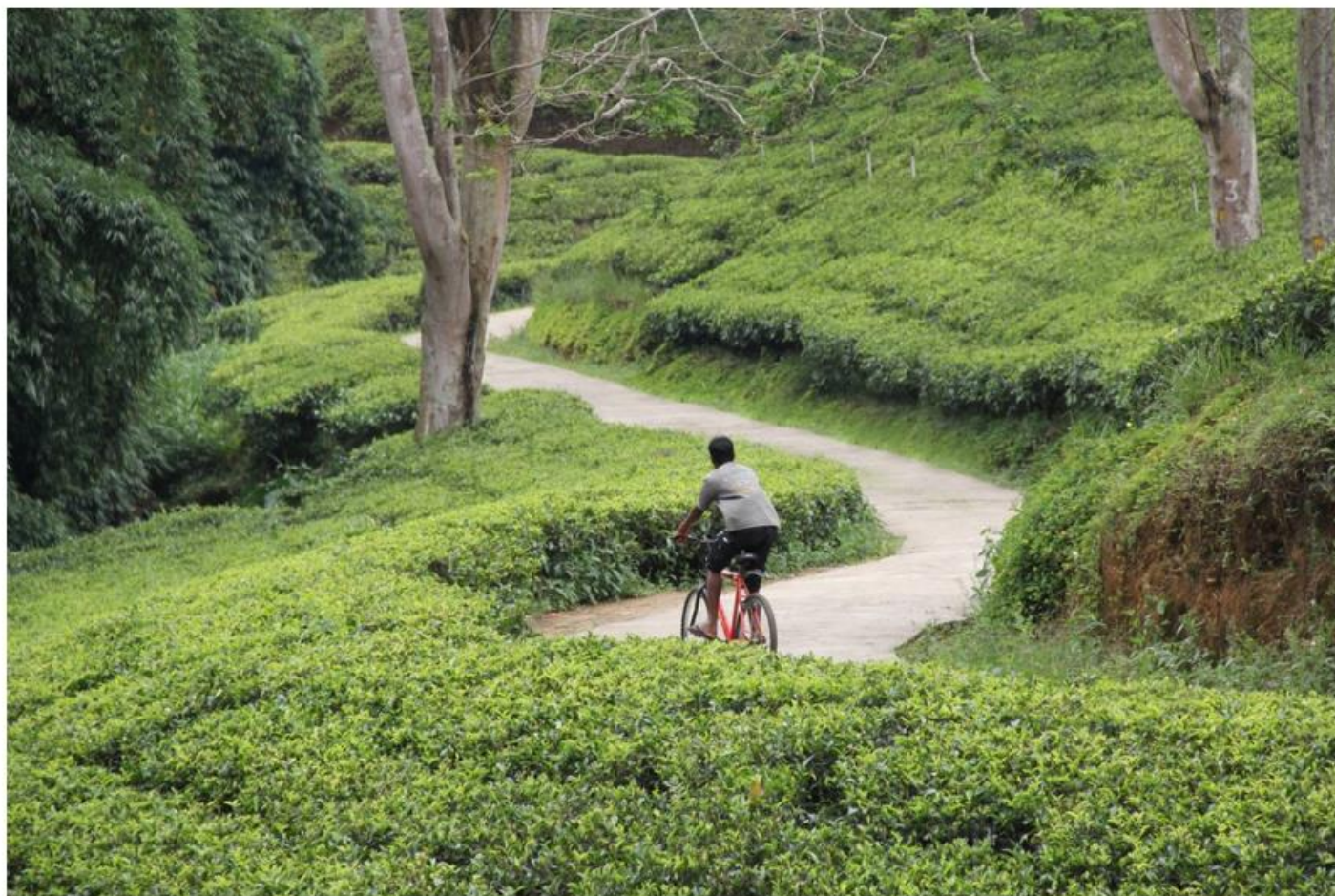


Through Ancient Cities: Taking the Road Less Biked

PRODUCED FOR **CONDE NAST** **Traveler** | WITH **Edward Jones**



Courtesy SITA

Cycling through Tea Plantations in Nuwara Eliya



Sri Lanka is one of Asia's fastest-growing destinations, and one travel company wants to show you why the island nation is best experienced via bicycle.

