

IBPG - Darwin

The Institute of Biopaleogeography
named under Charles R. Darwin



IBPG 3 (2021) 1-44

E-ISSN 2956-4573

Beautiful, natural places and tourist attractions in Sri Lanka

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Publisher's Address:

Scientific Publishing House DARWIN at The Institute
22, Adama Mickiewicza Street, 78-520 Złocieniec, District Drawski, West Pomerania, Poland

Cite of this article:

K. A. I. L. Wijewardena Gamalath. Beautiful, natural places and tourist attractions in Sri Lanka. *The Institute of Biopaleogeography named under Charles R. Darwin 3 (2021) 1-44*

ABSTRACT

This report presents the beautiful and cultural places in Sri Lanka attracting tourists. Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka is an island nation in South Asia, located in the Indian Ocean enrich with beautiful white sandy beaches, lush green landscapes varying from rainforests to peak wilderness sanctuaries, *Buddhist monasteries* and accented by a cultural history dating back thousands of years. Sri Lanka has been a popular place of attraction for foreign travelers as early as the 410's AD/CE, the Chinese traveler Fa-Hien in the twelfth century and the Italian explorer Marco Polo claiming "best island of its size in the world". Tourism in the island nation is the third largest foreign exchange earner. The airport and seaports have been closed to tourists for several months due to the pandemic. Discussions are underway to reopen the airport to tourism under a phased programme in January 2021.

Keywords: Sri Lanka, beaches, central highlands, wilderness and wild life, archaeology and history, spiritual pursuits

INTRODUCTION

Sri Lanka, the Pearl of the Indian Ocean, also was known as the Taprobane (ancient Greek) Serendib (Persians and Arabs) from Sanskrit *Siṃhala-dvipaḥ* and Ceylon (Portuguese Empire) is an island paradise in the Indian Ocean situated near southeast of the Indian subcontinent separated by the Palk Strait, inlet of the Bay of Bengal. Photo 1 shows the map of Sri Lanka in the Indian Ocean. The nation has a land mass of 62,710 km² and a population of 21.8 million comprising mainly of Sinhala Buddhists and other ethnic minorities.

Sri Lanka has a proud history of more than two thousand years with evidence of prehistoric human settlements dating back at least 125,000 years, having the golden days during the kingdom of Anuradhapura (377 BC–1017 AD), Polonnaruwa (1056 AD–1236 AD) and Dambadeniya (1220–1345 AD) characterized by the preservation of Theravada Buddhism and the development over two millennia of a sophisticated system of irrigation in the drier parts of the country.

At present Sri Lanka is modernizing and technologically improving country with modern cities and rural country sides. Photo 2 shows the parliament building in Sri Jayewardenepura Kotte, the legislative capital of Sri Lanka, the capital of the Sinhalese kingdom of Kotte from 1415 to 1565 largely owing to the lagoons, rivers, and swamps that still encircle it providing a natural defense. Skyline of Colombo, the commercial capital and largest city of Sri Lanka by population is shown in Photo 3 and a rural village in Photo 4. Politically Sri Lanka is a Republic and a Democracy and having a high standard of free education. Sri Lanka's higher education institutes are of a very high standard while a universal free health care system, higher than the regional average in health care caters to all citizens.

Sri Lanka, geologically speaking is an extremely old country, ninety percent of the rocks of the island are of Precambrian age, 560 million to 2,400 million years ago. Nearly 25% of the total land area of Sri Lanka is potentially gem-bearing, making Sri Lanka one of the countries with the highest density of gem deposits compared to its landmass. The blessed geological conditions provide an ideal blend of chemistry, heat, pressure, time for gem crystals to grow and weathering to be deposited and concentrated in gravels. Most of the gem deposits are in an

