

# TRAVEL TALK ASIA

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## TONIK Introduces a Story-First Vision for Sri Lanka's Hospitality Sector

DINUSHKA CHANDRASENA

Sri Lanka's hospitality industry is entering a new phase with the evolution of TONIK, a brand that places narrative, cultural context, and design-led experiences at the core of travel. Backed by the Acorn Group—one of the region's most diversified conglomerates with established interests spanning aviation, travel, logistics, leisure, insurance, and education across several Asian markets—TONIK reflects a long-term vision to enrich Sri Lanka's tourism offering with global insight and purposeful growth.

Drawing on Acorn Group's extensive experience in connecting people and markets across borders, TONIK is founded on the belief that destinations are defined not just by place, but by identity. The brand's philosophy centres on translating Sri Lanka's cultural depth into carefully curated villa and boutique hotel experiences—creating value for property owners while responding to the expectations of today's globally minded traveller.

According to Harith Perera, Partner at Acorn Group, Sri Lanka's tourism narrative is layered, diverse, and ripe for more meaningful representation on the world stage. He notes that TONIK's guiding principle, Every Stay Is a Story, mirrors the broader shift within global tourism, where travellers increasingly seek authenticity, cultural connection, and purpose-driven experiences. He adds that a design-conscious, culturally rooted



approach has the potential not only to elevate Sri Lanka's appeal internationally, but also to generate lasting benefits for communities, owners, and the wider tourism ecosystem.

At the heart of TONIK's positioning is a distinctive perspective: villas and boutique properties are viewed as living expressions of place rather than standalone commercial assets. Each property is developed as a narrative shaped by architecture, heritage, craftsmanship, and its surrounding community. This approach responds to a key challenge within Sri Lanka's villa sector—exceptional properties that lack the visibility, positioning, and global access needed to reach their full potential. TONIK bridges this gap by refining and amplifying each property's unique identity, transforming individuality into sustainable commercial success.

Chief Executive Officer of TONIK, Sundararajah Kokularajah, believes the island is poised for a new tourism chapter. He highlights Sri Lanka's wealth of untapped stories, traditions, and experiences, noting that TONIK aims to unlock this potential with care, creativity, and forward-thinking strategy.

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## Sri Lanka Tourism Hits the Numbers, but Value Remains the Real Test

DINUSHKA CHANDRASENA

Sri Lanka has begun the year with a headline achievement: visitor arrivals have officially surpassed 2018 levels. The confirmation, delivered at a recent media briefing by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Employment and Tourism Vijitha Herath, signals a much-needed inflection point for an industry that has endured an extraordinary sequence of setbacks since 2019. While the arrival figures invite celebration, they also invite scrutiny.



2018 to around 8.4–8.6 nights in 2023–24 along with a lower per-visitor spend—a trend that suggests rising visitor traffic, but weaker returns per visitor.

The recovery is unfolding at a moment when Sri Lanka is once again commanding global attention. In recent months, the island has been named among Travel + Leisure's 50 Best Places to Visit in 2026 and recognised by U.S. News as one of the Best Places to Visit in Asia for 2026—a strong endorsement of its enduring appeal and renewed relevance in long-haul travel planning.

However, beneath the momentum lies a more complex reality. Despite higher arrivals, tourism revenue remains below 2018 levels, pointing to a persistent gap between volume and value. For an industry that sits alongside worker remittances as one of Sri Lanka's most critical sources of foreign exchange, this divergence is becoming increasingly difficult to ignore.

Recent data from the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority derived from a survey carried out according to the World Tourism Organization guidelines further sharpens the picture. The average length of stay has shortened from 10.8 nights in

Industry veteran Stefan Furkhan, writing in the Daily FT, argues that this is where Sri Lanka must return to the basics of "Marketing 101": listening. From long immigration queues and unclear processes to inconsistent visitor experiences, Furkhan notes that a single point of friction can undo weeks of destination marketing. In tourism, when yield fails to keep pace with volume, the solution is rarely louder promotion—it is sharper attention to what travellers are actually saying.

This perspective is particularly relevant as Sri Lanka refocuses on India, its most important source market. A multi-city roadshow scheduled to take place within the first half of January will take the Sri Lankan travel trade comprising of hotelier and DMC's to three key cities in India, as the destination works to rebuild confidence and strengthen industry ties in this key market.

According to the Chairman, Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority and SLTPB,

Cont on Pg 2



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As Sri Lanka closes 2025, the tourism industry has a genuine milestone to acknowledge. Visitor arrivals have surpassed the numbers recorded in 2018 – widely regarded as the industry's golden year, marking a symbolic return to scale and confidence after years of disruption. It is a moment worth recognising, not simply for the numbers themselves, but for what they represent: resilience, belief, and renewed global interest in the destination.

Yet, arrivals alone do not tell the full story. Despite the record arrivals, overall tourism revenue has not kept pace, underscoring a long-standing challenge for Sri Lanka Tourism – yield. This gap calls for sharper, more strategic planning and marketing, particularly in high-potential source markets where travellers demonstrate higher spending patterns. Moving forward, success must be measured not just by how many visitors arrive, but by the value they bring to the economy and the communities they touch.

Encouragingly, in the aftermath of recent disruptions, arrival trends have remained steady, reflecting sustained confidence in Sri Lanka as a destination. While restoration efforts continue in affected areas, there has been a notable positive development in infrastructure. The railway network in the central highlands has seen the successful restoration of almost all routes, with only a few exceptions, reinstating one of the country's most iconic and sought-after travel experiences. This is a timely reminder of how critical connectivity and accessibility are to tourism recovery.

On a celebratory note, congratulations are due to Chandra Wickramasinghe and the team at Thema Collection on the first anniversary of Amba Yaalu, Sri Lanka – the country's first all-women-run hospitality property. In just one year, Amba Yaalu has come to represent thoughtful, place-driven hospitality that today's travellers increasingly value, rooted in authenticity, sustainability, and a strong sense of community, while also setting a powerful benchmark for inclusivity and leadership within Sri Lanka's tourism industry.

As Sri Lanka steps into its next phase of tourism growth, the task ahead is clear: convert momentum into meaningful value, and arrivals into long-term impact.



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# NEWS

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## TONIK Introduces a Story-First Vision....

By nurturing properties as living narratives and respecting the communities that sustain them, the brand seeks to shape a tourism model that is authentic, resilient, and future-focused.



For property owners, TONIK's strength lies in its access to Acorn Group's deep market intelligence and international reach. With established networks across the Maldives, the Middle East, Europe, and Asia—supported by the Group's aviation and travel operations—TONIK benefits from a nuanced understanding of global travel behaviour, including High-Net-Worth travel segments where Acorn holds a strong presence, particularly in the Maldives. This insight enables TONIK to position Sri Lanka competitively while opening pathways into new and emerging markets.

As global travel continues to evolve toward slower, more intentional journeys, TONIK is designed to meet this demand through a seamless blend of design, personalised

service, and technology-driven experiences. The result is hospitality that prioritises emotional connection and depth—attributes increasingly valued by boutique and luxury travellers alike.

Looking ahead, TONIK envisions a future where every property serves as a gateway into Sri Lanka's cultural fabric, offering guests a deeper understanding of its people, craftsmanship, and heritage. Supported by Acorn Group's scale, strategic frameworks, and commitment to innovation, TONIK is poised to emerge as a Sri Lankan hospitality brand with global resonance.

By reimagining leisure travel, aligning with the evolving needs of international travellers, and building capabilities comparable to leading global brands, TONIK is charting a confident path toward becoming a recognised name in the international villa and boutique hospitality space.

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## Sri Lanka Tourism Hits the Numbers....

India accounted for the highest number of cancellations following the recent cyclone, prompting closer engagement with two of India's leading travel and tourism associations, namely, TAFI and TAAI to stabilise sentiment and restore momentum.

will be defined less by rankings and arrival tallies, and more by execution—how efficiently visitors move through gateways, how consistently experiences are delivered, and how effectively the destination converts interest into longer stays and higher spend.

Sri Lanka enters 2026 with enviable global endorsements and renewed traveller interest. The next phase, however,

The numbers may signal recovery. The challenge now is turning that recovery into resilience.

## TCEB Announces Five-Year Carbon Reduction Target for Events Strengthening Thailand's Green MICE Leadership

### TTA BULLETIN

Demonstrating leadership in sustainable development, the Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau (Public Organization), or TCEB, announced a new sustainability mission to steer the Thai MICE industry toward Carbon Neutrality and a Net Zero Carbon future, aiming to reduce emissions by 20,000 TonCO<sub>2</sub>e by 2030.



