

# SRI LANKA

Newsletter

December 2018



## Revealing Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka is a small country of immense charm and impressive cultural heritage which, since time immemorial, has been a meeting point for Eastern and Western trade. The island was known for its precious stones and tortoise shells to ancient Greek merchants and sailors from the Roman Empire and to navigators from Persia, Armenia and Arabia. Chinese cartographers mapped the island well before the sea route from Europe to India was discovered in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century.

The Portuguese arrived in 1505 but were ousted by the Dutch in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Neither the Portuguese nor the Dutch were able to capture Kandy. In 1802, under the Treaty of Amiens, the Dutch ceded the territory they held to the British who consolidated their grip on the country in 1815 with the fall of Kandy.

Ceylon gained its independence on 4 February 1948 and the country changed its name to Sri Lanka in 1972. Civil war broke out in 1983 between the Sinhalese and the Tamils. The war lasted 26 years and finally ended in 2009 when government forces defeated all territory held by the Tamil separatists and their military wing, the Tamil Tigers. Some 450,000 Tamils sought asylum in Western Europe and the United States between 1983 and 1998 alone and it is estimated that between 60,000 and 100,000 people were killed in the conflict, perhaps as many as 40,000 in the closing stages alone.

Today, Sri Lanka is at peace and there has been a steady and impressive growth in tourism since the end of the conflict. Visitor numbers exceeded two million for the first time in 2017 and are expected to continue to grow over the coming years. Tourism has emerged as an important sector in the economy and is helping to drive forward improvements in infrastructure as well as being a valuable source of economic growth, employment and foreign exchange. Today there are over 150,000 people employed directly in tourism with at least another 200,000 indirectly in the ancillary sector such as food and beverage production, making souvenirs, laundry services, construction and handicraft markets.

People are friendly and engaging, welcoming travellers with a ready smile.

## Getting there

Sri Lankan Airlines has a daily direct service from Heathrow to Colombo departing at 21.30 and arriving at 12.45 the following day (10 hours 45 minutes). The return flight departs at 13.05 and lands at 20.00 (11 hours 25 minutes).

## Time Zone

Sri Lanka is 5½ hours ahead of GMT, 4½ hours ahead of British Summer Time and 3½ hours ahead of Continental European Time.

## Domestic Flights

Sri Lankan Airways has a good network of local flights throughout the country unless we are arranging land transfers either by road or train.

## Visas

A visa is required for entry. This is now available on-line for European nationals and costs \$35. It is recommended that you safely carry your passport at all times and ensure that it is valid for 6 months beyond the date of travel.  
<http://www.eta.gov.lk/slvisa/>

## Vaccinations

It is advisable that you check you are covered against Polio, Tetanus, Typhoid and Hepatitis A. If you have been to Africa within 3 months of arriving in Sri Lanka you would need to provide proof of vaccination against Yellow Fever.

## Insurance

A policy to cover cancellation, curtailment, theft, and medical issues (including repatriation) is recommended.



### Colombo

Sri Lanka's largest city is also the main seaport. Slave Island and Independence Square are worth a visit together with some of the Buddhist and Hindu temples. It is said that in colonial times if you spent enough time in the foyer at the Grand Oriental hotel you would sooner or later meet everyone that you could ever possibly need to know.

In the hour before sunset many residents wander down towards Galle Face Green to fly kites, play cricket and paddle in the Indian Ocean.

### Anuradhapura

Anuradhapura was the capital of the island from the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC to the 10<sup>th</sup> century AD. The ancient part of the city is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and is dotted with Buddhist shrines, handsome dagobas, ruins with fine stone carvings, gardens, ponds and an excellent irrigation system of reservoirs and canals.

Anuradhapura is home to the much venerated Sri Maha Bodhi tree which was reputedly planted in 288 BC and under which the Buddha attained enlightenment. Anuradhapura is an excellent base from which to visit Sigiriya, Dambulla and Polonnaruwa.



### Money

The local currency is Sri Lankan Rupees. Currency can be exchanged in Sri Lanka only so you would be best to bring sterling, US dollars or euros. The exchange rates are fairly flat across all the banks but the hotel rates are considerably poorer.

