

Leopards & wildlife safari

A 7 nights & 8 days Leopards & wildlife safari with 6 exciting game drives to Yala National Park, Sri Lanka's premier national park with interpretative natural history guiding by Amila Salgado.



Asian Elephant

Toque Macaque

Hanuman Langur

Leopard

Itinerary in brief

Day 1 Arrive/ Katunayake

Day 2 Katunayake / Yala (5 nights).

Day 3 Yala National Park (2 game drives).

Day 4 Yala National Park (2 game drives).

Day 5 Yala National Park (1 game drive & leisure).

Day 6 Yala National Park (1 game drive & leisure).

Day 7 Yala / Katunayake.

Day 8 Departure.

Introduction.

Yala National Park is the premier park for Leopards & wildlife in Sri Lanka and the centre of this exciting holiday. We visit Block 1 of the Yala National Park, which covers an extent of 141 sq.km. The park comprise of a wide range of habitats such as scrub jungle, monsoon forests, inland fresh water bodies, mudflats, open grassy plains, rock outcrops, riverine forests, mangroves, sand dunes bordering the sea and a good network of roads to explore all these and their inhabitants.

Our prime focus of this holiday is seeing its fabled Leopards, which number close to 40 individuals making this probably the park with the highest Leopard density in the world. Leopard is the no. 1 big cat in Sri Lanka which makes it 'bolder' than in Africa and India where they have to compete with several other big cats thus forcing them to be increasingly nocturnal & secretive. Thanks to the advantages of being the apex predator & protection afforded to its habitats & prey species in Yala, Leopards can be seen during the daytime more often compared to other areas of its range. This fact and their high density make Yala National Park probably one of the best places to see Leopards in the world.

We visit the park by means of a comfortable safari jeep driven by a sharp-eyed driver. On days when we make 2 game drives, we will return to our game lodge after the morning's safari to rest and 'refuel' before revisiting in the afternoon. Each fresh game drive to Yala National Park entails a fresh entry ticket and 6 visits are calculated in this way. On each visit we will be exploring the park for about 3 hours.



I will be providing interpretative natural history guiding, which is a key feature of this high-end wildlife holiday. Also this holiday is conducted even for 1 person and the limited to a maximum of 6 participants. I believe that small group size always have a host of benefits. Foremost among these is it will enable us to travel in one jeep which will ensure ‘undivided’ attention of myself, the guide. It will also provide better opportunity for everybody to see what has been spotted and share each other’s sightings.

With 6 exhilarating game drives to the Yala National Park we stand a very good chance to see this magnificent big cat in their home ranges. It is often our experience that with a proper ‘game plan’ we are able to accomplish our goals and sometimes surpass them! Amila will work hard towards this ultimate goal together with the local jeep drivers & trackers combining all their expertise. With proper team work we should be in business by about the 3rd game drive at least! However, in the unlikely event that we fail to see Leopard during our 6 game drives to Yala, a 7th will be offered on complementary basis!



Malabar Pied Hornbill



Tissamaharama



Yala Village Hotel



Leopard cub

Detailed itinerary

We will pick you up from the International Airport in Katunayake (35 km north of Colombo) and transfer you to Taj Airport Garden Hotel just 10 minutes away to rest after a long flight. A long ground transfer is in prospect on the next day to reach the wilderness expanse of Yala in south-east Sri Lanka, our destination for 5 nights.

Our accommodation at Yala is the luxurious Yala Village Hotel which is fringed by the turquoise Indian Ocean set in a well-wooded plain in the buffer zone of Yala Park and we hope to reach it in the afternoon after several comfort stops en route. Today we will take the evening easy to sample the pool, enjoy a beach combing walk or simply savour the vista from a vantage strategically close to the bar. Over the next 4 days we will make 6 exciting visits to Yala National Park with Amila Salgado your Natural History Tour Leader.

Our pursuit for Leopards will also yield many of Yala’s sought-after big game and foremost among these is Sloth Bear and Elephant. The Sloth Bear is the only Bear species recorded in Sri Lanka and we will look for this opportunist in several of its known sites. Elephants are found in considerable numbers in the Yala Park and surrounding areas and we should have little difficulty in seeing these majestic herbivores which may include tusked. Some of the other mammal highlights may include Spotted Deer (No1 prey species of the Leopards), Wild Boar, Sambar Deer, Wild Buffalo, Hanuman Langur, Toque Macaque & Ruddy Mongoose. The park also has a good population of Mugger crocodiles and we should have little difficulty in seeing some very big ones. Yala is also home for a great diversity of birds and some of the highlights may include Sri Lanka Junglefowl, Black-necked Stork & Malabar Pied Hornbill. We could also visit Tissamaharama (with no extra cost) one



afternoon for a leisurely stroll along on the banks of ancient irrigation tanks for general natural history.

On day 7 we will make farewell to Yala and its Leopards and head back to our transit hotel in Katunayake before the departure transfer to the airport on the same night or following day for departure.

Accommodation on arrival & just before departure:

Taj Airport Garden Hotel - This 5 star transit hotel situated just 10 minutes from the Bandaranaiyake International Airport is our preferred retreat after a long flight. Standard rooms provide satellite television, safety lockers, e-mail and internet connections, 24 hour room service, a mini bar and in-house & laundry facilities. The hotel offers a 24 hour Coffee Shop, business centre & 2 restaurants which include a specialty Chinese one. The hotel gardens and a small wetland adjoining offers decent birding.

Accommodation at Yala:

Yala Village Hotel is bordered by the turquoise Indian Ocean & forested coastal plains and is our luxurious base to explore Yala. The hotel offers sixty one chalets spread over 10 acres of well wooded area with each featuring an animal design element in its interior décor. The air-conditioned chalets come with a spacious bathroom, a private verandah, satellite TV, well stocked mini bar, telephone/IDD, tea and coffee making facilities and hair dryer. The hotel also has facilities such as laundry, babysitting, safe deposits, souvenir shop and internet/email. The restaurant offers a good choice of eastern and western cuisine. The roof top bar & observation deck provide great views of the Indian Ocean and the surrounding well wooded landscape dotted by rock outcrops that are at times visited by Leopard for prime time viewing over cocktails.

Tour Leader – Amila Salgado

I have led many tours to Yala and have been fortunate to find the Leopard in several one off game drives for my clients. I approach each safari with a clear game plan works in coordination with the jeeps drivers and the local tracker to produce results. I carry my telescope in the jeep to assist better viewing which is required when 'subjects' do not cooperate. I ensure a fun-filled Leopard & big game experience.

For rates and details e-mail: amila@birdwingnature.com or phone 0094-777-591155

Website: www.birdwingnature.com

For latest reports visit my blog: <http://gallicissa.blogspot.com>

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