Windsurfing: Beach Holiday Bonus

Posted on

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Are you looking for a beach holiday with a bonus? With the beauty of warm seas to encircle you, soft winds to engulf you, tame waters to pamper you and a golden sun to tan you… Your venue undoubtedly is Sri Lanka.

The beauty of this Indian Ocean isle is unquestionable, but, as they say, there is more to it than meets the eye … Its waters offer a wide variety of experiences and vistas for you. Sri Lanka is rapidly developing into an idyllic venue for aqua-sports, popularly voted by none other than her tourists themselves, claiming that the ideal requisites of warm water, consistent winds and perfect wave conditions are unmatched by many other of the famed aqua-sporting centres of the world.

Taking to Sri Lanka’s waters are windsurfers from all over the world attracted by the irresistible conditions offered by Mother Nature and hospitable facilities offered by resort hotels, imaginatively located facing the sea of the West, South-West, South and East Coasts. Each of them designed and geared to gain optimum advantage of the coast frontage.

Windsurfing which has taken its due place in the international scene recognized as an Olympic sport in the shortest duration of the existence of any sport, has certainly risen to great heights in Sri Lanka too, after its small beginnings in 1983.

Furthermore, windsurfing has injected new life in to Sri Lanka's beach entertainment sector and has made favourable contributions to the coffers of the tourist industry. Windsurfing is one of the most popular water sports in the Western world, attracting patrons from the affluent strata and interesting millions of direct and indirect spectators.

Sri Lanka's tourist industry is much obligated to West German windsurfing experts – Dieter Feld, Peter Pock and Kurk Kudner – for identifying the conditions and introducing the sport to Sri Lanka.

The Germans were greatly assisted by local travel trade enthusiasts Gerd Ramsch, Anton Wickremeratne, Eardley Fernando, Shelton de Alwis, Mervyn Fernadopulle and others, which resulted in the formation of the Windsurfing Association of Sri Lanka. Dieter Feld, a windsurfing instructor by profession, was first to predict there was "money in Lanka's winds". By his prediction he certainly spelt a magic word as it has put Sri Lanka on the world map of windsurfing. International experts are agreed that the seas around Sri Lanka provide the world's finest winds, long-riding waves and warm waters which make the island one of the best centres for the sport and international championships . To prove its popularity, Sri Lanka Coasts of being the venue of several international championships, the first ever held in mid-1984 on the East Coast at Nilaveli in the Trincomalee District, home to one of the world's biggest natural harbours. Participants included world-class champions from West Germany, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, France, Holland, Italy, Australia, the Maldives and Singapore. 'The excellent setting at Nilaveli cook competitors and judges by surprise, which subsequently obtained wide publicity for Sri Lanka in international windsurfing magazines, newspapers and a 30-minute film screened on NRD in Germany during prime viewing time to an audience of millions, among whom were 1.8 million registered members from West German windsurfing clubs. The exposure transformed Sri Lanka's image overnight into a "surfers' paradise". The first international meet put the stamp of authority on Sri Lanka's claim to be the ideal venue, says Mr. Baron de Livera, President of the Windsurfing Association of Sri Lanka since 1985. He says international experts having confidence in the reliability of conditions necessary for the sport have continued to vote constantly in staging meets in Sri Lanka, since there are no probabilities of cancellations of events, similar to what is occurring in Europe, California, Hawaii and other centres

due to wind failure.

In ideal times the best beaches for windsurfing are on the East Coast from April to end-September, which is scalloped with a hundred perfect beaches where the waves are gentle and you can walk a mile into the sea, as at Nilaveli, Upuweli, Kalkudah, Pasekudah, Arugam Bay and Narigama (the latter two are more favourable for surfing). However troubled political conditions which affected some of these areas in the past have compelled promoters to shop around for other places to keep the sport ‘smooth surfing’. And they did find plenty of such areas. To beach lovers, parts of Sri Lanka have their seasons. But Sri Lanka herself is never out of season. There is always some part of her that has waters that are friendly. Exploration for alternative sites, particularly in the West, South-West and South Coasts, revealed similar positive conditions for the sport. Windsurfers not only captured those beaches but also manufacturers, distributors and dealers of windsurfing equipment of international repute have converged on Sri Lanka by the hundreds to test their windsurfing equipment here.

Sri ILanka’s first German qualified “A’ Grade windsurfing instructor, Mr. Thilak Weerasinghe, who has studied the beach conditions around Sri Lanka, identifies the beaches of Negombo including the lagoon, Mt. Lavinia. Beruwela. Bentota, Hikkaduwa and Hambantota as prime beaches conducive for windsurfing. His conclusions were derived after studying carefully the weather patterns of the beaches over a five-year period. These weather patterns have also been sent to international associations for setting up of international standards.

Thilak notes that the best seasons are from November to April and he admonishes that the sport is not merely for professionals but also for all aspiring individuals. All it takes is a little balance and some strength for you to master the technique, he adds.