This ambition reflects the Thai MICE industry's growing resolve, having collectively reduced and avoided 2,445.97 TonCO<sub>2</sub>e across 232 events in FY 2025, compared to 780 tons of CO<sub>2</sub>e in FY 2024. The 313 percent increase underscores the industry's rising commitment to environmentally responsible event management.

Mrs. Supawan Teerarat, President of TCEB, stated that creating a greener footprint for Thailand's events aligns with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) initiatives set by the United Nations and supports the government's national development strategy by enabling the Thai MICE industry to deliver measurable contributions to sustainable national growth.

"Thailand is advancing sustainability from aspiration to achievement, turning long-term commitments into measurable impacts. Building on TCEB's long-standing focus on eco-friendly growth and proactive green initiatives, we are fully prepared to help clients host meaningful and sustainable events. Integrating sustainability into every aspect of the MICE industry is both a responsibility and a strategic direction that strengthens Thailand's competitiveness and reaffirms its position as a premier MICE destination, meeting the needs of businesses that prioritise sustainability."

To achieve this goal, TCEB has updated its Terms of Reference for bidders and proposal submitters, requiring organisers to plan carbon-neutral events. Event organisers are required to calculate the carbon footprint of their events and implement measures to achieve carbon

emissions, obtaining certification or following additional guidance from TCEB. Organisers are also encouraged to offset emissions by sourcing carbon credits from greenhouse gas reduction projects in Thailand, ensuring that the event's net greenhouse gas emissions are reduced or fully neutralised.

TCEB provides practical tools to support organisers in meeting these sustainability goals. These resources include a carbon footprint avoidance calculator for event planners, the Zero Carbon application developed by the Thailand Greenhouse Gas Management Organization (Public Organization), or TGO, for tracking emission reductions, a comprehensive network of auditing and verifying bodies, and access to domestic carbon credit projects to facilitate effective offsetting. By empowering organisers with these innovative tools and support systems, TCEB is not only making sustainable event management more accessible but also encouraging a culture of accountability and continuous improvement across the industry.

"This commitment reflects TCEB's readiness to meet the evolving expectations of the global business community and our dedication to helping international clients host sustainable, high-impact events in Thailand," added Mrs. Supawan.



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## FITUR Screen 2026 to connect the tourism and audiovisual industries through screen tourism

### TTA BULLETIN

FITUR Screen, the section organised by FITUR together with the Spain Film Commission dedicated to screen tourism, will be holding its eighth edition within the framework of the International Tourism Trade Fair, which is taking place from 21 to 25 January 2026 at IFEMA MADRID. The section returns for yet another edition with the aim of bringing the relationship between the audiovisual industry and the tourism industry closer, demonstrating that on-screen content has become a strategic resource for the international projection of destinations.

Over the course of the trade fair's professional days, from 21 to 23 January, FITUR Screen is hosting its professional programme in Hall 10, where tourism professionals, film commissions and film offices, as well as representatives from the audiovisual sector will congregate.

In recent years, the screen has become a meeting point between the audiovisual industry and the tourism industry. According to the Spanish Screen Tourism Observatory, four out of ten foreign travellers have discovered a place in Spain thanks to an audiovisual production. In this way, current data underline how stories and scenarios that reach the viewer can become a first contact to spark interest in a destination.

At this year's edition, FITUR Screen will be featuring a wide and varied range of



presentations and professional activities that will revolve around the Spain Film Commission's Experiences Programme. This strategic initiative, funded by the Ministry of Industry and Tourism - State Secretariat for Tourism (SETUR), aims to promote innovative and sustainable tourism products based on audiovisual locations.

In this way, the exhibition area of the section will be especially dedicated to showcasing the diversity and potential of the initiatives proposed in the Experiences Programme, highlighting their capacity to generate value in the territories and enrich the Spanish tourism offer.

FITUR Screen will be highlighting the strategic role of the film industry as a driver of cultural, economic and tourism development through its renowned awards. As a new feature, this year the section will also include the Award for the Best Screen Tourism Experience, which will recognise exemplary initiatives that integrate creativity, sustainability and innovation in the creation of screen tourism experiences.

## Elevating Capabilities with the Google for Startups Cloud Program

### TTA BULLETIN

MarketeerPro has been formally accepted as a participant in the Google for Startups Cloud Program. This strategic affiliation directly supports the company's mission to empower new and growing businesses with solutions built on Data-Driven Efficacy.



its analytical capabilities and supporting a commitment to Intelligent Marketing - Made Effortless.

"Eliminating guesswork is the key to business longevity," said Iromal Perera, Founder/Director. "Accessing Google Cloud's advanced resources allows

us to scale our platform's intelligence without limitations. This is a critical step in ensuring that the new and growing companies we serve have access to the same powerful infrastructure and ethical standards that drive the world's leading enterprises."

### Delivering Proven Results and Strategic Guidance

MarketeerPro's unique value is its seamless, all-in-one service. The company provides a unified solution for market entry, growth, and sustained success, distinguishing its value in a market often fragmented by niche specialists.

The MarketeerPro platform provides trialed and tested strategic frameworks. These initial frameworks are the result of vast, automated processing and serve as a

## Khiri Travel Now GSTC Certified in All Its Destinations

### TTA BULLETIN

Asian destination management company Khiri Travel is now Global Sustainable Tourism Council certified in all destinations where it operates.

The certification applies to all eight countries where Khiri offers services: Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam, Philippines, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka. Khiri Travel was officially GSTC-certified on 18 December 2025.

The GSTC said: "Being certified by an Accredited Certification Body means that your tourism product or service complies with the highest social and environmental standards on the market."

It added: "With an accredited certification, customers and buyers are assured that the business was certified in a credibly verified procedure in a transparent, impartial, and competent manner."

Khiri Travel met the standards as assessed by the GSTC-accredited certification body Control Union. The audit process reviewed not only office practices but also field operations and included interviews with Khiri Travel's local partners and suppliers.

"As a destination management company, ensuring that all partners share Khiri's commitment to sustainability is a



challenge," said Sukhum Jarangdej, Sustainability Coordinator - Khiri Core. "Achieving certification shows that Khiri's network of partners and suppliers are aligned with the company's vision for responsible travel."

Willem Niemeijer (pictured), the CEO and founder of the 33-year old

DMC added: "Certification shows that Khiri is walking the talk on making tourism a force for social and environmental good. It is proof of our commitment to upholding the 4Cs of regenerative travel as defined by The Long Run: conservation, community, culture and commerce."

In 2025, 14 Khiri Travel staff, including 'Green Team' spokespersons across eight Asian countries, also earned the person-based GSTC Professional Certificate in Sustainable Tourism. The endeavour was part of Khiri's ambition to be a completely GSTC-certified DMC by the end of 2025 – a goal it has now achieved.

GSTC certification for Khiri Travel in eight destinations topped a year in which Khiri was also named Destination Management Company of the Year at the TDM Travel Trade Excellence Awards 2025 and earned an Outstanding Achievement Award for Most Sustainable Travel Company at the 2025 TTG Travel Awards.

## The Ritz-Carlton Yacht Collection makes their maiden call to Sri Lanka with Aitken Spence Travels, docking at Colombo & Galle

### TTA BULLETIN

Aitken Spence Travels marked a significant milestone with the handling of The Ritz-Carlton Yacht Collection's first call to the ports of Colombo & Galle, on the 14th & 15th of December 2025. This inaugural visit reflects Aitken Spence's ongoing efforts to introduce world renowned, ultra-luxury cruise brands to Sri Lanka, elevating the country's profile within the high-end, global cruise travel segment, and establishing Sri Lanka as the ideal, multiport destination for luxury travellers.



company has placed a strong emphasis on developing the luxury cruise segment, fostering relationships with prestigious brands and showcasing Sri Lanka's potential as an ideal destination for premium ocean journeys. The upcoming visit by The Ritz-Carlton Yacht Collection is a remarkable testament to the continued efforts of the company in promoting Sri Lankan tourism.

