

INSPIRING SRI LANKA

WHERE TO GO, WHAT TO DO & MORE



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WHY TRAVEL WITH INSPIRING VACATIONS?



GLOBAL EXPERTS

When you travel with Inspiring Vacations, you can expect thoughtfully curated tours to iconic destinations across the globe. Our authentic and culturally-rich tours are packed with must-see sights, lesser-known locations and enriching local experience, all at an unbeatable price.



ONLINE ADVANTAGES

Browsing and shopping for your next Inspiring Vacations tour couldn't be easier. We are an online company which means you can shop at your own convenience — anytime, anywhere, even while on tour. Our award-winning website is user-friendly and easy to navigate. We want our customers to be empowered to be able to access and manage their booking at any time — manage upgrades, book optional tours, and more.



INSPIRING COMMUNITY

Our travel articles, digital magazine, destination videos and member-only Facebook community groups will inspire your wanderlust or if you prefer, have a phone chat with one of our travel specialists for their recommendations.

WHY VISIT SRI LANKA NOW?



Brendon Cooper

CHIEF PRODUCT OFFICER
Inspiring Vacations



GOOD VALUE

Is Africa a little costly or too far away? Bringing together culture, religion, wildlife and friendly people, Sri Lanka is easily accessible and incredibly affordable not only to access, but once you arrive, it makes for an incredibly good value holiday.



WILDLIFE

One of the highlights of any visit to Sri Lanka is its wildlife, which inhabit the land and sea. Sri Lanka is home to a range of national parks, the most famous being Yala National Park which allows you to see incredibly diverse wildlife. Board an open air safari vehicle and venture into any of the parks to see herds of elephants, sambar (deer), leopards and if you are lucky, sloth bears. The action isn't just on land, Sri Lanka's waters are home to the largest animal to ever inhabit the earth, the blue whale.



HISTORY

Once the wildlife action stops, Sri Lanka houses history spanning centuries and deep rooted religions. One of the highlights of any visit to Sri Lanka is Lion Rock. While it is a steep journey to the top, the palace is built at the rock plateau 370 meters above sea level and offers breathtaking views of its surroundings.

Sri Lanka is one of those lucky destinations which can be visited most of the year. Favourite times to travel are September to March when the weather is at its best. However, there really isn't a bad time to visit with different parts of the island experiencing good weather most of the year and a stable equatorial climate.

And take it from me, one visit isn't enough.



Stilt fishermen can often be seen on the Galle coast

(Image: iStockphoto)

WHEN IS THE BEST TIME TO VISIT?

Sri Lanka is rapidly gaining popularity, thanks to its beautiful beaches, fascinating culture, mesmerising landscapes and welcoming people. But, when is the best time to go?

SRI LANKA MIGHT BE SMALL, but its weather patterns are complex. This is largely attributed to the island's two separate monsoon seasons, as well as geographic features like plateaus, valleys, basins and peaks, all of which affect temperature, rainfall, wind and humidity. As a result, the coasts might only be hours apart by car, but each experience quite different weather systems.

One thing Sri Lanka usually is, is warm, due to its proximity to the equator, so only the rainfall should impact when you plan to visit. Thankfully, no matter when you wish to travel, there's usually somewhere in Sri Lanka that is dry.

(All images: iStockphoto)



Opposite: Sri Lanka offers something for every traveller, no matter the season

Among the more popular regions to visit in Sri Lanka are the west and south-west coastal areas. Here, you will find the tropical capital of Colombo, the historic town of Galle, and the golden beaches of Unawatuna, Negombo and Bentota. These regions are best explored between **December and March**, when they're dry and temperatures range from the high twenties to low thirties.

The Hill Country is also best explored between **January and March**, when lush towns like Nuwara Eliya average a moderate 20 degrees celsius during the day. The cultural capital of Kandy is also perfect in this window, with little rain and a lovely 30-degree average temperature.

If you are keen for some wildlife viewing, head to Yala National Park from **February to June**, when water reserves are at their lowest and animals are out and about.

