

The Gardens of Sri Lanka with Joe Swift

WEDNESDAY 13th MARCH 2019

With its warm climate and a rich culture, Sri Lanka is home to colourful flora, lush vegetation, amazing wildlife and a stunning collection of gardens, and this unique group tour will allow both the avid & the casual gardener the opportunity to fully explore this remarkable island in the company of BBC's Gardener's World presenter and garden designer Joe Swift, who will share his passion for all things floral.

Aside from visits to the must-see Sigiriya Lion Rock and the Temple of the Tooth, guided tours are enjoyed in the Botanical Gardens of Henarathagoda, Peradeniya & Hakgala, and excursions made to gardens as diverse as Popham's Arboretum, the Brief Garden & the Lunuganaga Estates. There will also be time for a tea tasting experience at a tea-estate, to explore historic Galle, to ride a traditional tuk-tuk in Kandy, to trek in the Sinharaja Forest Reserve, and to go on safari in Yala National Park.



THE ITINERARY

13th March 2019: Departure

Depart London Heathrow on the direct overnight non-stop flight to Colombo.

14th March 2019: Colombo

On arrival, the group will be met and transferred to the tranquil Negombo Lagoon to stay overnight at the Gateway Hotel.

The afternoon is free to relax and explore the hotel's facilities and surroundings, which include a nature walk trail and the property's own vegetable and spice garden before a visit is made to the Henarathagoda Botanical Gardens. One of the six botanical gardens in Sri Lanka and now more than 125 years old, Henarathgoda was one of the first locations used by the British in their attempts to cultivate rubber and is now home to luscious flora and over 80 species of bird.

This evening a welcome dinner will be held at the hotel, affording the group the opportunity to become acquainted with one another.

Accommodation: Gateway Hotel [Half Board]



15th March 2019: Colombo - Dambulla

This morning the group will travel inland to view the Dambulla Cave Temple. Designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, this is the largest and best-preserved cave temple complex in Sri Lanka, with the rocks which house the caves towering 520ft over the surrounding plains. The five main caves contain multiple statues and paintings of Lord Buddha and his life, with the murals covering an area of 2,100 square metres. After a stop for lunch continue onwards to stay for two nights in Dambulla.

Accommodation: Heritance Kandalama Hotel [Breakfast]



16th March 2019: Dambulla

After breakfast, the group will proceed to the Sigiriya Lion Rock, an ancient rock fortress of historical and archaeological significance that is dominated by a massive column of rock. Declared a World Heritage site, the 5th-century citadel of King Kasyapa sits on the top of the rock, with a gateway in the form of an enormous lion located halfway up the side. Sitting at the foot of the rock are the beautiful Royal Gardens, a series of symmetrical water gardens & features, which include bathing pools, little islands with pavilions that were used as dry-season palaces, terraced gardens, natural boulders and landscaped borders.

In the afternoon the focus switches to Jathika Namal Uyana, the largest ironwood forest and pink quartz mountain in Asia. Endemic to Sri Lanka and spreading over 260 acres, this rare forest dates from the 8th Century and has seen service previously as both a sanctuary for monks and as a prison camp, where the inmates were made to plant trees as their punishment.

Accommodation: Heritance Kandalama Hotel [Breakfast]



17th March 2019: Dambulla - Kandy

After breakfast the group will travel to Kandy, making two stops en-route.

The first stop will be at Popham's Arboretum, a garden originally created and owned by an Englishman Sam Popham, and subsequently gifted to a local institute to be used for conservation, research and education. The country's only dry zone arboretum, it is now over 35 acres in size and is home to an amazing number of tree, bird, butterfly and mammal species. The group will enjoy a guided nature walk in the company of a professional botanist along the twisting footpaths and over the wooden bridges, and will undoubtedly spot some of the varied wildlife, from woodpeckers, sunbirds & parakeets, to eagles, deer & wild boar.

After continuing onwards, the next stop will be in the town of Matale, the centre of a rich agricultural area which lies in a broad, fertile valley at an elevation of 300m. The region's flagship crops include tea, rubber & vegetables, but it is most famed for the many spice plantations, one of which the group will visit to learn how vanilla, rubber, cinchona, jackfruit, cocoa, cardamom & chillies all thrive.

