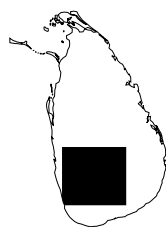


The Hill Country



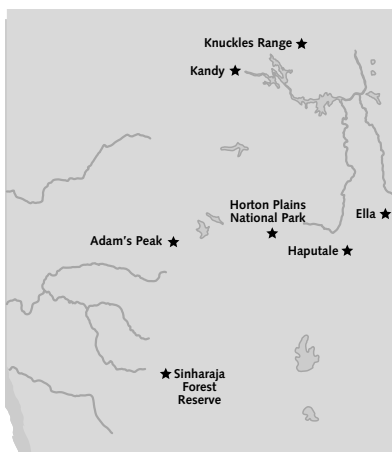
The proud Sinhalese kingdom of Kandy resisted European domination for more than 300 years after the coastal regions first surrendered to the Portuguese in the 17th century, and even now the surrounding Hill Country region feels a world apart from the rest of Sri Lanka. The landscape is green and lush, with an emerald carpet of tea plantations, and with montane forest clinging improbably to serrated ranges bookended by waterfalls on almost every corner. The climatic norm is an everlasting, energising spring, with occasionally (much) cooler temperatures threatening to forever hijack your expectations of this 'tropical' country.

The Hill Country capital of Kandy remains the Sinhalese cultural and spiritual centre for all of Sri Lanka, and the bustling city is an interesting gateway to the rest of the region. It's a region that promises leisurely train rides through rolling tea plantations, poignant reminders of the days of British colonial rule, and some of Sri Lanka's finest opportunities for exploring the outdoors. In the south the verdant Sinharaja Forest Reserve is a compact slice of Sri Lanka's last remaining rainforest. Further north, the Horton Plains National Park provides a wide-open route to the dramatic escarpment of World's End. Around Ella and Haputale, fill your days with lazy day walks through surrounding tea estates before returning to some of Sri Lanka's best guest houses.

Before or after a few days on the beach, don't be too surprised if the Hill Country is another region in which the days also drift lazily by.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Experiencing the up-close-and-personal excitement of elephants, drummers and dancers at the **Kandy Esala Perahera** (p159)
- Getting away from Sri Lanka's energetic buzz by trekking in the rare montane forests of the **Knuckles Range** (p175)
- Joining devout pilgrims and following flickering torchlight to ascend the sacred heights of **Adam's Peak** (Sri Pada; p175)
- Rattling and rolling with Tamil tea pickers on a slowly, slowly train journey from **Haputale to Ella** (p190)
- Winding down with a few leisurely days in **Ella** (p195), combining excellent home-cooked food and spectacular walks
- Discovering your inner birdwatcher amid the tangled, overgrown perfection of the **Sinharaja Forest Reserve** (p204)
- Rising before dawn and being rewarded with an unimpeded view from the stunning heights of **World's End** (p187)



0 20 km
0 12 miles



The **Henerathgoda Botanic Gardens** (☎ 033-222 2316) near Gampaha, off the Colombo–Kandy road about 30km northwest of Colombo, are where the first rubber trees planted in Asia were grown. Some original plantings dot the 37-acre gardens, together with 400 other plant varieties.

About 50km from Kandy is **Cadjugama**, famous for its cashew nuts. Brightly clad sellers beckon passing motorists with nuts they've harvested from the surrounding forest. A 1kg bag of still-warm chilli-infused cashews costs around Rs 900 – perfect for accompanying a couple of weeks of sundowner beers. At the 48km post is **Radawaduwa**, notable for woven cane items.

Kegalle, 77km from Colombo, is the nearest town to the **Pinnewala Elephant Orphanage** (opposite). Nearby is **Utuwankandu**, a rocky hill from where the 19th-century Robin Hood-style highwayman, Saradiel, preyed on travellers until the British executed him.

At **Kadugannawa**, just after the road and railway make their most scenic climbs – with views southwest to the large Bible Rock – is a tall pillar erected in memory of Captain Dawson, the English engineer who built the Colombo–Kandy road in 1826.

Cadjuduma, Kegalle and Kadugannawa are on the A1, easily accessible by bus between Colombo and Kandy. Catch a train to Kadugannawa and the Henerathgoda Botanic Gardens at Gampaha.