# Wild Sri Lanka … In Style!

## Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

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### Beruwala Beach extension

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

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Tour Itinerary

**Dates 2020**

Monday 9th November – Sunday 22nd November 2020  Cost: £3,995  
Sinharaja extension: to Wednesday 25th November 2020  Cost: £995  
Beruwala Beach extension: to Friday 27th November 2020  Cost: £695

**Dates 2021**

Monday 4th January – Sunday 17th January 2021  Cost: £3,995  
Sinharaja extension: to Wednesday 20th January 2021  Cost: £995  
Beruwala Beach extension: to Friday 22nd January 2021  Cost: £695

Monday 8th November – Sunday 21st November 2021  Cost: £3,995  
Sinharaja extension: to Wednesday 24th November 2021  Cost: £995  
Beruwala Beach extension: to Friday 26th November 2021  Cost: £695

**Dates 2022**

Monday 3rd January – Sunday 16th January 2022  Cost: £4,195  
Sinharaja extension: to Wednesday 19th January 2022  Cost: £1,095  
Beruwala Beach extension: to Friday 21st January 2022  Cost: £795

Monday 7th November – Sunday 20th November 2022  Cost: £4,195  
Sinharaja extension: to Wednesday 23rd November 2022  Cost: £1,095  
Beruwala Beach extension: to Friday 25th November 2022  Cost: £795

**Single room supplement**

£1,395 (£395 for Sinharaja extension and £350 for Beruwala Beach extension)

**Grading**

A.

**Focus**

Blue Whales, Leopards, other mammals and birds, plus elements of the island's history and archeology.
How does this tour benefit the local community and wildlife?

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 who ensure that the habitat that these birds, mammals and reptiles live in are protected for the future of the species and viewing pleasure of wildlife lovers.

Many research and conservation projects are launched every year in Sri Lanka that help students to learn about the island's flora and fauna. These projects are collaborations between the wildlife departments 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 recommendations coming from these new minds are helping to shape policies about the subject, and learning more about these animals. The most recent outcome of this was to change the 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 & 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.

Introduction

A 14-day holiday in search of the rich culture of Sri Lanka, Leopards of Lunugamvehera and Yala National Park, Blue Whales off Sri Lanka’s south coast, and wildlife of the Horton Plains (Sri Lanka’s highest and most isolated plateau), all enjoyed in the utmost comfort and style, plus an optional extension to Sinharaja Forest and/or the beaches extension to Beruwela.

This deluxe tour combines the opportunity to enjoy wildlife-viewing in Sri Lanka’s finest national parks and a quest to see Blue Whales, with visits to some of the country’s great archaeological sites. We have timed the tour to coincide with the large numbers of birds which visit the island during the winter, including waders from Siberia and passerines from the Himalayan region. We use some of Sri Lanka’s very best hotels and lodges for this new tour, so you can swap the cold of a British winter for wildlife-watching based in luxurious accommodation on this beautiful tropical island.

We begin with a glimpse of the island’s past at Sigiriya, famous for its towering rock fortress and ancient wall frescoes; and there’s an impressive panorama for those energetic enough to reach the summit. On the following day we visit the remains of the ancient capital of Polonnaruwa, where we may be lucky enough to find one of the resident Brown Fish Owls. We'll be based for two nights at the luxurious Kandalama Hotel designed by Sri Lanka's famous architect, Geoffrey Bawa who conceived it 'as an austere jungle palace'. Kandalama is luxurious and widely adored. The minimalist interiors and the building itself are cleverly designed to blend into the landscape without interfering with the tranquil surroundings. Bawa's design allows magnificent views of the ancient Sigiriya Rock, the surrounding mountains and the Kandalama Tank (reservoir). We'll explore the forests surrounding Sigiriya’s famous rock fortress in search of some of the more retiring bird species and endemics. In particular we will hope to see the magnificent white-phase of the male Paradise Flycatcher, their tails like white streamers as they fly from perch to perch.
Travelling south through the island’s main spice-growing region we continue to Kandy for a 2-night stay at Cinnamon Citadel Hotel overlooking the Mahaweli River. Once the capital of an autonomous kingdom until captured by the British in 1815, Kandy marks our ascent into the picturesque Hill Country, and is surrounded by forests in which we should find such endemic birds as the charming Sri Lanka Hanging Parrot and Layard’s Parakeet. We’ll then penetrate deeper into the hills to stay for two nights in colonial splendour at the Grand Hotel, an Iconic Landmark of Sri Lanka situated in the high elms of Nuwara Eliya (also known as Little England). Enchanted with the tranquility and beauty of the salubrious climes of Nuwara Eliya, Sir Edward Barnes, Governor of Ceylon during the era from 1830 to 1850 built the Barnes Hall at his own expense, which now stands as the legendary ‘Grand Hotel’ whilst maintaining the British Colonial architecture, the Hotel has evolved to resonate palatial grandeur blended with exceptional hospitality that has surpassed the expectations of many a visitor. This area is the heart of the island’s tea industry and we will visit one of the many estates en route from Kandy. Yet more endemic birds occur at this increased elevation, amongst them Yellow-eared Bulbul and Hill White-eye, plus such winter visitors as Blyth’s Reed Warbler and Pied Ground Thrush. We will spend one day exploring the wild expanses of the Horton Plains which epitomise the uniqueness of the Hill Country with its strange forests of stunted trees festooned in bromeliads, and stretches of moorland leading to the aptly named World’s End where a sheer escarpment drops to the plains far below. This is the haunt of the handsome highland race of the Purple-faced Leaf Monkey and a great diversity of plants and birds including the endemic Arrenga, Blue Magpie and Sri Lanka Woodpigeon.

