TRAVELTALK ASIA

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VOL 25 NO 11 2026 36 PGS

Sri Lanka Redefines Its Value Proposition for Discerning Travellers

Award-winning trails, ancient healing traditions and a World Bank-backed campaign plan put Sri Lanka's high-value tourism push on firm ground.

DINUSHKA CHANDRASENA


Prof. Ruwan Ranasinghe


Oliver Martin

Sri Lanka is preparing to fundamentally reshape its tourism model. Deputy Minister of Tourism Prof. Ruwan Ranasinghe says the focus is shifting from simply increasing visitor numbers to extracting greater economic value from each tourist, retaining more visitor spending locally and spreading tourism-led growth beyond established destinations.

"We have achieved the volume as planned," the Deputy Minister has said. The next step is better products, high-value segments and higher revenue, on the road to $8 billion by 2030.

The shift will underpin a new National Tourism Strategic Plan for 2026–2031. Alongside it, a five-year Global Destination Communication Campaign Road Map is being developed with international and local consultants under the World Bank's Grant Facility for Project Preparation (GFPP).

Skift, the world's largest travel industry intelligence company, in a joint venture with international strategy consultancy MTI Consulting, has been selected by the Tourism Ministry and the World Bank to lead the roadmap. The assignment covers a five-year global campaign strategy backed by market intelligence, marketing direction and a robust campaign management blueprint.



The aim is to modernise how Sri Lanka speaks to the world: insight-driven, internationally benchmarked and true to the island's authentic identity. The groundwork includes a dedicated pre-launch team, comprehensive research, a strategic communications framework and internationally aligned procurement.

Speaking at a conference during a recent visit to Colombo, Skift Advisory Senior Director Oliver Martin argued that Sri Lanka's problem is brand, not product. Frequent shifts in positioning have blurred the island's image, he said. The answer is a single culture-led brand story, backed by consistent investment and a sharper focus on fewer markets.

The aim is messaging that is insight-driven, internationally benchmarked and true to the island's authentic identity, prepared by a dedicated pre-launch team and comprehensive research.

The Pekoe Trail has won the 2026 World Trails Network (WTN) Trail Tourism Award, shared with Canada's Trans Canada Trail. The award honours trails that advance tourism and economic development while supporting local communities.

Cont on Pg 2

British Airways returns with nonstop London Gatwick–Colombo flights

Three nonstop flights a week, a winter season timed for peak demand, and a British market already sending one in ten of the island's visitors make this the airline story Sri Lanka has been waiting for.

DINUSHKA CHANDRASENA


Neil Chernoff

The airline's inaugural flight from London Gatwick touched down at Bandaranaike International Airport on 23 October 2026, restoring BA's presence in Colombo for the first time since March 2015. The Boeing 777 service will operate three times a week through the 2026/27 winter season.

For Sri Lanka's tourism industry, the arrival carries weight far beyond a single route. It is a signal from one of the world's best-known airlines that the island is open, stable and commercially worth flying to.

Passengers can choose from three cabins: World Traveller (economy), World Traveller Plus (premium economy) and Club World (business class).

BA is the only scheduled operator between Gatwick and Colombo. SriLankan Airlines continues its nonstop service from Heathrow, giving British travellers a choice of two London airports and two carriers for the first time in more than a decade.

Gatwick itself is an advantage. It serves London's southern suburbs and the South East, and sits close to many of the UK's specialist long-haul tour operators.

Colombo was announced in March as one of only two new destinations, alongside Melbourne, in BA's winter 2026 schedule, which grows its long-haul network by nine per cent. Announcing the expansion, BA's chief planning and strategy officer Neil Chernoff said he was confident both destinations would prove popular with customers.

The United Kingdom is Sri Lanka's second-largest source market after India. The Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority recorded 160,727 British visitors between January and September 2026, about one in every ten international arrivals.

British travellers are also the kind Sri Lanka most wants. They tend to stay longer, travel the length of the island and spend across the whole value chain, from heritage hotels and safari lodges to Ayurveda retreats and tea-country bungalows.

Extra nonstop capacity from a high-spending market, arriving just as the British winter and Sri Lanka's west and south-coast season begin, fits that strategy neatly.

For UK tour operators, BA adds a familiar brand, a second London gateway and more seats to package for winter. A premium economy and business-class cabin also gives operators a stronger offer for higher-spending clients.

The test now is load factors. The route is seasonal, and BA left Colombo once before on commercial grounds. Strong winter bookings are the best argument for more flights and, eventually, a year-round service.



TRAVELTALK ASIA

With British Airways back in Colombo after more than a decade, Sri Lanka arrives at World Travel Market with its strongest calling card in years, and a clear message: the island is chasing value, not volume.

When British Airways' inaugural flight from London Gatwick touched down at Bandaranaike International Airport on 23 October, it marked more than a new timetable entry. The UK flag carrier had been absent since March 2015. It now flies nonstop three times a week through the winter, with World Traveller, World Traveller Plus and Club World cabins

BA is the only scheduled carrier on the Gatwick route, complementing SriLankan Airlines' Heathrow service. Colombo was one of just two new destinations, alongside Melbourne, in a winter programme that grows BA's long-haul network by nine per cent. Airlines do not add long-haul routes on sentiment. This is a commercial vote of confidence.

The UK is Sri Lanka's second-largest source market. SLTDA recorded 160,727 British visitors from January to September 2026, around one in ten international arrivals.

British travellers have stood by the island through war, tsunami, pandemic and economic crisis. They book through a mature specialist trade, stay longer, travel further and spend across the value chain, from heritage hotels in the Cultural Triangle to south-coast surf camps and hill-country tea bungalows. They are exactly the travellers Sri Lanka now says it wants.

The timing helps. Extra nonstop seats from London at the start of the British winter could not be better placed.

Sri Lanka welcomed a record 2.36 million visitors in 2025, yet earnings have lagged. Tourism revenue fell 11.8% in the first half of 2026 to US$1.51 billion, and this year's targets have been trimmed to 2.7 million arrivals and US$4.2 billion.

Deputy Minister of Tourism Prof. Ruwan Ranasinghe has called five million visitors a year the island's ceiling, with future growth to come from value. The Hotels Association of Sri Lanka agrees, urging a focus on earnings through MICE, wellness, sports, spiritual and nature-based travel.

The strategy is right, but it will be judged on delivery: consistent service, protected landscapes, reliable infrastructure and pricing that reflects quality. Discerning British travellers will notice either way.

At WTM this year the message is clear: turn new seats into new business. Show the British trade the value story, and remind London that Sri Lanka is not a cheap alternative to its neighbours but a destination worth paying for.



The Speedbird is back in Colombo. Now the work begins to keep it here and hopefully year-round!

Dinushka

Dinushka Chandrasena
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Traveltalk Asia is a Monthly publication
of Doubledee Publications Private Limited

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NEWS / MOVEMENTS

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The Pekoe Trail Named Winner ....



The 300-kilometre route crosses the Central Highlands in 22 stages, linking tea heritage, biodiversity and village life.
Built under the EU-funded Tourism Resilience Project with USAID support, it has moved from donor project to locally led stewardship, without relying on government funding or new donor programmes.

"To have The Pekoe Trail recognized internationally alongside the Trans Canada Trail is an extraordinary achievement for a trail that is still so young," said Pramudith Thenabadu, Executive Director of The Pekoe Trail Company, at the World Trails Conference in Perth. "Our ambition has always been bigger than a hiking route."

Wellness is the second pillar. Promoters are placing the island's centuries-old indigenous healing traditions at the heart of a renewed push into wellness travel, a segment seen as a route to higher-spending, longer-staying visitors. International interest in Sri Lankan retreats has doubled, and BookRetreats.com named the island the world's No. 1 trending wellness destination for 2026.

Asoka Hettigoda, President of The Hotels Association of Sri Lanka (THASL), called the ranking "a powerful endorsement of Sri Lanka's growing global reputation for authentic, heritage-based healing." In October, Sri Lanka won Leading Wellness Destination (Visitors' Choice) at the South Asian Travel Awards. Wellness in Wetlands 2026, the second International Conference on Wetlands, Wisdom and Well-being, drew around 100 national and international participants to Sri Jayawardenepura Kotte.

Sri Lanka stands among South Asia's most sustainable destinations. Sigiriya is certified against Global Sustainable Tourism Council standards, and 100 small businesses hold National Sustainable Tourism Certification.

Its hotels carry the story. The 1864 Galle Face Hotel, Ceylon Tea Trails, Jetwing Vil Uyana and Santani Wellness Resort have all earned international acclaim.

With a trail the world applauds, healing traditions in demand and a campaign built on evidence, Sri Lanka no longer needs to be travel's best-kept secret. It needs to be its best-told story.

Sri Lanka Beyond the Postcard: Hidden Trails, Full Houses and Tourism's Next Big Leap

TTA BULLETIN



As visitor arrivals continue to climb, M. Shanthikumar, Immediate Past President of The Hotels Association of Sri Lanka, explains why the island's most exciting stories are now being written off the beaten track, and what it will take to make tourism the nation's number one foreign exchange earner

Few people know Sri Lankan hospitality as intimately as Mr. M. Shanthikumar. As Immediate Past President of The Hotels Association of Sri Lanka (THASL), the apex body of the country's formal hotel sector, and a former President of the Colombo City Tourist Hotels Association (CCTHA), he has steered the industry through decades of challenges. Throughout, he has been a persistent voice at the policy table, lobbying successive governments for guidelines that allow hoteliers, and the destination, to thrive.

Today, his outlook is one of confident optimism. Arrivals continue their upward trend, and Sri Lanka is cementing its reputation as one of the world's finest experiential destinations for holidaymakers from every corner of the globe.

Ask Mr. Shanthikumar where the energy lies and he points beyond the familiar circuit. Ella, Haputale, Badulla, Hiriketiya and Wasgamuwa have surged in popularity, particularly among younger travellers.

"New locations are continuing to be discovered," he said. "Sri Lanka keeps offering travellers something they haven't seen before."

What makes these places special is the remarkable variety of accommodation that has grown up outside the formal sector. Much of it is rustic by design, but full of character and perfectly suited to the adventurous traveller. In the hill country, some guests trek two to three kilometres into the interior to reach their lodgings, and are rewarded with some of the most breathtaking views on the island.

Even the coastline is reinventing itself. Sri Lanka's beaches are no longer simply about golden sand and turquoise water; a lively scene of entertainment and experiences has grown up around them, giving visitors far more reasons to stay longer.

Sri Lanka remains a safe haven for holiday travellers, with minimal incidents involving visitors. Just as important is the famous warmth of its people. Sri Lankans make guests feel truly at home, and they respect visitors, understanding the vital role tourism plays in the nation's economic growth.

The proof is everywhere online. Every day, a steady stream of social media posts, videos and reviews from delighted travellers serves as a powerful, organic endorsement of the destination's growing appeal.

The boom is not limited to boutique and rustic stays. Formal sector hotels are also enjoying strong occupancy across every segment of the market: individual business travellers and corporate groups; leisure guests including couples, families, solo travellers, honeymooners and tour groups; and the MICE segment, from meetings large and small to destination weddings and celebrations.

Mr. Shanthikumar is candid that the industry still faces its share of challenges. Hoteliers, he says, will continue to work hand in hand with the Government to resolve them and to take the development and promotion of Sri Lanka tourism to the next level.

"Our goal is to make tourism Sri Lanka's number one foreign exchange earner within the next three years," he said.

With the right support from the Government, he is hopeful this ambition can become reality, and that the world will keep discovering just how much more Sri Lanka has to offer.

Mr. M. Shanthikumar is the Immediate Past President of The Hotels Association of Sri Lanka (THASL) and a former President of the Colombo City Tourist Hotels Association (CCTHA). He is a Director at Ramada by Wyndham Colombo and serves on the Board of the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA), representing the private sector.



The Perfect Beachfront Stay in Ambalangoda

WITH EVERYTHING YOU NEED FOR A TROPICAL GETAWAY

Mask & Tide is more than a place to stay; it's a window into the tropical soul of Sri Lanka's southern coast. Its setting on a secluded stretch of beach means the turquoise waters and golden sand are right on the doorstep, while the town's colourful mask-making heritage gives each stay its character.

Rooms here are designed around the view. Twenty-two Deluxe rooms, with thoughtfully curated interiors, open onto either the sea or the lush island greenery, while seven new Super Deluxe rooms occupy the top floor, where those views stretch even further. The pool looks out over the open ocean, with sweeping views of waves rolling onto the shore. Come evening, sun loungers on the sand face the sunset as waves crash against the rocks. A Balinese spa treatment completes the seaside escape.

The Main Restaurant, with its bold mask-inspired interiors, serves local and international favourites. Beyond the hotel, the Ariyapala Mask Museum is just a walk away, along with river safaris and sea turtle hatcheries for those who love to explore.







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NEWS

Secrets of Ceylon Collection Wins Two International Honours at theLux Life Hospitality Awards 2026

TTA BULLETIN



Secrets of Ceylon Collection, the Sri Lankan hospitality group known for its unique boutique properties and authentic local experiences, has won two awards at the Lux Life Hospitality Awards 2026, presented by UK-based premium lifestyle publication Lux Life.

The collection was named Best Boutique Hotel Collection 2026 – Sri Lanka and won the Community Impact Excellence Award 2026 – Sri Lanka, recognising both the quality of its properties and its commitment to the communities in which they operate.



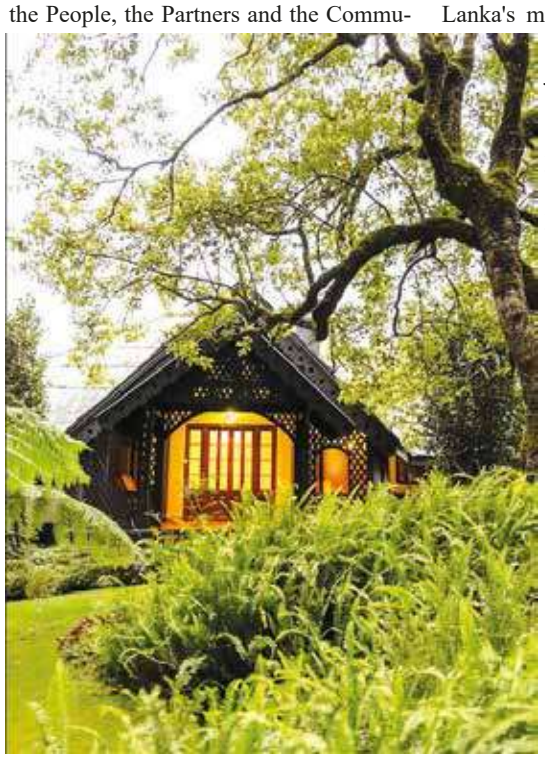
The awards follow another recent international accolade for the group. Kulu Safaris Yala, a Secrets of Ceylon property, was the only Sri Lankan property named in Wanderlust Magazine's Green List 2026.

"We are delighted with this recognition," said Jean-Marc Flambert, Founder and Managing Director of Secrets of Ceylon Collection. "Many people make the mistake of saying that the customer is the most important person. I say it is the PPC: the 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 our customers."

Secrets of Ceylon Collection brings together 13 unique boutique properties and experiences across Sri Lanka. Many are private holiday homes, some owned by the same family for more than a century. Every property follows the group's BEE Philosophy: Buy local, Employ locally, and Enrich the community.

While all properties deliver four-star service and quality, the collection defines luxury differently. "It is not luxury in the traditional sense of a TV and a minibar in the room," Flambert explained. "We offer authentic, local experiences, and for our foreign visitors, this is what they look for in luxury and wellness."

Guests at Horathapola Coconut Estate can join a complimentary estate walk to learn about the coconut palm, one of Sri Lanka's most important trees. Idal Villa offers a complimentary train journey and village house experience, while at Hapu Tales the owner personally presents a traditional Thaal cuisine meal. At several properties, the owners host these experiences themselves, adding a personal dimension that larger hotels cannot replicate.



About the Lux Life Hospitality Awards

Lux Life is a premium UK lifestyle publication with a readership of 300,000. Its awards celebrate outstanding achievement and creativity across a range of luxury sectors, including hospitality and tourism. Winner profile: https://lux-life.digital/winners/secrets-of-ceylon-collection/

INSPIRING JOURNEYS

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH ACORN GROUP

WHEN RECOGNITION MEETS PURPOSE: NAZOOMI AZHAR, GENERAL MANAGER OF CINNAMON GRAND COLOMBO, ON 28 YEARS IN HOSPITALITY, AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP AND WHY THE BASICS STILL MATTER



He started on the night shift, with no qualification beyond the job itself. Twenty-eight years later, Nazoomi Azhar walked onto the stage in the Maldives to be named Best General Manager in South Asia at the 10th anniversary edition of the South Asian Travel Awards (SATA).

For a region that judges its hoteliers hard, the award is a rare signal. It says that the man leading one of Colombo's busiest and best-known hotels has earned the respect of an industry that rarely hands out praise lightly.

The Journey

Nazoomi's story begins at the front desk after dark. "I started as a night receptionist," he recalls. "I didn't have any other qualification to get into the industry, but I sacrificed a lot of time and effort, and I learned from the bottom up."

That apprenticeship in the fundamentals carried him through a career spanning almost three decades, in Sri Lanka and in the United Kingdom. Before taking the helm at Cinnamon Grand Colombo on 1 September 2025, he led sister property Cinnamon Lakeside Colombo.

At Lakeside, his teams collected the Most Outstanding Overall Hotel Championship Trophy at Culinary Art Food Expo (CAFE) 2025 and the BarChamps 2025 championship. Within Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts, the property was also named for Best Annual Plan Achievement and Best Commercial Team for 2024/2025.

Authentic Empowerment

Ask Nazoomi to sum up his leadership and he reaches for two words. "I've always been authentic and simple," he says. "The principle is authentic empowerment. You build trust through being authentic, being simple, and ethically governing the system."

Ethical governance, he stresses, "has always played a key part of my journey." So has open feedback, given and received. He sees the SATA award as validation of exactly that model: "Professionally, it validates my leadership style, which is built on ethical governance, open feedback and a true sense of empowerment."

