

Introduction

The following document provides a synthesis of the most recent January, 2025 international visitor arrivals data sourced from the Department of Immigration & Emigration. The data is current as of 31st January 2025, and subject to change. The data provides an overview of month-on-month and annual changes in visitor arrivals to Sri Lanka from international source markets. The data is meant to provide an overview of how travel and tourism is performing to Sri Lanka.

This report is developed by the Research & International Relations Division at Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA). Questions, comments and feedback are welcome and will support the future amendment and enhancement of the report to ensure it meets the data and insights needs of Sri Lanka's Government and industry stakeholders.



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Summary

Sri Lanka commenced 2025 with a remarkable influx of 252,761 tourists in January, marking the highest number of arrivals ever recorded for this month. This figure represents a 21.4% increase compared to January 2024 and a 5.8% rise over January 2018, which was previously considered the peak year for the nation's tourism industry. Enhanced air connectivity, the revival of cruise tourism, and strengthened bilateral relations could be some of the pivotal factors contributing to this growth momentum.

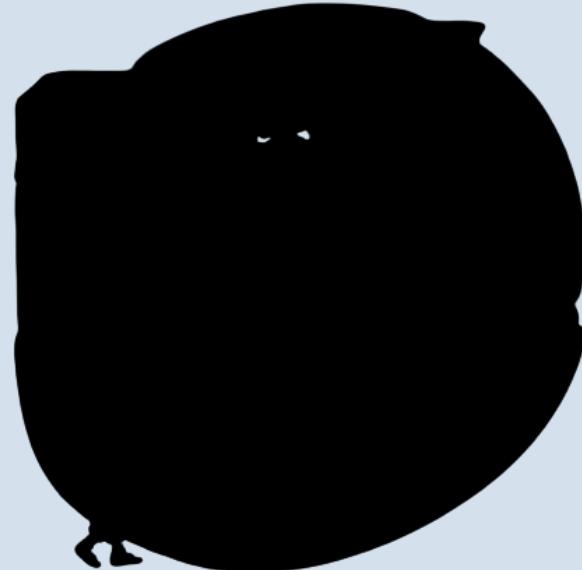
The significant rise in tourist arrivals from source markets like India, Russia, the UK, China, and Germany has been pivotal in revitalizing Sri Lanka's tourism sector.

According to UNWTO, in 2024, international tourism rebounded significantly, with approximately 1.4 billion tourists traveling globally, marking an 11% increase from 2023 and nearly reaching pre-pandemic levels.

This resurgence was fueled by strong post-pandemic demand, robust performance from major source markets, and the ongoing recovery of destinations in Asia and the Pacific. Enhanced air connectivity and improved visa facilitation also supported international travel. Looking ahead, international tourist arrivals are projected to grow by 3% to 5% in 2025 compared to 2024, though economic and geopolitical challenges continue to pose significant risks (UNWTO, 2025).

Table 1. Monthly tourist arrivals, January 2025

Month	2024	2025	% Change 2025/24
January	208,253	252,761	21.4
February	218,350		
March	209,181		
April	148,867		
May	112,128		
June	113,470		
July	187,810		
August	164,609		
September	122,140		
October	135,907		
November	184,158		
December	248,592		
TOTAL	2,053,465	252,761	



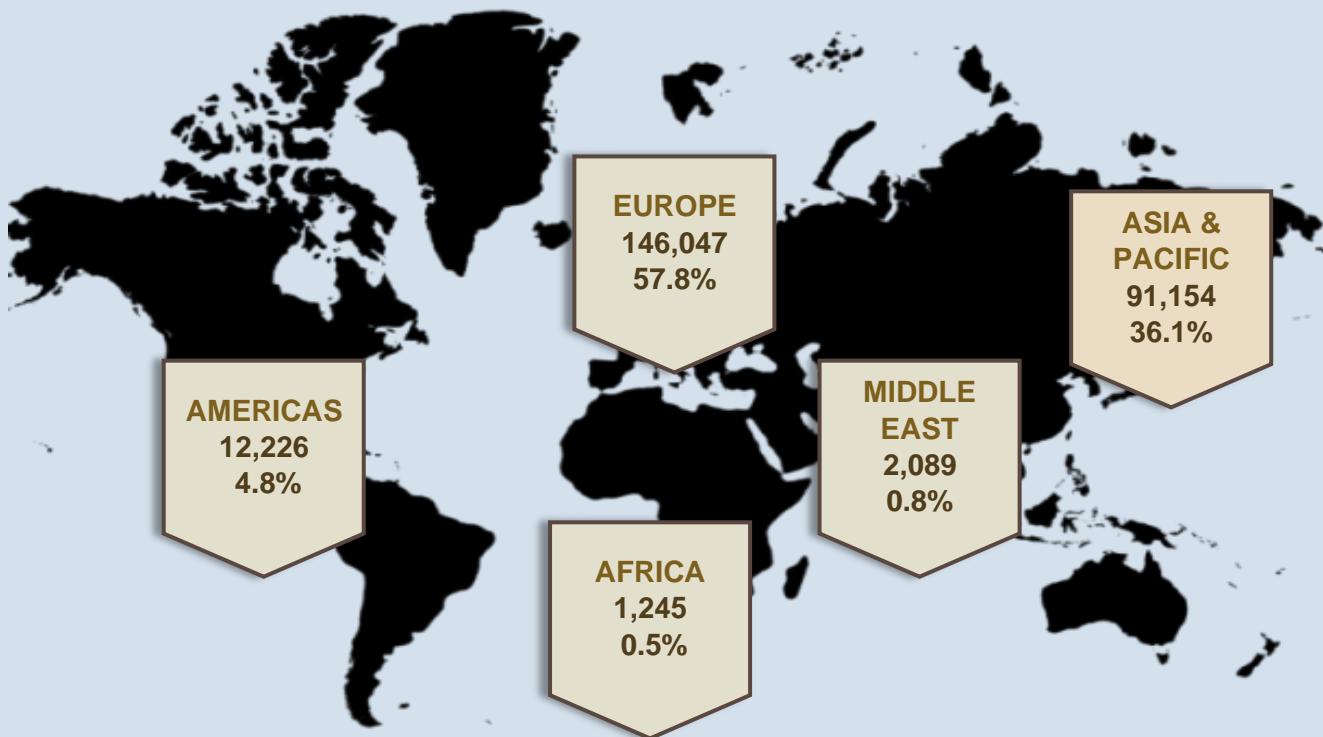
Tourist Arrivals | January 2025

252,761

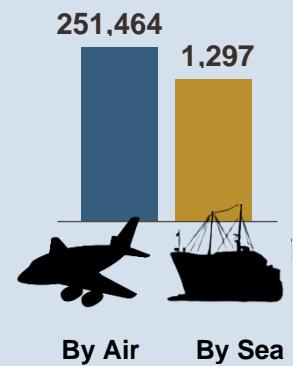
Tourist arrivals by region and percentage share

