

Sri Lanka

WAYS

There's a stay to suit every pocket in Sri Lanka, finds Joanna Booth

Many things will make your clients' holiday in Sri Lanka feel priceless - spotting leopards or encountering elephants, stuffing themselves to bursting on delicious egg hoppers and sambal, exploring Buddhist temples and leafy tea plantations, and relaxing on miles of sandy beach.

There is a cost to creating this magic, however - accommodation doesn't come for free. Happily, the island offers a wide choice, so for every newly-opened boutique hideaway (the luxury end of the market is



SPEND



SPLURGE



flying), there's a solid three-star waiting in the wings to cater to more earth-bound budgets.

Here's a selection of suggestions to get you started. Unless otherwise stated, packages are quoted per person, and include flights and transfers.

▶ **SAVE**

Aerial footage of Sri Lanka shows green rimmed by gold, and sandy beaches backed by swaying coconut palms, which offer good value for money despite the flight distance.

There's no need to blow the

budget to stay right on the shore, with plenty of value choices in great locations. Many are scattered along the southwest coast, within easy reach of Bandaranaike airport.

Riu Sri Lanka, which opened last year, is one of the largest hotels on the island, its U-shaped curve meaning all 500 rooms point towards the sea. There are three pools and five restaurants, and its all-inclusive programme, free Wi-Fi and complimentary kids' club for four to 12-year-olds seem sure to make it a family favourite. Tui offers 14 nights' [→](#)



Sri Lanka
3 WAYS

LEFT:
Mermaid
Hotel & Club

superior room in July or August. It's not all about families, however. The Mermaid Hotel & Club in Kalutara sells well for Premier Holidays with couples young and old, who like its tranquil beachside location and the sports and recreational activities that come as standard in its all-inclusive package. Premier offers seven nights' all-inclusive from £929. For solo travellers, Mercury Holidays has the advantage of no single supplement on selected dates at the Royal Palms Beach Hotel, a 130-key option also in Kalutara. Whether going solo or as a couple, guests enjoy the large outdoor swimming pool, three restaurants, racket sports and fitness centre. Mercury offers a week all-inclusive from £899 based on a Birmingham departure. Those who want to sightsee rather than sunbathe can find good value too. Hotel Sigiriya is an excellent value three-star with stunning views of Sigiriya Rock from the pool. It's perfectly placed in the cultural triangle

and Travel Gallery usually books clients for three nights (from £78 per night, half-board) so they can fit in Sigiriya, the ancient city of Polonnaruwa and the Dambulla Cave Temple.

SPEND

Spending a little more brings plenty of beach-life benefits. Shangri-La's Hambantota Resort & Spa – already a best-seller for Sunset Faraway since opening in 2016 – is on the wild, beautiful southeast coast, within easy reach of wildlife sanctuaries including Yala and Udawalawe. The 300 rooms are spread across nearly 60 hectares, and with an 18-hole golf course, spa and craft village, it's a destination in itself. The Cool Zone Kids Club lives up to its name, with a seven-metre-high trapeze, a drone flying area and outdoor water park. Seven nights with breakfast through Premier starts from £1,329.

Clients will love the stylish rooms at Anantara Kalutara, and it won't hurt that it's home to the largest spa on the island, plus there's a yoga pavilion, water sports centre and cookery classes, alongside three restaurants, serving international, Italian and Asian cuisine. Gold Medal's rate leads in from £103 per night, with breakfast.

For something a little different, families can try Why House, a boutique retreat of just eight rooms set among rural rice fields near Galle. Some suites can accommodate two extra single beds for kids, the large pool and walled garden create a perfect play space, and



FAST FACT
Sunset Faraway's top Sri Lanka sellers are Shangri-La Hambantota, Avani Kalutara and Amari Galle

ABOVE:
Centara
Ceysands

BELOW:
Trapeze at
Shangri-La
Hambantota

while there is no official kids' club, staff will often join in with games of football or cricket. There's even a friendly pet dachshund to play with. A week's B&B through Elegant Resorts starts from £2,225 departing September 8.

Touring visitors can head two hours from the international airport to the tranquillity of Rosyth Estate House, a 1926 colonial planters' bungalow turned eight-room boutique. Located in the low tea country – with a heritage tea factory just 10 minutes away – and just over an hour from Kandy, it's a great spot to start or end a tour.

