

Sri Lanka

WHALES AND LEOPARDS

- Enjoy marine safaris looking for the mighty Blue and Sperm whales in the Indian Ocean
- Explore Yala National Park, home to the highest density of leopards per sq km in the world
- Visit the UNESCO World Heritage site of Galle and the beautiful Dutch fort
- The tour includes a donation to the Wilderness and Wildlife Conservation Trust of Sri Lanka



Summary

Under the tutelage of Sri Lanka's leading wildlife experts, this tour is designed to show you some of Asia's most fascinating wildlife in a small group of only 10 people. You can enjoy a thrilling whale safari in the rich waters of the Indian Ocean watching the magnificent blue and sperm whales breach near our privately chartered boat, whilst schools of dolphin hundreds strong, surf the waves.

You then continue to Yala National Park, which contains more leopards per sq km than anywhere else in the world and is considered by many to be the best place on the planet to see these elusive creatures. Yala itself however, is also home to large herds of Asian elephant, the striking jackal, along with civets and pangolin, which you can search for on the evening drives.

In addition to this, you have one of the richest bird lists in the whole of Asia, with 435 recorded species, 20 of which are endemic, including the Sri Lanka Junglefowl and the rare black necked stork and it is easy to see why Sri Lanka offers one of Asia's most exciting wildlife experiences.

Overview



One of the world's most bio diverse countries and home to a dazzling array of flora and fauna, Sri Lanka is a land full of riches. 16 National parks, 22% of the country has dense forest cover with 12% devoted to wildlife protection. From evergreen forests where elephants roam wild, to open savannahs and the world's highest densities of leopards, to the rich Indian Ocean home to the awesome blue and sperm whale, Sri Lanka is a nature lover's paradise.

This trip offers a small group of intrepid travellers the chance to explore the islands wildlife accompanied by some of Sri Lanka's leading naturalists. The trip begins off the shores of Sri Lanka, home to a wide range of marine mammals, including blue and sperm whale and pods of up to 100 dolphins have been known to ride the surf which you will hopefully see as you head out with one of the region's leading marine biologists in specially adapted boats.



You then move on to Yala National Park, considered by many to be the best place in the world to view leopards and is home to the highest concentration of leopards on the planet. Not only will the focus here be on these elusive cats, but you will also be looking out for large herds of Asian elephants, bears, jackals spotted deer and troops of Hanuman Langurs.



The birdlife here is also excellent and include the beautiful bee-eaters, rosy starling and the rare black-necked stork. Not only does this allows for some exciting wildlife experiences, but the warmth and generosity of the Sri Lankan people as they open their doors to tourism will leave a lasting impression.

Itinerary



Day 1

On arrival in Sri Lanka, you will be welcomed by your guide and after a quick coffee, you will begin your drive to Mirissa, located on the southern coast of the island. This is a longer journey of around 5-6 hours (which includes stops for lunch and photo opportunities) but will pass along beautiful Sri Lankan coastline and if lucky, passed some of the traditional stilt fisherman found in the region. On arrival here, you will be based at the Paradise Beach Club on the beachfront of Mirissa itself. Whilst this is one of the more simple properties in the region, it is in a perfect location overlooking a beautiful stretch of the beach. This evening there is a welcome dinner and the chance to get to know your hosts. Overnight Paradise Beach Club, breakfast and dinner.



Day 2 - 3

This morning after breakfast, you head to Mirissa Fishery's Harbour where you board your small, specially adapted boat and head out off-shore to look for blue and sperm whales, found in these rich marine waters. This tour is designed to maximise your chances of seeing these incredible animals during their annual migration where blue whales in particular are seen relatively close to shore, as the continental shelf is narrow to the South of Dondra. In addition to the whales, the area is also known to be home to dolphins and turtles and you will spend the morning searching for these fascinating creatures. You then return to the lodge early afternoon, depending on sightings to relax on the beach. Overnight at Paradise Beach Club, breakfast and dinner.



Day 4

This morning is your last marine safari, after which you drive for around 3 hours to Yala National Park, Sri Lanka's most famous and most visited park - with good reason. Harboring the world's highest concentration of leopard with more of these elusive cats per square km than anywhere else in the world. The incredible diversity of habitats, from scrub jungle, brackish lagoons to riverine forests harbours a rich array of wildlife in an area over 14,000 hectares. Whilst your main focus here will be searching for the park's most famous resident, the Asian leopard, this beautiful park is also home to elephant, bears, deer, the endemic toque monkey, jackal and crocodile and the best place in Sri Lanka to see the rare black-necked stork. In fact a day trip to the park can yield over 100 species, including the endemic Sri Lankan jungle fowl and the brown-capped babbler.



