



Sri Lanka

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

Accommodation

Hotels on tours are generally 'medium range' and vary from place to place. At each hotel your Tour Leader will try to organise the rooming arrangements to suit everyone's requirements. If you are travelling as a couple please note that we cannot guarantee the availability of double beds. Not all hotels have tea and coffee making facilities in their rooms.

Transport

Transport throughout the tour is on an air conditioned coach. There is a left hand drive and fairly modern roads can be found in the bigger areas. Traffic congestion can be a problem with more and more vehicles occupying the country's roadways.

Seatbelts - Please note that seatbelts are not compulsory by law in Sri Lanka and therefore the local people largely choose not to wear them. For this reason local operators may or may not have seatbelts hidden underneath protective seat covers. It is recommended that where seatbelts are available customers must use them and remain seated at all times whilst the vehicle is moving.

Meals

All meals are included in your package. Breakfast is normally buffet-style at the hotel. Lunch and dinner is generally at local restaurants or hotels and consist of local cuisine. Special dietary needs and food allergies should be noted on your Medical Information Form; however, we do recommend that you advise your Tour Leader who will do their best to ensure your requirements are met. Unfortunately we cannot guarantee this especially in rural areas. Alcohol is readily available in Sri Lanka.

Special Dietary Requirements

If you are on a restricted diet, it is a good idea to reiterate this with your guide upon arrival.

Vegetarians - Every meal will generally include a vegetarian dish. However in order to ensure that you are properly catered for at each meal, please advise us if you are vegetarian so that arrangements can be made for you.

Food Allergies - If you have food allergies or preferences, please make them known to your National Escort who will do their best to ensure that your requirements are met in advance. Unfortunately we can give no guarantee that special requirements can always be met. We recommend you bring snack you can eat to ensure you will always have something on hand if your allergy cannot be catered for.

People on restricted diets should expect complications in Sri Lanka. It is likely that vegetarian tourists will be served meat by restaurant staff who do not understand why anyone who can afford meat can choose not to eat it. In these cases, patience, understanding and personal involvement will go a long way.

Confectionary & Condiments

Fresh milk, Western tea bags and instant coffee are not easy to obtain in Sri Lanka. It is a good idea to take powdered milk, tea and coffee with you. For those tour members who may crave Western food we suggest that you bring some favourites such as Vegemite, Peanut Butter and Muesli bars.

Water & Milk

It is highly recommended that you **do not** drink the local tap water, including ice with drinks. Reputable brands of bottled water and carbonated soft drinks are widely available; be sure to check for an unbroken seal. Most hotels do not provide free water so you need to ensure you have an adequate supply for each night. Bottled drinking water is available to purchase on the coach. Be very careful with street vendors and food stalls; ensure that you do not sip from glasses provided here, instead drink from bottles you purchase yourself, again always ensuring that the seal is unbroken. We also suggest brushing your teeth with boiled or bottled water to avoid potential stomach upsets.

Fresh milk should always be treated with suspicion as it is often unpasteurised.

Haggling & Shopping

Department stores and a number of shops in Colombo have fixed prices, but in most others bargaining is acceptable and expected. As a general rule, respond with an offer of 40% and negotiate from there. Please remember that this process is a bit of fun and should be undertaken with a generous dose of humour and patience, resulting in both parties reaching a mutually beneficial outcome. The local people admire good manners and a sense of humour and tend to be put off by a loss of temper. **VAT (Value Added Tax):** - There is a VAT of 10% which applies in high end stores and some mid-range places. These taxes are non-refundable.

Pharmaceutical Goods

It is recommended that you take any pharmaceutical products that you may require on your tour. This could include items such as sleeping pills, tablets to relieve stomach upsets, headaches, motion sickness and any other medication that you usually take. For any prescribed medication we strongly recommend that you have a letter from your doctor.

Tipping

As with most countries, tipping is a recognised part of life in Sri Lanka. For our passengers' convenience we ask for a specified amount to be paid at the beginning of our group tours to cover tipping for guides, drivers, restaurant staff etc. Approximate tipping amounts can be found in our brochure and/or website. Exact tipping amounts will be stated in your final documentation, approximately 3 weeks before departure. This amount will not be paid in Australia to your travel agent or Wendy Wu Tours. It is paid locally in USD to cover the tips for your main service providers; guides, drivers, attendants and wait staff. Most hotels and restaurants include a 10% service charge on the bill.

