

- ☀️ **January 1**
New Year's Day
- ☀️ **February 4**
National Day
- ☀️ **April***
Buddhist New Year
- ☀️ **April***
Wesak (the day Buddha is believed to have been born, gained enlightenment, and died)
- ☀️ **May 1**
May Day
- ☀️ **December 25**
Christmas

**date varies*

Religion in Sri Lanka

Seventy percent of Sri Lankans are Buddhist. Hindus comprise another 15 percent of the population, followed by Christians (8 percent) and Muslims (7 percent).

In its purest form, **Buddhism** is a way of life. The Buddha was not a god but a teacher. After living as a privileged but careless youth, Prince Gautama Siddhartha abandoned his life of luxury in a search for insight through solitude and fasting. It was through meditation that Siddhartha achieved liberation from all sorrow—nirvana—and became “Buddha” (one

completely awakened). In nirvana, it is believed that all passion, hatred, and delusion die out and the soul is released from the body. Buddha also understood the constant motion of the universe and that everything in it is subject to birth and decay. This motion is part of the Dharma, the laws of nature. One of these laws is of cause and consequence, or karma, which implies that all actions have a corresponding effect. In essence, the force generated by a person's actions is a determining factor in the nature of his/her next life. Buddhism emphasizes five regimens: striving not to kill, not to steal, not to engage in sexual misconduct, not to speak falsehoods, and not to use drugs. Buddhist holidays include Bodhi Day (December 8), which celebrates the enlightenment of Buddha under the Bodhi tree; Buddha Day (April 8), which commemorates the birth of Gautama in Lumbini Garden; and Wesak (April/May), the holiest of Buddhist holy days, which celebrates Buddha's birth, enlightenment, and death.

To **Hindus**, Vishnu is the creator, preserver, and destroyer of the universe, according to Hinduism's sacred text, the Padma Purana. His most important task is the preservation of the divine order—the Dharma, which is the natural harmony existent in all things. In Hinduism, all experience is taken into the next life as karma. People with negative karma will end up in a humble position in the next life; people with good karma will hold a high position.

Additional sources include the CIA World Factbook and State Department websites.



Population	21 million
Capital City	Colombo
Official Language	Sinhala
Per Capita Income	US\$2,920/year
Youth Literacy Rate	98% male/99% female
Access to Safe Water	99% urban/92% rural
Under 5 Mortality Rate	10/1,000 live births

Source: The State of the World's Children 2014 (UNICEF)

The **Republic of Sri Lanka** is an island country in the Indian Ocean. It lies approximately 20 miles off the southeastern coast of India. Sri Lanka is about as large as the state of West Virginia and was formerly called Ceylon. The island has been famous for more than 2,000 years for its spices and precious stones, attracting travelers from all over the world. Sri Lanka ranks second only to India in tea production and is a leading exporter of precious stones and rubber to the world market. The average temperature in Sri Lanka, given the close proximity to the equator, is relatively constant at 81°F. Rainfall varies on the island, with the center portion receiving more than 230 inches per year while the northern and southern coasts receive only 80 to 100 inches.



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A Brief History

During ancient times, Sri Lanka was known to the people of the world by merchants who used its natural harbors as a gateway between the east and the west. To the Asian civilizations it was a stronghold of Buddhism and attracted many pilgrims. The Veddahs, a wandering people, are said to have first inhabited the island of Sri Lanka around 500 BC. Invading forces from southern and northern India established settlements in the northern (Sinhalese Dynasty) and southern (Tamils) portions of the island. European control of the island began in 1505, when the Portuguese landed in Colombo seeking trade routes to Asia. The Dutch and British also gained control of the island at different times. British rule of the country ended in 1948, when independence was granted. In the years following independence, the Sinhalese, who resented British favoritism toward Tamils during the colonial period, disenfranchised Tamil migrant plantation workers from India and made Sinhala the official language. In 1972, the Sinhalese changed the country's name from Ceylon and made Buddhism the nation's primary religion. As ethnic tension grew, in 1976, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE, or Tamil Tigers) was formed, and it began to campaign for a Tamil homeland in northern and eastern Sri Lanka, where most of the island's Tamils reside. In 2002, Norway brokered a cease-fire agreement between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government, but both sides repeatedly violated the terms. In May 2009, the government of Sri Lanka claimed that it had defeated the rebels and liberated the country.

Plan's work in Sri Lanka covers five key areas:

- ☀ Children's health
- ☀ Education
- ☀ Hygiene standards
- ☀ Household economic security
- ☀ Child protection and participation

Children's health

Plan works to address health issues that present a risk for children in Sri Lanka. There has been a decline in the quality and coverage of primary health care services, including health care in schools. Meanwhile, children often suffer from malnutrition, iron deficiency, and diarrhea. Plan also conducts prevention awareness programs about HIV and sexually transmitted diseases targeted at young people.

Education

We have worked in collaboration with educational authorities, children, schools, communities, and partner non-governmental organizations to develop school improvement programs in 112 schools. We also help develop regulatory standards for home-based early childhood care and development (ECCD) and to prepare handbooks for the implementers of home-based ECCD.

Hygiene standards

We transfer knowledge to young people regarding safe water and environmental sanitation while discouraging unhygienic practices and risky behavior. Plan also works with the government to set up water supply and sanitation projects in rural areas.

Household economic security

19.2 percent of the people in Sri Lanka live below the poverty line. Plan is working to improve the situation with four key activities: microfinance, such as small loans and savings schemes; vocational training; rural transport; and irrigation.

Child protection and participation

Only 12 of the government's 22 District Child Protection Committees responsible for monitoring cases of child abuse are functional, and none of the women and



children's desks attached to the police department are fully functional. We are working to improve the situation by providing financial and technical support to the National Child Protection Authority (NCPA) and to the police to prevent violence against children. Plan also raises awareness in child rights by showing children how to produce their own media.

Economic Security

Plan operates predominantly in rural areas where agriculture is the mainstay of the economy. Agriculture in Sri Lanka can be divided into two sectors: the plantation sector and the rural agriculture smallholder sector. The country's main export crops are tea, rubber, and coconut, which come under the plantation sector. The remaining arable land is used by the smallholder farmers who cultivate the dry and infertile soil for basic food crops. Productivity in these situations is hampered by the traditional farming practices used by the farmers and poor irrigation systems. Many farmers simply rely on the rain to feed their crops, which often results in a high rate of crop failure.

Naming Traditions

Most children are named for religious figures and heroes of epics. In Sri Lanka, the family name (ge) is written first, followed by the given name. The individual

will be addressed by his given name. When asked his/her name, the person will give the initials of his family along with the given name.

Language

Sinhala (along with Tamil and English) is one of the official languages of Sri Lanka. It is very likely that you will encounter a language barrier in communicating with your sponsored child, as the majority of the children do not know enough English to write a letter. Those who cannot write will be assigned community workers and volunteers who will explain your letters and help the children compose their responses.

Here are a few phrases in Sinhala that you can use in your correspondence with your sponsored child:

- ☀ **Obey suwaduk kohomada?**
How are you?
- ☀ **Preethimath upan dinayakwewa**
Happy birthday
- ☀ **Yubowan**
Goodbye

Holidays

Celebrations are very important to your sponsored child and family. You might want to send a note to commemorate these special days: