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SAH Study Tour 2025

Architecture of Sri Lanka

December 7-20, 2025

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SUMMARY

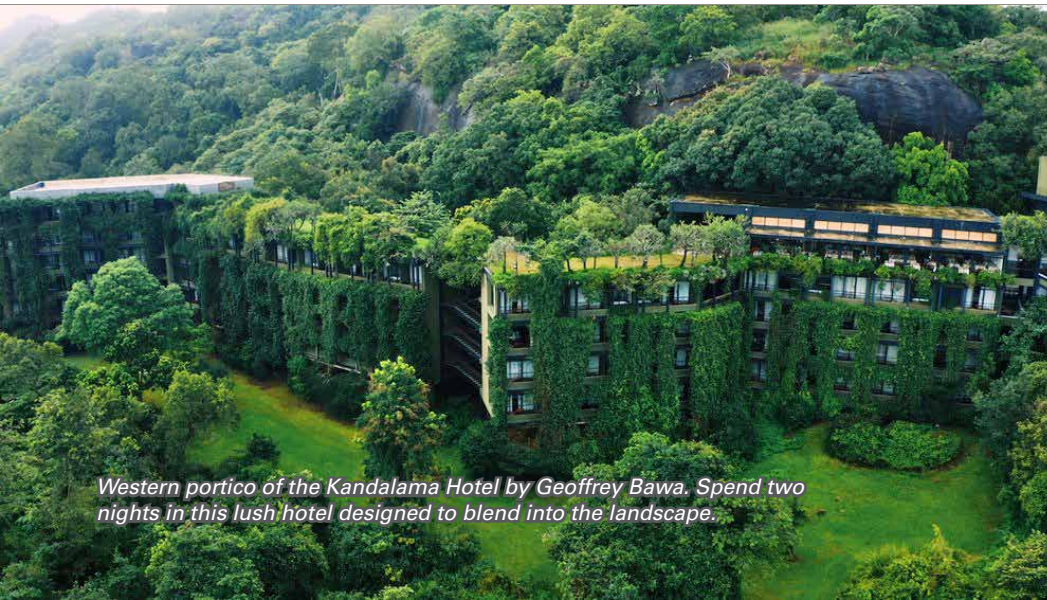
Marco Polo once described Sri Lanka as “the most beautiful island of its size in all the world.” SAH invites to you to witness the layers of its 3,000-year history.

Known by many names – Lanka, Taprobane, Serendib, Ceylon – the island’s interactions with ancient India, China, the Middle East and three successive colonial powers – Portugal, the Netherlands and Great Britain – resulted in a rich fusion of Asian and European culture and architecture.

Curated and led by Sri Lankan-American architect Ravi GuneWardena, our 14-day tour traces these cultural interactions within Sri Lanka’s diverse structures. Start with ancient Buddhist and Hindu monuments dating to the 4th century BCE and continue through colonial-era buildings. Cap your understanding of the nation’s architecture with visits to 20th century works by modern world-renowned figures like Geoffrey Bawa, Minette de Silva, and Valentine Gunasekara.

You will also enjoy time to reflect and relax in overnight accommodations with significant architectural pedigree — 19th-century grand hotels, a former British governor’s residence, and four luxury resorts designed by renowned modern architect Geoffrey Bawa.

Cover image: Abayagiri monastery complex.



Western portico of the Kandarama Hotel by Geoffrey Bawa. Spend two nights in this lush hotel designed to blend into the landscape.

