



Tsunami Update: Sri Lanka

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Sri Lanka's northern, eastern and southern coasts were badly affected by the tsunami on 26 December 2004, which caused destruction as far as 2km inland in some areas. Over 38,000 people are confirmed dead, 15,000 injured and more than 5,600 still missing, presumed dead.

Thirteen districts were affected, the hardest hit include Ampara, Hambantota, Galle, Kalutara, Matara and Trincomalee. Much of Sri Lanka's fishing industry has been disrupted, and in some case, destroyed by the tsunami, causing economic and food supply problems at local and national levels.

As of March, more than half a million people are resident in more than 300 camps or the homes of relatives and friends. The majority of the camps are tent communities that, if all goes well, will soon be transferred to temporary shelters which might stand for several years while replacement housing is built. In the tent communities, there is usually no power or running water. Water, food supplies, clothing, and much more is being provided as part of the emergency relief and transitional development efforts of the government and local and international agencies.

DANGERS & HAZARDS

There are not many serious concerns to travellers on the ground (other than those already outlined in [Lonely Planet's Sri Lanka guide](#)).

The National Steering Committee for Mine Action has warned that some landmines and unexploded ordnance were displaced by the tsunami. Confirmed cases of this are restricted to areas known not to have been fully cleared (Jaffna, Killinochchi, Mullaitivu, Vavuniya, Mannar, Trincomalee and Batticaloa districts) or to have been located near washed-out government army and navy encampments. Recovery efforts have been considerable and all areas frequented by travellers are safe; caution should still be taken in areas not already explored by others.

Driving conditions on coastal roads (more so in the East than elsewhere), sometimes already quite bad, have deteriorated further. Significant funds have supposedly been placed at the disposal of the Road Development Authority to deal with this. Piles of gravel, sand and earth have been dumped along roadways in many places in the East and although

Sri Lanka Recovery



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surveying is being done, no real work has begun yet. All primary roads are passable in vehicles of all types, and many bridges have already been replaced with temporary spans.

In the North and East, significant numbers of security checkpoints, only a few of which require you to stop, keep traffic slow. There have not been any reports of false checkpoints leading to any trouble.

Drinking local water, already discouraged, should be avoided.

HEALTH SITUATION

Despite early alarms, there have been no *serious* outbreaks of water- or mosquito-borne disease in the months since the tsunami, although there are problems related to poor sanitation and waste management. While conditions are being carefully watched (especially since refugees have moved from schools and temples into tent camps where sanitation and waste removal are not as good) confidence is high. But that doesn't mean that the effects of uncontrolled (and sometimes illegal) dumping of debris and waste onto beaches and into lakes and lagoons won't be felt down the line. Check locally about whether swimming in the ocean or in lakes and lagoons is possible. Ask specifically about any nearby waste disposal.

Psychological trauma for those involved and affected by the tsunami is also of widespread concern for health agencies in Sri Lanka.

GETTING THERE AND AWAY

Colombo Airport is operating normally, receiving international flights as per its usual schedule.

AREAS NOT AFFECTED

The interior of Sri Lanka, including Kandy, Dambura, Polonnaruwa and Ratnapura have not been affected by the tsunami. Beaches north of Negembo on the western coast have been largely unaffected. The cultural triangle, the tea gardens, the hill country and 16 of the 17 national parks (Yala being the exception) are untouched by the tsunami.

ECONOMIC IMPACT

A projected 20% drop in tourist numbers as a result of the tsunami will have a major impact on Sri Lanka's economy, which relies on tourism for 12% of its GDP. Many of the areas most affected by the tsunami include coastal resorts heavily dependant on tourism. An estimated 173,000 fishermen depend on Sri Lanka's 18 million dollar fishing industry. With equipment, ports and markets destroyed by the waves, the micro-economics of Sri Lankan villages and fishing community will take a long time to recover.

USEFUL WEBSITES

Other than the government and ministry websites, the only moderately useful and somewhat up-to-date traveller information is located on the [Tsunami Information Management Centre for Sri Lanka](#) website. Here you can read about the Ministry of Tourism's 'Bounce Back Sri Lanka' campaign, as well as find incomplete and outdated information about the state of readiness of hotels throughout the country.

Some communities are using websites to appeal for help and provide the

latest information. For example, the [Arugam Bay Hotel Association](#) has good coverage of that area.

For extensive general information about the post-tsunami humanitarian effort in Sri Lanka, including statistics, assessments, studies and analyses covering all sectors of the work in all districts, check out the following sites:

- [The Consortium of Humanitarian Agencies](#) (CHA) is the leading local NGO helping to coordinate relief and development activities (particularly with the NGOs) throughout the country. A long list of interesting links can be found by clicking on 'Websites on Tsunami Information'.
- [The Humanitarian Information Centre](#) in Sri Lanka, a part of the United Nation's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, works in collaboration with CHA to serve as management relief and development work focal point and information clearinghouse (particularly with other U.N. structures).
- [The Task Force for Rebuilding the Nation](#) (better known locally as TAFOR) is 'entrusted with building and reconstructing infrastructure' in a variety of sectors, including tourism (although there is very little tourism-related information available).
- [The Natural Disaster Management Centre](#), maintained by the UNDP is a useful site for statistics.
- [The WWW Virtual Library for Sri Lanka](#) is an interesting accumulation of links to press articles of all flavours about Sri Lanka, most focussed on the tsunami and post-tsunami times.

Disclaimer: Lonely Planet have taken care to make this information as accurate as possible, but it is provided 'as is' and we accept no responsibility for any loss, injury or inconvenience sustained by anyone resulting from this information.

