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Tourism in Paradise
Volume 09
September 2026



Editorial

Volume 09

According to the Theravāda Buddhist tradition, Aṅgulimāla was a deadly murderer who cut off a finger from each body he killed, as instructed by a silly teacher. Jealous fellow students set him up. However, Aṅgulimāla, actually named Ahimsak, followed the instructions because the teacher and his teachings had no rationale; he followed the teacher and memorized the lessons passed down from generation to generation out of competition. The mere unconscious rat race made Ahimsak an Aṅgulimāla, an evil mass murderer. My favorite part of this story is the encounter with the Gautama Buddha when Aṅgulimāla was attempting to kill his mother. There, Aṅgulimāla tried to kill the Buddha, but he couldn't catch the Buddha and finally shouted, "Stop!" Buddha replied, "I already stopped, but you must stop running." This means the Buddha asked him to slow down.

Slowing down and stopping at leisure awakens the conscious mind, making it more rational than when running. Therefore, I draw an analogy with this religious story to understand the notion of mass tourism versus slow tourism, which can also be called conscious journeys – the underlying theme of Tourism in Paradise Magazine's ninth volume. The more the traveler slows down on his or her journey, the more he or she consciously experiences cultural immersion, connection, compassion, spirituality, self-actualization, and transformation. It is like Aṅgulimāla, who later became one of the most influential Buddhist monks and attained enlightenment. But for those who want the same experience sitting in a coffee shop, on a couch at sweet home, or any place you love to be, the crafted pages of this issue will do the same—they will take you through a transformative journey. Again, another but: for that, you have to slow down; you have to stop!

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Prof. Iraj Ratnayake
Dean
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It is with great pleasure that I convey my warmest greetings to the Department of Tourism Management, Faculty of Management Studies, Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka, on the publication of the ninth volume of “Tourism in Paradise”, under the timely and thought-provoking theme, “Conscious Journeys”.

In the contemporary context, tourism extends beyond the mere movement of people across destinations. It is a complex phenomenon connected to economic development, environmental sustainability, cultural preservation, and social responsibility. The concept of conscious journeys therefore invites us to reflect on the impact of tourism critically and to advocate for practices that ensure the long-term well-being of destinations, host communities, and future generations. The publication of this volume is particularly significant as it coincides with the celebration of World Tourism Day in Udawalawe, a destination that provides an important context for appreciating tourism development, biodiversity conservation, and community engagement. I am confident that the theme will encourage meaningful academic discourse and foster a deeper understanding of the principles of responsible and sustainable tourism.

I wish to place on record my sincere appreciation to the Editor-in-Chief, Senior Lecturer Hiran Dinusha, and the entire editorial team for their scholarly commitment, intellectual initiative, and diligent efforts in bringing this publication to fruition. Their contribution demonstrates the importance of student engagement, academic inquiry, and knowledge dissemination in the advancement of tourism management education. I commend the Department of Tourism Management for its continued contribution to the development of tourism scholarship and professional competencies. May this volume serve as a valuable platform for knowledge sharing, critical reflection, and the promotion of more sustainable and responsible tourism practices. I extend my best wishes for the continued success of “Tourism in Paradise” and for a meaningful and memorable World Tourism Day celebration.



Dr. Sampath Bandara Wahala
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It is with great pride that I extend my heartfelt wishes to the editorial team on the release of the 9th Volume of TIP Magazine, themed “Conscious Journey.”

Over the past eight volumes, TIP Magazine has grown into a distinguished voice bringing together the perspectives of industry practitioners and scholars alike, through thoughtful, well researched narratives on the tourism sector. This 9th volume, launched in line with the World Tourism Day 2026 programme organized in collaboration with the Sabaragamuwa Provincial Tourism Authority and the Department of Tourism Management, marks yet another significant milestone in that journey.

The theme “Conscious Journey” and the global World Tourism Day 2026 theme, “Digital Agenda and Artificial Intelligence to Redesign Tourism,” are, in truth, two sides of the same story. If digital agendas and AI are the tools reshaping how the world travels personalising itineraries, automating services, predicting demand then consciousness is the compass that must guide how those tools are used. Technology alone cannot decide whether tourism uplifts a community or displaces it, whether it protects a fragile ecosystem or exploits it; that choice remains a human one. TIP Magazine’s theme therefore speaks directly to the global agenda: as Sri Lanka’s tourism sector begins to embrace AI-driven innovation, a conscious journey ensures this transformation stays rooted in empathy, sustainability, and respect for local communities and heritage proving that the most advanced technology and the most meaningful travel experiences can, and must, move forward together.

I am confident that this volume will, once again, showcase the intellectual curiosity and dedication of our students, while sparking meaningful dialogue on responsible tourism practices, both locally and globally.

My sincere congratulations to the editorial board, faculty advisors, and all contributors for their tireless efforts in bringing this volume to life. I wish TIP Magazine continued growth and success in the years ahead.



Why Do South Koreans Walk the Camino?

Introduction

From *Squid Game* and *KPop Demon Hunters* to K-pop acts such as BTS, South Korea has been attracting global attention as a cultural powerhouse. Having risen from the devastation of the Korean War and decades of poverty, the country has achieved one of the fastest rates of economic development in the world. Yet Korean society also grapples with some of the longest working hours in the OECD, minimal annual leave, and persistently high rates of suicide and life dissatisfaction. Younger Koreans, often called the “MZ generation,” are increasingly rejecting the sacrificial, achievement-driven ethos in favour of a more self-determined, present-oriented way of living. For a growing number, that shift takes the form of a long, or frequent, career break spent travelling.

Taking a break from that hyper-competitive society, South Koreans have increasingly been walking the Camino pilgrimage. For three to five weeks, they cross northern Spain, France or Portugal, following the centuries-old pilgrimage route to Santiago de Compostela. In 2025 alone, more than seven thousand Korean pilgrims completed the Camino de Santiago, making South Korea one of the largest sources of foreign walkers on the route — a fascinating cultural phenomenon.

My research into this phenomenon draws on netnography — including the blogs and vlogs of forty Korean pilgrims — alongside participant observation across Spain and Portugal. My study findings suggest that the Camino offers Koreans a meaningful mental reset precisely because it strips away the structures that define everyday Korean life: the job, the hierarchy, social pressures, and the constant self-comparison. One pilgrim in his early thirties noted: “I felt competitive against fellow pilgrims regarding walking speed, [and then] I realised why I was unhappy. I was too competitive in every aspect of life.” For many pilgrims, this becomes a recurring realisation. To them, the Camino offers space for being away, for slowing down, and for reflection — and, of course, plenty of walking. All of them reported feeling refreshed through the Camino, and “healed.”

Why the Camino Pilgrimage?

But why the Camino specifically? And why a pilgrimage at all? In the past decade, various television shows,



celebrity YouTube videos, and books have promoted how the Camino has healed those who walk it. Christianity is also a major religion in Korea, practised by around 30 percent of the population. Even among entirely secular travellers, there is something magnetic about a route that has functioned as a trusted space for healing for a thousand years. While not religious themselves, many pilgrims sought out quiet contemplation in local churches, attended Masses in languages they could not even understand, and treated the Pilgrims’ Mass at Santiago Cathedral as the emotional culmination of their journey — an experience several described as unexpectedly moving them to tears.

This suggests that the Camino’s centuries of accumulated ritual provide pilgrims with an important tool for deep reflection and for recharging mentally and spiritually. For both religious and non-religious Korean travellers, the Camino’s rituals and setting function as a trust-conferring backdrop: a place where the seriousness of the setting authorises the seriousness of their own reflection, and where centuries of accumulated healing energy lend them the confidence to work through whatever is on their minds. All my participants reported a deep sense of introspection: confronting their true selves, broadening their perspectives on life, and outlining a new direction for the future. For some, this meant allowing themselves to get lost — accepting who they are, and forgiving themselves, along the way.

The Mechanisms

The mechanisms through which pilgrimage heals people can be better examined in research. From my own research, for Korean pilgrims, four stood out: (1) being away from everyday life and having space to oneself; (2) simple rituals; (3) physical challenge; and (4) connections with, and learning from, fellow pilgrims.

Simple rituals of walking, eating, washing up, and sleeping, together with an unhurried pace, become part of the healing itself. Carrying only what fits in a backpack for a month prompts many pilgrims to reconsider their relationship with material things. Some described a heightened appreciation for small, ordinary pleasures such as birdsong, simple meals, and unhurried conversation with fellow pilgrims or local people. Many mentioned that the physical pain and challenge actually helped to build their emotional release and mental resilience. Encounters with fellow pilgrims, Korean and foreign alike, exposed Korean pilgrims to broader ways of living and new perspectives on life. One participant’s entire sense of direction broadened after meeting a British pilgrim who had held twenty-three jobs in his life, which offered a viable alternative path and perspective.

Conclusion

The appeal of the Camino for Korean pilgrims lies not only in the ancient tradition and ritual, but also in distance, slowness, and a legitimate reason to turn inward and reflect. The lessons travel far beyond this one pilgrimage route: sustained time away from everyday routines, pressures, and social obligations; simple daily rituals; physical challenge that quiets and strengthens the mind; fellow travellers who offer new perspectives; and spaces, sacred or otherwise, that make reflection feel worth taking seriously.

The Camino's Korean pilgrims offer a useful reminder of what pilgrimage, or travel undertaken with intention, is ultimately for: making room, briefly and deliberately — through tangible acts like long, challenging walks — to ask harder questions about how one wants to live, and to truly face oneself.

Yet not every effect of walking the Camino proves long-lasting. Several pilgrims who had completed the Camino years earlier described the sense of clarity and calm fading gradually, prompting some to repeat the pilgrimage every two or three years as a kind of emotional recalibration and spiritual recharge. This points to something important for anyone drawn to spiritual or wellness travel: healing gained through slow, embodied experience may need to be treated as an ongoing practice rather than a one-off journey — one that benefits from conscious renewal.

It is also worth noting that this kind of travel tends to benefit “middle-class” pilgrims and travellers, who can afford the time and money required. Researchers need to investigate further how people on lower incomes, or with reduced physical ability, might access the benefits of this phenomenon too.



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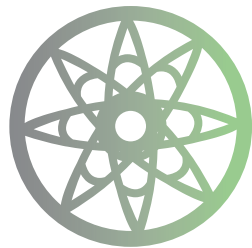
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Is the Tourist a Terrorist???

Globally, travel and tourism have become an impactful industry. It accounts for approximately 4.1% of GDP and represents 9.8% of the global economy, according to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC, 2025). People's travel habits have increased. Usually, they move from their usual place to other places to fulfill different requirements and gain experiences. Within that, many tourist-pull regions have benefited. This has created a significant economic impact on their territories.

However, most residents in European regional counties have raised red flags towards the influx of tourists due to the unsatisfactory impacts of tourism as an industry. Especially, **Tourism carrying capacity** has become a significant issue for geographical areas due to travelers. Let's consider a small example. There is a small house. It is comfortable for a small family to live in and do their day-to-day activities. If we are going to fill this house with more people, it will negatively affect its members and their daily activities. On the other hand, let's consider any object: if we try to add too many things to this object, it can be damaged or destroyed. It can create a bad impact on the surroundings as well. Similarly, when considering a specific territory, tourist influx may increase abnormally, negatively affecting not only the community and social fabric but also environmental and economic aspects.

As a tourist-welcoming region, Sri Lanka can introduce strategies before seeing tourists as a threat. Mainly, it can cater to alternatives rather than popularised hotspots to meet travelers' same tourism interests. In addition, introducing **de-seasonalised regional tourism activities** and **less impactful tourism activities for the mass market** can enhance travelers' experiences amid the immobility of service-product ownership.

Finally, there needs to be the implementation of sustainable and responsible tourism initiatives as a catalyst to keep tourists as an asset, rather than ignoring them as terrorists. Made with love, topped with memories.



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The Journeys We Take When Staying Hurts Too Much!

There are journeys people plan with laughter, and there are journeys people take because staying in one place hurts too much. Not every traveler carries excitement inside a suitcase. Some carry sleepless nights, silent heartbreaks, unfinished conversations, and memories too heavy to live beside. They do not leave home to discover the world; they leave because home no longer feels safe for the heart.

This is the quiet soul of griefcation tourism.
Not luxury.
Not adventure.
But healing.

Sometimes grief arrives without warning: a final phone call, an empty chair at dinner, or a love story ending too soon. Afterward, life continues moving while the heart remains frozen somewhere in yesterday.

That was me.

One sleepless night, emotionally exhausted in ways sleep could never fix, I found myself watching *Eat Pray Love*. At first, it felt like another travel movie, but slowly I realized it was not only about tourism. It was about survival, about rebuilding a life after losing yourself inside it, and suddenly it felt like permission to leave the places that were quietly breaking me.

The next morning, I booked a train to Ella with nothing but a backpack and my guitar. As the train climbed through mist-covered mountains, waterfalls disappeared into forests while endless tea plantations rested beneath grey skies. For the first time in months, the world outside the window felt softer than the one inside my mind.

In Ella, I learned my first lesson in griefcation, Nature does not rush healing.
It simply allows it.

Standing near Nine Arches Bridge and watching a train disappear slowly into the fog, something inside me loosened.

But healing moves,
So, did I.

I traveled through Haputale, where silence became company instead of loneliness.
Then Nuwara Eliya, where rain-covered windows and cold winds slowed time itself.
Then Belihuloya, where waterfalls sounded

louder than my thoughts.

One evening, beside a hidden waterfall, I opened my guitar case for the first time in months. My hands trembled against the strings. Grief had stolen music from me long before it stole my sleep. But surrounded by rain, wind, and rushing water, something returned.

I played again.
Not perfectly.
But honestly.
And in that moment, I felt alive again.

Finally, I reached Tangalle. Unlike crowded beaches filled with noise, it felt quiet, raw, and honest. I sat beside the ocean as the sunset dissolved slowly into darkness and the waves returned endlessly to the shore. For the first time since my loss, I cried without trying to stop myself.

Not because I was breaking.
But because I was finally releasing.
As the sky faded into night, a line from *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* came softly into my mind,

"It does not do to dwell on dreams and forget to live."

Sitting beside the endless sea, I finally understood what those words truly meant. For too long, I had lived inside grief and forgotten that life was still happening in forests after rain, in strangers' smiles, in train rides through mountains, and in distant roads still waiting ahead.

That is the beauty of griefcation tourism. It is not about escaping pain but about learning how to carry it differently, because sometimes the heart heals best in places where nature speaks louder than thoughts.

Perhaps that is why griefcation tourism matters so deeply today. Sometimes people are not searching for destinations; they are searching for themselves again. And sometimes, they find themselves in mist-covered mountains, silent forests, endless oceans, and unfamiliar roads that gently teach broken hearts how to breathe again.

Bhashinee Jayathunga

Crabby Curry Mood

Can being caught in a crabby mood actually yield feelings of bliss and serenity? I can tell you with my mouth full, that it's a definite yes!

After a long set of flights that originated in Albuquerque, New Mexico, I landed in Colombo early on a Saturday morning groggy in mind and wobbly in stature - a rather perfect way to later segue into a "crabby curry mood."

Sri Lanka is famous for its crab curry - blue swimmer or mud crabs, simmered in a claypot with rich coconut milk, fragrant curry leaves and fiery seasonings. Practically the country's gastronomic trademark, the crab curry originated in the northern city of Jaffna and has become a much-celebrated dish throughout the coastal parts of Sri Lanka. I devoured this nautical wonder two ways - street style in a casual setting and with elbows-off-the-table in a fancier atmosphere.

Pettah Market is home to dynamic corridors and alleyways of vendors peddling everything from textiles to lentils. And in the core of this bustling bazaar sits the unassuming Mayura Hotel. It's not actually a place to slumber, but a cafe with a cult following that whips up heavenly traditional Sri Lankan dishes. The crab curry, naturally, tends to be the star of the menu.

I unraveled myself from the jaunty ride in my tuk-tuk and walked in, wide-eyed and admittedly a little intimidated. Mayura Hotel was already a-buzz with locals and hints of tourists such as myself, eager to slurp up the crabby delicacy. I wondered if the waitstaff could sense my vulnerability. They ushered me in warmly, and I plopped down at a table right behind the cashier, who took my order with glee and passed it to a server.

I asked the cashier to recommend a local beverage and he suggested the EGB - Elephant House Ginger Beer that's deliciously potent and not for the faint of heart. It wonderfully complemented the ultra-spicy profile of my crab, which was plated on a banana leaf and served with rice, a fried egg, Parripu(dhal curry), carrot curry, and bean curry. Though the crab itself was lean in girth, the meat was juicy and plentiful and tasted extra savory when dipped in its accompanying jus. And the bevy of eggs inside this creature - oh my! The unctuous flavor and bright orange color were proof that even in the simplest of eateries, you can eat regally. I turned around, faced the cashier and gave him two thumbs up. He returned my gesture with smiling eyes.

Mayura Hotel, with its harried throngs of patrons yet lax environment, is certainly the kind of place I could have lingered in for hours. But I knew other patrons were waiting in line, clamoring to get their hands on the claws of Sri Lankan crab curry. I left the premises in a sated and delightful disposition, ready to tackle the maze-of-a-market and gawk at nearby religious sites like the Red Mosque and Sri Kaileswaram Temple with much enthusiasm.



Whereas Mayura Hotel is no-frills in its decor, the surroundings at Ministry of Crab is sumptuous in nature. The original outpost of this elevated seafood restaurant is housed within the historic Old Dutch Hospital complex. Launched by Chef Dharshan Munidasa along with prominent Sri Lankan cricketers Mahela Jayawardena and Kumar Sangakkara, Ministry of Crab boasts sister locations from Shanghai to Melbourne. I took myself out to dinner at this highly lauded establishment and even wore satin geometric printed trousers and a satin sleeveless blouse to further revel in the elegant occasion.

Soaring ceilings, bright lights and overstimulated tourists dominate the scene but an inexplicable coziness can somehow be felt throughout the restaurant. Perhaps it's the whimsical touch of the napkin folded into the shape of a robe, the mild-mannered staff, or the glimpses into the lively, open kitchen that make Ministry of Crab fun and approachable. I started the evening off with a dainty appetizer of grilled black tiger prawns then plunged into the main course. Naturally, I still found myself in a crabby curry mood, so I ordered the Sri Lankan specialty in all its spicy glory.

Pinpointing the size of the crab is thrilling - with the body ranging from a half kilo to the 2 kilo "crabzilla." I opted for the safe medium size and still found it too mammoth to conquer! A larger-than-life critter with beady eyes arrived at my table, sizzling in a clay pot and already dismantled, making cracking open its joints and body parts a breeze. Proudly sporting my bib, "Keep calm and crab on," I tore into its chunky meat with gusto. I was messy and sticky and didn't care. The gravy was loaded with garlic and fresh curry leaves and paired harmoniously with the side of rice. As much as I desired to devour every last bit of crab and soak up every last drop of sauce, my stomach began to tighten up. But it didn't shrink enough to refuse dessert. A raging sweet tooth prompted me to close the night with a decadent coconut creme brulee, served in a coconut shell with its sugary canopy torched to a golden top right at my table.

