

# SRI LANKAN FAMILIARIZATION COURSE

## Introduction To

## SRI LANKA

### GEOGRAPHY

Sri Lanka is a 25,000 sq mi (65, 610 sq. km) tropical island paradise and a major tourist destination. It is just off the southeastern coast of India between five and 10 degrees north of the equator. It is strategically located near Indian Ocean sea lanes. It is slightly larger than West Virginia. It has a beautiful coast line of 1,340 kilometers which attracts a lot of tourists all year around. Sinharaja, which is one of world's protected tropical rain forests, is located in Sri Lanka.

The administrative capital, Sri Jayawardenpura-Kotte, is located near the largest city, Colombo, at about 6 degrees north latitude and 79 degrees east longitude.

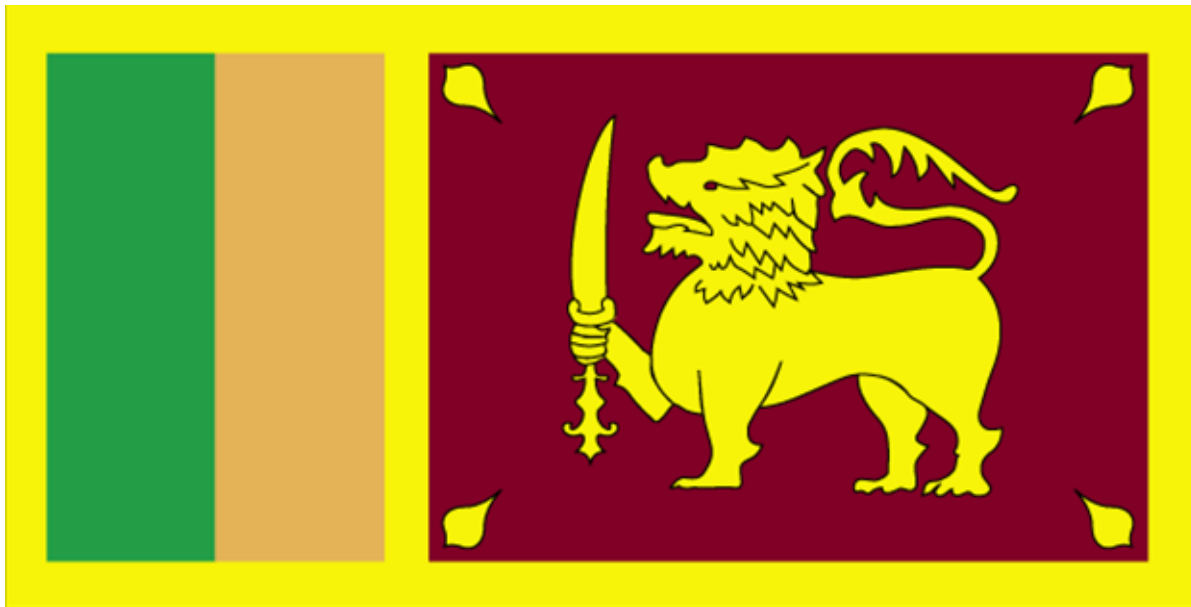


*Sri Lanka Map*



*Sri Lanka lies off the southeast coast of India.*

### *Flag of Sri Lanka*



The flag of Sri Lanka shows a lion holding a sword which signifies that the Sinhalese who are the majority belongs to the lion race which is a mythological belief. The four leaves at the four corners signify the Buddhist religion which is the religion of the majority of the Sinhalese. The green stripe to the left signifies the Muslim minority and the orange stripe signifies the Tamil minority.

### **CLIMATE**

The climate of Sri Lanka is tropical with rains from the northeast monsoon from December to March and southwest monsoon from June to October. The coastal areas are warm and humid but the central hills are cooler and less humid. December and January are usually the coolest months and therefore considered the best time of year to visit. Some western slopes receive up to 2500 mm (100 inches) of rain per month (not year!), but the leeward slopes in the east and northeast receive little rain.

May is the hottest month, with the heavy monsoon rains soon arriving from the west to cool things down. Nuwara Eliya in the Central Highlands has the lowest mean temperature at 16°C. Contrast that with Trincomalee on the northeast coast, which has a mean temperature of 32° C, sometimes rising to 38 °C. The average yearly temperature for Sri Lanka as a whole is between 28 to 30 °C. Due to its proximity to the sea, day and night temperatures may vary by only 4 to 7° C.

