



Highlights of Sri Lanka

8 Nights / 9 Days

Colombo – Anuradhapura – Sigiriya – Kandy – Colombo

Visit one of Anuradhapura's most revered Buddhist temple sites, Ruvanvelisaya Dagoba, where a fantastic atmosphere is created by the many visiting pilgrims. Enjoy a fascinating walking tour of Colombo's Pettah market where everything from electrical goods to fresh produce is sold. Climb the thousands of steps to the top of Sigiriya Rock and be rewarded with spectacular views of the surrounding countryside. Stop at a village near Habarana for an insight into rural Sri Lankan life. Take a bullock cart to see traditional farming life and enjoy a simple local lunch.

Day 1 Arrival to Colombo

Upon arrival in Colombo you will be met and transferred to your hotel. Tonight, meet your tour leader and your fellow travellers for welcome drinks and a tour briefing. Please note, it is common for international flights to arrive in Colombo late at night, so your tour briefing may take place tomorrow.

Day 2 Colombo

Today we explore Sri Lanka's bustling capital. A fascinating mix of old and new, colonial and modern, religious and secular, Colombo has been an important trading centre since the 5th and 6th centuries and reflects the colourful history and culture of the nation. Explore Fort, the central business district of Colombo and home to many of Colombo's iconic buildings like the Grand Oriental Hotel and the Old Dutch Hospital. Insider Experience – Local: Explore some of Colombo's most iconic areas by foot including the Fort and Pettah, a vibrant and crowded street market area where everything from televisions to chillies are sold wholesale and retail. We also visit one of the city's kovils, the Hindu temples of the Tamil trading community, before finishing the religious spectrum of the city at Gangaramaya Temple – one of the capital's favourite places of worship with an incredible collection of religious artefacts and ornate décor inside and out. In the afternoon enjoy some free time to relax or explore. Perhaps walk the city's famous Galle Face Green and watch the sunset over the Indian Ocean, joining the locals at this very popular evening institution. (B)

Day 3 Colombo to Anuradhapura

This morning depart Colombo early as our journey heads north into the island's spiritual heart. Insider Experience – Local: Stop at the fishing and beach town of Negombo to see the town's famous fish market, the Llelama, where traditional boats haul in their catches for sale – a little on the nose but a fascinating sight. We may also be able to see the process of toddy tapping, producing a popular local alcoholic beverage produced from palm trees, as we head by road to Anuradhapura, our base in the country's rich Cultural Triangle. A capital for over a thousand years, and with a history dating back some 2,500 years, Anuradhapura is a superb introduction to Sri Lanka's great cultural heritage. These days a collection of ruined and active temples and palaces spread across beautiful park-like countryside, it retains a serene and picturesque quality. Arriving mid-afternoon, we settle into our hotel. (B)

Day 4 Anuradhapura and Mihintale

We start this morning with a visit to the ancient complex of Mihintale, birthplace of Sri Lankan Buddhism. Please note – there are some steep steps here but those not wishing to climb can

explore the base of the site and take in the views. In the afternoon, take an exploration of some of Anuradhapura's main sites. This will include the revered Sri Maha Bodhi, the world's oldest authenticated tree which has been worshipped and guarded here for over 2,000 years since its original cutting was brought from India where the Lord Buddha attained enlightenment under its sheltering branches. Also, see the ruined columns of the Brazen Palace and the Thuparama Dagoba (pagoda), perhaps the oldest Buddhist structure in the world. Insider Experience – Unique: This evening we visit one of Anuradhapura's most revered Buddhist temple sites where a fantastic atmosphere is created by the many visiting pilgrims coming to pray under the huge dome of Ruwanwelisaya Dagoba. (B)

Day 5 Anuradhapura to Sigiriya

This morning after departing Anuradhapura we stop at a village near Habarana for an insight into Sri Lankan rural life. Taking local bullock carts, we are shown aspects of farming life and will also have the chance to try a simple local lunch prepared in village style featuring typical local ingredients which may include eggplant, yam, green banana, okra and others. We may also have the chance to take local boats through a beautiful local waterway where fishing eagles make their home. In the afternoon take a tour of the ancient capital of Polonnaruwa. Here we focus on the remains of the Royal Palace complex and the impressive neighbouring Quadrangle, which still retains some palace structures. View the superb standing and reclining Buddha images at the Gal Vihara, still highly revered by local people. Afterwards, we continue to our hotel at nearby Sigiriya, in the shadow of Sri Lanka's most iconic sight. (B, L)

