

The Eco-Traveller Notes for Teachers – Sri Lanka



In this exercise, pupils are asked to choose from a list of interesting sites to visit on the beautiful island of Sri Lanka.

There are some ancient temples, fortresses, religious shrines and lots of local industries including gemstone mines and tea plantations.

Tourists should make an effort to observe local culture and to respect Sri Lankan customs even if they seem a bit unusual.

Here are some quick guidelines:

- 70% of the people are Buddhist, so foreigners should dress in suitable clothing when visiting shrines or temples. No bare legs or shoulders; hats and shoes should be removed on entering a temple.
- Buddhists are friendly and will usually shake hands on meeting visitors.
- Always carry plenty of small change because lots of people depend on tips for their main income and it is customary to give tips to anyone who helps you.

Places to visit

Galle Fort

Galle Fort was built by Dutch settlers during the 17th century. Even today, after 400 years, it looks new and polished. Today many Dutch people still own most of the properties inside the fortress, which protected them from the terrible tsunami during Boxing Day, 2004.

Uda Walawe National Park

This is an important National Park in the Southern Province of Sri Lanka. The reserve covers 300 km² and was set up in 1972 to protect the catchment of the Uda Walawe reservoir. The habitat is open parkland so animals are quite easy to spot, with 400 wild Asian elephants, leopards, jackals and many rare birds.

Kandy

Kandy is popular because of the annual festival, in July/Aug known as the Esala Perahera when the casket containing the tooth relic of Buddha is taken in procession through the city. The procession includes dancers and drummers in traditional dress, torch bearers and also the grandly attired elephant carrying the casket. This ceremony attracts large crowds from the country and also many foreign tourists.

Polonnaruwa

The 12th century city and former capital of Sri Lanka with many magnificent ruins, palaces and statues. There are wonderful canals and water storage tanks for irrigation, of great interest to any archeologist.

Ratnapura

Every day, large numbers of traders gather in the town to buy or sell gemstones. Merchants collect gemstones from locals and sell them in the international market. Miners dig for gems in open pits, 10 – 50 metres deep. As well as the rubies and sapphires, visitors are also keen to see the Bopath Ella, a spectacular 30 metre waterfall close to Ratnapura.

Pinnawela Elephant Orphanage

This is a very popular tourist attraction. Young elephants are fed and cared for by their mahouts. Visitors gather to observe the bathing elephants from the banks of the river as it allows them to observe the herd interacting socially and playing.

Yala National Park

Elephants roam the National Park in their natural habitat and tourists explore the area in jeep safaris, looking out for wild boar, crocodiles, spotted deer and monkeys. The area was badly hit by the tsunami in 2004 but strangely, very few of the animals were hurt.

Nuwara Eliya

This is a centre for the tea industry but also attracts a lot of visitors because English settlers used the area to recreate a little bit of English village life, complete with country houses, an 18-hole golf course, racecourse and trout fishing in the high hills. Since the introduction of tea to Sri Lanka in mid 19th century Nuwara Eliya has been the capital of the tea industry!?

Sigiriya

The Sigiriya Rock Fortress consists of an ancient castle with the remains of an upper palace sited on the flat top of the rock, the famous Lion Gate and the mirror wall with its frescoes, as well as the lower palace, clinging to the slopes below the rock, and the moats, walls and gardens that extend for hundreds of metres from the base of the rock. The upper palace includes cisterns cut into the rock that still retain water. The moats and walls that surround the lower palace are exquisite. These remains provide the visitor with a wonderful insight into the skills and creativity of its builders.

Anuradhapura

This ancient capital city still contains the Sri Maha Bodhi or sacred fig tree brought from Bodhi Gaya by the Princess Sanghamitta more than 2000 years ago. It is a cutting of the tree that sheltered Gotama Buddha as he meditated and achieved Enlightenment. The tree was planted in Anuradhapura and has been tended with great care ever since. This is even more remarkable because the city has been invaded and conquered so many times.

Pupils are free to send both groups to the same destinations but by the shortest possible route to reduce pollution and travel time as well as costs.

Encourage your pupils to do some research either from books or the internet. As a bonus, your pupils can go into their local First Choice store and request more information to complete the activity sheets. Your First Choice store will have some fact sheets and any brochures available on the various destinations for your pupils to cut out pictures if need be. If your pupils go into the stores with their families they can expect to walk away with an Eco-Traveller certificate just for asking for more information.