

EXPLORE!



North Sri Lanka Explorer

This trip provides an opportunity to venture into uncharted territory and discover the less visited north of the island. Wild donkeys, palm trees and quaint fishing communities characterise Mannar, while Jaffna is a wonderful mix of Hindu temples, colonial charm and Tamil culture. There are many opportunities to spot wildlife including blue and sperm whales at Trincomalee, wild elephants and leopards in Willpaththu and birdlife almost everywhere. Dambulla, Sigiriya and Colombo are also visited making this a wonderful adventure on a beautiful island.

Trip highlights

- ★ **Jaffna and Mannar** - Explore the lesser visited north with its colourful Tamil culture and ornate Hindu temples
- ★ **National Parks** - Spot leopard, elephant and sambar deer in their natural habitat
- ★ **Whale watching** - Search for Blue and Sperm whales off the coast of Trincomalee
- ★ **Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, Dambulla and Sigiriya** - Discover ancient capitals, painted cave temples and the dramatic 'Sky Fortress'

ACCOMMODATION GRADE:

Standard

Our standard, mid-range accommodation offers a good level of service, often with other amenities such as a restaurant, bar, garden or swimming pool. Generally rooms will be comfortable with en suite facilities.

TRIP PACE:

Moderate

Moderate pace tours are ideal if you want a holiday which combines exciting activities and experiences with plenty of time to relax and unwind. Typically you'll be active and busy for part of the day but then also have time to rest and recharge your batteries.

GROUP SIZE:

10 - 16

Maximum group size ranges from between 6 to 20 people, depending on the type of trip, the transport and accommodation used and activities included. We rarely have groups that are smaller than five or six people and the average is 12 people plus an Explore leader.

Itinerary

Itineraries on some departure dates may differ, please select the itinerary that you wish to explore.

DAY 1 - Join trip in Negombo

Negombo is the ideal starting point for our adventure. Just 15 minutes from the airport and well known for its fishing industry and golden sands, we can relax and enjoy a good meal or watch the sunset over the ocean on our first evening in Sri Lanka.



Accommodation: Hotel J (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: None

DAY 2 - Search for leopards and elephants in Willpaththu National Park

We drive northwards along the coast and through the small towns of Chilaw and Putalam. We are heading for the uncrowded Willpaththu National Park which boasts nearly 60 lakes and is renowned for leopard, elephant and sambar deer spottings. Our afternoon is spent exploring the park in four-wheel drive vehicles before retiring to our campsite for an al-fresco dinner and a night under canvas. Our tents have raised bed, mattress, pillows, and bed linen ensuring a comfortable night as we fall asleep to the sounds of the park.



Accommodation: Big Game Safari Camp Wilpattu (or similar)



Standard Camping



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast & Dinner

DAY 3 - Coastal drive and cross a causeway to Mannar Island

Today we head for the beautiful island of Mannar which is connected to the mainland by a causeway. On the way we visit the huge 2300-year-old site of Thanthirimale and its spectacular reclining Buddha statue, some 14 metres in length and painstakingly carved on the side of a huge rock. We'll also explore caves filled with pre-historic paintings and ancient inscriptions in the Brahmi and Linhala languages dating from the 3rd century BC, and we'll visit the famous Madhu Shrine. An important place of pilgrimage for Catholics, the shrine is home to a Madonna-and-child statue brought to the site in 1670 by Catholics fleeing persecution by Dutch Protestants. The diminutive figure has a reputation for miracles and is said to be particularly effective in protecting against snakebites. Reaching Mannar in the late afternoon we'll head for the coastline of white sands and palm trees that wild donkeys and sea birds call home, while most of the human population reside in small fishing communities along dusty lanes.



Accommodation: The Palmyrah House (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Meals Provided: Breakfast & Dinner

DAY 4 - Full day to explore Mannar Island and evening barbecue

After breakfast we continue exploring Mannar, seeking out coastal ruins from the colonial period including the Doric Bungalow and Arippu Fort, reminders of Dutch, British and Portuguese interest in an area famous for its pearls. In the afternoon we will visit the old Talaimannar Pier and the 12 metre long graves which legend says belong to Adam and Eve, before ending the day with an evening swim in the sea or a walk along the beach, and dinner around a camp fire.



