

# Visitor's Information

Posted on

Below find some helpful information and interesting facts to familiarize you with Sri Lanka. For more information please contact the Tourist Information Centers (TIC) run by the Ceylon Tourist Board. TIC's are located at 321 Galle Road, Colombo 3, telephone - 573175; and at 340-3/1 R.A. de Mel Mawatha (Duplication Road), Colombo 3, telephone - 575458, 575937. The centers are open Monday through Friday from 8:30 to 4:45 p.m. and on Saturday, Sunday and Public Holidays, 8:30 to 12:30 p.m. Sri Lanka: The Country & Its People Sri Lanka lies in the Indian Ocean between 5°5' and 9°5' north latitude, 79°4' and 81 °5' east longitude. The island is 445 km in length by 225 km in breadth, forming a total land area of 65,610 square kilometers. The island's relief features a mountain-massif in the south-central region, with summits exceeding 2,500 meters surrounded by spreading, undulating plains.

The coast is fringed by beaches and the sea temperatures rarely fall below 27°C. In the maritime regions the climate is typically tropical; mean temperatures range from 26-28°C (79-82°F) in the low country, and from 14-24 °C (58- 75°F) in the hill country. In the hilly interior, it is quite cool all year with temperatures down to 16°C in Nuwara Eliya, at 1890 meters the highest point. Rain falls from two monsoons and from convectional precipitation. The southwest monsoon blows from May to September and the northeast from November to March. Seasonal rains can be heavy but are not prolonged; bright, warm sunny days in Colombo are the rule, tempered by the ocean's refreshing breezes. It is this varied climate that makes Sri Lanka a yearround vacationland. History If geographical features determine a country's history, Sri Lanka may prove the point.

Wide-open to foreign penetration from the dawn of time its harbors have been an inlet to numerous alien influences which in time were assimilated to compose today's unique mosaic of Sri Lanka people. The island's history goes back to prehistoric times during which Neolithic cultures flourished. Documented history began with the North Indian colonizations which began from the 8th century B.C. Settlers from South India entered the island from times immemorial to barter and trade, and many settled along the coastal belt, as did the Arabs and Levantines. Use of iron and the art of artificial irrigation were evidently understood here from at least the 5th century B.C. By that time Anuradhapura had grown from a gama

(village) to a royal city, scientifically planned and constructed, as recent excavations have proven. In 247 B.C. Buddhism became the official religion of king and country. It is believed the religion's introducer, the great missionary-monk, Mahinda, was the son of India's renowned Emperor Ashoka. With the acceptance of Buddhism the culture flowered into a great exuberance of creativity in all the arts and sciences. The splendid remains of colossal shrines built during the 3rd century B.C. to the 6th century A.D. are yet visible.

From about the 2nd century B.C., however, Sri Lanka was regularly invaded by the kingdoms of South India. As a result of repeated ever more forceful intrusions, Anuradhapura fell by the end of the 10th century A.D. A great warrior prince, Vijaya Bahu I, succeeded in resoring the sovereignty of his kingdom seventy-five years later. He established the capital in Polonnaruwa. Subsequent kings, including Parakrama Bahu I and Nissanka Malla, embellished the city and raised it to further eminence. Invasions, however, continued and the kings shifted their capital further and further to the southwest, which by the 15th century had gained greater prominence due to the European expansion into the East. When the Portuguese conquistadors arrived in 1505, the royal capital was at Kotte, 12 kilometers from Colombo harbour. The Portuguese ruled until 1648, followed by the Dutch, and then the British in 1796. British rule lasted till 1948, when political independence was regained. Sri Lanka is now a sovereign republic with an Executive President, a democratically elected National State Assembly and a Cabinet of Ministers. The government is unitary: a free, sovereign, democratic, socialist republic.

**Demography** Sri Lanka has a population of over 15 million, of whom the majority are Sinhalese (74%). The others are: Tamils (12.6%), Indian Tamils (5.5%), Moors, Malays, Burghers (descendants of Europeans-Sri Lankans) and other small ethnic groups (7.9%). Sri Lanka is a multi-religious country with Buddhists constituting the majority, 69%; Hindus 15.4%, Muslim 7.6% and Christians 7.4%. Sri Lanka's literacy rate is 86.5% – one of the highest in Asia. At least 46 % of the population is under 20 years of age. The majority and official language is Sinhala. Tamil is mainly used in the north and east. English is widely spoken and understood. The economy is mainly agricultural and closely tied to the country's major cash crops: tea (almost a monoculture), rubber and coconut and their allied products. The island is self-sufficient in its staple rice.

### Getting Around Colombo

Colombo is the capital and commercial center of the country, situated 34 kilometers

from Katunayake International Airport. A flourishing seaport for over a thousand years' today the harbor bustle combines with dynamic developments in commerce and business.

Colombo is divided into fifteen zones (for postal purposes). Once outside the crowded business area of The Fort, and the thronging shopping lanes of the Pettah, a cooler, greener, more salubrious Colombo exists in the quiet residential suburbs known as Colombo 5, 6, 7 and 8. Just outside the city limits on the south are the beach resorts of Dehiwela and Mount Lavinia. Transportation by taxi, bus and train is relatively inexpensive in the city and its suburbs. It is advisable to arrange the fare before taking one of the rednumber plated taxis, the yellow trishaws or other taxi-services. Some taxis and trishaws have meters. Taxis are usually available in front of hotels, at road junctions or are found cruising down the main highways at regular intervals. An extra charge is made during the night. Chauffeur-driven or self-drive cars are also available from travel agencies. Bus rides are extremely cheap, each session costing about 50 cents to Re. 1 from point to point. Private coaches ply the roads and their charges vary. Beware of pick-pockets in both coaches and buses. Government trains provide service to places of interest, including the hill country (Kandy and Nanu Oya, near Nuwara Eliya) the ancient cities (Polonnaruwa and Anuradhapura) and down the coast to Bentota, Hikkaduwa Galle and Matara. The main train station is in the Colombo Fort-Pettah area.

