

Travel Tips



Important Notice for Visitors to Sri Lanka

The Electronic Travel Authorization (ETA) system is now in operation, with effect from 01st January 2012.

However, the ETA is not a pre-condition to board a flight/vessel to Sri Lanka.

Bona-fide tourists who arrive in Sri Lanka without an ETA reference number would be issued visas on arrival upon payment of the relevant ETA processing fee.

High Commission of Sri Lanka
London

5th January 2012

Sri Lanka is a photographer's delight. However, permits are required before you can take photos at certain sites. Entrance tickets to individual sites are available only from 6 a.m. to 10 a.m. These tickets cover charges for photography, recording and parking. Rates are quoted in US Dollars and rupee parities are subject to fluctuation.

- **Custom Imports**

You are allowed to bring into the country duty free 1.5 litres of spirits, two bottles of wine, a quarter-litre of toilet water, and a small quantity of perfume and souvenirs with a value not exceeding US \$250. The import of personal equipment such as cameras and laptop computers is allowed but must be declared on arrival. However, personal equipment must be taken out of the country upon the visitor's departure. The import of non-prescription drugs and pornography of any form is an offence.

Sri Lanka Customs: www.customs.gov.lk

- **Custom Exports**

On leaving the country you are allowed to export up to 10kg of tea duty free.

No antiques . . . antique. defined as anything more than 50-years-old - rare books, palm-leaf manuscripts and anthropological material can be exported without permission from the Director, National Archives, 7 Reid Avenue, Colombo 7. Tel: +94-11-2694523, +94-11-2696917 www.archives.gov.lk and the Director General, Department of Archaeology, Sir Marcus Fernando Mw, Colombo +94 11 2692840/1 Tel. +94-11-2694727, +94-11-2667155 (www.archaeology.gov.lk).

Purchase and export without licence of any wild animal, bird or reptile, dead or alive . also the export of parts of animals, birds or reptiles, such as skins, horns, scales and feathers is prohibited. Occasional exports are, however, permitted exclusively for bona fide scientific purposes. It is prohibited to export of 450 plant species without special permits. The export of coral, shells or other protected marine products is also strictly prohibited.

Applications for special permission to export fauna should be made to the Director, Department of Wildlife Conservation, 382 New Kandy Road, Malabe (+9411 25060380 <http://www.dwlc.lk>) and flora should be made to the Director, Forest Department, 82 Rajamalwatta Road, Battaramulla, (+011 94 28666 16/ 2866632 www.environmentlanka.com)

- **Foreign currency regulations**

Visitors to Sri Lanka bringing in more than US\$10,000 should declare the amount to the Customs on arrival. All unspent rupees converted from foreign currencies can be re-converted to the original currency on departure as long as encashment receipts can be produced.

- **Health precautions**

The health risks in Sri Lanka are different to those encountered in Europe and North America. Watch out for bowel diseases such as diarrhoea and amoebic dysentery, vector borne diseases such as malaria and dengue fever, and a variety of fungal infections. Sri Lanka.s physicians, though, many of whom have trained in the West, are particularly experienced in dealing with locally occurring diseases.

- **Before you go**

No inoculations are compulsory unless you are coming from a yellow fever or cholera area.

(Cholera is very occasionally reported in Sri Lanka, so is not considered a serious risk.) However, the following vaccinations are recommended, particularly if you plan a long trip or intend visiting remote areas:

typhoid (monovalent), polio, tetanus, hepatitis A, hepatitis B, rabies
Children should, in addition, be protected against:

diphtheria, whooping cough, mumps, measles, rubella

Remember to plan well ahead with vaccinations. Allow up to six weeks to receive the full course, for some vaccinations require more than one dose, and some should not be given together.

The risk of malaria exists throughout the whole country apart from the districts of Colombo, Kalutara and Nuwara Eliya. Medication has to start one week prior to travel, continue during the trip, and finish four weeks after your return. Once again, planning is essential, as well as care to ensure the course is followed.

