

Ancient Kingdoms of Sri Lanka



Trace the history of Sri Lanka through its ancient and modern capitals on this 10-night historical tour. Discover the origins of Sinhalese culture in ancient Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa and Sigiriya, before venturing to Kandy, Sri Lanka's colonial-era capital. The tour continues into the highland town of Nuwara Eliya, in Sri Lanka's tea region, before ending with a stay in a rainforest eco-lodge.

Day 1: Arrive Colombo

You will be met on arrival into Colombo and transferred to the Ramada Hotel, where you stay one night in a double room (inc. breakfast).

Ramada Hotel

The Ramada Hotel is a comfortable city resort situated close to Galle Face Beach. Perfect for a first or last night stay in Colombo, it offers comfortable rooms with all the expected amenities. All rooms feature internet access. Hotel facilities include a gym, sauna and pool.

Day 2: Colombo – Anuradhapura (B)

After breakfast at your hotel, depart Colombo for Anuradhapura in a private vehicle (approx. 5 hours). On arrival, check-in at the Palm Garden Village for two nights (inc. breakfast).

Palm Garden Village

The Palm Garden Village is a comfortable garden hotel situated in Anuradhapura. Set in a beautiful natural setting, it's a relaxed resort, as well as a great base from which to plan excursions into the surrounding area.



Palm Garden occupies a huge area of parkland in what was formerly a Sri Lankan chena plantation. Guests are accommodated in garden cottages, which are scattered widely around the grounds. All rooms are en-suite and comfortably furnished. Guest facilities include a swimming pool, restaurant & bar.

Day 3: Anuradhapura (B)

Meet with your guide after breakfast and embark on a guided tour of the UNESCO World Heritage site of Anuradhapura.

Now a picturesque ruin, the ancient city of Anuradhapura was once the centre of Sri Lankan civilization, and provides a fascinating insight into early Sinhalese culture.

Though little-known today, few ancient capitals were as long lasting or as influential as Anuradhapura. Founded in the 4th-century BC, Anuradhapura served as the political and religious capital of Sri Lanka for over 1,300 years, before succumbing to invaders from southern India in the late tenth-century AD. During this period, the city saw the rise and fall of no fewer than 113 Sinhalese kings.

At its height, Anuradhapura was a major spiritual centre, containing hundreds of Buddhist monasteries and temples. While exploring the ruins, you'll stumble upon bell-shaped stupas constructed of red brick, crumbling temples and magnificent sculptures, foremost among them the beautifully-preserved Thuparamaya, said to contain the clavicle of the Buddha. Moving away from the temples, you'll discover the foundations of what were once palaces and homes, while the early Sri Lankans' talent for urban planning is reflected in Anuradhapura's sophisticated system of canals and reservoirs.



Day 4: Anuradhapura – Sigiriya (B)

Depart Anuradhapura after breakfast and journey south to Sigiriya (approx. 1½ hours). Check-in at Aliya Resort & Spa for two nights (inc. breakfast).

Aliya Resort & Spa

This boutique resort is named after Sri Lanka's most iconic animal, the elephant – or "Aliya", in Sinhalese. Nestled in verdant forest, where wild elephants dwell, the Aliya is stylish yet simple, designed so as to blend in easily with its natural surroundings. Guests are accommodated in en-suite chalets or tents, which have been attractively-furnished and which enjoy marvellous views.



Late this afternoon, after lunch and some time to rest at Aliya Resort, embark on an exciting journey into Minneriya National Park for a 4x4 safari. Declared a wildlife sanctuary in 1931, Minneriya is one of Sri Lanka's most beautiful parks. Almost 90sq km in size, it encompasses a diverse eco-system of wetland, forest and scrub, centred on the ancient Minneriya Tank, a 3rd-century reservoir. Most famous for its wild elephants, which congregate on Minneriya's open plains in vast herds, the park is also notable for its rarer mammals, including sambar deer, leopard (very rarely sighted) and the endemic to Sri Lanka toque macaque monkey.

