

Lesson 2: Sri Lanka: The pearl of the Indian Ocean**A Discuss these questions in pairs.**

- 1 Which country is often known as the Pearl of the Indian Ocean?
- 2 Which country is the world's largest tea exporter?
- 3 Which country did the spice cinnamon originate from?
- 4 Which country was mentioned in the great Indian epic the *Ramayana*?
- 5 Which country has the highest literacy rate in South Asia?

B Now read the following passage to find your answers to the questions in A.

a When someone comes to Sri Lanka, they may often hear the word *Ayubowan*. This word means 'May you have the gift of long life'. It is with this traditional greeting that everyone is welcomed to Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka has many nicknames: Serendip, Ceylon, Teardrop of India, Pearl of the Indian Ocean, etc. These names reveal the richness and beauty of this island nation. Many travellers, from ancient mariners and merchants to modern astronauts, have been attracted by the beauty of this island.

b Sri Lanka is located in the Indian Ocean, just off the south-eastern coast of India. Shaped like a teardrop, the island of Sri Lanka measures about 415 kilometres from north to south, and about 220 kilometres from east to west, with a total land area of about 65,600 square kilometres. It has more than 1340 kilometres of coastline.



c Despite its modest size Sri Lanka has a population of about 20 million. Sri Lanka is a multi-religious, multi-racial and multi-lingual country. The four major ethnic groups are Sinhalese, Sri Lankan Tamils, Indian Tamils and Sri Lankan Moors or Muslims. A fifth group, the Veddhas are the original inhabitants of the island. The ancient history of Sri Lanka is depicted in the Hindu epic the *Ramayana*. But the most important work on Lankan origin is related in *Mahavamsa* or 'The Great Chronicle'.



d Sri Lanka's economy has traditionally been based on agriculture. The emphasis is on exporting crops such as tea, rubber, and coconuts. In fact, Sri Lanka is the largest tea exporter of the world. The country is also a major producer and supplier of a variety of spices such as cinnamon, cardamom, pepper, cloves, and nutmeg. Cinnamon first originated in Sri Lanka and was introduced later to the world by the Arab merchants.

e Sri Lanka's archaeological treasures reflect the civilizations of the past that covered the golden age of Greece, the Roman Empire, Mayan citadels, and Napoleonic greatness. The culture that followed those glorious pasts has been enriched by the more recent influences of Western colonizers and Eastern traders. That resulted in developing a unique mix of races and religions, arts and crafts, festivals and costumes available in this small country.

f Besides these man-made riches, one may find the God-given blessings of nature in Sri Lanka. The island is blessed with azure seas, sandy beaches, green hills, cascading waterfalls, abundant wildlife and a variety of flowers and fruits. The country abounds with coconut groves, spice gardens, tea estates and many other gardens and woods. Travellers from all over the world come to Sri Lanka. Here, a weary traveler can pass a gloriously lazy day by a palm-shaded lagoon looking at the endless ocean. And for the adventurous, days can be full of excitement, snorkeling, swimming, fishing or sailing.