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Middle East hospitality embraces resilience and experience-led growth as industry prepares for ATM 2026

DINUSHKA CHANDRASENA

As hospitality leaders respond to changing guest expectations and a rapidly evolving market, Arabian Travel Market's (ATM) 2026 will explore how businesses are adapting through personalised experiences, innovation and long-term investment.



industry in the region is resilient, and we are confident it will bounce back."

Mattar believes that this resilience is enabling the industry to look beyond recovery and focus on meeting the expectations of a new generation of travellers.

Taking place from 14-17 September 2026 at Dubai World Trade Centre under the theme 'Travel 2040: Driving New Frontiers Through Innovation and Technology,' ATM will bring together hospitality leaders to explore how hotels are responding to changing consumer behaviour while building resilience across one of the industry's most dynamic regions.

According to Haitham Mattar, Managing Director, India, Middle East & Africa, IHG Hotels & Resorts, the Middle East's sustained tourism growth continues to reinforce confidence in the hospitality sector, supported by long-term investment across key markets.

Mattar said: "We're extremely confident about the Middle East. It's one of the fastest-growing tourism regions around the world. We've seen continued growth linked to the investment being made in tourism, whether it's in the UAE, Saudi Arabia or Egypt. These are long-term investments, and that's what gives us confidence in our people, our owners, our products and our brands across this diverse and complex region."

As governments continue to invest in tourism infrastructure and destinations diversify their offerings, hospitality operators are increasingly focused on creating business models that are both resilient and adaptable. At the same time, evolving traveller behaviours are reshaping the way hotels compete, with operators placing greater emphasis on personalised experiences, wellness and lifestyle-led offerings to drive long-term value.

Highlighting the sector's enduring strength, Mattar said: "The hospitality

"No two travellers are the same. People are no longer simply looking for a room; they're looking for experiences. Whether it's gastronomy, outdoor adventure, wellness, culture or heritage, these experiences have become major motivators for travel. Hotels are responding by becoming experts in creating and recommending experiences that are authentic and meaningful."

These themes will feature across ATM's conference programme. On the Global Stage, the session "Does the Hospitality Industry Need Reinventing?" will examine how hotel operators are responding to a new phase of commercial recalibration, exploring strategies including asset repositioning, wellness, branded residences, mixed-use developments and experience-led programming to strengthen resilience and long-term value. Featuring Amir Golbarg, Chief Operating Officer, Minor Hotels, the discussion will also examine changing investment priorities and the commercial strategies shaping the future of hospitality.

Complementing this discussion, the Future Stage will host "Decoding Hospitality Growth – What Do Today's Travelers Want?". Bringing together leading industry experts including Hala Matar Choufany, President MEA & South Asia, HVS; Justin Reid, Senior Director of Global Partnerships, Tripadvisor; Jad Shamseddin, Chief Operating Officer, Aleph Hospitality; and Sarah Duignan, Director, Client Relationships, STR, the session will explore how hotels are responding to increasingly multi-motivated travellers by creating personalised experiences that combine wellness, culture, connection and value.

Cont on Pg 2

Tourism Excellence Awards 2026 Set to Crown the Island's Finest

DINUSHKA CHANDRASENA

A landmark national initiative launches to celebrate world-class hospitality, spark innovation, and power Sri Lanka's rise as a leading global destination — culminating in a glittering Awards Gala in January 2027.



Sri Lanka's tourism and hospitality industry has long been one of the nation's greatest strengths — renowned for its warm hospitality, rich cultural heritage, and breathtaking natural beauty, sustained by thousands of professionals and enterprises who create memorable experiences for visitors from around the globe. As the industry enters a new era of growth and global competitiveness, recognising excellence has never mattered more.

It is in this spirit that the Sri Lanka Tourism Excellence Awards 2026 has been launched — a prestigious national initiative celebrating outstanding achievement across the tourism and hospitality sector and inspiring organisations to pursue ever-higher standards.

The Awards will honour exemplary performers among hotels, restaurants, tourism marketers, and hospitality service providers who have demonstrated exceptional achievement in service excellence, customer experience, product quality, innovation, sustainability, operational excellence, and leadership. More than an awards programme, the initiative is a national movement designed to promote a culture of excellence and strengthen Sri Lanka's position as a world-class tourism destination.

A Rigorous, World-Class Evaluation Framework

Developed on internationally accepted best practices, the evaluation framework assesses participating organisations across key dimensions:

- Service Excellence
- Customer Experience
- Product Quality
- Innovation, Distinctiveness and Global Reach
- Sustainability and Responsible Practices
- Consistency, Operational Excellence and Performance
- Leadership and Industry Impact

These criteria reflect the qualities that define world-class tourism enterprises and provide a robust framework for measuring excellence in a fair, transparent, and objective manner.

Governance Built on Integrity

To ensure the highest standards of credibility and independence, the Awards are governed through a three-tier structure:

- An Advisory Committee, responsible for overall administration, governance, and strategic oversight;
- A Technical Committee, entrusted with developing the awards framework, evaluation criteria, and assessment methodologies, and conducting the technical evaluation; and
- An independent Panel of Judges, whose eminent members will make the final decisions based solely on the evidence presented and scores obtained through the rigorous assessment process.

This structure has been designed to uphold transparency, impartiality, and integrity at every stage of the competition.

Why It Matters

For participants, the Awards offer a valuable opportunity to benchmark against national standards, showcase achievements, strengthen brand reputation, and gain recognition among industry peers, customers, policymakers, and the wider public. The programme is expected to foster healthy competition, drive continuous improvement, and embed sustainability as a core business principle across the industry.

At a national level, the Awards are expected to contribute meaningfully to the economy — lifting quality across the tourism value chain, promoting responsible tourism practices, enhancing visitor satisfaction, and strengthening Sri Lanka's global tourism brand.

Cont on Pg 2

There is a renewed sense of momentum in the air - quite literally.

This month, we celebrate the launch of new air connections between Vietnam and Sri Lanka, with both Vietnam Airlines and VietJet opening direct links between the two destinations. These services do far more than shorten travel times; they open a vital corridor between two of Asia's most dynamic tourism markets, promising fresh flows of leisure and business travellers in both directions and reaffirming Sri Lanka's growing appeal across South-east Asia.

Our cover story this issue shines a spotlight on The Hotels Association of Sri Lanka, which has announced the launch of the Tourism Excellence Awards. This landmark initiative will recognise and reward the very best in Sri Lankan hospitality, raising service standards and celebrating the people and properties that make the island such a compelling destination. It is a timely and welcome move, and we look forward to seeing the industry rally behind it.

Further west, Arabian Travel Market Dubai is booked and ready to welcome visitors back to a region that has, of late, been in the news for less than favourable reasons. Yet the organisers and the wider industry remain resolutely bullish, determined to drive recovery without delay. If there is one lesson our industry has learned time and again, it is that travel rebounds and ATM is positioning itself at the very heart of that resurgence.

Back home, Sri Lanka remains firmly positive. Emerging markets are playing a key role in the island's recovery story, with India continuing to lead arrivals, while the government prepares to kick off a much-anticipated digital marketing campaign to amplify the destination's voice globally.



From new routes to new awards, the message is clear: Asia's travel industry is moving forward with confidence.

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NEWS / MOVEMENTS

Cont on Pg 2

Middle East hospitality embraces resilience....

Together with the Experience Hub, the programme will provide strategic insights into how innovation, collaboration and long-term planning are shaping the next chapter of global tourism.

Danielle Curtis, Regional Portfolio Director – UAE, RX Global, said: “These insights reflect many of the trends shaping the global hospitality industry today. Across the Middle East, investment continues to accelerate while traveller expectations are becoming increasingly experience-led, personalised and wellness-focused. Through a range of dedicated sessions, ATM provides a platform for the industry's leading voices to explore these changes, share practical strategies and build the partnerships that will drive the future of hospitality.”

Leading hospitality brands exhibiting at ATM 2026 include IHG Hotels & Resorts, Accor, Minor Hotels, Rotana, Hilton, Jumeirah, Mandarin Oriental, Four

Seasons Hotels & Resorts, Rixos Hotels and Sofitel, alongside destinations, tourism authorities and hospitality technology providers from across the globe.

Innovation will also be a central focus through ATM Travel Tech, the dedicated co-located event showcasing technologies transforming the guest journey. From AI-powered personalisation and predictive guest services to robotics, immersive technologies and smart hospitality solutions, ATM Travel Tech will demonstrate how technology is enabling hotels to deliver increasingly seamless and experience-led stays while enhancing operational efficiency.

By bringing together global hospitality leaders, technology innovators and tourism decision-makers, ATM 2026 will provide a platform to examine how resilience, innovation and evolving guest expectations are shaping the future of hospitality in the Middle East and beyond.

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Tourism Excellence Awards....

The Grand Finale: Awards Gala, January 2027

The Awards Gala, scheduled for January 2027, is set to be one of the most prestigious tourism events of the year, bringing together industry leaders, policymakers, business executives, sponsors, media representatives, and distinguished guests to celebrate the achievements of Sri Lanka's finest tourism enterprises.



hospitality industry.

