

Sri Lanka

Marine Wildlife

A Greentours Itinerary

"On leaving the island of Andaman... the traveller reaches Ceylon, which is undoubtedly the finest island of its size in all the world" - Marco Polo. Well he certainly hadn't seen all the islands in the world, but we think he was pretty close to the mark. Sri Lanka is a veritable tropical paradise. The people are extremely welcoming, reflecting the colourful and varied culture of a multi-ethnic background. Sri Lanka is surrounded by the warm waters of the Indian Ocean, making the seas, lagoons and coastal areas of the island a hotbed for marine wildlife. Our tour offers a captivating exploration of the island's marine wildlife that thrives in these crystal-clear waters.

Day 1

Depart UK/Europe

An evening departure from London Heathrow or elsewhere in Europe.

Day 2

Arrive Colombo and transfer to Negombo. Visit the fish market

Our arrival in Colombo is around lunch time. We'll transfer straight to our hotel, the Jetwing Blue in Negombo, and if you are not too tired after the overnight journey we'll visit the Negombo Fish Market! Sometimes these places give you a good insight into the species that you will encounter while you are under the sea! And of course it may also give you an inkling of the superba cuisine you'll enjoy during this tour.

Days 3 – 7(am)

Kalpitiya: Bar Reef Marine Sanctuary, Lagoon Dolphin Watching, Whale-watching in the Bay, exploration of the Mangrove Forests

Kalpitiya's lagoon is backed by the Bar Reef Marine Sanctuary, Sri Lanka's largest reef, renowned for its incredible biodiversity. The reef teems with hundreds of fish species, including many colourful Parrotfish, Bannerfish, all sorts of Butterflyfish, Black-Tip Reef Sharks, and good numbers of Hawksbill and Green Turtles. We'll enjoy several snorkelling sessions in this rich habitat whilst boat trips in the lagoon will allow us to get up close to the uncommon Indo-Pacific Humpback Dolphins. Outside we'll find Pilot Whales and Bottlenose Dolphins, whilst the huge schools of super-active Long-snouted Spinner Dolphins wow us with their crazy antics. There's a very good chance we'll come across Whale Sharks here too.

Each day will have a different scenario. We'll spend one whole day out on the Bar Reef Marine Sanctuary which is a 25km boat ride out from Kalpitiya. We'll go after an early breakfast and spend all day out there with a lunch made for us on one of the many little sand islands. We'll have morning and afternoon snorkelling in these beautiful reefs. The shallow waters are crystal clear so the rainbow colours of the underwater world are even visible from above. And then in the evening we'll return to the hotel.

The next morning we'll head out to the Kalpitiya lagoon in search of Indo Pacific Humpback Dolphin. These unusual dolphins frequent only coastal areas and are extremely local though they have a wide distribution. Varying from grey to a quite fetching pink they are relatively sluggish in the water though shy. And then before lunch we'll drop into a Mangrove Reforestation project. Lunch on this day will be on the beach and in the afternoon we'll be back out on the water but this time cruising the waters of Kappaladi Lagoon through some fin mangrove forests. At the end of the cruise we'll have a barbecue on the beach.

The following day we'll head well out to sea on a special Dolphin and Whale watching trip where as well as a tremendous show of Dolphins we'll be on the look for Sperm Whales which at this season are frequently observed in the deeper waters where the continental shelf dips steeply off of the Kalpitiya Peninsula. In the afternoon we'll spend time searching for Whale Sharks and hopefully will try to snorkel with them.

Day 7(pm) & 8(am) **Wilpattu**

For just a morning and an afternoon we'll leave the watery world and explore Wilpattu National Park where we'll find many exotic birds and some of Sri Lanka's more iconic mammals. Wilpattu National Park is one Sri Lanka's oldest and largest protected areas. Wilpattu translates as "the land of the lakes" and indeed the limestones that dominate the landscape here are pockmarked with depressions that cut the water table. The presence of so much water attracts abundant wildlife. We'll search for Sri Lankan Leopard, Sloth Bear, Spotted Deer and Asian Elephants. It is also home to a wide variety of birds including Common Peafowl, Painted Stork, Spot-billed Pelican, Stork-billed Kingfisher, Chestnut-headed Bee-eater and both White-bellied Sea Eagle and Gray-headed Fish Eagle.

Day 8(pm) – 10 **Gulf of Mannar: Dugongs and Adam's Bridge National Park**

Adam's Bridge is a chain of shoals that stretch all the way from India to the northern tip of Sri Lanka. Legend has it that Rama, the hero of the Hindu epic Ramayana, and a varnara (monkey) army built the 'bridge' to rescue his

abducted wife from the island. Indeed records suggest that the 'bridge' may have been whole and passable on foot as recently as 1480.

We'll be concentrating on matters under the water though for this is a great area to search for Dugong. Dugongs frequent in particular shallow waters and sea grass beds and we'll spend each morning slowly cruising these areas in search of this most unusual of marine mammals. In the evening's we'll explore Adam's Bridge National Park on foot.

Day 11

To Trincomalee – explore town and fort in the afternoon

After breakfast we'll head to the north east coast of the island where the town of Trincomalee is set around world-renowned Trinco Harbor. We'll settle into the Trinco Blu, a lovely resort at the northern end of Trincomalee where the lagoon empties into the sea. After lunch we'll have some time to enjoy the beautiful grounds and surroundings before spending a couple of hours exploring the old fort and the town itself.

Days 12 - 14

Trincomalee morning Whale and Dolphin watching boat trips. Afternoons snorkelling at Pigeon Island

Trincomalee has in the past couple of decades become synonymous with whale-watching in Sri Lanka and with good reason. This is a great place to see the world's largest animal, the Blue Whale. 'Super-pods' of around fifty Sperm Whales bob to the surface like so many champagne corks in the waters of the deep sea canyon off Trinco. Humpback Whales, Bryde's Whales and even Dwarf Sperm Whales are likely to be seen as are dolphins such as Fraser's and Striped. We'll spend the mornings whale-watching, the afternoons snorkelling the vibrant coral reefs of Pigeon Islands. Renowned for clear water, the reefs here are home to colourful anemones, Clown Fish, Moray Eel, Bi-color Cleaner Wrasse, Raggedfin Parrotfish, Humphead Wrasse, Melon Butterflyfish, Black-wedged Butterflyfish, Moorish Idol, Blue-ringed Angelfish and the widespread but always magnificent Emperor Angelfish. Impressive Napoleon Wrasse cruise the corals and we will also see Moorish Idol, Triggerfish and probably a Black-tip Reef Shark or two.

We'll have two whale-watching trips that will depart early in the morning. The seas are calmest and the whale-watching the best in the early hours of the day. On both of these we'll take breakfast out on the boat with us to maximise our time on the ocean at the best time of day. After the whale-watching trips you can return to the hotel to rest for the afternoon or join us for afternoon snorkelling sessions at various reefs in the immediate area. We'll also go out to Pigeon Island one morning and have a long morning snorkelling session there.

Day 15 to Colombo

It is a six hour drive from the North East Coast to the West Coast and Colombo. But Sri Lanka's ever enthralling landscapes will keep us occupied as we pass by and there will be time for some stops en route.

Day 16 Departure

A relaxed start this morning with plenty of time for breakfast before we head off to the airport and return flights to UK/Europe.

If you would like to ask about any other aspect of this holiday, please call 01298 83563 or email us at enquiries@greentours.co.uk.

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