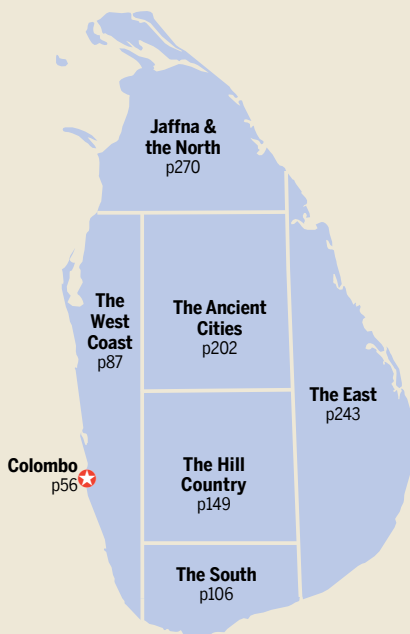




Sri Lanka



Anirban Mahapatra,
Ryan Ver Berkmoes, Bradley Mayhew, Iain Stewart

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Itineraries



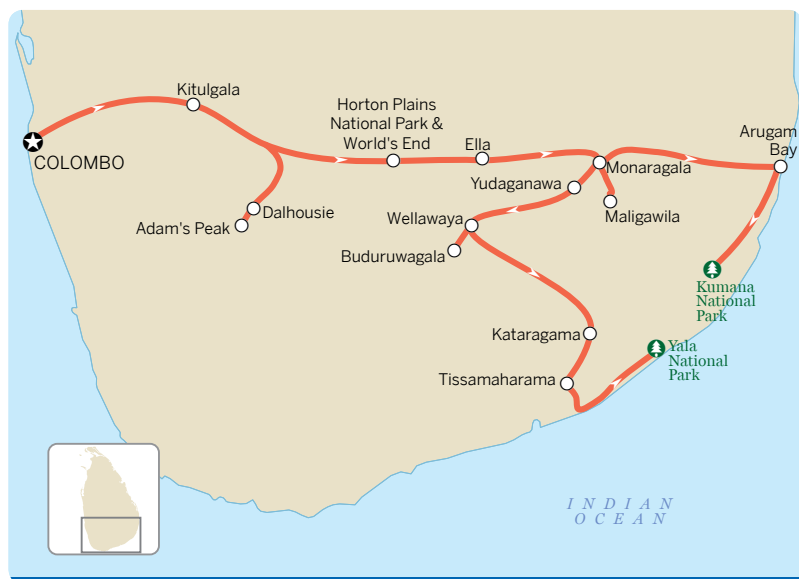
Essential Sri Lanka

This compact trip covers a core selection of Sri Lanka's must-see sights.

Start in **Colombo**, exploring the markets and visiting the city's revitalised Fort district. Then take the train south along the coast to beguiling **Galle**, avoiding the often traffic-clogged road on the west coast and the ho-hum towns along it.

From Galle, go get some beach time. The **Tangalla** region has a growing selection of lovely beach places on its beautiful 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 into the heart of the Hill Country and put down roots for a few days in **Ella**, a cool town with a fun traveller vibe.

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.



