

# TRAVELTALK

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## Sri Lanka Welcomes Two Millionth Tourist Arrival, Marking a Post-2018 Milestone

DINUSHKA CHANDRASENA



Sri Lanka has achieved a significant milestone in its tourism sector, proudly welcoming the two millionth tourist arrival on December 26, 2024. This marks the first time since 2018—when the country recorded its highest-ever arrivals of 2.3 million—that such numbers have been reached. The achievement reflects the resilience of the tourism industry despite the challenges of the past five years.

The past week recorded daily tourist arrivals exceeding 10,000—a figure expected to rise further towards the end of the month—the milestone underscores the success of combined efforts by the private sector stakeholders and Sri Lanka Tourism in ensuring a robust holiday season. Promotional campaigns and collaborative strategies have helped pave the way for this achievement, signaling a positive outlook for the future of the industry.

Sri Lanka's tourism industry has faced significant ups and downs since 2019, beginning with the Easter attacks, followed by the COVID-19 pandemic and an economic downturn. Despite these hurdles, the country welcomed 1.4 million tourists in 2023, and the steady growth into 2024 highlights its ability to rebound and regain its status as a sought-after destination.

Strategic government intervention played a key role in this progress, with the initial step taken by the newly elected government resolving the online visa issues in September 2024 ensuring smooth travel for international visitors. The government's recognition of tourism as a priority industry underlines its commitment to fostering an inclusive economy, with ambitious targets of 3 million arrivals and USD 5 billion in

revenue by 2025.

A special ceremony was held at the Bandaranaike International Airport's Silk Route Lounge to honour the two millionth tourist. Hosted by the Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau and Airport Aviation Services Limited, the event featured traditional dance performances and the presentation of special mementos.

Sri Lanka's rich diversity continues to captivate travelers worldwide, offering everything from sun-kissed beaches to lush mountains and exotic wildlife. The country's efforts have been recognized globally, with 21 international tourism accolades in 2024 alone. These include Forbes Magazine naming Sri Lanka the fourth most popular solo travel destination, National Geographic highlighting the Pekoe Trail as one of the world's best hiking experiences, and the Wanderlust Gold Award for Most Desirable Island.

Looking ahead, the government's strategic direction focuses on creating a sustainable and inclusive tourism economy. Plans to extend free visas to travelers from 39 countries next year aim to further incentivize travel to Sri Lanka. Combined with robust PR and digital campaigns targeting key source markets, the industry is well-positioned to achieve its ambitious goals for 2025 and beyond.

Sri Lanka's two millionth tourist arrival is more than just a milestone—it is a testament to the enduring appeal of this island paradise and the collective efforts of its people and institutions. With continued focus and innovation, Sri Lanka is poised to build on this success and solidify its place as a premier global travel destination.

## Sri Lanka Tourism Awards 2024: A Grand Celebration of Excellence and Resilience

DINUSHKA CHANDRASENA



The much-anticipated Sri Lanka Tourism Awards returned on December 20th, 2024 at Cinnamon Life Colombo, after a five-year hiatus, delivering a spectacular evening that celebrated the achievements of the travel and hospitality industry.

Held under the theme "Inclusive Tourism", the 7th edition of this prestigious event honored the diversity, innovation, and contributions of all stakeholders in Sri Lanka's tourism ecosystem.

Graced by the esteemed presence of the Minister of Tourism, Hon. Vijitha Herath, and PATA CEO as the Chief Guest, who specially flew in for the occasion, the awards underscored Sri Lanka's resilience and commitment to becoming a world-class travel destination.

The event highlighted the exceptional efforts of both internationally renowned players and grassroots entrepreneurs, fostering a culture of inclusivity and excellence in the industry.

Speaking at the event, Minister Vijitha Herath emphasized the importance of recognizing the contributions of diverse stakeholders, from local vendors to luxury establishments, in revitalizing the tourism sector. "Sri Lanka's tourism story is one of resilience and potential. Tonight, we celebrate the creativity and dedication that drive our sector forward," he stated.

The evening featured the participation of

over 150 entrants competing across a wide range of categories, from sustainable practices and youth contributions to MICE tourism and excellence in service. Special focus was given to emerging sectors such as eco-tourism, nature-based experiences, and innovative marketing efforts, showcasing the dynamism of Sri Lanka's tourism offerings.

Udana Wickramasinghe, Director of Research and International Relations at the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority, noted, "This year's awards are a testament to our nation's ability to adapt, recover, and thrive despite challenges. The inclusivity and innovation celebrated tonight will inspire continued growth and global recognition for Sri Lanka."

The Sri Lanka Tourism Awards 2024 not only celebrated past accomplishments but also set the stage for a brighter future. Partnerships with international organizations such as the UNWTO and PATA further solidified the event's credibility, shining a global spotlight on Sri Lanka as a premier travel destination.

The awards marked a pivotal moment for the industry, signifying recovery from the challenges posed by the Easter Sunday attacks and the COVID-19 pandemic. As the curtains closed on this landmark event, the message was clear: Sri Lanka's tourism sector is stronger, more inclusive, and ready to make its mark on the global stage.

As Sri Lanka welcomes its 2 millionth visitor, the island is celebrating both milestones and new opportunities. While these numbers signify a strong recovery for the tourism industry, the focus must now shift toward attracting high-spending tourists. Beyond quantity, the true potential of Sri Lanka lies in positioning itself as a premium destination offering world-class experiences.

Accolades from Business Insider and Lonely Planet have recognized Sri Lanka's unique blend of natural beauty, cultural richness, and innovative services. These endorsements highlight the island's appeal and underscore the importance of curating experiences that resonate with discerning travelers.

December also marked the triumphant return of the Sri Lanka Tourism Awards, celebrating the resilience and dedication of the industry. This prestigious event acknowledged the collective efforts of stakeholders who have tirelessly promoted the island despite challenges. Such recognition serves as a reminder of the industry's pivotal role in shaping Sri Lanka's global image.

January begins on a high note with the launch of Amba Yaalu, the latest addition to Thema Collection's portfolio. Inspired by the beloved Sri Lankan novel, this innovative resort is a trailblazer, being the country's first to be exclusively operated by an all-female team. This bold initiative reflects the industry's evolving ethos, emphasizing inclusivity and empowerment.

Adding to the optimism, Emirates Airlines has increased its flights and seat capacity to Sri Lanka, enhancing accessibility for international travelers.

With such positive developments, 2025 promises to be a year of transformation for Sri Lanka's tourism sector, setting the stage for further growth and recognition as a premier global destination.

The journey ahead calls for collaboration, innovation, and a steadfast commitment to showcasing the best of Sri Lanka to the world.



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## NEWS

# Strategies for Sustained Tourism Growth: A Call for Action and Reform

TTA BULLETIN

In a recent interview on Face to Face on TV1 by Newsfirst, Malik Fernando, Chairman of the Sri Lanka Tourism Alliance, laid out a compelling vision for addressing the challenges facing Sri Lanka's tourism industry. Highlighting the need for immediate action and reform, Fernando provided a detailed roadmap to ensure the country leverages its full potential as a leading global destination.



Malik J Fernando

Fernando stressed that Sri Lanka is at a critical juncture. The current stability of the government offers a unique chance to address systemic challenges that have hindered the tourism sector. "This is a golden opportunity to enact long-overdue reforms and put tourism on a sustainable growth path," he emphasized.

While the increase in tourist arrivals is encouraging, Fernando warned against complacency. Current numbers remain far from optimal, with off-peak seasons and certain regions underperforming. He also urged caution when interpreting tourism revenue figures, many of which are often inaccurate. A focus on genuine growth metrics, rather than superficial gains, is essential to long-term success.

Fernando highlighted the importance of targeted consumer marketing and robust destination positioning to drive sustained demand at profitable rates. Beyond tourism, he advocated for a comprehensive nation branding strategy that integrates tourism with the promotion of Sri Lankan goods and services. "A well-executed nation brand can elevate our international profile and attract both visitors and investors"

Fernando called for the formation of a dedicated task force to manage a comprehensive tourism marketing campaign. He noted that existing structures are insuff-

icient to deliver impactful results. "This task force must be agile, focused, and equipped to execute a global campaign that positions Sri Lanka as a premier destination," he said.

Poorly managed attractions are a significant threat to the tourism industry's reputation. Fernando pointed to Yala National Park as an example, describing the tourist experience there as "terrible." He called for immediate improvements in the management of wildlife and cultural attractions, emphasizing that many issues can be resolved through simple process improvements rather than significant financial investments.

To enhance service quality and visitor experiences, Fernando proposed a unified management structure for Sri Lanka's wildlife and cultural attractions. Consolidating oversight under one authority would enable a more streamlined and effective approach to managing these vital resources.

"Sri Lanka has all the ingredients to be a world-class destination, but this potential will remain untapped unless we act decisively. The time to reform and innovate is now." His insights on Face the Nation underscore the urgency of embracing these strategies to ensure Sri Lanka's tourism industry thrives in the years ahead.

This interview serves as a rallying call for stakeholders across the industry to unite and drive meaningful change, securing a sustainable and prosperous future for Sri Lanka's tourism

## Sensory Indulgences featured in Forbes' list of 10 Great City Tours for Travelers in 2025

TTA BULLETIN

Sensory Indulgences Sri Lanka has secured a spot in Forbes "10 Great City Tours for Travelers in 2025." This prestigious recognition highlights the unique offerings of Sensory Indulgences, a boutique tour company renowned for curating customized experiences with local experts. The tour of Galle—a vibrant coastal city brimming with history, culture, and charm—has been spotlighted as a must-experience journey for global travelers seeking meaningful and immersive adventures.



The accolade from Forbes places Sensory Indulgences on the global map of exceptional city tours, inviting discerning travelers to explore Galle and Sri Lanka through a new lens. With a focus on experiential travel, Sensory Indulgences ensures each tour is personalized, offering a sensory journey that immerses guests in the sights, sounds, and flavors of their destinations.

Forbes described the selected tours as ideal introductions to destinations, offering travelers deeper insights through curated itineraries that highlight art, architecture, history, and culinary delights. The recognition of Sensory Indulgences cements its commitment to redefining travel in Sri Lanka by crafting personalized, sensory-driven experiences for discerning travelers.

Co- Founder, Executive Director Brindley Wijesooriya expressed his gratitude for the acknowledgment, stating: "Considering how we started, I still find it a little hard to believe where we are right now. It still feels like we're just getting started. The experiences sphere has so much potential and so little minds working on it. We're looking forward to watching this sector of tourism grow."

"The future of travel and tourism will be all about connections. In a post COVID era where loneliness is fast becoming an epidemic, the purpose of travel has evolved to fulfill the craving for connections no matter which destination people travel to. Hosted experiences are the conduit that connects travelers with a destination through meeting interesting and insightful storytellers along the way. We are glad to play the part of a catalyst driving this travel revolution in Sri Lanka, to revealing the inner fabric of our beautiful island through our local expert hosts" said Udaya Wickramage, Co - Founder, Managing Director of Sensory Indulgences.