You can also withdraw cash island-wide on most ATM machines linked to the cirrus, maestro and plus networks. You may need to alert your bank/credit card company to the fact that you will be using your card in Sri Lanka as sometimes cards will be automatically blocked to avoid credit/debit card fraud. Most allow up to US\$200 a day with some allowing an enhanced withdrawal of US\$400 per day. Many cash machines will only dispense notes of Rs.1000 although it is a good idea to have a supply of smaller notes and change.

Banks open Mon-Fri, 8.00 a.m. – 3.00 p.m. Some are open till 7 pm and even open at weekends and festival days. The millennium branch of the Seylan Bank in Colombo (district 3) is open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Credit cards (Mastercard, Visa) are commonly accepted in hotels, restaurants and many shops, but do check first.





### Sirigiya

The Sigiriya rock fortress is surrounded by the remains of an extensive network of gardens and reservoirs. It is a tough walk to the top so you need to be reasonably fit (NB. vertigo sufferers may find it too daunting) but the frescos are interesting and the views are impressive.

The Sigiraya was built during the reign of King Kassapa I in the 5<sup>th</sup> century, and it is one of the seven World Heritage Sites of Sri Lanka.

### Dambulla

The largest and best-preserved cave temple complex of Sri Lanka dates back to the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC. It was first used by King Valagam Bahu who took refuge here following an invasion by rival powers. On regaining his throne he commissioned magnificent carved images to be built within the rock. Later kings made further improvements and the five caves here contain over one hundred and fifty images of the Buddha of which the largest is a colossal figure spanning fifteen meters. Well worth a visit.



### Polonnaruwa

Polonnaruwa became the capital in the 11<sup>th</sup> century under King Vijaya Bahu but it was Parakramabahu the Great (died 1186) who constructed thousands of reservoirs and irrigation canals. He devised the Parakrama Samudra (Sea of Parakrama) as a vast man-made lake which he linked to other fortified reservoirs to circle the main city like a ribbon. As well as providing water the lake defended the city against invaders and continues to irrigate some forty-five square miles of paddy fields.



### Hotels and Ground Arrangements

Our team of travel specialists will provide first-hand expertise and advice. We book airport-hotel transfers, city tours, excursions and internal flights, buses or trains according to your needs together with all hotels and ground arrangements. You will usually have a driver assigned to you for your stay.

### Costs

Prices will vary according to season of travel, the standard of accommodation and whether we are booking travel arrangements for you on a private basis or as part of a group tour. Please contact us to discuss your arrangements.

### Internal Travel

Many roads are in poor condition and driving is often erratic. Amongst the hazards on the road are pedestrians with little road awareness, animals, potholes, rickshaws, and determined bus drivers with no sense of courtesy or moderation. Always wear a seatbelt in cars and taxis. Security checkpoints and roadblocks are common. Taxis are inexpensive and motorized rickshaws (tuk-tuks) are readily available. Always agree a price before you travel.

### Food & Drink

The staple diet is rice and curry. Sri Lankans eat even this for breakfast so do not be surprised to see this on the menu in addition to American or Continental breakfast. Coffee is generally weak and tea is often served with hot milk.

Bottled water is available almost everywhere. Locally brewed Lion or 3 Coins beer is excellent, the local gin is fine but the tonic is generally quite flat (international brands are available). Australian, French, South African and Chilean wines are relatively expensive and there may be a very restricted choice for wines by the glass. Fruit juices are very sweet but it is worth trying king coconut water.

### Cultural sensitivities

Dress appropriately when visiting temples and places of worship (knee length dress, trousers not shorts, shoulders should be covered). Footwear and head gear (including sunglasses) must be removed before entering a Hindu or a Buddhist shrine.

Keep small denomination notes readily accessible to pay to the keepers who man the shoe racks. Other donations at temples are voluntary and you might feel under pressure to make a contribution but you should never hand money directly to a monk.

It is considered very rude to blow your nose in public.

