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"...marching forward in strengthening of ecotourism fraternity of Asia-Pacific Region..."

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Elephant Gathering in Sri Lanka



There are an estimated 6000 wild elephants in Sri Lanka, with the species having been listed as officially endangered by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) since 1986. These gentle giants are an integral part of the island's culture and religion, besides being a key feature of the nation's identity.

Elephants are revered here, but deforestation and the spread of human habitation has led to their falling populations, countered today by sustained efforts at their conservation.

Watching elephants in their natural habitat is a great way. They are a protected species on the island, and can be spotted at several national parks throughout the year, including, Minneriya, Udawalawe, Wilpattu, Kumana (Yala East), Lunugamwehera, Wasgamuwa and Gal Oya National Parks.

However, the best way to watch these magnificent creatures is to drive up for The Gathering: a congregation of more than 300 elephants from all over Sri Lanka's Northern Province, coming together on the lake bed at Minneriya National Park close to Habarana, Sri Lanka. This is the glimpse of the biggest gathering of wild Asian elephants in the world.

Minneriya National Park is located around 80 kilometers from Colombo, in the North Central Province National The park covers an area of more than 8,500 hectares of land and is part of the elephant corridor that connects the Kaudulla and Wasgamuwa National Parks.

In addition to the large number of elephants that can be seen here, the park is home to more than 20 other species of mammals, including the purple-faced langur monkey and the toque macaque monkey, sambar deer, Sri Lankan leopards, and sloth bears. There are also 160 types of birds that can be spotted here, the most visible of which are the flocks of over 2000 cormorants.

This congregation is fueled by the diminishing water and food resources in other areas provides a spectacular sight as the elephants socialize, bathe, drink, feed and potentially find mates.

This gathering is recognized as the sixth largest animal gathering globally by Lonely Planet and acclaimed by the BBC and CNN as a natural phenomenon that offers visitors a unique and memorable life time experience.

Sri Lanka Ecotourism Foundation joins with Rain Forest Connection (RFCx), USA to conserve Forests and Wildlife



Sri Lanka Ecotourism Foundation, the pioneer National Ecotourism Society of Sri Lanka that established 25 years ago has collaborated with Rain Forest Connection, USA, a world authority in conservation of rain forests and wildlife parks in supporting of their global efforts. Through this collaboration Sri Lanka forests and wildlife parks also would immensely benefit in conservation of biodiversity and protecting of forests and national parks from illegal logging and poaching.

Rainforest Connection (RFCx) builds and deploys scalable, open acoustic monitoring systems that can halt illegal logging and poaching, and biodiversity measurement and monitoring. System. Deforestation which accounts for 17% of all global carbon emissions and affects. Rain Forests are protecting the Earth's largest carbon sinks that we need in order to have a stable atmosphere.

The primary business of the Rain Forest Connection (RFC) is to develop soundscape data for conservation. RFC has installations in 38 countries. Rainforest Connection (RFCx) uses their 'Guardian System' to help protect forests and wildlife from illegal logging and poaching. Part of this system with hardware with solar-powered acoustic streaming device that is placed in tree-top canopies, with a highly sensitive external microphone that captures all ambient sound within 3 SKM depending on the source of the sound. Rain forests' rich biodiversity is incredibly important to our well-being and the well-being of our planet. Rainforests help regulate our climate and provide us with everyday

The RFCx monitoring system gives its partners the opportunity to protect key rainforest areas and respond to real-time alerts, while sharing large amounts of ecosystem data that help negotiate increased protections in the forests and national parks.

Sri Lanka Ecotourism Foundation has developed a proposal to be forwarded to the authorities of Forests and Wildlife in Sri Lanka with a view to save our forests and wildlife resources with the help of RFC.



Topher White, Founder, Rainforest Connection

Editors Note

Leader of the National People's Power (NPP) Mr. Anura Kumara Dissanayake was sworn in as the ninth executive President of Sri Lanka at the Presidential Secretariat on the 23rd September, 2024. Delivering a short speech at the ceremony he vowed to bring in economic stability as his first priority and said his victory was a victory of the people.

Mr. Dissanayake further said he will ensure economic stability as his first priority and will get help from business community, foreign countries to develop the economy. As published in the election manifesto of the NPP the development of tourism is one of the main priorities of Presidents economic agendas. Sri Lanka Ecotourism Foundation (SLEF) is happy to note that one of his economic priorities is to develop tourism in Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka's tourism industry is anticipating continued growth following the recent presidential election, widely regarded as one of the most peaceful in the nation's history, Sri Lanka.

It is estimated that the tourism sector earned around \$1.1 million in 2022. Earnings from tourism in 2022 amounted to \$1,136 million, compared to \$507 million in 2021, recording an impressive annual growth of 124.2 percent but still far behind \$4.4 billion earnings in 2018.

