## Sri Lanka – Wildlife & History

### Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

**Outline itinerary**

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**Blue Whales extension**

| Days 16/18 | Koggala                                      |
| Day 19     | Katunayake                                   |
| Day 20     | Fly London                                   |

**Beruwala Beach extension**

(You could take this extension after the main trip or after Blue Whales extension)

| Day 19/21  | Cinnamon Bey, Beruwala Beach.                |
| Day 22     | Fly London                                   |

*See next page for dates and prices*
2020

Saturday 7th November – Monday 23rd November 2020
Cost: £3,195
Extension: Sunday 22nd November – Thursday 26th November 2020
Cost: £795
Beruwala Beach extension: to Saturday 28th November 2020
Cost: £695

Saturday 19th December – Monday 4th January 2021
Cost: £3,395
Extension: Sunday 3rd January – Thursday 7th January 2021
Cost: £895
Beruwala Beach extension: to Saturday 9th January 2021
Cost: £695

2021

Saturday 30th January – Monday 15th February 2021
Cost: £3,195
Extension: Sunday 14th February – Thursday 18th February 2021
Cost: £795
Beruwala Beach extension: to Saturday 20th February 2021
Cost: £695

Saturday 6th November – Monday 22nd November 2021
Cost: £3,195
Extension: Sunday 21st November – Thursday 25th November 2021
Cost: £795
Beruwala Beach extension: to Saturday 27th November 2021
Cost: £695

Saturday 18th December – Monday 3rd January 2022
Cost: £3,395
Extension: Sunday 2nd January – Thursday 6th January 2022
Cost: £895
Beruwala Beach extension: to Saturday 8th January 2022
Cost: £695

2022

Saturday 29th January – Monday 14th February 2022
Cost: £3,395
Extension: Sunday 13th February – Thursday 17th February 2022
Cost: £795
Beruwala Beach extension: to Saturday 19th February 2022
Cost: £695

Saturday 5th November – Monday 21st November 2021
Cost: £3,395
Extension: Sunday 20th November – Thursday 24th November 2022
Cost: £795
Beruwala Beach extension: to Saturday 26th November 2022
Cost: £695

Saturday 17th December – Monday 2nd January 2023
Cost: £3,595
Extension: Sunday 1st January – Thursday 5th January 2023
Cost: £895
Beruwala Beach extension: to Saturday 7th January 2023
Cost: £695

**Cost**

£500 reduction if booked without flights, land only trip.

**Single room supplement**

£795 (extension: £195 and £350 for Beruwala Beach extension).
Highlights

- Over 200 bird species.
- We’ll hope to see most of the island’s 34 endemics on the tour.
- Warm, tropical climate.
- Comfortable hotels & tasty cuisine.
- Leopard & Indian Elephant among mammals likely to be encountered.
- Tea estates in the hills, with a visit to one during the holiday.
- Time spent in ancient cities of Anuradhapura & Sigiriya.
- Colourful butterflies & a rich flora.
- Visit to spice growing area.
- Friendly islanders.
- Blue Whales and Beach Extensions.
- Led by an expert naturalist guide.

Accommodation
Comfortable tourist class hotels and lodge, all with private facilities.

Food
All included in the price. Comfortable tourist class hotels and lodge, all with private facilities.

How does the wildlife and community benefit from this tour?

On this tour we will visit many interesting historic and cultural places; everywhere we go we will be met with smiling faces of the locals going about their day to day activity or providing a service in an area we visit. Tourism is the main income for many of these local communities and life has evolved around the people who come to visit this beautiful island. We will also spend time in local villages searching for wildlife that has been looked after by young wildlife enthusiasts. They ensure that the habitat that these birds, mammals and reptiles live in are protected, taking care for the future of the species and viewing pleasure of wildlife lovers.

Many research and conservation projects are launched every year in Sri Lanka which help students to learn about the island’s flora and fauna. These projects are collaborations between the wildlife department and the tourism departments of Sri Lanka, as tourists visiting national parks and forests generate a large income for the country.

With the increasing interest in Whale watching around our waters, many Sri Lankans have now diverted their attention to studying marine biology and the feedback and recommendation coming from these new minds are helping to shape policies about the subject. The most recent outcome of this was to change shipping lanes further into international waters, thereby decreasing the fatalities and injuries caused to whales due to collisions with vessels.
NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather and other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available. We cannot guarantee a particular hotel, but always endeavour to book similar to the one mentioned in the itinerary.

**Introduction**

The principle aim of this holiday will be to see a representative selection of the island's diverse birdlife, including most of the 34 species endemic to Sri Lanka. We also hope to encounter a good variety of mammals, particularly at Yala National Park and Lunugamvehera National Park where Indian Elephant and Leopard are both possibilities, and Uda Walawe, one of the best Elephant reserves in Asia. Tour members with interests in other aspects of natural history will not be disappointed; the island boasts a wonderful tropical flora, colourful butterflies, including huge bird-wings, and a fascinating variety of reptiles. Everywhere we go in Sri Lanka we will see evidence of the island's extraordinary history, especially during the first few days of the itinerary when we visit the ancient city of Anuradhapura, Mihintale and the rock fortress at Sigiriya.

There is a generally relaxed pace to this tour although early starts are necessary for the excursions to Yala National Park, Lunugamvehera National Park, Horton Plains and Sinharaja Forest. The island's roads are not designed for speed but we have relatively few long drives and most journeys will be punctuated by regular stops to look at birds or to photograph scenery. Included in the itinerary will be a visit to a spice garden near Matale and a stop at one of the highland tea estates for a short tour of the factory. For those who wish to stay longer on this beguiling island, we recommend a post-tour extensions to Mirissa and/or Beruwala Beach.

**Day 1**

**Saturday**

**In Flight**

We depart London in the evening on a direct Sri Lankan Airlines scheduled flight to Colombo. We will be in-flight overnight. If you would prefer to fly on any other airline from London to Colombo, we can arrange this for you (availability permitting), though this is likely to involve extra cost. Call Rajan on 01962 733051 for details.

