

Getting Started

While Sri Lanka is arguably the easiest place in which to travel in all of South Asia, a little advance knowledge and planning will go a long way towards making your trip more fulfilling, hassle-free and fun.

For the most part you'll find that larger towns – and even smaller towns with a highly developed tourism infrastructure – cater to all travel budgets. In places more off the beaten track, especially those in the Hill Country and in the North, luxury accommodation and high-standard dining are relatively hard to find, but the offerings are usually sufficient for all but the most finicky travellers.

The 12 August 2005 assassination of then foreign minister Lakshman Kadirgamar by a suspected Tiger sniper heightened political tensions and security concerns, and violence again broke out in April 2006. Added caution may therefore be needed when travelling in the North and North-east; check the situation before leaving.

WHEN TO GO

Climatically speaking, the driest (and best) seasons in Sri Lanka are from December to March for the west coast, the south coast and the Hill Country, and from April to September for the ancient cities region and the east coast.

December through March are also the months when most foreign tourists visit, the majority of them escaping the European winter. During the Christmas to New Year holiday season, in particular, accommodation anywhere on the island can be tight due to the huge influx of foreign visitors.

July/August is the time of the Kandy Esala Perahera, the 10-day festival honouring the sacred tooth relic of the Buddha, and also the time for the Kataragama festival in the South. In both towns accommodation just before, during and immediately after the festivals is very difficult to come by, and rates usually double or treble. Be sure to book rooms well in advance.

Sri Lanka's climate means that it is always the 'right' beach season somewhere on the coast. The weather doesn't follow strict rules, though – it often seems to be raining where it should be sunny, and sunny where it should be raining. Rainfall tends to be emphatic – streets can become flooded in what seems like only minutes.

Out-of-season travel has its advantages – not only do the crowds go away but many air fares and accommodation prices drop right down. Nor does it rain *all* the time during the low season.

See Climate Charts (p322) for more information.

DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

- Packing a light suitcase – clothes can be readily bought in Colombo, Galle and Kandy.
- Bringing along a windbreaker, parka or jumper for cool nights in the Hill Country.
- Checking with a Sri Lankan embassy or consulate to see whether you need a visa (p333).
- Confirming what medicines or inoculations you need (p344).
- Checking government travel advisories for general security issues (p323).
- Building up your chilli tolerance.

TOP FIVES**Our Favourite Festivals**

Virtually every week of the calendar there's a festival somewhere in Sri Lanka. The following list is our pick of the ones worth seeking out, but see p326 and throughout the book for other festivities and events.

- Navam Perahera, Colombo, February (p93)
- Vesak Poya, throughout Sri Lanka, May (p326)
- Kandy Esala Perahera, Kandy, July/August (p167)
- Kataragama, Kataragama, July/August (p159)
- Vel, Colombo and Jaffna, July/August (p93 and p327)

Best National Parks

With over a dozen national parks and forest reserves in Sri Lanka, you could spend months exploring them all. To help you prioritise, here's our list of favourites based on accessibility, scenic beauty and presence of wildlife.

- Yala National Park (p156)
- Sinharaja Forest Reserve (p221)
- Uda Walawe National Park (p220)
- Wilpattu National Park (p109)
- Minneriya National Park (p245)

Lie-Back-&-Relax Beaches

Sri Lanka's east, south and lower west coasts are lined with bays, coves and beaches. Most structures along these coastlines experienced at least some damage during the 2004 tsunami, and many buildings were completely destroyed. The beaches themselves suffered least of all, although some are still being cleaned of rubble. Here are our favourite sand-and-sea getaways.

- Kalkudah Bay Beach (p284)
- Mirissa (p144)
- Nilaveli (p292)
- Induruwa (p118)
- Unawatuna (p138)

Hill Country Scenery

Sri Lanka's Hill Country covers a huge chunk of the island and almost all of it could be classed as 'scenic'. For truly dramatic views, however, these are the top five.

- Adam's Peak (p194)
- Knuckles Range (p194)
- Ella (p213)
- Haputale (p208)
- Horton Plains National Park (p205)

COSTS & MONEY

Sri Lanka is more expensive than South Asia or India, but costs are still reasonable. Double rooms with bathroom, mosquito net and fan cost about Rs 500 to 1000, while an international-class hotel room may run to Rs 10,000 or more. Most high-end hotels quote room rates in US dollars but accept either dollars or rupees; some also quote in euros.

