

Travel Tips

VISA

Nationals from 80 countries who visit Sri Lanka for tourist purposes are exempt from visa requirements and automatically receive a free 30-day visa on arrival. Those from these countries who visit for purposes other than tourism should obtain prior visas from a Sri Lankan Consular Office. For nationals of other countries there is a varying fee for the 30-day visa.

The 30-day visa can be extended up to 90 days on the payment of a fee. You'll need to show a return or onward airline ticket out of Sri Lanka, along with proof of funds, such as traveler's cheques or credit card, and provide a copy of the bio-data page of your passport and 02 photographs.

Department of Immigration and Emigration,

Ananda Rajakaruna Mawatha,

Maradana,

Colombo 10.

Tel: +94-11-5329000, +94-11-5329316/20/21/25 www.immigration.gov.lk

When to visit Sri Lanka?

Sri Lanka is a year round destination with an abundance of sunshine all year round. The average temperature is around 27°C - 30°C in most parts of Island. The temperature gradually drops as the land rises towards the hill country, with some parts of the highland as low as below 10°C.

The island has two wet monsoon seasons; briefly between May and July in the south-west region and between December and January in the north-east. However, Sri Lanka has no off season per se as clear blue skied bright sunny days are the general rule even during the wet season.

Sri Lanka is 5 hours ahead of GMT (Greenwich Median Time), 2½ hours behind Singapore and 4½ hours behind Australia EST (Eastern Standard Time).

What to pack?

Sri Lanka has a tropical country and cotton clothes are the most ideal to wear and of course your bathing suits are a must if you are visiting the beaches. Sun tan lotion could be very handy as it can be very hot sometimes.

If you are visiting the cultural and religious sites, it is a must that you wear appropriate clothing. Gents are required to wear trousers to cover their knees or a “sarong” with a shirt or T-shirt. Ladies should ideally wear decent attire such as a trouser or a skirt to cover the knees and a blouse or T-shirt. It may not be advisable for ladies to wear deep necked or a sleeveless top.

Organizing your trip

If you are interested in booking a Round Trip program, the flight times is an important component when making the maximum use of your stay. Most travelers prefer to stay near airport in the first night (if they arrive in evenings). However most European and Middle East carriers arrive early morning to Sri Lanka which is ideal for most travelers to start the tour in the same day.

Currency/ Money Exchange

Foreign currency and Traveller's Cheques may be changed at any hotel, although commercial banks offer better rates. Converting Sri Lankan rupees back to a selected foreign denomination could be done at the airport bank which is open 24 hours of the day. Please retain your money changing receipts.

Currency notes are in 10s, 20s, 50s, 100s, 200s, 500s, 1000s, 2000s, 5000s.

Credit Cards

Hotels and shops accept most international credit cards. No surcharge is required for their use. Cash advances may be acquired against credit cards at certain bank ATMs. Most widely accepted cards are American Express, Visa and MasterCard.

It is advisable to enquire if your card type is accepted by the establishment before the use of any services.

Banks are generally open from 9.00am to 1.00pm from Monday to Friday. Some city banks close at 3.00pm, while others offer night banking facilities. Banks are closed on Saturdays, Sundays, all public holidays and special bank holidays on June 30th and December 31st. ATMs are most found adjoining bank branches island-wide.

Shops

Most shops open at 10.00am and close at 6.00pm. Shops are usually closed on Sundays and Full moon (Poya) days. The full moon poya day has religious significance for Buddhists and alcohol is not served in hotels, bars and public recreational areas on this day.

Customs

You may be required to open your baggage for inspection. Refrain from carrying prohibited or restricted goods. Certain types of animal products, antiques and gold are not allowed to be taken out of the country.

Important Retain your shopping receipts, especially for gems.

Immigration

Embarkation forms are available at the airport check-in counter and need to be filled and handed over to the immigration desk prior to departure.

Water

Filtered, mineral and bottled drinking water is available at most retail shops. Avoid drinking water from the tap.

