

Welcome to Sri Lanka

Endless beaches, timeless ruins, welcoming people, oodles of elephants, rolling surf, cheap prices, fun trains, famous tea and flavourful food make Sri Lanka irresistible.

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 uncertainty kept Sri Lanka off many itineraries.

Now, however, all that has changed. The country is moving forward quickly as more and more people discover its myriad charms. Lying between the more trodden parts of India and Southeast Asia, Sri Lanka's history, culture and natural beauty are undeniably alluring. It's the place you haven't been to yet, that you should.

So Much in So Little

Few places have as many Unesco World Heritage Sites (eight) packed into such a small area. Sri Lanka's 2000-plus years of culture can be discovered at ancient sites where legendary temples boast beautiful details even as they shelter in caves or perch on prominent peaks. More recent are evocative colonial fortresses, from Galle to Trincomalee.

Across the island, 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, water buffaloes, all manner of birds and a passel of primates.

Rainforests & Beaches

When you're ready to escape the tropical climate of the coast and lowlands, head for the hills, with their temperate, achingly green charms. Verdant tea plantations and rainforested peaks beckon walkers, trekkers and those who just want to see them from a spectacular train ride. And then there are the beaches. Dazzlingly white and often untrodden, 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. And you're always just a short hop from something utterly new.

It's So Easy

Distances are short: see the sacred home of the world's oldest living human-planted tree in the morning (Anuradhapura) and stand awestruck by the sight of hundreds of elephants gathering in the afternoon (Minneriya). Discover a favourite beach, 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. Wander past colonial gems in Colombo, then hit some epic surf. Sri Lanka is spectacular, affordable and still often uncrowded. Now is the best time to discover it.



Why I Love Sri Lanka

By Ryan Ver Berkmoes, Writer

My fascination with Sri Lanka began when I read Paul Theroux's *The Great Railway Bazaar* as a child. His wonderment at the island's endless contradictions stayed with me. In 2004 I was in the west and south in the weeks after the tsunami. I was struck by the stories of the survivors. In the years since, I have been endlessly amazed by the ability of Sri Lankans to overcome disaster, war and other challenges. And I am slack-jawed at how one small island-nation can embody so much beauty and wonder. It seems so much bigger than it is.

For more about our writers, see p352