

HOSPITALITY

Pulse

SRI LANKA'S PREMIER HOSPITALITY MAGAZINE

1ST ISSUE

01 Sri Lanka Shatters Records:
277,000+ Arrivals in Historic
January Surge

02 **Hotel Show Colombo 2026:**
A Bigger & Better
Hospitality Showcase

08 **Boat & Marine Show 2026:** A
Marine Milestone for Sri
Lanka



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PUBLISHER NOTE

This monthly publication is more than just a magazine—it is a platform for collaboration, innovation, and storytelling. Whether you are a hotelier, restaurateur, supplier, or passionate advocate of Sri Lanka's vibrant hospitality industry, we invite you to embark on this journey with us as we explore the boundless opportunities that define Sri Lankan excellence.

Hospitality Pulse serves as your gateway to the latest industry updates, trends, and insights from this premier hospitality exhibition. Bringing together hoteliers and the entire supply chain—from technology providers and interior designers to food and beverage specialists—this platform highlights cutting-edge products and emerging innovations.

Beyond event coverage, Hospitality Pulse is a celebration of Sri Lanka's rich cultural heritage, exquisite gastronomy, and dynamic hospitality sector together with sustainable tourism practices, our content aims to inspire, inform, and connect all those shaping the future of the industry.

Thank you for joining us on this journey. Together, let us elevate Sri Lanka as a global hub of hospitality, innovation, and excellence.

Editor-in-Chief

CONTENT



01 Sri Lanka Shatters Records: **277,000+ Arrivals** in Historic January Surge

02 **Hotel Show Colombo 2026:** A Bigger & Better Hospitality Showcase

03 **National Barista Championship** Powered by Industry Excellence

04 **Taj Weligama:** A New Luxury Beacon on Sri Lanka's Southern Coast

05 **National Room Stylist Challenge** Celebrating Housekeeping Excellence

06 **SriLankan Airlines' "Chicken Calzone"** A Soggy Let-Down on One of Its Priciest Routes

07 **National Tea Masters Cup** Innovation Rooted in Heritage

08 **Reforming Sri Lanka's Tourism Act:** Diagnosis Before Disruption
By Vipula Wanigasekara

09 **Boat & Marine Show 2026:** A Marine Milestone for Sri Lanka

10 **Bar Champs** Where Creativity Meets Craft

11 **UPI Arrives in Paradise:** Cinnamon Hotels Redefines Convenience for Indian Guests

12 **Spice Ceylon:** Sri Lanka's First Spice Heritage Museum Opens Doors in Matala

Sri Lanka Shatters Records: **277,000+ Arrivals** in Historic January Surge

Sri Lanka's tourism sector kicked off 2026 with unprecedented momentum, recording its highest-ever monthly arrivals in January. According to the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA), 277,327 international visitors arrived during the month—a remarkable 9.7% increase year-on-year from January 2025's 252,761 arrivals. This figure also surpasses pre-pandemic benchmarks, including a 16.1% rise over strong historical months, marking a clear sign of full recovery and accelerated growth.

The surge defied seasonal norms, with January outperforming even December 2025's 258,928 arrivals. Peak daily inflows reached 10,483 visitors on January 15, underscoring robust demand during the northern winter travel season. India led source markets with 52,061 arrivals (representing 19% of the total), followed by Russia (29,540) and the UK (27,134, up 24.9%). This diverse inflow highlights Sri Lanka's enduring appeal across key regions.



The performance provides a strong foundation toward the national target of 3 million visitors for 2026—a 27% increase from 2025’s record 2.36 million—aimed at bolstering foreign exchange earnings and supporting economic recovery efforts.

For the hospitality sector, the record arrivals translate into immediate benefits. Hotels, resorts, and guesthouses across Colombo, the southern coast, the hill country, and the cultural triangle reported heightened occupancy and forward bookings. The influx drives demand for premium accommodations, wellness retreats, and adventure experiences, spurring job creation in operations, food services, guiding, and transport.

Tourism earnings reached \$378.3 million in January, up from December 2025 but down 6% from January 2025’s \$400.7 million, reflecting lower per-capita spending amid a shift toward budget-conscious travellers. Industry stakeholders emphasize the need to attract higher-yield segments through targeted marketing, luxury developments, and value-added offerings to maximize economic impact.

This historic January milestone signals sustained confidence in Sri Lanka as a premier destination. With continued marketing, infrastructure improvements, and a focus on quality tourism, the sector is well positioned to exceed expectations, delivering broader economic gains for communities nationwide.