The cost of accommodation in the touristy areas drops considerably out of season. Expect to pay triple the usual accommodation price in Kandy during the Kandy Esala Perahera and in Nuwara Eliya during the April high season. Because of the lack of tourism infrastructure following long years of war, room rates are also much higher than the norm in Jaffna.

Local food is reasonably priced, though it's about three times more expensive in guesthouses than in local restaurants; it's around Rs 300 to

FOREIGNER PRICE

There's no way to put this diplomatically: many Sri Lankans try to overcharge tourists for anything from a bus fare to a gemstone necklace. Most hotels have one price for foreigners and another for Sri Lankans, and government departments continue to arbitrarily ramp up foreigners' entry fees, which are often 10 or 20 times higher those paid by locals.

450 at a guesthouse, or as little as Rs 100 at a local restaurant. Dinner at the country's better restaurants costs around Rs 2000 per person.

At national parks, entry fees plus (often mandatory) 4WD hire and other extras add up to something between Rs 2000 and 5100.

Public transport is cheap. Hiring a car (or van) and driver for a day costs Rs 2500 to 4500 depending on the condition of the vehicle.

TRAVEL LITERATURE

Considering what a colourful and culturally rich destination Sri Lanka is, it's surprising that more writers haven't left a trail of ink chronicling their experiences here.

Running in the Family, by Michael Ondaatje, recounts a return to Sri Lanka in the 1970s after growing up here in the '40s and '50s, and captures many of the little oddities that make up life in Sri Lanka.

RL Brohier records his travels around Sri Lanka as a British surveyor in the first half of the 20th century in *Seeing Ceylon* and *Discovering Ceylon*. Both books capture lots of intriguing historical tidbits that are hard to find elsewhere (even if they're not 100% accurate, on occasion).

A Village in the Jungle, by Leonard Woolf, is a rather depressing account of local life in Hambantota. First published in 1913, it is in the same vein as George Orwell's *Burmese Days*.

An engaging, insightful story, *July*, by Karen Roberts, tells of two neighbours – one Sinhalese, one Tamil – growing up together.

Elmo Jayawardena picked up literary prizes with *Sam's Story*, the tale of an illiterate village boy working in Colombo. It's a simple, often light-hearted read that deftly deals with the wider problems of society.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Ever since the World Wide Web grew out of the old US military Arpanet it has become a rich resource for travellers. You can research your trip, hunt down bargain air fares, book hotels, check weather conditions or chat with locals and other travellers about the best places to visit (or avoid!).

A good place to start your explorations is the Lonely Planet website (www.lonelyplanet.com). Here you'll find everything from the Thorn Tree Forum, where you can ask questions and dispense advice, to World-Guide, which provides useful predeparture information.

Other good websites:

Art Sri Lanka (www.artsrilanka.org) A gateway to Sri Lankan high culture, this site covers art history, contemporary art and religious art from various traditions.

Crazy Lanka (www.crazylanka.com) A cheerfully silly website with lots of parodies of current news events. There are lots of in-jokes but some amusing gems nonetheless.

InfoLanka (www.infolanka.com) This has links to recipes, chat lines, news, organisations, nature, entertainment and more.

Sri Lanka Tourist Board (www.srilankatourism.org) The official tourism site, with tons of information. It's a good starting point.

Sri Lanka Web Server (www.lanka.net) This has lots of links to Sri Lankan newspaper and magazine websites.

HOW MUCH?

Air-con bus Colombo–Anuradhapura Rs 210

2nd-class train Ella–Badulla Rs 12

Lunch packet (fish) Rs 175

Cultural Triangle round ticket Rs 4120

Guesthouse double room (Kandy) Rs 1800

See also the Lonely Planet Index, inside front cover.

