

The Hill Country



The Hill Country lives in a cool, perpetual spring, away from the often enervating heat and heavy air of the coastal regions or the hot dry air of the central and northern plains. Everything here is green and lush, and much of the region is carpeted with the glowing green of the tea plantations, with montane forest hugging the higher slopes.

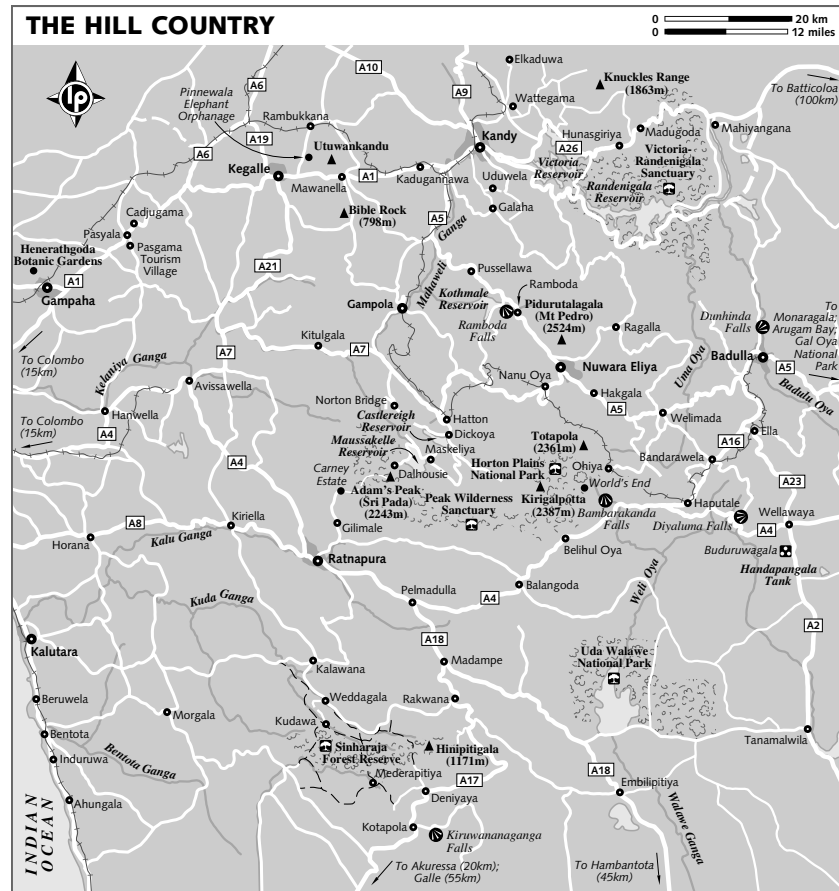
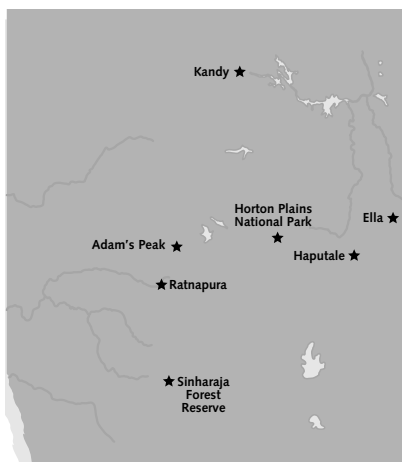
Although Sinhalese culture was born in the north of Sri Lanka, following the decline of the Polonnaruwa dynasties in the early 13th century, power shifted southwest to Kotte (near Colombo) and to the Hill Country. The kingdom of Kandy resisted European takeover for more than 300 years after the coastal regions first succumbed to the Portuguese in the 17th century, and the city of Kandy remains the Sinhalese cultural and spiritual centre.

Since the 19th century the region has become home to a large number of Tamils, brought from India by the British to labour on the tea estates. The Tamil culture in the Hill Country is very different from that found in northern Sri Lanka; the Hinduism practiced here is not as strict and there is much less support for the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

The Hill Country is a relaxed area where it's very easy to find the days just drifting by. Higher up into the hills are many towns that are worth a visit, and an abundance of walks and climbs, refreshing waterfalls and historic sites.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Watching the throbbing throng of elephants, drummers and dancers at the **Kandy Esala Perahera** (p167)
- Meandering around **Kandy Lake** (p165) in the evening
- Slogging up **Adam's Peak** (Sri Pada; p194) to be rewarded by a perfect sunrise
- Rattling through the high tea plantations in a Hill Country train; the trip between **Haputale and Ella** (p216) is particularly lovely
- Hiking through the countryside around **Ella** (p217) while enjoying the views to the plains
- Exploring the pristine **Sinharaja Forest Reserve** (p221) with an expert guide
- Digging up the perfect gem in one of **Ratnapura's gem shops** (p224)
- Rising early to walk through **Horton Plains National Park** (p205) and peer over stunning World's End



COLOMBO TO KANDY

The **Henerathgoda Botanic Gardens** (☎ 033-222 2316) near Gampaha, off the Colombo–Kandy road about 30km northwest of Colombo, was where the first rubber trees planted in Asia were carefully grown and their potential was proved – some of those original rubber trees are still in the 37-acre gardens today, along with around 400 other plant varieties. It's worth a stop if you have the time and an interest in botany.

Some 47km from Colombo is the village of Pasyala, where there's a turn-off leading to the **Pasgama tourism village** (☎ 033-228 5183; admission US\$10), about 1.5km from the main road. This privately owned venture is an attempt to bring to life a pre-1940 settlement

showcasing craftspeople, dancers and other features of traditional village life. Some enjoy this place while others see it as corny commercialism – few are delighted by the entry fee. There's a shop selling handicrafts. Hire a three-wheeler from Pasyala to get to the tourism village; it should cost Rs 150 each way.

About 3km further towards Kandy from Pasyala is **Cadjugama**, a village famous for its cashew nuts. Stalls line the road, and brightly clad cashew-nut sellers beckon passing motorists. At the 48km post is **Radawaduwa**, where all sorts of cane items are woven and displayed for sale at roadside stalls.

Kegalle, located 77km from Colombo, is the nearest town to the Pinnewala Elephant

Orphanage (below). A little further on you can see **Utuwankandu**, a prominent rocky hill from which the 19th-century Robin Hood-style highwayman, Saradiel, preyed on travellers until he was caught and executed by the British.

At Kadugannawa, just after the road and railway make their most scenic climbs – with views southwest to the large **Bible Rock** – is a tall pillar erected in memory of Captain Dawson, the English engineer who built the Colombo–Kandy road in 1826.

Pasyala, Cadjugama, Kegalle and Kadugannawa are on the A1 and are all accessible by buses travelling between Colombo and Kandy. The train is useful for getting to the Henerathgoda Botanic Gardens at Gampaha, and Kadugannawa.

Pinnewala Elephant Orphanage

This government-run **orphanage** (adult/child under 12 Rs 500/250, video camera Rs 500; ☎ 8.30am–5.30pm), near Kegalle, was created to protect abandoned or orphaned elephants. It has now grown into the most popular jumbo attraction in Sri Lanka, and with good reason, for nowhere else except at *peraheras* (processions) are you likely to see so many elephants at close quarters. The elephants are controlled by their *mahouts* (keepers), who ensure they feed at the right times and don't endanger anyone, but otherwise the elephants roam freely around the sanctuary area.

There are usually 60 or so elephants in residence, from babies to young adults. The elephants are led to a nearby river for bathing daily from 10am to noon and from 2pm to 4pm, while meal times are at 9.15am, 1.15pm and 5pm. There's a café and some shops selling snacks, camera film, elephant T-shirts, elephant toys and so on.

A few readers have written to express their distress over the *mahouts'* treatment of the elephants. If you think you might have trouble accepting the *mahouts'* traditional use of the goad – an L-shaped tool with a pointed metal tip – then this is probably not the place for you.

Near the Pinnewala Elephant Orphanage are a couple of **spice gardens**. You can turn up unannounced and a guide will show you around, explaining their uses and growth habits. A tip will be expected and, more often than not, you'll end your tour at the gar-

den's shop for a high-pressure sales pitch. If you're interested in buying Sri Lankan spices you'd be much better off shopping in local markets.

The orphanage is on a good road a few kilometres north of the Colombo–Kandy road. The turn-off is just out of Kegalle on the Kandy side. From Kandy you can take a private bus or Central Transport Board (CTB) bus 662 to Kegalle – get off before Kegalle at Karandupona junction. From the junction catch bus 681 going from Kegalle to Rambukkana and get off at Pinnewala. It's about an hour from Kandy to the junction, and 10 minutes from the junction to Pinnewala. There are also numerous buses between Colombo and Kegalle.

Rambukkana station on the Colombo–Kandy railway is about 3km north of the orphanage. From Rambukkana get a bus going towards Kegalle. Trains leave Kandy at 6.45am (arriving at Rambukkana station at 8.21am), 10.30am (arriving at 12.13pm) and 2.15pm (arriving at 3.43pm). Trains for Kandy leave from Rambukkana at 1.55pm and 2.25pm.

There is also a train from Colombo Fort at 11.30am that terminates in Rambukkana at 1.55pm. If you're heading to Colombo, trains leave Rambukkana at 10am and 11.25am, arriving roughly 2½ hours later.

From Anuradhapura take a bus to Kurunegala, then change to another bus to Rambukkana and travel by three-wheeler the rest of the way.

KANDY

☎ 081 / pop 112,000 / elev 500m

Some say Kandy is the only other real 'city' in Sri Lanka, other than Colombo. The easy-going capital of the Hill Country has a lot to offer – history, culture, forested hills and a touch of urban buzz. Only 115km inland from the capital, climatically it is a world away due to its 500m altitude.

Kandy served as the capital of the last Sinhalese kingdom, which fell to the British in 1815 after defying the Portuguese and Dutch for three centuries. It took the British 11 years to build a road linking Kandy with Colombo, a task they finally completed in 1831.

The town, and the countryside around it, is lush and green and there are many pleasant walks from the town and further afield.

The town centre, close to Kandy's picturesque lake set in a bowl of hills, is a delightful jumble of old shops, antique and gemstone specialists, a bustling market and a very good selection of hotels, guesthouses and restaurants. As night falls the city becomes eerily quiet.

Kandy is particularly well known for the great Kandy Esala Perahera (p167), held over 10 days leading up to the Nikini *poya* (full moon) at the end of the month of Esala (July/August), but has enough attractions to justify a visit at any time of year.

Locally, Kandy is known as either Maha Nuwara (Great City) or just Nuwara (City), which is what some conductors on Kandy-bound buses call out.

Orientation

The focus of Kandy is its lake, with the Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic (Sri Dalada Maligawa) on its north side. The city centre is immediately north and west of the lake, with the clock tower a handy reference point. The train station, the market and the various bus stations and stops are just a short walk from the lake. The city spreads into the surrounding hills, where many of the places to stay are perched, looking down on the town.

MAPS

The *A–Z Street Guide*, available at bookshops such as Vijitha Yapa (right), contains one of the most detailed maps of Kandy. The tourist office has maps as well but the quality tends to be a bit dodgy. Nelles Verlag produces a reasonable map of Kandy.

Information BOOKSHOPS

If you're interested in books on Buddhism, visit the friendly people at the Buddhist Publication Society towards the east end of the lake. Local scholars occasionally and monks sometimes give lectures here. It also has a comprehensive library.

Cultural Triangle Office (☎ 9am–12.30pm & 1.30–4pm) Opposite the tourist office, this has a selection of books for sale on the ancient cities. *Kandy*, by Dr Anuradha Seneviratna, is an informative guide to the city's heritage. Also available here is *The Cultural Triangle*, published by Unesco and the Central Cultural Fund, which provides good background information on the ancient sites and monuments.

Mark Bookshop (151/1 Dalada Vidiya) Has a good selection of books about Sri Lanka, as well as fiction and nonfiction. It's poky but the staff are very helpful.

Vijitha Yapa (5 Kotugodelle Vidiya) Good bookshop selling periodicals, newspapers (including foreign papers) and assorted fiction and nonfiction.

CULTURAL CENTRES

Alliance Française (☎ 222 4432; allikandy@sltnet.lk; 642 Peradeniya Rd; ☎ 8.30am–6pm Mon–Sat) To the southwest of town, the Alliance hosts film nights (though in French, the films often have English subtitles), and has books and periodicals. Good coffee is available. Nonmembers are welcome to browse in the library.

British Council (☎ 223 4634; enquiries.kdy@britishcouncil.org; 178 DS Senanayake Vidiya; ☎ 9.30am–5pm Tue–Sat) The council has back copies of British newspapers, CDs, videos and DVDs. Although English instruction is the main activity, the council sometimes holds film nights, exhibitions and plays. Nonmembers may read newspapers on presentation of a passport.

INTERNET ACCESS

There are five or six Internet cafés in the town centre; the going rate last we checked was Rs 60 per hour (except at Koffeepot, where the rate was inexplicably triple).

Café@Internet (77 Kotugodelle Vidiya)

Cyber Cottage (1st fl, 154 Kotugodelle Vidiya)

Koffeepot (Ground fl, The Pub, 36 Dalada Vidiya)

MEDICAL SERVICES

Lakeside Adventist Hospital (☎ 224 6295; percydias@yahoo.com; 40 Sangaraja Mawatha) If you need a doctor in Kandy, this hospital offers good, efficient service.

MONEY

Most major Sri Lankan banks have branches in town, and offer ATM service.

Bank of Ceylon (Dalada Vidiya)

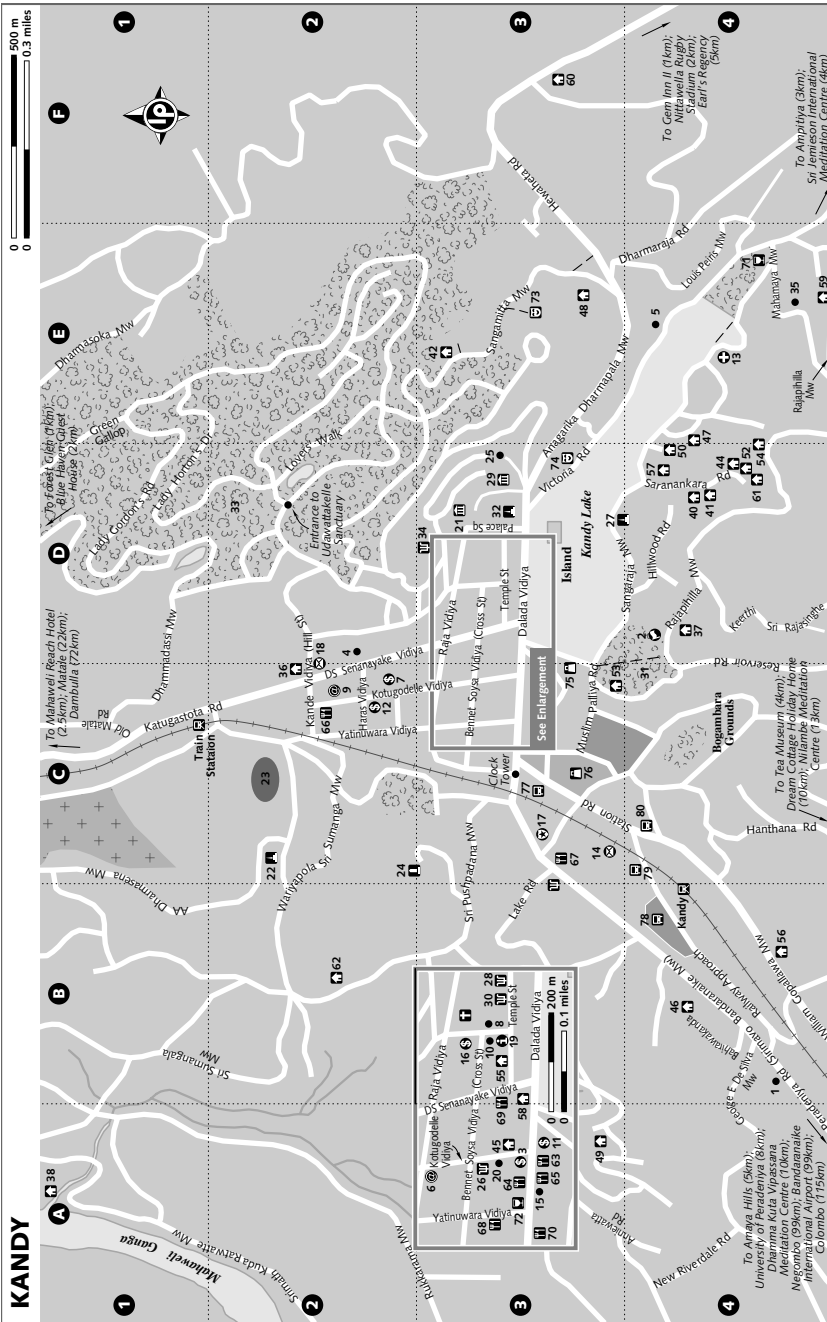
Commercial Bank (Kotugodelle Vidiya)

Hatton National Bank (Dalada Vidiya)

HSBC (Kotugodelle Vidiya)

POST

The main post office is over the road from the train station. There are a few smaller, more central post offices, including one at the intersection of Kande Vidiya and DS Senanayake Vidiya. There are numerous private communications bureaus in town. **DHL** (☎ 447 9684; 7 Deva Vidiya) offers domestic and international courier services at its office opposite the Cultural Triangle Office.



KANDY

INFORMATION	
Alliance Française	1 B4
Assistant High Commission of India	21 C2
Bank of Ceylon	2 D4
Buddhist Publication Society	4 D2
Cat@Internet	6 A3
Commercial Bank	8 B3
Cultural Triangle Office	9 C2
Cyber Cottage	10 B3
DHL	11 A3
Hatton National Bank	12 C2
HSBC	13 C2
Kolpothota Adventist Hospital	14 C3
Land Office	15 A3
Mark Bookshop	16 B3
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Vijitha Yapa	21 D3
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Asgiriya Maha Vihara	23 C2
Asgiriya Stadium	23 C2
Bahiravakanda Vihara Buddha Statue	24 C2
British Garrison Cemetery	25 D3
Kataragama Devale	26 A3
Malwatta Maha Vihara	27 D3
Natha Devale	28 B3
National Museum	29 D3
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Sri Lanka Cricket Office	(see 23)
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Uththara (Peligawa)	33 D3
Uththara Dabbe Sanctuary	34 D3
Vihara Dabbe Sanctuary	34 D3
Wediamadura Ayurveda	35 E4
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Comfort Lodge	39 E5
Freedom Lodge	40 D4
Glenn	41 D4
Golden View Rest.	(see 41)
Green Wood	42 E5
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Highest View	44 D4
Hotel Casuarina	45 A3
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Hotel Suisse	47 E4
Hotel Thiranku	48 E3
Hotel Topaz	49 A3
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Old Empire Hotel	54 D4
Palm Garden Guest House	56 B4
Pink House	57 D4
Queens Hotel	58 B3
Royal Tourist Lodge	59 E4
Senkada Rest.	60 F3
Sharon Inn	61 D4
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House	64 A3
Devon Restaurant	65 A3
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Kandy Lake Club	73 E3
Kandyan Art Association & Cultural Centre	74 D3
Market	75 C3
Market	76 C3
Transport	77 C3
Clock Tower Bus Stop	78 B4
Goods Shed Bus Station	78 B4
Malik Tours	(see 56)
Private Buses to Airport & Negombo	79 C4
Private Buses Within Kandy District	80 C4
Archaeological Museum	81 D3
Asgiriya Maha Vihara	82 C2
Asgiriya Stadium	83 C2
Bahiravakanda Vihara Buddha Statue	84 C2
British Garrison Cemetery	85 D3
Kataragama Devale	86 A3
Malwatta Maha Vihara	87 D3
Natha Devale	88 B3
National Museum	89 D3
Pattini Devale	90 B3
Royal Palace Park	91 C4
Sri Lanka Cricket Office	(see 23)
Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic	92 D3
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Vihara Dabbe Sanctuary	94 D3
Wediamadura Ayurveda	95 E4
Archaeological Museum	96 C2
Asgiriya Maha Vihara	97 D4
Castle Hill Guest House	98 A1
Citadel	98 A1
Comfort Lodge	99 E5
Freedom Lodge	100 D4
Glenn	101 D4
Golden View Rest.	(see 101)
Green Wood	102 E5
Helga's Folly	103 E5
Highest View	104 D4
Hotel Casuarina	105 A3
Hotel Hilltop	106 B4
Hotel Suisse	107 E4
Hotel Thiranku	108 E3
Hotel Topaz	109 A3
Lake Bungalow	110 D4
Lakshmi Court House (Palm Garden 2)	111 E5
Mahanuwara YMBA	112 D4
McLeod Inn	113 C3
Old Empire Hotel	114 D4
Palm Garden Guest House	116 B4
Pink House	117 D4
Queens Hotel	118 B3
Royal Tourist Lodge	119 E4
Senkada Rest.	120 F3
Sharon Inn	121 D4
Swiss Residence	122 B2
Bank House	(see 122)
Cargills Food City	123 A3
House	124 A3
Devon Restaurant	125 A3
Flower Song Chinese Restaurant	126 C3
Luvya Cafe	127 C3
Palma's Restaurant	128 A3
Rams	129 B3
White House Restaurant	130 A3
Archaeological Museum	131 E4
Asgiriya Maha Vihara	132 A3
Blackout	(see 132)
Kandy Lake Club	133 E3
Kandyan Art Association & Cultural Centre	134 D3
Market	135 C3
Market	136 C3
Transport	137 C3
Clock Tower Bus Stop	138 B4
Goods Shed Bus Station	138 B4
Malik Tours	(see 138)
Private Buses to Airport & Negombo	139 C4
Private Buses Within Kandy District	140 C4

TOURIST INFORMATION

Cultural Triangle Office (☎ 9am-12.30pm & 1.30-4pm) Located in an old colonial-era building across the road from the tourist office. Books are available for sale (p163) though not everything displayed is in stock. You can buy Cultural Triangle round-trip tickets that cover many of the sites of the ancient cities here. Within Kandy the round-trip ticket covers the four Hindu *devales* (complexes for worshipping deities; Kataragama, Natha, Pattini and Vishnu), two monasteries (Asgiriya and Malwatta), the National Museum and the Archaeological Museum. It is customary to make a donation (usually Rs 50 and upwards) at the *devales* and monasteries, though you are unlikely to be asked to produce a Cultural Triangle ticket. The National Museum costs Rs 100 to enter without a triangle ticket, while the Archaeological Museum insists on one. See later in this section for more details on these places. For more information on these tickets, see p228.

Tourist Information Centre (☎ 222 2661; Palace Sq; ☎ 9am-1pm & 1.30-4.45pm Mon-Fri) Housed in a rather empty-looking pavilion beside Olde Empire Hotel, this is helpful for information on transport and things to do in the Kandy area, and also has some information on places to stay.

Dangers & Annoyances

The back alleys of the town centre are worth avoiding after dark – they're home to sour bars, gambling dens and the homeless. Touts are particularly numerous around the train station and the lake. They will generally have a well-rehearsed stock of stories about guesthouses that you shouldn't patronise (presumably because those place won't pay them commission). Another neat trick is the man who says he works at your hotel, who's off shopping for tonight's dinner. Of course he doesn't work at your hotel, and any money you give him for a special meal disappears.

Sights KANDY LAKE

A lovely centrepiece for the town, Kandy Lake was created in 1807 by Sri Wickrama Rajasingha, the last ruler of the kingdom of Kandy. Several small-scale local chiefs, who protested because their people objected to labouring on the project, were put to death at stakes in the lake bed. The island in the centre was used as Sri Wickrama Rajasingha's personal harem, to which he crossed on a barge. Later the British used it as an ammunition store and added the fortress-style parapet around the perimeter of the lake. On the south shore in front of the Malwatta

Maha Vihara there's a circular enclosure that is the monks' bathhouse.

A cement footpath dotted with benches encircles the lake and is a favourite venue for early-evening strolls.

TEMPLE OF THE SACRED TOOTH RELIC (SRI DALADA MALIGAWA)

Just north of the lake, the **Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic** (admission Rs 500, still/video camera Rs 150/350; ☎ 6am-5pm, puja 5.30am, 10.15am & 7.15pm) houses Sri Lanka's most important Buddhist relic – a tooth of the Buddha. The temple was damaged when a bomb was detonated – by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, according to the government – near the main entrance in early 1998, but the scars have been repaired.

The tooth is said to have been snatched from the flames of the Buddha's funeral pyre in 543 BC, and was smuggled into Sri Lanka during the 4th century AD, hidden in the hair of a princess. At first it was taken to Anuradhapura, but with the ups and downs of Sri Lankan history it moved from place to place before eventually ending up at Kandy. In 1283 it was carried back to India by an invading army but was soon brought back again by King Parakramabahu III.

Gradually, the tooth came to assume more and more importance as a symbol of sovereignty; it was believed that whoever had custody of the tooth relic had the right to rule the island. In the 16th century the Portuguese, in one of their worst spoilsport moods, apparently seized the tooth, took it away and burnt it with Catholic fervour in Goa. 'Not so', say the Sinhalese; the Portuguese had been fobbed off with a replica tooth and the real incisor remained safe. Even today there are rumours that the real tooth is hidden somewhere secure, and that the tooth kept here is a replica.

The Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic was constructed mainly under Kandyan kings from 1687 to 1707 and from 1747 to 1782, and, in fact, the entire temple complex was part of the Kandyan royal palace. It is an imposing pink structure surrounded by a deep moat. The octagonal tower in the moat was built by Sri Wickrama Rajasinha and used to house an important collection of *ola* (talipot-palm leaf) manuscripts. However, this section of the temple was heavily damaged in the 1998 bomb blast.

The main tooth shrine – a two-storey rectangular building known as the Vaha-hitina Maligawa – occupies the centre of a paved courtyard. The eye-catching gilded roof over the relic chamber was added by President Ranasinghe Premadasa and paid for by Japanese donors. The bomb blast of 1998 has exposed part of the front wall to reveal at least three layers of 18th- to 20th-century paintings depicting the *perahera* and various Jataka (Buddha life stories).

It is impossible to overestimate the importance of this temple to most Sri Lankan Buddhists, who believe they must complete at least one pilgrimage to the temple in their lifetime. Worshipping at the temple is thought to improve one's karmic lot immeasurably.

The tooth shrine itself receives a constant flow of worshippers and flocks of tourists, with fewer tourists in the morning than in the evening. Wear clothes that cover your legs and your shoulders and remove your shoes (which are kept by shoe minders near the entrance).

During *pujas* (offerings or prayers), the heavily guarded room housing the tooth is open to devotees and tourists. However, you don't actually see the tooth. It's kept in a gold casket shaped like a dagoba (stupa), which contains a series of six dagoba caskets of diminishing size and eventually the tooth itself.

Most visitors are only allowed to view the dagoba casket from the doorway, which is around 3m from the actual altar. Guards keep the queue moving so that no-one gets more than 10 or 15 seconds to see the inside of the shrine room. Occasionally you'll see VIPs being invited to enter the inner sanctum for a closer look. Thai and Japanese nationals – because of their country's generous temple donations – may be allowed into the tooth room upon advance request to the temple guardians.

