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**AMBA YAALU KANDALAMA
MARKS ONE YEAR OF REDEFINING
WOMEN-LED HOSPITALITY
IN SRI LANKA**



Boat & Marine Show Sri Lanka 2026



BOAT & MARINE
SHOW

SRI LANKA 2026
9TH EDITION | SINCE 2008

South Asia's most focused and largest international Boat & Marine Show Sri Lanka 2026 will be held from 30th January 2026 at the Port City - Colombo. This boat and marine show in Sri Lanka is organized to show case the country's capabilities in recreational boating, yachting, marine tourism, boat building and related services for export and local markets.

To attract the younger age groups towards boating, in addition to the boat and ship building sector, water sports events geared to the younger generation including wake boarding, water skiing, jet ski racing, wind surfing, catamaran and dinghy racing, try a boat event run by sailing clubs, fashion show linked to a nautical theme, fishing events and demonstrations, music, F and B court, classic car rally and display (With the local club), Sri Lanka cultural display especially those linked to the sea, events for school children, marine tourism, ocean academy, Sun & Sand Festival etc. will be added.

Following the success of Boat Show Sri Lanka 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014, 2016, 2018 & 2023 the upcoming boat and marine show will attract large number of buyers and visitors, boating enthusiasts, and industry professionals from countries such as India, Singapore, Maldives, South Korea, Belgium, Middle East, Germany, Holland, UK, Seychelles etc.

Organized by the Chamber of Marine Industries Sri Lanka and managed by CDC Events (Pvt) Ltd, the show is backed by the (Ministry of Industry and Entrepreneurship,) Foreign Affairs, Employment and Tourism, and the Sri Lanka Export Development Board (EDB). This strong endorsement underscores Sri Lanka's ambition to become a regional hub for boating, yachting, marine tourism, and boat and ship building.



Comprehensive Sustainable Tourism Plan by the government

The Sri Lankan government has introduced a comprehensive Sustainable Tourism Plan aimed at safeguarding the country's environment and boosting its economy. The plan focuses on promoting eco-friendly accommodations, engaging local communities, conserving wildlife, improving waste management, and marketing sustainable tourism to both domestic and international audiences. While challenges like funding and public awareness exist, the future direction involves creating a framework that balances economic growth with environmental stewardship. The government encourages travelers and stakeholders to support sustainable practices to preserve Sri Lanka's natural and cultural heritage. You can read more about Sri Lanka's Sustainable Tourism Plan.

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Amba Yaalu
KANDALAMA

Celebrating One Year of Amba Yaalu Kandalama: A Journey of Empowerment and Connection

Chandra Wicramasinghe
Chairman, Managing Director

Amba Yaalu Kandalama proudly marks its first anniversary, a year built on the vision of being 100% women-led, where heartfelt hospitality and meaningful guest experiences intertwine with the empowerment of women in the community. Speaking at the anniversary celebrations Chandra Wickramasinghe, Chairman of Thema Collections told gathering that this milestone is not just a celebration of operational success but a testament to the collective spirit and dedication of the team that has come together to create a space rooted in care, purpose, and connection.

From its inception, Amba Yaalu Kandalama has been more than just a destination; it has been a movement aimed at uplifting women and fostering a supportive environment. The establishment was founded with the belief that when women lead, communities thrive. This philosophy is reflected in every aspect of the guest experience,

from the warm welcome at the door to the personalized service delivered by a team of passionate women committed to excellence. In just one year, Amba Yaalu Kandalama has successfully created a haven for travelers seeking authentic experiences that resonate with the essence of Sri Lanka. The establishment has welcomed numerous guests who have enjoyed the unique blend of local culture, culinary delights, and unparalleled hospitality. Through partnerships with local artisans and businesses, Amba Yaalu has also contributed to the economic empowerment of women in the region, ensuring that their stories and crafts are celebrated and shared.

The past year has seen the launch of various initiatives aimed at fostering community engagement. Workshops led by local women have allowed guests to immerse themselves in traditional crafts, cooking classes, and cultural storytelling sessions, creating lasting memories and connections between visitors and the community.



One of the standout features of Amba Yaalu Kandalama is its commitment to heartfelt hospitality. Every team member embodies the spirit of warmth and care, ensuring that each guest feels valued and at home. The feedback received has been overwhelmingly positive, with many guests highlighting the genuine connections they formed with staff and the community during their stay.

As part of their anniversary celebrations, Amba Yaalu Kandalama is hosting a special event to honor the women who have been integral to its success. This gathering will not only celebrate the past year but also serve as a platform to share stories of empowerment, resilience, and hope. Attendees will enjoy cultural performances, local cuisine, and a showcase of the crafts made by local women, further emphasizing the establishment's commitment to community engagement.

As Amba Yaalu Kandalama reflects on its achievements over the past year, the team is excited about the future. "This journey has only just begun. We look forward to welcoming many more stories, smiles, and milestones ahead," said a Wickramasinghe. With plans to expand its

offerings and deepen its community ties, the establishment is poised to continue its mission of empowerment and connection. Changing the face of hospitality in Sri Lanka, Thema Collection during the weekend ceremonially opened its latest theme hotel, the four star 'Amba Yaalu', fully operated and managed by women, on the banks of the picturesque Kandalama Lake.

Chairman of the company, Chandra Wickremesinghe said, "Our objective is to empower women by opening new frontiers for them in the hospitality industry which is a male-dominated profession and, to harness their talents. Amba Yaalu Kandalama stands as a shining example of what can be achieved when women lead with passion and purpose. As they celebrate this pivotal year, they invite everyone to join them in their journey of heartfelt hospitality, meaningful experiences, and the empowerment of women in Kandalama and beyond.

The company has invested Rs. 800 million on the property with 50 percent on bank loans and the rest from private funds, while the land was leased by the Mahaweli Authority.

CLAUDE GUNASEKERA



Sri Lanka Unveils Hidden Secrets Dambulla on January 24

Sri Lanka will unveil Hidden Secrets, Dambulla on January 24. "True to its name, Hidden Secrets, Dambulla reveals surprises at every turn, inviting travellers not just to stay, but to explore, connect, and uncover the hidden treasures of the region, while supporting a vibrant living community and embracing meaningful, responsible travel" said Nalin Malwenna the owner of the property and Managing Director of H.O.T Tourism.

"Hidden Secrets' is the country's first boutique hotel thoughtfully designed around three core pillars of tourism which are community, nature, and history" said Nalin Malwenna the owner of the property and Managing Director of H.O.T Tourism. He said around 300 families call the village home, while 50-100 villagers work daily preparing traditional Sri Lankan meals in nine mud houses, inviting guests to experience the genuine rhythms of village life. "This initiative not only creates sustainable livelihoods but also transforms the village into both a living community and a shared cultural space, where meaningful connections naturally unfold" further revealed Malwenna.

He invites guests to discover seven unique nature-based experiences that showcase Sri Lanka's breathtaking environment. From gliding across a tranquil lake on catamaran boats and cycling through lush village trails to exploring local farms, birdwatching, staying in treehouses, and enjoying authentic Sri Lankan lunches in mud houses, each experience is designed to foster a deep connection with nature and local traditions.

Nestled in a man-made village, the property places local life at its heart. Set amidst a timeless landscape, the property offers an intimate escape with nine villa rooms and a presidential suite featuring a private plunge pool, providing a serene and luxurious base for travellers seeking authentic and immersive experiences. Surrounded by the dramatic Boulder Range rocks, guests can wander through ancient formations and village pathways that echo the timeless relationship between people and the land. The natural rock structures and surroundings reflect the enduring heritage of Dambulla, offering a profound sense of place shaped by history and tradition.

CLAUDE GUNASEKERA



Nalin Malwenna
Managing Director



Nishansala Malwenna
Director, CEO

Sri Lanka Emerges as Australia's Third Fastest-Growing Travel Destination!

In a remarkable twist in the tourism landscape, Sri Lanka has officially claimed the title of the third fastest-growing travel destination for Australian holidaymakers in 2025, boasting an impressive 19 percent increase in arrivals year-on-year. According to the latest statistics from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), the picturesque island nation now ranks just behind outshining well-established regional competitors.

