



SRI LANKA THE LAND OF THE SERENDIPITY

March 10 - March 24, 2027

Led by: Tour Lecturer Michel Behar

Sri Lanka is one of the most enchanting places on the planet, an island of serendipity. The island of Sri Lanka surprises you with its intense diversity. Its mix of culture, religions, people, landscapes, wildlife and cuisines offers an incredible range of experiences, which is expanding all the time in the now-peaceful climate. It is easy to get around too – even a short trip could encompass golden beaches, rainforests, tea plantations and mountain ranges. But Sri Lanka is not just naturally beautiful; there are ancient cities, shrines sacred to different faiths, granite-carved fortresses and delicious food. With 16 national parks and eight UNESCO World Heritage Sites, it is a country that is rich in culture, natural splendor and hospitality, just waiting to be rediscovered.

Ihab Zaki
Managing Director

Wednesday, March 10

Arrive in Colombo (SRI LANKA)



Upon arrival in **Colombo's** Bandaranaike International Airport, meet the guide & transfer to *Jetwing Beach hotel or similar* in **Negombo** for check in, dinner and overnight. **(D)**

Thursday, March 11

Negombo (City Tour)



After breakfast, start the day with a visit to the vibrant **Negombo Fish Market**, a bustling hub of activity near the tranquil Negombo Lagoon. As we wander through the market, witness the local fishermen unloading their fresh catches, from fish to prawns, in a lively and authentic atmosphere. The sights, sounds, and smells of the market offer a fascinating glimpse into Sri Lanka's maritime culture, and it's a great place to pick up some local insights and maybe even try some fresh seafood. From the market, head to the **historic Dutch Fort**, which dates back to around 1678. Although the fort is likely to be closed to visitors due to its condition, we can still take a peek at its exterior and learn about its rich history. As we explore the surrounding area, get a chance to see some of the remaining colonial buildings that are still in use today, offering a glimpse of Negombo's rich cultural heritage. In the afternoon, take a relaxing boat ride through the Dutch canals at the **Muthuraj Wela Nature Reserve**, a thriving saline wetland and bird haven. This unique ecosystem was once a rice-growing area, but after saltwater flooding, nature reclaimed the land, and it's now home to an incredible array of wildlife. As we glide through the canals, spot a variety of bird species, including some colorful residents, and maybe even catch a glimpse of monkeys and crocodiles. The water lilies and other aquatic plants add to the serene atmosphere, making this a perfect spot to unwind and connect with nature. Return to the *Hotel* for overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Friday, March 12

Negombo - Anuradhapura



After breakfast, begin the scenic drive to **Anuradhapura**, the ancient capital of Sri Lanka. As the journey unfolds,

pass through lush countryside, where rolling hills, verdant forests, and rustic villages create a picturesque backdrop. The road meanders through charming small towns, offering glimpses of everyday rural life and, occasionally, local artisans at work—each scene a window into the heart of Sri Lanka's cultural landscape. Upon arrival in Anuradhapura in the afternoon, our first stop is the sacred **Sri Maha Bodhiya (Jaya Sri Maha Bodhi)**—the oldest living human-planted tree in the world, with an unbroken lineage dating back to 288 BC. This Sacred Fig tree is a direct descendant of the Bodhi tree under which Lord Buddha attained enlightenment in Bodh Gaya, India. Deeply revered by Buddhists across the globe, it remains one of the most venerated relics in Sri Lanka, drawing pilgrims and spiritual seekers year-round.

Next, continue to the **Ruwanwelisaya**, one of the most iconic stupas in Sri Lanka and a marvel of ancient Sinhalese architecture. Known also as the **Great Stupa**, it was built in 140 BC by the legendary King Dutugemunu as a tribute to the Buddha and a symbol of Buddhist revival in the country. The stupa's base is adorned with a magnificent frieze of carved elephants, representing strength and protection. The design of the stupa is rich in symbolism: the dome reflects the boundless nature of the Buddha's teachings; the four rectangular terraces above it symbolize the Four Noble Truths; the concentric rings represent the Noble Eightfold Path; and the crystal pinnacle signifies the ultimate goal of enlightenment. After the explorations, transfer to *Rajarata Hotel or similar* for check-in, followed by dinner and overnight **(B,L,D)**