Day 6 Sigiriya

Early, this morning we explore the incredible rock of Sigiriya. Ancient monastery or palace, its possibly two millennia of history hidden in myth and legend, the view of the rock alone is breathtaking. Climbing the steps of the rock even more so – this is a steep climb involving several thousand steps. Those not wanting or able to climb may enjoy the fine park-like water and boulder gardens at the base, which offer more views of the rock. For climbers, the first treat is the superb Apsara frescoes about halfway to the summit. A final ascent through two enormous rock lion's paws brings you to the summit, with its rock foundations and sweeping views of the surrounding jungles and countryside. Note: The climb is only suitable for those with good fitness; plenty of water and sun protection should be carried. In the afternoon enjoy free time to relax by the hotel pool – or join your tour leader for a visit to the deserted forest monastery of Ritigala, with its famously ornate 'urinal stones'. (B, D)

Day 7 Sigiriya to Kandy

Departing Sigiriya we continue the short distance to Dambulla. Home to one of Sri Lanka's most celebrated collections of Buddhist art, the cave temples are a gallery of beautiful religious sculpture and painting. The 5 hilltop caves hold dozens of Buddha images and vast colourful frescoes. Note: The climb to the caves is on wide stone steps which are relatively even but the climb is hot and takes around 15 minutes. Those not wishing to climb may stay at the base of the hill. Later visit a tropical spice garden, learning of the many culinary and medicinal plants which are grown in the island's rich hill country. We will also stop here for a delicious local lunch. Afterwards, we continue up in to the central hills and Sri Lanka's second city Kandy, set amidst forested peaks and with a character all its own. Relax in the fine grounds of your hotel in the late afternoon. (B, L)

Day 8 Kandy

We start early today with a visit to the ornate Temple of the Tooth. The temple houses Sri Lanka's most revered relic, a tooth of Lord Buddha. We visit for one of the daily pujas (prayer ceremonies) which Sinhalese Buddhists regard as the ultimate worship. Pilgrims from all over the Buddhist world flock to the temple, regarded as one of the holiest in the religion, for an opportunity to be close to the temple's revered relic. Insider Experience – Taste: If you wish to

try a typical, delicious Sri Lankan breakfast, join your tour leader for a visit to a nearby local cafe to see how the locals take their morning meal – and sample some delicious typical local breakfast snacks if you wish, or just a refreshing cup of local tea. Afterwards, take a city tour of Kandy, including the lovely lakeside drive and colourful central market area. Later, in the afternoon, drive the short distance beyond town to the verdant Peradeniya Botanical Gardens. Favoured by Sinhalese kings and the British colonial rulers, the gardens feature a spectacular and colourful collection of exotic tropical plants as well as a huge colony of fruit bats. Finish your memorable journey with an enjoyable Sri Lankan cooking demonstration, to then enjoy as your farewell dinner with your fellow group members. (B, D)

Day 9 Departure from Colombo

This morning after a leisurely start you will check out of your Kandy hotel and travel by road towards Colombo. En route, stop at a tea plantation for a fascinating insight into the tea growing process in this important island industry. There is the opportunity to sample and purchase local teas. Afterwards, continue towards Colombo's airport, where your journey ends. Note: If you are departing on a late-night flight from Colombo, you may wish to book an airport hotel room and departure transfer (at additional cost) – however the airport is a comfortable place to spend a few hours with a range of cafes, restaurants and shops. (B)

Included:

- 8 nights' accommodation
- Daily Breakfast for 2 Persons
- 2 Lunches
- 3 Dinners
- Transport in air-conditioned vehicles
- Small group touring
- All Entrance fees
- English speaking tour leader
- All Tipping
- Arrival and departure transfers



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