



Tourism starts 2014 with double digit growth



W O N D E R O F A S I A

time high arrivals of 154,000 in December 2013.

The traditional market – Western Europe produced the most number of tourists with 46,301, reflecting an 18% growth year on year. UK led the pack with 12,896 arrivals, up by 13.6% followed by Germany 9,211, a growth of 16.7%. France brought in 8,430 tourists, up sharply by 33.6% over January last year. All major Western European source markets recorded double digit growth except Netherlands, arrivals from where were down by 3% whilst Switzerland produced a 7% growth in arrivals. Second highest visitors came from South Asia amounting to 28,392 up by 14.6% with India accounting for 17,886, up by 5.6%.

East Asia emerged third largest source market with 25,823 tourists, up by a whopping 95.6%. China led the way with 10,779 arrivals, a growth of 224% from a low base a year earlier. There were 2,859 Japanese tourists in January 2014, up by a healthy 52% whilst Malaysia produced 2,059 tourists up by 64%.

Eastern Europe, an emerging source market for Sri Lanka brought in 24,837 tourists reflecting a healthy 63.6%. There were 10,700 Russians, up by 91.6% and 6,424 Ukrainians, up by 21%. The Middle East produced 6,842 tourists, reflecting a 10% increase over January last year. Arrivals from North America grew by 22.4% to 6,909 whilst Australasia recorded a 15% growth to 6,210 tourists.

Sri Lanka achieved its highest ever tourist arrivals of 1.274 million in 2013, up from 1.005 million in the previous year. Since the end of the conflict in May 2009, tourist arrivals have remained on the up and analysts welcomed the January data most of which reflect double digit growth from a growing base.

First month of the New Year heralds record arrivals of 146,575; up 32.6% from a year earlier.

Sri Lanka's tourism industry had begun 2014 with double digit growth with arrivals in January recording a 32.6% increase to 146,575.

This is the highest ever arrivals figure for the month of January whilst the achievement is also comes on the back of all



Sri Lanka to promote Hambantota as a MICE destination



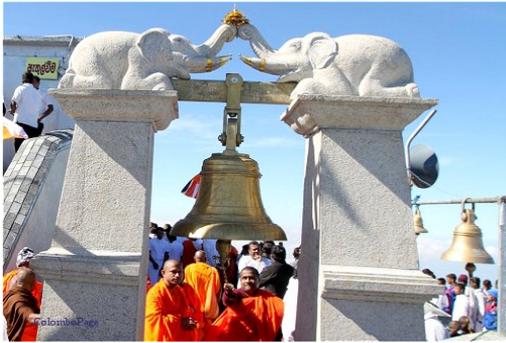
Sri Lankan authorities are trying to promote Hambantota as a MICE destination in the South Asian region.

The Sri Lanka Conventions Bureau is in discussions with organizers of conferences and exhibitions scheduled for this year to explore the possibility of shifting some events to Hambantota in order to promote the area among MICE (meetings, incentives, conferences and events) visitors.

While there are two exhibition centers in Colombo, the increasing number of exhibitions registering with the Conventions Bureau has resulted in discussions with organizers to shift some of the events to Hambantota, the local media reported.

General Manager of the Bureau, Vipula Wanigasekara said that while there were about 40 exhibitions and conferences conducted last year, the number is expected to increase to 50 this year. He explained that there was space for conducting conferences in Hambantota and even the banquet and foyer areas could be used for exhibitions, which accounted for an area of about 4000 square meters.

New Dolos Mahe Pahana and the Gantara Kuluna unveiled at Sri Pada



A new Dolos Mahe Pahana (Eternal Flame Oil Lamp) and the Gantara Kuluna (bell tower) were unveiled at Sri Lanka's sacred mountain of Sri Pada (Adam's Peak).

The Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa strewed jasmine flowers from a helicopter on the sacred mountain Sri Pada (Adam's Peak) while the Defense and Urban Development Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapaksa unveiled the Dolos Mahe Pahana and the Ghantara Kuluna.

The bell tower was placed on the Sri Pada mountain top by a Sri Lanka Air Force MI-17 helicopter. The Lamp, which weights 8,613 kilograms, has been totally made from rubble. Air Force helicopters were used to airlift all materials that were required for the construction.

Sri Pada, also known as Adam's Peak has been proclaimed as a world heritage site by the UNESCO.

Hundreds of thousands of local and foreign devotees belonged to all four major religions - Buddhists, Hindus, Christians, and Muslims- trek to the summit of the sacred mountain each year during the season.

2nd Tourism Awareness Programme a tremendous success

The Hotels Association of Sri Lanka (THASL) conducted the 2nd Tourism Awareness Programme for A/L Students in Kalutara Region on the 06th February 2014 at Royal Palms Beach Hotel, Kalutara and it was even more of a success than the inaugural one held in Negombo a few weeks ago. Over 130 A/L students from 13 schools in the Kalutara, Panadura and Wadduwa areas participated along with 15 teachers in charge.