April through to September is when the east coast experiences its dry season and the beaches of Trincomalee and Tangalle are ideal. Meanwhile, the plantations of the Tea Country are kept lush at this time of the year by the rains, and Yala is at its wettest, particularly between **May to August**.

The west and south-west coasts experience their monsoon during these months. Although Galle and Colombo are at their wettest from **April to June**, temperatures are still extremely pleasant, between 26 and 30 degrees celsius, and much can be seen between showers.

July and August are hugely popular months to visit Kandy for the Perahera Festival, which lasts for ten days

ONE THING SRI LANKA USUALLY IS, IS WARM, DUE TO ITS PROXIMITY TO THE EQUATOR, SO ONLY THE RAINFALL SHOULD IMPACT WHEN YOU PLAN TO VISIT. “ ”

in honour of the sacred tooth. All festivities, from the extravagant parades to the traditional dancing, are great spectacles for repeat visitors and first-time travellers alike. Finally, the so-called 'cultural triangle' is also at its best at this time of year, with the ancient cities, landmarks and temples of Sigiriya, Anuradhapura, Dambulla and Polonnaruwa dry and hot, from **May through to September**.

Sri Lanka offers something for every traveller at any time of the year, and a trip around the country will reward all visitors with a wonderful range of experiences. ●

Watch our
Sri Lanka
weather video.
[Scan here](#)



INSPIRING
VACATIONS

↳
Sri Lanka's famed
Nine Arch Bridge

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Sri Lanka videos
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(Image: Shutterstock)

INTRODUCING →

SRILANKA



A resident leopard at Yala

INSPIRING
VACATIONS

This sprawling
national gem boasts
the highest density
of leopards in the world
and is a must-see
for any animal
enthusiast

SNAPSHOT ON →
**YALA NATIONAL
PARK**



(Image: Shutterstock)

📌 *Clockwise from right: Yala has the highest density of leopards in the world; spotted deer drinking at a savannah; bee-eaters are just one of the 200 bird species found at Yala; the ancient temple of Sithulpawwa; on safari*

A SAFARI THROUGH NATIONAL

parkland sits at the top of many bucket lists. While Sri Lanka typically conjures up images of picturesque coastline and sprawling tea plantations, it is also home to 60 wildlife sanctuaries and 22 national parks, packed with animals often associated with Africa. One highlight is going on a safari through the famous Yala National Park which has a well-deserved reputation as the country's most popular site for wildlife spotting.

Located on the southern coast of Sri Lanka, Yala stretches across 979 sq km and backs onto the Indian Ocean. It was designated

as a wildlife sanctuary at the beginning of the 20th century, however, under British rule, it was utilised as a game hunting reserve by the elite. Thankfully, Yala National Park is now bound by strict regulations to ensure its inhabitants are protected and can live freely.

Yala is divided into five separate blocks; block one is the most popular due to its proximity to the town of Tissamaharama. The climate of the national park is highly variable and is equipped to accommodate different animals and their habitat requirements. A safari drive through the park is the perfect way to experience this geographic



diversity; watch it change as you traverse the landscape, from semi-arid areas to lush greenery and fresh lakes, each hosting an array of wildlife that call the park home.

Over 44 different mammals and 200 bird species have been documented here, including Asian elephants, sloth bears, jackals, peacocks and spotted deer. Only the sharpest of eyes can spot animals on a game drive, so be sure to keep your attention focused at all times. Yala also contains the highest density of leopards anywhere in the world. While the big cats are stealthy and nocturnal by nature, the chances of sighting a leopard here are far greater than in the enormous nature reserves across Africa.

