
Sri Lanka Birding, Wildlife and History

25 September-10 October 2027



Malabar Pied Hornbill

Join BirdGuides and discover the incredible birds and wildlife of Sri Lanka on this 14-day adventure, exploring national parks, misty highlands and the spectacular Sinharaja Rainforest. Search for endemic birds including Sri Lanka Blue Magpie, Sri Lanka Spurfowl and Serendib Scops Owl, alongside elephants, leopards and a host of other wildlife. Along the way, experience some of the island's most fascinating cultural and historical sites, including the ancient city of Anuradhapura and iconic Sigiriya Lion Rock.

Itinerary

This 14-day adventure takes you through some of Sri Lanka's finest birding and wildlife locations, from the dry forests of Wilpattu and the wildlife-rich plains around Sigiriya to the misty highlands of Nuwara Eliya and the extraordinary Sinharaja Rainforest. Along the way, we'll search for a fantastic range of Sri Lankan birds and wildlife, while also experiencing the island's fascinating history and culture, including Anuradhapura, Sigiriya and the Dambulla Cave Temple. With safaris, rainforest walks, night excursions and dedicated birding at each location, this is a comprehensive journey through Sri Lanka's remarkable natural diversity.

Day 1: Katunayake / Wilpattu

Upon arrival at Katunayake International Airport, we'll begin our journey north-west towards Wilpattu National Park. The drive takes approximately four hours (160 km), giving us our first glimpse of Sri Lanka's landscapes and wildlife-rich countryside.

After arriving in the Wilpattu area and settling in, we'll head out for some evening birding in the surrounding area, with opportunities to start discovering some of Sri Lanka's birdlife straight away.

Dinner and overnight: Lavendish Wild, Wilpattu

Day 2: Wilpattu National Park

After an early start and a packed breakfast and lunch, we'll spend the full day exploring Wilpattu National Park by jeep. With its varied habitats, lakes and forest, the park offers excellent opportunities for both birding and wildlife watching.

Throughout the safari, we'll look for some of the park's noteworthy bird species, including Sri Lanka Junglefowl, Brown-capped Babbler, Malabar Pied Hornbill, Crested Serpent Eagle, Shikra, Oriental Honey Buzzard, Crested Hawk-Eagle, Grey-headed Fish Eagle and White-bellied Sea Eagle. Other possibilities include Pacific Golden Plover, Garganey, Pin-tailed Snipe, Painted Stork, Brown Fish Owl and Purple Heron.

The park is also home to an impressive range of mammals, and we'll keep watch for Asian Elephant, Leopard, Sloth Bear, Sambar Deer, Spotted Deer, Ruddy Mongoose, Golden Jackal, Toque Macaque, Grey Langur, Grizzled Giant Squirrel and Black-naped Hare, among others.

After dinner, we'll venture out again on a night drive around the villages and surrounding area, searching for some of Sri Lanka's nocturnal wildlife. Possible sightings include Fishing Cat, Rusty-spotted Cat, Jungle Cat, Grey Loris, Small Indian Civet, Common Palm Civet, Black-naped Hare, Wild Boar, Sambar Deer, Spotted Deer and White-spotted Chevrotain. We'll also listen and look for nocturnal birds such as Jerdon's Nightjar, Indian Nightjar, Brown Fish Owl, Indian Scops Owl and Forest Eagle Owl.

Meals: Breakfast and lunch (packed)

Dinner and overnight: Lavendish Wild, Wilpattu

Day 3: Wilpattu National Park

After an early start, we'll head back into Wilpattu National Park for another full day of exploration by jeep. With a packed breakfast and lunch, there will be plenty of time to explore the park's diverse habitats and look for the birds and wildlife that make Wilpattu such a rewarding destination.

A second full day in the park gives us further opportunities to search for species we may have missed on our first safari, as well as enjoy more time observing the park's wildlife and landscapes at a relaxed pace.

Meals: Breakfast and lunch (packed)

Dinner and overnight: Lavendish Wild, Wilpattu

Day 4: Wilpattu – Anuradhapura Ancient City – Sigiriya

After breakfast, we'll leave Wilpattu and travel to Anuradhapura, approximately 40 km away (around 1 hour). Here, we'll visit the Ancient City of Anuradhapura, one of Sri Lanka's most significant historic sites, before stopping for lunch at a local restaurant en route to Sigiriya.

In the afternoon, we'll continue our journey to Sigiriya (approximately 80 km / 1.5 hours). After settling in, we'll head out for some evening birding in the Sigiriya Sanctuary, exploring the area as the day begins to cool and the wildlife becomes more active.

