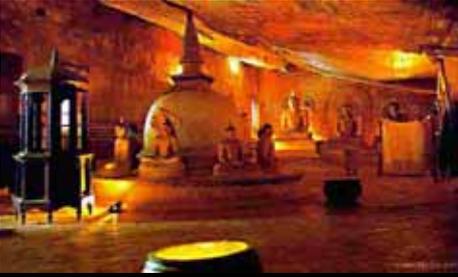


Sri Lanka



The Island of Sri Lanka is a small Island containing as many variations of culture, scenery, and climate as some countries a dozen times its size. Filled with cultural and natural treasures, the island encompasses, magnificent landscapes, beautiful tropical beaches, an abundance of wildlife, breathtaking views, ancient art and architecture. It's clear to see why **Marco Polo** proclaimed Sri Lanka to be one of the finest islands in the world.

It is probably the most singular geological formation in Sri Lanka, and encompasses one of the more remarkable archaeological sites. It is simply an awesome tourist experience that should not be missed. For maximum enjoyment, however, make your ascent of the rock at dawn.



Pinnawela Located about 90km from Colombo towards Kandy is the home to some 60 or more elephant orphans. A place you will really enjoy and never forget. Most orphans are accustomed to their curious human visitors. Started in 1972 the Elephant Orphanage was relocated to the present site in 1975. The 24 acres large elephant orphanage is also a breeding space for elephants, twenty elephants were born since 1984, and it has the greatest herd of elephants in captivity in the world. Bathing time at Ma Oya just in front of the orphanage is at 10.00am and 2.00pm. Feeding time is about an hour earlier.

Sri Lanka contains an astonishing seven UNESCO World Heritage Sites within its compact shores, the same number as heritage-packed Egypt. Six cultural sites are testament to a civilization with over 2,000 years of recorded history, while a seventh natural site boasts some of the highest biodiversity found outside the Amazon basin. From colossal ancient monuments and serene rock carvings in sprawling ruined cities, to a 5th century AD king's palace in the clouds, the World Heritage Sites showcase the island's rich history and contribution to civilization. The largest and most dramatic of these are located in the so-called **Cultural Triangle**, the area formed by linking the ancient capitals of **Anuradhapura**, **Polonnaruwa** and **Kandy**. It's a living heritage, where the visitor will see Buddhist monks and reverent devotees and hear the hypnotic murmur of religious invocations - all of which bring the crumbling brick temples, granite statues and towering dagobas of Sri Lanka's ancient cities to life.



Located in the foothills of the central highlands around the banks of a picturesque lake, steeped in history, **Kandy** is Sri Lanka's renowned second city. In many ways, however, Kandy is more important than the true capital, for although Colombo may be the hub of commerce and communication, it is Kandy that has always been the centre of Sri Lanka's rich culture and the symbol of the nation's complex identity.

While it will be impossible to see everything Sri Lanka has to offer in a single trip, listed below are a selection of the country's highlights: outstanding religious and cultural sites, memorable scenery and wildlife.



Polonnaruwa was Sri Lanka's medieval capital between the 11th and 13th centuries. Enclosed within three concentric walls, the city contained royal palaces, bathing ponds, monasteries and sacred architecture such as dagobas and image houses. Its grandeur was largely the creation of three kings, Vijayabahu, Parakramabahu and Nissanka Malla.

Sigiriya is located 22km north-east of Dambulla in the North Central Province. Declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1982, it towers more than 200m over the surrounding plains and has been visited by tourists for over 1,000 years - indeed it is considered one of the world's oldest tourist sites. Though the rock has weathered, its former opulence and greatness as a magnificent palace can still be seen in the form of beautiful paintings, ancient graffiti and symmetrical gardens.

Kandy is known to most Sri Lankans as **Maha Nuwara**, "The Great City," and great it is. The sacred **Tooth Relic of the Buddha** is housed here in its own temple, and is paraded around the city in one of Asia's most celebrated festivals, the **Kandy Perahera**, held during July-August. The monasteries of Sri Lanka's two leading Buddhist sects have long been established in the city.



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Diving H.M.S. Hermes - Sri Lanka



History of H.M.S. Hermes

The HMS Hermes was the world's first purpose built Air Craft Carrier; built by Armstrong-Whitworths in January 1918; launched September 11, 1919; commissioned by the British Royal Navy in 1923 and sunk by the Japanese on April 9, 1942.