In addition to its wildlife, Yala National Park is also the home of an obsolete Buddhist settlement known as Sithulpawwa. Experts believe that Sithulpawwa, or 'the hill of the quiet mind,' would have welcomed over 12,000 pilgrims during its operational years. The complex once included multiple places of worship, but the Rock Temple is the most significant. It's still open to visitors and offers stunning panoramic views of the national park. ●



SNAPSHOT ON →

SIGIRIYA ROCK

With its
natural majesty
and role in ancient
Buddhism, Sigiriya
is Sri Lanka's most
spectacular
sight

JUST A FEW HOURS FROM

Wagamuwa, lies an ancient fortress considered one of the most unmissable sights in all of Sri Lanka. Sigiriya Rock Fortress (also known as Lion's Rock) is a citadel carved into the top of a magma plateau from an extinct volcano. Inscriptions inside the caves connected to the fortress allude to it being a place of refuge for Buddhist monks as long ago as the 3rd-century BC, however it remained relatively insignificant until the 5th-century AD. Under the order of King Kasyapa, the site was expanded and fortified. It's believed that he chose this spot for his royal headquarters because he was worried about the kingdom being attacked by his brother, Moggallana, who he exiled to India so he could take the throne.

The rock itself towers 200 metres higher than its jungle surrounds and is fittingly grandiose for a royal court. ►

(image: Shutterstock)



Clockwise from right: Overlooking Sigiriya Lion Rock; the view along the side at the top of the fortress; meditation with perfect views, ancient frescoes; tourists climbing the 1200 steps to the top

Centuries ago, Sigiriya was even painted white and made to look like a cloud floating above the trees, creating a unique illusion for visitors and subjects alike. Its walls were once plastered in stunning frescoes of women adorned in jewellery, some of which still remain in various parts of the ruined palace.

Upon arrival, follow the red clay path towards the enormous rock looming over the horizon. The closer you get, the more detail becomes clear – marbled colours swirl within the rock and provide an interesting contrast to the green forest it’s encircled by. The walk is a great way to get the blood pumping – there are 1200 steps to tackle until you reach the top.

On your way up, keep your eyes peeled for murals and sculptures. While most were washed away

Today, all that hints to its imposing former size are its enormous front paws.

Just a few more stairs and you’ll reach the Sky Palace. During the reign of King Kasyapa, the top of Sigiriya was etched with terraces, water gardens and an elaborate palace. Wander the remains of these constructions and enjoy sweeping views of lush Sri Lankan jungle as many would have 1600 years ago. Sigiriya is one of those confoundingly elaborate ancient constructions that baffles comprehension. Like the pyramids or Machu Picchu, there are theories as to its construction, but no one knows for sure how it was built or how materials were transported. All you can do is take in the unobstructed landscape and let the stunning sight settle into your memory. ●

DURING THE REIGN OF KING KASYAPA, THE TOP OF SIGIRIYA WAS ETCHED WITH TERRACES, WATER GARDENS AND AN ELABORATE PALACE. “ ”

when Buddhists transformed the site back into a monastery after Kasyapa’s death, some were just too hard to reach and thus have stood the test of time. Eventually, you’ll reach the impressive Lion’s Gate that guarded the entrance to the inner section of the city.



**INSPIRING
VACATIONS**

A favourite destination for outdoor lovers, Ella's mountainous setting has a special kind of rustic charm

SNAPSHOT ON →



ELLA

SRI LANKA'S FAMOUSLY LUSH, green hill country has a range of activities that appeal to both high-energy hikers and low-key tea-tasters. Above all, it has incredible landscapes, cloud forests, relaxing vibes, and excellent eats – all in all, a great place to kick back and enjoy a change of pace from city life. Stroll through tea plantations at your leisure and soak in the verdant greenery, as Ella is surrounded by hills and even taller mountains. Depending on when you're heading to Ella, be prepared for rain (monsoon season is typically between July and November) as well as some dramatic mist – this is cloud forest country, after all. ►

(Image: Shutterstock)

▼
Left: The breathtaking beauty of Sri Lanka's green hill country



Clockwise from right: Ella's delicious curries, dal and vegetables topped with a papadam; fresh lime juice; the famed blue train; Ravana Falls



Things to do

Hiking is extremely popular around Ella, with plenty of routes of varying difficulties. There's a very manageable hike to Little Adam's Peak (not to be confused with its much larger sibling, Adam's Peak) which isn't too far out of Ella itself. Getting up to Ella Rock is a bit more of a challenge, if only because the signage isn't great – some hikers might prefer to get a guide or make friends with a local.