The recent data reveals a notable transformation in travel preferences, with 132,390 Australians choosing to visit Sri Lanka throughout the year. This surge not only highlights Sri Lanka's appeal but also positions it ahead of traditional heavyweights in the Australian outbound travel market, indicating a robust recovery trajectory for the nation's tourism sector.

Matthew Duckworth, Australian High Commissioner in Sri Lanka, highlighted the growing trend of Australian tourism to Sri Lanka, stating: "It's evident that Australians have developed a profound love for traveling to Sri Lanka, a destination renowned for its stunning landscapes, rich heritage, and warm hospitality. Recent statistics reveal an encouraging trend: more Australians than ever are choosing to visit this beautiful island paradise. This surge in interest is particularly significant because Australians are not only more likely to travel extensively within the country, but they also tend to spend more during their vacations compared to tourists from other regions.

This insight opens up exciting avenues for Sri Lanka to enhance its tourism strategy. By crafting a well-targeted and dynamic approach, we can capitalize on this momentum to further increase the number of Australian visitors by 2026. Our collaboration with the Sri Lankan government is vital in this regard, as we strive to create tailored experiences that showcase the diverse beauty, vibrant culture, and unique adventures awaiting in Sri Lanka. Together, we aim to entice even more Australians to witness firsthand the incredible offerings of this remarkable country, making their journeys unforgettable!"

While Sri Lanka is basking in this growth, it still faces the challenge of catching up with the front-runners of the Australian outbound market. Established favorites like Indonesia and New Zealand continue to dominate in sheer visitor numbers. However, industry analysts suggest that Sri Lanka's remarkable 19 percent growth rate is more significant than the modest increases seen in these saturated markets, as the island carves out a distinctive niche as an alternative travel route.

A pivotal factor driving this anticipated growth is a substantial enhancement in air connectivity. Currently, the primary service on this route is provided by SriLankan Airlines, which offers daily direct flights from Melbourne and additional direct services from Sydney. These connections have been essential for recovery, further bolstered by transit options via Singapore and Kuala Lumpur.



Matthew Duckworth
Australian High Commissioner in Sri Lanka

Kanishka Udawatta, Director of Sales at Shangri-La Hotels Sri Lanka, highlighted the evolving nature of the Australian market, emphasizing its transition from a seasonal influx to a consistent year-round growth driver. He urged the industry to rethink its approach to this burgeoning market segment in order to maximize potential.

"For years, Australia was viewed as a seasonal source market for Sri Lanka—booming during certain months and quiet during others. That narrative is now outdated" Udawatta asserted. "Australia is swiftly evolving into a year-round market, fueled by real demand, improved accessibility, and strong emotional connections among repeat Australian travelers. If Sri Lanka aims for sustainable tourism growth, Australia must be prioritized strategically. The critical question is no longer why we should focus on Australia, but rather how swiftly the industry can adapt to this new reality,"

"Strong Australian demand leads to increased restaurant covers, heightened bar revenue, and improved outlet utilization, resulting in greater profit per guest" Udawatta explained. "For hotels, this translates to incremental revenue rather than just filling rooms—this market actively drives total hotel profitability." Udawatta concluded.

To maintain this upward momentum, industry experts recommend that local hoteliers pivot away from rate-centric offers and instead focus on experience-led packages. Suggestions include curating specialized food and beverage experiences that resonate with Australian dining preferences, ensuring consistent service quality throughout the year, and fostering stronger collaborations with airlines and tour operators.

Furthermore, the economic impact of Australian tourists is proving to be significantly beneficial for the hospitality sector. Unlike budget-driven travelers who primarily focus on room occupancy, Australian visitors are recognized as high spenders, particularly on food and beverage, thus greatly enhancing overall hotel profitability.

CLAUDE GUNASEKERA



Kanishka Udawatta
Director of Sales at Shangri-La Hotels Sri Lanka



CINNAMON LIFE AWARDED 5 STAR STATUS



Colombo | Press Release | Cinnamon Life | Mariam Gunawijayah, Assistant Manager – Media Relations, Cinnamon Life at City of Dreams.

Cinnamon Life at City of Dreams Receives Prestigious Five-Star Certification from SLTDA

Cinnamon Life at City of Dreams has been officially awarded the esteemed Five-Star Certification by the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA), underscoring its status as a landmark in Sri Lanka's hospitality landscape and a benchmark for excellence in the region.

As South Asia's largest and first fully integrated resort, Cinnamon Life at City of Dreams represents a transformative investment in Sri Lanka's tourism and leisure economy. Developed by John Keells Holdings PLC with a historic USD 1.2 billion investment – the largest private development in the country – the resort has reshaped Colombo into a premier destination for luxury travel, entertainment, world-class events, and international business.



Sanjiv Hulugalle, CEO/GM Cinnamon Life

A hallmark of the property is its extensive event and convention infrastructure, featuring over 160,000 sq. ft. of versatile, high-spec event space. With five signature ballrooms, cutting-edge technology, and three exceptional outdoor venues offering panoramic views of the ocean and the Colombo skyline, Cinnamon Life has established itself as an unrivalled hub for global conferences, high-profile celebrations, and corporate gatherings for both local and international travellers.

“We are deeply honoured to receive this Five-Star Certification from the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority,” said Sanjiv Hulugalle, CEO and General Manager of Cinnamon Life at City of Dreams. “This recognition reflects our unwavering commitment to world-class service, guest centric innovation, and the elevated experiences that define Cinnamon Life. Our aspiration is to set new standards for luxury, leisure, and MICE tourism in the region, while supporting Sri Lanka’s positioning on the global stage.”

Sanjiv Hulugalle, CEO/GM Cinnamon Life

The Five-Star Certification further cements Cinnamon Life at City of Dreams as one of Sri Lanka’s foremost luxury destinations. With its two luxury hotels, curated signature dining concepts, immersive entertainment arenas, and a vibrant retail and lifestyle precinct, the resort offers an unparalleled blend of hospitality, lifestyle, and experiences under one iconic address.



Buddhika Hewawasam Chairman SLTDA

The certification was presented at Cinnamon Life, attended by senior leadership from SLTDA and Cinnamon Life, members of the hospitality industry, and media representatives. The event celebrated this milestone achievement and marked a significant step forward in elevating Sri Lanka’s luxury hospitality offering.

About **City of Dreams**

City of Dreams is Sri Lanka’s largest and most ambitious integrated resort, redefining Colombo’s skyline as a symbol of modern luxury and innovation. Designed as a “city within a city,” the destination offers 800 luxury rooms and suites, with 687 at Cinnamon Life and 113 at NUWA, complemented by a diverse selection of 13 restaurants and bars that showcase global cuisines alongside Sri Lanka’s rich culinary heritage. Adding to its appeal is a vibrant mix of high-end retail, Sri Lanka’s premier entertainment arena, a shopping mall, office towers, and luxury residences. This integrated ecosystem enables delegates to stay, work, meet, dine, shop, and celebrate seamlessly under one roof, delivering unmatched convenience and engagement.

Sri Lanka Gets Cheaper Flights to Aussies



Jetstar's upcoming launch of direct flights between Melbourne and Colombo in August 2026 is poised to be a significant development for both Australian and Sri Lankan tourism and travel markets. This initiative marks a historical first, establishing the first-ever budget airline connection between Australia and Sri Lanka. The introduction of a low-cost carrier on this route is expected to fundamentally alter the pricing dynamics for travel between the two nations, making Sri Lanka a considerably more accessible and affordable destination for a broader range of travelers.

Historically, travelers from Australia seeking budget-friendly international options have often gravitated towards Southeast Asian destinations due to the availability of numerous low-cost flight connections. Jetstar's new service is anticipated to directly compete with these established routes by offering a compelling, cost-effective alternative to Sri Lanka.[3] This strategic move by Jetstar, a subsidiary of Qantas, aims to tap into the growing demand for affordable long-haul travel and to open up Sri Lanka to a segment of the Australian market that may have previously found the destination cost-prohibitive.[4] The direct nature of these flights will also reduce travel time and the inconvenience of layovers, further enhancing Sri Lanka's appeal.