As Sri Lanka continues its journey towards becoming one of the world's most admired destinations, the Sri Lanka Tourism Excellence Awards 2026 stands as a beacon of aspiration — recognising those who lead by example, inspiring innovation, and shaping a stronger, more vibrant future for the nation's tourism and

Eric Goh to headline ‘Jewels Beneath the Waves’

TTA BULLETIN

Internationally published underwater photographer brings his visual journey to the latest edition of Cinnamon Nature Trails’ ‘Top Experts in the City’ series

Colombo, Sri Lanka (6th August 2026) – Beneath the ocean's surface lies a world of extraordinary beauty, diversity and discovery. Bringing this hidden world to life, Cinnamon Nature Trails, the premier wildlife and adventure experience provider of Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts, welcomes internationally published Malaysian photographer and master diver Eric Goh to Colombo for Jewels Beneath the Waves, the latest edition of its acclaimed Top Experts in the City series.

With more than 20 years of experience specialising in underwater, wildlife and nature photography, Eric has captured remarkable moments from beneath the waves across diverse marine environments. His work has appeared in international magazines, newspapers, books and campaigns, and has been commissioned for major tourism and environmental initiatives.

Having explored and photographed Sri Lanka's marine ecosystems over the past five years, Eric brings a unique perspective on the island's underwater world. Through his lens, he reveals the beauty, diversity and mystery of marine life, transforming fleeting encounters beneath the surface into captivating visual stories.

Eric is also the author of Terengganu Islands & State Parks, a publication supported by the Royal Foundation, and serves as Chairperson and Judge of the Sultan Mizan International Photography Awards (SMIPA), one of Malaysia's largest photography competitions.

The evening will feature Eric's presentation, “Jewels Beneath the Waves”, alongside Chitral Jayatilake, Head of Cinnamon Nature Trails, who will showcase some of the team's most memorable wildlife encounters and expeditions from across the globe, while offering an exclusive preview of upcoming nature travel experiences.



Vice President of John Keells Holdings and Head of Cinnamon Nature Trails, Chitral Jayatilake, said: “At Cinnamon Nature Trails, we are passionate about creating experiences that inspire a deeper appreciation of the natural world. Through our Top Experts in the City series, we bring internationally recognised experts to Colombo to spark curiosity, encourage meaningful conversations, and foster greater awareness of wildlife and conservation. Eric Goh's work is a powerful reminder of the extraordinary beauty and diversity that exists beneath our oceans.”

Senior Vice President, Colombo Hotels, Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts and General Manager, Cinnamon Life at City of Dreams Sri Lanka, Kamal Munasinghe said: “At City of Dreams Sri Lanka, we believe the most memorable experiences are those that inspire curiosity, create connections and offer new perspectives. Our collaboration with Cinnamon Nature Trails brings together exploration, storytelling and discovery, allowing guests to experience the natural world in a truly immersive way. We are delighted to welcome Eric Goh to Colombo and provide a platform for his extraordinary underwater photography, while continuing to establish City of Dreams Sri Lanka as a destination where meaningful experiences come to life.”

Commenting on the collaboration, Head of Cards at Seylan Bank PLC, Ruchith Liyanage, said, “In creating a platform for internationally renowned wildlife specialists to present their expertise and experiences, we celebrate efforts that safeguard the natural world through impactful storytelling. Our partnership with Cinnamon Nature Trails is our heartfelt bid to create a truly unique experience for our clients. The event is part of an expanding endeavour to create meaningful impact for our clients through immersive, educational experiences with an emphasis on celebrating the diverse majesty of the natural world”.

The Top Experts in the City series continues to bring inspiring voices in wildlife, photography and exploration to Colombo, creating meaningful experiences that connect audiences with the natural world.



A SERENE *beachfront escape* ALONG NEGOMBO'S GOLDEN COAST



Set along the golden coast of Negombo, Jetwing Sea offers a refreshed take on a much-loved escape, where light-filled spaces and life by the beach shape an easy, welcoming stay, elevated by legendary Sri Lankan hospitality.

The newest addition, the Sea Residence, is a spacious suite where the sea greets you before the day even begins with wide, uninterrupted views right from the comfort of your bed. Across the hotel, a natural ease carries through, from Seaside Social, an easy-going lounge and cocktail bar, to The Horizon on the beachfront, where thoughtfully crafted cuisine and drinks reflect both local character and global flavour.

With the ocean always in frame and the shore just steps away, Jetwing Sea invites you to check-in, unwind and let Negombo surprise you.



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Aitken Spence Travels helps restore flood damaged school library, renewing learning opportunities for over 1,400 students

TTA BULLETIN



Education has always been at the heart of Gangasiripura Kanishta Vidyalaya in Gampola, which was established in the 1930s. The school has shaped generations of young minds and today it provides education to more than 1,400 students, across 38 classes, from Grades 1 to 11.

However, when Cyclone Ditwah swept through the central region of Sri Lanka, the school was left grappling with extensive damage in its aftermath. Among the hardest hit facilities was the school library, where floodwaters destroyed all the books, furniture, electrical fittings, and learning resources, depriving the students of a treasured space that had stimulated curiosity and creative development, fostering a love for reading.

Recognising the importance of restoring access to quality learning environments, Aitken Spence Travels, through its sustainability platform 'Pure Path' and the Nurturing Lilies programme, undertook the complete refurbishment of the school library. The restoration included repairing the flood damaged structures, replacing electrical wiring, installing lighting and ceiling fans, repainting the interior, and restocking the library with a collection of new books and educational materials.

Adding a personal touch to the initiative, employees of Aitken Spence Travels contributed books from their own collections, reflecting the company's culture of giving and sharing to the development of young learners. Their personal generosity helped transform the library into a vibrant, welcoming space where students can once again discover the joy of reading, broaden their knowledge, and pursue their ambitions and aspirations.

The fully restored library was officially handed over to the school during a special ceremony attended by Mr. Nalin Jayasundera, Managing Director of Aitken Spence Travels, together with members of the company's sustainability team, the school Principal, teachers, students and representatives of the local community. The occasion celebrated not only the successful completion of the project but also the reopening of a vital learning hub that will continue to inspire and support future generations.

Speaking at the ceremony, Principal of Gangasiripura Kanishta Vidyalaya Mr. R. M. M. Wasantha Kumara expressed his gratitude for the initiative, stating, "the

restoration of our school library is about so much more than rebuilding a physical space, it is about restoring hope, opportunity and a love for learning among our students. Our children lost one of their most treasured learning resources. Today, thanks to the generosity of Aitken Spence Travels, our students once again have a safe, welcoming, and inspiring environment where they can read, learn and broaden their knowledge. On behalf of our students, parents, teachers, and the entire school community, I extend our heartfelt gratitude to Aitken Spence Travels for their kindness, compassion and support. This investment will leave a lasting legacy for generations of children and will stand as a shining example of how the private sector can play a meaningful role in uplifting communities, creating opportunities for schools such as ours"

Further, Mr. Jayasundera stated "Education is one of the most powerful investments we can make in the future, and a library is every child's dedicated environment that inspires learning, curiosity and growth. We are honoured to support the restoration of the Gangasiripura Kanishta Vidyalaya Library and hope this renewed space will empower these young students to dream bigger, read more widely, and build brighter futures."

At Aitken Spence Travels, sustainability goes beyond environmental stewardship. It is all about creating meaningful, long-term value for the communities in which we operate. Through 'Pure Path', the company continues to invest in initiatives that strengthen education, livelihoods and community resilience. The restoration of the Gangasiripura Kanishta Vidyalaya library is a reflection of this commitment, ensuring that students have access to a safe, inspiring and resource-rich environment where learning can flourish for years to come.

At Aitken Spence Travels, sustainability is about creating lasting value for the communities that we serve. Restoring the Gangasiripura Kanishta Vidyalaya Library reflects our belief that investing in education is an investment in the future. By helping students regain access to a safe and inspiring place to learn, we are proud to play a small part in rebuilding not only a library, but also the opportunities, aspirations, and hopes that it represents for generations to come.

INSPIRING JOURNEYS

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH
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INSPIRING BY EXAMPLE: HOW SAMINDRI LIYANAGE ROSE TO THE TOP OF HILTON SRI LANKA'S COMMERCIAL RANKS



Some careers are built on ambition alone. Others, the ones worth writing about are built on something rarer: the quiet, daily discipline of showing up, lifting others as you climb, and refusing to let anyone else define the ceiling. Samindri Liyanage's career belongs unmistakably to the second kind.

Today, as Cluster Commercial Director for Hilton Sri Lanka, Samindri sits at the commercial helm of one of the most recognised hospitality brands on the island. But her story did not begin in a corner office. It began as a trainee of Hilton Colombo, where a young hospitality professional, qualified in hotel management, hungry to learn and unafraid of hard work set out in an industry where the commercial leadership ranks were, at the time, overwhelmingly male.

In our latest three-part Inspiring Journeys interview series on Travel Talk Asia digital, Samindri opened up about that journey not merely as a professional, but as a woman navigating and ultimately reshaping a male-dominated corporate landscape.

Breaking Ground, Quietly and Completely

Ask Samindri about the challenges of being a woman in commercial hospitality leadership and she doesn't reach for grievance she reaches for gratitude. Yes, there were rooms where she was the only woman at the table. Yes, there were moments when she had to work twice as hard to be heard. But what shaped her, she says, were not the obstacles themselves but the people who helped her past them.

