

# PAUL McDOUGALL

wildlife photographer  photographic safaris

## Sri Lanka- A Wilderness Getaway

### Sri Lanka- A Wilderness Getaway 13n/14 days

Accommodation: Hotel / Lodge with A/C rooms

Photo guide: Paul McDougall

Trip Date: 13<sup>th</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup> October 2025

Trip Duration: 13 nights and 14 days

Trip Cost: Available on Request

Private Trip Cost: Available on Request

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#### ITINERARY AT GLANCE

Date	Location	Accommodation	Meal Plan	Activity
Day 1	Katunayake	Tamarind Tree Garden Resort	D	TRSF
Day 2	Wilpattu	Claughton Wild (Standard Chalet)	B L D	AG
Day 3	Wilpattu	Claughton Wild (Standard Chalet)	B L D	FG
Day 4	Wilpattu	Claughton Wild (Standard Chalet)	B L D	FG
Day 5	Wilpattu	Claughton Wild (Standard Chalet)	B L D	FG
Day 6	Kaudulla or Minneriya National Parks	The Other Corner (Standard Chalet)	B L D	AG, EG
Day 7	Horton Plains NP	The Plains Green (Deluxe Room)	B L D	AG
Day 8	Horton Plains NP	The Plains Green (Deluxe Room)	B L D	FG
Day 9	Kumana National Park	Wild Edge Panama (Deluxe Room)	B L D	AG, EG
Day 10	Kumana National Park	Wild Edge Panama (Deluxe Room)	B L D	MG, AG
Day 11	Kumana National Park	Wild Edge Panama (Deluxe Room)	B L D	MG, AG
Day 12	Mirissa	Mandara Resort Mirissa (Superior Sea View Room)	B L D	BT

Day 13	Mirissa	Mandara Resort Mirissa (Superior Sea View Room)	B L D	BT
Day 14	Mirissa to Katunayake (Airport)		B	TRSF

B – Breakfast, L – Lunch, D – Dinner, MG - Morning Game Drive, AG – Afternoon Game Drive, EG – Evening Game Drive, TRSF –Transfer, FG – Full Day Game Drive, BT – Boat Trip

Please note accommodation may be altered to an equivalent option dependent on availability.



The teardrop-shaped island of Sri Lanka lies off the southern tip of the Indian subcontinent. The legendary explorer Marco Polo who visited Sri Lanka in the 13th century was captivated by its natural beauty and hospitable people and regarded as ‘the finest island of its size in the world’. Popularly referred to as the ‘Emerald Isle’ over the years, Sri Lanka, an island rich in history has been referred to by many names including ‘Serendib’ by the Arab traders, ‘Taprobana’ by the Greeks in the 4th century and ‘Ceylon’ during the period of British rule.

With a tropical climate, surrounded by golden sandy beaches and turquoise waters, this island paradise is a year-round destination for holidaymakers seeking sun, sand and sea. The oceans are abundant with life, and amazing coral reefs. The deeper waters are home to marine giants such as the Blue Whale, the largest animal to have ever lived.

Sri Lanka boasts a rich natural heritage, with amazing wildlife and biodiversity and incredibly for an island of its size can boast of iconic megafaunas such as leopards, elephants, and sloth bears. The island is also regarded as a biodiversity hotspot and teams with endemic birds, reptiles, amphibians, and plant species. Sri Lanka comprise a wide range of picturesque

landscapes and natural habitats which can be compared to that of a much larger country. It has numerous natural lakes and man-made reservoirs and rivers running through its interior. Lush tropical rainforests, mangroves and coastal lagoons, misty highlands laden with waterfalls and dry zone scrub jungles contribute to the biologically diverse environment.

