



2026



MONTHLY TOURIST ARRIVALS REPORT:

A MONTHLY SNAPSHOT OF INTERNATIONAL ARRIVALS TO
SRI LANKA FROM IMMIGRATION STATISTICS

MAY



Introduction

The following document provides a synthesis of the most recent May 2026 international visitor arrivals data sourced from the Department of Immigration & Emigration. The data is current as of 31st May 2026, 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

The year commenced on a positive note, with 277,327 arrivals in January 2026, representing a 9.7% increase compared to January 2025 and a 16.0% increase over January 2018, which was one of Sri Lanka's strongest tourism years. This momentum continued in February, when arrivals reached 279,328, marking the highest monthly arrival figure recorded during the first five months of 2026. February exhibited particularly strong growth, increasing by 16.2% compared to 2025 and 18.5% compared to 2018. Between January and May 2026, Sri Lanka recorded 1,022,022 tourist arrivals, surpassing the one-million mark within the first five months of the year. These figures suggest that Sri Lanka remained an attractive destination during the peak winter travel season, supported by strong demand from key source markets.

The consecutive declines during March and April significantly impacted overall tourism performance and interrupted the strong growth trajectory observed at the beginning of the year. Given that approximately one-third of Sri Lanka's inbound tourists traditionally transit through key Middle Eastern gateways such as Doha, Dubai, and Abu Dhabi, the conflict had a significant impact on travel connectivity and booking patterns. In addition to flight disruptions and route adjustments, the crisis may have also contributed to a decline in traveller confidence, increased uncertainty regarding international travel, and changes in travel plans, collectively resulting in a

notable reduction in tourist arrivals during these months.

Encouragingly, May 2026 showed signs of recovery, with arrivals increasing to 145,745. This represents a 9.65% increase over May 2025 and a 12.6% increase compared to May 2018. The positive performance in May indicates that the downturn experienced in March and April may have been temporary rather than indicative of a sustained decline. The rebound suggests a recovery in travel demand and demonstrates the resilience of Sri Lanka's tourism sector.

Overall, the 2026 performance presents a picture of strong underlying tourism demand coupled with short-term volatility. The achievement of over one million arrivals by May demonstrates that Sri Lanka remains competitive in the international tourism market. However, sustaining growth throughout the remainder of the year will require continued focus on air connectivity, market diversification, destination, promotion, and addressing any factors that may have contributed to the downturn observed during March and April. If the recovery observed in May continues, Sri Lanka remains well positioned to record a strong tourism performance for the full year 2026.

The key source markets for the month of May includes India, United Kingdom, China, Germany and Australia

Table 1. Monthly tourist arrivals, May 2026

Month	2025	2026	% Change 2026/25
January	252,761	277,327	9.7
February	240,217	279,328	16.2
March	229,298	183,979	(19.8)
April	174,608	135,643	(22.3)
May	132,919	145,745	9.6
June	138,241		
July	200,244		
August	198,235		
September	158,971		
October	165,193		
November	212,906		
December	258,928		
TOTAL	2,362,521	1,022,022	



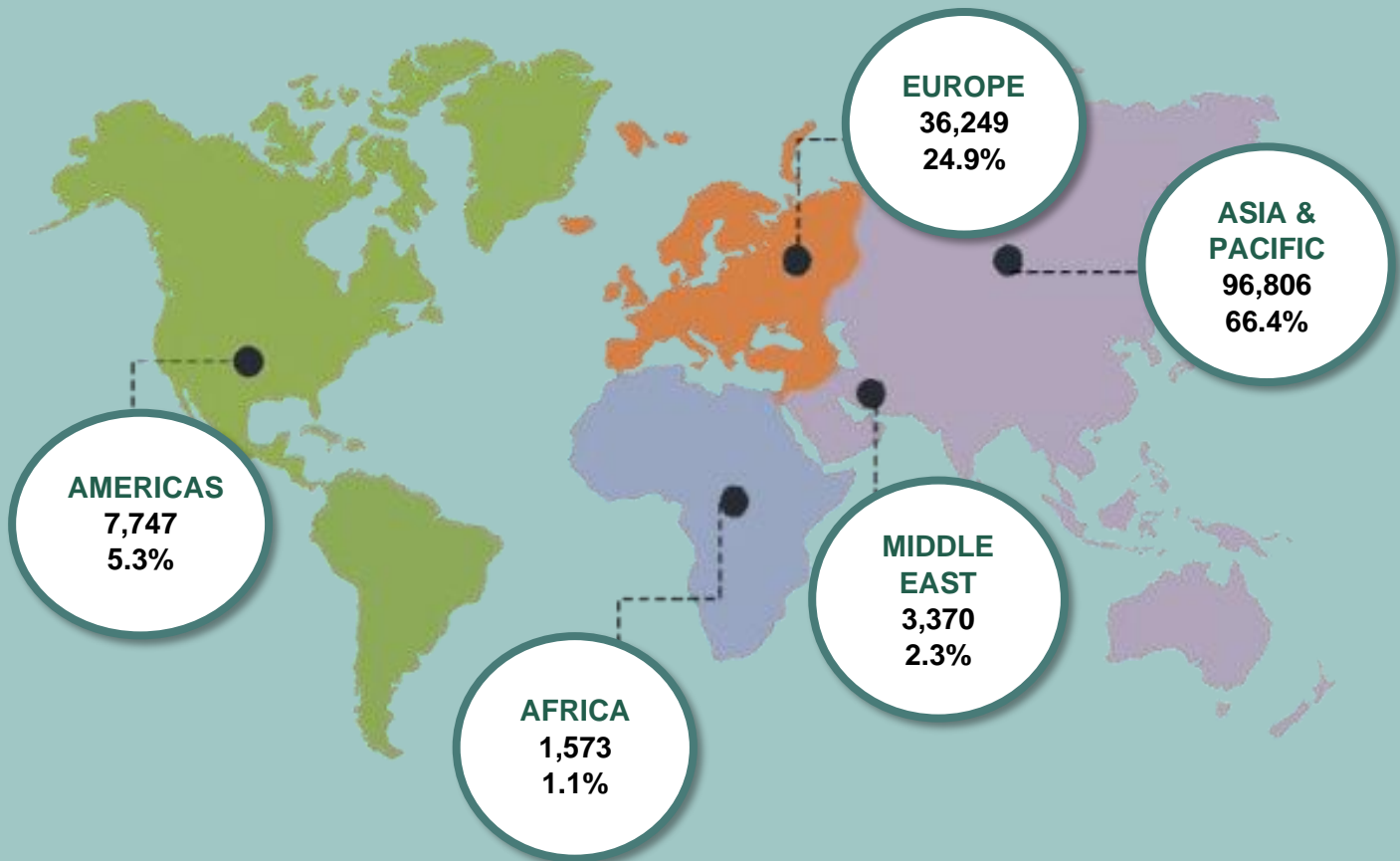
Tourist Arrivals | May 2026

145,745



Tourist arrivals by region and percentage share May 2026

Map 1. Tourist arrivals by region and percentage share



Sri Lanka's tourism market exhibits a pronounced geographic concentration, with the Asia and Pacific region accounting for approximately 66.4% of total tourist arrivals, a figure that reflects a 17.6% year-on-year increase compared to May 2025. This regional dominance is underpinned by India's growing outbound travel market, geographical proximity, enhanced air connectivity, and deep-rooted cultural and religious ties with Sri Lanka. While this concentration sustains healthy visitor volumes and supports short-haul travel growth, it simultaneously heightens the country's vulnerability to regional political instability, economic headwinds, and disruptions in aviation networks.

