



Trip Extensions – Sri Lanka

Highlights of Colombo

Activities

Overnight

Day 1

Colombo, the capital of Sri Lanka, is a melting pot of Sinhalese Buddhists, Tamil Hindus, Muslims and Christians. The city dates to the early 1500s, when the Portuguese first constructed a fort here from which to launch their conquest of the island. The city was later conquered by the Dutch, who expanded the fort and built a system of canals throughout the city. The British, the next colonial power to dominate Sri Lanka, significantly improved the harbor, establishing it as a major Indian Ocean maritime port. The country's many riches, which still exist today, include precious gems such as sapphires and rubies, spices such as cinnamon and pepper, and of course, Ceylon tea.

Our first stop today is the bustling Pettah shopping bazaar, filled with shops selling tea, spices, electronics, household goods, clothing and more. While in this area we will explore the candy-striped Jami-ul-Alfar mosque and the 18th century Wolvendaal Kerk. We will also walk down Sea Street, home to many gold and silver jewelers and several important Hindu temples. We will further visit two imposing churches, St. Anthony's and St. Lucia's, which illustrate the mix of religions found in this small city. Lunch at the colonial-era Galle Face Hotel. Afternoon visit to Kelaniya Raja Maha Vihara, one of Sri Lanka's most revered Buddhist temples. The inside is decorated with beautiful murals depicting the Buddha's mythical visit to the island in the 5th or 6th century BC.

Colombo

Day 2

We will start our day with a drive by some of Colombo's most interesting colonial buildings, such as Cargill's department store and the Grand Oriental Hotel. This will be followed by a visit to the National Museum, which contains a superb collection of Sri Lankan fine arts and crafts, including Buddhist sculpture, Hindu bronzes, traditional Sinhalese masks and artifacts belonging to the last king of Kandy. Lunch in the De Soysa Circus shopping area, home to Colombo's poshest boutiques and souvenir stores. Afternoon tour of the Gangaramaya Buddhist Temple and its fascinating collection of antiquities and other gifts given

Colombo

to the temple by devotees. This will be followed by a visit to the Seema Malaka Buddhist temple, designed by renown Sri Lankan architect Geoffrey Bawa.

Day 3 Depart Colombo for the U.S. or for other destinations in Sri Lanka.

Kandy and the Cultural Triangle

	Activities	Overnight
Day 1	<i>Starting point – Kandy.</i> Kandy was one of the last cities in Sri Lanka to be conquered by the Europeans. Due to its long history of independence, it was able to remain a center of Sinhalese arts, culture and religion. Today we will visit the Royal Palace complex, the Kandy Garrison Cemetery, and the four principal <i>devales</i> , or temples, of Kandy. The temples are primarily Buddhist, with Hindu elements incorporated, reflecting the fact that Kandy was once ruled by Tamils from South India. Sunset visit to The Temple of the Tooth, Sri Lanka’s most important Buddhist temple, which is the current home of the Buddha Tooth Relic. The Tooth Relic is believed to be a tooth of Lord Buddha rescued from his cremation pyre; whoever possesses it is said to have the divine right to rule Sri Lanka. The evening puja at the temple is serene, with thousands of worshippers, dressed solely in white, waiting patiently in line with bowls of fragrant flowers to place on the temple altar.	Kandy
Day 2	Today you are free to explore Kandy on your own. Possible sights to visit include the National Museum, which houses an excellent display of royal costumes and artifacts, as well as the Peradeniya Botanical Gardens or the Tea Museum. You can also take a walk through the scenic Udawattekele Sanctuary (see “Wildlife from Land to Sea” below), browse through Kandy’s numerous arts and crafts shops or enjoy a massage at a local ayurvedic spa. Evening dance performance at the Kandyan Arts and Crafts Association.	Kandy
Day 3	Morning departure for Polonnaruwa, the capital of Sri Lanka from the 11 th to the 13 th centuries. Polonnaruwa was originally a capital of the invading Tamil Cholas from India, but was recaptured by the Sinhalese King Vijayabahu I in 1073. It was therefore inhabited by both Indian Hindus and Sinhalese Buddhists, and its architecture and fine arts are a wonderful blend of both. We will visit the Vatadage, an intricately-carved, circular shrine that once housed the Buddha’s Tooth Relic. We will also view the remains of the royal palace and council chamber of King Parakramabahu, regarded as the last great king of Sri Lanka. Afternoon drive to Sigiriya, arriving in time for diner.	Sigiriya
Day 4	Morning visit to the spectacular temple complex at Sigiriya, or Lion	Dambulla

