EXPLORE! Tour Notes

PRICE GUARANTEE 100% NO SURCHARGES

Secrets of Sri Lanka (DSL 2014)

CULTURAL DISCOVERY

TOUR DURATION **14** DAYS

Tour Style: Premium
Tour Pace: Moderate
Tour Type: Small Groups
Tour Comfort: Comfortable
Tour Code: DSL

Tour Highlights - Secrets of Sri Lanka

- ✓ Dambulla - Explore the painted caves of this temple complex
- ✓ Polonnaruwa - Visit the Royal Palace and dramatic scultpures of this ancient city
- ✓ Sigiriya - Climb to the top of Lion Rock, stopping to see the painted maidens half way up
- ✓ Kandy - Visit the Temple of the Tooth for the daily ceremony
- ✓ Yala - Look out for leopard in the national park
- ✓ Galle - Soak up the atmosphere in the historic fort
- ✓ Bentota - Time for relaxation on the beautiful coastline.

Tour Essentials

Accommodation:	13 nights Comfortable Hotel
Included Meals:	13 breakfasts, 0 lunches, 0 dinners
Start Point:	Join tour: Negombo
End Point:	Tour ends: Bentota
Transport:	Bus
Countries:	Sri Lanka

Secrets Of Sri Lanka

Staying in stylish and comfortable hotels, we travel to some of Sri Lanka's greatest sights: from ancient Buddhist monuments to tea plantations and historic cities. We visit the Temple of the Tooth, search for elephants in Yala National Park and relax by the idyllic Indian Ocean coast.

Suitability

We've given each of our tours a comfort rating and a tour pace, walking or cycling grade to give you a general idea about the level of activity on each tour and the standard of accommodation you will be staying in at the end of your day's adventure.

Often you'll stay in different styles of accommodation during your tour; so we make an average rating across the entire tour. For more information on where you'll stay each night, please refer to the day by day tour itinerary.

Tour Comfort: Comfortable

Hand-picked and chosen for their character, location or local importance, these properties have excellent facilities and a higher level of comfort and service. They provide the perfect wind down after an active day.

Tour Style: Premium

These tours are perfect if you want to combine an original, off-beat classic adventure with the added comfort of hand-picked accommodation chosen for its character, location or local importance. Revel in adventurous days followed by relaxing nights.

Tour Pace: Moderate

These moderately paced tours provide some busy days with plenty of experiences to enjoy, as well as time to relax along the way.

Your tour itinerary

Tour itinerary notes

While our intention is to adhere to the day-by-day itinerary as printed below, a degree of flexibility is built in. Overnight stops may vary from those suggested.

Your Tour Leader

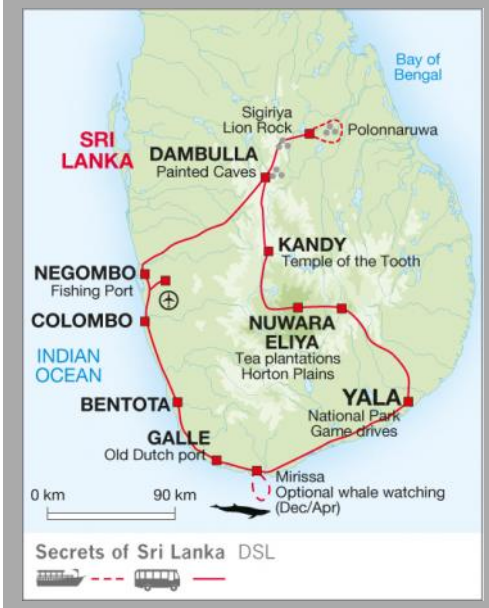
A Tour Leader is an integral part of any Explore tour and your tour will be led by one of our experienced tour leaders who have been handpicked and expertly trained. We believe that our Tour Leaders are the key to the success of our tours; they are passionate travellers who are bursting with first-hand local knowledge which they love to share. Your tour Leader will also take care of all the planning and organization throughout your journey. Their passionate approach will make this tour fun and inspiring, bringing the destination to life whether you're travelling alone or with others.

DAY 1 Join tour Colombo

Check-in at hotel in Colombo.

Jetwing Blue
The Jetwing Blue hotel is a lovely beach front property, located within resort town of Negombo. The hotel is bright, modern and stylish, offering beach front dining and a spa. Each room has either a balcony or terrace with ocean views and all have modern facilities.

