

Sri Lanka Special Adventure and Honeymoon Dossier

Sri Lanka is an island of amazing diversity and enormous natural beauty. With primeval jungles that are home to wild elephant and leopard, miles of golden sandy beaches lined with swaying palms, ancient ruins and local markets laden with exotic fruits and scented spices, a trip to Sri Lanka is a wonderfully romantic and culturally captivating experience.

Highlights

- Explore ancient Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa
- Cultural city of Kandy
- Visit the amazing rock fortress of Sigiriya
- Marvel at the exquisite temple frescoes at Dambulla
- Search for wild elephants in Uda Walawe National Park
- Enjoy tea and spice tours
- Relax on golden sandy beaches



Factfile

Transfers

Arrival and departure transfer.

Fully Escorted

By English-speaking driver/ guide.

Transport

Air-conditioned deluxe vehicle and one day train.

Activities

Jeep safari in Uda Walawe National Park, extensive walking at sites.

Accommodation

12 nights boutique hotels and/or eco-lodges.
For further details please see the Trip Dossier.

Meals

As per itinerary.
B - Breakfast, L - Lunch, D - Dinner.

Entrance Fees

Included on tours listed as part of the itinerary.

Itinerary

DAY 1 - COLOMBO – WAIKKAL

Arrival day. Transfer by private vehicle and boat to your overnight accommodation at Ranweli Holiday Village. (D)

Colombo

Almost everybody arrives in Sri Lanka at the International Airport north of Colombo. Although Colombo is the commercial capital and by far the largest city in Sri Lanka, it is still relatively small by Asian standards. We do not stay in the capital itself, but in Negombo, a beach resort located to the north, near the airport.

Ranweli Holiday Village

The magical Ranweli Holiday Village is an eco-friendly resort located on a private wetland estuary that teems with wonderful birdlife. Ranweli is home to individual bungalows that have been tastefully decorated using local, renewable resources and offer either beach or river views. The resort can only be reached by boat, which adds to the romantic notion of being stranded on a paradise island.

DAY 2 - WAIKKAL

A full day to relax and enjoy the beach. (BD)

DAY 3 - WAIKKAL – ANURADHAPURA

Today you head to the ancient capital of Anuradhapura visiting the Avukana standing Buddha on the way.
Overnight at the Palm Garden Village Hotel. (BD)

Anuradhapura

Anuradhapura was the capital of the Sinhalese people for 1000 years from the 4th century BC, despite frequent invasions from South India. Today it is the largest and most important ancient site in Sri Lanka, and there are a wealth of old palaces, temples, dagobas and Buddha statues to explore, covering a huge area. The most visited part is the sacred Bo tree which is said to have been planted from a sapling from the tree under which Buddha gained enlightenment. This was brought from India by Sangamitta, the daughter of the great Indian Emperor Ashoka who had sent his own son, Arahath Mahinda, to spread Buddhism in Sri Lanka; it is one of the most important pilgrimage places in the country.

Palm Garden Village Hotel

Each villa at The Palm Garden Village Hotel is nestled amongst beautiful botanical gardens planted with wonderful flowers, spices and fruit trees and it is not unusual to see wild elephant and deer strolling by. Aside from beautiful surroundings the hotel also offers some exceptional facilities including a large swimming pool to cool off in, a restaurant and bar to enjoy, and the luxury of a spa where you can indulge in a massage, flower bath or jacuzzi.

DAY 4 - ANURADHAPURA – SIGIRIYA

Drive to Sigiriya with the chance to walk amongst the fossilised forest at Namal Uyana and see the famous pink quartz mountain before arriving at Dambulla Cave Temple, considered the largest painted cave in the world. Evening elephant ride through dry zone jungle. Overnight at the Sigiriya Village Hotel. (BD)

Dambulla

The cave paintings and sculptures at Dambulla are a spectacular sight. Carved out of the rock, this extensive series of caves are covered from floor to ceiling with extraordinarily well-preserved frescoes depicting all kinds of Buddhist imagery. The complex is the largest of its kind in the world and the biggest cave is over 50m long. The caves have been places of worship for more than 2,000 years although the frescoes have been added at various times through the ages.

Sigiriya Village Hotel

Sigiriya Village Hotel is an exclusive jungle retreat that blends comfortably with nature, thus preserving the rich natural beauty of the surrounding landscape. Pathways along the edge of lotus-filled ponds lead to the dining area where you can enjoy your evening meal overlooking the magnificent Sigiriya Rock Fortress. Each cottage has been tastefully decorated and comes with a private verandah, the ideal place to relax with a drink as the sun goes down.

