



Sri Lanka

meet buddhists and hindus; ask if they're sponsored by orange!

Tourcode: **SSK**

Groepsgrootte: **2-24**

Aantal dagen: **16**

Reisbeschrijving

Massive lion paws

On day 3, we will then drive through lovely tropical hill country to **Sigiriya**, a perfect base to explore the spectacular rock **fortress the Lion Mountain** guarded by two massive lion paws. Its frescos of women have been identified as Apsaras or celestial nymphs, as **ladies of the Kashyapa court**. You probably won't care who they are but they are great!

Polonnaruwa by bike

Not far from Sigiriya lies the ancient city of **Polonnaruwa**, littered with statues and ruins that are probably best **explored by bicycle**. On day 5, we'll travel to Anuradhapura the Buddhist world's most holy place of pilgrimage, the Bo Tree. It's thought to be the only living vestige of the tree under which **Lord Buddha** received enlightenment in 544 BC. We'll then move on to the lovely and unforgettable pilgrim town of Mihintale, the **birthplace of Buddhism** in Sri Lanka and home to an enormous white Buddha that overlooks the panoramic scenery.

Ancient capital of the country

On day 6 we'll drive up to **Kandy**, the spiritual centre and ancient capital of the country. On the way we'll visit the ancient **cave temples of Dambulla**, one of the world's most beautiful Buddhist monuments and visit a spice plantation where you can see how pepper, coffee, cinnamon, cloves, cocoa and ginger are grown. Kandy is built around the sacred site of the **Tooth Temple of Lord Buddha**. Here in a well guarded shrine the most revered object of the island is kept and it was said that who holds the Buddha's tooth, holds sway over the island. The first time you look at the shrine it will be as if you were hit by an electric spark, which really shook me.

Washing elephants

Day 7, it is one of the cutest things to do on the island; visit the **elephant orphanage at Pinnawela** and enjoy the little ones taking a bath (you can join in under the guidance of the mahouts). Don't forget to visit the lush botanical gardens of Peradeniya and enjoy a show of traditional dance in the evening, complete with **fire walking**. The following day we will visit a **tea factory** en route to Nuwara Eliya, formerly a British colonial town and then go **by train to Bandarawela** which is in the foothills and from where you'll be free to go for a walk among the tea plantations & country side.

Safaris into National Parks



On day 11 we travel in to **Tissamaharama**, starting point for optional safari's to the **Yala or Bundala National Parks** where you can encounter elephants, buffaloes, and if you are lucky, a bear or a leopard. Wild peacocks roam free here in abundance. We will also take you to the most interesting temple of Sri Lanka, in Kataragama. Here, both Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims pray, which is unique in the world!

Beautiful sunsets

Then proceeding on day 12 to **Weligama** (known for its stilt fishermen) and the old Dutch East Indies Trading Company town of Galle, before arriving in Hikkaduwa where we'll have time to **enjoy the beach**, beautiful sunsets and the sultry sea breeze until day 14 when we leave to Katunayake in anticipation of going our separate ways. No doubt very tearfully on day 15.

Routekaart



Uitgebreide reisbeschrijving

Welkom

Welcome to Shoestring!

Shoestring is looking forward to welcoming you on one of our unforgettable journeys. Be well prepared, get informed about your destination and make sure you know which vaccinations or other medication you require. During the trip, be flexible and don't feel



obliged to always stay with the group. Your guide will advise and assist you, but remember that he or she will have a lot on their mind to ensure that everything runs smoothly. We hope you have a fantastic time in this beautiful destination.

Before you travel

If your trip is unexpectedly cancelled, we will let you know at least three weeks prior to departure. Cancellations are very rare though, so go ahead and prepare yourself for your trip.

Moeilijkheidsgraad Informatie

This tour is classified as category A

The level of our trips varies. The experience of the level of a trip is also different from person to person. In order to give an indication of the level of a trip, we have developed the following rating system:

Category A: Light trip, possible for everyone. Short travelling distances, good hotels, slow pace.

Category B: Possible for everyone who is prepared. Sometimes longer travelling distances, good hotels or camping facilities, sometimes-adventurous camping sites, trip with a normal pace.

Category C: Possible for everyone who is well-prepared and has a flexible attitude; however, the trip has some tough parts – long walking days or travelling times, some simple accommodation.

Category D: Relatively tough trip: long travelling times, often primitive accommodation or tents, strenuous walking.

Category E: Tough trip. Participants need to know themselves and their boundaries, need to prepare well and be aware that the trip can be demanding.

The Sri Lanka trip belongs in **category A**. This trip can be enjoyed by anyone who is reasonably fit. The travel times are short and nearly all hotels are reasonably comfortable. Keep in mind that you travel in a developing country that has much lower standards of living than those you are used to. Also, it is possible that some roads cannot be used due to the weather or lack of maintenance; in which case we will have to change the route slightly. A flexible and positive attitude is therefore more important than physical fitness.

Nature of the trip

Sri Lanka is known as 'the Pearl of the Indian Ocean'. Shoestring's trip through this very hospitable paradise is very affordable. In two weeks, you will visit the best sights of the country, such as the ancient royal city of Anuradhapura and the cave temples of Dambulla. You will enjoy white beaches lined with palm trees and green tea plantations. Or how about visiting an elephant orphanage, taking a bicycle trip along the ruins of Polonnaruwa or an adventurous jeep safari in the most beautiful nature reserve near Yala? Sri Lanka is waiting for you, with open arms.

Wat is inclusief

Accommodation in hotels; transportation in AC (mini)buses only for transfers from hotel to hotel; train journey from Nanu Oya to Bandarawella; English speaking tour leader (not during stay at beach in Hikkaduwa).



Wat is exclusief

International flights; all meals; tips; visas; optional excursions; all entrance fees; airport transfers; booking fee; travel insurance.

Let op

♦ You will generally travel with other UK clients. However, if less than 6 people book the tour on the UK website then your group may be combined with a Dutch, German, Italian or Spanish group. Your tour would still be conducted in English. ♦ Groups less than 6 travellers will be guided by an English driver/guide in a smaller vehicle. Starting from 6 people you will be accompanied by an extra English speaking escort.