Descending to the arid south of the island we next visit a number of freshwater ‘tanks’ or lakes, crowded with birds, before reaching the endless palm-fringed beaches which characterise the Indian Ocean coastline. Our next destination is Yala National Park where in recent years diurnal Leopards have been a regular attraction, and we’ll
make early morning and afternoon game drives in search of these iconic cats and the wealth of other mammals and birds that the park supports. Wildlife abounds in Yala and each drive is likely to produce sightings of Asian Elephant, Wild Boar, Spotted Deer, Sambar, mongooses, crocodiles and lizards as well as a stunning profusion of colourful birdlife. During our three days at Yala we will be staying at the very comfortable and luxurious Cinnamon Wild Hotel just outside the park; with no fences to constrain the inhabitants it is by no means unusual to see a Wild Boar wander through the grounds or even to find an Asian Elephant browsing in the garden!

After many memorable experiences in Yala we next transfer to the comfortable Weligama Bay Marriott Resort & Spa, located on Weligama Bay, moments from Mirissa Beach for a 2-night stay. From here we will enjoy two morning whale-watching cruises from a nearby port. Blue Whales will be our main target here, but we may also see Bryde’s and Short-finned Pilot Whales, plus Bottlenose and Spinner Dolphins which should provide a fitting finale to our Sri Lankan holiday. For those who wish to stay longer on this beguiling island, we recommend a post-tour extensions to Sinharaja Forest and Beruwala Beach. In Sinharaja over 80% of the island’s endemic bird species occur in the forest and resident species include the spectacular Blue Magpie, Red-faced Malkoha and Orange-billed Babbler; 60% of the trees are found nowhere else in the world, and most of the other flora and fauna has a similarly high level of endemism.

**Day 1**  
**Monday**  
**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.

**Day 2**  
**Tuesday**  
**Dambulla**  
We arrive in Colombo early this afternoon and will be met at the airport by our Sri Lankan naturalist guide, who will be with us throughout the tour. As we head towards Dambulla, a light meal stop will no doubt be welcome after the overnight flight and will give us an opportunity to make the acquaintance of some characteristic Sri Lankan birds such as Common Myna, Asian Koel, Coppersmith Barbet and Purple Sunbird. Continuing along the road we pass through areas of paddy fields and scattered woodland, before reaching Dambulla, our base for two nights. We’ll stay for the next two nights at the luxurious Kandalama Hotel, a unique hotel built close to a man-made reservoir or ‘tank’, one of many in this part of Sri Lanka. It’s beautiful natural surroundings, ideal for those favouring a restful evening sitting with drink in hand! Birdlife in the gardens and surrounding scrub often includes several water and forest birds.

