# Sri Lanka

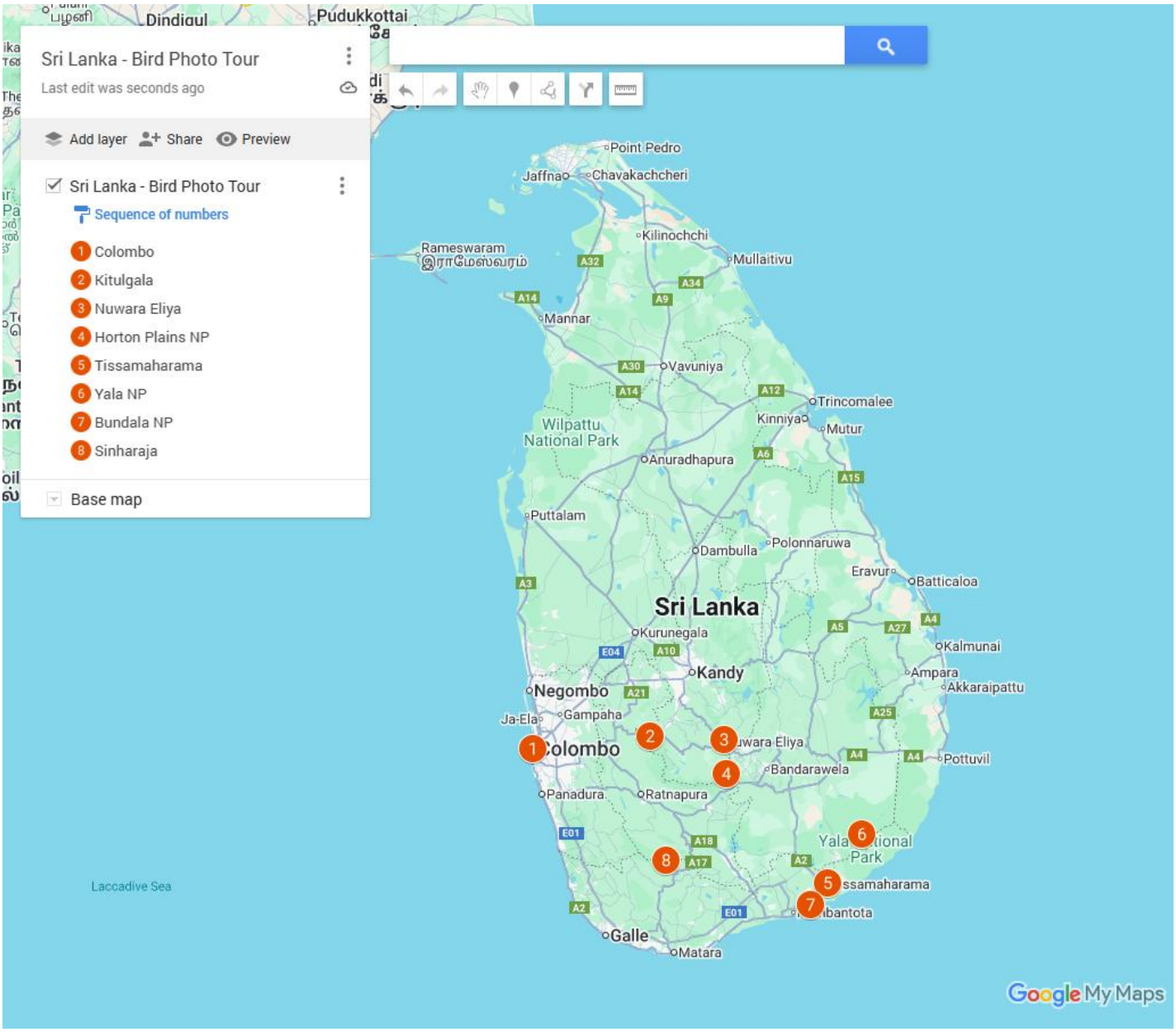
## Bird Photo Tour



**Sri Lanka Blue Magpie by Glen Valentine**

*Sri Lanka is a friendly island nation boasting verdant scenery, characterised by terraced tea plantations and forest patches, and blessed with many surprisingly large national parks brimming with game and birds. From the central highlands to the rich lowland rainforests, Sri Lanka is one of only a handful of magical destinations where it is possible to see, and potentially even photograph, every single country endemic on a well-planned trip such as this. Overall, the opportunities for photography are some of the finest in Asia making this Bird Photo Tour a 'must' for the keen bird photographer! Sri Lanka is also blessed with a fascinating history, vibrant culture and delicious cuisine, making this a truly exotic destination and a pleasure to explore.*

# *Itinerary & Map*




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| **Day 1** | **Arrival in Colombo** |
| **Day 2** | **Colombo to Kitulgala** |
| **Day 3** | **Kitulgala Rainforest** |
| **Day 4** | **Kitulgala to Nuwara Eliya** |
| **Day 5** | **Nuwara Eliya & Horton Plains** |
| **Day 6** | **Nuwara Eliya to Yala via Tissamaharama** |
| **Day 7** | **Yala National Park** |
| **Day 8** | **Yala to Embilipitiya & Uda Walawe NP via Bundala NP** |
| **Day 9** | **Embilipitiya to Sinharaja Rainforest** |
| **Days 10 & 11** | **Sinharaja Rainforest** |
| **Day 12** | **Sinharaja to Colombo, final departure** |

## *Highlights*

- ***Spending time exploring beautiful national parks like Yala, Bundala and Uda Walawe in open air safari vehicles. These reserves are some of Sri Lanka's premium wildlife havens***
- ***Enjoy a wide variety of large mammals including good chances for Leopard, Sloth Bear, Water Buffalo, and Asian Elephant***