Single Rooms Available



DAY 2 Drive to Dambulla

Leaving the capital, our journey takes us northwards along the coast to the fishing port of Negombo. We will pause to visit a nearby fishing village where the catch is made in traditional style large outrigger canoes, known locally as 'oruvas'. We may also see the toddy tappers climbing tall coconut trees and collecting sap from the flowers to make Arrack, a local whisky type spirit. Leaving Negombo we drive to Dambulla, where a great series of caves have been turned into temples (dating from the 1st century BC). We will visit five separate caves, which contain a large number of Buddha images and a few sculptures of Hindu Gods. The Reclining Buddha is no less than 14m long! This World Heritage Site is visited by crowds of worshippers. Finally we reach our resort in Dambulla.

Amaya Lake
Amaya Lake is set amidst beautiful gardens, with rooms spaced out over the grounds and views of Kandalama Lake. There is a relaxed and peaceful atmosphere and each room has its own private terrace. Rooms benefit from contemporary furnishings with a taste of Sri Lanka in the design. There are a choice of restaurants and bars, a pool and spa.

Single Rooms Available

DAY 3 Visit Sigiriya; elephant ride

In the morning we drive to Sigiriya. A morning climb brings us up to the redoubtable Sky Fortress. The ruins of this 5th century fortress are one of Sri Lanka’s major attractions, a stupendous sight to behold and a feat of consummate engineering skill. A switchback series of steps and steel stairways (sometimes steep and challenging) ascend to the top. Halfway up, tucked beneath a sheltering overhang of rock, are the famous frescoes – the Sigiriya Damsels, their colours still glowing. Magnificent views can be enjoyed from the summit of the rock palace. Heading to Habarana, we make an elephant back safari through the shrub jungles & across the Habarana ponds. Here we should encounter a variety of small wild animals and birds amidst fascinating plants and flowers. (200m high).

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Single Rooms Available

DAY 4 Visit Polonnaruwa

Today we explore the ancient city of Polonnaruwa, which reached its height of glory in the 12th century. The city still has many interesting and spectacular buildings and monuments. There is the Royal Palace Group with its Audience Hall, Bathing Pool and Quadrangle - a very compact collection of ruins. Close by is the Circular Relic House, a curious round structure with a beautifully preserved moonstone carved at the foot of a flight of steps. Another famous feature of the deserted city is the group of carved images of the Buddha known as Galvihara. Here there are four colossal figures, all of which are hewn out of solid granite. Later in the afternoon we return to Dambulla.

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Single Rooms Available

DAY 5 Drive to Kandy

Lying in the mountains 112km northeast of Colombo, Kandy is, in climatic terms, a world apart due to its altitude of 500m above sea level. The town was captured by the British as late as 1815, and is known more for its cultural and spiritual importance rather than its history. Buddhists from all over the world come to this delightful old highland town, specifically to visit the Temple of the Tooth, the Dalada Maligawa. The costly jewelled shrine of the Holy Tooth (said to be 3.5cm long by 1cm thick and Buddha's left canine) is kept in the upper floor of the original building. This relic was brought from India 1,500 years ago and every year, at the time of the August full moon, it is paraded round the town with great pomp and circumstance. During this ten-night festival of Perahera, the Tooth (or a simulacrum) is borne along on a richly caparisoned elephant, surrounded by saffron-robed monks and Kandyan dancers. Kandyan dancers can also be seen performing every night at one or two locales around town. This afternoon's sight-seeing includes attending the Temple of the Tooth Ceremony and a visit to the Peradeniya Botanical Garden.

Amaya Hills
Built in the style of a Kandyan Palace and set amongst the picturesque hill tops of Kandy, Amaya Hills offers a breathtaking retreat with stunning views of the forrested surroundings. Along with an open-air restaurant and bar the hotel benefits from a pool, spa and fitness centre.

Single Rooms Available

DAY 6 Free day in Kandy

A full free day to continue your exploration of this charming mountain town or simply relax and enjoy the amenities at our hotel.

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Single Rooms Available

DAY 7 Drive through the Hill Country to Nuwara Eliya

This morning we head off across the highlands, through green rolling hills covered in tea plantations, visiting a working tea factory en route to the hill station of Nuwara Eliya. After checking into our hotel we'll take a tour around this little town, known as Little England, famous for its lake, golf and race course and well manicured gardens.

