



## TOUR INFORMATION FOR SRI LANKA in spring

*These notes are designed to help you prepare for your trip. Please read carefully.*

**ENTERING SRI LANKA:** United Kingdom citizens will need a passport valid for six months beyond the intended length of stay. Tourists from the United Kingdom need to apply for an Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) to enter Sri Lanka. Other nationalities should check with their nearest Sri Lankan Embassy.

ETAs can be applied for online at [www.eta.gov.lk](http://www.eta.gov.lk). It is possible to obtain a visa on arrival but this usually costs more, and by obtaining one before you leave the UK will mean you can get through Immigration quicker. We strongly recommend that you print out a copy of your ETA and take a copy with you.

Evidence of a Yellow Fever vaccination must be shown only if you are arriving within six days after leaving or transiting epidemic areas.

It is always a good idea to take a photocopy of your passport and air ticket with you when travelling abroad. They can prove invaluable in helping you get replacements if your originals are lost or stolen. Obviously you should keep the photocopies in a separate bag to the originals.

**TIME DIFFERENCE:** Sri Lanka is 5½ hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time.

**CURRENCY:** Sri Lankan rupees (LKR) may not be brought into or taken out of the country, but there are currency exchange services at the airport and at some of our hotels. As the tour price includes all travel, hotel and main meal costs, you need only bring enough money to cover snacks, drinks with meals and picnics, or other purchases of a purely personal nature.

**LANGUAGE:** The national languages are Sinhala and Tamil but English is widely spoken.

**CLIMATE:** Sri Lanka enjoys a tropical climate. The northeast monsoon will just be finishing when we arrive so some rain can be expected. At this time of year rain showers rarely last more than an hour or two but can be very intense and can cause flooding of trails and tracks. Most of the time the weather will be hot with temperatures averaging around a daytime maximum of 31°C and night-time lows of 23°C. This will vary according to our elevation and we can expect a couple of colder mornings and evenings in the highland areas (10-15°C). The humidity will also vary being as high as 80% in some parts of the wet zone but lower in the dry zone.

**PACE OF TOUR AND DAILY ROUTINE:** This tour is not a particularly strenuous one and although there are a few long walks these are generally not very arduous and can be tackled by anyone with a reasonable degree of fitness.

There are some very long days on this trip with some very early starts and a couple of evening night birding options. Note also that there will be several days where we take a break during the heat of the day and return to our lodgings. We will also start early, possibly at 04:00, on the day we drive from our hotel in Nuwara Eliya up on to the Horton Plains.

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We will search for Serendib Scops Owl which can sometimes be found at its day roost. We may have to cross the River Kelani. This is done by standing on a small flat raft with hand rails. The raft takes about 6-7 people at a time and is attached to two canoes. These are used to push the raft across the 30metre wide river to reach the forest on the other side. There are a number of well-defined steps down to the river bank before stepping onto the raft platform from the shingle beach. There are some large rocks to step onto should the river water be high. There are also well-defined steps and paths leading up into the forest the otherside. This crossing is optional, and the leader will discuss the logistics with the group prior to heading down to the river.

If river levels are low an extensive deposit of shingle and pebbles will be exposed along the river bank. If this happens we would need to wade out through the shallow water then step up onto the raft. Some clients have taken flip-flops, or sandals which they don't mind getting wet, and carried their walking boots, leech socks, and a hand towel to use once on the other side. Open flip-flops or sandals are not recommended in the forest itself as the walk is up and along a narrow rocky hill. Please also note that there is nowhere on the far side of the river where we can safely leave our flip-flops or sandals and so they must be carried with us. While walking on this trail there are one or two very short but steep sections to negotiate. These have natural boulder steps and, like the raft crossing, have never proved to be a problem.

Note that if the Owl cannot be found during the daytime we will try searching for it at night. For night-birding we normally cross the river at dusk, walk the trails, then return to the river in the dark. You do need to be sure-footed, or take a hiking stick for support, when walking these trails at night. And you will need a good torch, preferably a head-torch, for the return walk back to the river bank.

**HEALTH: It is essential that you contact your own doctor to obtain the latest information on the regions you are visiting.** Please contact your doctor well in advance of your tour's departure as some medication must be initiated weeks before the period of possible exposure.

It is recommended that you are up-to-date on routine vaccination including polio, tetanus and your yearly flu jab.

Biting insects are not numerous but may occur locally: insect repellent will provide adequate protection. Malaria is generally not much of a problem at the time of our visit, however useful information on all aspects of malaria, including how to reduce your chances of being bitten can be found at the website <http://www.preventingmalaria.info>.

Tap water is not safe to drink. Upset stomachs are not much of a problem in Sri Lanka however because of the high humidity on some parts of the island it is important to drink plenty of water. We suggest bringing anti-diarrhoea medicine such as Imodium or Arret just in case. Packets of Dioralyte are also worth bringing as they replace the vital salts and minerals lost during a bout of diarrhoea.

