

Sigiriya Rock

Introduction

Sigiriya is one of Sri Lanka's most famous historical monuments. Residents call this ancient palace and fortress complex the eighth wonder of the world and it has significant archeology and attracts thousands of tourists annually. This is probably the most visited tourist destination in Sri Lanka.

The Sigiriya rocky plain, made of magma from an extinct volcano, is 200 meters higher than the surrounding forest. The exhibition surprises visitors with its unique harmony in nature and human imagination.

Thanks to this lion, the palace got Sigiriya. The word Sigiriya is derived from the word Sihagri, meaning Lion Rock. The western walls of Sigiriya are almost exclusively covered with frescoes, made during the Kasyapa period. Eighteen frescoes are still alive today.

The fresco depicts a naked woman and is seen as a picture of Kasyapa's wife and concubine, or as a priest containing religious rites. Although the identity of the unknown woman is depicted in the mural, this unique ancient painting celebrates the beauty of women and has a remarkable historical impact.

One of the best features of Sigiriya is its mirrored walls. In the old days it was so refined that the king could see the reflection. The mirror walls are painted with inscriptions and poems written for Sigiriya's guests.

The oldest inscription is from the ninth century. The inscription says that Sigiriya was a tourist destination over a thousand years ago. Today it is strictly forbidden to paint walls.

What can you experience at Sigiriya Rock?

1. Sigiriya Mirror Wall

Just past the "Sigiriya Frescoes", you walk alongside what is known as the "Mirror Wall" – a wall polished so heavily that the king would have been able to see his

reflection on the surface. You'll see names and notes scribbled into the wall, some from as early as the 8th century, by visitors to Sigiriya Lions Rock. One translated writing reads: "I am Budal [the writer's name]. Came with hundreds of people to see Sigiriya. Since all the others wrote poems, I did not!" Some things never change. Further graffiti nowadays is strictly banned to protect these ancient writings.

2. Sigiriya Lion's Paw

At the northern end of the Sigiriya Lion Rock, a narrow pathway emerges on to the large platform from which the site derives its name – Sigiriya (from sinha-giri) means 'Lions Rock'. HCP Bell, the British archaeologist responsible for an enormous amount of archaeology in Sri Lanka, found the two enormous lion paws when excavating in 1898. The final ascent to the top commenced with a stairway that led between the Sigiriya lion's paws and into its mouth. The 5th-century lion has since disappeared, apart from the first steps and the paws. Reaching the top means clambering up across a series of metal stairs, but you can still see the original grooves and steps cut into the Sigiriya Lion Rock.

3. Sigiriya Frescoes

After passing the gardens, you'll approach a staircase that slowly winds its way up Sigiriya Lion Rock. One section of the staircase will allow you to view some of the ancient frescoes painted on the Sigiriya cave walls. These paintings are similar to those of the Anuradhapura period but have a distinct style in the way the lines and shadows are drawn. To add to how impressive these ancient Sigiriya paintings are, it's believed that the original paintings would have covered the entire face of Sigiriya Lions Rock – an area 140 meters long and 40 meters high. Take the extra few minutes to view the paintings and try to imagine what Sigiriya Rock would have looked like in all its painted glory thousands of years ago. As John Still suggested in 1907: "The whole face of the hill appears to have been a gigantic picture gallery . . . the largest picture in the world perhaps"

4. Sigiriya Boulder Gardens

As you enter Sigiriya Lions Rock, you'll first walk through a series of beautiful gardens as you make your way to the towering Lion's Rock ahead. The water gardens, cave and boulder gardens, and terraces gardens at Sigiriya are among the oldest landscaped gardens in the world, so be sure to take some time to appreciate them!

History Of Sigiriya Rock

According to inscriptions found in the Sigiriya caves which honeycomb the base of the Sigiriya Rock Fortress, it served as a place of religious retreat as far back as the third century BC, when Buddhist monks established refuge in the locale.