### Electricity

Sri Lanka uses two main power sockets, UK-style square 3-pin plugs and Asian round 3-pin plugs. Better hotels sometimes have an adaptor in rooms (or available at reception) but you are advised to take your own universal adaptor to charge mobile phones and electronic gadgets. It is also a good idea to carry a fully-charged power monkey and relevant cables with you in case batteries run low on phones and cameras.

### Ethnicities

Sinhalese 74.88%; Sri Lankan Tamil 11.21%; Sri Lankan Moors 9.23%; Indian Tamil 4.16%; Malays/Burghers/Others 0.52%.



### Kandy

The royal city of Kandy is one of the most scenic cities in Sri Lanka, set in a valley of tea plantations. The people of Kandy take considerable pride in the city which forms the southernmost tip of the Cultural Triangle. Neither the Portuguese nor the Dutch were able to capture the city but it finally succumbed to the British in 1815.

The Temple of the Tooth, Sri Dalada Maligawa, is a hugely important shrine and place of pilgrimage as it houses the important tooth relic of Buddha. The tooth itself is encased in seven gold caskets decorated with precious gemstones. The golden canopy which covers the shrine was built in 1987.

The complex includes the Royal Palace and the Temple Museum which contains a stuffed elephant, Raja, which used to take part in the important annual parade (Kandy Esala Perahera). The festival takes place over ten days each July/August and includes dancers, musicians, acrobats and fire-eaters.

### Ceylon Tea

Until the 1860s Ceylon was best known for its coffee, which had been introduced by the Dutch at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. By 1857, under British rule, coffee plantations covered over eighty thousand acres and within ten years this would double. But in the 1860s coffee blight began to take a hold and over the next few years the great coffee industry built by private enterprise collapsed entirely and planters, farmers and investors desperately sought to grow other crops to avoid financial ruin.

Tea is best grown at high altitudes of over 2,100m (6,890 ft), and the plants require an annual rainfall of more than 100–125 cms (39–49 inches). The humidity, cool temperatures, and rainfall in Sri Lanka's central highlands provide an ideal climate for the production of high quality tea. James Taylor, a Scotsman working on a coffee plantation at the Loolcondera Estate in Hewaheta near Kandy, is the man credited with pioneering tea in Sri Lanka. Born in 1835, he arrived in Ceylon in 1852 aged just 17. In 1866 he was sent by his employers to India to learn about the production of tea and in 1867 he planted nineteen acres at Loolcondera.

Within a few decades Ceylon teas would become famous throughout the world. The 1884 and 1886 international fairs held in London introduced the world to Ceylon teas and by 1887 tea had become the country's principle export commodity. In 1890 Thomas Lipton, who already owned 300 grocery stores bearing his name, met James Taylor in Ceylon and bought four failing coffee plantations. Lipton Teas were born.

The Planters Association of Ceylon used various publicity stunts to support the industry: in 1891, Kaiser Wilhelm II, Czar Alexander III, Grand Duke Nicholas, the Queen of Italy and Emperor Franz-Josef each received sixty chests of tea together with an illustrated book about Ceylon. At the 1893 World Fair in Chicago one million packets of Ceylon tea were sold. Replica tea factories were erected in the Sri Lanka pavilion at the famous Paris Exposition of 1900 for which the Planters Association won an award. To work the estates, planters brought in large numbers of Tamil workers from southern India, who soon made up ten per cent of the island's population.

"Not often is it that men have the heart, when their one great industry is withered, to rear up in a few years another as rich to take its place; and the tea fields of Ceylon are as true a monument to courage as is the lion of Waterloo."

Arthur Conan Doyle

After water, tea is the most widely consumed beverage in the world. Today, tea is cultivated on 479,000 acres of land in Sri Lanka (approx. 750 square miles) and production in 2018 is expected to surpass 7 million pounds (320 million kgs). Sri Lanka is the world's fourth largest producer of tea after China, India and Kenya. The tea industry employs over a million people.

### Religions/Philosophy

Buddhist 69.3%; Hindu 15.5%; Muslim 7.5%; Christian 7.5%; others 0.2%.