**Day 2**

**Sunday**

**Anuradhapura**

We arrive in Colombo and will be met at the airport by a Sri Lankan naturalist who will escort us throughout the tour. Later, as we head north towards Anuradhapura, a light meal stop will no doubt be welcome after the overnight flight and will give us an opportunity to become acquainted with some characteristic Sri Lankan birds such as Common
Myna, Koel, Coppersmith Barbet and Purple Sunbird. Time permitting, we will stop at Anawilundawa wetland and hope to see Lesser Whistling Duck, Cotton Pygmy Goose, Asian Openbill, Black-headed Ibis, Eurasian Spoonbill, Indian Pond Heron and Purple Heron, plus Cattle, Great, Intermediate and Little Egrets, Spot-billed Pelican, Little and Indian Cormorants, Darter, Brahminy Kite, White-breasted Waterhen, Purple Swamphen, Common Coot, Pheasant-tailed Jacana, Red-wattled Lapwing, Whiskered Tern, Rose-ringed Parakeet, Indian Swiftlet, Asian Palm Swift, House Crow, Barn Swallow, White-bellied Drongo and Yellow-billed Babbler. Continuing along the road we will reach the ancient capital of Anuradhapura in the evening which will be our base for two nights. Our hotel is situated close to a massive man-made reservoir (or 'tank'), one of many in this part of Sri Lanka. The tank provides food for a variety of waterbirds including Spot-billed Pelican, cormorants, Whiskered Tern and wildfowl, whilst its muddy shoreline may be frequented by a number of waders if conditions are suitable. Today or tomorrow, we will explore the trees and scrub near our hotel in search of Jacobin Cuckoo, Blue-faced Malkoha and a number of other Dry Zone birds. Birds that are regularly seen in the hotel’s garden include Brown-headed Barbet, White-throated and Stork-billed Kingfishers, Asian Koel, and Purple, Long-billed and Purple-rumped Sunbirds. Indian Pittas often winter in the vicinity, announcing their presence with distinctive whistles as dusk settles and sometimes feeding along the garden paths.

Day 3

Anuradhapura

Anuradhapura was founded in about the 4th century BC and became Sri Lanka’s first capital. It was a very well planned city with a regular water supply assured by the construction of numerous reservoirs; however, eventually a struggle for power led to the re-location of the capital and subsequent abandonment of the city. Today, remarkably well preserved remains of this ancient civilisation can be seen in a pleasant parkland setting and we will spend the morning touring these. There will be plenty of birds to look at amid the monuments and on the nearby tanks. Among the species we can expect to see are Pond Heron, White-breasted Waterhen, Pheasant-tailed Jacana, Brahminy Kite, Crested Tree-swift, Indian Roller, Rose-ringed Parakeet, Black-rumped Flameback Woodpecker, Indian Robin, Oriental Magpie Robin and Black Drongo. The ubiquitous, but always endearing, Palm Squirrels will be a regular sight throughout the tour and two other common mammals should make their first appearance during the morning: the agile Grey Langur and the slower moving Toque Macaque. A variety of lizards may be found, including Water Monitors which can grow up to a metre in length.
Later in the day we will drive the short distance from Anuradhapura to Mihintale where Buddhism was first introduced to the island. A huge dagoba (a dome-shaped shrine) marks this important site and is surrounded by parkland and forest. The area is rich in birds and the species we will be looking out for here include Sri Lanka Grey Hornbill, Crimson-fronted Barbet, Greater Flameback Woodpecker, Small Minivet, Blue-winged Leafbird, Iora, Black-hooded Oriole, Sri Lanka Wood-shrike and White-browed Bulbul. If we are lucky we may also encounter a troupe of Purple-faced Leaf-monkeys, another endemic and a much more timid creature than the other two resident primates.

Day 4

Sigiriya

Today’s destination is the rock fortress at Sigiriya. As we travel there from Anuradhapura we will visit a famous statue of the Buddha, the Avukana. The Avukana is a standing statue of the Buddha over 40 feet high. We will also pause at several roadside tanks inhabited by a variety of waterbirds. Great, Intermediate, Little and Cattle Egrets are all likely to be seen during the journey and other species may include Painted and Openbill Storks, Purple Heron, Black-headed Ibis, Cotton Pygmy-goose, Purple Swamphen, Red-wattled and Yellow-wattled Lapwings, Blue-tailed and Green Bee-eaters, Streaked Weaver and Black-headed Munia.

King Kasyapa was responsible for the building of a city fortress on Sigiriya rock in 477 AD. Standing at the foot of the rock today it seems a staggering achievement that a palace and complex of gardens were constructed on the 3-acre summit. The complex served as a royal citadel for 18 years. Visitors can reach the site by ascending flights of steps hewn into the rock; however, it is a steep climb and not recommended for anyone with a fear of heights. A few frescoes are all that remain of some 500 paintings which formerly graced the rock walls and these can be viewed during the ascent. Shahin Falcons nest on the rock and the surrounding primary forest is superb for birds (keen birders may find an exploration of the latter an attractive alternative to scaling the rock). Birds to look for include Woolly-necked Stork, Crested Serpent-eagle, Emerald Dove, Orange-breasted Green Pigeon, Alexandrine Parakeet, Grey-bellied Cuckoo, Black-crested Bulbul, Paradise Flycatcher, White-browed Fantail, White-rumped Shama, Forest Wagtail, Oriental White-Eye, Brown-capped Babblers and Pale-billed Flowerpecker.

