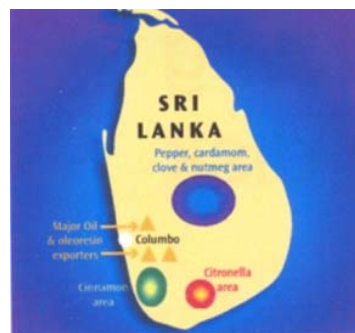


**A DIARY OF THE
STUDY TOUR OF SRI LANKA**

(Sunday 24 – Saturday 30 April 2005)

by Clinton Green



In order to avoid e-mailing problems of a very large file, this report provides a limited number of photographic illustrations, mainly of the tour’s social occasions and of the country’s scenery. Collections of photographs of the various industries examined during the tour are available for viewing and downloading as individual PDF documents via the Sri Lanka map link on the homepage of IFEAT’s website(www.ifeat.org).

Sunday (Day 1)

After resting from our international flights, the IFEAT tour group joined up in the early evening at our hotel, the Colombo Hilton. The group was composed of twelve people from seven countries:

- Australia: Jodi Geri, Australian Botanical Products.
- China: Winnie Yeung, Kallin International.
- India: Ravi Sanganeria, Ultra International; Shyam Varshney, Som Extracts.
- Indonesia: Tirta & Hardwin Salim, Indowangi Nusajaya.
- Taiwan: Clarke Teng, Taiwan Fine Chemicals.
- UK: John Black, Aroma Trading; Clinton Green, IFEAT.
- USA: Stephan Pisano, Citrus & Allied; Jim Gates, Lebermuth; Zena Bell, Pepsi

We represented different career backgrounds and only three had prior – but limited - experience of the Sri Lankan industry. What united us was an enthusiasm to obtain first hand knowledge of Sri Lanka’s spices, essential oils and oleoresin industries from the raw material production phase through processing operations to the point of product export.

Jet Asia, our tour company, started the evening with an introductory tour of some of the historic and cultural sites in Colombo.



Our introduction to members of the local industry was made at an enjoyable welcome reception, cultural show and dinner, hosted by the Sri Lanka Spice Council (TSC) and attended by the Chairman of the Export Development Board. This event was recorded for the television news.



Monday (Citronella day)

The field tour commenced with an early start for the drive by minibus to Katunawa in the far south. On arrival at the Citro Essential Oils Co. estate, we were shown the Ceylon citronella plantation and the distillery. As a bonus, the opportunity arose of observing coir processing. This was followed by a respite from the coastal heat over an excellent lunch at the house of our Citro host, Mr Kularatna.



The drive to our hotel for the night took us in an arc around the southwest coastal road, northwards to the Galle area. This provided the first appreciation of the tsunami devastation.

Originally, we had planned to stay at a hotel in Dikwella but this two-story building had been swept away. Instead, we checked in at the pleasant Untanawa Beach Resort, one of the few hotels open for business on the coastal strip in April 2005. Once again, we were treated to an evening welcome reception, cultural show and dinner, in this case hosted by the Cinnamon Association of Sri Lanka. The more energetic in the group ended the night with a moonlight walk along the beach.



Tuesday (Cinnamon day)

After breakfast, we made a rapid tour of the historic Fort in Galle and then drove north along the road to the cinnamon producing area of Ambalangoda. On this leg, we saw some of the coastal villages that had suffered the full brunt of the tsunami and the survivors housed in tents or temporary huts on the plots where their homes had once stood.



Our first cinnamon visit was to Mr Jayathikale's plantation and peeling centre, where we received a thorough explanation of all operations from the planting of saplings, through husbandry and harvesting to

the skilled, labour intensive process of quill preparation. Next, we visited the nearby H D de Silva & Sons organic cinnamon estate and its leaf oil distillery at Kasagoda. After lunch, we commenced the long drive through the central hills to the Kandy area.



Wednesday (Cardamom day)

We awoke to the comparative cool of the mountains and the wonderful views at the Hunwas Falls Hotel. Our visit for the day was to mountain top cardamom plantation and curing facilities on the P W Rodrigo estate at Kabaragala. This gave a good insight of the labour intensiveness and skill demanded in producing a quality product. We had an excellent lunch on the estate, hosted by EOAS and P W Rodrigo, plus the bonus of seeing the adjoining tea plantations.