Dag-tot-dag schema

	Vervoer	Route	Overnachting
1.		Marawila	Marawila
2.			
3.		Marawila - Sigiriya	Sigiriya
4.		Sigiriya - Polonnaruwa	Polonnaruwa
5.		Polonnaruwa	Polonnaruwa
6.		Polonnaruwa - Dambulla - Spice Garden - Kandy	Kandy
7.		Kandy	Kandy
8.		Kandy - Nuwara Eliya	Nuwara Eliya
9.		Nuwara Eliya - Bandarawela	Bandarawela
10.		Bandarawela	Bandarawela
11.		Bandarawela - Tissamaharama	Tissamaharama
12.		Tissamaharama - Hikkaduwa	Hikkaduwa
13.		Hikkaduwa	Hikkaduwa
14.		Hikkaduwa - Katunayake	Katunayake
15.		Katunayake	End of tour

Dag-tot-dag schema

Dag 1 - 2: Marawila

You will land on the tropical island of Sri Lanka. From the airport Katunayake (Colombo) it is little less than one hour's drive to the hotel in Marawila.

Marawila lies on a long, quiet beach in a beautiful tropical setting. It is a wonderfully relaxed spot that has not been discovered by tourists yet, as opposed to nearby Negombo. Your first impression will be of the real Sri Lanka. A good optional excursion from Marawila is a boat trip to explore the 'Dutch Channels' area with small motorboats. Narrow creeks and small lakes with white lilies and lilac water hyacinths, overhanging palm trees, distant huts in lush tropical vegetation, swimming children, women doing the washing, friendly fishermen, toddy tappers balancing in the palm tops on ropes between the trees, illegal arrack distilleries where you can pop in for a sip of liquor, rich bird life and idling monitor lizards are among the sights on this relaxed boat trip. Near Marawila is the touristy Negombo, which you can visit. In the centre of this town are some houses dating from the Dutch period. Other remarkable sights are the baroque catholic churches of the Karaya fishermen living in Marawila and Negombo. Their catamarans have square



sails and robust floats on each side. It is wonderful to see hundreds of them set sail each morning. A huge variety of fish is caught and brought ashore, from shellfish and brightly coloured coral fish to three-metre long swordfish and sharks.

Dag 3: Marawila – Sigiriya

In our own coach, we will drive through tropical plantations to Sigiriya. The travel time is around five hours. You can pay a visit to the spectacular rock fort of Sigiriya, or 'Lion's Rock'. At the foot of the fort, two giant lion's paws guard the entrance. You go up a flight of spiral stairs past frescoes that were commissioned by King Kasyapa, portraying half-naked women draped with jewellery. The view that rewards you for the climb is magnificent. This giant fort was built in the fifth century by King Kasyapa to defend himself against the troops of his brother he had his father murdered to gain power. You will stay in a simple but attractive hotel in Sigiriya for one night.

Dag 4: Sigiriya - Polonnaruwa

Today you will go to Polonnaruwa. Take, if you are interested, an optional excursion to the ruins of this thousand-year old former capital of Sri Lanka. It can be toured by bicycle. In the 10th and 11th century, the Tamils made Polonnaruwa the most important city on the island. In this period, many Hindu temples were erected in the new provincial capital, a few of which have been preserved. The monarchs extended Polonnaruwa with palaces and luxurious estates and fortified it with a system of city walls. The remains of this medieval royal city extend over a considerable area, although the most important ones are grouped inside just one square kilometre. Here are the remnants of a complete city with marketplaces, workshops, stables, roads, garrison buildings and countless tiny temples. The biggest dagoba in the city is 55m high and would have had a golden tip. However, the most beautiful masterpiece is a group of four splendid Buddha statues, Gal Vihare, hewn from one giant piece of granite. The recumbent 15 m. Buddha is the largest of the group.

Dag 5: Polonnaruwa

Free day. An optional trip will take you to Anuradhapura and Mihintale. Two thousand years ago, Anuradhapura may well have been the most beautiful city in Asia. In the early 19th century, the Englishman; Backhaus discovered a vast area with overgrown ruins in a thinly populated region of North Sri Lanka. He also remarked that people prayed around a large old tree. Later, this tree turned out to be the only live shoot of the tree under which the Buddha was enlightened in 544 BC. This has made the tree one of the holiest places of pilgrimage for Buddhists around the world. Apart from the bodhi tree there are immense stupas and remains of palaces that are worth visiting. Another interesting place near Anuradhapura is Mihintale. Mihintale is of great importance as a place of pilgrimage for Sri Lankan Buddhists. The atmosphere is most special. The religious buildings are sited on and around granite hills, in a very lush green setting. The environment has been protected by law for over a thousand years. To see all there is to see requires a climb of 1840 steps! An enormous white Buddha overlooks the broad landscape. You then return to your hotel in Polonnaruwa.

Dag 6: Polonnaruwa – Dambulla – Spice Garden – Kandy

The ancient cave temples of Dambulla are among the most beautiful Buddhist



monuments in the world over the last two thousand years (entrance fee for Dambulla is included). These temples were hewn from a large rock that protrudes from the green plain. After ascending the stone staircase, a wide panorama opens up. The fourth cave dates from the first century BC and is the most beautiful. Apart from tens of sitting, standing and recumbent Buddha figures and bodhisattvas, there are some Hindu gods, including the god Vishnu that can always be recognised by its blue colour. Even now, religious ceremonies attract thousands of islanders to the caves. The journey continues along scenic roads with magnificent views in the direction of the central mountain range. We will stop at one of the many spice plantations, where pepper, cinnamon, cloves, cocoa and ginger are grown. In one such tropical garden, a worker on the plantation will explain something about the cultivation of these plants. We could also stop at a woodcarving workshop, where statues and dance masks are produced. If there is time, we will stop in Matale, famous for its nearby monastery; Alu Vihare. Then we will continue to Kandy, where you will stay in an attractive 3-star hotel with a swimming pool and grand view over the surrounding hills.