area called the Highland Complex, extending northeast to southwest and containing high-grade metamorphic rocks and Ratnapura (city of gems) contains the most gem deposits. Ancient times, Sri Lanka was known as Ratna-Dweepa (Gem Island), reflection of its natural wealth. Marco Polo wrote that the island had the best sapphires, topazes, amethysts, and other gems in the world. Ptolemy, the 2nd century astronomer recorded that beryl and sapphire were the mainstay of Sri Lanka's gem industry. Sri Lanka's gems are largely found in alluvial deposits in the Highland belt, made up of gravels that have washed down from the mountains and been deposited in the floodplains of rivers and lakes. The main gemstone species found in Sri Lanka are blue sapphire, ruby, padparadscha, yellow sapphire, star sapphires, alexandrite, cat's eye, amethyst and garnet, spinel, tourmaline, beryl, quartz and moonstone etc. Photo 5 shows the highland complex and river gem mining in Photo 6.

As a wonderful gift of nature, several hot water springs occur in Sri Lanka, though it is not situated within a very active tectonic zone of the earth. The world over such hot springs were named as healing mineral thermal waters. Photo 7 shows the map of the hot water spring. Mahapelassa Hot Water Springs, four wells built around the main spring with varying degrees of temperature lying among the vast paddy fields first recorded by Leonard Woolf, Assistant Government Agent of Hambanthota (1908-11) is shown in Photo 8.

The staple food of Sri Lankan is rice and curry and pre-colonial Sri Lanka took pride in the country's vast reservoirs and irrigation canals that harnessed monsoon rains, supplying water for paddy cultivation. Photo 9 shows villagers working in a paddy field and Photo 10 on a threshing-floor. Coconut tree refer to as kapruka, is a very important tree to the islanders, since coconut milk is used for preparing meals, timber for house-building and furniture, the leaves for thatching roofs, fibre for making ropes and firewood. A man climbing a coconut tree to pluck coconuts in the traditional way with rope close up is shown in Photo 11. When British forces occupied the island starting in 1815 and subsequently stripped farmers of their land, they made it difficult for islanders to grow rice and instead expanded plantation crops such as tea, rubber and cinnamon for their export gains.

Philanthropist Arthur V. Dias during his independence movement marches in Sri Lankan central highlands saw the destruction of the island's native jackfruit trees, a tree been a fortune particularly for rural poor families. The versatile green Jackfruit is a staple and delicious food item in Sri Lanka. At every stage of its development, when it is young, mature and fully ripened, Sri Lankans have found ingenious ways to make the best of it. It has hundreds of seeds which are tightly packed together and the flesh encasing the seed is what is generally consumed, though even the seeds are used and eaten roasted or boiled. Its timber is expensive and its raw leaves are used for cattle and goat fodder and the dry leaves are taken for manure. To eradicate starvation in Sri Lanka Dias promoted islanders to plant one million jackfruit trees as 'Trees of Rice' across the island to gain food self-sufficiency during the British rule, and they have since helped islanders to avoid starvation during 1970's, a combination of inflation, droughts and a food shortage pushed Sri Lanka to the verge of collapse and during the lockdown due to corona virus in 2020. Photo 12 shows the jackfruit tree.

Main export crops of the island nation are tea, rubber, coconut and spices. Tea production introduced to the country in 1867 by James Taylor, a British planter is one of the main sources of foreign exchange for Sri Lanka. The tea-growing regions are clustered mostly among the central mountains of the island and its southern foot hills. The humidity, cool temperatures, and rainfall of the country's central highlands provide a climate that favours the production of high-quality tea. The tea production in low-elevation areas is popular in the Middle East. Photo 13

shows the Sri Lankan map and Photo 14 a tea estate. Sri Lanka, rubber industry, profitable supply of an agricultural commodity, is a leading global sourcing destination for natural rubber since planted in 1876 by British. The traditional rubber growing areas of Sri Lanka is located mainly in the wet zone. Photo 15 shows the tapping of a rubber tree for latex. Coconut, one of the major plantation crops in Sri Lanka are usually dispersed right along the coastal belt with a high concentration of coconut trees in Colombo, Kurunegala and Chilaw also known as the Coconut Triangle. Photo 16 shows a coconut estate. Sri Lanka well known for its spices, cinnamon, pepper, cardamom, turmeric, tamarind, cloves, nutmeg and mace is one of the reasons that the Portuguese, Dutch and British tried to gain control of it, as spices were worth a king's ransom. National spice garden in Matale is shown in Photo 17 and in Photo 18, the remote village Meemure on the border of Matale and Kandy district, with no cellular connectivity or a direct postal service where the staple crops are cardamom, pepper, ginger and paddy. Photo 19 shows Sri Lanka postage stamps with spices.