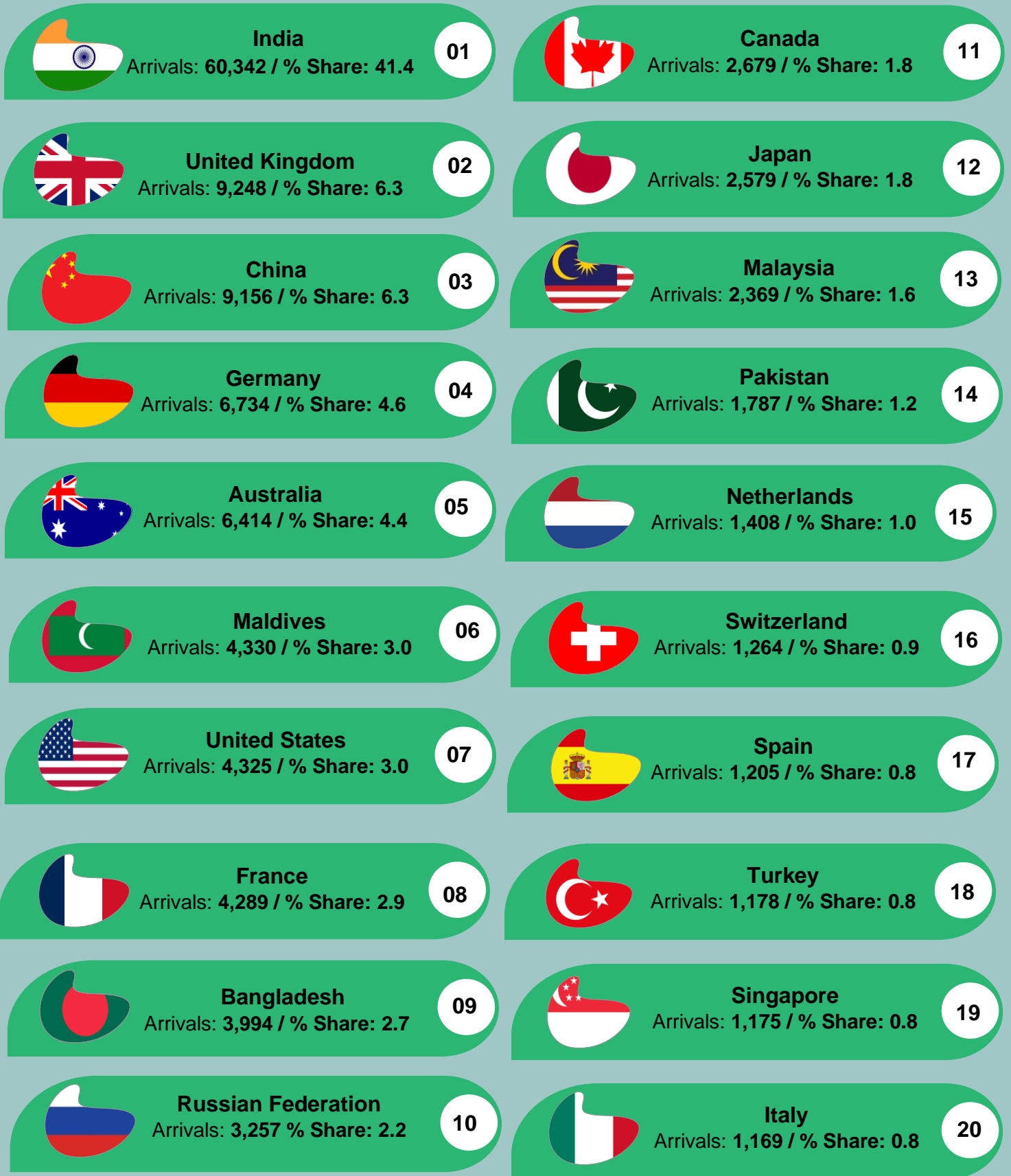
Europe represents the second-largest source market, contributing around 24.9% of total arrivals and remaining a vital long-haul segment, led by key markets including the United Kingdom, Germany, Russia, and France. Nevertheless, European travel demand has grown increasingly susceptible to global economic uncertainty, escalating travel costs, and geopolitical tensions. Arrivals from Europe recorded a notable decline of approximately 9.6% compared to May 2025, a trend likely attributable to the Gulf conflict, rising fuel prices, airline disruptions, and subdued consumer confidence factors that have collectively weighed on Sri Lanka's overall arrival figures during this period.

The Middle East and Africa contributed modest shares of approximately 2.3% and 1.1% of total arrivals respectively, underscoring Sri Lanka's relatively limited market penetration in these regions and the broader imperative for source market diversification to strengthen resilience against external shocks. Notably, however, arrivals from the Middle East recorded a remarkable surge of 72.6% compared to May 2025, signaling emerging growth potential in this corridor that warrants strategic attention.



Top primary markets and top potential markets

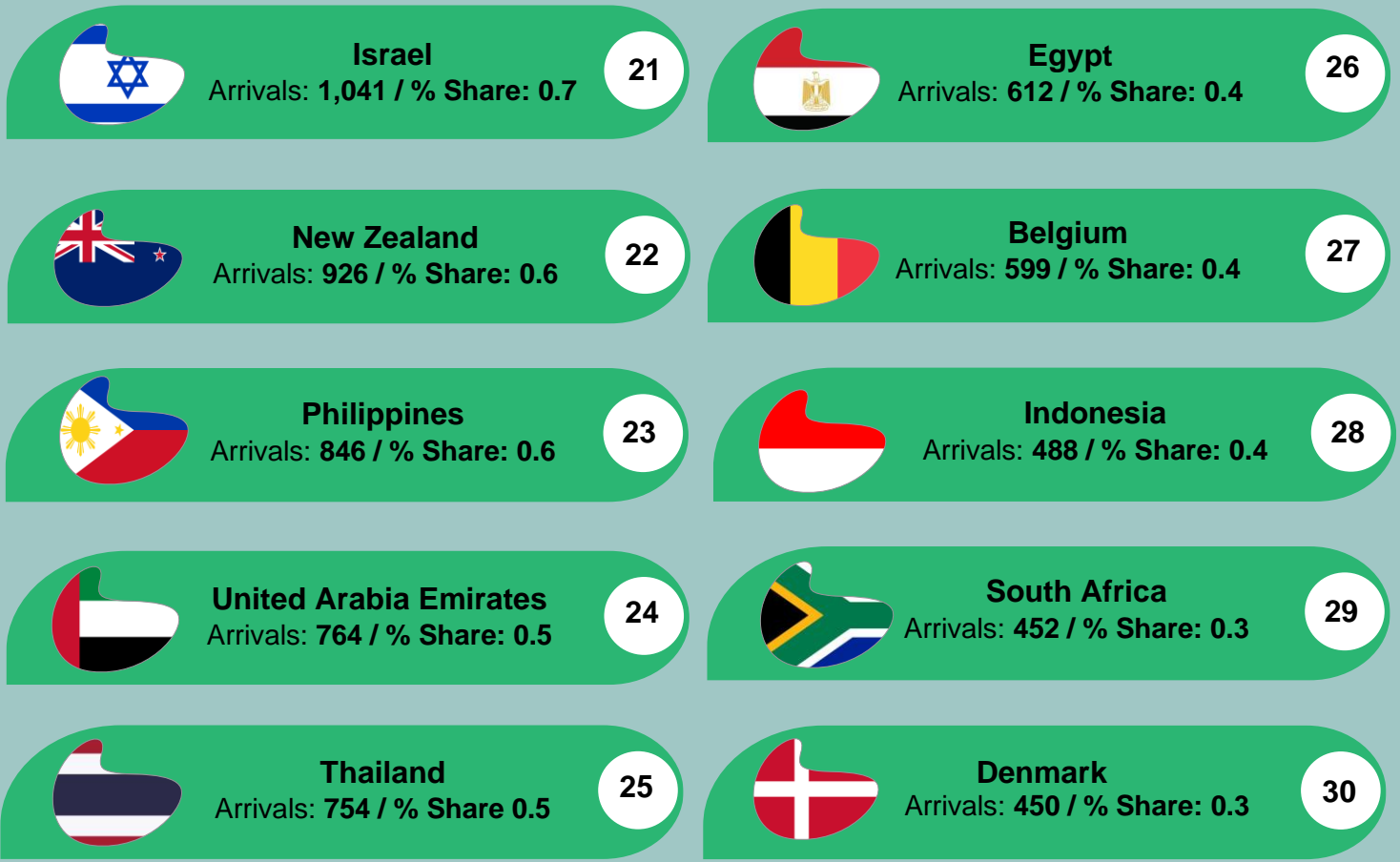
Top primary markets, May 2026



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.



Top potential markets, May 2026



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.



Top ten source markets

May 2026

India continues to dominate Sri Lanka's primary source markets by an extraordinary margin, with arrivals surging from 47,001 in May 2025 to 60,342 in May 2026 a year-on-year increase of over 28.4%. This growth with a share of 42% accounts for the bulk of Sri Lanka's overall tourism uptick in the month. The near-exclusive reliance on air travel (60,337 out of 60,342) underscores strong air connectivity and suggests that Indian travelers prefer short-haul flights over regional sea routes.

A second key observation is the notable decline from two traditionally significant markets: France and Bangladesh. French arrivals dropped from 5,470 to 4,289 (down roughly 22%), while Bangladesh saw a sharp fall from 7,282 to just 3,994 a reduction of nearly 45%. These decreases may signal shifting travel preferences, economic pressures, or increased competition from other destinations. In contrast, the United Kingdom and China showed steady, modest growth, while Germany experienced a slight decline from 7,223 to 6,734.

Finally, the data reveals interesting shifts in smaller but emerging markets. The Maldives recorded a strong jump from 3,006 to 4,330, reflecting growing regional travel ties. Meanwhile, sea-based arrivals remain negligible for most countries, except Germany (2,160 by sea) and the United States (1,003 by sea), indicating that cruise or ferry travel appeals primarily to long-haul Western travelers. Overall, while India's performance is robust, the double-digit drops from Bangladesh and France warrant close monitoring to diversify and stabilize future arrivals.

