

# *BIG FIVE*

TOURS & EXPEDITIONS



# *Sri Lanka*

## **Travel Guide**

The following general outline offers practical information, suggestions, and answers to some frequently asked questions. It is not intended to be the definitive guide for your trip. Be sure to check the reading listing included here for more information.

## COLOMBO

### Average Temperature

| °F | Jan. | Feb. | Mar. | Apr. | May | Jun. | Jul. | Aug. | Sep. | Oct. | Nov. | Dec. |
|----|------|------|------|------|-----|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
|    | 81   | 82   | 83   | 84   | 84  | 83   | 83   | 83   | 83   | 82   | 81   | 81   |

### Average Precipitation

| in. | Jan. | Feb. | Mar. | Apr. | May  | Jun. | Jul. | Aug. | Sep. | Oct. | Nov. | Dec. |
|-----|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
|     | 3.3  | 2.5  | 4.5  | 10   | 13.2 | 7.5  | 5.1  | 3.8  | 6.2  | 13.9 | 12.1 | 6    |

## KANDY

### Average Temperature

| °F | Jan. | Feb. | Mar. | Apr. | May | Jun. | Jul. | Aug. | Sep. | Oct. | Nov. | Dec. |
|----|------|------|------|------|-----|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
|    | 73   | 75   | 77   | 78   | 77  | 75   | 75   | 75   | 75   | 75   | 75   | 73   |

### Average Precipitation

| in. | Jan. | Feb. | Mar. | Apr. | May | Jun. | Jul. | Aug. | Sep. | Oct. | Nov. | Dec. |
|-----|------|------|------|------|-----|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
|     | 4.8  | 2.6  | 4.1  | 7    | 6.1 | 8.1  | 6.7  | 5.5  | 5.7  | 11.3 | 10.8 | 8.6  |

## WEATHER

Sri Lanka has a tropical climate. Upland areas are cooler and more temperate, and coastal areas are cooled by sea breezes.

There are two monsoons, which occur May to July and December to January. Equatorial and tropical influenced by elevation above sea level, but marked by only slight diurnal and seasonal variations; temperature in Colombo (at sea level) varies from 25°C to 28°C, and in central massif (site of highest elevations) 14°C to 16°C.

Rainfall uneven; divides country climatically into wet zone comprising southwestern quarter and dry zone on remainder of island. Annual precipitation in wet zone averages 250 centimeters; in dry zone precipitation varies from 120 to 190 centimeters.

## TIME ZONE & FLIGHT TIME

**Time Zone:** GMT + 6.

**Flight times (approximate):** Depending on your departure gate, you flight time to Sri Lanka is approximately 18 to 20 hours.

## PASSPORTS / VISAS

**Passports:** For international travel, a U.S. passport valid for at least six months from date of departure, containing **at least** two blank pages is necessary.

**Visas:** U.S. and Canadian citizens do not require visas in advance. Citizens from other countries, consult the nearest **Sri Lanka** consulate.

**Important:** Please look at your passport prior to travel to insure that:

- 1) Your passport is valid for at least six months after the date of travel.
- 2) You have sufficient blank pages for visa stamps that will be added as you travel in and out of various countries.

**Please note:** Pages reserved for amendments and endorsements cannot be used for visas.

## AIRPORT FORMALITIES

**On Arrival:** Upon arrival, proceed through immigration and baggage claims and customs. Handy baggage carts are available free of charge. You can also exchange money at this time. Big Five personnel or their representatives will assist you with your baggage and escort you to your hotel. They will assist with check-in formalities. Upon leaving, this will be in reverse.

**Taxes & Int'l Departure Tax:** Departure tax is US\$10.

**Duty Free:** The following items may be imported into Sri Lanka by visitors aged 18 years and over without incurring customs duty: *200 cigarettes or 50 cigars or 340g of tobacco; 2 bottles of wine and 1.5l of spirits; a small quantity of perfume and 250ml of eau de toilette.*

**Note:** (a) Only two members of the same family traveling together are entitled to free import allowances. (b) Valuable personal effects (including jewelry), must be declared on arrival in Sri Lanka. (c) There is no gift allowance.

**Banned goods:** Gold, Sri Lanka currency in excess of Rs 250; firearms, explosives or other weapons; antiques; animals, birds or reptiles; tea, rubber and coconut plants, dangerous drugs.