When you are there

- Upset stomach

As most stomach upsets 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. Salads can be risky unless purified water has been used to wash the various vegetables. Fruit that has already been peeled should be avoided. Be careful of ice cream, in particular the varieties sold by street vendors and served at cheap restaurants. Sometimes there are power outages Sri Lanka, especially away from urban centres, so it pays to be suspicious of all refrigerated foods if you know there has been a recent outage in your area.

- **Water**

Tap water is not safe to drink, and boiling and filtering is sometimes done too hastily in some hotels and restaurants, so the best solution is to drink bottled water. There are now many brands available, mostly using spring water from the highlands of the island. Make sure that the bottle carries an SLS certification and that the seal is broken only in your presence. Beware of ice unless you are satisfied it has not been made from tap water, and remember the tap water you may be tempted to use to rinse out your mouth after brushing your teeth is unsafe. Keep a bottle of water in your bathroom for this purpose.

- **Sunburn**

When you flop onto the beach or poolside lounge 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. If you don't apply sunscreen you are liable to become so sunburnt that it will be painful to move, your skin will peel, you will have to start afresh to get that tan, and . most importantly . you put yourself at risk of serious dermatological disease.

- **Heatstroke**

Sometimes those who have spent too long in the sun suffer what is termed heatstroke, the most common form being caused by dehydration. This condition can occur if the body's heat-regulating mechanism becomes weakened and the body temperature rises to unsafe levels. The symptoms are a high temperature - yet a lack of sweat - a flushed skin, severe headache, and impaired coordination. In addition, the sufferer may become confused. If you think someone has heatstroke, take that person out of the sun, cover their body with a wet sheet or towel, and seek medical advice. To avoid heatstroke, take plenty of bottled water to the beach, or buy a thambili (king coconut) from an itinerant seller.

- **Prickly heat**

Prickly heat rash occurs when your sweat glands become clogged after being out in the heat for too long or from excessive perspiration. The rash appears as small red bumps or blisters on elbow creases, groin, upper chest or neck. 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.

- **Local health care**

Minor health problems can always be treated by doctors with practices in the resorts and elsewhere in the country. If you have a more serious problem, Colombo now boasts a selection of modern, well-equipped private hospitals offering the latest in conventional medical and surgical therapies. A growing number of foreigners are taking advantage of affordable, high quality private healthcare in Sri Lanka, and combining it with the chance to take a holiday. Though the medical tourism industry in Sri Lanka is still in its early days, a number of private hospitals in Colombo are geared to provide advanced surgery and other treatment to international clients

- **Travellers with special needs**

Travellers with special needs, especially if they visit Sri Lanka without a companion, should note that the country has relatively few facilities for disabled people, although greater awareness and improvements are evolving. There's no need to worry at Colombo's airport as wheelchairs and assistance in boarding and disembarking are available. Buildings, offices, and banks are becoming better-equipped with wheelchair ramps and suchlike. If you aren't travelling with a companion, you'll find that Sri Lankans will be only too eager to assist.

- **Sri Lanka's Currency**

The local currency is the Sri Lankan Rupee, divided into 100 cents (you rarely come across cents today). Currency notes are Rs2,000, Rs1,000, Rs500, Rs100, Rs50, Rs20 and Rs10. Beware of mistaking the Rs500 note for the somewhat similar Rs100 one. To check whether notes are genuine when not given at a bank, look for a lion watermark. Coins, should you have received them, will be in denominations up to Rs10.

Make sure you have plenty of lower denomination notes (Rs50, Rs100, Rs500), especially when travelling and you need to buy small items, fruit, and eat cheap meals, because change is often hard to come by apart from at hotels and big shops.

- **Banks**

Banks are open from 0900 hrs to 1300 hours Monday to Friday. Some city banks close at 1500 hrs, while some are open on Saturday mornings. It's easy to withdraw money across the island at ATMs using international credit cards or debit cards.

- **Credit cards**

Most hotels, restaurants and shopping centres accept credit cards. Some establishments may try to add a surcharge, which is illegal.