While supporting to develop tourism in Sri Lanka we, the SLEF wishes to bring the attention of the new president to focus in attracting high-end tourism market, particularly ecotourism market." Ecotourism is presently seen as one of the most lucrative niche markets in the global tourism industry, as ecotourists are higher spenders than ordinary mass tourists. High spending, nature loving, responsible tourists are undoubtedly an attractive option for governments looking for ways of earning scarce foreign exchange through tourism". (UN-WTO). The concept of Ecological Tourism or popularly known as Ecotourism is a new dimension of the global tourism industry in which selected sites and locations and sometimes entire geographical zones are preserved for tourists to visit and appreciate them in their pristine natural beauty. Ecotourism is ecologically sustainable tourism with a primary focus on experiencing natural areas that fosters environmental and cultural understanding, appreciation and conservation. Ecotourism, as a niche tourism market, is considered to be one of the fastest growing segments of the tourism industry, with claims that interest in ecotourism is increasing by 25% to 30% a year. This demand is being fueled by among other things, such as nature-based experiences in uncrowded, pristine environments, community interactions, nature and wildlife etc. Certainly many destinations in the Asia Pacific region, especially Sri Lanka, falls within this category and potential to develop these ideals.

Since 2020, the SLEF is supporting Sri Lanka Tourism to develop ecotourism segments to attract high-end tourists to Sri Lanka. SLEF has been collaborating with many international ecotourism networks. Among them, our main partner, The International Ecotourism Society (TIES), is the oldest and largest ecotourism society in the world with over 15,000 members in 50 countries. In 2021 TIES offered its fullest support to host a landmark ecotourism conference in Sri Lanka, The Ecotourism and Sustainable Tourism Conference. (ESTC) to bring hundreds of global tourism professionals to Sri Lanka. Mr. Jon Bruno, President and CEO of TIES informed the then Minister of Tourism in Sri Lanka in bringing international ecotourism development expertise at least from 50 nations and this could be a great global exposure to Sri Lanka TIES believed such a conference would generate at least 3,000,000 USD worth of Ecotravel to Sri Lanka, as the organization will post pictures and articles over a period of months, since the TIES is a very strong driver of ecotraveler decision making.

Bogambara Prison Cells in Sri Lanka transform to hotel rooms



(Courtesy Sunday Times) Spending a holiday in a prison cell might seem unusual; yet the oldest and maximum security prison Bogambara in Kandy, Sri Lanka, now declared as a heritage site, is likely to become part of the Signature Collection of the Hilton Hotel chain. The government has been in discussion with the Melwa Group that has been engaged in establishing the Hilton hotel in Yala and since it was looking for space in Kandy this heritage site in the center of the city will become the next best attraction for visitors. Any hill country hotel has a view but Bogambara is in the middle of the city, when we develop a hotel there is quite a challenge, due to the heritage value of the building and the thematic nature of the prison. Previous investors were unable to develop the present developer says.

The present developer explained that they were on the look out to establish a Hilton Hotel in Kandy when they were approached by the authorities to use this building while retaining its heritage value as they were ready to accept..

The requirement for Bogambara prison is to be converted to a hotel that will attract high end travellers and for the landmark building to be developed as a historical place. The negotiations are still on and the lease agreement is yet to be signed with the Melwa Group and the government, he noted.

With about 350 cells on four floors within these walls it includes various art work and in fact the walls have a large number of inscriptions in the form of poems relating the stories of its inmates. "We are interested and it is a very challenging property," he said adding that with plans to establish a hospitality training institute this would become an ideal location.

Architects ARC International based in Dubai will be working on the project to ensure the building will be preserved. Plans are underway to host guests to evening shows and dramas and other activities. This prison was built by the British and it is one of the few prisons in Sri Lanka that has the gallows and the death row comprising single cells where prisoners are held seven days before they are hanged.

Years ago, the Bogambara prison was closed down and shifted to Pallekele, Sri Lanka



TIES (The International Ecotourism Society)



Rainforest connection's primary focus is promoting soundscape data for supporting conservation and eliminate poaching and illegal logging in Forests and Wildlife Parks of all over the world which RFC currently has installations in 38 countries.

Mr. Bruno, has sent a felicitation message in congratulating the HE Anura Kumara Disanayake, the newly elected President of Sri Lanka. He also assured his fullest support to develop tourism in Sri Lanka generating eco-tourism business worth of approximately 4 million USD annually. Mr. Jon hopes the President would be happy to collaborate with TIES as his capacity of Minister of Tourism in Sri Lanka.

Introduction to Sri Lanka Ecotourism Foundation (SLEF)

Sri Lanka Ecotourism Foundation (SLEF), is the pioneer National Ecotourism Society of Sri Lanka established 25 years ago. www.srilankaecotourism.org SLEF was the first Presidential Award Winners of Sri Lanka Tourism; for "Outstanding Contribution for Sri Lanka Tourism" and the 'Best Initiative for Ecotourism Research, Training and Education in Sri Lanka'.

