

Directory

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ACCOMMODATION

Sri Lanka has a good range of accommodation options, from rooms in a family home to five-star resorts.

Unlike neighbouring India, only a handful of places in Sri Lanka have dormitory-style rooms. The main accommodation option for solo travellers is single rooms, and they're often doll-sized boxes or cost the same amount as double rooms. On the other hand, most places bigger than a small guesthouse will have a 'family' room with three or four beds for 20% to 50% more than a double.

Prices are very seasonal, particularly in beach resorts. The prices quoted in this guide are high-season rates, and you can often find spectacular bargains in the low season. The 'season', and its prices, has a more or less official starting date – 15 December on the west and south coasts, 1 April on the east coast. The monsoon may have ended well before the season starts. High season ends around March in the South and West, and around September on the east coast. Of course, you can often bargain prices down at any time of the year.

Guesthouses and hotels are in demand during April in Nuwara Eliya, and in Kandy during the Kandy Esala Perahera (July/August). It would certainly pay to book well ahead if you plan to be in these places at these times.

Many places have a variety of rooms at different prices, and it's often worth asking if there are any cheaper rooms available once the staff have shown you their first room or quoted you their first price.

Most guesthouses and hotels can arrange transport or car hire for wherever you want to go, or can tailor a tour for you.

In this guide we place doubles (or equivalent) costing less than Rs 1500 (US\$15) a night in the budget category, Rs 1500 to 8000 (US\$15 to US\$78) in the midrange category and over Rs 8000 in top end. Many midrange and top-end hotels quote room prices in dollars, but will accept the rupee equivalent. Unless stated otherwise, all rooms have a bathroom, fan, and mosquito net or electric 'mat'. Few budget places, except in the Hill Country, have hot water; if budget accommodation does have hot water, it will be mentioned in the review. Midrange places

BOOK ACCOMMODATION ONLINE

For more accommodation reviews and recommendations by Lonely Planet authors, check out the online booking service at www.lonelyplanet.com. You'll find the true, insider lowdown on the best places to stay. Reviews are thorough and independent. Best of all, you can book online.

PRACTICALITIES

- **Daily News** (www.dailynews.lk), **Daily Mirror** (www.dailymirror.lk) and the **Island** (www.island.lk) publish national and international news in English daily, while the **Sunday Times** (www.sundaytimes.lk) and **Sunday Observer** (www.sundayobserver.lk) come out weekends.
- Sri Lanka Broadcasting dominates the national AM/FM radio networks with a mix of English-, Sinhala- and Tamil-language programming; Colombo has a few private FM stations that broadcast a variety of music, news and talk. Short-wave radios can pick up the BBC.
- There are seven TV channels, including the state-run SLRC (Sri Lanka Rupavahini Corporation), ITN (Independent Television Network) and privately owned ETV-1, ETV-2, MTV, Swarnawahini and TNL. BBC World Service can be picked up on ETV-1 and StarPlus on ETV-2.
- The electric current is 230V, 50 cycles. Plugs comes two varieties (three round pins, or one flat pin and two round), so carrying an adaptor is necessary even for electrical gear purchased in Sri Lanka. Adaptors are readily available at electrical stores for about Rs 70.
- Sri Lanka uses the international metric system, though some Sri Lankans still express distance in yard and miles. The term *lakh* is often used in place of '100,000'.

have hot water; most have air-con too. Many places either have their own restaurant or will provide meals on request.

Guesthouses

You'll find some very inexpensive guesthouses, plus a few in the midrange bracket and even the occasional top-end place. Some guesthouses will rent just a couple of rooms, like the English B&B establishments, while other guesthouses are like small hotels. It's a good idea to pin down exactly what you're getting for your money, or you might be surprised with a bill for every cup of tea.

Apart from the low cost, the 'meeting people' aspect is the big plus of guesthouse accommodation. If you're after privacy, stick to the guesthouses with a separate guest annexe; some guesthouses have separate entrances for guests, while others require you to tiptoe through the lounge after a night on the town.

As many guesthouses are very small, its better to telephone first to see if a room is available rather than simply turning up. If you arrive in a town late at night without booked accommodation, consider a hotel room instead – most guesthouse owners are helpful, but they don't appreciate being woken up by unannounced arrivals.

Hotels

The line between lower-priced hotels and upper-range guesthouses is a blurred one, and not least in name since places that call

themselves 'hotels' are really guesthouses, while other small hotels are called inns, lodges, villas and so on. You'll rarely find a double in a hotel for less than Rs 1000 (US\$10), and there are places going all the way up the price scale.

The larger hotels are of two basic types: modern resort hotels and older colonial-style places. The latter type definitely has the edge when it comes to atmosphere, and the facilities are often just as good. The newer places pride themselves on luxury facilities such as tennis courts, windsurfing instruction, night-clubs, and prime beach, riverside or hill-top locations, and are mostly geared to package tourists. Resort doubles on the west coast cost from around US\$35 up to US\$100 plus. People with residency visas get discounts as high as 70% on the FIT (foreign individual tourist) rates at resort hotels, though the saving is more commonly around 30%.

The Ceylon Hotels Corporation operates a number of hotels and resorts around the country, as well as numerous resthouses. Some are well run and good value, while others are marginal and overpriced.

National Parks

The **Department of Wildlife Conservation** (Map pp84-5; ☎ 011-269 4241; www.dwlc.lk; 18 Gregory's Rd, Col 7) has bungalows, each accommodating up to 10 adults and two children, in some national parks, including Yala, Uda Walawe, Wasgomuwa, Wilpattu, Gal Oya and Horton Plains. It costs US\$24 per person per

night in a bungalow, plus a linen charge of Rs 100 per person per day and a US\$30 service charge per group per stay. Students and children six to 12 years of age pay half price (kiddies under six stay for free). You must bring your own dry rations and kerosene. Camp sites cost US\$6 per site per day, plus Rs 200 service charge per trip. On top of these costs, there is a park entry fee of US\$12 for the most popular parks. You can book up to a month in advance.

The **Wildlife Trust** (Map pp84-5; ☎/fax 011-250 2271; 18 Gregory's Rd, Col 7) maintains bungalows in national parks, and offers some 'nature' tours; see the small shop at the Department of Wildlife Conservation for information. Companies such as **Adventure Sports Lanka** (☎ 279 1584; actionlanka.com; 366/3 Rendapola Horagahakanda Lane, Talagama, Koswatta) also arrange trips to parks.

Resthouses

Originally created for travelling government officials by the Dutch, then developed into a network of wayside inns by the British, resthouses now mostly function as small midrange hotels. They're found all over the country, including in little out-of-the-way towns (where they may be the only accommodation). Although they vary widely in standards and prices (those run by the Ceylon Hotels Corporation are usually well maintained), the best resthouses are old-fashioned, have big rooms, and are usually situated to enjoy the view from the highest hill or across the best stretch of beach. A double costs anywhere from US\$10 (Rs 1000) up to US\$50 (Rs 5100).

Tea-Estate Bungalows

In the tea-growing areas of the Hill Country, a number of bungalows that were once the homes of British tea-estate managers have been converted into guesthouses or hotels. Despite the 'bungalow' appellation, they're often rambling villas with beautiful gardens and sitting rooms stuffed with antique furniture dating to when Sri Lanka was part of the Raj.

Price-wise the converted tea estate bungalows tend to fall into the midrange category, although a few are very much luxury properties. Tea Trails (p197) organises accommodation at for four magnificently renovated bungalows in the Dikoya area.

ACTIVITIES

Sri Lanka offers a range of activities for those who want to do more than simply sightsee.

Ayurveda

Ayurveda (eye-your-veda) is an ancient system of medicine that uses herbs, oils, metals and animal products to heal and rejuvenate. Heavily influenced by the system of the same name in India, Ayurveda is widely used in Sri Lanka for a range of ailments. Essentially, Ayurveda postulates that the five elements (earth, air, ether, water and light) are linked to the five senses and these in turn shape the nature of an individual's constitution – their *dosha* (life force). Disease and illness occurs when *doshas* are out of balance. The purpose of Ayurvedic treatment is to restore the balance and thus good health.

Traditional Ayurveda clinics patronised by Sri Lankans are very inexpensive, while those facilities orientated towards tourists charge many times more.

Therapeutic treatments often take some time; the patient must be prepared to make a commitment of weeks or months. More commonly, tourists avail themselves of one of the Ayurvedic massage centres attached to major hotels. The full massage treatment involves a head massage with oil, an oil body massage and a steam bath followed by a herbal bath. But this sort of regimen is really only for relaxation.

The standards at some Ayurvedic centres are low; the massage oils may be simple coconut oil and the practitioners may be unqualified, except in some cases as sex workers. As several poisoning cases have resulted from herbal treatments being mis-administered, it pays to enquire precisely what the medicine contains and then consult with a conventional physician.

For massage, it may be useful to enquire whether there are both male and female therapists available, as we've received complaints from female readers about sexual advances from male Ayurvedic practitioners. In general it's not an acceptable Ayurvedic practice for males to massage females and vice versa.

Both the University of Colombo and the University of Gampaha offer degrees in Ayurvedic medicine. In this book we've included only clinics where the staff are qualified with degrees.

Cycling

Cycling is a great way to get around in Sri Lanka and mountain biking is also catching on. See p339 for more information.

Diving & Snorkelling

Coral and interesting shipwrecks can be seen at several spots along the west coast, including Hikkaduwa and Tangalla. The reef at Kirinda is said to be in fine shape, but rough seas make it inaccessible for all but a couple of weeks in April and May. There are also reefs at the Besses in the southeast and along the east coast. Pigeon Island off Nilaveli is a fine place to go snorkelling. You can also snorkel at Hikkaduwa, Unawatuna, Mirissa and at Polhena, near Matara.

Diving shops can be found in Colombo and in the major west coast resorts. They hire and sell gear, including snorkelling equipment. PADI courses are also available.

Along the west coast, the best time to dive and snorkel is generally from November to April. On the east coast, the seas are calmest from April to September.

Coral bleaching (where coral loses its algae due to higher-than-average ocean temperatures and regional influences) in 1998 struck about half of the island's reefs. The affected reefs were recovering when the 2004 tsunami struck. However, it is estimated that not more than 5% of the reef systems were affected by the tsunami, and some divers reported that visibility actually improved. See p64 for tips on responsible diving and snorkelling.

Golf

There are three excellent golf courses in Sri Lanka. Green fees and other expenses including club hire comes to about US\$40 a day. The most scenic is definitely the Victoria Golf & Country Resort (p169) near Kandy, overlooking the Victoria Reservoir. There is also the historic Nuwara Eliya Golf Club (p202) and the Royal Colombo Golf Club (p92), which has a decent course.

Meditation

Many visitors to Sri Lanka participate in Buddhist meditation retreats. Although you'll find monasteries all over the island where meditation is practiced, the Kandy area is the main centre for such pursuits; see p192 for a list of retreats near Kandy.

There are also listings of places to practice intensive meditation in Sri Lanka at www.vipassana.com/resources/meditation_in_sri_lanka.php and www.metta.lk/temples/meditation-centers.html.

Surfing

The best surf beach in Sri Lanka is at Arugam Bay on the east coast – surf's up from April to September. Guesthouses and surf shops here can give advice on other surf breaks along this coast. Kirinda, near Tissamaharama is another option.

On the west and south coasts, the best time to surf is from November to April. Hikkaduwa is a long-time favourite for international surfers, and offers gentle breaks for novices. Mirissa is becoming popular too. The point at Midigama is another good, if more isolated, spot.

You can hire surfboards, body boards, wetsuits and anything else you'll need from shops beside the beaches. You can also buy second-hand gear.

Walking

Walking and hiking continue to slowly gain popularity in Sri Lanka. There isn't as much of an organised hiking industry as there is in India, and it's usually a matter of striking out on your own. A few guesthouses in the Hill Country, such as White Monkey/Dias Rest (p211) in Haputale, can arrange guided hikes. Adam's Peak (Sri Pada), Sri Lanka's most sacred mountain, is a good, stiff hike with stunning views as a reward.

White-Water Rafting, Canoeing & Boating

White-water rafting can be done at a few places, notably on the river near Kitulgala in the Hill Country (where *Bridge on the River Kwai* was filmed). **Adventure Sports Lanka** (☎ 011-279 1584; actionlanka.com; 366/3 Rendapola Horagahakanda Lane, Talagama, Koswatta, Colombo) arranges trips. Canoeing trips can also be arranged through this company.

Boat or catamaran trips for sightseeing, bird-watching or fishing are becoming very popular. You can organise excursions in Negombo, Bentota and Weligama.

Windsurfing

Top-end hotels on the west coast are the only places that rent sailboards. Bentota is

the best spot to windsurf, and several outfits there hire out equipment and provide lessons.

BUSINESS HOURS

The working week in offices, including post offices, is usually from 8.30am to 4.30pm Monday to Friday. Some businesses also open until about 1pm on Saturday. Shops normally open from 10am to about 7pm weekdays, and until 3pm on Saturday. Businesses run by Muslims may take an extended lunch break on Friday so staff can attend Friday prayers. Banks are generally open from 9am to 3pm on weekdays, although some banks are open on Saturday. Tourist restaurants are generally open between 8am and 11pm. All exceptions to these opening hours are noted in the reviews.

CHILDREN

Sri Lankans adore children, and hotels and restaurants will happily cater for them. Lonely Planet's *Travel with Children* has lots of road-tested advice for trips with kids.

Practicalities

Sri Lankan hotels and guesthouses invariably have triple rooms, and extra beds are routinely supplied on demand.

If you have a very young child, one dilemma is whether to bring a backpack carrier or a pram. Opinion seems to be divided on this – if you can, bring both. One reader opted for a pram because a backpack would have been too sweaty in the tropical heat; however, prams have to contend with uneven or nonexistent footpaths.

Pharmaceutical supplies, as well as imported baby food and disposable nappies are available at Keells and Cargills Food City supermarkets; however, they can be relatively expensive. Cloth nappies are easier to manage, and hotel staff will get them washed as a matter of course.

Car-rental companies usually have child car seats.

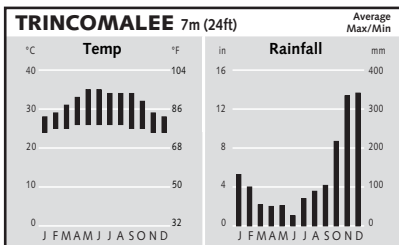
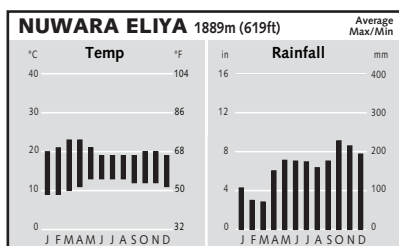
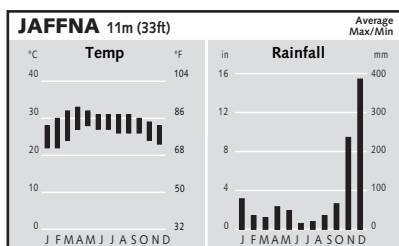
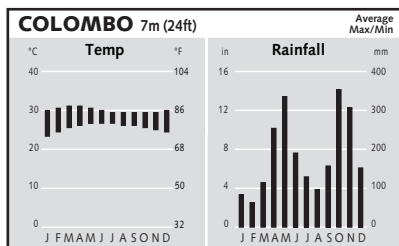
Sights & Activities

There aren't a great many attractions dedicated solely to children. One favourite for kids is the Pinnewala Elephant Orphanage, while the turtle hatcheries on the west coast are also popular. A safari in one of the national parks might also appeal. All top-end

hotels have swimming pools and, of course, Sri Lanka is famous for its beaches.

CLIMATE CHARTS

Sri Lanka is tropical, with distinct dry and wet seasons. The seasons are slightly complicated by having two monsoons. From May to August the Yala monsoon brings rain to the island's southwestern half, while the dry season here lasts from December to March. The southwest has the highest



rainfall – up to 4000mm a year. The Maha monsoon blows from October to January, bringing rain to the North and East, while the dry season is from May to September. The North and East are comparatively dry, with around 1000mm of rain annually. There is also an inter-monsoonal period in October and November when rain can occur in many parts of the island.

Colombo and the low-lying coastal regions have an average temperature of 27°C. At Kandy (altitude 500m), the average temperature is 20°C, while Nuwara Eliya (at 1889m) has a temperate 16°C average. The sea stays at around 27°C all year.

COURSES

Woodlands Network (☎ 223 2668; woodlands@sltnet.lk; 38/1C Esplanade Rd) in Bandarawela (p212) is a nonprofit, grass-roots organisation that offers cooking and meditation courses, and volunteer opportunities. See p321 for more on meditation in Sri Lanka.

The **University of Peradeniya** (☎ 081-238 8301; www.pdn.ac.lk) in Kandy has a comprehensive program of Pali and Buddhist studies.

At Sri Lanka's beach resorts, numerous outfits run PADI scuba diving courses. See p321 for Sri Lanka's diving spots.