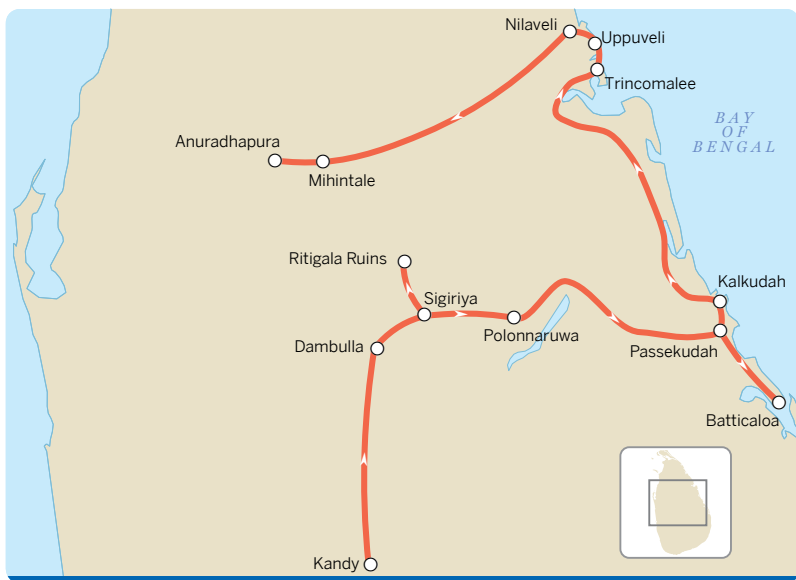
2
WEEKS

Natural South

It's not a big island, but Sri Lanka still retains one beautiful wilderness areas, especially among the tropical peaks and valleys, in the national parks and along the beach-lined southern coast.

Start in **Colombo**. On your way east, **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 the misty region of **Adam's Peak (Sri Pada)**. The climb of this sacred peak is an important pilgrimage for many. **Dalhousie** is the traditional starting point for the pre-dawn ascent. Spend a few days in the region tasting fragrant single-estate teas and bed down in luxurious ex-colonial tea planters' bungalows, or cosy guesthouses. Head east to **Horton Plains National Park** where you'll find **World's End**, a 9.5km looping walk to a stunning vantage point with stops at waterfalls. Now make the short drive to a Hill Country highlight: **Ella**. This village has more hiking, wonderful views and guesthouses renowned for having some of Sri Lanka's tastiest home-cooked food. Continue 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 more than a thousand years old.

On the coast is the popular **Arugam Bay**, with its easygoing surfer vibe and excellent seafood. 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. Explore the seldom-visited wilds of **Kumana National Park**, then 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. Nearby **Tissamaharama** has a lovely lakeside setting, which is also a convenient entry point for the hugely popular safaris into **Yala National Park**, where you can spot elephants, leopards and most of Sri Lanka's other iconic critters.



2
WEEKS

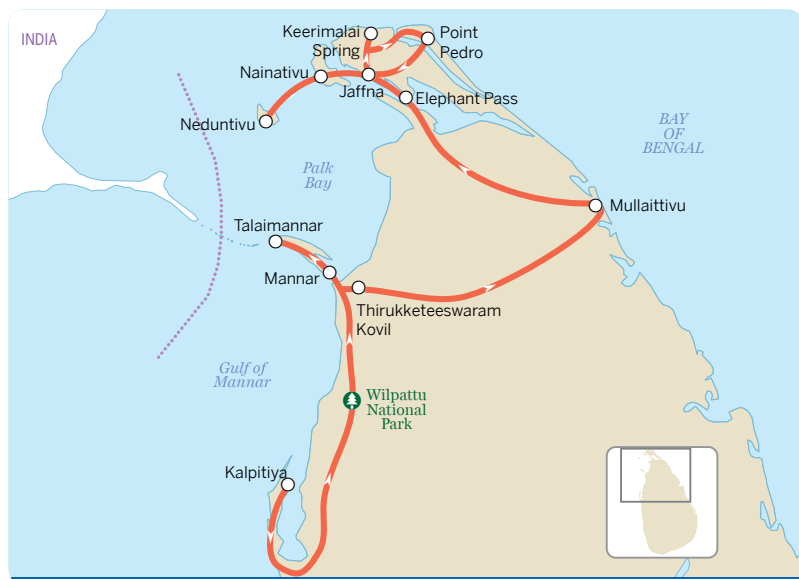
The Cultured Centre

This tour covers the uncrowded middle of Sri Lanka, which is at the heart of the country's rich culture. You'll see ancient temples and towns, along with some of the natural beauty that has inspired generations.

Start in **Kandy**, which has a lakeside setting with real natural beauty and was the capital of the last Sinhalese kingdom until the early 19th century. Head north to **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. A short drive northwest will bring you to the Ritigala Strict Nature Preserve. Deep inside this land is one of Sri Lanka's most mysterious sites: the **Ritigala Ruins**. Your inner Indiana Jones will enjoy exploring the remains of this once vast and ancient place.