Hers is a career, by her own telling, full of great mentors and leaders at Hilton who saw her potential early, invested in her growth, and taught her that authority is never demanded; it is earned through consistency, competence and care. Rising through the ranks at Hilton Colombo to become Director of Sales, she represented both her hotel and her country at trade shows and sales missions across the world, building the international perspective that would define the next chapter of her career.

That chapter took her to Malaysia, where she spent close to a decade with Hilton, rising to Commercial Director at DoubleTree by Hilton. Leading commercial strategy in a foreign market, far from home and every familiar support system, was the crucible in which her leadership style was forged. Along the way, she added an MBA and chartered marketer status to her credentials, proof of her conviction that growth is a discipline, not an accident.

And then, in a full-circle moment that feels almost scripted, she came home not to the role she left, but to lead the commercial function across Hilton's Sri Lankan portfolio.

The Drive Behind the Discipline

What gets her out of bed each morning? Not the title, and not the targets, though in a market as competitive as Sri Lanka, the targets are relentless. For Samindri, it is the people. She speaks about her team the way great coaches speak about their players: her job, as she sees it, is to build high-performing teams by making every individual believe they are capable of more than they think.

Those who have worked with her describe a leader who is transparent, articulate and personable; demanding of standards but generous with credit, and never too busy to develop the person standing next to her. In an industry that runs on pressure, she maintains her fire by remembering why she chose hospitality in the first place: it is, at its heart, an industry about people, and there is no greater privilege than helping both guests and colleagues experience their best.

A Message to the Next Generation

Perhaps the most powerful moments of the interview series came when Samindri addressed the young Sri Lankan women who will follow her. Her message is characteristically direct: be prepared to work hard, harder, sometimes, than seems fair. Never compromise on your integrity or your standards, because reputation is the one asset no one can take from you. Step out of your comfort zone, as she did when she boarded a flight to Malaysia; the growth you're looking for is almost always on the other side of the fear. And find your mentors then, one day, become one. It is advice she lives rather than merely gives.

Watching Samindri Liyanage today leading Hilton's commercial charge in Sri Lanka at a pivotal moment for the island's tourism revival, one sees exactly what she hopes the next generation will see: that there is no room a Sri Lankan woman cannot lead, no market she cannot conquer, and no ceiling that discipline, humility and heart cannot break.



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Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts Strengthens Sri Lanka's Bid for the Worldchefs Congress 2030 Through Strategic Partnership with Chef Guild Lanka

TTA BULLETIN

As part of its continued commitment to positioning Sri Lanka as a leading destination for international conferences and business events, Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts has entered into a strategic partnership with Chef Guild Lanka to jointly pursue the bid to host the Worldchefs Congress 2030 in Sri Lanka.



The partnership was officially announced during the launch of Cinnamon Box Office, a new digital platform by Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts designed to simplify access to world-class entertainment, business events, conferences and experiences. The announcement reflects Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts' broader vision of creating an integrated ecosystem that supports the growth of Sri Lanka's Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions (MICE) industry while enhancing the country's competitiveness as a global business events destination.

Over the past several years, Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts has led a series of strategic initiatives to strengthen Sri Lanka's conference bidding capabilities. These include the establishment of the Sri Lanka Conference Ambassador Programme (SLCAP), launched in collaboration with the Sri Lanka Convention Bureau (SLCB) and SriLankan Airlines to mobilize local experts, industry leaders and professional associations in attracting international conferences to the country. Complemented by strategic partnerships across the public and private sectors, together with the development of dedicated industry platforms such as Cinnamon Box Office, these initiatives continue to build a stronger ecosystem for securing global business events and positioning Sri Lanka as a competitive international conference destination.

The collaboration with Chef Guild Lanka marks another significant milestone in these ongoing efforts. Through the partnership, both organizations will work together to prepare and submit Sri Lanka's bid to host the prestigious Worldchefs Congress 2030, one of the world's foremost culinary industry gatherings that brings together thousands of chefs, culinary professionals, educators, hospitality leaders and food industry partners from across the globe.

Hosting the Congress would further strengthen Sri Lanka's position on the international MICE calendar while generating significant economic value through delegate arrivals, hotel occupancy, destination exposure and opportunities for the local hospitality and culinary industries.

Commenting on the partnership, Dileep Mudadeniya, Senior Vice President Global Alliances and Partnerships – John Keells Leisure, and Head of Corporate Affairs John Keells Holdings said:

"Positioning Sri Lanka as a preferred destination for international conferences requires long-term investment, meaningful partnerships and a collaborative ecosystem. Over the years, we have continued to build this foundation through initiatives such as the Sri Lanka Conference Ambassador Programme and by working closely with professional associations across diverse industries. Our partnership with Chef Guild Lanka represents another important step in that journey. We are delighted to support Sri Lanka's bid for the Worldchefs Congress 2030 while continuing to create new opportunities that deliver lasting value to the country's tourism and business events sectors."

Kamal Munasinghe Senior Vice President, Colombo Hotels Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts and General Manager – Cinnamon Life at City of Dreams Sri Lanka, added: "City of Dreams Sri Lanka was envisioned as a destination capable of hosting events of international significance. The launch of Cinnamon Box Office is another investment towards creating an integrated events ecosystem where conferences, exhibitions, entertainment and cultural experiences are more accessible through a single platform. Announcing this partnership at the launch reflects our commitment to supporting international conferences from bid stage to delegate experience, further strengthening Sri Lanka's position as a destination for world-class events."

Speaking on behalf of Chef Guild Lanka, Chef Gerard Mendis, Chairman said: "Hosting the Worldchefs Congress in Sri Lanka would be a landmark achievement for our culinary industry and an opportunity to showcase our country's exceptional hospitality, culinary heritage and professional talent to the global community. We are pleased to partner with Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts in pursuing this bid and look forward to working together to present Sri Lanka as a compelling host destination for Worldchefs 2030."

The proposed bid forms part of Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts long-term strategy of working alongside industry associations, government stakeholders and international partners to attract high-impact global conferences to Sri Lanka. Through continued investment in destination development, industry collaboration and world-class infrastructure, the organization remains committed to expanding Sri Lanka's international conference portfolio and reinforcing its position as one of Asia's emerging business events destinations.

PATA Recognises Outstanding Chapters and Student Chapters

TTA BULLETIN



The Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) has recognised outstanding achievements across its global network of Chapters and Student Chapters through the 2026 PATA Chapter and Student Chapter Awards, celebrating excellence, leadership, engagement and sustainability across the Pacific Asia tourism community.

The awards were presented during the PATA Executive Board & Board Members Networking Reception at Commons Café, Old Court House Kuching, held the night before PATA Travel Mart 2026 in Sarawak, Malaysia.

The Best Newcomer Award was presented to the PATA Hong Kong Metropolitan University Student Chapter, recognising a Student Chapter in its early stages that has made an impressive impact from the very beginning.

The Outstanding Industry Engagement Award was presented to the PATA India Chandigarh University Student Chapter, recognising its excellence in industry engagement and its efforts to help prepare students for careers in travel and tourism.

The Best Engagement with Young Tourism Professionals Award was presented jointly to the PATA Malaysia Chapter and PATA Thailand Chapter, recognising their support for local young tourism professionals and tourism institution activities.

The Best Sustainability Initiative Award was presented to the PATA Thailand Mae Fah Luang University Student Chapter, recognising its activities supporting sustainability, social responsibility, the environment and the responsible development of tourism.

The Award of Excellence, recognising Chapters and Student Chapters whose activities best exemplify dedication to the development of the travel and tourism industry within the Pacific Asia region, was presented to:

- PATA Malaysia Chapter
- PATA Nepal Chapter
- PATA Malaysia Taylor's Student Chapter

The Spirit of PATA Award, recognising a Chapter that consistently and progressively demonstrates its commitment to, and best embodies, the aims and objectives of PATA over the past five years, was presented to the PATA India Chapter.

In addition to the annual awards, PATA presented Special Recognition to Chapters and Student Chapters whose dedication and continued support have strengthened the Association over the years, as part of the celebration of PATA's 75th Anniversary.

The Special Recognition recipients were:

- PATA Chinese Taipei Chapter
- PATA Denmark Chapter
- PATA Finland Chapter
- PATA France Chapter
- PATA German Chapter
- PATA Hong Kong Chapter
- PATA Macau Chapter
- PATA Maldives Chapter
- PATA Micronesia Chapter
- PATA New York Chapter
- PATA Philippines Chapter
- PATA Singapore Chapter
- PATA UK & Ireland Chapter
- PATA Hong Kong School of Hotel & Tourism Management (SHTM) Student Chapter
- PATA India Christ University Student Chapter
- PATA Japan Wakayama University (WU) Student Chapter
- PATA Malaysia HELP University Student Chapter
- PATA Thailand Bangkok University Student Chapter
- PATA UAE Higher Colleges of Technology Student Chapter

"PATA's Chapters and Student Chapters are at the heart of our global community, creating opportunities for connection, learning, leadership and collaboration at the local level," said PATA CEO Noor Ahmad Hamid. "These awards recognise the important work being undertaken by our Chapters and Student Chapters and the commitment of their members to strengthening the tourism industry across the Pacific Asia region."