Behind the shrine stands the three-storey **Alut Maligawa**, a newer and larger shrine hall displaying dozens of bronze sitting Buddhas donated by Thai devotees. In fact, the design of this floor is intended to resemble a Thai Buddhist shrine hall as a tribute to the fact that Thai monks re-established Sri Lanka's ordination lineage during the reign of King Kirti Sri Rajasinha. The upper two floors of the Alut Maligawa contain the **Sri**

KANDY ESALA PERAHERA

This *perahera* (procession) is held in Kandy to honour the sacred tooth enshrined in the Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic. It runs for 10 days in the full-moon month of Esala (July/August), ending on the Nikini *poya* (full moon). The big night of the year in Kandy comes at the culmination of these 10 days of increasingly frenetic activity.

The first six nights are relatively low-key; on the seventh things start to take off as the route lengthens, the procession becomes more and more splendid and accommodation prices go right through the roof.

The procession is actually a combination of five separate *peraheras*. Four of them come from the four Kandy *devalas* (complexes for worshipping Hindu or Sri Lankan deities, who are also devotees and servants of the Buddha): Natha, Vishnu, Kataragama and Pattini. The fifth and most splendid *perahera* is that of the Sri Dalada Maligawa itself.

The procession is led by thousands of Kandyan dancers and drummers beating thousands of drums, cracking whips and waving colourful banners. Then come long processions of elephants – 50 or more of them. The brilliantly caparisoned Maligawa tusker is the most splendid of them all – decorated from trunk to toe, he carries a huge canopy that shelters, on the final night, a replica of the sacred relic cask. A carpet-way of white linen is laid in front of the elephant so that he does not step in the dirt.

The Kandy Esala Perahera is the most magnificent annual spectacle in Sri Lanka, and one of the most famous in Asia. It has been an annual event for many centuries and is described by Robert Knox in his 1681 book *An Historical Relation of Ceylon*. There is also a smaller procession on the *poya* day in June, and special *peraheras* may be put on for important occasions. It's essential to book roadside seats for the *perahera* at least a week in advance; prices for such seats range from Rs 3750 to 4750. Once the festival starts, you may be able to get seats about halfway back in the stands quite cheaply.

There's a daylight procession on the first day of the Nikini *poya* month, which marks the end of the Kandy Esala Perahera.

Dalada Museum (admission Rs 100; ☎ 9am-5pm) with a stunning array of gilded and bejewelled reliquaries and gifts to the temple. There is also a sobering display of photographs of the damage caused by the truck bomb in 1988.

To the north inside the compound, and accessible only via the Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic, is the 19th-century **Audience Hall**, an open-air pavilion with stone columns carved to look like wooden pillars. Adjacent to this, in the **Rajah Tusker Hall**, you can view the stuffed remains of Rajah, the Maligawa tusker who died in 1988 (see Kandy Esala Perahera, above).

NATIONAL MUSEUM

This **museum** (adult/child under 12 Rs 100/50, camera Rs 150; ☎ 9am-5pm Sun-Thu) was once the quarters for Kandyan royal concubines and now houses royal regalia and reminders of pre-European Sinhalese life. On display is a copy of the 1815 agreement that handed over the Kandyan provinces to British rule. This document announces a major reason for the event.

...the cruelties and oppressions of the Malabar ruler, in the arbitrary and unjust infliction of bodily tortures and pains of death without trial, and sometimes without accusation or the possibility of a crime, and in the general contempt and contravention of all civil rights, have become flagrant, enormous and intolerable.

Sri Wickrama Rajasinha was therefore declared, 'by the habitual violation of the chief and most sacred duties of a sovereign', to be 'fallen and deposed from office of king' and 'dominion of the Kandyan provinces' was 'vested in...the British Empire'.

The audience hall, notable for the tall pillars supporting its roof, was the site for the convention of Kandyan chiefs that ceded the kingdom to Britain in 1815.

The National Museum, along with the less-interesting Archaeological Museum behind the temple, four *devalas* and two monasteries – but not the Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic itself – together make up

one of Sri Lanka's Cultural Triangle sites. You can buy a Cultural Triangle round-trip ticket at the office across the road from the tourist office (p165).

BRITISH GARRISON CEMETERY

This **cemetery** (donation appreciated; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Sat) is a short walk uphill behind the National Museum. There are 163 graves and probably 500 burials in total here, lovingly cared for by the friends of the cemetery. The amusing and friendly caretaker is more than happy to show people around and provide information about many of the graves. Some of the demises were due to sudden sunstroke, or elephants, or jungle fever. The Cargills of supermarket fame lie here. James McGlashan survived the battle of Waterloo but disregarded instructions given on mosquitoes, which ultimately proved deadlier.

The office, once the chapel of rest, has pamphlets and the old cemetery records.

DEVALES

There are four Kandyan *devales* (complexes for worshipping Hindu or local Sri Lankan deities) to the gods who are followers of Buddha and who protect Sri Lanka. Three of the four *devales* stand close to the Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic. The 14th-century **Natha Devale** is the oldest. It perches on a stone terrace with a fine *vahalkada* (solid panel of sculpture) gateway. Bodhi trees and dagobas stand in the *devale* grounds, and there's a fine icon in the main shrine. Next to the Natha Devale is the simple **Pattini Devale**, dedicated to the goddess of chastity. The **Vishnu Devale** on the other side of Raja Vidiya is reached by carved steps and features a drumming hall. Vishnu is the guardian of Sri Lanka and an indicator of the intermingling of Hindu and Buddhist beliefs, since he is also one of the three great Hindu gods.

The **Kataragama Devale** is a little way from the others – a brightly painted tower gateway fights for attention with the bustle on Kotugodelle Vidiya. Murugan, the god of war (also called Skanda), appears here with six heads, 12 hands wielding weapons, and riding a peacock.

MONASTERIES

The principal *viharas* (Buddhist complexes) in Kandy have considerable importance – the high priests of the two best known, Malwatte

and Asgiriya, are the most important in Sri Lanka. These temples are the headquarters of two of the main Nikayas (orders of monks). The head monks also play an important role in the administration and operation of the Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic. The **Malwatte Maha Vihara** is directly across the lake from the Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic, while the **Asgiriya Maha Vihara** is on the hill off Wariyapola Sri Sumanga Mawatha to the northwest of the town centre, and has a large reclining Buddha image.

ELEPHANTS

Elephants can often be seen in and around Kandy. Working elephants might be spotted anywhere, and you may catch the Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic elephant chained up along the lakeside near the temple. There are elephants in the Riverside Elephant Park (p191) as well.

From Kandy it's a fairly easy trip to the Pinnewala Elephant Orphanage (p162).

UDAWATTAKELLE SANCTUARY

North of the lake is this cool and pleasant **forest** (adult/child under 12 Rs 600/300; ☎ 7am-5pm). There are lots of huge trees, much bird- and insect life and many monkeys, but visitors are advised to be careful in this woodland if they're alone. Muggers are rare in Sri Lanka but not unknown, and single women especially should take care.

Entry to the sanctuary is seriously overpriced. You enter through the gate, which you reach by turning right after the post office on DS Senanayake Vidiya (there's a sign at the junction). There are clear paths, but it's worth paying attention to the map at the entrance.

TEA MUSEUM

This recently opened **museum** (Map p189; ☎ 070-280 3204; admission Rs 250; ☎ 8.15am-4.45pm) occupies the 1925-vintage Hanthana Tea Factory, 4km south of Kandy on the Hanthana road. Abandoned for over a decade, it was refurbished as a museum by the Sri Lanka Tea Board and the Planters' Association of Sri Lanka. In addition to a good collection of 19th-century rollers, dryers and other typical tea-factory equipment in their original settings, the museum contains exhibits on the lives and work of tea pioneers James Taylor and Thomas Lipton.

UNIVERSITY OF PERADENIYA

Ten years after the 1842 founding of the University of Ceylon in Colombo, the bulk of the university (Map p189) moved to Peradeniya, 8km south of Kandy. Today around 7800 students are typically enrolled at any given time. The Mahaweli Ganga (Mahaweli River) flows through the leafy green campus.

Activities

AYURVEDA

Wedamedura Ayurveda (☎ 074 479484; www.ayurvedamedura.com; 7 Mahamaya Mawatha; 1hr massage Rs 800, 2½hr full treatment Rs 4000), southeast of the lake, is a fully licensed Ayurveda treatment facility with both male and female masseurs. Week-long residential packages, including accommodation and food, are also available.

You could also splurge at the Ayurvedic treatment centre at **Amaya Hills** (Map p189; ☎ 223 3521; amayahills@amayaresorts.com; Heerassagala; facial Rs 1000, oil massage & steam bath Rs 2500). The body oil massage and steam bath takes 1½ hours – the bath is *very* hot. The 40-minute facial treatment includes a massage, sandalwood/turmeric mask and steam. Although Amaya Hills (p193) is a bit far from town you can relax around the pool after the treatment with a drink, and make an afternoon (or morning) of it. A three-wheeler from Kandy should cost Rs 800 return.

GOLF

The **Victoria Golf & Country Resort** (☎ 237 5570; www.srilankagolf.com; green fees US\$35, club hire Rs 1000, caddy per round Rs 350) is 20km east of Kandy. Surrounded on three sides by the Victoria Reservoir and with the Knuckles Range as a backdrop, it's worth coming out here for lunch at the clubhouse just to savour the views. Claimed to be the best golf course in the subcontinent, it's a fairly challenging 18 holes.

MEDITATION

Visitors can learn or practise meditation and study Buddhism at several places in the Kandy area. Ask at the **Buddhist Publication Society** (☎ 223 7283; www.bps.lk; 54 Sangharaja Mawatha; ☎ 9am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-12.30pm Sat), by the lake, for details about courses. Many centres offer free courses but they'd obviously appreciate a donation. Give what you'd normally be paying per day for food and accommodation in Sri Lanka. For

details of some of the centres that offer courses, see p192.

SWIMMING

South of Kandy lake, **Hotel Suisse** (☎ 223 3024; 30 Sangaraja Mawatha; pool fee Rs 150) charges non-guests to use the pool (towels included), located in a garden. In the town, **Queens Hotel** (☎ 223 3290; Dalada Vidiya; pool fee Rs 150) also has an OK pool and a pretty garden. There are some stunningly positioned pools around Kandy, including at: **Hotel Thilanka** (☎ 223 2429; 3 Sanghamitta Mawatha; pool fee Rs 200) on a terrace looking down on the lake; **Hotel Hilltop** (☎ 222 4162; 200/21 Bahirawakanda; pool fee Rs 150); **Swiss Residence** (☎ 447 9054; 23 Bahirawakanda; pool fee Rs 100), the least expensive in town; and **Amaya Hills** (☎ 223 3521; amayahills@amayaresorts.com; Heerassagala; pool fee Rs 200), southwest of Kandy, from whose terrace you get great views over the countryside.

WALKING

There are many walks around the centre of Kandy, such as up to the **Royal Palace Park** (admission Rs 50; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm), also constructed by Sri Wickrama Rajasinha, overlooking the lake. Further up the hill on Rajapihilla Mawatha there are even better views over the lake, the town and the surrounding hills, which disappear in a series of gentle ranges stretching far into the distance. If you're in the mood for a longer walk there are also a couple of paths, along from Rajapihilla Mawatha, that head up into the hills.

Looming over Kandy, the huge concrete **Bahiravokanda Vihara Buddha Statue** (admission Rs 150) can be reached by walking 20 minutes uphill from near the police station on Peradeniya Rd. Save your sweat and money – there are no views from the top and the statue is unremarkable.

Sleeping

Kandy has heaps of good guesthouses. In the middle and top brackets there are some lovely, luxurious houses and an increasing number of good hotels. Many places are set on the hills surrounding the town – in some cases 3km or more from the centre – but because of their outstanding locations and views they are worth the effort to get there. See p192 for details.

At the time of the Kandy Esala Perahera, room prices in Kandy can treble or quadruple;

even worse, you may not be able to find a room at all. If you're intent on coming to see the *perahera*, booking far ahead may secure you a more reasonable price.

You'll find the highest concentration of places to stay along or just off Anagarika Dharmapala Mawatha; buses 654, 655 and 698 (or just ask for 'Sanghamitta Mawatha' at the clock tower bus stop) will get you to this area and beyond.

Kandy Hoteliers Association (www.kandyhotels.com) maintains a useful website with details on midrange and top-end accommodation in the city.

BUDGET

Lakshmi Guest House (Palm Garden 2) (☎ 222 2154; www.lakshmipg2.lkguide.com; 57/1/1 Saranankara Rd; r Rs 800-1500) This art deco guesthouse was recently taken over by the friendly owners of Palm Garden and has been completely refurbished. Eleven rooms, ranging in size from relatively small to large, all very clean, are available; six have attached bathrooms. Reasonably priced meals are served on a terrace overlooking the town. Guests have access to Internet. Cars and motorcycles are available for hire.

Pink House (☎ 077 780 9173; 15 Saranankara Rd; r with/without bathroom Rs 700/400) This old stand-by occupies a quaint, one-storey rambling bungalow around a courtyard. The facilities are basic and the rooms well-worn. Choose from seven rooms with shared bathrooms and one with a private bathroom. The owners are very friendly and helpful.

Glen (☎ 223 5342; 58 Saranankara Rd; r with/without bathroom Rs 700/500) This place has clean, homey rooms, two with shared bathroom and one with private bathroom. The couple who own the place are friendly and maintain a pretty garden for use of the guests.

Lake Mount Tourist Inn (☎ 223 3204; hirokow@slt.net.lk; 195A Rajapihilla Mawatha; r with/without bathroom Rs 1300/1000) Clinical and tidy, and run by a Sri Lankan-Japanese husband and wife, this inn features a variety of rooms and some quiet, tidy lounge areas. Free transport from the bus or train stations is available if you call upon arrival.

Lake Bungalow (☎ 222 2075; shiyand@ispkandyan.lk; 22/2B Sangaraja Mawatha; r Rs 550-880, apt Rs 2500) This place offers six clean, cheerful rooms in a multistorey building that looks like a school. In fact, there's a preschool on the

ground floor – here's hoping you like kids. All rooms are decorated with floral prints and have hot water and kitchenettes. You can rent a floor with three bedrooms as an apartment. The rooms look out over the villa of the head abbot of the Malwatte Maha Vihara. It's on a lane off Sangaraja Mawatha, just one street along from Saranankara Rd.

Olde Empire Hotel (☎ 222 4284; fernandovja@eureka.lk; 21 Temple St; r Rs 400-500) Run by the same family for over a century, this colonial hotel has oodles of faded ambience. Most rooms are very basic and come with shared bathrooms (cold water only); two have attached bathroom. Some of the rooms at the back are a little dingy, but there's a great balcony with old chairs and tables at the front, overlooking the lake. There's a good, dirt-cheap restaurant here. The clientele tends to be Sri Lankan males, and solo female travellers may want to give it a miss unless they're prepared for extra attention.

Mahanuwara YMBA (Young Men's Buddhist Association; ☎ 223 3444; 5 Rajapihilla Mawatha; r with/without bathroom Rs 1150/690) Well located near the lake and town centre, the local YMBA offers 32 basic rooms (only six with attached bathroom) in a three-storey building. There's a small, inexpensive cafeteria on the premises.

McLeod Inn (☎ 222 2832; mcleod@slt.net.lk; 65A Rajapihilla Mawatha; r with/without view Rs 950/1300) Featuring six clean rooms with hot water, some with stunning views, this is a modern place with pleasant lounge areas, good food and a steady following.

Freedom Lodge (☎ 222 3506; freedomamead@yahoo.com; 30 Saranankara Rd; r Rs 1000-1250) Further up on the other side of the road, this place (owned by Tamil Catholics) has three spotless, bright rooms, all with hot water. The double upstairs has a balcony and attracts a higher price. There's a small garden and the hosts are very welcoming.

Green Woods (☎ 223 2970; greenwoodkum@slt.net.lk; 34A Sanghamitta Mawatha; r with/without hot water Rs 1000/800) This quiet house with six guestrooms (only two with hot water) sits on the green verge of Udawattakelle Sanctuary and is popular with birders. The kindly owner keeps a log of birdlife spotted from the balcony and has recently added a rooftop terrace dedicated to bird-watching. The food is excellent, too.

Palm Garden Guest House (☎ 223 3903; www.palmgardenkandy.com; 8 Bogodawatte Rd, Suduhumpola; r

Rs 1000-1500) Owned by a very friendly and industrious Kandy family, this modern and comfortable guesthouse offers 12 spacious rooms, each with its own balcony. The rooms at the back are quieter than those facing the street. The rooftop restaurant-bar is a great spot to relax, and the food – Sri Lankan, Indian and Western – may be the best guesthouse fare in Kandy. The guesthouse also offers reliable car hire (Rs 2750 per day) and personalised tours anywhere in Sri Lanka. It's a Rs 400 three-wheeler ride from the centre of town, on the road to Peradeniya.

Burmese Rest (DS Senanayake Vidiya; s/d Rs 150/300) This former pilgrims' guesthouse, still the cheapest place to stay in Kandy, has six very basic rooms downstairs with shared bathrooms – no showers, just small plastic buckets. Upstairs are four larger rooms with better shared toilet and shower facilities. With advance permission you may use the kitchen to prepare your own food. The monks living here are friendly, and the crumbling courtyard has its charms.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Sharon Inn (☎ 222 2416; sharon@slt.net.lk; 59 Saranankara Rd; r incl breakfast Rs 2200; ☎) At the top of Saranankara Rd, this is a particularly well-managed guesthouse. The owners, a Sri Lankan-German couple, keep everything scrupulously clean and are very helpful. The newer rooms upstairs have better views, while the older rooms on the 1st floor are a little more spacious. The guesthouse serves nightly Sri Lankan buffets (Rs 400).

Senkada Rest (☎ 222 9291; www.senkadarest.com; 108 Hewaheta Rd; r Rs 1500-1750) A multistorey building tucked into a hillside, Senkada Rest offers a combination of helpful service and well-kept spacious rooms. The owners are happy to arrange free transport to or from your arrival point, with advance notice.

Hotel Casamara (☎ 222 4688; 12 Kottugodelle Vidiya; s/d Rs 2500/3000; ☎) Conveniently located near the town centre, restaurants and lake, the Casamara features comfortable modern rooms with TV and minibar, plus a rooftop bar with cityscape views.

Golden View Rest (☎ 223 9418; goldenview@slt.net.lk; 46 Saranankara Rd; r with/without view Rs 1000/800, apt with/without air-con Rs 3000/1800) This large family-owned house offers nine very clean, quiet rooms, Chinese food, email access, an Ayurveda treatment room and even a

piano. On the top floor the owners have recently added three new air-con rooms with a shared pantry, outdoor dining area and Finnish sauna. The rooms can be rented individually or together as an apartment.

Highest View (☎/fax 223 3778; 129/3 Saranankara Rd; r Rs 600-1200) This place has clean, plainly decorated rooms with hot water, and a balcony with good views. The rooms without balconies are cheaper; the only complaint is that they're a bit small.

Royal Tourist Lodge (☎ 222 2534; www.royal.lodge.srilankaads.com; 201 Rajapihilla Mawatha; r Rs 1250-2000; ☎) This lodge is a comfortable, modern middle-class home with three guestrooms. The more expensive room has a balcony, and all have hot water. Meals are available if you order in advance.

Comfort Lodge (☎ 074 473707; www.lanka.net/comfort; 197 Rajapihilla Mawatha; s/d Rs 1300/1800) This place has six modern, smallish rooms with all mod cons, including hot water, TV and telephone. There's a large sitting area, a roof garden and cooking facilities.

Castle Hill Guest House (☎ 222 4376; ayoni@slt.net.lk; 22 Rajapihilla Mawatha; r Rs 2750) Overlooking the lake, this is a lovely art deco villaturned-guesthouse with four rooms, all with

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Queens Hotel (☎ 223 3290; queens@kandy.ccom.lk; Dalada Vidiya; s/d/tr US\$30/40/50; ☎) If you're assessing comfort-per-rupee, Kandy offers several comfortable yet bland options, but for ambience and location nothing else compares with this 165-year-old Raj relic. Having thus far escaped being taken over and gussied up by an international hotel franchise, the Queens harbours the lost-time feel that Yangon's Strand and Bangkok's Oriental long ago relinquished to the accountants. The large rooms have polished floorboards, old-style furniture (bedspreads your grandmother would probably love), telephone, TV and modern bathrooms. This is *the* place to be during the Kandy Esala Perahera (see p167), but any time of year it is a perfect base for exploring Kandy's quaint-cum-seedy town centre, plus it's only a short walk from the Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic and Royal Palace compound. Kick back with a cold Three Coins at night at the equally antique Pub Royale next door.

bathroom. The rooms are immense, and the lounge room has a piano and French doors to the gardens.

Helga's Folly (☎ 223 4571; www.helgasfolly.com; 32 Frederick E de Silva Mawatha; r US\$75-100, ste US\$130; 🍷 🍷) Off Rajapihilla Mawatha, this is a deeply eccentric place crammed with palatial furnishings, puffed with comfy cushions and partially lit by wax-dripping candelabras. A long list of celebs stayed here in the post-WWII era; the Stereophonics composed the song 'Madame Helga' after a memorable stay here. It's possibly the only hotel in the world that discourages having too many guests, and package tourists are banned. All rooms have attached bathrooms and private balconies. There's a pool surrounded by fairy statues, and a restaurant where merely curious non-guests can dine.

Hotel Hilltop (☎ 282 2416; hilltop@ispkandyan.lk; 200/21 Bahirawakanda; s/d incl breakfast US\$42/54; 🍷 🍷) A five-minute walk off Peradeniya Rd, the Hilltop has 81 colourful rooms, great views over the town and surrounding hills, a peaceful garden with a good-sized, clean swimming pool and a modest Ayurvedic health centre.

Hotel Swiss Residence (☎ 447 9054; jethot@sri.lanka.net; 23 Bahirawakanda; s/d/tr incl breakfast US\$50/55/60; 🍷 🍷) This multistorey, 40-room hotel sits atop one of the city's highest hills, so virtually every room has a great view. All rooms are equipped with IDD phone, satellite TV and balcony or terrace.

Hotel Suisse (☎ 223 3024; suisse@kandy.com.lk; 30 Sangaraja Mawatha; s/d US\$55/67; 🍷) South of the lake, this was once a British governor's house before sprouting extra ballrooms and billiards rooms and turning into a rambling hotel. The original wing dates back to the 1840s. The rooms have been updated with satellite TV, minibar and comfy chairs, but six rooms have antique or reproduction furniture for the full colonial attack. Be forewarned that, for such a palatial spot, the beds tend to be rather hard and the pillows rather flat. Although a bit far from the town centre, one can stroll around the lake to the town centre. There are spacious public areas, including a snooker room and a fine garden. On weekends, when Kandyans host wedding parties here, it can be rather busy.

Thilanka (☎ 223 2429; www.hotelthilanka.com; 3 Sanghamitta Mawatha; s/d US\$40/45; 🍷 🍷) This

rather large but very welcoming hotel overlooks the lake. The older rooms are a bit dark and neglected, while the newer wing offers light, airy rooms and great views. The oldest part of the hotel, including the reception hall, still boasts some of the original features, including elegant tiles and furniture. From the pool area, guests have a good view over the town and lake.

Hotel Topaz (☎ 223 2326; topaz@eureka.lk; Annie-watte; s/d US\$58/66; 🍷 🍷) Way up on top of a hill overlooking the town from the west, about 2km up from Peradeniya Rd, Topaz has 75 rooms (most with air-con). It's rather bland but the superb views and swimming pool help justify the prices.

Citadel (Map pp164-5 ☎ 223 4365/6; htres@keells.com; 124 Srimath Kuda Ratwatte Mawatha; s/d with air-con US\$101/115; 🍷 🍷) A mostly package-tour resort beside the Mahaweli Ganga, 5km west of the town centre, Citadel has 121 rooms with balconies overlooking the river. The swimming pool is worth a visit. A taxi from Kandy costs Rs 400.

Eating

Lyon Café (☎ 222 3073; 27 Peradeniya Rd; dishes Rs 60-120; ☎ 8am-11pm) Among locals this is one of Kandy's most famous restaurants. There are three dining rooms, a fan-cooled room downstairs and two slightly fancier, air-con rooms on two separate floors upstairs. About two-thirds of the menu is Chinese, a third Sri Lankan, but for dinner just about everyone orders the Sino-Sinhalese 'Lyon Special', a huge platter of fried rice, boiled eggs and your choice of devilled meats. One plate will easily feed two or three people (though that doesn't stop most Sri Lankan patrons from downing one platter each).

History Restaurant (☎ 220 2109; 27A Anagarika Dharmapala Mawatha; mains from Rs 300; ☎ 8am-11pm) A high-concept restaurant owned by the same family that owns Bake House and Pub, History is named for the hundreds of black-and-white photos – taken during the 100-year period between 1860 and 1960 – that decorate its walls. The menu offers an eclectic variety of European, Thai, Malay and Italian dishes. The restaurant occupies the 2nd floor of a new building close to the lake. As you climb the stairs, stop off at the 1st floor to see Sri Lanka's first 'show kitchen'.

(Continued on page 185)

(Continued from page 172)

Flower Song Chinese Restaurant (☎ 222 3628; 137 Kotugodella Vidiya; dishes Rs 400-700) Another local family favourite, Flower Song does Sri Lankan-style Chinese with old-fashioned service in clean, air-con surroundings.

Olde Empire Hotel (☎ 222 4284; 21 Temple St; dishes Rs 75-150) This hotel's (p170) modest dining hall is full of character and still serves delicious rice and curry, and lunch packets.

Bake House (☎ 223 4868; 36 Dalada Vidiya; dishes Rs 70-150) Downstairs from Pub, and under the same ownership, Bake House is a quick counter-service place with pastries and short eats (plates of pastries and savouries). The bacon-and-egg roll is a good bet any time of day.

Devon Restaurant (Dalada Vidiya; dishes Rs 80-350) Popular with both visitors and locals, the chrome-and-Formica Devon Restaurant offers a wide range of Chinese, Western and Sri Lankan dishes.

White House Restaurant (Dalada Vidiya; mains Rs 100-250) Down the street from Devon, this restaurant is tacky but cheap. It has snacks, drinks and ice cream, or you can fill up on meals such as mixed fried rice, chicken fried noodles and sweet-and-sour chicken.

Paiva's Restaurant (37 Yatinuwara Vidiya; dishes Rs 70-300) Featuring a North Indian menu, Chinese menu and bakery, Paiva's Restaurant offers a seating choice between the airy, busy section downstairs or the office-like surroundings upstairs. There's also an inexpensive lunchtime rice and curry.

Rams (11 DS Senanayake Vidiya; mains Rs 150-250; ☎ 7.30am-10pm) In a new, larger location, Rams continues to serve good South Indian food, including vegetarian thalis ('all-you-can-eat' meals consisting of rice with vegetable curries and pappadams) and a variety of dosas (paper-thin rice- and lentil-flour pancakes) in a wonderfully colourful setting featuring Hindu devotional art.