Further east the former royal capital of **Polonnaruwa** offers an inspiring collection of Buddhist sculptures and monastery ruins dating back nearly a thousand years. Continue east to the coast and the beaches at **Passekudah** and **Kalkudah**. The former is a broad long ribbon of deserted and beautiful sand. The latter is part of a vast new resort development. Follow the coast south to **Batticaloa**, a historic port that has provided refuge to ships for years. It has a Dutch fort, while offshore is one of Sri Lanka's most fabled dive sites: the HMS *Hermes*, a British aircraft carrier sunk in WWII.

Going north you'll pass through nature preserves and deserted beaches until you reach the idyllic natural harbour of **Trincomalee**. It has a colourful history going back centuries as evidenced by its fort, which has Kandasamy temple right inside. Continue north to the beach town of **Uppuveli** with its cool travellers' scene and the beguiling and untrodden sands of **Nilaveli**. Now head due west into the heart of the country. Prepare for a steep climb up the hillside at **Mihintale** to appreciate the Buddhist history here that dates back to the 3rd century BC. A mere 13km further west brings you to **Anuradhapura**, one of the top sights in all of South Asia. Wander or bike around this sprawling landscape of temples, ruins and more.



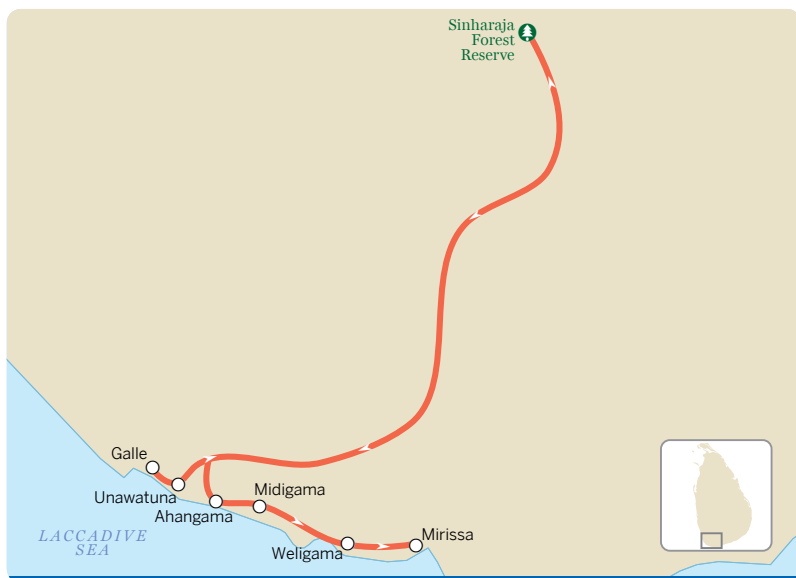
Emerging North

Visitors are now discovering the beauty, beaches and culture of Sri Lanka's north, which was off-limits for many years. Roads are in excellent shape and train lines to Jaffna and other points are all open.

Start at **Kalpitiya**, the main town on the long finger of land that juts up into the Indian Ocean. The beaches here are OK, but the kitesurfing and dolphin-watching are spectacular. Hook your way around north to **Wilpattu National Park**. This treasure has leopards and many other large mammals. Next, explore another beautiful spit of Sri Lanka extending into the sea: **Mannar** is an island that looks to be thumbing a ride to the subcontinent. Amid African baobab trees, remote **Talaimannar** looks out at Adam's Bridge, a chain of reefs and islets, that almost forms a land bridge to India. Until service was halted by the war in the 1990s, this was where train ferries ran to India.

