

# Sri Lanka's Mammals

## Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

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### Outline itinerary

<b>Day 1</b>	Depart London.	<b>Day 13</b>	Return to Colombo.
<b>Day 2/5</b>	Sigiriya.	<b>Day 14</b>	Fly London.
<b>Day 6/7</b>	Kandy.		
<b>Day 8/9</b>	Nuwara Eliya.		
<b>Day 10/12</b>	Lunugamvehera and Yala National Park.		

### Sinharaja Forest extension

<b>Day 13/15</b>	Sinharaja Forest.
<b>Day 16</b>	Colombo.
<b>Day 17</b>	Fly London.

### 2024

Friday 28th June — Thursday 11th July 2024  
Sinharaja Forest extension: to Sunday 14th July 2024

Cost: £3,995  
Cost: £795

### 2025

Friday 27th June — Thursday 10th July 2025  
Sinharaja Forest extension: to Sunday 13th July 2025

Cost: £3,995  
Cost: £795



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## Single room supplement

£895 (£295 for extension)

## Grading

A.

## Focus

Leopards, other mammals and birds, plus elements of the island's history and archaeology.

## 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.



Asian Elephant



Malabar Pied Hornbill, courtesy of Geoff Harwood



Male Leopard, courtesy of Rob North



Asian Elephant, courtesy of Gerald Broddez

**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

This 14-day tour specifically goes in search of Sri Lanka's mammals – some endemic, and many nocturnal or elusive. In particular, we will enjoy the 'Elephant Gathering' at Minneriya, probably the largest Asian Elephant gathering in the world. An optional 3-day extension to the World Biosphere Reserve Sinharaja Forest is also available.



Asian Wild Elephants



Sri Lanka Blue Magpie



Sri Lanka Junglefowl



Kandy Temple of the Tooth

The delightful tropical island of Sri Lanka is renowned as a natural history destination *par excellence*. Many thousands of years of isolation have helped shape a unique fauna and flora which displays an extraordinary level of endemism despite the island's proximity to the Indian mainland. Naturetrek has enjoyed many years of association with this gem of an island and our programme includes tours which focus on birdlife, whale-watching and botany, but this exciting new holiday will be devoted to Sri Lanka's special mammals. These include the largest concentrations of Asian Elephants in the world, endemic primates, deer, Leopard and many other fascinating species. Our search for them will lead us into many of Sri Lanka's top wildlife habitats, from atmospheric mist-clad highland forests to magnificent game reserves where Asian Elephants, Water Buffalo and deer graze the perimeters of numerous lakes under the baleful gazes of giant Mugger Crocodiles awaiting their chance to seize the unwary. Many of the island's mammals, such as the ubiquitous Indian Palm Squirrel and troupes of Toque Macaque, are conspicuous

and easy to observe, but others are retiring and nocturnal. In order to look for them, on this tour we will be doing a number of night walks and night drives (using specially hired open-topped jeeps) and using spotlights. Amongst our tour targets will be such endemics as the Grizzled Giant Squirrel, Toque Macaque and Purple-faced Leaf-monkey, plus Slender Loris, Sloth Bear, Rusty-spotted, Jungle and Fishing Cats, Leopard, Asian Elephant, Wild Boar, Sambar, Spotted Deer, White-spotted Mouse Deer, Water Buffalo, Indian Flying Fox and Stripe-necked, Ruddy, Indian Grey and Brown Mongooses.



Lesser (Long-eared) False Vampire Bat



Brown Mongoose



Giant Flying Squirrel



Asian Elephant

Sigiriya, beneath the world-famous rock fortress which towers above the surrounding forests and countryside, will be our initial base. A 4-night stay there will allow us to witness the huge assemblies of up to 300 Asian Elephants that occur annually at this time in the nearby national park of Minneriya, where a guaranteed water supply attracts them in the dry season. Other mammals found in the park include Sambar and Spotted Deer although, with luck, rarer creatures such as Rusty-spotted and Jungle Cat may occasionally be seen. This region also contains a number of interesting historical sites such as the ancient city of Polonnaruwa, famed for a large reclining Buddha, and the magnificent cave frescoes at Dambulla. We will absorb the history and wildlife of these iconic places by day, then return after nightfall to look for the endemic Slender Loris, an endearing but rare inhabitant of this region, and also the endangered Indian Pangolin.