Grand Hotel
With award winning gardens the Grand Hotel offers plenty of space to relax, a restaurant and coffee shop overlooking the grounds and a spa to aid relaxation. Rooms are spacious with traditional decor and most offer views over the gardens.

Single Rooms Available

DAY 8 Walk on Horton Plains

We head out this morning for the Horton Plains, situated on Sri Lanka’s highest plateau between altitudes of 2000m and 2300m. Traditionally named Mahaeliya the park’s main attraction is the thrilling escarpment known as World’s End which offers stunning views across the tea plantations. We aim to trek to World’s End in the morning when the air is clear and the views are best. Although the area is now devoid of elephants, we may be lucky enough to see other flora and fauna such as the Sambar deer. Returning to the hotel in the early afternoon, there is time to refresh and relax; maybe even a round of golf on the adjacent golf course!

Grand Hotel
With award winning gardens the Grand Hotel offers plenty of space to relax, a restaurant and coffee shop overlooking the grounds and a spa to aid relaxation. Rooms are spacious with traditional decor and most offer views over the gardens.

Single Rooms Available

DAY 9 Drive to Yala

A long but scenic journey today as we descend from the central highlands to the coast. At Ella we visit Rawana Ella Falls, then continue south through the hill country until we eventually meet the plains at the small town of Wellawaya, which stands at a major national crossroads. Continuing southwards, we reach Yala National Park where we'll take a late afternoon game drive. This huge nature reserve covers a wide range of habitats, from dense jungle to open parkland with huge rocky outcrops which gives way to huge sand dunes before meeting the sea. The park is notable for its leopard population and though sightings of these are rare, we hope to spot many of the other species native to this area such as elephant, crocodile, wild boar and langur monkey. Yala is also home to over 130 species of bird, including orioles, hornbills and a wide variety or migrating birds who stop to rest and water here.

The Safari
Situated close to the borders of Yala National Park and on the banks of Tisa lake the Safari consists of 50 rooms, a large swimming pool set in lush tropical gardens. All rooms feature air conditioning, flat screen televisions, tea & coffee facilities and en-suite bathrooms feature rain showers. The hotel restaurant overlooks the swimming pool and lake and serves traditional Sri Lankan cuisine.

Single Rooms Available

DAY 10 Drive to Galle

This morning there is a chance to take an optional game drive in to Yala National Park. Game drives are taken in jeeps with local naturalists who will help you spot the native wildlife. For those not wishing to take a game drive there is free time to relax at the hotel. In the late morning we head out of the park and on along the coast to Galle. Although there is still evidence of damage from the 2004 tsunami all along this coastline, the international relief effort has put the area on a fast path to recovery; and the brand new infrastructure is allowing local communities to benefit from tourism once again.

Tamarind Hill
Located on the outskirts of Galle the Tamarind Hill is set in three acres of lush, tropical gardens with relaxing courtyards and an outdoor swimming pool. Rooms are furnished with LCD televisions, tea & coffee facilities and mini bars.

Single Rooms Available

DAY 11 In Galle. Drive to Bentota

Galle has a variety of activities and attractions to occupy your free time. You may choose to hire snorkelling equipment and explore the corals or take a sea trip around the coast. Alternatively travel up river past small largely uninhabited islands. There is the option in the evening to visit the old, walled town of Galle itself. Important as a trading port for the Portuguese since the 16th century when the fortress was constructed, it has undoubtedly been a trading centre since ancient times. There is plenty to see particularly in the old fort area, which was designated as a World Heritage Site in 1988. Overlooking the sea, the fort ramparts protect the harbour, old houses, churches, warehouses and the Arab quarter. For those seeking pure relaxation, local Ayurvedic massages with natural, aromatic herbal oils are highly recommended. Between December and April there may be the opportunity to go on a whale watching trip from nearby Mirissa. Alternatively you may wish to visit our Trees for Life project and sponsor a tree which will eventually be donated to villages affected by the tsunami. Tonight we drive to Bentota.

The Surf
Its key goal being to embrace the island's secluded privacy The Surf Hotel offers 88 well-appointed and stylishly designed rooms and suites, each with a breath taking view of what is known to be "the longest stretch of beach" on the south west coast. With a spa, gym and two swimming pools there are plenty of facilities to help you relax. Rooms are equipped with air-conditioning, wi-fi access, flat screen tv's and minibars.