DAY 5 - SIGIRIYA – GIRITALE

After breakfast climb the Rock Fortress of Sigiriya. Afterwards you will head for Polonnaruwa - the medieval capital of Sri Lanka with its immense Buddhas carved from rock. Continue on to Giritale and the tranquil Deer Park Hotel. (BD)

Sigiriya

Often referred to as a "sky fortress", the remains of the 5th century fortress of Sigiriya atop a 200m high rock outcrop is one of Sri Lanka's most extraordinary and impressive monuments. It is enormous and dominates the surrounding landscape so much that you can imagine why the King chose to consolidate and gather his forces here. At the bottom of Sigiriya there are traces of the extensive gardens and moat which used to surround the rock fortress. A precarious staircase leads up through the remains of an enormous lion statue (the paws remain, but sadly the original entrance through the lion's mouth is now left to the imagination alone) to the flat summit of the rock.

In the 5th century a huge palace complex covered this summit. Now only the foundations remain, but the scale of the buildings and their spectacular location are impressive. As you ascend to the summit there are breathtaking views across the forest-covered plains and the walkway is decorated with vivid 1,500-year-old rock frescoes, much celebrated for the beauty of their female images.

Polonnaruwa

This ancient city is a delight to wander through. Although not as important historically as Anuradhapura, the remains are better preserved and there are some truly awe-inspiring monuments to be seen. Some of the most impressive are the massive carvings of Buddha which are hewn out of bare rock. It is not difficult to take a step back in time and imagine life as it must have been here almost a thousand years ago. The city itself was established when the Sinhalese moved their capital from Anuradhapura to Polonnaruwa in the early 12th century. Later in that century, the city experienced its heyday under the ruling of Parakramabahu. He went on a building spree, constructing the huge lake and the many large buildings and parks that you will visit.

Deer Park Hotel

This luxury eco-resort provides a contemporary, exotic retreat where the silence is broken only by the sound of cascading waterfalls and birdsong. You are sure to leave the Deer Park Hotel totally relaxed and calm, after luxuriating in the stunning surroundings and enjoying the hotel's famous Herbal Spa.

DAY 6 - GIRITALE – KANDY

Drive through the beautiful Knuckles Mountain Range toward Kandy, located in the heart of the island. En route enjoy a guided tour of a spice garden and a batik factory. Your hotel in Kandy is the beautifully situated Mahaweli Reach Hotel on the Banks of Sri Lanka's longest River, the Mahaweli. (BD)

Kandy

While Kandy is the second-largest city in the country after Colombo, and is the capital of the central hill regions, it is a peaceful and attractive place. There are plenty of scenic walks through the hills and forests that surround the town as well as along the lake that forms its centre. In the heart of town is the Temple of the Tooth (Dalada Maligawa), the most important shrine in the country, which houses a relic of a tooth of the Buddha taken from his funeral pyre in the 6th century BC. Each evening, the day's worship culminates when the casket containing the tooth relic is put on display to devotees who have travelled from all over the Buddhist world.

Sri Lanka's most famous festival (the Esala Perahera) takes place in Kandy every July or August. Unfortunately the exact dates are not known more than a couple of months in advance as the most auspicious dates must be obtained from an astrologer. This is, however, one of the most amazing festivals to witness with thousands of dancers and performers and hundreds of elephants marching through the town.

Spice Garden

Sri Lanka has a long history of producing spices but the climate requirements for producing them is actually quite restrictive and only a small area of the country offers ideal conditions. You will stop at a small roadside garden where a local specialist will guide you through the many and varied plants and their uses. Some like cinnamon, coffee, vanilla you may know, others and their ayurvedic uses, you may not.

Mahaweli Reach Hotel

Perched on the Banks of the Great Mahaweli River this Hotel is thought of by most to be the best Five Star Property in the Kandy region. Relax and enjoy the sumptuous yet unobtrusive surroundings of this beautiful and welcoming Hotel. Let the friendly and efficient staff cater your every need whether it be by the spacious pool or when using the Hotels wealth of facilities.

