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Tom Parker

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MUMBAI Unit Nos. 3A & 4, 20th Floor, One Lodha Place, Senapati Bapat Marg, Lower Parel, Mumbai- 400013, Maharashtra, India NEW DELHI TEC Qutab, Level 1 & 2, Crescent Building, Lado Sarai Mehrauli, New Delhi 110030, India

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## REVEALING SRI LANKA'S OPULENT SANCTUARIES SHANGRI-LA COLOMBO AND SHANGRI-LA HAMBANTOTA

Within the verdant tapestry of Sri Lanka's landscapes, where the whispers of history intertwine with the melodies of contemporary charm, lie two sanctuaries of unparalleled luxury - Shangri-La Colombo and Shangri-La Hambantota. Sri Lanka being a travel hotspot, these stunning properties are quintessential reflections of the island's deeply rich heritage and lush beauty.

In the pulsating heart of Colombo, Sri Lanka's cosmopolitan capital, Shangri-La Colombo stands as a beacon of refined elegance. Seamlessly blending modern sophistication with the island's rich cultural heritage, the hotel offers guests an oasis of tranquility amidst the city's dynamic energy. Upon entering its grand foyer adorned with exquisite decor, guests are enveloped in an ambiance of luxury. Delight your palate with culinary masterpieces crafted by world-renowned chefs, savored amidst stylish surroundings that reflect the city's cosmopolitan flair. As the sun sets over the glistening waters of the Indian Ocean, indulge in a symphony of island flavors at Tiki bar, commanding panoramic views of Colombo's iconic skyline.

Further along Sri Lanka's Southern coast, in the serene enclave of Hambantota, lies Shangri-La Hambantota - an idyllic haven where luxury harmonizes with nature's bounty. Surrounded by tropical gardens and azure waters, the resort offers a gateway to family fun and relaxation. Here, adventure beckons at every turn, from exhilarating rounds of golf on an 18-hole golf-course spread across 100 acres, a waterpark to enthrall the kids, to unforgettable wildlife safaris in nearby national parks, where encounters with majestic elephants await. After a day of exploration, enjoy a relaxing massage or retreat to your luxurious abode, where spacious rooms and suites offer unparalleled comfort.

Whether immersed in the vibrant pulse of urban life or ensconced in the serenity of coastal splendor, Shangri-La Colombo and Shangri-La Hambantota invite discerning travelers to enjoy a resplendent journey through Sri Lanka's multifaceted vibrancy. Experience the magic of these extraordinary retreats, and infuse your spirit with the warmth of Asian hospitality and the promise of the colourful joys of life.







omeday, when I return to Sri Lanka, I know exactly what I will do. I will sit on the ramparts of Galle Fort and watch Sri Lanka play India (if not, Australia will do). There will be a hat on my head, a hot dog and a cold shake in my hand, while the boys will chug their beers (I also know who I am going with). I'd like the sun to be an easy 32 degrees. Turn on Days 4 and 5 is inevitable, but I'd like a stiff ocean breeze for some delicious swing. We'll spend five days watching the game, going into the stadium when things get spicy, and out around the fort when they are not.

Both times I was in Galle last year, I stood on the ramparts and pictured this exact scene over and over again. There was no game on those dates, so I need to plan another trip to make it happen. Despite several visits, my list of to-dos in Sri Lanka is still pretty long, more than what my paid time off can accommodate. So maybe I will

conspire an assignment, or three. Like a hike up the Pekoe trail, a surfing lesson off Ahangama, a spot of whalewatching in Trincomalee, an untold Geoffrey Bawa story (if there is such a thing), or a Jaffna piece (long overdue). Some of these ideas are on offer further down this book. As is a list of some terrific hotels, which frankly, are experiences by themselves. It will take very little for me to go back for a meal at Abode by the Beach at Ahangama, a drink at Smoke & Bitters—one of Asia's best bars (but get there before sunset), or a stay at the fantastic Kayaam House at Tangalle. It helps that you are barely three hours away from blue skies, misty hills, or lashings of rainwhatever you prefer. I can't think of too many places that let you switch seasons with such little effort. A year ago, I may have asked you to visit Sri Lanka to help the country recover. Now, you should go simply because it's a damn good place to be. 🕡

Sali? Deshpande



All information and travel details are correct at the time of going to press, and may have altered after publication. Unless otherwise stated, hotel prices and airline fares are for the months of publication. Currency conversions are correct at the time of going to press, and may be rounded up.





Nestled within the southern edge of Yala National Park, Hilton Yala Resort offers a tranquil retreat overlooking the Indian Ocean. Thoughtfully designed to harmonize with its surroundings, our resort seamlessly blends with the natural landscape.

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An insider's guide to the city's culinary hotspots, cultural haunts and shopping highlights.

By Adilah Ismail. Photographs by Himanshu Lakhwani

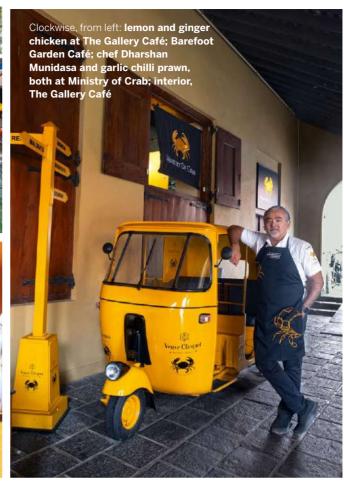


#### **GETAWAY**









here are three versions of Colombo that travellers encounter: the city that was, the city that is and the city that it aspires to be. From an old colonial asylum in Cinnamon Gardens that was converted to a plush shopping arcade, now derelict, to sleek skyscrapers in a neighbourhood where Dutch colonisers once held slaves, and a constant remaking of its public spaces, every now and then, all three versions of the city converge with each other.

Any Sri Lanka itinerary that skips the capital is missing out. An inchoate city still discovering itself and always shape-shifting, Colombo is open to endless explorations. Here's an insider's run through the city's mindblowingly diverse food, ancient and contemporary cultural scene, its priceless bargains and shopping spots.

#### WHERE TO EAT

Dutch Hospital Complex in Colombo's heart is home to the globally lauded Ministry of Crab, a seafood restaurant founded by chef Dharshan Munidasa and cricketers Mahela Jayawardene, and Kumar Sangakkara. The restaurant pays homage to Sri Lankan crab, playfully offers bibs to diners and invites eating with hands. Highlights of the menu include dishes such as pepper crab, garlic chilli crab (their signature preparation), clay pot prawn curry mopped up with woodfired bread, and coconut crème brûlée. A meal for two (without drinks) can work out to ₹12,000.

To ward off Colombo's heat, leafy alfresco dining is the ticket. On Sunday afternoons, the **Barefoot Garden Café** (inside the legendary Barefoot boutique on Galle Road, founded by Barbara Sansoni) hosts live any other day, this is a lovely brunch spot, often hosting regular art exhibitions by local artists. The Gallery Café, which used to be renowned architect Geoffrey Bawa's office on Alfred House Road, is stunning in the evening—a romantic date location with sophisticated cocktails and desserts. Rare bar + kitchen has alfresco as well as indoor and private dining. Expect modern international cuisine interpreted with Sri Lankan flair. The restaurant is in one of the city's liveliest nightlife guarters, the cobblestoned Park

jazz in its courtyard. Even on

If you're in Colombo on a Saturday, head to the Race Course Grounds where **The Good Market** takes place every weekend, bringing together

Street, where crowds spill out

of its popular bar, Uncle's, and

and Park Street Trattoria.

restaurants, Monsoon, Kuuraku

pop-ups from responsible businesses across the country. There's a large range of food and drink available, making it an excellent spot for breakfast after a morning walk around Independence Square, built to commemorate Sri Lanka's independence after British rule. Picture hoppers loaded with different toppings, milky kiribath paired with a tart, fiery katta sambol, lavariya (a steamed rice flour dumpling stuffed with coconut and jaggery) and more.

For brunch, Café Kumbuk on Independence Avenue offers a contemporary riff on local, seasonal produce with multiple vegan and vegetarian options. The Black Cat Café in Colombo 07 has no black cats, only cosy nooks to sit in, an easy ambience, good coffee and food. For lunch, head to VOC Café at the Dutch Burgher Union, known for its lamprais. →

# Award winning wellness in the bills of Sri Lanka

Where opulence confluences with consciousness; rediscover your well-being through a refreshing lens at Santani Wellness Kandy



If you're looking to be pampered in the lap of luxury that has been pillared on sustainability, look no further than Santani Wellness Kandy. This idyllic destination is located in Kandy, Sri Lanka, which is four hours from bustling Colombo and three-and-a-half hours from the airport. Posing as a rejuvenation gem in the wild, the brand believes that "protecting the world means protecting you first!" True to form, this resort is a tranquil oasis fostering a connection with oneself and the world around you.

#### **RECONNECTING WITH NATURE**

A former tea plantation turned into an eco-wellness resort, this retreat spreads across 116 acres. Built to include natural ventilation, the brand claims to facilitate 70% energy saving compared to a conventional luxury resort. Moreover, the accommodations offer breathtaking views of the Hanthana Mountain range. The resort also offers no WiFi zones to allow you time to reflect, bond and relax amid nature.

Helping you embrace healthy living is the retreat's curated wellness programmes. Think, Ayurveda, detox, yoga and spa services that enable you to reset and lay back in the embrace of nature. Living up to the tag of one of the best luxury wellness resorts in the world, Santani Wellness Kandy understands one size doesn't fit all when it comes to caring for the human body, and provides a platter of bespoke treatments. Every guest experience is tailor-made by the Head of Wellness and team—based on an assessment of one's body composition, current lifestyle, stress levels, fitness, emotional state and future goals.



#### FOR THE LOVE OF WELLNESS

Experience gourmet wellness cuisine through the plethora of Santani Wellness Kandy services that are rooted in the ancient wisdom of Ayurveda. At its core lies the principle of 'Rasa Haya', which translates to the six tastes: sweet, sour, salty, bitter, pungent, and astringent. This innovative approach to mindful eating prioritises taste-based nutrition over conventional nutrient-based approaches. This ensures your body receives nourishment that is devoid of meats and liquor, and customises it to your unique requirements.

For all of its unique features,
Santani Wellness Kandy has
secured a special spot in the hearts
of conscious but luxury travellers.
A satisfied customer, Sharon
Kennedy, shares, "The resort was
absolutely amazing, we loved it.
The facilities were just perfect and
we had the most stunning views
from our chalet. The staff were all
so friendly and attentive. The spa
treatments were also some of the
best I've experienced. I would go
back again and would recommend
it to anyone else wanting to go."



For more information, visit www.santani.com











A beloved staple of the Sri Lankan Burgher community (locals of Eurasian ancestry), the lamprais is slow-cooked rice simmered in a flavourful broth with frikkadels, seeni sambol, brinjal pahi and blachun, steamed in a banana leaf. Call ahead and reserve your lamprais as these sell out fast, and wash it down with DBU's homemade ginger beer.

