

Birdwatch Sri Lanka

Dates: 26th Mar – 5th/6th Apr 2025

Guide: Dhammithra Samarasinghe

Price: £2300 (£2510 with extension)

Note: There may be slight changes to arrival and departure times, dependent on final published schedules.

This tour includes all international flights, guidance, transport and accommodation, as well as bottled water, breakfasts and evening meals during the tour,



26th Mar: Depart London

Take an overnight flight to Colombo.

27th Mar: Arrive Colombo - Kitulgala

After arrival in Colombo, you will be met by your guide and drive to Kitulgala (c. 3h). There should be time in the late afternoon for some birding. Kitulgala is a small town in the west of Sri Lanka. It is in the wet zone rain forest, which gets two monsoons each year, and is one of the wettest places in the country. Nevertheless, it comes alive in the first three months of the year, especially in February, the driest month. The Academy Award-winning *The Bridge on the River Kwai* was filmed on the Kelani River near Kitulgala, although nothing remains now except the concrete foundations for the bridge (and, supposedly, the submerged train cars that plunged into the river in the climactic scene).

Possible noteworthy species: SL Spurfowl, SL Junglefowl, Crested Goshawk, Besra, Rufous-bellied Eagle, Mountain Hawk Eagle, SL Green Pigeon, SL Hanging Parrot, Layard's Parakeet, Red-faced Malkoha, Green-billed Coucal, SL Frogmouth, Serendib Scops Owl, Chestnut-backed Owlet, Dollarbird, Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher, Malabar Trogon, Yellow-fronted Barbet, Crimson-fronted Barbet, SL Grey Hornbill, Lesser Yellownape, Crimson-backed Goldenback, Indian Pitta, Black-naped Monarch, SL Blue Magpie, SL Swallow, Black-capped Bulbul, Yellow-browed Bulbul, Black Bulbul, Green Warbler, Large-billed Leaf Warbler, Brown-capped Babbler, SL Scimitar Babbler, Dark-fronted Babbler, Orange-billed Babbler, Velvet-fronted Nuthatch, SL Myna, Spot-winged Thrush, Indian Blue Robin, Asian Brown Flycatcher, Brown-breasted Flycatcher and Legge's Flowerpecker.

28th Mar: Kitulgala – Nuwara Eliya

We spend the morning at Kitulgala before heading to Nuwara Eliya (c. 2.5h). Nuwara Eliya - The 'Little England' of Sri Lanka, is set against beautiful backdrops of mountains, valleys, waterfalls and tea plantations. It is supposed to be one of the coldest places on the Island, but it is really just like an English spring or summer day, although the temperature does drop at night. All around Nuwara Eliya you will see evidence of the British influence. Houses are like country cottages or mansions. Victoria Park in the town is well-known as a birding site.

Possible noteworthy species: Indian Pitta, Pied Thrush, Forest Wagtail and Kashmir Flycatcher.

29th Mar: Horton Plains

We have an early start with a packed breakfast for a day trip up to Horton Plains today. Horton Plain is a gently undulating highland plateau at 2100m, lying at the south and of the Central Highlands, its surroundings forests and the adjoining Peak Wilderness, constitute Sri Lanka's most important catchment area of almost all major rivers. The plains are also of outstanding scenic beauty and conservation importance, containing most of the habitats and endemic fauna and flora representatives of the country's wet and montane zones. The western slopes support the most extensive area of montane cloud forest surviving in the country.

Possible noteworthy species: Common Kestrel, Common Buzzard, Mountain Hawk Eagle, Sri Lanka Wood Pigeon, Crimson-backed Goldenback, SL Blue Magpie, Pacific Swallow, Yellow-eared Bulbul, SL White-eye, SL Bush Warbler, Green Warbler, Large-billed Leaf Warbler, SL Scimitar Babbler, Dark-fronted Babbler, Velvet-fronted Nuthatch, SL Whistling Thrush, Indian Blackbird, Pied Bushchat, Dull-blue Flycatcher, Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher and Black-throated Munia.

30th Mar: Nuwara Eliya - Tissamaharama

We drive towards the coast today to Tissamaharama (c. 3h). In the afternoon, we will have time to bird around the local wetlands, which have a good species overlap with Bundala National Park (see below).

31st Mar: Yala National Park

Today, we have a full day safari in open-topped jeeps to Yala National Park. Yala National Park is the second largest and most visited in Sri Lanka. It is situated in the south-east region of the country and covers 979 square kilometres. It was originally designated as a Wildlife Sanctuary in 1900. The Park is best known for its variety of wild animals. Yala is one of the Important Bird Areas in Sri Lanka. It harbours 215 bird species, including six endemics. The number of mammals that have been recorded from the park is 44, and it has one of the highest Leopard densities in the world.

Possible noteworthy bird species: Barred Buttonquail, Indian Peafowl, Woolly-necked Stork, Black-necked Stork, Lesser Adjutant, Spot-billed Pelican, Darter, Common Kestrel, White-bellied Sea Eagle, Grey-headed Fish Eagle, Crested Serpent Eagle, Booted Eagle, Changeable Hawk Eagle, Eurasian Thick-knee, Great Thick-knee, Yellow-wattled Lapwing, Grey-bellied Cuckoo, Blue-faced Malkoha, Sirkeer Malkoha, Jerdon's Nightjar, Indian Nightjar, Oriental Scops Owl, Brown Fish Owl, Orange-breasted Green Pigeon, Crested Treeswift, Chestnut-headed Bee-eater, Coppersmith Barbet, Malabar Pied Hornbill, Yellow-crowned Woodpecker, SL Woodshrike, Marshall's Iora, White-browed Fantail, Ashy Drongo, Racket-tailed Drongo, Jerdon's Bushlark, Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark, Grey-breasted Prinia, Jungle Prinia, Ashy Prinia, Tawny-bellied Babbler, Yellow-eyed Babbler, White-rumped Shama, Rosy Starling, Brahminy Starling, Baya Weaver and Indian Silverbill.