Accommodation: The Palmyrah House (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Meals Provided: Breakfast & Dinner

DAY 5 - Explore the coastal mangroves by boat and the old fort of Mannar

This morning we make an early start for an hour's drive to Vidaltivu. A small fishing village located close to coral reefs, it's a hive of activity first thing as the fishermen head out to sea. We'll take to the water ourselves as we explore the coastal mangroves and shallow lagoon by boat, navigating an old canal built by the Dutch that connects the lagoon to the sea, and searching for the birdlife and wildlife of the area. In the afternoon we will visit Mannar Fort, St Lucia's Church, and Thiruketheeswaram Kovil temple before enjoying a barbecue dinner under the stars.



Accommodation: The Palmyrah House (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Meals Provided: Breakfast & Dinner

DAY 6 - Take the train to Jaffna via Elephant Pass

After breakfast we drive to Vavuniya to catch the train to Jaffna. The train journey provides a great opportunity to mix with the local as we pass through beautiful countryside and stop of at small village stations. We' arrive in to Jaffna via the Elephant pass, a small

strip of land that connects the peninsula to the rest of the island and is known as the 'gateway to Jaffna'. We'll arrive in to the bustling northern city around mid-afternoon and take a short walk to our hotel.



Accommodation: Jetwing Jaffna (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 7 - Explore Delft and Nagadeepa Islands by boat and on foot

An early start this morning as we take a short boat ride to the remote and wind-swept island of Delft. Although inhabited, it has a deserted feel to it and once we get away from the port area we are as likely to see the wild Delft ponies as we are the island's people. The shallow waters surrounding the island are famously turquoise and the sands are almost white. There is a small Dutch Fort made of coral and a 'growing' rock to explore. In the afternoon we move on to Nagadeepa Island, an important place of pilgrimage for both Hindus and Buddhists. The latter revere the Rajayathana stupa built at the place where the Buddha intervened between two warring kings during his second visit to Sri Lanka. The former visit the Naga Pooshani Amman Kovil Temple, dedicated to the goddess Meenakshi, a consort of Shiva and said to help women conceive.



Accommodation: Jetwing Jaffna (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 8 - Bathe in Jaffna's natural springs and visit the Nallur Temple

Our exploration of Jaffna begins with a visit to Keerimalai natural springs where legend has it the mythical sage 'Nagula Muni', born with the face of a mongoose, meditated and bathed in the springs to turn his face in to a human one. The waters have a high mineral content and locals believe they have many health benefits. In Jaffna itself we will visit the ancient Buddhist burial site of Kantharodai and Jaffna Fort. Built in 1618 when the Portuguese took the city, the fort's impressive walls are largely intact and still form an impregnable barrier to anyone trying to enter the harbour. We'll also visit Nallur temple, the largest and most important Hindu temple in the area, venturing inside to learn about Hindu worshiping practices. Finally we'll wander around the colourful Jaffna Market where local food and handicrafts are available to be bartered for and bought. We'll depart feeling we have a real insight into the north of Sri Lanka and its Tamil culture.



Accommodation: Jetwing Jaffna (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 9 - Train to Anuradhapura and explore ancient ruins

Leaving Jaffna on the early morning train we alight at Anuradhapura, an ancient capital famous for its well-preserved ruins and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Founded around 500 BC, it is one of the oldest continually inhabited cities in the world. Anuradhapura's golden age began in around 260 BC when the king converted to Buddhism and the city began a rapid expansion. Hospitals, hostels and artificial reservoirs were built and the city soon spread to cover several miles. We'll get a sense of its former grandeur as we discover the 2,200 year-old sacred Bo-Tree; the Brazen Palace, once a nine storey residence for monks; and the 4th century Smadhi Buddha masterpiece and the Ruvanvalisaya Dagoba - a 90 metre-high dome-shaped shrine towering over the surrounding countryside.



Accommodation: The Lakeside Nuwarawewa (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 10 - Walk the pilgrim route to the top of Mihintale. Drive to Trincomalee

This morning we travel to the mountain peak of Mihintale, the site of the momentous meeting between the monk Mahinda and King Devanampiyatissa, which resulted in the introduction of Buddhism to the country. Reaching the summit involves climbing a flight of 1840 shallow stone steps, but the stunning views from the top are well worth the effort. In the afternoon we drive to Trincomalee. Set in a beautiful location this east coast town straddles a narrow peninsular between the Indian Ocean and one of the largest natural harbours in the world. We'll explore the town on foot and enjoy its charming mix of sleepy backstreets, colonial villas, mosques, churches and temples.