A physical environment of wide-ranging diversity makes Sri Lanka one of the world's most scenic countries having a highly varied cultural landscape. Sri Lanka's tropical location ensures perennially high temperatures, with monthly averages between 22 °C and 33 °C in the lowlands. Sri Lanka caters for wide range of tourists. For visitors interested in having a relaxing holiday in the tropical beaches, the nation offers most beautiful beach destinations with bright white sands and aqua-blue oceans. Sri Lanka's west coast is most developed, most Westernized, and most tourist-oriented from Negombo in the north to Hikkaduwa in the south. Photo 20 shows a sailing boat on the beach of Negombo and Photo 21 the Hikkaduwa beach. Towards the southern end of the east coast, the village of Arugam Bay (Photo 22) is a popular beach destination with some of the best waves for surfing. In the northeast is the Nilaveli (Photo 23) one of the best beaches in Sri Lanka while on the less developed East coast are Kalkudah beach and Pasikuda beach (Photo 24). Sri Lanka has an abundance of coral reefs around most part of the island. The colourful coral reefs with tropical fish and other marine species (Photo 25) can be explored at several diving and snorkeling locations in several beaches. All kinds of whales, dolphins, flying fish, turtles, manta rays and whale sharks are seen in a few miles off the South Coast. Photo 26 shows dolphins in their natural habitat in Kalpitiya and whales watching in Mirissa in Photo 27. Stilt fishing, one of the most interesting traditional fishing methods of Sri Lanka is shown in Photo 28.

Visitors interested in cool climate and hilly areas have the option of central highlands, Kandy and Nuwara Eliya. Kandy, the last capital of ancient kings of Sri Lanka is located in between multiple mountain ranges. Sri Dalada Maligawa or the Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic, a Buddhist temple in the city, located in the royal palace complex of the former Kingdom of Kandy, housing the relic of the tooth of the Buddha is shown in Photo 29. Since ancient times, the relic has played an important role due to the belief that whoever holds the relic holds the governance of the country. Kandy is a World Heritage Site mainly due to the temple. Photo 30 shows the Royal Palace of Kingdom of Kandy. Photo 31 shows the Royal botanical garden in Peradeniya fostering more than 4000 species of plants, orchids, spices, medicinal plants and palm trees. It is renowned for its collection of orchids (Photo 32). Photo 33 shows the beautiful Kandy Lake. Nuwara Eliya, often referred to as little England, is a *city perched on the tea hills surrounded by spellbinding greenery. The waterfalls dotting the region further accentuate its beauty and offer eye pleasing views.* Victoria Park in Nuwara Eliya named as the best-maintained park in all of South Asia is shown in Photo 34. The Nanu Oya River runs through the park creating a number of small lakes while huge flowers and a number of rare bird species

can be found in the park. Photo 35 shows Lake Gregory, a reservoir in the heart of Nuwara Eliya constructed in 1873 during the period of British Governor. The slow-growing tea bushes (*Photo 20*) of this highland region produce some of the world's finest orange pekoe tea. Bomburu Ella the widest waterfall near the border of Nuwara Eliya and Badulla districts in Sri Lanka consisting of several small waterfalls grouped together is shown in Photo 36. Photo 37 shows the nature of highlands and Ambewela New Zealand Farm, a dairy farm in Nuwara Eliya is shown in Photo 38. Four miles south east of Nuwara Eliya is another prominent peak, Hakgala. At its foot lie the Hakgala Botanical Gardens, with over 10,000 species of flora planted (*Photo 39*) and above it is the Hakgala Strict Nature Reserve harbouring many species of endemic mammals (*Photo 40*).