We stay overnight in the Sigiriya Hotel, which is sufficiently close to the rock for those favouring a restful afternoon to sit, drink in hand, watching the exertions of the climbers. There’s also a tempting swimming pool. Birdlife in the gardens and surrounding scrub often includes several Indian Pittas, Brown-capped Babblers and, most winters, one or more Orange-headed Ground Thrushes. Time permitting and subject to weather conditions, a night drive may be
organised on one of the nights in Sigiriya to the surrounding Sigiriya forest in search of Common Palm Civet, Ring-tailed Civet, Indian Gerbil and other nocturnal mammals and birds.

**Day 5**

**Sigiriya**

We will spend today at Sigiriya enjoying the forest birdlife or perhaps scaling the rock in the cooler morning air. Later, for anyone interested in seeing a further aspect of Sri Lankan history there will be an opportunity to visit Polonnaruwa (at additional cost). The capital was relocated here in the 11th century AD after Anuradhapura suffered an invasion from India, and many remains of the ancient city can still be found including a famous reclining Buddha. Like other such areas of historic interest, Polonnaruwa is also frequented by good numbers of birds, and visitors may be lucky enough to find one of the resident Brown Fish Owls. The birdwatching programme at Sigiriya will consist of further time in the excellent forests surrounding the rock with the focus on finding some of the more retiring species and endemics. The magnificent white-phase of the male Paradise Flycatcher can often be seen here – their tail feathers trail out behind them like white streamers as they fly from perch to perch. The occasional wild Asian Elephant can be encountered in the forests as may Slender Loris, although the latter is nocturnal and so is rarely seen during the day. Before dinner we’ll attempt to find Jerdon’s Nightjar as well as other nocturnal species.

**Day 6**

**Kandy**

We leave Sigiriya today after an early breakfast and drive south towards Kandy. As we pass through the island’s main spice growing area around Matale, we will pause briefly to look round one of the numerous spice gardens beside the main road.

On the way we will stop at Dambulla cave temple which is a World Heritage Site. A sacred pilgrimage site for 22 centuries, this cave monastery (with its five sanctuaries), is the largest, best-preserved cave-temple complex in Sri Lanka. The Buddhist mural paintings (covering an area of 2,100 square metres) are of particular importance, as are the site’s 157 statues. There are numerous spice gardens beside the main road. Many kinds of spice are cultivated here and it is possible to purchase some of the produce. We’ll have lunch at the Spice Garden.
As we head towards Kandy, the vegetation becomes very luxuriant and green, signifying our departure from the Dry Zone into the edge of the Hill Country.

Kandy is steeped in history and was the capital for a succession of Kandyan kings until the city was captured by the British in 1815. The famous ‘Temple of the Tooth’ beside Kandy Lake is one of the best known Buddhist temples in the country and attracts thousands of visitors every year. Kandy is traditionally a centre of music and dance and on most nights it is possible to witness demonstrations of both art forms at special performances. Tour members wishing to attend a performance of dancing will probably be best advised do so today (ticket cost is around £8). We will stay at The Thilanka or Suisse Hotel.

Day 7

Kandy

The lovely forested hills around Kandy are home to a number of endemic birds including the Yellow-fronted Barbet. Today we will visit Udawattakele Reserve on a hillside overlooking the lake and hope to encounter one of the ‘bird-waves’ which are a feature of tropical forests. Often the forest will initially appear devoid of birds but the arrival of a mixed-species feeding flock will transform the scene, as suddenly half a dozen or more species will appear in the same field of view. Udawattakele’s avian residents include Emerald Dove, Greater Flameback, White-bellied Drongo, Yellow-browed Bulbul, Sri Lanka Scimitar Babbler, Brown, Brown-breasted and Grey-headed/Canary Flycatchers, Indian Blue Robin and Large-billed Leaf-Warbler. A small pool in the forest is often frequented by some particularly large Water Monitors.

The Peradeniya Royal Botanical Gardens is where we’ll spend the afternoon. Once the pleasure gardens of a Kandyan Queen, the 150 acres of gardens are full of interesting trees and plants set out in a very attractive style; the orchid house is particularly worth a visit. Birds flock to enjoy the many fruiting trees in the gardens and we may find two endemic parrots, the diminutive Sri Lanka Hanging Parrot and Layard’s Parakeet. Other regular visitors include Hill Myna, Velvet-fronted Nuthatch and Tickell’s Blue Flycatcher. There is a good chance of seeing the large colony of Indian Flying Foxes in the heart of the gardens and, as
dusk approaches, the giant fruit bats become increasingly active as they prepare for their nocturnal forays into the surrounding country.

The birdwatching will be divided into two half-day excursions and, if time permits, later in the day we will travel to the Hanthana mountain range about 10 kilometres from the city where we’ll be looking for such birds as Layard’s and Plum-headed Parakeets, Black Eagle and Bar-winged Flycatcher-Shrike. Over the last few years this picturesque locality has proved to be well worth visiting and one of the best parakeet spots on the tour.

Day 8  
Saturday  
Nuwara Eliya

The 70-kilometre drive from Kandy to Nuwara Eliya will take us deeper into the Hill Country and past a succession of tea estates. We will stop at one of these to join a tour of the factory where we can see the various processes leading to the production of top quality Ceylon tea and sample the finished product.

