

SRI LANKA AT A GLANCE

POPULATION: 21,323,733 (July 2019 est.)

LANGUAGES: Sinhala and Tamil (both official), English

PREDOMINANT RELIGIONS: Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Roman Catholicism

TIME ZONE: 9½ hours ahead of Eastern Daylight Time (New York City)

TELEPHONE CODES: 94, country code

A visit to Sri Lanka sometimes feels like a vacation at the circus. Sitting along the road at the famous Kandy *perahera* (parade), tourists can watch bare-chested men cracking whips, boys on stilts juggling torches, and crimson-robed elephants lumbering along beside their bejeweled *mahouts* (trainers). And the carnival atmosphere doesn't evaporate after the parade ends. Sri Lankans smile constantly — perhaps amused, perhaps joyous — at the spectacles that surround their daily lives: fishers on stilts reeling in mullet along the south coast; young couples walking the walls of the 17th-century Dutch fort in Galle; children searing their tongues with a fiery curry meal.

Sri Lanka was labeled by Italian explorer Marco Polo as “the best island of its size in the world.” And in fact, tourism on the island is rapidly increasing, as visitors from around the world are discovering the fascination of Sri Lanka for themselves. The island is rich in natural beauty — from national parks filled with exotic wildlife to miles of sparkling beaches. It is also rich in history, home to six archaeological UNESCO World Heritage sites.

Sadly, past years of civil and ethnic conflict left hundreds of thousands of people displaced, and many of them now live in slums or barracks-style camps with little or no clean water



or proper sanitation. Most affected are mothers with young children, and the rates of women who die in childbirth and babies who die in their first month of life are higher in these slum areas than in the rest of the country.

COMPASSION IN SRI LANKA

Compassion's ministry in Sri Lanka began in 2010. Today, more than 14,300 children are served by more than 75 Compassion-assisted child development centers throughout the country. Compassion's church-based child development centers are places of hope for impoverished children in Sri Lanka. Under the guidance of caring Christian adults, children's pressing needs for nutrition and medical attention are met. Children also receive tutoring to help with their academics. Health and hygiene lessons teach them to care for their own physical well-being, and positive social skills are modeled and encouraged.

WEATHER

Sri Lanka's weather is affected by two different monsoons. The southwest part of the island gets soaked May through July, and the northeast monsoons arrive December through January.

Humidity is high year-round, however, and you can expect some rain just about every day. The humidity and heat are at their most uncomfortable in April. Temperatures there are about 10-15 degrees F / 5-8 degrees C cooler than temperatures along the coasts. In the highest part of the country — around Nuwara Eliya — it gets surprisingly cool in the evening. Be sure to bring a jacket or sweater.

CURRENCY

The official currency of Sri Lanka is the Sri Lankan *rupee* (LKR). U.S. dollars and other major currencies can be exchanged for rupees at banks in all major cities, and ATMs can be found throughout the country. Credit cards can be used at most hotels, but smaller guesthouses may accept only cash.

FOOD

Most hot, freshly cooked food should be safe, but peel fresh fruit and raw vegetables before eating, choose meat that is cooked thoroughly, avoid local dairy products, and assume the water is unsafe (stick with prepackaged or boiled drinks).



SHOPPING

Bargaining is expected in Sri Lanka. Shop owners are good-natured and sometimes loud, but the experience can be a better souvenir than the item purchased. Depending on the product, offer one-third to two-thirds of the initial asking price and haggle from there. Look for traditional designs, such as the *makara* (a mythical animal), on items such as boxes, trays, lanterns, vases and silverware. Jewelry, tea sets, ritual masks, lacquerware, batik and handmade textiles, lace, and wood carvings also make excellent souvenirs.

ELECTRICAL OUTLETS

The voltage used in Sri Lanka is 220V, and outlets accommodate plug types D, M or G. (For up-to-date plug and outlet information, check whatplug.info and click your destination country.) You may wish to take a universal plug adaptor, available in the luggage/travel section of most big-box stores.