### **TERRAIN**

Sri Lanka is shaped like a pear. Sri Lanka's terrain is low, flat to rolling plains near the coast, and mountainous at the center. The mountains are only in the south-central section of the island, the highest, Pidurutalagala (Mt Pedro), is 2,524 meters, or 8,281 feet. The many rivers (called gangas after India's Ganges River) are well-fed by the rains. The largest rivers are located in the southwest.

## **POPULATION**

The population of Sri Lanka in the 2001 census was 18,732,255 giving it a population density of 818/square mile. The Human Development index in 2006 was 93<sup>rd</sup> in the world at .7555 It was estimated that 15% of the population lived in urban areas in 2001 The economic capital, Colombo, is the largest city with a metropolitan population of over 600,000. Other urban centers include: Dehiwala 209,787 (2001)  
Jaffna 145,600 (1997 estimate)  
Sri Jayawardenepura 115,826 (2001)  
Kandy 110,049 (2001)  
Galle 90,934 (2001)

Due to the civil war, Sri Lanka has a large number of refugees and internally displaced persons. They include both Tamils and non-Tamils and number 500,000-600,000 (2006). After the hostilities between the government and armed Tamil separatists began in the mid-1980s, several hundred thousand Tamil civilians have fled the island and more than 200,000 Tamils have sought refuge in the West (July 2006 est.)

The largest ethnic groups in Sri Lanka are the Sinhalese at 74%, the Tamils at 18%, and Sri Lankan Moors (descendents of Arab traders) at 7%. Tamils can be further broken down into Indian Tamils and Sri Lankan Tamils. 2001 census data indicates the following breakdown of religious affiliation: Buddhist 69.1%, Muslim 7.6%, Hindu 7.1%, Christian 6.2%, unspecified 10%. Sri Lanka's Languages include Sinhala (official and national language) 74%, Tamil (national language) 18%, other 8%. English is commonly used in government and is spoken competently by about 10% of the population. The level of literacy is 93%.

## **GOVERNMENT**

The Sri Lankan government is a democratic socialist republic, with a Western-style parliamentary democracy, has a presidential system of government. The voting age in Sri Lanka is 18 years. President is the head of the state and wields executive power. He/she is also the commander in chief of the armed forces. He/she is elected by popular vote and holds power for six years. He/she can be re-elected for a second term which is the maximum period for the president. The legislative power is with the parliament which is also elected for a period of six years but the president has the power to dissolve it at any time. The unicameral legislative branch has 225 seats. Sri Lanka's judicial branch has a Supreme Court and a Court of Appeals. Judges for both courts are appointed by the president. Sri Lanka also has an independent judiciary which stands as a buffer between the President and the parliament. The President appoints the Prime Minister from the largest party represented in the parliament and also the cabinet. The President is the head of the cabinet as well. Thus, the President of Sri Lanka is very powerful. The current president is Mahinda Rajapakse and the prime minister is Ratnasiri Wickremanyake, elected in April, 2004.

There are several political parties that represent all shades of opinion from capitalism, socialism, nationalism, and to Marxism. The main parties are the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) which is a social democratic party and the United National Party (UNP) which is a capitalist party. The Marxists have three main political parties, namely, the Peoples' Liberation Front, the Equal Society Party and the Communist Party of which the People's Liberation Front (PLF) has now become the

strongest. While the PLF is Marxist in orientation, it is also a radical nationalist party mostly of Sinhalese.

There are other nationalist parties and pressure groups such as the Jathika Hela Urumaya which is a Sinhalese-Buddhist nationalist party, Buddhist clergy, radical chauvinist Sinhalese groups such as the National Movement Against Terrorism, the Tamil Nationalist Alliance (TNA) that is supported by Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) which is a terrorist organization that controls parts of Northern and Eastern and fighting for a separate state lead by Velupillai PRABHAKARAN, Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC) which represents the Tamils of recent Indian origin who live central Sri Lanka, Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) and the Eelam Peoples Democratic Party (EPDP). The LTTE doesn't tolerate political freedom and therefore Tamil democratic parties such as the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), Eelam Peoples Democratic Party (EPDP) and others are not allowed to function freely in the areas under their control.

The Tamil minority that forms the majority in the Northern and Eastern provinces is clamoring for autonomy and the LTTE has gone a step further and wants to create a separate state for the Tamils through an armed uprising. The Sri Lankan state has been fighting the LTTE rebel forces for more than two decades. The on going armed conflict between the two sides is the main political problem that Sri Lanka faces at present. Because of the civil war there are reports of human rights violations and racial tension between the majority Sinhalese community and the minority Tamil community. Over time, most Tamils have come to the realization of the futility of armed conflict and want to reach a peaceful settlement with the government which has agreed to devolve substantial power to the Tamil majority areas. However, the refusal of the LTTE to agree to government proposals has resulted in a political impasse and continued violence.

