

# A PROPOSAL TO SUSTAIN AND DEVELOP REGIONAL TOURISM FOR SMEs IN SRI LANKA

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A think tank for the SME mind

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# Overview

This proposal outlines ten (10) key initiatives that will strengthen and develop Sri Lanka's tourism and related SMEs in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as the continuing effects of last year's Easter Sunday attacks. The proposal presents a powerful recovery and developmental model using the East Coast of Sri Lanka as a pilot, so that the successful outcomes and learnings can be implemented to tourism localities throughout the island for full scale, nationwide impact.

The proposed strategies, solutions and projects have also been designed to generate new business and employment opportunities that will help revitalise the Sri Lankan travel and tourism industry through initiatives that have the potential to support skilled and unskilled workers and many rural families across the island.

## SMEs are...

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90% of establishments in the country  
45% of employment in the country  
52% of national GDP  
33% of SMEs are in the service sector

**2,250,000 people employed**

## SMEs in the service sector are...

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17% of national GDP from Service SMEs  
15% of employment in the country from Service SMEs

**742,500 people employed by Service SMEs**

**Sustaining SMEs means sustaining all their employees and their families. Keeping people employed and businesses open will give Sri Lanka a stronger chance to bounce back from this crisis.**

# Introduction

This proposal focuses on the East Coast travel season which is currently underway. The tourism region of the East primarily consists of Arugam Bay, Trincomalee and Pasikuda. It is a highly potent tourist area that has been steadily developing over the past decade. The proposed strategies look to support the continuity of this promising region's growth and address the current issues.

We have also taken special care to design these solutions so that they are applicable to other tourism localities of Sri Lanka after assessment.

## **The Urgency of the East**

The East coast season typically begins in April around Avurudu time, and continues until mid October, peaking in the months of June, July, August and September. Due to the Easter bombings of 2019, the East Coast tourism season last year was severely affected. With the Covid-19 pandemic reaching its peak in April 2020, the travel and tourism SMEs of the East Coast are now facing unprecedented levels of strain burdened by two rough subsequent seasons. This is partly why this proposal focuses on answering the urgency of the East. Simultaneously, the East Coast region is within a manageable scale to use as a pilot model and successfully assess the outcomes, before implementing the solutions islandwide.

Acting now to promote the peak of the East season will help businesses sustain themselves until we see a resurgence of international travel. Sustaining the SME operators also means sustaining their employees and families. Keeping people employed and businesses open will give Sri Lanka a stronger chance to bounce back from this disaster.

These goals will be just as effective in sustaining and developing upcoming seasons on the rest of the island.

# Introduction

## Scope

There are three time frames we are addressing, immediate, short term and mid to long term.

### Immediate Term (start now)

1. Establish safety protocols for businesses and travelers to operate, specifically in a post Covid 19 environment.
2. Alleviating financial burden on operators and travelers.
3. An Advertising campaign to promote the area in season.

### Short Term (1-3 months)

4. Ensuring safety for travellers and business operators.
5. Ensuring adequate supply of utilities for running operations.
6. Offering incentives to consumers and operators.
7. Creating Short Term environmental stop gaps.

### Mid to Long Terms (3 months onwards)

8. Setting up SL Tourism sponsored Centers for Consumer Affairs and Better Business Operations.
9. Long Term environmental protection.
10. Educational opportunities for eco tourism and development in tourist zones.

## Who We Are

We are a self-organised group of SMEs that are directly in or closely connected to travel and tourism; this includes owners of hotels, guest houses, homestays, restaurants, bars, cafes, coffee shops, bakeries, rest stops, travel agencies, tour operators, retail stores, farms and food supply services as well as artists, craftsmen, educators, media producers and entertainers.

With our businesses facing an immense challenge to survive, we are being challenged to adapt our businesses and even change the way we do business altogether.

As we understand the burdens of the government within the current alarming context, our collective efforts are to join our thinking and creative resources to present solutions and take the necessary leadership to implement them with governmental support. What we seek for is support and access to promote tourism locally and to create an environment that will help SMEs survive and self sustain into the future.

