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# PLAN YOUR TRIP

YOUR PLANNING TOOL KIT

Photos, itineraries, lists and suggestions to help you put together your perfect trip

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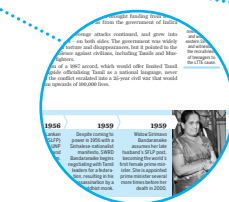
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# UNDERSTAND SRI LANKA

GET MORE FROM YOUR TRIP

Learn about the big picture, so you can make sense of what you see

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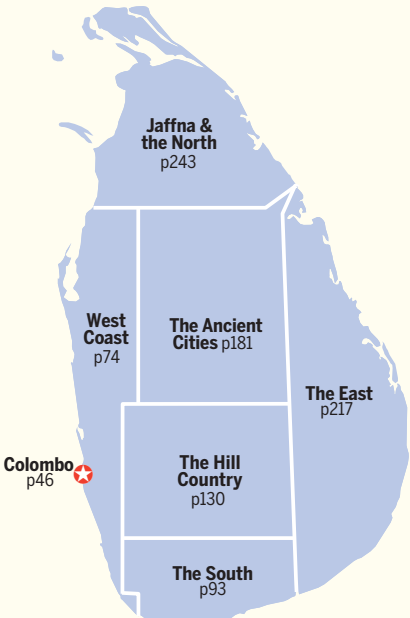


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# ON THE ROAD

YOUR COMPLETE DESTINATION GUIDE  
In-depth reviews, detailed listings and insider tips



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# SURVIVAL GUIDE

VITAL PRACTICAL INFORMATION TO  
HELP YOU HAVE A SMOOTH TRIP

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THIS EDITION WRITTEN AND RESEARCHED BY

**Ryan Ver Berkmoes**  
**Stuart Butler, Amy Karafin**

➤ **Every listing is recommended by our authors, and their favourite places are listed first**

