



## Body Rituals and Vel Worship in Sri Lanka with Paul King

Featuring the Kataragama Festival  
12 Days/11 Nights  
July 2012 and 2013 (Dates TBA\*)

	Activities	Overnight
Day 1	Fly U.S. to Colombo.	Colombo
Day 2	Morning drive to Galle, once a busy Asian trading port and now the best preserved colonial town in Sri Lanka. The imposing Galle Fort was first constructed by the Portuguese in the late 16 <sup>th</sup> century, and later expanded by the Dutch in the 17 <sup>th</sup> century. Today it contains a maze of narrow streets filled with colonial villas, Dutch and British churches, trading-era spice warehouses and other commercial and government buildings. Recently added to the mix are stylish cafés, boutiques, and luxury hotels and guesthouses. After a walking tour of the old fort area, you will be free to have lunch in one of the town's numerous cafés and to explore its many craft and antique shops. Continue driving to Koggala, a beautiful beach town on Sri Lanka's southern coast.	Koggala
Day 3	The morning is at your leisure to enjoy your beach resort or to wander the quiet streets of Koggala. Here you will find the remains of a World War II airstrip, as well as the Martin Wickramasinghe Folk Art Museum, which contains a charming collection of traditional masks, puppets and musical instruments. Afternoon drive to Kataragama, one of the holiest towns in Sri Lanka, held sacred by Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims. The god Kataragama is believed by Tamil Hindus to be another form of Skanda or Murugan, a son of Shiva, while Sri Lankan Buddhists view him as a protector of their religion and the island itself. He is often depicted by a spear, or <i>vel</i> , which is said to embody his power and energy. As a result, Skanda is sometimes called the God of War, but he more subtly represents the Triumph of Good Over Evil. Skanda's vel is said to be held within Kataragama's Maha Devala shrine, and the evening <i>puja</i> , or worship, here is always dynamic and colorful.	Kataragama
Day 4	Our visit to Kataragama is timed to coincide with the town's annual festival that commemorates the life and mythology of Skanda. The festival attracts thousands of pilgrims from all over the country, yet is rarely visited by foreigners. For ten nights in a row, the holy symbol of Skanda is carried on the back of an elephant to visit his beloved wife in her nearby temple. Singers, dancers, musicians and throngs of worshippers accompany the	Kataragama

nightly procession.

In comparison to other vel festivals in Sri Lanka, however, Kataragama is less about parades and mass spectacle and more about individual acts of devotion or penance. Many worshippers pierce their cheeks, arms, legs or backs with hooks or skewers as a sign of devotion to Skanda. The skewers are actually small lances or vels, thus the process of skin piercing can be seen as the penitent surrendering to the power and supremacy of the deity himself. Hook swinging, fire walking, walking on nails, and rolling the body over hot sand is also practiced during the festival. Some of these rituals occur at the main temple complex, while others occur on the banks of the nearby Menik Ganga river under the auspices of holy men who perform the piercing while drumming and reciting prayers to bring the penitent into a trance. As we watch the festival's events, our expert guide, Paul King, will share his extensive knowledge of vel worship, the practice of trance, and the history of self-sacrificial body rituals in Sri Lanka, India and Southeast Asia.

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| <b>Day 5</b> | The morning is at your leisure to enjoy your hotel or to explore the Kataragama festival on your own. Afternoon safari in Yala National Park, the best game preserve in Sri Lanka, which has more leopards per square mile than any other place in the world. Other animals that might be seen today include elephants, sloth bears and a wide variety of birds. Tonight we will again visit the festival grounds to witness the dramatic conclusion of this remarkable event, including the late-night fire walking ceremony.  | Kataragama   |
| <b>Day 6</b> | Morning drive to Nuwara Eliya (6,200 feet), a British-style colonial town in Sri Lanka's hill country, stopping en route to tour a local Ceylon tea plantation. After a devastating blight destroyed the region's coffee plantations in the 1860's, the British brought the tea plant over from India to see if it could be grown in the cool, damp climate of the Sri Lankan hills. The experiment was a resounding success, and high-grown Ceylon teas from Nuwara Eliya are now some of the finest teas in the world. Afternoon tour of the colonial architecture, tranquil parks and local markets of Nuwara Eliya.   | Nuwara Eliya |
| <b>Day 7</b> | Early morning visit to the remote plateau of Horton Plains National Park (6,500 feet). From this precipice you have commanding views of the surrounding magical landscape, filled with clouds and mist, lush vegetation, crystal-clear streams and waterfalls, and dramatic mountain peaks. Continue driving to Kandy, one of the last cities in Sri Lanka to be conquered by the Europeans. Its long history of independence enabled it to remain a center of Sinhalese arts, culture and religion. Afternoon tour of Kandy, including the Royal Palace complex, the Kandy Garrison Cemetery, and the four principal <i>devales</i> , or temples, of Kandy. The temples are primarily Buddhist, with Hindu elements incorporated, reflecting the fact that Kandy was once ruled by Tamils from South India. Tonight we will enjoy the evening puja at The Temple of the Tooth, Sri Lanka's most important Buddhist temple, which is the current home of the Buddha Tooth Relic. The Tooth Relic is believed to be a tooth of Lord Buddha rescued from his cremation pyre; whoever possesses it is said to have the divine right to rule Sri Lanka. | Kandy        |
| <b>Day 8</b> | Today you are free to relax at your hotel or to explore Kandy on your own. Possible sights to visit include the National Museum, which houses an  | Kandy        |

excellent display of royal costumes and artifacts, as well as the Peradeniya Botanical Gardens or the Tea Museum. You can also take a walk through the scenic Udawattekele Sanctuary, browse through Kandy's numerous arts and crafts shops, or enjoy a massage at a local ayurvedic spa. Evening dance performance at the Kandyan Arts and Crafts Association.