Dag 7: Kandy

Day off in Kandy, the cultural capital, situated in lush tropical hill country. The city and its surroundings offer lots to see and do, and the travel guide will tell you about all the options. Kandy houses the most important temple on the island, the one where the Buddha's tooth is kept. This object has been the central relic in the religious life of the Sinhalese population for over two thousand years. There is a museum with old royal regalia, jewellery and historic drawings of Kandy. The centuries-old garden of Peradeniya is one of the most beautiful botanical gardens in the world. It is 6km southwest of Kandy, on the road to Colombo. On a 60ha area in a loop of the Mahaweli River, is an extensive collection of trees, tropical climbers, bamboos, palms, orchids, spices and other plants, a total of 4000 species. Also worth a visit is the elephant bathing site on the Mahaweli River in Kandy, where elephants are taken at the end of the day for a well-earned bath. From Kandy, you can also visit the larger elephant orphanage in Pinnawela. The travel guide will offer an optional excursion there. It houses dozens of elephants. The young are fed by bottles and at certain times all the babies are allowed to have a bath in the nearby river. Seeing the baby elephants playing together is delightful. You should not miss one of the sparkling performances by the Kandyan dancers, the island's most famous dancers. The traditional opening; with drumming and fire is followed later by the devil's dance. It closes with a fire dance on live burning coals. The entire performance lasts one hour.

Dag 8: Kandy - Nuwara Eliya

Our route through the mountains to the next destination is breathtakingly beautiful. You pass waterfalls and tea plantations on the hillsides. The tea pluckers look like colourful butterflies between the bushes. We stop to visit a tea-processing site. In the afternoon, you arrive in Nuwara Eliya. It is just as if England was in the tropics. Victorian cottages that could be in Devonshire, a golf course, gardens full of roses, a lake with rowing boats, mown lawns and cool temperatures. Cargills supermarket could easily appear in a pre-war movie as a provincial department store. Nuwara Eliya (also called Nurelia) is also popular among Sri Lankans.

Dag 9: Nuwara Eliya - Bandarawela



This morning you can take an optional walking trip into the splendid Horton Plains National Park, in the highlands.

In the early afternoon, we drive to the nearby station of Nanu Oya, where you take a train to cross the mountains. The gorgeous three-hour train journey takes you through the most scenic mountain landscapes in the country, interspersed with the occasional tea or jungle plantation. The train is very slow, huffing and puffing through tunnels and along abysses, and at one stage it passes a height of 1900m above sea level. At the end of the afternoon you will have reached Bandarawela on the east side of the island. The bus will deliver your luggage to this simple hotel.

Dag 10: Bandarawela

Bandarawela is on the edge of the alpine mountains, which descend steeply to the low coastal plain. It is an area rich with fabulous views, mountain tracks along steep abysses and waterfalls on streams rushing down from the central mountain range.

Dag 11: Bandarawela - Tissamaharama

Today the bus will take us through a descent of over 1000m to Kataragama, at the foot of the mountains. Kataragama is one of the holiest places in Sri Lanka and a place of pilgrimage for Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims alike, who all venerate the god Skanda. This god works his wonders through the countless visionaries, oracles and medicine men on the island. Buy some lotus flowers or fruit for an offering in this temple or visit Ganesh, the elephant god of Hinduism who is also well loved by Buddhists. At one of the numerous festivals in Kataragama, you can see believers who pierce their lips or cheeks with pins.

Time for some wildlife! You will spend a night in a hotel in Tissamaharama near the Yala National Park, on the southeast coast of the island. The travel guide will tell you about the possibilities and help organise a safari. Yala is the main nature reserve of Sri Lanka. Its savannah is dotted with woods, lakes and immense granite rocks. The shy panthers and bears of Yala seem to have a preference for areas with lots of these rocks. Wild buffaloes, deer and particularly large herds of elephant can be observed from the jeeps that cross the park. In the ponds, crocodiles lie in wait for prey. Bundala nature reserve can also be crossed by jeep. It is a beautiful reserve with savannah, lakes and a beach which is of particular importance to the birds that nest there, such as storks, marabou, spoonbills, peacocks, pelicans, herons, ibises, flamingos and bee-eaters. Elephants are also spotted regularly, as well as crocodiles, monitor lizards, macaques, spangled leaf monkeys and deer. Wirawila Lake is the most unspoilt reserve also with many species of water bird, spangled leaf monkeys, crocodiles and elephants.

Dag 12: Tissamaharama – Hikkaduwa

Today you will drive via Hambantota and Weligama (known for the stilt fishermen) to the beach of Hikkaduwa.

Dag 13: Hikkaduwa

This coastal strip is famous for its coral reef. From November to April, you can go diving and snorkelling, or just look at the reef from a glass bottomed boat. The coral is OK but not world-class. Part of the reef has died. The tropical fish, however, remain unparalleled. A trip through the green lagoons behind the coast is also highly recommended.



Particularly special are the giant monitor lizards of over 2m long that walk around and swim about freely. Another rather quaint sight is Galle, a former Dutch fortified town. If you stand on the walls of Galle overlooking the beautiful, palm-lined bay, you can easily imagine yourself back in the old colonial days. It is as if time stopped. Other options are a visit to the Matara temples, a bike ride, a visit to a snake farm, or a turtle farm, or perhaps a river cruise. You could visit the 'blowhole' near Kudawella and the beaches near Unawatuna and Tangalle. But don't forget to enjoy the beach, the gorgeous sunsets and the endless warm sea breezes.

The hotel has a swimming pool and is located in an idyllic place on the beach. Here we will say goodbye to the travel guide. The hotel reception can guide and help you organise many activities

Dag 14: Hikkaduwa - Katunayake

Today you travel to Katunayake where you will stay your last night in a hotel very close to the airport.

Dag 15: Katunayake

It is the last day of your tour but rather than being about 'Goodbye' your thought should be 'Go further'!

Visit your personal 'my.shoestring' page on our website. 'my.shoestring' is the perfect way to make contact with other travellers before and after your trip. You can read and create journals from trips and upload your photos onto the photo gallery. Visit my shoestring today.

When booking your tour, please check to see whether you need any post-tour nights, bearing in mind that accommodation for the night of the final day of the tour (day 15) is not included.

