

## **AITO TSUNAMI APPEAL**

We all recall with horror the memories of that tragic day on 26<sup>th</sup> December 2004 when the tsunami hit the coastlines of Aceh, Sri Lanka, western Thailand, south-eastern India and the Maldives, Nicobar and Andaman islands of the Indian Ocean. Our thoughts remain with the many who suffered on that day and since.

AITO's member companies and travel agent and business partners felt a strong desire to help and raise funds and we chose to launch an Appeal specifically for Sri Lanka for several reasons. AITO's links with Sri Lanka have been particularly special following our wonderful conference there in November 2003, with newfound friends and business acquaintances. From a tourism perspective, it became clear that the coastal tourist areas had been seriously affected by the tsunami and would need help with recovery. Therefore, it seemed fitting to focus our relief and recovery efforts there.

The Sri Lankan people faced much tragedy through loss of life and injury. Many homes, and some hotels and businesses were destroyed or damaged along the coastline, and tourists stopped visiting not only the affected coastal tourist resorts but the whole of inland Sri Lanka too.

### **AITO TSUNAMI APPEAL – Stage 1 for Sri Lanka - Merlin**

AITO first led an appeal for emergency relief in the form of water sanitation and health assistance. AITO members and our travel agent and business partners raised over £30,000 within two weeks of the disaster. This was given to Merlin, the UK registered charity, for specific use in Sri Lanka on the east coast. AITO's Executive Manager, Angela Simpson, visited Sri Lanka in April and saw at first hand the work that Merlin was doing. They had already built a dispensary, which was operational (*left picture*), and they were in the process of constructing two hospitals to replace buildings affected by the tsunami. Merlin's team of staff were working closely with local NGOs and local councils on systems for health education, proper sanitation and disease prevention – it was most impressive work in difficult circumstances.

For more information on Merlin please go to [www.merlin.org.uk](http://www.merlin.org.uk)



### **AITO TSUNAMI APPEAL – Stage 2 for Sri Lanka – medium-term, tourism-related recovery**

Having reached our target for immediate relief, we decided to look to the medium-term and to more tourism-related recovery projects in Sri Lanka. Together with our friends in the Sri Lankan travel industry, we have been working with the Travel Foundation to set up a sound structure to identify, set up and manage a number of tourism-related initiatives that will directly benefit the communities that have been badly affected by the tsunami.

We have carried on fund-raising and have amassed another £25,000 so far. If you would like to help by donating to our appeal, we would be delighted. Simply complete the *Donation* form (*go back to previous webpage*) and send it with your cheque to the Travel Foundation.

The Travel Foundation is working on two projects in particular...

1. **Craft training:** many vulnerable young people do not have jobs following the tsunami and this project on the south coast is training young unemployed girls to make lace products.
2. **Trees for Life - Revegetation of land affected by the tsunami:** using indigenous native species, working with foresters and rangers.

For more information on the Craft training and Trees for Life project see *AITO and The Travel Foundation Initiative* on the AITO website.



### AITO APPEAL STAGE 3:

#### PLEASE DO TAKE A HOLIDAY IN SRI LANKA, THAILAND & THE MALDIVES

THE BEST WAY TO HELP IS TO HAVE A WONDERFUL HOLIDAY THERE

AITO companies have been actively encouraging people to take holidays in these countries, and continue to do so. They have in-depth knowledge about these destinations and know the situation 'on the ground'. The vast majority of each country was not affected by the tsunami at all, and you can have a fantastic time visiting historic sites, exploring the rainforests and immersing yourself in the fascinating culture, or even lazing at the beach. Nearly all the damaged hotels have been renovated (and look better than before) and the local communities are getting their lives back together. A small number of beachfront hotels were badly damaged and will either remain permanently closed or will be rebuilt.

The Maldivian and Thai authorities have been quick to facilitate the re-building programmes. In Sri Lanka the re-building of housing is taking longer, so for the foreseeable future the visitor should be prepared to see some temporary housing and ruins along the coastal road from the south of Colombo round the south coast to the east. This should not, however, deter you from having a wonderful and memorable holiday in the company of remarkable people – they will surely welcome you with open arms.

