



Natural Selections

BIRDING, WILDLIFE, AND PHOTO TOURS



Sri Lankan Elephant

Sri Lanka is an island paradise, lined with golden sandy beaches and turquoise blue waters. The oceans are rich with life, and amazing coral reefs. Sri Lanka has rich natural heritage, with amazing wildlife and iconic mega fauna such as leopards, elephants and sloth bears. The island is also a biodiversity hotspot and teems with endemic birds, reptiles, amphibians as well as plant species found nowhere else on earth. With numerous lakes and rivers throughout its interior, lush tropical rainforests, mangroves and coastal lagoons, misty highlands laden with waterfalls and dry zone scrub jungles, Sri Lanka comprises of a wide range of picturesque landscapes and natural habitats which can be compared to that of a much larger continent.

Sri Lanka: The Ultimate Island Safari Experience

15 Nights/16 Days

Tour Overview

Day 1: Arrival Bandaranaike International Airport (CMB)
Day 2, 3, 4: Wilpattu National Park
Day 5: Habarana, Kaudulla/Minneriya
Day 6: Polonnaruwa primates
Day 7: Kandy, Temple of the Tooth
Day 8: Nuwara Eliya
Day 9: Horton Plains National Park
Day 10, 11, 12: Yala National Park
Day 13: Udawalawe National Park
Day 14, 15: Sinharaja Forest Reserve
16: Departure from Bandaranaike International Airport (CMB)

15 Night/16 Day Itinerary

Day 1, Arrival at Bandaranaike International Airport and transfer to Katunayake:

Upon arrival we will be welcomed by our naturalist guide, with a warm welcome of “Ayubowan”, which is the Sri Lankan word for “May you Live Long”, which is the universal greeting across the island. He will escort us outside and to our comfortable vehicle for our ride to the nearby hotel (10 min drive) and check in to our hotel to spend the remainder of the day at leisure.

Meals: Dinner

Lodging at Tamarind Tree Garden Resort

Day 2, Journey to Wilpattu National Park:

Today after breakfast, checkout from your hotel and you will journey Northwest towards



Jungle Cat

Wilpattu National Park. Upon reaching Wilpattu, check into your safari lodge for lunch and afterwards venture into Wilpattu National Park for your afternoon game drive.

Popularly dubbed as ‘the land of the lakes’, Wilpattu National Park is famous for watching wildlife within its picturesque villus and dry evergreen forests. It is Sri Lanka’s oldest and largest national park which re-opened in 2010 after being closed for nearly three decades due to the civil war. Wilpattu is one of the top spots in Sri Lanka for watching Leopard and Sloth Bear.

The park is approximately 1,317 square KM, and a study in 2008 observed over 530 individual leopards within this eco system (265 males and 277 females), which makes Wilpattu National

Park the holder of the highest density of leopards in the world. The Sri Lankan Leopard (*Panthera pardus kotiya*) is the largest subspecies of leopard sharing the same size and weight along with the Persian Leopard of Iran with the largest males reaching to a weight of over 200lb or 90kg.

The typical sightings of leopards during your game drives would include the leopards walking towards you along the shady, sandy roads, or laying on the white sand brimmed natural lakes which dot the park, or in the shady dark forest with its long vines, and dense backdrop. You might even find them on the trees, or on the long grass which surrounds some of the natural lakes. The photography opportunities will be quite unique with varying settings and backgrounds and lighting conditions. One of the unique

features of the park is photographing a leopard in the dark forest with a single beam of sunlight falling on its eye. Creative opportunities will present itself while on safari.

Besides the leopards you will also have a chance to encounter and photograph the Sloth Bear. Wilpattu would be the best park to see them year-round, usually in the first stretch of the park between the park office and Chapman junction, these bears are usually observed foraging for termites on the roadsides. Patience is key in waiting for the bears to approach for good photographs. Though photography can be challenging given their dark coat and the shady forest it resides in, hence using the correct settings and focusing points on the camera is vital to obtain the correct exposure. It is advisable to usually underexpose one's images when photographing the Sloth Bears as one would typically focus on the lighter colored face hence to correctly expose the dark black coat on the photograph.

Ceylon Magpie



Though large herds are not commonly observed in Wilpattu, you will encounter lone bull elephants while on safari. These giants are often seen along the main road, as well as in the open lakes as they come out to feed on the water plants that grow on the lakes. The beautiful backdrops will provide a lovely setting for some compelling images.