Itineraries

CLASSIC ROUTES

CAPITAL, COAST & HILLS

Three to Four Weeks

Start with a few days in **Colombo** (p77), sampling some of Sri Lanka's finest cuisine and becoming acquainted with the city's vibrant Buddhist temples. Then hug the coast south, stopping off in **Bentota** (p118) and **Hikkaduwa** (p123) to relax on palm-lined stretches of sand. Next comes **Galle** (p130) and its 17th-century Dutch city-within-a-fort – a must-see if you're interested in the island's colonial history.

From here head inland to **Horton Plains National Park** (p205). Make a side trip to the 240m-high **Bambarakanda Falls** (p208), Sri Lanka's tallest waterfall, and spend a night or two in the misty ex-colonial hill station of **Nuwara Eliya** (p199), which earns another superlative as the island's highest city.

Continue north to Kandy, stopping off for a tour and tea tasting at **La-bookellie Tea Factory** (p198) and, if you haven't had enough waterfall action, **Ramboda Falls** (p198). **Kandy** (p162), Sri Lanka's main cultural centre, will delight you with its mild climate, colonial architecture, frequent festivals and sumptuous Buddhist temples. From Kandy it's a relatively easy ride back to Colombo.

This 547km route takes you through Sri Lanka's highlights in under a month. Lie on palm-fringed beaches, check out colonial architecture and stare at stunning Hill Country views. Just watch out for the traffic on the Colombo–Galle road.



NEGOMBO & ANCIENT CITIES

Two to Three Weeks

As the seaside city of **Negombo** (p111) is closer than Colombo to Bandaranaike International Airport, it's easy enough to kick off your trip here and skip the capital altogether. Whether or not you decide to spend a night or more in the historic city, Negombo is worth a stop to see the historic remains of the Dutch fort, charming Catholic churches, bustling fish markets and the rich marshlands of **Muthurajawela** (p116).

From Negombo head northeast to North Central Province and into the Cultural Triangle, so-called because it contains three of the country's most significant historical sites; it's also a centre for handicrafts. Your first stop should be **Dambulla** (p231), a series of cave shrines painted with vivid Buddhist murals. From here it's a short jaunt to **Sigiriya** (p233), a 200m-tall rock outcrop that was once either a palace or a monastery (depending on whom you believe) and is truly one of the island's most amazing sights.

Further northeast the former royal capital of **Polonnaruwa** (p237) offers an inspiring collection of Buddhist sculptures and monastery ruins dating back nearly a thousand years. In the vicinity, **Minneriya National Park** (p245) is well worth a visit to view the largest herds of wild elephants in Sri Lanka, along with plenty of other wildlife.

Next head northwest to **Anuradhapura** (p247), an even older ex-royal capital with an extensive, well-preserved historical park containing the ruins of monasteries, palaces and dagobas (stupas). Stop off in **Mihintale** (p255), just 13km east of Anuradhapura, to view its small yet impressive collection of monastic ruins and dagobas, and the remains of an ancient Ayurvedic hospital.

This 347km trip through Sri Lanka's ancient cities region takes in centuries-old dagobas (stupas), monasteries, sculptures and palaces as it rolls across hilly green plains and farming valleys and meanders through arid, East Africa-like topography.



ROADS LESS TRAVELLED

EAST BY NORTH

Three Weeks

The North and East region feels like a different country. And in some places, controlled by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), it effectively is. Just check the security situation before starting the trip.

Start off in the delightfully laid-back surf beach of **Arugam Bay** (p270), then head to **Ampara** (p276) to see elephants parade past the Peace Pagoda as though timetabled. Having peeked into dramatic **Gal Oya National Park** (p278) from atop Inginyagala Dam, continue north to the intriguing city of **Batticaloa** (p281) and have a splash at the deserted beach at **Kalkudah** (p284).

Get your first taste of Tamil Tiger territory by taking the post bus on to **Muttur** (p286), from where ferries cross Koddigar Bay into **Trincomalee** (p286), arguably the world's finest deep-water harbour. Recover from the bumpy trip with an agreeably restorative stay at the beaches of **Uppuveli** (p290) or **Nilaveli** (p292), and do a little diving at **Pigeon Island** (p292).