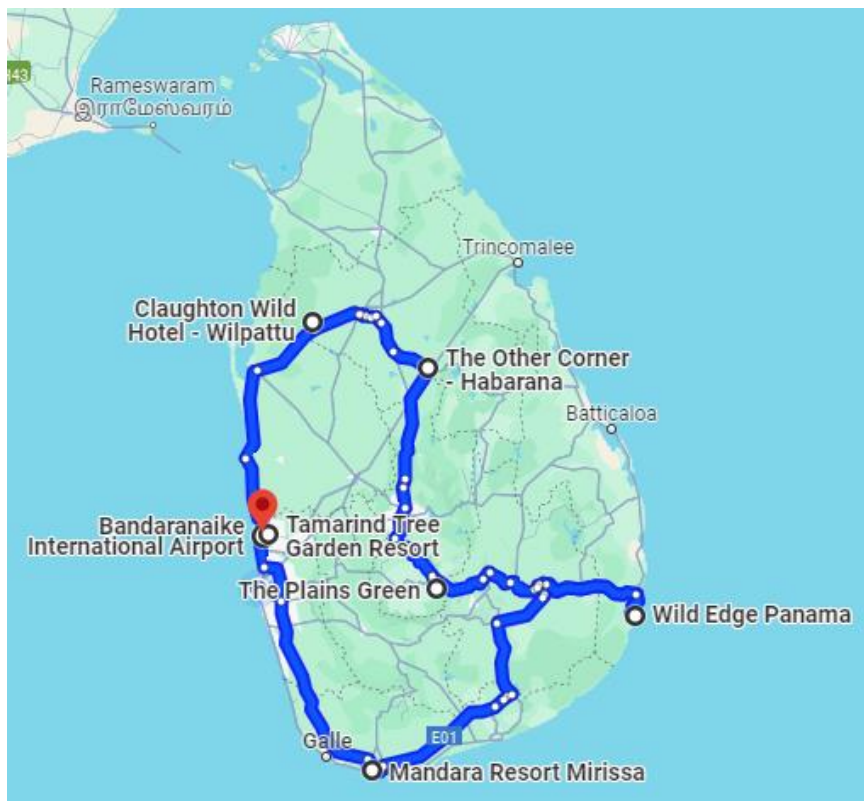
The island has a rich cultural heritage dating back over 2500 years, with marvelous archeological monuments. Magnificent stupas, massive irrigation reservoirs, and ruined remains of ancient kingdoms dot the landscape. Much of heritage can be linked to the origins of Buddhism in the country.

It is no wonder that this little island (about the size of the US State of West Virginia), boasts of eight UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

The hidden treasure of Sri Lanka is its people, a rich multi-cultural and multi-religious society. The warm hospitality and friendly nature of Sri Lankans will make anyone feel welcome. Boasting unique culinary heritage, Sri Lankan cuisine is rich in spices with its distinct flavour and is a fusion of traditional dishes mixed with influences from traders and colonial powers.

With palm-fringed beaches, diverse wildlife, spectacular landscapes, cultural heritage, and delicious food, Sri Lanka truly is the complete package when it comes to finding the perfect holiday destination with a unique array of different experiences on offer.

## Your Journey on a Map



## Detailed Itinerary

### Day 1- Katunayake

Upon arrival at the Bandaranaike International Airport in Katunayake, you will be warmly welcomed by your expert naturalist guide with the words “Ayubowan” which means may you attain a long life in the traditional language of the island, Ayubowan is the customary form of greeting in Sri Lanka.

Thereafter, you will be escorted to your vehicle and proceed to drive towards the nearby airport hotel for check-in followed by leisure after a long flight (5km / approx. 15 mins).

**Accommodation- Tamarind Tree Garden Resort (Superior Room)**

**Meal Plan- Half Board Basis**

### Day 2- Wilpattu

After breakfast, proceed to checkout from your hotel and head towards Wilpattu which is in the North-West of the island (180km / approx. 4.5 hrs).

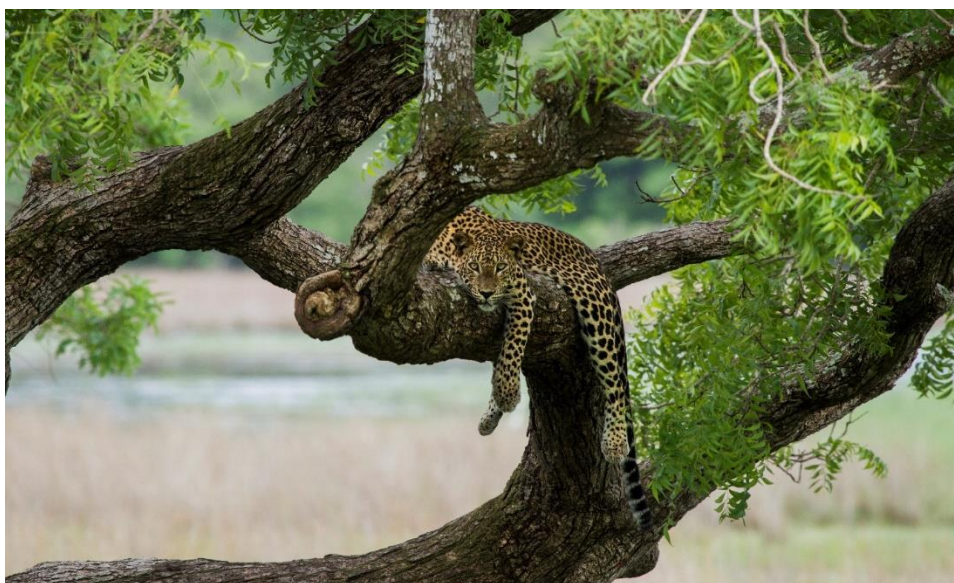
Upon reaching your safari lodge, you will check-in for lunch.

