

SOME FAST FACTS AND A BIT OF HISTORY

Full Name:	Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka
Capital:	Sri Jayewardenepura
Commercial Capital:	Colombo
Area:	65,610 square km / 25,332 square miles
Population:	20.33 Million
People:	74% Sinhalese 15% Tamils 9% Moor 2% other

Major industries: Processing of rubber, tea, coconuts, and other agricultural commodities; clothing, cement, petroleum refining, textiles, tobacco, rice, sugarcane, grains, pulses, oilseed, spices, tea, rubber, coconuts; milk, eggs, hides, beef

Major trading partners: US, UK, Germany, Japan, Singapore, India, Iran, Taiwan, Belgium, Hong Kong, China, South Korea

History: The ancient history of Sri Lanka begins in the 6th century BC, when an exile prince from West Bengal landed on the north western shores of the Island. However, the prehistoric evidence dates as far as back 37,000 BC.

History states that the exile prince and his 700 followers tricked the inhabitants into handing over the island to them. The inhabitants were to be of three tribes: yaksaha, naga and deva tribes. By 380BC the kingdom moved to the first capital of ancient Sri Lanka which stood tall for 1400 years. Due to its close ties of the royals with India, this period sees the introduction of **Buddhism** and in turn sees the cultural and technology of the old world introduced to the developments that came about.

The kingdom thereafter started to move through the island from Polonnaruwa all the way to Kandy due to various invasions from India and its close proximity. An eastern invasion took place due to the trade lines that the island was in close proximity to. Its immense wealth of spices, gems, ivory and elephants were key in its success to be an important stakeholder in the trading lines.

Known as "**Taprobane**" to Greeks and Romans, trade partners from the Middle East were Arab Traders since the 10th century who knew the island "**Serendib**". Its first run of coastal colonisation happened by the Portuguese in the 16th century who called this island "Ceilao". In the 17th century, the Dutch overthrew and took over the areas held by the Portuguese, which in turn they ceded by default to the British who went on to make the island "**Ceylon**" as a British Colonial colony in the 19th century. The British took control of the entire island by means of a treaty signed by the Kandyan monarchy known as the "Kandyan Convention".

During the British colonisation the island was introduced to modern world infrastructure, which included the present **railway system** and some of the early **roadways** to name a few. They were also instrumental in the introduction of **tea** and **rubber** cultivation, which remain as some of the top income sources to the island.

After gaining its independence in 1948 the island took its course of change along with its name changing to "**Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka**". The 1980's see the start of the dark ages of the modern era with severe unrest arising in the north and south. Although the unrest in the south is neutralised, unrest in the north that was due to ethnic tension spirals out resulting in a three-decade long war, which was neutralised in 2009 by many thousands laying down their lives. These decades saw the island go through many ceasefires, assassination and suicide bomb blasts that halted its development amongst its peers in Asia. Since then the island has been steered towards its future through the numerous developments that are ongoing island wide.

GETTING THERE

Being an island, access is mainly by air, or through one of the many cruise ships entering the ports of Colombo or other port cities such as Trincomalee or Hambantota.

SriLankan Airlines (UL) is the flag carrier of Sri Lanka and a member of the Oneworld alliance, currently serving 105 destinations in 47 countries. International carriers from all over the world are connected to Sri Lanka, with Asia and the Middle East being the main focus.

AIRPORTS

International

Colombo Bandaranaike (CMB) (Katunayake) 29km (19 miles) north of Colombo
Mattala Rajapaksa International Airport (HRI) 70km east of Tangalle

Domestic

Ratmalana (RML) is a primarily domestic airport serving the city of Colombo – 18km south of Colombo

PASSPORT AND VISAS

Passports

Passports must be valid for at least six months from the date of entry.

ETA (Visas)

All holiday or business travellers to Sri Lanka must have an electronic travel authorization (ETA) for entering Sri Lanka. An ETA is issued only for short visits to Sri Lanka for business, tourism and transit purposes

Validity

ETA is valid for three months. A fresh ETA cannot be obtained using the same passport until that ETA expires. If you lose the passport that contains the valid ETA, you may apply for a fresh ETA by paying the relevant fee again.