The personal meaning runs just as deep. "It's rewarding and also humbling to see 28 years of resilience, hard work and sacrifice being recognised," he says. "It's a testament to staying humble, being true to yourself and staying grounded." He is quick to share the moment with those who shaped it, thanking his mentors, his family and his young children.

Nor does he claim it alone. Cinnamon Grand's recent wins in food and beverage and in young leadership, he says, are "a testament to the teamwork and the ethics we have built around the leadership here."

For young people entering hospitality, Nazoomi offers two lessons. First, Master the basics. "It's sacrifice. Once you know the basics, you can master the rest of the journey, and you will be able to meet it with confidence." Secondly, Stay open to feedback. "Critics are always good. When you take it on board, you get the confidence to make decisions. You learn to speak freely, give fresh ideas and make decisions for yourself with confidence."

A Win for Sri Lankan Hospitality

Nazoomi's recognition lands at a good moment for Sri Lanka. As the island's tourism recovery gathers pace, a regional title for a home-grown hotelier shows that Sri Lankan talent can lead at the very top of South Asian hospitality.

It also carries a message for every young person working a night shift today. The path from the front desk to the General Manager's office is long, but it is open, and it is built on the basics, on honest feedback and on trust.

For Nazoomi Azhar, the journey that began behind a reception counter has come full circle on a stage in the Maldives and he proudly shares the recognition with his team at Cinnamon Grand Colombo.

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Tuan Kitchilan joins Discover The World

TTA BULLETIN


Tuan Kitchilan

Discover the World, a global travel representation company, has appointed Tuan Kitchilan to strengthen its presence in Sri Lanka and drive further growth across the aviation, travel and tourism sectors.

Tuan brings more than two decades of industry experience in business development, commercial management, sales, marketing and strategic partnerships. Having previously worked with Discover the World, he also brings a strong understanding of the company's business and global representation network.

Discover the World currently represents Hertz, GOL and KM Malta Airlines in Sri Lanka and aims to expand its portfolio through new partnerships across Airlines, Cruise operators, Transportation providers, Travel technology companies, Tourism boards and other travel-related brands.

Commenting on the appointment, Justin Gosling, Vice President of Discover the World Canada, India & Sri Lanka, said: "Tuan brings an excellent combination of industry experience, commercial expertise and an understanding of Discover the World. His appointment reflects our confidence in the opportunities available in Sri Lanka and our commitment to strengthening our presence"

"We see opportunities to help international brands grow through strong local representation,

meaningful industry relationships and a proactive understanding of market needs.

We welcome airlines, cruise operators, transportation providers, travel technology companies, tourism boards and other travel brands interested in developing their business in Sri Lanka to explore partnership opportunities with Discover the World"

Ddot Travels Appoints Pathumi Silva as Head of Operations to Drive International Growth

TTA BULLETIN


Pathumi Silva

Ddot Travels (Pvt) Ltd, a destination management company with a presence in Sri Lanka and Australia, has announced the appointment of Pathumi Silva as Head of Operations. The appointment strengthens the company's operational capabilities as it expands its international partnerships and grows its reach across new source markets.

Pathumi brings more than 14 years of experience in Sri Lanka's travel and tourism industry, with particular expertise in destination management, tour operations and international travel markets. Over the course of her career, she has handled both FIT and group travel across Asian and European markets, building strong working relationships with travel agents, tour operators, hotels and other industry partners.

Welcoming her appointment, Amila Abeywickrama, Director – Business Development at Ddot Travels, said: "We are delighted to welcome Pathumi to the Ddot Travels family. Her extensive experience, industry knowledge and commitment to personalised service will make her a valuable asset to our team. With Pathumi overseeing our day-to-day operations, I am confident that this important part of our business is in capable hands.

"As we prepare to launch a new marketing campaign in Australia in 2027 with Australian PR company Gate 7, Pathumi will play a key role in ensuring our operations support our international growth. We look forward to working together to deliver exceptional travel experiences and strengthen the confidence our partners place in Ddot Travels."

In her new role, she will oversee the company's operations across its portfolio of tailor-made holidays, private and group tours, luxury travel and MICE programmes in Sri Lanka and the Maldives, ensuring the personalised service and reliable on-ground support that international partners have come to expect from Ddot Travels.

Speaking on her appointment, Pathumi Silva said, "Sri Lanka offers so much more than beautiful landscapes and iconic attractions. It is our culture, our warm hospitality, our diverse cuisine, our traditions and our authentic local experiences that make this country truly special. Travel is not just about visiting places, but about understanding cultures and creating meaningful connections that stay with people long after the journey ends. At Ddot Travels, I look forward to building strong international partnerships and helping travellers discover the true beauty and character of my country."

Beyond her professional work, Pathumi is a language learner, cultural explorer and content creation enthusiast, interests that shape her people-centred approach to travel and her ability to connect with partners and guests from diverse backgrounds.

Dilshan Kudahetty joins Hayleys Aviation as General Manager - Airlines

TTA BULLETIN


Dilshan Kudahetty

Seasoned airline commercial leader Dilshan Kudahetty, known across the trade as "DK", has been appointed General Manager – Airlines at Hayleys Aviation, part of Advantis Aviation Services of the Hayleys Group. Kudahetty took up the role in September 2026 and heads the British Airways General Sales Agency (GSA) in Sri Lanka.

His immediate priority is British Airways' return to Colombo, with a three-times-weekly service linking London and Colombo.

Kudahetty brings more than 26 years of experience across the travel value chain, nearly 20 of them with SriLankan Airlines. During his tenure with the national carrier, he served as Country Manager for Western India and later for Malaysia, before leading the airline's Corporate Business and Strategic Partnerships portfolio from 2020 to 2026.

His career began in hospitality. After training as a junior chef in Switzerland and at the Hilton Colombo under celebrated chef Gerard Mendis, he moved into contracting at Serendib Leisure, and later into outbound travel and MICE with Sri Lankan Holidays and Emirates Holidays.

In 2015, Kudahetty won Gold at the Sri Lanka Institute of Marketing (SLIM) All-Island Awards for International Territory Management & Sales and for Outstanding Sales Management, the first time a travel industry executive had received these honours. He served on the jury of the South Asian Travel Awards from 2023 to 2025 and has sat on the boards of the Airline Representatives Associations of both Malaysia and India.

An alumnus of Royal College, Colombo, Kudahetty holds an MBA in Digital Marketing & Communication from the University of Bedfordshire, UK; a BCom (Hons) from Lincoln University College, Malaysia; a BA in Hotel Management & International Tourism from IMI Switzerland; and an HND in Data Science & Artificial Intelligence - Skills Development Council, Canada. He is also HCIMA-certified and holds IATA certification in Distribution and Airline Retailing with NDC.

The Wolseley Hospitality Group Appoints Laura Mills as Managing Director

TTA BULLETIN


Laura Mills

The Wolseley Hospitality Group is delighted to announce the appointment of Laura Mills as Managing Director.

Laura brings almost 15 years of senior leadership experience in hospitality, most recently as Managing Director of The Ivy Collection, where she led one of the UK's best-known restaurant groups. Known for her people-first approach, Laura believes great restaurants are built on great teams, and she has a strong track record of developing talented, long-serving leaders.

Commenting on her appointment, Laura said: "Walking through the doors of The Wolseley has always felt like an occasion. It's a place where European grandeur meets genuine British warmth, and where every guest, whether they're in for breakfast or celebrating a milestone, is made to feel truly special. I've admired these restaurants for years, both as a guest and as someone in the industry, so it's a real privilege to be joining such a talented team.

"My focus is simple: to protect everything that makes our restaurants so special, look after the people who bring them to life every day, and write the next chapter together."

The Wolseley Hospitality Group was founded in 2003 and encompasses some of London's best-loved restaurants; The Wolseley, The Wolseley City, The Delaunay, Brasserie Zédel, Colbert, Fischer's, Bellanger, Soutine and Manzi's of Soho. The group prides itself on immaculate presentation, seamless and personalised service, charming interiors, and an all-day dining offering.

The Wolseley Hospitality Group is owned by Minor International Trading Company Limited (MINT), the parent company of Minor Hotels.



To every guest who has walked through our doors and has inspired us to strive for excellence in everything we do:

Thank you for being a part of our journey.

Minor Hotels Sri Lanka Announces Leadership Promotions Across Its Kalutara Resort Complex

TTA BULLETIN


Jude Silva


Ashane Fernando

Minor Hotels Sri Lanka has announced two leadership promotions across its Kalutara resort complex, comprising Anantara Kalutara Resort and Avani Kalutara Resort. Jude Silva, previously Hotel Manager at Avani Kalutara Resort, has been promoted to Complex Resort Manager, while Ashane Fernando, formerly Cluster Assistant Director of Sales, has been promoted to Complex Director of Operations. Both appointments encompass Anantara Kalutara Resort and Avani Kalutara Resort, bringing together extensive resort management experience and a strong understanding of hospitality operations and commercial performance.

The promotions celebrate two distinct career journeys rooted in hands-on guest service and shaped by continuous learning. Together, Jude Silva and Ashane Fernando bring perspectives that will support the teams across both properties in delivering thoughtful service, strengthening operational standards and creating memorable stays that reflect each brand's individual character.

Jude's hospitality career began in the early 1980s in housekeeping, laying the foundation for decades of growth into resort leadership. His experience spans Villa Ocean View, Hotel Sigiriya and Hibiscus Hotel, followed by his role as Executive Housekeeper at Hotel Serendib in Bentota, where he strengthened his operational expertise and people management skills.

In 2009, a cross-exposure placement at Anantara Hua Hin Resort in Thailand, facilitated by Serendib Leisure Management, broadened his understanding of international luxury hospitality and Anantara's service culture. He later assumed wider management responsibilities at Club Hotel Dolphin before joining Avani Kalutara Resort as Resident Manager and progressing to Resort Manager.

His promotion to Complex Resort Manager recognises a career shaped by perseverance, continuous learning and a commitment to people, bringing extensive operational knowledge and thoughtful.

Ashane began his career as a Front Office Trainee at Cinnamon Red Colombo, gaining an understanding of guest service before moving into sales. Over more than eight years with Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts, he progressed through sales and commercial roles across city and resort properties. His final position with the group was Senior Manager – Sales at Cinnamon Bentota Beach, where he contributed to the resort's transition into Cinnamon's luxury Signature Selection.

In March 2025, Ashane joined Minor Hotels Sri Lanka as Cluster Assistant Director of Sales, overseeing meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions (MICE), leisure and corporate business across the Sri Lankan portfolio. His responsibilities spanned corporate accounts, weddings, group business and destination sales, further developing his understanding of how commercial strategy translates into guest expectations and hotel performance.

Appointed Complex Director of Operations in September 2026, Ashane now brings that commercial perspective to the delivery of the guest experience across both Kalutara resorts. The move builds on his front office beginnings, connecting his knowledge of markets and client needs with the daily work of resort teams.

LocalFlow Sets a New Standard for DMC Operations in Sri Lanka

TTA BULLETIN

Homegrown platform built by an operator brings speed, security and simplicity to the travel trade

For decades, Destination Management Companies across Sri Lanka have relied on spreadsheets, email chains and WhatsApp threads to manage complex itineraries, supplier rates and client communication. LocalFlow, a new operations platform built in Sri Lanka for DMCs and tour operators, aims to change that.

LocalFlow's strongest advantage is where it comes from. It was not designed by outsiders looking in. It was shaped by co-founder Nalinda Perera, whose 20 years in DMC operations gave him first-hand knowledge of the daily pressures operators face. The result is a platform that reflects how the industry actually works.

A complete tour in under 20 minutes
LocalFlow brings the full tour lifecycle into one platform: route planning, itinerary building, costing, quotation, invoicing and vouchers. Tasks that once took hours across multiple tools can now be completed in under 20 minutes, so operators can respond to enquiries faster and convert more business.

"Having run a DMC for two decades, I know how much time operators lose to manual work. LocalFlow gives that time back, so teams can focus on what matters most: creating great experiences for their clients" said Nalinda Perera – CEO

One link, one live itinerary, one live quote
Operators can share a live itinerary and live quotation together through a single link. Clients and agents always see the latest version, which removes version confusion and creates a more professional client experience.

Security that puts operators first
DMCs hold years of valuable client and supplier data, and LocalFlow treats its protection as a priority. The platform runs on SOC 2 Type II and ISO 27001 certified infrastructure, with industry-standard encryption both in storage and in transit. Every plan includes full data export rights, because a DMC's data belongs to the DMC.

Accessible to operators of every size
Advanced operations software has traditionally been out of reach for smaller businesses. LocalFlow changes this with plans starting at USD 29 per month and a 30-day free trial, making it accessible to boutique operators and established DMCs alike.

LocalFlow is already in use with paying pilot operators in Sri Lanka and Bali, and is now open to DMCs and tour operators across South and Southeast Asia.


Nalinda Perera


Aloka G[illegible]ekara


Dharmesh Unnithan

Antyra Solutions Wins Gold at SLIM DIGIS 2.6 for High-Performance Jetwing Hotels Campaign

TTA BULLETIN



Antyra Solutions won Gold in the Performance Marketing category at the recently concluded SLIM DIGIS 2.6 for its holistic performance marketing campaign for Jetwing Hotels, securing top honours in a highly competitive category featuring some of Sri Lanka's biggest brands.

The achievement highlights the growing importance of performance-led digital marketing in driving measurable business outcomes, demonstrating how strategic campaign execution can translate digital advertising investment into substantial revenue while improving customer acquisition efficiency.

The same Jetwing Hotels campaign executed by Antyra also secured two Bronze awards, in the Travel, Leisure and Hospitality category and the SEO/SEM category, recognising its effectiveness across multiple dimensions of digital marketing.

The award-winning campaign supported the launch of Jetwing Hotels' new Luxury Reserves Collection, using Google Ads to introduce the collection to international audiences, unlock revenue from new markets and deliver a high return on advertising investment.

The campaign generated a return on ad spend (ROAS) exceeding 15:1, producing more than US$500,000 in revenue within a few months. It also achieved a room acquisition cost equivalent to just 6.7% of the room cost, compared with the industry benchmark cited for online travel agency (OTA) bookings of approx. 20%.

These results demonstrate the commercial potential of a data-driven performance marketing strategy, particularly in the hospitality sector, where balancing revenue growth with distribution and acquisition costs is critical to profitability.

Commenting on the achievement, Niranka T. Perera, Chairman and CEO of Antyra Solutions, said, "Digital marketing is at its most powerful when it moves beyond visibility to become a genuine driver of business growth. For us, that means understanding the business priorities of our clients and building strategies that deliver. This recognition is an encouraging validation of that philosophy, and of the value that a strong client-agency partnership can create."

The grand finale of SLIM DIGIS 2.6 brought together Sri Lanka's digital marketing fraternity to recognise outstanding brands, agencies, campaigns and professionals. With more than 550 entries evaluated by a panel of over 70 industry experts, this edition was among the competition's most challenging, with only 11 Gold awards presented.

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Arabian Travel Market 2027 announces 'Travel without boundaries' theme as experiences reshape traveller demand

TTA BULLETIN

Arabian Travel Market (ATM) has announced its 2027 theme, Travel without boundaries: Shaping global travel through experience, reflecting how travellers' interests, passions and expectations are reshaping where, why and how people travel, while also creating business opportunities across the tourism industry.

Taking place from 3–6 May 2027 at Dubai World Trade Centre (DWTC), ATM 2027 will explore how destinations and businesses can respond to these changing motivations by developing experiences that attract visitors, encourage spending, and create lasting value for local communities.

According to the ATM Travel Trends Report 2026, produced in association with Tourism Economics, an Oxford Economics company, 56% of consumers are more interested in exploring new destinations than they were two years ago, rising to 68% among prospective visitors to the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia (MENASA). 50% report greater interest in sampling local food and drink, while 40% are more interested in meeting local people.



The report identifies a shift towards journeys built around specific passions, with travellers choosing an experience first and arranging the logistics around it. Culture, gastronomy, adventure, wellness, music, and sport are increasingly influencing where people travel, while 30% of consumers report greater interest in event-related travel than two years ago.

For tourism businesses, this places greater emphasis on the distinctiveness of their offering and how it contributes to the wider journey, creating new revenue opportunities through experience packages, additional services and partnerships with local providers. A restaurant can become a reason to visit a city, a sporting event can introduce a destination to a new audience, and a hotel can help visitors explore local culture.

Danielle Curtis, Regional Portfolio Director – UAE, RX Global, said: "Travellers are looking more closely at what a journey allows them to experience, whether that is discovering a culture, pursuing a passion or sharing something memorable with the people around them. For destinations and businesses, the opportunity is to understand those motivations and build an offering that gives people a compelling reason to visit.

"'Travel without boundaries' reflects how these opportunities extend across the industry. The same journey can combine business and leisure, wellness and adventure, or premium experiences and everyday value. Through ATM 2027, we want to explore what businesses can create together when they look beyond traditional categories and consider the experience as a whole."

The theme will be developed through four pillars: Experience without boundaries, Opportunity without boundaries, Innovation without boundaries and Possibility without boundaries. Together, they will examine how changing traveller motivations influence tourism products, where new markets and commercial opportunities are emerging, how technology can improve the journey, and what collaboration across sectors makes possible.

Innovation will remain central to the exhibition offering, with an emphasis on how technology supports more personalised and intuitive travel experiences. The report highlights AI's growing influence on travel planning alongside the continued value of human expertise, local guides, hosts and communities. This will be highlighted with the return of ATM Travel Tech, the co-located event showcasing the technologies and innovators redefining the travel experience.

The theme also reflects a positive longer-term outlook for tourism. The research forecasts international arrivals to grow by 8% worldwide and 17% across MENASA in 2027, as travel recovers after 2026 disruptions. Worldwide visitor nights, including domestic and international travel, are projected to exceed 29 billion by 2030, with spending within destinations reaching US$10 trillion.

The Global Stage and Future Stage will host key discussions on these emerging trends, while the Experience Hub will return, providing a platform for peer-to-peer roundtables, specialised industry discussions and networking.

ATM 2027 will examine how demand for distinctive experiences is reshaping tourism products and investment priorities, bringing destinations and travel businesses together to discuss changing traveller expectations and opportunities across established and emerging markets.

