

## Exotic Asian Holidays

### [Preparing For Your Holiday to Sri Lanka](#)

#### **Visa Requirements**

The Government of Sri Lanka has introduced a visa requirement for all foreign nationals travelling to Sri Lanka. A person can apply directly online for an ETA from the official website of the Department of Immigration & Emigration (DI&E) Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka.

<http://www.eta.gov.lk>

**For a short visit to Sri Lanka, you need to obtain an ETA with effect from 1st of January 2012.**

On the basis of reciprocity, citizens of **The Republic of Singapore** and **The Republic of Maldives** are exempted from the requirement of obtaining **ETA** to visit **Sri Lanka**.

The **ETA** is initially limited to 30 days from the date of arrival and it may be extended up to six (06) months.

For more information visit [www.immigration.gov.lk](http://www.immigration.gov.lk)

A free 30 day visa on arrival will be given to **British** citizens travelling to **The Maldives**.

**British** citizens are required to be in possession of a valid visa for entry to **India**.

All travelers are responsible for ensuring that they have a passport valid for six months after the date of arrival in **Sri Lanka**. If you are not a **British** citizen you are requested to make sure that you have the relevant visa documentation by contacting the embassy or consulate of **Sri Lanka**.

Please contact the **Sri Lanka Embassy** for further information.

#### **Sri Lanka Embassy**

Sri Lanka High Commission  
13 Hyde Park Gardens  
London  
W2 2LU  
Tel: 020 7262 1841

### [Health Check](#)

#### **Health-Before Departure**

- **No Compulsory Vaccinations Are Required For Visitors To Sri Lanka.**

You may however wish to update your vaccinations against polio, diphtheria, tetanus, hepatitis A and B. **Sri Lanka** has cases of malaria (Classified Zone B). Discuss details of your planned itinerary with a doctor if you have any concerns.

## [Sri Lanka Guidebooks](#)

### **Lonely Planet**

Unusually, the **Sri Lanka** edition is not one of their best country guides. Prices quoted for accommodation, taxis etc are very inaccurate even in the most recent edition.

### **Rough Guide**

After many years, **Rough Guides** have finally released a book on **Sri Lanka**, and it is undoubtedly the best all round guidebook about the island presently available in the **UK**. Not least because **Mark Ellingham**, the founder of **Rough Guides** is actually married to a **Sri Lankan!** Sightseeing locations are described in great detail with up to date accounts of restaurants, shops etc.

(Recommended)

### **Footprint**

Particularly good coverage of the island's historical sites and a well researched hotels index. No photographs but very comprehensive maps, especially of the important tourist sites.

(Recommended)

### **Neos (Michelin)**

A very well presented guide to **Sri Lanka**, which includes a great section on **Maldives** resorts as well. Accurate and well illustrated regional/town maps. Great all-round coverage of the island.

(Recommended)

### **Insight**

Beautifully designed with photographs from **Sri Lanka's** leading travel photographers, the **Insight Guide** has a great deal of background information on the island. The actual travel section is much smaller.

## [What to Pack](#)

### **Lowland Sri Lanka and the Beaches**

As **Sri Lanka** is near the equator, the island is always hot and humid, with daytime temperatures hovering around 30°C and 70/80% humidity.

### **Highland Sri Lanka**

Daytime temperatures are about 16-20°C but at night can become quite chilly, especially in the high hills around **Nuwara Eliya**.

### **Beach Clothes**

Light cotton clothes are best suited to tropical climates. Remember that even on the beach very revealing swimwear may attract unnecessary attention. Sun-hats and sunglasses are a must.

### **Clothes on Tour**

Loose clothing is recommended for traveling and sightseeing, especially due to the long journey times, which are sometimes necessary while traveling between locations. Informal clothing is fine but short skirts and low cut clothing are frowned upon.

Warm clothing (light jumper/jacket) is essential in the **Central Highlands** where night temperatures can be as low as 5°C!

Canvas shoes or trainers are good options for traveling while protecting feet against cuts. Alternatively, rubber slippers are commonly worn and easily bought in **Sri Lanka**. These

are also easy to slip off when entering religious sites.

Strong walking shoes or boots are recommended at Horton **Plains**, **Sinharaja Rainforest** and **Adam's Peak**.