As Sri Lanka prepares for a promising 2025 tourism season, this recognition comes as a timely reminder of the country's vast potential to captivate the world with its unique offerings.

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## Intrepid wins Big at Sri Lanka Tourism Awards 2024

TTA BULLETIN

Intrepid Travel the world's largest adventure travel company, a key player in Sri Lanka's tourism sector, has been awarded at the prestigious Sri Lanka Tourism Awards 2024, winning the Best Destination Loyal Partner, Under Travel & Tourism Operator category and being shortlisted as a finalist in Best Sustainable Practices in Specified Tourist Services. These accolades reflect the company's unwavering commitment to promoting Sri Lanka as a premier travel destination while embedding sustainability at the heart of its operations.

The awards ceremony, held on 20 December at Cinnamon Life, celebrated businesses and individuals who have been instrumental in revitalizing Sri Lanka's tourism industry amidst global challenges. Intrepid's recognition underscores its pivotal role in fostering sustainable tourism and showcasing Sri Lanka's cultural and natural treasures to the world.

Winning the Destination Loyal Partner category highlights Intrepid's long-standing partnership with Sri Lanka, bringing thousands of international travelers to experience the island's unparalleled beauty, diverse culture, and rich heritage. The company's innovative itineraries prioritize authentic local experiences while driving economic benefits to communities and preserving the environment.

Adding to the celebration, Natalie Kidd, Managing Director - Asia for Intrepid Travel, shared her thoughts: "This recognition is a testament to the incredible work of our team in Colombo and Globally. It highlights how Intrepid's dedication to sustainable travel and meaningful connections with local communities continues to elevate Sri Lanka as a destination of choice. Together, we're not just inspiring travelers but also creating lasting impacts for the people and places we visit."

In 2024, Intrepid achieved remarkable growth, welcoming over 4,000 travelers to Sri Lanka, a 209% increase from 2023, surpassing pre-COVID-19 levels. With ambitious plans to welcome over 15,000 travelers by 2030, the company aims to run 550+ small group adventure trips in 2025 which is over 75% growth from 2024, contributing significantly to Sri Lanka's tourism and growth.

Poornaka Delpachitra, Intrepid's Country

General Manager for Sri Lanka, emphasized the significance of this achievement: "We are incredibly proud and humbled to be recognized at the National Sri Lanka Tourism Awards 2024. This achievement reflects our ambition to continue growing Sri Lanka as a key destination in our source markets, driving more travelers to the island and ensuring that the benefits are shared with local communities, while prioritizing responsible and sustainable tourism practices."

Some of Intrepid's positive social impact initiatives include Intrepid Foundation's partnership with Zero Plastic Movement to create a behavioral change in combating plastic pollution, industry collaboration with Market Development Facility along with full endorsement of Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA) to promote gender equality and empower women in Sri Lanka's tourism industry, and being a leader in climate-conscious travel options and pioneering the use of electric vehicles in the island. Additionally, Intrepid recently pledge to support the Pekoe Trail as an official premium partner, further amplify new experiences what Sri Lanka has to offer in the global stage and increase its sustainable efforts.

Intrepid Travel is the world's largest adventure travel company, operating in more than 100 countries and offering diverse itineraries that cater to adventure seekers, cultural enthusiasts, and eco-conscious travelers. As a certified B Corporation, Intrepid is committed to using business as a force for good, empowering communities, and preserving the environment.

As one of the largest offices for Intrepid Travel globally, Intrepid Colombo employs over 250 staff and 35+ local tour leaders, with women representing over a third of its leadership team. The office also acts as a Centre of Excellence, supporting Intrepid's global operations across multiple functions and a fully-fledged destination management company.

This milestone win at the Sri Lanka Tourism Awards 2024 reaffirms Intrepid's dedication to sustainable travel and its role in making Sri Lanka a globally renowned travel destination. The company remains steadfast in its mission to inspire and empower travelers to explore the world responsibly while contributing to the sustainable growth of the tourism industry.



## Thema Collection Wins Prestigious Green Business Leadership Award

TTA BULLETIN

Thema Collection has been awarded the coveted Green Business Leadership of the Year Award 2024 at the Annual Green Building Awards Ceremony held at the BMICH, Colombo. The prestigious award was received by Mr. Chandra Wickramasinghe, Chairman of Thema Collection, alongside his team, in recognition of the hotel chain's exceptional commitment to green building practices and its leadership in advancing environmental sustainability and sustainable tourism within the hospitality sector.

This accolade follows a rigorous evaluation process, assessing factors such as green building certifications, energy and water efficiency, waste reduction, sustainable procurement, and innovative environmental programs. Thema Collection's holistic approach to sustainability has set a benchmark for the industry, prioritizing initiatives that positively impact the environment and uplift local communities. In the past year, Thema Collection has implemented a series of impactful measures, including energy-saving strategies, optimized water management systems, and comprehensive waste reduction programs involving recycling and composting. Single-use plastics have been phased out, and eco-friendly materials are now a staple across operations. Many of the chain's properties have been recognized for meeting green building standards, showcasing the company's commitment to responsible construction and sustainable design.

Beyond operational changes, Thema Collection has been a driving force in community engagement, conducting educational programs to promote sustainable living and fostering collaborations with local communities, schools, and organizations. By encouraging green practices and inspiring meaningful change, the organization has become a



beacon for sustainability in Sri Lanka's hospitality industry.

Thema Collection's employees play a critical role in this success, with regular training programs ensuring alignment with the company's sustainability vision. As a result, every aspect of their operations reflects their commitment to a greener, more sustainable future.

This award is a testament to Thema Collection's unwavering dedication to redefining the hospitality sector, blending luxury with sustainability for a better tomorrow.

Thema Collection remains dedicated to driving innovation in environmental sustainability. Whether through advancements in energy efficiency, water conservation, or eco-conscious procurement, we strive to lead by example in the hospitality industry. This award is a testament to the hard work and passion of our team, as well as the continued support of our guests, partners, and stakeholders.

We extend our gratitude to the Green Building Council of Sri Lanka for this honor and to everyone who has been part of our sustainability journey. As we look to the future, we remain steadfast in our mission to create meaningful, eco-friendly experiences that benefit both people and the planet. Together, we can make a lasting impact and lead the way toward a greener, more sustainable future.

## SLAPCEO Hosts 20th AGM and Unveils Women in MICE Initiative

TTA BULLETIN

The Sri Lanka Association of Professional Conference, Exhibition & Event Organisers (SLAPCEO) held its 20th Annual General Meeting recently at the Imperial Hall, Mount Lavinia Hotel, which graciously hosted the venue.

The AGM marked a significant milestone for SLAPCEO, with President Mr. M. M. Imran addressing members and stakeholders. He provided an overview of the association's achievements and actions taken during 2023/2024, highlighting its contributions to Sri Lanka's Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE) sector. Key resolutions were passed during the meeting

A significant highlight of the day was the launch of the Women in MICE initiative, an effort supported by the Sri Lanka Convention Bureau (SLCB) and organized by SLAPCEO in collaboration with BMICH, Aitken Spence Travels, Golden Isle Travels, and CDC Events & Travels.

This groundbreaking initiative aims to empower women in the MICE industry, providing a platform to foster leadership and inclusion in this dynamic field. The launch event featured a panel discussion with esteemed speakers Paddy Paul (Golden Isle Travels), Kumudu Henedige (Sri Lanka Convention Bureau), Rajani Pillai (ITC Ratnadipa) and Virazmi Aher (Sri Lankan Holidays)

These industry leaders shared valuable insights on creating opportunities for women in MICE, addressing challenges, and driving innovation and excellence within the sector. The evening concluded with a fellowship session, creating an opportunity for networking and collaboration among MICE professionals and stakeholders.

SLAPCEO continues to lead initiatives that strengthen Sri Lanka's position as a premier destination for MICE tourism, demonstrating its commitment to innovation, inclusivity, and industry growth.



## Tropical beach and Sri Lankan hospitality

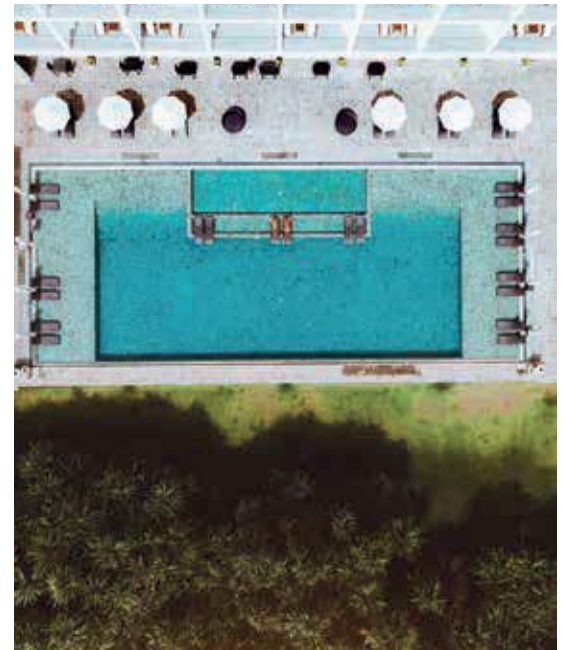
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## Bonita Odayar Appointed Country Head for Amadeus Travel Distribution

TTA BULLETIN

Amadeus Travel Distribution recently appointed Bonita Odayar as Country Head, Sri Lanka. A seasoned professional in the travel and tourism industry, Bonita brings 37 years of invaluable experience to this leadership role.



commitment to innovation and collaboration remains steadfast as we continue to deliver cutting-edge solutions to power better, more rewarding journeys for our subscribers.”

For over 25 years, Amadeus has been a pioneer in Sri Lanka’s travel industry, shaping the future of travel through innovation and collaboration. From broadening horizons to building economies, Amadeus has consistently powered progress in travel. With Bonita’s leadership, the company is poised to elevate its impact, delivering even greater value to the travel community.

Amadeus Travel Distribution Sri Lanka looks forward to continuing its journey of innovation, working closely with stakeholders to create seamless and rewarding travel experiences.

Bonita began her career at Sparklink Travels before moving to American Express, where she managed travel desks for esteemed organizations such as the US Embassy and USAID, along with other prominent corporate accounts. She joined Amadeus Lanka 25 years ago and has been instrumental in driving the company’s growth and strengthening its partnerships within the travel ecosystem.

Reflecting on her appointment, Bonita said, “It is an honor to lead Amadeus Sri Lanka into its next phase of growth. Our

## Dr. Sumith De Silva Joins the Board of the Sri Lanka Institute of Tourism & Hotel Management

TTA BULLETIN

Dr. Sumith De Silva, Head of Marketing Communications at Airport and Aviation Services Sri Lanka, has been appointed to the Director Board of the Sri Lanka Institute of Tourism & Hotel Management (SLITHM), the government’s premier institute for tourism and hospitality education.

With a distinguished academic and professional background, Dr. De Silva holds a Ph.D. in Business Management and Marketing from the Management and Science University (MSU), Malaysia. He is a Practicing Marketer (SLIM), a Certified Professional Marketer (Asia) under the Asia Marketing Federation, and an MBA graduate specializing in marketing. Dr. De Silva is also a member of the Asia Pacific

Institute of Event Management (APIEM).