Sri Lanka Ecotourism Foundation (SLEF) dedicated to promote Ecotourism in Sri Lanka.

The main focus of Sri Lanka Ecotourism Foundation is the socioeconomic and socio-cultural development of Sri Lanka, through Sustainable and Ecotourism.

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Mr. Jon Bruno is the President, CEO, The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) and the Managing Director, Rain Forest Connection, USA and the CEO of Global Sustainable AI Assembly.

CCH Connects Nature to positively impact in the lives of Children: The Story of Nature Appreciation Clubs in Northern Sri Lanka.



For the past 14 years, the Center for Children's Happiness (CCH) has been transforming the lives of children by connecting them to nature through its Nature Appreciation Clubs (NAC). Established in over 100 schools, primarily in Northern Sri Lanka, these clubs have reached more than 18,000 children, fostering a deep appreciation for the natural world and inspiring future leaders in environmental conservation. T. T. Mayuran, founder of CCH, highlighted the power of nature involvement in bringing positive changes to the lives of children as well as the Earth.

The NAC, supported by the Field Ornithology Group of Sri Lanka and renowned ornithologist Prof. Sarath Kotagama, has taken over 40 schools on residential field learning trips to the Sinharaja Rainforest. These immersive experiences allow children to engage with biodiversity firsthand, strengthening their understanding of ecosystems and instilling a sense of responsibility toward protecting the environment. Field camps and outdoor activities organized by NAC have created opportunities for children to bond with nature, often leading to improved mental wellbeing and resilience.

In addition to hands-on nature education, the clubs actively engage in research and advocacy to address environmental issues. The initiative promotes conservation efforts, such as tree planting and bird watching, and empowers children to participate in protecting their natural surroundings. By introducing nature as a key element in addressing the wellbeing of children and families, NAC has made a significant impact on emotional health, especially for those in post-conflict regions.

Beyond personal enrichment, many children involved in the NAC have testified that their experiences shaped their career choices, with some pursuing paths in climate action and environmental advocacy. The program's goals go beyond education—it seeks to create a nature-friendly childhood that fosters a lifelong connection to the environment. Through nature education, awareness programs, and professional development opportunities, NAC is cultivating future stewards of the Earth who are dedicated to protecting and preserving the environment for generations to come.





India-Sri Lanka passenger ferry service resumes

The passenger ferry service between Nagapattinam in India and Kanke-santhurai (KKS) near Jaffna in Sri Lanka's Northern Province, which was first launched in October 2023, has now resumed operations.

The Indian High Commission said that the ferry named 'Sivagangai' and operated by IndSri Ferry Services, completed recently its maiden journey on the route in approximately four hours, carrying around 50 passengers. The passengers were warmly welcomed at the KKS port by the Consul General of India at Jaffna, marking a significant moment in the efforts to enhance maritime connectivity between the two nations.

To make the ferry service more affordable, the Government of India is providing financial assistance of over LKR 25 million per month for one year to cover relevant charges and operating costs at the Nagapattinam port.

In addition, the Government of Sri Lanka has reduced the deviation tax charged to passengers leaving Sri Lanka by vessels and ships.

Looking ahead, there are plans to explore additional routes and services to expand connectivity and enhance economic collaboration between India and Sri Lanka.



SLAF launches 'Eagles' Skydive Sri Lanka' to boost adventure tourism

Sri Lankan fans will be getting a chance to witness an exciting display of sky diving at the Koggala Sri Lanka Air Force complex from November 22 to December 4.

Sky Diving enthusiasts will receive a rare chance in to dive from 12,000 feet up in the sky after a medical test and a training session along with a foreign trained experienced sky diver.

Men and women who are over 18 years of age will be eligible to take part in the event said Ananka Vithana, Director Operations, Sky Dive Lanka. Staged under the blessings of the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA) this sky diving extravaganza will bring thrills and enjoyment for the young sky diving enthusiasts and will be a blessing for the tourism industry of the island.

A G18 modern aircrafts will be used for the event and according to the Director of Operations of Sky Dive Sri Lanka, a large number of enthusiasts have already applied for participation.

For more information, contact SLAF, or visit the website [airforce.lk/skydive] (<https://www.airforce.lk/skydive/>) +94 76 818 4436 / +94 77 222 9264



Visa Issue for the tourists; The SC orders contempt charges against immigration chief

The Supreme Court has ordered that contempt of court charges be filed against the Controller General of Immigration and Emigration for his failure to comply with a Court interim order to suspend the implementation of the electronic visa system. Right now a tourist is forced to spend around two and a half hours on arrival at the Bandaranaike International Airport (BIA) as there is no online platform for a person to obtain a visa to enter the country, causing chaos and congestion and creating a bad reputation on the image of Sri Lanka, Sri Lanka Association of Inbound Tour Operators (SLAITO) President Nishad Wijetunga said at a media briefing held on Friday at the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce. Representatives of other industry associations were also present at the meeting. He said that the "all-powerful" Sri Lankan Immigration Controller Harsha Ilukpitiya was holding out, going against directives from the executive and the judiciary.



