

# SRI LANKA - 2024





This friendly country is sort of the Caribbean for Europeans. The many seaside resorts and gorgeous mountains are a common tourist destination for the British, particularly. Our Tour had only 20 people and we were the only non-Brits.

There are 3 official languages: Sinhala, Tamil, and English.



When you greet someone, you should put you hand together (like a prayer), slightly bow your head and say “Ayubowan”, meaning have a long and happy life.



After a flight to London (via Dallas?), we waited in the airport all day for the next flight to Colombo, Sri Lanka, where we finally arrived. A brief bus ride to our hotel, the swank Movenpick, we rested and enjoyed the gorgeous views from our hotel.



The stunning lotus radio tower.

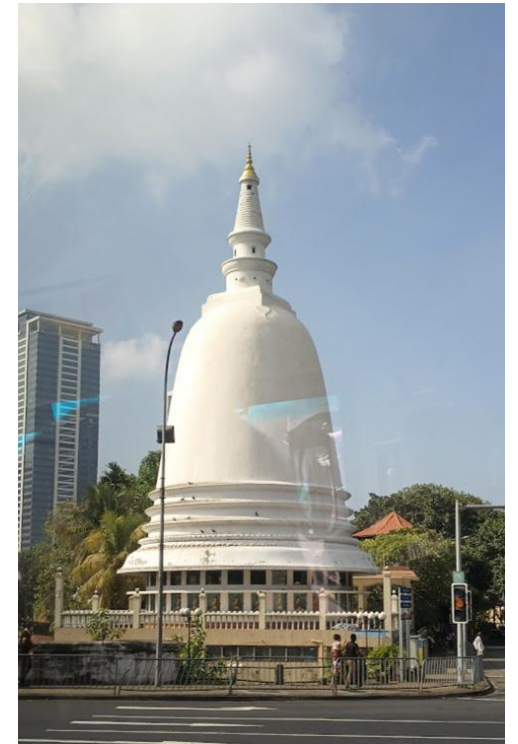


The hotel swimming pool.





Our first day on the tour was spent driving around Colombo, with narration by our excellent guide, Udi. The city was an amazing mixture of modern architecture, Buddhist statues and simple shops. And of course, Tuk Tuks.





These sea turtles can get this big.



Our first tour destination was a Sea Turtle rescue facility. The eggs were planted in sand, and then when they hatch, the infant turtles march to a light (they think is the moon) and are collected in tanks labeled “Day 1, Day 2, Day 3”. Finally, they are put into larger tanks to mature. When old enough they are transferred into the sea.



The Day 3 tank.

They also heal wounded turtles.





A word about driving in Sri Lanka.

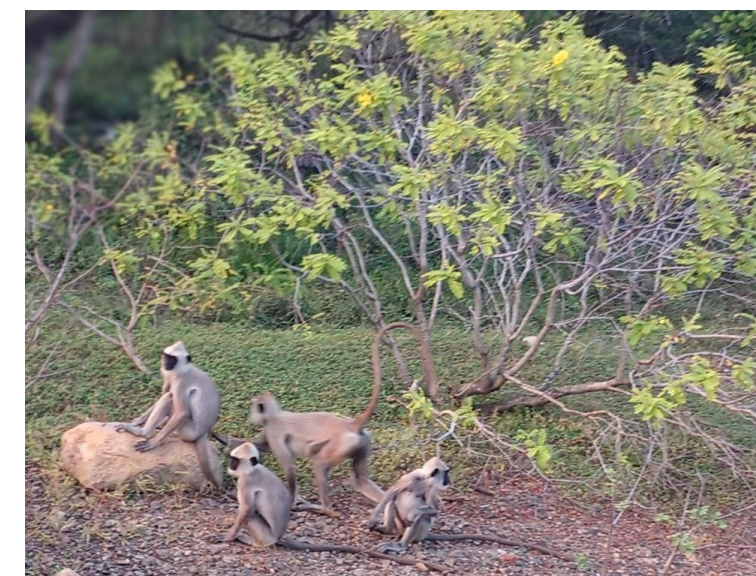
Throughout the entire country, most of the roads were just 2 lanes. They were filled with buses, trucks, tuk tuks, motor bikes, and pedestrians. How the drivers, including our terrific bus driver, Lasthi, (on the right) maneuvered our big bus around all these obstacles was a wonder. This was particularly frightening when going up the mountains, maneuvering around hairpin curves.

