

Travel Tips for Sri Lanka



Sri Lanka @ a Glance



Bandaranaike International Airport



Population 21,866,445
(July 2014 est.)



Languages: Sinhala (official and national language) 74%, Tamil (national language) 18%, other 8%. English used by around 10% of population



Local currency is the Sri Lankan Rupee. USD 1 = Rs 130



Tropical monsoon; northeast monsoon (December to March); southwest monsoon (June to October)

Quick Tips

Tip #1 - People

Sri Lankans are friendly and helpful people. When dealing with them, they appreciate a calm, respectful and friendly attitude.

Tip #2 - Cash & Cards

- Make sure to have small denominations when travelling around
- ATMs are available in cities
- Credit cards: MasterCard and Visa are commonly accepted in midrange stores, shops, boutiques and hotels.

Tip #3 - Best Weather

- From December to March for the west coast, the south coast and the Hill Country,
- From April to September for the ancient cities region and the east coast.

Tip #4 - What Is There to Do?

- Beaches
- Hiking / Trekking
- Adventure Tours
- Safaris & Wildlife
- Ancient Ruins
- Cultural Tours
- Water Sports
- Fishing
- Golfing
- Meditation & Wellness
- Spa Treatments
- Gem Shopping

Tip #5 - Emergency Contacts

- Sri Lankan directory service number is 1231 (free of charge from local lines)
- Police / Emergency number is 119

Tip #6 - Pharmacy

- in Sri Lanka, pharmacies sell over the counter medicines. However, you will want to pack your standard medications.

Quick Tips

Tip #6 - What to Pack?

Basically light cotton clothes are the most suitable for Sri Lanka. Warm clothes are recommended especially if you plan on visiting the hilly regions, where it tends to get quite cold.

- T-shirts
- Cotton pants
- Shirts
- Shorts
- Skirts (below the knee)
- Sun dresses
- Set of dress clothes (optional)
- Socks (really useful for visiting temples and cold cities in the hills)
- Slippers or sandals
- Trainers or walking shoes
- Underwear and swimming gear
- Sweater (for the hilly regions as it gets really chilly)
- Towel (optional - not all guesthouses offer towels)
- Hat - umbrella
- Mosquito repellent

Tip #7 - Smoking

- Smoking is not allowed in public areas in main cities and especially religious temples. So make sure to check before you smoke.
- Smokers are allowed to bring in one carton of cigarettes in the country. To purchase cigarettes, there are local cigarettes and Dunhill Blues. You can check at stores if they carry Marlboro Lights.

Tip #8 - Alcohol

- Available in stores throughout the city. There is no alcohol served during religious holidays (Poya).

Tip #9 - Photography

- You can take pictures at the sites and of the statues of Buddha. However, it is not allowed to take pictures of yourself or others with the statues of Buddha.
- If you plan on taking pictures of people, you need to first ask for their permission.

Quick Tips

Tip #10 - Touts

There are a lot of touts in Sri Lanka and basically that is how many people earn their living.

You can find guides at the site, but just check and haggle with them regarding prices. Many earn a commission on wherever they take tourists be it shops, guesthouses, or hotels.

Tip #11 - Water

It is not safe to drink water from the tap, so purchase bottled water. It is very easy to find water and supplies anywhere you go. It is cheapest at super markets, but can be bought at shops along the way or at bus stations.

Tip #12 - Vaccinations

Vaccinations: please don't forget to check with your physician before going to Sri Lanka on the recommended vaccinations.

Tip #13 - Booking

It is better to have an idea where you are staying before you travel, or else you will be approached by loads of touts when you arrive at your destination.

Tip #14- Creepy Crawlies (Bugs)

- Mosquito repellants are highly advised
- Based on where you plan to travel in Sri Lanka, there might be leeches. In the case that you get exposed to leeches, the best way to get rid of leeches is to use lime on them or burn them off.

Tip #15 - Beaches

Topless or nude swimming is banned in Sri Lanka.

