

USEFUL INFORMATION FOR TOURIST

Festivities & Holidays in Sri Lanka

Leaving that aside one must be aware that holidays and festivals that take place in Sri Lanka as we stated earlier due to the multicultural background. Significant religious and national festivals are celebrated throughout the year. So with Saturday designated as a half day and Sunday full day off, Sri Lankans starts “TGIF” on Friday evening, and get into to the “islander mood”. Full moon days of each month are referred to as “poya” day and it is prohibited by law to serve or sell alcohol and red meat in hotels, restaurants and supermarkets however fish will be available, so best be prepared.

Other not to miss events in Sri Lanka

The first cultural pageant or “Perahera” as it’s known in Sinhalese, is “Duruthu” itself meaning January in the Sinhalese calendar which takes place in the commercial capital Colombo, great time to combine shopping and sightseeing of this colonial era seaport and capital, don’t forget to take a stroll down Galle face green, taking in the gram hawkers, kites dancing in the breeze and the sea spray.

April marks the end of paddy harvesting season and the New Year according to the Buddhist calendar, the 13 & 14 of April is the time when all Sinhalese and Hindu’s celebrate “Awurudu”, a unique event



where the whole country follows a single time table to cook and eat, and many sweets meats are made along with milk rice to celebrate, great time to be around where anyone will be invited to join in on the festivities, most hotels will organize a festival to celebrate Awurudu. this is the time of “summer blooms” festival in the cooler climates of Nuwara Eliya. The wealthier Sri Lankans spend Awurudua in this “Little England” as the colonials called it, parades and flower

shows mark the season opening along with horse and car races. The usually sleepy town becomes crowded during this time.

Deepavali – Hindu festival of lights celebrated by Hindu’s in either October or November and **Tamil Thai Pongal Day** - Tamil New Year in mid January our two other prominent festivals in Sri Lankan calendar.

The most Extravagant cultural pageant in Aisa (This year from 20th to 29th August 2015)

The most extravagant festival is the one held each year in the month of July – August is “Esala perahera” in Kandy, which pays homage to the Sacred tooth relic of lord Buddha, as Robert Knox describes it aptly from 350 years ago, “Forty Elephants all covered with white cloth and decorated in brass upon which the Sacred Relic rides with all the triumphs that the king and Kingdom can afford followed by a great multitude of drummers, pipers, trumpeters, Kandyan dancers, fire walkers through all the street of the city in honor of the Sacred relic” The Perahera goes on for ten days, the last day is the best, expect long queues and huge crowds long before the start of the perahera which takes place in the night, if you are fussy or not the type that likes crowds best you find one of the many spots within the route to comfortably watch this truly magnificent pageant.



Christmas & Easter celebrations in Sri Lanka

Although only around 7% of Sri Lankans are Catholic or Christian, Christmas is celebrated in grand manner in Sri Lanka especially in the southern and western coastal cities, urban areas and all hotels will celebrate Christmas in one form or the other. The focus of the local people is to ensure that the tourists have a wonderful time. Almost every major hotel organizes a grand Christmas party and a TV and Radio stations organize parties throughout the month of December. Note that most hotels will charge you a Christmas and New Year supplement, best clarify same if you are planning to travel during this time and book ahead to avoid the rush as this is the height of the tourist season. Exact Dates will alter from year to year. The Tourist Board produces a new comprehensive list each year for many other events on their website



Kindly note that exact dates for all the above celebrations will change according to the auspicious time calculations done for that particular year, Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority official website will carry an updated list for all above mentioned and many other event throughout the year. When travelling around Sri Lanka, you should make arrangements through reputable travel companies and exercise appropriate caution.

How to get around and communicate?

It's advisable to book your tour ahead with a reputed travel facilitator who will organize all you're travelling and ease your mind, save you time and money of having to negotiate first and agree on rates and place every single time. Erratic driving is common and as a result, road accidents are frequent. Pedestrians and animals often appear in the road without warning, best leave the driving to locals, while you enjoy the tour. English is widely spoken throughout Sri Lanka except in very remote villages, speaking slowly and clearly is better than speaking louder as it has no effect on understanding.



