

Colombo



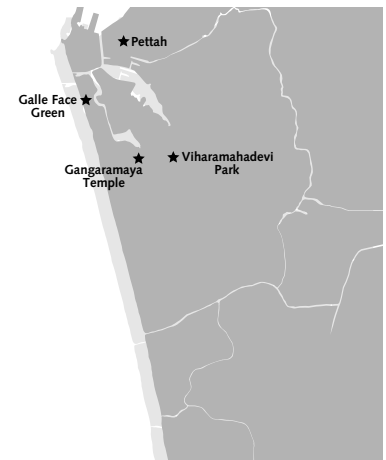
Colombo, Sri Lanka's capital, biggest city and major port, draws together all the colours and cultures that make up this island nation, condenses them into a patchwork of markets, gardens and buildings both humble and grand, and knocks them against a narrow slab of beachfront.

Many visitors will appreciate Colombo's colonial heritage, its fine dining and shopping opportunities, and the dash of urban buzz in an overwhelmingly rural country. Others will tire quickly of the diesel fumes and the modern buildings on Galle Rd, the city's main artery. If you're only on a short trip to Sri Lanka, you may wish to pass by Colombo, but if you have the time – say at least two days – there are plenty of cultural and historical attractions in areas such as Fort, Cinnamon Gardens and Pettah.

Colombo is the political, economic and cultural centre of Sri Lanka, so if you need to extend your visa or buy a plane ticket, you'll find yourself here. The city was the scene of quite a few bombings during the war years, but security has been relaxed since a cease-fire was declared and peace talks began.

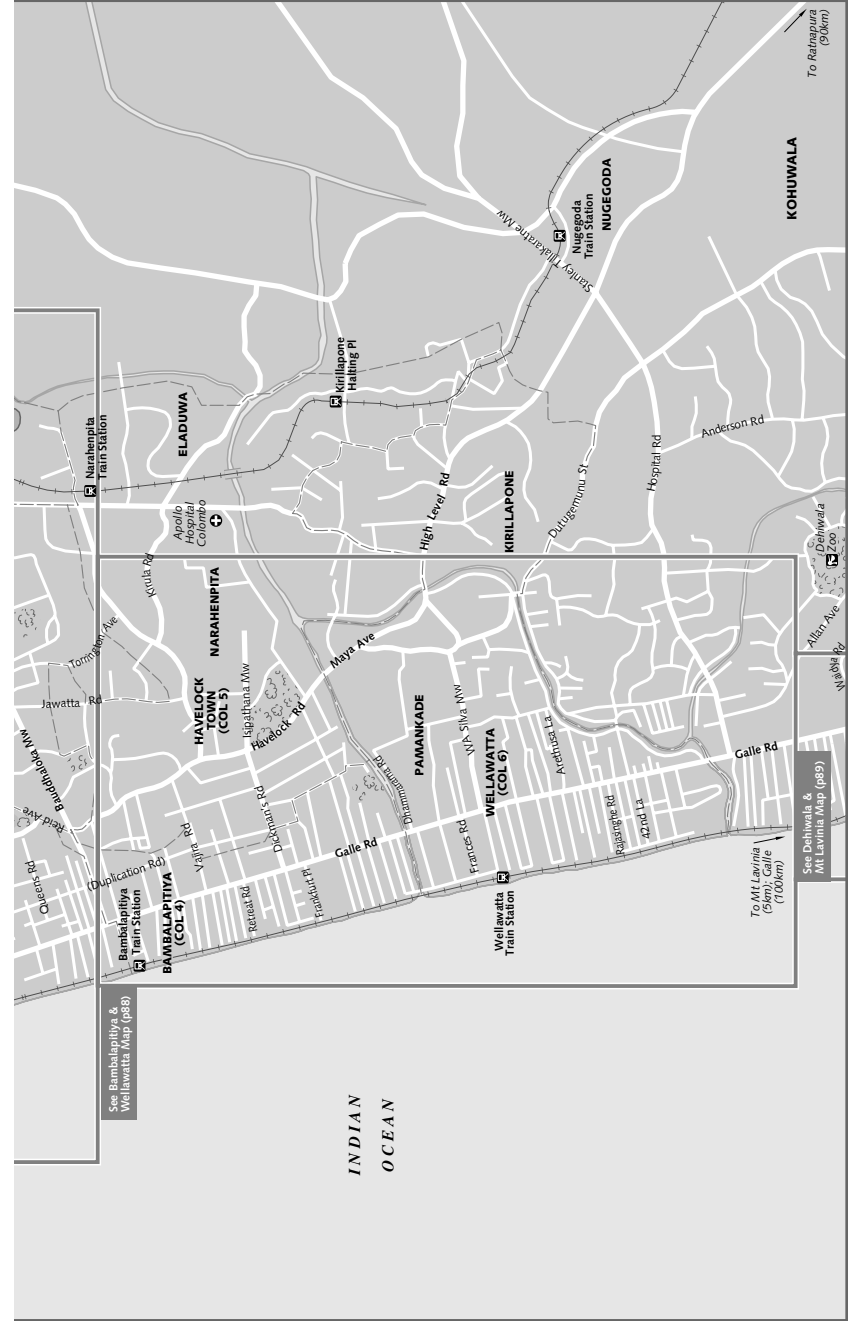
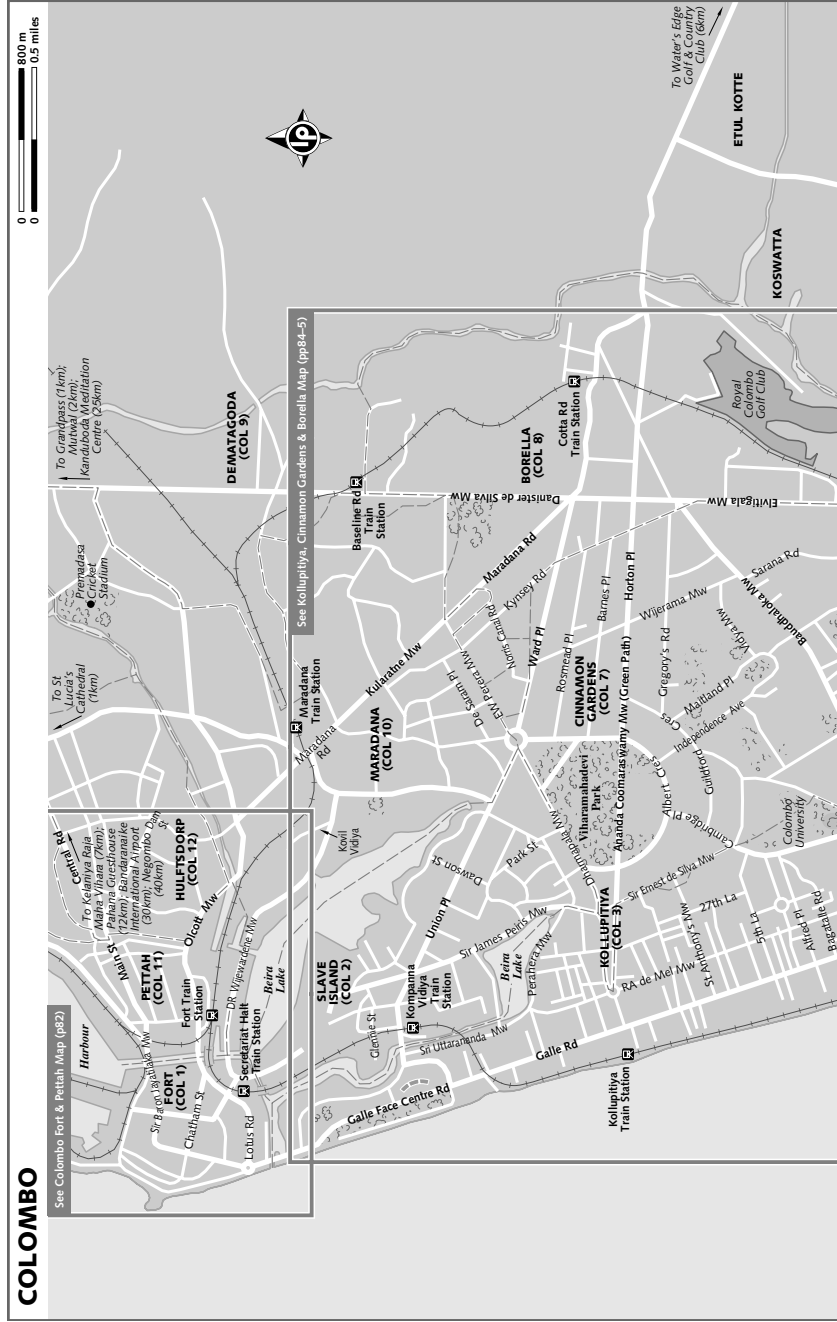
HIGHLIGHTS

- Chewing, sipping and slurping your way through the huge variety of **food** (p97) on offer
- Elbowing your way through the street-stall 'boutiques' in **Pettah** (p89)
- Relishing peaceful **Viharamahadevi Park** (p90) after navigating the darting three-wheelers and the jungle of streets
- Taking a sunset promenade on **Galle Face Green** (p90)
- Visiting Hindu **kovils** (p91) during the Thai Pongal festival or watching elephants and dancers parade during the Navam Perahera at **Gangaramaya Temple** (p91)



■ TELEPHONE CODE: 011

■ POPULATION: 2.2 MILLION



HISTORY

As far back as the 5th century, Colombo served as a sea port for trade between Asia and the West. During the 8th century, Arab traders settled near the port and, in 1505, the Portuguese arrived. By the mid-17th century the Dutch had taken over, growing cinnamon in the area now known as Cinnamon Gardens, but it wasn't until the British arrived that the town became a city. In 1815 Colombo was proclaimed the capital of Ceylon.

During the 1870s the breakwaters were built and Fort was created by flooding surrounding wetlands. Colombo was peacefully handed over when Sri Lanka achieved independence in 1948. A new parliament was built in Sri Jayawardenepura-Kotte, an outer suburb of Colombo, in 1982.

Isolated Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) bomb attacks in Fort during the 1990s caused Colombo's major businesses and institutions to disperse across the city. These days Colombo is spreading north and south along the coast as people migrate to the city to work.

ORIENTATION

Colombo is split into 15 postal code areas, which are often used to identify the specific districts. Pettah, for example, is also referred to as Colombo 11 (or just Col 11), Slave Island is referred to as Col 2, and so on. See right for a full listing of codes. Once you've got a few directions down, it is relatively easy to find your way around the city. From the visitor's point of view, Colombo is a long coastal strip extending about 12km south from Fort (Col 1). The spine of this strip is Galle Rd. Colombo's main train station, Fort, is actually in Pettah, as are the main bus stations – all 10 or 15 minutes' walk from Fort itself. The domestic airport is at Ratmalana Air Force Base, south of central Colombo, while Bandaranaike International Airport is at Katunayake, 30km north of the city. For details on getting to/from the airport and bus and train stations, see p104.

Travelling south down Galle Face Rd from Fort you come to a large oceanfront lawn area called Galle Face Green. Inland from here is Slave Island, which isn't really an island at all as only two of its three sides are surrounded by water (though it really was used for keeping slaves in the Dutch

COLOMBO'S SUBURB CODES

Zone	Suburb
Colombo 1	Fort
Colombo 2	Slave Island
Colombo 3	Kollupitiya
Colombo 4	Bambalapitiya
Colombo 5	Havelock Town
Colombo 6	Wellawatta
Colombo 7	Cinnamon Gardens
Colombo 8	Borella
Colombo 9	Dematagoda
Colombo 10	Maradana
Colombo 11	Pettah
Colombo 12	Hulftsdorp
Colombo 13	Kotahena
Colombo 14	Grandpass
Colombo 15	Mutwal

colonial era). South is neighbouring Kollupitiya, followed by Bambalapitiya, Wellawatta, Dehiwala and finally the old beach resort of Mt Lavinia, which isn't officially part of Colombo but is definitely within its urban sprawl.

If you turn inland (east) from Kollupitiya you'll soon find yourself in Cinnamon Gardens, home of the national art gallery, museum, university, Viharamahadevi Park, some of the most exclusive residential quarters and many embassies.

Finding addresses is complicated by the fact that street numbers start again each time you move into a new district. Thus there will be a '100 Galle Rd' in several different neighbourhoods.

Some Colombo streets have both an old English name and a postindependence Sinhala name. Ananda Coomaraswamy Mawatha is also known as Green Path, for example, while RA de Mel Mawatha is also still known as Duplication Rd.

Throughout Sri Lanka, Mw is an abbreviation for Mawatha, meaning 'Avenue'.

Maps

If you're going to be spending some time in Colombo, the 96-page *A-Z Street Guide* (Rs 400) extends as far south as Mt Lavinia and as far inland as Kelaniya, and covers Galle, Kandy, Nuwara Eliya, Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa. It also includes information on Colombo's suburban and

inner-city buses. Its main competitor, *A to Z Colombo* (Rs 170), has only 45 pages and doesn't cover Mt Lavinia, but for central Colombo it is more detailed and more accurate. Both publications are available from bookshops.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Colombo has some excellent bookshops. Top-end hotels also often have bookshops where you'll find up-to-date foreign magazines and newspapers.

Barefoot (Map pp84-5; ☎ 258 9305; 704 Galle Rd, Col 3) Better known for its textiles, this shop carries a broad range of quality books on local art, culture, travel and literature.

Bibliomania (Map p82; ☎ 243 2881; 32 Hospital St, Col 1) Jam-packed with a random selection of second-hand fiction and a mixed bag of magazines, educational books and more. Most are in English. Prices are often the best in the city.

Bookland (Map pp84-5; ☎ 256 5248; 430-432 Galle Rd, Col 3) Offers the usual range of books about Sri Lanka, plus English titles and magazines.

Buddhist Book Centre (Map pp84-5; ☎ 268 9786; 380 Baudhaloka Mawatha, Col 7) Filled with books on Buddhism; about a third of the stock is in English.

Lake House Bookshop (Map pp84-5; ☎ 257 4418; Liberty Plaza, RA de Mel Mawatha, Col 3) Colombo's oldest bookshop has an extensive range of books, along with foreign and local magazines and newspapers.

MD Gunasena Bookshop (Map p88; ☎ 255 3379; 27 Galle Rd, Col 4) Gunasena's ambitious-looking outlet is opposite Majestic City; it carries a decent selection of titles.

Vijitha Yapa Bookshop (Crescat Boulevard (Map pp84-5; 89 Galle Rd, Col 3); Unity Plaza (Map p88; ☎ 259 6960; Galle Rd, Col 4) Stocks a comprehensive collection of foreign and local novels, magazines and pictorial tomes on Sri Lanka. The branch in Crescat Boulevard shopping centre is smaller.

Cultural Centres

Alliance Française (Map pp84-5; ☎ 269 4162; 11 Barnes Pl, Col 7) Hosts seminars, and shows films at 3pm on Tuesday and 6pm on Wednesday. Has a library.

American Information Resource Center (Map pp84-5; ☎ 233 2725; 44 Galle Rd, Col 3) Periodically hosts films and seminars, and offers a library and Internet access (per day Rs 100).

COLOMBO IN...