He added, "I congratulate all of this year's award recipients and thank every Chapter and Student Chapter for their continued contribution to PATA. Their energy, ideas and dedication are essential to building a stronger and more meaningful tourism economy for the future."

The PATA Chapter and Student Chapter Awards are part of PATA's ongoing commitment to recognising the contributions of its members and supporting the development of future tourism leaders.





Browns

HOTELS & RESORTS

CROWNED FOR EXCELLENCE IN HOSPITALITY



The
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Chamber
of Commerce of Sri Lanka

National Business Excellence Awards 2026



www.browshotels.com

Browns Hotels & Resorts was celebrated at the 21st National Business Excellence Awards 2026 with dual honours for The Eden Beruwala and Thaala Bentota under the Hospitality and Tourism category.

From the five-star luxury of The Eden Beruwala on the Golden Mile to the distinctive Bawa heritage of Thaala Bentota, we continue to create hospitality that reflects the character of Sri Lanka while meeting the expectations of the modern traveller.

This recognition is a testament to the people behind every experience and our commitment to building a stronger hospitality industry, creating value for our guests, our communities and the country we call home.

The **Eden**
Beruwala

BENTOTA
Thaala

WTM Spotlight Riyadh to highlight tourism resilience and strengthen global industry partnerships

TTA BULLETIN

WTM Spotlight Riyadh will showcase the strength, resilience and rapid growth of Saudi Arabia’s tourism sector, bringing together global industry leaders to strengthen partnerships, explore new opportunities and reinforce confidence in one of the world’s fastest-growing tourism markets.



recovery is consistent and, in most cases, leads to stronger growth.

The WTTC report also highlighted that recovery is a result of leadership, investment and collaboration. Ibrahim Osta, Senior Economic Growth Director & Global Tourism Lead at Chemonics International, said: “Recovery doesn't just happen – it's a decision. The destinations that came back fastest are the ones that made the bold decision to invest at the height of the crisis, protected their businesses, and controlled their own narrative when everyone else went quiet. That is not luck. That is leadership.”

Saudi Arabia's tourism sector has maintained sustained investment in aviation, hospitality and destination development. Passenger traffic across Saudi airports reached 140.9 million in 2025, while the Kingdom's connectivity network expanded to 176 international destinations according to statistics from the General Authority for Statistics (GASTAT).

Investment across tourism infrastructure has also continued, with new hospitality developments, expanded airport capacity, enhanced visitor experiences and major tourism projects supporting the Kingdom's ambition to welcome 150 million visitors annually by 2030.

WTM Spotlight Riyadh has been created to support this growth by providing a highly focused environment where destinations, tourism authorities, travel brands, hospitality providers, airlines, technology companies, and buyers can establish meaningful commercial relationships and explore new opportunities. By connecting the world to Saudi Arabia and Saudi Arabia to the world, the platform allows international stakeholders to engage directly with one of the world's most dynamic tourism markets while supporting the Kingdom's Vision 2030 ambitions.

The event will bring together more than 6,500 regional and international visitors and 150 international hosted buyers, creating a dedicated marketplace where industry leaders can exchange ideas, develop partnerships and contribute to the continued resilience and growth of global tourism.

Designed as a focused B2B2C platform, WTM Spotlight Riyadh will showcase the full travel ecosystem, from destinations, hospitality providers and attractions to transportation, travel technology and tourism services. Through pre-arranged business meetings, curated networking opportunities, and a comprehensive conference programme, the event will create an environment in which meaningful commercial outcomes can be achieved while supporting Saudi Arabia's long-term tourism ambitions.

Exclusive insights from STR have highlighted the resilience of the Kingdom’s tourism sector, with Jeddah in particular performing well, with strong demand since March 2026 due to the city’s coastal location, resulting in growth being revised up and the rebound expected to continue through 2027. The data also indicated that giga-projects in Riyadh will support a rapid rebound in demand in 2027, with expectations to reach 2025 levels in February.

These findings align closely with Saudi Arabia’s own tourism trajectory. In Q1 2026, data from the Saudi Ministry of Tourism showed that visitor numbers increased by 8% year-on-year to 37.2 million, with tourist spending reaching SAR82.7 billion. Domestic tourism rose by 16% during the same period, reflecting strong local engagement with the Kingdom's expanding tourism offering and growing confidence in the sector's future.

In 2025, the Kingdom welcomed nearly 123 million domestic and international visitors, generating more than SAR304 billion in tourism spending and surpassing Vision 2030 tourism milestones ahead of schedule.

Danielle Curtis, Regional Portfolio Director, UAE, RX, said: “Tourism has consistently demonstrated an extraordinary ability to recover, adapt and grow, even in the face of significant challenges. Saudi Arabia's tourism sector is an excellent example of this resilience. Supported by Vision 2030 and continued investment in tourism infrastructure, aviation, hospitality, and visitor experiences, the Kingdom has built a robust ecosystem that continues to generate growth, attract investment, and create opportunities across the travel value chain.

By bringing together international and regional travel stakeholders, WTM Spotlight Riyadh provides a focused environment where meaningful business relationships can be established and developed, knowledge can be shared, and new opportunities can be unlocked.”

Research from the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), developed in partnership with George Washington University and Chemonics International, which will deliver three conference sessions during WTM Spotlight Riyadh, outlined the resilience of the travel sector and its ability to recover from disruption. According to the report's research,

Formula 1 Roars Back to Malaysia: Sepang to Host Grand Prix Weekend This October After Nine-Year Absence

TTA BULLETIN

Historic cross-border agreement sees Sepang International Circuit stage the 2026 Bahrain Grand Prix, delivering a major boost for Malaysian tourism and Southeast Asia's events calendar



Formula 1 races between 1999 and 2017, earning a reputation among drivers and fans alike for its sweeping high-speed corners, wide racing lines and dramatic tropical conditions. The

2017 finale, won by Max Verstappen, was long thought to be the circuit's farewell to the sport.

Formula 1 returns to Malaysia for the first time in nearly a decade, with the Sepang International Circuit (SIC) confirmed to host the Formula 1 Gulf Air Bahrain Grand Prix from 2 to 4 October 2026.

The landmark agreement — finalised between Formula 1, the Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA), the Government of Bahrain and the Government of Malaysia — sees Sepang step in as the substitute venue for the Bahrain Grand Prix, which was deferred due to ongoing regional security challenges in West Asia. While the race retains its official Bahrain title in recognition of Gulf Air's title sponsorship, all the on-track action will unfold on Malaysian soil.

The announcement marks an emotional homecoming for one of the sport's most beloved circuits. Sepang hosted 19

A Windfall for Malaysian Tourism
Sepang's return is expected to deliver significant dividends for Malaysia's travel and hospitality sector. Strategically scheduled between the Azerbaijan Grand Prix and the Singapore Grand Prix, the race creates a seamless Asian triple-header — positioning Kuala Lumpur at the heart of a once-in-a-generation regional motorsport swing.

For international visitors, the timing could not be better. Fans can now pair the Sepang weekend with the Singapore night race the following week, unlocking extended multi-destination itineraries across Southeast Asia. Hotels, airlines, tour operators and hospitality providers across the region are expected to benefit from the influx of teams, media, sponsors and travelling supporters.

Shining The Spotlight On Purposeful Engagements, Incentives, and Wellness Centred Programming

TTA BULLETIN

This year's IT&CM Asia and CTW Asia-Pacific will present an expanded educational programme in partnership with



Barrett, Consultant Events at The Slate, Phuket, the panel discussion will feature

leading industry thought leaders, that places a strong focus on wellbeing, sustainability, and purposeful engagement. Designed to inspire attendees to integrate these values into MICE and business travel planning, the event promises dynamic sessions and interactive experiences that go beyond traditional learning.

panellists like Bhummikitti Ruktaengam, President of The Sustainable Tourism Development Foundation Phuket; David Boucher, Chief Executive Officer of Bumrungrad International Hospital Phuket & Phuket Market; and Rubel Miah, General Manager of Mövenpick BDMS Wellness Resort Bangkok.

Engaging Content Focused on Business Travel and Wellness Delegates can look forward to an enriching three-day conference featuring expert-led sessions that encourage innovation, resilience, and collaboration in the business events and corporate travel sectors. The agenda aligns with TCEB's latest campaign “Meet Well” which advocates for mindful and rejuvenating travel experiences.

On 24 September, two thought leadership sessions will take centre stage. The first conference session, INSIDE MICE: Trends and Data for Strategic Decision-Making by the Global MICE Collaborative, will provide a data-driven global perspective on industry trends. The second session, Power of Collaboration: Building Stronger Connections for a Resilient Future by ICCA, will highlight the role of cross-sector alliances in fostering innovation and sustainable growth.

On 23 September, Noor Ahmad Hamid, CEO of PATA, will present Shaping the Future of Travel, touching on the global travel outlook, an essential topic in today’s rapidly evolving landscape where global events continue to shape travel behaviour for both personal and business trends. In addition, the Pulse Check: Well-Being in Events and Business Travel session will explore mindfulness as a strategic element in event design, delegate engagement, and travel programmes. Moderated by David

On 25 September, the discussion will shift to food as a wellness driver in Beyond Nutrition: Future Food, Personal Wellness & Sustainable Hospitality Ecosystems by Tastebud Lab. Through a special collaboration with CTW Asia-Pacific powered by GBTA, there will also be Meet the Corporate, an exclusive networking session designed to connect corporate travel buyers with suppliers.

