

Significance of promoting Eco-Tourism hotspots



The scenic Kanthale Wewa

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An Australian-based premium company in healthcare named *AusCeylon* and *PhytoMedica Pvt Ltd* want to develop an Eco Resort and a medicinal Plant Garden at Agbopura 227/C in the Kanthale district. Kanthale is one of the most famous travel destinations worldwide for centuries due to its unique and pristine biodiversity and culture.

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, Sri Lanka remained the fourth most popular destination for tourism in 2020. The company believes vigour and health are vitally important to human beings as much as their culture and food. They believe that healthiness can be promoted through Natural Medicines found in Sri Lanka.

The Australian-based company commenced operations in mid-January 2021 in Ratnapura and initiated its second project in Pasikudah and third at Royal Beach Villas in Mankadawala, Anuradhapura. These were eco-resort and medicinal gardens. Their fourth project in Sri Lanka would also be an eco-resort and a medicinal plant garden in Kanthale.

KANTHALE

Kanthale goes back to the era of *King Agbo II*. It is situated in the Trincomalee District, lies 38 km Southwest of Trincomalee, and the city is surrounded by the Kanthale reservoir (*Wewa*), which attracts travellers. Kanthale City is full of history and lies a few miles from Trincomalee with other attractive tourist sites such as Kaudulla National Park.

The new project will be implemented at the banks of *Kanthale Wewa*. The reservoir is majestic with a beautiful scenic view and covers an area of 23 square kms and has a capacity of 140.6 million cubic metres. The dam is 16.75 metres high and 2.5 km long. Apart from the view, the reservoir provides a rich water resource for the growth of many valuable medicinal plants. The

area is covered with green thickets of trees and shrubs, providing a promising natural beauty. The *Kanthale Wewa* can flood the area during monsoon rains, therefore, the risk is minimal since the land elevation for the project is above the overflow level. Crops will be strategically located to minimise the impact of potential floods. The project will be carefully designed with minimal disturbance to this rich ecosystem.

ECO-TOURISM AND NATURAL MEDICINES

The project is a combination of eco-tourism and natural medicines. Eco-tourism can promote mental well-being and makes a soothing impact on the increasingly stressed lifestyle of the urban population. It blends with nature and simultaneously acts as prophylactic healthcare that augments the people. Eco-tourism will open up the heritage of natural medicines to the world, hence, the proposed project in Kanthale aims to take maximum advantage of the two world-class strengths thereby creating a direct and in-direct socio-economic opportunity for the local population as much as the tourists.

Ecotourism focuses on development and sustainability in the rich lands of Kanthale with carefully constructed conservation agreements and the cultivation of medicinal plants to be used as raw materials for *Phytomedica Pvt Ltd*. The project will engage in research, development, production and marketing of exports of varieties of natural plant extracts (*Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (API)*) used in herbal medicines and nutraceuticals. Further, eco-friendly residences will be constructed by the company to create an attractive ecotourism destination for tourists. It will provide a highly effective plan to minimize the impact on nature. Thus, the company strategy will be to follow the main intentions of the National Tourism Plan to gain an enhanced profit, while simultaneously sustaining the integrity and value of the natural, cultural, social and economic resources of Sri Lanka. The

project will, directly and indirectly, create a variety of opportunities to improve the livelihood of local communities.

The collaborative project by *AusCeylon Pty Ltd & PhytoMedica Pvt Ltd* intends to develop eco-tourism and medicinal plant cultivation at Kanthale holds many valuable religious, cultural, historical and natural sites, which are vastly visited by many local and foreign tourists around the world.

AusCeylon & PhytoMedica Pvt Ltd believes that Sri Lanka holds a promising future for eco-tourism. The concept has the potential to attract both local and foreign travellers, including the millennials who seek a sustainable living and also the traditional tourists who seek experiences to appreciate and enjoy nature. It is a highly strategic source of revenue to protect natural areas and boost the Sri Lankan economy. According to the mid-term strategic plan for Sri Lanka tourism has only 1% of eco-tourist visits or sites are due to the misuse of the concept. Thus, it is vital to reconsider the concept and put it into action to acquire important socio-economic goals.

The following are the strategic advancements toward eco-tourism at the Kanthale site:

- By cultivating valuable medicinal plants to be used as authentic raw materials to manufacture patented products innovated by *Phytomedica Pvt Ltd*.
- Enabling Sri Lankan indigenous medicines as a world-class premium healthcare management among locals and international tourists.
- Provision of direct and indirect socio-economic benefits to the local community by creating direct and indirect opportunities for the maximum use of local human and material resources.
- Product development and operation, including efficient waste management, thereby creating a minimal negative impact on the environment.
- Quality and efficacy are to be maintained by establishing the herbal

raw material supply chain by maintenance.

- Reaching out to the local communities to advance their knowledge and skills in ecotourism.
- Creating and enforcing a fair revenue model to allocate revenue to all stakeholders.

The *AusCeylon* project will provide an authentic, interactive, and educational nature-based experience with the historical value of Kanthale to create tours that will appeal to the target segments.

The financial feasibility of the project has a few considerations. *AusCeylon* expects a low revenue in the initial year due to the current situation in the country, and the time taken for the crops to grow. To mitigate such risks, short harvest crops will be introduced and long-term crops would generate adequate revenue for continuous operations. Further, special packages will be offered to popularise the destination among local tourists.

LOCAL COMMUNITY

Direct employment opportunities at the resort will enable the skill development of the local community. Rapid revenue generation for small businesses – particularly for housewives will be implemented. Cultivate medicinal plants within every household garden space on a small scale will be introduced, and sell them to the raw material collection centre established at the project site. Increased opportunities will be created to sell handicrafts and crops to the local and foreign tourists and local tour guides. The company intends to introduce employment opportunities for the local community through tourism, which has plummeted since 2019 since the Easter bombing and the COVID-19 pandemic.

The initial investment is estimated approximately at Rs. 20 million based on the outcome of phase one of the project, further investment will be done to increase the number of lodges and facilities.

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