

Melissa & Andy's Guide to Sri Lanka & Our Wedding

March 2010
The Lighthouse Hotel and Spa
Galle, Sri Lanka

Please feel free to email us at spectacle@spectacle-boat.com at any time with any questions.

Since you are reading this document, you know the great news that we are getting married and you are invited. Hopefully, you will find this document to be a catalyst for excitement over exotic foreign travel. Sri Lanka is not at the top of everyone's travel list, but having been to many places, we think it's pretty fantastic.

We have been intrigued with Sri Lanka for a variety of different reasons. Our [Cricket World Cup experience](#) with the Sri Lankan team was the highlight of our year in the Caribbean. And our December 2007 trip to Sri Lanka sealed the deal. It is simply the most magical place we've ever been. The English word "[serendipity](#)" comes from the old Arabic/Persian name for Sri Lanka, "Serendib." We think this is just right.

We want the joyous occasion of our wedding to reflect our joint passion for other cultures. Even moreso, we want share our passion for exotic travel with you. So please come join us for this serendipitous occasion in Serendib.

About this Guide

The purpose of this guide is multi-fold: to provide a general and travel-oriented overview of Sri Lanka compiled in a single location, to minimize the work involved to plan your trip, and to provide our personal opinions about what we think about Sri Lanka as a travel destination. Do not expect this document to be objective. We are opinionated and highly editorial travel advisors; however, we encourage everyone to solicit clarifications, utilize other resources, and forge out on your own whenever the mood strikes. Please keep in mind that this document was finalized in June of 2009 – the contents are current through then, but sign up for the e-mail distribution list for updates.

A Note About Attendance

We are well aware that many people in our lives view the location, details, and logistics of our wedding with confusion and even consternation. We are well aware of how inconvenient and downright disruptive it is to fly literally halfway around the world. We are well aware that while our lifestyle is quite compatible with this type of travel, most lifestyles present far more obstacles to attending an event of this sort.

Before we go on, everyone please listen closely: our wedding is not a mandatory event. If your attendance is unworkable, we will not be offended and our friendship will not suffer. Whether you are a blood relative, a friend from high school, an in-law, or the new girlfriend of someone we once met in a Caribbean anchorage, we have no expectation that you are able and willing to

travel this far for us. Please do not attend our wedding merely out of a sense of obligation, a demonstration of devotion, or a perceived payback of some kind.

Indeed, we want guests whose mentality is exactly the opposite – we want our wedding to be just the excuse you need to visit an obscure but fantastic place like Sri Lanka. We are promising you an adventurous, well-organized, memorable time, both at our wedding and at a number of fantastic related events.

A Note About Your Children's Attendance

We will not be making general value judgments about bringing children. Ultimately, the decision lies with each individual family. If you are very interested in our opinion, please send us an email with your specific questions and we will respond candidly and objectively.

However, we will confidently offer the following points that may assist in your decision making process. First, Sri Lanka is an extremely family-oriented culture. Children are welcome everywhere and Sri Lankan hospitality enthusiastically applies to kids of all ages. Second, Sri Lanka is not Disneyland. We consider Sri Lanka to be “advanced” travel that is probably most appropriate for mature audiences. Third, the transit process is very exhausting, and many adults, much less children, respond with irritability, bellyaching, and even the occasional wall-eyed fit.

Children are welcome to attend all wedding festivities with the exception of the dinner event occurring the night before the wedding. We will be providing organized childcare and/or activities for this and several other group events to minimize chaos and maximize fun for everyone in attendance.

A Note About the Attendance of Others

Not to make you feel expendable, but this event is far from exclusive – we have invited almost everyone we know and like! After two-and-a-half years of traveling, we know a lot of people – a lot of very interesting people! A quick perusal of our guest list shows addresses from all over the world: Columbia, Missouri to Cartagena, Colombia; Auckland to Oakland; Austria to Australia; Calabasas to Caracas; Mumbai to Melbourne to Madrid to Malta to Montana to Manila.

Why do we bring this up? Our wedding will be a unique cultural experience further enhanced by a wonderful group of diverse people. Even beyond visiting the actual location, the true magic of traveling is meeting other people. Trust us. This is not an event where you will be stuck at a dinner table with boring strangers left to exchange awkward pleasantries.

Additionally, please let us know if you would like to invite someone and we will happily add them to our guest list ... other family members, nannies, past traveling companions, geographically proximate friends, whoever. Our general attitude is the more the merrier, especially if it makes you more willing and able to travel.

General Information / Logistics / Travel Tips

The following is a hodge-podge of information that you may find useful.

Traveler Documentation

A valid passport for every traveler is mandatory. Please take the time to locate and look at your passport several months in advance to identify any potential problems.

Visa

No prearranged visa is required if traveling from the United States or any other country approved on the [Department of Emigration and Immigration's List A](#). Upon arrival, travelers are issued a 30-day tourist visa that can be easily extended.

Customs Regulations (Inbound)

Baggage should not contain goods for others, goods in commercial quantities, and prohibited or restricted goods. Travelers are entitled to bring in 1.5 liters of spirits and 2 bottles of wine.

Customs Regulations (Outbound)

You are entitled to take out what you have brought into the country, and whatever you have purchased locally and declared, with the following exceptions: gold (crude, bullion or coins), Sri Lankan currency in excess of 250 Rupees, coral, ivory, firearms, explosives, dangerous weapons, artifacts, statues, treasures, vintage books, animals, birds, reptiles (intact or in parts, dead or alive), plants (tea, rubber, coconut), and drugs. Precious stones must have a permit. Antiques more than 50 years old require the authorization from both the director of the National Archives, and the Director General of the Archeological Department. Unused Sri Lankan currency should be reconverted to foreign currency at departure.

Tuk Tuk

Also called a tri-shaw or an auto rickshaw, a [tuk tuk](#) is three-wheeled taxi that resembles an enclosed motorcycle. Tuk tuks go a maximum of about 40 miles an hour. They are ubiquitous in most parts of Asia because they are cheaper than cars and easier to negotiate through congested traffic. Tuk tuk drivers often take pride in the appearance of their vehicle with colorful or religious-themed decorations. It is considered polite to notice and compliment the embellishments.

Tuk tuks are much cheaper than taxis – most trips will be well under \$10. We suggest negotiating a price for the ride prior to getting into the tuk tuk. Drive a hard bargain on the price, and then tip the driver the difference from the negotiation. Please keep in mind that the “hard bargain” probably represents no more than about \$5.

Rental Cars

Driving in Sri Lanka is chaotic and confusing, especially for Westerners. The traffic is crazy; navigation is extremely complicated; parking is impossible. We would never rent a car in Sri Lanka. Save yourself the aggravation and utilize the tuk tuks or taxis, or hire a driver which is actually quite affordable. Be forewarned that driving yourself will detract from your experience. We strongly counsel against it. We will be organizing group transportation at various times (including from Colombo to Galle).

United States Embassy

The U.S. Embassy is located at 210 Galle Road, Colombo 3, Sri Lanka, and also covers the Republic of Maldives.

- Telephone number, Monday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. -- (94) (11) 249 8500
- Telephone number, after-hours and emergencies -- (94) (11) 249 8888
- Fax number -- (94) (11)-249 8590
- Embassy web site -- <http://srilanka.usembassy.gov/>
- Email address for general inquiries – consularcolombo@state.gov
- Email address dedicated to American Citizens Services -- ColomboACS@state.gov

Trip Advisor

Throughout this document, we refer to the opinions and ratings of [Trip Advisor](#) frequently, and we rely heavily on Trip Advisor in planning our own travel itineraries. [Trip Advisor](#) is an online community where regular people post their experiences, opinions, and advice on a variety of different travel topics. The website compiles the information into user-friendly sections and overall ratings. Trip Advisor is particularly useful in getting past glossy marketing material and the ambiguities of unfamiliar destinations to select an appropriate hotel. Additionally, Trip Advisor provides you some information about the post's author so you can decide how relevant a particular review is to your personal travel decision. Trip Advisor does not book actual reservations and does not allow traditional paid advertising of any kind.

Clothing


Sri Lanka is a tropical island so expect the weather to be hot and humid. Cotton and viscose/cotton mixed garments are commonly worn. Light clothing is recommended in the lowland areas and light woolen clothing is suitable in the hill country. A sun hat and sun glasses are essential to escape the heat during day time.

Dress for the wedding and wedding related events will be fairly casual. For the wedding and the dinner the night before the wedding, collared shirts and zippered trousers are appreciated for the men. Flip-flops and sandals are acceptable at all times.

If you plan to visit a religious-oriented location or a place of worship, you are strongly advised to maintain extreme modesty by covering your body appropriately. Shorts, backless tops, and bare shoulders are considered disrespectful and unacceptable. When entering a place of worship, footwear and headgear should be removed.

After spending 2007 in the Caribbean, and 2008 crossing the Pacific, we have a lot of experience with simultaneously staying cool in steamy places and still complying with the rules of modest dress. One handy item is convertible pants that zip off into shorts. They're usually made of non-wrinkling and fast-drying nylon to keep you cool. Additionally, we are never without a long-sleeved, button-front shirt to quickly cover bare arms and shoulders when appropriate. Moisture-wicking fabric and zippered vents keep you cool, and the UHF treatment keeps you protected from the sun. Athletic and outdoor stores carry tons of similar stuff.

At a Glance – Fact Sheet

Full Name	Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka
Official Capital City	Colombo
Legislative Capital City	Sri Jayewardenepura Kotte
Area	66,000 Square Kilometers; 25,483 Square Miles
Population	20,926,315 Million
Population Density	309 People Per Square Kilometer
Life Expectancy	Female – 74, Male – 64
Time Zone	GMT/UTC +5.5; No Daylight Savings
Language	Sinhalese, Tamil, English
Religion	Buddhist – 69%, Muslim – 8%, Hindu – 7%, Christian – 6%
Currency	Sri Lankan Rupee (Rs)
Paper Denominations	2, 10, 20, 50, 100, 200, 500, 1000, 2000
Coin Denominations	1, 2, 5, 10, 25, 50
Conversion to the U.S. Dollar as of May 1, 2009	Approximately 120 Rupees to US \$1.00
Electricity	230 Volts, 50 Hertz
Plug Details	South African / Indian-style plus with two circular metal pins above a large circular grounding pin
Plug Graphic	
Country Dialing Code	94
Internet TLD	.lk
Newspapers	Daily Mirror (website: www.dailymirror.lk) Daily News (website: www.dailynews.lk) Evening Observer The Island (website: www.island.lk) Lankadeepa (website: www.lankadeepa.lk) Sri Lanka Rupavahini Corporation (SLRC) is a state-owned network that operates two channels: Rupavahini and Channel Eye.
Television	Private English-language stations include MTV, CNN, and Al-Jazeera. Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC) is a state-owned network that operates services in Sinhala, Tamil and English.
Radio	Privately owned English radio stations include TNL Radio, Sun FM and Yes FM.
Current President	Mahinda Rajapaksa
Current Prime Minister	Ratnasiri Wickremanayake

National Flag	A Lion bearing a sword in its right hand is depicted in gold on red background with a yellow border. Four Bo leaves pointing inwards are at the four corners. Two vertical bands of green and orange at the mast end represent the minority ethnic groups. It is an adaptation of the standard of the last King of Sri Lanka.
National Flower	The Blue Water Lily (<i>Nymphaea Stellata</i>)
Literacy Rate	92%
Ethnic Mix	Sinhalese – 74%, Tamil – 18%, Muslim – 7%, Burgher and Other – 1%

History of Sri Lanka

It is impossible to give Sri Lanka's vast and colorful history the credit it deserves in a document like this. However, the following is [brief summary](#) provided by the [Official Website of Sri Lanka Tourism](#). Please let us know if you have additional interest in a more detailed account of Sri Lanka's history, and we will enthusiastically recommend some resources for you.

Overview

Sri Lanka is a place where history seems to fade into the mist of legend. Adam's Peak is said to be the very place where Adam set foot on earth, having been sent out of heaven. Isn't that his footprint squarely on top of the mountain to prove it? Or is it the Buddha's footprint on Sri Pada? And isn't Adam's Bridge (the chain of islands linking Sri Lanka to India) the very series of stepping stones Rama, aided by his faithful ally, the monkey god Hanuman, stepped across in his mission to rescue Sita from the clutches of the Rawana, King of Lanka, in the epic Ramayana?

The first entries in the Mahavamsa – or “Great History” – date back to 543BC, which coincides with the arrival of Prince Vijaya in Sri Lanka. Some 300 years later, commenced the early Anuradhapura Period, with King Devanampiya Tissa as the first ruler. It was in this period that a sapling of the sacred Bo Tree, under which the Lord Buddha attained enlightenment, was brought to Sri Lanka. The late Anuradhapura Period, which began in the year 459, saw the reign of King Kasyapa, and the construction of Sigiriya. The Polonnaruwa period, witnessed the transfer of the capital from Anuradhapura to Polonnaruwa in 1073. Famed explorer, Marco Polo, arrived in Sri Lanka in the period between 1254 and 1324, and, in 1505, the Portuguese landed, and occupied the island's coastal regions.