Amazing!



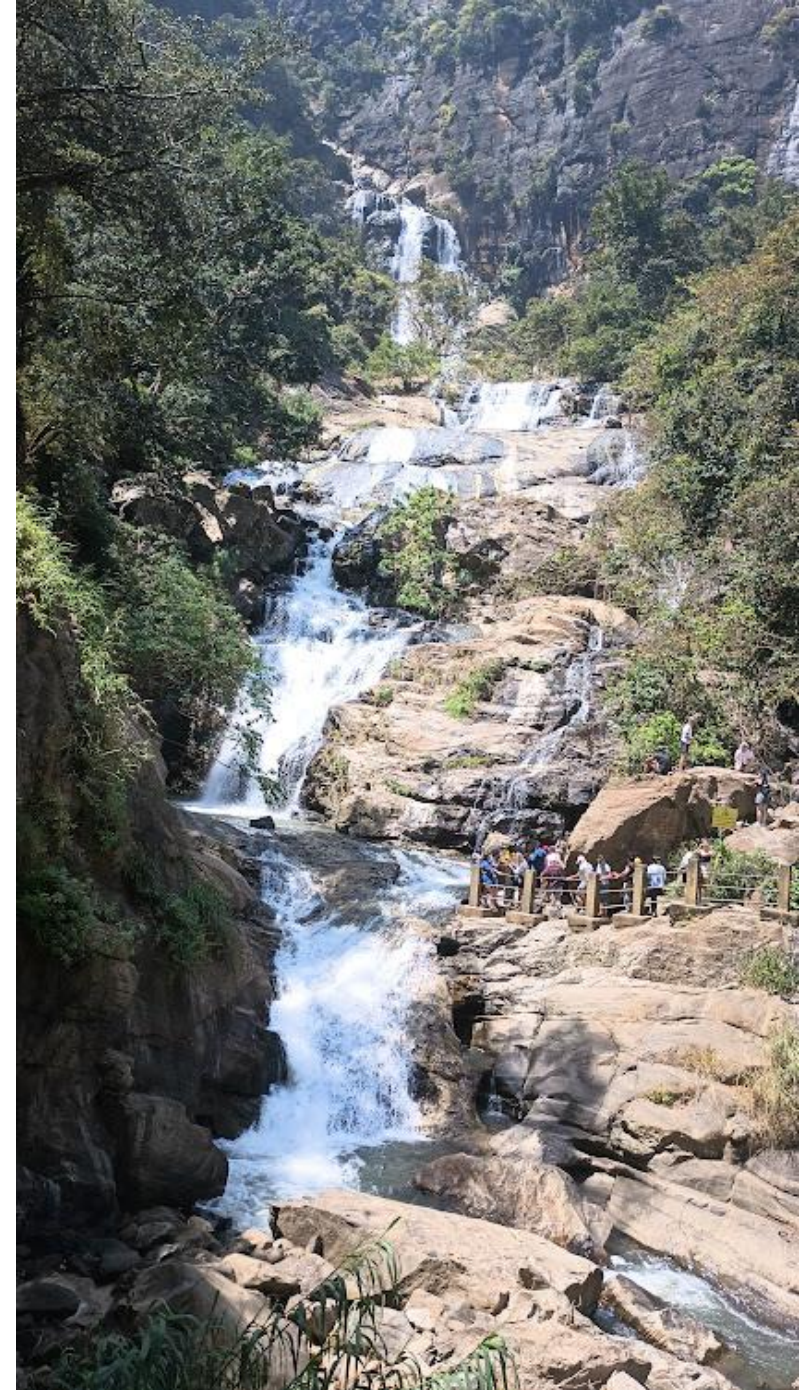


Peacocks are scary!