DAY 7 - KANDY

Morning city tour of UNESCO World Heritage listed Kandy with the opportunity to visit a gem museum. In the evening watch a performance of traditional Kandyan dancers and drummers including devotional fire walking, then visit the Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic of Buddha. (BD)

DAY 8 - KANDY - ELLA

Travel by train through breathtaking scenery covered in tea plantations, cascading waterfalls and endless greenery. You will be met and transferred to the Country Comfort Hotel. (BD)

(Note that on the rare occasion that we are unable to obtain tickets for the Observation Saloon on the train, travel will be by car instead).

Country Comfort Hotel

The Country Comfort Hotel is ideally located in the cool, tranquil Southern Highlands, tucked away amidst tropical rainforest and lush tea plantations. This converted colonial style cottage offers pretty terraced gardens, fabulous views, restaurant and bar, making it the perfect base to explore this region further.

DAY 9 - ELLA – UDA WALAWE - KALAWANA

In the morning visit a tea plantation and factory of the renowned Ceylon Tea. Continue on via the Uda Walawe National Park to search for wild elephants by jeep with your own private tracker. You will also visit the elephant transit camp. Overnight at the unique Boulder Garden eco-hotel. (BD)

Elephant Transit Camp

The elephant transit camp rescues orphaned elephants that would be unable to survive in the wild. The camp provides care for the elephants and teaches them the skills that are required before they are released back into the wild.

Uda Walawe National Park

In India many of the wildlife sanctuaries were once Maharaja's hunting grounds – a strange irony – but in Sri Lanka the situation was always very different due to the Buddhist belief in the sanctity of life. For thousands of years, Sri Lankan Kings chose specific areas to be protected so that the wildlife could thrive in its original habitat. Uda Walawe wildlife reserve is 300km² and one of a number set up in the south of the island to protect the indigenous flora and fauna. Herds of wild elephant are often seen here and you will enjoy a jeep safari through the most beautiful part of the park.

Boulder Garden Eco-Hotel

This remarkable hotel has been carefully designed to skilfully utilise a crop of gigantic black boulders, and is ideally situated just minutes away from the entrance to Sinharaja rainforest. The rooms are comfortable and equipped with all that you need for a relaxing stay. A highlight of the hotel is the outdoor facilities, with an open-air restaurant which is overhung by a large boulder that transforms into a mini-waterfall when rain falls.

DAY 10 - KALAWANA

A full free day to enjoy the exotic location of the Boulder Garden, and the surrounding countryside. (BD)

DAY 11 - KALAWANA – BENTOTA

En route to the luxury beachside resort of Taru Villas you have the opportunity to make many interesting stops such as Wevurukannala Temple, Veherahena – an underground temple complex, the UNESCO World Heritage listed Galle Dutch Fortress, the amazing stilt fishermen and a turtle hatchery. Overnight at Taru Villas, Bentota. (B)

Bentota

Bentota is one of Sri Lanka's most famous beach resorts, renowned for being home to some of Sri Lanka's best beaches. If you prefer to stay active rather than relax on a beach there are plenty of activities on offer including swimming, deep sea fishing, diving, water skiing, wind surfing and boat rides through the mangroves, to name but a few options. The beaches are also home to the Giant Sea Turtles. Whilst here you can visit the hatchery at Kosgoda which has prepared protected beds of sand for the eggs, laid annually, and large tanks to view the young before they are returned to the sea.

Taru Villas

Taru Villas is a delightful boutique hotel tucked away on the edge of Bentota, on a stunning section of golden beach. There are nine unique bedrooms, each individually decorated and furnished with antiques and works of art. There are peaceful gardens bursting with frangipani, an inviting turquoise pool and a restaurant serving up a tantalising selection of dishes, fusing different eastern cuisines. This is the perfect place to relax at the end of your trip, cooled by the gentle ocean breeze.

DAY 12 - BENTOTA

A full free day for you to relax on the beach. (B)

DAY 13 - BENTOTA - COLOMBO AIRPORT

Transfer to airport for departure or extend your stay at the Taru Villas. (B)

Supplementary Information

Staffing

Throughout the tour you will be accompanied by an English speaking driver / guide. He will be able to provide you with all the assistance and advice that you need during the course of the tour.

Hotels

We have selected some of the finest hotels that Sri Lanka has to offer so that you can be confident that you will experience only the highest level of comfort. Whilst each hotel retains its own character, they all offer superb service and international standards of cuisine.

All of the hotels that we have listed in the itinerary will be booked subject to availability. If we are unable to secure a booking at the selected hotel we will suggest a suitable alternative.