Chart 1. Top ten source markets to Sri Lanka, May 2026

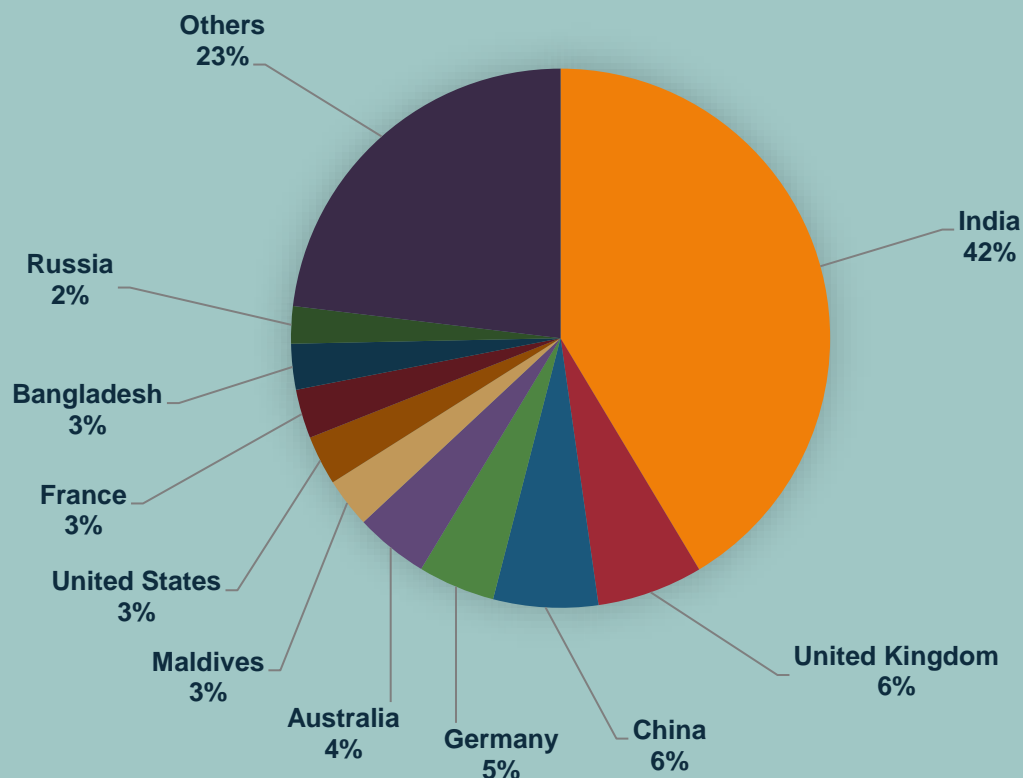
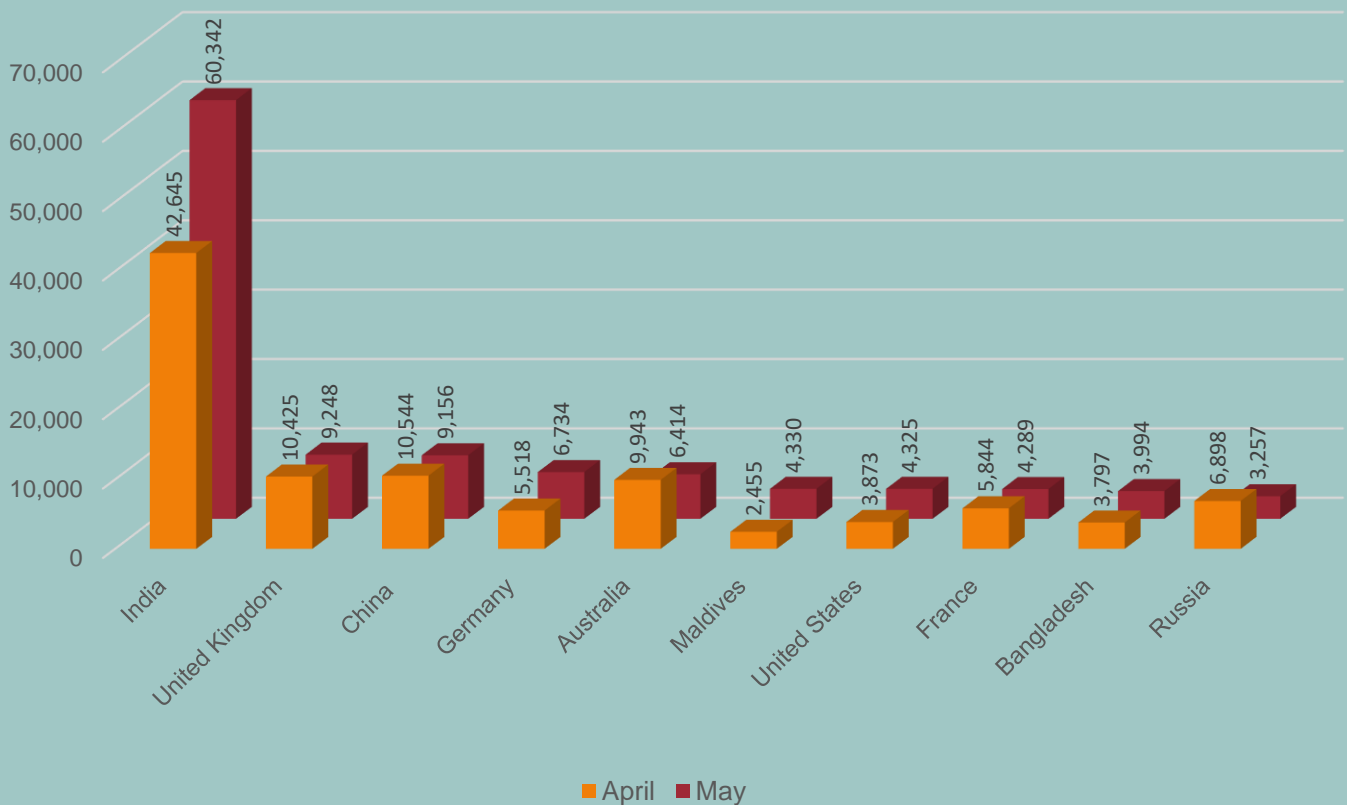


Table 2. Top ten source markets to Sri Lanka, May 2026

Rank	Country of Residence	Tourist arrivals (May 2026)			Tourist arrivals	
		By Air	By Sea	Total	May 2025	Percentage Change (2026/2025) May
1	India	60,337	5	60,342	47,001	28.4
2	United Kingdom	9,100	148	9,248	9,221	0.3
3	China	9,138	18	9,156	8,803	4.0
4	Germany	4,574	2,160	6,734	7,223	(6.8)
5	Australia	6,219	195	6,414	5,929	8.2
6	Maldives	4,330	0	4,330	3,006	44.0
7	United States	3,322	1,003	4,325	3,607	19.9
8	France	4,275	14	4,289	5,470	(21.6)
9	Bangladesh	3,994	0	3,994	7,282	(45.2)
10	Russia	3,253	4	3,257	3,328	(2.1)

Chart 2: Comparison of arrivals from top ten markets to Sri Lanka, April / May – 2026





Top ten source markets

January to May 2026

Over the first five months of 2026, Sri Lanka recorded a marginal decline in total tourist arrivals, from 1,029,803 in 2025 to 1,022,022 in 2026 – a drop of roughly 0.75%. While nearly flat overall, this aggregate mask significant shifts in individual source markets. India strengthened its position as the leading market, growing from 204,060 to 250,260 arrivals (a 22.6% increase), widening the gap with all other countries. The United Kingdom also posted a modest gain, rising from 96,274 to 98,093.

The most striking downturn came from the Russian Federation, which plummeted from 110,421 arrivals in the first five months of 2025 to just 76,073 in 2026 a steep decline of over 31%. This likely reflects ongoing geopolitical and air connectivity challenges, possibly including reduced flight options or shifting travel preferences away from long-haul destinations like Sri Lanka. Similarly, France saw a notable drop from 57,112 to 49,235 (down nearly 14%), while Germany, Poland and Netherland also recorded slight decreases. In contrast, China showed robust recovery momentum, climbing from 56,983 to 67,947 (up 19.2%), and Australia grew from 44,026 to 48,726 (up 10.7%). The United States remained virtually stable.

Overall, while India and China are driving growth, heavy reliance on a few markets and sharp declines from Russia and Western European countries present a mixed outlook for Sri Lanka's tourism sector in 2026. Diversifying source markets and addressing factors behind the Russian drop should be priorities.

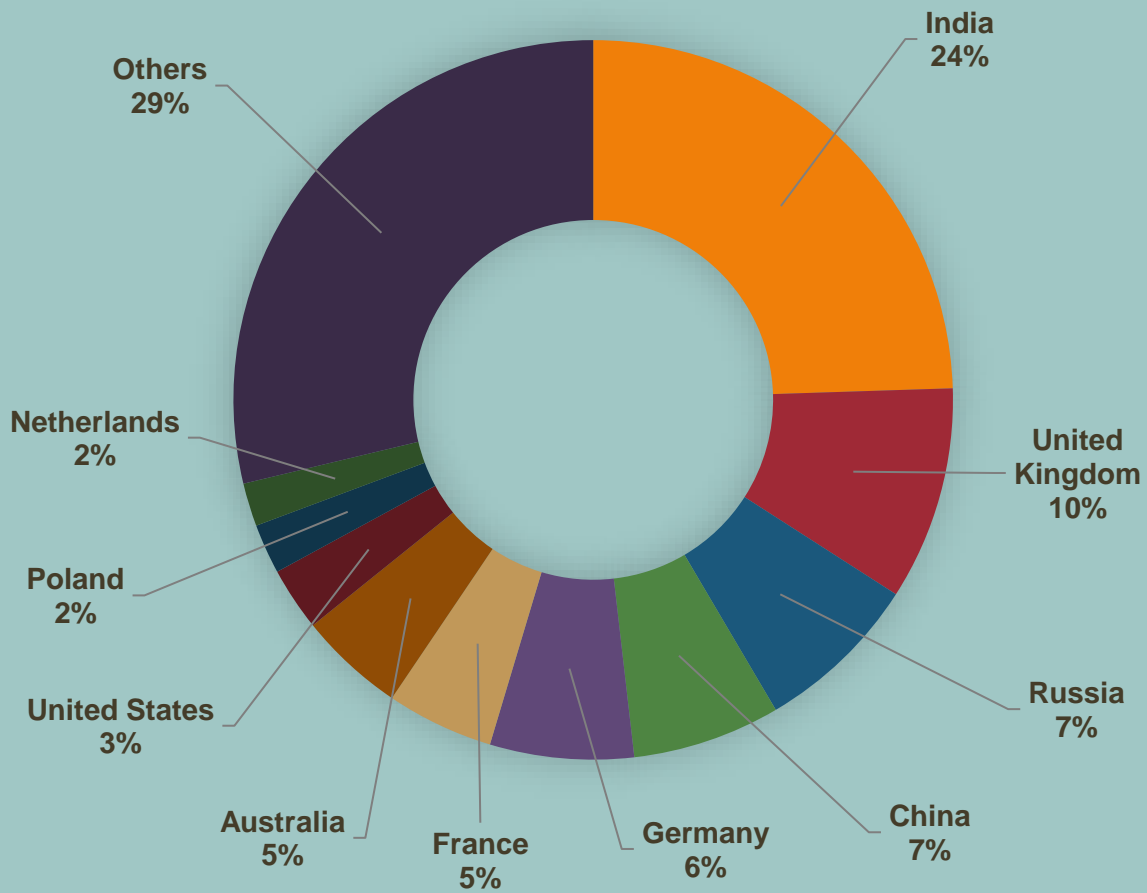
Table 3. Top ten markets to Sri Lanka, January to May 2026

Rank	Country of Residence	Tourist Arrivals (Jan ~May 2026)	Tourist Arrivals (Jan ~May 2025)	Percentage Change Jan – May 2026/2025
1	India	250,260	204,060	24.5
2	United Kingdom	98,093	96,274	9.6
3	Russian Federation	76,073	110,421	7.4
4	China	67,947	56,983	6.6
5	Germany	66,023	69,078	6.5
6	France	49,235	57,112	4.8
7	Australia	48,726	44,026	4.8
8	United States	29,161	28,991	2.9
9	Poland	22,901	24,941	2.2
10	Netherlands	19,848	23,716	1.9
11	Others	293,755	314,201	28.7
Total		1,022,022	1,029,803	





Chart 3. Top ten source markets to Sri Lanka, January to May 2026





Tourist arrivals by purpose of visit

May 2026

The purpose of visit of tourists who visited Sri Lanka in May reveals a clear dominance of leisure travel, with “Pleasure/Vacation” accounting for nearly two-thirds (63%) of all visitors. This underscores Sri Lanka’s strong appeal as a holiday destination, likely driven by its beaches, cultural heritage, and natural attractions.

Visiting friends and relatives (VFR) makes up 9%, a notable segment that often correlates with diaspora connections and repeat visits. MICE tourism (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, Exhibitions) contributes 7.13%, highlighting Sri Lanka’s emerging role as a regional hub for business events, though it remains far behind leisure travel. Pure business travel is smaller at 4%.

Niche categories such as education 1%, sports (0.5%), religious (0.43%), and health/Ayurvedic (0.39%) collectively account for less than 2% of arrivals. While small, these segments offer potential for targeted growth, for example, promoting Ayurveda wellness retreats or religious pilgrimages. The negligible “Official” category (0.001%) reflects minimal government-related travel. Overall, Sri Lanka’s May tourist profile is heavily leisure-oriented, with moderate VFR and MICE contributions, leaving room to diversify into specialty tourism markets.

Chart 4: Purpose of visit, May 2026

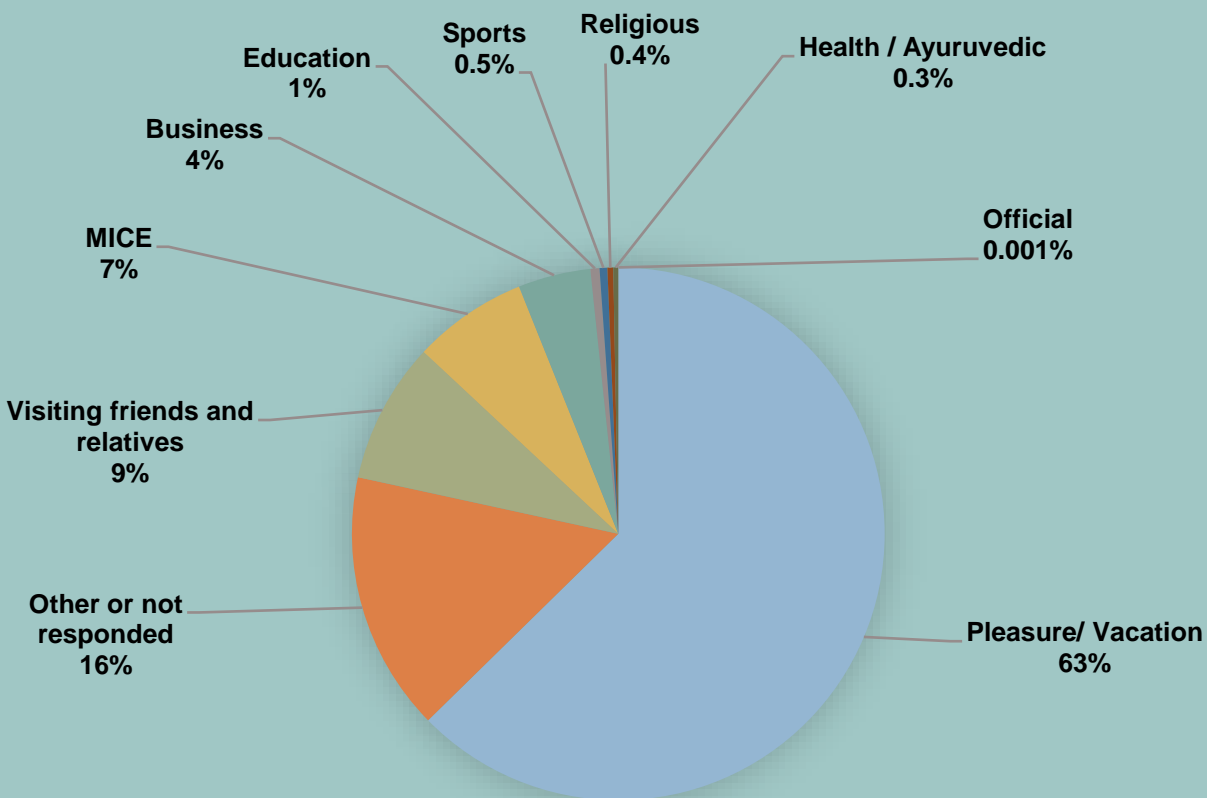


Chart 5: Purpose of visit vs main source markets



The purpose of visit analyzed by source market reveals several striking patterns, indicating how travel motivations differ significantly by country of origin.

Pleasure and vacation travel is the leading purpose for most markets, especially for Bangladesh (76.31%), Germany (74.70%), China (70.88%), and France (68.20%). However, the share is noticeably lower for the United Kingdom (54.16%) and Australia (57.05%), where visiting friends and relatives (VFR) plays a much larger role (27.04% and 28.19% respectively). This suggests that for UK and Australian tourists, diaspora connections or family ties are major drivers. The United States also shows a substantial VFR share (19.54%), while India records a modest 3.64%, indicating that Indian tourists overwhelmingly travel for leisure rather than to see relatives.

MICE and business travel highlight Russia and China. Russia stands out with the highest MICE share (20.88%). This suggests that Russian arrivals in May may be linked to corporate events, incentives, or exhibitions. China, meanwhile, leads in pure business travel (12.06%). This aligns with China's role as a major trade and investment partner for Sri Lanka. India also contributes a notable MICE share (7.77%) and business share (5.43%), reflecting regional commercial links.

Niche segments with geographic concentration, Health/Ayurvedic tourism, though tiny overall, is relatively important for Germany (3.00%), indicating that German visitors have a specific interest in wellness and traditional medicine. Religious tourism is marginal everywhere, but slightly higher for the United States (0.74%) and India (0.62%), possibly reflecting visits to Buddhist or Hindu sacred sites. Sports tourism is negligible across all markets, with India showing the highest (0.73%), perhaps due to cricket-related travel.



The data suggests that Sri Lanka's tourism marketing should be tailored: for UK and Australia, emphasize VFR-friendly packages; for Russia, target MICE groups; for China, facilitate business travel infrastructure; and for Germany, promote Ayurveda retreats. Overall, while leisure is the backbone, source-market heterogeneity offers clear opportunities for diversification.