The Portuguese Period

At this time Sri Lanka had three main kingdoms – the Kingdom of Jaffna in the north, the Kingdom of Kandy in the central highlands and Kotte, the most powerful, in the south-west. In 1505 the Portuguese, under Lorenso de Almeida established friendly relations with the king of Kotte and gained, for Portugal, a monopoly in the spice and cinnamon trade, which soon became of enormous importance in Europe. Attempts by Kotte to utilize the strength and protection of the Portuguese only resulted in Portugal taking over and ruling not only their regions, but the rest of the island, apart from the central highlands around Kandy. Because the highlands were remote and inaccessible, the kings of Kandy were always able to defeat the attempts by the

Portuguese to annex them, and on a number of occasions drove the Portuguese right back down to the coast.

The Dutch Period

Attempts by Kandy to enlist Dutch help in expelling the Portuguese only resulted in the substitution of one European power for another. By 1658, 153 years after the first Portuguese contact, the Dutch took control over the coastal areas of the Island. During their 140-year-rule the Dutch, like Portuguese, were involved in repeated unsuccessful attempts to bring Kandy under their control. The Dutch were much more interested in trade and profits than the Portuguese, who spent a lot of efforts spreading their religion and extending their physical control.

The British Period

The French revolution resulted in a major shake-up among the European powers and in 1796 the Dutch were easily supplanted by the British, who in 1815 also won the control of the kingdom of Kandy, becoming the first European power to rule the whole island. But in 1802, Sri Lanka became a Crown Colony and in 1818 a unified administration for the island was set up. Soon the country was dotted with coffee, cinnamon and coconut plantations and a network of roads and railways were built to handle this new economic activity. English became the official language, and is still widely spoken.

Coffee was the main crop and the backbone of the colonial economy, but the occurrence of a leaf blight virtually wiped it out in the 1870s and the plantations quickly switched over to tea or rubber. Today Sri Lanka is the world's second largest tea exporter. The British were unable to persuade the Sinhalese to work cheaply and willingly on the plantations, so they imported large number of South Indian laborers from South India. Sinhalese peasants in the hill country lost land to the estates.

Independence

Between World War I and World War II, political stirrings started to push Sri Lanka towards eventual independence from Britain – but in a considerably more peaceful and low-key manner than in India. At the end of WW II it was evident that independence would come very soon, in the wake of independence for Sri Lanka's neighbor. In February 1948 Sri Lanka, or Ceylon as it was still known, became an independent member of the British Commonwealth.

Current Issues in Sri Lanka

It's no secret that Sri Lanka has been embroiled in some unfortunate news recently. In inviting so many people to travel around the world to see us, we feel that it's important to be honest about potentially uncomfortable topics. Two issues stand out: (1) the 2004 Tsunami and subsequent recovery and reconstruction, and (2) the military conflict.

The Tsunami and Reconstruction

On December 26, 2004, a 9.0-magnitude earthquake near Sumatra, Indonesia, triggered a massive tsunami that ultimately killed an estimated 250,000 people in southern India, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, and Sri Lanka. Huge waves mauled more than 80% of Sri Lanka's coastline, leaving more than 40,000 people dead and a staggering 2.5 million people displaced. Though 1,000 miles from the earthquake's epicenter, Sri Lanka was struck with waves more than

20 feet high that swept inland as far as three miles. People, cars, homes, businesses, and even a train carrying 1,700 passengers were literally washed away. After the ocean subsided, many survivors returned to their homes to find absolutely nothing left ... not a shoe, not a brick, not a grain of rice.

Take a moment and try to consider a population of approximately 20 million losing 40,000 people in one day. In the south especially, not a single person went unaffected by the tsunami. Everyone has a story, and they are willing to share that story, even stories of unimaginable loss, if you are willing to listen. We heard amazing first-hand accounts where mind-boggling terror is exceeded only by heroism, courage, and the will to survive.

Reminders of the tsunami are all around. Some are fairly obvious, like the hulls of huge boats shredded like paper not yet removed from a roadside beach, and some are less obvious, like half-hidden, overgrown foundations of homes never rebuilt. Much reconstruction has been accomplished, but much work remains to be done.

No one expects tourists to maintain polite or awkward silence about the tsunami -- quite the opposite. The tsunami is in no way a taboo subject, and it actually comes up in normal conversation frequently. Generally, Sri Lankan locals do not begrudge your vacation, nor do they expect you to focus on good works or volunteerism. Most are thankful that you are there enjoying Sri Lanka, spending your money, and perhaps later speaking well of Sri Lanka to encourage future tourism.

Lastly, do not avoid Sri Lanka because you fear another tsunami. Although terrible, one cannot overemphasize how rare and freakish an occurrence this was.

The Sri Lankan Conflict

Sadly, it is impossible to render an accurate portrait of the Sri Lanka visitor experience without discussing the internal conflict – civil war, if you want to call it that – that has killed more than 70,000 Sri Lankans over the last 26 years. Many have expressed concern over the conflict's recent heavy media coverage and how the fighting might impact their personal safety.

Of course, it has been in the news largely because the war is now over. In April 2009, the government recaptured all the territory once held by the LTTE (the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, also known as the Tamil Tigers) and wiped them out militarily. It is obviously too early to tell whether this military victory will translate into lasting peace, reconciliation and fruitful reconstruction, but there certainly are reasons for optimism, not least of which was the death, on May 18, 2009, of [Vellupillai Prabhakaran](#), the leader of the LTTE. There was a distinct cult-of-personality flavor to the LTTE, and his death (along with the deaths of the entire LTTE leadership) make the reappearance of a reconstituted LTTE highly unlikely.

Nevertheless, it's essential to have some understanding of what the conflict was all about. The following [article](#) (which is now out of date, of course) is provided by the [Council on Foreign Relations](#), a non-partisan and independent membership organization. Founded in 1921, the Council seeks to promote “understanding of foreign policy and America's role in the world” and takes no institutional positions on policy. Additionally, the [Council](#) publishes the widely

respected journal, Foreign Affairs. We hope this article will provide you with some perspective of the conflict.

Introduction

For almost thirty years, the Sri Lankan government has been engaged in a bloody civil war with the [Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam](#) (LTTE). More commonly known as the Tamil Tigers, the LTTE wants an independent state for the island's Tamil minority. In February 2002, the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government reached a cease-fire agreement, but both sides repeatedly violated the truce. After several failed peace talks, the Sri Lankan government formally withdrew from the cease-fire in January 2008. Since then, the government has pursued a fierce military offensive against the rebels, and in February 2009, claimed to have come close to defeating the separatist group. But the rebels continue to pose a considerable challenge to the government.

For a lasting peace, experts say the government will need to find a political solution to the ethnic conflict between the majority Sinhalese and the minority Tamils that has plagued the country since its independence. The European Union and Canada have joined the United States, India, and Australia in labeling the LTTE a terrorist organization, which has made it more difficult for the group to get financing from abroad. The civil war has killed nearly seventy thousand, and watchdog groups have accused both the LTTE and the Sri Lankan military of human rights violations, including abduction, extortion, and the use of child soldiers.

Historical Context

Sri Lanka has been mired in ethnic conflict since the country, formerly known as Ceylon, became independent from British rule in 1948. A 2001 government [census \(PDF\)](#) says Sri Lanka's main ethnic populations are the Sinhalese (82 percent), Tamil (9.4 percent), and Sri Lanka Moor (7.9 percent). In the years following independence, the Sinhalese, who resented British favoritism toward Tamils during the colonial period, disenfranchised Tamil migrant plantation workers from India and made Sinhala the official language.

In 1972, the Sinhalese changed the country's name from Ceylon and made Buddhism the nation's primary religion. As ethnic tension grew, in 1976, the LTTE was formed under the leadership of Velupillai Prabhakaran, and it began to campaign for a Tamil homeland in northern and eastern Sri Lanka, where most of the island's Tamils reside. In 1983, the LTTE ambushed an army convoy, killing thirteen soldiers and triggering riots in which 2,500 Tamils died.

India, which has its own Tamil population in the south, deployed a peacekeeping force in 1987 that left three years later amidst escalating violence. During the ensuing conflict, the LTTE emerged as a fearsome terrorist organization, famed for suicide bombings, recruitment of child soldiers, and the ability to challenge Sri Lankan forces from the Jaffna Peninsula in the north down through the eastern side of the island. The U.S. State Department placed the LTTE on its terror list in 1997. In 2002, Norway brokered a cease-fire agreement between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government. Peace talks broke down the following year, but experts posit the fragile truce held in large part because of devastation related to the 2004 tsunami, which caused thirty thousand deaths on the island.

In August 2005, the assassination of Sri Lanka's foreign minister, Lakshman Kadirgamar, reignited the conflict. For the next two years, both the government and rebels repeatedly violated the cease-fire agreement. In January 2008, a cabinet spokesman said it was "[useless talking to them \[the LTTE\] now](#)" (AP), and the Sri Lankan government formally withdrew from the truce, prompting Nordic monitors to pull out of the country. Since the end of the cease-fire, the Sri Lankan military has been trying to root out the LTTE, and in February 2009, the government claimed that it was close to [defeating \(Guardian\)](#) the rebels.

Taking Control from the LTTE

In November 2005 national elections, candidate Ranil Wickremasinghe of the governing United National Party (UNP) lost narrowly to anti-LTTE hard-liner Mahinda Rajapaksa. Rajapaksa allied his Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) with two staunchly anti-LTTE political parties: the radical Marxist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP, People's Liberation Front) and the nationalist Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU, National Heritage Party) controlled by Buddhist monks. Muslim parliamentarians have also sided with this alliance against the militants.

In 2006, the government launched a military campaign to root out the LTTE, and by July 2007, it had seized control of the country's east. The governing coalition forged a partnership with the pro-government splinter of the LTTE, Tamil Makkal Viduthalai Pulikal (TMVP), and installed the leader of that party as chief minister of the newly created Eastern Provincial Council after May 2008 elections. Experts say this approach would likely be used in the north if the government succeeds in defeating the LTTE. However, rights groups allege the TMVP commits human rights abuses with impunity because of support from the central government. The Sri Lankan government [denies these allegations \(BBC\)](#), saying they are intended to discredit it and its allies.

Humanitarian Concerns

Watchdog groups have accused both the Sri Lankan military and the LTTE of engaging in widespread human rights abuses, including abduction, conscription, and the use of child soldiers. In August 2007, Human Rights Watch released a report that catalogues [alleged abuses](#) on both sides of the conflict. Amnesty International made similar accusations in its [2008 report](#) on the state of the world's human rights.

Increased fighting in the country's north in early 2009 left more than 250,000 displaced; both the LTTE and the government were accused of placing civilians at risk. Both sides also increasingly target the media. The government has cracked down on all independent Tamil news sources and denies access to conflict zones for journalists, according to a 2008 [report](#) from media watchdog Reporters without Borders. Three journalists have been killed since 2008. The LTTE tolerates no dissent in the areas it controls, while in the rest of the country reporters and editors critical of the government's war against the Tigers are labeled "traitors" and "terrorists," notes a January 2009 [report](#) by the International Press Institute. "A hostile environment of intolerance by the top political leadership has created a culture of impunity and indifference" for the attacks on the media, it says.

Funding and Support for the LTTE

Approximately one-quarter of the global [Sri Lankan] Tamil population lives outside of Sri Lanka. Most of the diaspora resides in Canada, the United Kingdom, and India. While some of the Tamils who live overseas support LTTE efforts, the LTTE often uses intimidation to secure most of its funds from abroad. LTTE tactics include telling expatriates to contribute funds to protect the safety of family members back in Sri Lanka, as well as kidnapping affluent Tamils in Sri Lanka for ransoms secured overseas. Members of the Tamil community abroad say the culture of fear that surrounds such tactics is enough to coerce them to fund the LTTE.

The U.S. State Department says the LTTE has also used charitable groups, like the Tamils Rehabilitation Organization, as a front for fundraising. These forms of funding have made the LTTE one of the wealthiest militant organizations in the world. In a [January 2008 report \(PDF\)](#), the Congressional Research Service said the LTTE continues to raise an estimated \$200 million to \$300 million per year despite recent declines in overseas financing.

India's Role in the Conflict

During the 1970s, India's external intelligence agency, the [Research and Analysis Wing \(RAW\)](#) helped to train and arm the LTTE, but after the group's terrorist activities grew in the 1980s--including its alliances with separatist groups in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu--RAW withdrew this support. In 1987, India made a pact with the Sri Lankan government to send peacekeeping troops to the island. The Indian forces were unable to end the conflict and instead began fighting with the LTTE. India was forced to withdraw by Sri Lankan President Ranasinghe Premadasa in 1990. Rajiv Gandhi, prime minister of India at the time of the peacekeeping force deployment, was killed by an LTTE suicide bomber in 1991. Premadasa met a similar fate in 1993.

