



International Hospitality Leaders' Conference Sets the Blueprint for Sri Lanka's Hospitality Future

More than 250 hospitality leaders and global experts convene in Colombo to advance the future performance and competitiveness of Sri Lanka's hospitality sector.

DINUSHKA CHANDRASENA

The Institute of Hospitality – Sri Lanka Region successfully convened more than 250 of the country's senior hospitality and tourism leaders at Cinnamon Grand Colombo for the inaugural International Hospitality Leaders' Conference 2026 (IHLC 2026), bringing together global expertise, industry leadership and a shared commitment to shaping the future performance and competitiveness of Sri Lanka's hospitality sector.



Ramesh Dassanayake



Refhan Razeen

an increasingly dynamic global tourism landscape. International perspectives from destinations including Seychelles and the Maldives provided insight into destination leadership, national positioning and industry collaboration, while sessions on AI, revenue management and consumer trends explored the technologies and behaviours reshaping hospitality. These conversations culminated in the Great Reform Debate, which challenged speakers and delegates to consider what needs to change if Sri Lanka is to realise its Vision 2030 ambitions.

A key outcome of IHLC 2026 was the Vision 2030 Declaration and an industry whitepaper, which has already been drafted by academics from APIIT Sri Lanka. Bringing together research and industry perspectives on the future direction of Sri Lankan hospitality, the whitepaper will now be circulated among industry and relevant government stakeholders as a reference to support wider dialogue, policy thinking and future action.

"We did not create this conference to celebrate what we have endured. We created it to confront what comes next. Our industry has already proven its resilience. The next chapter is about reimagining how we lead, compete and grow together," commented Refhan Razeen, Conference Chairman, IHLC 2026 and General Manager, Shangri-La Hambantota.

Beyond the programme, IHLC 2026 created opportunities for networking and experience-sharing throughout the day, with Official Hospitality Partner Cinnamon Grand Colombo playing a central role in the delegate experience.

A particularly distinctive aspect of the conference was its core organising committee, which brought together senior hospitality professionals with extensive operational, commercial, learning and brand marketing experience. Led by Refhan Razeen, General Manager, Shangri-La Hambantota; Patrick Pereira, Vice President Learning & Development, Aitken Spence Hotels; Nazoomi Azhar, General Manager, Cinnamon Grand Colombo; and Pramukshi Kariyawasam, former Director – Marketing & Communications at Shangri-La Dubai and former Director – Brand Marketing & Partnerships at Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts, the committee brought a strong practitioner perspective to the programme. Having worked together across previous workplaces and projects, the team was able to combine their respective areas of expertise and create a conference that was deeply rooted in the realities and opportunities facing the hospitality industry.

The discussions moved beyond individual businesses to consider the wider ecosystem required for Sri Lankan hospitality to compete more effectively in

Beyond Arrivals: Sri Lanka's Tourism Value Question

DINUSHKA CHANDRASENA



Angeline Ondaatjie



Shiromal Cooray



Grant Dreher

More visitors, but less money per visitor. At Australia House in Colombo, industry stakeholders asked whether Sri Lanka can turn record arrivals into real value, and what it will take to get there.

Sri Lanka has never had a problem attracting attention. Its beaches, tea country, wildlife and ancient cities sell themselves. The harder question is whether the country is earning what that attention is worth.

That question sat at the heart of a candid panel discussion held at Australia House, Colombo, under the theme "Beyond Arrivals: Can Tourism and Hospitality Power Sri Lanka's Next Growth Phase?" Organised by the Australian High Commission in collaboration with William Angliss Institute, Australia, the session formed part of the "ConnectED" Knowledge Partner Series.

Moderated by Wayne Crosby of William Angliss Institute, the panel brought together Angeline Ondaatjie – Managing Director Tangerine Tours / Tangerine Group of Hotels; Shiromal Cooray – Chairperson/ Managing Director Jetwing Travels; and Grant Dreher of William Angliss Institute.

Volume up, value down

Asked where Sri Lanka truly stands on its journey to becoming a high-value destination, Shiromal Cooray did not soften her answer. "We are just at the beginning," she said.

She pointed out that arrivals in 2023 were close to the 2018 peak, yet revenue was significantly lower. The country has grown volume, not value. The goal, she argued, must be visitors who stay longer, spend more, and whose spending is retained and shared within Sri Lanka.

Part of the problem is perception. Without a sustained marketing strategy, the

destination's story is increasingly being told by backpackers and influencers promoting budget travel. On the ground, a high-paying guest and a budget traveller often receive the same experience at major sites. Even simple spending opportunities, such as quality souvenir outlets at key attractions, are missing.

Plans on the shelf

If there was one theme the room returned to, it was execution. Sri Lanka does not lack strategies, Cooray noted; many have been developed with support from partners such as the World Bank. "The trouble is that there is no implementation."

She cited a planned destination marketing campaign held up by a long drawn out procurement process, is far too slow for an industry that moves at very high speed. What is needed, she said, is a mechanism to implement the plans that already exist.

Access is another gap between the promise and the reality. After a long-haul flight, reaching Jaffna or the East Coast remains difficult. Road journeys are long, rail services limited and domestic air travel expensive. Until that changes, visitors will struggle to disperse beyond the familiar circuit.

Yet Cooray also credited the industry's resilience. Through repeated setbacks, tourism has bounced back largely through private sector effort. Fix the implementation problem, she suggested, and the sector would be in a far stronger position. A level playing field, and "high value for whom?"

Speaking from the investor's perspective, Angeline Ondaatjie said the commercial case for Sri Lanka has always been strong because of its unique proposition. The real deterrent is structural.

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October has been a month of renewal and energy for Sri Lanka's travel and tourism industry. With the Annual General Meetings of our leading associations now concluded, Travel Talk extends warm congratulations to the newly appointed Presidents of the Sri Lanka Association of Inbound Tour Operators (SLAITO), the Travel Agents Association of Sri Lanka (TAASL) and the IATA Agents Association of Sri Lanka. Their leadership comes at a defining moment, and we wish them every success as they steer their organisations and members through the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead. Strong, collaborative associations remain the backbone of our industry, and their voices will be vital in the months to come.

We also congratulate Chandra Wickramasinghe and the team at THEMA Collection on the opening of Deewara in the South. Yet another unique concept hotel within the THEMA Collection portfolio, Deewara reflects the creativity and confidence that continue to define Sri Lanka's hospitality landscape. It adds a distinctive new experience to the southern coast and demonstrates the kind of investment and imagination that keeps our tourism product fresh and competitive.

Knowledge sharing has been equally prominent this month. The Hospitality Leaders Conference, organised by the Institute of Hospitality Sri Lanka Chapter, was a resounding success. An impressive line-up of local and international speakers addressed some of the most pressing issues facing our industry, giving leaders a valuable opportunity to exchange ideas and better understand the way forward.

The Australian High Commission also hosted a thought-provoking panel discussion, with a particular focus on value-driven tourism. The conversation was a timely reminder that sustainable growth depends not merely on visitor numbers, but on the quality of experiences we offer and the value we create for travellers, local communities and the wider economy.

What emerges clearly from these gatherings is an industry working tirelessly to position Sri Lanka on the global stage. There is now a general consensus that a focused destination marketing and positioning campaign is the order of the day. In an increasingly competitive regional market, we cannot afford to let our story be told in fragments. The passion, expertise and goodwill are already in place. What is needed now is a unified

voice and a clear, compelling narrative that tells the world why Sri Lanka deserves a place on every traveller's list.



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International Hospitality Leaders'

The hotel curated a special breakfast to welcome delegates, followed by a showcase of its signature restaurants at lunch and dinner, with individual stations bringing together a wide selection of cuisines and culinary experiences under one roof. Delegates praised the breadth of the selection and quality of the food, making the dining experience an important part of the conference itself. Powered By Partner Nestlé Professional also hosted an all-day coffee lounge and introduced its new Nescafé Superiore range.

“Supporting IHLC 2026 was our way of investing in the people, ideas and conversations that will shape Sri Lanka’s hospitality future. As a leading local hospitality brand, we felt it was our responsibility to support an initiative that brought together the industry’s leaders and created a platform for meaningful dialogue around its future. The response to the conference and the quality of engagement throughout the day reaffirmed the value of bringing the industry together, and we were proud to contribute to an event that was so well received by the hospitality community,” stated Nazoomi Azhar, Vice Chairman, IHLC 2026 and General Manager, Cinnamon Grand Colombo.

"Seeing this vision become reality has been incredibly rewarding. My sincere thanks go to our organising committee, partners, speakers and every delegate who made the

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Beyond Arrivals: Sri Lanka's Tourism....

The formal sector carries a heavy load of taxes and regulation. A large and growing informal sector, in both accommodation and tours, largely escapes them, and often without consistent safety or quality standards. To build investor confidence, she argued, the rules on regulation and taxation must apply evenly to everyone, within a predictable framework.

On development, Ondaatjie reframed the debate with a simple question: high value for whom? Development should benefit local communities and protect the country's core assets: its history, landscapes, wildlife and beaches. "The destination itself is the product," she reminded the audience.

She warned that some of that authenticity has already been lost, pointing to the transformation of Slave Island in Colombo and unregulated construction that has eroded Nuwara Eliya's "Little England" charm. High-rise buildings that could be anywhere, she said, do nothing to make Sri Lanka special.

From resilience to competitiveness
Resilience is not the same as long-term competitiveness. Angeline Ondaatjie's answer centred on protecting the natural assets that bring visitors in, and on building the basics around them.

Unregulated large-scale construction along coastlines and scenic vistas, she argued, is steadily diminishing Sri Lanka's long-term value. Existing laws on coastal conservation and building heights, including the well-known "coconut tree rule," need consistent enforcement rather than new legislation.

She also turned to everyday infrastructure. Tourism zones need proper connectivity and things to do. Modern, interactive museums could educate and engage visitors while spreading them beyond crowded hotspots. Even basic signage needs attention.

With a new Tourism Act under discussion, Ondaatjie urged that the formal private sector have a real voice, so that regulation and taxation are fair across the board. She recalled that the Tourism Development Levy began as a private sector initiative to fund marketing. A unified voice from hotels, travel agents and guides alike would carry far more weight.

Agility, too, should become strategy. When crises struck, regional markets kept Sri Lanka going. Those relation-

inaugural International Hospitality Leaders’ Conference such a meaningful success. What we have started through IHLC 2026 is an important conversation for our industry, and I hope the Vision 2030 Declaration and the work that follows will continue to bring our sector together around the opportunities and challenges ahead," said Ramesh Dassanayake, Chairman, Institute of Hospitality – Sri Lanka Region.

IHLC 2026 was proudly Powered By Nestlé Professional, with the support of Platinum Partners CodeGen International and APIIT Sri Lanka; Gold Partners Lion Brewery Ceylon and Rockland Distilleries; and supported by Lakarcade, Celsius, LAUGFS, SriLankan Airlines, Classic Travels, Aitken Spence Travels Ninewells Hospital, Hameedia and BYD Sri Lanka. Cinnamon Grand Colombo served as Official Hospitality Partner, while Maharaja Media Network was Official Media Partner.

