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Sri Lanka Tourism launches Home Stay program.

To supplement the demand for accommodation at various tourist destinations in the Island, Sri Lanka tourism launched the Home Stay and Bungalow program adding another exciting segment to present accommodation categories.

At present Sri Lanka Tourism has recognized 1-5 star class hotels, guest houses, Ayurveda hotels, eco lodges, apartment hotels, boutique villas and hotels, and camping sites. Commenting on the Home Stay and Bungalow program, Chairman Sri Lanka Tourism said: “This is a different approach to provide clean, comfortable and affordable supplementary accommodation to tourists. They will have an opportunity of an engaging experience of customs, traditions, authentic cuisine and other attractions of the location, while staying with the local host, thus giving them a memorable experience during their holiday; and it will help us to reinforce one of our key pillars in positioning, the ‘Authenticity’ of our tourism product”. Home Stay and Bungalows once approved by the Standards & Quality Assurance division of Sri Lanka Tourism will be duly publicized. An accommodation guide listing all registered Home Stay properties and Bungalows will be issued to enable both domestic and foreign tourists to avail themselves of this facility.

The objectives of the program are to provide accreditation to the Home Stay and Bungalow category, broaden the stakeholders base in tourism, expand the benefits of tourism to the community, as well as to support the demand for supplementary accommodation in urban areas, and provide employment and economic benefits to the local community.

Sri Lanka received 654,000 tourists in 2010. This figure is expected to go up to 750,000 tourists (in 2011). The Home Stay and Bungalow program is expected to generate about 1000-1500 rooms immediately.

Hon. Lakshman Yapa Abeywardena, Deputy Minister of Economic Development said: “Mahinda Chinthana has clearly identified that benefits of all economic development will have to go down to the common people. The Home Stay program will enable the community to get directly involved in the tourism industry and derive its benefits, and will further enable us to take tourism to a higher level of success”.

Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA) has come out with criteria to inspect and register such establishments and all required information can either be collected from the Quality Assurance division or downloaded from www.sltds.gov.lk.

Commenting on the new scheme Mr. Dileep Mudadeniya, Head of Standards & Quality Assurance and Investment said: “New rooms which are under construction will take another 2 years to come to the market. But we have untapped potential for Home Stays and Bungalows that can be turned immediately into accommodation units to meet the immediate demand. Further, this is a well known accommodation category in Europe, and even in India, and our visitors are familiar with the concept.” While any private house in good condition with owners occupying the same house and located in an easily accessible part of the country will primarily qualify to register as a Home Stay unit, unoccupied houses with cooking/meals (and other guest service) facilities are categorized as Bungalows. The house shall fulfill the minimum requirements of the Home Stay scheme including having one or more rooms for accommodation, with each room having separate attached bathroom facilities. Interested parties are at liberty to submit fresh proposals for approval for setting up Home Stay/Bungalow units in suitable locations, under the supervision Sri Lanka Tourism. As part of the program Sri Lanka Tourism will also
be providing a training for all Bungalow and Home Stay owners covering areas such as on-line marketing, house keeping, cooking with focus on guest satisfaction, kitchen hygiene, storage of food, garbage disposal, preparation of authentic cuisine, emergencies etc.

Etisalat has come forward to promote and distribute this concept via a dedicated portal. “In the current context, online medium has by passed many traditional channels and real world barriers reaching the global customer at a minimal cost. Home-stay portal will enable local property owners to market their home-stay online and attract the potential tourist just with a click. In the long run, we are aiming at providing knowledge to them which will help them in improving their services and standards. Our vision & mission had always been geared towards extending people’s reach via advanced technologies. I strongly believe that this initiative will be a success and we are delighted and honored to be part of this initiative to empower Sri Lanka tourism sector to be the wonder of Asia” said Mr. Dumindra Rathnayaka, CEO Etisalat Sri Lanka.

Regional Development Bank ( RDB ) has come forward to provide limited loan assistance for the concept. Commenting on the program Ms. Janaki Kuruppu, Chairperson of the RDB said “At RDB we believe in Empowering Sri Lankans" to achieve economic development of their families. We are the only 100% GOSL owned bank serving the real SME sector, with a reach of over 200 service points in rural Sri Lanka alone. We are always on the lookout for ventures that will appeal to our target customers. We feel the type of household that will go for this "Home Stay" concept will be very much within the reach of our customer base and will be a great opportunity for them. This is the only way that the country's macro economic growth can be shared with the common people."

The Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA) invites all Sri Lankans who have well located, attractive and suitable bungalows and homes, with minimum required standards, in various parts of the Island to come and register with Sri Lanka Tourism.

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