**US Customs:** Your personal exemption is \$800. There are limits on the amount of alcoholic beverages, cigarettes, cigars, and other tobacco products you may include in your duty-free personal exemption. Regulations frequently change. For more information you can contact your nearest Customs office, write the U.S. Customs Service at Box 7407, Washington, DC 20044, visit the *Customs & Border Protection* website [www.customs.gov/xp/cgov/travel/](http://www.customs.gov/xp/cgov/travel/), or go to the U.S. Bureau of Customs homepage at: [www.customs.gov/xp/cgov/home.xml](http://www.customs.gov/xp/cgov/home.xml)

## BUSINESS HOURS

**Banks and Exchange Bureaus:** Mon-Fri 0900-1500.

**Business Offices:** Mon-Fri 0800-1630.

**Shops and Commerce:** Mon-Fri 0900-1730, Sat 0900-1300

**Restaurants:** Varies

## ELECTRICITY

230/240 volts AC, 50Hz. Round three-pin plugs are usual, with bayonet lamp fittings.

## CURRENCY / BANKING

**Currency:** Sri Lanka Rupee (SLRe, singular; SLRs, plural) = 100 cents. Notes are in denominations of SLRs1000, 500, 200, 100, 50, 20 and 10. Coins are in denominations of SLRs10, 5, 2 and 1, and 50, 25, 10, 5, 2 and 1 cents. There are also large numbers of commemorative coins in circulation.

**Currency exchange:** Foreign currency must be changed only at authorized exchanges, banks and hotels, and these establishments must endorse such exchanges on the visitor's Exchange Control D form which is issued on arrival and must usually be returned at time of departure.

**Credit & debit cards:** American Express, Visa and MasterCard are widely accepted. Diners Club has more limited acceptance. Check with your credit or debit Card Company for details of merchant acceptability and other services which may be available.

**Traveler's checks:** The rate of exchange for traveler's checks is better than the rate of exchange for cash. To avoid additional exchange rate charges, travelers are advised to take travelers checks in US Dollars or Pounds Sterling.

**Currency restrictions:** The import and export of local currency is limited to SLRs1000. The import of notes from India and Pakistan is not allowed, otherwise the import of foreign currency is not restricted but all amounts over US\$5000 are subject to declaration. Export of foreign currency is limited to the amount declared on import.

## HEALTH

Please keep in mind that these requirements change frequently. Tour members should consult their personal physicians and / or the Center of Disease Control in Atlanta, for any recommended general and / or specific health measures at the time of travel. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) in Atlanta has a fax information service with updated travel information. To receive these documents, call 404-332-4565 and follow the prompts. You can also go to the Center of Disease Control website at [www.cdc.gov/travel/](http://www.cdc.gov/travel/).

### General Recommendations:

- Do not drink tap water at all.
- Do not drink your beverages with ice.
- Always drink bottled mineral water and soft drinks (diet soft drinks are not always available).
- Avoid any raw foods while traveling in the continent, except in recommended restaurants and hotels, where you may do so if you wish. Always choose cooked food.
- If you wear prescription glasses or contact lenses, it is advisable to bring an extra pair and cleaning fluid.
- In places of altitudes above 8,000 feet, you may suffer digestive problems, light dizziness or headache. We recommend that you only eat light foods the first day or two, and avoid alcohol.
- Sudden dietary changes, from your daily consumption at home to exotic dishes, especially on the first day or two, may result in digestive problems, often leading to

headache, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea. Please be careful.

**Yellow Fever:** A yellow fever vaccination certificate is required from travelers over 1 year of age arriving within 6 days from infected areas, or if you are visiting two or more African countries.

**cholera:** Following WHO guidelines issued in 1973, a cholera vaccination certificate is not a condition of entry to Sri Lanka. However, cholera is a serious risk in this country and precautions are essential. Up-to-date advice should be sought before deciding whether these precautions should include vaccination as medical opinion is divided over its effectiveness.

**Malaria:** Malaria risk, predominantly in the benign *vivax* form, exists throughout the year in the districts of Amparai, Anuradhapura, Batticaloa, Badulla, Hambantota, Jaffna, Kandy, Kegalle, Kurunegala, Mannar, Matale, Matara, Moneragala, Polonnaruwa, Puttalam, Ratnapura, Trincomalee and Vavuniya. The malignant *falciparum* strain is also present and is reported to be highly resistant to chloroquine.