As a leading professional in the fields of marketing and communication, Dr. De Silva brings invaluable expertise to SLITHM, further strengthening its mission to develop Sri Lanka’s tourism and hospitality industries. His appointment underscores a commitment to innovation and strategic growth within these sectors.

Dr. De Silva’s leadership is expected to play a vital role in shaping the future of tourism education and training in Sri Lanka, enhancing its global competitiveness and reputation



## Duminda Kuruwitaarachchi Appointed to the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority Board

TTA BULLETIN

The Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA) is pleased to announce the appointment of Duminda Kuruwitaarachchi as a member of its Board. A distinguished leader in the tourism and transport sectors, Kuruwitaarachchi brings a wealth of expertise and a visionary approach to driving sustainable growth within Sri Lanka’s tourism industry.

In his capacity as a Board member, Kuruwitaarachchi will support the SLTDA in formulating policies, overseeing strategic tourism development initiatives, and promoting Sri Lanka as a premier global destination. His leadership is expected to play a vital role in ensuring the



industry’s progress aligns with sustainable practices while contributing to the nation’s economic growth.

Kuruwitaarachchi’s appointment to the SLTDA Board coincides with his recent election to the Board of the United Federation of Travel Agents Association (UFTAA) during its Extraordinary General Assembly and Annual General Assembly. This global recognition highlights his contributions as the President of the Travel Agents Association of Sri Lanka (TAASL) and Managing Director of Travel Outlook Ltd., with over 27 years of entrepreneurial experience in the travel industry.

## Eventex Awards unveils 2025 events industry trends report

TTA BULLETIN

Eventex Awards, the world’s leading awards for events and experience marketing, has released its annual report exploring upcoming trends in the events industry. The Eventex 2025 Events Industry Trends Report offers structured expert insight on how the events industry will move forward next year and beyond.



The report features contributions from the Eventex Awards 2025 jury, which comprises some of the most influential figures in the events industry across the globe, including renowned journalists from leading event magazines, heads of associations, representatives of convention bureaus, top influencers, and thought leaders.

“Event professionals have taken artificial intelligence in stride, successfully incorporating it alongside other technologies to elevate events, experiences, services, and venues. As AI matures, the industry will see new challenges such as adapting to budget constraints and global uncertain-

ty,” notes Ovanes Ovanessian, Co-founder of Eventex Awards. Eventex Awards will continue to celebrate the ways the industry deploys creativity and innovation to rise above the challenges while preserving the magic of human connection that lies at the heart of every event.

Founded in 2009 to celebrate creativity, innovation, and effectiveness in the industry, today Eventex Awards is the most esteemed international awards in the world of events and experiential marketing. Every year, the awards highlight the best agencies, events, tech, suppliers, and venues from the world of events.

## Australian Influencers Amplify the Island’s Allure

TTA BULLETIN

Sri Lanka recently played host to four renowned Australian-based social media influencers in a groundbreaking digital marketing initiative aimed at rejuvenating the country’s tourism industry. This carefully curated campaign, organized by the Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau (SLTPB), concluded successfully on December 16th, 2024, as the influencers returned to their home countries, leaving a trail of mesmerizing content that has already garnered global attention.



During their 12-day journey, these influencers explored Sri Lanka’s breathtaking landscapes, vibrant culture, and warm hospitality. From the golden beaches of Mirissa to the ancient majesty of Sigiriya, and from the tranquil hills of Nuwara Eliya to the wildlife spectacle at Yala National Park, their content vividly captured the island’s rich diversity. Real-time updates, immersive stories, and high-quality imagery flooded social media, offering their millions of followers a virtual taste of Sri Lanka.

This campaign’s impact has been extraordinary, particularly in positioning Sri Lanka as a prime travel destination for Australian tourists. The combined reach of the influencers—over 1.5 million followers on Instagram and TikTok—has sparked a wave of engagement, with potential

travelers expressing keen interest in visiting the island. Posts featuring Sri Lanka’s iconic landmarks and unique experiences have already accumulated hundreds of thousands of likes, comments, and shares, amplifying the nation’s visibility across global travel communities.

Luana Soares Ostling, with over 1 million Instagram followers, showcased Sri Lanka as a hub for luxury and leisure, while Simran Gulati’s content resonated with wellness and lifestyle enthusiasts. David Yiu Wai Chin’s artistic photography emphasized the country’s natural beauty and cultural richness, while Dylan Mahoney’s TikTok videos offered a fun, adventurous perspective, particularly appealing to younger audiences.

The success of this initiative was made possible through the collaboration of local tourism stakeholders who provided complimentary services to support the campaign. Their contributions reflect a collective commitment to revitalizing Sri Lanka’s tourism sector, showcasing the country as a destination that caters to diverse traveler interests.



As Sri Lanka looks to capitalize on this momentum, the ripple effects of this campaign are expected to fuel a resurgence in international arrivals. By leveraging the global reach of these influencers, Sri Lanka has not only attracted immediate attention but has also planted the seeds for sustainable growth in its tourism industry. The journey may have ended, but the story of Sri Lanka continues to inspire the world.

## Sri Lanka Convention Bureau Partners with Uva Wellassa University to Promote MICE Tourism and Develop Future Professionals

TTA BULLETIN

The Sri Lanka Convention Bureau (SLCB), in collaboration with Uva Wellassa University, successfully organized an interactive educational session aimed at promoting Sri Lanka as a prime destination for international, regional, and domestic conferences, meetings, exhibitions, and incentive travel.

The event which was held on 17 December at Uva Wellassa University, saw the enthusiastic participation of 80 young bright mind undergraduates, who are poised to be the future professionals of the Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE) industry.

The primary objective of the program was to highlight Sri Lanka's potential as a competitive destination for MICE tourism while simultaneously fostering the development of professional skills among university students. The initiative reflects SLCB's commitment to empowering the younger generation and positioning Sri Lanka as a global hub for business tourism. This session covered the timely topics such as Understanding of MICE events, Expectations of an Event Organizer & Customers as well as the topic on How to build your MICE career with Digital Marketing.

Mr. Dheera Hettiarachchi -Chairman SLCB delivered an inspiring address that highlighted the importance of developing local talent to meet the growing demands of the global MICE industry.



He further mentioned that "This program is not just about promoting Sri Lanka as a destination it's about equipping young minds with the knowledge and skills needed to excel in this dynamic sector," said Mr. Hettiarachchi.

The event was graced by the presence of distinguished invitees, Vice Chancellor -Senior Professor Kolitha B Wijesekara, Dean Mr. Dhananjaya Nawarathne, and Head of Department Ms. Chathuri Dhanthararyana from Uva Wellassa University.

The event featured insightful discussions, presentations and interactive sessions conducted by the industry professionals Mrs. Paddy Paul, Mr. Ziyen Ameen and Mr. Gihan Samarasekera. This session educated participants about the opportunities available in the MICE sector and its contribution to the national economy.

The Sri Lanka Convention Bureau, as the country's leading MICE authority, remains committed to nurturing local talent while strengthening Sri Lanka's reputation as a premier destination for business and incentive travel.



## Tourism as a driver of rural empowerment: UN Tourism Global Conference concludes in Viet Nam

TTA BULLETIN

UN Tourism joined with the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism of Vietnam to host the First Conference on Tourism for Rural Development in the historic town of Hoi An. The event brought together government officials, international and regional financial institutions, development agencies, tourism professionals, rural community leaders, researchers and NGOs to explore policies and strategies to maximize the role of tourism in progressing development in rural areas.

Sessions spotlighted the power of tourism to create jobs, safeguard nature and cultural heritage, and promote social inclusion, with a focus on empowering local communities, women and youth. Key discussions included topics such as policy frameworks

for rural tourism development, growing agriculture and tourism synergies to drive sustainability, market access and integration, innovative digital tools and funding mechanisms to support rural destinations, entrepreneurs and community-led initiatives.

Opening the conference Zoritsa Urosevic, Executive Director, UN Tourism said: "This landmark event has demonstrated the immense potential of tourism to transform rural communities. By placing people and planet at the center of our discussions, we have fostered meaningful connections and actionable strategies that will ripple across rural areas worldwide. Together, we have sown the seeds for a more inclusive and sustainable future."

## Sri Lanka Elevates Luxury Tourism at ILTM 2024

TTA BULLETIN

Sri Lanka Tourism displayed its potential of taking on major source markets as France, by promoting Sri Lanka as a key holiday destination equipped with everything that a traveler needs. This initiative was taken at the International Luxury Travel Mart (ILTM) 2024, in Cannes, France, which is one of the world's leading luxury travel events. The event took place from December 2-5, marking the largest edition of the event up to date, with a record of over 85,000 scheduled meetings. Over 2350 brands from 105 countries participated, alongside an extensive programme of networking events. Sri Lanka Tourism also participated showcasing its unparalleled luxury travel offerings alongside 12 Industry partners, Promoting exclusive luxury segments.

The ILTM 2024 started on the 02nd of December 2024 with a grand opening ceremony including a forum, with globally recognized Industry experts, who addressed an audience of more than 3000 participants featuring inspirational presentations for the Global luxury and travel community.

After a lapse of four years, Sri Lanka Tourism participated at this event for the fourth consecutive year. As France is an important source market for Sri Lanka, the Sri Lankan travel Industry partners did their best to showcase their promotional material in order to lure the participants to consider about their next holiday destination. The promotional material, themes and attractive locations of Sri Lanka attracted the visitors and were very much impressed with what the destination had to offer.

ILTM Cannes also hosted over 100 of the world's most influential travel editors, which was a significant part of the event, from all publications and platforms that are the voice of luxury travel to their high net worth readers and communities around the world. Several of these travel advisors and exhibitors praised the event and made their positive comments regarding the occasion.

The creative design of the Sri Lanka stand stood out from the rest and many visitors were seen interested in the colorful cultural performances done by the traditional dance troupes. It was a dynamic yet an interesting experience for all those who participated in the event to know about the different cultures, traditions and tourist locations of each country. Sri Lanka's participation also included B2B meetings



with the foreign Industry stakeholders and discuss about encouraging more French tourists to visit Sri Lanka, and build more business partnerships. Mr. Viranga Bandara, Assistant Director handling the French Market, represented SLTPB. The participation was successful as a lot of visitors expressed their interest in visiting Sri Lanka. The Sri Lanka delegation consisted of 12 Industry stakeholders such as ArTravele Sri Lanka, Ayu in the Wild Holidays (Pvt) Ltd, Anantara Peace Haven Tangalle Resort, Travel Design by CDC (Pvt) Ltd, Sri Lanka in style, Atypique Lanka (Pvt) Ltd, The Fabulous Getaway, Boutiques in Sri Lanka, Authenticities, Galle Face Hotel, Cuurate, and Sri Lanka Tailor Made.

