



INALA'S SRI LANKA

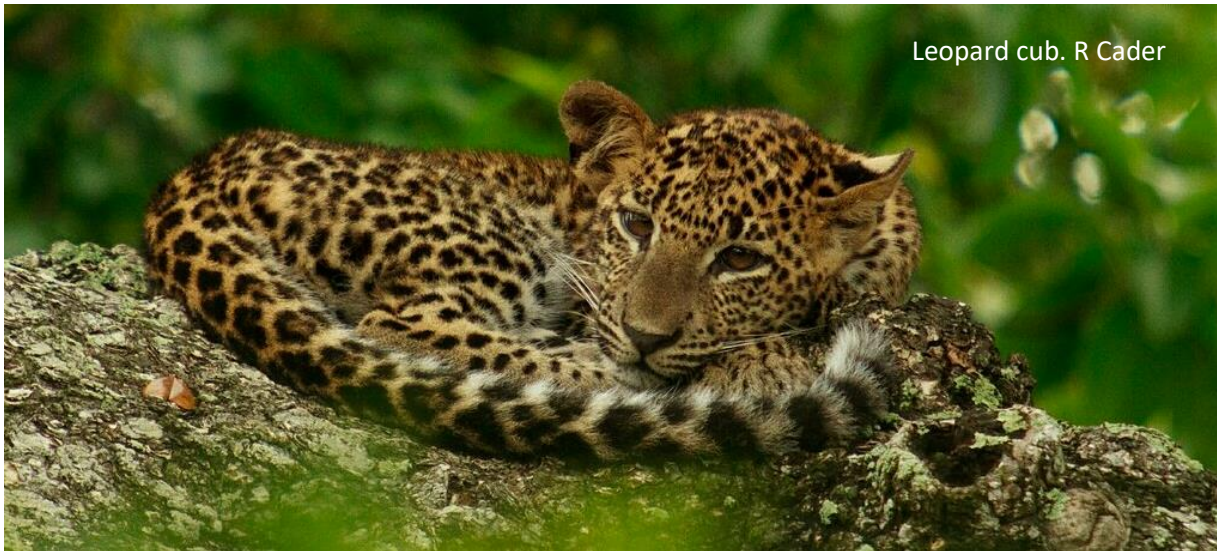
Leopards, Blue Whales and the Sinharaja Bird Wave

25 February – 10 March 2025

Prepared by Dr Tonia Cochran, Inala Nature Tours - March 2024.

Sri Lanka is an island filled with an abundance of natural treasures. It is one of the most ecologically rich countries in the world and is recognized as a global biodiversity hotspot, believed to have the highest species diversity in Asia. The island is an excellent birding location with over 450 recorded species including migrants. Of these, 34 species are endemic to Sri Lanka and a further 18 species can be seen within the Indian subcontinent only. Sri Lanka is also home to a diversity of mammals too, including Leopard, Sloth Bear, Asian Elephant, Asiatic Buffalo, Sambar and Spotted Deer, as well as a range of primates, squirrels and other small species. The island is one of the best places in the world for whale watching, so we will take a day cruise into the Indian Ocean to look for Blue Whale and Spinner Dolphin, and, with good luck, Sperm Whale and Orca too. On this tour, we visit a variety of habitats from tropical rainforests, wetlands, arid scrub jungle and savanna grasslands to experience the best of wild Sri Lanka.

[This tour has been designed to join a tour to Nepal and there is an option of taking both at a discounted price.](#)



Leopard cub. R Cader

ITINERARY OUTLINE:

- Day 1.** Arrive Colombo and transfer to Waikkal.
- Day 2.** Morning boat cruise and afternoon safari at Wilpattu National Park
- Day 3.** Full day at Wilpattu National Park
- Day 4.** Wilpattu NP to Habarana, afternoon lakeside birdwatching
- Day 5.** Sigiriya Sanctuary including Sigiriya Rock Fortress
- Day 6.** Habarana to Kandy with visit to ancient cave temple at Dambulla
- Day 7.** Kandy to Nuwara Eliya and Hakgala Botanic Gardens
- Day 8.** Horton Plains
- Day 9.** Nuwara Eliya to Tissamaharama
- Day 10.** Full day at Yala National Park
- Day 11.** Morning visit to Bundala NP then to Galle and Weligama.
- Day 12.** Morning whale watching cruise then to Sinharaja
- Days 13 & 14.** Sinharaja
- Day 15.** Sinharaja to Colombo and depart.

