

The Ancient Cities

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Best Places to Stay

- Rice Villa Retreat (p212)
- Lion Lodge (p203)
- Jim's Farm Villas (p196)
- Kalundewa Retreat (p199)
- The Sanctuary at Tissawewa (p222)
- Lakeside at Nuwarawewa (p221)

Best Places to Eat

- Heritance Kandalama Hotel (p199)
- The Sanctuary at Tissawewa (p222)
- A&C Restaurant (p197)

Why Go?

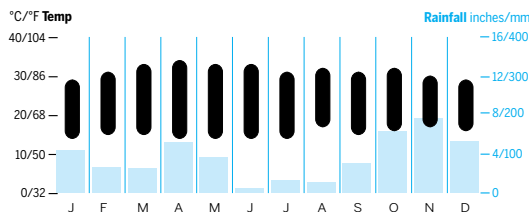
Crumbling temples, lost cities and sacred sites are reason enough to head up country to the cultural heartland of Sri Lanka. It was here on the hot central plains that ancient Sinhalese dynasties set up their capitals and supported massive artistic and architectural endeavours. Eventually these kingdoms fell, giving nature a chance to reclaim the land.

For more than a century archaeologists have been slowly shedding the many layers of history from this overgrown landscape. The rock fortress at Sigiriya, the monumental dagobas of Anuradhapura and refined carvings of Polonnaruwa are but a few of the sites now considered national treasures.

This region is commonly called the 'Cultural Triangle'. Besides the amazing ruins, save time for the national parks, which teem with elephants and outstanding birdlife. Plan on spending several days here making new discoveries daily.

When to Go

Dambulla



Jun A great festival, the Poson Poya, is held at Mihintale on the Poson full-moon night.

May–Sep Elephants abound in the central and easily visited Minneriya National Park.

Nov Ceremonies in Anuradhapura for Unduvap Poya, marking the sacred bodhi tree's arrival.



Ancient Cities Highlights

- 1** Feeling humbled by the epic scale of the monuments and profound spirituality evident at **Anuradhapura** (p215)
- 2** Scaling the great rock of **Sigiriya** (p200) for epic views, outstanding art and intriguing ruins
- 3** Admiring the exquisite carvings and temples at the fascinating ruins of the former Sinhalese stronghold of **Polonnaruwa** (p206)
- 4** Spotting bird and animal life in the lush **Minneriya National Park** (p213)
- 5** Going Buddha-spotting in **Dambulla** (p197), where hillside rock caves contain some of Sri Lanka's most stunning cultural artefacts
- 6** Marvelling at the scenery, temples and monuments of **Mihintale** (p223)