The inaugural IHLC 2026 marks the beginning of an ongoing platform for the Institute of Hospitality – Sri Lanka Region to convene industry leaders, bring international thinking into the local hospitality conversation and support the sector in translating ideas into meaningful action towards 2030.

ships, she said, should be maintained rather than set aside once traditional European markets return.

High value starts with people
Grant Dreher brought an outsider's eye, and the line of the afternoon. He hoped Sri Lanka would never develop in a way that let him order a club sandwich at midnight in a concrete tunnel. The country, he said, must define high-value tourism on its own terms: its people, its culture and its vistas.

His central message was that a high-value destination needs a highly skilled, motivated workforce. Sri Lankan hospitality professionals are valued worldwide for their skills and disposition. The risk is that the country becomes a "skills export factory," training talent only to lose it to markets such as the UAE.

Too much training, he argued, focuses on entry-level skills. The priority should be clear pathways into supervisory, general management and specialist roles. Capabilities matter as much as skills; the multilingual ability of many Sri Lankans, for example, is a major asset in the industry.

To help young Sri Lankans build careers at home, Dreher set out four priorities:

1. Make tourism careers financially competitive, so parents see them as a real future for their children.
2. Turn hospitality from a stopgap job into a respected profession, with visible career progression.
3. Treat overseas work as an investment in experience, and encourage people to bring those skills home.
4. Open more opportunities for women in non-traditional hospitality roles, with role models and clear pathways.

The panel's conclusion was clear. Sri Lanka's next growth phase will not come from chasing arrival numbers. It will come from delivering on existing plans, protecting what makes the island unique, creating a fair environment for investment, and investing in the people who deliver the experience.

At a time when Sri Lanka's tourism sector is at a crossroads, conversations like this are exactly what the industry needs.



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Sri Lanka Targets Gulf Growth as Arabian Travel Market 2026 opens in Dubai

TTA BULLETIN



The 33rd edition of Arabian Travel Market (ATM) opened today at Dubai World Trade Centre, bringing destinations, tourism authorities, airlines, hospitality brands, technology companies and buyers together for four days of business, networking and knowledge exchange.

Running from 14 to 17 September under the theme Travel 2040: Driving New Frontiers Through Innovation and Technology, ATM 2026 will examine the forces reshaping global tourism, from artificial intelligence and digital transformation to changing traveller expectations, destination resilience, smart mobility and long-term sustainable growth.

Danielle Curtis, Regional Portfolio Director – UAE, RX Global, said ahead of the opening: "I'm delighted to be opening the doors to Arabian Travel Market 2026 tomorrow and welcoming the global travel and tourism industry back to Dubai."

This edition marks the debut of ATM

Travel Tech as a dedicated co-located show, with more than 180 exhibitors from 30 countries across two halls, anchored by an 850sqm Tech & Innovation Hub covering artificial intelligence, VR and AR, robotics, fintech and green technologies. The Global Stage opens with the Ministerial Debate: Building A Resilient Industry Through Collaboration, with speakers including H.E. Abdulla bin Touq Al Marri, UAE Minister of Economy and Tourism, and H.E. Shaikha Al Nuwais, Secretary General, UN Tourism. ATM 2026 also introduces the show's refreshed brand identity.

Among the destinations exhibiting is Sri Lanka, whose national stand brings together more than 55 companies spanning destination management companies, hotel and resort groups, boutique and villa operators, and the national carrier, SriLankan Airlines. The delegation is in Dubai to meet Gulf buyers, tour operators and travel trade partners across the four days, and to strengthen the island's positioning with both the regional source market and the long-haul traffic routing

Sri Lanka Tourism Strengthens Travel Trade Partnerships Through 2026 B2B Networking Series in Australia and New Zealand

TTA BULLETIN



The Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau (SLTPB) successfully concluded a landmark series of B2B Networking Sessions across Australia and New Zealand, held from 31st August to 09th September 2026 in the cities of Christchurch, Auckland, Sydney, Adelaide and Perth. Over the course of the nine-day roadshow, Sri Lankan delegates comprising Destination Management Company (DMC) and hoteliers representatives engaged directly with more than 250 travel agents and tour operators from Australia and New Zealand, making the initiative one of the largest and most sustained trade engagement platforms Sri Lanka Tourism has undertaken in these two key source markets.

The five-city program was designed to strengthen business relationships between the Sri Lankan tourism industry and key travel trade stakeholders in both countries, giving representatives a platform to engage directly with agents, tour operators and DMCs while promoting Sri Lanka as a diverse destination. It

combined face-to-face B2B discussions, press conferences, media interviews, destination presentations and networking, offering an opportunity to develop new partnerships, itineraries and commercial opportunities.

The roadshow commenced in Christchurch, New Zealand, on 31st August 2026, marking the first time a Sri Lanka Tourism B2B Networking Session was held there a milestone reflecting the growing importance of New Zealand's regional markets to Sri Lanka's tourism strategy. The session featured H.E. Mr. Prasanna Gamage, High Commissioner of Sri Lanka to New Zealand, who highlighted the importance of New Zealand travellers to Sri Lanka's tourism sector. Dr. Hamish Campbell, MP for Ilam, encouraged stronger ties between the two industries, while Mr. Buddhika Hewawasam, Chairman of the Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau, spoke on Sri Lanka's tourism opportunities and new tourism experiences. The event also featured cultural performances, a Q&A session and

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How three friends followed their hearts to Sri Lanka and brought a taste of home to Galle Fort and Colombo.

Some journeys begin with a plan. Others begin with a feeling. For Paolo Gavioli, Ian Fernández and Executive Chef Roberto Vicario, Sri Lanka was meant to be a holiday. Instead, it became home.

The three friends first arrived on the island about a decade ago and kept coming back, watching the country change and grow with every visit. It was within the ramparts of Galle Fort that the spell was cast. Wandering its cobbled lanes, they were reminded of the borghi the small villages of Italy where old stone walls frame tables laden with honest, generous food.

That feeling became AQUA Forte on Leyn Baan Street, an intimate restaurant where everything, from the pasta to the daily focaccia, is made by hand. Its tiramisù soon became the stuff of local legend.

The love affair only deepened. At Park Street Mews in Colombo, the trio opened Aqua Pazza named after the Campanian classic of fish poached in "crazy water" alongside its relaxed neighbour, Aqua Pizza. Sleek, warm and unhurried, Aqua Pazza is a place to linger, and Chef Roberto is often at the table himself, introducing handmade ricotta and spinach ravioli in sage butter, a prawn and pesto risotto, and the namesake pesce all'acqua pazza. And yes, that famous tiramisù has made the journey north from Galle.



What makes their story inspiring is not only the food. It is the conviction behind it the decision to invest in Sri Lanka, to build a local team, and to champion the island to the world. Their restaurants have become meeting points for travellers and residents alike, proof that hospitality is at its finest when it is personal.

Chef Roberto believes Italian cuisine charms because it is at once refined and hearty. The same could be said of the journey that brought these three friends here.

For travellers, the invitation is simple: begin in Colombo, end in Galle, and let an Italian love affair unfold one plate at a time.



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Bobby Jordan Hansen Elected SLAITO President

TTA BULLETIN

New President declares the apex body of Sri Lanka's inbound tour operators "an association for all," as industry leaders, diplomats and policymakers gather at Cinnamon Life at City of Dreams

The Sri Lanka Association of Inbound Tour Operators (SLAITO) has entered a new chapter, with Bobby Jordan Hansen elected President at the association's

Annual General Meeting held recently at Cinnamon Life at City of Dreams, Colombo. The meeting drew a distinguished gathering of key industry stakeholders, senior government officials and members of the diplomatic community, underscoring the central role inbound tour operators continue to play in shaping the island's tourism future.

Delivering his message to members, Immediate Past President Nalin Jayasundera reviewed a two-year tenure in which Sri Lanka's inbound operators unified the industry's voice, modernised infrastructure and strengthened the association's institutional capital.

The association's financial reserves rose by 120 percent, from a baseline of LKR 16 million to LKR 35 million, securing funding for long-term advocacy programmes. Membership grew by 25 percent, from 178 to 220 inbound tour operator organisations, a clear sign of growing trust across the sector.

On the policy front, SLAITO engaged directly with the Ministry of Finance and the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority to secure a dedicated vehicle importation scheme, resolving acute service bottlenecks in the tourist transport fleet. The association also convened international panels of experts to present the case for a global marketing campaign directly to political leaders, placing destination marketing firmly on the national agenda. In addition, SLAITO joined THASL, ASMET and SLAPCEO in a united coalition of major private sector bodies to submit joint amendment proposals to the Tourism Act, in response to regulatory changes considered detrimental to the industry.

A standout achievement was the transformation of Sancharaka Udawa from a local trade exhibition into Sri Lanka's premier international B2B platform.

The tenure also invested in the industry's future. The "Guardians of the Blues" programme delivered specialised capacity training for guide lecturers and tour personnel, while academic knowledge-sharing workshops created a pipeline for university students entering hospitality. SLAITO's web infrastructure was also fully revamped to better serve international partners.

Reflecting on these achievements, Jayasundera pointed to unity as the association's greatest strength. "We are a collective voice



for the industry, and this unity was the foundational asset that enabled every other success," he said.

In her first address as President, Hansen set out a clear and forward-looking agenda built on inclusion and partnership. She highlighted the urgent need to bring Sri Lanka's rapidly growing informal tourism sector into the formal fold, noting that a

stronger, more regulated industry benefits operators, travellers and the destination alike.

"Our industry is growing in ways we cannot ignore, and much of that growth is happening outside the formal sector," Hansen said. "Bringing these players into the mainstream is not about exclusion or control. It is about raising standards, protecting the visitor experience and ensuring that everyone who contributes to Sri Lankan tourism has a seat at the table."

Hansen was equally direct in addressing a long-held perception about the association. "There is a myth that SLAITO exists only for the larger organisations. Let me be very clear: SLAITO is for all. Whether you are a large DMC or a small, emerging operator, this association is your voice."

She urged all stakeholders to work together to build a more inclusive tourism industry, stressing that close collaboration with the public sector will be essential. "Sustainable and equitable growth will only be possible if the private and public sectors move forward as genuine partners," she said.

The evening also paused to recognise one of the association's long-serving leaders. Past President Nishad Wijetunga felicitated Past President Harith Perera for his commendable contribution to SLAITO over many years, in his capacities as a committee member, President and Past President. The tribute was warmly received by members, many of whom acknowledged Perera's steady guidance and unwavering commitment to the association and the wider industry.

The Hon. Prof. Ruwan Ranasinghe, Deputy Minister of Tourism, graced the occasion as Chief Guest, while the Australian High Commissioner to Sri Lanka, H.E. Matthew Duckworth, and the New Zealand High Commissioner to Sri Lanka, H.E. David Pine, addressed the gathering as Guest Speakers. Also present was the Chairman of the Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau and Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority.

