

West Coast Sri Lanka

Researched 12–16 February 2005

NOTE ON THIS CHAPTER

This document provides updated information for pages 122–34 of Lonely Planet's 9th-edition *Sri Lanka* guidebook. Information is presented in the same order as that found in the book. Information on specific places is limited to those covered in the book; many more establishments are open. Since conditions change rapidly, it is best to verify the situation before you travel, especially if you hope to stay at a specific property. Note that even places that are open may not have working telephones, although email, which can often be checked off site, sometimes works. Also note that some places that claim to be open for business may have had one or two rooms spared but may also have had the majority of their facilities destroyed. Be sure to verify the meaning of 'open' before your visit. The places we list as open generally had most of their facilities intact or repaired by the end of February.

For updated information on Sri Lanka, see www.lonelyplanet.com/tsunami/srilanka

GENERAL CONDITIONS

Tsunami damage to the West Coast of Sri Lanka begins about 20km south of Colombo. Areas of damage can be found all along the coast south of this point. Seemingly untouched areas will suddenly yield to areas of widespread destruction. Be prepared for zones of complete destruction where thousands died, but also be aware that some areas are just as beautiful and green as ever. You will see tent camps for displaced people in many places and large amounts of debris and rubble.

Most services for travellers are functioning, markets and shops are open, and electricity and telephones are generally operating, even if some individual places still lack services. Although many small businesses catering to travellers are damaged or destroyed, many others are open and every day several more reopen. You will not have a hard time finding a place to sleep or eat, but note that some of the better places are booked out by charitable organisations. Look for a brown line on surviving walls and buildings to see the height of the tsunami waters.

Numerous aid groups are operating throughout the affected area. Some, such as the International Red Cross, are involved with major projects to bring regular clean-water deliveries to displaced people. Other smaller groups are involved in helping individuals to clean up the huge amount of debris littering their property. In fact one of the most appreciated volunteer opportunities right now is simply helping with the cleanup. Travellers won't have to look far to help. Another group of 'aid workers' are often seen: those wearing special T-shirts with legends such as 'Tsunami Disaster 2004', wandering about with clean hands and gawking like tourists. Their value to locals is minimal.

Given the dearth of travellers, prices are in the low-season range.

TRANSPORT

The train line from Colombo to Matara was heavily damaged, although its reconstruction is a priority and over a thousand people are working around the clock to restore service. Trains were running south as far as Ahungalla, just north of Ambalangoda, in early February. Check locally for the latest service information.

The bus service reaches all places of the West Coast, although without the trains the buses are even more crowded, as there are more of them jamming the coastal road. The road itself

is fully open right round the coast and in good shape – some of the temporary bridges are of better quality than the ones they replaced. Three-wheelers are as ubiquitous as ever, some sporting ingenious post-tsunami repairs by their owners.

KALUTARA & WADDUWA

The Kalu Ganga bridge on the main road trapped many of the bodies and debris after the waters receded. You would not know this from its present peaceful appearance.

Places to Stay

Most hotels and resorts here had some water damage but were quickly repaired and reopened.

Tangerine Beach Hotel – open

Siddhalepa Ayurveda Health Resort – open

Royal Palms Hotel – open

The Blue Water – open

BERUWELA & MORAGALLE

Maggona, about 55km south of Colombo and just north of Beruwela, presents a dramatic picture. Here most buildings have been washed away, leaving a damaged church right on the ocean. The debris is typical of that found all along the coast: bits of buildings and furniture, household goods, dead plants, trash, and – perhaps the most poignant – torn, water-stained pages from a child's school workbook and lots and lots of shoes. In a land where not many people own more than one pair, this may be the starkest reminder of all the lives lost.

Places to Stay

Most places here were heavily damaged, and the land shows extensive scars from the water.

Blue Lagoon Hotel – at least six months from reopening

Ypsylon Guest House – at least six months from reopening

Hotel Sumadai – Should have fully reopened by March. Much damage was caused by water surging through the ground floor and into the nearby lagoon. The owners have a tale of their amazing escape.

Barberyn Beach Ayurveda Resort – main hotel open by May; bungalows destroyed

Tropical Villas Hotel – open

BENTOTA, ALUTHGAMA & INDURUWA

The coast south of Induruwa is a good example of the at times fickle nature of the tsunami destruction. The first 500m is untouched and lovely; the next 500m is heavily damaged.

Generally, many of the beachside hotels and resorts did OK as the land is in many places a little higher than the beach.

Places to Stay

Budget & Midrange

Bentota

Hotel Susantha – open

Southern Palm Villa – open

Ayubowan – open

Aluthgama

Hotel Sunil Lanka – open

Terrena Lodge – open

Hotel Hemadan – open

Induruwa

The higher ground here protected the two places listed below. The owners and employees say that the biggest problem is a lack of guests – a view that is repeated often along the coast.

Long Beach Cottage – open

Ikrams Holiday Bungalow – open

Top End

Bentota

Lihiniya Surf Hotel – Open by 1 March after water damage is repaired. As is common, guests will then enjoy all new furniture.