It was dawn on April 9, 1942 when Japanese reconnaissance planes discovered their target. Below them, the British aircraft carrier HMS Hermes and her Australian escort HMAS Vampire were cutting south through the crystal waters along Sri Lanka's east coast. Alerted to the peril, the Allied crews scrambled to action stations. But at 10:35 am, off Batticaloa, 70 Japanese dive bombers attacked the Hermes. Within 10 minutes the ship had taken 40 hits. It capsized and disappeared beneath the waves with 307 of its crew. The Vampire survived two near-misses and tried to counter attack with anti aircraft guns. But it was hopeless: as the crew abandoned ship, a direct hit split the destroyer in two and she sank.

Diving the East Coast Wrecks

Sixty years later, HMS Hermes is just one of the wrecks that forms a divers' paradise around Batticaloa, 132 kilometres south of Trincomalee (the wreckage of the Vampire is yet to be found). Sunken ships and other detritus of war, litter the sandy bottom along the coast, including remains from more recent conflicts. Until 2008, it was only possible to dive the east coast if you were accompanied by the Sri Lankan navy.

Today, diving the **Batticaloa** region is nothing short of amazing for the avid wreck diver. HMS Hermes is now available for technically trained divers to explore. There are very few aircraft carriers available for divers to explore in the world (USS Oriskany in Florida, USS Saratoga in Bikini Atoll and the German Graf Zeppelin in the Baltic Sea). HMS Hermes is unique in the fact that she was sunk in battle.

Lost in battle on the same day, and now able to be dived are the recently identified merchant ship **S.S. British Sergeant**, British oil tanker **R.F.A. Athelstane** and corvette **H.M.S. Hollyhock**. There have also been several boiler wrecks and cargo ships found in the area.



What to Expect

Sri Lanka is a developing nation still lacking in infrastructure. Travel and diving in the country is not without it's challenges. Divers should come with an open mind, patience, flexibility and a good sense of humour! Hotel facilities are basic by western standards but are functional and clean. Water is solar heated and not always hot. Expect to eat lots of rice and local curries. Diver support is also basic but functional and improving with each season. Be prepared to lend a helping hand if required and take responsibility for your pre-dive preparation & checks.

Batticaloa is about 300km from the capital city of Colombo. Getting there is generally a 6 hour affair. Public transport is available but is more time consuming and may take up to 10 - 12 hours.

The journey to Batticaloa (Batti) is as exciting as the destination. From the ancient kingdom of Polonnaruwa, the road to Batti is tortuous; winding upon an arid terrain covered with bush and occasional stray cattle. Sightings of wild herds of elephants, peacocks, deer and mongoose is a common occurrence.



Sinking 9th April 1942

Highlights of diving H.M.S. Hermes :

Depth: 45 - 58 metres (Technical Decompression Dive)

A stunning wreck dive for it's size, history and marine life around the wreck. Stark white trees of black coral adorn the hull. Large gorgonian fans grow on the superstructure. Huge schools of dogtooth tuna, mangrove jacks, trevally and snapper swim around the wreck often blocking your view. Near the forward anti aircraft guns is an open munitions locker still filled with ammunition for these guns. Ahead is the forward head, a row of porcelain toilet bowls on display. Nearby is the starboard anchor. The bridge, now covered by part of the flight deck, can be examined as can the crow's nest. A trip to the stern is a must to see the two massive propellers (if you can find them through the fish life!).

Vis ranges from 15-30 metres. Water temp can drop to 24°C during the dive but is normally 27-29°C. Currents range from zero to raging.

Diving Guidelines

HMS Hermes is recommended for divers with minimum technical training to 50 metres.

The wreck is a "**military maritime grave**" and as such no attempt should be made to gain access to the inside of the wreck or touch or disturb or in any way interfere with the wreck. There must be no attempt to remove artefacts of any kind from the wreck.

Whilst there is no objection to still photography or filming of the wreck, the dive team should only photograph or film the exterior of the wreck. Every effort must be made to avoid photographing or filming any human remains. Any photographs or film inadvertently taken of human remains should under no circumstances be published or broadcasted.