Rock. This enormous rock outcrop rises 600 feet above the plains, and was transformed into a gigantic seated lion in the 5th century AD by King Kassapa. While only the sculpted lion paws remain, the summit of the rock contains the ruins of the king's royal palace and elaborate gardens, as well as the mysterious Sigiriya Damsels, one of the largest rock murals ever painted. Afternoon visit to the Dambulla cave temples, the most impressive Buddhist cave temples in Sri Lanka, which are completely filled with statues and paintings depicting the life of the Buddha. These temples were originally built by King Valagambahu I in the 1st century BC, with further embellishments made by the kings of Kandy in the 17th and 18th centuries.

Day 5 Morning departure for Colombo, stopping en route at Yapahuwa. Here we will admire a beautifully preserved stone staircase decorated with carvings of lions, musicians and dancers that leads to the ruins of the town's royal palace and temple complex. Depart Colombo for the U.S. or for other destinations in Sri Lanka.

The Highlands and the History of Tea in Sri Lanka

	Activities	Overnight
Day 1	<i>Starting point – Colombo or Kandy.</i> Morning drive to Nuwara Eliya (6,200 feet), a British-style colonial town in Sri Lanka's hill country, stopping en route to tour a local Ceylon tea plantation. After a devastating blight destroyed the region's coffee plantations in the 1860's, the British brought the tea plant over from India to see if it could be grown in the cool, damp climate of the Sri Lankan hills. The experiment was a resounding success, and high-grown Ceylon teas from Nuwara Eliya are now some of the finest teas in the world. Afternoon tour of the colonial architecture, tranquil parks and local markets of Nuwara Eliya. In the 1840's, famed explorer Samuel Baker introduced English-style agriculture to Nuwara Eliya, and today the fields abound with potatoes, leeks, cabbages, beets, carrots and strawberries, among other crops.	Nuwara Eliya
Day 2	Morning visit to Horton Plains National Park (6,500 feet) and the remote plateau of World's End. From this precipice you have commanding views of the surrounding magical landscape, filled with clouds and mist, lush vegetation, crystal-clear streams and waterfalls, and dramatic mountain peaks. Afternoon tour of Hagkala Botanical Gardens. Established in 1860, these gardens were first utilized to experiment with cinchona, the plant from which quinine is made. Today they feature a wide variety of rose, fern and orchid species, as well as abundant montane birdlife. This will be followed by a visit to the Sita Ammam Kovil, a small Hindu temple that is believed to be where the demon god Ravana held Sita captive as described in the <i>Ramayana</i> .	Nuwara Eliya

Day 3	Morning drive to Ratnapura, stopping en route to taste tea at another historic tea estate; many of these properties still utilize Victorian-era factories and tea processing machinery. This will be followed by a visit to the Saman Devale temple complex, an interesting group of Kandyan-style white buildings with red-tiled roofs. Afternoon tour of Ratnapura, known as the City of Gems due to the significant concentration of precious stones found in the surrounding countryside. After a short walk through town to watch locals bargaining for bags of uncut stones, we will visit the Gem Bureau Museum, which houses a colorful collection of gems and minerals from Sri Lanka and abroad.	Ratnapura
Day 4	Today you have the choice of exploring the Sinharaja Forest Reserve or making the difficult climb to the summit of Adam's Peak. The Sinharaja Forest Reserve is a pristine tropical rainforest that contains over 800 species of endemic flora and fauna, including many rare species of trees, birds, reptiles and insects. You will spend the day with an expert guide who has intimate knowledge of this dense and vibrant natural environment. Alternatively, you can climb Adam's Peak, a major pilgrimage site in Sri Lanka due to the existence of a footprint at its summit that is believed to be that of Lord Buddha. Interestingly, Sri Lanka's Hindus, Muslims and Christians also claim the footprint as their own, belonging to Shiva, Adam and St. Thomas, respectively.	Ratnapura
Day 5	Depart Ratnapura for other destinations in Sri Lanka, or for Colombo to catch your return flight to the U.S.	

