

Sri Lanka Treasure Island

A wealth of gemstones lies under the soil of Sri Lanka: sapphire, ruby, cat's-eye chrysoberyl, spinel, garnet, beryl, tourmaline, topaz, quartz, and many others. As its mining industry has grown, so have related industries. Sri Lanka is now a colored gemstone destination, blending centuries of mining, cutting, and trading experience with modern technology and global business strategy. Let's take a gemological tour.

A SELECTION OF GEMS FOUND IN SRI LANKA



SAPPHIRE



RUBY



CHRYSOBERYL



SPINEL



GARNET



TOURMALINE



BERYL



TOPAZ

Gem images courtesy of Mr. Sham Kapil & Dr. Eduard J. Gübelin Collection



Highland Hotbed: Most of the gem deposits are in the Highland Complex, a wide band that runs roughly down the middle of the island.



"Colorful" Markets: Gems are often bought and sold in outdoor street markets that can have thousands of dealers.



Centuried Craftsmanship: Sri Lanka's traditional cutters are considered some of the finest in the world in understanding sapphire rough. Their technique is well suited to high-end sapphires and other gemstones where placement of color is critical. A modern precision-cutting industry is also growing.



Gem Hub: Favorable import and export regulations have attracted foreign investment and brought rough material from around the world to the island, helping to make it a colored gemstone cutting, treatment, and trading hub. China's growing appetite for gemstones has also helped the industry.



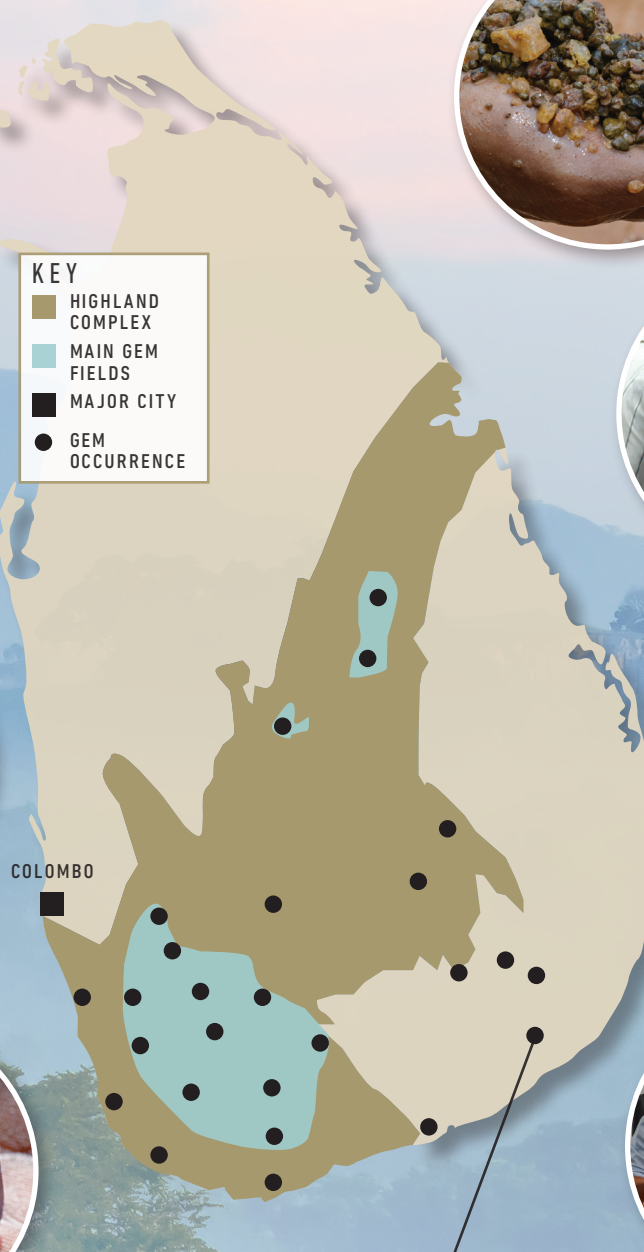
Gem Hunting: Gem deposits in Sri Lanka are typically found in secondary deposits like rivers. When a river transports gems, it also carries a variety of other denser materials that collect as gravel in the riverbeds. A lighter overburden material lies on top of the gemstones, and miners dig below it to reach the gem-bearing gravels.



Eco-Mining: Of the 6,500 licenses issued for mining in 2013, more than 6,000 were for pit-mining operations. In this type of mining, rocks and minerals are removed from an open pit that is typically 15 to 25 feet deep and six to 14 feet wide. The government favors this approach, as it is considered to be less harmful to the environment, and provides a more stable source of employment. Pits must be refilled and rehabilitated after the mining is completed.



Surprise Sapphires: A primary sapphire deposit near Kataragama was discovered by accident in 2012, where sapphires like this one are found.



2500+
years gems have been mined in Sri Lanka

466 ct
size of the Blue Giant of the Orient Sapphire, the largest found in Sri Lanka

20%
land mass of Sri Lanka that may contain gems

17
of the 20 largest sapphires in the world were unearthed in Sri Lanka

138.7 ct
size of The Rosser Reeves Star Ruby

90%
of gems found are in alluvial sources such as rivers

