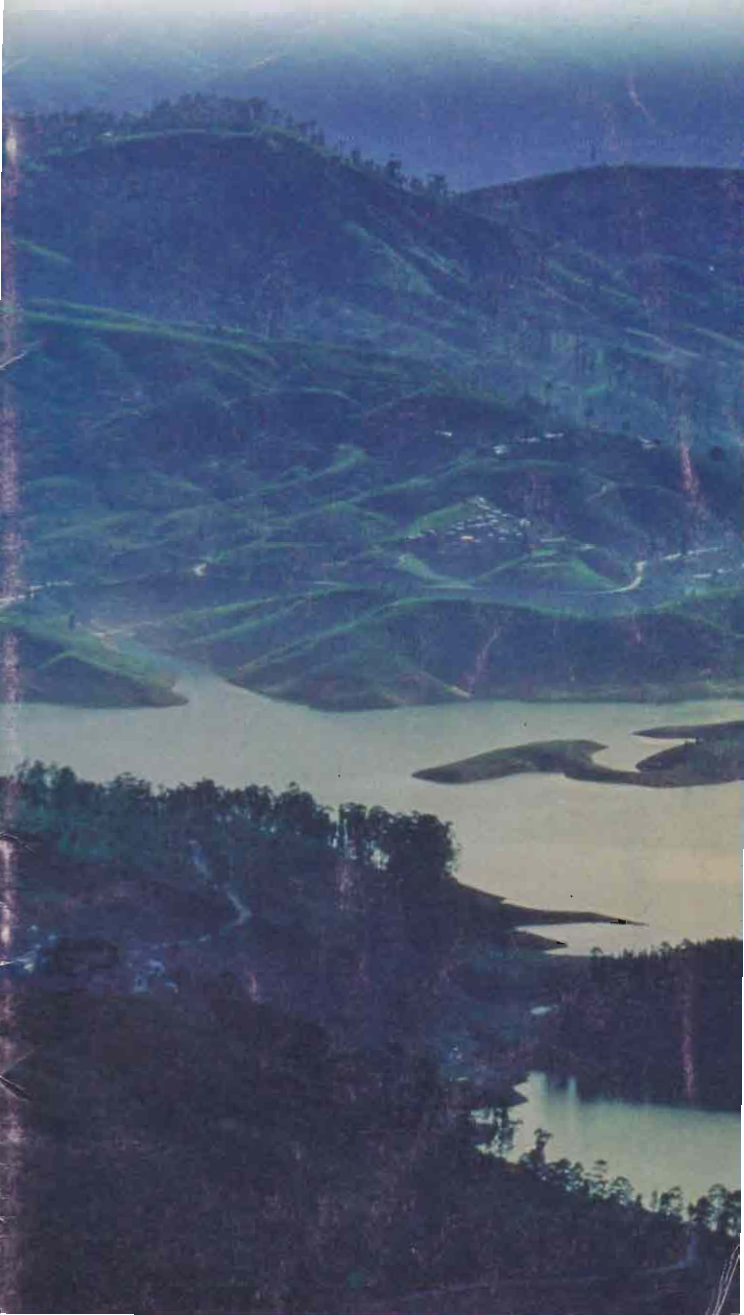


SRI LANKA

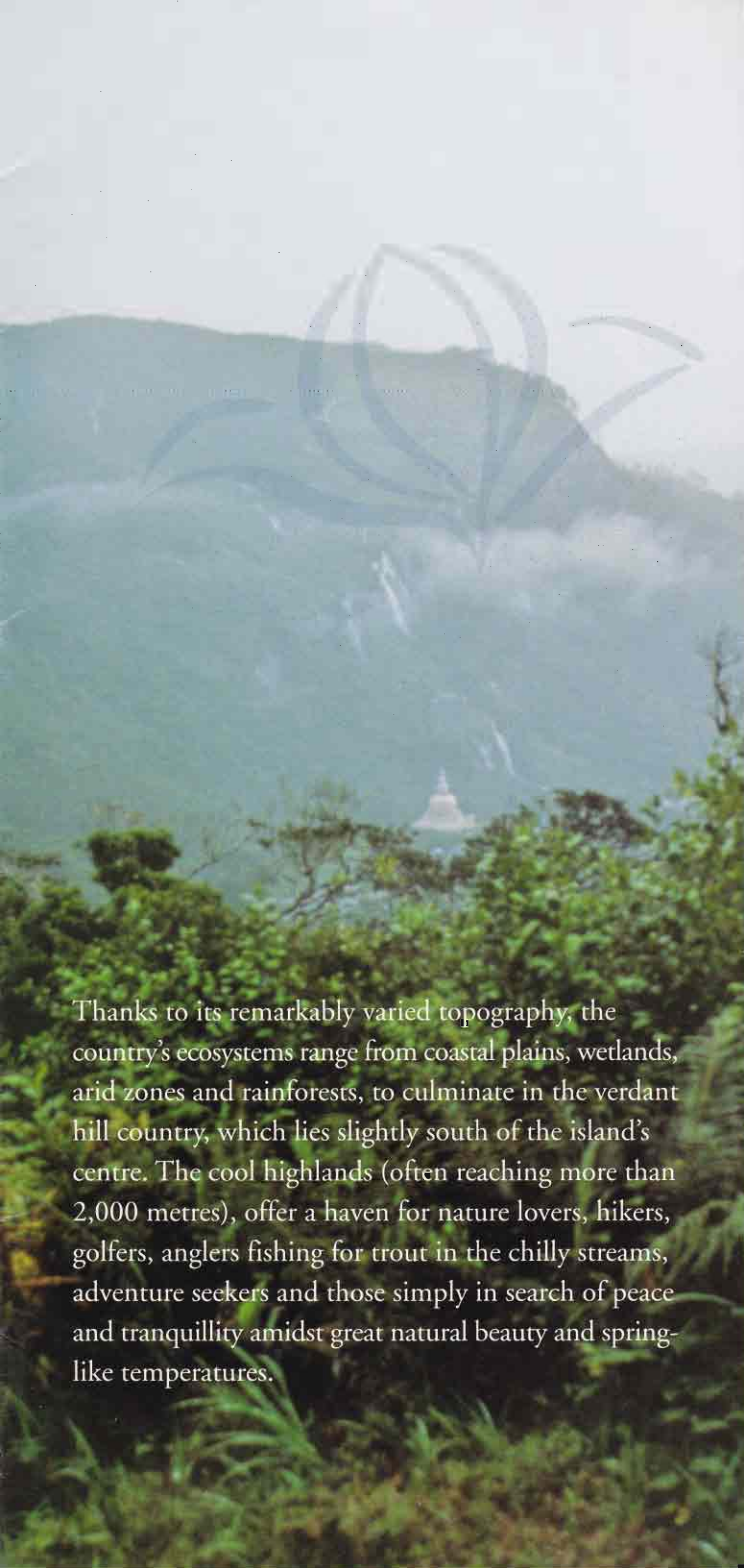
The Hill Country





High in the Magical Mountains

Cascading waterfalls, high wind-swept plateaus, dizzying precipices and mist-draped mountains where deer, wild boar and jackals lurk in pockets of wilderness, and where mysterious cloud forests, medicinal herbs and rare birds await discovery. Can such dramatic landscapes possibly be part of the tropical isle of Sri Lanka?