Wild Boar



Common Palm Civet



Leopard



Giant Flying Squirrel

Our next destination is Kandy, the former capital of an autonomous kingdom and a city steeped in history. Here we will visit Peradeniya Botanical Gardens where amongst hundreds of plants, flowers and orchids is a large roost of Indian Flying Foxes. From Kandy we will then drive through numerous picturesque tea estates as we move higher into the hill country to reach Nuwara Eliya, a popular hill-station resort in colonial times. Two nights in this airy town will give us a full day to explore the Horton Plains, Sri Lanka's highest and most isolated plateau. This is a fascinating and spectacular place, a mixture of open grassy expanses and patches of forest festooned with epiphytes, from which, on clear days, it is possible to see the distant summit of Adam's Peak. Here we will hope to find the extremely handsome endemic Purple-faced Leaf Monkey, the subspecies here being the long-coated, highland form known as the Bear Monkey. Tennant's Giant Squirrels also inhabit the trees, as do the smaller endemic Dusky Palm Squirrels, while in the open plains we may see a distant herd of Sambar Deer. This is also a splendid location for seeing endemic birds and there are also rare endemic lizards to look for.

Finally, a wonderfully scenic drive takes us from the hills to the south coast. There we will enjoy a comfortable 3-night stay at Yala, from where we will visit the Lunugamvehera and Yala National Parks, Sri Lanka's best known national parks. Here we are likely to see Asian Elephant, Wild Boar, Water Buffalo, Spotted Deer, Sambar, Golden Jackal, Grey Langur, mongooses, crocodiles and an abundance of stunning and colourful birds on our daily wildlife drives. We will also look for Leopards, for which Yala and Lunugamvehera are particularly famed. Whilst in India they are elusive, wary of Tigers, here they are the top predator, and are often to be seen draped across the branches

of a tree or atop a track-side boulder! Sadly Yala will be our final stop on this mammal odyssey, but for tour members wishing to extend their stay in Sri Lanka we recommend a post-tour extension to the World Biosphere reserve of Sinharaja Forest, home to a unique set of flora and fauna including most of Sri Lanka's endemic birds.

## Day 1

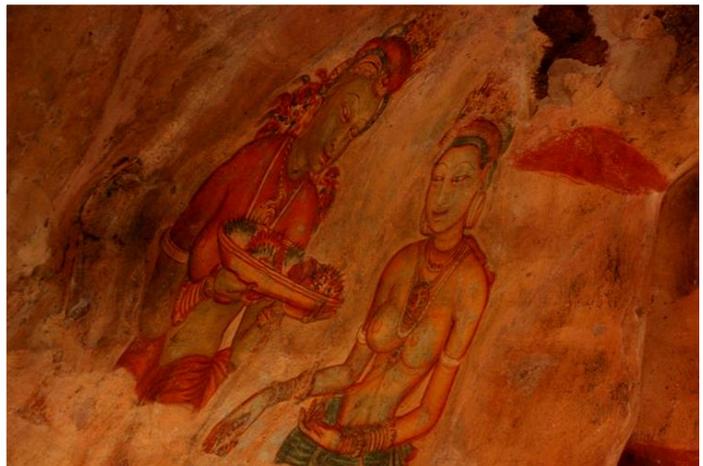
### In flight

We depart London in the evening at 2130 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

### Sigiriya

We arrive in Colombo early this afternoon at 1245 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 Sigiriya, 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 as well as our first mammal which will doubtless be the ever present Indian Palm Squirrel which occurs throughout Sri Lanka in almost every type of habitat. Continuing along the road we pass through areas of paddy fields and scattered woodland, before reaching Sigiriya, our base for four nights. The 3-star Hotel Sigiriya lies amongst the lush forest beneath the stunning Sigiriya Rock fortress which looms above the hotel, its gardens and delightful swimming pool. There is no finer introduction to Sigiriya, or base from which to explore the region's rich wildlife and cultural sites. This tasteful and unobtrusive single storey hotel blends well into its environment and offers comfortable en-suite accommodation and a wide range of eastern and western buffet choices from its open-air restaurant in the grounds. WiFi is available in the lobby, and both tea/coffee-making facilities and a hair dryer are provided in each room.



Sigiriya rock paintings

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 but a palace and complex of gardens were constructed on the 3-acre summit and for 18 years served as a royal citadel. 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.