For those who are interested in wilderness and wild life, the virgin forests of Sri Lanka are rich in their variety and profusion of flora and fauna and wildlife, including elephants, leopards, bears, buffalo, and peafowl, and tree species such as ebony, mahogany, satinwood, and teak. There are also over 200 bird species that make their home in the park areas, including several endemic to Sri Lanka. One can hike a pilgrimage trail to the summit of Sri Pada (Adam's Rock) (*Photo 41*), a mountain topped by a sacred rock formation, walk through the Sinharaja forest (*Photo 42-43*), a tropical rainforest home to numerous rare flora and fauna meeting the local and tribal villagers living along the border of the forest reserve or hike the Knuckles Mountain Range (*Photo 44*) high in hill country consisting almost one-third of the island's flowering plant species, more than 25 Orchids species (*Photo 45*) in the forest range or visit island nation's 300 odd waterfalls (*Photo 46*). Animal lovers can experience a visit to the Pinnawalla Elephant Sanctuary, (*Photo 47*), Horton plain national park in the central highlands (*Photo 48*: a crow perching on axis deer), take a safari in the country's large elephant-filled national parks Yala situated in the southeast region, bordering the Indian Ocean (*Photo 48*: animals), Wilpathu with natural lakes, natural, sand-rimmed water basins or depressions that fill with rainwater located in the Northwest coast (*Photo 49*: animals), Udawalawe on the boundary of Sabaragamuwa and Uva Provinces (*Photo 50*: animals, *Photo 51*: view of peninsula with young elephants) and visit for bird-watching in Bundala National Park an internationally important wintering ground for migratory water birds in Sri Lanka. (*Photo 52*).

Visitors interested in archaeology and history have wealth of resources in Anuradhapura (*Photo 23-25*), Polonnaruwa (*Photo 26*), Dambulla (*Photo 27*) and Dambadeniya (*Photo 28*). Mihintale, a mountain peak near Anuradhapura in Sri Lanka, believed by Sri Lankans to be the site of a meeting between the Buddhist monk Mahinda, the son of King Asoka of India and King Devanampiyatissa of the island which inaugurated the presence of Buddhism in Sri Lanka is shown in *Photo 54*. *Photo 55* shows, the Jaya Sri Maha Bodhi of Anuradhapura one of oldest living tree with a written history planted in 236 BC. Ruwanwelisaya Stupa, containing largest collection of Gothama Buddha's relics built in 140 B.C. and Thissa wewa an artificial reservoir of 3.2 km long and 7.6 m high built in 3rd century BC in Anuradhapura is shown in *Photo 56*. *Photo 57* shows Sigiriya (Lion Rock), ancient rock fortress with a giant gateway carved in the shape of a lion halfway up the mountain near the town of Dambulla, once the mountaintop palace of an island king (477 – 495 CE) now a UNESCO listed World Heritage Site.

The sides of the mountain have giant frescoes painted on (*Photo 58*). Dambulla Royal Cave Temple is shown in *Photo 59*. Medieval city of Polonnaruwa capital of Sri Lanka from the 11th to 13th centuries, a World Heritage **site** is shown in *Photo 60*. *Photo 61* shows the Samadhi, standing and reclining statues of Buddha at Polonnaruwa Gal Viharaya (Uttararama), a rock temple of the Buddha, ruins of ancient Vatadage, Lankatilaka Viharaya and royal palace. The

Sea of Parakrama or Parakrama Samudra a reservoir of 14 km length and average depth of 25 feet, originally consisting of five large reservoirs which relieved the pressure on the main dam, built by King Parakramabahu the first who ruled Pollonnaruwa from 1153 AD to 1153 AD is shown in Photo 62. Yapahuwa a former capital of Sri Lanka in Kurunegala is a massive rock with a fortress built on top with a remarkable ornamental stairway used to conduct the royal palace. Surrounding the beautiful architecture with breathtaking beauty enriches the walk to the top of the hill (Photo 63). Lankatilaka Vihara, an ancient Buddhist temple situated in Udunuwara, Kandy built in 14th century with details and embellishments of Kandy era culture, considered as the most magnificent architectural edifice created during the Gampola era is shown in Photo 64.