You will be based at the recently refurbished, Yala Village, the best place to stay for wildlife, situated on 10 acres of scrub jungle and a nearby remote nearby beach (although swimming is not recommended - which is why the lodge pool is so welcome!) The view from the top deck of the bar-restaurant overlooks the pool to the lake beyond and as there are no boundaries between the park and the lodge wildlife can often be seen passing through coming to drink. It is also a great place to watch the sun set. Overnight Yala Village, breakfast and dinner.



Day 5-8

Over the next four days, after an early start, you head out into the park to enjoy a traditional game drive in one of Asia's finest wildlife reserves, in a small 4WD and experienced naturalist. At 97,800 hectares, this is the second largest of Sri Lanka's national parks. Its open undulating terrain made it famous for elephants for many years, but recently the park has also received much fame through publicity by National Geographic which focused on leopard research and conservation projects. Claims have subsequently been made that Yala National Park has the world's highest concentration of leopard per square kilometre.



This park is primarily scrub jungle with several salt and fresh water lagoons with dense scrub in which the animals hide. After a morning drive, you return to the lodge for lunch, with time to relax, before heading out again in the afternoon to explore the area. You then return early evening to enjoy a delicious dinner and the chance to discuss the day's sightings. Overnight Yala Village, breakfast and dinner.



Day 9

This morning you leave Yala and drive northward along the south-western coast to visit the ancient Dutch fort of Galle. Said to be the famous Tarshish of the Bible where King Solomon obtained gems and spices, this “Living” UNESCO World Heritage Site is the port where the Portuguese first landed in Sri Lanka in 1505. Captured and fortified by the Dutch who ruled maritime Sri Lanka in the 17th and 18th centuries, the city still retains the air that colonial period, but has taken on a Sri Lankan atmosphere all of its own. The main focal point Galle is the amazing architectural Galle Fort, built in the 17th century, showcasing an amazing array of classic structures which allow a brief glimpse into Sri Lanka’s bygone era.



Its position at the south of the city offers stunning views of the glistening Indian Ocean from the enclosed walls. The charm in this fascinating part of Sri Lanka is that it is still used today as part of a working community, populated with administrative offices and courts along with bustling streets stretching from Galle’s historic district. After lunch here, you then continue to Colombo, the country’s capital, for a short tour of the city and some last minute souvenirs, before heading to the Tamarind Tree Hotel for your last night. This simple hotel is chosen for its convenient location for your departure tomorrow, but still offers a clean, comfortable and welcoming place to enjoy your farewell meal.

Overnight Tamarind Tree Hotel, breakfast and dinner.



Day 10

This morning is at leisure, before you are transferred to the airport for your flight home.

Date

2012

18th to 27th February 2012
20th to 29th November 2012

This itinerary is both a group departure on the above dates or a year round suggested tailor-made itinerary - please contact us to discuss which suits your own requirements best.

Main tour

From £1,595.00 per person in a twin share room, excluding international flights

Includes

Expertise of English speaking naturalist and guide during the trip. All accommodation on a half full board basis (breakfast and dinner only), including bottled water. Local guides and trackers, other expertise on the venture. A contribution per person is given to support local community and conservation projects through the Sri Lankan Wildlife Conservation Society.

Excludes

International economy return flights from London to Colombo (which we are happy to arrange) travel insurance (mandatory), visas, vaccinations, items of a personal nature, gratuities, alcohol, extra meals.

Single Supplements

If you are happy to share accommodation with a fellow traveller of the same sex then you will not be charged a single supplement for your holiday. This is of course dependent on there being another same sex traveller on the trip who is also wanting to share. If we cannot find a partner with whom you can share then unfortunately we will be left with no choice but to pass on the single supplement, imposed by the properties we are using. We will endeavour to keep this supplement to a minimum. Naturally should you wish to have a single room then this is possible by simply opting to pay the single supplement as per the itinerary. The cost of a single supplement is £295.

International Flights

We are happy to quote you with flights to Colombo from the UK to arrive in time to coincide with the tour departure as we are a fully bonded tour operator holding a full ATOL license.