Ancient Buddhist Gems – Anuradhapura and Mihintale

	Activities	Overnight
Day 1	<i>Starting point – Anuradhapura.</i> Full day tour of the ancient city of Anuradhapura. This was the royal capital of Sri Lanka for 1,400 years, ruled by 113 successive kings and four queens who oversaw tremendous advancements in the arts, culture, architecture and engineering. The city was once home to tens of thousands of monks and possibly two million civilians, and is today filled with the ruins of elaborate palaces, sculptures, gardens and monumental stupas. It also features one of the earliest examples of mass irrigation in the world; lake-size water tanks were constructed to catch the monsoon rains and channel the water into the surrounding agricultural land. This ancient city is further home to the Sri Maha Bodhi, one of the oldest trees in the world, which is said to have been grown from a sapling of the original bodhi tree under which the Buddha attained enlightenment. Tonight we will watch the evening worship at Sri Maha Bodhi, as well as at the Ruwanweliseya, a gigantic, ghostly-white stupa supported by a ring of full-size, sculpted elephants.	Anuradhapura

- Day 2** Full day excursion to Mihintale, or “Mahinda’s Hill,” believed to be the birthplace of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. According to legend, it was here that the Indian missionary Mahinda, son of the Indian emperor Ashoka, converted King Devanampiyatissa and 40,000 others to Buddhism in 247 BC. Today we will visit Mihintale’s ancient temples and stupas, many of which are connected by a long series of steps that climb to the hill’s summit. We will visit the beautifully carved Kantaka Cetiya stupa, one of the earliest religious monuments in Sri Lanka, and the Ambasthala Dagoba, or Mango Tree Stupa. We will also tour monastic rock shelters dating from the 3rd century BC, and two ancient water reservoirs carved out of rock, the Pond of the Lion and the Pond of the Serpent. We will end the day with a visit to the ruins of a 3rd century AD hospital, complete with rock-carved bathing tanks for the sick. A nearby museum houses a small collection of ancient medical implements. Anuradhapura
- Day 3** Depart Anuradhapura for other destinations in Sri Lanka, or for Colombo to catch your return flight to the U.S.

Sri Lanka’s Coastal Towns and Beaches

Sri Lanka has no shortage of gorgeous beaches upon which you can relax and recharge after sightseeing on the island or in neighboring India. Much of the major damage caused by the 2004 tsunami has been repaired, and new lodging options are opening rapidly. Accommodation ranges from inexpensive guesthouses and beach bungalows, to luxury villas and resorts, to innovative boutique hotels and eco-lodges.

West Coast - The west coast of Sri Lanka is the most developed, with large beach towns such as Negombo, Bentota, Beruwala and Hikkaduwa alongside smaller towns such as Kalutara, Aluthgama and Induruwa. Here you will find the wetlands of Muthurajawela and the fishing town of Chilaw, home to one of the most important Shiva temples in Sri Lanka. Near Kalutara is the Gangatilaka stupa, the only hollow stupa in the world, which is filled with murals depicting the life of the Buddha. The village of Mahawewa is known for its batik workshops, while Ambalangoda is a center for the island’s mask carvers. Beruwala is known for its ayurvedic spas, while the nearby Kachimalai Mosque is believed to be the oldest in Sri Lanka. Kalpitiya is one of the best places in Sri Lanka to view dolphins, while Kosgoda is home to a large sea turtle conservation project. Brief Garden and Lunuganga, the estates and gardens of artist Bevis Bawa and architect Geoffrey Bawa, respectively, are not to be missed, nor is the Indo-Saracenic Richmond Castle, which was modeled after an Indian Maharajah’s palace.

South Coast - The southern coast of Sri Lanka is less developed than the west coast, and is filled with beautiful beaches, colonial architecture and excellent wildlife parks. The best beach towns include Koggala, Tangalla, Unawatuna, Weligama and Mirissa. In Koggala you will find the remains of a World War II airstrip, as well as the Martin Wickramasinghe Folk Art Museum, which contains a charming collection of traditional masks, puppets and musical instruments. The nearby Kataluwa Temple is filled with a number of unusual murals, some dating back to the era of the Kandyan kings. Just off the coast of Weligama is Taprobane Island, a tiny island featuring a 1930’s colonial villa that

can be rented by the night. Mirissa is a center for whale watching, while Rekawa is known for its nightly turtle migrations. The town of Ahangama is the best place to see Sri Lanka's traditional stilt fisherman, while the village of Midigama is popular with surfers.