Please visit <http://www.eta.gov.lk> for more information.

HEALTH REQUIREMENT

For most short-term travellers the usual recommended vaccinations for Sri Lanka include cover against the childhood diseases (Tetanus, Diphtheria and Poliomyelitis, Measles, Mumps and Rubella) as well as cover against the food and water borne diseases of Typhoid and Hepatitis A. For those trekking in the Sri Lankan countryside or staying for longer periods then cover against Hepatitis B and Rabies should be considered.

Standard tourists should have their initial consultation for vaccinations for Sri Lanka at least 4 – 6 weeks in advance of departure. Those planning a more extensive trip or undertaking adventure sports should consider attending a consultation earlier.

Many tourists to Sri Lanka will stay within the south-western corner of the country or travel inland to Kandy. The incidence of foreign tourists developing Malaria after their time in Sri Lanka is very small. A decision on the

requirement for Malaria Prophylaxis will need to be weighed against time of the year, locations to be visited and duration of the trip.

Sri Lanka is situated like a teardrop off the south-eastern tip of India close to the equator. The climate is fairly steady throughout the year with temperatures generally above 20c and a moderately high humidity throughout the year – especially along the coastal resorts. Most rainfall tends to fall during April, May and June and again during October and November. It will be important to ensure that the correct clothing is brought to cope with the climatic conditions.

Please note that each traveller will require a specialised consultation and this information only contains basic guidelines.

CUSTOMS REGULATIONS

The following items may be imported into Sri Lanka by persons over 18 years of age without incurring customs duty:

- 2 bottles of wine and 1.5l of spirits; a small quantity of perfume and 250ml of eau de toilette.
- Please note that tobacco products are prohibited to be brought into the country
- Firearms, explosives and dangerous weapons; ivory; antiques, statues and treasures; old books; animals/birds/reptiles (dead or alive) and parts; tea; rubber; coconut plants; dangerous drugs.
- Only two members of the same family traveling together are entitled to free import allowances.
- Valuable personal effects (including jewellery), must be declared on arrival in Sri Lanka.
- There is no gift allowance.
- Unused Sri Lankan currency should be reconverted to foreign currency upon departure. You are not permitted to leave Sri Lanka with currency in excess of LKR250

CURRENCY AND EXCHANGE

Currency

Sri Lanka Rupee (LKR) = 100 cents. Notes are in denominations of LKR 5000, 2000, 1000, 500, 200, 100, 50, 20 and 10. Coins are in denominations of LKR10, 5, 2, 1, 50 and 25 cents. There are also large numbers of commemorative coins in circulation.

Currency Exchange

Foreign currency must be changed only at authorized exchanges, banks and hotels, and these establishments must endorse such exchanges on the visitor's Exchange Control D form, which is issued on arrival and must usually be returned at the time of departure.

Credit/Debit Cards and ATMs

American Express, MasterCard and Visa are widely accepted. Diners Club has more limited acceptance.

LOCAL TIME AND WORKING HOURS

GMT +0530

Banks 09:30 hours to 15:00 hours - Monday – Friday

Currency Exchange Booths 10:00 hours to 18:00 hours - daily

Department stores and Shopping malls 10:00 hours to 19:00 hours - Monday – Saturday

Offices	09:00 hours to 17:00 hours - Monday – Friday 09:00 hours to 12:00 hours - Saturday
Government offices	09:00 hours to 16:30 hours - Monday – Friday
Offices usually recess for one-hour lunch break between 12:00 hours and 13:00 hours	

RELIGION

70% Buddhist | 12% Hindu | 10% Muslim | 7% Christian | 1% Other

Dressing in a **modest manner** is essential for men and women when visiting religious sites.

When you visit a temple or other religious site, remember that photography should not be carried out in a manner causing disrespect. For instance, it is strictly forbidden to be photographed in front of or beside any statues and murals. Note that flash photography can damage old murals. Any not adhering to these guidelines may result in prosecution and deportation. Footwear will need to be taken off when entering a religious building.

