

Sri Lanka hopes for tourism revival with 1.5m arrivals in 2023

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Dhaka: Sri Lanka hopes to double tourist arrivals to 1.5 million in 2023 and bring in USD 5 billion in vital foreign exchange, the tourism minister said on December 1, as the island nation seeks ways to tackle its worst financial crisis in seven decades.

The country of 22 million people, famed for its beaches, ancient temples and aromatic tea, has been struggling for months to pay for essential imports of fuel, food and medicine because of a lack of foreign exchange.

"Tourism can play a major role in Sri Lanka's recovery and this is what we are aiming for next year," said Tourism Minister Harin Fernando.

Sri Lanka would likely end 2022 with 750,000 tourist arrivals and about USD 2 billion in earnings, Fernando said, adding his ministry would be targeting high end tourists and introducing new products in 2023.

Months of protests, political turmoil, power cuts and fuel queues dampened tourism in Sri Lanka just as it was recovering from the Covid-19 pandemic in mid-2022.

An estimated USD 4 billion loss in tourism revenue over the past two years also contributed to tipping Sri Lanka into the financial crisis, according to former ministers.

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