Travel has been my life for 20 years. St Augustine’s famous quote remains as true to me today as it was when I first set up 2by2 Holidays – “the world is a book and those who do not travel, read only one page”. My first love was Africa, the place of my birth. Its remarkable wildlife and cultures continue to captivate me today. A recent visit to the gorillas of Uganda has starkly reminded me just how fragile the survival of so many endangered species remains. And reinforced my belief that travel must always have conservation at its heart.

In recent years I have discovered the joys of travel in the Indian subcontinent and Latin America. The iconic sites and cultures here are no less enthralling. And everywhere wildlife adapts and survives, from harsh barren deserts to cool mountain cloud forests and tropical wetlands.

My enthusiasm burns as brightly as ever and I continue to be as involved in every aspect of the business as I always have been, backed up by our superb travel team. I’m particularly thrilled that so many of our customers return time after time. I do hope you find our latest brochure inspiring and we all look forward to hearing from you.

Hambe Kahle – Travel Safely

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This is a spiritual country where Buddhism is the main religion of the Sinhalese, although there are significant Hindu, Christian and Muslim minorities. Evidence of these many religions is everywhere, from fabulous ancient Buddhist shrines and towering Hindu temples, to the many personal shrines found on street corners.

Most trips to Sri Lanka start in the capital of Colombo, a port located on the ancient spice route and today an eclectic mix of modern and old. As you leave the city, most visitors stop at Pinnawala Elephant Orphanage for close-up views of Asian elephants rescued from the wild. They are much smaller than their African cousins, with different shaped ears and heads. Here you can participate in bottle-feeding an infant, before walking down to the river to watch them all bathe with gusto.

Sri Lanka's Cultural Triangle is located in the centre of the country and is a mix of ancient cities, fortresses and temple caves, many of which are now World Heritage Sites. A real highlight is ascending the 1,200 steps to the top of Sigirya Rock, a breathtaking fortress in the sky also known as Lion Rock. It was a 5th century fortress and later a Buddhist monastery, so a deeply spiritual place with ancient rock paintings and incredible views. Don’t miss the small museum at the entrance. The cave temples at Dambulla are also astonishing, with no fewer than 150 magnificently preserved Buddhas from the first century BC. It is one of the best preserved of all the temples in Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka’s most significant shrine is the Temple of the Tooth, situated in the hill capital of Kandy in the centre of the island. Here there is a tooth relic of the Buddha, held in a golden casket that is displayed to the public three times a day during the pooja ceremony. The annual Festival of the Sacred Tooth takes place in July and is one of the country’s most lively and vibrant celebrations. Kandy’s Peradeniya Botanical Gardens are also well worth a visit. Ask your hotel to pack you a picnic lunch to enjoy here, and don’t forget to visit the orchid house.

If you have time to travel further afield, the ancient city of Anuradhapura was founded in the 4th century on the mountain peak of Mihintale and is today a World Heritage Site, with many huge circular white-domed stupa shrines. Here you can walk under the canopy of the sacred Bodhi tree, grown from an offshoot of the tree under which the Buddha attained enlightenment. At over 2,200 years it is the oldest historically documented tree in the world.

Polonnaruwa was the capital of Sri Lanka from the 11th to 12th centuries, following the fall of Anuradhapura, and is another World Heritage Site complete with enormous Buddha statues. The Buddha at Aukana is the tallest and most magnificent undamaged ancient statue in all of Sri Lanka. Remember to dress conservatively and remove your shoes when entering temples.

Yala is the most famous of Sri Lanka’s national parks as leopard are found here in the highest concentration in the world. But do not expect this to be a safari in the African sense, as the wildlife is sparser and the people more numerous. Notwithstanding this, nothing compares with the thrill of spotting one of these magnificent creatures in the wild. Wilpattu National Park in the north also has high concentrations of leopard, but they are more difficult to spot because of the denser vegetation.

Sightings of wild Asian elephants in this country are among the best in the world at parks such as Udawalawe in the south, which has an elephant orphanage that is less commercial than Pinnawala. Here you can expect good sightings of water buffalo, sambar and spotted deer, langur and macaque monkeys, as well as many other smaller mammals. Sloth bears are also present but are much harder to see. Further north at Minneriya National Park, in August and September elephants migrate along a corridor from neighbouring parks to feed on the fresh grass on the lakebed. This annual event is remarkable and is known as ‘The Gathering’.