# Cohorts of Interest

Our best chance to sustain the travel industry is to promote local tourism. The cohorts that will travel address the immediate season in the East and North West Coast, but this same group will also be motivated to travel around the island with each area in season.

## Who Will Travel?

1. Locals who would be traveling abroad for summer holidays. Since the South Coast will be under monsoon, the East and North West coasts are ideal for a beach holiday.
  2. Resident expats Resident expats that are drawn to a coastal lifestyle. Large numbers reside in the South and West but few travel East or North.
  3. Embassy workers who would normally return home will have large groups who would travel together.
  4. Corporate retreats for the blue chips as well as SME sector.
  5. Colombo, Galle/Matara area, Kandy and Jaffna residents are major urban centers that will be seeing sustained rain during May through September. The East and North West offer beaches that are in season.
  6. Wildlife enthusiasts that can visit national parks across the island throughout most of the year.
  7. Eco-travelers that support sustainable businesses and practices. There are many local organizations that are working on wildlife conservation, recycling, farm to table concepts that will attract the green crowd.
1. University trips and summer camps for those working on agriculture, sustainability, development, arts, etc.
  2. Professional associations would also find this appealing as work retreats, art retreats, creativity camps, etc. Additional security can be provided by the tri-forces since this would be a sensitive area. Local women volunteers and teachers can be trained as aides in these activities.
  3. Dream Home visa holders. This group of retiree expats has found themselves without a place of welcome since Covid 19. This cohort wishes to come to a tropical climate and can be attracted to the wildlife, beaches and the developing lifestyle businesses of Sri Lanka. They will also be a permanent resident population that can help to balance the lack of tourists in the off season.

# Goal 1: Establish Safety Guidelines for Businesses and Travelers to Operate in a Post Covid 19 Environment.

Seeing that Covid 19 will be with us for a while, when new waves of infection happen there needs to be infrastructure in place to inform visitors and operators on what needs to be done.

## **Clear and Consistent Information Given to Hotels, Restaurants and Tourism Operators**

- Operational guidelines of how to maintain a safe area should be published on all Tourism Ministry and SLTDA websites in all three languages. Anyone calling for procedures is to be directed to this site.
- Proper guidelines for hotels, restaurants, tour operators, retail and any other tourism related service like spa's etc. should be specifically accounted for.
- A fast method to have operators get certified as safe operators.
- Regular checks by PHI to ensure that standards are being maintained.
- This is an area the Better Business Center (Goal 8) can be involved in by scheduling site visits, maintaining a list of certified operators and publishing the guidelines and making it available to all operators in a region.

## **Clear and Consistent Information Given to Travellers**

- In order to attract travellers, the Tourism Ministry in partnership with the police need to have a publicly available guideline for travel requirements that allow visitors to travel between districts. A communication hotline should be established to facilitate this and deal with on site problems. Too often the local offices are not informed of protocols and requirements. Too often a bribe is being offered to allow vehicles to pass which greatly increases risk for everyone.
- Tourists leaving the airport are being made to pay 'visa overstay' fees despite it being published that visas have been extended during the crisis. There are corrupt agents looking to profit on the side from the confusion.

# Goal 1: Establish Safety Guidelines for Businesses and Travelers to Operate in a Post Covid 19 Environment.

## Clear and Consistent Information Given to Travellers (continued)

- Develop a Travel Information Center (goal 8) so it can provide timely information and updates on an area, act as a hotline to field questions, and be a first line of defense for travellers in trouble.
- There are many long term foreigners living in tourist areas who have adapted and integrated into local life. They could, in partnership with a local person with equal experience in foreign culture, provide this kind of support. This could be a hot line, whatsapp, or online chat in addition to a physical office.
- Promote this number and information so that resident tourists, expats and embassies can get relevant information. Having it staffed by a mix of locals and resident foreigners with legal work visas will immediately build trust.



# Goal 2: Alleviate Immediate Financial Burden on Operators and Travelers

The primary challenge for operators is cash flow. They need to sustain payrolls as well as debt obligations. These suggestions will immediately offer relief in the short term.