While it's romantic during term time, with private dining for honeymooners, cooking classes and tea estate tours, in school holidays families are well catered for with interconnecting rooms and treasure hunts in the grounds. Half-board room rates with Travel Gallery start from £208 per night based on a three-night stay, including afternoon tea, a tea factory visit and either a spa treatment or cooking class.

Within 40 minutes of Kandy, the Bougainvillea Retreat offers a home-from-home atmosphere – if your home happens to be a Tuscan-style house with a sweeping balcony and views of the Knuckles mountain range. There are eight guest rooms, with a ground-floor open-plan living and dining area with a pool table. The basement is a home cinema with a choice of more than 1,000 movies, and there's a spa. Rates start from \$222 with breakfast.



PICTURES: MARKUS GORTZ; CENTARA HOTELS & RESORTS

all-inclusive here from £1,570 for a May 16 departure from Gatwick with car hire. Centara Ceysands in Bentota is another great family choice, with a kids' and teens' club. The 165-room property has an attractive setting on a peninsula with the beach to one side and the mangrove-fringed Bentota River to the other. Three restaurants

offer a choice of international and Sri Lankan dishes, and upgrades to all-inclusive are available. Family residences have a separate kids' room, and guests in the Exclusive Spa Deluxe View rooms can enjoy a massage or body wrap every other day. Bookings through Kuoni start at £1,470 per week half-board for a

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Sri Lanka 3 WAYS



LEFT:
Rosyth
Estate
House

RIGHT:
Ranawara
Villa

BELOW:
Cape
Weligama



PICTURES: OLIVIA BONNAL SANSONI; TOM PARKER

► SPLURGE

Big spenders are spoilt for choice, as luxury hotels have been popping up all over Sri Lanka in the past five years.

Cape Weligama sits high on a cliff near Galle. Its 39 spacious rooms are spread over villas that cluster around swimming pools, crowned by the 60-metre crescent-shaped infinity pool at the cliff edge. The diving centre offers whale watching on a private catamaran, and there are outdoor movie screenings and in-villa spa treatments. From the freshest catch of the day to Ceylon high tea, dining is taken seriously. Rates start from £337 with breakfast, afternoon cream tea and one activity a day.

Sister property Tea Trails is the world's first tea bungalow resort, with five bungalows and one private cottage set in 2,000 acres of tea plantations in the central highlands. Days start with



It's all about reading on the veranda, playing croquet or taking a hike - followed by a G&T

Bed Tea served by your butler, then it's all about reading on the veranda, playing croquet on the lawn, or taking a hike - followed swiftly by a stiff G&T. All-inclusive rates start from £513 per night.

Tri is a sustainably-focused boutique with a real sense of zen overlooking the calm waters of Lake Koggala. Rooms are dotted around the private gardens, with living roofs and glass walls, and furnished with local textiles. Yoga lessons take place in the treetop studio, and a rotating calendar of health practitioners

and Ayurvedic specialists boosts the hotel's wellness programme. Rooms start from £231 per night half-board.

The opening up of Yala National Park has made leopard spotting and safari-style stays a big draw for Sri Lanka. At Chena Huts by Uga Escapes, 14 sleek, luxury pavilions with private plunge pools are directly on the beach, but just five minutes from the park entrance. Rates including food, drinks, game drives and laundry start from £778 per night with Travel Gallery.

For a more rustic look, the Luxury Lodge Tent at Noel Rodrigo's Leopard Safaris is a good alternative, with a four-poster bed, plus there are standard tents too. Rates, inclusive of food, drinks and two game drives a day start from \$895 per night in a standard tent and \$1,250 for the luxury option.

Sometimes size does matter,

and the biggest room in Sri Lanka is the Dubu Suite at Kahanda Kanda, just inland from Koggala, which starts from \$420 per night (B&B). It's more than a room - an entire reconstructed traditional timber Javanese house with a wrap-around balcony, two bathrooms (one indoor and one outdoor) and its own pool, set 100 metres away from the rest of the hotel for total privacy, but with all the benefits of the facilities, which include a spa, gym and restaurant.

That has couples covered, but large families and groups will be better at Ranawara Villa, east of Tangalle, set on the beach and within private 23-acre grounds. With five bedrooms in the main house and two cabanas in the garden, there's also a large pool, open-air dining pavilion, and a team of staff including a chef. A night at this secluded hideaway starts from \$550 for three rooms and up to \$950 for the whole lot. 