Tour leader: Dr Tonia Cochran (Inala Nature Tours) with local guides.

DETAILED ITINERARY:

B- breakfast, L- lunch and D-dinner.

Day 1. Arrive Colombo and transfer to Waikkal. On landing at Bandaranaike International Airport, you will be met by your local guide and transferred to Waikkal for your first night in Sri Lanka. [Those participants who are also travelling to Nepal will join Tonia for the short flight from Kathmandu to Colombo.](#)

Accommodation: Waikkal (en suite room). **Meals:** none

Day 2. Morning boat cruise and afternoon safari at Wilpattu National Park. We start the day with an early boat safari in the waterways near Ranweli in search of herons, bitterns, kingfishers and other waterbirds. After we leave for Wilpattu in the dry north-west of the island, where we will have lunch. In the afternoon, we will take a safari in Wilpattu National Park. Declared a sanctuary in 1905, Wilpattu has one of the largest populations of Leopard on the island. **Accommodation:** Resort at Wilpattu (en suite room). **Meals:** B, L, D.



Day 3. Full day at Wilpattu National Park. We spend today on a full day safari in the dry scrub forest and



seasonal wetlands of Wilpattu NP, where we will look for Leopard, Sloth Bear, Asian Elephant, Jackal, Sambar, Spotted Deer and Muger Crocodile. Over 250 species of birds are also here, including Sri Lanka Junglefowl, Indian Peacock, Crested Serpent Eagle, Brown Fish Owl, Painted Snipe, Emerald Dove and Asian Paradise Flycatcher. **Accommodation:** Wilpattu as for last night. **Meals:** B, L, D.

Day 4. Wilpattu NP to Habarana, afternoon lakeside birdwatching. After breakfast we leave for Anuradhapura to spend the morning exploring the island's first capital founded in 5th century BC. Here we will see some of the most famous dagobas (Buddhist shrines) of Sri Lanka, remains of palaces, temples, monasteries, ceremonial baths and the temple of the holy Bo-tree. This tree was grown from a sapling of the tree under which the Buddha found enlightenment. We will then proceed to Habarana, our base for two nights. In the late afternoon, we will go on a birding walk along a nature trail that borders Habarana lake. We will keep an eye out for winter migrants including Orange-headed Thrush, Indian Pitta and resident species Yellow Bittern, Cinnamon Bittern, Black Bittern, and the elusive Three-toed Kingfisher.

Accommodation: Chalet at Habarana (en suite room). **Meals:** B, L, D.



Day 5. Sigiriya Sanctuary including Sigiriya Rock Fortress. Early morning, birding in Sigiriya Sanctuary will yield dry-zone species. Afterwards, the energetic have the opportunity to climb the iconic Sigiriya Rock Fortress, where Shaheen Falcon (subcontinental race of the Peregrine Falcon) can often be spotted. At the top of the massive 200-metre high rock are the palace ruins of King Kassapa. In the afternoon, we will make our way to ancient Polonnaruwa before returning to Habarana for the night. **Accommodation:** Habarana. **Meals:** B, L, D.

Day 6. Habarana to Kandy with visit to ancient cave temple at Dambulla. Today we head to Kandy in the heart of the island, stopping en-route at the Dambulla Cave Temple. The Dambulla Cave Temple is famous for its rock paintings and is among the best preserved monastic temple cave complexes in Sri Lanka. Dambulla's origin as a place of worship dates back to the reign of King Valagamba in the 1st century BC, who took refuge in these caves when driven out of Anuradhapura by Chola invaders. Once he regained the throne, the king had the interior of the caves transformed into magnificent rock temples. More paintings and statues were added over time by later kings. Afterwards, we will visit Sri Dalada Maligawa, the Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic. Built in the 16th century AD, the temple is the most revered site in Sri Lanka. It was believed that the owner of this sacred relic had the right to rule the country. Sri Dalada Maligawa is located adjacent to the Royal Palace complex of the former Kingdom of Kandy and overlooks the placid expanse of Kandy Lake.

Accommodation: Resort at Kandy (en suite rooms). **Meals:** B, L, D.

