

Sri Lanka: Combined Nature and Cultural tour. October 2023

Tour company: [WalkWithJith.com](http://WalkWithJith.com)

This 14-day tour is highly recommended. It extremely well organized, uses good quality hotels, transportation and expert, highly experienced, and friendly staff. The hotels have comfortable rooms, excellent service and an abundance of good food for people of all tastes.

The major cultural sites included the Sigiriya Rock Fortress dating from the 5th Century AD, the Dambulla Cave temple dating to the first century BC, and the tea-growing region of the Nuwara Eliya Highland region. The ancient buddha statues and murals on the cave walls at Dambulla are spectacular. In the grounds of the hotels and sites numerous birds (babblers, woodpeckers, barbets, leaf-birds, sunbirds, pigeons, mynas, parakeets, swallows, flycatchers), lizards, butterflies, dragonflies, Sri Lanka giant squirrel and toque monkeys were to be seen. We visited the nearby forests and parks including the UdawaEa Kelle forest reserve near Kandy, Victoria Park, Horton Plains National Park, Surrey Bird Sanctuary and wetlands at Tissamaharama.





We did a day trip In the Horton Plains national park which contains extensive areas of montane forest. Although we had rain and foggy conditions impairing the photography, we saw many endemic species including the Sri Lankan wood pigeon, Sri Lankan White-eye, Yellow-eared bulbul, dusky blue flycatcher, orange-billed babbler, scimitar-billed babbler, Sri Lankan bush warbler and the Sri Lankan Whistling Thrush.





Two days spent at Yala National Park was one of the highlights of the trip. Here, photography from jeeps in very diverse habitat afforded excellent opportunities to capture many different bird and animal species. We caught glimpses of the Sri Lankan leopard and got very close to langur monkeys, elephants, spotted deer, and wild boar. This was followed by a half day jeep safari in Lunugamvehera national park which was also excellent for water birds and raptors. Next, we visited Debarawewa wetland where we photographed herons (pond, grey and purple), purple swamphens, pygmy geese, black-headed ibis, and pheasant-tailed jacana.



We spent 2 days exploring the Sinharaja rain forest site in the heart of the wet zone. The park's extensive bird list includes most of the country's endemics and we saw Sri Lanka spur fowl, orange-billed babbler, red-faced malchoa, Legg's flowerpecker, spot-winged thrush, Sri Lankan Forest Myna, emerald dove, and purple-faced leaf monkeys.

Overall, during this trip we spotted 152 different species of birds including many of the endemic species and sub-species. Five Owl species including the Serendib Scops owl were seen. We

photographed the vast majority of these birds. However, the photography is of the “on the go” style with birds in difficult lighting conditions, often high in the forest canopy and sometimes not in ideal weather conditions, rather than easy photography from blinds and around feeders. In summary, I think this is one of the best organized, comprehensive and high-quality nature tours that I have done and it comes at a very reasonable cost. However, it is aimed at clients who are still relatively fit and adventuresome as one has to walk carrying equipment moderate distances and be able to climb up rocky paths in some places.