Ancient Kingdoms of Sri Lanka

Trace the history of Sri Lanka through its ancient and modern capitals on this 10-day 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 ends with a visit to the highland town of Nuwara Eliya, in Sri Lanka's tea region, followed by a stay in a rainforest eco-lodge.

Day 1: Arrive Colombo
You will be met on arrival at Colombo airport 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 the Ramada, depart Colombo for Anuradhapura in a private vehicle (approx. 5 hours). On arrival, check into the Palm Garden Village for two nights (inc. breakfast).

Palm Garden Village
The Palm Garden Village is an eco-friendly hotel in Anuradhapura. Set in a beautiful natural setting, it’s a wonderfully relaxed resort, as well as a great base from which to plan excursions into the surrounding area.

Your Financial Protection
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For more information see our booking terms and conditions.
Palm Garden occupies a huge area of parkland in what was formerly a chena plantation. Guests are accommodated in cosy garden cottages, which are scattered widely around the grounds to ensure privacy. All rooms are en-suite and comfortably furnished. Guest facilities include a swimming pool, restaurant, bar, and gym & health centre providing natural ayurvedic treatments.

Day 3: Anuradhapura (B)
Meet with your guide after breakfast and embark on a guided tour of the UNESCO World Heritage site of Anuradhapura. This ancient city, now a picturesque ruin, 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 1300 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 in a private vehicle and journey south to Sigiriya (approx. 1 ½ hrs). Check into 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 elephant 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 beautifully furnished and which enjoy marvellous views.

The afternoon is at leisure. This evening, 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 elephant, 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 a spectacular example of early Sinhalese art and iconography.

Allow 3-4 hours to climb to the summit of Sigiriya. 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 middle ages, 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 begun in Anuradhapura.

Return to your lodge late afternoon. The evening is free for you to relax or, time-allowing, to enjoy a sunset game drive in Minneriya National Park.

Day 6: Sigiriya – Kandy (B, L)
Depart Sigiriya for Kandy (approx. 3½ hrs), travelling via Matale and the Dambulla Cave Temples.

The Royal Rock Temple complex in Dambulla consists of five separate caves containing 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 Gardens, where you’ll be able to learn about the great variety of spices grown in Sri Lanka, followed by 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 is derived from the Swiss family that bought the building prior to its conversion).*

*Hotel Suisse stands to this day as the city’s oldest and most impressive 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 local 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, 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 amid paddy fields and tea plantations. 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.

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 jack 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 hrs; 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 for two nights (inc. breakfast).

Windsor Hotel

The Windsor is a charming, family-run hotel situated close to the centre of Nuwara Eliya, where it enjoys easy access to the Queen Victoria Park, the grand Nuwara Eliya Golf Club, and the Race Course (all within walking distance).

The Windsor’s 49 rooms are attractively furnished and feature en-suite bathrooms and polished wooden floors. Large windows allow in the light and offer impressive views of the town and 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 into the Rainforest Eco-lodge for two nights in a chalet (half board).
The Rainforest Eco Lodge
This small, intimate eco-lodge features just 16 comfortable forest chalets, each of which has been designed with 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 famous amphibians or its equally rich birdlife, and they’ll plan a route to accommodate your interests.

Return to your lodge late afternoon.

Day 11: Depart
You will be collected from the lodge after breakfast and transferred to the airport for your return flight home.

See the following page for prices.
**Price Guide:** The cost of this itinerary is from £1,195 per person, based on twin 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](mailto:info@ganeandmarshall.com).

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