

**Internship report:**  
**Internship for diploma thesis in Sri Lanka**

***Fact sheet:***

Supervisor:	Prof. Jürgen Breuste
Supervisor in Sri Lanka:	Dr. Lalitha Dissanayake
Duration:	39 days
University:	University of Peradeniya
Title of diploma thesis:	“Sri Lanka as an Example for Austrian Geography Lessons”
Main aim of diploma thesis:	Theory and practice about how Sri Lanka can be integrated in Austrian Geography lessons to serve as an example for various topics defined in the curriculum.
Aims of internship:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– research for specific theoretical information about Sri Lanka</li><li>– insight into Sri Lankan Geography lessons</li><li>– gaining an authentic impression of the country</li></ul>

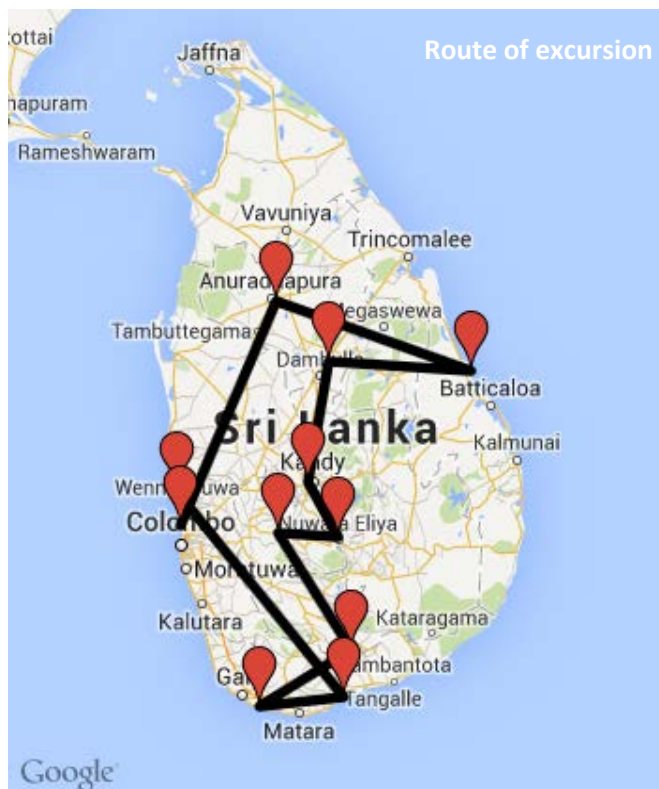
For my diploma thesis with the title “Sri Lanka as an Example for Austrian Geography Lessons”, my supervisor Prof. Breuste arranged an internship at the University of Peradeniya in Sri Lanka. The internship lasted 39 days – from the 28<sup>th</sup> of September 2014 until the 5<sup>th</sup> of November 2014. During this period, I had the opportunity to research at the University of Peradeniya, to visit Geography lessons at a College and to get a deep insight into the culture of the country, because I was offered to live with the local family of Dr. Lalitha Dissanayake.

The main aim of the internship was to find out how Sri Lanka can serve as an example for topics defined in the Austrian geography syllabus, as for example: *different ecological zones of the world, economy and land use, or natural disasters*. Therefore, a theoretical analysis of Sri Lanka in the respect of these topics was an aim in order to use this information for creating classroom material. Another aim was to find out how and which knowledge about Sri Lanka is taught in Sri Lankan Geography lessons, as similar ways and concepts could be used in Austria as well. Additionally, an overview of all facets of the country was a goal so as to convey an authentic and realistic version of Sri Lanka in the Austrian geography classroom.

Before my internship started, I took part in the University of Salzburg's excursion to Sri Lanka, which was arranged and conducted by Prof. Breuste. The excursion started on the 14<sup>th</sup> of September near Colombo and lasted for 15 days. During the excursion, we (over 40 students, Prof. Breuste and his wife)



visited many culturally, naturally, economically and historically important sights of the country and experienced geographically relevant characteristics and structures of the region. Our program included for example boat tours through mangroves, walks through a rain forest, visits of Hindu and Buddhist temples, investigation of urban development, visits of tea and brick factories, and much more. During these 15 days, we also covered a huge part of the island as can be seen on this map:



Tea cultivation



Mangroves

(Source: <https://mapsengine.google.com/map/viewer?mid=zfVcmiOzTfPM.kHRmiEbqCsx8>)

After the excursion, which ended on the 28<sup>th</sup> of September, my actual internship started, and so I went to Peradeniya to meet my supervisor for the time in Sri Lanka: Dr.

Lalitha Dissanayake. She guided and supported me during my whole internship and helped me to do the research for my thesis. She did her PhD in Geography at the University of Salzburg and was also supervised by Prof. Breuste. Moreover, she kindly offered me to stay with her family during the five-and-a-half weeks of my internship and so it was possible for me to stay in an affordable, safe and homely environment, where I was treated like a family member and had the chance to experience the life of a local family at first hand.

Dr. Lalitha Dissanayake is lecturer at the University of Peradeniya and made it possible for me to access all the facilities of the Geography Department of the university and to use the resources without constraints. Many days of the internship, I spent in the Geography Department working with books like “The National Atlas of Sri Lanka” to find out specific information about the country. I was also allowed to listen to interesting lectures like one about “Medical Geography” held by Dr. Dissanayake.



Dr. Lalitha Dissanayake also helped me to visit the Nugawela Central College, where I was allowed to observe two Geography lessons in Grade 6 and 9. It was not easy to get per-



mission for a school visit for a foreign student like me so I have to thank Dr. Lalitha Dissanayake and her sister Mrs. D. M. S. Dissanayake for their effort to make this possible. It was very interesting to attend these Geography lesson and to get a deeper insight into the Sri Lankan education system. Furthermore, I got access to many teaching materials that are

used in Geography lessons all over the country and that can serve as great examples in my diploma thesis. In addition to investigate the education in schools, I also had the chance to get an impression of the so-called “extra-classes”, which are private tuition classes attended regularly by about 90 % of the Sri Lankan school children. Moreover, I was invited to various ceremonies like the celebration of the “International Day of Non-Violence” at the University of Peradeniya or the award ceremony “Colours Eve” of the Girls’ High School Kandy, where achievements in sports are honored.

Besides the research in the field of Geography and education, I also had the opportunity to experience how people in Sri Lanka live and handle their daily routines. Dr. Lalitha Dissanayake, her husband Mr. D. R. G. K. Godamunne and their daughters Pavithra (16) and Anuradha (8) included me into their family life and offered me, for example, to visit a wedding, to take part in many religious ceremonies and to join them in their free-time activities like visiting relatives or doing sports. They answered my questions to all kinds of topics and showed me how Sri Lankan people eat, sing, celebrate, pray, travel, work, laugh and live.

Before the end of my stay, I left the University of Peradeniya and the family for a few days in order to visit a typical tourist hotspot at the south-eastern coast named Hikkaduwa. Tourism is one of the most important economical sectors for Sri Lanka and is steeply increasing since the end of the civil war in 2009. Moreover, this region, as most of Sri Lankans coastline, was severely affected by the tsunami of 2004 and serves therefore also as an example for natural disasters.

All in all, this internship and the excursion beforehand built a great foundation for the work on my diploma thesis and were also a great and unforgettable life experience. I would like to thank Prof. Breuste for making this internship possible, Dr. Lalitha Dissanayake and her family for all their help and for welcoming me so warmly into their family and all the Sri Lankan people for their friendliness, helpfulness and generosity.

***Christina Kirchsteiger***

