

EXPLORE!

NEW

North Sri Lanka - Eclipse
10 days

Sri Lanka - Trip code NSE



North Sri Lanka - Eclipse

This trip explores Northern Sri Lanka while taking in the solar eclipse from the small island of Analaitivu, located just off the coast of Jaffna, the welcoming and busy capital city of the north. At Wilpattu National Park we'll search for elephant, leopard and other wildlife, while at Mannar Island we see the legendary graves of Adam and Eve and explore the small fishing communities. We also take in the UNESCO World Heritage sites of Lion's Rock and the Dambulla cave temple on an exciting 10-day adventure to this lesser known part of the 'Paradise Island'.

Trip highlights

- ★ **Annular eclipse** - Watch the solar eclipse from Analaitivu Island
- ★ **Jaffna** - Explore the colourful capital and its impressive Nallur Temple
- ★ **Wilpattu National Park** - Spot leopard, elephant and sambar deer in their natural habitat
- ★ **Anuradhapura, 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:**12 - 18**

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, it's a great place to 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 Wilpattu National Park

Driving northwards along the coast for around 4 hours, we pass through the small towns of Chilaw and Putalam heading for the uncrowded Wilpattu National Park. Boasting almost 60 lakes, the park is renowned for leopard, elephant and sambar deer sightings. The 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. The tents have raised beds with mattress, pillows, and bed linen, and en suite facilities, ensuring a comfortable night while falling asleep to the sounds of nature.



Accommodation: Big Game Safari Camp Wilpattu (or similar)



Standard Camping



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 3 - Walk the pilgrimage route at Mihintale, and drive to Mannar

Today we head for the beautiful island of Mannar which is connected to the mainland by a causeway. On the way we visit the mountain peak of Mihintale. It is believed that this was the site of a momentous meeting between the monk Mahinda and King Devanampiyatissa, the result of which introduced Buddhism to the country. Exploring Mihintale involves climbing a flight of 1,840 shallow stone steps, eventually leading to the summit of the Missaka Mountain. There are excellent views from the top of the area and Anuradhapura. Reaching Mannar in the late afternoon we head for a coastline of white sands and palm trees that wild donkeys and sea birds call home, while most of the human population resides in small fishing communities along dusty lanes.



Accommodation: The Palmyrah House (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 4 - Full day to explore Mannar Island and Christmas Eve barbecue on the beach

After breakfast we continue exploring Mannar, seeking out coastal ruins from the colonial period including the Doric Bungalow and Arippe 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 a Christmas Eve dinner around a camp fire.



Accommodation: The Palmyrah House (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Meals Provided: Breakfast & Dinner

DAY 5 - Drive to Jaffna and cross to Analaitivu Island

We take a leisurely 3-4 hour drive to Jaffna today, where we stop off for Christmas lunch before taking a boat to Analaitivu Island, which falls directly in the path of the annular eclipse. The quiet island is inhabited by small fishing communities and is completely off the tourist trail, so we will almost certainly have it to ourselves for our all-important eclipse viewing. We will enjoy a barbecue under the stars while our astronomer briefs us on everything we need to know about tomorrow's big event. Please note that Analaitivu does not have any tourism infrastructure so our night on the island will be spent either staying with local families in their homes or camping using equipment that we'll bring from the Sri Lankan mainland.



Accommodation: Analaitivu Island Home Stay or camping (or similar)



Simple Homestay



Meals Provided: Breakfast & Lunch

DAY 6 - View the annular solar eclipse and discover Jaffna

The eclipse will take place at around 09.30 local time and we will be ready to view the whole event from start to finish in the

company of a local astronomer. Known as an annular eclipse, the distance of the moon from the earth means that while it lines up exactly with the sun, it doesn't cover it completely and leaves a thin circle of light known as the 'ring of fire'. Weather conditions cannot be guaranteed, but the chance of clear, mostly clear or partly cloudy skies is around 50%, with a 50% chance of it being cloudy. Once we have witnessed the eclipse we head back to the mainland to begin our exploration of Jaffna. We start with 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 into 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: Valampuri Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



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 Buddhists and Hindus. The Buddhists revere the Rajayathana stupa built at the place where the Buddha intervened between two warring kings during his second visit to Sri Lanka, while the Hindus venerate the Naga Pooshani Amman Kovil Temple, dedicated to the goddess Meenakshi, a consort of Shiva and said to help women conceive.



Accommodation: Valampuri Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 8 - Visit the renowned cave temple at Dambulla

We have an early start this morning for a 5 hour drive to the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Dambulla. 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 move on to Minneriya or Kaudulla National Park, depending on which one is currently experience the best wildlife sightings. Next door to each other, both parks are renowned for their gatherings of elephants 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: Gimanhala Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 9 - Climb Lion's Rock and drive to Negombo

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 less well known 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. After lunch we drive to Negombo, a journey of around 4 hours. Here you can enjoy your last evening watching the sunset from the beach.



Accommodation: Hotel J (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 10 - Trip ends in Negombo

Our trip ends in Negombo after breakfast.



Meals Provided: Breakfast

Why book this trip

Northern Sri Lanka has recently 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. 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. The area is a wonderful place to visit, and this trip offers a great opportunity to explore it while viewing a rare natural phenomenon.

What's included?



Included meals

Breakfast: 9
Lunch: 1
Dinner: 1



Transport

Bus
4WD
Boat



Trip staff

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



Accommodation

1 nights standard camping
1 nights simple homestay
7 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. Eclipse viewing glasses will be provided for you.

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

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.

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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.