

EXPLORE!

BEST SELLER

Buddha's Island
15 days

Sri Lanka - Trip code SL



Buddha's Island

This comprehensive tour of the \ Pearl of the Indian Ocean\ covers Sri Lanka's many highlights at a relaxed pace. Uncovering ancient cities, rock carvings and gilded temples, we discover its rich Buddhist history and culture. Other highlights include the spectacular Hill Country, wildlife-filled national parks and an idyllic tropical coastline, where we enjoy some down-time. Along the way, we are welcomed by generous hospitality and friendly faces.

Trip highlights

- ★ **National Parks** - Enjoy a jeep safari with the hope of spotting a leopard, elephant and sambar deer in the wild
- ★ **Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, Dambulla and Sigiriya** - Explore ancient capitals, painted cave temples and the dramatic 'Sky Fortress'
- ★ **Kandy and the Hill Country** - Explore the rich cultural heritage of the 'Hill Capital' and the lush tea plantations and colonial charm of the surrounding area
- ★ **Adam's Peak** - Join pilgrims in a trek to the summit of this sacred mountain in time for sunrise
- ★ **Unawatuna and Galle** - relax on the white sand beaches of the south coast and soak up the laid-back, artistic vibe of Galle

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 tour in Negombo

Our tour begins this afternoon in the coastal town of Negombo, famous for its fishing industry and golden sands. Our hotel is just a 15 minute drive north of the airport. From its beach location, we are likely to see fishing boats bring in the day's catch. We may also be treated to a stunning sunset over the ocean.



Accommodation: Hotel J (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: None

DAY 2 - Game drive in Wilpattu National Park; drive to Anuradhapura

A three-hour drive north takes us to Wilpattu National Park. En route, we will visit a nearby fishing village which uses traditional-style outrigger canoes, known as 'oruvas'. Along the way we hope to spot the toddy tappers climbing tall coconut trees to collect sap from the flowers. This is used to make Arak - a local whisky-type spirit. Despite the park's location in Sri Lanka's dry zone, it boasts nearly 60 lakes and is renowned for leopard, elephant and sambar deer sightings. We will go on a jeep safari in the hope of spotting the elusive leopard. We choose to visit this park, rather than the more touristy Yala National Park further south because we believe it offers our customers a better experience. The same animals can be seen here as in Yala, however it is less crowded, making our visit more enjoyable and responsible. Leaving the park, we drive to nearby Anuradapura, where we will spend the next two nights.



Accommodation: Lakeside at Nuwarawewa (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 3 - Full day to explore the ancient citadel

This morning, we explore the ancient capital of Anuradhapura - a UNESCO World Heritage Site famous for its well-preserved ancient ruins. One of the oldest continually inhabited cities in the world, it was founded around 500 BC. Its golden age began around 260BC, when the King and his people converted to Buddhism. The city became vast, spreading over many miles. There were hospitals for the sick, hostels for travellers and artificial reservoirs to ensure a good water supply. Of great interest are the 2,200 year-old Sacred Bo-Tree; the Brazen Palace, once a nine storey residence for monks; the 4th century Smadhi Buddha masterpiece and the Ruvanvalisaya Dagoba - a 90 metre-high dome-shaped shrine towering over the surrounding countryside. In the afternoon, we travel eight miles to the mountain peak of Mihintale. It is believed that this was the site of a momentous meeting between the monk Mahinda and King Devanampiyatissa, introducing Buddhism to the country. Exploring Mihintale involves climbing a flight of 1,840 shallow stone steps, and a short final section with uneven steps and a hand rail leading to the summit of the Missaka Mountain. There are excellent views from the top looking back to Anuradhapura.



Accommodation: Lakeside at Nuwarawewa (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 4 - Visit Dambulla's cave temples en route to Giritale

Travelling towards Giritale, we pause to view the magnificent Standing Buddha of Aukana, which stands 12 metres high. Sculptured in the 5th century by a master craftsman, it is still relatively isolated in its jungle setting. Our next stop is Dambulla, where a great series of caves have been turned into temples dating from the 1st century BC. This World Heritage Site still attracts scores of worshippers. We will visit five separate caves, which contain a large number of Buddha images and a few sculptures of Hindu Gods. After a lunch stop, we reach the small town of Giritale - our base from which to explore Polonnaruwa. Our hotel for the night looks out over a large and picturesque 7th century man-made lake.



