

1

Depart Australia - Arrive Negombo

Ayubowan and welcome to Sri Lanka! Affectionately known as the Pearl of the Indian Ocean, Sri Lanka is a total feast for the senses and we can't wait to dive in headfirst.

Separated from India by the Palk Strait, Sri Lanka boasts a rich history that spans centuries. Historically referred to as 'Ceylon', this beautiful tear-drop shaped island was officially named 'Sri Lanka' in 1972.

Home to a rich blend of traditions and cultures, Sri Lanka has been carved by the diverse religions and ethnic groups that have thrived there for centuries. The best bit? These unique customs shift and change depending on where you are! So no matter where you go, there's always something fascinating to discover. We're in for a real treat!

We'll arrive in Sri Lanka's capital city of Colombo this evening, and transfer to our gorgeous hotel nestled by the beaches of Negombo.

2

Negombo

Wake up and bask in the coastal-town-vibes of Negombo. Set alongside a picturesque lagoon and home to an impressive network of canals built in Dutch colonial times, Negombo was an important strategic outpost for the trade of cinnamon in colonial times and has been ruled at varying times by the Dutch, Portuguese and British empires.

We'll enjoy the day at leisure today to rest up and refresh from our flight before our sightseeing commences in the early evening.



SPECIAL EXPERIENCE

Take a scenic cruise along the jungle-fringed Negombo Lagoon at sunset, before enjoying a delicious BBQ dinner.

As the sun sets, keep an eye out for various colourful birds and water monitors while our boat navigates the mangrove islands. To welcome us to Sri Lanka, we'll be treated to a scrumptious dinner of traditional and local dishes, while we enjoy the opportunity to get to know our fellow travellers!

 B  D

3

Negombo - Dambulla - Habarana

Negombo's fish markets are full of life and colour each morning when the fresh catch is brought in and vendors voice their prices at the top of their lungs. Buyers bargain for the best deals in what is a daily practice for the locals of this coastal town. We'll visit the fish markets during a morning tour of Negombo; don't wear your best shoes and have a handkerchief on hand just in case of a strong aroma (it tends to smell rather fishy)!

Next, we'll make our way to the Dambulla Caves, home to the best-preserved cave temple complex of Sri Lanka. The cave temples were built in the 1st century and the gigantic granite outcrop towers more than 160 metres above its surrounds. We explore the caves covered by ancient frescoes and their interior where over a hundred statues of Buddha (157 to be exact) are housed, some carved from the rock itself.

Sri Lanka is home to no less than eight UNESCO World Heritage-listed sites, five of which are situated in what is known as the 'cultural triangle' that is located in the centre of the island. Neighbouring some of Sri Lanka's most important sites and landmarks, Habarana is one of the main gateways to the iconic cultural triangle and national parks. We make our way to Habarana and enjoy the remainder of our afternoon at leisure. Our hotel features a large outdoor pool, ideal for relaxing after a day of sightseeing.

 B  D

4

Habarana

Anuradhapura is one of the ancient capitals of Sri Lanka and the capital of the North Province. This UNESCO World Heritage-listed city is known for its many ruins of temples, ancient pools and dagobas. We'll spend the morning exploring Sri Lanka's largest and oldest ancient city, seeing its famous white dagobas – large bell-like structures that reach some 60 metres in height which house ² .ddhist relics.

We'll travel back to Habarana via the Ritigala Medicinal Forest. Set deep in the jungle around a large hill formed by huge sculptural

granite monoliths, lies the ancient and now abandoned hermitage of Ritigala. Today the visible remains are those of a Buddhist monastic congregation that used to practice meditation in total austerity. Rarely visited by tourists, this mystical place is incredibly beautiful and unspoilt with shady forests filled with streams, pools and granite boulders leading to ruins with various meditation platforms.



CHALLENGING DAY

Today is a particularly challenging day, where there will be extended periods of walking time, often across uneven ground and in areas of high altitude or heat and humidity.