What's the local currency and are ATMs widely available?



Local currency is Sri Lanka Rupees, the airport counter or any of the commercial bank will be able to exchange it for you on arrival, and note that travelers' cheques exchange commissions are higher than currency and rates are more or less same among the banks but considerably poor in hotels. Money can be exchanged on the black-market at a better rate, namely jewelers, large stores but discretion is essential and a local will get a better rate than so

a trustworthy local friend will come in handy.

Some travelers experience problems using their credit / debit cards on arrival in Sri Lanka when their banks' automated fraud protection system blocks transactions. It may be useful to inform your bank in advance of your intended travel arrangements. VISA/MASTERCARD ATM's are available throughout except in very remote areas.

Sri Lankan banks are open Mon - Fri 9am - 3pm and closed at the weekends and Poya Days. The main banks are Bank of Ceylon, Sampath, HSBC, Peoples, Hatton national and Commercial.

Is the water drinkable?

Yes it is, as long as it's bottled, however check seal before purchasing and one can boil tap water and use.

Do disabled travelers have easy access to facilities?

Sri Lanka still has some way to go in terms of its facilities for disabled services, and have been making gradual changes over the last few years. Most hotels have taken notice of the requirements of the disabled and now have wheelchair access, ramps, lifts, and other amenities suited for the disabled.

What kind of attractions are there for kids and families?

Sri Lankans are very family-oriented and Sri Lankans welcome children everywhere. Plenty of opportunities in all hotels and resorts to keep kids entertained and upon request you will be able to employ a nanny, to have a peaceful candle lit dinner under a galaxy of stars. You can mingle your activities with theirs at most of the country's top attractions.

Most hotels are children-friendly and will have western dishes like pasta, eggs (scrambled or omelet) while hotdogs, burgers are only available in large cities at McDonalds, KFC or Pizza Hut. The supermarket chain is extensive now reaching out to most areas with the exception of the remotest villages disposable nappies, and the equivalent of "Calpol" is "Panadol" in a syrupy form available at all pharmacies in Sri Lanka, check expire dates before purchasing.

Sri Lankan kids' are exceptionally practical and will keep themselves entertained and out of their parent's way, boys will mostly play cricket, cycle or site see, so western kids can add these to their normal activities on offer like snorkeling, nature walks and wildlife, cycling and sightseeing, as Sri Lankan kids will happily welcome a new Western friend to their games.

Sunscreen is a must along with wide brimmed hats to avoid sunburn on tender skin, and best purchased from



native country along with mosquito repellents, as Sri Lanka doesn't stock them for obvious reasons or will not have the brands that you look for and kids making friends with stray cats and dogs must definitely be discouraged.

Are gay and lesbian travelers welcomed and where should they go?

This is considered taboo in Sri Lanka due to religious beliefs and cultural background, however you will see that most men and women hold hand in same sex, but don't take it to have the western meaning! Same sex relationships are illegal in Sri Lanka while nude or topless sunbathing is not tolerated.

Are narcotics permitted in Sri Lanka?

Like most western countries it is prohibited by the penal code of Sri Lanka and there are severe penalties for all drug and related offences and crimes related to the abuse of children. In most circumstances detainees can be held without charge, indefinitely and convicted offenders may face lengthy jail sentences.

How to contact friends and family back home by phone or internet?

Sri Lanka is quite well connected to the rest of the world via mobile phones, buy a "simcard" on arrival (you might have to submit a photocopy of your passport) wayside communication shops provide internet facilities excepts in the most remote villages and charge you by blocks of one hour.

Last but not least, how are the health facilities in Sri Lanka?

