

Pearl of the Indian Ocean

Pictureseque beaches, crystal clear blue sea, colourful coral reefs and secluded coves: Sri Lanka is the epitome of a tropical paradise.

SpaDreams Sri Lanka Guide



The islands in the Indian ocean have much to offer. Although Sri Lanka is tiny in comparison with its not too distant neighbour India, you will still find an incomparable level of diversity across this little island.

As well as 1330km of stunning coastlines, you can expect to find tea plantations fringed by mountains of flourishing flora and fauna, timeless cities, a rich cultural heritage stretching back over 2000 years, including ruined cities and fascinating temples, the thousand year old tradition of Ayurveda, and last but not least, incredibly warm and friendly people.

Sri Lanka in Brief

- Island nation in the Indian Ocean with a population of approx. 20.6 million. Known as Ceylon from the beginning of British Colonial Rule until 1972.
- Capital city: Colombo.
- Length from north to south: 440 km, widest point: 220 km, total area 65,500 km²
- Most important exports: Tea (Ceylon-tea), coffee, coconuts and rubber
- Landscape: Central highlands with tea growing regions and up to 2,500 m high mountains, fertile lowland plains, coastal area with fisheries and palm fringed beaches.

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Highlights



Cultural Treasures

Sri Lanka is rich in cultural and natural treasures. In fact, five out of the eight UNESCO World Cultural and Natural Heritage sites are located in an area of the Sri Lankan highlands which has been nicknamed the “cultural corner” of Sri Lanka. Here, you will find the ancient ruined cities of Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa, the palace of Sigiriya, the cave temples of Dambulla and the holy city of Kandy.

The cities of Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa, which were formerly seats of the Sinhala royal dynasties, are particularly well known for their many typical Sri Lankan hemispherical temples known as Dagobas. In addition to ancient monastery sites, bronze palaces and temples with an abundance of Buddhist figures, the cityscape is characterised by many magnificent gardens, parks and palace complexes. In Anuradhapura, you will also find the famous Bodhi tree, the focal point of numerous Buddhist pilgrimages. The tree was grown from a branch of the tree under which Buddha became enlightened.



The striking palace of Sigiriya was built in around 500 A.D. on a steep cliff known as the “throat of the lion”, which is riddled with numerous caves. The climb up the cliff is definitely worth it - about halfway up you'll find the daintily coloured frescoes of the famous “cloud girl”.

In the caves of Dambulla, you can admire beautiful paintings and Buddhist statues, which have been created over a period of 2,000 years.

The holy city of Kandy is Sri Lanka's religious centre. The last royal capital of the Sinhalese is unbelievably beautiful, situated in a wild mountain landscape and home to a variety of fascinating religious sites. The best tea in the world comes from Kandy.



Highlights



Adam's Peak is the holiest mountain in Sri Lanka and it is climbed by hundreds of pilgrims every day. At its peak you will find an indent in the rock that looks like a footprint. It has been interpreted differently by followers of different religions - for Christians and Muslims, it is the footprint of Adam; for Buddhists it is the footprint of Buddha, and for the Hindus it is a sign of Shiva.

Protection of nature and the environment is a top priority in Sri Lanka and the country has 15 national parks in total. One of the largest and most impressive is the Yala National Park in the South of Sri Lanka. By taking advantage of the organised safaris on offer here, you can get to know the fascinating wild life of Sri Lanka: crocodiles, goannas, leopards and the mesmerising world of birds with peacocks, pelicans and storks - crossing paths with elephants on the way, of course!

There is also the capital city Colombo - as the entrance and exit for all visitors to Sri Lanka it is well worth a visit. Spacious parks and wide streets as well as colonial stately buildings dominate the cityscape of this bustling metropolis.

Also counted amongst the World Cultural and Natural Heritage sites is the port city of Galle in south west Sri Lanka with its fort, which dates back to the Dutch colonial rule in the 17th century. The old town is surrounded by an impressive walk-on fortress wall, with breathtaking views of the harbour, sea and old town. The colonial flair which permeates the old town invites guests to explore the many small boutiques and other tourist attractions in the region.



Home of Ayurveda

There is no place in the world, not even in India, its place of origin, where Ayurveda is as alive and present as in Sri Lanka. There are many hotels and resorts which employ experienced ayurvedic doctors and offer authentic Ayurveda cures in dreamlike locations.