The introduction of direct budget flights is expected to have a multifaceted impact particularly increased tourism to Sri Lanka. Lowering the financial barrier to entry, Jetstar's service is likely to significantly boost tourist arrivals from Australia to Sri Lanka. This influx of tourists could provide a much-needed stimulus to Sri Lanka's tourism sector, supporting local businesses, hotels, and attractions.

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competitive fares across the board for travel between Australia and Sri Lanka. This could benefit consumers even beyond those flying with Jetstar.

For price-sensitive Australian travelers, Sri Lanka could become a more attractive alternative to traditional Southeast Asian destinations. This shift could diversify travel patterns and introduce new cultural experiences to a wider audience.

Economic Benefits for Sri Lanka: Beyond tourism, increased air connectivity can foster stronger economic ties, facilitate trade, and potentially lead to increased investment opportunities between Australia and Sri Lanka.

Jetstar's decision to launch this route aligns with its broader strategy of expanding its international network to popular and emerging leisure destinations, particularly those that can sustain a low-cost model. The airline typically operates a fleet of Airbus A320s and Boeing 787 Dreamliners for its international routes, with the latter being a likely candidate for the longer Melbourne-Colombo journey, offering a balance of capacity and fuel efficiency. The airline's focus on direct, point-to-point travel minimizes operational costs, allowing it to offer more attractive fares.

As of early 2026, the global travel industry continues to recover and adapt to evolving consumer demands. There is a sustained appetite for international travel, with a particular emphasis on value and unique experiences. Sri Lanka, with its rich cultural heritage, diverse landscapes, and growing tourism infrastructure, is well-positioned to capitalize on this trend, especially with enhanced accessibility provided by budget airlines. The Australian market, known for its strong outbound travel propensity, represents a significant opportunity for destinations offering compelling value propositions.



Sri Lanka Rings in 2026: Record breaking New Year's Evening Celebrations in the City

On the last day of 2025, December 31, Sri Lanka's hospitality sector hosted some numerous parties a variety of New Year's Eve NYE celebrations across the country. The capital city, Colombo, hosted events, including concerts featuring popular artists and themed parties at luxury hotels.

New Year's Eve celebrations across Sri Lanka typically involve a variety of festivities. Many hotels and resorts, particularly in popular tourist destinations host gala dinners, themed parties, and live entertainment to ring in the New Year. These also included special menus and fireworks displays. Public spaces and beaches also become hubs for celebrations, with locals and tourists gathering enjoy the festive atmosphere. Cultural performances and traditional rituals were also common, especially in more rural areas, reflecting Sri Lanka's rich heritage. Some establishments offered exclusive packages encompassing accommodation, dining, and entertainment for the New Year's Eve festivities. The transition into the New Year is a significant occasion, marked by both modern and traditional celebrations across the island. This is a well-established tradition within the hospitality industry globally, and in Sri Lanka, where the festive season is a major draw for both local and international tourists.



Meals with a smoky flavor, at Nuwa at City of Dreams.

Major hotels and resorts across popular tourist destinations like Colombo, Negambo, Kandy, Hills such as Nuwara Eliya, Bandarawela, Ella and coastal areas like Kalutara, Beruwela, Hikkaduwa, Galle, Matara, Hambantota and also Trincomalee, Batticaloa and Jaffna have hosted notable special events. Mirissa and Hikkaduwa held vibrant beach parties, drawing a mix of foreign tourists and locals. There was a large number of foreign tourists were seined at these events as the country's tourism trend was increasing. The majority of foreign visitors hailed from countries such as India, the United Kingdom, China, and Germany, indicating a broad international interest in Sri Lanka's offerings. Sri Lanka's festive offerings were patronized a substantial presence of foreign tourists at these celebrations.

The Galle Face Hotel in Colombo hosted a Gala Dinner in the Jubilee Ballroom, a Latin Dinner Buffet at King of the Mambo, and a curated fine dining experience at 1864 – Limited Edition. For those seeking a vibrant atmosphere, the King of the Mambo offered a Latin Dinner Buffet. Additionally, 1864 – Limited Edition provided a curated 5-course set menu for a fine dining experience. The Galle Face Hotel, known as South Asia's Grande Dame, has a tradition of celebrating the New Year with its team members and guests, offering various events and culinary experiences. The hotel is an iconic landmark in Colombo, situated along the seafront and facing the Galle Face Green.



Mount Lavinia Hotel, surrounded by elegance, celebration, and unforgettable moments.

'Dancing through the Decades' at Cinnamon Life Colombo, held at the Lumina Ballroom. This event featured live performances by popular artists. Guests enjoyed an elegant night a journey through music from the 80s, 90s, and 2000s performed by Falan, Corrine, Clifford, Geoffrey, Rukshan, Damian, and Sohan spanning various eras. The programme included raffle draws, exclusive prizes, and a memorable midnight countdown. Gourmet dining also designed to welcome 2026 in style. The party included a countdown to midnight, sophisticated décor, and a mix of local and international attendees, making it one of the standout celebrations in Colombo for the night. In addition, other event spaces hosted by Cinnamon Life included a diverse range of NYE options, from elegant dinners and live performances to energetic dance parties, making it a key destination for celebrations in Colombo that night. Various lounges and bars within the complex offered themed parties, DJ sets, and cocktail experiences catering to different tastes and preferences.

Hilton Residences Colombo known for its spacious apartments and comprehensive amenities, often hosts significant events throughout the year catering to both in-house guests and external attendees. HRC hosted the New Year's Eve 2025 Gala Dinner to welcome 2026. This event included an elaborated dining experiences, with live music, and a festive atmosphere to mark the transition into the New Year at the FLOW. Its talented chefs have curated a menu that showcases both local Sri Lankan flavors and international cuisine. Those gathered expressed they "Enjoyed freshly prepared seafood, succulent meats, and a variety of vegetarian options, all beautifully presented". Guests also commented their thrill as they could watch the chefs prepare delectable dishes live, adding to the interactive dining atmosphere. At the Dessert Bar, featured an array of mouth-watering sweets to satisfy cravings as you say goodbye to the old year. The FLOW was transformed into a festive haven, complete with twinkling lights and celebratory elements that embodied the spirit of New Year's Eve. Guests were entertained with music throughout the night, ensuring a vibrant atmosphere. Hilton Colombo hosted two primary events to welcome 2026. 'High Five to 2026' in the Grand Ballroom and an elevated poolside party at SunsetBlu.

Claude Gunasekera



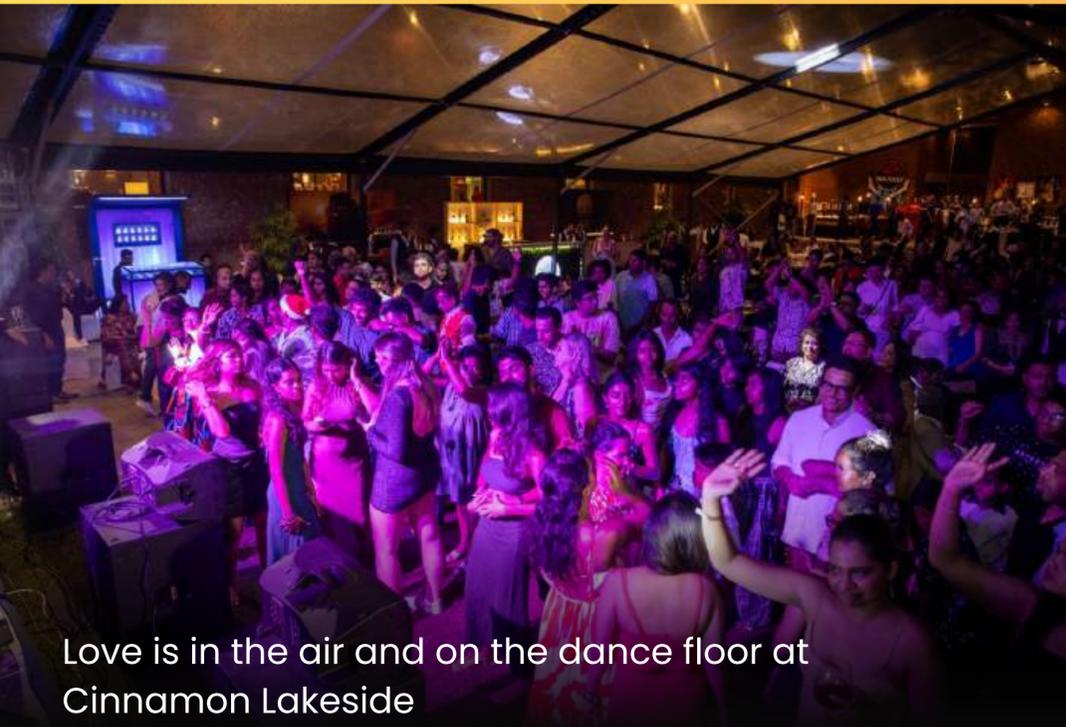
It's time to reveal the lucky raffle winner at Hilton Residences!