Commenting on the historic arrival of The Ritz-Carlton Yacht Collection to Sri Lanka, Mr. Nalin Jayasundera, Managing Director of Aitken Spence Travels, stated "We are truly thrilled to welcome The Ritz-Carlton Collection to Sri Lanka on their maiden voyage. This milestone reflects the hard work and dedication of our team in positioning Sri Lanka within the luxury cruise travel segment. It is a significant endorsement of our country as a destination-of-choice, particularly at such a critical moment, bringing high-net-worth travellers to experience the island's diversity through bespoke, privately curated shore excursions."

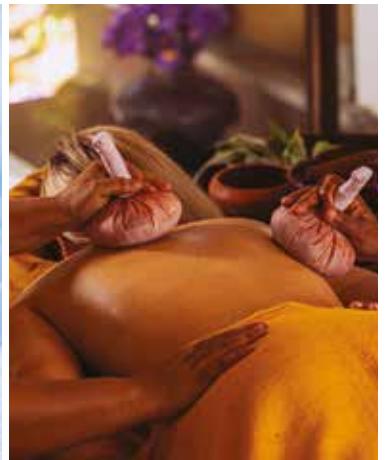
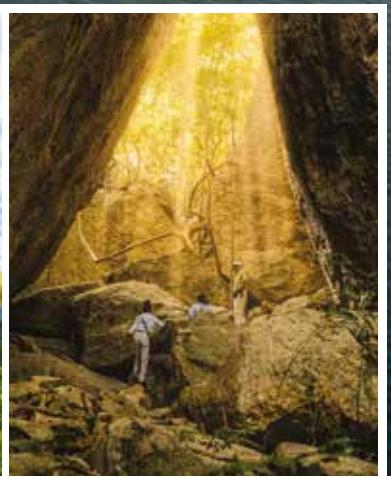
Chairman / Chairperson Ms. Stasshani Jayawardena added "We are delighted that



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## The Shoppes at City of Dreams Launches Its 8th Floor, Ushering in a Season of Holiday Magic

### TTA BULLETIN

The holidays are officially here, and The Shoppes at City of Dreams Sri Lanka is ready to welcome you! This season, the mall unveils its newly launched 8th Floor — a vibrant collection of shopping, lifestyle, and indulgence — adding even more sparkle to Colombo's festive spirit.



locally rooted craftsmanship for the festive season. Explore a diverse mix of brands, from bespoke tailoring and contemporary womenswear to batik artistry and relaxed resortwear. Discover premium tea boutiques, natural wellness essentials, silver and fashion jewellery collections, and artisanal florals and terrariums crafted for thoughtful gifting. The floor also features limited-edition festive pop-ups, offering shoppers a chance to experience select brands available exclusively for the season.

Designed to delight, the 8th Floor offers an elevated retail experience, seamlessly complementing the festive ambience that brightens both the 7th and 8th floors.

"The 8th Floor brings a fresh mix of premium retail, local creativity, and gifting inspiration, offering visitors a vibrant holiday experience like no other. From handcrafted treasures and stylish fashion and festive pop-ups, it's the perfect place to celebrate the season, find thoughtful gifts, and immerse yourself in the spirit of the holidays at The Shoppes", said Director – Mall Management at the City of Dreams, Sri Lanka, Romesh Jayawardene.

Step into the newly opened 8th Floor — a refined retail destination bringing together premium fashion, thoughtful gifting, and

The 7th Floor of The Shoppes at City of Dreams Sri Lanka is now home to the refined Denza showroom, introducing a new standard of premium electric vehicles to Colombo. This exclusive level further reinforces The Shoppes as the city's definitive destination for high-end retail and lifestyle experiences.

Together, these curated vendors create a shopping environment that blends luxury, heritage, and modern lifestyle experiences. Come for the festivities, stay for the sparkle, and celebrate the season in true City of Dreams style!

## FITUR aims for a standout 2026 edition with a strong focus on knowledge

### TTA BULLETIN

FITUR is finalizing all arrangements for its next edition, which will take place from 21 to 25 January 2026 at IFEMA Madrid. Participation expectations are high, reflecting the strong momentum in the tourism sector. According to UN Tourism, international arrivals were up 5% on 2024 figures as of September, reaching 1.1 billion travellers worldwide.



grown by 50%, bringing together solutions from more than 150 companies across 20 countries. The Knowledge Hub will also host talks, conferences and professional meetings from areas such as FITUR TechY, FITUR Know-How & Export, FITUR Sports, FITUR Talent and the FITURNEXT Observatory, all keen to expanding and diversifying the tourism offering.

With a month to go before opening day, FITUR 2026 confirms the participation of more than 10,000 companies spanning the full tourism value chain: destinations, public institutions, transport operators, hospitality, intermediaries, technology firms, innovation specialists and service providers, among others. Their presence reinforces FITUR's role as a strategic meeting point for the industry, fostering business opportunities, public-private collaboration and knowledge exchange.

The diversity of participants enables a broad, cross-cutting approach to the sector's main challenges and opportuni-

The 46th edition of FITUR will be officially inaugurated on Thursday 22 January, the fair's second professional day, featuring its position as one of the world's leading tourism platforms.

In line with its commitment to sustainability and reducing its carbon footprint, FITUR 2026 places special emphasis on promoting public transport, highlighting IFEMA Madrid's excellent connections by bus and metro. The fair aims to encourage the use of cleaner, more efficient and more sustainable mobility alternatives.

One of the key new features this year is the Knowledge Hub, conceived to become the fair's centre for tourism-focused innovation and a space to address the sector's most relevant challenges. The Innovation Hub will run on 21, 22 and 23 January in Hall 12.

FITUR's Travel Technology Area has

## INSPIRING JOURNEYS

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### CHANDRA WICKRAMASINGHE. A LIFE SHAPED BY PURPOSE, PASSION AND PLACE



Long before sustainability became a strategic priority and experiential travel a global trend, Chandra Wickramasinghe was quietly shaping a different kind of hospitality narrative in Sri Lanka one guided not by formulas, but by instinct, integrity and a deep respect for place. At a time when the industry favoured scale and convention, he chose meaning over margins, and authenticity over excess. In doing so, he emerged as one of the true pioneers who helped define Sri Lanka's modern tourism identity.

Chandra Wickramasinghe's journey is marked by courage, curiosity and clarity of vision. Entering an industry that was still finding its global voice, he charted a path that was both thoughtful and forward-looking. He believed that hospitality should be deeply human rooted in culture, community and connection. This philosophy would go on to influence every facet of his work, from destination management to hotel development, setting him apart as a leader who consistently looked beyond the obvious.

As the visionary force behind Connaissance de Ceylan, Chandra redefined destination management in Sri Lanka. The company became synonymous with curated, immersive travel experiences that invited visitors to truly understand the island rather than simply pass through it. Each journey was designed to tell a story of heritage, landscape and people appealing to discerning global travellers seeking depth, authenticity and purpose in their travels.

His influence extended seamlessly into the hotel sector, where he continued to challenge conventional hospitality models. Chandra believed hotels should exist in harmony with their surroundings not as isolated developments, but as living extensions of the places they occupy. This belief translated into properties that celebrated Sri Lankan craftsmanship, respected the natural environment and embraced sustainability long before such practices became mainstream. Starting from Culture Club Kandalama (now known as Amaya Lake) to Maalu Maalu and the first ever all-female run hotel 'Ampa Yaalu', every single property under the Thema Collection portfolio, has a unique concept and identity.

Today, as Sri Lanka's tourism industry navigates a new era shaped by responsibility, resilience and reinvention, Chandra Wickramasinghe's journey feels more relevant than ever. His work serves as a powerful reminder that true progress is not driven by trends, but by principles and that the most meaningful legacies are built when vision is guided by conscience.

For Travel Talk's Inspiring Journeys, Chandra Wickramasinghe stands as more than a pioneer. He represents a philosophy of tourism that is thoughtful, immersive and enduring one that continues to influence how Sri Lanka is experienced by the world, long after the journey ends.

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## South Asia's First-Ever Reggae Music Festival "ONE LOVE 2026" Set to Ignite Bentota

### TTA BULLETIN

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.

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.



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."

## ATM unveils groundbreaking 2026 conference programme, setting a new benchmark for strategic insight across global travel and tourism

### TTA BULLETIN



Arabian Travel Market (ATM) has unveiled its extensive conference programme for ATM 2026, outlining a multi-stage agenda which will shape the future of the global travel and tourism industry.