Landinformatie Sri Lanka

Achtergrondinformatie

Celebrations and festivals

Most festive days are linked to religion. Except for the Christian festive days, the Sri Lankan festive days are linked to the moon calendar, so they vary every year. Each full-moon day is poya day, the most important temple day for Buddhists.

Esala Perahera: at the end of July or the beginning of August the feast of Esala Perahera is celebrated in Kandy. It is an impressive spectacle and, for the mainly Buddhist population, it is their most important festival. In this ten-day festival; a copy of the Buddha's tooth – the original is safely stored in the Dalada Maligawa (Temple of the Tooth) in Kandy – is carried in one of five processions on the back of a richly decorated temple elephant. The Esala Perahera has various sections. The first six evenings consist of the Kumbal Perahera. This part is slightly less impressive than the subsequent Randoli



Perahera, which builds to its climax on the tenth night. Then all elephants from far and near pay their respects and the greatest number of dancers, acrobats and musicians take part in the procession. To round it all off, a small ceremony takes place in the daytime: the water cutting ceremony or Day Perahera. The procession starts early evening. After chanting and prayers have filled the air across Kandy for many hours, suddenly there is silence. A thunderous cannon shot from the Temple of the Tooth announces the preparations must begin. It takes 45 minutes for the keeper of the Tooth to wrap himself in a 40m silk drape. Only when the second cannonball is fired can the procession begin to move. It is dark by then and torchbearers light the procession. In front men carry long whips. They halt every tenth step and snap their whips. Now the hour has come. The tension is almost tangible. A roll of drums accompanies the acrobats who whirl fire around their heads, necks and limbs. Groups of drummers accompany the dancers. The musicians look fairytale-like, in their long white gowns with red sashes and their bare torsos draped with jewellery. Various groups of dancers go by, mainly men but some women. Each dance has its own symbolic meaning. The movements and the dress are minutely prescribed. The procession approaches slowly and halts continually. The rolling of the drums becomes louder and acrobats performing multiple somersaults disengage from the group of dancers. The dancers, fall into an ever-deeper trance and make ecstatic movements. Groups of priests and temple servants in magnificent outfits are accompanied by a large number of elephants swathed in rich drapes, often lit by hundreds of lights powered by a wheeled battery pulled behind. The very last group, the Dalada Maligawa approaches. Surrounded by musicians and dancers, the splendidly dressed largest temple elephant carries the silver shrine containing the copy of the Tooth of the Buddha on its back. Flanked by two smaller but no less richly decorated elephants. They are followed by a long procession of acrobats, dancers, sword fighters and believers. On the last night, it takes three hours for the procession to pass by. Then the show is over and the throng moves on to the fun fair. The moon determines the timing of Esala Perahera. On the last night of Randoli Perahera it is full moon.

Communications

Sorry, this information is not available at this moment. Please check back later.

Cultural differences and habits

The cultural differences between Europeans and Sri Lankans are so vast that one could write a large book about them. Below you will find some points to take into account when mixing with the locals.

"Yes and no": Maybe the most confusing cultural difference between Sri Lankans and Europeans is use of the words; yes and no. To begin with, 'yes' is not indicated by nodding but by quickly moving the chin to and fro, which causes the head to 'wobble' (you should try it!). Secondly, whether spoken or 'wobbled', 'yes' has a much broader meaning. Besides 'yes', it can indicate 'eh', or 'understood', or even something like 'that's probably right', or 'I have heard you, but I'm not interested in what you are saying'. 'Yes' when uttered by a Sri Lankan hence doesn't give you much of a clue. 'No' is a word Sri Lankans do not like to say too often, for example when asked if the bus to Colombo stops here. Offered a piece of liquorice, nine out of ten Sri Lankans will find the taste foul but the chance of them saying 'no' when offered would be very slim.

Etiquette: Visits to holy places, even ruins, have to be taken bareheaded and barefoot. To take pictures of a westerner in front of a Buddha statue is not done. Adult men wearing



shorts are seen as ridiculous by Sri Lankans, and women wearing pants as outrageous. Sri Lankans will dress formally for important events. Should you be invited to a wedding, ask about the dress code. Swimming naked or topless is prohibited. A monk should never be touched. If you wish, you can perform the Sri Lankan greeting, hand palms pressed together and held upright in front of the face. The higher you hold your hands, the more respect you express. Monks are not allowed to accept money – only food or something to drink. Not all monks are orthodox!

Left and right: The right hand is used to eat, while the left hand is reserved for washing the backside. Should you be eating a meal with Sri Lankans using your hands, remember to only use your right hand. Changing hands is considered foul by Sri Lankans. Do not touch anyone with your left hand.

Appointments: We are from a highly hectic culture where time is money and appointments tend to be met punctually. Sri Lankans do not share this problem. Not that they will always be late: it is equally possible that they didn't have anything else to do so they turn up an hour early.

In general

Remember that you are visiting a country where people have different ways and customs. They are not behaving deviantly, it is you!

Food and drinks

Food: Sri Lankans eat a light and simple breakfast. It is usually made up of fruit, jam or juice with bread or hoppers, the shell-shaped pancakes made of rice flour and coconut milk. All hotels serve a European breakfast. Bread, jam, tea or coffee and fruit juice, supplemented by the heavier English breakfast of baked eggs and scrambled eggs, sausages and beans. Sri Lanka is a country where the trees are heavy with fruit, so every breakfast is rich in fruit and juice. Other meals consist of some sort of rice and curry. A large pile of rice surrounded by small amounts of proteins and vitamins prepared as a spicy curry. This has been the traditional dish for centuries. There are a large variety of curries. In a poor family, rice and curry may be no more than rice, some braised chilli peppers with coconut and lime and perhaps another braised vegetable, while a rich meal may count as many as twenty curries. There are vegetable curries, fish curries, egg and meat curries and even fruit curries. They all share complicated mixes of spices in which they are braised, baked, marinated or boiled. The varieties are subtle, although Westerners tend to mainly notice the hotness of the spices. Sambal, a spicy condiment, has many visitors grasping for their glass of mineral water – which only worsens the experience. Curries are always accompanied by a 'fire extinguisher': curd, a thick yoghurt made of buffalo milk. Sri Lankans eat with the fingers of their right hand. A little ball of curry is carefully mixed with rice and maybe some curd, and then worked into the mouth using one hand.