**Food & drink:** All water should be regarded as being potentially contaminated. Water used for drinking, brushing teeth or making ice should have first been boiled or otherwise sterilized. Bottled water and a variety of mineral waters are available at most hotels. Unpasteurized milk should be boiled. Powdered or tinned milk is available and is advised, but make sure that it is reconstituted with pure water. Pasteurized and sterilized milk is available in some hotels and shops. Avoid dairy products made with unboiled milk. Only eat well-cooked meat and fish, preferably served hot. Pork, salad and mayonnaise may carry increased risk. Vegetables should be cooked and fruit peeled.

**Other risks:** Hepatitis A, B and E are present and precautions should be taken. Dengue fever occurs. Typhoid occurs in rural areas. Rabies is present. For those at high risk, vaccination before arrival should be considered. If you are bitten, seek medical advice without delay.

**Health care:** Treatment is free at government hospitals and dispensaries; 24-hour treatment is available at Colombo General Hospital. Some hotels also have doctors.

## SAFETY

Common sense safety precautions you normally observe when traveling anywhere should be followed to minimize the risk of personal injury or property loss.

**Leave jewelry at home!** Do not leave cash, traveler checks, airline tickets, etc. in an unattended room, even in a locked suitcase. Most of the lodges, hotels, and camps have safe deposit facilities at the front desk for your valuables. Use them. Be careful when carrying purses or cameras. Do not carry large amounts of currency or valuables. Do not walk around unfamiliar cities alone at night. Be wary of entering into conversation with unknown people on the street. These are the same precautions a visitor would observe in North American cities. Common sense is the best defense.

Don't carry a lot of packages at once. Purses should be zippered and have short shoulder straps so you can protect them with your upper arm. Wallets and passports should not be carried in your back pocket, and expensive watches, chains and jewelry should not be worn. Don't leave cameras or binoculars in sight of any open window. Do not

leave any valuables or money unattended in your hotel room. If you follow these precautions, you probably won't have any trouble. Common sense is the best deterrent to theft.

**Carry Your Passport.** Please ensure that you carry your passport or tourist card at all times. Never go anywhere (not even the Post Office) without your passport or tourist card. Should you ever be asked, you should be able to present your identification, your passport, tourist card, or visa. Not having it with you could mean a trip to the Police Station.

Pamphlets addressing safety issues abroad are available from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402, or Bureau of Consular Affairs' home page: <http://travel.state.gov>.

## COMMUNICATIONS

**LANGUAGE:** Sinhala, Tamil and English. Sri Lanka is a land of several languages, and language is a political issue. Early attempts at making Sinhalese (or Sinhala) the sole language of government and education sparked the first Tamil protests in the early 1970s. Both Sinhala (spoken by more than 70 per cent of Sri Lankans) and Tamil (spoken by around 20 per cent) now have the status of 'national' languages, while Sinhala is the 'official' language. English, which is widely spoken and used on signs, maps, timetables and place names, provides a neutral link between the two.

**Telephone:** IDD facilities are available to the principal cities. Country code: 94. Outgoing international code: 00. Phone cards are available at post offices and shops. **Mobile:** GSM 900 network.

**Fax:** The General Post Office in Colombo provides a service. Many hotels also have facilities.

**Internet:** Internet cafes provide public access to Internet and e-mail services.

**Post:** Airmail to Europe takes up to a week.

## FOOD & DRINK

**Local cuisine:** Standard foods are spicy and it is advised to approach curries with caution. There are many vegetables, fruits, meats and seafoods. Continental, Chinese, Indian and Japanese menus are available in Colombo. A specialty is basic curry, made with coconut milk, sliced onion, green chili, aromatic spices such as cloves, nutmeg, cinnamon and saffron and aromatic leaves. *Hoppers* is a cross between a muffin and a crumpet with a wafer-crisp edge, served with a fresh egg soft-baked on top. *Stringhoppers* are steamed circlets of rice flour, a little more delicate than noodles or spaghetti. *Jaggery* is fudge made from the crystallized sap of the kitul palm. The *durian* fruit is considered a great delicacy.

**Drinks:** Tea is the national drink and thought to be amongst the best in the world. *Toddy*, the sap of the palm tree, is a popular local drink; fermented, it becomes *arrack* which, it should be noted, comes in varying degrees of strength. Alcohol cannot be sold on *poya* holidays (which occur each lunar month on the day of the full moon).

