

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – July 2007

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A NEW RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL MAP OF SRI LANKA REDEFINES TOURISM IN THE RESPLENDENT ISLE

LOCALternative Sri Lanka Highlights Responsible Travel Destinations

COLOMBO, SRI LANKA. A new and unique travel map of Sri Lanka, now available in bookstores countrywide, is poised to redefine tourism in this South Asian island nation. **LOCAL**ternative Sri Lanka – *A Responsible Travel Map* is a vital and progressive tool promoting responsible travel and appealing to the growing numbers of travellers with a conscience. It looks at LOCAL projects that follow ALTERNATIVE pathways to beneficial ends.

“Along comes a very distinctive map that... provide[s] a summary of Sri Lanka’s green tourism opportunities,” reads a recent review of the map appearing in *The Sunday Times*, Sri Lanka’s largest-selling, independent, English-language Sunday newspaper. “This map is of considerable importance, for although many tourist guidebooks to Sri Lanka have surfaced in the past two decades, not even recent examples have gathered together, categorised and uniformly described the country’s green destinations for the benefit of travellers.”

LOCALternative Sri Lanka does indeed look at green destinations ... and much more. On the front of the full-colour foldout page (23” x 55”) – a simple but attractive schematic harking back to the early days of cartography – 170 numbered icons spotlight places where nature and animals come first and people and organisations try to act responsibly. These points of interest – covering pristine and manmade natural areas, unorthodox accommodations, vaunted cultural and religious centres and proactive community-based projects – are described on the back of the map.

“The site descriptions show considerable research, are sensibly standardised, and are well-written,” continues the review. “A concise site description is followed by a note on the site’s responsible actions. There are also location directions ... and contact information.”

Reasonably priced at Rs.450 (about US\$4), the map draws much-needed attention to Sri Lanka’s small- and medium-sized tourism enterprises, many of them community-based and nature-friendly.

A Map for a New Kind of Tourism

LOCALternative Sri Lanka was more than six months in development, involving background research, careful on-site inquiry and steady collaborative work between the conceiver/writer, a local design studio (Impact Solutions) and tourism advisors from Sewalanka Foundation, whose generous financial support made this first edition of the map possible.

“There is a new kind of tourism sweeping the world today, one increasingly demanded by travellers with a conscience,” says Ethan Gelber, conceiver and author of the map. “These conscientious travellers acknowledge that, as I have written on the back of the map, the decisions they make affect the people and the land around them. They hope to have a positive impact on the nature, animals and communities they visit. They do this by searching out ways to support conservation, preservation and community development. **LOCAL**ternative Sri Lanka is a tool for these kinds of travellers, the kind I believe we all want to be and that we all want to meet. The kind that cares.”

A spokesperson from Sewalanka Foundation said that the organisation has recognised the value of sustainable, community-based tourism as a means of helping marginalised Sri Lankan communities increase their income.

“Community-based tourism activities that we are involved in, such as the map, emphasise the use of environmental resources and the conservation of natural heritage. They respect the cultural heritage of host communities and contribute to intercultural understanding and tolerance,” she said.

“Sewalanka has supported the development of **LOCAL**ternative Sri Lanka because we believe the product will generate benefits for Sri Lankan communities, the environment and for tourists.”

The map relies on growing evidence that tourism today and tomorrow is about active and responsible engagement. People do not want to hide behind walls; they want to meet the locals in whose midst they are travelling. They also want to know that the tall trees they visit today will still be there (and much taller) tomorrow and that the bird and animal species they shelter won't have been threatened to the point of extinction by human neglect.

It is Gelber's intention to seek out and work with partners who share this ethic and to expand the scope of the LOCALternative brand in other countries interested in developing a responsible tourism industry that deserves greater visibility and patronage.

More Information

In keeping with the spirit of responsible tourism, the map of Sri Lanka is printed on a combination of recycled and chlorine-free pulp paper from a mill that respects environmental norms. In addition, Sewalanka Foundation has agreed to use any profit from the sale of the map to support responsible tourism projects in Sri Lanka. For more about the map, visit www.localalternative.com.

Ethan Gelber is an American-born professional travel writer, editor and consultant. He lived in Colombo from September 2004 to September 2005, working as a freelance travel writer for, among others, Lonely Planet and *travelsrilanka* magazine. His initial research into Sri Lanka's alternative tourism industry stemmed from his desire to pen a series of articles about it. For more information, consult www.ethangelber.com.

Sewalanka Foundation's mission is to enhance the capacity of rural communities to democratically identify and address their own development needs and to provide services that contribute to economically viable, socially just and ecologically sustainable development of Sri Lanka. Sewalanka Foundation believes that sustainable tourism offers many opportunities to revive local livelihoods and support long-term, sustainable community development. See www.sewalanka.org.

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