Hotel Show Colombo 2026:

A Bigger & Better Hospitality Showcase



Hotel Show Colombo 2026 is set to take place on 24, 25 & 26 July 2026 at the Sirimavo Bandaranaike Memorial Exhibition Centre (BMICH) in Colombo, Sri Lanka. Organized by the Sri Lanka Hospitality Graduates Association (SLHGA) in partnership with CDC Events and supported by both public and private sectors, this flagship event stands as the largest and most prestigious gathering for the country's hospitality industry.

As Sri Lanka's premier hospitality trade exhibition enters its 18th edition, it continues to provide an unmatched platform for business, innovation, and connectivity across the regional sector. Last year's edition brought together more than 200 exhibitors and over 300 exhibition booths, drawing thousands of visitors, including hoteliers, restaurateurs, tourism operators, suppliers, and investors from Sri Lanka and abroad.



The exhibition side of Hotel Show Colombo 2026 will see an extensive lineup of international and local exhibitors presenting products and services tailored for hotels, resorts, and hospitality businesses—from hotel equipment and interior solutions to technology and sustainable innovations. Visitors and buyers from Sri Lanka, the Maldives, India, and across South Asia are expected to attend, offering exhibitors exceptional visibility and networking opportunities.

Complementing the exhibition are concurrent events that celebrate creativity, skill, and professional excellence across hospitality disciplines. These include the National Barista Championship, National Room Stylist Challenge, Ceylon Tea Masters Cup, Bar Champs, Colombo Food Fest, and National Masterclasses. Each event brings its own excitement—whether through competitive flair, culinary innovation, or immersive experiences—enriching the overall atmosphere of the show.

With more stalls, expanded offerings, and continued growth year-on-year, Hotel Show Colombo 2026 promises to be a comprehensive and dynamic hub for anyone involved in the hospitality industry—from suppliers and service providers to buyers, professionals, and enthusiasts.





National Barista Championship ***Powered by*** **Industry Excellence**

The National Barista Championship, a flagship concurrent event at Hotel Show Colombo, continues to be a prestigious platform celebrating Sri Lanka's finest coffee professionals. Last year's competition was strongly supported by Fits as the Coffee & Machinery Sponsor, ensuring participants worked with professional-grade equipment, while Kotmale served as the Dairy Sponsor, highlighting the importance of quality ingredients in coffee craftsmanship. Beverage innovation was further elevated with Liquid Island (Pvt) Ltd – Monin as the Syrup Sponsor, alongside Liquid Island (Pvt) Ltd – Olu as the Hydration Partner.

The championship brought together skilled baristas who showcased technical precision, creativity, and sensory excellence in espresso preparation and specialty beverages. It not only celebrated individual talent but also reinforced global coffee standards within Sri Lanka's hospitality industry.

As Hotel Show Colombo returns from 24 to 26 July 2026 at BMICH, the National Barista Championship promises even greater competition, innovation, and excitement. Coffee professionals, enthusiasts, and industry stakeholders are invited to witness the next evolution of Sri Lanka's coffee culture live on stage.

Taj Weligama:

A New Luxury Beacon on Sri Lanka's Southern Coast

The Indian Hotels Company Limited (IHCL) has announced a significant addition to Sri Lanka's hospitality landscape with the signing of Taj Weligama, a 220-key beachfront resort in partnership with the Beryll Group. The greenfield project will bring Taj's signature luxury to one of Sri Lanka's fastest-growing coastal destinations.

Set along Weligama's scenic crescent bay with panoramic Indian Ocean views, the resort will feature 220 rooms—including 80 luxury apartments—catering to both leisure travellers and longer-stay guests. It will offer a full range of premium facilities: multiple dining options (all-day restaurant, two specialty venues, beach bar & grill, bar lounge, and deli), the renowned J Wellness Circle, a swimming pool, gym, kids' playroom, and extensive event spaces exceeding 9,000 square feet, including banquet halls, meeting rooms, and beachfront lawns perfect for weddings and corporate gatherings.



Puneet Chhatwal, Managing Director and CEO of IHCL, said: “Weligama is emerging as one of Sri Lanka’s leading coastal destinations, driven by surfing, wellness, and nature-based tourism. This project strengthens Taj’s presence in the country as tourism continues its strong recovery.”