Electricity

220 Volts/50 Hz Ac. Two and three pin plugs are used mostly.

Embassies/ Consulates

A list of embassies is given in the local telephone directory which is provided in most hotel rooms. If not, one may be obtained at the hotel concierge's desk. Please contact us if further assistance is required.

Medical Facilities

If you need a doctor, please contact the hotel reception. The hotel will have a doctor within the hotel premises or nearby. Pharmacies can generally be found at the commercial centre of most towns.

Communication

International Direct Dialing (IDD) facilities are available at all city hotels, resorts, post offices and telecommunication centers. Postal services are provided at most hotels and at the local post office or authorized sub-post offices. Telegrams and faxes can be handed over to the hotel reception for transmission.

Tipping

It is customary to tip drivers, guides and hotel housekeeping/restaurant staff if the service is satisfactory. This is solely at your discretion. The average tip is 100 rupees for Housekeeping and 10% of your meal bill for restaurant staff.

Food & Drink Tips

Your hotel provides safe and high quality food and we, as a policy do not recommend restaurants outside the hotel. Always wash and peel fruit before consumption. Drink plenty of water during the day to avoid dehydration.

Custom Exports

On leaving the country you are allowed to export up to 10kg of tea duty free.

Purchase and export without license of any wild animal, bird or reptile, dead or alive. also the export of parts of animals, birds or reptiles, such as skins, horns, scales and feathers is prohibited. Occasional exports are, however, permitted exclusively for bona fide scientific purposes. It is prohibited to export of 450 plant species without special permits. The export of coral, shells or other protected marine products is also strictly prohibited.

Applications for special permission to export fauna should be made to the Director, Department of Wildlife Conservation.

Foreign currency regulations

Visitors to Sri Lanka bringing in more than US\$10,000 should declare the amount to the Customs on arrival. All unspent rupees converted from foreign currencies can be re-converted to the original currency on departure as long as encashment receipts can be produced.

Banks

Banks are open from 0900 hrs to 1300 hours Monday to Friday. Some city banks close at 1500 hrs, while some are open on Saturday mornings. It's easy to withdraw money across the island at ATMs using international credit cards or debit cards.

Time difference

Sri Lanka Standard Time is five and a half hours ahead of GMT. (Allowance should be made for summer-time changes in Europe.)

Language

Sri Lanka has two official languages . Sinhala and Tamil - with English as a link language. Most people have some knowledge of English, and signboards are often in English.

Photography: Restrictions & Permits

Sri Lanka is a tremendously photogenic island, so it's hardly surprising that most tourists bring a camera of some kind when they visit the country. The stunning landscapes, the captivating fauna and lush flora, and the stupendous archaeological remains provide great opportunities: a bonus is that Sri

Lankans love to be captured on film. So it's easy to capture the traditional rural lifestyle. You'll find villagers, farmers, fishermen and tea pluckers will readily stand in front of your viewfinder. Your subjects will often ask to have a copy of picture sent to them. This may be laborious, but it is a reasonable courtesy as many may never have seen a picture of themselves. It is also understandable that many will also expect a token recompense for allowing themselves to be photographed.

Restrictions

There are some important restrictions that apply to photography regarding Buddhist imagery. When you visit a temple or other religious site, remember that photography should not be carried out in a manner causing disrespect. For instance, it is strictly forbidden to be photographed in front of or beside any statues and murals. Note that flash photography can damage old murals.

Getting there

Usually all visitors to Sri Lanka travel by air; flights arrive at the Bandaranaike International Airport, 35 km north of Colombo, and 6 km of Negombo.

Mobile phones have been made so affordable in Sri Lanka that almost everybody has one, and coverage has extended beyond the major cities. There are four main network operators on the island; Dialog GSM , Mobitel, Etisalat, Airtel and Hutch. If you'd rather not use your own mobile phone on roaming but still want to be contactable, the cheapest alternative is to get a mobile phone connection with one of these major companies. All these phone companies have a pay-as-you-go plan where you can buy a local SIM card for around Rs.300 (that will work in GSM phones from Europe, the Middle East and Australasia) and keep adding money to the connection as you require it. You will find recharge cards at any corner store throughout the island.