If visiting the southern coast you should not miss Galle, once a busy Asian trading port and now the best preserved colonial town in Sri Lanka. The imposing Galle Fort was first constructed by the Portuguese in the late 16th century, and later expanded by the Dutch in the 17th century. Today it contains a maze of narrow streets filled with colonial villas, Dutch and British churches, trading-era spice warehouses, stylish cafés, boutiques, and luxury hotels and guesthouses. Matara, the second largest town on the southern coast, is also filled with Portuguese and Dutch architecture. The national parks of Bundala and Yala (see "Wildlife from Land to Sea") can also be found on the southern coast, as can the Kottawa Rainforest and Arboretum and the Hiyare Rainforest Park. Adjacent to Yala National Park is Kataragama, one of the holiest towns in Sri Lanka, held sacred by Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims. The vel (spear) of the god Kataragama (aka Murugan, a son of Shiva) is said to be held within the Maha Devala shrine, and the evening worship here is always dynamic and colorful.

East Coast - The east coast of Sri Lanka is the least developed and least visited by tourists, having sustained extensive damage in the civil war and from the 2004 tsunami. Despite this, it boasts many beautiful (and virtually empty) beaches, such as Nilaveli and Uppuveli. In Uppuveli you can visit the Commonwealth War Cemetery, which contains the graves of 362 Allied service men of varying nationality who were killed here during WWII. One can also visit the nearby hot springs of Kanniyai. Arugam Bay is a popular spot with surfers and a place from which to explore a number of important Buddhist sites, such as the Kudumbigala jungle monastery, the gigantic Buddhist statues of Maligawila, and the ruins of the 5th century AD city of Magul Maha Vihara. Trincomalee, the fifth largest city in Sri Lanka, is home to one of the world's largest deep water harbors, and was utilized as a major port as far back as the 11th century. Today it is filled with stupas, mosques, Hindu temples, colonial villas and the remains of a 17th century fort built by the Portuguese. Another east coast town filled with Dutch colonial buildings is Batticaloa, which is also famous in local folklore as having a lagoon filled with "singing fish," shellfish that emit musical tones at certain times of the year.

Wildlife from Land to Sea

While Sri Lanka is most closely associated with the Sri Lankan elephant (a subspecies of the Asian elephant), it is also home to a wide range of other animals, such as leopards, sloth bears, langur monkeys, spotted deer, crocodiles, monitor lizards, giant squirrels and wild rabbits. Sri Lanka is also home to several hundred resident bird species, many of which are exclusive to the island, such as the hanging parrot, the red-faced Malkoha and the chestnut-backed owlet. Large areas of the country are protected as national parks and nature reserves, making it possible to view these animals in their natural habitats.

For example, the 3rd century AD water tank in **Minneriya National Park** hosts the largest gathering of wild elephants anywhere in Asia when they come to feed here during the dry season. **Uda Walawe National Park** is another wonderful place to spot herds of wild elephant, while the **Pinnawela Elephant Orphanage** is a natural habitat established in 1975 to provide a safe home for elephants that have been orphaned or injured. **Yala National Park** is the best game preserve in Sri Lanka, and has more leopards per square mile than any other place in the world. **Bundala National Park** encompasses coastal lagoons and wetlands, and is home to a large population of aquatic birdlife, including migratory flamingoes, and lots of crocodiles and elephants. The **Sinharaja Forest Reserve**

is a pristine tropical rainforest that contains over 800 species of endemic flora and fauna, including many rare species of trees, birds, reptiles and insects. Other excellent places for bird watching include the **Kalametiya Bird Sanctuary** on the southern coast, the **Hakgala Botanical Gardens** in the highlands near Nuwara Eliya, and the **Udawattekelle Sanctuary** in Kandy.

The southern coast of Sri Lanka is also one of the top spots in the world to view blue and sperm whales during their bi-annual migration. There are also occasional sightings of killer whales, Bryde's whales and spinner dolphins from the southern coast. Furthermore, Sri Lanka is a primary migration point for turtles in the Indian Ocean, and five of the world's major species of marine turtle (green, loggerhead, hawksbill, olive Ridley and leatherback) nest on its beaches. Along the western coast you can visit small turtle hatcheries that buy eggs from local poachers, help them to hatch, and then return the baby turtles to the water. To view nocturnal turtle hatchings, the best places to visit are at Rekawa on the southern coast, and Kosgoda on the western coast (home to the Kosgoda Sea Turtle Conservation Project).

Please contact us if you would like to plan a custom itinerary in Sri Lanka.

