

Promotions on for Indo-Lanka tourism

Representatives of the Indian travel trade met their Sri Lankan counterparts in Colombo recently and launched a drive to promote more two-way tourist visits between the 2 countries.

The promotion drive took off at a panel discussion held at the Hotel Taj Samudra under the auspices of representatives of both governments. The discourse was organized by the Sri Lanka Tourism Ministry and the Ceylon Tourist Board in alliance with the Sri Lankan travel trade. High officials from the Indian Government's tourist sector as well as representatives from the Indian High Commission in Colombo also participated in the discussions. The meeting ended on the accord that there was tremendous scope to increase the number of visitors from India to Sri Lanka and vice versa.

Referring to Indo-Lanka tourism, Ceylon Tourist Board Chairman H.M.S. Samaranayake said that of the 950 million population in India, about 300 million people in the middle class and upper brackets were potential visitors. Vipula Wanigasekera, Director Marketing of the Tourist Board believes that Sri Lanka could offer a wide variety of attractions for tourists from India. These include the best features of Sri Lanka from its golden beaches to our ancient heritage. Sri Lanka is hoping to attract family travellers for shopping, businessmen for conventions, over-50-years groups for relaxation, student groups and honeymoon couples.

It was also noted that for two-way tourism to succeed airline frequencies between the 2 countries have to be increased. Air Lanka's Chief Marketing Officer Sunil Perera expressed that they would like to increase their quota of seats and to fly to new destinations like Hyderabad and Bangalore. P.J. Crasta, Deputy Managing Director of Indian Airlines, said his airline had not been able to utilise to the full the quota of seats allocated to it, as part of it had been given to Air Lanka. If the traffic grows Indian Air Lines would be prepared to increase the quota and the frequencies.

Proposals were made to erase frontier formalities to encourage tourism between the 2 countries. like reduced visa fees, giving visas at entry points for group tours and easing exchange control.

The delegates agreed that the travel trade representatives of the two countries should build on the contact made in Colombo and take a greater interest to promote two-way tourist visits.