

Ironman Triathlon 2019 in Sri Lanka projected to generate US\$ 4mn in earnings



At the media conference (L-R): Amith Sumanapala, Chris McFall, Himalee Madurasinghe, Julian Bolling, Suthesh Balasubramaniam and Yasas Hewage. (Pic by Jude Denzil Pathiraja)

by STEVE A. MORRELL

The Ironman Triathlon 2019 in Sri Lanka will be a major tourist draw that is expected to net in more than US\$ 4 million over a period of two weeks, it was announced last week.

The key international sporting event is expected to kick off on February 24, 2019.

The Ironman Triathlon 2018 in Colombo was a grand success. It attracted around 800 participants in addition to supporters, observers and fun-seekers. Overall, more

than 2,300 visitors from 63 countries were in Sri Lanka for the event.

More significant was the positive placing of Sri Lanka on the traveler map worldwide attracting tourists from these countries and the image projection that the country was a safe and fun-filled destination to visit.

Olympic swimmer, Director, Pro Am Serendib, Julian Bolling, told a news conference last week that sports tourism and its outdoor features were appropriate to feature the 'Sun n Sand' growing

image that Sri Lanka was now an established visitor destination.

The Ironman Triathlon 2018 and its potential to feature para athletics at its last outing in Sri Lanka early this year, included blind participants and many differently-abled aspirants. Around 200 such athletes were included to compete in the events. Cycling, swimming and a marathon over a distance of about 50 kilometers were also featured. Competing sports included a wide cross section of competitors and grassroot aspirants from rural backgrounds were also included, Bolling recalled.

Managing Director, Sri

not, at this stage, identify other private sector contributors.

World class sports standards could be expected, not second to such events in other countries. Eventually, attractions in Eastern beach spots, Passekuda, Arugam Bay and Trincomalee would be extensive attractions that would prove to be strong visitor sites for further extension of the event in these resort locations.

In time, kite surfing could also be included in the event line-up. Ironman 70.3 would have about 91 percent participation, including local competitors. In addition, the sea and topographic attractions the country could offer will continue to place Sri Lanka in a strong position on the world tourism map, he explained.

Ironman 2019 would include more hotels in the tourism sector being part of the event.

CEO, Kantar Sri Lanka Insights, Himalee Madurasinghe, said at the panel discussion, the 2019 event will also feature about 70 percent 'first time travelers' to Sri Lanka. Participants would number more than the 2018 event. Attendant advantages already recorded would be that more travelers would visit for extended stays beyond two weeks. The endorsement of the hospitality tag Sri Lanka is now famous for worldwide would enhance the image of the country.

Tourism worldwide is now an industry that attracts more than US\$ 1 billion. Sri Lanka could be an important beneficiary to expect visitors to bring in the dollars. Our growing image will feature quite strongly as a destination option to have visitors spend dollars here freely", she noted.

Sales and Marketing Manager, Shangri-La Hotel, Chris McFall, said the hotel would be a major factor contributing to the event, as done in early 2018. "That would not change. We are happy to extend our services and be supportive".

Director, Pro Am, Yasas Hewage and Director/CEO, Hayley's Tours, Amith Sumanapala, also spoke. The panel discussion was moderated by Sharon Maskarenas.

Lanka Tourism, Suthesh Balasubramaniam, said the success of the event, as experienced this year, was index to depth of combined partnership of the public and private sectors.

He explained that an event of this magnitude involved intense planning and, above all, finance. The Ministry would contribute Rs. 30 million.

Although all other entities, including the hotel sector, would be outstanding partners, Balasubramaniam did