

The Reptiles & Amphibians of Sri Lanka

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline Itinerary

- Day 1 – 2** Outbound Flights. Arrive Colombo
-
- Day 3 – 4** Explore Sri Lanka's wonderful habitats
-
- Day 16** Depart Colombo. Inbound flights
-

Departs

August – September

Focus

Reptiles and Amphibians

Grading

Important: please read the 'Tour Grading and Focus' section at the end of the document before booking.

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code LKA12)

Highlights

- Incredible endemic lizards; Hump Snout Lizard, Rhino-horned Lizard, Leaf-nosed Lizard and Pygmy Lizard
- Highly sought-after snakes such as Sri Lanka Humpnose Viper, Indian Star Tortoise, Green Vine Snake and Sri Lankan Green Pitviper
- Visit the wonderful cultural sites of Pidurangala Rock temple, Temple of the Sacred Tooth, Dambulla cave temples and Sigiriya Lion Rock
- Comfortable en suite accommodation throughout



Indian Star Tortoise, Rhino-horned Lizard, Sri Lankan Green Pit Viper



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Introduction

Sri Lanka is a naturalist's paradise. The island's isolation from the mainland and the country's wide range of altitudes have given Sri Lanka a variation in climate and biodiversity normally found across an entire continent. These varying climates and altitudes are synonymous with a wonderful diversity of habitats and a hugely exciting range of reptile and amphibian species.

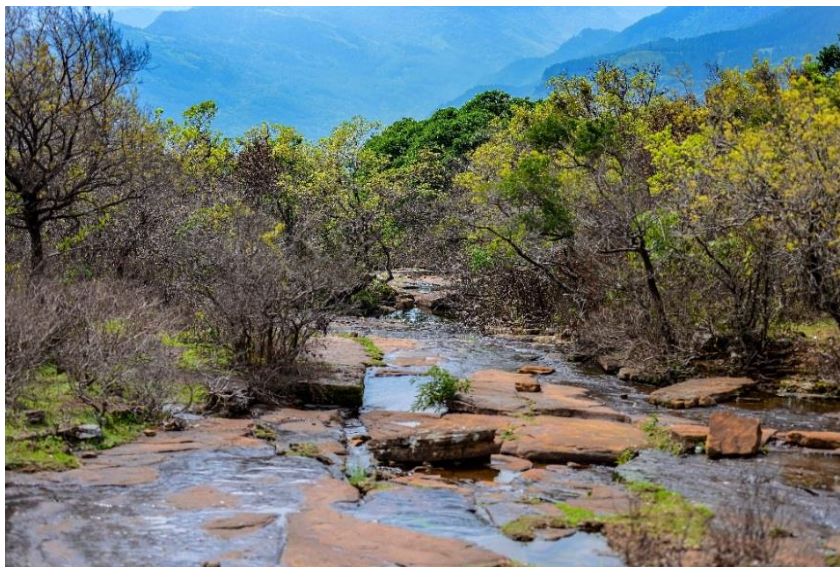
219 species of reptiles are found on Sri Lanka and an incredible 159 of these are endemic, with a number of reptile families which can only be found here. Additionally, Sri Lanka has some of the most morphologically spectacular reptiles on earth such as the Rhino-horned Lizard, Hump Snout Lizard, Kangaroo Lizards, Humpnose Vipers and Sri Lankan Flapshell Turtle. Sri Lanka also has some non-endemic icons; Indian Star Tortoise, Indian Chameleon, Mugger Crocodile and Russel's Viper.

The amphibians are fantastic in Sri Lanka too; 120 species of which 109 are endemic and can only be found here. Species such as the Narrow-mouthed Frogs, Treefrogs and even Caecilians such as the lovely Common Yellow-banded Caecilian.

This itinerary is carefully planned to take in the key locations to find Sri Lanka's special reptiles and amphibians. We'll visit the Sinharaja biosphere's stunning primary tropical rainforest with habitats packed full of insects, butterflies and birds alongside the reptiles and amphibians. In the highlands, we'll visit Horton Plains National Park where we'll search montane grassland and cloud-forest, rich in biodiversity. We'll also search Morningside for its highly range restricted reptiles and amphibians.

Not only will this itinerary go in search of Sri Lanka's finest wildlife, but it has been prepared to take in some of Sri Lanka's wonderful cultural locations too; Pidurangala Rock temple, Temple of the Tooth, Rangiri Dambulla Cave Temple and Sigiriya Lion Rock.