The millennia old natural healing method Ayurveda is a holistic cure which focuses on establishing unity between body, mind and soul. Ayurveda treatments, which are always adapted to suit the unique constitution of the individual, are based on an array of herbal medicines and include numerous cleansing techniques (e.g. Panchakarma), oil massages and many other wellness treatments. The aim of these treatments is to create inner-balance, establish a sense of well-being and to fight against illness. An original Ayurveda cure can also help heal or alleviate many diseases such as rheumatism or hypertension.



Holiday Tips



Climate

Sri Lanka lies in the tropics in the coastal region, so temperatures are relatively high throughout the entire year. The temperature difference between day and night is hardly noticeable, however the mountain regions can get very cold. In the lowlands temperatures swing between 24 and 32 degrees Celsius in the shade. Due to the monsoon season we recommend travelling to South and West of Sri Lanka between November and April, although there are often beautiful days and many hours of sun from May until October. The water temperature is a pleasant 25-27 degrees Celsius.



Food and Drink

Traditional Sri Lankan cuisine has been influenced by a diverse range of dishes, however the main local dish is curry. Sri Lankan curry has nothing to do with spice mixes as we know them. Curry in Sri Lanka is a highly individual mix of different spices e.g. coriander, chilli, mustard, curcuma, pepper, cinnamon and garlic. Each curry takes its name from its respective main ingredient e.g. vegetable curry, chicken curry or white curry (based on coconut milk).

Hollow, hemispherical pancakes made from rice flour, coconut milk and coconut flakes called „hoppers“ are often eaten for breakfast. Moreover, the country also has a wide variety of tropical fruit on offer, such as mangoes, passion fruit, papayas and many types of bananas.

Delicious local drinks include coconut milk sipped directly from a freshly opened coconut and tea (mostly served with milk). Alcohol can be purchased in licensed shops which are named Arrak, after a type of drink typical to Sri Lanka which is made from ingredients derived from Kittul palm trees, coconut and Palmyra trees. During festival days and the monthly Poya (full moon) periods, no alcohol is sold and it can only be consumed in private places such as your hotel room.



Jetwings Ayurveda Pavilions

Holiday Tips



Electricity

In Sri Lanka the AC voltage is 230-240 volts. The usual outlets are three terminal sockets with contacts arranged in triangle. You can usually purchase adapters for three terminal sockets from the hotel reception. Be careful with sensitive devices - the voltage on the island varies! Power outages are not rare.

Mobile Telephones

Many phone shops and internet cafes offer international phone calls for just a few cents. Using mobiles and iPhones is usually problem free, however there are many dead spots in the mountains where you will not be able to get signal. You will have to pay for any incoming calls to your mobile phone. Data roaming costs can be extremely high. Frequent telephone users can buy a local SIM card for little money at the airport or a phone shop.

Language and Communication

The official nation languages are Sinhalese and Tamil. Around 74% of the population of Sri Lanka speak Sinhalese, 25% speak Tamil and less than 1% are English native speakers. Nonetheless, English is very widespread. Place names and signs are written in both English and Sinhalese, or English and Tamil, and sometimes even in all three languages.



Shopping

Whether you're looking for handmade crafts, tie-dye fabrics, tea, jewellery, colourful printed fabrics, herbal remedies or wooden elephants, the Sri Lankan markets offer a wide variety of beautiful souvenirs for remembering your holiday in Sri Lanka.

The state owned department stores and self-service shops have fixed prices and opening times. However, most smaller shops stay open until late in the evening and are also open on Sundays. You can bargain at these stores and with dealers on the streets, but not over staples, such as rice or bread.

Please note that exporting antiques, tortoiseshell and ivory is forbidden. Travellers returning to the EU over the age of 18 may bring (amongst other things) up to 1.5 litres of alcohol and 0.25l of perfume. Check Sri Lankan customs laws before bringing back any goods.



Heritage Ayurveda Maha Gedara

Important Information



Health

Sri Lanka has millennia of experience in ayurvedic medicine, however there are also Sri Lankan doctors who have had a comprehensive education in Western medicine. Nevertheless, you should still take note of a few medical precautions.