One Day

Start off the day while it's still relatively cool with a ramble through the aromatic markets of **Pettah** (p89), testing fruit for ripeness, buying fresh coconut juice and watching the locals haggle. While you're in the neighbourhood, learn about Sri Lanka's colonial history at the **Dutch Period Museum** (p89) and enjoy this restored mansion's garden.

Kill the proverbial two birds with lunch at **Gallery Cafe** (p99) after perusing the arts and crafts at **Paradise Road Cafe** (p100), both housed in the former offices of acclaimed Sri Lankan architect Geoffrey Bawa.

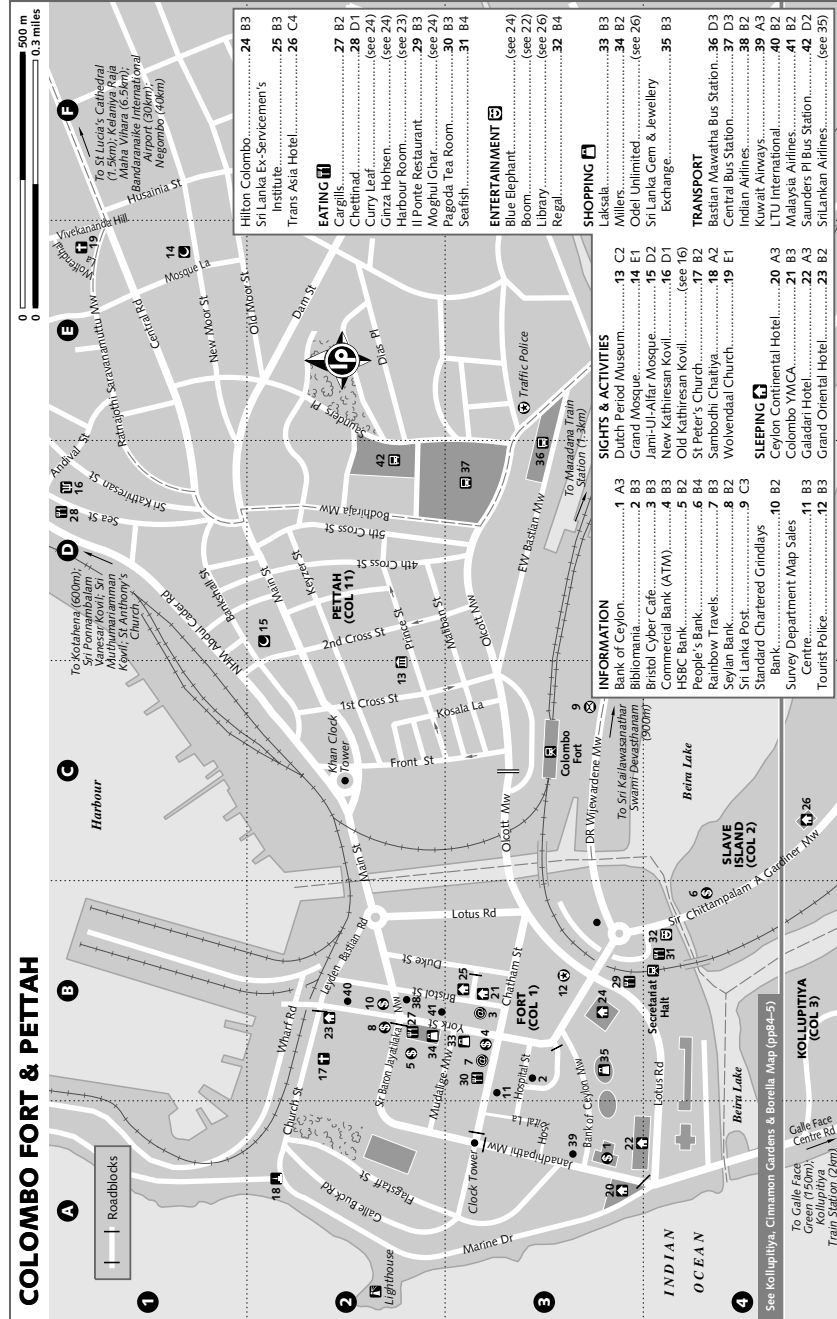
In the afternoon take in the Colombo's most visually impressive Buddhist temple, **Kelaniya Raja Maha Vihara** (p91). Take a stroll along the oceanfront with Sri Lankan families at **Galle Face Green** (p90) as the sun sets, followed by a cold Lion Lager or cocktail at the courtyard bar of **Galle Face Hotel** (p95).

Two Days

Breakfast with Colombo's high society at **Barista** (p98) or grab a *kotthu rotti* (doughy pancakes chopped and fried with a variety of ingredients) on the street before tackling the recently renovated **National Museum** (p90). Clear your head of historical overload with a walk across adjacent **Viharamahadevi Park** (p90).

If you have time for two temples, explore the contrasts between the humble Bawa-designed **Seema Malakaya** (p91) on Beira Lake, and the grand **Gangaramaya Temple** (p91) nearby. Go native for lunch with South Indian *idlis* (spongy fermented rice cakes) and *dosas* (paper-thin rice and lentil-flour pancakes) at **Amaravathi** (p98) or Sri Lankan hoppers (bowl-shaped pancakes) and *pittu* (rice flour and coconut steamed in a bamboo mould) at **Palmyrah** (p98).

To get an idea of how British Colombo looked at its zenith, take a walk north along York St in **Fort** (p89), past row after row of grand Victorian shop-houses, to the **Grand Oriental Hotel** (p93). Have a drink at the hotel's **Harbour Room** (p97) and check out the namesake views.



Hilton Colombo.....	24 B3
Sri Lanka Ex-Service men's Institute.....	25 B3
Trans Asia Hotel.....	26 C4
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Carillans.....	27 B2
Chettinad.....	28 D1
Curry Leaf.....	(see 24)
Griza Hohen.....	(see 23)
Harbour Room.....	(see 23)
Il Ponte Restaurant.....	29 B3
Moghul Ghar.....	(see 24)
Pagoda Tea Room.....	30 B3
Seafish.....	31 B4
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Blue Elephant.....	(see 24)
Boom.....	(see 22)
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Old Unlimited.....	(see 26)
Sri Lanka Gem & Jewellery Exchange.....	35 B3
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Basitan Mawatha Bus Station.....	36 D3
Central Bus Station.....	37 D3
Indian Airlines.....	38 B2
Kuwait Airways.....	39 A3
LTU International.....	40 B2
Malaysia Airlines.....	41 B2
Saunders PI Bus Station.....	42 D2
Sri Lankan Airlines.....	(see 35)

INFORMATION	
Bank of Ceylon.....	1 A3
Bibliomani.....	2 B3
Bristol Cyber Cafe.....	3 B3
HSBC Bank (ATM).....	4 B2
HSBC Bank.....	5 B2
People's Bank.....	6 B4
Rainbow Travels.....	7 B2
Seylan Bank.....	8 B2
Sri Lanka Post.....	9 C3
Standard Chartered Creditays Bank.....	10 B2
Survey Department Map Sales Centre.....	11 B3
Tourist Police.....	12 B3
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES	
Dutch Period Museum.....	13 C2
Grand Mosque.....	14 E1
Nani's Millar Mosque.....	15 D1
Old Kabbirnan Kovil.....	(see 16)
St Peter's Church.....	17 B2
Sambodhi Chattraya.....	18 A2
Wolvendaal Church.....	19 E1
SLEEPING	
Ceylon Continental Hotel.....	20 A3
Colombo YMCA.....	21 B3
Galadari Hotel.....	22 A3
Grand Oriental Hotel.....	23 B2

British Council (Map pp84-5; ☎ 258 1171; 49 Alfred House Gardens, Col 3) Puts on regular free cultural events, including films (usually Friday and Saturday), exhibitions, concerts and lectures. There is a library as well.

Goethe Institut (Map pp84-5; ☎ 269 4562; 39 Gregory's Rd, Col 7) Offers German language courses, screens German films and puts on music concerts, seminars and more.

Russian Centre (Map pp84-5; ☎ 268 5440; 10 Independence Ave, Col 7) Has one of the city's best auditoriums, which is often used by visiting musical performers.

Emergency Services

Accident Service (☎ 269 1111)

Fire & Rescue Service (☎ 242 2222)

Medi-Calls Ambulance (☎ 257 5475)

Police (☎ 243 3333)

Red Cross Ambulance (☎ 269 5434, 269 1095)

Tourist Police (Map p82; ☎ 243 3342; Bank of Ceylon Mawatha, Col 1) Has its main office at the police station in Fort.

Internet Access

Shops offering Internet services are found all over the city. On Galle Rd you're rarely more than walking distance from one, and each shopping centre has at least one. Access is cheap; most places charge around Rs 60 per hour. A few places we've found especially accommodating:

Berty's Cyber Cafe (Map pp84-5; 380 Galle Rd, Col 3)

Bristol Cyber Cafe (Map p82; 8/3/4 Bristol St, Col 1) Opposite the YMCA.

Cafe@Internet (Map pp84-5; 491 Galle Rd, Col 3)

Infotech Internet (Map p88; 46 Galle Rd, Col 6)

Rainbow Travels (Map pp84-5; 113 Chatham St, Col 1)

Colombo Fort & Pettah (Map pp84-5)

Slave Island (Map pp84-5)

Kollupitiya (Map pp84-5)

Colombo has recently begun sprouting public wi-fi spots. Some allow free wi-fi access, while others require the purchase of access codes. So far it's available at Bandaranaike International Airport, Gallery Cafe (p99), Barista (p98), Barefoot Garden Cafe (p99) and Cricket Club Cafe (p99).

Left Luggage

Left luggage services are available at the Fort train station's **cloakroom** (Map p82; per bag per day Rs 20; ☎ 4.30am-11.30pm). As you approach the station from Olcott Mawatha it's on the extreme left of the building, up a flight of stairs.

Media

LT, distributed free at hotels, shops, bars and restaurants aiming for the expat mar-

ket, carries listings of bars, clubs, restaurants, galleries and cultural events. **Linc** is a comparatively inferior free magazine with a smattering of information tucked between advertisements and advertorials. **Travel Lanka** has information about concerts, plays, and lectures held by cultural centres.

Hands on Colombo, updated annually by Dinesh Kulatunga and Peter Kamps, and the American Women's Association's **Colombo Handbook**, serve the expat community with listings and reviews of everything from dentists to jewellers.

Medical Services

Avoid government hospitals such as Colombo General, if you can. The following private hospitals have relatively high standards and English-speaking doctors.

Apollo Hospital Colombo (Map pp78-9; ☎ 453 0000; cnr Vijaya Kumaratunga Mawatha & Park Rd, Col 5) Established in 2002, this medical facility contains a bank and food centre as well as the usual.

Asha Central Hospital Colombo (☎ 269 6411; 57 Horton Pl, Col 7)

Nawaloka Hospital (Map pp84-5; ☎ 254 4444; 23 Sri Saugathodaya Mawatha, Col 2)

Osu Sala (Map pp84-5; ☎ 269 4716; 255 Union Pl, Col 2; ☎ 24hr) This is the only nonhospital pharmacy open round the clock.

Money

There are banks and ATMs all over the city, and several 24-hour bank branches in the arrivals hall at the Bandaranaike International Airport.

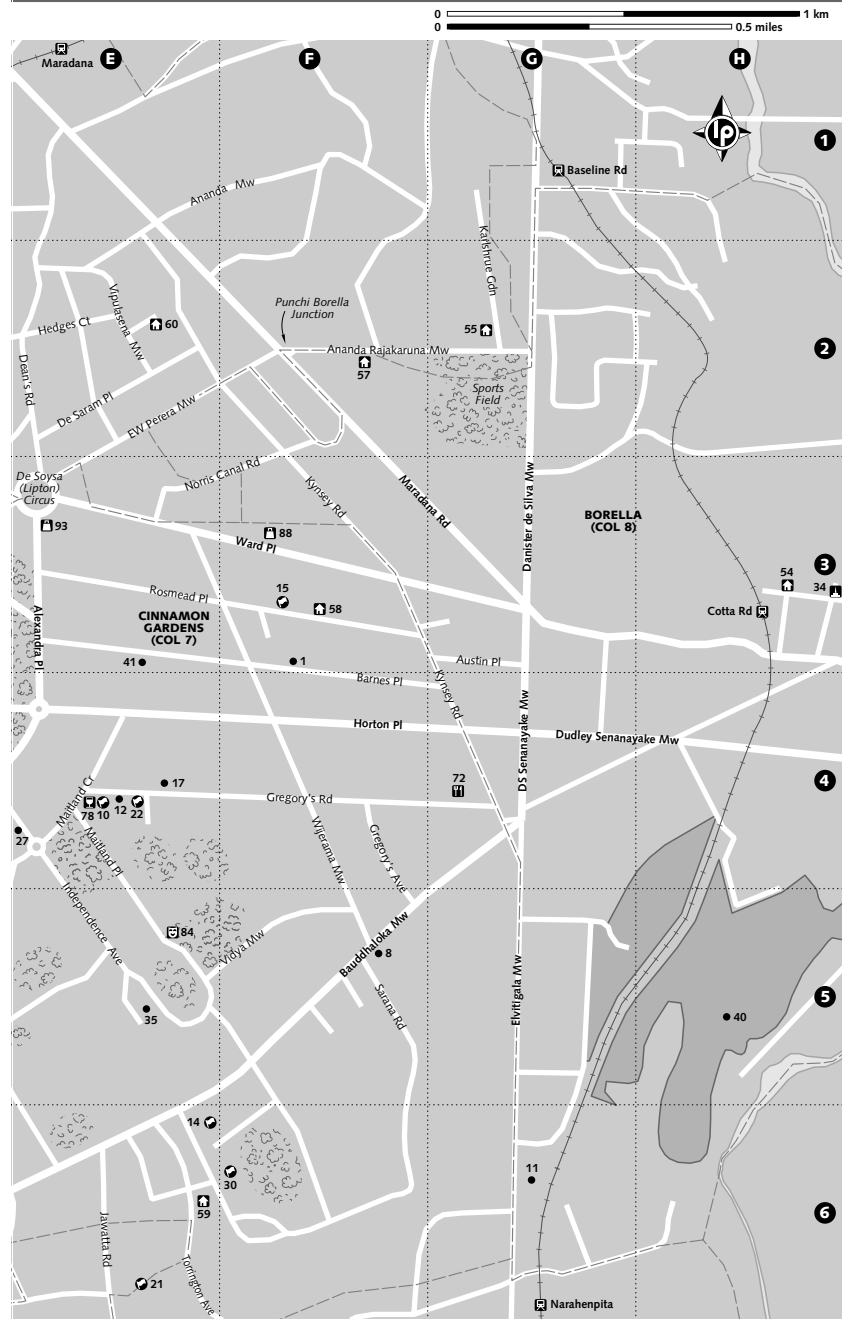
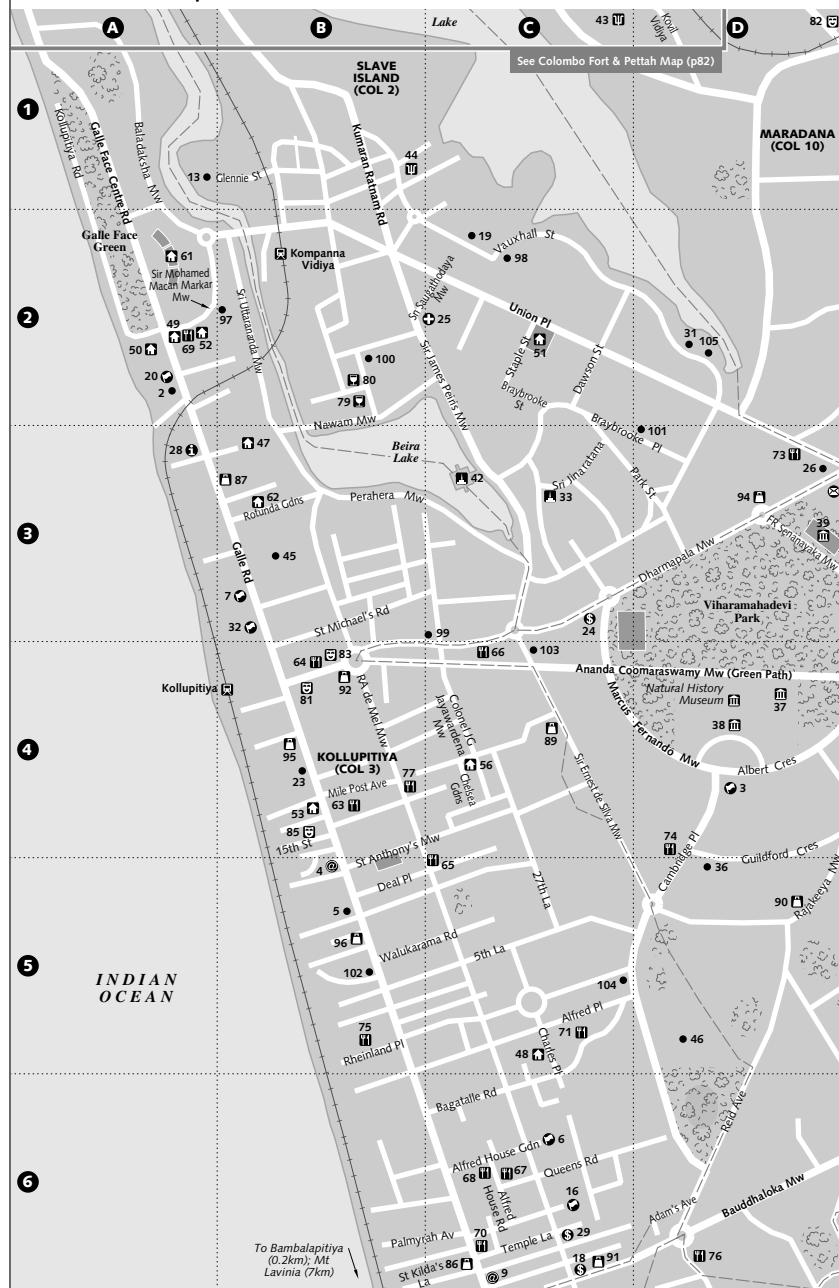
There are several moneychangers in Fort; their offices are concentrated in and around Chatham St and Mudalige Mawatha. Their cash-only rates are a little higher than you would get in a bank. You can change cash or travellers cheques at reduced rates in the main hotels.