Day 5: Sigiriya and Polonnaruwa (B)

An early start today, as you set off for the Sigiriya Rock Fortress. Often dubbed the Eighth Wonder of the World, this giant rock citadel is Sri Lanka's most spectacular monument. Built in the 5th-century AD, during the reign of King Kasyapa, it's an astounding feat of engineering, as well as an example of early Sinhalese art and iconography.

Allow 3-4 hours to get to the summit of Sigiriya and down. It's a steep climb but worth the effort for the marvellous views from the top. Close to the summit, you pass through the "Lion Paws", which overlook the former royal gardens below, presenting a splendid spectacle.

Take the time to examine the Lion Rock's intricate frescoes, which recall the Gupta style of paintings found in India, and the equally stunning "mirror wall", with its ancient graffiti.

Before departing Sigiriya, be sure to pay a visit to the museum at its entrance, which explains how the citadel's sophisticated irrigation system was once used to pump water to its summit. After exploring the citadel, travel back to your lodge for lunch.

In the afternoon, explore the ancient ruins at Polonnaruwa.



Polonnaruwa rose to prominence following the fall of Anuradhapura. The crown jewel of King Parakramabahu I, it served as Sri Lanka's capital during the 11th and 12th centuries, and remains one of the country's most impressive repositories of tradition and culture.



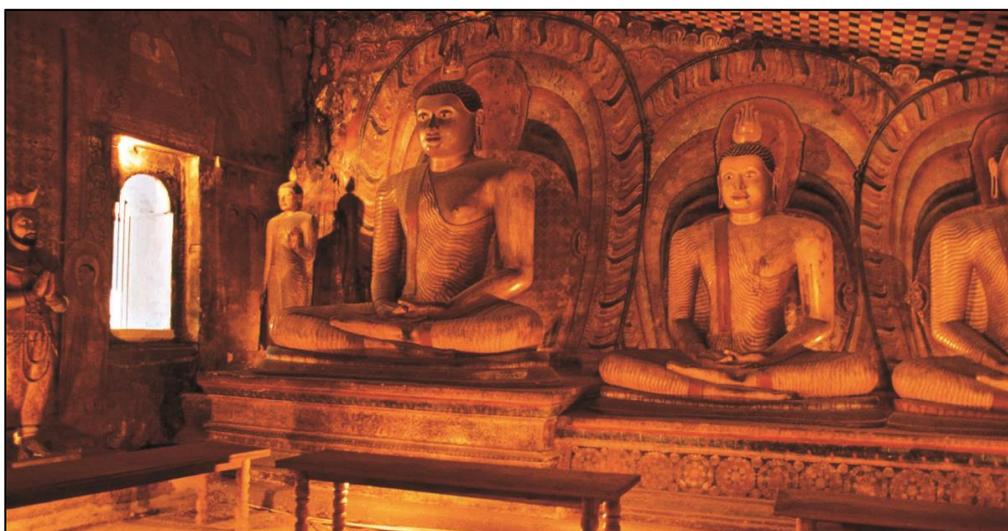
Allow 2-3 hours to explore within Polonnaruwa's old stone walls, where you'll encounter crumbling stupas, reclining Buddha statues, and intricately-carved Hindu sculptures. Exploring the ancient city's numerous monuments, you'll be able to continue the journey through Sri Lanka's history that you began in Anuradhapura.

Return to your lodge late afternoon, with the evening at leisure.

Day 6: Sigiriya – Kandy (B, L)

Depart Sigiriya for Kandy (approx. 3½ hours), travelling via Matale and the Dambulla Cave Temples.

The Royal Rock Temple complex in Dambulla consists of five separate caves, housing between them well over one hundred Buddha statues and paintings. Dating back to the 1st-century BC, they constitute Sri Lanka's largest and best-preserved cave temple complex, and contain some of the country's most iconic and evocative examples of religious art.



Adjoining the Dambulla Rock Temples is the Golden Temple, said to date back to the 5th-century BC.



After exploring Dambulla, take a tour of the Ranweli Spice Garden, where you'll be able to learn about the great variety of spices grown in Sri Lanka, followed by a lunch served in the paddy fields.

