

Public Space and Quality of Life:

A Case Study of Mount Lavinia Beach

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Joggers Photo: UF

Research assistants

Our research assistants are all students of the Department of Town & Country Planning, University of Moratuwa. The research team consists of Hasini Artigala, Nishani Chaturika, Prabhasini Subhasinghe, Sukhitha Ranasinghe, Thushara Weerakoon, Dinidu Chathuranga, Dilshan Rathnajith, Shriyani Herath, Nilmini Dissanayaka, and Thushari Nuwaragedara. Special mention goes to Hasini Artigala and Nishani Chaturika.

Photo credits

Photos taken by Udan Fernando and Debra Efroymson. Cover photo by Udan Fernando.

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“Umbrella lovers”

Photo: UF

Authors' credentials

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Early morning joggers on a cloudy day Photo: UF

Notes by co-authors

As an international guest in Sri Lanka who has worked for years on the issue of public spaces, I made my decision to move here largely due to Mount Lavinia Beach. I love public spaces and how they contribute to wellbeing in cities. It is thus a pleasure for me to have the opportunity to work on this study about my favourite place in Sri Lanka. In my travels I have seen more beautiful beaches, but I prefer Mount Lavinia Beach. It feels real. Many of the visitors are local residents who come every day, and the fishermen and vendors add to the feeling of authenticity. Other beaches feel more artificial; people come from farther away or only to enjoy sun and surf.

Mount Lavinia Beach is vibrant, with so much activity, so much life. You see almost nobody sunbathing or just sitting. It's easy to entertain yourself watching others. It's a friendly place: people wave, talk to each other, make friends and enjoy ongoing acquaintances. It's hard to imagine feeling bored or unhappy here.

The success of the beach as a public space offers many lessons for other public spaces in Sri Lanka and internationally. I hope this report contributes to people's understanding of some of the qualities of a truly great public space and how to incorporate some of those qualities in other public spaces in our cities.

--Debra

Mount Lavinia Beach is, in a way, my extended living room as it is so close to where I live and so easily accessible. I don't need to make an effort to 'visit' the beach. It's my place to walk, exercise, eat, drink, relax, host friends and 'just be'! As a result, I have been part and parcel of the beach and have seen its life as a participant observer. I have met many people on the beach and developed acquaintances, professional linkages and friendships with some. One such person is Debra, the co-author of this report. I am glad that we share a deep attachment to the Mount Lavinia Beach and wanted to 'see' the beach deeper than is usually possible. Our professional and academic backgrounds brought in many resources and networks and much inspiration to make the study successful.

A unique feature of this study was that it wasn't 'commissioned'; this is an independent study by two beach users. What we have captured is part of the vibrant life of the beach. This report cannot fully capture the sounds, colour, movement and beauty of the beach. However, I believe that our modest effort will inspire others to look at many other dimensions of the Mount Lavinia Beach and such efforts will result in preserving the value and beauty of this great public space.

--Udan



Man relaxing at beach Photo: UF

Foreword

Dr. Jagath Munasinghe, Head, Department of Town & Country Planning, University of Moratuwa

Mount Lavinia Beach is undoubtedly one of the most attractive coastal settings in the world. The picturesque beauty, the welcoming ocean breeze and the dramatic surroundings in the evenings create an everlasting memory in the minds of those who visit. At a time when the Government of Sri Lanka intends to provide more and more public recreational facilities in urban areas for the improvement of people's quality of life, Mount Lavinia beach provides an enormous opportunity to fulfill that goal. Hence, sustaining this precious site with necessary improvements is a requirement of the day. Authorities, responsible for the maintenance of this worldly heritage, have made many efforts to improve the quality of the setting, but not with adequate studies on the activities built into it and that give life to it. This study on Mount Lavinia Beach as a public space is a valuable contribution to such efforts.

The study can be highly regarded for many reasons, including the simple methods adopted for observations, and the way the findings are presented that, though one may feel obvious, yet no one previously bothered to record to the extent that this study has done. I sincerely believe that this report should be taken seriously by the relevant authorities, not for work on Mount Lavinia beach alone, but also as a precedent to initiate better informed projects for the improvement of all public areas in Sri Lanka.

1. Introduction



Early initiation to the beach

Photo: UF

At seven o'clock on a Sunday morning, Mount Lavinia beach is a lively place. People walk and jog. Groups of youth run up and down the beach, and fall onto the sand to do push-ups. A man practices breathing exercises. Others stretch, meditate, and introduce their reluctant dogs to the water. Young men practice flips, their slim bodies hurtling into the air and falling, not always gracefully, onto the sand.

Two, three, then four men sit in a row on a boat next to the *kolakenda* stand, two of them involved in a deep discussion while the other two sit quietly, occasionally interjecting a comment. But mostly they just watch other people and enjoy the early morning breeze. A regular flow of people approach the stand to savour their drink and exchange a few words with the seller.

Couples pose for wedding pictures, the bottom of the women's dress stained with mud, while others watch the pictures being taken.

During the day the beach is quieter. People stroll along the shore. Children play in the water, laughing in delight. Some build sand castles, many of which are gorgeous, the sand carefully shaped with square buckets or dribbles of wet sand. Parents bury their child in the sand; friends bury each other. A young man with a ponytail shapes the sand over his submerged friend into the shape of a crocodile with two bulging eyes, a long snout, and a beautifully shaped body and tail. Other young men build a mermaid. This is art in its most temporary, transient form, soon

to be washed away by the waves.

A small dog races up to two local youth near the Dehiwala canal. The boys look quizzically at the dog, then at the nearby foreigner. "Is that your dog?" On receiving an affirmative, they proceed to chase the dog along the beach, repeatedly hurtling themselves onto their stomachs on the sand, to the delight of both the foreign woman and her diminutive dog.

Two Vietnamese Buddhist nuns, one in orange and one in grey robes, pick seaweed from the rocks to make a salad for their dinner. A French woman and a French-speaking African man sit on rocks near them. Groups of locals stroll by, speaking Sinhala, Tamil, and English.

There are far more beautiful beaches in Sri Lanka than Mount Lavinia. Other beaches are cleaner and better maintained. Other beaches have more facilities for their users. But it is difficult to imagine a beach that is better used. Foreigners and locals, young and old, nearby residents and visitors from afar, men in shorts and women in burqa, all come to the beach. The variety of users is matched by the variety of activities the beach inspires: people walk, jog, play in the sand and in the sea, engage in group sports, and chat with friends. They feel free to make use of the beach as they see fit, engaging in the activities they enjoy. In that sense, Mount Lavinia Beach is a model of a popular and highly functional public space.

Why is that important? Because public spaces are so important to our lives. People need places they can rest, relax, and enjoy themselves when they are not busy at home, work, or school. They need opportunities to observe and mix with others. They need to feel a part of the society in which they live, not just the structured aspects of the day but all the parts that help give meaning to our lives: the chatter, laughter, and fun. People need a place where are all equal, where income, sex, and skin colour are unimportant, and everyone is simply human. They need a place where they can get the exercise needed for physical health and the enjoyment needed for mental health. To be fully human, to realize their natures as social animals, people need to be part of a community.

The Government of Sri Lanka has taken advantage of the opportunity created by the ending of the war to refurbish existing public spaces and create new ones. (Although the term "public space" refers to any place where people can freely gather, including parks, plazas, squares, traditional markets, and sidewalks, this report focuses on recreational areas: parks and the beach.) The government's interest in public spaces is part of its plans to restructure the urban landscape and engage in "beautification" to attract tourism and investment. The government knows that it is easier to recruit workers to an attractive city with ample opportunities for recreation and socializing.

The vision of the Urban Regeneration Project for the City of Colombo is "To eliminate shanties, slums and other dilapidated housing from the city of Colombo by resettlement of the families presently living under unhygienic and poor environmental conditions in such housing in new housing schemes of internationally recognized standards and in doing so to make the City of Colombo the most attractive city in South Asia."

--Urban Development Authority (UDA), www.uda.lk

While UDA's vision for the urban regeneration of Colombo does not explicitly mention public spaces as part of the process of making Colombo "the most attractive city in South Asia," the government's obvious interest and involvement in public spaces is beneficial. However, some

have expressed concern that the focus of the government's efforts is leading to public spaces that are sterile, cater only to the high income, and stifle rather than encourage life. In an effort to create spaces that cater to an international audience, it seems that local people and their needs have been forgotten. On its website, the UDA makes many references to "exclusive", "super luxury" and "very best brands" when discussing the plans for urban redevelopment, which seem focused more on making the city a sterile playground than a truly vibrant place.

As part of its beautification plan, several parks in and around Colombo have emerged, as well as walking paths. The emphasis of these spaces is on relaxation and recreation, including exercise. What is not always explicit in the plans or apparent in the designs is a realization of just how much public spaces can contribute to quality of life for all income groups by serving as a place that encourages a range of activities to meet people's diverse needs. Instead, the focus often appears to be on luxury.

According to the Urban Development Authority's Metro Colombo Urban Development Project, "Sri Lanka needs competitive and dynamic cities to reach its aspiration of becoming an upper-middle-income economy and a global hub." Colombo's urban development is driven by the idea of transforming it into a 'world-class city' and a preferred destination for international business and tourism, according to the Secretary, Defence and Urban Development. Therefore, many of the Urban Development Authority's (UDA) initiatives, apart from those related to flood control or road improvements, have focused on enhancing the image of Colombo by building urban landscapes and spaces for consumption that are 'world-class', such as the Dutch Hospital and the Race Course.¹ According to UDA's website, "The former 17th century Colombo Dutch Hospital has now been transformed into Colombo's finest shopping and entertainment precinct. The Courtyard houses the very best brands in fashion, jewellery, personal care, handicrafts, restaurants and cafés. The courtyard is foreseen to be popular among tourists, as well as the Sri Lankan public." The government's vision of a public space is made clear in this invitation: "Visit the Dutch Hospital Shopping Precinct for the most exclusive shopping experiences, where you can shop, wine and dine, or just simply stroll along, marvelling at the Colonial Architecture of possibly one of the city's oldest heritage sites."²

In addition to its efforts on beautification, the Government of Sri Lanka has a goal of nearly doubling per capita income (PCI) from US\$2,399 in 2012 to US\$4,400 in 2015. The goal gives rise to many questions, but also has implications for public spaces. If the goal of doubling PCI is increase wellbeing and quality of life, then providing more public spaces would be a direct way to reach it.

Research has shown that beyond a certain income level, people are no happier at higher incomes unless only their incomes rise and not those of their neighbours.³ In cases of extreme poverty, increases in material well-being are vital to happiness. Eliminating poverty would indeed increase wellbeing, but in that case, the increase should target the poor specifically. An overall increase in incomes among the middle and upper classes will not be likely to lead to any greater happiness in those income groups. International research has shown that higher incomes but lower quality of

¹ "Towards a World-Class Colombo: Development without Democracy." Collective for Economic Democratisation, 17 June 2013.

² Urban Development Authority (www.uda.lk)

³ Richard A. Easterlin, "Will raising the incomes of all increase the happiness of all?" *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization*, Vol. 27 (1995):35-47.

human relationships — more solitude, more trouble in communicating, fear, lack of trust, ‘family infidelity’ and decreased involvement in social affairs — all lead to less happiness. In all but the poorest countries, “happiness varies more with the quality of human relationships than with income.”⁴ As former mayor of Bogotá, Enrique Peñalosa, has written, “The measure of success of a society cannot be its level of economic development but rather its happiness. We will have to seriously consider other measures of success, such as time spent by children with their grandparents.”⁵

Thus while income is one contributor to wellbeing, it is by no means the only one or even the most important. If other factors are more important to people’s quality of life, then it would make sense to look into other ways to increase happiness than through increases in income. Public spaces play a significant role in increasing liveability in cities, and those cities with the best public spaces are the ones that rank the highest in liveability. More and better public spaces could increase quality of life more than higher incomes are likely to do. But for public spaces to fulfill their role in furthering happiness, they need to meet the diverse needs of the local population.



Photo: UF

⁴ John Helliwell, Richard Layard and Jeffrey Sachs, ed. *World Happiness Report*. Earth Institute, Columbia University, 2012.

⁵ Enrique Peñalosa, Speech at International Mayors’ Forum, 10-11 November 2004.

2. What Makes a Great Public Space?



Family enjoying beach at sunset Photo: DE

“The beach is an ideal place to walk. We try to come everyday.” – beach user

“It’s mainly where I exercise. It’s a free environment, unconstrained, unconfined, open area with fresh air. Any day that it doesn’t rain, I’m here.” –beach user

“...people and human activity are the greatest object of attention and interest. Even the modest form of contact of merely seeing and hearing or being near to others is apparently more rewarding and more in demand than the majority of other attractions offered in the public spaces of cities and residential areas. Life in buildings and between buildings seems in nearly all situations to rank as more essential and more relevant than the spaces and buildings themselves.” –Jan Gehl, award-winning architect and professor

A great public space is one that attracts a wide range of people who engage in a large number of different activities. It is particularly important that the low-income feel comfortable using public spaces. The wealthy have other opportunities for recreation; the poor have very few. When public spaces in cities offer a range of recreational opportunities, they help to equalize the inequities in the life experiences of the rich and poor. It is also important that public spaces be well-used by women, children, and the elderly, who have more barriers to entering and using public spaces than do young men. Finally, public spaces should allow and encourage a wide variety of uses as well as users. People need opportunities to express their creativity. They need chances to step out of the boxes that contain life at school, work, and home. If people only feel comfortable sitting and walking in a public space, or if it is mostly only used by men or by the wealthy, then it is not a great public space.