NationsTrust Bank/American Express (Map pp84-5; ☎ 441 4141; 104 Dharmapala Mawatha, Col 7) sells travellers cheques.

Post

Sri Lanka Post (Map p82; DR Wijewardhana Mawatha, Col 1; ☎ 7am-6pm, poste restante 7am-9pm, stamps & telephone 24hr) was moved out of its historic premises on Janadhipathi Mawatha for security reasons in 2000 and has changed locations several times since then. The poste restante holds mail for two months - call ☎ 232 6203 to see

KOLLUPITIYA, CINNAMON GARDENS & BORELLA



INFORMATION	Royal Colombo Golf Club.....	40	H5	Namaste.....	(see 53)
Alliance Française.....	Sapumal Foundation.....	41	E3	Number 18.....	74 D4
American Information Resource Center.....	Seema Malakaya.....	42	C3	Palmyrah.....	(see 53)
Australian High Commission.....	Sri Kailwasanathar Swami Devasthanam.....	43	C1	Sakura.....	75 B5
Berty's Cyber Cafe.....	Sri Shiva Subramaniam Swami Kovil.....	44	B1	Sea Spray.....	(see 50)
Bookland.....	Temple Trees.....	45	B3	Shanti Vihar.....	76 D6
British Council.....	University of Colombo.....	46	D5	Siam House.....	77 B4
British High Commission.....	SLEEPING ☑			DRINKING ☑	
Buddhist Book Centre.....	Cinnamon Grand Hotel.....	47	B3	Clancy's Irish Pub.....	78 E4
Cafe@Internet.....	Colombo House.....	48	C5	Molly's Irish Pub & Restaurant.....	79 B2
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DHL Worldwide Express.....	Hotel Renuka & Renuka City Hotel.....	53	B4	Elphinstone Theatre.....	82 D1
Dutch Embassy.....	Mrs A Jayawardhana's.....	54	H3	Liberty Cinema.....	83 B4
French Embassy.....	Mrs Chitrangi de Fonseka's.....	55	G2	My Kind of Place.....	(see 61)
German Embassy.....	Mrs Padmini Nanayakkara's.....	56	C4	Sri Lanka Cricket.....	84 E5
Goethe Institut.....	Mrs Swarna Jayaratne's.....	57	F2	Star Dust.....	85 B4
HSBC Bank.....	Parisare.....	58	F3	SHOPPING ☑	
HSBC.....(see 51)	Ranjit Samarasinghe's.....	59	E6	Barefoot.....	86 C6
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Indian High Commission.....	Taj Samudra.....	61	A2	Elephant Walk.....	88 F3
Italian Embassy.....	YWCA National Headquarters.....	62	B3	Kandyan Antiques.....	89 C4
Japanese Embassy.....	EATING ☑			Lakpahana.....	90 D5
Lake House Bookshop.....(see 92)	1864.....(see 50)			Lanka Hands.....	91 C6
Mountain Hawk Express.....	Amaravathi.....	63	B4	Liberty Plaza.....	92 B4
Nations Trust Bank/American Express.....	Barista.....(see 50)			Mlesna Tea Centre.....(see 87)	
Nawaloka Hospital.....	Beema.....	64	B4	Mlesna Tea Centre.....(see 92)	
Osu Sala.....	Chesa Swiss.....	65	C5	Odel Unlimited.....	93 E2
Russian Centre.....	Commons.....	66	C4	Paradise Road.....	94 D3
Sri Lanka Tourist Board.....	Cricket Club Cafe.....	67	C6	Photo Technica.....	95 B4
Standard Chartered Grindlays Bank.....	Delifrance.....(see 87)			Photo Technica.....(see 92)	
Swedish Embassy.....	Delifrance.....(see 96)			Photoflex.....	96 B5
TNT Express.....	Gallery Cafe.....	68	C6	Yolland Collection.....(see 87)	
US Embassy.....	German Restaurant.....	69	A2	TRANSPORT	
Vijitha Yapa Bookshop.....(see 87)	Green Cabin.....	70	C6	Automobile Association of Ceylon.....	97 B2
Wildlife Trust.....(see 12)	Kafé Kent.....	71	C5	Cathay Pacific.....	98 C2
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Gangaramaya Temple.....	Keells.....(see 92)			Czech Airlines.....	100 B2
Gotami Vihara.....	Le Palace.....	72	G4	Emirates.....	101 D3
Independence Hall.....	Lotus Leaf.....	73	D3	Expo Aviation.....	102 B5
Lionel Wendt Centre.....	Mahout Café.....(see 88)			Qatar Airways.....	103 C4
National Art Gallery.....				Royal Jordanian.....	104 C5
National Museum.....				Singapore Airlines.....	105 D2
Old Town Hall.....				Thai Airways.....(see 51)	

if there's anything awaiting you. See p330 for postal and parcel rates.

If you are sending home anything of particular value you should consider using a courier service. Reliable couriers:

DHL Worldwide Express (Map pp84-5; ☎ 230 4304; Keells, 130 Glennie St, Col 2)

IML (Map pp84-5; ☎ 233 7733; 140 Vauxhall St, Col 2) UPS agent.

Mountain Hawk Express (Map pp84-5; ☎ 252 2222; 300 Galle Rd, Col 3) FedEx agent.

TNT Express (Ace Cargo; Map pp84-5; ☎ 244 5331; 315 Vauxhall St, Col 2)

Telephone & Fax

For international calls there are many relatively pricey private communication bureaus (which often have fax machines). A cheaper option is using the card-operated international direct dialling (IDD) telephones, of which there are many in Colombo.

Most Internet centres in Colombo offer web-phone services, which cost about the same as regular Internet access.

All five-star hotels have business centres that offer a range of communication services, from email and fax to telephone.

For domestic calls, **Sri Lanka Post** (Map p82; DR Wijewardhana Mawatha, Col 1; ☎ 7am-6pm, telephone 24hr) sells Sri Lanka Telecom phonecards; calls from these cardphones (found in post offices only) are slightly cheaper than those from the private cardphones. However, it's probably more convenient to use one of the yellow Lanka Pay or Tritel cardphones.

See p332 for general information on phone services.

Tourist Information

Sri Lanka Tourist Board (SLTB; Map pp84-5; ☎ 243 7059; www.srilankatourism.org; 80 Galle Rd, Col 3; ☎ 9am-4.45pm Mon-Fri, 9am-12.30pm Sat) The country's national tourism office. The staff can help with hotel bookings, answer questions and hand out leaflets. It also maintains a 24-hour booth at the international airport.

Travel Agencies

Colombo's plethora of travel agencies can help organise car hire, city tours or tours elsewhere in Sri Lanka. Following are some of the biggest operators, plus some recommended niche-market companies.

A Baur & Co Ltd (☎ 244 8087; www.baur.com; Baur's Bldg, 5 Upper Chatham St, Col 1) One of the few companies specialising in bird-watching tours.

Adventure Asia (☎ 536 8468; 338 TB Jaya Mawatha, Col 10) A relatively young company specialising in white-water rafting, kayaking and bicycling tours.

Adventure Sports Lanka (☎ 279 1584; http://actionlanka.com; 366/3 Rendapola Horagahakanda Lane, Talagama, Koswatta) Arranges outdoor activities including white-water rafting, kayaking, diving, mountain biking and walks.

Aitken Spence Travels (☎ 230 8021; www.aitken-spence.com; Vauxhall Bldg, 305 Vauxhall St, Col 2) One of the biggest tour operators; organises tour packages, hires out cars and drivers, and books hotels.

Jetwing Travels (☎ 234 5700; www.jetwing.net; Jetwing House, 46/26 Nawam Mawatha, Col 2) Another big operator; has a large chain of upmarket hotels and organises tours within Sri Lanka and to the Maldives.

JF Tours & Travels (☎ 258 7996; www.jftours.com; 189 Baudhdhaloka Mawatha, Col 4) Specialises in steam-train tours (groups only), and booking train tickets in general.

Quickshaws Tours (☎ 258 3133; www.quickshaws.com; 3 Kalinga Pl, Col 5) Organises standard tours but specialises in personalised tours with a car and driver.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES Crime

While violence towards foreigners is uncommon, it helps to tell someone where you are going and when to expect you back.

Women in particular are urged to take care at night. Even couples should be very cautious about walking along lonely beach areas, such as those near Mt Lavinia, after dark.

Solo women should be careful when taking taxis and three-wheelers at night; if, as sometimes happens, your taxi turns up with two men inside, call another. Travelers should also avoid taking three-wheelers between the airport and Colombo at night; robberies are not unknown.

Watch out for pickpockets when on public transport. Never get on a bus or train with your shoulder bag unzipped – in fact, don't even walk down the road with it in that state. If you are carrying valuables such as a passport, travellers cheques or reasonably large amounts of cash, keep them out of sight and out of reach in a money belt or a pouch under your clothes. Bum bags, besides being a fashion error, are far too conspicuous.

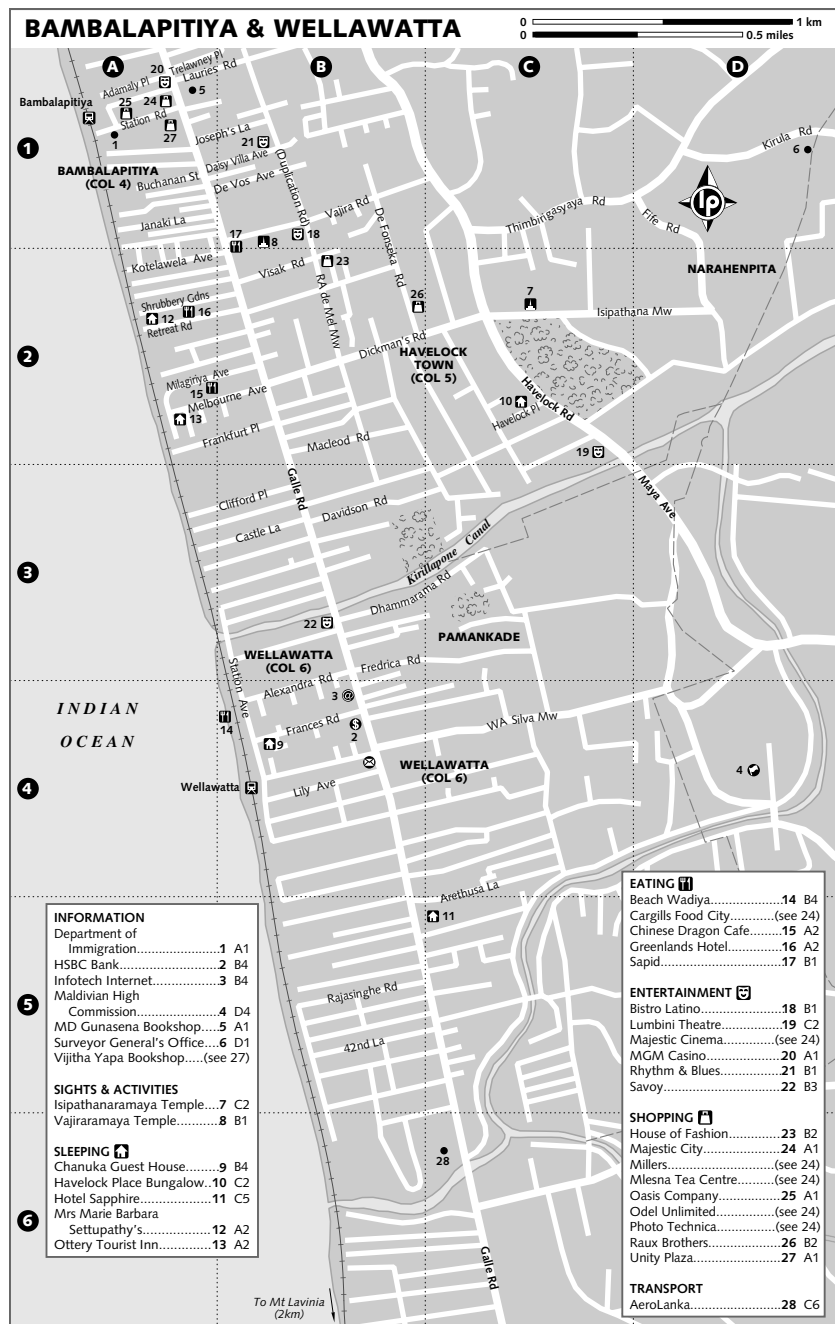
See p334 for tips for women travellers riding buses and trains in Colombo and elsewhere in Sri Lanka.