Accommodation: Pigeon Island Resort (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 11 - Snorkelling off Pigeon Island and Blue whale spotting from Konewaram Temple

Just off the coast of Trincomalee, a short boat ride will take us to Pigeon Island, famed for its powdery white sands and coral gardens. The reef here is very shallow, making snorkelling very rewarding with dozens of corals, a multitude of reef fish, black tip reef sharks and turtles all likely sightings. After exploring the underwater world, we discover what Trincomalee has to offer on land, including the old town, Kanniya Hot wells, Marble Beach and Konewaram Temple. The area is famously one of the few places in the world where Blue whales and Sperm whales can sometimes be spotted from land and the Konewaram Temple is a particularly good vantage point; binoculars are recommended. Whale watching cruises may also be possible on a Navy boat however there is no regular schedule. Your Explore Leader will offer you this option if it is available during your visit.



Accommodation: Pigeon Island Resort (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 12 - Visit the world famous cave temple at Dambulla

The World Heritage Site of Dambulla is our first stop today. Thought to have been a place of worship since 1st century BC, when King Valagamba took refuge here, the interior of the caves are carved into magnificent rock temples. We will visit five separate caves, which contain a large number of Buddha images and sculptures of Hindu Gods. In the late afternoon we visit Minneriya or Kaudulla National Park depending on which one has had the best sightings according to the local rangers. Next door to each other, both parks are renowned for their gatherings of elephants in the dry season and should offer a good opportunity to view wild elephants in large numbers. The parks are also home to a large array of birdlife, including painted storks.



Accommodation: The Lake (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 13 - Climb Lion's Rock and discover ancient Polonnaruwa

This morning we have two options to choose from. We can climb the famous Lion's Rock or nearby Pidurangala. Lion's Rock is a 'sky fortress' dating to the 5th century and one of Sri Lanka's major attractions; our early start ensures we beat the crowds and make the climb before it gets too hot. Built in just seven years as a fortified palace to protect the reign of merciless King Kassapa, it is seen as one of the world's best-preserved examples of ancient urban planning. A switchback series of steps and steel stairways ascend to the top. Halfway up, tucked beneath a sheltering overhang of rock, are the famous frescoes - the Sigiriya Damsels, their colours still vibrant. Once at the 200 metre summit, magnificent views can be enjoyed of the surrounding jungle and countryside. The lesser visited Pidurangala involves a short climb up steep steps to the 10th Century Royal Cave Temple and large reclining Buddha. From here the summit is reached via a rough path and the reward is a stunning vista of the surrounding countryside and a perfect view of Lion's Rock. In the afternoon we explore the ancient city of Polonnaruwa. The city reached its height of glory in the 12th century and still maintains many of its spectacular buildings and monuments. Arguably the most impressive is the Quadrangle, a superbly decorated circular shrine which is one of the most ornate buildings and the former home of the tooth of Buddha relic. Another famous feature of this deserted city is the group of carved images of the Buddha, known as Galvihara. These four colossal figures are all hewn out of solid granite and the Reclining Buddha alone a massive 14 metres long.



Accommodation: The Lake (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 14 - Take a walking tour through colonial Colombo

We head to Colombo for an afternoon exploring Sri Lanka's capital city. We'll visit Wolfendhal Church, the oldest in Colombo with a name that reminds us of a time when wild beasts roamed the area, and Captain's Garden Hindu Temple which is famous for its constant live music and the beautiful painted images and statues on the ceiling. We'll wander round the 'fort' area, now the business

district, whose buildings are like a slice through Colombo's colonial history and visit the Pettah neighborhood, famous for its bustling open air bazaars and markets. Finally, as the sun sets, we'll enjoy afternoon tea at the famous Galleface hotel which overlooks Galleface Green, a popular haunt with locals out for an evening stroll.



Accommodation: Colombo City Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 15 - Trip ends in Colombo

Our trip ends in Colombo after breakfast.



Meals Provided: Breakfast



Why book this trip

Northern Sri Lanka has only just opened up after a 30 year civil war. This means that the area has a very raw and unpolished feel to it, and is a different proposition to the much visited south. It also means that travelling there offers a very interesting and authentic experience. Unused to tourists, you'll find the locals friendly and inquisitive, but you'll also find that service can be relaxed and that time can be a somewhat vague concept. There is still a military presence with the occasional checkpoint and some services that you'd expect to be in private hands are run by the army or navy (for example the whale watching boat in Trincomalee). To help our trips operate as smoothly as possible, we use our experienced local partner and Explore leaders from the south of Sri Lanka, assisted by a local agent in the north and local guides where necessary. While an open mind is an advantage, there is no doubt that visiting now is the ideal time as you'll get to see the real Northern Sri Lanka before it starts to change and loses something of its unspoilt charm.

