Tour Code
SRL1

ADVENTURESABROAD

SRI LANKA & THE MALDIVES

Ancient Kingdoms & Island Shores

17 days

Created on: 17 Nov, 2026

Day 1 Arrival in Colombo - Transfer to Negombo

Arrival at Bandaranaike International Airport and transfer to Negombo (approx. 30 minutes).

Negombo's story is written in layers. Once the most prized source of cinnamon in the Dutch colonial empire, this compact seaside town passed between Portuguese, Dutch, and British hands across four centuries, each power leaving a distinct imprint on its churches, canals, and streetscapes. That layered heritage is still legible today -- in the Dutch-influenced architecture, the Catholic churches standing beside Buddhist temples, and the fishing community that has worked these lagoon waters throughout it all. It is an quietly fitting introduction to a country shaped, again and again, by those who came seeking its treasures.

Overnight in Negombo.

Included Meal(s): Dinner

Day 2 Negombo: Dutch Canals & Coastal Life

We begin the morning on the water. A boat excursion through the historic Dutch canal system -- an extraordinary network originally developed during the colonial period as both a transport and irrigation artery -- offers a relaxed and intimate introduction to Sri Lanka's coastal life. Gliding quietly through narrow waterways lined with coconut palms and village homes, birdlife abundant on the banks, daily routines unfolding in full view, it is a peaceful and revealing way to start the journey.

From the canals we make our way to Negombo's Fish Market, a bustling hub of activity near the lagoon where the morning's catch is landed in vivid, aromatic abundance -- fish, prawns, and crab laid out in colourful displays, accompanied by the rhythm and energy of negotiation and trade. The sights, sounds, and smells offer a fascinating glimpse into Sri Lanka's enduring maritime culture.

We then stop at the historic Dutch Fort, dating to around 1678. The fort itself is not open to visitors due to its current condition, but its exterior and the surrounding colonial streetscape repay a slow walk -- a further layer of Negombo's long and complicated history made visible in stone.

Overnight in Negombo.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 3 Negombo - Wilpattu National Park - Anuradhapura

Heading north from the coast, the landscape opens into a quieter Sri Lanka -- rolling countryside, verdant forest, and small villages where coconut palms mark the boundaries of every plot. En route, we pause at a coconut plantation to learn how this extraordinarily versatile tree underpins so much of rural life here, from food and oil to fibre and timber.

The journey takes us into Wilpattu National Park, Sri Lanka's largest protected reserve and one of its least-visited. What distinguishes Wilpattu is its "villus" -- natural, rain-fed lakes scattered across dense dry-zone scrub and forest like still mirrors, drawing wildlife from the surrounding landscape. There are no manicured circuits or viewing platforms here; Wilpattu feels genuinely remote. Travelling by 4WD through the softer afternoon light, we search for elephants moving between water sources, spotted deer at the forest edge, crocodiles basking on muddy banks, and the leopard for which the park is quietly famous. The absence of crowds makes every sighting feel earned.

We continue to Anuradhapura as evening approaches -- one of South Asia's most remarkable archaeological and spiritual sites, and our base for the next two nights.

Overnight in Anuradhapura.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 4 Anuradhapura & Mihintale

Few cities anywhere in the world can claim Anuradhapura's continuity. Established as a royal capital by King Pandukhabaya in 380 BC, it served as the seat of 119 successive Sinhalese kings across more than 1,600 years -- a span that dwarfs most of what we call ancient history elsewhere. Today the ruins extend across a vast sacred precinct: enormous dagobas that rank among the largest ancient structures on earth, the remains of palaces, monasteries, and ceremonial baths, and intricately carved stonework that speaks to the remarkable sophistication of the civilisation that produced it.

Among the most affecting sights is the sacred Bo-tree -- grown from a cutting of the very tree under which the Buddha attained enlightenment, and tended with unbroken devotion for over 2,300 years. Few living things on earth carry such weight of history.

Late in the afternoon we drive to Mihintale, regarded as the birthplace of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. It was here, in the 3rd century BC, that the monk Mahinda is believed to have encountered the Sinhalese king and set in motion a transformation that would define the island's identity for millennia. Climbing the ancient stone steps between forested slopes and granite outcrops, we reach white dagobas at the summit as the light begins to soften -- sweeping views across the plains, a stillness in the air, and a palpable sense of standing at one of the quiet turning points of Asian history.