January 2025

Map 1. Tourist arrivals by region and percentage share

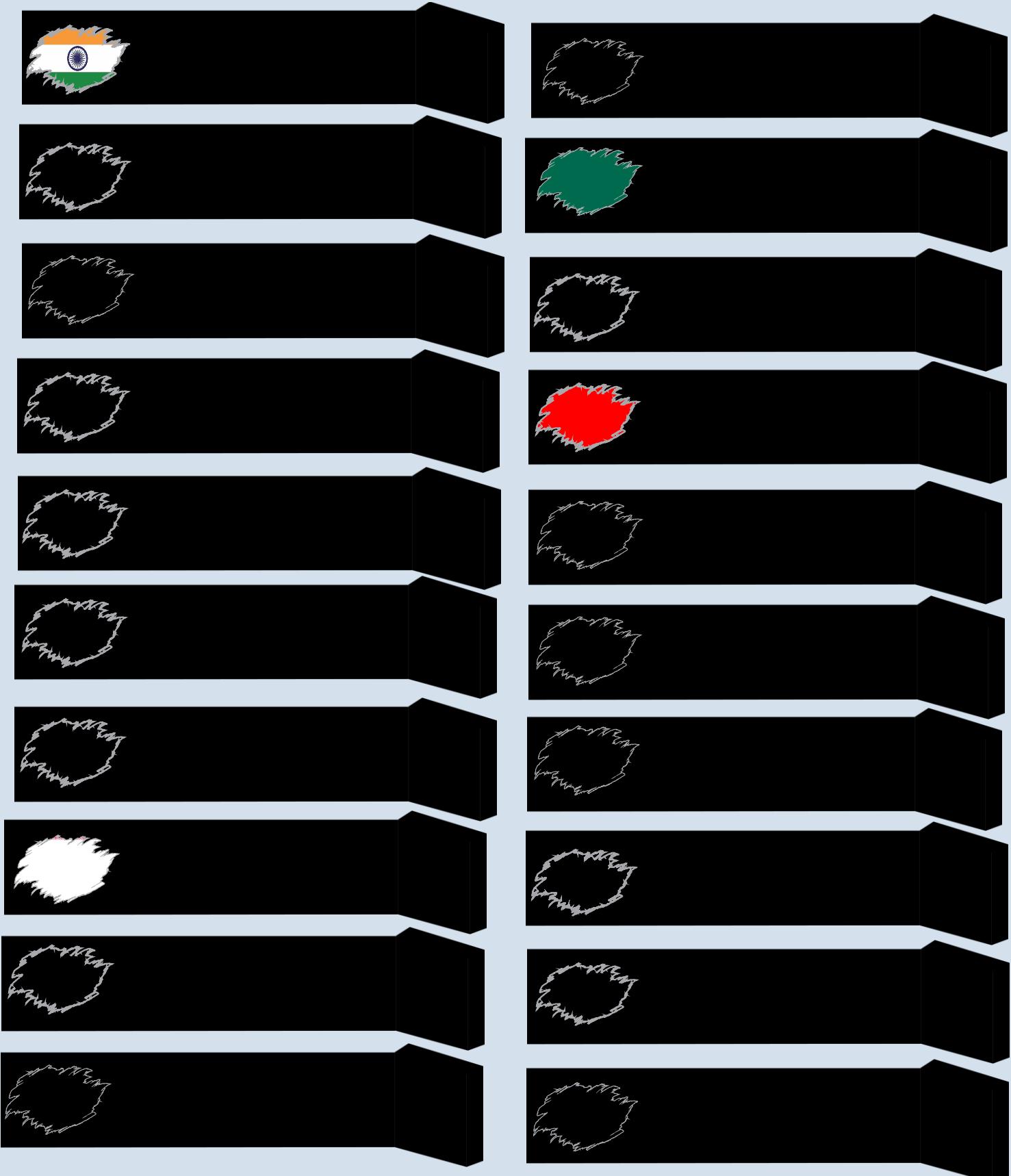


Europe has solidified its position as the leading contributor to Sri Lanka's tourism sector accounting for 57.8% of total arrivals in 2025. This underscores the region's significant influence on the country's tourism dynamics. Following Europe, the Asia and Pacific region contributed 36.1% of tourist arrivals in 2025. This highlights the region's growing importance in Sri Lanka's tourism landscape. The Americas accounted for 4.8% of all foreign visitors to Sri Lanka in 2025, reflecting a modest yet notable contribution to the country's tourism sector. The Middle East and Africa regions have smaller shares in Sri Lanka's tourism market, with the Middle East contributing 0.8% and Africa 0.5% of total arrivals. Key markets driving this growth include India, Russia, the UK, Germany, and China. The diversity of Sri Lanka's tourism landscape is further enriched by contributions from various regions, each adding unique value to the country's tourism sector.