Entrance Fees

All of your entrance fees for attractions listed in the itinerary are included in the price of your tour. However, you may be offered additional sightseeing that is not included in the itinerary. Participation in this is at the discretion of the passenger and is not part of your tour. Please ensure you have a little extra money to allow for these optional extras should you wish to partake in them.

Weather

Sri Lanka has a tropical climate with two distinctive seasons, wet and dry, with two monsoon seasons; the 'Yala season' from mid-May to October and the 'Maha season' from December to March. The Yala season brings heavy rain from the Indian Ocean to the south and west coasts and the Central Highlands, with the northern and eastern parts of the country a little drier. The Maha season brings rain from the Bay of Bengal and causes heavy rain in the northeast of the country. The average temperature throughout the country varies from 26-28°C, with 14-16°C in the Central Highlands. November to January are the cooler months, with February to May being the hottest.

What to Wear

Clothing - Out of respect for local values, we ask that you follow your Tour Leader's advice at all times. We recommend you take light, comfortable cotton clothing. Casual wear is acceptable for most occasions. Shorts and T shirts may be worn in rural areas - however, please remember to respect the local customs. It would be advisable to pack light rain wear, sun screen and a sun hat.

Footwear - Comfortable walking shoes/sandals are recommended for most days, however closed, non-slippery shoes are recommended on days where there is much walking or easy trekking involved.

Equipment - A backpack/day pack will come in handy as well as a reusable water bottle.

Photography

You should always ask permission before taking anyone's photograph and respect their decision if they say no. Your guide will indicate when you cannot take photographs, or better still, ask him/her if you are unsure.

Safety & Security

Most people find that generally Sri Lanka is a very friendly and hospitable country to visit and feel comfortable wandering around its colourful streets. However, as with any area you are not familiar with (and in particular in large cities such as Colombo), it is recommended that you exercise more caution at night.

Please be aware of your personal items and ensure you keep belongings on you at all times and that your suitcase/daypack has a lock on it, this is especially recommended in crowded areas like marketplaces and train stations. Do not leave any valuables unattended in your hotel room. We advise you to lock away any cash, credit cards, airline tickets, passports, jewellery, etc. in the safe (either in your room or at Reception). Not all hotels will have in-room safes so, if this is not possible, you must either carry these things with you, or put them in the hotel safe. Wearing a money belt under your clothing is strongly recommended.

It is also recommended that you do not bring valuable jewellery, etc. with you to Sri Lanka. We suggest that each passenger takes photocopies of their passport and that the copies are kept in various sections of your luggage - i.e. not where the original documents are kept!

Likewise, whilst travelling each day, do not leave any valuables unattended on the bus. It is your own responsibility to ensure that you carry your money and valuables on you at all times.

Visas & Immigration

Entry visas are required by all visitors to Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan visa is an ETA (Electronic Travel Authorisation), the price of which is included in your full inclusive package and is applied for online by Wendy Wu Tours. Once completed, Wendy Wu Tours will print this and include it with your final itinerary and documentation. You will need to keep the ETA with your passport and present to authorities upon entry into Sri Lanka.

If you have not purchased the fully inclusive package which includes the Sri Lankan ETA, you will need to apply for this and purchase it yourself. Validity on passports should be 6 months from your return date. There is severe penalty for drug traffickers.

Luggage & Incidental Items

On all tours, passengers are limited to 1 suitcase per person, weighing no more than 20kg and 1 piece of hand luggage under 7 kg. A camera, fold up umbrella, torch, insect repellent, sun hat and sun block are also recommended.

Insurance & Health

Comprehensive Travel Insurance is highly recommended. If you have chosen to decline the insurance offered by your agent or Wendy Wu Tours please ensure you have arranged the appropriate cover for your holiday, as overseas medical costs are expensive and Medicare and Australian private health insurance will not cover you outside of Australia. If you are taking out travel insurance with your **credit card company**, you need to investigate the policy's inclusions and conditions fully. You should receive a policy number, an international access phone number to contact them in an emergency and a copy of full conditions.

