



Natural Selections

BIRDING, WILDLIFE, AND PHOTO TOURS



Sri Lankan Elephants

Sri Lanka - Wildlife, Culture, and More!

10 Nights/11 Days

This immersive, 11-day natural history journey is designed to traverse the heart of Sri Lanka's dry zone wilderness, exploring three of the island's most important ecological strongholds: Wilpattu, Habarana, and Kumana. Though located within the broader dry zone biome, each site offers its own distinctive landscapes, from the ancient villus of Wilpattu and the elephant-rich grasslands of Minneriya, to the lagoon-fringed coastal forests of Kumana.

Your route passes through dry monsoon forest, arid scrub jungle, wetland systems, and transitional lowland habitats, offering excellent opportunities to observe an extraordinary range of wildlife. From iconic species such as Asian Elephants, Sloth Bears, and the elusive Sri Lankan Leopard, to smaller and lesser-known mammals like Ruddy Mongooses, Fishing Cats, and Rusty-spotted Cats, this journey captures the full spectrum of mammalian life in Sri Lanka's dry zone.

Alongside mammals, you'll encounter a remarkable array of dry zone birdlife, including several Sri Lankan endemics, raptors, storks, owls, and waterbirds, as well as reptiles, amphibians, butterflies, and unique dry-zone flora such as Manilkara, Satinwood, and Diospyros species.

This journey is not just about species sightings, but about immersion—understanding the interconnectedness of ecosystems, the subtle seasonal rhythms, and the cultural and ecological narratives that have shaped this wild island. With the guidance of expert naturalists and time spent in some of Sri Lanka's most remote and beautiful landscapes, this tour offers an intimate and rewarding insight into one of Asia's richest and most underappreciated natural destinations.

10 Night/11 Day Itinerary

Tour Overview

Day 1: Arrive Bandaranaike International Airport (CMB) transfer to hotel

Day 2: Katunayake to Wilpattu

Days 3 & 4: Wilpattu

Day 5: Wilpattu to Habarana

Day 6: Habaranam to Panama

Days 7, 8, 9: Panama-Kumana-Panama safaris

Day 10: Panama- Katunayake

Day 11: International flights home from Bandaranaike International Airport (CMB)

Day 1, Airport- Katunayake:

Upon arrival at Bandaranaike International Airport, you will be greeted by your naturalist guide and transferred to a tranquil hotel nestled within semi-evergreen lowland forest—a transitional ecozone between Sri Lanka's Wet and Dry Zones.

This lush garden setting, with its flowering trees, fruiting shrubs, and scattered wetlands, is home to a surprising number of species. You may spot endemic birds such as the Crimson-fronted Barbet or Sri Lanka Green Pigeon during a leisurely walk.

This day is reserved for rest and recovery from your long journey, allowing you to ease into the rhythms of the island's natural world.

Meals: Dinner

Lodging at Tamarind Tree Resort



Blue-tailed Bee-eaters

Day 2, Katunayake – Wilpattu:

We depart for Wilpattu after breakfast, arriving for lunch.

At around 02:30 PM, engage on your afternoon game drive at Wilpattu National Park.

Sri Lanka's oldest and largest national park spans over 1,300 km² of dry monsoon forest, interspersed with more than 60 natural lakes, or "villus." These rain-fed basins serve as the park's lifeline, attracting a wide variety of wildlife—especially during the dry season—when water sources become scarce elsewhere.

This diverse landscape, a mosaic of scrub jungle, tall dry forest, and wetland clearings, supports an impressive range of fauna. Among the large mammals are Leopards (*Panthera pardus kotiya*), the apex predator of the park, as well as Sloth Bears, solitary bull Asian Elephants, and common ungulates like Spotted Deer, Sambhur (Sri Lanka's largest deer species), and the elusive Indian Muntjac.

The park is also home to a rich primate population, including the Grey Langur and the endemic Toque Macaque—a highly social species often seen in troupes near the villas. Smaller mammals such as ruddy and Indian Gray Mongooses, Golden Jackals, Black-naped Hares, and Crested Porcupines can also be encountered. Rarer, more elusive carnivores like the Fishing Cat and the Rusty-spotted Cat—the world's smallest wild cat—inhabit the area as well, though they are mostly nocturnal.