## **Provide a Debt Moratorium for 2 Years.**

- Currently banks are offering 6 month moratoriums on existing debt and 1 year moratorium on new debt. For the East coast which suffered a down year last year immediately after the Easter bombings, and needs fresh relief this year, a 6 month moratorium is too short. Allow businesses to get one full season under their belt in 2020 before payments are to be made.

## **Grant Reductions in Utility Payments**

- Grant concessions or reduction in utility payments until a recovery is seen.

## **Subsidize Fuel for Transport for Tourism and Alternative Energy Sources**

- Grant subsidies for fuel used for transport back and forth to the East and alternative power sources like generators.
- Since transport operators will have to halve their occupancy, reduction in fuel prices will help offset this cost. With a global reduction in the cost of oil this is now possible.

## **Reallocate Fee Payments back to Employers and Employees for the Near Term**

- Suspend SLTDA fees. 1% of all revenues are paid to SLTDA and operators need these funds now to cover expenses until recovery is seen in 2021.
- Suspend employers EPF/ETF contributions until recovery is seen in 2021. This will allow employers to keep staff employed for longer by reducing their overhead costs. While an argument can be made that this is detrimental to the employees themselves however if this means that a company is less likely to let the staff go due to high cost, then it is far better to keep them employed with less benefits than to lose their jobs altogether.
- Allow employers to give staff EPF contributions directly to staff. This allows workers to have more disposable income.

# Goal 3: An Advertising Campaign to Promote the Area in Season

For the best reach and to gain the confidence of local travellers SL Tourism and relevant ministries should conduct a promotional campaign highlighting the areas in season.

There is always an area in season at any time of the year so there is a year round opportunity to travel. The aim is to focus on each area approaching its prime season. The immediate opportunity is the East and North West Coast which is in peak season from May through September.

|     | South/West Coast | East/North Coast | National Parks | Hill Country | Cultural Triangle |
|-----|------------------|------------------|----------------|--------------|-------------------|
| Jan | prime            |                  |                | prime        | prime             |
| Feb | prime            | good             | prime (east)   | prime        | prime             |
| Mar | prime            | good             | prime (east)   | prime        | prime             |
| Apr | good             | good             | prime (east)   | prime        | prime             |
| May |                  | prime            | prime          | prime        | prime             |
| Jun |                  | prime            | prime          |              |                   |
| Jul | good             | prime            | prime          |              |                   |
| Aug | good             | prime            | prime          |              |                   |
| Sep | good             | prime            | prime          | good         | good              |
| Oct |                  | good             | good           | good         | good              |
| Nov | good             |                  | good           |              |                   |
| Dec | prime            |                  |                | good         | good              |

The above table only aims to show how Sri Lanka has year round attractions to offer. While this is fairly well known in the international arena, it is less widely known locally.

The opportunity we have is to create new travel opportunities for locals as well as establish a recurring and sustainable tourist demographic, making Sri Lanka more resilient as a tourist economy.

# Goal 3: An Advertising Campaign to Promote the Area in Season

This section will focus on the Arugam Bay area of Komari, Urani, Pottuvil, Arugam Bay, Panama and Kumana. This is a small enough area that is in season, with both wildlife and beaches to be a pilot program to implement the development goals herein.

## Key Areas to Promote

- Arugam Bay Area (Includes Urani, Komari, Pottuvil, Panama and Kumana)
- The main tourist interest in Arugam Bay is surfing and wildlife. Typically many visitors from Europe, Australia and Israel will visit Arugam Bay during this time to surf. With the rise in popularity of the sport we are seeing more and more local tourists also taking up an interest in the sport.
- This is a family friendly activity and can involve parents as well as children.

## Shortened Travel Time

- With the extension of the Southern Highway to Mattala it is now possible to drive to Arugam Bay within 6 hours from Colombo. Previously it took 7-8 hours and was seen as a major detractor for local tourists in the West Province to travel to Arugam Bay.

## Other Areas of Interest:

- Surfing & Surf Lessons. Arugam Bay offers many facilities for those that want to learn how to surf. With ISA certified instructors and some nationally ranked athletes from the Sri Lanka national team offering lessons, there is a high level of knowledge on offer.
- Uncrowded beaches. Arugam Bay main point is the main beach that gets promoted but there are many other beaches within driving distance that are empty and pristine. Namely Urani (Whisky Point), Pottuvil, Elephant Rock, Komari, Peanut Farm and Panama beaches.

