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| Country Information Guide 2016 | Abstract  When going to Sri Lanka it’s useful to have a little information about the beautiful island. This guide will have a brief outline of a few important facts and knowledge that you should be aware of before going there. |

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# Quick Facts

Sri Lanka was formerly known as Ceylon and is an island in the India Ocean, south of India.

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| Capital | Sri Jayewardenepura Kotte, but Colombo is the commercial capital. |
| Currency | Sri Lankan rupee (LKR) |
| Area | 65,610km² |
| Population | 20.359.439 (estimated in 2012) |
| Language | Sinhala (official and national language) 74%, Tamil (official and national language) 18%, other 8%  English (commonly used in government & spoken competently) 10% |
| Religion | Buddhist 70.19%, Hindu 12.6%, Christian 7.4%, Muslim 9.7% (estimated in 2011) |
| Country Code | +94 |
| Time zone | UTC+5:30 |
| Information of the Dutch Embassy | 25, Torrington Avenue , Colombo - 7,  Sri Lanka,☎ (94) (11) 2510200 (fax: (94) (11) 2502855) |
| Information of the Sri Lankan Embassy | 2, Jacob de Greafstraat, 2517JM Den Haag  Netherlands, ,☎ (31) 070 3655910 |

# History

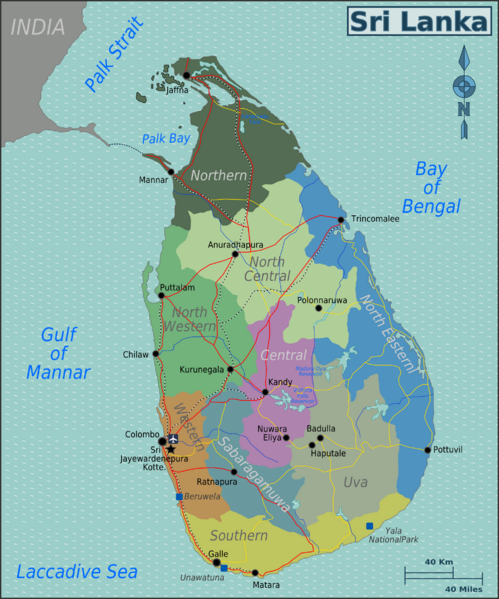
Sri Lanka has more than 2,550 years of continuous written history by means of the Mahawansha, and was also mentioned in several ancient Indian texts. One of the most famous is the **Ramayana**, in which the island, which was referred to as Lanka, was the island fortress of the king Ravana, who captured the wife of Rama an incarnation of the Hindu God, Vishnu. Legend has it that Hanuman the monkey god flew over to Lanka and destroyed the capital by setting it on fire, while Rama and his remaining troops later crossed over from the mainland by building a land bridge across the sea.

The Sinhalese arrived in Sri Lanka late in the 6th century BC, probably from northern India. Buddhism was introduced in about the mid-3rd century BC, and a great civilization developed at such cities as Anuradhapura (kingdom from c. 200 BC to c. 1000 AD) and Polonnaruwa (c. 1070 to 1200). Other notable but relatively more recent kingdoms are Dambadeniya, Yapahuwa, Gampola, Kandy and Jaffna Kingdoms.

Partially occupied by the Portuguese in the 16th century and by the Dutch in the 17th century, the coastal parts of the island was ceded by the British in 1796, and became a crown colony in 1802. The entire island was ceded to the British in 1815. As Ceylon, it became independent in 1948; the name was changed to Sri Lanka in 1972.

In May 2009 government military forces defeated the Tamil Tigers' separatist movement and ended a brutal 26 year-long war that began in 1983, thus opening up a new chapter in its history.

## Map of Sri Lanka



# Visa rules

Since Sri Lanka does not issue a specific volunteer Visa, this guide has information about obtaining a tourist Visa. Visa charges are about USD30.

## Online visa

All foreigners can apply for an online visa called the Electronic Travel Authorization System (ETA) ([www.eta.gov.lk](http://www.eta.gov.lk/)). This "Tourist ETA visa" is valid for 3 months, starting from the day it has been approved. The visa is double entry which means you can enter the country twice during the three months' time. In each entry, your maximum length of stay is 30 days. A visitor wishing to stay more than 30 days in Sri Lanka may apply for an extension. The short visit visa may be extended up to 90 days from the date of arrival at the first instance and further 90 days at the second instance. Note that even with ETA visa, you still need to fill the Immigration Form which asks the very same questions again.