Anura Lokuhetty, Immediate Past President of THASL started off the proceedings giving a very inspiring opening speech, drawing on his hands-on experience in the industry where he started off in the industry as an inexperienced school boy, and rose to the top. The students were able to relate with him well. He outlined the prospects in the industry as well as the acute manpower shortage that the industry will face in the future.

Srilal Miththapala, Past President of THASL gave an overview of the industry, and hotel operations. He also touched on the peripheral opportunities and career paths available for those who join the hotel industry. He stressed that there are no short cuts in this industry and that one must be prepared to work hard and persevere, but that at the end the rewards are good. He also outlined some of the basic pre-requisite attributes that one should have in working in the hotel industry.

Ravi Kurukulasooriya, General Manager of Royal Palms Beach Hotel then gave a more detailed analysis of the different departments of the hotels, and outlined the structure and career paths possible. He also touched on the possible remuneration levels one could expect in the hotel industry, along with the perks.

The students were then given some snacks with coffee/tea, and divided into groups and taken on a tour of the hotel. This was the highlight of the sessions where the students could see for themselves how the different departments of a large hotel operates and coordinates all activities.

Most of the school teachers who attended the session praised this effort and even some of the principals also called after the event to thank for the initiative. Some of the students expressed their intention to do the final research paper of their A/L exam on tourism.





Thotupola Kanda: The World at Your Feet



Like many of the mountains in Sri Lanka, this peak also has its own story steeped in legend, drama and mysticism. Thotupola Kanda - which means landing site - was the legendary landing site of the flight of Ravana, Hanuman and Sita. Taking the mythical plane, Ravana flew to India, kidnapped Sita and escaped to Sri Lanka, with the aircraft first landing on the peak of Thotupola Kanda.

The small, narrow path belies the adventure awaiting any avid nature traveller. It's a two kilometre climb to the top that takes less than an hour for any young hiker. The mountain at 2,360 metres above sea level is the third highest after

Pidurutalagala and Adam's Peak. According to park rangers, the best times to visit are February to April while July to September is also fairly dry.

Things to do at the peak: take a nap or take a stroll, while the world is at your feet. Savour these often rare moments in a country grappling to retain its valuable forest cover, aesthetic environment, fauna and flora.

Bird life is in abundance though many are not spotted during the first week of January. On the way up, an occasional butterfly rests on a flower-maybe it's not butterfly season. Through the rugged but well-carved path, a sambur had been there not so long ago, leaving behind fresh footprints.

Thotupola Kande has plenty of red binary flowers and all kinds of vegetation. From the peak, the road meandering through Horton Plains is clearly seen with rows of vehicles parked outside the entrance to World's End.

From the top, visitors generally spend a few moments watching Adam's Peak, at times covered by clouds... then, as the clouds settle down, emerging in its full glory.

Access to Thotupola Kanda is either through Nuwara Eliya or Bandarawela. The train journey is also breathtaking right upto Pattipola or Ohiya station, which is eight kilometres from the park.

Pattipola has the highest railway station in Sri Lanka at an altitude of 1897.5 metres above sea level. On the way through Badulla, the 9-arch bridge Demodara Railway Bridge is an awesome sight. The bridge, which is 300 feet long and 25 feet wide is built from solid rock, bricks and cement, according to various sources, without a single piece of steel. It is connected to a tunnel just before the Demodara Station.

While several dozen visitors were seen at the entrance to World's End with rows of vehicles parked, not many visited Thotupola Kande. There are no water sources on the trail, which makes it necessary to carry enough drinking water along. Sections of the bush have thick undergrowth and wearing shorts may not be the best option while a good pair of sports shoes is recommended.

Horton Plains including Thotupola Kanda is a strict 'no polythene' zone. Visitors are not permitted to carry any plastic bags, sheets, cigarettes, lighters or match boxes. Alcohol is banned. Thotupola Kanda is clean as a whistle - not a drop of polythene or any sign of human visitation is evident. A pleasant experience indeed for the environmentally-conscious traveller!





Thambili: A delightful sip

The refreshing taste of thambili or king coconut is the preferred beverage of many Sri Lankans. And as such wayside boutiques laden with thambili is a common sight throughout the Island and has become an integral part of the culture. It is grown commercially in areas such as Gampaha, Anuradhapura and many more, yet it is not uncommon to find at least one king coconut tree gently swaying in the gardens of many households. However, coastal areas with a higher content of salt in soil and plenty of sunshine are said to be the ideal growth conditions for thambili.

