

## **Sri Lanka**

### **Facts and Statistics**

**Location:** Southern Asia, island in the Indian Ocean, south of India

**Capital:** Colombo

**Climate:** tropical monsoon; northeast monsoon (December to March); southwest monsoon (June to October)

**Population:** 20 million

**Ethnic Make-up:** Sinhalese 73.8%, Sri Lankan Moors 7.2%, Indian Tamil 4.6%, Sri Lankan Tamil 3.9%, 10.5%

**Religion(s):** Buddhist 69.1%, Muslim 7.6%, Hindu 7.1%, Christian 6.2%, other 10%

**Government:** republic

### **Language in Sri Lanka**

Sinhala (also called Sinhalese or Singhalese) is the mother tongue of the Sinhalese ethnic group which is the largest in Sri Lanka. It belongs to the Indo-Aryan branch of the Indo-European languages.

Sinhala is spoken by about 16 million people in Sri Lanka, about 13 million of whom are native speakers. It is one of the constitutionally-recognised official languages of Sri Lanka, along with Tamil. Tamil is a classical language and the oldest of the Dravidian language family and spoken by the Tamil population of Sri Lanka. It is also spoken by Tamils in India, Malaysia and Singapore. As of 1996, it was the eighteenth most spoken language, with over 74 million speakers worldwide.

### **Sri Lankan Culture and Society**

#### **Religion**

- o The main religions of Sri Lanka are Buddhism and Hinduism which both have large influences on political, cultural, and social life.
- o Generally speaking Buddhists believe people are reincarnated and have several lives. In each they learn lessons and should try to better their conduct in each life until they reach what is known as "Nirvana".
- o Buddhists make five promises:
  - o Not to harm or kill any living things.
  - o Not to steal or take anything that is not freely given.
  - o To control sexual desire.
  - o Not to tell lies.
  - o Not to drink alcoholic beverages or take drugs.
- o Hinduism has two important beliefs, "samsara" (reincarnation and that actions in this life determine the status of the soul in the next incarnation) and "dharma" (caste or social class).
- o Hinduism has many deities including Ganesh, Shiva, Vishnu, and Parvati and Kali all of which are aspects of Brahman (the eternal source of everything).
- o Religion has both a direct and indirect impact on business. Most predominant is the shared acceptance of fatalism, i.e. that a higher force is in control. As a result people will turn to religion when making decisions, etc.

#### **Hierarchy**

- o The influences of Buddhism and Hinduism as well as the caste system have created a culture that operated within a hierarchical system.

- o Sri Lankans are conscious of social order and status.
- o All relationships, whether in family life or at the office, to some extent involve hierarchies.
- o At home the patriarch (the father or oldest male in the household) is considered the leader of the family. In the office, the boss/owner is seen as the source of ultimate responsibility in business. All relationships within these circles are then based on upon people's positions within the hierarchy.

### **Face**

- o Face, which can be described as honor or personal dignity, is extremely important to Sri Lankans.
- o Face can be given or lost in social situations and it is important to avoid the latter.
- o In business, for example, publicly reprimanding or criticizing someone would lead to a loss of face for both parties. As a result Sri Lankans are very conscious of protecting their and others' face at all times.
- o This manifests in many ways. For example, many Sri Lankans will not feel comfortable making decisions since this may lead to failure which then leads to loss of face. Similarly, if asked a question to which the answer is "no" many Sri Lankans would prefer not to be so blunt and may give rather vague or uncommitted answers in order to avoid losing face.