

Sri Lanka's Wildlife and Cultural Treasures

Secrets of the Jungle

February 22 to March 12, 2027



Asian Elephants

SAFARI OVERVIEW

Journey across one of the most wildlife-rich islands on Earth—Sri Lanka, where ancient forests, dry-zone plains, and turquoise coasts create a mosaic of ecosystems teeming with life. Over 19 days, explore habitats that hold everything from tiny tree frogs to blue whales, and from forest elephants to the island's legendary leopards. In Wilpattu, search for leopards among shimmering forest pools. In Gal Oya, watch elephants swim between lake islands—a sight seen in only a few places on Earth. Along the southern coast, head out to sea in search of blue whales, the planet's largest mammals. Each day is guided by seasoned naturalists whose deep field experience and enthusiasm help you see—and understand—the connections that sustain these wild places. This adventure is designed for travelers who value authentic encounters with nature, small group experiences, and the chance to support meaningful conservation in the process.

WHY CHOOSE THIS TRIP?

- **Remarkable Wildlife Encounters.** Seek leopards, elephants, sloth bears, and an extraordinary range of birdlife in one of the planet's most concentrated areas of biodiversity.
- **Small-Group Safaris.** With no more than four guests per vehicle, enjoy quiet, unobstructed viewing and the flexibility to follow wildlife behavior as it unfolds.

- **Knowledgeable Naturalist Leaders.** Your guides combine extensive field experience with academic backgrounds in ecology and ornithology, offering context that enriches every sighting.
- **Explore Lesser-Visited Parks.** Venture beyond the typical safari routes into protected areas like Gal Oya and Bundala, where wildlife still thrives in relative solitude.
- **Conservation-Focused Travel.** Your participation helps support local communities and projects dedicated to preserving Sri Lanka's wildlife and wild spaces.
- **Comfort in the Wild.** Stay in eco-lodges and mobile camps that reflect the beauty of their surroundings, offering warm hospitality, local cuisine, and a genuine sense of place.

LEADER: Krishan Fernando.

DAYS: 19, including estimated travel time.

GROUP SIZE: 12.

COST: \$10,200 per person, double occupancy, not including airfare, singles extra. See the *Costs* section on page 9.

Date	Description	Accommodation	Meals
Feb 22–23	Travel to Sri Lanka. Begin your wild adventure to Sri Lanka.		
Feb 24	Touch down in Colombo and transfer to Negombo. Arrive in Colombo and step into tropical warmth as you transfer to peaceful Negombo, where lagoon views and a gentle sea breeze welcome you.	Jetwing Lagoon, Negombo	D
Feb 25	Head North to Wilpattu. Journey to Sri Lanka's oldest national park, Wilpattu. Enjoy your first game drive in leopard territory in the afternoon. Feel the thrill of spotting elusive leopards and hearing the calls of exotic forest birds.	Mahoora, Wilpattu	B, L, D
Feb 26–27	Two Full-days of Wilpattu Safaris. Immerse yourself in the wilderness on two full-day safaris. Explore lakes, forest trails, and grasslands, searching for elephants, sloth bears, and vibrant birdlife.		B, L, D
Feb 28	Climb the Lion Rock. Travel to Sigiriya, the "Lion Rock", and ascend the iconic fortress for panoramic views and rich cultural history and architecture.	Water Garden, Sigiriya	B, L, D
Mar 1	Ancient Ruins and an Enchanting Night safari. Discover Polonnaruwa's historic grandeur and join a guided evening safari in search of nocturnal wildlife.		B, L, D
Mar 2	Pidurangala Rock and Minneriya National Park. Enjoy a morning birding session and an afternoon catamaran ride on Thakoltay Lake, a renowned hotspot for birding. Then witness spectacular		B, L, D