Public spaces are of tremendous importance to quality of life, as can be sensed when visiting a well-used and well-loved park, plaza, or beach. We must ensure that spaces are designed and maintained in such a way as to realize their full potential. We need to understand some of the qualities of more and less successful public spaces in order to improve our ability to create new public spaces and renovate existing ones. This report sets out some standards for measuring the quality of public spaces in the Sri Lankan context and their ability to promote wellbeing and quality of life.

3. Research Questions

This study set out to answer the following questions:

1. What are the elements that make Mount Lavinia beach a great public space?
2. What benefits do the users gain from the beach?
3. What changes could be made to the beach that would encourage more people to use the beach, or people to use it more often and/or to stay longer?⁶
4. How can these lessons be applied to other public spaces such as beaches and parks in Colombo/Sri Lanka?

In addition to answering those questions, the study sought to develop and test a set of tools that can be used to determine the quality of other public spaces in Sri Lanka. This report will discuss the answers to the above questions, as well as present the tools used and discuss their potential usefulness in evaluating the quality of other public spaces.

4. What We Did (Methodology)



Men being interviewed for study Photo: UF

4.1 Site selection

Mount Lavinia Beach was chosen as an example of a great public space, with a good diversity of users and uses. The beach was divided into three segments: 1) Sawadee Restaurant (200 meters from Sawadee Restaurant towards Dehiwala); 2) Seaspray Restaurant (100 meters each towards Dehiwala and Mount Lavinia Hotel); and 3) from Le Ciel Bleu Restaurant (200 meters towards the Mount Lavinia Hotel). These three segments were selected because they belong to the beach stretch which is densely used throughout the day.

⁶ The level of use of a public space is a factor both of the number of people using it and how long they stay; one person staying for an hour is equivalent to six people who each stay for only ten minutes.

4.2 Research tools

This study made use of four different research tools, which were adapted from previous HealthBridge research on public spaces in Bangladesh, India, and Vietnam. The tools are included in the Appendices. The tools used were:

- ④ A public spaces audit tool, which identified various infrastructure at the beach and other qualities of the space including smells and sounds.
- ④ An activity audit to measure the number of different activities, the intensity of the activities, and the variety of users by age group and sex. One form was used per hour, with two observers tracking activity on one section of the beach. Our activity audit covered 18 activities, as well as options for writing in “other”. The activities can roughly be grouped as physical activity/exercise (walking, jogging, sports, school/university sports/fitness, and other exercise such as stretching), relaxing (standing, sitting), social (social interaction, romance), fun (playing in water/sand, dog play/exercise, music/dance /singing), commercial transactions (selling), consumption (eating, drinking alcohol) and work (fishing/working with nets, boats). We observed not only whether the activity occurred but whether it was engaged in each hour by a small group of people (5 or fewer), medium (6-20), high (21-50) or very high (51+). (The numbers are estimates made by students with experience at guesstimating numbers of people.) In addition, we noted whether males and females were present in four rough age groups (children, teens/youth, adults, and elderly: 60+).
- ④ A user survey, which asks users various questions about why people use the public space and their experience of it.
- ④ Key informant interviews with a few selected respondents, including nine long-term beach users, and the Deputy Mayor of Dehiwala-Mount Lavinia Municipal Council. The beach users were asked their perceptions about safety, exercise, and why they use the beach. Officials were asked about policy concerning public spaces and about maintenance and upkeep of public spaces.

4.3 Study design

The study was carried out from February through June 2013. Training of the research assistants took place on 10 February (a Sunday) at Mount Lavinia Beach.

The activity audit was carried out on a Saturday and a Sunday (16 and 17 February 2013), from 6 a.m. to 7 p.m. each day. It was then repeated on Friday, 26 April 2013, from 6:15 a.m. till 6:45 p.m. The user survey was conducted on the same days as the activity audit.

The public spaces audit consisted of a rapid observation on Monday, 18 February 2013, followed by a second visit on Friday, 15 March 2013. A final audit of the Mount Lavinia section of the beach was conducted on 9 April. Key informant interviews were conducted in March and June 2013.

In addition to the tools described above, it should be noted that the co-authors reside in Mount Lavinia and visit the beach regularly as part of personal recreation, exercise and socialising. They thus possess a certain degree of tacit knowledge and a sizeable number of observations collected over a lengthy period. This informed the co-authors’ broad understanding of and perspective on the subject matter.

4.4. Analysis

The data was entered in Excel and analyzed using that program. Responses in Sinhala were translated into English and entered into the forms. For convenience of analysis, the three segments of the beach were combined in the analysis, and Saturday and Sunday were combined and treated as weekend, versus the Friday (weekday).

4.5 Study limitations

Due to limitations on time, we were not able to carry out a sufficiently lengthy training of the research assistants. As a result, there were some errors in their data collection. These included some missing values (failure to record the sex and age of some of those responding to the survey) and mistakes in terms of whether or not the person was from the local area. The use of Excel for data analysis was not ideal and may have led to some minor errors in calculations.



People of different walks of life playing at the beach
Photos: DE & UF

5. What We Discovered (Findings)

“My health is better because of the fresh air.” –beach user

“I exercise elsewhere as well but I prefer the beach because of fresh air and the large open area. Otherwise I am running in a circle.” –beach user

5.1. Beach audit (Observation of Mount Lavinia Beach)

The Dehiwala Mount Lavinia Municipal Council (DMMC) area is the second largest municipality in Sri Lanka, and covers an extent of 2109 hectares. It lies south of the Colombo Municipal Council area and is separated from it by the Dehiwala canal, which forms the northern boundary of DMMC. Mount Lavinia is located 10-14 km south of Colombo. Given its proximity to Colombo, Mount Lavinia is now a suburb of the city, with large numbers of people commuting daily to work in Colombo. Mount Lavinia is famed for its “Golden Mile” of beaches, making it a popular destination for foreigners and locals alike. The five-star colonial Mount Lavinia hotel, perched on a mound protruding into the sea, provides a further attraction.

Prior to the Portuguese colonizing the region, the area that is now the DMMC was a part of the Kingdom of Kotte. It consisted of various villages such as Pepiliyana Nedimala, Attidiya and Kalubowila. Previously Ratmalana and the areas south of Dehiwala formed one large expanse of marshland, and were scarcely populated. In the year 1510 A.D., the village of “Galkissa” is mentioned, which was named after the rocky mound (Lihiniyagala) protruding into the bay. Dutch invaders referred to the mound “the pregnant wench”. The area was later renamed Mount Lavinia in reference to a romance between British Governor Thomas Maitland (1805-1812) and a local dancing girl called Lovina⁷.

The beach is essentially public, although numerous restaurants encroach on the space, especially during the evening when they place tables directly on the sand, and when they have parties including weddings, for which they often fence off an area of the beach.

Various facilities are available at the beach, including three playgrounds (two in the Dehiwala portion), fitness equipment in the form of chin-up and other bars, and plenty of space for sports. A number of fixed stalls sell cut-up fresh fruit, corn, balloons, balls, shorts, and other items. For about 45 minutes in the morning (approximately 7:15-8 a.m.) one stand sells *kolakenda* (a hot beverage made of green leaves or grains and rice). In addition, mobile vendors sell homemade cassava chips, pineapple, popcorn, *vadai*, and other items.



Vendor stall selling balls; vendor stand selling foods Photos: UF

⁷ This section is informed by City Profile: Dehiwala Mount Lavinia Municipal Council, October 2003, UN Habitat (SCP), Western Province, Dehiwala Mount Lavinia Municipal Council. Prepared by Archt/Plnr S.L.F Wijayapala.



A restaurant occupies some of the beach space; playground near Loon Tao restaurant

Photos: DE

The beach is quite attractive, with the natural beauties of sand and surf and a number of trees. Depending on one's perspective, the beauty is either enhanced or marred by the presence of restaurants, vendor stalls, and fishing boats.

Sounds include waves, shouting, laughter, passing trains, and birds. Car horns are typically not audible at the beach. The main smell is of seawater, but a bad smell can come from the wastewater streams that empty into the ocean. Sometimes one can smell fish frying in coconut oil at the fishermen's shacks and the smell of various foods for breakfast at the Mount Lavinia Hotel.

There are several street lights along the Mount Lavinia portion of the beach, although a couple of the fixed lights are not working as the wires are disconnected, and the remaining lights are placed quite high and so are not pedestrian-oriented. The main lighting comes from the restaurants along the beach, although it is fairly dark along the water.

There is a fair amount of litter but almost exclusively very small items such as candy wrappers. After big rains, a lot of litter accumulates near the canals, especially at the Dehiwala end, where sometimes there is almost no bare sand left. There are trash cans scattered along the beach but at a distance from the water, and they are insufficient. No risky litter, such as needles or alcohol bottles, was observed. However, we did observe the occasional broken bottle or board with nails, which could cause harm if stepped on.

Seating is minimal. There are two benches between Seaspray and Golden Mile. In some spots, people make use of boats on the sand for secondary seating. There are backless benches and cement seats surrounding tables in front of Steamboat and Haus Chandra. Those tables and benches are essentially private, belonging to the restaurant, but are available for public use at most times (other than the evening). In addition, around 2007, cement seats were fitted from Boat Haus to Golden Mile but later removed due to vandalism.

There is a complete absence of shade, public toilets (the ones in restaurants can only be used by clientele) or water taps.



Benches are typically well-used, but insufficient; a fishing boat provides secondary seating and a place to lean
Photos: DE



Difficult access near Mount Lavinia Hotel Photo: DE



Flooded access next to Boat Haus; crossing the train tracks to reach the beach

Photos: DE

The beach is accessible, though indirectly, from the Mount Lavinia train station. There is direct access from Dehiwala train station, though one has to pass through the fishermen’s area. Several roads between the Mount Lavinia Hotel and Dehiwala canal give access: there are over 13 roads that connect the beach to Galle Road, plus 5-6 other roads that lead directly to fishermen’s houses and thus may not be used by others for beach access. In addition there are some smaller access roads.

The beach is an extremely popular and well-used public space. It was not possible for us to record the number of users at the beach due to difficulties in double-counting, as people move across different areas. Instead we charted the number of different types of activities occurring at three segments of the beach and the intensity of those activities, as well as noting whether males and females of four different age groups, from children to the elderly, participated in the activity.

5.2. User survey

“I came to Sri Lanka because of the beach. I come here whenever I can.” –foreign beach user

“At the beach you meet people, you make friends.” –beach user



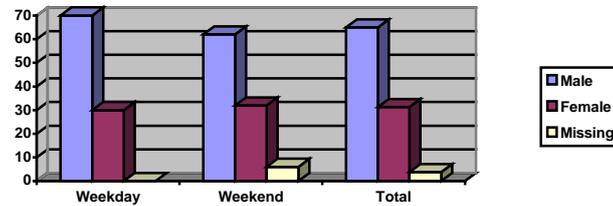
Interviewers hard at work (photo: UF)

A total of 371 people were interviewed. Of those, 249 were interviewed on the weekend of 16-17 February 2013 and 122 were interviewed on Friday, 26 April 2013. In total, 31% of the respondents were female and 65% were male. Values were missing for the remaining 4%. The female-male ratio was similar on the weekend and weekday.

Table 1: Sex of respondents

Sex (%)	Weekday	Weekend	Total
Female	30	32	31.3
Male	70	62	65.0
Missing	0	6	3.8
Total	100	100	100

Figure 1: Sex of respondents

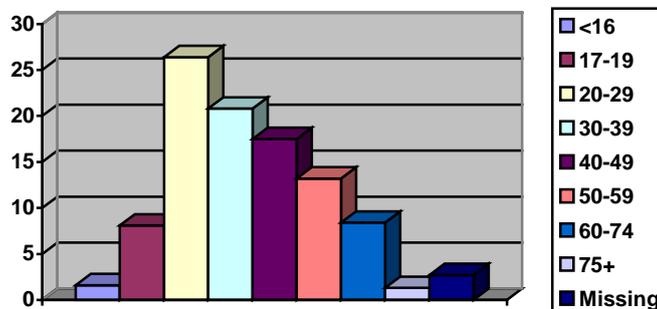


Most of the respondents were from 20 to 59 years old. About half were between 20 and 39 years old. About 10% of the total respondents were aged 19 or below, and about 10% were aged 60 and above.

Table 2: Age of respondents

Age (%)	Weekday	Weekend	Total
<16	0.8	2.0	1.6
17-19	7.4	8.4	8.1
20-29	25	26.9	26.4
30-39	24	19.3	20.8
40-49	19	16.9	17.5
50-59	12	13.7	13.2
60-74	9.8	7.6	8.4
75+	1.6	1.2	1.3
Missing	0	4.0	2.7
Total	100	100	100

Figure 2: Age of respondents



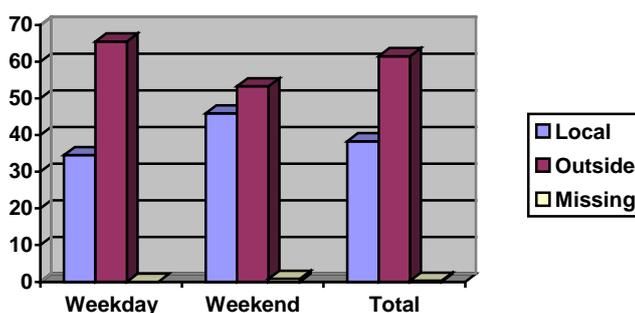
Overall, more of the visitors to the beach were from outside the local area (61.5%) than from the local area (38.3%). While weekend visitors were more evenly split, more of the weekday visitors were from outside the local area. We suspect, however, that there may be an under-

reporting of residents in the local authority as we realized after the study was conducted that the students were not necessarily aware what constitutes the local authority area.