There's a variety of authentic Sri Lankan cuisine to pick from. Try village-style chicken curry, roast paan, a seven-in-one vegetable curry and buffalo curd with treacle at **Upali's** in Colombo 07. You can also opt for **Palmyrah**, another old reliable located inside the basement of Renuka City Hotel, which centres flavours from Sri Lanka's north in dishes such as mutton poriyal, Jaffna crab curry, fried fish pittu and odiyal kool—seafood soup from the north.

Love cake, a Sri Lankan cake made with semolina, cashew and crystallised pumpkin, travels well and has a long shelf life.

The Cake Factory in Kollupitiya does an excellent version. Local baker Nanditha Peiris Gamage also has a sinfully fudgy, cashew nut-laden milk toffee that can be picked up on order.

Intrepid foodies can try **Abdul Hameed Street** (or Aluthkade)
in north Colombo, a night
market for street eats which is
especially vibrant on weekends
and includes everything from
dolphin kotthu (a type of kotthu
with larger roti pieces), smoky
mandi rice and oxtail soup to
offal dishes and colourful novelty
drinks. Crowded and chaotic,
the quality can vary wildly—take
cash and your curiosity to guide
you through the frenzy.

One of the cornerstones of Sri Lankan snacking culture is short eats or portable snacks such as cutlets, rolls, patties, kimbula buns and fish buns, which are freely available from outlets like Fab, Perera and Sons, Caravan Fresh and Tasty Caterers. Occasionally, you may see a choon paan truck belting out a tinny version of Beethoven's "Für Elise", selling these tiny bites around selected neighbourhoods.

Like many countries, Sri Lanka has its adaptation of Chinese cuisine. **The Station**, by the Dehiwala beach, has a robust Sri Lankan Chinese menu and is particularly known for its hot butter cuttlefish (HBC)—calamari dusted with cornflour, and fried and tossed with chili paste, spring onions, minced garlic, butter and sugar.

#### WHERE TO SHOP

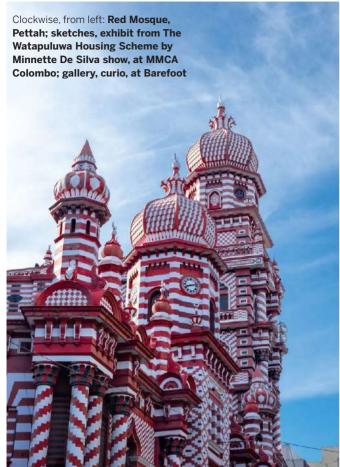
**Barefoot**, the 60-year-old boutique founded by Sansoni, a writer and artist, has built

an international reputation for its kaleidoscopic, colourful handlooms, home furnishings, clothing, accessories as well as souvenirs, food gifts and a book shop which stocks many Sri Lankan writers.

Social enterprise **Selyn** has a boutique on Fife Road and is prized for its fashionable collection of fair-trade handlooms. Both Lakpahana and Laksala (a state-owned gift store) offer a wide range of spices, including Ceylon cinnamon (far superior to the more freely available cassia cinnamon). Sri Lankan arts and crafts and souvenirs. Paradise Road in Colombo 07 can be a good stop for artfully crafted, contemporary gifts, homeware, souvenirs, crockery and more. The Design Collective, on

The Design Collective, on Stratford Avenue, founded by Shahili Gomes-McCoy and Binu Wickremasinghe, showcases →





close to 50 independent and sustainable fashion brands from South Asia, in a multi-concept store with jewellery, accessories, clothing and skincare. Wellness brand Spa Ceylon, known for their beauty line, has stores Trade Centre. throughout the city, while luxury WHAT TO DO Ayurveda spa, Kemara, on Reid Avenue inside the Lakpahana premises, offers rejuvenating

Colombo is a hub for classic ceramics and crockery; tourists often stop by the outlets of Sri Lankan brand Dankotuwa and Japanese brand Noritake in Colombo 07. The Midaya Ceramic Company, which supplies to Disney, Harrods and Anthropologie, has stores in One Galle Face mall and Nugegoda.

massages and spa treatments.

There is no dearth of gemstone shopping herefor established vintage and craftsmanship, try Colombo Jewellery Stores at Alfred House Gardens.

Vogue Jewellers and Raja Jewellers, both on Galle Road. Local entrepreneur Ruwini Jayarathne, who fuses semiprecious stones and modern design, has a store in the World

Evenings in Colombo are best spent at its cherished sea-facing promenade Galle Face Green, enjoying sunsets while eating manioc chips, achcharu (fruit spiced with chili salt) and sampling street food from various vendors. If you're in the mood, drop by the 160-year-old Galle Face Hotel, a heritage icon, for drinks and live music at the open-air space Checkerboard

This is a city with deep cultural roots and, to immerse yourself in it, visit its many temples and shrines. One of the oldest temples here is the Buddhist place of worship







For art lovers, the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art Sri lanka (MMCA) is a good starting point. Tucked away in an old shopping mall, the museum curates regular exhibitions and free talks and events. At Sapumal Foundation, a gallery housed in portraitist Harry Pieris's old house, you can dive into the works of greats like Lionel Wendt, Justin Deraniyagala and Ven. Manjusri Thera, founder members of the '43 Group, the first modern art movement in Sri Lanka.

The Collective for Historical Dialogue and Memory (CHDM) organises regular memory walks,





screenings, exhibitions and talks, highlighting forgotten or neglected aspects of Sri Lanka's past. A recent exhibition shed light on the history of the Malaiyahas—Indian-origin Tamils who were indentured labourers in the country's coffee and tea plantations under British rule.

Keep a day to experience Colombo's natural wonders. Its urban wetlands **Beddagana** Wetland Park, Diyasaru Park and Thalangama Wetland are havens for birding and fishing cats. Small Cat Advocacy and Research (SCAR) holds bimonthly wetland walks.

Given that Colombo is still rebounding from the 2022 economic crisis and tourism is a key driver of its current growth—tip generously wherever possible. Instead of thinking of the city as a hurried layover, take your time to ease into it and you'll be pleasantly surprised and charmed.



There's something undeniably enchanting about surrendering to the tranquillity of a beach holiday, where the rhythm of the waves sets the pace. Imagine waking up to the gentle lull of the ocean, the sun painting the sky as it rises above the horizon. In this idyllic setting, amidst the palm-fringed shores of Sri Lanka's famed 'Gold Mile,' lies Taj Bentota Resort and Spa, beckoning travellers to embrace the art of relaxation.

Perched along this renowned stretch of coastline, Taj Bentota invites guests to immerse themselves in Europeanstyled living spaces, adorned with Sri Lankan wood accents. Private balconies provide uninterrupted views of the pristine sands and shimmering waters below. For those seeking ultimate rejuvenation, the J Wellness Circle awaits, where pampering becomes an art and relaxation a timeless ritual.



#### THINGS TO SEE AND DO

As day transitions to dusk, guests can savour culinary delights at an array of restaurants, each offering a symphony of flavours inspired by the rich tapestry of Sri Lankan cuisine. When night falls, the resort comes alive with the soft glow of candle-lit dinners, where the soothing sounds of the waves provide the perfect backdrop for an intimate dining experience. Beyond the confines of the resort, a world of cultural exploration awaits. Embark on a journey to Ambalangoda's enchanting Mask Museum, where intricate carvings and vibrant colours tell stories of tradition and heritage or glide through the Madu River on a boat safari, surrounded by lush mangrove forests. Then, let your imagination set sail as you venture into Galle Fort—a UNESCO World Heritage Site binoculars in hand to behold playful dolphins and the majestic blue whale, the largest creature on Earth.

In its commitment to sustainability, the resort partners with Paathya to weave eco-conscious practices into every aspect of its operation, earning accolades such as the Earth Check Platinum Certification and the esteemed SATA award for excellence in beach resort hospitality. At Taj Bentota Resort and Spa, each experience is crafted to captivate and rejuvenate.





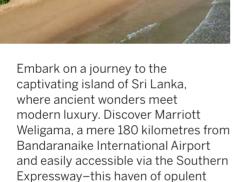




For more information, visit www.tajhotels.com

## A tale of oceanfront huxury

In the heart of Weligama Bay lies a haven of tranquillity and luxury, where the rhythm of the ocean sets the stage for an luxurious escape–envisioned for one and all. Welcome to Weligama Bay Marriott Resort & Spa, where every moment matters



serenity is ready to be explored.



#### WHERE OPULENCE COINCIDES WITH NATURE

When choosing this opulent holiday abode, nestled in the embrace of nature, enjoy this hotel's stellar accommodations. Ranging from the highrise guest rooms, suites to presidential suites—each space offers mesmeric views of the sea. Created with a promise of royal living, expect furnishings that impress and modern amenities for a stay that exceeds all expectations.

Inside, created with interior influences of the West are the charming touches of traditional Sri Lankan craftsmanship, giving local art a showcase and allowing guests to feel the city's soul from comfort of their beds.

#### AN ARRAY OF ALLURING ACTIVITIES

The true magic of Weligama Bay Marriott Resort & Spa lies beyond its luxurious accommodations. Here, amidst the lush gardens and sparkling pools—not one but three; the lap pool, the relaxation pool and the kids pool, all guests; from the tiny tots looking for a splash to adults who wish to get a workout in are invited to discover a whole new meaning of rejuvenation.

Moreover, relaxation also includes the offerings of Quan Spa; home to wellness treatments that refresh and reset the mind, body and soul. If you're one not to miss an adventure, partake in exhilarating water sports—that promise to create memories that transcend time.



#### **SOULFUL PLATES**

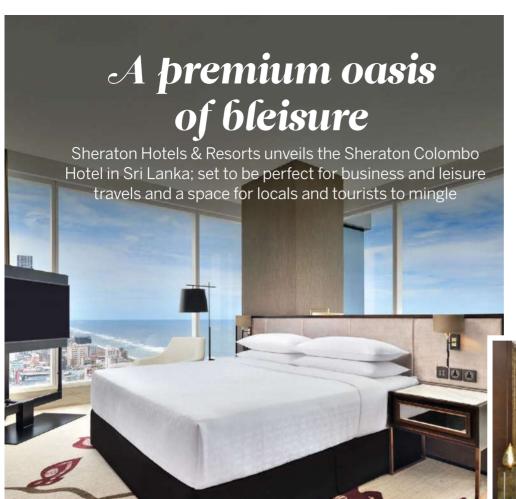
Depending on your palette, make a choice from this five star property's six dining gems; the evergreen Weligama Kitchen, the upbeat lounge, Tides Bar, the perfect seafood location—Big Fish or deli that has won hearts, Mirissa Baking Company. Followed by Surf's Up Pool & Beach Bar for incredible concoctions and pop-up restaurant.

#### **HOSPITALITY FROM THE HEART**

From the moment guests arrive, they are greeted with warmth and sincerity, as the staff is trained to ensure that every need is met with care. Whether you choose to explore the city around; stilt fishermen, visit turtle hatcheries, scout historic landmarks like Galle Fort or wish for a curated dinner under the stars—the Weligama Bay Marriott Resort & Spa team is dedicated to creating memories that will last a lifetime.