After lunch, continue to Kandy. On arriving into the city, check-in at the Hotel Suisse for two nights (inc. breakfast).

Hotel Suisse

Situated close to the heart of Kandy, this 90 room colonial-era hotel occupies nearly four acres of landscaped gardens overlooking the famous Kandy Lake. The building dates back to the 17th-century, when it was used as a ministerial residence, before being acquired by British colonists in the 19th-century. It was only in the 20th-century that it was converted, first into a private guesthouse, and later into the present Hotel Suisse (the name derived from the Swiss family that bought the building prior to its conversion).

Hotel Suisse stands to this day as the city's oldest hotel. It offers immaculately furnished rooms and facilities, including a lounge bar, traditional Sri Lankan restaurant, outdoors pool, and spa & sauna.

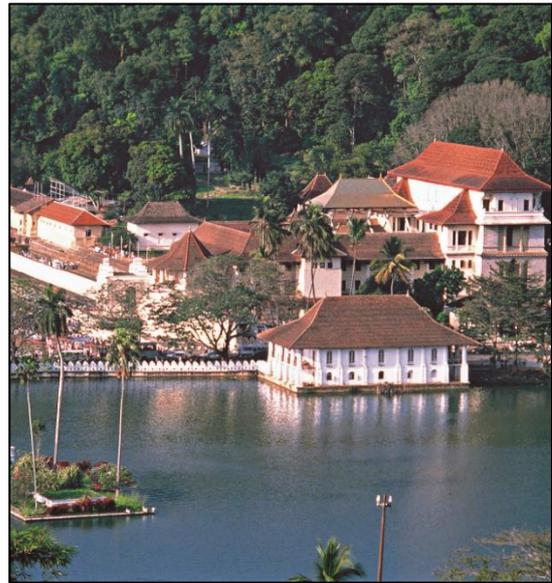


Day 7: Kandy (B, L)

This morning, embark on a tour of Kandy accompanied by an experienced guide, continuing your tour of Sri Lanka's history through its former capitals.

The last royal capital of the Sinhalese kings, succeeding both Polonnaruwa and Anuradhapura, Kandy is among Sri Lanka's best-preserved "sacred cities". However, unlike the former ancient capitals you've visited thus far (old Anuradhapura being very much distinct from the modern city of Anuradhapura), Kandy is also a vibrant, living city, with a thriving economy and lively market centre.

Take the time to explore the city with your guide, visiting its most famous colonial-era and royal monuments, including Sri Dalada Maligawa (the Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic).

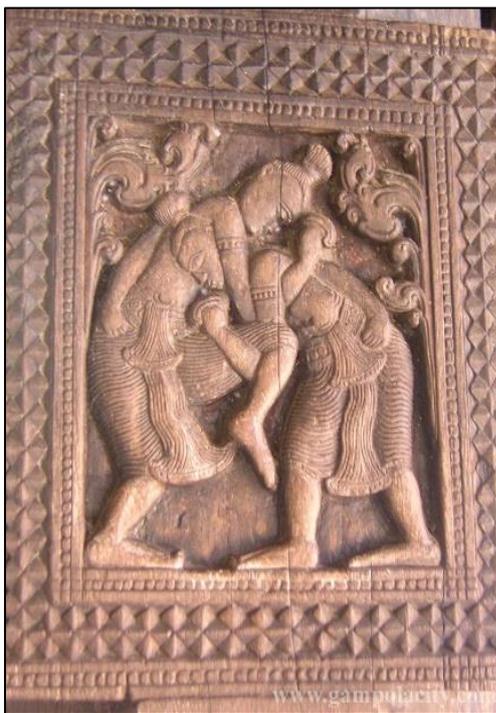


Early afternoon, stop for lunch at a local resident's home, where you'll be able to learn more about the city's people and their history. Late afternoon, we recommend tea at the iconic Queen's Hotel or the Empire Cafe.

Dinner is to your own account. You might like to sample hoppers, a traditional Sri Lankan dish, at Avanhala, followed by drinks at the kitsch Helga's Folly, Kandy's most eccentric bar and hotel which has played host to everyone from Laurence Olivier to Gandhi!

