

Sri Lanka



KEY FACTS

Joined Commonwealth:	1948
Population:	21,098,000 (2012)
GDP p.c. growth:	4.5% p.a. 1990–2012
UN HDI 2012:	world ranking 92
Official languages:	Sinhala, Tamil
Time:	GMT plus 5:30hr
Currency:	Sri Lanka rupee (SLRs)

Geography

Area:	65,610 sq km
Coastline:	1,340 km
Capital:	Colombo

The Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka (formerly Ceylon) is an island in the Indian Ocean, separated from south-east India (Tamil Nadu state) by the Palk Strait. It is almost linked to the Indian mainland by Adam's Bridge, an atoll barrier, mostly submerged, lying between the offshore island of Mannar and India itself.

The country comprises nine provinces (from south to north): Southern (provincial capital Galle), Sabaragamuwa (Ratnapura), Western (Colombo), Uva (Badulla), Eastern (Trincomalee), Central (Kandy), North-Western (Kurunegala), North-Central (Anuradhapura) and Northern (Jaffna).



Topography: Beyond the coastal plains, Sri Lanka's topography is dominated by an outstandingly beautiful central mountain mass of gneiss rock, with the highest point at Pidurutalagala (2,524 metres). The holy Adam's Peak (2,243 metres) is so called from a mark at the top in the likeness of a human footprint, variously attributed as the print of the Buddha, Vishnu or Adam, and is a place of pilgrimage. The coastal plains are broader in the north, tapering off in the long low-lying Jaffna peninsula. Several fast-flowing non-navigable rivers arise in the mountains. The Mahaweli Ganga, from which hydroelectric power is obtained, is the longest at 322 km.

One of the most violent earthquakes ever recorded occurred on 26 December 2004 in the Indian Ocean west of Sumatra generating a tsunami that swamped the east and south coasts of Sri Lanka causing approximately 31,000 deaths and devastation of the coastal area.

Climate: Tropical. The lowlands are always hot, particularly from March to May. The highlands are cooler. During December and January there is occasional frost on very high ground – for example, at Nuwara Eliya. The dry season is March to mid-May. The south-west monsoon season lasts from mid-May to September; the north-east monsoon season lasts from November to March.

Environment: The most significant environmental issues are: deforestation; soil erosion; coastal degradation as a result of mining activities and increased pollution; pollution of freshwater resources by industrial wastes and sewage; air pollution in Colombo; and the threat to wildlife populations of poaching and urbanisation.

Vegetation: Forest covers 29 per cent of the land area, having declined at 1.2 per cent p.a. 1990–2010. Vegetation is rich and luxuriant, with a great variety of flowers, trees, creepers and flowering shrubs. The flora of Sri Lanka were described by Linnaeus in 1747 from specimens collected by a fellow botanist. Among the many species of trees are the rubber tree, palm, acacia, margosa, satinwood, Ceylon oak, tamarind, ebony, coral tree and banyan. Flowers and shrubs include the orchid and rhododendron. There are about 3,300 species of plants, of which some 280 are threatened with extinction. Arable land comprises 19 per cent and permanent cropland 16 per cent of the total land area.

Did you know?

Sri Lanka was the first Commonwealth state to have a female Prime Minister. Sirimavo Bandaranaike served for three periods of office: 1960–65, 1970–77 and 1994–2000.

Shehan Karunatilaka won the Commonwealth Writers' Book Prize in 2012.

Sanath Jayasuriya was Wisden Leading Cricketer in the World in 1996, Muttiah Muralitharan in 2000 and 2006, and K. C. Sangakkara in 2011.

Wildlife: Nature reserves now cover ten per cent of the island. Wilpattu National Park in the north-west (813 sq km) is best known for leopards; Yala National Park in the south-east (112 sq km) is home to large elephant populations. However, reduction of the natural tropical hardwood forest is endangering several animal species. Some 29 mammal species and 15 bird species are thought to be endangered (2012).