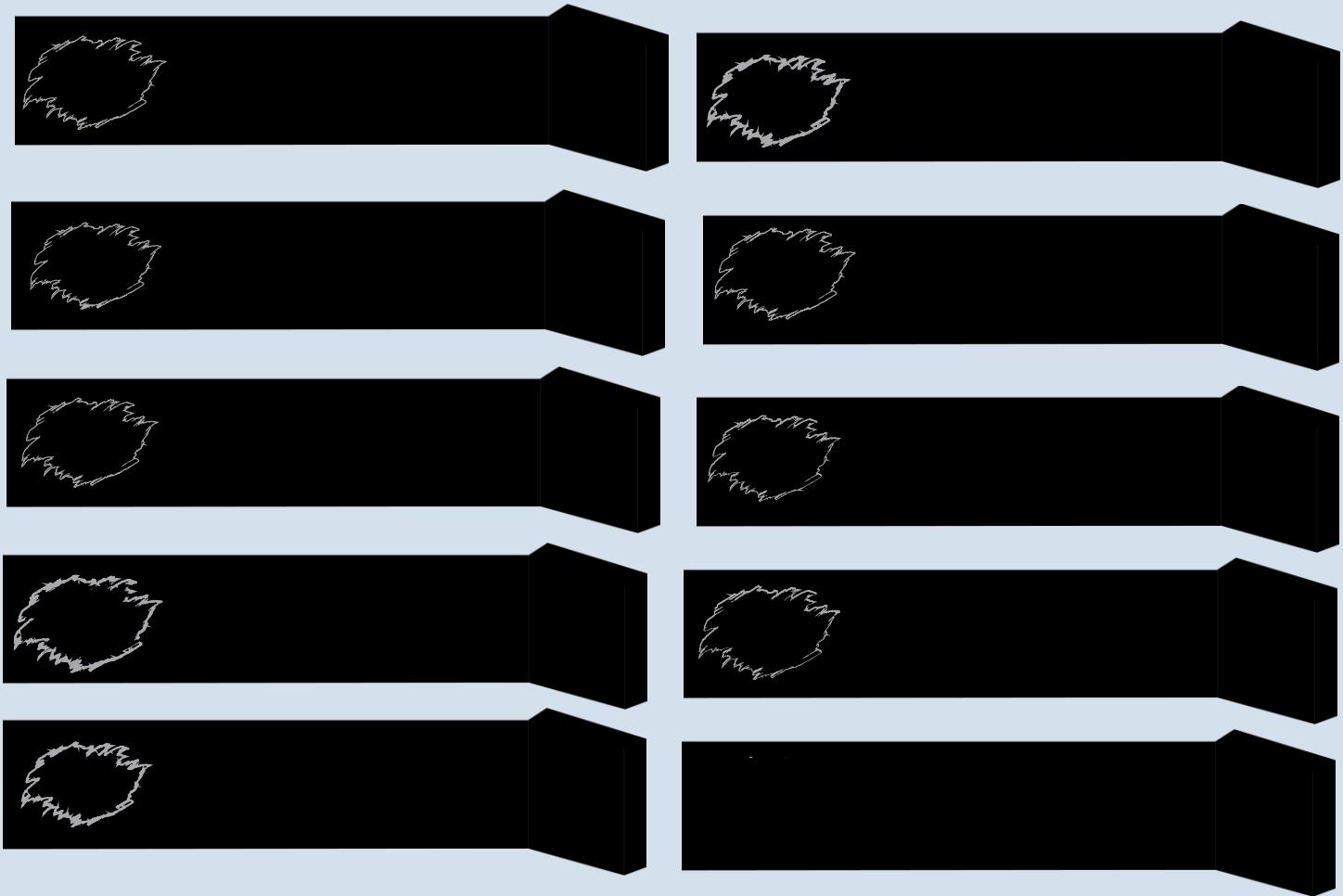
Top primary markets and top potential markets

Top primary markets, January 2025



Note: The top primary markets for Sri Lanka have been identified using visitor arrivals.. The intention is to track these source markets on a go-forward basis to understand future performance of Sri Lanka's tourism economy, including during the projected international tourism recovery period, 2022-2025.

Top potential markets, January 2025



Note: The top potential markets for Sri Lanka have been identified using visitor arrivals data. The intention is to track these source markets on a go-forward basis to understand future performance of Sri Lanka's tourism economy, including during the projected international tourism recovery period, 2022-2025.



Top ten source markets

January 2025

In January 2025, India led as the primary source of tourists to Sri Lanka, making up 17% of all arrivals. The Russian Federation followed with 14%, while the United Kingdom and Germany accounted for 9% and 7% respectively. The surge in visitors from countries like the Netherlands and Australia is particularly noteworthy. The growth from countries such as the Netherlands suggests a broadening of Sri Lanka's appeal, attracting tourists from a wider array of regions. The increase from Australia may be largely attributed to the diaspora visiting friends and relatives, reflecting evolving travel trends.