Vishal Agarwal, Director of Beryll Group, added: “Partnering with IHCL allows us to create a world-class coastal resort that respects Weligama’s natural character while delivering international luxury standards.”

Taj Weligama will complement IHCL’s existing properties (Taj Bentota, Taj Samudra Colombo, and Vivanta Colombo) and position the south as a stronger luxury hub. Its location near beginner-friendly surf breaks, Mirissa whale watching, and Galle Fort will attract high-value travellers from India, Europe, and the Middle East while boosting local employment and economic activity.

The resort represents renewed investor confidence in Sri Lanka’s hospitality sector and promises to elevate standards across the southern coast. Taj Weligama is set to become a landmark property that blends iconic Taj hospitality with the timeless beauty of Sri Lanka’s shoreline.



National Room Stylist Challenge Celebrating Housekeeping Excellence



The National Room Stylist Challenge shines a spotlight on the often-unsung heroes of hospitality—housekeeping professionals. Last year’s event was supported by Celcius Solutions (Pvt) Ltd as the Linen, Mattress & Furniture Sponsor, Selyn Exporters (Pvt) Ltd as the Throw Pillow and Bed Runner Sponsor, and Industrial Multiclean Systems together with Ranvel Lanka Holdings (Pvt) Ltd as the Cleaning Equipment and Cleaning Chemical Sponsors.



Competitors demonstrated speed, precision, and creativity in bed-making and room styling, highlighting the critical role of presentation in guest satisfaction. The challenge celebrated professionalism, attention to detail, and operational excellence.

As Hotel Show Colombo returns in July 2026, the National Room Stylist Challenge invites hospitality professionals and visitors alike to witness world-class room presentation standards live at BMICH.

National Tea Masters Cup Innovation Rooted in Heritage

The Ceylon Tea Masters Cup celebrates Sri Lanka's iconic tea heritage through modern creativity. Last year, the competition was proudly supported by Sunshine Consumer Lanka Limited as the Exclusive Premium Tea Sponsor, alongside Knuckles as the Water Sponsor.

Participants showcased inventive tea-based beverages that blended tradition with contemporary mixology, demonstrating the versatility of Ceylon Tea beyond conventional formats.

With Hotel Show Colombo 2026 on the horizon, the Ceylon Tea Masters Cup invites tea professionals, mixologists, and enthusiasts to experience innovative interpretations of Sri Lanka's most celebrated export live at BMICH on 24 July 2026.



A photograph of a man leaning out of a window on a teal train. He is wearing a patterned headband and a sleeveless shirt. The train is moving through a lush, green, hilly landscape. The background is slightly blurred, suggesting motion.

Reforming Sri Lanka's Tourism Act: **Diagnosis Before Disruption**

by Vipula Wanigasekara

Sri Lanka's Tourism Act of 2005 has once again become the subject of intense debate, with calls for amendment, reform, or outright repeal. As recent discussions highlight, this debate should not be reduced to a simplistic binary choice of "retain or scrap." The reality is far more complex. What is required is a structured, pragmatic approach—one that begins with first principles and ends with clearly defined, measurable outcomes.

Any serious evaluation of the Tourism Act must begin by understanding why it was introduced in the first place. The 2005 Act emerged at a time when Sri Lanka required a coherent institutional framework to manage tourism development, destination marketing, regulation, and investment promotion. It aimed to professionalise governance, separate policymaking from implementation, and provide a degree of institutional autonomy insulated from short-term political cycles. These foundational objectives remain relevant even today.

The second step is to assess the needs of the hour, guided by a future-oriented vision. Sri Lanka's tourism sector now operates in a vastly altered environment—marked by post-conflict recovery, recurring economic shocks, evolving global travel behaviour, sustainability imperatives, and intense regional competition. The critical question, therefore, is not whether the Act is flawless—no legislation ever is—but whether it can be adapted to meet current and future challenges.

This naturally leads to the third and most critical consideration: the implications of amendment versus repeal. Repealing an Act is not merely a legal exercise; it carries real-world consequences—administrative disruption, erosion of institutional memory, investor uncertainty, and delays in implementation. Many of the shortcomings identified in the current Act could have been, and still can be, addressed through targeted amendments informed by systematic monitoring and evaluation.

That said, the policy conversation changes if the Government's strategic priority shifts decisively towards large-scale infrastructure-led or provisional development, with tourism institutions relegated to a secondary role. In such a scenario, alignment between funding priorities, destination marketing objectives, and institutional mandates must be made explicit. Diverting resources away from tourism marketing will inevitably weaken Sri Lanka's competitive positioning, irrespective of how robust the supporting infrastructure may be.