Afterwards, you will venture into Wilpattu National Park for your afternoon game drive (3km / approx. 5 mins).

Popularly dubbed as ‘the land of the lakes’, Wilpattu National Park is famous for watching wildlife within its picturesque villus and dry evergreen forests. It is Sri Lanka’s oldest and largest national park which re-opened in 2010 after being closed for nearly three decades due to the civil war. Wilpattu is one of the top spots in Sri Lanka for watching Leopard and Sloth Bear.

The park is approximately 1,317 square KM, and a study in 2008 observed over 530 individual leopards within this eco system (265 males and 277 females), which makes Wilpattu National Park the holder of the highest density of leopards in the world. The Sri Lankan Leopard (*Panthera pardus kotiya*) is the largest subspecies of leopard sharing the same size and weight along with the Persian Leopard of Iran with the largest males reaching to a weight of over 200lb or 90kg.

The typical sightings of leopards during your game drives would include the leopards walking towards you along the shady, sandy roads, or laying on the white sand brimmed natural lakes which dot the park, or in the shady dark forest with its long vines, and dense backdrop. You might even find them in trees, or among the long grass which surrounds some of the natural lakes. The photography opportunities will be quite unique with varying settings and backgrounds and lighting conditions. One of the unique features of the park is photographing a leopard in the dark forest with a single beam of sunlight falling on its eye. Creative opportunities will present themselves while on safari.





Besides the leopards you will also have a chance to encounter and photograph the Sloth Bear. Wilpattu would be the best park to see them year-round, usually in the first stretch of the park between the park office and Chapman junction, these bears are usually observed foraging for termites on the roadsides. Patience is key in waiting for the bears to approach for good photographs. Though photography can be challenging given their dark coat and the shady forest it resides in, hence using the correct settings and focusing points on the camera is vital to obtain the correct exposure. It is advisable to usually underexpose one's images when photographing the Sloth Bears as one would typically focus on the lighter colored face hence to correctly expose the dark black coat on the photograph.



Though large herds are not commonly observed in Wilpattu, you will encounter lone bull elephants while on safari. These giants are often seen along the main road, as well as in the open lakes as they come out to feed on the water plants that grow on the lakes. The beautiful backdrops will provide a lovely setting for some compelling images.

Besides the charismatic 3 species, you will also encounter Asiatic Wild Water Buffalo, Wild Boar, Spotted Deer, Sambhur Deer, Indian Muntjac another small species of deer known also as the Barking Deer, as well as the Grey Langur and Toque Macaque (Endemic to Sri Lanka) as monkey species. Other mammals which are commonly seen are the Ruddy Mongoose, Black Naped Hare and the Golden Jackal.

Rare mammals which might be encountered but not often are the Mouse Deer, Fishing Cat and Rusty Spotted Cat, but often daytime sightings are quite rare and cannot be guaranteed.

From a reptile perspective the most common encounters would be the Bengal Monitor who is often seen along the sandy safari trails, as well as the Mugger Crocodile along the lakes and waterbodies in the park. Though not often, sightings of snakes such as the Indian Rock Python and Spectacled Cobra are not uncommon. Occasional sightings of the bizarre Indian Chameleon are also a possibility while on safari in the park.



From a birding perspective there are several species which can be encountered, which include endemic birds such as the Sri Lanka Jungle Fowl a colorful species which is the national bird of Sri Lanka, the Lesser Flameback a beautiful species of woodpecker, the Sri Lanka Woodshrike and the Grey Hornbill.

