

# SRI LANKA

## PRACTICAL INFORMATION

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Historically and culturally intertwined with the Indian subcontinent, but geographically separated, the tropical island nation of Sri Lanka is a biodiversity hotspot – perfect for those in search of an adventurous getaway! Khiri Travel are pleased to offer you herewith some useful tips and practical information on traveling in Sri Lanka.



## FAST FACTS

### OFFICIAL NAME

Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka

### CAPITAL CITY

Sri Jayawardenepura Kotte (a suburb of the commercial capital and largest city, Colombo)

### TOTAL AREA

65,610 km<sup>2</sup>

### CURRENCY

Sri Lankan rupee

### LANGUAGE

Sinhalese

### POPULATION

21.5 million

### PEOPLE

Sinhalese, Tamils, Moors, Burghers, Malays and Vedda (believed to be the original indigenous group to inhabit the island)

### RELIGION

Buddhism (Therevada)

### TIME ZONE

UTC +5.30 hours

### INTERNATIONAL DIALING CODE

+94

### ELECTRICITY

220-240V

### DRIVING

Left hand side

## PASSPORTS & VISAS

Visas for Sri Lanka can be obtained on arrival at the airport, but we advise travelers to apply online prior to arriving, as this helps to avoid delays or long queues at the airport.

## MONEY

The currency used in Sri Lanka is the Sri Lankan Rupee. International currency can be exchanged at the arrival lounge of the airport, however banks, moneychangers and hotels also exchange currency. Hotels will usually charge a higher commission. You may also use ATMs for money exchange – Visa and MasterCard are widely acceptable, however Amex cards are not so popular.

Important: Be sure to advise your bank and credit card company that you will be using your cards overseas before you leave, otherwise they may report a fraud alert on your account!

## HEALTH

Overall, Sri Lanka is a very safe destination – but there are certain risks. For example, it isn't recommended to drink tap water. Mosquitos are also a risk, as Dengue Fever has been recorded in this country. We therefore recommend that travellers always apply mosquito repellent to ensure that they don't get bitten. In general street food is fine to eat, but of course we recommend using your best visual judgment to determine the hygienic quality of the vendor; if you are unsure, it's best to avoid it.



# INTERNATIONAL AIRPORTS BY ISLAND AND CITY

At present, Sri Lanka has two international airports; 'Bandaranaike International Airport' and 'Mattala Rajapaksa International Airport'. The former brings in most of the traffic and is located approximately 37km from the capital city of Colombo. Mattala Rajapaksa Airport is located in Hambantota, which is a 258km drive from Colombo along the southern expressway, which runs from Colombo to Matara.

## CLIMATE

Sri Lanka has been categorized as a tropical island and the weather is pleasant throughout the year. However, as the global weather patterns are changing rapidly there could be few exceptions. You might encounter sudden rain showers, but there it's never too long before the sun shines again.

### The monsoon season can be categorized as follows:

March-April:	First Inter Monsoon Season
May-September:	Southwest Monsoon Season
October-November:	Second Inter Monsoon Season
December-February:	Northeast Monsoon Season

Detailed information on the monsoon seasons can be obtained through Sri Lanka's Department of Meteorology:  
<http://www.meteo.gov.lk/index.php?lang=en>



## DONATIONS & GIFT GIVING

Most sightseeing locations in Sri Lanka will have a fixed entrance fee, while various sites such as temples are happy to receive donations. Travelers can decide on the amount for themselves. Gifts can be given to worthy institutions; for example, village schools and orphanages. It is always better to check with the institution on their requirements before handing out gifts or donations, to make sure it best helps those in need.

## COMMUNICATION

Travelers can purchase local sim cards on arrival at the airport. There will be two or three service providers to choose from. The sim cards can be topped up at local communication centers throughout the island. Most of the hotels and cafés provide WI-FI for free, or at a reasonable price.

# CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Sri Lankans are very friendly and respectful to travelers, and will always take the extra effort to help you out in any situation – and this not done expecting a tip of any sort. ‘Ayubowan’, which means ‘may you live longer’, can be used to greet people at any time of the day. Sri Lanka is a multicultural country and the population predominantly consists of Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims, Malays and

Burghers.

All religions should be respected equally. When visiting religious sites it is compulsory to be decently dressed and it is better to avoid loud colors. No photographs should be taken with the back facing to any religious shrines as it is considered impolite.

## DISPLAYS OF AFFECTION

Kissing in public is not allowed in Sri Lanka due to local culture and practices; it is considered a private way of showing affection to your loved ones. However, there is no offence in handholding – or a simple hug, which is also a way of showing hospitality, affection and tenderness.