Then, cut inland to **Vavuniya** (p298) to prepare for an eye-opening journey to Jaffna. This takes you through what the locals call Tamil Eelam (Tamil Precious Land), the unrecognised but de facto country run by the Tamil Tigers, complete with its own police force, banks and even a kind of visa (available at the border). You'll eventually arrive in **Jaffna** (p304), an intriguing city of contradictions: officially government controlled yet loyal to the Tigers, welcoming and friendly but with a heavy military presence, lushly comfortable in its suburbs despite a bombed-out centre.



Rumble through humid coastal plains, relax on deserted beaches and transit Tamil Eelam, Sri Lanka's country-within-a-country – this 553km route promises a trip that's as thought-provoking as it is attractive.

TEA, TREKS & TEMPLES

Two to Three Weeks

Start your trip across the heart of Sri Lanka in **Kitulgala** (p197), a gateway for rafting and canoeing the Kelaniya Ganga (Kelaniya River) as well as for jungle hikes. From here it's a relatively short hop to misty **Hatton**, **Dikoya** and **Maskeliya** (p196), three small towns centred on one of the top tea-growing regions in Sri Lanka. Aside from getting to taste incredibly fragrant single-estate teas in arguably the most scenic part of the Hill Country, you can bed down in luxurious ex-colonial tea planters' bungalows, explore winding, village-to-village trails or make the strenuous predawn climb up Adam's Peak (Sri Pada).

Head across to **Ella** (p213) and **Haputale** (p208), on the Hill Country's precipitous eastern side, for more hiking, stupendous views and small-town ambience. If an encounter with Buddhism is on your agenda, head northeast to **Bibile** (p279) and attend a meditation retreat at Nagala Viharaya. Then, travel southeast to **Monaragala** (p267), the jumping-off point for one of Sri Lanka's most atmospheric ancient Buddhist sites, **Maligawila** (p266), which is home to an 11m-tall standing Buddha that's at least a thousand years old.

Cut back west to Wellawaya to take in **Buduruwagala** (p219), a set of seven colossal figures – including the tallest Buddha in the country – carved into the side of a rock cliff.

From Wellawaya descend to the coastal plains of **Kataragama** (p157), the terminus of the Pada Yatra, a pilgrimage that begins at the other end of the island. One of Sri Lanka's oldest and most venerated dagobas can be found in nearby **Tissamaharama** (p153), which is also a convenient entry point for forays into **Yala National Park** (p156).



Expect hairpin curves and breathtaking views for much of this 304km outing; hike, taste some of Sri Lanka's tea and view ancient Buddhist sites before dropping down to the coastal plains.

TAILORED TRIPS

UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE SITES

Anuradhapura (p247) The remains of monasteries, palaces and other monuments that belonged to a royal capital that flourished for 1300 years.

Dambulla Cave Temples (p231) A pilgrimage site for over 2000 years, the five caves here contain important Buddhist murals and statuary.

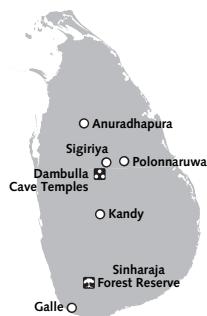
Galle (p130) Founded by the Portuguese in the 16th century, this is the most well-preserved example of a fortified colonial city in South Asia.

Kandy (p162) This city served as the last capital of the Sinhala kings before Sri Lanka's occupation by the British. The Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic (Sri Dalada Maligawa) is one of the world's most famous Buddhist pilgrimage sites.

Polonnaruwa (p237) The compact ruins of Sri Lanka's second royal capital include both Buddhist and Brahmanic monuments, along with the impressive 12th-century city works created by King Parakramabahu I.

Sigiriya (p233) The remains of King Kassapa's palace (or possibly a monastery) grace the slopes and summit of a 370m granite outcrop.

Sinharaja Forest Reserve (p221) Sri Lanka's most famous protected area harbours its last major tropical rainforest.



OUTDOORS & WILDLIFE

Adam's Peak (Sri Pada; p194) Sacred to Christians, Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists, this mountain rewards a predawn climb with far-reaching views and a glimpse of the peak's triangular shadow on the clouds below.

Arugam Bay (p270) The bay and nearby beaches and mangroves provide ample opportunities for surfing, cycling, hiking and nature-watching.

Gal Oya National Park (p278) Explore the rolling grasslands and evergreen forests surrounding Senanayake Samudra, a large tank (artificial lake) frequented by elephants and other wildlife.

