



# Sri Lanka

*Endemics, Elephants, and Leopards*

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Tour Leader: Rob Ripma

March 11-25, 2027

## **Itinerary Overview:**

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March 12: Transfer to Kitulgala - Kitulgala Forest Reserve  
March 13: Kitulgala Forest Reserve  
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March 15: Sigiriya and Surroundings  
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March 18: Transfer to Tissamaharama - Yala National Park  
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March 20: Bundala National Park and Tissamaharama Wetlands  
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March 23: Sinharaja  
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March 25: Departure from Colombo, Sri Lanka

## **Detailed Itinerary:**

### **March 11: Arrival in Colombo, Sri Lanka**

Your journey through the natural wonders of Sri Lanka begins as you arrive at Bandaranaike International Airport. Your local guide will be there to welcome you and help with luggage. We'll make the short drive into Colombo. The hotel offers a comfortable place to relax after the long international flight, and the remainder of the day is yours to rest, enjoy the rooftop views, and prepare for the adventure ahead.

If time and energy allow, we can make an introductory birding stop at the Talangama Wetlands, a surprisingly productive urban oasis. Here we could see the Purple Heron standing motionless among the reeds, Pheasant-tailed Jacanas walking delicately across lily pads, and the Indian Pond-Heron in its breeding finery. Water monitors can be seen basking along the banks, and a quiet stroll can yield our first kingfishers, including the dazzling Common Kingfisher and the noisy White-throated Kingfisher.

*Overnight: Jetwing Colombo Seven*

### **March 12: Transfer to Kitulgala - Kitulgala Forest Reserve**

After breakfast, we leave the bustle of the city behind and make our way to Kitulgala. The drive takes us past small villages, roadside fruit stands, and tea-clad hills, and by the time we arrive at our lodge, the scenery has shifted to dense, lush rainforest. This is one of Sri Lanka's wettest areas, and the constant backdrop of flowing rivers and bird song makes it an unforgettable place to begin our exploration of the island's endemic-rich forests.

In the late afternoon, we venture into the Kitulgala Forest Reserve. The dense canopy is alive with movement, and with some patience and the sharp eyes of our guides, we can hope to spot the iridescent blue and rust colors of the Sri Lanka Blue-Magpie, the elusive Green-billed Coucal moving quietly in the understory, and the Chestnut-backed Owlet perched motionless as it watches the forest floor. Between bird encounters, we may glimpse Purple-faced Leaf Monkeys leaping through the treetops or hear the distant call of the Indian Paradise Flycatcher echoing through the forest.

*Overnight: Moksha@Kitulgala*



*Sri Lanka Blue-Magpie*

### **March 13: Kitulgala and Makandawa Forest Reserves**

Today is dedicated to exploring the forests and rivers of Kitulgala in full. We begin with an early morning crossing of the Kelani River, either by canoe or on a narrow suspension bridge, entering the Makandawa Forest Reserve. This is prime habitat for some of Sri Lanka's most sought-after species. We will quietly work the forest trails in search of the shy Sri Lanka Spurfowl and the beautifully marked Spot-winged Thrush on the forest floor, while above us the Sri Lanka Scimitar-Babbler calls in its distinctive rhythm. The early hours often reveal a chorus of barbets, bulbuls, and drongos, with flashes of green, yellow, and red betraying their presence.

After returning to our lodge for lunch and a short rest, we will spend the afternoon exploring secondary growth and edge habitats around the village. These more open areas attract a different suite of species, from the colorful Crimson-backed Flameback to the noisy Layard's Parakeet. We may also find the Black-rumped Flameback drumming on a dead trunk or the Crested Serpent-Eagle circling overhead. After dinner, those who wish can join a night walk, where the forest transforms into a realm of sound

and shadow. With luck, our flashlights will reveal the cryptic shape of a Sri Lanka Frogmouth on a low branch or a Jungle Owlet calling from the darkness.

