

Sri Lanka by Rail: Culture, Coast & Highlands

Day 1 – Welcome to Sri Lanka!

Welcome to Sri Lanka! One of our friendly team members will meet you at the airport and we've arranged your transfer directly to the Galle Face Hotel. What an elegant way to kick off your Sri Lanka adventure! Did you know that your hotel's roots stem way back to 1864?

Tonight at dinner in one of our favourite local restaurants, you'll get to know your guide and fellow MagRailers. Welcome to the beginning of your love affair with Sri Lankan food!

Accommodation: Galle Face Hotel (or similar), Colombo

Included: Dinner

Day 2 – Kandy Cooking Demonstration

The Colombo – Kandy train is not running in its entirety because the rail lines have been damaged by the cyclone. Instead we'll travel to Kandy by road where you'll enjoy a cookery demonstration with a local Sri Lankan chef.

There's time to explore Kandy's Palace Temple with your guide this afternoon, before some free time at dinner. You might like to dine in-house, or jump aboard a tuk-tuk for a thrilling ride into the town centre. The promenade around the lake is particularly beautiful at night with the city lights in the background.

Accommodation: Hotel Topaz (or similar), Kandy

Included: Breakfast, Lunch

Day 3 – Peradeniya Botanical Gardens

You're on your way to visit Ambuluwawa Temple this morning. More like a tower than a temple, it stands as a symbol of religious unity, with worship places for Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims and Christians.



And make sure you've got some comfy shoes on, because you'll be walking off your delicious local lunch at the Royal Botanical Gardens in Peradeniya. When you've got sights like the Ebony Collection, the Giant Bamboo Forest, Orchid House and the National Herbarium of Natural Medicine to discover, you're definitely going to clock up some steps!

Accommodation: Hotel Topaz (or similar), Kandy

Included: Breakfast, Dinner

Day 4 – Dambulla Cave

Today you're headed to Sigiriya – your home for the next two nights! Your group will stop at the largest and most preserved Buddhist cave complex in the country. Dambulla Temple's artwork stretches across the expanse of 5 caves, which are filled with Buddha statues. It's truly inspiring if not a tad overwhelming, but we're sure you'll be craning your neck to take in all that detail.

Dinner is at a local restaurant tonight, but you may like to lap up the views of Sigiriya Rock beforehand while you do a lap or two of your hotel's pool.

Accommodation: Kassapa Lions Rock (or similar), Sigiriya

Included: Breakfast, Dinner

Day 5 – Minneriya Safari

Day 5. This morning, we've arranged a visit to Sigiriya Rock Fortress for the early birds. It's a steep stair climb to the top, but if you have the energy, once you're up there you'll understand why it's worth it. If you fancy a lie-in instead, no worries! Meet up with everyone at breakfast once they're back, or choose to laze away your entire morning.

After lunch, make sure that your battery is fully charged, because it's Safari time! September is one of the best months to witness what's simply dubbed The Gathering – an annual coming together of wild elephants in Minneriya National Park.

As the light takes on the glow of late afternoon, you'll hear them before you see them. Your anticipation builds as they crash through the forest and finally lumber into view to feed, drink and socialise. This Nature Show is so mesmerising you'll hardly notice you're sharing it with



anyone else!

Accommodation: Kassapa Lions Rock (or similar), Sigiriya

Included: Breakfast

Day 6 – Ancient City of Polonnaruwa

Pack your bags because you're moving-on today for a short drive and 45 minute train ride to Polonnaruwa. Keep your eyes peeled for elephants because they cross these tracks regularly. The old rattler travels slowly and the train drivers are always on the lookout for them. Have your camera ready, just in case!

Polonnaruwa was the second Sinhalese capital and its beginnings date back more than 1,000 years. This afternoon, when you're standing amongst the city's ruined buildings, some of them still substantial structures, you'll be asking yourself how it was possible this enormous swathe of physical, cultural and religious history was completely lost for centuries.

Your hotel rests in a tranquil lakeside spot tonight, so take the evening to enjoy the facilities. Otherwise, it's just a short tuk-tuk ride into town for dinner at a local restaurant. Your guide will let you know which ones to try.

Accommodation: Deer Park Hotel (or similar), Girithale

Included: Breakfast, Dinner

Day 7 – Dabana

Get ready for a cultural experience, as we spend the next two nights at Mapakada Village. There'll be a few hours drive to get there, but once you're gazing across the lake to the quiet wooded hills and beyond, you'll instantly shake off the drive.

Have you ever heard of the Vedda Tribe? Indigenous to Sri Lanka, it's believed they are direct descendants to the island's original habitants back to Neolithic times. Late this afternoon, you'll travel to their small community with a local guide. Witness demonstrations of traditional hunting methods, cultural activities and folk dance over the course of the evening.



Accommodation: Kevans Casa (or similar), Mediyaya

Included: Breakfast, Dinner

Day 8 – Village Life and High Tea

It's Day 8 – already!

We've snuck in one more village highlight for you, and that's later today when you visit a farming community just nearby the hotel. You'll learn about Chena, the oldest method for cultivating crops in Sri Lanka, and visit a local rice mill to see how this staple food for over half of the world's population is processed. After, jump in a boat to sail across the Mapakada Lake, and hear how it is an integral part of sustaining the village.