CUSTOMS

You may bring 2.5L of spirits, 2L of wine, 200 cigarettes or 200g of tobacco, 250mL of perfume, and travel souvenirs (not exceeding US\$125 in value for stays of less than 90 days, or up to US\$500 for stays between 90 days and a year) into the country. You may take out of the country anything you declared upon entering. Up to 3kg of tea may be exported duty free. For more details, check the customs department website at www.customs.gov.lk.

To export an antique (any article older than 50 years) you need an exemption permit from the Commissioner of Archaeology. We've been told that huge amounts of red tape make it difficult to get the permit; when expats pack up to leave, they've had trouble even for items they brought into Sri Lanka but didn't keep the receipts for. Short-term visitors need to go to the **Department of Archaeology** (Map pp84-5; ☎ 011-266 7155; www.archaeology.gov.lk; National Museum, Albert Cres, Col 7). Inspections and permit issuing are done on Wednesdays only.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Ethnic Tension

The country's ethnic conflict has been widely reported, and many potential visitors have been scared away by the war in the North and East. At the time of research, the situation on the ground was far more relaxed than the old headlines would suggest, and many of the disputed areas had become accessible. You could travel by road, but there were some very specific safety issues in this region – minefields and unexploded ordnance being the most dangerous. Army camps in the North and East were heavily fortified (several old Dutch and Portuguese forts have been garrisoned by the army), and high-security zones such as air bases were completely off limits – definitely not the places to wave around a camera. See the relevant chapters for more information.

All reports were that in the North and East the army and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) cadres were treating foreigners with respect. Ethnic Sinhalese tourists were almost universally welcomed on visits to Jaffna and other Tamil areas.

However, in April 2006 violence broke out again in the northeast, putting the peace negotiations in jeopardy. The situation is likely to be changing quickly though, so you should check the latest situation with your embassy before you leave.

The war has spawned other risks as well. Thousands of soldiers deserted during the long years of war, and some turned to armed banditry to survive. There have been some isolated but vicious attacks on foreigners by ex-soldiers. Illegal loggers have been stripping forests on the fringes of the conflict zone, and some national parks are

GOVERNMENT TRAVEL ADVICE

The following government websites offer travel advisories and information on current hot spots.

Australian Department of Foreign Affairs (☎ 06-6261 3305; www.smarttraveller.gov.au)

British Foreign Office (☎ 0845-850 2829; www.fco.gov.uk/travel)

Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs (☎ 800-267 8376; www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca)

US State Department (☎ 888-407 4747, 202-501 4444; <http://travel.state.gov>)

potentially dangerous, should you stumble across an armed loggers' camp. Before venturing into these areas, go armed with local knowledge and preferably with a local guide.

The government had tried to protect senior politicians from assassination by recruiting dozens of private bodyguards. These armed henchmen soon became political tools, used to intimidate rivals. You're unlikely to meet them, but they're a scary bunch who consider themselves above the law. These goons, and the sons of politicians they're meant to protect, have been accused of several well-publicised bashings in posh Colombo nightclubs.

Theft

With the usual precautions, most people's visit to Sri Lanka is trouble free. However, pickpockets can be active on crowded city buses, notably in Colombo along Galle Rd. They often work together – one to jostle you and the other to pick your pocket or slit your bag, often as you board a bus. All you can do is try to keep a little space around you and hold tight to what you're carrying.

It's often unwise to sleep with your windows open – particularly if you're on the ground floor. Thieves sometimes use long poles with hooks to snaffle items of value. Monkeys are genetically gifted pilferers, and can slip through small gaps and steal food from your room.

One thieves' trick reported by a number of travellers is to take the bottom one or two of a block of travellers cheques, so that you don't notice anything missing until later.

If you do get robbed, go to the police – you won't get your money back but passports and tickets are often jettisoned later. One Australian got her passport back after the pickpockets dropped it in a mailbox!

Touts

Sri Lanka's tourism industry provides an income to many, from the owner of a fancy hotel to the driver of a three-wheeler who drops you at the door. For those at the top of the financial pyramid, the money pours in; for the folks down the bottom, commissions are the name of the game. Touts or, as they like to call themselves, 'friends' or 'guides' lurk around bus and

train stations, waiting to persuade you to go to a hotel or guesthouse of their choice. (The place you want to stay in, you see, is closed, full of giant bugs, overpriced etc.) If you stay at their suggested hotel, the tout will gain a commission, sometimes up to 30% of your bill. This is sometimes subsidised by extra charges to you, but often the hotelier makes do with less money. Saying you have a reservation, whether true or not, is a good ploy to fend off touts. However, many travellers like going with a tout, as often you get a better deal and you don't have the headache of tramping the streets.

The airport is a prime breeding ground for touts (and scams). You may be approached with stories designed to make you sign up for a tour on the spot.

Restaurants also play the commission game: your guide gets a kickback for the lunch you ate. Most gem shops, handicraft stalls and spice gardens, basically any business connected to the tourist industry, also have some kind of commission system set up. Just remember: this is how many make a living – you can help out, or you can spend your money elsewhere. Either way, don't get hung up on beating the commission racket.

Traffic

Sri Lankan drivers – private-bus drivers in particular – can be a real danger. It seems to be acceptable for a bus, car or truck to overtake in the face of oncoming smaller road users – who sometimes simply have to get off the road or risk getting hit. To announce that they are overtaking, or want to overtake, drivers use a series of blasts on loud, shrill horns. If you're walking or cycling along any kind of main road make sure you keep all your senses on alert.

DISABLED TRAVELLERS

Though Sri Lanka is a challenge for disabled travellers, the ever obliging Sri Lankans are always ready to assist. If you have restricted mobility you may find it difficult, if not impossible, to get around on public transport; for example, buses and trains don't have facilities for wheelchairs. Moving around towns and cities can also be difficult for those in a wheelchair or the visually impaired because of the continual

roadworks and very ordinary roads (don't expect many footpaths). A car and driver is the best transport option; if possible, travel with a strong, able-bodied person.

Apart from top-end places, accommodation is generally not geared for wheelchairs. However, many places would be able to provide disabled travellers with rooms and bathrooms that are accessible without stairs. It might take a bit of time to find places with the right facilities, but it is possible. Medical facilities outside Colombo are limited.

Disabled travellers can get in touch with their national support organisation for more information. In the UK, contact **Radar** (☎ 020-7250 3222; 250 City Rd, London EC1V 8AS) or the **Holiday Care Service** (☎ 01293-774 535).

DISCOUNT CARDS

Bad news folks: an International Student ID Card won't get you much. You can't get a discount on the pricey Cultural Triangle round ticket, but you can sometimes get half-price individual site tickets if you sweet-talk the ticket seller. It's the same sad story for seniors, too.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Sri Lankan Embassies & Consulates

There is a full list of Sri Lankan embassies and consulates at the website of the **Ministry of Foreign Affairs** (www.slmfa.gov.lk).

Australia (☎ 02-6239 7041; <http://slhcaust.org>;
35 Empire Circuit, Forrest, Canberra, ACT 2603)

Belgium (☎ 02-344 5394; sri.lanka@skynet.be; Rue Jules Lejeune 27, 1050 Brussels)

Canada (☎ 613-233 8449; <http://srilankaahcottawa.org>;
Ste 1204, 333 Laurier Ave West, Ottawa, Ontario K1P 1C1)

France (☎ 01 55 73 31 13; sl.france@wanadoo.fr; 16 Rue Spontine, 75016 Paris)

Germany (☎ 030-80 90 97 49; www.srilanka-botschaft.de;
Niklasstrasse 19, 14163 Berlin)

Italy (☎ 06-855 4560; slembassy@tiscali.it; Via Adige 2,
00198 Rome)

Japan (☎ 03-3440 6911; <http://lankaembassy.jp>; 2-1-54
Takanawa, Minato-ku, Tokyo 108 0074)

Netherlands (☎ 070-365 5910; mission@infolanka.nl;
Jacob de Graefflaan 2, 2517 JM The Hague)

South Africa (☎ 012-460 7702; www.srilanka.co.za;
410 Alexander St, Brooklyn, Pretoria 0181)

UK (☎ 020-7262 1841; www.slhclondon.org; 13 Hyde
Park Gardens, London W2 2LU)

USA (☎ 202-483 4026; www.slembassyusa.org; 2148
Wyoming Ave NW, Washington DC 20008)

SAFE SWIMMING

Every year drownings occur off Sri Lanka's beaches. If you aren't an experienced swimmer or surfer it's easy to underestimate the dangers – or even to be totally unaware of them. There are few full-time lifesaving patrols, so there's usually no-one to jump in and rescue you. A few common-sense rules should be observed:

- Don't swim out of your depth. If you are a poor swimmer, always stay in the shallows.
- Don't stay in the water when you feel tired.
- Never go swimming under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
- Supervise children at all times.
- Watch out for rips. Water brought onto the beach by waves is sucked back to sea and this current can be strong enough to drag you out with it; the bigger the surf, the stronger the rip. Rips in rough surf can sometimes be seen as calm patches in the disturbed water. It's best to check with someone reliable before venturing into the water. If you do get caught in a rip, swim *across* the current if you can – not *against* it. If it's too strong for you to do this, keep afloat and raise a hand so someone on shore can see that you are in distress. A rip eventually weakens; the important thing is not to panic.
- Exercise caution when there is surf.
- Beware of coral; coming into contact with coral can be painful for the swimmer, and fatal for the coral. Always check with someone reliable if you suspect the area you're about to swim in may have coral.
- Never dive into the water. Hazards may be lurking under the surface or the water may not be as deep as it looks. It pays to be cautious.

Embassies & Consulates in Sri Lanka

It's important to realise the limits to what your embassy can do if you're in trouble. Generally speaking, their hands are tied if you've broken Sri Lankan law. In real emergencies you might get some assistance, but only if all other channels have been exhausted. Embassies can recommend hospitals and dentists in a crisis, but they expect you to have insurance to pay for it all.

The following embassies are all in Colombo; if calling from outside the capital, you will need to add the area code 011 to the telephone numbers.

Australia (Map pp84-5; ☎ 269 8767; ahc@sri.lanka.net; 3 Cambridge Pl, Col 7)

Canada (Map pp84-5; ☎ 522 6296; clmbo@international.gc.ca; 6 Gregory's Rd, Col 7)

France (Map pp84-5; ☎ 269 8815; ambfrclb@dree.org; 89 Rosmead Pl, Col 7)

Germany (Map pp84-5; ☎ 258 0431; www.colombo.diplo.de; 40 Alfred House Ave, Col 3)

India (Map pp84-5; ☎ 242 1605; info.colombo@mea.gov.in; 36-38 Galle Rd, Col 3)

Italy (Map pp84-5; ☎ 258 8388; http://sedi.esteri.it/colombo; 55 Jawatta Rd, Col 5)

Japan (Map pp84-5; ☎ 269 3831; www.lk.emb-japan.go.jp; 20 Gregory's Rd, Col 7)

Maldives (Map p88; ☎ 551 6302; www.maldiveshigh.com.lk; 23 Kaviratne Pl, Col 8)

Netherlands (Map pp84-5; ☎ 259 6914; nethemb@sri.lanka.net; 25 Torrington Ave, Col 7) Despite the address, the Dutch Embassy is located on the street next to Torrington Ave.

Sweden (Map pp84-5; ☎ 479 5400; ambassaden.colombo@sida.se; 49 Bullers Lane, Col 7)

UK (Map pp84-5; ☎ 243 7336; www.britishhigh.com.mission.gov.uk/srilanka; 190 Galle Rd, Col 3)

USA (Map pp84-5; ☎ 244 8007; http://colombo.usembassy.gov; 210 Galle Rd, Col 3)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Sri Lanka has many Buddhist, Hindu, Christian and Muslim festivals. A full working week is a rarity! Many of the festivals, particularly those on the *poya* (full moon) days, are based on the lunar calendar so the dates vary from year to year according to the Gregorian calendar; see p328 for upcoming *poya* dates.

The dates of Hindu festivals often depend on fiendishly complicated astrological calculations, and the exact dates might not be known until a month or so in advance.

Muslim festivals are timed according to local sightings of various phases of the

moon and vary from year to year. During the lunar month of Ramadan that precedes Eid-ul-Fitr, Muslims fast during the day and feast at night, and normal business patterns may be interrupted.

The tourist board publishes information on festivals and events on its website at www.srilankatourism.org. The following are some of the major festivals in Sri Lanka.

JANUARY

Duruthu Perahera Held on the *poya* day in January at the Kelaniya Raja Maha Vihara in Colombo and second in importance only to the huge Kandy *perahera* (procession), this festival celebrates a visit by the Buddha to Sri Lanka.

Thai Pongal Held in mid-January, this Hindu harvest festival honours the Sun God.

FEBRUARY

Navam Perahera First celebrated in 1979, Navam Perahera is one of Sri Lanka's biggest *peraheras*. Held on the February *poya*, it starts from the Gangaramaya Temple and travels around Viharamahadevi Park and Beira Lake in Colombo.

FEBRUARY/MARCH

Maha Sivarathri In late February or early March the Hindu festival of Maha Sivarathri commemorates the marriage of Shiva to Parvati.

MARCH/APRIL

Easter The Christian Good Friday holiday usually falls in April, but can fall in late March. An Easter passion play is performed on the island of Duwa, off Negombo.

Aurudu (New Year) Both New Year's Eve on 13 April and New Year's Day on 14 April are holidays. This occasion for hospitality coincides with the end of the harvest season and the start of the southwest monsoon. See opposite for more details.

MAY

Vesak Poya This two-day holiday – *poya* day and the day after – commemorates the birth, enlightenment and death of Buddha. Puppet shows and open-air theatre performances take place, and the temples are crowded with devotees bringing flowers and offerings. The high point is the lighting of countless paper lanterns and oil lamps. The Adam's Peak pilgrimage season ends at Vesak.

National Heroes' Day Although not a public holiday, 22 May is a day honouring soldiers who have died in the ethnic conflict.

JUNE

Poson Poya The Poson *poya* day celebrates the bringing of Buddhism to Sri Lanka by Mahinda. Anuradhapura

CELEBRATING THE NEW YEAR SRI LANKAN STYLE

On 14 April, when the sun leaves Pisces, the last zodiac sign in its cycle, Buddhist and Hindu Sri Lankans celebrate their new year – Aurudu. Significant tasks, including the lighting of the hearth to cook *kiri bath* (coconut-milk rice), bathing, the first business transaction and the first meal of the new year, are performed at astrologically determined auspicious moments. There are also auspicious colours to be worn and directions to face, all to ensure good fortune for the year ahead.

Aurudu falls at the time when the harvest ends and the fruit trees produce bounteous crops. The festival brings the country to a standstill for almost a week. Public transport is packed on the eve of new year as everyone returns to their parental homes for the celebration. Bread supplies are scarce for a week – bakeries and businesses close down to allow staff to travel home for a few days.

The rituals begin with cleaning the house and lighting the oil lamp. The pounding of the *raban*, a large drum played by several women, sounds the dawning of the new year. The lighting of the hearth is the first ceremonial act for the new year, and even women who are not especially devoted to astrology ensure they light the fire to heat the new pot filled with milk. Families constantly watch the clock, assisted by countdowns on state TV, until it is time to take the first meal for the new year. And just in case you missed it, a shrill chorus of firecrackers reminds everyone that the moment has arrived.

After the other rituals are performed, the family visits friends or joins the games being played in the village, and children ride high on swings hanging from nearby mango or jackfruit trees.

Special Aurudu food is enjoyed during the following days. The ubiquitous plantains (bananas) are a staple, and special additions are *kaung* (oil cake) and *kokis* (a light, crisp sweetmeat of Dutch origin).

Family members exchange gifts after eating, usually clothes (a sari for mother, a shirt or sarong for father and clothing 'kits' for the children), and give sweetmeats or fruit to neighbours. Aurudu sales and markets give Sri Lankans the opportunity to shop for bargains of all sorts.

Aurudu has become deeply embedded in the culture of Sinhalese Buddhist and Tamil Hindu Sri Lankans. It is not celebrated by Buddhists or Hindus anywhere else in the world, and many expat Sri Lankans return to their homeland at this time of year to share the new year and holiday season with their family and friends. The wealthier expats often avoid the heat and humidity by escaping to the cooler hills around Nuwara Eliya, spending the days playing golf and tennis, horse riding or motor racing in the annual hill climb, and partying at night. Accommodation prices here soar at this time of year – if you can find a room at all.

and Mihintale, where Mahinda met and converted the Sinhalese king, are the main sites for this celebration; thousands of white-clad pilgrims climb the stairs to the summit of Mihintale.

JULY/AUGUST

Kandy Esala Perahera The Kandy Esala Perahera, the most important and spectacular festival in Sri Lanka, is the climax of 10 days and nights of celebrations during the month of Esala, ending on the Nikini full moon. This great procession honours the sacred tooth relic of Kandy; see p167 for more details. Smaller *peraheras* are held at other locations around the island.

Vel This festival is held in Colombo and Jaffna. In Colombo, the gilded chariot of Murugan (Skanda), the god of war, complete with his *vel* (trident), is ceremonially hauled from a temple in Sea St, Pettah, to another at Bambalapitiya. In Jaffna the Nallur Kandaswamy Kovil has a 25-day festival in honour of Murugan.