Main towns: Colombo (commercial capital; Western Province; pop. 685,200 in 2010), Dehiwala–Mount Lavinia (greater Colombo, 234,600), Moratuwa (greater Colombo, 204,800), Negombo (145,000), Sri Jayewardenepura–Kotte (administrative capital; greater Colombo, 126,900), Trincomalee (Eastern, 126,900), Kandy (Central, 120,100), Vavuniya (108,800), Kalmunai (105,000), Galle (Southern, 97,800), Batticaloa (97,600), Katunayaka (92,500), Battaramulla (greater Colombo, 85,300), Jaffna (Northern, 84,400), Dambulla (77,100), Maharagama (greater Colombo, 75,100), Daluguma (74,400), Anuradhapura (North–Central, 68,200), Chavakachcheri (54,500), Ratnapura (Sabaragamuwa, 51,200), Badulla (Uva, 47,300), Point Pedro (40,000), Valvettithurai (34,700) and Kurunegala (North–Western, 29,100).

Transport: There are 114,090 km of roads (80 per cent paved) and about 1,460 km of railway. Rail links exist between the major towns. The lines run from Colombo north along the coast to Puttalam, north via Kurunegala and Anuradhapura to Mannar and to Jaffna; north-east to Trincomalee and Batticaloa; east to Kandy via Gampaha; and south along the coast to Galle and Matara.

The international ports are at Colombo, Galle, Talaimannar and Trincomalee. Bandaranaike international airport is 32 km from Colombo.

The larger domestic airports are at Ratmalana (Colombo) in the south and Jaffna in the north.

Society

KEY FACTS 2012

Population per sq km:	322
Life expectancy:	74 years
Net primary enrolment:	94%

Population: 21,098,000 (2012); 15 per cent of people live in urban areas; growth 0.9 per cent p.a. 1990–2012; birth rate 18 per 1,000 people (31 in 1970); life expectancy 74 years (43 in 1946 and 64 in 1970).

The largest ethnic group is Sinhalese (estimated at 74 per cent of the population), followed by Sri Lankan Tamils (12 per cent), Muslims (seven per cent), Indian Tamils (five per cent), and small communities of Malays and Burghers (persons of Dutch or partly Dutch descent) and a small number of Veddhhas, descended from the earliest inhabitants. Sinhalese settlers arrived in the 5th and 6th centuries BCE.

Sri Lankan Tamils settled mainly from the tenth century onwards. Indian Tamils arrived later, brought in by the British in the 19th century as labour for the plantations. Some Indian Tamils were repatriated from 1964, and since 1988 all remaining Indian Tamils have attained Sri Lankan citizenship. The Muslims are mostly descendants of Arab traders, and the Burghers descendants of European settlers of the 17th century onwards.

Language: The official languages are Sinhala and Tamil. English is used in commerce and government and very widely understood.

Religion: Buddhists 69 per cent, Muslims eight per cent, Hindus seven per cent and Christians six per cent (2001 partial census; did not cover the predominantly Tamil north and north-east).

Health: Public spending on health was two per cent of GDP in 2011. Both Western and Ayurvedic (traditional) medicine are practised, though most doctors practise Western medicine. A free health service is available, with hospitals and clinics countrywide, supplemented by several private hospitals and clinics in Colombo. Some 93 per cent of the population uses an improved drinking water source and 91 per cent have access to adequate sanitation facilities (2011). Infant mortality was eight per 1,000 live births in 2012 (83 in 1960). Over 90 per cent of children are born in hospital. Family planning is common, with about 68 per cent of married women practising contraception. Polio has been eradicated, but malaria remains a problem.

Education: Public spending on education was two per cent of GDP in 2011. There are nine years of compulsory education starting at the age of five. Primary school comprises five years and secondary eight, with two cycles of four years. Some 97 per cent of pupils complete primary school (2010). The school year starts in January.

The University Grants Commission (UGC) recognises 15 public universities and 17 higher education institutes, and there are four other public universities that come under other departments of government (2013). Leading universities include the University of Colombo, which was established – as University of Ceylon – in 1942 when the Ceylon Medical College (founded 1870) and Ceylon University College (1921) were merged; University of Kelaniya; University of Peradeniya; and Open University of Sri Lanka, which provides courses through distance learning. Technical colleges offer courses up to diploma level in engineering and business. The female–male ratio for gross enrolment in tertiary education is 1.80:1 (2011). Literacy among people aged 15–24 is 98 per cent (2010).

