

2025 Sri Lanka Trip Report

We were spoiled for choice in Sri Lanka. Eighteen days is considered a long safari by African standards, but there is a lot to do on this beautiful little island. In 18 days, we still did not get to all Sri Lanka offers. We did manage three national parks; six UNESCO World Heritage sites; a temple festival; a famous train ride; a tea estate; meeting the country's few remaining Indigenous people; excellent food; a cooking class so we could recreate the amazing cuisine at home; an elephant sanctuary; and thoroughly enjoyed our three-man Sri Lankan bus and guiding crew who became family. Some of us spent a few days on Sri Lanka's gorgeous coastline before flying home. A great addition to the next itinerary would be a few days at one of Sri Lanka's Ayurvedic Wellness Centres. Sri Lanka offers a wealth of healing services.

MTGT's destinations include a nature component. In Sri Lanka's case, the itinerary included the national parks for its alpha predator – the leopard – which has captured international attention for many years now. We also expected and hoped to see them. However, there is such focus devoted to spotting leopards that game vehicles drive up and down the same game routes which are known as leopard crossing points. This makes what can be the briefest of sightings even more difficult because of the number of vehicles. (Similar situations happen in Tanzania's busy Serengeti National Park when there are cat sightings or in India's tiger parks.) To complicate game drives still further, the roads inside Sri Lanka's parks are in very poor condition, especially away from the main tracks. This traps all the daily visitors onto one road. Yala National Park's Block 01 is known for being overcrowded. We stayed away from it, opting for game drives in the less visited Blocks 05 and 06. We did catch brief sights of leopards along with Sloth bears and Asian elephants, but the most memorable game drive was a morning spent birding (which is excellent and well worth focusing on) in Yala's Block 06. This block was empty! We saw one other vehicle, but the closest we came to a leopard sighting was a pug mark. It depends on what you want out of your wildlife destination. Are you ok with crowds which stress the wildlife as much as they stress you or do you prefer nature to yourself? I know what I choose.