

SRI LANKA



BLUE WHALES LEOPARDS & ELEPHANTS

**Wildlife Holiday in a Tropical Paradise
21st March to 1st April 2020**

**Led by
Dr. Charles Anderson**

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BLUE WHALES, ELEPHANTS & LEOPARDS

21 March to 1 April 2020

SUMMARY

Sri Lanka has long been renowned for its fabulous terrestrial wildlife and birds. It is also one of the top whale-watching destinations in the World, with Blue Whales and Sperm Whales being the prime attractions. This holiday combines the best of both, with visits to the magnificent Wilpattu National Park (for Leopards and other wildlife), Habarana (Elephants as well as birds and butterflies, and possibly also Grey Loris) and Trincomalee on the east coast (for Blue, Sperm and possibly Bryde's Whales). There will also be visits to some historical and cultural sites. And for those who cannot get enough of their whales, there will be an optional 3-day extension at Trinco for additional whale-watching.

INTRODUCTION TO SRI LANKA

Sri Lanka is a small island nation in the central Indian Ocean, just off the southern tip of India. The population of 20 million is a mix of Buddhist Sinhalese, Hindu Tamils and others. They have a rich cultural heritage, with temples and ancient ruins throughout the island. The capital city, Colombo is a bustling modern metropolis, but much of the countryside remains given over to rice cultivation, plantations and forest. Sri Lanka is well known for its spectacular scenery and wonderful terrestrial wildlife. And we will be visiting one of the wildlife highlights – Wilpattu National Park.

What was less well known, until recently, is that Sri Lankan waters are home to some of the best whale and dolphin watching in the world. At the right place and time, Blue Whale sightings are all but guaranteed. Sperm Whales and Bryde's Whales are also common, as are a variety of dolphin species.

We will visit the NE coast, near the town of Trincomalee (universally known as Trinco). Here, at this time of year, it is possible to see Blue Whales, Sperm Whales and other species.

ITINERARY

Group size: 9 plus leaders (Charles Anderson and local naturalists)

Day 1. Saturday 21 March 2020. Arrival in Sri Lanka. Arrive at Bandaranayake International Airport; transfer to 2* Tamarind Tree Hotel nearby. Remainder of day at leisure (the hotel has a pool and grounds which offer a nice start to Sri Lankan birding).

Day 2. To Anuradhapura. After breakfast we head inland to Anuradhapura (an ancient capital of Sri Lanka). The drive takes about 6 hours, and provides an introduction to the bustling outdoors life of the Asian tropics. We will stop enroute for refreshments, and for birds and any other wildlife. Check in to Palm Garden Hotel. Evening bird walk.

Days 3-5. Wilpattu National Park. Three days exploring the enormous Wilpattu National Park, renowned for its Leopards and other wildlife. One afternoon we will enjoy some of the ancient sites in Anuradhapura.

Day 6. Transfer to Habarana. Check into Habarana Village Hotel. Afternoon drive for wild Elephants and other wildlife. Possible evening excursion in search of Lorises.

Day 7. Habarana to Trincomalee. Morning visit the stupendous Sigiriya rock fortress. Afternoon transfer to Trincomalee. Our hotel there, the Trinco Blu, is right on the beach just north of Trinco town. Sunset drinks overlooking the ocean.

Days 8-10. Whale-watching. Three days of whale-watching, with a 4-6 hour boat excursion every morning. We depart from the beach immediately in front of our hotel, and should be among the whales within a matter of minutes. We will return to shore around lunchtime, and there will be opportunities in the afternoon for birding and to visit local sites, including the moving Commonwealth War Cemetery and an ancient Hindu temple.

Day 11. Head West. After breakfast drive back west, across country to Negombo, near the International Airport. Stop for lunch enroute. The journey will take about 6 hours, depending on traffic. Check into Tamarind Tree Hotel.

Day 12. Wednesday 1 April 2020. Flight home. Morning transfer (about 10 minutes drive) to International Airport for flight home.