Next, we visited the Yala National Park. All these wonderful animals in the wild.





We climbed up into the mountains, visiting the Buduruwagala temple, with a huge, ancient carving of Buddha in the rock. Then to a gorgeous waterfall. (Note how small the people are.)





As we climbed higher into the mountains, and it got colder and colder, we arrived at Nuwara Eliya, and the elegant, old Grand Hotel.



Wonderful wall art in the hotel.



## Our Tuk Tuk Tale (*pronounced took took*):

In our first hotel in Colombo, we stupidly left our phone chargers.

So, when we got to the Grand Hotel in Nuwara Eliya we asked our guide if we could go to an electronic store to buy new ones.

He told us to go down to the bottom of the hill and turn **left** and a store would be found.

But when we set out, we mistakenly turned **right**. We walked on that street, down hill, for quite a while, until we realized our error.

By this time my old legs were worn to a frazzle and the thought of walking back up the hill was extremely daunting.

Exhausted, we sat in a small cafe for a coke.

While we were sitting there a tuk tuk parked right outside the door.

Now, we'd seen hundreds of these already on our travels and thought it was a possible way to get us back to the hotel, and maybe to a store first, without walking back up the hill.

I approached the driver and tried to explain our predicament, but his English was limited.

Then out of the blue our savior appeared. A charming young man approached and with perfect English asked our problem.

We explained and he talked rapidly to the driver who now understood our needs.

He negotiated a price, 1000 SL rupees (about \$3), and delighted we got into the tuk tuk, which took us up the hill and past the hotel and into the town, stopping at a very modern electronic store.

We bought the chargers and got back into the tuk tuk, which then took us to the hotel.

It was such fun to ride in one of these

and it was so nice to arrive to the elegant entrance of the Grand Hotel in such style.

All this was possible because of the nice young man who stepped up to help us.





Only women were allowed to pick the tea leaves (men were too clumsy, or something.)



We went on a 3-hour train ride through the mountains. Beautiful scenery! The most amazing was to see the miles of tea fields, on the mountains. How the pickers maneuvered on those hills was a mystery.



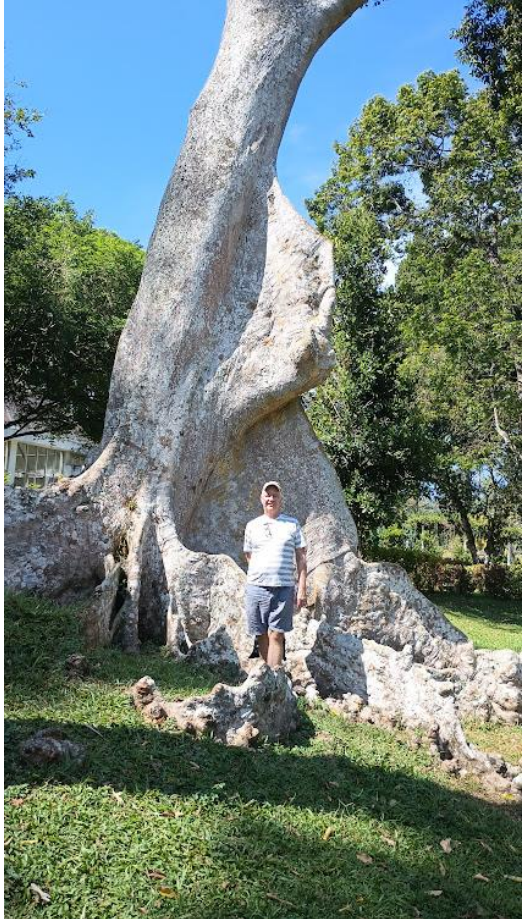


The Cylon Tea Factory was fascinating. We learned how this process worked to make all the different kinds of tea.



And of course, we bought some tea.