Above all people who are in spiritual pursuits like meditation in Vipassana/Mindfulness can find many institutions, some catering specially for foreigners. Paramita International Meditation Centre perched on top of a hill with panoramic views of the sprawling valleys below, built on the site of a previous tea plantation providing a venue for people from all over the world to come and learn Buddhist meditation is shown in Photo 65.

Our national carrier, Sri Lankan airlines boasts of providing “a taste of paradise” is shown in Photo 66.

CONCLUSION

Since the end of separatist war in May 2009 tourism in Sri Lanka has been booming and it has been ranked as one of the top tourist destinations in the world for the past few years. As a tourist destination, Sri Lanka can compete successfully with other destinations because of its strategic location in the Indian Ocean on the major air and sea routes between Europe and the Far East as well as been able to offer overabundance of options like beach destinations, favourable climate, rich cultural heritage, national parks and wildlife. The pandemic situation has brought lot of negative impacts to the Sri Lanka tourist industry gradually recovering after the 2019 April Easter attacks. The government has imposed severe restrictions. Presently, this unprecedented public health crisis has become a catastrophic economic crisis. The airport and seaports have been closed to tourists for several months. Discussions are underway to reopen the airport to tourism under a phased programme in January 2021.

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Appendix



Photo 1.



Photo 2



Photo 3



Photo 4

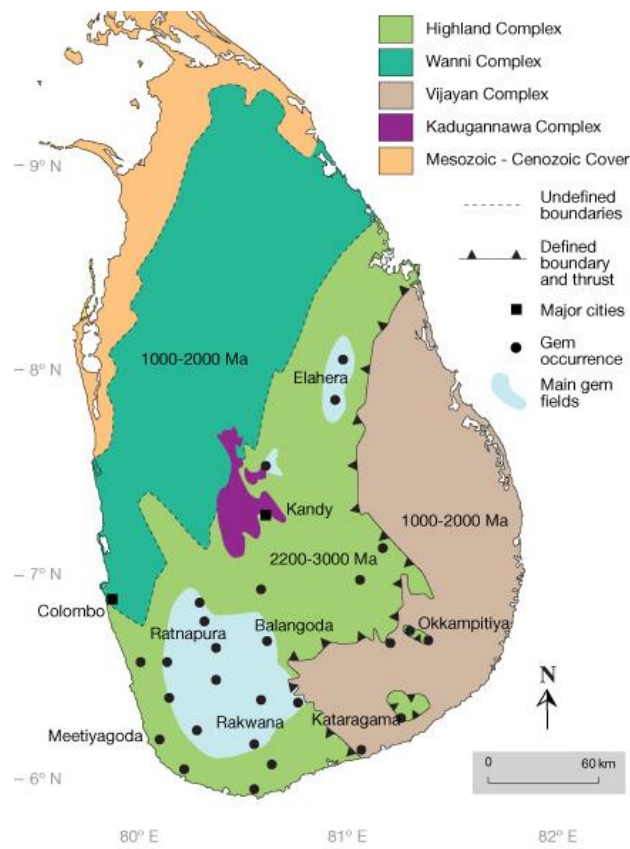


