



THE EMBASSY OF THE DEMOCRATIC SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF SRI LANKA
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As tourist arrivals grow, Belgium relaxes travel advisory on Sri Lanka

Belgian tourist arrivals to Sri Lanka have increased by 108.2 % in the first 11 months of 2010 over that of the previous year, compared to a Western European average of 50.5% and an overall increase of 45.7% in the corresponding period. The increase in tourist arrivals from Belgium in the month of November 2010 alone, over that of November 2009, was a staggering 290.5%. This month Belgium also relaxed its travel advisory deleting a reference in its September 2010 travel advisory which stated “given the security situation, all travelling to North and East of Sri Lanka not recommended”.

The impact of these developments were amply demonstrated from the attention Sri Lanka received at the 2010 Brussels Travel Expo (BT Expo) which was held in Brussels this month. BT Expo, the largest business to business tourism promotional event in the Belgium calendar was attended by more than 250 exhibitors. The event dedicated to the travel industry in Europe, attracted upto 4000 trade visitors – including leading professionals from destination management companies, hotels and convention bureaus, as well as leading travel and business journalists.

Addressing over 50 journalists at a media event titled '*Sri Lanka - Back in Business*', held at the centre of the BT Expo pavilion, Sri Lanka's Ambassador to Belgium, Luxembourg and the EU Ravinatha Aryasinha said, “in less than one year since Sri Lanka got back on the Belgian travel catalogues and only a month since a direct weekly flight was launched, Belgium was clearly accelerating to where it left off in Sri Lanka's tourist arrivals table, prior to terrorism affecting the country”. He said the representatives from over 40 Belgian companies who visited Sri Lanka in November, some of who were present on the occasion to share their experiences, would testify to the fact that the country is back in business, and in no sector was it more visible than in the tourism sector. Noting that traditionally Belgian visitors to Sri Lanka were also high spenders and demanded quality, the Ambassador assured that the rejuvenated travel sector in Sri Lanka is well geared to meet their demands.

Second Secretary (Political) Madhuka Wickramarachchi, who is also responsible for the tourism coordination work of the Embassy, outlined Sri Lanka Tourism's new branding strategy for 2011 – the 'Visit Sri Lanka Year' and future prospects in the tourism sector both for visits as well as for investment. Minister (Economic and Commercial) R.D.S. Kumararatne briefed the audience on the Embassy's overall economic promotion plan for 2011, including a multi-faceted 'Sri Lanka Business Week' in May.

Mr. Hans Vanhaelemeesch, Spokesperson of Jetair said "bookings to Sri Lanka were very positive", "a lot of investment and a lot of effort has been made by the authorities to promote tourism", and "I feel that there is a bright future for Sri Lanka as a holiday destination among other countries". Mr. Baptiste van Outryve, Cooperate Communications Manager of Thomas Cook said "As a tour operator we strongly believe in Sri Lanka, not only as a coastal destination but also as a destination which combines its culture and heritage. We go to Sri Lanka to stay in Sri Lanka and to enjoy the country". Mr. Mahen Kariyawasam of Andrews Travels said "the Belgium tourist market is growing dramatically" and thanked the tour operators "for their unstinted support in both good and bad times". He also said "Belgians travel in all seasons to Sri Lanka and they spend more money than most Europeans".

Mr. Robrecht Willart, Hony. Director for Sri Lanka Tourism in Belgium was the host of the event, which was followed by a reception where Sri Lankan 'kevili' and tea was served.

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