At all tour hotels dress codes are usually informal although some of the 5 star hotels in **Colombo** expect guests to be formally attired for evening meals. At the old colonial **Hill Club** at **Nuwara Eliya** a 'jacket and tie' are necessary, but can be hired, for formal meals.

### **Personal Toiletries**

Contact lens solutions, sun protection cream (factor 15 plus) and other personal healthcare items should be brought with you.

### **Camera Films and Accessories**

Take these with you from the **UK**. Local shops may sell low quality films. Wait until your return for processing since quality can be variable. Digital camera accessories are NOT easy to buy, but in **Colombo**, **Photo Technica** at **Colombo 03** provides **Digital Camera** solutions.

**288 Galle Road**

**Colombo 3**

**Sri Lanka**

**Telephone:** 011 257 7877

**Fax Line:** 011 257 7094

**Email Address** technica@dialogsl.net

### **For Your Safety in Event of Loss or Theft**

Photocopy essential documents (Passport photo page), Driving License, Airline Ticket. This will make the process of replacement in event of loss or damage much easier.

### **Customs at Colombo Airport (Entry)**

#### **Duty Free Allowances per Person**

- 1.5 Litres of alcohol (spirits)
- 2 Bottles of wine
- Perfumes for personal use
- Other souvenirs to the value of \$250

Officially, there is no duty free allowance on cigarettes, and they are not sold at **Colombo Airport Duty Free** shops on arrival.

### **Money**

For up-to-the-minute exchange rates, check out [www.xe.com](http://www.xe.com)

***CURRENT RATE OF EXCHANGE £1=@ RS 200***

The **Sri Lankan Rupee** (LKR) is not traded abroad and so it is not possible to purchase local currency before your arrival in **Sri Lanka**.

It is recommended that you exchange money upon arrival at the **Airport Bank Counters** (open 24 hours) or at bank branches located in towns because hotel counters usually offer substantially lower rates of exchange for foreign currency or credit card advances. You will need to show your passport for any foreign exchange transactions. Keep your receipt to enable re-conversion to **UK Pounds Sterling** upon departure.

### **Travelers Cheques**

Reputable **Travelers Cheques (American Express, Thomas Cook)** are widely accepted at banks and may in fact give you a better exchange rate than currency notes in **Sri Lanka**. A small commission will be charged. Passports need to be shown when encashing travelers' cheques. Hotels will offer a substantially lower rate than banks.

### **Credit Cards**

#### **Payment by Credit Card**

**Visa** and **MasterCard** are recognized by a large number of hotels, tourist shops and banks throughout the island.

#### **ATM Machines for Credit Card Cash Withdrawals**

Although there has been a rapid expansion of **ATM** machines throughout **Sri Lanka**, many do not necessarily dispense cash from **International Credit Cards** despite **Visa/MasterCard** signs on the **ATM**.

If you require cash from an **ATM** machine we would recommend **HSBC ATM's**, throughout the island that usually recognize **International Credit Cards**.

**HSBC Main Branch ATM: Bauddaloka Mawatha. Colombo 5.** This has a very secure environment and allows large cash withdrawals.

If you wish to take out money using your **Debit Card**, you need to make sure that you inform your **UK** bank prior to your arrival in **Sri Lanka**.

#### **Local Banks**

Private Banks such as **Hatton National Bank, Commercial Bank, Sampath Bank** and especially **HSBC (Colombo and Kandy)** offer better service than the Government banks (**Bank of Ceylon** and **People's Bank**)

**Opening Hours: Monday-Friday 9:00-13:00** (town branches are open until 15:00).

### **Office Hours and Public Holidays**

#### **Post Offices**

Opening Hours: Monday-Friday 8:00-16.30. Saturday 13:00. May open longer at tourist resorts. Always leave your mail directly at a post office instead of post boxes. Letters and postcards may take 7-15 days to reach its destination overseas.

#### **General Office Hours**

Monday-Friday 9:00-17:00 Saturdays 9.30-13:00.

Service can be slow and frustrating at all times, especially during the lunchtime siesta!

#### **Public Holidays**

**Sri Lanka** probably has the largest number of fixed public holidays for any country in the world! This is to accommodate the monthly **Buddhist** full -moon (**Poya**) day and various other religious communities who reside in the island (**Hindu, Islamic, Christian**).