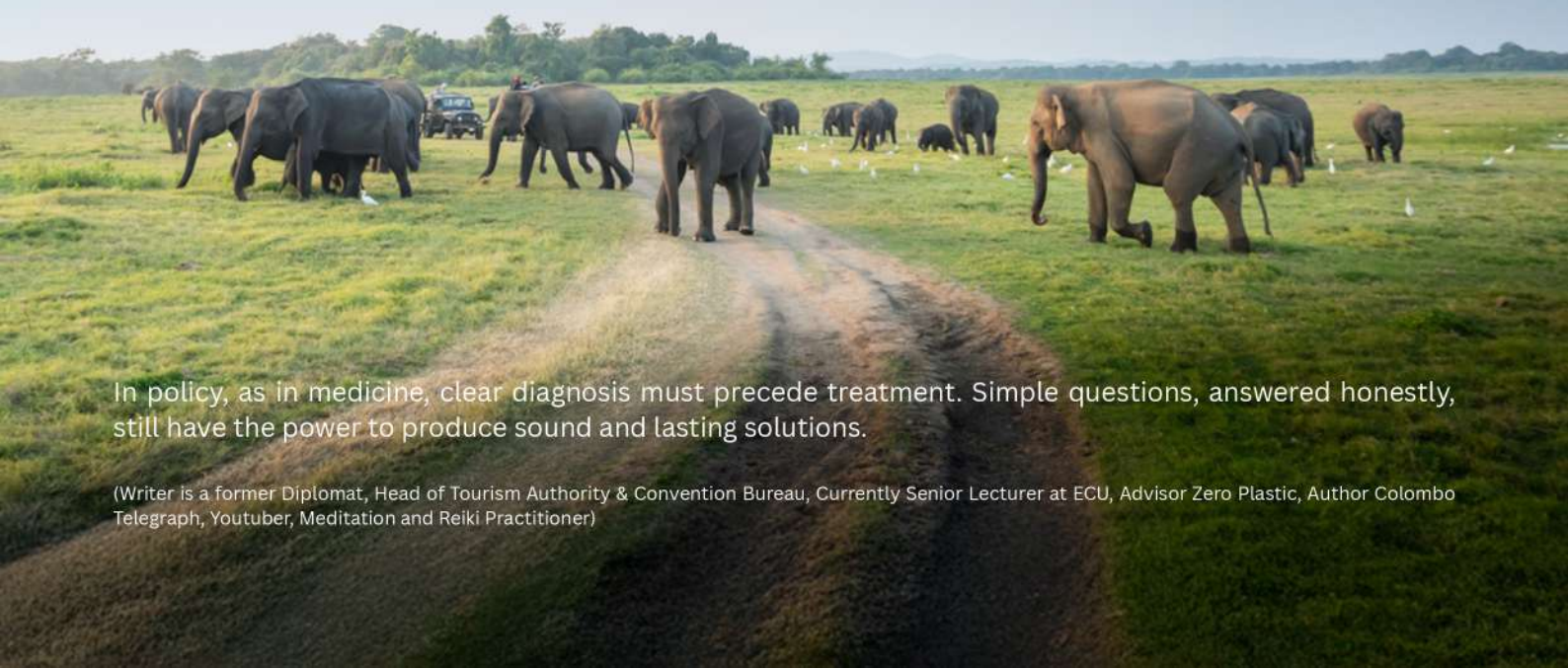
Consultation is often presented as the solution. However, consultations are meaningful only when there is a genuine willingness to listen and adjust. Otherwise, reforms risk becoming arbitrary exercises rather than evidence-based policymaking.

Perhaps the most effective way forward is also the simplest: clearly identify the ten most important outcomes Sri Lanka expects from its tourism sector—such as quality of arrivals, yield optimisation, regional dispersion, sustainability, resilience, and brand strength—and then work backwards. What kind of administrative and institutional structure is required to deliver these outcomes? If the existing Act can support them with refinement, amendment should suffice. If not, a more fundamental overhaul may be warranted.

To depoliticise this process, an independent expert panel could be tasked with formulating recommendations—provided both the Government and the tourism industry submit, in good faith, a one-page, point-form document clearly outlining what they expect the Tourism Act to deliver. Evidence, not impulse, should guide reform.