Troupes of the endemic Toque Macaque might well be seen in the vicinity of the hotel and possibly also the elegant Grey Langur as both species have learnt to loiter around tourist or religious sites in the hope of hand-outs. Palm Squirrels will certainly be seen and heard scuttling around the gardens or chasing each other across the buildings. On this first evening tour members may wish to retire early but as an alternative we can arrange the first of several spot-lighting excursions to the surrounding Sigiriya forest. Here we have a chance of locating the rare and secretive Slender Loris while other mammals that may present themselves include the Ring-tailed Civet, Common Palm Civet and Indian Gerbil. The Grey Slender Loris, representative of the lemur family is largely arboreal and nocturnal in habits but with luck we can hope to find a few in their favourite forest. Much harder to predict, but a constant possibility on these night forays are the endangered Indian Pangolin, or Scaly Ant-eater and the diminutive White-spotted Mouse Deer. The latter is reasonably widespread in forests but extremely timid and very hard to observe whilst if we do have the good fortune to come upon a Pangolin the views are likely to be somewhat easier! It is appreciated that the group may well favour a night of rest and we shall repeat the Loris search on another night for anyone wishing to opt out!

## Day 3 – 5

### Sigiriya

Our programme at Sigiriya will include visits to Polonnaruwa and Minneriya Reserve as well as further exploration of the forests surrounding Sigiriya Rock. We also plan evening drives to continue our search for nocturnal mammals.

Minneriya Reserve encompasses 8890 hectares of scrub and evergreen forest surrounding Minneriya Tank, a great reservoir constructed by King Mahasena approximately 1700 years ago. The reserve is teeming with wildlife, including large numbers of waterbirds and rare reptiles but is best known as perhaps the finest place in the world to observe Indian Elephants. During the Dry Season, which extends from June to September, Minneriya Tank assumes great importance for the local elephant population as a source of both water and food as succulent vegetation revealed by the lower water level becomes available to graze. Elephants converge into the reserve from the surrounding districts to form an impressive daily assembly known colloquially as ‘The Gathering’. Numbers



Hotel Sigiriya

fluctuate depending upon prevailing conditions but from 150 -300 elephants may congregate around the Tank. This creates a kind of African-style spectacle rare to witness in a species that is much more of a retiring forest dweller than its Savannah loving African cousin. We will visit Minneriya in late afternoon to maximise our chances of seeing the largest numbers of elephants but will also pay attention to the other mammal residents

of this fine reserve which include; Spotted Deer, Sambar, Golden Jackal, Grey Langur, Toque Macaque and Black-naped Hare.

On one of the evenings we will visit nearby forest gardens in search of the grey slender loris.



Statues at Dambulla Cave Temples

During our stay we will spend more time at Sigiriya exploring the forests and will also visit Polonnaruwa. The island's capital was relocated to Polonnaruwa in the 11th century AD after Anuradhapura was captured by invaders from India, 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 situated amid pleasant parkland and close to areas of great natural history interest, not least Minneriya Reserve.

Mammals will always be less visible and predictable than the island's feathered inhabitants but our spotlighting activities combined with day walks could

provide sightings of many interesting species. Among the mammals recorded in the Sigiriya and Minneriya districts are; Fishing, jungle and Rusty-spotted Cats, Common Palm and Small Indian Civets, Giant Squirrel, Slender Loris, Ruddy Mongoose, Grey Mongoose, Otter, Wild Boar and the endemic Purple-faced Leaf Monkey. There are also some 30 species of bats in Sri Lanka, by far the most obvious of these is the impressive Indian Flying Fox. Identification of the smaller night-flying bats is always problematic but some may be found in their day roosts which can vary from crevices in hotel walls to the generator sheds beside swimming pools. Most species recall variations of more familiar European bats although the very striking Painted Bat displays an unmistakable colouration of black and orange.

## Day 6

### Kandy

We leave Sigiriya 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

On the way we will stop at Dambulla cave temple which is a World Heritage Site. A sacred pilgrimage site for over 2000 years, 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 m<sup>2</sup>) 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 to do so on this first night.

Before reaching the main city we will pause to stroll around the picturesque Peradeniya Botanical Gardens. 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 and 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. A large colony of Indian Flying Foxes can be observed 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. These truly impressive creatures look distinctly prehistoric as they flap overhead and this will be a fine opportunity to admire them at close range hanging like strange fruits from their favoured trees. Numbers have been steadily increasing at this site and they appear to be popular with visiting tourists.

Tonight we will check in to Hotel Tree of Life for a two night stay. This simple but comfortable hotel is set amid attractive gardens.