#### **Language**

**English** is widely spoken and understood throughout the island, especially in the main tourist areas. Otherwise the main language is **Sinhalese** in the **South** and **South West** or **Tamil** in the **Hill Country** and **East Coast**.

### **Time Difference**

**Sri Lanka** is 5.30 hours ahead of **Greenwich Mean Time (GMT)** and 5 hours in the summer.

### **Electricity**

If you are taking any electrical appliances take a universal adapter for wall plugs since socket sizes vary. Some hotels will provide adapters for guests. 230-240 V AC, 50Hz.

### **Communication**

#### **Telephone**

We would recommend you to avoid making international phone calls from your hotel room due to the hefty surcharges added by most hotels.

International phone cards (from shops and kiosks) and communication centres are fairly common and are open till late including weekends. Some call centres allow you to accept incoming calls at a nominal rate for each minute.

#### **To Call UK from Sri Lanka**

UK Country Code: 0044

#### **How to Call Sri Lanka from UK**

Sri Lanka Country Code: 0094

#### **To Call a Number in Sri Lanka, Do The Following**

Country Code (0094) + City Code (Without the 0) + Phone Number (0094) (11)  
250 6021

*Ie: To Call Our Office in Sri Lanka from UK*

NOTE: In **Sri Lanka**, only dial the local number within the town but include the STD code when dialing from outside the town. There are also several private operators with telephone numbers which begin 114, 115 etc.

#### **Mobile Phones**

If you have requested 'International Call Roaming' for your mobile, it will switch automatically on arrival to local operators such as **Dialog Telekom, Tigo, Hutch** or **Mobitel**. Coverage is actually quite good in most areas visited by tourists within the island except inside the wildlife parks and remote areas of the **East Coast**. Reception may also be variable in the mountainous **Hill Country** for understandable reasons.

Local mobile telephones numbers have a digit range between 071-078.

In **Sri Lanka** calls to mobile numbers are charged BOTH to the caller and receiver by some operators and call packages, so conversations tend to be brief!

If you are likely to be making a lot of international phone calls from your mobile, think seriously about buying a **SIM Card** from a **Sri Lankan** mobile operator on arrival. **SIM Cards** are widely available at phone shops and cost about £10. With this you will be charged domestic rates for international calls (@ 16 pence a minute) and local calls (@ 0.04 pence a minute!).

#### **Internet and E-Mail**

There has been a very rapid expansion of Internet Cafes in all parts of the island. Just about every tourist hotel will have e-mail facilities available for guests. Do remember that the servers are unreliable at times and access may be slow.

## **Nightlife**

Club culture has definitely not reached the island. Nightclubs are to be found only at the beach hotels and at 5 star hotels in **Colombo**. Expect to be disappointed, although the beach resort of **Hikkaduwa** has a collection of bars and restaurants that attract young crowds.

## **Health**

### **Health Precautions While In Sri Lanka**

#### **Sun (Sunstroke and Dehydration)**

Protect yourself from the sun. Full acclimatization to high temperatures takes about two weeks. Take plenty of water, use salt on food and avoid extreme exertion.

Always wear a sunhat or baseball cap, sunglasses and suntan lotion. Use high protection factor suntan lotions designed specifically for the tropics. It is very important to drink liquids frequently.

#### **Stomach Problems**

These will be caused by change of food (use of coconut milk in curries) and climate. Take anti-diarrhea pills/upset stomach medication. A doctor should treat any diarrhea continuing for more than three days.

#### **Water**

**Never Drink Tap Water. Always Make Sure That Water Given To You Is Bottled Or Has Been Boiled Beforehand.** Bottled water is very cheap (Rs 40) and available at just about every shop in **Sri Lanka**. Ice is also unsafe unless made from treated water.

#### **Mosquitoes**

These should not be a problem inside A/C hotel rooms but they may be a source of irritation in dark outdoor places. Dusk and early evening is the worst time for mosquitoes. Repellents, sprays and 'mosquito coils' exist but their effectiveness is very varied.

#### **Leeches**

These will only be a problem at **Sinharaja** and other rainforests or the **Hill Country** in damp environments. Your guide will recommend a local tonic

'**Siddhalepa**' which when applied is extremely effective. If you see a leech on your body DO NOT try to remove it yourself since the head may break off inside your skin leading to irritation.