Overnight in Anuradhapura.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 5 Anuradhapura - Aukana Buddha - Village Experience - Dambulla

Heading south through the Cultural Triangle, we pause at one of Sri Lanka's most accomplished works of ancient sculpture: the Aukana Buddha. Carved from a single granite face in the 5th century AD, this 12-metre standing figure is an astonishing achievement -- its name, meaning "sun-eating," a reference to the precise eastward orientation that catches the first light of dawn across the statue's face. The serenity of the expression and the refinement of the stone carving reward close attention.

We then step away from monumental heritage entirely and into living tradition. A leisurely ox-cart ride carries us along sandy tracks past rice paddies and irrigation channels -- reminders that the great hydraulic systems of Sri Lanka's ancient kingdoms were not merely royal engineering projects, but the foundation of an agricultural civilisation that persists today. We cross a village reservoir by small wooden boat, walk through cultivated fields, and are welcomed into a local home for a simple cooking demonstration and traditional rice-and-curry lunch prepared over a wood fire. The contrast with the morning's ancient stones could hardly be more instructive.

Our destination for the night is the Heritance Kandalama, designed by Geoffrey Bawa -- Sri Lanka's most celebrated architect and one of the defining figures of tropical modernism. The building emerges from a forested cliff face above a shimmering reservoir as though it grew there, its open corridors, dramatic sightlines, and vine-draped facades dissolving the boundary between interior and landscape. The property itself is a considered architectural experience, and a fitting transition between the ancient north and the cultural heartland ahead.

Overnight in Dambulla

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 6 Dambulla: Sigiriya & Polonnaruwa

We make an early start for Sigiriya, when the rock is cool and the light is at its best. Rising 370 metres above the surrounding plain, this extraordinary granite outcrop was transformed in the 5th century AD into a fortified royal palace -- complete with terraced water gardens (the oldest of their kind in Asia), a processional boulevard, and a summit complex of halls and pools that commanded views across the entire kingdom. The Mirror Wall, inscribed with verses by visitors across more than a thousand years, still carries fragments of its original glazed surface. Halfway up, the famous Sigiriya frescoes glow in a sheltered rock cavity -- a rare and vivid survival from an ancient world. As a feat of engineering, aesthetics, and ambition, Sigiriya has few equals anywhere in South Asia, and its UNESCO status barely does justice to the

experience of standing on it.

The ascent is entirely achievable for those in reasonable condition, though it involves a sustained climb, uneven surfaces, and several narrow stairways, some exposed -- making good footing and a comfortable level of mobility important. Those who prefer not to ascend fully are welcome to remain within the lower garden complex, which is itself extensive and rewarding.

From Sigiriya we drive to Polonnaruwa, the medieval successor to Anuradhapura as Sri Lanka's royal capital. The ruins are remarkably well-preserved -- temples, dagobas, a royal palace, and a great library still readable in stone -- and the irrigation network constructed by King Parakrama Bahu the Great in the 12th century, an interconnected system of tanks and channels still in agricultural use today, is one of the most impressive feats of pre-modern hydraulic engineering in the world.

Overnight in Dambulla.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 7 Dambulla - Matale - Kandy

This morning we visit the Dambulla Cave Temple -- one of Sri Lanka's most extraordinary religious monuments, and a place that rewards a slow and attentive visit. Carved into a towering rock outcrop in the 1st century BC, the complex consists of five sanctuaries hewn from living stone, their interiors transformed over two millennia into luminous chambers of devotion. The ceilings are entirely covered in intricate Buddhist murals -- a vast painted canvas depicting scenes from the life of the Buddha -- while more than 150 statues of varying scale create an atmosphere that is at once intimate and monumental. Few places in Sri Lanka so vividly convey the unbroken continuity of Buddhist worship across two thousand years.

Descending from the caves, we continue south to Matale, where a visit to a spice garden traces the aromatic thread that runs through so much of Sri Lankan history: the cinnamon, cardamom, pepper, and clove that once made this island one of the most coveted destinations in the known world.

