

Sri Lanka

A Treasure Trove of Biodiversity

February 22 to March 12, 2026



Leopard

© Cheesemans' Ecology Safaris

SAFARI OVERVIEW

Embark on an unforgettable journey into the intriguing island nation of Sri Lanka, where diverse flora and fauna await discovery. Through jeep safaris, bush walks, boat excursions, night drives, and night walks, you'll experience a unique and personal connection with the country's vibrant wildlife. Venture into lesser-visited parks for an even closer look at nature's wonders. Despite its small size, Sri Lanka stands out among the world's top big-game destinations, thanks to its remarkable wildlife diversity. This ecological richness stems partly from Sri Lanka's unique geological history: around 10,000 years ago, the island was connected to the Eurasian landmass. Rising sea levels later isolated it, shaping distinct ecosystems that you'll explore on this fascinating safari.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Seek elusive leopards and Sri Lankan sloth bears.
- Ascend the incredible Sigiriya Rock Fortress.
- Meet a rare slender loris on a night walk.
- Boat safari alongside swimming Asian elephants.
- Encounter the world's largest mammal – the blue whale.

LEADER: Sunil Gunathilake.

DAYS: 19, including estimated travel time.

GROUP SIZE: 12.

COST: \$9,900 per person, double occupancy, not including airfare, singles extra. See the *Costs* section on page 8.

Date	Description	Accommodation	Meals
Feb 22-23	Travel to Sri Lanka		
Feb 24	Arrive in Colombo and transfer to Negombo.	Jetwing Lagoon, Negombo	D
Feb 25	Travel from Negombo to Wilpattu and take afternoon safari.	Mahooru, Wilpattu	B, L, D
Feb 26	Safari for a full day in Wilpattu National Park.	Mahooru, Wilpattu	B, L, D
Feb 27	Take another full-day game drive in Wilpattu National Park.	Mahooru, Wilpattu	B, L, D
Feb 28	Travel from Wilpattu to Sigiriya and climb the rock fortress.	Water Garden, Sigiriya	B, L, D
Mar 1	Visit the ruins of Polonnaruwa and night safari in the Sam Popham's Arboretum.	Water Garden, Sigiriya	B, L, D
Mar 2	Climb the Pidurangala Rock and spend the evening in Minneriya National Park.	Water Garden, Sigiriya	B, L, D
Mar 3	Travel from Sigiriya to Gal Oya, then walk with a resident naturalist.	Gal Oya Lodge, Gal Oya	B, L, D
Mar 4	Boat safari in Gal Oya National Park.	Gal Oya Lodge, Gal Oya	B, L, D
Mar 5	Jeep Safari in Gal Oya National Park.	Gal Oya Lodge, Gal Oya	B, L, D
Mar 6	Travel from Gal Oya to Yala for an afternoon game drive.	Jetwing, Yala	B,D
Mar 7	Spend full day game driving in Yala.	Jetwing, Yala	B,L,D
Mar 8	Spend another full day game driving in Yala.	Jetwing, Yala	B,L,D
Mar 9	Transfer from Yala to Galle by way of Bundala National Park.	The Fortress Resort, Galle	B
Mar 10	Go whale watching and then explore Galle.	The Fortress Resort, Galle	B
Mar 11	Depart for home or join the Ceylon Tea Trails Extension .		B
Mar 12	Arrive home.		

OPTIONS

- Continue your journey on our [Ceylon Tea Trails Extension](#) from March 11 to 14, 2026. Complete your Sri Lanka experience with a luxurious excursion to the verdant hills of Hatton.

LEADER: Sunil Gunathilake

Sunil Gunathilake, a top-ranked National Tour Guide Lecturer, specializes in wildlife tours and has decades of experience in Sri Lanka's biodiversity. Active in research and conservation since 1986, he has contributed to over 25 films and documentaries, including work with Disney's *Monkey Kingdom* and Sir David Attenborough's *The Life of Mammals*. As a conservationist, Sunil has published research on wildlife and led over 500 conservation programs, promoting environmental education and the preservation of Sri Lanka's natural heritage.



DETAILED ITINERARY

Feb 22 - 23 ~ Travel to Colombo, Sri Lanka

Feb 24 ~ Arrive in Colombo, Sri Lanka from home

Arrive in Sri Lanka with meet and greet services at the Silk Route Arrivals Lounge. Have some refreshments and meet your local representative before transferring to the Jetwing Lagoon in Negombo (30 minutes).

Feb 25 ~ Wilpattu

After a leisurely breakfast, transfer to Wilpattu (3.5 to 4 hours).