ATM 2026, which will take place from May 4 to 7 at Dubai World Trade Centre, will host a conference programme featuring actionable insights, data-driven perspectives, and debates across major travel sectors. Under the theme "Travel 2040: Driving New Frontiers Through Innovation and Technology," the sessions will take place on the Global Stage, the Future Stage, and the newly rebranded Experience Stage, formerly the Business Events Stage, part of IBTM @ ATM.

Throughout the conference programme, renowned global thought leaders, policymakers, innovators and practitioners will share insights that support sustainable global growth, elevate standards, and strengthen the long-term resilience of travel and tourism worldwide.

Danielle Curtis, Exhibition Director ME, Arabian Travel Market, said: "At ATM, we want to raise the bar in how we guide the global travel and tourism industry. Our 2026 conference programme has been carefully curated to provide strategic direction through informed, industry-led insight, ensuring that decision-makers leave with the knowledge they need to act with confidence.

"We want ATM to be a platform where thought leaders share expertise that supports global growth, improves standards and strengthens the future of travel and tourism worldwide. By covering every major vertical within the industry, and by grounding our agenda in research, innovation and real-world scenarios, we are empowering the sector to make smarter, more sustainable decisions."

Designed to deliver practical takeaways alongside big-picture thinking, the Global Stage will outline the insights needed to make informed strategic decisions in an increasingly complex, fast-evolving environment. A particular focus will be on

research-led sessions, with new data and insights presented throughout the programme from companies including Tourism Economics, an Oxford Economics company, Euromonitor, and GSIQ.

On the final day of the Global Stage, the agenda will focus on the Women in Travel Forum, delivered in partnership with Women in Travel CIC, which will provide a dedicated platform to address accessibility, inclusion, equity and leadership across the travel and tourism industry.

The agenda will examine how destinations, businesses and policymakers can design more inclusive travel experiences, remove barriers for underrepresented groups, and embed accessibility into tourism planning and product development. The forum will also highlight the importance of diverse leadership and representation in driving innovation, improving standards and supporting sustainable growth across the sector.

Reflecting this year's full debut of ATM Travel Tech as a co-located show, the Future Stage will be central within the Tech and Innovation Hub, an immersive area showcasing the technologies transforming travel around the world. Across four days, it will highlight the trends and breakthroughs redefining how journeys are planned, delivered and experienced.

Across all stages this year, emphasis will be placed on more interactive and intimate experiences. Exclusive roundtable discussions, the launch of Lunch 'n Learn sessions, Meet the Speaker opportunities, as well as a partnership with Vox Technologies, which will see the use of headset devices that directly translate sessions in real time, encouraging deeper conversation and peer-to-peer knowledge exchange.

"With our expanded scope, redefined stages and renewed focus on inclusion, innovation and evidence-based insight, the ATM 2026 conference programme underscores the event's position as the region's leading knowledge platform for travel and tourism," added Curtis.

# Amber Yaalu Kandalama

Marks One Year of Redefining Women-Led Hospitality in Sri Lanka

Amber Yaalu Kandalama, Sri Lanka's first women-led hotel, proudly marks its first anniversary, celebrating a year of empowerment, inclusion, and purposeful hospitality.

Amber Yaalu Kandalama was conceived in response to a pressing gap within Sri Lanka's tourism and hospitality sector. Despite women representing 52.8% of the national population and achieving high literacy levels, female participation in the formal hospitality workforce remains critically low at approximately 10%. Limited opportunities to showcase talent, restricted access to education and professional training, workplace discrimination, and concerns around safety have long prevented women from fully participating and progressing within the industry.



Recognizing both the challenge and the responsibility to act, Thema Collection, a pioneering, thematic, and eco-conscious hospitality brand - introduced Amber Yaalu Kandalama as a bold intervention. Under the leadership of its Chairman, renowned for conceptualizing 16 distinctive properties that have reshaped Sri Lanka's tourism landscape, Amber Yaalu was envisioned as more than a hotel. It was designed as a platform where women are trusted to lead, supported to grow, and empowered to redefine hospitality on their own terms.

Nestled beside the serene Kandalama Lake and surrounded by flourishing mango groves, Amber Yaalu Kandalama stands as a living example of what inclusive tourism can achieve, proving that when women are given equal space, opportunity, and respect, they deliver experiences defined by authenticity, warmth, and excellence.



**Mr. Chandra Wickramasinghe**  
Chairman - Thema Collection

Beyond the boundaries of the property, Amber Yaalu Kandalama has intentionally extended its impact along the value chain. A conscious effort has been made to engage and support women-led suppliers, particularly in areas such as flowers, mushrooms and spices, ensuring that the benefits of tourism reach beyond the hotel and into the wider community. This approach reinforces the belief that true empowerment must be inclusive, sustained, and shared.

Local recruitment has been another cornerstone of Amber Yaalu's first year of operations. Approximately 20% of the team has been recruited directly from the surrounding villages, creating meaningful employment opportunities close to home and strengthening the relationship between the hotel and the local community.



Speaking on the vision behind Amber Yaalu, the Chairman of Thema Collection stated:

"Amber Yaalu is more than a resort; it represents a promise shaped by the strength of women, inspired by my single mother who nurtured and raised eight children with resilience."

Over the past year, we have seen confidence grow, skills flourish, and hospitality delivered with genuine warmth and care at every turn. Amber Yaalu has reaffirmed my belief that women's compassion, creativity, and courage are not just strengths, but the very heart of meaningful hospitality.



As we mark one year of this journey, Amber Yaalu stands as our gift to Sri Lanka - proof that inclusive tourism can inspire change, uplift lives, and redefine the future of our industry. This is a movement wrapped in mango blossoms and bound by purpose."

Reflecting on the journey, Resort Manager Jeewanthi Adhikari shared her perspective on building a women-led team from the ground up:

"When we first started, there were many questions about whether we would be able to recruit and sustain an all-women team. Today, those doubts have been replaced with confidence. We have built a committed and capable team, and in our recruitment process, we continue to give special emphasis to local women, creating opportunities for growth, learning, and long-term careers in hospitality."



As Amber Yaalu Kandalama enters its second year, it does so with renewed commitment and quiet confidence. The journey ahead will continue to focus on deepening skills, expanding opportunities, and strengthening its role as a catalyst for inclusive growth within Sri Lanka's tourism industry.

More than a celebration of one year, this milestone affirms a powerful truth, that when women are empowered, communities prosper and hospitality becomes a force for lasting change. At Amber Yaalu Kandalama, the future of tourism is not just being imagined; it is being lived, led, and nurtured every day.



# HOTELS

## Santa Land at The Reef – A Magical Day for Kids

### TTA BULLETIN

On 21st December, Pegasus Reef Hotel hosted Santa Land at The Reef – a festive Christmas carnival filled with joy and excitement for children.

Kids enjoyed colourful decorations, fun games, cheerful music, and magical moments that brought the Christmas spirit to life. The highlight was seeing their faces light up with happiness as they explored



## Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts' Acceleration of Gender Inclusion and the Ripple Effect of Female Leadership

### TTA BULLETIN

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 Tharuja Mudiyanselage 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.



Tharuja, the group's second female Resort Manager, rose to influence from humble beginnings in Welimada. Her admission to the Ceylon Hotel School in Colombo marked a pivotal shift, requiring her to adapt to the pace and demands of city life, worlds apart from her village upbringing. "I learnt very early on to embrace changes that came my way," she reflects.

A graduate of the Ceylon Hotel School and a scholarship recipient in Germany, Tharuja 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

the carnival and enjoyed festive treats in a safe, family-friendly setting by the sea.

Santa Land was a celebration of childhood joy and unforgettable family memories. We were thrilled to welcome so many happy families and look forward to creating more magical experiences at Pegasus Reef Hotel.



## Amaya Resorts & Spas Welcomes the New Year Across the Country

### TTA BULLETIN

Amaya Resorts & Spas ushered in the New Year with vibrant celebrations across its signature destinations in Kandy, Dambulla and Pasikudah, bringing families, couples and friends together for an evening filled with joy, indulgence and unforgettable moments.



guests will return to, year after year.

Amaya Resorts & Spas is the epitome of unparalleled hospitality, offering exceptional experiences across Sri Lanka's most scenic locations, including Kandy, Dambulla and Pasikudah. Renowned for its blend of modern luxury and natural beauty, Amaya

provides guests with unforgettable stays, whether they are seeking romantic getaways, vibrant celebrations or serene retreats. Committed to sustainability and outstanding service, Amaya Resorts & Spas ensures each visit is a memorable journey.