The afternoon brings us into Kandy, the last royal capital of the Sinhalese kings, set at 500 metres above sea level amid green hills and centred on a still, reflective lake. We take in the city with a scenic lakeside drive before visiting the Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic -- the holiest site in Sri Lankan Buddhism, said to house the relic of the Buddha preserved here since its arrival on the island in the 4th century AD. If timing allows, we witness a traditional Kandyan dance performance: an emphatic and theatrical art form combining drumming, precise footwork, and elaborate costuming that has been performed in these hills for centuries.

Overnight in Kandy.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 8 Kandy Area Touring

After breakfast we visit the Pinnawala Elephant Orphanage, a sanctuary established in 1975 that now cares for more than 60 orphaned and injured elephants. Watching these animals being fed, bathed, and moving freely through a spacious riverside setting offers a close encounter that is both moving and informative -- and a meaningful window into Sri Lanka's long relationship with the elephant, an animal that has figured in its ceremonial, religious, and working life for thousands of years. The visit also invites reflection on the broader and often complex realities of wildlife conservation and human-animal interaction on the island.

In the afternoon we explore the Royal Botanic Garden at Peradeniya -- one of the finest botanical collections in Asia, originally laid out in 1371 under King Vikrama Bahu III and later greatly expanded under British administration. By the Second World War it was serving a rather different purpose: as the regional headquarters of Lord Mountbatten and the Allied South-East Asia Command. Today orchids, towering royal palms, cannonball trees, and dense spice plantings make Peradeniya a genuinely beautiful place to spend an afternoon -- and a reminder that in Sri Lanka, even a garden tends to carry history.

Overnight in Kandy.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 9 Scenic Train to Nuwara Eliya

This is one of the great railway journeys of Asia. The line from Kandy climbs steadily into Sri Lanka's central highlands, threading through tunnels, crossing viaducts, and emerging onto hillsides where the view -- of terraced tea estates dropping away into misty valleys, of Tamil tea pickers moving between the rows, of waterfalls catching the light in the distance -- is simply extraordinary. By the time we enter the Hill Country proper, the elevation has reached 1,500 metres and the temperature has dropped perceptibly; the world below feels far away.

Arriving at Nanu Oya station, we transfer to Nuwara Eliya -- a hill station town at 2,070 metres that the British colonial administration shaped in their own image, complete with a racecourse, a golf course, trout streams, and a climate cool enough to feel almost English. The pink-brick post office and the grand Hill Club are charming period pieces, and the surrounding mountains blanketed in tea give the whole place a quality of tranquil unreality.

During our time here (today or tomorrow, depending on conditions) we visit a working tea estate to follow the journey from leaf to cup -- a process that rewards attention with the realisation that great tea, like great wine, begins with soil, altitude, and season.

Overnight in Nuwara Eliya.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 10 Horton Plains & World's End

An early start -- breakfast boxes in hand, on the road by 6am -- takes us up onto Horton Plains, a high-altitude plateau of rolling montane grasslands and cloud forest set more than 2,000 metres above sea level. The park is home to endemic birdlife found nowhere else on earth, and its cool, bracing air is a world apart from the lowland tropics.

The centrepiece of the morning is World's End -- an abrupt escarpment at the plateau's southern edge where the land simply drops away: 880 metres of sheer cliff falling almost 3,000 feet to the plains below. On a clear morning, Sri Lanka's second and third highest peaks, Kirigalpotta and Totapola, are visible in the middle distance. Two walking options are available. A shorter out-and-back route leads to the Mini World's End viewpoint (approximately 3 km each way), while a longer loop trail (approximately 8-9 km total) takes in the main World's End viewpoint and Baker's Falls, a picturesque cascade set within dense vegetation. The terrain is uneven in places with some rocky sections; good walking shoes are recommended for either route.

Returning to Nuwara Eliya by late morning, the afternoon offers a deliberate change of register: high tea at the Hill Club, where starched linen, silver teapots, finger sandwiches, and freshly baked scones have been served in this wood-panelled colonial interior for well over a century. After the elemental drama of World's End, it is a pleasingly civilised counterpoint.