India has been wary of getting involved in Sri Lanka since then, but trade between the two countries has been on the rise. Bilateral trade increased from \$658 million in 2000 to \$ 3.2 billion in 2008, and India remains one of the country's leading foreign investors. Sri Lanka is also in talks to form a [partnership \(Bloomberg\)](#) with India's National Stock Exchange, which may include offering India a stake in Sri Lanka's bourse. The Asian Development Bank in 2008 said the rise in violence had not yet had an [impact on growth \(PDF\)](#), which has been driven by strong domestic demand and a robust private sector. But it says the escalating conflict could hamper economic growth. The United Nations Development Program's 2008 statistics show Sri Lanka [ranks 104](#) out of 179 countries on the Human Development Index, which measures education, standard of living, and life expectancy.

India remains concerned about the conditions of the Tamil minority in Sri Lanka, as it stirs protests and tensions among its own Tamil population in the south. In February 2009, India's foreign minister expressed concern over the safety of civilians in Sri Lanka and said the only way forward would be the devolution of power from the center to the provinces. Under the [1987 accord](#) with India, which was followed by the [thirteenth amendment](#) to the Sri Lankan constitution, Colombo agreed to devolve some authority to the provinces and make Tamil an official language of the state. But no government has fully implemented the provisions, say experts.

Washington's Role

Washington has not been a major player in the Sri Lankan civil conflict. According to the Congressional Research Service, the United States has provided more than \$3.6 billion to Sri Lanka since its independence in 1948, most of it in the form of food aid. Military aid was suspended in December 2007 because of Sri Lanka's human rights violations, which are catalogued in the U.S. State Department's [annual report on human rights practices](#). Since 2008, the United States has also been working with the Sri Lankan government through the U.S. Agency for International Development on [programs](#) focused on democracy, governance, humanitarian assistance, and economic growth. It also awarded a five year, \$12 million contract to [support regional government](#) in Sri Lanka's eastern and north central provinces.

The LTTE campaigns regularly to be taken off the U.S. State Department's terrorist list. In August 2006, federal authorities arrested and charged eight suspects in New York with attempting to bribe U.S. officials to remove the LTTE from the list. The suspects, said to have close ties with LTTE leaders like Prabhakaran, are also charged with trying to purchase surface-to-air missiles, missile launchers, AK-47s, and other weapons for the LTTE.

The Future of the Conflict

By early 2009, many experts said the LTTE's conventional military capabilities had been largely crushed. It is "effectively finished except as a guerilla outfit" says [Robert Rotberg](#) of Harvard's Program on Intrastate Conflict and Conflict Resolution. However, he cautions the outfit could carry on a guerilla war for years, depending on the survival of its leader, Prabhakaran. Unlike the 1990s, when the government's claims that it had defeated the rebel force were quickly proved wrong, the army, a much stronger and less corrupt force, has managed to deal a hard blow to the Tigers. Moreover, Rotberg adds, the LTTE has run out of money because of the successful blocking of payments from the Tamil diaspora.

But the larger problem of integrating the island's minority Tamil population will remain even if the LTTE is defeated, say experts. It is essential that the government moves to give "a fair deal to the Tamils and integrate them more effectively in the fabric of the nation" says Rotberg. Ahilan Kadirgamar, spokesperson for the Sri Lanka Democracy Forum, an independent group of activists working to promote democracy, says the government hasn't shown enough interest in moving on to the political process. Much of the country's politics in the last three decades has revolved around the LTTE, with successive governments attempting to wipe out or negotiate with the Tigers, says Kadirgamar. But the group's demise will open up possibilities for the discussion of a whole range of other issues, he [writes \(Himal\)](#), "including issues of economic justice, gender, caste, labor rights and democratization."

What It Means to Tourists and Travelers

The truth is that the conflict affects tourists and travelers very little. The military fighting was exclusively in the far north, hundreds of miles away from Sri Lanka's tourist destinations. No recently published travel guide will suggest that you travel north of Anuradhapura, and neither would we. The other potentially dangerous areas are in the Eastern Province, another area devoid of tourist attractions.

In terms of security, military checkpoints with armed guards are not uncommon in parts of Colombo and at the airport. Guards may ask your driver where you are going to make sure the destination is tourist-oriented and may verify the destination with you. It might feel intimidating for a moment, but let your cultural sensitivity prevail.

Furthermore, although they have launched brutal and bloody attacks against civilians, the LTTE has never targeted tourists. Indeed, a good argument can be made that they have assiduously avoided tourists (for example, an attack on the airport occurred when the airport was closed, and an attack on the Temple of the Tooth was after hours).

In conclusion, there is little reason to believe Sri Lanka is "unsafe" for a tourist visit because of the LTTE, especially now that the war has ended. Indeed, the U.S. State Department's [travel advisory](#) is decidedly non-hysterical by its notoriously alarmist standards. We find the "register with the embassy" stuff to be excessive, but the other advice is worth considering anywhere you travel - be alert, know your surroundings, etc. Not to be too flippant about it, but we find the crazy driving more frightening than the LTTE.

The single most important current fact regarding the political situation in Sri Lanka is that there has not been a single bombing or violent incident since the final surrender of the LTTE in May 2009.

Geography

Just 217 miles long and 112 miles wide at the broadest point, Sri Lanka is shaped like a teardrop falling from the southeastern tip of the Indian subcontinent. The 31-mile-wide [Palk Strait](#) separates Sri Lanka from India, although a series of stepping-stone coral islets known as [Adam's Bridge](#) (or Rama's Bridge, or Ram Setu) nearly forms a land bridge between the two countries. The entire northern half of Sri Lanka comprises a large plain extending from the southern rugged hill country to the [Jaffna Peninsula](#). Sri Lanka's highest mountain is the 8,281-foot [Mount Pidurutalagala](#) (or Mount Pedro) near [Nuwara Eliya](#). Sri Lanka's longest river is the 208-mile-long [Mahaweli](#), which flows from the interior mountainous region and empties into the [Indian Ocean](#) at [Trincomalee](#). The southern coast boasts beautiful white-sand beaches and incredible views of the Indian Ocean.

Seasonality

Sri Lanka is a typically tropical country with distinct dry and wet seasons. The wet season is highlighted by two monsoons: the Yala season (May to August), when the southwest monsoon brings rain to the southern, western and central regions; and the Maha season (October to January), when the northeast monsoon brings rain to the north and east of the island. The low-lying coastal regions are hot and tropical year round, but the interior hill country can be quite cool with the increasing altitude.

Culture

Long before [Marco Polo](#) declared Sri Lanka the finest island of its size, this beautiful country found its way into Greek, Egyptian, and Indian literature. The Sri Lanka mystique perseveres

through its very rich culture derived from 1,500 years of history, ancient traditions, international influences, and religious tolerance.

The People

Interacting with the people of Sri Lanka, nicknamed “The Smiling People,” is a highlight of traveling there. As with many non-American cultures, Sri Lankans prioritize communication and interpersonal relationships more highly than anything else on the “to do” list. You will be approached by regular people on the street who will introduce themselves, shake your hand, and chat with you. Westerners are occasionally wary of being approached by strangers, perhaps skeptical of their motives or annoyed to have one’s busy schedule interrupted. Rest assured, locals almost always just want to chat with you about where you are from, and how you are enjoying Sri Lanka, as well as tell you about their experiences or relatives in your home country.

Around 74% of Sri Lanka's population is ethnically and linguistically Sinhalese. While most Sinhalese are Buddhist, Sinhalese is primarily an ethnic identity. While many theories exist, Sinhalese culture is thought to derive from the descendants of [Prince Vijaya](#) and his followers. According to the [Mahavamsa](#), Sri Lanka's ancient historical text, [Prince Vijaya](#) was the first known king of Sri Lanka arriving from northern India in the 6th century BC. These early settlers practiced Theravada Buddhism and inter-married with the indigenous population called the [Balangoda people](#), who were [Mesolithic](#) hunter-gatherers dating back 34,000 years. Thus, the core of the Sinhalese cultural was born. The Sinhalese culture of the Kandy and the interior hill country is somewhat different from the Sinhalese culture of the plains and coastal areas. Geographically remote, Kandy remained independent during the periods of European colonization and was thus less exposed and influenced by it. The [Sinhalese language](#) remains in common as one of the two official languages of Sri Lanka (along with Tamil). Sinhalese belongs to the [Indo-Aryan](#) branch of the [Indo-European languages](#).

About 18% of Sri Lanka's population is ethnically [Tamil](#) descending from southern India's [Tamil Nadu](#) region. While 90% of Sri Lankan Tamils are Hindu, communities of Tamil Christians and Muslims are common as well. An extremely diverse and rich culture, Tamil art, architecture, and music extends back two millennia in recorded history. The legend of the Tamil [Sangam](#), assemblies of Tamil writers and intellectuals from the 4th century, adds to the proud heritage of [Tamil literature](#), language, and philosophy. The exact details of Tamil arrival in Sri Lanka is not completely known since migration frequently occurred in different time periods under differing circumstances. Nonetheless, the Tamil [Vannimais](#) chiefs controlled much of Sri Lanka after the fall of the Sinhalese Golden Era around the 12th century. Sri Lankan Tamils are further segmented into Ceylon Tamils (descendants of the ancient [Jaffna Kingdom](#)) and Hill Country Tamils (descendants of bonded laborers brought from India by the British to work the tea plantations). The co-official language of Sri Lanka, Tamil is a [Dravidian language](#).

About 8% of the population, Muslim traders arrived in Sri Lanka during the lifetime of the [Prophet Muhammad](#) from the Middle East. The Sinhalese kings were not adept at business and trade, and so they often employed and relied on Muslim settlers to manage commercial affairs. By the 10th century, Muslim communities dominated Sri Lanka's ports and interacted well with Sinhalese and Tamil cultures. Prosperity, lucrative commercial trade, and religious tolerance contributed to the cooperative spirit between the diverse communities. Though Islamic tenets

were carefully preserved, [Sri Lankan Muslims](#) eventually spoke Tamil since it was the language of business at the time. Travel from the Middle East was difficult, and as such, Muslim settlers probably did not bring women. Because they learned to speak Tamil, Muslim settlers tended to marry Tamil women as well further enriching the cultural tradition.

The term "[Burgher](#)" refers to Sri Lankan, usually male-line, descendants of European colonists (Portuguese, Dutch, German, or English) from the 16th through to the 20th centuries. Europeans arrived in Sri Lanka under a number of different circumstances including employment by the [Dutch East India Company](#), sailors with the conquering Portuguese, and entrepreneurs seeking new horizons in the blossoming trade industry of Sri Lanka's ports. Burghers represent about 1% of the Sri Lankan population, have no physical homogenous characteristics, and frequently have surnames like Mendez, Fernando, and Vandort.

Religion

Religious practices in Sri Lanka are inevitably diverse due to its complex history and multiple ethnic groups. Various communities in Sri Lanka recognize four of the world's major religions: Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity. The ethnic majority, Sinhalese, are primarily adherent to Buddhism, while other ethnic groups like Tamils, Moors, Burghers, and others practice Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. Each has had a unique influence on Sri Lankan culture overall. Syncretism is prevalent throughout Sri Lankan religious practices blending elements of all four along with the spiritual beliefs of the indigenous people. This has created not only a uniqueness of religious character in Sri Lanka, but also a higher level of religious tolerance and inclusivity.

Sri Lanka has the longest continuous history of [Buddhism](#) of any predominantly Buddhist nation. The [Sangha](#) has existed in a largely unbroken lineage since its introduction in the 2nd century BC. [Hinduism](#) was brought to Sri Lanka by successive Tamil kings and their followers from Tamil Nadu in southern India. The Sri Lankan Tamil Hindus are responsible for much of the archaeology that currently remains in Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa. [Muslim](#) and Islamic culture arrived with traveling Arabic traders in the 10th century. [Islam](#) continues to thrive in Sri Lanka even though some traditions have changed to adapt to the conditions of South Asia. Additionally, Muslim Sri Lankans suffered serious persecution by the Portuguese Christians in the 1500's. According to [Christian](#) tradition, the [Apostle Thomas](#) was active in Sri Lanka and southern India in the first century AD. Cathedrals and churches dot the countryside. Located just north of Colombo, [Negombo](#) is nicknamed "Little Rome" because of its many ornate Catholic cathedrals including the religiously significant St. Mary's.

Cricket

Speaking of religion ...

Despite being a country of only 20 million people and lacking the sports infrastructure of an [England](#) or [Australia](#), [Sri Lanka](#) is an international cricket [powerhouse](#), having [won](#) the [World Cup](#) in [1996](#) and finished [second](#) in [2007](#).