- ***Excellent chances at seeing and even photographing all of Sri Lanka's endemic birds***

## *Birding sites in detail*

**Colombo to Kitulgala.** We depart Colombo and travel through local towns and rubber plantations to the Kitulgala. Occasional stops en route could produce White-throated Kingfisher, Indian Swiftlet, Blue-tailed Bee-eater, Greater Coucal, Crested Serpent Eagle, and Indian Pond Heron.



**Yellow-fronted Barbet by David Hoddinott**

**Kelani River.** The scenic and peaceful Kelani River is the location where the classic film, 'Bridge over the River Kwai' was filmed. The gardens of our lodge contain several interesting birds and we will no doubt want to get the cameras out rather quickly as species such as Green Imperial Pigeon, flocks of Sri Lanka Hanging Parrots feeding in the flowering trees, Yellow-fronted Barbet, the impressive Stork-billed Kingfisher, White-rumped

Munia, Orange Minivet, Golden-fronted Leafbird, Yellow-billed Babbler, Oriental Magpie Robin, Purple-rumped and Loten's Sunbirds, Pale-billed Flowerpecker and Square-tailed Bulbul can all be found.

**Kitulgala Rainforest.** We will cross the Kelani River in dugout canoes and spend time walking in the surrounding lowland tropical rainforest in search of the diurnal Chestnut-backed Owlet, Sri Lanka Junglefowl, Sri Lanka Grey Hornbill, Alexandrine, and Layard's Parakeets, the shy, Green-billed Coucal, Brown-capped and noisy flocks of Orange-billed Babblers, Brown-breasted Flycatcher, Legge's Flowerpecker and Spot-winged Thrush. The stunning Sri Lanka Blue Magpie gives itself away by its striking call and may be found feeding at eye-level, sometimes allowing very close approach and excellent photographic opportunities. Other scarce inhabitants include Sri Lanka Spurfowl and Red-faced Malkoha, but we will count ourselves lucky to see either of these two species here.