Fruit juices are widely available but should be treated with caution as they may not have been blended with water that is safe to drink. Tap water may be contaminated, particularly during the monsoon season. You should be able to trust fruit juices in main resort hotels, but those sold in smaller restaurants and roadside stands are best avoided. Bottled water and soft drinks are widely available.

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.

## CLOTHING

**For men:** Light cotton or linen short-sleeved shirts, and/or T-shirts, shorts and light baggy pants for the coast, lightweight linen suit for business or more formal occasions, light jacket or cotton sweatshirt for evenings in Kandy and the hills where evenings can be cooler. Jacket and tie required at some older, more formal hotel restaurants and clubs.

**For women:** Linen or cotton skirts, tops, pants, shorts and T-shirts, beachwear. Large cotton or silk shawl comes in handy for cool up-country evenings.

**For both:** Modest wear covering knees, arms and shoulders is required for visiting temples, mosques and sacred sites, including the ancient cities. Lightweight clothing and rainwear should be brought.

**Other useful items:** Small flashlight and batteries, mosquito repellent, binoculars.

**Laundry Facilities:** Laundry can be done at major hotels.

## SHOPPING

Sri Lanka is a treasure house of riches for the souvenir shopper, with mementoes to suit all budgets. Small craft and souvenir shops surround virtually every resort hotel, and bargaining is the order of the day.

At the lower end of the scale, there are carved wooden masks depicting *nagas* and other mythical characters from the Sri Lankan pantheon of demons and deities. Some of the masks, which are used in dance-dramas, in processions and on festival days, can be bought by tourists. The '18-disease' mask shows a demon in possession of a victim; he is surrounded by 18 faces – each of which cures a specific ailment. Versions produced for the tourist market are often of a high standard.

Special purchases comprise of handicrafts and curios of silver, brass, bone, ceramics, wood and terracotta. Also included are cane baskets, straw hats, reed and coir mats, and tea. Batik fabric, lace and lacquerware are also popular. Fabrics include batiks, cottons, rayons, silks and fine lace.

Leather goods such as bags and belts are also good value. The quality and price of silver and gold jewelry depends on the workmanship and the gold and silver content.

Sri Lanka is also rich in gems. Precious and semi-precious gemstones are widely sold, especially around Ratnapura, Sri Lanka's 'gem city'. The most valuable are rubies and sapphires. Beware, however, of buying gems on the street or of dealers who offer a seemingly irresistible bargain - invariably, on returning home, the stone you have bought will turn out to be worth far less than you paid for it, and may be completely worthless. Reputable gem centers in Colombo are the only reliable place to buy stones.

Avoid buying goods made from ivory, turtle shell, or reptile skin of any kind. Local vendors may assure you that such wild animal products are legal in Sri Lanka or are made

from species which are not endangered. This is unlikely to be true (there are not any snake or other reptile farms in Sri Lanka) and your new purchases will be confiscated by customs on your return home.

## SMOKING

We suggest that passengers refrain from smoking in public areas, sightseeing vehicles, and when aboard any cruise vessel while in the cabins, the dining area, or community areas. There are designated areas for smoking on cruise vessels. Please dispose of cigarette butts in the appropriate receptacles/ashtrays. Do not throw cigarette butts on the ground or overboard.

## INTRODUCTION TO SRI LANKA

**Geography:** Sri Lanka is shaped like a giant teardrop falling from the southern tip of the vast Indian subcontinent. It is separated from India by the 50km (31mi) wide Palk Strait, although there is a series of stepping-stone coral islets known as Adam's Bridge which almost form a land bridge between the two countries. The island is just 350km (217mi) long and only 180km (112mi) wide at its widest, and is about the same size as Ireland, West Virginia or Tasmania.

The southern half of the island is dominated by beautiful and rugged hill country. The entire northern half comprises a large plain extending from the edge of the hill country to the Jaffna peninsula. The highest mountain is the 2524m (1565mi) Mt Pidurutalagala near Nuwara Eliya, and the longest river is the Mahaweli which courses from the centre and empties into the Indian Ocean at Trincomalee. The best beaches are on the south-western, southern and south-eastern coasts.