Tips for Sites

Tip #16 - Temples & Dagobas

- Wear clothes that cover your legs and your shoulders
- You will need to remove your shoes before entering

Tip #17 - Sigiriya Tips

- Hornets nests halfway through the vertical climb to the summit. It is said that noise provokes them, so just be careful on your way up.
- Monkeys can be seen on the site. They are not dangerous, yet it is advisable not to feed them so as not to get them riled up.
- Wind sometimes gets very strong, so make sure to hold on to the railing when climbing and wear comfortable clothing.
- Sun is fierce, so make sure to carry water and sunblock.
- This site is not recommended for those with a fear of heights

Tip #18– Basics for Sites

- Best times to go to sites early in the morning or later in afternoon
- Carry water
- Ensure that you are wearing good footwear, especially in rainy weather where the trail or climb can get slippery
- Bring socks with you for temples, as paved areas get really hot sometimes

Tip #19- Kandy Dance Show

- Arrive early to ensure front row seat in auditorium

Tip #20 - Tipping

In general, tipping is expected

- Tips vary from LKR 50 – LKR 100.
- At restaurants, a 10% tip is a good rule of thumb.
- Guides and drivers will also expect a daily tip. It is based on your level of satisfaction with the guide or driver. It can vary between LKR 500 – LKR 2000

All About Public Transport



Tip #21 - Buses

Buses are an experience in Sri Lanka. Buses and bus stations are extremely crowded. However, the people are very helpful and if you ask anyone, they will generally point you to the bus you need to take.

You need to be prepared for crowds, music/radio, crazy driving, and people randomly handing you bags when the bus is full so that you can place on your lap if you are seated.

- Try to catch the bus at the station so that you can find a place to sit.
- Have small change. Cost of buses varies based on where you are going, however, they are relatively cheap. (Buses vary from LKR 20 – LKR 300). Bus tickets are purchased on the bus from the bus conductor.
- Tell the bus conductor where you will want to get off and ask him to notify you of the stop. This may or may not happen, so just check once every so often.
- Try to travel light, as there is rarely space on public transport. If you are backpacking, then you will probably be charged the cost of an extra seat.

All About Public Transport



Tip #22 - Trains

Trains are a great way to cross Sri Lanka, although they are slower than buses. However, they are more comfortable and provide scenic routes. There are three classes on Sri Lankan trains: 1st, 2nd, and 3rd class seats and the Sri Lankan Railways (www.railway.gov.lk) website provides travelers with a useful trip planner.

- It is advisable to reserve 1st class seats in advance. Observation saloons are the best as they allow travellers vantage views with their large windows.
- You can also reserve 2nd class on intercity express trains.
- You can reserve tickets up to 10 days in advance.
- In the case you are travelling over 80km, you can stop at any intermediate station for 24 hours without penalty. You'll need to make fresh reservations for seats on the next leg.
- In monsoon seasons, check that the trains are running, as flooding can cause delays or halt railway operations.

All About Public Transport



Tip #23 - Tuk Tuk (Three Wheelers)

Tuk Tuks are in abundance in Sri Lanka and are a quick and easy way to get around in the city and between towns. You will find them everywhere and they also offer in-city tours, as well as provide transportation to nearby cities. Just make sure that you check with your guest house or hotel on going rates.

- Avg. fee from bus stop to guesthouse (depends on where your guest house is located): Rs 200 – Rs 400
- Transportation fee varies between cities / tours (based on distance and duration): LKR 2000 – LKR 6000
- Tuk-tuks are a bumpy ride, so be prepared
- Before getting on a tuk-tuk or hiring a guide, it is best to settle on the price beforehand



Negombo

Perfectly located around 12km away from the Bandaranaike International Airport, Negombo is the main west coast beach resort and a traditional fishing town.

The town has several buildings that date back to the Dutch and Portuguese colonial era.