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| <b>Day 9</b>  | Morning departure for Polonnaruwa, the capital of Sri Lanka from the 11 <sup>th</sup> to the 13 <sup>th</sup> centuries. Polonnaruwa was originally a capital of the invading Tamil Cholas from India, but was recaptured by the Sinhalese King Vijayabahu I in 1073. It was therefore inhabited by both Indian Hindus and Sinhalese Buddhists, and its architecture and fine arts are a wonderful blend of both. We will visit the Vatadage, an intricately-carved, circular shrine that once housed the Buddha's Tooth Relic. We will also view the remains of the royal palace and council chamber of King Parakramabahu, regarded as the last great king of Sri Lanka. Afternoon drive to Sigiriya.   | Sigiriya       |
| <b>Day 10</b> | Morning visit to the spectacular temple complex at Sigiriya, or Lion Rock. This enormous rock outcrop rises 600 feet above the plains, and was transformed into a gigantic seated lion in the 5 <sup>th</sup> century AD by King Kassapa. While only the sculpted lion paws remain, the rock contains the ruins of the king's royal palace and elaborate gardens, as well as the mysterious Sigiriya Damsels, one of the largest rock murals ever painted. Afternoon visit to the Dambulla cave temples, the most impressive Buddhist cave temples in Sri Lanka, which are completely filled with statues and paintings depicting the life of the Buddha. These temples were originally built by King Valagambahu I in the 1 <sup>st</sup> century BC, with further embellishments made by the kings of Kandy in the 17 <sup>th</sup> and 18 <sup>th</sup> centuries. | Dambulla       |
| <b>Day 11</b> | Morning drive to Colombo, stopping en route to visit the Pinnawela Elephant Orphanage. This natural habitat was established in 1975 to provide a safe home for orphaned or injured elephants. An increasing number of elephants are now born here, and watching the babies being fed with tiny bottles is a highlight of any trip to Sri Lanka. Tonight we will enjoy a farewell feast in Colombo featuring local Sri Lankan cuisine.   | Colombo        |
| <b>Day 12</b> | Depart Colombo for the U.S. or other destinations in Asia.  | Flight to U.S. |

*Accommodation Utilized* – Our tour in Sri Lanka will utilize a mixture of 3-star and 4-star hotels, all of which are very clean and comfortable and feature a wide range of food choices. The exact lodging to be utilized on the trip will be provided to you well in advance of your departure from the U.S.



## Body Rituals and Vel Worship in Sri Lanka with Paul King July 2012 and 2013 (Dates TBA\*)



Trip cost: \$3,550.00 per person (2012 cost)

Single supplement: \$530.00 (2012 cost)

Deposit required to hold booking: \$500.00

Balance of trip cost due 60 days prior to your departure from the U.S. (May 2012/2013\*)

Trip cost includes:

- All accommodations (based on double occupancy);
- All meals, including one alcoholic beverage at lunch and at dinner, with the exclusion of lunches in Galle (Day 2) and Kandy (Day 8);
- Ground transportation (car/motorcoach/train/boat);
- All airport transfers;
- Baggage handling and portage;
- The services of experienced, English-speaking guides;
- All monument/museum/site entry fees;
- All gratuities except for the senior tour guide;
- 24/7 emergency medical/security evacuation services;
- Bottled water in all vehicles; and,
- All required local taxes and fees.

Trip cost does not include:

- International flights from the U.S. to Sri Lanka;
- Items of a personal nature such as laundry, telephone calls, Internet/business center expenses and room service;
- Lunches in Galle (Day 2) and Kandy (Day 8);
- Alcoholic beverages not included with meals as described above;
- Gratuities for the senior tour guide;
- Excess baggage charges;
- Trip cancellation/interruption, baggage delay/loss and supplemental medical expense insurance – **highly recommended**;
- Visa/passport processing costs; and,
- Immunizations and prescription medications required for travel.

\* The exact dates of the Kataragama festival are not formalized by local temple authorities in Sri Lanka until approximately two months prior to the actual festival (e.g., May of each year). **Any travelers who have signed up for the tour but are subsequently unable to go due to scheduling issues once the dates are announced will receive a full refund of their trip deposit.** However, once definitive trip dates are announced and travelers have reconfirmed their participation, all refunds will be subject to our full Payment Terms and Conditions, a summary of which is as follows:

If you cancel: a) 60 days or more before departure, you forfeit 50% of your trip deposit plus any cancellation fees, surcharges or non-refundable deposits charged to us by individual hotels, airlines or other third-parties; b) 31 to 59 days before departure, you forfeit 50% of the land cost; and c) 30 days or less before departure, you forfeit 100% of the land cost.



Since we will not waive our stated cancellation and refund policies regardless of cause, **we highly encourage travelers to purchase trip cancellation/interruption, baggage delay/loss and supplemental medical expense insurance.** Upon receipt of your trip deposit, you will receive a comprehensive sign-up package that will include our full Payment Terms and Conditions, as well as instructions for purchasing trip cancellation/interruption, baggage delay/loss and supplemental medical expense insurance. It is important to note that, in order to have a *pre-existing conditions* waiver or a *cancel-for-any-reason* waiver included in your plan, you must purchase your supplemental travel insurance within 15 to 21 days (depending upon the policy chosen) of making your initial trip deposit (which for the purposes of purchasing supplemental travel insurance will be the date on which you reconfirm your trip participation once final tour dates are announced).

Our full Payment Terms and Conditions can be found at  
<http://www.fromlosttofoundtravel.com/pricingandpaymentterms/paymentterms.html>