With a new President at the helm and a renewed focus on inclusivity, formalisation and public-private partnership, SLAITO enters the year ahead building on a stronger foundation than ever. Its mandate is clear: to ensure that the growth of Sri Lanka tourism is not only rapid, but also sustainable and shared by all.

Sri Lanka Showcases Its Tourism Potential at IFTM Paris 2026

TTA BULLETIN

Sri Lanka made a strong impression at this year's International French Travel Market (IFTM) in Paris, showcasing the island's diverse tourism offerings alongside 36 prominent Sri Lankan tourism companies.

The Sri Lanka Pavilion was officially inaugurated by H.E. Sugeeshwara Gunaratna, Ambassador of Sri Lanka to France, together with representatives of the Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau, Sri Lankan Airlines, and distinguished representatives from the tourism industry.

The Sri Lankan delegation highlighted the country's diverse tourism experiences, ranging from its rich cultural heritage and natural beauty to Ayurveda and other unique experiences, positioning Sri Lanka as an attractive and diverse destination for French travelers. The strong collaboration between the Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau and the private sector further demonstrated Sri Lanka's continued commitment to strengthening its presence in the French travel market.

IFTM Top Resa is one of France's leading international tourism trade fairs. The 2026 edition brought together 32,022 tourism



professionals, 1,650 brands and 177 destinations, with 16,725 business meetings facilitated during the three-day event.

Sri Lanka attracted considerable attention from trade professionals and visitors throughout the event. The Sri Lanka Pavilion showcased the country's rich cultural heritage, natural beauty, Ayurveda and a wide range of tourism experiences.

As part of the promotional activities, Ceylon Tea was served to visitors at the pavilion, providing an opportunity to further promote the renowned product in the French market. Traditional Sri Lankan dance performances held throughout the event also attracted considerable attention, drawing large numbers of visitors to the Sri Lanka Pavilion and creating an engaging cultural experience.

Through a combination of digital marketing, participation in international tourism events, public relations and consumer promotions, Sri Lanka continues to strengthen its presence in key international markets and position itself as a destination not to be missed.

Intrepid hosts media and creators travelling on Jetstar's inaugural direct flight to Colombo

TTA BULLETIN

Intrepid Travel has collaborated with Jetstar to showcase Sri Lanka to Australian media and content creators travelling on Jetstar's inaugural direct flight from Melbourne to Colombo.



Jetstar's inaugural flight marked the first direct connection between Melbourne and Colombo operated by an Australian airline. The new service will operate three times a week, offering more than 100,000 low-fare seats between Australia and Sri Lanka each year.

Intrepid brought its deep local knowledge to the group, helping ANZ journalists and content creators experience the best of Sri Lanka once they landed. The local team manages more than a dozen itineraries and hundreds of trips each year, meaning the same people looking after the media trip are drawing on years of experience creating and operating trips for Intrepid travellers.

Sri Lanka was Intrepid's sixth most popular destination for Australian and New Zealand travellers in 2025, with bookings growing almost 30% yoy. So far in 2026, it has climbed to fifth place, with bookings up 15% yoy.

Intrepid's local operation is one of its largest outside Australia. Its Colombo

office, established in 2012, has grown to 276 office-based staff and 45 local tour leaders, supporting everything from

product development and customer service to finance, technology and revenue management.

Poornaka Delpachitra, General Manager Sri Lanka, Intrepid Travel said: "Jetstar's new direct service will make it easier for Australian travellers to get to Sri Lanka, and we wanted to make sure the media travelling on that first flight got to experience what makes this destination so special once they arrived. We've been operating in Sri Lanka for more than 14 years, so our local team knows the country incredibly well. There's so much more to Sri Lanka than the places you'll find in a guidebook – it's the people you meet, the food you eat and the experiences you have along the way that really bring it to life. That's what we wanted to share with the media on this trip – a real taste of Sri Lanka, through the eyes of the people who know it best."

The five-day Tailor-Made itinerary kicked off with a welcome dinner for the creators, their trip leader and Intrepid's General Manager Sri Lanka, Poornaka Delpachitra. Over the five days, the group experienced some of the best of Sri Lanka's wildlife, culture, food and communities, including

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DIGITAL ASSETS

IATA Agents Association of Sri Lanka Holds 38th Annual General Meeting in Kathmandu, Nepal

TTA BULLETIN

The IATA Agents Association of Sri Lanka (IAASL) successfully held its 38th Annual General Meeting (AGM) on 17 September 2026 at the Dusit Princess Hotel, Kathmandu, Nepal, bringing together leading representatives of Sri Lanka’s travel trade and key stakeholders from the regional tourism and aviation industry.



tion for placing their trust and confidence in him. He also paid special tribute to his mentor and Guru, Mr. Rizmi Reyah, Chairman of The Traveller Global (Pvt) Ltd, whom he credited for playing a significant role in mentoring and guiding him throughout his professional journey and inspiring him to pursue a career in outbound tourism.

The AGM was attended by representatives from over 60 travel companies, reflecting the strong participation and continued commitment of Sri Lanka’s IATA-accredited travel agency community towards strengthening the country’s outbound travel and aviation sectors.

The event was graced by Her Excellency Ruwanthi Delpitiya, Ambassador of Sri Lanka to Nepal, whose presence added significance to the occasion and underscored the importance of strengthening bilateral relations and greater cooperation between Sri Lanka and Nepal in tourism and travel.

At the AGM, Mr. Mumthazer Mahir, Managing Director of The Travel Port (Pvt) Ltd, was elected as the new President of the IATA Agents Association of Sri Lanka. Mr. Mahir brings with him over 36 years of experience in the travel and tourism industry, with extensive knowledge of outbound tourism, airline distribution and the travel agency sector.

In his address as the newly elected President, Mr. Mahir expressed his sincere appreciation to the members of the Associa-

Mahir acknowledged the importance of the guidance, mentorship and industry knowledge that have shaped his career, while expressing his commitment to working collectively with members and industry stakeholders to further strengthen and develop Sri Lanka’s travel agency sector.

The AGM was further strengthened by the presence of a number of distinguished industry stakeholders and tourism representatives, including officials representing SriLankan Airlines, comprising representatives from its General Sales Agent (GSA) and online partner network. Their participation reflected the continued importance of close collaboration between airlines and the travel agency community.

The event also welcomed representatives from key tourism and industry organisations in Nepal, including the Nepal Tourism Board and the Nepal Association of Tour & Travel Agents (NATTA). Their participation provided an important platform for strengthening bilateral industry relations and exploring opportunities for greater cooperation between the Sri Lankan and Nepalese travel and tourism sectors.

Sheraton Colombo Hotel Welcomes Imran Noordeen as Director of Sales & Marketing

TTA BULLETIN

Sheraton Colombo Hotel has announced the appointment of Imran Noordeen as its new Director of Sales & Marketing, bringing with him more than two decades of experience across Sri Lanka’s hospitality industry and international markets.



Turtle Beach Resort. Most recently, he served as Director of Sales & Marketing for Cinnamon City Hotels.

In his new position at Sheraton Colombo Hotel, Imran will lead the hotel’s sales and marketing strategy, with a focus on strengthening its market presence, developing strategic partnerships and driving meaningful commercial opportunities.

“I am delighted to return to Marriott International and be part of this exciting chapter for Sheraton Colombo Hotel. Sheraton has always represented meaningful connections, and I look forward to working closely with our associates, partners and guests to create experiences that resonate, while strengthening our position within Colombo’s dynamic hospitality landscape,” said Imran Noordeen.

He commenced his journey with Marriott International in 2017 with his appointment as Sales Manager for Weligama Bay Marriott Resort & Spa, and continued to serve as the commercial leader for Courtyard by Marriott Colombo and Sheraton Kosgoda

Chamila Wijethunge Elected TAASL President as Association Convenes 51st AGM in Nepal

TTA BULLETIN

The Travel Agents Association of Sri Lanka (TAASL) successfully convened its 51st Annual General Meeting (AGM) on September 17, 2026, at the Dusit Princess Hotel in Kathmandu, Nepal, marking a historic chapter for Sri Lanka’s travel trade sector with the election of Chamila Wijethunge as President.



team at Acorn Travels. Strengthening Regional Partnerships Her Excellency Ruwanthi Delpitiya, Ambassador of Sri Lanka to Nepal, honored the occasion as Chief Guest, emphasizing the importance of expanding tourism and commercial linkages between the two nations.

The event brought together representatives from over 50 member companies alongside key regional stakeholders, underscoring strong industry unity and highlighting growing bilateral ties between Sri Lanka and Nepal.

A central milestone of the 51st AGM was the election of Chamila Wijethunge, representing Acorn Travels (Pvt) Ltd, to the helm of the Association. Wijethunge becomes only the second woman President in TAASL’s 50-plus-year history, reaffirming the organization’s commitment to advancing equal representation and leadership opportunities within the travel and tourism sectors.

In her inaugural address to the membership, she stressed the vital role of internal harmony and cross-industry cooperation:

“The continued progress of TAASL depends on members working together with a shared purpose and maintaining strong relationships across the industry.”

She expressed her gratitude to the general membership for their vote of confidence, while acknowledging the support of her

The AGM saw active engagement from major aviation and trade authorities, including:

* Aviation & Trade Partners: Representatives from SriLankan Airlines, General Sales Agents (GSAs), and digital travel platforms.

* Host Country Authorities: Delegates from the Nepal Tourism Board and the Nepal Association of Tour & Travel Agents (NATTA).

Following formal proceedings, TAASL hosted a high-level networking session attended by more than 100 industry leaders. The forum provided a strategic platform for Sri Lankan delegates and Nepalese tourism authorities to explore joint promotional initiatives, discuss pressuring industry challenges, and build direct B2B ties.

With Wijethunge at the helm, TAASL enters its next operating year with a clear mandate focused on inclusivity, international partnership development, and sustained advocacy for Sri Lanka’s travel agency community.

Secrets of Ceylon wins 2 Awards at Lux

TTA BULLETIN

Unique & Boutique experience led hospitality group Secrets of Ceylon Collection has been recognized just before her 3rd birthday in the Hospitality Awards by Lux Life UK.

Two awards
Best Boutique Hotel Collection 2026 – Sri Lanka
Community Impact Excellence Awards 2026 – Sri Lanka

Secrets of Ceylon Collection, Founder and Managing Director Jean-Marc Flambert says “ We are delighted with this recognition, soon after Kulu Safaris Yala was the only Sri Lankan property to be recognized by Wanderlust Magazine Green List 2026.



Secrets of Ceylon is a community of boutique hotel owners, that work with in their local community. We comprise 13 unique and boutique properties and experiences, and each follows the BEE Philosophy – Buy local, Employ locally and Enrich the community. Many of our hotels are private holiday homes, some with the family for over 100 years and all offering

unique experiences. All offer 4 star service and quality, but not in the traditional sense of TV and mini fridge in the room – we offer authentic and local experiences and for our foreign visitor this is what they look for in luxury and wellness. For example : Horathapola Coconut Estate offers a free coconut estate walk to learn about the most important tree, Idal Villa offers a free train and village house experience and Hapu Tales offers a Thaal cuisine traditional meal presented by the owner. Some properties the owners themselves host the experience which adds a whole additional dimension.

Many people make the mistake of saying that the customer is the most important person. I say it is the P.P.C. - People, the Partners and the Community. Tourism must benefit the community (and in the case of wildlife - the animals). We exist to improve the lives of the people, and this is achieved through income from customers.



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Emirates and Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau build on strategic partnership to promote in-bound tourism to the Indian Ocean nation

TTA BULLETIN



Emirates and the Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau (SLTPB) have renewed their partnership in order to amplify efforts aimed at benefiting the country’s tourism industry. The world’s largest international airline, which flies to almost 140 destinations, continues to draw on its vast network spanning six continents to promote the destination’s offerings to global audiences and support the growth of tourist arrivals.

The partnership was formalised through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the two parties and aims to build on the successes of previous years, since it was first established in 2022, with Emirates consistently contributing to tourism arrivals to the nation. Last year Sri Lanka recorded healthy international tourist arrivals, in excess of 2.3 million, reflecting an impressive overall annual growth rate of 15.1% higher than the previous year’s visitor count of just over 2 million.

At Arabian Travel Market 2026, the MoU was signed by Essa Sulaiman Ahmad, Emirates’ Senior Vice President of Commercial West Asia & Indian Ocean and Chamila Jayarathna, Deputy Managing Director – Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau. The signing ceremony was also attended by H.E. Arusha Cooray - Ambassador of Sri Lanka in UAE, Alexi Gunasekera - Consul General of Sri Lanka and Madusha Perera, Deputy Director – Marketing – SLTPB, in addition to other representatives of the airline and tourism bodies.

The renewed MoU reinforces the successful partnership between Emirates and SLTPB, which together promote Sri Lanka as a destination to key markets within

Emirates’ network. Top markets in Emirates’ vast network spanning six continents and contributing to the tourist arrivals by air include Russia, UK, Germany, Australia and the US, among others.

Both the airline and SLTPB continuously collaborate on joint initiatives including marketing efforts, customised excursions, incentives and familiarization trips to showcase the island nation and its offerings to key feeder markets. Through engagement with its network of trade partners and tour operators, Emirates, along with SLTPB, provide incentives, special packages and other marketing tools to provide a compelling proposition for customers to visit Sri Lanka.

Essa Sulaiman Ahmad, Emirates’ Senior Vice President, Commercial West Asia & Indian Ocean said: "Sri Lanka is among the longest-standing destinations in our network, having served it for over 40 years now, and we are proud to continue to work hand in hand with its tourism authority to contribute to its success as a top tourist destination. We continue to dedicate substantial efforts to contribute to the success of the nation’s tourism industry.

“As a key strategic market for us, we proudly introduced our latest aircraft, the Airbus A350, last year and as testament to its importance, we introduced a second daily A350 to serve the Dubai - Colombo route as of August, further elevating the travel experience for customers with our latest-generation aircraft with Premium Economy cabins. This reinforces our commitment to delivering enhanced comfort, choice and connectivity for travellers to and from Sri Lanka.”

SLAITO Honours Past President Harith Perera for His Lasting Contribution to SLAITO and the Industry

TTA BULLETIN

Tribute at Annual General Meeting recognises a leader who championed collaboration, regional MSMEs and the growth of Sancharaka Udawa



The Sri Lanka Association of Inbound Tour Operators (SLAITO) paid tribute to its Past President, Mr. Harith Perera, at its Annual General Meeting held recently at Cinnamon Life City of Dream, recognising his years of service to the Association and his contribution to the development and promotion of Sri Lanka as a tourism destination.

The tribute was delivered by fellow Past President Nishad Wijetunge, who worked closely with Harith during his tenure and later went on to lead the Association himself.

Harith joined the SLAITO Committee in 2009 and served in several positions before being elected President in 2017. He took office at a time when the industry was evolving rapidly and facing new challenges and opportunities.

"From the outset, he approached the responsibility not simply as an honorary position, but as an opportunity to create greater value for the industry, its stakeholders, and the members he represented," said Wijetunge.

During his presidency, Harith focused on strengthening industry collaboration and promoting Sri Lanka as a destination. He believed tour operators, hotels, government institutions and tourism authorities needed to work together to present Sri Lanka to the world as a compelling, sustainable and competitive destination.

A central part of his legacy is the growth of Sancharaka Udawa, SLAITO's flagship event. Under his leadership, the event was developed into a more sustainable platform, with a particular focus on giving MSMEs from across the regions, especially those offering lesser-known tourism products, a wider and more affordable

route to broader markets.

He also strengthened engagement between the private sector and government, building closer relationships with ministries and tourism institutions while advocating for inbound tour operators. He placed strong emphasis on developing human resources, raising service standards and deepening cooperation among tourism associations.

"Sometimes, the greatest achievements are the platforms we create for others, the relationships we build, the opportunities we open for the next generation, and the institutions we leave stronger than we found them," Wijetunge said. "That is why Harith Perera deserves our recognition today."

Reflecting on their time working together, Wijetunge added that the lessons he learnt from Harith proved invaluable when he later served as President of the Association. Newly elected President Bobby Jordan Hansen said: "It is fitting that we honour Harith at the very meeting where a new committee takes office. The foundations he helped lay, in collaboration, advocacy and support for smaller operators, are ones we intend to build on. As we look ahead, his example reminds us that leadership is measured by what we leave behind for the industry and for Sri Lanka."

“Harith never saw the presidency as a title. He saw it as a responsibility to the whole industry” concluded Wijetunge.

Harith was presented with a token of appreciation in recognition of his service by President of SLAITO Bobby Jordan Hansen and immediate Past President Nalin Jayasundera

Thineth Software Solutions Celebrates Major National Recognition for AI and Tourism Innovations

TTA BULLETIN

Thineth Software Solutions has hit landmark milestones in technological innovation, earning top national accolades for its suite of enterprise and AI platforms.

At the Tourism Start-Up Competition 2026, organized by the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA) under the theme "AI-Driven Innovation for the Future of Tourism," Thineth Software Solutions emerged as the Winner for Best Enterprise-Centric Solution (Commercial Category - Hospitality Industry). The recognition highlights the impact of Hotel e

shop, an all-in-one digital concierge and ordering platform, alongside E TaskApp, a streamlined task and workflow management system.

Further cementing its technology leadership, Thineth Software Solutions was honored at the National AI Awards during Sri Lanka AI Week 2026. Their flagship customer lifecycle platform, Thinexa AI was recognized for delivering 24/7 automated multilingual customer communication and intelligent performance tracking.

Founder partners Dr. M.B.M. Rameesh, Pubudu Dassanayake and Dinidu Prabath received the prestigious awards on stage. These achievements highlight Thineth Software Solutions commitment to driving digital transformation and practical AI integration across the hospitality and corporate sectors. Within this time Sri Lanka needs foreign exchange. Software export is a great solution for this requirement. The recognition by National bodies spurs us on to greater creations.





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HOTELS

Newburgh Ella by Browns Hotels & Resorts Recognised as Sri Lanka’s First Certified Paperless Operation Hotel

TTA BULLETIN



Newburgh Ella – The Tea Factory Resort, by Browns Hotels & Resorts, has been recognised by the National Cleaner Production Centre (NCPC), Sri Lanka, as the first hotel in Sri Lanka to achieve a certified paperless operation, marking a significant milestone in the country’s journey towards more resource-efficient and digitally enabled hospitality.



The certification was formally presented by Samantha Kumarasena, Director General/CEO of the National Cleaner Production Centre, Sri Lanka, to Mr. Eksath Wijeratne, CEO of Browns Hotels & Resorts, recognising Newburgh Ella’s achievement in establishing a paperless hotel operation.

The recognition is particularly significant for Newburgh Ella, a 41-room resort housed within a former tea factory dating back to 1903. A building that once relied on handwritten ledgers, registers and paper records to document the daily movement of tea now operates through digital systems across guest services and hotel operations.



Newburgh Ella’s paperless approach extends far beyond replacing printed menus or introducing digital check-in. The hotel has digitised processes across departments, creating a connected system that allows information, approvals, monitoring and documentation to move digitally throughout the operation.

Guests can complete their registration digitally, access dining menus electronically and receive bills and folios without printed documents. In finance and administration, approvals, records and documentation are managed through digital systems, reducing the need for physical files and paper-based circulation.

The digital approach continues across the operational departments. Engineering teams use digital systems to monitor areas such as electricity consumption, allowing usage to be recorded and reviewed efficiently. In the kitchen, chefs record temperature checks digitally, creating an accessible record for food safety monitoring and audits. Housekeeping teams use digital devices to manage and record their daily activities, while stores and inventory processes are also systemised digitally, allowing stock movements and related documentation to be maintained electronically rather than through multiple physical registers.

The same systems make routine compliance and audit documentation more efficient. Since operational information is recorded within structured digital systems, teams can access records when required without searching through physical files, while managers can monitor processes and maintain documentation in a consistent and traceable manner.

“Newburgh Ella was created to give a historic property a new chapter without losing what makes it special. The paperless operation is part of that thinking. We have looked at the way a hotel works, from the guest journey to the back office, and challenged ourselves to remove unnecessary paper wherever technology allows us to do so. Having this work recognised by the National Cleaner Production Centre is an important milestone for Browns Hotels & Resorts,” said Eksath Wijeratne, CEO of Browns Hotels & Resorts.

The initiative has also been approached as a measurable resource-efficiency programme. Based on Newburgh Ella’s internal tracking of paper and stationery consumption and comparison with conventional paper-based hotel operations, the transition is estimated to avoid approximately 1.3 tonnes of CO₂ equivalent annually. The tracking covers key operational areas including front office, finance, food and beverage and administration.

The recognition by the National Cleaner Production Centre reinforces Newburgh Ella’s position as an example of how a heritage property can embrace technology and more resource-conscious ways of operating while preserving the character and stories that give it its identity.

More than a century after its establishment, Newburgh Ella is bringing together the heritage of Sri Lanka’s tea country with a modern approach to hospitality, demonstrating how a historic property can be preserved physically while its way of operating evolves for the future.

Amari Colombo Earns Great Place To Work® Certification with 91% Trust Index Score

TTA BULLETIN



Amari Colombo has been officially recognised as a Great Place To Work® Certified™ organisation for August 2026 to August 2027, recording an outstanding Trust Index™ score of 91%, significantly surpassing the global benchmark for a positive employee experience.

The certification comes at a time when organisations across industries are navigating rapid technological change and the growing influence of artificial intelligence (AI) in the workplace. For Amari Colombo, the recognition underscores a fundamental belief that while technology can transform how businesses operate, people remain at the heart of sustainable organisational success.