Indeed, in a 2007 World Cup match that we attended, Sri Lanka sent India (the world's most [cricket-crazed country](#)) [out of the tournament](#) embarrassingly early, touching off [low-level](#)

[rioting](#) on the subcontinent. In last year's [Asia Cup](#) final, Sri Lanka administered an even more savage beating, demolishing India by the cricket equivalent of six touchdowns. Of course, it helps to have the greatest bowler in cricket history ([Muttiah Muralitharan](#)) and two of the [world's top five batsmen](#) ([Mahela Jayawardena](#) and [Kumar Sangakkara](#)) on your team.

As the majority of you know, we share Sri Lanka's nationwide cricket obsession. To understand why, check out the detailed accounts of our World Cup exploits [here](#) and [here](#). Through that incredible experience, we have become friends with many of the national players. During our visit to Sri Lanka, we had the opportunity to meet and spend time with many of the players' wives and families, and they are among the wedding invitees. We can't wait to put our Sri Lankan friends, American friends, and international friends together in the same room!

As you also probably know, the team was the [target](#) of a [terrorist attack](#) in Lahore, Pakistan, on March 3, 2009. Please use the utmost sensitivity regarding this matter as it was an unspeakably harrowing ordeal for those involved.

Cricket itself is a remarkably simple game (at least as far as the [rules](#) are concerned; strategy is a different matter) and we encourage you to try to learn at least the very basics.

Ayurveda

From [Sanskrit](#) meaning “the science of life,” [Ayurveda](#) is practiced in Sri Lanka for medicinal (holistic, alternative, or complementary) and/or cosmetic purposes. Evidence of Ayurveda is found deep in India’s history as far back as the sacred proto-[Hindu](#) texts known as the [Vedas](#) around the first and second millennia. The basic principles were [supposedly handed down](#) personally from [Brahma](#), the supreme [Hindu deity](#), to [Dhanvantari](#), the god of medicine.

Ayurveda teaches that the human body is governed by three [doshas](#), or [life forces](#): [pitta](#) (fire and water), [kapha](#) (water and earth), and [vata](#) (air and ether). Ayurveda focuses on proactively balancing these life forces to prevent illness.

Ayurveda therapy ranges the full gamut from yoga and herbal massage to rigorous detoxification and moxibustion. The Ayurvedic resorts and retreats also offer the full range of services from a more spa-like experience referred to as “soft Ayurveda,” to addiction therapy, to hard core medical services for those with serious illnesses and often, no other options. If you are interested in an Ayurvedic experience, I would encourage you to do your homework starting with Sri Lanka’s [Ministry of Indigenous Medicine](#) to locate a clinic commensurate with your needs and expectations.

Sri Lankan Food

Food is tremendously important in Sri Lankan culture. Sri Lanka has not traditionally had much restaurant culture because meals hosted at home (prepared with painstaking detail, pride, and love) have always been the cultural norm. Sri Lankans always treat guests with the utmost hospitality, and food is huge part of making guests feel welcome.

Sri Lanka’s unique cuisine is often overshadowed by the ubiquitous food of its perceived “big brother,” India. While commonalities exist, the food in Sri Lanka is distinct from India’s, owing

to so many international influences over the centuries, local ingredients, and a bounty of [indigenous spices and herbs](#). Fiery hot, cheap and plentiful, and always served with pride, the [cuisine in Sri Lanka](#) will not disappoint. Make no mistake – this is a “food culture.”

Dining Etiquette

Sri Lankans swear that the food tastes better, and the texture is better appreciated, when eaten with your hands. Don't worry -- tourists are always provided cutlery -- but no one will think twice if you roll up your sleeves and dig in. Simply separate a small wad of rice, roll it together in a curry dish, hold the bite-sized portion in the tips of your fingers above the middle knuckle, twist the wrist and slightly scoop to your mouth. Sri Lankans will appreciate the effort, and the restaurant staff will whisk you finger bowls, and probably offer a little helpful instruction, in no time. It is traditionally acceptable to eat only with your right hand (left hand is traditionally used for, ahem, something else), but this taboo is no longer strict in modern society.

Sri Lankan food is often very hot and spicy. In touristy restaurants, Sri Lankan chefs automatically reduce the heat without being asked. However, if you have a tender palate, we would suggest politely asking for the mellowest version possible until you get acclimated to the flavors.

A gratuity is expected in Sri Lankan restaurants. Some places will add a 10% surcharge, while others rely on hard work and excellent service to be rewarded with a 10-15% tip.

Rice and Curry

When ordering Sri Lankan food, the menu is often not necessary. The traditional meal is called “[rice and curry](#)” (never “curry and rice” or just “[curry](#)”) which results in an impressive banquet of various Sri Lankan specialties to include vegetable, fish, and meat dishes of varying flavor and heat. It is not uncommon for a party of two ordering rice and curry to require a whole separate table just to hold the food! Rice and curry is not only delicious, but also an artistic visual and aromatic experience.

Sri Lankan curry dishes tend to include chili, [turmeric](#), [cinnamon](#), [cardamom](#), [coriander](#), [pandanus leaves](#), mustard, and [tamarind](#) to name a few. Along with rice, there are flavorful and largely unfamiliar condiments, including sambols and chutneys. Coconut milk and dried fish are also frequent ingredients.

Sambol

Sambol is a semi-generic word for the assortments of spicy condiments accompanying traditional rice and curry. Use of sambol resembles the use of salsa in Mexican and Mexican-American cooking -- it can have many forms and uses but ultimately enhances the spice and flavor of a dish. A particularly spicy variety called “pol sambol” is a combination of chili powder, chopped onions, salt, grated coconut, and Maldivian fish. Use [pol sambol](#) sparingly, as it will burn your face off.

Hoppers

Sri Lanka's most famous food item surely must be hoppers. They are small, bowl-shaped, wafer-thin quasi-pancakes which are delicious by themselves or when served with a savory or sweet filling. The coconut milk and palm toddy batter is poured into a small, wok-like skillet on very high heat. Most of the batter pools at the bottom so hoppers are soft and doughy at the base, and thin and crispy around the edges. Move over tortillas – hoppers are the best starch item ever invented!

Egg hoppers are hoppers served with a sunny-side-up fried egg in the middle and appropriate for all meal times. String hoppers, which bear no similarity to regular hoppers, are flat bunches of tangled “noodles” that resemble spaghetti but are more delicate and flavorful.

Other Specialties

Kitul – The sap extracted from the [kitul palm](#) frequently used as a [sweet syrup](#) in Sri Lankan desserts.

Jaggery – When kitul is boiled and set to harden, jaggery is the result. Jaggery is a commonly used sweetener in Sri Lankan cuisine.

Kiribath – [Kiribath](#) is a rice cake cooked in thick coconut milk and usually cut into diamond-shaped pieces. Kiribath can be served as a dessert with jaggery and fruit, or unsweetened with sambol and other spices. Legend has it that [Lord Buddha](#) derived strength and energy from kiribath on his [path to enlightenment](#). Because rice is the symbol of life and fertility, kiribath is traditionally served at weddings and other auspicious occasions and is often a Sri Lankan baby's first solid food.

Maldive fish – Quite common in Sri Lankan cuisine, [Maldive](#) fish is salty and intensely flavored shreds of sundried tuna.

Roti – A [Muslim](#) specialty, [roti](#) is a doughy pancake filled with curried meat, potato, and vegetables. A roti can be rolled up like a burrito, or folded into a triangle or square, and taken to go.

Sri Lankan Drink

While the tap water is considered safe to drink (and we drink it), conventional wisdom says to avoid it just in case – better to be safe than sorry – and stick to bottled water. Soda is widely available, but we would suggest Sri Lanka's [ginger beer](#), which is thought to have medicinal qualities. Coconut water is also widely available and, thanks to its high glucose and potassium content, is highly recommended as a hangover (or diarrhea) cure. Coffee is not very popular with the locals, but all somewhat touristy places will offer it. [Tea](#), on the other hand, is omnipresent and usually served already mixed with milk and sugar (unless expressly ordered otherwise).

Unlike some of its neighbors, Sri Lanka is definitely an imbibing culture! Domestically, [Lion Lager](#) is ubiquitous, delicious, and large (sold in 20-ounce bottles). [Lion](#) also brews a stout that

is quite that. [Carlsberg](#) is popular as well, but the local version is brewed in Sri Lanka and, frankly, tastes nothing like the Danish original. [Three Coins](#) is considered the “higher-end” domestic beer and is described as “delicately malty.” Additionally, imported beer (especially Heineken) is available, but we think you’ll be pleasantly surprised by the local stuff.

Sri Lanka also boasts two types of spirits derived from the versatile coconut. Tapped from the flower of the coconut, “toddy” is non-alcoholic when fresh but ferments into an alcoholic cider. When fermented and distilled, toddy becomes “[arrack](#),” which slightly resembles rum. Arrack is roughly 70 proof and not for the feint of heart – we are not big fans, but you should try it at least once. It is served neat, mixed with Coca-Cola or lemonade, or in a number of specialty cocktails. Most hotels and restaurants will have a full range of brand-name imported spirits as well.

Wine drinkers will have a slightly more difficult time ... good wine is difficult to find and can be quite expensive. Sri Lanka is not a wine culture mostly because the indigenous cuisine is not very wine friendly. Conventional wisdom says that the type of wine best paired with curry is, um, beer! Upscale hotels offer wine lists, and Amangalla and The Lighthouse both have some selections. When ordering off of a wine list, make sure you read the fine print; sometimes, an additional wine surcharge will be added to your final bill in excess of the bottle’s listed price.

When we were there in December of 2007, the concept of the hip wine bar was beginning to gain momentum. Hopefully, this phenomenon will continue to grow and develop Sri Lanka’s entire wine inventory. Additionally, Sri Lankan customs allows each traveler to carry 1.5 liters of spirits and two bottles of wine into the country without penalty. Some of you may be enlisted by us to be our wine mules to ensure suitable libations for the festivities!

What To Do In Sri Lanka

In-depth coverage of all the available activities, sights, and opportunities of a Sri Lankan vacation would be impossible within the scope of this document. Detailed information is included for Colombo because that is where the airport is located, and thus, every traveler experiences Colombo to some extent. Additionally, we have provided some detail about Galle since it is the actual wedding location and a highlight of Sri Lanka. **Please know that we are happy to provide you with whatever assistance you may require in planning your trip.**

You may be asking yourself, “What will my trip to Sri Lanka be like?”

The trickiest part of Sri Lanka is internal transportation. Travel within Sri Lanka is mostly slow, often tardy, sometimes bumpy and usually difficult. Sri Lanka is not a particularly large country, but because of its remarkable diversity and the aforementioned logistical difficulties, it starts to feel much larger rather quickly. In the interest of time and distance, you may need to make compromises about what you really want to see, and what you may need to skip.

Here are some suggestions:

Outdoorsy Adventure

Between the strikingly blue Indian Ocean (and its many bays and inlets) and the lush tropical rainforest, plenty of water activities (both salt and fresh) are available, including surfing, wind surfing, snorkeling, kayaking, whitewater rafting, and seasonal scuba diving. Additionally, outdoor adventurers will be pleased with the many opportunities for mountain biking, hiking, trekking, and rock climbing. With several internationally recognized national parks, Sri Lanka is known for unique bird-watching and wildlife safaris with elephants, leopards, monkeys and other exotic indigenous animals.