Brahminy Kite, Crested Honey Buzzard, Crested Serpent Eagle and Black Eagle may be viewed soaring over the surrounding forest, while large numbers of swifts can sometimes be seen skimming the river. These include Indian Swiftlet, Asian Palm Swift and the huge Brown-backed Needletail. The enigmatic Serendib Scops Owl, discovered as recently as 2004, also occurs here, and we will try hard to find this elusive endemic. The near-endemic and highly elusive Sri Lanka Bay Owl also occurs in the forest-proper and we might be this rarity during our time in the area if we are extremely fortunate.



**Serendib Scops Owl by Keith Valentine**

**Kitulgala area.** We'll also spend time photographing and birding in the more open, secondary forest where the conditions are often a bit easier and more rewarding than the forest interior. Although a few of the rarer and more secretive species are absent from the open, secondary forest, the habitat does support most of the area's specialties and endemics and the birds that do occur here do so in much higher densities than in the forest interior. In this habitat we'll keep a lookout for noteworthy species such as Southern and Sri Lanka Hill Mynas, Sri Lanka Grey Hornbill, Sri Lanka Green Pigeon, the low-density Crimson-fronted Barbet, wintering Indian Pitta,

Black-headed Cuckooshrike, Yellow-browed and Black-capped Bulbuls, Plum-faced Parakeet, Black-hooded Oriole, and Tickell's Blue Flycatcher. Crested Goshawk, Shikra and Banded Bay Cuckoo are also often seen here and there's even a chance of finding one of the island's rarer species such as White-faced Starling, Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher, the quite distinctive and endemic subspecies of Common Hawk-Cuckoo or Slaty-legged Crake.

**Nuwara Eliya.** The small town is located in the cooler highlands of central Sri Lanka. We'll spend our time photographing and birding various sites in the vicinity where a selection of localised endemics, restricted to these higher elevations, can be found. Targets include the extremely low-density Legge's Hawk-Eagle soaring overhead, mixed species flocks with Sri Lanka White-eye, Velvet-fronted Nuthatch, Green and Large-billed Leaf Warblers, Orange Minivet, Yellow-eared Bulbul, Dull-blue Flycatcher, Cinereous Tit and Grey-headed Canary-flycatcher and the skulking Sri Lanka Bush Warbler in the undergrowth. We will also spend time at a Sri Lanka Whistling Thrush site, where a late afternoon/dusk vigil will hopefully produce a sighting of this rare and secretive endemic.



**Indian Pitta by Greg de Klerk**

**Horton Plains.** The stunning Horton Plains National Park is a good site for the endangered and secretive Sri Lanka Whistling Thrush. This highly prized endemic, which inhabits the fringes of high-altitude forested pools, is tricky to pin down and we will be happy with any sighting of this enigmatic species. Other exciting specialities of this stunted and twisted forest include Sri Lanka Wood Pigeon, Crimson-backed Flameback, Indian Blackbird, the reclusive Sri Lanka Bush Warbler, the stunning and localised Kashmir Flycatcher, here at its winter quarters and often associating with mixed flocks, the endemic Dull-blue Flycatcher, Sri Lanka White-eye, the flashy Indian Blue Robin, Sri Lanka Scimitar Babbler, the stunning Yellow-eared Bulbul and possibly Legge's Hawk-Eagle. In

the grassland areas we'll likely encounter the near-endemic Hill Swallow, as well as Pied Bush Chat and flocks of munias that could include Tricolored, White-rumped and the rare and range-restricted Black-throated.

**Victoria Park.** Here we will search the gardens and thickets along a stream for the secretive Indian Pitta and shy Pied Thrush, both on their wintering grounds. Other noteworthy specials include Forest Wagtail, Greenish Warbler, Velvet-fronted Nuthatch, Kashmir Flycatcher and if we are very lucky, the secretive Slaty-legged Crake or endemic Sri Lanka Thrush.



**Dull-blue Flycatcher by Glen Valentine**

**Surrey Bird Sanctuary.** We may make a short stop here for Brown Wood Owl if they are still roosting. Other species of interest that we may find here while searching for the owl include Red-backed Flameback, Southern Hill Myna, Yellow-fronted and Brown-headed Barbets, Orange Minivet, Tickell's Blue and Dull-blue Flycatchers, White-browed Bulbul and Sri Lanka Wood Pigeon.