Single Rooms Available

DAY 12 Free time in Bentota

Our final days are spent relaxing on the Indian Ocean coast. If you feel like exploring further however, we recommend a trip into Colombo by train for more sightseeing and shopping.

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Single Rooms Available

DAY 13 Free time in Bentota

Today is left free to explore Bentota.

The Surf
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Single Rooms Available

DAY 14 Tour ends Bentota

Our tour ends this morning after breakfast.

Accommodation and Meals

Food & Drink

Included meals: 13 breakfasts, 0 lunches,0 dinners included in the price of this tour. Please be prepared to pay for non-included meals. Please note that costs for drinks and meals can vary depending on location.

Budgeting for your Tour

You will need some extra money to cover meals and drinks not included in the tour price, any optional sightseeing, souvenirs and items of a personal nature such as laundry.

Other Sightseeing & Activities

The following excursions and/or activities are usually available and may be arranged locally. Estimated costs are provided below for guidance only, are on a per person basis unless shown otherwise, and may depend on the number of participants. Prices quoted are correct as of the date these tour notes were originally issued but may change at any time due to currency fluctuations.

Please note: These activities are booked and paid for direct with the supplier and do not form part of your Explore holiday contract.

Optional Excursions

Kandy - Cultural Show £2.50.
Whale Watching - US$ 95.00pp (min 4 persons).
Yala National Park - The game drive consists of two costs - the jeep hire and the entry fee. Entry fee to the park is as follows: Adult - US$ 18 pp. Child - US$10 pp. Jeep hire is approx US$ 60 including service charge and vehicle entry fee. A jeep can accommodate up to a maximum of 6 people.

Tipping - Tour Leader

At your discretion you might also consider tipping your Tour Leader in appreciation of the efficiency and service you receive.

Tipping - Local Crew

In this area, tipping is a recognised part of life. Although Explore pays most gratuities for the smooth operation of the tour, some local staff will still look to members of the group for personal recognition of particular services provided. Accordingly, you should allow £25 for tipping. Your tour leader will account to you for any organised tipping.

Foreign Exchange

Sri Lanka

ATM Availability: Yes, usually in major towns.

Credit Card Acceptance: Credit cards can usually be used in most large shops and restaurants. Please note that Foreign Office advice warns about the problem of credit card fraud in Sri Lanka so please consider this when deciding if to pay by card while on tour.

Travellers Cheques: Can be exchanged in most major towns.

Local Currency: Sri Lankan Rupee.

Recommended Currency for Exchange: US$ and UK£ are equally good

Where to Exchange: In most major towns.

Joining your Tour

Flight Information

You are able to book this tour on a 'land only' basis or as a ‘flight inclusive’ package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

Booking a land only package with Explore

For passengers making their own travel arrangements, please ensure you join the group as described on day one of the tour itinerary. If you are considering purchasing your own airline tickets, you can book these through any travel agent, directly with an airline or through an online flight consolidator. In all cases, we would be happy to arrange transfers to and from the joining point of your tour if required.

Joining Tour Abroad

Clients booked on **'Land Only'** arrangements should make their own way to the joining point. Please refer to separate **'Joining Instructions'** for time and place of rendezvous with tour leader

Booking a flight inclusive package with Explore

We have a good selection of flights not only from London but from many regional airports around the UK allowing us to compare fares between scheduled carriers as well as low cost and charter airlines. Our dedicated flights team will match the best flight options to your arrival and departure airport.

On our website we display a UK flight inclusive package guide price which is generally based on a London departure. To avoid paying supplements or to secure your preferred flight option, we recommend booking as early as possible, especially for peak travel dates.

Important Information

Travel Insurance

It is a condition of joining **any** of our tours that you must have valid travel insurance. It must indicate that you have cover for (at least) medical expenses and emergency repatriation in the event of illness or injury. Medical and repatriation insurance cover is not mandatory for UK residents who are travelling in England and Scotland. We also strongly recommend your policy includes curtailment, personal effects and cancellation protection as all deposits paid are non-refundable.

If you require travel insurance for your tour, Explore Worldwide is an appointed representative of Campbell Irvine Limited, who is authorised and regulated by the Financial Services authority. Our travel insurance policy is specially tailored to the needs of the adventure traveller and will cover you for any included activity on any Explore trip. You can either purchase this at the time of booking or call us on 0844 499 0903 after you have booked.

