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# TEA TIME

*Sri Lanka may not be the first place that springs to mind when you think of tea, but if we use the island's older name, Ceylon, instead it becomes a much more familiar one to the connoisseur of a good cuppa.*

If you visit Sri Lanka's hill country in the centre of the island it is easy to appreciate that tea is a major part of the country's economy. Tea bushes cover the majority of this area, carpeting the lush green hills around Kandy and clinging to the steepest mountainsides around Nuwara Eliya. Tea is a legacy of the 19th century British colonists, but it wasn't their original intention to plant tea in Sri Lanka at all. Had their initial planting attempts not gone disastrously wrong we might be drinking Ceylon Coffee today. As it was, however, the coffee plants initially introduced by the British planters didn't suit the conditions and were wiped out by disease; tea was introduced as an emergency replacement and fared much better.

For exploring Sri Lanka's tea plantations, Nuwara Eliya is a good starting point. This hill station town was once the main social centre for the British planters. Its cool climate reminded them of home so they built a little Britain here, complete with mock-Tudor post office and a golf course. The town is best reached by train from Kandy; trundling along at a snail's pace is a lovely way to enjoy the stunning mountain views and watch life in the plantations go by. A stay at the Hill Club is like stepping back in time to a place where there are separate ladies' and gentlemen's bars, hunting trophies lining the walls and compulsory jackets

and ties at dinner. For a similarly colonial ambiance but with a few more concessions to the modern age in terms of service and facilities, St Andrew's is an excellent choice.

Your tea tour could then take you on to Bandarawela on the southern edge of the hill country, where you can enjoy walks through the plantations to some fantastic viewpoints such as Lipton's Seat. To really get a feel for life on the tea estates, you can stay in the cosy Kirchhayn Bungalow, a wonderful old planter's house.

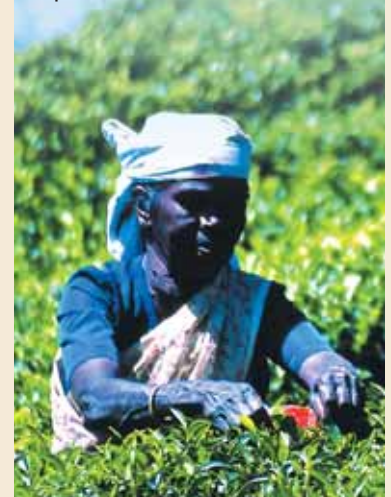
**The average person in Sri Lanka uses 4.5kg of tea a year.**

No tea lover's tour of the hill country would be complete without a visit to a tea factory. Here you can see the processes involved in transforming the fresh green tips, and find out what exactly is meant by outlandish terms such as Flowery Orange Pekoe. Many factories also sell tea at factory prices, so after your tour you can put your newly found expertise into practice by sampling the product and selecting a few packets to take home.

**Jenny Smith**  
Sri Lanka Specialist

## FACT FILE

A 14-night tour of Sri Lanka with private car and experienced chauffeur guide costs from £1,650 per person based on two people travelling. For further details please contact our Sri Lanka specialists on 01869 276 218.



1 Tea pluckers at work.

2 Kirchhayn Bungalow.

3 Hill country scenery near Bandarawela.