There are no injections required for a visit to Sri Lanka. However, it is recommended to get booster shots of polio, diphtheria and tetanus prophylaxis and to get vaccinated against typhus and hepatitis. The usual warnings regarding water and food hygiene also apply: do not drink tap water (drink bottled mineral water instead), do not take any drinks with ice, only eat peeled fruit and wash your hands regularly. Even take caution with ice cream.

Although Malaria is present in Sri Lanka the risk of contracting it is fairly low. Those who would like to avoid using mosquito repellents containing prophylaxis should protect themselves by wearing long clothing, sleep under a mosquito net and rub themselves with insect repellent.

Don't forget sun protection (hat, sunglasses and cream)! In rural areas there are not too many pharmacies so make sure you bring all the medicine with you that you need. We recommend that you also bring a standard travel first aid kit with medication for fever, pain, diarrhoea and colds, as well as wound disinfectants, insecticides, sunscreen products, ointment for insect bites or other skin irritation, fever thermometers and bandages.

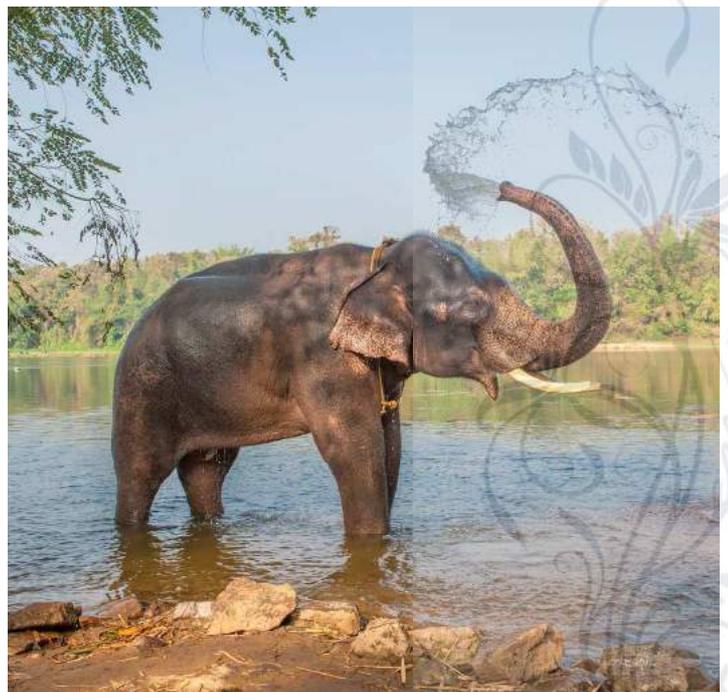
You should take out travel health insurance that covers flight cancellation costs, in case of emergency.

For detailed and up-to-date medical information, visit the Foreign Travel Advice website: www.gov.uk/foreign-traveladvice/sri-lanka/health.

Entry Requirements

There are visa and passport requirements for travelling to Sri Lanka. Your passport must be valid for at least six months. You can apply for your visa with a Sri Lankan foreign representative or at <http://www.eta.gov.lk/slvisa/> and must do so in plenty of time before your journey. Obtaining a visa usually costs around US\$50 for adults and is free for children under the age of 12. These visas last for a maximum of 30 days and you must have proof of a return flight, sufficient finances for your stay (at least foreign US\$15 worth of foreign currency for each day of your stay) and a hotel to stay in.

Please note that these entry requirements change frequently. Up to date information can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/sri-lanka>



Important Information



Safety and Security

Security in Sri Lanka has improved enormously since the end of the civil war in 2009. Whilst most visits to Sri Lanka are trouble free, political rallies have occasionally turned violent and it is important to remain vigilant and aware of current events. There is still a strong military presence in some areas of the island and you should always carry a form of official photographic identification. Up to date safety and security information can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/sri-lanka/safety-and-security>

Money

The currency in Sri Lanka is Sri Lankan rupees (LKR). € 1 equals approx. 150 LKR, £ 1 equals approx. 200 LKR. You can find current exchange rates at <http://www.cbsl.gov.lk> and a currency converter at <http://www.xe.com/currencyconverter>

Currency exchange is available 24 hours a day at the airport. For good value currency exchange it is best to go to a professional bureau de change. You can usually change money at your hotel without any issues, however you will not always get a good rate.

Banks are usually open from Mon-Fri from 9:00-13:00. Additionally there are cash points for use with credit and debit cards in many places and most hotels and large restaurants accept major debit and credit cards. However, as credit card fraud is a risk for tourists, it is best to use cash whenever possible and only use ATMs attached to banks and major hotels.