Drinking water: Do not drink tap water; it is not fit for consumption. Buy bottles of purified drinking water, which are available everywhere in the country. Make sure that the bottles come with their original lids or tops. Likewise, ice cubes in your coca cola are taboo, as these are made from tap water.

Restaurants and other eating places: In every village there will be a small restaurant serving hoppers or rice and curry. The restaurants where the ordinary Sri Lankans eat are very cheap. Sometimes, you can eat there for as little as 65p. Not everyone will be



equally impressed by them as they appear to be hygienically challenged. In practice, the conditions often are not all that bad, but for many Westerners the grotty furniture serves to reduce the appetite. The tourist hotels serve Sri Lankan food that has been adjusted to Western taste. The best food is prepared in the kitchens of Sri Lankan families. If you are lucky enough to be invited for a meal with an islander, be sure to grasp the opportunity. Fish and seafood dishes are prepared very well all along the coast. The most important ingredient of a seafood dish is fresh fish and these are in abundance. The exception is lobster and shrimps. Sometimes far less delicious frozen ones are served. Avoid eating defrosted seafood by inquiring emphatically about their freshness and, in case of doubt, ask to see them in the kitchen. Fresh lobster means live lobster. Vegetarians are well off in Sri Lanka. In many restaurants thalis are served. These are South-Indian, vegetarian versions of rice and curry. The Chinese prepare a good many delicious dishes made with only vegetables (and sometimes eggs). Also, most rice and curry dishes contain only one or two curries with animal protein. Originally, both the Hindus and the Buddhists were vegetarian. Only fish was consumed. It took the Europeans to make meat an integral part of the Sri Lankan diet. Even now, a large part of the population is strictly vegetarian. The amount of meat that rice and curries contain is less than what Europeans are used to.

Fruit: One of the greatest attractions of Sri Lanka is the nearly infinite availability of exotic fruits. They come in a variety of colours, shapes and sizes, but they outdo each other in taste. To explore Sri Lanka is to surrender to the strange looking fruit piled up along the road or sold by women who make a living out of selling fruit on the beach or along the street. Some of the most delectable fruits are mango, rambutan, papaya, pineapple, royal coconut, sour sob, jackfruit, mangosteen, durian and many types of bananas.

Landscape

Sri Lanka is an island in the Indian Ocean just southeast of the southernmost tip of India. The equator is only 6 degrees away from the island, which has a surface area of 65,610sq km. It is roughly the size of the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxemburg together. The island is shaped like a pear. The northern part is a plain that has a dry withered appearance for most of the year and has to be irrigated from the thousands of artificial lakes that have been here since time immemorial. In these plains, we find the ruins of Polonnaruwa, one of the impressive ancient cultures witnessed by the island in former times. Approaching towards the south, the plains are regularly interrupted by giant granite outcrops, rising up nakedly from out of the increasingly green landscape. Then the landscape of the interior opens up: lovely rolling hills in which the rice fields alternate with tropical woody plantations. Spices are grown here in special gardens. Beyond the magnificent cultural capital of the island, Kandy, the hills develop into mountains, reaching a height of 2524m at the peak of Mount Pidurutalagala. Conifers, eucalyptus trees and rhododendrons have replaced the tropical vegetation of the lower lying regions. The hillsides are covered in immense tea plantations which alternate with much smaller plantations of coffee, bananas or cardamom. The small houses in the mountains are painted in multiple colours, and surrounded by various types of colourful flowering trees, bushes and climbers. Descending from the mountains to the west, you end up in the greenest and most densely populated part of the island. This is coconut country. The flat coastal strip is interrupted in many places by wide shallow rivers that turn into lagoons. In the southeast, the extensive savannas are scarcely populated. They contain various nature reserves with a rich fauna - bears, panthers, elephants, wild buffaloes, deer and crocodiles are among the larger animals. The island boasts approximately 450 species of



bird, including very colourful ones. There are many species of exotically colourful butterflies.

The Sri Lankan landscape has been adorned through the ages by dagobas, temples and monasteries in the most beautiful spots on the island. Thousands of sculptures, frescoes and innumerable ornate woodcarvings have lifted the spirits of Sri Lankans. Semi spherical dagobas exist in any size, from a modest earthen mound to something approaching the size of an Egyptian pyramid. In the decaying ancient royal cities it is the dagobas that reveal man's hand influence on the landscape. A dagoba is a religious shrine. Inside all the major dagobas, a particle of the Buddha's body is stored. These edifices are the symbol of death and the ascension into nirvana of the Buddha. Apart from the dagobas, the temples also play a major role in the veneration of the Buddha. In the early centuries, statues of the Buddha were taboo. Instead, footprints or lotus flowers symbolized the master. Also the many shoots of the original bodhi tree served to remind believers of the enlightenment of the master, exactly as they do now. The earliest examples of temples with actual portrayals of the Buddha date from the first century AD. The oldest shape was that of the vatadage: amidst concentric circles of pillars, sometimes carrying a wooden roof, a small dagoba or a Buddha could be seen. One beautiful example can be found in Polonnaruwa. In later temple shapes, the influence of Hinduism emerged. An iconography developed in which numerous subtle differences in the positions of the Buddha statues referred to different aspects of the master. From the first statues, sixty-four positions emerged, such as the sitting and meditating Buddha, the blessing Buddha with a flat hand next to the face, the teaching Buddha, the sleeping Buddha, and the Buddha who has been received into nirvana, who also lies, but now with one of his feet in a slightly different position. In the course of time, numerous bodhisattvas were added to those, so that the interior of a temple boasts a great multitude of statues as well as colourful decorations. In the earlier temples the proportions of the interior, the statues and decorations all told their stories and nothing was left to chance. In the later temples, elements of a purely decorative nature were introduced.