In the event of a rejection, the system will send a referral notification to the applicant and he/she needs to contact the nearest Sri Lanka Overseas Mission for necessary assistance. However, The Department maintains a no refund policy on your visa application fees.

## Visa on arrival

You can also apply for visa on arrival but be warned that it can take long and there may be problems. As of February 2015, immigration authorities at Colombo airport are very demanding with respect to the accuracy of the passport number on your electronic travel authorization obtained online. A single digit mistake is taken as a reason to force you to buy a new visa and refer you to some obscure government office in Colombo for refunds of your online payments. Be careful about 1 vs. I and zero vs. O. The number should exactly match the machine-readable section of your passport, and not anything else.

## Visa from the Embassy

When going for longer than 30 days it is possible to have a visa extension while being in Sri Lanka but it is also possible to get a 3 month visa from the Sri Lankan Embassy in your own country. When going to the embassy you will have to bring with you the following:

1. Proof of departure: Computer generated flight itinerary from the airline or a travel agency or copy of airline ticket showing entry and departure from Sri Lanka.
2. Financial requirements: Travellers must have sufficient funds to support themselves during visit to Sri Lanka. ( a copy of a bank statement)
3. Passport requirement: The traveller must carry an original, signed passport valid for 6 months beyond stay, with at least one blank passport page available for stamp(s). Amendment pages in the back of the passport are not suitable for stamps.
4. Bring two passport photo’s
5. Bring about 60,00Euros cash

The address of the Sri Lankan Embassy in the Netherlands is: 2 Jacob de Greafstraat, 2517JM Den Haag. Directions with public transport: Take the train to Den Haag HS. From there you can get tram line number 17 in the direction of ‘Statenkwartier’ but get off at the ‘Groot Hertoginnenlaan’. Walk in the direction that the tram was going and on the second side street turn in and on the left side of the road you will find the embassy.

## Extensions

Extensions can be made at the [Department of Immigration](http://www.immigration.gov.lk/) (011-532 9300; 41 Ananda Rajakaruna Mw, Col 10; M-F 09:00-16:30), in Punchi Borella, Colombo. The last payments are received at 14:30. The department sets the cost in US dollars, but you pay in rupees. A visa extension gives you a full three months in the country and you can apply for your extension almost as soon as you arrive (the 30-day visa given upon entry is included in the three months). A further three-month extension is possible, but you must again pay the extension fee plus another LKR10,000. Extensions beyond this are at the discretion of the department, and incur a LKR15,000 fee plus the extension fee.

The whole process takes a few hours. First, go to the 1st-floor office and pick up a visa-extension application form from the person closest to the door. You then work your way along the counter, through six or seven stages of stamps and receipts. Then you wait 30 minutes or so while your passport works its way back down the counter and is returned to you. You will need your passport, an onward ticket and either a credit card or foreign exchange receipts.

# Climate

Since Sri Lanka is a tropical country, you can expect the rain anytime of the year in most parts. However, the two major rainy seasons are North-East monsoon (October to January) and South-West monsoon (May to July).

Being an island, the climate of Sri Lanka changes dramatically from one part of the country to another. For example in Nuwara Eliya, in the hills of Central Sri Lanka, it has a temperature of around -5-20°C throughout the year, whereas Hambanthota, located in the dry zone, has a temperature consistently of around 30-35°C.

# Language

Sinhala and Tamil are the two most common and official languages that are spoken. English can be used in most cities, especially Colombo, Kandy and Galle, and by government and tourism officials. But while most of the people in Colombo can speak English, don't expect everyone, everywhere to be able to speak it fluently. In the beach and tourist areas you will have no problem with English. Most people in rural villages, however, cannot speak any English, beyond a few simple words.

The greeting in Sinhala is "ayubowan". It means "May you live longer"; 'Thank you' is "Bohoma sthuthi" and "how are you" is "kohomada", pronounced "Ko homede""

The greeting in Tamil is "Vanakkam"; 'Thank you' is "Nandri"

# Transportation

## By Three-Wheeler

The most common mode of transport in Sri Lanka is a three-wheeler (Tri-Shaw). Also known as Tuk-Tuks from the noise of their horns. These operate in a manner similar to taxis, and in many situations are a convenient and highly cost-efficient way to get around. Safety is a concern however, as none of them have seat belts and they are open on the sides.