Main Things to See

- Beaches
- Negombo Lagoon
- The Old Dutch Fort (now part of the prison)
- The Dutch Canal
- Angurukaaramulla Temple
- St Mary's Church, St. Sebastian's Church, Anglican Church
- Fish Market and Fishing villages

Main Activities

- Watersports
- Fishing
- Wildlife-viewing boat tour in the Lagoon
- Catamaran rides



Sigriya

Sigriya (Lion Rock Fortress) – 1200 steps

This is an amazing and spectacular site situated in Matale district near to Dambulla. It can be reached by bus.

The views from the top are magnificent and breathtaking. Truly awe inspiring – well worth the climb!

It is considered by some as the 8th wonder of the world, as it is a testimony to an archaeological engineering feat in terms of city planning, art, landscaping, engineering, hydraulics and defense. It dates back to the 5th century AD.

The Fortress is divided into two sections: the rock itself, on whose summit Kassapa established his principal palace; and the area around the base of the rock with the different royal gardens, fountains, land bridge with a lotus moat, and various monastic remains pre-dating Kassapa's era.



Sigiriya

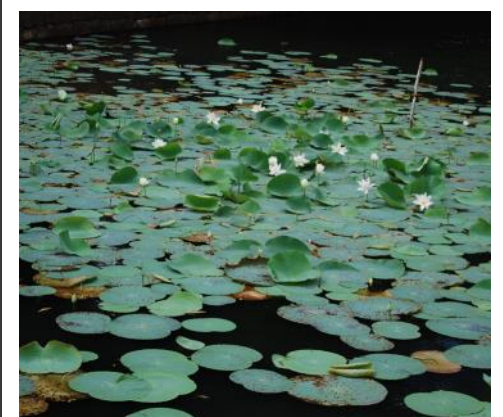
What you will see:

- Water Gardens
- Boulder Gardens and Terrace Gardens
- The Sigriya Damsels & Mirror Wall
- Lion Platform
- The Summit

Entrance Fee: \$30

Best times to go: early in the morning or later in the afternoon

Level of difficulty: tough vertical climb. It is not an easy leisurely site and requires a certain level of fitness, as it involves climbing up lots of steps. It consists of 1,200 steps with some places along the way where you can stop and rest. The first part is made up of steep stone steps. The second part consists of a spiral staircase whereby you can see some of the cave paintings and where the mirror wall used to be. Then you will proceed up a steel ladder taking you to the top, with the last section involving stone steps.

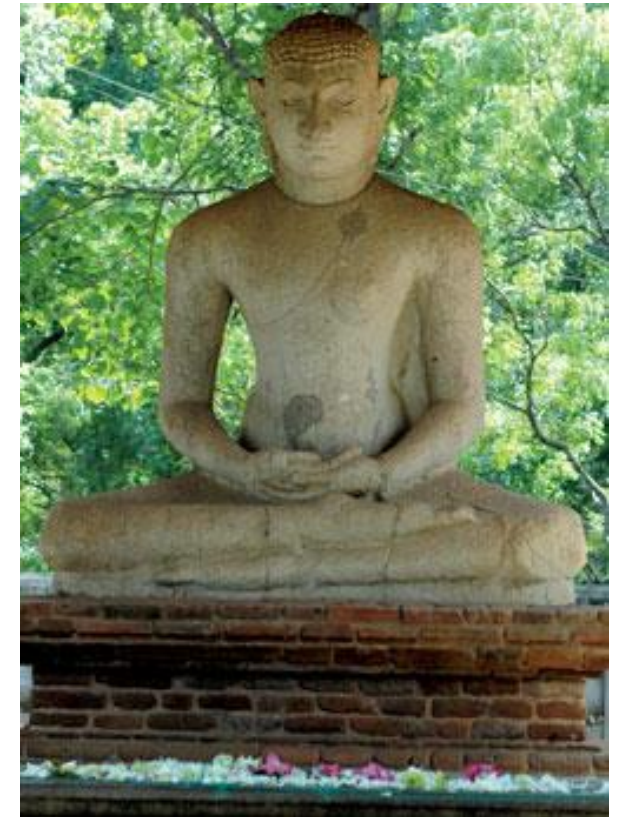


Anuradhapura

Anuradhapura was the first royal capital of Sri Lanka in 380 BC. It remained residence and royal capital until the year 1000 AD. The capital was then moved to Polonnaruwa. Amongst its interesting ruins include huge bell-shaped stupas, temples, sculptures, palaces, and ancient drinking-water reservoirs. Anuradhapura is most famous for its dagobas, stupas and the temple of the Bo-tree.