Hook around again to the Jaffna peninsula. On the mainland near the coast, just east of Mannar Town over the historic causeway, imposing **Thirukketeeswaram Kovil** is one of the *pancha ishwararam*, the five historical Sri Lankan Shiva temples established to protect the island from natural disaster. Now cruise on the newly improved roads right across the island to **Mullaittivu**, a town that was isolated during the war years. Legacies of that time abound, including the bizarrely compelling Sea Tiger Shipyard, where the LTTE tried to build submarines.

Head west on the smooth A35, then turn north on the A9 for **Elephant Pass**, with its stark beauty and bombastic war memorials. Continue on to **Jaffna**, where the rich Tamil culture offers temples on shady backstreets that await exploration. Cruise the colonial fort, bustling market area and good restaurants. Head north for **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 east at **Point Pedro**, with its long swath of lonely white sand at Munai Beach. Jaffna has nearby islands well worth exploring for their sheer minimalist beauty, including **Nainativu**, a tiny speck of sand with Buddhist and Hindu temples, and **Neduntivu (Delft)**, a windswept place beyond the end of the road where wild ponies roam.



1
WEEK

Quick Southern Jaunt

This fast trip will warm even the most frostbitten 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. A vibrant foodie hotspot, Galle has some very stylish hotel bars for refined cocktail sipping.

Hit the beach at nearby **Unawatuna**, which has an alluring crescent of sand, cafes overlooking the surf and perfectly blue waters luring you in. The impressive Rumassala Peace Pagoda and pretty Jungle Beach are just a 15-minute walk west of Unawatuna.

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. The only way to get about the reserve is by foot, and excellent park rangers or freelance guides can lead you along slippery trails, pointing out the wealth of stunning plant, bird and animal life.

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. It's also a hotspot for surfers (best for beginners).

Not far away is the sandy gem of the south, **Mirissa**, where cute guesthouses are hidden in the palms. Mirissa Harbour, across the peninsula from the west end of the beach, is always buzzing with boats, and the one very popular activity is a whale-watching boat trip. Spend the last bit of your trip soaking up the sun by the beach, which is an absolute dream.

Map Legend

Sights

- Beach
- Bird Sanctuary
- Buddhist
- Castle/Palace
- Christian
- Confucian
- Hindu
- Islamic
- Jain
- Jewish
- Monument
- Museum/Gallery/Historic Building
- Ruin
- Shinto
- Sikh
- Taoist
- Winery/Vineyard
- Zoo/Wildlife Sanctuary
- Other Sight

Activities, Courses & Tours

- Body surfing
- Diving
- Canoeing/Kayaking
- Course/Tour
- Sento Hot Baths/Onsen
- Skiing
- Snorkelling
- Surfing
- Swimming/Pool
- Walking
- Windsurfing
- Other Activity

Sleeping

- Sleeping
- Camping
- Hut/Shelter

Eating

- Eating

Drinking & Nightlife

- Drinking & Nightlife
- Cafe

Entertainment

- Entertainment

Shopping

- Shopping

Information

- Bank
- Embassy/Consulate
- Hospital/Medical
- Internet
- Police
- Post Office
- Telephone
- Toilet
- Tourist Information
- Other Information

Geographic

- Beach
- Gate
- Hut/Shelter
- Lighthouse
- Lookout
- Mountain/Volcano
- Oasis
- Park
- Pass
- Picnic Area
- Waterfall

Population

- Capital (National)
- Capital (State/Province)
- City/Large Town
- Town/Village

Transport

- Airport
- Border crossing
- Bus
- Cable car/Funicular
- Cycling
- Ferry
- Metro station
- Monorail
- Parking
- Petrol station
- Subway station
- Taxi
- Train station/Railway
- Tram
- Underground station
- Other Transport

Routes

- Tollway
- Freeway
- Primary
- Secondary
- Tertiary
- Lane
- Unsealed road
- Road under construction
- Plaza/Mall
- Steps
- Tunnel
- Pedestrian overpass
- Walking Tour
- Walking Tour detour
- Path/Walking Trail

Boundaries

- International
- State/Province
- Disputed
- Regional/Suburb
- Marine Park
- Cliff
- Wall