# Goal 3: An Advertising Campaign to Promote the Area in Season

## Other Areas of Interest (continued):

- Kumana is a well known migratory route of over 200 species of tropical birds. Panama and Urani have large lagoon water bodies that can be developed as eco-sanctuaries and important estuaries for supporting wildlife and retention of water in the dry zone. Eco-conscious tours can also be developed to see the bird and wildlife.
- Kumana has the same biodiversity as Yala and is host to leopards, elephants (tuskers!) and bears.
- Lahugala national park has a large collection of Elephants.
- Ancient sites, from Kudumbigala sanctuary to the ruins of Muhudu Maha Viharaya and Magul Maha Viharaya are holy sites with great mystique that will attract the cultural crowd.
- A diverse dining scene. Arugam Bay area offers many interesting restaurants with local, foreign and fusion cuisine and cater to a variety of budgets and tastes.
- Range of accommodations from budget to luxury. Arugam Bay is thought of as a surf town and attracts budget travellers but there is now a collection of high level accommodation options, from larger hotels like Jetwing to many boutique and eco friendly resorts. A diversity of dining options utilizing the area's fresh harvest has developed along with many resident expats who have added new flavors to the dining scene.

# Goal 4: Ensuring Safety for Travellers and Business Operators

Travelers (especially women), operators and investors are faced with many obstacles when they become victims of crimes. Usually in the form of threats, harassment, extortion and intimidation. They also face an uphill struggle when trying to go to the police or take a case to court. Oftentimes they choose not to follow up on these cases and the perpetrators go free.

## Immediate Shortfall Areas:

- Increase patrols of the Tourist Police in areas where most cases are reported (i.e. beach side) during peak season times. This way a regiment that is on the East coast during the peak season (June - Sept) can rotate to the South during its peak season (Nov - Feb).
- Allow a system to revoke licenses from establishments where such cases of complaints have taken place. Suspend such operators from carrying out any tourist related activities until the issue has been addressed via an expedited court hearing. Any financial penalties need to be significant.
- Request the Justice Department to instruct local courts to expedite any tourist complaint case.
- For example, in Thailand any complaint filed with the local police in connection with any visiting Tourist must be dealt with by a designated Tourist Court. In special sittings if needed, within 24 hrs. By doing so, memories are fresh, injuries if any also, witness's memory is vivid and everyone is present.
- That also has totally eliminated the backlog of cases, and fully improved the reputation and confidence in the minds of any visitor.

# Goal 4: Ensuring Safety for Travellers and Business Operators

## Crimes Against Tourists and Resident Expats

- When a crime happens to a foreginer too often criminals escape without having to go to court as the victim leaves the country due to the end of holiday or being threatened against giving a statement in court.
- A system should be developed to allow testimonials to be given even after the traveller leaves the country. For example, setting up a video call system through the relevant embassies and allowing the victims to safely return to their country but also be able to give further testimony to the case ensuring the criminals are brought to justice.
- This can be achieved through the Tourist Information & Safety Center proposed in goal 8.

## Crimes Against Investors and Business Operators

- Many local businesses and foreign investors find themselves alone when facing local harassment issues.
- Foreign investors get coerced, sometimes physically intimidated and locals as well can fall prey to predator tactics of local gangs, corrupt operators and those looking for bribes.
- The Tourist Board should develop a hotline to accommodate and investigate these reports and assist in creating a criminal case to be submitted to the police as well as local courts.
- This can be achieved through the Better Business Center proposed in Goal 8.