For more information, visit www.marriott.com



Colpetty Lounge offers innovative cocktails by the hotel's mixologists. The Sheraton Club Lounge, an exclusive space on the 21st floor, provides Marriott Bonvoy Elite members and Club Room guests an environment for meaningful collaboration as well as an array of food and beverage selections, with 24/7 access to this club. If you're looking for a place to rejuvenate with tropical cocktails, head to The Pool Bar. Alternatively, indulge in a session of total relaxation at Sheraton's Shine Spa. where a team of Balinese therapists will readily welcome you to a sensory oasis with restorative treatments. encompassing holistic massages,

In the heart of Sri Lanka, a brand new hotel has opened its doors that imbibes the country's vibrant spirit and cultural richness. A part of Marriott Bonvoy's portfolio of over 30 brands, the Sheraton Colombo Hotel is the second property of the Sheraton Hotels & Resorts to open in Sri Lanka. With curated premium spaces to facilitate business and leisure travels, this hotel is crafting bespoke experiences for tourists and locals alike.

A 45-minute drive from the Bandaranaike International Airport, the property is situated in the heart of Colombo, the central business and shopping district of the island. As you enter the two-tiered lobby, you notice how its design incorporates an open, airy layout with abundant lighting. Its

thoughtfully designed 320 rooms and suites span from 36 to 88 square meters and each room is equipped with modern furnishings, including a 49-inch flat-screen TV, complimentary high-speed internet, chic marble bathrooms, and the Sheraton signature bed. Guests can choose to elevate their experience by opting for a Club Room or a luxury suite, which comes with access to the exclusive Sheraton Club Lounge.

#### THE SHERATON EXPERIENCE

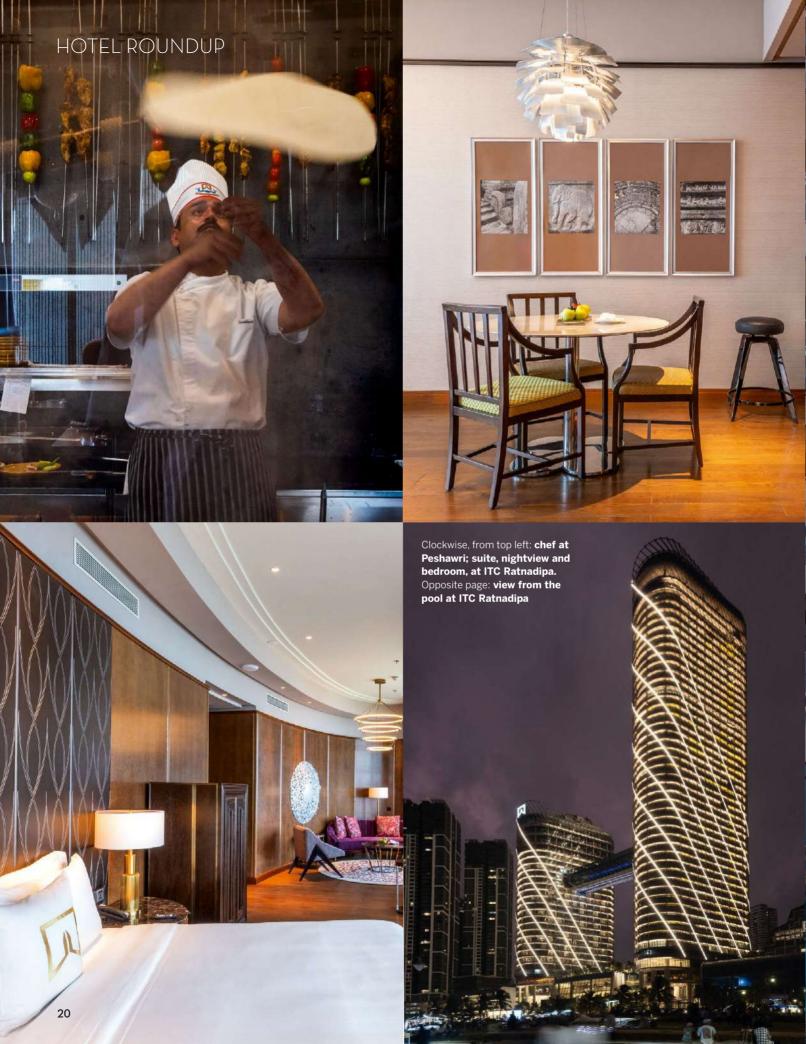
A myriad of upscale dining options await you at the Sheraton Colombo Hotel. Serving international and local delicacies through its live cooking stations and open kitchen, the Colombo Kitchen stands out as a must-visit in your itinerary. The soon-to-open rooftop restaurant flaunts a massive indoor fine dining area and an outdoor bar space, offering stunning views of the Indian ocean and the Colombo skyline.

Adjacent to the lobby, The Ceylon Bake Shop serves a delightful assortment of freshly baked pastries and sandwiches complemented by a selection of coffee and tea. The facials, and body scrubs. Beyond the hotel premises, you can immerse vourself in Sri Lanka's culture as renowned landmarks. such as Gangaramaya Temple and Viharamahadevi Park, both within a 2 km radius. Avid shoppers can head to the Dutch Hospital Shopping Precinct for a plethora of eateries, and souvenir shops. "Whether visiting for business or leisure. Sheraton Colombo Hotel looks forward to welcoming guests to our inviting spaces, and intuitive service to discover Sri Lanka's warmth and instantly feel at home," says Rahul Maini, General Manager of Sheraton Colombo Hotel



For more information, visit www.sheratoncolombohotel.com







#### KAYAAM HOUSE, REKAWA

#### FOR THE SEA-AND-SPA LIFE

Inside a quiet village along the busy south coast, the scenery at this wellness sanctum swivels from jungle greens on one end to a sun-drenched beachside on the other. A white villa complex (8 rooms) restored to merge with its rootsy surroundings, the main draw here is the Ayurveda package using local herbs and spices, including tailor-made meals. When you are not healing, grab a bicycle or kayak for a breezy day out or dial up the adrenaline with whale-watching tours or scuba lessons in Tangalle. Doubles from approx. ₹25,000; thereverie.life

#### WELIGAMA BAY MARRIOTT RESORT & SPA

#### FOR THE FAMILY BEACH VACAY

All 198 rooms of this high-rise in the palm-fringed Weligama bay open to gently lapping ocean waves. The resort's three outdoor pools, four restaurants, three bars and signature Quan Spa maximise every bit of contentment. Seafood spot Big Fish switches smoothly from crabs to cuttlefish. After some surf and sun, wind down at Tides lounge bar. Doubles from approx. ₹16,000; marriott.com

#### NINE SKIES, ELLA FOR FAMILY FUN OUTDOORS

A vintage tea estate in Demodara, this bungalow's five suites have been given a glow-up with stunning antiques and decor. Walks to the Nine Arches bridge or the Demodara train loop—one of the prettiest rides in the country—are glorious. Inside, go from lazy swims in the infinity pool to a relaxing library stocked with board games. Doubles from approx. ₹48,000; teardrop-hotels.com





#### TAJ BENTOTA RESORT & SPA

#### FOR HONEYMOON STAYS

The Taj's Bentota outpost melds opulent sprawl and versatile services like immaculate cuisine and a top-of-the-line spa with local flair (Sri Lankan carvings and tropical accents). A vast choice of rooms—160 in total, some with en suite Jacuzzis—is only rivalled by the many dining options, especially the romantic private dinner set-ups by the seaview terrace or the beach shack. Doubles from approx. ₹13,000; tajhotels.com

#### CEYLON TEA TRAILS, HATTON

#### FOR PEACE AND QUIET

Five restored colonial tea planter bungalows in Bogawantalawa Valley house 27 suites scented with morning blooms and freshly plucked tea. Antique flourishes and timber architecture boost the colonial aura of each suite, while outside, the plantation invites solitary walks and tea tastings. Enjoy a tour with veteran tea planter Bernard or partake in a champagne-soaked barbecue overlooking tea valleys. Doubles from approx. ₹62,000; resplendentceylon.com

#### CINNAMON BENTOTA RESORT

#### FOR THE HERITAGE CONNOISSEUR

The resort's 2022 restoration was an ode to Lankan artistry. Architect Channa Daswatte refurbished the original Bawa design using textile touches from Ena de Silva and a dazzling sculpture by Laki Senanayake. Even the rooms, with private balconies, evoke this grandeur. Dining is global-meets-local fare and a roster of activities (toddy tapping, mask-making) keep you glued. Doubles from approx. ₹22,000; cinnamonhotels.com →



#### HOTEL ROUNDUP

#### THE POSTCARD GALLE

#### FOR THE CULTURAL BREAK

True to name, the hotel's languid setting, by a quiet lagoon not far from Galle Fort, is matched by its impeccable aesthetic (Burmese teak ceilings and glam rustic furniture). Between lounging inside the Therapy Suite or feasting on a Jaffna curry rice, be outside amongst mangroves or Ambalangoda's mask-makers, or in one of Galle Fort's cafes. Doubles from approx. ₹15,000; postcardresorts.com

#### JETWING SAFARI CAMP, YALA

#### FOR WILDLIFE TRAILS

At the edge of Yala National Park, the hotel declares that it's home to the natta kota (short tail)—the Asian elephant—native to this forest. Apart from tented cabins, outfitted with every required comfort and a personalised butler service, you have access to a viewing deck and curated morning and evening trails, alongside hearty Sri Lankan dining. Doubles from approx. ₹25,000; jetwinghotels.com →





## The epitome of travelling in style

Contemporary design, signature yellow hues, functional features, you know it's a Mokobara bag when you see one. But here's why owning one of these bags can up the ante on your travel experience

We all have a plan in place for everything we do—this can be a shopping expedition, a day out or a much-awaited trip. The journey, while memorable, should be complemented by the right accessories that make you look sharp and leave a lasting impression. And, championing this philosophy is Mokobara, a premium travel & lifestyle brand that aims to breathe magic into every transit. Offering the finest luggage, backpacks, briefcases, handbags and more, each Mokobara product aims to elevate the joy of travel for those #GoingPlaces.

#### THOUGHTFUL DESIGN AT ITS CORE

Positioned as versatile luggage for the modern traveller, Mokobara beautifully marries thoughtful functionality with

clean aesthetics, and follows the principle of Lagom, a Swedish word which means 'not too much, not too little but just right'. For today's discerning traveller, travelling in style is essential and this extends to their luggage as well. With Mokobara, the products feature clutter-breaking. functional, distinctive designs. Think a vibrant colourway of vellow, lilac, blue. green and black that stand out on the conveyor belt. The brand's luggage is known for its signature smooth stroll, making it the perfect accompaniment for long airport queues. In addition to this, the bags also boast lightweight and unbreakable design, a charging plug for your devices on the go, a magic eraser to scuff away the tough marks as well as a dust and laundry bag to help you

take a little extra care of your luggage and outfits.