Experience luxury camping at its finest! This mobile camp offers comfortable tents with attached flushable toilets and shower areas, a fully equipped kitchen, cozy dining areas, and hammocks for ultimate relaxation. Surround yourself with the beauty of nature, whether unwinding in a hammock or soaking up the sights and sounds around the campsite. After a delicious lunch, embark on an afternoon game drive that extends until dusk. Later, return to the camp to enjoy a drink at the jungle bar, followed by dinner in a specially-chosen surprise location, creating an unforgettable wilderness dining experience.



Sri Lankan Sloth Bear
© Amit Sankhala

Feb 26 ~ Wilpattu

Set out from the campsite early for a full-day game drive in Wilpattu National Park, complete with packed breakfasts and lunches to enjoy along the way.

Wilpattu, Sri Lanka's largest national park, is known for its diverse forest landscapes and rich heritage. As one of the first parks to open in Sri Lanka, it boasts over 30 recorded mammal species, including elusive leopards, Sri Lankan elephants, spotted deer, and the island's unique Sri Lankan sloth bears. Bird enthusiasts can also spot wetland species like the Pintail, Whistling Teal, Spoonbill, and White Ibis.

Renowned for its elusive leopard population, Wilpattu remains a premier safari destination to observe these magnificent big cats. The park also supports a dense population of Sri Lankan sloth bears, a rare subspecies found only on the island.

After returning to camp, unwind with sundown tea and a delightful dinner by the campfire. To cap off the day, join a night walk along the park's borders, where you may encounter nocturnal residents of the jungle—perhaps even the rare, slender loris!

Feb 27 ~ Wilpattu

Spend a second full day and evening on safari in Wilpattu National Park.

Feb 28 ~ Wilpattu to Sigiriya

Start your day with a guided morning walk led by a camp naturalist to a nearby lake, a vibrant birdwatching hotspot. Capture stunning avian moments before returning to camp for breakfast, then drive two hours to the iconic Sigiriya Rock Fortress.

Sigiriya Rock Fortress is one of Sri Lanka's most remarkable architectural marvels. Rising nearly 700 feet above one of Asia's best-preserved ancient gardens, this UNESCO World Heritage Site is a breathtaking sight. Built in the 5th century AD by King Kasyapa as a fortress-palace, Sigiriya's dramatic history is as striking as its setting. According to legend, Kasyapa seized the throne by murdering his father, King Dhatusena, fearing his half-brother Moggallana's rightful claim. Kasyapa fortified Sigiriya against an eventual confrontation, but when Moggallana returned, Kasyapa's forces abandoned him, leading to his defeat and tragic end. Nicknamed the "8th Wonder of the World," Sigiriya is Sri Lanka's answer to the Taj Mahal—a place of awe-inspiring beauty, historical intrigue, and unforgettable scenery.



Sigiriya Rock Fortress
© Don Sander

Mar 1 ~ Sigiriya

In the morning, set out to explore the ruins of Polonnaruwa, the medieval capital of Sri Lanka and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Originally established as the capital by King Vijayabahu I, it was King Parakramabahu who transformed the city into an impressive complex of massive buildings, ornamental parks, and the vast 2,500-hectare reservoir known as Parakrama Samudra. Polonnaruwa's well-preserved ruins, divided into five main areas, include highlights like the Quadrangle (Terrace of the Tooth Relic), the Northern City Group, and the Rest House Group with the royal palace of Nissanka Malla. Thanks to the compact layout and flat, well-kept roads, the site is perfect for exploring on foot or by bicycle.



Sigiriya
© Amit Sankhala

Lunch will be at Priyamali Gedara, a homestyle restaurant run by a local family. Named after the parents, Priyamali Gedara offers hearty, authentic Sri Lankan dishes served by a family of five who share their passion for local flavors with visitors. Located near the Vatadage in Polonnaruwa, the restaurant provides an array of traditional Sri Lankan meals, snacks, and sweet treats to give you a true taste of Sri Lankan hospitality.

In the evening, take a short drive to Dambulla Kandalama for a night walk at Sam Popham's Arboretum, Sri Lanka's only dry zone arboretum. Established in 1963 by Englishman Sam Popham, who transformed 7.5 acres of scrub jungle into a sanctuary for native flora and fauna, the arboretum was later expanded to 27 acres and is now managed by the Institute of Fundamental Studies for Conservation and Research.