Accommodation: The Lake (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 5 - Search for elephants in Minneriya National Park

This morning we explore the ancient city of Polonnaruwa, which reached its height of glory in the 12th century, when it was a thriving commercial and religious centre. The city still maintains many of its spectacular buildings and monuments, with arguably the most impressive being the Quadrangle. This sacred precinct originally housed the tooth relic. It contains a superbly decorated circular shrine which is one of the most ornate buildings in the country. The neighbouring audience hall and bathing pool are also worth a visit. Close by, the curious round structure of the Circular Relic House has a beautifully preserved moonstone carved at the foot of a flight of steps. 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 is no less than 14 metres long. In the early afternoon, we drive to either Minneriya or Kaudulla National Park (depending on the season), where we enjoy a jeep safari to look for herds of wild elephant. These 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 6 - Climb Lion's Rock at sunrise; drive to Kandy

An early start this morning as we plan to climb Sigiriya Rock ahead of the crowds and whilst it is cool. The ruins of this 5th century 'Sky Fortress' are one of Sri Lanka's major attractions, a stupendous sight to behold and a feat of consummate engineering skill. Built in just seven years as a fortified palace to protect the reign of merciless King Kassapa, who had assassinated his father and deposed his brother, it is seen as one of the world's best preserved examples of ancient urban planning. Unfortunately for the king, despite its impregnable reputation, he was defeated here by his brother after a reign of just 18 years. 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 glowing. Before our final ascent to the summit, we pass between a set of enormous lion paws carved out of the rock - all that remain of an ancient gateway that gave Sigiriya, the 'Lion Rock', its name. Once at the 200 meter summit, magnificent views can be enjoyed of the surrounding jungle and countryside. This afternoon, a two-hour drive takes us to Kandy. En route, we stop to visit the woodcarving centre at Naula and a spice garden.



Accommodation: Hotel Hill Top (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 7 - Discover the Temple of the Tooth

Sitting on a plateau 500 metres above sea level and 112km northeast of Colombo, Kandy is, in climatic and cultural terms, a world apart from Colombo. Serving as the capital of the last Sinhalese kingdom until falling to the British in 1815, it is a place of cultural and spiritual importance. Buddhists from all over the world come here specifically to visit the Temple of the Tooth, the Dalada Maligawa. The costly jewelled shrine of the Holy Tooth, said to be Buddha's left canine, is kept in the upper floor of the original building. This relic was brought from India 1,500 years ago and every year, at the time of the August full moon, it is paraded round the town with great pomp and circumstance. This morning's sight-seeing includes attending the Temple of the Tooth Ceremony and a visit to the serene Peradeniya Botanical garden. Your afternoon is free to continue your exploration of this delightful old highland town. In the evening, we hope to have the opportunity to watch a performance by the famous Kandyan dancers, admiring their impressive costumes and graceful dances, accompanied by a thundering drum beat.



Accommodation: Hotel Hill Top (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 8 - Drive to Dalhousie for an ascent of Adam's Peak

After a free morning, we drive to Dalhousie in the foothills of Adam's Peak. Here, we have the opportunity to ascend this sacred peak, known locally as Sri Pada. A depression at the top of the peak is said to be Buddha's footprint and, each year, thousands climb to the top for sunrise. Shortly after midnight, we join pilgrims for our ascent. There is a stone staircase which we follow right to the top. It can be tough on the legs, and some may find it physically challenging, but you can go at your own pace, take your time and savour the experience. We reach the top in time for sunrise, when spectacular views all around us. For anyone not wanting to climb the peak, there is free time to explore the small town of Dalhousie, or relax at our guesthouse.



Accommodation: Punsisi Rest Guest House (or similar)



Simple Guesthouse



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 9 - Stop at a tea plantation on the way to Nuwara Eliya

Returning from the peak early this morning, we enjoy a well-earned breakfast before making our way to picturesque Nuwara Eliya. Known as 'Little England', here we will find red telephone boxes, Victorian colonial architecture and pretty rose gardens - legacies from its era as a hill country retreat for any homesick British. The cool climate provided a sanctuary in which to immerse themselves in familiar pastimes, such as polo, golf, cricket and fox hunting. This part of Sri Lanka is also an important tea growing area and plantations stretch over rolling hills for as far as the eye can see, interspersed with the occasional tea-making factory. We have free time for the rest of the day to explore this colonial treasure.



Accommodation: Windsor Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 10 - Drive to the hill town of Bandarawela

This morning, we make our way to Bandarawela by train. Regarded as among the most picturesque train journeys in the world, we wind our way through the mountains on a rail network that was introduced during British Colonial rule and has changed little since. Passing by impressive waterfalls and travelling through lush tea plantation country, we are likely to see colourfully-dressed tea pickers working in groups. Arriving in Bandarawela late in the afternoon, we have the opportunity to explore the quaint shops of this small, untouristy town, before settling down in our colonial-style hotel for the night.



Accommodation: Bandarawela Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 11 - Transfer to the coastal town of Unawatuna

This morning, we visit Rawana Ella Falls, one of the widest waterfalls in the country, before continuing south through the hill country until we reach the plains and the small town of Wellawaya. Travelling onwards, we are likely to spot a 51 foot image of the Buddha, known as Colossi of Buduruvagala, rising majestically above us, along with other Mahayana statues. Continuing southwards, we descend through a huge rice growing area before reaching the coast. We will also travel through the small fishing port of Tangalle and may be lucky enough to see the famous stilt fisherman balancing seemingly precariously above the ocean. Tangalle is also home to a lace making project supported by the Travel Foundation, where women learn to make and sell lace, helping them to become more self sufficient. We hope to visit a learn a little of their craft. Our base for the next three nights is the attractive beach resort of Unawatuna, close to the southern tip of Sri Lanka. Once again, our itinerary today involves a long drive, but is broken up with lots of breaks. Varied and spectacular scenery from the hill country, through paddy fields and on to the coast, provides plenty of interest.