From non-endemic species more commonly seen birds would be the Indian Peafowl, Malabar Pied Hornbill, Painted Stork, Lesser Adjutant Stork, Openbill Storks, Black Winged Stilts, Red-wattled Lapwings, Greater Thick-knee, White Throated Kingfisher, Common Kingfisher, Stork Billed Kingfisher, Little Green Bee Eater, Blue Tailed Bee Eater, Chestnut Headed Bee Eater, Black Hooded Oriole, Lesser Whistling Duck, Purple Heron, Greater Cormorant, Little Cormorant, Brown Fish Owl, White Bellied Fish Eagle, Grey Headed Fish Eagle, Crested Serpent Eagle and the Crested Hawk Eagle to name a few.



Rare birds that you might encounter would be the Spot Bellied Eagle Owl also known as the Forest Eagle Owl the largest and most iconic owl species in Sri Lanka, the Brown Wood Owl, Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher, Black Capped Kingfisher, Chestnut Winged Cuckoo to name a few.

As the sun begins to set, you will exit the park gates at 6.00 PM to head back to your lodge.

**Accommodation- Claughton Wild (Standard Chalet)**

**Meal Plan- Full Board Basis**

### **Day 3, 4 & 5- Wilpattu**

This morning at 5.30 AM, the lodge would arrange a tea or coffee before you venture into the park with a packed breakfast and lunch by 5.45 AM to reach the park gates for the opening time of 6.00 AM for a full day game drive (3km / approx. 5 mins).

The longer one spends in the park exploring the whole region and back roads the better chances for good wildlife sightings and compelling photography.

After lunch, continue your game drives until exit time at 6.00PM where you will head to your lodge for dinner and an overnight stay.

**Accommodation- Claughton Wild (Standard Chalet)**

**Meal Plan- Full Board Basis**



### **Day 6- Habarana**



After breakfast, proceed to checkout from your lodge and head towards the North Central region (95km / approx. 2.5 hrs).

Reaching your next lodge, after checking in you will enjoy some lunch.

After lunch, you will venture on safari jeep with your naturalist guide to either Kaudulla or Minneriya National Parks (which park both located nearby will depend on where the most elephants have gathered during the time of travel which your safari driver and naturalist will be aware of).

These ancient lakes build by King Mahasen over 2500 years ago to provide irrigation for the whole region have now been converted to national parks. During the dry season, as the waters are released for cultivation, the receding shores along the lake sprout fresh green grass. This grass attracts herds of wild elephants from all around the region to these shores. Numbers of elephants ranging from 100-400 individuals occur every year. This is the best setting to get up close to these large herds which consists of females and their young calves and the perfect opportunity for some great animal behavior photography, portraits as well as landscapes. There will also be the attraction of large bulls in musth and might include a few large tuskers as well.



Besides the elephants you will encounter bird species such as Openbilled Storks, Painted Storks, Black Headed Ibis, White Bellied Fish Eagle, Grey Headed Fish Eagle, Brown Fish Owl to name a few. Golden Backed Jackal are also seen on these shores.

As the sun sets, exit the park by 6.00 PM and head to your lodge for the night.

After an early dinner, head back out on safari jeeps for a night safari in the buffer zones of Habarana.



After an early dinner, venture out again by jeep equipped with spotlights in search of nocturnal cat species in the village trails and buffer zones bordering the park. The three species of cat species are the Fishing Cat, Jungle Cat and the Rusty Spotted Cat. The sightings if any would be using spotlights, hence though it might be a memorable sighting, it might not necessarily be a great photography opportunity. You might also encounter species such as the Golden Palm Civet, Ring Tailed Civet, as well as owl species such as the Brown Wood Owl and Brown Fish Owl.

Return to your lodge late at night after an eventful foray after dark.



**Accommodation – The Other Corner (Standard Chalet)**



## **Meal Plan- Full Board Basis**

### **Day 7- Ambewela**

After breakfast, check out from your stay by around 10.30 AM and head to Ambewela, a village located in the highlands of Nuwara Eliya (185km / approx. 6 hrs).

Upon arrival at your hotel in Ambewela, check-in lunch and head out on an afternoon game drive in Horton Plains National Park (17km / approx. 1 hr).

Horton Plains National Park, which is Sri Lanka's highest elevated national park lying approximately 7,000 feet above sea level and comprises of cloud forests and open grassland and UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Sambar, Sri Lanka's largest species of deer are encountered regularly in the plains close to the entrance while the shaggy coated Bear Monkey (Highland race of the Purple-faced Leaf Monkey) is occasionally seen within the forested areas. Many species of endemic birds can be found in the park including the Sri Lanka Whistling Thrush or Arrenga, and Sri Lanka Bush Warbler.