Delight Bakers & Sweet House (Dalada Vidiya; dishes Rs 60-150) Similar to Bake House, Delight has reasonable bread, pastries, cakes and short eats, and dozens of sweets waiting to march out the door.

Cargills Food City (Dalada Vidiya) Self-caterers can shop for groceries or cheap prepackaged meals here.

Many people eat in their guesthouses, where some of Kandy's tastiest food is to be

had. Particular kudos go to the kitchens at **Golden View Rest** (☎ 223 9418; 46 Saranankara Rd), **Sharon Inn** (☎ 222 2416; 59 Saranankara Rd; buffet Rs 400), **Palm Garden Guest House** (☎ 223 3903; 8 Bogodawatte Rd, Suduhumpola) and **Lakshmi Guest House** (☎ 222 2154; 57/1/1 Saranankara Rd). Non-guests are welcome, but should call ahead to make sure there's enough food to go around.

Drinking

In this sacred city the zoning and licensing for pubs, bars and discos is very strict – the typical Kandyan goes to bed early, and looks down on recreational drinking. As well as the places listed below, the top hotels all have bars.

Pub (☎ 232 4868; 36 Dalada Vidiya; ☎ 4pm-midnight) This pub, with a balcony overlooking the street below, is a good place to unwind and meet other travellers over a beer. Stick to beer and cocktails; on our last couple of visits we found the food to be of below-average quality, yet overpriced – and rather slow to arrive.

Pub Royale (Dalada Vidiya; ☎ 5pm-midnight) Beside Queens Hotel, this is a large airy bar with old-fashioned flavour. It's a place for a quiet drink, with relatively low prices.

Kandy Garden Club (☎ 222 2675; Sangaraja Mawatha; ☎ 5pm-late) At the far end of the lake, this venerable gentlemen's club is open to visitors, and for a temporary membership fee (Rs 100) you can relax in the bar or on the veranda with a Lion Lager and fried devilled cashews. For a fee, rack up on the old tables in the billiards room, still something of a male bastion.

Entertainment NIGHTCLUBS

Kandy's two nightclubs are found in hotels. At both, entry for women is free, for mixed couples Rs 400 to 500, and there's usually no entry allowed for men from outside the hotel. Expect dress codes to turn away anyone in shorts, sandals or baseball caps.

Blackout (☎ 447 9054; Swiss Residence, 23 Bahirawakanda) Located in Swiss Residence, this is the only dance club within city limits.

Le Garage (Map p189; ☎ 223 3521-2; Amaya Hills, Heerassagala; ☎ 9pm-2am Fri, to 3am Sat). Twenty minutes' drive southwest of town by three-wheeler (Rs 500), the Amaya Hills disco is open Friday and Saturday nights only.

KANDYAN DANCERS & DRUMMERS

The famed Kandyan dancers are not principally a theatrical performance, but you can see them go through their athletic routines each night at three locales around Kandy.

Kandy Lake Club (admission Rs 300) Located 300m up Sanghamitta Mawatha, this club starts its show at 7pm. It's very popular; the finale is a display of fire-walking. The front seats are usually reserved for groups and if you want to get good seats, turn up at least 20 minutes early. Kandy Lake Club is also a casino.

Kandyan Art Association & Cultural Centre (admission Rs 300) There are shows here at 6pm, which culminate in fire-walking. The auditorium makes it easier to take photographs than at Kandy Lake Club. It's on the northern lake shore.

Mahanuwara YMBA (☎ 223 3444; 5 Rajapihilla Mawatha; admission Rs 300) Southwest of the lake, the YMBA guesthouse (p170) hosts dance shows at 5.45pm.

You can also hear Kandyan drummers every day at the Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic (p166) and the other temples surrounding it – their drumming signals the start and finish of the daily *puja*.

SPORT

The modest Asgiriya Stadium, north of the town centre, hosts crowds of up to 10,000 cheering fans at international one-day and test matches. Ticket prices depend on the popularity of the two teams. India versus Sri Lanka matches are the most valued; seats in the grandstand can cost up to Rs 2000, while standing room in the public areas will cost Rs 120. Tickets are also sold on the day, or you can book grandstand seats up to a month in advance through the **Sri Lanka Cricket office** (☎ 223 8533; sl.cricinfo.com) at the stadium or online.

If you're a rugby fan and are in Kandy between May and September, you can take in a game or two at the Nittawella rugby grounds. Check with the tourist office for details on who's playing when.

Shopping

The Kandyan Art Association & Cultural Centre (above) has a good selection of local lacquerwork, brassware and other craft items in a colonial-era showroom covered in a patina of age. There are some craftspeople working on the spot.

There's a government-run Laksala arts and crafts shop to the west of the lake that has cheaper prices than those of the Art Association & Cultural Centre, but it has nothing on the big Laksala in Colombo.

Central Kandy has a number of shops selling antique jewellery, silver belts and other items. You can also buy crafts in and around the colourful **main market** (Station Rd). Kandy has a number of batik manufacturers; some of the best and most original are the batik pictures made by **Upali Jayakody** (Peradeniya Rd) and by **Fresco Batiks** (Peradeniya Rd) outside Kandy. You'll find several showrooms purveying antiques and curios in the same general vicinity, including **Dharshana Lanka Arts** (Peradeniya Rd).

Getting There & Away BUS

Kandy has one main bus station (the manic Goods Shed) and a series of bus stops near the clock tower. It can be hard to work out which one to head to. A rule of thumb worth following is that the Goods Shed has long-distance buses, while local buses, such as to Peradeniya, Ampitiya, Matale and Kegalle, leave from near the clock tower. However, some private intercity express buses (to the airport, Negombo and Colombo, for example) leave from Station Rd between the clock tower and the train station. If you're still confused, ask a passer-by.

Colombo

CTB buses run from the Goods Shed bus station every half-hour till 8.30pm (Rs 70, 3½ hours). There are also ordinary private buses (Rs 80 to 120, three hours), and air-con intercity express buses (Rs 140, 2½ to three hours); both services start at 5.15am and leave when full throughout the day (on average every 45 minutes). The express and ordinary buses leave from stand No 1.

International Airport & Negombo

Private intercity express buses to Bandaranaike International Airport and Negombo leave from the Station Rd bus stop. CTB buses leave from the Goods Shed. The first intercity bus departs at about 6.30am and the last at about 5.30pm. They tend to leave when full, every 20 to 30 minutes. The fare for the three- to 3½-hour journey is Rs 64 for the CTB bus and Rs 140 for the air-con express bus.

Nuwara Eliya & Hatton

Private air-con buses go to Nuwara Eliya, and some go on to Hatton (or you can change in Nuwara Eliya for Hatton). They leave from the Goods Shed bus station every half-hour between 5am and 5pm. The fare is Rs 125.

Haputale & Ella

Change buses at Nuwara Eliya for these destinations.

Ratnapura

Ordinary buses to Ratnapura leave from the Goods Shed every 45 minutes, from 5.30pm to 3.45am; the fare is Rs 67.

Anuradhapura

Buses leave from the Goods Shed bus station. Air-con intercity express buses start running at about 4.30am and depart roughly every half-hour until 6.30pm. The trip takes three hours and costs Rs 150. Ordinary buses take about 30 minutes longer and cost Rs 75. You can also catch an air-con Anuradhapura-bound bus to Dambulla, but you must pay the full amount regardless. The trip to Dambulla on an ordinary private bus costs Rs 40.

Polonnaruwa

Ordinary buses leave the Goods Shed bus station from 4.30am and go roughly every 20 minutes until 6pm. Tickets are Rs 90 and the journey takes three hours, with a change of bus in Dambulla (included in the ticket price). Air-con buses leave three times daily at 9.30am, 11.30am and 1pm and cost Rs 150.

Sigiriya

There's a CTB bus to Sigiriya from the Goods Shed bus station at 10.30am, which returns at 5.30pm (Rs 45). There are a couple of ordinary private buses per day for Rs 52. You can also take one of the more-frequent Polonnaruwa-bound buses, then get off at the Sigiriya junction and take another bus the final 9km to Sigiriya.

TAXI

Many long-distance taxi drivers hang around the Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic, waiting for work. Your guesthouse or hotel can organise taxi tours but you may be able to get a cheaper deal if you organise it through these chaps. Cars can generally be hired, with a driver and petrol, for approximately

MAIN TRAINS FROM KANDY

Destination	Departure time	3rd-class fares (Rs)	2nd-class fares (Rs)	1st-class fares (Rs)	Duration (hr)
Badulla (<i>Podi Menike</i>)	8.24am, 11.10am	92	171	341	7½
Bandarawela (<i>Podi Menike</i>)	8.24am, 11.10am	76	141	270	6
Colombo (Intercity Express)	6.25am, 3pm	80	125	250	2½
Colombo via Rambukkana	1.40am, 6.40am, 10.30am, 3pm, 4.10pm	61	114	—	3
Ella (<i>Podi Menike</i>)	8.24am, 11.10am	82	152	310	6½
Haputale (<i>Podi Menike</i>)	8.24am, 11.10am	70	121	268	5½
Hatton (<i>Podi Menike</i>)	8.24am, 11.10am	35	64	245	2½
Matale	5.10am, 7.05am, 10.05am, 2.25pm, 5.20pm, 6.55pm	13	—	—	1½
Matara via Bentota & Galle	5.20am	135	225	—	6
Nanu Oya (for Nuwara Eliya) (<i>Podi Menike</i>)	8.24am, 11.10am	51	94	289	4

Rs 2000 to 2500 per day. For a whole van you should expect to pay around Rs 2800 per day.

Some guesthouses advertise day trips to all three Cultural Triangle destinations (Sigiriya, Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa) but this is an exhausting itinerary for both driver and passengers, and one that encourages manic driving. At least one overnight stay in Anuradhapura, Sigiriya or Polonnaruwa would be a saner – and safer – option.

A taxi to Bandaranaika International Airport costs about Rs 4000 and to Colombo about Rs 3200.

TRAIN

For details of the train services from Kandy see p187. Tickets can be bought and reserved up to 10 days in advance at Kandy's train station from counter 1, which is open from 5.30am to 5.30pm.

Seats are very popular in the 1st-class observation saloon on the Badulla-bound train, which originates in Colombo and after Kandy stops in Hatton (near Adam's Peak), Nanu Oya, Haputale and Ella, yet the official allocation for Kandy boarding is limited to a mere four seats. If you're unable to reserve a seat at the ticket window, it's worth checking with the stationmaster, who has the authority to release further seating for tourists.

Getting Around

BICYCLE

You can hire bicycles from **Malik Tours** (☎ 220 3513; www.palmgardenkandy.com; Palm Garden Guest House, 8 Bogodawatte Rd, Suduhumpola) for Rs 150 per day. Some guesthouses can arrange bicycle hire, as well.

BUS

Buses to outlying parts of Kandy and nearby towns such as Peradeniya, Ampitiya, Matala and Kegalle leave from near the clock tower.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

You can hire cars and motorcycles for self-drive from **Malik Tours** (☎ 220 3513; www.palmgardenkandy.com; Palm Garden Guest House, 8 Bogodawatte Rd, Suduhumpola). This well-run company hires out Nissan Charades or Toyota Corollas for Rs 2500 per day with unlimited kilometres. A Honda 250cc motorcycle or similar costs Rs 1250 per day, discounted

to Rs 1000 per day for hires of five days or more. The price includes a helmet and insurance – but double-check with the company. Malik also leads tours around the island and is fluent in French.

TAXI

With metered air-con taxis, **Radio Cabs** (☎ 223 3322) is a comfortable alternative to three-wheelers. However, be aware that you may have to wait some time for your cab, especially if it's raining and demand is heavy. With taxis (vans) that are not metered, settle on a price before you start your journey. On average, taxis cost Rs 40 to 45 per kilometre.

THREE-WHEELER

The standard cost to take a three-wheeler from the train station to places towards the southeast end of the lake is Rs 60 to 100, and as much as Rs 120 to 200 to places a bit further out such as Green Woods. Drivers will ask foreign tourists for much more than this, but if you stick to your guns you'll get the local price.

AROUND KANDY

☎ 081

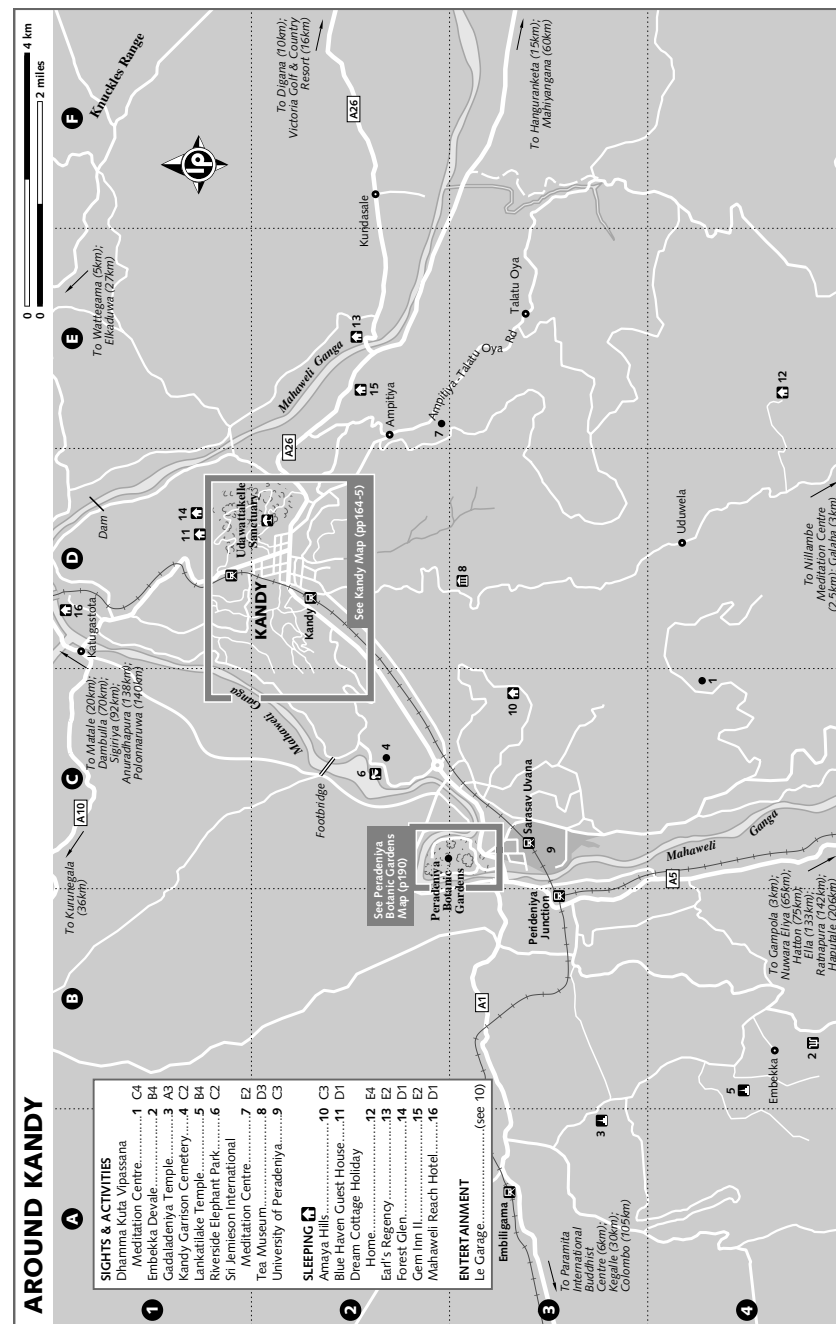
There are a few things worth seeing around Kandy that can be done in a morning or afternoon trip or – if you're not in a rush – you could take the day.

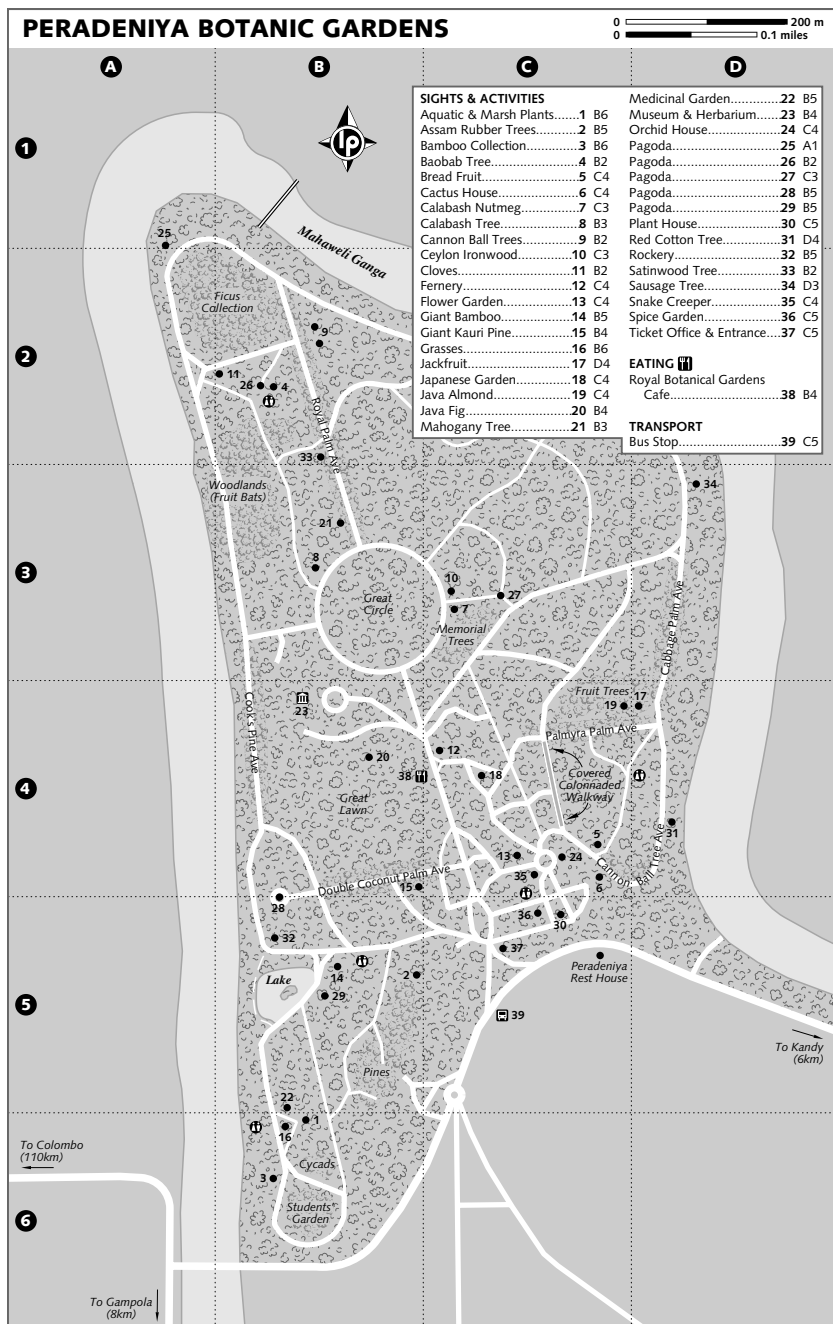
Sights & Activities

PERADENIYA BOTANIC GARDENS

The **gardens** (adult/student/child under 12 Rs 300/200/200; ☎ 7.30am-4.30pm) are 6km from Kandy. Before the British arrived these were royal pleasure gardens; today they're the largest botanic gardens in Sri Lanka, covering 60 hectares and bounded on three sides by a loop of the Mahaweli Ganga. They're beautiful and well worth a visit.

There's a fine collection of orchids and a stately avenue of royal palms that was planted in 1950. A major attraction is the giant Javan fig tree on the great lawn – it covers 1600 sq m. There's an avenue of cannon ball trees and another of cabbage palms. Don't miss the avenue of double coconut palms (*coco de mer*) – each coconut weighs from 10kg to 20kg. The spice garden, near the entrance, allows you to see nutmeg, cinnamon, cloves and more. The snake creeper close by is also well





PAINTING THE BUDDHA'S EYES

In making a Buddha image, craftsmen leave the *netra pinkama* (eye ritual) until last, and then only paint them in at an auspicious moment, painstakingly charted out by astrologers.

The act of creating the eyes consecrates the Buddha statue. For the *netra pinkama*, the painter, from the Sittaru subcaste of temple craftsmen and artists, is locked into the shrine with an assistant. Rather than looking directly at the face of the image, the painter adds the eyes using a mirror. When the eyes are finished, the painter is blindfolded and led outside to a place where his first gaze can be upon something that can be symbolically destroyed, such as a pool of water, which can be hit with a stick. There is quite a fear of dire consequences if there's a slip-up in the *netra pinkama*. In the 16th century Robert Knox explained the ritual this way: 'Before the eyes are made, it is not accounted a God, but a lump of ordinary metal...the eyes being formed, it is thenceforward a God.'

worth seeing. Then there are the giant bamboo and Assam rubber trees, and who could resist hunting down the sausage tree? You can easily spend a whole day wandering around these gardens.

The Royal Botanic Garden Café (dishes Rs 300 to 600), about 500m north of the entrance, serves good à la carte meals (Western and Sri Lankan) at tables on a roofed veranda. Inside the café is a gift shop with locally made clothes and fabrics.

At the entrance you can buy a copy of the *Illustrated Guide, Royal Botanic Gardens*, which has a map and suggested walks through the gardens. There are other books available too – all decently priced.

Bus 654 from the clock tower bus stop in Kandy will take you to the gardens for Rs 4.50. A three-wheeler from the centre of Kandy to the gardens will set you back about Rs 600 (return trip) and a van will cost Rs 1000.

KANDY GARRISON CEMETERY

This beautifully kept garden cemetery (Deveni Rajasinghe; donations accepted; ☎ 10am-noon, 1-6pm) was founded in 1817 for the interment of British-era colonists and is today managed by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. Although there are many 19th-century grave sites, most of the 203 graves date from WWII. The most famous permanent resident of the cemetery is Sir John D'Oyly, a colonial official who planned the bloodless British capture of Kandy in 1815 and then succumbed to cholera in 1824.

This peaceful, rather sad place is close to the River Side Elephant Park, 2km southwest of Kandy.

RIVERSIDE ELEPHANT PARK

Those who don't plan to visit the Pinnewala Elephant Orphanage can engage in close encounters with pachyderms at this park (admission Rs 400; ☎ 7.30am-4.30pm) 4km southwest of Kandy on the Mahaweli Ganga. On our last visit there were six elephants on hand. The admission price includes a short ride, while Rs 1000 buys a longer ride, very popular with Sri Lankan visitors in particular. An 'elephant safari' to Kandy and back costs Rs 2000. The elephants knock off work at around noon and bathe in the river.

A TEMPLE LOOP FROM KANDY

Visiting some of the many temples around Kandy gives you a chance to see a little rural life as well as observe Sri Lankan culture. This particularly pleasant loop will take you to three 14th-century Hindu-Buddhist temples and back, via the botanic gardens. There's quite a bit of walking involved so if you're not in the mood you could narrow down your visit to one or two of the temples listed or take a taxi trip to all three; expect to pay Rs 1500 to 1800 from Kandy.

The first stop is the **Embekka Devale** (admission Rs 100), for which you need to catch bus 643 (to Vatadeniya via Embekka) from near the clock tower in Kandy. The buses run about three times an hour and the village of Embekka is about seven twisting and turning kilometres beyond the botanic gardens, a ride of around an hour from Kandy. From the village you've got a pleasant countryside stroll of about 1km to the temple, built in the 14th century. Its carved wooden pillars, thought to have come from a royal audience hall in the city, are said to be the finest

in the Kandy region. The carvings include swans, eagles, wrestling men and dancing women. A local elephant *perahera* is held here in September.

From here to the **Lankatilake Temple** (admission Rs 100) is a 1.5km stroll along a path through the rice paddies until you see the blue temple loom on the left. From Kandy you can go directly to the Lankatilake Temple on bus 666 or take a Kiribathkumbura or Pilimalatalawa bus from the same stop as the Embekka buses. It's a Buddhist and Hindu temple with fine views of the countryside, featuring a Buddha image, Kandy-period paintings, rock-face inscriptions and stone elephant figures. A caretaker will unlock the shrine if it's not already open. A *perahera* is held here in August.

It's a further 3km walk from here to the **Gadaladeniya Temple** (admission Rs 100), or you can catch a bus from Kandy (bus 644, among others, will take you there). Built on a rocky outcrop and covered with small pools, the temple is reached by a series of steps cut into the rock. This Buddhist temple with a Hindu annexe dates from a similar period to that of the Lankatilake Temple and the Embekka Devale. A moonstone (carved stone 'doorstep') marks the entrance. The shrine's murals and some of the statues have been nicely restored. A resident artist will be happy to show you around.

The main Colombo-Kandy road is less than 2km from Gadaladeniya Temple – you reach the road close to the 105km post. It's a pleasant stroll, and from the main road almost any bus will take you to the Peradeniya Botanic Gardens or on to Kandy.

MEDITATION

Nilambe Meditation Centre (☎ 077 775 7216; upul.nilambe@yahoo.com), close to Nilambe Bungalow Junction about 13km south of Kandy, can be reached by bus (catch a Delthota bus via Galaha and get off at Office Junction; the trip takes about an hour). It's a pretty spot, with great views. There's a daily schedule of meditation classes, and basic accommodation for about 40 people. You can stay for Rs 400 per day (including food), and although blankets are supplied you may wish to bring a sleeping bag. There's no electricity, so bring a torch. To reach Nilambe from Office Junction you have a steep 3km walk through tea plantations (or a three-wheeler may be at

the junction to take you for Rs 150). A taxi to/from Kandy costs Rs 750. The road up to the centre is a narrow, partially sealed track, so you might want to summon a van rather than a sedan.

Near Ampitiya, 4km southeast of Kandy, the **Sri Jamieson International Meditation Centre** (☎ 222 5057; Ampitiya Samadhi Mawatha) runs free five- and 10-day courses. Phone to find out when the next course starts. There are eight rooms for male students only – this is a monastery and temple. Women must stay off-campus but are welcome to meditate here during the day. To get here catch a Talatu Oya bus from the clock tower bus stop in Kandy. Look for the sign on the right-hand side about 3km along the Ampitiya-Talatu Oya road. There's a 1.2km walk up a winding track to the centre.

Dhamma Kuta Vipassana Meditation Centre (☎ 223 4649; www.beyondthenet.net/dharmakuta; Mowbray, Hindagala) offers free 10-day courses following the SN Goenka system of meditation, but you must book – you can't just turn up. There's dorm accommodation for about 90 students, with separate male and female quarters. Retreat schedules are posted at the Buddhist Publication Society in Kandy. Take a Mahakanda-bound bus from the clock tower bus stop in Kandy and get off at the last stop. There's a small sign at the bottom of the track to the centre. It's a very steep 2km walk, or you can catch a three-wheeler for Rs 150. A taxi from Kandy should cost Rs 400 to 500.