Table 3: Place of residence

Place of residence (%)	Weekday	Weekend	Total
Local authority area	34.5	45.9	38.3
Outside local authority area	65.5	53.3	61.5
Missing value	0	0.8	0.3
Total	100	100	100

Figure 3: Place of residence



Although for the most part on the weekday the surveyors did not ask where people came from, we received several answers. The responses were varied and largely different than for the weekend visitors. Places mentioned by both weekday and weekend visitors were Attidiya, Rathmalana, Boralesgamma, Piliyandala, Katubedda, Moratuwa, Horana, Kandy, and Anuradhapura. In addition, weekday visitors came from Eheliyagoda, Bandarawela, Berawala, Grandpass, Kaduwela, Kalubowila, Kegalle, Kesbewa, Kurunegala, and Welimada.

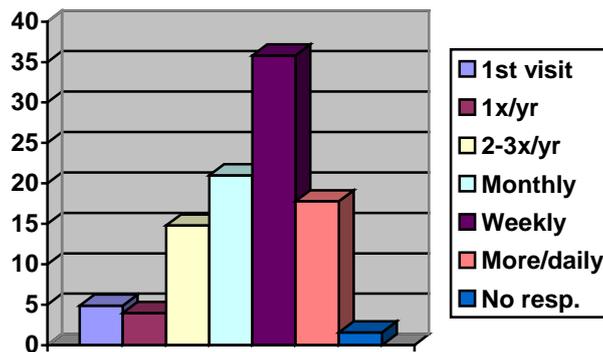
In addition to the places mentioned above, some of the places from which the weekend visitors came were Wellawatta, Maharagama, Rajagiriya, Kirulaphona, Kotte, Pitakotte, Kollupitiya, Koswatta, Nugegoda, Town Hall, Hokandura, Panadura, Homagama, Welisara, Kiribathgoda, Jaela, Negombo, Gampaha, Embilipitiya, Polonnaruwa, Diyathalawa, Abilipitiya, and Nuwara Eliya. On the weekend there was also one tourist from India.

Most of the people interviewed visited the beach weekly, monthly, or daily. While overall the responses for frequency of visit were the same for weekday and weekend visitors, more weekday visitors visited daily than weekend visitors, and more weekend visitors only came 2-3 times a year. It should be noted that since the survey took place over the course of the day, and thus over-sampled those using the beach at less popular times, we likely got a larger number of infrequent users than we would have gotten if we had conducted the survey only at peak times (morning and evening).

Table 4: Frequency of visits to the beach

Frequency (%)	Weekday	Weekend	Total
1st visit	3.3	5.6	4.9
1x/yr	4.9	3.6	4.0
2-3x/yr	9.8	17.3	14.8
Monthly	22.1	20.5	21.0
Weekly	34.4	36.5	35.8
More/daily	23.0	15.3	17.8
No resp.	2.5	1.2	1.6
Total	100	100	100

Figure 4: Frequency of visits to the beach

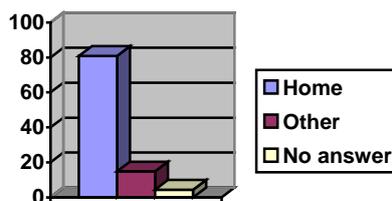


Most visitors (81%) traveled to the beach from home while 14% came from work, shops, hotel, college/classes, the home of a friend or relative, their place of boarding, and camp. New visitors were not asked. Responses were similar for weekday and weekend visitors.

Table 5: From where do visitors usually travel?

Traveling from (%)	Weekday	Weekend	Total
Home	82	80.3	80.9
Other	16	14.1	14.8
No response	1.6	5.6	4.3
Total	100	100	100

Figure 5: From where do visitors usually travel?

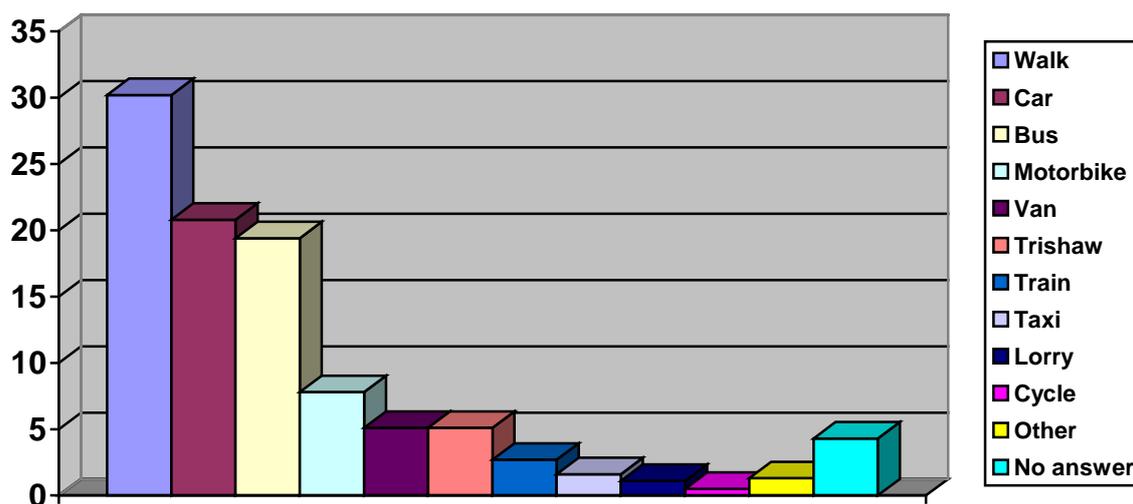


Almost a third of visitors come to the beach on foot, though that proportion is higher on the weekdays than the weekend. The next most common modes are car and bus. More weekday visitors come by bus than weekend visitors. Other modes, by declining degree of importance, were motorbike, van, trishaw, train, taxi, lorry, and bicycle.

Table 6: Mode of travel to the beach

Mode of travel (%)	Weekday	Weekend	Total
Walk	34.4	28.1	30.2
Cycle	0.8	0.4	0.5
Motorbike	8.2	7.6	7.8
Car	19.7	21.3	20.8
Bus	23.0	17.7	19.4
Trishaw	4.9	5.2	5.1
Taxi	0.8	2.0	1.6
Train	0.8	3.6	2.7
Van	4.9	5.2	5.1
Lorry	1.6	1.6	1.1
Other	0.8	1.2	1.3
No answer	0	6.0	4.3
Total	100	100	100

Figure 6: Mode of travel to the beach

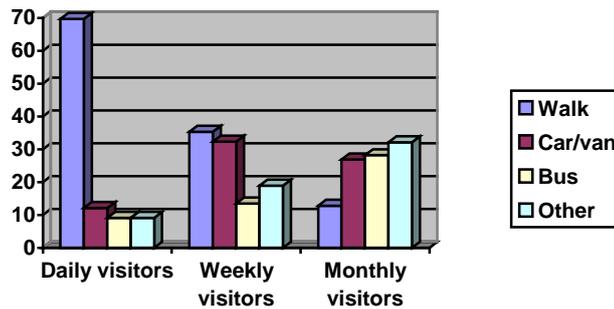


When we look at mode of travel by frequency of visit, some definite patterns emerge. Daily visitors are much more likely to come on foot than weekly and monthly visitors. Car and van use is much higher among weekly, followed by monthly, visitors, and is quite low for daily visitors. More monthly visitors arrive by bus than by car or van.

Table 7: Mode of travel by frequency of visit

Mode of travel (%)	Daily	Weekly	Monthly
Walk	69.7	35.3	12.8
Car/van	12.1	32.3	26.9
Bus	9.1	13.5	28.2
Other	9.1	18.9	32.1
Total	100	100	100

Figure 7: Mode of travel by frequency of visit

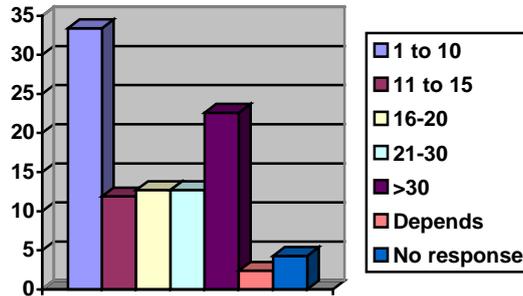


How long the journey took varied, with the most common responses between ten minutes or less (26%), or over 30 minutes (23%). Far more of the weekday visitors reported that the trip took less than ten minutes (48% vs. 26% of weekend visitors), while the response was the same for over 30 minutes for weekday and weekend visitors (23%).

Table 8: Length of trip to the beach

Trip length in minutes (%)	Weekday	Weekend	Total
1-10	48.4	26.1	33.4
11-15	12.3	11.6	11.9
16-20	4.9	16.5	12.7
21-30	7.4	15.3	12.7
>30	23.0	22.5	22.6
Depends	3.3	2.0	2.4
No response	0.8	6.0	4.3
Total	100.0	100	100

Figure 8: Length of trip to the beach



Most weekday visitors who travel by foot said their journey takes less than ten minutes (90.5%); none who travel by foot on the weekday say the journey takes over 30 minutes. On the weekend, in contrast, just over half (54%) of those who travel by foot said that their journey takes less than ten minutes, and 11% said it takes over 30 minutes. In total, 68% of those who arrive by foot walk for ten minutes or less. Those who come by car travel much longer: only 29% said it takes ten minutes or less while 21% say it takes over 30 minutes.

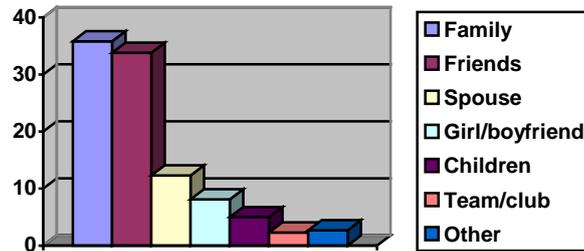
More than half of the respondents said they usually come with others, a fourth said they usually come alone, and 10% said they do both. (There were no responses for the occasional visitors.) Of those who said they often/usually come with others, most come with family (spouse, children, and/or others). A third said they come with friends. More of the weekday than the weekend visitors usually arrive alone.

Table 9: Whether visit alone or with others; with whom

With anyone (%)	Weekday	Weekend	Total
Alone	32.8	20.1	24.3
With others	56.6	61.8	60.1
About equal	8.2	11.2	10.2
No response	2.5	6.8	5.4
	100	100	100
With who? (%)*			
Spouse	15.4	11.0	12.3
Children	7.7	3.8	5.0
Family	33.3	36.8	35.8
Friends	34.6	33.5	33.8
Team/club	1.3	2.7	2.3
School gp.	0.0	0.0	0.0
Girl/boyfriend	5.1	9.3	8.1
Other	2.6	2.7	2.7

* Some people gave multiple responses. The percentage refers to percent of total answers, not percent of people giving that answer.

Figure 9: Whether visit alone or with others; with whom



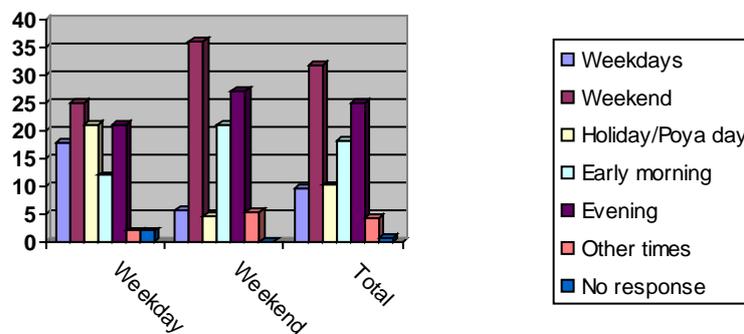
People gave multiple responses to the question of when they prefer to come to the beach, yielding a total of 569 responses from the 371 respondents. The most common responses were weekend, evening, and early morning. Other than midday and night time, the beach is always popular.

Table 10: When people prefer to come to the beach

When do people prefer to come to the beach (%)*	Weekday	Weekend	Total
Weekdays	18	5.7	9.8
Weekend	25	36	31.8
Holiday/Poya day	21	4.6	10.2
Early morning	12	21	18.1
Evening	21	27	25.1
Other times	2	5.4	4.2
No response	2	0	0.7

* Some people gave multiple responses. The percentage refers to percent of total answers, not percent of people giving that answer.

Figure 10: When people prefer to come to the beach



Visitors gave many reasons for coming to the beach. The most common response was to relax or

think followed by to play or have fun. Significant numbers also came to keep fit and improve their health, to bathe, to walk their dog, and to wait for or accompany their children. Other responses included to fish, for sports practice, to shoot a teledrama, to talk with friends, to watch others, to sell goods, to get medicine from sea water, to have a beer, to work as a lifeguard, for parties, to practice rugby, to work as a security officer, to improve English by talking with foreigners, to read the newspaper, to collect empty bottles, and to take sand to the temple.

