

Sri Lankan ~Tree Tops Jungle Lodge™ Wins Wild Asia Responsible Tourism Award 2008



Run by local staff team the primitive Tree Tops eco lodge in Sri Lanka's Southeastern wilderness was announced as Wild Asia Award Winner at the evening award party in Kuala Lumpur Malaysia.

Sri Lankan Tree Tops Jungle Lodge has been honored with the Wild Asia Responsible Tourism Award 2008 at an award ceremony in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Tree Tops is a basic mud- and tree-hut eco lodge entirely run and managed by staff recruited from the remote local community. None of the staff members have completed their O' Levels. Situated in lowland Uva, 10 km from Buttala, the lodge is located in the dry zone; Weliara bush jungle in Southeastern Sri Lanka, a wilderness

and slash & burn cultivation area connected to Yala National Park.

Initiated in 2006 by the Malaysian based conservation group Wild Asia, the Awards showcase exemplary Asian ecotourism ventures that are committed to sustainable practices. This year's Awards attracted a diverse group of tourism operators from Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, the Philippines, Laos, the Maldives, Sri Lanka and India.

The award winners were selected after six months of short-listing the finalists and as a unique feature; Wild Asia representatives inspected the final eight properties. This year Wild Asia introduced a new set of criteria which included: 1) Sense of place – whether tourists understand their destinations better through operators' efforts. 2) Sustainability – whether these efforts are long-term. 3) Involvement of guests – do the operators involve their guests in their practices? 4) Internalization – how much is sustainability part of the day-to-day operations?

Dr Reza Azmi, Director and Founder, Wild Asia, visited Tree Tops Jungle Lodge, and said: "What's great about the Awards is we always find a gem – a property that challenges us in our evolving views of what makes a 'sustainable' business. I had a preconceived idea of Sri Lanka's Tree Tops Jungle Lodge as yet another wildlife lodge but what we discovered was how local everything was, i.e. from the design of the mud huts to the entire wildlife experience. Despite being a small operation, the lodge serves as important business, educational and conservation catalysts for the area".

"The Wild Asia Award is an incredible encouragement for me and my team as well as attracting well deserved international attention to Sri Lankan ecotourism" – Lars Sorensen, Chief, Tree Tops Jungle Lodge said. Explaining what makes Tree Tops special, Lars Sorensen adds: "The jungle lodge vision developed from 2001 was quite a daring combination of adventure, experience and minimal facilities.

However we went our own ways and have proven to be a world class Sri Lankan ecotourism product in terms of real and authentic experience. Our concept is tailor made for the particular area and aims to preserve local culture, nature and wildlife – call it 'living in the wilderness with local people'. The concept puts weight on the human resource part and environmental conservation rather than an actual physical hotel. Organization and service make the magic more than conventional comfort". This is all depending on the preservation of the surrounding nature because living amidst jungle, birds, spotting leopard paw marks and observing an occasional wild elephant is the core attraction for visitors".