



SRI LANKA KANDY

FESTIVAL AND LOCAL CULTURAL PHOTOGRAPHY TOUR

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ABOUT THE FESTIVAL PHOTO TOUR

This is a specially designed photography tour focused on the annual Kandy Esala Perahera festival held in August, along with a range of cultural photography experiences across Sri Lanka following the festival sessions. The Kandy Esala Perahera is held to honor the sacred tooth relic of Gautama Buddha, a highly revered Buddhist tradition in Sri Lanka. The event features a vibrant procession with traditional dancers, drummers, fire performers, and beautifully decorated elephants. The tour is led by an experienced Sri Lankan travel and portrait photographer, who carefully conducts each photography session at the right time and under optimal lighting conditions. This tour is ideal for both professional and beginner photographers. Beginners will gain valuable practical knowledge of basic photography techniques, camera settings, and composition, guided step by step by the tour leader in real shooting environments throughout the journey. After the festival photography sessions, the tour moves to other parts of Sri Lanka for local people photography experiences, including stilt fishermen, indigenous Vedda people, Buddhist monks, tea pluckers, rural village life, and more.



ABOUT THE PHOTO TOUR GUIDE

Saman Weeratunga is a travel photographer and videographer based in Kandy, the heart of Sri Lanka. He has a strong passion for photography and videography. His creative journeys have taken him across amazing countries such as Switzerland, Austria, France, Germany, Poland, the Netherlands, Belgium, Kenya, the Czech Republic, Singapore, and Malaysia. These experiences have given him valuable international knowledge and creative insight. He has excellent knowledge of the people of Sri Lanka and understands the right timing and locations for people photography. Saman will guide you while traveling around Sri Lanka to capture stunning photos and videos of local people and their daily lives. As his strong connections with local communities make access easy, people are welcoming and cooperative. They are happy to take part in photography sessions, allowing you to capture authentic moments with confidence. If you are a beginner photographer, he will help you learn basic camera settings and controls. He also teaches lighting techniques, composition, and creative approaches, ensuring a rewarding learning experience while traveling.



HASSLE FREE DRONE CLEARANCE

We handle all the hassle of obtaining official clearance for drone flights in Sri Lanka, making the entire process simple and stress free. Drone usage in Sri Lanka requires approvals from several authorities, and all communication is managed on behalf of clients. This includes the civil aviation authority, the central cultural fund, and the department of archaeology, each of which has its own set of rules and procedures that must be followed carefully. Obtaining drone permissions can be even more challenging when it comes to protected archaeological and heritage sites such as Sigiriya and Polonnaruwa. These locations are strictly regulated to preserve their cultural and historical value, so special approvals are required before any drone activity can take place. Understanding and managing these requirements can be time-consuming and complicated for visitors. That is why full responsibility is taken for the entire process, including preparing documents, submitting applications, and coordinating with relevant authorities. By handling everything from start to finish, the stress and confusion are removed, ensuring a smooth and well managed approval process.



PHOTOGRAPHY HIGHLIGHTS

ESALA PERAHERA FESTIVAL IN KANDY

This is a candid photo session beside the main street where the procession takes place. The photographers can capture the spectacular annual historic procession paying homage to the sacred tooth relic of the Buddha, featuring traditional dancers, drummers, decorated elephants, and much more. It is also possible to capture how dancers, drummers, and participants get dressed before the procession starts. The perahera is a deeply sacred Buddhist procession held in Kandy to honor the sacred tooth relic of the Buddha and express devotion and faith through rituals and offerings.



PHOTOGRAPHY HIGHLIGHTS

STILT FISHERMEN IN HABARADUWA

This is an organized private photo session with a few stilt fishermen at sunrise or sunset, away from the tourist beach areas. Photographers can direct the fishermen as they wish and capture amazing photos under beautiful lighting conditions. Stilt fishermen are traditional Sri Lankan fishermen who balance on wooden poles planted in shallow coastal waters while fishing with simple rods. This unique and iconic practice, mainly seen along the southern coast, is a traditional method of fishing known as stilt fishing, where fishermen sit on crossbars fixed to wooden poles above the sea.