Surfing Locations and Details

Location	Break	Type	Level
Arugam Bay	Point Break	Right	All Surfers
Bennys	Coral Reef	Left	Experienced Only
Coral Garden	Rocky Reef	Right and Left	Very Experienced
Dalawella	Coral Reef	Right and Left	Experienced Only
Dewella (Unawatuna)	Coral Reef	Right and Left	All Surfers
Elephant Rock	Point Break	Right	All Surfers
Gaza Strip	Rocky Reef	Left	Experienced Only
GD's	Beach Break	Right and Left	All Surfers
Hikkaduwa	Coral Reef	Right and Left	All Surfers
Koggala Lefts	Coral Reef	Left	Experienced Only
Local's Point	Coral Reef	Right and Left	Experienced Only
Matara	Sand Bar	Right	All Surfers
Midigama Left	Point Break	Left	All Surfers
Midigama Right	Rocky Reef	Right	Experienced Only
Mirissa	Coral Reef	Right	All Surfers
Okanda	Point Break	Right	All Surfers
Owerkanda	Coral Reef	Left	All Surfers
Peanuts Farm	Point Break	Right	All Surfers
Pottuvil Point	Point Break	Right	Experienced Only
Thalpe	Rocky Reef	Right and Left	All Surfers
Thalyadi	Beach Break	Right	Experienced Only
The Peaks	Coral Reef	Right and Left	All Surfers
The Rock	Coral Reef	Right and Left	All Surfers
Unawatuna	Coral Reef	Right and Left	Experienced Only
Wiligama	Beach Break	Right and Left	Beginners Wave
Wijjya Beach	Coral Reef	Right and Left	All Surfers

Scuba Locations and Details

Sri Lanka's southwestern coast is populated with many reputable, competent, and [PADI](#)-certified scuba diving outfits. The protected areas around Hikkaduwa provide calm conditions perfect for beginners, first-timers, and dive courses. Rental equipment is widely available. March is considered an excellent month to scuba dive in Sri Lanka – warm Indian Ocean and 25 meters of visibility. The best areas for scuba diving are both on the southwest coast within reasonable proximity to Galle: Hikkaduwa and Unawatuna. The ocean around Hikkaduwa has 17 local shipwrecks to visit as well as 15 local reef and rock formations. Wreck highlights include:

Dive Site	Depth	Description
Conch	12 – 21 meters	One of the first steam-powered oil tankers in the world, the Conch was built in 1892 in Stockton for Shell. She weighed 3,555 tons and was on a journey from Novorossisk to Madras when on 2nd of June of 1903 she hit a rock and sank. The wreck is well preserved, with penetration possible into the cabin which is filled with cave-dwellers. Visibility is stable because of the rocky bottom. Good for groupers, napoleons, queen angelfish and all other reef fishes.
Earl of Shaftesbury	14 meters	The Earl is one of Sri Lanka's oldest wrecks dating back to the 1820s. A steel 4-mast sailing ship, the Earl sank following a fire on board and she now lies on a sandy bottom. Good for special native sweetlips and stingrays, groups of silver batfish and schools of Fosters barracuda.
Alliance	23 meters	The Alliance is a British wooden sailboat that sank carrying a cargo of charcoal. Resting on a sandy bottom, reef fishes are plenty.
Rangoon	30 meters	The Rangoon is a steam ship built in 1863 by Samuda Brothers in London. She was part of the P & O fleet and did regular trips from Suez to Calcutta. Captained by GF Henry, the ship weighed 1776 tons. One of Sri Lanka's most beautiful wrecks, the Rangoon is upright in full sailing position. Teeming with marine life.
Arcturus	18 meters	The Arcturus is a British steam ship wreck built in 1870. Lying on a large rocky bottom area called Mada Gala, the wreck has some beautiful marine life and lots of soft corals.
Crispigi Cross	16 meters	Coming from Panama, the Crispigi Cross was carrying rice and paint and sank in the 1980's in front of Galle Hospital. Penetration is possible into the stern.
Orestes	16 meters	The Orestes was a British steam ship that sank carrying a cargo of bricks. Lying on a sandy bottom near Galle Harbor, the site is still littered with wine and soda bottles. No information can be located regarding this ship other than that it belonged to the Ocean steam ship Company in
No Name II	24 meters	Liverpool and was built in 1866. She rests on a sandy bottom in front of Galle Harbor. Lots of reef fishes and eagle rays.
Lord Nelson	18 meters	The Lord Nelson is a modern boat that sank in a storm in 2000 while carrying a cargo of cement. Penetration is possible in most of the wreck and lots of reef fishes.
Norsa	15 meters	The Norsa is a steam ship from 1889 lying on Passi Gala, near Conch and Earl of Shaftesbury.

Hikers and View Seekers

Hikers and history buffs alike revel in the steep climb up to [Sigiriya](#) located in central Sri Lanka just north of hill country. The country's most significant geologic site and one of seven [World Heritage Sites](#), Sigiriya is a flat-topped rock formation that is actually the hardened [magma plug](#) of an extinct [volcano](#) eroded away long ago. Popular myth says that the Sigiriya served royal and military functions during the reign of [King Kassapa](#) (AD 477 – 495) who needed a new and fortified residence after usurping power by assassinating his own father, [King Dhatusea](#) (AD 455 – 473). Contrary to the myth, archeologists believe that Sigiriya was never a fortress or a palace, but a [Mahayana](#) and [Theravada](#) Buddhist monastery pre-dating King Kassapa by several centuries. Sigiriya also includes terraced gardens, frescoes, thousand-year-old “graffiti,” caves and abandoned dwellings, and the last remaining paws of the giant lion carved out of the summit.

Adventurers should also consider the beautiful and [spiritual journey](#) to [Adam's Peak](#), which soars to 7,360 feet. The peak is known by several different names: Adam's Peak (the place where Adam first set foot after being cast out of heaven), Sri Pada (Sacred Footprint, Lord Buddha's left footprint, and in one stride, placed his right footprint in [Siam](#)), and Samanalakande (Butterfly Mountain, where butterflies go to die). Whatever you believe, the peak is of great importance to many pilgrims both modern and ancient. The four-and-a-half-mile journey is up 5,200 steps and takes anywhere from two to four hours. It is possible to start the trek at 2:30 a.m. in order to reach the peak at dawn for a truly remarkable experience.

Beach Bum and Relaxation Junkie

It would be very easy to spend a week, soaking up the equatorial sun, swimming in the crystal blue Indian Ocean, and staring at sunsets. Beautiful beaches dot the entire Sri Lankan southwestern coastline ranging from the bustling to the deserted, tranquil turquoise water to crashing waves, white powdery sand and striking cliffs. The Lighthouse sits on one of the most stunning beaches in all of Sri Lanka, and The Fortress, in nearby Koggala. Several hotels also support world-class spas and related services. Yoga and Ayurvedic opportunities abound as well.

History Buff

For over 1000 years, the jungle has worked to reclaim the remnants of ancient [Sinhalese](#) civilization, then called [Rajarata](#), or The Land of Kings. Archeologists and [UNESCO](#) continue to excavate and restore the former glory of the Golden Age: 1,500 prosperous years of dynasties, economic expansion, and ambitious engineering projects such as dams, intricate irrigations systems, and religious structures.

[Anuradhapura](#) became a capital city in 380 BC, but its significance rose immensely with the [arrival of Buddhism in Sri Lanka](#) some time between 247 and 207 BC. Noted prince and war hero, [Dutugemunu](#) (161 – 137 BC), embarked on a vast building project that included many of the monuments remaining today. Anuradhapura is also home to the [Sri Maha Bodhi tree](#), which has been continuously [tended for 2,000 years](#) since a cutting was taken from the tree in India under which the Buddha attained enlightenment. Built in the third century, the Jetavanarama Dagoba was the third largest [building in the ancient world](#), behind only the two largest [Egyptian pyramids](#). Other sights include the royal palace, the [Brazen Palace](#) with its bronze roof, gardens and bathing tanks, and several historically significant [dagobas and stupas](#).

Because Anuradhapura was vulnerable to constant attack by Indian forces, [Polonnaruwa](#) became the capital and strategic center of Sri Lanka around 683. This capital reached its peak under [King Parakramabahu I](#) (1153 – 1186) who invested heavily in infrastructure and public projects. Unfortunately, the following king, [Nissanka Malla](#) (1187 – 1196) nearly bankrupted the capital city with vain and boastful projects meant only to out-do his predecessors. Much younger than Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa is considered Sri Lanka's premier archaeological destination because the monuments are closer together and easier to navigate. Polonnaruwa is also home to the 12th century, 46-foot tall, religiously significant Reclining Buddha monument.

Colombo

Sri Lanka's urban center, Colombo is a typical bustling and chaotic south Asian capital city. It is home to more than 3 million of Sri Lanka's 20 million people, and has the attendant traffic jams, crazy drivers, and overly trusting pedestrians and cyclists. It summarizes Sri Lanka well: a high-energy, multi-faceted maze that is Asian but colonial, eastern but western, historical but modern, grand but humble, Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, Muslim, and many things in between.

Colombo is sprawling and difficult to navigate. The city is organized into 15 districts in a futile attempt to minimize confusion: Fort, Slave Island, Kollupitiya, Bambalapitiya, Havelock Town, Wellawatta, Cinnamon Gardens, Borella, Dematagod, Maradana, Pettah, Hulftsdorp, Kotahena, Grandpass, and Mutwal. To add to the confusion, many streets have both a colonial name and Sinhalese name. The discrepancy may or may not be posted, and the traffic is chaotic. Did we mention that you really, really, really should not even consider renting a car? Tuk-tuks and taxis are everywhere. Leave the driving to the local professionals. Seriously.

Colombo is also close to [Bandaranaike International Airport](#), which is in the northern suburb of [Katunayake](#). The 20-mile drive from the airport to Colombo will be your first taste of Sri Lanka ... and the culture shock of a jet-lagged drive on a chaotic road through some of Colombo's least attractive neighborhoods will likely be a bit unsettling. Don't worry -- the city itself is much nicer than the drive into town.

Many people view Colombo as nothing but a jumping off point to see the rest of Sri Lanka. Personally, we like it. At the most basic level, it provides a nice place that is full of amenities in which to recover from a long flight while adjusting to your new surroundings. If there's enough interest and a critical mass of guests arriving on the same day or two, we will host an organized event in Colombo.

Hotels

There are many hotels to choose from in Colombo, but we have selected the Cinnamon Grand and the Galle Face Hotel and Regency because of quality and location. They are almost right across the street from one another.

Cinnamon Grand

P.O. Box 252, 77 Galle Road, Colombo, Sri Lanka

With 500 recently renovated rooms overlooking Colombo and the Indian Ocean, the [Cinnamon Grand](#) is walking distance from the [Galle Face Green](#). Very modern and comfortable, the hotel's

amenities include spa, massage, fitness center, pool, pillow menu, internet access, and flat screen television with satellite. Additionally, the hotel offers a rockin' fun bar, live music, happy hour, several restaurants (including the delicious Lagoon), and a casual café serving tea, barista specialties, and delicious Sri Lankan and international goodies. Standard room prices begin at \$100, and range all the way to \$1000 per night for the presidential suite. We have stayed here and [recommend](#) it enthusiastically.

Galle Face Hotel

2 Galle Road, Colombo 3, Sri Lanka

Established in 1864, the [Galle Face Hotel](#) is truly an exceptional landmark with its Victorian architecture, sweeping views of the Indian Ocean, and historic clientele of celebrities and dignitaries. The hotel's amenities include pool, spa, fitness center, nine restaurants, wine lounge, butlers, salon, museum, and art gallery.

The Galle Face Hotel has 82 rooms over two wings ranging in price from \$75 to \$500 per night with available meal plans such as breakfast buffet. When booking, most [travel sources](#) highly recommend that you specifically request the recently refurbished southern wing, often called The Regency. Otherwise, parts of this historic hotel feel a little too historic, frequently described as "faded decadence." Even if you opt for a different hotel, no one should venture to Colombo without enjoying a Lion Lager (or your preferred cocktail) on the seaside patio as the sun sets over the Indian Ocean.

Trans-Asia Hotel

115 Sir Chittampalam A Gardiner Mawatha

The [Trans-Asia](#) is currently undergoing a major refurbishment and will reopen on September 1, 2009 as the Cinnamon Lakeside. In our experience, the hotel had 359 well-appointed and reasonably priced rooms as well as a fantastic pool and a well-reviewed Thai restaurant that we quite liked. The rooms typically range from \$95 to \$900 for the Royal Suite, and a tuk-tuk to the Galle Face Green will cost about \$3 and take 10 minutes. When we stayed at the Trans-Asia, we found it [quite comfortable](#) but not as nice or as well located as the Cinnamon Grand. However, there may be serious bargains to be found here.

Hilton Colombo

2 Sir Chittampalam A Gardiner Mw, Colombo 2, Sri Lanka 02

We have never been to the [Hilton Colombo](#), but we feel it deserves mention since it is [highly rated](#) according to Trip Advisor. The hotel has a million amenities including several well reviewed restaurants, a karaoke bar, and a sports and fitness club. The Hilton Colombo is primarily a business traveler destination, but good deals starting at \$110 per night can be found if convention attendance is low. Rates increase towards the top floors which we would interpret as "less bang for the buck." A tuk-tuk to the Galle Face Green will cost \$2 and take less than 5 minutes. The Hilton Colombo should not be confused with the [Hilton Colombo Residence](#) which does not receive sparkling reviews.

The Wallawwa

Located in Kotugoda about 20 minutes from the international airport, [The Wallawwa](#) is very new as well as the current highest-rated hotel in Colombo according to [Trip Advisor](#). Because of its

proximity to the airport, many reviewers find The Wallawwa to be the perfect place to get rested and rejuvenated at the start and finish of the vacation. We have not been there, but with 14 rooms starting at \$140 per night, well reviewed restaurants, pool, spa, and raves about the service, we will definitely be checking this property out during our visit in September of 2009.

