



# Ecotourism in Sri Lanka

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**Ecotourism is defined as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people.” (TIES, 1990)**

**E**cotourism is about uniting conservation, communities, and sustainable travel. This means that those who implement and participate in ecotourism activities should follow the following ecotourism principles:

- Minimize impact.
- Build environmental and cultural awareness and respect.
- Provide positive experiences for both visitors and hosts.
- Provide direct financial benefits for conservation.
- Provide financial benefits and empowerment for local people.
- Raise sensitivity to host countries' political, environmental, and social climate.

Sri Lanka, blessed with an abundance of flora and fau-

na, has a lot to offer the holiday maker in terms of nature tourism and is taking steps to develop this niche of holiday.

Conservation in Sri Lanka goes back to its ancient Buddhist tradition which teaches respect and compassion to all living things. The world's first wildlife sanctuary was set up by Royal edict in the 3rd century BC in Mihintale (where Buddhist doctrine was first preached) and is still a sanctuary today.

Understanding the importance of conservation ecological integrity, large wilderness tracts were set aside by successive rulers, as reserves for rain catchment and pest control purposes. The sanctuaries, national parks, and reserves, where law protects flora and fauna comprise 14% of the island's total land area 65,610sq km.

Within this land area there are more than 70 sanctuaries, National Parks and numerous wetlands and mountain ranges, therefore the biodiversity in Sri Lanka is regarded to be greater per sq. metre of surface area than any other country in the Asian region. Compared with other Asian countries Sri Lanka's ecosystem has more rain forests, mountains, lowlands, virgin forests and wetlands for its area. Other ecosystems which can be found are mangroves, sand dunes, beaches and coral reefs. Numbering over 220, Sri Lanka for its size has perhaps the largest number of waterfalls of any country in the world.



Sri Lanka is a global biodiversity hot spot. About half of its species are endemic, including all fresh water crabs, 90% of the amphibians, 25-75% of the reptiles and vertebrates, around 50% of fresh water fish, 26% of flowering plants and 145 mammals.

### “One of Asia’s Top Wildlife Destinations”

Travelling into the jungles with camps deep within the National Parks is an undiscovered treasure in Sri Lanka on the world wildlife map.

The richness of species is astonishing and there are known to be over 3,368 species of flowering plants, 314 ferns, 575 mosses, 190 liverworts, 896 algae, 1,920 fungi, 400 orchids, 242 butterflies, 117 dragonflies and damselflies, 139 mosquitoes, 525 carabis beetles, 266 land snails, 78 fresh water fish, 250 amphibians, 92 snakes, 35 fresh water crabs, 21 geckos, 21 shinks and 322 non-migrant birds. The island also provides a critical habitat for internationally mobile species, including 5 species of endangered marine turtles, about 100 species of waterfowl, and many other migratory birds.

Described as “one of Asia’s top wildlife destinations”, a new development in safaris is luxury-tented camps taking you overnight into the heart of the National Parks. The uniqueness of such camps is the complete ‘away from it all feeling’; with amazing water front sites, cool breezes and animal sightings.

There are several National Parks, of these the best known is the Ruhunu (Yala) National Park in the deep south of the island. The other parks are Gal Oya, Udawalawe, Wasgomuwa, Minneriya, Wilpattu and Horton Plains. The topography and vegetation change from park to park, even the fauna and flora. Most common in the parks are elephants and birdlife.







### Safari Camping

Sri Lanka is the ideal destination for wildlife safari and camping lovers. Although small, Sri Lanka has many wildlife locations suitable for camping and safari.

“Experiences of a lifetime” come in an assortment of tours, from one day safaris to multi-day camping safari tours. There is a wide range of related options connected to camping such as observing or studying fauna or flora in various types of forests, bird or butterfly watching, or even observing and interacting with the indigenous people (Veddha’s) of Sri Lanka.

**Yala National Park** is situated in the south-east region of Sri Lanka and is the 2nd largest National Park in the island, situated some 300 km away from Colombo. It was at first established in the early 1890s as a game sanctuary. The largest concentration of Leopards can be seen in this region though the chances of seeing this animal are very low, and the creature is said to be one of the most endangered species. About 32 species of mammals, 125 species of birds and many reptiles and lagoon fauna species have been recorded in the park. The Yala National Park is famous among visitors as the best place to view large mammals within one territory.

**Wasgomuwa National Park** is one of the many national parks in Sri Lanka. This is one of the places in Sri Lanka where elephants can be seen in very large numbers. It also rises up to prominence for bird-watchers too, and is also considered as one of the Important Bird Areas in Sri Lanka.



## Bird Watching

Sri Lanka's abundant birdlife makes the island a true ornithologists paradise. Of the 427 recorded species, 250 are resident and 33 are endemic to the country. With such a variety of environments ranging from wet to dry zone, forest to jungle, and hill country to lowlands, there is no end to the fascinating locations in which to spot many of these beautiful birds.

Most of the endemic birds (such as the Sri Lankan grackle) are restricted to the wet zone, while birds such as the whistling thrush and the yellow-eared bulbul reside in the hill country. Others, like the brilliantly plumaged jungle fowl, the striking red-faced malkoha and the shy brown-capped babbler can be found in forests and sanctuaries throughout the island. Among the best areas for sighting these birds are the Sinharaja Rainforest and Adam's Peak Wilderness sanctuary.



## Sinharaja Rain Forest

A world heritage site (Nature), Sri Lanka's most beautiful and biggest rain forest is situated close to Ratnapura and is between the villages of Rakwana, Deniyaya and Matugama. A variety of indigenous plants and animals, flowing rivers and silent streamlets cover up nearly 9,800 hectares. Out of a total of 830 indigenous flowering plants in the island, Sinharaja has nearly 500 plants and out of the 21 native bird species in the country 17 species have made Sinharaja their home.



## Arugam Bay

is a bay situated on the Indian Ocean in the dry zone of Sri Lanka's southeast coast. The bay is located 320 km due east of Colombo. "Ullai" as Arugam Bay is locally known is a popular surfing and tourist destination. Beyond surfing there are many things can be enjoyable, Lagoon tour, bird watching, elephant watching, Kumana National Park, Kudumpigala monarchy and many ancient ruins & archaeological sites.

**Nilaveli Beach** is one of the finest beaches in Sri Lanka, the pearly sands, the breath-taking coastline

this is a tangible proof of serenity in our island. It is so unique that the feeling you experience when you see it, is unique itself. One can really connect with nature at this beach at an intense level. This is a place where most people come to take a break from the hectic lives and rejuvenate.

The beach is ideal to visit during April and October. The Sun is at its most intense during this period so that you can work out on your tan. Watersports are also a huge feature in this beach, surfing and windsurfing are the major excursions undertaken here. This is a must in everyone's itinerary when visiting Sri Lanka.

