

# SRI LANKAN TOURISM IN TROUBLE AGAIN



Sri Lankan tourism is in real troubles. It is well known that the country has serious problems with Tamil Tigers, a separatist movement. The fights started in 1983. There has been a cease-fire signed in 2002 but it collapsed last year and since then more than 5,000 people have been killed. The development could not stay unnoticed by the world's public opinion and therefore the number of visitors has dropped by 24 percent in the first six months of this year. This is another blow to the country's economy and especially to the tourism sector. In 2004 the country was devastated by the tsunami which killed 35,000 people and wrecked hundreds of hotels on the southern and eastern tourist coasts. The Tamil Tigers as well as the Sri Lanka's government claim that they wish no harm to foreigners but not many people prefer spending holiday in a war zone. Another attack that scared off number of tourists were the Tamil Tigers' air strikes that damaged an Air Force base near the only international airport and then oil facilities near the capital.

Foreign officials have reacted to this development and they recommend their citizens not to travel to Sri Lanka. Tourism industry generates only 3 percent of Sri Lanka's gross domestic product according to Danushka Samarasinghe, manager of research at Asia Securities in Colombo. Nevertheless, it is an important source of foreign currency - after tea, textiles, and gemstones. It is also very important for the related businesses. The income that the tourists provide to farmers, taxi drivers, even sarong sellers on the beach, means that the livelihoods of more than 1 million of Sri Lanka's 20 million residents benefit from it. The unrests have caused inflation and the prices are rising. According to the central bank data, tourism earnings from January to September fell to 273.6 million dollars in 2007 from 325.5 million dollars in the same period last year.

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