➤ **Look out for these icons:**



Our author's top recommendation



A green or sustainable option

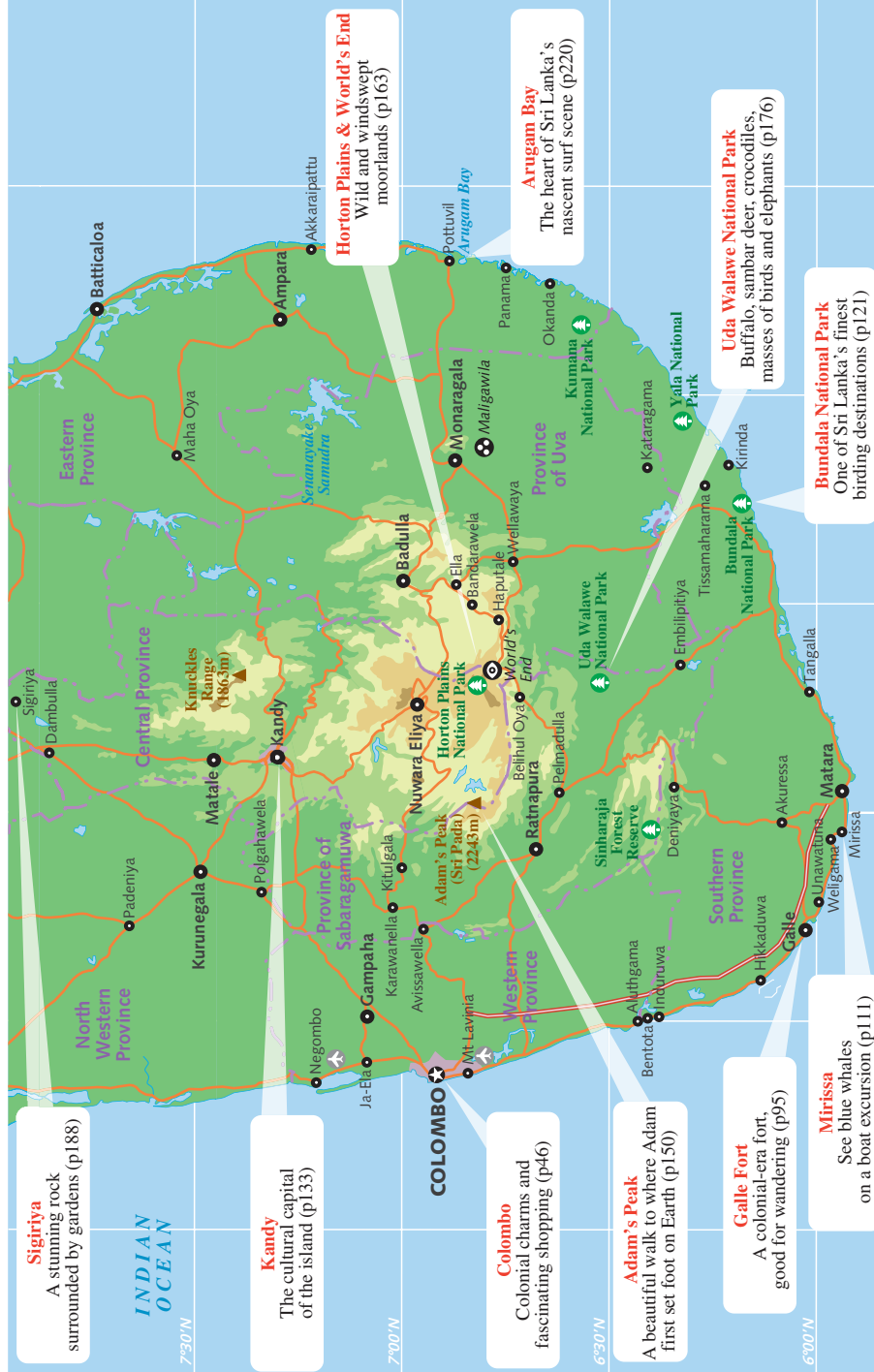


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# On the Road

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**Sigiriya**

A stunning rock surrounded by gardens (p188)

**Kandy**

The cultural capital of the island (p133)

**Colombo**

Colonial charms and fascinating shopping (p46)

**Adam's Peak**

A beautiful walk to where Adam first set foot on Earth (p150)

**Galle Fort**

A colonial-era fort, good for wandering (p95)

**Mirissa**

See blue whales on a boat excursion (p111)

**Horton Plains & World's End**

Wild and windswept moorlands (p163)

**Arugam Bay**

The heart of Sri Lanka's nascent surf scene (p220)

**Uda Walawe National Park**

Buffalo, sambar deer, crocodiles, masses of birds and elephants (p176)

**Bundala National Park**

One of Sri Lanka's finest birding destinations (p121)



## OUR STORY

A beat-up old car, a few dollars in the pocket and a sense of adventure. In 1972 that's all Tony and Maureen Wheeler needed for the trip of a lifetime – across Europe and Asia overland to Australia. It took several months, and at the end – broke but inspired – they sat at their kitchen table writing and stapling together their first travel guide, *Across Asia on the Cheap*. Within a week they'd sold 1500 copies. Lonely Planet was born.

Today, Lonely Planet has offices in Melbourne, London and Oakland, with more than 600 staff and writers. We share Tony's belief that 'a great guidebook should do three things: inform, educate and amuse'.

## OUR WRITERS



### Ryan Ver Berkmoes

**Coordinating Author, Colombo, The Ancient Cities** Ryan Ver Berkmoes first visited Sri Lanka in 2005 after the tsunami, when he covered the aftermath as a journalist. Impressed then at Sri Lankans' resilience, he's only more impressed now as the island emerges from its long time in the shadows. On his visits since, he has criss-crossed this beautiful island looking for the best rice and curry ever. He's had some great ones but this sort of quest should never end. Off-island,

Ryan lives in Portland, Oregon and writes about travel and more at [ryanverberkmoes.com](http://ryanverberkmoes.com).