Whale-watch Extension

There is an optional 3-day extension at Trinco, for those who would like extra time with the whales. And there is also the possibility of swimming with the whales for those who are proficient snorkelers. Instead of heading back to the airport on Day 11 we will stay on at the Trinco Blu and enjoy three more days of whale-watching. We will transfer back to near the airport on Friday 3 April, in good time for flights out on **Saturday 4 April.**

OUR HOTELS

Near airport: Tamarind Tree, 2* (Half-board)

Near Wilpattu: Palm Garden Hotel, Anuradhapura. 3-4* (Full-board). About 30 mins drive from National Park gates.

At Habarana: Habarana Village by Cinnamon, 3-4* (Full-board)

At Trincomalee: Trinco Blu by Cinnamon, 4* (Half-board). Just north of town, right on a long sandy beach.



Trinco Blu Hotel



Nearby Hindu Temple

DATES

The dates of our 2020 trip are:

	Arrive Sri Lanka	Depart Sri Lanka	Days	
Blues, Leopards, Elephants	21 Mar, Sat	1 Apr, Wed	12	£3629 pp
Whale-watching extension	1 Apr, Wed	4 Apr, Sat	3	£1319 pp

These dates are for time in Sri Lanka. Add on time at each end to include international flights.



Trinco Blu launch and Sperm Whales

BOAT TRIPS

At Trinco, we will make three morning excursions out to the whales (six excursions if the extension is added on). For this we have the exclusive use of two 20' launches, which depart right from the beach in front of the hotel. This trip will run with a small group, and a maximum of 6 in each boat. This will give plenty of room for everyone.

The boats have sun-covers, but no toilet. Late March / early April is the intermonsoon calm season, so we do expect good conditions (although thunderstorms can build in the afternoons). It is normally particularly calm in the mornings, so we will leave early, possibly taking a packed breakfast with us. Potential species include Blue Whales, Bryde's Whales, Sperm Whales, Indo-pacific Bottlenose Dolphins, Spotted Dolphins and Spinner Dolphins.



Blue whale off Trinco

CLIMATE

Sri Lanka lies just north of the equator, so the climate is tropical. March-April is normally calm and sunny, but the wind can pick up and bring occasional showers or thunderstorms in the afternoons. Temperatures typically reach 29-33°C during the day, dropping to about 25-27°C at night. Sea breezes make this quite comfortable, although when there is no wind it does feel hot.

Biting insects are occasionally a nuisance. Bring insect repellent. While inland, wear long sleeved shirts and long trousers in the evenings. At Trinco, by the coast, insects are no problem. (Note: Sri Lanka does have a low level of malaria and dengue; best to avoid getting bitten!).

COST

Blue Whales, Leopards and Elephants	£3629
Single supplement	£999
Optional whale-watching extension	£1319
Extension single supplement	£409

Includes: Hotel accommodation and meals as stated; Wilpattu excursions, including jeep hire and national park fees; whale watching excursions; standard whale watching tax; other excursions as stated; naturalist guides; airport transfers; all other land transport.

Does not include: International flights; Sri Lankan visa fee; insurance; drinks; some lunches; airport taxes; whale-watch swim-with permit (if required); gratuities; personal items. In view of uncertainty about future oil prices, we reserve the right to pass on any fuel supplement at cost if necessary.

Payment schedule: To confirm your booking we will require a non-refundable deposit of £500 per person. The balance should be paid no later than three months before departure.

It is a good idea to bring Dollars, Pounds or Euros cash to cover miscellaneous expenses.

VISAS

A tourist visa is required, and it is recommended to apply for one online before arrival. The typical cost is currently US\$30 pp. Alternatively, you can pay on arrival (currently US\$35 pp – look for the kiosk just before Immigration). However, the online procedure is quite straightforward:

www.eta.gov.lk

WHALE WATCH PERMITS

The Sri Lankan government levies a new whale-watching tax. The standard daily charge has been incorporated into the holiday cost. However, there is an additional permit required for anyone who wants to swim with the whales. Swimming with the whales is possible on this holiday, but only for those who are competent snorkelers and are happy swimming in very deep water. If you would like to do this, do tell us in advance so we can arrange your swim-with permit, for which there will be *an additional charge of \$100 per person (approx. £85)*.