Cheers to a fabulous NYE celebration with foreign tourists at NH Collection Colombo

event in the Grand Ballroom featured performances by Gypsies and Misty, with Falan Andrea adding a contemporary touch. This event was designed with elegance, fine dining, premium spirits, and a dance floor in mind, aiming to carry attendees into the early hours of the New Year. This event featured live music from Cold Sweat, supported by a lineup of DJs including DJ Hiranya, DJ Dhanushka, DJ Bonnie, DJ Thoshan, DJ Naushad, and DJ Kapila Mohotti. The SunsetBlu celebration was characterized by high energy, indulgent dining, and the promise of a sunrise welcome to 2026. Hilton hotels globally are known for hosting various celebrations, including New Year's Eve events and offer customized food and beverage options.

Cinnamon Hotels in Colombo hosted distinct New Year's Eve 2025 celebrations to usher in 2026. The Cinnamon Grand Colombo offered a variety of New Year's Eve experiences across its diverse dining venues. The hotel's main celebration, a grand gala dinner, was held in its ballrooms, featuring live entertainment, gourmet cuisine, and a countdown to midnight. The Lagoon and Nuga Gama, also hosted special themed dinners with unique menus and ambiance tailored for the occasion. These events typically included live music, DJ performances, and festive decorations, catering to guests looking for an upscale and vibrant celebration. Cinnamon Lakeside Colombo focused on its picturesque lakeside setting for its New Year's Eve festivities. The hotel's main event, the dinner dance, was held in its ballroom and supplementary event by the pool, offering stunning views of the Beira Lake.



Love is in the air and on the dance floor at Cinnamon Lakeside



Executive Excellence at Cinnamon Grand

Cinnamon Red Colombo known for its modern and trendy vibe, hosted a more contemporary New Year's Eve celebration. The Flavoured, was the primary venue for its New Year's Eve party, while rooftop offering panoramic views of the city skyline and fireworks and celebrated the arrival of 2026 in style with a remarkable New Year's Eve event. The celebrations continued at Cloud Red with live music, vibrant DJ performances, and a countdown to midnight. Guests danced the night away, creating memories to cherish for years to come.

Nuwa at City of Dreams in Colombo: A high-end celebration featuring live music, gourmet dining, and exclusive entertainment, attracting a sophisticated crowd for a stylish countdown to 2026. It was a high-profile event featuring a luxurious, vibrant atmosphere. The event featured a curated menu with gourmet dining options with a lively atmosphere with a countdown to midnight. Premium drinks, and entertainment designed to ring in 2026 in a luxurious setting. Nuwa's NYE party was identified as an event attracting a mix of local and international guests seeking an upscale celebration.



Music for the new year at Cinnamon Red



Making memories and shaking off worries at Galle Face Hotel



Watching the fireworks light up the sky, from Shangri La, Coombo



Lucky raffle winner at Hilton Colombo

Shangri-La Colombo hosted a series of festive events to celebrate New Year's Eve. Central Restaurant offered a lavish buffet dinner, featuring a variety of dishes to delight guests. Capital Bar & Grill served a six-course feast providing an elegant dining experience complemented by live music. Shang Palace: Presented an elegant set menu, allowing guests to indulge in refined Chinese cuisine in a sophisticated setting. Horizon Lounge hosted a rooftop celebration. The location offered panoramic views of Colombo's skyline, live entertainment, and a vibrant atmosphere to ring in the New Year. The Marquee: Provided an exclusive after party, featuring live DJs, gourmet bites, and flowing beverages, creating a lively environment for guests to continue the festivities. These events were designed to offer a diverse range of experiences, ensuring that guests could celebrate the arrival of 2026 in style at Shangri-La Colombo



Dance like nobody's watching, but we know everyone is At Ravana Pool Club Ella

NH Collection Colombo celebrated a wonderful time of the year with a mesmerizing festive celebrations designed for the whole family to sparkling New Year's Eve soirées. Three celebrations were held at AYU, Ballroom and Rooftop complete with joyful flavours and entertainment while their kids enjoyed at Aditya with a special buffet, fun activities, drinks, and cozy movie night. The Grand Masquerade New Year's Celebration was held at the Ball Room with Grand Gala Dinner, and a late night Breakfast.

Ravana Pool Club, Ella hosted New Year's Eve (NYE) celebration on December 31 in a large-scale with live DJs and percussion, a countdown celebration, complimentary sparkling wine, special food and drink menus, and exclusive pool and lounge packages. Overall, the club positioned this as a full festive week in one location, with families, couples, groups of friends, who had a joyful stay in Ella.

We at TOURGUIDE witnessed a significant number of people have gathered for New Year's Eve celebrations, particularly in Colombo, the crowd may have surpassed the past. Galle Face Green, reported the largest gathering due to various events held in the suburbs.

SOUTH ASIA'S FIRST-EVER REGGAE MUSIC FESTIVAL

"ONE LOVE 2026"

SET TO IGNITE BENTOTA

ONE LOVE
A TRIBUTE TO THE LEGENDARY
BOB MARLEY

27th, 28th and 29th March 2026

NUWA SRI LANKA HOSTS STAR-STUDED PRESS CONFERENCE TO KICK-OFF THE ROAD TO THE FESTIVAL

CLAUDE GUNASEKERA

Colombo, Sri Lanka is set to make history as it hosts South Asia's first-ever Reggae Music Festival, "ONE LOVE 2026 – A Tribute to Bob Marley", from 27 to 29 March 2026 on the golden shores of Bentota. The three-day festival will take place from 6:00 p.m. onwards, bringing an unprecedented celebration of global reggae culture to the region. The press conference to announce this historic moment was held at NUWA Sri Lanka, the latest ultra-luxury property in Colombo.

This landmark festival will feature six internationally acclaimed reggae icons—the largest gathering of global reggae talent ever seen in Asia and the Pacific:

- Maxi Priest – the "Prince of Reggae"
- The Wailers
- Julian Marley & Ky-Mani Marley – sons of the legendary Bob Marley
- Inner Circle
- Big Mountain

The festival will also feature four international DJs, with two major artists headlining each night:

- 27 March: The Wailers & Maxi Priest
- 28 March: Inner Circle & Big Mountain
- 29 March: Julian Marley & Ky-Mani Marley

Adding to the excitement, Kingsley Ben-Adir, the lead actor in the 2024 musical drama One Love, and its director Reinaldo Marcus Green, are also set to attend the festival.



Kamal Munasingha
COO Cinnamon Hotels & Resort

Thalshila Galapatti
Hotel Manger NUWA at City Of Dreams

Chamika Karunaratne
Head Of Marketing NUWA at City Of Dreams

With reggae's deep cultural resonance in Sri Lanka, the festival is expected to draw thousands of local fans along with visitors from India, the Maldives, Bangladesh, and Western travelers escaping winter for Sri Lanka's tropical warmth.

Organised by Sri Lankan-owned One In A Million Entertainment Ltd., headquartered in Europe and Colombo, in collaboration with Caribbean Entertainment, the event builds on a legacy of bringing global stars such as Shaggy, Diana King, Maxi Priest, and Big Mountain to Sri Lanka.

