

Sri Lanka logs all-time-high 2.36 million annual tourist arrivals in 2025; average tourist spending decreases

- A Monitor Desk Report

Date: 15 January, 2026



Dhaka: The Sri Lankan tourism industry logged over 2.36 million tourist arrivals in 2025, the highest-ever annual visitor count in history for the country, according to the Ministry of Tourism in Sri Lanka.

The ministry said new figures have crossed the long-standing record set in 2018 by 1.23%. Moreover, it represents a strong 15.1% year-on-year growth.

December recorded the strongest monthly performance in history with 258,928 arrivals, exceeding December 2018 record levels by 2.27%, or 5,759 visitors. In comparison to December 2024, it was a 4.2% rise.

Initially, the Sri Lankan Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA) had set a 3 million tourist arrivals target for 2025. Later, in August, it revised the target down to 2.4 million.

However, the delays in launching the nation branding campaign, the yet-to-be-implemented free-visa scheme for 47 countries, global travel advisories, and the impacts of Cyclone Ditwah in November 2025 contributed to the country falling short, even of the revised target.

Despite a 15.1% year-on-year increase in tourist arrivals, tourism earnings for 2025 have been estimated to cross just over USD 3.2 billion, a moderate rise over the USD 3.17 billion recorded in 2024. This is particularly because average tourist spending has shrunk over the years.

In November 2025, the SLTDA revised estimated per-day tourist spending to USD 148, reflecting an updated assessment of August 2025. Previously, it was USD 171, based on a 2018 survey.

The Sri Lankan tourism industry suffered from a prolonged tourism drought in the last couple of years. The Easter Sunday attacks in 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, an unprecedented economic crisis in 2022, and global travel advisories had the most impact. The record figures of 2025 indicate the industry is progressing through a strong recovery.

For 2026, the Sri Lankan government is expecting to welcome at least 3 million tourists to the country, an ambitious 27% year-on-year increase. The country wants more visitors from the Americas and the Middle East.

Meanwhile, the SLTDA is targeting around USD 500 million in tourism-sector investments this year. The Ministry of Tourism assured the free-visa scheme would be launched before March and pledged to roll out the long-delayed nation branding initiative.

Under a five-year plan to 2030, Sri Lanka aims to attract more than 5 million visitors and generate around USD 8 billion in annual tourism revenue.

V