Visa Information

Sri Lanka: All foreign nationals who intend to visit Sri Lanka for a short stay of up to six months, including transit passengers, must apply for travel authorization online prior to travel to the country.

To obtain an Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) you must visit http://www.eta.gov.lk to apply for it prior to travel. It is strongly recommended that you print and bring a copy of the ETA approval notice with you.

The Sri Lankan authorities require that your passport must be valid for at least 6 months after departure from Sri Lanka.

All visa information is subject to change. You should confirm all visa related issues with the relevant Embassy prior to departure.

Vaccinations & Protection

Sri Lanka

Nothing compulsory, but we recommend protection against malaria, typhoid, tetanus, infectious hepatitis and polio. Good mosquito repellent containing DEET is advisable. The above is not an exhaustive list. Further information regarding vaccinations and travel health advice can be found by following the NHS and NaTHNaC links at http://www.explore.co.uk/Travelhealth/ and from your local healthcare provider.

Preparing for your Tour

Climate

Sri Lanka

Year round high temperatures in coastal regions: Colombo averages 27°C. It is much cooler in the hills with Kandy averaging 20°C and Nuwara Eliya down to 16°C. Springlike temperatures in the hill country, but chilly evenings. Two monsoon periods: Apr-Sep when rain is confined to the southwest; and Oct-Mar when it falls in the northeast.

Clothing

Select your clothes carefully, bearing in mind that the climate is tropical and that upland areas are cooler and more temperate. Lightweight rainwear is also essential, and warmer clothing for the highland walks and chilly night temperatures in the mountains. When visiting religious sites you will need to dress respectfully by covering you knees and shoulders as well as taking off your shoes and hats. You may like to wear socks for temple visits as the ground can get very hot and burn the soles of your feet. You will need to bring long trousers, or buy a sarong locally.

Equipment

A water bottle is recommended for walks. There are leeches in the highlands and you may wish to consider bringing leech socks with you.

Footwear

Lightweight shoes and sandals.You may consider taking some walkingshoes/boots for the visit to Hortons Plain.

Luggage: On Tour

One main piece of baggage and a daysac. Remember, hotel porters are not always available, so don't overload yourself.

Luggage allowance on tour: 20kg

General Information

Food

The prices for meals and drinks can vary greatly depending upon location and the prices detailed below are an average guide. In general you would expect that drinks purchased in a supermarket or local bar to be less expensive, whilst drinks in an upmarket bar or restaurant may be more expensive. The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide.Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

Sri Lanka

Lunch £: 4.00

Dinner £: 8.00

Drink

Sri Lanka

Bottle of Beer £: 2.00

Water £: 0.50

Country details

Sri Lanka

Population: 20,238,000

Size of Country: 65,610 sq km

Major Language: Sinhala, Tamil

Religion: Buddhism

Time Difference to GMT: +6

Electric Supply & Plugs

Sri Lanka

3 Pin Round

Why Choose Explore

We've been creating award-winning pioneering adventure holidays for over 30 years, earning the trust of thousands of delighted customers, who feel safe in our hands. Our tour leaders have expert local knowledge and our tours are designed to take you off the beaten track to see the most exotic, inspiring and dramatic places in the world.

- With over 30 years experience, we are passionate about what we do.
- Pioneering small group adventures & tailormade holidays.
- Award winning tour leaders who you can trust.
- Responsible travel is and always has been one the driving principles of Explore.

Our adventure holidays are full of exciting things to see and do, exploring in small groups travelling by bus, boat, plane, rickshaw, camel, elephant, or any number of unusual forms of transport . Often you will stay in family run hotels and village houses and enjoy authentic local cuisine. In this way, it's easy to discover the true heart of the people and the place you travel to – and make some new friends along the way. Each tour is uniquely different, so please feel free to browse through our tours to see what may whet your appetite.

Our commitment to the environment

We are passionate about sustainable travel and work hard to create tours where your holiday delivers real benefits to the local communities. We minimise our impact by travelling in small groups, respecting local cultures and traditional, reducing waste and offsetting 100% of the CO2 from our flights.

When you travel with Explore, you are directly contributing to local economies and helping empower the people you meet. We currently support a range of charities and good causes, including: The Sunshine Orphanage (which cares for abandoned children in Luxor, Egypt), Education for All (sponsoring children through their secondary education in Morocco), The Hope Foundation (helping an Indian Village to recover from the 2004 Tsunami) and the Mufindi Orphanage, which support AIDS orphans in Tanzania.