In 1980 Sri Lanka hosted the Eighth Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers in Colombo. Commonwealth Education Ministers meet every three years to discuss issues of mutual concern and interest.

Media: There are several daily newspapers in Sinhala, Tamil, and English including the state-owned *Daily News*, and the independent *Daily Mirror* and *The Island*, plus several weeklies including the state-owned *Sunday Observer* and independent *The Sunday Times*.

The public radio network of the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation and many private stations broadcast in Sinhala, Tamil and English. The Independent Television Network and Sri Lanka Rupavahini Corporation both provide public TV services, and there are several private TV channels; public and private channels are also in Sinhala, Tamil and English.

Some 76 per cent of households have TV sets (2007). There are 38 personal computers per 1,000 people (2005).

Communications: Country code 94; internet domain '.lk'. Mobile phone coverage is good in urban areas and the number of subscribers has grown rapidly. Internet cafés can be found in the main towns. Postal services are good.

There are 163 main telephone lines, 916 mobile phone subscriptions and 183 internet users per 1,000 people (2012).

Public holidays: Independence Day (4 February), Sinhala and Tamil New Year (mid-April, two days), Labour Day (1 May) and Christmas Day.

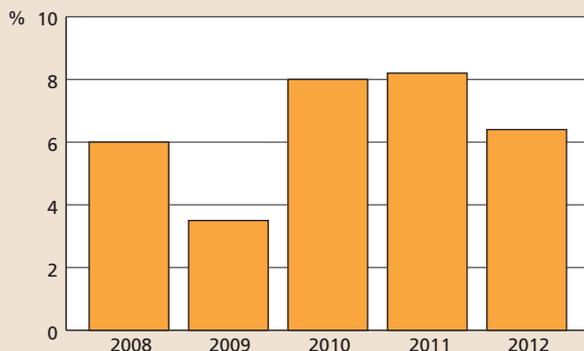
Religious and other festivals whose dates vary from year to year include Tamil Thai Pongal Day (mid-January), Prophet's Birthday, Good Friday, Vesak Poya Days (two days generally in May) and Deepavali (Diwali, October/November). There is a Buddhist Poya holiday each month on the day of the full moon. With the exception of the Vesak Poya Days, when Poya Days fall at the weekend they are nonetheless observed on the full moon day. Eid al-Fitr (End of Ramadan) and Eid al-Adha (Feast of the Sacrifice) are observed only by Muslims, and Mahasivarathri only by Hindus.

Economy

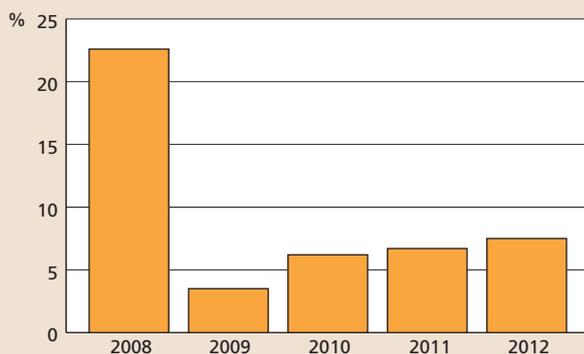
KEY FACTS 2012

GNI:	US\$59.3bn
GNI p.c.:	US\$2,920
GDP growth:	6.4% p.a. 2008–12
Inflation:	9.1% p.a. 2008–12

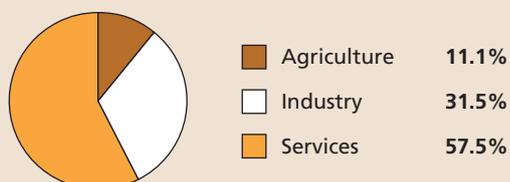
Real Growth in GDP



Inflation



GDP by Sector (2012)



While agriculture is central to Sri Lanka's economy – and tea, rubber and coconut continue to be important exports – manufacturing and services (including banking and financial services) are of increasing importance, especially textiles and clothing which are major exports. Since 1989 the former policies of nationalisation have been superseded by extensive liberalisation, which has led to extensive privatisation of the formerly largely centralised economy, including agricultural enterprises, banking, transport services and utilities.