**Day 3**  
**Wednesday**  
**Dambulla – Sigiriya**  
In the early morning we will visit the rock fortress at Sigiriya and on our way back we will 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, Blue-tailed and Little Green Bee-eaters 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 to have built a palace and complex of gardens on the 3-acre summit. Visitors can reach the site by ascending flights of steps hewn into the rock but it is a stiff climb, and not recommended for anyone with a fear of heights. A few frescoes are all that remain of some 500 paintings that 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, containing many interesting species which keen birders may find 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, Racket-tailed Drongo, Black-crested Bulbul, Paradise Flycatcher, White-browed Fantail, White-rumped Shama, Forest Wagtail, Oriental White-eye, Brown-capped Babbler and Pale-billed Flowerpecker.

In the afternoon you will be free to relax and enjoy our lovely hotel or to visit Polonnaruwa. The island’s capital was relocated to Polonnaruwa in the 11th century AD and many remains of the ancient city can still be found including the 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 spending further time exploring the forests surrounding the rock with a 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 tails trailing like white streamers as they fly from perch to perch. The occasional wild Asian Elephant can be encountered in the forests as can Slender Loris, although the latter is nocturnal.

**Day 4**

**Thursday**

**Kandy**

We leave Dambulla after breakfast and drive south towards Kandy but as we pass through the island’s main spice growing area around Matale, we will pause briefly to look around one of the numerous spice gardens beside the main road. Here many kinds of spice are cultivated and it is possible to purchase some of the produce (although in many instances it is actually cheaper to buy them in a British supermarket!).

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 157 statues.
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 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, which will be advertised in our hotel. Tour members wishing to attend a performance of dancing will probably be best advised do so on this first night.

Tonight we will check into the Cinnamon Citadel Hotel for two nights stay. Situated on the bank of the Mahaweli River, this is one of the best hotels in Kandy.

**Day 5**

**Kandy**

The lovely forested hills around Kandy are home to a number of endemic birds including the Yellow-fronted Barbet. 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 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.

We’ll spend the afternoon at the Peradeniya Royal Botanical Gardens. Once the pleasure gardens of a Kandyan Queen, the 150 acres of gardens are full of interesting trees and other plants; the orchid house is particularly special. 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. A large colony of Indian Flying Foxes can be watched 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.
Day 6

Nuwara Eliya

Today’s 70-kilometre drive from Kandy to Nuwara Eliya takes us deeper into the Hill Country, passing through a succession of tea estates. We will stop at one of these to join a tour of the factory, where we'll be able to 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.

Today we will check in to the Grand Hotel for a 2-night stay. Sir Edward Barnes, Governor of Ceylon during the era from 1830 to 1850 built the Barnes Hall at his own expense, which now stands as the legendary ‘Grand Hotel’ whilst maintaining the British Colonial architecture.

Day 7

Nuwara Eliya

We’ll 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 this becomes a swirling cauldron of cloud 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. Grizzled Giant Squirrels also inhabit the trees, as do the smaller Dusky 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, Sri Lanka Dull Blue Flycatcher, Zitting Cisticola, Sri Lanka Bush Warbler and Hill Swallow. The rare Sri Lanka Whistling Thrush is another endemic found on 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 would be desirable to maximise our chance of seeing this attractive thrush. Although at first sight not a typical habitat for reptiles, Horton Plains boasts several rare endemic species, although none of these is easy to locate.
Time permitting, in the evening we will stroll into the town and visit Victoria Park, a small public gardens very reminiscent of similar areas 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. An untidy little stream running through the park is usually frequented by a small flock of Pied Thrushes, long distance migrants from the Himalayas, and it is often possible to find Indian Pitta and Indian Blue Robin in the same ditch! Other birds which might be seen include Common Sandpiper, Brown Shrike, Grey Wagtail, Blyth’s Reed Warbler and Kashmir Flycatcher.

Day 8

Yala

A long descent to the plains involves endless hairpins 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 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 daytime roost but are a candidate for ‘highlight of the tour’ 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 sailing 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.

We should finally reach Yala in the late afternoon where we’ll check into the splendid Cinnamon Wild Yala Hotel for a 3-night stay.

You will be free to relax at the lodge or join the tour leader for a birdwatching walk around the lodge this evening.
Day 9

**Lunugamvehera National Park**

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 Racket-tailed Drongo and common water birds such as the Grey Heron, Black-headed Ibis, Asian Openbill, Painted Stork and Spot-billed Pelican.