Three-wheelers are ubiquitous in Sri Lanka. On any given street, you'll hardly have to wait more than a couple of minutes without one going by that you can wave down. Some are metered and some are not. If available then always prefer the metered and make sure they turn the meter on. This trip will cost you much less than an agreed price. If metered are not available (especially in countryside or smaller places) then agree a total price (which will be a few times more than normal if you are a tourist). Public transport is cheaper by far, and most three-wheel drivers tend to over-price foreigners, so never agree to the first estimate.

## By car

Rented cars usually turn out cheaper than three-wheelers, and are less prone to road accidents and are recommended by most hotels.

Rented car with a driver: Rented cars often come with their own drivers. Often the automobile itself is free, whereas the driver will charge a fee for his services. Some drivers/guides are government-licensed; some are extremely knowledgeable and multi-lingual, specializing in historical and cultural knowledge, and environment/natural history for your visits to the ancient sites and the natural reserves. Some of them may charge extra money, if you want to switch on the A/C.

Rented cars without a driver: First of all you need to have your international licence from your own country with you and also you must get it validated in Sri Lanka licencing centre. You may not drive in Sri Lanka without it! All rental companies will direct you to the right place or even take you there with their driver to help you through the 15 minute process.

There are several rental companies at the airport before you go out but it’s cheaper to get another company from town. Insurance is included (just in case check with your company) and your own responsibility is around 300 EUR. Driving in Sri Lanka is on the left side and traffic is quite hectic - recommended only for confident and experienced drivers. There seems to be no rules other than bigger vehicles have the right of way. Don’t be surprised to have a big bus coming at you on your side of the road so you have to get out of the way. Honking is common as a friendly "here I come" warning everywhere. Note that central Sri Lanka has a lot of steep mountain roads and difficult to reach hotels so if you plan to have a fully loaded car and drive in central areas then at least rent a vehicle with a minimum of 1,5L engine.

Also remember the maximum speed limits for highways 100kmh, Main Roads 60kmh (70kmh allowed only if clearly mentioned on the road) and 50kmh city limits.

## By motorbike

You can rent motorbikes or join a motorbike tour from several places in Negombo. The roads are generally good, the distances not too far and you have the freedom to go where you want to. The locals are always helpful with directions. It’s better to have an existing motorbike license for insurance. If you want to ride a motorbike in Sri Lanka, you must have a valid motorbike driving license along with valid third party insurance and must wear a helmet including the pillion passenger. It is against the law to ride more than 250 cc capacity motorcycles on public roads. Also local police requires you to switch on the head light even during the day time. Don't give your passport to the rental service providers, just give them the photocopy of it.

Another cheap and good idea to go around Sri Lanka is to ride a Scooter, if you are familiar to ride it and have a license to ride it. It is available for rent in Negombo and mount Lavania areas. It can be rented on daily basis with unlimited kilometers.

## By bus

For those on a budget, buses are everywhere. They're sometimes crowded and uncomfortable, but they get you around for almost nothing; it costs about a dollar to get half-way across the island. If you're planning on splashing out, AC buses run most routes for twice the price, which offer air-conditioning and a guaranteed seat. However, they're still uncomfortable. Bus stations are confusing places, especially the big ones, but almost everyone will be delighted to practice their English and help you. Also, when travelling by bus, it is local etiquette in most buses to provide or give up the very front passenger seats to members of the clergy such as monks or priests if they are present.

The buses, branded Lanka Ashok Leyland, come in three flavours. Red and blue buses are government owned, the colourful buses are privately owned. They are more expensive but also generally more comfortable, as well as less punctual. Red government buses travel vast distances across the country. Blue buses will stay in the region. Both of these are somewhat punctual and generally state their route in Sinhalese, Tamil and English. Keep in mind that a bus displaying a static "Colombo - Galle" sign, might well be on it's way to Colombo instead of Galle.

## By train

Sri Lanka has an extensive railway system serving most major towns and cities in the island. There are special Observation carriages for tourists that like to take in the scenery. Trains can be slower than buses, depending if you are on a line that offers an express train or not, but more comfortable and even less expensive than buses. You can look up train schedules on the official site or down load an android app. (<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.aselalee.trainschedule&feature=search_result#?t=W251bGwsMSwxLDEsImNvbS5hc2VsYWxlZS50cmFpbnNjaGVkdWxlIl0>) Be advised, however, that these will only give you results for direct connections between stations.

There are 3 classes of railway caraiges, although 1st and 2nd class are only available on some Intercity and Express trains. Travelling 3rd class is not as bad as it may sound. Often the difference between 3rd and 2nd class is only a missing arm rest between seats.

