



EXPO 2020 DUBAI UAE

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# EXPO DUBAI 2020 - Behind The Scenes Explained

Ayubowan!

With multiple versions and opinions shared about EXPO DUBAI 2020, in the interest of all concerned Sri Lankans and stakeholders i will do my best in explaining all events leading to its current stature.

## How did it all start?

EXPO Dubai 2020 was commissioned on the 27th November 2013 by Bureau International des Expositions (BIE) and is one of the biggest events among the International Fairs. With the participation of 192 countries, the EXPO city is spanned across a 4.38 square kilometer area between Dubai and Abu Dhabi and will continue for 6 months. (01.10.2021 - 31.03.2022)

## Sri Lanka's commitment to EXPO

The Official commitment of Sri Lanka took place on the 08th of July 2019, through Export Development Board (EDB). The contract signing ceremony was led by Hon. Nalin Bandara, (Former) Deputy Minister of Development Strategies & International Trade. Ms. Indira Malwatte, Chairperson & Chief Executive of Export Development Board. The line cabinet minister was at that time, Hon. Malik Samarawickrama. The commitment was 580 Million LKR in total for the entire fair.

Ref - <https://www.srilankabusiness.com/news/sri-lanka-all-set-for-expo-2020-dubai.html>

## The Design of EXPO Sri Lanka Pavilion

Following a competition for the Design of the said pavilion, it was awarded to a group of young vibrant individuals from the Department of Architecture, University of Moratuwa. One such water based theme design also bagged a price from EXPO officials worth of 4000 USD.

The selected design was then taken by Expo officials and constructed the pavilion on FOC basis for Sri Lanka as part of Sri Lanka's delegation assistance package which would have otherwise cost Sri Lanka a large sum.

Since the pavilion was constructed entirely by Expo their constructors utilizing and adopting the most pragmatic means using the materials available. I repeat this was constructed by Expo at no cost to Sri Lanka.

Also certain design elements of the pavilion had to be changed from the original layout in accordance with the EXPO DUBAI 2020 HSE guidelines. One such example is rattan ceiling due to pest control measures of Dubai.

However the Design was subsequently approved by EDB in 2019 December (Under the patronage of the previous government) and was constructed by EXPO officials following the consent from Sri Lanka Government.

Ref - <https://www.ft.lk/business/Sri-Lanka-prepares-for-Expo-2020-Dubai/34-673707>

### **What is Sri Lanka Tourism's role at EXPO Dubai 2020?**

As mentioned, the trade fair was completely initiated, handled and executed by the Export Development Board, until December 2020. Through a cabinet paper, only in December 2020, due to unavoidable circumstances, EDB made a request to Sri Lanka Tourism to take over the initiative and see to its successful execution.

With the best interest of the country and multiple commitments made by many stakeholders prior to my tenure as chairperson tourism, me and my team took over the challenge with merely 6 months to go.

### **What was the investment that went into EXPO Dubai 2020?**

The initial investment committed by the previous government as explained was 580 Million LKR. However with the pandemic outbreak and with His Excellency, the president's directive to optimise the usage of government funds, we managed to bring down this figure to a 155.5 Million LKR for the entire of 6 months. This includes the funds of managing the pavilion with events and activations in Dubai for 6 months.

### **Why are the activities within the Sri Lankan Pavilion limited?**

I am aware of multiple suggestions by concerned and enthusiastic Sri Lankans to better our presence at the world stage. Unfortunately however, with high global standards many of these are against the guidelines set by the organizers.

Serving Sri Lankan beverages like Tambili and Ranawara and other concepts were thought of but with the Covid and expo regulations these ideas could not be implemented. The traditional masks are showcased and we have multiple activities which has churned the interest of many visitors. Traditional masks are a great attraction for foreign visitors and they have been highlighted and picked up by many international media too.

We cannot also move to serve any food, unless otherwise we move for an exuberantly high investment and construct a dedicated kitchen fully in compliance with Health and safety guidelines which at this point would not be feasible.

However we have secured a rotation of pavilion activities from Cane Craft, Batik, Sri Lankan Puppetry, Clay Pottery, Wood Carving, Sri Lankan Sculpting Craft, Patterns of 'Beeralu', Brass Plate Designs, Mask Carving, Rush and Reed Craft, Flax Designs and other Sri Lankan Art showcasing Sri Lankan art and craft to the world. We see lot of interest and visitor engagement towards these activities during the last couple of weeks.