Opening Borders, Opening Opportunities: Visa Openness and Tourism Growth

In May 2026, Sri Lanka took a decisive step in reshaping its tourism landscape by extending visa waivers to tourists of 40 countries for a period six months. The move was not merely procedural, it signaled a fundamental shift in how the island nation intends to position itself on the world stage. In doing so, Sri Lanka joined a growing number of countries that have come to recognize a powerful truth: the ease with which a traveler can enter a country is often as important as what awaits them once they arrive.

What a Visa Actually Does and Why It Matters

At its core, a visa is an official authorization permitting a foreign national to enter a country for a defined purpose and period. Governments have historically relied on visa systems to manage border security, regulate migration, collect entry data, and generate revenue. These remain legitimate and necessary functions.

But the conversation around visas has evolved considerably. What was once viewed purely as an instrument of border control is now widely recognized as a lever of economic policy. An overly restrictive visa regime does not merely inconvenience travelers, it suppresses tourism demand, discourages airline route development, and sends an unwelcoming signal to the world.

Historical background

The history of visas can be traced back to ancient civilizations, where early forms of travel control were already in place. In Persia, travelers were required to carry “caravanserai passes” to move safely between rest stations, while China issued “teh-passes” to regulate the entry of foreigners, laying the foundation for structured border control. During the medieval era, “safe conducts” or “letters of passage” were commonly used, allowing diplomats, traders, and pilgrims to travel securely across territories. The modern visa system began to take shape in the 19th and early 20th centuries, with key developments such as the British Aliens Act of 1905 and the League of Nations’ standardization of passports and visa regulations in 1920. Following World War II, the establishment of the United Nations strengthened international cooperation, leading to more structured visa frameworks for tourism, work, and diplomacy. In the digital age, the introduction of electronic visas and visa waiver systems has transformed travel by making cross-border movement faster, simpler, and more accessible, significantly supporting the growth of global tourism and business mobility (Planet Chronical, 2024).

The Spectrum of Visa Openness

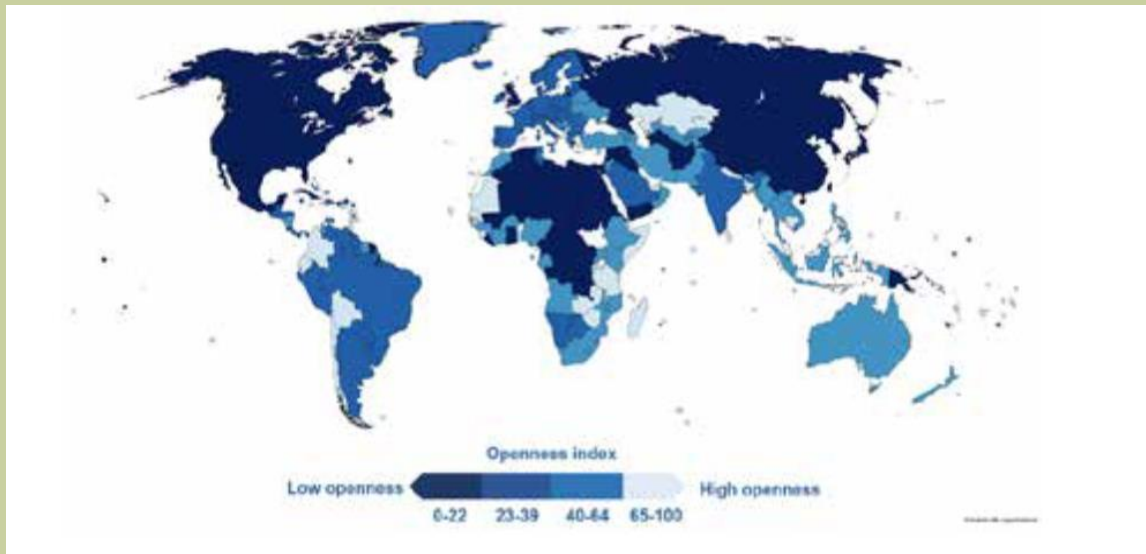
Not all visa arrangements are equal. At the most restrictive end, travelers must apply in advance through embassies, submit supporting documents, and await approval, a process that can deter spontaneous travel and add significant cost. Moving along the spectrum, visa-on-arrival systems offer greater flexibility by allowing travelers to obtain authorization upon reaching their destination. Electronic visa platforms further streamline the process by enabling online applications that can be processed within hours or days.

At the most open end of the scale sits the visa waiver, a complete exemption from visa requirements for travelers from designated countries. This is widely considered the gold standard of travel facilitation, removing friction entirely from the entry process.

The Visa Openness Index, used in global tourism policy analysis, measures how accessible a destination is based on the breadth of its visa-free arrangements, the availability of on-arrival and digital options, and the overall simplicity of its entry procedures.



Tourism visa openness index, 2023



Source: UN Tourism

Lessons from Global Leaders

Southeast Asian nations have adopted increasingly liberal visa-free policies to boost tourism competitiveness. Singapore maintains a highly selective visa-waiver program, granting visa-free entry to passport holders from 190+ countries, including Americans, Europeans, and Australians for stays of 30–90 days, while offering innovative 96-hour visa-free transit facilities (VFTF) for travelers from India, China, and other CIS countries. Cambodia offers visa-free entry to 11 ASEAN and neighboring countries for 14–30 days, while maintaining accessible visa-on-arrival and eVisa options for others, streamlining tourism entry through digital platforms. Vietnam recently expanded its visa exemption significantly, now offering visa-free entry to 24 countries (up from 12), including 12 newly added European nations for up to 45 days reflecting aggressive tourism stimulus policies.

Thailand, the regional leader in visa liberalization, implemented visa-free entry for 98 countries (including Sri Lanka, India, and most Western nations) for tourism and business purposes, allowing 30–60 days stay without advance applications, while also offering 14-day visa-exempt entry for 11 Cambodia neighboring countries and pioneering seamless airport processing; this has made Thailand one of the world's most visited destinations, attracting over 35 million tourists annually. Best practices across these countries include digital visa systems (e-Visa), extended visa-free periods (Vietnam's 45 days, Thailand's 60 days), visa-free transit programs (Singapore's VFTF), ASEAN regional reciprocity (Cambodia's 14–30 day exemptions for neighbors), and flexible multiple-entry policies that balance tourism promotion with security through pre-arrival digital registration rather than traditional visa requirements.

Why Openness Works

The logic is straightforward. When travelers face fewer administrative barriers, they make decisions more quickly and more freely. Spontaneous trips become possible. Short-notice bookings increase. Tour operators face lower transaction costs. Airlines find it easier to justify new routes and higher frequencies to markets where passenger visa approval rates are strong.

Beyond individual travel decisions, visa openness shapes destination image. A country that welcomes visitors without friction is perceived as confident, outward-looking, and hospitable — qualities that matter deeply in how travelers choose between competing destinations. Research consistently shows that easing visa restrictions can lift tourist arrivals by anywhere from five to twenty-five percent, depending on the scope of the policy change and the markets targeted.



Sri Lanka's Strategic Moment

Against this backdrop, Sri Lanka's 2026 initiative arrives at a critical juncture. The global tourism industry continues to navigate significant headwinds, geopolitical tensions, economic pressures in key source markets, volatile fuel costs, and ongoing uncertainty from climate and health-related disruptions. In such an environment, reducing the barriers to entry is one of the most direct actions a destination can take to protect and grow its share of international arrivals.

Sri Lanka is also operating in a fiercely competitive regional context. Destinations across South and Southeast Asia are actively courting the same travelers, and those with faster, simpler entry systems are gaining ground. By extending visa waivers to 40 countries, a carefully chosen mix of high-volume and high-value markets Sri Lanka is directly targeting the source markets most capable of accelerating its tourism recovery.

The implications extend beyond visitor numbers. Simplified entry encourages airlines to invest in the destination, improving connectivity that benefits both tourism and trade. A more accessible Sri Lanka is also a more attractive Sri Lanka for business travelers, conference organizers, and investors, segments that generate significant economic value beyond the headline figures of tourist arrivals.

A Long-Term Investment in Openness

Sri Lanka's visa waiver initiative reflects an understanding that in the modern competition for international visitors, administrative barriers are not neutral they impose real costs on demand, connectivity, and reputation.

While the visa waiver initiative carries considerable promise, it is not without its drawbacks. A more open entry system inevitably reduces the screening layer that visa applications traditionally provide, raising legitimate concerns around irregular migration, human trafficking, and broader security vulnerabilities. On the ground, a significant surge in tourist arrivals could place enormous pressure on infrastructure that is already stretched, from roads and water systems to heritage sites like Sigiriya and Galle Fort, risking both environmental degradation and a diminished visitor experience. This feeds into wider concerns about over tourism, particularly in the island's most popular destinations, which could ultimately undermine the very appeal Sri Lanka is trying to protect. The economic gains and competitive positioning benefits are likely to outweigh the costs but only if the authorities simultaneously invest in infrastructure, maintains strong border monitoring systems, and pursues reciprocal arrangements where possible. Openness works best when it is managed strategically, not simply declared.