ARCHITECTURAL HIGHLIGHTS

- Explore monumental *stupas* (domed-structures), Hindu Temples, and stately *pokuna* (bathing pools) used by of generations of monks at the ancient capital cities of Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa.
- Scale Sigiriya Rock Fortress, a vast palace compound of gardens, pools, and remains of monastic structures built between the 3rd and 5th centuries.
- Wonder at Lankatilaka Royal Temple, which combines architectural hallmarks of the medieval period with Indo-Chinese influences.
- Take in colonial-era design at the New Oriental Hotel, built in 1684 as headquarters for Dutch commanders, and the 1775 Dutch reformed Church, and a historic mosque within UNESCO World Heritage town of Galle.
- Visit 13 hotels, homes, and places of worship designed by preeminent Sri-Lankan architect Geoffrey Bawa, profiled on page 6.
- Access three intimate spaces Bawa designed for himself: His country estate at Lunuganga, his urban residence at No. 11 33rd Lane in Colombo, and his former design studio in the same city.



Lankatilaka Royal Temple, with renovation work undertaken in 2018. Image by Sandy Isenstadt



Jetwing Beach Hotel, Negombo

TRAVEL ITINERARY

The tour is organized chronologically, starting with the ancient capitals, moving southward to Kandyan Kingdom and highland regions, to coastal colonial ports, and ending in the modern capital Colombo.

Day 1: Negombo

Sunday, December 7

Arrive at the 16th century Portuguese seaport of Negombo, which boasts more than 20 Catholic churches as well as houses of worship for Protestant, Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist faiths. A private shuttle will transport you to the hotel. Then, spend the day exploring the port city and admiring a selection of splendid sacred spaces.

Accommodation: Jetwing Beach Hotel by Geoffrey Bawa

Meals: Lunch, Dinner

Day 2: Negombo to Anuradhapura

Monday, December 8

After breakfast, you will travel to the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Anuradhapura, one of the oldest continuously occupied cities in Asia. We will stop on the way to visit Polontalawa Estate Bungalow, a 1963 project by Geoffrey Bawa and Ulrich Plesner. After checking in to our next accommodation, visit Kaludiya Pokuna (Black Water Pond) forest monastery and Mihintale rock, where Buddhism is said to have been introduced to Sri Lanka by the arrival of Indian monk Mahinda, son of Emperor Asoka, in 200 BC.

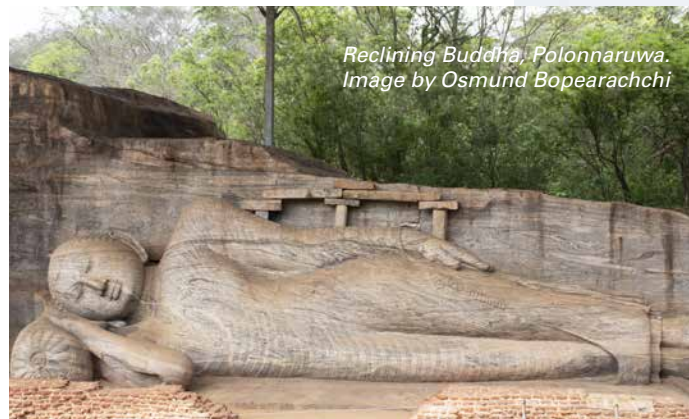
Accommodation: Historic Sanctuary at Tissawewa colonial-era hotel

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 3: Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa

Tuesday, December 9

You leave this morning for an in-depth tour of the ancient capital of Anuradhapura. View several colossal dome-shaped Buddhist *stupas*, including Jetawanaramaya, the tallest stupa ever built in Sri Lanka and the world's second-tallest non-pyramidal building of the ancient world after the lighthouse at Alexandria. Marvel at the extensive ruins of Buddhist monastery Abhayagiri, built between 80-77 BC, and discover the historical rivalry that inspired it. After lunch you will head towards the ancient city of Polonnaruwa, which served as the second capital of Sri Lanka from 993 CE. It comprises several Brahmanic monuments built by the South Indian Cholas and the monumental ruins of the fabulous 12th century garden-city, The final



*Reclining Buddha, Polonnaruwa.
Image by Osmund Bopearachchi*





Sigiriya complex. Image by Divya Kumar-Dumas from her upcoming publication on Sigiriya.