I left Ministry of Crab in a highly energized and elated way of being, ready to greet my week ahead in Central Sri Lanka with curiosity and exploration. My only regret since parting ways with Sri Lanka is not indulging in even more of the seafaring delicacy; crab curry is truly a mouthwatering, delectable dish I'm still dreaming about! But that just means I need to return to Sri Lanka for a sophomore visit and perhaps wrestle with crabs all the way up in Jaffna.

In the meantime, please don't bother my crabby curry mood!



Crab curry from Mayura Hotel in Colombo. Served on a banana leaf with crab jus, a fried egg, parripu, carrot and bean curries and EGB drink.



Crab curry sizzling in a clay pot at Ministry of Crab in Colombo.



Decadent coconut creme brulee from Ministry of Crab in Colombo.



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Beyond the Golden Temple: A Conscious Journey through Dambulla

When “Dambulla” comes to mind, most travelers immediately visualize the Cave Temple, ancient cave paintings, or the iconic rock rising above the landscape. For others, Dambulla is simply a convenient stop between Cultural Triangle attractions.

But Dambulla is more than a visit.

What if a traveler could actually experience, understand, and contribute rather than just visiting Dambulla? This is the heart of a conscious journey. Beyond the famous attractions, a conscious traveler observes the traditions, cuisine, people, landscapes, and everyday life that make a destination unique. In Dambulla, such a journey can create a connection between community, nature, and cultural heritage.

The Story behind the Stone

Dambulla Cave Temple is at the heart of Dambulla’s cultural identity and is recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage Site; it contains remarkable Buddhist statues

and paintings that reflect centuries of religious and artistic heritage. These caves are not simply an attraction; they remain a sacred place of worship.

A conscious traveler takes time to observe rather than simply pass through. Behaving respectfully, maintaining silence, dressing appropriately, and taking photographs thoughtfully can help preserve the dignity of the site. Understanding the meaning behind the paintings and statues allows visitors to move beyond taking photographs toward an experience of understanding.

Where the Harvest Meets the Table

Dambulla is deeply connected to agriculture. Paddy fields, vegetable cultivation, and water resources such as Kandalama Lake are important parts of the surrounding area and support local livelihoods through fishing, contributing fresh fish to the local food culture.

For travelers, this offers a valuable opportunity to experience another side of Dambulla through its cuisine; purchasing fresh, locally sourced meals and supporting small food businesses allows for a meaningful tourism experience.

Imagine sitting down to a traditional Sri Lankan meal and knowing that some of its ingredients have come directly from nearby farms. In this way, each meal can become more than a taste, and a connection between people, nature, and culture. Conscious tourism does not always require remarkable experiences. Sometimes, it begins with something as simple as choosing where to dine and what to purchase.

Travelling Light on the Land

Dambulla’s beauty is more than its cultural heritage. Its nearby landscapes and natural areas, including Kandalama Lake and surrounding wetlands, are blessed with lush flora and fauna, reminding travelers of the importance of a healthy ecosystem. Tourism depends on healthy environments.

A destination’s natural beauty depends not only on what visitors experience but also on how it is treated carefully. Visitors use packaging and plastic bottles. Vehicles contribute to emissions. When tourism grows in that area, these impacts can become increasingly important. Conscious travel is about the small choices we make along the way.

Travelers can protect Dambulla by properly disposing of waste, conserving energy and water, protecting the natural environment, using reusable items, avoiding single-use plastics, and selecting and staying in

accommodation committed to sustainable practices. In this way, sustainability becomes an integral part of the travel experience rather than an added feature.

A Different Kind of Souvenir

Modern tourism often encourages travelers to collect photographs, but the best souvenirs are not always the ones stored on a phone. It may be the taste of a traditional meal, a story told by a local resident, or the experience of walking through an agricultural landscape.

In Dambulla, travellers can get experience like picking fresh fruits, vegetables and herbs from a farm and understanding how these ingredients are grown, preparing local cuisines with local community where travellers can learn how to prepare traditional Sri Lankan cuisines using locally available ingredients and traditional cooking methods and also can get experience with enjoying locally caught fish or learning about traditional fishing practices around Kandalama Lake and the quiet atmosphere inside an ancient cave. These experiences can become a meaningful souvenir for travelers not a physical one, but knowledge, skills, flavors, and memories they can carry home.

This is where travel becomes meaningful. Instead of asking, “How many places can I visit today?” the traveler asks, “How deeply can I experience this place?”

What Will We Leave Behind?

The true success of Dambulla should be measured not only by how many visitors it attracts or how much tourism revenue it generates, but also by the impact tourism has. Are local communities benefiting? Are cultural values respected? Environment protected? Will future generations experience Dambulla with the same sense of wonder?

A conscious journey invites travelers to consider these questions. It encourages us to look beyond photographs and consider the footprints we leave through our choices, spending, and behavior.

The most valuable souvenir is not a physical item we take home, but the knowledge that our visit has supported local communities, respected cultural heritage, and helped protect the environment or destination. Beyond the Golden Temple lies a Dambulla waiting not only to be seen, but to be truly appreciated and understood.



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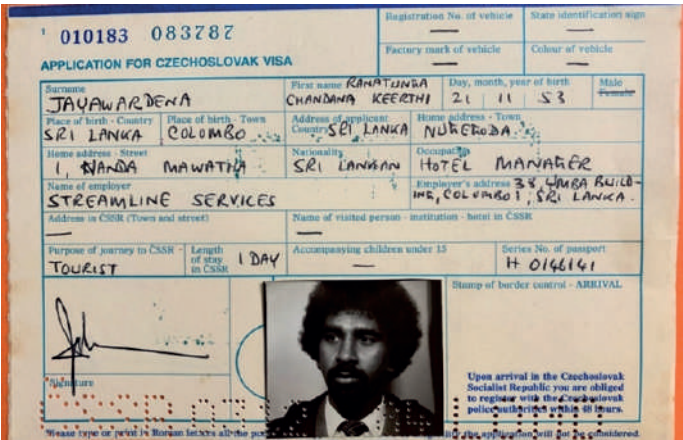
A Winter Adventure: A Student's Journey Across 17 Countries

Introduction: A Journey Fuelled by Curiosity, Not Currency

What compels a young graduate student to embark on a six-week journey across 17 countries in the depths of one of Europe's harshest winters, with barely £1,300 in hand? It is neither comfort nor convenience that drives such an undertaking, but curiosity, courage, and an openness to the unknown. Shortly after my master's degree convocation at the University of Surrey in England, and before embarking on what would become an international career in hotel management, my wife and I set out on an adventurous journey that would profoundly shape our lives.

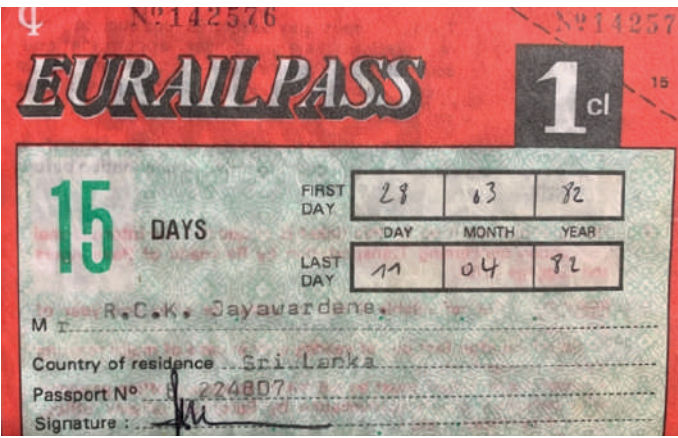
For a good trip, the essential ingredients are a well thought-out plan, detailed schedules, being ready for contingencies, and adjustments to the plan when needed. Although the trip was for six weeks, I invested twelve weeks' time for planning, checking train and ship schedules, buying train tickets, and obtaining visas. Travelling with Sri Lankan passports meant a longer wait time to obtain visas from multiple embassies in London. I had to spend extra time to obtain our visas for Czechoslovakia and Romania, as at that time they did not have a well established tourist traffic from Western countries.

Armed with little more than heavy winter clothing, modest backpacks, and an adventurous spirit, we travelled across Western Europe, Eastern Europe and briefly into North Africa. At the time, we did not conceptualise our potential travel experience in academic terms. Yet, in retrospect, it represents a powerful example of what is now described as conscious travel — a form of tourism grounded in mindfulness, simplicity, and authentic human connection.



Czechoslovakian visa

Travelling Light: The Discipline of a Shoestring Budget



A limited budget does not merely restrict; it educates. With only £1,300 — my remaining savings after paying substantial tuition fees as an international student in England- my wife and I were compelled to make deliberate and thoughtful decisions throughout the journey. Our shopping during the trip was limited to one postcard per city we visited. Luxury was beyond our reach; instead, we embraced efficiency and intentionality.

Having previously used Eurail passes for a couple of short trips across Europe, we were convinced it was the most flexible way to travel by train in Europe. There was no need to pre-book as there were many trains daily between each city and the next destination. The train service in most European countries was efficient and very punctual.

Our primary modes of transport were trains and ferries, supplemented occasionally by buses. Night trains became both a practical necessity and a strategic advantage, doubling as accommodation and reducing costs. Meals were simple, often improvised, and rarely indulgent. Yet this very simplicity heightened our awareness of place and experience. Every third night, we checked into a small hotel to get a good night's sleep.

Free from the distractions of comfort and excess, we engaged more deeply with our surroundings. This approach aligns closely with contemporary principles of conscious tourism, which advocate minimising consumption while maximising meaningful engagement. Travelling light, we discovered, was not a constraint but a form of liberation.

From England to Wales and Ireland: A Slow Start

Our journey began in London, where we lived in a modest one-room rented flat. Travelling westward by bus, we stopped at Cardiff, Swansea, and Carmarthen before reaching Fishguard Harbour. These early stages were relatively gentle, allowing us to settle into the rhythm of travel.

From Fishguard, we boarded a night ferry to Rosslare Harbour in the Republic of Ireland. The crossing proved challenging, with rough seas and minimal comfort making sleep elusive. Nevertheless, this early discomfort instilled a sense of resilience and anticipation.

In Dublin, we spent several days exploring the city's literary heritage and vibrant urban culture. Even brief encounters with locals and fellow travellers enriched our experience, underscoring the social dimension of travel. We then embarked on a 24- hour ferry journey to France during a winter storm — an experience both daunting and exhilarating.



At Cardiff Castle, Wales

France: Beauty Amid Hardship

Our travels in France took us to Le Havre and Rouen, where we stayed with one of my cousins and his French wife and son. After that, when we reached Paris, which had been blanketed in snow, it appeared almost dreamlike in its beauty. Yet the realities of winter travel soon became apparent. Train compartments were frequently unheated, and water sources froze in the severe cold.

Sleep was often difficult, and physical discomfort became a constant companion. However, these hardships fostered resilience and shifted our perspective. Rather than seeking comfort, we learned to appreciate small pleasures - a warm beverage, a moment of sunlight, or a conversation with a fellow passenger.

These seemingly minor experiences became significant, reinforcing the idea that meaningful travel lies not in luxury but in awareness and engagement.

From Paris, we travelled overnight to Bordeaux, enduring freezing conditions throughout the journey. Despite the discomfort, arriving in the world's most renowned wine region was deeply satisfying. As a trained sommelier at the time, I had hoped to visit vineyards; however, adverse weather conditions made this impossible.



With family in Rouen, France

Across Iberia: Lasting Impressions in Portugal and Spain

Our journey continued with a demanding 30— hour train ride from Bordeaux across Spain to Porto in Portugal. Fatigue was constant, yet the reward was equally profound. The sight of the Douro River and its iconic bridges, combined with the opportunity to taste port wine at its source, made the experience memorable.

We then travelled to Lisbon and Madrid, each capital city offering distinct cultural characteristics. Lisbon's coastal charm and historic character contrasted with Madrid's dynamic energy. These contrasts highlighted the diversity of European cultures and enriched our understanding of place. In each city, we had a traditional local meal, did a three-hour bus tour, and visited the most important museum and art gallery.



In Madrid

Morocco: Human Connection Beyond Borders

Crossing from southern Spain into Morocco, we arrived in the port city of Tangier. Our initial impressions were challenging, marked by bureaucratic obstacles at the customs counter and persistent touts. However, our experience transformed dramatically upon reaching Casablanca.

There, we were welcomed into the home of a fellow traveller's family. Their generosity was extraordinary. Living with an eleven-member household, we shared meals, stories, and daily routines. One particularly memorable experience involved preparing and sharing a traditional meal - Moroccan lamb stew with couscous. We sat on mats and ate from one large clay plate using our fingers. Our hosts were impressed that my wife and I respected the local customs and blended well with their family.



Authentic hospitality in Casablanca at a Moroccan home

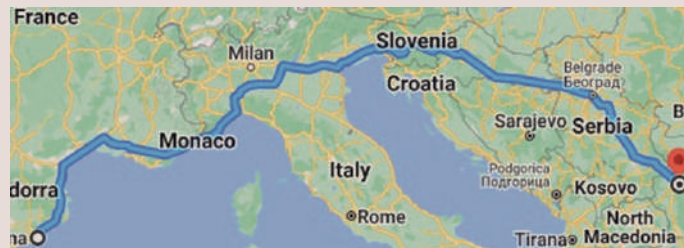
This was not tourism in the conventional sense - it was genuine cultural immersion. Such experiences emphasise a fundamental truth: the most meaningful aspects of travel often occur not in famous landmarks and Michelin-star restaurants but in the everyday lives of people.

This journey laid the foundation and my appetite for a lifetime of travel, eventually encompassing visits to over 100 countries by the year 2024.

Spain: Adaptation and Care

Returning to Spain via Gibraltar, we encountered both light-hearted challenges and more serious difficulties. In Valencia, even ordering a traditional dish such as paella proved to be an exercise in cross-cultural communication.

A more significant challenge arose in Barcelona, where a health issue forced us to pause our journey for several days. This interruption, though unexpected, proved



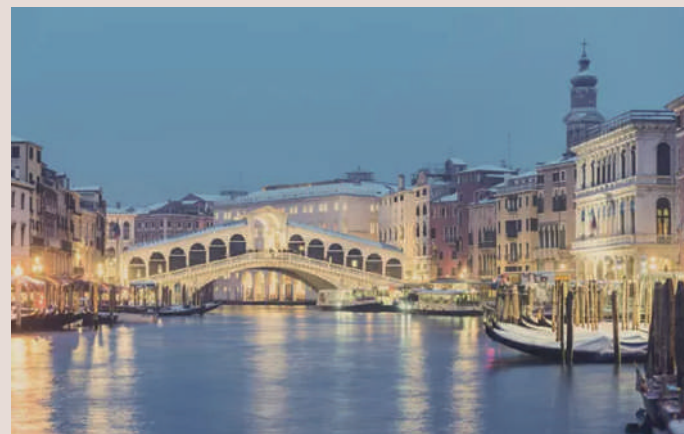
invaluable. It highlighted the importance of rest and adaptability - qualities essential for any ambitious traveller.

The owner of a small inn where we stayed demonstrated notable kindness, caring for my wife, who became ill. Despite language barriers, her actions exemplified the true spirit of hospitality, reinforcing lessons that would later influence my professional career. Kindness is a prerequisite for genuine customer service.

Deadly Extreme Winter Conditions and Revisiting Italy

Despite warnings from our new friend, the innkeeper in Barcelona, to delay our journey due to worsening weather, we continued our travels during one of the coldest European winters on record. Temperatures in parts of France dropped to -41°C, and reports indicated hundreds of weather-related fatalities across the continent.

As an Executive Chef in my early hotel career, once a week for seafood buffets in Sri Lankan resorts in Hikkaduwa and Bentota, I prepared and served bouillabaisse (well, my version of it!), the famous traditional Provençal fish stew originating in Marseille, France. Although winter was not the best time for it, I was determined to try the authentic Bouillabaisse Marseillaise near the famous fish market in Marseille. It was lighter and different from my preparation. "Well, lost in translation!" I thought to myself whilst enjoying a whole bowl of it with French bread and garlic butter in a small café. It was perfect warm food for a cold day. After the South of France, we passed Monaco to reach Italy.



Venice, Italy

Continuing our journey, we travelled through Italy. My wife and I lived and travelled all around Italy a few years before, when I was on an ILO/UNDP Fellowship at the Turin Centre. Therefore, we focused on one city we missed travelling to - Venice!

Spending a day exploring its canals and architecture was deeply rewarding. From Venice, we crossed the Iron Curtain and entered a markedly different political and social environment.

Crossing the Iron Curtain to Eastern Europe



Belgrade, Yugoslavia

At the time, the Iron Curtain represented a profound division between Western Europe and the communist states of Eastern Europe, aligned with the Soviet Union.

We travelled through Yugoslavia, today divided into seven independent nations: Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Slovenia, North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Kosovo. We then continued by train from Belgrade to Sofia in Bulgaria. Travel conditions were harsh, and Western tourists were scarce, adding to the sense of adventure.

A particularly challenging incident occurred at the Bulgaria—Romania border, where we were unexpectedly removed from a train and denied entry despite holding valid visas. This resulted in a 1,320-kilometre detour through unfamiliar territory to reach Vienna, the charming Austrian capital.

These experiences highlighted how political realities shaped travel during the Cold War. Travel was not merely geographical; it was deeply shaped by historical and political realities.

Comfort in Austria, Liechtenstein and Switzerland

Arriving in Vienna brought a sense of relief and familiarity. Having visited previously, we felt at ease. Having heard about our plight at the Romanian border, a group of our friends came to the Vienna railway station to welcome us.

The city's cultural richness, exemplified by landmarks such as the 1,441-room Schönbrunn Palace, offered inspiration. Based on pleasant memories from our previous visit to Vienna, we requested our friends to take us back to the world-famous Café Sacher to taste their Sachertorte - widely considered the best Chocolate Cake in the world. Viennese coffee houses are institutions, beloved by locals and tourists alike for providing a space to discuss the day's events in a relaxed and quaint environment. Frequented by musicians, artists, intellectuals, and philosophers since the 19th century, they have developed a reputation for being cultural hubs where great minds gather and share concepts, ideas, and creations.

During our stay in Austria, we also visited Budapest in Hungary and Bratislava in Czechoslovakia (today, two countries: the Czech Republic and Slovakia). After a few days with our friends in Vienna, I travelled to one of the smallest countries in the world - Liechtenstein. After that, I had a memorable stay in Zug, Switzerland, where I reconnected with a Ceylon Hotel School batchmate of mine who had become an artist in addition to his work as a chef.