Whilst we are aware that when it comes to booking international flights there are a number of different options available to you which may differ from those we are able to provide, please bear in mind that we are usually able to hold flights, allowing for a much greater degree of flexibility than if you were to pay direct, usually requiring the full balance up-front. When booking international flights with Steppes in conjunction with your holiday you are afforded a much greater level of financial protection than if you book your flights separately through a different source. This is down to EU Package Regulations which state that if a tour operator is booking international flights combined with ground arrangements on your behalf and the holiday has to be cancelled by the tour operator before departure because, for example, the flight from the UK is unable to take off, then the tour operator is obliged to refund the full cost of your holiday.

This additional insurance against unforeseen circumstances can offer not only peace of mind but valuable cover should the unexpected occur.

Important information

Coming From outside the UK

Experience tells us that the best way to get to Colombo is via London and therefore we would encourage you to join the tour here.

Weather And Best Time To Travel

This tour is designed not only to see Sri Lanka at its most colourful, but also to maximise your chance of wildlife sightings with the best time to travel between October through to April.

Vaccinations And Visa's

We recommend the following inoculations: Typhoid, Tetanus and Hepatitis A & B. Malaria is prevalent in Sri Lanka and expert advice is therefore essential. Please consult a medical practitioner or ring MASTA on 09065 501402 (premium rate calls) at least one month before travel.

For those travelling on British passports, your passport is stamped on arrival, free of charge.

Health And Fitness

As the very nature of wildlife viewing involves dawn and dusk movements for the best chance of sightings - please be aware that this itinerary involves early morning starts to go into the field, and make the most of the day. Though this is not a physically demanding tour, a reasonable level of fitness will allow you to fully appreciate this tour and to walk in the park with the rangers on foot patrols. We advise some light exercise in preparation We also suggest taking a small personal medical kit.

Accommodation And Food

We use accommodation based on a combination of the location, atmosphere and service. The lodges are not luxurious, but are simple, clean and comfortable and in Mirissa and Yala are in fantastic locations offering some great wildlife viewing. Please note however, that whilst the service may be a little slow, the welcome and warmth of the Sri Lankan people you will receive will more than make up for this. The wonderful diversity of Sri Lankan food means that special dietary requirements can easily be accommodated if given prior notice.

Security

The safety and security of our clients is of paramount importance. Despite its turbulent past, Sri Lanka is a wonderfully welcoming country and the hospitality and warmth of the Sri Lankan people are a huge part of the success of these tours.

Flexibility

This tour is a pioneering one for Sri Lankan wildlife tourism, and visitors joining this ongoing programme should be aware that they require flexibility of movements and attitude and a good sense of humour to work well. The tour itself is very much dictated by the movements of the wildlife.

Our commitment



An unavoidable consequence of travel is the emission of carbon dioxide into the high atmosphere and while Steppes Discovery takes measures to reduce the carbon footprint of its holidays, regrettably it is not yet possible to make them carbon neutral. If you are able to, we suggest you consider offsetting the carbon emission of your long haul flight by using Rainforest Concern's Forest Credits scheme. Details can be found at www.forestcredits.org.uk

Rainforests have a central role to play in the slowing of climate change and yet we are removing forests from the planet at a faster rate than they can grow back. Rainforest Concern supports projects that look to preserve the forests that we have. Rather than replanting new ones, working to safeguard biodiversity and local communities and in so doing mitigate climate change.



The Wilderness and Wildlife
Conservation Trust Sri Lanka

Created in 2004, the trusts mandate is to preserve, protect and create wilderness areas specifically on the island of Sri Lanka and to protect and conserve its wildlife populations. The trust is involved in international wilderness and wildlife conservation and actively promotes the establishment and protection of wilderness areas worldwide.

This approach to direct conservation includes using awareness campaigns for conservation of wilderness and wildlife and working with local communities to ensure an equitable balance between the needs of people and the needs of wilderness and wildlife.

Want to discuss this trip?



Please call Chris on ++ 44 (0) 1285 643333 or e-mail chris@steppesdiscovery.co.uk for more details or to make a booking.

Having travelled extensively through many of the world's wildlife hotspots, from Central, East and Southern Africa, to the whole of South East Asia, Sri Lanka still remains one of his own personal favourites.

Having spent time searching for elephants in Wasguma, watching turtles surf the waves at Tangalle to enjoying the country's incredible food, Chris will be happy to talk you through how to get the best from this diverse country.