Chart 1. Top ten source markets to Sri Lanka, January 2025

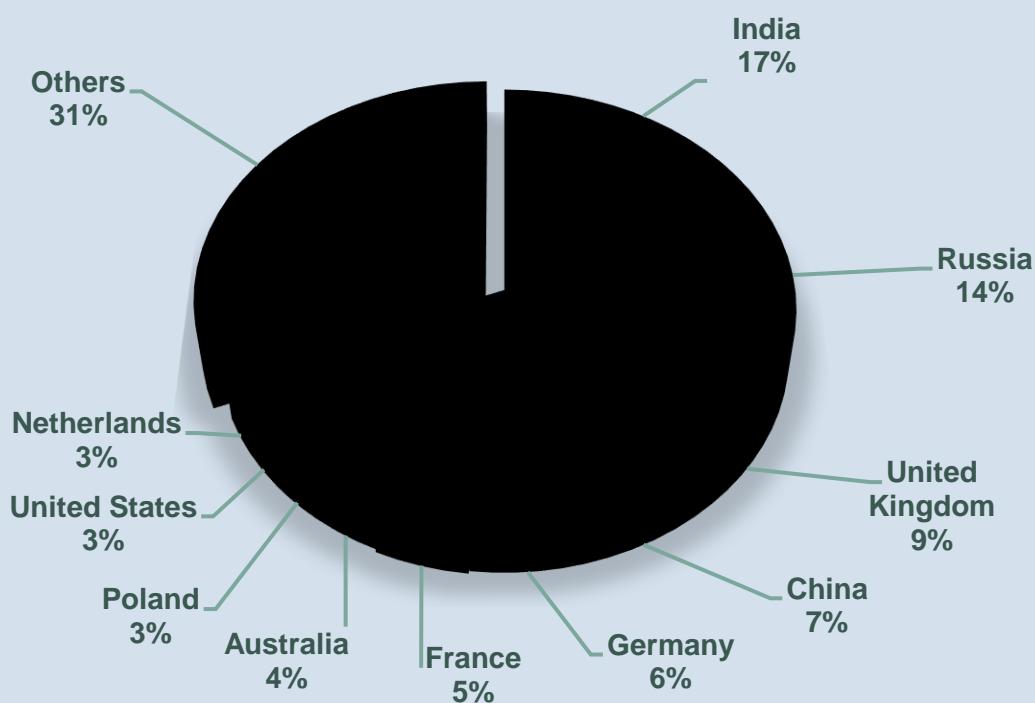


Table 2. Top ten source markets to Sri Lanka, January

Rank	Country of Residence	Tourist Arrivals (January 2025)			Tourist Arrivals (January 2024)
		By Air	By Sea	Total	
1	India	43,375	0	43,375	34,399
2	Russian Federation	34,094	2	34,096	31,159
3	United Kingdom	21,606	124	21,730	16,665
4	China	16,700	9	16,709	12,528
5	Germany	14,972	78	15,050	13,593
6	France	12,616	3	12,619	9,919
7	Australia	9,465	98	9,563	6,645
8	Poland	7,582	3	7,585	7,800
9	United States	6,423	644	7,067	5,712
10	Netherlands	6,443	41	6,484	4,531



Tourist arrivals by purpose of visit

January 2025

An analysis of tourist motivations for visiting Sri Lanka reveals several key factors. Leisure and vacations are the primary reasons, accounting for 52.7% of arrivals, which underscores Sri Lanka's status as a premier destination for recreation. Additionally, 6.2% of visitors travel to reconnect with friends and family, highlighting the country's appeal for personal and social engagements.

While business travel accounts for a small portion of tourism in Sri Lanka at 1.6%, the Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE) sector represents 5.6% of arrivals, suggesting Sri Lanka is becoming a popular location for corporate events. Additionally, niche tourism is emerging, with 0.72% of visitors interested in Ayurvedic or wellness experiences and 0.18% participating in sports activities. These statistics highlight Sri Lanka's diverse tourism options and its capacity to develop in emerging markets like wellness tourism, MICE, and specialized activities, which could broaden its range of visitors.

Chart 2: Purpose of visit

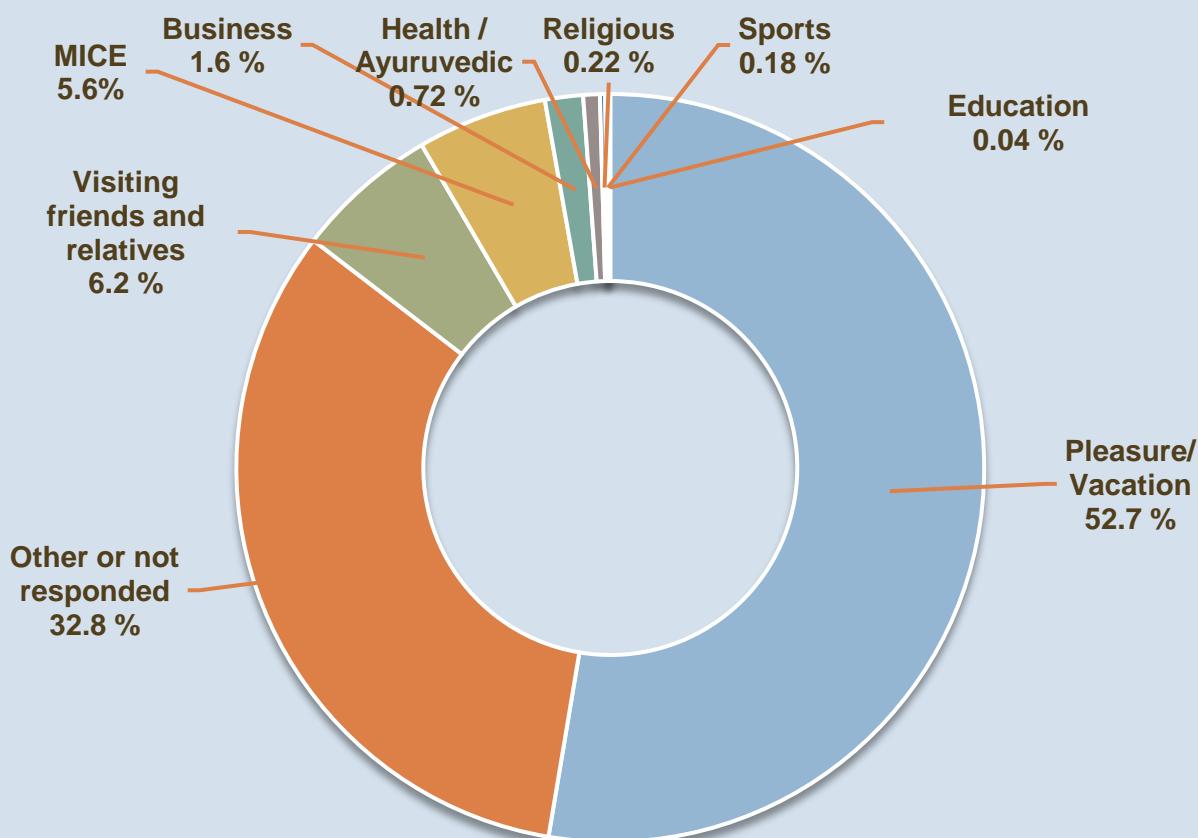
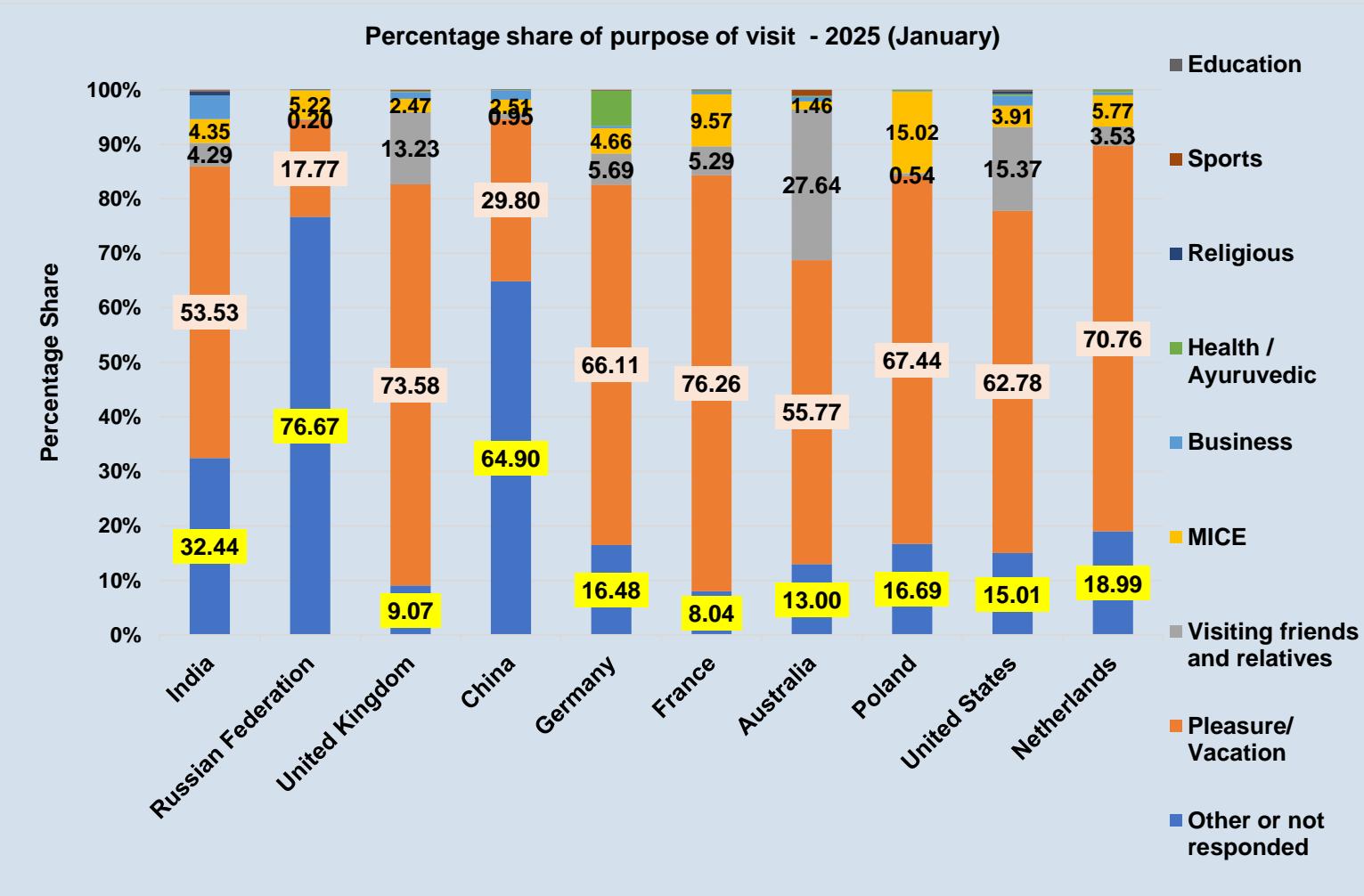