## SAFETY

It is very safe to travel to any part of the island and the locals are very helpful and respectful towards travelers. Guests are encouraged to engage with the local communities and experience the local culture. However, it is advisable to follow the instructions of the local guide at all times.

## POYA DAYS

The most common holiday is the Poya Day, which occurs every full moon and is important to Buddhists for religious observances. There are approximately 12 or 13 Poyas per year. Generally, shops and businesses are closed on Poya days, the sale of alcohol and fresh meat is forbidden, and entertainment is restricted.

## LANGUAGE

‘Sinhalese’ is the language spoken commonly by locals, and English is widely spoken throughout the country. Hence, communication will be relatively easy in Sri Lanka.

## PHOTOGRAPY

You will find outstanding opportunities for photography.

- If you are bringing a digital camera, remember to bring extra storage cards, and a battery charger and/or extra batteries. Batteries can be charged at most hotels and lodges, but additional batteries or storage cards are difficult to purchase in small rural areas.
- Bring a reliable waterproof case or zip-lock plastic bags to protect your camera from humidity and rain or if your itinerary includes boat travel.
- Do not turn your back to a Buddhist statue when within a reasonable distance. This includes posing for pictures. It is ok to take photos of a statue, but all persons should be facing it.



# GRATUITIES

Tipping is always at your discretion, although it is very common and expected throughout Sri Lanka. Below is a guideline to help you determine how much and when you will need to be prepared to tip. Please tip in Sri Lankan rupees whenever possible, especially for all local services; regional tour escorts and drivers can accept US dollars (in clean, new, unmarked denominations).

Most hotels in Sri Lanka have a tipping box where you can leave cash for the entire staff, rather than attempt to tip the myriad of staff you will encounter; ask at each reception desk. The managers will divide the tip amongst all service staff. The exception is for bellboys, whom you can tip about \$0.50 USD per bag. For most trips in

Sri Lanka you can plan from \$20 - \$30 USD per person, per day in gratuities. Always be looking for opportunities to change into small denominations of local currency for tips, because change for larger denominations can sometimes be hard to come by.

- Escort and drivers can be tipped at the end of their service period.
- Local guides/boatmen can be tipped daily as they may change on a daily basis.
- Most restaurants automatically include a service charge of 10% so tipping at meals is not necessary.

## FOOD & DRINKS

Options for food and drinks are widely available throughout the main cities. However, the options will be limited as you travel further out of the main tourist cities. Sri Lankan food is in general spicy. Sampling Sri Lankan food at a restaurant or a village home is an experience on its own! If travelers have sensitive stomachs it is advisable to acquire the help of a local guide when deciding on a dish.



## CLOTHING AND PACKING FOR SRI LANKA

Pack lightweight cotton-clothing or quick-dry apparel. All visitors must wear decent clothing to cover the body appropriately when visiting religious places. Shorts and sleeveless tops are not acceptable and this rule is strictly adhered to at all religious sites. Visitors should remove hats, caps, shoes and slippers when entering buildings and sites with religious monuments. Most of these places have a secure facility at the entrance for visitors to leave behind shoes and slippers for a small fee.

Pack layers of clothes, including a mid-weight jacket, gloves and hat for early-morning game safaris when temperatures can be chilly in winter. In general, dress is casual unless going to dinner at upscale hotels, restaurants, or theatres where you may want a nice skirt or pants. Good walking shoes or lightweight hiking boots are essential if you plan to do a lot of walking. Carry an extra pair of lightweight shoes or sandals to change into at the end of the day. Laundry service is available at most hotels where you'll be staying for at least two nights.

# TRAFFIC

Mostly traffic is seen in Colombo during business hours (e.g. from 7am to 9am in the morning and from 4.30pm to 8pm in the evening). Also traffic can be seen during the days that Sri Lankans celebrate their main festivals (e.g. Vesak/New Year Holidays etc.). Recently the government introduced two expressways, one from Colombo to Galle and the other from the airport to Colombo. That proves to be an advantage for quick traveling.

# DRUGS

Drug taking is not acceptable. If any person is caught using drugs in Sri Lanka, or importing drugs into the country, the police will arrest them and take legal action. Obvious physical and mental health concerns aside, one of the main reasons we recommend avoiding drugs in Sri Lanka is the risk of imprisonment.

# MOSQUITOES

The most common disease in urbanized areas is Dengue Fever. The number of victims contracting this disease has been increasing over the last few years. The government has initiated Dengue prevention campaigns throughout the island, starting from local schools to several institutes. As a precaution, we recommend that travelers use mosquito sprays or mosquito nets to avoid getting bitten. These items can be purchased from local pharmacies, supermarkets, or prior to leaving your home country.