What's included?



Included meals

Breakfast: 14
Dinner: 4



Transport

Bus
4WD
Boat
Train



Trip staff

Explore Tour Leader
Boat Crew
Driver(s)
Local Guide(s)
Naturalist(s)



Accommodation

1 nights standard camping
13 nights standard hotel

Trip information

Country information

Sri Lanka Holidays & Tours

Climate

Year round high temperatures in coastal regions: Colombo averages 27°C. It is much cooler in the hills with Kandy averaging 20°C and Nuwara Eliya down to 16°C. Springlike temperatures in the hill country, but chilly evenings. Two monsoon periods: Apr-Sep when rain is confined to the southwest; and Oct-Mar when it falls in the northeast.

Time difference to GMT

+6

Plugs

3 Pin Round

Religion

Buddhism

Language

Sinhala, Tamil

Budgeting and packing

Clothing

You will need loose fitting, comfortable clothes for hot, humid conditions. Sunhat, sunglasses, long trousers and long sleeved shirt are essential for protection from the sun. Lightweight rainwear is also recommended. When visiting religious sites you will need to dress respectfully by covering you knees and shoulders plus taking off your shoes and hats. You may like to wear socks for temple visits as the ground can get very hot and burn the soles of your feet. You will need to bring long trousers, or buy a sarong locally.

Footwear

Lightweight shoes and sandals.

Luggage

20kg

Luggage: On tour

One main piece of baggage and a daysac. Remember, hotel porters are not always available, so don't overload yourself.

Equipment

A refillable water bottle is recommended. Binoculars are a good idea for whale watching.

Tipping

Explore leader

At your discretion you might also consider tipping your Explore Leader in appreciation of the efficiency and service you receive.

Local crew

Although entirely voluntary, tipping is a recognized part of life in this region of the world. Some local staff will look to members of the group for personal recognition of particular services provided. In order to make things easier for you, the Tour Leaders may organise a group's tips kitty and if this is the case, they will account for it throughout the tour. Accordingly you should allow approximately £40.

Country Information

Sri Lanka Holidays & Tours

Food and drink

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

Lunch price

£6.00

Dinner price

£9.00

Beer price

£3.50

Water price

£1.00

Foreign Exchange

Local currency

Sri Lankan Rupee.

Recommended Currency For Exchange

US\$ and UK£ are equally good

Where To Exchange

In most major towns.

ATM Availability

Yes, usually in major towns.

Credit Card Acceptance

Credit cards can usually be used in most large shops and restaurants. Please note that Foreign Office advice warns about the problem of credit card fraud in Sri Lanka so please consider this when deciding if to pay by card while on tour.

Travellers Cheques

Are not easy to change and where they can be changed the exchange rates can be poor.

Transport, Accommodation & Meals

Transport Information

Bus, 4WD, Boat, Train

Accommodation notes

Booking a Single Room

All of our group tours are planned and operated on a twin-share basis, meaning that the standard cost is based either on individual travellers sharing accommodation with another group member of the same sex, or people who book together sharing accommodation. Please refer to the tour notes where the single room option availability is detailed on a night by night basis for this tour, and the price for the available nights is detailed on the dates & prices tab by departure date. For Self-Guided trips the Single Room supplement offers the option of a single room each and is charged per person. The Single Room supplement also applies to the third person in a party of three that will be accommodated in a single room.

Traditional Sri Lankan cuisine is excellent, and although it can be very spicy there are many dishes that feature cooling coconut milk or have a spicy sambar on the side to allow you to adjust the meal to your taste. There isn't a culture of eating out in Sri Lanka, most locals will eat at home, and as such there are very few restaurants around, and those that exist tend to be in hotels. As tourism develops a few independent restaurants are beginning to appear, mainly in Colombo but also in Kandy, Galle and in the coastal resorts. During the tour we will endeavour to eat out at local restaurants wherever possible but for many nights, at this point in time, the hotel restaurants are the only option available.

Essential information

FCO Advice

We strongly recommend that you check your government's travel advisory for up-to-date information and advice about your destination: safety and security, entry requirements, health, local laws and customs. For UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office advice click [here](#).