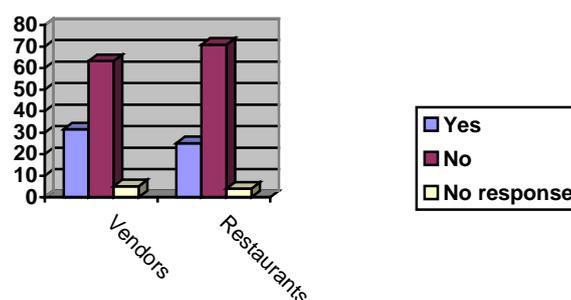
In response to a similar question, what do you normally do at the beach, the main responses were walk, enjoy the beauty of the surroundings, exercise, and play sports or games. Other reasons included to enjoy a cultural program or other entertainment, to watch sports or games, bathe, chat with friends, collect empty bottles, walk dogs, watch children play, for fun, to serve as a lifeguard, for romance, to observe others, to party with friends, to read the newspaper, to sea bathe, dive, sell something, sit, surf, swim, wait for children, work, and buy fish. Only about 2% of the responses were to drink alcohol (7 people).

Most of the respondents said they do not purchase items from vendors (63%) or from restaurants (71%). More weekend (33%) than weekday (28%) visitors bought from vendors, while more weekday (35%) than weekend (20%) visitors bought from restaurants.

Table 11: Whether people buy from vendors and restaurants

Buy from vendors? (%)	Weekday	Weekend	Total
Yes	28	33.3	31.5
No	69	60.6	63.3
No response	3.3	6.0	5.1
Total	100	100	100
Buy from restaurants? (%)	Weekday	Weekend	Total
Yes	35	20.1	25.1
No	62	75.1	70.9
No response	2.5	4.8	4.0
Total	100	100	100

Figure 11: Whether people buy from vendors and restaurants

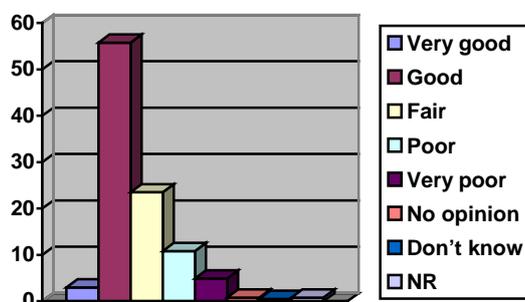


Respondents were asked whether the beach is a welcoming, healthy, safe and secure place which is properly cared for. The responses seemed mostly based on perceived cleanliness, as seen by the comments below. The most common response, among over half of respondents, was that it is in good condition, while a quarter labelled it fair. Only 5% said it is very poor and 3% said it is very good.

Table 12: Condition of the beach

Condition of beach (%)	Weekday	Weekend	Total
Very good	2.5	3.2	3.0
Good	61	53.4	55.8
Fair	23	23.7	23.5
Poor	9	11.6	10.8
Very poor	4.9	4.8	4.9
No opinion	0	1.2	0.8
Don't know	0	0.8	0.5
No response	0	1.2	0.8
Total	100	100	100

Figure 12: Condition of the beach



A flag marks the lifeguard's presence; Lifeguards at their post Photos: UF and DE



Small litter at the beach; bags and other items left unattended on the sand

Photos: UF

We received many comments about the condition of the beach. The most frequent comments were that the beach was dirty and not well-maintained. Respondents also commented that the beach was unsafe due to lack of lifeguards or other security to protect from drowning and petty theft, and that the dogs can be a nuisance. Other negative comments included:

- ☐ it is dirty on Sunday mornings/by the end of Sunday;
- ☐ it is less clean than Hikkaduwa Unawatana, Negombo, and Marble Beach in Trincomalee;
- ☐ guys party through the night so the place is destroyed by the morning;
- ☐ there is dirty water from the waste water streams;
- ☐ it was much cleaner previously;
- ☐ they need (more) dustbins to dispose of plastic and polythene;
- ☐ now it is not good because of tourism;
- ☐ people throw food and plastic everywhere;
- ☐ there are not enough cleaners;
- ☐ the Dehiwala side is very poor;
- ☐ more improvement is needed.

People also made positive comments:

- ☐ it is clean on weekdays;
- ☐ it is cleaner than in the past;
- ☐ the beach is better than Dehiwala, Panadura, Galle Face, and Wellawatta and as good as Negombo;
- ☐ it is clean because there is a cleaning service;
- ☐ the Mount Lavinia side is good;
- ☐ it is as clean as the cleanest beaches in Sri Lanka.

A few people said that they come to the beach because it is clean or that it is a good place to have fun as it is cleaner than other places and there is no entrance fee.

Most beach visitors said they had not experienced or witnessed a “serious problem”, with less

than one-fifth saying they had. Weekend visitors were twice as likely as weekday ones to say they had experienced a serious problem. Problems included thefts (of clothes, wallets, phones, and bags while people bathe), arguments/fights/quarrels, lack of safety for girls after dark, vendors who hassle people to buy, and dog menace including a dog bite incident.

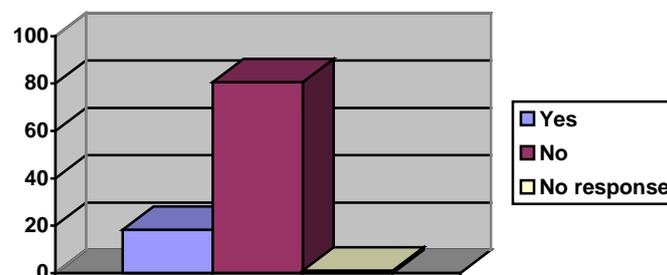
Many people mentioned alcohol-related problems. These include that people drink and then get into fights, and after drinking, they break glass bottles and leave shards on the beach.

Other problems mentioned included obstruction due to youth playing rugby and cricket, locals/beach boys who hassle foreigners; drugs, prostitution, the disappearance of a child, people struggling in surf after drinking; and that “at least two people drown a month”.

Table 13: Whether respondent has witnessed or encountered a serious problem at the beach

Serious problem? (%)	Weekday	Weekend	Total
Yes	9.8	22.5	18.3
No	89	76.3	80.6
No response	0.8	1.2	1.1
Total	100	100	100

Figure 13: Whether respondent has witnessed or encountered a serious problem at the beach

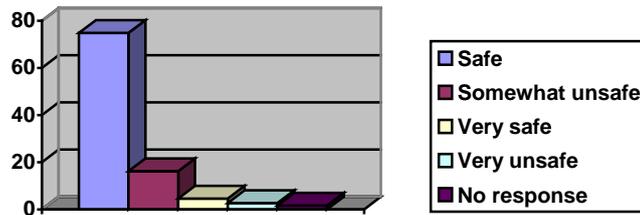


Most respondents (80%) considered the beach safe or very safe at the time of day of the interview, though that figure was higher for weekday than for weekend visitors, while 19% consider the beach as somewhat or very unsafe. (We asked about safety at the time of the interview because most respondents will consider a place unsafe at night, which does not yield useful information about conditions when people actually visit the place.)

Table 14: Perception of safety

Is the beach safe? (%)	Weekday	Weekend	Total
Very unsafe	0.8	3.6	2.7
Somewhat unsafe	16	16.1	16.2
Safe	80	72.7	74.9
Very safe	2.5	5.6	4.6
No response	0.8	2.0	1.6
Total	100	100	100

Figure 14: Perception of safety



The most common safety concerns were related to the perceived absence or shortage of lifeguards and of security personnel to prevent petty theft. Negative comments about safety included:

- ☐ it is unsafe for women at night;
- ☐ after 10 pm there are drug addicts prowling;
- ☐ it is fine after 7 am but not at night/after 5:30 pm;
- ☐ people sell drugs;
- ☐ if they had realized they would have been robbed they wouldn't have come;
- ☐ there is no protection for tourists;
- ☐ it is not safe for bathers;
- ☐ we are afraid because of things that appear in newspapers and what we see on TV;
- ☐ it is sometimes unsafe because of vendors and people living in this area;
- ☐ dogs pester people;
- ☐ it is unsafe for vehicles.

People also made positive comments about safety, including:

- ☐ the beach is safe because of police, the navy camp, and lifeguards;
- ☐ flags indicate the presence of lifeguards;
- ☐ it is safer on weekends;
- ☐ it wasn't safe before but now is;
- ☐ it is safer than Beruwala beach;
- ☐ it is safe when people are around.

Specific remarks included “lifeguard required; tourists don't like to go to sea without them,” “lifeguard facility is not enough,” and “last week a dog bit a man.”

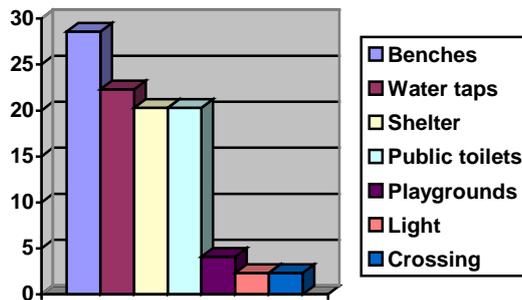
Finally, we received a vast number of suggestions about potential improvements to the beach. The most common requests were for more benches/seating, shelter from rain and sun, water taps, and public toilets, with almost 30% of respondents asking for more seating and a fifth requesting the other amenities (there were multiple responses). Far smaller numbers requested better lighting and safer railway crossings. There were various differences in preference between weekday and weekend visitors. Note that the amenities listed in the following table were options on the survey form; other responses were written in and we were not able to calculate a percentage for those requesting that amenity.

Table 15: Desired amenities

Desired amenities (%)*	Weekday	Weekend	Total
Playgrounds	3.0	4.7	4.1
Public toilets	25.5	16.4	20.3
Water taps	29.1	17.2	22.3
Shelter from rain/sun	12.7	25.4	20.3
Light	1.2	3.0	2.3
Safer railway crossings	3.0	1.7	2.3
More benches/seating	24.2	31.5	28.6

* Some people gave multiple responses. The percentage refers to percent of total answers, not percent of people giving that answer.

Figure 15: Desired amenities



Although few people requested playgrounds specifically, many wanted some sort of play area for children. The other most common suggestions, in addition to the ones listed above, were changing rooms, better cleanliness and maintenance, more dustbins, more lifeguards and signage showing where it is safe to bathe/indicating the presence of lifeguards, and more people to guard belongings. Several people said that there should be food available at affordable prices. Other comments were the need to restrict glasses and plastics, to beautify the beach, and to provide more sales huts and huts for lifeguards. People also suggested removing temporary hotels, requiring that the hotels maintain the portion of the beach near them, reducing the number of street dogs, getting rid of soothsayers because they harass visitors, making the surroundings more beautiful, and providing/organizing beach games.



Signs warning of danger and lack of lifeguards

Photo: DE

Ideas expressed by some were in direct conflict with those expressed by others. While some complained about the appearance of the beach and the presence of vendors, restaurants, fishermen's boats, and shacks, others said that the beach looks fine, that the vendors and restaurants should be allowed to remain so that the beach has a Sri Lanka, not Singapore, identity, and that the beach is best as it is. While some requested attractions, others said they would distract people from enjoying the beach. Some complained that there are no facilities for the elderly and that the beach, or at least the commercial part, appears to be reserved for one class of society: the wealthy. Some complained about lack of easy access by car due to narrow roads and lack of car parking. A few people requested a paved walking area.



Vendors can be a source of useful items or a nuisance, depending on their behaviour and the perspective of the customer
Photo: UF

5.3 Activity audit

“Our children live abroad so it’s just us. We talk about them as we walk on the beach and talk with others, so we don’t feel alone.” –beach user couple



Researcher busy recording Photo: UF

As described under Methodology, in order to conduct the activity audit, the Mount Lavinia portion of the beach was divided into three segments. Two research assistants stood on each segment and took note of the activities they witnessed, filling out one audit form for each one-hour period. The observations began at 6 am and ended at 7 pm. The activity audit was conducted on the weekend of 16-17 February as well as on Friday, 26 April. The activity audit contained 18 activities, including “other”. Each was then classified in terms of activity level: low (5 or fewer people), medium (6-20), high (21-50) and very high (51+). The audit also gives columns to note whether children, teens/youth, adults, and the elderly, male and female for each age group, are involved in the activity. There were additional rows for other activities and an additional column for comments.

The activity audits yielded a wealth of information. As little difference was observed overall between the weekday and weekend, the results are presented together here.

Activity by time

- There are peaks and valleys in activity throughout the day, with the main peaks being early morning and in the evening. Although activity waned during the hot period of the day, people were seen engaged in various activities even at the hottest times, and in a wide range of activities for the cooler hours.
- During the early morning period (6-9 am), the main activities are walking, jogging, sports (especially in school/college/other groups) and other exercise. There is also a lot of sitting, standing, playing in water, socializing, and dog walking. Other activities observed at lower intensities include selling, romance, playing in the sand, and fishing. Eating and drinking alcohol and singing/playing music were not observed at that hour.

- Cleaning of the beach was observed only in the morning (7 am-12 pm) and occurred on all three of the days when the audit was conducted.
- At about 9 am, the weather changed from cool to warm, and by 11 am it changed to hot. During the hotter period (9 am through 4 pm), activity was slower. Many people were still seen walking, but almost nobody was jogging. Sports continued throughout that period, but the school/college groups were only present earlier in the morning. Other exercise (besides walking) stopped by 10 am and only a little was observed between 6 and 7 pm on the weekend. On the weekday, walking and jogging resumed by 3-4 pm and continued through the evening. Sports and other exercise resumed at 4-5 pm on the weekday and continued through evening.
- Although fewer people were seen sitting and standing during the hot period, those activities continued throughout the day. Selling picked up at 9 am and continued throughout the day. As exercise waned, social interaction picked up at 9 am and became very high during the evening period (4-7 pm).
- Romance was low until 9 am, then became medium and only became high from 5 pm.
- There was little eating seen throughout the day until the 4-7 pm period. Little drinking was seen, and that from 11 am to 12 pm and again 4-7 pm. There was little music or dancing seen, and only from 4-7 pm.
- Playing in water ranged from high to very high throughout the day. Playing in sand did not start till 8 am and was minimal from 11 am to 2 pm, then picked up later.