The event aligns with the celebration of Bob Marley's 81st birthday on 6 February, enriching its cultural and emotional significance. Normal tickets are priced at Rs.10,000 per day and VIP tickets are priced at Rs. 50,000 per day. For all Reggae music enthusiasts wanting a Festival Pass for all three days, there is an Early Bird Offer at Rs. 25,000 (normal tickets) and Rs. 125,000 (VIP tickets). Tickets will be available on the PickMe Events platform. A part of the proceeds from One Love Festival ticket sales will be donated to children's orphanages water purification project carried out by the Indian Cultural Association in Sri Lanka. One Love Festival is also working with the Bob and Rita Marley Foundation to support its charity activities in Jamaica.

The festival's international artist delegation—an estimated 70-member crew—will be hosted at the iconic NUWA Sri Lanka, Colombo's newest ultra-luxury lifestyle and entertainment destination owned by Melco Resorts & Entertainment.



Michael Habashi

Speaking on the partnership, Michael Habashi, Vice President & Property General Manager of City of Dreams Sri Lanka, said: "City of Dreams Sri Lanka is proud to be the hospitality partner of South Asia's first Reggae Festival. As Colombo's emerging entertainment hub, we are committed to strengthening the city's cultural and artistic fabric. Welcoming world-renowned reggae legends reflects our mission to champion creativity, support the arts, and bring globally iconic experiences to Sri Lanka."

Ticket information indicates that normal tickets are priced at Rs. 10,000 per day, while VIP tickets are Rs. 50,000 per day. An Early Bird Offer for a three-day festival pass is available at Rs. 25,000 for normal tickets and Rs. 125,000 for VIP tickets. Tickets will be available for purchase on the PickMe Events platform.

FLYDUBAI ANNOUNCES MAJOR FLEET EXPANSION AND NEW INFLIGHT CONNECTIVITY PARTNERSHIP



Advantis Aviation Services, the General Sales Agency (GSA) for flydubai in Sri Lanka revealed that 'flydubai' has announced a series of significant developments that will support its long-term growth strategy and enhance the travel experience for its customers. The airline has signed a landmark agreement for 150 Airbus A321neo aircraft, marking its first order with Airbus, alongside a Memorandum of Understanding for 75 Boeing 737 MAX aircraft, reinforcing its strong relationship with Boeing and ensuring flexibility in future fleet planning.

In addition, flydubai confirmed Starlink as its new inflight connectivity partner. The high-speed, low-latency satellite broadband service will be introduced across its fleet, enabling passengers to enjoy seamless streaming, communication, and online activities during their journeys. Installations are set to begin in 2026.

Commenting on the milestone announcement, His Highness Sheikh Ahmed bin Saeed Al Maktoum, Chairman of flydubai, said: "We are pleased to announce a landmark agreement for 150 A321neo aircraft, representing another important milestone in flydubai's journey. This new agreement is not only about adding aircraft. It supports the vision of His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, and aligns with the Dubai Economic Agenda D33.

This strategic addition diversifies our narrow-body fleet and strengthens our long-term expansion plans. It will also enable flydubai to play a key role in the success of Dubai World Central's expansion, which is set to become one of the largest airports in the world. The A321neos will support the next phase of our network development and enable us to meet rising demand across our markets. We look forward to establishing a strong and enduring partnership between flydubai and Airbus."

Ghaith Al Ghaith, Chief Executive Officer at flydubai, added: "We are proud to bring Starlink's cutting-edge technology to our customers. This agreement marks a major milestone in our ongoing efforts to elevate the travel experience, providing fast, reliable internet access across our growing network. Reliable connectivity has become essential and our partnership with Starlink allows us to meet the evolving expectations of today's travellers. As we continue to expand our fleet and network, innovation remains at the heart of our strategy."

These announcements highlight flydubai's continued commitment to innovation, operational efficiency, and an elevated customer experience as the airline strengthens its position in the global aviation sector.

Claude Gunasekera



Sri Lanka to Launch Buddhist Tourism Initiative with Korean Support



Colombo, Sri Lanka – In a significant move to bolster its tourism sector, Sri Lanka is set to launch a dedicated initiative aimed at promoting Buddhist tourism, with the invaluable support of South Korea. This long-awaited endeavor highlights Sri Lanka's rich cultural heritage and historical significance as a major Buddhist destination, while also marking a strategic approach to diversify its tourism offerings.

Sri Lanka is home to numerous sacred sites and destinations that are integral to Buddhist history and practice. Notable among these are the ancient cities of Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa, both UNESCO World Heritage Sites, which feature remarkable stupas, monasteries, and relics associated with the life of the Buddha. The Temple of the Tooth in Kandy, another vital site, houses what is believed to be the relic of Buddha's tooth and attracts thousands of devotees and tourists each year.

With South Korea's support, Sri Lanka aims to enhance its appeal to Buddhist travelers by developing tailored pilgrimage packages and improving accessibility to these sacred locations. The initiative is not just about

attracting tourists; it represents a broader vision of fostering intercultural dialogue and strengthening ties between the Buddhist communities in Sri Lanka and South Korea.

The collaboration with South Korea is particularly strategic, as the country has shown a growing interest in Buddhist tourism. South Korean travelers are known for their commitment to cultural and spiritual tourism, making them an ideal demographic for Sri Lanka's new market approach. The Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority is planning marketing campaigns that will specifically target South Korean tourists, highlighting the island's rich Buddhist heritage and the peaceful, spiritual experience it offers.

This initiative is expected to not only boost the local economy but also create job opportunities in the tourism sector, contributing to the overall development of the country. By positioning itself as a key destination for Buddhist tourism, Sri Lanka aims to compete in the global market, attracting a diverse range of visitors who seek spiritual enrichment and cultural experiences.

As Sri Lanka embarks on this exciting journey, the government and tourism authorities are optimistic about the potential impact of this initiative. With its stunning landscapes, deep-rooted traditions, and warm hospitality, Sri Lanka is poised to emerge as a premier destination for Buddhist pilgrims and tourists alike, further solidifying its status on the global tourism map.

Sri Lanka Tourism, in collaboration with the Embassy of Sri Lanka to the Republic of Korea, has extended its support for two significant Buddhist delegations from South Korea, reinforcing cultural and religious ties between the two nations.

The first delegation, comprising 120 members including Anunayake thero of the Jogye order, South Korean chief Buddhist monks, and devoted practitioners, arrived in Sri Lanka early this month and similarly, the second

VVIP Buddhist delegation arrived last week. They received a warm and colorful welcome at Bandaranaike International Airport. Their visit aims to undertake a pilgrimage tour, underscoring Sri Lanka's prominence as a major Buddhist destination. VVIP Buddhist delegation arrived last week. They received a warm and colorful welcome at Bandaranaike International Airport. Their visit aims to undertake a pilgrimage tour, underscoring Sri Lanka's prominence as a major Buddhist destination for devotees worldwide



The arrival was marked by a vibrant cultural dance troupe and a group of Sri Lankan children, creating a festive atmosphere that made the guests feel at home. Ms. Thanuja Muniweera, Deputy Director and officer in charge of the Korean Market, was present to greet these esteemed visitors. This delegation consisted of 150 individuals, including priests and devotees, and was led by Ven. Hyeil, Chief Priest of Haeinsa Temple. The primary objective of these visits is to showcase Sri Lanka as a welcoming and culturally vibrant destination. This initiative not only highlights the significance of the Korean market as an emerging source of tourism but also promotes Buddhist and pilgrimage tourism in the region. South Koreans are increasingly traveling in large numbers, particularly during December 2025, epitomized by the participation of the Buddhist delegation.

These visits will enhance the historical and spiritual connections between Sri Lanka and South Korea, marking a fresh chapter for Sri Lanka Tourism. The South Korean market continues to be a vital source of tourists for Sri Lanka, helping to promote its rich 2,500-year Buddhist culture and heritage to the global Buddhist community. – **Claude Gunasekera**



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CINNAMON HOTELS AND RESORTS CEO HISHAN SINGHAWANSA APPOINTED TO JKH GROUP HOTEL BOARDS

Listed John Keells Holdings (JKH) Group hotel companies Trans Asia Hotels PLC and Asian Hotels and Properties PLC which operate Cinnamon Grand and Cinnamon Lakeside have appointed Hishan Singhawansa to their respective Boards as a Non-Independent Non-Executive Director.