TRAVEL ITINERARY

stop will be the Gal Vihara (Rock Temple), a colossal 12th-century Buddhists monolithic sculpture group of a reclining Buddha and other figures in various positions hewn out of the granite hillside. Rest tonight at the Kandalama Hotel, a 1994 Geoffrey Bawa project remarkable for the way its vine-covered structure was designed to visually merge with the surrounding jungle while enjoying wrap-around views of the reservoir valley from within.

Accommodation: Kandalama Hotel
Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 4: Sigiriya and Dambulla

Wednesday, December 10

After an early breakfast you will be driven for the Sigiriya Rock climb. Designated a World Heritage site by UNESCO in 1982, Sigiriya (meaning Lion's rock) is Asia's best-preserved city of the first millennium, showcasing sophisticated town planning, irrigation, and construction skills. Explore the vast 3rd through 5th century monastery palace compound of gardens, pools, and remains of other structures. After lunch, visit the abundant Dambulla Cave Temple, a towering hilltop rock is filled with thousands of frescoes and statues depicting the life of Buddha.

Accommodation: Kandalama Hotel
Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 5: Matale to Kandy

Thursday, December 11

Our first stop will be Sri Muthu

Mariamman Temple, a tall and exuberantly decorated structure in a typical Hindu style seen across the island. Travel onward to Aluwihare Heritage Centre, artist Ena de Silva's home and location of a women artists' collective which she founded. You will arrive finally at Degaldoruwa Rajamaha Vihara, an 18th frescoed temple with royal patronage.

Accommodation: Queen's Hotel
Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 6: Kandy and Environs

Friday, December 12

The Temple of the Tooth is a 16th century structure with features characteristic of Kandyan architecture. It was built to enshrine the most venerated relic in Sri Lanka, the Buddha's tooth. Next, enter one of the most magnificent architectural edifices of Sri Lanka's Gampola era, the Lankatilaka Royal Temple. Nearby Gadaldeniya, built entirely of sculpted granite, and Embekke Devalaya, a 14th century shrine with a drumming hall, granary, and dancing hall round out the day's activities. In the evening, you may optionally take a coach tour of Kandy Lake and uphill environs to get an excellent view of the Temple of the Tooth and city below, or enjoy a traditional dance performance at the Kandyan Cultural Centre designed by architect Minette de Silva.

Accommodation: Queen's Hotel
Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

TRAVEL ITINERARY

Day 7: Kandy

Saturday, December 13

Greet the morning with a walking tour of Kandy Temple area, the 19th century Police Court, the Lawers' Building, and Trinity College Chapel. Trinity, the 1922 Anglican prep school and chapel, was designed in a hybridized Kandyan vernacular by Rev. L.J. Gaster. Murals on the outer walls are by Sri Lankan Eurasian artist David Paynter. Afterwards, we will visit Kandy House – a former aristocratic manor for the Amunugama family built in 1804. A visit to Helga's Folly, the eclectic home of architect Minette de Silva's niece, Helga de Blow Perera, follows. Among the many decorations are original 1950s renderings by Minette from her time in Paris where she worked for Le Corbusier.

Accommodation: Queen's Hotel
Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 8: Nuwara Eliya and Bandarawela

Sunday, December 14

Today, the group sets out on a long journey through the central highlands on curving roads along tea plantations. On the way, you'll make a quick stop at Labookellie tea factory to sample their fine teas, then head to the Grand Nuwara Eliya for lunch. The temperate climate gives the city a very different feel from the rest of the country and, along with the colonial architecture, has earned it the name 'Little England'. Afterward the group continues

to Good Shepherd Chapel in Bandarawela, a 1965 project by Geoffrey Bawa with collaboration from artists Barbara Sansoni and Laki Senanayake. Tonight, stay at another historic rest house, the Bandarawela Hotel, originally built as a colonial planters' club and inn.