Nuwara Eliya is the capital town of the Hill Country and a delightful place to stay for two nights. A golf course and racecourse are reminders of its popularity as a resort for the British during the days of the Raj and there are other resonances of a bygone era in the quaint Hill Club and the Victorian style of architecture. Stands of pines are a feature of the area and there is a distinctly cooler feel to the air as might be expected at an altitude of 1,890 metres. After lunch at our hotel we will drive into town and visit the Victoria Park, a small public gardens very reminiscent of those in many British towns. The birdlife is, however, startlingly different and despite the afternoon crowds we can expect to see a number of interesting species including two more endemics, the handsome Yellow-eared Bulbul and Sri Lanka Hill White-eye. A small stream running through the park is usually frequented by Pied Thrushes – long distance migrants from the Himalayas – and it is often possible to find Indian Pitta and Indian Blue Robin here. Other birds we might see include Common Sandpiper, Brown Shrike, Grey Wagtail, Blyth’s Reed Warbler and Kashmir Flycatcher.
Day 9

Nuwara Eliya

We will spend today on the Horton Plains, Sri Lanka’s highest and most isolated plateau. Although only 28 kilometres from Nuwara Eliya, the road is in poor condition and the final ascent to the plateau involves some steep inclines. This is a fascinating place, a mixture of open grassy expanses and patches of forest, much of the latter festooned with epiphytes. The scenery is spectacular and on clear days it is possible to see the distant summit of Adam’s Peak. At World’s End, the plateau drops steeply to the plains over 1,000 metres below and a swirling cauldron of clouds gather overhead as the day progresses. We should certainly hear, and hopefully see, the extremely handsome Purple-faced Leaf Monkey in the forests, a long-coated, highland subspecies also known as the Bear Monkey. Tennant’s Giant Squirrels also inhabit the trees, as do the smaller Dusky Striped Squirrels and in the open plains we may see a distant herd of Sambar Deer. Pied Bush Chats are one of the more conspicuous bird inhabitants, but other species to look for include Blyth’s Hawk-eagle, Black Eagle, Sri Lanka Woodpigeon, Sri Lanka Blue Magpie, Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike, Orange-billed Babbler, Dull Blue Flycatcher, Zitting Cisticola, Sri Lanka Bush Warbler and Hill Swallow. The rare Arrenga or Sri Lanka Whistling Thrush is another endemic found on the Horton Plains; it is extremely hard to find, although one particular pool is always worth checking in the hope that the resident male is in view. The Whistling Thrushes regularly visit this pool during the first half-hour of daylight, so an early start from Nuwara Eliya is advisable in order to maximise our chances of seeing this attractive thrush. Although at first sight the Horton Plains does not look like typical reptile habitat, it boasts several rare endemic species (although none of these are easy to locate).

If time permits, we will also visit Hakgala Botanical Gardens on the outskirts of the town. Here we have another chance to meet the Purple-faced Leaf Monkey as a troop often resides in these attractive gardens. A variety of birds may be seen as we follow a circular trail around the perimeter of the gardens including Scimitar Babbler, Yellow-eared and Black Bulbuls, Dark-fronted Babbler, Kashmir and Grey-headed Flycatchers, Scarlet Minivet and Sri Lanka White-eye.

Rhinoceros-horned Lizard

Waterfall on the Horton Plains
Day 10

Tissamaharama

Today we descend into the plains on a journey involving numerous hairpin bends, and frequent photographic opportunities, as the changes in elevation present different views of the hills stretching away to the east. We will punctuate the long drive to the coast with several stops. The first of these will be at the Surrey Tea Estate where trees surrounding the former manager’s house attract a great variety of birdlife. Sri Lanka Woodpigeons breed here and the garden’s best known residents are a pair of Brown Wood Owls which can be very hard to find at their day-time roost but are a candidate for tour highlight if discovered! After more winding twists and turns we eventually reach Ella where a superbly situated rest house affords spectacular views down a deep valley with rugged hills on every side. This makes an ideal lunch stop and, in addition to the chance of raptors soaring over the valley, we should see a good selection of birds during our break, including Chestnut-headed Bee-eater and all three sunbirds. Several hours after leaving Ella, we will reach the hot dry southern plains, and as we continue south, the dominant scrub jungle is gradually replaced by increasingly frequent palms. Occasional roadside birds may interrupt our progress but the next planned stop is to look for a nesting pair of the rare White-naped Woodpecker at a site not too far from our next hotel, at Tissamaharama.

Our accommodation at Tissamaharama is situated near a huge tank and, after checking in to the hotel, we will investigate the marshy western shoreline of this attractive lake. Depending on the water level we could find large numbers of waterbirds here and likely species include Spot-billed Pelican, Indian and Little Cormorants, Oriental Darter, Pond and Purple Herons, Yellow Bittern, Painted Stork, White-bellied Sea-eagle, Purple Swamphen, Caspian Tern, Marsh and Purple Herons, Stork-billed Kingfisher, Pied Cuckoo, Clamorous Reed Warbler and Streaked Weaver. Masses of Whiskered Terns congregate over the water and among these we may identify a few of the rarer White-winged Terns. Nearby Deberawewa Tank is another good locality to see both Black and Yellow Bitterns, plus Black-headed Munia and Streaked Weaver in the waterside vegetation and a selection of passerines in the bushes. Not far from here we pass another roost of Indian Flying Foxes, and both langurs and macaques are plentiful around Tissamaharama which contains a number of important shrines (ensuring plenty of hand-outs for the monkeys!)
Day 11

Lunugamvehera – Yala

In the morning we will drive for over an hour to the impressive Lunugamvehera National Park with our packed breakfast and lunch for a full day safari. This National Park was declared in 1995 with the intention of protecting the catchment area of the Lunugamvehera reservoir. Ghostly white dead trees decorate the reservoir and its rotting remains make perfect watch towers for nesting White-bellied Sea Eagles. The recent spike in Leopard populations in this park has made it a sought out alternative to Yala National Park. Mosaic of scrubland and grassland make up the forest which is home to Sloth Bear, Muntjac, Mouse Deer, Stripe-necked Mongoose and an array of birds including the rare Racket-tailed Drongo and common water birds such as the Grey Heron, Black-headed Ibis, Asian Openbill, Painted Stork and Spot-billed Pelican. We leave Lunugamvehera late in the evening and drive to Yala where we’ll stay for two nights at the very comfortable Cinnamon Wild Yala Hotel on the coast.

Day 12

Yala

An early start will be necessary to enter the very popular and busy Yala National Park in jeeps for a morning of bird and mammal watching. Yala is among the oldest and best known National Park in Sri Lanka and unlike many African parks with open plains, Yala has a diverse ecosystems ranging from moist monsoon forest, to dry monsoon forests, semi-deciduous forests, thorn forests, grasslands, sandy beaches and both freshwater and marine wetlands.