Saturday, March 13

Anuradhapura (Aukana & Mihintale Dambulla)



After breakfast at the Hotel, begin the day with a journey steeped in spiritual and historical significance. Our first stop is the magnificent **Aukana Buddha Statue**, one of Sri Lanka's most iconic and well-preserved ancient monuments. Towering 42 feet, this awe-inspiring statue was carved during the 5th century B.C. under the reign of

King Dhatusena. The name “*Aukana*” translates to “sun eating,” and the statue is best appreciated in the soft light of morning. Nestled beneath a recently constructed brick shelter—thought to mirror a 1,000-year-old image house—this serene masterpiece remains a testament to the island’s rich spiritual legacy. Later in the afternoon, proceed to the sacred site of **Mihintale**, often referred to as the cradle of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. Perched atop a series of rocky hills, Mihintale is where Mahinda Thero famously met King Devanampiyatissa, initiating the island’s conversion to Buddhism. Today, thousands of pilgrims ascend the 1,840 ancient stone steps to reach the summit, where they are rewarded with panoramic views and the profound spiritual aura of the dagoba at the peak. Return to the Hotel for a relaxing evening and enjoy a traditional Sri Lankan dinner overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Sunday, March 14

Anuradapura - Dambulla



After breakfast, proceed to the heart of Sri Lanka’s Cultural Triangle—**Dambulla/Sigiriya**. This region is famed for its ancient temples, majestic landscapes, and awe-inspiring ruins. As the day cools, prepare for an unforgettable experience: the ascent of the legendary **Sigiriya Rock Fortress**, also known as *Lion Rock*. Rising dramatically 600 feet from the jungle floor, this ancient citadel was once the opulent royal residence of King Kasyapa. The climb to the summit, via 1,200 steps, begins with a tranquil stroll through beautifully landscaped **pleasure gardens**, complete with water gardens, fountains, and boulder gardens, evidence of advanced hydraulic systems centuries ahead of their time. Halfway up, marvel at the iconic frescoes and the massive lion’s paws that once formed the grand entrance to the palace above. From the summit, enjoy breathtaking panoramic views and wander through the ruins of the king’s gleaming white palace, once a place of splendid isolation and tragic history. After descending, enjoy a relaxing evening immersed in the serene natural beauty of the area. Transfer to *Amaya Lake Resort or similar* for check-in, dinner and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Monday, March 15

Dambulla - Polonnaruwa - Minneriya



After breakfast, set off on a scenic drive to the historic city of **Polonnaruwa**. 1.5 hours from Sigiriya. Recognized as a **UNESCO World Heritage Site**, Polonnaruwa served as the second capital of Sri Lanka after the fall of Anuradhapura. It was here that King Vijayabahu I reunified the country in 1070 AD, and over the next several centuries, the city flourished as a center of art, religion, and commerce. Your guided city tour will take

you through a richly significant archaeological site. Highlights include the **Archaeological Museum** to understand the city’s layout and history; the **Royal Palace**, once a grand structure with impressive walls and remnants of its audience hall; the **Quadrangle**, a sacred site filled with stupas, shrines, and intricate carvings; **Lankatilaka and Gal Vihara**, stunning stone temples with colossal Buddha statues, **Pabalu Vehera**, **Rankot Vihara**, and **Dagaba Kiri Vihar**, iconic stupas showcasing ancient Buddhist architecture, **Shiva Devale**, reflecting the influence of South Indian Hinduism during Chola rule, at around 2:00 pm, head toward **Minneriya National Park** for an exciting **Jeep Safari**, one of the best ways to experience Sri Lanka’s spectacular wildlife up close. The park spans nearly 250 square kilometers and surrounds the ancient Minneriya Tank, built in the 3rd century AD by King Mahasena. The safari offers a chance to spot Herds of **Asian elephants**, especially during the famous *Gathering*, **Sloth bears**, **leopards**, **spotted deer**, **monkeys**, and more; a wide variety of birds, including **painted storks**, **cormorants**, **pelicans**, and the ever-majestic **peacocks**. The experience typically lasts 2–3 hours, with plenty of photo opportunities and moments to marvel at nature’s raw beauty. Return to your hotel in **Dambulla** to unwind after your adventurous day. Enjoy a relaxing dinner and another peaceful night surrounded by the charm of Sri Lanka’s Cultural Triangle in *Amaya Lake or similar* overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Tuesday, March 16

