



Wilpattu National Park

Information guide



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Wilpattu National Park at a glance:

- Size: 131,655 ha
- National Park status since 1938
- Ramsar Wetland of International Importance since 2013
- Unique villu ecosystems: more than 40
- High possibility of encountering the "Big 3":
Elephant, Leopard and the Sloth Bear
- Numerous archaeological sites and ancient irrigation systems
- Two ticketing counters: Hunuwilagama and Eluwankulama
- Speed Limit: 25km/h
- Visiting hours: 6 am-6 pm





Wilpattu National Park (WNP) covers an area of 131,656 ha, and is the largest protected area in Sri Lanka. It was declared a National Park in 1938 under the Fauna and Flora Protection Ordinance and consists of five blocks, gazetted between 1938 to 1973 and is managed by the Department of Wildlife Conservation. The park spans across Puttalam and Anuradhapura Districts while bordering Mannar and Vavuniya Districts. WNP is bounded in the north by the rivers Modaragam Aru and Aravi Aru, in the south by the Kala Oya, and in the west by Portugal and Dutch Bay as well as the open sea. Wilpattu West Sanctuary and the 40,000 ha Mavillu Conservation Forest encompass the northern border, while the 21,933 ha Thabbowa Sanctuary is located adjoining to its southern border. This area is one of the most important elephant habitats of the country.

The landscape of WNP is flat and covered with dry evergreen forest and deciduous thorn scrub, interrupted by open plains and some 40 seasonal or permanent lakes known as Villu rimmed by sand dunes or sandy plains. Villu are flat, shallow depressions containing rain water, usually with no water inlet

or outlet. They give Wilpattu its name: the “Land of lakes”. The extent of the villu ranges from less than 10 ha to 160 ha and may contain either freshwater (e.g. Kumbuk Vila), brackish water (e.g. Kali villu), or saline water (Kokkari villu). The villu are located in the Central and North-West of the national park and is home to a variety of animals and plants. In 2013 all of WNP and its bordering sea and islands within 10 km offshore as well as Mahavilachchiya tank, were declared a wetland of international importance under the Ramsar Convention.

Physical properties

The climate is typical of the dry and arid zone of Sri Lanka, in which wet (monsoon) and dry seasons alternate.

- The altitude ranges from the sea level to 240 m.
- Annual rainfall is approximately 1,000 mm.
- Wet seasons: September to December, and March to May.
- Dry seasons: January to February, and May to September.

Biological wealth

Around 70% of Wilpattu National Park is covered with dry evergreen forest of differing heights depending on soil quality, and deciduous thorn scrub. There are small grasslands surrounding the villu that get exposed to flooding in the wet seasons. A total of 621 species of plants have been recorded in Wilpattu, and the large Palu tree (*Manilkara hexandra*) is conspicuous in the forest. There are also permanent and seasonal rivers as well as irrigation tanks up to 2,000 years old, coastal salt marshes and scrub lie behind the beach. The Kala Oya estuary contains one of the largest mangrove forests in Sri Lanka. The shallow sea is highly productive, supporting artisanal fishermen, and contains beds of sea grass, supplying food for globally endangered Dugong.

Wilpattu National Park and its surroundings support many species of animals:

- 23 species of fresh water fish
- 17 species of amphibians
- 57 species of reptiles
- 253 species of birds
- 45 species of mammals



The park is well known for accommodating globally threatened large mammals: Leopard (*Panthera pardus kotiya*), the Sloth Bear (*Melursus ursinus*) and Elephant (*Elephas maximus maximus*). Scattered herds of Spotted Deer (*Axis axis*) can be found throughout the park, while the Mugger Crocodile (*Crocodylus palustris*) is the most noteworthy reptile. In the shallow marine waters live endangered Dugongs (*Dugong dugon*), Indo-Pacific Humpbacked Dolphins (*Sousa chinensis*) and Marine Turtles (Olive Ridley - *Lepidochelys olivacea* and Green Turtle - *Chelonia mydas*).