Skal International Colombo EGM 2026

Skal International Colombo recently held its Extra-ordinary General Meeting (EGM) at the Taj Samudra Hotel in Colombo. The Guest speaker for the meeting was Hon. Santosh Jha, High Commissioner of India to Sri Lanka. The occasion also marked the first industry partnership between Skal international Colombo and LaundroPlus offering a membership incentive by the Celsius Luxury Linen Group.



HOTELS

Walk Through the Story of Ceylon Tea at Newburgh Ella

TTA BULLETIN

Long before Ella became one of Sri Lanka’s most sought-after travel destinations, the hills surrounding the region were already home to a legacy that would introduce the world to the finest Ceylon Tea.



tea factory employees who are now part of the resort team, welcoming guests with their personal memories, knowledge and connection to Newburgh’s tea story.

The Tea Factory Tour Experience takes visitors beyond a cup of tea, revealing the fascinating journey from plantation to factory floor.

Nestled amidst lush tea plantations, Newburgh Ella – The Tea Factory Resort by Browns Hotels & Resorts invites guests and visitors to discover this remarkable heritage through its signature Tea Factory Tour Experience—an immersive journey through a historic tea factory that has stood for more than 120 years.

Built by renowned planter George Thomson in 1903, the story of Newburgh Tea Factory predates one of Ella’s most photographed landmarks—the Nine Arches Bridge, completed in 1921. While the bridge became a symbol of Sri Lanka’s railway heritage, the tea factory was already part of a much older narrative, producing Ceylon Tea that travelled across the world.

Today, the former tea factory has been transformed into a distinctive 41-room heritage resort by Browns Hotels & Resorts, preserving the character of its tea-making past while offering guests an immersive hospitality experience. The legacy also lives on through many former

The one-hour guided experience begins with a walk through the resort’s tea plantation, where guests discover the art of cultivation, the influence of Ella’s climate and altitude, and the traditional technique of selecting the finest “two leaves and a bud” for premium Ceylon Tea.

Guests are then welcomed into the historic factory with a cultural greeting before exploring its preserved interiors, vintage machinery and authentic equipment that bring the past to life.

The walkthrough reveals every stage of tea production, including withering, rolling, oxidation, drying and grading, while explaining how each process shapes the flavour, aroma and character of the final product. Visitors also learn the differences between black tea and green tea production, gaining a deeper appreciation of the craftsmanship behind every variety.

Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts Maldives unveils four distinctive island celebrations for the festive season

TTA BULLETIN

Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts Maldives is preparing to trade winter chills for warm shores this festive season, with four distinctly themed celebrations unfolding across its island resorts. From evenings inspired by the stars and a festive journey around the world to a tropical wonderland and celebrations beneath the blue, each resort will put its own spin on Christmas and New Year in the Maldives. Across the islands, days will move between long lunches, ocean adventures and time on the beach, before evenings give way to festive dining, live entertainment and celebrations under the stars.

Cinnamon Velifushi Malives
At Cinnamon Velifushi Maldives, Christmas looks to the stars with Galaxy of Dreams, a celestial-themed celebration made for the island’s wide-open skies. Sunset cruises, saxophone performances by the beach, intimate gourmet dinners and live music set the pace in the days leading up to Christmas, while younger guests can join their own Adventures Among the Stars. Christmas Eve brings a gala feast, the Velifushi Choir and Santa’s grand arrival before celebrations continue late into the night. The theme reaches its finale on New Year’s Eve, when DJs, a live band, dancers and a midnight countdown bring the Galaxy of Dreams to life one last time.



Cinnamon Hakuraa Huraa Maldives
Cinnamon Hakuraa Huraa Maldives will take the festive season Around the World, drawing inspiration from the food, music and traditions of different cultures while keeping the setting unmistakably Maldivian. Christmas Eve begins with a feast inspired by flavours from across the globe, followed by carols and live music, before the night shifts into dancing beside the ocean. The journey continues beyond Christmas with a celebration of Maldivian heritage during Spirit of the Islands, sunset cruises across the atoll and, as 2026 draws to a close, a New Year’s Eve filled with international music, live performances and dancing into the first hours of 2027.

Cinnamon Dhonveli Maldives
At Cinnamon Dhonveli Maldives, Tropical Wonderland swaps snow-covered Christmas scenes for sunshine, sand and plenty of island energy. The season begins with the lighting of the Christmas tree and unfolds with experiences ranging from sunrise yoga and traditional coconut-leaf craftsmanship to festive activities for children. Christmas Eve brings everyone together for a Tropical Wonderland Gala Dinner, carols by the Dhonveli Choir and Santa’s arrival by the sea.

Yazu at the Beach Brings a New Kind of Plant-Powered Pan-Asian Dining to Galle

TTA BULLETIN

What happens when Pan-Asian flavour meets a centuries-old philosophy of mindful eating? At Yazu at the Beach, the answer is a menu that is colourful, playful and seriously delicious, while opening up a new dining avenue for vegetarian and Jain guests on Sri Lanka’s southern coast.



Yazu at the Beach, the beachfront Pan-Asian dining destination at Radisson Blu Resort Galle, has introduced a dedicated Jain and Vegetarian menu, bringing together Japanese, Cantonese and Asian-inspired favourites without making vegetables feel like an afterthought.

The menu spans everything from Miso Shiro, Tibetan Thenthuk and Sweet Corn Soup to Crispy Asian Greens Cheung Fung, Avocado Tartare, Edamame Dumplings and a Crispy Avocado & Cucumber Roll. Larger plates include Mock Duck & Tofu Clay Pot, Chilli Bean Clay Pot Tofu, Mah Poh Tofu and Cantonese Asian Greens.

At the heart of Jain food culture is ahimsa, or non-violence, reflected in a dietary philosophy centred on avoiding harm to living beings. Traditional Jain practices can also exclude root vegetables, while emphasising mindful choices around

ingredients and preparation. For Yazu, the opportunity is to translate that philosophy into food that still feels unmistakably Yazu: vibrant, contemporary and made for sharing.

There is a health story here too. Well-planned vegetarian diets can provide nutritional adequacy and are associated with improvements in several cardiometabolic health outcomes. Research also links healthier plant-based dietary patterns with lower risks of cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes.

The launch also taps into an emerging gap along the South Coast. While vegetarian food is increasingly accessible in destinations such as Galle and Ahangama, dedicated vegetarian concepts are still relatively limited, while travellers seeking specifically Jain food can find it harder to identify suitable options.

For Yazu, the answer is simple: more choice, more flavour, and absolutely no boring vegetables.

With the Indian Ocean as its backdrop and Yazu’s signature energy at the table, Galle now has another reason to say yes to eating green.

Experience Nuwara Eliya with Langdale Boutique Hotel & Oliphant Boutique Villa

TTA BULLETIN

A journey to Nuwara Eliya reveals a side of Sri Lanka unlike anywhere else on the island. As the road climbs into the central highlands, the temperature drops and the scenery gives way to tea country, mountain ranges, cottage gardens and a distinct sense of highland heritage. Within this landscape, Langdale Boutique Hotel and Oliphant Boutique Villa offer two intimate ways to experience Nuwara Eliya, each reflecting a different side of life in the tea country.



Located just 15 minutes from Nanu Oya Railway Station, Langdale Boutique Hotel is an eleven-room haven overlooking the Great Western Mountain Range and surrounding tea estates. Days here can begin with a swim in the heated outdoor pool, where warm water meets Nuwara Eliya’s crisp mountain air, before setting out to explore the region through trekking, tea estate experiences or a visit to Horton Plains. Back at the hotel, guests can enjoy the spa, mini golf, leisurely dining and the gardens, while its front lawn provides a picturesque setting for intimate celebrations.

Higher in the hills, Oliphant Boutique Villa offers a more heritage-led experience from its setting in Shanthipura, Sri Lanka’s highest village, close to the historic Oliphant Tea Estate. With just seven rooms, the villa retains the intimacy of an

old highland bungalow through four-poster beds, fireplaces and period interiors. Outside, its expansive lawn lends itself to breakfast beneath the trees, afternoon tea and intimate gatherings, while evenings take on a character of their own as temperatures fall and guests retreat indoors to the warmth of the fireplace. Pidurutalagala, The Eagle’s View Point, Nuwara Eliya Golf Club and the region’s tea country are all within reach for days spent exploring beyond the villa.

Together, Langdale and Oliphant capture what makes a Nuwara Eliya getaway so distinctive. One brings together mountain views, outdoor pursuits and the rare pleasure of a heated swim in the cool highlands; the other draws guests into the heritage and fireside comfort of bungalow life in Sri Lanka’s tea country. Whether arriving aboard the celebrated train to Nanu Oya, setting out for Horton Plains or simply enjoying a cool afternoon in the gardens, Langdale & Oliphant invite travellers to stay long enough to experience Nuwara Eliya beyond the usual sightseeing itinerary.