Accommodation: Bandarawela Hotel
Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 9: The Southern Coast, Mirissa and Galle

Monday, December 15

After an early breakfast and check out, relax on a scenic drive south to Matara where you will have lunch at the Resthouse in the Dutch period Matara Fort. In Mirissa, a short distance away, tour the airy vacation home of the extended family of Sri Lankan President J.R. Jayewardene designed, of course, by designed by Geoffrey Bawa.

Another short drive brings you to the ancestral home of the prolific Sri Lankan writer Martin Wickramasinghe and the Folk Museum he established on the property. Lastly, take in the 3.5 acre complex of SOS Children's Village in Galle, designed in 1987 by Bawa associate C. Anjalendran. Today, 103 children live within the SOS family. An early-evening arrival at Bawa's final resort project, the Lighthouse Hotel, Galle, allows plenty of time to unwind from a busy day.

Accommodation: Jetwing Lighthouse
Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner



Good Shepherd Chapel.
Image by Ravi GuneWardena



Cinnamon Bentota Beach Hotel.

TRAVEL ITINERARY

Day 10: Galle

Tuesday, December 16

Spend time exploring the walled city of Galle. Situated at an ancient harbor, the Galle fort was built by the Portuguese and further developed by Dutch colonizers in the 17th century. With its narrow alleyways and cobbled streets, it looks like a quaint European village transplanted half a world away. On our walking tour you'll see a wide variety of historic buildings from the eras of Dutch and British rule including the Dutch Hospital Building, Bank of Ceylon Southern Province, the distinctive 1940s Art Deco-style Merchant's House, New Oriental Hotel, Dutch Reformed Church, Galle, Meeran Jumma Mosque, and more. Stay tonight at the

5-star Bentota Beach Hotel by Bawa and bask in its "tropical modernism" architecture.

Accommodation: Cinnamon, Bentota Beach

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 11: Lunuganga and Bentota

Wednesday, December 17

Tucked away behind a steep dirt road in Bentota, Geoffrey Bawa's country estate of Lunugnaga offers a story of transformation. Bawa acquired the plantation as the country was on the cusp of independence from Britain. He converted the land into a garden, replacing an extractive practice with a rich ecosystem. The home held no limitations, and the architect's full creativity and imagination are on display. Here



A WORLD CLASS ARCHITECT AND DESIGNER

For decades, Geoffrey Bawa (1919-2003) was Sri Lanka's most influential architect and helped put the country "on the map" as a place with an individual and sophisticated style. His feelings about the country's cultural heritage protected Sri Lanka's uniqueness from foreign influences. Long after his death, his style, standards and aspirations are revered by new generations of Sri Lankan architects and, in the beautiful renovations of boutique hotels and villas he designed, his traditions are revered.

Feel the legacy of Bawa firsthand as you step into the spaces he created, including overnight stays at several hotels he designed. Our farewell dinner will take place at his architectural studio – now one of Colombo's most sought-after dining establishments.

Geoffrey Bawa Portrait © Dominic Sansoni, courtesy of the Geoffrey Bawa and Lunuganga Trusts

*Bawa's Lunuganga Estate
Image by Ravi GuneWardena*

YOUR EXPERT GUIDE



Ravi GuneWardena, FAIA

Sri Lankan-American architect Ravi GuneWardena is a founding principal with Frank Escher at Escher Gunewardena Architecture, Los Angeles. In addition to award-winning work of their own design, the firm is known for their historic preservation projects such as John Lautner's 1960 Chemosphere, the 1949 Eames House, and Richard Neutra's 1929 Lovell Health House.

GuneWardena studied architecture at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona and art history in Florence, Italy. He served on the Hollywood Public Art Advisory Panel for the CRA/LA. He recently served as director of the Los Angeles branch of the Sogetsu School of Ikebana. He was elevated to the College of Fellows of the American Institute of Architects in 2023.



*Shiva temple at Polonnaruwa.
Image by Nahid Sultan via Wikimedia*

TRAVEL ITINERARY

you can also see the house Bawa designed for artist Ena de Silva, which was transported brick by brick from its original location in Colombo and rebuilt on the estate.