Horton Plains National Park (p205) Precipitous views, mossy stunted forests, unique plant and animal life, and a cool climate guarantee an especially good romp in the outdoors.

Minneriya National Park (p245) Minneriya is renowned for its large herds of wild elephants, but there's plenty of other wildlife roaming the park as well, including toque macaques, sambar deer, cormorants and painted storks.

Sinharaja Forest Reserve (p221) This Unesco World Heritage Site is home to over half of the island's endemic species of mammals and butterflies; there's also a high number of endemic birds and many rare insects and amphibians.

Wilpattu National Park (p109) This park, famous for its jungle, leopards, sloth bears and birds, reopened in 2003 after years of war.

Yala East National Park (p275) This park contains the Kumana mangrove swamp and bird-life in spectacular numbers.



LUSH LIFE

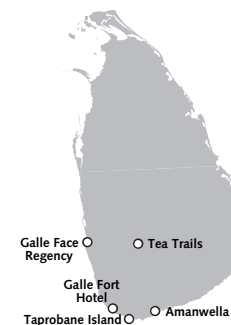
Amanwella (Mawella; p149) This is perhaps the island's ultimate romantic beach getaway – you'll never want to leave your oceanfront suite, with its private swimming pool and terrace.

Galle Face Regency (Colombo; p95) Stay in the Royal Oceanic Grand Spa suite and bubble your troubles away in either of the two Jacuzzis – one inside the mammoth bathroom, the other on the ocean-facing teak veranda.

Galle Fort Hotel (Galle; p135) Whether or not you overnight in one of the rooms in the thick-walled former 17th-century Dutch merchant's home, do treat yourself to the stellar Asian-fusion cuisine served here.

Taprobane Island (Weligama; p144) You can't get much more lush than renting your own stunning island, complete with six staff, an infinity pool and an open-air, five-bedroom five-bathroom villa that was built by Count de Maunyn-Talvande in 1922, and later owned by writer Paul Bowles.

Tea Trails (Dikoya; p197) Live a tea-estate manager's life – without the accounting problems – in your choice of four colonial bungalows dating from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The house chef cooks perfect Sri Lankan and Western dishes and, since the place is owned by the Dilmah tea company, you'll drink nothing but the best teas in the Hill Country.



BEACH OUT

Aluthgama, Bentota & Induruwa (p118) These great beaches come with lively markets, a turtle hatchery, and the placid waters of the Bentota Ganga.

Arugam Bay (p270) The island's surf mecca has a laid-back, friendly village and a mellow party scene.

Hikkaduwa (p123) Take scuba-diving lessons, body-surf the gentle waves or simply do what most visitors do – wander from one beach café to the next while the sun sets over the Indian Ocean.

Kalkudah Bay (p284) You'll probably share this long, palm-lined beach with only an occasional fishing crew.

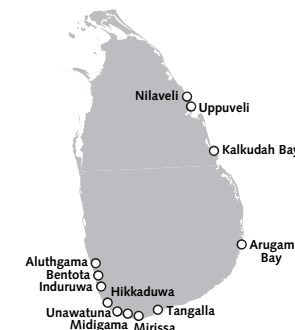
Midigama (p142) If you brave the coral and rocks, you and your board will love the powerful left break.

Mirissa (p144) If sleepy is what you want, Mirissa can oblige, but there's also excellent snorkelling and surfing.

Tangalla (p149) The pretty bays and long stretches of white sand offer a private corner for everyone. Medaketiya Beach is beautiful, but watch the currents.

Unawatuna (p138) The South's most popular beach has it all: good swimming, creamy white sands, a dearth of traffic, and laid-back beach cafés.

Uppuveli & Nilaveli (p290 & p292) Whale and dolphin-watching tours and dive trips to nearby islets are the main activities here, along with relaxing and frolicking in the turquoise waters.



Snapshot

When the noted scientist and writer Sir Arthur C Clarke made his home in Sri Lanka in 1956, he did so claiming that Sri Lanka was the best place in the world from which to view the universe. Looking out from Sri Lanka to the universe is a fascinating activity; looking within Sri Lanka, one finds a universe in itself.