The flora is equally distinctive, with dominant dry-zone species such as *Manilkara hexandra* (palu), *Chloroxylon swietenia* (satinwood), and various species of *Terminalia* and *Diospyros*, which together form dense forest canopies. In the open clearings, grasses and aquatic vegetation flourish, drawing herbivores and a remarkable array of birdlife.

Birding here is superb, with both dry forest and wetland species present. Notable endemics include the Sri

Lanka Junglefowl, Sri Lanka Woodshrike, and Sri Lanka Grey Hornbill. Wetland areas attract birds such as the Lesser Adjutant, Painted Stork, Indian Pond Heron, and Black-Winged Stilt, while raptors and nocturnal species such as the Crested Serpent Eagle, White-Bellied Sea Eagle, Brown Fish Owl, and the rare Spot-bellied Eagle owl complete the rich avifaunal diversity of the park.

Exit the park by 06.00 PM and head straight to the property for an early dinner.

By around 08.00 PM venture out for a 2-hour night safari on the outskirts of the park which include village trails. This night safari has the chances to reveal three species of small cat found in Sri Lanka. Namely the Fishing Cat, Jungle Cat and Rusty Spotted Cat.

Your guides will explore the many harvested cultivation fields, lakes and lonely trails after dark with the

Sri Lankan Leopard



aid of a spotlight in detecting eye shine which might reveal these felines to us.

*Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Lodging at Thimbiri Wewa Resort Wilpattu*

Day 3 & 4, Wilpattu:

Spend two full days on dawn-to-dusk safaris, venturing deep into the park's interior where fewer vehicles travel. Packed breakfast and lunch will be arranged by the property for your full day exploration.

The extended time in the field significantly increases your chances of witnessing rare species, intimate wildlife interactions, and fascinating behavioral moments in their natural setting.

You may come across Elephants bathing in secluded villus, often accompanied by elegant egrets and vibrant kingfishers. Leopards are sometimes seen resting beneath the shade of Palu trees or silently crossing sandy tracks in the early



Sri Lankan Elephants

morning light. Sloth Bears may be spotted foraging for termites, especially during fruiting seasons when they are drawn to the sweet Palu berries.

The park's rich herpetofauna includes Mugger Crocodiles in nearly every major waterbody, along with Monitor Lizards, and with some luck, the elusive Indian Rock Python or the agile Bronze-backed Tree Snake. Waterbodies also attract a variety of insects, with butterflies and dragonflies particularly abundant near the edges.

Pause for lunch at around 12.30 PM at a designated picnic spot inside the park.

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

*Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Lodging at Thimbiri Wewa Resort Wilpattu*

Day 5, Wilpattu-Habarana:

After breakfast, travel to Habarana, nestled in the heart of Sri Lanka's dry zone and surrounded by ancient reservoirs, semi-evergreen forests, and open grasslands.

Check-in to your property for lunch.

In the afternoon, set out to explore either Minneriya or Kaudulla National Park—two vital elephant corridors that lie within the central dry zone. These vast man-made tanks, originally constructed by ancient kings, now serve as crucial sanctuaries for wildlife.

Between July and October, this region hosts the famed Elephant Gathering, one of the largest seasonal congregations of wild Asian Elephants in the world. During this spectacle, it is possible to witness between 150 and 300 elephants socializing, feeding, and bathing along the tank's edge.

Aside from elephants, the parks are also home to a range of other wildlife, including Sambhur, Spotted Deer, Wild Boar, Grey Langurs, and the endemic Toque Macaque. The wetlands and surrounding grasslands attract a vibrant array of birdlife, such as Painted Storks, Asian Openbills, Woolly-necked Storks, Whiskered Terns, and birds of prey like the Grey-headed Fish Eagle.

Return to the property at dusk for dinner.

After dark, embark on a spotlight-guided night safari to search for elusive nocturnal mammals. With some luck, you may encounter Jungle Cats, Fishing Cats near water bodies, and the rarely seen Rusty-spotted Cat. Other nocturnal species that may reveal themselves include the Indian Palm Civet and the Ring-tailed Civet.



Sri Lanka Grey Hornbill

After a productive evening return at night to your hotel for your overnight stay.

*Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Lodging at Habarana Village by Cinnamon*

Day 6, Habarana-Panama:

Early this morning, with packed breakfast in hand, check out from Habarana and begin your journey toward the remote village of Panama, located on the southeastern coast—a gateway to the Kumana National Park.

Upon arrival, check in and enjoy a relaxed lunch, followed by an afternoon at leisure to unwind.

In the evening, have an early dinner before heading out on a night drive through the buffer zones of the park, in search of nocturnal wildlife.

This rugged and wild region is known for its rich biodiversity, offering good chances of spotting elusive small cat species—and with

a bit of luck, even a Leopard or a Sloth Bear.

*Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Lodging at Wild Edge Safari Lodge, Panama*

Day 7 & 8, Panama-Kumana-Panama:

Your routine for these days will be as follows;

5:15 AM leave the lodge with packed breakfast and Lunch arranged by the property & aim to enter the park by 6:00 AM.

You will be passing through the park buffer zone as you drive through so keep an eye out for any wildlife which catches your eye.

Located on Sri Lanka's southeastern coast, Kumana (also known as Yala East) is a striking blend of dry thorn forest, seasonal lagoons, granite outcrops, and pockets of riverine gallery forest interspersed with palm-dotted plains. This rich mosaic of habitats



Sloth Bear

supports a remarkably diverse array of wildlife.

Leopards are often found along rocky outcrops and forest edges, using them as vantage points for resting and hunting. Open scrublands and sun-dappled glades provide ideal grazing grounds for Spotted Deer and Wild Boar, and with luck, you may spot a Sloth Bear foraging through the underbrush. The park's lagoons and wetlands attract a variety of rare and striking bird species, including the Black-necked Stork, Great Thick-knee, and numerous waders.

Deeper into the dense dry forest, you'll find troops of monkeys, snakes, and endemic reptiles such as the vibrantly patterned Painted-lipped Lizard. Other commonly sighted species include Water Buffalo, Sambhur, and Grey Langur. Smaller carnivores like the Ruddy Mongoose or the elusive Golden Jackal may also make an

appearance, while elephants, though less conspicuous, are resident year-round and especially visible during the dry months.

Lunch will be enjoyed at a shaded forest rest area, offering a tranquil break before continuing your

afternoon exploration through this wild and remote sanctuary.

Exit the park by 06.00 PM with a return to the property for a much-needed rest.

*Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Lodging at Wild Edge Safari Lodge,
Panama*

Day 9, Panama-Kumana-Panama:

Embark once again on a full-day game drive in Kumana National Park, with packed breakfast and lunch provided as usual. The safari will continue through the day until around 6:00 PM.

After exiting the park, set out on another night safari, scouring the buffer zones for elusive small cat species as you make your way back to the lodge.

Enjoy a late dinner upon arrival to the hotel, followed by an overnight stay.

*Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Lodging at Wild Edge Safari Lodge,
Panama*

Day 10, Panama- Katunayake:

Enjoy a relaxing breakfast before checking out and embarking on the long journey back to Tamarind Tree in Katunayake (roughly 7 hours).

Have lunch at a local restaurant en-route. Continue your journey, check-in & spend the remainder of your final stay in complete relaxation.

*Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Lodging at Tamarind Tree Garden
Resort*

Day 11, Airport and departure:

After breakfast, transfer to the airport (30-minute drive) for your departure, leaving with indelible memories of Sri Lanka's wilderness, its rhythms, its cultures, and its remarkable creatures.

Meals: Breakfast

Included in this itinerary:

Services of a professional naturalist guide (5 clients and above 2 naturalists and 2 jeeps), transport in an air-conditioned vehicle for all transfers (5 clients and above using a Mini Coach, below using a tour van), all jeep safaris and park entry fees as per the itinerary, accommodations as per the itinerary, meals beginning with dinner on day 1 to lunch on day 10, bottled drinking water, all taxes.



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Not Included:

Airfare, visa, personal travel insurance, tips and gratuities, hotel extras, meals not mentioned, expenses of a personal nature, activities and excursions not mentioned on the itinerary.

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. Please see <https://www.naturalselectionstours.com/travel-insurance/> for details.