Possible noteworthy species include Sri Lanka Junglefowl, Lesser Whistling Duck, Woolly-necked Stork, Pheasant-tailed Jacana, Barred Buttonquail, Peregrine Falcon, White-bellied Sea Eagle, Grey-headed Fish Eagle, Crested Serpent Eagle and Crested Hawk-Eagle.

The sanctuary also offers opportunities to look for a wide variety of forest and woodland species, including Orange-breasted Green Pigeon, Sri Lanka Green Pigeon, Blue-faced Malkoha, Sri Lanka Grey Hornbill, Malabar Pied Hornbill, Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker, Rufous Woodpecker, Sri Lanka Woodshrike, Greater Racket-tailed Drongo, Black-naped Monarch, Jerdon's Bushlark, Golden-fronted Leafbird, Brown-capped Babbler, Tawny-bellied Babbler, Yellow-eyed Babbler, Velvet-fronted Nuthatch, Orange-headed Thrush, Indian Blue Robin, Sri Lanka Shama, Tickell's Blue Flycatcher and Baya Weaver.

Nocturnal species may also be encountered, including Jerdon's Nightjar, Indian Nightjar and Brown Fish Owl, while other possibilities include Crested Treeswift, Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher, Crimson-fronted Barbet, Coppersmith Barbet, Banded Bay Cuckoo, Grey-bellied Cuckoo, Drongo Cuckoo and a variety of cuckooshrikes, leafbirds and warblers.

Dinner and overnight: Ehalagala Lake Resort, Sigiriya

Day 5: Sigiriya Lion Rock Fortress – Minneriya/Kaudulla National Park

After breakfast, we'll climb the iconic Sigiriya Lion Rock Fortress, exploring this remarkable ancient site and enjoying panoramic views across the surrounding landscape.

We'll return to the hotel for lunch before heading out in the afternoon for a jeep safari to either Minneriya or Kaudulla National Park. The park we visit will depend on the whereabouts of the elephants, giving us the best opportunity to experience one of Sri Lanka's most spectacular wildlife encounters.

Possible noteworthy species include Woolly-necked Stork, Black-headed Ibis, Spot-billed Pelican, Kentish Plover, Lesser Sand Plover, Jerdon's Bushlark, Paddyfield Pipit, Blue-tailed Bee-eater and Green Bee-eater, as well as Asian Elephant, Spotted Deer, Grey Langur, Ruddy Mongoose, Grey Mongoose, Land Monitor and Golden Jackal.

After dinner, we'll venture out again for a night drive around Sigiriya village, searching for some of the area's nocturnal wildlife. Possible sightings include Fishing Cat, Rusty-spotted Cat, Jungle Cat, Grey Loris, Small Indian Civet, Common Palm Civet, Black-naped Hare, Wild Boar, Sambar Deer, Spotted Deer and White-spotted Chevrotain.

We'll also keep watch and listen for nocturnal birds, including Jerdon's Nightjar, Indian Nightjar, Brown Fish Owl, Indian Scops Owl, Oriental Scops Owl, Brown Wood Owl and Forest Eagle Owl.

Dinner and overnight: Ehalagala Lake Resort, Sigiriya

Day 6: Dambulla Cave Temple – Kandy

After breakfast, we'll leave Sigiriya and travel towards Kandy, stopping en route to visit the impressive Dambulla Cave Temple, approximately 20 km away (around 30 minutes).

After exploring the temple complex, we'll continue our journey to Kandy, with lunch at the hotel before taking some time to relax and enjoy the surroundings.

In the late afternoon, we'll explore the hotel gardens for some birdwatching, followed by a search for nocturnal mammals as darkness falls. Possible sightings include Giant Flying Squirrel, Golden Palm

Civet, Yellow-striped Chevrotain and Indian Crested Porcupine, as well as nocturnal birds such as Brown Fish Owl and Brown Wood Owl.

The journey from Dambulla to Kandy is approximately 75 km and takes around 2.5 hours, with the changing landscapes offering a glimpse of the varied scenery of Sri Lanka's central region.

Dinner and overnight: Tree of Life Resort, Kandy

Day 7: Horton Plains National Park – Victoria Park

We'll make an early start with a packed breakfast and head to Horton Plains National Park for a half-day of birding and wildlife watching. The high-altitude grasslands, montane forest and cool climate make this one of Sri Lanka's most distinctive habitats, with opportunities to encounter several of the island's endemic species.

Possible noteworthy species include Sri Lanka Whistling Thrush, Sri Lanka Bush Warbler, Yellow-eared Bulbul, Dull-blue Flycatcher, Sri Lanka Wood Pigeon, Greater Flameback, Sri Lanka White-eye, Scimitar Babbler, Sri Lanka Scaly Thrush, Black Eagle, Velvet-fronted Nuthatch and Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher. Mammals we may encounter include Stripe-necked Mongoose, Brown Mongoose, Sambar Deer, Leopard, Dusky-striped Squirrel and Flameback Squirrel.