	nighttime gathering of herds of elephants at Minneriya National Park.		
Mar 3–5	Journey to Gal Oya. Travel to the remote jungle haven of Gal Oya where elephants roam and ecosystems flourish undisturbed. You will experience a boat safari on Sri Lanka's largest reservoir, looking for swimming elephants and finding a wide range of bird species. In the evening you can do a leisurely bicycle ride or join resident naturalists for night walks. On another day, a jeep safari will get you into the park, looking for extraordinary wildlife encounters, including elephants, four species of deer, as well as many bird species.	Gal Oya Lodge, Gal Oya	B, L, D
Mar 6	Travel from Gal Oya to Yala. Drive south to the famous Yala and its abundant leopard population. The afternoon brings a game drive through scrub forests and coastal lagoons.	Jetwing, Yala	B, L, D
Mar 7–8	Explore Yala in Depth. Spend two days immersed in Yala's varied landscapes, where the rustle of brush may reveal a leopard on the move or a herd of elephants at a quiet waterhole.		B, L, D
Mar 9	Birding and Travel to Galle. Head south to Galle, stopping for some amazing wetland birding at Bundala National Park, searching for flamingos and migratory species. Arrive in the later day to Galle's colonial coast.	The Fortress Resort, Galle	B, L, D
Mar 10	Whale Watching and Fort Exploration. Set sail in hopes of spotting dolphins and whales, including the mighty blue whale, then stroll the historic ramparts of the UNESCO-listed Galle Fort.		B, L, D
Mar 11	Depart for home or join the Ceylon Tea Trails Extension or the Hikkaduwa Snorkeling Extension. Return to Colombo for flights home or continue on a peaceful tea country retreat on our Ceylon Tea Trails Extension or an ocean getaway on our Hikkaduwa Snorkeling Extension.		B
Mar 12	Arrive home.		

ENHANCE YOUR TRIP

- Continue your journey on our [Ceylon Tea Trails Extension](#) or our [Hikkaduwa Snorkeling Extension](#), both from March 11 to 14, 2027. Complete your Sri Lanka experience with a luxurious excursion to the verdant hills of Hatton or an ocean escape exploring coral reefs of the Indian Ocean.

LEADER

Cheesemans' Ecology Safaris carefully selects leaders who are experts in their field to ensure that your experience is the best it can be. One leader with assistant naturalists in the parks will provide a range of expertise for your trip.

Krishan Fernando

Krishan is a Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority–certified National Tourist Guide Lecturer with over 15 years of experience leading birdwatching and wildlife tours. Trained in ornithology at the University of Colombo, he specializes in rare and endemic species while also showcasing the island's broader biodiversity. A skilled wildlife photographer and long-time member of the Field Ornithology Group of Sri Lanka, Krishan blends scientific expertise, engaging storytelling, and a passion for conservation into unforgettable nature experiences.



DETAILED ITINERARY

Feb 22–23 ~ Travel to Colombo, Sri Lanka

Begin your journey to Sri Lanka, where wilderness, culture, and coastal beauty await.

Feb 24 ~ Arrive in Colombo, Sri Lanka from home

Upon landing, enjoy meet-and-greet services at the Silk Route Arrivals Lounge. Refresh, meet your local representative, and then transfer (~30 minutes) to Jetwing Lagoon in Negombo for your first night in Sri Lanka. Enjoy some birding at the lagoon right there at the hotel.

Feb 25 ~ Wilpattu

After a relaxed breakfast, depart for Wilpattu (3.5–4 hours). Check into a luxury mobile camp featuring comfortable tents with attached flush toilets and showers, a fully equipped kitchen, dining areas, and hammocks.

Following a delicious lunch, you'll head out on an afternoon game drive through forest and villus 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 Leopard

Feb 26–27 ~ Wilpattu

Rise early for two full-day game drives—packed breakfast and lunch included. Wilpattu National Park is the largest national park in Sri Lanka. It is home to many diverse forest types. It was one of the first parks to open in Sri Lanka and thus has a rich heritage.

There are over 30 recorded mammalian species inside Wilpattu. Apart from leopards and sloth bears there are also Sri Lankan elephants and spotted deer. Wetland bird species such as the Pintail, Whistling Teal Spoonbill, and the White Ibis can also be found in the Wilpattu National Park.

After returning, enjoy sundown tea and dinner by the campfire. In the evening on one of your nights, join a night walk along park borders—your chance to spot nocturnal creatures such as the slender loris.