Slender Loris
© Amit Sankhala

As you walk along winding paths and wooden bridges over small streams, you'll be immersed in the sights, sounds, and scents of this lush landscape. The arboretum's semi-evergreen monsoon dry forest features ebony, palu, margosa, weera, and Ceylon iron wood, among other native trees. You'll encounter an array of birdlife, from jungle fowl and Paradise Flycatchers to Black-headed Orioles and Crimson-backed Woodpeckers, as well as animals like spotted deer, wild boar, mouse deer, and the elusive Slender Loris. This enchanting natural sanctuary offers an unforgettable glimpse into Sri Lanka's biodiversity.

Mar 2 ~ Sigiriya

Veiled in the early morning chill and mist, you will head out to climb the Pidurangala Rock. At its zenith, you will be drawn by the unique view of Sigiriya's "Lion Rock" and the surrounding pristine splendor of the forest. The remains of a monastery dating back to 2 BC is another treat for you to explore here.

Pidurangala is a rocky promontory about 3 kilometers north of Sigiriya Fortress. It is home to an ancient Buddhist monastic complex, Pidurangala Cave temple. This monastery was developed in the fifth century by King Kashyapa when he seized Sigiriya to build his palace. He relocated the monks to the top of the Pidurangala Rock and had five ritual buildings built: a stupa, a chapter house, a house containing a Buddha, a prayer hall, and a Sangharama (the monks' residence). The monastery also includes a sacred tree. In addition to many caves (mostly old troglodyte dwellings of monks), one can see the monumental statue of a reclining Buddha.

In the evening, you'll head for the Minneriya National Park. The park is a protected wildlife reserve in the heart of Sri Lanka's Dry Zone. Its main feature is the Minneriya Reservoir, a true engineering marvel, the largest of 16 built in the 3rd Century AD by King Mahasena.

Minneriya National Park is home to 24 species of mammals including the world's largest gathering of Asian elephants. Moreover, Minneriya National Park plays a pivotal role in Sri Lanka's conservation efforts, particularly in safeguarding vital habitats for elephants and other wildlife. This destination is not merely a testament to nature's wonders but also a testament to the rich history and culture of Sri Lanka.



Elephants
© Amit Sankhala

Mar 3 ~ Sigiriya to Gal Oya

After breakfast, set out from Sigiriya on a scenic 3.5-hour drive to Gal Oya, stopping for lunch en route. Check in at Gal Oya Lodge, your home for the next three nights, where you'll have the unique opportunity to witness elephants swimming in Senanayake Reservoir.

Discover an ancient, untouched land—a serene haven that invites you to reconnect with nature's rhythms. Gal Oya, one of Sri Lanka's most remote and least-visited wilderness areas, offers a chance to immerse yourself in pristine landscapes, encounter local culture, and explore rich wildlife.

Gal Oya Lodge is a distinctive Sri Lankan ecolodge spread over 20 acres of private jungle. Enjoy this natural paradise through an array of immersive experiences including a walk with the Vedda people, one of the last remaining forest-dwelling indigenous communities in Sri Lanka. Guided by a tribesman, you'll learn about the uses of medicinal plants, age-old hunting grounds, ancient cave dwellings, and the ways in which these hunter-gatherers have thrived for centuries in the Gal Oya jungles.



Asian Elephant
© Amit Sankhala

Embark on a nature walk with a resident naturalist, exploring the lodge's surroundings and abundant birdlife. Multiple trails lead through the jungle and around a nearby lake, offering sightings of diverse bird species such as kingfishers, eagles, kites, and a variety of aquatic birds. Feel free to share your interests with the naturalist to customize the experience and make the most of your time in this tranquil wilderness.

Mar 4 ~ Gal Oya

Experience what makes Gal Oya National Park truly unique – the only place in Sri Lanka where you can embark on a boat safari—and if you're fortunate, you may even witness Asian elephants swimming in their natural habitat. Imagine the thrill of gliding across the water watching these magnificent creatures swim from island to island, foraging and socializing along the water's edge. It's a rare and unforgettable sight that will leave a lasting impression.

In the evening, you can join one of the lodge's naturalists for a relaxed bicycle ride. Choose from two routes: a shorter, off-track trail to Kiri Oruwa Lake, a haven for bird species, or a longer ride along the main road through the national park to the beautiful Namal Oya Reservoir.



Boat Ride
© Amit Sankhala

Alternatively, you may join a resident naturalist for a night walk in the forests surrounding the lodge. As darkness settles, use a torch to catch glimpses of nocturnal wildlife emerging from their resting spots. Keep an eye out for reflective glimmers that could reveal a variety of animals, from amphibians and reptiles to mammals and night birds. A highlight of the night walk is the chance to spot the unusual frogmouth bird—and, if you're very lucky, the elusive and endangered thick-tailed pangolin.