To this exciting herpetology itinerary we can add delightful cuisine, wonderful history and the chance to see such species as Leopard, Indian Elephant, Sloth Bear, Indian Pitta, Bee-eaters, Blue Magpie and Junglefowl. This is simply an unmissable tour for the keen naturalist.



One of the many stunning biotopes we'll search for Reptiles & Amphibians on this tour

Itinerary

NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Day 1

Depart UK

If using the group flights, we depart London in the evening on a direct overnight Sri Lankan Airlines scheduled flight to Colombo. Should you wish to join the holiday from another home country, please do get in touch and we will be very pleased to assist with such arrangements.

Day 2

Colombo / Wilpattu

We arrive into Colombo airport early this afternoon where we will be met by our herpetologist tour leader who will be with us throughout the tour. From the airport, we'll head along the coast to the north-west of the island in Wilpattu. We'll have the chance to freshen up and to enjoy our first meal together before heading out on the first of our late evening excursions in search of nocturnal reptiles and amphibians. Throughout the tour, our spotlighting sessions will also see us come across some exciting wildlife across the taxa such as nocturnal mammals, owls, moths and much more. We'll take the time to appreciate any special species we come across, whilst dedicating the majority of our time to our pursuit of Sri Lanka's reptiles and amphibians.



Indian Star Tortoise (*Geochelone elegans*)

The exciting reptile and amphibian species we can hope to first encounter include the infamous and beautiful Russel's Viper (*Daboia russelii*), Bengal Monitor (*Varanus bengalensis*), Indian Star Tortoise (*Geochelone elegans*), Sri Lankan Flapshell Turtle (*Lissemys ceylonensis*), Mugger Crocodile (*Crocodylus palustris*), Oriental Rat Snake (*Ptyas mucosa*), Indian Burrowing Frog (*Sphaerotheca breviceps*), Mihintale Red Narrow-mouthed Frog (*Microhyla mihintalei*) and Sri Lanka Whipping Frog (*Polypedates cruciger*) amongst numerous others.

Tonight we'll stay in a comfortable lodge not far from the boundary of Wilpattu National Park.

Day 3

Wilpattu National Park

After breakfast we'll head into Wilpattu National Park where we'll find a series of "Willus" (natural lakes) holding rainwater, a vital resource for reptiles and amphibians. We'll enjoy a half-day safari of the national park where we will hope to find any of the diurnal contingent we missed last night, plus an exciting chance to find Indian Chameleon (*Chamaeleo zeylanicus*), Ceylonese Dasia (*Dasia haliana*), the vividly coloured Common Green Forest Lizard (*Calotes calotes*), Oriental Garden Lizard

(*Calotes versicolor*), Ceylon Bloodsucker (*Calotes ceylonensis*) and the fantastic Black-spotted Kangaroo Lizard (*Otocryptis nigristigma*).

After our safari there will be time for a rest and shower before an evening walk around the hotel grounds in search of reptiles and amphibians. After dinner there will be another chance to go in search of any nocturnal species we have missed during the previous days.

Day 4 - 5

Sigiriya

Today we'll proceed to Sigiriya, stopping at Pidurangala Rock where will have the opportunity to search for reptiles in the areas surrounding this iconic location. New species in this area could



Pidurangala Rock - an iconic place to search for endemic lizards!

include Sri Lanka Bronze Skink (*Eutropis madaraszii*), Water Monitor (*Varanus salvator*), and the stunning Indian Flying Snake (*Chrysopelea taprobanica*). We'll have time to take in the views before heading back to our hotel.

After breakfast on the following morning we'll make the exciting ascent of Sigiriya Lion Rock and explore the surrounding water holes for reptile and amphibian life.

On both evenings we will enjoy dinner before embarking on night drives and walks. Species we may encounter here include the impressive Indian Rock Python (*Python molurus pimbura*), Sri Lanka Cat Snake (*Boiga ceylonensis*), Indian Gamma Snake (*Boiga trigonata*), Gravenhorst's Golden-backed Frog (*Hydrophylax gracilis*), Sri Lankan Painted Frog (*Uperodon taprobanicus*), Marbled Globular Frog (*Uperodon systoma*) and Spotted Treefrog (*Polypedates maculatus*).