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[lonelyplanet.com/members/ryanverberkmoes](http://lonelyplanet.com/members/ryanverberkmoes)



### Stuart Butler

**West Coast, The South, The Hill Country** English-born Stuart Butler first hit Sri Lanka during a long trans-Asia surf trip many years ago. One wave and one curry and he was hooked. Since then the food, beaches, wildlife, waves, people and hills have called him back many times. He now calls the beaches of southwest France home. In addition to Sri Lanka his travels have taken him across South Asia and beyond, from the desert beaches of Pakistan to the coastal

jungles of Colombia. He still waxes lyrical over Sri Lankan curries. Read about his travels on <http://stuartbutler-journalist.blogspot.com>.

Read more about Stuart Butler at:  
[lonelyplanet.com/members/stuartbutler](http://lonelyplanet.com/members/stuartbutler)



### Amy Karafin

**The East, Jaffna & the North** For almost 20 years Amy Karafin has been meditating and reading the ancient Pali texts first written down in Sri Lanka. She's also been fascinated by Tamil culture since living in a hut in Tamil Nadu on her first South Asia journey in 1996. The North and East, with their long histories of spiritual exchange, were a natural fit for her, and she jumped at the chance to be among the first travellers to visit islands, beaches, temples and natural

springs that had been closed to civilians for decades. When not on the road, Amy lives in Brooklyn, New York.

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# itineraries

*Whether you've got six days or 60, these itineraries provide a starting point for the trip of a lifetime. Want more inspiration? Head online to [lonelyplanet.com/thorntree](http://lonelyplanet.com/thorntree) to chat with other travellers.*



## Two Weeks Capital, Coast & Hill Country

Start in **Colombo**, exploring the markets and visiting the city's vibrant Buddhist temples. Then take the new Southern Expressway south and you'll be in **Galle** in no time, avoiding the often traffic-clogged road on the west coast and the ho-hum towns along it. Explore the languid streets of Galle's 17th-century Dutch city-within-a-fort.

From Galle, go get some beach time. **Tangalla** has a growing selection of groovy beach places on its lovely and uncrowded ribbon of sand. Head inland and venture up to **Uda Walawe National Park**, where you'll see dozens of elephants and many other animals. Take the winding road up in the heart of the Hill Country and put down roots for a few days in **Ella**, a cool town with a fun travellers' vibe. Walk to waterfalls and mountain peaks.

Take one of the world's most beautiful train rides to the stop for the British colonial heritage town of **Nuwara Eliya**, where you'll enter a time warp. Visit tea plantations and stop in iconic **Kandy** for temples and gardens. From here it's an easy jaunt back to Colombo or the airport.





### Three Weeks

## Hilltops & Beaches

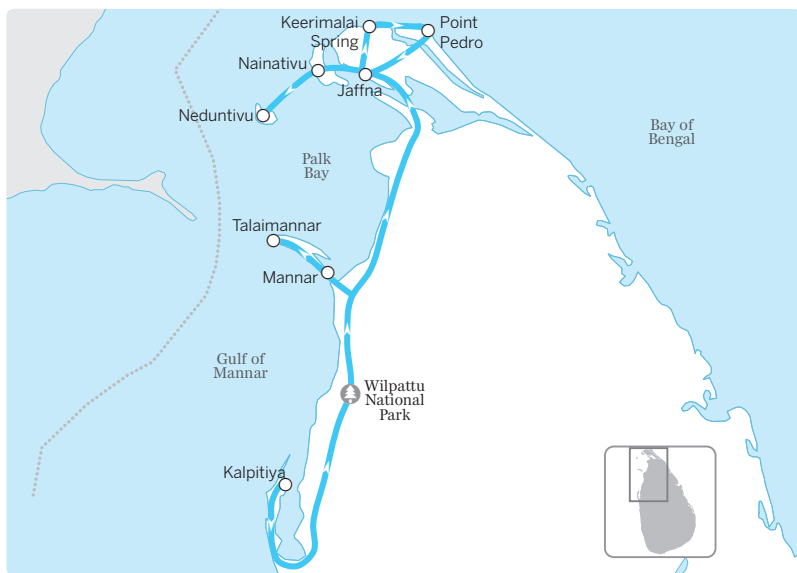
Start in **Colombo**, where you can absorb some of Sri Lanka's newfound energetic vibe before you head right off the map – almost. **Kitulgala** is a gateway for rafting the Kelaniya Ganga, as well as for jungle hikes and birdwatching. Movie buffs might recognise scenes from *Bridge on the River Kwai* here. Take the short hop to misty **Hatton**, **Dikoya** and **Maskeliya**, three small towns in some of the most scenic parts of the Hill Country. Spend a few days tasting fragrant single-estate teas and bed down in luxurious ex-colonial tea planters' bungalows, or cosy guesthouses in **Dalhouseie**, the traditional starting point for the pre-dawn ascent of Adam's Peak.