Singhawansa is CEO of Cinnamon Hotels and Resorts, leading the brand in “bringing the best of Sri Lanka to the world with style and elegance” across its hotel operations. Cinnamon Hotels and Resorts is part of the Leisure Industry Group of John Keells Holdings PLC (JKH), Sri Lanka’s largest listed conglomerate, which operates over 70 companies across seven diverse industry sectors. In addition to this role, Singhawansa serves as an Executive Vice President at John Keells Group and as a Board Member of John Keells Hotels PLC.

He holds a BSc in Engineering (Hons) from the University of Moratuwa, Sri Lanka, and an MBA from the University of Wales. Singhawansa began his career at John Keells in 2008 as a Management Trainee in the Retail Industry Group, where he went on to head Category Management and Supply Chain before transitioning to the Group’s Leisure sector in 2017. With over 17 years of experience in business and operational efficiencies, he is focused on bringing people and capital together to advance the company’s growth objectives. Under his leadership, Cinnamon Hotels and Resorts is charting a journey defined by authentic hospitality, curated guest experiences, and empowered community development.

He currently leads the brand at a pivotal moment of strategic growth and regional expansion. A key milestone in this trajectory is Cinnamon Life, the Group’s landmark \$ 1.2 billion integrated resort development, Sri Lanka’s largest private-sector investment which is set to position Colombo as a premier MICE and leisure destination in South Asia. In addition to his executive responsibilities, Singhawansa also serves on the Board of Directors of the Sri Lanka Convention Bureau and is a Committee Member of The Hotels Association of Sri Lanka (THASL).

“ TOURISM IS ABOUT ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION AND COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT. OUR COMMITMENT IS TO BE A CATALYST FOR CHANGE, ENSURING INDIAN TRAVELLERS NOT ONLY EXPERIENCE THE BEST OF SRI LANKA BUT ALSO CONTRIBUTE TO UPLIFTING LOCAL COMMUNITIES. ”



CINNAMON HOTELS & RESORTS AIMING FOR 30% FEMALE WORKFORCE BY 2030

Colombo, Sri Lanka: Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts is strengthening its commitment to gender inclusion across its portfolio, with female participation now at 19.5%, marking a healthy trajectory toward its 2030 goal of achieving 30% workforce representation. Women currently hold 22% of leadership positions across the group.

In Sri Lanka female participation in hospitality is barely making 10%, careers in tourism for women often carry significant social stigma, creating misconceptions that the industry is unsafe for female employment. As a leading hospitality brand, Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts aims to challenge these outdated perceptions by making hospitality a sector where women can excel and prosper, reinforcing the message that the industry is a safe, secure, and empowering place for women to work.

A key milestone in this journey is the appointment of Thanuja Mudiyansele as Resort Manager at Trinco Blu by Cinnamon, a strategic move that not only increases female representation in leadership but also leverages that leadership to uplift and inspire others.

A graduate of the Ceylon Hotel School and a scholarship recipient in Germany, Thanuja has advanced through Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts' leadership pathways. She firmly believes that "honesty, commitment, and a positive attitude are the keys to success. Women are more than capable of excelling in this field." Her initiatives echo this ethos. During her tenure at Hikka Tranz by Cinnamon, she championed sustainability and community programmes, from the Turtle Hatchery Project to the EmpowerHER Network, fostering skill development and local engagement.

For Thanuja, "leadership is about nurturing talent. It's about providing the right tools, knowledge, and environment for individuals to thrive. It's about believing in their potential and empowering them to achieve their best."



Thanuja Mudiyansele
as Resort Manager at Trinco Blu by Cinnamon

She champions open communication and mentors colleagues, supervisors, and managers, instilling agility and confidence. At Trinco Blu by Cinnamon, she focuses on empowering her team by addressing their diffidence through a series of workshops designed to overcome habitual shyness, a trait common among many.

These workshops engage staff from colleague to managerial levels across housekeeping and operations. Yoga for Female Colleagues, EmpowerHER Meetings encourage dialogue and collaboration, and recreational programmes to strengthen teamwork and balance.

These efforts are helping young women including single mothers to build confidence, develop leadership skills, and unlock new pathways for career progression, positioning Trinco Blu by Cinnamon as a model for inclusive hospitality. Thanuja's journey forms part of a wider mission within Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts, to build workplaces where women lead, talent thrives, and inclusion drives performance. - Claude Gunasekera

Sri Lanka Targets **3 Million** Tourists by 2026 Following Record **2.36 Million** Arrivals in 2025.

In a significant announcement at a press conference in Colombo on Monday, Sri Lanka's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Vijitha Herath, unveiled a strategic roadmap aimed at attracting over 3 million tourists by the year 2026. This ambitious plan comes on the heels of a record-breaking year for tourism in 2025, where the country welcomed a staggering 2,363,521 visitors, marking the highest number of tourist arrivals in its history.

Minister Herath expressed pride in the tourism sector's achievements, stating, "We are proud that Sri Lanka managed to record the highest-ever tourism numbers. We are hopeful that tourism revenue will also continue to grow, and this will help our economy at a critical time." The minister's optimism is supported by data from the Sri Lanka Tourism and Development Authority (SLTDA), which indicates that India emerged as the largest source market for visitors, followed closely by the United Kingdom, Russia, Germany, and China, which rounded out the top five markets for 2025.

To realize the goal of 3 million tourist arrivals, the SLTDA plans to implement a series of targeted promotional activities, with a significant focus on the Indian market. A major roadshow is set to take place in Mumbai, aimed at engaging over 100 prominent tour operators to facilitate

further bookings. In a move to simplify travel for international visitors, the government is also planning to launch a long-awaited free visa scheme in the first quarter of 2025.

Beyond the Indian subcontinent, Sri Lankan authorities are keen to tap into markets in Singapore, Malaysia, and Taiwan, leveraging the rich offerings of the "Buddhist circuit" to attract regional tourists. Additionally, to maintain tourism momentum during the off-peak season, the government will introduce special promotional campaigns targeting Eastern Europe.

In a proactive step towards diversifying its tourism offerings, Sri Lanka is also introducing niche products that focus on "religious and spiritual tourism" as well as "marine tourism." Furthermore, the authorities are working to regulate accommodations more strictly and address disparities in tourism development across the island, particularly in the Eastern Province.

With these comprehensive strategies, Sri Lanka aims not only to enhance its tourism sector but also to foster economic growth and stability in the years to come.

CLAUDE GUNASEKERA

Sri Lanka Welcomes Air Astana Flight from Kazakhstan!



Sri Lanka Tourism marked yet another milestone with the arrival of an important flight from Kazakhstan a pleasant Christmas surprise, as the aircraft landed on December 25th itself. The special flight was operated by Air Astana, the national carrier of Kazakhstan, in collaboration with LSR as the ground handler.

This inaugural flight for the 2025/2026 winter season carried 166 passengers aboard an Airbus A321. Air Astana will continue operations until March 2026, with two weekly flights (Monday and Thursday) connecting Almaty, the capital of Kazakhstan, to Bandaranaike International Airport, Colombo.

The arrival was celebrated with a traditional water salute, creating a spectacular sight for passengers and crew. They were further delighted by Sri Lanka's trademark hospitality – greeted warmly and escorted through a vibrant cultural dance troupe, which showcased the island's rich traditions and colorful heritage. Souvenirs were presented to mark the occasion, leaving visitors with a lasting impression of Sri Lanka as a welcoming paradise.

Sri Lanka Tourism emphasized that the country offers a 365-day destination experience, where diverse travel opportunities can be enjoyed within a single day's journey. This accessibility and variety provide exceptional value for international visitors.

Kazakhstan, as part of the East European region, is now recognized as an emerging market for Sri Lanka. Arrivals such as these will help spread Sri Lanka's uniqueness as a premier travel destination across the region, beyond its traditional source markets.