Another popular pastime is checking out Ella's picturesque waterfalls. One notable waterfall is at Ravana, which holds a cultural and religious significance. Named for the demon king from the Hindu legend Ramayana, Ravana is where the eponymous king supposedly hid Sita, King Rama's wife, in a cave; archaeological digs have



(All images: Shutterstock)

uncovered ancient relics farther within the cave complex, dating back tens of thousands of years. The cave itself can be a little tricky to get to, as there are steep sections, so consider getting a guide. A little ways out of town is Diyaluma waterfall, another stunner that's well worth the tuk-tuk ride.

There are less strenuous activities,

Things to eat

Ella has its fair share of tasty eateries, but the undoubted king is probably Café Chill, a local institution unto itself that attracts many discerning backpackers. It's easy to find hearty Sri Lankan curries and roti around Ella, so wander around and see what you can find – taking a chance on a

RAVANA IS WHERE THE EPONYMOUS KING SUPPOSEDLY HID SITA, KING RAMA'S WIFE, IN A CAVE; ARCHAEOLOGICAL DIGS HAVE UNCOVERED ANCIENT RELICS FARTHER WITHIN THE CAVE COMPLEX, DATING BACK TENS OF THOUSANDS OF YEARS. “ ”

too – visit the Nine Arch Bridge, a historic fixture in Ella's landscape, and watch the train pass through. There's even a café where you can have a nice cuppa and relax with a book. There's also the option of getting an ayurvedic massage, which might appeal to weary, sore hikers, or visiting one of Ella's various tea plantations for a tea factory tasting.

smaller establishment can yield delicious results.

In the evenings, try one of Sri Lanka's most famous (or infamous, depending) drinks – arrack, a sweet-ish coconut spirit, which is a nice way to wind down after a busy day on one's feet. Arrack is, in essence, fermented coconut sap, and is often paired with ginger beer or lime juice. ●

GUIDE TO → TAILOR-MADE SRI LANKA

Offering a feast for all of the senses, Sri Lanka never disappoints. Visit the cities that suit your travel tastes



If you like hiking, YOU'LL ♥ THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS

Adam's Peak (Sri Pada) is a gruelling trek up a 2,243 m mountain in the lush Central Highlands of Sri Lanka. It's not for the faint-hearted as it includes hiking up almost 6,000 crumbling steps, but if you're a fan of outdoorsy hikes you'll love it. It's also a celebrated place of pilgrimage among several religions so the hike can get busy with locals and tourists alike in peak season. The best time to climb is from January to May and most climbers make their ascent in the middle of the night in order to make it to the peak for sunrise. ►

(Image: Shutterstock)

Adam's Peak, Central Highlands

If you like colonial architecture, **YOU'LL ♥ GALLE**

Galle is one of the most attractive yet underrated gems of Sri Lanka. The seaside town on the country's west coast has it all: fantastic food, a charming old town, world-class beaches nearby and interesting Dutch-colonial buildings to snap your camera at. The UNESCO World Heritage-listed Galle Fort dates back to the 16th-century and walking through the age-old streets is a wonderful blend of old and new. There are luxe boutiques (visit The Three by TPV for homewares), divine seafood eats (The Fort Printers restaurant is housed in a converted 18th-century mansion) and on the first Sunday of every month, the Galle Fort Flea Market takes place.

If you like history, **YOU'LL ♥ KANDY**

The beautiful UNESCO heritage site of Kandy teems with history; it was, in fact, the last capital of the ancient kings' era of Sri Lanka. The hilltop town is surrounded by looming mountains making it the perfect jumping-off point to also explore the nearby verdant green tea plantations. Before you hit the hills though, be sure to visit age-old temples such as the Buddhist Temple of Sacred Tooth Relic with its stunning architecture and take a relaxed walk around the town's pretty lake. If you love your tea, a visit to the Ceylon Tea Museum could be up your alley.



