
Sri Lanka's jungle adventures - Adventure tourism a growing global phenomenon

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Lazy summer days at the beach getting a tan are passé as Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Board (SLTPB) is marketing the country as an adventure destination with adventure seekers being identified as a potential growth market. "Adventurous holidays are a rapidly growing trend in global tourism and an increasing number of travellers are seeking out new adventures like Sri Lanka having done the usual African Safaris," said SLTPB Managing Director, Dileep Mudadeniya.

"The adventure tag fits in very well to Sri Lanka given the number of fantastic adventure and wildlife activities we have on offer," he said. Sri Lanka is a land where you can glimpse a wild elephant, gaze at the pristine grace of a leopard, see a nesting turtle lay its eggs on the beach or witness the dazzling display of peacock feathers. The country is blessed with an abundance of natural diversity despite its small size. This astounding diversity is largely due to its dramatically different terrains ranging from coastal plains to hill country and lush rainforests to arid dry zones. Large areas rich in flora and fauna are conserved in 13 national parks across the country and over 100 other protected areas. This is not surprising given the country's 2000-year old history of conservation. What was probably the world's first wildlife sanctuary was created here in 3rd Century BC. A trip to Sri Lanka's wildlife parks is memorable as one is greeted by the sounds of numerous birdcalls. As you enter a park with an expert tracker in a four-wheel drive vehicle, the jungle comes alive with a myriad sights, sounds and motions. As the vehicle bumps along rutty jungle tracks, the scenery is constantly changing. Monkeys scamper across the path casting anxious glances at the vehicle. A peacock slowly opens its plumage and strikes up a regal pose for the cameras. A cuddly white rabbit hops into view, stops and looks enquiringly and disappears among the foliage just as quickly. Wildlife and nature conservation in Sri Lanka has a long history. The country's traditional law has reference to forests where the felling of timber is prohibited. Ancient Sri Lanka also had reservoirs built in the forests so that wild animals would not need to enter human settlements in search of water. There are many tanks and waterways in and around the wildlife parks of Sri Lanka and there are plenty of crocodiles in the water. Water Monitors, Iguanas and a variety of lizards also inhabit the jungles of Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka has more than 950,000 hectares of national parks, sanctuaries and nature reserves. Popular among them are the Bundala National Park, Horton Plains, Kumana Bird Park, Sinharaja Forest, Wasgomuwa National Park, Wilpattu National Park and Yala National Park and the Habarana Safari Park. Large and small herds of elephants are a common sight at the Yala National Park. It also has the largest leopard population in Sri Lanka. Common also are large herds of Spotted Deer and Sambhar, Wild Buffalo, bears and different species of monkey are also in plenty. Among the primates are several species of monkeys including the macaque and the large-eyed loris. The scaly pangolin can also be spotted along with wild buffalo, giant squirrel, wild boar, jungle cat and the cat-like palm quivet. The wildlife parks are also home to a variety of birds. Peacocks, painted storks, herons, parrots, spoonbills, bee-eaters, hornbills, woodpeckers and many more of over 450 species of birds can be observed. Some of them are migrant and seasonal. The Siberian duck for instance fly away from the winter to the moderate climate in Sri Lanka. Twenty-six species of birds are endemic to Sri Lanka. Apart from birds, the other brilliantly coloured creatures seen flying in the island's skies are over 250 species of butterfly, most of them found in the foothills up to about 900 metres. Sri Lanka also has an intriguing number of creatures that slither, swim or jump, with 54 species of freshwater fish, and a variety of frogs and reptiles. In addition, there are 3,350 species of flowering plants, lush tropical fruits, majestic tall trees, lush undergrowth, and rare orchids and medicinal plants. Wildlife trips offering tourists up-close views of nature's beauty and beasts in their natural habitat are a fast-growing niche and form part of Sri Lanka's eco-tourism industry. The animals, despite being wild, aren't prone to attack and even though game-hunting draws tourists to certain countries, in Sri Lanka, guests shoot with their cameras and not their rifles. © 2008 Al Bawaba (www.albawaba.com) & Pictures <http://www.srilanka.com>