Carne Diem Grill by Dharshan Named to 50 Best Discovery 2026

TTA BULLETIN

Carne Diem Grill by Dharshan has been named to the 50 Best Discovery 2026 collection, becoming the only restaurant in the Maldives to be featured in this year's global selection. The listing places the restaurant before the global audience of travellers, luxury travel advisors and food enthusiasts who actively follow the 50 Best ecosystem.



custom-engineered charcoal grill capable of reaching temperatures of up to 750°C. Developed specifically for Carne Diem Grill, it embodies the restaurant's philosophy of Meat. Heat. Salt. – the belief that exceptional steak requires nothing more than outstanding ingredients, precise cooking and perfect seasoning.

Announced as part of the largest-ever expansion of 50 Best Discovery, the 2026 edition welcomed more than 650 new venues from around the world. The platform now showcases over 3,500 restaurants, bars, hotels and vineyards across more than 800 cities and towns, serving as one of the world's most respected expert-curated hospitality guides.

Published by the organisation behind 50 Best Restaurants, 50 Best Discovery is not a platform that establishments can apply to join. Every venue is selected following votes cast by members of the independent 50 Best Academies, comprising more than 3,000 chefs, restaurateurs, food writers, critics and hospitality experts from across the globe.

For Carne Diem Grill by Dharshan, the recognition reflects the strength of a concept built on consistency, craftsmanship and a clear point of view. Since opening at The Marina at CROSSROADS Maldives in 2020, the restaurant has remained committed to refining its craft rather than chasing trends, steadily establishing itself as one of the destination's standout dining experiences.

At the heart of the restaurant is Ignis Maximus, Chef Dharshan Munidasa's

That commitment to authenticity has attracted an international clientele, with guests from around the world sharing their experiences long after leaving the Maldives. Carne Diem Grill has also taken its signature live-fire cooking beyond the islands through acclaimed pop-up events in Colombo and Bangkok, each featuring an Ignis Maximus grill custom-built in the host country to faithfully recreate the restaurant's distinctive cooking experience.

"To receive recognition from our peers through 50 Best Discovery is a tremendous honour – not only for Carne Diem Grill, but also for the Maldives as a culinary destination," said Chef Dharshan Munidasa. "Carne Diem has always been about doing one thing exceptionally well. We have never tried to be another steakhouse. We've remained committed to our philosophy of exceptional ingredients, precision cooking and genuine hospitality, and it is incredibly rewarding to see that recognised on a global platform."

The recognition also marks another significant chapter in Chef Dharshan Munidasa's culinary journey. Following the international success of Nihonbashi – the first restaurant from Sri Lanka to be featured on Asia's 50 Best Restaurants; and Ministry of Crab, which has

The Kingsbury Honours 60 Long-Serving Colleagues at its 2026 Long Service Awards

TTA BULLETIN

The Kingsbury, Colombo, celebrated the people behind its renowned hospitality at the Long Service Awards Ceremony 2026, recognising 60 colleagues who have dedicated 15, 20 and 25 years of service to the hotel. Bringing together senior leadership, colleagues and family members, the evening honoured the individuals whose professionalism, commitment and passion have helped define the exceptional guest experiences for which The Kingsbury is known.



The ceremony recognised 25 colleagues celebrating 15 years of service, 23 colleagues marking 20 years and 12 colleagues reaching the remarkable milestone of 25 years. Representing departments across Front Office, Food & Beverage, Housekeeping, Engineering, Finance, Security, Administration, Banquet Operations, Laundry and Kitchen, the award recipients embody the teamwork and expertise that underpin every aspect of the

hotel, from memorable guest interactions to the countless behind-the-scenes efforts that ensure seamless operations.

Addressing the gathering, Managing Director of Hayleys Leisure, Mr. Rohan Karr, commended the recipients for their unwavering dedication, consistency and pursuit of service excellence throughout their careers. He also paid heartfelt tribute to their families, acknowledging the invaluable support they provide and the sacrifices they make through long hours, festive seasons and the unique demands of a career in hospitality. Their encouragement, he noted, has been instrumental in enabling employees to build lasting and meaningful careers at The Kingsbury.

As one of Colombo's leading hospitality destinations, The Kingsbury attributes its continued success not only to its offerings and experiences, but to the people who bring them to life each day.

Cinnamon Box Office Launches AI-Powered Destination Event Calendar

TTA BULLETIN

Cinnamon Box Office (CBO) has launched an AI-powered Destination Event Calendar designed to transform how visitors and locals discover events, entertainment, culture and experiences across Sri Lanka, while strengthening Colombo's proposition as a year-round destination for tourism, events and lifestyle experiences.



The Destination Event Calendar is part of Cinnamon Box Office, a ticketing and premium event experience platform designed to position Sri Lanka as a destination for world-class events, entertainment and lifestyle experiences. Its event proposition spans eight pillars: Concerts, MICE, Contemporary Music, Classic Music, Children, Food & Beverage, Speakers and Theatre, creating a broader events offering capable of attracting local, regional and international audiences.

The platform brings together audiences, event organisers, venues, hotels and partners through an integrated offering covering ticketing, event management, marketing, audience engagement and reporting. Cinnamon Box Office supports events from planning to performance through event consultation, online market-

ing, AI-powered social campaigns, ticket sales management, AI sales forecasting, D-Day ticket validation and QR entry, 24/7 hotline support and payment reconciliation.

The launch comes at a time when Colombo has significant untapped potential as a tourism and events destination. Colombo currently captures just 28% of Sri Lanka's tourist arrivals, compared to a regional average of approximately 70%. Despite having the highest number of five-star hotels in the country, Colombo also has the lowest occupancy. With seasonality and dependence on winter markets continuing to influence tourism patterns, achieving three million arrivals will require Colombo to attract an estimated one million intra-regional tourists.

At the same time, Colombo is not yet widely associated with being a leading tourism city. According to the Brand Finance Global City Index 2024, Colombo ranks 84th globally. The opportunity is to strengthen the city's destination identity by creating greater visibility around its cultural, entertainment and lifestyle experiences, supported by planned activity throughout the year.

Hilton Yala Inspires Young Wildlife Champions with Sri Lanka's Only Resort-Based Internationally Recognised Junior Ranger Certification

TTA BULLETIN

Hilton Yala Resort is inviting young explorers to discover the wonders of Sri Lanka's natural heritage through its immersive Junior Ranger Program—an educational wildlife experience designed to inspire curiosity, environmental stewardship, and a lifelong appreciation for nature among children.



around the world.

Set against the extraordinary backdrop of Yala National Park, Hilton's only wildlife resort globally offers children aged 5 to 12 the opportunity to step into the shoes of a wildlife ranger. Guided by the resort's experienced ranger team, the program combines hands-on learning with outdoor exploration, introducing participants to the remarkable biodiversity, ecosystems, archaeology, history, and conservation efforts that make Yala one of the world's most celebrated wildlife destinations.

What sets the Junior Ranger Program apart is its integration with the internationally recognised CyberTracker Conservation assessment methodology. Hilton Yala Resort is proud to be the only resort in Sri Lanka offering young participants the opportunity to work towards CyberTracker Junior Tracker certification, a globally respected wildlife tracking accreditation used by conservationists, wildlife guides, researchers and protected area managers

Designed specifically for children, the CyberTracker Junior Tracker certification encourages observation, critical thinking, exploration and scientific reasoning through practical outdoor learning rather than classroom instruction. Young participants are assessed through engaging field activities and simple tracking exercises that reward curiosity and understanding while building confidence in nature interpretation. Rather than focusing solely on correct answers, the assessment encourages children to observe, discuss, reason and learn from the environment around them.

Available as one-day and two-day experiences, the Junior Ranger Program takes children beyond traditional holiday activities through guided nature walks, wildlife observation, bush skills, animal tracking, archaeology experiences, biodiversity identification, conservation learning and interactive educational sessions that foster teamwork, confidence and environmental awareness. Participants successfully completing the program receive their Junior Ranger recognition together with the opportunity to achieve internationally recognised CyberTracker certification appropriate to their level.

Anantara’s Signature Anniversary Experiences in Slow Travel and Wellbeing

TTA BULLETIN

From a Balinese purification ritual to a night beneath the Maldivian stars, five Anantara destinations invite guests to slow down and stay a while



handcrafted teakwood boat of Anantara Chiang Mai Resort, gliding along the Mae Ping River for 90 minutes past riverside temples and the unhurried life of the Wat Ket community. Ashore, the route winds to the ancient Wat Ket Karam and on to Khua Kaek Bridge, where Doi Suthep rises in the distance, and an alms-giving to a monk marks the day with a quiet blessing. Lunch waits back at the resort: a Lanna khantoke laid beneath 400-year-old Bodhi trees at Bodhi Terrace, where northern Thai flavours carry the region’s enduring stories.

Where stillness rises with the stars

In the Maldives, calm has a way of moving upward. As the lagoon darkens and the day’s last colour drains from the horizon, Anantara Kihavah Maldives Villas invites guests to climb to its SKY overwater observatory for a stargazing session with the resort’s SKY Edhuru. Through the lens of the Maldives’ most powerful telescope, distant galaxies, constellations and planets emerge across the Indian Ocean night sky. It is a reminder that stillness, too, can be a form of discovery.