Besides the charismatic 3 species, you will also encounter Asiatic Wild Water Buffalo, Wild Boar, Spotted Deer, Sambhur Deer, Indian Muntjac another small species of deer known also as the Barking Deer, as well as the Grey Langur and Toque Macaque (Endemic to Sri Lanka) as monkey species. Other mammals which are commonly seen are the Ruddy Mongoose, Black Naped Hare and the Golden Jackal.

Rare mammals which might be encountered but not often are the Mouse Deer, Fishing Cat and Rusty Spotted Cat, but often daytime sightings are quite rare and cannot

be guaranteed.

From a reptile perspective the most common encounters would be of the Bengal Monitor who are often seen along the sandy safari trails, as well as the Mugger Crocodile along the lakes and waterbodies in the park. Though not often, sightings of snakes such as the Indian Rock Python and Spectacled Cobra are not uncommon. Occasional sightings of the bizarre Indian Chameleon are also a possibility while on safari in the park.

From a birding perspective there are several species which can be encountered, which include endemic birds such as the Sri Lanka Jungle Fowl a colorful species which is the national bird of Sri Lanka, the Lesser Flameback a beautiful species of woodpecker, the Sri Lanka Woodshrike and the Grey Hornbill.

From non-endemic species more commonly seen birds would be the Indian Peafowl, Malabar Pied Hornbill, Painted Stork, Lesser Adjutant Stork, Openbill Storks, Black Winged Stilts, Red-wattled Lapwings, Greater Thick-knee, White Throated Kingfisher, Common Kingfisher, Stork Billed Kingfisher, Little Green Bee Eater, Blue Tailed Bee Eater, Chestnut Headed Bee Eater, Black Hooded Oriole, Lesser Whistling Duck, Purple Heron, Greater Cormorant, Little Cormorant, Brown Fish Owl, White Bellied Fish Eagle, Grey Headed Fish Eagle, Crested Serpent Eagle and the Crested Hawk Eagle to name a few.

Rare birds that you might encounter would be the Spot Bellied Eagle Owl also known as the Forest Eagle Owl the largest and most iconic owl species in Sri Lanka, the Brown Wood Owl, Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher, Black Capped Kingfisher, Chestnut Winged Cuckoo to name a few. As the sun begins to set, you will exit the park gates at 6.00 PM to head back to your lodge.

After an early dinner, venture out again by jeep equipped with spotlights in search of nocturnal cat species in the village trails and buffer zones bordering the park. The three species of cat species are the Fishing Cat, Jungle Cat and the Rusty Spotted Cat. The sightings if any would be using spotlights, hence though it might be a memorable sighting, it might not necessarily be a great photography opportunity. You might also encounter species such as the Golden Palm Civet, Ring Tailed Civet, as well as owl species such as the Brown Wood Owl and Brown Fish Owl. You might even encounter a prowling leopard as well as Eurasian Otter though these are rarities.

*Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Lodging at Claughton Wild Wilpattu*

Day 3 and 4, Wilpattu National Park Safari:

The next two nights the daily routine would be as follows 5.30 AM tea/coffee at the lodge and venture to the park with a packed breakfast by 5.45 AM to reach the park gates for opening



Green Garden Lizard

time of 6.00 AM for a full day game drive.

The longer one spends in the park exploring the whole region and back roads the better chances for good wildlife sightings and compelling photography.

During the afternoon freshly made lunch will be delivered inside the park to the designated picnic site for you to enjoy.

After lunch continue on your game drives until exit time at 6.00 PM where you will head to your lodge for dinner and overnight stay.

Each day we return to camp at dusk. Additional night drives are optional (US \$ 25 per person and minimum 2 pax needed for the drive), and we may opt for this, or just stay back and relax.

*Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Lodging at Claughton Wild Wilpattu*

Day 5, Travel to Habarana:

Today after checkout, we'll head towards Habarana (2.5 hours' drive), and check into our hotel for lunch.

Afterwards, we'll head to either Kaudulla or Minneriya National Parks to witness a large gathering of Asian Elephants. The Gathering of Elephants an amazing wildlife viewing spectacle, which usually runs from June through October each year.