My friend encouraged my artistic pursuits, which left a lasting impact. Indeed, it was during this phase of the journey that seeds were planted for my later work as a semi-professional abstract artist. Travel, in this sense, became not just an experience but a catalyst for personal transformation.



A warm welcome to Austria from our Viennese friends

The Last Lap: Zürich-München-Paris-London-Colombo-Habarana



The president of Hotelconsult, Dr Wolfgang D. Petri, hosted me with their Sri Lankan students.

During a visit to Hotelconsult (now César Ritz Colleges Switzerland), I delivered a guest lecture that later led to a two-semester visiting professorship in Switzerland.

The final stage of our journey included visits to different cities in Switzerland and Germany, then a return to Paris and London, and eventually Sri Lanka.

Shortly after returning to Sri Lanka, I rejoined my former employer, John Keells Group, as the General Manager of the Lodge and the Village (today, the Cinnamon brand).

While my academic qualifications provided a strong foundation for my career, it was this six-week journey that gave me a deeper understanding of global cultures, an invaluable asset in my fifty-year-long career in hospitality and tourism.

Conclusion: The Enduring Value of Conscious Travel



Settling down in my office at the Habarana Resort Complex

This six-week journey was not defined by the number of countries visited, but by the depth of experience gained. It embodied principles that are now widely associated with conscious tourism:

- Simplicity
- Resilience
- Mindfulness
- Sustainability
- Cultural immersion

For contemporary travellers, particularly students, the message is clear: meaningful travel does not require wealth. It requires curiosity, courage, ambition, and a willingness to engage authentically with the world. In an era increasingly dominated by curated experiences and digital distractions, such journeys remind us that travel can still be transformative, not only for the individual but for the broader human community.

If one wishes to have a career in tourism and hospitality, my advice is to, whenever possible, find opportunities to explore travel as a meaningful and reflective experience, emphasising mindfulness, simplicity, sustainability, and deeper connections with nature, culture, and oneself.

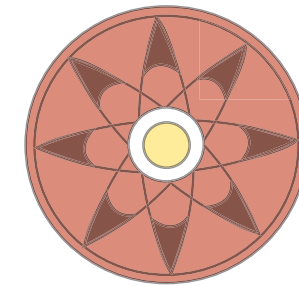
Travel, meet people, experience diversity, learn, share, and enjoy the essence of tourism!

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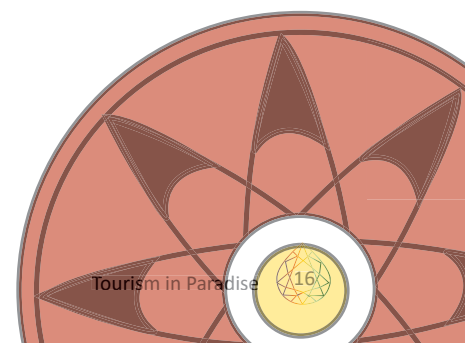
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Dr. Chandana (Chandi) Jayawardena
President, Chandi J. Associates Inc.,
Canada
Tourism Professor and Dean



The Rat Race



The Soundscapes of Serendib

Exploring how sound, memory, and neuroscience are reshaping the way we experience destinations.

We are a generation living through a visual revolution. We travel across continents chasing the perfect filtered photograph, turning exploration into a competition to capture moments rather than experience them. As Sri Lanka enters a new era of tourism growth, its most iconic locations risk becoming nothing more than digital backdrops. But to experience a destination beyond its surface, we must turn down the visual noise and start listening to the island.

Think about the soundtrack of modern life. It is a constant mixture of keyboard clicks, urban traffic, machine noise, and endless digital notifications. This continuous stimulation keeps the mind in a state of alertness, leaving less room for reflection, creativity, and deeper awareness.

True cognitive exploration begins when we allow ourselves to encounter unfamiliar environments. Travel becomes a powerful interruption of routine, and Sri Lanka offers a remarkable setting for acoustic ecology - the study of how humans interact with the sounds of their surroundings.

The Polyrhythms of the Streets vs. The Geophony of the Hills

When you step into a bustling Sri Lankan transit hub or a local open-air market, you enter a complex soundscape. The familiar rhythm of the *Choon Paan* bread truck, the calls of street vendors, the movement of crowds, and the

overlapping voices of Sinhala and Tamil communities create an environment that demands attention. You are not simply observing a place; your mind is actively learning its rhythm.

Now move away from the crowded centres and into the mist-covered landscapes of the Knuckles Mountain Range or the ancient wilderness of Sinharaja. Here, the dominant voices are different: **geophony** - the sounds of nature such as wind, rain, and waterfalls, and **biophony** - the living sounds of birds, insects, and wildlife.

This contrast between human-made noise and natural sound can influence how we experience the world. Research on natural soundscapes suggests that environments rich in natural sounds may reduce stress responses, support attention, and encourage a calmer state of awareness.

When external noise decreases, the brain has a greater opportunity for reflection. The Default Mode Network, a system associated with internal thought, memory, and imagination, becomes more active during moments when we are less focused on constant external demands. These quiet periods may allow the mind to connect ideas, process experiences, and develop new perspectives.

Perhaps this is why certain travel memories remain powerful long after a journey ends. A photograph can

remind us where we were, but a sound can return us to the exact feeling of being there.

The whistle of a train disappearing into Sri Lanka's misty highlands. The sudden silence of a forest trail. The rhythm of waves arriving on an empty beach. The unfamiliar voices of a market in a city we have never visited before.

These moments create a deeper relationship between traveller and destination.

Tuning In to an Authentic Future

As Sri Lanka's tourism landscape evolves, the future of travel may belong to those seeking meaningful connections rather than simply collecting images. The next generation of travellers is not only searching for places to visit; they are searching for experiences that change how they understand the world.

To move beyond conventional tourism, we must stop travelling as passive consumers and begin experiencing destinations with greater awareness.

On your next journey through Sri Lanka, leave the camera aside for a moment. Stand in a quiet hill-country village. Listen to the movement of a market. Sit beside the ocean before sunrise. Walk through a forest where nature creates its own rhythm.

Close your eyes. Listen.

Because a destination is not only what appears in front of you. Sometimes, the most unforgettable part of a journey is what remains after the world becomes quiet.

Oshadi Nimanthika



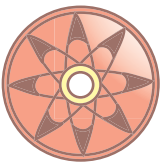
Where Earth Meets the Soul: The Spirit of Japanese Onsen

Deep beneath volcanic mountains, the earth quietly creates something extraordinary. Heated by geothermal energy and enriched with minerals, natural hot springs as known as Onsen, come to the surface. For centuries, this natural gift has shaped a unique part of Japanese culture. It is much more than a place to take a bath. It is a place to calm yourself, to blend with nature and leave the noise of everyday life behind.

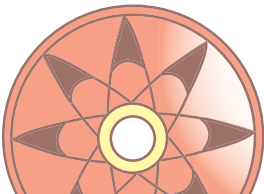
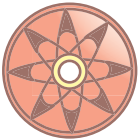
One of the most fascinating places to experience this relationship between earth and spirituality is Beppu of Japan, home to the famous Seven Hells (Jigoku Meguri-別府地獄めぐり). The name “Jigoku” which means “hell” may come from the extreme heat, while also emphasizing the Buddhist image of hell. These spectacular hot springs display boiling water, colourful pools, steamy air and bubbling mud, creating a unique and scenic landscape that attracts visitors as a remarkable natural attraction.

The outdoor rotenburo (露天風呂) baths allow people to experience the changing seasons while soaking in warm water. The warmth can relax muscles and help people unwind from physical and mental stress. This is why the onsen fits into wellness tourism. Staying at an onsen ryokan, a traditional Japanese inn can extend the experience through traditional Japanese food, hospitality and seasonal customs. Perhaps this is the true spirit of the onsen; nature is not something to conquer, but something to respect and live alongside.

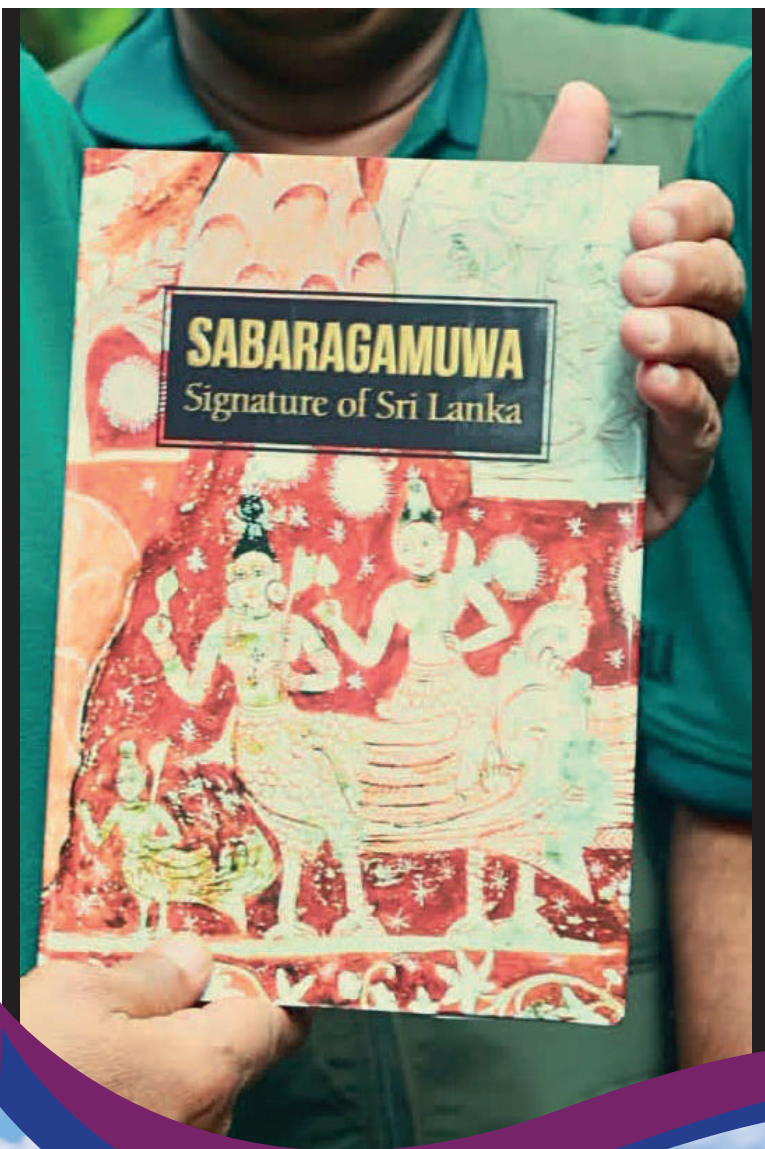
Oshini Gunathilake



The Invitation



Ministry of Tourism Sabaragamuwa Provincial Council



Sabaragamuwa is a province rich in natural beauty, cultural heritage, human potential, and economic opportunities. With its diverse landscapes, vibrant communities, and distinctive cultural identity, the province holds a unique place in Sri Lanka's tourism landscape. Recognising this potential, the Sabaragamuwa Provincial Tourism Ministry contributes significantly to strengthening the tourism sector across the province, with a particular focus on regional tourism planning, tourism-site development, and infrastructure improvements across the Ratnapura and Kegalle districts. The Ministry also places strong emphasis on professional training and capacity building through initiatives such as the Area Tourist Guide Lecturers' Licensing Programme, supporting the development of knowledgeable and professional local guides.

The tourism potential of Sabaragamuwa Province spans a remarkable range of natural, cultural, and historical resources. The province proudly encompasses a significant portion of the UNESCO World Heritage Site of the Sinharaja Forest Reserve, alongside renowned attractions such as Udawalawe National Park, Adam's Peak, Kitulgala, Saman Dewalaya, and Pinnawala. These destinations offer visitors a unique combination of nature, wildlife, adventure, spirituality, and cultural heritage. In addition to these renowned attractions, the Ministry is focusing on other rural destinations, such as

Suriyakanda and Belihuloya, recognising their tourism potential and further expanding tourism opportunities across Sabaragamuwa. Beyond these destinations, Sabaragamuwa is enriched by its precious gemstones, diverse flora and fauna, extensive plantations, minerals, and traditional livelihoods, each contributing to the province's unique identity and growing tourism appeal.

The Ministry is committed to developing the tourism potential of the entire Sabaragamuwa Province responsibly and sustainably, while ensuring tourism creates meaningful economic and social opportunities for communities throughout the province. At the same time, protecting the natural environment and preserving Sabaragamuwa's rich cultural heritage remain essential to maintaining the region's unique character, authenticity, and long-term appeal.

Looking ahead, Sabaragamuwa has the potential to emerge as an increasingly attractive destination for nature, adventure, cultural experiences, and community-based tourism. With its people, heritage, and extraordinary natural resources at the heart of this journey, the Sabaragamuwa Provincial Tourism Ministry continues to work towards a future where tourism becomes a sustainable pathway to opportunity, community empowerment, and lasting prosperity for the province, while making a meaningful contribution to the growth and development of tourism in Sri Lanka.



A & Q

look abroad, especially after the uncertainty our country has experienced. For me, Sri Lanka is home. I wanted to bring back the experience and confidence I had gained and use them to create opportunities here. I also wanted to show that young Sri Lankans can build meaningful international careers while being based in Sri Lanka.

Joining Intrepid Travel in 2022 brought together the things I value most: people, purpose, sustainability and strong commercial performance. Leading both our Sri Lanka destination business and the Colombo Centre of Excellence has reinforced my belief that Sri Lanka can be both a world-class tourism destination and a base for talented professionals supporting a global organisation.

The biggest leadership lesson I have learned is that you do not need to have every answer. You need to provide clarity, stay close to the operation, trust and develop people, and take responsibility when things do not go to plan. Today, I try to balance people, purpose and performance. Tourism should create value beyond arrivals and revenue. It should support communities, protect the places people travel to and create meaningful opportunities for local people.



Poomaka Delpachitra
Country General Manager/Director
Intrepid Travel in Sri Lanka

Q Mr Poomaka, your journey from Corporate Travel Executive to Country General Manager of Intrepid Travel Sri Lanka is truly inspiring. Looking back, what key experiences, turning points and lessons shaped your career in tourism, and how have they influenced the way you approach the industry today?

My journey has been shaped less by a fixed career plan and more by the opportunities, challenges and people I have encountered along the way.

Before beginning my corporate career, rugby was a major part of my life, and I had the privilege of representing Sri Lanka. It taught me discipline, resilience and, above all, teamwork. Individual talent matters, but lasting success comes when people trust one another and work towards a shared goal. That principle still shapes how I lead today.

Starting as a Corporate Travel Executive gave me a strong grounding in customer service and tourism operations. I learned to listen carefully, understand different needs and stay calm when plans changed. Moving to the UK in 2010 was another important turning point. I went for higher studies, began working part-time with a tour operator and gradually took on more responsibility. That experience pushed me beyond my comfort zone and taught me how to connect global customer expectations with authentic local delivery.

After several years overseas, I made a conscious decision to return. I understand why many talented Sri Lankans

Q Intrepid Travel began with a simple idea shared by two friends and explorers who wanted to experience the world differently. Could you take us back to those early days and tell us about the vision behind Intrepid's creation? How has that original philosophy evolved, and what makes Intrepid distinctive in today's global travel market?

Intrepid's story began with two friends, Darrell Wade and Geoff Manchester, who believed travel could be more adventurous, personal and connected to local life. In the late 1980s, while travelling independently with friends, they asked a simple question: could more people experience the freedom and cultural immersion of independent travel without having to manage every challenge alone? That question became the foundation of Intrepid.

The idea was never simply to move people from one attraction to another. It was to travel in small groups, use local transport and services, connect with local people and experience a destination more deeply. It was also based on an early belief that the communities and places making travel possible should benefit from it.

The business has grown enormously, but that philosophy remains at its centre. Intrepid is global in scale and local in delivery. Our trips are built around local leaders, local knowledge, local experiences and local partnerships. Purpose and commercial success are not treated as competing priorities. Our B Corp certification, The Intrepid Foundation and our commitments to communities, wildlife and the environment all reflect the same long-standing idea: travel should create positive change through the joy of discovering the world.

The scale has changed, but the question remains the same: how can we help people experience the world in a more meaningful way while leaving a positive impact on people and the planet?

Q Intrepid is known for creating meaningful, immersive travel experiences rather than simply taking visitors from one attraction to another. What types of travel experiences and itineraries does Intrepid offer around the world, and what are today's travellers increasingly looking for beyond conventional sightseeing?

Intrepid offers a wide range of small-group experiences, including cultural and food journeys, walking and trekking, wildlife, cycling, family travel, Premium trips and expeditions. The common thread is not simply where we go, but how people experience each destination.

“The best journeys leave people with more than photographs. They leave them with stories, relationships and a new perspective

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Travellers are becoming more intentional. They want experiences that reflect their interests and give them a deeper understanding of a place. We see this in the demand for women's expeditions, community-led experiences, active travel and journeys built around food, nature and culture. People increasingly want access to local perspectives, not only famous sights.

In Sri Lanka, this comes to life through the way we connect travellers with local leaders, small businesses and community experiences. One example is the ZeroPlastic Impact Centre in Sigiriya, supported by The Intrepid Foundation. It helps travellers understand the local challenge of plastic pollution while seeing practical action led from within the destination. We have also been working to create more opportunities for women in tourism, including aspiring women tour leaders and women-owned businesses, so that travellers can encounter a broader range of Sri Lankan stories and perspectives.

We are also exploring lower-impact ways of operating locally. Introducing electric mobility into our transportation is one practical example of testing how innovation can improve the travel experience while reducing environmental impact.

Ultimately, travellers are moving beyond asking, 'What can I see?' They are asking, 'What can I experience, what can I learn and how can my visit make a positive contribution?'

Q In your experience, what makes a journey truly meaningful for a traveller? Are you seeing a growing interest in authentic experiences, local communities, culture, nature and a deeper connection with the destinations people visit?

For me, a meaningful journey is one that stays with you after you return home. It may be a conversation with a local person, a meal shared with a family, a moment in nature or an experience that changes how you see the world.

Travellers still want to visit iconic places, of course, but they increasingly want to feel a destination through its food, culture, people and everyday life. In Sri Lanka,

the most memorable moments are often not the most staged ones. They may come from travelling with a knowledgeable local leader, meeting an entrepreneur, learning how a traditional product is made or hearing directly how a community is responding to an environmental challenge.

The best journeys leave people with more than photographs. They leave them with stories, relationships and a new perspective. Our responsibility is to create those moments in a way that is respectful and ensures local communities benefit from tourism too.

Q From your experience leading Intrepid Travel in Sri Lanka, how do international travellers perceive Sri Lanka as an adventure and experiential tourism destination? What are Sri Lanka's greatest strengths, where are the most significant gaps, and what needs to change to create greater value for visitors and local communities?