Chart 3: Purpose of visit vs main source markets



Tourist motivations for visiting Sri Lanka from key markets indicate that leisure is the primary driver. For example, a significant percentage of tourists from France (76.2%), the UK (73.5%), Germany (66.1%), the Netherlands (70.7%), and India (53.5%) visit Sri Lanka for leisure or vacation. Visiting friends and relatives (VFR) is a notable motivation for tourists from the UK (13.2%), Australia (27.6%), and the US (15.3%). There is also a growing interest in MICE tourism, with 15.02% of Polish visitors traveling for this purpose, and 4.35% of Indian tourists. Additionally, some German tourists (6.47%) are motivated by health and Ayurvedic tourism.

A Glimpse into tourists visiting Sri Lanka: trends and highlights

Collecting feedback from departing foreign tourists is essential for understanding visitor experiences and enhancing tourism services. The Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA) conducts annual surveys targeting international tourists departing from the country. These surveys aim to build detailed profiles of departing tourists, enrich tourism statistics with both qualitative and quantitative data, identify factors influencing tourist arrivals, and provide information for strategic decision-making by public and private sectors.

To facilitate the collection of this valuable feedback, QR codes have been implemented at key points such as Bandaranaike International Airport (BIA) and Jaffna Airport. By scanning these codes, departing tourists can easily access online surveys and provide their insights. This method streamlines the feedback process, making it more convenient for travelers to share their experiences. The data collected through these QR code-enabled surveys is instrumental in informing decisions related to tourism planning, promotion, and marketing, ultimately contributing to the sustainable development of Sri Lanka's tourism industry.

Sri Lanka's tourism sector has observed distinct patterns in visitor demographics, travel preferences, and favoured destinations. Understanding these trends is crucial for stakeholders aiming to enhance the country's appeal to international tourists.

Age and Gender Demographics

A significant portion of tourists visiting Sri Lanka fall within the 24-35 followed by 35- 44 age group. This youthful demographic indicates Sri Lanka's appeal to younger travelers seeking diverse experiences. As per the findings of survey conducted by Travo Trip, Millennials and Gen Z are leading the charge, making up 84% of respondents and driving trends with their appetite for exploration, community, and meaningful experiences. This global trend resonates with the findings of this survey. Contrary to the global trend where female travelers often outnumber male's majority of travelers worldwide are female (Trova trip, 2025), Sri Lanka sees a higher number of male tourists. This deviation suggests unique factors influencing male travel to the country, warranting further research to tailor marketing strategies effectively.