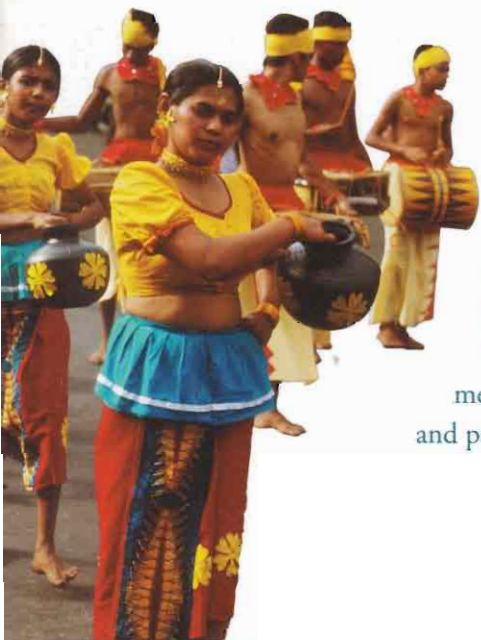


Thanks to its remarkably varied topography, the country's ecosystems range from coastal plains, wetlands, arid zones and rainforests, to culminate in the verdant hill country, which lies slightly south of the island's centre. The cool highlands (often reaching more than 2,000 metres), offer a haven for nature lovers, hikers, golfers, anglers fishing for trout in the chilly streams, adventure seekers and those simply in search of peace and tranquillity amidst great natural beauty and spring-like temperatures.



The capital of the hill country, Kandy, spreads around a scenic lake at 500 metres above sea level. The city's main attractions include the famed Dalada Maligawa or Tooth Temple (where the sacred tooth of Lord Buddha is enshrined).

The glittering festival, Esala Perahera, a stunning display of medieval pageantry, including brilliantly decorated elephants and thrilling Kandy drummers and dancers, is held each July or August.



The magnificent 57-hectare *Royal Botanical Gardens* at nearby Peradeniya are justly renowned for their collection, including spectacular orchids, spices, medicinal plants and palms.



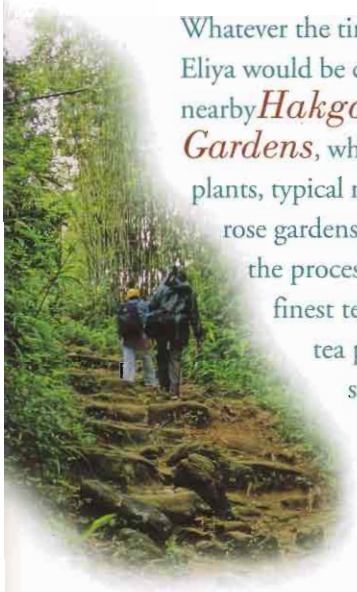
Sri Lanka's famous cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg, pepper and cardamom flourish in the fertile soil of commercial spice gardens to the north of Kandy, near Matale. This town is offset by the remarkable Knuckles Range, reaching 1,500 metres and home to unique stunted cloud forests, protected in a Forest Reserve.

While Kandy may be the hill country's capital, Nuwara Eliya is the unquestioned Queen of the Hill Resorts. Established by the colonial British in the early 19th century, the attractive town boasts one of Asia's most beautiful golf courses, a race course, a man-made lake and market gardens where the temperate-climate produce includes strawberries. Set almost 1,900 metres above sea level, Nuwara Eliya can be downright chilly at night, while in the daytime, the climate encourages pleasant walks in the surrounding countryside.



Nuwara Eliya's *Victoria Park* is filled with glorious flowers, especially from January through to April. During that month, the town's grand colonial hotels and guest houses are packed with local holiday makers enjoying the season with its many sporting and social events.

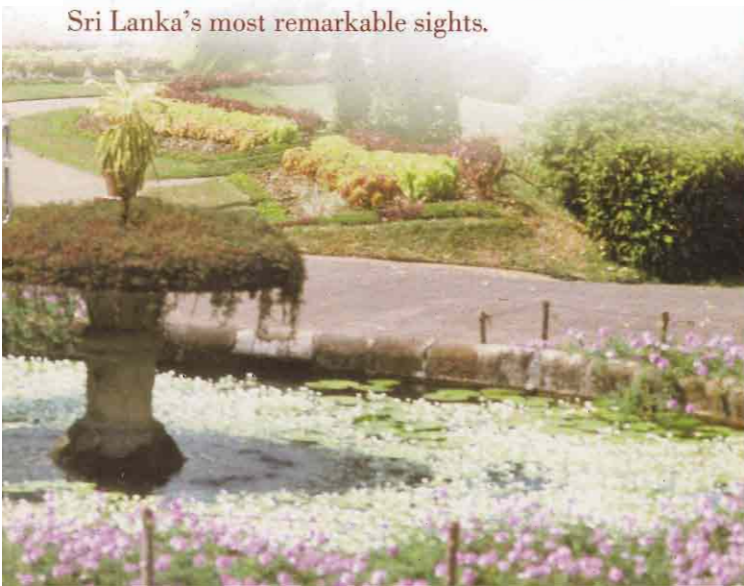
Whatever the time of year, no visit to Nuwara Eliya would be complete without a trip to the nearby *Hakgala Botanical Gardens*, which are filled with sub-tropical plants, typical montane trees and the popular rose gardens. It is also possible to discover the process of producing the world's finest tea by visiting one of the many tea plantations which cover the slopes around Nuwara Eliya and most districts of the Hill Country.

