



**THE EMBASSY OF THE DEMOCRATIC SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF SRI LANKA
TO BELGIUM, LUXEMBOURG AND THE EUROPEAN UNION**

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Belgian tourist arrivals to Sri Lanka grows by 114.5% during the first nine months of 2011

Sri Lanka's Ambassador to Belgium, Luxembourg and the EU Ravinatha Aryasinha has said "Belgian tourist arrivals to Sri Lanka grew by 114.5% during the first nine months of 2011" and that "Sri Lanka has become one of the most preferred destinations in Asia for Belgian tourists". The Ambassador added that "the number of Belgian tourists visiting in this period which was 7200, surpassed the previous highest amount of Belgian tourists who visited Sri Lanka in any given calendar year, which was 6,333 in 2006. 5398 Belgian tourists visited Sri Lanka in 2010, compared to 2613 in 2009. The 2011 growth pattern is significant in the context of the average increase in tourist arrivals recorded from Western European countries which stood at 25.3%, and the overall global increase which was at 34.3% in the corresponding 9 months".

Ambassador Aryasinha made these observations on the occasion of the 'Visit Asia' Tourism Exposition, organized by 'Connections', one of the leading tour agents in Belgium, and held in Brussels last weekend. The Embassy which had a promotional stand at the 'Connections' event, in addition to promoting the destination, also briefed visitors on the new ETA visa system which would be implemented in Sri Lanka from next January. Around 400 professionals in the travel & tourism sector and Belgians planning to visit Asia attended this event.

The Ambassador attributed the increase in Belgian tourist arrivals mainly to the aggressive marketing strategies adopted throughout Belgium since the end of the terrorist conflict by different tour agencies including 'Connections', with close cooperation with the Sri Lanka Embassy and the Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau. He said expansion of air connectivity between Belgium and Sri Lanka also had an important bearing on this increase. In order to cater to the growing demand, Jetair and Thomas Cooke, two of the main tour operators in Belgium started a direct weekly charter flight from Belgium to Sri Lanka since October 2010. In addition to Sri Lankan Airlines which continues to offer direct flights to Colombo via Paris or Frankfurt, with rail connections from Brussels, Qatar Airways, Ithiad Airlines, Royal Jordanian and Jet Airways promote fast connection to Sri Lanka via Doha, Abu Dhabi, Amman and Chennai/Mumbai/New Delhi. This has resulted in Sri Lanka presently being connected with Belgium on all seven days of the week.

During the past two years, the Sri Lanka Embassy in Belgium has represented Sri Lanka at two of the biggest tourism events in Belgium, 'Brussels Travel Expo' and 'Salon des Vacances', and also took part in several other promotional events such as 'Bel Asia' and 'Bruges Travel Day'. It also participated in several Radio/TV discussions in the French and Flemish languages focused on promoting Sri Lanka. Journalists, from leading travel Magazines, 'The Diplomatic World' and 'Travel 2 Magazine' also visited Sri Lanka in 2011, and their reports which were published in

September 2011 have been well received. Additionally, Belgium's leading travel publication, 'Travel Magazine' has over the past year carried quarterly supplements focusing on Sri Lanka.

It has been noted that Belgians are known to be high spending tourists and that they stay in Sri Lanka an average of 10 days. While targeting this up-market segment, the Embassy has also planned several new initiatives to be carried out in the coming months, particularly focusing on MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences & Exhibitions) tourism, which is also a sector in which Sri Lanka could attract Belgians in the future.

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