Health - We strongly advise that you consult your doctor or contact the Travellers Medical and Vaccination Centre in your capital city as multiple inoculations may be required at least 6 weeks prior to departure. We strongly encourage all passengers to take necessary measures to avoid insect bites, including using insect repellent at all times. Water-borne, food-borne, parasitic and other infectious diseases (including typhoid and hepatitis) are also prevalent. You should also check the latest Travel Advice and Health Alerts for all the countries being visited at www.smartraveller.gov.au for up to the minute information. Wendy Wu Tours' staff are not qualified to make any sort of recommendations in this regard.

Money

Local Currency - The Sri Lankan unit of currency is the LHR (Sri Lankan rupee), where 1 LHR consists of 100 cents. Coins come in denominations of 5, 10, 25 and 50 cents and Rs. 1, 2, 5 and 10. The higher value denominations are found as notes, namely Rs.10, 20, 50, 100, 200, 500 and 1000.

Changing Money, Credit Cards and ATM's - The use and acceptance of credit cards is widespread. While visiting any remote areas it is advisable to arrange for an alternative mode of payment apart from credit card.

Most outlets take all major credit cards and ATM machines are readily available, where the exchange rate is automatic. Some carry a sizeable surcharge per withdrawal so check with your credit card company beforehand. Not all ATM

machines take all kinds of cards; many will not take Visa or MasterCard, or will take one but not the other. Please ensure that you look for the credit card logos on the ATM signs. It is advisable to inform your credit card company/Bank that you intend to be in Sri Lanka prior to your departure.

Time Difference

While on holidays, most people like to contact their family members or friends but it is often difficult to work out the time back home. Sri Lanka has a Standard time zone which is 4 ½ hours behind Australian EST.

Keeping in Touch

Phones - Calls can be made from your hotel, however, please check the cost before you make a call as it can be expensive. To call Wendy Wu Tours in Sydney you would need to dial 00 61 2 9224 8888.

Mobile phones - Mobile phones are very popular in Sri Lanka and should have coverage as long as you have activated Global Roaming. You may need to speak to your Mobile provider prior to travel to organise this.

Post - It costs approximately Rs 4.50 to post a letter locally and it can take up to three weeks.

Internet & Email - There are internet cafes in cities and small towns alike, where you can access your email. This is often the easiest and cheapest way to keep in touch. Rates vary between Rs 4 - 12. The business centres in most hotels has internet access - once again, please check relevant costs.

Electricity

Voltage - The electricity in Sri Lanka is 230 volts, 50 cycles per second. Most receptacles in Sri Lanka have three large round pins in a triangular pattern.



3 large round pin plug

Etiquette & Customs

In most cases your Tour Leader will brief you on etiquette and local customs; however there are a couple of good points worth noting;

Sri Lanka is a very family-orientated society and much of the culture is reflected in this.

- The predominant religion of Sri Lanka is Buddhism. As in many Buddhist countries, there are many significant temples open to foreign visitors. These temples are places of worship and devotion in addition to being an attraction. As such please be mindful and respectful at all times.
- Women should not touch a Buddhist monk under any circumstance and should also never try to give anything directly to a monk.
- Do not photograph Buddhist monks without their permission. It's OK to take pictures of statues and images of Buddha, but it's not acceptable to pose in front of Buddha.
- Try to respect the locals to the same degree you would want to be respected at home.
- Visitors should dress neatly and conservatively in all religious shrines. It is acceptable to wear shoes when walking around the compound, but not inside.

Religion

The local population practices a variety of local religions, however the majority (70%) are Theravada Buddhists, 15% are Hindu's, 7.5% are Muslims and another 7.5% are Christians. Sri Lanka has been ranked the 3rd most religious country in the world by a 2008 poll, with the vast majority of locals saying that religion is an important part of their daily life.

Our Ground Operator

If you have any concerns prior to your departure please do not hesitate to contact our office on 1300 727 998 or your local travel agent during office hours.

If it is outside of hours and your query is urgent please email: afterhrsassistance@wendywutours.com.au

Wendy Wu Tours wish to ensure that your holiday runs as smoothly as possible and so if, during your trip you are dissatisfied with any element of your arrangements please notify your National Escort or Local Guide who will endeavour to resolve the issue at the time. During your time in Sri Lanka your arrangements will be handled by our partners - Aitken Spence.

Their office contact details are:

Aitken Spence Travels Ltd (Formerly ACE Travels)

315 Vauxhall Street, Colombo

Tel: 94 - 11 - 2499600/2308308 Ext 9599

Mobile: 94 - 777-557887

The content of this fact sheet was correct at the time of printing and may be subject to change.