Main Attractions:

- The Sri Maha Bodhi, sacred Bodhi tree
- Aukana Buddha
- The Samadhi Buddha
- Isurumuniya Temple-The Lovers
- The Mihintale Stupa (1840 steps)
- Ruvanvelisaya Dagoba
- The Mahathupa - Ruwanweli Dagaba
- The Thuparama Dagaba
- The Jetavana Dagaba
- The Abhayagiri Monastery & Dagaba
- The Mirisavati Dagaba
- Ratnaprasada
- Loha Prasada - The Brazen Palace
- The Kuttam Pokuna - The Twin Ponds
- Moonstone
- Archaeological Museum



Polonnaruwa

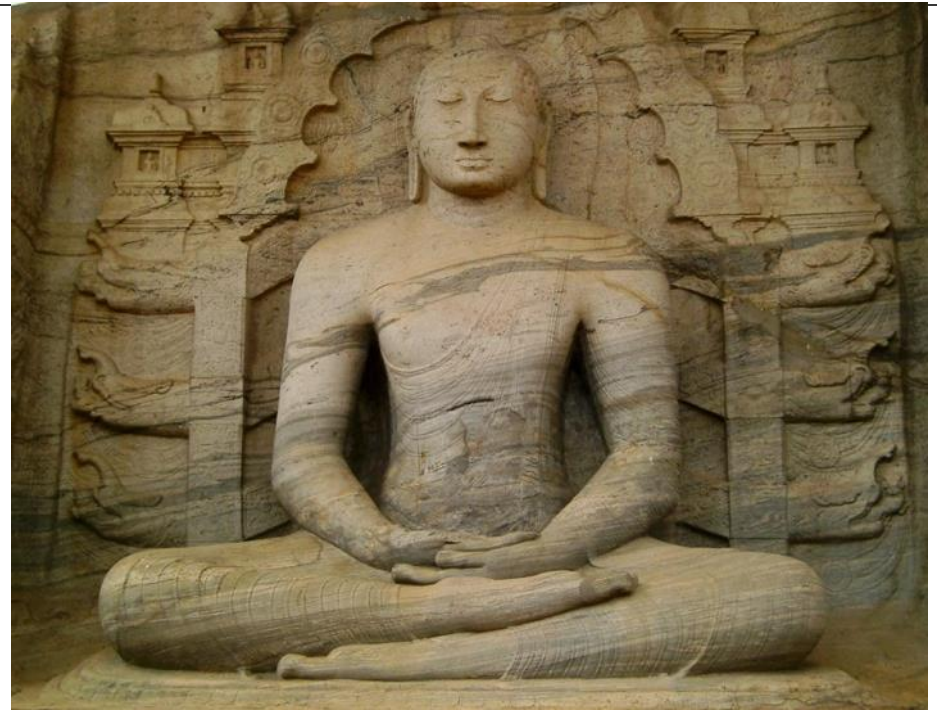
Complex of temples housing loads of ancient ruins. Most recommend a driver or a tuk-tuk to cover the area. Some also hire bikes to go around; however, you will need to be careful if renting bikes, as it is extremely hot.

Level of difficulty: It is quite an easy walk, just need to cover an extensive area.