The **Paramita International Buddhist Centre** (☎ 257 0732) at the top of the Bolana Pass, 1km past Kadugannawa on the Colombo road, is another meditation centre. It runs two free fortnight-long meditation programs per month, starting every second Saturday. It has clean accommodation for 15 people (men and women), lush gardens and a library. A typical day kicks off at 4am. Several teachers, including a Dutch monk, lead courses in SN Goenka's Vipassana. A three-wheeler from here to Kadugannawa's train or bus stations will cost Rs 50.

Sleeping

If you want quiet days spent wandering along shaded tracks, with views of rolling hills, then stay just out of Kandy. It's always easy to get into town should you want to – a taxi or three-wheeler is never far away.

BUDGET

Gem Inn II (☎ 222 4239; www.geminn.com; 102/90 Hewaheta Rd, Talwatta; r Rs 600-1400) About 2.5km south-east of Kandy's town centre, this guesthouse is perched on a hillside with wonderful views over the Mahaweli Ganga and the Knuckles Range. There are seven rooms, all looking a bit tired; most have their own balcony. There's a large garden and good food.

Blue Haven Guest House (☎ 223 2453; bluehavetravels@sltnet.lk; 30/2 Poorna Lane; s Rs 500-800, d Rs 1000-1200; 📶) On the north side of the Udawat-takelle Sanctuary in Kandy, each of the five rooms has florid décor, hot water and a large airy balcony overlooking the jungle setting. The owner can arrange road trips and walks around Kandy and into the Knuckles Range.

Forest Glen (☎ 222 2239; forestglen@ids.lk; 150/6 Lady Gordon's Dr, Sri Dalada Thapowana Mawatha; r Rs 900-1500; 📶) Tucked away on a winding road on the edge of Udawattakelle Sanctuary, this is a welcoming guesthouse with good food. The eight rooms feature fans, spotless bathrooms and views over a leafy little valley. Rooms with balconies cost the most.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Dream Cottage Holiday Home (☎ 071 283626; siribas@sltnet.lk; Uduwela; s/d Rs 1500/1800) This modern villa is 10km south of Kandy (the road here leads through tea estates), set in the countryside at the foot of the Urugala Range. It has intriguing architecture, incorporating two huge boulders, and are three rooms, or you can rent out the whole place for Rs 5000 – it has room for eight. There are frequent minibuses from the clock tower to Uduwela; from there a three-wheeler costs Rs 350. It's on the site of the former Metiyagulla Tea Estate, so ask for that name if no-one in Uduwela seems to have heard of the place.

Mahaweli Reach Hotel (☎ 074 472727; www.mahaweli.com; 35 PBA Weerakoon Mawatha; s/d US\$135/150, ste US\$250-500; 📶 📺) Vying for the honour of being Kandy's best hotel, this palatial white building occupies a beautiful spot on the banks of the Mahaweli Ganga north of town. The 115 spacious rooms have recently been renovated. Facilities include elegant restaurants, tennis and squash courts and a particularly nice swimming pool. International cricket teams stay here, and the hotel sometimes hosts concerts (jazz or classical music, typically).

Amaya Hills (☎ 223 3521; amayahills@amayaresorts.com; Heerassagala; r/ste US\$96/184; 📶 📺) This imposing, V-shaped hotel sits on a grassy slope high in the hills, 20 minutes' drive southwest of Kandy. The rooms are decorated with Kandyan craftwork, and there's an inviting pool with superb views and a well-equipped Ayurvedic centre, which is also open to nonguests. A disco, Le Garage, is open Saturday nights only.

Earl's Regency (☎ 242 2122; erhotel@sltnet.lk; s/d US\$120/140; 📶 📺 📺) Near Kundasale, this is a substantial hotel with all mod cons, great views and immaculate rooms. The rooms have a slick black bathroom and polished floorboards, and most have a balcony. The only drawback is that it's very popular with tour groups, and since there are no restaurants nearby, you may find yourself queuing for buffet meals.

EAST OF KANDY

Most travellers from Kandy go west to Colombo, north to the ancient cities or south to the rest of the Hill Country. It's also possible to go east to Mahiyangana, beyond which you will find Badulla on the edge of the Hill Country and Monaragala on the way to Arugam Bay, Gal Oya National Park and, further north, Batticaloa on the east coast; all are reachable by bus from Kandy.

The Buddha is said to have preached at Mahiyangana and there's a dagoba here to mark the spot. There are two roads to Mahiyangana, on either side of the Mahaweli Ganga and the Victoria and Randenigala Reservoirs. The A26 north road goes past the Victoria Golf Club and the Victoria Reservoir to Madugoda, before twisting through no less than 18 hairpin bends, a dramatic exit from the Hill Country to the Mahaweli lowlands and the dry-zone plains. From the top you have a magnificent view of the Mahaweli Development Project. It makes for one of the country's hairiest bus rides – on the way up you worry about overheating and on the way down you try not to think about the brakes. You usually pass at least one 4WD or truck that didn't make it and that now lies in the jungle beneath.

Drivers prefer the road along the southern shores of the Victoria and Randenigala Reservoirs, which is much faster and in better condition. This road closes at dusk, however, because wild elephants from the

nature reserve are attracted to headlights. To travel from Kandy to the hills of Uva Province (including towns such as Ella and Haputale), it's quicker to take this road and then the route south to Badulla than to go via Nuwara Eliya.

Mahiyangana

☎ 055

The town was laid out to serve the new irrigation districts, so it's sprawling and not very densely settled. Besides the **Mahiyangana dagoba** (where, according to legend, the Buddha on his first visit to Lanka preached to the primitive people who then inhabited these parts) there are a couple of passable hotels.

Venjinn Guest House (☎ 225 7151; 42 Rest House Rd; r Rs 500-1200, with air-con Rs 1400-1800; 🏠) This place has 10 fairly ordinary rooms, plus an outdoor restaurant and a bar. It's a short three-wheeler ride from the bus station.

Tharuka Inn (☎ 225 7631; 89/1 Padiyathalawa Rd; s/d Rs 1000/1400) About 1km from the bus station on the Ampara road, this is a multi-storey building with slow country service. The clean bland rooms (cold water only) will do for a night.

Mahiyangana Rest House (☎ /fax 225 7099; r Rs 1800-2500, with air-con Rs 2500-3000; 🏠) On the banks of the Mahaweli Ganga, this is a low-rise building in reasonably clean condition. The rooms with air-con are more spacious than the fan rooms.

Sorabora Village Inn (☎ 225 7149; info@vanityholidays.com; r Rs 500-1700; 🏠) This 15-room hotel, restaurant and bar is a popular local option for wedding receptions on weekends, but during the week it's a good, quiet choice.

Mahiyangana is something of a transport hub for the area, and there are regular buses to Badulla (CTB Rs 45), Polonnaruwa (private bus Rs 64), Ampara (CTB and private bus Rs 70), Monaragala (CTB Rs 49) and Kandy (private bus Rs 45, three hours). Travellers from Mahiyangana to Monaragala may need to change buses at Bibile.

Knuckles Range

So named because the range's peaks look like a closed fist, this 1500m-high massif is home to pockets of rare montane forest. The area, which offers some pleasant walks, has been declared a Unesco World Heritage Conservation Area. The Rs 575 entry fee is collected at Hunasgiriya, 27km from

Kandy. Hotels and resorts in the Knuckles Range can organise guided hiking trips.

Green View (☎ 077 781 1881; bluehavetravels@sltnet.lk; Elkaduwa Rd, Elkaduwa; s Rs 800-1000, d Rs 1000-1200) This seven-room hillside lodge offers spectacular views into a forested mountain valley, with rice fields below. It's a particularly good spot for walks as there is a good network of trails nearby. Nature tours are also available. The Sri Lankan fare here is good, and reasonably priced. By advance arrangement the owners can pick you up at the train or bus stations in Kandy.

Rangala House (☎ 081-240 0294; anewman@sltnet.lk; 92B Bobebila Rd, Makuldeniya, Teldeniya; villa US\$340) This former tea planter's bungalow ensconced on a steep forested hillside contains three double rooms, each with attached bath, plus large living and dining room with a fireplace. Guests can prepare their own meals in the large Western-style kitchen or have the resident cook do the work; either way you pay only the actual costs of the raw ingredients purchased. A large swimming pool on the premises is solar-heated.

Hunas Falls Hotel (☎ 081-247 0041, 081-247 6402; www.hunasfallsotel.com; Elkaduwa; r US\$120, ste from US\$160; 🏠 🏠) A luxury hotel with one of the most spectacular settings in the country, it's 27km out of Kandy, high up in a tea estate at Elkaduwa. It has all the mod cons, including a tennis court, a well-stocked fish pool and plenty of walks in the surrounding hills.

A taxi from Kandy to Elkaduwa should cost Rs 800. Alternatively, take a bus to Wattegama (from near the clock tower in Kandy) and then catch another to Elkaduwa.

ADAM'S PEAK (SRI PADA)

elev 2243m

Located in a beautiful and fascinating area of the southern Hill Country, this lofty peak has sparked the imagination for centuries. It is variously known as Adam's Peak (the place where Adam first set foot on earth after being cast out of heaven), Sri Pada (Sacred Footprint, left by the Buddha as he headed towards paradise) or Samanlakande (Butterfly Mountain, where butterflies go to die). Some believe the huge 'footprint' on the top of the 2243m peak to be that of St Thomas, the early apostle of India, or even of Lord Shiva.

Whichever legend you care to believe, this place has been a pilgrimage centre for

over 1000 years. King Parakramabahu and King Nissanka Malla of Polonnaruwa provided *ambalamas* (resting places to shelter weary pilgrims) up the mountain.

These days the pilgrimage season begins on *poaya* day in December and runs until **Vesak festival** in May. The busiest period is January and February. At other times the temple on the summit is unused, and between May and October the peak is obscured by clouds for much of the time. During the pilgrimage season a steady stream of pilgrims (and the odd tourist) makes the climb up the countless steps to the top. They leave from the small settlement of Dalhousie (del-house), 33km by road southwest of the tea town of Hatton, which is on the Colombo-Kandy-Nuwara Eliya railway and road. The route is illuminated in season by a string of lights, which look very pretty as they snake up the mountainside. Out of season you can still do the walk; you'll just need a torch. Many pilgrims prefer to make the longer, much more tiring – but equally well-marked and lit – seven-hour climb from Ratnapura via the Carney Estate, because of the greater merit thus gained.

It's not only the sacred footprint that pilgrims seek. As the first rays of dawn light up the holy mountain you're treated to an extremely fine view – the Hill Country rises to the east, while to the west the land slopes away to the sea. Colombo, 65km away, is easily visible on a clear day. It's little wonder that English author John Stills, in his book *Jungle Tide*, described the peak as 'one of the vastest and most revered cathedrals of the human race'.

Interesting as the ascent is, and beautiful as the dawn is, Adam's Peak saves its *pièce de résistance* for a few minutes after dawn. The sun casts a perfect shadow of the peak onto the misty clouds down towards the coast. As the sun rises higher this eerie triangular shadow races back towards the peak, eventually disappearing into its base.

Activities

You can start the 7km climb from Dalhousie soon after dark – in which case you'll need at least a good sleeping bag to keep you warm overnight at the top – or you can wait till about 2am to start. The climb is up steps most of the way (about 5200 of them), and with plenty of rest stops you'll

get to the top in 2½ to four hours. A 2.30am start will easily get you there before dawn, which is around 6.30am. Start on a *poaya* day, though, and the throng of pilgrims might add hours to your climb.

From the car park the slope is gradual for the first half-hour or so. You pass under an entrance arch, then by the Japan-Sri Lanka Friendship Dagoba. The pathway then gets steeper and steeper until it becomes a continuous flight of stairs. There are tea houses for rest and refreshments all the way to the top, some of which are open through the night. A handful are open out of season. The authorities have banned litter, alcohol, cigarettes, meat and recorded music so that the atmosphere remains suitably reverent.

Since it can get pretty cold on top, there's little sense in getting to the top too long before the dawn and then having to sit around shivering. Bring warm clothes in any case, including something extra for when you get to the summit, and bring plenty of water with you. Some pilgrims wait for the priests to make a morning offering before they descend, but the sun quickly rises (as does the heat), so it pays not to linger too long.

Many people find the hardest part is coming down again. The endless steps can shake the strongest knees, and if your shoes don't fit well then toe-jam starts to hurt, too. It's a good idea to take a hat – the morning sun gets strong quite fast. Try to remember to stretch your leg muscles, or you'll be limping for the next few days.

Between June and November, when the pathway isn't illuminated and there aren't many people around, travellers are urged to do the hike at least in pairs. Expect to pay around Rs 500 for a guide.

Leeches may be about. A popular method of deterring these unpleasant little beasts is an Ayurvedic balm produced by Sidhalepa Ayurveda Hospital. From the way climbers enthusiastically smear it on, one would think it does for leeches what garlic does for vampires. It costs only a few rupees and is available in Dalhousie and indeed throughout Sri Lanka.

Sleeping & Eating

The area surrounding Adam's Peak has a handful of places to stay. Dalhousie is the best place to start the climb, and it also has the best budget accommodation in the area.

Head to Dikoya (see right) if you're seeking midrange and top-end choices.

Out of pilgrimage season the bus driver may dump you in Dalhousie's bare main square, but during the season the buses stop near the beginning of the walk. In the season there are a few tea shops, some of which stay open all night, where you can get something to eat, buy provisions for the climb, or get a place to sleep (before you start the climb).

About 1.5km before you get to the place where the buses stop, there are a handful of guesthouses (on your left as you approach Adam's Peak). Most are open only during the pilgrimage season.

White House (s/d Rs 400/500) About 100m beyond the River View Wathala Inn (below), this newer guesthouse has basic but clean rooms. It also has friendly owners who not only lead Adam's Peak climbs but can take visitors trekking down the opposite side of the peak to Ratnapura. Like many guesthouses here it opens only during the main tourist season (December to May). You can swim in the river behind the guesthouse.

Sri Pale (s/d Rs 400/600) The four rooms here are very rustic but have a nice location by a small river. The hosts are a congenial local farming family. It's open only during the pilgrimage season.

Yellow House (☎ /fax 051-222 3958; s/d Rs 400/500) Continuing with the colour/name theme, this place next to Sri Pale offers 12 basic rooms, which are open seasonally.

Punsisi Rest (☎ 070 5211101; r Rs 400) Further up the road, closer to the bus stop and above a shop, Punsisi has nine small rooms with hot water. The rooms on the top floor are the best but the stairs are steep and narrow. This one is usually open year-round.

Green House (☎ 051-222 3956; r Rs 400) This is across the bridge at the start of the walking path, and, yes, it's painted green. There are simple clean rooms in a characterful little house. There's also a pretty garden and the host can prepare a herbal bath (Rs 150) for an après-pilgrimage soak. The management offers an 'Adam's Peak full-service package' for Rs 2000 that includes a night's accommodation, meals and guided climb. It's open seasonally.

River View Wathala Inn (☎ 051-222 5261; www.wathalainn.net; r Rs 800-2000) This modern, rambling place has 14 large rooms with hot water, and unlike most of the other Dal-

housie places it's open year-round. The cheapest rooms have shared bathrooms. The recently expanded restaurant here is popular with tour groups. Rafting and canoeing trips can be arranged.

Getting There & Away

Reaching the base of Adam's Peak is quite simple, and if you're making a night ascent you've got all day to arrive. Buses run to Dalhousie from Kandy (from the Goods Shed bus station), Nuwara Eliya and Colombo in the pilgrimage season. Otherwise, you need first to get to Hatton or to Maskeliya (which is about 20km along the Hatton-Dalhousie road).

Throughout the year there are service to Hatton from Colombo, Kandy (three hours) or Nuwara Eliya. There are also some direct buses from Nuwara Eliya and Colombo to Maskeliya, which enables you to avoid stopping in Hatton, if you wish.

There are buses from Hatton to Dalhousie via Maskeliya every 30 minutes in the pilgrimage season (CTB/private bus Rs 28/40, two hours). Otherwise, you have to take a bus from Hatton to Maskeliya (Rs 12, last departure about 7pm), then another to Dalhousie (Rs 12, last departure about 8.30pm). There are usually hotel touts on, in, above and beside the bus when it terminates at Dalhousie.

The *Podi Menike* and *Udarata Menike* trains from Colombo arrive in Hatton at 11.30am and 2.15pm, respectively. These trains continue to Nanu Oya (for Nuwara Eliya), as do the local trains that leave Hatton at 7.35am and 4.20pm. In the other direction (to Colombo) the *Podi Menike* passes through Haputale and Nanu Oya and reaches Hatton at 2.13pm; the *Udarata Menike* leaves Hatton at 10.55am. Mail train 46 leaves at 10.52pm.

A taxi from Hatton to Dalhousie should cost Rs 600 to 700.

AROUND ADAM'S PEAK

Other than making the pilgrimage up the famous peak, visitors to the area can arrange easier hikes through forests and connecting tea plantations in Dikoya, Hatton and Maskeliya, or do a little boating and fishing on the Castlereagh or Maussakelle Reservoirs. Local tea-estate bungalows can handle the arrangements.

A few tea factories in these districts also offer tours and cuppings (tea tastings). The charming 19th-century Anglican church built on a promontory overlooking the Castlereagh Reservoir is worth a visit for its quaint stone architecture, tiny but atmospheric colonial cemetery and sweeping views of the reservoir and adjoining tea plantations.

Hatton, the main train junction in the area, is a bustling tea-trading town with narrow, crowded streets, a market and a few drinking houses.

Sleeping & Eating

At elevations of around 1200m to 1400m, the area around Dikoya has the Hill Country's best selection of converted tea-estate bungalows. There are a couple of grimy local inns near the train station in Hatton and one or two in Maskeliya, but these are best avoided except as a last resort. If you have your own transport it is possible to do Adam's Peak from Dikoya without needing to stay overnight in Dalhousie.

Upper Glencairn (☎ 051-222 2348; Dikoya; s/d Rs 1250/1500) A grand old place, built in 1906, surrounded by gardens and a working tea estate. The five rooms all have attached hot-water bathrooms. There's a bar and leather couches to sink into in the lounge. Meals are available (breakfast Rs 150, à la carte lunch and dinner around Rs 300 per dish).

Lower Glencairn (☎ 051-222 2342; Dikoya; s/d Rs 1250/1500) Below the main road, this one is rather jaded and shabby compared with its Upper counterpart, but the garden is nice, as are the views. Meals aren't served here but rather at Upper Glencairn, a short walk away.

Castlereagh Family Cottages (☎ 051-222 3607; castle@sltnet.lk; Norton Bridge Rd, Dikoya; cottages Rs 2500-5000) Further along the road to Hatton, look for the sign for this place just after a bridge. The cottages are in a lovely spot under eucalyptus trees on the edge of the Castlereagh Reservoir. The smaller cottage has a double bed and a room with two bunks. The bigger one has three double rooms, plus a kids' room that could fit six to 10. Both have kitchens and hot water, and are nicely decorated.

Tea Trails (☎ 011-230 3888, 051-492 0401; www.tea-trails.com; Dikoya; r US\$188-240, ste US\$236-405) Partially owned by Dilmah Tea, one of Sri Lanka's largest tea companies, Tea Trails comprises a collection of four colonial-style bungalows

built for British tea-estate managers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Completely refurbished and opened to visitors in 2005, the bungalows feature four to six large bedrooms each, along with spacious dining and living areas, verandas and gardens with views over Castlereagh Reservoir. Rates include sumptuous Western and Sri Lankan meals prepared by a professional resident chef, along with complimentary wines and single-estate teas. Also on staff are an experienced guide who can lead hikes from bungalow to bungalow (or beyond), and a tea expert who can enlighten guests on the processes involved in growing, picking and curing Ceylon tea.

Getting There & Away

Upper and Lower Glencairn and Castlereagh Family Cottages are along the main road between Hatton and Dikoya and can thus be reached by bus. Tea Trails will arrange pick-up for its guests in Colombo, Kandy or Hatton. A taxi from Hatton to any of these accommodations should cost around Rs 700 to 900.

KITULGALA

☎ 036

Southwest of Kandy and north of Adam's Peak, Kitulgala's main claim to fame is that David Lean filmed his 1957 Oscar-winning epic *Bridge on the River Kwai* here. You can walk down a paved pathway to the site where the filming took place along the banks of the Kelaniya Ganga. The pathway is signposted on the main road, about 1km from Plantation Hotel in the direction of Adam's Peak. It is virtually impossible to head down the path without attracting an entourage of 'guides' who expect a consideration for their troubles. If you know the film you'll recognise some of the places.

Kitulgala's second claim to fame is **white-water rafting** along the Kelaniya Ganga. The typical trip takes in seven Class 2-3 rapids in 7km for US\$30 per person, including transport and lunch. Experienced rafters can opt for more difficult Class 4-5 rapids by special arrangement. You can organise this through Rafter's Retreat (p198) or Plantation Hotel (p198).

The Kelaniya Ganga also has some good **swimming** spots - a popular hole is beside Plantation Hotel.

The area is also famous for birding. According to Rafter's Retreat, 23 of Sri Lanka's 27 endemic bird species inhabit the surrounding forest.

One corner of the dining room at **Kitulgala Rest House** (☎ /fax 228 7528; www.ceylonhotels.lk/kitul.html; r with/without air-con US\$48/36; 🍴) is a veritable shrine to the David Lean epic; black-and-white photos of the stars decorate the walls. Each of the 20 large rooms here has a veranda facing the river. White-water rafting and river canoeing can be arranged here.

Further towards Adam's Peak than the Kitulgala Rest House, the eight stylish rooms at **Plantation Hotel** (☎ 228 7575; hauschandra@wow.lk; Kalukohutenna; r with/without air-con US\$48/36; 🍴) are very comfortable; there's also a restaurant serving 'Western and Eastern' cuisine beside the river. Bird-watching and rafting trips can be arranged.

Plantation Hotel also manages **Plantation Resort** (Royal River Resort; ☎ 272 4692; hauschandra@wow.lk; Eduro Ella; s/d US\$48/60; 🍴), a collection of open-air dining areas and plush guest rooms built alongside the Ing Oya rapids of the river. All rooms come with fireplaces and river views. The restaurant is popular with day-trippers and tour groups.

Rafter's Retreat (☎ 228 7598; channap@itmin.com; r/cottages incl half-board US\$35/54) A beautiful 85-year-old colonial tea-estate bungalow serves as the centre for this guesthouse-cum-rafting outfit. Guests don't stay in the old house but rather in three rooms in an adjacent house, or in 11 rustic wood-plank cottages facing the river. The Rafter's Retreat management can arrange rafting, hiking and birding trips.

It's easy enough to have a quick stop at Kitulgala even if you are travelling by bus. If you're coming from Ratnapura you'll have to change at Avissawella; catch the bus to Hatton and get off at Kitulgala (Rs 32). When you're over Kitulgala, flag a bus to Hatton from the main road (Rs 40).

KANDY TO NUWARA ELIYA

The road from Kandy to Nuwara Eliya climbs nearly 1400m as it winds through jade green tea plantations and past crystalline reservoirs. The 80km of asphalt allows for plenty of stops at waterfalls and tea outlets, not to mention Tamil and Sinhalese villages along the way.

At Pussellawa, 45km from Kandy, the 120-year-old **Pussellawa Rest House** (☎ 031-247 8397; ceylonhotels.lk; r with/without air-con US\$35/25; 🍴) has four reasonably well-maintained rooms in a colonial-style bungalow with fine views.

Kothmale Reservoir (also known as Puna Oya Reservoir) can be looked down on from a little further up the road. It's a large place created as part of the Mahaweli Development Project, and partly blamed by some locals for unusual climatic conditions in recent years. **Ramboda Falls** (108m), about 1.5km from the road, is a double waterfall created by converging brooks.

Ramboda Falls Hotel (☎ 052-225 9582; r from US\$18), about 58km from Kandy, by Ramboda Falls and near the Kothmale Reservoir, is down a very steep driveway to your right as you travel from Kandy. The view you get of the falls from here is quite marvellous and there's a restaurant with a pleasant veranda from which to view them. Tasty and reasonably priced meals are available. If you want to venture further, there's also a narrow path to the falls. Some of the 16 rooms are a bit musty but others are airy and bright with balconies, so do have a look before checking in. Indian movie superstar Amitabh Bachchan once stayed here, and there are photos of him looking inscrutably cool.

On the A5, 5km before Nuwara Eliya, the **Labookellie Tea Factory** (☎ 8am-6.30pm) is a convenient factory to visit as it's right on the roadside and staff will willingly show you around. You can buy boxes of good tea cheaply here and enjoy a free cup of tea with a slice (or two) of their delicious chocolate cake.

Closer to Nuwara Eliya are roadside stalls overflowing with all manner of vegetables, a legacy of Samuel Baker, who first came to the area in 1846 and decided it would make a pleasant summer retreat. He introduced a variety of vegetables here, and they're still grown in abundance today. Also grown in abundance are flowers, which are transported to Colombo and abroad. Along the steep roadside approach to Nuwara Eliya you'll come across children selling flowers. If you don't buy their wares, they hurtle down a path to meet you at each and every hairpin turn until (hopefully) you fork out some cash.

THE TEA HILLS

Tea remains a cornerstone of the Sri Lankan economy and a major export. Tea came to Sri Lanka as an emergency substitute for coffee when the extensive coffee plantations were all but destroyed by a devastating disease in the 19th century. The first Sri Lankan tea was grown in 1867 at the Loolecondara Estate, a little southeast of Kandy, by one James Taylor. Tea needs a warm climate, altitude and sloping terrain – a perfect description of the Hill Country – and today the area is virtually one big tea plantation.

Tea grows on a bush; if it isn't cut it can grow up to 10m high. Tea bushes are pruned back to about 1m in height and squads of Tamil tea pluckers (all women) move through the rows of bushes picking the leaves and buds. These are then 'withered' (demoisturised by blowing air at a fixed temperature through them) either in the old-fashioned multistorey tea factories, where the leaves are spread out on hessian mats, or in modern mechanised troughs. The partly dried leaves are then crushed, which starts a fermentation process. The art in tea production comes in knowing when to stop the fermentation, by 'firing' the tea to produce the final, brown-black leaf. Tours of tea plantations and factories are readily available all over Sri Lanka.

There is a large number of types and varieties of teas, which are graded both by size (from cheap 'dust' through fannings and broken grades to 'leaf' tea) and by quality (with names such as flowery, pekoe or souchong). Tea is further categorised into low-grown, mid-grown or high-grown. The low-grown teas (under 600m) grow strongly and are high in 'body' but low in 'flavour'. The high-grown teas (over 1200m) grow more slowly and are renowned for their subtle flavour. Mid-grown tea is something between the two. Regular commercial teas are usually made by blending various types – a bit of this for flavour, a bit of that for body.

Sri Lanka may grow some very fine tea but most of the best is exported. Only in a small number of hotels, guesthouses and restaurants will you get a quality cup. But you can buy fine teas from plantations or shops to take home with you.

