

Directory

CONTENTS

Accommodation	286
Activities	287
Business Hours	291
Children	291
Climate Charts	292
Courses	292
Customs Regulations	293
Dangers & Annoyances	293
Discount Cards	294
Embassies & Consulates	294
Festivals & Events	294
Food	296
Gay & Lesbian Travellers	296
Holidays	296
Insurance	296
Internet Access	297
Legal Matters	297
Maps	297
Money	297
Photography & Video	298
Post	298
Shopping	299
Smoking	300
Solo Travellers	300
Telephone	300
Time	300
Toilets	300
Tourist Information	300
Travellers with Disabilities	301
Visas	301
Volunteering	302
Women Travellers	302

ACCOMMODATION

Sri Lanka has accommodation ranging from rooms in family homes to five-star resorts. Unlike India, not many places in Sri Lanka have dormitory-style rooms. The main option for solo travellers is single rooms: sometimes in tiny boxes, or costing the same as double rooms. For groups of travellers, some guest houses will have a 'family' room with three or four beds for only 20% to 50% more than a double room.

Prices are very seasonal, particularly at beach resorts. The prices quoted in this guide

LIVING THE HERITAGE HIGH LIFE

Sri Lanka is one of the travel world's best-value destinations if you're looking to splurge in a restored coastal villa or a refurbished colonial hotel. See **Boutique Sri Lanka** (www.boutiquesrilanka.com) or **Sri Lanka In Style** (www.srilankainstyle.com) for comprehensive listings of many heritage Sri Lankan properties that are now open as accommodation.

are high-season rates; look forward to good discounts in the low season. The high season begins around 15 December on the west and south coasts, and 1 April on the east coast. The monsoon may have ended before the season starts. High season ends around March in the south and west, and around September on the east coast. It's always worth negotiating a discount year-round.

Guest houses and hotels are in demand during April in Nuwara Eliya for the Sinhalese/Tamil New Year, and in Kandy during the Kandy Esala Perahera (July/August). Book ahead for both occasions. Many places have different rooms at different prices; it's always worth asking if there are any cheaper rooms.

In this guide, doubles (or equivalent) costing less than Rs 1500 a night are in the budget category, Rs 1500 to 8000 in the midrange category and over Rs 8000 in top end. Some midrange and top-end hotels quote room prices in US dollars or euros, but will accept the rupee equivalent. Note that a service charge of 10% will be added to the rate you're usually quoted. At top-end hotels an additional Value Added Tax (VAT) of 15% is added. Reviews in this book include the addition of both service charge and VAT.

Unless stated otherwise, all rooms have a private bathroom, fan and mosquito net or electric insecticide 'mat'. Air-conditioning is available in most midrange and top-end accommodation, especially in the south and west of the country; the availability of air-con is noted in specific reviews. In the Hill Country's cooler climate, air-con is not usu-

ally needed. Many places have their own restaurant or can provide meals on request.

An increasing number of environmentally friendly accommodation is opening in Sri Lanka (see p21).

Guest houses

Sri Lankan guest houses cater to travellers on a variety of budgets. Some guest houses rent a couple of rooms, like B&B establishments, while other guests are like small hotels.

Apart from lower rates, the 'meeting local people' aspect is a benefit of guest houses. Expect to pay up to Rs 1500 for a simple, double room in a family guest house. Good negotiation skills might see you secure a 10% to 15% discount. Many guest houses are small, so it can pay to phone ahead.

At the time of writing, the economic situation in Sri Lanka had seen a few lower-end guesthouses offering rooms on an hourly basis for sexual assignations. It's worth paying a little extra for a better place.

Hotels

The line between lower-priced hotels and upper-range guest houses is blurred as places that call themselves 'hotels' are really guest houses, while other small hotels are called inns, lodges or villas. Whatever the name, doubles in hotels start at around Rs 2200 and escalate up to high-priced luxury places.

Larger hotels are either modern resort hotels or colonial-style places in heritage buildings. Many of these heritage places are decked out with modern conveniences, including wi-fi internet and air-con. It's worth splurging on them occasionally to break up the guest house routine and really capture the languid essence – think rattan furniture and slowly spinning ceiling fans – of colonial Sri Lanka.

More contemporary hotels offer facilities such as tennis courts, windsurfing instruction, nightclubs, as well as prime beach, riverside or hill-top locations. Most are geared to package tourists. Expect comfortable rooms, but an occasional lack of ambience and personality.

National Parks

The **Department of Wildlife Conservation** (☎ 011-256 0380; www.dwlc.lk 7) has bungalows, each accommodating up to 10 adults and two children, in national parks, including Uda Walawe and Horton Plains. Many national parks also have camp sites available.

Adventure Sports Lanka (☎ 01-279 1584; www.actionlanka.com; 366/3 Rendapola Horagahakanda Lane, Talagama, Koswatta) also arranges trips to parks.

Rest houses

Originally created for travelling government officials by the Dutch and then developed into a network of wayside inns by the British, rest houses now mostly function as small midrange hotels. Standards and rates vary widely – those run by the **Ceylon Hotels Corporation** (www.ceylonhotels.lk) are well maintained – but most rest houses are old-fashioned with big rooms featuring wooden floors and high ceilings.

Rest houses usually have locations on the highest hills, near the most spectacular beaches or beside the prettiest rivers. Doubles cost US\$45 (Rs 5000) up to US\$80 (Rs 9000).

Tea-estate Bungalows

In the Hill Country, a number of bungalows once the homes of British tea-estate managers have been converted into guest houses or hotels. Despite the 'bungalow' appellation, they're often rambling villas with beautiful gardens and antique-stuffed living rooms.

These bungalows fall into the midrange category, with a few luxury properties. Tea Trails (p177) offers accommodation in four beautifully renovated bungalows near Dikoya.

ACTIVITIES

Sri Lanka offers more than just stunning scenery, beaches and temples.

Ayurveda

Ayurveda (eye-your-veda) is an ancient system of medicine using herbs, oils, metals and animal products to heal and rejuvenate. Influenced by the system of the same name in India, Ayurveda is widely used in Sri Lanka for a range of ailments.

BOOK YOUR STAY ONLINE

For more accommodation reviews and recommendations by Lonely Planet authors, check out the online booking service at www.lonelyplanet.com/hotels. You'll find the true, insider low-down on the best places to stay. Reviews are thorough and independent. Best of all, you can book online.