## Day 7

### Kandy

The lovely forested hills around Kandy are home to a number of endemic birds including the Yellow-fronted Barbet. One of the best local nature reserves is Udawattakele which occupies a forested hill overlooking the city. Although best known as a birdwatching destination the forests are also home to various mammals and



we will be hoping to find a few of these during our visits. Toque Macaques are a certainty but other inhabitants include Giant Squirrels, Muntjac and Common Palm Civet.

In between the natural history excursions there will be time to take a closer look at the city and maybe visit the Temple of the Tooth.

## Day 8

### Nuwara Eliya

The 70-kilometre drive from Kandy to Nuwara Eliya will take 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 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.



Rhinoceros-horned Lizard

In the afternoon we will pay a visit to Hakgala Botanical Gardens 7 kilometres from the town. The gardens are another fine example of Victorian garden design set below a craggy escarpment at the edge of hills. The long-coated highland race of Purple-faced Leaf Monkey known as the 'Bear Monkey' can often be found either inside or close-by Hakgala and here they have become accustomed to

people thus allowing close views. They are extremely attractive animals found only in Sri Lanka and represent one of the highlights of the hill country. The males have a blood-curdling roaring cry which if heard resonating around the forested hills could certainly convince travellers that a fearsome predator was at large!

## Day 9

### 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 Purple-faced Leaf Monkey in the forests which are also inhabited by Tennant's Giant Squirrel and the smaller Dusky Squirrel,



Waterfall on the Horton Plains

all three mammals characteristic of the hills. In the open plains we may see a distant herd of Sambar Deer and these are a prey species of the resident Leopards although it is rare to see one by day. Although the Horton Plains does not have characteristics of typical reptile habitat, it does boast several rare endemic species although none of these are easy to locate.

The wild expanses of Horton Plains are a paradise for natural history including several of the island's endemic birds. The area boasts a splendid variety of mammals but perhaps it would not be realistic to expect too many encounters during our brief visit.

## Day 10

### Yala

A long descent to the plains involves endless hairpins bends and frequent photographic opportunities, as the changes in elevation present different views of the hills stretching away to the east. Our usual lunch stop is at the Ella Rest House, a superbly situated tourist complex perched at the very edge of the hills overlooking the plains far below. Several hours after leaving Ella, we will reach these 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-in at the splendid Cinnamon Wild Yala (formerly Chaaya Wild) Hotel for a 3-night stay. This 4-star hotel is situated on the edge of Yala National Park, with just the dunes and coastal bush separating it from the beach and the Indian Ocean just 30 metres away (though very strong currents make swimming in the sea inadvisable). Its location is ideal for the naturalist as the hotel overlooks lagoons and bush that attract a wealth of birds and mammals. The en-suite rooms, built within a complex of single-storey chalets amongst the bush, are modern, clean and very comfortable, and the service here is excellent. Cinnamon Wild Yala has an elevated open-air restaurant which boasts wonderful views of the nearby

beach, bush and lagoons; it also has a splendid swimming pool. The rooms are air-conditioned with WiFi, and are equipped with both hair dryer and tea/coffee-making facilities.

A night walk/drive around the hotel garden may be organised in search of the Common Palm Civet, Indian Black-naped Hare, Indian Gerbil and other nocturnal birds such as Jerdon's Nightjar and Brown Fish Owl.

