

Sri Lanka – Island of Serendipity

Pilgrimage with Dharmacharya Shantum Seth: January 5 to January 17, 2026 (13 days)

Sri Lanka Extension January 17 to January 19, 2026 (3-days)

ITINERARY

1	05-Jan-26	Monday	Pilgrimage begins in Colombo at 12 noon	Colombo
2	06-Jan-26	Tuesday	Colombo-Anuradhapura by road (208.7km)	Anuradhapura
3	07-Jan-26	Wednesday	Anuradhapura	Anuradhapura
4	08-Jan-26	Thursday	Anuradhapura-Mihintale-Minneriya-Polonaruwa by road (113km)	Polonaruwa
5	09-Jan-26	Friday	Polonaruwa	Polonaruwa
6	10-Jan-26	Saturday	Polonaruwa-Dambulla-Sigiriya by road	Sigiriya
7	11-Jan-26	Sunday	Sigiriya	Sigiriya
8	12-Jan-26	Monday	Sigiriya-Aluvihara-Kandy by road	Kandy
9	13-Jan-26	Tuesday	Kandy	Kandy
10	14-Jan-26	Wednesday	Kandy-Galle by road (230km)	Galle
11	15-Jan-26	Thursday	Galle	Galle
12	16-Jan-26	Friday	Galle-Colombo airport by road (150km)	Colombo
13/1	17-Jan-26	Saturday	Departure/ Extension at Nuwara Eliya	Nuwara Eliya
2	18-Jan-26	Sunday	Extension at Nuwara Eliya	Nuwara Eliya
3	19-Jan-26	Monday	Departure	

DETAILED ITINERARY

DAY 1: Monday, January 5, 2026: Arrival in Colombo. Meet at 12.00 pm (noon). After our orientation we shall visit the purpose-built National Museum, that was constructed in 1877 and has large Banyan trees on the grounds. The museum is a treasure trove of artefacts of various historical Sri Lankan kingdoms, masterpieces of Buddhist art, demon masks, 19th century paintings by the English of Sri Lanka and even an innovative toilet display. Later we shall visit the sacred Kelaniya Buddhist temple, where Sri Lankans believe the Buddha visited. It has a strong devotional congregation and beautiful murals, depicting the rich history of Buddhism in Sri Lanka.

Night's stay Colombo

DAY 2: Tuesday, January 6:

Drive from Colombo to Anuradhapura

Visit the oldest continually recorded tree in the world, the Sri Maha Bodhi which adorns this city of shrines. It was brought from India in the 3rd century BCE by Emperor Ashoka's daughter. Its sanctity rests on it being grown from the Bodhi Tree (*Ficus religiosa*) in Bodh Gaya under which the Buddha attained enlightenment.

Night's stay at Anuradhapura

DAY 3: Wednesday, January 7: Anuradhapura

Anuradhapura (a UNESCO World Heritage Site) depicts the trajectory of the Sinhalese civilization from the time it was founded in 4th century BCE. The past grandeur is narrated by a fascinating collection of ancient ruins, including stupas enshrining the relics of the Buddha, some of which have been painstakingly restored. Visit Isurumuniya, Brazen Palace, Ruwanwelisaya, Thuparamaya, the Abhayagiri monastic complex, the Elephant pond, Guard stone and Moon stone, the Buddha Samadhi statue, Kuttam Pokuna twin ponds, Ratnaprasada, Jetavanaramaya Monastery and the Archaeological Museum.

Night's stay at Anuradhapura

DAY 4: Thursday, January 8: Drive from Anuradhapura to Polonnaruwa

Visit Mihintale the first recorded wildlife sanctuary in the world, and where Buddhism in Sri Lanka began as King Devanampiya Tissa met the monk Mahinda on the hilltop in the 3rd century BCE. Also, Aradhana Gala, Katu Seya, the Black water pond of Kaludiya Pokuna and the ancient stone bridge.

Take a Safari through the Minneriya National Park, where there is the greatest gathering of Asian elephants. It is also the home of two endemic species of monkeys, the Sri Lankan leopard and the Sri Lankan sloth bear, besides many other mammals and birds.

Night's stay at Polonnaruwa

DAY 5: Friday, January 9: Polonnaruwa.

The impressive ruins of an ancient kingdom are home to massive palaces, huge statues including the famous sitting, standing and reclining Buddha, imposing temples and an artificial lake. Polonnaruwa is considered the cleanest city of Sri Lanka and is a UNESCO World Heritage site. Although historically and culturally important, it also has a living culture of Buddhism and we will sit at Gal Vihara, a rock-cut temple of the 12th century where we hope to interact with the local Theravada monks. We shall also visit the excellent archeological museum

Night's stay at Polonnaruwa

DAY 6: Saturday, January 10: Polonnaruwa to Sigiriya via Dambulla caves

The Dambulla cave monastery (a UNESCO World Heritage Site) is traced back to the 1st century BCE and remains the best-preserved historical structure in Sri Lanka. It has five caves under a vast rock that overhangs the temple. On the underbelly of the rock a drip line is carved that keeps the interiors dry.

Inside the caves, the ceilings are adorned with intricate patterns of Buddha and bodhisattvas meticulously painted following the natural contours of the rock. It remains a living shrine that draws thousands of devotees. We reach the cave temple by walking on the gentle slope of the towering Dambulla rock that gives us a magnificent view of the plains below with the Sigiriya rock fortress emerging out of the flat landscape.

Night's stay at Sigiriya

DAY 7: Sunday, January 11: Sigiriya

Sigiriya (a UNESCO World Heritage Site) is a palace fortress of stunning splendor, an architectural marvel, a classic example of urban planning and a tribute to its ingenious builders of the 5th century. A park laid out on a symmetrical plan and water retaining structures with ingenious hydraulic systems which function till today.