Mar 5 ~ Gal Oya

Gal Oya National Park is one of Sri Lanka's hidden natural gems. Today, embark on a jeep safari to the lesser-known Nilgala section of the park, an area once preserved by ancient royalty for its wealth of medicinal plants and unique birdlife. Though often elusive, most of Sri Lanka's native wildlife can be found here. Keep an eye out for herds of elephants, four species of deer, and an array of fascinating bird species. For those seeking a deeper connection with the jungle, an optional hike to the mouth of the Makara River with an expert naturalist offers a chance to encounter wildlife on foot and fully immerse yourself in this untouched wilderness.

Mar 6 ~ Gal Oya to Yala

After breakfast, transfer to Yala (4 hours), arriving in time for lunch followed by a late afternoon game drive in Yala National Park. Located in the southeast of Sri Lanka and bordered by the Indian Ocean, Yala is the island's most renowned national park. Spanning over 300,000 acres of scrubland, light forest, grassy plains, and brackish lagoons, Yala is teeming with wildlife, home to 44 species of mammals and 215 bird species.

As one of Sri Lanka's first national parks, Yala was established as a wildlife sanctuary in 1900 and later designated a national park in 1938. Today, it boasts the highest leopard density in the world. Unlike the elusive, nocturnal leopards found elsewhere, Sri Lankan leopards are more visible due to the lack of natural predators. Early morning is the best time for leopard sightings, especially the young males, who are often seen confidently walking along the tracks. The park also supports large herds of elephants, spotted deer, sambar, wild boar, wild buffalo, sloth bears, jackals, and mongooses. Birdlife is equally spectacular, with species such as Rosy Starlings, Paradise Flycatchers, Crested Hawk Eagles, Blue-tailed Bee-eaters, and common lorises inhabiting this rich wilderness.



Asian Elephant
© Amit Sankhala

Mar 7 ~ Yala

Take morning and afternoon games drive in Yala National Park in a private jeep with the service of a naturalist. Snacks along with tea/coffee will be served during the safaris.

Mar 8 ~ Yala

Spend another day taking morning and afternoon game drives in Yala.

Mar 9 ~ Yala to Galle via Bundala National Park

With an early start, you'll head to Bundala National Park (1.5 hours), where the rich birdlife and peaceful surroundings create a true paradise. Covering 15,000 acres of lagoons, scrub jungles, salt pans, and marshes, Bundala is the most important wetland sanctuary in Southern Sri Lanka, renowned for its incredible biodiversity and prolific birdlife. This park is a vital stopover for migratory birds, which rest and feed by the picturesque lagoons and intertidal mudflats during their winter stay.



Shopping in South Galle
© Amit Sankhala

Afterward, continue to Galle (2 hours) and check in at Fortress Resort for your final two nights in Sri Lanka. As the

bustling provincial capital and administrative center of the South, Galle was Sri Lanka’s first hub of international commerce and trade. The ancient port city is famous for Unawatuna Bay, a beautiful cove sheltered by a reef. The Galle Fort, a UNESCO World Heritage Site overlooking the ocean, was originally built by the Portuguese in 1587 and later reinforced by the Dutch. The 88-acre fortress, surrounded on three sides by the sea, protects a collection of old houses, churches, warehouses, and the Arab quarter. Even as Galle modernizes, its stunning array of ancient structures offers a captivating glimpse into the past.

Mar 10 ~ Galle

On your first morning in Galle, enjoy a packed breakfast from the hotel before departing for a whale and dolphin watching excursion off the coast of Mirissa, one of the world’s top 10 blue whale colonies.

Sri Lanka’s South Coast offers one of the best locations to see blue whales, with a longer season than anywhere else. From November to April, the whales migrate annually from the Horn of Africa to the Arabian Sea, passing through the waters around Sri Lanka. In addition to blue whales, you may also spot pods of sperm whales and other cetaceans, such as Bryde’s whales, dwarf sperm whales, spinner dolphins, striped dolphins, and Indo-Pacific bottlenose dolphins.



Blue Whale
© Cheesemans’ Ecology Safaris

Later, take time to explore Galle Fort, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, which is unlike any other place in Sri Lanka. Entering through the ‘new’ English gate or the ‘old’ Dutch gate feels like stepping into a different world. Inside, around 600 houses, each with varying degrees of renovation to their original Dutch architecture, line narrow, cobblestone streets, exuding Old World charm. The fort’s thick, high ramparts, which once protected the area, are now popular for evening strolls, morning power walks, and scenic viewpoints overlooking local cricket matches, including those held in the nearby Galle Cricket Stadium. Be sure to visit Dutch-era churches and museums that offer a deeper glimpse into the area’s fascinating history.