Now in its 34th year, Arabian Travel Market (ATM) is the leading global platform driving growth and innovation across every sector of the travel and tourism industry. Held annually in Dubai – the gateway to global travel and tourism with its unmatched connectivity – ATM is where the energy of opportunity comes to life.

ITB Asia 2026: Human-Centred Travel Takes Centre Stage in Singapore

TTA BULLETIN



A new Experience Zone, curated Guided Tours and a 184% expansion of MICE Show Asia defined the 19th edition of Asia-Pacific's largest travel trade show

Under the theme "Experiences in Motion: Human-Centred Design in Travel & Tourism", ITB Asia 2026 gathered the international travel industry at the Sands Expo & Convention Centre, Marina Bay Sands, from 21 to 23 October. Organised by Messe Berlin Asia Pacific, Asia-Pacific's largest 3-in-1 travel trade show ran alongside MICE Show Asia and Travel Tech Asia. It brought destinations, hospitality groups, travel businesses and technology innovators together for three days of business and knowledge exchange.

The event drew more than 1,000 exhibiting brands, over 1,500 qualified buyers and more than 18,000 participants. Some 60,000 targeted business appointments connected buyers with relevant exhibitors. Over 80% of exhibitors represented international markets across Asia-Pacific, Europe, the Americas, Africa and the Middle East.

Guest of Honour Ms Gan Siow Huang, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs and Energy, Trade and Industry, graced the opening ceremony, underlining Singapore's role as a key meeting point for the global travel trade. Opening keynote speakers Lovrenc Kessler of Simon-Kucher and Brett Henry of WebBeds addressed the global travel outlook and competition in the age of AI.

"Travel is ultimately about people: the experiences they seek, the connections they make and the places that stay with them," said Darren Seah, Executive Director, Messe Berlin APAC. "With Experience Zones and Guided Tours, a significantly expanded MICE Show Asia and a strong focus on technology, this year's event reflects an industry that is evolving fast but remains firmly centred on human needs. Our role is to create the connections that help the industry move forward."

Designing travel around people

The new Experience Zone gave companies offering travel experiences, activities and attractions a dedicated space to meet buyers looking for products that match changing traveller preferences. It also housed the Experience Pavilion by Tripadvisor, which showcased participating brands and distinctive experiences.

For the first time, participants could join complimentary curated Guided Tours of the exhibition, supported by Official Guided Tour Partner Woopa Group. A new invitation-only Association Executive Networking Session created space for peer-to-peer exchange and collaboration across the travel and MICE industries.

Cultural showcases from Indonesia, Japan, Kazakhstan and China, along with Apsara dance, acrobatics and performances supported by Official Cultural Heritage Partner Ancient Sound of Dunhuang, celebrated the role of heritage in creating distinctive travel experiences.

MICE Show Asia grows by 184%

MICE Show Asia reached a milestone, with exhibition space up 184% on 2025, reflecting rising demand for a dedicated platform linking international suppliers with MICE and corporate travel buyers. More than 200 MICE buyers attended. Among them were American Express Global Business Travel, ConferenceDirect, FCM Meetings & Events, HelmsBriscoe, Medical Meetings and TMA Australia, alongside associations such as the European Society for Medical Oncology, SKAL International, World Aquaculture Society and World Psychiatric Association.

Exhibitors including Firenze Fiera, Sapporo Convention Bureau, Sri Lanka Convention Bureau, South African Tourism, Hotel Tentrem and Sun PhuQuoc Airways engaged directly with procurement decision-makers.

A truly international marketplace

Tourism organisations present included the Hong Kong Tourism Board, German National Tourist Board, Malta Tourism Authority, Singapore Tourism Board, Tourism Authority of Thailand, Tourism Fiji, Turespaña, PROMPERU, Visit Finland and Visit Norway. Radisson Hotel Group, Pan Pacific Hotels Group, Wyndham Hotels & Resorts, Resorts World Sentosa, Mandai Wildlife Group, EVA Airways and Agoda were among the wider line-up.

At Travel Tech Asia, Airbnb, DerbySoft, Trip.com Group, Juniper Travel Technology, China Mobile International and others presented solutions in distribution, connectivity and customer engagement, with a strong focus on artificial intelligence and automation.

The forces shaping travel's future

The conference programme delivered 4,500 minutes of content across more than 100 sessions in three theatres, with 160 speakers from organisations including Airbnb, Access Hospitality, Disney Cruise Line, Jack Morton, Sabre and Trip.Biz. The Knowledge Theatre examined market intelligence and destination development, the MICE Show Asia Theatre focused on meetings, incentives and business events, and the Travel Tech Asia Theatre explored AI and emerging innovation.

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AI VISIBILITY REPORT FOR SRI LANKA HOTELS

IBTM Ignite returns to Barcelona to fuel the next wave of events innovation

TTA BULLETIN


Claire Grecian


Gianluca Sordano


Shelby Crisan

Thirty start-ups, more than 15 investors and one show floor: IBTM World 2026 gives emerging event-tech founders a direct route to capital and connections

IBTM Ignite, the programme linking investors with the next generation of meetings and events businesses, returns to IBTM World from 17 to 19 November 2026 at Fira Gran Via, Barcelona. Delivered with growth consultancy and M&A specialist allpoints, Ignite combines investment-readiness support, live pitching and structured introductions. It is designed to move promising ideas towards real commercial opportunity.

The programme's track record speaks for itself. Participating businesses have so far secured £3.5 million in investment. This year, 30 qualified start-ups make up the cohort. TTA spoke to two of them about what the platform means for their growth.

Fixing what's behind the scenes

Both founders say the industry's operational side has not kept pace with its creative ambition.

"The events industry is changing quickly, but the way corporate events are planned and delivered has not changed at the same pace," says Gianluca Sordano, CEO and Co-Founder of Always Friday. His company combines technology, AI and event expertise so that organising a corporate event can feel "as simple and fast as using any other modern service."

Clients can use Always Friday as a self-service platform or hand the full event to its team. Either way, AI handles much of the research, request management and coordination. The company also works with venues, helping them find suitable opportunities and benefit from requests they cannot take on themselves.

Shelby Crisan, Founder of KNO Events, draws on 20 years of event production experience. "We've become incredibly sophisticated in what we create for attendees, but behind the scenes, teams are still running multimillion-dollar events with spreadsheets, email chains and systems that don't talk to each other," she says.

KNO Events is building the infrastructure that sits beneath an event, bringing budgets, room blocks, F&B, contracted spaces and vendor data into one intelligent view. Shelby likens it to "adding a teammate who knows every detail of every event."

Opening doors faster

IBTM World will be Always Friday's first public demonstration. For Gianluca, the value lies in access. "It is difficult for a young company to build relationships across an established industry from scratch," he says. "Programmes like Ignite shorten that distance."

Shelby agrees that the connections matter as much as the capital. "One introduction can lead to a customer, partnership, investor or an entirely new opportunity," she says. "If we want more innovation in events, we can't just celebrate new ideas once they're successful, we have to create opportunities for early ideas to become successful."

Capital with experience behind it

More than 15 investors are expected to attend. Gianluca notes that the right backers bring more than funding, particularly in a complex market. "Investors who understand technology, marketplaces and service businesses can help us make better decisions as we scale."

For Shelby, investment changes the pace of decision-making. "Investment can turn some of those 'or' decisions into 'and'," she says.

Among the investors is Claire Grecian, Founder and CEO of Circle Agency. "Our industry thrives on fresh thinking, and the best new ideas deserve a real route to capital, mentorship and profile," she says. She expects AI to play a major part in smarter planning and more personalised, accessible events, "but always in service of why we're there in the first place: being together, in person."

Pitching on the Future Stage

Selected founders will receive investment-readiness training before pitching live on IBTM World's Future Stage, with investors and audiences responding in real time.

"Preparing the pitch forces us to be very clear about the problem we are solving, why the timing is right and what we have learned from our customers so far," says Gianluca. Shelby welcomes the challenge of having experts test "the bigger vision for KNO Events" before taking it straight to investors.

Where the industry meets

For both founders, IBTM World offers a rare meeting point. It brings together corporate buyers, venues, agencies, suppliers and technology firms, with investors now part of the conversation. As Shelby puts it, Ignite connects the people who experience the problem, those building solutions and those who can help them scale.

Galle Face Hotel: A Year of Gold for the Grand Old Dame

TTA BULLETIN

From an industry jury in the Maldives to the votes of travellers worldwide, Colombo's 162-year-old landmark has received two major honours. Both reward the same quality: heritage that is still very much alive.

Some hotels earn awards. A few become part of the story of a nation. For 162 years, Galle Face Hotel has been both. This season, Sri Lanka's best-loved heritage address has two more accolades: Gold for Best Heritage Hotel at the South Asian Travel Awards (SATA), and No. 6 in the Rest of Asia category of the Condé Nast Traveller Readers' Choice Awards 2026, with a score of 92.50.

One award comes from the industry. The other comes from the guests themselves. Together they give the Grand Old Dame of Colombo a rare double endorsement.

The SATA Gold, presented at a ceremony in the Maldives, marks the first time Galle Face Hotel has taken the top honour in the Best Heritage Hotel category. It is a significant milestone for a property whose history goes back to 1864.

The category recognises hotels that protect their historic legacy while keeping up the standards of service, authenticity and character expected of a true heritage destination. For Galle Face, this balance has always been central. It must remain faithful to the traditions that make it unique while meeting the expectations of today's discerning traveller.

The Condé Nast Traveller Readers' Choice Awards rank among the most respected honours in global travel because they are decided by travellers who have experienced these properties first-hand. A score of 92.50 places Galle Face Hotel among the most admired stays in the region. It is a vote of confidence from the people who know it best.

"Being recognised by both the industry and our guests is a meaningful affirmation of the experience we strive to deliver every day at our hotel-in-a-garden," the hotel said.

Set on Colombo's Galle Face Green and facing the Indian Ocean, the hotel is one of the most recognisable historic hotels in South Asia. For generations it has welcomed royalty, statesmen, writers and travellers from around the world. It has become a symbol of Sri Lankan hospitality, known for timeless luxury, distinctive character and a legacy that keeps evolving without losing its roots.

At Galle Face, heritage is not only preserved in colonnades and corridors or recorded in guestbooks. It lives on through its people, its service and the warm sense of belonging that guests call the Galle Face Spirit.

The hotel was quick to stress that neither award was won alone. It credited Chairman Sanjeev Gardiner, together with the ownership and leadership team, for his stewardship, vision and commitment to protecting the institution for future generations. It thanked its guests for their loyalty and for sharing their experiences, and its partners for their continued collaboration and support.

Above all, the hotel dedicated both achievements to its team. That includes front office and housekeeping, the culinary and food and beverage teams, engineering, security and every department behind the scenes. "This belongs to you," the hotel told its staff. "You are the custodians of our legacy and the people who turn our heritage into memorable experiences."

The hotel summed it up in four words: Chairman. Guests. Partners. Team.

Travellers increasingly want experiences rooted in culture, history and a sense of place. In that climate, the two awards show the lasting value of heritage hospitality and strengthen Sri Lanka's standing as a destination of distinction.

For the Grand Old Dame, the celebrations are well earned, but the mission stays the same: honour the past, empower its people and create meaningful experiences for the generations still to walk through its doors. After 162 years, Galle Face Hotel continues to welcome the world with its timeless promise: Heritage with Heart.



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Two Decades, One Vision: Kahanda Kanda Marks its 20th Anniversary

Dinushka Chandrasena

As Kahanda Kanda celebrates two decades on its hillside above Koggala Lake, founder George Cooper talks to Travel Talk Asia about a Javanese ceiling, the school of hard knocks, and why the world should be selling Sri Lanka all year round.

George Cooper first set foot on the land that would become Kahanda Kanda 27 years ago. What he found was hardly the stuff of glossy brochures: ten acres of run-down estate, much of it under tea, the rest given over to coconut palms and a few grazing cattle. There was a single, very old and very mouldy bungalow. The spot where the heart of the hotel now stands was scrub, bush and trees.

Yet something about the place held him. "There was a serenity and sense of calm that resonated," he recalls. "There were fish eagles flying overhead and views to Koggala Lake."

The trees, above all, shaped what came next. Cooper was adamant that as many of the estate's mature trees as possible should survive the build. The result is the hotel's signature layout: not one large block but a scattering of separate buildings set among the canopy, each with its own sense of privacy and place.

Two decades on, the arrival experience is still the moment he cares about most. "When guests walk up the steps, I want them not only to be wowed by what they see, but to feel supremely welcome, and that they have chosen the right hotel for them."

Ask Cooper to name one object that tells the Kahanda Kanda story, and he hesitates, then settles on a whole building: Dubu, the Plantation Honeymoon Villa.

Dubu began life as a traditional Joglo house in Java. Cooper came across it in Bali, on the road to Ubud, and knew at once he had to have it. The reason was its ceiling: an extraordinary, elaborately carved timber canopy. He bought the structure, shipped it to Sri Lanka and rebuilt it on the estate. Today, guests can lie in bed directly beneath that ceiling. The name is a quiet tribute to where it was found: Dubu is Ubud spelt backwards.

"It is unique in Sri Lanka," he says, "and it has been there since before the hotel opened." In a sense, Dubu is Kahanda Kanda in miniature: a collector's eye, a willingness to go to great lengths for the right piece, and a home for it among the trees.



George Cooper

Few Sri Lankan hoteliers have had an easy two decades, and Kahanda Kanda has weathered every storm the island has faced, from the Easter Sunday attacks to the pandemic and the economic crisis that followed.

Cooper credits what he calls "the School of Knocks" with carrying him through. "Life, professional and personal, is always a bit of a roller coaster," he says. "When the going gets tough and you have to dig deep, it is amazing what resilience and determination can do to keep you going."

His sense of duty is rooted in people. With a payroll of more than 100 across Kahanda Kanda, sister property KK Beach and the KK Boutique in Galle Fort, he sees providing for his team and their families as his responsibility, and one he accepts gladly. "Giving up was never an option," he says. "It was not even considered. You learn to accept the rough with the smooth, and that is life."

Design has always been central to the KK identity, and it draws on a long first career. Before Sri Lanka, Cooper spent more than 30 years as an interior designer in the UK, an experience that taught him flexibility. "There is no single right way when it comes to design," he says, "but there are plenty of wrong ways."

At Kahanda Kanda he set out to bring his English life together with Sri Lankan furniture, artefacts and textiles. The guiding rule is simple: a guest should wake up and know which country they are in. "You can have references of Englishness," he explains, "but there must also be enough of Sri Lanka in the rooms."



The result is a conversation between two cultures rather than a pastiche of either, and Cooper believes that is exactly why it works.

Many of the Kahanda Kanda team have been with the hotel for years. Asked why, Cooper laughs: "I'm a nice guy?" The fuller answer is a set of principles: treat everyone with respect, never ask anyone to do something you would not do yourself, and stay closely involved in the day-to-day running of the hotels.

He credits his father, who was 50 when Cooper was born, with instilling a strong work ethic, and he has long championed what he calls an "apprenticeship" approach to hospitality. Young people, he believes, must learn their craft from the ground up rather than expect to step straight into management.

He is candid about the challenges of recruitment in rural Sri Lanka, where many school leavers have limited spoken English and little early work experience. It is one reason he sees the hotel's role as giving young people a genuine start.

Most of the staff come from the neighbouring villages, and the hotel's links with them run deep. Kahanda Kanda has raised funds for the Sunday School at Tithagala Temple and is now raising money to build toilets for village homes whose owners cannot afford them.

For Cooper, sustainability starts with "keeping our own house in order". Kahanda Kanda runs a no-plastic policy and a recycling programme, and is building a treatment plant for all of its waste water.

"These are all small steps," he says. But the hotel also encourages staff to take these habits home with them, creating what he calls "the ripple effect" through the surrounding villages.

How has the KK guest changed in 20 years? "They have become older!" Cooper jokes. Behind the quip is a remarkable loyalty: around 15 couples return every year, some for up to a month. One couple arrives next February for two months, their seventh such visit.

The guest mix remains broad, from young couples to "silver surfers". What has shifted since Covid is the pace. More travellers now want a slow holiday: longer stays, fewer hotel changes, more time to unwind. Kahanda Kanda's policy of welcoming no children under 12 helps protect the calm Cooper first felt on the land, giving the hotel what he describes as a Zen-like feeling.

As Kahanda Kanda marks its milestone, Cooper's message to tour operators is clear: think of Sri Lanka as an all-year-round destination.

Weather patterns are less predictable than they once were, he notes, and in the south the temperature barely changes through the year. "We probably only have about ten days in the whole year when it rains all day long," he says. Even in the monsoon, a shower of an hour or so is typically followed by sunshine, or there is no rain at all.

Last year Kahanda Kanda opened a new spa building. Cooper is clear that it is not trying to become a wellness resort; it is a boutique hotel with a wellness offering. The next chapter will build on that, with more retreats led by a wide range of practitioners and more wellbeing options for every guest.

Twenty years after a mouldy bungalow and a canopy of old trees, the fish eagles are still overhead. The difference now is a hotel that has learned to grow without losing the calm that started it all.

Kahanda Kanda at a Glance

- **Location: Hillside estate overlooking Koggala Lake, near Galle, southern Sri Lanka**
- **Founder: George Cooper, former UK interior designer**
- **The KK Collection: Kahanda Kanda, KK Beach and the KK Boutique in Galle Fort**
- **Team: More than 100 staff, most from neighbouring villages**
- **Signature stay: Dubu, the Plantation Honeymoon Villa, a Javanese Joglo house with a hand-carved ceiling**
- **Policy: No children under 12**
- **New: Spa building, opened 2025; expanded retreat programme to come**





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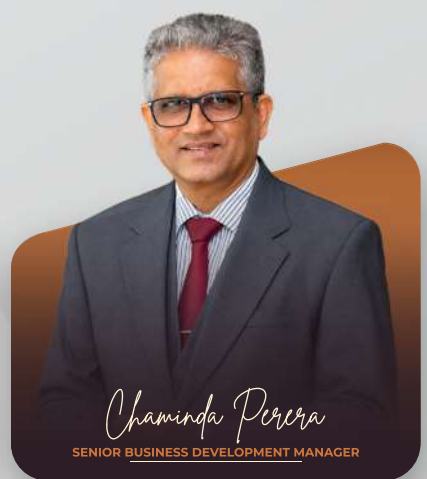
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Mandara Hotels offers travelers Sea, Safari and Tea

TTA BULLETIN

From a palm-fringed bay on the south coast to the leopard country of Yala and a planter's bungalow high in the tea hills, Mandara Hotels & Resorts offers British travellers a rare thing: the whole island, told in three distinct chapters, by one family of hoteliers.