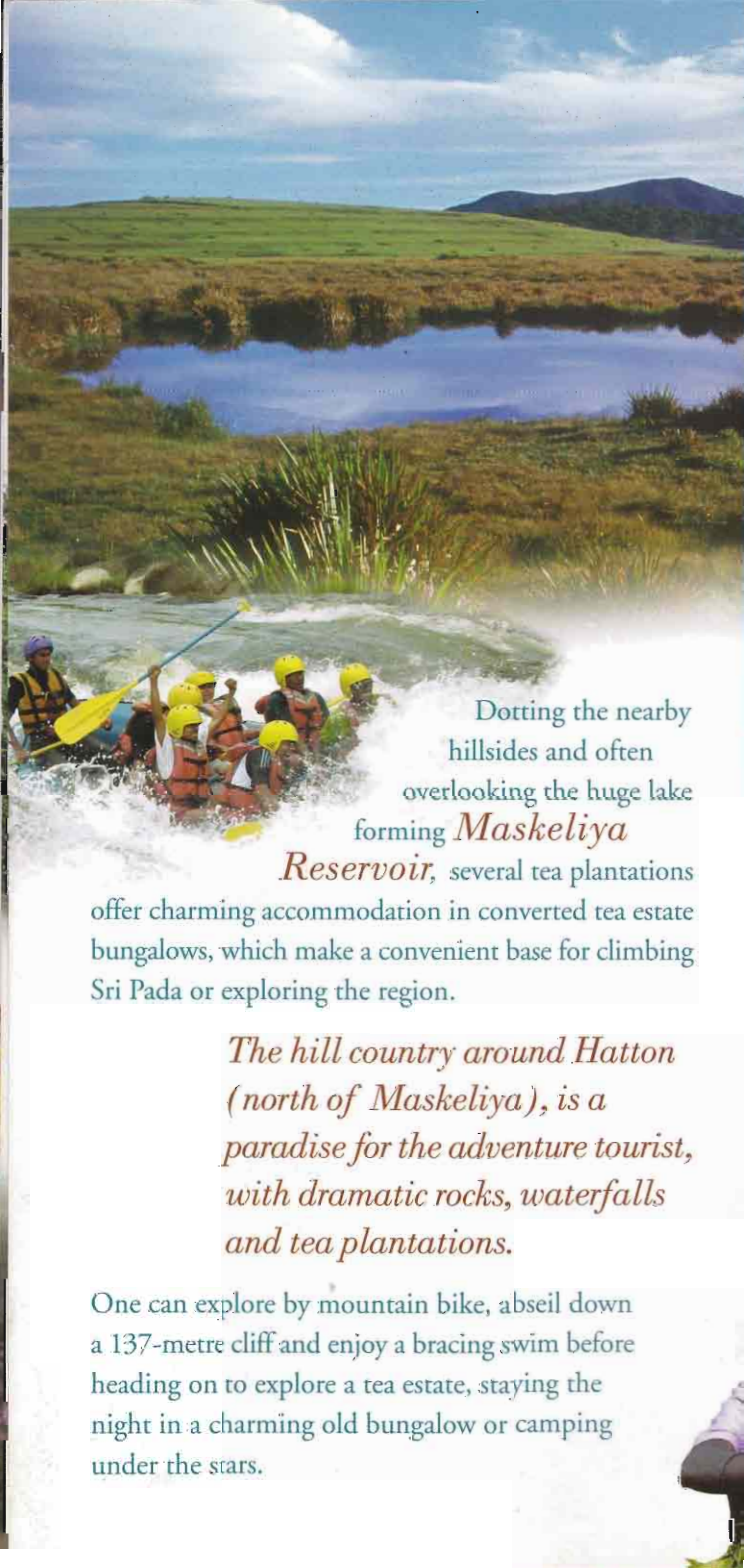




Southwest of Nuwara Eliya, a needle-like peak towers dramatically above a virgin forest reserve. Although not the country's highest mountain, the 2,234-metre Sri Pada or Adam's Peak is certainly its most sacred.

To Buddhists, the indentation in a rock on the summit is the footprint left by Lord Buddha. To Muslims and Christians, it is believed to be that of Adam, while to Hindus, it was made by the god Siva as he danced the world into creation. Consequently, the mountain is climbed by thousands of devout pilgrims each year between December and May. The climb requires stamina rather than mountaineering skills, and the view from the summit at dawn is one of Sri Lanka's most remarkable sights.





Dotting the nearby hillsides and often overlooking the huge lake forming *Maskeliya Reservoir*, several tea plantations offer charming accommodation in converted tea estate bungalows, which make a convenient base for climbing Sri Pada or exploring the region.