Mar 11 ~ Transfer back to Colombo and depart for home or join the [Ceylon Tea Trails Extension](#).

Mar 12 ~ Arrive home

COSTS (ALL COSTS ARE IN US DOLLARS)

Cost

Type	Cost per Person
Trip Cost, double occupancy	\$9,900
Single Supplement	\$3,420

Costs are per person, double occupancy, not including airfare, singles extra. See *Included* and *Not Included* sections for more details.

If you are a single traveler, we will try to find a roommate for you, but if we cannot pair you with a roommate, we will charge you a single supplement. Single rooms cost extra and are subject to availability.

Payment Schedule

Payment	Due Date	Amount per Person
Deposit	Due now to reserve your space	\$500
Final	August 15, 2025	Remaining Balance

Payments are due based on the schedule above. All reservations require a deposit to confirm reservation of your space.

Cancellations

Until the Final Payment due date, deposits are refundable except for a cancellation fee of \$150 per person, which can be applied toward another trip if reserved within six months of the cancelled trip's departure date. Cancellations are non-transferrable. No refunds are given after the Final Payment due date.

Included

- Carbon offsets for the duration of this trip.
- Silk Route / Fast track service at the airport on arrival with meet and assist service (clients will be paged at the aerobridge and fast-tracked through immigrations/custom formalities. Baggage clearance will be done by lounge staff while clients enjoy a lite snack with tea or coffee in the Silk Route Arrival Lounge).
- All leaders, transport, park entry fees, and permits for all activities unless described as optional.
- Accommodations (double occupancy) for 15 nights.
- Meals from dinner on Feb 24 through breakfast on Mar 11, except meals listed in *Not Included* section.
- Transfers on Feb 24 and Mar 11 between lodging and the Colombo airport.
- Gratuities – all tipping is included in your cost.
- Trip Planning Materials – information about entry requirements, flights, packing, gratuities, etc.

Not Included

- Carbon offsets for your flights to/from this trip.
- All airfare, airport and departure taxes, and excess baggage fees. Round-trip airfare is approximately \$1,200 to \$1,500 between the US and Colombo, depending on origin.
- Passport and visa fees.
- COVID tests.
- Lunches on Feb 28, Mar 2nd, 3rd, 9th, and 10th and dinners on Mar 9th and 10th.
- Divergent airport transfers (arranged by us) and extra hotel nights.
- Optional [trip cancellation insurance](#).
- Items of a personal nature such as laundry, telephone calls, medical costs or hospitalization, room service, alcoholic and other beverages, items not on the regular menu, etc. If you have special dietary needs, please indicate them on your Traveler Form.

SIGN UP

Please contact us first to check availability, reserve your space, and obtain a Traveler Form. To confirm your reservation, we require a deposit and signed form from each participant.

[Cheesemans' Ecology Safaris](#)

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OTHER DETAILS

Climate

Temperatures in most of Sri Lanka stay the same year-round. In February, Colombo and Galoya experience highs of around 90°F and lows around 75°F. In Galle and Sigiriya, average highs are around 86°F, and lows of about 66°F.

Fitness Level

Moderate fitness levels are required for long days in nature with a combination of vehicle transportation and walking. If you wish to climb to the top of Sigiriya Rock Fortress (not required), there are approximately 1,200 steps to navigate to the top. Please contact us if you have any health concerns that may make this trip challenging.

Flights

Detailed logistical information is included in the Trip Planning Materials we will send you.

Flights you book

- Arrive in Colombo, Sri Lanka (CMB) by 4pm on Feb 24
- Depart from Colombo, Sri Lanka (CMB) after 2:00pm on Mar 11. If **you are continuing on our [Ceylon Tea Trails Extension](#)**, see the *Flights* section in its itinerary for departure information.

Terms and Conditions

Read our current [Terms and Conditions](#).

Conservation

Our company ethos has always regarded conservation as inseparable from responsible tourism. We struggle with the dilemma that traveling worldwide expends climate-changing carbon. However, we wholeheartedly believe that traveling with us will cultivate your passion for conserving our beautiful world while stimulating each destination's local economy. We encourage you to explore the various ways in which Cheesemans' operates within this context:

- **Ecotourism and Conservation [Sri Lanka](#).**
- **Cheesemans' Trips are [Carbon Neutral](#).**
- **Offsetting your Travel to/from our Trip:** We ask you to pledge to offset the carbon emissions for your travel to and from our trips. You can purchase offsets with most airlines (Delta includes them automatically), use our handy [carbon calculator](#) and donate to Sustainable Travel International, or contribute to your favorite offsetting organization.