In policy, as in medicine, clear diagnosis must precede treatment. Simple questions, answered honestly, still have the power to produce sound and lasting solutions.

(Writer is a former Diplomat, Head of Tourism Authority & Convention Bureau, Currently Senior Lecturer at ECU, Advisor Zero Plastic, Author Colombo Telegraph, Youtuber, Meditation and Reiki Practitioner)



BOAT & MARINE SHOW 2026

A MARINE MILESTONE FOR SRI LANKA

The 9th edition of the Boat & Marine Show 2026 concluded successfully at Port City Colombo, marking another important step in positioning Sri Lanka as a rising hub for boating, yachting, and marine tourism in South Asia. Held from 30 January to 1 February, the three-day showcase welcomed visitors daily from 3.00 p.m. to 10.00 p.m., drawing strong industry participation and international attention.

Organized by the Chamber of Marine Industries Sri Lanka and managed by CDC Events (Pvt) Ltd, the event received the backing of key government institutions, including the Sri Lanka Export Development Board and several line ministries (including the Ministry of Industry and Entrepreneurship, Foreign Affairs, Employment, and Tourism), underscoring the sector's growing economic significance.

Over 50 local exhibitors, alongside international participants, showcased their offerings across 90 stalls. Displays ranged from boats and yachts to marine engines, navigation systems, water sports equipment, charter services, diving operations, and offshore solutions. A major highlight was the on-water boat displays, which added vibrancy and realism to the exhibition experience.





An international conference on nautical tourism, attended by around 100 delegates, further strengthened dialogue on advancing marine tourism, boat manufacturing, and regional collaboration. The show attracted foreign buyers, investors, marina operators, and high-net-worth individuals, generating meaningful networking and partnership opportunities.

The hospitality and tourism sectors also reaped benefits, with increased visitor traffic boosting hotel occupancy, food and beverage services, and experiential offerings linked to Sri Lanka's rich ocean heritage.

As Sri Lanka continues to position itself as a nautical gateway in the Indian Ocean, the Boat & Marine Show 2026 delivered on its promise—driving economic momentum, enhancing global visibility for the marine industry, and enriching the island's tourism and hospitality landscape through this vibrant celebration of boating as a lifestyle.





BAR CHAMPS

Where Creativity Meets Craft

Bar Champs has become one of the most energetic concurrent events at Hotel Show Colombo, spotlighting the flair and creativity of Sri Lanka's bartending professionals. Last year, the competition was elevated by Rockland Distilleries as the Liquor Sponsor, providing a strong foundation for innovative cocktail creations.

Participants impressed audiences and judges alike with bold presentations, inventive techniques, and modern interpretations of classic cocktails. Bar Champs successfully showcased the evolving mixology culture within Sri Lanka's hospitality and nightlife scene.

Looking ahead to Hotel Show Colombo 2026, Bar Champs is set to return with even more energy, talent, and inspiration. Visitors can look forward to thrilling performances, creative beverages, and a celebration of bartending excellence at BMICH.