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International tourist arrivals by country of residence

	May 2026			Tourist arrivals May 2025	% change May (26/25)	Total tourist arrivals up to May 2026	Total tourist arrivals up to May 2025	% change up to May (26/25)
	Tourist arrivals							
	By Air	By Sea	Total					
AMERICAS	6,480	1,267	7,747	7,544	2.7	51,779	52,227	(0.9)
North America	5,903	1,245	7,148	7,107	0.6	48,710	49,398	(1.4)
Canada	2,473	206	2,679	3,412	(21.5)	18,920	19,877	(4.8)
Mexico	108	36	144	88	63.6	629	530	18.7
United States	3,322	1,003	4,325	3,607	19.9	29,161	28,991	0.6
Caribbean & Central America	118	0	118	80	47.5	513	401	27.9
Costa Rica	15	0	15	12	25.0	53	58	(8.6)
Jamaica	04	0	04	03	33.3	23	15	53.3
Others	99	0	99	65	52.3	437	328	33.2
South America	459	22	481	357	34.7	2,556	2,428	5.3
Argentina	123	05	128	60	113.3	615	466	32.0
Brazil	150	13	163	132	23.5	878	934	(6.0)
Chile	42	02	44	41	7.3	315	310	1.6
Colombia	69	02	71	56	26.8	363	291	24.7
Others	75	0	75	68	10.3	385	427	(9.8)
AFRICA	1,564	09	1,573	972	61.8	6,604	6,112	8.0
North Africa	440	0	440	266	65.4	1,234	1,265	(2.5)
Morocco	129	0	129	108	19.4	396	452	(12.4)
Sudan	172	0	172	66	160.6	413	316	30.7
Others	139	0	139	92	51.1	425	497	(14.5)
Sub-Saharan Africa	1,124	09	1,133	706	60.5	5,370	4,847	10.8
Kenya	94	0	94	71	32.4	363	350	3.7
Mauritius	58	0	58	56	3.6	459	354	29.7
Nigeria	07	0	07	14	(50.0)	47	42	11.9
South Africa	443	09	452	198	128.3	2,065	1,995	3.5
Others	522	0	522	367	42.2	2,436	2,106	15.7



Monthly Tourist Arrivals Report May 2026

	May 2026			Tourist arrivals May 2025	% change May (26/25)	Total tourist arrivals up to May 2026	Total tourist arrivals up to May 2025	% change up to May (26/25)
	Tourist arrivals							
	By Air	By Sea	Total					
ASIA & PACIFIC	96,519	287	96,806	82,342	17.6	473,817	411,429	15.2
North East Asia	12,091	21	12,112	11,493	5.4	89,938	77,140	16.6
China	9,138	18	9,156	8,803	4.0	67,947	56,983	19.2
Japan	2,576	03	2,579	2,126	21.3	16,938	14,366	17.9
South Korea	358	0	358	544	(34.2)	4,954	5,711	(13.3)
Others	19	0	19	20	(5.0)	99	80	23.8
South East Asia	6,404	11	6,415	4,990	28.6	33,331	26,575	25.4
Cambodia	102	0	102	28	264.3	803	862	-6.8
Indonesia	487	01	488	471	3.6	2,958	2,025	46.1
Malaysia	2,364	05	2,369	1,920	23.4	10,309	9,202	12.0
Myanmar	185	0	185	203	(8.9)	1,976	642	207.8
Philippines	843	03	846	472	79.2	3,043	2,427	25.4
Singapore	1,175	0	1,175	1,054	11.5	5,958	5,375	10.8
Thailand	752	02	754	556	35.6	3,981	4,023	(1.0)
Vietnam	444	0	444	250	77.6	4,056	1,852	119.0
Others	52	0	52	36	44.4	247	167	47.9
Oceania	7,126	250	7,376	6,802	8.4	54,482	49,211	10.7
Australia	6,219	195	6,414	5,929	8.2	48,726	44,026	10.7
New Zealand	871	55	926	840	10.2	5,524	4,977	11.0
Others	36	0	36	33	9.1	232	208	11.5
South Asia	70,898	05	70,903	59,057	20.1	296,066	258,503	14.5
Afghanistan	05	0	05	10	(50.0)	18	54	(66.7)
Bangladesh	3,994	0	3,994	7,282	(45.2)	18,870	27,311	(30.9)
Bhutan	17	0	17	55	(69.1)	284	280	1.4
India	60,337	05	60,342	47,001	28.4	250,260	204,060	22.6
Iran	84	0	84	354	(76.3)	1,106	5,782	(80.9)
Maldives	4,330	0	4,330	3,006	44.0	15,105	13,296	13.6
Nepal	344	0	344	403	(14.6)	2,622	2,300	14.0
Pakistan	1,787	0	1,787	946	88.9	7,801	5,420	43.9
EUROPE	33,619	2,630	36,249	40,108	(9.6)	481,359	549,244	(12.4)
Northern Europe	10,925	156	11,081	11,056	0.2	126,853	124,016	2.3
Denmark	449	01	450	500	(10.0)	9,184	8,650	6.2
Finland	157	0	157	208	(24.5)	2,704	2,494	8.4
Norway	301	0	301	355	(15.2)	4,821	5,258	(8.3)
Sweden	255	0	255	286	(10.8)	6,676	6,467	3.2
United Kingdom	9,100	148	9,248	9,221	0.3	98,093	96,274	1.9
Others	663	07	670	486	37.9	5,375	4,873	10.3



Monthly Tourist Arrivals Report May 2026

	May 2025			Tourist arrivals May 2025	% change May (26/25)	Total tourist arrivals up to May 2026	Total tourist arrivals up to May 2025	% change up to May (26/25)
	Tourist arrivals							
	By Air	By Sea	Total					
Western Europe	12,318	2,425	14,743	17,626	(16.4)	164,147	180,430	(9.0)
Austria	343	73	416	483	(13.9)	7,699	8,458	(9.0)
Belgium	583	16	599	664	(9.8)	6,803	7,629	(10.8)
France	4,275	14	4,289	5,470	(21.6)	49,235	57,112	(13.8)
Germany	4,574	2,160	6,734	7,223	(6.8)	66,023	69,078	(4.4)
Netherlands	1,351	57	1,408	2,329	(39.5)	19,848	23,716	(16.3)
Switzerland	1,162	102	1,264	1,424	(11.2)	14,117	13,993	0.9
Others	30	03	33	33	-	422	444	(5.0)
Central/Eastern Europe	5,139	20	5,159	6,487	(20.5)	142,760	189,886	(24.8)
Belarus	77	0	77	148	(48.0)	5,866	5,346	9.7
Czech Republic	259	01	260	354	(26.6)	8,815	9,971	(11.6)
Estonia	13	0	13	28	(53.6)	2,186	2,742	(20.3)
Hungary	122	06	128	133	(3.8)	3,221	3,726	(13.6)
Kazakhstan	84	0	84	207	(59.4)	3,736	7,614	(50.9)
Lithuania	55	01	56	102	(45.1)	2,560	4,536	(43.6)
Poland	408	04	412	1,078	(61.8)	22,901	24,941	(8.2)
Romania	153	03	156	190	(17.9)	2,725	3,188	(14.5)
Russia	3,253	04	3,257	3,328	(2.1)	76,073	110,421	(31.1)
Slovakia	128	0	128	212	(39.6)	3,295	3,997	(17.6)
Ukraine	220	0	220	234	(6.0)	4,528	5,023	(9.9)
Others	367	0	368	473	(22.2)	6,854	8,381	(18.2)
Southern/Mediterranean Europe	5,237	29	5,266	4,939	6.6	47,599	54,912	(13.3)
Greece	143	0	143	140	2.1	1,875	1,703	10.1
Italy	1,160	09	1,169	1,333	(12.3)	15,245	17,383	(12.3)
Portugal	283	02	285	312	(8.7)	2,714	3,439	(21.1)
Spain	1,191	14	1,205	1,593	(24.4)	9,793	12,509	(21.7)
Turkey	1,174	04	1,178	384	206.8	4,352	3,789	14.9
Israel	1,041	0	1,041	896	16.2	9,288	10,475	(11.3)
Others	245	0	245	281	(12.8)	4,332	5,614	(22.8)
MIDDLE EAST	3,370	0	3,370	1,953	72.6	8,462	10,791	(21.6)
Bahrain	93	0	93	54	72.2	270	391	(30.9)
Egypt	612	0	612	298	105.4	1,341	1,834	(26.9)
Iraq	205	0	205	65	215.4	437	457	(4.4)
Jordan	398	0	398	169	135.5	921	1,183	(22.1)
Kuwait	69	0	69	106	(34.9)	488	746	(34.6)
Lebanon	444	0	444	169	162.7	1,112	1,498	(25.8)
Oman	168	0	168	136	23.5	651	712	(8.6)
Qatar	93	0	93	47	97.9	203	272	(25.4)
Saudi Arabia	389	0	389	433	(10.2)	1,316	1,895	(30.6)
United Arab Emirates	764	0	764	400	91.0	1,364	1,429	(4.5)
Others	135	0	135	76	77.6	359	374	(4.0)
TOTAL	141,552	4,193	145,745	132,919	9.6	1,022,022	1,029,803	(0.8)



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

The table of last departure airports for tourists arriving in Sri Lanka during May 2025 offers valuable insights into geographic source markets, transit hubs, and regional connectivity patterns. The data shows that Indian airports dominate the list, with four Indian cities Chennai (11.88%), Delhi (8.32%), Mumbai (7.97%), and Bangalore (7.44%) occupying the top four positions. Together, these four Indian airports account for over 35% of all arrivals, reinforcing India’s position as Sri Lanka’s single largest tourism feeder market. Chennai’s leadership (17,321 tourists) is particularly notable, likely due to its proximity, frequent flights, and strong cultural and business ties.

