

Independent **TRAVEL****TRAVELLERS TALES****BY DESIGN Sri Lanka ~ a cultural tour ...**

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FIRSTLY, getting there. There are direct flights from London to Colombo, but for our clients we recommend Emirates from Manchester, changing in Dubai.

"We flew business to Dubai – what an experience TOTAL luxury, champagne all the way, huge seat pods, fantastic food and service to die for."

First stop ~ Colombo

The capital city of Colombo and usually a night here to settle in after the flight and acclimatise to the wonderful climate. Meet your guide who will be with you for your tour.

"We arrived at Colombo and were met by Priyal our guide/driver for the week. I knew straight away that we would get on with him. He was young (32), knowledgeable, enthusiastic and polite and helpful.

"He was great fun and we had a load of laughs and he really made the tour a complete pleasure. Surprisingly it was not just about the places we visited but the journey in between; we were able to see at first hand a beautiful and fascinating country."

Day two ~ the tour begins— After breakfast transfer to Dambulla visiting the Pinnawela Elephant Orphanage en route.

The Pinnawela Elephant Orphanage is unique in that it breeds wild elephants in captivity and also takes care of orphaned wild elephants found in the jungles. Here you will enjoy watching the daily routine of feeding and bathing the elephants. Continue on your journey to Dambulla.

"The tour commenced the following day with an interesting journey to Pinnawela Elephant orphanage— excellent and on to Amaya Lake. Amaya Lake is in a lovely position. Nice villa style rooms spotlessly clean, good restaurant and lovely staff. Full marks again."

Day three ~ Polonnaruwa.

After breakfast, visit Polonnaruwa, a ruined city which displays the influences of both Indian and Sinhalese cultures. See the world famous Polonnaruwa Gal Viharaya consisting of three huge stone monoliths of the Lord Buddha, in sitting, standing and reclining positions

"The visit next day to Polonnaruwa was fascinating especially for anyone like me with an interest in cultures and history. However it is a huge site (we got round it by car). The local guide was a mine of information and this 9th century site is amazing and very much more advanced than anything in the West of Europe at that time. It predates the major castles and cathedrals by 300 years."

Day four ~ Sigiriya. After an early rise, you will have the opportunity to climb

the famous Sigiriya Rock fortress. Considered the eighth wonder of the world, Sigiriya was built in 5AD by patricide King Kasyappa and boasts world famous frescoes of women carved onto the sheer rock face.

"Equally impressive, and perhaps more so because it predates the above by 500 years, is Sigiriya. This 200mtr vertical rock fort is one hell of a climb. 1200 steps, vertiginous drops, you need a head for heights and to be pretty fit to get up there. Once gain the local guide on our tour was first class."

En route you will visit Dambulla cave temples and then go on to Kandy, the drive takes approximately 3 hours with stunning scenery on the way as you begin the climb to the delightful hill station.

"The Dambulla cave temple is stunning, 2200 years old and totally intact. Then on to Kandy, The Mahawela Reach hotel is lovely and the following day of gem factory visit, wood carver batik factory, spice garden and tea factory is very interesting. There was no hassle to buy stuff but we did pick up some souvenir items. We found Sri Lanka generally hassle free. People / hawkers do try but also accept no as no. Like all Sri Lankans even the hawkers seem to be polite."

Day Five ~ Nuwara Eliya.

After breakfast, travel to Nuwara Eliya. The scenery is breathtaking as you drive on mountainous roads amidst tea gardens and cascading waterfalls

"Nuwara Eliya is known as little England for good reason. It's worth the trip though as the Tea Factory is special. In a spectacular spot

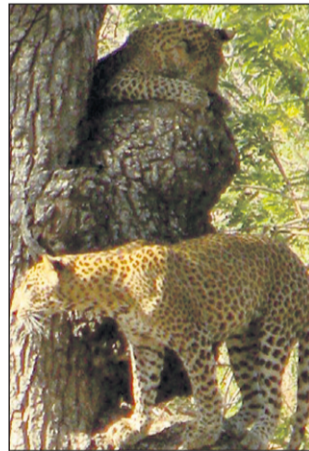
amongst the tea plantations. Once again it's a superb hotel and they gave us a very warm welcome and UPGRADED us again!"

Day Six ~ Yala National Park.

After breakfast this morning leave for Yala Tissamaharama

"The following day was an early start which got us to Kataragama in the early afternoon. We drove through some VERY spectacular scenery including the Ella Gap once again on roads which in places ceased to exist. Through bustling towns where goats and cows roamed the streets. None of the towns could be described as picturesque but colourful and fascinating certainly.