Kataragama Another important Hindu festival is held at Kataragama, where devotees put themselves through the whole gamut of ritual masochism. Many of the devotees have already made the pilgrimage from Jaffna, which reaches Kataragama in time for the festival; see p159 for details.

OCTOBER/NOVEMBER

Deepavali The Hindu festival of lights takes place in late October or early November. Thousands of flickering oil lamps celebrate the triumph of good over evil and the return of Rama after his period of exile.

DECEMBER

Adam's Peak The pilgrimage season, when pilgrims (and the odd tourist) climb Adam's Peak, starts in December. **Unduvap Poya** This full-moon day commemorates Sangamitta, who accompanied her brother Mahinda to Sri Lanka and brought a cutting from the sacred Bodhi Tree, which still stands in Anuradhapura today.

FOOD

Sri Lankan cuisine has clear links with Indian food, yet it also has many of its own traditions. The staple meal is rice and curry, which comes in all sorts of variations. In Colombo you have a wide array of cuisines from which to choose, while tourist centres such as Hikkaduwa you can get all the usual traveller stand-bys (pizza, french fries and so on). In many other places you'll find a curious kind of fusion cuisine – Sri Lankan meets whatever Western cuisine you dare to choose. Don't be surprised if pasta comes with curry leaves! Sri Lanka rivals any country when it comes to tropical fruits.

Food preparation takes a long time in Sri Lanka; rice and curry can take up to 1½ hours to prepare. Get into the habit of pre-ordering your meal: peruse the menu during the day, order, turn up at the allocated time, and everyone should be happy.

For further information on Sri Lankan cuisine, see p69.

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELLERS

Male homosexual activity is illegal in Sri Lanka (there is no law against female homosexuality) and the subject is not openly discussed. There have been some convictions in recent years so it would be prudent not to flaunt your sexuality.

According to a gay expat working in Colombo, Sri Lanka is particularly dull when it comes to a gay lifestyle. There are no clubs or pubs where expat or local gays congregate and, besides the 'beach boy' prostitution racket, local gay life is secretive to say the least. Probably the best way to tap into the local gay scene is via the Internet. Check out **Sri Lankan Gay Friends** (www.geocities.com/srilankangay). It provides information on gay and lesbian life in Sri Lanka, as well as a schedule of gay and lesbian events.

Companions on a Journey (coj@sri.lanka.net; P0 Box 48, Wattala) is a support organisation for the Sri Lankan gay and lesbian community, based in Colombo. It provides a drop-in centre, a library, film screenings, health-related advice and more. It also lobbies for legislative changes.

Friendship Sri Lanka (c/o Shan Gunawadane, 1049 Pannipitiya Rd, Battaramulla) is orientated towards lesbians and bisexual women.

POYA

Every *poya* or full-moon day is a holiday. *Poya* causes buses, trains and accommodation to fill up, especially if it falls on a Friday or Monday. No alcohol is supposed to be sold on *poya* days, and some establishments close. If you're likely to be thirsty, stock up in advance! Some hotels and guesthouses discreetly provide their needy guests with a bottle of beer 'under the table'.

The *poya* days in the second half of 2006 are 9 August, 7 September, 7 October, 6 November and 6 December. In 2007, *poya* days fall on 3 January, 3 February, 2 April, 2 May, 31 May, 29 June, 31 July, 28 August, 26 September, 26 October, 24 November and 24 December; in the first half of 2008, the dates are 22 January, 21 February, 21 March, 20 April, 20 May, 18 June, 18 July and 16 August.

HOLIDAYS

Independence Day 3 February

Labour Day 1 May

Black Tiger Day 5 July; commemorates the first suicide bombing attack by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in 1987 (LTTE areas only)

Heroes Day 27 November; commemorates the death of the first LTTE cadre at Velvetturai in 1982 (LTTE areas only)

Christmas Day 25 December

INSURANCE

A travel insurance policy to cover theft, loss and medical problems is a good idea. There is a wide variety of policies available, so check the small print. The policies with higher medical expense options are chiefly for countries such as the USA which have extremely high medical costs.

Some policies specifically exclude 'dangerous activities', which can include scuba diving, motorcycling and even trekking. A locally acquired motorcycle licence is not valid under some policies, so again check the fine print carefully.

You may prefer a policy that pays doctors or hospitals directly, rather than you having to pay on the spot and claim later. Check that the policy covers ambulances and an emergency flight home.

Worldwide cover to travellers from over 44 countries is available online at www.lonelyplanet.com/travel_services.

INTERNET ACCESS

You shouldn't have trouble finding Internet facilities in the major tourist towns – even most towns that are off the beaten track have access. Internet access in Colombo is cheap (Rs 60 per hour); elsewhere you'll find places that charge Rs 4 to 10 per minute, occasionally less.

Some larger hotels offer Internet access in the rooms – for a charge (usually much higher than an Internet centre). If you're travelling with a portable computer you can usually plug in at an Internet centre for the same rate as using one of the common terminals. See p19 for a list of websites with good information on Sri Lanka.

LEGAL MATTERS

Sri Lanka's legal system is a complex, almost arcane mix of British, Roman-Dutch and national law. The legal system tends to move fairly slowly, and even a visit to a police station to report a small theft can involve lots of time-consuming form-filling. The tourist police in major towns and tourist spots should be your first point of contact for minor matters such as theft.

Drug use, mainly marijuana but also heroin, is common in tourist centres such as Hikkaduwa, Negombo and Unawatuna. Dabbling is perilous; you can expect to end up in jail if you are caught using anything illegal. Besides the risks, one group of Aussie surfers asked us to warn visitors that 'the dope they sell here is shithouse, mate'.

MAPS

One of the best foreign-produced maps is the Nelles Verlag 1:450,000 (1cm = 4.5km) *Sri Lanka*, which also has maps of Colombo, Anuradhapura, Kandy and Galle. Berndston & Berndston's *Sri Lanka Road Map* is excellent for extra detail on routes and sites. Globetrotter's 1:600,000 (1cm = 6km) *Sri Lanka* has a decent colour country map and a handful of simplified town maps.

The Sri Lankan Survey Department's *Road Map of Sri Lanka* is 1:500,000 (1cm = 5km); it is an excellent overall map and is clear to read. The department also produces a *Road Atlas of Sri Lanka* at the same scale but with 17 town maps at the back. The Survey Department has 82 sheets at 1:50,000 (1cm = 500m) covering the island in British-ordnance-survey style.

In Colombo, the **Survey Department Map Sales Centre** (Map p82; ☎ 011-243 5328; 62 Chatham St, Col 1; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri) has a useful selection, including the best Colombo street atlas and the *A to Z Colombo* (Rs 170), which is also available at major bookstores. For the full collection take your passport to the map sales office at the **Surveyor General's Office** (Map p88; ☎ 011-258 5111; Kirula Rd, Narahenpita; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri). Both places are closed on government holidays.

MONEY

The Sri Lankan currency is the rupee (Rs), divided into 100 cents. Coins come in denominations of five, 10, 25 and 50 cents and one, two, five and 10 rupees. Notes come in denominations of 10, 20, 50, 100, 200, 500 and 1000 rupees. Break down larger notes (Rs 500) when you change money as most vendors never seem to have change. Dirty or torn notes might not be accepted, except at a bank. See the inside front cover for exchange rates and p18 for typical costs.

ATMs

Commercial Bank has a wide network of ATMs accepting international Visa, MasterCard and Cirrus/Maestro cards. Other options include Bank of Ceylon, NationsTrust Bank, People's Bank, Hatton National Bank, Seylan Bank, Sampath Bank and HSBC. ATMs have spread to all of the cities and major regional centres, though you can't rely on the network paying up every single time.

Black Market

Although a small number of unlicensed moneychangers trade currency at slightly better rates than officially licensed moneychangers, they work mostly with Indians and Sri Lankans doing black-market import-export.

Cash

Any bank or exchange bureau will change major currencies in cash, including US dollars, euros and pounds sterling. Change rupees back into hard currency before you leave the country for the best rates.

Credit Cards

MasterCard and Visa are the most commonly accepted cards. Other major cards such as Amex and Diners Club are also accepted.

Moneychangers

Moneychangers can be found in Colombo and the major cities, as well as in tourist centres such as Hikkaduwa. They generally don't charge commission and their rates are usually competitive.

Tipping

Although a 10% service charge is added to food and accommodation bills, this usually goes straight to the owner rather than the worker. So tipping is a customary way of showing your appreciation for services rendered. Drivers expect a tip, as do people who 'guide' you through a site. A rule of thumb is to tip 10% of the total amount due. If there's no money involved use your other thumb for this rule: Rs 10 for the person who minds your shoes at temples, and Rs 20 for a hotel porter.

Travellers Cheques

Fewer people use travellers cheques these days, but major banks still change them – Thomas Cook, Visa and Amex are the most widely accepted. Expect a smallish transaction fee of around Rs 150. Banks in major cities and tourist areas sometimes have special counters for foreign exchange.

PHOTOGRAPHY & VIDEO

Airport Security

Airport X-ray machines won't damage film carried in hand luggage; however, if you want to be on the safe side, put it in a lead-lined bag. Serious photographers won't put their film through any X-ray machine, preferring to put it in clear plastic containers and carry it through by hand. If you do this, be prepared to have each and every canister inspected. Don't leave film in baggage that will go into aircraft holds, as it may be exposed to large doses of X-rays that can damage it.

Film & Equipment

You can buy transparency and print film in Sri Lanka; Cargills Food City (located in large towns) generally has a good supply of both. It pays to check the use-by date before you buy, and to ask for film that's been kept in a fridge. Memory cards are widely available at photo and computer shops in Colombo; see p103 for some recommended places. **Millers** Fort (Map p82;

☎ 232 9151, York St, Col 1); Majestic City (Map p88; Galle Rd, Col 4) in Colombo is a reliable place to have your film developed.

Bring any equipment you'll need. There are a few camera sales places in Colombo, but they may not have what you want. For camera repairs, **Photoflex** (☎ 258 7824; 1st fl, 451/2 Galle Rd, Col 3, Colombo) has been recommended, although many cameras are too advanced these days to be repaired there. The heat and humidity can gum up delicate machinery, so try to keep your camera or video in its case along with moisture-absorbing silica gel crystals when you're not shooting. Taking pictures of wildlife in national parks is usually done in a 4WD, so high-speed film is an advantage.

For useful photography tips see Lonely Planet's *Travel Photography: A Guide to Taking Better Pictures*, by renowned photographer Richard I'Anson, as well as the rest of the *Guide to Taking Better Photos* series, which includes titles such as *Wildlife Photography* and *Urban Photography*.

Restrictions

You aren't allowed to film or photograph dams, airports, road blocks or indeed anything associated with the military. In Colombo, the port and the Fort district are especially sensitive. Take particular care in the North and East, where there are many High Security Zones.

POST

Airmail letters weighing less than 10g sent to the UK, continental Europe or Australia cost Rs 30. The fee rises by Rs 12 for every additional 10g. Airmail letters to North America weighing up to 10g cost Rs 33, plus Rs 17 for every additional 10g. Postcards to these destinations cost Rs 17. Parcels cost Rs 90 and Rs 110 respectively up to 1kg, or a maximum of Rs 475 and Rs 725 for 5kg to 10kg.

It costs Rs 5 to send a letter locally, while local parcels are charged a fixed fee of Rs 10 plus Rs 5 for every 250g or portion thereof.

Private agencies as well as post offices sell stamps. To get up-to-date information on postal rates check out www.slpost.lk.

Ordinary airmail parcels sent from Sri Lanka can take longer than expected – a parcel to Australia can take up to three weeks. If you have something valuable to

send home, it may be wiser to use a courier service (for reliable couriers, see p83).

Post offices in larger centres have poste restante, and will generally keep your mail for two months. Amex also has a mail holding service for its clients.

SHOPPING

Sri Lanka has a wide variety of attractive handicrafts on sale. Laksala, a government-run store, is found in most cities and tourist towns. Each store has a good collection of items from all over the country and its stock is generally of reasonable quality, moderately priced and has fixed price tags. There are other handicraft outlets in Colombo; see p102 for details. Street stalls can be found in touristy areas, but you'll need to bargain.

Bargaining

Unless you are shopping at a fixed-price store, you should bargain. Before you hit the open markets, peruse the prices in a fixed-price store for an idea of what to pay. Generally, if someone quotes you a price, halve it. The seller will come down about halfway to your price, and the last price will be a little higher than half the original price.

Batik

The Indonesian art of batik is relatively new in Sri Lanka, but it has been taken to with alacrity. You'll see a wide variety of batiks made and sold around the island. Some of the best and most original are made in the west coast towns of Marawila, Mahawewa and Ambalangoda. Batik pictures start from about Rs 200, and go up to well over Rs 1000. Batik is also used for a variety of clothing items.

Gems

There are countless gem showrooms and private dealers all over the country. In Ratnapura, the centre of the gem trade, everybody and their brother is a part-time gem dealer! It pays to be cautious about authenticity and price; at the government-run gem-testing laboratory in the **Sri Lanka Gem & Jewellery Exchange** (Map p82; ☎ 239 1132; www.slgemexchange.com; 4th & 5th fl, East Low Block, World Trade Center, Col 1), tourists can get any stone tested for free. The only snag with the testing service is that it's not always easy, or practical, to 'borrow' a stone to take it in

for testing before you buy it. However, one reader wrote that a reputable dealer, at least in Colombo, would accompany you to the gem-testing Laboratory for a testing.

There have been letters from readers who have had Sri Lankans try to sell them large amounts of gems with the promise that they can be resold for a big profit in other countries. It's a scam, and unless you happen to be a world-class gem expert you're sure to lose money. Guidebooks from 100 years ago make exactly the same warning.

For more information on the gems found in Sri Lanka, see p225.

Leather

You can find some cheap, good quality leatherwork here – particularly bags and cases. In Colombo, look in the leatherwork and shoe shops around Fort. The bazaar on Olcott Mawatha, beside Fort Station, is cheaper than Laksala for similar-quality goods. Hikkaduwa is also a good place for leather bags.

Masks

Sri Lankan masks are a popular collector's item. They're carved at a number of places, principally along the southwest coast, and are sold all over the island. Ambalangoda is Sri Lanka's mask-carving centre, and you can visit several showroom-workshops there.

Touristy or not, the masks are remarkably well made, good value and look very nice on the wall back home. They're available from key-ring size for a few rupees up to high-quality masks for over Rs 2000. See p51 for more information about Sri Lanka's masks.

Other Souvenirs

If you like to spend, there are countless other purchases waiting to tempt your rupees out of your money belt. The ubiquitous coconut shell is carved into all manner of souvenirs and useful items. Coir (rope fibre from coconut husks) is made into baskets, bags, mats and other items.

Like the Thais and Burmese, Sri Lankans also make lacquerware items such as bowls and ashtrays – layers of lacquer are built up on a light framework, usually of bamboo strips. Kandy is a centre for jewellery and brassware, both antique and modern.

There are some nice chunky silver bracelets, as well as some attractive brass suns and moons – or you could check out a hefty brass elephant-head door knocker. Weligama on the south coast turns out some attractive lacework.

Spices are integral to Sri Lanka's cuisine and Ayurvedic traditions. A visit to a spice garden is an excellent way to discover the alternative uses of familiar spices. You'll see cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg, vanilla beans, cardamom and black pepper, to name just a few. You can buy the pure products, oils or Ayurvedic potions, although the prices are often extortionate; check in local markets beforehand to get an idea of costs.

SOLO TRAVELLERS

Travelling alone isn't a major issue in Sri Lanka, although women should take extra care (see p334 for more information). It's not wise to hike alone in the Hill Country or to walk alone on deserted beaches late at night, as such situations are prime targets for potential thieves.

TELEPHONE

Local calls are timed, and cost about Rs 30 for two minutes, depending on the distance. To call Sri Lanka from abroad, dial your international access code, the country code (☎ 94), the area code (minus '0', which is used when dialling domestically) and the number.

There are no national emergency phone numbers.

International calls can be made from thousands of communications bureaus and booths; many offices also have faxes and Internet access. The cheapest option is a card-operated International Direct Dialling (IDD) telephone, of which there are many in Colombo.

Many villages use what's called a wireless local loop network. This involves having a radio transmitter connected to a land line, allowing a number of subscribers on a 'loop' to use telephones.

Sri Lanka also has a decreasing number of private pay phone operators (right).

Mobile Phones

There are four main network operators. Mobile phones are multiplying like a virus, and coverage is extending beyond the major

cities and road corridors into regional areas. GSM phones from Europe, the Middle East and Australasia can be used in Sri Lanka. You can buy a local SIM card for about Rs 2500; local calls on a Sri Lankan SIM card cost about Rs 5 to Rs 7 per minute. Phone rental costs around Rs 3000 per week, cheaper by the month.

Sri Lanka's main mobile-phone companies, roughly in order of size, are **Mobitel** (www.mobitellanka.com), **Dialog GSM** (www.dialog.lk), **Celltel** (www.celltelnet.lk) and **Hutchison Telecom** (www.hutchison.lk).

