

CAVING EXPEDITIONS GUIDELINE
- LAND BASED ADVENTURE TOURISM ACTIVITIES-
For Registration with Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority

1. Definition

Caving also known as spelunking, is the recreational or adventurous Tourism Activity of exploring natural underground cavities and passages, such as caves and tunnels. Caving involves navigating through various geological formations, underground waterways, and sometimes tight or challenging spaces. It often requires specialized equipment and knowledge to ensure safety and to minimize environmental impact. Caving enthusiasts may explore caves for their geological, biological, archaeological, or simply adventurous aspects, and it can range from easy, guided tours to more technically demanding and advanced expeditions.

Caving is rapidly gaining popularity as a prominent form of eco-adventure tourism in Sri Lanka. Various caving activities have emerged in different geographical and topographical areas across the country, following the trend of Caving activities.

- i. **Pre-historic Caving** – Exploration of caves dating back to around 4000 – 47,000 years. These caves carry great historic importance as archeological findings have proven it had been used as a dwelling over many eras.
- ii. **Submerged Caving** – Exploration of caves that are filled with under water areas. This type of caving commonly requires SCUBA diving equipment. Most of them are Harem Caves belonging to kings and princes in Sri Lanka.
- iii. **Monastic Caving** – The custom of using natural caves or rock-shelters under the sides of boulders lying on the slopes of hills or hewing cells and chambers out of mountain rock for religious settlements, this was prevalent since the early days of Buddhism in Sri Lanka.
- iv. **Lime Stone Caving** – Cave formations that begins when rainwater absorbs carbon dioxide as it falls through the atmosphere. Rainwater must have carbon dioxide to become acidic. This is necessary for it to chemically react to the limestone bedrock. Rainwater is absorbed by the soil into the ground.
- v. **Explo-Biodiversity Caving** – Exploration of caves to discover the flora and fauna found in the caves. These caves are nocturnal and require experienced guides.
- vi. **Sub-Cavern Caving (Rock Shelters)** – These are caves formed by Rock Falls. Our indigenous folk also used these as transit caves along with reptiles and mammals who also used them as transit habitats.
- vii. **Vertical Caving** – These caves require experienced rope work to access all or part of the caves due to existing large vertical drops. Ex: Endirilena Cave at Balangoda.

2. General Guidelines

2.1. Cave Location

- 2.1.1. A cave may be located entirely in a privately owned property or in a public area or may extend from one area to the other.
- 2.1.2. Explicit approval must be obtained from the private owner of the property where the cave is located before arranging any caving activities.
- 2.1.3. In the case of caves located in state owned lands, the approval of the relevant authorities such as the Forest Department, The Department of Wildlife Conservation, Archaeologic

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Department, and Irrigation Department etc. shall be obtained prior to arranging caving activities.

2.2. Services to be provided

- 2.2.1. Service provider shall obtain demographic details of the clients (participants) signed medical and indemnity form.
- 2.2.2. The Cave sites shall be clearly marked on a map of suitable scale with degree of difficulty. A list of 'Dos' and 'Don'ts' must be handed to each participant after explaining the content, this shall also contain a list of attractions that can be observed along the Cave path.
- 2.2.3. The Caving operator shall provide the communication facilities (mobile communication, radio communication etc.) along the planned Cave Excursion.
- 2.2.4. The Caving operator and staff shall have adequate professional training and experience.
- 2.2.5. The speleologist/ Local Cave guide shall be well versed in the locality, Cave-fauna & flora, geology, geography, surveying, biology, archaeology, paleontology and of course engineering for the equipment/s.
- 2.2.6. Degree of difficulties, approximate distance and the time estimation shall be communicated to all participants prior to the Caving Activity.
- 2.2.7. The use of a designated/assigned local guide shall be made mandatory where the Caving activities.
- 2.2.8. All essential Caving gear and equipment's shall be made available for the Caving activity well in advance as follows;

2.2.8.1. Mandatory Safety Gear particularly for caving activities.

- 2.2.8.1.1. Helmet with Chinstrap
- 2.2.8.1.2. Three independent sources of light; at least one should be mounted on the helmet.
- 2.2.8.1.3. Spare batteries and light bulbs (It is highly recommended not to use Halogen Bulbs for caving activities.)
- 2.2.8.1.4. Glow sticks are necessary to be carried in every exploration as an alternative light source.
- 2.2.8.1.5. Good non-marking boots with good treads
- 2.2.8.1.6. Cave pack (dry bag) to carry spare gear

