



The West

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Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Lords (p90)
- ➔ Home Grown Rice & Curry (p101)
- ➔ Petit Restaurant (p90)
- ➔ Spaghetti & Co (p101)

Best Places to Stay

- ➔ Ging Oya Lodge (p91)
- ➔ Shangri-Lanka Villa (p97)
- ➔ Villa Araliya (p89)
- ➔ Saman Villas (p97)
- ➔ Aditya Resort (p101)

Why Go?

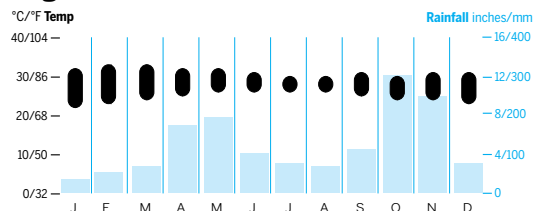
You don't have to be on Sri Lanka's west coast for long to realise that the coastline has something of a multiple personality. North of the capital is Negombo, a cheerful beach town crowned with church spires that is, thanks to its proximity to the airport, a staple of almost every visitor's Sri Lankan journey. Head further north, though, and you enter a wild and little-visited region that seems to consist of nothing but coconut plantations and lagoons, sparkling in the sun and filled with dolphins.

South of Colombo's chaos is a world that oscillates between the dancing devils of traditional Sri Lankan culture in Ambalangoda, the chic boutique hotels and uncluttered golden sands of Bentota and the down-at-heel but ever-popular backpacker party town of Hikkaduwa.

Whichever part of the west coast you choose, you can be sure you'll end up spending longer here than planned.

When to Go

Negombo



Jan Schools of dolphins party in Dutch Bay; backpackers party nightly in Hikkaduwa.

Mar–Apr Sri Lanka's Christians stage Easter passion plays in Negombo and Talawila.

Nov If you prefer your beaches (mostly) tourist free, November is the month to come.



West Coast Highlights

- 1 Scanning the horizon for schools of playful dolphins in the waters off **Kalpitiya** (p92)
- 2 Finding your feet after a long flight in charming but ramshackle **Negombo** (p86)
- 3 Feeling the stress levels drop under the palm trees of lovely **Bentota** (p95), and booking in for a pampering in one of the area's boutique hotels
- 4 Ticking off egrets and herons during a waterborne birdwatching safari through the **Muthurajawela Marsh** (p86)
- 5 Scouring the undergrowth for leopards and spotted deer at **Wilpattu National Park** (p94)
- 6 Getting all green-fingered in the **Brief Garden** (p95) near Bentota
- 7 Raising a toast to the sunset after a hard day's diving and surfing in lively **Hikkaduwa** (p98)