DO'S AND DON'TS

- **Do** visit an Ayurvedic spa. Ayurvedic medicine, which developed in India, uses natural products to treat illness. Even if you're not sick, you can still enjoy an oil massage or a steam bath.
- **Don't** forget that Colombo is divided into 15 postal zones, and that address numbers repeat themselves from zone to zone.
- **Do** be careful if buying the Sri Lankan version of fast food — the curried meat, fish or vegetable packets sold on the street at lunchtime. Its cleanliness can be suspect.
- **Do** handle all security delays as the Sri Lankans do — with a smile.
- **Do** have a drink from a fresh coconut by the side of the road. For about Re10 (10 rupees), a vendor will lop the top of the fruit and put a straw in the hole, giving you a safe and delicious tropical drink. Be more careful about other fresh fruit juices — outside tourist hotels they may be mixed with unpurified water.

- **Do** ask the attendant to cancel the stamp when you send postcards from post offices, or it's unlikely the postcard will reach its destination.
- **Do** bring toiletries, cosmetics, medicine and more digital memory cards or film than you think you'll need.
- **Do** watch your step — Sri Lanka leads the world in deaths by snake bite per capita.
- **Don't** forget to take off your shoes if you enter a temple or mosque.

DRESS

No matter what time of year you visit, bring an umbrella. Sri Lankans use them constantly — as parasols if it's sunny or as umbrellas if it's raining. Shorts and T-shirts are fine for sightseeing, but if you visit a religious site, make sure you are appropriately dressed. Don't wear skimpy clothing at holy sites or on city streets. Make sure your arms are covered at the predominantly Muslim Galle Fort. If you are visiting temples or mosques, make sure to remove your shoes before entering.

Women: Modest, loose-fitting tops (nothing form-fitting) are recommended; sleeveless tops are acceptable, but please cover your shoulders in places of worship; pants, capris, longer skirts and loose-fitting, casual dresses are recommended for women.

Men: Button shirts and polo shirts are recommended. T-shirts are allowed in casual settings. Long, non-denim pants are recommended for center visits and church services.

Both: Shorts are highly discouraged outside of beachside locations. A light jacket is recommended for cool evenings or rainy days.

Shoes: Closed-toe shoes are recommended during the day due to potential unsanitary or uneven terrain.

GENERAL SECURITY PRECAUTIONS

Leave at home all unnecessary credit cards, Social Security card, library cards and similar items you may routinely carry in your wallet. Carry items in front pockets, not back pockets. Do not display large sums of money in public; only make visible only the amount of money that approximates your purchase. Never leave items with cash in them (purse, wallet, backpack, etc.) on a bus, car or any other location. Stay alert and be cautious at all times. Don't take safety and security for granted.

U.S. EMBASSY INFORMATION

Website: lk.usembassy.gov

Phone: 11-249-8500

Address: 210 Galle Road, Colombo 03, Sri Lanka

We strongly advise you to contact the CDC (www.cdc.gov) or check with your personal physician for more information about your specific health needs while traveling, including any recommendations for immunizations.

All information taken from the World Factbook, World Population Review and Compassion International.

USEFUL WORDS AND PHRASES

The official language of Sri Lanka is Sinhalese. The country's secondary language is Tamil. Some common Sri Lankan greetings include:

Yes	Ow
No	Naa
Hello/good day	Ayubowan
Thank you	Istuti
Thank you very much	Bohoma istuti
How are you?	Kohomadhe?
Fine	Varadak neh
Please	Karunakerara
What is your name?	Nama mokadhdha?
My name is....	Mage nama (name)
OK/very good	Hari hondai
How much (is this)?	(Meeka) kiyadha?
Very expensive	Hari ganan
Do you speak English?	Ingirisi dannevada?
I don't speak Sinhala	Singhala danna naa
I don't understand	Mata terinneh neh