Day 10

**Yala National Park**

Another 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, fresh water & marine wetlands, and sandy beaches, which possesses a large number of important plant species and smaller animals. Early morning is the best time to come across a Sloth Bear or Leopard; 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-cross the accessible areas of the national park which comprises open country, where herds of Spotted Deer and Sambar graze, as well as riverine forest, secluded lakes and coastal mudflats. It is not permitted to drive out of tracks or walk inside the park except at designated areas but despite this restriction 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) along with Purple Herons, Spot-billed Pelicans, and Painted and Openbill Storks. Waders include the odd-looking Great Thick-knee, Black-winged Stilts, Yellow-wattled Lapwing and sandpipers. 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, Hooopoe, Blue-faced Malkoha, Sirkeer, Malabar Pied Hornbill, Black-headed Cuckoo-shrike, Baya Weaver, White-throated Silver-bill and Brahminy Myna. In places we emerge onto the coast and overlook magnificent stretches of deserted beach 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 may find flocks of Brown-headed Gulls, while 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 animals are frequent. Diurnal sightings of Leopards in Yala have become much commoner in recent years and we will hope that good fortune is on our side as we tour the park. Sometimes the cats may be observed padding along the road, or disappearing into cover, but the best views are obtained when one is discovered in a tree and such individuals may spend hours dozing on a convenient branch to the delight of the tourists.

Wild Boar are in general much more conspicuous than their predators, and both Ruddy and Grey Mongooses occur, the former distinguished by a black tail tip. The larger Stripe-necked or ‘Badger’ Mongoose is also a Yala resident. Elephants are widespread inside Yala but surprisingly elusive and hard to see amongst woodland. If we are lucky we may chance upon a family group bathing in one of the pools. In addition, 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.

After lunch at the Cinnamon Wild Yala Hotel we will return for an afternoon game drive in the park. Once again, looking for Leopards will be a high priority, but we will also be seeking any of the inhabitants not seen during the morning visit. Another mammal not already mentioned is the powerful wild Water Buffalo. Herds of these impressive beasts inhabit Yala and probably originate from wild stock although escapee feral Water Buffalo over the years make it difficult to be certain about the genetic purity of the wild population. These somewhat bellicose creatures are treated with due respect by their neighbours but when one dies – through accident or natural causes – the carcass provides a rich feast for the crocodiles and other scavengers! Afternoon visits into the national park can be as productive as those in the morning, but it is a park regulation that all vehicles should exit by nightfall so we are obliged to leave before the emergence of the many nocturnal inhabitants of Yala.
Day 11

Weligama

Driving southwards we head towards Weligama, making various stops to break the journey en route. We will pass through a number of large expanses of open water known in Sri Lanka as ‘tanks’, originally constructed for irrigation purposes. The proliferation of these tanks is one reason why waterbirds are so numerous and we will look for some of these in the vicinity of the ancient city of Tissamaharama. Storks, herons, egrets and cormorants may be seen on these bodies of water along with Black and Yellow Bitterns, Purple Swamphen, Pheasant-tailed Jacana, Oriental Darter, Brahminy Kite, White-bellied Sea-eagle and many other species.

Later we will reach Weligama and check into Weligama Bay Marriott Resort & Spa for a 2-night stay. The awe-inspiring beauty of Sri Lanka is on full display at Weligama Bay Marriott Resort & Spa. Located on Weligama Bay, moments from Mirissa Beach, the hotel offer guests a 5-star resort experience and spectacular waterfront views. The immaculate accommodation feature plush bedding, pristine marble bathrooms and charming private balconies, providing guests with both serenity and luxury. It offer a sparkling outdoor pool, a modern fitness center and Quan Spa, tranquil wellness retreat.

On one of the afternoons, we will visit Galle city and Galle Fort. Founded in the 16th century by the Portuguese, Galle reached the height of its development in the 18th century, before the arrival of the British. It is the best example of a fortified city built by Europeans in South and South-east Asia, showing the interaction between European architectural styles and South Asian traditions.
Day 12  

Weligama

Ten minutes’ drive from the hotel is the small fishing port of Mirissa and it is here that we board a whale-watching vessel this morning for a 4-hour excursion in search of Blue Whales. The distance sailed will very much depend on whale sightings and sea conditions. We may go up to 15 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 lingering 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 a tall columnar blow and it is this 9-metre 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-ups on the following days.

While Blue Whales will be our principal quarry, many other species of cetacea occur in these waters and species observed during the previous 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, and Crested, Bridled and White-winged Terns.