PHOTOGRAPHY HIGHLIGHTS

INDIGENOUS GROUP OF PEOPLE IN DAMBANA

This is an organized private photo session with a few indigenous people early in the morning at a remote area away from the main tourist village. Photographers can capture indigenous ritual dance performances, dancing around the fire, as well as close up portraits. The Vedda are the indigenous people of Sri Lanka, known for their deep connection to nature and their way of life. Traditionally living in forested areas, they follow customs, rituals, and hunting practices that have been passed down through generations. Today, their culture remains an important part of Sri Lanka's heritage.



PHOTOGRAPHY HIGHLIGHTS

BUDDHIST MONKS WITH RUINS IN POLONNARUWA

This is an organized private photo session with a few Buddhist monks brought from a nearby temple. The session is arranged with special permission from the department of archaeology to access the ruins at sunrise, when no tourists are allowed. Photographers can respectfully direct the monks as desired and capture stunning images under beautiful lighting conditions. The ancient city of Polonnaruwa in Sri Lanka is a historic site that was once the capital of the country during the 11th to 13th centuries. It is known for its well preserved ruins, including palaces, temples, and statues.



PHOTOGRAPHY HIGHLIGHTS

TEA PLUCKERS ON TEA FIELDS IN HAPUTALE

This is an organized private photo session with a few tea pluckers in the tea fields at sunrise, a time when they usually do not work. Photographers can direct the tea pluckers as they wish and capture amazing photos under beautiful lighting conditions. Sri Lankan tea pluckers are an essential part of the country's world famous tea industry, hand picking fresh tea leaves in the lush green hill country. Working across steep and scenic plantations, they skillfully select only the finest leaves, a practice that requires speed and precision. They are dressed in colorful clothing and carry on their backs.



PHOTOGRAPHY HIGHLIGHTS

RURAL TEA ESTATE VILLAGERS IN HAPUTALE

This is a candid photo session walking around a rural village where photographers can capture amazing close up portraits of children and elderly people during their day to day activities in the village. Tea estate workers in Sri Lanka trace their origins to Indian Tamil laborers who were brought during the British colonial period in the 19th century. When the British established large coffee and later tea plantations in the central highlands, there was a shortage of local labor, so workers were recruited from South India, mainly Tamil Nadu for plantation work in Sri Lanka and beyond.



PHOTOGRAPHY HIGHLIGHTS

PETTAH MARKET PORTERS IN COLOMBO

This is a candid photo session walking along a street in Sri Lanka's biggest and busiest marketplace, where constant activity unfolds as porters carry wholesale goods such as vegetables and spices. Photographers can capture striking close up portraits and the daily life of porters and traders in the street. Pettah market is a vibrant hub of narrow streets, each dedicated to different goods. Among them, 4th cross street Pettah stands out for its intense activity and wholesale trade, where porters carry heavy loads of vegetables, fruits, and other goods using handcarts and on their shoulders.



PHOTOGRAPHY HIGHLIGHTS

PORUTHOTA FISHING VILLAGE IN NEGOMBO

This is a candid photo session walking along the coastline where a small fishing village is located, where fishermen practice small scale fishing. Photographers can capture striking close up portraits and daily morning activities of fishermen coming to shore in small boats, gathering fish from nets, and bringing the catch to sell at nearby fishing markets. Before sunrise, fishermen head out into the sea in small wooden boats, often powered by outboard engines or paddles, carrying nets, lines, and equipment. These fishing activities take place close to shore, targeting species such as sardine.



PHOTOGRAPHY HIGHLIGHTS

DAMBULLA CAVE TEMPLE IN DAMBULLA

The Dambulla Cave Temple is one of Sri Lanka's remarkable historical and cultural sites, known for its ancient rock caves filled with Buddhist murals and statues. The complex features five main caves, each adorned with preserved murals covering the ceilings and walls, along with over a hundred Buddha statues in various poses. The site houses more than 150 statues, including reclining Buddha figures and finely detailed seated and standing statues, all arranged in a harmonious and atmospheric setting. Its elevated location offers stunning panoramic views of the countryside.