Photo 5



Photo 6

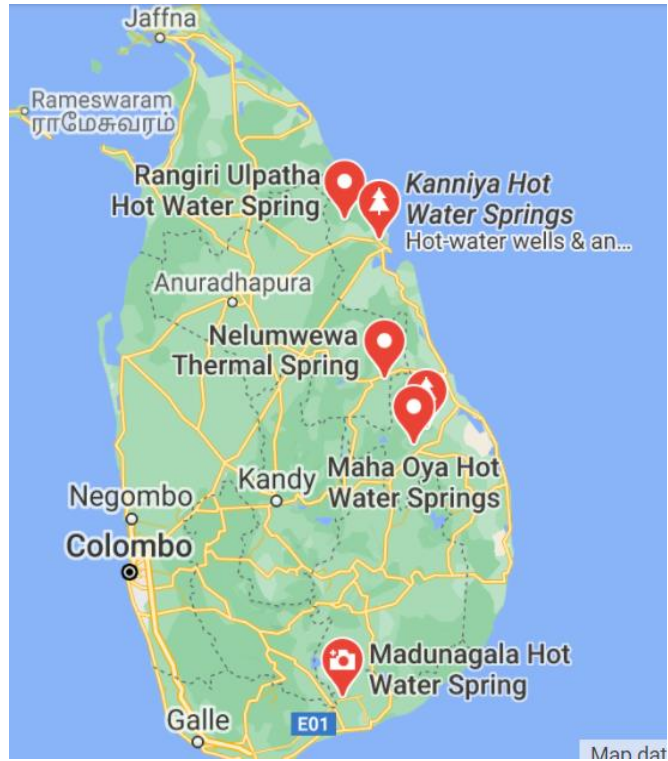


Photo 7



Photo 8



Photo 9



Photo 10



Photo 11



Photo 12



Photo 13



Photo 14



Photo 15



Photo 16



Photo 17



Photo 18



Photo 19



Photo 20



Photo 21



Photo 22



Photo 23



Photo 24



Photo 25



Photo 26



Photo 27



Photo 28



Photo 29



Photo 30



Photo 31



Photo 32



Photo 33



Photo 34



Photo 35

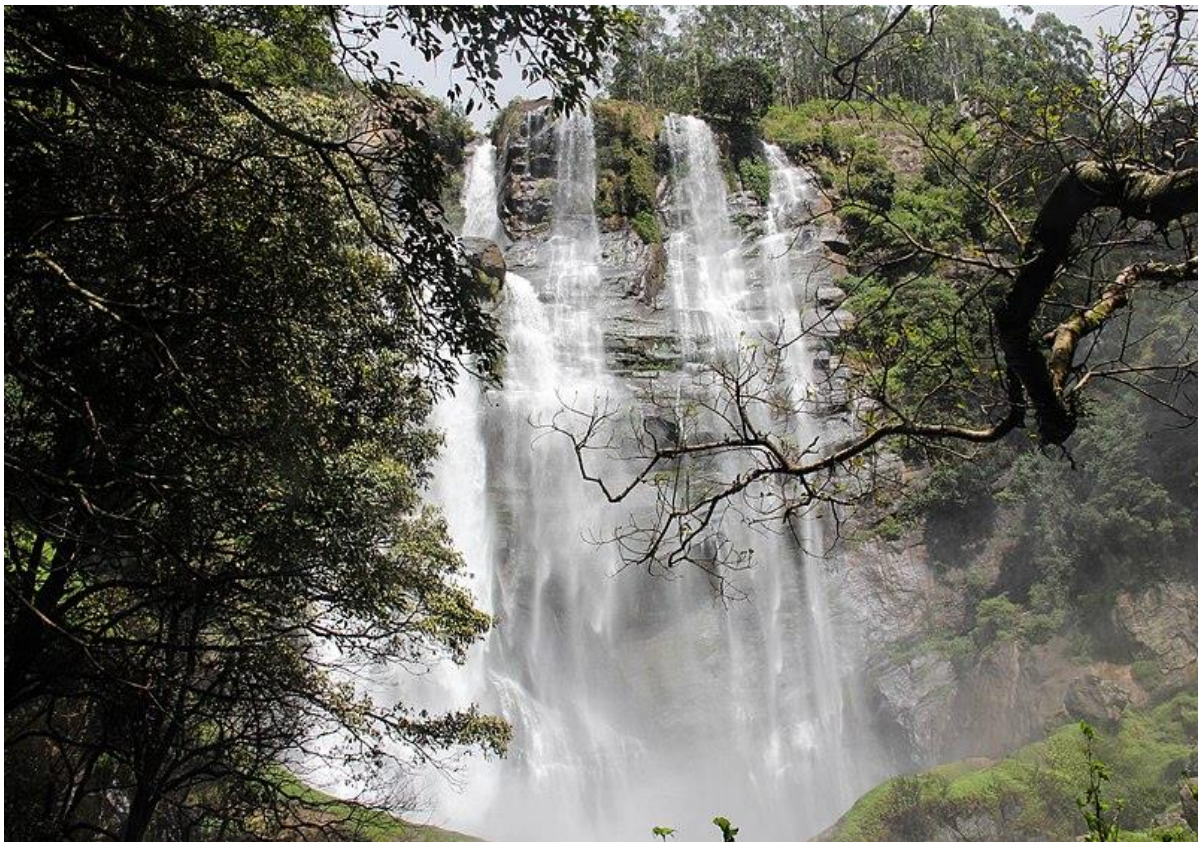


Photo 36



Photo 37



Photo 38



Photo 39



Photo 40



Photo 41



Photo 42



Photo 43

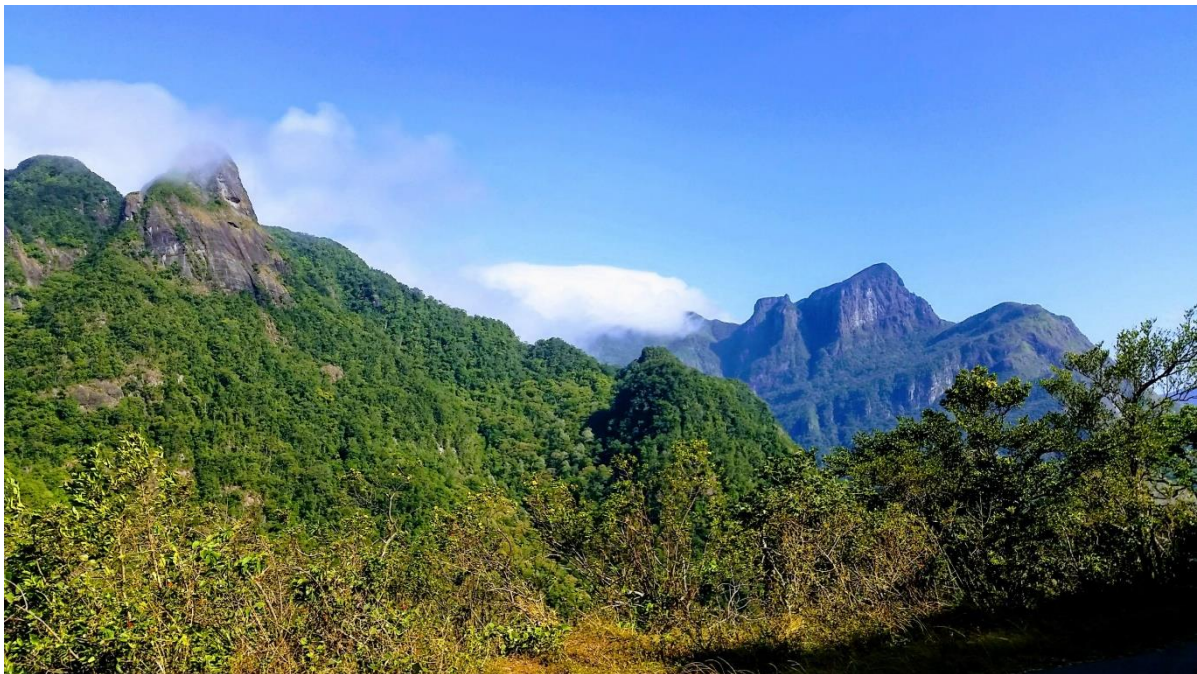


Photo 44



Photo 45



Photo 46



Photo 47



Photo 48



Photo 49



Photo 50



Photo 51



Photo 52



Photo 53



Photo 54



Photo 55



Photo 56



Photo 57



Photo 58



Photo 59



Photo 60



Photo 61



Photo 62



Photo 63



Photo 64



Photo 65



Photo 66