Day 7. Kandy to Nuwara Eliya and Hakgala Botanic Gardens. After dawn birdwatching in the hotel gardens,



we will drive to Nuwara Eliya high among the tea plantations in the hill country. Later in the day, we visit Hakgala Botanical Gardens. Only a few kilometres from Nuwara Eliya, this quaint garden is a serene and quiet place with an interesting collection of plants. The name Hakgala dates back to the legend of Rama and Sita, where the monkey god Hanuman was sent by Rama to fetch to find a particular medicinal plant. As Hanuman forgot which herb it was, legend states that he brought back a piece of the Himalayas in his mouth, hoping the herb was growing on it. The gardens grow on a rock

called Hakgala which literally means "Jaw Rock". The gardens are a good place to see the endemic highland variety of the Purple-faced Leaf Monkey known locally as the "Bear Monkey" due to its shaggy and thick coat.

Accommodation: Nuwara Eliya (en suite room). **Meals:** B, L, D.

Day 8. Horton Plains. We will take breakfast with us to Horton Plains National Park, set on a plateau in the central highlands. We will look for a variety of wildlife including endemic Rhino-horned and Hump-nosed Lizards, and highland bird species including the Sri Lanka White-eye, Dull-blue Flycatcher and Yellow-eared Bulbul, as well as montane vegetation. Horton Plains is one of the few known locations where elusive highland endemics such as the 'Arrenga' or Sri Lanka Whistling Thrush and Sri Lanka Bush Warbler can be observed. There is also of the option of going on a nature walk to the Mini-World's End view point. **Accommodation:** Nuwara Eliya as for last night. **Meals:** B, L, D.

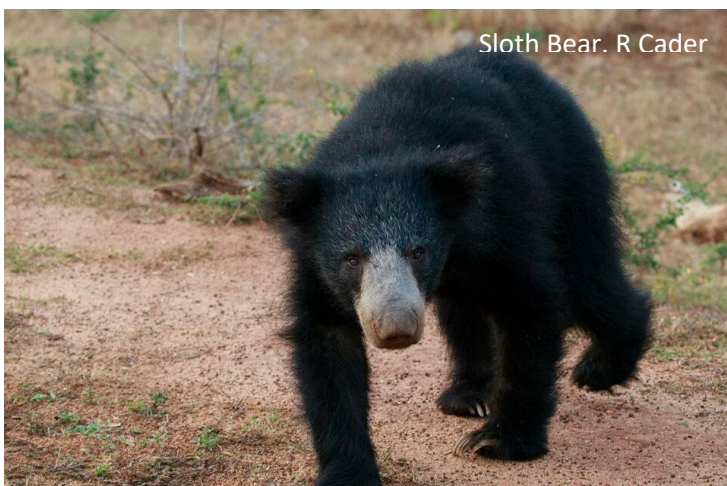


Day 9. Nuwara Eliya to Tissamaharama. An early morning visit to Victoria Park give us a chance of the dapper Pied Thrush and Kashmir Flycatcher, which breeds in the Himalayas and overwinters in the upland forests of Sri Lanka and southern India. After breakfast, we leave for Tissamaharama, a few kilometres inland from the SE coast. In the late afternoon, we will look for owls around Tissamahrama. Barn Owl, Jungle Owlet and Collared Scops Owl can be seen regularly in day roost sites in this area. If we have time, we will also go birding at Tissamaharama wetlands, where elusive species such as the Water Cock may be encountered.

Accommodation: Chalet at Tissamaharama (en suite room). **Meals:** B, L, D.



Day 10. Full day at Yala National Park. Today we spend a full day on safari in Yala National Park. Yala National Park is the country's premier destination for wildlife viewing. Yala's star attraction is the Leopard and Yala Block I is believed to have the world's greatest concentration of these big cats. It is also one of the few places in the country where the endangered shaggy coated Sloth Bear can be seen. Asian Elephants are also encountered here, along with Sambar, Spotted Deer, Buffalo, Wild Boar and Grey Langur. Yala is also an excellent birding destination with close to 300 species recorded. Among the species seen regularly are Indian Peafowl, Sri Lanka Junglefowl, Changeable Hawk Eagle, Painted Stork, Malabar Pied-hornbills, and the stunning Chestnut-headed, Asian Green and Blue-tailed Bee-eaters. **Accommodation:** Tissamaharama as for last night. **Meals:** B, L, D.