Trains are generally crowded, especially in the morning and late afternoon. Also, observation carriage seats for popular routes with tourists (like the Colombo-Kandy route) are often booked out several days in advance in the peak season. So whenever possible you should get a reservation beforehand.

The Railway system in Sri Lanka is very picturesque when entering the hill country because of the winding tracks along the mountains especially on the Badullu-Nanu Oya line. Make sure, if you can, to sit on the right side of the train, as it offers the better view.

Travel by Train in itself is a journey to remember, be it traveling to Central Sri Lanka or travelling on the coastal line is just amazing. Highly recommended to travel by train if you are travelling outside Colombo. The Hill train to Badulla is an amazing journey. Preferably choose the express trains, and try to get a reservation beforehand, if you can. The newly renovated Jaffna railway line is expanded up to Palai station in the North. So you can travel in comfort over to the Jaffna town by booking a seat from Colombo Fort. A second class seat can be reserved for just LKR600 in the 06:50 Intercity train and it will reach Palai around 13:00 same day. Palai to Jaffna by bus nearly one hour journey will cost LKR70. Return journey you have to book at Mobitel office in Jaffna town and it is not available from Colombo Fort. A fully A/C journey in the luxury Express train between Palai and Colombo Fort is priced at LKR1,400. Colombo - Jaffna bound train service is started now. This luxury Express A/C train is started from Mt. lavinia at 5.10 AM.

# places you can visit?

**Please be aware** that to get into many of the tourist sites in Sri Lanka, you, as a foreigner will be charged up to x10 more than locals. But still those charges are not so high relative to USD.

Go to Kandy to see the Sri Dhalada Maligawa and Peradeniya Botanical Gardens. Also don't miss out on the traditional Sri Lanka dance performance held every day at 17:00 in the city hall.

Go to Matale and climb the [Sigiriya](http://wikitravel.org/en/Sigiriya" \o "Sigiriya) or Pidurangala Rock, see the ancient frescoes and enjoy a panoramic view of the area.

Go to Raththota, Matale and climb Riverstone, see the Mini Worlds' End and directly travel to Wasgamuwa.

Go to [Anuradhapura](http://wikitravel.org/en/Anuradhapura) and [Polonnaruwa](http://wikitravel.org/en/Polonnaruwa" \o "Polonnaruwa) to see ancient temples, ruins which are very beautiful.

Go to Nuwara Eliya to see beautiful villages which look like England. There are many tea estates and Hakgala botanical gardens too.

Go to [Unawatuna](http://wikitravel.org/en/Unawatuna" \o "Unawatuna), [Galle](http://wikitravel.org/en/Galle), [Trincomalee](http://wikitravel.org/en/Trincomalee" \o "Trincomalee) (Nilaweli Beach), Pasikuda and north areas to see extremely beautiful beaches.

Go to [Mirissa](http://wikitravel.org/en/Mirissa" \o "Mirissa) and Kalpitiya and watch whales and dolphins with privately operated boat tours.

Go to [Jaffna](http://wikitravel.org/en/Jaffna) to see the Portuguese built Fort (1618) it was later expanded by the Dutch (1795), Nallur Temple, Keerimalai natural fresh water pond just 10 feet from the sea and the islands in the Northern Province (Delft, Kayts, Leyden, Middlburg and many more) to see unexplored Sri Lanka.

Go to [Yala National Park](http://wikitravel.org/en/Yala_National_Park" \o "Yala National Park) , Wilpattu , Wasgamuwa for the best wildlife Safari experience. Udawalawe to see elephants and Kumana (Yala East) for birdwatching.

Go to Kithulgala for white water rafting in the Keliniya River.

Go to Dehiwala Zoo. Located in the Colombo district. It will take nearly 8 - 10 hours to view all the animals, Aquarium, Butterfly Park, Elephant Show, sea lion show and the snake farm. You have to purchase entrance tickets. Also you will have to pay for your camera/video. Ticket prices may vary for foreigners and SARC citizens from the locals. When you get inside the compound follow the guide number posted there, starting 1 and it is nearly 60 routes there. 176 route bus pass this place or on the Galle road, get down at the Dehiwala junction. It is strictly prohibited to take polythene bags with you. Good restaurant available inside the compound. Sundays are crowded days especially on school holidays there may be around 5,000 visitors in a day.