Each pelagic trip will last about four hours and on our return to land we will retire for a leisurely evening at the hotel.

Day 13  

Katunayake

This morning we will have another whale-watching excursion from Mirissa, hoping for further Blue Whale sightings as well as appearances by other whales, dolphins and birds. Dolphins often swim in the bow wave of the vessel, offering spectacular views as they do so. Huge pods of Spinner Dolphins can be seen in these waters, but they are not a predictable phenomenon. If we are fortunate enough to witness one of these there will be plenty of good photo opportunities as the seas become a turmoil of activity – scores or sometimes hundreds, of dolphins may progress across the ocean in a loose assembly, leaping out of the water at great speed as they pursue their prey.
In the afternoon we will start our journey back on the southern highway for a three hour drive north. Upon arrival in Katunayake, we will check into our 4-star The Gateway Airport Garden Hotel Katunayake for some rest and a good night’s sleep!

**Day 14**

**Sunday**

London

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

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**Sinharaja Forest extension**

Cost: From £995  
Single room supplement: £395  

(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**

For those who wish to stay longer on this beautiful island, we recommend a post-tour extension to Sinharaja Forest. Over 80% of the island’s endemic bird species occur in the forest and resident species include the spectacular Blue Magpie, Red-faced Malkoha and Orange-billed Babbler; 60% of the island’s trees are found nowhere else in the world, and most of the other flora and fauna has a similarly high level of endemism.

**Day 13**

**Saturday**

Sinharaja Forest

Today we leave after our boat trip at Mirissa and embark on a three hour drive to our simple but comfortable overnight accommodation at the Rain Forest Eco Lodge near Sinharaja Forest. Hopefully the prospect of three nights at this pleasant location, and the magnificent scenery en route, will compensate for the long journey into the hills.

**Day 14 – 15**

**Sunday – Monday**

Sinharaja Forest

One of the highlights of this extension will be today’s and tomorrow’s excursion to Sinharaja Forest, the largest and most important lowland rainforest in Sri Lanka. A fairly early start is necessary to reach the forest by first light but the effort is worthwhile in order to see the early morning bird activity. After about a 30-minute drive the approach roads change and become very poor quality and, despite being a distance of only a few kilometres, the journey by jeep can take almost an hour. Sinharaja is a stronghold for endemic birds and its importance has been acknowledged in its being 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 Laughing-thrush, Sri Lanka Blue Magpie, White-faced Starling, Hill Myna, Sri Lanka Myna and Black-throated Munia. Inevitably, 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. A wonderful diversity of butterflies occurs in the forest, including the spectacular Blue Mormon and 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 two days 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 become extinct if their fragile ecosystem is eventually destroyed.

**Day 16**

**Katunayake**

We return to Katunayake today, but before leaving the Rainforest Edge lodge 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 can postpone the moment no longer and will set off on the southern highway for a four hour drive north. Upon arrival in Katunayake, we will check into our 4-star 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 afternoon Sri Lankan direct flight to London. We are due to arrive in London by early evening.
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 16 – 18**  
*Tuesday – Thursday*

**Beruwala Beach**

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

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**Day 19**  
*Friday*

**London**

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

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**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/](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/](http://www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk/).
Climate

Generally hot and sunny with temperatures in the low country ranging from 20-30°C with high humidity, particularly in the Wet Zone. Temperatures decrease in the hills to a range of 15-25°C around Nuwara Eliya. Rain can occur at any time but is not usually prolonged outside the monsoon seasons.

Accommodation & food

For this tour we will be using some of Sri Lanka’s finest deluxe hotels and lodges, all with private facilities. All meals ((Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner) are included at Yala and Sinharaja. Half Board (Breakfast and Dinner) is included at all other hotels. On Beruwala Beach extension breakfast is included in the cost.

Grading

A. This is a luxury wildlife and cultural holiday that includes no strenuous walking. A couple of optional longer walks are, however, included at Horton Plains and Sinharaja.

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.

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 expected to pay an extra £150 per person (minimum two people are required) for the additional transfer fees. These prices are only approximate and may vary according to availability and season. We will be pleased to approach the respective airline for you and offer a quote on request.
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 or/and 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 7.10pm. 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 Wild Sri Lanka … In Style! departures tend to book up a long time in advance. Please book as early as possible to avoid disappointment.
Wild Sri Lanka ... In Style!

