

LOT Polish Airlines to extend season until May 2022 as Sri Lanka exceeds expectations as a travel destination



Ambassador Semasinghe and LOT CCO Michal Fijol in Warsaw

During a meeting between Ambassador Dhammika Kumari Semasinghe and Mr. Michal Fijol, Chief Commercial Officer (CCO) and Board Member, LOT Polish confirmed plans to extend the season's operations from March to May 2022, citing Sri Lanka's tremendous success as a favoured winter destination by Polish travellers.

CCO Fijol described the airline's Colombo experience as: *"Sri Lanka was an excellent destination, exceeding all our expectations."* He further said that while direct flights between Warsaw and Colombo had resumed thrice weekly since 7 December 2021, the demand for bookings soared in February 2022. With LOT flights getting overbooked, the airline had to increase the frequency to four flights a week in the past month.

At the policy level, Mr. Fijol attributed the Sri Lanka success story to the positive Polish Government travel advisory on Sri Lanka, and the Sri Lanka Government maintaining traveller - friendly and consistent entry protocols, including the island's successful vaccination drive in the COVID-19 pandemic context.

Ambassador Semasinghe highlighted that Poland retained its place among Sri Lanka's top ten tourist source countries in January and February 2022, with a combined total of 7,334 arrivals in the two months. Commenting on the Embassy's destination

promotional activities, the envoy said that sustained efforts since July 2021 led to much needed confidence building early on, among the key Polish tour operators about the island's unique draw. These, coupled with public diplomacy activities increased awareness of the country, its unique culture and society among a significant portion of the Polish public. Therefore, it was heartening to note the dividends that were now accruing from those efforts to LOT Polish, to Sri Lanka tourism, to the visitors and Polish tour operators.



The Embassy's "SO Sri Lanka" stall at the International Charity Bazaar- Warsaw – November 2021

Welcoming the airline's considered plans to extend its operations until end May 2022, the Envoy said that the Sri Lanka Embassy will continue to promote the country as an year -round travel hotspot, not only because of the comfortable weather, but also because of the country's traditional festivals and cultural events that were in store during most of the year. The Sinhala and Tamil New Year "Avurudu" in April, would be followed by "Wesak", the festival of lights and lanterns in May – all unique treats for the curious visitor at that time of the year.

Towards this end, the Embassy, in close partnership with Sri Lanka Tourism, enlisted TVN Discovery/National Geographic Traveler Poland, with a 38 million Polish

viewership, to film a Sri Lanka destination promotional series for Spring/Summer 2022, and filming was already underway. Citing the removal of the pre-departure COVID-19 PCR/Rapid Antigen tests for fully vaccinated travellers effective March 2022, Ambassador Semasinghe expressed optimism about Sri Lanka sustaining its unique year-round attraction to travellers, not only in Poland, but across Europe as well.



Deputy Editor Michał Cessanis of NatGeo-Poland filming in Sri Lanka

Embassy of Sri Lanka in Warsaw

7 March 2022