Balance restored on the Andaman

At Anantara Layan Phuket Resort, wellbeing begins with attention: a personal consultation at Layan Life by Anantara that shapes everything to follow. From there, a session of sound healing and Pao Ya heated herbal therapy works to ease tension, support digestion and restore balance from the inside out. As the light softens, the day gives way to a sunset over the water, stargazing and a glass of Champagne beneath the open Andaman sky.

A monastery’s quiet wisdom

Above the harbour of Amalfi, a 13th-century Capuchin convent has held its calm for centuries. At Anantara Convento di Amalfi Grand Hotel, that inheritance shapes the morning. It begins in the terraced gardens with Friar Marcus, who leads guests among rare Mediterranean botanicals and ancient monastic herbs while sharing the philosophy of Pace & Bene, before the path continues into the Chef’s Garden, where the kitchen’s produce is grown. A sound healing ritual follows in the convent’s sanctuary, its resonance designed to settle the mind and rebalance the body. The morning closes with a picnic of artisan breads, garden produce and aged cheeses, laid out in a secluded setting where the Amalfi Coast falls away to the sea.

Morning rhythms along the Mae Ping

In Chiang Mai, the river sets the pace. The morning opens aboard Nam Jai, the

Cinnamon Grand Colombo Brings Back Fan-Favourite South Indian Restaurant Chutneys for a Limited-Edition Culinary Encore

TTA BULLETIN

Cinnamon Grand Colombo is reviving one of the capital’s most fondly remembered dining concepts, bringing back Chutneys for a four-night culinary showcase at the hotel’s Courtyard restaurant from 20 to 23 August 2026.



the rich and spice-laden Mutton Mangala, the well-loved Kori Garlic Thalna, a Rice Thali layered with familiar South Indian flavours, and the aromatic Kozhi Biriyani — dishes that longtime patrons will instantly recognise.

Chutneys was for years a defining South Indian dining destination within Cinnamon Grand Colombo, known for its Paper Dosai, spice-forward curries and warm, familiar hospitality. Although the restaurant has since closed, guest demand for its signature dishes has remained strong — prompting the hotel to bring the concept back, if only for a limited run.

Titled 'Come Back for the Chutneys', the pop-up dining experience revives the restaurant’s most requested dishes, prepared to their original recipes. The line-up includes the iconic Paper Dosai,

The initiative reflects a broader trend among Colombo’s leading hotels: reviving nostalgic, guest-favourite dining concepts as a way of deepening loyalty and drawing both returning regulars and first-time diners curious to experience a piece of the city’s culinary history.

For guests who once had their regular order at Chutneys, this is a chance to taste it again. For those discovering the restaurant’s flavours for the first time, it offers a window into one of Cinnamon Grand Colombo’s most memorable dining stories.

Amaya Hills Marks World Honey Bee Day with its Growing Beekeeping Initiative in Kandy

TTA BULLETIN

In celebration of World Honey Bee Day on 15th August, Amaya Hills, Kandy, highlights its beekeeping initiative that has grown from a horticultural experiment into a thriving part of the resort’s sustainability and guest experience.



understanding the importance of bees to pollination and biodiversity, and tasting honey produced within the resort grounds. It transforms sustainability from something happening behind the scenes into an experience guests can see, understand and enjoy with their stay at Amaya Hills, Kandy.

The journey began in May 2021, when the horticulture team introduced four bee colonies into the gardens of Amaya Hills. Although only one survived, the team continued building its apiary knowledge and reintroduced three colonies in 2025. By 2026, the property had expanded to seven successful, actively managed bee colonies.

Today, these colonies provide a protected environment for bees to thrive while supporting pollination across the resort gardens and the surrounding greenery of Heerassagala. In doing so, they contribute to the biodiversity of the Kandy hills, while producing fresh honey that is harvested on-site, used in the resort’s main kitchen and offered as a welcome amenity.

Guests can also discover the process first-hand through a dedicated honey-harvesting experience, learning how the colonies are maintained,

Five years after the first hives were introduced, beekeeping at Amaya Hills reflects the patience required for meaningful environmental initiatives to take root. This World Honey Bee Day, the resort celebrates the role these essential pollinators play in sustaining the landscapes that surround one of Kandy’s distinctive hill-country retreats.

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.



The Kingsbury Presents Arabian Nights at Harbour Court

TTA BULLETIN

The Kingsbury invites Colombo to experience Arabian Nights at Harbour Court, a week-long celebration of Mediterranean cuisine, culture and entertainment. From 20th to 26th August 2026, one of the city’s most popular buffet destinations will take on the spirit of Arabia with an expansive 40-dish spread, live-action stations and an atmosphere created to make each evening feel immersive and memorable.



prepared meat dishes and traditional desserts. Live stations add a sense of theatre throughout the evening, with shawarma, whole roasted goat, Moroccan chicken, kofta and kebabs prepared fresh before guests. Together with live entertainment and a specially created setting, Arabian Nights brings the flavours, hospitality and spirit of Arabia to life at Harbour Court.

Leading the culinary experience is visiting Lebanese Executive Chef Hadi Salami, who brings more than 24 years of experience in Arabian cuisine and luxury hospitality, including time with the Jumeirah Group and large-scale culinary operations across West Asia. His career has earned notable recognition, including the BBC Good Food Award for Best Lebanese Restaurant in MENA for Al Nafoorah in 2013, multiple What’s On and Time Out awards, and Gold, Silver and Bronze medals at the Emirates International Salon Culinaire for traditional Arabic mezze and Arabian cuisine.

Guests can explore a generous selection of hot and cold mezze, aromatic Arabic rice specialities, vegetarian favourites, richly

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 for your wedding, meeting or conference with 3 stunning ballrooms and two meeting spaces. The hotel also provides a large swimming pool overlooking the ocean, a fully-fledged spa, a business centre and a well-equipped fitness room.

34th Annual General Meeting of The Institute of Hospitality Sri Lanka

The Institute of Hospitality Sri Lanka Region successfully concluded its 34th Annual General Meeting (AGM) at the historic Galle Face Hotel, Colombo, marking another significant milestone in the Institute's journey of professional excellence and industry leadership.



Emirates SkyCargo transports Orbitworks' Altair-1, the first commercial AI-enabled satellite developed and manufactured in the UAE

TTA BULLETIN

Emirates SkyCargo has completed the transport of Altair-1, the UAE's first commercial AI-enabled earth observation satellite. Part of Orbitworks' Altair constellation, the movement of the satellite highlights a landmark achievement in the UAE's vision to become a global leader in space and advanced technologies. Altair-1 was flown on an Emirates SkyCargo Boeing 777 freighter aircraft from Dubai (DWC) airport to Los Angeles (LAX) ahead of its scheduled launch in October 2026.

Altair is a multi-sensor satellite constellation developed and manufactured in the UAE by Orbitworks. The system is equipped with optical, infrared, thermal and RF sensing capabilities and onboard AI processing. With advanced imaging payloads, optimised orbital design, frequent revisit rates and consistent data acquisition, Altair will provide analysis-ready intelligence for applications including environmental

monitoring, disaster response, land and coastal-use analysis, maritime domain awareness, and resource and infrastructure assessment. The satellite transported by Emirates SkyCargo is the first of 10 that will form the Altair constellation.

The transportation of Altair highlights Emirates SkyCargo's expertise in flying highly sensitive and specialised cargo under its Aerospace and Engineering vertical. A dedicated Emirates SkyCargo team managed the end to end transport of the satellite, maintaining rigorous environmental and safety controls and delivering on schedule.

Badr Abbas, Divisional Senior Vice President, Emirates SkyCargo said: "Emirates SkyCargo is proud to support



Orbitworks at this significant moment and contribute to the UAE's growing reputation as a global hub for innovation, advanced technologies and specialised logistics. Transporting highly sensitive and

technologically advanced cargo requires precision and expertise and we are well positioned through decades of deep expertise to support this critical mission. The movement of Altair-1 from the UAE to the United States ahead of its launch also underlines the role of specialised air cargo solutions in supporting the global aerospace sector."

Schahan Sediqi, General Manager, Orbitworks said: "Altair-1 is the product of hard work by an incredible team, and today marks a historic moment, not just for Orbitworks, but for the UAE's ambitions in

space. We could not have reached this point without in-country partners like Emirates SkyCargo, whose care and expertise got Altair safely from Dubai to Los Angeles. We are incredibly proud of what our team has built, and we now look forward to October, when Altair-1 will launch into orbit and begin its mission."

Emirates SkyCargo has extensive experience transporting satellites and other highly sensitive aerospace equipment worldwide. Most recently, the air cargo carrier transported Arab Satellite 813 from Dubai to its launch site near Shanghai, China. In 2018, the air cargo carrier made history by transporting Khalifasat, the first satellite developed and built by UAE engineers from Dubai to South Korea. Emirates SkyCargo's dedicated solution for transporting Aerospace and Engineering cargo is one of the fastest growing verticals in its portfolio of specialised products.

Qatar Airways’ 150 Starlink-Equipped Widebody Aircraft Now Include World’s First Starlink-Equipped Boeing 787-9

TTA BULLETIN

Over 23 million passengers have connected to Starlink onboard Qatar Airways since October 2024



Qatar Airways, the operator of the world’s first and largest Starlink-equipped widebody fleet, has become the first airline to operate Starlink-equipped Boeing 787-9 aircraft, globally. The carrier has also completed Starlink rollout across its Boeing 787-8 sub-fleet in seven months, bringing the total number of its Starlink-equipped widebody aircraft to 150.