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## HISTORY

### A Thumbnail Description of Sri Lanka's History

The Sinhalese arrived in Sri Lanka late in the 6th century B.C.E., probably from northern India. Buddhism was introduced beginning in about the mid-third century B.C.E. (see religion, below), and a great civilization developed at the cities of Anuradhapura (kingdom from circa 200 B.C.E. to circa C.E. 1000) and Polonnaruwa (from about 1070 to 1200). In the 14th century, a south Indian dynasty seized power in the north and established a Tamil kingdom. Occupied by the Portuguese in the 16th century and by the Dutch in the 17th century, the island was ceded to the British in 1796, became a crown colony in 1802, and was united under British rule by 1815. As Ceylon, it became independent in 1948; its name was changed to Sri Lanka in 1972.

Tensions between the Sinhalese majority and Tamil separatists erupted into war in 1983. Tens of thousands have died in the ethnic conflict that continues to fester. After two decades of fighting, the government and Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) formalized a cease-fire in February 2002, with Norway brokering peace negotiations. Violence between the LTTE and government forces intensified in 2006, but neither side has formally withdrawn from the cease-fire. The tsunami of December, 2005 devastated more than half of the coastline of Sri Lanka, with more than 30,000 people reported dead or missing.



*This gentleman catches a ride in a U.S. military truck a month after the 2004 Tsunami. The US was one of many countries to provide assistance after the disaster. Photo by JPS 2005*



*The ancient palace fort of Sigiriya is a popular site for domestic and foreign tourists alike.  
2005 by Jeffrey P. Smith*





*30,000 Sri Lankans were lost in the 2004 tsunami. Many more lost their homes. By Jeffrey P. Smith (JPS)*



*A fishing boat cast upon the shore by the tsunami. By JPS*



*Three-wheel taxi in front of devastated tourist shop. By JPS*



*Volunteers pack sugar for tsunami victims. By JPS*

## ECONOMY

The Sri Lankan economy is still considered volatile. Sri Lanka's 2005 GDP is about \$86.72 billion (61<sup>st</sup>) and per capita is about \$4300 (111<sup>th</sup>). Their currency is the Sri Lankan Rupee (Rs.).



*A coconut shell and a stick are used to tap a rubber tree. Photo by JPS*



*Front and back of a two rupee coin.*

It is primarily an agricultural country with rice growing as the major occupation. Sri Lanka is also one of world's leading producers of tea which grows in the hill country. Aside from tea, rubber and coconut are the other two main commercial export crops. It is also famous for valuable gemstones such as sapphires, rubies, and cat's eyes. Also, Sri Lankan mines are particularly known for gems such as emeralds. Recently, garment manufacturing.

Natural resources include: limestone, graphite, mineral sands, gems, phosphates, clay, and hydropower. The majority of energy is produced with imported oil. The main domestic energy source is hydroelectric, which provides nearly half of total electric output. Total electricity production in 2004 was 7.714 billion kWh. Blackouts due to shortages are common.

Sri Lanka has economic growth has been stunted since the civil war began in the early 1980's. Despite this Sri Lanka's life expectancy at birth is 73 years and general good physical health has remained high, due in part to strong public health education.



In 1977, Colombo discontinued economic policies that involved a high degree of government intervention and its import substitution trade policy for more market-oriented policies, export-oriented trade, and encouragement of foreign investment. Recent changes in government have brought some policy changes, however. Currently, the ruling Sri Lanka Freedom Party has an economic approach involving more government intervention which seeks to reduce poverty by steering investment to disadvantaged areas, developing small and medium enterprises, promoting agriculture, and expanding the already large civil service. The government has halted most privatizations. Although suffering a brutal civil war that began in 1983, Sri Lanka saw GDP growth average 4.5% in the last ten years, with a brief interruption during the global downturn in 2001.

In late December 2004, a major tsunami took about 31,000 lives, left more than 6,300 missing and 443,000 displaced, and destroyed an estimated \$1.5 billion worth of property. Growth, partly spurred by reconstruction, has reached 5% in 2005 and more than 6% in 2006. Sri Lanka's most dynamic sectors now are food processing, textiles and apparel, food and beverages, port construction, telecommunications, insurance and banking. In 2005, plantation crops made up only about 15% of exports (compared with more than 90% in 1970), while textiles and garments accounted for more than 60%. Sri Lanka has no domestic Oil production, while consuming 80,000 bbl/day (2004 est.). About 800,000 Sri Lankans work abroad, 90% in the Middle East. They send home about \$1 billion a year. The struggle by the Tamil Tigers of the north and east for a largely independent homeland continues to burden the economy.