SIGHTSEEING HIGHLIGHTS

SIGIRIYA ROCK FORTRESS IN SIGIRIYA

Sigiriya is an ancient rock fortress and palace complex in Sri Lanka dating back to the 5th century AD, built by King Kashyapa as his royal residence and stronghold after he seized the throne. It functioned as a royal palace and fortress, and later became a Buddhist monastery after the king's death. To reach the summit, visitors climb approximately 1,200 steps, passing through gardens and terraces. At the site, visitors can see fresco paintings, mirror wall graffiti, lion's paw entrance, summit palace ruins, ancient stairways, water gardens and panoramic views of the surrounding landscape.



SIGHTSEEING HIGHLIGHTS

TEMPLE OF THE SACRED TOOTH RELIC IN KANDY

The temple of the tooth is one of the most sacred Buddhist sites in Sri Lanka, housing the tooth relic of Gautama Buddha. The history of the temple dates back to the 4th century AD, when the relic was brought to Sri Lanka from India and became a symbol of authority, as it was believed that whoever possessed the relic had the right to rule. Today, it remains an active place of worship, where daily rituals are performed, and it is also the focal point of the Esala Perahera, a procession that honors the sacred tooth relic with traditional dancers, drummers, decorated elephants and whip crackers.



SIGHTSEEING HIGHLIGHTS

HISTORIC GALLE DUTCH FORT IN GALLE

The fort was originally built by the Portuguese in 1588 to protect their trading interests along the southern coast. Later, in 1640, the Dutch captured Galle and extensively rebuilt and expanded the fort, strengthening its ramparts, gates, and bastions to create a powerful coastal defense system. The design of the fort reflects classic Dutch military architecture, carefully planned to withstand attacks from both land and sea. Today, the fort is a living heritage site where colonial buildings, old churches and narrow cobblestone streets still preserve its historic charm beautifully intact.



SIGHTSEEING HIGHLIGHTS

A TRAIN PASSING OVER THE NINE ARCHES BRIDGE IN ELLA

The bridge was built during the British colonial period entirely out of stone, brick, and cement, without the use of steel, and stands as a remarkable example of early railway engineering and local craftsmanship. The area around the bridge is popular with travelers who come to enjoy scenic walks along the railway tracks. One of the best experiences at the nine arch bridge is watching a train slowly pass over its nine elegant arches. As the train curves gently along the track, framed by thick greenery and rolling hills, it creates a perfect, postcard like moment with breathtaking views.



SIGHTSEEING HIGHLIGHTS

SCENIC TRAIN JOURNEY FROM DEMODARA TO HAPUTALE

The train journey is a relatively short but scenic ride through Sri Lanka's hill country. Along the way, passengers can enjoy views of tea plantations, misty mountains, small villages, waterfalls, and forest-covered hills. The train passes through tunnels and over valleys, offering changing landscapes at every turn. A better way to enjoy the scenery is to sit by the window and relax, as it offers a view throughout the journey. Many foreign passengers prefer standing at the doors for photography and open air views, but it can be dangerous due to sudden tunnels, narrow sections.



SIGHTSEEING HIGHLIGHTS

TUK TUK RIDE THROUGH GREEN VALLEY IN HAPUTALE

This is an amazing journey in a vibrant three wheeler, where you can enjoy spectacular views of the mountains and tea fields. This small, open vehicle lets you truly see and feel the beautiful landscapes, from misty mountain peaks to endless green tea plantations. As the three wheeler winds its way through narrow village roads, you can breathe in the fresh mountain air, catch the aroma of freshly plucked tea leaves, and hear the gentle rhythm of daily village life around you. This kind of experience and fresh air is something you cannot enjoy when traveling by car or bus in comfort.



SIGHTSEEING HIGHLIGHTS

GIRAGAMA TEA FACTORY IN PILIMATHALAWA

Visiting a tea factory, visitors can learn the full tea manufacturing process, starting from freshly plucked green leaves brought from nearby plantations to the final graded product ready for export. The process typically includes withering, rolling, oxidation, drying, and sorting, with each stage carefully controlled to develop the tea's flavor and aroma. This guided tour is led by knowledgeable staff and is followed by a tea tasting session, where guests can sample freshly brewed Ceylon tea, and it is also possible to buy fresh, factory-made Ceylon tea directly from the factory outlet shop.