International travellers see Sri Lanka as one of the world's most versatile adventure and experiential destinations. Within a relatively small area, a visitor can move from ancient cities and living culture to tea country, mountains, wildlife, beaches and local communities. We have an exceptional combination of nature, food, wellness, history and adventure. Our greatest strength, however, may be the warmth and openness of our people. Those human connections often turn a good holiday into a lasting memory.

The next phase of tourism development cannot be only about increasing arrivals. We need to create greater value from each visitor, encourage longer and more varied journeys, and ensure that income reaches more

communities and local businesses.

One opportunity I feel strongly about is women's participation in tourism. Sri Lanka has women with exceptional knowledge, skills and entrepreneurial ability, but many remain underrepresented in the formal tourism economy. This is not only an inclusion issue. It is a missed economic and product-development opportunity.

We need more women across the tourism ecosystem as tour leaders, entrepreneurs, suppliers, experience hosts and business leaders. At Intrepid, our local Women in Tourism work has supported women-owned businesses and aspiring women tour leaders. This can open new career paths while giving travellers access to stories, skills and parts of daily life that are often absent from conventional itineraries.

We also need to broaden the way Sri Lanka presents itself. Beaches, wildlife, Sigiriya, tea and scenic train journeys are important, but the country is much more than a familiar set of images. We should develop more locally owned food, cycling, walking, cultural, wellness and community experiences, and give travellers stronger reasons to explore beyond established tourism circuits.

Sustainability must also become practical rather than promotional. Our support for the ZeroPlastic Impact Centre in Sigiriya and our introduction of electric mobility into our transportation are examples of local action. They are not complete solutions, but they demonstrate the value of testing ideas, learning and scaling what works.

Product development, destination management and marketing must work together. We should not promote

a place first and manage the pressure later. We need to protect natural and cultural assets, build local capability, plan infrastructure responsibly and give communities a genuine role in shaping tourism.

Sri Lanka's greatest strength is its diversity. Our biggest opportunity is to ensure that diversity is reflected both in the experiences we offer and in the people who shape and benefit from them. If we move from simply counting arrivals to building deeper, higher-value and more inclusive experiences, Sri Lanka can become not only a successful tourism destination, but a genuinely sustainable one.

Q Looking ahead, how do you see traveller expectations changing over the next five to ten years? What emerging trends in adventure and experiential travel should Sri Lanka pay attention to, and what should the industry do now to remain competitive?

Over the next five to ten years, travellers will become more informed, more intentional and more demanding. One-size-fits-all tourism will become less relevant as people look for journeys shaped around their interests, values, pace and lifestyle.

Technology and AI will play a major role in how people research, compare and book travel. Planning will become faster and more personalised. For tourism businesses, the opportunity is to use technology to understand demand, improve service and make authentic local experiences easier to discover and book.

But technology will not replace the human side of travel. In fact, as planning becomes more digital, travellers may value genuine human connection even more. AI can recommend an itinerary, but it cannot replace the insight of a skilled local leader, a conversation with a community host or the feeling of experiencing a culture first-hand.

Sustainability will also shift from being a point of difference to a basic expectation. Travellers will pay closer attention to environmental impact, community benefit and how businesses respond to climate change. Sri Lanka should act now by improving digital capability, using data more effectively, investing in skills, supporting local entrepreneurs, developing experiences beyond traditional routes and setting clear standards for responsible growth.

Beautiful places alone will not keep us competitive. Our advantage will come from combining innovation with authentic human experiences and building a tourism industry that is resilient, inclusive and ready for the traveller of tomorrow.

Q As a young tourism leader recognised by PATA, you have already achieved significant milestones. What advice would you give students and young professionals entering tourism today, particularly those who want to build successful careers and contribute positively to destinations and communities?

My first advice is to stay curious and keep learning. Tourism sits at the intersection of people, culture, communities, business and the wider world. Some of your best lessons will come not from a classroom, but from listening, asking questions, working in the operation and being willing to step outside your comfort zone.

Second, do not see tourism simply as an industry that moves people from one place to another. It can create jobs, support small businesses, preserve culture, protect nature and build understanding between people. But that positive impact does not happen automatically. It depends on the choices we make.

Ask yourself not only, 'What can I achieve?' but also, 'What positive impact can I create?' A successful career and a positive contribution do not have to be separate.

Finally, do not wait for a senior title to make a difference. Bring ideas, challenge outdated ways of working respectfully, understand the commercial realities and take responsibility for turning ideas into action. In our Sri Lanka team, some of the most valuable progress, from sustainability initiatives to new community partnerships, has come from people who saw a possibility and were prepared to take the first practical step.

The future of tourism needs people who are commercially smart, globally minded and deeply connected to the communities they serve. That is the real opportunity for the next generation: to build a rewarding career while helping shape a better future for tourism.

“ The future of tourism needs people who are commercially smart, globally minded and deeply connected to the communities they serve. ”



Pilgrimage – Okanda – Kataragama

“Haro Hara! Haro Hara!” Before the sun rises over Sri Lanka’s eastern coast, The morning quiet is broken by the familiar chant of pilgrims preparing to continue their sacred journey. Barefoot and carrying only what they need, they gather their belongings, offer their prayers, and begin another day of walking through forests, rivers, and open wilderness. The Pada Yatra from Okanda to Kataragama is one of Sri Lanka’s most remarkable spiritual journeys, bringing together faith, nature, and culture. Some pilgrims begin their journey much earlier, travelling from sacred places in the north, including Selvachchanithi and Nagadipa, before making their way south through the eastern regions. Eventually, they arrive at Okanda Murugan Devalaya, where the wilderness journey begins. Okanda holds a special place in traditions associated with Lord Murugan. According to local legend, Lord Murugan arrived in the area in a golden boat and is believed to have become the Ran Oru Gala. At the temple, pilgrims pray, seek blessings and prepare themselves mentally and spiritually before leaving the familiar world behind.

From Okanda, the journey takes on a different character as pilgrims enter the wilderness. They travel through the forests and open landscapes of Kumana, passing places such as Bagurawa, Madamethota, Gajabawa, Pilinnawa and Poththana. Dense forests, grasslands,

wetlands, and rocky terrain gradually replace the sounds of towns and roads. Instead, birds, insects , and the surrounding wilderness become their companions. The heat and long distances make the journey physically demanding, but there are no shortcuts ; the only way forward is to continue walking. After crossing the Kumbukkan Oya, pilgrims enter Yala National Park and continue through its remote landscapes towards the Menik Ganga and Warahana. They then pass through Yala Block I, towards Katagamuwa and eventually Kataragama. As the pilgrims move closer to Kataragama, the landscape gradually changes, and the atmosphere becomes increasingly vibrant, particularly as the annual Kataragama festival, generally held during June and July, approaches. Kataragama becomes a meeting point for different religious traditions, especially Hindu, Buddhist and indigenous beliefs, with processions, prayers and traditional ceremonies filling the area with colour and sound.

Yet, no pilgrim walks the Pada Yatra alone. Throughout the journey, the pilgrims are met by countless acts of kindness. Communities, volunteers, and organizations come together to offer food, drinking water, and essential facilities, turning the long wilderness trail into a journey carried not only by faith but also by the generosity of others. Police officers, security personnel

and wildlife officials stand watch across the wilderness, helping safeguard both the pilgrims and the delicate landscapes they pass through. Along the way, the warmth of Dansal brings another kind of comfort: free meals and refreshments offered with open hands, reflecting the generosity, compassion, and timeless spirit of hospitality that accompany the pilgrimage.

The Pada Yatra is not only a religious journey but also a meeting point of people, traditions and cultures. Tamil and Sinhala devotees take part in the pilgrimage, while members of the Vedda community contribute their traditional knowledge and practices. In recent years, the journey has also attracted adventure hikers, photographers and visitors interested in experiencing the wilderness and cultural heritage of the region. Approximately 40,000–41,000 devotees participated in the 2026 Pada Yatra, highlighting its continuing importance. Yet this growing participation also brings challenges. More people can increase waste, disrurb wildlife, and put pressure on the fragile natural environment. Protecting the forests and wildlife while preserving the pilgrimage’s spiritual and cultural significance is therefore an important responsibility.

After days of walking through forests, crossing rivers, and enduring the heat, the sight of the sacred grounds of the Kataragama Maha Devalaya carries a special meaning. The journey’s tiredness may remain, but reaching the

destination makes every difficult moment worthwhile. The familiar sound of “Haro Hara!” once again fills the air as pilgrims complete their journey. Rituals such as Gini Paagima, or fire-walking, and Diya Kepeema, associated with the Menik Ganga, add to the rich traditions surrounding Kataragama. Yet the true meaning of the Pada Yatra lies beyond the final destination. It is a journey in which faith meets nature, culture meets community, and physical endurance meets spiritual devotion. The road eventually ends at Kataragama, but for those who undertake the pilgrimage, every step, every river crossed and every forest entered becomes part of a deeply personal experience. Some journeys are not measured by the kilometres we travel, but by what we carry in our hearts along the way.

Sanuda De Alwis
Samudi Balasooriya
Siyani Tennakoon



Bus No. 111



JAADI

A TASTE OF THE COAST

Jaadi is a traditional salted fish delicacy associated with the coastal communities of southern Sri Lanka, particularly Dodanduwa in the Galle District. It is also prepared in other coastal fishing communities, including areas around Ambalangoda and Balapitiya. Known for its distinctive salty-and-sour taste, Jaadi has long been part of the traditional food culture of Sri Lanka's southern coast.

INGREDIENTS

1 kg fresh balaya (skipjack tuna) or kelawalla (yellowfin tuna)
300–400 g coarse sea salt
100–150 g goraka (Malabar tamarind)

METHOD

To make Jaadi, select fresh fish and clean it well. Cut the fish into medium-sized pieces, wash once, and drain thoroughly. Drain the fish well before placing it in the pot. Then, put a layer of coarse salt at the bottom of the clean, dry clay pot. Coat each piece of fish well with salt and arrange the pieces in layers. Place pieces of goraka between the layers and continue until the pot is filled. Cover the pot with the lid and seal it well. Leave the pot undisturbed for several weeks until the fish is properly preserved and develops the taste and texture of Jaadi. During this period, a salty liquid known as “lunuja” forms in the pot. It can be used in small quantities to add flavour to some traditional dishes. When the Jaadi is ready, remove the fish from the pot and wash it well to remove excess salt and the remaining goraka. The fish is then cut into smaller pieces and cooked with onions, chilli, and spices before being served with rice and other traditional accompaniments.

Malsha Sandeepani
Kavindya Samaranayake

*From
the Ocean
to Our Table...*

PEOPLE
PLACES
FLAVOURS
HERITAGE

*"More than food,
Jaadi is a story of the sea,
its people, and way of life."*

Ein bisschen Deutschland

Bridging Language, Culture and Gastronomy through Experiential Learning

Experiential learning took centre stage at the Faculty of Management Studies (FMS), Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka (SUSL), where German language, culture, cuisine and hospitality came together in a vibrant campus celebration. Held on 17 March 2026 under the theme “Ein bisschen Deutschland” (A Little Bit of Germany), the German Food Festival was organised by third-year undergraduates pursuing the BSc (Hons) Tourism Management and BSc (Hons) Hospitality Management degree programmes as an integral component of their academic learning experience. Under the guidance of the German lecturer, the event demonstrated how foreign-language education can extend beyond the classroom to become a practical, creative and memorable learning experience.

From the Classroom to the Food Stall

With creativity, enthusiasm and teamwork, the students transformed the Faculty cafeteria into a small street corner of Germany. Ten food stalls offered a variety of German-inspired dishes and refreshments, including Kartoffelpuffer, Erdbeerkuchen, Berliner, Pfannkuchen, Limonadesaft, Nudeln, Pommes and Käsepommes.

The festival provided students with practical experience in planning, organisation, communication, teamwork, food presentation and customer service. Warm snacks were offered at affordable prices, while interactive



games provided opportunities for winners to enjoy complimentary meals. A specially decorated photo booth (Fotokabiene) also created a memorable space for visitors to capture the experience.

Language, Culture and Hospitality in Practice

The festival demonstrated how foreign-language learning can become more meaningful when applied in authentic contexts. German was not limited to grammar exercises and textbooks; instead, it became a tool for communication, cultural exchange and professional development.

The integration of language, food and culture enabled students to engage with the university community while developing confidence and practical competencies relevant to the international tourism and hospitality industry.



“**One language sets you in a corridor for life. Two languages open every door along the way**

”
-Frank Smith-



A Celebration of Culture and Hospitality

The event attracted academics, students and members of the university community, creating a lively atmosphere of cultural exchange. A judging panel comprising Iraj Ratnayake, Professor in Tourism; Dr Nadee Mahawatta, Senior Lecturer; and Mr Hiran Dinusha, Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Management Studies, evaluated the stalls based on taste, cleanliness, decoration and presentation.

The teams presenting *Erdbeerkuchen* and *Berliner* were declared the winners, while the creativity and high standards demonstrated across all participating stalls were widely commended.

Ultimately, “Ein bisschen Deutschland” was much more than a German food festival. It was an example of experiential learning in action—connecting language, culture, gastronomy and hospitality while enabling students to develop skills through practical participation.

On 17 March 2026, during the lunchtime period, the Faculty of Management Studies became a vibrant meeting point of German language, cuisine and intercultural learning, offering the university community a true taste of Germany.



Yoganjana Menike, PhD
Senior Lecturer
Department of Tourism Management
Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka

Photo Credits: German Language Students' Community



Bangkok Beyond the Postcard: Reflections from a Conscious Journey

My recent visit to Bangkok, Thailand, was not simply a holiday; it was an opportunity to combine professional engagement with personal exploration. I travelled to Bangkok to participate in an international conference, where I had the privilege of sharing my academic work and engaging with researchers and academics from different parts of the world. Alongside the intellectual experience of the conference, I also took the opportunity to explore some of Bangkok and its surrounding tourist attractions. What began as a conference visit gradually became a memorable journey filled with fascinating experiences, unexpected observations, and moments of reflection.

Travel is often described as an escape from everyday life. We travel to see new places, taste unfamiliar food, experience different cultures, and return home with photographs and memories. Yet, a truly meaningful journey should offer something more than beautiful photographs. It should make us pause, observe, question, and reflect. My recent journey to Bangkok, Thailand, became such an experience.

Under the theme “Conscious Journeys,” I began to look at my Bangkok tour not merely as a tourist visiting popular attractions, but as a traveler trying to understand what lies behind the tourism experience. From floating markets and elephants to tigers and crocodiles, the journey was filled with excitement, curiosity, and unforgettable moments. At the same time, it raised important questions about commercialization, animal tourism, culture, and the responsibilities of travelers.

My journey began from the First Hotel Bangkok, where the driver and tour guide arrived punctually. Their professionalism and timely service created a positive beginning to the day. Soon, we two Egyptian girls and a Sri Lankan professor from Australia were travelling through Bangkok towards our first major attraction—a place promoted as a Tiger Zoo.

The experience was fascinating, but it also made me uncomfortable. I fed baby tigers that were remarkably calm, almost like sleeping domestic cats. Their softness and gentleness were captivating. Visitors were also allowed to take photographs with the large tigers; however, we had to pay a substantial amount of money for the opportunity. Two tigers were restrained with strong iron chains, allowing tourists to stand close to them and even hold their tails for photographs. I remember gently squeezing the tails while posing for a

photograph. One tiger snorted and attempted to turn around, but the restraint prevented it from doing so. I could feel the smoothness of its coat, almost like velvet.

At that moment, however, another thought entered my mind: Was this really a zoo, or was it a tourism business built around our desire to experience something extraordinary?

The animals were undoubtedly fascinating, but the experience also demonstrated how tourism can transform wildlife into commercial attractions. As tourists, we often focus on the excitement of the moment without thinking about what happens behind the scenes. Conscious travel requires us to ask whether the experiences we purchase contribute to animal welfare and responsible tourism.

The journey continued with an equally dramatic crocodile show. Among the various performances, one particular act remains unforgettable—a man placing his head inside the open mouth of a crocodile. It was genuinely spine-chilling. The audience watched in silence and anticipation as the performer demonstrated an extraordinary level of courage and control.

Although the performance was thrilling, it again made me think about the relationship between entertainment and animal exploitation. Tourism has the power to create livelihoods and memorable experiences, but it also carries a responsibility to ensure that entertainment does not come at the expense of animal welfare.

Another memorable experience was the elephant show. Watching elephants participate in activities such as playing football was entertaining and certainly attracted the attention of visitors. Yet, as I watched them perform, I found myself thinking about the long journey behind such performances. Elephants have become important symbols of Thai tourism, but their presence in tourism also raises questions about ethical treatment, training, living conditions, and whether animals should be performing primarily for human entertainment.

The journey then took us to a traditional teak-wood furniture workshop. This was, in many ways, a different kind of tourism experience. Beautifully crafted furniture and exquisite traditional carvings demonstrated the skill, patience, and creativity of local artisans. Unlike the

staged animal performances, this experience offered an opportunity to appreciate human creativity and cultural heritage. Standing among the beautifully carved teak furniture, I was reminded that tourism does not have to be about spectacles. It can also be about discovering the knowledge, skills, traditions, and stories of local communities. Supporting authentic local craftsmanship can help preserve cultural heritage while providing economic opportunities for communities.

The floating market offered yet another dimension of Bangkok. Floating markets are among Thailand’s iconic tourism experiences, combining commerce, culture, food, colour, and movement. Boats filled with goods and food created a lively atmosphere. Yet, even here, I noticed the powerful commercial nature of tourism. Every experience seemed to provide another opportunity to purchase something, taste something, photograph something, or pay for something.

My evening visit to Pattaya added another unforgettable chapter to the journey. The lights, energy, entertainment, and crowds created an entirely different atmosphere. It demonstrated how destinations can continuously transform themselves to satisfy the expectations of visitors.

By the end of the trip, one thought stayed with me: Bangkok’s tourism industry is remarkably successful at encouraging visitors to spend. From attractions and performances to food, souvenirs, transportation, photographs, and entertainment, tourism appears to have been carefully designed around consumption.

But perhaps this is where the idea of a “Conscious Journey” becomes important.

Conscious travel does not mean refusing to spend money or avoiding tourist attractions. Rather, it means becoming more aware of where our money goes, what our choices support, and what impact our experiences have on people, animals, culture, and the environment. A traveler can enjoy a destination while still asking difficult questions.

My Bangkok journey, therefore, became more than a holiday. It became an opportunity to observe tourism from both sides—the excitement experienced by tourists and the commercial machinery operating behind that excitement.

When we travel consciously, we do not simply collect photographs; we collect perspectives. We do not merely visit destinations; we learn from them. And perhaps the greatest souvenir from a journey is not something we purchase, but something we bring back within



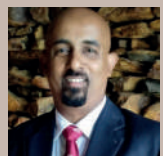
"Hear the wind sing a sad, old song
It knows I'm leaving you today
Please don't cry or my heart will break
When I go on my way..."