Also, a specialty in the park is to see the two endemic species of lizards found exclusively in this eco system, and nowhere else in the world. The Rhino Horned Lizard with its signature horn on its nose, and the tiny Pygmy Lizard. Both are special rarities in the park, along with many rare and endemic plant species, and endemic flowers which are found in the park.



If you are truly lucky you might catch a quick glimpse of the elusive leopard, which is much larger and has a thicker coat than its lowland counterparts. This national park is truly an ecological treasure and one of the most important natural sites in Sri Lanka. The weather can be cold and windy for it is advisable to wear warm clothing during the visit.

#### **Accommodation – The Plains Green (Deluxe Room)**

#### **Meal Plan- Full Board Basis**

### **Day 8- Ambewela**

Make an early morning start with a packed breakfast and lunch to Horton Plains National Park (17km / approx. 1 hr), which is Sri Lanka's highest elevated national park lying approximately 7,000 feet above sea level and comprises of cloud forests and open grassland and UNESCO World Heritage Site. Take a guided walk along the nature trails to a viewpoint known as World's End with spectacular views of the surrounding countryside. On the walk back you can stop over to see the impressive Baker's Falls in full flow.

Explore the rolling plains of the park, which are magical close to sunset, and always keeping ones eyes open for the prowling leopard.

By 6.00 PM proceed to exit the park and return to your lodge for your overnight stay.





**Accommodation- The Plains Green (Deluxe Room)**

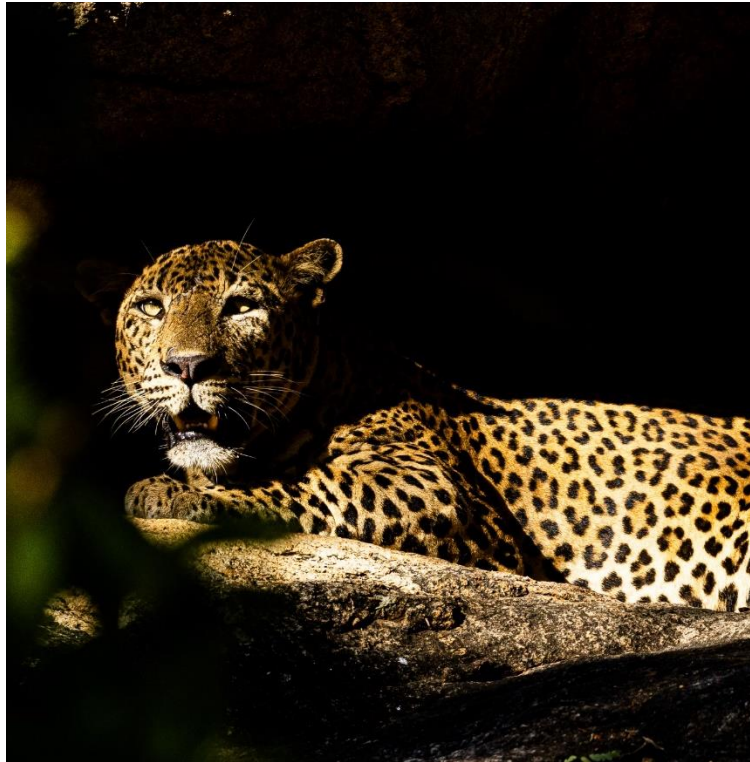
**Meal Plan- Half Board Basis**

### **Day 9- Panama**

After an early breakfast checkout from your hotel and head down to the Southeastern corner of the island, towards the village of Panama (pronounced Paanama) which is bordering Kumana National Park (215km / approx. 6 hrs).

Check into your safari lodge for lunch. After lunch venture out for your first game drive to Kumana National Park (20km / approx. 1 hr).

The Kumana National Park lies north of the Kumbukkan Oya and is referred to as Yala-East. Kumana is comprised of scrub jungle, brackish lagoons, rocky outcrops, and numerous waterholes.



This park will be your second main location for leopard photography. The park has a high density of leopards with very frequent sightings.

The landscape of this park will be different than Wilpattu. Here you will look out for leopards along dry scrub jungle, open lagoon plains, and one of the main features is the many rocky outcrops scattered across the park, as well as the many large trees where the leopards prefer to rest and hoard their kill.



Besides leopards you will also encounter other species which you might expect in the dry zone such as the Sloth Bear, Sri Lankan Elephant, and other herbivores such as Wilpattu.



Birdlife would also be similar with different backgrounds and settings.

