

Areas, seasons, tourist climate and beach resort options

This article is meant to be kind of introduction' towards the more technical information available. Do note that whilst not even the real meteorologists can give a detailed long-term forecast, a more popularly written and condensed story like this can claim even less accuracy! But hopefully it's a help in planning holidays.

And hopefully it avoids people following a new trend by insisting on visiting a place out-of-season simply because the holiday dates are fixed and it's on their bucket lists, e.g. Jaffna and Trincomalee in January or Matara-Galle area in June and November. One could call this with a tongue-in-cheek "forcetheseasonitis" ;-). In other words "nature, cultural festivals, wildlife etc. should adjust their seasons and dates to THEIR whims". That does not sound in any way a useful form of holidaying to us but more a consequence of another modern term (google it) - FOMO. A better concept is adjusting, when-in-Rome-act-like-the Romans, go-with-the-tide etc. (and enjoy what is available during your travel times, even if it means changing your destination). In Sri Lanka there is except November always at least one area with good climate, so the advice is to take advantage of that...

Tourist regions

There are six main regions currently popular with tourists, and each has a more or less consistent climatological pattern; however with at times internal variations which are mentioned. They are described here with the temperature pattern, as this is not linked to the 'monsoon seasons' but only sometimes to the solar calendar. And also add a bit about humidity, though this is partly linked to the monsoon seasons.

Southwestern coast

From Mannar-Kalpitiya up north to Galle in the south. Temperature year-round between 27' at night and 32' daytime, with March-April being hottest and November-December coolest. High humidity except for the more dry far northern part of it (Puttalam-Kalpitiya).

South coast

Between Galle and Yala, and including the lowland plains (e.g. Udu Walawe park). Temperature year-round between 27' at night and 32' daytime, inland a few degrees hotter. Humidity and rainfall varies quite a bit – the western half is more under Southwest monsoon influence, whilst Tangalle-Hambantota-Yala area is amongst the most dry zones of the country but if it rains it's from Northeast monsoon.

(North) East coast

From Jaffna in the far north through Trinco-Passekudah-Batticaloa-Arugam Bay to Yala. Temperature year-round between 27° at night and 32° daytime, with July-August being hottest and November-January coolest. High humidity except for the more dry far southern part of it (Pottuvil – Kumana – Yala).

Hill Country

Roughly the area south of Kandy / Hatton / Nuwara Eliya up to the southern hill ridge Haputale-Ella-Badulla. Temperature and humidity fluctuate both with altitude and solar season; though Sri Lanka has a tropical climate the 'cold tropics' have some kind of normal colder country spring-summer-fall pattern with associated vegetation. Temperatures in e.g. Nawalapitiya-Hatton, around 600-1000 m altitude, can be 15-25° nighttime-daytime in summer and 10-20° same in winter. In Nuwara Eliya district, upto 2000 m altitude, it can be 10-20° in summer and 3°-15° in winter with even the odd frosty night. And Haputale-Ella, more or less in between (1000-1400 m), it's 5°-15° in winter and 10-20° or even 25° in summer..

Kandy area

Including the Matale-Knuckles mountainous area. Temperature fluctuates with solar season. Temperatures can be 17-25° nighttime-daytime in summer and 10-20° same in winter.

Cultural Triangle

Defined here as roughly the area between Anuradhapura, Dambulla and Pollonaruwa; a huge lowland plain with the odd mountain popping up and a small mountain ridge from Matale-Dambulla northwards. Temperature year-round between 30° at night and 35° daytime. Humidity is high, rainfall varies quite a bit – the western half is more under Southwest monsoon influence, whilst Habarana and surroundings are more under Northeast monsoon influence.

Seasons

'Popular speak', and impacting the weather for tourists, there are four seasons plus two gray areas following the main monsoons. Monsoon is a wind pattern, deciding the waves/currents at sea and up to some extent the rains on the land.

- Northeast monsoon ('Maha season'), mid December-February, meaning bad weather on East coast and good dry weather in Southwest. After all now East Coast is the windward side and SW coast the leeward side. This monsoon wind tends to bring considerable rainfall, more stable and predictable in this aspect than the SW monsoon.
- First intermonsoon, popularly defined as June and first half of July. Meteorology defines it a bit differently.
- Southwest monsoon ('Yala season'), second half of July through September. Good weather on East coast (leeward side); on Southwest it's still nice sunny mornings, but cloud build-up at some point in the afternoon followed by brief heavy showers. Southwestern sea has heavy currents and waves, as it's windward side.
- Second intermonsoon, generally from late October until mid December.

Both intermonsoons have a similar pattern, on all coasts: quite unpredictable and mixed weather. Generally one experiences (blocks of) three types of days: nice sunny mornings with later clouds (Southwest monsoon like), all-cloudy days with intermittent showers and three-seasons-in-one-day: sun, clouds, brief shower, sun again and so on. However during First intermonsoon there is hardly impact on the East coast, April-October there generally is quite good weather.