In 2006, the annual value of Sri Lanka's imports, \$9.655 billion f.o.b., is greater than that of its exports, \$7.076 billion f.o.b. in 2006. External debt totals \$12.23 billion. Sri Lanka received \$577 million in economic aid in 1998. The main import trading partners are: India 20.7%, Singapore 8.3%, Hong Kong 7.3%, China 7.1%, Iran 5.9%, Malaysia 4.4%, and Japan 4.3%. (2005). Imports include: textile fabrics, mineral products, petroleum, foodstuffs, machinery and transportation equipment. Exports partners include: US 31.1%, UK 12.2%, India 8.9%, and Germany 4.3% (2005). Exports include: textiles and apparel, tea and spices; diamonds, emeralds, rubies; coconut products, rubber manufactures, and fish.



*Fishing boats such as these are used extensively on the Sri Lankan coast.*





*A community of fisherman makes its first catch a month after the devastating 2004 tsunami.*



*A crowd gathers around the day's catch of fish.*

Major sectors of Sri Lanka's economy include: agriculture: 17.3%, industry: 27.3%, services: 55.3% (2006 est.). The labor force of 8.2 million includes: agriculture: 38%, industry: 17%, services: 45% (1998 est.). Other important economic data include: unemployment rate: 7.6% (2006

est.); population below poverty line: 22% (1997 est.); consumer inflation rate: 12.1% (2006 est.) The national budget in 2006 included revenue of \$4.762 billion and expenditures of \$7.095 billion. Primary agricultural products include: rice, sugarcane, grains, pulses, oilseed, spices, tea, rubber, coconuts; milk, eggs, hides, beef; and fish. Major industries include: processing of rubber, tea, coconuts, tobacco and other agricultural commodities; telecommunications, insurance, banking; clothing, textiles; cement, and petroleum refining. A sampling of exchange rates provides the following data: Sri Lankan rupees (currency code LKR) per US dollar - 102.987 (2006), 95.662 (2002).

## **EDUCATION**

Even though Sri Lanka is considered a third world country, the education level is quite high. It enjoys one of the highest literacy rates in Asia. According to 2000-2004 UN estimates, 91% of Sri Lanka's adult population is considered literate. It's mainly due to the fact that education in Sri Lanka is free up to the university level.

The system of education in Sri Lanka was originally derived from the British system. However, it has undergone important changes since the country became independent in 1948. The education structure is divided into five parts; namely, primary (grades 1-5), junior secondary (grades 6-9), senior secondary (grades 10-11), collegiate (grades 11-12), and tertiary. Education is compulsory for all up to grade 9. After completing senior secondary education, students sit for the General Certificate of Education (GCE) Ordinary Level Examination (normally called O level). After passing the examination the student has the option of leaving the high school to join a vocational school or go on to collegiate education that lasts for two years at the end sit for the GCE Advanced Level Examination (normally called A level).

If the student obtain high marks, (s)he will get an opportunity to be admitted to a university. University education is not provided by quarters or semesters, but yearly. Since entrance to Sri Lanka's universities is highly competitive due to lack of space and facilities, only those who get very high marks gets admitted. Others have several options: go abroad and join foreign universities and colleges; continue their education at several private educational institutes; enter teacher training colleges; join continuing educational programs of traditional universities or the Open University and sit for degree examinations as external candidates; enter the job market; help the family business, etc.

In schools, the medium of education is Sinhala or Tamil which is called the first language. English is the second language for all students. The first language and mathematics are compulsory. In the universities, medicine and engineering are taught only in English while other subjects can be studied in Sinhala, Tamil, or English. The most popular subject areas of study in Sri Lanka are social and general sciences, languages, engineering, medicine, law, and business related subjects. Availability of vocational schools is limited.



*These six-year-old girls are in class at a Buddhist monastery in southern Sri Lanka. Photo by JPS*

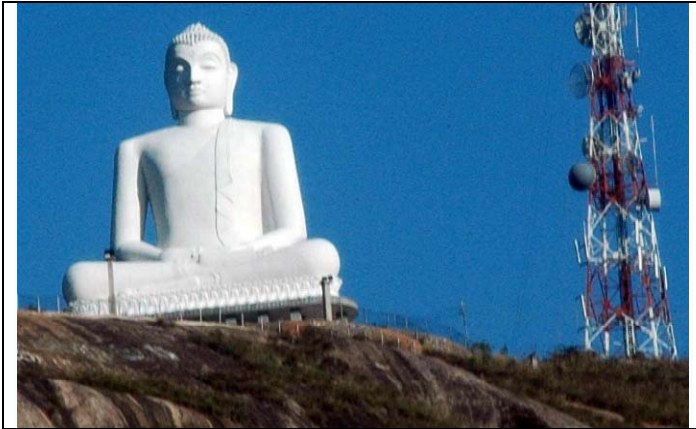
Most of the schools in Sri Lanka require students to wear uniforms. The female students wear a white dress with the school tie and male students wear white shirts with mostly blue pants. Different schools have different ties to differentiate their school. Usually schools have school bands and sports teams as well.