Mandara Hotels sits on a ribbon of golden sand on Weligama Bay, at the point where the Polwathumodara River slips quietly into the Indian Ocean. Coconut palms lean over the beach, the lagoon glows at dusk, and the resort's terraces look out on both. It was one of the pioneering 4 star luxury hotels on this stretch of coast, and it retains the intimate, unhurried feel of those early days.

Rooms are laid out to suit how you travel. Superior Sea View rooms open on to private terraces facing the shore. Ground-floor Superior rooms each come with their own plunge pool, an indulgence couples tend to remember. Families gravitate to the Deluxe Rooms with an indoor Jacuzzi, while the Standard Lagoon View rooms trade the surf for still water and tropical greenery.

Days here follow the rhythm of the sea. Mirissa harbour, ten minutes away, is the island's best-known departure point for whale and dolphin watching, and the resort arranges early-morning excursions. Surfing, snorkelling, kayaking and diving are all close at hand, and lifeguards keep watch over the resort's own swimmers. Back on shore, the Ayurveda Spa draws on centuries-old Sri Lankan therapies to ease sun-tired limbs.

Dining leans into the coast: fresh seafood, crab and lobster, and local curries lifted by the spices the island has traded for centuries, alongside international favourites. Dinner can be taken on the sand, at a themed buffet or a beach BBQ

Beyond the gates, the south coast is a gallery of its own. Galle Fort lies about 40 minutes west, the stilt fishermen of Koggala closer still, and the world's first cinnamon museum is just two kilometres down the road. Coconut Tree Hill, the most photographed viewpoint on the coast, is a ten-minute drive.

Inland and to the east, the coast gives way to scrub jungle, rocky outcrops and the most celebrated wildlife country in Sri Lanka. Mandara Rosen stands on the edge of Kataragama, a sacred town revered by Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims alike, and within easy reach of Yala National Park, which has the highest concentration of leopards on the island.



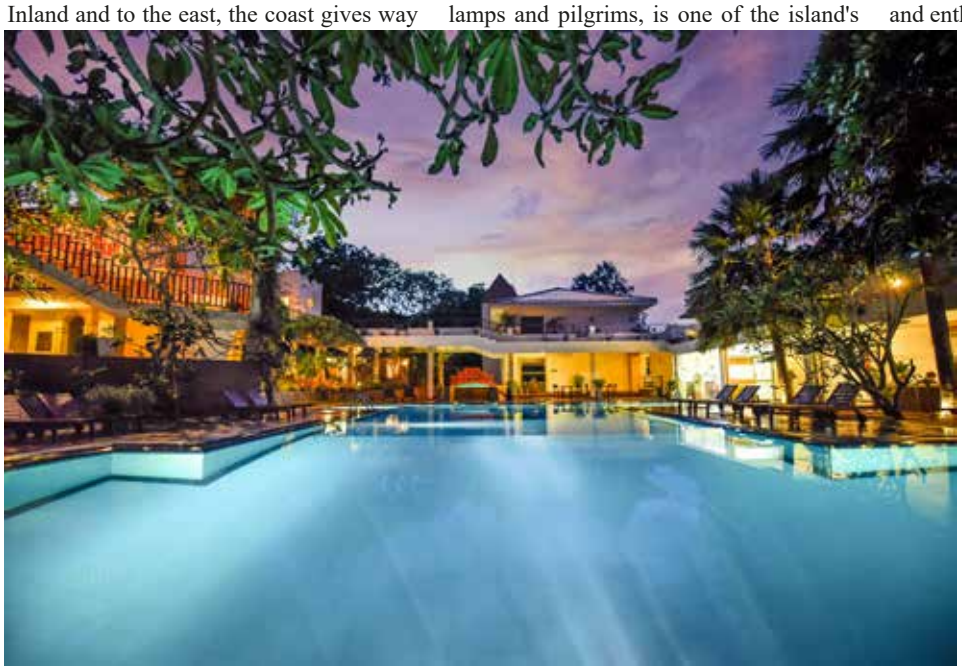
The 60 rooms are spacious and calm. Double and Twin Deluxe rooms each measure some 350 square feet, while the Suites double that, with room for a family of five. The centrepiece is the pool, said to be the first outdoor pool in Sri Lanka with underwater music, a detail that delights children and surprises adults. An Ayurveda spa, gym, billiards and karaoke round out the evenings, and the hotel also offers childcare.

The safari is the main event. Yala's Katagamuwa entrance, for Blocks 1 and 2, is about 20 minutes' drive; the Galge entrance to the quieter Block 5 is a similar distance. Elephant, sloth bear, crocodile and spotted deer share the park with its famous big cats. Bird lovers can add Bundala, a wetland haven of some 200 species, or the lagoons of Kumana.



Kataragama itself is unforgettable. The great Devalaya complex and the white dome of Kiri Vehera are a ten-minute drive, and the evening puja, with its drums, lamps and pilgrims, is one of the island's most moving spectacles. Visitors arriving in July or August may catch the Kataragama Perahera festival. Further afield lie the ancient rock monastery of Situlpawwa, dating to the second century BC, and the vast stupa at Yudaganawa.

The hotel's sustainability work is woven into the stay: solar-heated water, water purification, and an organic farm that supplies the kitchen. Mattala International Airport is approximately 40 minutes away, and enthusiasts may note the Sooriyawewa international cricket stadium is at a similar distance.



The road climbs, the air cools, and the view opens across folded green hills to the plains far below. Mandara Ridge is not a hotel in the conventional sense but a hill-country bungalow, set within its own 100-acre tea estate near Haputale. It is the most personal of the three properties, and for many guests it is the one they talk about longest.

The bungalow keeps things intimate: a handful of rooms looking over a rose garden, a homely dining room serving the estate's own produce, and the option to book the entire house for complete privacy. That makes it ideal for families, small groups of friends, or anyone who has ever dreamed of having a planter's bungalow to themselves for a few days.

The estate is the attraction. Guests can wander self-guided trails through the tea fields, watch tea and coffee being harvested, and visit the organic vegetable garden, coffee garden and spice garden that feed the kitchen. Breakfast eggs come from the estate's own hens. A cooking class with the chef turns that morning's harvest into lunch. Keen-eyed walkers may spot deer, wild boar, hornbills and, on rare occasions, a leopard.

Haputale is also one of the great bases for exploring the hill country. Lipton's Seat, the lookout where the Scottish tea baron Sir Thomas Lipton surveyed his estates, is within reach, as is the Tudor-style Adisham Bungalow, now a Benedictine monastery. Waterfall hunters can choose between Bambarakanda, the island's tallest, about half an hour away, and Diyaluma, the second tallest. Horton Plains and World's End, Ella Rock and the gardens of Nuwara Eliya make memorable day trips, and the nearby stations of Idalgashinna and Ohiya sit on one of the world's most scenic railway lines.

The south coast's peak season runs from November to April, with calm seas and long sunny days, which maps neatly on to the British winter and the Easter holidays. The hill country is at its clearest from December to April too.

The second is familiarity with a twist. British readers will find echoes of home everywhere in the hills, from Nuwara Eliya's "Little England" gardens to Lipton's Seat and colonial bungalows built by planters who named their homes after English villages. Yet the experience is entirely Sri Lankan: Ayurvedic rituals, temple drums at Kataragama, and curries scented with cinnamon grown a few miles from the beach.

The third is ease. One group, one standard of welcome and one booking conversation covers beach, safari and hills, and the drives between them are part of the pleasure.

Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts introduces Cinnamon DISCOVERY – Dine with D$, a new dining rewards programme for Colombo

TTA BULLETIN

Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts has introduced Cinnamon DISCOVERY – Dine with DISCOVERY Dollars (D$), a new dining rewards programme launching across Cinnamon Grand Colombo, Cinnamon Lakeside Colombo, Cinnamon Red Colombo, and select outlets at City of Dreams Sri Lanka, from 1st October 2026.

For years, Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts has been part of how Colombo eats out, from long lunches to late dinners to 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 have already chosen to have with the group, at the tables they already know well.

The programme covers some of the city's most familiar dining rooms and bars. At Cinnamon Grand Colombo, that includes The London Grill, one of Colombo's oldest fine dining establishments, alongside Plates, The Lagoon, and Nuga Gama, as well as Breeze Bar and Cheers Pub. At Cinnamon Lakeside Colombo, guests can dine at The Dining Room and Royal Thai, or settle in at ColomBar and The Library. Cinnamon Red Colombo pairs all-day dining at Flavoured with evenings at Stirred and the rooftop Cloud Red. At City of Dreams Sri Lanka, the programme extends to select outlets, among them Quizine, Staten Bar & Grill, Bistro Des Marees, Yoroko, Sapphire Dragon, Indiya, Cloud Wine, and Gatz.

Signing up takes little more than a QR code, scanned at any participating restaurant or bar, and DISCOVERY Dollars begin accruing from a guest's very first visit. Once earned, they can be spent with equal ease at any other outlet in the programme. Membership itself is structured around four tiers, set by annual spend. Silver members receive a 15% benefit on food and beverages, rising to 20% at Gold, 25% at Platinum, and 30% at Titanium.


Kamal Munasinghe


Hiran Singhawansa

"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 introduction of Dine with DISCOVERY Dollars (D$) forms part of Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts' wider focus on strengthening its position within Colombo's dining landscape and building a community around food, experiences and discovery.

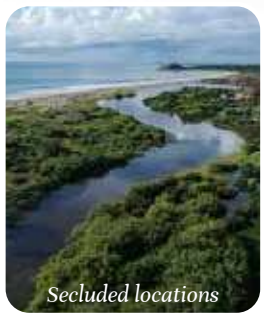
The programme is supported by Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts' membership of Global Hotel Alliance (GHA), through GHA DISCOVERY, the global loyalty programme of the alliance. Cinnamon joined GHA in 2025, bringing its portfolio of hotels and resorts in Sri Lanka and the Maldives into a global network of independent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

Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts is Sri Lanka's leading hospitality brand, operating a diverse portfolio of city hotels and resorts across Sri Lanka and the Maldives. A member of John Keells Holdings PLC, one of Sri Lanka's largest listed conglomerates, Cinnamon is recognised for its design led properties, destination driven experiences, and warm Sri Lankan hospitality. Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts features four city properties in Colombo, nine resort properties across Sri Lanka, and four resorts in the Maldives, with several new projects in development. Its luxury portfolio includes the landmark US$1.2 billion Cinnamon Life at City of Dreams, which opened in 2025.

Cinnamon DISCOVERY is the brand's loyalty programme, offered in partnership with the Global Hotel Alliance (GHA), the world's largest alliance of independent hotel brands, and is part of the GHA DISCOVERY loyalty platform.

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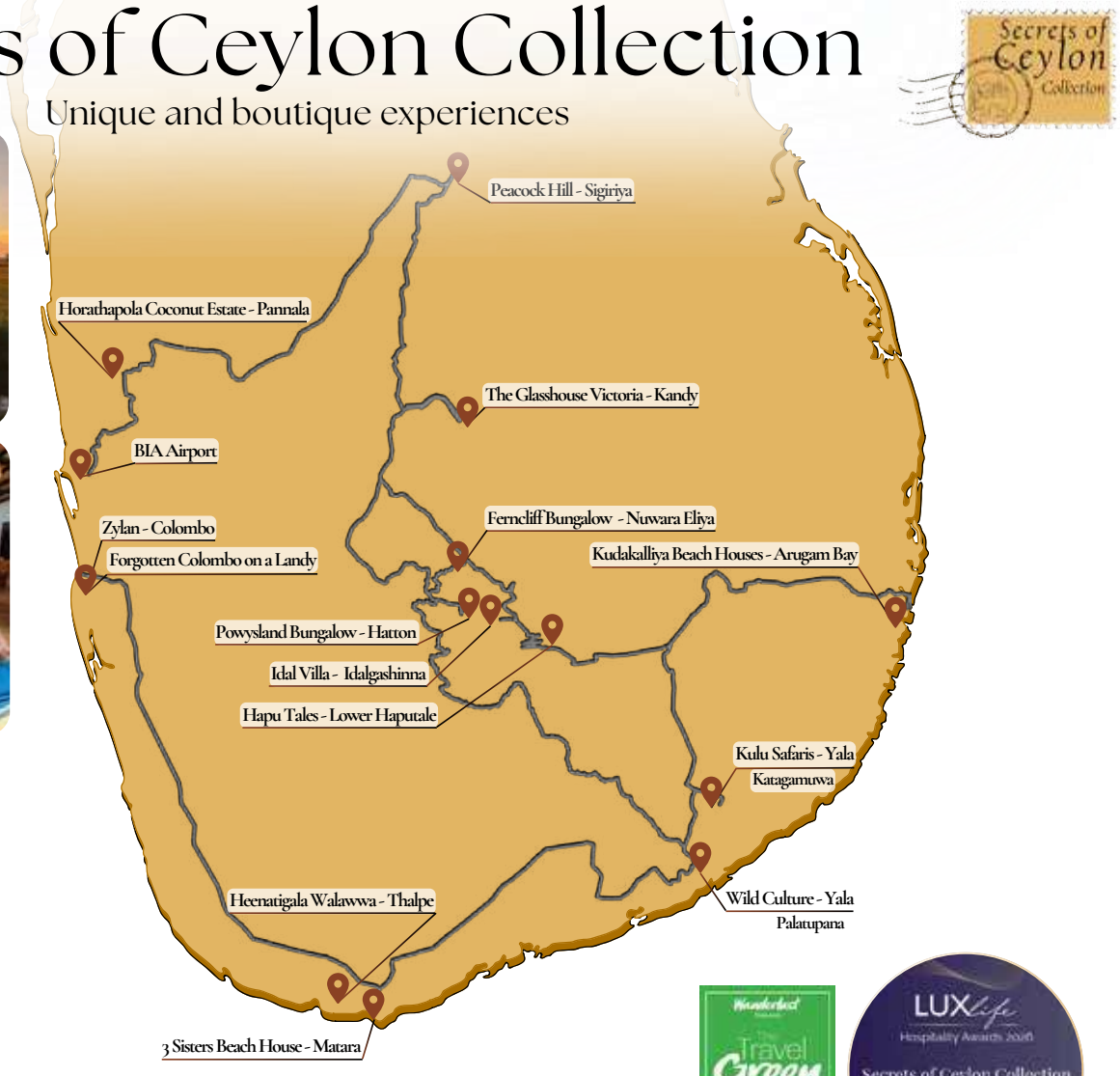
Horathapola - Coconut Estate tour

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Thema Collection's Deewara: Where Sri Lanka's Southern Coast Tells Its Story

TTA BULLETIN

Thema Collection's newest retreat, Deewara, restores a cluster of historic homes on the golden sands of Mawella near Tangalle. Founder and Chairman Chandra Wickramasinghe tells Travel Talk why the group's 17th property is about far more than a place to stay.

On Sri Lanka's southern coast, before the sun is fully up, the fishermen of Mawella haul their seine nets in from the surf. It is a scene that has played out for generations. Now it sets the tone for one of the island's most characterful new openings.

Deewara, which means fishing and the fishing community in Sinhala, is a boutique coastal retreat of just 11 rooms. It sits within a group of restored stately homes, framed by tropical gardens, open courtyards and the beach beyond.

"We wanted a name that reflected the property's connection to the sea and the traditional coastal way of life," says Chandra Wickramasinghe, Founder and Chairman of Thema Collection. "Deewara brings together the charm of restored historic homes and the relaxed atmosphere of the southern coast, offering guests an authentic Sri Lankan experience."

Deewara takes its cues from the traditional Sri Lankan home: gardens, courtyards, antiques and a close bond with the landscape. The brief was never to build something new, but to give old houses a second life.

"We wanted to preserve the original character of the property while introducing the comforts and facilities expected by today's travellers," Wickramasinghe explains. "The main challenge was finding the right balance between preserving its heritage and ensuring modern comfort. Our aim was to retain its charm and character rather than make it feel like a conventional boutique hotel."



For Wickramasinghe, Deewara closes a circle. Maalu Maalu Resort & Spa in Pasikuda, the group's first property, was built around the fishing communities of the east coast. It was also the first hotel to rise on that coast after the end of Sri Lanka's 30-year war.

"At Maalu Maalu, the fishing community concept celebrates the traditional livelihoods and coastal heritage of the eastern coast," he says. "Deewara continues this approach in the south, drawing inspiration from the region's fishing heritage and way of life."

The 2022 rebrand from Theme Resorts and Spas to Thema Collection made that philosophy the brand itself. "It reflected our vision of bringing together properties with distinct identities and experiences," he says. "Our focus is on developing properties that reflect their destinations and communities, offering guests more than just a place to stay. Deewara is a natural extension of that vision."

For British and European travellers escaping the northern winter, the pitch is simple. "Sri Lanka is an attractive winter destination for travellers seeking sunshine, nature and culture," says Wickramasinghe. "Deewara's main attraction is the golden sands of Mawella Beach, complemented by beachfront dining, a swimming pool and an Ayurvedic spa."



Beyond the property, the south coast opens up. Guests can drift to the surf town of Hiriketiya, explore Dikwella and Tangalle, or join the night-time turtle watch at Rekawa. Seine-net fishing on Mawella Beach, mangrove trails and village encounters bring guests closer to local life. The cultural sites inland are equally rewarding, from the cave temples of Mulkirigala Rock Temple to the giant seated Buddha at Wewurukannala Rajamaha Viharaya.

The UK remains an important market for Thema Collection, and the group arrives at World Travel Market with a clear message for the trade. "At WTM, we aim to strengthen relationships with travel trade partners and showcase how our properties can be combined to create memorable journeys across Sri Lanka," Wickramasinghe says.