THE ESSENTIAL CAMERA GEAR CHECKLIST

This tour takes you through a variety of unique locations and lighting conditions, offering diverse opportunities for both creative and documentary style photography. To help you get the most out of this photography experience, we recommend coming well prepared with a few essential tools that will support different shooting situations throughout the tour. We recommend bringing these essentials along with your camera body and versatile zoom lenses like standard, wide angle etc.

If you are interested in aerial photography, bringing a drone will be a great advantage. We take care of all necessary permits, so you can enjoy hassle free flying and focus fully on capturing unique perspectives from above.

A sturdy tripod is also an important part of your kit, especially for low light situations, sunrise and sunset shoots, or when you want to create long exposure images with stability and precision.

The filters such as neutral density, polarizing, or graduated filters will greatly help you manage light conditions and enhance the overall quality and mood of your photographs in different environments.

For more creative control, portable lighting equipment or reflectors can be very useful depending on your personal style, helping you shape light for portraits or add extra dimension to your images. Also a black background drop cloth is ideal for close up portrait photography, allowing you to isolate your subject and create powerful, clean, and professional looking compositions.



CHALLENGES IN PERAHERA PHOTOGRAPHY

Photography of the Kandy Esala Perahera procession is always dynamic and requires adaptability. Thousands of local people gather in the narrow streets of Kandy to watch the procession, so the scene is constantly changing, making photography an ever moving challenge. The two photography sessions of the Kandy Esala Perahera will be conducted on the street, as it is very close to the procession and allows for eye level photography. There is no proper seating on the street, so photography must be done while standing among the local crowd or sitting on the ground for approximately 3 - 4 hours. You may need to arrive early and stay under the sun during the day to secure a good spot for eye level photography without obstruction from local spectators. We hope you are ready to embrace these dynamic conditions and capture amazing photographs of this beautiful, sacred procession during this iconic cultural festival experience.

Please note that paid chair seating areas are available above street level for viewing the Kandy Esala Perahera. However, for photography, these chairs are placed on elevated platforms, making it difficult to capture good portrait shots due to the high shooting angle. In addition, local spectators usually sit on the ground in front of these platforms, which increases the chance of people appearing in the frame and makes it difficult to obtain clean shots without spectators. Therefore, we do not recommend photographing the Kandy Esala Perahera procession from these chairs. However, if you still prefer to sit on these chairs and photograph the procession, we can arrange the seating for you. Please note that the cost of the chairs must be paid directly by you, as it is not included in the tour price. You can get the available price at the time the festival is held.



MODE OF TRANSPORT – A PRIVATE MINIBUS

PHOTOGRAPHY TOUR ITINERARY - 10 DAYS

DAY 01 - SATURDAY 22ND AUGUST 2026

The Tour Will Begin At The Designated Meeting Point
Poruthota Fishing Village In Negombo (Early Morning)
Pettah Market Porters In Colombo (Evening)
Overnight Stay In Negombo

DAY 02 - SUNDAY 23RD AUGUST 2026

Traveling From Negombo To Kandy (4-Hour Drive)
Giragama Tea Factory In Pilimathalawa (Afternoon)
Esala Perahera Festival In Kandy (Night - 01 Randoli Perahera)
Overnight Stay In Kandy