It may be difficult to obtain any special medication during the tour, so bring all you are likely to need. Note that it is now impossible to buy most drugs from pharmacies in Sri Lanka without a doctor's prescription.

For further information on health advice refer to the Medical Advisory Services for Travellers Abroad website [www.masta-travel-health.com](http://www.masta-travel-health.com)

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**Leeches:** On some of the forest trails during the mid part of the tour we may encounter small terrestrial leeches. These are well known to travellers in South East Asia and are not harmful. They are found on the forest floor and the best way to prevent them from getting onto your ankles is to spray your boots with insect repellent. Be careful however to ensure that your boots will not be damaged by the chemicals in the repellent, which is mildly corrosive on rubber and some synthetic materials. Canvas and especially suede desert boots are not affected and are ideal for spraying with repellent.

The other widely used technique is to make a pair of 'leech socks'. These are made from material such as densely woven cotton and come above the ankles onto the calf. These leech socks should have a drawstring at the top to hold them in place. These can also be sprayed with repellent. The leader also recommends carrying a small quantity of salt to sprinkle onto your footwear and between fingers while in the forested areas. Leeches hate salt and, with insect repellent too, this should guarantee that the little beasts will not get through to bare skin! Some people choose not to wear tight underwear to prevent leeches finding somewhere to hide! Leech socks are available for purchase from the Oriental Bird Club (see below).

**ACCOMMODATION:** We will be staying in a variety of hotels and Rest Houses – all with modern facilities including swimming pools. Some have an eco-friendly, rustic, retreat-like feel amongst natural settings all served with typical Sri Lankan hospitality. All rooms have en suite facilities, hot water, and air-conditioning fans. Our hotel near Sinharaja rainforest has a private, open-air, shower room, and shutters (no glass) on the windows.

**LAUNDRY:** Good laundry services are available at the larger hotels, and at all the ones where we stay for more than one night. There are no drying facilities at the hotels which are in the forested areas, however a few hairdryers can be provided upon request.

**ELECTRICITY:** Same voltage as the U.K. however some lodgings only have 2 or 3 round-pin sockets. An international travel plug is useful and can be bought in most airport departure lounges. You may find the following website helpful: <http://www.power-plugs-sockets.com>.

**FOOD:** Sri Lankan food consists of a variety of dishes served in individual bowls from which you help yourself. Although spices are widely used only a few of these are very hot. The leaders will advise if you are in doubt. Vegetarians are well catered for. Western or 'Continental' food is served some days and is usually available as an option. Although not world-renown like Indian cuisine Sri Lankan food is tasty, fairly varied and hygienically prepared. Traditionally Sri Lankans eat with their fingers but cutlery is provided for visitors!

**DRINKS:** Bottled water, a soft drink or a beer (or wine if appropriate) are provided at meals, as is coffee or tea. In addition, we keep a supply of bottled water on the tour vehicles. Bottled or filtered water may also be provided in some rooms where we stay.

**INTERNET AND MOBILE PHONE ACCESS:** Most of the hotels we visit have wireless internet, mainly in common spaces such as dining and reception areas. Mobile phone coverage is good.

**FIELD CLOTHING:** Dress is informal throughout. Please bring subdued clothing for birdwatching in the forest. Light, warm-weather wear is the general rule including a suitable hat and long-sleeved garments for protection against the sun and insects. A warm jacket, sweater and gloves are required for the potentially cool and windy weather in The Highlands.

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Light footwear will be adequate in the hotel grounds and on the days when we remain in the jeeps for the safaris into the wildlife parks, however for the forested areas and occasional walks into the thorny brush and dry grasses comfortable walking shoes or boots are recommended.

Rain is possible in the afternoons at Sinharaja so adequate rainwear is advisable. You will find a small folding umbrella **very** useful as well as an extra pair of leech socks since you may not be able to get one pair dry in time for use the following day. Some clients have used a poncho to cover themselves and their optical equipment, only to find that leeches have crept up inside the poncho where they couldn't be seen! If asked, the drivers of the open-sided jeeps will stop so you flick the leeches out.

During the tour we will visit a couple of Buddhist temples where short trousers, hats and sleeveless T-shirts should not be worn. The leaders will advise where this will be applicable.

**MISCELLANEOUS EQUIPMENT:** Please bring the following:

Note book and pencil	Personal medication
2 pairs of leech socks	Insect repellent/salt
Alarm clock	Small rucksack/shoulder bag
Torch & extra batteries	Sun protection lotion
Universal sink plug	Sun glasses
Small folding umbrella or poncho	Plastic bags (to protect equipment from dust)
Flip-flops for crossing the river if it's high.	

