

Colombo

Population: About 648 000

Currency: Sri Lanka Rupee (LKR)



COLOMBO

Colombo is the commercial capital of Sri Lanka, an enchanting island lying off India's southern tip. These city folk go about their daily business with a cheerfulness born of optimism in this chaotic, noisy and traffic-congested metropolis. It would be difficult not to immerse yourself in the serenity of Buddhism, which is practiced by the majority of Sri Lankans yet Colombo is home to all religions as evidenced by temples, mosques and churches sprouting amidst a jumble of Dutch and British-built buildings, a legacy of its colonial past.

THE CITY



Colombo sits on the west coast of Sri Lanka and has developed from an old seafaring port into a huge urban sprawl bristling with Asian atmosphere. Around the historic centre of Fort are colonial facades of banks, buildings and tumbledown shops and streets teeming with people, trishaws, bicycles, buses – and the occasional cow! Towering above Fort to the east are gleaming skyscrapers reflecting modern Colombo but wherever you go in the city you stumble across history, culture and friendly folk. Colombo is divided into districts (or postcodes) numbered 1-15 and knowing these numbers is essential for orientation. South along the coast from Fort, the district known as Colombo 1, is Colombo 2-10 where many top-end hotels are located. These districts continue inland taking in the fashionable shopping and residential area of Colombo 7, while Colombo 11-15 spreads northeast covering the harbor area.

DO & SEE



City Tour

Enjoy the sights from the comfort of an open-deck, double decker bus with live commentary. Three different tours stopping at the mayor sights. For pickup points see website.

The National Museum

Browse at a wealth of exhibits from prehistoric times to the colonial era. Look out for traditional fearsome masks said to be linked to magical powers.

Seema Malaka Buddhist Temple

Designed by Geoffrey Bawa, Sri Lanka's leading architect, this temple is used for the inauguration of Buddhist monks. The resident monk explains the principles of Buddhism. Admission: Free entry but donations accepted.

National Art Gallery

Entry is free to view this collection of

works by Sri Lankan artists. The paintings, which reflect local themes and scenes in European style, are housed in a large room.

Viharamahadevi Park

A peaceful interlude can be found here from the cacophony of town with neat paths bordered by tropical vegetation. Spot slumbering bats in mahogany and eucalyptus trees, bird life and land monitors languishing on lawns.

The Pettah

Explore scores of shops selling everything under the sun and streets devoted to hardware shops, electrical equipment, watches, gems and spice traders. Arrive early before trishaws and touts clog up the streets.

Dutch Period Museum

This fine colonnaded Dutch building, with creaking floors and staircases, contains exhibits from the Dutch colonial era.

Galle Face Green

Weekends bring kite-flyers, strolling families and impromptu cricket matches to this wide ocean-fronted promenade. Enjoy a drink at the Galle Face Hotel at the southern end of the promenade or fill up on tasty snacks on the waterfront.

Lionel Wendt Theatre and Art Gallery

Prestigious venue for the performing arts, especially music. Consult the tourist office for details of contemporary arts and crafts exhibitions.

Kathiresan Kovils

These kovils or temples, dedicated to the war god Skanda, bring colour to Colombo's backstreets with their ornate exteriors of sculptured Hindu deities. Visit at night when priests perform the evening puja or prayers to the sound of drums.

CAFES



- **Gallery Café**
- **Café 64**
- **Cricket Club Café**

EATING



- **Saffron Restaurant**
- **The Bayleaf**
- **Lavinia Breeze**
- **The Sizzle**
- **The Mango Tree**
- **Palmyrah**
- **Sakura Japanese Restaurant**
- **Taj**

SHOPPING



Modern air-conditioned malls are found adjacent to top end hotels or in the same vicinity and they're perfect for souvenirs such as traditional masks, batik, gems and presentation packs of the famous Ceylon tea. The best shopping area in town is Cinnamon Gardens where you can find just about anything made in Sri Lanka. Check out Paradise Road, 213 Dharmapala Mw, Cinnamon Gardens, Colombo 7; for trendy home décor and a fine selection of fabrics and linens, objets d'art and carvings in a gorgeous colonial house. Or pack plastic when you explore Odels; a stylish department store stuffed with designer clothing, linens, toys, books and records and several cafés (5 Alexandra Place, Lipton Circus, Cinnamon Gardens, Colombo 7). Also in Colombo 7 investigate the Elephant Walk, at 61 Ward Place; with two floors of innovative giftware such as silk placemats and cushions, candles and furniture, in this delightfully converted colonial villa. Give Crescat Shopping Centre a visit, adjacent to Cinnamon Grand Hotel, Colombo 3. It features several floors of shops linked by escalator selling everything from books, clothing, records and a place to buy tea from the Mlesna Tea Centre on the first floor. In the basement there's a supermarket and a large bustling food court.