- Demis Roussos

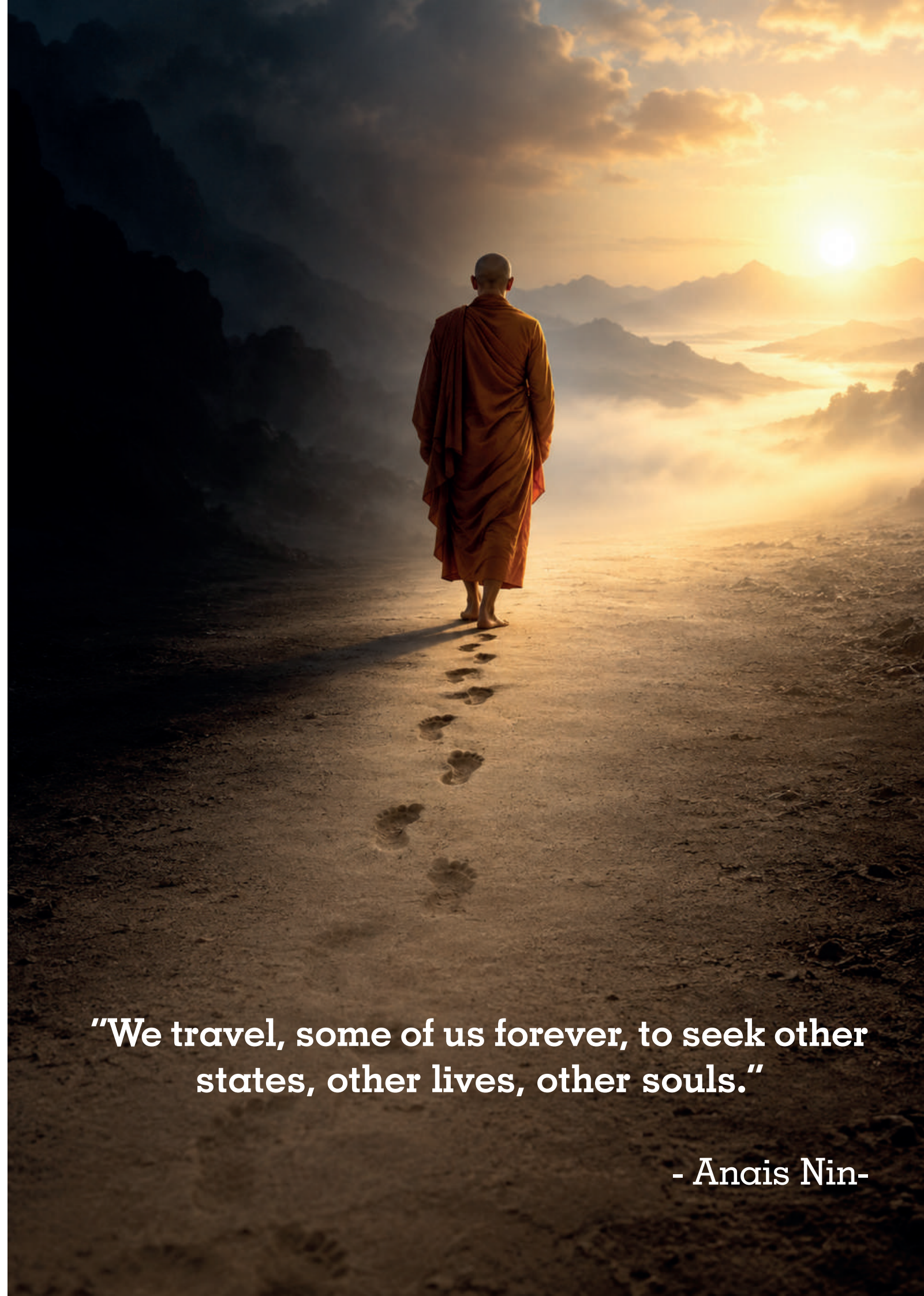
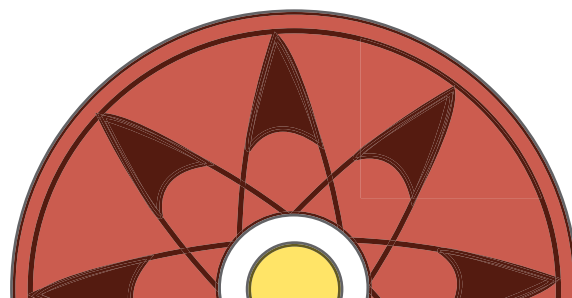
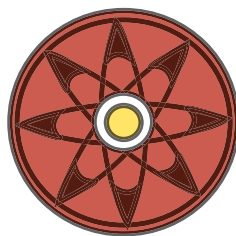


ourselves—a deeper understanding of the world and our responsibility towards it.

Bangkok gave me many unforgettable memories. More importantly, it reminded me that every journey should leave us not only entertained but also more thoughtful, responsible, and conscious travelers.



Lal Gunasekara, PhD
Senior Lecturer
Department of Tourism Management
Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka



"We travel, some of us forever, to seek other states, other lives, other souls."

- Anais Nin-

Q&A

Q Mr. Niluka, many people regard you as one of the most influential tourism entrepreneurs in the Udawalawe region. How would you describe your entrepreneurial journey, and what has driven your success?

As I became more involved in the tourism business, I realised that simply offering a safari was not enough. My goal was to create a value-added experience that would give visitors something more meaningful. One of my first decisions was to invest in new safari jeeps. It was a major financial risk because we lacked a strong financial background, and purchasing new vehicles at the time required a significant investment. Nevertheless, I believed that taking calculated risks was essential for long-term growth. After improving our fleet, I focused on developing innovative safari packages and introducing new experiences to set our services apart from others. I believe that my willingness to innovate, take risks, and continuously improve the visitor experience has been the main driving force behind my entrepreneurial success.

Q We understand that your business journey began with safari jeep operations linked to Udawalawe National Park. Could you take us back to the beginning and share how your entrepreneurial journey unfolded from those early days?

My entrepreneurial journey began with my father's safari jeep business, which was established in 1992 with just two safari jeeps operating around Udawalawe National Park. From a young age, I had a strong passion for joining the family business, developing it further, and taking the safari experience to a new level. After completing my Advanced Level examination in the Commerce stream at Embilipitiya National School, I joined the family business in 2004. I worked as a safari jeep driver for two years, and this experience gave me a valuable understanding of the tourism industry and visitors' needs. It also encouraged me to further my knowledge of tourism and management. At that



Niluka Ariyajeewa
Managing director
Niluka Safari Services (pvt) Ltd

time, Sri Lanka was affected by the civil war, and the country received only around 300,000 international tourists each year, with only a small percentage visiting Udawalawe. From the beginning, I had a clear vision to promote Udawalawe as a unique tourism destination, not just a place for safari tours. As I observed the needs of visitors, I realised that there were only a few hotels in the area, and tourists had limited options for enjoying a quality meal. To address this gap and enhance the overall visitor experience, I established a restaurant.

My next step came from noticing that many visitors wanted to spend more time in nature rather than simply go on a safari. This inspired me to invest in Athgira River Camping. I started with only four tents and introduced glamping, which was still a relatively new concept in Sri Lanka. Since there were very few local examples, I learned about the concept through online and international tourism trends. Investing in such a new idea involved considerable risk because I was unsure whether tourists would accept it. Fortunately, the concept was successful, and today Athgira River Camping operates around 50 tents and has become one of the leading glamping brands in Udawalawe. I also wanted to encourage visitors to stay in Udawalawe for two or three days instead of leaving after a safari and a visit to the Elephant Transit Home. Therefore, I developed experiences such as Countryside Farming by Athgira, giving

visitors opportunities to experience local agriculture, fishing, village life, and the surrounding community.

As the business developed, I realised that travellers have different interests and budgets. This encouraged me to create a wider portfolio covering accommodation, agriculture, and community-based tourism experiences. Community involvement became an important part of this development, as I wanted the benefits of tourism to reach local people, including safari drivers, dairy farmers, cultivators, and other community members. Today, the business has grown from a small safari operation into a diversified tourism enterprise, with the broader aim of promoting Udawalawe as a destination while creating meaningful experiences for visitors and opportunities for the local community.

Q Focusing on your tourism businesses, Niluka Safari and Athgira Hotels have established a strong reputation in the region. What makes these brands unique compared to other tourism operators in Udawalawe?

Building a strong brand in the tourism industry is not easy; it requires dedication, consistency, and strong relationships with industry professionals. For me, the success of Niluka Safari and Athgira Hotels has come not only from the services we provide our guests but also from the relationships we maintain with the wider tourism community. I place great importance on maintaining good communication and strong public relations with safari drivers, guides, suppliers, and other tourism stakeholders in the region.

I believe that tourism is an industry where no business can succeed completely on its own. Every stakeholder plays an important role in creating the overall visitor experience. Therefore, I have always focused on working collaboratively with the people around us and building relationships based on trust and mutual support. This approach has helped our businesses develop a positive reputation and strengthen our position within the local tourism industry.

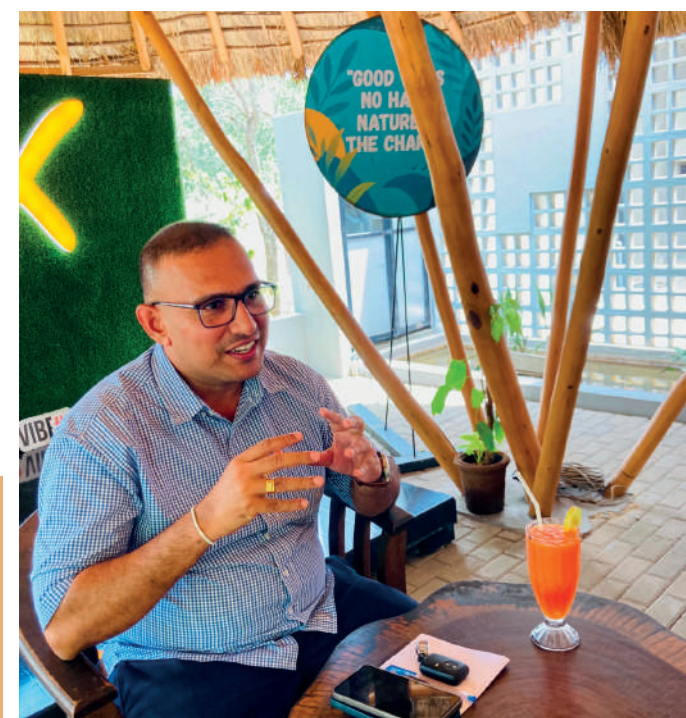
I often describe the tourism industry as a pyramid, where reaching the top requires moving forward with the entire industry rather than going it alone. The stronger our relationships and collaboration with other stakeholders, the greater the opportunities for

“Building a strong brand in the tourism industry is not easy; it requires dedication, consistency, and strong relationships with industry professionals.”

our brands to grow. For me, this ability to work with the tourism community, maintain strong relationships, and grow together with the destination is one of the key factors that makes Niluka Safari and Athgira Hotels unique.

Q As the leading entrepreneur in the Udawalawe, some may view this level of expansion as highly aggressive, or even as market dominance. How would you respond to such perceptions, and how do you balance business growth with fair competition and destination development?

When we consider competition, I believe Niluka Safari has established itself as a strong brand by continually improving the safari experience rather than simply focusing on expanding its market presence. From the beginning, I introduced several improvements that went beyond the ordinary safari experience. For example, I provided proper training for safari drivers, including professional standards such as wearing uniforms and appropriate footwear, and improved their knowledge of wildlife, the environment, and local history. We have also recently conducted several programmes in collaboration with Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka to enhance their skills, develop language abilities, and improve their understanding of industry rules and regulations. In addition, we have naturalists on board and have established the facilities needed to support a high-quality, sustainable safari experience. These efforts have helped us differentiate our brand while contributing to the overall improvement of the safari industry in Udawalawe.





Looking at my business today, say, for example, Niluka Safari, we have over 50 jeeps. Some might view this as market dominance, but that is not the case. I also hire external suppliers to ensure those benefits flow to other operators, because we cannot do this alone. Some days, we handle up to 100 safari jeeps due to cruise ship operations visiting Udawalawe. On those occasions, we work collaboratively and share the benefits with everyone else.

Q From your perspective as an entrepreneur who has invested extensively in the destination, how do you evaluate Udawalawe's competitiveness compared with other nature-based tourism destinations in Sri Lanka? What are the destination's greatest strengths, what challenges remain, and what developments would you like to see in the future?

Yes, I believe Udawalawe has several competitive advantages over other national parks in Sri Lanka, particularly Yala. One of its greatest strengths is the opportunity to see elephants year-round. In addition, the Udawalawe Reservoir and the area's rich biodiversity offer visitors opportunities to see a variety of wildlife, including leopards during certain seasons. These natural assets give Udawalawe a distinctive value as a nature-based tourism destination. However, protecting these resources is essential. We have seen how excessive tourism pressure can negatively affect destinations such as Yala, and we strongly believe that if Udawalawe is

"As tourism entrepreneurs, we have a significant responsibility not only to operate successful businesses but also to protect the destination on which our businesses depend."

damaged in the same way, little will remain for future visitors to experience.

As tourism entrepreneurs, we have a significant responsibility not only to operate successful businesses but also to protect the destination on which our businesses depend. One of the ways we contribute to this is through environmental awareness programmes. We have organised awareness programmes for schoolchildren in villages surrounding Udawalawe to encourage greater understanding of environmental conservation and the importance of protecting the area's natural resources.

At the same time, Udawalawe still faces several challenges. Although competition among accommodation providers exists, I believe the destination still needs more hotels offering high-quality facilities and services. Another major issue is that most visitors come primarily for the Elephant Transit Home or a safari and then leave. We need to develop a wider range of tourism activities that encourage visitors to stay longer. Udawalawe has considerable potential for experiences such as night walks, village visits, community-based tourism, fishing, and boat safaris on the reservoir. Unfortunately, many of these opportunities have not been fully developed yet. Greater collaboration with government institutions is also essential, as certain rules and regulations can create barriers to developing new tourism activities. Balancing necessary regulation with practical tourism development would help unlock the destination's potential.

In my opinion, I believe Udawalawe needs better accommodation, improved infrastructure, and stronger visitor facilities if it is to attract more visitors and compete with other leading destinations. Currently, many tourist itineraries follow the route from Sigiriya to the southern coast, with Udawalawe often treated as a transit point rather than a major destination. We need to change this by developing more experiences and facilities that encourage tourists to stay for several days. If we protect our natural resources while developing responsible, community-based tourism and improving the overall visitor experience, Udawalawe can become a major nature-based tourism destination in Sri Lanka.

Q Finally, what message or advice would you like to share with the next generation of tourism leaders as they prepare to shape the future of the country's tourism sector?

Tourism in a country like Sri Lanka is certainly a challenging business. However, for anyone considering entering the tourism industry, I would say it offers great growth potential and is genuinely enjoyable and rewarding. If you are planning to start a new business,

"If you can face challenges confidently, handle difficult situations, and keep moving forward smoothly, tourism can be a highly rewarding and enjoyable field to be part of."

tourism offers a wide range of opportunities. As students learning about the tourism industry, you already know there are many opportunities to grow, whether your goal is to become an entrepreneur or develop yourself as a skilled professional. At the same time, anyone who wants to enter Sri Lanka's tourism industry must be prepared to face challenges. Tourism is an industry that can be affected by unexpected situations at any time. We have experienced this through events such as the Easter Sunday attacks and the economic crisis. Even today, global economic challenges and war continue to directly impact the tourism industry.

Therefore, anyone entering the tourism sector should be willing to embrace challenges. In tourism, challenges are unavoidable, but learning to accept them, adapt to changing circumstances, and handle difficulties with a positive attitude is essential. If you can face challenges confidently, handle difficult situations, and keep moving forward smoothly, tourism can be a highly rewarding and enjoyable field to be part of.



This interview was conducted with Mr. Niluka Ariyajeewa at the Vibe X Pub and Restuarant, in Udawalawe on the 02nd August 2026

Land of the Thunder Dragon

Bhutan, officially known as the Kingdom of Bhutan, is a landlocked country located in the eastern Himalayas between India and China. Renowned for its spectacular mountain landscapes, rich Buddhist heritage, well-preserved traditions, and commitment to environmental conservation, Bhutan has developed a distinctive tourism identity. The country is particularly recognized for its unique approach to development, which emphasizes Gross National Happiness alongside economic progress. With its ancient monasteries, historic fortresses, vibrant festivals, diverse ecosystems, and traditional communities, Bhutan offers visitors a combination of cultural, spiritual, and nature-based tourism experiences. These distinctive characteristics have made Bhutan an increasingly significant destination for travellers seeking authentic and sustainable tourism experiences.

At the heart of this unique destination lies a philosophy that sets it apart from almost anywhere else in the world: Gross National Happiness (GNH). Introduced in the 1970s, GNH reflects the belief that true development should not be measured by economic growth alone, but by the overall well-being and happiness of society. It is built around four pillars: sustainable and equitable socio-economic development, environmental conservation, preservation and promotion of culture, and good governance. This philosophy has strongly shaped Bhutan's tourism industry, leading to its distinctive "High Value, Low Volume" approach. Rather than pursuing mass tourism and large visitor numbers, Bhutan focuses on attracting responsible visitors who are willing to experience its culture, nature, and traditions while making a meaningful economic contribution. The Sustainable Development Fee (SDF) further supports this vision by directing tourism revenue towards national priorities such as environmental conservation, healthcare, education, infrastructure, and community development. In this way, Bhutan does not simply ask, "How many tourists can we attract?" but rather, "How can tourism improve the well-being of our people while protecting our country for future generations?"

Economically, tourism has become an important contributor to Bhutan's development, creating income, employment, and opportunities for communities across the country. The tourism sector supports a wide network of hotels, restaurants, transport providers, tour operators, guides, handicraft producers, farmers, and small local businesses. A key economic mechanism is the Sustainable Development Fee (SDF), which requires international visitors to contribute directly to Bhutan's national development. Following the post-pandemic

reopening, the SDF was reduced from US\$200 to US\$100 per adult per night in September 2023, making the destination more accessible while continuing to generate revenue for public priorities. In 2024, Bhutan welcomed more than 150,000 international tourists, generating substantial tourism-related earnings and supporting livelihoods throughout the country. The revenue from the SDF is channelled into areas such as healthcare, education, environmental conservation, infrastructure, and community development, allowing tourism spending to create benefits beyond the tourism industry itself. This creates a distinctive economic cycle: visitors contribute to the national economy, tourism businesses earn income, local communities gain livelihood opportunities, and a portion of tourism revenue is reinvested in the country's long-term development. Thus, tourism becomes not merely a source of foreign exchange, but a financial instrument for building a stronger and more resilient Bhutanese economy.