In Sigiriya we'll stay in very comfortable accommodation with well-appointed and air-conditioned rooms.

Day 6

Matale / Knuckles

After exploring the central region's wonderful landscapes, it will be time to journey 70km south, to Matale, stopping en-route to visit Rangiri Dambulla Cave Temple UNESCO World Heritage Site. A sacred pilgrimage site for over 2000 years, this cave monastery, with its five sanctuaries, is the largest, best-preserved cave-temple complex in Sri Lanka. The Buddhist mural paintings (covering an area of 2,100 m²) are of particular importance, as are the 157 statues.

After lunch we'll explore the Riverstone Mountain range where we can enjoy a new range of species, such as Trinket Snake (*Coelognathus helena*), Green Vine Snake (*Ahaetulla nasuta*), Brown Vine Snake (*Ahaetulla pulverulenta*), Buff Striped Keelback (*Amphiesma stolatum*), Northern Sri Lanka

Gecko (*Cyrtodactylus yakhuna*), Spotted Bow-finger Gecko (*Cyrtodactylus triedrus*), Kandyan Shrub Frog (*Pseudophilautus rus*) and Leaf-dwelling Shrub Frog (*Pseudophilautus folicola*).

In Matale we'll stay in a very comfortable hotel with air conditioning.

Day 7

Pitawala & Riverstone

After breakfast we'll have time to further explore the Pitawala and Riverstone regions. There are many more species to find today, amongst them some of the exciting endemic lizards; the endangered Leaf-nosed Lizard (*Ceratophora tennentii*), Dumbara Agama (*Cophotis dumbara*), and Pethiyagoda's Crestless Lizard (*Calotes pethiyagoda*).



Leaf-nosed Lizard (*Ceratophora tennentii*)

Around the streams here we'll hope to see some fantastic amphibians including the recently discovered *Lankanectes pera*, the critically endangered Kirthisinghe's Rock Frog (*Nannophrys marmorata*), and Hoffman's Shrub Frog (*Pseudophilautus hoffmanni*).

Day 8

Nuwara Eliya via Kandy

After an early breakfast we continue to Nuwara Eliya visiting the Temple of the Tooth enroute, one of the best known Buddhist temples in the country. We'll enjoy lunch in a restaurant in Kandy and this afternoon you will have the option of either having the time at your leisure to re-charge your body (and camera!) batteries, or to head out to a nearby forest where we have another opportunity for Rhino-horned Lizard, plus Black-cheek Lizard (*Calotes nigrilabris*), Pygmy Lizard (*Cophotis ceylanica*) and Common Rough-sided Snake (*Aspidura trachyprocta*). Whether you rest or take the excursion in the afternoon, there will be another opportunity for these species tomorrow.

For the next two nights we'll stay in a comfortable hotel surrounded by greenery.

Day 9

Hortons Plains National Park

Today we have a full day in Hortons Plains National Park. This is a fascinating place, a mixture of open grassy expanses and patches of forest, much of the latter festooned with epiphytes. The scenery is spectacular and on clear days it is possible to see the distant summit of Adam's Peak. At 'World's End', the plateau drops steeply to the plains over 1,000 metres below and this becomes a swirling cauldron of cloud as the day progresses.

Here, amongst the exciting species we had the opportunity to see in yesterday's excursion, we'll have a chance for two 'hump-nosed' species; Sri Lanka Humpnose Viper (*Hypnale nepa*) and the remarkable and highly sought-after Hump Snout Lizard (*Lyriocephalus scutatus*). Amphibians here include the endangered Half-webbed Pug-snouted Frog (*Uperodon palmatus*), Small-eared Shrub Frog (*Pseudophilautus microtympanum*) and Saddled Treefrog (*Taruga eques*).

In the park we can see some lovely bird species including Sri Lanka White Eye, Oriental Magpie-robin, Loten's Sunbird, Dull-blue and Kashmir Flycatcher and Orange Minivet. Mammals may include Purple-faced Langur, Dusky Palm Squirrel and Sri Lankan Giant Squirrel.