Early morning is the best time to come across a Sloth Bear or Leopard but it is also the time of peak bird activity and there will be much to see in this wonderful reserve. A network of tracks criss-crosses the accessible areas of the national park. Jeeps must keep to designated tracks except in a few areas and walking is mostly forbidden. We should see many birds during the morning. Peacocks are common, and in the first few hours after dawn Sri Lanka Junglefowl emerge from cover to display and call. Raptors include Changeable Hawk-eagle, White-bellied Sea-eagle, and Grey-headed Fish-eagle.

Black-necked and Adjutant Storks are among the many waterbirds inhabiting the reserve (albeit both very rare) and waders include the odd-looking Great Thick-Knee. Not all the residents are associated with water and in the drier areas we will be looking for Blue-tailed and Little Green Bee-eaters, Hoopoe, Blue-faced Malkoha, Sirkeer, Malabar Pied Hornbill, Black-headed Cuckoo-Shrike, Brown Shrike, Baya Weaver, White-throated Silver-bill and Brahminy Myna. At times we will emerge onto the coast where the views of magnificent stretches of deserted beach appear to be taken straight from the pages of a holiday brochure! One or two small fishing communities exist inside the park and, where
the catches are brought ashore, we might find flocks of Brown-headed Gulls; a scan of offshore rocks could reveal both Great Crested and Lesser Crested Terns.

The Yala Leopards, like big cats everywhere, are unpredictable in their appearances but tales of obliging individuals are frequent. Wild Boar are fairly conspicuous in the park, and both Ruddy and Grey Mongooses occur, the former distinguished by a black tail-tip. Elephants are widespread inside Yala but surprisingly elusive and hard to see amidst the woodland. If we are lucky we may chance upon a family group bathing in one of the pools. To complete a dazzling array of creatures, Land and Water Monitors are numerous and large Mugger Crocodiles inhabit the bigger pools. As with all such excursions, luck will play a big part in what we see during our time in Yala, but no visit is ever dull and we are certain to encounter an impressive variety of species.

The afternoon is free for relaxation at the hotel but there are more active options including hiring a jeep for another visit to Yala (at extra cost) or joining the leader in a birdwatching excursion to nearby areas.

Day 13

Bundala – Embilipitiya

With packed breakfast we check out of the Cinnamon Wild hotel and proceed to Bundala National Park. The park comprises a large tidal lagoon surrounded by scrub jungle frequented by large numbers of birds including masses of wildfowl, waders and herons. Eight species of tern are possible here and many rare waders have occurred among the thousands of stints and sandpipers on the lagoon and the nearby salterns. This is also the most likely place to see Greater Flamingoes and the delightful Small Pratincole.
We will have our lunch in a restaurant in Hambantota before proceeding to Embilipitiya where we will stay for one night. The road passes by several interesting tidal inlets and our progress is sure to be delayed by birdwatching stops. Herons, egrets, Painted Storks, Asian Openbill Storks and Spoonbills are all likely to be encountered and large flocks of Pintail and Garganey assemble during the winter months. Waders abound and should include Black-winged Stilts, Marsh, Wood and Curlew Sandpipers, Little Stint, Kentish, Greater Sand and Lesser Sand Plovers.

Day 14

Udawalawe National Park – Blue Magpie Lodge

In the morning we will visit Udawalawe National Park. This mix of abandoned teak plantations, grassland, forest and wetlands in the catchment area of a vast reservoir, in many respects resembles a smaller version of Yala and is similarly excellent for birdwatching. It is possible to see over 100 bird species during a game drive in Udawalawe, a selection of which could include Sri Lanka Junglefowl, Barred Button-quail, Malabar Pied Hornbill, White-bellied Sea Eagle, Changeable Hawk-eagle, Sirkeer and Blue-faced Malkohas. This will also be our best opportunity to see herds of browsing Indian Elephants as over 200 frequent the reserve and it is easily possible to see 40 or 50 in a visit. Our lunch will be in a restaurant close to the national park.

Our next destination is the Blue Magpie Lodge near Sinharaja Forest, a 3-hour drive away. There is magnificent scenery to be enjoyed en route.

Day 15

Blue Magpie Lodge

One of the highlights of the tour will be today's excursion to Sinharaja Forest, the largest and most important lowland rainforest in Sri Lanka. Unfortunately, a fairly early start is necessary to reach the forest by first light but the effort is worthwhile to catch the early morning activity, which greatly increases our chances of seeing the forest inhabitants. The approach roads are of very poor quality and, despite being only a few kilometres from the lodge, the journey by jeep can take almost an hour. Sinharaja is a stronghold for endemic birds and in recognition of its importance the forest was awarded World Heritage Site status in 1988. Old logging trails facilitate access into the primary forest and from these we will be looking for such species as Blyth's Hawk Eagle, Crested Goshawk, Sri Lanka Spurfowl, Layard’s Parakeet, Red-faced Malkoha, Green-billed Coucal, Malabar Trogon, Brown-backed Needletail, Chestnut-backed Owlet, Yellow-fronted Barbet, Black-crested Bulbul, Yellow-browed Bulbul, Spot-winged Thrush, Orange-billed Babbler, Ashy-headed Laughingthrush, Sri Lanka Blue Magpie, White-faced Starling, Hill Myna, Sri Lanka Myna and Black-throated Munia. We are unlikely to see all of these in a single visit but
Sinharaja is one of those magical places that can suddenly be alive with birds following periods of relative quiet. Even at midday it is possible to encounter one of the mixed-species ‘bird waves’ which usually comprise Orange-billed Babblers in association with Crested Drongos, Malabar Trogons, Red-faced Malkohas and a miscellany of other species.