Overnight in Nuwara Eliya - "Lunch" provided today in the form of a high tea

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Lunch

Day 11 Nuwara Eliya - Yala National Park

Leaving the cool, mist-laced heights of Nuwara Eliya behind, we descend from Sri Lanka's central highlands toward the island's southeastern plains -- and the transformation is immediate and vivid. Winding mountain roads thread past cascading waterfalls and terraced tea estates before gradually giving way to drier scrublands and wide, sunlit expanses. The air warms perceptibly, the vegetation changes character, the landscape opens. Sri Lanka, for all its small size, moves through its ecosystems with remarkable speed.

By afternoon we arrive at Yala National Park -- Sri Lanka's most celebrated wildlife reserve, and a striking contrast to the dense, enclosed forest of Wilpattu encountered in the north. Here the terrain feels broader and more elemental: open grasslands, rocky outcrops, coastal lagoons, and acacia-dotted plains offer both dramatic visibility and prime habitat for large mammals. Yala supports one of the highest densities of leopard of any park in the world, and while wildlife is never guaranteed, the anticipation as we enter by 4WD in the golden hours of late afternoon is palpable. Elephants move deliberately between waterholes; crocodiles bask along muddy banks; peacocks call from the treetops; sambar deer graze in the open. With the Indian Ocean not far beyond the dunes, Yala offers a safari experience that is expansive, dramatic, and unmistakably wild.

Overnight near Yala.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 12 Yala - Southern Coast - Galle

We begin the morning with a final safari into Yala, when the light is low and the park at its most atmospheric. The open terrain that makes this reserve so rewarding for wildlife viewing -- its grasslands, rocky outcrops, and coastal lagoons -- reveals itself differently in the early hours, and a second foray often yields sightings that the previous afternoon did not. Leopards in particular tend to be more active in the cooler morning light.

Leaving the dry wilderness of Yala, we travel westward along Sri Lanka's southern coastline, where the landscape gradually softens into palm-fringed beaches and fishing villages facing the broad expanse of the Indian Ocean. Portions of our drive trace the shoreline itself, offering glimpses of turquoise water, colourful outrigger boats pulled high onto the sand, and the daily rhythms of communities that have depended on the sea for generations.

En route we pause at one of the southern coast's most iconic sights: the stilt fishermen. Perched on slender poles anchored in the shallows, these fishermen cast their lines with remarkable balance and patience -- a practice that emerged during the mid-20th century and has since become an enduring symbol of this stretch of coastline.

By late afternoon we arrive in Galle, whose Dutch-built fort stands above the sea with an authority that repays a long look. Enclosed within massive ramparts first raised by the Portuguese in the 16th century and later fortified by the Dutch, Galle Fort is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and one of the best-preserved colonial towns in Asia. Our walking tour threads through cobbled lanes past elegant merchant houses, historic churches, hidden courtyards, and small galleries, before emerging on the ramparts above the crashing surf below. As the light turns gold and washes across the coral-stone walls, Galle reveals its layered past -- European, South Asian, mercantile, and maritime -- with an ease and atmosphere that are genuinely hard to leave.

Overnight in Galle.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 13 Galle - Madu River & Cinnamon Island - Colombo

Heading north along the coast from Galle, the landscape eases from beach resort to river estuary and quiet fishing community. Our first stop is the tranquil Madu River -- a complex wetland of mangroves, small islands, and winding channels that shelters a remarkable variety of birdlife and riverbank habitats. By boat we explore this serene landscape, gliding through green corridors of mangrove before landing on "Cinnamon Island," where the harvesting and processing of Sri Lanka's most famous spice is demonstrated using methods unchanged for centuries. It was this same cinnamon that first drew the Portuguese to Negombo's shores in the 16th century -- and in tracing it from bark to bundle here, that long history suddenly feels very immediate.

We visit the Kosgoda turtle hatchery, where active conservation work protects nesting grounds and rehabilitates endangered sea turtles along this stretch of coast -- a small but meaningful counterweight to the pressures these ancient animals face across the Indian Ocean.

Continuing north, the coastal calm gives way to the growing energy of the capital. Passing Sri Jayawardenepura Kotte -- the official capital, its modern Parliament building reflected in an artificial lake -- we enter Colombo, where two millennia of trade, colonialism, and independence have produced a city of compelling contrasts.

