

Explore the Paradise – Sri Lanka

While engaging with the unique conference experience of GCSM 2026, don't forget to explore the Pearl of the Indian Ocean before you return home. We have listed a few suggestions to help you plan your travel itinerary for your stay in Sri Lanka.

Things to See in Colombo

Colombo, the vibrant capital of Sri Lanka, offers a mix of colonial architecture, modern attractions, and cultural landmarks. Don't miss trying Sri Lanka's iconic dishes like Hoppers, Kottu Roti, and Rice and Curry, available at local restaurants and street food stalls.

1. **Gangaramaya Temple**

A beautiful Buddhist temple blending Sri Lankan, Thai, Indian, and Chinese architecture. It also has a fascinating museum with ancient relics.

2. **Seema Malaka Temple**

A serene temple built on Beira Lake, designed by the famous architect Geoffrey Bawa. Perfect for quiet reflection and stunning photos.

3. **Colombo National Museum**

The largest museum in Sri Lanka, displaying a rich collection of ancient artefacts, royal regalia, and colonial-era exhibits.

4. **Old Dutch Hospital**

One of the oldest buildings in Colombo is now turned into a trendy shopping and dining complex with cafes, boutiques, and restaurants.

5. **Galle Face Green**

A popular oceanfront park where locals gather to enjoy street food and watch epic sunsets over the Indian Ocean.

6. **Colombo Lotus Tower (Conference Dinner Venue)**

The tallest structure in South Asia, offering panoramic views of the city skyline and coastline.

Cultural Sites/Cities

Sri Lanka features several UNESCO World Heritage Sites that highlight its rich cultural heritage, ancient architecture, and historical importance.

1. **Ancient City of Anuradhapura (around 4.5-to 5-hour drive from Colombo)**

One of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world, Anuradhapura is famous for its giant stupas, sacred Bo Tree (Sri Maha Bodhi), and ancient monasteries. It was the spiritual and political heart of ancient Sri Lanka.

2. **Ancient City of Polonnaruwa (around 5-to 6-hour drive from Colombo)**

The second capital of Sri Lanka, after Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa is filled with impressive ruins of palaces, temples, and colossal Buddha statues. It showcases the island's medieval history and sophisticated irrigation systems.

3. **Sacred City of Kandy (around 3-to-3.5-hour drive from Colombo)**

Kandy is home to the Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic (Sri Dalada Maligawa), one of the most sacred Buddhist sites in the world. The city, surrounded by misty hills, preserves rich Sinhalese culture and traditions.

4. **Old Town of Galle and its Fortifications (around 1-to-1.5-hour drive from Colombo)**

Galle Fort is a beautifully preserved fortified city built by the Portuguese and later expanded by the Dutch. Its colonial architecture, cobblestone streets, and vibrant art scene make it a unique blend of European and South Asian styles.

5. **Dambulla Cave Temple (around 3.5-to 4-hour drive from Colombo)**

This vast cave complex houses over 150 statues and stunning murals of Buddha. It has been a sacred pilgrimage site for more than 2,000 years.

6. **Sigiriya (Lion Rock) (around 4-to 4.5-hour drive from Colombo)**

Often called the "Eighth Wonder of the World," Sigiriya is a massive rock fortress featuring ancient frescoes, gardens, and royal palaces. It was built by King Kashyapa in the 5th century AD.

National Parks (Safari)

If you're a nature lover, Sri Lanka is an ideal destination for exploring its rich wildlife and diverse ecosystems. Here are a few national parks that offer a great safari experience and a glimpse into the island's incredible biodiversity:

1. **Yala National Park (around a 5-to 6-hour drive from Colombo)**

Yala is Sri Lanka's most visited national park, famous for having one of the highest leopard densities in the world. Elephants, sloth bears, crocodiles, and colourful bird species also thrive here.