Feb 28 ~ Wilpattu to Sigiriya

Begin with a morning guided walk led by your camp naturalist to a nearby birding lake, a birding hotspot. After breakfast, drive (~2 hours) to Sigiriya and settle in. Ascend Sigiriya Rock Fortress—a 5th-century UNESCO site rising 700 feet above ancient gardens and courtyards.



Green Bee-eater

Built in the 5th century AD by King Kasyapa as a fortress-palace, Sigiriya's dramatic history is as striking as its setting. Legend tells us 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, resulting in his defeat and a 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.

Mar 1 ~ Sigiriya

In the morning, explore the ancient city of Polonnaruwa, Sri Lanka's medieval capital and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Originally founded by King Vijayabahu I and later expanded by King Parakramabahu, the site features ruins of palaces, temples, and the vast Parakrama Samudra reservoir. Key highlights include the Quadrangle, the Northern City Group, and the royal palace of Nissanka Malla. Its flat, well-maintained paths make it ideal for walking or cycling.



Slender Loris

Stop for lunch at Priyamali Gedara, a beloved family-run restaurant located near the Vatadage. Operated by a local family of five, this welcoming spot serves flavorful, home-style Sri Lankan dishes prepared with fresh ingredients and a personal touch. From fragrant curries to traditional sweets, every meal reflects the family's pride in their heritage and hospitality.

In the evening, visit Sam Popham's Arboretum in Dambulla Kandalama—the country's only dry zone arboretum. Established in 1963 and spanning 27 acres, it protects native tree species like ebony and margosa and offers peaceful paths through semi-evergreen forest. As you walk, watch for birds like Paradise Flycatchers and jungle fowl, and animals such as wild boar, deer, and the elusive slender loris.

Mar 2 ~ Sigiriya

Before breakfast, head out on a birding walk to Thalkotay village, where a serene lake draws a rich variety of birds. Glide across the water on a traditional catamaran, offering prime views for photography and birdwatching. Along the way, connect with local villagers and glimpse their daily rhythms, from farming to tradition.

In the evening, visit Minneriya National Park, a protected reserve in Sri Lanka's Dry Zone. Its highlight is the Minneriya Reservoir. It is an engineering feat built in the 3rd century AD by King Mahasena.

The park is home to 24 mammal species, including the world's largest seasonal gathering of wild Asian elephants. It also plays a crucial role in conserving Sri Lanka's dry-zone habitats and supporting long-term protection of its native wildlife and cultural landscapes.

Mar 3–5 ~ Sigiriya to Gal Oya

After breakfast, depart Sigiriya on a scenic 3.5-hour drive to Gal Oya. En route, pause for lunch. Check in at Gal Oya Lodge, your base for the next three nights. While here, you'll have the unique opportunity to witness elephants swimming in Senanayake Reservoir. Gal Oya is among Sri Lanka's most remote and least-visited wildlife zone. Here, you'll relax and discover an ancient, untouched land—a serene haven that invites you to reconnect with nature's rhythms.

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.

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, including 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.



Painted Stork



Grey Langur



Asian Elephants

Experience what sets Gal Oya National Park apart—it's the only place in Sri Lanka where you can enjoy a boat safari. If you're lucky, you may witness Asian elephants swimming freely in their natural habitat. Glide across still waters as these giants move from island to island, foraging and socializing at the water's edge. It's a rare, moving experience you won't soon forget.

That evening, join a lodge naturalist for a relaxed bike ride. Choose a short, off-track route to bird-rich Kiri Oruwa Lake or a longer ride through the park to the scenic Namal Oya Reservoir.

Alternatively, take a guided night walk through surrounding forests. As darkness falls, scan with a flashlight for glowing eyes and sudden movements—frogs, reptiles, small mammals, and night birds emerge. Highlights may include the strange frogmouth bird—or, if fortune smiles, the endangered thick-tailed pangolin.

Gal Oya National Park is one of Sri Lanka's hidden natural gems. On your last day here, 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, set out on a four-hour drive to Yala, arriving in time for lunch. In the late afternoon, head out on your first game drive in Yala National Park, Sri Lanka's most iconic wildlife reserve, located in the island's southeast and bordered by the Indian Ocean. Spanning over 300,000 acres of scrubland, open forest, grassy plains, and brackish lagoons, Yala offers some of the richest wildlife viewing in the country. It is home to 44 species of mammals and more than 215 species of birds.

