

Sea turtle conservation in Sri Lanka

Project Overview

Why not explore Sri Lanka and help protect the turtles?

Sri Lanka is separated from the Indian sub continent by a few miles of sea, but the water hasn't dampened the vibrancy found on the mainland. Sri Lanka offers the traveller a similarly stunning experience in a handy, fun-size package. Its diminutive stature allows you to explore the whole island with relative ease, where you'll find golden beaches, mountains and lush jungle as well as a really welcoming people. Our partner project on the island monitors and protects the 5 different species of sea turtle found in Sri Lanka. Unfortunately when the island was badly damaged by the 2004 tsunami the project lost important equipment, resources and tanks, meaning your support will be even more valuable as it continues to grow.



Trip Highlights:

- Helping to conserve these awesome creatures of the sea
- Living the Sri Lankan beach life - lucky you!
- Meeting and making friends with the local community - and taking inspiration from their strong spirit and approach to life

Project details:

We are working with a well-established turtle conservation project in Kosgoda, on the south-west coast of Sri Lanka. Its purpose is to monitor and conserve the turtles in the Kosgoda area, and a mixture of local staff and volunteers have been supporting its development. However, after the Tsunami hit in December 2004, much of the infrastructure was destroyed and an important source of funding - the tourists - was lost. Over the last eight years, the project manager has been maintaining a database of turtle activity to allow definitive measurement of turtle behaviour in this area. Unfortunately, most of the equipment was washed away in the Tsunami. Computers, pumps, tanks, the visitors centre, tourist gifts etc. have all gone. Before the Tsunami, the project manager was able to offer posters, t-shirts, stickers and films to the local population, thereby raising funds for the project. He is very much hoping to rebuild this programme but needs funds and the help of volunteers to support it.

Why the project needs volunteers:

Sri Lanka is home to five species of turtle - the leatherback, the olive ridley, the loggerhead, the hawksbill and the green - and all five are endangered. Conservationists have been endeavouring to protect these species from extinction for the last 30 years, but they are battling against fishermen who exploit turtles for their meat and eggs. In addition, turtle populations have been diminishing due to the destruction of coral reefs and marine pollution. At this turtle project, volunteers are needed to support ongoing conservation efforts and to repair the damage done by the Tsunami. Before the Tsunami, the project had sufficient funds to pay a team of local people to patrol the beach area and ensure the survival of the eggs at the nesting sites or in the hatchery. Volunteers are needed to give tours and to assist with the day to day running of the project.

What kind of skills you need to go on this type of project:

Conservation volunteers will be hands-on people who love the outdoors. You must be prepared for some hard physical work, and you must be flexible, as this project involves a variety of activities. IT skills, research skills and communication skills may also be utilised during your conservation project. This project would suit a volunteer with a lot of initiative who is prepared to work hard individually and in a team.

Your role as a volunteer:

You will perform a range of different tasks to support the general running of the project, including feeding and cleaning the turtles and their environment; monitoring and releasing baby turtles from the hatchery and monitoring turtle egg laying. You may be required to develop information resources and tourist souvenirs, and to conduct tours around the project.

Where the project is based:

This project is located right next to the beach, about 1 mile from Kosgodra, a small town about 75 km south of Colombo. In Kosgodra, you will have access to facilities such as internet cafés, shops and banks.

Please book your flight to arrive into Colombo (airport code CMB) on the advertised arrival date to ensure your airport pickup.

Fast Facts

Project Information

- Project Duration: Min 2 weeks - Max 12 weeks
- Project Costs: £699.00 for 2 weeks, £100.00 for every week thereafter
- Location of project: Kosgodra, on the west coast about 70 kms south of Colombo
- Arrival Airport: Colombo (airport code CMB)
- Activities: Various types of conservation work, including monitoring turtle activity, creating information resources and rebuilding damaged facilities. Please note that you may also get involved in the community project too
- Working Hours: Flexible; 8 hours a day from 8am to 12pm and from 1pm to 5pm, all other time is free
- Getting to the project: Accommodation on site
- Requirements: Minimum age 18

What's Included

- Accommodation: Shared rooms in volunteer house
- Food: Breakfast and dinner
- Airport Pickup: Included on arrival date. Ask us for details if you're arriving early!
- Training: In-country orientation
- Support: Pre-departure helpdesk, Local in-country team and 24hr emergency support

What's not included

- Flights, Insurance, Visas, Return Airport transfer, Local Transport, Food (lunch is not provided)

Country Guide - Sri Lanka

A little bit of history...

Sri Lanka's history is interwoven with myths and religious beliefs. In the central hill country, Adams Peak is fabled as the first place that Adam set foot after being cast out of Eden – his footprint is set in the rock seems indelible proof. Buddhists claim that the footprint is proof that Buddha placed a holy foot in Sri Lanka en route to paradise. To the north of the country a series of islands runs north to India – these are believed to be the stepping stones that Rama crossed in order to rescue his wife Sita from Rawana, the devilish King of Lanka. One thing that these myths do prove is that the religious and cultural history is both diverse and complex.