# TRAVEL TIMES

Travel times can be challenging to determine, and Google Maps can be misleading as the road conditions influence travel times. While most of the road networks are very well developed and maintained, when traveling from one destination to another you may come across certain towns with poor road conditions that will slow down your drive time. Expect a few bumpy rides! Also, depending on the time of day you travel, your travel times may vary due to work and school peak hours. When traveling up to the mountain areas, the roads are winding and this also increases traveling time.

# LOCAL TRANSPORTATION

When using local transport like Tuk Tuks, be mindful to drive with a Tuk Tuk that has a charging meter to avoid getting over charged. The best option is to download the most popular local Tuk Tuk hailing app – Pick Me. In addition, the UBER app works within Colombo.

# LOCAL MOBILE CONNECTION

Once you meet your guide at the airport, please request his assistance to purchase a local sim card. Our recommended network is Dialog, as this has coverage at most locations.



# PURCHASE OF TRAIN TICKETS

The procedure for purchasing train tickets is quite complicated in Sri Lanka, as there is no online booking system. Usually the tickets open up for sale 30 days prior to the train ride date; demand is very high and tickets need to be purchased at the train stations, so there are often queues. Availability, train times, train compartment and seats cannot be guaranteed due to the high demand.



## SUSTAINABILITY

### Elephant rides and captive elephants

This is something that we don't offer under any circumstance. We believe that it is a money making machine, and uses captive elephants for unethical purposes. Our view is that elephants belong in the wild and that's where our clients will see them, not at a perceived "orphanage" with dubious credentials.

### Plastic bottles

Many hotels have adopted the concept of eliminating the use of plastic water bottles, however this is still a challenging procedure as certain areas have limited access to clean drinking water. Therefore, we suggest our guests use sealed plastic water bottles – we personally collect the used bottles and pass them on to recycling plants to minimize environmental damage while ensuring clients' health and safety.



## BEACHES

Down south there are beaches like Bentota, Beruwala, Tangalla, Galle, Mirissa, and Unawatuna. They are mostly popular in winter. On the east coast the beaches are Pasikudah, Arugam Bay, Trincomalee, Nilaveli, which are mostly popular during summer.

Sunbathing can be done at private beaches owned by hotels, where it's acceptable for women to wear bathing suits and bikinis. It's not acceptable to sunbathe on public beaches.

# TREKKING & OTHER ADVENTUROUS ACTIVITIES

Trekking in Sri Lanka can be done in some areas such as Horton Plains, Sinharaja Rain Forest and Knuckles Mountain Range. Travelers wishing to go on a trek must get advice and guidance from experienced trekkers. Guides can make travelers aware of accident risks, for example natural

disasters such as landslides, floods, draughts, and lightning. Attacks from wild animals can be a possible threat. We promote adventurous trekking based on the guidance given by professional tour guides.

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## SCAMS

Scams can occur in Sri Lanka. Occasionally shopkeepers attempt fraud by fooling customers, and we advise guests to be aware of overcharging at sights for entrance fees. There are three options for travelers to pay these sight entrance fees:

- 1) Pay the entrance fees along with the total package before arriving to Sri Lanka.
- 2) Pay the entrance fees at the beginning of the tour to the tour guide.
- 3) Pay the entrance fees on the spot.

Options one and two are safe for tourists, however the third option can leave you open to being overcharged. There are often a number of different guides collecting entrance fees on the spot, and they may charge different rates or a "premium" fee for tourists.







## TIPS FOR TIPPING

Usually travelers pay tips to guides, drivers, and porters that are based on clients' satisfaction regarding their service. Sometimes people ask for more tips from travelers than required, as some travelers can be confused by Sri Lankan notes and values. Trustworthy guides will often explain these scams to tourists, however travelers can refer to the reviews from previous visitors on TripAdvisor.

## LINKS & READING

It is always best to have an idea of the country you are traveling to, and the internet is a great tool where travelers can read up on the local culture, food, weather, experiences and local festivals. Of course, often more accurate up to date information could be obtained from us on request.

There are several books we can recommend to read before or during a stay in the country:

- **From Ceylon To Sri Lanka**, by Jayantha Jayawardene
- **A History of Sri Lanka**, by K.M. De Silva
- **Woolf in Ceylon**, by Christopher Ondaatje
- **The Jam Fruit Tree**, by Carl Muller
- **Running in the Family**, by Michael Ondaatje

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