On this tour there will be quite a lot of standing around waiting for particular species, such as Seredib Scops Owl and Sri Lanka Spurfowl, to respond to playback. Several participants have found it useful to carry a small, folding seat with them.

**Optional:** Telescope & tripod (recommended if you have them as there are a few open water areas where a telescope would be useful), camera, film or memory cards, spare binoculars and spare spectacles (in case of loss or damage), field guide, swimwear.

**Note:** The most effective insect repellents are those containing at least 35% of the active ingredient diethyltoluamide (DEET). The higher the percentage, the greater the effectiveness. However, care must be taken to avoid getting the repellent on to optical equipment as it dissolves rubber and plastic and can damage coated lenses. A reasonably effective alternative, which isn't corrosive, is Mosi-guard, produced by MASTA, and we recommend this. It is available in most high street chemist (including those at the airport). Camping supply stores sell a product containing permethrin 0.5%, which must be applied directly to clothing in advance of wearing and allowed to dry. This non-staining, odourless chemical is non-toxic to humans and protective on clothing through several launderings. Please make sure you never to spray insect repellent inside the vehicle or when you are standing close to other participants – it may drift on to their optical equipment.

**LEADER'S EQUIPMENT:** The leader will provide the following for group use:

Telescope & tripod	Playback equipment
Field guides and references	Basic first-aid kit
Laser pointer	

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**LUGGAGE:** Our Final Information document, which will be sent to you approximately three weeks before departure, will give details about baggage weight and size restrictions imposed by the airline used for this tour.

If possible, please bring your luggage in soft-sided bags or cases (rather than large hard 'Samsonite'-type suitcases) as these pack more easily into our vehicles during the tour. Please note that on many tours there are no porters to carry your luggage so please ensure that **no bag is so heavy that you are unable to lift and carry it yourself**. As a general rule, in addition to using your luggage labels, it is a good idea to fix identification to the *inside* of each piece of luggage.

**PHOTOGRAPHY:** Scenery and memory shots will be plentiful and simple to obtain. In the wet zone forest areas light can be bad and in the dry zone heat haze can also be a problem. Although there will be occasions when bird photography is possible, a birdwatching tour is not normally the best means of pursuing this aim. Bring all your film or memory cards with you as it may be difficult to find precisely what you need during the tour. Camera equipment should be packed in moisture- and dust-proof bags, as a precaution. "Digiscoping" is perfectly compatible with the tour, though it is recommended you bring your own telescope as the leader's telescope is not available for this activity. **Please note it is considered very bad manners to have yourself photographed whilst standing with your back to a Buddha image.**

There will be plenty of opportunities to take photos of birds, mammals and scenery and the leaders will do all they can to accommodate anyone wishing to take photographs. However, if you are a serious photographer please bear in mind that this is first and foremost a birdwatching tour. Please do not allow your photographic desires to conflict with other participants' birdwatching activities.

**TRANSPORT:** Transportation between sites is by air-conditioned coach. However, at three National Parks we will travel around in large jeeps (open-sided with canvas roof). Bottled water is provided on the coach. Participants should be able to ride in any seat in tour vehicles.

**SMOKING:** Smoking is not allowed in the vehicles or when the group is gathered for meals, checklists etc. If you are sharing a room with a non-smoker, please do not smoke in the room. If you smoke in the field, we ask that you do so well away and downwind from the group if possible.

**TRAVEL INSURANCE:** Travel insurance is essential and we insist that you take out suitable cover as soon as your tour is booked. If you are bringing expensive optical equipment or other valuable items, please make sure they are also adequately insured on your home contents policy, as most travel insurance policies do not cover very expensive individual items. You may wish to consult your insurance broker regarding coverage. Please also ensure that your policy covers you in the event of a medical emergency, cancellation of a trip or severe delays. Medical costs abroad can often be extremely expensive. Please note that Sunbird is not liable for any medical or repatriation costs resulting from injury or illness during a tour or for covering any costs resulting from a flight delay such as extra hotel accommodation.

If you wish, insurance can be arranged by Helen Fisher, Bullerwell Independent Insurance Brokers, 13 Goldington Road, Bedford, MK40 3JY. Tel: 01234-866964. Please contact Helen for a quote and she will send the schedule directly to you.

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**TIPPING:** All tour-based tips are included in the tour price. These include tips to local guides, drivers, hotel porters, and waiters and waitresses when we have group meals together in restaurants. You only need to pay tips for personal services such as room service or drinks from the bar.

### **BIBLIOGRAPHY:**

Warakogoda D., Grimmett, R., Inskipp, C. and Inskipp, T. 2012 Birds of Sri Lanka. Christopher Helm. London. **The recommended field guide for this tour.**

Grimmett, R., Inskipp, C. and Inskipp, T. 2011. Birds of the Indian Subcontinent. Christopher Helm. London. (ISBN 978-1-4081-2763-6). An excellent portable field guide (which is the second edition of the former Pocket Guide in 1999) that illustrates all the species we will see on this tour using the same plates as the same authors' hefty 'Birds of the Indian Subcontinent'.