Accommodation: Hotel J Unawatuna (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 12 - Stroll through the Portuguese Fort at Galle

This morning is free for you to enjoy the many activities and attractions of Unawatuna and the surrounding area. You may choose to hire snorkelling equipment and explore the beautiful corals, or take a boat trip around the coast or upriver, past small largely uninhabited islands. This afternoon, we plan to visit the neighbouring pretty coastal town of Galle. An important trading centre since ancient times, the fortifications that can be seen today were built by the Portuguese and then the Dutch from the 16th to the 17th centuries. The fort ramparts of this World Heritage Site protect the harbour and a myriad of fascinating old houses, churches and warehouses. Today, the town has a strong arts vibe, with foreign and local artists, writers, photographers, designers and poets drawing inspiration from their surroundings. Boutique shops and cafes around the town showcase their work. There is a lot to explore in the town and enjoyment can be gained simply by wandering around its streets, soaking up its unique atmosphere. If you feel that you haven't spent enough time here on this afternoon's sightseeing tour, you have the opportunity to come back tomorrow.



Accommodation: Hotel J Unawatuna (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 13 - Free time to relax on Unawatuna's quiet beaches

Today is free to relax on the beaches of Unawatuna, or explore more of nearby Galle. For those seeking pure relaxation, local

Ayurvedic massages with natural, aromatic herbal oils are highly recommended. Alternatively, between the months of December and April, you might prefer to go on a whale watching trip in the hope of spotting humpback and blue whales.



Accommodation: Hotel J Unawatuna (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 14 - Early morning wetlands visit en route to Negombo

An early start this morning to fit in a few stops on our journey back north to Negombo - a total travel time of just a couple of hours. We plan to visit a beautiful wetland reserve where a boat trip provides us with the opportunity to spot kingfishers. A short detour to Colombo in the afternoon provides us with time to explore the capital, before returning to our hotel in Negombo for our final evening.



Accommodation: Hotel J (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 15 - Tour ends in Negombo

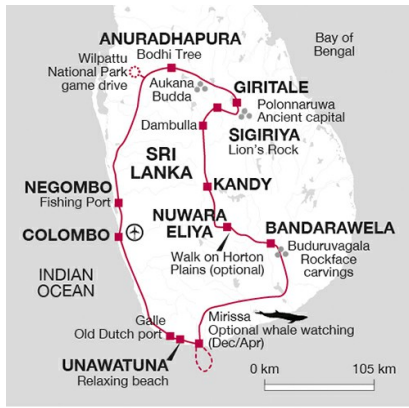
Our tour ends this morning after breakfast.



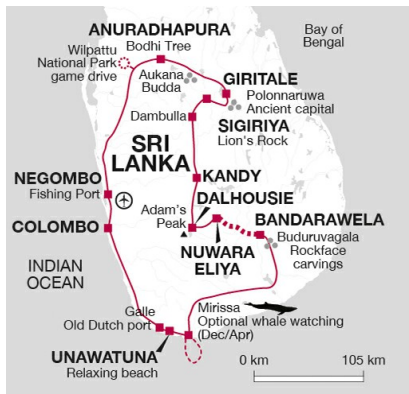
Meals Provided: Breakfast

Free Single Room Upgrade

Book any departure before the 20th December 2017 and you'll get a free single room upgrade.
[Find out more details here](#)



Horton Plains Itinerary



Adam's Peak Itinerary

Why book this trip

This trip is one of our best-sellers with the chance to see elephants in the wild, climb to Lion Rock's ancient fortress and relax on quiet beaches. The trip focusses on the main highlights of Sri Lanka and is ideal for travellers interested in history and culture. There is plenty of sightseeing as well as free time for you to experience this increasingly popular destination or to simply relax.



What's included?



Included meals

Breakfast: 14



Transport

Bus



Trip staff

Explore Tour Leader
Driver(s)
Local Guide(s)



Accommodation

1 nights simple guesthouse
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

Optional activities

Kandy - Cultural Show £5.00. Unawatuna - Boat Excursion to coral reef £5.00. Half Day Trips - Boat ride to Cinnamon Islands; turtle hatchery at Kosgoda; picnic lunch; transport - £9.00. Unawatuna - Whale watching boat trip £60.00.

Clothing

Select your clothes carefully, bearing in mind that the climate is tropical and that upland areas are cooler and more temperate. Lightweight rainwear is also essential, and warmer clothing for the highland walks and chilly night temperatures in the mountains. 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. Whilst in the tea areas you may encounter leeches, you may wish to consider taking leech socks with you.

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 water bottle is recommended for walks. Although mosquito nets or screens are provided at most nightstops and in spite of fewer mosquitoes due to higher elevation, you may choose to bring your own (attachable with nails and tape) for use here. Alternatively, please bring mosquito coils.

Tipping

Explore leader

At your discretion you might also consider tipping your Tour 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

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.

Food and drink

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.

Non refundable permits

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.