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The rise of the Japanese Imperial Navy and the loss of HMS Hermes



Country	United Kingdom
Ship Class	Hermes-class Light Carrier
Builder	Armstrong-Whitworth
Laid Down	15 January 1918
Launched	11 September 1919
Commissioned	1 July 1923
Sunk	9 April 1942
Displacement	11085 tons standard; 13208 tons full
Length	548 feet (167 metres)
Beam	70 feet (21.3 metres)
Draft	18 feet (5.48 metres)
Machinery	Two Parsons Steam Turbines (6 Yarrow small-tube boilers, 2 shafts, Parsons geared turbines)
Power Output	40000 SHP
Speed	25 knots
Range	6000 nm at 18 knots
Crew	700
Armament	6 x 5.5 inch; 3 x 4 inch AA; 2 quad 0.5 inch AA (added 1934). 6 x 1 x 20mm AA.
Armor	3" side (belt) 11"-2" side (ends) 1" upper deck 1" main deck
Aircraft	Up to 20 planes including Martlet (F4F) Fighters Swordfish T.B's
Flight Deck length	570 ft. (173 metres)

HMS Hermes' Ninth commission (and ultimately her last) was to patrol and carry out trade protection duties and searches for Vichy blockade-runners in the Indian Ocean. However during these times, Hermes would be up against the powerful, aggressive and ruthless Imperial Japanese Navy. This was a formidable task even for one of the new armoured fleet carriers of the Illustrious Class.

In November 1941, with Hermes in Simonstown's main dockyard basin for hull maintenance, the threat of the Japanese to South-East Asia seemed a long way. But later that year in 7 December 1941, Japan entered the war in the Pacific and South-East Asia with a devastating air attack on Pearl Harbor led by commander-in-chief of the Combined Fleet Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto who then entrusted the attack to Vice Admiral Chuichi Nagumo, with six of the largest of Japan's carriers who were later to be involved in the sinking of Hermes I (flagship Akagai, Hiryu and Soryu). This was accompanied by powerful invasions of Thailand, Malaya, Hong Kong and the Philippines, as well as the occupation of the International Settlement at Shanghai. All over south-east Asia the weakness of the Western colonial powers, including Britain, was starkly highlighted as the Japanese Army made rapid advances throughout the region.

On Wednesday 10 December came a devastating blow to the Royal Navy, when battleship Prince of Wales and the battle cruiser Repulse were sunk by a ruthlessly efficient force of the Japanese Navy torpedo-bombers, for the loss of only half a dozen enemy aircraft. On Christmas Day the British garrison at Hong Kong surrendered, and by the end of 1941 the Japanese Army had pushed the British forces in Malaya into headlong retreat towards the island of Singapore.

The capture of Penang Island had closed the Malacca Strait to British and Allied shipping and it would not be long before the eastern side of the Indian Ocean was dominated by Imperial Japan.

On 10 January 1942 a single Allied command area was formed which was known as the ABDA area (American, British, Dutch and Australian sea, land and air forces) but it was not long before the rapid advance of the Japanese forces took over with Singapore surrendering on 15 February. Hermes left South Africa to rejoin the East Indies Fleet temporarily at Colombo, which was being organized as a base for a new Eastern Fleet since Singapore was now untenable as a naval base. On 19 February, she put to sea in order to land on the 12 Swordfish aircraft of 814 Squadron and to rendezvous with the Australian destroyer, HMAS Vampire. Vampire had been with Prince of Wales and Repulse when they were sunk off Kuantan and she had helped survivors from the waters of the South China Sea.

In 9 March 1942, Vice Admiral Nagumo (same vice admiral involved in Pearl Harbor attack) was ordered to carry out an aggressive raid on Ceylon and any British shipping in the Bay of Bengal in order to sweep the area clear of Royal Navy units, and to prevent any attacks on the Japanese supply routes. To carry out the raid Admiral Nagamo had at his disposal a force of five (5) fast aircraft carriers (3 being flagship Akagi, Hiryu and Soryu) with approximately 330 of the latest naval fighter bombers, supported by four (4) fast battleships, two (2) cruisers and eight (8) destroyers, accompanied by six (6) oil tankers. The Japanese force sailed from Celebes Sea on 26 March 1942 and steamed into the Indian Ocean towards Ceylon. In mid-March Hermes and Vampire were ordered to leave Trincomalee and steam for Fremantle where they were to form part of the ANZAC command, but after were recalled back to Trincomalee to join the elderly battleships Ramillies, Resolution, Royal, Sovereign and Revenge as part of Force B.