The Tintagel

Also a relatively new property, the Tintagel has an amazing history as a private residence. Completed in 1930, Tintagel was intended as a residence for Dr. Lucien de Zilwa. In the mid 1940's de Zilwa was given a week to vacate the property by the British Military to house one hundred soldiers. The military occupation saw the house wrecked and de Zilwa sold Tintagel to Sir Solomon Dias Bandaranaike for his son, Solomon West Ridgeway (SWRD) Bandaranaike, who became Prime Minister in 1956. SWRD was shot on the verandah of Tintagel in 1959 and subsequently died in hospital. In 1960, his widow, Sirimavo Bandaranaike, became the world's first female Prime Minister. Mrs. Bandaranaike won several elections and was re-elected in 1970 and 1994, thereby becoming the longest serving Prime Minister of Sri Lanka. Mrs. Bandaranaike resided at Tintagel right up until her demise in 2000.

The Tintagel is the second highest rated hotel in Colombo according to [Trip Advisor](#), and offers 10 rooms starting at \$200 per night, incredible grounds and gardens, and a swanky international restaurant. To quote Conde Nast Traveller, "Colombo has never had it so chic."

Activities

As mentioned, Colombo is frequently considered a mere stop-over on the greater tour of Sri Lanka. We mostly agree with this assessment not because we dislike Colombo (we like Colombo very much), but because there is so much great stuff to see beyond Colombo. If you are interested in spending more time experiencing the hustle and bustle of Colombo, there is plenty to do including [Viharamahadevi Park](#), [Gangaramaya Temple](#), the [National Museum](#), National History Museum, and National Art Gallery, as well as sites in Colombo's many notable suburbs.

The Galle Face Green

Colombo's biggest park, the Galle Face Green is a half-mile long promenade of lawn along the sea front. With beautiful views and a central location, the Green is quite the gathering place in the late afternoons and evenings with joggers, picnickers, kite-fliers, and street food vendors. The Green's creator, [Sir Henry Ward](#), governor from 1855 to 1860, recommended preservation of the park "to his successors in the interests of the Ladies and Children of Colombo" according to his memorial plaque. Additionally, Sri Lanka's first four [prime ministers](#) are honored with statues in the park, including [Don Stephen Senanayake](#) who died in 1952 from injuries sustained while riding his horse on the Green.

The Pettah

As the oldest district in Colombo, the [Pettah](#) is a chaotic and bustling bazaar at its finest. If it's for sale, it's at the Pettah. The market is organized in the traditional bazaar fashion with specific streets devoted to particular trades and products. Front Street is sanctioned for bags, suitcases, and shoes. First Cross Street has hardware and electrical goods. Third Cross Street and Keyzer

Street are both jam-packed with the most bright and colorful fabrics and linens you've ever seen. For less mundane items, the jewelers on Sea Street have plenty of sparkly gold, the Ayurveda merchants dwell on Gabo's Lane, and Fourth Cross Street is chock full of spices.

If aimlessly walking foreign cities floats your boat, put on your comfortable shoes and go to the Pettah. It's an amazing cultural experience just for the people-watching alone. But the Pettah is also one of Colombo's most culturally, ethnically, and religiously diverse districts as well with a strong Tamil and Muslim flavor. Indeed, the word Pettah derives from the Tamil word *pettai* which means village. Interspersed between tiny shops stuffed floor-to-ceiling with goods to sell are mosques, churches, and both Buddhist and Hindu temples.

If you hate crowds, you should avoid the Pettah. It can be exhausting maneuvering your way through the hordes of shoppers, makeshift kiosks and sidewalk sales, wheel barrows piled high with stuff, and donkey-driven carts carting away recently purchased goods.

Restaurants

There are several restaurants in Colombo that we personally recommend, including [Gallery Café](#), [Lagoon](#) (in the Cinnamon Grand), Royal Thai (in the Trans-Asia), and Raja Bojun (a rice-and-curry buffet walking distance from Cinnamon Grand and Galle Face Hotel).

Shopping

Besides the Pettah, Colombo is filled with fantastic shopping opportunities from high-end jewelry to arts and crafts to the finest clothes from Sri Lanka's massive garment industry. The Galle Face Hotel is surrounded by the Piazza Shops which have many chi-chi labels at low prices. Expect to find bargains and exceptional quality on things like housewares, tea, linens of all kinds, stationary paper, antiques, art, Buddhist and Hindu religious items, masks, batiks, drums, lacquered bowls, and random objets d'art (anything you can imagine beautifully handmade).

Spas, Meditation, Golf

The spa at the Galle Face Hotel offers the full range of pampering.

The [Kanduboda Meditation Centre](#) is a traditional, Buddhist, semi-monastic, meditation community in the style of the late [Mahasi Sayadaw](#). Accommodation, services, and instruction are free through the support of lay-Buddhists and visitor donations. Two complementary meals are served per day comprised of various vegetarian dishes, rice gruel, coconut water, and tea. Beginning or advanced, meditators attend for any length of time from a few days through the full three week program and beyond. The only meditator requirement is full white dress at all times. The centre is about 25 kilometers outside of Colombo and accessible by the Pugoda bus number 224.

The [Royal Colombo Golf Club](#) offers 18 holes of Sri Lanka's colonial flavored elegance. Dating back to 1879, it was the third club in the British Empire to earn the "royal appellation" status. Greens fees, club rental, and compulsory caddie costs a total of about 5,000 rupees (about \$45). Golfers are required to wear collared shirts and zippered shorts or trousers.

Galle

With a population of approximately 90,000, [Galle](#) is Sri Lanka's fourth-largest city and is located on Sri Lanka's southwest point about 75 miles south of Colombo. Pronounced "Gaul", Galle is thought to be the ancient Biblical city of [Tarshish](#), the source of [King Solomon](#)'s many valuable treasures. The combination of its natural harbor and its strategic position on the sea routes between Arabia, India and Southeast Asia made the town of Galle an important trading port long before the arrival of the Europeans.

Galle's modern [history](#) begins in 1505 with the arrival of [Lourenço de Almeida](#)'s Portuguese-flagged ship seeking safe port from a huge storm. Legend has it that while in Galle Harbor, the Portuguese sailors heard a rooster crowing, and thus came up with the name Galle from the Portuguese word for cock which is "galo". However, it is far more likely that Galle received its name from the Sinhalese word "gala" meaning "rock".

The Portuguese conquered Galle by force, ruled with an iron hand, forced Catholicism on the Sinhalese, and built a small fort in 1588. The Dutch captured the city in 1640, building the town's famous fort, establishing a street plan and engineering an elaborate sewer system still in use today.

Activities

Galle provides every traveler plenty of options to keep busy with local activities or as a jumping off point for other adventures. Again, it would be impossible to reproduce the volumes of already published travel guide information within the confines of this document. Please feel free to contact us for additional information regarding an extended visit around Sri Lanka's southern and western coasts.

Galle Fort

Built by the Dutch beginning in 1663, the 90-acre [Galle Fort](#) occupies most of the promontory that forms the older part of Galle. This [UNESCO World Heritage Site](#) is an amazing collection of structures and culture dating back through the centuries, and wandering the streets at random yields one architectural surprise after another.

Part of the Fort's allure is that isn't just a pretty place. Alongside old churches and Dutch colonial villas, one finds a working community, with offices, exports companies and lots of regular people populating the streets. The Fort's main pleasure is ambling around the old streets and around the wall, savoring the easy pace of life. It is impossible not to be seduced by the Fort's understated and sleepy charm ... street facing verandahs, majestic ramparts, crashing waves, and the five-times-daily Muslim call to prayer. The Fort is rapidly gentrifying, with locals selling their often amazing unrestored buildings to foreigners and speculators.

Originally named Kerkstaat by Dutch settlers, Church Street is one of two major north-south thoroughfares through the fort. Next door to the luxurious and historic Amangalla hotel is the [Dutch Reformed Church](#), or the [Groote Kerk](#), built in 1755. Among its colonial charm are the graceful façade, the pulpit's canopy and organ loft, and the floor filled with ornately carved memorials. On Queen's Street, the Great Warehouse was built in 1676 to store and secure ships'

provisions and valuables. Other highlights include the post office, the Queen's House, the [Historical Mansion Museum](#), and All Saints' Church.

Unawatuna Beach

[Unawatuna](#) has won several awards on various "best beaches in the world" travel lists. Legend has it that when the warrior, [Lakshman](#), was wounded, a Himalayan herb was required for the cure. The god [Hanuman](#) was tasked with fetching the herb, but in his journey, he forgot the name of herb. To be on the safe side, Hanuman tore off a chunk of the [Himalayas](#), carried it on his back, and dumped it in the perfect semi-circle of Unawatuna Bay. Unfortunately, the 2004 tsunami hammered the beautiful bay washing much of the crystal white sand out to sea, but the [beach is slowly rebounding](#). Unawatuna Bay is excellent for swimming and general hangin' out at the beach.

Yala National Park

Declared a protected national park in 1938, [Yala National Park](#) is considered one of the best places in the world to see [leopards](#). While the leopards are very shy and elusive, sightings are very common. Even more visible are the park's many elephants. Other residents include [sambar](#) and [spotted deer](#), wild boar, wild buffaloes, [macaque](#) and [langur monkeys](#), [sloth bears](#), [jackals](#), [mongooses](#), [pangolins](#), [porcupines](#), and [crocodiles](#). Yala is also home to a variety of birdlife throughout the beautiful terrain including scrub jungle, brackish lagoons, and huge rock monoliths.

Only one of five blocks over the 100,000 hectare area is open to visitors so the park remains relatively unspoiled. Yala is about 120 miles, or a four hour drive, from Galle. The Lighthouse offers long one day trips (7:00 a.m. to 10:30 p.m.) for about US\$300 including meals, coach transportation to the park with several stops at various points of interest (temples, [flying fox](#) colony, salt factory, etc.), a four-wheel drive jeep tour of the park, and a naturalist guide (mandatory for park entry). Extended overnight versions are available as well.

Udawalawa National Park

While this 30,821 hectare park contains many of Sri Lanka's native species, [Udawalawa](#) is famous for elephants – adults and babies swimming and frolicking in huge herds. Udawalawa is 80 miles, or a three hour drive, from Galle. The Lighthouse offers a day trip (9:00 a.m. to 10:30 p.m.) for US\$250 including meals, coach transportation to the park with several stops at various points of interest (Vavrukannala and Dondra Temples, rice fields, etc.), four wheel drive elephant safari, and naturalist guide.

Hotels

Galle's popularity as a tourist destination has led to a recent increase in boutique hotels. There is a full range of accommodations available in Galle and the surrounding areas, with everything from world-class beach-front resorts to secluded villas to refurbished 17th-century mansions to family-run guesthouses.

When searching for a hotel in the Galle area, you will likely encounter some bargain basement options. At first glance, you might think that staying in a very cheap hotel is a great way to save money. You might ask yourself, how bad could it possibly be? The answer is: it is probably

very very bad, meaning no hot water, no shower at all (just a spigot coming out of the wall and a bucket if you're lucky), no air conditioning, mangled mosquito nets, etc. Don't make the mistake we once made – stick with the recommendations. If not actually seen by our own eyes, each recommendation provided below comes from a trusted source.

On the other hand, if you are a backpacker type, or a seasoned traveler who knows what a third-world cheap hotel entails, then go for it. If you like to rough it, there are serious bargains to be found, but consider yourself warned.

Beyond the below recommendations, many private villas are also available to rent. Varying in size, a villa could be the perfect accommodation for a family or combination of families providing ample living space, full kitchens, yards and oftentimes, pools. Please let us know if you are interested in something like this and we can direct you to an appropriate resource.

The Lighthouse Hotel & Spa

The [Lighthouse Hotel & Spa](#) is the site of our wedding ceremony and is the hotel where we will be staying throughout the festivities in Galle. This is basically Wedding Headquarters, complete with a hospitality suite.

Although not as luxurious as Amangalla, it is a member of [Small Luxury Hotels of the World](#). [Trip Advisor](#) ranks The Lighthouse as the fourth best hotel in the Galle area, which is chock full of very pricey luxury hotels. The quality of the 63 rooms and facilities is at least on par with any of the other (non-Amangalla) hotels in the area, and the [Geoffrey Bawa](#) design is quite visually appealing.

Located one mile from the Galle Fort, the best part of the Lighthouse is its setting on a small hillock right on the ocean. It's not an accident that this is where we chose to get married. It has the beach/pool/umbrella-type facilities that appeal to sun-seekers, as well as a luxurious spa program, tennis and pretty nice gym. The outdoor common areas (pool, lawn, beach) are sprawling and wide open, making the Lighthouse an excellent choice for letting children run wild. It has two great bars (one outside, one inside with a pool table) that will surely see plenty of use during the time of our wedding.

We have eaten at the Lighthouse a handful of times, and our experiences have been mostly good. At the casual [restaurant](#), the Cardamon Cafe, the buffet food was predictably fine, but the a la carte and food-station cooking was pretty good. Breakfast is not to be missed. This is a particularly solid choice for picky eaters and those with children, as the range of food (especially Western food) on offer is quite broad. We have not tried the fine-dining Cinnamon Room (but we can report that it smells great!).