At each resort, festive dining, lively entertainment and the warmth of Sri Lankan hospitality came together to create memorable experiences, reinforcing Amaya's reputation as one of Sri Lanka's most preferred family holiday brands. Across all properties, curated cuisine, engaging entertainment and seamless service ensured a celebration that delighted guests of all ages.

As the final moments of the year turned into new beginnings, one thing was clear: New Year's Eve at Amaya is an experience by itself. With its signature blend of celebration and connection, Amaya Resorts & Spas continues to set the stage for New Year's Eve celebrations that

## Anantara Peace Haven Tangalle Resort Launches a New Era of Wellness

### TTA BULLETIN

Tranquil and tropical with a rugged beauty and temperate climate, Sri Lanka's south coast is blessed with a naturally restorative environment. On a rocky outcrop overlooking a secluded cove of golden sand, Anantara Peace Haven Tangalle Resort harnesses the nurturing qualities of its shoreline home to create a sophisticated oasis of soothing and renewal.



and eye rituals. The brightening and firming Kumkumadi Royal Facial uses the esteemed Kumkumadi oil to leave skin supple and luminous. The Kesha Revive Hair Ritual pairs a lime and onion extract head massage with warm triphala therapy to relieve tension, fortify roots and boost scalp health. The 120-minute Prana Radiance

Ritual detoxifies the senses and rejuvenates vital energies through carefully crafted steps that promote release, balance and renewal. Also available are Abhyanga massages, Pizhichil Kerala-style oil baths, Sweda thermal infusions and more.

Beyond Ayurveda, the award-winning Anantara Spa has also introduced four specially curated aromatic massages, showcasing the sensory potency of the island's indigenous ingredients. Melt away stress and tension with a Four Hand Massage in which two skilled therapists work in perfect synchronicity to induce profound relaxation. Invoking the natural healing of the ocean, a unique Seashell Massage releases muscles and improves circulation by moving polished shells in graceful, flowing strokes across the body.

Age is no barrier to bliss at Anantara Spa with tailored 30-minute Kids' Massages for ages four to 12. Using light pressure and natural coconut oils, these gentle treatments support healthy care for growing bodies. For mums-to-be, a 60-minute Pregnancy Massage eases the back, neck, and shoulders, reducing swelling and assisting sleep to boost comfort for mother and baby throughout their shared journey.

In addition to enhancing its wellness team, the resort has also launched the pioneering Ayurvedic beauty sanctuary, Ayu Lavanaya. Named from the Sanskrit words Ayu (life) and Lavanaya (grace), the sanctuary is a modern reimagination of a quintessential Ayurvedic parlour. It aligns physical care with deeper wellbeing through timeless rituals and ancient wisdom. Offered in a new space within the lush, floral environs of Anantara Spa, each meditative treatment at Ayu Lavanaya is formulated for immediate results and long-lasting benefits.

Signature therapies complement a full menu of Ayurvedic manicures, pedicures



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# HOTELS

## Christmas Day Brunch at The Reef: A Festive Feast to Remember

### TTA BULLETIN

Pegasus Reef Hotel hosted an unforgettable Christmas Day Brunch on 25th December, welcoming nearly 500 guests to celebrate the season in style.

Our talented culinary team created a massive brunch buffet featuring festive favourites, international specialties, and indulgent desserts. The atmosphere was filled with Christmas cheer as families and friends gathered to enjoy outstanding food, warm hospitality, and vibrant festive



## Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts Maldives extends the festive spirit from Christmas Celebrations to New Year's Eve

### TTA BULLETIN

The festive season has unfolded across Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts' Maldives properties with a series of Christmas celebrations that brought together guests, island communities and resort teams, setting the tone for a vibrant transition into the New Year. Across all four resorts, the season has been marked by shared moments, seasonal traditions and relaxed island celebrations, with attention now turning to New Year's Eve experiences planned to welcome 2026.



The celebrations reflected the resort's approach to festive programming, blending familiar seasonal traditions

with the natural rhythm of island life. Guests were invited to experience Christmas in an unhurried setting, with beachfront gatherings, open-air dining and activities designed to encourage togetherness while embracing the surrounding ocean landscapes.

As the festive period continues, the focus now shifts to upcoming New Year's Eve celebrations, which will be marked across all four resorts with gala dinners, beach parties, live DJs and bands, fireworks displays and countdown celebrations by the shore. Each resort will ring in the New Year against the backdrop of the Indian Ocean, offering guests a celebratory yet relaxed setting to mark the transition into the year ahead.

The New Year's Eve programmes are designed to complement the Christmas

ambience.

The overwhelming response made this brunch truly special — a celebration of flavours, community, and the Christmas spirit.

Thank you to everyone who joined us and made it a remarkable success. We look forward to welcoming you to more exceptional dining experiences at Pegasus Reef Hotel.



## The Kingsbury Wins Sector Award at the CMA Excellence in Integrated Reporting Awards 2025

### TTA BULLETIN

The Kingsbury, Colombo, has been recognised as the Winner of the Best Integrated Report for the Hotels & Travels Sector at the CMA Excellence in Integrated Reporting Awards 2025, reaffirming its leadership in transparency, accountability and sustainable value creation within Sri Lanka's hospitality sector.

The awards ceremony, organised by the Institute of Certified Management Accountants of Sri Lanka (CMA Sri Lanka) in collaboration with the Colombo Stock Exchange (CSE), was held on 17th November 2025 at Cinnamon Life. The event celebrated organisations that excel in demonstrating how financial performance, sustainability initiatives and long-term strategy integrate to create holistic value for all stakeholders. Distinguished guests included Chief Guest Prof. Anil Jayantha Fernando, Minister of Employment and Deputy Minister of Finance and Economic Development; Jean Bouquot, President of the International Federation of Accountants; Prof. Mervyn King, former Chairman of the International Integrated Reporting Council; Prof. Ho Yew Kee, Chairman of the Panel of Judges; Rajeeva Bandaranaike, CEO of the CSE; and Prof. Lakshman R. Watalwala, Founder President of CMA Sri Lanka.

The Kingsbury's recognition reflects its unwavering commitment to integrated thinking, ethical governance and responsible business practices. Its award-winning

integrated report demonstrates the hotel's sustainability performance, transparent governance structures, financial stewardship and people-focused culture, presented through comprehensive and cohesive disclosures. This achievement reinforces the hotel's commitment to continually enhancing reporting excellence while delivering lasting value to guests, employees, communities and stakeholders.

Now in its 11th year, the CMA Excellence in Integrated Reporting Awards is regarded as one of Sri Lanka's most respected platforms for recognising leadership in corporate reporting. The Kingsbury Colombo's achievement in 2025 further cements its position among the country's most forward-thinking and responsibly managed organisations.

The Kingsbury, Colombo, is one of the most iconic five-star hotels in the city. With 229 rooms and suites, the hotel is located in the heart of the bustling city of Colombo with easy access to business centres, shopping malls and entertainment hubs.

The Kingsbury offers an unparalleled dining experience with 9 restaurants and bars that will leave you spoilt for choice. The hotel also provides the ideal backdrop

## Shangri-La Hambantota: Recognised Among World's Finest Golf Resorts

### TTA BULLETIN

Set along Sri Lanka's unspoilt southern coastline, Shangri-La Hambantota has been ranked 70th in the Golf World Top 100 – World Resorts, placing it among the most respected golf and resort destinations worldwide.



wildlife."

This harmony between course and environment is central to the resort's appeal — delivering golf that is engaging, memorable and distinctly Sri Lankan.

A Resort Designed to Be Lived In: Beyond the fairways, Shangri-La Hambantota unfolds as a destination in its own right. Spanning 58 hectares, the resort has been conceived to offer depth, balance and ease — whether for couples, families or multi-generational travellers.

Chris Bertram, writes in his review "You never need to leave the resort, there is so much to do for all ages, whether that be enjoying one of the array of treatments in the Ayurveda-focused spa, idling by one of the three outdoor pools, or lazing on the beach."

From CHI, The Spa with its Ayurveda-focused treatments, to expansive pools, beachside leisure and curated activities ranging from sport to quiet contemplation, the experience is unhurried yet richly layered — a hallmark of Shangri-La's resort philosophy.

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# HOTELS

## 31st December Gala at Pegasus Reef Hotel – A Night to Remember

### TTA BULLETIN

Pegasus Reef Hotel welcomed hundreds of guests for an unforgettable New Year's Eve Gala on 31st December, ringing in 2026 with celebration, music, and laughter by the sea.

