Sri Lanka, officially the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, is a country on the southern coast of the Indian Subcontinent. Known until 1972 as Ceylon, Sri Lanka is an island surrounded by the Indian Ocean. It is a part of South Asia. It is located in the path of major sea routes and in ancient times too it was an important stop on the ‘Silk Route’.

Sri Lanka has been the centre of Buddhism and culture from ancient times. The Sinhalaese community forms the majority of the population and Tamils the largest ethnic minority. Other communities include Muslims, Burghers, Malays and the aboriginal Adi Vaasi (Veddah) people.

Sri Lanka is a republic and a unitary state governed by a Presidential system.

The country is famous for tea, rubber and coconut. Sri Lankan tea is acclaimed the world’s best. Coffee, cinnamon, cardamom and cloves are also produced as export crops. Rich in mineral resources, Sri Lanka is a major copper exporting country. Sri Lanka is a major exporter of precious and semi-precious stones.

The country has one of the longest and colorful histories of over 3000 years. The rich culture can be attributed to its ethnic diversity.

Within the boundaries of this one small island you find more than 1000 miles of sunny, palm fringed beaches, breathtaking scenery up in the hills covered with lush green tea plantations, cascading waterfalls, wonderful architecture of the ancient past, brooding jungles and wild life and the fascinating art and culture.

Sri Lanka is a founding member of SAARC and a member of the United Nations, Commonwealth of Nations, OIC and Non Alignment Movement.

Anuradhapura

This 5th Century Capital of Sri Lanka has been a well known city even before the advent of Buddhism. Anuradhapura served as the Capital of the country for nearly 1400 years. Here it is found the largest number of ancient monuments of the Sinhala civilization. Taking pride of place is the Sri Maha Bodhi tree over 2000 years old (the oldest historically documented tree in the world) and a branch of the very tree under which Buddha attained Buddha hood and the world famous ‘Sri Maha’ Buddha Statue. Marvels of ancient architecture, sculpture, art and craft and irrigation are also evidenced everywhere.

Polonnaruwa

After the decline of Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa became the Capital of Sri Lanka during the period 10th to 12th Century A.D. The greatness of the ancient people is amply demonstrated by the huge man-made reservoirs, verdant island seas like Parakrama Samudra. The monuments of this city mainly date from the reign of King Parakramabahu the Great. The Gal Vihara complex and the Tivanka Image House best known for its Buddhist frescoes are the most visited places.

Sigiriya

UNESCO declared World heritage Site. The so called ‘Fortress in the Sky’ built by King Kassapa in the 5th century A.D was an impregnable retreat of steps and stairway with a palace at the summit. Halfway up this rock are the world famous frescoes of the ‘Heavenly Maidens of Sigiriya’ remains of a gallery of frescoes.

Dambulla

The retreat chosen by King Vatta Gamini Abyaya when he was driven away from Anuradhapura by the Tamils in the 1st Century. This maze of rock and the caves therein were turned into a temple later by the same king. Some of the frescoes in these caves are over 2000 years old. There is also a 47 ft long recumbent figure of Buddha carved out of rock.

Kandy

115 Kms (72 miles) from Colombo. Elevation 1,600 ft. (488 metres) above mean sea level. Kandy the beautiful hill Capital of Sri Lanka and is a repository of Sinhala culture having traditions dating back to the original Sinhala civilization. It conjures visions of storied past and ancient splendor, legend, folklore and traditions lovingly kept alive for centuries. This seat of kandyans kings from 14th Century was also the last stronghold of Sinhala Kings which was finally ceded to the British in 1815. Kandy’s focal point is the Dalada Maligawa (Temple of the Sacred tooth relic of the Buddha) This is also the venue of the Esala Perahera (pageant) when the relic of the relic casket is paraded along the streets accompanied by caparisoned elephants, colourfully costumed dancers and drummers. Rare paintings, frescoes, wood and stone carvings are the rewards to the visitors from the Dalada maligawa. Temple of Asigiriya and Mahawatte chapters, the four devala (shrines) and the Museum. Embekka Devale, Lankathilake, Gadaladeniya around Kandy are the other places of interest.

Royal botanical gardens, Peradeniya was a pleasure garden for the queen of King Wickramabahu the 3rd (14th Century). It covers an area of approximately 60 hectares (147acres) cored by the river Mahbowli. The garden is well known for its variety of plants (over 4000 species), the Orchid House, palm and pine avenues and the spice garden.

Nuwara Eliya

Elevation 6,300 above mean sea level. It is home of finest tea. The drive through the vast ‘teaescapes’, the sight of the tea plucking women and the factories in sharp contrast to the neatly trimmed acres of green would be most fascinating. A whole English countryside has almost been transplanted here. Most of the houses, in styles are similar to that of Georgian and Queen Anne. The 18 hole golf course is one of the most picturesque and challenge to many a champion. The worlds End a 90 degree vertical drop, Haggala botanical gardens overlooking the conch shell shaped mountain range, Sita Eliya are places worth visiting.

Galle

Galle (116 Km 72 Mls from Colombo) was the main seaport of the island before Colombo port was developed. Its main attraction is the Fort built by the Portuguese in 1588 and subsequently expanded and developed by the Dutch and the British, which has now been declared a World Heritage Site. This 90 acre fort shows no signs of the original Portuguese Fortress. Most of the buildings are of the Dutch period. The oldest building in the fort built around 1658 is the National Museum building. The Dutch Reform Church built in 1752 is an excellent state of preservation. Present Distrtit Secretariat is housed in the old Dutch Hospital building. An ingenious drainage curr waste water disposal system had been in use with underground sewers that were flushed twice a day with rising tide of the sea.

There are many places of tourist interest in and around Galle. Famous Hikkaduwa Tourist Resort, Unawatuna a beautiful stretch of beach, Rumasala are some of those places.

Jaffna

Jaffna, the land of the palm trees, the administrative head quarters of the Jaffna District and the main city in the North has been an integral part of Sri Lankan political History. The city has a rich cultural heritage and a history of colonial influence of Portuguese, Dutch and the British. Dieth island is 35 km from Jaffna named after the famous Dutch city, Jaffna Fort Originally built by Portuguese and later rebuilt and expanded by the Dutch occupies an area of about 49 acres.

Nagadeppe on Nainativu island reached by ferry, is a famous Buddhist temple.

Trincomalee

Known as Trinco to locals, it has one of the world’s best natural harbours. Following settlement by the Portuguese and the Dutch, the British colonized Ceylon. British forces took residency in 1940s at Lars Hill a high ground with a spectacular view of the harbour. Present day Welcombe Hotel was their Head office. Trinco has a historical Fort. The Swami Rock with a straight drop of 130 metres is known locally as the ‘Lovers Leap’ due to a historic legend that a Dutch officer’s daughter threw herself down after watching her fiance desert her by sea. At the peak of this rock stands the holy site of Koneswaran Temple.