Ethnic Tension

Since the February 2002 cease-fire no civilian areas of Colombo have been hit by (alleged) LTTE bombings. However, in July 2004 a woman detonated a bomb in a Kollupitiya police station, killing herself and four policemen, and critically injuring 11 people. There have been no additional incidents since then, but if hostilities should flare up again, the Fort and Pettah areas are the traditional targets.

Scams

Touts (sometimes disguised as officials) gather inside the second arrivals hall waiting for jet-lagged visitors to emerge. You may be approached with claims that, for some reason or another (eg a bomb's just gone off somewhere), it's dangerous to travel any further unaccompanied. The pitch is that the tourists should, for their own safety, sign up for a tour on the spot. This can end up being a convenient scam if you do want to take a tour, but if you want to travel independently double-check the current security situation with the Sri Lanka Tourist Board's information desk in the first arrivals hall.



Touts

Colombo has its share of touts and con artists. Fort train station is a favourite hang-out and the touts here are particularly skilful and persuasive. Galle Face Green is another favourite hunting ground. You are likely to be approached at some stage by someone who, after striking up a conversation, asks for a donation for a school for the blind or some such cause – these people are invariably con artists.

SIGHTS

Wags may claim there's nothing to see in Colombo but most people will find plenty of diversion. The Fort district is where most of the historical sights are concentrated, Pettah is the place for street markets and bazaars, while almost everything else – including temples and churches – is scattered around the city.

Fort

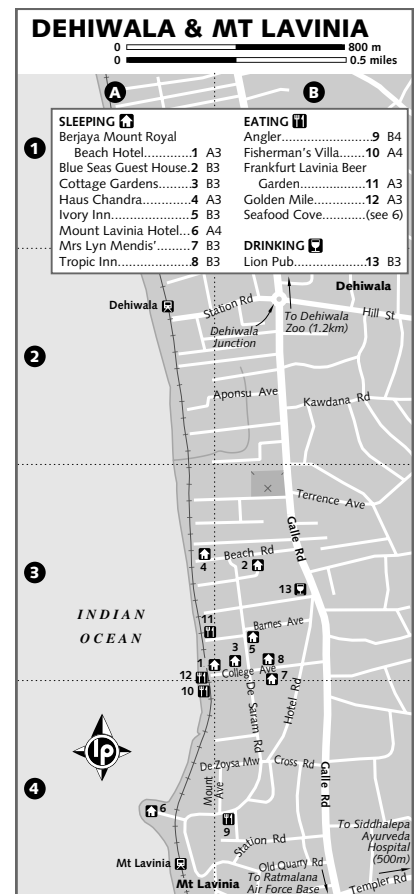
During the European era Fort (Map p82) was indeed a fort, surrounded by the sea on two sides and a moat on the landward sides. Today it's a curious mix of brash modern structures such as the World Trade Center, venerable red-brick institutions such as Cargills and Millers, and buildings from a variety of other eras. The security presence is heavy here, curtailing vehicle access and some pedestrian access. Fort can be eerily quiet in spots, though vendors still line the Cargills side of York St, selling everything from fluorescent alarm clocks to padded bras. The lack of traffic at least makes it easy to take a walk around.

There's also a harbour (off limits) and the large white dagoba (stupa) of **Sambodhi Chaitiya**, perched about 20m off the ground on stilts – a landmark for sea travellers.

A good landmark in Fort is the clock tower at the junction of Chatham St and Janadhipathi Mawatha (once Queen St), which was originally a lighthouse.

Pettah

Immediately inland from Fort, the bustling bazaar of Pettah (Map p82) is one of the oldest districts in Colombo and one of the most ethnically mixed places in the country. You name it, and a boutique (street stall) will be selling it in Pettah. Each thoroughfare has its own speciality; Gabo's Lane and



5th Cross St specialise in Ayurvedic medicines, while jewellery stores line 2nd Cross St. Leading up to major holidays such as Christmas, the Pettah crowds reach Biblical proportions. If crowds leave you cold, *poya* (full moon) days are a good time to have a look around. Pettah also harbours many religious buildings (p91).

The **Dutch Period Museum** (Map p82; ☎ 244 8466; 95 Prince St; adult/child Rs 65/35; 🕒 9am-5pm Sat-Thu) was originally the 17th-century residence of the Dutch governor and has since been used as a Catholic seminary, a military hospital, a police station and a post office. The well-restored mansion contains a lovely garden courtyard. Exhibits include Dutch colonial furniture and other artefacts.

National Museum

Housed in a fine 1877-vintage building in Viharamahadevi Park, the **museum** (Map pp84-5; Albert Cres, Col 7; adult/child Rs 500/250; ☎ 9am-5pm Sat-Thu) displays a collection of ancient royal regalia, Sinhalese artwork (sculptures, carvings and so on), antique furniture and china, and *ola* (leaves of the talipot palm) manuscripts. There are fascinating 19th-century reproductions of English paintings of Sri Lanka, and an excellent collection of antique demon masks.

Galle Face Green

Immediately south of Fort is Galle Face Green (Map pp84-5), a long stretch of lawn facing the sea. It was originally cleared by the Dutch to give the cannons of Fort a clear line of fire. Today its broad lawns are a popular rendezvous spot; on weekdays it's dotted with joggers, kite flyers and walkers, and on weekends (especially Sunday evenings) food vendors gather to feed the hordes.

The remaining structures of the 19th-century **Colombo Club** face the green from the grounds of Taj Samudra hotel; the club's rooms are still used for functions. At opposite ends of the green are delightful old Galle Face Hotel and monolithic Ceylon Continental Hotel.

Cinnamon Gardens

About 5km south of Fort and 2km inland, Cinnamon Gardens (Map pp84-5) is Colombo's ritziest address. A century ago it was covered in cinnamon plantations. Today it contains elegant tree-lined streets and the posh mansions of the wealthy and powerful, as well as the city's biggest park, several sports grounds and a cluster of museums and galleries.

The centrepiece of Cinnamon Gardens is the 50-acre **University of Colombo** (also called the University of Ceylon) campus, which originally opened as the Ceylon Medical School in 1870.

VIHARAMAHADEVI PARK

This is Colombo's biggest park, originally called Victoria Park but renamed in the 1950s after the mother of King Dutugemunu (see p153). It's notable for its superb flowering trees, which bloom in March, April and early May. The broad Ananda Coomaraswamy Mawatha cuts across the middle of

the park, while Colombo's white-domed **Old Town Hall** (also called White House) overlooks the park from the northeast. Working elephants sometimes spend the night in the park, happily chomping on palm branches.

INDEPENDENCE HALL

Critics lambast this modern recreation of a Kandyan audience hall as a concrete non-entity, but it's a rather impressive structure nonetheless, and makes a good photo opportunity. As the name suggests, it was built to commemorate Sri Lanka's independence in 1948. The parkland surrounding it is painstakingly well kept.

Art Galleries

The **National Art Gallery** (Map pp84-5; 106 Ananda Coomaraswamy Mawatha, Col 7; admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm, closed poya days) is next door to the Natural History Museum in Viharamahadevi Park. The permanent collection mostly consists of portraits, but there are also some temporary exhibitions by Sri Lankan artists.

The stylish **Lionel Wendt Centre** (Map pp84-5; 18 Guildford Cres, Col 7; admission varies; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2-4pm Mon-Fri) has contemporary art and craft exhibitions. It stages musical performances and has occasional sales of antiques and other items.

The **Sapumal Foundation** (Map pp84-5; 2/34 Barnes Pl, Col 7; admission free; ☎ 10am-1pm Thu-Sat) is located in what was once the home of artist Harry Pieris. Today this rambling tile-roofed bungalow is packed with some of the best examples of Sri Lankan art from the 1920s onwards.

Art galleries are sometimes attached to upmarket cafés, including **Gallery Cafe** (p99) and **Commons** (p100).

Dehiwala Zoo

By the standards of the developing world, this **zoo** (☎ 271 2751; Dehiwala; adult/child Rs 500/250; ☎ 8.30am-6pm), 10km south of Fort, treats its animals well enough. Over the last five years the 70-year-old zoo has undergone a much-needed face-lift, developing facilities for smaller animals, including a walk-in aviary and a butterfly park. The major attraction is the elephant show at 5.15pm, when elephants troop on stage in true trunk-to-tail fashion and perform a series of feats of elephantine agility. An aquarium displays over 500 varieties of aquatic life. A

new veterinary hospital is due to be completed by the end of 2006.

You can get to the zoo on bus 118 from Dehiwala train station.

Galle Road

Galle Rd – the 'backbone' of Colombo – runs from north to south along practically the entire length of the city. Yes, it can be choked with air pollution (depending on sea breezes), and it is lined with some of the city's worst architecture. But hold your breath and launch in – you'll find some yummy restaurants, shopping centres brimming with goodies and, near the northern end, the Indian and British high commissions, the US embassy and the prime minister's fortified official residence, **Temple Trees** (Map pp84-5).

Places of Worship

BUDDHIST TEMPLES

Most of Colombo's Buddhist temples date from the late 19th-century Buddhist Revival, a period when Sri Lankan Buddhists resisted the flooding of the island by Christian missionaries.

The most important Buddhist centre is the **Kelaniya Raja Maha Vihara**, 7km northeast of Fort, just off the Kandy road. Even if the thought of seeing yet another temple sends you reaching for the arrack, this one is worth the effort. The original temple was destroyed by Indian invaders, restored, destroyed again by the Portuguese, and restored again in the 18th and 19th centuries. It's mostly known for its very fine reclining Buddha. The dagoba, which (unusually) is hollow, is the focus of the Duruthu Perahera (Duruthu Procession) in January each year. To reach the temple take bus 235 from in front of the traffic-police station, which is just northeast of the Bastian Mawatha bus station.

Another important Buddhist centre is the sprawling **Gangaramaya Temple** (Map pp84-5; ☎ 243 9505; Sri Jinaratana Rd, Col 2), near Beira Lake. Run by one of Sri Lanka's more politically adept monks, the ever expanding temple complex has a library, a **museum** (donation Rs 100) and an extraordinarily eclectic array of bejewelled and gilded gifts presented by devotees and well-wishers over the years. Most of the Buddha images on display in the temple were donated by Buddhists from Thailand, Myanmar and Japan. Gangaramaya is the

focus of the Navam Perahera (p93) on the February *poya* day each year.

The small but captivating **Seema Malakaya** (Map pp84-5) on Beira Lake comprises two island pavilions, designed by Geoffrey Bawa in 1985 and run by Gangaramaya Temple. The pavilions – one filled with Thai bronze Buddhas, the other centred on a bodhi tree and four Brahmanist images – are especially striking when illuminated at night.

The **Vajiraramaya Temple** (Map p88; Vajira Rd, Col 4) has been a centre of Buddhist learning since 1901. From here Sri Lankan monks have taken the Buddha's message to Western countries, and on Sundays the complex is thronged with thousands of children taking Buddhism school.

The modern **Gotami Vihara** (Map pp84-5), 6km southeast of Fort near Cotta Rd train station in Borella, has some outstanding Jataka (Buddha life stories) murals by modern artist George Keyt. The **Isipathanaramaya Temple** (Map p88; Isipathana Mawatha, Col 5) has particularly beautiful frescoes.

HINDU TEMPLES

Known as *kovil*, Hindu temples are numerous in Colombo. On Sea St, the goldsmiths' street in Pettah, **New Kathiresan Kovil** (Map p82) and **Old Kathiresan Kovil**, both dedicated to the war god Murugan (Skanda), are the starting point for the annual Hindu Vel festival held in July/August, when the huge *vel* (trident) chariot is dragged to various *kovils* on Galle Rd in Bambalapitiya.

In Kotahena, northeast of Fort, you'll find the **Sri Ponnambalam Vanesar Kovil**, which is built of South Indian granite, and the **Sri Muthumariamman Kovil** (Kotahena St, Col 13). The **Sri Kailawasanathar Swami Devasthanam** (Map pp84-5), apparently the oldest Hindu temple in Colombo, has shrines to Shiva and Ganesh; it's at Captain's Gardens, 600m west of Maradana station off DR Wijewardena Mawatha. There is also the huge **Sri Shiva Subramaniam Swami Kovil** (Map pp84-5; Kew Rd, Col 2).

During the harvest festival of Thai Pongal (held in January) devotees flock to these temples, which become even more colourful and lively.

MOSQUES

The **Grand Mosque** (Map p82; New Moor St, Col 11) is the most important of Colombo's many mosques. In Pettah you'll also find the

decorative 1909 **Jami-UI-Alfar Mosque** (Map p82; cnr 2nd Cross & Bankshall Sts, Col 11), which has candy-striped red-and-white brickwork. There are many mosques in Slave Island, dating from the British days, when a Malay army regiment was stationed here.

CHURCHES

The 1749 **Wolvendaal Church** (Map p82; Wolvendaal Lane, Col 11) is the most important Dutch building in Sri Lanka. When the church was built, this now-crowded inner-city district was a wilderness beyond the city walls. The Europeans mistook the packs of roaming jackals for wolves, and the area became known as Wolf's Dale, or Wolvendaal in Dutch. The church is in the form of a Greek cross, with walls 1.5m thick, but the real treasure is its Dutch furniture. The Dutch governors had a special pew made with elegant carved ebony chairs, and the workmanship in the wooden pulpit, baptismal font and lectern is just as beautiful. The stone floor includes the elaborate tombstones of five Dutch governors, moved here from an older Dutch church in Fort in 1813. The congregation dwindled as the Burghers emigrated, but it still holds services – in Sinhala, English and Tamil – on Sunday mornings.

St Peter's Church (Map p82), near the Grand Oriental Hotel in Fort, was converted from the Dutch governor's banquet hall and was first used as a church in 1804.

The enormous **St Lucia's Cathedral** (St Lucia's St, Kotahena) lies in the Catholic heart of the Kotahena district. The biggest church in Sri Lanka, it can hold up to 5000 worshippers. The interior is plain but the immense domed mass of the church is impressive.

One of the city's most interesting shrines is **St Anthony's Church** (St Anthony's Mawatha, Kotahena). Outside it looks like a typical Portuguese Catholic church, but inside the atmosphere is distinctly subcontinental. There are queues of devotees offering *puja* (prayers or offerings) to a dozen ornate statues behind glass cases; a statue of St Anthony endowed with miraculous qualities is the centre of devotions. Mothers often bring pubescent daughters here to pray for protection from evil spirits that might take advantage of the girl's nascent sexuality. The church seems to be as popular with Hindu and Buddhist mothers as it is with Catholics. Photography is frowned upon.

ACTIVITIES Swimming

The only Colombo beach where you'd consider swimming is in Mt Lavinia, a somewhat faded resort area 11km south of Fort – and even that's borderline, with a severe undertow at times and some foul waterways issuing into the ocean just to the north.

Visitors can use the pools at several top-end Colombo hotels for a fee. One of the nicest spots is the outdoor saltwater pool right by the waterfront at **Galle Face Hotel** (Map pp84-5; 2 Kollupitiya Rd); it costs nonguests Rs 250. A dip in the magnificently positioned pool at **Mount Lavinia Hotel** (Map p89; 100 Hotel Rd) will cost Rs 500 and includes access to the hotel's private stretch of beach. Or head to **Berjaya Mount Royal Beach Hotel** (☎ 273 9610; 36 College Ave), which charges nonguests Rs 350.