Phone Codes

All regions have a three-digit area code. In addition, companies operating wireless loop systems also have three- or four-digit prefixes. Calls to these phones cost about the same as to a standard telephone. Mobile phone companies also have separate prefix codes.

Company	Access code
Celltel	☎ 072
Dialog GSM	☎ 077
Hutchison	☎ 078
Lanka Bell	☎ 075
Mobitel	☎ 071
SLT (WLL)	☎ 070
Suntel	☎ 074

Phonecards

Sri Lanka Telecom sells phonecards, but they can only be used with the card phones found in post offices. There are also phone cards for use in booths operated by Lanka Pay or Tritel, but these booths are relatively rare outside Colombo, since most Sri Lankans either make calls from small privately operated telephone offices or use mobile phones. It's a lot less hassle simply to stop off at a private telephone office and make local calls, even if it costs a hair more.

TIME

Sri Lanka recently changed its time zone; it's now 5½ hours ahead of GMT (the same as India), four hours behind Australian EST and 11 hours ahead of American EST.

TOILETS

All top-end and midrange places to stay have sit-down flush toilets, but if you're staying in budget accommodation you will some-

times find squat toilets, though often there's a choice of commode. In budget digs you might not find toilet paper; it's sold in general stores. Public toilets are scarce, so you'll have to duck into restaurants and hotels.

TOURIST INFORMATION

The Colombo main office of the **Sri Lanka Tourist Board** (SLTB; Map pp84-5; ☎ 011-243 7059; www.srilankatourism.org; 80 Galle Rd, Col 3; ☎ 9am-4.45pm Mon-Fri, 9am-12.30pm Sat) is near the Taj Samudra. The board also runs a **tourist information centre** (☎ 081-222 2661; Palace Sq; ☎ 9am-1pm & 1.30-4.45pm Mon-Fri) in Kandy, as well as a 24-hour **information office** (☎ 011-225 2411) at Bandaranaik International Airport. Staff can help with hotel bookings as well as answer queries and hand out booklets and leaflets. In Colombo the JF Tours office at Fort train station is very helpful.

Among publications provided by SLTB offices inside and outside Sri Lanka is an *Accommodation Guide*, updated every six months, with fairly thorough listings. *Explore Sri Lanka* has feature articles, and information on things to see and places to stay, shop and eat.

Sri Lanka Tourist Board has offices in the following countries:

Australia (☎ 02-6230 6002; fax 6230 6066; 29 Lonsdale St, Braddon, Canberra, ACT 2612)

France (☎ 01 42 60 49 99; ctbparis@compuserve.com; 19 Rue du Quatre Septembre, 75002 Paris)

Germany (☎ 069-28 77 34; ctbfra@t-online.de; Allerheiligentor 2-4, D-60311 Frankfurt am Main)

Japan (☎ 03-3289 0771; ctbtokyo@zaf.att.ne.jp; Dowa Bldg, 7-2-22 Ginza, Chuo-ku, Tokyo)

UK (☎ 020-7930 2627; srilankatourism@aol.com; 26-27 Clareville House, Oxendon St, London SW1Y 4EL)

USA (☎ 732-516 9800; ctbusa@anlusa.com; 111 Wood Ave South, Iselin, New Jersey 08830)

VISAS

Dozens of nationalities, including Australians, New Zealanders, North Americans and virtually all Europeans, receive a tourist visa upon entry, valid for 30 days. It is sometimes possible to obtain a visa for longer than 30 days in your home country; this is more often the case at Sri Lanka's bigger overseas missions, in London and Washington for example. The latest regulations are given at www.immigration.gov.lk.

Extensions can be made at the **Department of Immigration** (Map p88; ☎ 011-250 3629;

VISA EXTENSION FEES

Country of origin	Cost US\$
Australia	27
Canada	50
France	26
Germany	26.80
Italy	35
Netherlands	49
New Zealand	34.50
Switzerland	27.20
UK	54
USA	100

www.immigration.gov.lk; 23 Station Rd, Col 4; ☎ 9am-4.30pm Mon-Fri), near Majestic City shopping centre in Bambalapitiya, Colombo. The last payments are received at 3.30pm. The department sets the cost in US dollars, but you pay in rupees. A visa extension gives you a full three months in the country and you can apply for your extension almost as soon as you arrive (the 30-day visa given upon entry is included in the three months). A further three-month extension is possible, but you must again pay the extension fee plus another Rs 10,000. Extensions beyond this are at the discretion of the department, and incur a Rs 15,000 fee plus the extension fee.

See above for fees for the first 90-day extension.

The whole process takes about an hour. First, go to the 1st-floor office and pick up a visa-extension application form from the person closest to the door. You then work your way along the counter, through six or seven stages of stamps and receipts. Then you wait 30 minutes or so while your passport works its way back down the counter and is returned to you.

You will need your passport, an onward ticket and either a credit card or foreign exchange receipts.

Tourist visas for India can be obtained at the **High Commission of India** (Map pp84-5; ☎ 242 1605; info.colombo@mea.gov.in; 36-38 Galle Rd, Col 3). The cost of a six-month visa depends on your nationality, and you'll need to supply two photos. It takes at least five days to process a tourist visa, but only one day if you are a foreign resident in Sri Lanka. Lines tend to be very long. You can also

VOLUNTEER LIFE BEATS TRAVELLING *Brigitte Ellemor*

There was no-one to meet me after midnight at the airport arrivals area – a bus stop was as close as nonauthorised visitors could get to the terminal. The next night, power workers started a four-day strike, leaving homes without fans and water (if they had electric water pumps). Soon after, the government imposed power cuts of up to eight hours a day. Welcome to Sri Lanka!

During later months, a couple of bombs blasted Colombo targets killing dozens of people, a national parliamentarian was assassinated and a curfew was imposed to limit violence during local government elections. Tropical paradise? I think not.

At home in my bedsit flat, I hand-washed clothes on the floor of the shower for 18 months. Outside, I travelled in crazily driven buses crammed full like sardine cans. But for every negative or confusing experience, there was an equally delightful interaction. The family at the general store who understood my charadelike request for candles during the power strike became the people whom I visited if I needed cheering up. My landlady-neighbour delivered the auspicious dish *kiri bath* (coconut-milk rice) on the first day of each month. I enjoyed bathing at private wells in friends' gardens, and the excitement of the national cricket team winning an international tournament was never far away. Most touching were the invitations to witness the cycle of life events and the rituals attached to birth, adolescent rites of passage, marriage and death.

Working as a volunteer in another country is one of the best ways to experience life as it really is for citizens of the country. The opportunity provides unique challenges and rewards, and allows you to move beyond the sometimes superficial encounters and observations of a traveller. If visiting a place renders it part of your consciousness forever, then living in a country for a year or more means it is indelibly marked on your mind and heart. However, the longer-term experience often raises as many questions as it answers, and I doubt I will ever understand Sri Lanka's politics or the long and bloody ethnic conflict.

Living in the 'Third World' brings the inescapable realisation that although life is a struggle for most of the world's people, they generally meet the difficulties with resourcefulness. Like me, Sri Lankans also endure verbal and sometimes physical harassment, the frustration of working in a public sector bureaucracy, and the physical limitations and emotional trauma of living in a country at war with itself, but they generally don't have the opportunity to leave.

obtain an Indian visa in Kandy at the **Assistant High Commission of India** (☎ 081-222 4563; ahckind@mailandnews.com; Box 47, 31 Rajapihilla Mawatha). Kandy makes a good alternative to Colombo because it's not as busy.

VOLUNTEERING

Sri Lanka is a base for many NGOs, and there are about half a dozen major volunteer agencies that operate in Sri Lanka. The best place to start searching for placements is the Web. Check out www.workingabroad.com and www.vso.org.uk.

Woodlands Network (☎ 223 2668; woodlands@stlnet.lk) in Bandarawela (p212) can help arrange volunteer opportunities in the Hill Country.

WOMEN TRAVELLERS

Few Sri Lankan women travel unchaperoned, so lone female travellers may occasionally experience uncomfortable levels of male attention. Covering your legs and shoulders

helps you blend in more effectively, though you'll be stared at no matter what you wear. In Colombo you can relax the dress code a little and get away with wearing sleeveless shirts. Lone women travellers may be hassled walking around at night, or while exploring isolated places. Stray hands on crowded buses are something else to watch out for.

However, don't imagine travelling in Sri Lanka is one long hassle. Such unpleasant incidents are the exception, not the rule. Women travellers have the opportunity to enter the society of Sri Lankan women, something that is largely out-of-bounds for male travellers. On the other hand, there are many social environments that are almost exclusively male in character – local bars, for example. If you feel uncomfortable in local eateries or hotels, try to find one where women are working or staying.

Stock up on tampons, as they can be hard to find outside Colombo.

For further comments, see opposite.

WOMEN TRAVELLING IN SRI LANKA *Jessa Boanas-Dewes*

Before a recent trip to Sri Lanka I was told the country was 'really chilled – way more relaxed than India'. From what I could gather, dressing demurely was a good idea but not essential.

I'd tried to pack long skirts and shirts but decided to get more clothes when I arrived. Unfortunately, finding nonsynthetic clothing that fitted me (or that I vaguely liked!) proved difficult. When I was able to find some clothes, I found that dressing conservatively really made a positive impact on the way I was treated. Sarongs were particularly helpful for creating a baggy layer over a singlet or shirt.

Unabashed staring from men made me feel very uncomfortable and I got the distinct impression that foreign women are regarded as more sexually 'available' than local women, who are carefully chaperoned. It's worth keeping in mind that you'll mostly talk to men, who are the drivers, waiters and hotel owners. Sri Lankan women I encountered were friendly but shy, and they are often starkly absent from the public sphere, so you can't rely on being able to seek shelter in their company. I was glad I'd made the effort to learn some words in Sinhalese – it helped break the ice.

One of the greatest challenges for me was that although so many people were friendly and helpful, some ostensibly 'friendly' conversations veered towards another goal, such as asking for money. 'Are you married, Madam?' was a common question and I found it easier to say 'yes'. Bringing a fake wedding ring and maybe even a photo would have helped; I wasn't asked about my availability while travelling with two male friends.

A female travelling companion didn't get groped (as I did) but found that sometimes men got too close (such as in crowded temples). Her solution was to put her hands on her hips and use her elbows to create more personal space. Unlike other countries in South Asia, trying to publicly shame an offender had no effect. At first, I was under the impression that only foreign women are the subject of sexual harassment. However, I've since learned that unaccompanied Sri Lankan women also have to put up with it, and often carry a spare sari pin to 'accidentally' prop would-be gropers or frottage-artists.

But, overall, these issues were only hiccups in what was otherwise an extremely friendly and chivalrous cultural experience.

Bus & Train Travel

Women travelling solo may find riding the buses and trains extremely trying at times. In Colombo, for example, ordinary buses are so packed that sometimes it's impossible to avoid bodily contact with other passengers. If a sleazebag is making a concerted effort to invade your space, such as it is, you have a few options: put your bag up as a shield; move to another part of the bus if you can; or get off and catch another bus. In Colombo buses are so frequent that you generally don't have to wait long for one that's less crowded. The most important

thing in such a situation is to trust your gut instinct; if you feel the need to get off a bus, get off.

Unlike many other Asian countries, shaming the perpetrator seems to have little effect; local women often arm themselves with sari pins to 'accidentally' jab men who attempt to rub lewdly against them. We would strongly suggest that you do not travel on trains alone, as we have received warnings from women who have been sexually assaulted on such trips. Seriously think about finding a travelling companion instead.

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Transport

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THINGS CHANGE...

The information in this chapter is particularly vulnerable to change. Check directly with the airline or a travel agent to make sure you understand how a fare (and ticket you may buy) works, and be aware of the security requirements for international travel. Shop carefully. The details given in this chapter should be regarded as pointers and are not a substitute for your own careful, up-to-date research.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Flights, tours and rail tickets can be booked online through Lonely Planet; see www.lonelyplanet.com/travel_services.

ENTERING THE COUNTRY

Immigration at Bandaranaike International Airport is a straightforward matter of handing your passport over to officials, who will check your visa and stamp your passport with an exit date.

Passport

You must have your passport with you all the time in Sri Lanka; it is the most basic

travel document. Before leaving home, check that it will be valid for the entire period you intend to remain overseas. See pp333 for information on visas.

AIR Airports & Airlines

The only international airport in Sri Lanka is **Bandaranaike International Airport** (airport code CMB; ☎ 011-225 2861) at Katunayake, 30km north of Colombo. There are 24-hour money-changing facilities in the arrivals and departures halls. The travel desks in the arrivals hall often have discounts for mid-range and top-end hotels in Negombo and Colombo; you may well be offered a 10- or 20-day package with hotel, van and driver on the spot. There are also bank counters, a few duty-free shops and a cafeteria in the departures lounge, but prices are high.

Sri Lanka isn't quite on the A list for major airlines. Of the bigger European carriers, only Lufthansa flies there. Most of the airlines flying between Europe and Sri Lanka are from the Middle East. A better range of airlines flies between Sri Lanka and Asia (with connections elsewhere).

It's worth reconfirming flights 72 hours in advance in Sri Lanka, as the country is a turning point for flights. Sometimes if a 200-seat plane is scheduled to fly to Sri Lanka but only 80 seats are full, an airline will send a 120-seat plane instead. If there are 200 or so passengers waiting to leave Sri Lanka on that plane, difficulties arise. The passengers who have reconfirmed stand a better chance of leaving Sri Lanka as planned. Absolutely, definitely reconfirm if you're flying with national carrier SriLankan Airlines, as they're notorious for bumping passengers who fail to do so. You'll need the flight number plus a contact address.

AIRLINES FLYING TO & FROM SRI LANKA

All the phone numbers listed below are for the airlines' Colombo offices; add ☎ 011 if calling from elsewhere.
Austrian Airlines (code OS; ☎ 272 5555; www.aua.com; hub Vienna)
Cathay Pacific (code CK; Map pp84-5; ☎ 233 4145; www.cathaypacific.com; hub Hong Kong)

AVOIDING COLOMBO

Although we think Colombo has its good points, some travellers opt to bypass it altogether and take a taxi straight from the airport to Negombo (Rs 600) or to Kandy (Rs 3300).

Condor Airlines (code DE; Map pp84-5; ☎ 232 9804; www.condor.com; hub Frankfurt)

Czech Airlines (code OK; Map pp84-5; ☎ 234 2941; www.csa.cz/en; hub Prague)

Emirates (code EK; Map pp84-5; ☎ 230 0200; www.emirates.com; hub Dubai)

Etihad Airways (code EY; ☎ 476 6500; www.etihadairways.com; hub Abu Dhabi)

Indian Airlines (code IC; Map p82; ☎ 232 6844; www.indian-airlines.nic; hub New Delhi)

Kuwait Airways (code KU; Map p82; ☎ 244 5531; www.kuwait-airways.com; hub Kuwait City)

LTU International Airways (code LT; Map p82; ☎ 473 1366; www.ltu.com; hub Düsseldorf)

Malaysia Airlines (code MH; Map p82; ☎ 234 2291; www.malaysia-airlines.com; hub Subang Jaya)

Qatar Airlines (code QR; Map p82; ☎ 452 5726; www.qatarairways.com; hub Doha)

Royal Jordanian (code RJ; Map pp84-5; ☎ 230 1626; www.rja.com.jo; hub Amman)

Singapore Airlines (code SQ; Map pp84-5; ☎ 230 0750; www.singaporeair.com; hub Singapore)

SriLankan Airlines (code UL; Map p82; ☎ 242 1161; www.srilankan.lk; hub Colombo)

Thai Airways (code TG; Map pp84-5; ☎ 244 7332; www.thaiair.com; hub Bangkok)

Tickets

The plane ticket will probably be the most expensive item in your trip budget. Some of the cheapest tickets have to be bought months in advance and popular flights sell out quickly.

Colombo is not as good as some other Asian centres for cheap flights, and you may be better off booking your onward tickets before you leave home. For details of travel agencies in Colombo, see p87.

The airport no longer charges a separate departure tax.

Asia INDIA

SriLankan Airlines flies twice daily between Thiruvananthapuram (Trivandrum) in Kerala and Colombo. One-way/return

fares start at US\$119/238. Travelling to Tiruchirappalli (Trichy) in Tamil Nadu costs only slightly more, and there are three weekly flights. Other destinations include Bodhgaya in the northern state of Bihar, and Bangalore in Karnataka. Indian Airlines and SriLankan Airlines have flights between Colombo and Chennai (Madras) for US\$155/293 one way/return.

If you're looking for a travel agent in India, **STIC Travels** (www.stictravel.com; Chennai ☎ 044-2433 0211; Delhi ☎ 011-2332 0239; Mumbai ☎ 022-2218 1431) is recommended.

MALDIVES

Many visitors combine a visit to Sri Lanka with a trip to the Maldives. One-way/return fares on SriLankan Airlines flights between Colombo and Male cost US\$143/269.

SINGAPORE

The best airfares from Singapore to Colombo are usually with Emirates, at around US\$254. SriLankan Airlines, Singapore Airlines, Malaysia Airlines and Thai Airways also fly from Singapore to Colombo (either nonstop or with a stop in Kuala Lumpur) for somewhat higher fares.