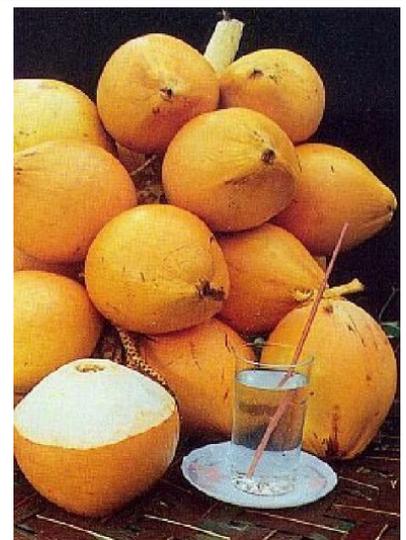
Once grown, about six to eight years after planting, a tree can yield up to 140 to 200 coconuts each season and depending on the size, each can contain up to one litre of sweet water. Thambili is said to be cut when the coconut is unripe and the process of cutting is a fascinating procedure that require years of experience and skill. There are several ways to climb the coconut tree; however the most interesting technique would be where the climber uses the aid of a jute rope. First in preparation, the climber will have to tie the jute rope around his feet and place his feet on the base of the trunk. To aid in the climb, he must further enlist the help of a sturdy cloth, rope or rubber, winding the length around the tree trunk at chest level and holding it tightly. Afterwards it is all about catching the tree trunk higher each time with the length of rope and pushing up along the trunk. Once the climber reaches the top, he would tie a long piece of rope to the stem of a bunch of king coconut and cut it before slowly lowering the goods to the ground taking care not to damage the king coconuts. Harvested thus, the thambili is either brought to Pettah or sold directly to vendors or in their own shops.

Thambili is rich with nutrients such as calcium, carbohydrates, potassium, Vitamin E and iron while protein, fat, several enzymes and dietary fibre are also part and parcel of the sweet beverage. As such the health benefits derived from this natural source of wellness is abundant. It is famed throughout the isle as a remedy for various ailments such as kidney disorders, rashes, allergies and much more. Further, due to the high levels of electrolytes present, it is ideal as a sports drink or during times of illnesses such as diarrhea to replenish the lost nutrients in the body. Adding to the long list of excellent properties of thambili, it is said that during World War II, doctors both American and Japanese have used thambili, due to its sterile properties, as a substitute for saline.

However, one does not require a reason to enjoy the sweet taste of a thambili that refreshes and invigorates the body and mind instantly, especially if battered by the harsh rays of the sun during the dry season. In order to drink, firstly the wider side of the king coconut is cut until the white surface beneath the orange exterior is exposed. Then a small opening is made enough to either drink directly or by using a straw.

Further, after draining every drop within the husk, when cleaved into two halves, the inside is lined with a white jelly named 'londe' that could be peeled off and eaten-a delectable yet tender mouthful.

Revitalising sweetness alone is not the only thing that thambili has to offer as thambili tel or oil for hair, thambili wine and other products can be produced from the king coconut water as well.





In The Peaceful Realm Of Heritage Hotel



Spread over an area of four acres, Heritage Hotel is easily accessed from the Anuradhapura-Puttalam Road. The well tended garden is picturesque and sets the tone for the hotel. Located in the historic kingdom of Anuradhapura, as its name implies—Heritage—the design of the hotel draws inspiration from the ancient architecture of the kingdom. Pillars and steps of stone, with motifs of the nelum flower on the columns are a few of such features. The lobby is spacious with the reception too highlighting elements of stone. Glass has been used where-ever possible to allow the greenery and the beauty of nature to be felt within.

Heritage Hotel is a 36-key property with single, double and triple categories. All rooms are air conditioned and open onto a balcony or verandah. WiFi, tea/coffee making facilities as well as mini bar and telephone with IDD connection are available in each room. The interior is decorated with bright colours that is cheerful at the same time relaxing too.

Nelum Restaurant, which is the main dining room can accommodate approximately 60 pax including outside seating. Set menu, a la carte and buffet options are available while both Sri Lankan and international cuisine are served at the restaurant. From one side the view is of the garden and on the other a central water feature amidst a rock garden gives a cooling ambience to the setting of the restaurant.

Manel Ballroom has a capacity of 300 covers and is suitable for weddings as well as conferences and business meetings. The Olu Bar is fully equipped and has a oakwood feel to its interior.

The swimming pool and outer garden are beautiful and give a sense of completeness to the hotel. While many guests who arrive at Heritage Hotel prefer to visit the many religious and historic sites of Anuradhapura, the Wilpattu National Park is only a 40min drive from the hotel. Excursions can be organised on request and bicycles are available for rent.

Heritage Hotel is a three star property with all the facilities for a comfortable and idyllic holiday.



The Embassy of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka



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