Photo shoot



Cleaners



Romance



Soothsayer



Socializing

Photos: UF

Activity by sex

- ✦ In the morning for some age groups only males, not females, were seen walking on weekends, but females were seen walking throughout the rest of the day on weekends and on weekday mornings.
- ✦ In the weekend mornings, both males and females were seen jogging, but only males jogged later in the day. On weekends, females also jogged in the afternoon and evening.
- ✦ Mostly only males were seen playing sports, except in school/university/other group sports in which both males and females were involved.
- ✦ Although for the other age groups it was similar, far more teenage males were seen sitting and standing than teenage females on the weekend, though it was similar on the weekday.
- ✦ While for adults it was similar, for children and teenagers, only males were seen selling.
- ✦ Males and females of different ages were involved in social interaction and romance throughout the day.
- ✦ Few females of any age were seen drinking alcohol.
- ✦ More males than females of all ages walked dogs.
- ✦ Only males, mostly adult but on one occasion a youth and on another elderly male, were seen fishing.

Activity by age group

- ✦ Walking was less common among children and the elderly than other age groups, but was still seen, especially in the evening. Almost no children or elderly jogged except for the elderly jogging early on a weekday morning. The elderly were not seen playing

sports. Somewhat fewer children than other groups walked dogs.

- ✦ Except in the evening, children and especially the elderly were seen sitting and standing less than other age groups. Children and the elderly were also not seen being romantic.
- ✦ Only the elderly were not seen playing in the sand. Except for late afternoon, mostly only children played in the sand. In the late afternoon/evening, all age groups and both sexes were seen playing in the sand.
- ✦ Only male teens were seen playing music/singing/dancing except on the weekday, when the activity was only observed from 6-7 pm and only among adult and elderly men and adult women.
- ✦ Fishing was mostly only done by adult males.



Fishing

Photo: Bodh Maathura



Girls exercising



Playing sports



Playing in water



Playing in sand



Jogging

Photos: UF

Differences by day

As is illustrated in Table 16 below, there were many differences in activity level, and to a lesser degree type, by day of the week. On each day there were morning and late afternoon/early evening activity peaks, but there were fewer people engaged in fewer activities on the weekday than the weekend. Although the beach was well used each day, Sunday garnered more activity than the other days.

Table 16: Activities by time and day

	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
6-7 am	Walking, jogging , sports, other exercise, standing, playing in water, cleaning, dog walking, fishing	Walking, jogging , sports (football*), school exercise, other exercise, sitting, standing, social interaction , dog walking, dog bathing	Walking, jogging, sports, school exercise , other exercise, sitting, standing , eating, drinking alcohol, playing in water, cleaning, dog walking
7-8 am	Walking, jogging, sports (cricket) , school exercise, other exercise , sitting, standing, selling , social interaction, romance , playing in water, cleaning, dog walking, fishing	Walking, jogging, sports, school exercise, other exercise, sitting, standing , selling, social interaction , romance, playing in water , exercise in water, cleaning, dog walking , boat riding	Walking, jogging, sports, school exercise, other exercise , sitting, standing , social interaction, romance, playing in water , cleaning, dog walking , wedding photography
8-9 am	Walking, jogging, sports (cricket) , other exercise, sitting, standing, selling, social interaction, romance, playing in water, playing in sand, cleaning, dog walking, fishing , wedding couple photo shoot	Walking, jogging, sports (volleyball, football), school sports, other exercise, sitting, standing , selling, social interaction , romance, playing in water, playing in sand , cleaning, dog walking , boat riding	Walking, jogging, sports (football, rugby), school exercise , other exercise, sitting, standing , selling, social interaction, romance, playing in water , playing in sand, cleaning, dog walking, fishing
9-10 am	Walking , jogging, sports, other exercise, sitting, standing, selling, social interaction, romance, playing in water, playing in sand, dog walking, fishing	Walking , other exercise, sitting, selling, social interaction, romance , eating, playing in water , playing in sand, cleaning, dog walking, fishing, boat riding	Walking , jogging, sports (football), school exercise, other exercise, sitting, standing , selling, social interaction, romance , eating, playing in water , playing in sand, cleaning, dog walking, fishing
10-11 am	Walking , sports, other exercise, sitting, standing, selling, social interaction, romance , playing in water, playing in sand, cleaning, dog walking, fishing	Walking , jogging, sports, standing, selling, social interaction, romance, playing in water, playing in sand , cleaning, dog walking, boat riding, fishing , soothsayers	Walking , jogging, other exercise, sitting, standing , selling, social interaction, romance , eating, drinking alcohol, playing in water, playing in sand , dog walking, fishing, soothsayers, cycling ,

	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
11 am-12 pm	Walking, sitting, standing, selling, social interaction, romance, playing in water, cleaning, dog walking, fishing, boat riding	Walking, sports, sitting, standing, selling, social interaction, romance, eating, drinking alcohol, playing in water, surfing, playing in sand, cleaning, dog walking, fishing, boat riding, soothsayers	shooting Walking, sports (cricket, football), sitting, standing, selling, social interaction, romance, eating, drinking alcohol, playing in water, surfing, playing in sand, dog walking, fishing, shooting, reading newspapers
12 -1 pm	Walking, standing, selling, social interaction, romance, fishing, boat riding, photo shoots, soothsayers	Walking, sports, sitting, standing, selling, social interaction, romance, eating, playing in water (surfing, bathing), playing in sand, dog walking, fishing, boat riding	Walking, sports (football, cricket), sitting, standing, selling, social interaction, romance, eating, playing in water, playing in sand, music/dancing, dog walking, fishing (working with nets)
1 -2 pm	Walking, sitting, standing, selling, social interaction, eating, playing in water, fishing, photo shoots, soothsayers	Walking, sports, sitting, standing, selling, social interaction, romance, playing in water, playing in sand, dog walking, soothsayers	Walking, sports (volleyball), other exercise, sitting, standing, selling, social interaction, romance, eating, playing in sand, fishing, working with nets, boat service
2 -3 pm	Walking, sitting, standing, selling, social interaction, romance, playing in water, playing in sand, fishing	Walking, sports, sitting, standing, selling, social interaction, romance, eating, playing in water, playing in sand, fishing	Walking, sports (football), sitting, standing, selling, social interaction, romance, eating, playing in water, playing in sand, dog walking, fishing
3 -4 pm	Walking, jogging, other exercise, sitting, standing, selling (balloons, toys, cloths, hats), social interaction, romance, drinking alcohol, playing in water, playing in sand	Walking, sports, sitting, standing, selling, social interaction, romance, playing in water, playing in sand, dog walking	Walking, sports (cricket, football), school exercise, sitting, standing, selling, social interaction, romance, eating, drinking alcohol, playing in water, playing in sand, music/dancing, dog walking, fishing, cycling, soothsayers, boat riding
4 -5 pm	Walking, jogging, sports, other exercise, sitting, standing, selling, social interaction, romance, eating, drinking alcohol, playing in water, playing in sand, dog walking, fishing, wedding photo shoots	Walking, sports (cricket, football), sitting, standing, selling, social interaction, romance, eating, drinking alcohol, playing in water, playing in sand, music/dance, dog walking	Walking, jogging, sports (volleyball, football), sitting, standing, selling, social interaction, romance, eating, drinking alcohol, playing in water, playing in sand, music/dancing, dog walking
5 -6 pm	Walking, jogging, sports (cricket, football), school exercise, other exercise, sitting, standing, selling, social interaction, romance, eating, drinking alcohol, playing in water, playing in sand, dog walking, wedding photo shoots, playing, swimming	Walking, jogging, sports (football, cricket, volleyball, rugby), sitting, standing, selling, social interaction, romance, eating, drinking alcohol, playing in water, surfing, playing in sand, music, dog walking, fishing, begging	Walking, jogging, sports (volleyball, football, cricket, rugby), sitting, standing, selling, social interaction, romance, eating, drinking alcohol, playing in water, surfing, playing in sand, dog walking, pony riding
6 -7 pm	Walking, jogging, sports (cricket, football), other exercise, sitting, standing, selling (incl. candy floss), social interaction, romance, eating, drinking alcohol, playing in water, playing in sand, music/dancing, dog walking, wedding photo shoots, playing, swimming	Walking, jogging, sports (football, cricket, volleyball), other exercise, sitting, standing, selling, social interaction, romance, eating, drinking alcohol, playing in water, surfing, playing in sand, music/dancing, dog walking, fishing, pony riding	Walking, jogging, sports (volleyball, football), sitting, standing, selling, social interaction, romance, eating, drinking alcohol, playing in water, surfing, playing in sand, dog walking

* (words in bold refer to medium-high level of activity)

* We suspect that “football” is sometimes a mistake for “rugby”.

Other activities

Other activities observed included people bathing their dogs, riding and working on boats (e.g. a diving boat for tourists), pony rides, cycling, kabadi (a sport), lifeguards on duty, taking photo shoots of wedding couples, begging, police on patrol, people reading newspapers, kids flying kites, and gypsies/soothsayers reading palms.

A wide variety of items were for sale at different times of the day, including cassava chips, *kolakenda*, pineapple, mango, king coconuts, betel, candy floss, *vadai*, gram, olives, incense sticks, tickets, bangles, necklaces, balloons, toys, clothes, and hats. A snake charmer with a monkey was also observed repeatedly.

Table 17: Activity by segment of beach, 7-8 am, Sunday

ACTIVITY	1) Le Ciel Bleu	2) Seaspray	3) Sawadee
Walking	H	H	L
Jogging	H	M	L
Sports	M	--	--
School/university sports/fitness	M	--	--
Other exercise	M	L	L
Sitting	L	--	L
Standing	L	M	--
Selling	--	--	--
Social interaction	--	--	L
Romance	L	L	--
Eating	--	--	--
Drinking alcohol	--	--	--
Playing in water	M	M	--
Playing in sand	--	--	--
Cleaning	L	L	--
Music/singing/dancing	--	--	--
Dog walking/dog play	L	M	L
Fishing/working with nets, boats	--	--	--
Other	Dog bathing	Constructing security house	Wedding photography

1) from Le Ciel Bleu Restaurant (200 meters towards the Mount Lavinia Hotel); 2) Seaspray Restaurant (100 meters each towards Dehiwala and Mount Lavinia Hotel); and 3) Sawadee Restaurant (200 meters from Sawadee Restaurant towards Dehiwala).⁸

Code: L=5 or fewer people, M=6-20 people, H=21-50 people, VH=51+

⁸ The observation segments in the study/report go by the name of the restaurant concerned (Sawadee, Seaspray and Le Ciel Bleu) and from each point a length of about 200 meters was observed horizontally.

Table 18: Activity by segment of beach, 6-7 pm, Sunday

ACTIVITY	Le Ciel Bleu	Seaspray	Sawadee
Walking	VH	VH	VH
Jogging	--	--	L
Sports	VH	H	VH
School/university sports/fitness	--	--	--
Other exercise	--	--	--
Sitting	VH	H	VH
Standing	VH	VH	VH
Selling	M	M	M
Social interaction	VH	H	VH
Romance	H	M	H
Eating	M	H	M
Drinking alcohol	M	L	--
Playing in water	VH	VH	VH
Playing in sand	VH	H	M
Cleaning	--	--	--
Music/singing/dancing	--	--	--
Dog walking/dog play	L	M	H
Fishing/working with nets, boats	--	--	--
Other	Pony rides, flying kites	Pony rides	

Code: L=5 or fewer people, M=6-20 people, H=21-50 people, VH=51+



A diversity of users and uses at the beach

Photo: UF

5.4 Key informant interviews

Beach users

Key informant interviews were conducted with nine beach users. These were two couples in their 60s, a man about 70 years old, an 82-year-old man, a woman in her 30s, a female seller of the beverage *kolakenda*, and a male army physical trainer, about 40 years old, who was at the beach with a group of soldiers for physical training.

Although some of the users visit other public spaces such as Galle Face, most of the respondents

prefer Mount Lavinia Beach because of its proximity to their home. Respondents visited the beach because it is clean, close to their home, and is better for exercise/physical training than other places, as the soft sand requires more effort when jogging. One older couple said they visit no other public spaces because they love the beach and thus decided to purchase a house after retirement in Mt. Lavinia so they could easily access it, as it is an ideal place for walks.

Different people make use of different parts of the beach. One factor mentioned in the choice is the availability of seating. A couple of the people use the entire portion, whereas the army trainer prefers the portion opposite Golden Mile as it is near an entrance at College Avenue and is wider there than at other portions of the beach.

The most common response of what people do at the beach is exercise, including walking, jogging, and stretching/other exercises. The elderly man said that he likes to walk on the sand as it massages his feet, and the army trainer said that after training they sometimes take a sea bath, though it is too dangerous during the rain season. Other activities people mentioned were enjoying the fresh air, sitting, and socializing. One couple mentioned that they would like to play with a ball and play badminton but that there is no place to play those games at the beach.