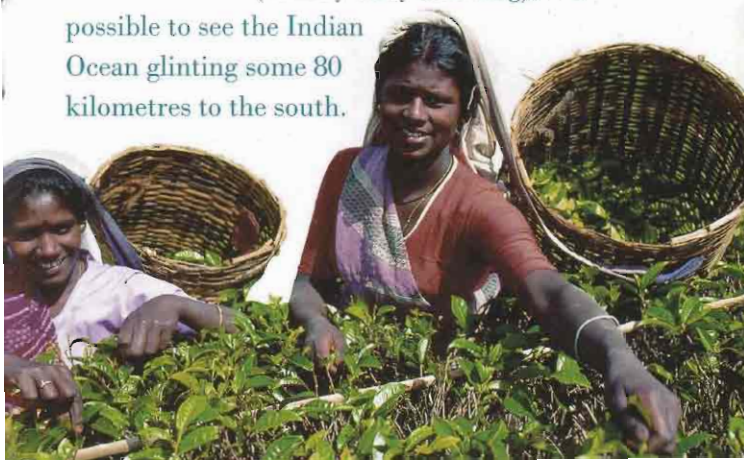
The hill country around Hatton (north of Maskeliya), is a paradise for the adventure tourist, with dramatic rocks, waterfalls and tea plantations.

One can explore by mountain bike, abseil down a 137-metre cliff and enjoy a bracing swim before heading on to explore a tea estate, staying the night in a charming old bungalow or camping under the stars.



Horton Plains, a 2,130-metre grassy plateau south of Nuwara Eliya, is a secluded and hauntingly lovely region (protected as a national park), perfect for hiking. Giant scarlet rhododendrons, and primrose and daffodil orchids provide bright accents in the few patches of forest, while rare endemic species of birds, monkeys and butterflies can be spotted by lucky hikers.