Sri Lanka may be tiny but it defies a tiny definition. It is, as the travel brochures proclaim, a resplendent paradise. It is jungle, green and fertile. It is also desert, red and arid. Just as its landscape is diverse, so too are its people and its stories – stories overlaid with centuries of varied narrative and meaning.

Sri Lankans love their country and have a strong desire for others to love their country as well. They'll besiege you with talk of Sri Lanka's beauty, history and scenic sites. It's a delight to hear and is one of the quickest ways of gleaning the lowdown on places to see and stay. Mind you, the yarn and the reality may be hugely different, but you'll no doubt experience something you'd not intended. Living up to the country's name (the word serendipity is derived from its earlier title, Serendib), Sri Lanka is a happy series of unexpected discoveries, whether it's people or places, old or new.

Relationships and connections are important to Sri Lankans. Men will reminisce for hours about the old school tie, the fallout from the 1981 South African cricket tour or the last mass elephant capture in the 1950s. If they weren't there, they've heard the stories and are capable of passing them on as if they'd had a prime part in the action. And while recollecting their own schooldays, plans for the next generation's schooling are determined with much deliberation. Education is highly regarded in Sri Lanka.

Rice and hoppers (bowl-shaped pancakes) are not just food for feast; they're also food for thought. According to many, today's commercial rice has shrunk in taste and variety – all the more reason to have a paddy of one's own.

'Peace' is a catchword here, but in practice it's never quite caught on. Most Sri Lankans wish for a country where harmony reigns, life is secure and prosperity flourishes. But the country has a long history of conflict, and the majority Sinhalese and minority Tamils have been involved in an on-and-off civil war for 25 years (p35). As Norwegian negotiators attempt to bring the parties together in some semblance of a peace process (p37), old questions repeat themselves. Will there ever be peace? How and when will it come? Is the cost of compromise too high? Is the cost of no compromise too high?

Between talk of peace and cricket comes talk of prices – rising too much and too quickly.

For the moneyed, there's the problem of servants: the difficulties in hiring good ones, compounded by the monthly holidays on *poya* (full moon) days, when there are no servants at all. And the wealthy still find the veranda a haven for slow drinks and happy chatter, but this can be easily disrupted by a guest – perhaps a factory manager – trying to keep staff in line by yelling directions down his mobile phone.

For the less moneyed, it's life much as their ancestors knew it. Some are servants to the wealthy while others cultivate the land or fish the sea. Some leave the conviviality of the village to toil at the factory, hoping to

improve the economic circumstances of their families back home. Others serve and clean in the tourist industry. And a few beset the traveller with 'worthy' schemes (aka scams) to enhance their meagre earnings.

Like many other countries, Sri Lanka has a range of views on its original people, now known as the Veddahs (p43). Some historical texts describe them as spirit people who could morph from human to animal, at will – a 'useful' assessment of nonexistence and therefore a nonconcern. Today, only few people identify as indigenous. Their actual numbers are not known but they are certainly diminishing, perhaps because they have assimilated into the majority groups, perhaps because the struggle for land and identity are just too much.

Of all Sri Lankans, Kandyans retain a special status, borne of centuries of resistance to invading powers (p31). Even non-Kandyans can be noble for a day – at many a wedding the bridal party don Kandyan ceremonial garb and drummers in traditional dress beat ancient rhythms.

Perhaps it's the *peraheras* (processions) that best embody the complexities of this small nation. Drummers, fire walkers, dancers and elaborately adorned elephants parade in a fusion of ancient and modern. Like the nation itself, the *perahera* is intricate, fragile and contradictory. Where else will you see a sequin-adorned elephant carrying relics of the Buddha along a white cloth that is ceremoniously laid before it, followed by a truck with a generator to power the neon sponsorship signs on the elephant's back? This is current-day Sri Lanka.

Arthur C Clarke is right, of course. Sri Lanka is a fine place from which to view the universe. For the traveller, making even the smallest sense of the universe that is Sri Lanka is indeed a privilege and an adventure – one guaranteed to include many serendipitous encounters.

FAST FACTS

Population: 19.9 million

Population density per sq km: Colombo 2500 people, dry zone less than 50.