Travel Companions and Duration

Family travel is the most prevalent mode of visitation to Sri Lanka, with individual travel following closely. The surge in family travel could be likely due to the influx of Indian, British and German tourists travelling with their families. This is in line with the global trends, in Sri Lanka also. Solo travel is booming, as more individuals embrace the freedom to explore on their own terms. The typical stay for tourists ranges from one to two weeks, allowing ample time to explore the nation's rich cultural heritage, natural beauty, and historical sites. As per the study conducted by the TrovaTrip travelers are prioritizing trips that last 7–10 days, balancing immersion with convenience. 2025 travel insights show that experiences are king, with food and beverage tours, beach relaxation, cultural exploration, and outdoor adventures topping wish lists.

Information Sources Influencing Travel Decisions

Tourists primarily gather information about Sri Lanka through friends and relatives, online platforms, and digital advertising. The influence of personal networks underscores the importance of positive word-of-mouth, while the reliance on online sources highlights the need for a robust digital presence to attract potential visitors.

Travel Arrangements and Purpose

A majority of tourists prefer non-package tours, opting for personalized travel experiences. The primary motivation for visiting Sri Lanka is holiday or leisure, indicating the country's strong positioning as a destination for relaxation and recreation.

Preferred Accommodation Types

Hotels, guest houses, rest houses, and inns are the most favoured accommodation options among tourists. This preference suggests a demand for a range of lodging types, from luxury hotels to more budget-friendly guesthouses, catering to diverse traveler needs.

Popular Activities

Tourists engage in various activities, with a keen interest in culture and history, wildlife and nature, and beach and coastal experiences. This trend reflects Sri Lanka's diverse offerings, from ancient temples and historical sites to national parks and pristine beaches.

Top Tourist Destinations

The five most popular destinations among tourists are Ella, Galle, Sigiriya Rock Fortress, Nuwara Eliya and Temple of the Tooth, Kandy. These destinations highlight the country's rich cultural heritage, natural beauty, and historical significance, making them must-visit spots for travelers.

While the above were the travel patterns for 2024 in Sri Lanka, it is vital to look forward to the future travel patterns that will shape the tourism industry in 2025. Understanding these tourism trends is essential for stakeholders aiming to enhance Sri Lanka's appeal and ensure sustainable growth in the sector.

Travel trends for 2025

Amadeus, a leading travel technology company and BBC has identified several key travel trends set to shape the industry in 2025:

New Heydays

Travelers are increasingly seeking experiences that evoke nostalgia, revisiting destinations from their youth or reliving significant life events such as honeymoons and gap years. This trend reflects a desire to reconnect with simpler times and cherished memories.

Personalized Flying

Advancements in artificial intelligence (AI), 5G connectivity, and virtual reality (VR) are enabling airlines to offer highly personalized and immersive in-flight experiences. Passengers can expect tailored content and services that cater to their individual preferences, enhancing the overall journey

Trailblazer Hotels

Hotels are evolving into destinations themselves, offering unique identities and immersive experiences that reflect their surroundings. Travelers are drawn to properties that provide a strong sense of place, often planning their trips around these distinctive accommodations.

Asia Uplift

Asia is experiencing a resurgence in travel, with countries implementing visa-free programs and other initiatives to attract visitors.

Connections In Real Life (IRL)

As digital fatigue sets in, travelers are seeking genuine, face-to-face interactions during their journeys. This trend includes solo travelers looking to make new friends and individuals interested in forming real-world connections, moving away from online interactions. These trends highlight a shift towards personalized, meaningful, and immersive travel experiences, reflecting travelers' desires to connect deeply with destinations and people.

Off the Beaten track Destinations

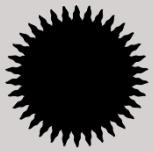
This movement towards off-the-beaten-track destinations is gaining momentum as travelers look to avoid overcrowded tourist hotspots. Forbes reports a rising demand for journeys that offer respite from overcrowding, allowing for more authentic and intimate experience (Hall, 2025).

References

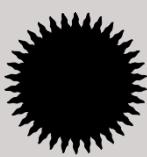
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International tourist arrivals by country of residence

	January 2025			Tourist Arrivals January 2024	% Change January (25/24)		
	Tourist Arrivals						
	By Air	By Sea	Total				
AMERICAS	11,404	822	12,226	10,566	15.7		
North America	10,791	816	11,607	9,934	16.8		
Canada	4,297	161	4,458	4,126	8.0		
Mexico	71	11	82	96	(14.6)		
United States	6,423	644	7,067	5,712	23.7		
Caribbean & Central America	68	01	69	85	(18.8)		
Costa Rica	08	01	09	20	(55.0)		
Jamaica	03	0	03	04	(25.0)		
Others	57	0	57	61	(6.6)		
South America	545	05	550	547	0.5		
Argentina	164	0	164	141	16.3		
Brazil	229	05	234	236	(0.8)		
Chile	45	0	45	56	(19.6)		
Colombia	45	0	45	54	(16.7)		
Others	62	0	62	60	3.3		
AFRICA	1,238	7	1,245	956	30.2		
North Africa	223	0	223	193	15.5		
Morocco	82	0	82	62	32.3		
Sudan	72	0	72	57	26.3		
Others	69	0	69	74	(6.8)		
Sub-Saharan Africa	1,015	7	1,022	763	33.9		
Kenya	42	0	42	42	-		
Mauritius	49	0	49	48	2.1		
Nigeria	14	0	14	01	-		
South Africa	358	07	365	332	9.9		
Others	552	0	552	340	62.4		