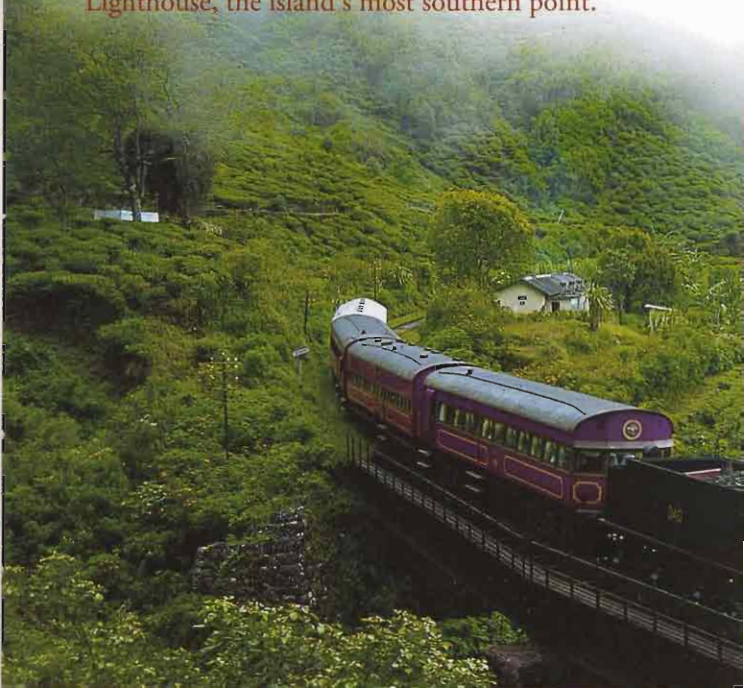
A gentle stroll of about 4 km across the plain leads to the country's most dramatic views, *World's End*, a sheer escarpment dropping vertically for a dizzying 880 metres. When the weather is clear (usually early morning), it is possible to see the Indian Ocean glinting some 80 kilometres to the south.



East of Horton Plains, near the village of Haputale, the hills are covered with tea plantations, including Dambatenne, established by the famous Sir Thomas Lipton. Visitors are welcome to the processing factory, and can also visit Lipton's Seat to admire the views that he once adored.

Also near Haputale, Benedictine monks living in the attractive stone *Adisham Monastery*, welcome visitors on weekends and full moon (poya) days. A few kilometres away towards the village of Wellawaya, one of Sri Lanka's highest waterfalls, Diyaluma, rushes over a cliff edge and drops 170 m in a sheer curtain to the pool below.

North of Haputale, the small town of Ella is famed for its stunning view through *Ella Gap* down to the coastal plain 1,000 metres below, and on to Dondra Lighthouse, the island's most southern point.

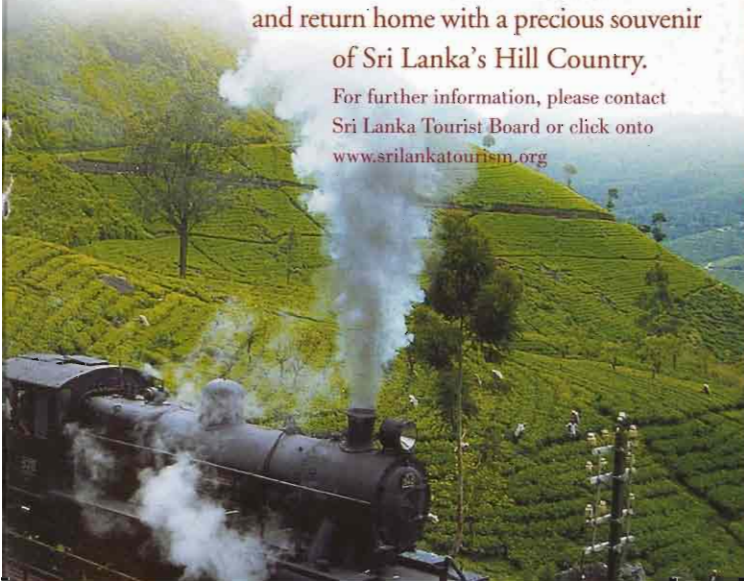


More dramatic vistas are promised by a train ride from Haputale via Ella to Badulla. The tracks cross countless iron bridges and viaducts, making incredibly steep ascents and descents, the most dramatic being at Demodera where the track loops and tunnels back under itself 30 metres lower.



Although there mightn't be 'gold in them thar hills', there is certainly a wealth of gem stones. Around *Ratnapura*, in the southern foothills, rubies, sapphires and other exquisite stones are literally dug up from the earth, cut, polished and set into jewellery. Visitors can watch the entire process in one of the city's jewellery specialists, and return home with a precious souvenir of Sri Lanka's Hill Country.

For further information, please contact Sri Lanka Tourist Board or click onto www.srilankatourism.org



Sri Lanka Tourist Attractions



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