NUWARA ELIYA

☎ 052 / pop 25,966 / elev 1889m

The summer resort of Nuwara Eliya (*nu-rel-ya*, meaning 'City of Light') keeps its colonial hill station atmosphere more completely than any place in the subcontinent. The town centre is a concrete tangle but the outskirts still keep the atmosphere of a misplaced British village, with hedges, rose gardens and red-roofed bungalows sporting twee names. It was a favoured stomping ground for the tea planters – the 'wild men of the hills' as one British governor called them. The old post office, the racecourse, the English country house-styled Hill Club with its hunting pictures, mounted fish and hunting trophies and the 18-hole golf course all somehow seem more British than Britain itself.

Nuwara Eliya has a fair assortment of country-style houses with large gardens – many have been turned over to vegetables, making this one of Sri Lanka's main market-gardening centres.

Come prepared for the evening cool – Nuwara Eliya is much higher than Kandy. In January and February you may find yourself needing to sleep with two blankets

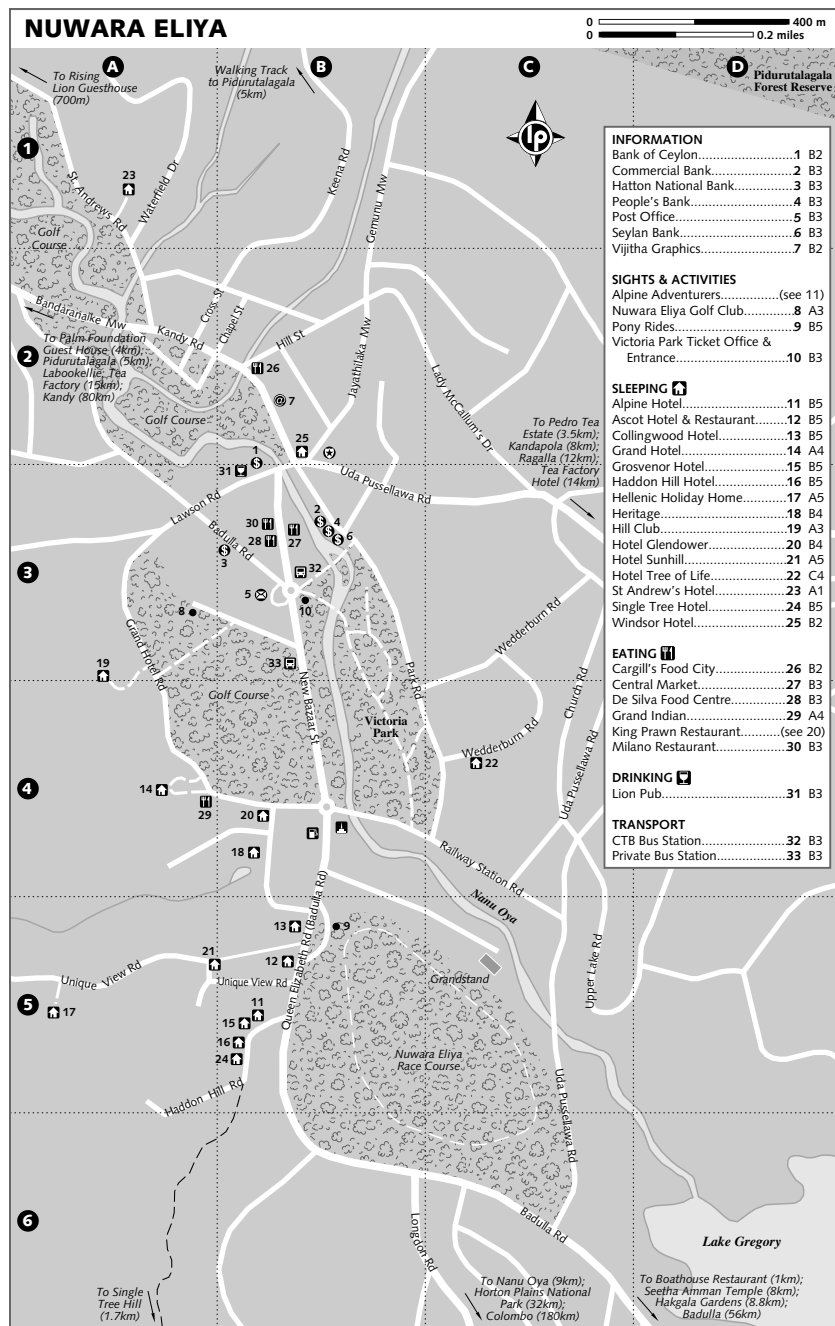
and all your clothes on. The town can be grey and grim in a peculiarly Scottish way on rainy days. Nuwara Eliya is the 'in place' for socialites during April, around the Sri Lankan New Year. At that time of year the cost of accommodation – if you can find any at all – goes through the roof. Horse races are held on the picturesque semiderelict racecourse then, too.

The town has an abundance of touts angling to get a commission for a guesthouse or hotel.

History

Originally an uninhabited system of forests and meadows lying in the shadow of Pidurutalagala (aka Mt Pedro, 2524m), Nuwara Eliya became a singularly British creation, having been 'discovered' by colonial officer John Davy in 1819 and chosen as the site for a sanatorium a decade later. The sanatorium's reputation became such that Sir J E Tennent wrote in *Ceylon* in 1859 that 'In the eyes of the European and the invalid, Nuwara Eliya is the Elysium of Ceylon.'

Later the district became known as a spot where 'English' vegetables and fruits such as



lettuce and strawberries could be successfully grown for consumption by the colonists. Coffee was one of the first crops grown here, but after the island's coffee plantations failed due to disease, the colonists switched to tea. The first tea leaves harvested in Sri Lanka were planted at Loolecondara Estate, in the mountains between Nuwara Eliya and Kandy. As tea experiments proved successful, the town quickly found itself becoming the Hill Country's 'tea capital', a title still proudly borne.

As elsewhere in the Hill Country, most of the labourers on the tea plantations were Tamils, brought from southern India by the British. Although the descendants of these 'plantation Tamils' (as they are sometimes called to distinguish them from Tamils in northern Sri Lanka) have usually stayed out of the ethnic strife endemic to Jaffna and the north, there have been occasional outbreaks of tension between the local Sinhalese and Tamils. The town was partially ransacked during 1983 riots, but the damage has long since been invisible to anyone unaware of what the place looked like previously.

Orientation

CTB buses leave from Railway Station Rd and from the private bus station on New Bazaar St. Over the road is Victoria Park. Further north along New Bazaar St is the central market and a collection of cheap eateries. At the top of the street is the Windsor Hotel and nearby is Bank of Ceylon. If you veer left into Kandy Rd, you will come to Cargill's Food City (you can see the golf course on your left). If you head south from the bus station along New Bazaar St, you will enter Queen Elizabeth Rd (also known as Badulla Rd) – many of the cheaper guesthouses are clustered nearby.

Information

The major banks in town can exchange travellers cheques, but only People's Bank has an ATM.

Bank of Ceylon (Lawson Rd)

Commercial Bank (Park Rd)

Hatton National Bank (Badulla Rd)

People's Bank (Park Rd)

Post office (Badulla Rd; ☎ 7am-8pm Mon-Sat, closed public holidays) Aside from buying stamps or mailing letters and postcards, you can also conveniently make long-distance phone calls here.

Seylan Bank (Park Rd)

Vijitha Graphics (☎ 223 4966; vijithak@sltnet.lk; 28 Daily Fair Trade Complex, Kandy Rd) Internet access.

Sights

The lovely **Victoria Park** (admission Rs 10; ☎ dawn-dusk) at the centre of town comes alive with flowers around March to May, and August and September. It's also home to quite a number of Hill Country bird species, including the Kashmir flycatcher, Indian pitta and grey tit.

If you're keen to see where a good, strong cuppa comes from, head to the **Pedro Tea Estate** (admission Rs 50; ☎ 8.30am-12.30pm & 2-5pm) about 3.5km east of Nuwara Eliya on the way to Kandapola. Guided tours of the factory, which was originally built in 1885 and still contains much 19th-century engineering to marvel at, run for about a half-hour. Overlooking the plantations there's a pleasant tea house where you can have a tea break. A three-wheeler from Nuwara Eliya should cost Rs 400 to 500 return, including waiting time. Alternatively you could hop on a Ragalla-bound bus (bus 743) from the main bus station in Nuwara Eliya. On the way out you'll pass Hawa Eliya, the site of the Lion brewery (alas, no tours). A side road takes you up to what's locally known as **Lovers Leap** (there are various stories as to who the lovers actually were). From here you get a good view of the countryside.

The **Hakgala Gardens** (adult/student Rs 300/200; ☎ 7.30am-5pm), 10km southeast of Nuwara Eliya (and about 200m lower), was originally a plantation of cinchona, the plant from which the antimalarial drug quinine is extracted. Later, the gardens were used for experiments in acclimatising temperate-zone plants to life in the tropics, and were run by the same family for three generations until the 1940s. Today Hakgala is a delightful garden of over 27 hectares, famed for its roses, ferns and medicinal plants.

Legend has it that Hanuman, the monkey god, was sent by Rama to the Himalayas to find a particular medicinal herb. He forgot which herb he was looking for and decided to bring a chunk of the Himalayas back in his jaw, hoping the herb was growing on it. The gardens grow on a rock called Hakgala, which means 'jaw-rock'.

The Hakgala Gardens is a short bus ride from Nuwara Eliya (take a Welimada-bound

bus). There are some accommodation options nearby.

On the way out to Hakgala Gardens, near the 83km post, stop off to see the colourful Hindu **Seetha Amman Temple** at Sita Eliya. It's said to mark the spot where Sita was held captive by the demon king Rawana, and where she prayed daily for Rama to come and rescue her. On the rock face across the stream are a number of circular depressions said to be the footprints of Rawana's elephant. Tamil wedding parties make it a point to stop here for *pujas*.

Activities

Grand Hotel, St Andrew's Hotel and Hotel Glendower all have snooker rooms; non-guests can usually play for around Rs 125 to 200 per hour. Holidaying Sri Lankans like to give their children pony rides on the racecourse.

GOLF

Nuwara Eliya Golf Club (☎ 223 4360; fax 222 2835; green fees weekdays till 3pm/weekends & holidays Rs 1900/2300, caddie fee per 3hr Rs 700), which spreads north from Grand Hotel Rd, is beautifully kept. It didn't take the tea planters long to lay out land for drives and putts in their holiday town, and the club was founded in 1889. The club has been through tough times but survives to this day. Water – in the form of rivers and streams – comes into play on six holes. You can become a temporary member by paying Rs 100 per day. On weekdays after 3pm green fees drop to less than half for six holes. You can hire golf clubs for Rs 400 per day and golf shoes for Rs 150 per day. The club expects a certain dress code: shirt with collar and slacks or shorts (of a decent length), socks and shoes. Women can wear 'decent' golf attire. The club has a convivial wood-lined bar that almost encourages you to talk in a fake Oxbridge accent. Also on the grounds are a badminton hall and billiard room. Dinner in the dining room includes classic bland English cuisine such as grilled chops with mint for around Rs 300.

CYCLING

Fat-tire fans will find plenty of steep dirt trails radiating into the hills from the outskirts of town. Most hotels and guesthouses can arrange for **mountain-bike rental** (per day Rs 500).

HORSE RACING

The Sri Lanka Turf Club sponsors horse racing at the 1875-vintage Nuwara Eliya Race Course and during the December–January and April–May high seasons the stands are filled with Sinhalese, Indian and Arab horse-racing fanatics. The most important event every year is the Governor's Cup race, held over the April New Year season. The races usually begin around 10.30am; bets start at Rs 250.

WALKING

Sri Lanka's highest mountain, Pidurutalagala (2524m), rises behind the town. On top stands the island's main TV transmitter, which means the peak is out of bounds to the public. You can walk about 4km up as far as a concrete water tank; beyond here is a high-security zone. Follow the path from Keena Rd, which leads along a little ravine through the exotic eucalyptus forest (which keeps the town supplied with firewood) and into the rare, indigenous cloud-forest. There are a few leopards on the mountain, which sometimes descend to the edges of town and devour some unfortunate pooch.

An alternative walk is to go to **Single Tree Hill** (2100m), which takes about 90 minutes. To get here walk south out of Nuwara Eliya on Queen Elizabeth Rd, go up Haddon Hill Rd as far as the communications tower and then take the left-hand path.

TENNIS

There are tennis courts at the **Hill Club** (☎ 222 2653; hillclub@eureka.lk; per hr Rs 250). The fee includes balls and racquet hire.

Tours

Most hotels and guesthouses in town can arrange day trips by car or 4WD to Horton Plains National Park and World's End. The standard price for up to five passengers is Rs 1700. One of the better 4WD tours is based at **Single Tree Hotel** (☎ 222 3009; 1/8 Haddon Hill Rd). The road is better than it used to be and the trip takes about 1½ hours one way. It costs about the same from Haputale. For more information on this destination, see p205.

Alpine Adventurers (☎ 222 3500; Alpine Hotel, 4 Haddon Hill Rd) specialises in trekking, camping, mountaineering and rafting tours in the area.

Sleeping

Nuwara Eliya is a place where it's worth being a bit choosy about where you lodge, as the budget hotels can be on the dreary side. You'll need blankets to keep warm at night at almost any time of year, owing to the altitude. All places to stay *claim* to have hot water, but in many you have to wait for it to heat up; only a handful have a 24-hour hot-water service. Another way of keeping warm is to get a fire lit in your room, for which you'll be asked to pay Rs 100 or more. Make sure the room has ventilation or an open window, or you may get carbon monoxide poisoning (which can be fatal).

During the 'season', around Sri Lankan New Year in April, rooms are three to five times their normal price. Prices also increase during long-weekend holidays and in August when package tours descend from abroad.

BUDGET

Guesthouses with historic architecture and antique furniture charge higher rates than the more-modern places but aren't necessarily more comfortable.

Single Tree Hotel (☎ 222 3009; 178 Haddon Hill Rd; s/d Rs 1000/1200) The 10 rooms here were recently renovated with lots of wood panelling (upstairs rooms are best), and the helpful owner can arrange all manner of local and regional tours.

Collingwood Hotel (☎ 222 3550; fax 223 4500; 112 Queen Elizabeth Rd; s/d/f Rs 750/1200/3000) The rooms at the front are the best in this colonial-era home that's filled with antique furniture. The family room sleeps six.

Haddon Hill Hotel (☎ 222 3500; 88 Haddon Hill Rd; s/d Rs 900/1200) It won't win prizes for architecture but the rooms are nice and clean and guests can use the kitchen. Some of the rooms have a small balcony.

Ascot Hotel & Restaurant (☎ 222 2708; 120 Queen Elizabeth Rd; r Rs 950) This is one of the least expensive inns in town. Despite an uninviting dirt front yard, it's basically an OK place to stay and all the rooms now have hot water. The owners are very friendly.

MIDRANGE

Hotel Glendower (☎ 222 2501; hotel_glendower@hotmail.com; 5 Grand Hotel Rd; r/ste Rs 1800/3000; ☎) This rambling colonial house with sizable rooms is a definite cut above its rivals, with

helpful, friendly staff, a pretty garden with a croquet set, a large lounge with soft couches and a fireplace, a cosy English-style bar and a good snooker room upstairs.

Heritage (☎ 222 3053; hritage@snet.lk; r US\$45-55, ste US\$70-85) Formerly Ceybank Rest, and once the British governor's mansion, this huge, recently renovated hotel behind Victoria Park and opposite the Nuwara Eliya Race Course offers large airy rooms with colonial-style teak furnishings. A good bar, billiard room and restaurant round out the package. The service seems a bit better and more genuinely friendly than that found at the old posh stand-bys like St Andrew's and Hill Club.

Palm Foundation Guesthouse (☎ 222 4033, 222 2839; www.palmfoundationsrilanka.org; 485/5 Toppass-Kandy Rd; r Rs 1500) This new place outside of town on the road to Kandy offers basic, homey accommodations several kilometres north and several hundred metres above Nuwara Eliya proper. Sunsets and sunrises from the organic garden in the front yard are sublime. Possible adventures include hikes into the surrounding forest and tea gardens. All proceeds go toward the holistic community development activities of Palm Foundation, a local NGO that accepts skilled volunteers with advance notice.

Hotel Sunhill (☎ 222 2878; sunhill@itmin.com; 18 Unique View Rd; r standard/deluxe Rs 1300/2000) This place has boxlike standard rooms but better-value deluxe rooms. The bar has a karaoke machine and can get rather noisy on weekend evenings.

Alpine Hotel (☎ 222 3500; www.alpineecotravels.com; 4 Haddon Hill Rd; s/d/tr Rs 3600/4300/5000; ☎ ☎) The inn has 25 passably decent rooms and a large restaurant. Mountain bikes can be hired for Rs 500 per day. The front desk can arrange hiking, trekking and bird-watching tours for guests.

Grosvenor Hotel (☎ 222 2307; 6 Haddon Hill Rd; s/d incl breakfast Rs 1650/1980) More than 100 years old and once belonging to a colonial governor, the Grosvenor has 10 spacious, simple rooms and a comfortable lounge room.

Hotel Tree of Life (☎ 222 3684; hoteltreeoflife.com; 2 Wedderburn Rd; s/d/tr US\$24/32/38; ☎) This 106-year-old colonial-style bungalow features a lovely garden and six well-furnished but faded rooms.

Rising Lion Guesthouse (☎ 222 2083; fax 223 4042; 3 Sri Piyatissapura; r Rs 900-1800) Perched high above town, this place has cheerfully odd

taste in furnishings and art. The hosts are very personable and have lots of advice on interesting side trips in the area. The 13 clean, homely rooms all have fireplaces ready, and the more expensive ones have spiffy views. If you ring ahead the staff will pick you up from the bus station for free, or from Nanu Oya for Rs 200.

Hellenic Holiday Home (☎/fax 223 5872; 49/1 Unique View Rd; s/d Rs 1500/2000) This well-situated place has superb views and 10 modern, carpeted rooms of reasonable quality. A three-wheeler here from the bus station should cost Rs 100.

TOP END

St Andrew's Hotel (☎ 222 2445; www.jetwing.net/andrews; 10 St Andrew's Dr; r US\$84-108; ☑) North of town on a beautifully groomed rise overlooking the golf course, this was once a planter's club. There are terraced lawns with white cast-iron furniture, and five-course European dinners are served in the dining room beneath a pressed-copper roof. The rooms are immaculate; during bouts of cold weather the staff offers hot-water bottles for the beds. The difference between the less expensive and more expensive rooms is more substantial than the rates suggest.

Windsor Hotel (☎ 222 2554; fax 222 2889; 2 Kandy Rd; r US\$50) One of Nuwara Eliya's landmarks in the middle of town, the Windsor looks a bit jaded from the outside but the interior is more tasteful. The rooms are clean and the staff is friendly.

Hill Club (☎ 222 2653; www.hillclubsrilanka.com; 29 Grand Hotel Rd; r US\$40-100, f US\$115, ste US\$115-140; ☑) A preserve of the British male until 1970, Hill Club now admits Sri Lankans and women but remains very much in the colonial tradition. It's like a living museum of British colonial male privilege – and, in fact, the current members have reciprocal rights with London clubs. Temporary members (Rs 100 per day) are welcome to help keep the tills ringing. Tennis courts are available to guests and nonguests, and the lawns and gardens are immaculate. The suites are very charming but the regular rooms are small and have standard furnishings given the price. Hence, if you can't afford the suites you'll be better off at Heritage or St Andrew's.

Grand Hotel (☎ 222 2881-7; tangerinetours@eureka.lk; s/d in old wing US\$74/92, in new wing US\$101/127) Right by the golf course, this is a vast mock-

Tudor pile with immaculate lawns, a reading lounge and a wood-panelled billiards room. However, the rooms have lost most of their original features, and the service could still use improvement.

Tea Factory Hotel (☎ 222 3600; ashmres@aitekens.pence.lk; Kandapola; s/d US\$106/141) This tea factory, 14km east of Nuwara Eliya, has been transformed into a 57-room hotel, leaving bits and pieces of factory machinery as part of the décor. The views from the hotel and the walks around it are very pleasant and from the front desk there's plenty of information available on what to see and do.

Eating & Drinking

Guesthouses and hotels are among the safest bets when it comes to eating and drinking in Nuwara Eliya, as most stand-alone restaurants in the town centre aren't particularly inspiring. Collingwood Hotel, Alpine Hotel and Hotel Sunhill are all good choices in this department.

Grand Indian (Grand Hotel Rd; dishes Rs 150-300) Out the front of Grand Hotel, this modern, glass-walled cafeteria serves excellent and inexpensive Indian food, with northern and southern dishes. Try a cone-shaped *kheema* dosa (dosa with mince) for Rs 215, or a vegetarian thali for Rs 210.

King Prawn Restaurant (Hotel Glendower, 5 Grand Hotel Rd; dishes Rs 250-500) The relaxed dining room of Hotel Glendower serves the best Chinese food in town, perhaps the best outside of Colombo and the beach resorts. All the Chinese standard menu items are available, and the restaurant caters to vegetarians, as well.

De Silva Food Centre (90 New Bazaar St; dishes Rs 120-250) This inexpensive eatery located along a busy main street serves Sri Lankan and Chinese fare.

Milano Restaurant (94 New Bazaar St; dishes Rs 150-350) This is a more middle-class version of De Silva Food Centre, with friendly service and a reliable menu of Sri Lankan, Western and Chinese dishes.

Boathouse Restaurant (Badulla Rd, Lake Gregory; dishes Rs 125-300) Open only during the July–August, December–January and April peak seasons, this is a popular local lakeside bar and restaurant with a nautical theme. There are carrom (a cross between snooker, marbles and air hockey – you flick disks into corner pockets) boards to pass the time.

Hill Club (☎ 222 2653; 29 Grand Hotel Rd; set course dinner US\$17, à la carte from US\$5) Dinner at Hill Club (opposite) is an event in itself. The five-course set menu focuses on roast beef, rack of lamb and the like, served with all the trimmings promptly at 8pm. You can also order off the à la carte menu for considerably less, but you still have to eat at 8pm. The whole thing is carried off with faded colonial panache: gloved waiters, candles, and linen tablecloths and serviettes. Men must wear a tie and jacket (there are a few on hand, but they sometimes run out) or Sri Lankan national dress. Women must also be suitably attired in a dress or dress slacks; some turn up in evening wear. If you're not staying the night here, you'll have to pay a Rs 100 temporary joining fee. The food doesn't live up to everyone's expectations, especially with such a relatively high price tag, but most people enjoy the experience.

St Andrew's Hotel (☎ 222 2445; 10 St Andrew's Dr; mains Rs 500-1100) Another colonial nostalgia evening-out option is the airy dining room at this hotel (opposite), minus the temporary membership and dress code of Hill Club. As at the latter, the emphasis is on stolid culinary pillars of the British Empire.

Tea Factory Hotel (☎ 222 3600; Kandapola; mains Rs 400-600) Behind the corrugated-iron walls and green doors of the factory-turned-hotel is a cosy bar and restaurant serving quite passable Western and Sri Lankan food. You can work up an appetite by going for a walk in the surrounding tea estate. A taxi here and back costs Rs 700 to 800.

Lion Pub (Lawson St) Almost every town of size in Sri Lanka seems to have a 'Lion Pub', and this version sitting at the edge of the town centre is as good a spot as any for draught lager at local prices.

Self-caterers should head for the central market for fresh produce and to Cargills Food City for canned goods.

Getting There & Away BUS

The trip from Kandy takes about four hours and costs Rs 125 in a private intercity express bus or van. It's a spectacular climb. Buses leave every 30 minutes to an hour. There are also buses to/from Colombo (intercity express Rs 220, six hours). There are direct CTB buses to Haputale (Rs 50, 2½ hours) a few times daily, or more frequent departures

to Welimada (Rs 23, one hour), where you can change to a Haputale-bound bus (Rs 22). Similarly, for Bandarawela you have a choice of direct CTB bus (Rs 44, three hours) or you can change local buses at Welimada. To get to Matara on the south coast, one intercity express bus (Rs 260, seven to eight hours) leaves each morning around 7.30am.

TRAIN

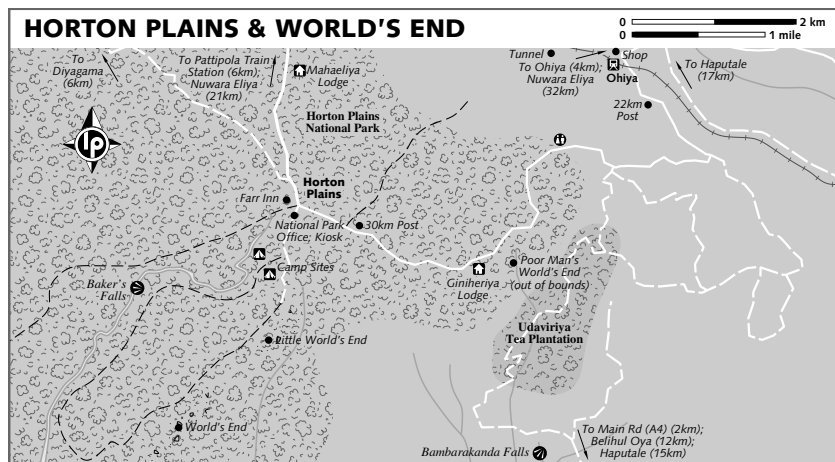
Nuwara Eliya does not have its own train station, but is served by Nanu Oya, about 9km along the road towards Hatton and Colombo. Buses (Rs 13 to Nuwara Eliya) meet the main trains, so don't get sucked in by touts. You can also always take a taxi (Rs 250 to 300) from the station.

The 8.56am *Podi Menike* from Colombo (via Kandy) reaches Nanu Oya at 1pm. The 9.45am *Udarata Menike* from Colombo (not via Kandy) reaches Nanu Oya at about 3.40pm. Fares onwards to Badulla in 3rd/2nd/1st class cost Rs 30/119/155. Going west, the *Udarata Menike* to Colombo (but not stopping in Kandy) leaves Nanu Oya at 9.35am; the *Podi Menike* leaves at 12.55pm, reaching Kandy at 4.35pm before continuing on to Colombo. Fares to Kandy in 3rd/2nd/1st class cost Rs 51/94/240.

HORTON PLAINS NATIONAL PARK & WORLD'S END

The Horton Plains is a beautiful, silent, strange world with some excellent hikes in the shadows of Sri Lanka's second- and third-highest mountains – Kirigalpotta (2395m) and Totapola (2359m), rearing up from the edges of the plateau. The 'plains' themselves form an undulating plateau over 2000m high, covered by wild grasslands and interspersed with patches of thick forest, rocky outcrops, filigree waterfalls and misty lakes.

The plateau comes to a sudden end at World's End, a stunning escarpment that drops almost straight down for 880m. Unfortunately the view from World's End is often obscured by mist, particularly during the rainy season from April to September. The early morning (between 6am and 10am) is the best time to visit, before the clouds roll in. In the evening and early morning you'll need long trousers and a sweater, but the plains quickly warm up, so take a hat as well. January to March are usually the clearest months, weatherwise.