B D

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Habarana

This morning our eyes are set on Polonnaruwa, which lies at the cultural triangle's easternmost point and became Sri Lanka's second capital in the 11th century after the destruction of Anuradhapura. We'll spend our morning discovering this ancient city that was built alongside a large artificial lake and is home to well-preserved ruins of palaces, bathing pools, stupas and exquisite rock sculptures of Buddha at the Gal Vihara. We'll also get a chance to see the 'Quadrangle', a fascinating group of raised-ruins that are bounded by a wall—a total archaeologist's dream!

While in Polonnaruwa, we're treated to a delicious, traditional lunch. Bursting with regional spices and flavours, we'll eat with a friendly local family in their very own backyard – lucky us!

Our destination this afternoon is Minneriya National Park, where vast expanses of evergreen forest and scrub areas serve as the roaming grounds for elephants and sambar deer. The central feature of the park is the ancient Minneriya Tank, built in the 3rd century by King Mahasena. During the dry season from June to September, this tank is an incredible place to observe the elephants who come to bathe and graze, as well as the huge flocks of birds such as cormorants and painted storks that come to fish in the shallow waters. Here, we'll enjoy a game drive by jeep; make sure your camera is recharged.

B L D

6

Habarana

Regarded as one of Sri Lanka's most impressive sites, a visit to the famous rock fortress of Sigiriya is a must. The remains of a 5th-century fortress lie perched high atop a rock plateau, offering panoramic views over a vast plain and dense jungles. Built by King Kasyapa, an impressive 5-acre fort sat astride the rock and a city nestled at its base, but now the city is gone and the fortress is in ruins.

We depart our hotel early this morning to visit Sigiriya. Braving the spiral staircase, we'll see the 21 frescoes of female nature spirits, known as Apsaras, painted beneath an overhang about 90 metres up the rock. These frescoes are beautiful – still boasting vibrant colours even after 1,500 years. Just above them, a wall adorned with 1,000-year-old graffiti and poetry serves as a testament to visitors who recorded their impressions of the painted women. Reaching the summit after climbing 1,200 stairs, we are rewarded with breathtaking views over the Sri Lankan jungle below and intriguing remnants of a once-thriving kingdom.



SPECIAL EXPERIENCE

Be welcomed into a quaint village near Sigiriya, exploring the community and enjoying a traditional lunch with a local family.

We get acquainted with the traditions of the local family as we watch how they prepare their meals, learn some traditional cooking techniques and enjoy a delicious meal together. After lunch, we'll enjoy the remainder of our afternoon at leisure



CHALLENGING DAY

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B L D

7

Habarana - Matale - Kandy

This morning we farewell Sigiriya with our sights set on Kandy! En route, we'll discover the impressive Coconut House, which is a wonderful opportunity to see how a local family utilises every element of a coconut tree, from extracting coconut oil to creating rope. We will also stop in Matale and visit some of the best spice plantations on the island. A large variety of spices such as cinnamon,

pepper, nutmeg and precious cardamom (a relative of ginger) are grown here. We'll be shown how some of these spices are grown and processed and will be able to purchase favourites to take home.

Kandy is a truly charming town that is set around an artificial lake and nestled amidst rolling hills covered by forests and tea plantations. It's known for housing the most important Buddhist temple in the country, the former capital of Ceylon and the last seat of the Sinhalese Kingdom is Sri Lanka's cultural capital. Kandy's beautiful city has a distinctive style due to the impressive colonial architecture that still survives today!

On arrival, we'll visit the Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic. Ever since it was founded in the 16th century, it has housed one of the most sacred relics of Buddhism—a tooth of Buddha collected from his funeral pyre, which is now protected within the gold-roofed Temple of the Tooth.

 B  D

8

Kandy

The stunning Royal Botanical Gardens of Peradeniya is our destination this morning. Initially a Royal Park, it became a Botanical Garden in 1821 under British rule. Here exotic crops such as coffee, tea, nutmeg, rubber and cinchona (quinine)—all of which are important to the country's economy—were first tested. The Botanical Gardens include a beautiful orchid house and a wide variety of plant species from all over the world.