Everything about Sinharaja is special and the flora contains many species found nowhere else. Pretty Bamboo Orchids grow commonly beside the trails and many of the trees are adorned with epiphytes. There is a wonderful diversity of butterflies in the forest, including the spectacular Blue Mormon and Sri Lanka tree-nymphs, dancing like windblown paper through the high canopy. Lizards are plentiful and the residents include a number of rare endemics. Although plenty of mammals inhabit Sinharaja, sightings are always a matter of luck, but troops of Purple-faced Leaf Monkeys are likely to reveal their presence by the fearsome roaring calls of the males.

It will be a long and tiring day at Sinharaja involving uncomfortable jeep journeys but the forest is truly unique and represents a privileged view of a fast disappearing habitat, along with a selection of species that will also become extinct if their fragile ecosystem is eventually destroyed.

**Day 16**

**Katunayake**

We return to Katunayake today but, before leaving the Blue Magpie, we will enjoy another morning of birding in the vicinity of the hotel where Green-billed Coucals are often easy to find at first light and other interesting residents include Spot-winged Thrush, Chestnut-backed Owlet, Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher and Black-throated Munia.

Eventually we will set off on the southern highway for a 3-hour drive north. Upon arrival in Katunayake, we will check into our 4-star accommodation, The Gateway Airport Garden Hotel Colombo, for some rest and a good night’s sleep!

**Day 17**

**London**

We have a mid-morning transfer to Katunayake airport to catch our Sri Lankan Airways direct flight to London. We are due to arrive in London by early evening.
Blue Whales extension

Cost: from £795
Single room supplement: £195

(The minimum number of people required to run this extension is five; however, we may decide to operate it with fewer people, at our discretion, with local guides.)

Introduction

The Great Whales are a source of wonder and fascination to land-based humans as we struggle to comprehend their alien, unfettered existence roaming the mysterious depths of the world’s oceans. There is a seemingly insatiable desire to savour the experience of being close to these magnificent creatures and wherever feeding or breeding imperatives bring numbers of whales to congregate in a particular area there will invariably be local boatmen taking visitors to enjoy a few precious moments sharing the ocean with these leviathans. The largest of all the cetaceans, indeed the largest of all mammals, the Blue Whale, has always been something of an enigma, a true ocean wanderer living a pelagic lifestyle which rarely brings them with any predictability close to land. Gradually, however, scientists are beginning to gain some understanding of the enormous migrations undertaken by Blue Whales and one discovery has been their regular appearances close to the south coast of Sri Lanka between November and early April. It is this annual event that we will be taking advantage of during this extension in a country that has long been a Naturetrek favourite.

Day 16

Koggala

Today we leave the group and travel by road to our delightful accommodation, the Koggala Beach Hotel. Areas of Sri Lanka’s south-western coastline were devastated by the 2004 tsunami. However, the Sri Lankans are resilient people and much reconstruction has taken place since the tragedy. Fortunately, the Koggala Beach Hotel was only partially affected and this resort hotel will be our base for all three nights of our extension tour. The drive from Sinharaja will probably take 2 to 3 hours and, after settling into our rooms, a period of relaxation will no doubt be welcome. There will be time to sample the resort’s amenities or simply sit on the sandy beach watching the waves breaking on the sand with binoculars at the ready in case a huge White-bellied Sea Eagle should appear overhead or terns begin fishing.
offshore. Sri Lanka is a remarkably lush, verdant tropical island and trees surrounding the will hotel offer further birdwatching opportunities (even from the comfort of a lounger beside the swimming pool!). Typical forest edge species such as Magpie Robin, Yellow-billed Babbler, three species of sunbird, Coppersmith Barbet and Flameback Woodpecker are among the bird seen here. The local bird list is sure to grow with each day spent at Mirissa.

Day 17

Mirissa

Thirty minutes’ drive from the hotel is the small fishing port of Mirissa and it is here that we board a whale-watching vessel for a 4-hour morning excursion in search of Blue Whales. The distance sailed will very much depend on whale sightings and sea conditions but we may go up to 10 kilometers offshore (although it is more likely that most observations will be much closer to land). The seas off Sri Lanka are rich in marine-life but it is only comparatively recently that scientists have discovered the regular appearances of Blue Whales between November and early April. Up to a dozen or more of these enigmatic ocean wanderers may be present off the coast and we will rely on our skipper’s expertise to locate as many individuals as possible during each excursion. Despite their huge bulk, Blue Whales have a very small dorsal fin and are not always easy to find on the surface; however, they do have an extremely tall columnar blow, and it is this 9-metre high plume of condensed water vapour that usually betrays the presence of a whale. Blue Whales also tend to display their huge curved tail flukes before each dive and this again is an indicator of where to look. The captain will take the boat as close as he can without causing disturbance to the whales and we will hope that by drifting with the current we can allow the creatures to approach alongside the vessel, hopefully near enough to be able to smell their distinctive pungent breath! We may have to content ourselves with longer distance views on this first outing but there will be more chances for close-up encounters on the following days. Whilst Blue Whales will be our principle quarry, many other cetacea occur in these waters and species observed during the recent seasons include Bryde’s, Sperm and Short-finned Pilot Whales, Bottlenosed Dolphins, Rissos’s Dolphins and Spinner Dolphins, the latter sometimes in pods numbering several hundred animals.
Birdlife is less plentiful at this time of year but possibilities include Flesh-footed and Wedge-tailed Shearwaters, Pomarine Skua, Crested, Bridled and White-winged Terns.

The sailing will last about 3 to 4 hours and, on our return to land, we will retire for a leisurely lunch before enjoying the birding around the resort. There are no boat rides in the afternoon as outings are less productive and the sea can be rough (please note boat rides are weather dependent and can be cancelled without prior notice). At the end of our boat trip, as we return to the Koggala Beach Hotel, we will hope to be celebrating some memorable encounters with the largest creature on earth.