Day 8: Kandy - Nuwara Eliya (B)

Start the day with a tour of the Three Temple Loop of Embekke, Lankathilaka and Gadaladeniya.



This trio of temples are among the most impressive examples of religious architecture in the Kandy region.

The first, Embekke Devalaya (late 14th-century), is situated south of Kandy, in semi-rural surrounds near the village of Daulagala. Dedicated to the Hindu god Kataragama, Embekke is most famous for its intricate wood carvings and ornate drummer's hall.

Built in 1344, Lankathilaka predates Embekke Devalaya by several years, and conforms to a more traditional Sinhalese design style. The interior of the temple has been beautifully preserved, its painted wooden doors still bright with their original paint work from the later Kandyan era.

Gadaladeniya, the most significant of the three temples, enjoys impressive views of the surrounding countryside from its hilltop position. Among its most notable features are its 638-year-old teak wood doors, which still exhibit their original paintings.

Late morning, transfer to Peradeniya Station and board the 12:30pm train to Nanu Oya (approx. 3½ hours; first class observation carriage).

On arrival in Nanu Oya, you will be met by your guide and transferred to the Windsor Hotel in Nuwara Eliya, where you stay two nights (inc. breakfast).



Windsor Hotel

The Windsor is a comfortable, family-run hotel situated close to the centre of Nuwara Eliya, where it enjoys easy access to the Queen Victoria Park.

The Windsor's 49 rooms are attractively furnished and feature en-suite bathrooms and polished wooden floors, and have views over the town or onto the surrounding countryside.

In the afternoon, enjoy a guided tour of Nuwara Eliya, one of Sri Lanka's most typical colonial-era hill stations. Stop at the tea factory to learn the story of Ceylon Tea, and enjoy the cool and pleasant climate, a refreshing change from the tropical heat of the lowlands!



Day 9: Nuwara Eliya – Sinharaja (B)

Depart Nuwara Eliya this morning and travel by road to Sinharaja (approx. 4½ hours). On arrival, check-in at the Sinharaja Rainforest Ecolodge for two nights in a chalet (half board basis).



The Rainforest Ecolodge

This small, intimate eco-lodge features just 20 comfortable forest chalets, each of which has been built from recycled materials. The rooms are raised on stilts and enjoy marvellous views of the Sinharaja forest canopy and surrounding tea plantation from their private verandahs.

Inside, the chalets are spacious and generously furnished. Each has an en-suite bathroom, bedroom and separate living area, and opens onto a private deck overlooking the tea plantation or forest.

Day 10: Sinharaja Rainforest (B, L)

After breakfast, embark on a guided walking tour in the Sinharaja Rainforest accompanied by a naturalist guide.

Sri Lanka's only natural UNESCO World Heritage Site, Sinharaja Rainforest is host to a spectacular diversity of fauna and flora, including over 100 endemic species (most of them amphibian!)

There are a number of trekking routes through the rainforest of varying altitude and length. Each offers a different perspective on the forest and its wildlife, so let your guide know what your main interests are, whether you want to discover Sinharaja's many amphibians or its equally rich birdlife, and they'll plan a route to accommodate your interests.

Return to your lodge late afternoon.



Day 11: International departure

You will be collected from the lodge after breakfast and transferred to Bandaranaike International Airport (Colombo) for your international flight home, or to a city hotel in Colombo or nearby Negombo if your flight schedule requires a night at the end of the itinerary (additional hotel night at extra cost).

Please see price guide on next page.

Price Guide

The cost of this itinerary is from **£1,850 per person**, based on twin/double share and subject to availability at the time of booking. For more information, or if you would like to enquire about a tailor-made holiday combining part or all of the above itinerary, please [contact us](#).

Includes:

- Accommodation and meals as described
- Activities as per itinerary (optional activities on self-guided days are not included)
- All transfers as outlined
- Private driver-guide and vehicle
- Return airport transfers

Excludes:

- International flights – please ask us for a quote
- Travel insurance
- Meals not specified
- Items of a personal nature
- Additional activities
- Tips