From observation and research, it appears that most people come either in the morning or the evening. Since these interviews were conducted in the morning, we caught the morning people. They come to the beach somewhere between 5:30 and 9 am and stay for somewhere between an hour and two and a half hours. People come to the beach to exercise, relax, enjoy the fresh air, and gain improvement in their health problems. People appreciate the fact that the environment is free and open. Most of those interviewed said that they do not exercise anywhere else, or if they do, they prefer the beach because it has far more open space.

All those interviewed felt that the beach contributes to their quality of life. For the seller, it provides a good income. For others, it provides a good atmosphere for relaxation where one can breathe fresh air, and the opportunity to socialize with others, which decreases a sensation of loneliness when your children live abroad. People also mentioned mental relief from the opportunity to enjoy a good environment.

When asked if they encountered problems at the beach, most of the people said they had not. For those who answered “yes” the most common problem was having their slippers stolen. One man who had lost a good pair of slippers years earlier now brings shabby ones which have not been taken. One woman mentioned having her chain snatched on the way to the beach. Another woman said that the beach is always safe in the mornings and that she does not come at other times. She suggested that it is possible that people have trouble in the evenings because that is when the drinking crowd comes. One woman said that she has not seen bad activity but sometimes has seen the police come and take someone away. She added that “Sometimes when someone loses something, one of the locals is taken by the police regardless of whether he’s guilty, but sometimes it’s the outsiders who have stolen it.”

Most of the people said they never eat at the beach restaurants or buy from the vendors, though one couple frequents one of the beach restaurants because they feel the service is good.

Some of the key informants said that the beach is narrow partly due to encroachment from the restaurants. One person said that the Municipal Council should provide lights, not the restaurants; “It’s not right that they invade public territory just to provide lighting.” One woman

said that normally the restaurants are not a problem, “but when there are functions they erect extra structures and those do take away from public space.” Others did not feel they encroach on public space or have no idea. One man said that “restaurants are good because they attract foreigners to the beach. But temporary stalls block the space for exercise.”

Most of the informants feel that the beach is quite safe, as is evidenced by their continuing to make daily or regular visits. Problems mentioned include theft of slippers, that it would be better if there were lifeguards and more awareness of safety issues regarding the sea, and that women have troubles because people make remarks at women walking alone. However, one woman who jogs and walks alone said that “There could be problems if a woman walks at dusk, but I don’t know that.”

Most of the informants feel that the beach is just the same as in the past. The only differences mentioned were “The beach is narrower than before,” “Not much other than more and more restaurants coming up, more and more invasion into public spaces;” “No change—no improvement, no deterioration. Just the same;” and “A long time ago the beach was much more serene. Now there are a lot more people. After storms, the beach is full of garbage.”

The informants mostly said they have not heard negative comments about the beach. One person mentioned hearing “There are slums behind the restaurants. The slum dwellers dump their garbage and sewage on the beach. It would be good to have a system for disposing of their waste.” Another said he’d heard that “The garbage disposal system is bad. So much comes from the waste water streams, so the beach is neglected and gets polluted. And people say that the restaurants provide lighting and seating. But the Municipal Council should provide the lights and seats for the public use. Restaurants can’t encroach on public space using that as an excuse.”



A man reads a newspaper Photo: UF

Interview with S.V.D. Kesarralal Gunasekera

Deputy Mayor, Dehiwala-Mount Lavinia City Council, 21 March 2013

The Deputy Mayor of Dehiwala-Mount Lavinia noted that beach restaurants regularly occupy land that they are not entitled to and thus space for the public is reduced, but it is difficult to continue fighting with them over this issue every time they break the law. He also commented that the restaurants do provide a few services: they clean the beach in front of their restaurant and provide safety.

The Deputy Mayor explained that the government budget for parks is low, coming from residential taxes, and parks and other public spaces are not a priority. He mentioned that there is a possibility for turning some additional areas into parks and that he would be happy to work with the community but there is no formal process. He stated that while people used to be more involved in council affairs, they now are too busy. As a result, it is mostly the elderly who are involved. While he felt that currently the municipality hardly gets any assistance from the public, he would welcome it. He also mentioned coordination problems with UDA, which plans and carries out projects without consulting with the local authority.

6. Discussion and Recommendations



A crowd enjoying the beach

Photo: UF

The study results, detailed above, provide much useful information for answering our research questions, that is,

1. What are the elements that make Mount Lavinia beach a great public space?
2. What benefits do the users of the beach say they gain from it?

3. What changes could be made to the beach that would encourage more people to use the beach, or people to use it more often and/or to stay longer?
4. How can these lessons be applied to other public spaces such as beaches and parks in Colombo/Sri Lanka?

In this section, we answer each of the questions utilizing the information gathered in the research and our own observations of Mount Lavinia Beach and other public spaces in and around Colombo.

6.1 Important elements of Mount Lavinia Beach

Mount Lavinia Beach provides an example of an extremely well-used and well-loved, and thus successful, public space. We call it successful despite the range of problems people mentioned and suggestions they had for improvement, because it is used by such a diversity of people in such a diversity of ways. Males and females, from children on up through the elderly, use the beach during weekdays and the weekend, engaging in at least 15 different activities overall. Personal observation has shown that the beach is used not only by a wide range of ages and by both sexes, but also by a variety of income groups and religions as well. It appears that there are more male users than female users, as is reflected in the survey results, and there is also a likely age bias as well with fewer children and elderly, at least at some hours. However, it is also clear that girls and women, children and the elderly, all enjoy using the beach as well as young and middle-aged men. Even during the quieter hours in the middle of the day, the beach was never empty, and activity levels reached high and very high during the peak hours.

Various factors determine just how well used a public space is. The exact same park in different parts of a city may generate very different use due to issues of location and access.⁹ A park is easily accessible when it is within walking distance of nearby homes and workplaces. An attractive public space that can only be reached by car will not be used by people of different income groups and it will have difficulty attracting daily visitors. However, a good location and easy access are necessary, but not sufficient, attributes of a good public space. An unattractive or potentially dangerous space (because of lack of lighting, presence of debris, or poor condition of walkways) may get little use despite being well located. We identified several key elements of a great public space. They are listed below, along with a brief comment about different public spaces in Colombo/Dehiwala-Mount Lavinia.

Access

Our results clearly supported the need to ensure that parks are within easy walking distance of where people live. Most people travel to the park from their home (81%). Most of the daily and weekday visitors walked to the beach, whereas more weekend and infrequent visitors drove a motor vehicle. While only 13% of monthly visitors walk to the beach, 70% of daily visitors do. A public space will only be well used if it is close to where people live and easy to reach by foot. It is thus ideal if a public space is located within a 5-10 minute walk of homes and workplaces. Mount Lavinia Beach has excellent accessibility as thousands of people live within a 5-7 minute walk of the beach.

⁹ Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. Random House, 1989.

Easy accessibility by public transit (bus and train) is also important. Even for monthly visitors, bus trips account for more of the transport to the beach than do car and van combined. It is relatively easy to reach the beach by public transit from the Mount Lavinia and Dehiwala train stations and from various bus stops on Galle Road, which in Mount Lavinia is serviced by at least six different bus lines.

In addition, the number of access points to a park is very important. If there is only one place to enter a park, this reduces its access and makes the distances people must travel to reach the park much greater. Mount Lavinia Beach is a linear public space, stretching from the Mount Lavinia Hotel to the Dehiwala Canal and has a high number of access points. (Technically, part of the beach is in Dehiwala, but as it is one continuous stretch, people can easily reach the Mount Lavinia portion from Dehiwala.) There are approximately 20 roads that connect the beach to nearby Galle Road. The beach thus scores extremely highly in terms of access.

Discussions to improve public spaces often focus on the need to provide more car parking. However, our results suggest that this would not improve the frequency of people visiting the beach and may have detrimental impacts as the larger the space allocated to parking the less space is available for public use. Improving access for people to arrive by car might thus make it easier for infrequent visitors to go to the beach, and for people to arrive from farther away, while decreasing access and convenience, as well as the quality of the experience, for those who currently most benefit from the beach.

For comparison, other public spaces in Mount Lavinia-Dehiwala are accessible by foot from a far smaller number of residences, as the parks themselves are smaller and non-linear. Galle Face is within walking distance of little other than government buildings and five-star hotels and is in a high security zone, but is readily accessible by bus and train. Other public spaces in Colombo, such as Independence Square, Diyatha Uyana in Battaramulla, and Wetland Park in Nugegoda are essentially only accessible by automobile. There are several downsides to this lack of access by other means. First, it makes them inaccessible for those without a car, raising the concern about inequality when creating public spaces that are only intended for the rich. Second, it means that a significant amount of land must be used for parking rather than for the park itself. Third, such locations induce traffic, that is, contribute to congestion by providing yet another venue to which people travel by automobile. Lastly, our results suggest that the vast majority of daily and frequent visitors walk to parks. Parks that are created with the intention of only being accessible by car are likely to be empty for much of the day.

Although this was scarcely mentioned, the fact that there is no entrance fee is also essential to the popularity of the beach and is a key element of accessibility. User fees discriminate against low-income users and violate the basic principle of a public space: that they be inviting to all members of the public. User fees reduce accessibility of parks for everyone as few people are willing to pay to use a park for everyday use.

A final accessibility issue is safety in reaching the public space. Although people must cross the railway track to reach the beach, this is far easier than crossing a busy street; few people mentioned the need for safer railway crossings. Public spaces located near busy streets should offer signalled crossings to make crossing easy and safe.

Visual and other appeal (smells, sounds)

People's need for recreation and socializing can be so great that they will gather even in uninviting places such as noisy street corners with smog and loud traffic noises. However, people obviously prefer more amenable venues. A place that is fairly attractive to look at and that either offers appealing smells and sounds, or at least does not have repulsive ones, will generally be preferred over an uglier, more barren, and less appealing place. Mount Lavinia Beach is fairly attractive (marred by trash and, according to some users, the presence of so many restaurants). For the most part the smells are pleasant, though the waste water streams can stink. The main sounds are of crashing surf, barking dogs, and people amusing themselves. Notably absent is the sound of traffic other than the trains. Although people do not specifically mention this, it is clear that one of the attractions of the beach is that it is a large carfree area, where people can enjoy themselves without the danger, noise, or smell of motorized vehicles (other than occasional noise and danger from trains).

The presence of the ocean is obviously not a replicable attraction. However, it is important to note that much of the actual activity that occurs at the beach does not involve entering the ocean. Also, though one cannot replicate the ocean, one can make water a feature of other public spaces. Given the attraction of water, many cities have installed water features in parks. Particularly popular are fountains that spring up from the ground, especially ones that release water at unpredictable times. Such fountains are particularly beloved by children, who frequently play in them, though they are used by different age groups as well. The lack of a pre-existing water body does not preclude the potential for having an extremely popular water feature. Beyond that, some basic features can enhance attractiveness, though they should not be so obtrusive that they discourage people from making full use of the space.

The attractiveness of Mount Lavinia Beach is seen in the fact that 57% of those interviewed said they come at least once a week and that people gave a wide range of responses in terms of when they prefer to come to the beach. That is, the beach is popular virtually all days of the year and most times of the day, while other public spaces may only get high use at a certain time of the day or week, such as on holidays or weekend evenings.

Ability to use the space as one wishes

One of the charms of the beach is the fact that it is “unscripted”: it allows people to use it in the ways they see fit. The beach is not, in a word, overly-designed. For the most part it offers empty spaces that people can use as they wish. This helps explain the wide variety of uses and users at the beach, with people regularly engaged in at least 14 different activities including various sports (cricket, football, rugby, and volleyball), walking, jogging, other exercise, socializing, romance, and various types of play. Beach visitors come for a wide variety of reasons: to relax, think, play, have fun, keep fit and improve their health, bathe, walk their dog, wait for or accompany their children, sports practice, shoot a teledrama, talk with friends, watch others, sell goods, practice rugby, and so on.

Galle Face Green has a similar “unscripted” nature: the park invites a wide array of activities. Small children run and play, adults sit and stroll. People sit on steps or on the wall. People linger to watch the sunset; some descend the steps from the wall to walk or lie on the sand and play in the sea. Other parks are less successful at inviting people's creativity and mostly are used for

walking and sitting, including Independence Square and Diyatha Uyana. Although Dutch Hospital has its attractive aspects, it mostly caters to the high income and the drinking crowd. The public space outside of Dutch Hospital is particularly barren, at least in the evening, consisting only of people sitting at the tables.

Catering to a diversity of users

As mentioned above, it is important that different types of people are able to access the public space and feel comfortable using it: this includes males and females of different ages, religions, and income. The physical accessibility of Mount Lavinia Beach, as well as its unscripted nature, helps in attracting a great diversity of users. This includes not only those who come to the beach for recreation but fishermen, sellers, photographers, those making TV dramas, wedding couples, and so on. Other public spaces are far less successful in attracting this diversity of users.

However, we did notice that there were more males than females, and more young adults than older adults and children. Although further interviews would be necessary to make definitive statements, one possible reason for this is the lack of shade and benches available throughout the length of the beach. Older adults in particular need regular opportunities to rest. Public toilets and other basic facilities could also make the beach more accessible to a wider range of users. Although this is less important in the case of a beach, other public spaces might be better used when there are playgrounds and activities specifically for children and parents.