THAILAND

A Bangkok-Colombo return flight costs US\$511 on Thai Airways, SriLankan Airlines, Cathay Pacific or Malaysia Airlines. One-way flights are not much cheaper.

Australia

SriLankan Airlines' return fares from Sydney are around A\$1690, while other airlines cost a bit more. Return fares from Perth cost at least 25% more; Emirates and SriLankan Airlines typically have the best prices.

Flight Centre (☎ 133 133; www.flightcentre.com.au) and **STA Travel** (☎ 1300 733 035; www.statravel.com.au) have offices throughout Australia. Check the *Yellow Pages* and major newspapers for other travel agencies.

Canada

The *Globe & Mail*, *Toronto Star*, *Montreal Gazette* and *Vancouver Sun* carry travel agency ads and are good places to look for cheap fares. **Travel CUTS** (☎ 866-246 9762; www.travelcuts.com) is Canada's national student travel agency. For online bookings try www.expedia.ca and www.travelocity.ca.

The cheapest return fares for nonstop flights between Vancouver and Colombo start at C\$2824 with Cathay Pacific and SriLankan Airlines. Eastern Canada is about as far you can get from Sri Lanka; Cathay Pacific has fares starting from C\$3438, with a stop in Hong Kong.

Continental Europe

SriLankan Airlines flies from London to Colombo daily. The main European carriers with flights to Sri Lanka are Czech Airlines (twice weekly from Prague via Dubai) and Austrian Airlines (a seasonal schedule from Vienna, peaking with two or three flights a week around New Year).

FRANCE

SriLankan Airlines has two flights a week between Paris and Colombo. Return flights range in price from €800 to €850.

France has a network of travel agencies that can supply discount tickets to travellers of all ages. Recommended agencies include the following:

Anyway (☎ 08 92 30 23 01; www.anyway.fr in French)

Lastminute (☎ 08 99 78 50 00; www.lastminute.fr in French)

Nouvelles Frontières (☎ 08 25 00 07 47; www.nouvelles-frontieres.fr in French)

OTU Voyages (☎ 01 55 82 32 32; www.otu.fr in French)
Agency specialising in students and young people.

Voyageurs du Monde (☎ 08 92 68 83 63; www.vdm.com)

GERMANY

SriLankan Airlines has two weekly flights between Frankfurt and Colombo. Return flights start at €1365. German charter companies with seasonal flights include Condor Airlines (from Frankfurt) and LTU International Airways (from Munich and Frankfurt).

The following travel agencies have been recommended:

Expedia (☎ 01805 007 143; www.expedia.de in German)

Just Travel (☎ 089-747 3330; www.justtravel.de)

Lastminute (☎ 01805 284 366; www.lastminute.de in German)

STA Travel (☎ 06974-303 292; www.statravel.de in German)

New Zealand

Both **Flight Centre** (☎ 0800 243 544; www.flightcentre.co.nz) and **STA Travel** (☎ 0508 782 782; www.

statravel.co.nz) have branches throughout the country. A website recommended for on-line bookings is www.travel.co.nz.

An Auckland-Colombo return flight with Emirates Airlines or SriLankan Airlines should cost around NZ\$1700.

UK & Ireland

Discount air travel is big business in London. Advertisements for many agencies appear in the travel pages of the weekend broadsheet newspapers, in *Time Out* and the *Evening Standard*, and in the free magazine *TNT*.

Fares from London to Colombo start at UK£613 return. Emirates, Czech Airlines and Royal Jordanian all have consistently cheap fares. In addition, SriLankan Airlines flies from London to Colombo daily.

Major travel agencies in the UK include the following:

Flight Centre (☎ 0870 499 0040; www.flightcentre.co.uk)

Flightbookers (☎ 0800 082 3000; www.ebookers.com)

North-South Travel (☎ 01245-608 291; www.northsouthtravel.co.uk)

Quest Travel (☎ 0870 442 3542; www.questtravel.com)

STA Travel (☎ 0870 630 026; www.statravel.co.uk)

Trailfinders (☎ 0845 058 5858; www.trailfinders.co.uk)

Travel Bag (☎ 0800 082 5000; www.travelbag.co.uk)

USA

The *New York Times*, *LA Times*, *Chicago Tribune* and *San Francisco Chronicle* all have weekly travel sections where you'll find any number of travel agency ads. San Francisco is the discount-ticket capital of America, although some good deals can be found in Los Angeles, New York and other big cities.

A return New York-Colombo flight with SriLankan Airlines or Cathay Pacific costs around US\$1650; on Emirates, fares can be as low as US\$1390. From Los Angeles, you'll pay US\$1370 for a flight with Cathay Pacific (via Hong Kong) or SriLankan Airlines (via Bangkok).

The following sites are recommended for online bookings:

Avia Travel (☎ 800 950 2842; www.aviatravel.com)

Cheap Tickets (☎ 312-260 8100; www.cheaptickets.com)

Expedia (www.expedia.com)

Lowestfare.com (www.lowestfare.com)

SEA

Plans to resume ferry services between Mannar and India come and go with the tide. Any schemes to relaunch the route must wait until the ports are repaired, however, so check with the **Sri Lanka Ports Authority** (www.slpa.lk) for the latest information.

A passenger-ferry service between Tutu-corin (Tamil Nadu) and Colombo has also been on the drawing board for some years, but has still not materialised. There has also been talk of ferry services between Chennai and Colombo, and Kochi and Colombo, but no plans have yet come to fruition.

GETTING AROUND

The only regular domestic flights are the flights between Jaffna and Colombo. Flights to Trincomalee were added following the cease-fire a few years ago but were suspended again following the drop in tourism after the 2004 tsunami. The flights are likely to start again if tourism picks up.

Travelling on public transport is therefore mostly a choice between buses and trains. Both are cheap. Trains can be crowded, but it's nothing compared with the seemingly endless numbers of passengers that squash into ordinary buses. Trains are a bit slower than buses, but a seat on a train is preferable to standing on a bus. Even standing on a train is better than standing on a bus.

On the main roads from Colombo to Kandy, Negombo and Galle, buses cover around 40km to 50km per hour. On highways across the plains, it can be 60km or 70km an hour. In the Hill Country, it can slow to just 20km an hour.

All public transport gets particularly crowded around *poya* (full moon) holidays and their nearest weekends, so try to avoid travelling then if you can.

AIR

Sri Lanka has two domestic airlines on the Colombo-Jaffna route: **Aerolanka** (Map p88; ☎ in Colombo 011-250 5632; www.aerolanka.com) and **Expo Aviation** (Map pp84-5; ☎ in Colombo 011-257 6941; info@expoavi.com).

For addresses of airline offices in Colombo and Jaffna, as well as schedules and fares, see p103 and p312. Checking in takes at least 2½ hours due to security measures.

Air taxis are another way of travelling internally. **Sri Lankan Air Taxi** (☎ 019-733 3355; www.srilankan.aero/airtaxi) offers charter services anywhere in the country, including a fairly regular flight to Ampara for US\$200.

BICYCLE

Keen cyclists will probably find Sri Lanka a joy, apart from the uphill sections of the Hill Country and the major arteries out of Colombo. When heading out of Colombo in any direction, take a train out beyond the urban corridors before you start cycling.

It's a good idea to start early in the day to avoid the heat, and to take lots of water and sun block. The distances you cover will be limited by the state of the roads – be prepared for a large amount of 'eyes down' cycling.

If you decide to bring your own bicycle, be sure to also bring a supply of spare tyres and tubes as these can suffer from the poor road surfaces. The normal bicycle tyre size in Sri Lanka is 28in by 1.5in. Some imported 27in tyres for 10-speed bikes are available but only in a few shops in Colombo and at high prices. Keep an eye on your bicycle at all times and use a good lock.

When taking a bicycle on a train, every part has to be described on the travel documents, so you should deliver the bicycle at least half an hour before departure. At Colombo's Fort station you may want to allow even more time (up to two hours). It costs about twice the 2nd-class fare to take a bicycle on a train.

Hire

In terms of hired bicycles, those with gears are the exception rather than the rule. You'll find that most range from merely adequate to desperately uncomfortable with dodgy brakes. Bikes imported from China and India are the norm. You should seriously consider bringing your own gear.

The **National Mountain Biking Association** (☎ 011-269 1505) in Colombo acts as a clearing house for information on mountain biking in Sri Lanka, and also arranges guides for individual or custom tours.

Adventure Asia (☎ 536 8468; 338 TB Jaya Mawatha, Col 10) and **Adventure Sports Lanka** (☎ 279 1584; actionlanka.com; 366/3 Rendapola Horagahakanda Lane, Talagama, Koswatta), both based in Colombo, arrange mountain-biking excursions in the Hill Country.

Purchase

You can buy mountain bikes at the following bike shops in Colombo. Expect to pay US\$100 to US\$450 for a new bike, depending on the quality. Most are made in India or China; the Chinese bikes are said to be sturdier and more reliable than the Indian bikes.

City Cycle Stores (☎ 011-250 4632; alamul@slt.lk; 117-119 Dam Str, Col 12)

Cycle Bazaar (☎ 011-268 6255; 82 Danister De Silva Mawatha, Col 8)

Suriyage (☎ 011-269 1505; suri@isplanka.lk; 524 Rider Tower, Maradana Rd, Col 10) Also repairs bikes and occasionally has used mountain bikes for sale for about half the cost of a new bike.

BUS

Bus routes cover about 80% of the nation's 90,000km of roads. There are two kinds of bus in Sri Lanka – Central Transport Board (CTB) buses and private buses. CTB buses are usually painted yellow and ply most long-distance and local routes. Private bus companies have vehicles ranging from late-model Japanese coaches used on intercity-express runs to decrepit old minibuses that sputter and limp along city streets or short runs between towns and villages. Private air-con intercity buses cover all the major routes; for long-distance travel they are by far the most comfortable option.

Bus travel in Sri Lanka can be interesting. Vendors board to sell all sorts of snacks and even books on long-distance routes. Blind singers sometimes get on and work their way down the aisle, warbling away and collecting coins. Beggars may approach passengers with a litany of misfortunes – which they may also sing. Buses sometimes stop at temples so the driver and passengers can donate a few coins.

The first two seats on CTB buses are reserved for 'clergy' (Buddhist monks) and this is never ignored. If you want to guarantee a seat, you'll need to board the bus at the beginning of its journey; Sri Lankans seem to know when to sprint after the right bus as it pulls in, and throw a bag or a handkerchief through the window to reserve a seat.

Finding the right bus at the chaotic bus stations in Colombo and Kandy can be very challenging. Virtually all of the destination signs hung over the bus parking areas are in Sinhala script only, and since there is

no central ticket office, you must locate the right parking area and buy your bus ticket either from a small booth or on board the bus. Probably the best strategy is simply to walk through the station saying the name of your destination until someone leads you to the right bus.

In smaller towns it's much easier, as there are usually separate bus stops for each destination or direction, and your hotel or guesthouse can tell you where these stops are.

Costs

In most cases, private bus companies run services parallel to CTB services. Intercity expresses charge about twice as much as CTB buses, but are more than twice as comfortable, and usually faster. Fares for CTB buses and ordinary private buses are very cheap. The journey between Kandy and Colombo costs Rs 70 on a CTB bus, Rs 80 to 120 on ordinary private buses and Rs 140 on an air-con intercity express. A bus trip from Colombo to Kataragama costs Rs 146 on an ordinary private bus and Rs 280 by intercity express.

Most buses have unbelievably small luggage compartments and they rarely have storage on the roof. For your own sake, travel light. If you have a large pack, you can buy an extra ticket for your bag.

Reservations

Private buses cannot be booked before the day of travel; to book CTB buses you can call ☎ 011-258 1120.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Self-drive car hire is possible in Sri Lanka, though it is far more common to hire a car and driver for a day or more. If you're on a relatively short visit to Sri Lanka on a midrange budget, the costs of hiring a car and driver can be quite reasonable.

When planning your itinerary, you can count on covering about 35km per hour in the Hill Country and 55km per hour in most of the rest of the country.

Motorcycling is an alternative for intrepid travellers. Distances are relatively short and some of the roads are a motorcyclist's delight; the trick is to stay off the main highways. The quieter Hill Country roads offer some glorious views, and secondary roads along the coast and the plains are reasonably quick. There are motorcycle-hire agencies

ROAD DISTANCES (KM)

Anuradhapura	---								
Colombo	206	---							
Galle	322	116	---						
Jaffna	195	396	512	---					
Kandy	138	116	232	320	---				
Nuwara Eliya	216	180	290	398	77	---			
Polonnaruwa	101	216	332	283	140	217	---		
Trincomalee	106	257	373	238	182	259	129	---	
Anuradhapura									
Colombo									
Galle									
Jaffna									
Kandy									
Nuwara Eliya									
Polonnaruwa									
Trincomalee									

in Hikkaduwa and Kandy. In addition to a cash deposit you must provide your passport number and leave your airline ticket as security. The official size limit on imported motorbikes is 350cc.

Driving Licence

An International Driving Permit can be used to roam Sri Lanka's roads, but it's valid for only three months. To extend the permit, turn up at the **Department of Motor Traffic** (Map pp84-5; ☎ 011-269 4331; Elvitigala Mawatha, Narahenpita) in Colombo. You'll need to bring your driving licence and two photos.

Hire

HIRING A CAR & DRIVER

You can find taxi drivers who will happily become your chauffeur for a day or more in all the main tourist centres. Guesthouse owners will probably be able to put you in touch with a driver, or you can ask at travel agencies or big hotels.

Various formulas exist for setting costs, such as rates per kilometre plus a lunch and dinner allowance. The simplest way is to agree on a flat fee with no extras. Expect to pay Rs 2500 to 2800 per day, not including fuel, or more for a newer, air-con vehicle.

At the time of writing, petrol cost Rs 85 per litre, and diesel Rs 46. Rates that include fuel can be arranged from around Rs 3000 per day. Most drivers will expect a tip of about 10%, but of course it's up to you. It pays to meet the driver before you set off, as there

may be a difference between who the travel agent has led you to expect and who turns up. Some travellers find themselves being almost bullied by their driver: the driver chooses where they go, where they stay and what time they leave. Hiring a driver for only two or three days at first can avoid these problems. Drivers seem to prefer spending only three or four days away from home as well.

Some travel agencies may suggest you take a guide along as well. Unless you speak absolutely no English or Sinhala, this is unnecessary.

Be aware that drivers make a fair part of their income from commissions. Most hotels and many guesthouses pay drivers a flat fee or a percentage, although others refuse to. This can lead to disputes between you and the driver over where you're staying the night – they'd prefer to go where the money is. Some hotels have appalling accommodation for drivers – sometimes just a dirty mattress under the stairs. Some of the worst conditions are in the big hotels; drivers share a dormitory and prison-style meals, people come and go all night, and no-one gets a good night's rest. The smarter hotels and guesthouses know that keeping drivers happy is good for their business, and provide decent food and lodgings.

SELF-DRIVE HIRE

Quickshaws Tours (☎ 258 3133; www.quickshaws.com; 3 Kalinga Pl, Col 5) and **Ameri Rent-A-Car** (☎ 258 1594; 30A Temple Lane, Col 3) are two Colombo-based

companies offering self-drive car hire. Both have air-con Toyota Corollas from Rs 2400 per day, including insurance, tax and the first 100km; there is a Rs 18 charge for each kilometre in excess of 100km. Discounted weekly rates are also available. Generally you're not allowed to take the car into national parks, wildlife sanctuaries or jungle, or along unsealed roads.

Road Conditions

Although you may see a number of accidents during your time on the road, driving seems fairly safe provided you take care and watch out for other road users. Country roads are often narrow and potholed, with constant pedestrian, bicycle and animal traffic to navigate.

Punctures are a part of life here, so every little village seems to have a repair expert doing an excellent, although rather time-consuming, job.

Road Rules

The speed limit for vehicles is 56km/h in built-up areas and 72km/h in rural areas. Driving is on the left-hand side of the road, as in the UK and Australia. The **Automobile Association of Ceylon** (Map pp84-5; ☎ 011-242 1528; 40 Sir Mohamed Macan Markar Mawatha, Col 3; ☎ 9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri) sells a booklet called *The Highway Code*.

HITCHING

Hitching is never entirely safe in any country in the world, and we don't recommend it. In any case, Sri Lanka's cheap fares make it an unnecessary option. Travellers who do decide to hitch should understand that they are taking a small but potentially serious risk; they can attempt to minimise this risk by travelling in pairs and letting someone know where they are planning to go.

LOCAL TRANSPORT

Many Sri Lankan towns are small enough to walk around. In larger towns, you can get around by bus, taxi or three-wheeler.

Bus

Local buses go to most places, including villages outside main towns, for fares ranging from Rs 4 to 25. Their signboards are usually in Sinhala or Tamil, so you'll have to ask which is the right bus.

Taxi

Sri Lankan taxis are often reconditioned Japanese vans. They're common in all sizeable towns and even some villages will be able to dig up a taxi. Only a few are metered, but over longer distances their prices are comparable to those of three-wheelers, and they provide more comfort and security. Radio cabs are available in Kandy and Colombo. You can count on most taxi rides costing around Rs 40 to 50 per kilometre.