Alongside the initiatives taken by the new government to develop the tourism sector along with its increasing tourist arrivals, this was an ideal opportunity to express Sri Lanka's latest promotional activities, projects and initiatives planned in the long run. The participants seemed to be much impressed with the unique boutique and luxury products offered by Sri Lanka, apart from its culture, history, spectacular locations and authentic cuisine.

The four-day event offered a dynamic mix of exclusive pre-scheduled business appointments, insightful educational sessions and impactful networking opportunities, all of which showcased Sri Lanka's unique charm and potential as premier destination for luxury travelers.

ILTM 2024 has proven to be an invaluable platform for exposure, connecting us with global luxury travel professionals and reinforcing Sri Lanka's position on the world tourism map. Given the necessary exposure, The French market can be a very crucial one to Sri Lanka to increase the current growth of tourist arrivals.

Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau (SLTPB) participated at the ILTM 2024, in collaboration with the Sri Lankan Embassy in France, adding to the impactful presence of Sri Lanka at ILTM 2024. Up to 11th December 2024, 84,009 tourist arrivals from France have been recorded, and being ranked the 6th place among the top 20 source markets for Sri Lanka.



## FITUR Woman 2025 will be putting a spotlight on women's leadership in tourism

TTA BULLETIN

The section, organised by FITUR together with Women Leading Tourism (WLT), is celebrating its fifth edition focused on boosting women's sense of pride in belonging to the tourism sector.



Madrid, 17 December 2024 - The International Tourism Trade Fair, organised by IFEMA MADRID and taking place from 22 to 26 January, will be the setting for FITUR WOMAN, the space that provides visibility to the role of women in the tourism industry. Organised by FITUR and Women Leading Tourism (WLT), it is celebrating its fifth anniversary with the support of Extremadura and under the concept 'Pride of Belonging', which will be exploring the emotional bond of people with tourist destinations and their impact on the social well-being and sustainable development of countries, regions and local communities.

Alongside this, women's leadership will be the central theme of FITUR WOMAN, which will bring together prominent leaders from the business and government spheres to highlight how women and their role in the management of companies and public bodies can elevate pride in tourism to a new level.

Maribel Rodríguez, president of Women Leading Tourism, stresses that "It's time to

intelligently manage, with the participation of all actors, safeguarding the sense of belonging of the resident population in tourist areas. We must avoid depersonalisation; authenticity is not only a key differentiating value for destinations, but also an opportunity for regions seeking to position themselves in the global market in a sustainable and competitive way. Promoting tourism in this way not only attracts visitors, but also generates a local sense of pride, preserves heritage and ensures the well-being of future generations.

Extremadura is presenting itself this year at FITUR Woman as an example of how to integrate female leadership into the development of tourism that preserves local identity and generates opportunities. A reference destination in terms of sustainability that promotes a tourism sector with a triple positive impact on the environment: social, environmental and economic. We support FITUR Woman as a space that inspires and gives visibility to the role of women as a driving force for change in the tourism sector.

## PATA Signs Organisational Partnership with VNU Asia Pacific for Asia's First B2B Travel Tech

### Launchpad: Travel & Tech Asia 2025

TTA BULLETIN

The Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) and VNU Asia Pacific have signed a landmark Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to drive advancements in travel technology across the Asia Pacific region. This strategic collaboration will spearhead the inaugural Travel & Tech Asia 2025, scheduled for July 2-3, 2025, at the Queen Sirikit National Convention Center (QSNCC) in Bangkok, Thailand.

The MoU was officially signed by PATA CEO Noor Ahmad Hamid and VNU Asia Pacific General Manager Chaisong Churitt on November 29, 2024, at PATA Headquarters in Bangkok.

Mr Hamid emphasised the importance of technology in shaping the travel and tourism industry, stating, "This collaboration with VNU Asia Pacific, a distinguished PATA member, leverages their extensive expertise in staging tech-related events across the Asia Pacific region. Timely and relevant, this inaugural event will address the growing demand for travel technology, cybersecurity, cross-border



payments, and the broader evolution of the travel and tourism industry."

"VNU Asia Pacific is honoured to partner with PATA, an organization that has been instrumental in promoting sustainable growth in travel

and tourism across the Asia-Pacific region," said Mr Churitt. "Through this partnership, we aim to create a meaningful impact by providing a platform where industry professionals can explore emerging trends, build strategic alliances, and embrace the innovations shaping the future of travel and tourism."

Organised by VNU Asia Pacific, the inaugural Travel & Tech Asia 2025 is a significant B2B trade fair dedicated to advancing travel technology in Thailand and the Asia Pacific region. Centred on digital transformation, sustainability, and smart tourism, the event will serve as a pivotal platform for tourism professionals to collaborate, innovate, promote sustainable growth, and forge strategic partnerships.

## Celebrating 2500 Trip Advisor Reviews: A Momentous Milestone for Sri Lankan Tourism

TTA BULLETIN

Blue Lanka Tours has become the first Sri Lankan tour operator to receive 2500 Tripadvisor reviews. The accolade becomes even more impressive due to the consistent 5-star reviews. The company is ushering in a new era of responsible tourism, focusing on personalised and unique experiences that showcase a dynamic Sri Lanka to the world. It is especially commendable considering what the local tourism sector endured between 2019-2022, experiencing adversity, one after another. Regardless of the ordeals, Blue Lanka Tours has demonstrated unwavering dedication to high-quality services that have satisfied thousands of travellers to this small island.

Speaking about the new feather in their cap, founder and managing director of BLT Dinesh N Perera said: "It is a simple concept executed with commitment by all of us. We want everyone who books their travels with us to enjoy their time on the island and leave with beautiful, cherishable memories. Our operation is customer-centric. We put effort into every bit of detail to make every itinerary perfect. We see our clients not as tourists but as travellers with a universal sense of wonder and adventure who want to discover the extraordinary and authentic that make their travels worth every penny and air mile. We also want them to learn how remarkable Sri Lanka is, not just the landscape but also the people and culture."

Blue Lanka Tours does more than showcase the beauty of Sri Lanka to global visitors. The company also works towards preserving the island's beauty and uplifting the lives of local communities that enhance that beauty. A laudable CSR action has given

rise to two pioneering initiatives in Sri Lanka's tourism industry.

Blooming Smiles is one of the initiatives that provides educational materials, equipment and supplies to schools and schoolchildren in rural Sri Lanka. BLT teams travel hundreds of miles to find remote villages and impoverished communities to lend a helping hand. These are usually places that often get overlooked and neglected. However, as a tour operator, BLT encounters diverse communities living far and wide on the island.

Blue Lanka Tours also advocates animal welfare with Island Sanctuary by collaborating with operators, service providers, communities and organisations that protect wildlife and improve the lives of animals in Sri Lanka. BLT actively supports wildlife corridors and safe passage projects, elephant bypass electric fences projects, wildlife rescue & rehabilitation centres, habitat restoration and protection and anti-poaching initiatives.

The consistent recognition and praise Blue Lanka Tours has received from the global community are the fruits of tireless dedication by a skilled destination management team that has grasped the true meaning of travel. Always resourceful with a fleet of luxury vehicles, attentive tour guides, a portfolio of over 1000 accommodation properties and reliable relationships with service providers, travellers are in safe and capable hands with BLT. And, with 2500 consistent 5-star Tripadvisor reviews, the company has achieved the most significant credibility, the one bestowed by the people.

## Redefining Work and Travel in Thailand

TTA BULLETIN

The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) has unveiled the highly anticipated "Workation Paradise Throughout Thailand Season 2" project, spotlighting a new way to blend work and travel with cutting-edge Pop-up Workspaces and the exciting "100-Baht Voucher" promotion. The programme is scheduled to run from December 2024 through March 2025.

Ms. Thapanee Kiatphaibool, TAT Governor, stated "Workation is an emerging trend as flexible working models allow professionals to work from anywhere. This project caters to Digital Nomads and Remote Workers while stimulating weekday travel. I am confident it will establish Thailand as a leading workation destination, driving tourism revenue and economic activity."

With a focus on high-season tourism (December through April), the initiative underscores Thailand's commitment to innovative travel offerings and sustained economic growth.

Mr. Kittipong Prapatpong, Deputy Governor for Digitalisation, Research and Development, added, "The Workation

Paradise Throughout Thailand Season 2 project fosters weekday travel and promotes extended stays and increased spending on tourism-related services. We deeply appreciate the collaboration from all industry partners and anticipate this initiative will significantly benefit local economies, drive job creation, and support Thailand's tourism goals."

The "Workation Paradise Throughout Thailand Season 2" builds on four years of success under the Workation Thailand campaign, first launched in 2020. This initiative continues to recognise the transformative impact of combining work and travel, aiming to stimulate weekday tourism, extend travellers' stays, and boost spending on tourism services. Encouraging professionals to explore Thailand's iconic destinations while working remotely, the campaign further underscores the country's position as a top-tier workation destination.

This campaign highlights Thailand's innovative approach to tourism, offering a unique blend of professional convenience and leisure.





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## Classic Destinations Appoints Chalaka Gajabahu as Head of Destinations

TTA BULLETIN

Classic Destinations, the inbound travel arm of Expolanka Holdings, is proud to announce the appointment of Chalaka Gajabahu as its new Head of Destinations. This strategic leadership move underscores the company's commitment to driving Sri Lanka's tourism industry to new heights.



Chalaka Gajabahu

Lanka's tourism recovery. My vision is to build on the solid foundation the company has established, leveraging my expertise to elevate the country's tourism offerings and contribute to its sustainable growth."

Classic Destinations, renowned for its tailor-made travel solutions and dedication to exceptional service, views this appointment as a significant step forward in strengthening Sri Lanka's appeal among international travelers.

"Chalaka's deep understanding of the global travel landscape and his proven ability to market Sri Lanka's unique offerings make him an invaluable asset to our team," said a spokesperson for Classic Destinations. "We are confident that under his leadership, we will unlock new opportunities for growth and solidify our position as a leading inbound travel operator in Sri Lanka."

With a renewed focus on innovation and collaboration, Classic Destinations is poised to usher in a new era of tourism excellence, further cementing Sri Lanka's reputation as a must-visit destination.

Chalaka Gajabahu, the former Chairman of the Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau (SLTPB), brings with him a wealth of experience in branding and marketing Sri Lanka as a world-class travel destination. During his tenure at SLTPB, he spearheaded innovative global campaigns that showcased Sri Lanka's vibrant culture, natural beauty, and rich heritage to a global audience.

As Head of Destinations, Chalaka will lead Classic Destinations' efforts to enhance Sri Lanka's positioning in the competitive global tourism market. His role will include forging new partnerships, creating bespoke travel experiences, and crafting targeted strategies to attract diverse traveler segments.

Commenting on his appointment, Chalaka said "I am delighted to join Classic Destinations at a pivotal time for Sri

## Business Insider Names Sri Lanka a Top 'Under-the-Radar' Destination for 2025

TTA BULLETIN

Sri Lanka has been spotlighted by Business Insider as one of the most underrated destinations to explore in 2025. In their feature, the publication tackled a common challenge: whether you're a frequent traveler or someone who makes just one trip a year, deciding where to go can be overwhelming. To help narrow it down, Business Insider turned to travel planners for their expert insights on hidden gems their clients are increasingly asking about.

