

Wings of Paradise

By Wendy Brewer Fleming



Excellent service is more than a pretty smile at Air Lanka; it's an inflight kitchen that was hailed the world's best airline caterer in 1985 and service that frequent travellers rank among the top three in the Asian region. For an international airline that's just eight years old, those are achievements to be proud of—"proud as a peacock"—the stylised Sri Lankan peacock, Monara, that stands as Air Lanka's symbol. It represents not only pride in excellence but, from the times of the mythical King Ravana. Legend speaks of a flying chariot or Dandu Monara that resembled a peacock and is documented as one of the earliest airborne machines. Indeed technical know-how came early to Lanka: over 2000 years ago engineers helped build the greatest hydraulic system of the ancient world reservoirs and aqueducts that still water the country's rice fields. Artists and architects of the second and third centuries A.D. created unrivalled masterpieces in stone and earth whose remains can be seen today at Anuradhapura. Award winning service and technical genius; what else does Air Lanka stand for?

"Wings of Paradise" that soar to 23 cities in 20 countries, from London to Rome to Dubai, Bombay, Tokyo and soon maybe all the way to Sydney. A computer reservation system in all major markets spells out your flight connections, assigns your seat, registers your special meal request, makes your hotel reservations and promises a rental car awaiting your arrival, all in a matter of seconds.

Reservations staff will provide you helpful information on the phone about your destination's climate, currency exchange, available transportation, business hours, holidays, etc. and will soon be able to arrange sight-seeing tours before you even set foot off the plane: efficiency that makes the most of your time away from home, whether on a business or pleasure trip. Air Lanka's unique Business Plus class is hardly "business as usual," A priority check-in system at most airports lets you skip the lines, allowing a few minutes to relax in their business class lounge.

Business Plus passengers can check up to 30 kg of baggage, above the standard 20 kg weight limit. On board special touches include French wines served in fine glassware, special gourmet meals presented on china and silver tableware, and a token pair of slippers, an eye shade and a "Do Not Disturb" sign to let you sleep in peace and comfort. Of course all passengers, whether First Class, Business Plus or Economy Class, enjoy Air Lanka's award winning cuisine, Sri Lanka's choicest teas and in-flight entertainment featuring a selection of music, audio games, a spoken introduction to Sri Lankan history and culture, and a recently released film with soundtracks in English, French, German or Japanese. On-board duty-free shopping services are notable as well, acclaimed best among scheduled carriers by the sponsor of the first International Tax and Duty Free Marketing Awards at Nice, France. Being Sri Lanka's national carrier Air Lanka is committed to stimulate the country's vital tourism industry. A recently completed air terminal at Colombo's Katunayake airport located just north of the capital hastens arrivals and departures with expedited services. Air Lanka's international promotional schemes including food festivals and cultural events in worldwide destination locales, and international windsurfing championship in the excellent sea off Sri Lanka, and the promotion of many travel journalists have helped capture 40% of the island's tourist traffic. For travellers stopping in Colombo enroute to other Air Lanka destinations, the airline's super-saving stopover Holiday packages are hard to pass up.

"Imagine hotel accommodations, ground transfers American breakfast, plus shopping and restaurant discounts-all for US\$ 16 a night; up to five nights for as little as \$ 49. It is hard to imagine that you could stay in any of 26 of Colombo's best hotels, some where crystalline waves lap at your doorstep and all with first class facilities, from tennis courts, putting greens and health clubs to secretarial services and fine food. One to seven - day tours cover all the island's main

attractions, from beach resorts to cool hill stations and fascinating monuments from ancient civilisations. Stop-over packages include transportation to and from the airport and discount vouchers. Special rates are available at hotels along the island's southwest coast during low season. The technological wizards of yesterday never thought of all this; though who knows what miracles of science outfitted King Ravana's catapulted flying machine. Today SriLankan ingenuity is still at work at Air Lanka, scaling heights in the highly competitive world of air transport, expanding and expediting on the-ground support, bringing its own Island of Paradise closer to today's world traveller.