We also care passionately about the world's wildlife. We are patrons of the Born Free Organisation, Travel Operators for Tigers (helping save the Bengal Tiger from extinction) and Friends for Conservation. We have also adopted a beautiful Sri Lankan Elephant called 'Serendip'.

We are delighted to have received a Five Star sustainable tourism status from the Association of Independent Tour Operators in recognition of our on-going commitment to sustainable tourism.

Cool Earth

Explore are delighted to support Cool Earth to reduce carbon emissions through preventing the illegal deforestation of the South America rainforest. One of the top sources of global carbon emissions, rainforest deforestation equivalent to the USA's annual emissions, it also destroys flora and fauna, sometimes to the point of extinction. It also degrades the lives and communities of the 350 million residents of the rainforest.

Cool Earth prevents the deforestation through its support of local communities as forest guardians and by focussing on areas in immediate danger of deforestation. It has so far protected over 350,000 acres of rainforest, with each acre saving an emission of 260 tons of CO2, as well as protecting rare animals and plants. When you travel on an Explore holiday we make a donation to Cool Earth that exceeds the impact of our customers flights each year. In addition to mitigating emissions, when you travel with Explore, you are helping to protect the source of 20% of the world's fresh water and oxygen, as well as the livelihoods of the 1.6 billion people who are reliant on the rainforest. www.coolearth.org

Earth Matters

- The Travel Foundation

  Explore are active members and supporters of the Travel Foundation which has established a variety of sustainable tourism projects in destinations and works with industry to improve practice. Visit their website www.thetravelfoundation.org.uk

- Tourism Concern

  Explore support the work of Tourism Concern who campaign for fairly and ethically traded tourism, and are part of its Ethical Tour Operator Group www.tourismconcern.org.uk
- For further information on responsible travel go to http://www.explore.co.uk/ResponsibleTourism/

Know before you go

We strongly recommend that you check your government's travel advisory for up-to-date information and advice about your destination: safety and security, entry requirements, health, local laws and customs. For UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office Advice follow the link at http://www.explore.co.uk/essential-travel-information/travel-resources/travel-safety

Booking Your Holiday

Peace of mind - book with confidence

You can book your Explore holiday with confidence, as all monies paid to us for your trip are fully protected. Explore is a fully bonded tour operator licensed by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) and by ABTOT.

The air holiday packages (Tours including flights) that we advertise are ATOL protected, since we hold an Air Travel Organiser's Licence granted by the Civil Aviation Authority. Our ATOL number is ATOL 2595. In addition, As a member of the Association of Bonded Travel Organisers Trust Limited (ABTOT), Explore has provided a bond to meet the requirements of the Package Travel, Package Holidays and Package Tours Regulations 1992. Please note that packages booked outside the UK are only protected when purchased directly with Explore.

Reserving your place

To reserve your place on this tour you will need to check availability on the Explore website or through our dedicated call centre based in the UK where you can. Our tours can fill up quickly so you are advised to book as early as possible. If your chosen date is ‘Available’ or ‘Guaranteed’ we will be able to provisionally hold you a space for up to 48 hours.

The easiest way to confirm your booking is through our website. When you are ready to book, we normally require a 10% non-refundable deposit, but for some holidays this may be more to cover such items as permit fees, internal flights or other non-refundable services. If your travel starts within 60 days of booking, full payment will be required at the time of booking

100% No Surcharge Guarantee

The price paid for our holidays is no longer subject to change. Once booked and confirmed we will guarantee the price you pay will not increase, whatever the circumstances. You will not be approached to pay fuel surcharges unlike the vast majority of other adventure tour operators. The price guarantee applies to all new bookings departing between 1st January 2013 and 31st December 2014.

Tour Itinerary Versions

Itinerary details may vary depending on departure date and alternative itineraries for this tour may exist. Please refer to the dates and prices page on our website to check which itinerary operates on each departure date.

Please ensure that you have an up-to-date copy of these tour notes immediately before you travel, as from time to time our itineraries may be amended, either for operational reasons or in response to feedback from customers. You will be informed of any major changes to your tour but small changes may just be added to these tour notes.

Please note: 2014 itinerary versions are applicable to tours departing in 2014. 2015/16 itinerary versions are applicable to tours departing from 1st January to 31st December 2015.

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