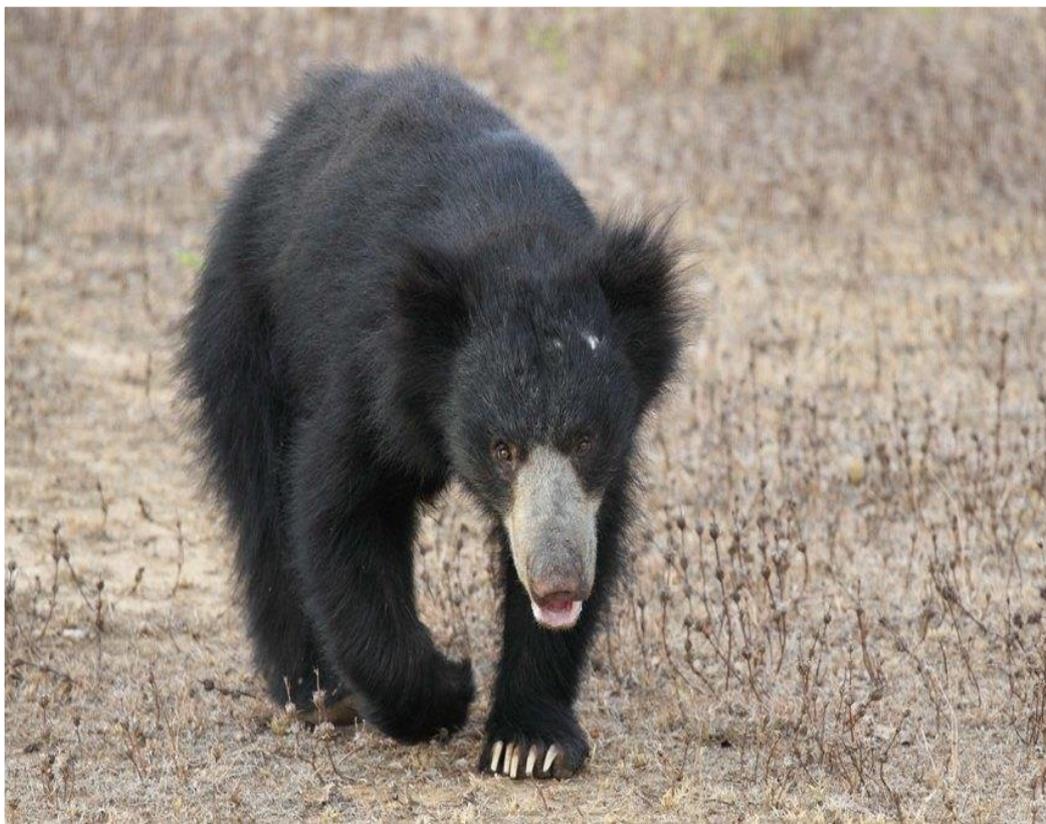


Leopard,

## Day 11

### 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



Sloth Bear

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

## Day 12

### Yala

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 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 Spot-billed Pelicans, Painted Storks, Openbill Storks and Purple Herons. Waders include the odd looking Great Thick-knee, Black-winged Stilts, Yellow-wattled Lapwing and sandplovers. Not all the residents are associated with water and in the drier areas we will be looking for Blue-tailed and Green Bee-eaters, Hoopoe, Blue-faced Malkoha, Sirkeer, Malabar Pied Hornbill, Black-headed Cuckoo-Shrike, Baya Weaver, White-throated Silverbill 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 and a scan of offshore rocks could reveal both Great Crested and Lesser Crested Terns.



Cinnamon Wild Yala

The Yala Leopards, like big cats everywhere, are unpredictable in their appearances but tales of obliging animals are frequent. Whether it is particular individuals becoming accustomed to human visitors, or a consequence of recent droughts, there is no doubt that 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 amid 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.



Asian Elephants

We will spend a full day inside the Yala National Park with our packed breakfast and lunch and return in the evening back to our comfortable Cinnamon Wild Yala Hotel. 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 the mornings, 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. Some of these we will hope to find during our late evening spot-lighting around the hotel garden.

## Day 13

### Katunayake

A leisurely return to Katunayake with few stops along the way and plenty of time for any diversions that we choose, whether cultural or for natural history. 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!

Nestled amidst a 38-acre coconut plantation bordering the tranquil Negombo Lagoon, the 4-star Gateway Airport Garden Hotel is a spacious and comfortable modern hotel. It is situated conveniently close to the airport and each comfortable air-conditioned en-suite room is equipped with TV, mini-bar, bath, tea/coffee-making facilities, hair dryer and other modern facilities. Its restaurant offers a choice of local and international cuisine. It also has a nice swimming pool.

## Day 14

### 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

(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 beguiling 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 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

### Sinharaja Forest

Today we leave the group at Yala and embark on a 4 to 5-hour drive to our overnight accommodation at the Blue Magpie Lodge. 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.

The Blue Magpie Lodge is a very small and simple 'birdwatching lodge', remotely situated in a valley beneath Sinharaja Forest. Its 12 small and basic en-suite rooms are set in small bungalows with verandahs; they have fans but no air-conditioning. A tin



Blue Magpie

roof is all that protects a simple 'open air' restaurant area from the elements. It's a 'no frills' lodge, but offers proximity to Sinharaja Forest as well as plenty of birds in the surrounding luxuriant gardens and forests!

## Day 14 – 15

### Sinharaja Forest

One of the highlights of this extension tour will be today's and tomorrow'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. 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 something of a stronghold for endemic birds and its importance was acknowledged by being awarded the status of a World Heritage Site in 1988. Old



Blue Magpie Lodge

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 troupes 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 eco-system 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 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!

