

Worldlink Travelâ€™S 20 Precious Years



Rising from humble beginnings, the Worldlink Travel Group celebrated its 20th anniversary this year as a company that has expanded to meet the specific demands of the environment of Sri Lanka's travel industry. Ahintha and Gerard Amerasinghe, the brothers who founded the group have achieved this success while staying persistently true to the values that they built their business around – conducting business with honesty, integrity and ethical trade practices.

By Haseena Razak
Photography Prabhath Chathuranga

The brothers, having more than 60 years of experience in the travel industry between them, set up their first office in August 1991. Looking back on that day, Ahintha Amerasinghe, Chairman and Managing Director of the Worldlink Travel Group said, "We started in a very small way. My mother and father were the Guests of Honour. We just had six staff: my brother, my father, three others and myself.

Our vision, mission and goal were simple – to be the finest travel agency, where we do every transaction with the highest level of honesty and integrity in the most ethical way. We would go beyond the call of duty to serve the travel needs of our customers. Twenty years later our simple vision, mission and goal of 1991 still remain the same." The first ticket issued by Worldlink Travels was to Hiroo Hanawa, the General Manager of the Tomen Corporation.

Over the years, the Worldlink Travel Group began to diversify into different companies, each specialising in handling a specific area of the travel industry in Sri Lanka. Worldlink Travels is the group's flagship company and handles corporate travel. The IATA accredited company has won several airline awards and boasts a clientele of leading corporates in the country. The MAS Holdings Group, one of Sri Lanka's leading apparel companies, has been a client of Worldlink Travels for the last 18 years. The Hidaramani Group, Access Group of Companies, Deutshe Bank and the ALF Group are some other companies that Worldlink Travels serves. The company holds the Sri Lankan record for issuing the highest value air ticket at Rs 4.8 million. "We issued two tickets for this client. His ticket was Rs 4.8 million and his wife's was Rs 3.8 million. Hence, just one transaction came to Rs 8.6 million. Of course, we spent a lot of time preparing the itinerary, which included over 40 sectors. The important thing is that not one flight was mishandled," said Gerard Amerasinghe, Director of the Worldlink Travel Group.

The Company Holds The Sri Lankan Record For Issuing The Highest Value Air Ticket At Rs 4.8 Million.

Worldlink Air Services is the General Sales Agent (GSA) for South African Airlines, Princess Cruises and Cunard lines. This company also represented Air New Zealand and Ansett Australia for many years until they closed down their operations in Asia. Being exclusive agents of Princess Cruises and Cunard Lines, the company markets luxury cruises aboard Princess and Cunard's Queen Mary and Queen Victoria to Sri Lankan holidaymakers. Princess Cruises presented Worldlink with the MVP Award, or Most Valuable Partner Award, in 2002 for promoting Princess Cruises in Sri Lanka.

Dream Holidays, the company that handles outbound holiday packages to any part of the world, came into being when the Amerasinghe brothers noticed several of their corporate clients approaching other travel companies for their holiday requirements. "Right from the beginning, we were perceived by customers to be excellent at handling corporate travel. However, many years ago we came across a situation where some of our corporate customers looked at other agencies when

they wanted to go on holiday, as they thought that we only handled corporate travel. Hence, without diluting the branding of Worldlink, we began Dream Holidays, our ‘holiday’ company,” explained Ahintha Amerasinghe. Today, Dream Holidays has become one of the largest companies that handle incentive travel programmes for many leading corporates in Sri Lanka. True to the company’s tagline, “we make your Dream Holiday a reality”, Dream Holidays pays great care in meeting the travel needs of any holidaymaker, whether it is a couple honeymooning in the Cook Islands or a group of 400 passengers on an incentive travel programme to Thailand. Based on customer comments, Dream Holidays also began implementing a unique series of tours called ‘Ladies Only Groups’. Accompanied by senior female staff of Dream Holidays, the tours offer safe and reliable travel solutions to groups of ladies travelling by themselves. Dream Holidays has already served a group of 44 women, who travelled to Thailand, and two more groups to Chennai.

The Worldlink Travel Group has also set up a travel company in Seeduwa, about a kilometre from the Katunayake Airport. Called Travel Zone, this IATA accredited company offers travel related services to the population living in the area from Wattala to Chilaw, thereby eliminating the need to travel to Colombo for these services. “We bought a small neglected building facing the main road in Seeduwa five years ago and renovated it to be a state-of-the-art travel office in the area,” said Gerard Amerasinghe. “Our staff, who worked in our Colombo office but lived in the vicinity of Seeduwa, were transferred to that office. Now, people living in that area do not have to travel all the way to Colombo to get their tickets and visas prepared.”

Promoting tourism within Sri Lanka is the group’s ‘inbound’ tour operator, Worldlink Tours. Although Worldlink Tours is a relatively small company, Ahintha Amerasinghe believes that this will prove to be an advantage when putting to practice the company’s tagline, ‘We will ensure that you’ll love Sri Lanka’. “Every visitor to Sri Lanka should be handled with utmost care and passion. Hence, being small, we can afford to take care of our customers personally and they will not be just a number in the books of Worldlink Tours,” he said. The company has operated tours in Sri Lanka for travellers from Hong Kong, Singapore, Thailand, India and several countries in the Middle East. Incorporated in 2000, Worldlink Tours was reactivated to meet the demands of a flourishing inbound tourism sector after the dawn of peace in Sri Lanka. Considering the high response from foreign tourists, Ahintha Amerasinghe is positive that the government’s target of attracting 2.5 million tourists to Sri Lanka will be achieved before the estimated year 2016.

The Group’s latest venture is Sigiri Oya Resort. Having bought 17 acres of lush, green land bordering the Sigiri Oya in a village called Indigaswewa, two kilometres from the Dambulla-Sigiriya road, the company plans to build a resort hotel with 60 rooms. At present however, there is a rustic holiday bungalow on the land called Sigiri Oya Cottage. The cottage can accommodate up to 10 people and is let out as a holiday home to Sri Lankans. “Guests staying at the cottage can go on safari to Habarana or Minneriya. Barbeques in the jungle, spending hours bathing in the Sigiri Oya or lunch in a tree house by the oya are other activities available,” explained Gerard Amerasinghe.

Asked why the Worldlink Group has diversified into several companies, Ahintha Amerasinghe replied, “By having very focused subsidiary companies with excellent sets of staff looking after their niche segments, we were able to offer the best to our customers.” This also enables the company to address any emergencies or requirements that customers may have. “If someone is in the United States and they call us and say that their flight is delayed, we will not tell them that it is two in the morning and we will only be working the next day. Within a few minutes we take action and do the needful. That is the kind of assurance we give our customers – irrespective of the time of day, we will do it for them,” emphasised Ahintha Amerasinghe.

The Worldlink Group liaises with several international partners. BCD Travel is one of them. With offices in almost 100 countries, the company is the third largest global corporate travel management company in the world. This has enabled Wolrdlink to provide the best of service to their corporate clients wherever in the world they may travel. The company also uses links with BCD Travel to make hotel bookings and buy domestic sector tickets for clients.

For the Amerasinghe brothers, their twenty years in the travel industry have been marked by good fortune as well as some challenging moments. Recalling some of these moments, Ahintha Amerasinghe said, “We have been at the Galadari Hotel since inception. The hotel was caught in bomb blasts twice and both times our office was severely damaged. The second bomb in 1997 was the worst; our entire office was destroyed. We continued working from Galadari with basic facilities for over six months.” The brothers now look forward to functioning their business in peaceful times.

