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My School : Sri Lanka

This four lesson Topic explores the school life of children living in the South Asian country of **Sri Lanka**.

Lesson 1 : My school day

Lesson 2 : Playtime

Lesson 3 : Friendships

Lesson 4 : Travelling to school

Sri Lanka



Sri Lanka is an island located 31 km off the coast of India. The country's history has reflected its close links with the subcontinent, as well as with South East Asia. The colonial European powers arrived on the island 1505; the Portuguese, the Dutch and finally the British, ruled the territory (which was then known as Ceylon) until the country gained independence in February 1948.

Since independence, Ceylon (which was renamed "Sri Lanka" in 1972) has faced a perennial problem of attempting to reconcile two contrasting peoples: the Buddhist Sinhalese majority, and the Hindu Tamil minority in the northeast of the country. Tamil separatism began in the 1950s. By a decade later the situation had escalated, with ethnic riots and the rise of the armed group the Tamil Tigers; this eventually led to 25 years of civil war.

The war lasted until May 2009, when the conflict finally appeared to be at an end - at least militarily - when government forces seized the last area controlled by Tamil Tiger rebels.

- Population: 20.2 million (UN, 2009)
- People: 73.94% Sinhalese, 12.7% Tamil, 7.1% Muslim, 5.5% Hill Tamil, and 1.5% other
- Languages: Sinhalese, Tamil, English
- Capital: Colombo (commercial), Sri Jayawardenepura (administrative)
- Area: 65,610 sq km (25,332 sq miles)
- Major languages: Sinhala, Tamil, English

- Major religions: Buddhism (70%), Hinduism (15%), Islam, Christianity
- Life expectancy: 70 years (men), 78 years (women) (UN)
- Monetary unit: Sri Lankan rupee
- Main exports: Clothing and textiles, tea, gems, rubber, coconuts
- GNI per capita: US \$1,780

Buddhism

Seventy percent of the population of Sri Lanka are Buddhists, and especially in the south of the country where these audio recordings were made, Buddhism is the prevailing ethos in everything from social mores to school routines

Buddhism began in north eastern India over 2500 years ago, and is based on the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama (The Buddha).

- Buddhists do not believe in a personal creator God
- Buddhists follow the life and teachings of the Buddha: be kind and helpful, do not kill, do not steal, do not lie, do not use drugs or alcohol
- A key concept of Buddhism is Nirvana, the most enlightened and blissful state that one can achieve, a state without suffering
- Buddhists believe they can reach Nirvana through following the teachings of the Buddha and through meditation
- Meditation is a special way of thinking and relaxing that empties the mind of thoughts to allow what is important to become clear.

School Life

The country's constitution provides for education as a fundamental right, and Sri Lanka has one of the most literate populations amongst developing countries, with a literacy rate of 92 percent. 83 percent of the population have had a secondary education. Education is taken very seriously indeed, and is compulsory for all children to attend school until grade 9 (age 14) at which point they can choose to continue their education or drop out and engage in apprenticeships, although the government strongly encourages all children to continue with their studies at least till the G.C.E Ordinary Level.

Typical School Shrine



The schools where these audio recordings were made, located near the town of Galle in the south of Sri Lanka, are all predominantly Buddhist in outlook. Each has a school shrine. Jayani and Maduri (Lesson 1) describe how their school day begins with a visit to the shrine to lay flowers, followed by an assembly where children chant the Buddhist precepts. Children also learn to meditate (Srimali, Lesson 1 Track 3), and religion is one of just four key subjects studied at primary level.

This Topic also examines the other dimensions to school life, including friendships (Lesson 3) and transport to school (Lesson 4), as well as favourite

playground games (Lesson 2). These include cricket, - something of a national obsession in Sri Lanka – as well as badminton and volleyball. Children also describe some of their favourite Sri Lankan playground games, including a team game called *lupa*, and a tag game for the younger children, known as *Eluwan Kema* (“The Eating Goat”).