Mobile vendor selling pineapples Photo: UF

Vendors

For many people, an important aspect of spending time outdoors is eating and drinking, from simple snacks to a full meal. People also enjoy being able to buy toys or other objects for their children. This is partly why festivals are so festive: people enjoy the range of food, drink, and objects available for sale right out on the street in easy access. Vendors can turn ordinary landscapes into a festive scene with their various items for purchase. This is not to say that vendors cannot also detract from the quality of public spaces by occupying needed space,

creating litter, and hassling potential customers. However, the demerits of allowing vendors must be balanced by their merits.

In the case of Mount Lavinia Beach and Galle Face, it is clear that vendors contribute to the liveliness of the space. On and near the beach (at various access points) they sell a variety of food and drinks including *kolakenda*, cut fruit, ice cream, cassava chips, and popcorn. They also sell shorts, toys, and other items. Although several people complain of being hassled by vendors and soothsayers, a third of beach visitors say that they buy from vendors. A frequent criticism of the beach is the lack of more affordable food options. Only one-fourth of visitors say they eat at the beach restaurants, suggesting that high prices are a significant deterrent to customers in Sri Lanka. More low-cost food stalls would be a welcome amenity.

Much of the liveliness and festive atmosphere of Galle Face is due to the presence of stalls and restaurants along the sea wall selling water, soft drinks, ice cream, shrimp cakes, *vadai*, *naan*, and full meals, as well as the vendors on the Galle Face Green selling various inflatable toys and kites, and blowing bubbles. Take away the vendors and you would take away much of the liveliness of the scene. In parks where the only food options are extremely high-priced, people may spend less time or be discouraged from visiting altogether, as part of the fun of the outing is enjoying food, which can become inordinately expensive on a family gathering when only high-priced items are available. Providing space and creating opportunities to encourage lower cost food options could enhance the experience for beach users.

6.2 Benefits to the users



Young men pose for a photo

Photo: UF

People gave many reasons for coming to the beach. These included to walk, to enjoy the beauty of the surroundings, to exercise, and to play sports or games. That is, most people who go to the beach do so for active reasons. The importance of the beach as a venue for exercise was reinforced by the interviews with long-term beach users, most of whom said that they exercise only at the beach. Other benefits people mentioned are fresh air and recreation.

Many hours over the years of casual observation of beach users in the mornings and evenings makes it clear that while most people exercise when they come to the beach, they gain other benefits as well. People out walking and jogging wave at and greet each other. People often walk or jog in clusters of two or three people. People make use of various sections of the beach to engage in other exercise such as sit-ups, push-ups, stretching, and breathing exercises. Some of those places, such as the Mount Lavinia Hotel end of the beach and the *kolakenda* stand in front of La Voile Blanche restaurant, are major activity nodes where people also socialize. On rainy days, people gather under awnings and talk to each other. When people refer to relaxation and mental health benefits from the beach, they likely also are thinking of the social interactions that occur there.

People also come to the beach to play. This includes playing in the water and in the sand, and playing sports. Active play is at the nexus of exercise and recreation. It is marked by shouts and laughter, and can be an important aspect of mental health. Building sand castles, mermaids, and alligators in the sand encourages creativity and artistic expression.

Although Sri Lankans are extremely class conscious and prefer to remain within their social class, some level of mixing does also occur. Wealthier people mix with fishermen when they go to buy fish. People exchange a few words with the vendors and other sellers. Africans and locals play football together. Those interactions are important, representing as they do “a pact to accept one another”¹⁰ in which different types of people meet and learn about those different from themselves. “Civility in cities relies on a general feeling that other people are more or less decent human beings.” Public spaces provide that opportunity. “Public spaces and the interactions they facilitate can and do save our cities. Being around, observing, sharing space with others is a great equalizer and humanizer. We can’t live together and live without it.”¹¹

In sum, the beach is a place where people can improve their health, enjoy existing acquaintances and make new friends, relax, play, express themselves, and learn about others.



Different clothing styles, same beach Photos: UF

¹⁰ Richard Register, *Ecocities, rebuilding cities in balance with nature*. New Society Publishers, 2006.

¹¹ Efrogmson, Ha, and Ha, *Public Spaces, How they humanize cities*. WBB Trust and HealthBridge, 2009.



Eating styles for different income groups Photos: UF

6.3 Changes that would encourage more people to use the beach, or to use it more often

Various changes, many of them fairly minor, would improve the experience for beach users, and thus both encourage more people to use the beach who do not currently do so, and those who do visit to do so more often and to stay longer. The main potential improvements are listed here.

Lighting

People can more easily engage in anti-social activities under cover of darkness and in the absence of people. Fewer people will visit a dark space, which in turn makes them emptier and thus increases their danger. Lighting is essential for safety in the evenings. Mount Lavinia Beach is not sufficiently lit, although the light from restaurants does create some element of safety well into the evening and night. Galle Face is fairly well lit, but there can be gaps between the lights which are a bit ominous particularly on weekday nights. Newer public spaces are far more successful at providing sufficient and high-quality pedestrian lighting, especially through the use of solar lights placed sufficiently low to provide gentle light for those on foot. The issue of lighting is particularly important in ensuring that public spaces can be used by women.

Cleanliness

Trash is a problem at most public spaces, and our results indicated that it is a problem at the beach as well. The problem is exacerbated where trash bins are unavailable or of poor design (too shallow or designed such that trash easily blows out) or are not regularly emptied. The problem is worsened by the high use of plastic bags and bottles by vendors and stalls. More than half of the respondents felt that Mount Lavinia Beach is in good or very good condition; only 16% felt that it is in poor or very poor condition. While opinions varied, some felt that Mount Lavinia Beach is cleaner recently than in the past due to better maintenance by city workers but for the most part lacks trash bins. Respondents also pointed out that users should take more responsibility for maintaining cleanliness.

Galle Face has a serious trash problem. Some other parks are better maintained, but if a park is very clean not because of maintenance but because few people use it, or only use it for their morning walk for exercise, then that is not necessarily a good sign.

Safety

Safety is closely related to lighting, but goes beyond it. Most (80%) of respondents consider the beach safe or very safe; 19% consider it somewhat unsafe or very unsafe. Similarly, over 80% of respondents had not experienced or witnessed a “serious problem”. The problems mentioned were for the most part not particularly serious, such as petty theft, arguments, vendors who hassle potential customers, and the fear of dogs. People were also concerned about the problems caused by alcohol consumption at the beach, though the activity audit picked up very little drinking. More serious problems include drownings, drugs, prostitution, and a child’s disappearance. A greater number of lifeguards and clearer marking of their presence would help reduce drownings. As this report goes to print, a new lifeguard post adjacent to Seaspray hotel has been inaugurated by the Coast Guard, which should alleviate the problem. It may not be feasible or sensible to post more security people at the beach to prevent petty theft, but more lighting would help with fear of crime.

Amenities

Respondents suggested a range of amenities that would encourage people to come to the beach more often and/or stay longer. The most common requests were for more benches/seating, shelter from rain and sun, water taps, and public toilets. Far smaller numbers requested better lighting and safer railway crossings. Many also wanted a play area for children, changing rooms, better cleanliness and maintenance, more dustbins, more lifeguards and signage showing where it is safe to bathe and indicating the presence of lifeguards, and more people to guard belongings. Several people said that there should be food available at affordable prices.

In terms of priorities, we would recommend increasing shade as the first major priority. Given the climate, public spaces in Sri Lanka require shade to become thoroughly usable throughout the day and not just early in the morning and in the evening. Shade can be in the form of trees or awnings. This would enhance the experience for all users, but is particularly important for encouraging the elderly to use the beach more often and to stay longer.

Benches and other seating arrangements can extend the amount of time that people stay in public spaces, as otherwise people become tired and leave earlier, which can make public spaces more deserted. Again, this is particularly important for the elderly. We would suggest this as the second major priority for improvements to the beach.

Young people particularly enjoy informal seating such as steps, planters, and the base of statues; older people typically prefer benches with backs. Rather than placing benches in stiff, formal rows, which makes it difficult to converse and can appear unattractive when they are unused, informal seating can be mixed with benches, and benches placed at angles so that people can speak to each other in a more comfortable way than if seated side-by-side. The occasional table enhances socializing by providing the opportunity to place objects on it and by creating a boundary between those seated. Optimal use of tables and placement of seating exists both at the section of the beach in front of Steamboat Restaurant and outdoors at Dutch Hospital.

The importance of public toilets goes without saying and can increase both cleanliness and length of stay. This is particularly important for people who use the beach on a more frequent basis. Water taps are also helpful in providing access both to drinking water and to cleaning facilities. Galle Face does better, in terms of providing public toilets and water taps, than Mount

Lavinia Beach, which currently has neither. Some of the most common recommendations for improving the beach are to provide more shade, seating, public toilets, and water taps.

6.4 How can these lessons be applied to other parks in Colombo/Sri Lanka



A couple enjoying the water Photo: UF

“A better city is a more humane one, one friendly to children, the handicapped and old people, to society’s most vulnerable members. ... Contrary to stereotypes, it is not its skyline that lends character to a city. Rather it is its human spaces, its pedestrian promenades, parks, plazas, libraries, and public transport. –Enrique Peñalosa

The importance of research: In order to conduct this research, the study team adapted and translated tools developed by HealthBridge that had been used successfully in other Asian countries. There is potential to use these tools in order to evaluate the quality of other public spaces in Colombo and Sri Lanka. It is important that the activity audit be used as well as the user survey and observation. A user survey might simply yield such information as satisfaction or dissatisfaction with cleanliness and safety, but it will not give an indication of the diversity of uses. An activity audit tells what is happening, but does not tell anything about the thoughts or habits of the users. Observation is also helpful in gaining an overall sense of a place, including whether it is lively and well-used. We suggest that the tools, with a slight bit more adaptation, could prove quite useful for research into the important qualities of public spaces in Sri Lanka that could then feed into public space policy and programming.

Qualities of a successful public space: It is not possible to replicate a beach. However, much of what makes the beach so popular and widely and well used are elements that can, to some degree, be replicated elsewhere. Further, the objections that people have to the beach could easily be addressed in other public spaces. A truly great public space will include elements of equity (providing high quality recreational, social, and exercise options for people of all incomes, ages, races, and both sexes), health (mental and physical), and community (providing a place for different types of people to observe each other and interact).

Important factors include:

- ▣ access, which means having no admission fee, and being easy to access from nearby residences and workplaces by foot, and from farther away by bus and train;
- ▣ amenities, including shade and public toilets;
- ▣ visual and sensory appeal;
- ▣ ability to use the space as one wishes;
- ▣ catering to a diversity of users and uses by providing opportunities for activities, particularly active ones, for young, old, rich, poor, men and women;
- ▣ places to sit, meet, and mingle, which help create a sense of community.



Foreigners and locals sharing the beach

Photo: UF



Attracting different ages and incomes

Photo: UF

Some of the typical flaws of traditional parks in Sri Lanka, and ways to address them, include:

Table 19: Typical problems and solutions

Problem	Suggested solution
Space caters mostly to children and youth (playground plus cricket field).	Provide a walking path, outdoor fitness equipment, benches, shade.
Space caters mostly to a particular social class.	A public space should not require expenditures. If one must spend money, the space is, by definition, not public. Where there are eating outlets and other shopping, they should include options for a range of income groups.
Lack of amenities, lack of maintenance.	Provide public toilets, water taps, benches and informal seating, dustbins, and shade; ensure regular maintenance.
Space is overly scripted (very neat and clean, discourages creativity).	Avoid excessive design. Provide objects to climb and sit on. Invite vendors.
Space is empty much of the day.	Provide seating and shade. Occasionally organize activities to encourage use.

Several of the people interviewed mentioned that the beach, or public spaces in general, do not gain priority from government officials. Maintenance and clean-up are neglected. Basic amenities fail to be provided. More acknowledgment of the importance of public spaces, and a stronger recognition that public spaces should cater to all income groups, not simply the elite, would likely result in improved quality of existing public spaces.



Sunset at the beach Photo: UF

7. Conclusion



A group of early morning exercises Photo: UF

“My quality of life is improved from going to the beach because I get fresh air and mental relief from the good environment.” –elderly beach user

The sky gradually lightens over Mount Lavinia Beach. Stray dogs gather around a couple who stoops in the sand to feed them. A group of people, foreigners and locals, push a boat into the water and scramble on, ready to go scuba diving. Clusters of parents exchange gossip while they watch their children playing sports.

A resident of one of the shacks lining the Dehiwala portion of the beach runs out and gestures to a foreign woman. “Come! Come!” He leads her over rubbish into his humble home, and proudly shows her the newborn baby lying on the bed. He removes the small mosquito net while his wife sits by the baby, glowing with pleasure. “Pooh-tek” (boy) he proudly tells his guest. As the foreigner ends her walk that morning, another couple, this one quite wealthy, residents of a nearby apartment building, proudly display their twins.

The sun sinks into the sea, lost in a sky of clouds. Novice monks play football at sunset, the water spraying as they kick the ball. A lone windsurfer rides the waves. Children fly kites. A snake charmer with a monkey looks for business. A foreign woman borrows sticks of fire from a performer and gracefully juggles them. People busy themselves fishing, selling, eating, talking, playing, loving. They generally require only the simplest of implements to enjoy themselves: often simply a tennis ball or cricket ball or football, most often nothing at all but the open space and each other.