He sketches the kind of circuit the collection makes possible:

- Culture: the Cultural Triangle from Aliya Resort and Spa
- Wildlife: safaris and wilderness at Gal Oya
- Wellness: dedicated Ayurveda at Ayurvie Sigiriya and Ayurvie Weligama
- Tea heritage: a leaf-to-cup experience at Tea & Experience Factory
- Coast: the final, unhurried stretch on the beach at Deewara

"These combinations allow travellers to experience Sri Lanka's coast, wildlife, culture, wellness and tea heritage in one journey," he says.

Wickramasinghe is clear that a hotel must earn its place in a community. "We believe tourism should create value for the communities that make each destination special," he says.

At Deewara, that means local employment, local suppliers where possible, and helping guests understand Mawella's fishing heritage. It also means responsible water and energy use, waste reduction and protecting the natural surroundings. These efforts sit within Thema Collection's wider programme, which includes biodiversity conservation, cutting single-use plastics and linen reuse.

After decades in the industry, Wickramasinghe sees Sri Lanka's diversity as its greatest asset. "Sri Lanka has a great deal to offer, from beaches and wildlife to ancient heritage, tea country and wellness experiences," he says. "The opportunity for the industry is to help visitors discover this diversity through quality experiences across the island."

For Deewara, he sees opportunities in the UK and wider Europe, alongside other markets drawn to coastal holidays and authentic experiences. His message to travellers is an invitation.

"Explore beyond the familiar highlights, meet local communities and experience the different facets of Sri Lankan hospitality," he says. "With its diversity, natural beauty and warm hospitality, Sri Lanka has something special to offer every traveller."







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ONYX at 60: Honouring the Past, Shaping the Future

Dinushka Chandrasena

As ONYX Hospitality Group marks six decades, Vice President – Commercial Marketing Pornthip Paothong tells Travel Talk Asia why one evening could never be enough, how Thai creativity is being woven into the guest journey, and where Sri Lanka fits into the group's next chapter.

Few hospitality companies in Asia can say they have grown up alongside the region's travel story. ONYX Hospitality Group can. Founded in Thailand six decades ago, the Bangkok-headquartered group has evolved into a multi-brand hotel management company, home to Amari, OZO and Shama, with a presence that now reaches well beyond its home market.

This year, ONYX marks its 60th anniversary. On a recent visit to Bangkok, Travel Talk Asia sat down with Khun Pornthip Paothong, known to many in the industry simply as Khun Sa -Vice President Commercial Marketing, to talk about what the milestone means and where the group is heading next.

For Khun Sa, the anniversary is about people first. “Sixty years is more than a corporate milestone,” she says. “It represents six decades of people, partnerships and shared experiences. It is a moment to honour those who have shaped ONYX Hospitality Group, from our team members and hotel owners to our partners and the millions of guests who have stayed with us over the years.”

The group has chosen ‘Legacy in Motion’ as its anniversary theme, a phrase she says captures a company that is proud of its past but not standing still. “We are proud of our heritage, and we continue to evolve our brands, experiences and capabilities for the future. That spirit also guides our vision to be the best medium-sized hospitality management company in Asia-Pacific.”

So why stretch the celebrations across a full year rather than marking the occasion with a single gala? “Sixty years cannot be meaningfully captured in one evening,” she explains. Instead, ONYX is rolling out guest experiences, brand initiatives, partnerships and activities across its portfolio throughout the year. “This gives guests, colleagues, owners and communities in different markets the opportunity to take part and experience ‘More of What You Love’ in their own way.”


Pornthip Paothong

Thai heritage, told in a contemporary voice

A central thread of the anniversary year is a series of collaborations with Thai partners. Khun Sa is clear that authenticity, for ONYX, does not mean freezing tradition in place. “Our approach is rooted in Thai hospitality, shaped by a global perspective and brought to life with a regional focus,” she says. “For us, Thai heritage is not about presenting tradition in a fixed way. It is about expressing the warmth, generosity and creativity that make people feel genuinely welcome, in ways that resonate with guests today.”

Partners were chosen because they share those values and bring their own modern reading of Thai creativity and lifestyle. Each collaboration, she notes, had to connect naturally with the group's brands and add something real to the guest experience.

The result spans design, dining, local discovery, fashion, wellbeing and everyday convenience. “The collaborations feel authentic because they are thoughtfully integrated into moments throughout the guest journey,” she says. “They also introduce contemporary Thai creativity to international travellers in a way that feels accessible and relevant to their interests.”

Timeless values for today's traveller

How does a 60-year-old company keep Thai hospitality fresh? By separating what never changes from what must. “The essence of Thai hospitality remains timeless: warmth, attentiveness and generosity of spirit,” Khun Sa says. “What continues to evolve is how we express it for today's traveller.”

She points to shifting guest priorities - personalisation, cultural connection, convenience and meaningful experiences. ONYX's task, in her words, is “to preserve the human touch while strengthening it through contemporary design, technology, local knowledge and a deeper understanding of guest preferences.”

That thinking shows up across the group's three core brands:

- Amari is being elevated through more purposeful experiences and deeper local discovery.
- OZO delivers energetic, efficient stays for travellers who want to make the most of every destination.
- Shama carries its ‘A Joy of Living’ philosophy into extended-stay communities across Asia.

Guests can expect more experiences, partnerships and brand initiatives under the ‘More of What You Love’ banner as the anniversary year unfolds. For hotel owners and industry partners, Khun Sa frames the milestone as a statement of long-term intent: to grow responsibly across Asia-Pacific. “Our Thai roots give us a distinctive hospitality philosophy; our global perspective helps us understand changing guest expectations; and our regional focus helps us apply both in ways that make sense for each market.”

Pegasus Reef Hotel Celebrates 60 Years of Hospitality Excellence

TTA BULLETIN

Six decades of history, heritage, and heartfelt hospitality - Pegasus Reef Hotel proudly celebrates 60 remarkable years of welcoming guests and creating lasting memories. As one of Colombo’s pioneering five-star hotels, Pegasus Reef has journeyed through generations, shaping its place in Sri Lanka’s hospitality landscape while embracing change and new possibilities. Today, proudly recognized as Colombo’s beachfront hotel, it continues to blend its rich legacy with distinctive coastal experiences, exceptional dining, and memorable celebrations. As the hotel marks this significant milestone, it looks forward to the next chapter with renewed ambition, continuing its tradition of warm Sri Lankan hospitality for generations to come.







Wild Glamping Gal Oya – Thema Collection Wins Silver at the Presidential Environment Awards 2026

TTA BULLETIN

Sri Lanka’s nature retreat in Rathugala earns national recognition for its commitment to sustainability and environmental conservation

Wild Glamping Gal Oya by Thema Collection has been honoured with the Silver Award at the Presidential Environment Awards 2026, held at the Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall (BMICH), Colombo. Organised by the Central Environmental Authority under the Ministry of Environment, the awards are Sri Lanka's foremost national recognition for excellence in environmental conservation and sustainable development.

The award, presented under the patronage of the President of Sri Lanka, recognises institutions and enterprises that go beyond conventional practice to protect the island's natural environment. For Wild Glamping Gal Oya, it affirms a model of hospitality in which conservation, community and comfort are designed to work together.

Set in the village of Rathugala, on the edge of Gal Oya National Park in the Uva Province, the retreat comprises 20 grass-roofed tents built by the indigenous community using locally sourced, eco-friendly materials. Conceived by Thema Collection Chairman Chandra Wickramasinghe and developed during the pandemic, the property was planned from the outset as a low-impact, village-style camp that sits lightly on the land.

The Silver Award adds to a growing list of honours for the property, including the Outstanding Sustainable Concept Award, the Green Destinations Good Travel Seal, ICRT Indian Subcontinent Awards 2026 Regenerative Tourism Category - GOLD, Presidential Environment Awards 2024 – Bronze and three awards at the SLTC Research and Innovation Awards 2025 for environment and sustainability research, inclusive growth and research and development.



“This award belongs to our team and the Rathugala community, who have been an integral part of building Wild Glamping Gal Oya. From the beginning, our vision was to demonstrate how tourism can support environmental conservation, create opportunities for local communities, and protect the natural and cultural heritage that makes this destination unique. This national recognition encourages us to continue strengthening our commitment to responsible tourism,” said Chandra Wickramasinghe, Chairman of Thema Collection

The recognition comes as travellers increasingly seek meaningful, responsible journeys. Wild Glamping Gal Oya offers just that: a chance to experience Sri Lanka's wild east and its oldest living culture, with a footprint designed to leave both stronger.

Revealing

A Castle Escape

Tucked away in the misty hills of Padukka, just an hour from Colombo, Ayr Castle 1922 offers the romance of a hill country escape without the long journey. Built in 1922 by Scottish tea planter J.F. Arley Elford as a grand expression of love, this remarkable stone castle continues to tell a story of romance, heritage and timeless beauty.

With just five spacious suites, antique Ceylonese furnishings, Scottish-inspired architecture, sweeping mountain views and an intimate library reminiscent of a Jane Austen novel, Ayr Castle is a world of its own.

Spend your days walking or cycling through the surrounding rubber estate, discovering the traditional art of rubber tapping, enjoying a picnic beside a waterfall, exploring a Botanical Garden or simply taking in the mountain views together. Return to the castle for leisurely dining, Sri Lankan tea and evenings wrapped in the quiet charm of a bygone era.

REVEAL

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Browns Hotels & Resorts Triumphs with Gold and Silver Awards at the South Asian Travel Awards 2026

TTA BULLETIN



Browns Hotels & Resorts has secured five prestigious accolades at the South Asian Travel Awards (SATA) 2026, held in the Maldives, earning two Gold and three Silver awards across five properties in its portfolio. The achievement celebrates the group's diverse hospitality offering, spanning Sri Lanka's tea heritage, luxury wellness, all-inclusive holidays, beachfront resorts and boutique experiences, strengthening its presence on the international tourism stage.

Leading the Gold wins, Newburgh Ella – The Tea Factory Resort clinched South Asia's Best New Hotel, while Ayugiri Ayurveda Wellness Resort secured South Asia's Leading Wellness Resort.

As the newest addition to the Browns Hotels & Resorts portfolio, Newburgh Ella – The Tea Factory Resort, under the leadership of General Manager Gangadara Velasamy, is a former tea factory dating back to 1903, transformed into a contemporary hospitality experience. This significant achievement, places the property among the region's leading new hospitality offerings and recognises its unique identity in a competitive field of hotels from across Asia.

Its historic architecture and considered design preserve the character of the original factory while introducing modern comforts. The tea factory tour and immersive tea experiences set Newburgh Ella apart as a one-of-a-kind experience in Asia. The property also operates as a fully paperless hotel, embracing digital solutions across its operations to enhance efficiency and support more sustainable hospitality practices.

The experience extends beyond the property into the surrounding landscapes of Ella, with access to renowned attractions and trails, including Ella Rock, Little Adam's Peak and the Pekoe Trail.

Winning Gold at the South Asian Travel Awards 2026 as South Asia's Leading Wellness Resort, Ayugiri Ayurveda Wellness Resort in Sigiriya, led by General Manager Sujeewa de Zoysa, offers a considered approach to luxury wellness. Set across 44 acres in Sigiriya, the resort combines personalised wellbeing with Sri Lanka's rich cultural heritage and abundant wildlife, including opportunities for elephant spotting.

Guided by its philosophy, The Art of Living Well, Ayugiri features 22 suites with private plunge pools, including two Presidential Suites. Its wellness experiences include personalised programmes, yoga, meditation, sound healing and treatments at the Ayuwasa Wellness Centre, complemented by the Beheth Oruwa, a traditional medicinal boat, and a resident doctor-led approach to wellbeing.

The experience extends to dining, with international gourmet cuisine and authentic local flavours served in memorable settings, from lakeside locations to a rock-top setting, tree hut and a restaurant with the view of the Sigiriya rock.

At Club Hotel Dolphin in Negombo, General Manager Manoj Perera and his team clinched South Asia's Leading All-Inclusive Resort for the third consecutive time, reinforcing the property's established reputation for energetic, experience-led family holidays, with an extensive range of dining, leisure and entertainment activities for guests of all ages.

Cluster General Manager Rohan Gamage and the team at The Eden Beruwala secured the Silver award for South Asia's Leading Beach Resort for the second consecutive time. Located along Sri Lanka's renowned Golden Mile, this five-star beachfront resort combines coastal surroundings with varied dining experiences, including beach dining, alongside a range of watersports and leisure activities.

Lantern Boutique Hotel by Reveal the Collection, part of Browns Hotels & Resorts, clinched the Silver award for South Asia's Leading Boutique Hotel, celebrating its approach to boutique hospitality. Led by General Manager Sharmen Perera, the property is located in Mirissa and offers an intimate, design-led stay shaped by its coastal surroundings.

Commenting on the achievement, Eksath Wijeratne, Director/Chief Executive Officer of Browns Hotels & Resorts, said:

"What makes this achievement particularly meaningful for Browns Hotels & Resorts is the diversity of the recognition. Each property has its own identity, purpose and guest proposition, yet all share the same commitment to delivering memorable and elevated experiences and showcasing the best of Sri Lankan hospitality. These accolades belong to the people behind every guest experience, whose dedication and passion make the difference every day. We look forward to welcoming more travellers to discover our properties, experience Sri Lanka in different ways and create stories of their own."

As Browns Hotels & Resorts continues to expand its presence across Sri Lanka, the group remains focused on elevating guest experiences through portfolio growth into new destinations, the remodelling of existing properties, evolving dining concepts and menus, and sustainability-led initiatives.

Heritance Hotels and Resorts Secures Four Wins at World Travel Awards 2026

TTA BULLETIN



Heritance Hotels and Resorts has secured four distinguished titles at the World Travel Awards 2026, with three national awards recognising its Sri Lankan properties and an international title for Heritance Aarah in the Maldives.

The three Sri Lankan titles recognise Heritance Tea Factory as Sri Lanka's Leading Heritage Hotel 2026, Heritance Ahungalla as Sri Lanka's Leading Luxury Hotel 2026, and Heritance Kandalama as Sri Lanka's Leading Wedding Hotel 2026. Heritance Aarah was named the Indian Ocean's Leading All-Inclusive Resort 2026.

Internationally recognised within the global travel and tourism industry, the World Travel Awards celebrate excellence across hotels, resorts, and destinations. Recognition at this level affirms the quality, distinctiveness, and consistency of the experiences delivered by Heritance Hotels and Resorts.

Stasshani Jayawardena, Chairperson of Aitken Spence Hotels, said:
"Recognition at the World Travel Awards is a meaningful affirmation of the standards we strive to uphold across Heritance Hotels and Resorts. These awards are particularly significant as they acknowledge distinct strengths across our portfolio, from the heritage and sense of place at Heritance Tea Factory and the refined luxury of Heritance Ahungalla to the destination wedding experience at Heritance Kandalama, and the premium all-inclusive experience at Heritance Aarah. They reflect the dedication of our teams and our continued commitment to creating experiences that showcase the best of Heritance hospitality to guests from around the world."

Named Sri Lanka's Leading Heritage Hotel 2026, Heritance Tea Factory offers an experience deeply rooted in the history of Sri Lanka's tea industry. Set more than 2,000 metres above sea level amid the misty mountains and tea estates of Kandapola, the hotel occupies a restored 19th-century tea factory and retains many elements of its industrial past.

Heritance Tea Factory offers a distinctive way to experience the landscapes, culture, and enduring heritage of Sri Lanka's central highlands. Guests can discover the story of Ceylon tea through tea-plucking, tea-tasting, and a visit to the Mini Tea Factory, while nature walks, cycling, and sections of the Pekoe Trail provide opportunities to explore the picturesque highlands. The region's heritage is also reflected at TCK 6685, a restaurant housed within a restored railway carriage at the hotel. Here, the essence of the region is conveyed through the surrounding landscape and activities as much as through the architecture itself.

Heritance Kandalama, named Sri Lanka's Leading Wedding Hotel 2026, brings together striking architecture, integrated into the natural surroundings to create a unique destination wedding experience.

Designed by renowned architect Geoffrey Bawa and set within Sri Lanka's Cultural Triangle, the hotel sits in harmony with its natural surroundings, with the forest landscape and Kandalama Lake forming an intrinsic part of the experience. Weddings range from intimate outdoor celebrations to larger receptions, supported by personalised coordination, refined dining, and atmospheric accommodation.

The experience extends beyond the celebration, with couples and their guests able to explore the region's cultural and natural heritage, including Sigiriya and Dambulla, as well as enjoy nature experiences, wildlife excursions, and the hotel's own immersive offerings. Signature dining experiences, including the Bawa Cave Dinner and village-inspired dining, further showcase the destination's distinct culinary and cultural character.