Claude Gunasekera



Strategic Media Alliance: Sri Lankan and Indian Journalists Boost Bilateral Tourism



Two senior journalists from Sri Lanka Claude Gunasekera, Chief Editor of Sri Lanka's International News Agency – NewsLanka (www.lankapuwath.lk) & Secretary of the Travel Journalists Association of Sri Lanka and former Business Editor Daily News and Sunday Observer now serving for Hiru News shirajiv sirimane were on a one week special media tour to Bangalore, India recently from 7- 12 December.

They attended a Press Conference at The Taj West End Hotel in Bangalore a historic luxury hotel located in the heart of Bangalore presided by Deepak Shetty, President ICEMA and CEO/MD of JCB India Ltd. Leading media professionals in Bangalore gathered at the media event hosted by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII). Following the Press Conference, Senior journalists of India and Sri Lanka had a joint symposium at the Bangalore Press Club situated in the scenic surroundings of Cubbon Park aimed at enhancing media engagement to promote tourism and trade & industry between the two nations.

In a vibrant display of collaboration, Gunasekera and Sirimane engaged in a productive discourse, culminating in a strategic

framework for the collaborative advancement of media exposure for bilateral tourism initiatives for integrated media campaigns and reciprocal trade & industry agreements. They had a successful media gathering with the media leaders of India at the Bangalore Press Club and at the Press Conference.

The Press Club President R. Sridhar warmly welcomed the Sri Lankan journalists on behalf of the Bangalore Media Fraternity. Local journalists invitation to Press Club was coordinated by veteran journalist Mrs. Mini Tajeswi, Deputy Editor of 'The Hindu' prominent Indian English-language daily newspaper of India. "India remains a crucial source market for Sri Lanka tourism and conversely, Sri Lanka is a popular destination for Indian travelers, particularly for religious tourism and cultural exchanges aimed to foster greater understanding and collaboration between the both nations. Such initiatives are vital for promoting cross-border tourism and strengthening bilateral ties, especially given the shared cultural heritage and historical connections between India and Sri Lanka. The focus on pilgrimage sites for Sri Lankan tourists aligns with the growing trend of religious tourism, which is a significant segment of the travel industry in both countries" stated R. Sridhar, President of The Press Club, Bangalore.



Claude Gunasekera, Shridar of Udayan TV India and Shrijiv Sirimanna from Media Sri Lanka



Claude Gunasekera, Shrijiv Sirimanna from Media Sri Lanka and Mini Tajaswi Deputy Editor The Hindu Leading English Newspaper in India

"With Sri Lanka witnessing a remarkable surge in tourist arrivals, the event emphasized the importance of highlighted innovative media strategies and partnerships, showcasing how both countries can boost mutual tourism, thereby enriching the travel experience for visitors and fostering deeper connections between the two nations" said Mrs. Mini Tajeswi, Deputy Editor of 'The Hindu'. "This exchange highlights a common strategy in international tourism, used to educate and engage where familiarization tours (Famtours) are media professionals, who then become advocates for the destination". Mrs. Tajeswi's statement directly reflects the success of such a Famtour, leading to her commitment to cover events related to tourism and trade promotion in Sri Lanka.

Claude Gunasekera's response indicates a similar approach for Indian destinations, suggesting a mutual benefit for both countries in fostering tourism through media collaboration. The local media expert Shirajive Sirimanna further emphasized the importance of targeted media promotion.

Lankan Journalists also had discussions with Ranjan Kumar Acharya, South Indian Bureau Chief - News7 India, one of the most-watched news channels in the Tamil-speaking community, Sirinivas B.L, Editor in Chief of Fortune World, a digital media platform that focuses on providing news, analysis, and insights across various sectors including global affairs, Abhinav Singh, of Malayala Manorama a prominent Indian daily newspaper, which is one of the oldest and most widely circulated Malayalam-language newspapers in India and with a number of other journalists. Lankan Journalists also visited EXCON 2026, South Asia's largest construction equipment exhibition, held at the Bangalore International Exhibition Centre (BIEC) in Bengaluru, organized by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and the Schwing Stetter's global manufacturing hub which spans for 52 acres in Cheyyar, Tamil Nadu.

CLASSIC TRAVEL PARTNERS WITH **MSC CRUISES**

A New Era for Sri Lankan Travelers.

In a significant development, Classic Travel, a prominent name in Sri Lanka's travel solutions, has been appointed as the Preferred Sales Agent (PSA) for MSC Cruises.

This partnership represents a major leap forward in enhancing the travel landscape for Sri Lankans, making luxury cruise experiences more accessible than ever.

MSC Cruises, recognized as the largest privately-owned cruise company globally, operates a remarkable fleet of 23 innovative ships. Each vessel is celebrated for its cutting-edge design, exceptional hospitality, and commitment to sustainability. With a robust international presence, MSC Cruises has garnered numerous awards for its ability to deliver unforgettable voyages that seamlessly blend comfort, entertainment, and adventure.

This collaboration is set to open new horizons for travelers in Sri Lanka, allowing them to explore the world in style and comfort. Stay tuned for more updates as Classic Travel embarks on this exciting journey with MSC Cruises! - **CLAUDE GUNASEKERA.**



NH Collection Sri Lanka illuminates the Season with Style and Spirit

NH Collection Colombo and Bentota marked the start of the festive season with its elegant Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremonies, last week, bringing a touch of warmth and seasonal charm to the heart of the city. This year, their events embraced a meaningful new approach, reflecting not only the joy of the season but also a message of confidence, resilience, and renewed positivity for Sri Lanka. Celebrations transformed into a festive gathering space as guests, team members, and well-wishers came together to witness the first illumination of the Christmas tree.

Christmas trees both in Colombo and Bentota, were beautifully decorated in traditional Christmas colours, stood as the centrepiece of the celebration, symbolising joy, togetherness, and the timeless spirit of Christmas. By lighting the trees at NH Collection Colombo and Bentota, the hospitality industry in Sri Lanka sent out a message to the world that Sri Lanka remains a warm, welcoming, and safe destination to travel.

“Our land of paradise is once again inviting tourists back with warmth and confidence, and our hotels continue to operate with the same passion, hospitality, and spirit we are known for” said Yann Decaix, General Manager of NH Collection Colombo. He said “At NH Collection Colombo, we have curated a bundle of offerings for the festive season, designed to bring people together and create uplifting moments throughout December. This tree-lighting ceremony marks the beginning of a series of celebrations that reflect our commitment to extraordinary and memorable hospitality in the heart of the city.”

To complement the ceremony, NH Collection Colombo has unveiled a thoughtfully curated festive programme throughout December. Guests can look forward to a range of seasonal experiences, including the Christmas Eve Buffet at AYU, joyful Christmas Day celebrations, a flavourful Thai-inspired Christmas Night feast at Thai Rasa, and multiple New Year’s Eve events such as the grand Masquerade Gala Dinner in the Ballroom, the vibrant Rooftop NYE celebration at Vistas, and a family-friendly Kids’ NYE Programme at Adityaa. Each event is designed to deliver memorable dining, live entertainment, and uplifting festive moments for guests of all ages.



NH Bentota Ceysands Resort welcomed the festive season with its enchanting White Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony in the serene surroundings of the Siam Pearl Garden. Set against the gentle rhythm of the lagoon and ocean, the celebration offered a magical start to the resort's festive programme.

As the White Christmas tree came to life, guests, team members, and well-wishers gathered to share a moment filled with warmth, light, and the spirit of the season. The glowing tree, dressed in elegant white and silver tones, stood as a striking centrepiece symbolising purity, celebration, and the joy of Christmas. Moments of festive cheer were shared as the evening unfolded.

Guests enjoyed seasonal cocktails and mocktails, Christmas carols, and festive culinary delights, creating an atmosphere of relaxed coastal festivity. A welcome drink and pool access added to the leisurely charm of the night, while an international dinner buffet offered a delightful selection to complete the celebration.

Speaking at the event, Wim Fagel, General Manager of NH Bentota Ceysands Resort, said: "At NH Bentota Ceysands, we have curated a bundle of offerings for the festive season, bringing together the warmth of celebration and the natural beauty of our coastal surroundings. This tree-lighting ceremony marks the beginning of a series of memorable experiences awaiting our guests along the shores of Bentota."