Middle Eastern hubs play a critical role, Dubai (6.89%), Abu Dhabi (5.43%), Doha (3.64%), and Sharjah (1.69%) collectively contribute nearly 18% of arrivals. Prior to the conflict in the Middle East, Gulf airports served as transit points for 33% of travelers. However, due to ongoing regional uncertainty, these figures have yet to return to previous levels. These airports function as major transit points for long-haul travelers from Europe, the Americas, and elsewhere, highlighting the importance of Gulf carriers (Emirates, Etihad, Qatar Airways, Air Arabia) in connecting Sri Lanka to global markets. The relatively high share from Kuala Lumpur (4.81%) and Singapore (4.14%) further underscores Southeast Asia’s role as a transit region and source of short-haul tourists.

European and long-haul markets appear smaller London (2.49%), Moscow (1.54%), Paris (0.97%), and Melbourne (1.08%) have modest shares. The presence of Istanbul (3.59%) is interesting, as it serves as a emerging transit point for European travelers especially since the Middle East conflict.

The concentration of arrivals from Indian and Gulf airports suggests that Sri Lanka’s tourism recovery and growth depend heavily on maintaining strong air connectivity with these regions. Enhancing flight frequencies, visa facilitation, and marketing campaigns could yield high returns. The prominence of transit hubs like Dubai, Kuala Lumpur, and Doha indicates that partnerships with international airlines and competitive stopover packages could attract more long-haul visitors. Conversely, the relatively low direct share from Europe and Australia points to an opportunity for promoting direct flights.

Chart 6. Main last departure airports to Sri Lanka, May 2026

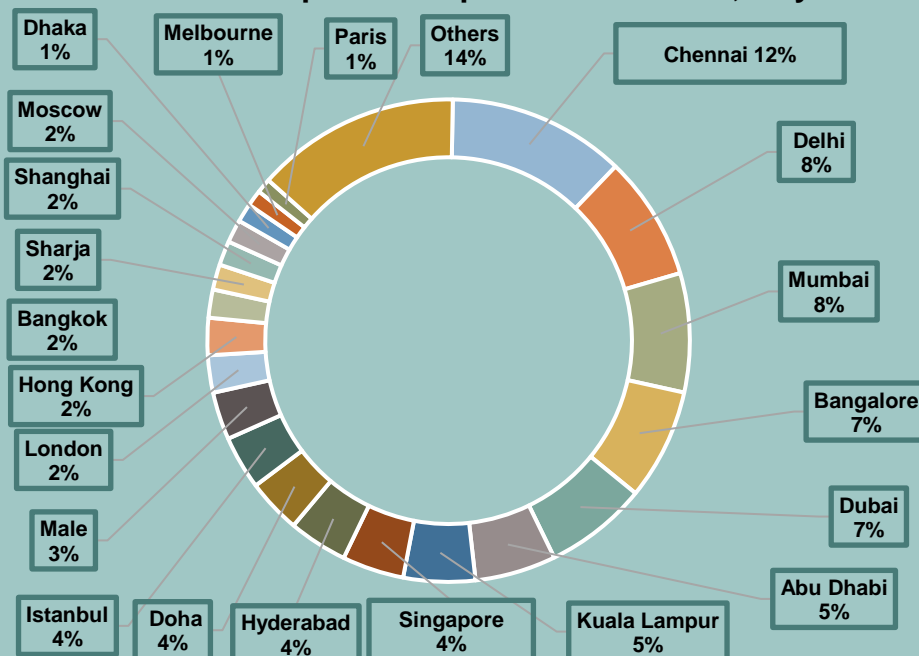
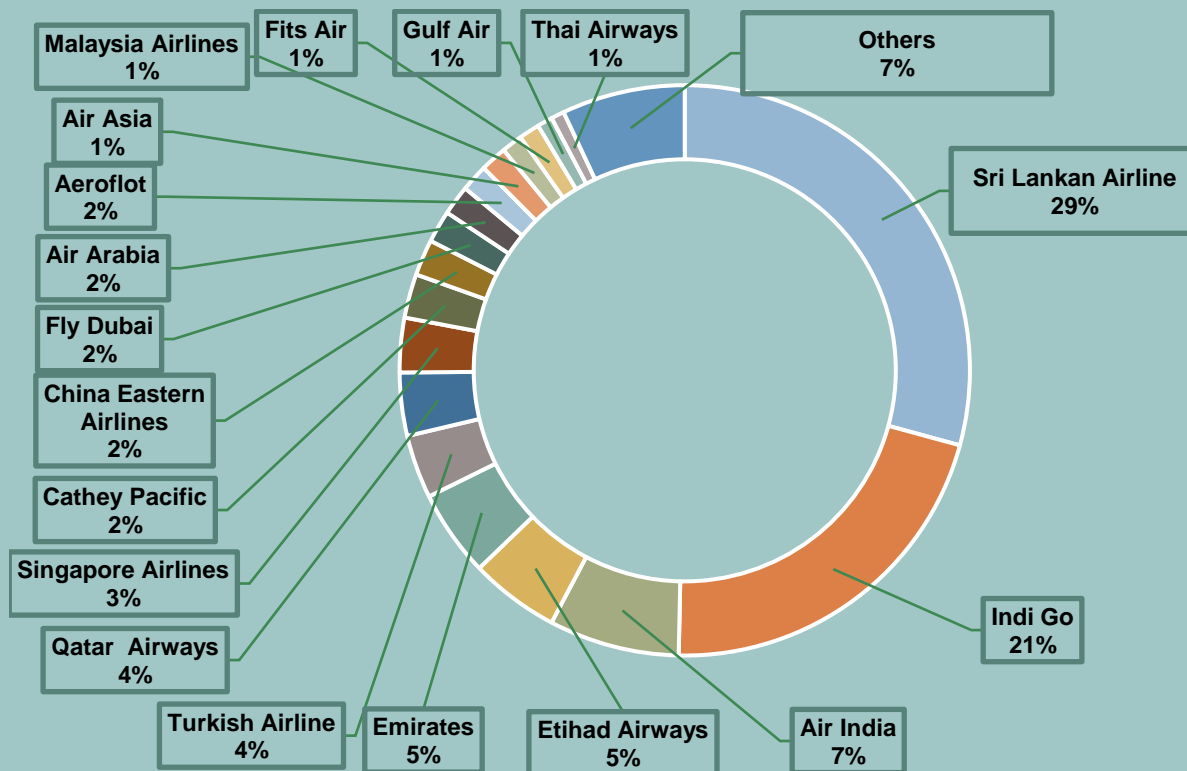


Chart 7. Main airlines to Sri Lanka, May 2026



The airline share data for May reveals a highly competitive market with Sri Lanka's national carrier holding a strong lead, followed closely by Indian low-cost and full-service airlines.

The national carrier carried 42,608 passengers, accounting for nearly 30% of all tourist arrivals. This reflects its extensive network. Maintaining this share is critical for Sri Lanka's aviation sector.

Indigo (21.10%) and Air India (7.40%) together transport over 28% of tourists. When combined with the Indian airport data (Chennai, Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore among top departure points), this underscores the immense short-haul traffic from India. Indigo's second-place position (30,758 passengers) highlights the success of its low-cost, high-frequency model on routes to Sri Lanka.

Middle Eastern carriers maintain significant presence with Etihad (5.07%), Emirates (4.91%), Qatar Airways (3.58%), Fly Dubai (1.82%), Air Arabia (1.69%), and Gulf Air (0.87%) collectively account for about 18% of arrivals, mirroring the earlier airport data for Gulf hubs. Despite regional conflicts reducing their previous 33% transit share, these carriers remain vital for connecting long-haul markets (Europe, Americas, Africa) to Sri Lanka.

Turkish Airlines (3.59%) provides European and Middle Eastern connections; Singapore Airlines (3.09%) and Malaysia Airlines (1.19%) serve Southeast Asian and Australian transit passengers; Cathay Pacific (2.49%) and China Eastern (2.04%) cater to Chinese and North Asian markets. Aeroflot (1.54%) indicates a modest but stable Russian tourist flow. The presence of Fits Air (1.17%) a small Sri Lankan regional carrier suggests niche point-to-point routes.

The heavy reliance on Indian and Gulf carriers means that any disruption in these markets could significantly affect arrivals. To diversify, Sri Lanka could explore incentivizing new direct routes from Europe (e.g., German or French carriers) and East Asia.