Tourism Industry Officials discussing about the tourist visa issues

Everything you need to know about the senior tourist

CURRENTLY, THE TRAVEL INDUSTRY IS UNDERGOING SIGNIFICANT CHANGES DIRECTLY RELATED TO DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS EXPERIENCED BY SOCIETY, ESPECIALLY EUROPEAN SOCIETY. THESE DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS ARE NOTHING OTHER THAN THE GROWTH OF THE SENIOR POPULATION (PEOPLE AGED 55 AND OLDER), WHICH IN TURN HAS BROUGHT WITH IT NEW AND INTERESTING CONCEPTS OF TOURISM:

Currently, the travel industry is undergoing significant changes directly related to demographic trends experienced by society, especially European society. These demographic trends are nothing other than the growth of the senior population (people aged 55 and older), which in turn has brought with it new and interesting concepts of tourism: senior tourism and the senior tourist. Everyone who works in the tourism industry must be up to date with these new trends, as it is believed that they will be transforming the tourism sector.

WHAT IS SENIOR TOURISM?

Before talking about senior tourists, it is necessary to define what senior tourism is. According to Antunes (2012), senior tourism can be defined as "the practice of activities and experiences by people over 55 years of age, outside of their daily lives, without dependents, children and for a minimum period of 24 hours and for undefined time".

THE SENIOR TOURIST

The main characteristic that defines a senior tourist is his age, this is what differentiates him from other tourists. In this sense, a senior tourist for some authors is one who is over 65 years of age, for others it is one who is 55 years of age or older. The "senior" category is often divided into two subgroups: the younger seniors from 55 to 64 years old and the older seniors from 65 and older.

PROFILE OF THE SENIOR TOURIST

Currently, senior tourists are characterized as being cultured people, with an adventurous spirit, with better physical and mental condition and, therefore, very willing to travel. In addition, this tourist is more integrated with technology, for example, according to a 2017 Promotur statistic, senior tourists booked their accommodation and flight through websites. When it comes to traveling, senior tourists are looking for a destination that helps them maintain their physical, mental and social well-being, as well as increase their personal enrichment, so likewise, one of the main reasons why older people travel is to enjoy their vacations or retirement. There is also visiting relatives, relaxing and getting out of the routine.

SERVICES THAT SENIOR TOURISM SEEKS

Something that every owner or investor of Seniors Resorts must take into account is the fact that there are certain services that senior tourists consider very important when choosing accommodation. These services are: safe medical assistance, direct and comfortable transportation, secure accommodation, food appropriate to their needs, means that facilitate communication, trained personnel to care for them, as well as a wide range of recreational activities.

The activities most in demand by senior tourists are all those related to recreation, rest, culture and religion.

EUROPEAN SENIOR TOURIST

Now, taking into account the European senior tourist, it has been seen that there is a high propensity to travel abroad from countries such as Belgium, Germany, the United Kingdom, Luxembourg, Denmark, the Netherlands and Austria, while countries such as Spain, Italy, Greece and Portugal the propensity to travel abroad is low. The main profile of the senior tourism are retirees with plenty of time on their hands, that are experienced travelers and are making traveling a priority now. They also have time flexibility and are demanding higher quality services than the average tourist.

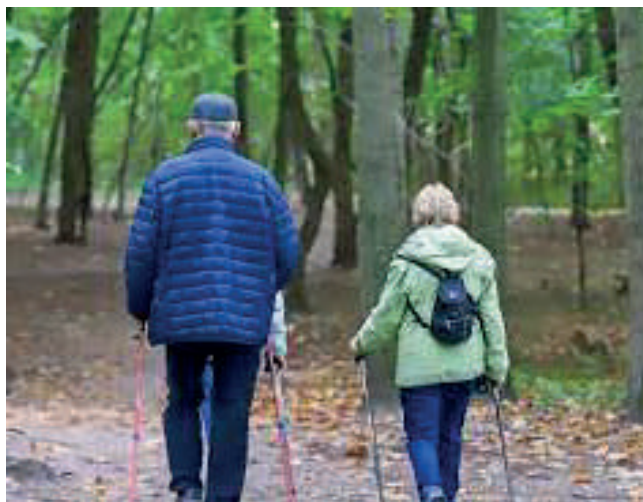
Another very important aspect to consider, especially the owner and investor in the senior resort sector, is that there is a willingness on the part of northern European countries to travel to countries on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, among which Spain stands out. On the other hand, the issuing countries for senior tourism that stand out the most in Europe are Germany and the United Kingdom.

THE "SENIOR RESORT" CONCEPT

Finally, the senior resort concept. This term refers to a tourist-residential complex designed specifically for people over 65 years of age. Senior resorts are made up of individual homes that can be apartments, villas, bungalows, farmhouses or chalets. They generally consist of 1 or 2 rooms. These homes are built near or around one or more central buildings that offer medical, restaurant, recreation and security services for seniors. Most of these complexes are equipped with special sports facilities and green areas for seniors to enjoy.

