



## Encounter a transcendent experience as you connect with elephants, feeling the harmony between human and animal spirits.

The Sri Lankan elephant (*Elephas maximus maximus*) is one of three recognized subspecies of the Asian elephant, and it is native to Sri Lanka. Here are some key points about the Sri Lankan elephant:

### Physical Characteristics

- **Size:** They are smaller than African elephants but are the largest of the Asian elephant subspecies. Adult males can reach heights of 2.7 to 3.5 meters (9 to 11 feet) at the shoulder and can weigh between 4,000 to 5,500 kg (8,800 to 12,100 lbs). Females are smaller, typically weighing between 2,700 to 3,500 kg (5,950 to 7,720 lbs).
- **Skin:** Their skin is dark gray to brown and often has patches of depigmentation, especially on the ears, face, trunk, and belly.
- **Tusks:** Only some male Sri Lankan elephants have tusks. These tusked males are known as "tuskers," and tusklessness is a common trait among the population.

### Behavior and Social Structure

- **Social Structure:** Sri Lankan elephants live in matriarchal herds led by an older female. These herds typically consist of related females and their offspring. Adult males are usually solitary or form small, temporary bachelor groups.
- **Communication:** They use a variety of sounds, including trumpeting, rumbling, and roaring, as well as non-verbal communication through body language and touch.
- **Diet:** They are herbivores, feeding on grasses, leaves, bark, fruits, and seeds. An adult elephant can consume up to 150 kg (330 lbs) of vegetation daily.

### Habitat and Distribution

- **Range:** They are found throughout Sri Lanka in various habitats, including dry and wet forests, grasslands, and scrublands.
- **Protected Areas:** Significant populations can be found in national parks such as Yala, Udawalawe, Minneriya, Wasgamuwa, Wilpattu, and others.

### Conservation Status

- **Threats:** The Sri Lankan elephant is classified as endangered due to habitat loss, human-elephant conflict, and poaching. Expanding human settlements and agriculture have encroached on their natural habitats, leading to frequent clashes with humans.
- **Conservation Efforts:** Efforts to protect them include habitat preservation, creating elephant corridors to ensure safe passage between fragmented habitats, and various human-elephant conflict mitigation strategies. Sri Lanka has several elephant conservation projects and sanctuaries dedicated to their protection and well-being.

### **Cultural Significance**

- **Symbolism:** Elephants hold a significant place in Sri Lankan culture and religion. They are revered in Buddhism and often participate in religious processions, such as the famous Esala Perahera in Kandy.
- **Tourism:** They are a major attraction for wildlife tourism, drawing visitors to the country's national parks and wildlife sanctuaries.

The Sri Lankan elephant is an integral part of the island's natural and cultural heritage, and ongoing conservation efforts are crucial for ensuring their survival amidst growing environmental pressures.

Here's a three-day itinerary focused on watching elephants in Sri Lanka:

### **Day 1: Arrival and Udawalawe National Park**

#### **Morning:**

- **Arrival in Colombo:** Arrive at Bandaranaike International Airport (Colombo).
- **Transfer to Udawalawe:** Take a scenic drive to Udawalawe (approximately 4-5 hours).

#### **Afternoon:**

- **Check-in:** Check into your accommodation near Udawalawe National Park.
- **Lunch:** Enjoy a local Sri Lankan meal at the hotel or a nearby restaurant.

#### **Evening:**

- **Udawalawe National Park Safari:** Head out for an afternoon safari in Udawalawe National Park, which is famous for its large elephant population. The park offers excellent opportunities to see elephants up close, along with other wildlife like water buffalo, deer, and various bird species.

### **Day 2: Udawalawe and Minneriya National Park**

#### **Morning:**

- **Elephant Transit Home:** Visit the Elephant Transit Home, where orphaned elephant calves are cared for and later released back into the wild. It's a great place to see young elephants being fed and interacting with their caregivers.

**Afternoon:**

- **Transfer to Minneriya:** Drive to Minneriya (approximately 4-5 hours). Enjoy the scenic countryside during the journey.

**Evening:**

- **Check-in and Relax:** Check into your accommodation near Minneriya National Park and relax.

**Day 3: Minneriya and Departure**

**Morning:**

- **Minneriya National Park Safari:** Go on an early morning safari in Minneriya National Park, known for the famous "Gathering" of elephants, which is one of the largest meeting points of Asian elephants in the world. The best time to visit is during the dry season (June to September) when elephants gather around the Minneriya Tank.

**Afternoon:**

- **Lunch:** Enjoy lunch at a local restaurant.
- **Optional Activity:** If time permits, visit the Sigiriya Rock Fortress or Polonnaruwa, which are nearby and offer rich historical and cultural experiences.

**Evening:**

- **Transfer to Colombo:** Drive back to Colombo (approximately 4-5 hours).
- **Departure:** Depending on your flight schedule, either head to the airport for your departure or check into a hotel in Colombo if you have a late-night or next-day flight.