### What to Pack

Travel light and wear practical clothing: cotton T-shirts and trousers, loose dresses rather than heavy jeans. Dresses and skirts should be at least knee length. Sleeveless shirts are not recommended outside of Colombo.

Sri Lankans tend to dress smartly when dining in style, particularly at places such as the Galle Face Hotel in Colombo. Although the country is less formal than it was, many hotels have a dress policy at their restaurants in the evenings. A couple of smart outfits might be a good idea, perhaps a light suit for men, a cocktail dress for women.

### Suggested Itineraries

#### Tea, Temples and Tuk-Tuks:

Our popular 2-week introduction to Sri Lanka.

**Highlights:** Colombo – Anuradhapura – Dambulla – Sirigiya – Kandy – Nuwara Eliya – Horton Plains – Galle – Beach

**Link:** <https://bit.ly/2yHdHuY>

#### Temples, Wildlife & the Undiscovered North

A 3-week itinerary to reveal Sri Lanka's secrets.

**Highlights:** Makandura – Wilpattu – Jaffna – Delft Island – Anuradhapura – Sirigiya – Minneriya - Dambulla - Kandy – Ella – Yala National Park - Mirissa – Galle – Colombo.

**Link:** <https://bit.ly/2q2KOFM>





### Nuwara Eliya

Nuwara Eliya is the highest town in Sri Lanka at 1,868 m (6,128 ft) and is surrounded by lush tea plantations. It is a pretty little place with a cool climate and unpredictable weather which became popular with British colonists in the 19<sup>th</sup> century who would come here for a spot of hunting (foxes, deer and elephants) and fishing, golf, polo and, of course, cricket. They have left their legacy with country houses in the Tudor-style with half-timbering and beautiful gardens, Gregory Lake and Victoria Park. Today Nuwara Eliya has a population of 27,500 and is known as "Little England". It is worth spending a couple of nights here to explore Nuwara Eliya properly and to visit the Horton Plains.



### Horton Plains

With waterfalls and wildlife, ice-cold streams, marshland trails and dramatic views a visit to Horton Plains is highly recommended but it requires a pre-dawn start before the weather sets in and shrouds the area in fog.

At 'Worlds End' (photo, right) the plateau plunges almost 1000 metres in a sheer drop. Butterflies and birdlife, rare lizards, hares, deer, monkeys, giant squirrels and wild boars are amongst the wildlife here.



Mirissa Beach

### Beaches

The delightful sandy beach of Mirissa was once a well-kept secret, but has become more popular in recent years. Mirissa has a safe, palm-fringed beach.

Off the coast of Mirissa, Blue Whales, bottlenose Dolphins, Sperm Whales and Humpbacks can often be seen during the whale-watching season, best between December and March.

The appealing beaches at Mount Lavinia, Wadduwa, Kalutara, Bentota, Hikkaduwa and Unawatuna along the coast between Galle and Negombo offer accommodation to suit every budget.

Our team of travel specialists will be happy to discuss what is best for you.



## Galle

Galle is the finest example of a fortress city built by Europeans in the whole of South-East Asia although there had been settlements here long before the arrival of the Portuguese in 1588.

It is believed to be the Tarshish of the Old Testament, appeared in Ptolomy's Geographia in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD and was mentioned by the 6<sup>th</sup> Century Byzantine geographer Cosmas Indicopleustes.

The Portuguese built embankments and bastions which the Dutch greatly expanded upon after they captured it in 1640. The fort of Galle was handed over to the English on 23 February 1796, one week after the surrender of Colombo. The city retains considerable colonial charm.



## Ella



Ella is surrounded by hills covered with cloud forests and tea plantations and wonderful views across the southern plains of Sri Lanka. This is one of Sri Lanka's prime hiking destinations and a great place to unwind for a few days. A short hike to Little Adam's Peak (1141m) will take only a couple of hours. The best weather is early morning when the skies are clear and the morning air is fresh and cool. To climb to the 7,329 ft (2234m) summit of Adam's Peak itself is altogether another matter. The goal is to be on top of the mountain at sunrise. Climbing at night is an unusual experience and is best between December to May. During other months it is inadvisable due to heavy rains, extreme winds, and thick mist.