Active travel is booming, with bicycling tours gaining popularity faster than you can say "Tour de France."

Most adventure-specialist companies have steadily developed and adapted their cycling trips for Europe, where the scenic countrysides of France and Italy make romantic backdrops for bicyclists of all levels.

But both avid and amateur riders are starting to merge their biking predilections with international-travel interests, and its inspiring travel planners to set up tours in out-of-the-ordinary places. The latest newcomer is Geringer Global Travel, a specialist agency serving the Asian subcontinent that this year is launching its first [cycling tour of Sri Lanka](#).

“Sri Lanka is not as well known to many travelers as its more popular northern neighbor, India, but it is a great emerging destination that more people should know about,” says Susan Geringer, the company’s founder. “It’s really beautiful, and a nice country to cycle in. [On this trip, riders] are going to be off the main roads, so the topography changes, and they can appreciate everyday life in Sri Lanka. When you’re riding a bike versus being in a car, it does immerse you in the culture more.”

Such is the appeal of cycling journeys, and a key reason why more and more tourists opt to see the world from a two-wheeler. The first concern, however, tends to be about both the recommended skill level, and, of course, the hill situation. Geringer says Sri Lanka’s overall flatness is one of the main reasons for making it her company’s debut cycling-trip destination.

Her other logic is that Sri Lanka’s roads are generally less crowded and less rough than other destinations she serves in India, Bhutan, and Nepal, for example. Plus they’re acceptable for cycling the three hours or so per day planned for this two-week tour. While she doesn’t recommend kids younger than about 16 years old for this trip, she says anyone who is “reasonably fit” and comfortable on a bike will do fine. (Though a van will ride along as alternate transportation.)

Over the course of the journey, riders set out from the central city of Habarana, with stays in a series of five-star accommodations as they head southward via Kandy, Ella, Udawalawe, Koggala, and, finally, the capital city of Colombo.

“The tour covers mountains, valleys, tropical rain forests, ancient sites, beaches, reservoirs, and remote countryside,” says Geringer. “Guests will explore a 3,000-year-old culture and gain insight into this resplendent land. They’ll be active, but they’re not ‘roughing it.’”

With a population that is around 70 percent Buddhist and 13 percent Hindu, temples, stupas, and ruins abound, particularly in the central and southern regions. The cycling tour allows for visits to UNESCO World Heritage sites including the ancient city of Polonnaruwa; the Sigiriya Rock Fortress; the City of Kandy, home to the Temple of the Sacred Tooth; as well as the Golden Temple of Dambulla, whose cave paintings and statuary dates back to the first century BCE.

Geringer says Sri Lanka’s tea plantations are a highlight, and are great places to hike or bike. The island is a naturalist’s delight, with national parks and wildlife across the island (which is roughly the same size as Ireland). Wild herds of elephants famously traverse the landscapes between Minneriya and Kaudulla national parks, where fauna from leopards and deer, to black turtles and great white pelicans dwell.



Courtesy SITA
Sigiriya Rock

For the best weather conditions, Geringer recommends choosing dates for the cycling tour between September and March. She collaborates with the India-based tour company Sita to enlist expert local cycling and tour guides, who also maintain the bikes for easy riding. There are no set dates for group tours on her Cycle Sri Lanka journey, and as few as two travelers at a time are welcome to book.

“There’s a lot of variety in Sri Lanka,” she says. “You have monuments, Buddhist temples, and cultural sites. You have the national parks for the wildlife and hiking. The food is delicious, and different than in India. Plus you have a different perspective of the land when you ride a bicycle rather than inside a car. Cycling through the ancient kingdom of Polonnaruwa, the breathtaking scenery of Ella, tea-growing highlands, and stunning beaches along the southern coast make this a very special experience. It’s a great time to go to Sri Lanka.”

Take a closer look at Condé Nast Traveler’s [Street Food Finds of Sri Lanka](#), to see which Sri Lankan luxury beachfront hotel made the [2015 Hot List](#).