On one of the afternoons in Mirissa we will enjoy an excursion to Galle, which was a thriving port long before colonial times; situated in the south-west of the country, it attracted Arabs, Persians, Romans and Greeks on their way across the Indian Ocean. In 1505, the Portuguese attacked and settled in the town, 135 years later conceding it to the Dutch, who built the famous fort at Galle. In 1796 the British took over and used the fort as their headquarters. Today, Galle Fort is the old part of the city, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and the best preserved colonial sea fortress in Asia. It is a cozy little town in its own right with narrow streets, churches, cloistered courtyards and shuttered mansions standing testament to their colonial past. Galle Fort has recently received a lot of investment from expatriates living in South-east Asia and is now bustling with boutique hotels, art galleries, tiny shops, cafes and restaurants. There are several museums to visit, as well as the Dutch Reformed Church and the lively Arab Quarter. The entrances to Galle National Maritime Museum and Fort are not included and can be paid locally. (At the time of writing there is no entrance fee required for Galle Fort, and it costs about £4 to visit the Galle National Maritime Museum.

Day 18

Mirissa

This morning we will repeat the whale-watching excursion from Mirissa and, with the ever-changing ocean, we will hope for further Blue Whale sightings as well as appearances by other whales, dolphins and birds. In characteristic fashion, the dolphins often swim in the bow-wave of the vessel offering spectacular views as they do so. The huge pods of Spinner Dolphins are not a predictable phenomenon but if we are fortunate enough to witness one of these it is as well to have your cameras at the ready, as the seas become a turmoil of activity and scores, or even hundreds, of dolphins progress across the ocean in a loose assembly, leaping out of the water at great speed as they pursue their prey. Sea conditions in March
and early April are usually calm allowing the best chances for observations and making whale ‘spouts’ visible over a long distance. Seas may, however, be a little rougher in November and December.

After lunch at the hotel we will spend the cooler end of the afternoon birdwatching. A wide range of species is possible including Red-wattled Lapwing and White-breasted Waterhen, Purple Swamphen, terns and waterbirds as well as more forest inhabitants. Alternatively, you may choose to relax or swim off the beach. Later in the day we can look for Indian Flying Foxes as the night settles and maybe witness enormous Indian Flying Foxes flapping off from their roost site to begin some nocturnal foraging. These huge, fruit-eating bats are widespread on the island (though declining in numbers) and colonies are always a welcome sight on our tours.

Day 19
Katunayake

Our plans for today are left deliberately flexible and will depend on what we have managed to see during the previous few days. If necessary, a further whale-watching trip could be taken at extra cost but, hopefully, we will have achieved our marine objectives and can conclude our tour. Eventually we can postpone the moment no longer and will set off on the southern highway for a 3-hour drive north. Upon arrival in Katunayake, we will check into our accommodation, the 4-star The Gateway Airport Garden Hotel Colombo for some rest and a good night's sleep!

Day 20
London

We have a mid-morning transfer to Katunayake airport to catch our Sri Lankan Airways direct flight to London. We are due to arrive in London.

Beruwala Beach extension

Cost: £695
Single room supplement: £350

(The minimum number of people required to run this extension is two.)
Introduction

Participants wishing to relax after an energetic wildlife tour would be well advised to choose the Cinnamon Bey Beruwala beach extension. The area south of the old historic settlement of Beruwala has been popular with visitors since the very inception of Sri Lankan tourism and offers all the components for a relaxing beach holiday.

Set in tropical grounds bordering the Indian Ocean, you will be welcomed into a tropical Asian paradise at the edge of a broad golden beach protected from the sea by the calming influence of a lagoon. Cinnamon Bey pays tribute to its location, and give guests the opportunity to experience the unique character of Beruwala. The history of Beruwala dates back to the 10th century when the first permanent Arab settlements were established in Sri Lanka and it is Turkish architecture which inspired the design of the resort which also takes its name from the term used to address a Turkish nobleman.

The hotel features balconies with ocean and garden views, each room equipped with flat-screen TVs and free Wi-Fi, as well as minibars, tea and coffee making facilities. Upgraded rooms provide access to a private bar, and suites have additional living areas and private plunge pools. Room service is available.

There are seven restaurants and bars, including a laid-back buffet eatery and an open-air sushi bar. Other amenities include two outdoor pools, a gym and a spa.
Day 19 – 21
Beruwala Beach

Today you will be transferred to Cinnamon Bey Hotel for three nights to relax and unwind after the tour.

Day 22
London

You will have an early-morning three hours transfer to Colombo airport to catch your afternoon Sri Lankan direct flight to London at 1250. We are due to arrive in London by early evening at around 7.10 pm.

Climate

Generally hot and sunny with temperatures in the low country ranging from 25°C to 35°C with high humidity, particularly in the Wet Zone. Temperatures decrease in the hills to a range of 15°C to 25°C around Nuwara Eliya. Rain can occur at any time but is not usually prolonged outside the monsoon seasons (showers are an almost daily occurrence at Sinharaja).
Accommodation & food

We use standard tourist hotels throughout the itinerary and these are of 3 or 4-star standard, most with swimming pools and other amenities. The exception is the Blue Magpie Lodge near Sinharaja which is a simple but comfortable rest house. Accommodation for this tour is in twin rooms with private facilities (single rooms are available on request). All food is included in the price of the tour. On Beruwala Beach extension breakfast is included in the cost.

Grading and Focus

This tour is graded A/B. Most of the birdwatching walks are gentle and suitable for any age and level of fitness. There are also a couple of slightly more strenuous longer walks included in the itinerary (at Horton Plains and Sinharaja). Throughout the holiday there will be early starts as we really need to maximise our chances of viewing wildlife by being out at the most productive time of day. It must be remembered that all activities are optional and you always have the choice of staying to relax at the lodges and to dip in and out of activities as you wish.

The focus of the tour is birds (mainly) and mammals with elements of the island’s history and archaeology. We will look at and enjoy anything that we are lucky enough to encounter.