Transport

You will use a private chauffeured vehicle to get around Sri Lanka. The roads are of varying quality and driving times can be long for even relatively short distances.

Visas

Most Nationalities (including EU, USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and Hong Kong) do not need to obtain a visa before travelling as these are issued free of charge on arrival in Sri Lanka.

Travel Insurance

Fully Comprehensive travel insurance is compulsory for all travellers. We recommend that you take out insurance to cover cancellation and curtailment, baggage loss or damage, medical expenses, emergency travel, repatriation and personal accident, before you leave home. It is your responsibility to ensure that you are fully insured to financially safeguard against unforeseen circumstances.

Money

The monetary unit in Sri Lanka is the Sri Lankan Rupee (Rs).
Approximate exchange rates (as at May 2009) are as follows:

- 1 Pound Sterling = 177 Rs
- 1 US Dollar = 120 Rs
- 1 Euro = 160 Rs

XE.com is a useful site for currency conversion.

During your stay in Sri Lanka, you may notice a general lack of small change. We recommend maintaining a small supply of coins and small denomination notes (e.g. 10 & 20 Rs notes).

Travellers' cheques can easily be changed at most major banks and hotels, where they will earn a slightly better rate than cash. US dollars are probably the best currency to bring but all major currencies are accepted and can be easily exchanged. ATMs are becoming a common sight in the major cities like Colombo and Kandy but are still uncommon elsewhere so you should not rely on this as your primary means of obtaining money.

Entrance fees

Entrance fees are included to all sites specified in the itinerary. There are very few additional sights for you to visit and entrance fees to these are minimal so you do not need to allow more than approx. US\$20 for this.

Tipping

Tipping is a way of life in Sri Lanka; wages are generally low and are then supplemented by tips. The following guidelines should help you to work out how much to tip, but you should remember that tipping is discretionary. If you have not received a good service, you should not tip whereas if the service has been particularly good, you might want to give more than we suggest.

Waiters can be left 10% of the bill
Porters - 20-30 rupees per bag
Driver / guide – approximately US\$10 per couple per day

Voltage and Plug Sockets

The voltage in Sri Lanka is 230-40V. Plug sockets are generally of the three round-pronged variety. Please note that power cuts are common in more remote regions and occur occasionally in major cities too.

Food & Drink

Sri Lanka is blessed with fertile soil, rich seas and a tropical climate in which delicious fruit, fresh vegetables and sensational spices grow abundantly. That abundance is reflected in the country's cooking, which also shows the influences of the many races who have settled the island of Sri Lanka in past centuries.

Generally lunch and dinner will consist of rice served with a wide variety of curries of all different kinds. At least half will probably be vegetarian, and will feature a range of different vegetables, many of which you may not be familiar with. There are also usually a couple of side dishes of local pickles or chutneys, the most popular of which is 'coconut sambol', a delicious though often very hot mixture of chilli, grated coconut and lime juice.

Food can be very spicy (generally more so than you find to the north in India) but there will always be less hot alternatives; if you do not like spicy food, please inform your driver and he will then be able to advise you which curries to avoid.

Fresh fruit is available everywhere and is delicious. There are numerous road-side stalls selling a huge variety of tropical fruit and your driver will be happy to stop and assist you in purchasing some.

Breakfast and dinner are included on each day of the tour; for lunch, your driver will be able to recommend the best options available locally. Approximate costs for meals and snacks are shown below:

- Simple snack = US\$1-2
- Light meal = US\$2-5
- Fancy restaurant = US\$5-15

Vegetarians

Many Sri Lankans, both Hindu and Buddhist, follow a vegetarian diet at least part of the time, making Sri Lanka an excellent destination for vegetarians, with many delicious meat-free dishes to choose from on the menu.

Drinks

You should avoid drinking the tap water in Sri Lanka as this may be contaminated, particularly during the monsoon season. Bottled water and soft drinks are inexpensive and widely available.

Fruit juices are also widely available but, except in hotels, should be treated with caution as they may not have been blended with water that is safe to drink.

You may frequently see stalls on the side of the road selling orange coconuts; these are called king coconuts and contain a refreshing watery juice. The stall holder will cut the top off the coconut and give you a straw to drink through. The liquid is said to be very good at preventing dehydration and is a good thing to try at some point during your tour !