The large pool at **Water's Edge Golf & Country Club** (☎ 440 2302; 316 Etul Kotte Rd, Battaramulla; nonmember club admission per day adult/child US\$10/8) is also open to the public.

Meditation

Kanduboda Meditation Centre (☎ 244 5518, 2570 306; kandubod@sltnet.lk), 25km outside Colombo in Delgoda, is a major centre for meditation instruction in the style of the late Mahasi Sayadaw. Accommodation and meals are offered free of charge, though donations are expected. Most meditators stay for an initial three-week training period, after which they can meditate on their own for as long as they like. White clothing (available on loan at no charge) must be worn. The Pugoda bus 224 passes the centre.

Golf

Royal Colombo Golf Club (Map pp84-5; ☎ 269 5431; Borella; greens fee weekday/weekend & holiday Rs 2500/3500, club hire Rs 600-1000, caddy Rs 350) has an 18-hole golf course at the Ridgeway Golf Links dating from 1879 – it was the third club in the British Empire to earn the 'royal' appellation. It's quite an institution, with 300-odd staff. The links are in good condition. Visitors are welcome, but ring in advance to let the club know that you're coming. Caddies are compulsory. Men must wear collars, decent shorts or trousers with zippers, while for women there's a one-word dress code: decency. The elegant clubhouse has a bar, a restaurant and a broad veranda.

Water's Edge Golf & Country Club (☎ 440 2302; 316 Etul Kotte Rd, Battaramulla; greens fee US\$14), in Kotte on the eastern edge of Colombo, has a modern 18-hole golf course.

Ayurveda & Spas

Siddhalepa Ayurveda Hospital (☎ 273 8622; Tempers Rd) in Mount Lavinia is a full-service Ayurvedic health centre.

The relatively new 450-sq-m **Aryana Spa** (☎ 440 2302; 316 Etul Kotte Rd, Battaramulla), at Water's Edge Golf & Country Club, offers a menu of Sri Lankan, Thai and Balinese treatments at very reasonable rates. **Taj Airport Garden Hotel** (☎ 225 2950; www.tajairportgardensrilanka.com), out near Bandaranaike International Airport, houses another Aryana Spa.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

The **Duruthu Perahera** is held at the Kelaniya Raja Maha Vihara (p91) on the January *poya*. The **Navam Perahera**, on the February *poya*, is led by 50 elephants; it starts from the Gangaramaya Temple (p91) and is held around Viharamahadevi Park and Beira Lake. During the **Vel**, the gilded chariot of Murugan (Skanda), the Hindu war god, is ceremonially hauled from the Kathiresan *kovil* in Sea St, Pettah, to a *kovil* at Bambalapitiya.

See p326 for more information on festivals in Colombo.

SLEEPING

Colombo has a range of accommodation options: there are cheapies (some of which are forlorn and overpriced), a small but growing collection of midrange places, and so many top-end options you won't know where to start. Rates for top-end hotels in the city fluctuate widely depending on time of year, whether there are any conventions in town and how far in advance you book. Budget and midrange places tend to have more-stable room pricing.

If you head to Fort you'll find the big hotels and their fancy restaurants and nightclubs, plus some spartan budget digs. Slave Island has hectic streets, a heavy police presence and small dwellings jammed in between office blocks.

Kollupitiya covers Galle Face Green, the ritziest stretch of Galle Rd with the highest security. The other chunk of Kollupitiya follows noisy Galle Rd south, and is lined with larger shops, restaurants and busi-

nesses; inland, expensive dwellings mix with commercial buildings.

Moving into Bambalapitiya, Galle Rd starts losing some of its gloss: the buildings are smaller, footpaths are busier, and shops abound. By Wellawatta, Galle Rd has lost all pretentiousness. Here, small shops and elbowing shoppers vie for space, and even the odd cow wends its way through the busy traffic. It's one of the most colourful parts of Colombo.

Within leafy Cinnamon Gardens you'll find stately public buildings, posh houses and embassies.

Borella and Maradana are a bit out of the way but give an idea of what life is like in middle-class Colombo.

Mt Lavinia is an ageing beach resort with a beachfront lined with restaurants. This is a decent spot to avoid busy Colombo and, with Fort's skyline visible from the end of the beach, you'll feel like you're close to the action.

Fort & Slave Island

BUDGET

Colombo YMCA (Map p82; ☎ 232 5252; fax 243 6263; 39 Bristol St, Col 1; dm/s Rs 200/250, s/d with fan Rs 400/500, r with fan & bathroom Rs 800) This is a basic institutional place with cramped 16-bed male-only dorms, and a few single and double rooms that are open to both men and women. There are no lockers, so you'll have to chain up your gear or risk it. There's a Rs 10 daily membership charge as well as a Rs 100 key deposit. Billiard tables, a gym and other facilities are available (for a fee), and there's an inexpensive cafeteria that serves Sri Lankan and Western food (meals Rs 100 to 150); it's open for lunch.

Sri Lanka Ex-Servicemen's Institute (Map p82; ☎ 242 2650; Bristol St, Col 1; dm/s/d Rs 200/400/850) Virtually next door to the YMCA, this is an option for male travellers if the YMCA is full. It has rickety bunks in a basic 10-bed dorm and coffinlike double rooms. The bar sells the cheapest beer in the Fort.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Grand Oriental Hotel (Map p82; ☎ 232 0391/2; goh@sltnet.lk; 2 York St, Col 1; s/d/ste US\$60/70/110) Opposite the harbour, this was Colombo's finest hotel 100 years ago when Bella Sidney Woolf wrote 'if you waited long enough in the hall...you would meet everyone worth

knowing.' Most rooms have been stripped of original features and renovated like a Spanish motel; the suites are pleasant but the standard rooms are boxy. There are superb views from the 4th-floor restaurant, Harbour Room (p97).

Hilton Colombo Residence (Map pp84-5; ☎ 230 0613; colomboresidence@hilton.com; 200 Union Pl, Col 2; 2-/3-bedroom apt per month from US\$2520/2990; 🏠 📺 🚿) The city's most luxurious full-service apartment complex, the Hilton offers 175 fully furnished apartments in a 34-storey tower. Amenities include parking for guests, a tennis court, pool, squash court, gym and private restaurant and bar. There is a shopping arcade on the ground floor.

Galadari Hotel (Map p82; ☎ 254 4544; www.galadarihotel.lk; 64 Lotus Rd, Col 1; s US\$80-100, d US\$90-120, ste US\$140-160; 🏠 📺 🚿) This hotel is very popular with travellers from India, Malaysia and the Middle East. Although the décor is a bit tacky, the 446 rooms are comfortable and offer good city views. Restaurants include the Sheherezade Arabic Restaurant, and the Crab Claw (Chinese cuisine). The lobby-level nightclub, Boom, is one of the city's busiest.

Ceylon Continental Hotel (Map p82; ☎ 242 1221; www.colombocontinental.com; 48 Janadhpathi Mawatha; s/d/ste US\$85/90/140; 🏠 📺 🚿) Beautifully located, the 250-room Continental faces the sea on one side and the north end of Galle Face Green on another. The rooms are very comfortable but a tad on the small side.

Hilton Colombo (Map p82; ☎ 249 2492; www.hilton.com; 2 Sir Chittampalam A Gardiner Mawatha, Col 2; s/d standard US\$180/200, executive US\$215/225; 🏠) Among business travellers this place is known as the city's most efficient and most comfortable business hotel. With six restaurants (one of which is open round the clock), a karaoke bar, a disco, a pub, a 24-hour business centre, a fully equipped sports-and-fitness club and even a masseur at hand, you needn't even leave the hotel.

Trans Asia Hotel (Map p82; ☎ 249 1000; www.transasiahotel.com; 115 Sir Chittampalam A Gardiner Mawatha, Col 2; r US\$150-180, ste US\$240-260; 🏠 📺 🚿) This modern, function-oriented hotel is a favoured location for conventions. The lobby is particularly grandiose, and the swimming pool is huge. The hotel's Library nightclub and Royal Thai restaurant are popular with moneyed locals. Lower rates may be available if you book through the hotel's website.

Kollupitiya BUDGET

YWCA National Headquarters (Map pp84-5; ☎ 232 3498; fax 243 4575; natywca@sltnet.lk; 7 Rotunda Gardens; s/d incl breakfast women only Rs 400/800, mixed Rs 1000/1700) This place has eight tidy, basic rooms that surround a leafy courtyard. It's a secure, homely refuge for female travellers; men can stay if they're with a female companion. There are women-only rooms with shared bathroom, while mixed rooms have private bathrooms. There's a cheap cafeteria (meals Rs 100 to 150), open from Monday to Saturday for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

MIDRANGE

Colombo House (Map pp84-5; ☎ 257 4900; colombohse@eureka.lk; 26 Charles Pl; s/d/tr Rs 1500/1900/2000, with air-con Rs 2000/2400/2500; 🏠 📺) Lying on a quiet leafy street not far from the University of Colombo, this ageing but attractive mansion has four large rooms.

Mrs Padmini Nanayakkara's (Map pp84-5; ☎ 071 278758; 20 Chelsea Gardens; s/d incl breakfast Rs 1500/2250) This place offers three cute rooms in one of Colombo's classier neighbourhoods. The house has some elegant furniture and a pretty little garden. Mrs Nanayakkara speaks fluent French.

Hotel Renuka & Renuka City Hotel (Map pp84-5; ☎ 257 3598; www.renukahotel.com; 328 Galle Rd; s/d US\$55/75; 🏠 📺 🚿) Possibly the best-value midrange hotel in Colombo, the Renuka is split into the older Hotel Renuka and the newer Renuka City Hotel. Although the 80 spotless rooms a little dated, they are in good condition. Added to this are two excellent, reasonably priced restaurants: Palmyrah (p98), serving Sri Lankan cuisine, and Namaste (p98), serving North Indian food. The swimming pool is around 50m from the hotel towards the sea.

Galle Face Court Suites (Map pp84-5; ☎ 239 6666; miguel@sri.lankainstyle.com; 23 Galle Face Ct II; r US\$60) Centrally located off Galle Rd, almost opposite the High Commission of India, Galle Face Court Suites has two comfortably decorated rooms with a good-sized living-and-entertaining area. This would be a good choice for someone needing a very private serviced apartment.

TOP END

Holiday Inn (Map pp84-5; ☎ 242 2001-10; holiday@sri.lanka.net; 30 Sir Mohamed Macan Markar Mawatha; s/d

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Galle Face Hotel & Galle Face Regency (Map pp84-5; ☎ 254 1010-6; www.gallefacehotel.com; 2 Kollupitiya Rd; hotel r US\$94-120, regency ste US\$263-1260; 🏠 📺 🚿) The hotel that epitomises Colombo is this 142-year-old *grande dame*, facing Galle Face Green to the north and the sea to the west. The sweeping stairways, high ceilings and grass courtyard buffeted by sea breezes look much the same as they did nearly 100 years ago. Just about everyone who visits Colombo shows up for a drink at the Veranda bar at some point, whether or not they stay at the hotel. While the northern wing still maintains an atmosphere of faded decadence, the southern wing has recently undergone a total renovation and now caters to discerning tastes with a wine lounge, a state-of-the-art spa, and a fusion restaurant, 1864 (p98).

US\$94/114; 🏠 📺 🚿) A step down from most other top-end hotels, this hotel has all the mod cons but is smaller and less grandiose. It has 94 rooms. Discounts are fairly easy to come by if you book in advance, lowering the cost of doubles to around US\$80.

Taj Samudra (Map pp84-5; ☎ 244 6622; www.tajhotels.com; 25 Galle Face Centre Rd; s/d with pool views US\$90/98, with sea views US\$120/140; 🏠 📺 🚿) This is a vast edifice with elegant public areas and a well-tended 12-acre garden. The remaining buildings of the colonial-era Colombo Club still stand near the entrance. The hotel has a 24-hour coffee shop, a restaurant serving North Indian cuisine, another with Cantonese and Sichuan dishes, and a steak house.

Cinnamon Grand Hotel (Map pp84-5; ☎ 243 7437; www.cinnamonhotels.com; 77 Galle Rd; s/d US\$116/132; 🏠 📺 🚿) Formerly the Colombo Plaza Hotel and, before that, the Lanka Oberoi, this five-star hotel occupies 10 acres and was completely refurbished in 2005. It's a short distance from Galle Face Green.

Bambalapitiya, Havelock Town & Wellawatta

Mrs Marie Barbara Settupathy's (Map p88; ☎ 258 7964; jbs@sl.lk; 23/2 Shrubbery Gardens, Col 4; s/d incl breakfast Rs 850/1000) The Settupathys offer five clean and tidy rooms. There's a sitting area with a TV and a minuscule pebble courtyard. To find the Settupathys' house, look

for the church on the left as you come down Shrubbery Gardens. The guesthouse is at the end of the alley next to the church.

Chanuka Guest House (Map p88; ☎ 258 5883; 29 Frances Rd, Col 6; s/d Rs 550/660, r with hot water Rs 800) Though the five rooms are bland they're very clean and the owners are friendly.

Ottery Tourist Inn (Map p88; ☎ 258 3727; 29 Melbourne Ave, Col 4; s/d Rs 350/700) This 1920s-era lodging house is a short walk from the coast. It's run-down and the staff is diffident at best, but the eight rooms are spacious, and it's doubtful you'll find closer to the sea for this price.

Havelock Place Bungalow (Map p88; ☎ 258 5191; www.bungalow.lk; 6-8 Havelock Pl, Col 5; r/ste US\$100/140; 🏠 📺 🚿) This handsome boutique hotel has six rooms, refined décor, comfy lounge areas and a garden. The outdoor café here is also well worth a visit.

Hotel Sapphire (Map p88; ☎ 238 3306; sapphire@sl.lk; 371 Galle Rd, Col 6; s/d/tr incl breakfast US\$68/81/96; 🏠 📺 🚿) The 40 rooms here have fridge and satellite TV as well as an overwhelming 1970s feel.

Cinnamon Gardens

Parisare (Map pp84-5; ☎ 269 4749; sunsep@visualnet.lk; 97/1 Rosmead Pl; s/d Rs 750/1500, deluxe Rs 1000/2000) This modern home houses two upstairs rooms and a deluxe downstairs room with a private garden. All rooms have hot water. Parisare is very popular – book ahead.

Ranjit Samarasinghe's (Map pp84-5; ☎ 250 2403, 071 234 7400; ranjitsam@hotmail.com; 53/19 Torrington Ave; s/d Rs 1600/2000, with air-con Rs 2200/2500; 🏠) This guesthouse is modern and airy with a small leafy courtyard and a wealth of books on Buddhism. There are three homely rooms, two with attached bathrooms. All rooms have air-con, though you have to pay extra to use it. Finding the house is a bit tricky. Coming down Torrington Ave from Baud-dhaloka Mawatha, look for the mosque on the right, then take the first left at a small playground, and then the first right. It's the second house on the left.