# Goal 4: Ensuring Safety for Travellers and Business Operators

## Protection Against Harassment of Women

- Sri Lanka in general has seen an alarming rise in the harassment of women. With 2 cases of rape that occurred in Arugam Bay since the beginning of the year and an incident of an elderly woman being raped in Beruwala (and perhaps more unreported), the word is spreading that Sri Lanka is not safe for women. The problem lies in our systems failing to provide adequate protection for these women.
- Typically a victim must go to the police to make a statement and then be subjected to a humiliating medical examination at a public hospital. There are stories of women being further fondled or stared at in these examination rooms by male hospital staff. Then the victim must wait for a court date to take the perpetrator to court and almost always the perpetrator does not show up and goes into hiding.
- Tourist police need specific training on how to handle sexual harassment cases. The prevailing attitude makes the victims feel shame when they need to be protected. Women officers who are trained in being empathetic as well as being able to speak English would greatly benefit the situation.
- There needs to be a specific unit in hospitals, also staffed by women, that are able to carry out an examination quickly, professionally and make the victim feel safe.
- An expedited process to bring perpetrators to court, ideally the next day.
- There needs to be harsh punishments given to these types of criminals. Even if caught, too often they are let go after a small period in remand and feel empowered to act again.
- Regional tourist police offices are often understaffed and they are unable to patrol the areas they have under their overview. They need to have more agents available to them during peak seasons.
- Enlisting the help of the tri-forces in this would also utilize existing manpower in the area.
- Programs against harassment against women should be started in schools and sponsored by the tourism sector.

# Goal 5: Providing Adequate Supply of Utilities for Running Operations

Water, power and trash collection are three large areas of inconsistency. Very often hotels are forced to undergo additional expenses to privately provide electricity, water and trash removal.

## Timely Trash Collection

- Private trash removal is a burdensome enterprise with no proper rules for disbursement of trash. Some private collectors will dump trash in the jungle and not take them to landfills. A properly funded municipal system can help reduce trash from the streets as well as ensure it goes to the right places.
- Having public trash cans placed along the streets and the beaches with an effective collection system. Too often street garbage creates a problem that smells during the heat of the day and attracts rodents and large amounts of wild dogs.
- Give municipal workers adequate pay so they don't feel it necessary to collect donations from hotels and restaurants just to do their jobs. Or encourage a donation (at a set price) from all hotels and restaurants during the season that goes directly toward compensation for these workers. Any establishment that pays the donation gets a sticker that they can place in front of their properties signifying their contribution.

## Increase Supply of Water and Power During Peak Seasons

- Peak season times are met with frequent power cuts and water cuts. These busy periods of demand are the same year over year and therefore possible to plan against.
- Providing additional power and water resources during these peak times will help operators reduce cost by having to resort to alternative power sources.



# Goal 6: Offer Incentives to Travelers and Operators

## **Streamlining and Enforcing Business License Applications and Renewals**

- A central office (like the Better Business Center) can assist operators in submitting their license renewals for operating a business. There are many obstacles in obtaining clear information as well as inconsistencies in what is needed to operate. There are instances of departments withholding the issuance of licenses only to come back later to impose fines on delays with regard to not having a valid operating license.
- Business licenses, Environment approvals, Coastal Conservation approvals, Excise License renewals, COC permits, Noise Permits, etc. are often done haphazardly. Putting these renewal systems online, or having one office to deal with the operators and the various other ministries would make it much easier for each operator to have the proper approvals, be registered, pay their taxes, etc.
- Businesses that come for seasonal operations should be required to get these licenses to avoid local conflict and competition.

## **Utilizing Sri Lanka's large IT Infrastructure to Develop a Renewal System**

- Sri Lanka's tourism will be affected severely for the next 12-24 months and during this time it will pay dividends to invest in technology that will make it easier for operators, investors and developers to do business

## **Provide Safe Transport Options and Incentives to Travel**

- Provide fuel concessions or incentives for local transport companies to transport guests to and from tourist areas.
- Provide fuel concessions for private travellers to travel longer distances and visit different parts of the county. For example a paid hotel booking will enable a visitor to gain a reduction in price to fill up their cars for the return trip. Or they earn rewards for other incentive programs.

# Goal 7: Creating Short Term Environmental Protection and Incentives

## Protecting Wildlife and Heritage Sites

- Regulating tours and making proper permits essential to visit national parks is paramount otherwise we end up in a situation where tour operators form protection rackets and intimidate outside operators.
- They work outside the guidelines of the parks and overcrowd the jungle endangering the animals. Sri Lanka needs to take a lesson from countries like South Africa that have a disciplined park industry and utilize proper training and permits for tour operators. There are already private park rangers trained in these famed parks in Sri Lanka who can aid in the effort.
- These sites also need to be regulated with restrictions on numbers that can visit and restricting the times that visits may occur. Very often private individuals seek to profiteer from tourists visiting these areas by charging nonsensical fees. Visitation guidelines need to be clearly published with a clear fee structure.