Ref - [http://www.mae.ro/sites/default/files/file/anul\\_2021/2021\\_pdf/pexpo\\_2020\\_covid-19\\_guide.pdf](http://www.mae.ro/sites/default/files/file/anul_2021/2021_pdf/pexpo_2020_covid-19_guide.pdf)

### **Sri Lanka Tourism's approach in making EXPO 2020 a success**

With budgetary constraints, we switched to multiple modes of Digital Experiences for lower investments and higher ROI. The imagery was organized in a story telling angel and pictorial walkthrough giving a

touristic perspective bringing out the 3 positioning pillars for Sri Lanka of Authenticity, Compactness and Diversity. It takes the visitors on a journey through history, culture, nature, people, food and many facets of the destination. Each picture carries a QR code which is linked to a microsite specially developed for Expo 2020 Sri Lanka which gives background details to the pictures. Also included are the display screens and about 7 medium and one large screen playing videos of different experiences in Sri Lanka with a cinematic depiction at the pavilion which features experiences you can indulge yourself while visiting Sri Lanka. All screens are integrated to provide visitors with a seamless audio video experience.

EXPO Dubai has only been around for just 2 + weeks. Each country will have a day of their own and the Dedicated day for Sri Lanka is the 03rd of January. We have multiple initiatives in store including Wedding show, Batik Fashion Show, Song Dance Drama and Drums of Sri Lanka and so much to come for. Also planned is the Sri Lankan night featuring Yohani in March 2022.

### **What else has SL tourism done for EXPO?**

Sri Lanka Tourism invited via industry circular to travel trade industry to present Sri Lanka at the pavilion and as a result an industry delegation on a rotation basis will represent from November to March. Further a Travel B2B industry meeting has also being organized by Sri Lanka Tourism on 2nd January 2022 in facilitating opportunity creation for the industry.

In partnership with the following line agencies and state bodies, the Sri Lankan Pavilion also caters an diversified experience.

- o Tea Board in promoting Ceylon Tea at Expo. Operating a tea counter from for 6 months with the participation of private sector tea vendors who will operate on roster basis. A tea B2B event is also organized parallel to Expo.
- o EDB promoting exports and they run the Retail corner on a roster basis interested retailers who applied to be a part of the retail corner in response to an industry circular. National Chamber of Exporters (NCE) are also planning for an export related exhibition parallel to Expo to promote Sri Lankan exports.
- o Gem and Jewelry Authority – mid December to early January is dedicated for Ceylon Gems. Also they will run a gem promotion tagged with social media from the month of November onwards.
- o BOI and Port city on promoting investments. An investor Forum is planned for 3rd January 2022 in line with National Day and a bigger event in March promoting investments to Sri Lanka. Pavilion will have less presence of Investments as the target audience is slightly different.
- o Laksala will lead in promoting art and crafts and a special Souk assigned to promote and sell Sri Lankan products. Further Laksala will also exhibit artifacts inside the pavilion.
- o Sri Lankan Airlines is also present at the pavilion and currently running a promotion on social media platforms.
- o Sri Lanka Plantations ministry – also to join in the month of February/march to showcase different products

### **How is the Sri Lankan Pavilion performing as of right now?**

Despite the bumpy road we've had coming down to EXPO Dubai 2020 and with multiple constraints in play, we have still managed to ensure Earned media value of approximately over USD115,000 (Over Rs. 23 million) with an estimated media coverage of over 45+ media clippings including Khaleej Times, Gulf News, Alroya, Eye of Arabia, Emarat Al Youm etc within 2+ weeks of its commencement. Further recently we have been covered extensively featured by CNN and CNBC and many other which are yet to be aired. Ensuring Higher ROI for the investment made. We have activities lined up for 21 weeks more with utmost diversity and the best is certainly yet to come.

### **Final Remarks**

EXPO Dubai 2020 was never a part of an agenda of Sri Lanka Tourism as explained. However my ever so dedicated team has managed to make it one of our own. Even with multiple constraints with previous commitments, i believe we have made the best possible outcome of the current situation.

Within simply 20 days of kick starting the event, we've recorded nearly 10 000 visitors exploring the beauty of our island.

I am confident that the hard work we've put through since last December will pay off. Visit us at EXPO Dubai 2020 if you still haven't and see for yourself.

Ref - <https://expo2020.srilanka.travel>

(signed)

*Kimarli Fernando*

Chairperson – Sri Lanka Tourism

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