The evening featured a sumptuous gala dinner, live entertainment, and stunning fireworks. A special highlight was the "Pegasus King & Queen" competition, where couples competed in fun games that



added extra excitement to the night.

Guests enjoyed delicious cuisine from our expert chefs, lively music, beachside celebrations, and champagne toasts as we welcomed the New Year in style.

Thank you to all our guests for making the night truly spectacular. We look forward to many more magical celebrations at Pegasus Reef Hotel.



## Shangri-La Group Extends Humanitarian Support for Cyclone Ditwah Relief Efforts in Sri Lanka

### TTA BULLETIN

Sri Lanka – In response to the humanitarian needs arising from Cyclone Ditwah, Shangri-La Group has extended financial assistance to support national relief efforts through the Sri Lanka Red Cross Society, under the leadership of Secretary General Dr. Mahesh Gunasekara.



temporary camps, offering care, comfort, and emotional reassurance during a deeply unsettling time.

"At Shangri-La, our commitment goes beyond the walls of our hotels.

In moments like these, it is about standing alongside communities with empathy, responsibility and care. We hope this support brings not only practical relief, but also comfort and reassurance to families - especially children - who are navigating an incredibly difficult time," said Shangri-La Sri Lanka Director of Human Resources, Madusha Pihilladeniya. "Our hearts are with every community affected, and we remain united in the belief that compassion, when shared, can help restore hope."

This initiative reflects Shangri-La's ethos of Heartfelt Hospitality - a philosophy rooted in empathy, responsibility, and solidarity. It stands as a quiet yet powerful reminder that, beyond hospitality, Shangri-La remains committed to standing with communities when care is needed most and hopes this brings comfort, together with practical assistance to communities affected during this challenging time.

The contribution will be directed towards critical, life-sustaining interventions in some of the most affected communities across the country. According to the Sri Lanka Red Cross, medical services in 25 major hospitals have been severely disrupted by the cyclone. Part of the assistance will therefore support the deployment of mobile medical camps, ensuring timely and accessible healthcare for vulnerable populations.

Recognising the urgent need for safe drinking water in flood-affected areas, the initiative will also focus on restoring natural water sources, including wells and springs, helping communities regain access to clean and reliable water. In addition, a portion of the funds will be allocated to psychosocial support programmes for children residing in

## Cinnamon Life Sets the Stage for "Island Invitation" Golf Experience in Colombo

### TTA BULLETIN

Cinnamon Life at City of Dreams is set to host the Island Invitation, an exclusive, invitation-only international lifestyle and golf-led experience taking place in Colombo in February 2026. The event will be delivered in partnership with Island Golf (Pvt) Ltd, bringing together world-class sport, refined hospitality, and curated lifestyle experiences.

The Island Invitation brings together a carefully curated group of international golfers, entrepreneurs, senior business leaders, and lifestyle influencers – predominantly from India, alongside Sri Lankan participants, for a premium golf and hospitality experience.

The tournament will be hosted at the Royal Colombo Golf Club, with Cinnamon Life serving as the official venue partner and title sponsor, anchoring the event's social and experiential elements. Two signature evenings will frame the programme: an Opening Gala Dinner on 16 February 2026 and a Closing Gala Dinner on 21 February 2026, both hosted at Cinnamon Life's flagship gala venues. Each evening is expected to welcome approximately 150 invited guests, including players, partners, and distinguished

invitees.

Sanjiv Hulugalle, CEO and General Manager of Cinnamon Life at City of Dreams, commented: "The Island Invitation underscores Colombo's growing recognition as a city capable of hosting sophisticated, internationally relevant sporting and lifestyle experiences. Through Cinnamon Life, we are proud to welcome global audiences and position Colombo as a destination that seamlessly blends world-class hospitality with premium event infrastructure."

"Bringing Indian and Sri Lankan teams together in a league format adds a unique dimension to the Island Invitational and speaks to where regional golf is heading," Mahela Jayawardene, Director of Island Golf (Pvt) Ltd said. "Hosting the tournament at Royal Colombo Golf Club, with Cinnamon Life as the title partner, creates a seamless experience for the players, combining high-quality competition with outstanding hospitality. It's a strong example of how Sri Lanka can deliver world-class golf alongside a premium lifestyle offering, and how partnerships like this can help shape the future of golf tourism in the region."



## Minor Hotels to Rebrand Hua Hin Property as NH Hua Hin, Expanding Select Service Portfolio in Thailand

### TTA BULLETIN

Minor Hotels, a global hospitality group with hotels, resorts and branded residences across 59 countries, announces the upcoming launch of NH Hua Hin in Thailand's royal seaside town. Minor Hotels will assume management of the hotel from 16 January 2026.



sunset views. Recreational facilities at the hotel include the rooftop pool, a Kids' Club with indoor and outdoor spaces for hours of entertainment, and a fitness centre, allowing travellers to keep their lifestyle during their trip.

NH Hua Hin will offer 152 modern rooms and suites with city and mountain views, starting from 30 sqm. The property provides accommodation options for leisure and business guests, designed for comfort and functionality, including deluxe rooms, family rooms with bunk beds, and one-bedroom suites.

For meetings and events, the hotel offers a fully equipped 110 sqm function room that accommodates up to 90 guests, ideal for productive off-sites and stress-free gatherings.

Guests at the hotel will enjoy three food and beverage outlets: an all-day dining restaurant serving international favourites and local specialities, a lobby café offering light bites and drinks throughout the day, and a rooftop bar by the infinity pool with

Situated 200 km south of Bangkok, Thailand's capital city, Hua Hin is renowned as Thailand's royal seaside retreat. NH Hua Hin's prime location at the southern end of Hua Hin will offer guests convenient access to Hua Hin Beach (beach access 400m away), local night markets (Cicada Night Market and Hua Hin Night Market), and shopping experiences (BLUPORT Hua Hin and

# THEMA COLLECTION TAKES CENTER STAGE AT SLTC RESEARCH AWARDS 2025 FOR ITS LEADERSHIP IN SUSTAINABLE TOURISM!

BMICH, Colombo, November 12, 2025 - In a celebration of industrial research, innovation, and collaboration, the Sri Lanka Technology Campus (SLTC) hosted its inaugural SLTC Research & Innovation Awards 2025 at the BMICH, Colombo. The event honored exemplary achievements in research excellence and highlighted the vital role of academia-industry partnerships in driving sustainable development.

A standout of the evening was Thema Collection, whose pioneering hospitality initiatives, Wild Glamping Gal Oya and Amba Yaalu - Kandalama, received multiple accolades for their commitment to sustainability, inclusivity, and environmental stewardship.

Wild Glamping Gal Oya, a unique glamping adventure developed during the COVID-19 pandemic, earned three major recognitions: Outstanding Research Commercialization Award - Environment and Sustainability Research, Inclusive Growth Award for Socio-Economic Empowerment Research, and a Merit Award for Outstanding R&D.

Conceptualized by Mr. Chandra Wickramasinghe, Chairman of Thema Collection, Wild Glamping Gal Oya integrates the cultural heritage of the indigenous Rathugala Veddah



community with the rich biodiversity of the Gal Oya region. Designed as a low-footprint, village-like glamping site, it reflects a deep respect for local traditions and the natural environment.

*"It was a big cultural change,"* said Mr. Wickramasinghe. *"We had to work with the indigenous community, and at first, they were not very receptive. It took time for them to open up. We had to live with them, learn their ways, and show that we were not there to take, but to protect what's around us and create something that lasts with nature."*

Also honored was Amba Yaalu - Kandalama, Sri Lanka's first 100% female-led hotel, which received recognition for its remarkable model of women's empowerment in tourism with a Merit Award for Outstanding R&D. Inspired by his mother, Mr. Wickramasinghe created the property to support the capabilities of women in the hospitality sector.

*"Amba Yaalu is more than a resort; it is a promise. A promise born from the strength of women, inspired by my own mother who raised eight children alone, and rooted in the lush mango groves beside Kandalama Lake. Here, we are rewriting the story of hospitality: women-led,"*

women-empowered, and women-delivering warmth and care at every turn. Even our day-to-day suppliers, from mushrooms to flowers, are women, creating a community where female talent thrives at every level," he noted. "Through this peaceful sanctuary, we show not only that women can lead, but that their compassion, creativity, and courage are the very heart of meaningful hospitality. This is our gift to Sri Lanka, a movement wrapped in mango blossoms and bound by purpose."