Do not wear any cloths or accessories with pictures depicting Lord Buddha or any other religious leaders as this may result in prosecution and deportation.

CLIMATE

Tropical climate. Upland areas are cooler and more temperate, and coastal areas are cooled by sea breezes. There are two monsoons, which occur from May to July and from December to January.

Required clothing - Lightweights and rainwear. The average temperature is 24 degrees Celsius.

WHEN TO GO

Climatically, the driest and best seasons are from December to March on the west and south coasts and in the hill country, and from May to September on the east coast. December to March is also the time when most visitors come.

Out of season travel (May – October) is advantageous as it's less crowded and accommodation cost is comparatively low.

July and August are the time for the Kandy Esala Perahera, the 10-day festival honouring the sacred tooth relic of Lord Buddha, and also the time for the Kataragama Festival in the south. However, take note that during these festivals times' accommodation prices in both these towns can double and should be reserved well in advance.

LANGUAGE

The majority of Sri Lankans speak Sinhala, with Tamil as the second language. English is commonly used by government and tourism officials. Don't expect everyone, everywhere to be able to speak it fluently. It's much more common in the beach and tourist areas. Most people in rural villages cannot speak any English, beyond a few simple words.

- Sinhala Language: The greeting in Sinhala is "**aa-yu-BO-wan**" It means that "May you live longer"; 'Thank you' is "**isthu-thee**"

- Tamil Language: The greeting in Tamil is "**Vanakkam**"; 'Thank you' is "**Nanri**"
- Sri Lankan Moor: If you meet a Muslim it is polite to say "**Assalamu Aliakum**" (Arabic); and Thank You "**Jaza-ka Alla**" (Arabic).

ELECTRICITY

230/240 volts, 50 cycles AC plug points used to be round pins however, the more modern hotels do have square pins; nevertheless, it is advisable to carry your travel adapters to avoid the hassle of not being connected.

CLOTHING

Cotton clothes are useful at any time of the year but you will need light woollens for the hills and waterproof clothing or an umbrella. Modest dress for women is advisable especially when visiting religious sites (**no shorts or skirts above the knee and tops or dresses that are see through revealing too much of cleavage would be permitted**). When entering religious sites, you must take off shoes and socks. Do not forget comfortable shoes, sandals or trainers and cotton socks. If you are planning to hike and climb go prepared with suitable gear. Water sports enthusiasts would do well to take their snorkels and diving equipment along however these could be rented at most coastal areas as well.

DRINKING WATER

Drink only bottled water of a reputable make and check that the top has not been tampered with.

POST AND COMMUNICATIONS

Post offices

They are available around the island for your convenience. Most hotels will help you with your post as well.

Mobile / Cell Phones

There are numerous mobile network operators available on the islands; it is advisable to get a connection with a mobile broadband, which would allow your smart devices to be connected and functional. All these phone companies have a pay-as-you-go plan where you can buy a local SIM card for around Rs. 1,000 (do keep in mind to request for micro SIM). You will find recharge cards at any corner store throughout the island. Your chauffeur guide or the reception of your hotel will assist you to find your best connection.

INTERNET

Majority of the hotels have Internet facilities. If your hotel does not have Internet or email facilities available, ask anybody where you can find a "Tele communication".

However, please note most coffee shops and restaurants do have free Wi-Fi available as well. In addition, most mobile service providers do have very attractive mobile broadband connections to keep you and your smart devices connected while on the go.

SHOPPING

Sri Lanka has several shopping malls, including Majestic City, Liberty Plaza, Crescat Boulevard, Odel Unlimited and JAIC Hilton. Some 5-star hotels in Colombo also have shopping arcades. Special purchases include handicrafts and curios of silver, brass, bone, ceramics, wood and terracotta. Also cane baskets, straw hats, reed and coir mats and tea. Batik fabric, lace and lacquer ware are also popular. Some of the masks, which are used

in dance-dramas, in processions and on festival days, can be bought by tourists. Sri Lanka is also rich in gems. Fabrics include batiks, cottons, rayon's, silks and fine lace.