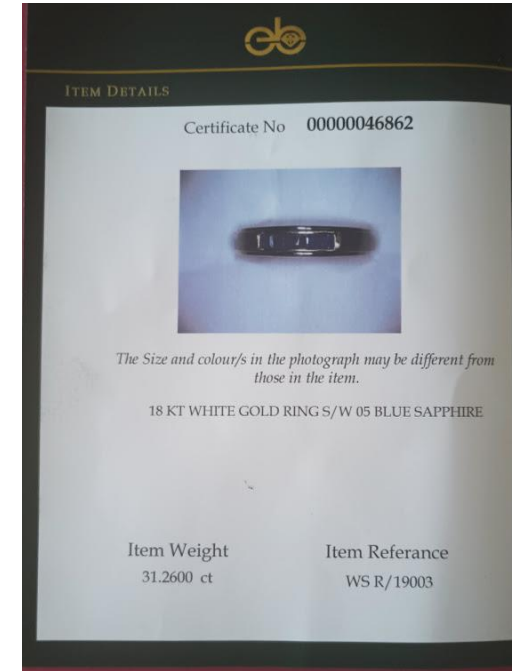




We visited the Royal Botanic Gardens. The white buffalo was sort of a lawn mower.

Our next city was Kandy, the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest city in Sri Lanka. We had time to walk around and shop. The sacred elephant was just walking in the street.



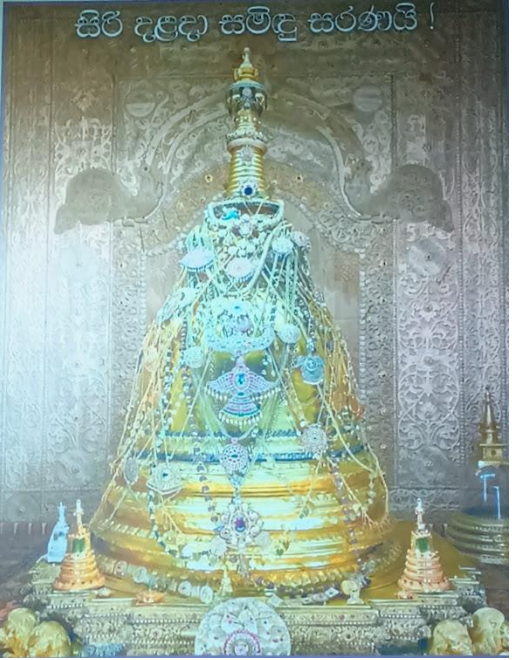


We visited the Balasuriya Gem Factory. After viewing a model of the mines, we were taken to a Jewelry store, and I bought a blue sapphire ring.

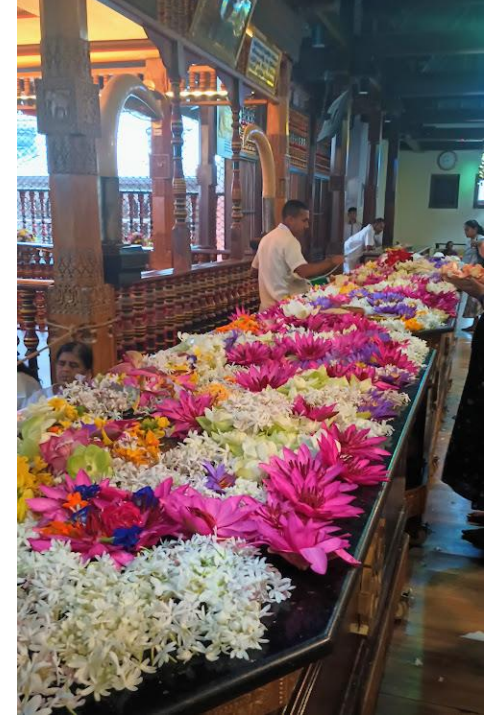
This was followed by a Cultural show, with lots of loud drumming, colorful dancing and fire walking.



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The most venerated temple is in Kandy, The Temple of the Tooth. Worshipers queue up for hours to pray, where a tooth of Buddha is held in a golden case (hidden in the temple.)



Worshipers bring lotus flowers.