Hotel Serendib – open

Bentota Beach Hotel – open

Club Villa – open

Taru villas Taprobana – open

Taj Exotica – open

The Villa Mohotti Walauwa – open

Aluthgama

Hotel Ceysands – open

Induruwa

Induruwa Beach Resort – open

Saman Villas – open

KOSGODA

All five turtle hatcheries along this stretch of coast sustained major damage. Some were simply washed away with little trace left. The popular albino turtles at the Kosgoda Turtle Hatchery were found amidst the debris and now live in temporary shelter at the local police station near the main road. However, floods haven't stopped turtles from reproducing and most of the shelters were working in February to hatch the eggs employees and volunteers were again collecting. Although you may just find a tent, it's worth a detour to follow the old signs for the hatcheries and talk with whomever you encounter.

AMBALANGODA & AROUND

The area from Ambalangoda to Hikkaduwa is the most devastated region on the west coast. Much of the land is low, and the death toll reaches well into the thousands. One of the most widely reported tragedies occurred about 8km south of Ambalangoda, where a train loaded with passengers was inundated by the water. The death toll was somewhere between 1000 and 1500. The dead have long since been removed and the damaged cars returned to the tracks, and the site has obtained a macabre popularity. Travellers and locals alike stop to gaze mutely at the cars, which can't be removed until the railway is repaired. People from a nearby displaced persons camp ask the curious for assistance, and tales of need have been affixed to the sides of the cars.

Although Ambalangoda and Balapitiya to the north are damaged, the markets and many businesses are open and busy. The beaches are mostly clean, except for fishing boats large and small that were beached and damaged. Despite the huge damage to the fleet, the price of sea fish in the markets remains low, as most locals are shunning fish for fear that they fed on the thousands of victims washed out to sea.

Things to See & Do

The various cultural attractions in the area mostly survive but may have erratic hours.

Places to Stay & Eat

Sumudu Tourist Guest House – open

Piya Nivasa – Most of the land, buildings and people here were simply scoured away by the water. However, this solidly constructed veteran from 1927 largely survived. A reopening date has not been set; many repairs are needed.

Inoka Rest & Restaurant – open

Shangrela – open, although much of the surrounding area is heavily damaged

Dream Beach Resort – open

Rasika Guesthouse & Restaurant – The Rajakaruna family who runs this place survived, although the building is heavily damaged and will not be fully repaired for a few months. See

the accompanying feature at lonelyplanet.com/tsunami/srilanka for details of the dramatic events.

Triton Hotel – heavily damaged; estimated repair time is six months

HIKKADUWA & AROUND

Hikkaduwa has a range of damage. The northern end of town, where the bus station and banks are centred, had significant water damage, although repairs are proceeding rapidly. The southern end, where many of the guesthouses and traveller cafés are located, shows little damage, and the lovely beach south of Wewala is almost unchanged, with numerous places ready to sell a traveller a Lion beer to go with the sunset. The one glaring difference in early February, however, was the dearth of travellers.

Information

The banks and post office are open.

Coral Sanctuary

Hikkaduwa's coral reef suffered as yet undocumented damage from the battering it received as the debris-laden tsunami waters receded. Local divers are planning to begin cleaning up the visible nets and other junk caught in the coral.

Scuba Diving

Most of the dive shops had some level of damage to their facilities, equipment and boats. The divers themselves worked long hours in late December retrieving bodies from the coastal waters. The International Diving School is typical in that the owners are anxious to begin leading divers again despite material setbacks. Customers are all that's needed.

Surf & Beach

A few surfers have returned to Wewala, and the Narigama beach is as pretty as ever. The A Frame Surf Shop is open.

Inland Attractions

There are a large number of shops cheerfully serving aid workers and other visitors interested in taking in a beautiful bit of Sri Lanka. The roads inland rapidly leave the damaged areas and provide a serene and green respite.

Places to Stay

Budget & Midrange

Hikkaduwa

Ozone Tourist Rest – open

Plantation Villa Hotel – open

Nature Resort & River Safari – open

Wewala

Most of the places here had about 1m of tsunami water.

El Dorado Tourist Guesthouse – open

Richard's Son Beach Villa – open and spotless

Miga Villa – open

Bright Sunshine – open

Casalanka – partly open

A Frame Surf Shop – open

Hotel Blue Note – open

Moon Beam Hotel – open

Nippon Villa – open

Narigama & Thiranagama

Damage was minimal here.

Neela's – open

Rita's Guesthouse – open

Ocean View Cottage – open
Sunil's Beach Hotel – open

Top End

Hotel Blue Corals – damaged but should be fully repaired by March
Suite Lanka – open
Coral Gardens Hotel – This was home to the US Marines while they worked to reopen the coast road. When the troops go in February, the hotel plans to close for renovations.

Places to Eat

Many of Hikkaduwa's restaurants had closed or changed before the tsunami. The following are those places whose status could be verified. Numerous places not listed in *Sri Lanka* are open.

Rotty Shop – undamaged, but closed until the crowds return
Sea View Pizza House – heavily damaged
Red Lobster – open

Entertainment

Among others, Top Secret and Chill Space Surf Café are open.

Getting There & Away

The bus station is open, minibuses are running and any guesthouse will direct you to a place that can hire out a motorcycle. Three-wheelers abound.