Day 10

Kitulgala

After an early breakfast we'll begin our journey west, proceeding to Kitulgala. Here, and over the



Hump Snout Lizard (*Lyriocephalus scutatus*)

next four days, represents our best opportunity to find the incredible Hump Snout Lizard. From our base in Kitulgala we'll search for Brown-patched Kangaroo Lizard (*Otocryptis wiegmanni*), Ceylon Wolf Snake (*Lycodon carinatus*), Montane Ceylon Krait (*Bungarus ceylonicus*), Common Bronze-back (*Dendrelaphis schokari*), Sri Lanka Wart Frog (*Lankanectes corrugatus*) and Long-snouted Treefrog (*Taruga longinasus*) amongst others.

Tonight we'll stay in a very comfortable hotel with air-conditioned rooms.

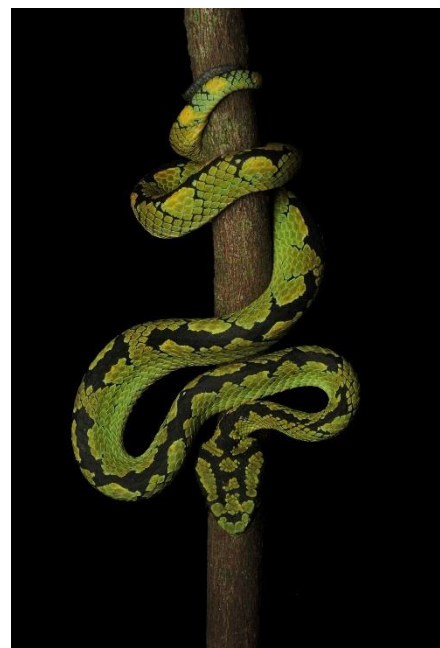
Day 11 - 12

Sinharaja

You'll have the morning at leisure before we enjoy lunch together and head to Sinharaja. Our hotel here is just 5 minutes away from the spectacular Sinharaja Rainforest. In the evening we'll have time to explore the hotel surroundings.

The following morning we'll have the full day to explore the delights of the rainforest. We'll try to see many special reptiles species here including Rough-nosed Horned Lizard (*Ceratophora aspera*), Whistling Lizard (*Calotes liolepis*), Greer's Mabuya (*Eutropis greeri*) Lowlands Humpnose Viper (*Hypnale zara*), Humpnose Viper (*Hypnale hypnale*), White-lipped Pitviper (*Trimeresurus albolabris*) and the stunning Sri Lankan Green Pitviper (*Trimeresurus trigonocephalus*).

Amphibians here may include Kirtisinghe's Frog (*Minervarya kirtisinghei*), Ceylon Streamlined Frog (*Nannophrys*



Sri Lankan Green Pit Viper (*Trimeresurus trianocephalus*)

ceylonensis), Sharp-snouted Shrub Frog (*Pseudophilautus cuspis*) and Günther's Golden-backed Frog (*Indosylvirana temporalis*).

As we are searching for reptiles and amphibians we'll have the chance to see some wonderful species from other taxa. Sri Lanka Junglefowl, Malabar Trogon, Sri Lanka Frogmouth, Layard's Parakeet, Asian Emerald Dove, Sri Lanka Hanging-Parrot, Bamboo Orchid, Glad-eye Bushbrown and Blue Mormon Swallowtail to name just a select few.

In Sinharaja, we stay in a simple 'birdwatching lodge', remotely situated in a valley beneath Sinharaja Rainforest. Its 12 en-suite rooms are set in small bungalows with verandahs and the surroundings are luxuriant gardens and forests which we can enjoy searching for wildlife.

Day 13 - 14

Morningside

This morning we'll continue south to Morningside, a rarely-visited forest patch in the east of Sinharaja, where we hope to find some very special species which are unique to this area. Erdelen's Horned Lizard (*Ceratophora erdeleni*), Karu's Horned Lizard (*Ceratophora karu*) and Ceylon Black-band Whistling Lizard (*Calotes desilva*) are all endemic here and we hope to see them during our excursion. Sri Lankan Keelback Blossom Krait (*Rhabdophis ceylonensis*), Peters' Tree Skink (*Lankascincus fallax*), and Striped Bronzeback (*Dendrelaphis caudolineolatus*) are likely other new species to find here along with another chance at some of Sri Lanka's most sought-after reptiles; Sri Lankan Green Pit Viper, Indian Star Tortoise, Hump Snout Lizard, Sri Lankan Flapshell, Brown-patched Kangaroo Lizard and Mugger Crocodile.