TIPPING

A 10% service charge is added to most restaurant and hotel bills. Tipping is a customary way to show appreciation for almost all services and small amounts are sufficient, otherwise 10% of the amount due is standard. Under tipping might be a cause of offence.

The below is our suggestion:

Hotel and airport porters: USD 1 per luggage

Taxi and tuk tuk drivers do not expect to be tipped.

Tour Guides and coach drivers respectfully accept any gratuity in recognition for outstanding service.

Chauffeur only: USD 3 -5 per day

Chauffeur guide: USD 8 – 10 per day

Travelling in groups: Chauffeur: USD 15 per day
 Helper: USD 6 – 10 per day
 National Guide: USD 35 – 50 per day

FOOD AND DINING

Standard foods are spicy and it is advised to approach curries with caution. There are many vegetables, fruits, meats and seafood. Chinese, Continental, Indian and Japanese menus are available in Colombo. A specialty is basic curry, made with coconut milk, sliced onion, and green chili, aromatic spices such as cloves, nutmeg, cinnamon, saffron, and aromatic leaves. If a dish is too spicy (hot), do ask for plain grated coconut – this will help ease the pain!

Things to know: Alcohol cannot be sold on **Poya** holidays (which occur each lunar month on the day of the full moon).

National specialties:

- **Hoppers** are a cross between a muffin and a crumpet with a wafer-crisp edge, served with a fresh egg soft-baked on top.
- **String hoppers** are steamed circlets of rice flour, a little more delicate than noodles or spaghetti.
- **Jaggery** is a fudge made from the crystallised sap of the kitul palm.
- The **durian** fruit is considered a great delicacy. Many hotels though, do not allow that the fruit is carried to your room as its smell can be very strong.

National drinks:

- **Tea** is the national drink and thought to be amongst the best in the world.
- **Toddy** (sap of the palm tree).
- **Arrack** (fermented Toddy which comes in varying degrees of strength).

Nightlife: Some Colombo hotels have supper clubs with music for dancing. There are theatres in Colombo, cinemas showing films from the USA, ballet, concerts and theatre productions.

Note: Cinema Theatres are closed on **Poya** Days.

CULTURES

Honour or personal dignity are extremely important to Sri Lankans and causing an individual to 'lose face' by public criticism. Anger should be avoided.

Homosexuality is illegal. Topless sunbathing is not permitted, as there are no nude beaches in Sri Lanka.

Smoking and drinking in public are strictly forbidden and can be prosecuted.

During public holidays and long weekends certain beaches and sites do get highly crowded with locals.

SAFETY AND SECURITY

In general, the threats to personal security for travellers in Sri Lanka are remarkably small. It is more pleasant to travel with a companion as it is advised not to travel alone especially after dark. The island including the North and East is safe to visit. If you have anything stolen, report it to the tourist Police. (A special tourist police set up to look after the needs of the tourists. Contact Number + 94 11 242 1451).

AIRPORT TAX

Departure tax is included in the cost of your ticket.

GENERAL ADVICE

Upset Stomachs - are due to the unsanitary preparation of food, it is useful to know what to watch out for under-cooked fish (especially shellfish) and meat (especially pork and mince) can be hazardous.

Sunburn - when you flop onto the beach or poolside lounger for a spot of sunbathing, always remember to apply a sunscreen product with a sun protection factor of at least 15. Remember you are just 600km from the equator: even with sunscreen, your sunbathing should be limited in time.

Heatstroke - sometimes those who have spent too long in the sun suffer what is termed heatstroke, the most common form being caused by dehydration. Take plenty of bottled water to the beach, or buy a thambili (king coconut) from an itinerant seller.

Prickly Heat - rash occurs when your sweat glands become clogged after being out in the heat for too long or from excessive perspiration. To treat it, take a cold shower, clean the rash with mild soap, dry yourself, apply hydrocortisone cream, and, if possible, a product that contains salicylic acid. Repeat every three hours.