#### **Rabies**

If you are bitten or scratched by a domestic or wild animal, do not leave things to chance. Scrub the wound with soap and water and seek medical assistance at once.

#### **Medicine in Sri Lanka**

There are many well-qualified doctors in **Sri Lanka** who speak **English** fluently. Many common drugs available in the west are found in chemists but check sell-by dates thoroughly and buy from reputable chemists only. Locally made drugs are not quality controlled and therefore may be unreliable.

#### **Pharmacies**

Leading supermarkets such as **Cargills** contain Pharmacies that are open all day in all major towns and cities.

## Local Customs

### **Photography**

Always ask **Buddhist** monks for permission before photographing them.

Never pose for a photograph in front of a sculpture or statue of the **Buddha**.

Photography and filming is prohibited at sensitive areas such as airports, dams and military zones.

Flash photography is prohibited at many temples (ie: **Dambulla Cave Temple** and **Sigiriya**) in order to preserve the extremely ancient paintings and murals that adorn these sites.

### **Dress Codes**

- **You will NOT be allowed entry to Buddhist and Hindu temples and other places of worship in inappropriate clothing. Shoes MUST be removed before entry to religious places.**
- Short skirts, shorts and low cut clothing are usually frowned upon outside of the beach areas.

### **Tipping**

Although hotels and restaurants include a 10% service charge on bills, the practice of tipping is widespread for hotel staff, guides, chauffeurs, porters etc.

## Food and Drink

### **Food**

Most tourist hotels will offer a choice of local 'rice and curry' meals or **European** style dishes. It has to be said that the standard and quality of food can vary greatly between establishments. If you have an interest in **Sri Lankan** food and cuisine we would recommend eating out in good 'local style' restaurants rather than the somewhat bland food to be found in tourist hotels. Vegetarian food is surprisingly uncommon (for a **Buddhist** country!) and may be difficult to find in some areas. Fish is an important part of the diet in **Sri Lanka**. The island consumes more fish per head of population than any other country in the world! **Beef** and **Pork** are rarely to be found for religious reasons. **Chicken** and **Mutton** are the most readily available meats.

### **Rice and Curry**

These tend to be very hot and spicy and are the staple food in **Sri Lanka**. If you like hot food, you will be in your element! Others may find it advisable to ask for 'mild curries with less chillies' especially when eating out at restaurants while on tour (lunch). Side dishes such as **Lentils** and vegetables may either soothe your palette (salads) or further add to the inferno, such as the fiery hot **Coconut Sambol**. You will also find a great many varieties of tropical vegetables not found in the **West**.

### **Chinese Cuisine**

**Chinese** food in **Sri Lanka** tends to incorporate spicy elements of local cuisine with traditional **Chinese** recipes and is recommended (especially noodles which are a good substitute for rice). **Chinese** restaurants are hugely popular and are to be found in all areas of the island.

### **Seafood**

Fresh seafood is excellent, especially large prawns, crab, lobster and cuttle fish but again may be hot in its curried form. In **Sri Lanka**, fish is an essential and important part of the staple diet. A huge variety of fish are to be found in the coastal waters of the island.

### **Breakfast**

Traditional **Sri Lankan** breakfasts include dishes such as '**Hoppers**' (made with fermented rice flour and coconut milk and called *aap-pa*) and '**Stringhoppers**' (called *indi-aap-pa*) which look like a nest of thin noodles. All tourist hotels also offer 'Western style' breakfasts (toast, bacon, eggs) as an alternative.

### **Fruits**

A real surprise in **Sri Lanka** is the existence of an amazing variety of fruits. Even those that are readily available in the **UK** are to be found in a great number of different mouth-watering varieties. **Bananas** (over 20 species!), **Pineapple**, **Mango**, **Passion Fruit**, **Avocado**, **Custard Apples**, **Papaya**, and **Jackfruit** etc are available in season. Many of these are used in fresh fruit drinks of which

**Lime Juice**, **Pineapple Juice** and **Passion Fruit Juice** are especially recommended. There are also some delicious seasonal fruits (July-August) that are rarely found in the **West** such as **Mangosteen** and **Rambutan**.

### **Desserts**

Traditional **Sri Lankan** desserts include '**curd**' (a yogurt made from buffalo milk and served with treacle), and **Wattalappan** (pronounced 'what-ta-lup-pan'), which is very much like caramel pudding.