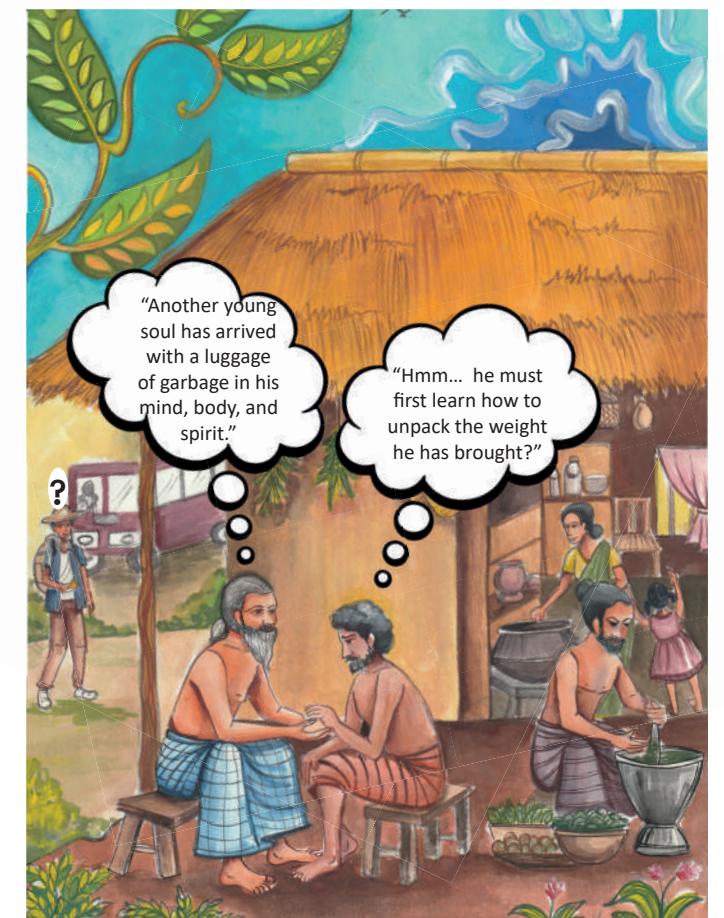
Beyond its economic value, tourism in Bhutan is deeply connected with the protection of its social identity and natural heritage. The country's ancient Buddhist traditions, traditional architecture, colourful festivals, handicrafts, music, dance, and distinctive national dress provide visitors with an authentic cultural experience while encouraging local communities to preserve their heritage. Places such as Paro Taktsang (Tiger's Nest Monastery), the historic Punakha Dzong, and the traditional streets of Thimphu allow travellers to experience Bhutan's living culture rather than observe it. At the same time, Bhutan's forests, rivers, mountains, and wildlife create opportunities for sustainable nature-based recreation. Visitors can enjoy trekking through Himalayan landscapes, birdwatching, mountain biking, rafting, camping, wildlife observation, and scenic hiking. At the same time, destinations such as the Phobjikha Valley, Jigme Dorji National Park, and the Punakha Valley showcase the country's extraordinary natural beauty. Community-based tourism and locally operated accommodations also allow visitors to interact with local people, taste traditional food, learn traditional crafts, and experience rural lifestyles. In this way, tourism becomes a bridge between visitors and communities, generating appreciation for Bhutanese culture while giving local people an incentive to protect both their traditions and the natural landscapes on which their livelihoods and tourism experiences depend.

Ultimately, Bhutan shows the world that tourism need not come at the cost of nature, culture, or community well-being. Its approach brings together environmental protection, economic prosperity, and social and cultural preservation to create a more balanced form of tourism development. From the forests and mountains that protect its biodiversity to the monasteries, festivals, and local communities that preserve its identity, every element contributes to a destination built around

sustainability. Bhutan's experience reminds us that the true success of tourism should not be measured simply by the number of visitors who arrive, but by the positive legacy they leave behind. By protecting what makes the country unique while creating meaningful benefits for its people, Bhutan demonstrates that tourism can be both a journey for the traveller and a pathway towards a sustainable future. The Land of the Thunder Dragon, therefore, stands as a remarkable example that when tourism respects people, planet, and prosperity, a destination can grow without losing its soul.

Jayani Senanayake
Gayandi Wijewansa
Manoshi Elapatha

The Healing Hearth



Travel Like a Traveler: Discovering the Soul of Phuket and Phi Phi Island

Earlier this year, I had the opportunity to explore one of Thailand’s most beautiful destinations - Phuket and the world-famous Phi Phi Island. Like many travellers, I was initially attracted by the promise of turquoise waters, tropical beaches, and exciting nightlife. However, the journey eventually became much more than a holiday. It taught me that the best memories are often created not by luxury, but by experiencing a destination as the local people do. That is why I believe in one simple philosophy: **travel like a traveler**.

Interestingly, my adventure began before I even reached Phuket. I had missed my luxury bus from Bangkok and suddenly found myself searching for another way to continue the journey. At the railway station, every first-class, second-class, sleeper, and even seated third-class ticket had already been sold out. The only option left was a third-class standing ticket to Surat Thani.

Although the journey was long and tiring, it became one of the most memorable experiences of my visit to Thailand. The crowded train, exhausted workers returning home, families travelling together, and vendors walking through the carriages selling local food reminded me so much of Sri Lanka’s Colombo-Badulla Night Mail train. Just as passengers in Sri Lanka eagerly wait for the famous “Isso Wade” vendors, Thai vendors constantly moved from carriage

to carriage with freshly prepared local snacks and traditional dishes. It was during this journey that I realised I was no longer travelling as a tourist; I was travelling alongside ordinary Thai people.

Upon arriving in Phuket, the first thing I did was rent a motorbike. It was undoubtedly one of the best decisions of the trip. Riding freely around the island allowed me to discover Phuket at my own pace, stopping whenever a beautiful beach, local market, or scenic viewpoint caught my attention. My days were spent exploring Patong Beach, the colourful streets of Phuket Old Town, Karon Beach, Kata Beach, and many hidden corners that are often missed by organised tours.

Patong Beach introduced me to Phuket’s vibrant atmosphere. During the day, the beach was alive with visitors enjoying the warm waters of the Andaman Sea, while after sunset Bangla Road transformed into a lively street filled with music, restaurants, performers, and people from every corner of the world. In contrast, Phuket Old Town revealed the island’s rich history through its beautifully preserved Sino-Portuguese buildings, charming cafés, colourful streets, and bustling local markets. Walking through these streets with authentic Thai street food in hand became one of the simplest yet most enjoyable experiences of the journey.



One aspect of Phuket that immediately caught my attention was its modern cannabis culture. Stylish cannabis cafés and boutique stores could be found throughout the island, something that was completely new to me. Out of curiosity, I decided to experience what Thailand’s newly legalised cannabis culture was all about. The contrast between this modern, relaxed side of Phuket and its deeply rooted spiritual traditions became even more striking later that day, when I visited several magnificent Buddhist temples, including the iconic Big Buddha. The golden temple decorations, the scent of incense drifting through the air, and the peaceful surroundings created a remarkable contrast to Phuket’s energetic nightlife. Standing there in complete silence while overlooking the island was an unforgettable experience that allowed me to appreciate another side of Thailand’s rich culture and spirituality.

From Phuket, I travelled to Phi Phi Island by public ferry instead of joining a luxury speedboat tour. Watching the towering limestone cliffs slowly appear above the turquoise waters of the Andaman Sea was a breathtaking sight. Over the following days, I explored Monkey Bay, the peaceful Loh Lana Bay, and the secluded Nui Beach. Kayaking through calm waters allowed me to discover hidden corners of the island, while snorkelling introduced me to a vibrant underwater



world filled with colourful fish and coral reefs. As evening arrived, the beaches came alive with music, international travellers, beachside restaurants, and spectacular fire shows that created an unforgettable island atmosphere.

Returning to Phuket, adventure continued with thrilling activities including ATV riding through rugged landscapes, zip-lining above tropical forests, and parasailing over the beautiful coastline. Another unique cultural experience was watching Muay Thai matches. Unlike many sporting events, there was no expensive entrance ticket; purchasing a single drink was enough to enjoy an evening of exciting fights. During the breaks, members of the audience were even invited into the ring to test their skills. Although I happily remained a spectator, the atmosphere reflected the welcoming and friendly nature of Thai people.

While Thailand is famous for its colourful street food and affordable dining, travelling beyond the tourist attractions revealed another side of the country. I enjoyed local favourites such as mango sticky rice, fresh seafood, and even crocodile meat, all at remarkably reasonable prices. Yet, alongside these culinary experiences, I often noticed local workers sitting quietly by the roadside eating plain white rice with a few boiled vegetables. It was a simple scene, but one that stayed

with me long after I returned home. Although many things in Thailand are inexpensive, it reminded me that affordable prices do not necessarily mean life is easy. Behind the country's thriving tourism industry are ordinary people working hard every day to earn a living.

As I reflect on my journey through Phuket and Phi Phi Island, I realize that the beaches, adventures, and beautiful scenery are only part of what makes Thailand special. The real beauty lies in its people, its culture, its local markets, and the unexpected moments that no itinerary can plan. Missing a bus, standing on a crowded train, travelling by public ferry, wandering through markets, and sharing everyday experiences with local people became the memories I treasure the most.

Travelling is not simply about reaching famous destinations; it is about understanding the places we visit and the people who call them home. Phuket and Phi Phi Island gave me unforgettable adventures, but more importantly, they reminded me that the richest journeys begin when we choose to **travel like a traveler**.

Kusal Kaluarachchi
Page Designer, TIP Vol. 8



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WoW, they were here

Searching for my ancestral footprints

I see a photo framed in the sitting room where an unknown landscape is pictured. In my father's collection of souvenirs, he showed me more photographs, pictures, and paintings of where my grandfather lived. Similar architecture to ours, but exotic beauty and a serene atmosphere.

'Don't you like to visit this resplendent island?' That is how the suggestion came. We planned to visit this tiny island in the Indian Ocean during our next vacation. So, every day when we had free time, we began to discuss our journey.

'The British went to Sri Lanka, then Ceylon, in 1796. We had to fight with the Dutch to capture the maritime provinces they had occupied. With the help of the local chieftains, we were able to get the island under our control in 1815. Till we left in 1948, granting them the Dominion state, it was under our crown.' My father explained.

'What did they do there?'

'Oh, My Lord!. There were so many things to do. We introduced them to commercial crops, education, and railways. Not only that, but the National Museum and Archives, too. Most of our people worked in the Colonial Civil Service in Ceylon as doctors, engineers, planters, lawyers, accountants, military personnel, and even Governors.'

'WoW, what a history!. I am impatiently waiting. Can you tell me more?'

'Their lives were not easy. The climate is different. So they preferred to live in Nuwara Eliya, which they later termed "Little England," and Kandy. They built houses like here, built Churches, and introduced sports such as Cricket, rugby, football, golf, hockey, and tennis. During leisure time, they engaged in trout fishing, horse racing, bird watching, drawing, painting, and writing poetry to counter nostalgia. In the Planters' Clubs, they enjoyed our music and dance.'

Now I am counting the days. Each day after school, I used to rush to read my father's collection. The notes, letters, and diaries my grandfather has kept have gifted me with a wealth of knowledge. I used to narrate everything I learned, but my friends, teachers, and neighbors were not interested in it. I complained to my father that nobody is interested in our journey, which is going to take place during the next school vacation.

'True, do not worry. Most people do not see the value of going through social memory. Only a limited number of people are interested in tourism studies. For others, it is just a journey. Dallen J. Timothy, in his book, says this is "roots tourism". Many people wish to see or visit their ancestral places to reconnect with their past. For those people who do not have such experiences, this is unimportant.'

'Is it the only book you've read?'

'No. Kathleen Adams highlights such travels as in search of identity and belonging. Russell Staiff says that these visits are based on social memory and generational connections. It is not only in Asia; even our people visit Africa where our ancestors lived and set their mark in various ways.'

'OK. Suppose when we go, what do I have to watch there?'

'There are so many places, my son.' In Colombo itself, you see the identity of the Portuguese, the Dutch and the British. The Galle Face Hotel is a testimony to our heritage. The Old Parliamentary Building a symbol of our colonial rule. Cargills and Millers were only two examples of British architecture, business and trade. The Colombo Fort Clock Tower was another colonial landmark.'

'Is that all?'

'No. If you go beyond Colombo, to the southern region, in Galle, Galle Lighthouse, Galle Clock Tower, All Saints' Church, Queen's House and Galle Library blend the iconic British, Dutch and local cultures. If you travel further, to

Matara, Matara Fort, The Star Fort and several Colonial Bungalows stand for the Dutch and British legacy in colonial Ceylon.

'If you travel inland to the central hills, Kandy is a famous place for the British administrators. British Garrison Cemetery, The Queen's Hotel, Royal Bar & Hotel, The Old Post Office, The Empire Hotel and the Royal Botanical Gardens are fascinating sites to watch how the British identity was instilled. In Nuwara Eliya, every Britisher must visit The Grand Hotel, The Hill Club, Post Office, Golf Club, Holy Trinity Church, Victoria Park, Queen's Cottage, Racecourse, and Pedro Estate and Tea Factories.'

'Last night, after my studies, I went on the internet. Most of the roads in Colombo have our names. There were Queen's Street, Albert Crescent, Maitland Crescent, Flower Road, Green Path, Duplication Road, Ward Place and Horton Place. Even the waterfalls in the hill country resemble the ones we are seeing in here. They named those as Baker's Falls, Devon Falls, St. Claire Falls, Aberdeen Falls and Dunsinane Falls.'

'Yeah, will go. You will have your lifetime's experience.'

I am anxiously waiting to go to this island. The pearl of the Indian Ocean, where my grandfather's legacy and many of our grandfathers' footprints are etched into this gorgeous culture. Roots tell us our past, from where we came, and we are strong on our feet, and to where we can move. We belong somewhere because we have our roots firmly in that place. It is not only a heritage, nostalgia, or ancestry. It is the glue that holds us together.

After my college studies, I prefer to engage in Tourism Studies. In my graduate studies, I plan to visit Sri Lanka and conduct detailed research on the colonial identity of the British Era in Ceylon. I am quite sure that I can remarkably contribute to 'Roots Tourism', setting an example for many others in my age and succeeding generations to come. In Roots Tourism, I can investigate the host-home relationship in a novel way. On the internet, I see Sabaragamuwa University offers such opportunities to capitalise. WoW!

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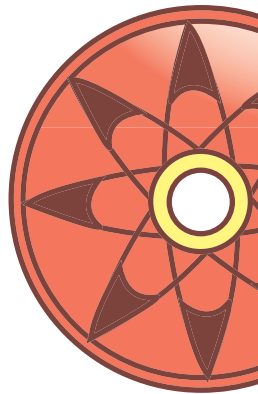
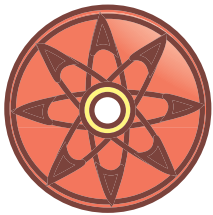
Elephant Transit Home – Udawalawe

“Elephants Belong in the Wild”

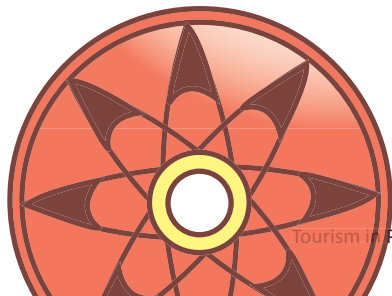
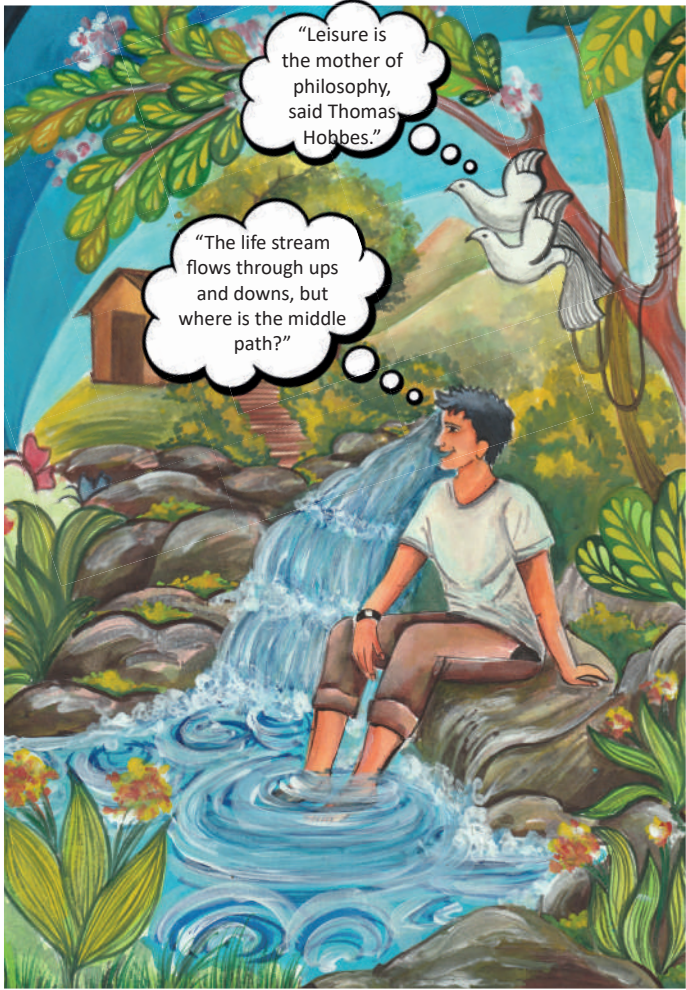
The Udawalawe Elephant Transit Home, locally known as ‘Ath Athuru Sevana’, is an important wildlife rehabilitation centre in Sri Lanka. Established to care for orphaned, injured, and abandoned elephant calves, the centre provides baby elephants with a safe environment in which they can grow and develop naturally. Unlike traditional elephant orphanages, its primary goal is not to keep elephants permanently but to prepare them to return to the Udawalawe National Park.

The Elephant Transit Home began by caring for orphaned calves such as ‘Komali’ and gradually evolved into a specialised facility with treatment areas, elephant wards, observation facilities, and an information centre called Elephant Knowledge Walk. At the centre, elephant calves receive milk, medical treatment, and other necessary care, while also having access to natural surroundings and grazing areas. They are encouraged to interact with other young elephants, as learning natural social behaviours is essential to their future survival. Visitors can also learn about the centre’s work through its public viewing sessions, held daily at 10.30 a.m., 2.30 p.m., and 6.00 p.m. From designated viewing areas, visitors can observe the calves while maintaining minimal direct contact. This helps the elephants retain their natural behaviour and reduces their dependence on humans. Once they are strong and independent enough to live on their own, they are released into Udawalawe National Park. According to official figures, by 2026, more than 100 elephants had been released into the wild through this programme. (Udawalawa.com, 2026)

Himashi Navodya



The Stream



Were the Ancient Olympics the beginning of sport tourism?