Galle Fort



Kandy

If you like beaches, **YOU'LL ♥ UNAWATUNA**

Unawatuna is a picturesque region in southern Sri Lanka where palm trees dot the shoreline, the sand is a beautiful white and the sea is a translucent aquamarine. The enchanting and renowned image of Sri Lankan fishermen perched atop rickety old sticks is a common sight in this part of the country, and Galle is just 6km away, so you can be rest assured there's plenty to do, if for some reason you get tired of beachcombing. The area has plenty of quaint guest houses to rest your head as well as luxe villas. Some of the best beaches in the area to visit are Dalawella Beach (be sure to visit Wijaya Beach Restaurant) and Mihiripenna Beach.



Unawatuna

If you like wildlife, **YOU'LL ♥ YALA NATIONAL PARK**

Leopards, elephants and crocodiles, oh my! Yala National Park is Sri Lanka's most famous national park which was declared a wildlife sanctuary in 1900. Today, wildlife lovers from far and wide travel to the 1,268sq km park to get a glimpse of the *Panthera pardus kotiya*, an elusive leopard endemic to Sri Lanka. The park is also home to 44 varieties of mammals and 215 bird species, including sloths, jackals and spotted deer, so there's no shortage of amazing wildlife encounters awaiting you here. You can even camp nearby in a luxury bush camp by the river. Bliss.



Yala

If you like nature, YOU'LL THE BOGAWANTALAWA VALLEY

No visit to Sri Lanka is complete without a stay amid the vibrant green pincushion hills and the rolling landscape of the tea plantations – and the lush Bogawantalawa Valley offers the perfect place to experience them. Called the ‘Golden Valley of Tea’ and located in the Central Highlands region, the valley has a wonderful selection of luxury hotels and tea estates to explore. At the luxury Ceylon Tea Trails, the world’s first tea plantation hotel, you can wander the grounds then take a daily tour with a resident tea planter who will demonstrate the age-old tea making process.



Central Highlands

If you like big cities, YOU'LL COLOMBO

The largest city in Sri Lanka dances to the beat of its own drum. Tuk-tuks roam the streets, occasional snake charmers wander through local parks, and Western cyclists tour the city on a bike. There’s never a dull moment with attractions and sights to see, restaurants to visit and nightlife to uncover. Add a visit to Galle Face Green on your to-do list; the five-hectare seaside urban park offers a nice walk and a chance to people-watch. For dinner head to the super stylish Nihonbashi restaurant, which is run by a Japanese-Sri Lankan chef-restaurateur.



Colombo



White fish curry



Hoppers

If you like food, YOU'LL THE WHOLE COUNTRY

From roti and rice to seafood, street food and mutton curries, Sri Lanka serves up a culinary feast when it comes to its foodie scene. No matter what part of the country you find yourself in, you will have endless options up your sleeve to choose from, be it a fine dining venue in a heritage-style hotel in Galle, street food in Kandy, or a white fish curry served at a quaint local guesthouse by the coast and made with the likes of green chillies, mustard, turmeric and coconut. If you love the street food scene be sure to sample some samosa, Saravita, a sweet treat wrapped in betel leaves; a fresh coconut; and hoppers – a pancake bowl served with eggs in the morning or curry in the evening. ●



Sri Lanka is a
playground for those
who love the outdoors

INSPIRING
VACATIONS

Take on the lush
bounty of Sri Lanka's
natural beauty,
including its wealth
of wildlife, waterfalls,
and scenic hikes

GUIDE TO →
GETTING AROUND SRI LANKA'S
GREAT OUTDOORS

(Image: Shutterstock)



SRI LANKA – KNOWN FOR ITS

ancient religious sites, world-famous Ceylon tea, and world heritage destinations – is also home to some truly magnificent nature reserves, teeming with all sorts of wildlife, from leopards to whale sharks, crocodiles, peacocks, elephants, and sloth bears. For outdoorsy first-time visitors, it can be a little overwhelming to decide where to go, especially on a budget; fortunately, we've got a general breakdown for aspiring hikers and animal lovers.