Sri Lanka is a country of a thousand lakes, so birdlife is outstanding including migrants, water birds and raptors. You will see the splendid peacock and the Jungle fowl – the national bird – pretty much everywhere. Horton Plains National Park in the central highlands is the place to go for beautiful walking and birding. Sinharaja Forest Reserve in the southwest is a virgin rainforest and another birding hotspot and World Heritage Site. The ocean around the south coast is also a magnificent wildlife arena and is home to the mighty Blue whale, Sperm whale and lively dolphin.

From a wildlife perspective, Sri Lanka is best known for its wild Asian elephants and the leopards of Yala National Park.

Situated off the southern tip of India, Sri Lanka means beautiful island and it truly does not disappoint. But this tear-shaped jewel previously known as Ceylon offers so much more, including many extraordinary cultural treasures.
Sri Lanka's beaches are some of the most beautiful in the world, with superb diving and snorkelling in the northeast, and colonial Galle Fort in the south.

When to go

Sri Lanka has a warm tropical climate and the sites of the Cultural Triangle can be visited at any time of year. The weather at the coast is affected by two monsoons, but as these are in opposite seasons, there is always one side of this small island that is good to visit. From December to March, the beaches are best along the south and west coasts. This is also the whale watching season, which runs from November to April. From April to September, the weather is best at Trincomalee and Pasikuda on the northeast, where the best scuba diving and snorkelling are found.

This region is dotted with many towering ornate Hindu temples and the cultural links to India are very much in evidence.

Sri Lanka has always been known for its Indian Ocean beaches and there are over a thousand miles of white sandy beaches from Beruwela, Bentota and Hikkaduwa in the southwest, to palm-fringed Trincomalee and Pasikuda in the northeast, where the best scuba diving and snorkelling are found.

On the south coast, historic Galle Fort is a World Heritage Site that is best explored on foot. If you want privacy and exclusivity, a beach extension in the Maldives is another option, albeit much more expensive.

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Sri Lanka is renowned for its tea, and on the way to Yala National Park, travel through the lush tea-producing hill country around Nuwara Eliya, whose Ceylon tea is amongst the most famous in the world. An option here is to take the scenic local train from Kandy, rather than a road transfer, for an interesting cultural experience.

For a complete contrast, consider adding an extension to Jaffna in the far north of the country. Tourism in the north and east of the country is reawakening once more and the people are especially friendly and welcoming to visitors. This is the heartland of the Hindu Tamil people, who have their own language and cuisine, including delicious mango delicacies.

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We have ATOL certification and membership of the Association of Tour Operators (AITO).

**Booking your holiday**
When you are ready to book, we will guide you through the process. In all our dealings we aim to be transparent and encourage you to read our terms and conditions thoroughly. These are on our website at www.2by2holidays.co.uk. Please do contact us if anything is unclear.

**Financial Protection**
Through our membership of ATOL (9025) and our Tour Operator Insurance, your holiday is fully financially protected wherever in the world you live, regardless of whether you book land-only arrangements or a complete holiday package with flights.

**AITO Quality Charter**

AIM is the Association for independent and specialist holiday companies. Our member companies, usually owner-managed, strive to create overseas holidays with high levels of professionalism and a shared concern for quality and personal service. The Association encourages the highest standards in all aspects of tour operating.

**Exclusive Membership**

AITO sets criteria regarding ownership, finance and quality which must be satisfied before new companies are admitted to membership. All members are required to adhere to a Code of Business Practice which encourages high operational standards and conduct.

**Financial Security**

An AITO member is required to arrange financial protection for all holidays and other arrangements (including accommodation only) booked by customers with the member under the AITO logo. This financial protection applies to customers who are resident in the UK at the time of booking and to most overseas customers who have booked directly with the member. In doing so, the member must comply with UK Government regulations. Members are required to submit details of their financial protection arrangements to AITO on a regular basis.

**Accurate brochures and websites**

All members do their utmost to ensure that all their brochures and other publications, print or electronic, clearly and accurately describe the holidays and services offered.

**Professional service and continual improvements**

All members are committed to high standards of service and believe in regular and thorough training of employees. Members continually seek to review and improve their holidays. They listen to their customers and always welcome suggestions for improving standards.

**Monitoring standards**

AITO endeavours to monitor public standards regularly. All customers should receive a post-holiday questionnaire from their tour operator, the results of which are scrutinised by the Association.

**Sustainable tourism**

Our members acknowledge the importance of AITO's Sustainable Tourism ethos, which recognises the social, economic and environmental responsibilities of tour operating.

**Customer relations**

All members endeavour to deal swiftly and fairly with any issues their customers may raise. In the unlikely event that a dispute between an AITO member and a customer cannot be settled amicably, either party can call on an arbitration service to bring the matter to a speedy and acceptable conclusion.

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