DAY 03 - MONDAY 24TH AUGUST 2026

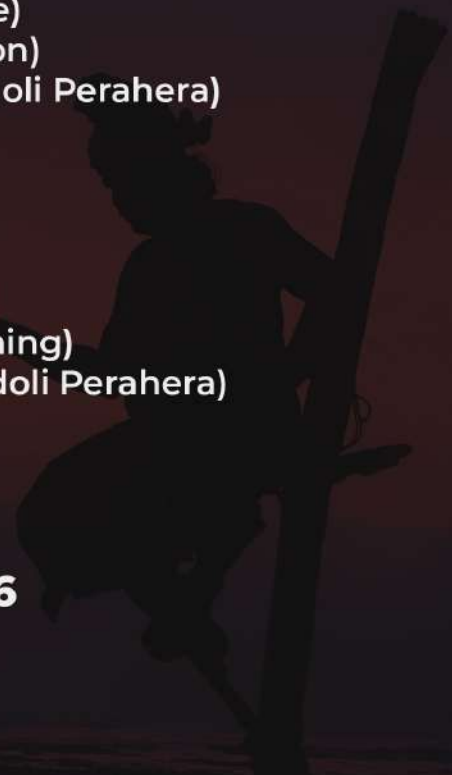
Temple Of The Sacred Tooth Relic In Kandy (Evening)
Esala Perahera Festival In Kandy (Night - 02 Randoli Perahera)
Overnight Stay In Kandy

DAY 04 - TUESDAY 25TH AUGUST 2026

Traveling From Kandy To Sigiriya (4-Hour Drive)
Sigiriya Rock Fortress In Sigiriya (Evening)
Overnight Stay In Sigiriya

DAY 05 - WEDNESDAY 26TH AUGUST 2026

Dambulla Cave Temple In Dambulla (Morning)
Traveling From Sigiriya To Polonnaruwa (1-Hour Drive)
Overnight Stay In Polonnaruwa



PHOTOGRAPHY TOUR ITINERARY - 10 DAYS

DAY 06 - THURSDAY 27TH AUGUST 2026

Buddhist Monks With Ruins In Polonnaruwa (Sunrise)
Traveling From Polonnaruwa To Mahiyanganaya (3-Hour Drive)
Overnight Stay In Mahiyanganaya

DAY 07 - FRIDAY 28TH AUGUST 2026

Indigenous Group Of People In Dambana (Early Morning)
Traveling From Mahiyanganaya To Demodara (2-Hour Drive)
Scenic Train Journey From Demodara To Haputale (2-Hour Journey)
Overnight Stay In Haputale

DAY 08 - SATURDAY 29TH AUGUST 2026

Tea Pluckers On Tea Fields In Haputale (Sunrise)
Rural Tea Estate Villagers In Haputale (Early Morning)
Tuk Tuk Ride Through Green Valley In Haputale (Morning)
A Train Passing Over The Nine Arches Bridge In Ella (Evening)
Overnight Stay In Haputale

DAY 09 - SUNDAY 30TH AUGUST 2026

Traveling From Haputale To Weligama (5-Hour Drive)
Stilt Fishermen In Habaraduwa (Sunset)
Overnight Stay In Weligama

DAY 10 - MONDAY 31ST AUGUST 2026

Historic Galle Dutch Fort In Galle (Early Morning)
Stilt Fishermen In Habaraduwa (Sunset)
The Tour Will End At The Designated Point
Overnight Stay In Weligama



PHOTOGRAPHY TOUR COST – 10 DAYS

COST PER PERSON

Total cost of the photography tour **US\$ 2,700** per person

INCLUDES

Hotel Accommodation On A Room Only Basis
Air Conditioned Private Transport
Photography Guide Service Fee
Entrance Fee For The Attractions
Kandy Esala Perahera Expenses
Veddas People's Photo Session Fee
Stilt Fishermen Photo Session Fee
Tea Pluckers Photo Session Fee
Villages Photo Session Fee
Train Tickets From Demodara To Haputale
Tuk Tuk Charges From Haputale To Dambethenna

EXCLUDES

Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner, Beverages
Air Tickets And Visa Charges
Kandy Esala Perahera Seat Booking (If Required)
Video Camera, Drone & Still Camera Permits (If Any)
Model Release Document Fees (If Any)
Tips & Other Similar Charges (If Any)

HOTEL COST CLARIFICATION

The tour cost includes hotel accommodation on a single-room basis at 3-star hotels in urban areas and 2-star hotels in rural areas. If you share a room, the tour cost will be reduced. If you prefer to stay in hotels higher than 3 stars, we can deduct the hotel cost from the tour package, and you may arrange the higher-standard accommodation yourself. However, please check with us before making any bookings, as the hotels need to be located close to our photography locations to ensure timely access for sunrise and sunset sessions. Staying at hotels located farther away may make it difficult to reach the locations on time.