**Tissamaharama.** We'll spend time visiting the wetlands and woodlands surrounding Tissamaharama (Tissa), home to an amazing variety of water-associated birds. Many of the species here offer up great photo opportunities and we are likely to encounter Spot-billed Pelican, Little and Indian Cormorants, Oriental Darter - often seen sunning itself on dead snags, Painted Stork, Asian Openbill, Black-headed Ibis, Yellow Bittern in the thick reeds, Lesser Whistling Duck, the spectacular Pheasant-tailed Jacana in open areas of lily-covered wetland, and, if we are fortunate, the endangered Lesser Adjutant, Cotton Pygmy Goose, Greater Flamingo or the

secretive Black Bittern. We'll also visit several potential day roosts for various owl species that could include the impressive Brown Fish Owl, Indian Scops Owl, miniscule Jungle Owlet and Eastern Barn Owl. In the late afternoon we'll stake out an area of coconut palms where we hope to find a pair of the scarce White-naped Woodpecker.



**Lesser Adjutant by David Hoddinott**

**Yala National Park.** We will board open safari jeeps for a day of game viewing, photography and birding in the fabulous Yala National Park. This wonderful reserve supports superb mammals, including healthy numbers of Asian Elephant, Water Buffalo, Sambar, Spotted Deer, sounders of Wild Boar, Golden Jackal, Stripe-necked and Ruddy Mongoose, Tufted Grey Langur, Toque Macaque, Indian Hare and even Leopard! In fact, Yala claims the highest density of Leopard of any site in the world and is one of the very best places in Asia to see this elusive feline. If we are extremely fortunate, we may even stumble across a Sloth Bear, which is encountered occasionally in the reserve.

Exploring the woodlands of Yala should prove rewarding and we will search for the rare White-naped Woodpecker, the unobtrusive Sirkeer and Blue-faced Malkohas, Yellow-crowned Woodpecker, Jerdon's Bush Lark, White-browed Bulbul, Marshall's Iora, Black-headed Cuckooshrike, Barred Buttonquail, White-browed Fantail, Jerdon's Leafbird, Indian Paradise Flycatcher, Blyth's Pipit and Streaked Weaver. Other interesting species we'll likely encounter include the handsome Brahminy Starling, Sri Lanka Junglefowl, Orange-breasted

Green Pigeon, Chestnut-headed, Blue-tailed and Asian Green Bee-eaters, Grey-bellied and Jacobin Cuckoos, Yellow-wattled Lapwing, Yellow-eyed Babbler and Baya Weaver. Indian Peafowl are common in the park, and we'll almost certainly find several males in full display, one of nature's greatest and most spectacular events!

Wetlands and coastal areas literally teem with birds, including the oversized Great Stone-curlew, Little Ringed, Kentish and Pacific Golden Plovers, a variety of other migratory waders, Painted Stork, Lesser Adjutant and the incomparable but scarce and erratic, Black-necked Stork.



**Sri Lanka Junglefowl by David Hoddinott**

**Bundala National Park.** This area contains extensive coastal wetlands and saltpans, giving us a chance for more coastal species such as the impressive, White-bellied Sea Eagle, Eurasian Whimbrel, Curlew Sandpiper, congregations of Black-tailed Godwit, Little Stint, the uncommon Small and Oriental Pratincoles, Caspian, Greater Crested, Lesser Crested, Little, White-winged, Whiskered and Gull-billed Terns. Scarcer waders include Great Knot, Broad-billed Sandpiper, Common Ringed Plover, and both Red-necked and Temminck's Stints. Scanning carefully around the numerous pans and reedbeds in this area may produce Black, Cinnamon and Yellow Bitterns, Yellow-wattled Lapwing, Watercock, Pin-tailed and Greater Painted-snipe, while wintering Blyth's Pipit may be found in open fields of shorter grass and Indian Stone-curlews are often located roosting under dense, scrubby bushes.