Information

Farr Inn, a local landmark and visitors centre, and the nearby national park office are reachable by road from Ohiya or Nuwara Eliya. Vans and 4WDs can make it up, but smaller cars might not. It's a stiff three-hour walk uphill from Ohiya train station. The **national park office** (☎ 070 522042; adult/child US\$12/6; ☎ 6.30am-6.30pm) is at the start of the track to World's End. Farr Inn itself, which once served as a hunting lodge for high-ranking British colonial officials, is currently being converted into a visitors centre that will contain educational displays.

Sights & Activities

WILDLIFE

As an important watershed and catchment for several year-round rivers and streams, the Horton Plains plays host to a wide range of wildlife. The last few elephants departed the area in the first half of the 20th century, but there are still a few leopards. Sambar deer and wild boar are commonly seen feeding in meadows at dawn and dusk. The shaggy bear-monkey (or purple-faced langur) is sometimes seen in the forest on the Ohiya road, and occasionally in the woods around World's End (its call is a wheezy grunt). You may also come across the endemic toque macaque.

The area is very popular with bird-watchers. Endemic species here include the yellow-eared bulbul, the fantailed warbler, the ashy-headed babbler, the Ceylon hill

white-eye, the Ceylon blackbird, the Ceylon white-eyed arranga, the dusky-blue flycatcher and the Ceylon blue magpie. Birds of prey include the mountain hawk eagle.

A tufty species of grass called *Crosyopogon* covers the grasslands, while marshy areas are home to copious bog moss (sphagnum). The umbrella-shaped, white-blossomed keena (*Calophyllum*) stand as the main canopy over montane forest areas. The stunted trees and shrubs are draped in lichen and mosses, giving them a strange, Tolkienesque appearance. Another notable species is *Rhododendron zelanicum*, which has blood-red blossoms. The purple-leaved *Strobilanthes* blossoms once after five years, and then dies.

WORLD'S END

This is the only national park in Sri Lanka where visitors are permitted to walk on their own (on designated trails only). The walk to World's End is about 4km, but the trail loops back to Baker's Falls (2km), from where you can walk to the entrance (another 3.5km); the round trip is 9.5km and usually takes around three hours. Be aware that after about 10am the mist usually comes down – and it's thick. All you can expect to see from World's End after this time is a swirling white wall. Although the ticket gate is open from 6.30am you can actually start walking earlier and pay on the way out. Try to avoid doing this walk on Sunday and public holidays, when it can get crowded. Guides at the national park office

expect about Rs 500 to accompany you on the walk – they say there's no fee for the volunteer guides, but expect to donate a similar amount. Some guides are well informed on the area's flora and fauna, and hiring one might be a consideration for solo women travellers.

Wear strong and comfortable walking shoes, a hat and sunglasses. Bring sunscreen (you can get really burnt up here) and lots of water, as well as something to eat. The shop at the park office makes a killing from people who forget to bring supplies. The weather can change very quickly on the plains – one minute it can be sunny and clear, the next chilly and misty. Bring warm clothing just in case. The authorities have cracked down on litter, and it is forbidden to leave the paths. There are no toilets en route to World's End, though there are toilets on the road coming up to Farr Inn from Ohiya train station.

There used to be a free alternative to World's End, dubbed Poor Man's World's End, but it has been fenced off and anyone caught in the area will get a Rs 10,000 fine. Travellers' haunts in Haputale are good sources for innovative ways to see the plains without being slugged with the entry fees, although of course you follow the advice at your own risk.

Tours

Hill Safari Eco-Lodge (right) in Ohiya can arrange guided hikes through the park. Guesthouses in Nuwara Eliya and Haputale also operate trips to Horton's Plains and World's End.

Sleeping & Eating

There are two basic Department of Wildlife Conservation bungalows where you can stay: Giniheriya Lodge, which used to be known as Anderson Lodge, and Mahaeliya Lodge. The bungalows contain 10 beds each, and the charge for foreigners is US\$24 per day plus the US\$12 park entry, US\$2 per group for linen hire and a US\$30 per group service charge. You must bring all of your own dry rations and kerosene. The lodges open up only when people are staying, and you must book ahead through the **Department of Wildlife Conservation** (Map pp84-5; ☎ 011-269 4241; www.dwlc.lk; 18 Gregory's Rd, Cinnamon Gardens, Col 7).

There are two camp sites (signposted near the start of the World's End track).

These can also be booked through the Department of Wildlife Conservation. There is water at the sites but nothing else; you must bring everything you need. Because you are inside the World's End park you are obliged to pay the US\$12 park entry fee plus the camp-site fee (Rs 600 per day, plus Rs 600 service charge per stay).

A more frugal and possibly more fulfilling alternative would be to stay in nearby Ohiya. **Hill Safari Eco-Lodge** (☎ 071-277 2451; r ind half-board per person Rs 1000), about 1.5km from the Horton Plains junction down a very rough and winding road, has three family rooms with attached bathrooms and hot water. It's a former tea manager's bungalow on the Lower Bray tea estate. Hill Safari offers a seven-day trekking itinerary in the national park.

Opposite the Ohiya train station the first small **shop** (☎ 0777 404658; r Rs 700) you come to has two rooms, if you're desperate. Food is available here at half the price of that at the kiosk near Farr Inn.

Getting There & Away

TAXI

If you don't feel like walking up the road to the park entrance, there is often a taxi waiting at the Ohiya train station. From there, getting to Farr Inn (40 minutes one way) should cost about Rs 1000 return, including waiting time.

It takes about 1½ hours to get from Haputale to Farr Inn by road (Rs 1800 return). From Ohiya the road rises in twists and turns through forest before emerging on the open plains. It's a pleasant journey and on the way through the forest you may catch sight of monkeys.

You can also drive to Farr Inn from Nuwara Eliya, a trip taking about 1½ hours one way (around Rs 1800 by taxi).

There is a 4WD road that goes past the Bambarakanda Falls (the road signposted on the main road between Haputale and Belihul Oya) and emerges near Ohiya train station. It's pretty rough and would probably be impassable in wet weather.

TRAIN & FOOT

Given that the mist comes down at World's End at around 10am, you'll want to get there by at least 9.30am. You can walk to World's End, but it's a 30km round trip from Ohiya with some steep ascents – it's for serious

hikers only. Theoretically it would be possible to catch a night train to Ohiya and start the walk in the early hours, but as the trains are often delayed you risk walking 15km up to World's End only to find the clouds have rolled in. It would be better to arrive in Ohiya the day before if you really want to do the walk. The walk from Ohiya to Farr Inn is 11.2km, or 2½ to 3½ hours, along the road – you'll need a torch if you do it at night. Then you've got another 1½ hours to World's End. It's a slog but it is doable. You'll need about two hours for the walk back down towards Ohiya. You'll sleep well after you've finished the walk.

You could also catch a taxi from Ohiya train station to Farr Inn.

The trip up the main road is a pretty walk with great views and you can be sure you won't get lost. Near the 27km post you'll find a toilet block.

Keen walkers can also strike out for Farr Inn from Pattipola, the next train station north of Ohiya (a walk of about 10km along a 4WD track), or from Bambarakanda Falls, about four hours downhill from the plains (below). To make this a longer two-day hike, start from Haputale.

BELIHUL OYA

☎ 045

Belihul Oya is a pretty hillside region worth passing through on your way to/from the Hill Country – it's 35km from Haputale and 57km from Ratnapura. From here you can walk up to Horton Plains, a seriously strenuous undertaking.

About 11km towards Haputale, near Kalupahana, are the **Bambarakanda Falls**. (Ask the bus driver to let you off at Kalupahana.) At 240m, they're the highest in Sri Lanka. March and April are the best months for viewing the falls; at other times the water may be reduced to a disappointing trickle. There's a four-hour trail from here to Horton Plains – it's a fair challenge.

Belihul Oya Rest House (☎ 228 7599; Ratnapura-Haputale Rd; r with/without air-con US\$48/30; ♿) has 14 clean but ageing rooms, and is exquisitely perched beside a stream that rushes down from Horton Plains. There's a restaurant here and a lounge packed with comfy chairs near a natural rock pool – feel like a dip?

River Garden Resort (☎ 228 0222; www.ecoclub.com/rivergarden/lodge.html; r US\$18.50, tent per person

incl half-board US\$18.50, lodge US\$24.50) has three cottages with spotless rooms set in a shady terraced garden above a stream. The 'ecolodge' 9km up the road sleeps five. A camp site set in a shady area below the restaurant offers spacious two- to four-person tents with easy access to swimming in the Belihul Oya. The camp site also has shared toilets and showers; some visitors choose to bathe in the river.

HAPUTALE

☎ 057 / pop 4706 / elev 1580m

Perched at the southern edge of the Hill Country, the largely Tamil town of Haputale clings to a long, narrow mountain ridge with the land falling away steeply on both sides. The bowl-shaped Uva valley, surrounded by the Idalgashinna and Ohiya peaks, as well as the Horton Plains plateau, lies to the north and east of the ridge, while the foothills of the lower Uva descend from the other side all the way to the sea. On a clear day you can see all the way to the south coast from this ridge, and at night the Hambantota lighthouse may be visible.

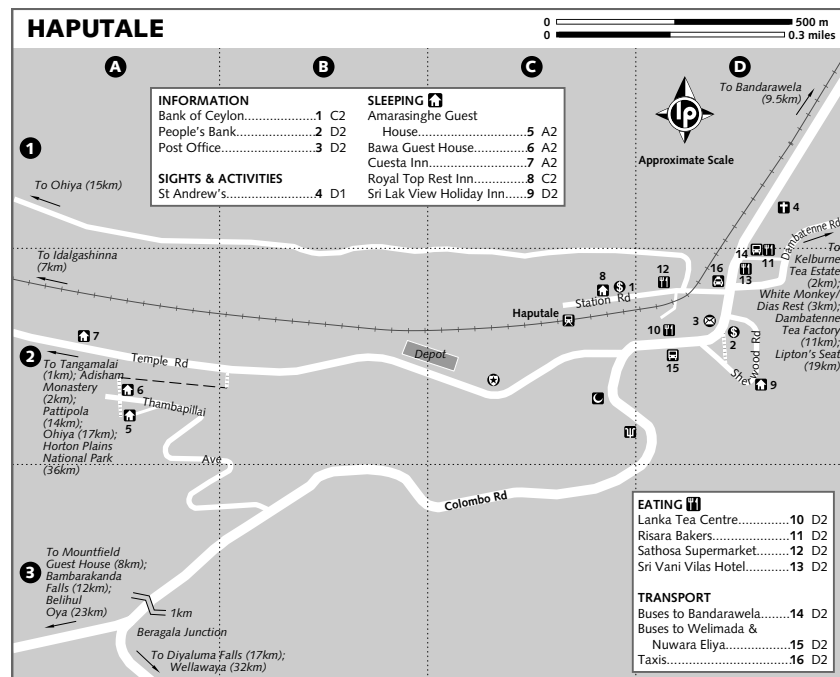
The town centre itself is a squall of traffic and small shops, but a short walk out of town quickly repays the effort with extraordinary views. The railway hugs one side of the ridge.

As in many places in the Hill Country, the legacies of the British planters live on. There are tea estates on hillsides, and the old plantation bungalows, some of which have lovely gardens. There's also a pretty little Anglican church (St Andrew's) on the Bandarawela road. The headstones in its cemetery make for interesting reading.

Haputale is a pleasant place with some good cheap accommodation, and makes a good base for visiting Horton Plains National Park, exploring other places in the area, or just taking pleasant walks in cool mountain air. Guesthouses arrange vans and 4WDs to Horton Plains for Rs 1700.

Information

The town isn't too small to have a **Bank of Ceylon** (Station Rd) and a **People's Bank** (Colombo Rd), where you can change money and travellers cheques and get cash advances on Visa cards. The post office is in the centre of town. **Amarasinghe Guest House** (☎ 226 8175; agh777@sltnet.lk; Thambapillai Ave) has Internet facilities.



Sights

DAMBATTENNE TEA FACTORY

A few tea factories in this area are happy to have visitors. The most popular, **Dambattenne** (admission Rs 180; ☎ closed Sun), was built in 1890 by Sir Thomas Lipton, one of the most famous figures in tea history. A tour through the works educates the visitor on the processes involved in the fermentation, rolling, drying, cutting, sieving and grading of tea. Some of the equipment in use is up to a century old. For further details about tea production, see *The Tea Hills*, p199.

Although it's 11km from Haputale, the popular factory is easily accessible. A bus (for the estate workers) goes from the bus station for Bandarawela to the factory and back again about every 25 minutes (Rs 10). Alternatively, a taxi there and back costs about Rs 350. If you are fit and energetic this is a great walk, with wonderful views.

DIYALUMA FALLS

Heading towards Wellawaya you'll pass the 171m-high Diyaluma Falls, Sri Lanka's third-highest waterfall, just 5km beyond

the town of Koslanda. Cascading down an escarpment of the Koslanda Plateau, the stream is fairly small, though it quickly builds up after a downpour. By bus, take a Wellawaya service from Haputale and get off at Diyaluma (1¼ hours). The falls leap over a cliff face and fall in one clear drop to a pool below – very picturesque and clearly visible from the road.

If you're energetic you can climb up to the beautiful pools and a series of mini falls at the top of the main fall. Walk about 500m down the road from the bottom of the falls and take the estate track that turns sharply back up to the left. From there it's about 20 minutes' walk to a small rubber factory, where you strike off uphill to the left. The track is very indistinct, although there are some white arrows on the rocks – if you're lucky, people in the rubber factory will shout if they see you taking the wrong turn! At the top the path forks: the right branch (more distinct) leads to the pools above the main falls, the left fork to the top of the main falls. The pools above the second set of falls are good for a cool swim.

ADISHAM MONASTERY

This Benedictine **monastery** (admission Rs 60; ☎ 9am–12.30pm & 1.30–4.30pm Sat & Sun, poya days & school holidays) is about 3km west of Haputale. Follow Temple Rd along the ridge until you reach the sign at the Adisham turn-off. The stone-block monastery once belonged to tea planter Sir Thomas Lester Villiers. This is one of only 18 monasteries in the world belonging to the Sylvestrine Congregation, a suborder of the Benedictine fraternity founded in the 13th century. The industrious monks have added lots of stonework, including garden walls, steps and terracing. Inside, visitors are allowed to see the living room and library, and occasionally a couple more rooms. There's a small shop selling produce from the monastery's lovely gardens and orchards. A taxi should cost Rs 300 return, including waiting time.

Before you reach Adisham the road passes through **Tangamalai**, a bird sanctuary and nature reserve. Although it's off limits to visitors, around sunset you'll still be able to see many birds, even sambar deer on occasion, by the roadside.

OTHER ATTRACTIONS

If you can't get enough of the views, take the train to **Idalgashinna** train station, 8km along the railway west of Haputale. You can walk back beside the train tracks enjoying a spectacular view because the land falls away steeply for a great distance on both sides.

Near the Dambatenne tea factory, the **Lip-ton's Seat** lookout has some claiming that it rivals the views from World's End (and it's free). Take the signed narrow paved road from the tea factory, and climb about 7km through lush tea plantations to the lookout. From the tea factory the ascent should take about 2½ hours.

Some visitors hike along the train lines from Haputale to **Pattipola** (14km, an all-day hike), the highest railway station in Sri Lanka. If you decide to do this, bring along a torch for the long railway tunnels. From Pattipola you can continue via foot or taxi to Ohiya railway station, and from there to the Horton Plains.

Sleeping & Eating

Royal Top Rest Inn (☎ 226 8178; 22 Station Rd; r with/without bathroom Rs 650/550) A short walk from the railway station, this is a friendly place

with pleasant views, a cheerfully gaudy living room and simple but clean rooms. There's a restaurant, a small outdoor area and a little sunny shared balcony.

Cuesta Inn (☎ 226 8110; kacp@sltnet.lk; 118 Temple Rd; r Rs 750) This inn has five basic rooms, each with a small balcony, and the large sitting room has superb views over tea plantations. The hosts are welcoming and will happily arrange excursions around the area.

Bawa Guest House (☎ 226 8260; 32 Thambapillai Ave; s Rs 250–350, d Rs 550–600) Run by a friendly Muslim family, this is a basic house nestled on the hillside. There are five cosy rooms with tolerable shared bathrooms in the original building, and two rooms with private bathrooms in the newer building next door. Inexpensive, filling meals (Rs 250 to 400) are available. There's lots of good information in its guest books.

Amarasinghe Guest House (☎ 226 8175; agh777@sltnet.lk; Thambapillai Ave; r with/without hot water Rs 880/660) This terrific guesthouse, located in a neat white home, has two rooms in a separate block and four modern spotless rooms (with balconies) in the house. The food here (meals Rs 250 to 400) is very good. Mr Amarasinghe will pick you up from the train station if you ring, and he keeps a guest book with some interesting comments and advice.

If you're arriving at the Bawa Guest House or Amarasinghe Guest House by foot, follow Temple Rd until you see a yellow Bawa Guest House sign to the south, just off the side of the road. Go down the first flight of stairs and head along the path (past the mangy truck) for about 250m. You'll come to Bawa first; a further flight of steps will take you in the back way to Amarasinghe Guest House.

Mountfield Guest House (☎ 226 8463; Haldumulla; r Rs 750, whole lodge Rs 2000) Located on the Belihul Oya road, 9km from Haputale, this stone lodge stands close to the road in a little plantation. It has two rooms, both with kitchenettes.

Kelburne Tea Estate (☎ 226 8029; kelburne@eur.eka.lk; bungalows Rs 4000–5000) About 2km east of Haputale train station, this is an absolute gem and would be a fine place to unwind for a few days. Three estate bungalows have been made available to visitors, complete with staff (including a cook) and all the trimmings. There's one bungalow with two bedrooms and two bungalows with three

bedrooms. Each bungalow comes with huge bathrooms, overstuffed couches and lots of magazines. Meals cost Rs 450 to 600. You must book ahead. A taxi from the train station will cost about Rs 150.

White Monkey/Dias Rest (☎ 071 259 1361; mailva.ganamdias@yahoo.co.uk; Thotulagala; s/d incl breakfast Rs 500/700) Three kilometres east of the train station, in Thotulagala, a Tamil family has opened a new guesthouse with one cottage so far. Meals (Rs 200 to 400) are available at reasonable prices. The owner is an experienced guide and has lots of information on local hikes.

Sri Lak View Holiday Inn (☎ 226 8125; Sherwood Rd; r Rs 800–1000) The more expensive rooms at this 11-room lodge have unimpeded views down the back side of the ridge, but general standards seem to drop with every passing year. Only recommended if every other place is full.

You're best off eating in your guesthouse, but there are a number of OK places in town for short eats, dosas, *rottis* (doughy pancakes), and rice and curry, such as the **Lanka Tea Centre** (Temple Rd), opposite the Welimada and Nuwara Eliya bus stand, and the **Sri Vani Vilas Hotel** (Dambatenne Rd), near the Bandarawela bus station. There's also a Sathosa supermarket tucked away on the road to the train station, if you want to buy your own supplies.

Getting There & Away
BUS

There are direct buses to Nuwara Eliya at 7am and 2pm (Rs 50, 3½ hours), but if you miss these buses you'll have to go to Welimada (private bus Rs 30, two hours) and get an onward service. To/from Bandarawela there are frequent buses (Rs 18, one hour) that run into the early evening. There are also express buses to Colombo (Rs 265, six hours).

For the south coast you usually have to change at Wellawaya (Rs 40), 1½ hours down the hill from Haputale. The last bus from Haputale to Wellawaya leaves at about 5pm.

TRAIN

Haputale is on the Colombo–Badulla line, so you can travel directly by train to and from Kandy or Nanu Oya (for Nuwara Eliya). It's 8½ to nine hours to Colombo, 5½ hours to Kandy, 1½ hours to Nanu Oya (3rd/2nd class, Rs 22/40), 40 minutes to Ohiya, 30 minutes to Bandarawela

(3rd/2nd class, Rs 6/11) and two hours to Badulla (3rd/2nd class, Rs 24/44).

The daily train departures in the Badulla direction are at 4.29am, 6.44am, 12.16am, 2.12pm (on *Podi Menike*) and 5.32pm (on *Udarata Menike*). In the Colombo direction the trains depart at 7.56am (*Udarata Menike*), 10.51am (*Podi Menike*), 8.09pm (on the night mail) and 9.30pm. The *Udarata Menike* doesn't go via Kandy.

BANDARAWELA

☎ 057 / pop 7188 / elev 1230m

Bandarawela, 10km north of Haputale but noticeably warmer, is a busy market town that makes a good base for exploring the surrounding area. Due to its agreeable climate, it's a popular area to retire to. Each Sunday morning the town has a lively market.

The focal point of the town is the busy junction just north of the train station. From here Haputale Rd goes southwest; Welimada Rd heads northwest then turns sharply left by a mosque; and Badulla Rd, with the main bus and taxi stops, heads downhill to the east.

Information

The main post office is near the Bandarawela Hotel, and there are plenty of telephone offices on the main streets. Micro Services, located off Welimada Rd, provides Internet access.

Bank of Ceylon (Badulla Rd) Has an ATM.

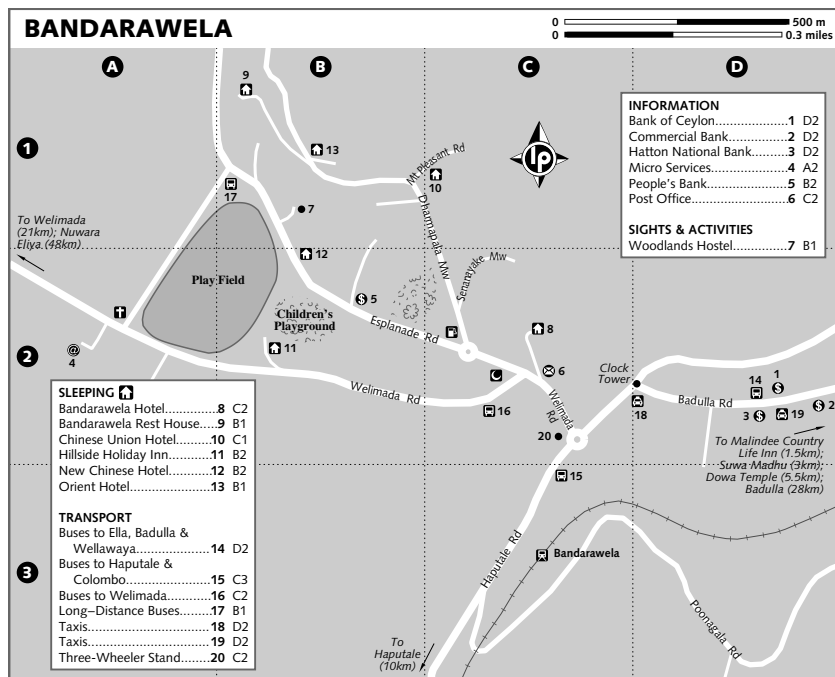
Commercial Bank (Badulla Rd) Has an ATM.

Hatton National Bank (Badulla Rd) Has an ATM; gives cash advances on MasterCard and Visa.

Woodlands Network (☎ 223 2668; woodlands@sltnet.lk; 38/1C Esplanade Rd) This nonprofit ecotourism centre (p212) has Internet access.

Sights & Activities**DOWA TEMPLE**

About 6km east of Bandarawela on the road to Badulla, the charming Dowa Temple is pleasantly situated close to a stream on the right-hand side of the road, with a beautiful 4m-high standing Buddha cut into the rock face below the road. The walls of adjacent cave shrine, cut from solid rock, are covered with excellent Sri Lankan-style Buddhist murals. The temple is easy to miss if you're coming by bus, so ask the bus conductor to tell you when to get off. A three-wheeler or taxi from Bandarawela should cost Rs 400 to 500 return, including waiting time.



WOODLANDS NETWORK

Founded by the late Dutch priest Harry Haas in 1992, **Woodlands Network** (☎ 223 2668; woodlands@sltnet.lk; 38/1C Esplanade Rd) is one of the most exemplary local-initiative tourism and social action organisations in Sri Lanka. Now headed by Sarojinie Ellawela, the centre offers a wide range of alternative tourism services in the Hill Country. The friendly staff can arrange local and jungle walks, Sri Lankan cooking lessons, meditation classes and visits to temples, forest hermitages, tea plantations, farms and waterfalls. Volunteer work is also available, and the centre sells spices, teas and local handicrafts. It also has a few hostel rooms (right) and can also arrange home stays for groups or individuals.

AYURVEDA

About 3.5km from Bandarawela is an Ayurvedic treatment centre called **Suwa Madhu** (☎ /fax 222 2504; Badulla Rd; head massage Rs 600, full treatment Rs 2600; ☎ 8am-8pm). It's a large, plush place that caters to tourists. The 1½-hour programme includes a 45-minute oil massage, a steam and a herbal sauna.

Sleeping & Eating

BUDGET

Woodlands Hostel (☎ 223 2668; woodlands@sltnet.lk; 38/1C Esplanade Rd; Rs 500) There are a few simple, clean rooms with shared bathroom in the house that contains this ecotourism centre (left). Guests may use the kitchen; with advance notice meals can also be arranged.

Chinese Union Hotel (☎ 222 2502; 8 Mt Pleasant Rd; r Rs 750, f Rs 1500) Founded by a Chinese immigrant over 60 years ago, this is an old-fashioned place offering five clean rooms in a setting that has changed little over the decades. The restaurant serves good Chinese food ranging from Rs 130 to 260 per dish.

New Chinese Hotel (☎ 223 1767; 32 Esplanade Rd; s/d/tr Rs 850/850/950) This three-storey motel-like structure contains spotless modern rooms that make up in comfort what they lack in character.

Hillside Holiday Inn (☎ 222 2212; 34/10 Welimada Rd; s/d Rs 850/1000) Just off Welimada Rd, this charming old colonial villa has clean, spacious rooms with finely carved wooden doors.

Malindee Country Life Inn (☎ 222 3124; Badulla Rd, Bindunuwela; s/d Rs 900/1200) Rather close to the road, 2km east of town, this is a family-run inn with lots of marble and brass on display. The staff is nice and the foyer-living room is an intriguing place to relax. A three-wheeler from town should cost Rs 75.

MIDRANGE

Orient Hotel (☎ 222 2407; www.orienthotelsl.com; 12 Dharmapala Mawatha; s/d/tr US\$27/30/32) The most popular hotel in town with tour groups, the Orient Hotel provides 50 comfortable rooms, along with a billiards hall, karaoke lounge, fitness centre, restaurant and bar.

Bandarawela Rest House (☎ 222 2299; fax 222 2718; s/d/f Rs 1200/1750/2100) This is a quiet spot with nine rooms, a pretty garden and friendly service. The five clean but bland rooms in the newer wing have a shared balcony with a view over the town. There are two decent family rooms in the older wing.

Bandarawela Hotel (☎ 222 2501; bwhotel@sltnet.lk; 14 Welimada Rd; s/d US\$47/59) Formerly the tea planters' club, this large chalet-style place opened in 1893 and stopped updating its furnishings around the 1930s. There are vast easy chairs to sink into in the lounge, and bathrooms with lots of hot water in 33 spacious rooms. There is a little courtyard garden with tortoises, as well as a restaurant and bar.