Three-Wheeler

These vehicles, known in other parts of Asia as *túk-túks*, *bajajs* or autorickshaws, are everywhere: turn a corner and you'll find one. Agree (or haggle your heart out) on the fare before you get in. Some keen drivers will offer to take you to the moon, but it's no fun being in a three-wheeler for more than an hour; believe us, this comes from hard experience. You may think that the driver is not obeying any road rules; you are probably right.

As a rule of thumb, a three-wheeler should cost no more than Rs 40 per kilometre. Three-wheelers and taxis waiting outside tourist hotels and similar places expect higher than usual fares.

TRAIN

Sri Lanka's rickety railways are a great way to cross the country. Although they are slow, trains travel short distances so there are few overnight or all-day ordeals to contend with. A train ride is almost always more relaxed than a bus ride.

There are three main lines. The coast line runs south from Colombo, past Aluthgama and Hikkaduwa to Galle and Matara. The main line pushes east from Colombo into the Hill Country, through Kandy, Nanu Oya (for Nuwara Eliya) and Ella to Badulla. The northern line launches from Colombo through Anuradhapura to Vavuniya (it once ran beyond Jaffna to the northern tip of Sri Lanka). One branch of the northern line reaches Trincomalee on the east coast, while another branch heads south to Polonnaruwa and Batticaloa.

The Puttalam line runs along the coast north from Colombo, although rail buses run between Chilaw and Puttalam. The Kelani Valley line winds 60km from Colombo to Avissawella.

Trains are often late. For long-distance trains, Sri Lankans sometimes measure the lateness in periods of the day: quarter of a day late, half a day late and so on.

There's a helpful information desk (No 10) at Fort station in Colombo, and also an **information office** (☎ 244 0048; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat), to the right of the main entrance, run by JF Tours. The staff can provide information on timetables and routes. For details of the main trains leaving Colombo and Kandy, see p105 and p187 respectively. Abbreviated timetables for fast trains can also be found at www.science.land.lk/railway/timetb.htm.

Classes

There are three classes on Sri Lankan trains. Third class is dirt cheap and invariably crowded, but with a little luck you'll get a seat on a bench. Second class has padded seats and fans that sometimes work, and it's generally less crowded. There are no 2nd-class sleeping berths, only 'sleeperettes' (fold-down beds in a shared compartment. First class comes in three varieties, all with air-con – coaches, sleeping berths and observation saloons (with large windows) – but is available on relatively few lines.

Costs

As a sample, the intercity express from Kandy to Colombo costs Rs 250 in 1st class or Rs 125 in 2nd class. From Colombo to Anuradhapura, the intercity express costs Rs 520 in 1st class or Rs 290 in 2nd class.

Reservations

You can reserve places in 1st class and on intercity expresses. On four of the daily intercity services between Colombo and Kandy you can also book on 2nd-class sleeperettes.

On weekends and public holidays, it pays to make a booking for 24-seat observation saloons, which only run on the main line, as these carriages often fill up; the booking fee is Rs 50. The best seats to book are Nos 11, 12, 23 and 24, which have full window views. The observation saloon is at the end of the train and jolts around quite a lot.

Reservations can be made at stations up to 10 days before departure. You can book a return ticket up to 14 days before departure.

If travelling more than 80km, you can break your journey at any intermediate station for 24 hours without penalty. However, you must make fresh reservations for seats on the next leg.

Health

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While the potential dangers of travelling in Sri Lanka may seem quite ominous, in reality few travellers experience anything more than an upset stomach. Hygiene is generally poor throughout the country, so food- and water-borne illnesses are common. Travellers tend to worry about contracting infectious diseases, but infections rarely cause serious illness or death in travellers. Pre-existing medical conditions, such as heart disease, and accidental injury (especially traffic accidents) account for most life-threatening problems.

Fortunately most travellers' illnesses can either be prevented with some common-sense behaviour or be treated easily with a well-stocked traveller's medical kit. The following advice is a general guide only and does not replace the advice of a doctor trained in travel medicine.

BEFORE YOU GO

Pack medications in their original, clearly labelled containers. A signed and dated letter from your physician describing your medical conditions and medications, including generic names, is very useful. If carrying syringes or needles be sure to have a physician's

letter documenting their medical necessity. If you have a heart condition bring a copy of your ECG taken just before travelling.

If you take any regular medication bring double your needs in case of loss or theft. You'll be able to buy many medications over the counter in Sri Lanka without a doctor's prescription, but it can be difficult to find some of the newer drugs, particularly the latest antidepressant drugs, blood pressure medications and contraceptive pills.

INSURANCE

Even if you're fit and healthy don't travel without health insurance, as accidents do happen. Declare any existing medical conditions; the insurance company will check if your problem is pre-existing and will not cover you if it is undeclared. You may require extra cover for adventure activities such as rock climbing and scuba diving. If your health insurance doesn't cover you for medical expenses abroad, consider getting extra insurance. If you're uninsured remember that emergency evacuation is expensive; bills of more than US\$100,000 are not uncommon.

Find out in advance if your insurance company will make payments directly to providers or reimburse you later for overseas expenditures. (In many countries, doctors expect payment in cash.) Some policies offer a range of medical-expense options; the higher ones are chiefly for countries that have extremely high medical costs, such as the USA. You may prefer a policy that pays doctors or hospitals directly rather than you having to pay on the spot and claim later. If you have to claim later, make sure you keep all documentation. Some policies ask you to call back (reverse charges) to a centre in your home country where an immediate assessment of your problem is made.

VACCINATIONS

Specialised travel-medicine clinics are your best source of information; they stock all available vaccines and will be able to give specific recommendations for you and your trip. The doctors will take into account factors such as past vaccination history, the

length of your trip, activities you may be undertaking and underlying medical conditions, such as pregnancy.

Most vaccines don't give immunity until at least two weeks after they're given, so visit a doctor four to eight weeks before departure. Ask your doctor for an International Certificate of Vaccination (aka the 'yellow booklet'), which will list all the vaccinations you've received.

Recommended Vaccinations

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends the following vaccinations for travellers to Sri Lanka (as well as being up to date with measles, mumps and rubella vaccinations).

Adult diphtheria & tetanus Single booster recommended if none in the previous 10 years. Side effects include sore arm and fever.

Hepatitis A Provides almost 100% protection for up to a year; a booster after 12 months provides at least another 20 years' protection. Mild side effects, such as headache and sore arm, occur in 5% to 10% of people.

Hepatitis B Now considered routine for most travellers. Given as three shots over six months. A rapid schedule is also available, as is a combined vaccination with Hepatitis A. Side effects are mild and uncommon, usually headache and sore arm. In 95% of people lifetime protection results.

Polio In 2004 polio was still present in Sri Lanka. Only one booster is required as an adult for lifetime protection. Inactivated polio vaccine is safe during pregnancy.

Rabies Three injections in all. A booster after one year will then provide 10 years' protection. Side effects are rare – occasionally headache and sore arm.

Typhoid Recommended for all travellers to Sri Lanka, even if you only visit urban areas. The vaccine offers around 70% protection, lasts for two to three years and comes as a single shot. Tablets are also available; however, the injection is usually recommended as it has fewer side effects. Sore arm and fever may occur.

Varicella If you haven't had chickenpox, discuss this vaccination with your doctor.

Immunisations recommended for long-term travellers (more than one month) or those at special risk:

Japanese B Encephalitis Three injections in all. Booster recommended after two years. Sore arm and headache are the most common side effects. Rarely, an allergic reaction of hives and swelling can occur up to 10 days after any of the three doses.

Meningitis Single injection. There are two types of vaccination: the quadrivalent vaccine gives two to three years' protection; meningitis group C vaccine gives around 10 years'

protection. Recommended for long-term backpackers aged under 25.

Tuberculosis (TB) A complex issue. Adult long-term travellers are usually recommended to have a TB skin test before and after travel, rather than vaccination. Only one vaccine is given in a lifetime.

Required Vaccinations

The only vaccine required by international regulations is yellow fever. Proof of vaccination will only be required if you have visited a country in the yellow-fever zone within the six days before entering Sri Lanka.

MEDICAL CHECKLIST

Recommended items for a personal medical kit:

- antibacterial cream, eg Muciprocin
- antibiotic for skin infections, eg Amoxicillin/Clavulanate or Cephalexin
- antifungal cream, eg Clotrimazole
- antihistamine: there are many options, eg Cetirizine for day and promethazine for night
- anti-inflammatory, eg ibuprofen
- antiseptic, eg Betadine
- antispasmodic for stomach cramps, eg Buscopan
- contraceptive
- decongestant, eg pseudoephedrine
- DEET-based insect repellent
- diarrhoea medication: consider an oral rehydration solution (eg Gastrolyte), diarrhoea 'stopper' (eg Loperamide) and antinausea medication (eg Prochlorperazine); antibiotics for diarrhoea include Norfloxacin or ciprofloxacin, for bacterial diarrhoea Azithromycin, for giardia or amoebic dysentery Tinidazole
- first-aid items, eg scissors, sticking plasters, bandages, gauze, thermometer (but not mercury), sterile needles and syringes, safety pins and tweezers
- indigestion tablets or liquid, eg Quick Eze or Mylanta
- insect repellent to impregnate clothing and mosquito nets, eg permethrin
- iodine tablets (unless you're pregnant or have a thyroid problem) to purify water
- laxative, eg Coloxyl
- migraine medication if you are a sufferer
- painkiller tablets, eg paracetamol
- steroid cream for allergic or itchy rashes, eg 1% to 2% hydrocortisone
- sunscreen and hat

- throat lozenges
- thrush (vaginal yeast infection) treatment, eg Clotrimazole pessaries or Diflucan tablet
- urinary tract infection treatment such as Ural or equivalent, if you're prone to urinary infections

INTERNET RESOURCES

There is a wealth of travel health advice on the Internet. **Lonely Planet** (www.lonelyplanet.com) is a good place to start. Other suggestions: **Centers for Disease Control & Prevention** (CDC; www.cdc.gov) Good general information.

MD Travel Health (www.mdtravelhealth.com) Provides complete travel health recommendations for every country, updated daily.

World Health Organization (WHO; www.who.int/ith/) Its superb book *International Travel & Health* is revised annually and available online.

FURTHER READING

Lonely Planet's handy pocket-sized *Healthy Travel: Asia & India* is packed with useful information. Other recommended references include *Traveller's Health* by Dr Richard Dawood and *Travelling Well* by Dr Deborah Mills – check out the website of **Travelling Well** (www.travellingwell.com.au).

IN TRANSIT

DEEP VEIN THROMBOSIS (DVT)

DVT occurs when blood clots form in the legs during plane flights, chiefly due to prolonged immobility. The longer the flight the greater the risk. Although most blood clots are reabsorbed uneventfully, some may break off and travel through the blood vessels to the lungs where they could cause life-threatening complications.

The chief symptom of DVT is swelling or pain in the foot, ankle, or calf, usually but not always on just one side. When a blood clot travels to the lungs it may cause chest pain and difficulty in breathing. Travellers with any of these symptoms should seek medical attention immediately.

To prevent the development of DVT on long flights you should walk about the cabin, perform isometric compressions of the leg muscles (ie contract the leg muscles while sitting), drink plenty of fluids and avoid alcohol and tobacco.

HEALTH ADVISORIES

It's usually a good idea to consult your government's travel-health website before departure, if one is available:

Australia (www.dfat.gov.au/travel/)

Canada (www.travelhealth.gc.ca)

New Zealand (www.mfat.govt.nz/travel)

South Africa (www.dfa.gov.za/consular/travel_advice.htm)

UK (www.dh.gov.uk/PolicyAndGuidance/HealthAdviceForTravellers/fs/en)

US (www.cdc.gov/travel/)

JET LAG & MOTION SICKNESS

Jet lag is common when crossing more than five time zones; it results in insomnia, fatigue, malaise or nausea. To avoid jet lag drink plenty of (nonalcoholic) fluids and eat light meals. On arrival, seek exposure to natural sunlight and readjust your schedule (for meals, sleep etc) as soon as possible.

Antihistamines, such as dimenhydrinate (Dramamine), promethazine (Phenergan) and meclizine (Antivert, Bonine), are usually the first choice for treating motion sickness. Their main side effect is drowsiness. A herbal alternative is ginger, which works like a charm for some people.

IN SRI LANKA

AVAILABILITY OF HEALTH CARE

Medical care is hugely variable in Sri Lanka. Colombo has some good clinics; they may be more expensive than local medical facilities but they're worth using because a superior standard of care is offered.

Self-treatment may be appropriate if your problem is minor (eg traveller's diarrhoea), if you are carrying the relevant medication and if you cannot attend a recommended clinic. If you think you may have a serious disease, especially malaria, do not waste time; travel to the nearest quality facility to receive attention. It is always better to be assessed by a doctor than to rely on self-treatment.

Before buying medication over the counter always check the use-by date and ensure the packet is sealed. Don't accept items that have been poorly stored (eg lying in a glass cabinet exposed to the sun).

INFECTIOUS DISEASES

Dengue

This mosquito-borne disease is becoming increasingly problematic in the tropical world, especially in the cities. As there is no vaccine it can only be prevented by avoiding mosquito bites. The dengue-carrying mosquito bites both day and night so use insect avoidance measures at all times. Symptoms include high fever, severe headache and body ache (dengue was previously known as 'breakbone fever'). Some people develop a rash and experience diarrhoea. There is no specific treatment – just rest and paracetamol; do not take aspirin because it increases the likelihood of haemorrhaging. See a doctor for diagnosis and monitoring.

Hepatitis A

This food- and water-borne virus infects the liver, causing jaundice (yellow skin and eyes), nausea and lethargy. There is no specific treatment for hepatitis A, as you just need to allow time for the liver to heal. All travellers to Sri Lanka should be vaccinated against hepatitis A.

Hepatitis B

The only sexually transmitted disease that can be prevented by vaccination, hepatitis B is spread by body fluids. The long-term consequences can include liver cancer and cirrhosis.

Hepatitis E

Hepatitis E is transmitted through contaminated food and water. It has similar symptoms to hepatitis A but is far less common. It's a severe problem in pregnant women, and can result in the death of both mother and baby. There is currently no vaccine, and prevention is by following safe eating and drinking guidelines.

HIV

HIV is spread via contaminated body fluids. Avoid unsafe sex, unsterile needles (including in medical facilities), and procedures such as tattooing.

Japanese B Encephalitis

This viral disease is transmitted by mosquitoes and is rare in travellers. Like most mosquito-borne diseases, it is becoming a

more common problem in many countries affected by mosquitoes. Most cases occur in rural areas, and vaccination is recommended for travellers spending more than one month outside of cities. There is no treatment, and a third of infected people will die, while another third will suffer permanent brain damage.

Malaria

Malaria is caused by a parasite transmitted by the bite of an infected mosquito. The most important symptom of malaria is fever, but general symptoms such as headache, diarrhoea, cough or chills may also occur. Diagnosis can only be made by taking a blood sample.

Two strategies should be combined to prevent malaria – mosquito avoidance and antimalarial medications. Most people who catch malaria are taking inadequate or no antimalarial medication.

Travellers are advised to prevent mosquito bites by taking these steps:

- using a DEET-containing insect repellent on exposed skin – wash this off at night, as long as you are sleeping under a mosquito net; natural repellents such as citronella can be effective but must be applied more frequently than products containing DEET;
- sleeping under a mosquito net impregnated with permethrin;
- choosing accommodation with screens and fans (if not air-conditioned);
- impregnating clothing with permethrin in high-risk areas;
- wearing long sleeves and trousers in light colours;
- using mosquito coils;
- spraying your room with insect repellent before going out for your evening meal.

There are a variety of medications available. The effectiveness of the **chloroquine & Paludrine** combination is limited in many parts of South Asia. Common side effects include nausea (40% of people) and mouth ulcers.

The daily tablet **doxycycline** is a broad-spectrum antibiotic that has the added benefit of helping to prevent a variety of diseases including leptospirosis, tick-borne disease and typhus. Potential side effects include photosensitivity (a tendency to

sunburn), thrush (in women), indigestion, heartburn, nausea and interference with the contraceptive pill. More-serious side effects include ulceration of the oesophagus; you can help prevent this by taking your tablet with a meal and a large glass of water, and never lying down within half an hour of taking it. It must be taken for four weeks after leaving the risk area.

Lariam (Mefloquine) has received much bad press, some of it justified, some not. This weekly tablet suits many people. Serious side effects are rare but include depression, anxiety, psychosis and fits. Anyone with a history of depression, anxiety, other psychological disorders or epilepsy should not take Lariam. If you are pregnant you should consult your doctor before taking Lariam. Tablets must be taken for four weeks after leaving the risk area.

The new drug **Malarone** is a combination of Atovaquone and Proguanil. Side effects are uncommon and mild, most commonly nausea and headache. It is the best tablet for scuba divers and for those on short trips to high-risk areas. It must be taken for one week after leaving the risk area.