Telephone 35838 for information. Bicycles and motorcycles can be rented from some garages. Hotels will make arrangements for you. Driving licenses are required for motorcycle rentals. Inland charter air services are available. Contact a travel agent for information. Accommodations A wide variety of lodging is available in Colombo.

Hotels range from five-star to one-star; guesthouses and "rooms-in-homes" proliferate. Government recommended accommodations are listed in the Sri Lanka Accommodations Guide available at the Ceylon Tourist Board. Room prices range from a few dollars to US\$ 80 per day.

Bank and Office Hours Normal banking hours all over the city are 9: 00 a.m. to 1 :00 p.m. on Monday and 9:00 a.m. to 1 :30 p.m. Tuesday through Friday. Banks are closed on Saturday, Sunday and Public and Bank Holidays. The Bank of Ceylon has facilities for encashment on Saturday from 9:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m.

Many department stores and hotels are authorized to change money. Most major

hotels, restaurants and shops accept international credit cards. All foreign currency transactions should be entered in the Customs-cum-Immigration Form. Shops in Sri Lanka are generally open from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday through Friday. Post offices are open from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., closed Saturday and Sunday. The General Post Office in Colombo-Fort has extended facilities till 8 p.m. The telegraph office at G.P.O. is open 24 hours. Several private telex companies operate round the clock. International telephone services to almost every country are available day and night at the Central Telegraph Office (CTO), Duke Street, The Fort. Foreign cables are accepted at this counter as well.

Newspapers, Radio and Television National daily newspapers are published in English, Sinhala and Tamil languages. Magazine-type editions are printed on weekends. A large selection of locally published and international magazines, journals, newspapers, etc. are available at news agents, bookstalls and in hotel foyers. The Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation operates radio transmissions in six languages: Sinhala, English, Tamil, Hindi, Urdu and Arabic, beamed to listeners between 5:30 a.m. and midnight. Television operates on two channels: ITN and Rupavahini.

ITN transmission starts at 6:30 p.m. daily and features English news at 9:30 p.m. Rupavahini transmission opens at 5:00 p.m. daily with English news at 9:00 p.m. Programs are also telecast on Saturday and Sunday in the morning. Many shows are in English. Holidays In addition to Saturday and Sunday, the full-moon day of each month (Poya day) is a holiday in Sri Lanka. On Poya days, all places of entertainment are closed and no liquor is sold. Hotels make special arrangements for their clientele. This month, May 1 is a holiday (May Day) and May 13-14 for Vesak and the day following Vesak/ Poya Day. May 22 (National Hero's Day) and 30 (Idul-Fitr-Ramazan Festival Day) are also holidays.

Permits Fees must be paid and permits obtained to visit the ancient cities, the Botanical Gardens, zoo, museums and some of the important temples and shrines etc. Posing in front of statues and paintings is prohibited. Photographic permits for the ancient cities and museums are available from the relevant authorities. Check with a travel agent or hotel receptionist. Visas Nationals of more than thirty-five countries do not need an entry visa prior to airport or port landing if visiting Sri Lanka as tourists for a period of up to thirty days. Any visitor who wishes to stay longer must apply for a visa extension from the Department of Immigration and Emigration, Galle Buck Road, Colombo 1, telephone- 29851, 21509. To qualify for an extension, one must show cash receipts for sufficient means of support (US\$ 15/day). Embarkation Tax Rs 200 at Colombo Airport, Katunayaka; Rs 5 at

Passenger Jetty, Colombo. Tourist Tips -Guide Lecturers trained and registered with the Ceylon Tourist Board may be hired through the Tourist Information Centers or travel agents. All are proficient in English and some speak other languages. They carry identity cards which indicate approved charges.

-If you have complaints regarding lost property -If you have complaints regarding lost property or undue harassment, contact the Tourist Police at New Secretariat Building Colombo 1 , telephone -26941, 26942

- Tipping is left to a customer's discretion, besides the 10% service charge added by most hotels and restaurants. If you wish to give a tip, about 10% of the bill is considered adequate. For bell-boys and porters, Rs 3 per large or burdensome bag is reasonable. - Dress comfortably in light cottons and walking shoes or sandals. Shade \_hats are advisable on the beaches and a sweater may be needed in the highlands. When visiting places of worship, scant clothing is not appropriate. When visiting a Buddhist or Hindu temple, please remove shoes and hats. And lastly ...Ayubowan - "May you have a long life," is the traditional Sinhalese greeting and parting gesture. Namaste is also said, meaning "I salute the divine spirit in you." Both are said with palms together and a slight bow of the head or upper body.



A Gypsy frequently seen while taking a stroll through Colombo. Photo courtesy: Ceylon Tourist Board.



Mango seller in Pasyala.  
Photo courtesy: Ceylon Tourist board.



A Mosque near town hall in Colombo.  
Photo courtesy: Ceylon Tourist Board.



Sweet – Meat stall at Kandy Market.



Satellite shot of Sri Lanka.  
Photo courtesy: Ceylon Tourist Board.



A Batik shop frequently visited by tourists.· Photo courtesy: Ceylon Tourist Board.



The Town Hall, Colombo.  
Photo Courtesy: Ceylon Tourist Board.



Fruit stall at kandy market