We'll discover the city of Kandy on a guided tour, starting at the Queen's Hotel, one of the oldest hotels in the country and the first to be officially established in Sri Lanka. We will also make our way to Kandy Lake, a scenic spot in the heart of the city, before making our way to the Kandy Market passing local streets en route.

To finish off the day, we're treated to a mesmerising cultural show and traditional dance performance. We'll witness the fascinating Kandyan dance, a vibrant art form unique to Sri Lanka that involves elements of fire dancing, drumming and acrobatics. The performance has deep cultural ties, traditionally being performed only during royal ceremonies, festivals and religious events.

 B  D

9

Kandy - Nuwara Eliya

The country's main hill resort, Nuwara Eliya is the heart of Sri Lanka's lush tea-growing region. Founded by the British explorer Samuel Baker in 1846, Nuwara Eliya was a sanctuary to the colonialists keen to escape the humidity and heat of Sri Lanka. The town was originally built with mock-Tudor houses featuring inglenook fireplaces and billiard tables, a golf course, racetrack, gentlemen's clubs and botanical gardens. Now a bustling town and the vegetable garden of Sri Lanka, it still provides a glimpse of life during the colonial heyday. The region's temperate climate makes this the coolest area in the country.

We'll visit a tea plantation and factory where we discover how Sri Lankan tea is produced, from picking the leaves to selling the tea! And of course, no visit would be complete without enjoying a few samples of the delicious product.

 B  D

10

Nuwara Eliya

We have a full day dedicated to discovering Nuwara Eliya and its beautiful surrounds. This morning we'll board the local train for a scenic ride to Thalawakale station, passing magnificent landscapes with every twist and turn. We stop in the main town of Nuwara Eliya and enjoy a guided tour to acquaint ourselves with historically rich city. Here we'll discover the idyllic Gregory Lake and the busy Central Market and Bazaar, full of vendors and locals going about their day. Known as Little England, Nuwara Eliya features beautiful colonial-era architecture which we'll have the opportunity to see on our tour – this includes the renowned Nuwara Eliya Post Office!

Our journey takes us out of town, venturing further to see the spectacular St. Clair and Devon Falls that cascade down the lush green mountains of the region. Known as Little Niagara of Sri Lanka, St. Clair Falls is one of the widest falls in the country. The nearby Devon Falls was named after an English coffee planter by the name of Devon, whose plantation is situated close by.



OPTIONAL EXCURSION

Horton Plains – Departing before sunrise you make your way to Horton Plains, home to many endemic loris and purple monkeys. Your trek will have you visiting the breathtaking Baker's Fall and the magnificent 'World's End' which offers one of the best panoramic views in Sri Lanka. 3 hrs/9km – from US \$78 pp. Includes local guide (please note: clients who choose to do the trek will miss out on the

morning train ride)

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11

Nuwara Eliya - Udawalawe - Yala

We make our way to Yala this morning, stopping to witness the gushing water of the incredible waterfalls at Ella before continuing to Udawalawe en route.



SPECIAL EXPERIENCE

Visit the incredible Elephant Transit Home in Udawalawe and learn about its extensive rehabilitation program.

Established in 1995, the Elephant Transit Home rehabilitates orphaned elephant calves until they're strong enough for release back into the wild. This special place is situated on the western border of Udawalawe National Park, where the elephants get the opportunity to roam free. Best job ever? Very well could be! Although we can't get up close and personal with the elephants, we'll be able to see plenty of adorable calves being fed during feeding time.

Waving goodbye to our new elephant friends, we make our way to one of Sri Lanka's most premier eco-tourism destinations, Yala National Park—the gateway to some of the island's incredible wildlife. Established in 1938, Yala National Park boasts a diverse range of habitats, including scrub jungle, brackish lagoons, lakes, and rivers, that leopards, elephants, wild buffalo and more call home.

 B  D

12

Yala National Park

This morning we'll enjoy time at leisure to relax and enjoy our hotel's facilities.