Hotel details

Kandalama Hotel

Heritance Kandalama is an architectural masterpiece by Geoffrey Bawa, built overlooking the eighth wonder of the world – the rock fortress of Sigiriya. The hotel sits at the heart of the cultural triangle of Sri Lanka, close to five UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

The unpaved road through the jungle gives no clue to what to expect – there are no views of the hotel on the horizon. Then suddenly, as you drive up a ramp, a cave-like entrance appears. And even as you step into another world of minimalist white pillars and cool curving corridors, enormous boulders intrude and birdsong hangs in the air.

The rooms are fully equipped with energy-efficient air conditioning, TVs with satellite and local channels, a comprehensive minibar, tea and coffee-making facilities and a digital safe. There are three swimming pools in this hotel.

Cinnamon Citadel Hotel

Influenced by the old and inspired by the new, Cinnamon Citadel has fused retro chic design with the rich heritage of this ancient kingdom to breathe new life to the most stylish hotel in the hills of Sri Lanka. The Cinnamon Citadel is an ideal retreat for those seeking the treasures of this ancient city and for those seeking rest and relaxation in a peaceful setting – all in the lap of luxury and sophistication. All rooms are air-conditioned and equipped with TV, minibar, tea and coffee-making facilities.

The Grand

We’ll then penetrate deeper into the hills to stay for two nights in colonial splendour at the Grand Hotel, an Iconic Landmark of Sri Lanka situated in the high elms of Nuwara Eliya (also known as Little England). Enchanted with the tranquility and beauty of the salubrious climes of Nuwara Eliya, Sir Edward Barnes, Governor of Ceylon during the era from 1830 to 1850 built the Barnes Hall at his own expense, which now stands as the legendary ‘Grand Hotel’ whilst maintaining the British Colonial architecture, the Hotel has evolved to resonate palatial grandeur blended with exceptional hospitality that has surpassed the expectations of many a visitor.
Cinnamon Wild Yala Hotel

The 4-star Cinnamon Wild Yala Hotel is more than just a resort, it is an extension of Yala National Park. The hotel's wooden floors and camp-style interiors, use of canvas materials, and abstract animal prints lend it a rugged, rustic yet luxurious decor. It has 68 air-conditioned jungle chalets, all equipped with DVD player, 32” LCD TV, WiFi, a minibar and safety deposit box, telephone with IDD, complimentary tea and coffee-making facilities, a hair dryer and complimentary toiletries.

Weligama Bay Marriott Resort & Spa

The awe-inspiring beauty of Sri Lanka is on full display at Weligama Bay Marriott Resort & Spa. Located on Weligama Bay, moments from Mirissa Beach, offer guests a 5-star resort experience and spectacular waterfront views. The immaculate accommodations feature plush bedding, pristine marble bathrooms and charming private balconies, providing guests with both serenity and luxury. Awaken refreshed and embrace all the hotel has to offer, including a sparkling outdoor pool, a modern fitness center and Quan Spa, and tranquil wellness retreat. Dine at one of several restaurants, including Big Fish 5-star culinary experience.

The Rainforest Edge

The Rainforest Edge has seven comfortable rooms, each with a private verandah from which to admire the spectacular view. The bathrooms have both covered and outdoor areas, with solar-powered hot water. The rooms themselves are spacious, with wood-panelled ceilings and polished cement floors. The swimming pool is inviting and is constructed in the centre of the lodge.

Summary from our January tour

A hungry Wild Boar stands its ground obstructing the leaders from obtaining the tickets for the Yala safari, as it sniffs out the delicious packed meals held by all our safari goers. Yet the delay only benefits us as we manage to sneak up to a sleeping Leopard no less than 30 metres from our jeeps. We are just in time to see her wake up and gently disappear in to the thick bushes beneath her rocky bed. Before long we are jolted by three Spotted Deer that dash out of the bushes, followed by our fierce feline. The chase stops abruptly, and views of our Leopard become very clear. We spend a few minutes with her before she disappears once again in to the forest, not to be seen again. The next day’s safari became fabulous with a sighting of a Sloth Bear, again no less than 30 metres from our vehicle. The handsome Orange-breasted Green Pigeon stood atop every other tree whilst the curious Ruddy Mongoose looked closely at us as we passed by. Overall, we recorded 198 bird species, 23 species of mammals and 18 species of reptiles, which all contributed to the success of this tour.