Hydrography

- River, Creek
- Intermittent River
- Canal
- Water
- Dry/Salt/Intermittent Lake
- Reef

Areas

- Airport/Runway
- Beach/Desert
- Cemetery (Christian)
- Cemetery (Other)
- Glacier
- Mudflat
- Park/Forest
- Sight (Building)
- Sportsground
- Swamp/Mangrove

Note: Not all symbols displayed above appear on the maps in this book



Iain Stewart

The South, Hill Country, Wildlife & Environmental Issues, People of Sri Lanka, Sri Lankan Tea Iain first hit the road during his university years, hitch-hiking around Europe followed by short forays into Turkey, Israel and Egypt. He then spent more than two years travelling the world – from India to Honduras – in the early 1990s, a trip that included a stint in Tokyo teaching English. Skint and without a career on his return to the UK, he trained as journalist and then worked as a

news reporter and a restaurant critic in London. Iain started writing guidebooks in 1997 and has worked for six publishers (including Lonely Planet, Rough Guides and DK Eyewitness) and penning over 30 books for destinations as diverse as Ibiza and Cambodia. Iain's worked on titles including *Mexico, Indonesia, Croatia, Vietnam, Bali & Lombok* and *Southeast Asia on a Shoestring* for Lonely Planet. He also writes regularly for the *Independent*, *Observer*, *Daily Telegraph* and *Wanderlust*. He'll consider working anywhere there's a palm tree or two, a beach of a generally sandy persuasion, a night club and a cocktail list. After 18 years in South London, Iain moved to Brighton in 2003 and lives close to sea, within firing range of the city's wonderful south-facing horizon.



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 Franklin, London, Melbourne, Oakland, Dublin, Beijing and Delhi, 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



Anirban Mahapatra

Curator Anirban Mahapatra multitasks as a multimedia travel journalist, iPhone photographer and independent filmmaker. Since 2007, his role as a Lonely Planet writer has seen him research, write, edit and curate multiple editions of Lonely Planet's bestselling *India* travel guidebook, several region-specific India handbooks, as well as country guidebooks *Bangladesh*, *Sri Lanka* and *Bhutan*. Apart from authorial roles, he has also designed content models and held training

workshops for new authors for Lonely Planet's India operations. Among his video pursuits, he has produced travel and cultural documentary films under the aegis of the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting (Govt of India), and is currently working on an experimental documentary on the ancient Himalayan kingdom of Mustang. When not roaming the world on work or personal explorations, he reads up on Buddhism, hosts barbecues and listens to the blues in his homes in Kolkata and Dhaka.



Ryan Ver Berkmoes

Colombo, The East Coast, Jaffna & the North, Plan chapters Ryan Ver Berkmoes has written more than 110 guidebooks for Lonely Planet. He grew up in Santa Cruz, California, which he left at age 17 for college in the Midwest, where he first discovered snow. All joy of this novelty soon wore off. Since then he has been travelling the world, both for pleasure and for work—which are often indistinguishable. He has covered everything from wars to bars. He definitely prefers the latter. Ryan calls New York City home. Read more at ryanverberkmoes.com and at [@ryanvb](https://twitter.com/ryanvb).



Bradley Mayhew

The West Coast, The Ancient Cities Bradley has been writing guidebooks for 20 years now. He started travelling while studying Chinese at Oxford University, and has since focused his expertise on China, Tibet, the Himalaya and Central Asia. He is the co-author of Lonely Planet guides to *Tibet*, *Nepal*, *Trekking in the Nepal Himalaya*, *Bhutan*, *Central Asia* and many others. Bradley has also fronted two TV series for Arte and SWR, one retracing the route of Marco Polo via Turkey,

Iran, Afghanistan, Central Asia and China, and the other trekking Europe's 10 most scenic long-distance trails. His first gigs with Lonely Planet were guides to Pakistan and the Karakorum Highway and he progressed from there to write for first editions of *Southwest China* and *Shanghai*.

OVER MORE
PAGE WRITERS

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