Poppy's Shrub Frog (*Pseudophilautus poppiae*)

Some of the special amphibians here include the endangered Kelaart's Toad (*Adenomus kelaartii*), Poppy's Shrub Frog (*Pseudophilautus poppiae*), Golden-eyed Shrub Frog (*Pseudophilautus ocularis*), Karunaratne's Narrow-mouthed Frog (*Microhyla karunaratnei*) and Brown Pug-snout Frog (*Uperodon obscurus*).

Our next two nights are spent at a very comfortable hotel, just 1 km from Udawalawe National Park. On the second day, there is a chance to rest at the hotel for those wish. For those participants who wish, we'll make an exciting second day of exploring Morningside.

Day 15

Udawalawe National Park

With a packed-breakfast, we'll take a fantastic morning's safari at Udawalawe National Park. On our safari at Udawalawe we hope to find Brown-speckled Whipsnake (*Ahaetulla pulverulenta*), Buff

Striped Keelback, Oriental Rat Snake, Indian Coral Snake (*Calliophis melanurus*), Vellore Bridal Snake (*Lycodon nympha*), and Spectacled Cobra (*Naja naja*).

Asian Elephant, Sloth Bear, Grey Langur, Jackal and Toque Monkeys are all regularly seen here. After a superb exploration for Sri Lanka's Reptile & Amphibians we'll begin our journey home by making our way back to the east coast to Katunayake, where we'll be in easy striking distance of Colombo for our international flight home tomorrow. In the evening we'll have time for a final search of the hotel's grounds for those who wish, or an early night may be on the cards for many, after an exhilarating search for Sri Lanka's superb reptiles and amphibians.

Day 16

Depart Sri Lanka

Today, if using the group flights, we'll take an afternoon direct flight to London. We are due to arrive in London by early evening.

Tour Grading & Focus

On a typical day on our herpetology tours we'll begin searching in the field after breakfast, when the sun has warmed the substrates and landscapes, often getting into the vehicles at 9am and, after stopping for approximately one hour for lunch, we'll continue into early-evening when we will stop for a rest and dinner. Most evenings it will be possible to do excursions in search of nocturnal species, which will on average be for three hours after dinner. With an equal percentage of the target reptile and amphibian species likely to be nocturnal, these night searches are an important part of the tour but are optional, with some participants preferring to rest on some of the days. On average, 5-8miles are walked per day.

We'll focus our time in the field on building an enviable list of reptile and amphibian species seen. Whilst searching, there is no doubt we'll come across a huge variety of amazing fauna and flora, of which we'll also take time to enjoy, but reptiles and amphibians will strongly remain our focus. Sensitively checking under stones, logs and other refugia is an effective way of finding many species. Some of the target reptile or amphibian species may require longer field hours to locate and therefore this tour is suitable, and most enjoyable, for experienced herpetologists or naturalists who, aside from wishing to see the region's rarely-seen reptiles and amphibians, relish being in the field searching for and identifying the vast array of birds, mammals, butterflies, invertebrates, orchids and other wildlife which can be found sharing the wonderful habitats that we'll explore on the tour.

In summary, Naturetrek herpetology holidays are suitable, and offer tremendous value, for those of whom spending most of their holiday time in wildlife habitats and for whom seeing some of the world's superb reptiles and amphibians is the focus of their time away.

This is a traditional lodge-based wildlife tour. Whilst some of the lodges are appointed simply, each is comfortable and has en suite facilities. A certain level of fitness is required for the tour, as the terrain may be rough, steep, or slippery in parts.

Weather, Clothing & Equipment

The weather will be generally hot and sunny with temperatures in the low country ranging from 25-35°C with high humidity, particularly in the Wet Zone. Temperatures decrease in the hills to a range of 10-16°C around Nuwara Eliya. There is a possibility of heavy rain at any time, but hopefully not to the extent that it will spoil your enjoyment. A strong waterproof torch is essential and amongst the options available a powerful head-torch will be most useful, which keeps your hands free for balancing.

What's Included

All accommodation and meals are included. Please note that we do not include items of a more personal nature such as drinks, tipping, laundry and souvenirs.

Extending Your Holiday

Should you wish to discuss these options, the tour's manager Dan Lay will be more than happy to help. Please email dan@naturetrek.co.uk or call 01962 733051

How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests, at the time of booking.

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Temple of the Tooth