



“Sri Lanka, the brand”

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Executive Summary

This research is done in order to find a solution in which way the Sri Lanka Tourist Board can stimulate Dutch leisure tourists to visit Sri Lanka, despite the current issues the country encountered. The Sri Lanka Tourist Board is a decision-making organization who is responsible for the tourism industry in Sri Lanka.

The goal of this research is to eventually create a marketing communication plan, after having determined what the image is of Sri Lanka amongst the Dutch population.

The research provides a situation-analysis in which both internal and external factors of Sri Lanka as a tourist destination will be treated. Furthermore, recommendations are made. The questions that will be answered are:

- What is the background of Sri Lanka?
- What are the current issues and what are their consequences?
- What are the advantages of Sri Lanka as a tourist destination?
- What is the current image of Sri Lanka?
- What is the desired image of Sri Lanka?
- What is the current marketing communication?
- What are the external factors that can affect the Sri Lankan tourism industry?
- What actions can be taken to increase the number of Dutch tourists, based on the STOP-SIT-model (Smith, 2000, p.44)?

During the research it became clear that Sri Lanka has a lot to offer to the tourist: nice weather, beautiful nature, rich culture, friendly people etcetera.

However, the situation with the Tamils and the effects of the tsunami caused a decrease in the number of tourists. Moreover, after several campaigns, there is no clear message to the public compared to its competitors e.g. Singapore or Thailand. Furthermore, the Tourist Board stated that there is no extensive media campaign, because of the risk that news bulletins about the Tamils will waste the effects of the campaign.

There are opportunities for Sri Lanka on the Dutch market; the increase of the aging Dutch population in the years to come and the growing economy. As a consequence people will take long vacations outside of Europe. Another important aspect is the upcoming interest for eco-tourism. Although the competing countries of Sri Lanka also relate to eco-tourism, they have not yet integrated this in their brand-positioning. Because Sri Lanka is not spoiled yet by the effects of mass-tourism and, due to its bio-diverse nature, sustainable and eco-tourism can be a strong value in their brand positioning.

Furthermore, a survey was held among 100 Dutch persons, who answered questions about Sri Lanka and what they think it has to offer. A majority of the people associated Sri Lanka with: nice weather, nature, friendly people, but also with the tsunami and the Tamils.

Another finding is that the situation with the Tamils has not been a very important obstacle of why people not have been to Sri Lanka yet. But later on in the survey, people do think that it is not very safe in Sri Lanka and no one thinks it is 100% safe there.

After the analyses, the new communication plan is based on three key elements: *eco-tourism, wellness & pure experiences* and *nature & paradise*.

A description of the person to whom the message is aimed at is: working, has an above-average income, is conscious of his/her environment, who takes a long annual vacation and an empty nester that enjoys life. Further segmentation is based on social-demographic aspects.

The brand-positioning of Sri Lanka will be constant and not depending on news bulletins about the Tamil-situation. The new communication plan uses integrated tools and emphasizes the positive aspects that Sri Lanka has to offer. Hopefully this will improve the image that people have of Sri Lanka.

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