This long but satisfying day was agreeably rounded off by a reception and dinner at our hotel, hosted by Link Natural Products.

Thursday (Nutmeg, clove, pepper and vanilla day)

While cardamom is produced on estates, the growing system for the other spices of the Kandy area remains the traditional smallholder’s low intensity, mixed ‘spice garden’. The importance to the local economy of the ability for individual families to sell daily small quantities (1kg or less) of pepper, clove and nutmeg was observed on visiting the Buhary Bros. spice buying store in Wattegama. The grading centres at these buying points for spices also provide a significant scale of local employment for women.



We enjoyed lunch in a country restaurant with magnificent views of the surrounding mountainous terrain. This break was completed with a visit to the adjoining batik cottage industry.



The early afternoon visit was to EOAS' organic spice estate at Matale, where cultivation is practised within a mixed tree system that is comparable to smallholders spice gardens. The demonstrations included the harvesting of nutmeg, pepper and clove and the hand-pollination of vanilla flowers. Additionally, we observed rubber tapping and the primary processing of the latex.



We drove back to Colombo, arriving in the evening very tired but happy with all that we had seen and learnt on the field trip.

Friday (The EOAS and HDDS factories)

On Friday morning, we visited EOAS' new facility at Horana and viewed the oleoresin extraction plant, the production of white pepper by decortication of black pepper and the cultivation of vanilla grown on supports and under shade netting.



The next visit was to the nearby H D de Silva factory where spice oils are distilled and an oleoresin extractor has recently been commissioned. Also, we were provided with an excellent lunch to the accompaniment of a country and western style band.



On return to Colombo, a meeting was held with representatives of producers, processors and exporters to clarify some details of the production operations that we had seen and to answer our hosts' questions about world market trends.

In the evening, we were treated to a final reception and dinner, hosted by the Spice and Allied Products Producers' and Traders' Association (SAPPTA). This also received coverage on television. The fitter members of the group then moved on to a jazz night club to finish to the evening



Saturday (The Link factory)

During the morning, we made our final factory visit to Link Natural Products at the village of Dompe. There, we saw the modern spice distillation and oleoresin plants and also were introduced to the production of Ayurvedic medicinal products.



Our hosts then provided us with lunch at a nearby historic colonial period guesthouse and arranged a meeting with an elephant. Finally, the shopaholics were let loose to run amok in Colombo for the afternoon.



Afterword

Well, did the tour achieve our objectives of gaining a thorough understanding of the spices, essential oils and oleoresin industries in Sri Lanka and of making personal contact with its members? It certainly lived up to the brochure caution that ‘participants must be prepared for hard travelling for long distances and this tour is for dedicated industry enthusiasts’.

The answer can be given as a modification of Julius Caesar’s famous words: ‘*We came, we saw, we learnt and we enjoyed*’. Equally important as the professional satisfaction obtained, the experience provided a very rewarding insight into the national character. We were overwhelmed by the good humour, sincere friendship and the hospitality extended to us by everyone we met. Participation in any future repeat of this tour can be recommended to members of IFEAT.

In conclusion, we wish to express our gratitude to all those we met and in particular thanks are due to the three IFEAT member companies for supporting the tour (Link, EOAS and HDDS) and to the chairmen of SAPPTA and the TSC.



Devapriya
Nugawella
(M/D, Link)



D A Perera
(M/D, EOAS)



Gehan de Silva
(M/D, H D De Silva)



Sarada De Silva
(Chairman, The
Spice Council)



S A Cadar
(Chairman,
SAPPTA)

Special thanks are owed to Fazal Mushin, the tour's tireless programme coordinator, and to Dhammika Gunasekera and his team at Jet Asia for their excellent planning and efficient execution of the programme.



Fazal Mushin
(Tour Programme
Coordinator, Link)

**The Jet Asia
tour team:**

		
Dhammika	Anusha	
		
Palitha	Asoka	Chris