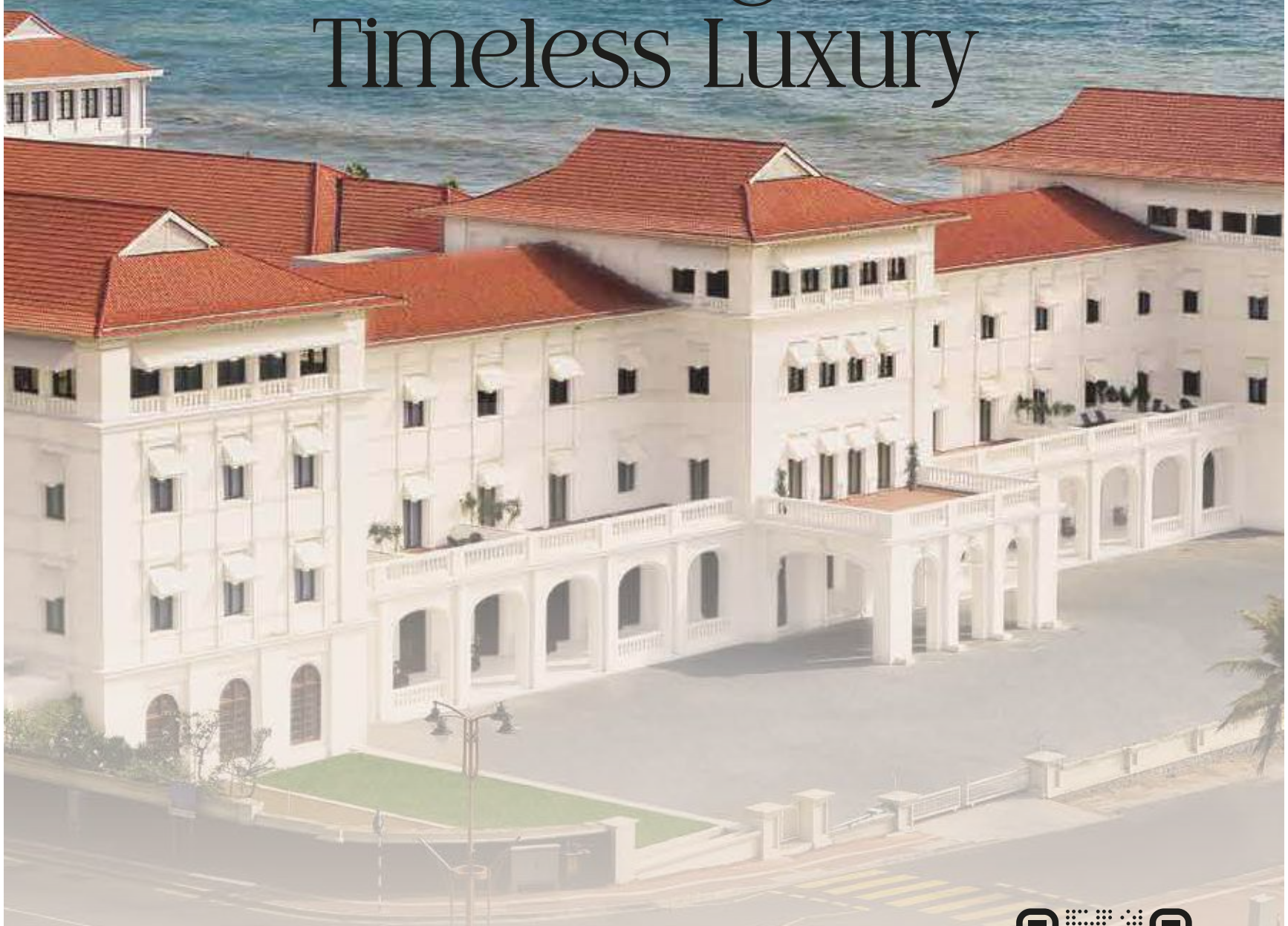
Heritance Ahungalla was recognised as Sri Lanka's Leading Luxury Hotel 2026, adding a significant accolade to the portfolio's coastal offering. Designed by Geoffrey Bawa and located along Sri Lanka's southern coastline, the resort combines tropical modernist architecture with ocean views, spacious accommodation, personalised service, and a range of beachside and family-friendly experiences.

In the Maldives, Heritance Aarah was named Indian Ocean's Leading All-Inclusive Resort 2026. Located in Raa Atoll, the resort's Premium All-Inclusive experience brings together seven restaurants and five bars, wellness at IASO Spa, marine activities, and opportunities to discover Maldivian culture. This recognition highlights the resort's distinctive approach to combining personalised service with culinary delights, wellness, and island experiences.

Together, the four World Travel Awards titles recognise the diversity of Heritance Hotels and Resorts' portfolio across Sri Lanka and the Maldives, celebrating Sri Lanka tea heritage in the central highlands, the architectural and natural legacy of the Cultural Triangle, and serene coastal hospitality. These hard-won accolades reflect Heritance's commitment to creating experiences connected to each destination's culture, landscape, and sense of place, while meeting and exceeding internationally recognised standards of hospitality.

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Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts Earns Nine SATA Honours

TTA BULLETIN



Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts won nine awards, including six Gold titles, at the tenth edition of the South Asian Travel Awards (SATA), held in Malé, Maldives. Its properties in Sri Lanka and the Maldives were recognised across meetings and conferences, weddings, food and beverage, wildlife tourism, surf travel and corporate social responsibility (CSR), alongside individual honours for two colleagues.

In the Gold category, Cinnamon Lakeside Colombo was named Leading Meeting/Conference Hotel, Cinnamon Dhonveli Maldives won Leading Surf Resort, Cinnamon Wild Yala took the Wildlife Tented Lodge/Resort award and Cinnamon Velifushi Maldives was named Leading Beach Resort. Nazoomi Azhar, General Manager of Cinnamon Grand Colombo, was named Best General Manager (Sri Lanka), and Gayani Punchihewa of Cinnamon Grand Colombo won Outstanding Young Hotelier. In the Silver category, Cinnamon Grand Colombo was named Leading F&B Hotel/Resort, Cinnamon Lakeside Colombo won Leading Wedding Hotel/Resort and Cinnamon Velifushi Maldives received the Nishan Seneviratne Best CSR Programme award.

“These nine awards, won across our hotels and resorts in Sri Lanka and the Maldives as well as by two members of our own team, reflect the work our people put in across every part of the guest experience, from our meeting rooms to our food and beverage outlets to our commitment to the communities around us,” said Hishan Singhawansa, Chief Executive Officer, Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts.

In the Maldives, Cinnamon Dhonveli Maldives, home to the Pasta Point surf break in North Malé Atoll, continued its run as Leading Surf Resort. Cinnamon Velifushi Maldives, in Vaavu Atoll, added Leading Beach Resort to the Nishan Seneviratne Best CSR Programme award, won for Ripples Beneath the Surface, a youth marine conservation programme for young people from the resort's neighbouring islands.

In Sri Lanka, Cinnamon Lakeside Colombo, a convention hotel on the shore of Beira Lake in Colombo, was named Leading Meeting/Conference Hotel and also won Silver for Leading Wedding Hotel/Resort for its lakefront event spaces. Cinnamon Wild Yala, which borders Yala National Park and offers guided safaris into the park, took Gold for Wildlife Tented Lodge/Resort, and Cinnamon Grand Colombo was named Leading F&B Hotel/Resort in the Silver category, recognising the hotel's restaurants and bars in Colombo.

Cinnamon Grand Colombo also produced two individual winners. Nazoomi Azhar, who took up the role of General Manager at the hotel in September 2025 after previously leading Cinnamon Lakeside Colombo, where the hotel won the Most Outstanding Overall Hotel Championship Trophy at the Cinnamon Awards for Excellence (CAFE) 2025, was named Best General Manager (Sri Lanka). Gayani Punchihewa, also of Cinnamon Grand Colombo, won Outstanding Young Hotelier.

"This recognition belongs to every member of the Cinnamon Grand Colombo team who turns up each day determined to get the details right for our guests," said Nazoomi Azhar, General Manager, Cinnamon Grand Colombo.

The awards reinforce Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts’ diverse offering across city hotels, beach and surf resorts, and wildlife tourism, while recognising the people and initiatives shaping the region’s hospitality industry.



The Rainforest Ecolodge Opens a New Chapter at Sinharaja

TTA BULLETIN



Sri Lanka’s first officially classified ecolodge is relaunching as more than a place to stay. It now aims to be the hospitality gateway to the island’s last great rainforest, built on conservation, community and discovery.

Dawn at the edge of the Sinharaja Forest Reserve starts with birdsong. Mixed-species flocks move through the canopy, endemic birds show up in flashes of colour, and mist lifts off the tea bushes of the Enselwatte Estate. This is where The Rainforest Ecolodge, managed by Aitken Spence Hotels, has started its next chapter.

The relaunch puts the Sinharaja, its biodiversity and the communities who live beside it at the centre of the guest experience. It is aimed at travellers who want more than a room near nature. They want to enter the forest with curiosity, understand what they see, and leave with a stronger connection to the natural world.

The Sinharaja is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and a Man and the Biosphere Reserve. It is Sri Lanka’s last viable area of primary tropical rainforest, home to an exceptional concentration of endemic plants, birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians and invertebrates. The lodge sits where dense rainforest meets cultivated tea land. That makes it an ecological transition zone where naturalists, photographers and citizen scientists can watch wildlife move between habitats.

“The Rainforest Ecolodge gives us an opportunity to bring people closer to one of Sri Lanka’s most remarkable natural treasures, while ensuring that conservation and local communities remain an integral part of that experience,” said Stasshani Jayawardena, Chairperson, Aitken Spence Hotel Holdings PLC. “This is very much in keeping with how we see the future of tourism: thoughtful, responsible, and deeply connected to place.”

The property was designed around responsible tourism from the start, and it holds LEED® Platinum certification from the US Green Building Council. Its 20 chalets are made from repurposed shipping containers and other recycled materials. Each has a private deck, modern amenities and immersive views, so guests stay comfortable without being cut off from the landscape.

That approach has been recognised. In 2026 the lodge was named Silver Winner in the ‘Nature Positive’ category at the ICRT Indian Subcontinent Awards and Sri Lanka’s Leading Lodge at the World Travel Awards.

Guided birdwatching walks start at first light. Daytime trails explain the rainforest’s layered structure, its medicinal plants and its wildlife. Waterfall treks follow forest paths to clear streams and natural pools. After dark, night walks show a different world of frog calls, moths, geckos and bats.

“We want the ecolodge to be more than just a place to stay,” said Susith Jayawickrama, Managing Director, Aitken Spence Hotel Holdings PLC. “We want it to become a meaningful gateway to understanding one of Sri Lanka’s most vital and vibrant ecosystems.”

Two new resources are in development: a Nature Interpretation Centre and an Online Knowledge Hub. They will bring together species profiles, field notes, publications, audiovisual material and conservation insights for travellers, students and nature enthusiasts to use before, during and after their stay. Planned partnerships with universities, conservation groups, naturalists, wildlife photographers, artists and wellness practitioners will support citizen science, acoustic monitoring and conservation storytelling. They will also give experts a platform to share their findings more widely.

Community is central to the model. The guest experience draws on local employment, naturalist-led excursions, rural food traditions and village livelihoods. Guests can learn about kithul tapping, traditional medicinal plant knowledge and tea cultivation. The rainforest’s story cannot be separated from the people who have lived and worked beside it for generations. The goal goes beyond reducing impact. It is a regenerative model of tourism that contributes to the long-term ecological and social health of the region.



The lodge suits seasoned birders, wildlife photographers and artists, as well as first-time visitors curious about biodiversity. It also works for travellers who simply want quiet, fresh air and a sense of place. Here, adventure is guided by knowledge, hospitality is shaped by responsibility, and every journey into the forest starts with the same invitation: come and look closer.

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Pluck, Brew and Walk Away: Powysland Bungalow Hatton

TTA BULLETIN



On a private 150-acre working estate at Dayagama, near Hatton, a new bungalow stay lets guests make tea in their own name, eat proper lamprais and leave on foot for Horton Plains.

There are tea bungalows, and then there are tea bungalows where you go home with your own tea. Powysland Bungalow, newly launched at Dayagama near Hatton, belongs firmly in the second camp.

The property sits on a private 150-acre tea estate in Sri Lanka's Central Highlands. It is the latest stay to be introduced by the Secrets of Ceylon collection. What sets it apart is simple: this is a working estate, and guests are invited into the work.

Powysland is very much a home with hosts. Estate Superintendent Lanil Tennekoon leads a free tour of the plantation for every guest, walking them through the fields and the craft behind Ceylon tea. His wife, Sandra, runs the bungalow and looks after guests during their stay.

The accommodation is intimate. The main bungalow has three bedrooms, and two duplex cottages each sleep two adults and two children. That makes it well suited to families, small groups of friends or a full private takeover.

The location is a strong selling point. Powysland is just 7km from the Dayagama entrance to Horton Plains National Park, one of the island's most celebrated highland landscapes.

1. Check out on foot. Few hotels let you leave by walking out of the garden. From Powysland, guests can hike to Farr Inn at Horton Plains in about an hour and a half, then continue their journey from there. The route forms part of Stage 10 of the Pekoe Trail, the long-distance walking trail through Sri Lanka's tea country. It is an elegant way to link the estate with a visit to the national park.

2. Authentic lamprais. Lamprais is one of Sri Lanka's great Dutch Burgher dishes: rice, curries and accompaniments wrapped and baked in a banana leaf. At Powysland it is a house speciality, and the team describes it simply as super delicious. It is reason enough to arrive hungry.

3. A tea made in your name. This is the experience guests will talk about. Stay two nights and you can join the estate team to pluck your own leaf, while they do the heavy lifting. You then oversee its production in the factory. At the end, each guest is gifted four packets of tea branded with their name, plus 5kg of loose tea per person in the party. Charges apply.

The same idea scales up for groups. Powysland offers a private label tea experience, running a dedicated batch of tea for your guests, with 5kg each to take away. A fee applies. It is a memorable option for incentive groups, corporate retreats and special celebrations.

For travellers who want more than a view of the tea, Powysland offers the chance to make some. In a region full of beautiful bungalows, that is a genuinely different story to tell.



Minor Hotels Brings Anantara Retreats to India with Darjeeling Signing

TTA BULLETIN



Slated to open in 2031, 70-key Anantara Retreat Darjeeling Hills will sit within a working tea estate in West Bengal.

Minor Hotels, a global hospitality leader with over 640 hotels, resorts and residences, has signed an agreement to manage Anantara Retreat Darjeeling Hills, the first Anantara Retreat in India. The 70-key property will open in 2031 within the Tindharia Tea Estate, an 849-acre plantation in West Bengal, creating a sanctuary where guests can enjoy luxurious accommodation amid pristine surroundings while the estate continues to operate as a working plantation.

Darjeeling is one of India's most established Himalayan hill destinations and the source of the 'Champagne of Teas'. The retreat will sit in Tindharia, 40km from Darjeeling town. Bagdogra International Airport (IXB) is about 33km away, roughly one hour by road, with direct daily flights to Delhi, Kolkata, Bangkok and other major cities.

The tea estate rises from 450 to 1000 metres above sea level, and the Anantara Retreat design will follow its topography, inviting guests to rediscover their spirit and vitality amidst the mist and tea bushes. Accommodation at Anantara Retreat Darjeeling Hills will comprise 35 suites and 35 tented villas along the slope. Complementing the retreat experience, guests will have access to Anantara Spa, a fitness centre and a swimming pool with expansive plantation and valley views, alongside wellness experiences inspired by the region's natural surroundings and tea-growing heritage. A 750 sqm meeting and event space will serve intimate MICE groups and destination weddings. Anchoring Anantara Retreat Darjeeling Hill's experiential programme will be the tea factory and tea garden, giving guests direct access to the working estate.

Anantara Retreat Darjeeling Hills is developed in partnership with JK Urbana Garden Private Limited, a joint venture between JK Urbanscapes Developers Limited and Mr Kaushal Kumbhat.

Kaushal Kumbhat, Director, JK Urbana Gardens Pvt Ltd, commented: "Our partnership with Minor Hotels is the realisation of a long-cherished dream to open the doors of our tea estate to the world, and let people experience the extraordinary beauty that we, as planters, have had the privilege of living amidst for generations. This venture is an opportunity to create sustainable livelihoods for our estate community, showcase the artistry of Darjeeling tea to a global audience firsthand and demonstrate that conservation and enterprise can flourish together. We believe that Anantara Retreat Darjeeling Hills will elevate Darjeeling as a world-class destination and set a benchmark for responsible, nature-integrated

BLAST THRU 2026: Colombo's Most Wanted New Year's Eve Gala Returns with a Masquerade Ball

TTA BULLETIN

Colombo's long-running New Year's Eve celebration, BLAST THRU, returns on 31st December 2026 at the newly upgraded Liberty Ballroom of Ramada by Wyndham Colombo, marking more than four decades of the event's presence on the city's festive calendar.

The 2026 edition will introduce a Masquerade Ball on a grander scale, with a bigger entertainment line-up at the Liberty Ballroom. Two of Colombo's prominent live bands, The Warehouse Project and Taxi, will headline the evening, marking a significant musical line-up for this year's celebration. They will be joined by a special guest performance from Saijith Perera, while Keshan Leitch will host the evening. The expanded programme reflects the continued evolution of BLAST THRU while retaining the live music and entertainment that have been central to the celebration for more than four decades.

Guests will be served a Gala Dinner and Breakfast Buffet, while each table of ten will receive three complimentary bottles, comprising two bottles of spirits and one bottle of wine.

Guests will also have the opportunity to participate in a grand raffle draw, with an exciting selection of prizes on offer, including return air tickets to some of the world's most sought-after destinations. SriLankan Airlines, the national carrier, has also come on board as a partner, alongside other partners supporting the celebrations.

Tickets are available at an Early Bird rate of LKR 20,500 nett per person until 30th November 2026, increasing to LKR 22,500 nett per person from 1st December 2026.

For ticket purchases and further information, please contact Chaminda on +94 77 126 2696, the Duty Manager on +94 77 731 3280, or the general hotline on +94 11 2 422 001. Alternatively, email chaminda@ramadacolombo.com.

With its longstanding legacy and this year's Masquerade Ball setting, BLAST THRU 2026 is set to bring together Colombo's New Year revellers for an evening of music, entertainment and celebration. Guests are invited to join Ramada by Wyndham Colombo as the city bids farewell to 2026 and welcomes 2027 in grand style.

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Mask & Tide Ambalangoda: A Fresh Beachfront Stay on Sri Lanka's Southern Coast

TTA BULLETIN



Sri Lanka's southern coast has long been defined by its famous stops: Galle's ramparts, Mirissa's whales, and Bentota's golden sands. Between them lies Ambalangoda, a quiet fishing town renowned for its mask making tradition, practiced and perfected by families for generations. Now, Jetwing Hotels is giving the town a renewed place in its portfolio with the reopening of Mask & Tide Ambalangoda, a refurbished and rebranded 29-room beachfront hotel that joins the company's Select hotels portfolio. Formerly Hotel J Ambalangoda, the property has been reimagined with a fresh identity rooted in the town's heritage.

The hotel sits directly on the shoreline along Galle Road, with access to a wide, secluded stretch of beach, which is not frequented by many. The public spaces, including the restaurant and the pool, have been redesigned; the 22 existing Deluxe Rooms have been completely revamped; and seven new Super Deluxe Rooms have been added on the top floor, where guests can wake up to some of the best direct ocean views or look inland toward the greenery and the hills beyond.