But what truly sets Mokobara apart is their immaculate attention to detail. With pockets that blend with the overall design, and their signature yellow accents, each Mokobara is designed to delight. So, this holiday season, don't just flaunt your ensemble but also your travel accessories because this brand is sure to elevate your joy of travel experience, no matter the destination.

#### FOR A SEAMLESS VOYAGE

Each Mokobara has been thoughtfully designed to make travel more seamless. The Cabin Pro has a quick access compartment for your laptop which allows you to breeze through airport security checks. Alternatively, the Access Luggage comes with a flattop opening that makes packing and unpacking in smaller and cramped up hotel rooms easier. Safe to say, Mokobara's wide-range of products has something for every traveller #GoingPlaces.



#### mokobara

For more information, visit www.mokobara.com

#### LUNUGANGA, BENTOTA FOR THE ARTISTIC SOUL

Celebrated architect Geoffrey Bawa built his country estate masterpiece over 50 years and it shows in every inch. The seamless flow of wind and space, the antiques and the frangipani blooms in its carefully curated gardens. All 10 rooms have unique interiors and the kitchen marries local and international tastes. Best of all is lunch at Bawa's preferred jackfruit tree. Doubles from approx. ₹25,000; geoffreybawa.com

#### SHERATON COLOMBO HOTEL

#### FOR A CITY GETAWAY

A trendy addition to Colombo's growing cluster of global chain hotels, Sheraton checks every box for a lively city break. If you are not out along Galle Face Green, where the hotel is located, stay in one of its 320 rooms, spending your day at The Pool Bar or ordering specials from The Colombo Kitchen. Doubles from approx. ₹17,500; marriott.com

#### THOTALAGALA, HAPUTALE

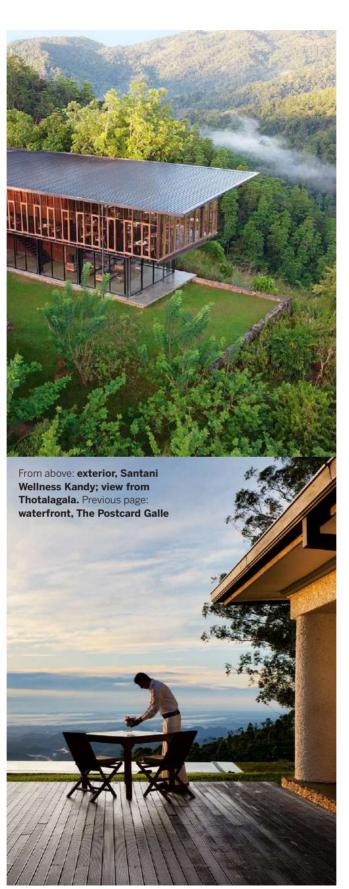
#### **FOR HISTORY SEEKERS**

A planter's bungalow on the Dambatenne estate, this is where Thomas Lipton coined the Ceylon Tea name. Its charming living quarters, spread over seven suites, fosters an intimate atmosphere where colonial history mingles with dewy sunrise views. Doubles from approx.₹25,000; thotalagala.com

#### HERITANCE KANDALAMA, DAMBULLA

#### FOR ADVENTURERS

Another Bawa creation, Kandalama's grandeur peeks out from a granite outcrop in Dambulla. Some rooms come



with dramatic views of Sigiriya rock fortress. The infinity pool flows into Kandalama Lake's waters and a 7-course fusion meal is served on the table Bawa once worked at. Many outdoor experiences await, including a meal in a cave and a nighttime loris trail. Doubles from approx. ₹25.000: heritancehotels.com

## SANTANI WELLNESS KANDY FOR JUNGLE SPA VIBES

Santani Wellness Kandy's floor-to-ceiling-view rooms stand on a hilltop inside Aratenna Tea Estate. Knuckles mountain acts as a serene real-life wallpaper in the distance, while you undergo full-body Ayurvedic and yoga sessions. Fresh, organic recipes by a globally seasoned chef are calibrated to get your chakras in synchronicity. Doubles from approx. ₹38,000; santani.com

#### ANI, DIKWELLA FOR LARGE GROUPS

Only a single group (6 to 30) can reserve these secluded, modernist villas, in the south, shrouded in beachfront greens. If the private chef or the pool butler don't impress you, then the chopper tours or private catamaran whale-watching rides will. *Price on request; aniprivateresorts.com* 

#### ABODE BY THE BEACH, AHANGAMA FOR THE CREATIVE NOMAD

If Abode Ahangama is the mature sibling. Abode by the Beach, a two-suite boutique near Devil's Rock, is the groovy, young hipster. The hotel, with a beach-chic style and well-travelled menu, sets a warm scene for conversations and spirits to flow, and for nomads to rest their backpacks for a while. Doubles from approx. ₹20,000; abodeboutiquehotels.com •

PHOTOGRAPHS: COURTESY OF THOTAGALA; SANTANI WELLNESS RESORT AND SPA



where relaxation and discovery manifest like never before

Nestled along the pristine beachfront of Kosgoda, Sheraton Kosgoda Turtle Beach Resort; popular for its sea turtle conservation project and picturesque oceanfront, invites you to indulge in a 5-star getaway. Amalgamating world-class amenities with the authentic Sri Lankan experience, this idyllic gem is just under two hours from the Colombo International Airport—making your coastal dream an accessible affair.

#### **EVENTFUL FOR ALL**

Regardless of your holiday style; for the vacationer and the explorer, Sheraton Kosgoda Turtle Beach Resort knows how to treat you. If you wish to spend your time sunbathing or playing a game of beach volleyball or table tennis, the resort is equipped with all arrangements. For families with tiny tots, Sheraton's dedicated kids' club, Little Hatchlings, offers fun activities to keep them engaged and entertained.

If discovery is on your agenda, this beachside abode is pampered with scenic walkways, where lush gardens and ocean views await—allowing you to witness where the greens and blues of Sri Lanka unite. Giving you a taste of Sri Lanka's rich culture and feeding your

curiosity as well, sign up for the resort's cooking classes and whip up traditional delights or embark on the journey to the Kosgoda Sea Turtle Conservation project to witness the majestic creatures up close.

For architectural enthusiasts, tour the wonders of the iconic Sri Lankan architect Geoffrey Bawa's private residence—Lunuganga Estate, or embark on a scenic boat ride along the Madu River, where mangrove forests and vibrant wildlife await. For those seeking an adrenaline rush, the water sports centres at Bentota are 15 minutes awayensuring your surf and jet skiing agenda is within easy reach.

#### SOULFUL STAYS AND SERVES

After a day of exploration, return to the comfort of your room—with 10 options to choose from, from the Deluxe Guest Room to the Presidential Suite, each space is envisioned to extend the rejuvenation you deserve. With spaces crafted to perfection, indulge your taste buds at diverse dining venues throughout the property. Savour global delicacies at S Kitchen, unwind with signature cocktails at SHO Lounge, or enjoy Mediterranean-inspired

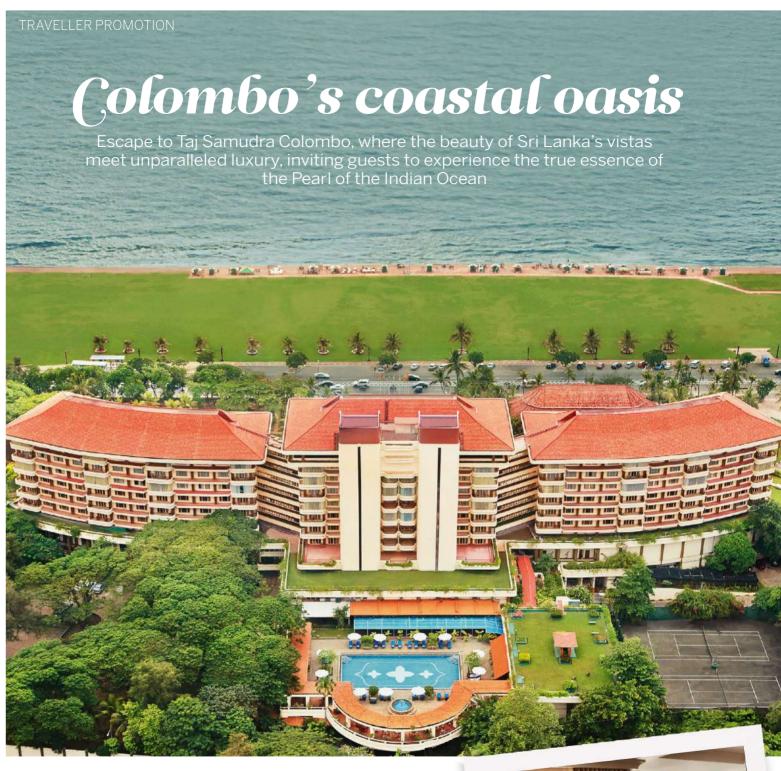
cuisine at Olive Restaurant & Bar. For a sophisticated speakeasy lounge experience, Ridleys is the place to be and for relaxed sights of the Indian Ocean, the rooftop lounge, Blue is a must-visit. Plus, with vegetarian, halal, and vegan options available at this resort you're sure to be pampered with delightful preparations of your choice and aesthetics that await capturing.

TRAVELLER PROMOTION

Tucked in by the Indian Ocean, this discerning property is a family recreational haven, serving you the best of all spheres. Whether it's impressive accommodation, delectable cuisines, enticing activities or world-class service—when at Sheraton Kosgoda, expect and experience it all.



For more information, visit www.marriott.com



Gazing out across the historic Galle Face Green, the newly reopened Taj Samudra Colombo beckons travellers with its blend of luxury and tradition. Strategically positioned in Colombo's bustling business district, this hotel is just a stone's throw away from the buzzing city centre, offering not just the best accommodation, but also an immersive experience steeped in Sri Lankan hospitality.

At the heart of the Taj Samudra lies its renewed commitment to

offering a range of experiences for every guest. Whether it's the contemporary Taj Club rooms or the opulent Presidential TATA Suite, each of the 300 rooms boasts a balance of comfort and luxury.

But the allure of Taj Samudra extends beyond its accommodations. The hotel has a rich heritage, with roots that stretch back to over 40 years. Its iconic status as a venue of choice for both local and international conferences.







as well as weddings and social events, is a testament to its unparalleled reputation.

With seven meeting rooms, including the exquisite Grand Crystal building, dating back two centuries, the hotel seamlessly blends colonial architecture with modern amenities. The rooftop Samudra ballroom, offering panoramic views of the Indian Ocean, and the newly renovated Anthurium banqueting space further elevate the hotel's appeal.

#### A GASTRONOMIC ESCAPADE

Culinary delights abound within the hotel's diverse dining options that promise to tantalise the taste buds and satisfy the most discerning palates.