Greek mythology holds that Zeus is the God of the Gods, and in the early days, ancient Greece was known as a sporting nation. Therefore, in tribute to the god Zeus, the Greek people undertook the Olympic Games as a religious ceremony. This quadrennial sports event took place in Olympia, Greece, from 776 B.C. to about 393 B.C., until the prohibition of religious festivals by Theodosius I.

The name Olympic arose from Mount Olympus, which was considered the realm of Greek gods, and the physical structure of the venue consisted of a sacred core, training and administration complexes, competition venues, accommodation facilities, and so on. Therefore, this sacred place did not just host the sporting events but also addressed the body, will, and mind of the participants. The ancient Olympic Games spread out from one day to five days, and competition took place for four days; day five was reserved for the crowning ceremony for champions, and that crown was made from olive leaves. The ancient Games featured boxing, running, long jump, chariot racing, javelin, discus, pankration, and wrestling. These games and the athletes who participated in this event demonstrated physical strength, speed and endurance, power and explosive ability, agility and coordination, skill in combat and survival, technical skill and precision, courage and competitiveness, and more.

Because of these demonstrations and the competitive atmosphere, thousands of spectators traveled from across Greece to watch the games in Olympia, where they stayed for about five days. Moreover, the ancient Olympic Games venue accommodated about 40,000 to 50,000 spectators all around the states of Greece, such as Athens, Sparta, Corinth, Thebes, and so on. The interesting thing about these spectators was that most of them were men, and they were wealthy travelers, including politicians, merchants, and philosophers.

On the other hand, in the present world, according to the United Nations World Tourism Organization, the word of “tourism” is defined as a social, cultural, and economic activity that involves individuals travelling outside of their normal surroundings for either personal or professional purposes. Regardless of the aim, it focuses on the visitor’s activities and related expenses.

Moreover, UN Tourism states that sport tourism is the travel experience of a visitor who either watches or actively participates in a sporting event, usually incorporating competitive revenue generating or non-revenue generating activities.

When compared with the ancient Olympic era and modern elaborations on sports tourism, both demonstrate a strong conceptual relationship to travel, economics, and social experiences. Moreover, the ancient Olympic Games were able to attract thousands of spectators from different cities, highlighting that the event was not only about sports but also spectacle and a structured period for travel and accommodation. Furthermore, closely observing the background of the spectators, there reflected early sport-related travel in Olympia, which was directly linked with wealthy travel. In this sense, ancient Olympic spectators were well-organized travelers who moved from their normal environment to new surroundings to explore cultural and sport experiences by expending their money.

Taken together, these two contexts show that an ancient Olympic spectator can be identified as a sport tourist, as they fulfilled the fundamental identification requirement of a sport tourist. Similarly, today’s sport tourists attend global events such as the Olympics, championships, games, and so on, carrying forward the centuries-old practice of travel motivated by sports.



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Handagiriya Entrance- The Sparkling Gateway to a Secret Slice of Heaven

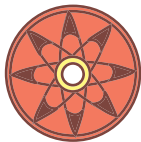
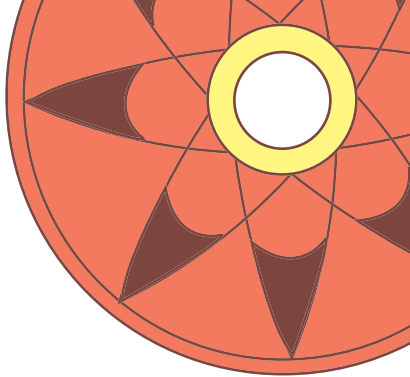
The Handagiriya Entrance is another gateway to enter Udawalawe National Park, located approximately 25.9 km away via the Weligepola–Handagiriya Road. Established to provide access to the park’s less-explored northern regions, this entrance offers visitors the chance to discover a quieter, more untouched side of Udawalawe. With the guidance and financial support of the Ministry of Tourism in Sabaragamuwa Province, this gateway has helped expand tourism opportunities in the region while encouraging visitors to explore destinations beyond the park’s more familiar routes. The national park is generally open to visitors from 8.00 AM to 6.00 PM, allowing tourists to enjoy both morning and afternoon wildlife experiences. Handagiriya promotes special-interest tourism, focusing on slow tourism, wildlife tourism, sustainable tourism, community-based tourism, and rural tourism, making it an ideal destination for travellers seeking an authentic experience surrounded by nature and rural landscapes.

The area is also rich in archaeological and prehistoric heritage, with several archaeological sites and ancient remains found in Pilimeddara, Ambethota, Ulgala, Pansal Kulugala, Vidiya Godaella, and Vehera Godaella. Furthermore, fossils associated with the Balangoda prehistoric human have been discovered near Bandi Pelessa. Through the Handagiriya Entrance, visitors can explore these fascinating archaeological and prehistoric treasures, adding a unique historical dimension to their wildlife experience. An interesting feature of this entrance is that tourists who enter the national park through Handagiriya must also exit through the same gateway, completing their journey where it began. Therefore, Handagiriya offers a quiet, authentic, and largely unexplored tourism experience, bringing together wildlife, history, rural culture, and natural beauty at this golden gateway to Udawalawe’s hidden wonders.

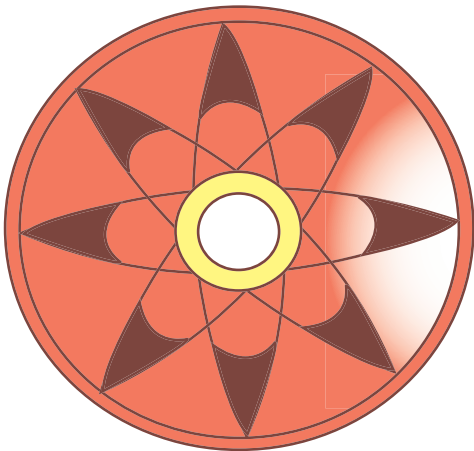
Tharindi Umasha
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The Plant





Co—Creating Transformative Journeys: Enriching Travelers and Communities

ohen (1979) argues that we cannot simply dismiss recreational travel as shallow, as it performs an important function in our modern societies characterized by tremendous pressure. Recreation-seeking tourists therefore seek enjoyable experiences that enable them to rejuvenate their physical and mental well-being. In other words, from the tourists' perspective, travel continues to be valued primarily as a source of pleasure, relaxation, and escape from everyday life. Conversely, from the perspective of destinations, tourism has become a key source of income, employment, and foreign exchange earnings. Consequently, many destinations continue to prioritize tourism growth despite increasingly facing challenges such as overcrowding, community tensions, and environmental degradation. In this sense, both tourists and destinations remain largely embedded within tourism's conventional paradigm, one that

emphasizes personal enjoyment and economic growth on the other.

However, one reality that neither perspective can afford to overlook is that we are living in an era of interconnected global crises that urge us to take more responsible actions, both in our everyday lives and through our travel choices. In international tourism, the number of tourists surpassed its pre-pandemic level, reaching 1.5 billion in 2025. Domestic tourism is estimated to be around six times larger than international tourism, suggesting that the total tourism population worldwide may exceed 10 billion annually. Given this unprecedented scale, it is evident that the tourism industry has a crucial role to play beyond its conventional role as a hedonistic pursuit and merely an economic activity. The question, then, is: how can we revalorize this global space for the betterment and well-



being of both travelers and local communities alike while regenerating the destinations on which it depends?

Over the past years, keywords such as *meaningful*, *conscious*, *reflective*, and *transformative* have become increasingly embedded in discussions of tourism experiences, but they are mostly viewed from the perspective of travelers. But what about local communities? Shouldn't tourism create a meaningful and transformative space for all the stakeholders involved?

To elaborate on this, I would like to share an example that is very close to my heart as an academic, researcher, and individual. That is the “*Heel Oya Community-based Tourism Village Initiative (HCBT)*”, a sustainable rural tourism model that we developed in Sri Lanka. In 2025, this initiative received the Gold Award at the ICRT (International Centre for Responsible Tourism) Indian Subcontinent Awards, under the category of “*all-inclusive responsible tourism*” (ICRT Global, 2025/9/13). The framework of this initiative was founded on the principles of sustainable and responsible tourism, while embracing the broader philosophy of regenerative tourism. At its core were the values of integrity and reflexivity.

Here, I will focus on one integral aspect of this initiative: designing transformative experiences by revalorizing the village's existing resources. Among the diverse range of customized experiences we developed, five signature experiences stand out: 1. agricultural heritage; 2. Kithul palm (*Caryota urens*) related gastronomy experiences; 3. cultural experiences with the Tamil community;

4. immersive homestays that foster deeper cultural understanding; and 5. experiences rooted in sustainable local lifestyles. Building on the four dimensions—deep human connectivity, deep environmental connectivity, self-inquiry, and engaged contribution—proposed by Sheldon (2020), we integrated these principles and values into every experience, placing transformation at the heart of the initiative. For instance, the local community experienced transformation through active engagement in every stage of the process, while travelers were encouraged toward self-transformation through carefully designed tourism experiences.

Now, let me take you on a transformative journey through this case study!

Let us first begin with the local community. We recognized the importance of having community members who are genuinely committed to sustainable and responsible tourism values. Therefore, we identified two individuals who shared a strong passion for lifelong learning and community empowerment. Today, the most valuable assets of this initiative are these two community leaders, Mr. Wajira Rajapaksha and Mrs. Samadi Rajapaksha. Through continuous learning and training, they have developed knowledge and practical skills that enable them to communicate the value of tourism from a holistic perspective. At present, they are actively engaged in tourism while also contributing as research assistants and guest speakers.





Regarding travelers, I would like to introduce our biennial Sri Lanka Study Tour, in which the HCBT Village Initiative serves as the central learning site for understanding the practical aspects of sustainable and responsible tourism. Over several days, Japanese students experienced authentic homestays while learning about and observing sustainable lifestyles in rural Sri Lanka. Let me share some reflections from the students:

“Putting myself in a completely unfamiliar environment took a lot of courage, but I returned home with unforgettable experiences and meaningful lifelong lessons.”

“I was deeply inspired by the way people live in harmony with nature. It gave me a new appreciation for a simpler, more sustainable way of life.”

“True happiness lies in meaningful human interactions and genuine relationships.”

“It was amazing to see how everyone in the community worked together to create a positive impact. The dedication of the community leaders was especially inspiring.”

This case clearly illustrates that transformation is not limited to travelers; it also extends to the local community when tourism is meaningfully structured around learning, reflection, and shared value creation. In a sense, they experienced what Wang (1999) refers to as existential authenticity, ultimately leading to self-transformation.

On a final note, let me quote Sheldon (2020): “Designing for transformation can assist the tourism industry in realizing its potential to contribute to the wellbeing

of all living beings and their conscious development. However, it requires a fundamental value shift by all decision makers away from short-term profitability” (p. 8). Therefore, moving the tourism industry beyond conventional frameworks and mere sustainability labels requires both genuine strategic actions at broader structural levels and carefully designed grassroots initiatives that foster individual transformation (Ranasinghe, 2026, p.27).

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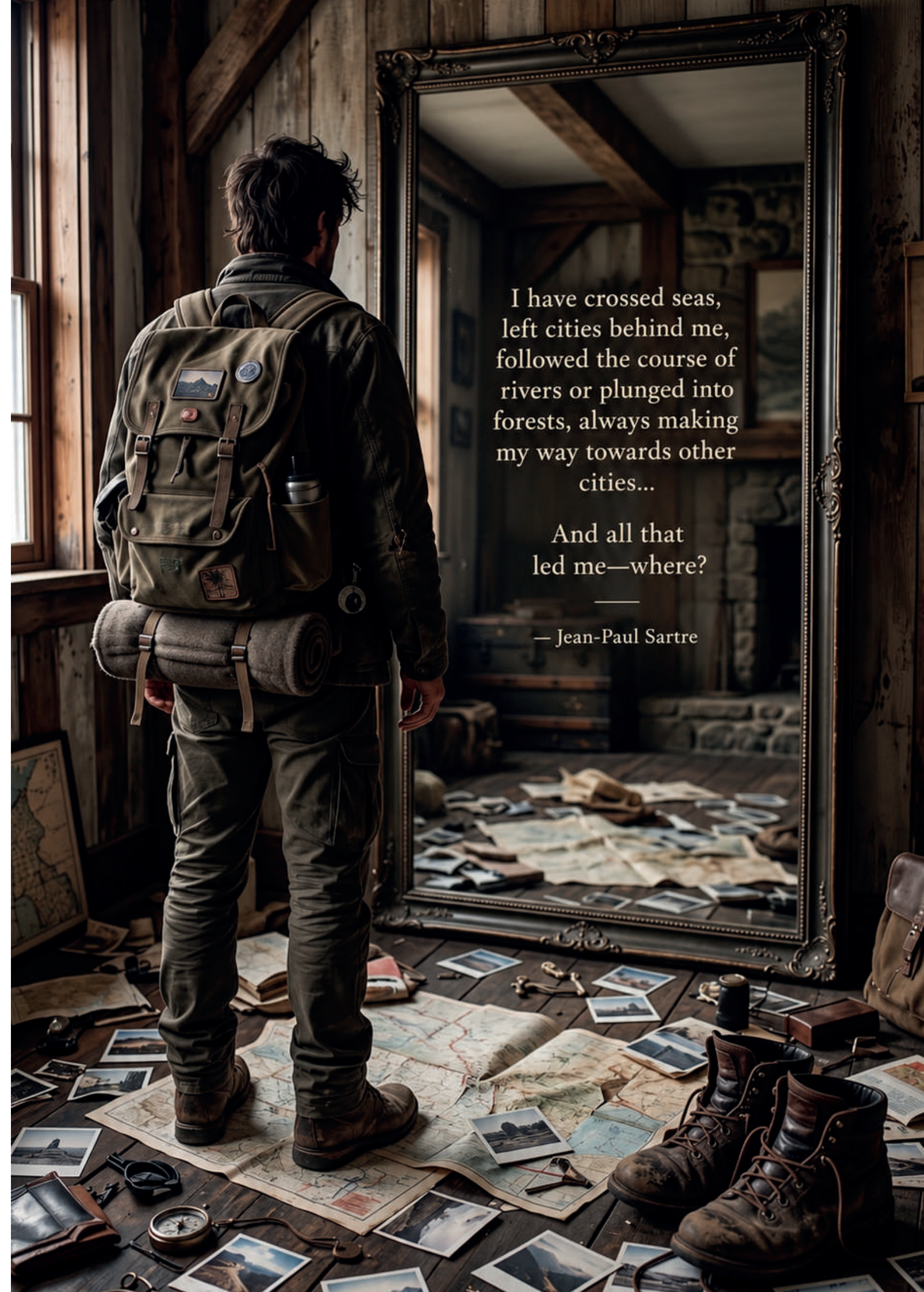
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I have crossed seas,
left cities behind me,
followed the course of
rivers or plunged into
forests, always making
my way towards other
cities...

And all that
led me—where?

— Jean-Paul Sartre

The Cliff Lodge

The Cliff Lodge sits in the mountains of Haputale, along the Monarakanda Estate Road, about 16–18 kilometres from Haputale Town in Sri Lanka’s Uva Province, off the usual tourist routes. The journey to the lodge is part of the experience, as the lodge team picks up guests from the designated parking area in Haputale and takes them by jeep along a scenic mountain route. The final leg is a hike through streams and caves to reach the lodge. Unlike a typical hotel, The Cliff Lodge is a unique glamping lodge built around the remains of an old tea-estate workers’ line house. It features eight glass sleeping pods designed mainly for nighttime use, as they can become hot during the day. Toilets and cold-water showers are located near the pods, with open views of the surrounding mountains. The lodge offers a simple, nature-based experience with no electricity, refrigeration, hot water, or gas, and limited cell service. These conditions encourage guests to disconnect from technology and enjoy a peaceful off-grid stay surrounded by nature.

The experience at The Cliff Lodge continues with simple meals and outdoor activities that help guests connect with the surrounding environment. Meals are prepared with firewood gathered from the nearby forest and served outdoors, either at the fountain table or on the forest decks. In the evening, lantern-lit dinners under the night sky create a calm, peaceful atmosphere. Guests can also explore the surrounding landscape through several trekking and hiking options, including a popular 4-kilometre trek to a river with natural pools and waterfalls. For those seeking a longer adventure, a 12-kilometre hike to Lipton’s Seat passes through small villages and tea estates, offering panoramic views of the Haputale Mountains along the way. The combination of simple accommodations, peaceful surroundings, outdoor dining, and nature-based activities creates a cozy, memorable atmosphere that makes The Cliff Lodge special.

Eshani Madhushika
Amandi Wijerathna



The hide-and-seek



Mindful Travel as an Art of Loving: Notes from a Visit to Manila’s Informal Settlements

Tourism is a legal transaction in which tourism providers enter into a contract with tourists for a specific service in exchange for money. As we know from Butler’s famous “Destination Life Cycle” (2019), such a legal transaction quickly develops an enormous momentum of its own. This is because tourism products often include things locals themselves do not need, while visitors from distant cities are practically craving them: access to — and an emotional encounter with — “sublime” mountain ranges, “endless” deserts, or “exotic” rainforests. What visitors view as “attractions” holds little practical value for locals: on mountains, locals can freeze to death; in deserts, they can die of thirst; and in primeval forests, they can be devoured. But as soon as outsiders are willing to pay money for such “strange” experiences, this suddenly becomes an unexpected gold mine for locals—one that must be exploited.

This also makes it clear that, in practice, tourism has little to do with “authentic encounters” between mindful, considerate people. Rather, on one side stands the businessman who specifically targets needs to satisfy them profitably. On the other side stands the customer who is willing to pay for the successful fulfillment of their expectations. In the best—case scenario, this encounter involves two satisfied business partners who wish to remain connected through business. A focus on sustainability may stem from this hope for future business, but tourism has nothing to do with love or thoughtfulness “behind the scenes.” At best, guests are skillfully given the impression “on stage” of being warmly welcomed and loved—a performance of professional communication.

Even at the risk of shocking my readers, I’ll draw a comparison here between professional tourism and prostitution: a professional sex worker offers a potential client, in exchange for payment, the prospect of experiencing feelings of physical, mental, and emotional bliss for a certain period of time. In return, the service provider guarantees the full



Harald-A. Friedl with Tuareg guide

engagement of their entire personality. The consumption of this service is comparable to the interplay between an actor and an audience member, or indeed between hosts and guests. It is a business relationship (Askew, 1997).