Accommodation: Galle Face Hotel
Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 12: Colombo

Thursday, December 18

Start the day with a walking tour of Colombo's landmarks including the Port, Grand Oriental Hotel, Cargills, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Queen's/President's House, General Post Office, Chartered Bank, Hatton National Bank, and Clocktower. You'll then visit the 1941 Baur's Building designed by modernist Swiss architect Karl Moschetti. Lunch will be

at Barefoot Colombo, the enterprise established by Barbara Sansoni. After absorbing his rural retreat, encounter Bawa's city residence at No. 11, 33rd Lane. The space was created by combining several smaller row houses over ten years into a continuous courtyard house.

Accommodation: Galle Face Hotel
Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 13: Colombo

Friday, December 19

Your final day of sightseeing covers a range of buildings, each with a connection to fine art. Start at Valentine Gunasekara's 1960 Jesuit Chapel "Nirmala." The Sapumal Foundation house gallery will reveal myriad 20th century works—the

WHAT TO EXPECT

This trip is appropriate for people in good health with overall good mobility. It will be a physical experience with a lot of walking on both paved and non-paved terrain, including walking up steep hills and multiple flights of steps. You will need to get on/off shuttle buses with ease and be able to carry/roll your luggage unassisted. Seasonal temperatures will be consistent with a hot U.S. summer along the gulf coast. Expect high humidity and daily highs in the mid-80s Fahrenheit. Hotels and shuttles will be equipped with air conditioning, but many of our tour stops will not be.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact SAH Director of Programs Christopher Kirbabas at ckirbabas@sah.org before booking.

private collection of artist Harry Pieris. Then, explore a home design centered around a music room, configured by Bawa for Sri Lankan pianist Druvi de Saram.

Our farewell dinner will take place at the Gallery Café, Geoffrey Bawa's former architectural studio – now the Colombo creative community's favorite haunt.

Accommodation: Galle Face Hotel
Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 14: Colombo

Saturday, December 20

Depart from Colombo airport for home, or wherever your travels take you next!



Dutch reformed Church, 1775, Galle.

PRICE

Double-occupancy: \$6,000 per person

Single supplement: \$850 per person*

*Single supplement will be charged when requested or required with limited availability.

Thank you for using your travel to support SAH.

Included in price:

- Accommodation and meals for 13 days as listed in the itinerary above
- Bottled drinking water throughout the journey
- English-speaking guide for all activities
- Entrance fees for all included visits
- Private vehicle transportation throughout the trip
- Gratuities for meals and baggage handling
- \$500 U.S. tax deductible donation to SAH

RESERVATIONS

Visit sah.org/tour-sri-lanka to make your reservation. SAH Upper-Level, Life, and Benefactor Members receive early access to register. Reservations will be taken on a first-come, first-served basis.

A per-person deposit of \$1,000 applicable to the total program cost is due upon reservation. Written cancellations received by SAH on or before September 2, 2025 will receive a 100% refund of fully paid program price minus the \$1,000 deposit/administrative fee. Cancellations received Sept 3–30 will receive a 50% refund minus the \$1,000 deposit. The total balance is due by October 1, 2025, and no refunds will be issued on or after this date.



QUICKSHAWS

All accommodations and travel arrangements in Sri Lanka will be coordinated by Quickshaws, an agency crafting tailor-made tours since 1950. With an unblemished record of safety and quality spanning six decades they are committed to sharing their passion for Sri Lanka and look forward to helping you get the very most out of your journey.

Not Included: Airfare and applicable taxes and fees to and from your origin city to Sri Lankan destinations; airline baggage fees and excess baggage fees; passport/visa fees; meals not specified in the itinerary; food and beverages not part of the included meals; personal items and expenses; gratuities other than specified; travel and trip cancellation insurance; post-tour extension; optional sightseeing; communication charges, including cellular roaming fees; other items not specifically mentioned in the itinerary or as included. Prices, itinerary, accommodations, and experts are subject to change.