Head east to **Ella** for more hiking, wonderful views and guesthouses renowned for having some of Sri Lanka's tastiest home-cooked food.

Travel southeast to **Monaragala**, a low-key gateway to the east and the jumping-off point for one of Sri Lanka's most atmospheric ancient Buddhist sites at **Yudaganawa**. Also nearby, **Maligawila** is home to an 11m-tall standing Buddha that's over a thousand years old.

Continue east to **Arugam Bay**, with its easygoing surfers' vibe, excellent seafood and few travellers compared with the southern beaches. It's easy to spend an extra day or three here, swinging in a hammock at one of the beach guesthouses. Don't miss a boat trip exploring the nearby Pottuvil Lagoon. After a few days on the beach, veer back inland via Monaragala to **Wellawaya**, and find time for a brief detour to Sri Lanka's tallest standing Buddha at **Buduruwagala**. Soak up the beauty of the tiny lakes and listen to the birds.

Descend from Wellawaya to the coastal plains of **Kataragama**, the terminus of the Pada Yatra, a pilgrimage that begins at the other end of the island. One of Sri Lanka's oldest and most venerated dagobas (stupas) is in nearby **Tissamaharama**, which is also a convenient entry point for forays into **Yala National Park**, where you can spot most of Sri Lanka's iconic critters. From 'Tissa', beach-hop via **Tangalla** along the south coast to laid-back **Mirissa**, a good base for whale-watching.



Two Weeks

## Emerging Sri Lanka

With peace, parts of Sri Lanka that were off limits – or almost off limits – for decades are opening up to visitors, who will be warmly welcomed. Start at **Kalpitiya**, the main town on the long finger of land that juts up into the Indian Ocean. The beaches here are just OK but the kitesurfing and reef diving are spectacular. Hook your way around north to **Wilpattu National Park**. This treasure was closed for years during the war but is now returning to life. It has all of Sri Lanka's iconic animals and is very quiet.

Next, explore another spit of Sri Lanka extending into the sea: **Mannar** is technically an island but feels like a peninsula. It has white beaches, wild donkeys and incredible beauty. The remote town of **Talaimannar** feels like the end of the world. Here a chain of reefs and islets almost form a land bridge to India.

