
Sri Lanka hopes to attract tourists once again

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Himanshi Dhawan, TNN COLOMBO: Riding high on the military victory over LTTE, Sri Lanka has now set its sights on attracting foreign tourists with an aggressive marketing campaign. Sri Lanka, which saw a steady dip in foreign tourist arrivals since last year — arrivals fell from 1.96 lakh in January-May 2008 to 1.57 lakh in 2009 — is now pushing hard to realise the tourism potential of the island country.

Ambitious plans include increasing tourist arrivals to 1 million in the next two years. Deputy Minister (tourism) Faiser Musthapa said, "We want to promote Sri Lanka as a value for money and safe destination. The country lost out due to terrorism that was plaguing the country for more than 30 years. Otherwise, the number of tourists would have crossed two million by now."

The Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau is keen to re-position the country as a "small miracle" and in the coming months will launch a campaign blitzkrieg. The re-branding campaign will be launched in Colombo on June 23 and various countries, including India, will have launches subsequently, Musthapa said, adding that there will be roadshows across India during August and September.

In some ways, Sri Lanka has very little time to lose. The country that has just finished a rather expensive war needs to boost its sagging economy. Tourism contributed to 4% of GDP in 2004 which dropped to 2.5% in 2008. "We want to increase foreign exchange earnings to 10% of GDP in the next 10 years," Musthapa said.

Among major plans to promote tourism is to hardsell competitive hotel rates in Colombo, connectivity from the capital city and the diversity of location. "The advantages Sri Lanka has include visa-on-arrival facilities and proximity of locations," Prema Cooray, Sri Lanka convention bureau chairman said.

However, the island nation continues to battle problems like lack of infrastructure, heightened security that can lead to inordinate delays in travel and domestic air connectivity. Courtesy: timesofindia.com