

THE WORLD WILL BE IN COLOMBO

By RAVNASH SENANAYAKE

Sri Lanka will attract over 730 athletes, representing 68 countries and earn an expected revenue of over \$3.5 million with the second edition of Sri Lanka IRONMAN 70.3 Colombo, commencing on 24 February 2019. The event promises to be one of Sri Lanka's largest sports tourism events.

The foreign athletes participating in this competition will be accompanied by around 500 friends and family. India will be represented by the most participants this year with 54 athletes, followed by Great Britain (55), Australia (40), France (34) and Japan (24). Besides the contingents from these top five countries, there will be squads representing several other countries, including the USA, Malaysia, Singapore, Germany, Russia, the Maldives plus of course local participants.

The average age of participants this year will be 38, with the oldest being 76, while the youngest is 18. The majority of participants will be males; only 24% of the competitors will be women.

This year's IRONMAN Colombo will encourage female participation in the sport, allocating 25 slots from Sri Lanka exclusively for the first 25 women that finish, who will be selected to take part at the 2019 IRONMAN 70.3 World Championship in Nice, France.

The race begins with a 1.9 km single loop swim from the beach adjoining Galle Face Green, followed by a 90 km bike course and a 21.1 km run. The combined distance will be total 113km. The main

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SriLankan presenting their sponsorship for the event

focus of the organisers of this year's event, Pro Am Serendib is to enhance both athlete and spectator experience, and a spectator-friendly course has been designed in pursuit of this goal. As Pro Am Serendib director Yas Hewage said, "IRONMAN was never just about IRONMAN; IRONMAN was about Sri Lanka". He further stated, "Our goal in bringing the IRONMAN Franchise to Sri Lanka last year was to establish the country as a viable destination for sports tour-

ism and outdoor tourism, while encouraging Sri Lankans to get more involved in physically-challenging activities."

Event director of Pro Am Serendib, Polan Thanaseyagum elucidated his personal view of the competition: "As we know, for everyone it's like a swim, bike and run; but for me as an IRONMAN athlete myself, it's all about stories; stories of overcoming, stories demonstrating that incalculable spirit of our humanity, and it's all about experience and how do we add that experi-

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So Sri Lanka presenting their sponsorship for the event

ence to these stories".

Deshabandu Julian Baling, director of Pro Am Serendib stressed the need to encourage more female athletes to participate.

"Having realised that the number of female participants needs to increase for future events, we are organising an 'in conversation' with IRONMAN great Julie Moss at the Kingsbury Hotel on February 21st, to encourage more women to get involved in endurance sports", he noted.

However, before IRONMAN 70.3 Colombo commences on the 24th, so Sri Lanka IRONMAN 70.3 Colombo Expo will take place from 21 to 24 February at the Lotus Ballroom of Shangri-La Colombo.

The Expo will showcase local and international sports, health and wellness products and services to the IRONMAN 70.3 participants as well as the general public. On the 23rd, the IRONMDS competition will take place at Galle Face Green, starting at 8 a.m.