## **COMMUNICATION**

Sri Lanka had over 1.5 million telephone main lines and 4.28 million cell phones in 2006. These systems provide good telephone services in most parts of the country. The international country code for Sri Lanka is 94. The two Intelsat satellite earth stations seem to provide clear if sometimes spotty service to places such as North America. Internet users in 2005 were estimated to be 280,000. The internet country code is .lk. TV stations number 14 and radio stations 34.

Sri Lanka's news media is comprised of newspapers and television. Sri Lankans are eager readers and listeners to political news. Because of the high literacy rate in the country, many Sri Lankans read the newspapers. The political news is freely circulated by television and newspapers. Even though the Sri Lankan media is generally free, because of the on-going civil war, news related to national security is somewhat controlled by the government. There are six television stations which broadcasts in Sinhala, Tamil, and English. Except for one, all other TV stations are privately owned.

Rupavahini is the government owned TV station. There are several newspapers in Sri Lanka which published in Sinhala, Tamil, and English. While The Lake House, which is one of the leading newspaper companies is owned by the government, the other newspaper companies are privately owned. Two leading newspaper companies which are privately owned are the Vijaya Newspapers Ltd., and the Upali Group. There are newspapers published by the different political parties as well.



*A giant Buddha sits next to a microwave tower on top of a monolith. Photo by JPS*

## **TRANSPORTATION**

The main international airport is near Colombo, in Katunayayaka and despite heavy security, came under attack by the Tamil rebels several years ago. Tourists are usually travel by taxis or rented vehicles.

The most common mode of transport of citizens of Sri Lanka is public buses and trains. According to recent statistics published by the World Bank, only 4.3% of the population own private vehicles. Out of this 1% are cars. The driver sits on the right. There are many motorcycle owners in Sri Lanka. The public transportation in Sri Lanka is extensive. The country is served by an extensive network of roads. Sri Lanka has almost 1,500 km of railways, almost all broad gauge. Sri Lanka has 97,287 km of roadways of which 80% are paved. Their often narrow, winding ways contribute to a high accident rate. In general, anyone can have access to transportation within 20 minutes.

Transportation of goods is mostly done by lorries (trucks) and to some extent by train. Sri Lanka has 16 airports, 14 paved. Seaports with terminals include Colombo and Galle. The trishaws, mostly with the two stroke engine have become numerous and popular during recent years. Bullock carts, drawn by oxen, have largely gone out of use, but are seen occasionally.

When traveling by train in Sri Lanka, the tickets have to be bought at the ticket counters of the railway station. In express and long distance trains there are three classes. First class is the most comfortable, as well as most expensive. Third class is the least expensive and least comfortable, and is often overcrowded. There are no classes in local trains. If you travel by bus, tickets are sold inside the bus by the conductor. There are regular buses as well as air-conditioned luxury buses that run long distances. Some of them are express buses. Also, there are no classes in buses and drivers do not issue tickets.





*Other modes of transport include: vans (usually rented);*



*Taxis (three and four wheel);*



*and bicycles. Photos by JPS*

## **MILITARY**



*Sri Lanka Navy Soldier wearing in his uniform.*

The three military branches, army, navy and air force accept volunteers at age 18 (there is no conscription). 2005 military expenditures are estimated at \$606 million, or about 2.6% of GDP.

## **HEALTH**

Sri Lanka is one of the few developing countries in the world where there is a well organized state sponsored healthcare system. Healthcare is generally free for all. Consequently, there is no need for citizens to buy health insurance even though health insurance is available for people to buy if they want to. Health insurance premiums are high and if one has health insurance, one can get good quality care from private hospitals in the urban areas. The state hospitals lack the quality and facilities that are found in the United States, particularly in the area of aftercare.

The doctors are well-trained and qualified (many specialists are trained abroad in developed countries) but many state hospitals lack modern facilities. However, if one wants to get high quality care, there are private hospitals and clinics in the urban areas that are available to provide them.