Ebony, teak, silkwood and spectacular orchids are found in the dense south-western tropical rainforests. Hardy grasslands, rhododendrons and stunted forests predominate in the cool, damp highlands, and shrubs and grasslands survive in arid zones in the north. Animal life is profuse and includes the ubiquitous elephant, as well as leopards, deer, monkeys, sloth bears, wild boar, cobras, crocodiles, dugong and turtles. The island is an important seasonal home to migrating birds, including flamingoes, who flock to the lagoons, wetlands and bird sanctuaries for respite from the northern winter. The best time to see birds is between January and April.

Sri Lanka is a typically tropical country with distinct dry and wet seasons, but the picture is somewhat complicated by the fact that it is subject to two monsoons: the Yala season (May to August), when the south-west monsoon brings rain to the southern, western and central regions; and the Maha season (October to January), when the north-east monsoon brings rain to the north and east of the island. Temperatures in the low-lying coastal regions are high year round but they rapidly fall with altitude and in the hill country, where it feels like perpetual spring. The highest temperatures are from March through June, while November to January is usually the coolest time of the year. Rainfall is heaviest in the south, south west and central highlands; the northern and north-central regions are very dry. The best time to visit the west, south coast and hill country is between December and March. May to September is best on the east coast.

**Religion:** Buddhist majority, with Hindu, Christian and Muslim minorities.

## HISTORY

Sri Lanka was part of the Empire of Asoka in the third century, during which time the population was converted to Buddhism. The Sinhalese inhabitants later moved their capital to Polonnaruwa, in the south of the island, to escape from repeated Tamil invasions during the 11th and 12th centuries. The first Europeans to arrive were the Portuguese, who were quickly supplanted by the Dutch in the 17th century. The British acquired Sri Lanka (as Ceylon) from the Dutch in 1796. Administration of the island initially was shared between the East India Company and the Crown, however, the latter assumed full control in 1802. Sri Lanka (as Ceylon) eventually won independence in 1948. Past colonization by the Indians, Portuguese, Dutch and British have all left their marks in architecture, customs, language and agriculture.

The country became a republic in 1972, adopting a new constitution along with the Sinhala name, Sri Lanka. The majority (70 per cent) of the population are Buddhists of Sinhalese descent, although the north and parts of the east of Sri Lanka are dominated by the Tamil population (15 per cent), Hindu by religion and ethnically linked to the Tamils of southern India. Serious conflict arose from the Tamil minority's demands for a separate Tamil state, with terrorist activity by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (Tamil Eelam being the title of their notional independent state) prevalent since the 1970s. This provoked increasingly vigorous responses from the government.

The Indian government became involved in the conflict, initially as official mediator between the Tamils and the Sri Lankan government but then, after the failure of an armistice in 1987, it intervened militarily (on the government's side). Its two-year military campaign ended with the death of over 1000 Indian soldiers and an ignominious retreat.

The assassination of Indian premier Rajiv Gandhi in 1991 was the apotheosis of the Tigers' campaign of revenge for the Indian military campaign. After that, the war entered a period of effective stalemate, with each side gaining occasional advantage through upgrading, re-equipping or deployment of new tactics.

Outside the Tiger-controlled areas in the north and east – inside which the guerrillas had absolute authority – the political environment was dominated by the struggle between the country's two main political groupings – the centre-right United National Party and the People's Alliance (a coalition of social-democratic and socialist parties). The decisive election of recent times took place in 1995, when the UNP's 17-year stranglehold on power was finally broken by the People's Alliance, under Chandrikha Kumaratunga, another member of South Asia's pantheon of formidable female politicians. (Her predecessor, Sirimavo Bandaranaike, was the world's first female prime minister and held several terms of office between 1959 and 1977.) Kumaratunga won a second presidential term in 1999, although the UNP regained control of the national assembly in December 2001, under veteran politician Ranil Wickremasinghe.

Kumaratunga was determined to resolve the Tamil conflict. Despite a number of setbacks and with the discreet assistance of Norwegian negotiators, Kumaratunga had made considerable progress and was close to reaching a political settlement by the beginning of 2002. A deal between the government and the Tamil Tigers was finally concluded at the end of February 2002, when the two sides signed a formal ceasefire. Despite skepticism from many quarters and a number of serious incidents, the ceasefire has been maintained for the last twelve months. Furthermore, the

island's sizeable Muslim population, who were persecuted by both sides throughout the two-decade-long conflict, has also been brought into the political settlement. As with any conflict of that length and hostility, there are many issues to be resolved, however, Sri Lanka is now poised to enter a new era of peace and perhaps even prosperity. By the end of 2002, both sides had agreed on an outline formula for the future government of the Tamil-dominated northern and eastern parts of the island. As of February 2003, the details were the subject of ongoing negotiations.