*Overnight: Moksha@Kitulgala*

### **March 14: Transfer to Sigiriya - Jetwing Vil Uyana**

This morning, we leave the lush, wet forests of Kitulgala behind and journey north toward Sri Lanka's famed Cultural Triangle. The change in scenery is dramatic, shifting from emerald rainforest to open plains, dry scrub, and small wetlands as we travel. By midday, we arrive at Jetwing Vil Uyana, an award-winning eco-lodge set within its own artificial wetland. This property is a sanctuary in itself, with a mosaic of reedbeds, forest patches, and open water that attract an impressive variety of birds.

In the late afternoon, we set out on a leisurely birding walk around the grounds. The wetlands here can produce sightings of Pheasant-tailed Jacanas gliding between lily pads, Stork-billed Kingfishers perched patiently above the water, and perhaps a Gray-headed Swampphen flashing its bright red bill as it moves through the reeds. Dry zone specialties, such as the Indian Roller and Blue-faced Malkoha, may be found in the surrounding forest. As night falls, we join the lodge's naturalist for a guided Loris Walk. Under the beam of our spotlights, the tiny Slender Loris peers down at us with large reflective eyes, while nocturnal birds such as the Brown Fish-Owl and Jerdon's Nightjar may reveal themselves in the quiet darkness.

*Overnight: Jetwing Vil Uyana*



*Pheasant-tailed Jacana*

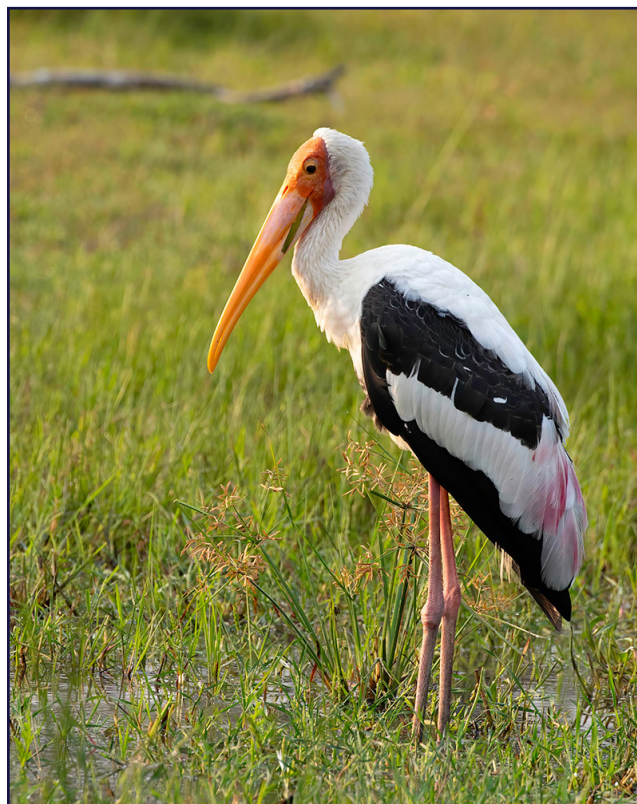
### **March 15: Sigiriya and Surroundings**

We begin the day with a visit to the iconic Sigiriya Rock Fortress, a UNESCO World Heritage Site that rises dramatically above the surrounding plains. While the ancient fortress and its elaborate frescoes are

remarkable, the real magic for us lies in the sanctuary that surrounds it. The dry zone forest and open areas here are home to species such as the brilliantly colored Indian Pitta, the Sri Lanka Gray Hornbill moving noisily among the trees, and the Brown-capped Babbler scratching in the leaf litter. Overhead, the Changeable Hawk-Eagle and Crested Serpent-Eagle may circle on the morning thermals.

In the late afternoon, we head out for a jeep safari in either Minneriya or Kaudulla National Park, depending on where elephants are gathering at the time. Both parks are renowned for their herds of Asian Elephants, which can be seen grazing on the grasslands or bathing in the tanks. These open landscapes also provide excellent birding opportunities, from Spot-billed Pelicans and Painted Storks feeding in the shallows to Indian Thick-knee and Yellow-wattled Lapwings striding across the short grass. Mammals such as toque macaques and golden jackals add to the diversity of the experience.

