

Sri Lanka



Geoff Moore was on Safari at the Mahoora Safari Camp followed by some chill-out time at the Ceu Ceylon Hotel

Sri Lanka is a country that is both welcoming and wonderfully friendly with some of the most accessible and striking wildlife encounters that you could hope for. Add in stunning tropical beaches and this island nation in the Indian Ocean has pretty much enough to satisfy the desires of most tourists.

Arrival in to Bandaranaike airport just north of Colombo, the capital, was fairly easy. Not picking up an immigration form in the terminal however meant a short delay as I had to queue again to be let in even though I had an advance visa! However I'm soon heading to the south west of the country to the Yala National Park, a 5 hour route much of which is along a modern expressway, further lengths are

near completion, so that journey time will reduce very soon as the older roads are slow and busy at times.

Mahoora Safari Camp

My stay was under canvas at the Mahoora Safari Camp virtually at the park boundary. When I say under canvas, these are spacious two room tents complete with inside showers toilet and carpets! Hot water, electric and cooling fans help to increase the level of comfort. Dining on the first night around an enchanting campfire under the stars was a great introduction to the delights of Sri Lanka. Little did I know what other excitement and animal encounters were to follow the next day!

Tropical noises started to stir me just before my alarm went off at 5am. An early start is essential if you want to increase your chances of a Leopard encounter and



with the park opening at 6am then it was certainly well worth it! With a guide and driver and seated high under a protective canvas roof the open sided vehicle provided an excellent game viewing position. Soon after entering the park the encounters started. Many beautiful tropical birds and a mongoose padded its way towards the jeep. Spotted deer were seen in a scrub clearing and a water hole presented me with the view of the tail end of a 2metre long crocodile.

What came next is what every visitor prays to happen, an encounter with one of Yala's leopards. As the truck rounded a sharp corner on the dust track there in the middle of the road we spotted an elegant leopard known to the park rangers as 'Michael'. He climbed a tree without a care in the world, and it seemed that to him we were just another fixture in



the park. Laying down his scent to mark his territory he was soon back down on the ground and disappeared into the bush leaving us all in awe! Other delights were to come; a herd of elephants, followed by several single males and a mother and calf came into view and then walked past our truck.

In Sri Lanka the top three wildlife spots are the leopard, elephant and sloth bear and on that day towards the end of the safari there too we saw the bear crossing the track. The hat trick all completed in 12 hours! Although the mammals are obviously the 'fav' spots, quite honestly the birds are amazing. Numerous exotic birds from gorgeous iridescent green bee-eaters to large storks and eagles can be seen close up!

Back at camp there's tales of the day's exploits with other guests and the chance to dine again under the stars. The staff will arrange all sorts of other experiences too, such as local cultural visits, cooking demonstrations or a night time wildlife trek to help you walk off your dinner!

Ceu Ceylon Hotel

With links to the camp and around 2 hours drive away is the Ceu Ceylon a brand new hotel ideal for a coastal break after being under canvas for 2 or 3 days the usual booking period for most guests.

Ceu in Portuguese means heaven and the

time escorted visits to are well worth it. Joining a group you will be taken to the beach where official turtle watchers will communicate back to their waiting area that a turtle has been spotted and you move off with red-light torches allowing you to witness the events with disturbance to the animal.

Ceu Ceylon with its modern open lounge, dining area, up to date bathrooms and reception area is very comfortable. The air conditioned bedrooms and shady balconies completes the package. Located on a spit of land between the sea and a small freshwater lake you can continue your bird watching from the hotel as many birds including pelicans visit regularly.

Just a short Tuk-Tuk ride away a much larger 50-hectare lagoon offers a man powered gentle boat ride, which I really loved. This was followed by climbing a rock out-crop to get an overview of the lagoon some 50 metres up in the air - what a great way to end the day!

For more Information please visit the following websites:

Mahoora;
www.mahoora.lk

Ceu Ceylon;
www.ceuceylon.lk

Experiential Journeys;
www.exjourneys.com

Turtle Watch;
www.facebook.com/TCP.Rekawa

