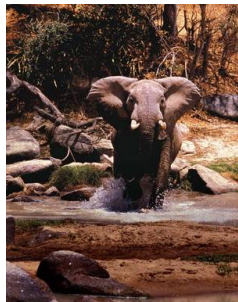


# ECO-TOURISM SAVES SRI LANKA'S ELEPHANTS



A Tourist attraction that provides a meaningful experience, raises awareness about sustainability and promotes sustainable tourism practices. Eco-tourism in Sri Lanka is thriving according to the Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau (SLTPB) as is evident from a series of sustainable tourism projects in the island nation. A case in point is Sri Lanka's elephant orphanage at Pinnawela which is breeding elephants in captivity in a sprawling 25-acre coconut plantation.

"The elephant population in Sri Lanka was being decimated to near extinction by the natural loss of their habitat, the hunting due to the lucrative ivory trade and lack of proper management," remarked SLTPB Managing Director, Dileep Mudadeniya.

"But all that is history now as from merely seven elephants in 1975, the Pinnawela elephant orphanage now houses 65 elephants including several bred in captivity under the intelligent management of the National Zoological Gardens," Mr. Mudadeniya said.

The pachyderms are roaming free in the 25-acre coconut plantation where they eat grass in addition to a daily diet of around 75 kg of coconut palm, jackfruit and other leaves per animal. The baby elephants at the orphanage are bottle fed on milk by their handlers.

Situated in close proximity to the main highway that links Colombo and the hill capital of Kandy, the elephant orphanage at Pinnawela is one of the few places in the world where visitors could see at close quarters a large number of elephants roaming freely. It has also attracted scientists from around the world to study the behaviour of the elephants and Sri Lanka's success in conservation.

It is estimated that Sri Lanka had a population of 30,000 elephants in 1815. The numbers however had dwindled to near extinction by the time the elephant orphanage was established in 1975. Since then the population has gradually increased to over 3,000 in the island nation.

Perhaps the most popular elephant activity at Pinnawela is the twice daily bath at the nearby river. They travel in procession to the river where they splash and play and get scrubbed and cleaned by their handlers for an hour each time. It's also the time when the cameras click furiously in the otherwise tranquil village of Pinnawela.

“The Pinnawela orphanage is a classic example of sustainable tourism because it meets the needs of present tourists and the villagers simultaneously,” remarked Mr. Mudadeniya.

The Pinnawela site is a regular tourist attraction that provides a meaningful experience to the tourists, raises awareness about sustainability and promotes sustainable tourism practices.

A visit to Pinnawela would also be the ideal opportunity to sample the wild natural beauty of the including scenic waterfalls, spice and tea plantations, bird and wildlife reserves, tropical jungle excursions and the luxurious yet eco-friendly accommodation.

By PROactive Communications

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