After our morning in the park, we'll return to the hotel for a late lunch and some time to relax.

In the evening, we'll enjoy some further birdwatching in Victoria Park, a pleasant urban green space that can be particularly productive for montane and migrant species. Possible sightings include Yellow-eared Bulbul, Dull-blue Flycatcher, Sri Lanka White-eye, Scimitar Babbler, Velvet-fronted Nuthatch, Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher and Brown-breasted Flycatcher.

Dinner and overnight: Heaven Seven, Nuwara Eliya

Day 8: Nuwara Eliya - Kataragama

After breakfast, we'll leave Nuwara Eliya and begin the longer journey south towards Kataragama, approximately 150 km away (around four hours).

We'll stop for lunch at a local restaurant en route, with opportunities to enjoy the changing scenery as we travel from the central highlands towards the drier landscapes of southern Sri Lanka.

Later in the journey, we'll spend some time birding around Tissamaharama village, searching in particular for owl roosts. This area offers a change of habitat and the opportunity to look for species that we may not have encountered earlier in the tour.

We'll then continue to Kataragama and settle into our accommodation before dinner.

Dinner and overnight: Grand Tamarind Lake, Kataragama

Day 9: Lunugamwehera National Park

With a packed breakfast and lunch, we'll set out for a full-day jeep safari in Lunugamwehera National Park. The park's mix of dry forest, scrubland and wetlands provides a different habitat to those encountered earlier in the tour, offering excellent opportunities for both birding and wildlife watching.

Throughout the day, we'll search for a wide variety of Sri Lankan birdlife. Possible noteworthy species include Barred Buttonquail, Sri Lanka Junglefowl, Indian Peafowl, Painted Stork, Woolly-necked Stork, Lesser Adjutant, Spot-billed Pelican, Darter, Common Kestrel, White-bellied Sea Eagle, Grey-headed Fish Eagle, Crested Serpent Eagle and Changeable Hawk-Eagle.

Other possibilities include Eurasian Thick-knee, Great Thick-knee, Yellow-wattled Lapwing, Orange-breasted Green Pigeon, Grey-bellied Cuckoo, Sirkeer Malkoha, Blue-faced Malkoha, Jerdon's Nightjar, Indian Nightjar, Oriental Scops Owl, Jungle Owlet and Brown Fish Owl.

The park is also home to an impressive variety of smaller woodland and scrub species, including Crested Treeswift, Chestnut-headed Bee-eater, Coppersmith Barbet, Malabar Pied Hornbill, Yellow-crowned Woodpecker, Sri Lanka Woodshrike, Marshall's Iora, White-browed Fantail, Ashy Drongo, Racket-tailed Drongo, Black-naped Monarch, Jerdon's Bushlark, Ashy-crowned Sparrow-Lark, Black-capped Bulbul, Grey-breasted Prinia, Jungle Prinia, Ashy Prinia, Blyth's Reed Warbler, Green Warbler, Large-billed Leaf Warbler, Tawny-bellied Babbler, Yellow-eyed Babbler, Sri Lanka Shama, Baya Weaver and Indian Silverbill.

After a full day exploring the park, we'll return to Kataragama for an evening at leisure.

Dinner and overnight: Grand Tamarind Lake, Kataragama

Day 10: Kataragama - Sinharaja

After breakfast, we'll leave Kataragama and begin our journey towards Sinharaja, travelling approximately 160 km (around 4.5 hours). As we head west, the landscape gradually changes, taking us from the drier southern plains towards the lush rainforest of the Sinharaja region.

After arriving and settling in, we'll enjoy some birding around the Sinharaja village, providing our first opportunity to explore this rich rainforest environment and look for some of the species associated with the area.

With the journey and afternoon birding making up the day's activities, there will also be time to relax and enjoy the peaceful surroundings of the lodge.

Lunch, dinner and overnight: Blue Magpie Lodge, Sinharaja

Day 11: Sinharaja Rainforest

After an early breakfast, with a packed lunch prepared for the day, we'll spend a full day exploring the extraordinary Sinharaja Rainforest. A UNESCO World Heritage Site and one of Sri Lanka's most important rainforest habitats, Sinharaja is renowned for its exceptional biodiversity and high number of endemic species.