The vibrant YUMI Japanese resto bar offers guests a taste of Japan with its authentic cuisine and lively atmosphere. Navratna, the Indian specialty restaurant, showcases the finest flavours of India, expertly prepared by a team of skilled chefs. Meanwhile, Golden Dragon, the Chinese specialty restaurant, serves up delectable dishes in an elegant setting, perfect for a memorable dining experience.

For seafood enthusiasts, The Crab Factory beckons with its mouth watering selection of fresh seafood, while Ports of Call, the hotel's all-day multi-cuisine restaurant, offers an extensive spread for buffets and Sunday brunch.



#### OF REST AND RELAXATION

Beyond dining, the Taj Samudra offers a range of recreational activities, including a fitness centre, floodlit tennis courts, and a jogging track. Guests can also indulge in leisurely shopping at the arcade or unwind with a pampering session at the onsite hair salon.

As the sun sets over the horizon, retreat to the comfort of your rooms or head to The Lattice lounge to unwind with a selection of coffees, teas, and wines. For those looking to extend their evening, the Marquee venue offers a unique indoor-outdoor ambiance, allowing guests to enjoy the beauty of the night sky.

In its essence, the Taj Samudra Colombo brings Sri Lanka's charm to life, offering a seamless blend of tradition and unparalleled hospitality.



For more information, visit www.tajhotels.com, email reservations.samudra@tajhotels.com, or call 00 94 11 2446622

## LANKA BEYOND THE BEACH

The island is not all sun, sand and sea. Go further inland for everything from wildlife to wellness, and tea to tee. By **Lakshmi Sankaran** 

The mountain mist trundling

#### **SLOW TRAVEL**

Last year, Sri Lanka unveiled its first long-distance nature loop—the Pekoe Trail. 300 kilometres curated by adventurer Miguel Cunat. A 22-day walking, hiking and trekking route through highland tea gardens and forests, the trail includes regular stops from its starting point (Hanthana, Kandy), to the end (Kandapola, Nuwara Eliya). Stage 1 will suit hiking greenhorns but Stage 2 onwards the terrain becomes more difficult. The beauty here is that you can plan as you go, choosing to stop to enjoy the majestic Horton Plains or speed through the lush villages of Hali Ela.

#### **WILD WONDERS**

There are nearly 25 national parks on this small island. Elephants and leopards are common in the southern forests of Yala (home to the eco-retreat Wild Coast Tented Lodge) and Udawalawe. There is also Sinharaja Forest Reserve. a UNESCOrecognised tropical zone in the southeast, a prime birding and leopard spotting zone. The Rainforest Ecolodge has a five-hour excursion into these woods. In the east's lessexplored Gal Oya National Park, boat safaris are the best option to see animals.

#### **A TEE TOUR**

over golf greens will improve your spirit, if not your game. Both Kandy and Nuwara Eliya in the Central Highlands are historic golf grounds: the Victoria Golf Club in Kandy, where chalets are available to stay, is a 6,933-yard, 18-hole challenge with gorgeous scenes all around; the **Nuwara Eliya Golf Course** is an 1889 green, founded by the British planters of the region. Only members can stay but visitors can pay ₹5,000 to play 10 holes.

#### A TO Z OF TEA

Tourism in highland hill towns, Nuwara Eliya, Kandy and Ella, runs on tea tastings but some experiences go deeper. At Amba Estate, in Uva, 30 minutes from Ella, a two-day course teaches you how to pluck, dry and roll your own black tea. For a more active sprint through the tea gardens, Ceylon Tea Trails in Hatton and Heritance Tea Factory in Nuwara Eliya have cycling tours. Ceylon Tea Museum in Hanthana is an excellent time capsule on how the brew flourished in these parts over the years. History goes down smooth here with a fine selection of teas available at its third-floor café

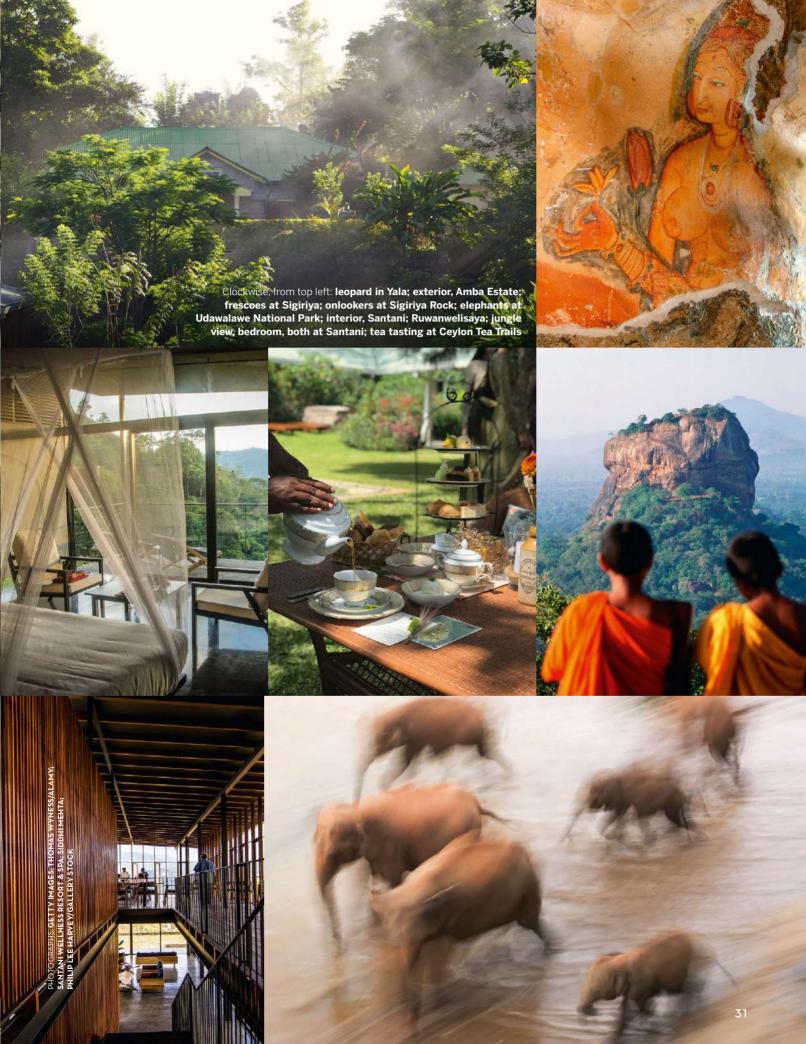
#### YOGA AND THE FARM

Sri Lanka has a way of balancing the modern spa and its countryside as witnessed in places such as Jim's Farm Villas, where Ayurveda massages go hand-in-hand with lessons in coconut farming, or the exclusive Santani Wellness Kandy, where birdsong in the jungle blends with "Om" chants during personalised yoga sessions. Sustainable travel has also picked up with many tours offering immersions in village life. For a more rural flavour, try the agro-luxury stay Jetwing Kaduruketha in Wellawaya, where you can live among paddy fields and interact with the growers.

#### BACK TO OLD COUNTRY

The island's most compelling relics and monuments are in its cultural triangle, from the Sigiriya rock fortress, whose flat-top gardens defy imagination, and the caves of Dambulla to Anuradhapura, an ancient capital in the north with royal temples such as Isurumuniya Vihara and Ruwanwelisaya. At Water Garden Sigiriya resort, see Sigiriya fortress through a telescope, while Uga Ulagalla is the only luxury pool villa in the entire triangle.







From sandy shores to verdant vistas, Cinnamon Hotels and Resorts is the ultimate island insider for exploring Sri Lanka



A vacation in the tropics is akin to stepping into a dreamscape of serene beauty. Here, time ebbs and flows like the gentle tides, inviting you to dip your toes in the golden sands and feel the ocean breeze rustling through swaying palm trees. Nestled amidst the azure waters of the Indian Ocean and the flourishing landscapes of Sri Lanka and the Maldives is a tropical haven, waiting to be explored. It is this kaleidoscope of natural brilliance that inspires Cinnamon Hotels and Resorts to be the conduits of unforgettable experiences that resonate with the true spirit of Sri Lanka.

Cinnamon Hotels and Resorts offer discerning travellers a haven of comfort and indulgence in some of the most coveted destinations in the world. With a portfolio of 16 properties. including 12 in Sri Lanka and 4 in the Maldives, the brand is synonymous with excellence in accommodation, service, and experiences tailored to delight even the most seasoned globetrotters. At Cinnamon Hotels and Resorts, the journey begins with a vision to showcase the very best of Sri Lanka to the world. The brand offers a unique perspective on experiencing the beauty of Sri Lanka through cultural immersions and personalised service, making for a journey that showcases the country's heritage and natural wonders in a way that is unique to Cinnamon.

#### **DISCOVERING SRI LANKA**

For those seeking an intimate rendezvous with nature, Cinnamon's

8 Sri Lanka Resorts epitomise the essence of each location, whether nestled in the mountains, by the sea, or bordering lush jungles. From the captivating wildlife havens of Habarana and Yala to the sun-kissed beaches of Beruwala, Bentota, Hikkaduwa, and Trincomalee, each locale promises an escapade like no other. Indulge in the refreshing sweetness of king coconuts and savour the tantalising flavours of authentic Sri Lankan cuisine, meticulously prepared by skilled chefs. Among the crown jewels of Cinnamon's portfolio is the Bentota Beach property, where the confluence of the river and the sea paints a picture of serenity. Here, guests are invited to indulge in a harmonious blend of art and architecture, with 16





tastefully designed suites that foster a deep connection with the natural surroundings.

#### **COLOURFUL COLOMBO**

Cinnamon Hotels and Resorts offers a unique perspective to Colombo, with insider access to the city's culture, gastronomic scene, and entertainment circuit. Venturing into the heart of Colombo, Cinnamon's city hotels boast award-winning accommodations and innovative eco-solutions, with each property serving as a gateway to Sri Lanka's capital. Guests can savour local favourites like isso wade and the iconic one-shot drink in Aluthkade. As the evening unfolds, the city transforms into an entertainment hub, boasting trendy bars and lively clubs serving up original cocktails infused with Sri Lankan flair. ColomBar at Cinnamon Lakeside Hotel offers inventive arrack-based cocktails inspired by Sri Lankan culture, including their signature blend of arrack, cinnamon, and tea, served in



unique kerosene lamp-shaped glasses. Whether a seasoned party-goer or seeking relaxation after exploration, Colombo's nightlife promises an unforgettable experience. Moreover, the culinary offerings elevate dining with meticulously crafted dishes like escargot, fillet mignon, and crab bisques at the esteemed Cinnamon Colombo Hotels.

#### CINNAMON LIFE AT CITY OF DREAMS

Set to be the largest of its kind in South Asia, Cinnamon Life at City of Dreams promises to seamlessly blend world-class hospitality, thrilling entertainment, and immersive experiences, setting new standards for excellence in the industry.