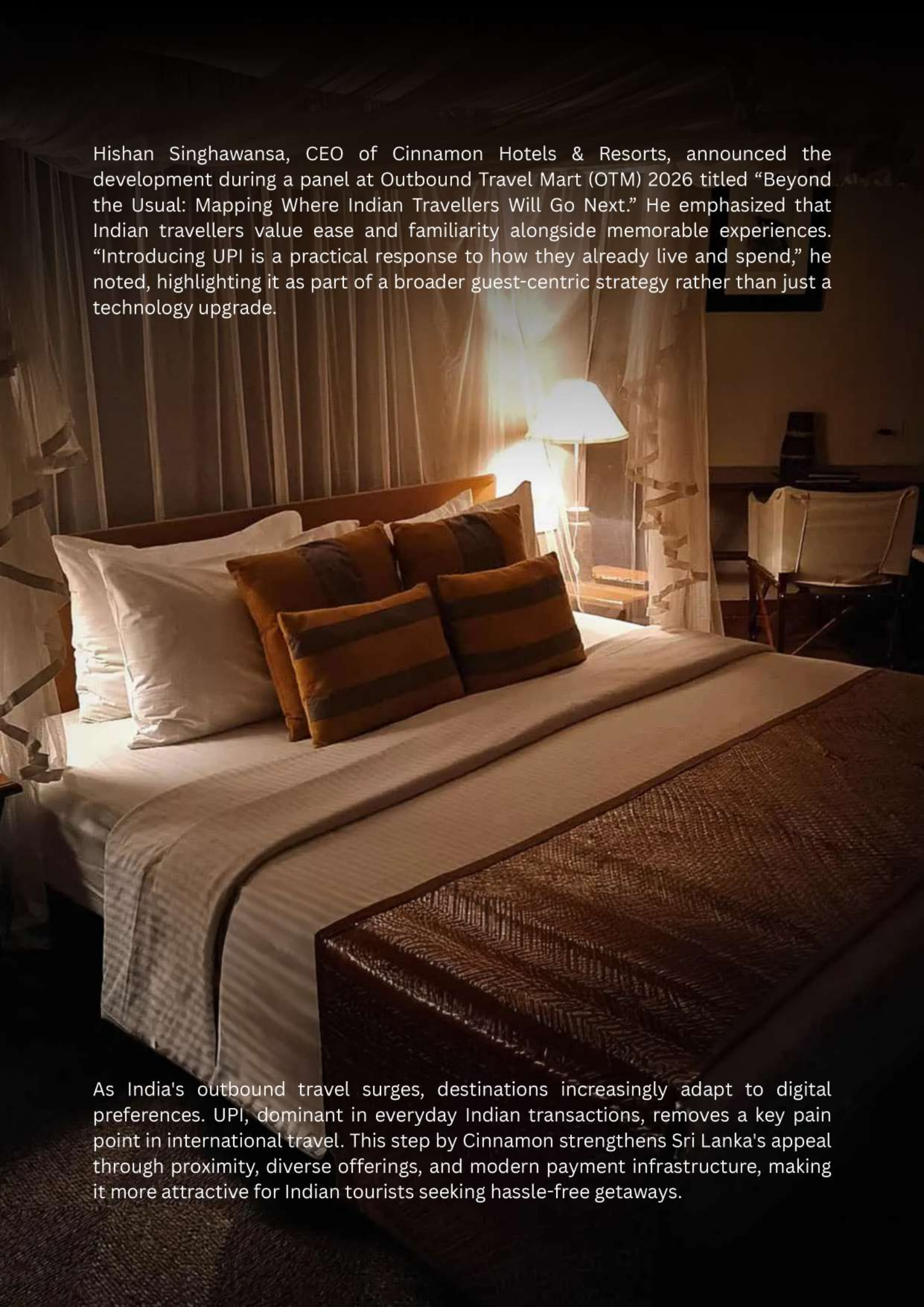
UPI Arrives in Paradise: **Cinnamon Hotels Redefines Convenience for Indian Guests**

Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts, one of the leading hospitality groups in Sri Lanka, has launched UPI payments across its entire portfolio in Sri Lanka and the Maldives. This move allows Indian travellers to make seamless transactions using their familiar UPI apps, such as Google Pay, PhonePe, or Paytm, directly at properties.

The initiative eliminates common hassles such as currency exchange, carrying cash, or relying on international credit cards. It creates a friction-free experience for payments related to hotel stays, dining, and other services. With India as Sri Lanka's largest inbound tourism market, this digital convenience targets the growing number of leisure travellers, families, destination weddings, and MICE groups from India.

Cinnamon operates 17 properties, including city hotels, beach resorts, cultural stays, and wildlife lodges. Notable among them is Cinnamon Life at City of Dreams Sri Lanka, South Asia's first integrated resort, featuring hotels, gaming, dining, retail, and convention spaces. This property has become popular among Indian visitors for both leisure and business events, helping position Colombo as a vibrant hub.



A photograph of a hotel room. In the foreground, a bed is neatly made with white linens and several pillows, including two with a brown and white striped pattern. A dark, textured throw blanket is draped over the foot of the bed. To the right of the bed, a bedside table holds a lit lamp with a white shade. In the background, a chair with a white seat and a dark frame is visible. The room is dimly lit, with the primary light source being the bedside lamp.

Hishan Singhawansa, CEO of Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts, announced the development during a panel at Outbound Travel Mart (OTM) 2026 titled “Beyond the Usual: Mapping Where Indian Travellers Will Go Next.” He emphasized that Indian travellers value ease and familiarity alongside memorable experiences. “Introducing UPI is a practical response to how they already live and spend,” he noted, highlighting it as part of a broader guest-centric strategy rather than just a technology upgrade.