Nestled amidst a 38-acre coconut plantation bordering the tranquil Negombo Lagoon, the 4-star Gateway Airport Garden Hotel is a spacious and comfortable modern hotel. It is situated conveniently close to the airport and each comfortable air-conditioned en-suite room is equipped

with TV, mini-bar, bath, tea/coffee-making facilities, hair dryer and other modern facilities. Its restaurant offers a choice of local and international cuisine. It also has a nice swimming pool.



The Gateway, Katunayake

## 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.

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## Climate

Generally hot and sunny with temperatures in the low country ranging from 25-35°C with high humidity, particularly in the Wet Zone. Temperatures decrease in the hills to a range of 10-16°C around Nuwara Eliya. Rain can occur at any time but is not usually prolonged outside the monsoon seasons.

## Grading and Focus

This tour is graded A. Most of the 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. (Horton Plains & Sinharaja)

You will need to appreciate that mammals are largely shy and retiring, present in low densities and often crepuscular or nocturnal in nature. Although this tour spends time and effort in looking for exciting and iconic mammal species such as Leopards, Sri Lanka Giant Squirrel, Indian Flying Fox, Purple-faced Leaf Monkey, Asian Elephant and other mammals, potential participants should be aware that mammals will be on view for only a small percentage of our time in the field. Anybody wishing for and expecting an East Africa safari-type experience full of animals should look elsewhere on our website for a holiday. Time between mammal encounters will be spent largely birdwatching (alert to mammals at all times of course), as birds are the most conspicuous members of the local fauna. Anybody who does not enjoy birdwatching as well as mammal-watching needs to consider whether this is the right holiday for them. If this does not put you off, you will hopefully be rewarded with a fantastic collection of mammal sightings as well as a wealth of fabulous birds.

This is a conventional wildlife holiday with a focus on mammals, birds and general natural history. No trekking or great hardship is involved (although long, potentially cold hours will be spent out in the mountains at Horton Plains), and the holiday is generally suitable for those of all ages and degrees of fitness. Some of the optional walks in the Sinharaja will be on undulating trails, sometimes muddy. It must be remembered that all activities are optional and there is always the opportunity to stay and relax at the lodges and dip in and out of activities should you wish.

Please do not hesitate to talk to the Operations Manager if you have any doubts about the suitability of this tour.

## **Accommodation & food**

Accommodation will be in very comfortable tourist hotels, each room will have private facilities. The exception is the Blue Magpie Hotel near Sinharaja (on extension) which is a simple but comfortable Rest House. All meals are included in the tour cost although any snacks or meals eaten in transit at the airports are not included.

## **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](http://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 **£295** and these flights will be with British Airways.

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 be expected to pay an extra £250 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.

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. If you would like to travel from one of the above regional airports, please let us know at the time of booking so that we can make the necessary arrangements and obtain a competitive fare.

If you would prefer to travel in Business class (normally available at a supplement charge of around **£3,495**). If you would like to travel from one of the above regional airports and/or book business class flights, please let us know at the time of booking.

## 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](http://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's Mammals departures tend to book up a long time in advance. Please book as early as possible to avoid disappointment.

## Highlights from our July Tour

We enjoyed good weather almost throughout the tour and a superb mixture of mammal sightings beginning with the spectacular Indian Flying Fox and the abundant Palm Squirrel. Good numbers of Asian Elephants were sighted on our first jeep safari at the Minneriya National Park which is famous for congregations of wild Asian Elephants coming together for mating, socializing and feeding. The endemic Purple-faced Leaf Monkey was also sighted at here along with more conspicuous Water Buffalo, Toque Macaque and Grey Langurs. We were particularly

delighted to observe many Grey Slender Loris during our late evening drives at Sigiriya. Ring-tailed Civet, Black-naped Hare, Mouse Deer, and Indian Gerbil were other creatures of the night that we also spotted. Our visits to the historical sites gave us an insight into the country's glorious past whilst also enabling good birding opportunities during which we encountered Sri Lanka Grey Hornbill, Sri Lanka Wood-shrike, Orange-breasted Green Pigeon, Crested Serpent Eagle and many other species, With our ascent to the central mountains of the island we became acquainted with the mysterious Giant Flying Squirrel, the shy Muntjac and the friendly Sambar Deer of the Hortons Plains National Park. We recorded Brown Wood Owl, Collared Scops Owl, Brown Fish Owl, and Jungle Owlet all in one day at their day roosts. On our safari in the famous Yala National Park, sightings of Leopard and Sloth Bear were a wonderful finale to another very successful mammal tour. In total we saw 26 Mammals, 14 Reptiles and 137 Bird species.