Sri Lankan private Hospitals are located in around Colombo while Kandy and Galle also have a few, the rest of the Island is served by government hospitals, however most towns will have well stocked pharmacies manned by qualified English speaking staff with the exception of the most remote villages. Contact your GP before your trip to check whether you need any vaccinations or other preventive measures.

Local Customs of Sri Lanka

Photography: ***DON'T*** pose in front or by the side of a Buddha statue it is considered extremely disrespectful or try to touch or try to photograph a Buddhist monk without prior assent, climbing on stupas and statues are considered sacrileges' so please avoid it. Remove your head gear and shoes when entering a religious or a place of worship and should also be attired decently.

Music: Sri Lankan youth will drum up a beat whenever they are on holiday and have a distinct type of ***"Baila"*** music, a derivative of Kafferinhoe, and anything available will turn into shakers or drums and most hotels play calypso music along with reggae during weekends.

Touts & Tipping: "Beach boy" is the common term used and offer various services if accepting note that they will also make a living thus will receive a commission from wherever they lead you, but they can also communicate very well in most European languages. A service charge of 10% is usually levied in most restaurants, if they haven't a tip of Rs. 100/- to 500/- depending on the standard service is considered good.

All of the above aspects of Sri Lanka are explored on this site, all you have to do is use it, and you can be sure to have a worry-free stay when you go to Sri Lanka. Worries aside, now all you need to do is click on the links to help you plan your trip or decide where to head first, take a look at what's on offer and for more information on the Best of Sri Lanka.

What to Wear in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka enjoys a tropical climate and we advise you to do the same by wearing linen or cotton clothing which absorbs sweat on your travels or on the beach along with shades and a wide brimmed hat. Nudity & topless sunbathing is prohibited by law, women should dress modestly to staring in public places e.g. Waterfalls, towns etc, and to avoid hassle at places of worship e.g. Temples, kovils etc.

The island has its share of bugs and mosquitoes so cover yourself well during evenings and dinner time as most of your meals will be alfresco

Religious Sites: All visitors to Buddhist and Hindu temples must remove shoes, hats and fold umbrellas, also require you to remove shoes & hats. Women should be decently clad covering legs and shoulders. If you chose to make a donation, place it into the donation box.



Hill Country: Getting there through windy road can give you a touch of motion sickness so if you are that type best have your pills ready but most of our drivers will have you in mind and drive slower than usual. Hill country is much cooler than the coast, particularly in the evenings. Keep your sweaters or fleece and a waterproof ready. In mid-country where it drizzles constantly you'll find leeches, local remedy is to have rub soap or salt on them and do not pull them off you.

Sri Jayawardensapura-kotte & Colombo: The capital and the commercial capital respectively, has received extensive face lifts during the past two years and is dotted with parks and many fashionable restaurants, is a thriving social scene. Linen casuals will be fine but you may feel a tad under dressed in the "vogue" restaurants.

Visas/Travel Insurance to Sri Lanka

Effective 1st of January 2012 a visitor's **visa** valid for 30 days is levied for Sri Lanka for all countries except Maldives and Singapore. The visa costs \$30 and can be applied for in advance via the ETA at the following website: www.eta.gov.lk. Visitors arriving without an approved visa will issued a visa on arrival for \$50. These visas can be extended for a fee in Colombo at the Visa Council located within the Immigration & Immigration Service building in "Punchi borella" (photographs are required). It is recommended that you carry your passport for identification purposes at all times and ensures that it is valid for 6-months beyond the date of travel.



Insurance - A policy to cover theft, loss and medical issues is a must. Depending on your taste you may also wish to check out cover for adventurous activities such as diving, white water rafting, cycling and abseiling etc, a word of caution though please do not make false complains in-order to claim insurance back home as done by several recently, as you will be fined.