Make sure you keep some coins and rupee notes in small denominations for smaller services.

Flights

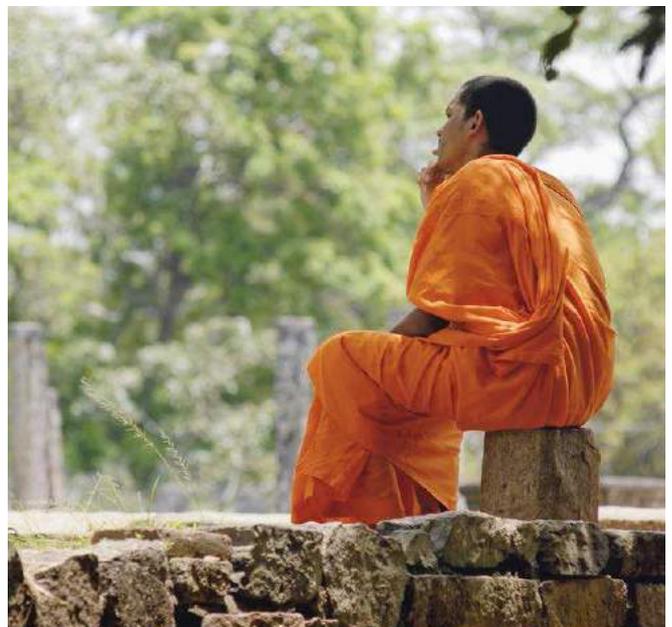
Flights to Sri Lanka from Europe take approximately 10-11 hours. Sri Lankan airlines offer direct flights from London Heathrow to Colombo, however most flights to Sri Lanka will involve one or two changes.

We are happy to organise a cheap and comfortable transfer to and from the airport and hotel for you.

SpaDreams Service and Quality

SpaDreams will help you organise your trip to Sri Lanka, offering you a highly individualised service and optimum advice, to ensure that your trip to Sri Lanka is comfortable and the best possible value. Whether you are looking for a relaxing holiday on the beach, an authentic Ayurveda cure, a tour through the highlights of Sri Lanka or a mixture of everything, our team of experts will help craft the perfect holiday for you.

We have long standing relationships and contracts with all of our hotel and resort partners in Sri Lanka and regularly travel to the resorts ourselves to perform on-site quality checks. Within our range of Sri Lankan hotels you'll find excellent prices, fantastic locations, direct access to sandy white beaches and exciting excursions to landmarks and tourist attractions. All of our hotels that offer Ayurveda cures are comprehensive and of the highest quality. The staff are friendly and always happy to assist you.



Etiquette Guide



Different countries, different customs: there are certain western customs that are not appropriate in Sri Lankan culture and may be considered insulting to the locals. Here are some tips about the typical sensitivities and behaviour in Sri Lanka:

- “Aayubowan” (may you live a long life) is the traditional greeting in Sinhalese and is also used to say goodbye. Both hands are placed together in front of your chest in a prayer-like gesture.
- Use your right hand to give something, to eat and for handshakes. In Sri Lanka the left hand is considered to be unclean.
- In Sri Lanka comfortable yet appropriate clothing is considered important. Jeans, cloth trousers and t-shirts are fine. Skirts should be at least knee length. Too short or too skimpy clothing will not be appreciated in Sri Lanka.
- Remove your shoes before entering a temple. In Hindu temples you are usually expected to cover your head, however in Buddhist temples no headpieces are allowed. Arms and legs must be covered.
- In rural areas men and women do not shake hands.
- Even though it may occur on some hotel beaches, topless or nude sunbathing is banned in Sri Lanka as the locals consider it shameful.
- Sri Lanka offers many wonderful opportunities for photography, however please ensure you ask politely before taking any photographs in museums, temples or of the locals. Do not take photos of religious buildings or paintings. Photography is forbidden in airports and military zones.
- Shaking your head means yes.
- Many people working in the tourism industry in Sri Lanka make a living from tips rather than their wages. It is customary to recognise good service by awarding a tip.
- Hotel porters/suitcase carriers earn 50-100 LKR per suitcase, taxi drivers 50 LKR and around 250 LKR is recommended for general services. In restaurants around 10% of the bill is an appropriate tip.