Grab your cameras, we're heading out on an incredible safari this afternoon through Yala National Park! Among the oldest and best known of Sri Lanka's national parks, our safari will take us through the park's stunning scenery and past a number of important cultural ruins. Think vast grassland terrain mixed with beautiful, open lagoons and water holes that are popular among the diverse species found here.

Keep your eyes peeled and get your lens ready to capture the numerous different species that call this park home. From the unique Sri Lankan sloth bear and wild water buffalo to the majestic Sri Lankan elephants that roam the area, there is magic to be found with every twist and turn. Here, you'll also get the opportunity to spot the elusive Sri Lankan leopard. Affectionately known as the Lords of the Jungle, Yala National Park has a leopard density that's higher than anywhere else on the planet. Fingers crossed we can spot one!

 B  D

13

Yala - Weligama - Galle

Farewelling the lush greenery of Yala this morning, we make our way to the coastal walled city of Galle, the capital of the South Province. Built by the Portuguese in the late 16th century, this old trading port was further fortified by the Dutch and British colonialists. The narrow streets of shuttered mansions and churches protected by the stone walls, bastions and ramparts, are a delight to stroll through.

On arrival in Galle, we'll enjoy a guided tour of the city on foot, learning about the town's history and immersing in its stunning colonial architecture. We will discover the UNESCO World Heritage-listed Galle Fort, a fantastically preserved colonial sea fortress and Galle's best-known site.

Early this afternoon, we make our way to the seaside village of Habaraduwa to visit a special turtle hatchery. Set up to conserve Sri Lanka's turtle population, we'll get the chance to see baby turtles before they're released into the wild. We then make our way to the stunning town of Weligama, where we'll witness the unique still fishermen of Weligama go about their trade—bring your camera, this makes for a cool photo opportunity!

 B  D

14

Galle

This morning we enjoy a scenic cruise along the Madu River, meandering through islets forested with mangroves. Look out for the 46 different species of birds that reside in the area, including 14 aquatic varieties, as well as huge water lilies and colourful butterflies.

We'll then visit the Moonstone Mine in Meetiyaogoda. This mine is one of the few places where the semi-precious stone is found in high concentrations, hence the villagers believe this area is blessed by the moon. At Meetiyaogoda you can see, or even go down into the deep, narrow shafts where the stones are mined.

On our way back to the hotel, we will make a stop at the moving Tsunami Photograph Museum which remembers the devastating 2004 Boxing Day Tsunami that inflicted widespread damage to the coast of Sri Lanka.

The rest of the afternoon is ours to enjoy at leisure.

 B  D

15

Galle - Colombo

Sri Lanka's capital Colombo, the 'Garden City of the East', faces the Indian Ocean and stretches along more than 14 kilometres of the island's western shores. A bustling city crowded with buses and minivans has overtaken the once quiet roads laden with bullock carts. Tree-lined boulevards, colonial buildings, open air markets, temples, lakes, and churches add great character to this city.



SPECIAL EXPERIENCE

Take a tour of the beautiful Gradely Cinnamon Estate property, before indulging in a delicious cinnamon-infused morning tea.

Upon arrival in Colombo, we'll enjoy a guided city tour, including a visit to the Gangarama Temple and the famous Cricket Club Café, a prominent establishment in town owned by two Australians.

This evening, we'll enjoy a farewell dinner at the Veranda Restaurant located within the historic and stunning Galle Face Hotel.

 B  D

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Depart Colombo

Today marks the completion of our adventure across amazing Sri Lanka. We'll enjoy the day at leisure to explore Colombo further or simply relax and enjoy our hotel amenities. We hope you leave with fantastic memories!



OPTIONAL EXCURSION

Optional Excursion – Visit the Bunnik Tours office – Enjoy a behind the scenes tour of the Bunnik Tour's Colombo office to see how our tours are created and meet the Sri Lankan team. Be taken on a tour of the building before enjoying a local homemade meal with the staff over lunch. 2.5 hours – complimentary

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Arrive Australia