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# The West Australian

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## Chasing waterfalls on Sri Lanka's scenic rail ride





**Bonita Grima** | The West Australian  
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📷 Stop to see Nine Arch Bridge while walking the tracks. Credit: Bonita Grima

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-  While the brightly coloured carriages of the old rattlers on the seven-hour train journey from Kandy to Ella in Sri Lanka may be lacking a little in modern comforts, there's a sense of being connected to the land and its people.
-  There are views from open windows and doors, and villagers lining the tracks waving.
-  And Ella, a picturesque little town 1041m above sea level, is the perfect base for your legs and tastebuds to do some exploring.
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### Walk This Way

The hill country of Sri Lanka's central highlands enjoys some of the best weather in the country, with daily temperatures averaging between 20-28C all year round, making it perfect for hikers.



**Little Adam's Peak**, named so because it resembles a smaller version of the country's holy mountain, Adam's Peak, is one of the most popular walking options that will take only a couple of hours. Close to town, you can reach the start of the trail by following signposts 20 minutes from the centre. The easy ascent to the top of Little Adam's Peak takes you first through a tea plantation where you will see workers picking leaves, to sets of steps leading you to the top where you will find a small statue of the Buddha and some magnificent 360-degree views.

**Ella Rock** offers a more challenging hike that takes you along train tracks, past a waterfall, through rubber tree forest and up a steep incline to the peak of the rock. Views from the top include Ella Gap, a space between the mountains where you can see all the way to the southern coast. Best at sunrise and sunset, this 8km trek can be started from town and takes around four hours.

Considered a marvel of colonial engineering, the **Demodara Loop** is a spiral section of railway on a hillside that passes under itself, going around in a loop and then emerging from a tunnel. It was designed and built to overcome a problem with elevation between hills.

Walking along the 9km section of track from Ella to the station stop of Demodara is extremely popular with visitors because of the impressive 24m high **Nine Arch Bridge** found halfway. Check train timetables to ensure the sighting of a train crossing for good photo opportunities before walking over.



It's easy to stray around Ella but walking to Demodara will keep you on track. Credit: Bonita Grima



The colourful carriages of Sri Lanka's trains. Credit: Bonita Grima

At 1970m above sea level, **Lipton's Seat** is where famous Scottish tea merchant Sir Thomas Lipton came to sit and look out over his estate. Follow his footsteps with the 8km walk from Lipton's Dambattenne tea factory, taking you through lush green landscape to the viewpoint. Stand next to a statue of the man himself and enjoy panoramic views over hill country.





## Legendary Waterfalls

The Sinhalese word for waterfall is ella – so it makes sense that you would find a few of them here.

The most famous is **Ravana falls**, named after the King Ravana character in the epic Indian legend of Ramayana. The Hindu story tells how the evil Sri Lankan king kidnaps Sita, the wife of Rama (an incarnation of the god Vishnu) and hides her in a cave near the waterfall. This impressive 25m waterfall is positioned on the outskirts of town and draws a crowd.



 Workers pick tea in a plantation in Ella. Credit: Bonita Grima

About 20km from Ella on the road to the town of Wellawaya, you'll find the smaller, much quieter, **Ella Wala falls** and after following a jungle trail for a couple of hundred metres, you'll be rewarded by a natural pool sitting at its base which is perfect for swimming.

**Dunhinda falls** gets its name from the smoky white mist that is created at the bottom of the waterfall as water cascades from a height of 63m.

Known as one of the most beautiful falls in the country, it is located 25km from Ella near the town of Badulla and can be reached after a 1.5km walk past a smaller waterfall.

## Rest and Recharge

There's a good range of accommodation and dining options to be found in and around town.

The main street has many cafes and restaurants serving local and western food. **Cafe Chill** and **360** are popular for laid-back atmosphere and variety.



To try something truly traditional, **Lanka's Restaurant** offers cooking classes. Learn to cook local dishes in clay pots over a fire, as they have done in the area for centuries.



Make time for tea. **Amba Estate** is a boutique estate with organic farm and guesthouse, nestled in a hidden valley on the edge of the Uva highlands, with views overlooking Lipton's Seat and Ella Rock. Some 30 minutes from Ella, the estate produces handmade tea, coffee, spices and preserves and works with the local community to support a variety of educational, environmental and economic initiatives.

The 100-year-old farmhouse and tea workers' quarters have been transformed for guests and whether staying or just visiting for the day, you can learn more with a tea-making tour or relax in the grounds, enjoying a meal prepared using ingredients from the farm.

If in need of some serious pampering after all that hiking, splurge with a stay at **98 Acres Resort and Spa**. This scenic tea estate exudes luxury and even has its own helipad.



The tea fields at Amba Estate. Credit: Bonita Grima



Luxury chalets in a levelled landscape at 98 Acres Resort & Spa. Credit: Bonita Grima

Carefully crafted chalets set in the levelled landscape of the plantation offer stunning views over Ella Gap and Little Adam's Peak.

As well as the specialty restaurant, pool and spa (with treatments such as the tea-leaf scrub or a body wrap consisting of buffalo curd, honey, cocoa butter and sandalwood) there are activities for guests such as archery, helicopter rides and bird watching.

Alternatively, just stop by on your way back from Little Adam's Peak, as I did, for a

nice cup of tea ... and of course, that view.

And if you're missing a bit of Aussie hospitality, stay at **Waterfall's Homestay**. Karen Robertson and partner Martin are from Perth but have been living in Ella for more than 14 years.