Despite women comprising over half of Sri Lanka's population and maintaining high literacy levels, fewer than 10% are employed in the formal hospitality industry. Thema Collection seeks to challenge this gap by fostering professional growth, creating safe work environments, and providing equal opportunities.

With a portfolio of 16 distinctive properties across the island, each built around authentic Sri Lankan narratives, Thema Collection continues to position itself at the forefront of sustainable tourism. The recognition at the SLTC Research & Innovation Awards 2025 further reinforces the company's commitment to responsible innovation and inclusive growth.



# HOTELS / AIRLINES

## Celebrating the Spirit of Christmas with Our Team

### TTA BULLETIN

At Pegasus Reef Hotel, the festive season is also a time to appreciate our incredible staff who work tirelessly to make every guest experience memorable.

This year, we organized a special Christmas party for our hotel family. After a year of hard work, our team enjoyed a night of fun, laughter, games, delicious food, and heartfelt moments — a chance to relax,



bond, and feel the warmth of the holiday season.

We are proud of our dedicated and passionate team, and this celebration was our way of saying thank you for their unwavering commitment to excellence.

Here's to more celebrations and shared successes with our amazing hotel family!



## Shang Palace Colombo Rings in the New Year with a New Menu

### TTA BULLETIN

Located within the city's most iconic luxury address, Shang Palace at Shangri-La Colombo welcomes the New Year with an elevated menu designed to engage food and beverage connoisseurs through depth of flavour, technical precision and immersive culinary theatre. Bringing together time-honoured traditions and contemporary finesse, the refreshed offering reflects a confident evolution of Shang Palace's culinary identity.



offerings like Kung Pao Slipper Lobster, showcasing wok mastery and balanced spice, and Seafood Fried Glass Noodles, celebrated for their depth and smoky wok hei. Vegetarian creations, including the Sizzling Mushrooms with Tofu, add umami-driven elegance, rounding out a menu defined by thoughtful contrast and breadth.

Seasonality, provenance and technique remain central to the new offering, with sustainably sourced seafood, locally inspired produce and premium international ingredients featured throughout. Whether enjoyed as an intimate dining experience or a celebratory gathering, the new menu invites diners to explore texture, aroma and flavour across a refined culinary landscape.

The new menu at Shang Palace reflects a continued commitment to authenticity and culinary excellence. By showcasing regional Chinese flavours alongside immersive dining experiences, the restaurant aims to offer guests a meaningful and memorable culinary journey.

With its elegant interiors, discreet service and culinary precision, Shang Palace continues to set the benchmark for luxury Chinese dining in Colombo. The new menu is now available daily for lunch and dinner at Shang Palace, Shangri-La Colombo.

Signature highlights include Shang Palace's renowned Peking Duck, expertly roasted and carved tableside from the show kitchen, underscoring both culinary precision and performance. Chef Jasen's Live BBQ selections bring bold, aromatic flavours to the forefront, while Szechuan favourites such as Shui Zhu Yu and La Zi Ji deliver layered heat, fragrance and unmistakable regional character.

Seafood takes centre stage through refined

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## City of Dreams Sri Lanka Marks Its First Christmas in Colombo with a Warm and Meaningful Festive Season

### TTA BULLETIN

City of Dreams Sri Lanka is marking an important milestone this December as it celebrates its first Christmas in Colombo, closing out the year with a thoughtful and community-centred festive program. In a season where many Sri Lankans are seeking moments of connection, hope, and togetherness, City of Dreams Sri Lanka has curated experiences across its spaces that focus on warmth, reflection, and celebration in a balanced and respectful way.



musical features and simple festive gatherings, Cinnamon Life continues to be a space where people come to unwind and feel uplifted. Full program details for both venues are available on the City of Dreams Sri Lanka website.

Looking ahead, The Shoppes at City of Dreams has expanded beyond its existing 7th floor presence with the opening of its 8th floor. This new level brings additional retail, dining and lifestyle experiences in the coming months. The expansion reflects City of Dreams' continued commitment to supporting Colombo's urban growth and delivering even more meaningful experiences for visitors and residents.

The Vice President (Property) & General Manager of City of Dreams Sri Lanka Michael Habashi shared, "Celebrating our first Christmas in Colombo is a significant moment for us. This year, our goal has been to create an environment that feels welcoming and comforting—one that acknowledges the season while being mindful of the challenges many are facing."

He added, "As we look ahead to 2026, we remain focused on developing spaces and experiences that add value to the community and contribute positively to Colombo's evolving landscape."

City of Dreams Sri Lanka welcomes guests to experience its first festive season—one centred on warmth, community, and quiet celebration.

## SriLankan Airlines Launches Operations at Terminal 1, Velana International Airport

### TTA BULLETIN

SriLankan Airlines officially transitioned its operations to Terminal 1 at Velana International Airport, Malé, effective 17 December 2025. To commemorate the move, Maldives Airports Company Ltd (MACL) hosted a ceremonial welcome for passengers arriving on UL101 at Terminal 1, as well as those departing from Terminal 1 on UL102. The event was attended by His Excellency Mohamed Rizvi Hassen, Sri Lanka High Commissioner to the Maldives, as Chief Guest, alongside

senior officials from MACL and SriLankan Airlines. Operating three daily flights to Male via its Colombo hub, SriLankan Airlines connects passengers to a global network of 117 destinations across 59 countries. The state-of-the-art facilities at Terminal 1 are set to enhance passenger comfort, promote seamless travel, and further support the growth of tourism to the Maldives, strengthening tourism and connectivity between the countries.



Seafood takes centre stage through refined

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## The Kingsbury Welcomes 2026 with a Spectacular New Year's Eve Celebration

The Kingsbury, Colombo, welcomed the New Year with a celebration that captured the very essence of festivity, bringing together music, movement and unforgettable city views for one remarkable night. As guests arrived to welcome the New Year, the hotel transformed into a vibrant destination; every space alive with energy and anticipation.

The excitement peaked at Honey Beach Club, where guests danced their way into the New Year to live performances by Infinity and beats from DJ E2, creating a lively, high-energy celebration that continued late into the night.

Meanwhile, Sky Lounge offered an elevated and equally electric experience, with live entertainment by The Kingdom and uninterrupted views of Colombo's skyline. As midnight approached, guests gathered to witness the city's fireworks from one of the best vantage points in Colombo, a moment that perfectly captured the magic of New Year's Eve.

Complementing the celebrations was an array of exceptional dining experiences across the hotel. Guests marked the occasion with festive menus, curated tasting experiences

and celebratory feasts, each delivered with The Kingsbury's signature warmth and attention to detail. Whether dining, dancing, or simply soaking in the atmosphere, every moment was designed to feel meaningful and memorable.

As the New Year dawned, The Kingsbury stood at the centre of Colombo's celebrations, having created a night filled with lasting memories. It was a New Year's Eve that reflected the spirit of celebration and the promise of the year ahead at one of Colombo's best five-star hotels.



## Emirates ends the year on high scooping 5 more global awards

### TTA BULLETIN

Emirates is ending 2025 on a sky-high note with another five global accolades won, this time at the 32nd annual World Travel Awards, held in Bahrain.

Adding to its impressive portfolio of more than 20 accolades received in 2025, the latest titles celebrate Emirates as a leading airline brand, as well as recognising its multi award-winning inflight entertainment system ice, more honours for Emirates First Class onboard experience and First Class Lounges, and another nod to Emirates Skyrwards – as the World's Leading Airline Rewards Programme 2025.

Emirates five latest gongs from the World Travel Awards are World's Leading Airline Brand 2025; World's Leading Airline Inflight Entertainment 2025; World's Leading Airline Rewards Programme 2025 - Emirates Skyrwards; World's Leading



Airline - First Class 2025 and World's Leading Airline Lounge - First Class 2025 - the Emirates First Class Lounge at Emirates Terminal 3, Dubai International Airport.

Emirates scores big with array of industry awards throughout 2025

In November, Emirates was voted 'Best Airline in the World' for the 8th consecutive year, at the esteemed ULTRAs travel awards. Based on votes from Ultratravel's global network of 1.2 million travellers, Emirates also scooped the 'Airline with the

Best Premium Economy Class' award, as well as a prestigious 'Lifetime Achievement Award for Services to Global Aviation' presented to Sir Tim Clark.