Go to Galle Face Terrace. It is located next to Colombo centre and next to the old parliament complex on the Galle road near to the sea. It is a place for locals to gather to spend their evening. At the end of the terrace is 150 years old Galle face hotel. In the morning it is a place for walking and jogging. (0.18Km). In the evening it is a place to see the fantastic sun set with different colours. Street vendor’s sell local food, Coca Cola, Pepsi and mineral water. During the season you can view different kinds of kites being flown over there. Also you can purchase one of them and can fly it. There is a viewing stage built in to the ocean you can walk up to the guard railing at the end. Also there is a flag post and in the sun rising and setting time you can watch colourful flag ceremony by the armed force it is a nice place to capture different kinds of images.

Go to Independence square arcade, Colombo. Fine dining, entertainment and shopping for International brands.

Go to Floating market at the Bastian Mawatha (Close to Fort Railway Station), for local products shopping and dining on a floating restaurant.

# What can you do with your free time?

Surfing from November to April you can surf in the western and southern coast. Best place for beginners is Weligama and Hikkaduwa on the southern coast.

Kitesurfing from April to September and from December to March you can kitesurf eastern coast. Best place for the beginners is Kalpitiya (Sethawadi and Kappaladi lagoons), where you can find kite schools.

Scuba Diving can be carried out in Sri Lanka's South coast from November till April and April till October in the East coast. There are many diving stations and schools that offer equipment hire and lessons. Divers can explore many sites with ship wrecks, marine life, coral garden and caves.

Hot air ballooning is available in the Dambulla area. It is a seasonal one. Sri-Lankan-certified pilots operates them during the morning time.

Bentota beach is famous for its sea turtles farm and hatchery along with lot of water sports activities.

Elephant ride is mainly available at Pinnawala close to the elephant orphanage, Sigiriya, Minneriya, and Habarana areas. If you want to see happy elephants who are absolutely not being ridden by tourists you can visit the Elephant Freedom project. They aim to give captured elephants the best life possible.

Sri Lanka has become a major spot for watching Whales and Dolphins. Sri Lanka is situated within international whaling commission’s protected zone in Indian Ocean. West coast in locations from Alankuda beach in Kalpitiya, Mirissa or Dondra Point of down south, east coast of Trincomalee is the main ports of Whale and Dolphin watching in Sri Lanka. US$150-800.

# Currency, Credit card, ATM and banking services

The currency is the *Sri Lankan rupee*.

Although you will locally often see it symbolised as "Rs" (with and without a full stop and placed both before and after the amount) together with "රු" (and sometimes even "SLRs." in tourist oriented areas), partly for consistency and partly to avoid confusion with other rupees, we use the international symbolisation of **LKR** placed before the amount with no intervening space in our guides.

There are coins for 25 and 50 cents (bronze), 1 rupee (old version is big and silver, new version is small and gold,) 2 rupees (silver,) and 5 rupees (gold,) as well as banknotes ranging from LKR10-5000. Coins that are more than a few years old are typically in quite bad condition.

In July 2015:

* USD1 = LKR133
* €1 = LKR147
* GBP1= LKR206

ATMs are located in many places (especially at bank branches) in the cities and suburbs, less so in the countryside. You can withdraw from debit cards too (Cirrus, Maestro, Visa Electron etc) where their logos are displayed.

Be careful of using credit cards, as fraud is on the rise in Sri Lanka. Mostly your card will be replaced by your bank once you go back to your country. Not every ATM accepts international cards, try Commercial Bank they accept international cards.

You can't send money by Western Union or Money Gram from Sri Lanka abroad. One can only receive money via international money transfer while in Sri Lanka.

# What food to expect

Sri Lanka and South Indian food share a lot in common, and many local restaurants will describe their menus as *Sri Lankan & South Indian*. There are a number of regional variations though, the different types of hopper, devilled prawns/cuttlefish/chicken/etc. and the common fiery addition to any curry, *pol sambol* made of grated coconut, red chilli powder and lime juice.

The staple food of Sri Lankans is **rice and curry** - a massive mound of rice surrounded by various curries and delicacies. If you want to eat a cheap lunch you can follow the Sri Lankan crowds and duck into any of a million small cafes, confusingly called 'Hotels'. These normally sell a rice and curry packet, as well as 'short eats', a collection of spicy rolls. If you are taking road trips outside Colombo, there are endless options for places to stop on the road for lunch. Rest houses and hotels along major roads throughout Sri Lanka have good restaurants, and will offer both Sri Lankan and Western menus. If you are less adventurous, you can easily get good sandwiches and soups at these restaurants. These places have excellent rice and curry plates, and you will be served many different types of curries over an extremely generous portion of rice. These meals are extremely delicious and will leave you full and happy at the end of the meal. Eating will definitely be a memorable experience in Sri Lanka.