Each afternoon, around 100 - 200 individual elephants emerge from the forest into the open to graze on the fresh green pasture by the water's edge at Minneriya and Kaudulla National Parks (The herds would move between the lakes depending on the time and date of



Malabar Pied Hornbill

the tour your guides will determine where the most elephants are and head to the specific lake). Here we have excellent opportunities to observe the social dynamics of the Asian Elephant as the large bulls in must compete among each other and seek the females within the herd, while young calves with carefree abandon go about their mischievous antics, often to the displeasure of their alert mothers within the herd. Water birds such as Painted Stork, Asian Openbill, Woolly-necked Stork along with raptors such as White-bellied Sea Eagles and Grey-headed Fishing Eagles are abundant around these large man-made lakes.

Once we've had and early dinner, we head to out by jeep on a night safari in the back roads of Habarana. This drive can give further chances of spotting the rare nocturnal small cat species, as well

as other mammals such as Grey Slender Loris, Spotted Chevrotain, as well as some owl species such as the Brown Wood Owl and Brown Fish Owl. Furthermore, keep your eyes out for snake species who venture out at night to the roads. (2-hour drive).

*Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Lodging at The Other Corner*

Day 6, Primate Research Center in Polonnaruwa and Sigiriya:

Early this morning we'll head to Polonnaruwa with a packed breakfast for an insightful primate experience.

We'll be ready at the entrance to Polonnaruwa at 7:15 am sharp to be met by our host, a researcher from the Smithsonian Primate Research Center. From here we are presented with a brief introduction

to Sri Lankan primates whilst our guide buys entrance tickets to the site. Once the tickets have been purchased, we'll walk into the first section of the site. Ancient and awe-inspiring, Polonnaruwa was once the ruling city of the country during the 8th century and the complex houses hundreds of archaeological structures that are best viewed in the soft sunlight and moderate temperatures of the early morning. Walking around the site is like a fantasy due to how many monkeys have made their homes within the ruins.

Our host will guide us around a small area of the complex, where we'll be able to stand just meters away from large groups of Toque Macaques and Grey Langurs (the Purple-faced Leaf Eaters are visible but stay high up in the trees and so are more difficult to observe closely). The monkeys' unerring resemblance to humans, their social behavior patterns and their obvious intelligence makes them fascinating to observe. Our host will accompany us as we follow the monkeys on foot and learn about their behavior and the various challenges of monkey conservation. When we finish we have the option to continue exploring Polonnaruwa by ourselves and this is recommended, however bear in mind that temperatures tend to increase quickly and by 11:00 am it can be a bit hot for exploring.

Lunch back at the hotel.

At dusk head to Sigiriya for a guided night walk in search of the elusive “elves of the forest” the Grey Slender Loris; a small, nocturnal primate which is regularly encountered and has become a resident within the property over the past few years. Fishing Cat, Collared Scops Owl, Indian Civet and the Golden Palm Civet are some other species occasionally seen here.

We return to our hotel for a late dinner and overnight stay.

*Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Lodging at The Other Corner*

Day 7, Kandy, the Central Hills, Sacred Temple of the Tooth:

Upon checkout today, our group heads towards the Central Hills of Kandy (2 hours’ drive), and lunch will be served at a restaurant en-route.

Known as the “Cultural Capital” of Sri Lanka and a UNESCO world heritage site, Kandy was established in the year 135 A.D. by King Wickramabahu and was named Senkadagalapura at the time. In 1592 Kandy became the official Capital of the last Sinhalese Kingdom as the coastal areas were conquered by the Portuguese invaders. The hill capital remained a stronghold despite constant invasions by the Portuguese and the Dutch during the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries and also by the British (most notably in 1803) which were repelled thanks to the hilly landscapes, and guerilla tactics of the Sinhalese forces.



Sri Lankan Leopard

The last ruling dynasty of Kandy was the ‘Nayaks’ of Kandy while the Kingdom preserved its independence until it finally fell to the British in 1815, mainly due to the lack of support of the royal families. The British deposed the last king, Sri Wikrama Rajasingha, and all claimants to the throne, thus ending the last traditional monarchy of Sri Lanka.

Upon reaching Kandy, we’ll head straight to the Sacred Temple of the Tooth Relic, which was built in the 16th century A.D. and is located adjacent to the Royal Palace complex of the former Kingdom of Kandy and overlooks the expanses of the Kandy Lake. Referred locally as the Sri Dalada Maligawa, the Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic is the most revered site in the country.

This temple complex houses the sacred tooth relic of the Lord

Buddha, and it is believed that whoever holds possession of the tooth, is the possessor of this sacred relic and has the right to rule the country.

*Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Lodging at Cinnamon Citadel*

Day 8, Nuwara Eliya and the Central Highlands:

After checkout this morning, we’ll head towards Nuwara Eliya in the Central Highlands.

En-route, we visit a tea factory for a guided tour, as a visit to the hill country would not be complete without a visit to a classic tea factory and estate. We can stroll through the beautifully manicured



Common Kingfisher

tea fields and thereafter head to the tea factory where the magic of converting raw leaves into black tea happens. An art developed during the British colonial period, some machines still using this process date back over 100 years.

We'll reach our hotel for lunch. Thereafter we can opt to spend the afternoon at leisure or join our naturalist in exploring the many spots in and around Nuwara Eliya for highland endemic bird species such as the Dull Blue Flycatcher, Sri Lanka White eye, Scimitar Babbler, Yellow Eared Bulbul and many more. We also have a chance to witness the highland sub species of the Purple Faced Leaf Monkey known as the "Bear Monkey" due to its shaggy coat and large whiskers.

*Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Lodging at Galway Heights Hotel*

Day 9, Horton Plains National Park:

Today we head to the spectacular Horton Plains National Park.

Horton Plains is Sri Lanka's highest

elevated national park lying approximately 7,000 feet above sea level and is comprised of cloud forests and open grassland. We make an early morning start with a packed breakfast into the park

itself -a UNESCO World Heritage Site- and take a guided walk along nature trails to a viewpoint known as World's End with spectacular views of the surrounding countryside. On the walk back we'll stop over to see the impressive Baker's Falls in full flow. Sambar, Sri Lanka's largest species of deer are encountered regularly in the plains close to the entrance while the shaggy coated Bear Monkey (Highland race of the Purple-faced Leaf Monkey) is occasionally seen within the forested areas.

One of the highlights of the tour would be to encounter the endemic Rhino Horned Lizard and Pygmy Lizard both found in and around the park, and we will make a serious effort for these fantastic-looking lizards. Afterwards we return to Nuwara Eliya where lunch will be served at the hotel and spend the remainder of the afternoon at leisure.

Those who wish can join our naturalist guide in a session of birding in and around Nuwara Eliya to possibly catch any species we may have missed while in Horton Plains. There are some good birding spots in and around the area which our naturalist guide will reveal to us.

*Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Lodging at Galway Heights Hotel*

Day 10, Transfer to Yala National Park:

After checkout we'll descend the highlands towards Yala (4.5 hours' drive), and en-route pass the scenic areas of Ella, which have some stunning landscapes. Upon reaching Kataragama (town next to Yala), we check into our hotel for lunch.

In the afternoon our group heads to the Tissa Wetlands for a session of birding and owling. The local village guides will direct us to some well-known spots for roosting owls such as the Jungle Owlet, Brown Fish Owl and Oriental Scops Owl. The wetlands are also great for many species of waterbirds including Black Bittern, Cinnamon Bittern, Watercock and many more. One of the must-see spectacles occurs at dusk, where tens of thousands of roosting Flying Foxes leave their daytime perch on the trees long the Tissa Lake in the thousands and in turn thousands of Greater, Intermediate and Little Egrets return to the trees for their nighttime roost. This amazing spectacle is a surreally beautiful sight not to be missed by any wildlife or nature enthusiast. We return to our hotel for dinner and overnight stay.

*Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Lodging at Kithala Resort, Yala*

Day 11, Yala National Park Game Drive:

This morning early, we depart with a packed breakfast head to Yala National Park for our first game drive here.

Yala National Park is the country's premier destination for wildlife viewing. And Leopards, are undoubtedly Yala's star attraction with certain areas of the Park believed to have the highest concentration of these big cats anywhere in the world.

Leopards however are elusive by nature and we recommend a minimum of three game drives to have the best opportunities for good encounters. It is also one of the few places in the country where the endangered haggly coated Sloth Bear can be seen. Asian Elephants are also encountered; lone bull elephants, a few iconic tuskers and small herds of females and calves maybe seen. Jackal, Sambar, Spotted Deer Buffalo, Wild Boar and the Grey Langur are among the other larger mammals that may be seen.

We return to our hotel for lunch and leisure time and in the afternoon head back into the park for a second, PM game drive and stay out until dusk.

*Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Lodging at Kithala Resort*

Day 12, Yala Game Drive and transfer to Udawalawe National Park:

Early this morning we head back into Yala for one more safari and after return to our hotel, checkout and head towards Udawalawe National Park (2 hours' drive).

Upon reaching Udawalawe, we'll check into our hotel for lunch and in the afternoon hop into our safari

jeep for the first guided game drive into Udawalawe National Park. Uda Walawe was declared as a national park in 1972 and was at one time an area where destructive slash and burn "chena" cultivation was widespread. The area was declared a national park with the intention of safeguarding the flora and fauna in the catchment area of the reservoir on the Walawe River. With ample water and rich nutrition from the scrub jungles and grasslands, Uda Walawe is now a stronghold of the Asian Elephant and one of the best places to see them in the wild year-round. Grey Langur, Toque Macaque, Jackal, Mugger Crocodile and Spotted Deer are the other larger animals seen occasionally.

Udawalawe also has occasional sightings of Jungle Cat, an elusive medium sized feline. The park is an excellent biding destination too especially for dry-zone species and raptors. Changeable Hawk Eagle, Grey-headed Fishing Eagle, Crested Serpent Eagle, White-bellied Sea Eagle, Black-shouldered Kite, Shikra, Oriental Honey Buzzard, Common Kestrel and Brown Fish Owl are some of the raptors regularly encountered here.

*Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Lodging at Centauria Wild*

Day 13, Udawalawe Game Safari and on to Sinharaja:

Today we'll engage in a final morning safari in Udawalawe, always remembering to keep a sharp look out for the elusive Jungle Cat and many elephants found in the park.



Black Drongo

After checkout, we'll head for the lowland rainforests of Sinharaja, arriving at our lodge for a late lunch and afterwards, head to the forest reserve and surrounding village with our naturalist and local tracker.

The largest tract of natural rainforest in Sri Lanka, the Sinharaja Forest Reserve contains a wide variety of endemic flora and fauna. It is a top birding location where 28 of Sri Lanka's 34 endemic species have been recorded including the recently discovered Serendib Scops Owl and other rarities such as the Sri Lanka Spurfowl, Chestnut-backed Owlet, and White-faced Starling. The mixed species bird flocks found moving through the rainforest canopy within Sinharaja are believed to be the longest studied and largest in the world, and are popularly dubbed the Sinharaja Birdwave. Other species of fauna encountered during a rainforest walk include Purple-faced Leaf Monkey, Giant Squirrel, Kangaroo



Sloth Bear

Sloth Bear

Lizard, Hump-nosed Lizard and Sri Lanka Keelback.

*Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Lodging at Jansens Bungalow*

Days 14 and 15, The lowland rain forests of Sinharaja:

We'll explore the vast area of Sinharaja over the next two days, both inside the main reserve as well as many hotspots in the surrounding villages and forest trails. With the help of our expert local spotters and trackers we'll experience this most biodiversity-rich part of Sri Lanka in a uniquely revealing light. The incredible bird diversity here will give us chances at roosting owls such as the endemic Serendib Scops Owl, Chestnut Backed Owlet and possibly the legendary Sri Lanka Bay Owl, in addition to birdwaves composed of endemics such as the Red-Faced Mal Koha, Sri Lanka Blue Magpie, Sri Lanka Green Billed Coucal, Sri Lanka Ashy Headed Laughing Thrush, Crested Drongo, White Faced Starling and much

more. We'll also visit a special, separate location to try our luck at spotting the elusive and endemic Sri Lanka Spur Fowl.

Along the way we'll keep an eye out for endemic reptiles such as Green Pit Viper and Hump Nosed Lizard, as well as endemic mammals such as the lowland variant Purple Faced Leaf Monkey. There is a small population of these primates close to our lodge that contains a few leucistic individuals with all-white coloration and if we're lucky we might catch a glimpse of these ghostly-white beauties.

*Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Lodging at Jansens Bungalow*

Day 16, Departure:

Today after you checkout, we'll head towards the airport, where we say our goodbyes to our guide and board our flights back home.

Meals: Breakfast and Lunch

Included in this itinerary:

In-country accommodations, ground transportation, tours, meals, soft drinks, guide and entrance fees.

Not Included:

Personal items such as alcoholic beverages, gift shop, laundry, etc. are not included.

Travel insurance:

We highly recommend purchasing travel insurance. In the event that you need to cancel your trip due to medical or other reasons, this insurance will protect you.



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