For more information from Explore about travel advice, click [here](#)

Under 18 immigration guidance

Please note that some countries require proof of parental consent when travelling overseas with under 18s. Please check requirements with the relevant embassy or consular office well in advance of travel if this applies to your party.

Essential Information

Once your booking has been confirmed we guarantee the price will not increase, whatever the circumstances. Before booking please ensure you have read our important tour pricing information. [Booking Conditions](#)

Visa Information

Sri Lanka: All foreign nationals who intend to visit Sri Lanka for a short stay of up to six months, including transit passengers, must apply for travel authorization online prior to travel to the country. To obtain an Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) you must visit <http://www.eta.gov.lk> to apply for it prior to travel. It is strongly recommended that you print and bring a copy of the ETA approval notice with you. The Sri Lankan authorities require that your passport must be valid for at least 6 months after departure from Sri Lanka.

If you do require assistance in obtaining a visa then you may consider applying through Explore's recommended visa service in the UK, Travcour. See www.travcour.com to download the relevant visa application for your trip, if applicable (UK citizens only), along with details of how to apply for your visa through Travcour. The Team at Travcour will be happy to answer specific questions relating to visa applications, please call them directly on 0208 5431846.

Booking conditions

Before booking your Explore trip, please ensure that you read both our [Essential Information](#) and [Booking Conditions](#).

Transfers

[Find out more about Trip Transfer Terms and Conditions before you book.](#)

Booking a land only package with Explore

Customers who have chosen to book on the 'Land Only' arrangements of our tour, please ensure that you have checked your tour specific 'Joining Instructions' prior to booking your own travel arrangements. Your joining instructions can be found below in the dates and prices information.

You may also be eligible for the Free Explore Transfer.

Joining Tour Abroad

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will now receive a Free Transfer, provided you arrive and depart on the tour only itinerary start and end dates. The transfers will be from the Explore designated airport or train station to the joining point of your tour, and then back from the ending point to the designated airport or train station. The exception to this rule is customers who are booked on a tour where the joining and ending point is at the designated airport or train station.

Free transfers are not available for Self-Guided, Tailormade or Tours for Churches customers.

If you are not eligible for the Free Transfer then you will need to make your own way through to the joining and ending point. On a majority of our tours Explore will be able to provide a private transfer at an additional cost. Please ask for a quote at the time of booking.

For more information regarding the Explore Free Transfer [click here](#)

Insurance

It is a condition of booking with Explore that you have adequate valid travel insurance. It is your responsibility to arrange appropriate travel insurance and ensure you have read and understood the full terms and conditions of your travel insurance policy to ensure that you are covered for all activities you intend to undertake whilst on the tour, including all optional activities. Your Insurance Policy must fully cover you for medical expenses and emergency repatriation to your home country. Please ensure your policy includes medical emergency helicopter evacuation in the event of illness or injury and covers the entire duration of your holiday. If you are trekking at altitude please ensure that there is no upper altitude limit which may limit or exclude cover for your trip. Medical and repatriation insurance cover is not mandatory for UK residents who are travelling on trips within the United Kingdom.

Read more information about what travel insurance is required.

Flight information

Explore offers a wide range of flexible flying options to make joining and leaving our trips easy. [Read more about them here.](#)

Flight Information

You are able to book this tour on a 'land only' basis or as a 'flight inclusive' package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

Booking a flight inclusive package with Explore

We have a good selection of flights not only from London but from many regional airports around the UK allowing us to compare fares between scheduled carriers as well as low cost and charter airlines. Our dedicated flights team will match the best flight options to your arrival and departure airport.

On our website we display a UK flight inclusive package guide price which is generally based on a London departure. To avoid paying supplements or to secure your preferred flight option, we recommend booking as early as possible, especially for peak travel dates.

Sri Lanka Holidays & Tours

Vaccinations

Nothing compulsory, but we recommend protection against malaria, tetanus, typhoid, hepatitis A plus Polio and diphtheria. Consult your travel clinic for latest advice on different prophylaxis available against malaria. We strongly recommend the wearing long sleeved shirts and the liberal application of insect repellents containing DEET as a precautionary measure to avoid being bitten by mosquitoes. These precautions should be taken at all times as the mosquitoes are also active during daylight hours. The above is not an exhaustive list. Further information regarding vaccinations and travel health advice can be found by following the NHS and NaTHNaC links at <http://www.explore.co.uk/Travelhealth/> and from your local healthcare provider. Visa and vaccination requirements are subject to change and should be confirmed before departure.