As we explore the forest, we'll look for some of Sri Lanka's most sought-after birds, including Serendib Scops Owl, Chestnut-backed Owlet, Sri Lanka Scaly Thrush, Sri Lanka Blue Magpie, Crimson-fronted Barbet, Sri Lanka Grey Hornbill, Red-faced Malkoha, Malabar Trogon, Legge's Flowerpecker, Southern Hill Myna, Scimitar Babbler, Dark-fronted Babbler, Ashy-headed Laughing-thrush, Besra, Yellow-fronted Barbet, Sri Lanka Spurfowl, Sri Lanka Crested Drongo and Sri Lanka Frogmouth.

Other possible species include Spot-winged Thrush, Sri Lanka Myna, Lesser Yellow-naped Woodpecker, Sri Lanka Hanging Parrot, Layard's Parakeet, Black-capped Bulbul, Sri Lanka Green-billed Coucal, Black-naped Monarch, Orange-billed Babbler and Black-headed Oriole.

The rainforest is also home to a fascinating variety of other wildlife. Possible sightings include Purple-faced Leaf Monkey, Grizzled Giant Squirrel, Dusky-striped and Flameback Squirrels, Sambar Deer and Mouse Deer, as well as reptiles such as Green Pit Viper, Bronze-back Tree Snake, Hump-nosed Lizard and Sri Lanka Kangaroo Lizard.

After a full day immersed in the rainforest, we'll return to the lodge for a relaxing evening.

Dinner and overnight: Blue Magpie Lodge, Sinharaja

Day 12: Sinharaja Rainforest

After an early breakfast, with a packed lunch prepared for the day, we'll spend another full day exploring the remarkable Sinharaja Rainforest. With more time in this unique rainforest habitat, we'll have further opportunities to look for the endemic birds and wildlife that make Sinharaja such a special destination for nature enthusiasts.

After dinner, we'll head out on a night walk through the rainforest, searching for some of its elusive nocturnal wildlife. In particular, we'll look for the Red Slender Loris and Golden Palm Civet, two of Sri Lanka's fascinating nocturnal mammals.

We'll return to the lodge after the night walk for a well-earned rest.

Dinner and overnight: Blue Magpie Lodge, Sinharaja

Day 13: Sinharaja – Katunayake

We'll make an early start with some pre-breakfast birding around Sinharaja village, giving us one final opportunity to enjoy the area's rich birdlife before leaving the rainforest.

After breakfast and some time to relax, we'll have lunch before travelling onwards to Katunayake, approximately 155 km away (around three hours). The journey provides a final chance to enjoy Sri Lanka's changing landscapes as we make our way towards the airport area.

On arrival, the remainder of the evening will be at leisure, providing time to relax and unwind after our days of birding and wildlife watching.

Dinner and overnight: Tamarind Tree Garden, Katunayake

Day 14: Departure

After an early breakfast, we'll make our way to Katunayake International Airport in time for your departure flight, bringing our Sri Lankan birding and wildlife adventure to an end.

We hope you leave with wonderful memories of Sri Lanka's remarkable birds, wildlife and landscapes.

Pricing

Our Sri Lanka birding tour offers exceptional value, with the price covering comfortable accommodations, ground transportation, entrance fees to all scheduled sites and reserves, and the expertise of experienced birding guides.

Priced at £3,950 per person, a single supplement is an additional £560.

A non-refundable deposit of 20% of the total trip price, per person, is required to secure the booking.

The final balance is due 60 days before the tour start date.

Included in the price:

- Accommodation throughout the tour
- All evening meals from Day 1 to Day 13, and also breakfast from Day 2 through to Day 14. Lunch is also included from Day 2 through to Day 13.
- Ground transportation during the tour
- Services of an experienced birding guide
- Entrance fees to all scheduled sites and reserve

Not included:

- International flights to and from the UK
- Visa fees, if applicable
- Travel insurance
- Beverages and alcoholic drinks
- Optional activities not specified in the itinerary

Trip Information

Tour leader

This tour is run exclusively for BirdGuides Travel. Your tour leader will be Mukesh Hirdaramani.

Group size

12, plus tour leader.

Recommended items

Essential items include a good pair of binoculars, comfortable walking shoes, weather-appropriate clothing and personal medication. You may also wish to bring walking poles.

Is this tour for me?

Due to rugged terrain, this tour is unsuitable for people with reduced mobility. BirdGuides Travel tours are also unsuitable for persons under the age of 16 years old. Please talk to us before booking your trip should you require further information.

Minimum participants

This tour requires a minimum of five confirmed participants. If we do not have the minimum required number of participants, we reserve the right to cancel this tour. We will notify you not less than 30 days before the start of the tour should this be necessary.

Financial Security

The Association of Bonded Travel Organisers Trust Limited (ABTOT) provides financial protection under The Package Travel and Linked Travel Arrangements Regulations 2018 for Warners Group Publications plc, and in the event of its insolvency, protection is provided for the following: Non-flight packages.

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