A World Heritage Site & the last royal capital of Sri Lankan kings, Kandy is a small lakeside town and is home to the Temple of the Tooth, which will be visited this afternoon; built within the Royal Palace complex, it contains the only surviving relic of Buddha.

A panoramic sightseeing tour of Kandy will include a journey in a custom-made traditional tuk-tuk.

Accommodation: OZO Kandy Hotel [Breakfast]



18th March 2019: Kandy

Today the group will be joined by Joe Swift, garden designer and presenter of the BBC's Gardener's World & of the BBC's coverage of the Chelsea Flower Show, for a guided tour in the company of a professional botanist at the superb Peradeniya Royal Botanical Gardens.

First developed by royalty in the early 1800's as a pleasure garden, they are situated at over 1,500ft above sea level and benefit from plentiful rainfall, which creates a lush collection of plants & trees.

The 150 acres are home to well-tended lawns, pavilions & an octagon conservatory, with notable attractions being an enormous banyan tree, giant Javan fig tree, a wonderful avenue of royal palms, and the orchid house which, with more than 300 spectacular species, has arguably the largest collection in Asia.

This afternoon the group will enjoy a trip with a professional botanist to the Udawattakele Forest Reserve, which is located on a hillside overlooking Kandy. A vital bio-reserve for the city, it is a sanctuary famous for its extensive variety of plant & shrub species, with over 460 recorded at the last count, as well as for being home to several giant climbing liana vines.

A Question & Answer session this evening with Joe Swift will be followed by dinner.

Accommodation: OZO Kandy Hotel [Half Board]



19th March 2019: Kandy - Nuwara Eliya

The morning is at leisure to explore the bustling streets of Kandy before a local train is boarded for the scenic journey through green valleys, pierced by endless waterfalls & dotted by tea pluckers draped in bright-coloured saris, to Nanu Oya.

On arrival an excursion will be made to a tea plantation and tea factory to learn about the fascinating processes of fermentation, rolling, drying, cutting, sieving and grading of tea. Sri Lanka and tea are words which are forever intertwined, and after enjoying the tour there will be the chance to taste a perfectly blended cup of pure Ceylon Tea.

The town of Nuwara Eliya and the atmospheric Grand Hotel will be home for the next two nights.

Located at the foot of Mount Pidurutalagala and enjoying a cool climate, Nuwara Eliya still retains a strong British influence, most noticeable in the immaculate lawns, colonial bungalows, golf course and Holy Trinity Anglican Church.

Accommodation: Grand Hotel [Breakfast]

20th March 2019: Nuwara Eliya

An early start today, again in the company of Joe Swift, as the journey is made to the Horton Plains National Park. Covering an area of 3160 hectares and with an altitude above 7000ft, visitors to the wet montane evergreen forests of Horton Plains are able to walk in the jungle to view the flora & fauna. The great views from World's End, with its head-spinning 3700ft drop, are hopefully supplemented by sightings of some of the wildlife which calls this World Heritage Site home - sambar deer, wild boar, monkeys, otters and even the elusive Sri Lankan leopard.

This afternoon the group will continue to the renowned Hakgala Botanical Gardens, to enjoy a tour in the company of a professional botanist. Originally established to cultivate the Cinchona tree and then later tea, the garden's purpose switched at the end of the 19th Century when subtropical plants were introduced and today it is famed for its extensive variety of magnificent roses, exotic orchids and rare ferns, with wooden bridges crossing the streams which flow through the grounds.

Accommodation: Grand Hotel [Breakfast]



21st March 2019: Tissamaharama

This morning there will be the opportunity to join a guided tour of the hotel's immaculately-manicured gardens before the group travels to the picturesque hill town of Ella, famous for its waterfalls and breathtaking scenery, and used as a base from which to trek into the surrounding countryside.

Continue onward to the Yala National Park to stay overnight, and the rest of the day is at leisure.

Accommodation: Cinnamon Wild Yala [Breakfast]

22nd March 2019: Deniyaya

Depart with a packed breakfast on an early morning jeep safari into the National Park. With terrain which varies from vast grasslands & dense jungle to lakes and lagoons, Yala is Sri Lanka's premier wildlife reserve and is home to a wide range of animals and birds including elephant, sloth bear, spotted deer, jackal and what is considered to be the world's highest density of leopards.