"Yala National Park was fantastic and once again our tour company secured the service of Kalu the top guide. He found us the leopards; we saw 3 and got some spectacular pictures. This was what I came to see and it made the trip for me. FANTASTIC



Day seven ~ Galle. After breakfast, you will begin your trip to Galle, the southern capital of Sri Lanka. Visit the famous Dutch ram-



parts in the Galle Fort. This fort now houses most government offices, the old post office, the 350 year old beautiful Dutch church and other colonial style buildings typical of the architecture that prevailed in that era. Walk along the ramparts with a view of the harbour and the famous old lighthouse. Galle is well known for its cottage industries and lace making, a traditional southern Sri Lankan craft. Visit a lace making craft centre and a mask making centre. These wooden masks are used in ceremonies and festivals in Sri Lanka. Each one is hand carved, reflecting a particular human emotion.

"On then to Galle fortress and upgraded again. We both regretted not having more than one night there it is beautiful and would make a great base for exploring the west and south of Sri Lanka. I would recommend it without hesitation."

Galle is also within easy reach of Dondra Point, which is the best centre in Sri Lanka for whale and dolphin watching – at the right time of year of course.

Your cultural tour concludes here, so what's needed now is some first class R and R. For many people the ideal destination is the Maldives, but why not stay on beautiful Sri Lanka and head to Bentota on the south west coast.

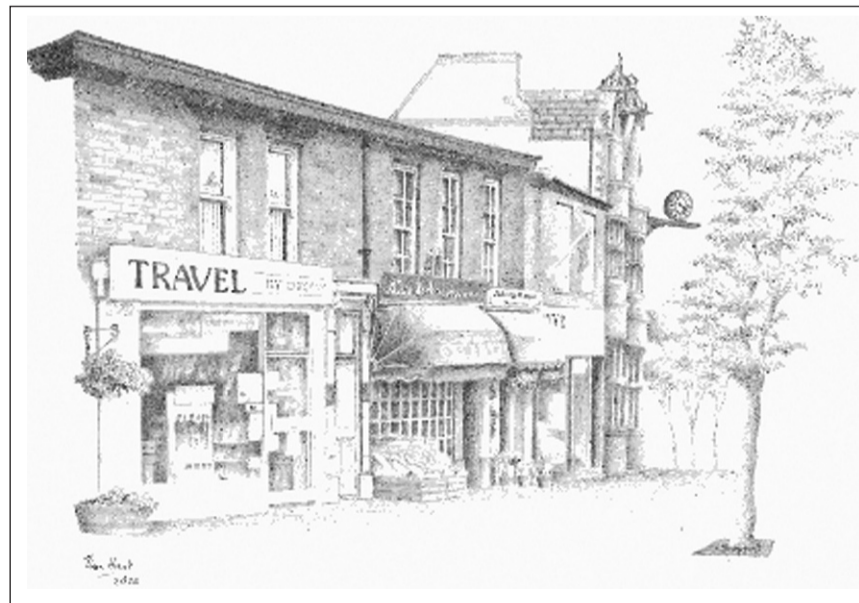
"Then on to Saman Villas WOW !!!! This is a BEAUTIFUL Place. The standard villa apartments are superb, there is a verandah, lounge area, raised bedroom, separate dressing room and a superb bathroom with a

huge deep bath and a shower open to the sky. The hotel is set on a rocky headland so everyone gets a sea view. The staff are wonderful and cannot do enough for you. Saman villas is very quiet, almost monastically so. The décor is minimalist and there is no entertainment and only occasionally music in the bar. We loved Saman villas as it was a perfect place to do not much at all after the tour. The weather was generally good despite Saman being in the SW monsoon wet zone. In fact the final 3 days were hot and sunny."

And the final word:

"What makes Sri Lanka special; is the people. I have never been anywhere that has been more welcoming the welcome is almost overwhelming. The Sinhalese have a warm ready smile for you that is genuine and not born out of trying to sell you something. Hotel staff take great pride in their work and serve you with warmth and enthusiasm. They are extremely polite – Sir /madam all the time. Many, many people came up to us just to say thank you for coming to Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka is also still very inexpensive. The average wage for an office worker is £150 per month and prices of food/clothing etc reflect this."

Thanks this holiday was SUPERB. With thanks to Graham and Heather Hall for sharing their wonderful holiday with us. And if you would like to visit Sri Lanka, call into Travel by Design and we will put your dream holiday together.



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