Among the recommendations, Kimberly Denison, a Virtuoso travel advisor, named Sri Lanka as a rising star for 2025. This recognition highlights the island's growing reputation for offering diverse experiences in a compact, accessible setting.

Sri Lanka's breathtaking beaches and lush rainforests have caught the attention of adventurers and leisure travelers alike. From surfing on golden coasts to hiking through the Pekoe Trail, the country provides numerous activities for nature enthusiasts.

Additionally, the island's geographical diversity and efficient accessibility make it easy to explore multiple attractions with minimal travel time. Whether transitioning from serene beaches to misty hill country or visiting ancient cultural landmarks and wildlife-rich national parks, Sri Lanka offers a seamless and immersive travel experience.

Sri Lanka was highlighted alongside Bhutan as one of the favoured Asian destinations for 2025. Both countries offer unique cultural charm and a sense of exploration. However, Sri Lanka stands out for its blend of vibrant traditions, warm hospitality, and opportunities for both relaxation and adventure.

With its inclusion in Business Insider's list, Sri Lanka is well positioned to welcome more travelers eager to uncover its wonders. Whether it's enjoying a tranquil sunrise on a southern beach, trekking through lush rainforests, or indulging in flavorful local cuisine, Sri Lanka promises unforgettable experiences for every kind of traveler.

## Prego Colombo Joins Amari Colombo's Culinary Portfolio

TTA BULLETIN

ONYX Hospitality Group is thrilled to announce the debut of its renowned Italian dining brand, Prego, at Amari Colombo, marking a new chapter in Sri Lanka's gastronomic scene. Since its inception in 2003 at Amari Koh Samui, Prego has gained a reputation for delivering authentic Italian cuisine, becoming a favourite for tourists and locals alike before expanded to many more outlets within Thai market. Now, this celebrated culinary experience arrives in Colombo, offering the city a taste of Italy in its most refined form.



"Prego's 21-year journey has been about staying true to authentic Italian roots," said Chef Marco Boscaini. "Bringing Prego to Colombo allows us to share such passion and tradition with a vibrant, new audience."

As Prego Colombo opens its doors, it invites diners to indulge in a timeless Italian experience, tasting the time itself – a perfect complement to the luxurious ambience of Amari Colombo.

ONYX Hospitality Group is a leading Asian hospitality brand, with a growing portfolio of hotels and resorts across South-east Asia. Prego's expansion into new territories underlines ONYX's commitment to creating innovative and authentic dining experiences. Colombo's culinary landscape is about to be transformed as Prego Colombo opens its doors within the luxurious Amari Colombo. Helmed by Chef Marc Boscaini, a passionate advocate of authentic Italian cuisine, Prego promises to bring a slice of Italy to Sri Lanka, blending generations of family traditions with a contemporary dining experience.

Prego is more than just a restaurant – it's an immersion into Italy's culinary traditions, crafted by Chef Marco Boscaini, whose menu is rooted in childhood memories and culinary mastery. All the recipes serve at Prego are more than 100 years of Boscaini's family heritage. Signature dishes like the famed Risotto alla Montanara, which has earned recognition among the Top 100 Dishes by Gallo Guide, alongside wood-fired pizzas and house-made pasta, showcase the heart of Italian dining at its finest.

## ATM 2025 to address soaring growth within the aviation sector as connectivity takes centre stage

TTA BULLETIN

Several leaders from the international aviation sector are expected to participate in the 32nd edition of Arabian Travel Market (ATM), which will take place at Dubai World Trade Centre (DWTC) from 28 April to 1 May 2025, discussing some of the most pressing topics in the industry.



New technology will also be addressed due to its increasing role in supporting airports

and airlines to drive operational efficiencies and reduce costs. Artificial intelligence (AI), for example, supports aviation industry professionals in various ways, from streamlining the customer journey to tracking weather, optimising routes, and even undertaking predictive maintenance. It has become an integral tool for the aviation industry, analysing scenarios to determine potential disruptions and providing data-driven decisions that minimise risk.

Several sessions are slated to take place throughout the four-day event, covering a variety of trending topics, ranging from sustainable aviation and new technology to the return of corporate travel and the rise of airport entertainment, under the show theme, 'Global Travel: Developing Tomorrow's Tourism Through Enhanced Connectivity'.

One particular topic expected to garner attention is the anticipated increase of sustainable aviation fuel (SAF), which, according to the latest findings from the International Aviation Transport Association (IATA), has seen SAF production double in 2024 to 1 million tonnes, with production expected to top 2.1 million tonnes in 2025.

Regionally, Emirates and Etihad have significantly reduced CO2 emissions using SAF on routes including Singapore Changi Airport, Amsterdam, London Heathrow, Paris, Lyon, Oslo, and Japan.

Leading examples include London Heathrow Airport's pilot AI-assisted air traffic control system, the Japan Airlines AI-powered baggage management system, and Gatwick Airport's AI-powered smart-stand technology, developed to enhance how aircraft turnarounds are managed.

Danielle Curtis, Exhibition Director ME, Arabian Travel Market, said: "At ATM, we recognise the critical importance of addressing the latest trends and innovations shaping the aviation industry. New technology and the increased use of sustainable fuels will be a game-changer for the sector, with far-reaching benefits for years to come."



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Beyond the adventures, the resort offers a peaceful retreat, with a refreshing pool, rejuvenating spa treatments, and exquisite dining that highlights the island's vibrant flavours. The spacious duplex family rooms provide a comfortable base, perfect for unwinding after a day of adventure. With its ideal mix of action and relaxation, Occidental Paradise Dambulla is the ultimate destination for both adventure lovers and those seeking tranquility.

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# HOTELS

## Browns Hotels & Resorts Wins International Gold Accolade at Green Apple Environment Awards 2024

TTA BULLETIN

Browns Hotels & Resorts (BHR) was recently awarded the prestigious International Gold Winner title in the Hospitality & Travel: Conservation & Wildlife category at the Green Apple Environment Awards 2024, held at Kensington Palace, London. This recognition celebrates BHR's exemplary mangrove conservation efforts, particularly its Ratha Milla (Lumnitzera littorea) project, spearheaded by Thaala Bentota Resort in collaboration with the Department of Wildlife Conservation.



The Ratha Milla, a critically endangered mangrove species native to Sri Lanka, was rediscovered in the Bentota estuary and Dedduwa lagoon after being unrecorded for over a century. Previously believed to be limited to the Madu River Ramsar Wetland, recent ecological studies have identified over 100 young plants, aged 10 to 20 years, marking a significant milestone in biodiversity conservation.

Launched earlier this year, the conservation project included a series of impactful initiatives such as installation of informational signage at the Bentota mangrove site to raise awareness on the vital role mangroves play in coastal ecosystems. Community educational sessions were also conducted, bringing together locals, tourists and environmental officials to discuss the importance of protecting the Ratha Milla and mitigating threats to its survival. Monthly excursions to the mangrove site provided hotel guests with a unique opportunity to experience the delicate balance of mangrove ecosystems and their contributions to biodiversity, carbon sequestration and coastal protection.

Speaking on the recognition, Eksath Wijeratne, CEO of Browns Hotels &

Resorts shared, "At Browns Hotels & Resorts, we believe that sustainability is an integral part of how we operate and the experiences we offer. Our work on the Ratha Milla project, which has gained global recognition, is just one example of our dedication to preserving Sri Lanka's rich natural heritage. Alongside this, we are involved in mangrove conservation in Gin Oya, managing a turtle hatchery in Mirissa and enhancing various wildlife conservation efforts across our resorts, while engaging our hotel teams, communities and guests. Our focus is always on creating memorable, responsible travel experiences that help safeguard Sri Lanka's wildlife and ecosystems for future generations."

The Ratha Milla project is currently thriving under the leadership of Rohan Gamage, General Manager of Thaala Bentota Resort and his team, who are committed to its continued success. Patrick Fernando, Niroshan Gallage, Dilina Mendis and Nimesh Kuruvita from Thaala Bentota

and BHR have been instrumental in bringing the initiative to life, from engaging with the community to implementing conservation efforts on-site. Additionally, key collaborators from the Department of Wildlife Conservation, including Wildlife Ranger, Saman Nishantha and Asanka Gunawardane, Head of the Marine Division in Hikkaduwa, have been vital in supporting the project and ensuring its success.

This international recognition highlights Browns Hotels & Resorts' commitment to sustainability on a global stage, with the Ratha Milla project serving as a testament to BHR's dedication to environmental conservation and biodiversity protection.



## The Grand Relaunch of Cheers at Cinnamon Grand Colombo

TTA BULLETIN



Cinnamon Grand Colombo, renowned for its iconic hospitality experiences, proudly unveiled the newly relocated Cheers at its Lobby Level on 19th December 2024. The grand relaunch event was graced by Mr. Krishan Balendra, Chairperson of John Keells Group, as the Chief Guest, alongside honored guests, media personnel, and invitees.

The evening began with a warm welcome to the distinguished attendees, followed by a celebratory toast led by Mr. Kamal Munasinghe, General Manager of Cinnamon Grand Colombo and Area Vice President of Cinnamon Colombo Hotels. Expressing his gratitude, Mr. Munasinghe remarked: "Today, as we relaunch Cheers in its stunning new location, I extend my deepest gratitude to everyone who has made this possible – the John Keells Group Management Committee, the Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts Executive Committee for their unwavering support, and our valued guests for their continued patronage. A special thank must also go to Mikael Svensson, CEO of Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts, and Hishan Sinhawansa, Deputy CEO of Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts, for their invaluable guidance and support in developing such a unique location for our valued guests. This new beginning is a testament to our collective effort to redefine hospitality and create

memorable experiences for all who walk through our doors." Situated at the Lobby Level, Cheers boasts a contemporary and vibrant ambiance with a seating capacity of 248, making it the ideal destination for casual get-togethers, sports viewings, and lively socializing. Guests are treated to a hearty menu featuring classic British pub fare, carefully curated by Chef Kapila, Executive Chef of Cinnamon Grand Colombo. The menu includes signature comfort foods, vegan options, and an exclusive Sunday carvery offering a selection of roasted meats, soups, salads, and desserts served tableside.

The beverage menu, curated by world-renowned bartender Atilla Skaif, complements the dining experience with an exquisite selection of local and international wines, spirits, craft beers, and signature cocktails. Cheers' Happy Hour, running from 5:00 pm to 7:00 pm (Monday to Thursday), offers 50% off on an array of drinks, ensuring an elevated yet affordable experience.

Cheers continues to cater to a wide audience, including local residents, young professionals, sports enthusiasts, and families, offering live music every evening with performances by some of Colombo's favorite musicians.

## MAC Holdings Enters Sri Lanka's Luxury Hospitality Industry with the Acquisition of Serene Pavilions

TTA BULLETIN

MAC Holdings (Pvt) Ltd. is proud to announce a significant milestone in its journey as it enters Sri Lanka's luxury hospitality industry with the acquisition of Serene Pavilions Private Limited. This marks the company's debut into the high-end hospitality sector with its very first hotel property, the renowned Serene Pavilions.

