



Natural Selections

BIRDING, WILDLIFE, AND PHOTO TOURS



Leopard

Sri Lanka is an island paradise and photographer's dream, dotted with tropical forests and lined with golden sandy beaches and turquoise blue waters. The oceans and coral reefs are rich with life, and forests here boast the highest density of the biggest Leopards on Earth, as well as other iconic fauna such as Jungle Cats, Fishing Cats, Elephants, Sloth Bears and much more.

In addition, Sri Lanka's unique natural heritage makes it a biodiversity hotspot that teems with a wide diversity of endemic birds, reptiles, and amphibians, as well as plant species found nowhere else on earth. Her landscapes and cultural diversity are some of the most beautiful and awe-inspiring to be found.

SRI LANKA WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHY with LEE HOY

12 Nights/13 Days

This immersive, 13-day nature and wildlife photo-tour, led by Wildlife Photographer Lee Hoy, is designed specifically for wildlife and nature photographers and traverses the heart of Sri Lanka's dry zone wilderness, exploring three of the island's most important ecological strongholds: Wilpattu National Park, the Habarana Jungle, and the Leopard-rich Kumana National Park.

Tour Overview

Day 1: Arrival to Bandaranaike International Airport (CMB)

Day 2: Katunayake to Wilpattu

Days 3, 4, 5: Wilpattu National Park

Day 6: Wilpattu to Habarana

Day 7: Habarana

Day 8: Habarana to Panama

Day 9, 10, 11: Kumana

Day 12: Panama to Katunayake

Day 13: Transfer to airport and departure (CMB)

12 Night/13 Day Itinerary:

Day 1, Katunayake:

Today upon landing in Bandaranaike International Airport, you will be transferred to your nearby hotel. Check into Tamarind Tree Garden Resort, and rendezvous with the rest of the group for the main tour.

Meals: Dinner

Lodging at Tamarind Tree

Day 2, Katunayake to Wilpattu:

Today after breakfast, checkout from your hotel and journey Northwest towards Wilpattu National Park which is about a 4 hours' drive. Reaching Wilpattu, check into your safari lodge for lunch.

After lunch you will 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

Sri Lankan Elephants





Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher

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.

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, Sambar 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. 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. Rarer 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.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Lodging at Thimbiriwewa Resort

Day 3, 4, 5 Wilpattu:

Next three days will entail full day game drives in Wilpattu National Park.

5.30 AM tea/coffee at the lodge and venture to the park with a packed breakfast and lunch by 5.45 AM to reach the park gates for opening 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. The park has a central point inside the reserve which is a designated picnic area with bathroom facilities.

As the sun begins to set, you will exit the park gates at 6.00 PM to head back to your lodge.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Lodging at Thimbiriwewa Resort

Day 6, Wilpattu to Habarana:

Today after a leisurely breakfast at the lodge, proceed to checkout and head towards Habarana and the Habarana Jungle which is a 2-hour drive.

Check into your resort for lunch. Remaining hours of the day spend at leisure enjoying the resort, and the sprawling gardens, perhaps in photography by the lake, possibly for some raptors including the White Bellied Sea Eagle, Grey Headed Fish Eagle, Crested Serpent Eagle and the Brahminy



Green Garden Lizard

Kite as well as kingfishers such as the Stork Billed King Fisher, White Throated Kingfisher, Common Kingfisher and Pied Kingfisher.

After an early dinner, you will venture out on a night safari in the back roads of Habarana.

This unique experience opens a hidden world into nocturnal mammals and birds which come alive after dark.

You will have chances to encounter Fishing Cat and Jungle Cat two of the three species of small cats found in Sri Lanka, as well as possible glimpses of the Eurasian Otter as well a Ring-Tailed Civet. One of the bizarre primates from Sri Lanka is the strictly nocturnal Grey Slender Loris whom also is active in these areas and sightings are frequent, though photography might be tricky if the animal does not lie still. Golden Jackal are also frequently seen during these night drives, and one might also encounter wild elephants after dark

as they roam these forests in the night.

From an avian perspective some owl species such as the Brown Fish Owl, Brown Wood Owl, Indian Scops Owl, Brown Hawk Owl and the rare Spot Bellied Eagle Owl have been recorded.

After an exciting night safari, return back to your hotel late night for your overnight stay.

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

Day 7, Habarana:

Today, you'll head out early with packed breakfast to Polonnaruwa, the location of Sri Lanka's second ancient city. Here you will join a primate researcher on exploring this archaeological site, photographing the social interactions and behaviors of three species of monkeys found here. The endemic Toque Macaque and

endemic Purple Faced Leaf Monkey as well as the Grey Langur. This was the setting for the Disney Nature documentary "Monkey Kingdom" and the morning hours with the ancient ruins as a backdrop is perfect for photography of these primates. Afterwards, return back to your resort for lunch and much needed rest and leisure.

After dark head out once again for one more night safari in Habarana.

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

Day 8, Habarana to Panama:

Today after an early checkout with packed breakfast, head towards the South Eastern coast towards the village of Panama (pronounced Paanama) which is bordering Kumana National Park. Check into your safari lodge for lunch. After lunch venture out for your first game drive to Kumana National Park.

The Kumana National Park lies north of the Kumbukkan Oya and is referred to as Yala-East. Kumana comprises of scrub jungle, brackish lagoons, rocky outcrops and numerous waterholes. This park will be your second main location for leopard photography. The park has a high density of leopards with very frequent sightings.

The landscapes of this park will be different that Wilpattu. Here you will lookout for leopards along dry scrub jungle, open lagoon plains, and one of the main features the many rocky outcrops scattered across the park, as well as the many large trees where the leopards prefer to rest and hoard its kill.

Kumana is famed for its especially bold leopards, with a history of man eaters, from the legend of the Lenama Leopards who wiped out an entire indigenous tribe, to the man-eating cases of 2019 and 2021.

The park is home to a high density of leopards as per the latest research one of the most leopard dense locations in the world. Besides leopards you will also encounter the other species which you might expect in the dry zone such as the Sloth Bear, Sri Lankan Elephant, and other herbivores such as are seen in Wilpattu. Birdlife would also be similar with different backgrounds and settings, with one of the more unique birds found here being the Black Necked Stork which is seen in the lagoons of this park.

Exit the park after dusk at 6.00 PM and after darkness sets in begin a night safari along the buffer zone as you wind your way back to your lodge.

These night drives are extremely productive, as this region is great to find the elusive Rusty Spotted Cat the smallest wild cat species in the world, as well as possibility of leopards as well after dark.

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

Day 9, 10, 11, Kumana:

For the next 3 days you'll enjoy full day game drives with packed breakfast, and picnic lunch delivered mid-day to the park office. We'll depart by 5.00 AM to enter the park first and maximize on wildlife sightings, which allows for maximum time in the field and ample photography opportunities, and increased chances of compelling wildlife encounters.

Leopard





Sloth Bear

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

Day 12, Panama to Katunayake:

Today after a leisurely breakfast at the lodge, we'll checkout and head towards Katunayake. A longish 8-hour drive with stops along the way for lunch and refreshing.

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

Day 13: Departure:

Today, after breakfast, proceed to checkout and head towards the airport for your return flight back home

Included for the duration of this itinerary:

Price includes accommodations with meals as indicated, all ground transportation, safaris as indicated (3 guests per jeep), bean bags, water throughout, snacks while on safari, entrance fees, local bilingual guide and international tour leader.

Not Included:

Tips, airfare, visa fees, alcoholic beverages, gift shop, laundry, and other items of a personal nature 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. For details, please see <https://www.naturalselectionstours.com/travel-insurance/>



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