### **Bottled Drinks**

All international brands (**Coke**, **Fanta**) are available and cheaply priced. Local soft drinks include **Cream Soda**, **Necto** (rather like **Ribena**), and **Orange Barley**.

### **Fresh Coconut**

Tender coconut which is called '**thambili**' (pronounced 'tham-billie') is available at the roadside and most establishments. You will find this safe, pure and very refreshing in the midday heat.

### **Alcohol**

#### **Beer**

Local brands include **Lion**, **Carlsberg** and **Three Coins Pilsner**. You will find that most hotels and 'tourist' restaurants will charge **European** prices even for locally made beers. These are very much cheaper at supermarkets and roadside boutiques.

#### **Spirits**

Imported internationally branded spirits (**Whiskey**, **Vodka**, **Gin** etc) are available at all tourist hotels and most restaurants, but at a price.

Local spirits include the famous '**arrack**' (made of fermented coconut), which can be very potent, although some may find the taste slightly rough. If you are willing to give it a go, the recommended brands are **Mendis Special**, **Double Distilled**, **VSOA** and **7 Year Old Arrack**.

**Sri Lankans** traditionally eat snacks (termed 'bites') along with their spirits. These are usually devilled meat dishes and other 'starters'. Alcohol may not be served (even at your hotel) on the monthly **Poya** religious holiday, but most will agree to serve alcohol to guests to be consumed in the privacy of your hotel room.

### [Travelling In Sri Lanka](#)

#### **Roads**

Road travel is something of an experience since the island's road network is not in good condition. Speeds of more than 60 km per hour are rarely possible and potholes abound, so it can be a somewhat bumpy ride. You will also see people and animals adopting casual attitudes to road safety (especially the sight of dogs that get out of the way seemingly in the nick of time!). It is definitely not recommended for anybody to attempt to drive on his or her own. **Colombo** can be highly congested especially between 7-10 am and 3.30-6 pm. The town of **Kandy** too can be crowded with vehicles during the daytime.

#### **'Tuk Tuks' or 3 Wheelers**

Three-wheeled motorbikes are to be found everywhere and are the most popular form of transport in the island. The golden rule is to ALWAYS agree on the fare BEFORE you get in. Tourists can expect to be quoted exorbitant prices. Always haggle and bargain down from the initial price asked. As a general rule do not pay more than Rs 100 per km for your journey. Short journeys in **Colombo** will be much faster in a 3 wheeler during periods of heavy daytime traffic.

#### **Touts**

Unfortunately, touts are a common feature of **Sri Lanka's** tourism industry.

#### **Beach Touts**

Hawkers locally called '**Beach Boys**' may approach you on the beach at resort locations. A firm 'NO' should persuade them to go elsewhere. Remember that even a casual show of interest in their services will illicit repeated soliciting very much to your irritation.

#### **At Tourist Sites**

People calling themselves 'official guides' will magically appear at all places of interest. Your driver-guide (if on a tour itinerary) is the person who is most qualified (and paid by us) to provide you with these services.

#### **Buying Gems and Jewellery**

Be extremely careful when buying precious stones from local traders. If you are interested in buying jewellery we would strongly recommend that you purchase these from a reputable shop, which will be recommended by your driver-guide. Sure enough he will be paid a commission (from the shop) for taking you there in the first place, but you will have the benefit of some sort of guarantee that the goods are indeed genuine.

#### **Personal Safety**

In comparison with other countries the risks to personal safety for travelers are small but common sense should be observed at all times.

- Do not regard hotel rooms as automatically safe (Use hotel safes for valuable items)
- Keep a record of all vital documents (Passport numbers, Credit Card details, Travelers' cheques etc)

[You're Departure from Sri Lanka](#)

**Reconfirmation**

Flight reconfirmation prior to departure from **Colombo** is now not necessary with **Sri Lankan Airlines**.

**Arrival at Colombo Airport**

It is recommended that you arrive **3 hours** prior to departure at **Colombo Airport** due to delays that may occur at the security and check-in areas.

**Customs at Airport Departure**

Strict controls exist at departure on the export of antiques. This is basically any object considered to be more than 50 years old! Unprocessed foodstuffs are also banned. Up to 3 kg of tea can be exported duty free.

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**Exotic Asian Holidays - 2014**