The best private hospitals are located in the capital city of Colombo. Doctors in state hospitals are allowed to do private practice after working hours, which is called “channeling.” In the rural areas, most of the hospitals and clinics are run by the state.

In Sri Lanka it is not necessary to have insurance to visit emergency rooms unless it is a private hospital. Unlike in the United States, people do not go the emergency room often. Mostly, accident victims or people with sudden illnesses are taken to the emergency room. Unlike in the United States, except in big cities like Colombo, there are no ambulance services that people can call in an emergency. They have to arrange their own private transportation.

Even though English is widely spoken and understood, it is important to know Sinhala or Tamil to communicate with the local people, particularly in an emergency or delivering medical assistance to people. However, once the patient is taken to the hospital, the communication can be done in English because all doctors know English. However, English knowledge among the nursing staff is limited and knowledge of local languages would be very helpful in dealing with them.

## RELIGION



*Arts and sculptures outside of the temple in Ruwanveliseeya in Anuradhapura. Photo by JPS*



*A stone Buddhist statue in the ancient city of Anuradhapura. Photo by JPS*

The predominant religion in Sri Lanka is Theravada Buddhism (sometimes mistakenly referred to as Hinayana (lesser vehicle) Buddhism). Sri Lanka's Theravada Buddhism is quite similar to that which is found in Cambodia, Myanmar (Burma) and Thailand. Theravada, or school of the elders, is considered to most closely follow the actual teachings of the Buddha. The government strongly supports Buddhism, and Buddhism has a strong influence on Sinhalese culture. The roots of Sri Lankan Buddhism go back to the third century B.C.E. when India's Emperor Ashoka sent his son Mahinda, an accomplished Buddhist monk, to Sri Lanka to help spread the dhamma (Sanskrit: dharma), or teachings of the Buddha. He famously encountered King Devanapriyastita who was hunting in the forest at the time. Devanapriyastita was impressed with Venerable Mahinda's demeanor and soon committed his life to following the dhamma. Sri Lanka was early in committing the Buddhist teachings to writing, an important step in helping to preserve them for future generations.

There are many places to read about the historical Buddha who lived in what is now known as north India. Theravada Buddhism recognizes him as an extraordinary mortal human being who developed himself morally and mentally to such a degree that he experienced on a very deep level these three powerful truths of existence: annica, annata, and dukkha. These are usually translated as impermanence, non-self and suffering. The term Buddha refers to someone who is "awake", awake to the true nature of reality. This "awakening" is possible for any human being to experience if their morality and mental abilities are properly developed.



*Life-size elephant statues decorating the base of a giant Stupa.*





*A novice monk shares a blossom. Photo by JPS*

The vast majority of Tamil's are Hindu. Buddhism and Hinduism have coexisted for thousands of years, leading to some joining of religious elements. This has resulted in Buddhists and Hindus sharing a common devotion to many of the same sacred sites and entities. Sri Lanka's Buddhist temples, for example, even have sections for Hindu deities.



*Elder sisters pay homage to the Buddha. Photo by JPS*



*Stupas are shrines to the Buddha. This one is at the ancient city of Anuradhapura. Photo by JPS*



## ETHNIC GROUPS

Ethnic Sinhalese make up 74% of the population. Tamils make up 18%. There are smaller communities of Moors (8%, descended from Arab traders). The Veddahs, Sri Lanka's indigenous tribal people, make up a very small portion of the population. Refugees and internally displaced persons number between 500,000-600,000, including both Tamils and non-Tamils displaced due to the long-term civil conflict.

## CULTURE

As a nation with long history of civilization, Sri Lanka is famous for art, crafts, music, literature, dance, architecture. Beyond that Sri Lanka is a family-oriented culture.



*The Perahera procession is Sri Lanka's biggest celebration. These girls are preparing for their villages version. by VWS 1995*



*Sinhalese Buddhist Grandmothers go to Temple by VWS 2005*



*Kandian Drummer by JPS 2005*

## GENERAL CUSTOMS, ETIQUETTE AND HOSPITALITY



*A young woman in Sri Lanka makes a formal welcoming by saying 'Aryuboovan'. (Photos of Sri Lanka: Courtesy—Google Images)*





*A family mourns a loved one.*



*Funerals are often performed in the home. by JPS 1998*



*Exterior of a typical Sri Lankan home surrounded by flowers, and fruit and, coconut trees. by JPS*



*Bathroom facilities found in Sri Lanka. by VWS.*



*Buddhist monks often are invited to visit homes. They may chant scriptures and share teachings of the Buddha, and the householder will offer them food and beverages. The monk is holding a glass bottle with holy water. by VWS*

Sri Lankans are very hospitable; guests are their central attention and are highly treated in their homes. For social gatherings Sri Lankan homes will prepare well-seasoned, spicy food, the hosts will be busy filling guests' plates and glasses whenever those are empty or low. After a helping or two it is acceptable to refuse politely or, more simply, just leave a little uneaten food on the plate. It is considered rare and unusual for one to go inside and Sri Lankan household and not be offered tea and food.

