



The South

Includes ➔

| | |
|-----------------------------|-----|
| Galle | 104 |
| Unawatuna | 115 |
| Weligama | 123 |
| Mirissa | 123 |
| Matara | 126 |
| Dondra | 128 |
| Talalla | 128 |
| Dikwella | 129 |
| Goyambokka | 129 |
| Tangalla & Around | 130 |
| Bundala National Park | 134 |
| Tissamaharama | 134 |
| Yala National Park | 138 |
| Kataragama | 140 |

Best Beaches

- ➔ Goyambokka Beach (p129)
- ➔ Marakolliya Beach (p131)
- ➔ Mirissa Beach (p124)
- ➔ Rekawa Beach (p131)
- ➔ Talalla Beach (p128)

Best Places to Stay

- ➔ Amanwella (p130)
- ➔ Fort Printers (p112)
- ➔ Fortaleza (p110)
- ➔ Frangipani Tree (p120)
- ➔ Lonely Beach Resort (p132)

Why Go?

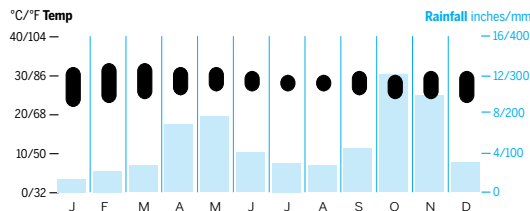
A sense of romance and wonder sweeps up all visitors to Sri Lanka's south coast; after all, this is the land where people dance across fire on monsoon nights, fishermen float on stilts above the waves, and turtles crawl up onto moonlit beaches.

Prepare your senses for overload. The landscape is one of utter beauty; the radiant-green rice paddies and forests of swinging palm trees contrast with endless beaches of ivory-coloured sand and an ocean of rich turquoise. People drift past in clouds of bright colours, especially in the colonial bastion that is Galle's Fort.

No matter what you're after you'll find it here. You can dive across glowing coral reefs or learn to surf on gentle sandbars. The culturally inclined can soak up works of Buddhist-inspired art in lonely caves; for the naturalist there are huge whales splashing through offshore swells, and leopards moving like spirits in the night.

When to Go

Galle



Dec–Apr Whales roll through the sea, the beaches buzz and everything's open.

Aug Pilgrims perform acts of self-mortification at the unforgettable Kataragama festival.

Nov The monsoon rains die out, beach resorts wake up and crowds are yet to arrive.



The South Highlights

- 1 Taking the train south to Unesco-recognised **Galle** (p105) and strolling its sculptured streets
- 2 Learning the tea trade at **Hundungoda Tea Estate** (p121)
- 3 Staring in slack-jawed amazement at the biggest creatures alive today on a **blue whale tour** (p124)
- 4 Trying to find your perfect beach in the sweet sands around **Tangalla** (p131)
- 5 Speeding through the tube at **Midigama** (p121) or learning to surf at **Weligama** (p123)
- 6 Watching the first faltering flipper-flaps of a tiny baby turtle on **Rekawa Beach** (p131)
- 7 Watching the mist rise off Tissa Wewa in the pink glow of sunset at **Tissamaharama** (p134)
- 8 Spotting a spotty leopard and listening for ear-flapping elephants in **Yala National Park** (p138)

Galle

📍 091 / POPULATION 100,200

Galle (pronounced 'gaw' in English, and 'gaar-le' in Sinhala) is the big unmissable destination in the south. It's at once endlessly exotic, bursting with the scent of spices and salty winds, and yet also, with its wonderful collection of Dutch-colonial buildings, a town of great beauty. Classic architecture melds with a dramatic tropical setting to create a reality that is endlessly interesting.

Above all else, Galle is a city of trade and, increasingly, art. Today the historic Fort area is crammed full of little boutique shops, cafes and hotels owned by local and foreign artists, writers, photographers, designers and poets – a third of the houses are owned by foreigners.

Built by the Dutch, beginning in 1663, the 36-hectare Fort occupies most of a promontory that's surrounded on three sides by

the ocean. Just wandering the old walls and streets at random yields one architectural surprise after another as you explore the amazing collection of structures dating back through the centuries. Its glories have earned the Fort status as a Unesco World Heritage Site.

A key part of the Fort's allure, however, is that it isn't just a pretty place. Rather, it remains a working community: there are administrative offices, courts, export companies, lots of regular folks populating the streets and a definite buzz of energy in the air.

Galle is easily reached as a day trip from Colombo and is a quick drive from the nearby beach towns of Hikkaduwa and Unawatuna, but to really savour the place, stay within the atmospheric walls of the Fort.

History

Although Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa are older than Galle, they are effectively aban-