Situated along the picturesque coastline of Wadduwa, Serene Pavilions epitomizes the pinnacle of luxury, serenity, and indulgence. Nestled within a breathtaking 5.5-acre property surrounded by lush gardens, aromatic Araliya blooms, tranquil ponds, and swaying palm trees, this exclusive retreat redefines elegance and refined living in Sri Lanka.

The property features 12 luxurious pavilions (16 rooms), each designed to ensure unmatched privacy and personalised service for discerning guests. Adding to the allure, all beach villas come equipped with private plunge pools and jacuzzis, offering an intimate sanctuary for relaxation.

The acquisition of Serene Pavilions underscores MAC Holdings' unwavering



commitment to excellence and innovation as the company continues to expand and diversify its portfolio. Once renovations are complete, the property will be rebranded, marking a new chapter in its legacy while further elevating Sri Lanka's reputation as a world-class luxury destination.

"This acquisition represents an exciting new venture for MAC Holdings as we step into the luxury hospitality sector. Serene Pavilions will serve as a testament to our vision of enhancing Sri Lanka's hospitality offerings to meet the highest international standards," the company stated.

The rebranding of Serene Pavilions will usher in a new era of luxury experiences, combining exceptional service, bespoke amenities, and the natural beauty of Sri Lanka's coastline to create unforgettable memories for every guest.



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## Passion and Seamlessness: The Secret Sauce for Commercial Success

TTA BULLETIN

In a rapidly evolving hospitality landscape, the synergy between sales, marketing, revenue management, and distribution can no longer operate in silos. Instead, a seamlessly integrated ecosystem is pivotal for achieving commercial success. Bharath



Bharath Satyavolu

Satyavolu, Vice President of Commercial for ONYX Hospitality Group, Thailand's premier management company for luxury hotels, resorts, serviced apartments, and luxury residences, shares his insights on building this ecosystem, fostering collaboration, and ensuring the brand's position as a leader in the industry.

"Passion and cohesiveness," Bharath begins, "are the secret sauce for commercial success. When sales, marketing, revenue, and distribution function cohesively, we create a well-oiled machine that not only drives results but also sets benchmarks for the industry."

At Amari Colombo, ONYX Hospitality Group's flagship property in Sri Lanka, this philosophy underpins every strategy. "We have a clear vision to align all commercial functions within the ecosystem. This means breaking down silos, ensuring cross-functional collaboration, and adopting a shared objective of delivering exceptional guest experiences with world-class standards, all while meeting financial goals," Bharath elaborates.

In today's digital era, the number of customer touchpoints has expanded, making it essential for departments to collaborate effectively. Bharath highlights this necessity:

"When revenue management, for example, operates in isolation from Sales and Marketing, we miss the opportunity to optimize pricing strategies in real time. Similarly, if sales teams are unaware of digital marketing campaigns, they overlook valuable leads. By integrating these areas and aligning them with our brand vision, we ensure that every initiative not only complements the others but also adapts to market needs—while steadfastly upholding the strength and consistency of our brand standards."

Amari Colombo's ecosystem thrives on advanced technology platforms that enable data sharing and insights across teams. This integrated approach allows the hotel to

- Tailor marketing campaigns to target high-value segments.
- Implement dynamic pricing strategies informed by real-time market trends.
- Optimise distribution channels to maximize revenue potential.

Building such integration isn't without its challenges. Bharath shares that one of the biggest obstacles is changing traditional mindsets.

"Hospitality businesses have historically operated in silos. Shifting to a model where every function collaborates requires a cultural transformation. At ONYX Hospitality Group, we've invested heavily in training and fostering a culture of open communication," he says.

Another challenge lies in technology adoption. "While there are excellent tools available, aligning them to our specific goals and ensuring that teams are proficient in using them takes time and resources," Bharath adds.

Technology serves as the backbone of this integrated ecosystem. As with all properties at ONYX Hospitality Group, Amari Colombo has embraced advanced systems for revenue management, and digital marketing automation.

"These tools allow us to track customer journeys from the first touchpoint to post-stay feedback. By centralising this data, we create a unified view of each guest, which informs everything from pricing to personalised marketing," Bharath explains.

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning has further enhanced their capabilities. "Predictive analytics helps us anticipate guest needs, while automated processes ensure efficiency without compromising the human touch," he adds.

Amari Colombo's commercial strategy has already delivered remarkable results. Bharath highlights a recent success story: "We launched a targeted campaign focused on the primary markets driving demand for Colombo. By integrating dynamic pricing, engaging social media initiatives, and direct sales efforts, we aligned all functions to achieve impressive occupancy rates within the hotel's first month of operation."

Another notable achievement was the seamless integration of revenue management and distribution strategies for the hotel's high-yield room categories. "Through in-depth analysis of market demand and the strategic use of dynamic pricing, we not only maximized occupancy but also significantly enhanced the hotel's profitability," Bharath explains.

As ONYX Hospitality Group returns to Sri Lanka with Amari Colombo, the focus is on creating a lasting impact. Bharath emphasises that the hotel's commercial success will set the tone for future properties in the region.

"Amari Colombo is more than a hotel; it's a statement of ONYX Hospitality Group's commitment to Sri Lanka. By integrating commercial functions and maintaining a passionate approach, we're not just achieving financial goals—we're shaping a brand legacy," he says.

## Club Hotel Dolphin by Browns Hotels & Resorts Crowned Sri Lanka's Best 4-Star Resort at Sri Lanka Tourism Awards

TTA BULLETIN

Club Hotel Dolphin, Waikkal, a standout property in the Browns Hotels & Resorts portfolio, proudly clinched the award for the Best 4-Star Resort in Sri Lanka at the prestigious 7th Sri Lanka Tourism Awards, organised by the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA). The accolade celebrates the resort's exceptional contribution to Sri Lanka's tourism industry and its commitment to delivering star-class hospitality infused with signature Sri Lankan warmth.

This year's Sri Lanka Tourism Awards ceremony brought together industry pioneers, emphasising the importance of promoting sustainable growth, inclusivity and service excellence. At the awards ceremony, Thurashath Niyatapala, General Manager of Club Hotel Dolphin, accepted the prestigious honour on behalf of the entire team. The property's dedicated staff were also present to celebrate the achievement, reflecting the team's commitment to guest satisfaction and heartfelt service, which continues to set new benchmarks in the industry.

Commenting on the achievement, Eksath Wijeratne, CEO of Browns Hotels & Resorts stated: "Being recognised as Sri Lanka's best resort in its category is a true reflection of the resilience and dedication of our team. As the largest all-inclusive club operation by a Sri Lankan hotel company, we take pride in creating experiences that go beyond expectations. Through challenging times, we have stayed true to our promise of delivering vibrant energy, warm Sri Lankan hospitality and an immersive cultural connection.



With an incredible team and a loyal base of repeat guests who return time and again, Club Hotel Dolphin remains a place where unforgettable memories are created. We will continue to raise the bar and redefine hospitality standards in Sri Lanka."

Situated just 20 minutes from the Bandaranaike International Airport and spread across 14 acres of Waikkal's coastal land, Club Hotel Dolphin offers an unparalleled getaway for travellers seeking relaxation, adventure and entertainment. The property features two swimming pools, including the largest pool on the island and a variety of activities such as archery, badminton, squash, billiards and beach volleyball. Guests can also indulge in expansive culinary offerings, from authentic Sri Lankan dishes to gourmet international delicacies, complemented by finely crafted beverages created by award-winning mixologists. The resort's renowned animation team keeps the energy alive with vibrant cultural shows, lively theatre performances, and interactive activities tailored for all ages, ensuring there is never a dull moment at Club Hotel Dolphin. The resort is also celebrated for its longstanding repeat guest base, with many visitors returning over twenty or even thirty times to relive their cherished experiences.

With the award for the Best 4-Star Resort in Sri Lanka, Club Hotel Dolphin continues to reflect the vision of Browns Hotels & Resorts – creating spaces that not only deliver memorable stays but also celebrate the essence of Sri Lankan hospitality.

## Anantara Lawana Returns with Beachfront Bliss, Revitalised Spaces, and Island Experiences

TTA BULLETIN

Anantara Lawana Koh Samui Resort, located on the stunning northern end of Chaweng Beach, unveils a fully enhanced resort following 10 weeks of extensive renovations. The reopening marks a complete refurbishment of its public areas, as well as an array of exciting new features and experiences, including a fully renovated beachfront, a redesign of landscaped public spaces, and new and elevated dining experiences at Cay Restaurant, Ocean Kiss, and the resort's award-winning Tree Tops Signature Dining.

The resort's design draws inspiration from the traditional Sino-Thai shophouses of Nathon Old Town, reflecting Koh Samui's rich Chinese merchant heritage. Its 122

luxurious guest rooms, suites, and pool villas are thoughtfully crafted to tell the island's story. The Anantara Pool Access Villas feature maritime-inspired interiors in cool blue hues, while the Anantara Pool Suites incorporate bird motifs, celebrating Koh Samui's iconic bird-singing competitions. The unique Four/Five/Seven Villas Anantara Lawana Residences, centred around a shared lap pool (20–28 metres), are perfect for multi-generational holidays.

The resort refurbishment also includes an upgraded pool deck and beachfront area which have both been enhanced with a new bamboo deck replacing the previous wood, refreshed pool tiles, and restored lush greenery surrounding the pool and beach.

## Cinnamon Lakeside Colombo Hosts Renowned Chinese Chefs for an Unforgettable Culinary Festival

TTA BULLETIN

Cinnamon Lakeside Colombo is delighted to present the Chinese Food Festival, a three-day extravaganza of authentic Chinese cuisine and culture from January 20th to 22nd, 2025. The festival promises an extraordinary culinary journey, featuring world-renowned Chinese chefs, traditional performances, and immersive experiences that celebrate the essence of Chinese gastronomy and heritage.



and artistry to the festival.

Chef Yang Luming, Deputy Head Chef of the Asian Games and Head Chef of Sichuan Cuisine at the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in Macao, is another star attraction. Chef Yang's mastery of Sichuan flavors and his contributions to Chinese gastronomy have earned him immense recognition. Guests can look forward to his exquisite interpretations of classic dishes.

Chef Chen Qi, a Chengdu Technical Expert specializing in cold and hot dishes, completes the stellar lineup. Renowned for his ability to preserve the authenticity of Sichuan cuisine while adding a contemporary touch, Chef Chen will captivate attendees with his culinary artistry.

The festival will feature a curated selection of authentic Chinese dishes that highlight regional flavors, from the bold and fiery notes of Sichuan cuisine to the delicate and nuanced dishes from across China. Each creation will be a testament to the chefs' dedication to preserving the rich culinary traditions of their homeland.

At the heart of the festival is an exceptional lineup of visiting celebrity chefs whose expertise and accolades have elevated Chinese cuisine on the global stage.