The entrance through the famous Lion gate with its giant paws still intact gives Sigiriya its name. Enthralling frescoes of sensuous women and the mirror wall graffiti which narrate a story painted and etched of the genius of a people who lived and loved with passion. The Mirror Wall was so polished that the King could see himself when he passed through the ornate terrace in the sky. Its surface suggests that it is made of some form of porcelain.

Night's stay at Sigiriya

DAY 8: Monday, January 12: Sigiriya to Kandy via Aluvihara

Aluvihara is of great significance to the global history of Buddhism. It was here that the Buddha's teachings, the Tipitaka (including the Suttas), was first committed to writing, in Pali. During the first 450 years the Buddha's teachings were memorized and passed on orally from generation to generation. We visit the rock-cut caves, in a picturesque setting and pay homage to those who committed the great teachings to writing. That effort still goes on, and we can witness the same nearly extinct method of inscribing on palm leaves. The words are first scratched out with a metal stylus, after which black soot is rubbed into the leaf, causing the invisible words to appear magically.

Night's stay at Kandy

DAY 9: Tuesday, January 13: Kandy

Kandy is the cultural and religious capital of Sri Lanka. It is a city with a graceful charm, radiating an ambiance of antiquity. It has a vast array of shrines, and temples dating back to the 14th century when it was a centre for both Mahayana and Theravada Buddhism. Cocooned in the comfort of a protected valley in the central hills of Sri Lanka, the city at 500 meters (1640 feet) above sea level is home to the Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic, and hence an UNESCO World Heritage site. The Temple of the Tooth is part of the royal palace of Kandy, due to the ancient tradition that stated that the monarch is the protector of the relic. We usually arrange a special audience with the Chief Abbot and an exclusive entry to the tooth relic chamber for our group (The pilgrims are expected wear white modest clothing that with garments that cover shoulders and cover the knees). We may also visit a Hindu temple.

We plan to visit the legendary Buddhist Publication Society bookshop, which mostly houses books related to Theravada Buddhism. We may also visit some workshops that cut and sell the famous gems of Sri Lanka.

Night's stay at Kandy

DAY 10: Wednesday, January 14: Kandy to Galle

Kandy is virtually hidden behind a thick curtain of natural foliage in the form of lush tropical forests and a 60-hectare Royal Botanical Gardens. The garden is thought to have originated as far back as 1371 when King Wickramabahu III ascended the throne and kept court at Peradeniya and was further conceived by King Kirthi Sri Rajasinghe in the 18th century on the loop of the Mahaweli River that partly encircles Kandy. The garden includes more than 4000 species of plants, including orchids, spices, medicinal plants and palm trees.

We continue our journey to Galle by joining the Southern Expressway.

We stay at the Lighthouse hotel designed and built by the famous architect, Geoffrey Bawa.

Night's stay at Galle

Day 11: Thursday, January 15: Galle

Galle is a UNESCO World Heritage Site city that was extensively fortified by the Dutch during the 17th century. This historic city is a delight to explore on foot, an endlessly exotic old trading port blessed with imposing Dutch-colonial buildings, ancient mosques and churches, grand mansions and museums. We shall wander its rambling lanes, visiting stylish cafes, quirky boutiques and impeccably restored hotels owned by local and foreign artists, writers, photographers and designers. Some of the places we plan to visit include the Lighthouse, the city's natural harbor, the Old Gate, Flag Rock, churches like the Dutch Reformed Church and the beautiful Meeran Mosque. You could also make an optional visit to see Dolphins and Whales at your own cost.

Night's stay at Galle

Day 12: Friday, January 16: Galle to Colombo.

Visit the Sarvodaya headquarters and the family of Dr. A. T. Ariyaratne, known as the 'Gandhi of Sri Lanka', who passed away in 2024. He had received the Sri Lankabhimanya, the highest National Honor of Sri Lanka. Sarvodaya is a socially engaged Buddhist movement that contains three stands, 'Gandhian ideals, Buddhist philosophy, and ecumenical spirituality'. Shantum collaborated with Sarvodaya when he worked with the United Nations and has been associated with them since the early 1980s.

Night's stay at Colombo

DAY 13: Saturday, January 17:

We will close the journey with a morning ceremony and farewells.

Transfer to airport for departure flight.

Sri Lanka Extension- Natural Wonders of Sri Lanka: January 17 to January 19, 2026 (3-days)

Day 13: Saturday, January 17: (continued)

Colombo | Nuwara Eliya

Continuing the journey, we embark on a scenic drive to Nuwara Eliya, passing the captivating Devon and St. Clair waterfalls. The journey unfolds amidst mist-covered hilltops and sprawling tea estates. After a delightful lunch, we'll visit the ancient Sita Amman Temple, a sacred site linked to the epic Ramayana. This Hindu temple is nestled within the beautiful Hakgala Botanical Garden, renowned for its orchid and rose collections.

Day 14: Sunday, January 18:

Nuwara Eliya

We'll start our day with an exhilarating hike through the mist-covered Horton Plains, a UNESCO World Heritage site. Experience the thrill of reaching World's End, a dramatic cliff edge offering breathtaking views. January offers the perfect conditions for exploring Horton Plains, with clear skies and cooler temperatures, ideal for hiking. In the afternoon, we'll relax by the serene Gregory Lake in Nuwara Eliya, the "city of light."

Day 15: Monday, January 19:

Nuwara Eliya | Colombo

Our journey back to Colombo begins with a visit to the stunning Ramboda Falls. We'll then explore the historic Labookellie Tea Estate, established in 1870, where we can savor the taste of freshly produced, unblended tea. Our Sri Lankan adventure concludes in the afternoon, with airport transfers available for departing guests.