Moreover, the resort hotels dotted on the banks of rivers and sea-shores at these venues offer excellent facilities for training. Prices range from Rs. 2,000 per person for a ten-hour basic windsurfing class including material and instructor, while windsurfing equipment could be hired at Rs. 150 per hour, Rs. 500 per day and Rs. 3,200 per week. Excellent places for windsurfing are:

NEGOMBO – a characteristic fishing t0wn on the West Coast, 37 km north of Colombo. Ensconced amidst groves of coconut palm . the place breathes the spirit of the sea. Elsewhere a picturesque lagoon turns idyllic as the sun sets. Negombo’

populace consists largely of fishermen who are devout Catholics – a heritage of Portuguese rule. Seafood you will find in plenty, brought in by traditional crafts like the outrigger canoe and the catamaran transforming it into a gourmet' paradise too.

MT. LAVINIA – An immediate city suburb and Colombo's weekend resort is just 12 km south of Colombo. The beach has been one of the better known from colonial time . It lies alongside a windswept headland jutting into the Indian Ocean. The sand is the softest and the waves calm and clear.

BERUWEIA – 56 km south of Colombo marks the beginning of a 130 km stretch of beaches where tourism development has taken immense strides in the past few years. You will discover the beauty of the ocean, while relaxing in the comfort of your room, as most resort hotels have pitched themselves within a caressing distance of the coast, shaded by clusters of coconut palms.

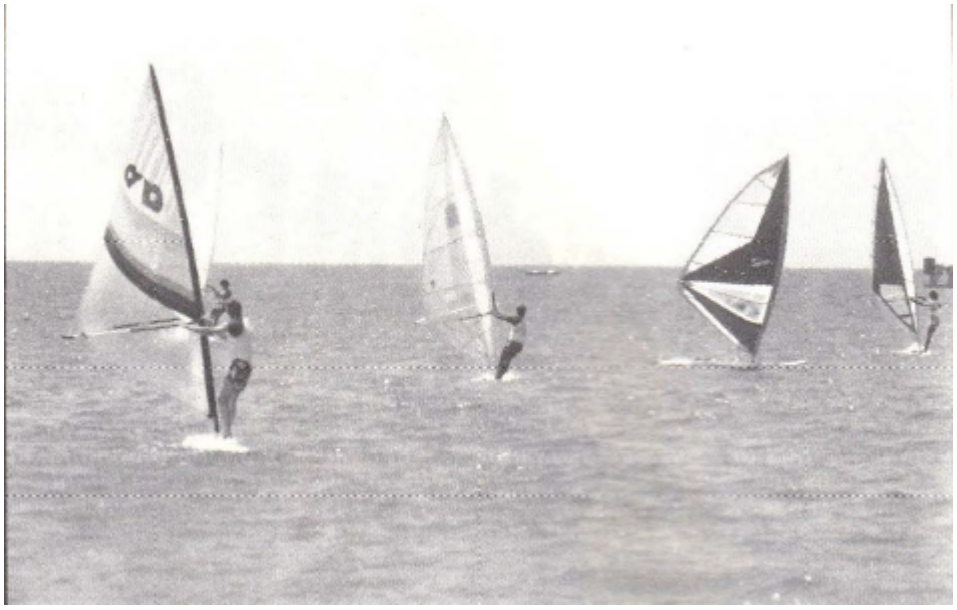
BENTOTA – 62km south of Colombo boasts of Sri Lanka's first self-contained beach resort complex ranking among the best in South Asia. A romantic rendezvous of river and sea, where you will discover many caves and bays with clusters of luscious palms overlooking everything.

HIKKADUWA – 90km from Colombo is the place for underwater delights. When you are not roaming its rippling waters, take time off to explore the fantasies beneath your feet. Here you will find the breathtaking coral gardens patronized by a vast variety of tropical fish and an occasional turtle.

HAMBANTOTA – 116 km from Colombo is home to Sri Lanka's famed salterns. Its water have been tried and tested and proved to be an ideal venue for staging windsurfing meets. The Windsurfing Association of Sri l.anka in cooperation with Mr. Thilak Weerasinghe has drawn up plans to introduce the sport on a national level penetrating into the curriculum of schools, the objective of which is to improve local talent, says the Association's President. The Association has been the guiding light to windsurfing in Sri Lanka, promoting and nurturing its existence, and it negotiates and schedules both international and national windsurfing championships.

Plans are now under way to introduce the sport to prime locations on Sri Lanka's 600,000 acres of inland waterways, which promises to be an opening to a fascinating variety of wild terrain, ancient buildings and a glimpse of a culture and traditions going back thousands of years. The Ceylon Tourist Board, the state

promotional service and earnest promoters of the sport, in the first quarter of 1989 hosted a visit to Sri Lanka by Natasha Bloemhard, Editor of the monthly Surf Totaal Holland magazine with a circulation of 200,000. Natasha plans to feature Sri Lanka’s ideal locations in a special tenpage spread. If you are around and wish to savour any of Lanka’s famed destinations for the sport, but you require last minute advice, the Windsurfing Association of Sri Lanka is at your service. You may call its President at 596636 or 562558, Colombo.



Windsurfers in action off Mt. Lavinia beach.