Yala was first protected as a wildlife sanctuary in 1900 and gained national park status in 1938, making it one of the oldest protected areas in Sri Lanka. Today, it holds the world's highest density of leopards. Unlike their elusive counterparts elsewhere, Sri Lanka's leopards are often spotted during the day due to the absence of large natural predators. Early mornings offer the best opportunities, especially for sightings of confident young males walking the tracks.

The park also shelters large herds of elephants, sambar and spotted deer, wild buffalo, wild boar, sloth bears, jackals, and mongooses. Birdwatchers will be equally rewarded, with highlights including Rosy Starlings, Crested Hawk Eagles, Paradise Flycatchers, Blue-tailed Bee-eaters, and Common Ioras.



Crested Hawk-eagle

Mar 7–8 ~ 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. You will have many wildlife encounters—track patterns, revisit sightings, and take in the rhythms of life in one of Sri Lanka’s richest habitats.

Mar 9 ~ Yala to Galle via Bundala National Park

With an early start, head to Bundala National Park (1.5 hours), a haven of stillness and birdsong. Spanning 15,000 acres of lagoons, salt pans, scrub jungle, and marshes, Bundala is the most significant wetland sanctuary in southern Sri Lanka. Famed for its biodiversity, the park plays a vital role as a seasonal stopover for migratory birds, which feed and rest in its shallow lagoons and mudflats during the winter months.



Leopards

Continue to Galle (2 hours) and check in at Fortress Resort for your final two nights in Sri Lanka. As the southern capital and once a thriving center of international trade, Galle is known for its colonial charm and seaside appeal. Unawatuna Bay offers a sheltered, reef-fringed cove, while the UNESCO-listed Galle Fort—originally built by the Portuguese in 1587 and later fortified by the Dutch—sprawls across 88 acres. Enclosed by sea on three sides, the fort is home to historic homes, churches, warehouses, and the old Arab quarter. Even amid modern growth, Galle’s preserved architecture offers a timeless glimpse into the island’s rich and layered past.

Mar 10 ~ Galle

Start your morning in Galle with a packed breakfast from the hotel before heading out on a whale and dolphin watching excursion off the coast of Mirissa, renowned as one of the world’s top ten locations to view blue whales. Sri Lanka’s South Coast offers one of the longest and most reliable blue whale seasons, from November to April, when the whales migrate from the Horn of Africa to the Arabian Sea. Along with blue whales, you may encounter sperm whales, Bryde’s whales, dwarf sperm whales, and several dolphin species, including spinner, striped, and Indo-Pacific bottlenose dolphins.



Blue Whales

Later, explore the iconic Galle Fort, a UNESCO World Heritage Site that feels like a world apart. Whether you enter through the English or Dutch gate, you’re stepping into history. Around 600 homes line cobbled streets, each bearing traces of Dutch architecture and colonial charm. The fort’s thick ramparts were built for defense, but now offer scenic views, sunset strolls, and glimpses of cricket matches at the nearby stadium. Don’t miss the Dutch-era churches and museums, which add even more depth to Galle’s historic appeal.

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

Mar 12 ~ Arrive home

COSTS (ALL COSTS ARE IN US DOLLARS)

Cost

Type	Cost per Person
Trip Cost, double occupancy	\$10,200
Single Supplement	\$3,800

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, 2026	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 light 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.
- Passport and visa fees.
- Lunch and dinner on Mar 11th.
- 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](#)

Email: info@cheesemans.com

WhatsApp: (408) 741-5330

Phone: (800) 527-5330 or (408) 741-5330

OTHER DETAILS

Climate

Temperatures in most of Sri Lanka stay the same year-round. In February, Colombo and Gal Oya 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.

Please wait to book your flights until you receive confirmation from your Coordinator that the minimum number of participants has been met to operate the trip. If you choose to book flights before receiving this confirmation, we strongly recommend purchasing flight cancellation insurance to protect your investment.

Flights you book

- Arrive in Colombo, Sri Lanka (CMB) by 4:00pm 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](#)** or our **[Hikkaduwa Snorkeling 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.