Dambulla - Kandy



Enjoy breakfast before exploring one of Sri Lanka’s most sacred and visually striking sites, the **Dambulla Rock Cave Temple**, also known as the Golden Temple of Dambulla. Just 30 minutes from Sigiriya, this UNESCO World Heritage Site is the largest and best-preserved cave temple complex in Sri Lanka. Carved into a massive granite outcrop, the temple dates back over 2,000 years to the reign of **King Valagamba**, who once sought refuge in these caves. Upon reclaiming his throne, the king built this magnificent temple complex in gratitude. As you explore the five sanctuaries, discover over 150 stunning Buddha statues and intricate ceiling murals that narrate scenes from Buddhist mythology and Sri Lankan history. The panoramic view from the temple’s summit is a bonus reward for your short climb.

Drive to **Kandy**, the cultural capital of Sri Lanka. En route, stop at a lush **Spice Garden in Matale**. Sri Lanka is known as the *Land of Spices* and walk through fragrant plantations where 15 varieties of spices are cultivated, including cinnamon, cardamom, nutmeg, vanilla,

turmeric, and cloves. Learn about their culinary, medicinal, and cosmetic uses, and enjoy a traditional meal enhanced with freshly harvested herbs. A small shop offers high-quality spices and herbal products if you wish to bring a piece of Sri Lanka home. Upon arrival in **Kandy**, unwind and soak in the atmosphere of this lakeside city nestled among misty hills. In the early evening, witness a vibrant **cultural dance performance**, a colorful display of traditional Kandyan music, drumming, and elaborate dances that reflect centuries of local tradition. The energy and passion of the performers make this unforgettable cultural immersion. Enjoy a warm, locally inspired dinner and spend the night in the heart of **Kandy**, where history and heritage come alive at *Cinnamon Citadel or similar*. **(B,L,D)**

Wednesday, March 17

Kandy - Pinawala - Kandy



After breakfast, embark on a morning excursion to the renowned **Pinnawala Elephant Orphanage**, located along the banks of the Maha Oya River in **Kegalle**. Established in 1975 by the Department of Wildlife Conservation, the orphanage was created to provide care and protection for abandoned and injured elephants found in the wild. It started with just five baby elephants and has since grown into a sanctuary home to dozens of elephants, including babies born under the facility's successful captive breeding program. Watch as the elephants are bottle-fed or bathe playfully in the river a heartwarming and memorable experience for all animal lovers. Have your camera-ready during bath time near the river for the most iconic photo moments. Return to the Hotel in **Kandy** for a brief rest before the spiritual and cultural immersion continues.

In the late afternoon, head to visit the sacred **Temple of the Tooth Relic (Sri Dalada Maligawa)**, the most revered Buddhist site in Sri Lanka. This stunning lakeside temple, built in the 16th century, houses a tooth relic believed to belong to the Buddha. The temple is a place of daily worship and rituals, where we can witness devotees offering flowers, incense, and prayers in a serene yet vibrant atmosphere. As dusk falls, enjoy another opportunity to attend a mesmerizing **Kandyan Cultural Dance Show** (if not experienced the previous night). The performance features a dazzling array of traditional Sri Lankan dance forms—from graceful Kandyan movements to energetic folk dances—accompanied by rhythmic drumming and culminating in an awe-inspiring fire-walking display. Conclude your day with a delicious dinner and a peaceful overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Thursday, March 18

