

## Sri Lanka Tourism with Pro-Am Serendib to promote active sports tourism

Sri Lanka Tourism and Pro-Am Serendib (Pvt.) Ltd are all set to bring the world's number one multi-sport event brand Ironman to Sri Lanka.

The Ironman 70.3 Colombo is a qualifying round for triathletes to participate in the Ironman World Championship 2018 in South Africa. The event is scheduled to be held on February 25, 2018, with a 1.9-kilometre sea swim, 90-kilometre bike ride and a 21.2-kilometre run – all to be completed by a triathlete within an 8.5-hour period or a relay team.

The Ironman Triathlon Series of events is the largest participation sports platform in the world, recognized for excellence through distinguished events, world-class athletes and quality products. Ironman has a history of over 37 years. It is the number one user-based sports brand in the world (Global Triathlon Website) with over 260 events across 44 countries. However, there are none in the South Asian region and it is a great pride for Sri Lanka for being the only country in the region to host this prestigious event in 2018.

The brand being a multisport anchored on sun, sea and sand as well as the road infrastructure for cycling with the need for precision in execution, perfectly blends into the desired positioning of brand Sri Lanka for 2020. Sports tourism is an emerging trend in Sri Lanka, which requires a strategic thrust. Recent marathon, swimming and cycling events held on a smaller scale reveal the market is ripe for an event of the magnitude of Ironman 70.3 Colombo.

"We are excited about this announcement as we are expanding our portfolio of races – especially in South Asia where the number of Ironman athletes is growing every year," said Ironman Asia Managing Director Geoff Meyer.

"We have been looking for the right partner to start our first event in South Asia and we are excited to work with Pro-Am Serendib (Pvt.) Ltd to organise a great race in Colombo."

So far, over 470 athletes have registered, with 1,200 family and friends confirmed from 53 countries to attend the event. A minimum of 300 liaison officers and 100 officials from Sri Lanka will be trained to officiate and thus will receive training from experts and international exposure within the country itself. This will provide the opportunity to build local capability and capacity to host international multisport endurance sporting events in Sri Lanka.

With these in mind, the event will contribute to Sri Lanka's tourism revenue in 2018 and beyond with a truly international product for the 'affluent traveller' market therefore, contributing to the national income. It can become the single most impactful tourism initiative for Colombo city hotels and urban lifestyle businesses in 2018/19 by concentrating over 2,000 affluent tourists for five days. It is to occupy 1,000 rooms per night, covering all key Colombo-based star-class hotels along with another 5,000 rooms per night outside of Colombo, focused towards the eight strategic product pillars of Sri Lanka Tourism.

It is estimated that during the event, Sri Lanka's economy will directly benefit from the spending by these travellers with as much as US \$ 4 million, in addition to driving economic activities through increased employment and activities of local industries including local cottage industries.

Ironman 70.3 Colombo will also position Sri Lanka as a 'hub for active sports tourism' in South Asia by 2020, endorsed by and



Tourism Minister John Amaratunga and Sports Minister Dayasiri Jayasekara address a gathering on sport tourism



Julian Bolling and Yasas Hewage

associated with the prestigious Ironman brand, the world's largest user-based sports brand. It will pave the way for similar events by creating content for sport's tourism marketing, capacity for event infrastructure, competency in terms of event management and international marketing and confidence with user and stakeholder endorsements and strategic associations.

Pro-Am Serendib is hopeful that Ironman 70.3 Colombo will become an annual event while putting Sri Lanka on the global triathlon map. The company hopes to hold a number of activities to promote the sport of triathlon in Sri Lanka to eventually achieve at least 20 percent local representation at the event.

The goal is to make Sri Lanka the destination of choice for Ironman events in Asia as the Philippines is currently the leading destination in Asia for Ironman events presently. Sri Lanka has the potential to claim that crown and attract a raving tourist fan base by hosting a memorable race that gives athletes a uniquely Sri Lankan experience.

Pro-Am Serendib are looking towards tapping into the exponential growth of sports tourism as the world is 'sports mad' – sport is considered a destination, while sporting facilities are considered tourist attractions with fans and spectators alike travelling specifically to attend sporting events. Sports tourism falls into three categories, of which this discipline falls under active sports tourism, where individuals actively participate or engage in sports-related travel as a form of leisure. The others are sport event tourism (the Olympics, World Cup Rugby, Cricket, Soccer, WTA) and nostalgia sports tourism, where travellers visit sport-related attractions.

The event will also offer a unique Sri Lankan experience, which will include a four-day expo, which includes cultural activities that will be part of the event to enhance brand Sri Lanka to the world. This expo will showcase Sri Lankan handicrafts, gems, jewellery, handloom products, spices and tea. It will also have the capacity to promote environmentally sustainable tourism as Ironman events are environmentally friendly and leave little or no carbon footprint as they are fully powered by human spirit.

Ironman 70.3 Colombo has the capacity to transform Sri Lanka into being Asia's foremost sports tourism destination as hosting such an event will allow Sri Lanka to differentiate herself from other Asian destinations while the rugged natural environment has the potential to position Sri Lanka as the adventure capital of Asia. The official print media partner of the event is Wijeya Newspapers (WNL).