Grapes are among the few fruits that will not grow in Sri Lanka, so all wines are imported and are therefore relatively expensive and often of indifferent quality. Lion lager, the country's main brand of beer, is relatively expensive in Sri Lankan terms, but like almost everything else in Sri Lanka, is cheap by international standards. Imported beers and Guinness stout brewed under license, are also available in bars and restaurants in the main tourist areas.

Approximate costs for drinks bought in a shop in the street are shown below but please note that prices in restaurants and hotels can be as much as double those specified.

- 1l of water = US\$0.25
- 30cl bottle of soft drink = US\$0.25
- 65cl bottle of beer = US\$2

Clothing

As a general guideline, clothing should be lightweight, loose fitting, hard-wearing and easily washed. In Sri Lanka's hot summer months, cotton clothing is much more comfortable than man-made materials like nylon. It doesn't usually get that cold in Sri Lanka but you will need some warmer clothes for the Hill Country.

Sri Lankans generally do not have particularly conservative attitudes towards dress compared to other countries in the region except at certain religious sites. Shorts are acceptable on both men and women in the main tourist areas.

A sarong is an invaluable item to carry as it can be used to instantly cover any exposed areas (i.e. head, legs) in temples and also if you feel that you are getting sunburned – easily done in the hot Sri Lankan sun!

Culture

Etiquette & Customs

For most rural Sri Lankans cutlery is an alien concept and all food is eaten with the right hand (as the left is associated with washing after using the toilet). Therefore you should remember to use your right hand for giving, receiving, shaking hands or eating (if there is no cutlery). You should also note that public displays of affection (such as kissing and holding hands) are generally not acceptable even though you will see Sri Lankan men holding hands (this is a sign of friendship rather than sexuality). You should also avoid pointing the soles of your feet at anyone. This may seem unlikely to happen but you could inadvertently do this while laying down or sitting with your feet up.

Religion

Travellers should respect that religion is an inherent part of Sri Lankan life. We encourage travellers to experience religious festivals and visit temples and shrines but ask that you follow local rules such as removing your shoes and refraining from taking photographs at certain sites. Your driver / guide will be able to advise you further on this.

Begging

You may encounter some beggars in Sri Lanka although this is not nearly as much of a phenomenon as in neighbouring India. Ultimately donations are a traveller's personal choice, however in line with initiatives and government policy in many of our destinations, our recommendation is NOT to give money, pens, gifts or sweets as this encourages a begging mentality and is largely ineffectual. If you do want to help it is probably better to give to a recognised charity. If you choose not to give, simply say no with a smile and keep walking. If you learn nothing else of the local language, learn 'no thank you'!

Haggling

Haggling is also a way of life in Sri Lanka. In the shops there is no fixed price so the shop keeper will start with a high price which you are then expected to haggle down until you reach a fair price. Haggling should always be relaxed and can be a lot of fun – you will find most shop owners are very friendly and will often invite you in for a cup of tea to break the ice before the haggling starts!

Safety

Most people find that Sri Lanka is a very friendly and hospitable country and crime against tourists is extremely low. Having said that you should of course take standard precautions such as not leaving money or expensive belongings in your hotel room.

General information

Communications

Email

Internet cafes can now be found in most cities and sizable towns and may also be available in hotels. However, connection times are often painfully slow although this does vary from place to place. The average cost for an hour is approx. US\$1 though it will be slightly more in hotels.

Phone

The Sri Lankan phone system is reasonably good but it can be expensive to call overseas, especially from hotels.

Post

The postal service is fairly good and stamps are available everywhere. An overseas stamp will cost approx. US\$0.3.

Weather

Sri Lanka's weather is affected by two different monsoons. In the southwest part of the island the monsoon arrives in May-July while the northeast monsoon arrives December-January. During the monsoon, it will usually rain heavily for a few hours but there are often blue skies and sunshine afterwards. Humidity is high year round, and it does sometimes rain outside the monsoon seasons. Sri Lanka is also warm throughout the year, with year round temperatures of roughly 25 degrees in the coastal region. It is much cooler in the hill country, however, and you will find yourself in need of a warm layer in the evenings, even in the middle of the summer.

Health

You should consult your doctor about what vaccinations are required for travel to Sri Lanka and check whether they recommend the use of malarial prophylactics.

Suggested Reading

- Sri Lanka Handbook (Footprint)
- Running in the Family (Michael Ondaatje)
- Reef (Romesh Gunsekera)
- Monkfish Moon (Romesh Gunsekera)
- The Flower Boy (Karen Roberts)
- July (Karen Roberts)

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