



Ellerton

Travel Tips

Sri Lanka is well endowed with guidebooks – most offer useful and practical advice. We have been travelling in Sri Lanka for many years and hope that the following will be useful. Probably the most important advice about Sri Lanka is NOT to attempt to do too much. This is a very common mistake, aggravated by the illusion of what seem to be small distances between destinations. However the roads in Sri Lanka are extremely slow, and an average speed of 25mph, less if you are going through towns, is to be expected. Also the roads are often poorly maintained, and coupled with Sri Lankan driving (see below) can make a long drive exhausting. So do not try to do everything in one trip. Plan on relatively short days of driving and your holiday will be much more enjoyable.

Railways

Do think about travelling by rail, even if you already have a car and driver. Many Sri Lankan roads have been disfigured by uncontrolled building but this has not affected the railway and the views are usually a good deal better than from the roads. Although slow, rail travel is approximately the same speed as roads and is extraordinarily cheap so even if you send your driver and car ahead with your luggage, the extra cost is minute. Also note the Observation Car that is at the back of some trains, and is the only first class. A relatively large supplement needs to be paid to sit there, but still very cheap by Western standards.

Drivers

It makes a great deal of sense to hire a car with a driver – the cost of the driver is built into the car cost and Sri Lankan “chauffeur-guides” are usually well educated; well versed in history; politics; geography; wildlife of Sri Lanka, and normally provide excellent company. Also the system is well-established whereby MOST hotels give free accommodation to the driver, and indeed most restaurants will feed your driver, while you eat in the main restaurant.

Money and credit cards

Our advice is to avoid credit cards, whose operators can be rapacious in their charges, and to change money into rupees and pay with cash. If convenient, do this on arrival at Colombo Airport, which avoids queuing in local banks and is relatively quick. Do keep a small pile of 10/20/50 rupees notes – the sums are small, and everyone is expecting a tip; it also helps to deal with beggars efficiently.

Telephones

The Sri Lankan mobile network is relatively efficient, and those who want to make or receive international calls (or indeed make local calls) when in Sri Lanka, should consider getting a local sim-card. In our view Dialog is the best; a sim-card only costs US \$15, and buying time is considerably cheaper than in Europe.

Language

Visitors often assume that, by virtue of having been a British Colony, people in Sri Lanka will all speak English. Unfortunately some thirty years ago, the government made the decision to only educate people in Sinhala, and although the Sri Lankans have an extraordinarily high standard of literacy, this decision has led to many Sri Lankans being unable to speak English, particularly in the rural areas. Also Sri Lankans are typically very keen to please, and particularly when being asked for information or direction, will often say what they think the tourist wants to hear rather than what is actually the case, which can lead to complications!

Dress

Sri Lanka is extremely relaxed in terms of dress and tourists rarely need a jacket. The Hill Club in Nuwara Eliya makes a point of asking men to wear ties, but this is probably the only place in Sri Lanka with such a dress code. In addition, up to about 2,000 ft (i.e. Kandy) all you will need is a light jersey in the evenings. Higher in the Hill Country a heavier jersey will be required.

Food

Many tourists imagine that Sri Lankan food is always hot and spicy, which is certainly not true. Because of this many hotels and restaurants tend to offer either western or “oriental” dishes, but we would urge people to try curries, which can be very varied and delicious. Unfortunately the food in the larger hotels does tend to cater for the mass-tourist market, and, in our opinion should be avoided. There is much more creativity in smaller hotels and restaurants.

Patience

Sri Lankans are very relaxed, and few things happen with any urgency. Remember that if you are a tourist, it is a holiday and time does not matter and in this way the slowness with which many things happen simply will not matter!!!

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