Getting There & Away

BUS

There are infrequent direct buses to Nuwara Eliya (Rs 44) or you can hop on one of the more frequent buses to Welimada (Rs 23) and continue on to Nuwara Eliya (Rs 21) from there. There also are regular buses to Haputale (Rs 18), Ella (Rs 13) and Badulla (Rs 27). Long-distance services include runs to Colombo (Rs 200, six hours), Tissamaharama, Tangalla and Galle. Buses to Tissa, Tangalla and Galle leave from the long-distance station on Esplanade Rd. You can also change at Wellawaya for buses to Tissa or the south coast.

TRAIN

Bandarawela is on the Colombo-Badulla railway line. Trains to Colombo (via Haputale) leave at 7.25am (on *Udarata Menike*), 10.20am (on *Podi Menike*, via Kandy), 2.20pm, 7.33pm and 8.56pm. Trains to Ba-

dulla (via Ella) leave at 5am, 7.15am, 1pm, 2.38pm, 3pm, 5.58pm and 7.15pm.

Destinations include Kandy (3rd/2nd/1st class Rs 31/85/149), Badulla (3rd/2nd/1st class Rs 7.50/19.50/34), Nanu Oya (for Nuwara Eliya; 3rd/2nd class Rs 24/67), Polonnaruwa (3rd/2nd/1st class Rs 76/210/356) and Ella (3rd class only, Rs 7).

ELLA

☎ 057

Sri Lanka is liberally endowed with beautiful views, and Ella has one of the best. The sleepy village is nestled in a valley peering straight through Ella Gap to the plain nearly 1000m below, and across to the coast where, on a clear night, you can see the Great Basses lighthouse. And as if the views weren't enough, Ella is surrounded by hills perfect for walks through tea plantations to temples and waterfalls. Ella only received electricity in 1984.

Information

There's a post office in the centre of the town, but for banking you will need travel to Bandarawela. Rodrigo Communications and RMS Communications on Main St both have Internet and IDD facilities. Rodrigo Communications is also a good source of travel information.

Activities

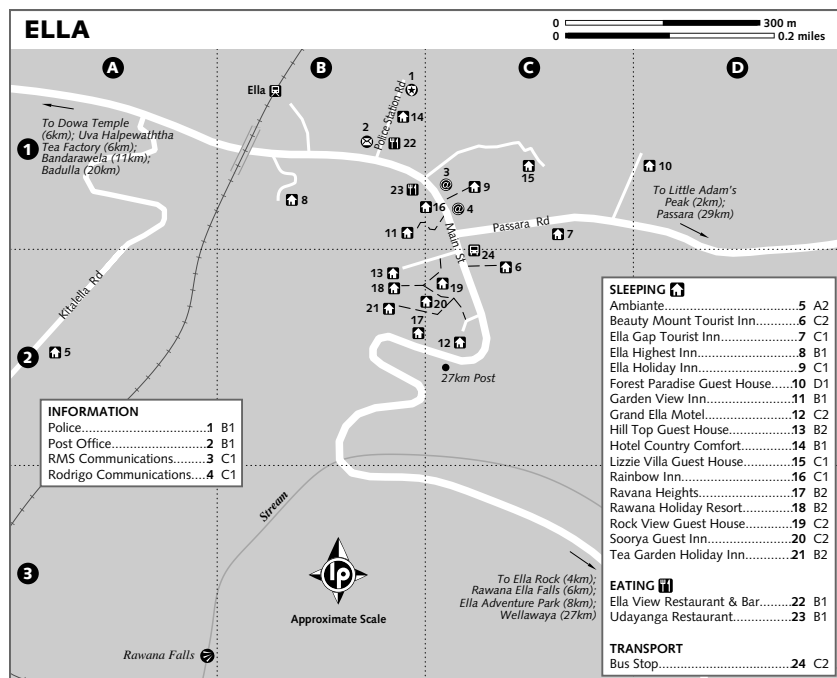
Ella is a great base for keen walkers who want to explore the surrounding countryside – the views can be spectacular. For more information, see p217.

Sleeping

Touts might attempt you on the train with tales that the hotel of your choice is too expensive, closed down, or rat-infested. In fact, every place we visited in Ella was quite acceptable, so don't believe them.

BUDGET

Ella Holiday Inn (☎ 222 8615; tourinfo@sltnet.lk; s/d/tr Rs 800/1000/1500) Recently opened by the same family that runs Rodrigo Communications, this three-storey inn sits in the middle of town and is reached by a footbridge from the main street. Rooms are clean and comfortable, the staff is friendly and the dining room serves good, inexpensive Sri Lankan and Western food.



Lizzie Villa Guest House (☎ 222 8643; s/d/tr Rs 600/1000/1500) Lizzie's is one of the longest-running establishments in Ella. Signposted on the main road, and reached on a 200m dirt track, this place has a hilltop location, a spice garden (the source of much of the home cooking), a shady veranda, and 10 simple, clean rooms with hot water.

Garden View Inn (☎ 222 8792; s/d Rs 500/700) This inn offers three simple rooms with bright, clean bathrooms in a family home. The owner has lots of info on walks in the area. Rice-and-curry meals here are inexpensive, so all in all it's very good value.

Beauty Mount Tourist Inn (☎ 222 8799; r/cottages Rs 500/900) This unpretentious little guesthouse has five rooms, as well as a cute little cottage up the hill, with a kitchen, fridge, one large bedroom and lots of privacy. The owner is a particularly good-natured fellow who likes to serve up home-grown coffee. The rooms are clean enough and the food is cheap.

Rainbow Inn (☎ 222 8788; s/d Rs 500/600, with hot water Rs 550/650) The friendly family here rents out five clean rooms, each painted a

different colour (hence the name). The food is tasty and inexpensive.

Ella Highest Inn (☎ 222 8608; s/d Rs 550/750) Set in a tea plantation, this place is a hike up the track from the main road, but it's worth it – you'll get great views of the hilly countryside. The rooms are basic, with small bathrooms.

Soorya Guest Inn (☎ 222 8906; s/d Rs 500/700) This is a clean little place with three rooms, a common balcony and a guest kitchen.

Rock View Guest House (☎ 222 8561; r Rs 600-1000) This is a large old Sri Lankan-style house with four clean but worn rooms set around a large living area. From the terrace there are views to Ella Gap.

Hill Top Guest House (☎ 222 8780; s Rs 600-700, d Rs 800-950) Hill Top has downstairs rooms with verandas surrounded by a garden, as well as upstairs rooms that share a balcony with superb views of Ella Gap. Good Sri Lankan meals are available.

Rawana Holiday Resort (☎ 222 8794; nalan kumara@yahoo.com; r Rs 800-1000) Perched high on a hillside overlooking Ella, this family-run hotel contains six balcony rooms with views, plus four less expensive interior rooms. The

Sri Lankan couple who owns the place is friendly, and the husband cooks very good Sri Lankan cuisine. The house speciality is a delicious garlic-based curry.

Forest Paradise Guest House (☎ 222 8797; forestparadise@123india.com; s/d Rs 800/900) Backed onto a pine forest, this guesthouse has four rooms in a handsome bungalow with clean private bathrooms. The owner arranges trips into the Namunugala Hills, 16km away, for Rs 1000 per person, including a BBQ lunch (minimum three people).

MIDRANGE

Ravana Heights (☎ 222 8888; jith@ravanaheights.com; r US\$45) Opposite the 27km post on the Ella-Wellaway road, this is a terrific little boutique guesthouse with four superclean rooms. It's a stylish, modern home with great service and friendly Sri Lankan-Thai owners. There's a veranda and a pretty garden, and the owners offer various organised excursions. The food is lovely too – if you ring ahead you can have Sri Lankan, Western or Thai dinner here for US\$7.50 per person.

Hotel Country Comfort (☎ 222 8500; info@hotelcountrycomfort.lk; Police Station Rd; r old Rs 800-100, new Rs 1700-2200) This is an older building with a new annex. The original building is a beautifully maintained 60-year-old villa, but the rooms here are smaller. The newer wing positively gleams, and the rooms have lots of space, bay windows and modern bathrooms. It's a great choice if you want a little more comfort. It also has a restaurant.

Ambiante (☎ 222 8867; hansasurf.tripod.com/ambiente/ambiente.htm; Kitalella Rd; r Rs 1200-2000) At the top of a hill, the motel-like row of rooms here all have ample balconies and good views down Ella Gap. It's quite a steep walk from the centre of town; a three-wheeler from the train station should cost Rs 150.

Ella Gap Tourist Inn (☎ 222 8528; Passara Rd; r Rs 1600-2250) This seven-room inn has a very pleasant outdoor restaurant and leafy gardens linking the rooms. The five older rooms are larger and have more charm than the two smaller, newer rooms.

Tea Garden Holiday Inn (☎ 222 8860; s Rs 1000-1500, d Rs 1500-2200) Near Rawana Holiday Resort, this place offers nine clean, spacious rooms. The cheaper rooms are a bit small; the more expensive rooms share a roomy balcony. There are also friendly hosts, excellent food and a leafy communal balcony

with pleasant views to the small Rawana Falls (and decent views through Ella Gap).

Grand Ella Motel (☎ 222 8655; ceylonhotels.lk; s/d/tr old US\$51/56/63, new US\$72/82/91, all incl breakfast) Formerly Ella Resthouse, Grand Ella Motel has a superb location with great views through Ella Gap from the front lawn. It's run by the government-owned Ceylon Hotels Corporation, and the service tends to be rather uninspired. This place pays hefty commissions so don't be surprised if your driver suggests you stay here. The less expensive rooms are in a rather dark building on the property's lower level.

Ella Adventure Park (☎ 228 7263; wildernesslanka.com; r/treehouses US\$55/60) About 9km southeast of Ella on the Wellaway road, this place is different to the usual cardboard-cut-out hotels. It has log furniture, natural-toned décor, Flintstonesque stone features and a quiet bush setting. The treehouses, though cute, are in need of repair; the cabins are a bit nicer, but the per-day rates are bit over the top. The management organises paragliding, canoeing, rock climbing, abseiling, camping and more. Most guests book in as part of a six-night package (US\$1200) that includes all of these activities. A restaurant serves traditional Sri Lankan food.

Eating & Drinking

Ella offers very little in the way of decent restaurants outside of those in the places to stay. All of the guesthouses and hotels serve food, but most ask for at least four hours' advance notice. Our favourites include Ravana Heights, Rawana Holiday Inn, Ambiante and Hotel Country Comfort. The garden dining area at Ella Gap Tourist Inn is especially good for Sri Lankan cuisine, and has perhaps the nicest ambience of any place in town.

Curd (buffalo-milk yoghurt) and treacle (syrup from the *kitul* palm; sometimes misnamed 'honey') is a much advertised local speciality, but, frankly, the shops that serve it here are not very clean and tend to fill up with local drunks.

Udayanga Restaurant (dishes Rs 120-180) This friendly and clean spot has good Sri Lankan and Western food at low prices.

Ella View Restaurant & Bar (dishes Rs 150-300) This dark roadside restaurant is popular with locals and tourists alike, and is one of the only places open past 8pm. Solo female travellers may attract unwanted attention from local men in their cups.

Getting There & Away

BUS & TAXI

The road to Ella leaves the Bandarawela-Badulla road about 9km out of Bandarawela. Buses change schedule fairly often. A couple of old rogues hang around the bus stop asking for foreign coins and occasionally taking money from people to buy bus tickets – don't trust them.

Buses to Bandarawela cost Rs 13 and are fairly frequent. There are infrequent buses to Badulla, although you can always get a bus to Bandarawela and change there for Badulla. It is advisable to catch intercity express buses to Bandarawela, Wellawaya and Badulla. To or from Kandy you must change at Badulla. Alternatively, you could go to Wellawaya, catch the intercity to Nuwara Eliya and then change again for Kandy.

Buses to Matara (CTB/intercity express Rs 80/150) stop at Ella around every hour from about 6.30am until about 2.30pm. The buses are likely to be quite full by the time they reach Ella, though the buses around noon are usually less busy. You can always catch a bus to Wellawaya (Rs 21) and change there for a service to the South or for Monaragala (for Arugam Bay).

It costs Rs 400 to go by taxi from Ella to Bandarawela.

TRAIN

Ella is an hour from Haputale and Badulla on the Colombo-Badulla line. The stretch from Haputale (through Bandarawela) has particularly lovely scenery. Roughly 10km north of Ella, at Demodara, the line performs a complete loop around a hillside and tunnels under itself at a level 30m lower. Ella's train station is quaint, and the fares and timetables well posted.

The main trains to Colombo depart at 6.52am (*Udarata Menike*) and 9.47am (*Podi Menike*). These have a 1st-class observation car; seats inside the car should be booked ahead. Other trains to Colombo depart at 6.50am and 8.23pm (2nd class Rs 230); trains to Kandy (2nd class Rs 152) include departures at 1.07pm and 6.50pm. Destinations on the Kandy line include Bandarawela (Rs 13), Haputale (Rs 23), Nanu Oya (for Nuwara Eliya; Rs 63) and Hatton (Rs 92). Badulla (2nd class Rs 18) departures are at 5.28am, 7.55am, 1.47pm, 3.08pm, 3.28pm (*Podi Menike*) and 6.09pm (*Udarata Menike*).

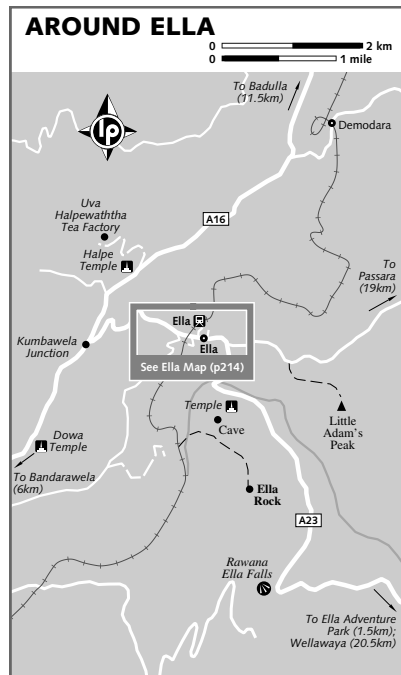
AROUND ELLA

Some people like to visit the **Dowa Temple** from Ella; for more information, see p211.

Another option is to visit a tea factory; **Uva Halpewaththa Tea Factory** runs tours (Rs 150). To get here catch a bus to Bandarawela, get off at Kumbawela junction and flag a bus going to Badulla. Get off just after the 27km post, near the Halpe temple. From here you've got a 2km walk to the factory. A three-wheeler from Ella will charge Rs 250 return.

The 19m-high **Rawana Ella Falls** are about 6km down Ella Gap towards Wellawaya. During rainy months the water comes leaping down the mountain-side in what is claimed to be the wildest-looking fall in Sri Lanka, but during the dry season it may not flow at all. There are vendors selling food and trinkets, and the invariable array of 'guides' wanting to point out 'the waterfall'. Buses from Ella cost Rs 6 and a three-wheeler will cost Rs 30 return, including waiting time.

Further up the road and to your left as you approach Ella, a side road takes you to a little **temple** and a **cave** that is associated with the Ramayana story. You may visit the temple,



which is part of a monastery, but remember to remove your shoes and hat, and to cover your legs and arms. The cave, located in a cleft in the mountain that rises to Ella Rock, is said to be the very one in which the king of Lanka held Sita captive. Boys often materialise to show you where the track up to the cave starts, but the track is steep, overgrown and slippery. Most people find the cave itself to be a disappointment.

Ella is a great place for walks though it would be inadvisable for women to head off walking alone. A gentle walk will take you to what is locally dubbed **Little Adam's Peak**. Go down the Passara road until you get to the plant shop on your right, just past the 1km post. Follow the track that is on your left as you face the garden shop; Little Adam's Peak is the biggest hill on your right. Take the second path that turns off to your right and follow it to the top of the hill. Part of this path passes through a tea estate. The approximately 4.5km round trip takes about 45 minutes each way.

Walking to **Ella Rock** is rather more demanding. Head along the train tracks (towards Bandarawela) for about 2.5km until you come to the metal bridge where you can see the small **Rawana Falls**. After passing the bridge, turn left towards the falls, cross a log bridge and follow the track up to Ella Rock, where you'll be rewarded with stunning views. The walk (approximately 9km in total) takes about two hours each way.

BADULLA

☎ 055 / pop 42,572 / elev 680m

Badulla marks the southeast extremity of the Hill Country and is a gateway to the east coast. It is one of Sri Lanka's oldest towns, and has a local reputation as a base for black marketeers. The Portuguese occupied it briefly, then torched it upon leaving. For the British it was an important social centre, although the teeming roads have changed the atmosphere quite drastically today. The railway through the Hill Country from Colombo terminates here.

Information

You can change money at **Bank of Ceylon** (Bank Rd), and buy stamps or mail letters at the **post office** (Post Office Rd). Opposite Bank of Ceylon, **Cybrain Computer Systems** (40/1 Bank Rd) offers inexpensive Internet access.

Sights

PLACES OF WORSHIP

Most Sri Lankans visiting Badulla stop at either Muthiyagana Vihara or Kataragama Devale. **Muthiyagana Vihara** is a large Buddhist complex, and includes a whitewashed dagoba that occupies spacious grounds in the southeast quarter of town. During festivals the resident elephant may be paraded around.

At **Kataragama Devale** the main objects of veneration are statues of the gods Kataragama, Saman and Vishnu. Uniquely, the *devale* was constructed in Kandyan style rather than South Indian Tamil style, with a long wooden shrine hall painted with murals depicting a *perahera*.

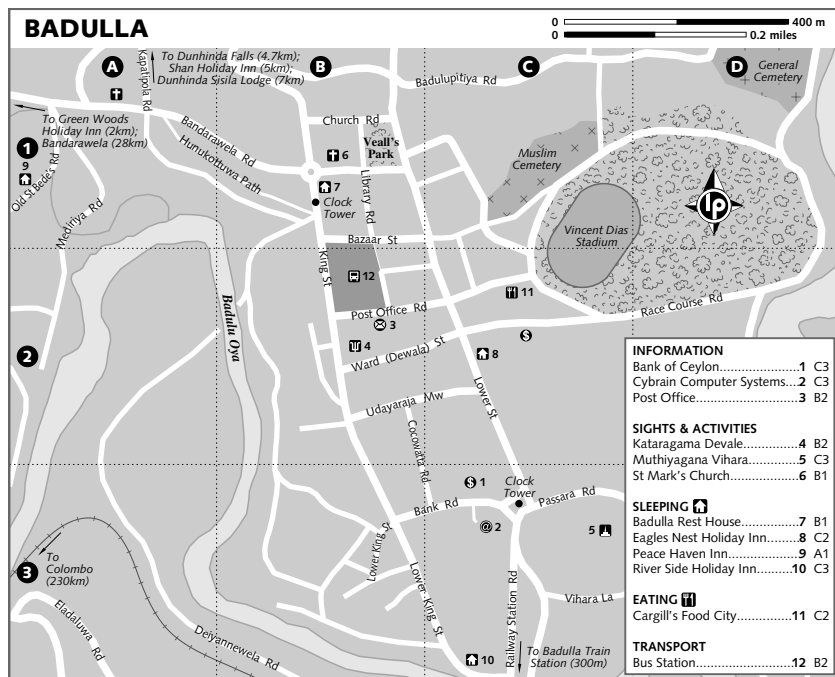
If you are a history buff, take a look through **St Mark's Church** and peruse the old headstones. Inside the church is a plaque commemorating the elephant hunter Major Rogers, who was killed by lightning.

DUNHINDA FALLS

Five kilometres north of Badulla are the 63m-high **Dunhinda Falls** (admission Rs 25), said to be the most awe-inspiring in the country. The best time to see them is June and July, but they're worth a visit at any time. It's a good spot for a picnic, but watch out for monkeys with lightning reflexes! Buses leave every 30 minutes from Badulla (Rs 16). From the bus stop the falls are about 1km along a clearly defined path. It can be a bit of a scramble, so wear suitable shoes. You can see a lower waterfall on the walk, and there's a good observation spot at the end of the path. There are many snack places on the main road and along the trail. Avoid public holidays and weekends, when the place can get packed. A three-wheeler from town charges Rs 350 for the return trip.

Sleeping & Eating

River Side Holiday Inn (☎ 222 2090; rahinn@slnet.lk; 27 Lower King St; d/f Rs 990/1650) Badulla's nicest and most efficiently run hotel is a modern affair with a variety of rooms. Some are very good value, others just so-so (although all are clean), so have a look before committing. Also on the premises are a karaoke lounge, a snooker room, plenty of parking and a cheery restaurant serving good Sri Lankan and Chinese cuisine. This is where most tour groups stay.



Badulla Rest House (Uda Rest House; ☎ 222 2299; s/d Rs 500/700) Smack in the centre of Badulla, this colonial-era rest house has faded rooms with shared bathrooms (no hot water) set around a grassy courtyard. Inexpensive Sri Lankan meals are available in an adjacent canteen.

Peace Haven Inn (☎ 222 2523; 18 Old St Bedes Rd; s/d Rs 500/700, r with hot water Rs 800) At the western edge of town, this is a modern place with slightly tatty rooms, although it's quieter than Badulla Rest House. A three-wheeler costs about Rs 60 from the bus station, or Rs 100 from the train station. Meals are available.

Eagles Nest Holiday Inn (☎ 222 2841; 159 Lower St; s/d Rs 500/750) This is a no-frills place with quaint rooms set around a courtyard. There's also a bar and liquor outlet, which attracts a clientele that might make a lone woman feel uncomfortable.

Green Woods Holiday Inn (☎ 223 1358; 301 Bandarawela Rd; r with/without air-con Rs 1850/1250; 🚗) The third place in Badulla bearing the popular 'Holiday Inn' moniker, this one can be found about 3km from the centre of town

on the road to Bandarawela. The rooms have ceiling-to-floor windows looking out to the countryside, and all have hot water. The rooms by the road are a bit noisy, so try to get a room towards the rear of the hotel. Decent Sri Lankan, Chinese and Western meals are available.

Dunhinda Sisila Lodge (☎ 223 1302; Mahiyangana Rd; s/d Rs 500/900) Close to the falls, this is a curious jumble of buildings by a river – one room has a tree poking through it. There's a natural swimming hole close by. To find it, follow the Dunhinda Falls road past the falls for a further 2.3km. Meals are available.

Shan Holiday Inn (☎ 222 4889; Mahiyangana Rd; r/cottages Rs 2000/2500) Just 300m past the falls entrance, this relatively new establishment has a large open-air restaurant with views of the valley below. Underneath the restaurant are three older cement-walled rooms, while above the restaurant stand three simple cottages with earthen walls.

There are many local nosheries along Lower St, near the intersection with Bazaar St. Self-caterers can buy groceries at **Cargills Food City** (Post Office Rd).

Getting There & Away

BUS

Buses run to Nuwara Eliya (CTB Rs 52) every 40 minutes until 4.30pm, to Bandarawela (private bus Rs 17) every 20 minutes from 6am until 4.50pm, and to Ella (private bus Rs 23) approximately every two hours until 5pm. There are also buses to Colombo (intercity express Rs 22) until 10pm, and to Kandy (CTB/intercity express Rs 100/190) until 2pm. For Monaragala (private bus Rs 64), buses leave every hour until 5.30pm.

TRAIN

The main daily services to Colombo depart Badulla at 5.55am (*Udarata Menike*), 8.50am (*Podi Menike* via Kandy), 5.50pm (with sleeperettes) and 7.15pm (a slow train). Tickets to Colombo cost Rs 152/268/580 in 3rd/2nd/1st class; tickets to Kandy cost Rs 92/171/380.

WELLAWAYA

☎ 055

By Wellawaya you have left the Hill Country and descended to the dry plains that were once home to the ancient Sinhalese kingdom of Ruhunu. Wellawaya is simply a small crossroads town and, apart from the nearby Buduruwagala carvings, there's not much of interest in the area. Roads run north through the spectacular Ella Gap to the Hill Country; south to Tissamaharama and the coast; east to the coast; and west to Colombo.

Information

There are branches of Hatton National Bank and Bank of Ceylon near the bus station.

Sights

About 5km south of Wellawaya, a side road branches west off the Tissa road to the rock-cut Buddha figures of **Buduruwagala** (admission Rs 100). A small signpost points the way along a 4km road.

The name Buduruwagala is derived from the words for Buddha (Budu), images (*ruva*) and stone (*gala*). The figures are thought to date from around the 10th century, and belong to the Mahayana Buddhist school, which enjoyed a brief heyday in Sri Lanka during this time. The gigantic standing Buddha – at 15m the tallest on the island – in the centre still bears traces of its original

stuccoed robe, and a long streak of orange suggests it was once brightly painted.

The central of the three figures to the Buddha's right is thought to be the Mahayana Buddhist figure Avalokitesvara (the Bodhisattva of compassion). To the left of this white-painted figure is a female figure who is thought to be his consort, Tara. Local legend says the third figure represents Prince Sudhana.

The three figures on the Buddha's left – hand side appear, to an inexperienced eye, to be of a rather different style. The crowned figure at the centre of the group is thought to be Maitreya, the future Buddha. To his left stands Vajrapani, who holds a *vajra* (an hourglass-shaped thunderbolt symbol) – an unusual example of the Tantric side of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. The figure to the left may be either Vishnu or Sahampath Brahma. Several of the figures hold up their right hands with two fingers bent down to the palm – a beckoning gesture. You may be joined by a guide, who will expect a tip.

A three-wheeler from Wellawaya costs about Rs 250 return and a taxi Rs 350 to 450 return.

Sleeping & Eating

Little Rose (101 Tissa Rd; r Rs 500-1000) About 1km south of town opposite the road sign announcing Wellawaya, this country home is surrounded by rice paddies and operated by a jolly, welcoming family. Good, inexpensive meals are available. A three-wheeler from the bus station costs about Rs 50.

Wellawaya Rest House (☎ 227 4899; Ella Rd; r with/without air-con Rs 1500/850; 🚗) On the road to Ella, this spot has basic but reasonably clean rooms, and an outdoor café.

Getting There & Away

Wellawaya is a common staging point between the Hill Country and the south and east coasts; you can usually find a connection here until mid-afternoon. Buses to Haputale (Rs 40) start running at around 5am, and the last bus leaves at about 5.30pm. There are regular buses to Monaragala (Rs 28, one hour), with the last bus leaving at about 6.30pm. Buses to Ella (Rs 24) run roughly every 30 minutes until 6pm. If you want to go to Kandy you must catch a bus to Nuwara Eliya and change there. For Tissamaharama you must change at Pannegamanuwa

Junction. There are also buses to Tangalla (Rs 54, three hours) and Colombo (intercity express Rs 225, seven hours).

EMBILIPITIYA

☎ 047

Embilipitiya is a good base for tours to Uda Walawe National Park, as it's only 21km south of the park's ticket office. It's a busy, modern town built to service the surrounding irrigated paddy fields and sugar-cane plantations.