## **FAMILY**

Sri Lankans can be found living in both nuclear and extended families.

### **Wedding**



*Sri Lankan Kandian bride*  
(Photos of Sri Lanka: Courtesy—Google Images)



*On the day after her wedding the bride wears red.*

## **FOODS**

Sri Lanka's tropical climate helps much of the island to be like a garden. The main meal consists of cooked rice and curries. Meat is expensive in Sri Lanka and mostly fresh fish, dry fish, curd, and dhal are used as sources of protein. Also, white bread called pan is eaten mostly for breakfast and sometimes during dinner. All manner of fruits and spices are grown with great ease mostly in home gardens. The fruits that are commonly grown in the garden include a wide variety of bananas, papaya, oranges, jack fruit, guava, and all kinds of fruits that are not found in the United States. Besides fruit it is not uncommon to see tea, coffee, cinnamon and coconut trees growing in people's home gardens.

Sinhalese cuisine is, to the European or American palate, quite similar to the more familiar East Indian cuisine. Tamil cuisine is obviously derived from the south Indian Tamil food and mostly hotter. Sinhalese food will contain vegetables and non-vegetarian foods since strict vegetarianism is not prescribed by the Buddhist precepts. Spicy hot food can be either extreme or moderate. The Sri Lankan cuisine uses herbs and spices that include cinnamon, cardamom, clove, cumin, nutmeg, garlic, thyme, curry leaves and curry powder etc. Below are photos of common ethnic dishes that Sri Lankans prepare.





*Vegetable and fruit stands are very common along the urban streets and rural roadsides.*



*Fruit for sale.*



*Cleaning jack fruit nuts for dinner.*



*Vegetables are often cut by holding the knife with the foot.*



*Cooking hearth fueled by fire wood blown with a blower. Almost all pots used by common people are made with clay.*



*Old fashion cooking with clay pots Fuel consists of coconut shells. She is preparing a curry with coconut milk.*





*Storing of covered pots with food on the extinguished hearth.*



*Grinding coconut "scraps". Photo by JPS*



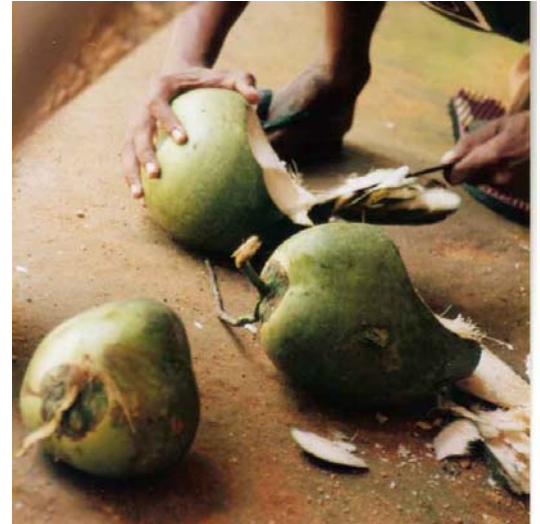
*Mortar and pestle for food preparation.*



*Grinding coconut "scraps". Photo by JPS*



*Young coconut is a cool safe and refreshing drink.*



*Just insert a straw into the sliced young coconut and your drink is ready.*



*These brooms are used to clean after the meal. Photo by JPS 1998*



## ARTS

Sri Lanka is a country of cultures that includes almost everything: architecture, music (folk and contemporary), literature, art (pottery, wood and stone), jewelry, etc.

## ARCHITECTER



*Sri Lankan Buddhists visit one of the most revered sites in Sri Lanka, the temple where a tooth of the Buddha is kept.*



*Art in the Temple of the Buddha's Tooth in Kandy.*



*Detail of statue in the Temple of the Tooth in Kandy.*



*Tusks are used in this display in Kandy.*





*Statue in Temple of the Tooth. Photo by JPS*



*Hemamali brings the Buddha's tooth to Sri Lanka hidden in her hair with her husband Danthakumaru.*



*Late 20<sup>th</sup> Century Buddha. Photo by JPS*



*Ceiling of village Buddhist temple. Photo by JPS*

## LITERATURE

There are a number of good-to-excellent books about Sri Lanka. A few of these are described below. Booker Prize-winning author Michael Ondaatje (*The English Patient*) has written two excellent books about his homeland, *Running in the Family*, as well as *Anul's Ghost*. His brother Christopher Ondaatje wrote *The Man-Eater of Punanai*. *The Architecture of an Island: the Living Heritage of Sri Lanka* is a great work and a beautiful book by Ronald Lewcock, Barbara Sansoni and Laki Senanayake (difficult to find outside of Sri Lanka).