Borella & Maradana

Mrs A Jayawardhana's (Map pp84-5; ☎ 269 3820; samera@sri.lanka.net; 42 Kuruppu Rd, Col 8; r Rs 850-1000) This is an unpretentious family home with three tidy rooms, a large garden, an excellent library of books on Buddhism and good Sinhalese food. Two rooms share a bathroom

while the other room has a private bathroom. The guesthouse is a bit out of the way: you can get here by train to Cotta Rd train station, or catch a bus from Fort (bus 168, 174 or 177). A three-wheeler from Fort will cost about Rs 350; ask the driver to head to the Cotta Rd train station. If you ring, the family may be able to arrange to pick you up from the Pettah bus stations or Fort train station.

Mrs Swarna Jayaratne's (Map pp84-5; ☎ 269 5665; indcom@sltnet.lk; 70 Ananda Rajakaruna Mawatha, Col 8; s/d Rs 1050/1350, with air-con 1550/1850; 🏠) Mrs Jayaratne's guesthouse features two clean rooms with a shared bathroom. There's an attached guest sitting area with satellite TV, a balcony and a small patch of lawn. To get here catch bus 103 or 171 (Rs 6 from Fort train station) and get off at Punchi Borella Junction.

Rendlesham Tourist Accommodation (Map pp84-5; ☎ 268 4985; 165 Vipulasena Mawatha, Col 10; s/d incl breakfast Rs 1800/2400; 🏠) This is a fine old villa packed with antiques. The handsome guest rooms have air-con, and the garden is crammed with parrots and pot plants. The glamorous owner, Mrs Suriya de Livera, is a fashion designer. Rendlesham is situated on a little alley that runs off Vipulasena Mawatha, close to the corner of Hedges Ct.

Mrs Chitrangi de Fonseka's (Map pp84-5; ☎/fax 269 7919; 7 Karlshue Gardens, Col 10; r US\$40-65; 🏠) This is a modern home bubbling with eccentricity, including chintzy décor, lots of porcelain and an indoor fountain. The three spacious rooms have TV, air-con, and laptop and phone connections, and there's a fully equipped guest kitchen. Bus 103 or 171 from Fort will take you nearby; get off at Punchi Borella Junction.

Mt Lavinia

BUDGET

Blue Seas Guest House (Map p89; ☎ 271 6298; 6/9 De Saram Rd; s/d/tr incl breakfast Rs 1035/1380/1725) This large house down a quiet lane has 12 clean, simple and spacious rooms, some with balconies. There's a large sitting room decked out with colonial furniture, and a garden. Guests praise the staff members for their helpful attitude.

MIDRANGE

Haus Chandra (Map p89; ☎ 273 2755; hauschandra@wow.lk; 37 Beach Rd; s/d/ste/villas US\$33/46/65/125, all incl breakfast; 🏠 📺 📺) This place has a mix-

ture of suites, a colonial villa and standard hotel rooms with air-con, TV, telephone and fridge; some rooms can be cramped so check them out before you book in. The two-person suites have antique furnishings, carpets and a fully equipped kitchen. The charming villa – an older Colombo-style house – sleeps six and comes with a kitchen.

Mrs Lyn Mendis' (Map p89; ☎ 273 2446; ranmal@bigfoot.com; 11 College Ave; s/d incl breakfast Rs 1750/2000; 🏠) Opposite Tropic Inn, Mrs Mendis' is a clean, peaceful and friendly guesthouse. There's a light-filled guest sitting area and a kitchen complete with stove and fridge.

Tropic Inn (Map p89; ☎ 273 8653; www.tropicinn.com; 30 College Ave; s/d incl breakfast US\$23/25; 🏠 📺 📺) This multistorey hotel features 20 clean rooms in a simple, stylish building. There's an internal courtyard and many of the rooms have a balcony; all rooms have cable TV.

Cottage Gardens (Map p89; ☎ 273 2478; aquila@eureka.lk; 42-48 College Ave; bungalows US\$21) This place offers five charming self-contained bungalows – each equipped with cooking facilities and a fridge – set in a small garden.

Ivory Inn (Map p89; ☎ 271 5006; 21 Barnes Ave; s/d Rs 1500/2500, with air-con Rs 1650/2750, all incl breakfast; 🏠) This a motel-like place that has 16 basic rooms with balconies; some have a view to the sea. There's a small garden but, overall, this place lacks character.

TOP END

Mount Lavinia Hotel (Map p89; ☎ 271 5221-7; www.mountlaviniahotel.com; 100 Hotel Rd; governor's wing s US\$100-120, d US\$120-140, s/d sea & garden wing US\$130/150, bay wing US\$160/180; 🏠 📺 📺) Built in 1836 as the residence of the British governor, this magnificently marbled hotel overlooks the sea. About a third of the hotel – the part referred to as the 'governor's wing' – has colonial architecture; the remainder is modern. There's a private sandy beach and a beautifully positioned pool and terrace. Many of the staff members are students at the hotel school on the premises. Locals still refer to this hotel as 'Galkissa', the district name before Mt Lavinia was established.

Berjaya Mount Royal Beach Hotel (Map p89; ☎ 273 9610-5; www.berjayaresorts.com; 36 College Ave; s/d US\$75/80; 🏠 📺 📺) This is a fading 1970s resort hotel where the rooms are dated but comfortable. In a nutshell, you're paying for its prime beach position.

Airport

Hotel Goodwood Plaza (☎ 225 2561; Canada Friendship Rd, Katunayake; s/d incl breakfast Rs 2000/2200) The basic motel-like rooms here are decent value, given the proximity to the airport. The hotel offers a shuttle (Rs 200) to and from the airport.

Taj Airport Garden (☎ 225 2950; www.tajairportgardensrilanka.com; s/d US\$105/110; 🏠 📺 📺) The 120-room Taj is 10 minutes' drive from the airport in the free hotel shuttle. The hotel has a 24-hour coffee shop, a Chinese restaurant and a pub. Lower rates are available through the hotel's website.

EATING

Colombo unsurprisingly boasts the best selection of restaurants in Sri Lanka. In addition to good Sri Lankan food, you'll find North and South Indian, German, Swiss, French, Italian, Malaysian, Japanese, Chinese and Korean cuisines. Some of the best restaurants are in the five-star hotels, but the real innovation is coming from the independent cafés and restaurants that are bringing a mix of cuisines to Colombo's wealthier classes.

For cheap, tasty food it's hard to beat a lunch packet. Sold between about 11am and 2pm on street corners and footpaths all over the city, the lunch packet contains rice and curry, usually made from vegetables, with fish or chicken as optional extras. It generally costs between Rs 75 and Rs 100. Restaurants will also prepare your meal for you to take away; ask for a parcel.

Fort, Pettah & Slave Island

BUDGET

Colombo YMCA (Map p82; 39 Bristol St, Col 1; meals Rs 100-150; 🍴 lunch) The cheap cafeteria at this hostel (p93) serves tasty Sri Lankan and Western dishes.

Pagoda Tea Room (Map p82; ☎ 232 5252; 105 Chatham St, Col 1; dishes Rs 75-150) Hungry like the wolf? Duran Duran filmed its classic 1980s video for that very song in this venerable establishment. It's one of the oldest eating establishments in Fort and the service is graciously old-fashioned. Although there's a variety of Sri Lankan, Malaysian, Chinese and Western dishes, the main focus on its inexpensive pastries. This is a sister establishment to Green Cabin (p98), where most of the food is prepared.

Chettinad (Map p82; 293 Sea St, Col 11; rice & curry Rs 60-70; 🍴) Enjoy cheap South Indian and Sri Lankan food at this place in the heart of Pettah. The downstairs dining room is open to the street, and the menu is veg only. Upstairs is air-con and offers both veg and nonveg meals; prices are about Rs 10 more than those downstairs. Bombay sweets are sold from a glass case in the lobby.

Cargills (Map p82; York St, Col 1) The original store of this countrywide chain has a food court offering Sri Lankan, Indian, Thai, Malay and Chinese cuisines, all scooped from steam trays.

MIDRANGE

Harbour Room (Map p82; ☎ 232 0391/2; 2 York St, Col 1; dishes Rs 350-600, buffets Rs 800) Overlooking the city harbour from the 4th floor of Grand Oriental Hotel, this blandly decorated hotel dining room is worth visiting for its superb views. The menu covers all the usual Sri Lankan, Chinese and Western bases. Inexpensive lunch buffets are served on weekdays; there are dinner buffets daily.

Seafish (Map p82; ☎ 232 6915; 15 Sir Chittampalam A Gardiner Mawatha, Col 1; mains Rs 700-1400) At the end of an alley on the southern edge of Fort, the venerable Seafish serves honest seafood in a faded colonial-club setting.

Lotus Leaf (Map pp84-5; ☎ 479 3100; 466 Union Pl, Col 2; dishes Rs 75-150; 🍴) This brasserie-style eatery, popular with students, serves fresh, reasonably priced Sri Lankan cuisine. The upstairs dining room has air-con.

Il Ponte (Map p82; ☎ 249 2492; 2 Sir Chittampalam A Gardiner Mawatha, Col 1; mains Rs 600-800) This light, airy restaurant in Hilton Colombo has a range of Italian and continental dishes, imported wines and beers, and a good salad bar.

TOP END

Hilton Colombo has possibly the best array of upscale international restaurants in the city. **Curry Leaf** (Map p82; ☎ 249 2492; 2 Sir Chittampalam A Gardiner Mawatha, Col 1; buffet Rs 950; 🍴 dinner only), tucked away in a lovely garden that recreates the atmosphere of a traditional village, serves excellent Sri Lankan food. It also has an arrack bar. **Moghul Ghar** (mains Rs 600-1000) specialises in Pakistani halal cuisine, and **Ginza Hohsen** (dishes Rs 1000-1600) serves sushi and other Japanese fare (made with all-imported ingredients).

Kollupitiya BUDGET

YWCA National Headquarters (Map pp84-5; ☎ 232 3498; 7 Rotunda Gardens; dishes Rs 100-150) The busy cafeteria at this hostel (p94) offers a wide variety of dirt-cheap eats.

Amaravathi (Map pp84-5; ☎ 257 7418; 2 Mile Post Ave; meals from Rs 125; ☎) This place offers attentive service and arguably the best South Indian cuisine in the capital for very reasonable prices. The menu includes three different vegetarian thalis ('all-you-can-eat' plates of rice, curries and accompaniments), plus a varied selection of veg and nonveg Madras- and Andhra-style dishes.

Crescat Boulevard (Map pp84-5; 89 Galle Rd; dishes Rs 135-250; ☎) A couple of minutes from Cinnamon Grand Hotel, this shopping centre has a good food hall downstairs. You have a choice of Sri Lankan, Chinese, Malaysian or Indian cuisine – or burgers. Service is efficient, the surroundings are clean (with clean toilets nearby), and the prices are moderate.

Fab (Map pp84-5; ☎ 257 3348; 474 Galle Rd; pastries Rs 25-45, dishes Rs 65-150) Upper-middle-class Colombo residents fill the Fab in the afternoon for tea, pastries, cakes and Western and Eastern snacks, all of which are cut above the similar fare at Green Cabin and Pagoda Tea Room. There are four other branches around the city, but this is the original and the most popular.

Green Cabin (Map pp84-5; ☎ 258 8811; 453 Galle Rd; dishes Rs 75-300) This place is a bit of an institution in the local restaurant trade. It's well known for both its baked goods and its inexpensive Sri Lankan, Indian and Chinese dishes; the lunchtime buffet is excellent value – the mango curry, if it's on, is very good. For a snack try the vegetable pastries or the bacon-and-egg pies.

Self-caterers can head to **Beema** (Map pp84-5; RA de Mel Mawatha) on the 2nd floor of the big market building near Liberty Plaza. It's an indoor place with fruit, vegetables and a good range of imported foods at very competitive prices. **Keells** (Map pp84-5; Crescat Boulevard 89 Galle Rd; Liberty Plaza RA de Mel Mawatha) is a super-market popular with expats.

MIDRANGE

Palmyrah (Map pp84-5; 328 Galle Rd; dishes Rs 200-500; ☎) In a nondescript kitchen in the basement of Hotel Renuka a chef is whipping

up some of the finest Sri Lankan curries in Colombo, along with a selection of South Indian specialities. Don't miss the stellar *wattalappam* (coconut milk, egg, cardamom and jaggery pudding).

Namaste (Map pp84-5; 328 Galle Rd; dishes Rs 300-600) This recent addition to Hotel Renuka does for North Indian cuisine what the Palmyrah does for Sri Lankan and South Indian food – it provides the highest standards at affordable prices.

Siam House (Map pp84-5; ☎ 257 6993; 55 Abdul Gaffour Mawatha; dishes Rs 250-500) The décor at this great place is simple but the Thai food is excellent and the service is good. It's located in a villa on a side street off RA de Mel Mawatha.

Chesa Swiss (Map pp84-5; ☎ 257 3877; 3 Deal Pl; mains from Rs 400; ☎) 7-11pm Tue-Sun) This place attracts regulars with sturdy Swiss fare (such as sliced venison in Cognac-pepper sauce), efficient service and its cosy, clean atmosphere. A good selection of imported wines and beers is available.

Sakura (Map pp84-5; ☎ 257 3877; 15 Rheinland Pl; dishes Rs 250-350) The food at Sakura, Colombo's oldest Japanese restaurant, is simply prepared yet very tasty. If you sit at the bar you can switch between watching the sushi chef and the delightfully weird Japanese game shows on the TV. Occasionally there are karaoke videos. There is also a private dining room with tatami mats.

German Restaurant (Map pp84-5; ☎ 242 1577; 11 Sir Mohamed Macan Markar Mawatha; dishes Rs 400-600; ☎) 6pm-midnight) Opposite Galle Face Hotel, this simply named eatery does all things German. You may wish to visit during the happy hour (7pm to 8pm) to sample the draught German beer and wines.

Kafé Kent (Kent Cafe; Map pp84-5; ☎ 255 2837; 35 Bagatalle Rd; dishes Rs 200-500) This cosy restaurant includes several areas for a drink, and multiple dining rooms for a quiet dinner. It's a good spot for women travellers.

TOP END

1864 (Map pp84-5; ☎ 254 1010; 2 Kollupitiya Rd, Col 3; mains around Rs 1500) One of the most talked-about restaurant debuts in Colombo, this place in Galle Face Regency wows its customers with a fusion of Indian, Italian and Japanese cuisines.

Barista (Map pp84-5; ☎ 535 8849; The Piazza, 2 Kollupitiya Rd, Col 3; coffees Rs 45-75, sandwiches Rs 375; ☎)

Sip perfect cappuccinos alongside the city's young, beautiful and wealthy in this large espresso bar and deli that's attached to the new shopping wing of Galle Face Regency.

Gallery Cafe (Map pp84-5; ☎ 258 2162; 2 Alfred House Rd; mains Rs 420-1100; ☎) The historic building that houses Gallery Cafe used to be an office for Sri Lanka's most famous architect, Geoffrey Bawa. Entry is through a series of colonnaded courtyards featuring ornamental pools; from the outer latticed gate you can gaze right through to the inner courtyard. There are exhibitions of paintings and photography in the courtyards, as well as in the building. The open-air café area looks over a pebbled courtyard, while the lounge-bar is where Bawa's old office used to be – in fact, his desk is still there. It's definitely one of the places to be seen in Colombo, but more importantly it's a stunning spot and a terrific retreat from the bustle of Colombo. On a par with the décor, the Sri Lankan-inspired dishes focus on fresh ingredients and bold, clean flavours. As a cheaper option, come for an afternoon coffee.