Commenting on the certification, Monty Ariyaratne, General Manager of Amari Colombo, said: “A 91% Trust Index is the highlight of this recognition for us. It tells us that our people genuinely experience Amari Colombo as a workplace where trust, respect, collaboration and belonging matter. Surpassing the global benchmark for a positive employee experience is something we are immensely proud of, but more importantly, it is a reflection of the culture our people are creating together.”

The hotel’s achievement was highlighted against the backdrop of the Great Place To Work® For All Conference 2026, organised by Great Place to Work Sri Lanka. The conference brought together business and HR leaders to explore the evolving relationship between technology, talent, leadership and organisational culture.

A key theme of the conference was “The People Algorithm”, examining how businesses can balance technological advancement with emotional intelligence, employee experience and human-centred leadership.

Representing ONYX Hospitality through Amari Colombo, Hotel Manager Indika Jayawardena participated in the panel discussion, “From the Boardroom to the Breakroom: Re-Engineering Business with Tech, Talent & Trust,” alongside Vinay Jaswal, Vice President – HR Operations, South Asia, Marriott International; Tracey McPeake, Head of Sustainability, Oxford College of Business; and Yohan Liyanage, Founder & CEO, Sentiva and CEO, Altrium.

The panel explored how businesses can prepare their workforces for the future by bringing together technology, capability development, leadership and employee experience.

Commenting on the recognition, Indika Jayawardena, Hotel Manager, Amari Colombo, said: “Amari Colombo’s Great Place to Work® certification reflects our continued commitment to creating a workplace where employee experience is treated as a business priority. We place strong emphasis on trust, leadership, collaboration and continuous learning, while creating meaningful opportunities for our people to contribute, grow and make an impact”

For Amari Colombo, the Great Place To Work® certification represents more than an organisational accolade. It is a reflection of the hotel’s ongoing journey towards creating a people-first, culture-first workplace, where a strong employee experience translates into stronger teams and, ultimately, better guest experiences.

Commenting on Amari Colombo’s certification, Kshanika Ratnayake, Director/-CEO, Great Place to Work® Sri Lanka, said: “Amari Colombo’s Great Place To Work® Certification™ is a strong reflection of the trust and confidence its people place in the organisation. The hotel has surpassed the global threshold for a positive employee experience measured through the Trust Index™ survey, demonstrating that its commitment to trust, pride and camaraderie is being experienced meaningfully by its employees. In a people-driven industry such as hospitality, this is particularly significant. When organisations create an environment where people feel heard, valued and empowered, they build the foundation for stronger engagement, better performance and sustainable business success.”

The certification is based on the Trust Index™ employee survey, a globally recognised assessment of workplace culture and employee experience. The survey measures employees’ perceptions across key dimensions including credibility, respect, fairness, pride and camaraderie, providing an independent view of the employee experience within an organisation.

Great Place To Work® Sri Lanka is part of the global Great Place To Work® organisation, a leading authority on workplace culture and employee experience. Through its research, employee surveys and workplace recognition programmes, Great Place To Work® supports organisations in building high-trust, high-performance cultures and workplaces where people can thrive.



Where ancient swimmers meet golden
shores

Thema Collection Opens Deewara, Bringing the Stories of Sri Lanka’s Southern Coast to Life

TTA BULLETIN



Thema Collection has opened Deewara – Mawella, Tangalle, its 17th property in Sri Lanka, introducing a boutique coastal retreat inspired by the island’s fishing heritage, traditional homes and the laid-back character of the southern coast. The opening ceremony was graced by Mr. Matthieu John, Deputy Head of Mission at the Embassy of France to Sri Lanka and the Maldives, as the Chief Guest, alongside guests from the travel, tourism and media sectors.

Set along the shores of Mawella, Deewara brings together a collection of restored stately homes, thoughtfully transformed into a quaint boutique villa while retaining the essence of the original dwellings. Surrounded by lush tropical gardens, open courtyards and views of the beach, the property offers a relaxed setting for guests to eat, drink and unwind.

The property features 11 rooms, combining traditional character with modern comforts, alongside beachfront dining, a swimming pool and a traditional Ayurvedic spa.

Bringing the Fisherman’s Story to Life
For Thema Collection Founder and Chairman Chandra Wickramasinghe, Deewara builds on an idea that has been part of the collection since its first property, Maalu Maalu.

“When we started with Maalu Maalu, our first property, we wanted to bring the life and character of Sri Lanka’s fishing communities into the hotel experience. That idea has stayed with us. With Deewara, we wanted to take that story further by restoring these old homes and creating a place that feels connected to the fishermen, the sea and the community of Mawella. It is not simply about building a hotel; it is about giving a place and its story a new life.”

Maalu Maalu Resort & Spa in Pasikuda marked the beginning of Thema Collection’s journey of developing properties around distinctive Sri Lankan themes, culture, nature and local communities. It was also the first property to be built on Sri Lanka’s East Coast following the end of the 30-year-long war, marking an important step in the region’s post-war tourism development. Deewara continues this approach through its architecture, setting and connection to the coastal traditions of Mawella.

Mawella – A Destination of Its Own
Speaking on the opening, Chamin

Wickramasinghe, Director / Chief Executive Officer of Thema Collection, highlighted the potential of Mawella as a destination for travellers seeking a quieter coastal experience.

“Mawella is a beautiful part of the southern coast, with lovely beaches, a relaxed atmosphere and a strong sense of place. We believe there is an opportunity to introduce more travellers to this side of Sri Lanka and encourage them to stay longer, explore the area and experience what makes Mawella different. Deewara gives us a base from which to do exactly that.”

From Deewara, guests can explore the surrounding area through experiences including night walks along the beach, Rekawa turtle watching, seine-net fishing at Mawella Beach, mangrove exploration, village encounters, local culinary experiences and visits to cultural sites such as MulKirigala Rock Temple and Wewurukannala Rajamaha Viharaya.

Stories Turned into Experiences
For Maxime Wickramasinghe, Director – Marketing & Business Development, Deewara reflects Thema Collection’s approach of connecting guests with the character and stories of each destination.

“At Thema, we are interested in bringing stories to life. Every place in Sri Lanka has something different to tell, and our role is to create experiences that allow our guests to discover those stories. At Deewara, that can be as simple as walking along the beach at night and experiencing the coast differently, watching turtles at Rekawa, meeting local communities or exploring the cultural sites around Tangalle. These experiences are what turn a stay into a real connection with Sri Lanka.”

A New Chapter for Thema Collection
Deewara adds a distinctive coastal property to Thema Collection’s portfolio, with its design, setting and experiences reflecting the character of Mawella and the wider Tangalle region.

The property also incorporates Thema Collection’s wider sustainability approach, including local employment, biodiversity conservation, reduction of single-use plastics, linen reuse and community-focused initiatives.

Deewara – Mawella, Tangalle is now open to travellers looking to discover the coast through its beaches, fishing heritage, nature, culture and local communities.

Ellaidhoo Maldives by Cinnamon celebrates World Manta Day with encounters in the blue

TTA BULLETIN

There are few encounters in the Maldives quite like watching the unmistakable silhouette of a manta ray emerge from the blue, its wings stretched wide as it glides effortlessly through the ocean before turning and disappearing once again into the distance. This World Manta Day, Ellaidhoo Maldives by Cinnamon celebrates one of the Indian Ocean’s most fascinating marine residents through an experience that takes guests beyond the island and into the waters of North Ari Atoll.



Operated by the resort’s Dive & Sail team, the manta excursion begins after breakfast with an 8.00 am departure from the resort, followed by a journey of approximately one hour and 40 minutes to two hours across the atoll, depending on sea conditions and where the mantas are gathering. Recently guests were taken towards Genburugau and Maavaru Kanduu, but from there nature determines how the day unfolds, with the season, weather, currents and concentration of plankton all influencing where the mantas appear and how many might be encountered.

On favourable days, sightings can range from five to as many as 30 manta rays, and a recent excursion offered a glimpse of just how remarkable the experience can become when conditions align. With the waters particularly rich in plankton, numerous mantas had gathered in the area,

allowing guests to enter the water and swim among them as they glided past, turned gracefully and circled through the blue.

Mostly oceanic manta rays are encountered during these excursions, and seeing their impressive size from beneath the surface brings an entirely different sense of scale, particularly when one passes nearby before sweeping around for another effortless turn.

For Ellaidhoo Maldives by Cinnamon, the journey also adds another dimension to an already rich underwater experience, extending beyond the resort’s renowned house reef and its abundance of marine life to explore the wider waters of North Ari Atoll and the remarkable species that call them home. Priced at USD 130 per person, the manta excursion includes lunch, while snorkelling equipment is available separately, with guests generally returning to the resort at approximately 2.30 pm.

As World Manta Day draws attention to these remarkable creatures and the marine environments they depend upon, the experience offers a chance not simply to see a manta ray, but to spend a few unforgettable moments sharing its world, because at Ellaidhoo Maldives by Cinnamon, sometimes the most memorable part of an island escape begins when the island disappears from view.

Galle Face Hotel and Ebert Silva Holidays Unveil "Kolamba Expedition"

TTA BULLETIN

Some cities are best understood through their stories. Colombo is one of them.

Beneath the traffic, the construction cranes and the rising skyline sits a layered inheritance of architecture, faiths, trades and neighbourhoods, assembled over generations by the people who made this city home.

Galle Face Hotel, among Sri Lanka's most recognisable heritage hotels, has joined Ebert Silva Holidays, a centenary name and an early pioneer of the country's travel, transport and tourism trade, to introduce Kolamba Expedition, a curated heritage experience designed to show the capital from a different angle.

This is not a conventional city tour. Kolamba Expedition unites two institutions whose own histories run through the story of Colombo itself.

Between them, Galle Face Hotel and Ebert Silva Holidays have watched the city remake itself several times over: from the era of horse-drawn carriages and tramlines, through the arrival of the motor



car and independence, to the decades of change that produced the capital visitors see today. That lived connection is what gives the experience its character and its authenticity.

The idea behind it is straightforward. Too many travellers treat Colombo as the door they pass through on the way to Sri Lanka. Kolamba Expedition asks them to stop at the door and look around, because the capital rewards exploration on its own terms.

Every expedition needs a starting point. For this one, it is Galle Face Hotel.

Facing the Indian Ocean since 1864, the hotel has been woven into Colombo life for 162 years, receiving generations of travellers alongside heads of state, royalty, statesmen and celebrated names from every corner of the world.

So the hotel is not merely where the journey departs from. It is one of the chapters the journey sets out to tell.

Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts Launches Dine with DISCOVERY Dollars

TTA BULLETIN

Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts is giving Colombo's diners a new reason to keep coming back. From 1st October 2026, it introduces Cinnamon DISCOVERY – Dine with DISCOVERY Dollars (D\$), a dining rewards programme spanning Cinnamon Grand Colombo, Cinnamon Lakeside Colombo, Cinnamon Red Colombo and select outlets at City of Dreams Sri Lanka.

For years, Cinnamon has been part of the way Colombo eats out. It's there for the long lunches, the late dinners and the quiet ritual of a favourite Sunday brunch. Dine with D\$ turns that familiarity into something guests can hold onto: a reward for the meals they already choose to share with the group, at the tables they already know well.

