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After several arduous years, the tourism industry in Sri Lanka is finally making a strong comeback with a record number of tourist arrivals. This year, for the second consecutive month, the number of tourist arrivals exceeded the 200,000 mark, showing some positive enforcement to curb the economic crisis of the country.

However, in order to maintain the demand and further develop the tourism industry, the hospitality industry needs to be levelled up to match international standards and tourism promotion needs to reach a new gear. In terms of tourism promotion, Sri Lanka holds a host of attractions that go well beyond the conventional tourism hotspots the country is famous for such as the sandy beaches, ancient architectural wonders like Sigiriya, and the elephants. Recently, the Pekoe Trail of Sri Lanka was included in National Geographic's 'Best of the World 2024' list, emphasising the importance of promoting tea tourism and cultural tourism.

Although the authorities are taking various strategies to promote tourism with different types of promotional projects, lucrative deals, and quick visa procedures, most of these tourism promotional measures are witnessed by eager travellers who wish to visit Sri Lanka or South Asia in general. To the unassuming traveller in the West, the wonders this island nation in the Indian Ocean possesses are not conveyed in an efficient way which is a huge waste of potential in terms of the tourism development in the country.

### Beauty of Sri Lanka 2024

Filling this void in the land of liberty and opportunity – USA – is the America Sri Lanka Photographic Art Society, Los Angeles (ASPAS) which has been organising exhibitions to familiarise the wonders of Sri Lanka with the far West for the past several years. Following their tradition, ASPAS is poised to organise its popular

# JOURNEY THROUGH PARADISE

Annual photography exhibition by ASPAS scheduled to be held in USA



SURIYA



ANDY



SANJAYA



SHANTHA



MEDINI



WIMUKTHI



KEERTHIRATHNA



RAVI



LAKSHITHA



KASUN

photography exhibition, 'Sri Lanka in Focus USA: Beauty of Sri Lanka' photographic exhibition for the fourth consecutive year.

Organised in collaboration with the Sri Lanka Consulate General in Los Angeles and the Sri Lanka Tourist Promotion Bureau, the exhibition is scheduled to be held in three locations in the USA. On 20 and 21 April the exhibition will be held in Los Angeles at the Art Gallery of Kerckhoff Hall from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. In New York, the exhibition is scheduled to be held on two consecutive days – 25 April (6:30 p.m. to 9 p.m.) and 26 April (10 a.m. to 4 p.m.) – at the Permanent Mission of Sri Lanka to the United Nations in New York. Lastly, in May, the exhibition is scheduled

to arrive at the administrative capital of the USA – Washington DC – where it will be held on 4 May from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the Embassy of Sri Lanka in Washington DC. The exhibition also coincides with Earth Day which is observed every year on 22 April.

### Works of award-winning photographers

The opening ceremony will include a Kandyan Dance performance by a recognised exponent of Kandyan dancing, Sandani Sulochani and Waruna Hemachandra and the exhibition will showcase works by acclaimed photographer the President of ASPAS Suriya Jayalath Perera who is credited with holding the first Sri Lankan Photographic exhibition in the USA. He will be joined by acclaimed

photographers; Lakshitha Karunarathna, Wimukthi Weeratunga, K.G. Keerthirathna, Ravi Ranasinghe, and Kasun Hulangamuwa. Moreover, award-winning Sri Lankan photographers from California; Suriya Jayalath Perera, Sanjaya Warnasuriya, Andy Samarasena, and Shantha Weerasinghe will also take part in the exhibition with their work.

To make the exhibition more attractive to the public and to promote tourism in Sri Lanka, it will include a series of related events, including a seminar, lectures, a cultural performance, and a screening of a video on Sri Lanka Provided by BBC and produced by the Blue Planet nature documentary.

The Chief Guest – renowned professor Saloni Mathur who is Professor and Chair of the Modern and Contemporary South Asian Art Department – will deliver

a keynote address relating to the history of South Asian photography. Prof. Priyanga Amarasekare who is a Professor of Ecology and Environment Biology at UCLA and a Fellow of the Ecological Society of America (ESA), will make a presentation on biological and ecological mechanisms that maintain biological diversity in variable environments. Medini Rathnayaka will be the emcee of the event.

The exhibition will comprise 75 captivating photographs encompassing the uniqueness of wildlife, culture and art of Sri Lanka. From lush greenery of rainforests, pristine sandy beaches, and the grandeur of Kandy Esala Perahera to the intricate carvings of Polonnaruwa Gal Vihara, the majestic tea estates of the misty hill country, and the unique fauna of the dry zone national parks, the exhibition will take the visitors to a world of natural wonders, rich biodiversity, and cultural heritage.

### A great way to promote tourism

The exhibition is a great opportunity for the American public to experience the magic of Sri Lanka through the lens of talented Sri Lankan photographers. Visitors will embark on a visual journey through the breath-taking landscapes and rich cultural tapestry of Sri Lanka at the upcoming exhibition in April 2024, delving into the mesmerising beauty of the island nation – its diverse fauna, flora, wildlife, marine life as well as the 2500-year-old historical and cultural heritage. The award-winning photographs will bring to life the stories and traditions that have shaped this enchanting country over millennia, a land where one can watch the land's biggest mammal – the Elephant – and the biggest marine mammal – the Blue Whale – within a couple of hours, and in between the majestic Leopard. All of them are depicted in the stunning photographs of the exhibition.

The exhibition will entice tourists to explore the scenic beauty, diverse wildlife, ancient history, and vibrant culture that make Sri Lanka a truly unique destination. It will also celebrate the essence of Sri Lanka and promote its allure as a premier tourist destination. The organisers are confident that the splendour of the island nation depicted in the photographs will inspire tourists and open up a new dimension of Sri Lanka to them.