1st Apr: Tissamaharama – Bundala - Udawalawa

We first head to Bundala National Park (0.5h) before heading to Udawalawa (c. 1.5h). Bundala is on the coast, and has a number of wetland areas and lagoons, favoured by both resident and migratory species.

Possible noteworthy bird species: Painted Stork, Woolly-necked Stork, Lesser Adjutant, Spot-billed Pelican, Black-headed Ibis, Glossy Ibis, Eurasian Spoonbill, Lesser Whistling-duck, Northern Pintail, Garganey, Black-necked Stork, Little Grebe, White-bellied Sea Eagle, Grey-headed Fish Eagle, Crested Serpent Eagle, Changeable Hawk Eagle, Watercock, Pheasant-tailed Jacana, Eurasian Thick-knee, Great Thick-knee, Yellow-wattled Lapwing, Pin-tailed Snipe, Greater Painted-snipe, Little Ringed Plover, Kentish Plover, Lesser Sandplover, Greater Sandplover, Black-tailed Godwit, Common Redshank, Marsh Sandpiper, Common Greenshank, Ruddy Turnstone, Little Stint, Curlew Sandpiper, Broad-billed Sandpiper, Ruff, Red-necked Phalarope, Small Pratincole, Brown-headed Gull, Gull-billed Tern, Caspian Tern, Lesser Crested Tern, Greater Crested Tern, Little Tern, Whiskered Tern, Jerdon's Nightjar, Indian Nightjar, Pied Kingfisher, Little Cormorant, Indian Cormorant, Great Cormorant, Darter, Yellow Bittern, Black Bittern, Striated Heron, Grey Heron, Purple Heron, Cattle Egret, Great Egret, Intermediate Egret and Little Egret.

2nd Apr: Udawalawa - Sinharaja

After a morning jeep safari in Udawalawa National Park, we head to Sinharaja, where we can begin our forest birding (c. 2.5h). Udawalawa National Park was created to provide a sanctuary for wild animals displaced by the construction of the Udawalawa Reservoir on the Walawe River, as well as to protect the catchment of the reservoir. Udawalawa is an important habitat for waterbirds and Sri Lankan elephants. It is a popular tourist destination and the third most visited park in the country. The species present are a mix of those from Yala and Bundala, as it is a mix of wooded grassland and wetlands. In the evening, we will be able to make our first visits around Sinharaja.

3rd Apr: Sinharaja

We have the entire day in the forested Sinharaja Forest Reserve. Sinharaja Forest Reserve is a national park and a biodiversity hotspot in Sri Lanka. It is of international significance and has been designated a Biosphere Reserve and World Heritage Site by UNESCO. The hilly virgin rainforest, part of the Sri Lanka lowland rain forests ecoregion, was saved from the worst of commercial logging by its inaccessibility, and was designated a World Biosphere Reserve in 1978 and a World Heritage Site in 1988. The reserve's name translates as Lion Kingdom. It is one of the endemic hotspots in the country.

Possible noteworthy species: SL Spurfowl, SL Junglefowl, Crested Goshawk, Shikra, Besra, Oriental Honey-buzzard, Black Eagle, SL Wood Pigeon, Emerald Dove, SL Green Pigeon, SL Hanging Parrot, Layard's Parakeet, Red-faced Malkoha, Green-billed Coucal, SL Frogmouth, Serendib Scops Owl, Chestnut-backed Owlet, Spot-bellied Eagle Owl, Malabar Trogon, SL Yellow-fronted Barbet, SL Grey Hornbill, Lesser Yellow-nape, Crimson-backed Goldenback, Black-headed Cuckooshrike, SL Blue Magpie, SL Drongo, SL Scimitar Babbler, Orange-billed Babbler, Ashy-headed Laughingthrush, SL Hill Myna, White-faced Starling, Spot-winged Thrush, SL Thrush, Legge's Flowerpecker and Black-throated Munia.

Option 1: Without extension

4th Apr: Sinharaja – Colombo Depart

After a morning at Sinharaja, head back to Colombo (c 3.5h) for an overnight flight home, arriving back on 5th.

Option 2: Extension with Whale-watching

4th Apr: Sinharaja – Weligama

After a morning at Sinharaja, head to Mirissa (c.2h). Mirissa is a small town on the south coast of Sri Lanka, located in the Matara District of the Southern Province. It is approximately 240 kilometres (150 mi) south of Colombo and is situated at an elevation of 4 metres (13 ft) above the sea level. Mirissa's beach and nightlife make it a popular tourist destination. It is also a fishing port and one of the island's main whale and dolphin watching locations.

5th Apr: Weligama – Mirissa – Colombo Depart

Today is reserved for a Whale-watching cruise from Mirissa. The ever smiling, mischievous dolphins will put on a show while some of the oldest and the largest sea creatures, Humpback and Blue Whales, will nonchalantly glide past you.

Seabirds are not high in variety or number, but we should see Bridled Terns. In the afternoon, head back to Colombo (c 3.5h) for an overnight flight home, arriving back on 6th.