The programme reads like a roll call of the city's best-known dining rooms and bars. At Cinnamon Grand Colombo, guests can dine at The London Grill, one of Colombo's oldest fine dining establishments, as well as Plates, The Lagoon and Nuga Gama, before unwinding at Breeze Bar or

Cheers Pub. Cinnamon Lakeside Colombo brings The Dining Room and Royal Thai into the fold, along with the relaxed comfort of ColomBar and The Library. At Cinnamon Red Colombo, all-day dining at Flavoured leads into evenings at Stirred and the rooftop Cloud Red. City of Dreams Sri Lanka extends the programme further still, with select outlets including Quizine, Staten Bar & Grill, Bistro Des Marees, Yoroko, Sapphire Dragon, Indiya, Cloud Wine and Gatz.

"Through our partnership with Global Hotel Alliance, Cinnamon Hotels and Resorts is part of a global hospitality ecosystem that connects guests to distinctive experiences across markets. With Dine with DISCOVERY Dollars, we are extending that value beyond hotel stays into dining, giving our guests more meaningful ways to earn, redeem and experience the benefits of GHA DISCOVERY while



deepening our connection with the global DISCOVERY community," said Hishan Singhawansa Chief Executive Officer, Cinnamon Hotels

& Resorts.

Joining couldn't be simpler. Guests just scan a QR code at any participating restaurant or bar, and DISCOVERY Dollars start adding up from the very first visit. Once earned, they can be spent just as easily at any other outlet in the programme, so a dinner at one venue can go towards a meal or drinks at another. Membership is built around four tiers set by annual spend, and the benefits on food and beverages grow with each one: 15% at Silver, 20% at Gold, 25% at Platinum and 30% at Titanium.

"In Colombo, dining out is not just a habit, it has become a form of status. People talk about where they eat the way they talk about where they travel. Dine with DISCOVERY Dollars (D\$) is our answer

to that; a programme that recognises our most loyal guests properly, and gives them a real stake in shaping the city's culinary core alongside us," said Kamal Munasinghe, Senior Vice President, Colombo Hotels, Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts, and General Manager, City of Dreams Sri Lanka.

The launch is part of Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts' wider ambition to strengthen its place at the heart of Colombo's dining scene. It also aims to build a community that comes together around food, experiences and discovery.

Behind the programme is Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts' membership of the Global Hotel Alliance (GHA), through GHA DISCOVERY, the alliance's global loyalty programme. Cinnamon joined GHA in 2025, bringing its hotels and resorts in Sri Lanka and the Maldives into a worldwide network of independent hotel brands. Through GHA DISCOVERY, members can earn and redeem DISCOVERY Dollars at participating properties across the alliance.

Sri Lanka Tourism at Arabian Travel Market 2026

Sri Lanka Tourism recently attended the Arabian Travel Market in Dubai with a 55+ strong delegation comprising of Hospitality leaders, Destination Management Companies, Travel Agents and Sri Lankan Airlines. Two Strategic MOU's with leading Gulf carriers Emirates and Qatar Airways were signed by Sri Lanka Tourism to enhance cross tourism promotions opportunities.



HOTELS

Heritage Hotels & Resorts partners with Sara Ali Khan to showcase Sri Lanka's landscapes and hospitality to Indian travellers

TTA BULLETIN

Heritage Hotels & Resorts has partnered with Bollywood celebrity Sara Ali Khan to present the diverse allure of Sri Lanka to Indian audiences. Facilitated by Heritage Hotels & Resorts, the collaboration brings together travel, culture and contemporary storytelling, offering a glimpse into the island's landscapes and distinctive hospitality through a celebrated celebrity lens.

As part of the collaboration, Heritage Kandalama, the iconic Geoffrey Bawa-designed hotel overlooking Kandalama Lake, set the scene for a special cover shoot for Hello Magazine India featuring Sara Ali Khan. Surrounded by remarkable natural landscapes, the property offered a

distinctive backdrop that brought together Sri Lanka's architectural legacy and its natural beauty.

The collaboration reflects Heritage Hotels & Resorts continued focus on bringing the character of its destinations to new audiences through meaningful partnerships that connect travel, culture, and storytelling.

Featuring Sara Ali Khan, the initiative offers Indian audiences a glimpse into Sri Lanka's diverse landscapes, rich heritage and warm hospitality, while shining a spotlight on the experiences offered by Heritage Hotels & Resorts.



Taj Samudra, Colombo Welcomes Hon. Defence Minister of India

TTA BULLETIN

Taj Samudra, Colombo hosted Shri Rajnath Singh, Hon. Defence Minister of India, during his recent visit to Sri Lanka. Mr. Samrat Datta, Area Director – Maldives & Sri Lanka and General Manager of Taj Samudra, Colombo, extended a warm welcome to the Hon. Minister on his arrival at the hotel.

Located on Colombo's Galle Face seafront, Taj Samudra has long been a preferred address for visiting dignitaries, heads of state and delegations, offering the blend of Sri Lankan hospitality and Taj service that has defined the property for decades.



"It was a privilege to welcome the Hon. Defence Minister of India to Taj Samudra," said Mr. Samrat Datta. "Hosting distinguished guests from India is always special for us, and reflects the close ties between our two countries."

Hilton Yala Resort Celebrates Sri Lanka's Wilderness With Luxe Global Awards Recognition

TTA BULLETIN

Hilton Yala Resort has been recognised at the LUXE Global Awards, receiving two distinguished accolades: Best Luxury Safari Experience in Sri Lanka and Best Luxury Sustainable Resort in Asia. The recognition celebrates the resort's distinctive approach to luxury hospitality, bringing together immersive wildlife experiences, thoughtful design and a deep connection to one of Sri Lanka's most remarkable natural environments.



particularly special is that they celebrate two things that are inseparable from who we are at Hilton Yala Resort — our wilderness

and the responsibility we have towards it. Yala gives us an extraordinary stage, but it is the knowledge and passion of our team, particularly our rangers, that transforms a wildlife encounter into something guests can genuinely learn from and remember. Being recognised for both our safari experience in Sri Lanka and sustainable luxury across Asia encourages us to continue raising the bar, not only for Hilton Yala, but for how Sri Lanka's wildlife experiences can be presented to the world."

Set against the wilderness bordering the renowned Yala National Park, Hilton Yala Resort offers travellers an opportunity to discover the extraordinary biodiversity and landscapes of Sri Lanka's southern region while experiencing the comfort and service of a contemporary luxury retreat. Its location provides a natural gateway to safari adventures and meaningful encounters with the destination's wildlife and ecosystems.

The resort's connection with its surroundings extends throughout the guest journey. Architecture and design draw inspiration from the colours, textures and character of Yala, while spacious accommodation, private outdoor areas, curated dining experiences, wellness offerings and nature-led activities allow guests to experience the destination beyond the traditional safari.

The recognition as Best Luxury Safari Experience in Sri Lanka reflects an experience shaped not only by the wilderness itself, but by the people who interpret it for guests. Hilton Yala Resort's resident ranger team includes guides qualified through the Field Guides Association of Southern Africa (FGASA) and CyberTracker, bringing internationally recognised field-guiding and tracking expertise into the resort's wildlife experiences.

Together, the two accolades reinforce Hilton Yala Resort's positioning as a destination where luxury and wilderness exist in harmony. From setting out into Yala in search of its remarkable wildlife to returning to the tranquillity of the resort, the experience is designed to offer travellers a deeper and more considered way to discover Sri Lanka's natural heritage.

The LUXE Global Awards celebrate outstanding hotels, resorts, spas and restaurants around the world, recognising excellence across the luxury hospitality sector. Winners are determined through an annual public voting process, complemented by independent evaluation and international recognition for selected major award categories.

Looking ahead, Hilton Yala Resort is working towards the Field Guides Association of Sri Lanka (FGASL), an initiative intended to contribute to the continued development and professionalisation of field guiding within Sri Lanka.

The resort's ranger team and experiential activities are led by Sajith Withanage, Head Ranger at Hilton Yala Resort, whose approach places interpretation, responsible wildlife viewing and a deeper understanding of Yala's ecosystems at the heart of the guest experience. From tracking and safari interpretation to nature-led activities within and around the resort, the team encourages guests to look beyond individual wildlife sightings and understand the wider landscape and its natural rhythms.

Building on the international knowledge and qualifications already represented within Hilton Yala Resort's ranger team through FGASA and CyberTracker, the initiative reflects a broader ambition to support knowledge sharing, professional development and high standards of nature interpretation within Sri Lanka.

Sustainability is equally integral to the resort's philosophy. The title of Best Luxury Sustainable Resort in Asia acknowledges its commitment to a more considered approach to hospitality — one that seeks to deliver memorable guest experiences while respecting the environment and destination in which it operates.

For future guests, this continued investment in guiding expertise will translate into increasingly immersive and educational ways to experience Yala — experiences that go beyond observing wildlife to understanding animal behaviour, tracking, habitats, conservation and the interconnected ecosystems that make the region so extraordinary.

Commenting on the recognition, Sanoj Perera, Director of Marketing & Communication at Hilton Yala Resort, said:

For Hilton Yala Resort, the latest honours therefore represent more than recognition of what has already been achieved. They provide further momentum for what comes next: deepening the resort's wildlife expertise, investing in its people and helping create experiences that inspire travellers to understand, appreciate and protect Sri Lanka's remarkable natural heritage.

"For me, what makes these recognitions

Yoshimichi Watanabe Chooses Hunas Holdings for His Next Chapter of Investment in Sri Lanka

TTA BULLETIN

Japanese investor Yoshimichi Watanabe is strengthening his commitment to Sri Lanka through an collaborative partnership with Hunas Holdings PLC, reflecting his long-standing confidence in the country and its future potential.

With investment experience across e-commerce, hospitality and real estate in Japan and international markets including Bali, Indonesia, Watanabe has also built a longstanding relationship with Sri Lanka, having made multiple investments in the country over the years. This sustained involvement has given him first-hand insight into Sri Lanka’s business environment, investment landscape and long-term potential.

His time in the country has given him

first-hand exposure to its people, business environment and investment landscape.

While recognising the economic challenges Sri Lanka has faced in recent years, Watanabe believes the current climate presents an important window for long-term investment. Rather than being discouraged by short-term uncertainty, his approach is centred on identifying opportunities with strong underlying potential and investing at a time when meaningful long-term value can be created.

It is this outlook that has led Watanabe to Hunas Holdings. As he looks to deepen his



investment interests in Sri Lanka, he has chosen to pursue this next chapter through Hunas, bringing his international experience together with the Group’s established local presence and understanding of the market.

Commenting on the partnership, Yoshimichi Watanabe said “Having spent many years connected to Sri Lanka, I have seen both its challenges and its remarkable potential. I understand the economic realities the country has faced, but I also believe this is an important time to look beyond the immediate challenges and invest with a long-term perspective. I have

great faith in Sri Lanka’s future, and in Hunas Holdings I see a partner with the local strength, understanding and ambition to build meaningful opportunities together.”