The Sun House

18 Upper Dickerson Road

The Sun House was built in 1860 as a private residence for a Scottish spice merchant. Perched on a hill about 5 minutes from Galle, the Sun House offers privacy, seclusion, and a panoramic view of Galle and Galle Fort. The library, swimming pool, frangipani garden, and signature cocktail (the Sun House Sour) add to the hotel's ambience. According to [Trip Advisor](#), the Sun

House is rated the third most popular hotel in Galle; however, after seeing it, we personally preferred the affiliated hotel, The Dutch House.

The Dutch House

18 Upper Dickerson Road

The exquisite [Dutch House](#) offers only four rooms in this renovated country house build in 1712. No luxurious detail is left to chance from the orchid-draped infinity pool to the silk curtains lightly covering floor-to-ceiling windows to the tropical garden and croquet lawn. Most meals are served steps away at the Sun House. The Dutch House is the seventh highest rated hotel according to [Trip Advisor](#), but it only has one review which is enthusiastically raving. At \$320 per night, the Dutch House is more expensive than the Sun House which starts at \$175 per night.

Hotels Inside the Fort

The Lighthouse, The Sun House, and The Dutch House are located in Galle proper, but not inside Galle Fort. Staying inside the actual Fort is an excellent experience – beautiful, historical, and cultural. The Fort is well located within Galle, so commuting to wedding-related festivities (a five-minute tuk tuk ride) or other sightseeing is far from difficult.

However, be forewarned of a couple of issues that, depending on your travel philosophy, may be considered downsides. First, there is little nightlife to speak of inside the Fort. If late night cocktails and conviviality is your thing, then be prepared to frequently commute to the Lighthouse, or to bring your party people to stay with you inside the Fort. Second, while the Fort is oceanfront, the hotels located inside the Fort are not beachfront. However, some very nice beaches are close by.

Amangalla

10 Church Street

The [Aman Resorts](#) chain is world renowned for excellence, and its [Amangalla](#) is the [gold standard](#) for accommodations in Galle. Amangalla is the result of the painstaking refurbishment of the [New Oriental Hotel](#), which was built in 1684 as the Dutch command headquarters. In 1865, the building was transformed into what was one of the finest hotels in Asia, as Galle's port soared to its zenith. Aman's restoration perfectly respects the New Oriental Hotel's legacy and heritage. The rooms are simply fantastic ... four poster beds, Burmese teak floors, antique armoires, free-standing footed bathtub, shuttered French windows, writing desk and planter's chairs. Don't forget butler service in the Garden Suites. The Spa, pool, and 200 year old gardens featuring fragrant frangipani are just amazing.

Amangalla is also the most expensive hotel in Sri Lanka usually starting at \$500 to \$600 per night. Amangalla offers an Ayurvedic detoxification program – 3 day taster, one week relaxer, and two week detoxification. Additionally, Amangalla offers package deals with Sri Lanka's other Aman property, [Amanwella](#), located two hours east on the beach in [Tangalle](#).

The Galle Fort Hotel

The 11-room [Galle Fort Hotel](#) is, not surprisingly, the highest-rated hotel in the area on [Trip Advisor](#). It is not as luxurious as Amangalla, but the prices are much lower (and generally somewhat lower than the Lighthouse). We have stayed here (for one night), eaten here (twice)

and had cocktails here (three or four times) and were very pleased with all of the above. The rooms are spacious and well-appointed with beautiful antiques and homey knick-knacks, the beds are super comfortable with great linens, and the food is terrific. Karl, the owner-operator, provides remarkable levels of personal service and will help with just about any issue you can think of.

This hotel is right in the heart of the Fort. Neither the grounds nor the common areas are very large, so this isn't really a "lounging around the hotel" kind of place. This is a hotel for people who want to get out and do something during the day, not the room-service/lounge at pool/watch CNN crowd. Many travel guides indicate that Galle Fort Hotel is fantastic for families with children, but we're not sure we would agree. Rooms are going for about \$180 per night.

Fort Printers

39 Pedlar Street

With only 5 rooms, the [Fort Printers](#) is definitely a charming and intimate guest experience. Rated the second best hotel in Galle on [Trip Advisor](#), the Fort Printers consistently wins a plethora of awards including [Conde Nast Hot List](#). The renovated 18th century mansion in Dutch colonial architecture was once the fort's print shop, and also served as a schoolhouse, reflected in the clever names of the rooms. The common areas are fantastic ... enjoy a cocktail in the spacious and beautifully appointed drawing room, and relax on the lovely terrace with a plunge pool. The restaurant is strictly reservations-only as the house chef prepares a menu based on that day's trip to Galle's fish market. Breakfast is not to be missed. Having stayed at both, we would say this is not quite as nice as the Galle Fort Hotel but somewhat less expensive. As of now, a suite costs about \$140 per night.

Hotels Beyond Galle

Though technically beyond Galle, the following hotel options are still quite proximate to the Lighthouse, the Fort, and other highlights of Galle. To reiterate, tuk-tuks are cheap and easy! Though technically beyond Galle, the following hotel options are still quite proximate to the Lighthouse, the Fort, and other highlights of Galle. Trip Advisor provides lots of information regarding other accommodations in [Unawatuna](#) (including the Unawatuna Beach Bungalows, [Thambapanni Retreat](#), [Flower Garden Hotel](#)). To reiterate, tuk-tuks are cheap and easy!

The Fortress

PO Box 126, Koggala, Sri Lanka

If you are looking for a beachside [luxury hotel](#) like you might find in Hawaii, then the [Fortress](#) is probably for you. We have visited and eaten at this hotel but not stayed here. Opened in 2007, the Fortress is a [Small Luxury Hotel of the World](#). The rooms are very modern and receive rave reviews. The ocean-side pool is quite luxurious, and the hotel has all the spa-type amenities one might expect. This is an excellent choice for the lay-in-the-sun-and-drink-Mai Tais crowd. Located in Koggala about 10 minutes east of Galle, the Fortress is luxuriously secluded without being remote. Readily available tuk tuks minimize the inconvenience.

Kahanda Kanda

Kahanda Kanda, Angulugaha, Galle, Sri Lanka

Located nine miles from Galle, [Kahanda Kanda](#) is a tea plantation carved out of the jungle in nearby Koggala. Kahanda Kanda is the number one rated hotel in Koggala according to [Trip Advisor](#). We have not been there, but the Trip Advisor posts speak for themselves. With only five rooms and sensational views, Kahanda Kanda is supposed to be absolutely stunning, and the food receives rave reviews. For those looking for something more isolated and away from the beach, this seems to be an excellent choice.

Aditya Resort

719/1, Galle Road, Devenigoda, Rathgama, Galle, Sri Lanka

Located about ten miles from Galle, [Aditya](#) is located only ten minutes from the hip seaside town of [Hikkaduwa](#) which is known for surfing and scuba diving. We have not been to Aditya, but it is the second-highest-rated hotel on [Trip Advisor](#) and the reviews are just stellar. With the private beach, incredible pool, twelve suites, and first rate staff, it is no wonder why past guests rave. Room rates start at \$300 per night and the nicest suites range up to \$700 per night.

Closenberg Hotel

11 Closenberg Rd, Galle, Sri Lanka

Once one of Galle's finest hotels, the [Closenberg Hotel](#)'s beauty is in the [eye of the beholder](#). What some call faded and tired, some see charming and historic. The 19th century residence of [Captain Francis Bayley](#) offers plenty of colonial heritage including private verandahs, teak doors with arched doorways, and terraced gardens. The Closenberg Hotel is family-friendly, and with three stars, less than \$100 per night.

Unawatuna Beach Resort

Unawatuna

Rated the [fourth best](#) hotel in Unawatuna, the [Unawatuna Beach Resort](#) receives mixed reviews. We speculate that this hotel might have the same problems as any mid-range beach hotel; however, we have not seen this hotel in person so we can only go on the comments of other travelers. The Unawatuna Beach Resort, nicknamed the UBR, is rated so highly because those guests who like it, really like it a lot, calling it quirky and eclectic. Others hate it. All reviewers agree that the UBR has a family-friendly atmosphere and the perfect location right on the beach in Unawatuna Bay (only three miles from Galle). The room rate structure is a bit convoluted with different suite categories and high season supplements; however, one could find a screaming deal at the UBR for well under \$100 per night with breakfast.

The Wedding

You will find this section of the handout deliberately vague in that the wedding traditions are described in very generic terms instead of proper names. While working to follow tradition whenever possible, we will also take some creative license to maintain a balance with our own traditions and preferences. Furthermore, we simply want to provide you with a tantalizing teaser without giving away all of our secrets! Suffice it to say, we can absolutely guarantee that our wedding will be a spectacle.

History

As many of you might know, we decided long ago to get married in the Sri Lankan tradition adhering to the local wedding customs dating back as far as 300 BC. Sri Lanka is a confluence of many religions including Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, and Christian, and the marriage rituals vary accordingly. In ancient times, Sinhalese marriage customs adhered more strictly to the [Hindu Laws of Manu](#). [Manu](#), also known as Manusmṛti and Mānava-Dharmaśāstra, is the most important and earliest metrical work of the textual tradition of Hinduism. The advent of Buddhism during the third century BC transformed Sri Lanka's wedding rituals, and its social structures overall.

The influence of the distinct Kandyan culture is also pervasive in the Sri Lankan Sinhalese wedding ceremony. Throughout history, Kandyan society has held flexible views towards marriage and romantic relationships. This openness was frequently at odds with Sri Lanka's other cultural influences including Buddhism's view of marriage as a secular contract, Hinduism's view of marriage as a sacrament, and the British Anglican's more rigid views of marriage. All of these customs converge to create a rich and beautiful wedding tradition.

Pre-Wedding Traditions

Sri Lankan weddings are scheduled according to Nekath, which means the auspicious time. Nekath is derived from the horoscopes of the bride and groom. While we wish to respect the traditions as much as possible, we will be seeking out an astrologer who is, ahem, cooperative in identifying auspicious times.

The Ceremony

Of the several traditional events that take place during a Sri Lankan wedding, the Poruwa ceremony is the most important. The [Poruwa](#) is basically an elevated and decorated altar upon which the wedding ceremony takes place. On the four corners of the Poruwa are the Pun Kalas which are earthen or brass pots filled with clusters of flowers from the coconut palm. Regarded as a good omen, the Pun Kalas are used on festive occasions.

After an extremely elaborate entrance, the bride and groom step onto the Poruwa leading with the right foot, and greet each other with palms held together.

Auspicious Number 7

The Shilpadhipathi, the master of ceremonies, presents the couple with a bundle of seven betel leaves. The bundle is received by the couple, and re-presented back to the Shilpadhipathi to be placed on an elevated and prominent position on the Poruwa. The [Betel plant](#) is an evergreen and perennial creeper, and is the mild stimulant referred to as Paan in Hindu. The number seven is one of the most auspicious numbers in all of numerology and one of the two most common numbers in the Indian Vedas. The bundle is an offering to the Gods to protect the lives of seven generations originating from the marriage.

The groom's brother presents a tray to the groom containing seven sheaves of betel leaves, each covered by a coin. While the groom holds the tray, the bride takes one sheaf at a time and drops

it on the Poruwa. The groom's brother presents the same tray to the bride, and the groom does the same. This ritual serves to remember and honor seven generations of relatives on both sides.

Golden Knot

The groom's brother presents the groom with a gold chain, which is then placed around the bride's neck. The bride and groom's uncles enter the Poruwa, tie the bride and groom's pinky fingers together with a gold thread, and pour water over the golden knot. The water, and the earth on which it falls, are the lasting witnesses to the marriage. The uncles then spin the couple clockwise three times.

The Mothers

The groom gives the bride a white cloth topped with a bundle of Betel leaves, which the bride then presents to her mother. It is an expression of the groom's gratitude to his new mother-in-law for raising the bride so well. Next, the groom's mother gives the groom a saree, which the groom presents to the bride, and is handed over to the bride's mother for safe-keeping. During this part of the ceremony, traditional wedding songs called Jayamangala Gaathaa are sung by a group of seven young girls. The Jayamangala Gaathaa are psalms describing the virtues of Lord Buddha and invoke blessings for a prosperous life.

Chathurthi Karma

The bride's mother presents a plate of kiribath, prepared with special ingredients befitting the wedding ceremony, to the bride who feeds a piece to the groom, and vice versa. Chathurthi Karma is the Hindu tradition of the wedding couple feeding each other symbolizing the nourishment of bone, muscle, skin, and soul.

The Big Finish

The newlyweds step down from the Poruwa with assistance from the groom's attendants. An auspicious relative breaks a coconut in two symbolizing the hope of future prosperity. The couple lights a traditional brass oil lamp, Pahana, as a commitment to maintain the relationship's love and warmth, and dispel the darkness of ignorance. Lighting of the Pahana accompanies many of Sri Lanka's special occasions.