- **Time difference**

Sri Lanka Standard Time is five and a half hours ahead of GMT. (Allowance should be made for summer-time changes in Europe.)

- **Electricity**

230 . 240 volts, 50 cycles AC. If you travel with a laptop computer bring a stabilizer. Language Sri Lanka has two official languages . Sinhala and Tamil - with English as a link language. Most people have some knowledge of English, and signboards are often in English. Photography: Restrictions & Permits

Sri Lanka is a tremendously photogenic island, so it.s hardly surprising that most tourists bring a camera of some kind when they visit the country. The stunning landscapes, the captivating fauna and lush flora, and the stupendous archaeological remains provide great opportunities: a bonus is that Sri Lankans love to be captured on film. So it.s easy to capture the traditional rural lifestyle. You.ll find villagers, farmers, fishermen and tea pluckers will readily stand in front of your viewfinder. Your subjects will often ask to have a copy of picture sent to them. This may be laborious, but it is a reasonable courtesy as many may never have seen a picture of themselves. It is also understandable that many will also expect a token recompense for allowing themselves to be photographed.

- **Restrictions**

There are some important restrictions that apply to photography regarding Buddhist imagery. 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.

- **Permits**

Tourists who wish to visit/and or photograph the principal ancient monuments in Sri Lanka are required to purchase a ticket from the Central Cultural Fund, 212/1 Baudhaloka Mawatha, Colombo 7 Tel: +94-11-2587912, +94-11-2500733, +94-11-2581944 (gen_ccf@sri.lanka.net) or Central Cultural Fund offices at Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, Sigiriya and Kandy.

A single round ticket for two months validity costs US\$50 and will entitle you to visit and photograph historic monuments such as Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, Sigiriya, Nalanda, Ritigala, Medirigiriya. There are separate charges at each site for those who do not obtain round tickets: Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa and Sigiriya US\$25, Nalanda US\$5, Ritigala US\$8, Medirigiriya US\$5.

- **When to visit**

Sri Lanka is a round-the-year destination for the visitors who seek for sun and sea the best time to visit the island is from November to April. The Southwestern coastal area, where the most of the beach resorts are located. Kalpitiya, located in the western (North Western)coast has been declared a new tourist attraction. Many development projects have also been planned such as hotels and other infrastructure to make the East a new tourist destination in Sri Lanka.

The central highlands are pleasantly cool and relatively dry from January to April. The peak season is mid December to mid January and March-April during Easter with a mini peak season in July and August when festivals and pageants are held through the country.

- **What to wear**

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 off the beach and when visiting religious sites. Don't forget comfortable shoes, sandals or trainers and cotton socks. If you are planning to trek and climb go prepared with suitable gear. Water sports enthusiasts would do well to take their snorkels and diving equipment along.

- **Getting there**

Usually all visitors to Sri Lanka travel by air; flights arrive at the Bandaranaike International Airport, 35 km north of Colombo, and 6 km of Negombo. A number of tour operators from UK and some West European cities offer good value package holidays throughout the year

- **Public places**

You may sometimes be overwhelmed by crowds of people in public places (railway stations, markets, bus stands, temples or simply busy streets). "Touts" and hawkers may jostle and push and clamour to show you a hotel and sell you things. Taxis and three - wheelers are often there when you do not need them.

- **Safety**

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 tel Number + 94 11 2382209

- **Where to Stay**

Sri Lanka Offers visitors an excellent range of accommodation facilities to suit all budgets from luxury hotels to low budget accommodations.(for more information on accommodation options.)

In the peak season (mid-January and during Easter) bookings can be heavy so it is best to reserve accommodation well in advance through Tour operators/ travel agents, booking online and through our travel planner.

- **Drink**

Sri Lankan 'Ceylon' tea is prepared as in the West and coffee too. There are a huge variety of bottled soft drinks, including well-known international brands. Thambili (king coconut water is a safe and refreshing option. Local beer and spirits are widely available. Bottled mineral water is available in 5 star hotels. Please note: Alcohol is not sold on Poya (full-moon day of the month) days.

(Courtesy: [Sri Lanka Tourism](#))