The senior resort functions as a vacation establishment or as a recovery center for a defined period of time.

They are also designed for retired people who want to stay for long periods or even for people who want to stay permanently. In the latter case, the person can buy the property or enter into a lifelong rental contract.



UN lauds Sri Lanka's mangrove forestation as example to the world

Sri Lanka has earned global recognition for mangrove restoration projects and is to be declared as a United Nations (UN) World Restoration Flagship. The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA)

Sri Lanka has earned global recognition for mangrove restoration projects and is to be declared as a United Nations (UN) World Restoration Flagship.

The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) proclaimed 2021–2030 as the Decade on Ecosystem Restoration. A global effort is on to prevent degradation of ecosystems as well as reverse the damage already done to ecosystems. Annually, expert groups appointed by the UN, evaluate, select and award the most striking efforts on ecosystem restoration and designate them as flagship initiatives.

This year Sri Lanka has been recognized.

Sri Lanka has received the recognition on February 27 at the United Nations Environmental Assembly held at Nairobi. Officials of the Department of Wildlife Conservation (DWC), Forest Department, officials of the ministry, other stakeholders as well as non-governmental environmental organization representatives has will attended this forum.

Meanwhile, DWC Director General Chandana Sooriyabandara said that the DWC, the Forestry Department as well as non-governmental organizations carried out mangrove ecosystem restoration programmes. The DWC focused on restoring mangroves in Anawilundawa in Puttalam where 40 hectares were planted.

A DWC official, said, that Anawilundawa was earlier used for prawn farming under a Board Of Investment project but was abandoned. The DWC initiated a mangrove restoration programme in the area in 2018.

But, a mob led by the brother of the late state minister Sanath Nishnatha destroyed the area to illegally allow prawn cultivation.

Following the destruction, the DWC fought a legal battle and was supported by non-governmental organizations, environmentalists, experts as well as universities and private companies. The DWC was able to successfully restore the mangrove ecosystem. The aftermath of the 2004 tsunami and its destructive impact on Sri Lanka's coastline emphasized the importance of mangroves as a coastal protector. However, the continued destruction of mangroves, and the lack of a formal mechanism impeded effective conservation and restoration.

Sri Lanka began to strengthen coastal ecosystems through expert panels, task forces, policies, action plans and restoration guidelines that represent top-to-bottom and bottom-to-top coalitions for action and conservation. The approach to mangrove restoration involves science-driven methodologies, with a focus on reviving ecosystem services.

This approach focuses on restoring the balance of the entire ecosystem and its connectivity. The programmes are being carried out with the involvement of youth as researchers along with multiple stakeholder groups covering the Government, NGOs, the private sector, academia and the community



Sri Lanka Tourism is launching the 7th edition of the National Tourism Awards, celebrating excellence and outstanding contribution in the travel and tourism

The objective of the National Tourism Awards is to promote and enhance service standards, encourage best practices, and foster a culture of excellence and innovation within the industry. By acknowledging the achievements of individuals and organisations, we aim to inspire others to contribute to the sustainable development of tourism in Sri Lanka," the state agency said in a media release.

The awards are for a wide range of categories to ensure every facet of the tourism industry is recognised. These categories cover various sectors including accommodation, restaurants, tour operators, airlines, MICE tourism, marketing communications, education and training, events, excellence in service, etc. Applications and relevant information can be downloaded from the website www.tourismawards.lk. Submissions are open from August 15 to September 15, 2024. The state agency didn't say when the awards would be presented.

The first ever National Travel and Tourism Award was held in 2008. Since then, this annual event has been gathering momentum with more participation and recognition of new products and services. The last event was held in 2018 and subsequent occurrences such as Easter Sunday Attacks and the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the continuity of this event.



Dr. Palitha Gurusinghe, President, Sri Lanka Ecotourism Foundation is receiving Sri Lanka Tourism Awards' for 'Outstanding Contribution for Sri Lanka Tourism' in 2011



International Tourism Fairs October, 2024 MEET POLAND Tourism Workshop, October 3-7, 2024 Krakow – Poland

This workshop is specially for the DMCs, Outbound Tour Operators, Event Organizers (MICE) and Decision Makers

Website: www.meetpoland.pl/program. This event is being organized in collaboration with the Polish Ministry of Tourism, Polish Tourist Organization and the Chamber of Hotels in Krakow, we have specially prepared a program for Hosted Buyers. For Buyers we offer: train transport from Warsaw and Krakow, 4 nights accommodation, participation in the programme and post tour in Krakow.