As India's outbound travel surges, destinations increasingly adapt to digital preferences. UPI, dominant in everyday Indian transactions, removes a key pain point in international travel. This step by Cinnamon strengthens Sri Lanka's appeal through proximity, diverse offerings, and modern payment infrastructure, making it more attractive for Indian tourists seeking hassle-free getaways.

SriLankan Airlines' **"Chicken Calzone"**

A Soggy Let-Down on One of Its Priciest Routes

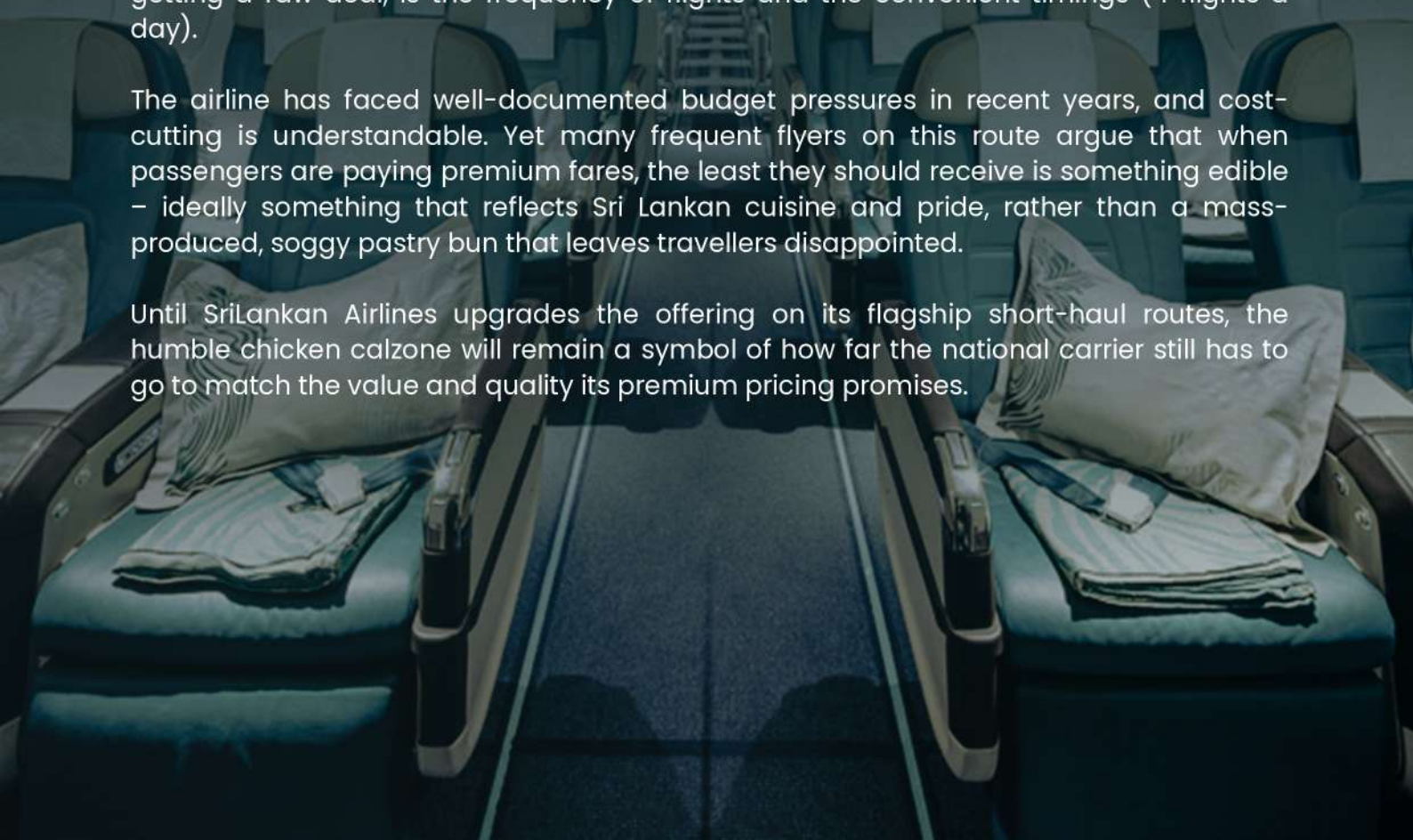
For the past couple of years, passengers on SriLankan Airlines' Colombo–Male–Colombo sector have been greeted with the same uninspiring in-flight snack: a small, soggy item the airline calls a "chicken calzone". It is essentially a hybrid between a bun and a pastry – dense, limp, and noticeably smaller than the fish pastries sold at P&S, one of Colombo's well-known bakeries.