Aviation Business Middle East also awarded Emirates 'Best First Class of the Year' and the prestigious 'Airline of the Year' award.

Emirates also won 'Best International Airline,' 'Best International First Class,' and 'Best International Airline Lounge' from the Forbes Travel Guide Verified Air Travel Awards 2025, as well as 'Best Long-Haul Airline' at The Times and The Sunday Times Travel Awards 2025. Sir Tim Clark was also recently recognised by the Wings Club Foundation with the prestigious Distinguished Achievement

Award.

In September, Emirates received global recognition at the APEX/IFSA Global EXPO in Long Beach, California, winning 2 notable awards – the 2026 APEX Best™ Global Entertainment Award for its inflight entertainment system - ice, and a 2026 APEX WORLD CLASSTM award for all aspects of the airline's customer experience and brand.

Earlier in 2025, Emirates was honoured with several awards including 'Best Long-Haul Airline' at The Telegraph Travel Awards, '2025's Most Recommended Global Brand' by YouGov, and multiple categories at the Business Traveller Middle East Awards, such as 'Best Airline Worldwide' for the 12th consecutive year, 'Best First Class', 'Best Premium Economy Class', and 'Best Airport Lounge in the Middle East.'

# AIRLINES

## Qatar Airways Launches World's First Starlink-Equipped Boeing 787

### TTA BULLETIN

Qatar Airways, the operator of the world's first and largest Starlink-equipped widebody fleet, has become the first carrier globally to enable Boeing 787-8 with Starlink. The airline has also equipped its entire Airbus A350 fleet within record-breaking eight months in December 2025. To date, Qatar Airways is operating three Dreamliners with the fastest Wi-Fi in the sky, bringing the total of its Starlink-connected widebody aircraft to nearly 120.

Marking the fastest and most ambitious Starlink widebody rollout programme in global aviation history, the airline is progressing at an unsurpassed pace. Within just 14 months, Qatar Airways started and completed the Boeing 777 and Airbus A350 Starlink installation programmes, and then expanded to its Boeing 787 Dreamliners.

This progress cements the airline's position as the global leader in Starlink-enabled long-haul and ultra-long-haul connectivity while also achieving the world's first and largest Starlink-equipped A350 fleet – building on Qatar Airways' legacy as the aircraft's global launch customer.

The World's Best Airline, as voted by Skytrax in 2025 for the ninth time, is also the first in the world to secure Starlink certification for Boeing 787-8.

The impact of this leadership is already being experienced by travellers globally,

with over 11 million passengers enjoying free, gate-to-gate\*, faster-than-home Wi-Fi onboard since the airline launched the service in October 2024.

In 2025, Starlink connected over 21 million passengers across global airlines. Qatar Airways' Starlink-connected passengers comprise nearly half of that, with over 10 million passengers being the first in the world to enjoy the complimentary service onboard widebody aircraft across long- and ultra-long-haul routes operated by the airline.

Nearly 120 widebody aircraft, representing over 58% of its widebody fleet across Airbus A350s, Boeing 777s, and Boeing 787s, now provide passengers with ultra-high-speed connectivity at up to 500 Mbps, enabling uninterrupted streaming, video calls, and real-time productivity that can surpass many home broadband networks. The airline is extending the fastest Wi-Fi in the sky across an increasing number of routes, including flights to the majority of destinations served by Qatar Airways in the Americas and Australia\*\*, and on prominent routes in Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Middle East.

Qatar Airways continues to lead the industry as the operator of the world's largest Starlink-equipped widebody fleet and the first carrier in the MENA region to offer this cutting-edge technology, reinforcing its reputation as the world's best airline for unmatched passenger experience.

decision-making is strongly influenced by confidence and clarity.

Commenting on the launch, Dimuthu Tennakoon, Head of Commercial of SriLankan Airlines said, "In the immediate aftermath of Cyclone Ditwah, restoring traveller confidence is critical, particularly as we enter the peak travel period. This campaign is designed to proactively reassure global audiences that Sri Lanka is ready, accessible and welcoming. As the national carrier, we have both a responsibility and a commercial imperative to lead this recovery by connecting reassurance directly with the ability to travel."

The digital-led initiative aims to minimise cancellations during the peak period, sustain forward bookings, and stimulate inbound demand by delivering real-time reassurance across the critical booking consideration window. Airline-led destination promotion also enables a direct link between inspiration and flight purchase, supporting load factors, route sustainability and tourism recovery.



### TTA BULLETIN

SriLankan Airlines has launched a one-month international destination promotion campaign on 16 December 2025, aimed at restoring global confidence in Sri Lanka following Cyclone Ditwah and reaffirming the country's readiness to welcome travellers.

The campaign will run across Meta and the Google platforms, promoting Colombo as the gateway to Sri Lanka, and will target key source markets in Europe (London, Paris, and Frankfurt), Australia, and Pan-India. It is expected to reach over four million potential travellers who have shown active interest in travelling to Sri Lanka or to competing destinations.

As the national carrier and the most visible international representative of the country, SriLankan Airlines is taking a proactive leadership role in reassuring global travellers that Sri Lanka is safe, operational, and open for tourism. Leveraging continued flight operations, stable schedules, and active international routes, the campaign provides tangible proof of destination readiness at a time when traveller

## Cathay kicks off its '80 Years Together' anniversary celebrations

### TTA BULLETIN

Stepping into 2026, Cathay is excited to officially launch its 80th anniversary celebrations, marking eight decades of moving its home city, people and global customers forward since 1946. To usher in this milestone year and honour its legacy of bringing people together, Cathay will be hosting a series of special events, initiatives and activations throughout 2026 – all anchored by the unifying theme of "80 Years Together".



conducting business, exploring the world, reuniting with family, or delivering vital supplies at critical moments, Cathay has always stood with the people of Hong Kong through countless shared journeys and memories.

"Looking ahead, through our investment of well over HK\$100 billion into our fleet, cabin products, lounges and digital innovation, Cathay will continue to elevate the customer experience as we strive towards our refreshed vision to become our customers' most loved service brand. At the same time, we remain steadfast in our commitment to strengthening Hong Kong's status as a leading international aviation hub.

"With the continued support and encouragement of our people, customers and partners, I am confident that Cathay, as an iconic Hong Kong brand, will soar to even greater heights in the years to come."

Cabin crew donning Cathay Pacific's vintage uniforms through various design eras also made a special appearance, paying tribute to the generations of people who have defined the signature Cathay service in the skies. Throughout 2026, around 1,000 to 2,000 of Cathay's cabin

## ICYMI! Emirates' 2025 year in review: Top 10 things to know

### TTA BULLETIN

This year, Emirates moved 55.6 million customers, circled Earth 29,290 times on nearly 180,580 flights, and placed orders for 73 new aircraft. The airline celebrated its 40th year of operations in October, but the real story of 2025 goes beyond that anniversary milestone, as Emirates plots what the future of flying better really means.



Whether you've been following Emirates all year or just tuning in now, here are the top 10 highlights that defined 2025 for the world's largest international airline:

The first Emirates A350 entered commercial service in early January with its maiden journey to Edinburgh. The airline's A350 network has expanded rapidly since then and now, 16 Emirates A350s fly to 18 cities, connecting travellers in comfort across Europe, West Asia, the Middle East, Australia and soon, the Americas when it debuts in Montreal in February 2026.

2025 saw Emirates double down on its footprint in Asia with the launch of two new Chinese mainland destinations – Shenzhen and Hangzhou – served by non-stop daily flights, as well as services to Danang in Vietnam, and Siem Reap, Cambodia via Bangkok. The airline has been working to serve growing travel and

trade demand across East Asia and China as business activity grows across the region.

Throughout 2025, Emirates has been adding more of its next-generation Airbus A350 and retrofitted Airbus A380 and Boeing 777 aircraft, all featuring the award-winning Emirates Premium Economy cabin, across its network. Today close to 70 cities are served by more than 100 aircraft offering the latest Emirates cabin interiors, constituting roughly 40% of the airline's passenger fleet.

Consistent with its ethos to deliver a superior, consistent experience across its fleet, Emirates announced the rollout of Starlink Wi-Fi across 232 aircraft in November at the Dubai Airshow. Starting with its Boeing 777s, the programme will quickly expand to make Emirates the world's first airline with Starlink-equipped A380s in early 2026. The airline will be installing Starlink at the rate of around 11 aircraft per month and by the end of next

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luxury  
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