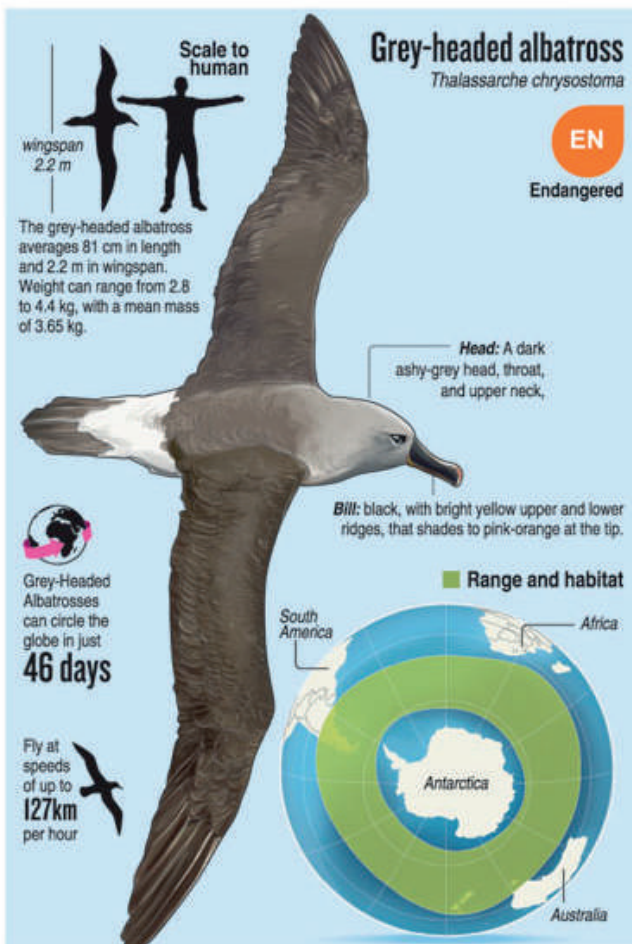
For Buyers TTG Poland offers a voucher for the stay of organized groups in Poland as a refund of flight costs for organizers of incoming tourism to Poland. Terms to be agreed during the workshops.

The workshop is coordinated by the TTG Poland, which has specialized in organizing B2B meetings for the tourism sector since 1992, including Polish Travel Mart, Buy Poland and Meet Poland.

Bird Watching in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka's first Albatross sighting thrills birdwatchers

Lahiru Walpita, an avid birdwatcher based in Mannar, spends his days combing the beaches in search of seabirds. On the morning of July 22, at around 5.45 a.m., something caught his attention; a large seabird appeared on the horizon. The bird was following a boat. Eagerly peering through his spotting scope, Mr. Walpita hurriedly noted the bird's features and was thrilled to identify the unmistakable beak pattern of an albatross. Later, around 10 a.m., he spotted the bird again. This time, he managed to take some clear photographs.



There are several species of albatross, so Mr. Walpita shared the photos with more experienced birders. With their help, the bird was identified as a grey-headed albatross (*Thalassarche chrysostoma*), based on its distinctive features—primarily a white body and a slate-grey head and neck.

"This could be one of the biggest finds of the century for Sri Lankan birds," says Prof. Sampath Senevirathne, an ornithologist at the University of Colombo. There are about 30 species of albatross worldwide, most of which inhabit the Antarctic and other southern polar regions, except for three species. This is the first recorded observation of a living albatross in the Northern Indian Ocean, says Prof. Senevirathne, highlighting the significance of the sighting.

Albatrosses are large seabirds that travel long distances. The grey-headed albatross, for example, has a wingspan of 2.2 meters (7.2 feet), making it a gigantic bird when it spreads its wings. The large wingspan of albatrosses, including the grey-headed albatross, is a remarkable adaptation that enables these birds to thrive in their oceanic environment, says Prof. Senevirathne. Some species, like the wandering albatross, can have wingspans of up to 3.5 metres (11.5 feet). Their wings are long and narrow, and this shape is ideal for gliding and soaring, as it reduces drag and allows for sustained flight. Their large wings distribute their body weight, making it easier to glide efficiently over the ocean, explains Prof. Senevirathne.

The grey-headed albatross primarily flies around the South Polar region and only comes to land to raise its young. The birds lay their eggs on islands, and the parents take turns caring for the young. While one stays with the chick, the other goes to sea to forage for food, a process that can take a week or two and involves travelling across the Southern Ocean. Upon returning, they feed the chick a nutrient-rich substance, and then the other parent leaves to forage. Prof. Senevirathne explained to the Sunday Times that this feeding cycle requires incredible stamina and endurance.

Albatrosses have a long lifespan, with some species reaching the age of 70 years. They require predator-free islands to lay their eggs, as they nest on the ground where small mammals like mice or snakes can threaten entire colonies. Albatrosses also have a tendency to follow fishing boats in search of an easy meal, but they often become entangled in long-line fishing hooks when attempting to take bait, resulting in drowning. Additionally, albatrosses often mistake plastic debris for food, leading to injury, starvation, and death. Overfishing reduces the populations of squid and fish that albatrosses rely on, further threatening their survival. These factors collectively make the species vulnerable, as increased adult mortality can cause a drastic decline in the population, says Prof. Senevirathne.