Crickets Club Cafe (Map pp84-5; ☎ 250 1384; 34 Queens Rd; meals Rs 600-900; ☎) 11.30am-2am; ☎) This older-style bungalow with a garden and veranda is one of Colombo's most popular places to meet, drink and eat. It is packed with cricket memorabilia, needless to say. Options range from pasta to seafood to burgers with salad and chips. There's a good bar and an excellent selection of beers and wines.

Sea Spray (Map pp84-5; ☎ 254 1010; 2 Kollupitiya Rd; buffet lunch/dinner Rs 600/900) This quaint oceanside restaurant in Galle Face Hotel specialises in barbecued seafood. The outside tables are close enough to the sea to hear the surf.

Barefoot Garden Cafe (Map pp84-5; ☎ 258 9305; 704 Galle Rd; sandwiches Rs 300-500, meals Rs 600-800; ☎) Located in the courtyard of the well-known Barefoot gallery (p102), this café serves sandwiches, snacks such as falafel in pita bread, and daily specials that usually include one Sri Lankan, one Thai, one Malay-Indonesian and several Western dishes. There's also a wine list.

Bambalapitiya, Havelock Town & Wellawatta

Greenlands Hotel (Map p88; ☎ 258 1986; 3A Shrubbery Gardens, Col 4; meals from Rs 120; ☎) Despite its hospital-ward-like interior, Greenlands whips up very good, fresh South Indian

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Beach Wadiya (Map p88; ☎ 258 8568; 2 Station Ave, Col 6; mains from Rs 400) Maybe it's the way the staff greets every arriving diner as if they were family. Or it might be because you feel equally welcome whether you're wearing a T-shirt or a tux. Whatever the appeal, come early to pick a table inside the weather-beaten beach shack or outside in the sand, order a chilled Three Coins beer while a waiter fills you in on the day's catch, and receive your specially customised grilled or fried seafood platter.

food. Divided in to a busy semi-open-air canteen area and a separate air-con dining room, this place is popular with locals. The prices are so low you won't mind that you may have to beg to be served.

Shanti Vihar (Map pp84-5; ☎ 258 02243; Havelock Rd, Col 5; meals Rs 90-145; ☎) This place's deliciously spicy vegetarian food and very reasonable prices make it popular with locals and foreigners alike. It's a basic, well-worn eatery, though there is a fancier air-con section. The menu's South Indian offerings are especially good: masala dosa (curried vegetables inside a paper-thin lentil-flour pancake) for Rs 60, curd *vadai* (a deep-fried lentil-flour patty with yoghurt) for Rs 25 and Madras thalis for Rs 90. Shanti Vihar also has a home-delivery service.

Sapid (Map p88; 145 Galle Rd, Col 4; dishes Rs 100-300; ☎) From the outside, Sapid's glassed-in dining rooms gives the place the look of a New York deli, but inside it's tasty and fast Sri Lankan food.

Chinese Dragon Cafe (Map p88; ☎ 250 3637; 11 Milagiriya Ave, Col 4; dishes Rs 200-400) Colombo probably has more Chinese restaurants than Sri Lankan ones, and this spot, housed in an old mansion, is one of the more popular because of its inexpensive rice and noodle dishes.

Majestic City (Map p88; Galle Rd, Col 4; ☎) A good spot for a cheap but reasonable quality lunch is the food hall in the basement of this shopping centre, where you can choose from Malaysian, Chinese, Sri Lankan, Western fast food and Indian. There's a play area for children next to the eating area, and the complex also has a good Cargills Food City on the ground floor.

Cinnamon Gardens

MIDRANGE

Paradise Road Cafe (Map pp84-5; ☎ 268 6043; 213 Dharmapala Mawatha; light meals Rs 250-450) Part of the shop of the same name (p103), this café serves great coffee, milk shakes, cakes and light meals (such as quiche and spaghetti) in an airy veranda-style atmosphere upstairs. It's just southwest of De Soysa (Lip-ton) Circus.

Delifrance (Map pp84-5; coffee & lunch Rs 500; Crescat Boulevard 89 Galle Rd, Col 3; Odel Unlimited 5 Alexandra Pl, Col 7) This busy café, on the ground floor of the very popular Odel Unlimited store, is delighted to siphon off your shopping change. There's also an outlet in Crescat Boulevard.

Mahout Café (Map pp84-5; ☎ 269 1056; 61 Ward Place; light meals Rs 400-500) In the mezzanine of Elephant Walk, this is a pleasantly casual spot for lunch or afternoon tea. The menu emphasises Mediterranean and Sri Lankan cuisines.

Commons (Map pp84-5; ☎ 257 4384; 74A Dharmapala Mawatha; light meals Rs 400-500) Part garden, part gallery and part café (with large, soft sofas), this is a safe retreat for women and for tired visitors generally. It's a perfect spot to take a break or to settle in with a sandwich and coffee while reading the Sunday papers. There's a good selection for the sweet-toothed, including fudge brownies and a delicious brunch that features pancakes, bacon and syrup.

TOP END

Number 18 (Map pp84-5; ☎ 269 4000; 18 Cambridge Pl; dishes Rs 500-1500) Local designer and hotelier Taru Fanseca has transformed this '60s-vintage bank governor's residence into a chic eatery with minimalist décor. Australian Russell Gronow is the man behind the menu, which blends Pacific Rim and Mediterranean influences. Also available is a variety of wines and exotic cocktails, including the Turkish delight martini.

Le Palace (Map pp84-5; ☎ 269 5920; 79 Gregory's Rd; dishes Rs 600-900) In a beautiful old mansion in one of Colombo's most exclusive streets, this place specialises in first-class pastries and baked goods, and has 15 international set menus ranging from Mexican to Malaysian. If you are coming here by taxi or three-wheeler, ask the driver to take you via the Kynsey Rd entrance; much of the street is closed to traffic.

Mt Lavinia

The beachfront here is lined with restaurants focusing on what most Mt Lavinia visitors expect: fresh seafood. Note that some restaurants have limited menus on weekdays because most local tourists come on the weekend.

Angler (Map p89; 71 Hotel Rd; dishes Rs 350-1000) Casual and friendly, this is a good choice for reliable and reasonably priced seafood, and a range of Sri Lankan and Western dishes.

Frankfurt Lavinia Beer Garden (Map p89; ☎ 271 6034; 34/8A De Saram Rd; mains Rs 400-1000) As the name suggests, German food – including delicious home-made sausages – is the speciality here. It's on the same lane as Blue Seas Guest House.

Fisherman's Villa (Map p89; ☎ 074 202821; 43/19 College Ave, Mt Lavinia; mains Rs 500-1500) Set in a wooden pavilion, this beachfront restaurant offers well-prepared seafood dishes cooked in Western, Sri Lankan and Thai styles.

Golden Mile (Map p89; ☎ 273 3997; 43/14 College Rd; mains Rs 600-1700) In a timber-framed, partially open-air building right on the beach, Golden Mile has become the most popular evening hang-out in Mt Lavinia for well-funded Sri Lankan weekenders. While the seafood and modern Sri Lankan menu (including a few vegetarian items) isn't stellar, the snappy service keeps them coming back.

Seafood Cove (Map p89; ☎ 271 5221-7; 100 Hotel Rd; mains Rs 800-2100) Enjoy Mt Lavinia's prettiest ocean view at Mt Lavinia Hotel's elegant beachfront restaurant.

DRINKING

Galle Face Hotel (Map pp84-5; 2 Kollupitiya Rd, Col 3; ☎ 11am-midnight) Favourite gathering spots for a drink at this venerable institution (p95) include Veranda, a no-nonsense bar on the inside veranda, and the Checkerboard, a cluster of tables on the courtyard lawn facing the sea. Or go the whole hog and quaff imported wine while smoking Cuban cigars and nibbling French cheeses in the hotel's new wine lounge.

Clancy's Irish Pub (Map pp84-5; ☎ 268 2945; 29 Maitland Cres, Col 7; ☎ 11am-3.30am) Colombo's stab at Irishness offers pub grub and a variety of beers and ales, including Guinness. It's a popular spot, with regular quiz nights, live music on weekends and a few couches to sink into. Upstairs, Shooters Sports &

Music Lounge has several billiards tables, a bar and a 150-inch TV screen for sport fans. All drinks are discounted 50% during the daily 6pm to 8pm happy hour.

Molly's Irish Pub & Restaurant (Map pp84-5; ☎ 254 3966; 46/38 Nawam Mawatha, Col 2; ☎ 10.30am-3.30am) Like Clancy's, this pub (tucked away in a small office area) has regular quiz nights, live music, pub meals, happy hours and retro dance nights.

White Horse (Map pp84-5; ☎ 230 4922; 2 Nawam Mawatha, Col 2; ☎ 10am-2pm) Close enough to Molly's that you could lead a conga line between them, White Horse is a sparse, modern space with stainless-steel décor, and low couches and tables. On Friday nights the mixed crowd of locals and expats often spills out onto the street.

Bistro Latino (Map p88; ☎ 258 0063; 21 RA de Mel Mawatha, Col 4; ☎ 6.30pm-2am) This wine bar serves tapas (Rs 300 to 800) and plays recorded Latin jazz and salsa. The staff offers free salsa-dancing lessons.

Cricketer Club Cafe (Map pp84-5; 34 Queens Rd, Col 3; ☎ 11.30am-2am) This café (p99) has yet another bar in which you can drink to colonial nostalgia, in this case while surrounded by cricket memorabilia.

Sri Lanka Ex-Servicemen's Institute (Map p82; 29 Bristol St, Col 1; ☎ 11am-11pm) The plain bar at the back of this hostel's (p93) lobby serves Lion Lager at about the lowest prices you'll find outside a grocery store, but you're not paying for atmosphere. Solo women travelers are advised against drinking here.

Lion Pub (Map p89; Galle Rd, Mt Lavinia; ☎ 11am-2am) Locals and tourists alike neck Lion Lager at this casual little bar that's not far from the beach.

ENTERTAINMENT

Although the long years of war put a dampener on Colombo's nightlife, since the 2002 cease-fire a small but vigorous group of clubs has loosened up the city's young and wealthy. A big night out might start at a restaurant or pub, segue into revelry at a nightclub, and finally collapse in a heap at a casino.

Casinos

Gaming is legal in Colombo, but only for foreign passport-holders. All five of the city's casinos are found in Bambalapitiya and Kollupitiya. Incentives to lure punt-

ers include free meals and drinks, plus free transport to and from the casino; bets at most tables start at Rs 500. Most casinos are open 24 hours. Despite bearing identical names, those listed alphabetically below have no relationship with the casinos in Las Vegas.

Bally's Casino (Map pp84-5; ☎ 257 3497; 14 Dharmapala Mawatha, Col 3) Near Liberty Plaza.

Bellagio Casino (☎ 257 5271; 430 RA de Mel Mawatha, Col 3)

MGM Casino (Map p88; ☎ 259 1319; 772 Galle Rd, Col 4) Near Majestic City.

Ritz Club (☎ 234 1496; 5 Galle Face Terrace, Col 3)

Star Dust (Map pp84-5; ☎ 257 3493; 15th Lane, Galle Rd, Col 3)

Cinemas

TV and video have largely killed off the cinema scene – many old movie houses are hanging on by catering to the raincoat brigade with lurid skin flicks such as *Craving Desire* and *House of Pleasure*; if the title doesn't tip you off, a notice on the marquee reading 'Strictly for Adults' will. Most of these films are either Hollywood backlot or B-grade Indian (both Hindi and Tamil) productions, often featuring the story of a busy victim seeking vengeance with heavy weaponry. Expensive scenes (explosions etc) are spliced in from other films. Sinhalese films are also popular, but production values are similarly low.

There are four nonsleazy cinemas that show Hollywood blockbusters, although often quite a while after they've been released elsewhere in the world. The air-con systems and volume tend to be turned up high. **Majestic Cinema** (Map p88; ☎ 258 1759; 4th fl, Majestic City, Galle Rd, Col 4) is the most modern and has the best screens. **Liberty Cinema** (Map pp84-5; ☎ 232 5264; Dharmapala Mawatha, Col 3), **Savoy** (Map p88; ☎ 258 9621; Galle Rd, Col 6) and **Regal** (Map p82; ☎ 243 2936; 8 Sir Chittampalam A Gardiner Mawatha, Col 2), opposite the original Lake House Bookshop, are also safe bets. Shows run in the morning and evening (usually starting at 6.30pm or 7pm). Tickets cost Rs 150 for adults and Rs 100 for children under 12.

The foreign cultural centres show art-house films; see *LT, Travel Lanka* and the *Linc* for what's on. Regal, which is opposite colonial-era Lake House, is a common screening location for local film festivals.

Nightclubs

Most of Colombo's dance-oriented nightlife centres on the top hotels. All clubs have a cover charge of about Rs 500 to 600 (which usually includes one drink). The dress code is fashion-conscious but casual; entry is usually restricted to mixed couples and single women. Things get going at about 11pm and continue through to 6am.

Blue Elephant (Map p82; Hilton Colombo, 2 Sir Chittampalam A Gardiner Mawatha, Col 1)

Boom (Map p82; Galadari Hotel, 64 Lotus Rd, Col 1)

Cascades (Map pp84-5; Cinnamon Grand Hotel, 77 Galle Rd, Col 3)

Library (Map p82; Trans Asia Hotel, Sir Chittampalam A Gardiner Mawatha, Col 2)

My Kind of Place (Map pp84-5; Taj Samudra, 25 Galle Face Centre Rd, Col 3)

Live music

Both Molly's Irish Pub & Restaurant (p101) and Clancy's Irish Pub (p100) host live local bands most nights, while Rhythm & Blues (Map p88; 19/1 Daisy Villa Ave, Col 4; weekend cover charge Rs 500) has live rock, R&B and blues nightly. Despite the Daisy Villa Ave address, Rhythm & Blues is on Duplication Rd.

Sport

Sri Lanka Cricket (☎ 472 2235; sl.cricinfo.com; 35 Maitland Pl, Col 7) The top sport in Sri Lanka is, without a doubt, cricket. You can buy tickets for major games from Sri Lanka Cricket, either online or at the office next to Sinhalese Sports Club.

Theatre

Foreign cultural centres such as the British Council occasionally host live theatre performances. These are advertised in newspapers and magazines such as *LT*, as well as at cafés and hotels frequented by expats. The following places, listed alphabetically, are some other notable theatres in Colombo.

Elphinstone Theatre (Map pp84-5; ☎ 243 3635; Maradana Rd, Col 7) This finely restored 80-year-old theatre maintains a busy programme that includes music, theatre and films.

Lionel Wendt Centre (Map pp84-5; ☎ 269 5794; 18 Guilford Cres, Col 10) Among other events, this gallery (p90) occasionally hosts live theatre.

Lumbini Theatre (Map p88; Havelock Rd, Col 5) This is the city's oldest theatre and one of the only places where you'll find modern Sinhala performances.

SHOPPING Handicrafts

If you missed out on buying Sri Lanka's plentiful handicrafts while travelling, don't worry – just about everything is available in Colombo. The better shops can easily arrange shipping.