The partnership brings together Watanabe’s international investment experience and long-term belief in Sri Lanka with Hunas Holdings’ established local presence and knowledge of the market.

For Watanabe, the decision represents more than an investment. It reflects his continuing belief in a country he has known for years and his conviction that the present economic climate offers the right moment to invest for the future, with Hunas Holdings at the centre of that journey

Institute of Hospitality Sri Lanka - International Hospitality Leaders' Conference 2026

The Institute of Hospitality Sri Lanka Chapter brought together the country's hospitality leaders at Cinnamon Grand Colombo for the Hospitality Leaders Conference – Vision 2030. Here are highlights from a day of insightful discussions, collaboration and a shared commitment to the industry's growth.



HOTELS

EKHO Belihuloya- Reimagined for a New Generation of Travellers

TTA BULLETIN

The much-loved Belihuloya Rest House has been welcomed back as EKHO Belihuloya, a 16-key riverside retreat that honours decades of memories while inviting travellers to discover Belihuloya as a destination in its own right.



For generations of Sri Lankan travellers, the journey into the hills had a familiar rhythm. Somewhere along the winding road through Sabaragamuwa, cars would pull over at the Belihuloya Rest House. Families stretched their legs, children ran down to the river's edge, and plates of rice and curry or a pot of tea arrived on the verandah as the Belihul Oya tumbled over smooth rocks below. It was never just a stop. For many, it was the moment a holiday truly began.

That cherished landmark has now returned as EKHO Belihuloya, recently reopened following a thoughtful reimagining that brings the property into a new era without erasing what made it special.

The refurbishment was guided by a clear principle: respect the memories. Rather than replacing the character of the old Rest House, the restoration draws on it. The property's riverside setting, its unhurried verandahs, and the gentle sound of flowing water remain at the heart of the experience. Returning guests will find the familiar charm intact, while discovering refreshed interiors, upgraded comforts and a more contemporary approach to hospitality.

With just 16 rooms, EKHO Belihuloya retains the intimacy that defined the original Rest House. It is a place where guests are known by name, where meals are lingered over, and where the pace of the day is set by the river rather than the clock.

The reopening also reflects a wider shift in how travellers see Belihuloya itself. Once known primarily as a convenient halt on the road to the hill country, the area is

increasingly recognised as a destination worth staying in for days rather than hours.

Surrounded by forested hills, rivers and some of Sri Lanka's most striking waterfalls, Belihuloya offers a natural playground for those seeking the outdoors. Bambarakanda Falls, the tallest waterfall in the country, lies within reach, along with a scattering of lesser-known cascades and natural rock pools ideal for a refreshing dip. Walking and hiking trails wind through tea country, villages and cloud-touched ridges, while the cooler climate and quieter roads make the region ideal for cycling, nature walks, birdwatching and slow exploration.

EKHO Belihuloya is positioned to serve as a base for these experiences, encouraging guests to stay longer, explore further and experience a side of Sri Lanka that many have only ever passed through.

EKHO Belihuloya is the sixth property to join the EKHO Hotels & Resorts portfolio, strengthening the brand's commitment to reviving historic properties in some of Sri Lanka's most evocative locations. The collection is set to grow further with the historic Kithulgala Rest House, long associated with river adventures and storied film history, scheduled to follow under the EKHO banner.

Together, these properties signal a renewed appreciation for Sri Lanka's rest house heritage: buildings that once served travellers on long journeys and now offer a meaningful way to reconnect with the island's past while enjoying the comforts of the present.



For those who remember the old Rest House, EKHO Belihuloya offers a welcome homecoming. For a new generation, it is an invitation to slow down, follow the river, and discover what lies beyond the roadside stop.

Hilton Colombo Celebrates 39 Years at the Heart of Sri Lankan Hospitality

TTA BULLETIN



Hilton Colombo celebrates its 39th anniversary this September, celebrating nearly four decades as one of Sri Lanka's pioneering international hotels and the flagship Hilton property in the country. Since opening in 1987, the hotel has grown alongside Colombo itself, becoming a familiar part of the city's story and a place where international travelers, local guests, world leaders, families and generations of Team Members have come together.

Over the years, Hilton Colombo has been the setting for moments that have shaped both the hotel and the city around it. The hotel has hosted Commonwealth Heads of State, former U.S. Presidents and visiting dignitaries, while its event spaces have hosted occasions ranging from CHOGM 2013 and Colombo Fashion Week to official state banquets and national celebrations. More than 20,000 weddings have been celebrated at the hotel, making Hilton Colombo part of countless family stories spanning across generations.

The hotel's role in Colombo has extended well beyond accommodation. With 368 guestrooms and suites, six restaurants and bars, and 2,891 square metres of meetings and events space, Hilton Colombo has long served as a meeting point for business, celebration and leisure. Its pillar-less Grand Ballroom has welcomed some of the city's most significant corporate and social gatherings, while venues such as The Blue and Ruby have provided distinctive settings for occasions both large and intimate.

Hilton Colombo has also played a defining role in the city's dining and social landscape. Graze Kitchen presents international and local cuisine through its signature show kitchens, whilst Emperor's Wok, the hotel's specialty Chinese restaurant showcases the fine-dining heritage of Chinese cuisine. L.A.B. has become renowned for leisurely afternoons by the Lotus Pond and lively jazz evenings, Café Kai for handcrafted cakes and pastries, SunsetBlu for poolside dining and after-dark energy, and Stella Karaoke Lounge & Bar for nights centered on music and good company. Oktoberfest at Hilton Colombo, now a tradition spanning

more than three decades, remains one of the hotel's most recognizable annual celebrations and will be taking place this year from 29th October to 7th November.

Reflecting on the milestone, Manesh Fernando, Area General Manager for Hilton Sri Lanka and General Manager of Hilton Colombo, said, "39 years is not simply a measure of time. It is made up of the people who have walked through our doors, the Team Members who have built their careers here, the families who have celebrated with us, and the guests who continue to return. Hilton Colombo has had the privilege of growing alongside this city and being part of many of its defining moments. As we celebrate this anniversary, there is a deep sense of gratitude for everyone who has shaped our story, and genuine excitement for the chapters still ahead."

As Hilton Colombo enters its 40th year, the hotel continues to evolve while staying true to the warmth and sense of connection that has defined its presence in Sri Lanka since 1987. From landmark events and business gatherings to dinners, weddings and everyday moments shared around a table, the hotel remains a place where Colombo comes together and where Hilton's vision, of filling the earth with the light and warmth of hospitality, is embodied every day.

Hilton Colombo is a premier city hotel renowned for its exceptional hospitality and versatile offerings. Whether for leisure or business, guests are welcomed to experience unparalleled comfort and sophistication. The hotel boasts state-of-the-art conference rooms equipped with advanced audio-visual technology, uninterrupted high-speed internet, guest-friendly lighting systems and bespoke coffee stations.

Culinary options abound, with Graze Kitchen offering world flavors, SunsetBlu providing relaxed dining with stunning views, Emperor's Wok serving authentic Chinese cuisine, and Cafe Kai offering grab-and-go delights. Entertainment options include Stella Karaoke Lounge & Bar and L.A.B. Lounge and Bar.

A Joyful Start to the Festive Season

Pegasus Reef Hotel welcomed the festive season a little earlier this year with a joyful and intimate Christmas Cake Mixing Ceremony, bringing together hotel members, in-house guests, and our dedicated team. Adding to the excitement, the rhythmic sound of bagpipes led to the colorful procession of festive ingredients from the lobby to the lawn, creating a lively and memorable atmosphere. Surrounded by laughter, music, and the spirit of togetherness, the celebration marked the beginning of our preparations for a truly magical Christmas at Pegasus Reef Hotel.



SriLankan Aviation College Marks Airline's Legacy Through 'Skyline Stories'

TTA BULLETIN

SriLankan Aviation College marked the 47th anniversary of SriLankan Airlines with a special anniversary edition of its aviation talk series, The Skyline Stories, celebrating the enduring legacy of the pioneering aviators who helped shape the National Carrier and the next generation carrying that legacy forward. The sixth episode of the series paid tribute to the pioneering years of Air Lanka, established in 1979, and traced the journey of the National Carrier to its present identity as SriLankan Airlines, while exploring how the values, experiences and influence of its early aviators continue to resonate in Sri Lankan aviation today.

The session featured Captain Shavantha Pedris and Senior First Officer Nuwan Jayawickrama, whose fathers, Captain Ranjit Pedris and Captain Nihal Jayawickrama, were among the pioneering flight crew of Air Lanka during its formative years. Their participation created a unique bridge between the generation that helped establish the National Carrier and the aviation professionals carrying that legacy forward today, while also reflecting the important role the airline has played in the development of Sri Lanka's tourism and aviation industry over the past 47 years.

Captain Shavantha Pedris said, "Growing up, everything around me seemed connected to aviation because of my father. He inspired me from a young age and always encouraged me to aim higher. The journey to where I am today has not always been easy, and there have been many challenges along the way. Each experience has shaped who I am and strengthened my passion for aviation. Now, I feel it is my turn to give back to the industry that has given me so much."

Senior First Officer Nuwan Jayawickrama added, "Aviation was always part of our family life, so becoming a pilot felt like a natural possibility. But having a parent who has already achieved so much in the industry also comes with expectations. Over time, I realised that the goal is not simply to follow someone else's journey, but to learn from it and build your own. Every career has its own challenges, and it is how you respond to them that shapes you as a professional."

These experiences are at the heart of The Skyline Stories, also an exclusive aviation

talk series created for students of SriLankan Aviation College to bridge the gap between aviation education and the realities of building a career in the industry. The programme gives students the opportunity to learn directly from leading aviators and aviation professionals about career choices, opportunities, challenges, setbacks, achievements, and the life lessons that cannot always be found in textbooks or classrooms.

Reflecting on the impact of the session, a student in the audience said, "Hearing directly from two pilots who literally grew up around Air Lanka was incredibly inspiring. It felt good to step away from the typical learning environment and understand what it takes to build real resilience and shape a career on your own terms. It gave us a clear vision of what it takes to succeed in this dynamic field."

Another student added, "Learning about the founding days of our beloved airline, we hope to be part of someday and how it evolved over the years was so refreshing. It gave us a much deeper appreciation for the legacy the national carrier has built.



Connecting with the early history of Sri Lankan aviation made the entire session truly unforgettable."

As the training arm of Sri Lanka's National Carrier, SriLankan Aviation College is uniquely positioned to provide its students with direct access to the people and experiences that have shaped the country's aviation industry. Through The Skyline Stories, the College seeks to prepare students not only with the technical and academic knowledge required for aviation careers, but also with a realistic understanding of the opportunities, responsibilities and challenges that await them. The Anniversary Edition celebrated the pioneering generation that helped build Air Lanka while recognising that a legacy is not simply something inherited and that each succeeding generation must find its own path and make its own contribution.