The following endemic species of birds were recorded in WNP and surroundings: Sri Lanka Junglefowl (*Gallus lafayetti*), Sri Lanka Green Pigeon (*Treron pompadora*), Grey Hornbill (*Ocyrceros gingalensis*), Black-capped Bulbul (*Pycnonotus melanicterus*), Brown-capped Babbler (*Pellorneum fuscocappilum*), Ceylon Hanging-parrot (*Loriculus beryllinus*), Ceylon Small Barbet (*Megalaima rubricapillus*), Crimson-backed Flameback (*Chrysocolaptes stricklandi*), Ceylon Swallow (*Hirundo hyperythra*), and Ceylon Woodshrike (*Tephrodornis affinis*).



Historical and cultural wealth

Structures scattered around the park including tanks, Buddhist monasteries, stupas, and rock inscriptions, give evidence of a civilization based on irrigated agriculture that was present in the region. Much of the legend and history is associated with the park and its surroundings. Tammanna Nuwara, where King Vijaya supposedly landed in about 500 BC and founded the Sinhalese people, is said to be in WNP between Kudiramale point and Moderagam Ara mouth. Galbendi Neeravia, North-East of Maradanmaduwa tank, is supposed to be the place where Prince Saliya, the son of King Dutugamunu, lived with his bride Asokamaala 2,000 years ago. Further, prehistoric sites of the Paleolithic and Mesolithic period have also been recorded.

The park was closed to the public for nearly 20 years during the civil conflict in Sri Lanka but was reopened on 27th February 2010, after the war ended in May 2009. For a substantial amount of time, parts of the frontline ran through or near the park. As a consequence, the management was severely disrupted and the park staff and many animal populations suffered. Now the park infrastructure and management is being rehabilitated and the wildlife is recovering.

Around 34,000 people in 135 villages live in the immediate vicinity of Wilpattu. Their livelihoods include coastal fishing, livestock-rearing in the North and South, but mostly by rain fed cultivation. Living beside a national park brings a lot of challenges, such as animals eating crops, but there are also benefits including employment in tourism sector. Wilpattu has a Community Outreach programme that aims to reduce such problems and to increase the benefits by working closely with the local people.

Visitor information

To enter the park for tourism purposes one has to obtain a ticket/permit from one of the two park entrances: Hunuwilagama (Anuradhapura) or Eluwankulama (Puttalam). The park is open from 6 am to 6 pm daily, but bad weather conditions may lead to a shift of opening hours. Only four wheel vehicles are allowed inside the park and they have to maintain a maximum speed limit of 25km/h. Visitors can get down from their vehicles only at designated locations such as Kumbuk Vila and Kudiramale Point. A museum is situated at Hunuwilagama entrance.

There are seven circuit bungalows that can accommodate 10 people each, and a dormitory, which can house up to 50 people inside the National Park. Campsites are also available for more independent visitors. Bungalows, dormitory and camp sites must be booked in advance through the e-service or directly from the Department of Wildlife Conservation.

You find a variety of accommodation facilities located within 10km from the park main entrance. More hotel options are available in Anuradhapura or Kalpitiya, which are approximately 25km and 30km away from WNP.



Code of Conduct for Tourists at Wilpattu National Park

- Do not feed animals or take any material from the park (including plant parts, bones, rocks etc.)
- Observe strict silence at wildlife sightings
- Do not leave your vehicle, lean out of the window or climb on the roof
- Only leave your vehicle in designated locations- such as Kumbuk Vila and Kudiramale
- Do not throw rubbish out of your vehicle, please take all the garbage back with you
- Smoking inside the park is strictly prohibited
- Only four wheel vehicles are allowed inside the park and they have to maintain a maximum speed limit of 25km/h
- Slow driving enables you to observe small animals such as birds, reptiles and mammals
- Please ensure that your driver does not obstruct other vehicles or interfere with animal movement



Map