The Veddahs were the original inhabitants of the island, but they were gradually displaced by Sinhalese migrants from northern India. This migration took place from around the 6th century BC and led to the founding of the first great Sinhalese empire, Anuradhapura in the 4th century BC. This kingdom was converted to Buddhism in the 3rd century by Mahinda and the country has remained largely Buddhist ever since.



The city of Anuradhapura was the centre of Sinhalese culture for over 1500 years until invasion by Southern Indian kingdoms gradually eroded its power and Vijayabahu I abandoned for the more southerly and more easily defended Polonnaruwa. This kingdom lasted for another 2 centuries until the excesses of its rulers and increasing invasions from India led to a dispersal of the Sinhalese culture and the emergence of a strong Tamil presence in the north of the country.

The Portuguese trader, Lorenço de Almeida, arrived in 1505 and began friendly relations with the king of Kotte, establishing a Portuguese monopoly on the lucrative spice trade. Over time the trade relationship changed from co-operation to colonisation and the Portuguese gradually gained control of the whole island. The Portuguese (like all colonial powers) exploited the island and ruled through a mixture of greed, avarice and intolerance. In an attempt to free themselves Portuguese rule the northern kingdom of Kandy enlisted the help of the Dutch, whose concerns were primarily mercantile and less intolerant of Sinhalese customs.

The Dutch ruled most of Sri Lanka until 1796, when the British swept to power. Over the next 150 years the British colonisers changed land laws and introduced the widespread planting of cash crops such as coffee, coconuts and cinnamon. The demands of these huge plantations saw a further migration of Tamil workers from Southern India, which would have devastating long-term effects on the future stability of Sri Lanka.

After India gained independence from British rule, the British government was under increasing pressure to grant independence to Sri Lanka and in February 1948 Sri Lanka became a sovereign state and a member of the British Commonwealth. In the years since independence tensions have run high between the Buddhist Sinhalese majority in the South and West and the Hindu Tamil minority in the North and East. Many wars have been fought, many ceasefires broken and an estimated 60,000 people have been killed and over a million displaced. At the time of writing, a Norwegian brokered ceasefire had been broken and fighting was raging in the around the eastern town of Vaharai.

Best time to go...

As with much of Southern Asia, the country's weather is dominated by the monsoon. To make things even trickier Sri Lanka experiences two monsoons!

The yala season runs from early May until August and sees the southwest monsoon hit the south and west coasts and the central highlands. The second monsoon – the Maha season – affects the north and east of the island between October and January. Dry season in this part of Sri Lanka runs from May to September while in the south and west it runs from December to March.

Temperatures during the dry season can climb to the mid-30°C, but the central highlands around Kandy can offer respite from the heat and warm jumpers are a common sight in the evenings. The seas around Sri Lanka remain warm all year but can be rough and sometimes dangerous during monsoon.

Getting around...

Travelling in Sri Lanka is can be a hugely frustrating experience. The only compensation that the traveller can gain from travelling in Sri Lanka is that the distances are relatively short. Whatever journeys you do decide to make in Sri Lanka, check security warnings from the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (see links below) before travelling to the north and east of the country.

Bus

When travelling by bus it is virtually impossible to reserve a seat. The only way to guarantee a seat is to arrive at the bus station a good half an hour before the scheduled departure time and hang on to your seat for dear life. There are a wide variety of bus services ranging from largely slow and uncomfortable CTB buses (Central Tourist Board) to privately run air-conditioned inter-city services that are faster and more comfortable.

Train

Train travel can be a more relaxing option than travelling by bus. There are three main lines: Colombo to Matara, Colombo to Badulla and Colombo to Anuradhapura. There are also two branch lines one to Trincomalee on the east coast and another to Polonnuruwa. Because of the relatively short distances involved there are very few overnight sleeper services. It is usually best to take a second-class seat as the seats are padded and they are usually slightly less crowded. For journeys along the south coast train travel is definitely the best option. Although the trains are often late, they are infinitely better than trying to negotiate the traffic jams, crashes and pollution of the Colombo to Galle road and there are normally people selling great food on the trains – corn on the cob, Sri Lankan sweets and fried prawns.

Taxis and car hire

While travelling around Colombo taxis and tuk-tuks are a great option. It is a good idea to arrange a fixed price before setting off. For longer distances car hire can be a great way to get around. Although the costs are relatively high, they offer larger groups more freedom and comfort. One consideration that should be taken into account are the state of some of the country's roads and the over-riding lunacy of many of the country's drivers – Sri Lanka is not a great place for inexperienced drivers, especially on the Colombo-Galle road. Another option is to hire a car and a driver. Again this is a relatively expensive option, but if you're short on time and have a little money to spare it can be a good option as not only do you get transport but you get a local guide into the bargain.