## SRI LANKA'S REGIONS

**Colombo:** Colombo, the island's largest city, is noisy, frenetic - and just a little crazy. While the city holds less obvious interest than many other parts of the island, it's still worth a visit to see what makes Sri Lanka tick.

Colombo is a relatively easy city to find your way around. To the north is the Fort district, where there are also sights such as the clock tower, a former lighthouse, the president's residence, and a cluster of colonial buildings which lend the district an air of the previous Empire.

Immediately south of here is Galle Face Green, where cricket games and kite flyers can be found. Cinnamon Gardens, further south, is Colombo's most luxurious neighborhood with elegant mansions. East is the pungent Pettah bazaar district. Walk through the riot of goods - fruit, vegetables, meat, gems, gold, silver, brass and tin junk.

Sites worthy of note are the National Museum, which has a good collection of historical works, and the city's many mosques and Buddhist and Hindu temples.

**Kandy:** The tranquil 'capital' of the hill country and the historical stronghold of Buddhist power, Kandy is built around a lake and set in a scenic basin of hills. It has a unique architectural nature thanks to its gently sloping tiled roofs. The town center is a delightful mix of old shops, noise, buses, markets and hotels. Its main attraction is the octagonal Dalada Maligawa (Temple of the Tooth), a temple which houses Sri Lanka's most important religious relic - the sacred tooth of Buddha. There are daily ceremonies of service to the Tooth Relic, each attracting white-clad pilgrims carrying lotus blossoms and frangipani. During the Kandy Esala Perahera celebrations, a replica of the shrine is carried through the city on an elephant.

Other sights include the small but excellent National Museum, the Peradeniya Botanic Gardens, the Udawattakelle Sanctuary, a peaceful shelter for birdlife, and the Kandyan Art Association & Cultural Center beside the lake. There are scenic walks around Kandy, one of which leads to the Mahaweli, where you may see elephants being bathed

**Anuradhapura:** Sri Lanka's first capital and a potent symbol of Sinhalese power, it is the most extensive and important of Sri Lanka's ancient cities. It became a capital in 380 BC and for over 1000 years Sinhalese kings ruled from this great city. Its impressive remains were found in the early 19th century and have been in the process of restoration ever since.

There are many interesting things to see in Anuradhapura. Grown from the tree under which Buddha achieved enlightenment, The Sacred Bo-Tree is the city's most sacred item. The Thuparama Dagoba, the oldest of many temples in Anuradhapura and believed to contain the right collar-bone of Buddha, it is the largest remaining structure and thought to have been over 100m (328ft) in height and home to an estimated 3000 monks. There are also museums that invite exploration, marvelously restored twin

ponds which were used by monks as ritual baths, and immense tanks built to provide irrigation water for the growing of rice. The best way to explore the area is by bicycle.

South-east of Anuradhapura are the remains of the ancient lakeside city of Polonnaruwa. These ruins date mostly from the reign of the Indian Chola dynasty in the 11th and 12th century, but they are in an exceptional state of repair.

**Sigiriya:** The rock fortress of Sigiriya is a spectacular and formidable stronghold. Built in the 5th century AD to fend off a feared invasion, it is situated atop a 200m (656ft) high rock. There are water gardens, 5th century rock paintings, and tremendous views.

**Nuwara Eliya:** With gabled roofs, immaculate lawns, rose bushes, and moss-covered gravestones, Nuwara Eliya still retains the vestiges of the Empire. Soak up the appealing atmosphere by visiting the Hill Club or visit the botanic gardens and tea plantations in the surrounding hills.

**Yala West:** South-east is one of the few Sri Lankan national parks still open to travelers, it covers almost 1000 sq km of scrub, lagoons and rocky outcrops. Yala West is a particularly good place to see elephants. There are also leopards, bears, deer, crocodiles, wild boar, monkeys, buffalo and wild peacocks. It's best to hire a jeep and driver in Tissamaharama and be in place near a waterhole at dawn or dusk. Nearby Bundala National Park is Sri Lanka's best spot for bird watching.