The gray areas March-May and early October 'have something of each adjacent season' – they could be stable and sunny on the Southwest coast and could have unsettled times. In Colombo region April-May is the hottest and most humid time of the year - with 'relief' in the form of heavy rains coming somewhere May.

In this description of the seasons mainly the coastal areas are mentioned. This is because Hill country, Kandy area and Cultural triangle have no consistent influence from them – and the first two also have a considerable solar calendar impact. Generally the eastern half of these inland areas shows more influence from the Northeast monsoon; e.g. Badulla and Eliya are infamous for flooding and landslides in December-January. But Sinharaja, the southwestern tip from the mountain massive, catches lots of rain in afternoons in all seasons except Northeast monsoon. Also Adam's Peak (Sri Pada) is not for nothing mainly open from Northeast monsoon until close to the first intermonsoon, in the other seasons it can be too rainy there making the paths quite risky, plus a number of other reasons not to visit it then. But e.g. Knuckles and Ella are worst during that same Northeast monsoon. And Kandy and Eliya are known for quite mixed weather in both intermonsoon seasons but also adjacent months: the days can be all sunny, but if clouds in the lowlands reach the mountains they can start bursting and then it can rain like cats and dogs for many hours.

The proof of the pudding, and a kind of summary of the article, is a mapping between seasons and tourist regions; with 'climate' (the more sunny the better for tourists) and where relevant information about the sea.

Region	<i>Season</i> <i>Northeast monsoon</i> Mid Dec-February	<i>First intermonsoon</i> June - mid July	<i>Southwest monsoon</i> Mid July-September	<i>Second intermonsoon</i> Late Oct - mid Dec
Southwestern coast	Best season, good sea	Mixed	2nd best season, rough sea	Mixed
South coast	Best season, good sea except Eastern half	Mixed (mainly Western half)	2nd best season, rough sea	Mixed
East coast	Terrible weather	Quite good weather & sea	Best season, good sea	Mixed

Hill country	Mixed, depends on West-East	Mixed	Mixed, depends on West-East	Mixed
Kandy area	Mixed	Mixed	Mixed	Mixed
Cultural Triangle	Mixed	Mixed	Mixed	Mixed

Beach climate and options

As beach lovers are more dependent on weather (and not only the sky but also the waters) than culture and nature fans, we zoom a bit more into the impact of these seasons for the beaches around the island. The four elements described for each beach area are:

A] Season for snorkel and dive (if any). This of course depends on the weather but also on there being a reef near the shore at all.

B] Season for surfing (if any). This depends on the specific waves in that area: whether it forms a 'surf break' or not.

C] Season for open sea swim.

This is either year round (if there is a protective reef close to the beach) or limited to the few months a year that there is no strong sea wind on this side of the island.

D] Bar/restaurant scene. This of course has nothing to do with the climate, but happens to be the sole other factor (well next to distance from an airport...) for tourists deciding where to stay. Hence for convenience we add it. Levels are:

* 'none' (eat halfboard in your accommodation or the ones nextdoor, or dare to eat local street food in the rice & curry shops - with its hygiene and spice problems)

* 'limited' (a few tourist-quality restaurants and bars in the area, but often quite scattered and sometimes needing tuktuk or bus)

* 'good' (advice is to book BB basis and eat out, at walking distance, every day)

We cover the island from top counterclockwise, as SW beaches are most popular. If a beach/village is not mentioned, assume NO bars/restaurants and interpolate the other elements from the adjoining resort areas.

Also mind that for eight popular resorts recommended in the forum, we give more detail in another top question here

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1sMlet-7Qz7ncYWd5PbGEjKogwFzErA06Cl_DRsX406U/edit

	Snorkel/diver season	Surf season	Sea swim season	Bars /Restaurants
Jaffna peninsula	Late March to September	None (?)	Late March to September	Limited (main city)
Kalpitiya	Xmas to March	April-Oct Kitesurf (no wavesurf)	Xmas to March	None
Negombo/Waikkal	None (some offshore options Xmas-April)	None	Xmas to March	Good
Mount Lavinia (Colombo)	None (some offshore options Xmas-April)	None	Xmas to March	Good
Wadduwa/Kalutara	None (some offshore options Xmas-April)	None	Xmas to March	Limited
Beruwala/Bentota (excluding Induruwa)	None (some offshore options Xmas-April)	Very limited Dec-April	Xmas to March	Good
Hikkaduwa	Xmas to March (in west monsoon season the odd morning with good visibility)	November to April	Year round	Good

Unawatuna-Thalpe	Xmas to March (in west monsoon season the odd morning with good visibility)	November to April	Year round	Good
Weligama-Mirissa	Xmas to March (in west monsoon season the odd morning with good visibility)	November to April. Outside of that beginners surf in one bay.	Year round	Good
Tangalle	Xmas to March	Xmas to March	Xmas to March	Good
Arugam Bay	Not really (April-Sept some offshore options)	April-Oct	Not really	Good
Batticaloa – Passekudah/ Kalkudah – Vakarai	Late April to September	None	Late April to Sept	Limited
Trincomalee area	Late April to September	None	Late April to Sept	Good (Uppuveli)