The meal is served with nothing more than a glass of orange or apple juice. The same offering appears on most of the carrier's short-haul flights.

What makes the experience particularly galling is the price charged for the Colombo–Male sector, which remains one of SriLankan Airlines' most lucrative routes and is consistently the most expensive option among all carriers operating it, including Emirates. While Emirates provides a far superior meal, together with much higher standards and service overall (which are non-comparable to those of SriLankan Airlines), it offers much more value for the fare paid by the passenger. SriLankan Airlines continues to serve this underwhelming and tasteless calzone even though a return ticket on the same airline to Bangkok, Singapore, or Delhi can be bought for roughly the same amount (just over USD 400 for a return ticket on the Male route). It is understood that one can't serve a full meal on a one-hour flight, but this is more about the quality of the snack than its size. A simple Malu Paan (local fish bun) would be a better option. The main reason customers keep using SriLankan Airlines, even though they feel they're getting a raw deal, is the frequency of flights and the convenient timings (4 flights a day).

The airline has faced well-documented budget pressures in recent years, and cost-cutting is understandable. Yet many frequent flyers on this route argue that when passengers are paying premium fares, the least they should receive is something edible – ideally something that reflects Sri Lankan cuisine and pride, rather than a mass-produced, soggy pastry bun that leaves travellers disappointed.

Until SriLankan Airlines upgrades the offering on its flagship short-haul routes, the humble chicken calzone will remain a symbol of how far the national carrier still has to go to match the value and quality its premium pricing promises.



Spice Ceylon: Sri Lanka's First Spice Heritage Museum Opens Doors in Matale

A new chapter in Sri Lanka's heritage tourism has begun with the grand opening of Spice Ceylon, a thoughtfully curated spice heritage experience developed by Thema Collection. Located along the Dambulla-Kandy road in Matale, close to the historic Aluvihare Rock Temple, this innovative attraction officially welcomed visitors in early February 2026, introducing the country's first dedicated Spice Heritage Museum.

Conceptualized by Thema Collection, a family-owned group renowned for its boutique hotels, resorts, and heritage-led hospitality, Spice Ceylon offers an immersive blend of history, nature, agriculture, and gastronomy. The project transforms a restored historic Walauwa (traditional aristocratic manor house) into a modern yet authentic cultural landmark that celebrates Sri Lanka's world-famous spices and their profound impact on global trade and local identity.

"At Thema Collection, we continuously strive to introduce new and meaningful concepts to Sri Lanka's tourism landscape," said Chandra Wickramasinghe, Chairman of Thema Collection. "Spice Ceylon is something truly different—an experience where guests can explore the history of Sri Lanka's spices through our dedicated museum, enjoy immersive guided tours, and conclude their journey with an authentic lunch inspired by Kandyan royal recipes."



The centerpiece is the Spice Heritage Museum, the first of its kind in Sri Lanka. It traces the island's centuries-old spice journey, spotlighting key commodities like cinnamon, pepper, and cloves. Through rare artifacts, interactive displays, and educational panels, the museum illustrates how these spices shaped Sri Lanka's cultural identity, international relations, and economic history.

Visitors can step outside for guided tours through spice cultivation areas and nature trails, led by knowledgeable interpreters with agricultural expertise. These walks delve into traditional farming methods, biodiversity, and sustainable practices that have sustained Sri Lanka's spice industry for generations.

The experience culminates in a curated lunch served within the historic Walauwa, featuring authentic Sri Lankan dishes drawn from Kandyan royal culinary traditions. This rare opportunity allows guests to connect directly with the island's living heritage through flavor and place.

Strategically positioned as a convenient, time-efficient stop, Spice Ceylon fits seamlessly into cultural and heritage itineraries in the Central Province. Whether travelers are heading between Dambulla, Kandy, or nearby sites, it provides a meaningful way to engage with Sri Lanka's spice legacy without deviating far from main routes.

By integrating museum education, hands-on grove exploration, and royal-inspired cuisine in one carefully managed setting, Spice Ceylon sets a fresh standard for heritage-driven tourism. It underscores Thema Collection's dedication to authentic, sustainable experiences that honor Sri Lanka's history, traditions, and natural bounty, inviting both locals and international visitors to rediscover the true essence of Ceylon spices.



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