**Kottu (Kothu) Roti** (a medley of chopped roti, vegetables and your choice of meat) is a must-have for anyone - tourist or otherwise - in Sri Lanka. It is uniquely Sri Lankan and tastes best when made fresh by street vendors. However, several kottu roti restaurants have been closed down due to their use of stale and old roti, which made some patrons sick. Use caution, and even better, talk with the locals to figure out where the best kottu roti restaurants are.

Sri Lankan food is generally spicy. But you can always ask for less spicy options when you are ordering your food.

Other food that you should try are **String Hoppers**, **Hoppers**, **Pittu** &**Kiribath**.

Note that Sri Lankans **eat with their right hands** - this isn't a major problem, because everywhere will be able to provide cutlery if you can't eat otherwise. But try the Sri Lankan way (tips of fingers only!), it's harder than it looks but strangely liberating.

Fast-food outlets such as KFC, Pizza Hut etc. can be found in major cities.

# What drinks to expect

Most locals drink tap water, but the governments travel website states that it is not safe. Should you choose to drink bottled water (1.5 litre for 60-70 LKR in March 2012) please make sure (essentially) that the Health Ministry registration number which would not have a date of registration more than 3 years or SLS (Sri Lanka Standard Institute) label is present. Some bottles are refiled with tap water and then sold again. Also in some parts of the country you'll find hard water due to the high presence of lime in the soil. **Fresh milk**, due to the climate, spoils easily, and so is often very expensive. Powdered milk, however, is safe and is often substituted.

**Thambili** the juice from King Coconut, is very refreshing. It's sold at the side of streets throughout the island, you know it's clean as the coconut is cut open in front of you and it's cheaper than bottled drinks at about Rs30/- each.

**Soft drinks** are available almost everywhere, normally in dusty-looking glass bottles. The local producer, Elephant house, make a range of interesting drinks - try the ginger beer and cream soda.

"Coca Cola" and "Pepsi" are also available in large and small sizes (plastic bottles) including several local soft drink brands - all available at rapidly multiplying supermarkets all across the country and grocery shops.

The most common local beer is **Lion Lager** (140 LKR in "wine shops" or 200-300 LKR in restaurants in March 2012). For something a bit different try **Lion Stout**. It is characterized by it's tar-like oiliness of body and chocolate finish. Other brews include **Three Coins**, which is brewed by the Mt Lavinia hotel chain, allegedly to a Belgian recipe.

The traditional spirit is **Arrack**, and is often drunk with club soda. The quality can vary depending on how much you want to pay. However, widely recommended brand would be "Old Reserve".

# Stay Safe

### When travelling and also staying at public places please keep an eye on your bags and belongings. Even at train stations or parks there is a chance that people or animals (such as monkeys) will take your things when you are not looking.

### Be aware that talking about religion, race, Sri Lankan politics or cricket may be sensitive topics for locals.

## Possible Scams

If you are victim of any of the below mentioned scams don't hesitate to report it to the police. It may help prevent another person from getting scammed.

**Con men, touts & pretenders:** First time travellers to Sri Lanka may find themselves the victim of scams. Therefore, if you are a first time visitor to Sri Lanka, don't admit it, and ignore all unnecessary approaches and unsolicited advice from strangers strolling around and offering their help to tourists. They may approach you by saying "You remember me?" or by telling you they work at your guest house or hotel, or they introduce themselves as police, some high official, a professional (e.g. airline pilot) or in charge of a location (like a bus terminal). This is of course all bushwalk and just a conversation starter to trick you into buying something or taking an overpriced tour with them. Using the services of a tout for accommodation, local travel, etc. will most likely increase the price steeply. Don't give away money to people on the street. Con men using children to beg for cash from tourists is prevalent in some tourist spots. Some people may approach by saying they have a grievance and ask for monetary help. Don't entertain unnecessary questions and offers, just ignore them without making any eye contact and go along. Don't trust in fake IDs and certifications. **Remark:** When seeking advice, address your question to local women, who generally are happy to help.