Laksala (Map p82; ☎ 232 9247; 60 York St, Col 1) Run by the Sri Lankan Handicraft Board (a government institute promoting traditional craft skills), Laksala has two floors showcasing all manner of traditional Sri Lankan crafts, including leather goods, silverwork, furniture, brass, batik and woodcarvings. The prices are decent and clearly marked, so there's no need to bargain.

Lanka Hands (Map pp84-5; ☎ 451 2311; 135 Baudhaloka Mawatha, Col 4) Here you'll find a good variety of local crafts including jewellery, Sinhalese masks, brightly painted wooden toys and puzzles, cane furniture and basketry, drums and more. The prices are reasonable.

Lakpahana (Map pp84-5; ☎ 269 8211; 21 Rajakeeya Mawatha, Col 7) As with Laksala and Lanka Hands, this Cinnamon Gardens showroom carries traditionally crafted items, including lacework, jewellery, batik and masks, as well as tea.

Fabrics & Clothing

Sri Lanka has a thriving weaving industry that produces both hand- and machine-woven fabrics, and is a major garment manufacturer. All manner of clothing, ranging from beach wear to padded jackets, is sold in Colombo. Many of the items are Western-style clothes – you'd be able to find them in department stores all over the world – while others you'll only find here.

Barefoot (Map pp84-5; ☎ 258 0114; www.barefootceylon.com/home.htm; 704 Galle Rd, Col 3) Designer Barbara Sansoni's beautifully laid-out shop, located in an old villa, is justly popular for its bright hand-loomed textiles, which are fashioned into bedspreads, cushions, serviettes and other household items (or sold by the metre). You'll also find textile-covered notebooks, lamp shades and albums, and a large selection of stylish, simple clothing.

Oasis Company (Map p88; ☎ 269 7097; 18 Station Rd, Col 4) You'll find goods similar those of Barefoot here, but some of the textiles are block-printed; there are carpets, too.

Odel Unlimited (Cinnamon Gardens Map pp84-5; 5 Alexandra Pl, Col 7; Majestic City Map p88; Galle Rd, Col 4;

Trans Asia Hotel Map p82; 115 Sir Chittampalam Gardiner A Mawatha, Col 2) Head here to shop with the glamorous. You'll find everything from homewares, designer-label clothing and sportswear to banana soap.

House of Fashion (Map p88; ☎ 250 4639; cnr RA de Mel Mawatha & Visak Rd, Col 4) This three-storey surplus outlet for the nation's garment industry is the place to go for serious clothes shopping. Many items are hugely discounted.

Collectables

Paradise Road (Map pp84-5; ☎ 268 6043; 213 Dharmapala Mawatha, Col 7) In addition to a variety of colonial and Sri Lankan antiques you'll find a good selection of original houseware here. Paradise Road's Gallery Cafe (p99) carries a similar array of collectables. Both are excellent places to look for small gifts to take home.

Elephant Walk (Map pp84-5; ☎ 269 1056; 61 Ward Pl, Col 7) Similar in scope to Paradise Road, this well-decorated shop housed in a Bawa-designed bungalow carries hand-crafted houseware, furniture, lamps and stationery, and gourmet food items.

Raux Brothers (Map p88; ☎ 533 9016; 7 De Fonseka Rd, Col 5) This 45-year-old antiques showroom, located in a large, beautiful colonial house, stocks an impressive range of furniture, and artworks crafted from wood. There are genuine antiques and handcrafted new pieces. This is the best antique house in the city, if you can afford it.

Kandyan Antiques (Map pp84-5; ☎ 451 0981; 36 Sir Ernest de Silva Mawatha, Col 7) Some of the antiques here are genuine, while others are skilful copies; the staff can tell you which is which if the price tags don't make it obvious. There's also a good selection of Buddhist and Hindu religious art.

Gems & Jewellery

There are many gem dealers and jewellers along Galle Rd and RA de Mel Mawatha, and on Sea St, Pettah, where the shops can be on a tiny scale. The biggest outlets employ the most silver-tongued salespeople in the business.

Sri Lanka Gem & Jewellery Exchange (Map p82; ☎ 239 1132; www.sligemexchange.com; 4th & 5th fl, East Low Block, World Trade Center, Bank of Ceylon Mw, Col 1) This is your safest bet for price and authenticity. It contains 41 government-approved shops plus a gem-testing laboratory.

Tea

Ceylon tea is sold in just about every place that sells foodstuffs, from minimarts to supermarkets. For the best quality and selection head to a **Mesna Tea Centre** (Crescat Boulevard Map pp84-5; 89 Galle Rd, Col 3; Liberty Plaza Map pp84-5; RA de Mel Mawatha, Col 3; Majestic City Map p88; Galle Rd, Col 4) or a Dilmah Tea Shop, located inside **Odel Unlimited** (Cinnamon Gardens Map pp84-5; 5 Alexandra Pl, Col 7; Majestic City Map p88; Galle Rd, Col 4; Trans Asia Hotel Map p82; 115 Sir Chittampalam Gardiner A Mawatha, Col 2). In these outlets you'll find a variety of teas packed in airtight canisters, ceramic containers and wooden or cardboard boxes, along with strainers, china and other tea-making paraphernalia.

Photographic Supplies & Repairs

The following places, listed in alphabetical order, sell photographic supplies such as film and memory cards; also try stores in luxury hotels.

Crescat Boulevard (Map pp84-5; 89 Galle Rd, Col 3)

Liberty Plaza (Map pp84-5; RA de Mel Mawatha, Col 3)

Majestic City (Map p88; Galle Rd, Col 4)

Millers (Fort Map p82; ☎ 232 9151; York St; Majestic City Map p88; Galle Rd, Col 4) For print and slide film.

The following stores have been recommended for camera repairs.

Photoflex (Map pp84-5; ☎ 258 7824; 1st fl, 451/2, Galle Rd, Col 3)

Photo Technica (Kollupitiya Map pp84-5; ☎ 257 6271; 288 Galle Rd, Col 3; Liberty Plaza Map pp84-5; RA de Mel Mawatha, Col 3; Majestic City Map p88; Galle Rd, Col 4)

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Colombo is the international gateway to Sri Lanka, and it is also the centre of the island's bus and rail networks. You may find leaving Colombo by train is easier than by bus, though trains are usually less frequent and a little more expensive than buses. There's more order at the train stations than at the bus stations, and there's often less overcrowding once on board.

Air

Colombo's domestic airport is at Ratmalana Air Force Base, south of Mt Lavinia. There is no public transport to or from this airport, but AeroLanka runs its own shuttle bus. Because of the air force presence security is heavy and you need to check in two hours before takeoff.

Expo Aviation (Map pp84-5; ☎ 257 6941; info@expoavi.com; 464 Galle Rd, Col 3) and **AeroLanka** (☎ 250 5632; www.aerolanka.com; 500 Galle Rd, Col 6) operate flights between Colombo and Jaffna (one way Rs 6900), while AeroLanka also flies to Trincomalee (one way Rs 4890). At the time of writing, however, AeroLanka had temporarily suspended flights to Trinco.

Bandaranaike International Airport is at Katunayake, 30km north of the city and about 2km east of the Colombo–Negombo road. For information on international flights see p336.

Bus

Colombo has three main bus terminals, all just east of Fort train station on the south edge of Pettah (Map p82). Long-distance buses leave from chaotic Bastian Mawatha

SELECTED BUS DESTINATIONS FROM COLOMBO

From Bastian Mawatha

Ambalangoda Rs 36, two hours.

Galle Regular/air-con Rs 63/130, three hours.

Hikkaduwa Regular/air-con Rs 54/110, two to three hours.

Kandy Regular Rs 70 to 120, air-con Rs 140, 2½ to 3½ hours.

Kataragama Regular/air-con Rs 146/280, 10 hours.

Matara Regular/air-con Rs 84/170, four to five hours.

Nuwara Eliya Rs 220, six hours.

Tangalla Regular/air-con Rs 104/210, six hours.

Trincomalee Regular/air-con Rs 200/240, six to seven hours.

From Saunders PI

Anuradhapura CTB/intercity bus Rs 107/210, five hours.

Badulla Rs 22, seven hours.

Haputale Rs 265, six hours.

Kurunegala Regular/intercity Rs 45/84, four to five hours.

Negombo Regular/air-con Rs 28/42, one to two hours.

Ratnapura CTB/intercity bus Rs 46/100, three hours.

Polonnaruwa Regular/air-con Rs 170/230, six hours.

station and Saunders PI station; Central Bus Station on Olcott Mawatha is where many suburban buses start and stop. See left for details of selected services.

Train

The main train station, Colombo Fort, is within walking distance of the city centre. Trains in transit often stop only for two or three minutes. See opposite for details of services.

There's an **information office** (☎ 244 0048; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat), in fact a branch office of JF Tours, at the front of Fort station. The helpful staff know everything about transport in and out of Colombo. Or you could try the information desk in the station. There is left-luggage storage at the station's **cloakroom** (per bag per day Rs 20; ☎ 4.30am-11.30pm). Fort station is crawling with touts waiting to hook you up with their 'uncle's' hotel in Kandy or down the coast.

GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport

To get to the domestic airport at Ratmalana Air Force Base AeroLanka offers free shuttle service if you hold its tickets; otherwise you'll have to take a taxi.

Taxis and buses are the most convenient forms of transport to and from Bandaranaike International Airport. If you're arriving in the dead of the night it's best to book a room and let the hotel or guest-house know what time you'll be arriving. Staff *should* be able to organise a driver to pick you up from the airport, though it's easy enough to jump in a taxi. Bus 187 to the airport departs the Bastian Mawatha station from 6am until 9pm (Rs 25). The buses are easy to find, as there are men screaming out 'Airport! Airport!' whenever one is filling up. From the airport they leave every 30 minutes between 4.30am and 11pm. Taxi drivers will tell you there is no public transport.

There is no bus directly to Negombo from the airport but you can catch an air-con bus to Katunayake junction (Rs 8), from where you can catch a bus to Negombo (intercity express Rs 15). Buses from Negombo head to the airport every 15 to 20 minutes from about 5am to 9pm – again, change buses at the junction. The trip takes about 45 minutes.

MAIN TRAINS FROM FORT

Destination	Departure time	Fare (Rs)			Duration (hr)
		3rd class	2nd class	1st class	
Anuradhapura	5.45am, 2pm	120	215	420	5
Anuradhapura (Intercity Express)	3.55pm	160	290	520	4
Anuradhapura (Night Mail)	9.30pm	175	309	520	5
Batticaloa (Intercity Express)	7.30pm	218	393	697	9-10
Badulla via Kandy (Podi Menike)	5.55am	190	343	580	9
Badulla via Peradeniya Junction (Udarata Menike)	9.45am	190	343	580	9
Badulla (Night Mail)	7.40pm, 10pm	190	343	580	9
Kandy via Peradeniya Junction	7am, 3.25pm	80	125	250	2½
Kandy via Rambukkana	5.55am, 10.30am, 12.40pm, 4.55pm, 5.50pm, 7.40pm	61	150	—	3
Matara via Bentota, Hikkaduwa & Galle	7.10am, 9am, 4pm, 10.30am, 2.05pm, 5pm, 5.52pm	72	180	—	4
Negombo	4.30am, 5.20am, 6am, 8.40am, 9.25am, 1pm, 1.45pm, 2.50pm, 4.55pm, 5.20pm, 5.35pm, 5.40pm, 6.20pm, 6.55pm, 8.20pm	21	—	—	2
Polonnaruwa	6.15am, 10.30pm	54	147	331	6-9
Trincomalee	6.15am, 10.30pm	194	347	587	8
Vavuniya via Anuradhapura	5.45am, 2pm	120	218	420	6
Vavuniya (Intercity Express)	3.55pm	160	290	560	4

It's possible, although not particularly convenient, to catch a commuter train to Colombo. The station is near the turn-off from the main road, about 500m from the terminal.

If you want a taxi, head to the Ceylon Tourist Board's **information desk** (☎ 24hr), in the first arrivals hall after you exit through customs, and find out the latest fixed rates. At the time of writing a one-way fare was Rs 1010 to Colombo (40 minutes to 1½ hours); Rs 600 to Negombo (20 minutes); and Rs 3300 to Kandy (two to three hours). After you've exited the second arrivals hall that's full of hotel and hire-car agencies, you'll be pounced on by an army of taxi drivers – take your pick, as you'll know what to pay. Taxis to the airport cost more –

around Rs 1500 from Colombo (Rs 1800 from Mt Lavinia), Rs 800 from Negombo and Rs 3500 from Kandy.

Avoid taking a three-wheeler between the airport and Colombo; it's a long, miserable journey and you'll be sucking in exhaust fumes all the way. Three-wheeler fares between the airport and Negombo should be around Rs 400 (30 minutes). Three-wheelers may not pick up passengers from the terminal but you can catch one on the road outside the airport.

Public Transport BUS

The *A-Z Street Guide* contains a detailed table and a map showing bus routes in Colombo. The Central Transport Board (CTB)

and private bus companies operate parallel services. A timetable is not necessary – the buses can hardly be described as running to one. Buses going down Galle Rd from Fort or Pettah include 100, 101, 102 and 400, and can be picked up at the Central Bus Station. Fares vary from Rs 4 to 25, depending on distance.

Private semiluxury and luxury buses are a recent addition to the Galle Rd service, although they are far fewer in number than the regular buses. Sometimes they have a destination sign in English in the front window. Generally they have curtains and soft seats. The fare is about twice that for ordinary buses, but still a bargain.

TRAIN

You can use the train to get to the suburbs dotted along Galle Rd – Kollupitiya, Bambalapitiya, Wellawatta, Dehiwala and Mt Lavinia – and to avoid the smog, noise and hassle of bus travel. The Kelani Valley line could be used to get to outlying suburbs such as Narahenpita (via Cotta Rd station) from Fort. Timetables are clearly marked at the stations, though if you just turn up you shouldn't have to wait long. If you board the train at Fort train station, double-check that it stops at all stations or you may end up speeding to Galle. Train fares are fixed and are usually marginally lower than bus fares. A taxi from Fort train station to Galle Face Hotel (a little over 2km) should cost about Rs 150 (less if a meter is used).

Taxi

Some taxis are metered, but often the driver won't use the meter – agree on the fare before setting off. Getting to Mt Lavinia, for example, should cost around Rs 650.

A less fraught alternative is using one of Colombo's radio cab companies; they take anywhere from five to 20 minutes to arrive. All have air-con cars with meters and average Rs 40 to 44 per kilometre. Reliable companies include **Ace Cabs** (☎ 281 8818), **GNTC** (☎ 268 8688) and **Cool Kangaroo** (☎ 258 8588).

Three-Wheeler

Everywhere you look you'll see a three-wheeler, often referred to as Bajaj after one of the Indian manufacturers. Darting through traffic in one of these might be called exhilarating by some and downright reckless by others.

As a rule of thumb you should pay no more than Rs 40 per kilometre, but agree on a fare before getting in. At times three-wheeler drivers will try their luck by asking for a ridiculous initial fare in the hope that you haven't got a clue. Try rolling your eyes and heading for another three-wheeler. From Fort, expect to pay Rs 150 to 200 to get to Cinnamon Gardens, Rs 300 to Bambalapitiya and Rs 500 to 550 to Mt Lavinia.

You'll generally get a better price hailing a three-wheeler on the street than using one that's waiting outside a hotel or sitting at a three-wheeler stand.

Keep in mind that it's often cheaper and less frustrating to take a metered taxi.