Harrison, John and Tim Worfolk. 2011. A Field Guide to the Birds of Sri Lanka written by John Harrison and illustrated by Tim Worfolk. **Recommended.**

Henry, G.M. 1955. A Guide to the birds of Ceylon. O.U.P. An excellent and entertaining book if you can find an original copy which has some fine plates by the author. There is also now available a completely revised version (1998. 3<sup>rd</sup> revised edition. A guide to the birds of Sri Lanka). Although this does not have any new plates it does contain up-to-date text.

Rasmussen Pamela C. and John C Anderton. 2012. Birds of South Asia: The Ripley Guide. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Lynx Edicions. (ISBN: Volumes 1 & 2 978-84-96553-85-9). Volumes I & II: The most complete and up-to-date guide to the birds of the region. Includes much previously unpublished data on identification, distributions, vocalizations and taxonomy, along with critical re-appraisal of historic information. **Recommended.**

Woodcock, Martin. 1980. Collins Hand-guide to the Birds of the Indian Sub-Continent. Collins, London. Contains nice illustrations of some of the commoner species we are likely to encounter. Useful.

**Other references:** Many of the standard books about Indian wildlife cover Sri Lanka as well.

Ellis, Royston. 2002. Sri Lanka: The Bradt Travel Guide. Bradt Travel Guides, Chalfont St. Peter, U.K. An excellent introduction to the country, its history, culture and people.

Campbell, Verity & Niven, Christine. Lonely Planet: Sri Lanka. August 2001. Full of useful travel information. [www.lonelyplanet.com](http://www.lonelyplanet.com)

Menon, Vivek. 2003. A Field Guide to Indian Mammals. Dorling Kindersley, New Delhi. (ISBN 0-14-302998-3). An excellent, comprehensively illustrated informative book and easily the best mammal guide to the subcontinent.

### **Sound Guides:**

Jannes, Hannu. 2002. Bird Sounds of Goa & South India. Privately published, Helsinki, Finland. An excellent CD with recordings of 99 species including a good number of common and not so common Goan birds, several of which we will encounter in Sri Lanka. Available from Wild Sounds (see below).

## **SRI LANKA in spring: Tour Information...7**

Sivaprasad, P. S. 1994. An Audio Guide to the Birds of South India. Part 1. An audio tape that provides a useful introduction to some of the endemic species as well as the commoner birds of the southern subcontinent, covering 66 species on 90 minutes of tape. We will see a number of the species included on this difficult to obtain tape in Sri Lanka.

Warakagoda, D. 2003 (2006. 3<sup>rd</sup> release). Bird Sounds of Sri Lanka. An audio CD featuring sounds of 99 species of birds found in ten natural habitat types in Sri Lanka. Available from Wild Sounds (see below) and [www.birdsounds.nl](http://www.birdsounds.nl)

Warakagoda, D. & Hettige, U. 2008. Birds of Sri Lanka, MP3 sound and image collection. This MP3-CD contains the sounds of 231 species of birds of Sri Lanka (323 tracks). It also provides beautiful photographs which appear when the sound is played on your iPod, iPhone or iTouch, along with extra information about each recording. Available from [www.birdsounds.nl](http://www.birdsounds.nl)

**OBTAINING BOOKS:** Most of the field guides and the major ornithological references in print are available by mail order from booksellers specialising in natural history titles.

Natural History Book Service Ltd  
Tel: 01803 865913  
[www.nhbs.co.uk](http://www.nhbs.co.uk)

Subbuteo Books  
Tel: 0870 010 9700  
[www.wildlifebooks.com](http://www.wildlifebooks.com)

WildSounds  
Tel: 01263 741100  
[www.wildsounds.co.uk](http://www.wildsounds.co.uk)

**MAPS:** Many of the region may be available from:

The Map Shop  
Tel: 01684 593146  
[www.themapshop.co.uk](http://www.themapshop.co.uk)

Stanfords  
Tel: 020 7836 1321  
[www.stanfords.co.uk](http://www.stanfords.co.uk)

**ORIENTAL BIRD CLUB:** Please support this charity which aims to raise money to support conservation projects, encourages an interest in the conservation of birds, and liaises with and promotes the work of existing societies within the region. You will find their contact details and further information about the Club at [www.orientalbirdclub.org](http://www.orientalbirdclub.org)

**FINAL INFORMATION:** Final information with instructions for meeting the group, hotel addresses etc., and your international air tickets will be sent out about three weeks before the start of the tour. If you have any questions, please contact us.