*Overnight: Jetwing Vil Uyana*



*Painted Stork*

### **March 16: Transfer to Nuwara Eliya - Victoria Park**

Today, we trade the warm, dry lowlands for the cool, misty climate of Sri Lanka's central highlands. Our route climbs steadily through scenic countryside, past terraced tea plantations where brightly dressed tea pickers work among the rows, and through small towns with bustling markets. Along the way, roadside stops may yield sightings of Hill Swallows swooping overhead or a Black Eagle soaring above the hills.

By afternoon, we reach Nuwara Eliya, a colonial-era hill station surrounded by mountain peaks and rolling tea estates. We spend the remainder of the day exploring Victoria Park, a well-known birding

site right in the heart of town. Here, we have a good chance of finding winter migrants, such as the Kashmir Flycatcher with its soft, orange breast, the shy Indian Blue Robin skulking in the undergrowth, and the striking Pied Thrush feeding quietly on the lawns. The cooler mountain air is refreshing after the heat of the lowlands, and the slower pace here is a welcome change before tomorrow's early start.

*Overnight: Jetwing St. Andrews*



*Kashmir Flycatcher*

### **March 17: Horton Plains National Park**

We depart before sunrise to reach Horton Plains National Park, a high-elevation plateau of montane cloud forest and open grasslands. The crisp morning air carries the calls of Sri Lanka Whistling-Thrush from dense thickets, while Yellow-eared Bulbul and Dull-blue Flycatcher move actively in the forest edges. The park is also home to Sambar Deer, which may be seen grazing in the open clearings, and the occasional toque macaque (highland subspecies) watching curiously from the roadside.

A walk to the World's End viewpoint offers sweeping views across the plains and down to the lowlands far below. Along the trail, we may encounter flocks of Sri Lanka White-eye feeding in the canopy, Sri Lanka Bush Warbler rustling in the undergrowth, and the occasional Black-throated Munia in the grasslands. Returning by midday, we enjoy lunch and have the afternoon free for relaxed birding near the hotel, where species like Gray-headed Canary-Flycatcher and Forest Wagtail often appear.

*Overnight: Jetwing St. Andrews*

### **March 18: Transfer to Tissamaharama - Yala National Park**

Leaving the highlands, we make our way down winding mountain roads to the dry lowlands of the south. The scenery opens up again, and with the warmer climate come new birding opportunities. Along the way, we may spot Crested Treeswifts perched along roadside wires or the occasional Shikra

scanning the fields.

By afternoon, we reach our lodge near Yala National Park and set out for a safari in Yala's quieter Block 5. This area offers a more peaceful experience than the busier sections of the park and is home to a wealth of wildlife. We may encounter the elusive Sri Lankan Leopard resting in the shade, the shuffling form of a Sloth Bear searching for termites, and a variety of dry-zone raptors, including Gray-headed Fish-Eagle and Changeable Hawk-Eagle. Spotted Deer, Ruddy Mongoose, and Indian Star Tortoise add further interest to the afternoon.

*Overnight: Chaarya Resort & Spa*



*Sri Lankan Leopard*

### **March 19: Bundala National Park and Yala**

The morning is devoted to Bundala National Park, a Ramsar-listed wetland complex that is a haven for waterbirds. We can expect large flocks of Greater Flamingos feeding in the shallow lagoons alongside Eurasian Spoonbills, Black-necked Storks, and a dazzling array of terns and shorebirds. Marsh Crocodiles bask on the muddy banks while Asian Openbills and Glossy Ibis feed in the marshes.

In the afternoon, we return to Yala Block 5, giving us another chance at its incredible mammals and birds. The park's mix of forest, scrub, and waterholes means every drive brings something new, whether it is a White-bellied Sea-Eagle gliding overhead, a Malabar Pied-Hornbill clattering through the canopy, or a Ruddy-breasted Crake darting into cover.

*Overnight: Chaarya Resort & Spa*

### **March 20: Bundala National Park and Tissamaharama Wetlands**

We begin with another visit to Bundala, this time focusing on shorebirds and migrants that may have eluded us. Species like Tibetan Sand-Plover, Curlew Sandpiper, and Whiskered Tern are often abundant,

while Indian Pond-Herons and Little Cormorants work the smaller pools.