It wasn't until the fifth century AD, however, that Sigiriya Lion Rock rose briefly to supremacy in Sri Lanka, following the power struggle that succeeded the reign of Dhatusena (455-473) of Anuradhapura. King Dhatusena had two sons, Mogallana, by one of the most desired and finest of his queens, and Kassapa, by a less significant consort. Upon hearing that Mogallana had been declared heir to the throne, Kassapa rebelled, driving Mogallana into exile in India and imprisoning his father, King Dhatusena.

The legend of Dhatusena's subsequent demise offers an enlightening illustration of the importance given to water in early Sinhalese civilization.

Threatened with death if he refused to reveal the whereabouts of the state treasure, Dhatusena agreed to show his errant son its location if he was permitted to bathe one final time in the great Kalawewa Tank, of which the construction he had overseen. Standing within the tank, Dhatusena poured its water through his hands and told Kassapa that this alone was his treasure.

Kassapa, none too impressed, had his father walled up in a chamber and left him to die. Mogallana, meanwhile, vowed to return from India and reclaim his inheritance. King Kassapa, making preparations for the expected invasion, constructed a new dwelling on top of the 200-metre-high Sigiriya rock – a combination of pleasure palace and indestructible Sigiriya rock fortress, which King Kassapa intended would emulate the legendary abode of Kubera, the god of wealth, while a new city was established around its base.

According to folklore, the entire Sigiriya lion rock fortress was built in just seven years, from 477 to 485 AD. The long-awaited invasion finally materialized in 491, Mogallana having raised an army of Tamil mercenaries to fight his cause. Despite the benefits of his indestructible Sigiriya fortress, Kassapa, in an act of fatalistic bravado, descended from his rocky abode and rode boldly out on an elephant at the head of his troops to meet the attackers on the plains below.

Unfortunately for Kassapa, his elephant took fright and bolted leading the battle. His troops, thinking he was retreating, fell back and left him to face off the battle. Facing capture and defeat, Kassapa killed himself. Following Mogallana's quest, Sigiriya Lion Rock was handed over to the Buddhist monks, after which its caves once again became home to religious ascetics seeking peace and solitude. The site was finally abandoned in 1155, after which it remained largely forgotten, except for brief periods of military use by the Kingdom of Kandy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, until being rediscovered by the British in 1828

How long does it take to climb Sigiriya?

To begin, you'll have to head to the ticket booth and pay the entrance fee (US\$30 or 4620 LKR for tourists, or 50 LKR for Sri Lankan citizens). Hang onto the ticket as it will be checked about mid-way through the Sigiriya hike.

When is the best time to visit Sigiriya?

Sigiriya is located in what is known as Sri Lanka's "dry zone", which is mostly arid and hot throughout the year. The climate in this region can be extreme from about April to August, with the temperature soaring upwards of 30 degrees Celsius. So the climb should start early morning or late afternoon.

The crowds also tend to be smaller in the afternoon as many tour groups visit in the morning (before moving on to the next destination), and there's also the additional bonus of watching the sunset once you get to the top! Just make sure you purchase your ticket before the entrance closes at 5 PM, wear sunscreen and bring a (large) bottle of water.

If you are climbing the rock in the afternoon, you may need to ensure that you have access to a flashlight (you can also use your phone's flash function) for the walk back down. There are no lamps to light your way back down, and the ground is extremely uneven, so you need to make sure you can see where you are stepping to avoid injury.

What to wear to hike up Sigiriya?

There is no strict dress code to visit Sigiriya as it is not a religious monument. That being said, you should adhere to and respect cultural norms – tank tops, spaghetti straps and shorts are acceptable and you do not need to cover your shoulders and knees (unless you are headed to the Dambulla Cave Temples before or after), but extremely revealing outfits with exposed midriffs and miniskirts are generally frowned upon.

How to get to Sigiriya?

Sigiriya is located approximately 3-4 hours by car from Colombo. The town itself can be a pain to get to as there are few direct buses and trains (the nearest station is in Habarana). It is highly recommend saving your time and energy and hire a private car to take you there whether you are traveling north or southbound during your Sri Lanka itinerary. If you are traveling directly to Sigiriya from Bandaranaike International Airport near Colombo then you can either hire an airport taxi which will cost approximately 12,000 LKR (~US\$65-70), or ask your hotel to arrange a 1-way transfer.