## Encourage Public and Private Trash Collection

- Provide public recycle trash cans and encourage visitors to use the appropriate trash outlets with clear messaging.
- Offer incentives for hotels that clean up the beaches in front of their properties.

## Reward Green Operators

Give tax credits or promotional incentives such as tax credits or exposure in advertising campaigns for hotels to any businesses involved in,

- Recycling or picking up trash
- Using recycled/upcycled products
- Using local produce or locally sourced produced
- Eliminating the use of single use plastics
- Recycling waste water
- Contribute to local wildlife conservation

## Create a Humane Way to Deal with Strays

- A major issue tourists and locals have is with growing herds of wild street dogs that will aggressively intimidate people on the streets, attack trash bins as well as ruin the properties of operators.
- Sponsor not for profit efforts to sterilize wild dogs and control the stray problem.
- Save on the costs it takes each year to provide rabies injections to the multitudes of people that are bitten.
- Create sterilization days in local veterinary clinics and utilize a portion of contributions of SLTDA fees to sponsor fees for vets and supplies.

# Goal 8: Setting up SL Tourism Centers for Consumer Affairs and Better Business

One of the most vital goals is to enhance the current Tourist Information Center (TIC) into a multi-faceted center to aid the growing needs of both travelers and operators. It needs to be staffed by locals with a good understanding of English as well as foreigners. Volunteers, resident expats or expat spouses would work well here. There are lots of travelling volunteers that would do this. Female staff for women's issues should be available. Involvement of the Tri Forces or Tourist Police in establishing security would be useful.

The center will be an extension of the SLTDA whereby a portion of fees paid by local operators will go directly towards funding the local center. Then communities will directly feel their involvement will bring about change. This will also encourage more membership in the SLTDA.

Many SME operators will not register as SLTDA entities because they don't see a correlation of the fees they pay and the benefits they get. This Center will show tangible results of member contributions.

There should be a goal to establish a center in every popular tourist zone across the island.

## **The Tourist Information & Safety Center**

- While there are Tourist Information Centers established in the country there needs to be a center specifically in each popular tourist zone.
- This center will address specific needs such as safety issues with regard to sexual harassment, intimidation of resident visa holders and expats and those that fall pray to scams.
- While the tourist police are set up to receive these complaints the victim often feels alienated and alone in this process. The Center will be the first stop and will assign a case agent to help a victim through the harrowing process and language issues faced when having to report to the police, the general hospitals or the court.

# Goal 8: Setting up SL Tourism Centers for Consumer Affairs and Better Business

## The Better Business Center

- This unit is a Consumer Protection initiative that serves both travellers and business owners.
- Local business owners also fall prey to extortion, intimidation and physical abuse by corrupt locals looking to exploit unknowing business owners. Operators, especially foreign investors and operators will have a starting point to go with their issues and case agents will aid them in taking their complaints forward to the police and court if necessary.
- In a similar way tourists can also be exploited by hotels, transport, restaurants and tour companies. Complaints coming here against operators will result in an investigation by a case agent and follow through on legal channels. Businesses that are marked as exploitative will have a case file against them and they will be marked as such until the case is either addressed or dismissed.
- If a business is discovered to be conducting malpractices, then the operators licence can be revoked/suspended and penalties will be applied.
- There must be a serious penalty enacted in order for business to comply and there also needs to be an equivalent benefit given for businesses to become members.
- The Better Business Center will streamline the process of renewing business operation licenses.
- We need to tap into Sri Lanka's IT infrastructure to develop a system that will take all license renewals online across all areas of tourism requirements.

# Goal 9: Long Term Environmental Protection

The lifeblood of Sri Lankan tourism is its natural beauty. With haphazard overbuilding, lack of zoning, lack of infrastructure and unclear protocols for waste management we are quickly destroying the greatest asset we have. While the issue of environmental impact would merit its own proposal here are actionable steps that can be implemented to mitigate this impact.