Quite fittingly, Sri Lanka is home to the world's first wildlife sanctuary, Mihintale, which was the site of a holy meeting between the Buddhist monk Mahinda, and a third-century Sri Lankan king known as the Deer Hunter. With such a noble calibre of historical and religious heritage, as well as an ancient royal precedent for protecting nature, Sri Lankans take environmental preservation quite seriously. On the flip side, this also

means that Sri Lanka's national parks can have pricey entrance fees that don't include various service charges, such as the cost of a tracker guide, park maintenance, and local taxes.

All park visits require the use of a jeep, which can easily be arranged through hotels. In order to properly safeguard these delicate ecosystems, jeep drivers also serve to instruct visitors on appropriate locations to get out and take photos, or to get a better look at the local wildlife wherever possible.

Besides these Sri Lankan safaris, there are countless opportunities to take scenic hikes all over the island, regardless of fitness level. General tips for hikers include packing for cold, wet weather at higher elevations, and being prepared to trek through difficult conditions such as tropical rainstorms (beware of lightning) and heavy mist – advanced hiking in Sri Lanka might involve experiencing multiple ecosystems in one day.



Clockwise from far left: The holy site of Mihintale; nature enthusiasts will be in for a treat when they visit: sloth bears, toque macaque monkeys, elephants

Do your research

Nature enthusiasts and birdwatchers should come prepared to identify precious flora and fauna – study up on specific animals you're keen on spotting, as not all parks have elephants and leopards – for instance, sloth bear enthusiasts should head to Wilpattu National Park, where they have the best chances of seeing these adorable, but painfully shy nocturnal creatures.

Wake up early

It is a truth universally known that wild animals are early risers, so be prepared to wake up bright-eyed and bushy-tailed to hit the parks by 6.30am. Savvy nature lovers should find out local sunrise times for optimum viewing of the more elusive animals, like leopards.

Make reservations far, far, far ahead

If you're planning an outdoor-centric trip to Sri Lanka, read up on its national parks, and make reservations way in advance. Local tourists enjoy much cheaper rates at national park lodges, so these tend to book up quickly. The most reliable way to make reservations is through Sri Lanka's Department of Wildlife Conservation, where visitors can check traffic information, make park bungalow reservations, and download a handy smartphone app.

Get a guide

It's worth the price because a good guide will ensure that you arrive on time to spot rare animals, and more importantly, avoid groups of other tourists. You can also get guides for walking tours of the highlands, where things can get unexpectedly complicated with leeches, the occasional aggressive wild boar, and sudden thunderstorms. It is best to negotiate guide rates in advance and anticipate an additional 10% service fee. Most official guide operators do not expect tips.

(All images: Shutterstock)

↙
Clockwise from below: Yala is a great park to go leopard spotting; The Knuckles is a world heritage site; Sinharaja Rainforest

The further the better

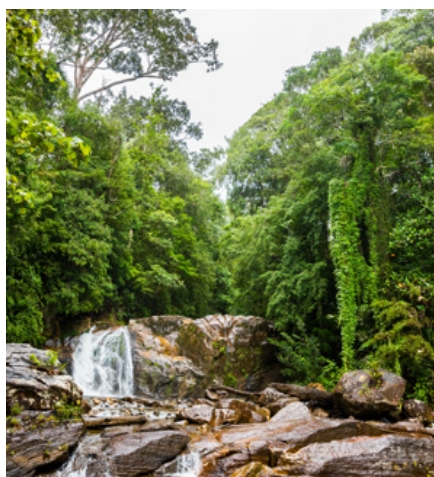
A basic rule of thumb is: the more remote the location, the less chance that you'll have to compete with large tourist groups. Yala National Park is a popular place for leopard sightings, but can become stiflingly overcrowded, which puts a damper on the whole 'safari wilderness' vibe. If you're looking for a more serene safari experience, consider putting in the extra legwork to check out more remote parks like Wilpattu, or the pristine Gal Oyak National Park.

Do go chasing waterfalls

Wherever you decide to go, bring a swimsuit and a rain jacket, as the great Sri Lankan outdoors is peppered with waterfalls (over 400 of them, though not all are accessible). Avoid only bringing flip-flops – pack sensible footwear with a good tread, as some of the trekking, even on a light, easy trail, might involve crossing over wet, slippery rocks. A quick-dry travel towel will come in handy, too.