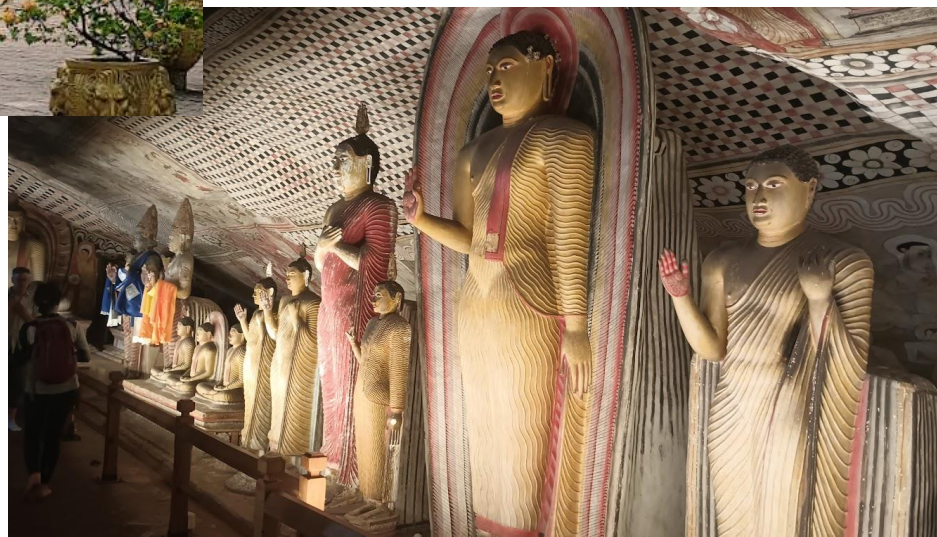
A short ride took us to a spice factory, where we were given a lecture on the various spices grown in Sri Lanka. Then some of our group were given massages with a spice. Afterwards, we were taken to a tent and given a “farmer’s lunch”.



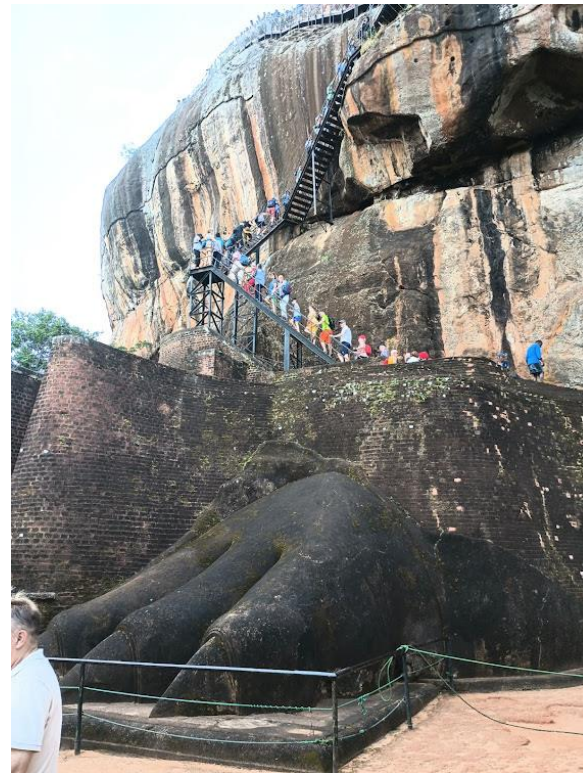




Before we went to the Dambulla Cave Temple, we stopped at this giant Buddha statue, with the “dragon gates” at his feet. Then we entered the 5 caves in a mountain that contained dozens of Buddhas in each. And there were adorable monkeys everywhere.



More temples. One worshipping the tree that Buddha received his enlightenment under. A twig housed in the golden structure (left) And the biggest Stupa shrine in the country.



Munro then climbed a rock (1,200 steps), while I relaxed around the pool with the Afghan Cricket team staying in our hotel.





One more day in the bus, for a 4-hour drive to our last hotel. The northern part of the island was settled by Portuguese and Tamel, so there were Hindu temples and Catholic Churches.





We say “Goodbye” to the delightful group of 18 Brits that made up our tour. Udi Vjv poses with his driver and helper, our new friends, David and Christine Waters and his favorite American guests.