FLIGHT INFORMATION

You will need to arrange your own flight to Sri Lanka. Scheduled airlines flying to Sri Lanka from UK include **Sri Lankan** (UL), **Emirates** (EK) and **Qatar Airways** (QR). Note that March is high season, and a busy time for flights; do book early. For those travelling from the UK, our trips are timed to coincide with the following flights:

Outbound

Fri 20 March 2020		
UL504	Depart Heathrow	2040h
Sat 21 March 2020		
	Arrive Colombo	1240h

Return

Wed 1 April 2020		
UL503	Depart Colombo	1305h
	Arrive Heathrow	2000h

From the UK, Emirates has flights not only from Heathrow, but also from Gatwick, Stansted, Birmingham, Manchester, Newcastle, Edinburgh and Glasgow.

Whichever flight your guests use, they will be met and transferred to our first night's hotel, and returned to the airport at the end of their holiday.

STOPOVERS

On Emirates you do have the option of a stopover in Dubai, while on Qatar Airways you could stopover in Doha. Both are very pleasant cities to visit (but probably better on the way out rather than on the return, since they start getting very hot in April). Some flights with Sri Lankan and Emirates go via the Maldives, which means there is the possibility of an island stopover. And if you would like to spend some extra time in Sri Lanka, do contact us with your ideas. We can advise on what to see, where to stay, and how to get there.

SRI LANKAN WILDLIFE

Cetaceans

The main attraction of whale and dolphin watching in Sri Lanka is the Blue Whales. Over the past few years we have had multiple sightings of Blue Whales on all of our trips, with encounters on over 90% of our days out in most years. On most days out we see 2-10 Blue Whales (with 20+ on several occasions), and are able to spend plenty of time with them. Of course, nothing can be guaranteed with wild animals, but it would be very surprising if we did not see many Blue Whales. In addition we can expect to see some of the following:

Bryde's Whale	<i>Balaenoptera brydei</i>
Eden's Whale	<i>Balaenoptera edeni</i>
Omura's Whale	<i>Balaenoptera omurai</i> (seen only once, in 2016)
Sperm Whale	<i>Physeter macrocephalus</i>
Dwarf Sperm Whale	<i>Kogia sima</i>
Longman's Beaked Whale	<i>Indopacetus pacificus</i>
Pilot Whale	<i>Globicephala macrorhynchus</i>
Spinner Dolphin	<i>Stenella longirostris</i>
Spotted Dolphin	<i>Stenella attenuata</i>
Striped Dolphin	<i>Stenella coeruleoalba</i>
Risso's Dolphin	<i>Grampus griseus</i>
Bottlenose Dolphin	<i>Tursiops truncatus</i>
Indo-pacific Bottlenose	<i>Tursiops aduncus</i>

Birds

On land, Sri Lanka is a birder's paradise. It is hard to ignore the numerous and often brightly coloured species that adorn the countryside. We are likely to see something of the order of 120+ species. While out with the whales there will be plenty of opportunity for seabird watching. We are likely to see a variety of tropical terns, and perhaps some other species.

NATURALIST

This trip will be led by Dr. Charles 'Chas' Anderson, a professional marine biologist who lives and works in the Maldives. He has made over 40 visits to Sri Lanka during the past 30 years. He is an authority on both the cetaceans and fishes of the central Indian Ocean, and the pioneer of whale and dolphin watching in the region. He predicted and discovered the previously unknown Blue Whale hotspot off southern Sri Lanka. In addition to numerous scientific papers, he has published a guidebook to the reef fishes of the Sri Lanka. Chas will be assisted by an experienced Sri Lankan naturalist and probably also by his wife Sue Anderson, who is a qualified nurse as well as an experienced and enthusiastic whale spotter.



Leopard in Wilpattu NP



Sloth Bear in Wilpattu NP

www.wildwings.co.uk