Global Surfing

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Surfing is one of the most popular sports in the world and it is continuing to gather momentum. It is dependent on the natural waves of the ocean, as such surfers travel the world in search

of the perfect waves. The global surfing community is estimated at 50 million. Sri Lanka is one of the most sought after surfing destinations as surfing can be done throughout the year as we have Arugambay in the East Coast and the Southern belt that generates the waves that are ideal for surfing. Arugambay is one of the top 40 surfing destinations in the world.

Words Udeshi Amarasinghe. Photographs BT Images.

Namal Rajapaksa, Minister of Youth and Sports is also a surfer. Sri Lanka could be the only country, where its own Minister is engaged in the sport. He has many plans to develop surfing within the country. Being a surfer himself he understands that the sport would encourage the youth to participate in the sport and also the immense tourism benefits for the country.

Interestingly, Thilak Weerasinghe of Lanka Sportreizen (LSR) has been engaged in water sports in Sri Lanka from the 1980s and he was featured in the March 1990 issue of Explore Sri Lanka as one of the country's top water sportsman speaking about the potential that Sri Lanka has as a water sports destination. Even at that time, which was during the height of the war, through Thilak Weerasinghe's initiative Sri Lanka participated in the HISWA 1990 exhibition in Amsterdam where the country was promoted for water sports. Thus, amidst the preva- lent COVID-19 period Sri Lanka should promote surfing as it is a market that continues to grow globally and has the potential to grow locally.

"The global market for surfing is estimated at USD 3.1 billion in the year 2020 and it is projected to reach USD 3.9 billion by 2027." Therefore Sri Lanka has great potential to tap into this market amidst the global COVID-19 pandemic and recession as the country has one of the top most surfing destinations in the world, Arugambay. Sri Lanka has a great opportunity to tap into considering that Arugambay was listed at number eight in Lonely Planet's Best of Asia in 2018 and also the number one destination in the country in 2019.

"The surfing industry sports equipment market, which is primarily surfing boards is set to record a three percent growth to reach USD 2.6 billion. The Surfing Boards

market will be reset to a new normal, which going forwards in a post COVID-19 era will be continuously redefined and redesigned. The clothing and accessory segment in the surfing industry will see a 3.3 percent growth during the seven-year period until 2027."

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"As part of the new emerging geographic scenario, the United States is forecast to readjust to 3.8 percent. Within Europe, Germany will add over USD 44.2 million to the region's size over the next seven to eight years. In addition, over USD 31.3 million worth of projected demand in the region will come from rest of European markets. In Japan, the surfing boards segment will reach a market size of USD 188 million by 2027. The changing relationship between China and the rest of the world will influence competition and opportunities in the surfing market. Against this backdrop and the changing geopolitical, business and consumer sentiments, the world's second largest economy will grow at 3.1 percent over the next couple of years and add approximately USD 126.3 million in terms of addressable market opportunity. The projected market size would be approximately USD 689.7 million by the year 2027." The world's top sports and accessories brands are all projecting growth over the seven-year period, which reflects the growing popularity and interest in the sport. Surfing is not simply a sport, it is a lifestyle. Surfing is a sport that you become dedicated to and those who are engaged in the sport will continue to chase the waves, as it is almost a religion for surfers.

Professional surfers including World Champions visit Sri Lanka, especially Arugambay, traveling from Europe, USA, Australia, Dubai, Israel, and other parts of the world. With surfing being introduced into the Olympic Games for the first time in 2020, greater excitement and enthusiasm was felt in Sri Lanka as well. Arugambay has been the host to many international surfing championships over the years. And, over the past year a Sri Lankan national team for surfing has emerged as well, with the team performing well in tournaments overseas. We believe it is essential for Sri Lanka to have more international level competition in the country at least a minimum of twice a year so that Sri Lanka will establish itself as a surfing destination globally. Further, it would enhance Sri Lanka's profile and could be the destination for the surfing rounds when the Olympics comes to the Indian sub-continent.

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The waves are ideal at one of the world's most sought after destination, Arugambay from April to October, and thereafter surfers move to the Southern belt to areas such as: Hikkaduwa, Mirissa, Weligama, Unawatuna, Talalla, Hiriketiya, Tangalle including Unakuruwa, starting from the end of September to March where the weather improves for the season in the South.

In surfing, no two waves are alike; the condition of the waves, the direction and strength of the wind, and the ebb and flow of the tide will all be factors. Therefore, a surfer has to continuously adjust to the changing conditions of nature. "The art of riding waves on a board is said to date back to ancient Polynesians living in Hawaii and Tahiti. Surfing was popularized by Duke Kahanamoku, from Hawaii, who won three gold medals in swim- ming at the Stockholm 1912 and Antwerp 1920 Games when competing for the USA. Kahanamoku is considered 'the father of modern surfing' and planted the seed for surfing's future Olympic inclusion by expressing his dream to see the sport become an Olympic sport while accepting his medal on the podium at the 1912 Games."



Minister Namal Rajapaksa riding the waves (Photo: Dylan Mark).



WSL Champion Julian Wilson won his first title in Arugambay at the World Qualifying Series (Photo: Greg Weatherall).



Lesitha Prabath, first national champion (2018) takes a swift turn.



Australian Julian Wilson in Arugambay during the Association of Surfing Professionals tournament (Photo: Greg Weatherall).



Thanujan, surf trainer, from Paper Moon Kudils perfectly balances on the wave.



Namal Rajapaksa, Minister of Youth and Sports surfing in Unakuruwa, Tangalle. He is the one and only Sports Minister to surf in the world (Photo: Dylan Mark).



Team Paper Moon Kudils, Arugambay Roccos, Arugambay PodBay and Explore Sri Lanka with Praneeth Sandaruwan; Lesitha Prabath; Sandika Thushara; Asanka Sanjeewa and Nadeen Sampath at the first National Surfing Championship 2018.