**Taxi & Tuk tuk scams:** Tell the driver where you want to go and always agree on the price (for the whole ride, not per person) before the journey and make sure he understands it. Do not allow any stranger(s) to sit at the passenger seat along with you. Many drivers overcharge tourists by collecting entire trip cost from each passenger, just like in a passenger bus. Beware of drivers that offer you to take you to the "best thing in town", which is "too far away to walk" or an alternative to where you want to go because "today yours is closed", dangerous, non-existent etc. Generally, any such (travel) advice is wrong and directions are unsolicited. If you have been told your hotel is closed or full, give them a call. If you want to get out of town, the local buses are a good option - just go to the bus station and ask at the counter or one of the bus guys. While availing the services of taxi companies or freelance drivers make sure that all of your belongings inside the car are safe (make sure things are not missing ,locks are not tampered with.. etc).

**Gem, jewellery shop scams:** Tuk tuk drivers take tourists to gem and jewellery shops while on the way to the requested destination, they will encourage you to take a look because they are paid by the owners of the shop. You may be taken to the workshop to view the process of grinding and polishing. Do not buy with the intention of selling them in your home country for a profit. Unless you are experts on gems don't consider buying. There is a possibility of colour altered or heated treated gemstones being sold to you. Purchasers of gems can verify the quality at many centres of Sri Lankan National Gem & Jewellery Authority without paying any fee.

**Spice garden & Ayurveda medicine scam:** You may be taken around to visit a spice garden and afterwards to a shop selling natural products, most of the shops sell these spurious products at inflated prices. Mostly the ride there is for free, but be prepared to find yourself in the middle of nowhere just to be presented with these expensive products. The Ayurvedic oils may contain recycled engine oil and other harmful substances which may cause irritation to the skin.

**Ayurveda massage scam:** Many Ayurveda massage centres are run by poorly trained staff working in dirty environments, drivers working in tandem with touts take gullible tourists to these centres operating without any license ,Firmly reject such approaches as they are total rip offs.

**Safari scams:** Many international tourist operators rely on the freelance safari tour operators at the national parks. Sometimes tourists are coerced into paying a larger amount upon arrival at the park gates.

**Fake ticket scams:** Tickets for visiting cultural attraction sites should only be purchased from the authorized selling counters, do not give your tickets to your guide, driver or anyone else after exiting the sites. These tickets may be resold to other gullible tourists with the connivance of corrupt officials.

**Credit card scams:** Be very careful when you use credit cards in hotels and stores. Always pay in cash if possible and use credit cards only in emergencies. Withdrawing cash at ATM is much safer and cash can be withdrawn from ATMs in all major towns. Avoid ATM machines situated in isolated areas, as there is a possibility of card skimming.

**E-Visa scams:** Many websites offer e-visa to Sri Lanka at exorbitant prices. Make sure that you are applying at the original government website, which is [http://www.eta.gov.lk](http://www.eta.gov.lk/).

# Solo Female Travellers

Solo females traveling on the island frequently face harassment from tuk tuk drivers, on public transport and near beach areas. Thus, solo female travel is not recommended. Rape/sexual assault against female tourists is sharply increasing.

Also, beware of single males who wish you to accompany them after a religious service. First, ask other members if the person is honest and reliable. Dishonest Sri Lankans, although rare, (mostly male) are very adept at talking tourists out of their money, and generally prefer this method over violence. They are frequent at the Galle Face Road area surrounding the tourist hotels, Galle Face Hotel and the Holiday Inn. Their "modus operandi" is to tell you upfront that they don't want anything from you, only to talk. There may be an auspicious day occurring in Sri Lanka and they will use this to coerce you to accompany them to a temple or church. They will wine, dine, and pay for everything, and then, after two days, will begin to extort money from you. This does not happen commonly but there have been a few cases - so beware.

# War and Terrorism

Sri Lanka's lengthy and bloody civil war ended in May 2009, when the government forces finally wiped out the LTTE. However, there might be one or two land mines, which can be troublesome, and the facilities in northern (and some parts of the east) cities and towns are war torn. These were the areas where the LTTE lived. The Sri Lanka Army is currently engaged in rapidly clearing landmines laid out by LTTE separatists. It's a long and difficult process.

Bombings and assassinations were a firm part of both sides in the conflict, and there is heavy security in all sensitive locations. While the separatists have never targeted tourists there have been deaths, notably in a landmine explosion at Wilpattu National Wild Park in 2006, and some have been wounded by terrorist actions. War is, after all, dangerous. In general, though, traffic accidents kill more people than terrorism (although according to statistical estimates, in the year 2005 for example, approximately 2300 people died in Sri Lanka due to road traffic crashes, and while the road traffic death rate in Sri Lanka is considered low when compared with other low-income countries, it has been steadily rising for several years).