**Uda Walawe National Park.** This extensive reserve of open grassland and scattered woodland is home to over three-hundred Asian Elephants and some scarce bird species, including the impressive and localised Malabar

Pied Hornbill, near-endemic Blue-faced Malkoha, Sirkeer Malkoha and Grey-headed Fish Eagle. Barred Buttonquail sometimes makes an appearance at the road-edge, and we also hope to find Jungle, Ashy and Grey-breasted Prinias, flocks of migratory Rosy Starling, Changeable Hawk-Eagle, and the spectacular Indian Roller. This is also the best area in Sri Lanka to observe the uncommon Jungle Cat!

**Sinharaja Rainforest.** The Sinharaja Rainforest area was selectively logged historically but has recovered well since its protection. It is now the largest area of lowland rainforest in all of Sri Lanka and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The birding around our lodge consists of forest edge and secondary scrub, which can be excellent at times. Noteworthy species we might encounter include Layard's and Plum-headed Parakeets, Yellow-fronted and Crimson-fronted Barbets, Crested Treeswift, Sri Lanka Hill and Southern Hill Mynas, Indian Paradise Flycatcher, Orange Minivet, Red-backed Flameback, Sri Lanka Swallow, Asian Brown Flycatcher, Scaly-breasted, White-rumped and the rare and elusive Black-throated Munias, Sri Lanka Hanging Parrot, Sri Lanka Scimitar Babbler, Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker, White-browed, Square-tailed and Yellow-browed Bulbuls, Sri Lanka Green Pigeon and the scarce and endemic Green-billed Coucal.



**Sri Lanka Spurfowl by Glen Valentine**

We'll spend time inside the park itself looking for Brown-capped, Dark-fronted and Orange-billed Babblers, the very secretive Sri Lanka Spurfowl – usually tracked down by its call, Layard's Parakeet screeching overhead, the migratory Chestnut-winged Cuckoo, Green-billed Coucal, Large-billed Leaf Warbler, the scarce Red-faced Malkoha, striking Malabar Trogon – often perched motionless high overhead, Spot-winged and shy Sri Lanka Thrushes and flocks of Ashy-headed Laughingthrush.

Forest clearings will afford us views of the canopy and it is here where we will scan for the scarce and very localised White-faced Starling, while watching the forest fringes we will keep our eyes peeled for Sri Lanka Hill Myna, the magnificent Sri Lanka Blue Magpie, Sri Lanka Drongo, Sri Lanka Scimitar Babbler, Legge's Flowerpecker, Brown-backed Needletail flying overhead and Black-capped Bulbul. Possible mammals include Grizzled Giant Squirrel, Purple-faced Leaf Monkey and Layard's Striped Squirrel.



**Jungle Owlet by Stephan Lorenz**

Sinharaja is also home to a colourful variety of butterflies as well as a fine selection of vividly patterned frogs, lizards, and snakes – we may even be lucky enough to encounter Hump-nosed Pit Viper or Indian Rock Python!

Night walks are strictly prohibited inside the park, but we'll try to find the endemic Serendib Scops Owl, rare and elusive Spot-bellied Eagle-Owl and Sri Lanka Bay Owl, as well as Sri Lanka Frogmouth outside the reserve. Our local guides are quite amazing at finding day roosts for these species, and we may not even need to venture out at night if we're lucky!

## *Tour Grading & Key*

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| **Photography** | | Generally excellent but no dedicated hides or ad hoc feeders. |
| **Overall Ease** | | Mostly undemanding. Suitable for all birding & wildlife interest levels. Comfortable tour for the reasonably fit. A few very early mornings & long days. Optional owling. |
| **Birding Ease** | | Moderate to easy. Most species provide good visuals in open conditions. A few trickier/skulking species. Not unusual to record all endemics on a single tour. |
| **Accommodation** | | Comfortable. |
| **Walking / Trails** | | Mostly easy walks on flat ground (roads or wide trails). A few narrow trails with the odd steep section that can be muddy or slippery. |
| **Vehicles / Roads** | | Good quality asphalt roads between most towns. Several roads to parks/small villages can be rough gravel or heavily potholed. A few long drives broken up by regular stops. |
| **Annoyances** | | Food is typically spicy, though not always hot. Lowland areas have high humidity. Chance for land leeches. |

## *Financial Arrangements and Important Notes*

Tour dates, prices, single supplement, approximate flight costs and tour spaces are displayed on our website.

