

Press Release - Sri Lanka in 60 Hits

Find out why the original island Vedda people think we are square; get buried in the sands of time in Jaffna; explore mythical caves with ancient underground chamber paintings and secret tunnels. Pimp up your vehicle with tuk-tuk tack at the infamous Pettah market in Colombo, join the millions of pilgrims at the yearly Nallur festival in July/August, get racy and seek your fortune in April at Nuwara Eliya's Ladies Day, equivalent of Ascot. Put on your dancing shoes and be drummed out in Hikkaduwa, have your demons removed in the ancient city of Matara, play cricket like Sri Lankan captain Sangakkara with bats made from jungle timber - but don't whatever you do get cursed by the cynomolgus bird.

Ditch your usual guidebook and grab a copy of *60 Hits*, but be warned – this is travel at its most addictive. We guarantee after you've read this book, you'll be straight on a plane, or maybe you'll never even leave. These phenomenal 250 pages of wicked copy, impish ideas, thought-provoking travel itineraries, content at its most bizarre and roguish pictures that are unique to the series will take you on a journey to places, events and festivals which will give you a real insight into what's actually happening in a country.

Meet the tuk-tuk drivers in Colombo who really know how to take you for a ride! Enjoy a city tour - even if you only wanted to pop out for toothpaste - in one of the many psychedelic, fluorescent-lit rickshaws, accompanied by ear-splitting sound systems, flashing disco lights and souped-up engines. But despite all the showiness, these tuks are all bark and no bite. Often nocturnal, these brightly-lit creatures swarm like bees round the city, making you wish you had such an instant transport service back home!

Zoom up to Jaffna to catch the month-long Nallur festival and discover what on earth the pilgrims who travel there actually do for 28 days – how do they get the time off work for a start and what about packing all those saris needed to last the course of the festival – and where do they put them when there is no accommodation, even in the off-season? Seek out the eerie sight of crumbling Portuguese houses as they slowly disappear into the sinking white sands of time. Need a sugar boost? For the sweet-toothed traveller, try some delicious Jaffna palmyra jam and find out where you can sample a hit or two (though we wouldn't advise 60!) of the Dom Perignon of *arrack* – the local coconut brew.

If you like old black and white movies like *The Monsters* and you find yourself in Kandy late afternoon, take a trip up to Helga's Folly for a freakish evening of fun. Cool-off with an icy G&T in the Folly's opulent-verging-on-kitsch sitting room. Evening meals are served upstairs by silver service butlers as fat antique-white candles drip-drip away as each course is served, like something out of *The Rocky Horror Show*. If you're lucky, the astonishing Madame Helga (as she is known on Stereophonics' track) might appear from the attic and grace you with her presence – and what a jaw-dropping spectacle she is; always dressed in full evening regalia, Helga is a sight for sore eyes and so is her hotel. Crammed full of bizarre antiques, Gothic-style black mosquito nets, wind-up gramophones, crystal chandeliers and animal heads hanging

amongst the celebrity photos, it's the perfect setting for a murder mystery and slightly creepy due to the number of unusual portraits that lurk in the nooks and crannies, the eyes of her ancestors' following your every move. If you have one drink too many, take a midnight swim in the pool, guarded by a fairy, as well as a butler who seems ready at any hour with a pristine white fluffy towel.

On the topic of the bizarre, why not go and find the hermits in the Knuckles caves, hunt down the Unawatuna magic man who predicts the Seenigama festival date, or head up to the Nainativu fertility festival in June at the Pooshani Amman Temple in the Northern Province? Here you can watch hundreds of women flock in packed ferryboats to the temple's *bo* tree with different types of dolls, offered up as a gift to the gods in the hope they will return nine months later with a baby, not a doll.

Love elephants? Well don't just be an ordinary tourist and watch them pass you by at Pinnewala Elephant Orphanage – read *60 Hits* and learn to become an actual *mahout*. Or is elephant riding not fast-moving enough for you? How about something quicker, like a spot of horse racing? If you're here in April, then head to Sri Lanka's Little England, as Nuwara Eliya is commonly known, where on race days you might feel you're at Royal Ascot or Epsom, what with all the amazing millinery on display. Make sure you come prepared, because it's not just the horses and jockeys that win prizes; a panel of judges present trophies to the best filly (ladies), best stallion (gents) and the best hat (ladies).

Next, trot along to misty Horton Plains. It's one of the best places in Sri Lanka to see an elusive leopard, as they love to lurk around the hazy plains; but make sure you spot them before they spot you or you'll find yourself stalked around the forests and grasslands.

Discover the real reason why the route to Adam's Peak has been trammelled for a millennium and why the mountain has a special place in all the world's religions. Pick a bright moonlit night and leave your footprint behind at the peak, like the Lord Buddha, Adam or Shiva, and as you take in the stunning views at dawn with the colourful prayer flags flapping in the wind, don't forget to toll the bell to mark you've finished the climb.

How about finding your very own jewel in the crown and become a gem expert for the day in Ratnapura, 'the city of gems'. The quality of these precious stones is legendary. Maybe like 12th century explorer Marco Polo you'll find a flawless ruby "a span long and as thick as a man's arm." Or perhaps you'll uncover a stunning sapphire – Sri Lanka is so famous for these azure beauties that Princess Diana's jeweller found the perfect stone for her engagement ring here. After breakfast, head to the clock tower where you can see hundreds of gem traders bartering and haggling over their sparkly treasures. Have a go yourself and see if you can sell your find and fund your trip. Or keep the stone for good luck - then armed with your amulet, head to Deniyaya Falls, known as the death falls in Sri Lanka, where we uncover why so many people have disappeared in the forbidden forest.

60 Hits celebrates natural highs and bad trips to bizarre places – from the first page we grab you with gem-mining in waterfalls, which hopefully if you strike

gold will fund the rest of your trip! Our team motto is to blow other textbook sightseeing right out of the water – but you'd never describe us as wet travel writers. After reading this guide you will never just want to spend your vacation sunbathing on beaches, booking into conventional hotels, be seen in historical sights that are tick lists on every traveller's itinerary wish-list or just hanging out in mundane museums. Once you have joined the random travel club that digs deeper than any archaeologist, pushes boundaries further than David Blaine and is more mischievous than Frankie Boyle, you'll understand why people are becoming addicted to the Sri Serendipity style of seeing the world from a completely different perspective, and we know you will be straight back to get your next 60 Hits in other parts of the globe!