Cinnamon Hotels and Resorts together with SriLankan Airlines and the Professional Travel Bloggers Association (PTBA) will be organising Asia's first-ever Travel Bloggers Conference (TBC) from 14 to 18 November, to promote Sri Lanka to the forefront of tourist destinations among future holiday makers.

Over 50 bloggers from around the world will be hosted by Cinnamon Hotels and Resorts on a four day Pre-Conference tour in Sri Lanka. The final day conference will be held on 18 November at Cinnamon Lakeside Colombo which will be open to a larger number of bloggers who may wish to learn the technical aspects of this craft.

It will also feature professionals from the travel and hospitality industry, including both local and foreign representatives of tourist boards, travel agents and other stakeholders will have an opportunity to interact with these leading bloggers as well as participate in the panel discussions and keynote addresses.

According to the PTBA, what makes this conference stand out from the rest is the pre-conference tour and learning opportunities for the bloggers in addition to just a one day conference as seen normally.

For the 50 bloggers chosen to take part in the conference, the itinerary includes stays at Cinnamon Lodge Habarana, which is at the epicentre of the cultural triangle and will give the bloggers the opportunity to experience the rich heritage and history of Sri Lanka, Cinnamon Citadel Kandy which will encompass them with the culture and also Cinnamon Bey Beruwala which will give them the opportunity to experience pristine beaches in the south coast.

The keynote speakers will represent leading social media sites such as Google, Trip Advisor and Facebook. They will add value to the learning experience of all those participating in the final day conference.

The future of tourism marketing

In an era where referral marketing plays a critical role in selecting destinations, products and services in the leisure industry, authentic information provided by travel bloggers are proving to be increasingly more valuable than traditional forms of advertising.

Speaking at an event held at Cinnamon Lakeside on Monday, PTBA Immediate Past President Michael Hodson said: "The PTBA is excited and honoured at the opportunity to work with Cinnamon Hotels And Resorts and Sri Lankan Airlines to make this conference happen this year."

"Travel blogging has come a long way in a very short period of time and having a chance to get over 50 top travel bloggers together to talk about trends, techniques, and methods to improve our craft and our professionalism is vital in the process of growing or profession. Additionally, today travel bloggers play an important role in the decision making process for individuals making travel decisions and having the opportunity for bloggers to be able to network with the many sponsors of this event and help educate those in the travel industry for the value of working with professional travel bloggers, is an opportunity that we are all looking forward to," he added.

John Keells Holdings Deputy Chairman and President of the Leisure Group Ajith Gunewardene also commented on their future plans for this project which will establish Sri Lanka as a paragon for the tourism industry in the continent.

"We expect this event to be held annually in different parts of Asia, which will help promote Asian tourism among potential travellers. Our association with the PTBA has enabled us to make this event a unique and relevant one for all stakeholders."

While expressing his delight in being a partner of Sri Lanka's first International Travel Bloggers Conference, SriLankan Airlines Chairman Nishantha Wickramasinghe also reflected on this point by saying: "Blogging is a social media platform that has evolved greatly over recent years, particularly where the travel industry is concerned and we look forward to reaping the benefits of exposure and publicity that the country and its national carrier will receive internationally through this valuable medium."

Why Sri Lanka?

Professional Travel Bloggers Association President Elect Laurence Noah commented on the wide interest shown towards this conference among the association members upon its announcement.

"Of about 340 members of the PTBA, 30-40% have already applied," he said while Michael Hodson also spoke of what makes Sri Lanka the ideal travel destination and the ideal location for an event of this nature. "There is such variety geographically in a limited area. There are very few places in the world that you can do as much as you can do in one country as you can in Sri Lanka. You can have beach activities in one day and then go inland, I hiked Adams peak one year. It had one of the top five sunrises I have ever seen in my lifetime," he added. TBC Asia registrations are now open at www.tbcasia.com.