Main Sites To See:

- Gal Vihara
- Rangkot Vihara:
- Atadage: The Atadage is the first Tooth Relic Temple of Polonnaruwa.
- Rangkot Vihara:
- Vatadage
- Royal Palace of King Parakramabahu I
- Parakramabahu's Council Chamber
- Thuparama Gedige:
- Gal Pota

Entrance Fee: LKR 3250 (\$25-\$30)



Kandy

Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic - Sri Dalada Maligawa:

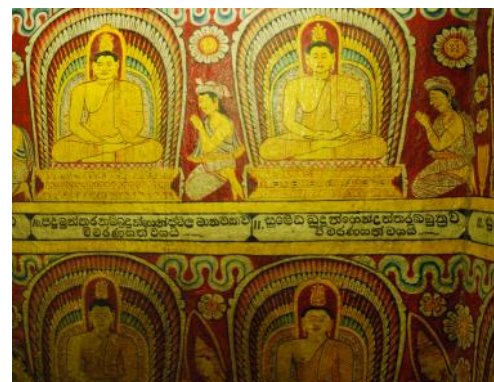
The Sri Dalada Maligawa in Kandy, the temple which houses the Sacred Tooth Relic of The Buddha, is possibly the most sacred Buddhist shrine in the world. It is venerated by Buddhists all over the world.

Entrance Fees:

- Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic: adult/child LKR 1000/free, video camera Rs 300 (No fee for regular cameras)
- World Buddhism Museum admission Rs 500

Opening Hours:

- 5.30am-8pm, puja 5.30-6.45am, 9.30-11am & 6.30-8pm
- World Buddhism Museum 9am-8pm
- Sri Dalada Museum 7.30am-6pm



Kandy

Other Main Attractions:

Royal Botanical Gardens - Peradeniya

- Entrance Fees: Adults: LKR 600 – Students & Children: LKR 300
- Opening Hours: 8am – 5:30pm

Elephant Orphanage in Pinnawala

Be sure to catch the elephants' bathing time, as well as the feeding of baby elephants.

- Entrance Fees: LKR 2500
- Opening Hours: 8:30am – 6pm

Traditional Kandy Cultural Show:

One hour show of the different Sri Lanka n dances with a Fire Walking performance.

- Entrance Fee: cost LKR 500
- Performance Hours: 5:30pm. Please note that they do not run shows during religious holidays.

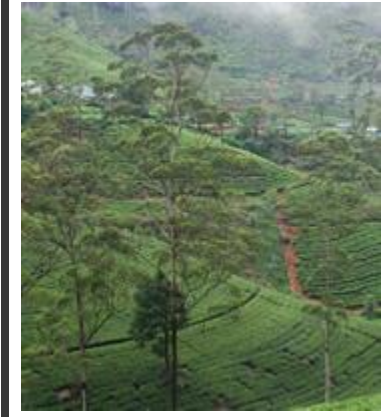


Nuwara Eliya

Nuwara Eliya meaning the City of Light is also known as Little England. Situated at around 1886m above sea level and surrounded by lush tea plantations, Nuwara Eliya is the main hill resort of Sri Lanka and the capital of the tea industry.

Main Attractions:

- **Victoria Park** (Entrance Fees: Adults: LKR 60 – Children: LKR 30 – Opening Hours: from dawn till dusk)
- **Labookelle Tea Center** (guided tours of the factory free of charge.)
- **Pedro Tea Estate** (3.5km east from Nuwara Eliya – Entrance Fees: LKR 100 – Opening Hours: Opening Hours: 8-11am and 2- 4pm)
- **Gregory Lake** (Entrance Fee: LKR 10, boats and paddle boats: LKR1500 per 30min, motor-boat: LKR2000 per 20min, horseback: LKR 2500 per hr – Opening Hours: from dawn till dusk)
- **Hakgala Gardens** (Entrance Fees: Adults: LKR 1100 – Children: LKR 550 – Opening Hours: 8am - 5pm)
- **Seetha Amman Temple** – Hindu Temple
- **Lovers Leap Falls - Ramboda Falls - Devon Falls - Laksapana Falls**



Ella

It is a beautiful small town on the southern edge of Sri Lanka's Hill Country. It is located around 58km from Nuwara Eliya. You can get there by bus, train (station is called Nanu Oya), tuk tuk, or private car. It is highly recommended to take the train from Nuwara Eliya to Ella to enjoy magnificent views.

