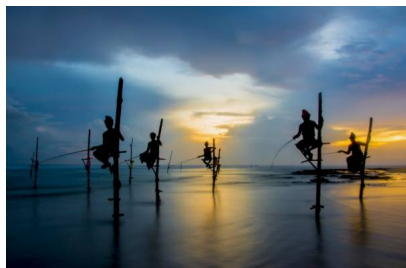


TOURISM IN SRI LANKA HARMED BY POLITICAL SITUATION



Sri Lanka's tourism industry is beginning to suffer the consequences of the political crisis in the middle of the tourist season. The uncertainty leads to cancellations by leisure tourists and business travelers.

Sri Lankan politicians according to many locals seek their own interests. This applies to all political parties in the country. Mahinda Rajapaksa, former Prime Minister, is still respected by the population because he ended the war with the Tamil insurgents.

However, it was a bloody purge that eliminated many innocent civilians. In power, he had installed almost his entire family for a lawful looting.

He had obtained a lot of help from the Chinese who hastened to take over a deep-water port and many fields. The current president wanted to give him back the position of prime minister.

But Parliament rejected this appointment and a court confirmed that this person was prevented from attending. Pending further elections, Sri Lankans are facing serious financial difficulties as food prices have risen sharply. The country remains expensive compared to some countries in Southeast Asia.

Tourism in Sri Lanka is estimated to account for about 5% of the Indian Ocean island's economy, valued at \$87 billion. These figures could be revised downwards due to the political crisis. However, it may take some time before cancellations appear in the arrival figures.

The number of tourists increased by 16.8% in November, according to official data, with a 37% increase in the number of visitors from Europe, although figures from China, Japan, the Middle East and Southeast Asia all decreased.

Last year, more than 2.1 million people visited Sri Lanka, according to the tourism authorities.

"We have cancellations of about 20% in the region," said Chandra Mohotti, director of the luxurious Galle Face Hotel in Colombo, which has about 200 rooms. "Normally, our hotel would be full. Harith Perera, president of the Association of Incoming Tour Operators of Sri Lanka, said there were also cancellations in travel companies. **The high season begins for holidaymakers from Europe, a major source of tourists, with India and China.** This one generally extends from December to the beginning of April.

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