After lunch and a short rest, we head out to the Tissamaharama wetlands, a series of tanks and paddy fields rich in birdlife. Here we look for Pheasant-tailed Jacanas with their long trailing tails, Yellow Bitterns moving stealthily among the reeds, and Indian Nightjars calling as dusk approaches. The fading light often draws flocks of Baya Weavers to their roosts, their intricately woven nests swinging gently over the water.

*Overnight: Chaarya Resort & Spa*

### **March 21: Flexible Day in Yala or Bundala**

Today's schedule is intentionally flexible, allowing us to revisit favorite sites or target species we have not yet seen. We can split the day between Yala and Bundala or focus entirely on one park, depending on recent sightings and group interest.

*Overnight: Chaarya Resort*



*Changeable Hawk-Eagle*

### **March 22: Transfer to Sinharaja - Birding Sinharaja**

An early departure takes us across the southern countryside to the lush rainforests of Sinharaja, another UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. The shift in habitat is immediate as the dry lowlands give way to towering trees, dripping ferns, and a chorus of cicadas and bird calls.

In the afternoon, we take our first walk near the forest edge or along nearby village trails. Here, we may

encounter the vibrant Sri Lanka Hanging Parrot feeding on fruiting trees, Black-capped Bulbul calling from the canopy, and the glossy black form of the Sri Lanka Drongo. The forest is also home to Purple-faced Leaf Monkeys, giant squirrels, and a variety of butterflies.

*Overnight: Jansen's Bungalow*

### **March 23: Sinharaja**

Today is dedicated to birding deep within the Sinharaja rainforest. The forest is famous for its mixed-species bird waves, where dozens of species move together in a dynamic feeding flock. We hope to see the striking Red-faced Malkoha, Ashy-headed Laughingthrush, and Sri Lanka Thrush, along with other endemics.

Between bird waves, we may encounter Malabar Trogon perched quietly in the understory, flocks of Orange-billed Babblers foraging noisily, and the occasional Sri Lanka Blue-Magpie flashing through the trees. The forest's damp trails are alive with life, from colorful frogs to rare butterflies, making every step a rewarding experience.

*Overnight: Jansen's Bungalow*

### **March 24: Sinharaja - Transfer to Colombo**

We'll enjoy a final morning of birding in Sinharaja, giving us one last chance to see species like the Spot-winged Thrush or Layard's Parakeet. After breakfast, we begin the drive back to Colombo, arriving in time for an evening visit to Diyasaru Park or Talangama Wetlands. These urban sites often produce species such as the Cotton Pygmy-Goose, White-breasted Waterhen, and Stork-billed Kingfisher, providing a fitting close to our birding journey.

The evening is free to relax, enjoy a final group dinner, and reflect on the incredible diversity of birds and wildlife we have experienced together in Sri Lanka.

*Overnight: Jetwing Colombo Seven*

### **March 25: Departure from Colombo, Sri Lanka**

You will be transferred to Bandaranaike International Airport for your onward flight.

## **Trip Details:**

### **Cost:**

Price per person (double occupancy), from Colombo, Sri Lanka: \$7,399

Single Supplement: \$1,150

Minimum Participants: 6

Maximum Participants: 10

### **Price Includes:**

- 2 Expert Guides
- Ground Transportation in Sri Lanka
- All Lodging
- All Meals
- Park Entrance Fees

### **Price Does Not Include:**

- Airfare to and from Sri Lanka
- Airport Taxes
- Passport and Visa Fees (if applicable)
- Alcoholic Beverages
- Personal Items
- Travel Insurance
- Tips

### **Deposit:**

A deposit of \$500 per person is required to hold your spot on this tour. The remaining balance is due no later than 3 months prior to the scheduled start date of the tour (December 11, 2026).

If you have an questions about this tour or would like to sign up for it, please contact us at [info@sabrewingnaturetours.com](mailto:info@sabrewingnaturetours.com), by phone at 317-324-8505, or register through our website at [sabrewingnaturetours.com](http://sabrewingnaturetours.com).

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