Chef Lan Minglu, Chairman of the prestigious French Blue Ribbon and Executive Vice Chairman of the Famous Chef Committee of the Chinese Cuisine Association, will lead the culinary showcase. A celebrated figure in the international culinary community, Chef Lan is also the Vice President of the Sichuan Provincial Sichuan Cuisine Foreign Exchange Promotion Association. Known for his innovative approach to Sichuan cuisine, Chef Lan brings a wealth of experience

## The Cathay Group surpasses the 100,000-passenger milestone on a single day

TTA BULLETIN

The Cathay Group is pleased to announce that it has achieved a significant milestone by carrying more than 100,000 passengers, the most on a single day since the start of its rebuild.



destinations for our customers and our home hub. A new chapter has now begun for Cathay."

Cathay Pacific recently resumed its seasonal service to Cairns, Australia and will be launching several long-haul routes in 2025, including Hyderabad in India, Dallas in the United States, and Munich and Brussels in Europe. In addition, HK Express added Shizuoka, Japan to its network recently and will be launching a new service to Sendai, Japan later this month.

Together as a Group, Cathay Pacific and HK Express have reached 100% of pre-pandemic flights from January 2025. It is projected that the two airlines will operate passenger services to 100 destinations around the world within 2025, marking another meaningful milestone for the Cathay Group.

With the commissioning of the Three-Runway System, Hong Kong has entered an exciting new era. As the city's home airline, Cathay will continue to contribute to Hong Kong's status as a world-leading international aviation hub, connecting Hong Kong, the Chinese Mainland and the world.

In December 2024, Cathay Pacific and HK Express, the Group's two passenger airlines, carried a combined total of 100,856 passengers, surpassing the 100,000-passenger mark on a single day.

Since the milestone was first reached, the Group exceeded the 100,000-passenger mark on a total of eight days during the year-end travel peak ending 31 December 2024.

Cathay Group Chief Executive Officer Ronald Lam said: "We are thrilled to have concluded the year 2024 on a high note with yet another milestone. The past year saw unprecedented progress and expansion for the Cathay Group, thanks to our people's dedication and efforts. In particular, I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to our global frontline teams, who have been working tirelessly over the holiday period to ensure that our customers enjoy a smooth journey as they explore new destinations or reunite with their friends and families during the holidays.

"We are pleased to have successfully completed our two-year rebuilding journey, during which we were firmly focused on adding more flights and

## Hilton Yala Resort Wins Prestigious Accolades at the World Luxury Hotel Awards 2024

TTA BULLETIN

Hilton Yala Resort, Sri Lanka's newest wildlife retreat, has been honored with three prestigious titles at the World Luxury Hotel Awards 2024: Best Interior Design (Global), Luxury Wildlife Resort (Continent), and Luxury New Resort (Continent). Opened in August 2023, the resort has quickly established itself as a premier destination, offering guests an exceptional blend of comfort and adventure.

Located in the buffer zone of the Yala National Park, Hilton Yala features 42 elegantly designed villas, each offering an immersive experience surrounded by the natural beauty of the area. The resort's design incorporates modern architecture with natural elements, featuring state-of-the-art rooms and public spaces that harmoniously blend comfort with the surrounding environment.

"At Hilton Yala Resort, our goal is to offer a personalized experience that exceeds customer expectations. We want every guest to leave with unforgettable memories, not just of our resort, but of Sri Lanka

as a whole," stated Gitanjali Chakravarthy, General Manager of the Resort.

She continued, "My team and I are committed to providing an authentic, responsible tourism experience. We want every guest who visits to feel connected to the rich culture and wildlife of Sri Lanka while enjoying exceptional service and hospitality. We take great pride in ensuring that each guest's stay is memorable, meaningful, and sustainable."

As part of Hilton's global commitment to responsible tourism, Hilton Yala Resort promotes eco-friendly practices and supports the local community. Guests are encouraged to explore Sri Lanka's rich wildlife and natural landscapes in a way that respects and preserves the environment for future generations.

For travelers seeking a star-class yet authentic Sri Lankan experience, Hilton Yala Resort offers a one-of-a-kind retreat where modern luxury premium hospitality meets the natural beauty of Sri Lanka.



## British Airways unveils its brand-new First class

TTA BULLETIN

British Airways has unveiled its brand-new First seat, combining elegant design with expert British craftsmanship, reflective of modern British luxury travel. The new cabin forms part of the airline's A380 retrofit plans, expected to take to the skies in mid-2026.

The airline's new First has been carefully designed to provide the feel of a modern luxury hotel, alongside home comforts and thoughtful British touches at 35,000ft. The seat has been beautifully curated by expert designers and world-class manufacturers from all corners of Great Britain and Ireland, including London, Glasgow, West Yorkshire, Kilkeel and Dublin.

The new seat is ultra-wide (36.5 inches), with a bed length of 79 inches, and features a multi-purpose ottoman and elegant stowable table, a 32-inch 4K TV screen, adjustable mood lighting including scenes such as 'relax', 'dine' and 'cinema'. The seat can be adjusted with the touch of a button to find the perfect level of comfort and is located within a cocooned 60-inch curved wall for ultimate privacy, whilst still providing a spacious environment.

For customers travelling together in the centre of the cabin, the divider slides open to create a shared lounge space, and the stowable tables mean customers can enjoy 'buddy dining' in the seat with their travel companion.

The elegant curves throughout the cabin take inspiration from British Airways' Concorde wings, giving a natural flow to the space and creating a welcoming environment. Customers can now simply wheel their luggage into their personal luggage space, making it even easier to settle in before their flight.

Elsewhere, the suite features an ambient light with an eye-catching design that subtly references the airline's speedmarque and further nods to Concorde. The suite features window blinds, activated by buttons on the internal control panel for all three windows per seat. The soft panelling inside the seat also helps with acoustics and absorbing sound, which adds to the sense of being in a cocooned, private space. Customers can also use the seat's brand-new 'do not disturb' functionality on its wireless control tablet, which notifies crew if they wish to maximise their rest on board.

## Mount Lavinia Hotel Rings in the New Year with a Spectacular Moulin Rouge-Themed Celebration

Mount Lavinia Hotel ushered in the new year with an unforgettable, Moulin Rouge-inspired evening that brought the heart of Paris to Sri Lanka. The theme, "Moulin Rouge - Une Nuit à Paris," transformed the hotel's iconic terrace into a vibrant Parisian nightlife scene, complete with red lighting, cancan dancers, and a lively blend of English and French comperes, making

the night feel like a true escape to the City of Lights.

With over 500 guests in attendance, the event was nothing short of magical

"We wanted to create an experience that was not only fun but also uniquely tailored to our guests. The Moulin

Rouge concept perfectly complements the character of Mount Lavinia Hotel and resonates with our clientele. The combination of the Moulin Rouge theme, a spectacular fireworks display, and exceptional food and music made for an unforgettable New Year's Eve celebration," said Anura Dewapura, Chief Operating Officer of Mount Lavinia Hotel. "







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# AIRLINES

## Emirates to introduce additional flights to/from Colombo

TTA BULLETIN

Emirates, the world's largest international airline, will operate an additional scheduled service between Colombo and Dubai, starting from 2 January 2025. The newly-introduced flight, to operate as EK654/655, increases the seat capacity on the route by 30 percent and supports Sri Lanka's plans to considerably increase tourist arrivals in 2025.

The additional service will operate six times a week until 31 March 2025. EK654 will depart Dubai International Airport (DXB) at 10:05hrs (every day except Wednesdays) arriving at Bandaranaike International Airport (BIA), Katunayake at 16:00hrs (all times are local). The return flight, EK655 will depart BIA at 22:05hrs and reach DXB at 01:05hrs (the following day). From 1 April 2025, a seventh weekly flight on Wednesdays will operate with an adjusted departure time of 22:05hrs, arriving in DXB at 00:55hrs while the return flight from will depart Dubai at 13:20hrs and arrive in Colombo at 19:15hrs.

The additional flight can accommodate up to 360 passengers, with eight suites in First Class, 42 Business Class and 310 Economy Class seats, offering a premium customer experience while enhancing convenience and choice with an expanded flight schedule. Emirates currently operates two direct flights between Colombo and Dubai and a third daily service via Male.

"These are exciting times for Sri Lanka's



tourism industry, which is looking at significant growth between 2025 and 2030," said Rashid Al Ardha, Emirates' Country Manager for Sri Lanka & Maldives. "As an airline that has played an integral role in the country's tourism industry for nearly 39 years, Emirates is committed to support the industry's growth aspirations, and this additional flight is one example of how we plan to contribute to the nation's tourism goals."

"By providing additional flights with convenient timings, we plan to enhance connectivity for passengers when travelling to and from significant feeder markets within our network," continued Rashid.

Emirates and Sri Lanka Tourism share a long-standing strategic partnership, collaborating on initiatives and programmes designed to boost tourism to Sri Lanka by showcasing the destination to customers across its global network. Sri Lanka Tourism recently announced its vision to appeal to eco-conscious travellers by highlighting the island's rich natural and cultural resources. Furthermore, with the boost in capacity on the Colombo-Dubai route, Emirates will contribute to achieving the country's tourism targets of attracting 3 million visitors by 2025.

Emirates began operations to Sri Lanka in

## Flyadeal To Serve Pakistan In Major Expansion Drive

TTA BULLETIN

flyadeal is to launch scheduled flights to Pakistan's commercial capital, Karachi, effective 2 February 2025, marking the start of a major international expansion drive by Saudi Arabia's leading low-cost airline.

Pakistan's largest city and financial centre will be served twice-weekly from both the Saudi capital, Riyadh, and commercial hub of Jeddah. The new flights also herald flyadeal's first scheduled services to Pakistan and South Asia.

Tickets are now bookable on the flyadeal mobile App, via the airline's website [www.flyadeal.com](http://www.flyadeal.com) and through local travel agents.

Steven Greenway, flyadeal Chief Executive Officer, said: "Building on the strong cultural and historical links between the Kingdom and Pakistan, and acknowledging the demand for air travel given the commercial, pilgrim and family ties of both countries, it was just a matter of time before flyadeal opened its newest air corridor.

"I would like to applaud the Pakistani authorities and our planning team for working diligently to bring a new market into flyadeal's family of year-round destinations, with more cities in Pakistan in the pipeline. Having successfully operated Hajj charters to Pakistan this



year, the two new Karachi routes also mark our entry into South Asia for the first time with scheduled services."

Added Greenway: "After developing a solid domestic operation across Saudi Arabia over the years, international growth is now our focus during 2025 for what will be an exciting year of expansion as more aircraft join the fleet."

A number of destinations in South Asia, Europe, Middle East and North Africa are due to be inducted into flyadeal's network over the next 12 months. Its growing international footprint supports the nation's Saudi Vision 2030 to attract over 150 million domestic and international tourists annually within six years.

Just seven years old, flyadeal currently operates almost 30 domestic and international year-round and seasonal destinations in the Kingdom, Europe, Middle East and North Africa from its three main bases of Riyadh, Jeddah and the eastern province capital of Dammam.