FOODS AND BEVERAGE COST

Our tour cost does not include breakfast, lunch, dinner, beverages, or any other food. We will recommend good restaurants close to the visiting locations. Food costs are not included as they are variable, and we also prefer to give guests the freedom to choose meals according to their own preferences.

PAYMENT METHOD

ADVANCE DEPOSIT

To confirm your reservation, a deposit of **US\$ 500** is kindly required for each participant. This deposit secures your booking and ensures your place on the tour.

BALANCE PAYMENT 01

Fifty percent (50%) of the total tour cost for each participant is kindly requested to be settled within three (03) days after arrival.

BALANCE PAYMENT 02

The remaining balance payment for each participant is kindly requested to be settled within eight (08) days after arrival.

REFUND POLICY

If any photography session is canceled during the tour for any reason, the cost of entrance tickets or any related expenses (excluding transport costs) will be refunded. Please note that this does not apply to tickets that have been purchased in advance, if applicable. Kindly be advised that advance deposits are non refundable in the event that a participant is unable to join the photography tour due to personal reasons.

PAYMENT MEDIUM

Kindly note that payments are accepted in cash only, in USD / EUR / GBP

ARRANGED PHOTO SESSIONS

During the tour, we offer both candid photography sessions and specially arranged shoots. The individuals featured in the arranged sessions are not professional models, but real local people. We organize these sessions and compensate the participants, scheduling them during the best available light conditions to ensure optimal results. Photographers are given the freedom to work creatively, with the opportunity to guide and direct subjects as needed, making the most of the lighting and environment to achieve their desired shots.

PHOTO SESSIONS AND TRAVEL TIME

We have scheduled one or two major photography sessions per day and have not planned more within a single day due to travel time and the tiredness that can follow long drives. However, it is always possible to make stops along the way to capture good photographs, depending on the lighting conditions during the journey.

PASSPORT INFORMATION SUBMISSION

It is necessary to provide the passport details of photographers / travelers in order to obtain special permission from the archaeological department for the sunrise photography sessions. Passport details are also required when booking train tickets. Therefore, please submit an image of the bio page of your passport. Your passport information will be stored securely and will be permanently deleted once the tour has ended. This is required for smooth coordination and official approvals.

TIPS FOR SRI LANKA THAT MIGHT HELP

Flying drones is prohibited in national parks and metropolitan areas like Colombo, Kandy. Special permission is required from the civil aviation authority, department of archaeology, central cultural fund, and Sri Lanka police for flying drones at archaeological sites like Sigiriya, Polonnaruwa, Galle.

When visiting Buddhist or Hindu temples, cover your legs and shoulders, and remove your shoes and hats. Thick socks can help protect your feet from hot sand. Never pose with your back to Buddha statues when taking photos, as it is considered highly disrespectful in Sri Lankan culture. Always face the statue respectfully.

The tropical sun can be very strong, protect your skin and eyes by applying sunscreen, wearing a hat, and using sunglasses. In the hill country, temperatures can be cooler, so it's a good idea to bring a light jacket or sweater.

Visa and MasterCard are widely accepted, but American Express may not be accepted everywhere. Small shops may not accept credit cards, so keep some Sri Lankan rupees on hand for small purchases and local restaurants. The standard voltage in Sri Lanka is 230 V with a frequency of 50 Hz. Plug types used are D and G, so you may need a plug adapter.

Sri Lanka has relatively few mosquitoes, mainly in the evenings, so use insect repellent and wearing light, long sleeved clothing is recommended for protection. Public restrooms may lack toilet paper or soap, so carry tissues and hand sanitizer.

Buy a SIM card at the airport for easy connectivity. Dialog and Mobitel offer the best coverage across the island. eSIMs are also available for purchase at the airport. Buying a local SIM or eSIM is recommended because hotel Wi-Fi is often very slow.

When traveling in rural areas, you may encounter many poor children who gather around you. Bringing small, inexpensive chocolates or sweets can make them very happy, as they love receiving something from foreigners. Stationery or educational materials are less practical, as there are often many children, but small packets of sweets are easy to distribute fairly among them.