The grey-headed albatross is categorized as endangered, with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) estimating their global population to be about 250,000 to 300,000, with a declining trend. Some species of albatross have nearly become extinct, with only a few dozen surviving, Prof. Senevirathne said, adding however that international conservation organizations are taking action based on scientific methodologies to minimize the threats faced by albatrosses. This has led to some conservation successes, with populations of most being stable, he said.

Climate change is also expected to impact albatross species, as changes in ocean temperatures and currents affect the availability of prey such as squid and fish. Rising sea levels and increased frequency of storms can damage breeding sites on remote islands, which can be particularly harmful for species like the albatross that have fewer broods. Prof. Senevirathne, who conducts research in Mannar, praises Mr. Walpita's dedication to seabird observation, noting that seabirds are one of the most challenging groups of birds to study. He said Mr. Walpita has provided a number of dead seabird specimens he found on the Mannar coast, some of which are first-time records.

Meanwhile, Mr. Walpita told the Sunday Times that he began birdwatching seriously in 2020 and focused more on studying seabirds in 2021, inspired by a few other birdwatchers who started engaging in seabird observations. Mr. Walpita begins his birding sessions daily at 5.30 a.m., walking a 5 km stretch along the beach in search of seabirds. He also rescues seabirds that have difficulty flying and collects carcasses to send to the University of Colombo's specimen collection.

Sri Lanka Forests and Wildlife Parks and Sanctuaries

Forests

Sri Lanka is in the north-equatorial tropical zone. Therefore, it experiences a climate with high rainfall and temperature which permits the country to be broadly classified into groups as follows:

- Terrestrial ecosystems
- Forests-Lowland rain forests, Dry monsoon forests, Montane forests, Thorn scrubs
- Grasslands-Savanna,
- Inland wetland is with Ecosystem-Rivers and streams, Reservoirs, Marshes and swamps, villus
- Ecosystem is with coastal Areas-Lagoons and estuaries, Mangroves, Coral reefs, Sea shore, Sand dunes, Sea grass beds, Salt marshes.

Deforestation in Sri Lanka

- In 1882, forest cover in Sri Lanka 82%
- Between 1990 and 2000, Sri Lanka lost an average of 1.14% of its forest per year
- In total, between 1990 and 2005 alone, Sri Lanka lost 17.7% of its forest cover.

Causes and Impacts

- Large scale agricultural and settlement schemes without the recognition given for wild animal habitats and their migration patterns have been a major driver of deforestation and degradation, particularly in the dry zone, during the last century. Planted crops, such as sugar cane, banana, maize and paddy, in an unplanned manner, have led to ever-increasing human-elephant conflicts.
- Sri Lanka current forest cover (In 2024) is 16.5% in 2019 down from 29.7% in 2017
- Deforestation rate is so high in Sri Lanka due to the illegal logging. It is the major issue in Sri Lanka.

Natural forests in Sri Lanka

- Sri Lanka exhibits a remarkable biological diversity and is considered to be the richest country in Asia in terms of species concentration. In 2019 a total area of 16.5% of Sri Lanka was forested. In 2010, it was 28.8% 9.0% of Sri Lanka's forests are classified as primary forest.
- Area: 10,825 km² (4,180 sq mi)
- Biome: Tropical forest
- Borders: Indian Ocean

The Deforestation in Sinharaja Rainforest Reserve in Sri Lanka

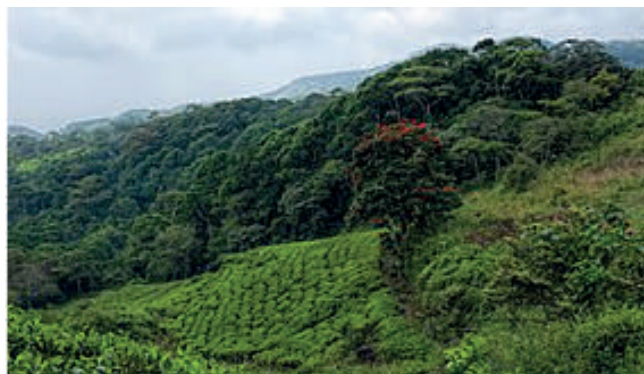
The Sinharaja Virgin Rain Forest is the largest forest in Sri Lanka and it is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Located in south-west Sri Lanka, Sinharaja is the country's last viable area of primary tropical rainforest. More than 60% of the trees are endemic and many of them are considered rare. There is much endemic wildlife, especially birds, but the reserve is also home to over 50% of Sri Lanka's endemic species of mammals and butterflies, as well as many kinds of insects, reptiles and rare amphibians.

Covering an area of 8,864 ha and ranging from an altitude of 300 – 1,170 meters, it consists of 6,092 ha of Forest Reserve and 2,772 ha of Proposed Forest Reserve.