What is so special about Sigiriya?

Sigiriya is one of the most valuable historical monuments of Sri Lanka. Referred by locals as the Eighth Wonder of the World this ancient palace and fortress complex has significant archaeological importance and attracts thousands of tourists every year. It is probably the most visited tourist destination in Sri Lanka.

Is Sigiriya the eighth wonder of the world?

There's a reason UNESCO ranks Sigiriya as the 8th Wonder of the World and once you see it you'll completely understand. Sigiriya is a stunning ruins of a castle built atop a tall rock mountain.

Why Sigiriya is the 8th Wonder of the World?

Sigiriya is also renowned for its 5th-century pre-Christian frescoes, which are reminiscent of the paintings of the Ajanta Caves in India. One of the eight World Heritage Sites of Sri Lanka, it has also been declared by UNESCO as the 8th Wonder of the World.

Who found Sigiriya?

The abandoned site of Sigiriya wasn't found until 1831. British Army Major Jonathan Forbes rediscovered Sigiriya in 1831. He came across the site during a horseback ride.

How long does it take to climb Sigiriya?

The climb all the way to the top can take between 1.5 hours and 3 hours – depending on your fitness, how crowded the place is, and how many pictures you are shooting.

What is inside Sigiriya?

The Sigiriya site contains the ruins of an upper palace located on the flat top of the rock, a mid-level terrace that includes the Lion Gate and the mirror wall with its frescoes, the lower palaces cling to the slopes below the rocks.

Who built Sigiriya rock?

Sigiriya was built by the fifth-century king Kashyapa I, who ruled the native Sinhalese dynasty, the Moriya. The imposing fortress was the capital of the Sinhalese kingdom until Kashyapa was defeated in A.D. 495.

What is Lion Rock?

Lion Rock, or less formally Lion Rock Hill, is a mountain in Hong Kong. It is located in Sha Tin District, between Kowloon Tong of Kowloon and Tai Wai of the New Territories, and is 495 meters (1,624 ft) high. The peak consists of granite covered sparsely by shrubs.

Can you climb Lion Rock?

Lion Rock is Piha's most iconic landmark, its profile from all angles, is known nation-wide. Lion Rock sits between Piha and North Piha beaches, offering people who climb it, spectacular views in all directions. It is not possible to climb to the top after a rockfall makes access too dangerous.

SIGIRIYA FOREIGN TOURIST ENTRANCE TICKET PRICES

Non-SAARC Foreign Adult US\$30

Non-SAARC Foreign Children US\$15

SAARC Foreign Adult US\$15

SAARC Foreign Children US\$15

All Infant & Toddler Free entry

SIGIRIYA LOCAL TOURIST ENTRANCE TICKET PRICES

Local adults Rs.100

Local children Rs.50

SIGIRIYA OPENING HOURS

Sigiriya Lion Rock Opening Hours – From 5.00 am to 5.30 pm every day

Notice: Better to arrive early in the morning before 9 am or late in the afternoon

It may be hard to climb during noon due to strong solar heat (Only some months of the year)

Sigiriya Lion Rock Adult & Children Ticket Age Categories

Adult – 12 years and above 12 years,

Children – 6 years and between 6 to 12 years

Toddler – below 6 years

PIDURANGALA ROCK TRAVEL GUIDE

Often referred to as the eighth wonder of the world, Sigiriya is one of the ‘must see’ places on any Sri Lankan bucket list. The Fortress, full of abandoned palaces, gardens, waterways and frescoes, has always been an important part of Sri Lanka history, and its become one of the country’s most visited cultural heritage sites (read our guide to Sigiriya [here](#)).

Fortunately, Pidurangala Rock, located adjacent to Sigiriya, provides epic views of the surrounding area, a historic cave complex of its own, a tenth of the crowds, and the most incredible view overlooking the famous Sigiriya rock. Hiking Pidurangala Rock for sunrise has become something of a right of passage for tourists visiting Sri Lanka, and it is something one must experience if travelling in Sri Lanka.

