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**Sri Lanka Tea Trails**

Thursday, July 27, 2006

Until 1972 the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka was known as Ceylon. The tropical island off the southeast coast of the Indian subcontinent lies along major sea trade routes from the Far East to Africa and Europe. It was a British crown colony for more than a century and gained independence in 1948. Its population is linguistically and religiously diverse.



**Watch video**

The entire island, sometimes called The Teardrop of India, is teeming with bird life and it is not uncommon to see elephants and leopards. The people are friendly and cuisine is delicious.



Colombo is Sri Lanka's commercial capital and home to over two million people. It can be hectic at times but there is a lot for the visitor to see. The Fort area is the business centre of the country and is home to the World Trade Centre, as well as other modern buildings.

A stroll along Galle Face Green gives wonderful views of the Indian Ocean and spectacular sunsets. Cinnamon Gardens is home to many of the city's most luxurious homes and The Pettah bazaar is good for people watching and purchasing gifts.



There are several interesting museums and beautiful parks to view, as well as numerous noteworthy churches, temples and mosques.

When the city heat becomes too much, do what the locals do. Head for the hills. Just three hours' drive from Colombo, Castlereagh Lake lies in the Bogawantalawa Valley. It is known as the Golden Valley of Tea and home to old Ceylon.

Rolling green hills, plantation bungalows and high tea at 1200 metres are reminiscent of the days of the Raj. It is the most beautiful part of Sri Lanka with views of mountain ranges and ravines, winding roads and waterfalls. Adam's Peak at 2250 metres may be the country's second highest peak, but is number one in cultural importance. The holy mountain is significant to Buddhists, Muslims and Christians and devotees make the six hour trek to the peak, climbing thousands of steps, to welcome the dawn.

Sri Lanka has 200,000 hectares of rolling hills carpeted with tea trees, making it the world's largest exporter. Local women can be seen across the emerald hills gently handpicking just two leaves and a bud of tea, which is still known as Ceylon tea.

Ceylon Tea Trails has four classic colonial bungalows which were built for British tea estate managers. The bungalows — Summerville, Castlereagh, Tientsin, and

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Norwood — have been restored by the Dilmah Tea company in co-operation with Bogawantalawa Tea Estates. They range from four to six rooms and offer the delightful experience of life on a working tea estate. Each is different and has its own manager, chef, butler and houseboys. The houses may be booked individually or collectively.

Some visitors follow the Tea Trail from one bungalow to the next, staying a night or two in each — other stay put in one cottage. Whatever you decide, you are sure to relish the pale tones and natural woods, old writing desks, silk cushions, regency striped footstools and huge spaces warmed by roaring fires in cool times. There are heated towel rails, mosquito netting, old books and prints, antique maps and rooms are filled with flowers in vibrant colours. Wide verandahs have cushioned chairs, perfect for relaxing with a white wine and cucumber sandwiches.

There are sweeping lawns and swimming pools, English rose gardens, spring crocus and agapanthus. Visitors can play tennis, croquet and enjoy a range of in-room spa treatments with expert therapists. High tea is served on the lawns and there are views of the viridian lake and mountains.

Cuisine is quite wonderful. Sri Lankan classics, seafood grills, fresh tropical fruit, delicious chocolate cakes, organic vegetables and fine wines are served at long teak tables, lit by glowing candles. Enjoy formal dinners or simple alfresco meals. It's all included.

Visitors set their own pace at Tea Trails. You can relax in the beautiful gardens, enjoy cool picnic spots, visit a factory for education in the art of Ceylon tea or be adventurous and cycle, trek or go white-water rafting.

Adventure Asia handles all active outings for Ceylon Tea Trails and specialises in itineraries throughout the country.

The best time to visit is between December and April.

### Location

Three hours from Colombo.

### Cost

Ceylon Tea Trails accommodation starts at \$440 a night twin share. All meals, drinks and tours are included.

Adventure Asia kayaking is around \$40 for three hours. Kayak, life jacket, paddles and guide are included.

Sri Lankan Airlines has return flights to Colombo from Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane starting at \$1775. Valid for sale and travel until November 17, 2006.

Please note that the prices listed are valid at the time of filming.

### For further information

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