## Jaffna



Jaffna is the principal city in the northern province and is an interesting combination of historic power, colonial legacy and strong Tamil and Hindu influence. While the centre and east of Sri Lanka were ruled by the Kingdom of Kandy and the south and west by the Kingdom of Kotte, the north was ruled by the Jaffna Kingdom which thrived from 1215 until 1624. With the arrival of Europeans in the 16th century, Jaffna came under Portuguese control and was then in the hands of the Dutch East India Company (1640-1796) until ousted by the British until independence in 1948. During the Sri Lankan Civil War (1983-2009) many Tamils emigrated or were displaced and Jaffna was out of bounds and isolated.

## Yala National Park



Yala National Park is Sri Lanka's most famous National Park and with good reason. Yala hosts a variety of ecosystems ranging from moist monsoon forests to freshwater and marine wetlands. Although many come in the hope of glimpsing a leopard (if you do, regard it as a bonus), Yala offers herds of wild elephant and buffalo, boar, pythons, innumerable birds, bears, jackals, iridescent peacocks, plenty of birdlife and more. Keep your eyes peeled, binoculars handy and a camera at the ready. Nearby is Bundala National Park, an area of wetlands, lagoons and mud flats which host an abundance of migratory birds during the period from August to April. The park is home to spotted deer, pangolin and grey langur monkey.

## Delft Island



Delft Island is a small coral and limestone island with clear waters, baobab trees, no cars, a 1000-year-old temple built by the Chola Dynasty, the ruins of a Dutch Fort and wild horses descended from those left by the Portuguese over 400 years ago. There are two ferry services per day, one in the morning and the other in the afternoon and the journey takes about an hour. The best way to get about the island is by bike or on the back of a tractor.



## Group Tours and Cruises

Although we specialise in putting together tailor-made itineraries for independent travellers, some people prefer to travel in a group accompanied by a Tour Leader throughout your entire trip, others like to travel on cruise ships.

Revealed Travel books a variety of Escorted Small-Group Tours and Cruises of fixed length, departing on fixed dates, and following a pre-set, fixed itinerary to Sri Lanka.



### Classic Sri Lanka Group Tour

Highlights: Negombo – Anuradhapura – Polonnaruwa - Sirigiya – Dambulla - Kandy – Bandarawela – Mirissa – Galle - Colombo

15 days from £1545 excluding international flights

Regular departures; group size usually 12-15 people.

Please contact our travel specialists to check dates and availability.

### Sri Lanka Adventure Group Tour (includes hiking, biking and white-water rafting)

Highlights: Dambulla – Sirigiya – Kandy - Adams Peak - Wilpattu National Park - Hikkaduwa Beach

15 days from £2415 excluding international flights.

Regular departures; small group tour (usually up to 16 passengers).



### Indian Ocean Cruise in Style

Countries: Sri Lanka, Maldives, Seychelles

Highlights: Colombo – Galle - Yala National Park - Uligamu Island - Hanifaru Bay - Male Praslin & Curieuse - Mahe

14 Days from £7920 pp

Please call us to check departure dates, cabin types, options and availability

### Dubai to Singapore Cruise

Countries: United Arab Emirates – Oman – India – Sri Lanka – Thailand - Singapore

Highlights: Dubai – Muscat - Mumbai (Bombay) – Goa - Kochi (Cochin) – Colombo – Phuket – Singapore

Regular departures between December and March

15 nights from £1450 excl. flights

Please call us to check departure dates, cabin types, options and availability.



### Meet the Team:

Do come and see us to discuss your holiday plans for 2019/2020. Revealed Travel will be exhibiting at the following travel shows:

**Destinations Manchester:** 17-20 Jan 2019  
Event City

**Destinations London:** 31 Jan – 3 Feb 2019  
Olympia

Please contact us to book an appointment and to secure free entry tickets.

### Previous Newsletters

Recent newsletters on Antarctica, the Galapagos Islands and Guatemala are available on our websites.

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We would be delighted to help with your travel arrangements for 2019/2020.



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