Main Attractions:

- Ella's Rock
- Ella Gap
- Little Adam's Peak
- Rawana Falls
- Diyaluma Falls
- Tea Plantations



Horton Plains

Horton Plains National Park –
Bakers Falls- World's End

The National Park is around 20km south from Nuwara Eliya. The park covers 31.60 km², and is a mixture of highland forest and wet grassland. It is around a 9km rugged trek.



Ella Rock

The hike up and down Ella Rock takes around four to five hours. You start off by walking along the rail track for a couple of km, after which there is a bit of a steep climb until it gives way at the summit. Once up at the top, the views of the mountains are amazing.

Tips:

- Carry water
- Ensure that you are wearing good footwear, especially in rainy weather where the trail can get slippery

Level of difficulty: Hiking up Ella Rock depends on your fitness level. It is about a 4-5 hr hike with an easy start along the rail tracks, then a somewhat steep climb. It is more difficult and longer than climbing up Little Adam's Peak.



Little Adam's Peak

Great views from the top and much easier than Adam's Peak. It affords amazing views and is an easy paced walk through tea plantations.

Level of difficulty: easy and leisurely walk to get to the top, where you pass by tea plantations. There are a number of steps that are nearer to the last section of the climb. There is supposedly an alternate route on the left that can be taken to avoid the steps; however, you will need to ensure that the trail is not too steep or that it hasn't been raining.



Adam's Peak

One of the most striking natural landmarks and one of its most celebrated places of pilgrimage, as it is revered as a holy site by Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims and Christians. In Buddhist tradition, it is believed to be the footprint of the Buddha; in Hindu tradition that of Shiva and in Islamic and Christian tradition that of Adam, or that of St. Thomas.

Two options to start the trek:

- **1st Option:** Hatton-Nallathanni Route: from Dalhousie 7km climb (around 5200 steps)
- **2nd Option:** Ratnapura-Palabaddala Route: from Ratnapura side and it starts from Palabadella 11km

Level of Difficulty: The path is very secure and enclosed, yet requires quite a high degree of fitness to climb up and go back down 5200 steps. The first part of the ascent starts off not too bad, but the steps become increasingly short and steep as you progress. By the time you near the vertical section equipped with handrails you're within about 1500 steps of the summit, although by then it is somewhat of a physical struggle. Also after the hours climbing up, the descent is not that easy.



Adam's Peak

Tips:

- One of the mysteries of Adam's Peak is the shadow's perfectly triangular outline, so make it a point to be at summit before sunrise to witness how the distinctive shape of the mountain casts a triangular shadow on the surrounding plain.
- Usually allow for 3-5hrs depending on your fitness level and number of stops
- The ascent starts around 2am-3am so that you catch the sunrise on the summit
- The pilgrims season to Sri Pada traditionally starts on the full moon of December and ends on the full moon of April.
- The path is lit up during the season. So if you are traveling off-season, you will want to bring a torch.
- Number of rest stops, tea places and kiosks can be found along the way
- Gets very chilly at the summit, so make sure to bring warm clothes and maybe even a blanket to keep you warm while awaiting the sunrise
- Take a water bottle with you can keep it filled with water sources found at rest spots.
- Except during the late months of Sri Pada season, the probability of rain is quite high, so be prepared with a rain coat and water proofing for electronics such as cameras. (Thunder storms during monsoon months May – July, Sep – Nov)



Hikkaduwa

Hikkaduwa is 98km south from Colombo and around 14km from Galle. It is a fun coastal town popular with surfers and where you can find many species of fish and large turtles.

It is a tourist destination famous for its beaches, corals, and beach parties.

There is a long stretch of restaurants, cafes, bars, shops and guesthouses.

During the monsoon season (May to October), many places close as the water may get quite

Main Activities:

- Swimming
- Snorkeling
- Diving
- Board Surfing