The bus station stands on the main road, in the centre of town. You'll also find branches of Seylan Bank, People's Bank, Commercial Bank and Sampath Bank, all of which have ATMs and can arrange Visa cash advances.

On the main road, about 200m south of the bus station and opposite People's Bank, **Sarathchandra Tourist Guest House** (☎ 223 0044; r with/without air-con Rs 1200/900; ♿) offers an assortment of clean rooms in the main building as well as in separate cottages. There's also a restaurant and a billiards table. It's a friendly, well-run spot, and offers Uda Walawe tours for Rs 2000 per person (minimum of three people).

Around 1.5km south of the town centre, and 600m south of Sarathchandra Tourist Guest House, **Centauria Tourist Hotel** (☎ 223 0514; centuria@sltnet.lk; s/d/tr Rs 3000/3300/3600; ♿) is modern in design yet has an old-fashioned, rambling air. The facilities are excellent – tiled floors, balconies, billiards room and an inviting pool. The restaurant offers buffets when tours stay, otherwise there's à la carte rice and curry, spaghetti bolognese and more. Uda Walawe 4WD tours cost Rs 2000 per person. A three-wheeler to the hotel from the bus station costs Rs 150.

Buses leave regularly for most destinations from, or near, the bus station. There are CTB buses to Tangalla (Rs 28), Matara (Rs 44) and Ratnapura (Rs 43); the intercity buses cost about twice as much. Colombo intercity buses leave every 30 minutes (Rs 180).

UDA WALAWE NATIONAL PARK

With herds of elephants, wild buffalo, sambar deer and leopards, Uda Walawe is the Sri Lankan national park that best rivals the savanna reserves of Africa. The park's 30,821 hectares centre on the large Uda Walawe Reservoir, fed by the Walawe Ganga.

The entrance to the **park** (per person US\$12, plus tracker per vehicle Rs 600; 🕒 6.30am-6.30pm) is 12km from the Ratnapura–Hambantota road turn-off, and 21km from Embilipitiya. Although most people prefer to take a tour organised by their guesthouse or hotel, if you select a 4WD from one of the many gathered outside the gate, you can expect to pay Rs 1500 for a half-day for up to eight people with driver. Last tickets are usually sold at about 5pm.

Apart from stands of teak near the river, there's little forest in the park. The tall *pohon* grass, which grows in place of the forest, can make wildlife-watching difficult, except during dry months.

This is one of the best places in Sri Lanka to see elephants – there are about 500 in the park in herds of up to 100. There's an elephant-proof fence around the perimeter of the park, preventing elephants from getting out and cattle from getting in. The best time to observe elephant herds is from 6.30am to 10am and again from 4pm to 6.30pm; they're usually near water.

Other creatures that call Uda Walawe home are sambar deer, wild buffaloes (their numbers boosted by domesticated buffaloes), mongooses, bandicoots, foxes, water monitor lizards, crocodiles, sloth bears and the occasional leopard. There are 30 varieties of snake and a wealth of birdlife; northern migrants join the residents between November and April.

A reasonably good little lodge with simple rooms and spacious grounds, **Walawa Park View Hotel** (☎ 047-223 3312; Tanamalwila Rd; r with/without air-con Rs 1400/1000; ♿) is about 8km from the park on the Embilipitiya road. A 4WD safari costs a reasonable Rs 1500 per half-day.

Walawa Safari Village (☎ 047-223 3201; kinjou@dialogsl.net; RB Canal Rd; s/d US\$15/18, with air-con US\$24/28, all incl breakfast; ♿) is located 3km south of a small junction on the road from Embilipitiya to Uda Walawe – you'll see the sign – and 10km from the park entrance. The clean and basic rooms come in a garden setting. Trips to the park from here also cost Rs 1200 per half-day.

The park has four bungalows and three camp sites along the reservoir and the Walawa Ganga. You must prebook with the **Department of Wildlife Conservation** (Map pp84-5; ☎ 011-269 4241; www.dwlc.lk; 18 Gregory's Rd, Col 7)

in Colombo. The bungalows each contain 10 beds; the charge is US\$24 per person per day, plus the US\$12 park entry, US\$2 per group for linen hire and a US\$30 per group service charge. You must bring all of your own dry rations and kerosene. Camp sites cost US\$6 per site per day, plus a US\$6 service charge per trip. Students and children aged between six and 12 years of age pay half-price (kiddies under six are free).

If you're staying at Embilipitiya and wish to organise a tour at the park, catch a bus heading to Tanamalwila (CTB/intercity express Rs 37/80) and ask to be dropped at the gate to the park.

SINHARAJA FOREST RESERVE

The last major undisturbed area of rainforest in Sri Lanka, this forest reserve occupies a broad ridge at the heart of the island's wet zone. On most days the forest conjures copious rain-clouds that replenish its deep soils and balance water resources for much of southwestern Sri Lanka. Recognising its importance to the island's ecosystem, Unesco declared the reserve a World Heritage Site in 1989.

Sinharaja (Lion King) is bordered by rivers: the Koskulana Ganga in the north and the Gin Ganga in the south. An old foot track that goes past the Beverley Estate marks the eastern border, close to the highest peak in the forest, Hinipitigala (1171m). Towards the west the land decreases in elevation.

The reserve comprises 18,899 hectares of natural and modified forest, measuring about 21km east to west and 3.7km north to south. It was once a royal reserve, and some colonial records refer to it as Rajasinghe Forest. It may have been the last redoubt of the Sri Lankan lion.

In 1840 the forest became British crown land and from that time efforts were made to preserve at least some of it. However, in 1971 loggers moved in and began what was called selective logging. The logged native hardwoods were replaced with mahogany (which does not occur naturally here), logging roads and trails snaked into the forest, and a wood-chip mill was built. Conservationists lobbied hard for an end to the destruction. In 1977 the government called a halt to all logging; the machinery was dismantled and taken out of the forest, the roads gradually grew over and Sinharaja was saved. Much of the rest

of Sri Lanka's rainforest stands on mountain ridges within a 20km radius of the forest.

There are 22 villages around the forest, and locals are permitted to enter the area to tap palms to make jaggery (a hard brown sweet) and treacle, and to collect dead wood and leaves for fuel and construction. Medicinal plants are collected during specific seasons. Rattan collection is of more concern, as the demand for cane is high. Sinharaja attracts illegal gem miners too, whose abandoned open pits pose a danger to humans and animals and cause erosion. There is also some poaching of wild animals.

Information

Tickets (adult/child Rs 575/290, plus compulsory guide Rs 300) are sold at the main Forest Department office at Kudawa; they're also sold at Deodawa, 5km from Deniyaya on the Matara road. The department offers basic dormlike accommodation.

There are several park access points, but the most relevant to travellers are those via Kudawa in the northwest and via Mederapitiya (reached from Deniyaya) in the southeast.

The drier months (August and September, and January to early April) are the best times to visit the reserve. Hinipitigala stands for most of the year under a constant drizzle, if not an outright downpour, as Sinharaja receives between 3500mm and 5000mm of rain annually, with a minimum of 50mm in even the driest months. There's little seasonal variation in the temperature, which averages about 24°C inside the forest, with humidity at about 87%.

Sights & Activities

WILDLIFE

Sinharaja has a wild profusion of flora, which is still being studied. The canopy trees reach heights of up to 45m, with the next layer down topping 30m. Nearly all the subcanopy trees found here are rare or endangered. More than 65% of the 217 types of trees and woody climbers endemic to Sri Lanka's rainforest are found in Sinharaja.

The largest carnivore here is the leopard. Its presence can usually be gauged only by droppings and tracks, as it is seldom seen. Even rarer are rusty spotted cats and fishing cats. Sambar, barking deer and wild boar can be found on the forest floor. Groups

of 10 to 14 purple-faced langurs are fairly common. There are three kinds of squirrel: the flame-striped jungle squirrel, the dusky-striped jungle squirrel and the western giant squirrel. Porcupines and pangolins waddle around the forest floor, mostly unseen. Civets and mongooses are nocturnal, though you may glimpse the occasional mongoose darting through the foliage during the day. Six species of bat have been recorded here.

There are 45 species of reptiles here, 21 of them endemic. Venomous snakes include the green pit viper (which inhabits trees), the hump-nosed viper, and the krait, which lives on the forest floor. One of the most frequently found amphibians is the wrinkled frog, whose croaking is often heard at night.

There is a wealth of birdlife: 147 species have been recorded, with 18 of Sri Lanka's 20 endemic species seen here.

Sinharaja has leeches in abundance. It would be most unusual to walk through the forest and not attract one or more of these unpleasant little critters. In colonial times the British, Dutch and Portuguese armies rated leeches as their worst enemy when they tried to conquer the hinterland (which was then much more forested), and one British writer claimed leeches caused more casualties than all the other animals put together. These days you needn't suffer as much because all guides carry antileech preparations that can be applied to the extremities.

DENIYAYA & AROUND

Kotapola, 6km south of Deniyaya, has a superb early-17th-century **rock temple**. It's well worth the climb. The **Kiruwananaganga Falls**, some of the largest in Sri Lanka (60m high and up to 60m wide), are 5km east of Kotapola on the road towards Urubokka. The **Kolawenigama Temple**, 3km from Pallegama (which is 3km from Deniyaya), is of modest proportions but has a unique structure that resembles Kandy's Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic. It was built by King Buwanekabahu VII in recognition of the protection given to the tooth relic by the villagers. The shrine has Kandyan-style frescoes.

Sleeping & Eating

It's more convenient to visit the reserve from Deniyaya if you don't have your own wheels, although Kudawa has better accommodation options. **Sena Serasinghe** (☎ 071 200727), a

local guide, is a good source of information on tours of Sinharaja and can help arrange local bed-and-breakfast accommodation.

DENIYAYA

Sinharaja Rest (☎ 041-227 3368; fax 227 3368; Temple Rd; s/d Rs 600/900) Staying here saves a lot of hassle as you can arrange a rainforest walk with Palitha Ratnayaka, a certified guide who is very knowledgeable about the forest. The six rooms at his home are fairly basic, but there's good home cooking and loads of information on Sinharaja. A trip to Sinharaja with Palitha costs Rs 600 per person per day, plus the entry fee and a Rs 800 per person 4WD ride up to Mederapitiya. Nonguests can take his tours, too.

Deniyaya Rest House (☎ 041-227 3600; r Rs 850) Like most rest houses in Deniyaya, this place has a plum position to check out the town's great views; in this case, overlooking the town and the countryside. The large, quaint rooms are in fair condition, if a bit dimly lit, and there's a bar and restaurant on the premises. Staff arrange forest tours through Sinharaja Rest.

Sathmala Ella Rest (☎ 041-227 3481; Pallegama; r Rs 1000-1200) This is a handsome middle-class home in a village about 3.5km from Deniyaya. Run by a friendly family, the guesthouse has 10 modern rooms with private bathrooms; hot water adds Rs 200 to the room price. The staff can arrange tours into the forest for Rs 600 per person, plus entry fees and Rs 800 per group for transport. There's a waterfall about 2km away. A three-wheeler from Deniyaya should cost Rs 150.

KUDAWA

Martin Wijesinghe's (Forest View; r Rs 600) Right on the park's boundary near Kudawa, this is a basic but congenial place. It's about 4km from the ticket office. You can contact Martin by leaving a phone message at the Weddagala post office (☎ 045-222 5528). Martin is an expert on Sinharaja, having worked as a ranger here for years, and is a mine of information. You can get a good rice and curry meal here – vegetarian, as there's no fridge – but if you are coming with your own car it would be a courtesy to bring your own food, which the family will cook for you.

Blue Maggie (☎ 045-250 9391; 115 Pirivena Rd; r Rs 600) This relatively new lodge stands close to the park offices where the road ends.

As at Martin Wijesinghe's, rooms are basic but comfortable. Sri Lankan meals here are excellent.

Singraj Rest (☎ 045-225 5201; Koswatta; r Rs 1500) At Koswatta, 3km from Kalawana, this is a country hotel with seven rooms, a restaurant and a bar – the latter is just about the only entertainment in these parts. The rooms are quite decent, though there's cold water only. Staff can arrange taxis to Sinharaja for Rs 1800 per day. A three-wheeler here from Kalawana costs about Rs 200.

Boulder Garden (☎ 045-225 5812; www.bouldergarden.com; Sinharaja Rd, Koswatta; s/d US\$213/252; 🚰) This brilliantly designed ecoresort offers 10 rustic suites – two of them in actual caves – built among boulders and streams. The staff run bird-watching tours and hiking trips around 10 hectares of rainforest. Meals are available in a beautiful garden restaurant.

The Forest Department at Kudawa has some bungalows with fairly basic accommodation. Contact the **Forest Department HQ** (☎ 011-286 6633; forest@slt.lk; 82 Rajamalwate Rd, Bataramulla), in Colombo, for information.

It is far simpler and cheaper to stay with one of the guides based at Kudawa. Sunil Handuwila is one guide who offers accommodation; you can stay at his house (one spare room) for Rs 400 per night.

Getting There & Away BUS

From Ratnapura to Deniyaya (CTB Rs 80) there are buses roughly every hour from 6.45am until the afternoon. There are also several buses to/from Galle (CTB Rs 80), although you can always catch one of the more frequent buses to Akuressa (Rs 21 from Deniyaya) and change there.

There's an intercity express bus to and from Colombo (Rs 200, 5½ hours); if you want a CTB bus you're better off going to Akuressa or Pelmadulla and changing. For Ella and Nuwara Eliya you must catch a bus to Pelmadulla and change there.

To reach Kalawana you can take a bus from Ratnapura (Rs 60 for an express). For Kudawa you can get a bus all the way from Colombo to Weddagala (4km before Kudawa, Rs 190), and then change in Weddagala to a Kudawa-bound bus.

Wherever you start, try to get moving as early as you can because the roads are often damaged by flooding.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

If you have a car, the road through Hayes Tea Estate, north of Deniyaya en route to Madampe and Balangoda (for Belihul Oya, Haputale or Ratnapura), is very scenic.

SINHARAJA TO RATNAPURA

The A17 goes north from Deniyaya and passes through **Rakwana**. The view from above the town gives a sweeping panorama across the plains of Uda Walawe National Park, with the escarpment of the Peak Wilderness Sanctuary to the north.

The best place to stay is the **Rakwana Rest House** (☎ 045-224 6299; r Rs 1050), a British-era bungalow with four pleasant rooms, a fine veranda, dining and drinks.

From Rakwana the road reaches a southern spur of the Hill (and tea) Country before hitting the important junction town of Pelmadulla, located between Ratnapura and Haputale.

There are around four buses per day between Rakwana and Ratnapura (Rs 27, two hours), and four between Rakwana and Deniyaya (Rs 48, 3½ hours).

RATNAPURA

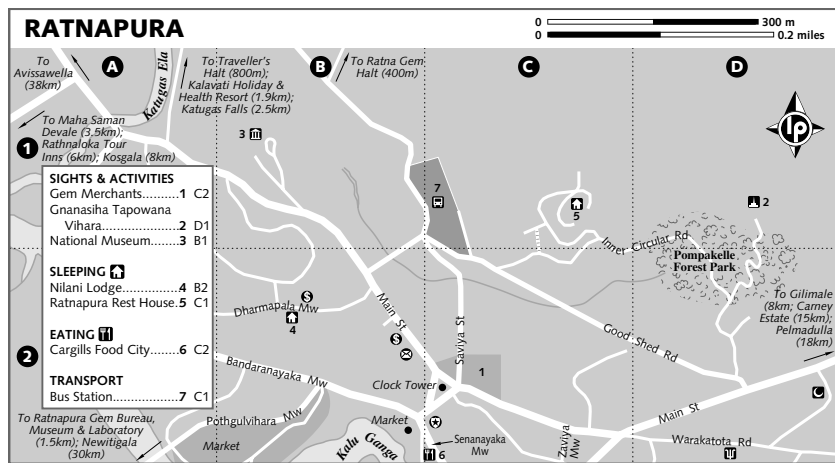
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Sitting near the centre of a number of richly watered valleys between Adam's Peak and Sinharaja Forest Reserve, busy Ratnapura ('City of Gems' in Sanskrit) is famous as a trade hub for the area's ancient wealth of gemstones. The region's wet and humid climate encourages the formation of river beds, which are in turn the perfect environment for gemstones to develop.

The rural scenery surrounding the town is often underappreciated – paddy fields cloak the valley floors, while rubber trees and tea bushes grow on the hills. Many villagers keep old Sinhalese traditions, such as leaving candles outside the front door at dusk to prevent evil spirits from entering.

Ratnapura was the traditional start of the toughest pilgrimages up to Adam's Peak. In clear weather it can be the best place for appreciating the full height of the sacred mountain, since the Hatton side – now the preferred starting point – sits at a higher elevation.

The attractive road route from Ratnapura to Haputale skirts the southern edge of the Hill Country before ascending into the hills.



Sights

The town's **National Museum** (☎ 222 2451; adult/child Rs 50/25; 🕒 9am-5pm Sat-Wed) displays the fossilised remains of various animals (including rhinos and elephants) discovered in gem pits. There are items of local culture as well, including gems, fabrics and jewellery.

There are several 'gem museums', which contain modest displays on gem lore along with less than modest showrooms where you're encouraged to purchase 'local' gems at 'local' prices. One place with relatively low sales pressure is **Ratnapura Gem Bureau, Museum & Laboratory** (☎ 222 2469; Pothgulvihara Mawatha, Getangama; admission free; 🕒 9am-4pm). There's a good display of local minerals and gems, as well as information on mining and polishing. A return three-wheeler trip from the centre of town should cost about Rs 250 (including waiting time).

The **Maha Saman Devala**, 4km west of the city, is an architectural treasure well worth visiting. Perched on a small hill, it boasts a handsome series of broad courtyards and multiroofed whitewashed pavilions in the Kandyan style. Originally built in the 13th century, the temple was destroyed by the Portuguese and then rebuilt during Dutch colonial times. The main sanctuary is dedicated to Saman, while side shrines honour the Buddha and Pattini. The major festival is a *perahera* on *Esala poya* (July/August); it's not as well known as the Kandy Esala Perahera, with which it coincides. You can take a three-wheeler from the town centre

for about Rs 80; no need to have the driver wait as there are usually three-wheelers at the temple.

The outskirts of town are dotted with **gem mines** and, although none cater to tourists per se, your guesthouse should be able to organise a visit. You can also observe **gem merchants** selling their wares along Saviya St northeast of the clock tower. The biggest local gem market, however, convenes most mornings (*poya* days being an exception) in **Newitigala**, a 40-minute drive away (hiring a taxi for half a day should cost around Rs 1500). Both markets usually run out of steam by 3pm.

There's a good-sized replica of the **Aukana Buddha** at the Gnanasiha Tapowana Vihara, on top of a hill overlooking the town; you can walk to it through Pompakelle Forest Park. There are some **caves** at Kosgala, about 8km from town.

You can also use Ratnapura as a base for a day trip to Sinharaja Forest Reserve. Expect to pay around Rs 4500 for up to four people. You'll also be offered day trips to Uda Walawe National Park but it's really too long a journey to do in a day.

Activities

GEMOLOGY

Ratna Gem Halt (☎ 222 3745; www.ratnapura-online.com; 153/5 Outer Circular Rd; courses per day Rs 2000) offers a five-day basic gemology course that teaches students skills, including how to cut and polish gemstones.

GEMS

In Ratnapura, gems are still found by ancient methods. Gem miners look for seams of *illama*, a gravel-bearing stratum likely to hold gemstones. It's usually found in the upper reaches of newly buried river beds, as the gems are heavier than gravel so aren't carried to the lower reaches of rivers. On the Colombo-Ratnapura road you'll see countless gem-mining operations in paddy fields beside the road, but there are many more off in the hills and fields around Ratnapura. Different areas have different specialities – villages sometimes have weekly gem markets.

Gem mining is a cooperative effort, requiring men to dig out the *illama*, work the pump and wash the muddy gravel as well as an expert to search through the pebbles. If a stone is found, the profit is divided between all the members of the coop, from the person who supplies the finances to the one up to his neck in mud and water. Children are sometimes sent down the shafts, which can be vertical or horizontal, depending on which way the *illama* runs.

Types of Gems

Every other person you meet in Ratnapura's streets is likely to whisper that they have an unbelievable bargain wrapped up in their pocket. If you're no expert on gemstones the bargain will be on their part, not yours. Synthetic stones are very hard to spot, even for experts.

It's a peculiarity of Sri Lankan gemming that a variety of stones is almost always found in the same pit. A stone's value depends on a number of factors, including rarity, hardness and beauty. Gems are still cut and polished by hand, although modern methods are also coming into use. Some stones are cut and faceted (*en cabochon*), while others are simply polished. The division between precious and semiprecious stones is purely arbitrary – there is no clear definition of what makes one stone a precious stone and another only semiprecious. Some of the more popular types of stone are listed here.

Corundrums are a group that includes sapphires and rubies, both precious stones and second only to the diamond in hardness. The best and most valuable rubies are red, but these are not found in Sri Lanka in commercial quantities. You will, however, see pink rubies, which are also correctly called pink sapphires. Rubies and sapphires are the same type of stone, with gradations of colour depending on the precise proportions of the chemicals in their make-up. Star rubies and star sapphires are a feature of the Ratnapura gem industry. The stones are comparatively dull, but under light a starburst appears within the gem. Other sapphires can be yellow, orange, white and, most valuably, blue. Sri Lanka has produced three of the world's largest blue sapphires, including the Star of India (displayed at the New York Museum of Natural History). Beware of pink or blue spinels being passed off as sapphires. You can often find corundrums containing 'silk': minute inclusions that give the stone a star effect, particularly with a single light source.

Cat's-eyes and alexandrite are the best-known gems in the **chrysoberyl** group. Cat's-eyes, with their catlike ray known as chatoyancy, vary from green through a honey colour to brown; look for translucence and the clarity and glow of the single ray. Alexandrite is valued for its colour change under natural and artificial light. One rip-off to watch for is tourmalines, which are far less valuable, being sold as cat's-eyes.

The best-known stone in the **beryl** group, the emerald, is not found in Sri Lanka. Aquamarine is found here, and is quite reasonably priced since it is not as hard or lustrous as other stones.

The appearance of a **zircon** can approach that of a diamond, although it is a comparatively soft stone. Zircon comes in a variety of colours, from yellow through orange to brown and green.

Quartz varies from transparent to opaque, and is usually quite well priced. Quartz also varies widely in colour, from purple amethyst to brown smoky quartz, right through to yellow or orange citrine.

The moonstone (**feldspar**), is Sri Lanka's special gem. Usually a smooth, grey colour, it can also be found with a slight shade of blue, although this colouring is rarer.

Among the other precious stones, **spinel**s are fairly common but are also quite hard and rather attractive. They come in a variety of colours and can be transparent or opaque. **Garnets** are a sort of poor person's ruby; light-brown garnets are often used in local rings. **Topaz** isn't found in Sri Lanka – if someone offers it to you it'll probably be quartz.

WALKING

One of the oldest routes up Adam's Peak once started at the Maha Saman Devale with the worship of Saman, the patron deity of the trek up the holy mountain. Peak-baggers and pilgrims today pick up the Gilimalai pilgrimage route from the roadhead at Carney Estate, 15km or one hour away from Ratnapura by bus. It takes six to eight hours to reach the top of the peak, and five to seven hours to descend. Leeches are a particular menace on this trail. Before the road was built, the village of **Gilimalai** ('Swallowed Mountain' – there's no view from here) was the first *ambalama* on the journey. The next stop was at **Pallebadole** (elevation 600m), a hill village with a dagoba and pilgrims' lodgings. Further uphill is **Nilihela**, a gorge; pilgrims tell a story of a woman named Nili who tried to save her child from falling over the edge, but fell herself. Pilgrims pause to call out her name, and the eerie echoes send out her answer, ever more faintly. The trail winds up to Diyabetma on the saddle of a ridge, then up the steep final ascent to the footprint on the summit.

Much closer to town there are less arduous walks than to Adam's Peak. Three kilometres north of town are the 6m-high **Katugas Falls**, which are quite pleasant but are crowded on Sundays and public holidays. The lush **Pompakelle Forest Park** lies behind Ratnapura Rest House, and is laced with walking trails through this lush forest.

Sleeping & Eating

Ratnapura Rest House (☎ 222 2299; udarest@stlnet.lk; r incl breakfast Rs 3300) This rest house has the best site in town, right on top of the hill that dominates Ratnapura. The colonial-style rooms are large and bare. Still, the place has heaps of charm with its spacious veranda, bar and grassy garden.

Ratna Gem Halt (☎ 222 3745; www.ratnapura-online.com; 153/5 Outer Circular Rd, r Rs 550-1500) This family-run, seven-room guesthouse north of town wins plaudits for its hospitality, good Sri Lankan food and fine views. The rooms are priced according to which floor they're on – the higher the room the more expensive it is. It's run by a gem dealer, who naturally also has a gem showroom.

Travellers Halt (☎ 222 3092; 30 Outer Circular Rd; r Rs 700-900, with air-con Rs 1200; ☎) Just over 1km

out of town in the direction of Polhengoda Village, this has nine rooms, two with air-con. The rooms are clean and pleasant and management is keen to arrange tours. A three-wheeler from the bus station should cost Rs 70.

Nilani Lodge (☎ 222 2170; hashani@sltnet.lk; 21 Dharmapala Mawatha; s/d Rs 1300/1500, with air-con Rs 1600/1800; ☎) This 1970s-era concrete three-storey building has 10 clean, comfy rooms with hot water. The management seems very friendly.

Kalavati Holiday & Health Resort (☎ 222 2465; fax 222 3657; Polhengoda Village; r with/without air-con Rs 2000/1300; ☎) An Ayurvedic centre 2.5km from the Ratnapura bus station, Kalavati boasts an extensive herb garden and is kitted out with antique furniture. One of the treatments at the Ayurvedic centres is 'gem therapy'. The rooms are basic and could use some treatment themselves, but the gardens help make it a pleasant place to stay. The restaurant has quite an extensive menu, and good food. A three-wheeler from the bus station costs about Rs 100 to 150.

Rathnaloka Tour Inns (☎ 222 2455; ratnaloka@eureka.lk; Kosgala/Kahangama; r standard/deluxe US\$32/45; ☎) This midrange place 6km from town was built by a gem magnate. Like many of the buildings around town funded by gem wealth, it strives to make a statement, but there's a large garden, an inviting pool, attentive service and a good restaurant. A taxi from Ratnapura should cost Rs 600, a three-wheeler half as much.

There are several eateries around Main St that serve reasonable rice and curry for low prices. There's also a Cargills Food City.

Getting There & Away

Any bus coming from Colombo (CTB/intercity express Rs 46/100, four hours) is likely to be jam-packed. For Hatton or Nuwara Eliya you'll have to catch a bus to Avissawella (Rs 19) and then change there. If you're going to Haputale, Ella and Badulla, you'll probably first have to catch a bus to Balangoda (Rs 28). The CTB bus to Embilipitiya (for Uda Walawe National Park) costs Rs 43. To get to Galle you must change at Matara (Rs 100, 4½ hours). There are also direct buses to and from Kandy (Rs 67, six hours).

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