One of the unique birds found here is the Black Necked Stork which is seen in the lagoons of this park.

Exit the park after dusk at 6.00 PM and explore the buffer zone with headlights for nocturnal mammal species En Route.

Reach the lodge later at night for dinner and overnight stay after an eventful day.

**Accommodation- Wild Edge Panama (Deluxe Room)**

**Meal Plan- Full Board Basis**

## **Day 10, 11 - Panama**

Spend the next two days on morning and afternoon game drives in Kumana National Park.

Your usual routine would be as follows:

5.00 AM leave the lodge with packed breakfast and enter the park by 6.00 AM and continue your game drive till around 11 AM (20km / approx. 1 hr).





As the sun gets very harsh head back to the lodge for some rest and lunch.

By 2.30 PM head out once again for your afternoon game drive which will last till 6.00 PM.



**Accommodation- Wild Edge Panama (Deluxe Room)**

**Meal Plan- Full Board Basis**

## **Day 12- Mirissa**

After an early breakfast checkout from your lodge and journey South towards the coastal town of Mirissa (275km / approx. 5.5 hrs).

Reaching your resort, check in to your rooms after lunch.

By 2.30 PM head out towards Matara, aboard a boat for a river safari along the Nilwala River.



The Nilwala River is famed for its large population of Saltwater Crocodiles (*Crocodylus Porosus*) the largest species of crocodilian and reptile in the world. This cruise will give you eye level views of these reptilians who can be seen swimming along the river as well as basking among the mangroves. This experience will also bring into light the day-to-day life of locals who live side by side in an uneasy truce with these predators with victims on both sides due to the conflict.



You might have a chance to see hatchlings taking shelter among the mangroves as well as giant adults ranging from 15-17 feet in length.

Besides the crocodiles, you will also observe many species of birds such as the Common Kingfisher, White Throated Kingfisher, Pied Kingfisher, Stork Billed Kingfisher as well as many species of egrets and herons.

Coming back to shore afterwards return to your hotel for your overnight stay.

### **Accommodation- Mandara Resort Mirissa (Superior Sea View Room)**

### **Meal Plan- Full Board Basis**

### **Day 14- Mirissa**

Early morning by 5.30 AM set out with a packed breakfast to Mirissa Fisheries Harbour to venture out to sea on a whale watching cruise. The ocean off Mirissa is home to a resident population of marine mammals which include Blue Whales, Brydes Whales and Spinner

Dolphins. Occasional sightings of Killer Whales, Risso Dolphin, Short Finned Pilot Whales are not uncommon.



\*note the ocean can be choppy based on the day of venture, hence motion sickness tablets can be helpful.

Return back to dry land after your oceanic adventure in the afternoon and return back to the hotel for some much needed rest and leisure.



Overnight stay in Mirissa

**Accommodation- Mandara Resort Mirissa (Superior Sea View Room)**

**Meal Plan- Full Board Basis**

### **Day 14- Airport**

Today after breakfast checkout from your hotel and journey back towards the airport for your flight back home (175km / approx. 3 hrs).

-End of Services-

Number of Nights – 13

Number of Days- 14

**Travel Period:** October 2026

**Pricing as follows:**

£4,500pp no single supplement.

Please note that the price reflects that this is a new itinerary and a new destination for me and therefore this trip is very much a trial for future trips. Booking this trip you do so with the full understanding that it is a new destination and new itinerary that I will be leading.

**Inclusions:**

- Accommodation in the mentioned hotels and lodges in the said meal plans of the itinerary.
- Transportation in a comfortable Tour KDH Flat Roof Van with air conditioning and adjustable seats driven by a well experienced English-Speaking Chauffeur throughout the entire tour.
- A well experienced English- speaking Naturalist Guide throughout the entire tour.
- All sightseeing excursions are mentioned in the itinerary.
- Jeep Safaris on private basis – 5 clients and 1 naturalist in 1 jeep
- Whale watching cruise on shared basis- Large oceanic vessel. (Guide will arrange preferred seating for photography)
- Crocodile watching on private basis – 5 clients and 1 naturalist in 1 boat
- All entrance tickets mentioned in the Itinerary.
- Bottled water throughout the stay.
- All govt taxes and levies.

**Excludes:**

- Airfare and Visa.
- Personal Travel Insurance.
- Tips and Gratuities.
- Activities not mentioned in the itinerary.
- Meals not mentioned in the itinerary.
- Alcohol and other beverages.
- Expenses of a personal nature.