I contrast the consuming tourist with the “traveler” in a foreign country. I compare the relationship between the traveler and the country being visited to a relationship between two lovers: it is characterized by affection and empathy, as well as by a deep interest in the country’s true “essence,” not its “appearance.” It is not beauty, charm, spectacle, excitement, or pleasure that counts (alone), but also the abysses, the ugly sides, the threatening, even the daunting. Love does not judge, but seeks to understand. Love does not demand, but offers attention, interest, and compassion. Love does not seek to be entertained, but feels richly rewarded by the intimacy granted step by step. Love does not “trade” the satisfaction of agreed-upon services for money, but rather trust, respect, care for trust, and a warm welcome.

To illustrate this model of the traveler as a “lover,” I recount my encounter with Aroma, an informal settlement on the outskirts of Manila, in 2023. I had the honor of being welcomed into this extraordinary world, far removed from popular tourist crowds and the magnificent palaces of power. Several thousand families live here in extremely cramped conditions, driven from their land by wealthy landlords and stranded at the edge of this vast, noisy metropolis of millions.

We were guests of teachers from the organization “Eskulayan,” which strives to provide the children of Aroma with a basic education. Reading, writing, and hygiene are fundamental skills needed to plant the seed of opportunity for a childhood spent in a biotope of cramped quarters, heat, drugs, garbage, oppression, prostitution, disease, violence, informants, and rats... Such scenes are jarring to visitors from the sheltered sphere of the European middle class, with its protective walls surrounding the green gardens of prosperity and its taken-for-granted luxuries: a secure income in a prestigious profession, a beautiful home, delicious food, stimulating leisure activities, a fast car—and all of this built upon the shards of the lives of all those whose living spaces are banished beyond the boundaries of perception: there, where what the rich and beautiful leave behind and discard at the end of their exquisite days accumulates.

We sat for some hours in the school’s small office, which also served as its only classroom, cooled by a whirring fan. A poster about children’s rights hung on the wall: the right to a healthy, violence-free environment, to education, and to a hopeful future. The teacher, Ella, described the daily lives of the people of Aroma: endless hours of monotonous work—mostly peeling garlic—in exchange for a meager wage worth a few kilos of rice and a few hours of electricity to keep the fan running against the heat. But when a typhoon floods the settlement, when drug dealers roam the alleys, when the military patrols, or when a pandemic breaks out, even this modest sense of normalcy shatters.

During the COVID lockdowns, the maze of alleys turned into a prison. Thousands of residents were forced, under threat of violence, to remain confined to their few square meters of living space, cut off from work and food, supplied by the government with just a few handfuls of rice and a few cans of sardines per family per month. In this dire situation, online prostitution flourished—young girls, encouraged by their families to undress in front of the camera to seduce clients on the other side of the world. Only now did I begin to see Downtown Manila through different eyes: Viagra sellers on every corner, young girls hawking themselves, a church banner protesting child cyber-prostitution—all consequences of that hardship (Roche et al., 2023).

Why don’t these people rebel? The rich and beautiful behind the high walls of their air-conditioned villas are probably asking themselves the same question. To ensure the ruling order remains intact, so that powerful men in their SUVs can reach their offices safely, so that their elegant wives and bored kids can shop undisturbed at the “Mall of Asia,” so that this country remains “safe and stable” — they take precautions: with “rice



Perfect Beach in Palawan_Philippines



Tourists look for stimulation-Sunrise in white Desert_Egypt

donations” to the poorest to ensure “proper voting behavior,” with the military for “security,” and with informants who “flag” troublemakers or simply make them disappear. That way, everything stays the same—for those down below and those up above.

After those hours in Aroma, the most intense of my life, we returned to the air-conditioned car, to the clean hotel, to our own safe, intact world. But this world of mine also encompasses Aroma—its confinement, its hunger, its dreams, its misery. Without my world, Aroma wouldn’t exist. To deny this part would mean lying to myself about the legitimacy of my privileges. The fact that I’m allowed to live in Austria is no merit of my own, but rather a jackpot in the global lottery. This windfall comes with responsibility—which is why I teach tourism ethics, and why I remain indebted to the people of

Aroma for the honor of being their guest.

We encountered one another with a raw openness that deeply moved us, caused pain, and left indelible traces—including those of our own helplessness. Lovers cannot always save one another, but they stand by each other even in despair. Such encounters have nothing to do with tourism, for they cannot be simulated or marketed without destroying them.

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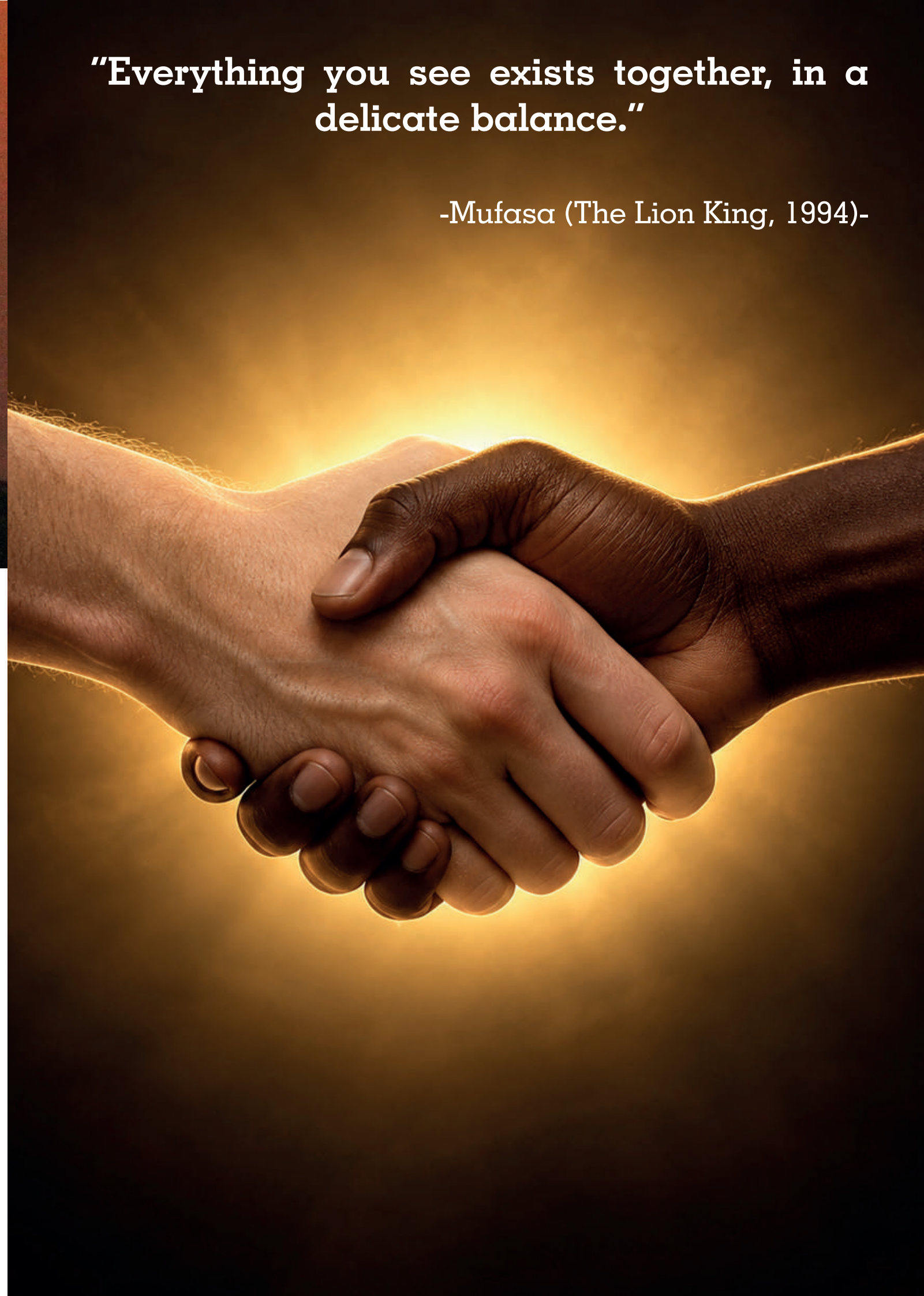
Transport during rain in Aroma



Assoz. Prof. Dr. Harald Friedl
FH JOANNEUM
University of Applied Sciences
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“Everything you see exists together, in a delicate balance.”

-Mufasa (The Lion King, 1994)-



The Walk of Philosophy: A Modern Pilgrimage

It has several names. Philosopher’s Walk, Path of Philosophy, Philosopher’s Path. We use those names interchangeably. Whatever you call it, it offers you a profound philosophical experience. It does not have a gate or a counter to issue you a ticket! That means that this stony rubble road is not yet official!

It is very rare that we can see an interesting connection between tourism and philosophy. Yes, there are cases where famous philosophers and their residences or the academic atmospheres are celebrated, and often we encourage others to visit such places to gain some insight into how they lived and advance their thinking. However, I find no evidence in history where the daily walkway of a philosopher has become a national treasure and a subsequent tourism attraction.

It is all happening in Kyoto, one of the most acknowledged tourism attractions in Japan and in the world. Kyoto is considered the cultural city of Japan. It is a place surrounded by prestigious tourism sites often preserved and designated by UNESCO as World Heritage Sites. The famous philosopher’s walk (Tetsugaku-no-michi) is somewhat seclusively situated between Ginkaku-ji (Silver Pavilion) and Nanzen-ji, one of the most important Zen

temples at the base of the Higashiyama mountains in Kyoto. It is believed to be the walkway of one of the most celebrated Japanese philosophers called Kitarō Nishida (1870-1945).

Kitarō is treated as a pathbreaking philosopher in the twentieth century who combined Anglo-European philosophy with Asian thoughts, especially East Asian Buddhist thoughts. He was able to produce novel thoughts about self, world, and nature.

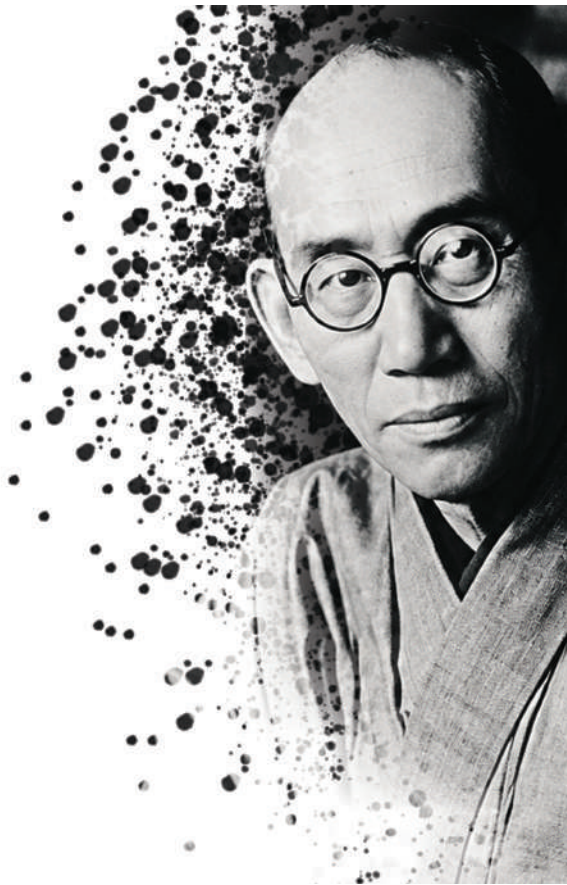
The philosopher’s walk exactly resembles his triangulations of the above three components in his philosophical tradition. The utmost tranquility makes the selfhood sink in nothingness when you look at the world through nature, which stands magnificent in front of you. The beauty which surrounds you with hundreds of cherry trees and a canal beside the pathway with crystal clear water gives you a heavenly experience.

Kitarō used to walk this way in his daily duty to Kyoto University. He was not just walking. He was meditating during his walk. And this walkway itself is a place for meditation and self-consciousness.

The Philosopher’s Path has plenty of cherry trees which blossom during late March and early April. One can walk through the canopy of cherry blossoms and by the side of a canal, enjoying the surrounding traditional cafes and restaurants. It is the same experience as Kitarō’s if one can consciously step into the deep silence and the Buddhist nothingness while encountering the complex architectural designs in modern Japan.

The path Kitarō took every day nicely fits into the holistic visual landscape of Kyoto. It is well maintained even today to resemble its original use.

Philosopher’s Path is not located in a deep jungle. It is within the atmosphere of modern Japan. When you walk



here, it is true that there is a soundscape, but that does not mean that you are far away from the busy highways.

It is a two-kilometer iconic walk of stone and rubble into a spiritual experience. This walkway is in the itinerary of almost all Kyoto visitors. When you walk through this, you feel that you are walking through the cultural essence of Japan. By following the footsteps of Kitarō, you may be able to replicate his experience, his spiritual journey.

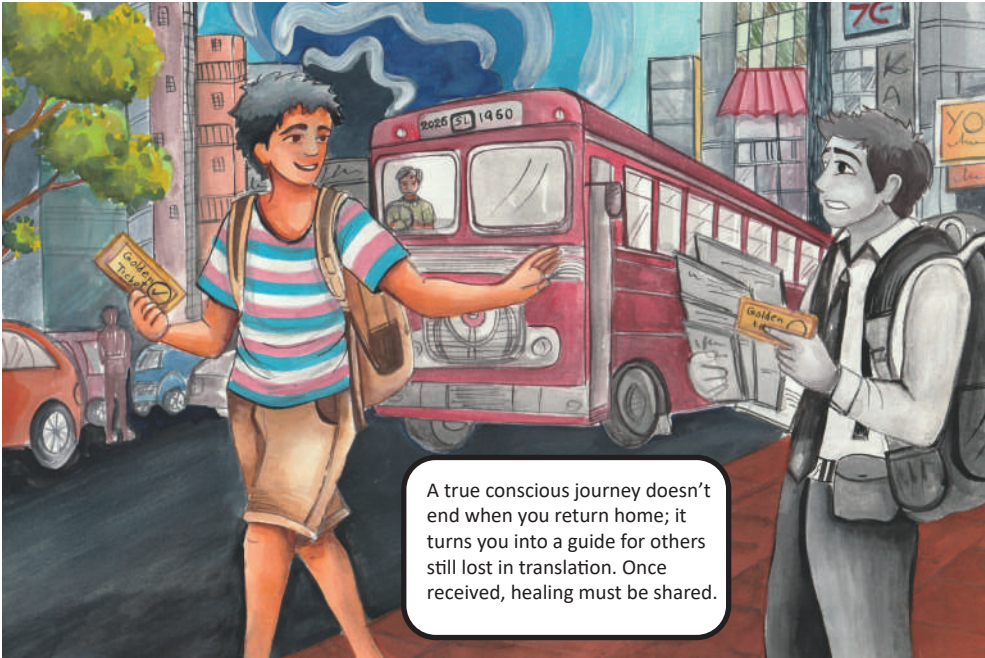
It is not just another walk. It is an experience of ‘becoming’, a transformation into another human being. It is a perfect feeling of becoming conscious of the world and its beauty.

If I put it in more figurative language, walk the walk of philosophy, make it a modern spiritual and scholarly pilgrimage!

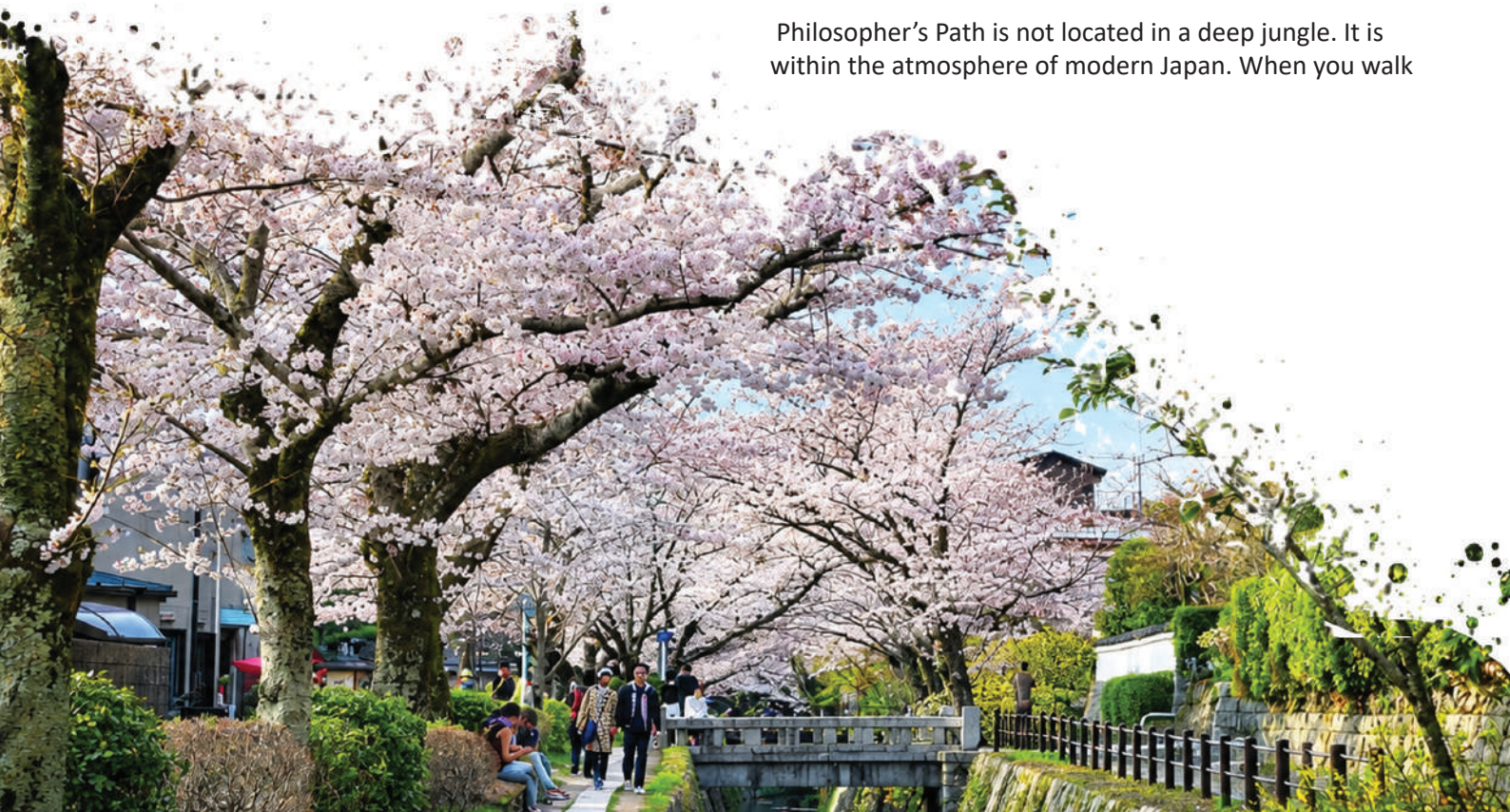


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Passing the Light



A true conscious journey doesn’t end when you return home; it turns you into a guide for others still lost in translation. Once received, healing must be shared.





**Tip
Team**





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