Sri Lanka had been aiming at achieving newly industrialised country status by the year 2000, but ethnic conflict adversely affected the economy, notably in the spheres of foreign investment and tourism, and particularly in the north and east of the country. Despite the conflict, tourism earnings generally held up in the 1990s and into the 2000s, though attacks on tourist areas, such as the international airport in 2001, caused sharp falls. Foreign investment in manufacturing and infrastructure were maintained and manufacturing output grew by 6.3 per cent p.a. 1980–90, 8.1 per cent p.a. 1990–2000, 4.5 per cent p.a. 2000–10 and 6.8 per cent p.a. 2010–12.

Thus, despite the disruption caused by the hostilities and relatively high spending on defence, the economy grew well throughout the 1990s, but plunged into recession in 2001 when it shrank by 1.5 per cent, as export markets for clothing weakened sharply, recovering in 2002.

The massive tsunami of December 2004 that swamped the east and south coasts of Sri Lanka, causing approximately 31,000 deaths and devastation of the coastal area, displaced more than 400,000 people and destroyed property valued at an estimated US\$1.5 billion. Despite this devastation of the economic infrastructure of the coastal areas in the south and east of the country, economic growth continued steadily, partly spurred by reconstruction, averaging 6.4 per cent p.a. during 2004–08.

Then the economy slowed in 2008–09 as the world economic downturn depressed demand for Sri Lanka's exports, causing GDP growth to moderate to 3.5 per cent in 2009, but in that year there was a compensatory surge of economic activity following the cessation of civil strife in May 2009, yielding strong growth of at least six to eight per cent p.a. in 2010–14.

Constitution

Status:	Republic with executive President
Legislature:	Parliament of Sri Lanka
Independence:	4 February 1948

Sri Lanka is a democratic republic with an executive presidency based on the French model. Under the 1978 constitution, the head of state and government is the President. There is universal adult suffrage with proportional representation; parliamentary and presidential elections are held every six years. Parliament has a single chamber with 225 members. Members are directly elected, but vacant seats occurring during the life of a parliament go to nominees of the party holding the seat.

Ministers are appointed by the President, who chairs the cabinet and appoints the independent judiciary. Amendments may be made to the constitution, subject to a two-thirds majority in parliament; however, to amend certain entrenched articles of the constitution approval in a national referendum is also required. The constitution provides for provincial councils.

The Eighteenth Amendment – enacted in September 2010 – removed the limit on the number of terms a President may serve, previously set at two.

Politics

Last elections:	26 January 2010 (presidential), 8 and 20 April 2010 (parliamentary)
Next elections:	2016 (presidential and parliamentary)
Head of state:	President Mahinda Rajapaksa
Head of government:	the President
Ruling party:	United People's Freedom Alliance
Women MPs:	6%

After a violent campaign in which at least 70 people died, in the parliamentary elections of October 2000, the ruling People's Alliance (PA), led by President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, won 107 of the 225 parliamentary seats, the United National Party (UNP) 89 and the Marxist Janatha Vimukti Peramuna (JVP) ten. Sirimavo Bandaranaike was reappointed Prime Minister. However, short of a working majority, the new government was dependent on the support of the smaller parties, and this diverted its attention from new peace initiatives (see 'Communal conflict' in *History*) and its economic reform programme.

Parliamentary elections were held in December 2001 after the PA lost its majority in parliament. The UNP won 109 seats, the PA 77, JVP 16, Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) 15 and Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) five. With the support of the TULF and SLMC, the UNP commanded a majority in the National Assembly, and the President was obliged to appoint UNP leader Ranil Wickremasinghe Prime Minister and invite him to form a government.

Thus, in due course, President Kumaratunga found herself chairing a cabinet composed entirely of political opponents. The new government was nevertheless determined to pursue the peace process. But as the end of the government's first year in office approached (when the President had the power to dissolve parliament and call fresh elections), relations between the President and government became increasingly strained. However, both the President and Prime Minister remained committed to the peace process, and in 2002 the government signed a ceasefire agreement with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and invited Scandinavian countries, led by Norway, to monitor the truce.