Most Sri Lankan mammals are shy, retiring, present in low densities and largely crepuscular or nocturnal. As such, mammal-watching will comprise a small percentage of our time in the field on this holiday. Time and effort will be dedicated to looking for Leopards, Sri Lanka Giant Squirrel, Indian Flying Fox, Purple-faced Leaf Monkey, Asian Elephant and other mammals, but any felines seen must be considered as a real bonus rather than a realistic target.
Between sporadic encounters with mammals, the bulk of our time in Sri Lanka will be spent birdwatching, as birds are the most conspicuous, best-studied and accessible of the local fauna. Those looking for a wildlife holiday in Sri Lanka with little or no focus on birds should consider a tailormade holiday with us – we’d be delighted to help with arrangements. Please do call us for further help and advice. Our Sri Lanka group tour offers a chance to travel in some wonderful, pristine landscapes, to have a small number of exciting encounters with iconic mammals and see wealth of fabulous birds along with learning about elements of the island’s history and archaeology.

Please do not hesitate to talk to Rajan Jolly, our Operations Manager for Sri Lanka, if you have any doubts about the suitability of this tour.

Mammal, bird & plant lists

Where available these are automatically provided on booking, and will gladly be sent to you before, if you wish for a more detailed preview.

Your safety & security

You have chosen to travel to Sri Lanka. Risks to your safety and security are an unavoidable aspect of all travel and the best current advice on such risks is provided for you by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. In order to assess and protect against any risks in your chosen destination, it is essential that you refer to the Foreign Office website – www.fco.gov.uk regularly prior to travel.

Entry requirements

All UK passport holders and most other nationalities require an Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) visa for Sri Lanka, which is obtainable in advance by filling the ETA form on http://www.eta.gov.lk/slvisa/. We recommend that you contact your doctor for the latest up-to-the-minute advice on the relevant vaccinations needed for Sri Lanka. Updated information on vaccinations is also available on http://www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk.

Flights

We use scheduled Sri Lankan Airlines direct flights for all our tours to Sri Lanka. All these flights depart from London Heathrow. If you wish to travel from Manchester, Newcastle, Edinburgh, Glasgow or Aberdeen there will be an additional charge of around £195 and these flights will be with British Airways.
The sole disadvantage of Sri Lankan Airlines flights to Sri Lanka is that sometimes the service is slow and special requests for seats and meals are not easily available. If you would prefer to fly with Emirates or Qatar Airways, please note that these flights are not direct. If you wish to fly with Emirates or Qatar Airways, we will gladly arrange it for you, but please give us plenty of warning and you can expect to pay between £100 and £200 extra for these indirect flights. Due to a difference in arrival and departure times, you will also expect to pay an extra £150 per person (minimum two people are required) for the additional transfer fees.

If you would prefer to travel in Business class (normally available at a supplement charge of around £2,595). If you would like to travel from one of the above regional airports and/or fly in business class, please let us know at the time of booking so that we can make the necessary arrangements.

Return flights with Sri Lankan Airlines are scheduled to arrive at London Heathrow at 7pm. Please note that your return flight might not connect with British Airways flights to regional airports, and you may require an extra night in London.

How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking. Please note that our Sri Lanka – Wildlife & History departures tend to book up a long time in advance. Please book as early as possible to avoid disappointment.

A great many Sri Lankans enjoy Yala, especially during the Christmas season when they are on holiday, and that they are happy to enjoy Yala despite - perhaps even because of - the crowds, congestion and noise at this season, which is far less to the taste of visitors from overseas requiring the tranquility in national park that is not to be found in a popular park at Christmas.

Our December departure is during the Christmas holiday season and it will be very busy in the Yala National Park and on the whale-watching excursions! You will be sharing the Yala National Park with 100’s of jeeps. I’m afraid there are no limit on the number of vehicles allowed inside the park.

Highlights from our February tour

A total of 225 bird species, 24 species of mammals and 12 of reptiles and amphibians were seen throughout the tour, including the extension. Overall the tour recorded 32 out of 33 endemic bird species, and from the total owl list we recorded eight. The safari to Lunugamvehera National Park was very successful as we saw three Leopards at the entrance. The whale-watching extension was very successful with close sightings of Blue Whales and Orca (Killer Whale), along with many Green Turtles.

Highlights from our November tour

A total of 235 species of birds, 28 mammal species and 16 species of reptiles and amphibians were seen throughout the tour, including the extension.
One of the highlights for the tour happened on our way to the Cinnamon Wild Yala hotel, after a day of Safari-searching for Leopards at Lunugamvehera National Park. We had given up hope of finding the Leopard that day when suddenly, to our surprise, a female Leopard appeared on the side of the road, quite close to our coach! With our headlights on, we were able to see the cat clearly as she walked across the road just a few feet away from our coach and disappeared in to the thick foliage within a few minutes. Further down the road we came across a large Mugger Crocodile dragging a carcass in the river, not too far from our hotel premises.

Another highlight was being able to see a pack of Golden Jackals playing round our jeep in Udawalawe National Park, which was exhilarating; to add to the excitement, we came across a herd of Asian Elephants not too far from where we saw the Jackals. The Elephants at one point were so close to our safari jeep that we could see them eye to eye!

**Highlights from our December tour**

A total of 219 birds, 22 mammals and 11 species of reptiles and amphibians were seen during the tour, including the extension. A very close encounter with a herd of Elephants was a wonderful sight to see with the herd consisting of youngsters who were grazing not too far from our Safari jeep.

Another highlight was seeing the Serendib Scops Owl after climbing a small mountain which was a memorable moment for the whole group as this is a very difficult bird to see.

Seeing five Blue Whales was definitely a highlight of the extension with a bonus of a pod of close to 100 Spinner Dolphins, which included a few Bottlenose Dolphins as well.

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**Golden Jackal**

**Leopard**