In just 5 weeks' time, beginning January 1, flyadeal will expand its Dammam operations with the launch of domestic flights to Najran, Tabuk and Yanbu. In addition, January 1 also marks the launch of flyadeal services from Riyadh and Jeddah to the Jordanian capital, Amman.

## SriLankan Airlines FlySmiLes Goes Live with Reimagined Website

TTA BULLETIN

SriLankan Airlines' frequent flyer programme, FlySmiLes, has gone live with a reimagined website that introduces several standout features, offering

seamless access and reward redemptions alongside many other intuitive functionalities for its nearly 800,000 global members. The platform is designed to bring exceptional ease and privileges, enhancing the travel experience for FlySmiLes members throughout their journeys and beyond.

Dimuthu Tennakoon, Head of Worldwide Sales and Distribution of SriLankan Airlines, stated, "The new FlySmiLes website exemplifies our unwavering commitment to delivering a superior customer experience. It marks a significant step forward in how we engage with and reward our loyal customers. With its enhanced, user-friendly features, the website empowers members to access exclusive rewards and personalised offers anytime, anywhere."

Chamara Perera, Group Head of Information Technology of SriLankan Airlines, added, "Developed entirely in-house, this project reflects the remarkable talent and innovation within our airline. The collective efforts of our teams ensured that every detail and feature of the website met the specific needs of our frequent flyers. By integrating cutting-edge technology, the website strikes the perfect balance between

practicality and aesthetics, serving as a comprehensive digital front for FlySmiLes and providing solutions for nearly every member requirement."

Members can now effortlessly navigate their personalised dashboard, check their FlySmiLes miles balance and track their membership tier progress. What's more, buying, transferring, and gifting miles has never been simpler. The platform also offers a seamless user experience with social login, enabling members to sign in using their Google or Facebook accounts. For added security, an OTP (One-Time Password) has been enabled for transactions, all integrated smoothly with a range of payment options, including American Express, Visa and MasterCard.

The website makes managing redemption vouchers a breeze, by making it possible to request, redeem, modify or cancel with just a few clicks. It also offers easy access to a variety of other vouchers, such as lounge access vouchers for co-branded cardholders, excess baggage vouchers and vouchers from non-airline partners.

FlySmiLes offers Platinum, Gold, Classic and Blue membership levels, while Silver membership is exclusively available for SriLankan Airlines' co-branded credit card



holders. As a member of the oneworld® Alliance, FlySmiLes is part of an elite group of the world's leading airlines working as one to give frequent international travellers a superior travel experience. Members can enjoy

special privileges and rewards, including access to over 600 lounges in over 1,000 destinations worldwide. Members can earn and redeem FlySmiLes miles whenever they travel, whether with SriLankan Airlines, oneworld member airlines, oneworld affiliate airlines or any partner airlines. For more information, visit the new website at [www.flysmiles.com](http://www.flysmiles.com)



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## SriLankan Airlines Toastmasters Raises a Toast to 22 Years of Excellence

TTA BULLETIN

The SriLankan Airlines Toastmasters Club, the second oldest corporate club in Sri Lanka, recently raised a toast to a well-travelled legacy and its equally promising future at its 22nd Annual Officer Installation Ceremony, held at the SriLankan Aviation College in Katunayake.

The event was attended by the Chief Guest and former Head of Human Resources at SriLankan Airlines, Sunil Dissanayake, who founded the Club in 2002, along with divisional representatives of Toastmasters: Ganga Fernando, District Director of District 82; Niroshan Nadarajah, Program Quality Director of District 82; Shabry Shamoon, Division Director of Area H, District 82; and Nimshi Palihawadana, Area Director of Area H4. Other attendees included members of the Senior Management Team of SriLankan Airlines, as well as presidents and members of neighbouring Toastmasters clubs, along with current



members of the airline's club.

The newly installed executive committee of the SriLankan Airlines Toastmasters Club has set its sights on the Golden Gavel, the most prestigious award in Toastmasters, as its next goal. The new committee members are: Kapila Chandra, Club President; Olarika Neerodha, Vice President of Education; Pubudu Wijerathne, Vice President of Membership; Vimukthi Dissanayake, Vice President of Public Relations; Nisanka Senarathne, Secretary; Dilshan Peiris, Treasurer; and Dakshitha Fernando, Sergeant-at-Arms. With a clear vision for the future, the SriLankan Airlines Toastmasters Club is eager to present its next chapters of success in the years ahead.

## Turkish Airlines Sets Guinness World Records™ title for the “Most Countries Flown to by an Airline”

TTA BULLETIN

Turkish Airlines, which has held the title of flying to the most countries in the world since



2012, has been officially recognized by Guinness World Records™ as the record holder. The national flag carrier has successfully achieved the Guinness World Records™ title for the “Most Countries Flown to by an Airline”.

The record certificate was presented at Santiago Arturo Merino Benítez International Airport following Turkish Airlines' inaugural flight to Chile. The ceremony was attended by Turkish Airlines executives and Guinness World Records™ officials.

Based on Guinness World Records™ evaluation criteria, Turkish Airlines set the record with flights to 120 countries, reflecting only the active routes of the past 12 months. Nevertheless, including temporarily suspended routes and today's inaugural flight to Chile, Turkish Airlines' flight network now spans 131 countries.

Commenting on the record, Turkish Airlines CEO Bilal Ekşi stated, “We are delighted to be in Santiago, Chile, our newest route launched today, and to receive the Guinness World Records™ title for the Most Countries Flown to by an Airline. As the only airline to hold this distinction for over a decade, we proudly showcase the strength of our flight network and reinforce our mission to connect people, cultures, and destinations around the globe.”

Talal Omar, VP – MENA & Türkiye,

Guinness World Records™ said: “Today, we mark a distinguished milestone for Turkish Airlines, whose steadfast commitment to connecting the world exemplifies vision and excellence in aviation. This remarkable achievement affirms its vital role in the global aviation landscape, reaching more international destinations than any other airline. We offer our congratulations to Turkish Airlines on this extraordinary accomplishment and declare them, with great distinction, Officially Amazing™.”

Established in 1933 with a fleet of five aircraft, Star Alliance member Turkish Airlines has a fleet of 491 (passenger and cargo) aircraft flying to 352 worldwide destinations as 299 international and 53 domestics in 131 countries. More information about Turkish Airlines can be found on its official website [www.turkishairlines.com](http://www.turkishairlines.com) or its social media accounts on Facebook, X, YouTube, LinkedIn and Instagram.

Established in 1997 as the first truly global airline alliance, the Star Alliance network was founded on a customer value proposition of global reach, worldwide recognition, and seamless service. Since its inception, it has offered the largest and most comprehensive airline network, with a strong emphasis on enhancing the customer experience throughout the entire Alliance journey.

## EFTA's record graduate cohort creates steady pilot pipeline for aviation

TTA BULLETIN

Courage, commitment and passion were all in evidence at Emirates Flight Training Academy's (EFTA)



fifth graduation ceremony, which marked the academy's biggest cohort to date. EFTA also announced the launch of an Advanced Diploma in Pilot Licensing Training (Aeroplane) on the back of the academy's recognition as an Accredited Training Provider (ATP) by the UAE National Qualifications Centre (NQC).

The graduation ceremony was headlined by His Highness Sheikh Ahmed bin Saeed Al Maktoum, Chairman and Chief Executive Emirates Airline & Group, the Group's senior leadership team, graduates, their families and friends, and the academy's faculty and cadets.

HH Sheikh Ahmed congratulated and presented certificates to the cadet graduates. He said: “Our Emirates Flight Training Academy was built on a vision and a solid strategy, and its journey so far has been nothing short of inspiring, even thrilling. The recognition by the NQC validates our commitment and our robust investments in our academy that is future-fit for the next generation.

“EFTA plays a vital role in nurturing the next generation of pilots, not just for the industry in the UAE but for world aviation, creating a steady and talented pilot pipeline. It's incredible that we are training, developing and empowering young adults to drive the future of aviation – right here in Dubai. I'm confident our graduates will make their mark in shaping the future of our industry. Congratulations to the class of 2024!”

After months of rigorous training on the ground and in the skies, 85 bright and talented cadets are now fully equipped to take on every aviator challenge. The cohort includes 67 UAE National and 18 international cadets. Since EFTA's launch, 271 cadets have been transformed from school leavers with no knowledge of flying to world-class professional pilots. EFTA also honoured four cadets for their exceptional performance throughout the year: Humaid Al Hammadi, Abdulla Raeisi, Alessandro

Muffolini and Sarah Shah; and Abdulla Alkaabi for being the most diligent.

Capt Abdulla Al Hammadi, Divisional Vice President Emirates Flight Training Academy said: “Today, we've witnessed not just a graduation ceremony, but the fulfilment of many collective dreams. After countless hours of hard work, challenges and accomplishments, our cadets have proven they are ready to conquer the skies. They've come far – both personally and professionally – and EFTA is proud to see them step into a world full of opportunities with their new and richly deserved wings. Congratulations to our graduates!”

“Our new Advanced Diploma in Pilot Licensing Training will be available to all EFTA graduates and will provide a strong academic foundation for future professional pilots, complementing the exceptional practical skills they've developed with us. At EFTA, we continue to elevate aviation education and prepare the next generation of skilled aviators, further supporting the GCAA\* and strengthening the UAE's aviation industry.”

The Diploma, with 94 credit hours, paves the path for cadets to obtain Bachelor's and Master's degrees from any university. Every cadet in the class of 2024 completed around 113 weeks of training with over 1,100 hours of ground-based and 270 hours of flight training. Located in Dubai South, the Academy combines cutting-edge learning technologies and a modern fleet of 32 training aircraft to train cadets with no previous knowledge of flying.

This year marked a brand new chapter in EFTA's international journey as the academy is well on its way to achieving European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) accreditation in early 2025. With this, cadets who graduate from EFTA will receive both a GCAA and an EASA\*\* licence, opening doors to exceptional career opportunities worldwide.

## Etihad Airways Unveils 10 NEW Destinations Starting in 2025

TTA BULLETIN

Etihad Airways, the national airline of the United Arab Emirates, today announced the launch of ten new destinations starting in 2025. Etihad now serves 93 destinations including operating and announced passenger and freighter services.

This announcement is part of the airline's rapid expansion program allowing Abu Dhabi to extend its renowned hospitality to more visitors from around the globe. The ten new destinations include Atlanta, Algiers, Chiang Mai, Hanoi, Hong Kong, Krabi, Medan, Phnom Penh, Taipei and

Tunis and complement Etihad's previously revealed new destinations for 2025: Prague, Warsaw, and Al Alamein.

The addition of Atlanta, Georgia, a bustling metropolis and a major business and transportation hub, underscores Etihad's commitment to increasing connectivity between the U.S. and Abu Dhabi. Furthermore, the expansion as a whole is set to bring tens of thousands of new visitors directly to Abu Dhabi, boosting the airline's position as a premier destination for leisure, business, and cultural tourism.



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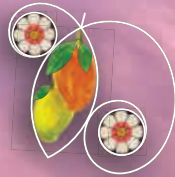
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