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

May 2026

Table 5. Top ten markets vs. main last departure airports to Sri Lanka, May 2026

Country	Chennai	Delhi	Mumbai	Bangalore	Dubai	Abu Dhabi	Kuala Lumpur	Singapore	Hyderabad	Doha	Istanbul	Male	London	Hong Kong	Bangkok	Sharja	Shanghai	Moscow	Dhaka	Melbourne	Paris	Others	Total
India	15,487	9,132	10,462	10,144	1,931	789	463	548	5,547	256	19	284	28	51	156	714	81	1	18	42	4	4,185	60,342
United Kingdom	194	285	194	84	1,200	1,354	385	208	28	1,055	439	75	2,764	97	130	148	7		18	33	12	538	9,248
China	25	32	15	15	143	47	1,009	344	1	31	15	257	3	1,865	419	14	2,020		70	4		2,827	9,156
Germany	64	224	220	39	675	567	139	71	1	638	708	64	46	11	72	20	5	1	2	7	548	2,612	6,734
Australia	55	207	25	56	141	94	814	2,015	21	37	16	57	20	155	97	27	8		13	1,357	9	1,190	6,414
Maldives	13	4	2	19	227	4	69	16		5		2,566	2	5	105	2	1		1			1,289	4,330
United States	153	168	105	162	193	371	72	299	102	253	324	64	138	414	90	38	19		26	2	33	1,299	4,325
France	73	301	23	18	907	497	165	61	1	417	711	25	60	16	59	58	9		0	1	498	389	4,289
Bangladesh	745	305	42	75	36	25	146	35		49	13	737	4	1	18	40			1,554	4	12	153	3,994
Russian Federation	18	42	10	18	249	233	49	10		46	67	61	3	10	44	32	64	2,215	13	2	3	68	3,257

An analysis of the last departure ports of tourists arriving in Sri Lanka provides valuable insights into international travel patterns, airline connectivity, transit preferences, and the accessibility of Sri Lanka from key source markets.

India remains one of Sri Lanka's most important source markets, with Chennai, Mumbai, Bangalore, Delhi, and Hyderabad emerging as the principal last departure ports. This reflects the strong air connectivity between major Indian metropolitan centers and Sri Lanka, particularly through direct and short-haul flights. The prominence of Chennai and other South Indian cities highlights the importance of regional connectivity and the close geographical proximity between the two countries.

For tourists from the United Kingdom, London serves as the primary departure gateway, while Abu Dhabi and Doha emerge as significant transit hubs. This indicates the important role played by Gulf carriers in facilitating travel between the UK and Sri Lanka. The reliance on these Middle Eastern hubs demonstrates how indirect flight networks enhance Sri Lanka's accessibility from long-haul European markets.

Among Chinese tourists, Shanghai, Hong Kong, and Kuala Lumpur function as major last departure points. While Shanghai and Hong Kong represent key aviation gateways within Greater China, Kuala Lumpur's prominence suggests that some travellers utilize regional transit connections through Southeast Asia before arriving in Sri Lanka. This highlights the importance of maintaining strong airline partnerships and connectivity with major Asian aviation hubs.

For the German market, Istanbul, Dubai, and Doha emerge as the leading last departure ports. This pattern reflects the extensive route networks offered by Turkish and Gulf carriers, which provide convenient one-stop connections between Germany and Sri Lanka. The importance of Istanbul also indicates the growing role of Turkish Airlines in connecting European travellers to South Asian destinations.

Australian tourists primarily utilize Melbourne and Singapore as their last departure points. While Melbourne represents a major Australian origin city, Singapore serves as a critical regional hub that facilitates onward connections to Sri Lanka. This demonstrates the strategic importance of Southeast Asian transit gateways in attracting visitors from Oceania.

For the Russian market, Moscow remains the dominant last departure port, reflecting the significance of direct or near-direct air connections between Russia and Sri Lanka. Given the recovery of Russian arrivals in recent years, maintaining and expanding connectivity from Moscow remains important for sustaining this market.

Tourists from Bangladesh predominantly depart from Dhaka, indicating that travel to Sri Lanka is largely concentrated through the country's main international aviation gateway. This suggests potential opportunities to further strengthen direct connectivity and promotional efforts within the Bangladeshi market.

Among French tourists, Dubai and Istanbul emerge as the principal last departure ports, once again highlighting the importance of Gulf and Turkish transit hubs in facilitating travel from Western Europe to Sri Lanka.

Table 6. Top ten markets vs. main airlines to Sri Lanka, May 2026

Country	Sri Lankan Airline	IndiGo	Air India	Etihad Airways	Emirates	Turkish Airline	Qatar Airlines	Singapore Airlines	Cathay Pacific	China Eastern Airlines	Fly Dubai	Air Arabia	Aeroflot	Air Asia	Malaysian Airlines	Fits Air	Gulf Air	Thai Airways	Others	Total
India	33.15	46.00	13.87	0.82	1.90	0.03	0.37	0.25	0.08	0.01	0.87	1.18	0.00	0.08	0.02	0.12	0.07	0.06	1.10	100.00
United Kingdom	37.73	3.24	3.05	14.31	9.42	4.75	11.36	1.74	1.04	0.09	3.08	1.60	0.00	2.17	0.65	0.19	0.44	0.42	4.71	100.00
China	17.05	0.44	0.42	0.44	0.83	0.16	0.34	3.20	20.36	29.18	0.62	0.15	0.00	3.94	2.99	0.74	0.58	2.17	16.38	100.00
Germany	14.05	1.78	5.52	8.38	9.40	10.51	9.41	0.80	0.16	0.07	0.58	0.30	0.01	1.11	0.16	0.31	0.40	0.39	36.63	100.00
Australia	47.82	1.73	0.83	1.36	1.79	0.25	0.56	25.18	2.42	0.12	0.37	0.42	0.00	1.61	10.18	0.05	0.00	0.78	4.54	100.00
Maldives	61.34	0.28	0.05	0.09	0.02	0.00	0.12	0.21	0.12	0.02	10.32	0.05	0.00	0.05	0.05	5.20	20.23	0.25	1.62	100.00
United States	17.43	8.49	2.94	8.65	3.61	7.49	5.80	5.76	9.57	0.49	0.67	0.88	0.00	0.95	0.18	0.28	0.32	0.79	25.71	100.00
France	21.68	2.38	6.46	11.73	18.56	16.58	9.63	1.14	0.37	0.30	2.19	1.35	0.00	2.33	0.23	0.37	0.07	0.56	4.06	100.00
Bangladesh	39.06	20.11	7.04	0.60	0.75	0.33	1.18	0.33	0.03	0.00	0.05	1.00	0.00	0.18	0.13	27.87	0.23	0.13	1.03	100.00
Russian Federation	4.24	1.38	0.80	7.00	5.34	2.06	1.41	0.18	0.31	2.03	2.12	0.98	68.01	0.64	0.12	0.71	0.34	0.40	1.93	100.00

An analysis of the airlines utilized by tourists from key source markets provides valuable insights into travel preferences, airline connectivity, and the role of different carriers in facilitating inbound tourism to Sri Lanka.

The findings indicate that IndiGo and Sri Lankan Airlines are the dominant carriers used by tourists arriving from India. This reflects the strong air connectivity between the two countries, supported by frequent direct flights linking several major Indian cities with Sri Lanka. The significant presence of IndiGo also demonstrates the growing influence of low-cost carriers in stimulating regional travel and increasing accessibility to the destination.

For tourists from the United Kingdom, Germany, Australia, Maldives, United States, France, and Bangladesh, Sri Lankan Airlines emerges as the most frequently utilized airline. This highlights the national carrier's critical role in connecting Sri Lanka with both regional and long-haul markets through its direct services and extensive partnerships. The airline's prominence across diverse source markets underscores its importance as a key facilitator of inbound tourism and its contribution to maintaining Sri Lanka's global connectivity.



Interestingly, this pattern differs somewhat from the pre-pandemic and pre-conflict period, during which Middle Eastern carriers, particularly those operating through major hubs such as Dubai, Doha, and Abu Dhabi, played a more dominant role in transporting tourists to Sri Lanka. While Gulf carriers continue to serve as important transit partners, the current findings suggest a stronger reliance on Sri Lankan Airlines, either through direct services or integrated route networks. This shift may reflect changes in airline capacity, route availability, traveller preferences, and the recovery strategies adopted by airlines following disruptions to global aviation.

For the Russian market, Aeroflot emerges as the principal carrier used by visitors travelling to Sri Lanka. This reflects the importance of direct or convenient air links between Russia and Sri Lanka and highlights the role of Aeroflot in sustaining one of Sri Lanka's fastest-growing source markets. The airline's prominence also demonstrates the significance of maintaining air service agreements and operational connectivity with Russia to support continued growth in arrivals.

Overall, the analysis highlights the pivotal role of airline connectivity in shaping tourist arrivals to Sri Lanka. The growing prominence of Sri Lankan Airlines across multiple source markets suggests that the national carrier continues to serve as a key gateway for international visitors, while market-specific airlines such as IndiGo and Aeroflot remain essential in supporting arrivals from strategically important tourism markets.





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