

welcome to Sri Lanka



The Undiscovered Country

You might say Sri Lanka has been hiding in plain sight. Countless scores of travellers have passed overhead on their way to someplace else, but years of war and challenges such as tsunamis have kept Sri Lanka off many itineraries.

But now – as you’ve probably heard – the war is over and Sri Lanka’s looking up. If you’ve ‘done’ India, grown blasé about Southeast Asia or simply want to explore a place whose appeal and pleasures are myriad, then it’s time you dropped in.

So Much in So Little

Sri Lanka’s attributes are many. Few places have as many Unesco World Heritage Sites (eight) packed into such a small area. Its 2000-plus years of culture can be discovered at ancient sites filled with mystery. Legendary temples boast beautiful details crafted by artisans through the centuries.

Across whole swaths of the country, that thing that goes bump in the night might be an elephant heading to a favourite waterhole. Safari tours of Sri Lanka’s pleasantly relaxed national parks encounter leopards, grouchy water buffaloes, all manner of birds and a passel of primates.



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Endless beaches, timeless ruins, welcoming people, oodles of elephants, killer surf, cheap prices, fun trains, famous tea, flavourful food – need I go on? – describe Sri Lanka.

(left) Procession toward Gangaramaya Temple (p53), Colombo
(below) Beach at Mirissa (p111)



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When you're ready to escape the tropical climate of the coast and lowlands, head for the hills, which are verdant, virescent and virally infectious with allure. Impossibly green tea plantations and rainforested peaks beckon walkers, trekkers or just those who want to see it on a spectacular train ride.

And then there are the beaches. The beaches! Dazzlingly white and all so often untrod, they ring the island so that no matter where you go, you'll be near a sandy gem. Should you beat the inevitable languor, you can surf and dive world-class sites without world-class crowds.

It's So Easy

Distances are short: see the sacred home of the world's oldest living tree in the morning (Anuradhapura) and stand awestruck by the sight of hundreds of elephants gathering in the afternoon (Minneriya). Find a favourite beach to call your own, meditate in a 2000-year-old temple, exchange smiles while strolling a mellow village, marvel at birds and wildflowers, try to keep count of the little dishes that come with your rice and curry. Stroll past colonial gems in Colombo and then hit some epic surf.

Sri Lanka is spectacular, it's affordable and it's still mostly uncrowded. Now is the best time to discover it.