Kandy - Nuwara Eliya



After breakfast, embark on one of the most scenic experiences in Sri Lanka—a **train** journey into the heart of the hill country. Travel from Kandy to **Nanu Oya**, the station that serves the charming colonial-era town of **Nuwara Eliya**, often referred to as "*Little England*" due to its cool climate & picturesque British-style architecture. This iconic train ride is considered one of the most beautiful in the world, winding its way through misty mountains, emerald, green tea plantations, cascading waterfalls, and dense forested valleys. Built in 1864 by the British to transport tea and coffee from the highlands, the railway remains a functional masterpiece and a beloved mode of travel for locals and tourists alike. Upon arrival at **Nanu Oya station**, a private vehicle will be waiting to transfer you to *Araliya Green Hills or similar* for check-in, have some free time to relax and soak in the cool mountain air and tranquil ambiance of this hill country retreat. If Time permits, we may visit a **working tea factory**, where we can witness Sri Lanka's world-renowned tea production process firsthand. Walk through the lush tea estates, observe skilled tea pickers at work, and learn how the tender leaves are transformed through rolling, fermenting, drying, and grading. The tour ends with a tasting session—a treat for tea lovers and the curious alike. Enjoy dinner and overnight at the *Hotel*. **(B,L,D)**

Friday, March 19

Nuwara Eliya (Horton Plain)



After an early breakfast, head out to explore the wild beauty of **Horton Plains National Park**, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and one of Sri Lanka's most treasured natural reserves. Located on a plateau over 6900 feet above sea level, Horton Plains is a biodiversity hotspot home to over 750 species of flora, 24 types of mammals, and nearly 90 bird species. Set off on the iconic **Horton Plains trek**, a scenic 6 miles loop that takes approximately 3–5 hours, depending on the pace and stops. The highlight of the trek is the jaw-dropping viewpoint at **World's End**, a dramatic escarpment with a sheer drop of nearly 880 meters. On clear days, we can see all the way to the southern coast of the island.

Continue along the trail to **Baker's Falls**, a picturesque cascade surrounded by dense montane forest. Pass **Mini World's End**, a smaller but equally scenic viewpoint. Return to Nuwara Eliya and enjoy some leisure time or a relaxing lunch before embarking on a **city tour** of this quaint hill station, affectionately known as "*Little England*." Nestled at an elevation of over 5,900 feet, the

city offers a cool climate and nostalgic charm. Explore landmarks that reflect its British colonial heritage: The **Old Brick Post Office**, a red-brick symbol of the town The **Hill Club**, resembling an English country house with a formal dress code and vintage décor, The beautifully maintained **18-hole golf course**, The **Victoria Park** and **Gregory Lake**, perfect for a quiet stroll or paddle boat ride, Let the misty atmosphere, rose gardens, and historic buildings transport us to a bygone era of elegance and simplicity. Return to the *Hotel* for dinner and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Saturday, March 20 Nuwara Eliya - Mirissa



Enjoy breakfast before departing for the southern coast town of **Mirissa**, a picturesque beach destination renowned for its relaxed vibe and ocean views. Before leaving the hill country, make a stop at the famous **Nine Arch Bridge** near Ella, one of Sri Lanka's most iconic engineering marvels. Nestled amidst dense jungle and rolling tea plantations, this elegant railway bridge stretches across a lush valley at a height of 78 feet. Built entirely from stone, bricks, and cement without the use of steel, the bridge is locally known as "*Ahas Namaye Palama*" or "*Nine Skies Bridge*" because when you stand beneath it, you can see the sky framed perfectly through its nine arches.

This spot offers fantastic photo opportunities and a chance to witness a local train passing by in one of the most scenic settings imaginable. Continuing towards Mirissa, visit **Udawalawe National Park** for an exciting late afternoon safari. This vast wildlife reserve is famous for its large population of wild elephants, estimated to be around 500 individuals, and offers excellent chances to spot them in their natural habitat. As we explore the park's open grasslands and sparse forests with our knowledgeable guide, keep an eye out for other wildlife including sambar deer, wild buffalo, leopards, foxes, and sloth bears. The cooler late afternoon hours are perfect for observing animals as they become more active. A special highlight is the **Udawalawe Transit Home**, a sanctuary dedicated to the rescue and rehabilitation of orphaned elephants. Here, we can see baby elephants receiving care and learn about Sri Lanka's conservation efforts to protect these magnificent creatures. As the sun sets over the wilderness, enjoy the magical sights and sounds of the wild before heading onwards. After a day filled with natural wonders and memorable wildlife encounters, transfer to *Manadara Resort Mirissa* or similar for check-in, dinner and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Sunday, March 21 Mirissa (City Tour)