From the peak, watch the stunning sunrise from this rock-top viewpoint, with panoramic vistas over Sigiriya in the distance. Stare in awe as the sun lights up the misty forests, lakes and villages, showering the vast central Sri Lankan landscapes in golden hues. In our view, you can’t visit Sri Lanka without a visit to Pidurangala and Sigiriya. Explore Pidurangala Rock yourself by following below information, featuring all the tips you need to have an incredible experience.

THINGS TO KNOW BEFORE VISITING PIDURANGALA

1) ENTRANCE TICKET TO PIDURANGALA ROCK

The Pidurangala Rock entrance fee is LKR 500 per person (\$3 USD). The fee is part of a donation to the Pidurangala Sigiri Rajamaha Viharaya temple that you pass through to commence the hike.

The Pidurangala Rock ticket office opens at 5 am and closes at 6 pm, but you're obviously welcome to stay as long as you like at the summit.

2) THE BEST TIME OF YEAR TO VISIT PIDURANGALA ROCK?

The best time of year to visit and hike Pidurangala is during the dry season, between late December and early April. For the best chance of a perfect sunrise or sunset, March is prime time, as there's a limited chance of cloud cover.

Do keep in mind that this is also the hottest part of the year, with temperatures and humidity exceedingly high, so always pack plenty of fluids.

The hike to Pidurangala Rock is not for the faint-hearted (more on that below), and, coupled with the Sri Lankan humidity and heat, can make this hike quite challenging for the unprepared.

3) THE PIDURANGALA ROCK HIKE

The hike to Pidurangala top takes around 30-45 minutes, depending on your fitness levels. It starts at Pidurangala Sigiri Rajamaha Viharaya, a white temple at the base of the rock. Here, you'll need to pay your entrance fee (LKR 500 / \$3 USD) before the first of the seemingly endless stairs start (also, it's a temple, so you'll need to cover up).

The trail itself follows a well maintained, if slightly 'off-road' pathway through the jungle, slowly ascending over rocks and tree roots, through caves, and past rocky cliffs before making its way to the first stop on the hike, Pidurangala temple. If you're hiking up for sunrise, we suggest stopping by the ruins of Pidurangala Temple on the return journey, as sunrise should be fast approaching.

AT THE MIDDLE OF PIDURANGALA ROCK

The next part of the hike is somewhat tricky but seriously fun. From the temple, its about a 15 minute hike which requires a decent amount of bouldering, climbing and shimmying between giant boulders and cliffs. It's not necessarily a hike at this point, more a European style via Ferrata, but in the heart of Sri Lanka. While it's not overly hard to pass through this point, we do recommend taking your time to avoid any injuries.

AT PIDURANGALA ROCK SUMMIT

After a few large steps, you'll tackle one final lunge to get onto the main part of Pidurangala rock, before a small walk up to witness the panoramic views you've been waiting to see.

4) PIDURANGALA ROCK TEMPLE

On the way up you'll come across the ancient remains of Pidurangala Temple. While not much remains, the most impressive sight is a 12m reclining Buddha which takes pride of place under rock face. Parts of the original structure remain intact, while the rest has been reconstructed using bricks, including the head, which was removed by treasure hunters. Interestingly, the reclining Buddha statue actually faces directly to the Lion's Paw of Sigiriya. There is also a 7th century rock inscription of 'pidu', 'ran', and good', literally translated as "offered piles of gold"

5) PIDURANGALA ROCK HISTORY

Both Sigiriya and Pidurangala Rock are volcanic hills rising out of the lowland jungles and central plains of Sri Lanka, and are steeped in history and mythology.

Briefly, when King Kashyapa arrived in Sigiriya in the 5th century, he discovered Sigiriya itself was a monastery complex. Wanting to build a fortress atop Sigiriya for himself, he offered to build them an alternative, similar monastery at the close by Pidurangala Rock. As the legend goes, King Kashyapa offered a 'golden monastery', or 'Aran gala', which would later become Pidurangala, which literally means "offered piles of gold". The monks duly obliged, and a Buddhist monastery was built in the caves and rocks around Pidurangala.

Now, the all that remains is the ancient cave temple and reclining Buddha which you pass on the way up, and a stupa near the temple entrance which is believed to mark the spot where King Kashyapa was cremated.

