

✘ Recall all the times you were stuck in traffic on your way to the airport, worried and stressed that you would miss your flight. Think of all the times you waited in traffic jams on your way back from the airport. Haven't all of us at some point or other wished that there was an easier and a faster way to get to the airport and back? Those days of wishing are long gone. With the introduction of an express train that shuttles between the Bandaranaike International Airport and Colombo city, now it is possible to avoid the stress and the traffic, save time and arrive at the airport in just forty minutes.

Words *Thilini Kahandawaarachchi* **Photography** *Menaka Aravinda*

Our journey was to start from the Secretariat station next to Colombo Hilton at eleven in the morning. We had reached the revamped and modernised Secretariat station well in advance and had the opportunity to walk around a bit. Not only has the station been painted in hues of blue, but also the Airport Express train sports a matching design and stands out from the many other trains that are operating around the country. Exactly as the clock struck eleven, we started our journey towards Katunayake.

Once inside the Airport Express we realised that it is indeed a train of a different kind. It is fully air-conditioned, spotlessly clean and the interior is tastefully designed with matching curtains and seats which can even be rotated to face the windows. Thus, the passengers can enjoy the view of suburban Colombo that rushes past outside. The compartments come equipped with a TV and during our journey it ran a video on the various tourist attractions in Sri Lanka as well as clips from international films which have been filmed in Sri Lanka. The train also boasts of a spacious cafeteria all complete with tables and chairs where you can sit and enjoy a snack before reaching the airport.

With no stops in between and no interruptions to the journey, the train reaches its destination as scheduled in a matter of forty minutes. A shuttle bus that waits at the Station takes the passengers all the way to the entrance of the Airport making it the most convenient option for anyone who is going from Colombo to the Katunayake Airport. There are also services available to load and unload baggage at both ends of the journey.

Based on a concept of President Mahinda Rajapaksa the Airport Express is surely on a journey that takes Sri Lanka to the next level of transportation that connects the airport and railway. The Airport Express is a project carried out in collaboration with the Airport and Aviation Services Sri Lanka and the Sri Lanka Railway Department.

The cashless top-up cards have replaced the traditional train tickets of the Airport Express.

The top-up cards can be purchased at the Bandaranaike International Airport or at the Secretariat Station in Colombo. Its doors are open not only to passengers who are taking a flight but also to the general public who want to go to the Katunayake Airport.

If you are a visitor to sunny Sri Lanka, the many smiling faces of the people who stand along the road and wave at you would definitely add to the warmth of Sri Lanka. Whether you are a visitor or a local, being able to avoid the traffic and reaching the airport from Colombo in just forty minutes would give you all the more reason to book your ticket on the Airport Express to Katunayake.

Tickets are priced at Rs 1500 or \$15. Secretariat Station (+94 11) 312 8161, BIA Station (+94 11) 306 2797, Airport (+94 11) 226 3096

airport.lk

