

## Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka, the Isle of Serendipity is a tourist paradise with pristine beaches, beautiful ancient cities, lush and cool hill country, majestic waterfalls, beautiful fauna & flora, exquisite handicrafts, world renowned gems, traditional dance & drama, colourful festivals, smiling people and mouth watering cuisine.

Situated 30 miles off the Southern tip of India the island with a population of 20 Million has a length of 447 km and a width at its widest point of 219 km. with a total land area of 65,610 sq. km. The Island enjoys pleasant tropical climate relatively hot in the plains and cooler in the central highlands.

The majority of the population is Sinhalese (74%) who speak an Indo-Aryan language called Sinhala. Other major ethnic groups are Tamils (18.1%) and Moors (7.1%). The majority of the population is Buddhist (69.3%). Other major religions are Hinduism (15%), Christianity (8%) and Islam (7%). Most Sri Lankans speak English.

### Colombo

Colombo, the island's largest city, is noisy, frenetic - and just a little crazy. 'No problem' might be the national motto; it's certainly the one phrase everyone knows and can say. While the city holds less obvious interest than many other parts of the island, it's still a colourful enough place and worth a visit to see what makes Sri Lanka tick. Of particular interest are the colonial style Fort district, the Galle Face Green to the South and its tree lined elegant neighbourhood and the large Pettah bazaar district.

### The central highlands

The Central Highlands of Sri Lanka offer a salubrious cool climate in complete contrast to the hot climate in the plains. The mountain slopes are covered with acres and acres of tea with its fragrant aroma mingling with the fresh air. Nestled among the mist covered central hills in a cool basin is Nuwara Eliya, the hill resort, resembling a little English village. The road leading to this hill station winds through miles and miles of 'green carpet' of tea bushes where tea pluckers are seen busily picking the 'bud and two leaves' that go to form the most popular brew in the world, 'Ceylon Tea'.

The geographical formation of the Island with the central highlands sloping down to the coastal plains has resulted in several rivers and streams starting from the central region flowing down the hilly slopes in a radial pattern, creating beautiful waterfalls in several places in the hill country. Ramboda Falls (100 metres) is seen on the way to Nuwara Eliya. Devon (86 metres) and St. Clair's (73 metres) are two waterfalls seen close to Nuwara Eliya.

Other areas of great natural beauty include, Horton Plains a mountain forest 3,160 hectares in extent located in a plateau high up on the hills at an elevation above 2000 metres. At the edge of the forest there is a sheer drop of over 800 metres called the 'World's End'. It is a sheer drop of over 800 metres with spectacular views. The jungle bordering the grassland abounds with wildlife. Among the animals that can be seen are the leopard, sambhur, barking deer, wild boar and monkeys. Horton Plains is a bird watcher's paradise.

Atop a 2,243 metre high mountain in the southwest corner of the highlands is Sri Pada, which bears the footprint of the Buddha or for Christians that of Adam (Adam's peak). Thousands of pilgrims of all faiths climb this mountain during the pilgrim season (December to May). Watching the sunrise from the summit is an unforgettable sight.

### National parks

There are many national parks and botanic gardens in Sri Lanka protecting the fauna and flora of Sri Lanka of this little Island. Some specialise in the rich birdlife of the island others are more dedicated to the tropical rain forest, others wildlife and of course there are the elephant sanctuaries of Pinnawala and Uda Walawe which are always popular. In total there are eleven National Parks in the Island but the most popular for viewing animals are the Ruhuna (also called Yala), Uda Walawe and Wilpattu National Parks.

### Temples, monuments and sights

Sri Lankan civilization is more than twenty centuries old. Its history is recorded in Mahavamsa, the Great Chronicle written in the 5th century AD. Remains of this ancient civilization reflecting the character, imagination, culture, philosophy, and the faith of its people are seen in the form of ruined cities, buildings, palaces, reservoirs, parks, dagobas, Buddha images, temples, sculpture and painting throughout the little Island. However it is at the major archaeological sites of Anuradhapura, Mihintale, Polonnaruwa, Sigiriya, Dambulla and Kandy that the glory of the Island's past can be seen in its most prestigious form. These ancient cities can be reached easily from Colombo in a comfortable morning's drive through green paddy fields, acres of coconut palms and alongside deep jungle where wild animals roam. The following are a few of the most important sites.

Kandy's main attraction is the Dalada Maligawa, the Buddhist Temple of the Sacred Tooth, a magnificent shrine, with decorative walls, moat, turrets, golden roof and fine wood-work. Three religious services (pooja) with traditional music, held daily at dawn, mid-day and in the evening, can be viewed by visitors.

The history of the Kelaniya temple goes back 2563 years. It is situated 7 miles from Colombo in Gampaha District on the banks of the Kelaniya River and is also famous for its image of the reclining Buddha and paintings which depict important events in the life of the Buddha.

Located north of Kandy, Dambulla Vihara is a historical town built around a vast isolated rock mass, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It is famous for its caves with the reclining figure of the Buddha carved from the rock, frescoes and other carvings.

The spectacular temple perched on top of Sigiriya rock in the heart of the jungle is not to be missed. Other temples include the Mahinyangana Maha Seya, the Ruwanveli Seya, Gal Vihara, Wewurukannala Vihara with its 160ft high seated Buddha, It is 160ft high, the largest statue in all of Sri Lanka and dates back to the time of King Rajadhi (1782 &ndash; 1798, the Buduruwagala Rock Sculptures and the Kataragama Devalaya

### Beaches

Over one thousand kilometers of palm fringed sandy beaches encircle the Island. Sri Lanka is never out of season for a beach holiday. There is always some part of the beach that has friendly and warm waters. The beach resorts in the West Coast, South Coast and the East Coast are popular among the tourists who enjoy taking a dip in the warm waters and relaxing on the sandy beach.

### When to go

Climatically the driest and best season is from December to March. The heavy rains tend to be in April, May and November and although the climate tends to be more humid from June to October, out of season travel has its advantages - it's less crowded, and many airfares and accommodation prices go right down. July/August is the time of the Kandy Esala Perahera, the 10-day festival honouring the sacred tooth relic of the Buddha, and also the time for the Kataragama Festival in the South. In both towns accommodation just before, during and immediately after the festivals is very difficult to come by, and rates are much higher. You must be sure to book rooms well in advance.

### Travel Warning

Unfortunately the fighting between the Sri Lankan government and the Tamil Tigers has resumed. Excluding the North & Eastern part, the island is considered to be safe. You should however check where you are travelling. Areas north of a line following the highway from Puttalam through Anuradhapura to Trincomalee, and east down to Batticaloa are unsafe for travellers as are the eastern areas around Ampara and Arugam Bay. Any travel to these areas should be reconsidered. The capital, Colombo, has experienced a number of bombings, including an explosion in a busy shopping district which killed at least 16 civilians and injured many others on 28 November. Travellers should exercise a high level of caution, monitor local news sources and heed any local warnings regarding safety.