After lunch proceed to the Sinharaja Forest Reserve, which with an average annual rainfall of 3000-6000 mm, is one of the world's finest examples of tropical rainforest. Declared as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, a lot of the flora & fauna found here is endemic, with the reserve also home to wildlife, birdlife and many kinds of mammals, butterflies, amphibians and reptiles.

Accommodation: Rainforest Eco Lodge [Breakfast]



23rd March 2019: Bentota

This morning the group will enjoy a trek into the Sinharaja Forest Reserve to view the myriad of flora and fauna before travelling onward to the historic UNESCO town of Galle.

Founded by the Portuguese in the 16th century, it was subsequently taken over by the Dutch and turned into one of the best examples of a fortified city in southern Asia. Amongst the streets lined with colonial-style houses are sights which include the Dutch fort complex, the Zwart bastion, and the lighthouse.

Continuing this afternoon, the beach resort of Bentota will be the base for the next two nights at the Vivanta By Taj.

Boasting some of the best stretches of clean sandy beach in the country, Bentota is perfect for some relaxing downtime - swimming in the ocean, enjoying one of the many watersports available, or simply watching as the sun sets over the sea.

Accommodation: Vivanta By Taj [Breakfast]



24th March 2019: Bentota

For those wanting to do more than just relax on the golden sands, this morning a visit will be made to Brief Garden, the legendary garden and country home of Bevis Bawa which was the inspiration for his brother, the renowned architect Geoffrey Bawa, to create Lunuganga.

Bought with the proceeds of a legal brief, (which gave the garden its name), it resembles a magical place from a fantasy novel and encompasses numerous gardening styles and plantings, including a shady Japanese garden, an Italian-style water staircase, and an edible garden filled with fruit. This is a must-see for those with a keen interest in landscape design.

Lunuganaga Estate is then next on the agenda. Geoffrey Bawa, Sri Lanka's most prolific and influential architect, created a personal fiefdom at Lunuganaga, with the many exotic plants and trees complemented by the house itself, which is full of impressive paintings and photographs of a bygone age.

The final stop for the day will be at the Amuura Permaculture Garden, a garden created for permaculture farming, food sovereignty and self-sustainability, and which acts as a role model to encourage small farmers from the surrounding area to start their own independent gardens. In addition to producing organic cinnamon, a great variety of organic fruits, spices and vegetables are also cultivated.

This evening a farewell dinner will be held at the hotel.

Accommodation: Vivanta By Taj [Half Board]



25th March 2019: Departure

This morning the group will be transferred to Colombo airport to depart on the direct daytime non-stop flight to London Heathrow, arriving early evening.

THE EXCLUSIVE EXPERIENCES

- BBC Gardeners' World presenter Joe Swift will join the tour for three full days
- Guided tours with a professional botanist at Popham's Arboretum, Peradeniya Royal Botanical Gardens, Hakgala Botanical Gardens & Udawattakele Forest Reserve
- Exclusive question & answer dinner with Joe Swift
- Garden tours of Hernarathgoda Botanical Gardens, Jathika Namal Uyana, Horton Plains National Park, the Grand Hotel's gardens, Brief Garden, Lunuganaga Estate & Amuura Permaculture Garden
- Sinharaja Forest Reserve trek
- Jeep safari in Yala National Park
- Escorted sightseeing in Kandy, Dambulla Cave Temple, Sigiriya Lion Rock, Matale & Galle
- Tea plantation tour and tasting
- Scenic train journey
- Luxury accommodation in all locations
- Welcome dinner & farewell dinner
- Specialist tour guide

THE PRICE

GBP3595.00 per person, based on two sharing	GBP1290.00 single supplement
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TOUR INCLUDES

Service of a specialist tour guide	Economy class international and domestic flights
Luxury accommodation & breakfast throughout	Meals as detailed
Dinner and Question & Answer evening with Joe Swift	Guided tours of Dambulla Cave Temple, Sigiriya Lion Rock, Matale, Kandy & Galle
Garden visits as detailed	Scenic rail journey & trek in Sinharaja Forest Reserve
Tea plantation tour & tasting & jeep safari in Yala National Park	Transfers and transportation
Airline departure taxes	Service of a Cleveland Collection tour manager

TOUR EXCLUDES

Sri Lanka visa	Meals not mentioned in the itinerary
Personal expenses	Travel insurance
Tips & gratuities	