Start the day with an early breakfast before heading out around 6:00am for an unforgettable **whale watching excursion**. Board a specially equipped boat to explore the rich waters of the Indian Ocean. Mirissa is renowned as one of the best places in Sri Lanka, and indeed the world to witness majestic whales and playful dolphins in their natural habitat. During the boat trip, we may spot an impressive variety of marine life including **Blue whales** (the largest animals on Earth), **Bryde's whales**, **Sperm whales**, **Fin whales**, Occasionally **Killer whales (orcas)**, Several dolphin species such as **bottlenose**, **spinner**, **Risso's**, **striped**, and **common dolphins**, Keep camera ready not only for whales but also for **turtles**, **flying fish**, and the vibrant ecosystem below the waves

If time allows, we may have the opportunity to witness or even try the iconic **stilt fishing**, a unique and age-old fishing method practiced by local fishermen along Sri Lanka's southern coast. Fishermen perch atop narrow wooden stilts anchored into the shallow waters near the shore, skillfully balancing as they cast their simple fishing rods. This striking cultural tradition is a photographer's favorite and an authentic glimpse into coastal life. End the day with dinner at the resort and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Monday, March 22 Mirissa - Galle - Colombo



After breakfast, embark on a scenic coastal journey northward to Colombo, Sri Lanka's vibrant commercial capital. En route, enjoy a captivating stop in the historic city of **Galle**, where centuries of colonial heritage meet tropical charm. Our exploration begins at the iconic **Galle Fort**, a **UNESCO World Heritage Site** originally built by the Portuguese in the 16th century and later fortified by the Dutch. Today, it stands as one of Asia's best-preserved examples of colonial architecture. As you step through its weathered gates, be transported into a world of cobbled streets, elegant colonial buildings, charming cafés, art galleries, and boutique shops. Led by our guide, enjoy a blend of walking and driving through the fort, with engaging stories and insights into Galle's multicultural past and its evolving role in modern Sri Lanka. **Galle Lighthouse**, the oldest light station in Sri Lanka, beautifully poised near the fort's southern edge, **Galle Museum**, showcasing colonial artifacts and maritime history, and **Galle International Cricket Stadium**, a world-renowned venue nestled beside the Indian Ocean. This offers a glimpse into how local culture has evolved alongside its colonial roots. After the enriching experience in Galle, continue the drive along the southern

coastline to **Colombo**, and upon arrival transfer to *Radisson Colombo Hotel* or similar, for check-in, dinner and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Tuesday, March 23
Colombo (City Tour)



Enjoy breakfast before taking a comprehensive **city tour of Colombo**, Sri Lanka's dynamic capital. Once a key seaport on ancient East-West trade routes, Colombo is now a bustling metropolis where colonial charm meets cosmopolitan energy. Your guided city tour offers an insightful blend of history, architecture, local culture, and shopping, allowing the US to discover the many layers of this multicultural city shaped over centuries by Roman, Arab, Portuguese, Dutch, and British influences. **Colombo National Museum**, the largest in the country, housing artifacts from Sri Lanka's ancient royal & colonial periods, Old and New **Parliament Buildings**, impressive symbols of the nation's governance set against dramatic backdrops, **Independence Memorial Arcade and Independence Square**, significant national monuments surrounded by beautiful open spaces, **Beira Lake**, a tranquil body of water in the city center, historically used by colonial powers, **The Lighthouse & Clock Tower**, originally a lighthouse, now an iconic Colombo landmark, **Colombo Harbor**, a vital hub for Sri Lanka's international trade, **BMICH (Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall)**, a gift from China and one of the country's most prominent conference venues. After the cultural and historical explorations, enjoy a bit of retail therapy at some of Colombo's best-loved shopping spots: **Laksala**, the state-run emporium for authentic Sri Lankan handicrafts, souvenirs, and gifts, **Odel**, **Cotton Collection**, and **Liberty Plaza**, offering everything from designer clothing and homeware to local fashion and curios. Return to the *Hotel* for dinner & overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Wednesday, March 24
Colombo - USA



After an early breakfast, transfer to the airport for your flight back to the US. **(B)**

"We reserve the right to change the order of activities/visits or sites due to unexpected events such as flight cancellations or changes of schedule, or any other reasons beyond our control. We will do our best to ensure that any necessary changes when/if needed to meet the needs of our clients".

