A Great Place to Go

The Indian Travel Congress, the 46th Annual Convention of the Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI) was held in Colombo from the 25th to the 29th of September this year.

The theme of this year's convention was 'Travel and Tourism – Key to Regional Prosperity.' Discussions and deliberations at the convention focused mainly on the development of regional and intra regional tourism.

Over 1000 delegates from India and the neighboring countries participated in the convention while over 100 delegates participated from Sri Lanka.

H.M.S. Samaranayake, chairman, Ceylon Tourist Board, stated that the convention was an opportunity to expose Sri Lanka to the Indian Travel Trade. He further stated that the regional markets should look to each other for the promotion of tourism and not depend on the European markets as is the case at present.

India has grown as an out- bound travel market. The population of India with a dispensable income to travel is about 450 million. This is higher than the combined traveling population of Europe. However about 200 million Indian travelers, travel only within India. It is hoped that Sri Lanka may be promoted as an extension to India in order to attract these travelers.

As hotel accommodation etc. in Sri Lanka is at a lower cost than in Europe and other destinations and air fares from India to Sri Lanka being low as a result of the small distance between the two countries, the Indian traveler will be able to obtain real value for money.

Udaya Nanayakkara President, Travel Association of Sri Lanka (TAASL) and chairman, Host Committee, said that Sri Lanka is a receiving and generating market and that there is a trend for the outbound market to increase.

TAASL plans to reorient the Sri Lankan travel market to suit the Indian travel market. Some of the plans include developing Sita Eliya as a sacred area for pilgrim purposes with financial assistance from India, A chain of hotels to suit the Indian traveler, Down town duty free facilities and a TAASL office has opened in India.

Some of the problems regarding regional tourism seem to be the lack of visa and air line facilities. As stated by Tej Sahni, president, TAAL, visa restrictions need to be eased. Capacity in terms of flights to be increased.

Currently Sri Lanka attracts about 45-50 thousand tourists from India annually. There are plans to attract 150-200 thousand tourists from India annually, within the next 3 years. Extensive and aggressive promotions are being held in order to promote Sri Lanka as a stable and safe destination and a great place to travel.