Population

The island is home to some 19 million people. This means on each square kilometre, live an average of 292 people. However, the population is distributed unevenly and the number of inhabitants of the western coastal strip, north and south of Colombo, is far greater than in the north and east of the island. With the exception of Colombo, which counts one and a half million inhabitants, the cities of Sri Lanka are relatively small. Jaffna and Kandy, the second and third cities of the country, are ten times smaller. For over 2000 years, agriculture and fisheries have been the backbone of the island's economy. Rice and coconuts are the major staples for the mostly rural population. These foodstuffs are mainly grown on a subsistence basis, together with fruit, vegetables, spices and flowers. The fisheries are also largely traditional. Family members sail out in small canoes or catamarans or use fishing rods to catch a daily meal on the coast or in the many sweet-water lakes in the interior. In some places, you can witness people catching fish by hand, spiking it on a stick. Well-known are the stilt fishermen of the south-western coast. Over half of the population provide for their daily meals in this way. Often, a cow or a goat and some chickens form a source of animal protein to supplement the standard diet of rice and vegetarian curries. The occasional egg and particularly curd, a greasy buffalo yoghurt, are among the small luxuries that most families can afford once or twice a week. Apart from traditional forms of farming and fishing, the island has some



large companies that grow tea, rubber, spices, rice and coconuts on a commercial scale. Tea is by far Sri Lanka's most important export. Three-quarters of a million people work on the plantations and in the tea-processing industry. The average family does not have a high income. Clothing, school materials, kitchen utensils and the occasional bus ticket can only be bought by selling products at the market or from the salary of a relative with a job in a hotel, or a plantation or in a textile workshop. Drums, torches, flutes and wildly dancing people, men in particular, is what Sri Lanka is known for. During religious festive days, attempts are made to cure the seriously ill on New Year's Day. The Sri Lankans, and in particular the Singhalese, reveal different aspects of themselves on the many occasions that call for song and dance. The two main dance forms of the Singhalese are those of the highlands and those of the lowlands. The former goes back to exorcist rituals that continue up to this day in the remoter villages. Villagers gather around an altar on which offerings are laid out. Crescendo and accelerating drumming on the yak beraye, the devil's drum, forms the introduction to the dance of the men representing demons, wearing multi-coloured masks. They are called on, one by one, to appear before a priest who will beg and threaten the demon to stop causing suffering. If there is a sick person, the demon will enter the person and speak through him or her. An offering to the demon usually makes him disappear. The highland dances can be traced back to the dances once performed in the court of the Kings of Sri Lanka, who last resided in Kandy. These, too, are characterized by wild, masculine movements to the rhythm of special drums, particularly the geta beraye, which hangs on a cord diagonally across the belly of the drummer. The drum is beaten on both sides. The costumes of the dancers are unforgettable. Crowns, metal bands and breastplates decorated with stones give the dancers their kingly appearance.

Religion

Buddhism: The large majority of the Singhalese, 64% of the population, is Buddhist. This means that they are followers of Siddhartha Gautama, a prince who preached a unique gospel around 2500 years ago in Northern India that was intended to reform the rigid Hinduism of the time. During his life, he reached enlightenment, and is remembered as the Buddha. His preachings proclaim that the existence or non-existence of a god is actually not of significant importance to Buddhists. Following Hinduism, the Buddha claims that everything that exists is an eternal reiteration of birth and death, a law nobody can escape: neither the gods, nor the universe, nor the people. However, he, the Buddha, did actually succeed in breaking loose from the eternal wheel of reincarnations. His teaching is a way to escape into nirvana, a state of timeless rest and unity with everything. The first great Buddhist truth is that all living is suffering. This suffering is caused by our lusts. By releasing these lusts, one can end suffering. The last great truth refers to the way to release those longings; this is called "taking the right way". The right way is a system of thinking and acting which ensures that the person who takes this way, will have his karma improved. Karma is the sum of all good and bad thoughts and deeds from this and all previous lives. It is a reckoning for lives lived. As the karma improves as a result of taking the right way, one expects to reincarnate into cleaner forms. Ultimately, one will reach the state of bodhisattva, in which one doesn't long for anything apart from the happiness of all others. Subsequently, one will dissolve in the nirvana, the state of enlightenment in which one realizes that everything which exists is an illusion and a mere mirage of the undividable unity which rests within itself.

Hinduism: Most of the Tamils in Sri Lanka are Hindus and this is the second most important religion on the island. Although Hindus live mainly in the north and east of the



country, their holy places are widespread, each dedicated to one of the many gods venerated in Hinduism. Just like Buddhism, Hinduism began in India and later migrated to Sri Lanka.

The pantheon of Hindu gods is impressive. On the one hand, there is one god, Brahma, a sort of universal soul outside of time and space from which everything once emanated and into which everything will one day return. However, Brahma has a multitude of manifestations, represented by individual gods in Hinduism. Brahma presents himself to the world in the form of a trinity, made up of Brahma, the creator, Vishnu, the perpetuator who is often portrayed with a blue skin, and Shiva, the destroyer. These three gods, representing the male element, all have a female side, in the above order, Sarasvati, Lakshmi and Shakti. Each one of these six gods and goddesses in their turn have their own appearances, which exist under a separate name. Hence, Shakti, or Mother Earth, is also Parvati, the dancing goddess of fertility, but also Kali, the sombre goddess requesting human offerings, and Durga, the terrible. Each of these manifestations rides an animal which in turn is a god. Likewise, Durga rides a tiger, while she carries weapons in all her ten hands. Vishnu's ride is the Garuda, a mythical bird. The gods have children. Thus, Parvati and Shiva are blessed with Ganesha, the god of wisdom with an elephant's head and one of the most popular gods of Sri Lankans, both Hindus and of Buddhists. The elephant among the gods rides a rat. However, the most important Hindu god in Sri Lanka is their second son, Skanda, the god of war who in his free time fights the daily problems and illnesses of the island-dwellers and is hence very favoured. His most important temple is in Kataragama, which you will visit. This god is venerated by Buddhists and by Muslims. Bringing daily offerings and prayers to the gods is an obligation called puja. Another such ritual is the tikka, the wearing of a red dot between the eyes. As a third eye, it is meant to keep a constant focus on the godly world, the world behind our reality, which is a reflection of higher worlds. The most important pujas that are held in the temples take place during sunrise and sundown. Accompanied by drums, bells, wind instruments and the reciting of the Vedas, an offering is brought representing the four elements, air, earth, water and light. The Buddhist temples are visited most frequently during full moon, and the Hindu temples during new moon.

