

TOURISM
AIMING FOR THAT
MAGIC MILLION

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Carl Muller



This small monograph is the fifth in a series presented by Carl Muller, best known in Sri Lanka for his devastating style as author and journalist. He is himself one of the small minorities in his island home and has yet maintained his essential "Lankan-ness" in the forceful "minority role" he plays.

This essay is, in a sense, the reflections of one who is concerned with the many aspects of his country's progress.

A “Thrust Industry”

Resilience is the name of the tourism game in Sri Lanka. The industry has had its bleak periods and the conflict in the North and East has not done it any good. As the Minister of Tourism, Lakshman Kiriella, told me recently, we could number a million tourist arrivals by 2005... if this war ends.

Tourism has slumped and risen many times and above all, endured. It is also counted as one of this island’s leading income- and employment-generating industries.

The old days saw all manner of dubious entities crowding the footboard. Hole-in-the-wall “Travels & Tours” were run by the smarmiest characters ever, each armed as it were with shearing clippers. Touting became an almost honourable profession and unwary visitors realized, often too late, that at the mercies these cheats, the lie of the land was actually the lies of the land! Guides were of the poorest and basest of quality; itineraries were hastily put together with the main eye on the centers where visitors could buy “glass and brass” at unbelievable prices while guides and drivers would line their pockets with the commissions surreptitiously paid them.

Today, thankfully, things have matured and growth is steady.