The Sinharaja Rainforest reserve is considered as a World Heritage by the United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), currently it is about being called as a Heritage destruction which is done in a way more connected with a political myopia. But there is a possibility to stop the huge desertification of the most gigantic rainforest in Sri Lanka. The major issue that caused at first is that the investigation finds that the authorities are unaware of the deforestation of the boundaries in the Sinharaja which is in the year of 2016, it has been five years and the contemporary situation records that The Department of Wildlife Conservation has decided to acquire privately-owned lands with forest cover, surrounding the Sinharaja Forest Reserve to the government. According to the spokesperson of the Department of Wildlife Conservation it is figured that 400 hectares have been taken into privately owned lands with the forest cover around the reserve. And regarding the findings related to the issue it is found that the Wildlife Conservation has no provisions to prevent the deforestation under the forest Ordinance. In every way it was mentioned by the different authorities that the safety of the World Heritage will be ensured. The topic of deforestation of Sinharaja has been under discussion throughout the years, it is quite disappointing to know that still the administration as well the public officers who are under the examination of the issue are not been able to figure the right laws to protect the mother nature.

The deforestation can be pointed out as a global threat these days. This process refers to the diminish the forest areas across the world. This greatly expedited by human activities since 1960. In the current Sri Lankan situation of the deforestation according to the statistics forest cover 16.5% in 2019 down from 29.7%. In the past Sri Lanka is a country with zones of high biodiversity. Sri Lanka is one of the 34 recognized biodiversity hotspots in the world and has the highest biodiversity per unit area of any Asian country. In local situation we can recognize the forests like, Sinharaja, Wnathawilluwa, Anathawilluwa, Muthurajawela, Wilpattu etc.

Threats to the values and integrity of the property primarily come from encroaching cultivation, particularly along the southern boundary. Development undertaken outside the property indirectly impacts the site through road developments which subsequently open up routes and entry points into the property,





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Asia Pacific Region is a vast region, covering some 2.8 billion hectares of land area, or approximately 22 percent of the global land area with an approximate population that represents 60% of the world population and nearly 4.75 billion people and more than 55 countries.

Asia-Pacific Region is a treasure trove for the marine ecotourism sector with about 55,000 small and big islands located in and around the Pacific and Indian Oceans, creating hundreds of thousands of kilometers of beautiful coastal shores, beaches that attract travelers from all over the world. APREC is receiving many inquiries from the Ecotourism Organizations of Asia-Pacific Region requesting information about the organization and how to enroll as a Member of APREC.

Profile of APREC

APREC is the oldest Regional Ecotourism Network founded by Sri Lanka Ecotourism Foundation (SLEF), and its core members during the first ever Regional Ecotourism Conference held in Colombo, Sri Lanka, in May 2009.

Mission of APREC

'.... to give a "voice to the Ecotourism fraternity of the Asia-Pacific region" that can be heard in the wider global forum of discussions'

Core Objectives of APREC

- To promote and strengthen the Community Based Ecotourism (CBE) Projects in the Asia-Pacific region and to increase the competitiveness of CBE products and services worldwide, inter-and intra-regional tourism markets.
- To bring together Ecotourism industry segments in the Asia-Pacific region to discuss issues and challenges confronted by the ecotourism fraternity in the region and to explore in strengthening of their networks.
- To disseminate latest information on Sustainable and Ecotourism amongst the members of APREC and CBE organizations of Asia-Pacific region and to provide networking opportunities for stakeholders.
- Enabling the communities living in Asia-Pacific Region to fulfill their role as key custodians of natural resources and derive economic and social benefits from Ecotourism.
- To serve as an annual platform to bring together Ecotourism industry segments in the Asia-Pacific region to discuss issues and challenges and to strengthen marketing strategies.
- To showcase quality CBE products and services as best practice examples and to promote the Asia-Pacific region as an attractive Ecotourism destination on the world map.
- Promote cost-effective and donor supported National Sustainable Ecotourism Certification Programmes in the countries of Asia-Pacific Region which are adoptable to their socioeconomic and sociocultural background.
- To host training, research & awareness programmes, conferences, workshops, events in Ecotourism on regional basis and to offer financial assistance to APREC Members to take part at these events.

APREC Steering Committee

We are in the process of expanding the **Steering Committee** of APREC. Those Ecotourism Associations based in the region could send their nominations to be appointed as Steering Committee Members.

HOW TO BECOME A MEMBER OF APREC

APREC is a non-profit organization supported by Sri Lanka Ecotourism Foundation (SLEF) and its donor networks. **Membership of APREC is FREE** for Ecotourism Organizations active in the region. Membership of APREC is also open to any individual/professional/student that admires, and loves the genuine ecotourism principles such as supporting the community in need through tourism, alleviation of poverty in the society, environmental and biodiversity conservation, preservation of cultural heritage etc.

For more info, please contact SLEF /APREC by an email

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