As stewards of the environment, the brand is dedicated to

implementing sustainable practices throughout its operations. From energy-efficient design features to responsible waste management initiatives, every effort is made to minimise ecological footprint and preserve the natural beauty of these destinations. With its unwavering dedication to sustainability and immersive experiences, Cinnamon Hotels and Resorts offer travellers an unparalleled journey into the heart of Sri Lanka.



For more information, visit www.cinnamonhotels.com







ri Lanka's new reputation as a top-tier cocktail destination is all thanks to a generation of home-grown mixologists, championing local spirits and seasonal produce such as palm treacle and tangerines. From elegant resto bars, to beach hideouts and plush rooftop pubs, visitors are spoilt for choice. A roundup of the most inviting tipple across the island nation:

#### LOCALE, WELIGAMA

Overlooking fishing boats along Weligama bay—the surf hotspot—is Locale, a contemporary gastro bar, with marble-top tables, industrial chairs and a monochrome photo wall. Their cocktails play with ingredients such as sweet oranges, cinnamon and nutmeg, and the restaurant's culinary theme changes regularly; the menu was Pan-Asian last year, while now Mediterranean is the word. [9] locale. Ik

#### ROPEWALK, GALLE FORT

A nod to the flapper era of the 1920s, Ropewalk is located inside the 300-year-old UNESCO World Heritage monument, Galle Fort. Its name is an homage to traditional arrack-making, where toddy tappers ply across coconut trees using coir ropes. Ropewalk's flavours lean regional, with ingredients such as tamarind and palm treacle. A standout: Leyn Baan, named after one of Galle Fort's streets, made with coriander, curry leaves and coconut arrack that is aged in halmilla (tropical timber) barrels. @ropewalksl

#### SMOKE & BITTERS, HIRIKETIYA

Number 40 on the Asia's 50 Best Bars 2023 list is a cocktail bar from Hiriketiya, sitting pretty in a coconut grove.
Native ingredients shine in island-inspired drinks such as their signature Silvertip White
Negroni made with Colombo gin, rare Ceylon silvertip tea infused in vermouth bianco, native olive bitters and a homemade cardamom tincture. The terracotta-roofed seating area with batik art tables and smokehouse menu serving succulent ribs ensure Smoke & Bitters is unmissable on any Sri Lanka itinerary. © smoke.bitters

#### COLOMBAR, COLOMBO

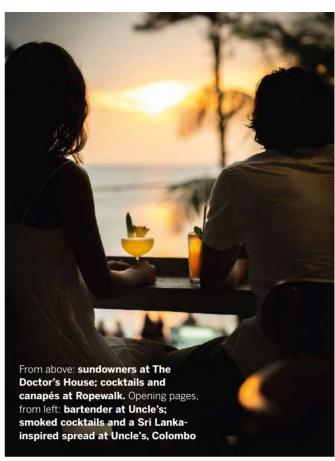
Known for its weekend music nights. ColomBar is Cinnamon Lakeside Hotel's big crowdpuller, famous for arrackcentred combinations inspired by Lankan traditions: their signature is a blend of arrack, cinnamon and tea, served in rustic kerosene lamp-shaped glasses. Specialities also include cocktails with palmyrah palm arrack from Jaffna and the north. alongside bites such as black pork curry, with a side of boiled cassava and grated coconut. @colombars1

#### THE DOCTOR'S HOUSE, MATARA

Perhaps the south coast's most energetic venue, The Doctor's House—inside a 200-year-old restored Dutch hospital—hosts (fortnightly) jewellery and art markets, DJ sessions, sunset jazz and live band performances every week during peak season, while serving a classic Old Fashioned or chilled local beer. Their rooftop den, The Upstairs, has a tapas menu paired with a selection of great cocktails and wine. (1) the doctors\_house

#### MONSOON, COLOMBO

Monsoon, which has expansive interiors decked with mixed marble tables and rattan chairs, →







In the heart of Colombo, where the historic Gangaramava Temple meets the Beira Lake, Courtyard by Marriott boasts iconic vistas. The serenity of the glistening waters frames the views from this property, where guests can relax through indulging in retail therapy and culinary delights, immersing themselves in the vibrant gastronomic scene of the city. Courtyard by Marriott, Colombo, provides an immersive experience that captures the essence of the island nation. The city's electrifying nightlife is just a stone's throw away, making this property a perfect base to explore a dynamic blend of business and pleasure. Read along as we outline some of the most exciting facets of this property.

#### TRANQUIL RETREATS

Unwind in inviting rooms with plush bedding and ergonomic work areas, perfect for relaxation and productivity. Deluxe amenities cater to your every need, while the city skyline, shimmering lake, or ocean views provide stunning backdrops. The 164 elegantly designed rooms include four suites, offering a haven for travellers.

#### FOR THE EPICUREAN IN YOU

Beira Kitchen, the hotel's crown jewel, takes centre stage as this all-day dining restaurant boasts both sophisticated indoor seating and a sky-high terrace. Feast your eyes on scenic Colombo vistas while indulging in a spread of local and international flavours. For caffeine enthusiasts, Tito's Café beckons with the irresistible aroma of freshly brewed coffee and decadent pastries.

#### **RECHARGE AND REJUVENATE**

After a day of exploring Colombo's vibrant tapestry, recharge in the state-of-the-art fitness centre. Take a refreshing dip in the rooftop infinity pool, where sun-drenched loungers invite you to soak up city views.

Whether you crave seamless business efficiency, immersion in the city's heritage, or pure relaxation in luxurious comfort, the hotel's impeccable service caters to all your desires. Embrace the coastal pride with Courtyard by Marriott, crafting unforgettable moments in the heart of Colombo.



COURTYARD

Colombo

For more information, visit www.courtyardcolombo.com

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is widely known for its fare—a sophisticated take on Southeast Asian street food. In addition, the bar gins up a curated list of local spirits. Think of Tom Yum Siam, a red chilli and vodka blend, or a Kochi Gin, made with a Sri Lankan chilli pepper blend.

#### CHARLIE'S, GALLE

Sun-dappled chic interiors and rampart views from the terrace greet visitors to Charlie's, inside the Galle Fort's art deco hotel Charleston. The resto bar uses tinctures and essences, all created from native ingredients. One highlight is Banana Thingamajig, a rum blend using sugar and sour banana reductions filtered in coconut milk for 72 hours. The drinks are a companion piece to its regional eats-try their line-caught seafood paired with river crabs. Ocharliesbargallefort

#### UNCLE'S, COLOMBO

Inspired by the slow, laid-back life of the island, Uncle's at Park Street is a nightlife favourite with its retro décor, quirky wall art, jazz sessions and, of course, the drinks. The menu always experiments with smoky, bitter and sweet-sour flavours—order their Dudley Please! which combines coconut arrack, spiced pineapple, and dark chocolate sourced from gourmet Sri Lankan chocolatier Gerald Mendis. @uncles\_colombo

#### LIGHTHOUSE, AHANGAMA

Lighthouse Ahangama, a boutique stay, sits right by the beach and two surf spots; the hotel's rooftop bar is ideal for catching a stunning sunset with a Cafe Arrack Shot, a blend of premium roasted small batch coffee and coconut arrack. Other creative drinks include house-spiced arrack paired with grilled pineapple juice and fishtail palm treacle. @lighthouse\_ahangama

#### TRAX. AHANGAMA

A café by day, this green oasis gets its name from the village's busy railway tracks and turns into Ahangama's most happening spot at dusk. The low-lit cocktail bar hosts DJ and disco evenings, featuring artists from across the world working the club's audiophile sound system—the only one of its kind in Sri Lanka. Drinks are a highend affair with coconut milk and banana-infused rum cocktails. (1) trax\_ahangama

#### HIDEOUT, UNAWATUNA

Unawatuna, a hamlet five kilometres south of Galle, isn't the most obvious choice for an amazing Mexican kitchen that doubles as a craft cocktail bar, but Norwegian-Sri Lankan owners Natasha Sand and Danushka Udayanga made it happen. Go for Taco Tuesdays where you can mix and match as many as tacos you like for a sweet deal, and stay for their pineapple margaritas served with homemade syrups.

#### VIRTICLE BY JETWING, COLOMBO

Even among rooftop bars, this 30th-floor, open-air bar is quite special: the view of the city skyline and the ocean at sundown alone make it worth the visit. On the menu are island brews like Rockland's Ceylon Arrack and locally produced white rum, which pairs well with the restaurant's menu that elevates street food like kottu with tofu and cashew curry.

② virticle.by.jetwing •









## THE BEST OF





#### SHORT BREAK

n the south coast of Sri Lanka, Galle is a much-loved destination. At the centre of all the action is Galle Fort—a centuries-old fort city where a thriving clutch of fine-dining venues, heritage hotels and charming boutiques attract tourists from around the world. Here is our pick of the best restaurants, shopping and hotels in this beautiful colonial city:

#### WHERE TO EAT

#### 1710 BY THE MER.CHANT

Located at The Mer.chant. a 14-room hotel with Dutch colonial architecture, this buzzy Galle Fort restaurant's menu is firmly rooted in its location. Dishes like the Merchant Biryani are based on family recipes of the fort's Moors, descendants of Arab traders who settled here centuries ago. There's also wambatu pahi, a tangy eggplant pickle, and ambul thiyal pizza, inspired by a beloved southern Sri Lankan sour and peppered fish preparation. themerchantgallefort.com

#### MARU

MARU loosely translates to "awesome" in Sinhala, and that sums up this restaurant serving poke bowls inside Galle Fort. Inspired by Japanese culinary traditions, MARU is an homage to fresh produce from the island's coasts and gardens. On the menu is a delicious tuna sashimi bowl spiced up with nai miris (fiery local chilli), soy sauce served with pickled veggies, as well as teriyaki-tossed eggplant bowls drizzled with wasabi mayo. Pop by on a hot afternoon and start with a king coconut to cool off. @marupokeandcafe

#### KIXI

Kixi is every local's go-to hangout to catch up with a friend or linger over iced lattes served with floating iced teddy bears. Downstairs, a small air-conditioned room can seat about eight people at once. A handful of outdoor tables on Lighthouse Street are always brimming with passing tourists, school children and the fort's residents. The rooftop is nice on breezy evenings, and the staff are always welcoming. Order Kixi's apple pie, waffles and the teddy bear coffee. @kixi.galle

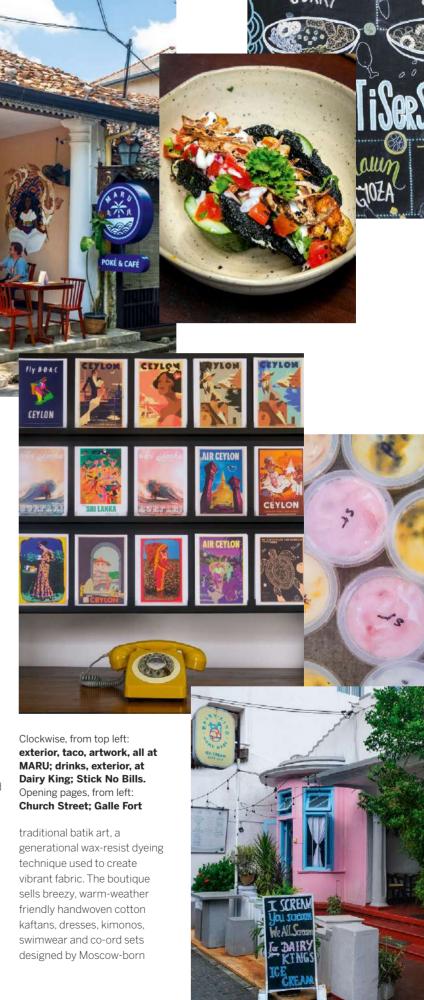
#### DAIRY KING

Galle Fort has several ice cream parlours, but none quite as charming as Dairy King, which is the oldest one and opened 12 years ago. With pastel pink walls and blue window sills, the outlet abuts the ancestral home of the family who runs it. You'll meet the always-smiling and chatty uncle Tariq, his friendly family, and aunties preparing homemade ice cream. Choose from a range of flavours: mango, ginger, crunchy cashew, choco chip and Oreo among others.