Tour inclusions:

- All meals from lunch on day 1 to breakfast on day 12;
- All lodgings;
- All ground transportation during the tour;
- All reserve entrance fees;
- All guiding services
- Tips for local guides, drivers and services.

Tour exclusions:

- Visa fees;
- ANY flights;
- Any beverages (including mini-bar charges at hotels);
- Optional excursions;
- Special gratuities;
- Telephone calls, laundry and other items of a personal nature.

**Single Supplement**: The single supplement cost for this tour will be charged if you wish to have single accommodation. If RBL cannot provide you with a rooming partner for these nights although you choose to share, the single supplement will become applicable. We will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that a rooming partner is found if you do wish to share.

**Tipping**: As noted above, gratuities (drivers, hotel staff, restaurants etc.) are included on this tour. However, this does NOT include your Rockjumper leader/s. If you feel that they have given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip them at your discretion.

- **Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is fixed only in the currency printed in bold, and the actual cost in the other currencies listed will be adjusted according to prevailing exchange rates at the time of final invoicing. The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates.**
- **Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registrations, a small group supplement will be offered to confirm the tour.**
- **Tour prices are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.**
- **The designated tour leader/s may be changed at short due to unforeseen circumstances.**
- **The itinerary is indicative only. Changes may need to be made to the order in which the tour is conducted, or some of the venues we visit closer to departure. We will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.**

- It is important for the comfort of your fellow travellers that you do not over-pack. Kindly stick to 20 kg (44 lb) for check in luggage and 8 kg (18 lb) for hand luggage.
- In certain areas that contain potentially dangerous animals, you are confined to the vehicle and are, quite understandably, not allowed to exit.
- This tour does not require a high level of fitness, but participants should be reasonably fit and in good general health as most of the birding will be done on foot and may require walking for several hours at a time. Should you have any physical limitations or medical conditions, please notify us in advance of departure. For much of this tour, we will be well away from modern medical facilities.

## *Bird Photo Tours*

- Our Bird Photo Tours are a hybrid between our Classic birding tours and dedicated photographic tours. You don't have to be a professional photographer or have the biggest lens; this is for everyone with an interest in photography and birding. Whether you're using a bridge camera or the latest body and prime lens, our aims are the same.
- These tours are not aimed at seeing the most species possible on the route, rather taking time to photograph key targets and any other interesting species we may find. Naturally, the overall species list will be lower than a comparable birding focused tour.
- Whilst we may use blinds, feeders and hide setups on some of these tours, we will not be spending an entire day nor even several hours fixed in one spot.
- These tours are suitable for photographers who prefer opportunistic photography over entire days in a hide.
- Our leaders will assist in helping everyone secure good photographic opportunities and advise as much as they can on camera setup. However, they are not professional photographic tour leaders.

## *Arrival and Departure Details*

The tour starts with an arrival day in Colombo, and you are free to arrive at any time. The tour departs around midday from Colombo International Airport on day 12.

The above information in respect of arrivals and departures is a guide only. Precise arrival and departure information will be sent to you in your Tour Confirmation package once the tour has been officially confirmed. If you wish to arrive early and/or depart late and would like assistance in this regard, kindly contact the Rockjumper office.

Colombo International Airport (IATA: CMB) is the main port of entry and departure for international flights into and out of Sri Lanka.

Visa requirements differ by country, nationality of the traveller and duration and purpose of your intended stay. It may be necessary to obtain a visa or an electronic travel authorization in advance of your travel. It is therefore vitally important that you check with your travel agent/consulate/embassy for exact visa requirements.

**DO NOT book any flights until the Rockjumper Team have officially confirmed the tour.**