On 28 March, Admiral Sir James Somerville received a report of the Japanese force which, it was thought, was going to attack Ceylon on or around 1 April. In fact, just as he had done at Pearl Harbor, Admiral Nagumo had chosen a Sunday morning – Easter Sunday, 5 April – for his raid. On morning of 9 April, with the sighting report of Hermes having been intercepted at Colombo, the carrier was ordered to return to Trincomalee with the 'utmost dispatch', while fighters should have provided her with air cover.

Unfortunately, however, the order did not reach the fighters in time for them to save the carrier from attack. At 10:35 am that morning, with Hermes in a position Lat 07 –35N/Long 82 – 05E, about 20 miles south-east of Batticaloa, more than 80 Japanese Zero fighter-bombers (Japanese Air Fleet's 50 Aichi D3AI aircraft soon to be called VAL by the Allied Forces), each armed with a 250lb. bomb, were sighted on the starboard quarter diving out of the sun at about 10,000 feet. Hermes opened fire with every gun that would bear as the enemy planes came within range, but it was clear that without fighter support she was virtually helpless against the skillful and determined attack by well-trained, modern day bombers. It was always said that because Hermes had spent most of her life in eastern waters, the Japanese knew of her capabilities and with a few misses, every bomb was on target. The same might also turned their attention to Vampire and corvette Hollyhock, the RFA Athelstone and the merchantman SS British Sergeant before Admiral Nagumo's force left the Indian Ocean and returned to Japan.

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Proposed Itinerary - Sri Lanka

- Saturday Day 1 :** **SQ 468 - Depart Singapore 22:45 / Arrive Colombo 23:45**
Meet and assist at Colombo airport, transfer to Negombo
Overnight: Paradise Holiday Village or alternative, Negombo (includes continental breakfast)
- Sunday Day 2 :** **Drive from Negombo to Batticaloa.**
The drive will take between 6 - 10 including sight seeing stops by mini coach (15 seater).
Stop at **Kurunegala**, the city famous for it's myths and legends, for a short tea break. At **Dambulla** to visit the Golden Cave Temple from 103 BC and climb it's 350 steps. Stop for lunch at **Habarana** then continue on and visit a wood carving centre near the 12th century city ruins in the **Polonnaruwa** region.
Overnight: Deep Sea Divers Lodge, Batticaloa (includes continental breakfast daily)
- Mon - Friday Days 3-7 :** 2 boat dives per day on H.M.S. Hermes or other local wrecks
Overnight: Deep Sea Divers Lodge, Batticaloa (includes continental breakfast daily)
- Saturday Day 8 :** Check out of Deep Sea Lodge and travel (approx. 3 1/2 hours drive) to visit and climb the 1,200 steps of the ancient rock fortress of **Sigiriya** (Lion's Rock). The palace ruin is surrounded by the remains of an extensive network of gardens, reservoirs and other structures. Proceed to Kandy.
Overnight: **Senani Hotel** or alternative, Kandy (includes continental breakfast)
Optional evening city tour.
- Sunday Day 9 :** Leave Kandy and drive towards the airport via **Pinnawela** to visit the Elephants Orphanage.
- Monday Day 10 :** **SQ 469 - Depart Colombo 01:10 / Arrive Singapore 07:40**



Wreck diving options (subject to weather conditions) :

HMS Hermes : 30 minute boat ride from Batticaloa. Lies port side down. Depth: 45 - 58 metres. Moderate to strong currents. Prolific marine life and coral growth.

Boiler Wrecks : lying in 12 metres off Batticaloa

SS British Sergeant : 75 minute boat ride from Batticaloa. Depth: 14 - 26 metres. In two parts, 15 metres distance apart. Lying on her port side.

SS Lady McCullum : small, upright cargo ship somewhat broken up. Depth: 18 metres. Can be done as a 2nd dive after British Sergeant. Has considerable marine life.

Lady Blake : small wreck can be done as a 2nd dive after British Sergeant. Depth: 4 - 10 metres.

RFA Athelstane : 45km drive from Batticaloa to the boat launch. Depth: 22 - 42 metres.

HMS Hollyhock: lies approx. 500 metres from the Athelstane. A bounce dive to 42 metres.

** Meals and sightseeing / entrance fees are optional and unless otherwise stated as included are at additional cost.*

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