In line with its festive spirit, NH Bentota Ceysands Resort has unveiled a diverse line-up of celebrations throughout December. Highlights include the Private Pontoon Christmas Eve Celebration on the river, the elegant White Christmas Gala Dinner at 360 Restaurant, a joyful Christmas Day Brunch at Café Bem, and two unforgettable New Year's Eve experiences – the serene Private Pontoon NYE Celebration and the vibrant New Year's Eve Gala Dinner at 360. Each event offers thoughtfully crafted dining, live entertainment, and exceptional seasonal ambience for guests seeking festive moments by the water.

The White Christmas Tree Lighting set the tone for a season of joyful gatherings, seaside celebrations, and unforgettable festive moments at NH Bentota Ceysands Resort.

– **Claude Gunasekera**



CINNAMON GRAND COLOMBO WELCOMES THE FESTIVE SEASON WITH WARMTH, TRADITION, AND TOGETHERNESS



Colombo, Sri Lanka | Cinnamon Grand Colombo ushers in the most magical time of the year with An Old World Christmas, a celebration filled with timeless traditions, festive flavours and heartwarming moments for all ages.

The season came alive with the Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony held in November, transforming the Cinnamon Grand lobby into a captivating festive wonderland. Guests are welcomed by twinkling lights, joyful Christmas carols, Santa's surprise appearances and the much loved Goodies Hut, brimming with Christmas cookies, cakes, yule logs and thoughtfully curated festive hampers.

Throughout December, Cinnamon Grand presents a series of festive dining experiences across its signature restaurants. Sharing his festive wishes, Mr. Nazoomi Azhar, General Manager – Cinnamon Grand Colombo, said, "At Cinnamon Grand Colombo, my wish for you this season is for this space to feel like coming home; to a place where the world slows down, with the true spirit of Christmas shining through." Every Sunday, guests can enjoy a Snowy Brunch at Plates from 12.00 noon to 3.00 pm, alongside a Seasonal Carvery Lunch at Cheers. Adding to the celebrations, a Festive High Tea will be served at the Tea Lounge from 15th to 25th December, between 3.00 pm and 6.00 pm.

A highlight of the season awaits on 21st December, when the lobby unveils an enchanting Diamond Cupcake Tree, a delightful festive surprise where a lucky guest may just discover something extraordinary.



Christmas Eve at Cinnamon Grand promises a world of flavours with specially curated dining options across the hotel. Plates will feature an indulgent international buffet, while London Grill presents an exclusive seven course set menu paired with vineyard specialities. Guests may also choose from festive carvery buffets at Cheers, a traditional Sri Lankan buffet at Nuga Gama, and à la carte dining at The Lagoon. On Christmas Day, celebratory lunch and dinner experiences will continue across all restaurants, ensuring a joyous feast for the entire family.

As the year draws to a close, Cinnamon Grand sets the stage for unforgettable New Year's Eve celebrations starting from 7.00 pm. Guests can savour international cuisine at Plates, enjoy a seven course fine dining experience at London Grill, and explore special festive menus at Cheers, The Lagoon and Nuga Gama.



SRI LANKA IS READY



Let Sri Lanka Shine on the Global Travel Map – Together!

As a collaborative effort between our public and private partners, Sri Lanka Tourism is launching a new hashtag campaign: **#SriLankalsReady**.

We warmly invite all Sri Lankans and our supporting friends across the world: including **content creators, travellers, influencers, and industry partners**, to join hands in highlighting the true beauty and spirit of our island.

Every **photo, video, reel, or story** you share has the **power to inspire** someone, somewhere, to choose Sri Lanka for their next journey.



To support this initiative, **whenever you create positive content** about Sri Lanka, please:

 Start your caption with: **#SriLankalsReady**

 End your caption with: **#SriLankalsReady, are you?**

Let's fill global timelines with **authentic travel moments, warm smiles, breathtaking landscapes, and stories** that reflect who we truly are. Your contribution helps Sri Lanka shine brighter on the world stage.

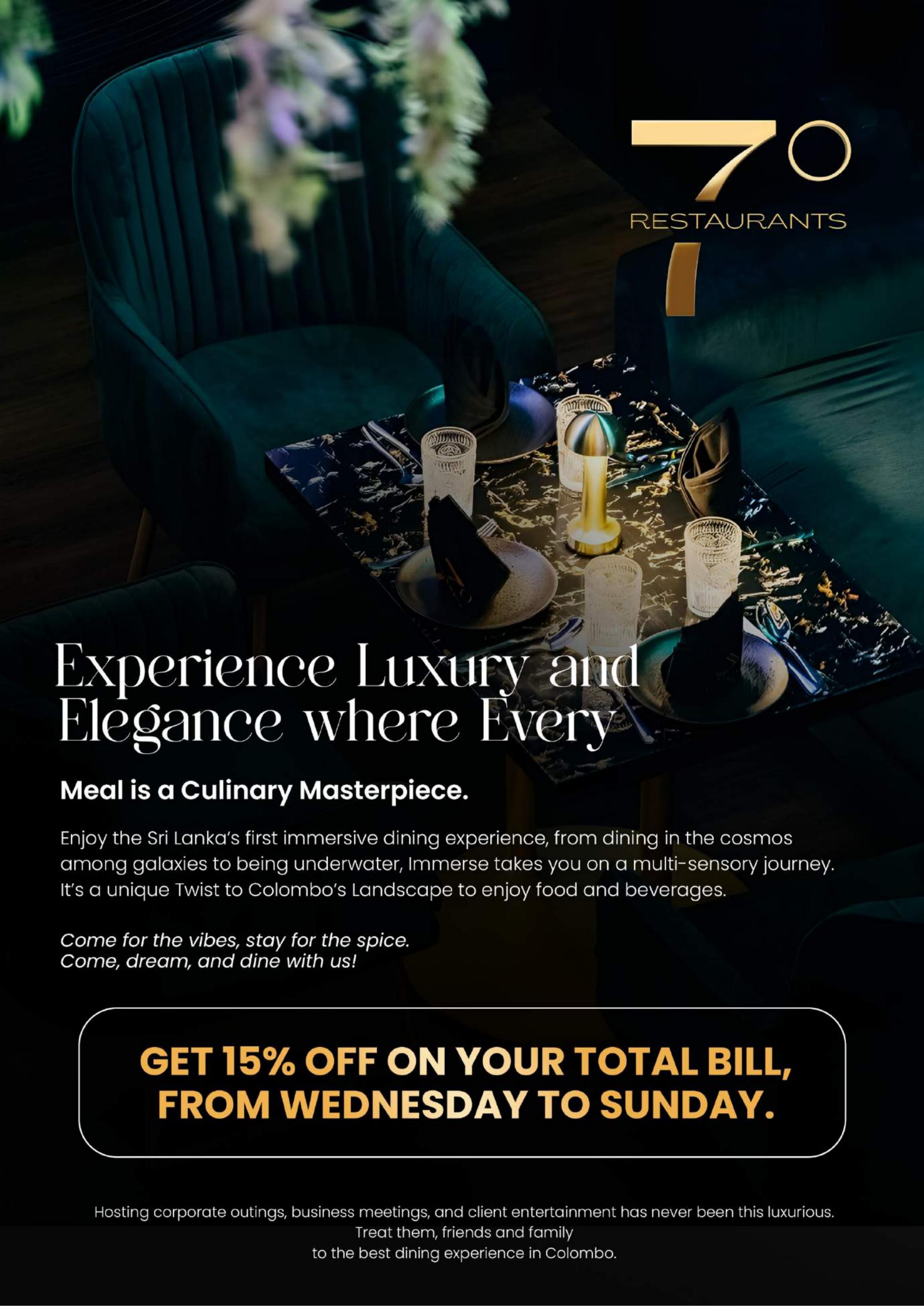
Thank you for your continued support. Let's show the world that **#SriLankalsReady** - and shining!



'SRI LANKA IS READY'

Press Conference held at the Ministry





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