Violent crime is not usually any more serious a problem for tourists in Sri Lanka than it is anywhere. There has been an increase in violent crimes involving tourists in the past few years, but it is still very rare. Tourists should exercise the same care and attention as they would at home.

In June of 2009, the Sri Lankan government lifted travel alerts after the military defeat of rebel insurgents in the north of the country, though it is advisable to check with the local travel advisory bureau in your country if there is any doubt.

# Stay Healthy

**Vaccination** are recommended for Hepatitis A+B and Tetanus. Also, the Typhus vaccination outside of tourist areas especially in the wet season. The CDC also recommends vaccination against [**Japanese encephalitis**](http://wikitravel.org/wiki/en/index.php?title=Japanese_encephalitis&action=edit&redlink=1).

[**Dengue fever**](http://wikitravel.org/en/Dengue_fever): During the rainy season use mosquito repellent. When head and joint aches occur get a blood check. There is no vaccination yet.

[**Malaria**](http://wikitravel.org/en/Malaria) : [Gampaha](http://wikitravel.org/en/Gampaha" \o "Gampaha) (e.g. Negombo), [Colombo](http://wikitravel.org/en/Colombo), [Kalutara](http://wikitravel.org/en/Kalutara" \o "Kalutara), [Galle](http://wikitravel.org/en/Galle), and [Nuwara Eliya](http://wikitravel.org/en/Nuwara_Eliya) districts are considered **malaria free**, as is the city (but not the entire district) of [Kandy](http://wikitravel.org/en/Kandy). Elsewhere, malaria exists and is most likely in [Anuradhapura](http://wikitravel.org/en/Anuradhapura). In the dry season, using **DEET repellent** for a mid-day road or train trip to Kandy (including visits to the Peradeniya Gardens) or Nuwara Eliya should suffice. Risk increases after sunset. **Malaria prophylaxis (anti-malarials)** are warranted for trips to the north (especially Anuradhapura), east, and southeast (however some types are not available locally, and it may not be as effective as what you could obtain back home.)

[**Yellow fever**](http://wikitravel.org/en/Yellow_fever): A yellow fever vaccination certificate is required from travellers over 1 year of age coming from infected areas.

[**Filarial**](http://wikitravel.org/wiki/en/index.php?title=Filaria&action=edit&redlink=1): Sri Lanka is the first country in the South Asia region to eradicate Filarial.

[**Polio**](http://wikitravel.org/wiki/en/index.php?title=Polio&action=edit&redlink=1): Sri Lanka is considered Polio free.

Although snake bites are extremely rare among tourists (comparable to being struck by lightning), anyone bitten should seek prompt medical care. This is true even if the bite doesn't result in any pain and swelling. The National Emergency number is 119. In Colombo, dial either 119 or if you want an emergency ambulance - 110.

There are tiny little flies that live in the sand. Any contact with the dry sand usually results in bites and subsequent painful scratch.

**Toilet Paper** cannot be taken for granted. In public restrooms, and even some houses you may visit may not have clean toilet paper. Locals tend to wash themselves after using the toilet using a shower head. However, towels to dry oneself afterward are not supplied either. As a result, travellers should either carry a roll of toilet paper or a towel depending on preference.

# Respect

There are several customs that take a bit of getting used to.

* It is **customary to remove shoes** and **wear conservative attire (i.e. no miniskirts, tank tops, short pants etc.)** when visiting temples. It is also the custom to remove shoes before entering a home, though this is not as strictly followed as in places such as Japan.
* **Never touch or pat the top of the head** of Buddhist monks, including children who practice at a temple.
* Do not **turn your back** to (or be alongside) a Buddha statue when within a reasonable distance (observe what others are doing). This includes posing for photos. It's OK to photograph a statue, but all persons should be facing it.
* **Public nudity** is illegal in Sri Lanka - nude/topless sunbathing and skinny dipping should be avoided, except in the private beach resorts which allow it.
* **Be respectful to monks**. There's no particular etiquette for Westerners - just be polite. Always give them a seat on a crowded bus (unless you're disabled or very elderly).
* Seemingly innocuous **public displays of affection** between lovers such as kissing and/or hugging may be culturally frowned upon as it is considered to be private behaviour but it is acceptable in functions and establishments designated for adults such as nightclubs, casinos and beach parties. Much lenience is given to foreigners and holding hands and public affection between parents and their children is not frowned upon.