Mount Lavinia Beach is an example of a great public space. Its popularity is mainly due to its unscripted nature that allows people to make their own space within the broader public space. The beach is largely self-organized. Nobody sets rules, implicit or explicit, about what activities are meant to occur there. It is not excessively engineered and overly designed as other parks tend to be, such as the revamped Independence Square or the Battaramulla Public Space area. The beach is not inviting only to a certain income group, such as Dutch Hospital. It is a space in which people feel comfortable engaging in a variety of activities, from sitting to jogging, from playing cricket to talking with friends, from walking their dog to making friends while watching their children play sports. The space encourages creativity and a sense of ownership among the users. As a result, people feel that the beach is *their* beach.

The presence of many restaurants on the beach, though it does take space away from other users, does not preclude people from visiting and enjoying the beach. The restaurants have their own traffic of clientele which is generally different from the other visitors to the beach. The small-scale vendors who sell food items at less than Rs. 50 cater to the general visitors. In many

cases, people bring their own food and beverages. As such, the commercialization does not limit the average visitor's ability to use the beach for recreation. Compared to a newly emerged public space such as the Battaramulla area where there is only a certain level of business establishments that sell food and beverages and the prices are relatively high, the situation in Mount Lavinia Beach is positive from the principle of public spaces in that it welcomes people of different income groups.

Mount Lavinia Beach is also positive in that it facilitates the coexistence of many different types of people and things. Public space and commercial space, tourists and locals, those who live close by and those who live farther away, wealthy visitors who walk expensive breeds of dogs and poor fishermen and vendors, foreign women in bikinis and local women in burqa, all mingle in the same place. Elderly walkers are as comfortable as young lovers; children play in the sand while youth play rugby and adults dine at restaurants. That sense of inclusivity, of welcoming many kinds of people and activities, makes the beach a truly successful place.

Mount Lavinia Beach is indeed 'beautiful' in its own way. It is a robust public space which is self-organized and functions in a harmonious manner while accommodating co-existence and diversity. This is not to say that it is perfect. The study identified several areas for improvement which demand the attention of policy makers and the general public. These improvements do not require a massive infusion of capital (that often comes in the form of loans) as seen in the recent 'beautification' initiatives in Colombo and its outskirts. Improvements need to be handled with care. The existing beauty and 'publicness', and the marvelous unscripted nature of the beach, must not be damaged or compromised in the name of beautification.

Beautification need not mean catering only to a certain income group. There is a beauty in an extremely popular public space where people of different ages and income groups come to enjoy themselves. Our study suggests that people are more interested in fun than in beauty. All too often, commercialization results in the invitation only to those with a certain level of purchasing power, so that public spaces become an exclusive space. Our plea is to allow the continuing existence of features of inclusivity, diversity, co-existence and harmony, wherein an upper-class family dines at one of the beach restaurants while another, less financially affluent family buys a packet of cassava chips or '*achacharu*' from a small scale vendor. Equity and the promotion of happiness are values that are too precious to come with a price tag.



Photo: UF

Appendix 1: Suggested Further Reading on Public Spaces and Related Urban Issues

Useful websites:

8-80 Cities: www.8-80cities.org

HealthBridge, Liveable Cities program: http://www.healthbridge.ca/livable_cities.html

Project for Public Spaces: www.pps.org

World Carfree Network: www.worldcarfree.net

Useful publications:

Daniel, K and D Efroymson, D. *Urban Planning for Liveable Cities: Density, Diversity and Design*. HealthBridge, June 2010.

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Shoup, D, *The High Cost of Free Parking*. Chicago: American Planning Association, 2005. A summary is available at http://www.wbbtrust.org/research/e_road.htm

Thomas, P, L Jones, and D Efroymson, *Cities for Children: Defining the Dream and Achieving the Reality*. HealthBridge, 2012. http://www.healthbridge.ca/healthbridge_publications.html

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, " Physically fit children appear to do better in classroom, researchers say". 18 Oct. 2004, <http://www.news.uiuc.edu/news/04/1018fitness.html>

UNESCO, *Growing up in an Urbanising World*. Louise Chawla, Ed. 2002.

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Appendix 2: Research Tools

Activity Survey

Name of Beach Segment.....

Surveyor

Name:.....

Date (dd/mm/yyyy):

Time of day (xx to xx) :

Day of the week (tick one)

Weather conditions (tick as many as apply)

- Monday
- Tuesday
- Wednesday
- Thursday
- Friday
- Saturday
- Sunday

- Rain
- Clouds
- Sun
- Windy
- Cool
- Warm
- Hot

	ACTIVITY	Low (5 or fewer people)	Medium (6-20)	High (21-50)	Very high (51+)	Children		Teens/Youth		Adult		Elderly (60+)		Comments (e.g. stationary/mobile, what other kinds of exercise, what is being sold, what kinds of play...)
						m	f	m	f	m	f	m	f	
1	Walking													
2	Jogging													
3	Sports													
4	School/uni sports/fitness													
5	Other exercise													
6	Sitting													
7	Standing													
8	Selling													
9	Social interaction													
10	Romance													
11	Eating													
12	Drinking alcohol													
13	Playing in water													
14	Playing in sand													
15	Cleaning													
16	Music/singing/dancing													
17	Dog walking/dog play													
18	Fishing/working with nets, boats													
19	Other													
20														
21														

Other comments: e.g. disagreements/fighting, anti-social activity/conflicts, particularly interesting activities, anything exceptional....:

User Survey

Questions for User Survey: Date: __/__/____ (dd/mm/yyyy)

Name of Interviewer:.....

Starting Time:.....

A1 Day of the week:

Monday	1 <input type="checkbox"/>
Tuesday	2 <input type="checkbox"/>
Wednesday	3 <input type="checkbox"/>
Thursday	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
Friday	5 <input type="checkbox"/>
Saturday	6 <input type="checkbox"/>
Sunday	7 <input type="checkbox"/>

A2 Weather conditions:

Rain	1 <input type="checkbox"/>
Cloud	2 <input type="checkbox"/>
Sun	3 <input type="checkbox"/>
Wind	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
Cool	5 <input type="checkbox"/>
Warm	6 <input type="checkbox"/>
Hot	7 <input type="checkbox"/>

Part A. Survey Information

Hello. We're conducting a survey of Mount Lavinia Beach. Could you spare five minutes to answer a few questions? (If they refuse, please check off on your refusal sheet)

A3 Which of the following categories best describes your age? (Please tick one only)

16 or under	17-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-74	75 or over
1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	5 <input type="checkbox"/>	6 <input type="checkbox"/>	7 <input type="checkbox"/>	8 <input type="checkbox"/>

A4 Gender of the respondent (Please tick one only)

Female	Male
1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>

A5 Where do you live? (Please tick one only)

Resident in this Local Authority area	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	Resident outside this Local Authority area	2 <input type="checkbox"/>
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Part B. About your visit:

B1 How often do you visit this area? (Please tick one only)

First visit	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	Go straight to C1
Once a year	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	Go straight to C1
2 or 3 times a year	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	
Monthly	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	
Weekly	5 <input type="checkbox"/>	
More Often/ Daily	6 <input type="checkbox"/>	

B2 When you visit, where do you usually travel from? (Please tick one only)

Home	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	Work	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	Shops	3 <input type="checkbox"/>
Hotel	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	School	5 <input type="checkbox"/>	College / University	6 <input type="checkbox"/>
Friends/relatives house	7 <input type="checkbox"/>	Other	8 <input type="checkbox"/>		
Other (please write in)					

B3 How would you normally travel to this place? (Please tick one only)

On foot	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	Cycle	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	Motorbike	3 <input type="checkbox"/>
Car	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	Bus	5 <input type="checkbox"/>	Three wheeler	6 <input type="checkbox"/>
Taxi	7 <input type="checkbox"/>	Train	8 <input type="checkbox"/>	Other	9 <input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please write in)					

B4 Approximately how long is your journey to this place? (Please tick one only)

1 - 10 minutes	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	11 – 15 minutes	2 <input type="checkbox"/>
16 – 20 minutes	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	21 - 30 minutes	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
More than 30 minutes	5 <input type="checkbox"/>	It is depend of traffic when travel by vehicle	6 <input type="checkbox"/>

B5 Do you normally visit this place alone or with others? (Please tick one only)

Alone	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	(Go straight to B7)
In a group	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	(Go to B6)
Both (equally divided)	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	(Go to B6)

B6 When you visit with others, who normally visits the beach with you? (Please tick as many as appropriate)

Husband-wife	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	Children	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	With family	3 <input type="checkbox"/>
Friends	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	Team / Club	5 <input type="checkbox"/>	School group	6 <input type="checkbox"/>
Girlfriend/boyfriend	7 <input type="checkbox"/>	Other	8 <input type="checkbox"/>	Go straight to B7	
Other (please write in)					

B7 What days/time of the day do you prefer to come? (Please tick as many as appropriate)

Weekdays	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	Weekend	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	Holiday/Poya Day	3 <input type="checkbox"/>
Early morning	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	Evening	5 <input type="checkbox"/>	Other times	6 <input type="checkbox"/>

B8 Why do you visit the beach? (Please tick up main reasons for normally visiting the beach)

To relax or think	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	For peace and quiet	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	To improve my health	3 <input type="checkbox"/>
To play/have fun	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	To keep fit	5 <input type="checkbox"/>	To get some fresh air	6 <input type="checkbox"/>
To meet friends	7 <input type="checkbox"/>	To follow the doctors advice	8 <input type="checkbox"/>	Other	9 <input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please write in)					

B9 What do you normally do when you visit the beach? (Please tick as many as appropriate)

Enjoy the beauty of the surroundings	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	Walk	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	Watch sport or games	3 <input type="checkbox"/>
Exercise	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	Cultural Program/Enjoy entertainment	5 <input type="checkbox"/>	Play sports or games	6 <input type="checkbox"/>
Eat (or non-alcoholic drink)	7 <input type="checkbox"/>	Drink alcohol	8 <input type="checkbox"/>	Other	9 <input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please write in)					

B10 Do you ever buy things from vendors?

Yes	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	No	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	Don't know/Didn't answer	3 <input type="checkbox"/>
-----	----------------------------	----	----------------------------	--------------------------	----------------------------

B11 Do you ever eat at the restaurants at the beach?

Yes	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	No	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	Don't know/Didn't answer	3 <input type="checkbox"/>
-----	----------------------------	----	----------------------------	--------------------------	----------------------------

Part C. About the beach

We want to know if you think this beach is a welcoming, healthy, safe and secure place which is properly cared for.

C1 How would you rate the standard of cleanliness of the beach? (Please tick one only)

Very good	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	Good	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	Fair	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	Poor	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	Very poor	5 <input type="checkbox"/>	No opinion	6 <input type="checkbox"/>	Don't know	7 <input type="checkbox"/>
-----------	----------------------------	------	----------------------------	------	----------------------------	------	----------------------------	-----------	----------------------------	------------	----------------------------	------------	----------------------------

C1a Enter any comments provided by the respondent in the space below.

C2 Have you ever encountered or witnessed a serious problem at the beach? (Please tick one only)

Yes	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	No	2 <input type="checkbox"/>
-----	----------------------------	----	----------------------------

C2a If yes, please explain in the space below.

--

C3 How safe do you feel that the beach is at this time of day?

Very unsafe	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	Somewhat unsafe	2 <input type="checkbox"/>
Safe	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	Very safe	4 <input type="checkbox"/>

Comments

--

C4 Can you think of anything that would encourage you to use the beach more often, or stay for longer?

(Please tick one only)

Yes	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	No	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	Don't know/Didn't answer	3 <input type="checkbox"/>
-----	----------------------------	----	----------------------------	--------------------------	----------------------------

C4a If you answered 'Yes', please choose option below, the top one or two things that would encourage you to visit more often or stay for longer. SURVEYOR: Read the options and ask the person to choose their top one or two choices) (Please tick one or more)

Provide playgrounds	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	Public toilets	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	Water taps	3 <input type="checkbox"/>
Ensure of shelter to protect from rain/sun	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	Light	5 <input type="checkbox"/>	Safer railway crossings	6 <input type="checkbox"/>
More benches/seating	7 <input type="checkbox"/>	Other	8 <input type="checkbox"/>		
Other (please write in)					

Key Informant Interview Question Guide

Questions for Key Informant Interview: Date: __/__/____ (dd/mm/yyyy)

Name of Interviewer:.....

1. Do you visit other public spaces in Mount Lavinia/Colombo? Which places do you prefer and why?
2. Which part of the beach do you use? Why? Why do you avoid other parts?
3. What do you do at the beach? Are there other activities you would like to engage in but can't, and why?
4. What times do you usually come? How often? How much time do you usually spend?
5. What role does the beach play in your life, e.g. a place for exercise, an occasional getaway, etc.
6. Do you exercise elsewhere as well? Which place do you prefer? Why? Would you be likely to get more or less exercise if you didn't come to the beach?
7. Does the beach contribute to your quality of life, and if so, how? How much?
8. Do you ever encounter problems at the beach? Have you witnessed other people having problems? Do you have any suggested solutions?
9. Do you ever buy things from vendors? Do you ever eat at the restaurants?
10. Do you think the restaurants take space away from other users? Do you benefit from the restaurants in any way, e.g. to eat at the restaurant, have lighting, ...)
11. How safe do you feel the beach is/what are your safety concerns? (very unsafe, somewhat unsafe, safe, very safe) Concerns: theft, sexual harassment, kidnapping, other)
12. If you have been living here/coming here for a long time, how does the beach compare to the past?
13. Do you hear negative comments about the beach, and if so, what kinds of comments? What do you think about that?