized due to limited infrastructure, low promotion, and fragmented tourism services. The likes of established tourism sectors in Galle and Hikkaduwa could also strengthen the tourism capabilities in the Rathgama division.

Tourism development in the Rathgama Division could offer several benefits to the community. It can lead to increased revenue through hospitality services, local crafts, and eco-tourism activities. The growing tourist footfall also encourages investment in infrastructure, creating new business opportunities. Additionally, it enhances the region's visibility, supporting sustainable growth and long-term profitability for stakeholders.

This study reveals significant opportunities to transform Rathgama into a holistic, inclusive, and sustainable tourism destination. By addressing existing weaknesses, such as inadequate infrastructure, lack of skilled labor, and insufficient marketing, and by leveraging its rich natural and cultural resources, Rathgama can attract a diverse range of tourists while fostering community well-being and environmental conservation.

A coordinated, community-driven approach emphasizing eco-tourism, cultural immersion, wellness experiences, and volunteer engagement will enable Rathgama to emerge as a resilient and responsible destination within Sri Lanka's broader tourism framework.

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