You won't get hungry today! If you're lucky, you might pick up some fresh veggies from the Chena and rice from the mill to take back to the hotel. As you continue your walk through the village, you'll stop for refreshments made from local produce.

To finish off the day, we've arranged High-Tea served on a boat – cue the sunset, please!

Accommodation: Kevans Casa (or similar), Mediyaya

Included: Breakfast, High Tea, and Dinner

Day 9 – Nuwara Eliya

Did someone say 'Little England'? It's true that Nuwara Eliya was known by this in its Colonial past. Back in the day, the cooler mountain air was a welcome retreat from the wilting heat of the plains below. That the area was well-suited to tea plantations, was an added bonus for the British.

Today you'll travel by road and there'll be time to explore Nuwara Eliya late in the day with your guide. Sleep well tonight – there's another train ride on the cards tomorrow and we're pretty sure this is the one you've been waiting for the most!

Accommodation: Mirage Kings Cottage (or similar), Nuwara Eliya

Included: Breakfast, Dinner



Day 10 – Ella Odyssey Specialty Train

All aboard the Ella Odyssey Specialty Train!! It's day 10 of your Sri Lanka rail adventure and your pinch-me moment is finally here. Even people who don't travel by train make the effort to ride this one – that's how famous it is!

The train pauses and you're glued to the window in front of mountain-side waterfalls and the celebrated Nine-Arches Bridge. The 3-hour trip goes by quickly and it builds to a crescendo when your ride disappears into the darkness of the tunnel directly below Demodara Station. Congratulations – you're now 'looping the loop!' A journey only topped by meeting the Station Master afterwards.

There's some time to relax in your hotel this afternoon. Or you may like to wander down the road for a beverage or two at one of the local restaurants.

At dinner with your fellow MagRailers, we're sure tonight's chatter will be filled with awe from today's experience!

Accommodation: Oak Ray La Ella Breeze (or similar), Ella

Included: Breakfast, Lunch, and Dinner

Day 11 – Ella

At Magnificent Rail, we think there is only one way to top breakfast-with-a-view and that's breakfast PLUS a view of a famous train line!

Walas Bedda Viewpoint is up a rough mountain road and a high vantage point to see a train, just like yours yesterday, looping the loop. Today's an early start, but we guarantee that this is worth getting out of bed for. After a hilltop Sri Lankan breakfast (be sure to try the freshly-cooked coconut roti) it's back down the mountain – your guide has plans for you and Beautiful Ella is awaiting your attention.

Accommodation: Oak Ray La Ella Breeze (or similar), Ella

Included: Breakfast, Lunch



Day 12 – Galle Fort

Fear not, the train rides aren't over yet, and today you'll be taking one from Beliatta to Galle. Heading south, you'll descend from the mountains quickly and before long, you'll be surrounded by rice paddy and roaming herds of water buffalo again. Before the British, came the Dutch, and Galle still oozes that colonialist and spice trading port history, and you're about to call this historical fort town your home for the next two nights.

Dinner is at your leisure tonight and you won't care one bit, because the laneways of the Fort are so user-friendly. We bet there will be more than one other MagRailer up for an aperitif on the balcony of one of the lush colonial-style restaurants!

Accommodation: Le Grand Galle (or similar), Galle

Included: Breakfast, Lunch

Day 13 – Madu Ganga Wetlands

This is yet another morning to be sure you've got your camera ready! The Madu Ganga Wetlands is a haven for wildlife and a designated RAMSAR Site. So, as you explore by boat with your guide, keep an eye on the sky for birds in flight, and others resting on branches in quiet mangrove pockets. The river is dotted with small islands and you'll share the waterway with locals commuting by canoe and going about their fishing.

In the afternoon, laze away under the shady verandah of your hotel, or grab some shopping time inside the fort. Just keep in mind the shopkeepers are up for a bit of kind-hearted bargaining banter. Tonight, you'll be catching up for dinner with your fellow MagRailers – it's your second-last night together, so make the most of it!

Accommodation: Le Grand Galle (or similar), Galle

Included: Breakfast, Dinner

Day 14 – Colombo

By now, you'll be right-at-home with Sri Lanka's laid back, train pace, so relax and enjoy your final journey. Look West – the coastline has appeared.. Can you believe this incredible



adventure is coming to an end?

Back in Colombo, it's time to get to know Sri Lanka's capital just a bit more, before some time back at The Galle Face Hotel to pack and prepare.

Tonight is your farewell dinner MagRailers, so let's make it special! Fill up on your favourite Sri Lankan dishes and laugh with your newfound friends about the incredible journey you've shared – and how Sri Lanka has captured your hearts... and taste buds!

Accommodation: Galle Face Hotel (or similar), Colombo

Included: Breakfast, Lunch, and Dinner

Day 15 – Farewell

After breakfast, as you hug and farewell your fellow MagRailers, this is no time to say goodbye – instead, say see you on another train, in another place!

We've arranged a timely transfer to the airport for your homeward or onward travel. Have a safe trip home!

Included: Breakfast