2. **Wilpattu National Park (around a 3.5-to 4-hour drive from Colombo)**

Wilpattu is Sri Lanka's largest national park, known for its many natural lakes called "villus." It is a quieter, less crowded alternative to Yala but also offers sightings of leopards and sloth bears.

3. **Udawalawe National Park (around a 4-to 5-hour drive from Colombo)**

Udawalawe is one of the best places in Asia to see wild elephants up close. The park is centered around the Udawalawe Reservoir, attracting herds of elephants year-round.

4. **Minneriya National Park (around a 4-to 5-hour drive from Colombo)**

Minneriya is most famous for the "Elephant Gathering," where hundreds of elephants congregate during the dry season. It's a heaven for birdlife and other mammals too.

Nature Trails (Hiking)

If you are a hiker, Sri Lanka is a great place to explore breathtaking landscapes, lush forests, and scenic mountain trails. The island offers a variety of hiking opportunities, from challenging mountain treks to serene nature walks.

1. Pekoe Trail

The **Pekoe Trail** is a scenic long-distance trail that runs through Sri Lanka's beautiful **Central Highlands**. The trail is named after Pekoe tea, a fine variety of Ceylon tea, and offers a fantastic experience of Sri Lanka's tea culture, along with breathtaking views of the mountains and valleys.

2. Ella Rock

Ella is famous for its **Ella Rock** hike, which offers one of the best views in Sri Lanka. Once at the top, you'll be rewarded with panoramic views of the surrounding valleys and mountains, including the world-famous **Nine Arches Bridge** in the distance.

3. Horton Plains National Park

Horton Plains is a must for hiking enthusiasts. The park offers the **World's End** trek, which takes you to a dramatic cliff with a sheer drop of nearly 1,000 meters. The **Baker's Falls** trail is also a scenic route, passing through dense forests and ending at a beautiful waterfall.

4. Knuckles Mountain Range

A UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Knuckles Mountain Range offers a variety of hiking trails, ranging from easy walks to more challenging climbs. The area is known for its rugged terrain, dense forests, and stunning views.

Pristine Beaches

Sri Lanka is home to some of the most stunning and pristine beaches in the world, offering the perfect escape to enjoy the sea breeze and unwind by the ocean. Whether you're seeking relaxation, adventure, or simply the beauty of nature, the beaches of Sri Lanka offer something for everyone.

Southern Coast (1-to 2-hour drive from Colombo)

1. Unawatuna (Swimming, Snorkelling)

Located near Galle, Unawatuna is famous for its golden sandy shores and crystal-clear waters. The calm bay is perfect for enjoying the gentle sea breeze, and nearby, you can explore the historic **Galle Fort**.

2. Mirissa (Snorkelling, Whale-watching, Diving)

A beautiful crescent-shaped beach on the southern coast of Sri Lanka. Known for its peaceful atmosphere, it's the ideal place to relax, enjoy a swim, or try out whale watching tours.

3. Weligama (Surfing)

Located along the southern coast, Weligama is a popular beach destination for both beginners and experienced surfers. The beachfront is lined with cafes and eateries, allowing you to enjoy the sea breeze as you relax with a refreshing drink.

4. Bentota (Beach activities)

A popular beach destination, offering a wide stretch of golden sand and clear blue waters. It's perfect for water sports like jet-skiing, windsurfing, and kite surfing.

East Coast (6-7-hour drive from Colombo)

1. Arugam Bay (Surfing)

A heaven for surfers, famous for its long, sandy beach and perfect waves. It's one of the best places in Sri Lanka to catch some waves while enjoying the relaxed vibe of the area.

2. Nilaveli (Snorkelling)

On the east coast of Sri Lanka, Nilaveli is a quieter beach destination, ideal for those looking for serenity. The white sand and turquoise waters make it perfect for a relaxing beach day.

3. Pasikudah (Swimming)

Well known for its shallow, warm waters and pristine beaches, making it ideal for swimming and relaxing by the sea. The beach is peaceful and not overcrowded, allowing you to enjoy the tranquillity of the area and the refreshing sea breeze.