



hillside town of Nuwara Eliya which, thanks to its elevation, is a refreshing break in cooler climates. It is also the place to relax with a cup of fresh tea. British colonisers introduced tea to these hills in the late 1800s, and the plantations continue to produce perhaps Sri Lanka's most famous export, Ceylon tea. Relax with a good book as you overlook the plantations, or take part in a masterfully curated tea-tasting experience.

Further south still is Galle, which offers a real insight into Sri Lanka's history, and its future. Colonised many times, the architectural evidence remains – the surrounding Fort was built by the Portuguese and fortified by the Dutch. Walk the fort walls, but for a glimpse of the country's modern now, also stop at the eclectic boutique stores and restaurants inside them. Art Deco prints for your wall? Italian gelato? A Spa Ceylon massage? You'll find it here.

Galle is located just a few kilometres from some stunning, isolated, sunny beaches along the island's south coast.

Oh yes, the beaches. That beach-side lounging we mentioned is here. Sandy stretches that would fit into any desert-island movie are met by beachside villas, ocean-side sunrise yoga, and ample fresh coconut water for re-hydration. So yes, if it's a topped-up tan you're after, then the island nation is just the right place to be.

The thing about Sri Lanka is, you can hike your way through the hills, explore ancient caves, navigate public transport with oh-such-rewarding-views, sleep amidst the tea plantations – and finish it all off with a relaxing stay on the island's south coast.

You may want to rethink your long weekend on the beach after all; a week or two in Sri Lanka seems far more preferable.

[THE WEEKEND ESCAPE]

A Case for Sri Lanka

The Indian Ocean island is not just another beach holiday destination – there is much more to explore in this vibrant country

A few short hours on a plane before gaining the opportunity to lounge, fresh coconut water in hand, on the beaches of the Indian Ocean. That's everyone's dream weekend, right? Well, it's one of ours.

If you happen to navigate the world from the Middle East, you're lucky to have the Indian Ocean and its many islands as a neighbour. One of them, Sri Lanka, has sat quietly and patiently for years, just below the tourism radar of its more popular sisters – the Maldives and the Seychelles – biding its time. That time is now. Following the end of its civil war 10 years ago, this teardrop-

shaped island has been healing itself and rebuilding its image for the outside world. And it shows.

The key to change? Infrastructure. The main places to see in Sri Lanka are scattered across the island; until recently this meant navigating your way between them was almost impossible, and certainly uncomfortable. Today, new highways connect attractions, evening outings include fine-dining restaurants and stylish bars, and accommodation offerings include five-star hotels and beachside villas – complete with butlers (naturally).

For some holiday bragging rights, Jaffna

on the island's far northern tip is the place to visit. The rest of the island has seen a dramatic increase in international tourists since the end of the civil war (up 80 percent since 2009), but Jaffna is yet to see anywhere near those numbers due to its difficult-to-reach location. Both geographically and culturally closer to southern India than to the rest of Sri Lanka, here you'll find Bollywood music blaring alongside generous portions of Indian street-food favourites,

idly and dosa.

Continue your journey south, via Kandy and Ella. A 300km drive south and surrounded by mountains with put-you-to-the-test hikes, car services to travel between the cities are available, but most tourists opt for the local train. We can't promise it will be comfortable, but you'll take in unparalleled views of the mountains and countryside as you travel. And about those bragging rights? This train journey is one to spam the Instagram stories with.

Close to Ella is the

