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Tourism in Sri Lanka receives a boost in Belgium

Jetair, one of the leading tour operators in Belgium, has introduced Sri Lanka as a new winter destination, and will operate weekly charter flights from Brussels to Colombo commencing October 2010. The formal announcement was made at this year's 'Jetair Fly summer road show 2010' held last week at the *Event Lounge - Brussels* attended by more than 600 travel agents.

Introducing Sri Lanka, Mr. Bart Brackx CEO of Jetair NV said "despite the economic crisis the Belgian travel Market is expanding and as a tribute to the Belgian traveler we are introducing the South Asian destination". He expressed confidence that more Belgian travelers will choose Sri Lanka this winter which will add a novel experience to their life. He said Jetair NV. has offered their clients 3 travel packages 'initiatique ideal' tour (3 days tour and 4 days in a beach resort), 'Beauté naturelle inégalée' tour (11 days tour and 3 days in a beach resort) and 'Sri Lanka Classique' (8 day tour for small groups) with their local partner, Aitken Spence Travels in Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka's Ambassador to Belgium, Luxembourg and the EU Ravinatha Aryasinha who was the special guest of honor at the launch, observed that "while overall tourist arrivals to Sri Lanka grew by 48% in the first six months of 2010 over the corresponding period the previous year, arrivals from Belgium was almost 60%". Noting that "despite the absence of a direct flight connecting the capitals, Belgium has been a country which sent visitors who have grown fond of Sri Lanka, who travelled there several times and were largely high spending", the Ambassador said "the decision taken by Jet Air to commence direct charter flights to Sri Lanka is not only a huge boost to the marketing of the destination in the BENELUX region, but will also add fillip to the numbers that will be able to visit the island". He called upon travel agents to promote Sri Lanka with vigor, and assured that Sri Lanka will match this enthusiasm by ensuring that it maintains quality and that guests return as satisfied customers.

Earlier last month the Sri Lanka Embassy in Brussels held a brain-storming session with 18 Belgian tour operators familiar with Sri Lanka, to share with them the future plans for tourism development in Sri Lanka and to get a better understanding of the challenges they faced in marketing the destination. Ambassador Aryasinha who emphasized that Sri Lanka was re-branding itself in a more strategic manner as an 'exclusive location' and as a 'family destination', said the time was ripe to convert the awareness generated, into tangible increase in tourist traffic to Sri Lanka. Mr. Robrecht Willaert, Hony. Director of Sri Lanka Tourism in Belgium made a presentation on the opportunities of promoting Sri Lanka. The tour operators who attended the brain-storming said with peace returning to the island, they saw great potential in making Sri Lanka a "most preferred" destination among Belgian travelers. They emphasized the need for on-line training for tour operators and sales personnel, enabling them to promote the destination in a more efficient manner.

Sri Lanka Embassy
Brussels

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