(All Images: Shutterstock)

IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR A MORE SERENE SAFARI EXPERIENCE, CONSIDER PUTTING IN THE EXTRA LEGWORK TO CHECK OUT MORE REMOTE PARKS LIKE WILPATTU, OR THE PRISTINE GAL OYAX NATIONAL PARK “



Take a hike

There is a wide range of terrain and trails suitable for all fitness levels, especially around the Sinharaja Rainforest, a World Heritage site that offers a spectacular range of biodiverse flora and fauna. Research trails and trail difficulty ahead of time to avoid unwanted surprises and confusing directions. For instance, Meemure is touted as one of the most beautiful nature spots on the island but can involve some extremely challenging vertical hikes.

Take a crack at the Knuckles

The Knuckles (also known as the Dumbara) are a spectacular mountain range located along the northern bit of central Sri Lanka, between Kandy and Matale. This World Heritage area boasts a rare dwarf cloud forest and is home to several traditional villages. Wildlife includes various types of deer, mongoose, purple-faced leaf monkeys, over 200 species of birds, and unique reptiles like the leaf-nosed lizard. About a fifth of the flora here is native to Sri Lanka.

Keep calm and trek on

Stay flexible, stay patient, and be prepared for anything. Bring your own water bottle, and if you're doing a multi-day trek, consider getting water purification tablets or a smart filter straw. Bring along a plastic bag or container to keep your rubbish. Always bring snacks, in case it takes you longer than expected to get back to civilisation – nobody wants to get hangry in the wild. ●



GUIDE TO → WHAT TO EXPECT ON **YOUR FIRST VISIT TO** **SRI LANKA**

Sri Lanka is a cultural microcosm for those seeking a balance of history, adventure, and of course, food.

HAVING FULLY OPENED UP

to tourism in 2009 – after a decades-long civil war – there's plenty to be discovered in the South Asian gem of Sri Lanka: unspoiled beach destinations, nature reserves, world-class surfing spots, world heritage sites, and of course, majestic tea plantations. The island's compact size makes Sri Lanka an ideal destination for a self-contained vacation, especially for travellers who enjoy a bit of adventure.

Here, some things you need to know before you go. ►

(Image: Shutterstock)



Monks at Anuradhapura historical park



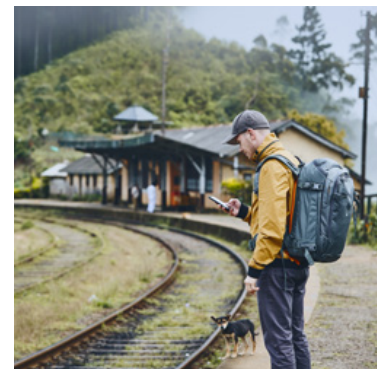
Clockwise from below: Expect beautiful (but steep) hills around Ella; packing for all seasons is often necessary in Sri Lanka; Rankot Vihara, UNESCO ancient city of Polonnaruwa; hiring a driver means you can sit back and take in the views

Rent a car

This is one way to sidestep the stress of bargaining with tuk-tuk drivers, but driving in Sri Lanka is quite different from what you might be used to. Terrain is varied – there are lots of steep hills around areas like Ella, which require careful driving; buses can be quite aggressive, so don't try to compete with them on the road. Road quality also varies from place to place. If you get beeped at, this is usually because the other driver wants you to know that they're overtaking you. A good plan is to hire a driver for your first few days, so you can observe local road etiquette. Another tip is to download an offline map of your planned route, so you don't have to worry about an unstable internet connection.

Hire a driver

This is one of the most popular ways for tourists to explore the island, and many will engage a driver for the entire duration of their stay. Engaging a driver in Sri Lanka can be tricky, as lowball quotes may involve an unexpected stop (or three) at a friend's shop or restaurant to make up for the lost revenue. Before finalising the rate, inquire about the car's condition and registration information – it is not considered rude to ask for photos of the vehicle. A reasonable day rate hovers between A\$69-97. Keep an eye on the metre, too.