A new spa, Flow, completes the transformation. With treatment rooms for both couples and individuals, it turns what might have been a convenient overnight stop into somewhere to linger. This is a place to slow down, with the sea close enough that swimming and unhurried beach walks become the main agenda.

The name itself is the clearest statement of intent. Ambalangoda is renowned for a mask-making tradition that stretches back centuries, and that artistic heritage is the town's real signature. By building its identity around it, Jetwing Hotels is making a case that a hotel should reflect where it stands rather than float above it. Guests can visit the Ambalangoda Mask Museum, or watch traditional mask-carving and lace-making in local workshops, experiences that tie a stay to the people who keep these crafts, and towns, alive.

The location also works as a practical base. Galle Fort, a UNESCO World Heritage site, is within reach, as are the Martin Wickramasinghe Folk Museum, Geoffrey Bawa's Lunuganga Estate, and Bevis Bawa's Brief Garden, a trio that will appeal to anyone interested in the island's design and literary legacy. For those after something more active, Mirissa offers whale watching and surfing, while boat safaris glide along the Madu Ganga.

Jetwing Hotels has spent more than half a century shaping how the world experiences Sri Lankan hospitality. Its 39 properties span four categories: Luxury Reserves, Premium Hotels, Select Hotels and Essentials, each offering its own view of the island's cultural heritage and natural beauty. The Select category is built for travellers who seek comfort, character and good value at an accessible price, a segment that is growing as visitors seek out lesser-known destinations. Each Select hotel has a distinct personality shaped by its surroundings, while reflecting the warmth Jetwing Hotels is known for. Mask & Tide fits the profile neatly: a modern, well-located hotel that offers a genuine encounter with local culture rather than a generic coastal escape.



Whether Ambalangoda becomes the next must-visit name on the southern coast remains to be seen. But Jetwing Hotels is betting that travellers are ready to look a little closer, and Mask & Tide gives them a good reason to stay awhile.

Aahaasa Collection Makes Stillness the New Luxury

TTA BULLETIN



Sri Lanka's emerging luxury brand introduces three multi-property journeys for 2026–2027, linking coast, tea country and mountains, with as much room for doing nothing as for discovery

In a travel world defined by packed itineraries and the pressure to see as much as possible, Aahaasa Collection is embracing a quieter idea of luxury: the freedom to do nothing at all.

After launching Aahaasa Island Concierge, the Collection has introduced three bookable multi-property journeys for travel in 2026–2027. They connect its sanctuaries on the coast, in the tea country and in the mountains. Each journey is designed as a continuous passage through the island, curated around landscape, wellness, cuisine and culture. Equal weight goes to something modern travel rarely allows: space.

The idea is simple. Luxury is not about adding more but about having the freedom to experience each moment at one's own pace. The journeys balance curated discovery with chance encounters and unstructured time.

"We often think of luxury in terms of what can be added to a journey, but there is also luxury in what we choose not to fill. These journeys offer guests the freedom to slow down, be present and allow each destination to reveal itself naturally. Sometimes the most meaningful moments are the ones that are not planned but come from nature and community," said Nath Rankothge, Founder of Aahaasa Collection.

Ocean rhythms on the south coast

At Aavya Cove Villas, the rhythm of the Indian Ocean sets the pace. Days may begin with sunrise yoga and a visit to local fishermen to select seafood for lunch. After that, guests might kayak along the coast, take a guided trip through the Madu River's mangroves or visit a sea turtle conservation project. Or they can spend the day by the pool or on the beach, with little to plan beyond dinner beneath the stars.

Life on a working tea estate

Aadya Tea Bungalows sits within a regenerated 200-acre working tea estate and offers a slower take on Sri Lanka's highlands. Guests can join estate staff to pluck and roll tea, explore on foot or by bicycle, hike sections of the Pekoe Trail or discover the estate's three waterfalls. Private tea tastings connect guests with local traditions, while the mist-covered hills invite quiet reflection.

Mountains, spice and tradition

Aarunya Nature Resort overlooks the UNESCO-listed Knuckles Mountain Range near Kandy, and here nature and traditional wellness shape the stay. Guests can walk the spice gardens with a naturalist-butler, watch village women harvest cinnamon, or learn about biodynamic agriculture and ongoing research at the Nature Pavilion. Mountain meditation, yoga and a leisurely breakfast overlooking the peaks offer a gentle start to the day.

Wellness shaped by the landscape

The idea of slowing down carries into the Aarogya Spa & Wellness offering at Aavya Cove Villas and Aarunya Nature Resort, where guests can weave Ayurvedic and aromatherapy-inspired treatments into their journey. Multi-day retreats begin with a consultation with an Ayurvedic doctor, and another follows afterwards. In between come daily treatments using ingredients from each property's surroundings, yoga, meditation and personalised nutrition developed by the doctor and chef together. In this sense, "The Art of Doing Nothing" is not about inactivity. It is about creating space for what matters most.

Travel at a personal pace

Aahaasa's new journeys reflect a broader approach to travel, one that values how a destination makes guests feel as much as what there is to see. For one guest, that might mean kayaking the Madu River. For another, it might be an open-air Ayurvedic treatment, or watching the mountains emerge through the morning mist from a private villa. For others, it may simply mean sitting quietly with a view and having nowhere else to be.



Beyond the Awards: Amari Colombo's Next Chapter

Building a distinctive brand, a high-performing culture and sustainable commercial growth

TTA BULLETIN


Monty Ariyaratne


Indika Jayawardena

Travel Talk Asia speaks to General Manager Monty Ariyaratne and Hotel Manager Indika Jayawardena about where Amari Colombo goes from here.

On Colombo's iconic Galle Road, overlooking the Indian Ocean, Amari Colombo continues to build an impressive track record of success and recognition. For the second consecutive year, the hotel has been named Sri Lanka's Leading Business Hotel at the World Travel Awards and has also earned the distinction at the South Asian Travel Awards. Its achievements extend beyond the property itself, with accolades recognising its leadership and people-centric culture, including honours for its General Manager among Sri Lanka's Most Influential General Managers, its marketing leadership among the country's Most Admired Marketing Leaders, and the Women-Friendly Workplace Award for the second consecutive year. Together, these accolades underscore Amari Colombo's growing reputation for hospitality excellence, visionary leadership, impactful marketing and a workplace culture that values its people.

Most hotels would happily let the trophies do the talking. Amari Colombo's leadership would rather focus on what comes next.

"We see recognition not as the destination, but as a catalyst," says General Manager Monty Ariyaratne. "Excellence is not measured by the recognition we receive, but by our ability to consistently deliver on the expectations it creates."

A regional legacy, a distinctive local identity
The hotel's ambitions reflect the broader evolution of ONYX Hospitality Group, which celebrates its 60th anniversary in 2026. Having grown from its Thai roots into an established hospitality management company with an expanding Asia Pacific presence, ONYX brings together four core brands: Amari, OZO, Shama and Oriental Residence. Each has its own positioning and identity, catering to the diverse needs of today's travellers.

As the Group continues to transform and evolve its brands in response to changing market dynamics and traveller expectations, its approach remains grounded in the enduring qualities of Thai hospitality: warmth, generosity, creativity and an intuitive understanding of what makes people feel genuinely welcome.

Contemporary design, technology, locally connected experiences and greater personalisation increasingly shape how these qualities are expressed, while the Group's regional expertise and operational capabilities support consistent brand standards and sustainable growth. Alongside commercial performance, ONYX recognises the importance of contributing positively to local communities and the environment.

At Amari Colombo, these principles meet the character of Sri Lanka's commercial capital. Ariyaratne's ambition is for the hotel to be more than an upper-upscale property in the heart of the city: a destination in its own right, reflecting Colombo's commercial energy, cultural connections and growing appeal to business and leisure travellers.

Everything ties back to Amari's brand promise, Brighten Your World.
"Our next chapter is not simply about expansion in scale or facilities," Ariyaratne says. "It is about strengthening our identity, improving our performance and creating long-term value."

Where business meets lifestyle
Colombo brings business, culture, dining and nightlife together in a compact urban setting, and Amari Colombo sits where commercial activity meets the city's social scene. Business travellers benefit from the efficiency, connectivity and consistency they expect, while the hotel's restaurants, rooftop venues, wellness facilities and social spaces attract local residents alongside in-house guests.

"We believe the future of urban hospitality lies in creating destinations that are relevant to both visitors and residents," Ariyaratne says.

This approach positions the hotel not simply as a place to stay, but as a space for dining, gathering, conducting business and discovering the city.

The numbers behind the momentum
The strategy is reflected in the results. Between January and May 2026, Amari Colombo recorded revenue growth of approximately 116% compared with the same period in 2025. During the first six months of the year, its corporate account portfolio expanded from 218 to 303.

For Ariyaratne, however, growth is only part of the equation. The focus extends beyond occupancy to total revenue, stronger direct bookings and a healthier mix of corporate, MICE, regional and leisure business, supported by data-led marketing and commercial decisions.

"We want to grow responsibly, protect our brand positioning and build a stronger foundation for long-term profitability," he says.

Service with a name
If Ariyaratne sets the direction, Hotel Manager Indika Jayawardena ensures guests experience it in every interaction.
"A brand promise only becomes meaningful when guests can experience it consistently," Jayawardena says. "Hospitality is not a transaction. It is about how we make people feel."

At Amari Colombo, this philosophy is embodied in ARI Service: Anticipate, Respond and Inspire Trust.

Anticipate means looking beyond what a guest explicitly requests, recognising preferences and making each stay effortless. Respond means taking ownership and acting with urgency, empathy and sound judgement. Inspire Trust means delivering on promises and accepting responsibility whenever something needs attention.

"ARI is not merely a service acronym. It is a shared mindset," Jayawardena explains. With multiple dining, leisure and guest-service experiences under one roof, this common philosophy connects every touchpoint. "A guest does not necessarily experience a hotel through organisational structures; they experience it as one continuous journey."

Great people, great hospitality
Delivering that journey consistently depends on the people behind it. Amari Colombo is Great Place To Work® Certified ™, with a Trust Index™ score of 91%, compared with a benchmark of 70%. Its workplace culture is anchored in ONYX's values: To Do Right, Create Impact, and Learn & Grow.

For Jayawardena, the certification represents a responsibility rather than simply another accolade.

"The real measure of success is not simply receiving a certification. It is whether our colleagues feel heard, valued, included and able to grow. When people understand the purpose behind their work and feel empowered to make a difference, that naturally translates into more authentic hospitality."

By investing in colleagues and fostering a culture of ownership, the hotel aims to strengthen both the employee experience and the quality-of-service guests receive.

What comes next
For both leaders, the next chapter rests on three priorities: a distinctive brand, sustainable commercial performance and a high-performing culture.

Ariyaratne wants Amari Colombo to demonstrate how the brand can thrive in an evolving destination while contributing to ONYX Hospitality Group's wider regional ambitions. Jayawardena, meanwhile, is focused on building a hotel where guests feel genuinely welcomed, colleagues are proud to belong and partners recognise lasting value.

"Ultimately, we want Amari Colombo to be remembered not only for its facilities or achievements, but for the experiences and relationships it creates," Jayawardena says.

The awards, in other words, are milestones along the way. For Amari Colombo, the real measure of success lies in what comes next: a stronger brand, meaningful connections and hospitality that continues to brighten the world of every guest.

NÜWA at City of Dreams Sri Lanka Wins Gold at SATA 2026, Marking Early Regional Recognition for Luxury Hospitality

TTA BULLETIN



NÜWA at City of Dreams Sri Lanka has been named South Asia's Leading Designer Hotel – Gold Winner at the South Asian Travel Awards (SATA) 2026, securing regional recognition for its distinctive approach to contemporary luxury, thoughtful design and personalised hospitality within its first year of operations.

The accolade marks a significant milestone for NÜWA and City of Dreams Sri Lanka, South Asia's first fully integrated resort, as the destination continues to establish Colombo as a compelling proposition for international luxury travellers.

For NÜWA, winning Gold in the Leading Designer Hotel category in its inaugural year of operations is a particularly notable achievement. It reflects the hotel's distinctive identity within Sri Lanka's evolving luxury hospitality landscape and its ambition to deliver an experience shaped by considered design, exceptional service and attention to detail.

Michael Habashi, Vice President & Property General Manager of City of Dreams Sri Lanka, said: "Winning Gold at the South Asian Travel Awards in our first year of operations is a tremendous honour for NÜWA and the entire City of Dreams Sri Lanka team. This recognition affirms our ambition to bring a distinctive expression of contemporary luxury to Sri Lanka, where thoughtful design is complemented by personalised service and genuine hospitality. As we establish ourselves within the regional hospitality landscape, we remain committed to creating experiences that resonate with our guests while contributing to Sri Lanka's growing reputation as a destination for world-class luxury travel."

As the ultra-luxury hotel within City of Dreams Sri Lanka, NÜWA brings together refined accommodation, bespoke butler services, distinctive dining and personalised guest experiences, complemented by panoramic views of Colombo. Its positioning reflects a contemporary interpretation of luxury, where privacy, individual attention and thoughtful design are central to the guest journey.

As City of Dreams Sri Lanka enters its next chapter, the recognition serves as both an achievement and an impetus to continue raising the bar for design-led hospitality, creating memorable experiences for guests and contributing to the evolution of tourism in Colombo and beyond.

Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts Maldives Celebrates Three Accolades at SATA 2026

TTA BULLETIN



Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts Maldives has secured three accolades at the South Asian Travel Awards (SATA) 2026. Cinnamon Dhonveli Maldives received Gold in the Leading Surf Resort category for the eighth time and fourth consecutive year, while Cinnamon Velifushi Maldives retained Gold in the Leading Beach Resort category for the second consecutive year. Cinnamon Velifushi Maldives also received Silver in the Nishan Seneviratne Best CSR Programme category.

Held at Barceló Nasandhura Malé in Malé, Maldives, on 8 October 2026, the 10th edition of SATA recognised achievements across South Asia's tourism and hospitality industry, celebrating excellence in guest experiences, industry leadership and responsible tourism.

Located in North Malé Atoll, Cinnamon Dhonveli Maldives is home to the renowned Pasta Point surf break, attracting surfers from around the world. Its eighth Gold accolade as Leading Surf Resort reflects its established position among the Maldives' surfing destinations, complemented by a range of water sports, wellness experiences and island hospitality.

"We remain committed to delivering memorable surf experiences and holidays in the Maldives," said Marlon Robert, General Manager of Cinnamon Dhonveli Maldives. He acknowledged the continued support of guests, the international surfing community and the resort team in achieving this recognition.

Cinnamon Velifushi Maldives' second consecutive Gold accolade as Leading Beach Resort recognises its distinctive island setting, characterised by white sandy beaches, a spacious lagoon and a choice of beachfront and overwater accommodation. A range of dining and wellness experiences further complements the island's natural surroundings, offering guests opportunities to explore the Maldives both above and beneath the water.

The resort's Silver accolade in the Nishan Seneviratne Best CSR Programme category recognises its efforts to create opportunities for young people from neighbouring island communities through dive education. Delivered in partnership with Dive & Sail, the resort's PADI certified dive centre, the six day programme enabled nine students aged 16 to 18 from schools in Keyodhoo and Felidhoo to obtain PADI Open Water Diver certification. Combining theoretical learning, practical training and supervised dives, the initiative promoted safe diving practices and reef conservation while introducing participants to potential career opportunities in marine tourism.

"These accolades reflect the dedication of our teams and the continued support of our guests, whose trust inspires us to keep raising the standard of our experiences," said Sanjeeva Perera, Area General Manager, Cinnamon Maldives Resorts.

The three accolades recognise the distinct experiences offered by Cinnamon Dhonveli Maldives and Cinnamon Velifushi Maldives, while highlighting Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts' continued focus on guest experiences, environmental awareness and community engagement across its Maldives portfolio.

Pegasus Reef Hotel Welcomes the Tuk-TukRental.com Tournament Crew!

TTA BULLETIN

Pegasus Reef Hotel was delighted to welcome the TukTukRental.com Tournament crew over the past weekend as part of their exciting adventure across Sri Lanka. The hotel served as a resting point for the team before they set off on the next leg of their journey. It was a pleasure for Pegasus





Reef Hotel to host the crew and be part of their adventure, providing a welcoming stop along the way. Pegasus Reef Hotel extends its best wishes to the entire team for a safe, memorable, and exciting journey ahead as they continue their adventure.

Home in the Heart of Colombo

TTA BULLETIN



Tucked down a leafy residential lane, UrbanSpace@29/1 offers travellers to Sri Lanka something the capital rarely does: room to slow down.

Colombo moves fast. Tuk-tuks weave through traffic, markets hum from early morning, and the city's colonial streets and seafront sunsets pull visitors in every direction. All the more reason to come home each evening to somewhere calm.

That is the idea behind UrbanSpace@29/1, in Colombo 5, one of the city's most central yet peaceful neighbourhoods. Cafés, boutiques, supermarkets and restaurants are a short walk or a five-minute tuk-tuk ride away, but once you climb the stairs, the noise of the city fades.

Inside, the flat is a warm nod to Sri Lankan tropical modernism. Rich wooden



furniture sits alongside cane pieces and handloom textiles, giving the space the feel of a family home rather than a hotel. Three bedrooms each come with their own en-suite bathroom, air conditioning, a ceiling fan and a small workstation with WiFi. The master has a king bed and the other two have queens, which makes it a natural fit for families, groups of friends travelling together, or colleagues on a work trip who want their own space.

The shared living and dining areas, kitchenette and laundry room make longer stays easy, and the rooftop is a lovely spot for an evening cup of Ceylon tea as the city lights come on.

For travellers arriving in Sri Lanka, whether for a few nights before heading to the hills and beaches or for a longer stay in the capital, it is a gentle, welcoming first stop.