#### **WHERE TO SHOP**

#### VAR VARA

Founded in 2012 by Russian designer Elena Shnyreva, VAR VARA revives Sri Lanka's



artist Alexey Rittenberg and handcrafted by local women artisans. @varvarafashion

#### **BARFFOOT**

Late artist Barbara Sansoni's popular Colombo brand also finds a spot inside Galle Fort, with a smaller boutique housing a curated collection of locally made handicrafts, books, herbal oils, soft toys and paintings made by artisans across Sri Lanka. You'll also find a limited collection of branded footwear, ideal for warm, beach days under the Sri Lankan sun. barefootceylon.com

#### KK BOUTIQUE

A 17th-century, monochrometiled residence inside the Galle Fort, the boutique is known for their summery prints and vibrant swimwear collection. But what makes this homegrown brand remarkable is their art gallery—inside, walls adorn the work of Sri Lankan artists. There's also an extensive collection of crockery, sculptures and candle holders, and you'll be hard-pressed to walk emptyhanded, kkcollection.com

#### LANKA LIVING GALLERY

If you are looking to own a piece of contemporary Sri Lankan art, head to the Lanka Living Gallery. The gallery was founded by Danish national Tomas Clausen, inside a heritage mansion, stocked with thoughtful vinyl prints and postcards on the island's unique people and culture. After browsing and chatting with Clausen, make your way upstairs to the delightful coffee shop.

#### STICK NO BILLS

Lining the iconic Pedlar's Street in Galle Fort, the brand's flagship store established in 2010 is a creative project spanning 150 years of illustrative poster





art. Their vibrant visual library honours the beauty, hope and resilience of everyday Sri Lankans and the island's multifaceted identity with quirky artwork and stunning photography. sticknobillsonline.com

#### WHERE TO STAY

**AMANGALLA** 

Once the headquarters of Dutch commanders dating back to 1684, this centuries-old sanctuary is perhaps the fort's most iconic accommodation. Preserving old-world charm with polished floors and teak armchairs, Amangalla offers rooms and suites with heritage wooden flooring, arched windows and four-poster beds. Enjoy high tea by the long, sundappled corridors overlooking the fort's ramparts or take the historic fort tour guided by your personal butler. Doubles from approx.₹98,000; aman.com

#### **GALLE FORT HOTEL**

This 300-year-old Dutch mansion turned into a heritage hotel is a Galle icon. A UNESCO-awarded hotel for its heritage conservation, Galle Fort Hotel features 12 luxe suites and a Palladian colonnade verandah. In a neighbourhood packed with

Clockwise, from top left: the pool at Galle Fort Hotel; Tomas Clausen at Lanka Living Gallery; view from Galle Fort; street in Galle; salad at Charlie's, inside The Charleston hotel

lively bars, the hotel stands out with Ropewalk, a specialty arrack bar serving great cocktails.

Doubles from approx. ₹28,000; galleforthotel.com

#### THE HERITAGE

Vintage candle chandeliers, teak armchairs and arched verandahs are all part of The Heritage's colonial Dutch history and glory, blending into the surrounding lush garden. Pick from the hotel's 15 rooms and two suites; the suites have antique baths and can accommodate up to four people. Doubles from approx. ₹16,500; theheritage.lk

#### THE CHARLESTON

A 1924 merchant villa,
Charleston is now a restored,
nine-bedroom, tropical art deco
boutique hotel with elegant
rooms offering sunset views. The
hotel's artisan-made interiors
with warm and honeyed tones
pair well with brass inlay terrazzo
while tours explore maskmaking and cuttlefish jewellery
mold with the fort's craftspeople.
Doubles from approx. ₹23,000;
wearecreativeleap.com •

# AD DESIGN SHOW

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# THE ULTIMATE BAWA TOUR

A 10-day guide to Geoffrey Bawa's gardens, homes and hotels takes you along the Sri Lankan coastline and deep into the architect's creative genius. Illustrator **Jitesh Patel** 

While you stay at Lunuganga,

#### DAY 1 COLOMBO

The late architect's home from 1958-2003, **House No 11** on 33rd lane in Colombo is the perfect introduction to Bawa's world—the custom pieces of furniture, the beautiful batiks, the stunning Rolls-Royce in his garage, the skylights and window frames. You can even choose to spend a night or two in the guest suite at the iconic property.

#### DAY 2-5 BENTOTA

Once you head south from Colombo to Bentota, a twohour drive is Lunuganga, the country home of the maestro for nearly half a century. It is the perfect way to experience Bawa's vision of a space where the indoors and outdoors coexist in perfect harmony. The landscaped gardens, the vistas, the private lake, the doubleheight windows, the frangipanis outside, the chequered floors-Lunuganga, managed by Teardrop Hotels, is available to stay for a maximum of 10 guests and is ideal for some quiet contemplation.

you could visit other Bawa properties in Bentota, including Boutique 87 at Galle Road (with a maximum occupancy of 4). Then stop by at Bentota Beach by Cinnamon, which reopened in 2022 after a restoration by architect Channa Daswatte. For a cheap and cheerful stay, head to Thaala Bentota Resort. followed by the unmissable Villa Bentota by KK Collection that was converted into a hotel by Bawa in the 1970s to which further modifications were made in 2007. Another option further south is the Heritance Ahungalla hotel, from where you can take a cruise on the Madu Ganga river and discover the mangroves and islands. Closer to Galle, you have the option of visiting Jetwing Lighthouse—the sculptural handrail of this hotel's spiral staircase is designed by Sri

#### **DAY 6-7 MIRISSA**

Head further south to the tip of the island to the **Claughton House**. Dramatically perched

Lankan artist Laki Senanayake.

atop a hilltop, it promises a luxurious stay. You could also make a quick stop at the **Red Cliffs Mirissa**, once known as Jayewardene House, as it was commissioned by Pradeep Jayewardene, grandson of a former president of Sri Lanka.

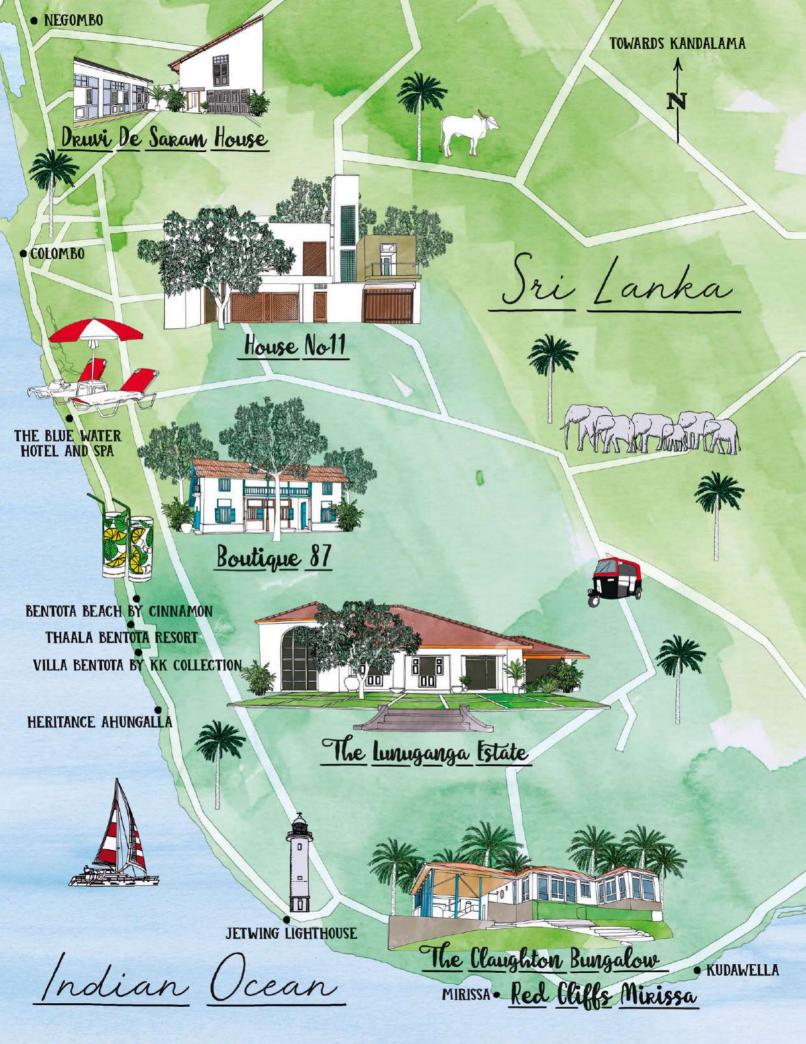
#### **DAY 8 COLOMBO**

To close the loop, head back to Colombo. But before you take your flight out, visit the **De Saram House**. Recently restored, it is now a boutique accommodation (with a capacity of eight) and music venue managed by the Geoffrey Bawa Trust.

#### DAY 9-10 KANDALAMA (OPTIONAL)

For a change of scenery and the definitive Bawa experience, a drive north to the interiors of Sri Lanka will take you to the Heritance Kandalama hotel near Sigiriya rock fortress. Built on a cliff and with panoramic views of the dense forests around, this labour of love was one of Bawa's last and most significant projects.

Laccadive Sea







A NEW WAVE OF CREATIVITY HAS FOLLOWED THE SURFERS AND YOGIS TO THE REEF BREAKS, COCONUT PLANTATIONS AND BUDDHIST MONASTERIES OF SRI LANKA'S SOUTH COAST.