Weather and climate

Climate: Sri Lanka's location, just north of the equator, guarantees a warm tropical climate. In the low-lying coastal regions, the average annual temperature is 27°C. Seawater temperatures are warm and vary little throughout the year. Changes of more than a few degrees cooler or warmer are an exception. The temperature is cooler in the mountains.

Best time to travel: The entire year is good, but for the southwest coast the best time to visit is from November to April. Whenever you go, you will have both sun and tropical rain showers, which are mostly considered very refreshing. The monsoon, from May to August, brings more rain than normal in the south-western coastal region. In these months, the sea can be rather wild, which makes it hard to swim and impossible to dive.

Praktische informatie

Arrival information

It is wise to take it easy the first day you are in Sri Lanka. Take time to acclimatize. The change of climate and culture can have quite an impact. Let the country and the



atmosphere sink in, relax at the poolside of your hotel and have a wonderful trip on the beautiful, mystical island of Sri Lanka!

Electricity

Sri Lanka has 230-240 volt, 50-hertz alternating current. Continental European plugs fit in the ungrounded sockets, although you may have to give them a push. There are also 3 pin sockets. Sometimes, hotel receptions will have adapter plugs.

Power-cuts are frequent. Hotels always stock candles or oil lamps, but it is a good idea to bring a good torch for evening walks. The many holes, bumps and ditches in and along the roads can become dangerous when street lighting stops working.

Health

Southern Asia is a region where more diseases are rife than in Europe. The situation is comparable to Europe before the Second World War. All dangerous diseases that are common in India or Nepal (to a lesser degree in Sri Lanka and the Maldives) almost exclusively affect the poor. Besides, for those that can afford it, with timely treatment they can almost always be checked. If you pay sufficient attention to hygiene use insect repellents and look after your skin, you will stay healthy, apart, perhaps, from some harmless intestinal problems.

Animals: Don't stroke animals. Rabies and scabies occur widely in Sri Lanka. Should you be bitten, call on a doctor immediately. In case of a bite by a monkey or a dog, you should seek medical care then be flown home right away. Rabies that is not been treated at an early stage is deadly without exception. Bites by snakes and scorpions are rare and as a rule are not deadly. However, do not walk in high grass with open shoes. Keep your travel bags closed. Do not put on your shoes in the morning before you have checked that they are uninhabited.

Food and hygiene: Intestinal problems are much more common in India and Nepal (and to a lesser degree in Sri Lanka and the Maldives) than in Western Europe and food can be a major source of contamination. Visitors to this country are advised to eat meat and chicken only in reputed restaurants and otherwise stick to vegetarian food. Eat in good restaurants or, if you do go to cheap eating places, look for the busiest ones. Here, the turn-around of the food is highest, and hence the freshness. Fried vegetarian snacks can hardly go wrong, although the quality of the frying oil can be reduced after frequent use and sit heavy on the stomach. In expensive restaurants, you should be able to trust all of the food, including meat, ice creams and salads, but in case of doubt, put it aside. It is best not to eat salads in simple establishments; the same applies to fruit salads and fruit juices. If you peel the fruit yourself, it is safe. Wash your hands often and check that cutlery and plates are washed properly. Keep your fingernails short.

Sun and heat: Sunburn is common and can be prevented very easily. In the bright tropical sun, risk of sunstroke or sunburn is high. To prevent this, try not to expose the more delicate parts of your body to direct sunshine, especially during the hottest hours of the day. Wear a hat or cap or an umbrella and a pair of sunglasses when walking in the sun, and use a good sun tan lotion when sunbathing. Buy these articles prior to the journey. The key to good skin care is to always treat any little wound with a disinfectant like iodine.



Insects: Mosquitoes are most active just after sundown or just before sunrise. Covering up the skin with clothing helps, and insect repellents like DEET. You can request mosquito coils from your hotel desk or the restaurant where you eat. These green spirals can be burnt underneath your table or chair, deterring the mosquitoes. Electric coils are better suited to closed spaces. You could also consider bringing a mosquito net.

Prickly heat: Prickly heat is an inflammation of the pores that is a consequence of excessive sweating. It is common and innocuous, but unpleasant. The skin becomes red and irritated. Places where skin touches skin are extra susceptible, such as armpits and thighs. The symptoms will become less if you shower several times a day (cold, no soap), and dry off well. Applying talcum powder to the sore points may help, too. In moist heat, sleep in a cotton shirt, rather than under a sheet. If you suffer badly, it is best to take a room with air-conditioning for a few nights.

Diarrhoea: The most common complaints are intestinal disorders, in particular diarrhoea. Diarrhoea is a natural defence mechanism of the intestines to quickly dispose of anything damaging or irritating in the digestive tract. In most cases it is completely innocuous and caused by a sudden change in diet, the heat or harmless bacteria, against which your body will quickly gain resistance. The main risk is dehydration. Dehydration occurs when the body continues to emit moisture and salts, while the intestines no longer absorb them. Symptoms are a feeling of listlessness, a dry mouth and lips and low urine production. Test for advanced dehydration by taking some skin on the top of your hand between your thumb and index finger, and release it. If the skin does not smooth itself out straight away, you are dehydrated. In elderly people, this test does not work so well. Serious dehydration often leads to a confused state of mind. Drinking lots of water, soft drinks and soup can prevent dehydration. In case of dehydration, it is best to drink water mixed with an ORS solution. This powder, which is available from chemists in sachets, both in India and at home, contains all minerals that the body loses as a result of diarrhoea. Sugar has been added to improve the uptake of salts and water. If the diarrhoea comes with high fever, vomiting, blood in the faeces or retching, call on a doctor immediately. It is possible that you have dysentery, which is caused by bacteria that may require medicine to fight it. There are excellent medicines to stop diarrhoea, but they do not remove the cause. Medicines containing loperamide, such as Diacura and Immodium, halt bowel activity. They are useful when you have to travel.