Driving License – International driving license is valid for only 3 months and must be obtained from your native country. For extensions, apply with two photos and fees at 4th Floor, Automobile Association of Sri Lanka, located near in Galle face green. Further information can be gained here www.aaceylon.lk. It is a good idea to take two photocopy sets of all relevant documents - passport, insurance policy etc., and leave one copy at home & carry the copy with the originals for authentication purposes.

Shops

Sri Lanka is full of art & crafts, jewelry and beautifully carved masks and antique furniture can be found throughout Sri Lanka. Note if they are made of wood to check with your native countries policy before making the purchase.

One of the main exports of Sri Lanka is ready made clothing and there are many manufacturers in Sri Lanka and Colombo's fashion stores stock up on unsold export stock. Colombo is the center for fashion, department stores, Western style shopping is available for a list of the best retailers visit Colombo region shopping.

The city of “Ambalangoda” located in the South West is home to the traditional devil masks and carved crafts. They craft great artifacts for decorating homes and the quality is first class, stretch from Ambalangoda to Galle, in particular is a haven for antiques and you will find some exquisite Dutch colonial pieces. They are very bulky so consider export charges and the law of your land when negotiating your price. Sadly, the dealers have become wise to demand for such pieces. Most has been exported and the prices are extremely inflated, and also beware of fakes.

Sri Lanka is famous and is the home to many beautiful gems, namely sapphires (not known by many, there are 5 colours not just blue), rubies, aquamarine, moonstone, garnets and topaz. Jewelry stores can be found in Ratnapura (The city of Gems) and predominantly in South West resort hotels where they have a kiosk highly inflated pricing but the quality is of a reasonable standard, and the city of Colombo, beware of touts and there is a Gem testing center in Galle (310 Galle Road, Kollupitya).

Having a local rate and tourist rate and this is common across Sri Lanka, though most tourist prices are still cheap. Please just accept it as the norm not only for these but for archaeological sites in the cultural triangle, botanical gardens & the Zoological gardens.

Communications

Time zone: Sri Lanka is GMT +6hrs

Country code: is 94, outgoing International code: 00.

Mobile Tel: A good telecom infrastructure but expensive. Select from four providers Dialog, Mobitel, Etisalat & Hutch mobile network & sim card can be bought off the counter and pre-paid cards are extremely cheap.

Fax: Available in most hotel receptions along with email facilities.

Internet: Almost every town has an internet café and hotels with Internet facilities who charge you by blocks of one hour, Rs.60/- - 80/- per hour is the norm.

Post: Operated by Sri Lanka postal service and Airmail to Europe takes about 7 days, for anything faster rely on courier companies.

Electricity: All accommodation points disperse electricity in 230-240 V AC, 50Hz form, so be careful if you appliances run on 110v. A **step-down transformer** is obtainable from any good electrical store in the main cities.

Guides/Books to Sri Lanka

Tourist Authority licensed travel guides are best hired (included on request at Best of Lanka) if you plan on a round trip, local sightseeing destinations will have its own though agree rates beforehand. They are very knowledgeable on their given subject and most English speaking drivers will have a general knowledge on you travel route.

Embassies and Diplomatic Missions in Sri Lanka

Applications for lost passport and other services

German Embassy – 011 2580431. Address - 40, Alfred house Ave, Colombo 03.

Italian Embassy – 011 2588388. Address - 55, Jawatte road, Colombo 05.

French Embassy – 011 2698815. Address - 89 Rosmead Place, Colombo 07.

British High Commission 011 5390639. Address - 389, Baudhaloka Mawatha, Colombo 07.

Russian Federation Embassy – 011 2574959. Address - 62, Sir Earnest De Silva Mw, Colombo 07.

Netherlands Embassy – 011 2596914. Address – 25, Torrington Avenue, Colombo 07.

Australian Embassy – 011 2463200. Address - 21, Gregory's road, Colombo 07.

Belgium consulate – 011 2504351. Address - 69/5D, Elvitigala Mawatha, Colombo 08.

Swiss Embassy – 011 2695117. Address - 63 Gregory's road, Colombo 07