Overnight in Colombo.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 14 Colombo Sightseeing

Colombo's history is longer and stranger than most cities of its size. Roman, Arab, and Chinese traders were calling at its harbour long before the Portuguese arrived to fortify it in the 16th century, the Dutch supplanted them in the 17th, and the British made it the capital of Ceylon in

1802. The result today is a city where a Buddhist temple, a colonial-era church, a Moorish mosque, and a Hindu kovil might occupy the same block -- layered, contradictory, and full of character.

We begin at the National Museum, whose collections of royal regalia, sculpture, and historical artefacts provide valuable context for everything we have seen across the past two weeks. From there we move into the trading energy of Pettah, the city's oldest commercial quarter, before visiting the richly ornamented Gangaramaya Temple -- one of Colombo's most important Buddhist institutions and a place of genuine devotional life. We take in the striking facade of the Jami Ul-Alfar Mosque, known as the Red Mosque, an architectural landmark in the heart of the old Pettah bazaar, and spend time along Galle Face Green, the beloved seafront esplanade where Colombo comes to breathe.

Time permitting, we enjoy a walk along Galle Face Green, Colombo's seaside promenade, where locals gather in the late afternoon to relax, fly kites, and enjoy the ocean breeze.

As a fitting close to our Sri Lankan journey, we ascend the Lotus Tower -- the tallest structure in the country -- for a special late lunch with panoramic views across the capital and its coastline. Harbour, city, hills, and sea visible from a single vantage point: an unexpectedly moving way to say goodbye.

Overnight in Colombo.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Lunch

Day 15 Colombo, Sri Lanka - Male, Maldives - Maafushi Island

We depart Sri Lanka and fly to Malé, capital of the Maldives -- a compact and densely populated island city that serves as the administrative and cultural centre of this dispersed island nation.

On arrival, we begin with a walking tour of Malé, offering insight into a side of the Maldives that many travellers never encounter. We visit the historic Hukuru Miskiy (Old Friday Mosque), built of intricately carved coral stone, as well as the Islamic Centre, whose golden dome dominates the skyline. Nearby, the bustling fish market provides a vivid glimpse into the importance of the sea to Maldivian life. We also hope to visit the small but interesting National Museum (occasional closures).

From Malé, we transfer by speedboat across the clear waters of the Indian Ocean to Maafushi Island (approx. 30-40 minutes). Unlike the private resort islands for which the Maldives is best known, Maafushi is a local inhabited island, offering a more grounded and authentic perspective. Here, everyday life continues alongside small-scale tourism, providing a rare opportunity to experience the Maldives beyond its luxury veneer.

Overnight in Maafushi

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 16 Snorkelling & Local Island Encounters

Today we set out by boat to explore both the marine environment and neighbouring inhabited islands, gaining a broader understanding of life across the atolls.

We begin with snorkelling stops over nearby coral reefs, where clear, shallow waters reveal a vibrant underwater world of reef fish, coral formations, and -- conditions permitting -- rays or small reef sharks. The immediacy of marine life here makes even a short time in the water a memorable experience.

We then continue to the island of Gulhi, a small and relatively quiet community where life unfolds at an unhurried pace. Walking through sandy lanes bordered by low coral walls, we gain a sense of the scale and rhythm of island living before enjoying a picnic-style lunch, often taken near the shoreline.

Later, we visit Guraidhoo, another inhabited island with a longer history of seafaring and craftsmanship. Accompanied by a local guide, we explore the island on foot, learning about traditional livelihoods, community structure, and the practical realities of life on low-lying coral atolls.

Throughout the day, the movement between islands, reefs, and open water highlights the geography of the Maldives itself -- a nation defined

as much by the ocean as by land.

We return to Maafushi in the late afternoon.

This evening we will get together for our final dinner of the tour.

Overnight in Maafushi

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 17 Return to Male & Departure

We return by speedboat to the airport in time for onward flights (approximately 40 minute boat ride).

As we depart, we leave behind a country unlike any other -- a nation of islands shaped by the sea, where culture, geography, and daily life are inseparable from the surrounding ocean.

BON VOYAGE!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast