



foreign exchange earner in any country, whether developed or developing.

Sri Lanka has great potential as a "must see" country with its far-stretched sandy beaches; rain forests (Sinharaja); Buddhist viharas and dagabas; huge monumental statues spread across the country, especially in Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa; multi-coloured, decorated mosques and kovils; beautiful cathedrals; the all-embracing hill country with a temperate climate and lush green tea plantations like red carpets laid for tourists visiting Kandy and Nuwara Eliya.

The other popular historical sites such as the Temple of the Tooth Relic in Kandy and Sri Pada where the imprint of Buddha's foot was found on the summit of the mountain, Smanala Kanda, attract large numbers of devotees and tourists during the festival seasons.

The breath-taking Kandy Perahara is exceptional, and it stands out. It is



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their playful but majestic march.

On the coastline down in the south of Sri Lanka, Hikkaduwa is yet another draw card. It has a magnificent, sandy beach and the most popular coral sanctuary - a shallow body of water enclosed by a reef

# Sri Lanka - a tourists' paradise

It is heartening to learn that the reinvigorated Sri Lanka, described often as a slice of paradise, now basking in peace and tranquillity after the 30-year old ruthless war waged by the terrorists which was conclusively won in 2009 by the valorous armed forces, has attracted unprecedented rush of overseas tourists during the last two years. The courage and strong determination displayed by President Mahinda Rajapaksa in guiding the destiny of the country at that critical stage and thereafter cannot be overemphasised.

has, highlighting its massive development projects in the war-ravaged North and East, and Sri Lanka's fascinating natural beauty, placed Sri Lanka among the new emerging countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Mexico and Argentine all of which are falling behind Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.

Tourist arrivals in Sri Lanka hit a new record in 2011 with 667,569 arrivals in the first 10 months as against 654,476 in 2010, an increase of 34.2 per cent.

No wonder, the World Travel Market 2011

Tourism is a lucrative industry and a main

conducted in the night led by whip-crackers, torch-bearers, traditional drummers and Kandyan dancers, both male and female, well over 50 elephants in colourful dresses illuminated by thousands of electric globes. The special elephant of the temple carries the casket containing a replica of the tooth relic of the Buddha making its way majestically amidst thunderous shouts of "sadhu", "sadhu" from the devotees lined up on either side of the streets to watch this spectacular procession and pay homage to the sacred tooth relic. Kandy perahara is indeed a heart-throbbing spectacle to watch in a great carnival atmosphere.

The Yala National Park and the largest Wilpattu Sanctuary teeming with an abundance of wild life from the mighty and sagacious wild elephant to the innocent and graceful deer, besides storks with long red legs, brown fish owl, crested hawk eagle and the herds of deer will take away the breath of any visitor.

The Pinnawala Elephant Orphanage is yet another exciting sight to see over 20 to 30 elephants, young and old, making their way in the form of a procession to have a dip daily in the close-by river, undeterred by the shouts and clapping of the onlookers impatiently waiting on either side of the rocky, winding gravel path to the river to have a glimpse of

decorated with layers of multi-coloured corals - ; a home to a countless number of coloured fish. Any visitor can explore the area in glass-bottomed boats to watch the attractive corals and the many colourful fish at very close range.

Snorkelling, surfing and diving in the clear waters of the sea are the other main attractions of this sea resort like Unawatuna, a few miles away, or Arumugam Bay in the eastern province.

According to the Central Bank, revenue from tourism was \$575.9 million in the last nine months of 2011 as against \$580.1 million in 2010.

The tourism industry, besides being one of the significant foreign exchange earners, provides employment to thousands of persons in the industry and in subsidiary industries - a commendable chain-reaction, adding tremendously to swell the economy of the country.

The Central Bank has, in fact, says that Sri Lanka's economy is expected to grow at 8.5 per cent in 2011, the highest rate since independence in 1948. This growth is reported to be due to strong macro-economic fundamentals and a post-war revival.

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 Home Visits possible

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nals, following one such article in Journal of American Medical Association (JAMA), and presented his work to the Australian Federal Parliament in August 2011.

Monash University has established a strong reputation within the program and therefore has become a favoured site for training. Professor John McNeil, Head of SPHPM said, "For our School the program is a very practical contribution to health in South East Asia. The opportunity to train the future leaders in public health in Sri Lanka is a great privilege for us."

The program includes both research and practical experiences. The practitioners are involved in research projects that lead to publications in peer-reviewed journals and conference presentations. They also attend short-courses provided within SPHPM of Monash University. Participants of the program have the opportunity to visit and observe firsthand the contributions to public health by various health organisations such as VicHealth, Victorian Department of Human Services, Victorian Cancer Council and local community

services.

The program provides Monash University the opportunity to increase involvement in other aspects of the Sri Lankan health system, including the provision of postgraduate degrees and research collaborations. This program has already placed Monash in a prominent position with the potential to become the key overseas provider of public health training for Sri Lankan health professionals.

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