Day 11. Morning visit to Bundala NP then to Galle and Weligama. Early morning, visit Bundala National Park for dry-zone species, rare migrants and waterbirds. The park is an internationally recognized RAMSAR wetland and a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. It contains five shallow, brackish lagoons that are a haven for migratory birds and waders. These lagoons are home to the freshwater Muggar, as well as the occasional Saltwater Crocodile, the largest species of reptile in the world. Late morning, we leave for Galle, where we will have lunch and then go on a guided walk around the 17th century Dutch built Galle Fort. Afterwards, we will check in at our beachfront accommodation at Weligama and spend the remainder of the evening at leisure. **Accommodation:** Resort at Weligama (en suite rooms). **Meals:** B, L, D.



Blue Whale - R Cader

Day 12. Morning whale watching cruise then to Sinharaja. This morning, we will take a cruise from Mirissa Fisheries Harbour to go whale watching. The main highlights are Blue Whales and pods of Spinner Dolphins. Other marine mammals seen occasionally are Bryde's Whale, Orca, Sperm Whale, Pilot Whale, Risso's Dolphin and Bottlenose Dolphin. We will also keep an eye out for seabirds. Afterwards, we travel back up into the hills to our next destination, the biodiversity hotspot of Sinharaja. Late afternoon, time permitting, we will bird around the property. Endemics found here include the exquisite Sri Lanka Blue Magpie and Yellow-fronted Barbet. **Accommodation:** Hotel in Sinharaja (en suite rooms). **Meals:** B, L, D.



Orca. R Cader

Days 13 & 14. Sinharaja. We will spend two days birding in Sinharaja, exploring both the nature trails bordering the reserve and the Sinharaja Forest itself. The largest tract of natural rainforest in Sri Lanka, the Sinharaja Forest Reserve contains a wide variety of endemic flora and fauna. 28 of Sri Lanka's 34 endemic species have been recorded in Sinharaja including the recently discovered Serendib Scops Owl and other rarities such as the Sri Lanka Spurfowl, Chestnut-backed Owlet, and White-faced Starling. The mixed species bird flocks found moving through the rainforest canopy within Sinharaja are believed to be the largest in the world. These flocks are popularly dubbed the Sinharaja Birdwave. Other species of fauna that might be encountered during rainforest walks include Purple-faced Leaf Monkey, Giant Squirrel, Kangaroo Lizard, Hump-nosed Lizard and Sri Lanka Keelback. **Accommodation:** Sinharaja as for last night. **Meals:** B, L, D.



Day 15. Sinharaja to Colombo and depart. After one last early morning birding walk in the periphery of the Sinharaja Forest Reserve, we will checkout and leave for Bandaranaike International Airport for our journey home. **Accommodation:** None. **Meals:** B.

Tour Price: US\$6,950 per person twin share. Single supplement:US\$700.

AU\$10,550 per person twin share and AU\$1,200 single supplement (conversion rate March 2024)

Please allow about AU350pp for tips to local guide, driver and associated staff/community members.

Price based on a group size of 6-8 participants + Inala leader Dr Tonia Cochran + local guide.

A discount of AU\$500 will apply for those taking a Nepal and Sri Lanka tour combination.

Additional accommodation can be booked on your behalf in Waikkal and/or the airport if required. Please let us know.