Doctors, dispensaries and medicines: Doctors and dispensary staff are generally well educated and trustworthy. The medical infrastructure (clinics) is of rather poor quality. All medicines can be purchased over the counter, without prescription. When buying medicine, note the date of packing. A small travel first-aid kit could contain the following items: plasters, bandages, cotton wool, a small pair of scissors, a thermometer, iodine, pain-killers, malaria tablets, ORS sachets, Immodium or Diacure, insect repellent such as DEET and itch-alleviating ointment or stick.

Vaccinations: There are no obligatory vaccinations for Sri Lanka, unless you have visited a region with yellow fever or cholera less than a fortnight before you arrive. To be sure of the best protection, always contact your GP or health authority in charge of vaccinations in the UK at least four weeks before you travel to find out if and what measures need to be taken. Usually, vaccinations against DTP are administered, as well as hepatitis-A, typhoid and malaria pills. The latter are to be taken during the trip and for one month after your return. Some people get bitten significantly less by mosquitoes if they start taking vitamin B complex pills two weeks before their journey, but unfortunately this



does not work for everybody.

Some more advice for a pleasant stay: Take time to allow your body and mind to adjust to the new time zone and location. Avoid stress; do not draw up a busy schedule right away. In any case, take it easy the first day. It is a good idea to get up early; in hot countries the morning temperature is often the most pleasant. Besides, the people here are used to getting up early. If you adjust to the local rhythm, you will be well rested, and have enough energy to make the most of your time.

Info for people at home

Make sure that those at home know which country you are in and how long you are planning to stay away. You may fix a date when you will contact them again. Provide those picking you up from the airport with your flight times and numbers. Shoestring will not provide flight and/or travel information, accommodation names and telephone numbers to third parties. Any information on delays can be retrieved via the information number at the airport or Teletext, not via Shoestring.

Contact persons

In case of an emergency, it is important for us to have details of someone we can reach as a contact person back home on your behalf. You will have entered a name on the booking form. It is possible that this person is unavailable or on holiday during your trip. If so, enter a second person so that we are sure to be able to get in touch with somebody.

Luggage and clothing

Sri Lanka is a tropical country. Take thin cotton clothing. A high-collared t-shirt with long sleeves or a thin cotton roll neck sweater is useful in the evening to protect against mosquito bites. It is better to take too little than too much – what you lack can be purchased locally. An umbrella is useful, against rain and bright sunlight. If the sun is high, some headgear or an umbrella is definitely recommended. (It is even more sensible to stay in the shade at these times.) During your stay in Sri Lanka's central mountain region, it is wise to have a sweater for the evening. A pair of good walking boots and a pair of flip-flops is all you will need. Remember you are expected to enter holy places barefoot. Flip-flops will serve you well. Females would be wise not to wear shorts, unless knee length, except on the beach – they can be seen as inappropriate by islanders. Besides, dresses are cooler. Bring a good pair of sunglasses from home, as they are expensive and hard to find on the island. A scarf or sarong is useful to enter mosques. It is useful to have a small daypack for your camera, jacket etc. Also bring a small first-aid kit and your own medicines if needed.

Money and currency

Money: The currency in Sri Lanka is the Sri Lankan rupee (LKR). For the latest conversion rates, look at <https://www.interchangeafx.co.uk> The rupee is made up of 100 cents. There are coins worth 1, 5, 10, 25 and 50 cents, and 1, 2 and 5 rupees, and notes worth 10, 20, 50, 100, 200, 500 and 1000 rupees. The two most valuable notes contain a silver thread that is embossed on the paper.

Most banks are open on Monday from 9am to 1pm and on Tuesday to Friday half an hour longer. The bank at Colombo airport is open 24 hours. Do not forget that other banks are



closed on the day of a full moon. The exchange rates differ very little between banks, but the rates of cashing traveller's cheques can vary between 50 and 300 rupees. Exchange rates of traveller's cheques tend to be slightly better than those for cash. There are other exchange points. Many hotels and department stores are officially licensed to change money, but the rates are less favourable than those in banks. In Negombo and Kandy, you can take out money from a cash machine at the Sampath Bank - that is, if they are working. Credit cards are accepted in nearly all hotels and in the more expensive restaurants and shops. It is a good idea to take a combination of traveller's cheques in dollars and cash in dollars, and bring a credit card as backup. In Colombo airport you can change some pounds and use this cash for the first few days.

Pocket Money

The pocket money we recommend is the minimum to pay for your meals, drinks, optional excursions, entry fees, local airport taxes and tips. Clearly, the amount that you spend depends on your personal purchasing behaviour, and for this reason expenditure on souvenirs is not included in the recommended pocket money. We suggest between £125 and £150 per week.

Photography

Never leave a film or camera in a locked bus. The mounting temperature can badly affect the quality of the photographic material. It is better to have prints made at home. Not all types of camera batteries are easy to find, so make sure you bring batteries that will last the entire trip. Our guidance for regular photography, applies equally for underwater photography. You will have to bring all gear from home, and have the pictures developed in Europe. For those who insist on taking a few snapshots of Sri Lanka's fascinating under sea flora and fauna, there are now throwaway underwater cameras available.

Safety

Theft from tourists is common in Sri Lanka, particularly in busy markets and hotel rooms, even if they are locked. Angling through open windows is a refined art and common practice. Consequently, never leave any valuables in your room; leave money and passports with reception and leave cameras and other important gear in a locked compartment in your room. Despite theft, Sri Lanka is not a place where you should feel unsafe or threatened.

Time difference

Sri Lanka is 6 hours later than in the UK, except during summer time, when the time difference is 5 hours.

Tipping

On bills in restaurants and bars, there is usually 15% VAT and 10% service added, but if you are happy with the service, it is customary to leave a tip as well. Tipping in hotels and restaurants that you come back to has another purpose. It makes staff much more considerate. Tips are not only a nice extra; they are an essential supplement to a low wage.

The bus driver and his assistant will expect a tip for the fortnight they have driven around the group, so long as they have done well. A guideline for the bus driver and his assistant



together is 65p a day for the two of them. For the local travel guide we recommend 65p per participant per day.

Adresgegevens