Cinnamon Lakeside Colombo Ushers in the Festive Season with Its Annual Cake Mixing Ceremony

TTA BULLETIN



Cinnamon Lakeside Colombo marked the beginning of its Christmas celebrations with the much anticipated Annual Cake Mixing Ceremony, held on 15th October 2026 at the hotel's King's Court. Bringing together corporate partners, media representatives and valued guests, the occasion celebrated a cherished festive tradition that continues to bring people together in the spirit of Christmas.

Speaking on the occasion, Dushyantha Tittawella, General Manager of Cinnamon Lakeside Colombo, shared his thoughts: "At Cinnamon Lakeside Colombo, our Annual Cake Mixing Ceremony is more than a festive tradition. It is an opportunity to bring together the people who have been part of our journey and celebrate the relationships we have built over the years. As we prepare to welcome another Christmas season, we look forward to creating meaningful experiences for our guests while continuing to uphold the warmth and hospitality that define Cinnamon Lakeside."

Renowned for its distinctive positioning as a "Resort in the City", Cinnamon Lakeside Colombo continues to bring together culinary traditions, celebrations and memorable guest experiences in the heart of Colombo. The Annual Cake Mixing Ceremony remains an important part of the hotel's festive calendar, reflecting its commitment to preserving traditions while creating opportunities for guests, partners and the wider community to connect.

Sri Lankan Hospitality Takes Centre Stage at SATA 2026 in the Maldives

Sri Lanka's travel and hospitality industry made a strong showing at the 10th anniversary edition of the South Asian Travel Awards (SATA), held recently in the Maldives. Competing against the region's finest, Sri Lankan hotels, resorts and travel brands took home a host of Gold and Silver awards, reaffirming the island's standing as one of South Asia's leading destinations for excellence in travel and hospitality.



AVIATION

Air India Opens A New Gateway To Japan With Non-stop Delhi-osaka Flights Starting February 2027

TTA BULLETIN



Air India announced new non-stop flights between Delhi and Osaka (Kansai International Airport), becoming the only airline to operate on the Delhi-Osaka route.

Beginning 2 February 2027, Air India will operate four weekly flights between India's capital and Japan's second-largest metropolitan area using its Boeing 787-8 aircraft, further strengthening connectivity between India and Japan.

Osaka will become Air India's second destination in Japan after Tokyo (Haneda), where the airline currently operates daily flights from Delhi and four weekly flights from Mumbai. The new service expands Air India's presence in a market witnessing strong growth in demand from Indian travellers and deepening economic, tourism, and cultural ties between the two countries.

The Boeing 787-8 deployed on the route features 18 full-flat beds in Business Class and 241 seats in Economy Class, delivering a comfortable travel experience between the two countries.

Designed to maximise customer convenience, the new service (AI360) will depart Delhi late evening and arrive in Osaka at a convenient time the following morning. The return flight (AI359) will depart Osaka late in the morning and arrive in Delhi the same evening, offering seamless connectivity to destinations across Air India's domestic and international network.

The addition of Osaka also enables travellers to book open-jaw itineraries, allowing them to fly into Osaka and return from Tokyo, or vice versa. This added flexibility is particularly relevant as multi-city travel is becoming increasingly popular among Indian visitors to Japan, especially along the country's famed "Golden Route", encompassing Tokyo, Kyoto, and Osaka..

Air India's Delhi-Osaka flights are being progressively made available for booking via the airline's official website, mobile app, customer contact centre, airport ticketing offices, and travel agents worldwide.

Japan continues to gain popularity among Indian travellers. More than 315,000 Indian visitors travelled to Japan in 2025, an increase of 35% over 2024 and nearly 80% above pre-pandemic levels, according to the Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO).

SriLankan Airlines Wins Prestigious SATA 2026 Visitors' Choice Award for Leading International Airline

TTA BULLETIN



SriLankan Airlines has once again been honoured with the prestigious Visitors' Choice Award for Leading International Airline at the South Asian Travel Awards (SATA) 2026, reaffirming its continued recognition in the regional travel and tourism industry. The airline, which has received this award in previous years, was the only international airline to be recognised in this category at this year's event. The 10th anniversary edition of the awards ceremony was held earlier this month at Hotel Barcelo Nasandhura in Male, Maldives.

Recognised as one of the key events on the Maldivian tourism and travel industry calendar, SATA celebrated its 10th anniversary on a grand scale, bringing together prominent industry stakeholders, including Government Ministers, distinguished dignitaries, diplomats and senior representatives from leading airlines and their respective head offices.

Commenting on the achievement, Dimuthu Tennakoon, Head of Commercial, SriLankan Airlines, stated, "We are honoured to receive this recognition at the South Asian Travel Awards 2026. Being named the Leading International Airline in the Visitors' Choice Awards once again is a meaningful acknowledgement of our commitment to serving our passengers and strengthening our presence in the region. This award inspires us to continue enhancing the travel experience we offer and to build stronger connections with the markets and communities we serve."

Complementing its commitment to service excellence, SriLankan Airlines offers an extensive flight network with convenient connections to destinations across the globe. In South Asia, the airline operates nearly 130 flights each week to 15 destinations across India, Pakistan, the Maldives, Nepal, and Bangladesh. With schedules thoughtfully designed to suit the needs of travellers, SriLankan Airlines provides seamless connectivity for those visiting Colombo for business or leisure, as well as passengers travelling onwards to destinations worldwide.

The accolade further reinforces SriLankan Airlines' presence in the regional travel and tourism industry, reflecting its commitment to delivering a quality travel experience and strengthening its relationships with travellers and industry partners across the region. The award also reflects the importance of building lasting relationships with travellers and industry

Qatar Airways and QNB Group Announce Strategic Global Payments Partnership

TTA BULLETIN



Qatar Airways and QNB Group have entered into a strategic global payments partnership that brings together the international reach and capabilities of two of Qatar's most recognised institutions.

The collaboration will integrate QNB's payment acceptance expertise with Qatar Airways' digital sales channels to support secure, efficient and seamless transactions for customers across the airline's global network.

The partnership agreement was signed by Qatar Airways Group Chief Executive Officer, Hamad Al-Khater, and Group Chief Executive Officer of QNB Group, Abdulla Mubarak Al Khalifa, in the presence of senior representatives from both organisations.

The collaboration reflects a shared commitment to innovation, resilience and the continued development of Qatar's digital payments ecosystem. It also demonstrates how leading Qatari institutions can combine complementary strengths to support secure, scalable and globally connected commerce.

With both organisations operating across international markets, the partnership will support cross-border commerce and strengthen the infrastructure of digital transactions across Qatar Airways' global sales network.

Under the partnership, QNB Group will process digital payments for Qatar Airways' e-commerce transactions, while both organisations work together to enhance transaction visibility, operational efficiency and the overall payment experience across the airline's digital sales channels.

The arrangement combines Qatar Airways' global customer reach and digital commerce platform with QNB Group's capabilities and payments expertise.

Qatar Airways Group Chief Executive Officer, Hamad Al-Khater, said: "As the aviation industry continues to evolve, Qatar Airways remains focused on building the digital capabilities required to support a modern, agile and globally connected business. Our partnership with QNB Group represents an important step in that journey, enabling us to further enhance the technology and financial infrastructure that underpins our operations. By combining our respective strengths, we are advancing our digital transformation agenda, increasing efficiency across our ecosystem and reinforcing our position as one of the world's leading digitally enabled airlines."

Commenting on the partnership and its broader significance, Group Chief Executive Officer of QNB Group, Abdulla Mubarak Al Khalifa, said: "This partnership reflects QNB's continued focus on building globally connected financial capabilities rooted in Qatar. By combining QNB Group's payments expertise with Qatar Airways' international reach, we are strengthening the infrastructure required to support secure, scalable and seamless digital commerce, while contributing to the continued evolution of Qatar's digital economy"

Beyond payment processing, the partnership establishes a framework for continued collaboration across digital commerce, customer experience, emerging technologies, and evolving payment solutions. Both organisations will explore opportunities that support their shared international ambitions, while responding to the evolving needs of travellers.

Thai Receives Ttg Travel Hall Of Fame 2026, Underscoring The Recognition Across The Regional Travel Industryinternational Airline

TTA BULLETIN



Thai Airways International Public Company Limited (THAI) received the Travel Hall of Fame Award at the 35th TTG Travel Awards 2026, held at Centara Grand at CentralWorld, Bangkok, on 24 September 2026. Mr. Chai Eamsiri, THAI's Chief Executive Officer, represented the Company in receiving the award.

The TTG Travel Awards, established in 1989, recognize outstanding individuals and organizations in the Asia-Pacific travel industry. The awards are determined by votes from readers of TTG Travel Trade Publishing's media network.

THAI was inducted into the TTG Travel Hall of Fame in 2016 after winning the Best South-East Asian Airline award for 10 consecutive years. THAI has continued to receive Hall of Fame recognition to the present day, reflecting the continued recognition of travel industry operators and partners for THAI's consistent standards of products and services.

THAI remains committed to continuously enhancing its products and service standards in order to deliver high-quality travel experiences to passengers and strengthen its position in the global aviation industry.

A Meaningful Exchange of Key Topics Discussed at SATA Connect 2026

Tourism leaders from India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan and the Maldives gathered at Barceló Nasandhura Malé on 7 October 2026 for Connect & Conversations, the knowledge platform of the South Asian Travel Awards. Across three panels, government and industry voices discussed a common South Asian visa, skills development, high-value tourism and the role of artificial intelligence, and spoke as neighbours with a shared future.

The panellists were Abdulla Ghiyas (Visit Maldives Corporation), Mohammed Hussein Alshaali (Gulf Craft), Jasim Janah (Hotels & Resorts Investment Maldives), Ugyen Dorji (HRAB, Bhutan), Enric Reina Canitrot (Barceló Nasandhura Malé), Nazoomi Azhar (Cinnamon Grand Colombo), VK Karthi (Crowne Plaza Dhaka Gulshan), Abdulla Yasir (Visit Maldives Corporation), Amal Goonetilleke (hospitality marketing consultant), Tek Mahat Bahadhur (HAN, Nepal) and Jyoti Mayal (THSC, India). Captain C.R. Rejith of Gulf Craft Maldives gave an industry presentation, and the sessions were moderated by Dinushka Chandrasena.























SriLankan Airlines Boosts Regional Aviation Training Credentials with A330 Programme for Etihad Airways

TTA BULLETIN



The SriLankan Airlines Flight Training team has successfully conducted a specialised Airbus A330 Line Flying Under Supervision (LFUS) programme for six senior training and examination pilots from Etihad Airways, underscoring the confidence placed by Etihad Airways in SriLankan Airlines' training and operational capabilities, while further strengthening the professional relationship between the two national carriers.

Five Type Rating Examiners (TREs) and one Senior Type Rating Examiner (STRE) from Etihad Airways participated in the programme, which drew on the expertise of SriLankan Airlines' flight instructors, experienced flight crew and supporting operational teams to provide the visiting examiner pilots with a safe, effective and professionally rewarding training experience.

Captain Chaminda De Zoysa, Head of Flight Operations at SriLankan Airlines, commented on the programme's success, stating, "For SriLankan Airlines, this opportunity represented more than a single training assignment. It demonstrates the airline's ability to leverage its Airbus A330 fleet, experienced instructors, operational expertise and established training infrastructure to support the training and development of aviation professionals from other major global carriers. The initiative also highlights the potential of SriLankan Airlines Flight Training to serve as a regional aviation training partner, offering specialised and high-quality training solutions to international operators."

Behind the programme was extensive planning and coordination by SriLankan Airlines. The Civil Aviation Authority of Sri Lanka (CAASL), the Ministry of Defence and other relevant stakeholders supported the process of establishing the necessary framework and securing the required clearances, paving the way for the seamless delivery of the programme.

Through initiatives such as this, SriLankan Airlines continues to demonstrate that its expertise is not just limited to operating flights, but extends to supporting the development of aviation professionals worldwide and positioning Sri Lanka as a regional centre for professional aviation training.

British Airways launches menu collaboration with Hoppers restaurants to celebrate new route to Colombo, Sri Lanka

TTA BULLETIN



British Airways is marking the launch of flights to Sri Lanka with a limited-time collaboration with Hoppers, the pioneering London-based Sri Lankan and South Indian restaurants.

From 23 October, customers in Club World travelling on board British Airways' new route to Colombo, will be able to enjoy a special menu created in partnership with Hoppers, to bring the bold flavours, rich spices and famous food culture of the island to the skies.

The menu features dishes inspired by Hoppers' best loved classics including a starter of yoghurt vadai, a soaked lentil fritter served with yoghurt, tamarind and coriander chutney and crisps - a Hoppers' rendition of the popular snacks sold by street hawkers on Galle Face Green. For main course, customers can enjoy a choice of Hoppers' signature Kalupol-spiced chicken, served with tangy lemon rice and beetroot curry, or Pollichathu Cod, marinated in a tomato chilli paste, cooked wrapped in banana leaf and served with coconut rice and spicy pineapple curry. Watalappam bread pudding is the comforting end to the meal, served with spiced crumble and malt cream - the Sri Lankan spin on the classic British dessert.

A specially curated Hoppers cocktail will also be available in the British Airways Club Lounge at London Gatwick for customers to enjoy before departure. The 'Ceylon Pearl' is the perfect pre-flight aperitif, featuring Tanqueray Rangpur gin, lychee and pink citrus tonic.

Mark Brega, British Airways' Executive Chef said: "It was a pleasure to work with the talented team at Hoppers to bring the vibrant flavours of Sri Lanka to our customers at 35,000 feet. Food is such an important part of experiencing a destination, and Sri Lanka has a rich culinary heritage that we wanted to celebrate. Working together, we set out to create dishes that capture the spirit of Sri Lankan hospitality to transport customers to the streets and shores of the island, before they even touchdown."

Hoppers opened in Soho in 2015, helping introduce a new generation of London diners to the food and flavours of Sri Lanka, and was awarded a Michelin Bib Gourmand within its first year. Inspired by the home cooking, roadside stalls and toddy shops of Sri Lanka and South India, Hoppers now has restaurants in Marylebone, King's Cross and Shoreditch.

Karan Gokani, founder of Hoppers said: "It's long been a dream to serve Hoppers food in the skies, so we were thrilled when British Airways approached us about this partnership. For the past decade, we've brought some of our favourite memories and flavours of Sri Lanka to our restaurants in London,

Emirates Holidays unveils Thailand Pass, unlocking exclusive perks and savings for holidaymakers

TTA BULLETIN



Emirates Holidays has launched the Thailand Pass, offering exclusive benefits across shopping, dining and leisure activities for customers travelling to and throughout Thailand.

Available to Emirates Holidays customers* traveling to Thailand, the pass unlocks exclusive offers of up to 40% off, with no minimum spend.

Emirates Holidays customers can redeem their offers by simply presenting their vouchers and a copy of their passport at the reception of the participating mall or outlet to collect their Welcome Package. The offers include shopping and dining vouchers across 14 participating malls across Bangkok, Phuket, Koh Samui, Pattaya, Krabi and Chiang Mai. The Thailand Pass also includes a complimentary shuttle service between centralwOrld and Central Village Bangkok, in addition to complimentary VIP lounge access at both venues.

The pass also unlocks Buy 1 Get 1 Free offers on a selection of top attractions and experiences across Bangkok, Phuket, Pattaya and Krabi, including Playsquare Laser Tag, Playmondo, Swensen's, Auntie Anne's, Aquaria Phuket, OTO Playpark and Monowheel, along with an additional 5% discount on Karmakamet wellness products.

The launch comes as Thailand remains one of Emirates Holidays' most popular destinations, with bookings up 10% year-on-year. It also builds on Emirates' continued investment in Thailand. The airline recently deployed its Airbus A350 aircraft to Phuket and today operates retrofitted Airbus A380 and Boeing 777 aircraft with new Premium Economy cabins to Bangkok. The airline operates 49 weekly flights to Thailand, reflecting sustained demand for the destination, making the Thailand Pass a timely addition to Emirates Holidays proposition for travellers.

The Thailand Pass is available on package bookings made until 31 March 2027, giving customers ample time to plan their Thailand getaway and take advantage of the exclusive benefits. Emirates Holidays' customers can also secure their trip with a deposit, in addition to benefitting from a flexible cancellation policy, allowing them time to apply for visas where needed, or make last-minute changes.

Qatar Airways to Increase Connectivity to Australia with Flights to Western Sydney International Airport in 2027

TTA BULLETIN



Qatar Airways announced the next phase of its expansion in Australia, with plans to launch direct passenger services between Hamad International Airport (DOH) and Western Sydney International Airport (WSI) from 15 December 2027.

Western Sydney becomes Qatar Airways' seventh gateway in Australia, alongside Sydney (SYD), Melbourne (MEL), Brisbane (BNE), Perth (PER), Adelaide (ADL), and Canberra (CBR).

The new route, on sale from 19 December 2026, delivers more choice for Australian travellers and builds on the airline's role in connecting Australia with the world. Qatar Airways links Australian cities with Doha and global destinations across Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and the Americas.

Qatar Airways Group Chief Executive Officer, Hamad Al Khater, said: "Our launch at Western Sydney International is the next chapter in our long-standing partnership with Australia, one of our most important markets.

"The new route will link Western Sydney directly with Doha and, through Hamad International Airport, with more than 170 destinations across the Middle East, Africa, Europe and beyond, strengthening existing ties and creating new opportunities for trade, tourism and investment between Australia, Qatar and the wider world.

"With the airport operating around the clock, we will bring more international visitors to New South Wales, offer Australian travellers the premium Qatar Airways experience from a second Sydney gateway, and give exporters across the state a direct cargo route to customers in the Gulf and beyond."

The new route will initially be served by three weekly flights using the airline's Boeing 777-300ER aircraft, featuring the award-winning Qsuite Business Class, with 42 Business Class and 312 Economy Class seats. Qatar Airways intends to progressively increase the service to daily operations further strengthening connectivity and customer choice.

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Wild Glamping Gal Oya, one of Thema Collection's 17 properties, is nestled in the historic village of Rathugala, developed in collaboration with the indigenous Vedda community. Set amidst savanna forests and picturesque mountains, its 30-acre organic farm offers an authentic nature-based experience. Guests can explore the surrounding wilderness on boat safaris, and if lucky, witness the unforgettable sight of wild elephants swimming between islands in Senanayake Samudraya.







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