Pack layers

Sri Lanka is a land of several climates, ranging from the cool climes of tea-covered hills to warm sandy beaches. Most hotels have either free or reasonably-priced laundry services, which is good news for those who have trouble packing light. Bring reliable walking socks and a rain jacket, as well as appropriately modest attire to visit religious sites, which brings us to our next point...

A GOOD PLAN IS TO HIRE A DRIVER FOR YOUR FIRST FEW DAYS, SO YOU CAN OBSERVE LOCAL ROAD ETIQUETTE. “

Be respectful at holy sites

It is considered highly disrespectful to show your back to Buddha iconography, so be aware of your position when you're taking snaps. Wear appropriate clothing, too – no shorts or bare shoulders. If you're visiting a Hindu temple (*kovil*), men may be asked to remove their shirts. If you are not comfortable being topless, you can opt to wear an angavastram, which is a draped cloth worn over the shoulders, or an unstitched garment. You should also remove footwear wherever appropriate. If in doubt, always ask.





Clockwise from below: Beautiful beaches await; the freshest coconut water, getting up close and personal; the perfect Sri Lanka breakfast: egg hoppers



A WELL-PLANNED TRIP TO SRI LANKA IS A SELF-CONTAINED GIFT – PEOPLE ARE WARM AND FRIENDLY... AND THERE IS PLENTY TO SEE AND DO. “”

Beach etiquette

Be sure to pack a cover-up when you're travelling to and from the beach; while bikinis are fine on the sand, many Sri Lankans are conservative about skimpy outfits away from the beach.

Local drinking habits

Sri Lanka has a jolly drinking culture – try the local coconut arrack with ginger beer – but be aware that every full moon is a booze-free public holiday.

Plan ahead

Depending on your interests (whether it be temple-hopping, scuba diving, or visiting nature reserves), be aware of the major monsoon/rainy seasons: October to January, and May to July. The best time for surfing is from November to April.

Snack attacks

When in Rome, do as the Romans do: it is far more rewarding to stick to local food. Roti and hoppers (thin, rice-flour crepes shaped like bowls, which can be filled with eggs, meat, and chutney or sambol) are popular favourites that can be eaten on-the-go at local kades (food stalls). Coconut milk is a mainstay in many curry recipes. Mangosteens are also a local favourite, so dig in if you're a fan of the 'queen of fruits' – jackfruit also appears in many savoury dishes.

Overall, a well-planned trip to Sri Lanka is a self-contained gift – people are warm and friendly, the lingua franca is English, prices are reasonable (although, as always, tourists may want to do some diplomatic bargaining for souvenirs), and there is plenty to see and do. What are you waiting for? ●



OUR CUSTOMERS.

Our customers love our Sri Lanka tours — here's what some of them have to say

Diversity at the heart

"We did the 15 Day Uncovered Sri Lanka tour and experienced such a diverse range of wonderful places to see and things to do. I would highly recommend this tour."

★★★★★

Toni

Happy Travellers

"We did the 15 Day Ultimate Sri Lanka tour which was great"

★★★★★

Suzanne

Beautiful experience

"We have just returned from our 13 Day Inspiring Sri Lanka tour, and I must say that it was an absolutely beautiful experience. By the end, we felt connected to this magnificent country and to Sri Lanka's exceptionally warm and welcoming people. We came with hesitation and left grateful for wonderful memories."

★★★★★

Nives

Spectacular

"Our holiday has been nothing short of spectacular, the culture, food and friendliness have been outstanding. Sri Lanka is a beautiful country; we had a fantastic time."

★★★★★

Bridgette

Above and beyond

"Arrived home yesterday after the Sri Lanka and Maldives trip. Everything was perfect and our group was so much fun, and we became instant friends. Our guide Kamal was an archaeologist and lecturer and was a wealth of information, he went above and beyond his role. The Maldives was a really good way to finish the holiday and the accommodation was unreal."

★★★★★

Kerri



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For more customer testimonials, scan me



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