

White Water Rafting In Sri Lanka



White Water Rafting At Kithulgala

The town of **Kithulgala** is situated on a beautiful stretch of the **Kelani River** that incorporates rock-strewn sections and rapids. These are frequently enclosed by high banks of tall bamboo creating the conditions ideal for the sport of **White Water Rafting**.

The river's clear water is born in the heart of the peak wilderness reserve and tumbles through a rocky gorge just above **Kithulgala**. Rafting in the white water sections of the river and through the boulders and rocks create grade 2/3 rapids, which are exhilarating and scenic. On certain occasions, you may encounter even grade 4 and 4 + rapids.

As the river widens, you pass the scenic location used for the film "**Bridge Over The River Kwai**" filmed in 1956, which is also a great place to jump in for a refreshing swim. On a clear day, you could even dive in to see the remains of the actual bridge and carriages used for the film (only for experienced divers with proper equipment). Your rafting journey, ends close to **Kithulgala** town where food and snacks are available.



Rapids On The Kelani River

The leading service provider for rafting in **Sri Lanka** is **Rafter's Retreat**, which starts its operation from the grounds of an old mansion that marks the beginning of **Kithulgala's** main street.

A briefing is given prior to the river run with instructions on paddling techniques and "man over board" procedures. At the end of the trip an optional riverside lunch buffet could be arranged for groups and large parties.



Local Village Ferry

The Kithulgala Run

The **Kithulgala** run is 6.5 km in length and takes about 90 minutes to complete. It rates between grades 2 and 3 and there are seven rapids to tackle, each with their own unique names. On a run down the river you run into the likes of **Virgin's Breast**, **Butter Crunch**, **Killer Fall** and the **Rib Cage**. As the names suggest, they each have their own distinct character.

A calm stretch in the river between two rocky outcrops on either side is the site where the bridge from the film **Bridge on the River Kwai** was constructed nearly half a century ago. The water flows silent here, deep and sluggish.

A most interesting rapid is the **Head Chopper**. The water picks up speed and forces its way through a channel on the right bank of the river. The speed shoots the boat around the corner and directly into the path of a low-lying branch. The adrenaline rush is brought about more by the sense of speed than actual proximity to the branch. For taller rafters, though, it is very advisable to duck!



Still From The Bridge Over The River Kwai

Contrary to the image it portrays, white-water rafting is not a sport that requires immense physical strength. An average level of fitness and a calm disposition are enough. The ability to swim is an advantage but not strictly essential, for each rafter is provided with a **Personal Flotation Device**.

Important Factors

- Rafting is not advisable for those with heart ailments, epilepsy or who are simply uncomfortable in water.
- It is advisable to wear shorts and t-shirt with soft shoes - either river sandals or sports shoes.
- Sun protection is recommended
- Being under the influence of intoxicants is also inadvisable.



Hanging Bridge Over The Kelani River

Note: Elephant Island uses the most reputable **White Water Rafting** operator at **Kithulgala**, called **Rafter's Retreat**, with many years of professional experience. However it is important to bear in mind that **White Water Rafting** in **Sri Lanka** is an activity that is done at the client's risk. There are no standardised inspections or health and safety measures in place for **White Water Rafting** operators in **Sri Lanka**. It is essential to make sure that your insurer is aware that your holiday package includes **White Water Rafting**.

Options For Absolute Beginners

For those who would like to enjoy the river and its wonderful scenery without the thrills and spills of large rapids, we could raft through the flatter section of the lower gorge, suitable for children over six and family groups.

Options For Experienced Rafters

Another choice is the **Sitawaka Run**, in the **Sitawaka River** off **Avissawella**. This lasts for nearly 2 hours. Only those with prior rafting experience should try this run as it needs a high degree of skill. On the **Kotmale River** near the **Hatton – Nuwara Eliya Road** is another stunning run. It starts just below **St. Clair's Falls**. It lasts about 6 hours and offers rafters more challenging rapids. An interesting option on **Poya (Full Moon)** days is also provided. For the three days either side of the **Full Moon** holiday, **Black Rafting** is offered. Given sufficient ambient light, the night time runs are a totally different experience. Each rafter is provided a headlight.

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