In November 2003, the week before the seventh round of peace talks was due to take place, the President sacked three ministers, suspended parliament and first declared then lifted a state of emergency, calling for a government of national reconciliation, and plunging the country into political crisis. This endured until April 2004 when in a snap election the President's United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) – a new alliance with the JVP – took 105 seats and 46 per cent of the votes, while the UNP won 82 seats and the Lanka Tamil State Party (ITAK) 22. President Kumaratunga formed a government and the UPFA's Mahinda Rajapaksa was sworn in as Prime Minister but, without an overall majority, they would be depending on the support of members of minority parties and any opposition members who crossed the floor.

In the presidential election in November 2005, UPFA leader Mahinda Rajapaksa, with just over 50 per cent of the votes,

defeated UNP leader Ranil Wickremasinghe. The overall turnout was 74 per cent, even though many Tamils boycotted the election in the LTTE-controlled areas in the north and east of the country.

Almost two years before the expiry of his term of office, Rajapaksa called a presidential election in January 2010, when he faced a challenge from former head of the army General (rtd) Sarath Fonseka, who had overseen the military victory against the LTTE that had been declared by the government in May 2009. In a poll with a 75 per cent voter turnout, Rajapaksa was returned to office with 57.9 per cent of the vote; Fonseka received 40.2 per cent of the vote, but contested the election result in the courts. A Commonwealth expert team was present during the election period. At the release of the team's report, Commonwealth Secretary-General Kamallesh Sharma said that 'on the day of the election voters were free to express their will', but shortcomings primarily in the pre-election period meant that overall the election 'did not fully meet key benchmarks for democratic elections'.

Two weeks after the presidential election, Fonseka was arrested and detained by the military police. A government spokesperson alleged he had been plotting a coup. In August 2010 he was convicted by court martial of participating in political activities while on active service and stripped of his rank, medals and pension. In September the court martial convicted him of arms procurement offences and he was required to resign the parliamentary seat he won in the April 2010 election.

In the parliamentary elections of April 2010, the UPFA won 144 of 225 seats, securing 60.3 per cent of votes cast; the UNP/SLMC electoral coalition took 60 seats (29.3 per cent); ITAK 14; and the Democratic National Alliance seven. Turnout was 61 per cent.

International relations

Sri Lanka is a member of the Indian Ocean Rim Association, Non-Aligned Movement, South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, United Nations and World Trade Organization.

Traveller information

Immigration and customs: Passports must be valid for at least six months from the date of arrival. Visas are required by all Commonwealth nationals. Prohibited imports include some fresh food, plants and plant material, and tea.

Travel within the country: Traffic drives on the left. Visitors wishing to drive will need an international driving permit.

Trains connect Colombo to most other towns; air-conditioned carriages are available on some services and express services operate on a few lines, for example Colombo–Kandy. Taxis have yellow tops and red and white number plates. Most are metered but visitors should always agree the fare before travel. Chauffeur-driven cars are also available and motorised rickshaws are plentiful.

Travel health: Prevalent diseases where appropriate precautionary measures are recommended include dengue fever, hepatitis A, hepatitis B, Japanese encephalitis, malaria, rabies and typhoid.

There were 1,006,000 tourist arrivals in 2012.

Further information

Presidential Secretariat: www.priu.gov.lk
Department of Elections: www.slections.gov.lk
Parliament of Sri Lanka: www.parliament.lk
Department of Census and Statistics: www.statistics.gov.lk
Central Bank of Sri Lanka: www.cbsl.gov.lk
Sri Lanka Tourism: www.srilankatourism.org
Commonwealth Secretariat: www.thecommonwealth.org
Commonwealth of Nations:
www.commonwealthofnations.org/country/Sri_Lanka

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Media

Daily Mirror: www.dailymirror.lk
Daily News: www.dailynews.lk
The Island: www.island.lk
Sunday Observer: www.sundayobserver.lk
The Sunday Times: sundaytimes.lk
Independent Television Network: www.itn.lk
Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation: www.slbc.lk
Sri Lanka Rupavahini Corporation: www.rupavahini.lk
Government News Portal: www.news.lk
Lankapuvath: www.lankapuvath.lk

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