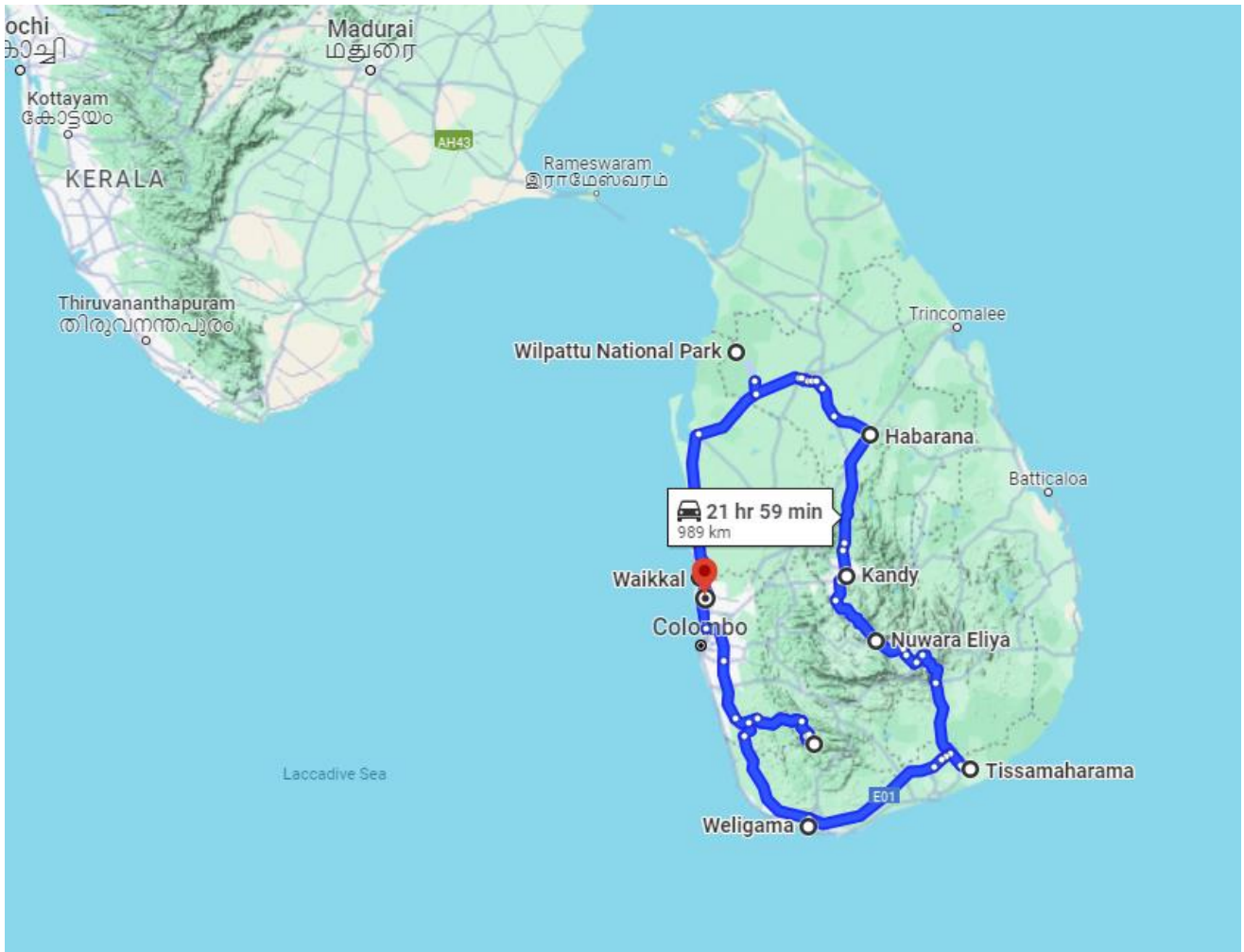
Inclusions: Accommodation for each night of the tour, specialist guiding and transport for day and night tours as outlined in the itinerary, all meals (B, L, D) and activities outlined in the itinerary and National Park entry fees.

Exclusions: International flights, alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages and expenses of a personal nature (snacks, travel insurance, internet, laundry, tips etc).

Please note:

- **Price:** The above rates are based upon a group size of 6-8 people. If the tour does not achieve minimum numbers, we may offer you the option of continuing with a smaller group size at a small supplement (we would always discuss options with you beforehand).
- **Meals and drinks:** Breakfast generally consists of a buffet style breakfast with cereal, fruit and yoghurt and tea/coffee, usually with a selection of meats and cheeses. A full cooked breakfast is not generally offered at most locations. Lunch will generally consist of a packed lunch style meal eaten in the field, but we may sometimes eat at a local cafe. Dinner usually consists of several options for main with the choice of either an appetiser or dessert although sometimes three course meals are available. Drinks (soft and alcoholic) are generally not included but at lunches and breakfasts juice may be made available.
- **The itinerary:** Whilst we aim to follow the itinerary as planned, please note that the itinerary provided should only be used as a guideline. Depending on individual trip circumstances, weather, and local information, the exact itinerary may not be strictly adhered to. The guides reserve the right to make changes to the itinerary as they see fit.
- **Mobility:** This tour is suitable for a range of activity levels and there are options for joining some walks and for more relaxed touring nearer the vehicle if you prefer.

MAP SHOWING THE MAIN PLACES VISITED ON THIS TOUR:



Sinhaaja Snake Green Vine - R Cader