An excellent source of Buddhist literature is the Buddhist Publication Society in Kandy, Sri Lanka <http://www.bps.lk/> P.O. Box 61, No. 54, Sangharaja Mawatha, Kandy, Sri Lanka. Tel: +94 81-223-7283 & 81-223-8901, Fax: +94 81-222-3679.

The BPS distributor in the US is Pariyatti, <http://www.pariyatti.com/>.

## **TOURISM**

The climate, environment, history and warmth of the people help to make Sri Lanka an inviting place to visit. We have prepared the following general advice for travelers to Sri Lanka. Because of the civil war, it is recommended to review sources that are consistently updated on Sri Lanka's conditions.

Foreign tourists have not been targeted by violence in Sri Lanka, but could become victims to it inadvertently. Until late 2006 terrorist and war activities seldom reached outside of the northern and eastern parts of the island, with the occasional attack in Colombo. Violent activity has now increased in tourist areas in the south and central regions of the island. A bright spot is that foreigners willing to travel in Sri Lanka might appreciate the reduction in other visitors brought about by the war and the tsunami.

## **Local customs**

Standards of dress and behavior are usually more conservative than in western countries. For instance, when visiting places such as temples you should cover your legs. Take care when doing activities such as photographing statues of the Buddha. You should receive permission and ask for guidelines when doing so (e.g. you may be asked to not have people in the photo with the statue).

## **Health Issues**

Many food-borne, water-borne and other infectious diseases such as typhoid, hepatitis and rabies can be prevented by vaccinations. Others, such as malaria, dengue fever, chikungunya fever, Japanese encephalitis and filariasis, can be prevented by avoiding mosquito bites. There is malaria risk in all areas, except for the districts of Colombo, Galle, Kalutara, and Nuwara Eliya.

The Ministry of Healthcare and Nutrition in Sri Lanka recently confirmed cases of chikungunya fever in patients from several districts; the most affected districts are Batticaloa, Colombo, Jaffna, Kalmunai, Mannar, Puttalam, and Trincomalee. Surveillance activities for chikungunya fever cases are continuing in sentinel hospitals in Sri Lanka. There are no preventive medications or FDA-approved vaccines for chikungunya fever, but travelers can take steps to reduce their risk of being bitten by infected mosquitoes.

There have been no recent outbreaks in polio and avian flu.

## **Local Laws**

Take care to observe all local laws. There are penalties for drug trafficking and homosexual acts. It is prohibited to take photos and video tape in high security zones (HSZs) such as some government buildings and military establishments.



*Monkeys are very common the Ancient city Anurahdapura where tourisss and pilgrims visits.*



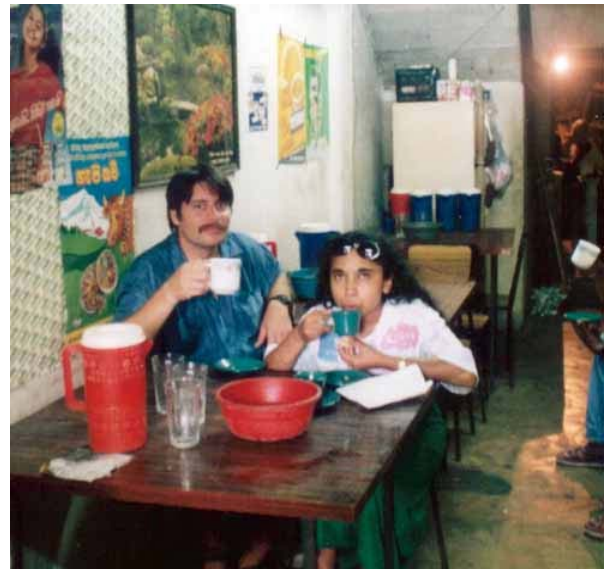
*Offering of flowers to the Buddha by pilgrims are visited by a common monkey in the area and a boy from USA. Photo by JPS*



*Here a monkey mother scurries across the temple grounds while carrying her baby. Photo by JPS*



*Tourists enjoy some of the many tropical beaches. Photo by JPS*



*A couple enjoys tea late at night at a roadside hotel (restaurant). 1998*