Rabies

This uniformly fatal disease is spread by the bite or lick of an infected animal, most commonly a dog or monkey. You should seek medical advice immediately after any animal bite, and begin postexposure treatment. Having a pretravel vaccination means that the postbite treatment is very much simplified. If an animal bites you, gently wash the wound with soap and water and apply iodine-based antiseptic. If you are not vaccinated you will need to receive rabies immunoglobulin as soon as possible, and this is almost impossible to obtain in much of Sri Lanka.

Tuberculosis

While TB is rare in travellers, those who have significant contact with the local population (such as medical and aid workers and long-term travellers) should take precautions. Vaccination is usually only given to children under the age of five, but adults at risk are recommended to have pre- and post-travel TB testing. The main symptoms are fever, a cough, weight loss, night sweats and tiredness.

Typhoid

This serious bacterial infection is spread via food and water. It gives a high and slowly progressive fever, and a headache, and it may be accompanied by a dry cough and stomach pain. It is diagnosed by blood tests and treated with antibiotics. Vaccination is recommended for all travellers spending more than a week in Sri Lanka. Be aware that vaccination is not 100% effective, so you must still be careful with what you eat and drink.

TRAVELLER'S DIARRHOEA

Traveller's diarrhoea is usually caused by a bacteria (there are numerous potential culprits), and therefore responds promptly to antibiotic treatment. Treatment with antibiotics will depend on your situation – how sick you are, how quickly you need to get better, where you are etc.

Traveller's diarrhoea is defined as the passage of more than three watery bowel actions within 24 hours, plus at least one other symptom, such as fever, cramps, nausea, vomiting or feeling generally unwell.

Treatment consists of staying well hydrated; rehydration solutions like Gastrolyte are the best for this. Antibiotics, such as Norfloxacin, Ciprofloxacin or Azithromycin, will kill the bacteria quickly.

Loperamide is just a 'stopper' and doesn't get to the cause of the problem, though it can be helpful (eg if you have to go on a long bus ride). Don't take Loperamide if you have a fever, or blood in your stools. Seek medical attention quickly if you do not respond to an appropriate antibiotic.

ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS

Diving & Surfing

Divers and surfers should seek specialised advice before travelling to ensure their medical kit contains treatment for coral cuts and tropical ear infections, as well as the standard problems. Divers should make sure their insurance covers decompression illness; consider getting specialised dive insurance through an organisation such as **Divers Alert Network** (DAN; www.danseap.org).

Food

Eating in restaurants is the biggest risk for contracting traveller's diarrhoea. Ways to avoid it include eating only freshly cooked

DRINKING WATER

- Never drink tap water.
- Bottled water is generally safe – check the seal is intact at purchase.
- Avoid ice.
- Avoid fresh juices – they may have been watered down.
- Boiling water is the most efficient method of purifying it.
- The best chemical purifier is iodine – it should not be used by pregnant women or those with thyroid problems.
- Water filters should also filter out viruses – ensure your filter has a chemical barrier, such as iodine, and a small pore size, eg less than four microns.

food, and avoiding shellfish and food that has been sitting in buffets. Peel all fruit, cook vegetables, and soak salads in iodine water for at least 20 minutes. Eat in busy restaurants that have a high turnover of customers.

Heat

Much of Sri Lanka is hot year-round. Avoid dehydration and excessive activity in the heat. Take it easy when you first arrive. Don't eat salt tablets (they aggravate the gut); drinking rehydration solution or eating salty food helps.

Dehydration is the main contributor to heat exhaustion. Symptoms include weakness, headache, irritability, nausea, sweaty skin, a fast, weak pulse, and a normal or slightly elevated body temperature. Treatment involves getting out of the heat and sun, fanning the sufferer and applying cool wet cloths to the skin, laying the sufferer flat with their legs raised and rehydrating with water containing a ¼-teaspoon of salt per litre. Recovery is usually rapid but it is common to feel weak for some days afterwards.

Heatstroke is a serious medical emergency. Symptoms come on suddenly and include weakness, nausea, a hot dry body with a body temperature of over 41°C, dizziness, confusion, loss of coordination, fits and eventually collapse and loss of consciousness. Seek medical help and start

cooling by getting the person out of the heat, removing their clothes, fanning them, and applying cool wet cloths or ice to their body, especially to the groin and armpits.

Prickly heat is a common skin rash in the tropics, caused by sweat being trapped under the skin. The result is an itchy rash of tiny lumps. Treat it by moving out of the heat and into an air-conditioned area for a few hours and by having cool showers. Creams and ointments clog the skin so they should be avoided. Locally bought prickly heat powder can be helpful.

Insect Bites & Stings

Bedbugs don't carry disease but their bites are very itchy. They live in the cracks of furniture and walls, and then migrate to the bed at night to feed on you. You can treat the itch with an antihistamine.

Lice inhabit various parts of your body but most commonly your head and pubic area.

Ticks are contracted after walking in rural areas and are commonly found behind the ears, on the belly and in armpits. If you have had a tick bite and experience symptoms, such as a rash at the site of the bite or elsewhere, fever or muscle aches, you should see a doctor. The antimalarial drug doxycycline prevents tick-borne diseases.

Leeches are found in humid rainforest areas. They do not transmit any disease but their bites are often intensely itchy for weeks afterwards and can easily become infected. Apply an iodine-based antiseptic to any leech bite to help prevent infection.

Bee and wasp stings mainly cause problems for people who are allergic to them. Anyone with a serious bee or wasp allergy should carry an adrenaline injection (eg an EpiPen) for emergency treatment.

Skin Problems

Fungal rashes are common in humid climates. There are two fungal rashes that affect travellers. The first occurs in moist areas of the body that get less air, such as the groin, armpits and between the toes. It starts as a red patch that slowly spreads and is usually itchy. Treatment involves keeping the skin dry, avoiding chafing and using an antifungal cream, such as Clotrimazole or Lamisil.

Cuts and scratches become easily infected in humid climates. Take meticulous care of

any cuts and scratches to prevent complications such as abscesses. Immediately wash all wounds in clean water and apply antiseptic.

Snakes

There are five species of venomous snakes in Sri Lanka, and it is relatively common to spot them, especially in the dry zone area around Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa. Be careful when wandering around the ancient ruins. Snake bites do not cause instantaneous death, and antivenins are usually available. Wrap the bitten limb tightly, as you would for a sprained ankle, and then attach a splint to immobilise it. Keep the victim still and seek medical help, if possible with the dead snake for identification.

Sunburn

Even on a cloudy day sunburn can occur rapidly. Always use a strong sunscreen (at least factor 30), making sure to reapply after a swim, and always wear a wide-brimmed hat and sunglasses outdoors. Avoid lying in the sun during the hottest part of the day (10am to 2pm).

WOMEN'S HEALTH

Pregnant women should receive specialised advice before travelling. The ideal time to travel is in the second trimester (between 16 and 28 weeks), when the risk of pregnancy-related problems is at its lowest. Always carry a list of quality medical facilities available at your destination and ensure you continue your standard antenatal care at these facilities. Avoid rural travel in areas with poor transportation and medical facilities. Most of all, ensure travel insurance covers all pregnancy-related issues, including premature labour.

Malaria is a high-risk disease during pregnancy. WHO recommends that pregnant women do *not* travel to areas with malaria that is chloroquine resistant. None of the more effective antimalarial drugs are completely safe in pregnancy.

Traveller's diarrhoea can quickly lead to dehydration and result in inadequate blood flow to the placenta. Many of the drugs used to treat various diarrhoea bugs are not recommended in pregnancy. Azithromycin is considered safe.

Language

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Sinhala and Tamil are both national languages, with English commonly described as a linking language. It's easy to get by in Sri Lanka with English, and the Sri Lankan variety has its own unique characteristics – 'You are having a problem, isn't it, no?' While English may be widely spoken in the main centres, off the beaten track its spread thins. In any case, even a few words of Sinhala or Tamil will win you smiles. People really appreciate the effort when they meet foreigners willing to greet them in their own language.

SRI LANKAN ENGLISH

Like every other country where English is spoken, Sri Lanka has its own peculiar versions of some words and phrases. Life can be a bit confusing if you don't have a grasp of some of the essentials of Sri Lankan English, so we've included a few examples here.

Greetings & Questions

Go and come – farewell greeting, similar to 'see you later'; not taken literally

How? – How are you?

Nothing to do – Can't do anything

What to do? – What can be done about it?; more of a rhetorical question

What country? – Where are you from?

People

batchmate – university classmate

baby/bubba – term used for any child up to about adolescence

to gift – to give a gift

paining – hurting

peon – office helper

uncle/auntie – term of respect for elder

Getting Around

backside – part of the building away from the street

bajaj – three-wheeler

bus halt – bus stop

coloured lights – traffic lights

down south – the areas south of Colombo, especially coastal areas

dropping – being dropped off at a place by a car

get down (from bus/train/three-wheeler) – to alight

hotel – a small, cheap restaurant that doesn't offer accommodation

normal bus – not a private bus

outstation – place beyond a person's home area

petrol shed – petrol/gas station

pick-up (noun) – 4WD utility vehicle

seaside/landside – indicates locations, usually in relation to Galle Rd

two-wheeler – motorcycle

up and down – return trip

up country/Hill Country – Kandy and beyond, tea plantation areas

vehicle – car

Food

bite – snack usually eaten with alcoholic drinks

boutique – a small, hole-in-the-wall shop, usually selling small, inexpensive items

cool spot – traditional, small shop that sells cool drinks and snacks

lunch packet/rice packet – portion of rice and curry wrapped in plastic and newspaper and taken to office or school for lunch

short eats – snack food

Money

buck – rupee

purse – wallet

last price – final price when bargaining

SINHALA

Sinhala is somewhat simplified by the use of many *eka* words. *Eka* is used more or less similarly to the English definite article 'the' and *ekak* is used like 'a' or 'any'. English words for which there is no Sinhala equivalent have often been incorporated into Sinhala with the simple addition of *eka* or *ekak*. So, if you're in search of a telephone it's simply *telefon ekak* but if it is a specific telephone then you should say *telefon eka*. Similarly, English definitions of people have been included in Sinhala simply by adding *kenek* – if you hire a car the driver is the *draiwar kenek*.

Two useful little Sinhala words are *da* and *ge*. *Da* turns a statement into a question – thus if *nohna* means a lady then *nohna-da* means 'This lady?' or 'Is this the lady?' The suffix *ge* is the Sinhala equivalent of an apostrophe indicating possession; thus 'Tony's book' in Sinhala is *Tony-ge potha*. *Ta* is like the English preposition 'to' – if you want to go 'to the beach' it's *valla-ta*.

As in many other Asian countries, Sri Lankans do not use the multitude of greetings that you find in English ('Hello', 'Good morning', 'How are you?', 'Goodbye'). Saying *aayu-bowan* more or less covers them all. Similarly, there isn't really a Sinhala word for 'Thank you'. You could try *istuh-tee* but it's a bit stiff and formal – a simple smile will often suffice. Appreciation of a meal can be expressed by *bohoma rahay*, which is both a compliment and an expression of appreciation. *Hari sho-ke* translates as 'wonderful', 'terrific' or even 'fine'. A side-to-side wiggle of the head often means 'yes' or 'OK'.

For a more comprehensive guide to the language, pick up a copy of Lonely Planet's *Sinhala Phrasebook*.

FORMS OF ADDRESS

In Sinhala there are more than 20 ways to say 'you' depending on the person's age, social status, sex, position and even how well you know them. The best solution is to simply avoid saying 'you'. The word for Mr is *mahaththeya* – 'Mr Jayewardene' is *Jayewardene mahaththeya*. The word for 'Mrs' is *nohna* and it also comes after the person's name. Any non-Eastern foreigner is defined

as white (*sudha*), so a male foreigner is a *sudha mahaththeya*.

Sinhala is officially written using a cursive script and there are about 50 letters in the alphabet.

PRONUNCIATION

The transliteration system used in this guide to represent the sounds of Sinhala uses the closest English equivalents – they are approximations only. Listening to Sri Lankans is the best way to learn Sinhala pronunciation.

When consonants are doubled they should be pronounced very distinctly, almost as two separate sounds belonging to two separate words. The letters **t** and **d** are pronounced less forcefully than in English, and **g** is pronounced as in 'go', not as in 'rage'. The letter **r** is more like a flap of the tongue against the roof of the mouth – it's not pronounced as an American 'r'.

Vowels

a	as the 'u' in 'cup'; aa is pronounced more like the 'a' in 'father'
e	as in 'met'
i	as in 'bit'
o	as in 'hot'
u	as in 'put', not as in 'hut'

Vowel Combinations

ai	as the word 'eye'
au	as the 'ow' in 'how'

Consonants

dh	one sound, as the 'th' in 'then' (not as in 'thin')
g	as in 'go'
r	a flap of the tongue against the roof of the mouth – not pronounced as an American 'r'
th	one sound, as in 'thin'

ACCOMMODATION

Do you have any rooms available?	<i>kaamara thiyanaawada?</i>
for one person	<i>ek-kenek pamanai</i>
for two people	<i>den-nek pamanai</i>
for one night	<i>ek rayak pamanai</i>
for two nights	<i>raya dekek pamanai</i>
How much is it per night?	<i>ek ra-yakata kiyada</i>
How much is it per person?	<i>ek kenek-kuta kiyada</i>

Is breakfast included?	<i>udeh keh-emath ekkada?</i>
hotel	<i>hotel eka</i>
guesthouse	<i>gesthaus eka</i>
youth hostel	<i>yut-hostel eka</i>
camping ground	<i>kamping ground eka</i>

CONVERSATION & ESSENTIALS

Hello.	<i>aayu-bowan/hello</i>
Goodbye.	<i>aayu-bowan</i>
Yes.	<i>owu</i>
No.	<i>naha</i>
Please.	<i>karuna kara</i>
Thank you.	<i>istuh-tee</i>
Excuse me.	<i>samah venna</i>
Sorry/Pardon.	<i>kana gaatui</i>
Do you speak English?	<i>oyaa in-ghirish kata karenawa da?</i>
How much is it?	<i>ehokka keeyada?</i>
What's your name?	<i>oyaaaghe nama mokka'da?</i>
My name is ...	<i>maaghe nama ...</i>

EMERGENCIES – SINHALA

Help!	<i>aaenyl/aaeeyoh!/ammoh!</i>
Call a doctor!	<i>dostara gen-nanna!</i>
Call the police!	<i>polisiyata kiyanna!</i>
Leave me alone!	<i>mata maghe paduweh inna arinna!</i>
Go away!	<i>methanin yanna!</i>
I'm lost.	<i>maa-meh nativela</i>

NUMBERS

0	<i>binduwa</i>
1	<i>eka</i>
2	<i>deka</i>
3	<i>thuna</i>
4	<i>hathara</i>
5	<i>paha</i>
6	<i>haya</i>
7	<i>hatha</i>
8	<i>atta</i>
9	<i>navaya</i>
10	<i>dahaya</i>
100	<i>seeya</i>
200	<i>deh seeya</i>
1000	<i>daaha</i>
2000	<i>deh daaha</i>
100,000	<i>lakshaya</i>
1,000,000	<i>daseh lakshaya</i>
10,000,000	<i>kotiya</i>

SHOPPING & SERVICES

bank	<i>bankuwa</i>
chemist/pharmacy	<i>faahmisiya</i>

SIGNS – SINHALA

Entrance	<i>ඇතුල්වීම</i>
Exit	<i>පිටාවීම</i>
Information	<i>තොරතුරු දැක්වීම</i>
Open	<i>විවෘතව ඇත.</i>
Closed	<i>වසා ඇත.</i>
Prohibited	<i>නෂ්ටවීම වැළැක්වීම.</i>
Police Station	<i>පොලීස් ස්ථානය</i>
Rooms Available	<i>කාමර ඇත.</i>
No Vacancies	<i>කාමර නැත.</i>
Toilets	<i>වැසිකිළි</i>
Men	<i>පුරුෂ</i>
Women	<i>ස්ත්‍රී</i>

... embassy	<i>... embasiya</i>
my hotel	<i>mang inna hotalaya</i>
market	<i>maakata eka</i>
newsagency	<i>pattara ejensiya</i>
post office	<i>tepal kantohruwa</i>
public telephone	<i>podu dura katanayak</i>
stationers	<i>lipi dravya velendoh</i>
tourist office	<i>sanchaaraka toraturu karyaalayak</i>
big	<i>loku</i>
small	<i>podu, punchi</i>
medicine	<i>behe-yat</i>

What time does it open/close?
ehika kiyatada arinneh/vahanneh?

TIME & DAYS

What time is it?	<i>velaave keeyada?</i>
day	<i>davasa</i>
night	<i>raah</i>
week	<i>sumasayanak</i>
month	<i>maasayak</i>
year	<i>avuuruudeh</i>
today	<i>ada (utther)</i>
tomorrow	<i>heta</i>
yesterday	<i>ee-yeh</i>
morning	<i>udai</i>
afternoon	<i>havasa</i>

Monday	<i>sandu-da</i>
Tuesday	<i>angaharuwaa-da</i>
Wednesday	<i>badaa-da</i>
Thursday	<i>braha-spetin-da</i>
Friday	<i>sikuraa-da</i>
Saturday	<i>senasuraa-da</i>
Sunday	<i>iri-da</i>

TRANSPORT

When does does the next ... leave/arrive?