	January 2025			Tourist Arrivals January 2024	% Change January (25/24)		
	Tourist Arrivals						
	By Air	By Sea	Total				
ASIA & PACIFIC	91,024	130	91,154	68,903	32.3		
North East Asia	21,505	12	21,517	16,213	32.7		
China	16,700	09	16,709	12,528	33.4		
Japan	2,628	03	2,631	1,993	32.0		
South Korea	2,149	0	2,149	1,677	28.1		
Others	28	0	28	15	86.7		
South East Asia	4,918	15	4,933	3,214	53.5		
Cambodia	26	0	26	42	(38.1)		
Indonesia	280	0	280	224	25.0		
Malaysia	2,124	01	2,125	1,096	93.9		
Myanmar	97	0	97	106	(8.5)		
Philippines	422	02	424	262	61.8		
Singapore	1,037	11	1,048	804	30.3		
Thailand	624	01	625	505	23.8		
Vietnam	257	0	257	166	54.8		
Others	51	0	51	09	466.7		
Oceania	10,498	103	10,601	7,399	43.3		
Australia	9,465	98	9,563	6,645	43.9		
New Zealand	992	05	997	732	36.2		
Others	41	0	41	22	86.4		
South Asia	54,103	0	54,103	42,077	28.6		
Afghanistan	06	0	06	26	(76.9)		
Bangladesh	4,626	0	4,626	2,329	98.6		
Bhutan	92	0	92	135	(31.9)		
India	43,375	0	43,375	34,399	26.1		
Iran	886	0	886	688	28.8		
Maldives	2,999	0	2,999	2,919	2.7		
Nepal	689	0	689	625	10.2		
Pakistan	1,430	0	1,430	956	49.6		
EUROPE	145,711	336	146,047	125,625	16.3		
Northern Europe	30,164	140	30,304	23,929	26.6		
Denmark	2,820	02	2,822	2,542	11.0		
Finland	806	02	808	737	9.6		
Norway	1,663	02	1,665	1,226	35.8		
Sweden	2,233	02	2,235	1,921	16.3		
United Kingdom	21,606	124	21,730	16,665	30.4		
Others	1,036	08	1,044	838	24.6		



	January 2025			Tourist Arrivals January 2024	% Change January (25/24)		
	Tourist Arrivals						
	By Air	By Sea	Total				
Western Europe	41,621	170	41,791	34,774	20.2		
Austria	2,478	14	2,492	2,385	4.5		
Belgium	1,727	12	1,739	1,313	32.4		
France	12,616	03	12,619	9,919	27.2		
Germany	14,972	78	15,050	13,593	10.7		
Netherlands	6,443	41	6,484	4,531	43.1		
Switzerland	3,300	22	3,322	2,951	12.6		
Others	85	0	85	82	3.7		
Central/Eastern Europe	59,834	13	59,847	58,031	3.1		
Belarus	2,050	0	2,050	2,342	(12.5)		
Czech Republic	2,754	0	2,754	3,484	(21.0)		
Estonia	915	0	915	910	0.5		
Hungary	1,385	03	1,388	1,544	(10.1)		
Kazakhstan	3,015	0	3,015	3,350	(10.0)		
Lithuania	1,639	0	1,639	1,015	61.5		
Poland	7,582	03	7,585	7,800	(2.8)		
Romania	888	0	888	853	4.1		
Russia	34,094	02	34,096	31,159	9.4		
Slovakia	1,117	0	1,117	990	12.8		
Ukraine	1,871	01	1,872	1,485	26.1		
Others	2,524	04	2,528	3,099	(18.4)		
Southern/Mediterranean Europe	14,092	13	14,105	8,891	58.6		
Greece	410	05	415	264	57.2		
Italy	4,776	02	4,778	3,485	37.1		
Portugal	789	0	789	487	62.0		
Spain	2,691	05	2,696	2,004	34.5		
Turkey	1,152	0	1,152	717	60.7		
Israel	2,730	0	2,730	773	253.2		
Others	1,544	01	1,545	1,161	33.1		
MIDDLE EAST	2,087	02	2,089	2,203	(5.2)		
Bahrain	159	0	159	122	30.3		
Egypt	357	0	357	396	(9.8)		
Iraq	131	0	131	54	142.6		
Jordan	178	0	178	180	(1.1)		
Kuwait	172	02	174	231	(24.7)		
Lebanon	145	0	145	155	(6.5)		
Oman	156	0	156	236	(33.9)		
Qatar	33	0	33	41	(19.5)		
Saudi Arabia	487	0	487	511	(4.7)		
United Arab Emirates	191	0	191	219	(12.8)		
Others	78	0	78	58	34.5		
TOTAL	251,464	1,297	252,761	208,253	21.4		

Main last departure airports and airlines to Sri Lanka, January 2025

January 2025

Air travel is crucial for Sri Lanka's tourism, acting as the main way international visitors reach the island. Around 29% of travelers have their last layovers in major transit hubs like Dubai, Doha, Chennai, and Abu Dhabi before arriving in Sri Lanka. Airlines such as Sri Lankan Airlines, Qatar Airways, Emirates and Indi Go are key, responsible for 51% of tourist arrivals.

The concentration of tourist arrivals via particular airlines and major transit hubs highlights the importance of strategic air connectivity and partnerships in shaping Sri Lanka's tourism landscape. Strengthening collaborations with leading airlines can improve accessibility and promote sustainable growth in the tourism sector.

