



**BUSINESS
TODAY
PASSIONATE
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CHANDRA WICKRAMASINGHE

**FOUNDER, CHAIRMAN/
MANAGING DIRECTOR,
CONNAISSANCE DE
CEYLAN AND THEME
RESORTS & SPAS**

1982

With the establishment of Connaissance de Ceylan in 1982, Chandra Wickramasinghe began a journey to redefine the hospitality sector in Sri Lanka. Forging ahead through a difficult period in the 1980s and 90s, with the aim of making a difference, a new concept was introduced by him in the form of Culture Club in Kandalama. This was his first hotel. Chandra Wickramasinghe is a pioneer in eco-cultural tourism where he showcased novel nature-based tourism that was unique to Sri Lanka.

Drawing on his experience as an inbound travel agent focusing on the French market, Chandra Wickramasinghe had identified the requirements of the traveller. It is this knowledge that ensured the operations of his business during challenging times. He was appointed as the agent for Air France as well and has received recognition from the French market.

Chandra Wickramasinghe was Sri Lanka's first hotelier to build a hotel in Kandalama. Culture Club with its unique concept and spatial arrangement set the standard for new hotels, to create luxurious properties that reflected Sri Lankan heritage and culture. While Culture Club is no longer owned by Chandra Wickramasinghe, his impact is still greatly visible.

The concept of eco-buildings, though existent, was not entirely encompassed in eco-tourism in the 1990s. It was, in fact, Chandra Wickramasinghe who really introduced this idea to Sri Lanka. Culture Club entails a space of 8,000 sq ft that is naturally ventilated, without air conditioning or even a fan. Furthermore, he thought about reducing carbon emissions before it became a hype and introduced bullock carts for transportation in the property. In this way Chandra Wickramasinghe was a pioneer in the eco-tourism sector of Sri Lanka.

The conflict years were difficult, where the business was operated on personal funding. Many challenges had to be faced overseas as well. However, due to the strong relationship with tour operators, tourists were attracted to the country by highlighting the many interesting features in non-conflict areas. Following the end of the conflict, Chandra Wickramasinghe recognised the importance of economic reconciliation in the areas that were affected; as a result, he was the first to venture into Passikudah in the East Coast with his landmark property Maalu Maalu. He paved the way for others to make 'that move' confidently, while he undertook great risks. Maalu Maalu, similar to Culture Club, at the time made waves in the tourism sector and it has become a must-visit location in the East Coast.

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Aliya Resort and Spa in Sigiriya reflects the novel concept and branding that is characteristic of Chandra Wickramasinghe. The guests are provided with a truly Sri Lankan experience. And, as with all his properties, staff and their service have been exceptional. Prior to making an investment three points are deliberated upon; the property must be eco friendly – protect the environment, protect the culture and give the maximum to the village or area. These aspects are clearly visible in all his endeavours.

Chandra Wickramasinghe was also one of the pioneers of introducing Ayurveda spas in hotels in Sri Lanka. He asserted the importance of promoting Ayurveda and showcasing the heritage of the country through this traditional treatment.

Chandra Wickramasinghe strongly believes that Sri Lanka will face an economic boom in the future and Sri Lankan companies will face the biggest challenge of competing with international players in the industry.

Business Today recognises hotelier Chandra Wickramasinghe for his passion and determination in striving forward in a very challenging industry, while introducing novel concepts that reflect the identity of Sri Lanka. His depth of experience in the hospitality and tourism sector has enabled new thinking in the hotel industry. He is a hotelier that truly represents Sri Lankan hospitality and is an example for the sector. ☐