The Going Away

Near the end of the reception, the bride disappears and reemerges after a costume change. The going away dress is usually red or orange, and symbolizes the bride's status change from single girl to married woman. The wedding couple thanks the families and heads off on their honeymoon.

Homecoming

Another major component of the Sri Lankan wedding ceremony is called the Homecoming. This party is hosted by the groom's parents and typically takes place after the honeymoon. The homecoming is literally the bride and groom coming home to begin their wedded life together. Some homecoming ceremonies are laden with ritual and as formal as the Poruwa service, and some are rockin' fun parties.

Bridal Costumes

Sri Lankan wedding customs have many different influences, as does the wedding dress. Sinhalese Buddhists traditionally wear off-white or gold saris, draped in a distinctive way unique to other sari-wearing cultures, with brocade work and embroidery. Sri Lankan Buddhists and Hindus wear pure white mainly to funerals or temple services. Sri Lankan Tamil brides traditionally wear red, orange, or pink, with braided ropes of jasmine buds in their hair.

The bride is heavily adorned with bling that would make any rapper jealous. Traditionally, the wedding jewelry is passed down through the generations as family heirlooms, but modern brides often find it more cost effective to rent. The bride's headdress, called the "nalal-patiya," is a tiara of sorts. It includes a pendant that hangs over the forehead, and two brooches on either side of head symbolizing the sun and the moon. Sri Lankan brides also auspiciously wear seven gold necklaces hanging in graduated lengths. The longest strand is called the "pethi-maala" or "petal necklace", which is composed of small pendants strung together. Bangles and earrings are also common, but this bride will stop short of piercing my nose.

As far as the groom is concerned, you're just going to have to wait. Suffice it to say, the get-up is spectacular. This is a photo opportunity you will not want to miss.

Other Wedding Related Activities

While there's plenty to keep you occupied during your stay in Sri Lanka, we have many optional pre-wedding events planned as well. The following information is intentionally vague because we are unable to solidify the actual wedding date at this time. Like most places in the world, Sri Lanka moves at a much slower pace than the United States. Planning far in advance is often impossible as other cultures prefer to live-in-the-now instead of looking too far into the future. Flights to Sri Lanka in the 2009 have just become available, and most hotels are not taking bookings yet. This is why it is so important to register for the wedding updates mailing list.

The week before the wedding, we will be registered guests at The Lighthouse Hotel and Spa, where we will also host a hospitality suite for everyone's convenience and enjoyment. Oftentimes, the bride and groom are largely unavailable and way too busy for anything but a rushed conversation. If you are willing to travel to Sri Lanka for our wedding, we are committed to spending quality time with you just hanging out and really catching up.

During that week, guests can expect several get-togethers including a barbeque on the lawn of The Lighthouse, rice and curry, afternoon tea, and various happy hours and dinner functions. If there's enough interest, we are happy to coordinate group tours of the local sites in and around Galle. Additionally, we will provide a sari fitting early in the week for women who would like to partake in traditional dress for the actual wedding ceremony.

Before that, we plan to play travel guides on an excursion to Kandy and another location (probably Anuradhapura) depending on interest. Everyone is welcome to join us on this excursion, provided you're willing to be flexible. More information on this trip will be available later, but please let us know if you are interested in taking part.

Airline Information

It's an awfully long way from the United States to Sri Lanka. Indeed, by longitude, Sri Lanka is exactly opposite the globe from western Texas. Getting there is tricky, and we're here to help.

The major leg of the flight is very long, and as such, we have several recommendations to make the journey more palatable. The first option is to bring sleeping pills and blackout mask. Just kidding ... although, not really. The first practical option is to minimize your layover time as much as is possible. The last thing you want to do is to survive a 10-hour flight from Los Angeles to Taipei only to hang out in the airport, exhausted and dirty, for another 10 hours or more, waiting for your connection.

There is certainly enough to see in Sri Lanka to fill a two-week vacation. However, some people will want to combine a trip to Sri Lanka with a visit elsewhere in the region, and we think this is a terrific idea. The best way to do this is with a four- or five-flight itinerary that begins and ends with flights to-and-from a major Asian hub.

Example of a Four Flight Itinerary

Home to Asian Hub	LAX to Bangkok [Visit to Thailand]
Asian Hub to Colombo	Bangkok to Colombo [Sri Lanka Visit]
Colombo to Asian Hub	Colombo to Bangkok
Asian Hub to Home	Bangkok to LAX

Example #1 of a Five Flight Itinerary

Home to Asian Hub	LAX to Kuala Lumpur
Asian Hub to Colombo	Kuala Lumpur to Colombo [Sri Lanka Visit]
Colombo to Destination	Colombo to Maldives [Maldives Visit]
Destination to Asian Hub	Maldives to Kuala Lumpur
Asian Hub to Home	Kuala Lumpur to LAX

Example #2 of a Five Flight Itinerary

Home to Asian Hub	LAX to Kuala Lumpur
Asian Hub to Destination	Kuala Lumpur to Bali [Bali Visit]
Destination to Colombo	Bali to Colombo [Sri Lanka Visit]
Colombo to Asian Hub	Colombo to Kuala Lumpur
Asian Hub to Home	Kuala Lumpur to LAX

Our American guests will be connecting through another city as, not surprisingly, non-stop flights to Colombo are not available. More surprising is the number of cities from which you can fly into Colombo including:

Anywhere in India

[Sri Lankan Airlines](#) and others

Singapore

[Singapore Airlines](#)

[Cathay Pacific](#)

[Emirates](#)

[Sri Lankan Airlines](#)

Kuala Lumpur

[Air Asia](#) (beginning September of 2009)

[Malaysia Airlines](#)

[Sri Lankan Airlines](#)

Bangkok

[Cathay Pacific](#)

[Thai Airways](#)

[Sri Lankan Airlines](#)

Dubai

[Emirates](#)

Hong Kong

[Cathay Pacific](#)

[Sri Lankan Airlines](#)

Frankfurt

[Condor Airlines](#)

[Sri Lankan Airlines](#)

Paris-de Gaulle, London-Heathrow, Tokyo, Rome

[Sri Lankan Airlines](#)

We should note that we have flown [Sri Lankan Airlines](#) in the past and it is plenty okay. Yeah, it ain't [Singapore](#) or [Emirates](#) or [Malaysia](#), but it's comparable to the [Uniteds](#) and [Qantas](#) (Quantii?) of the world.

Routes to Consider

From Los Angeles

The most obvious connection points are Kuala Lumpur and Singapore.

Kuala Lumpur has the slight advantage of having short layovers and a very convenient inbound arrival time to Colombo on Sri Lankan Airlines. When we went to Sri Lanka from Los Angeles in 2007, we flew Malaysia Airlines from LAX to Taipei to Kuala Lumpur to Colombo with a minimum of hassle and very short layovers. Malaysia Airlines also happens to be very, very nice.

Singapore is not without its advantages as well. It is a huge, “hub” airport, which facilitates side trips, and even has a non-stop flight on lovely Singapore Airlines from Los Angeles (although it arrives in the middle of the night). The Singapore Airport houses an extremely convenient, in-transit hotel where travelers can rent a small hotel room for long layovers without having to clear customs and immigration.

Bangkok is also well worth considering, as Thai Airways has a non-stop from Los Angeles and there are plenty of connecting flights. Coordinating departure and arrival times is somewhat harder to manage here, however.

From Chicago

Chicago has one unique possibility that other cities lack: the American Airlines non-stop to New Delhi. That’s right, American Airlines flies over the North Pole from O’Hare to New Delhi. This cuts down on travel time immensely (pretty much in half) and is no more expensive (often less expensive) than “horizontal” routes. This is highly recommended. Delhi also has the benefit of being near the major tourist attractions of India (including Rajasthan and the Taj Mahal), which makes it an attractive stopover for a side trip.

From New York / East Coast United States / Houston

From here, there are two obvious good options: (1) Emirates from Houston or New York to Dubai and through to Colombo, and (2) get to London and take the Sri Lankan Airways London-to-Colombo flight.

Emirates flies all the way from New York, stopping only in Dubai. The layover on the way to Sri Lanka is long, so it might be worth considering stopping in Dubai (conversely, the layover on the way back to New York is very short). Sri Lankan has near-daily 10:40 a.m. departures from Heathrow that fly nonstop to Colombo. As there are myriad East coast flights to London with early a.m. arrival times, facilitating a quick connection should be easy.

Cost

Coach airfare to Sri Lanka from Los Angeles, Chicago, New York or Washington is likely to cost between \$1,000 (consider this a screaming good deal) and \$1,400 (consider this an average deal) per person. We know it’s expensive, but it is a flight to the other side of the world.

A Final Note on Air Travel

If you’ve reached the point where you are considering booking flights to Sri Lanka, get in contact with us. We have done extensive research on flights to and from Colombo from all sorts of places. For preliminary searches, we recommend www.lessno.com, which has a much more dynamic search engine than Travelocity or Expedia.

A Combined Trip with the Maldives

The Republic of Maldives is a series of 26 atolls, a geologic eccentricity, in the middle of the Indian Ocean. Sri Lankan Airlines offers the quick one hour flight to Male about three times per day making a combined trip very convenient. With warm cobalt blue water, coral reef structures, and white sand beaches, the Maldives is considered paradise by many travel authorities. Take a look at [Trip Advisor](#) to peruse the many luxury and full service resorts to choose from depending on your preferences.

Wedding Gifts

Your enthusiastic attendance half a world away is definitely gift enough. And while we appreciate the thought, we have no need for china, crystal, silver, a gravy navy or any other traditional wedding gift. For those who insist on gift-giving, here's what we want:

(1) A Charitable Donation

We strongly believe in the [Hope Project](#) – a non-profit organization committed to the construction and support of a pediatric cancer hospital in Sri Lanka, spearheaded by famous cricketer and our good friend, Mahela Jayawardena.

“The Maharagama Cancer Hospital, Sri Lanka’s only and fully-fledged national cancer hospital is sadly inadequate in many necessities. The lack of modern equipment, adequate accommodation facilities and the best medicine, coupled with the high number of cancer patients far outweighed its ability to diagnose and treat cancer victims in time. Even though the hospital has a capacity to treat 650 patients, there are up to 850 being treated. The actual demand far exceeds this. A visit to the Maharagama Hospital is a heart wrenching experience. People have to wait for hours in long queues and patients often have to sleep on the floor for the want of beds. Therefore, many die of cancers that are treatable and curable in other countries. So as many as 1 in 10 Sri Lankan deaths are caused by cancer and that is the reason why every Sri Lankan knows someone who has or has died of cancer.”

The Hope Project is a recognized and tax-exempted charity by the Government of Sri Lanka. The Ministry of Health, Nutrition and Welfare of Sri Lanka has already provided two acres of land situated within the Maharagama Cancer Hospital premises. The first phase goals of the Hope Project include modern facilities, the latest technologies, and 450 of the projected 750 total bed capacity.

Through our wedding and our other outreach efforts, we are hoping to raise \$50,000 toward this project.

Although the Hope Project is a foreign organization, we have found a way for our American guests to make their donations tax-deductible. You can make a targeted and tax-deductible donation through Andy’s mother’s clinic, the [VIP Community Mental Health Center](#), to the Hope Project Pediatric Clinic. VIP has started a dedicated account for this endeavor, and you will receive a contribution letter for tax purposes. Donations in kind are not suitable for this account (although [VIP always appreciates items](#) such as stuffed animals, school supplies, backpacks, and new or gently used clothing, blankets, and children's books).

Please make your check payable to “VIP Community Mental Health Center” and – most importantly -- clearly write “Sri Lanka HOPE Project” on the check memo line. Mail it to:

VIP Community Mental Health Center
Attention: Ted Miller
1721 Griffin Avenue
Los Angeles, CA 90031
USA

(2) Wine

It’s no secret that we are wine collectors and avid appreciators. If you want to buy a gift for us to enjoy personally, we suggest that you call our favorite wine shop, Mission Wines. We maintain a temperature controlled locker on site into which your generous gift will be placed. Contact David McDonald at (626) 403-9463 for details, or use the [Mission Wines inquiry form](#) to send an email.

Beyond those two items, we don't need the kind of stuff for which people register. But if you think you know something else we'd really like, go for it ... just keep in mind that we live on a boat. During our travels, our mailing address is Astrid's house:

Melissa Woolf & Andy Heger
1370 San Luis Rey Drive
Glendale, CA 91208
USA

Distance Finder

Distance in Miles From Galle	Destination	Distance in Miles From Colombo
200	Anuradhapura	128
72	Colombo	N/A
N/A	Galle	72
10	Hikkaduwa	61
318	Jaffna	246
144	Kandy	72
8	Koggala	80
206	Polonnaruwa	134
93	Ratnapura	62
178	Sigiriya	75
49	Tangalle	121
231	Trincomalee	159
117	Yala	189