Chart 4. Main last departure airports to Sri Lanka, January 2025

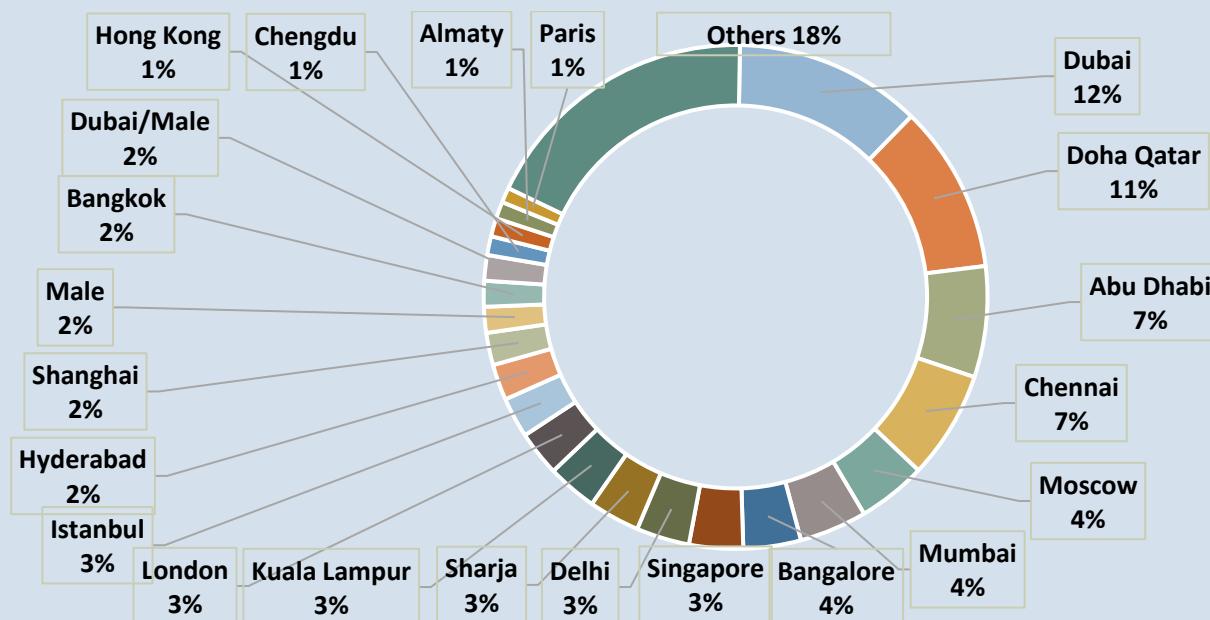
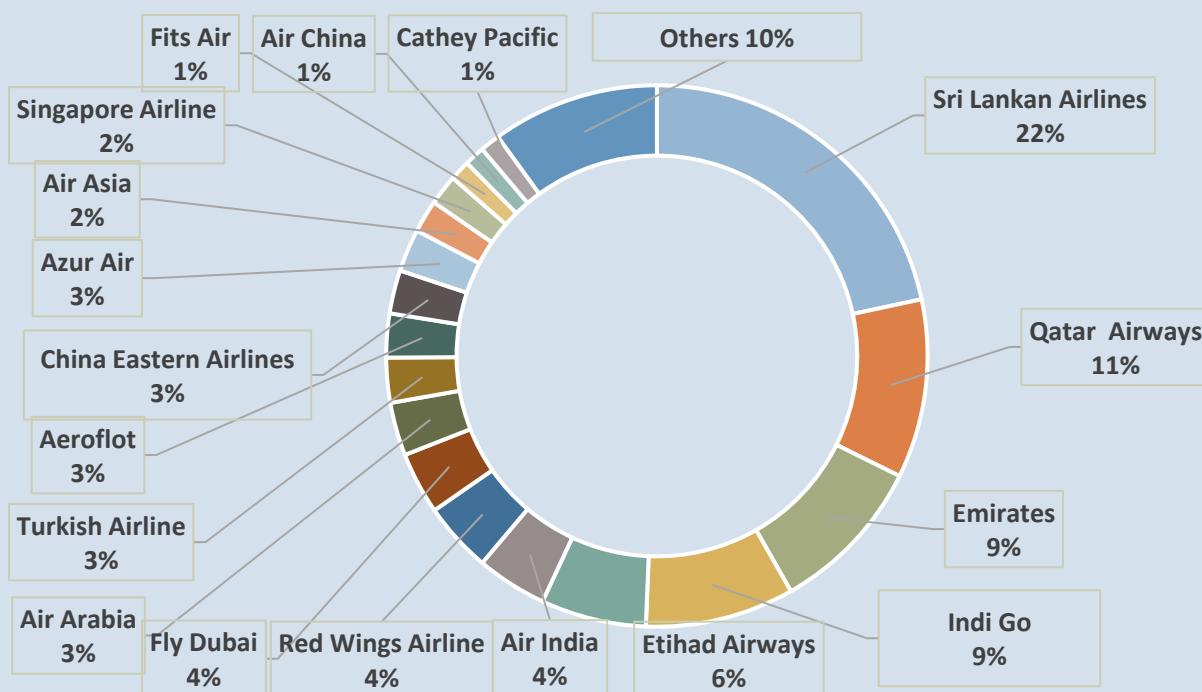


Chart 5. Main airlines to Sri Lanka, January 2025



Top ten markets versus main last departure airports and Main airlines to Sri Lanka

January 2025

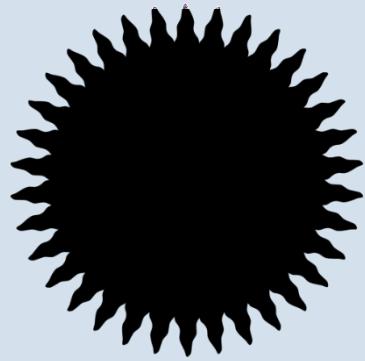
Travelers' airline preferences significantly shape their experiences in Sri Lanka, often linked to their origin. For instance, Indian tourists commonly use Sri Lankan Airlines and IndiGo, reflecting robust air links between the two countries. Russian visitors often choose Red Wings, while Chinese travelers favour China Eastern Airlines and Air China, showing a preference for national carriers. Visitors from Poland primarily fly with Fly Dubai. Sri Lankan Airlines is a popular choice among travelers from the UK, Australia, and the United States.

Chennai is the main departure airport for Indian travelers, while Doha serves as the principal gateway for tourists from UK, Germany, France, the USA, and the Netherlands. Singapore, Moscow, London, and Shanghai are key transit cities for travelers from Australia, Russia, the United Kingdom, and China, respectively. These patterns highlight the importance of accessibility in promoting tourism in Sri Lanka, as travelers' airline and airport choices are influenced by their home countries. Strengthening travel connections and expanding links with key international hubs is crucial for attracting global visitors and supporting the ongoing growth of Sri Lanka's tourism industry.

Table 4. Top ten markets vs. main airlines to Sri Lanka, January

Rank	Market	Airline	Last Departure Airport
1	India	Sri Lankan Airlines	Chennai
2	UK	IndiGo	Doha
3	Germany	Red Wings	Singapore
4	France	China Eastern Airlines	Moscow
5	USA	Air China	London
6	Netherlands	Fly Dubai	Shanghai
7	Australia	Sri Lankan Airlines	Chennai
8	Russia	Red Wings	Singapore
9	United Kingdom	China Eastern Airlines	Moscow
10	China	Air China	London

Table 5. Top ten markets vs. main last departure airports to Sri Lanka, January 2024



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