2.2.8.2. Other Items That are Commonly Needed

- 2.2.8.2.1. Knee and elbow pads
- 2.2.8.2.2. Food & Water (Service provider shall ensure the group/clients have adequate hydration and sustenance and/or provide accordingly)
- 2.2.8.2.3. Field first aid kit
- 2.2.8.2.4. Rugged, grubby clothing (It is recommended to use full body covered clothing such as long sleeves and long pants when caving.)
- 2.2.8.2.5. Climbing and Abseiling Gear for ascending and descending (Ex: ropes, leg-strap harnesses)
- 2.2.8.2.6. Diving & Snorkeling Gear
- 2.2.8.2.7. Breathing apparatus and Oxygen

2.2.9. Adequate changing facilities & public washroom shall be provided (Portable/ permanent)

- 2.2.10. Make sure the caving activity is informed to an individual outside and inform of the expected time of return to ensure that help will be ready in case of emergency. Allow some leeway on return times as this activity will often take longer than expected.

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- 2.2.11. Beware and informed of the nature of the caves. For example, caves with streams may be prone to flooding and weather must be taken into account. Other caves might require climbing skills and vertical equipment.
- 2.2.12. In case an individual gets lost or runs out of light, it is recommended to get into a safe position and wait for help from outside. (This is why an outside party must be informed about the caving activity)
- 2.2.13. In case of emergency, service provider shall be learned and aware the execution of relevant Procedure according to the contexts and know how about the distress signals. (incidents/accidents).
- 2.2.14. Participants shall be encouraged not to deviate from the established Caving paths for their own safety and for the wellbeing of the wildlife in the area.
- 2.2.15. The service provider for Caving tour operator shall have adequate number of staff trained on different Cave sites and knowledge and the skills of wilderness first aid and elementary first aid, lifesaving, survival techniques and terrain navigation etc.
- 2.2.16. Service provider shall ensure public liability insurance, travel insurance and dully filled accident management report.
- 2.2.17. All emergency contact numbers (such as hospital, doctors on call, police station, fire brigade rescue unit, armed forces, and relevant local authorities) of parties to be contacted in case of an emergency must be always available with the Caving guide as well as at the communication base station.
- 2.2.18. Written code of conduct shall be available for the Operators and Passengers according to the SOP.
- 2.2.19. The service provider offers a transparent and detailed sustainable policy, demonstrating commitment to environmental, social, and economic responsibility for participants awareness.

2.3. Important Practices

- 2.3.1. Cavers' Motto: Take nothing but pictures, leave nothing but carefully placed footprints and kill nothing but time.
- 2.3.2. As some of the Caves could be sensitive bio-diversitically or geologically, obey the Leave No Trace (LNT) principles and existing rules and regulations of respective authorities.
- 2.3.3. Smoking or lighting fires or matches are strictly prohibited as these caves might contain flammable gases such as methane.
- 2.3.4. Do not disturb archeological or paleontological artifacts.
- 2.3.5. Do no damage formations or other surfaces of the cave.
- 2.3.6. Staying on the established trails must be ensured to help keep other areas of the cave pristine.
- 2.3.7. Participation of projects to preserve and rehabilitate caves, such as removing graffiti, picking up litter, and repairing broken formations are encouraged.
- 2.3.8. Practice rope work on the surface under the guidance of an expert before engaging in a vertical caving trip.
- 2.3.9. Never cave alone. Always cave in a group of 3 or more. 3-4 group size is small enough to move quickly and big enough to handle emergencies in case of injury.
- 2.3.10. Move cautiously inside the caves. Uneven ground, low ceilings and pits make moving fast and jumping dangerous.

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2.3.11. The operator shall have the awareness of general weather condition patterns of the relevant area/locations.

2.4. Responsible Caving Practices

2.4.1. Cave courtesy – Caving is a team-oriented activity and courtesy must be upheld with the group.

2.4.2. The Caving operator shall have the knowledge of all existing hazards inside a cave.