Air India receives multiple honours including ‘Best Airline in India’, ‘Best Airline Staff in India & South Asia’, and Skytrax 4-Star Airline certification.

TTA BULLETIN

Air India, India's leading global airline, today announced that it has been honoured with three major accolades at the 2026 Skytrax World Airline Awards, winning ‘Best Airline in India’, ‘Best Airline Staff in India & South Asia’, and receiving the coveted Skytrax 4-Star Airline Certification for Business Class and Economy Class. Air India was also awarded with the below honours:

- Most improved airline in Asia
- Best Economy Class in India and South Asia
- Best Economy Class onboard catering in India and South Asia
- Best Business Class in India and South Asia
- Best Business Class onboard catering in India and South Asia

The awards for ‘Best Airline in India’ and ‘Best Airline Staff in India & South Asia’ are especially meaningful as they are based on customer feedback gathered through the world's largest airline passenger satisfaction survey; making them a direct reflection of guests' experiences and perceptions of the airline.

Moreover, the award for ‘Best Airline Staff in India & South Asia’ is a particularly significant recognition of the efforts of Air India's frontline teams across cabin crew, airports, customer support, and



operational functions, who serve millions of guests each year.

The honours follow Air India's recent elevation from a 3-Star to 4-Star airline which is widely regarded as a global benchmark for airline quality. Together, the recognitions underscore the airline's ongoing transformation under the Vihaan.AI programme and its ambition to become a world-class global airline with an Indian heart.

Campbell Wilson, Chief Executive Officer & Managing Director, Air India, along with Air India cabin crew received the awards on behalf of the airline at the 2026 Skytrax World Airline Awards ceremony held in London, UK. Campbell Wilson remarked, "To be recognised as ‘Best Airline in India’ and to receive the award for ‘Best Airline Staff in India & South Asia’ is especially meaningful because it reflects the New Air India experience our guests are experiencing and acknowledging. These awards belong to the more than 24,000 Air Indians whose professionalism, warmth, and commitment are driving our transformation every day."

Edelweiss Recognizes Top Travel Agents at Agents Awards Night

TTA BULLETIN

Edelweiss hosted a special Agents Awards Night at Cinnamon Life Colombo, recognizing and celebrating the outstanding performance of its top travel agency partners in Sri Lanka.

The top three performing agents were recognized for their exceptional contributions, namely Classic Travel which received first place followed by Hayleys Travels and Metro Voyage.

The event was graced by H.E. Daniel Hunn, Ambassador of Switzerland to Sri Lanka, the Deputy Head of Mission of the Embassy of Switzerland, and Urs Limacher, Head of Sales, Services & Distribution, Edelweiss.

The evening celebrated the strong partnership between Edelweiss and the Sri Lankan travel trade, recognizing the continued commitment and contribution of its valued agency partners.



Emirates takes off to Helsinki

TTA BULLETIN



Emirates has departed Dubai for Helsinki, Finland, for the very first time. Emirates flight EK167 departed at 07.30hrs today with a near-full passenger and cargo load, including a VIP delegation and media onboard.

With the new route, Emirates introduces the only year-round direct link between the UAE and Finland, unlocking enhanced opportunities for travellers. The new flight provides connectivity from nearly 140 points on the airline's global network, including key points in Australia, Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, where demand for convenient and comfortable travel to Helsinki continues to grow.

Emirates was honoured to welcome onboard Lieutenant Colonel Juma Abdulla Obaid Bin Subaih Alflasi, Acting Director of Passport Control, Terminal 3, General Directorate for Identity and Foreigners Affairs (GDRFA).

Fostering stronger tourism, trade and culture links between the UAE and Finland, His Excellency Mohamed Rashid bin Taliah, Assistant Minister of Cabinet Affairs for Government Knowledge Exchange joined the inaugural, along with a party of delegates from key areas of cooperation between Finland and the

UAE, including cybersecurity, digital transformation, energy, trade and education.

Her Excellency Tuula Yrjölä, Ambassador of Finland to the UAE and Bahrain, as well as Jorge Fernández Gates, Senior Advisor, Embassy of Finland, Abu Dhabi also joined the delegation on the first flight to Helsinki.

Omar bin Ghaleb, Deputy Director General of the General Civil Aviation Authority also joined the inaugural flight, along with Samuli Pesu, Chairman of the Finnish Business Council UAE.

The Emirates delegation onboard the inaugural flight was led by Adnan Kazim, Deputy President and Chief Commercial Officer and Jeffrey Van Haeften, Senior Vice President of Cargo Commercial Worldwide, Emirates SkyCargo.

The new daily service is operated on an Airbus A350, the newest aircraft type to join Emirates all widebody fleet. Accommodating 298 passengers in three spacious cabins – Business, Premium Economy and Economy – the A350 brings the latest of Emirates' world-class product and service to Finland from launch, with bright and airy cabins and the latest tech touches.

Qatar Airways Wins Four Skytrax Awards, Retains Prestigious 5-Star Airline Rating

TTA BULLETIN

Qatar Airways has capped a successful Skytrax World Airline Awards 2026, winning four titles and retaining its 5-Star Airline rating.



given for the World's Best Onboard Wi-Fi. These awards belong to our people. Sixty thousand colleagues deliver the best experience in the world for our passengers every day, and they have done so through a particularly challenging year.

The four World Airline Awards presented to Qatar Airways were: World's Best Business Class (the thirteenth time to receive this award)

Best Airline in the Middle East (the fourteenth time to receive this award)

World's Best Business Class Lounge (the eighth time to receive this award)

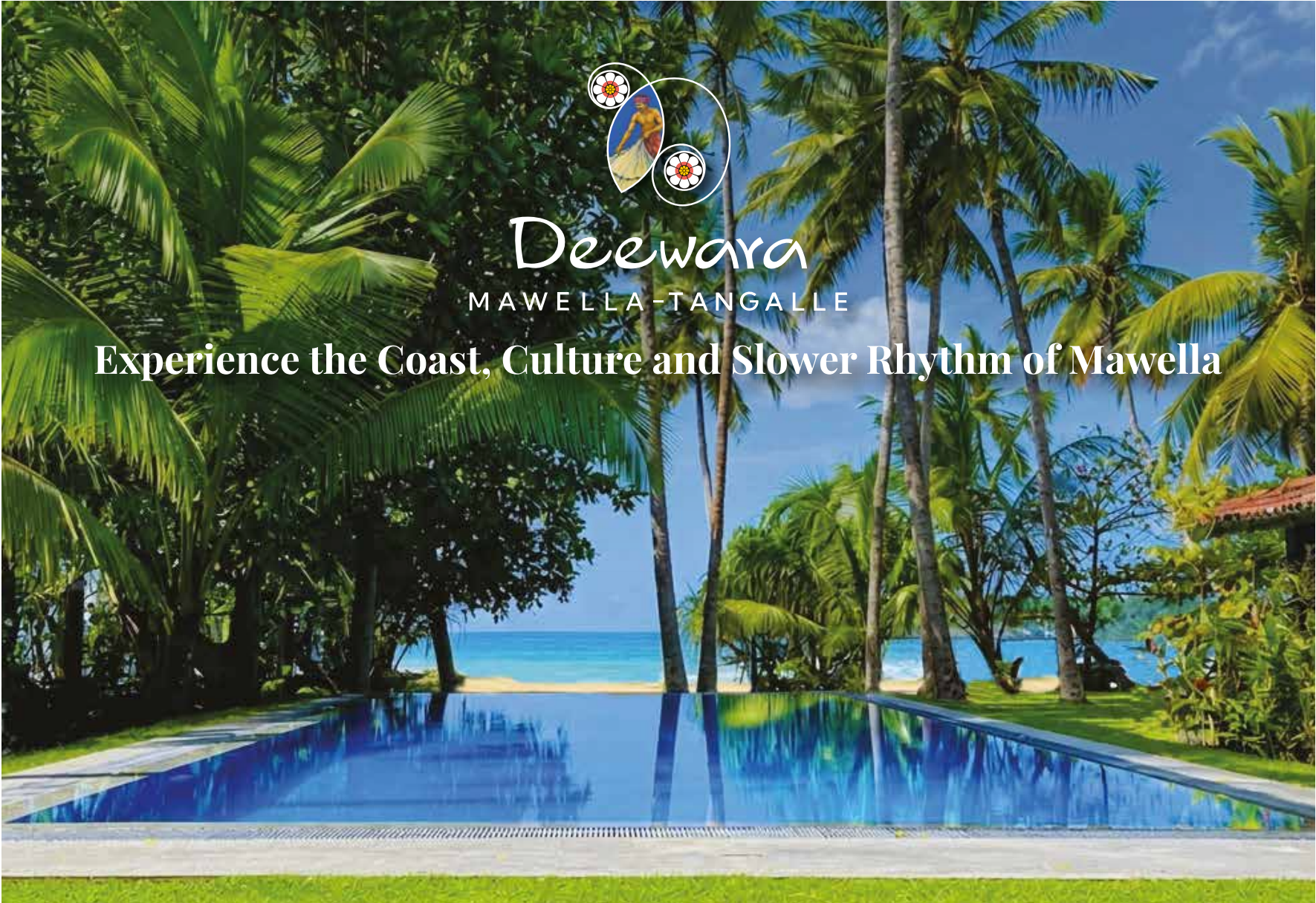
World's Best Onboard Wi-Fi (the first airline to ever receive this award)

The World Airline Awards, alongside the 5-Star Airline rating, reflect Qatar Airways' continued commitment to delivering exceptional passenger experiences, premium service, seamless onboard connectivity, and operational excellence across its global network.

Hamad Al-Khater, Qatar Airways Group Chief Executive Officer, said: "We are honoured to receive four World Airline Awards from Skytrax, including the World's Best Business Class for a thirteenth time and the first award ever

"As Qatar Airways prepares to mark its thirtieth anniversary next year, their dedication and professionalism are the foundation of everything we have built. I also extend my congratulations to our oneworld Alliance partners on being named the World's Best Airline Alliance for 2026, a recognition that reflects the strength of our shared commitment to excellence across global aviation. I thank our passengers for their loyalty, and I dedicate these four awards to every one of our people, as we take this airline further in the chapter ahead."

These latest accolades reinforce Qatar Airways' position as a benchmark for excellence in international aviation, made possible by the passion and dedication of its teams across the Group and the continued trust and loyalty of its passengers worldwide.



Deewara

MAWELLA-TANGALLE

Experience the Coast, Culture and Slower Rhythm of Mawella



A collection of stately homes restored to a homely and quaint boutique villa on the shore of one of Sri Lanka's best beaches. Think a lush tropical garden, relaxing open areas amongst the tropical gardens, with views of the unspoilt beach for eating, drinking and relaxing. Antiques and beautiful courtyards, all renovated while keeping the essence of these old homes with modern comforts. With a traditional Ayurvedic spa.



Thema

COLLECTION

- 
Aliya
SIGIRIYA
- 
Amba Yaalu
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
- 
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