RESTRICT AREAS AND OVERLAND BORDER CROSSING

Certain areas of the country such as high security zones and areas of national interest may not be accessed without prior approval from relevant departments.

There are no overland border crossings as it is an island however, deep sea expedition maybe carried out with prior approval and documentation as necessary.

GETTING AROUND BY ROAD

Traffic drives on the **left**. Most roads are tarred, with a 56kph (35mph) speed limit in built-up areas and 75kph (45mph) outside towns. Flashing lights mean that the driver is asserting right of way. Avoid remote areas and traveling at night.

Bus: An extensive network of services of reasonable quality is provided by the Sri Lanka Central Transport Board. Private bus drivers are paid according to the number of passengers and can often drive rather dangerously.

Taxi: These have yellow tops and red and white plates. In Colombo, taxis are metered but it is advisable to agree a rate before setting off. Drivers expect a 10 per cent tip. Uber, Pick-me, and Kangaroo operate through APPS – download these to your phone for easy going round in the town.

Car hire: Our company has fully insured cars. It is highly advisable to only use those as many local companies are not sufficiently covered by an insurance. We do not recommend self-driving.

Driving times: Going from place to place can be time consuming as traffic can be dense and not all drivers respect the rules. On average you cover 35km in one hour on normal roads, and 75km on the highway.

GETTING AROUND BY RAIL

Train rides in Sri Lanka can be a great choice to cross the country and it can be quite an adventurous experience.

One of the most exciting and scenic train rides is the up-country train tour where one can bask in the glorious sights of the lush green tea estates, gushing waterfalls and misty mountains as the train makes it climb up the hill country up to 6,000 ft. above sea level. The train ride available in the coastal region along the coastal towns, coconut-tree speckled beaches and turquoise waters is also quite striking.

Apart from the government railway network, the train services have now expanded into the private sector as well that offers tours from Colombo to Kandy, Badulla, Trincomalee and Vavuniya. The privately-operated rail carriages offer air-conditioned comfort, reclining seats and on-board meals.

Trains are extremely popular also with the local population and trains always run with full occupancy. Tickets can only be purchased one month ahead; for this we are not in a position to guarantee that sold tickets can actually be purchased. We have our dedicated teams to queue up, however at certain times the government blocks seats for own purposes.

INSURANCE

It is advisable that visitors consider short-term health and accident policies from your own insurance company prior to leaving home. As medical evacuations can be extremely costly, we recommend that you take out a comprehensive insurance policy that will cover the costs of a medical evacuation and subsequent medical care.

NOTABLE EVENTS

Sri Lanka has an enormous range of Buddhist, Hindu, Christian and Muslim festivals. The Kandy Esala Perahera (July/August) is the country's most important and spectacular pageant, with 10 days of torch-bearers, whip-crackers, dancers and drummers, not to mention elephants lit up like giant birthday cakes. It climaxes in a great procession honouring the Sacred Tooth Relic of Kandy. Second in importance is the Duruthu Perahera (January), held in Colombo, which celebrates a visit by Buddha to Sri Lanka.

Other celebrations include National Day (February), which is celebrated with parades, dances and national games; New Year (March/April), celebrated with elephant races, coconut games and pillow fights; Vesak (May), a sacred full moon festival commemorating the birth, death and enlightenment of Buddha; the Hindu Vel festival (July/August) in Colombo, where the ceremonial chariot of Skanda, the God of War, is hauled between two temples; and the predominantly Hindu Kataragama festival (July/August) in Kataragama, where devotees put themselves through a whole gamut of ritual masochism.

SOCIAL CONVENTIONS

Shaking hands is the normal form of greeting. It is customary to be offered tea when visiting and it is considered impolite to refuse. Punctuality is appreciated. A small token of appreciation, such as a souvenir from home or company, is always welcomed.

TRAVELLED WITH US?

Our aim is to constantly improve our services. Your feedback about your stay with us will be greatly appreciated. Please log in to <http://www.diethelmtravelsrilanka.com/feedback-form/>.

Thank you in advance for your valuable thoughts and time.

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