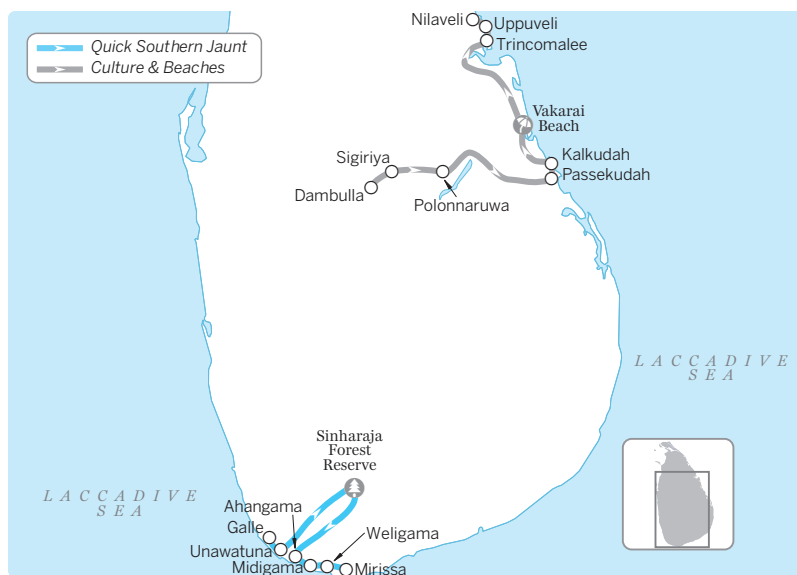
Hook around again to the Jaffna peninsula. **Jaffna** bears scars of the war, which still seems like a recent memory here. But the rich Tamil culture is returning and charming temples on shady backstreets await exploration.

Roads closed for years have reopened and you can visit **Keerimalai spring**, a sacred site with legendary bathing pools. It's close to the Naguleswaram Shiva Kovil, which traces its past to the 6th century BC.

Your next destination is **Point Pedro**, which is still shaking off the 2004 tsunami but holds onto traces of a colonial past. There is a long swath of the whitest beach you can imagine here.

Jaffna has nearby islands well worth exploring for their sheer minimalistic beauty. There's actual sights on **Nainativu**, which you reach via increasingly unsubstantial causeways and a ferry. Buddhist and Hindu temples draw the pious to this tiny speck of sand.

Another ferry ride – which is half the fun – takes you the 10km to **Neduntivu**, which some still call by its old Dutch moniker Delft. It's a windswept place beyond the end of the road and wild ponies roam seemingly deserted streets.



## One Week Quick Southern Jaunt

This fast trip will warm even the most frost-bitten visitor escaping a frigid winter elsewhere in the world. Begin your jaunt in **Galle**: founded by the Portuguese in the 16th century, it is one of Southeast Asia's best-preserved, fortified colonial cities. Walk the walls at sunset and enjoy the many cafes cropping up along streets lined with renovated and delightfully dilapidated old buildings.

Hit the beach at nearby **Unawatuna**, which has an alluring crescent of sand, cafes overlooking the surf and perfectly blue waters luring you in. Now find your inner Tarzan (many of the movies were shot in Sri Lanka) at the Unesco-recognised **Sinharaja Forest Reserve**, Sri Lanka's last major tropical rainforest.

Back on the south coast, Sri Lanka has a fast-breaking surf scene and you'll find lessons, board rentals and cheap surfer dives in **Ahangama** and **Midigama**.

Another short jaunt east brings you to **Weligama**, which has beach resorts and a lively fishing village with fascinating markets. Not far away is the sandy gem of the south, **Mirissa**, where cute little places to stay are hidden in the palms.

## One Week Culture & Beaches

This tour covers the uncrowded middle of Sri Lanka. Start in **Dambulla**, with its series of cave shrines painted with vivid Buddhist murals. From here it's a short jaunt to **Sigiriya**, a 200m-tall rock outcrop that was once a monastery and is truly one of the island's most amazing sights.

Further northeast the former royal capital of **Polonnaruwa** offers an inspiring collection of Buddhist sculptures and monastery ruins dating back nearly a thousand years. Head due east to the coast and the beaches at **Kalkudah** and **Passekudah**. The former is a deserted and beautiful broad strip of sand. The latter is also beautiful and draws locals by the busload.

Continue your beach adventures 20km north at one of Sri Lanka's hidden gems, **Vakarai Beach**. You're really off the grid here at this paradise and only have electricity a few hours at night.

Go north again and you are on the idyllic natural harbour of **Trincomalee**. It has a rich history going back centuries that the recent war couldn't erase. Finally, end your cultural and sandy trek at the dual beach towns of **Uppuveli** and **Nilaveli**. There's much debate about which is better: you decide.

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