




Asian Productivity Organization “The APO in the News”

Name of publication: Daily FT (16 September 2015, Sri Lanka)

Page: <http://www.ft.lk/article/471097/National-Home-stays-and-Farm-stays-Conference-2015-begins-in-Colombo>

National Home-stays and Farm-stays Conference 2015 begins in Colombo

0 Comments /  173 Views / Wednesday, 16 September 2015

 Tweet 0  Share 30

00:00



NPS Director Suranga Gunaratne



Japan APO Agriculture Department
Director Joselito Cruz Bernado



Sabaragamuwa University Senior
Professor of Agri Business
Management Prof. Rohana P.
Mahaliyanarachchi



By Harsha Udayakantha Peiris

National Home-stays and Farm-stays Conference 2015 sponsored and organised by the Asian Productivity Organization (APO), Tokyo, Japan and implemented by the Department of Agri Business Management, Faculty of Agricultural sciences of Sabaragamuwa University in collaboration with the National Productivity Secretariat (NPS) of Sri Lanka for the second consecutive year, commenced on 15 September at the Sri Lanka Foundation at Colombo 7 with the initiative of Nihal Rupasinghe, Secretary of Mega-polis and Western Province Development.

The two-day national conference has been organised with the objectives of creating greater awareness among policy makers, economic planners and key stakeholders in the agriculture and tourism sectors on the concept of agri-tourism as a strategy to create alternative income opportunities for farming communities and as a tool for revitalising the rural economy, exchanging ideas and experience on homestays and farmstays in Sri Lanka, Asia and the world with regards to its benefits, requirements and applications and identifying best practices of selected models of homestays and farmstays enterprises that can be developed and promoted in Sri Lanka.

Speaking at the inauguration of the program, Prof. Rohana P. Mahaliyanarachchi – the Senior Professor of Agri Business Management of the Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka stated that practicing home-stays and farm-stays in Sri Lanka strategically and competitively in the backdrop of the booming industry of tourism in the country is vital for the effective enhancement of the development of this segment of the industry.

“Over 1.1 billion tourists travelled abroad in 2014. International tourist arrivals reached 1,138 million in 2014, a 4.7% increase over the previous year, according to the latest UNWTO World Tourism Barometer. For 2015, UNWTO forecasts international tourism to grow by 3% to 4%, further contributing to the global economic recovery. The number of international tourists (overnight visitors) reached 1,138 million in 2014, 51 million more than in 2013. With an increase of 4.7%, this is the fifth consecutive year of above average growth since the 2009 economic crisis. Over the past years, tourism has proven to be a surprisingly strong and resilient economic activity and a fundamental contributor to the economic recovery by generating billions of dollars in exports and creating millions of jobs. This has been true for destinations all around the world, but particularly for Europe, as the region struggles to consolidate its way out of one of the worst economic periods in its history,” Prof. Mahaliyanarachchi said.

He also stated that despite global trends to innovatively and competitively develop the trade of tourism in and out of the region, detailed Sri Lanka Performance indices have ranked the country at 70 in enabling environment, 52 in business environment, 53 in safety and security, 71 in health and hygiene, 86 in human resource and labour market, 92 in ICT readiness, 65 in IT policy enabling conditions, 30 in prioritization of travel and tourism, 65 in international openness, 68 in price competitiveness, 103 in environmental sustainability, 64 in infrastructure, 71 in air transport infrastructure, 41 in ground and port infrastructure, 74 in tourist service infrastructure, 50 in natural and cultural resources, 35 in natural resources and 69 in cultural resources and business travel among the global players of international tourism industry.

The World Economic Forum has further ranked Sri Lanka at 63 out of 141 competitive economies who have implemented the industry of international tourism as a national revenue generator in their countries. Accordingly, at present, Spain, France, Germany, USA, UK, Switzerland, Australia, Italy, Japan and Canada come under the top 10 most tourism ready countries in the world.

“Therefore, serious considerations are needed to be properly identified and implemented by the authorities in discussion with the micro and macro stakeholders to overcome these challenges we are facing today against developing this an able market to effectively and sustainably feed to increase revenue in community and national levels,” he added.

Rupasinghe stated that a sustainable development program which is fully environmental friendly was on the way with lessons learnt from well-developed neighboring nations to constructively and creatively build Sri Lanka under the proposed mega-polis development program of the present Government. “The program will seriously look into heritage, history and the socio-economic wellbeing of the masses and the national economy in its vision to construct the mega-polis concept effectively in its implanting districts,” he said.

Suranga Gunaratne – the Director of the National Productivity Secretariat (NPS) stated that a productivity development agenda was of top most importance in developing home and farm-stays in Sri Lanka. “The tourism promotion is separate from the resource management of the industry and assistance of relevant national and international organisations is vital to develop a network for the program. The national plan and

framework developed for the home-stay and farm-stay in Sri Lanka within this two day conference would be of immense importance in realising the objectives of this segment of the industry effectively," he said.

Paddy Withana, Chairman of Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA), stated that the tourism industry in Sri Lanka should take a lot of consideration on safeguarding the value of the country in all its implementing procedures in order to let the industry sustainably flow under competitive environs.

"Aspects of our heritage and culture should be kept at the apex in developing agri-tourism a fruitful and viable venture. At the same time, benefits of such procedures, in reality, should accurately be reached by the rural families and the villages involved in agri-home and farm-stays," he said.

Withana also stated that rural agri – home-stay and farm-stay is an innovative and contributory program in return to share knowledge between different nations of the world.

Joselito Cruz Bernado, Director of the Agriculture Department of Asian Productivity Organization (APO), Tokyo, Japan, in his presentation on home-stays and farm-stays development in Asia in the backdrop of selected models from Japan, Malaysia, Taiwan and Philippines mentioned that It was of greater importance that those who involved in rural agri-tourism should promote more activities in the rural areas so that more tourists and travellers will prefer staying with rural agri-home and farm-stays that would also bring income generation to the communities in less developed areas.

"Home-stays and farm-stays are not basically about accommodation but about the experience that visitors get when they come to the village. It may be staying with the family plus farm plus community in a farm village or within the farm plus community. An agri-tourism business model involves any agricultural or farm based activity that brings visitors to a farm to generate revenue stream. In a farm-stay, visitors have specific interest to meet farmers and this also creates a want for the visitors to actively involved in farm activities. Agri-tourism enterprise planning is therefore, five 'P's namely, Products, People, Price, Place and Promotion," he said.

Sri Lanka has great potential for tourism development. The increasing traffic of tourists to the country also provides great opportunity for developing and promoting alternative tourism enterprises such as home-stays and farm-stays. At present, very few have ventured into home-stays and farm-stays as a business as it is still a new concept for most of the rural areas. To realise the potential, it is important for policy makers and government development planners to have a good appreciation of the concept so that they can help create a conducive policy environment as well as develop supportive programs.

Datuk Jeffrey Ayah, Founder and Advisor of the Home-stay Association in Sabah in Malaysia, attended the special resource personage at the event. Prof. Chandana Udawatta – Vice Chancellor of the Sabaragamuwa University, Prof. M. Sunil Shantha – Director General of Sri Lanka Rupavahini Corporation (SLRC), Malraj B. Kiriella – Director General of Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA) and Bhagya Mahavidanage – Assistant Director of SLTDA and a large gathering of public and private sector stakeholders in the industry of tourism in Sri Lanka attended the conference. The international travel and tour magazine, Sri Lanka The Treasure Island, acts the official print media partner of the National Home-stays and Farm-stays Conference 2015.

– Pix by Suranga Cooray