Qatar Airways remains on track to complete the Starlink rollout across its Boeing 787 fleet by the end of 2026.

The latest achievement builds on Qatar Airways’ record-breaking completion of the Boeing 777 programme in nine months and the Airbus A350 programme in eight months. The airline now operates the world’s first and largest Starlink-equipped Boeing 777, Airbus A350, and Boeing 787 fleets.

By building a Starlink-connected journey at a scale unmatched by any other widebody operator, Qatar Airways is bringing passengers closer to a future where travelling no longer means stepping away from the digital world. Every new Starlink-equipped aircraft extends that experience to more passengers, offering them greater freedom over how they spend their time onboard.

Whether they want to work, stay connected with loved ones or simply relax, Starlink Wi-Fi speeds of up to 500 Mbps allows the cabin to become whatever passengers need it to be at 35,000 feet.

Qatar Airways was the first airline to globally offer Starlink onboard long-haul and ultra-long-haul routes across six continents. With free of charge, gate-to-gate* Starlink Wi-Fi becoming available on more journeys across the airline’s global network, Qatar Airways is keeping passengers connected to what matters most while flying to the Americas and Australasia**, as well as key gateways across Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Middle East.

Since launching Starlink connectivity onboard in October 2024, more than 23 million passengers have connected to the fastest Wi-Fi in the sky across over 86,000 Qatar Airways flights.

As the fastest and most ambitious Starlink widebody installation programme in aviation history surpasses 83 per cent completion, Qatar Airways continues to lead in innovation and offer enhanced value to its passengers. With up to 323 Starlink-flights operating daily, the airline is making access to fast, seamless onboard connectivity an increasingly familiar part of its global passenger experience.

EventsAir Launches Planner Assistant

TTA BULLETIN

Planner Assistant is now live for all EventsAir customers, giving planners instant, natural-language answers and visualizations across their event data, and the ability to take direct action on what they find.

EventsAir, a global leader in event management technology, today announced that Planner Assistant, part of its Air Intelligence suite, is now live and available to all event planners on the platform.

Planner Assistant transforms how planners deliver events, combining native, in-product intelligence with a deep contextual foundation built on more than 35 years of event industry expertise.

Working across live and historical event data, Planner Assistant lets planners ask complex questions and uncover opportunities directly within EventsAir, without building reports or navigating dashboards. It can summarize what’s happening in plain language, turn insights into charts planners can save and share, and perform a growing set of actions within the platform when asked.

A planner can ask "Can you show me total revenue collected so far, broken down by registration type and payment status?" and get an instant, visual answer. Ask "Which

sessions are trending toward overcapacity?" and Planner Assistant can go a step further, taking action on the planner’s behalf, such as moving a session to a larger hall, on request and in the same conversation.

"Planner Assistant is about giving planners their time back," said Paul Trappett, CEO at EventsAir. "Every hour spent building a report or chasing down a number is an hour not spent on the parts of the job that actually shape a great event. Because Planner Assistant is built directly into the platform planners already rely on, it doesn't just tell them what's happening in their event. It helps them act on it, in the same place, in the same moment."

Planner Assistant is built directly into EventsAir, giving it the live context of a planner’s event data across registrations, revenue, sessions, speakers, accommodation and more.

That native approach was a deliberate choice. EventsAir focused first on bringing AI into the environment where planners already manage their events, helping them engage more deeply with their events, analyze data faster, and ultimately set up, manage and update events with less effort.

SriLankan Airlines Makes ShakthiSAT Mission Possible for Talented Sri Lankan Student

TTA BULLETIN

SriLankan Airlines is making Mission ShakthiSAT possible for Sri Lanka’s Official Student Representative, Seneesa Goonewardena, and ShakthiSAT (Devi) Ambassador for Sri Lanka, Dr. Sulochana Seger, by sponsoring their travel to India to participate in the groundbreaking project that will bring together young girls from 108 countries to collaboratively design and build a satellite for the first time. Empowering young minds to pursue their dreams has long been at the heart of SriLankan Airlines’ corporate social responsibility efforts. The airline has worked with numerous schools over the years, including many in rural communities, helping foster better learning journeys.



Seneesa Goonewardena was selected following a highly competitive national selection process that engaged more than 200 Sri Lankan schoolgirls in specialised STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) education programmes designed to introduce them to space technology. The programme was launched in Sri Lanka by Dr. Srimathy Kesan, Founder and Chief Executive Officer of Space Kidz India, who is recognised internationally for leading one of the world's largest educational satellite and rocket programmes.

The next phase of Mission ShakthiSAT will take place from 22 – 31 August 2026 at Gautam Buddha University in India, bringing together student delegates for advanced satellite integration, leadership development, cultural exchange and international STEM programmes, ahead of the satellite’s targeted launch between September and October 2026.

Deepal Perera, Manager Corporate Communications at SriLankan Airlines, stated, “We are delighted to support Seneesa Goonewardena and Dr. Sulochana Seger on this remarkable journey and to contribute to Sri Lanka’s participation in Mission ShakthiSAT. We hope Seneesa’s achievement will inspire students across the island to believe that with determination and perseverance, they can achieve their goals. We encourage students to make the most of every opportunity to learn, explore their interests, and pursue their ambitions with purpose. As the national carrier, we are proud to support this pioneering mission and to see a young Sri Lankan take their place on an international platform in space exploration.”

Expressing her excitement about the opportunity, Seneesa Goonewardena, said, “Being selected to represent Sri Lanka in the ShakthiSAT space journey is a dream come true, and I feel incredibly proud to carry my country’s name on this international mission. At 18, this experience reminds me that there are no limits to what young girls can achieve when we dare to dream. I am also proud to begin this journey by flying with our national carrier, SriLankan Airlines. I hope my journey will inspire more young Sri Lankan girls to look towards science, technology and space and believe that they too can reach for the

stars.”

Dr. Sulochana Seger added, “I am so happy to bring this opportunity to Sri Lanka and open doors for our girls to dream beyond the skies. ShakthiSAT is not just an event or a mission it is the beginning of a long-term journey. STEM education should not be an option for our country; it must be an essential part of our education. As the ShakthiSAT Ambassador for Sri Lanka, I feel immense pride knowing that on International Day of the Girl Child, our Sri Lankan flag will be placed on the Moon, following a small step I took just five months ago. And we are equally proud to begin this journey flying with our national carrier, SriLankan Airlines.”

From creating opportunities for children to explore the aviation industry, and supporting educational field trips, to providing facilities, learning aids and stationery for children from low-income families, organising wellbeing workshops, and supporting the development of sports skills in schools, SriLankan Airlines has always championed education and youth development. Today, the airline is proud to be a part of a pioneering global project that is expanding access to STEM education and inspiring the next generation, particularly girls, to explore possibilities beyond the boundaries they thought possible.

SriLankan Airlines connects passengers to 130 destinations across 63 countries through its own services and codeshare partnerships. Its direct network spans Europe, Australia, the Middle East, the Indian Subcontinent, Southeast Asia and the Far East. The airline operates an all-Airbus fleet comprising state-of-the-art A330-200/300 and A320/321 aircraft. For more information and to make bookings, visit www.srilankan.com or follow us on social media.

Space Kidz India (SKI) is one of India's leading space education organizations and an emerging aerospace startup founded by Dr. Srimathy Kesan. Through 27 successful space missions, including KalamSAT and AzaadiSAT, Space Kidz India has inspired and empowered millions of students by providing practical exposure to satellite engineering, space science, innovation, and international collaboration. Today, Space Kidz India works with governments, universities, industries, diplomats, scientists, and educators across the globe to make space education accessible to every child.

Mission ShakthiSAT is the world's first global all-girls lunar satellite mission. The mission brings together 12,000 girls from over 100 countries, providing them with hands-on engineering experience while promoting international cooperation in science, technology, diplomacy, and innovation.



Deewara
MAWELLA-TANGALLE

A New Beachfront Experience Arrives this August



Deewara was once a collection of traditional fishermen's homes in Mawella, Tangalle. Today, these homes have been thoughtfully restored into a boutique beachfront retreat, preserving their original charm while offering a relaxed stay by the sea.

Surrounded by tropical gardens and overlooking an unspoilt coastline, Deewara invites you to slow down, savour fresh coastal flavours, unwind with Ayurvedic wellness experiences and enjoy the simple beauty of Sri Lanka's southern coast.



Thema
COLLECTION



Aliya
SIGIRIYA



Amba Yalu
KANDALAMA



Mountbatten
KANDY



Scottish Planter
NUWARA ELIYA



Tea & Experience
MANDARAM NUWARA



Waraka
UDAWALAWE



Wild Glamping
GAL OYA



Wild Glamping
KNUCKLES



Kithala
TISSA-YALA



Blue Monk
TISSA-YALA



Maalu Maalu
PASIKUDA



Deewara
MAWELLA-TANGALLE



Parangi
WELIGAMA



Vista Vie
MIRISSA



Hikka House
HIKKADUWA



Ayurvedie
WELIGAMA



Ayurvedie
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