Special Tour Remarks:

This journey offers a truly authentic and immersive experience—but it is important to understand that travel through certain regions of Sri Lanka will involve **basic infrastructure and limited tourist facilities**. This is a trip for the adventurous at heart.

Please note of the following:

- Some days may involve **long hours of travel** over rural roads, with scheduled stops to stretch, explore, and experience local life along the way.
- While accommodations are **clean and comfortable**, they may lack some of the modern conveniences typically found in Western hotels.
- There may be times when **walking is necessary** to reach remote villages or explore less accessible sites.
- The overall pace can be **demanding**, and flexibility is key as we navigate off-the-beaten-path destinations.

By registering for this tour, participants confirm that they are in **good physical and mental health** and fully understand the nature of this journey. A **spirit of adventure, patience, and open-mindedness** will be essential to enjoy all the unique experiences this trip has to offer.



Tour Cost (Land Only):

6 - 9 travelers \$5,995.00

10 - 14 travelers \$4,995.00

Per person sharing in double occupancy

Single Supplement: \$995.00

Price based on group size minimum of 6 participants and maximum of 14 participants

Trip Grade: II Lodging Level: **.***

Afghanistan and Pakistan. Touring has afforded him the opportunity to capture stirring images from out of the way places in Iran, Pakistan and Mongolia just to name a few. His work has been exhibited in museums in the Netherlands and New York. He currently lectures on current affairs related to the Near East and the ethnic groups inhabiting this region. During this same period he has dabbled in journalism writing for several European newspapers on topics as varied as technology and economics.

He writes travel blogs and has done freelance work for travel guides and likes, of course what else World Music. He is specialized in leading tours to Africa, Middle East, and Central Asia along with being expert in Sahara led tours such as in Algeria, Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, Mali, Niger, Egypt, Ethiopia, the Horn of Africa, and West-Africa.

About your Lecturer, Michel Behar... boasts an impressive list of credentials and just reading through it makes you want to meet this person and share the road with him. A Dutch citizen, after his studies of Russian and Arabic in the Netherlands he took a course of advanced Arabic at the University of Khartoum in Sudan. Fluent in 12 languages including Farsi, English, Turkish, and French, he has an understanding of 7 others. He has been a tour manager since 1987 leading groups for US, Dutch, Swiss, German, and British companies.

He has led custom tours as a leader/photographer/lecturer for many prestigious museums, universities, and other institutions. He has traveled extensively throughout the world and led tours to all 21 Arab countries and for the last 20 years has turned his passion for photography into a second career. He also led tours to



Tour Includes:

- Airport/Hotel/airport transfers.
- Accommodation in hotels mentioned or similar.
- Meals as mentioned in the itinerary (B: Breakfast, L: Lunch and D: Dinner).
- Sightseeing in each city as per the itinerary.
- Services of professional English-speaking guides.
- Air-conditioned, private transportation.
- Entrance fees and donations to all sites and museums.
- Water on the bus during touring days.
- Escort of a lecturer (provided minimum number of travelers is reached).
- Gratuities to guides, drivers, rangers, etc. (provided minimum number of travelers is reached).

Tour does not include:

- International airfare USA-Sri Lanka-USA.
- **Sri Lankan Visa** (Currently an E-visa for \$50) - Subject to change).
- Beverages with or without meals.
- Items of a personal nature (camera fees, laundry, excess luggage, etc.).
- Transfers if not arriving/departing on scheduled tour dates.
- Dayroom/overnights necessitated by changes in airline schedules or early arrival.
- Trip surcharge to operate below required minimum participants.
- Gratuity to your tour manager - optional.
- Travel protection Plan (highly recommended).

Trip Grade

II Active: Some hikes, slightly more demanding walks at or to sites, few elevations, comfortable but busy schedule and some long rides.

Lodging Level:

**** Delightful:** Comfortable yet on the Spartan side, usually small but usually with private facilities. (2 or 3 stars)

***** Superior:** Lodges and hotels with additional amenities, refined service, and comfort acceptable to the western standards. (3 or 4 stars).