<i>meelanga ... pitaht venne/paminenne?</i>	
boat	<i>bohtuwa</i>
bus (city)	<i>bus eka</i>
bus (intercity)	<i>bus eka (nagaraantara)</i>
train	<i>koh-chiya</i>
plane	<i>plane eka</i>

I want to get off.

mama methana bahinawa

I'd like a one-way ticket.

mata tani gaman tikat ekak ganna ohna

I'd like a return ticket.

mata yaam-eem tikat ekak ganna ohna

1st class	<i>palamu veni paantiya</i>
2nd class	<i>deveni paantiya</i>
3rd class	<i>tunveni paantiya</i>
timetable	<i>kaala satahana</i>
bus stop	<i>bus nevatuma/bus hohit eka</i>
train station	<i>dumriya pala</i>
ferry terminal	<i>totu pala</i>

I'd like to hire ...

<i>mata ... ekak bad-dhata ganna ohna</i>	
a car	<i>kar (eka)</i>
a bicycle	<i>baisikeleya</i>

Directions

Where is (a/the) ...?	<i>... koheda?</i>
Go straight ahead.	<i>kelinma issarahata yaanna</i>
Turn left.	<i>wamata hareenna</i>
Turn right.	<i>dakunata hareenna</i>
near	<i>lan-ghai</i>
far	<i>durai</i>

TAMIL

The vocabulary of Sri Lankan Tamil is much the same as that of South India – as the written form is identical, using the traditional cur-sive script – but there are marked differences in pronunciation between speakers from the two regions. The transliteration

system used in this guide is intended to represent the sounds of Sri Lankan Tamil using the Roman alphabet – as with all such systems it is an approximate guide only. The best way to improve your pronunciation is to listen to the way Sri Lankans themselves speak the language.

PRONUNCIATION

Vowels

a	as the 'u' in 'cup'; aa is pronounced as the 'a' in 'father'
e	as in 'met'
i	as in 'bit'
o	as in 'hot'
u	as in 'put'

Vowel Combinations

ai	as in 'eye'
au	as in 'how'

Consonants

Most consonants are fairly similar to their English counterparts. The following are a few that may cause confusion:

dh	one sound, as the 'th' in 'then' (not as in 'thin')
g	as in 'go'
r	a flap of the tongue against the roof of the mouth – not pronounced as an American 'r'
s	as in 'sit'
th	one sound, as in 'thin'

ACCOMMODATION

Do you have any rooms available?

ingu room kideikkumaa?

for one/two people

oruvurukku/iruvurukku

for one/two nights

oru/irandu iravukku

How much is it per night/per person?

oru iravukku/oru aalukku evalavur?

Is breakfast included?

kaalei unavum sehrtha?

hotel	<i>hotehl</i>
guesthouse	<i>virun-dhinar vidhudheh</i>
youth hostel	<i>ilainar vidhudheh</i>
camping ground	<i>mukhaamidum idahm</i>

CONVERSATION & ESSENTIALS

Hello.	<i>vanakkam</i>
Goodbye.	<i>poytu varukireh</i>

Yes.	<i>aam</i>
No.	<i>il-lay</i>
Please.	<i>tayavu saydhu</i>
Thank you.	<i>nandri</i>
That's fine, you're welcome.	<i>nalladu varukha</i>
Excuse me.	<i>mannikavum</i>
Sorry/Pardon.	<i>mannikavum</i>
Do you speak English?	<i>nin-gal aangilam paysu-virhalaa?</i>
How much is it?	<i>adhu evvalavu?</i>
What's your name?	<i>ungal peyr en-na?</i>
My name is ...	<i>en peyr ...</i>

EMERGENCIES – TAMIL

Help!	<i>udavil!</i>
Call a doctor!	<i>daktarai kuppudunga!</i>
Call the police!	<i>polisai kuppudunga!</i>
Leave me alone!	<i>enna taniyaahu</i>
	<i>irukkavidunga!</i>
Go away!	<i>pohn-gohl/poi-vidu!</i>
I'm lost.	<i>naan vali tavari-vittehn</i>

NUMBERS

0	<i>saifer</i>
1	<i>ondru</i>
2	<i>iranduh</i>
3	<i>muundruh</i>
4	<i>naan-guh</i>
5	<i>ainduh</i>
6	<i>aaruh</i>
7	<i>ealluh</i>
8	<i>ettu</i>
9	<i>onbaduh</i>
10	<i>pat-tuh</i>
100	<i>nooruh</i>
1000	<i>aayirem</i>
2000	<i>irandaayirem</i>
100,000	<i>oru latcham</i>
1,000,000	<i>pattuh lat-chem</i>
10,000,000	<i>kohdee</i>

SHOPPING & SERVICES

bank	<i>vanghee</i>
chemist/pharmacy	<i>marunduh kadhai/pharmacy</i>
... embassy	<i>... tudharalayem</i>
my hotel	<i>enadu hotehl</i>
market	<i>maarket</i>
newsagency	<i>niyuz paper vitku-midam</i>
post office	<i>tafaal nilayem</i>
public telephone	<i>podhu tolai-pessee</i>
stationers	<i>eludhuporul vitku-midam</i>
tourist office	<i>toorist nilayem</i>

SIGNS – TAMIL

Entrance	<i>vahli ullay</i>	வழி உள்ளே
Exit	<i>vahli veliyeh</i>	வழி வெளியே
Information	<i>tahavvel</i>	தகவல்
Open	<i>thirandul-ladhu</i>	திறந்துள்ளது
Closed	<i>adek-kappattulladhu</i>	அடைக்கப்பட்டுள்ளது
Prohibited	<i>anumadee-illay</i>	அனுமதி இல்லை
Police Station	<i>kaav'l nilayem</i>	காவல் நிலையம்
Rooms Available	<i>arekahl undu</i>	அறைகள் உண்டு
Full, No Vacancies	<i>illay, kaali illay</i>	நிரம்பியுள்ளது, காலி இல்லை
Toilets	<i>kahlippadem</i>	மலசலகூடம்
Men	<i>aan</i>	ஆண்கள்
Women	<i>pen</i>	பெண்கள்

big	<i>periyeh</i>
small	<i>siriyeh</i>
medicine	<i>marunduh</i>

What time does it open/close?

et-thana manikka tirakhum/mudhum?

TIME & DAYS

What time is it?	<i>mani eth-tanai?</i>
day	<i>pahel</i>
night	<i>iravu</i>
week	<i>vaarem</i>
month	<i>maadheme</i>
year	<i>varudem</i>
today	<i>indru</i>
tomorrow	<i>naalay</i>
yesterday	<i>neh-truh</i>
morning	<i>kaalai</i>
afternoon	<i>pit-pahel</i>

Monday	<i>tin-gal</i>
Tuesday	<i>sevaay</i>

Wednesday	<i>budahn</i>
Thursday	<i>viyaalin</i>
Friday	<i>vellee</i>
Saturday	<i>san-nee</i>
Sunday	<i>naayiru</i>

TRANSPORT

What time does the next ... leave/arrive?

eththanai manikku aduththa ... sellum/varum?

boat	<i>padakhu/boat</i>
bus (city)	<i>baas (naharam/ul-loor)</i>
bus (intercity)	<i>baas (veliyoor)</i>
train	<i>rayill</i>

I want to get off.

naan iranga vendum

I'd like a one-way ticket.

enakku oru vahly tikket veynum

I'd like a return ticket.

enakku iru vahlay tikket veynum

1st class	<i>mudalahaam vahuppu</i>
2nd class	<i>irandaam vahuppu</i>
luggage lockers	<i>porul vaikku-midam</i>
timetable	<i>haala attavanay</i>
bus/trolley stop	<i>baas nilayem</i>
train station	<i>rayill nilayem</i>

I'd like to hire ...

enakku ... vaadakaikka vaynum

a car	<i>car</i>
a bicycle	<i>sai-kul</i>

Directions

Where is it? *adhu en-ghe irukkaradhu?*

Where is a/the ...? *... en-ghe?*

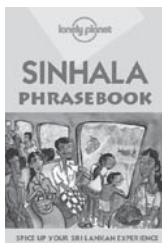
Go straight ahead. *neraha sellavum*

Turn left. *valadhur pakkam tirumbavum*

Turn right. *itadhu pakkam thirumbavum*

near *aruhil*

far *tu-rahm*



Also available from Lonely Planet:
Sinhala Phrasebook

Glossary

ambalama – wayside shelter for pilgrims
Aurudu – Sinhalese and Tamil New Year, celebrated on 14 April
Avalokitesvara – the *Bodhisattva* of compassion
Ayurveda – traditional system of medicine that uses herbs and oils to heal and rejuvenate

bailas – folk tunes (often love songs) based on Portuguese, African and local music styles
baobab – water-storing tree (*Adansonia digitata*), probably introduced to Mannar Island and the Vanni in northern Sri Lanka by Arab traders
bed tea – early morning cuppa served to you in bed
bodhi tree – large spreading tree (*Ficus religiosa*); the tree under which the Buddha sat when he attained enlightenment, and the many descendants grown from cuttings of this tree

Bodhisattva – divine being who, although capable of attaining *nirvana*, chooses to reside on the human plane to help ordinary people attain salvation
boutique – naturalised Portuguese word for a street stall or small shop
Brahmi – early Indian script used from the 5th century BC
bund – built-up bank or dyke surrounding a *tank*
Burgher – Sri Lankan Eurasian, generally descended from Portuguese-Sinhalese or Dutch-Sinhalese intermarriage

cadjan – coconut fronds woven into mats and used as building material
Ceylon – British-colonial name for Sri Lanka
chetiya – Buddhist shrine
Chola – powerful ancient South Indian kingdom that invaded Sri Lanka on several occasions
coir – mat or rope made from coconut fibres
copra – dried coconut kernel used to make cooking oil and also exported for use in the manufacture of confectionery
crore – 10 million of anything, but most often rupees
CTB – Central (formerly Ceylon) Transport Board, the state bus network
Culavamsa – ‘Minor Chronicle’, which continues the history commenced in the *Mahavamsa* up to 1758

dagoba – Buddhist monument composed of a solid hemisphere containing relics of the Buddha or a Buddhist saint; a *stupa*
devale – complex designed for worshipping a Hindu or Sri Lankan deity; the deities are also faithful servants of the Buddha
dharma – the word used by both Hindus and Buddhists to refer to their respective moral codes of behaviour

eelam – Tamil word for precious land
EPDP – Eelam People’s Democratic Party

gala – rock
ganga – river
gedige – hollow temple with extremely thick walls and a corbelled roof
geta bera – Kandyan double-ended drum
gopuram – soaring pyramidal gateway of a Hindu temple; part of a style of architecture found principally in South India
guardstones – carved ornamental stones that flank doorways or entrances to temples
gurulu – legendary bird that preys on snakes, used as an image in carved *raksha* masks

Hanuman – the monkey king from the *Ramayana*

illama – a gravel-bearing stratum likely to hold gemstones
IPKF – Indian Peace Keeping Force; the Indian Army contingent present in northern Sri Lanka from 1987 to 1990

Jataka – stories of the previous lives of the Buddha
juggernaut – huge, extravagantly decorated temple cart dragged through the streets during Hindu festivals (sometimes called a ‘car’)
JVP – Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (People’s Liberation Army); a Sinhalese Marxist revolutionary organisation that rose up in 1971 and again in the late 1980s

kachcheri – administrative office
kadé – Sinhalese word for *boutique*
Karava – fisherfolk of Indian descent
karma – Hindu-Buddhist principle of retributive justice for past deeds
Kataragama – see *Murugan*
kiri bath – dessert of rice cooked in coconut milk; it also has ritual significance
kolam – meaning costume or guise, it refers to masked dance-drama; also the rice-flour designs that adorn thresholds of buildings in Tamil areas
kovil – Hindu temple; most Sri Lankan *kovils* are dedicated to the worship of Shiva
kulam – Tamil word for *tank*

lakh – 100,000; a standard unit of measurement in Sri Lanka and India
lingam – phallic symbol; symbol of Shiva
LTTE – Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, also known as the Tamil Tigers; separatist group fighting for an independent Tamil Eelam in the north and east

Maha – northeast monsoon season

Mahavamsa – ‘Great Chronicle’, a written Sinhalese history running from the arrival of Prince Vijaya from India in the 6th century BC, through the meeting of King Devanampiyatissa with *Mahinda*, and on to the great kings of Anuradhapura

Mahaweli Ganga – Sri Lanka’s longest river, which starts in the Hill Country near Adam’s Peak, flows through Kandy and eventually reaches the sea near Trincomalee

Mahayana – later form of Buddhism prevalent in Korea, Japan and China, which literally means ‘greater vehicle’. It emphasises the *Bodhisattva* ideal, which teaches the renunciation of *nirvana* to help other beings to reach enlightenment

Mahinda – son of the Indian Buddhist emperor Ashoka, credited with introducing Buddhism to Sri Lanka

mahout – elephant rider or master

Maitreya – future Buddha

makara – mythical beast that is a cross between a lion, a pig and an elephant, commonly carved in the balustrade of temple staircases

makara torana – ornamental archway

mandapaya – a raised platform with decorative pillars

masala – mix (often spices)

mawatha – avenue or street; abbreviated to ‘Mw’

moonstone – semiprecious stone; also a carved stone ‘doorstep’ at temple entrances

mudra – symbolic hand position of a Buddha image

Murugan – Hindu god of war; also known as *Skanda* and *Kataragama*

naga – snake; also applies to snake deities and spirits

naga raksha – *raksha* mask featuring a ‘coiffure’ of writhing cobras

nirvana – ultimate aim of Buddhists, final release from the cycle of existence

nuwara – city

ola – leaves of the talipot palm; used in manuscripts and traditional books

oruva – outrigger canoe

oya – stream or small river

PA – People’s Alliance; a coalition including the *SLFP* founded in 1994

paddy – unhusked rice; field where rice is grown

Pali – the language in which the Buddhist scriptures were originally recorded

palmyra – tall palm tree found in the dry northern region

perahera – procession, usually with dancers, drummers and elephants

pirivena – centre of learning attached to monastery

pokuna – artificial pond

poya – full-moon day; every *poya* is a holiday

puja – ‘respect’, offering or prayers

rajakariya – ‘workers for the king’, the tradition of feudal service

raksha – type of mask used in parades and festivals

Rakshasas – legendary rulers of Sri Lanka, who could also assume the form of demons; led by *Rawana*

Ramayana – ancient story of Rama and Sita and their conflict with *Rawana*

Rawana – ‘demon king of Lanka’ who abducts Rama’s beautiful wife Sita in the Hindu epic the *Ramayana*

relic chamber – chamber in a *dagoba* housing a relic of the Buddha or a saint and representing the Buddhist concept of the cosmos

Ruhunu – ancient southern centre of Sinhalese power near Tissamaharama that survived even when Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa fell to Indian invaders; also spelt Ruhuna

samudra – large *tank* or inland sea

Sangamitta – sister of *Mahinda*; she brought the sacred bodhi tree sapling from Bodhgaya in India

sanni – devil-dance mask

Sangha – the community of Buddhist monks; in Sri Lanka, an influential group divided into several *Nikayas* (orders)

Sanskrit – ancient Indian language, the oldest known member of the family of Indo-European languages

sari – traditional garment worn by women

school pen – ballpoint pen, often requested (or demanded!) from tourists by Sri Lankan children

sikhara – dome- or pyramid-shaped structure rising above the shrine room of a Hindu *kovil*

sinha – lion

Sinhala – language of the Sinhalese people

Sinhalese – majority population of Sri Lanka; principally Sinhala-speaking Buddhists

Skanda – see *Murugan*

SLFP – Sri Lanka Freedom Party

stupa – see *dagoba*

Tamils – a people of South Indian origin, comprising the largest minority population in Sri Lanka; principally Tamil-speaking Hindus

tank – artificial water-storage lake or reservoir; many of the tanks in Sri Lanka are very large and ancient

Theravada – orthodox form of Buddhism practised in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia, which is characterised by its adherence to the *Pali* canon

unavakam – Tamil word for *boutique*

UNP – United National Party; the first political party to hold power in Sri Lanka after independence

vahalkada – solid panel of sculpture

vatadage – circular relic house consisting of a small central *dagoba* flanked by Buddha images and encircled by columns

Vedas – Hindu sacred books; a collection of sacred hymns composed in preclassical Sanskrit during the 2nd millennium BC and divided into four books: Rig-Veda, Yajur-Veda, Sama-Veda and Atharva-Veda

Veddahs – original inhabitants of Sri Lanka prior to the arrival of the Sinhalese from India; also called the *Wanniyala-aetto*

vel – trident; the god *Murugan* is often depicted carrying a *vel*

vihara, viharaya – Buddhist complex, including a shrine containing a statue of the Buddha, a congregational hall and a monks’ house

Wanniyala-aetto – see *Veddahs*

wewa – see *tank*

yak bera – double-ended drum used in the South

Yala – southwest monsoon season

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