Life expectancy: female 75, male 70

Adult literacy: female 90%, male 95%

Year women received the right to vote: 1931

Tsunami 2004: 30,000 lives lost, over 1 million people left homeless

Emigration due to civil unrest: 1 million people since 1983

Internally displaced people: Almost 1 million (362,000 due to civil unrest, 555,000 due to the tsunami)

GDP per capita: US\$4300 (USA: US\$41,800)

The Authors



JOE CUMMINGS

Coordinating Author, Colombo, The Hill Country, The Ancient Cities

Born to a military family in New Orleans, Joe was raised in many different locations. Shortly after earning a master's degree in South and Southeast Asian studies, he began updating Lonely Planet's Asia guides. Joe first travelled to Sri Lanka in the 1990s to research dagobas (stupas) for Lonely Planet's *Buddhist Stupas in Asia: The Shape of Perfection*. When he's not on the road, Joe lives next to the ruins of a 15th-century stupa in Chiang Mai.

Joe also wrote the Destination Sri Lanka, Getting Started, Itineraries, Environment, Directory and Transport chapters for this book.

My Favourite Trip

I'm happiest wandering around the Hill Country, talking to tea-factory managers about the local teas, and hiking in the hills around Dikoya (p196) and Hatton (p196). When driving from Colombo I'll stop off in Kitulgala (p197) for a swim in the Kelaniya Ganga (Kelaniya River) and lunch at Plantation Hotel. For another perspective on the local geography I'll hop on a train from Nanu Oya, the train station for Nuwara Eliya (p199), to Badulla (p217), with a side trip to Ella (p213) or Haputale (p208), my favourite towns for kicking back and catching up on some reading. If I have enough time I'll make a longer detour from Ella to indulge my passion for Buddhist art at the undervisited Budurwagala (p219), where Sri Lanka's tallest Buddha was carved into solid rock over a thousand years ago.



MARK ELLIOTT

The East, Jaffna & the North

When Mark first visited Sri Lanka in 1987, the country was racked by violence: a bus station had been bombed and the JVP was running amok. However, meditation retreats, cycling through tea estates, and the ever-welcoming population created a contrasting sense of calm. Fascinated ever since by this troubled paradise, Mark jumped at the chance to visit the 'other Ceylon' – the Tamil and Muslim areas that had been effectively off limits for decades.

Between researching travel guides on places that range from Iran to Indonesia to Greenland, Mark lives in blissfully quiet suburban Belgium with his beloved wife Danielle, who found him at a Turkmenistan camel market.



RYAN VER BERKMOES

West Coast, The South

Ryan was first beguiled by Sri Lanka when he read Paul Theroux' *The Great Railway Bazaar* as a teenager. Visiting after the tsunami he was overwhelmed by the devastation, even after a long career covering wars, disasters and other calamities. Ryan was happy to return to Sri Lanka to research this book as it allowed him to catch up with many people he'd met months earlier.

Born in the beach town of Santa Cruz, California, Ryan worked as journalist for many years before turning his attentions to Lonely Planet. He's written scores of guidebooks on places ranging from the Arctic to the equator. He definitely prefers sand between his toes to ice.

CONTRIBUTING AUTHORS

Teresa Cannon had been stuck for too many years in a suffocating bureaucracy when she felt compelled to escape to the rarefied environment of the Himalayas. There she trekked within century-old rhododendron forests and traversed the peaks and passes of the western moonscape region. She succumbed to the gentle and continuing welcome of '*Namaste*', which flowed like a mantra throughout the landscape. She wanted to stay. But visas run out and bank balances diminish.

Her love of travel led her overseas several times, especially to Asia. She has written numerous non-fiction works about Sri Lanka, and this is her sixth project for Lonely Planet. For this book she wrote the Snapshot, History, Culture and Food & Drink chapters.

Dr Trish Batchelor is a general practitioner and travel medicine specialist who works at the CIWEC Clinic in Kathmandu, Nepal, as well as being a Medical Advisor to the Travel Doctor New Zealand clinics. Trish teaches travel medicine through the University of Otago, and is interested in underwater and high-altitude medicine, and in the impact of tourism on host countries. She has travelled extensively through Southeast and East Asia and particularly loves high-altitude trekking in the Himalayas.

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