## **Create More Natural and Cultural Heritage Sites**

- To discourage overbuilding that destroys and encroaches into ecological areas, more natural and cultural areas need to be declared as heritage sites. This is especially important to restrict overbuilding and encroachment on beach reservations and jungle areas.
- Cultural sites need to be declared as national monument sites that will have strict penalties for polluting and encroaching into those areas.

## **Long Term Incentives for Green Operators**

- Using solar panels and waste water recycling facilities should be rewarded. Currently there are electricity credits applied from the CEB for having solar power, however rewards should be extended for recycling water as well as using solar to heat water.
- A water recycling system is an additional benefit that contributes to renewing the area's water table and being ecologically low impact.

# Goal 9: Long Term Environmental Protection

## **Create A Local Green Tax**

- All businesses in an ecological tourist area should contribute a small portion of revenues that go directly toward conservation. The contributions need to be spent locally on improving infrastructure for controlling pollution and increasing conservation.
- By empowering local municipalities to spend on improvement within their own region, communities will directly see the impact of their contributions and be encouraged to do more.

## **Educate Children in Tourist Areas on Sustainability and Conservation**

- The children growing up in tourist zones need to be made mindful of the precious resources of their environment that helps to promote tourism.
- Being mindful of trash collection, protecting wildlife, respecting conservation are all lessons that need to be installed from a young age so that we create a culture that is respectful as well as mindful of our national heritage.

# Goal 10: Educational Opportunities for Eco tourism and Development in Tourist Zones

## **Develop Incentive Programs for Environment Protection, Farming, Recycling and Conservation**

- There are a growing number of businesses and organizations working in conservation, recycling and eco tourism.
- This needs to be supported more in order to encourage green tourism. Sustainability is a growing trend and many travelers want to support environment friendly initiatives.
- Partnering with some of the groups and creating mindfulness campaigns on environment protection, farming and self sustenance, recycling and upcycling, wildlife conservation can be a benefit offered to schools as well as corporate offices as retreats.

## **Educate Children in Tourist Areas on Gender Equality and Harassment**

- The unspoken failure of tourism is that local area residents of popular tourist areas are poor and subsistence demographics. Fishermen, farmers, etc. are the general social fabric around which tourist hotspots develop in Sri Lanka.
- The local population neither directly gets most of the benefit and often have to live with the fallout of their environments becoming polluted, increased traffic and congestion, rising land prices and exploitative business practices.
- Attitudes toward treatment of women is a major area that needs to be addressed. Not only a foreign women made to feel unsafe, local women are also subjected to abuse that is ignored.
- Oftentimes children grow in toxic environments that neglect these issues. Many of the recent cases of rape have been perpetrated by youths and young adults. This is a sickness and attitude that needs to be addressed from the primary education levels on upward.

# Conclusion

Practical and urgent steps to sustain ourselves are essential, until such time that travel markets can return to their former levels of activity. The present industry climate calls us to serve the local travel market, and inspire domestic travel as one of the most promising means to sustain travel and tourism SMEs. In a world where border controls will be tighter and people will remain localized for the foreseeable future, we need to seize the opportunity to cater to our local markets in a way that we have not before, by creating safer, more sustainable and more educational environments for travellers.

While the SL government is taking certain steps to address the current travel and tourism industry crisis, there are specific issues which relate to SMEs, traveller safety and environmental preservation that have been severely under-represented. Some of these issues are new, in the current context of the covid-19 pandemic and the continuing effects of last year's Easter Sunday attacks: Other issues highlighted here have been present long before, holding Sri Lanka back from reaching its full potential as a travel destination. Now is the time to address all these outlined issues, and lay the groundwork to resurrect Sri Lanka's travel and tourism industry from deep waters. This paper brings these issues into focus and presents ten practical steps towards recovery in response.

These ten steps will not only create a resilient environment for tourism to survive future crises, but will also enable better business practices so that Sri Lanka may stand strong as a unique travel destination with fantastic tourism infrastructures when the world eases from its present tension through a global resolution.