



Sri Lanka – ‘Off The Beaten Track – The North’

May - October; 15D/14N ex London or 14D/13N Colombo to Colombo

This 2 week tour of central and northern Sri Lanka takes in both the country's best known sites: Kandy and the famous Cultural Triangle as well as less off the beaten track sites such as the unspoilt coast around Trincomalee, now open after a long time off limits during the tragic civil war, and Sri Lanka's largest wildlife reserve, Wilpattu. Featuring 5 UNESCO World Heritage sites and 2 national parks this tour is a great combination of cultural and natural and famous and off the beaten track sites plus of course plenty of friendly locals and the wonderful Sri Lankan cuisine.

Day 1 Departure from UK.

Day 2 Arrival in Colombo, meet your tour-leader and transfer to nearby Negombo on the island's west coast for some relaxation time after your flight.

Day 3 After breakfast, drive into Colombo for a guided tour of the city including visits to Bellanwila Temple, the National Museum, Beira Lake, the old Parliament Building, Galle Face Green and bustling Pettah Bazaar. In the late afternoon, transfer to Fort railway station for a scenic train journey into the northern Hill Country to Kandy, World Heritage site with a picturesque lake-side setting. Overnight in a colonial-style hotel.

Day 4 Morning at leisure with an afternoon visit to the beautifully kept and well-presented [Peradeniya Botanic Gardens](#) on the outskirts of Kandy. In the evening, experience the Buddhist puja (blessing ceremony) at the Temple of the Tooth, which houses Sri Lanka's most revered religious relic. (Yes, one of Buddha's teeth!)

Day 5 Morning drive to Dambulla, also a [UNESCO World Heritage site](#) and location of Sri Lanka's finest cave temples, dating back to the 1st century BC. In the afternoon we'll continue to Habarana where we'll stay at a forest lodge - the base for our 2 day exploration of the Cultural Triangle.

Day 6 Head to our 3rd World Heritage Site, the medieval capital of Polonnaruwa for a guided tour of its historic temples and exquisitely carved statues. In the afternoon, drive back towards Habarana for a jeep safari in Minneriya National Park to see elephants and a spectacular array of Sri Lankan bird life. During the August to October period we may be lucky enough to see the 'gathering', where great herds of elephants from all over the area congregate around Minneriya lake to seek the last available water at the end of the dry season.

Day 7 Drive to Sigiriya for an early morning ascent of the rock fortress of Sigiriya to view the surrounding countryside at dawn. Guided tour of Sigiriya's rock palace and ornamental gardens before heading northeast to Nilaveli on the island's east coast, 16 km north of Trincomalee. Arrive at a superbly positioned beachfront hotel within a palm grove overlooking nearby Pigeon Island, a popular excursion for snorkelling trips.

Days 8 & 9 At leisure at Nilaveli. Laze on the beach or by the pool, explore the local area or visit Trincomalee Town whilst more adventurous options includes either whale watching, (sperm and blue whales are regular sightings off the coast), or a snorkelling trip on the colourful reef around Pigeon Island.

Day 10 Return to the Island's interior and the Cultural Triangle at Anuradhapura where we'll stay in a picturesque hotel located by a watering hole popular with elephants, deer, water buffaloes and wild boar.

Day 11 Day trip to Wilpattu National Park, Sri Lanka's largest wildlife reserve, for a jeep safari. Only re-opened in 2010 the park consists of dry zone jungle with flood plain lakes and vast areas of forest, home to elephants, leopards, sloth bears, deer and a wide variety of bird life. In the afternoon we'll visit the ancient city of Anuradhapura, the 3rd century capital of ancient Lanka, with a sunset visit to the atmospheric Ruvanveliseya Dagoba and Sri Maha Bodhi, the oldest recorded tree in the world!

Day 12 Head southwest to Anamaduwa in Puttalam District, one of the island's least visited areas and best kept secrets. Overnight stay at the wonderful [Mudhouse, Puttalam](#); a traditionally built retreat of wattle and daub walls and thatched roofs, nestled in 24 hectares of forest and well off the beaten track in the rural heartlands of Sri Lanka.

Day 13 A choice of inclusive activities is offered by the Mudhouse including picnic trips, temple visits, bird watching walks, nature trails, lake kayaking, local historical sights and cooking lessons.

Day 14 After a leisurely morning, return to Negombo.

Day 15 Transfer to the airport for the flight back to the UK.

Note: This tour is offered with or without return flights from London to Colombo - those persons not wishing to take up the flight option should join the tour on day 2 in Colombo and would finish the tour in Colombo on day 15.

Highlights: Kandy, Polonnaruwa ancient city, Sigiriya rock fortress, Dambulla cave temples, Minneriya National Park, train journey, Wilpattu National Park, Indian Ocean beach stay, Galle, optional whale watching trip, local food

Accommodation: hotel, jungle lodge, beach chalet

Transport: minibus, train, jeep

Meals: full board except for lunch on days 2, 4, 8 & 9 and dinner on days 4, 7, 8, 9 & 14

Fitness: easy – all activities can be tailored to any fitness levels

Visa requirements: You must get a visa before arrival. They can be obtained online from www.eta.gov.lk at a cost of \$30, or by application to a Sri Lankan embassy.



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