BY CHANDRAHAS CHOUDHURY, PHOTOGRAPHS BY MATTHIEU SALVAING



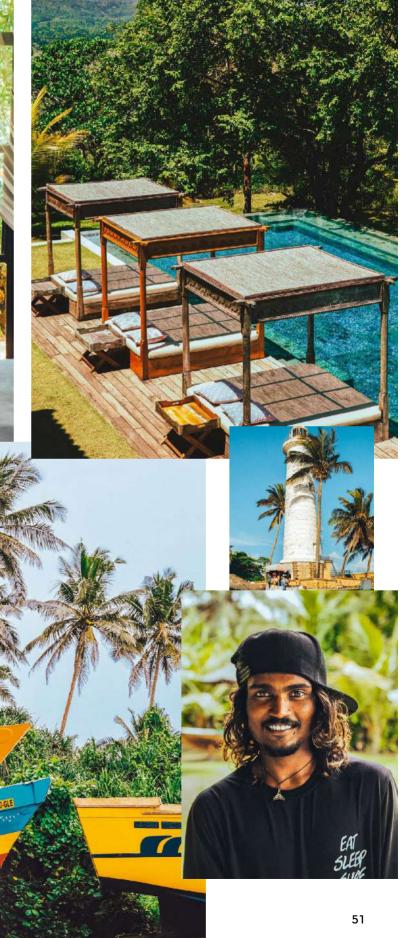




Deshan

Clockwise, from top left: bedroom at Villa Mine; pool at Malabar Hill; Galle Fort lighthouse; staffer at The Jungalows; boats in Hiriketiya; cocktail at The Surf Bar, Cape Weligama. Opposite page: surfing Sri Lanka's south coast





with my companionable driver, G Douglas Wijerathna, on an itinerary thoughtfully laid out by Ampersand Travel—I see scooters and tuk-tuks ferrying surfers to beaches and breaks, surf schools and camps. At sunrise and sunset, the sea is speckled with every kind of surfer: paddling out to sea, queueing to catch a wave, clustering in groups around coaches or lying on loungers quaffing orange thambili—the water of the delicious "king coconut" native to the island. An alien making landfall in the new surf towns of Ahangama or Hiriketiya might easily conclude that earthlings are an amphibious, chilled-out species attached to two totems. Twice a day, they park their phones and head to sea with their boards.

This beeline to an undiscovered shore is a familiar arc in the surfing world. On Sri Lanka's south coast, though, the surf revolution has also sparked great stores of home-grown creativity. It has drawn to this part of the island an artistic, culinary and entrepreneurial force not directly linked to the surf scene, opening out a new frontier crackling with a million-flowers-bloom energy not found in Colombo or along the Buddhist and tea trails. These include tea mogul Malik Fernando's Resplendent Ceylon and Reverie, two lines of boutique resorts where I delight in highly worked-up visions of Sri Lankan beauty—from a deep-tissue massage soundtracked by the muffled boom of the sea at the sublime Kayaam House to a dreamlike stay in a retro-futuristic canvas cocoon on the edge of a nature reserve at the Wild Coast

& Surf's founder Ed Templeton (also a former DJ from the UK), he's watched the local scene burgeon and given it a distinctive accent.

Sri Lanka had always attracted a small pool of surfers focused on the waves of Arugam Bay, the highly rated spot in the east of the island. Indeed, these hardy souls, largely indifferent to political and economic turbulence, were the mainstay of the tourist economy during the civil war that besmirched the lives of an entire generation from the 1980s onwards. Then, as tourism began to take off again after the end of the war in 2009, the south started to acquire a growing reputation, especially as a place where surfing beginners and intermediates could make progress. ("The waves are more forgiving here," explains Raff, "because the reef is only about two metres deep.") It also helped that surf season in the Sri Lankan south—unlike in Arugam Bay, where it starts in May—coincides with winter for so many potential visitors.

Around 2017, the scene really took off, sparked by reports on social media broadcasting the variety of breaks on offer: a lush sun-kissed landscape of swaying coconut trees, wild almond and pandanus; the charms of fresh seafood and thambilis on tap; and the growing number of establishments able to serve as one-stop portals to all the pleasures of this world. Soul & Surf, which started off as a pop-up surf camp, had already set down roots on its current site. And in 2018, Raff moved to Ahangama for good, both to ride and guide the

### The shared values are aquaphilia, mindfulness and multiculturalism: carpe-diem cool with an eco-warrior edge

Tented Lodge. And the beach town of Ahangama, formerly best known for its 19th-century Buddhist temple and stilt fishing, is now also home to Palm, a modernist A-frame jungle fantasy where, in the words of its owner Miriam Haniffa, "Shoreditch meets Sri Lanka".

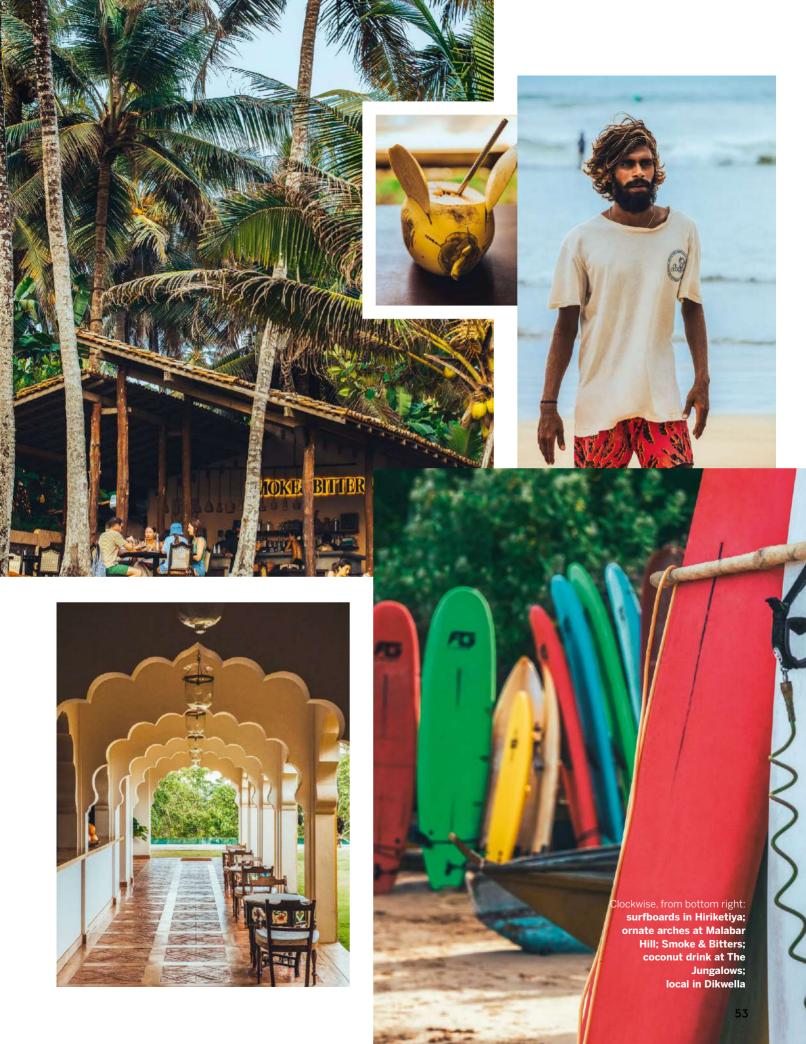
Meanwhile, the best cocktail bar and smokehouse in the region is not in Galle, the majestic Dutch colonial city that was historically the south's biggest draw. At Smoke & Bitters, in the jungly open air in the tiny village of Hiriketiya, Lahiru Perera and Don Ranasinghe direct boozy evenings of Ceylon arrack, silvertip-tea vermouth and house-made bitters alongside playful locavore food: "calamari" ingeniously concocted from coconut flesh, dragon-fruit ceviche and smoked jackfruit sandwiches. The region has, in one long breath, drawn a large, diverse cast of people who believe their best life is here.

Consider the case of Raffael Kably. I meet Raff one warm morning in his own kingdom: Soul & Surf, an eight-room B&B he is managing at the time of my visit (he has since left the establishment). On the edge of a blue cove in Ahangama, it is ringed by coconut trees and has its own little strip of beach. I imagined Raff would be Sri Lankan, but right away I place his Mumbai accent almost down to the exact postal code. We grew up, as it turns out, only a few kilometres apart in the western suburbs of the megapolis. But the similarities end there. Sea-suave in blue shorts and a crisp white half-sleeve shirt showing off his tattooed forearms, this former DJ and film producer is the consummate insider. In concert with Soul

wave. "After I surf in the morning, I find I just cruise through my day," he says. "I love setting up the same pleasure for others. Although here we're not just into 'surf, surf, surf'. We're after a more discriminating kind of surfer and traveller."

To that kind of traveller, establishments such as Dots Bay House in Hiriketiya, Soul & Surf and The Jungalows in Dikwella offer a community of like-minded people, a full menu of activity, pleasure and self-discovery, and an authentic connection to place. Here, the shared values are aquaphilia, mindfulness and multiculturalism—a kind of carpe-diem cool with an eco-warrior edge. Participants (guests seems too passive) are as likely to gather for beach clean-ups as sundowners. Soul & Surf has even come up with a manifesto of surfing as a way of life, which means caring for the planet, living in the present and practising blue health (the idea that being near water is good for you). Almost reads like a Dhammapada, or Buddhist scripture, for surfers, including the very meta idea of not taking surfing too seriously.

Not taking surfing too seriously, though, is not a notion that Shaggy can take seriously. Of all the interesting people I meet here, no one embodies the new ethos of this world more completely than this local surfing eminence. Shaggy—he seems to have jettisoned his birth name entirely—is smallbuilt, wiry and voluble, with a topknot (updos appear to be a mandatory styling choice among young Sri Lankan surf coaches), a smile to light up a concert hall and an Instagram account (@shaggy2557) where he strafes the smartphones of visitors with his best moves, sometimes in slow motion.







Shaggy received his first surfboard when he was seven years old, a present from a British tourist whose name, Gary Wills, he still remembers. "In the 1990s, we were 10 guys sharing a board, five waves each at a time," he says, in the lilting, long-vowelled English of the island. "We'd go surfing, then climb a coconut tree, drink up and go surfing again." Shaggy came of age perfectly in sync with the rising tides of the south, realising, even as many friends pondered emigration due to the island's economic downturn, that the world had started flowing towards him. He now runs a small, thriving operation called Shaggy's Surf School in the village of Midigama, close to five surf breaks with resonant names: Coconuts, Plantation, Ram's, Lazy Left and Lazy Right. "Playing cricket is a waste of time," he says with a scowl, demolishing the reigning passion of scores of his countrymen in one strike. "Me, I dream of the beach."

Over the days, I work out a way of shuttling between, even joining up, the bright new universe of the ocean rim and the older world that lies a few kilometres inland. (The border between the two is often very clear: the coastal railway line running south from Colombo to Beliatta). On the seaward side, behind the arcing silhouettes of coconut trees and the colourful rows of stacked surfboards in beach

shacks, are shoals of surfers gliding on a shimmering blue. On the landward side are women with parasols and school-children coasting on bicycles alongside emerald-green paddy fields that harbour a wealth of wetland birds: pond herons, darters, sunbirds.

The seaside is froth and laughter, bass beats and boot camps; faces flushed with excitement—delightful to contemplate in a country where pleasure and freedom have so often been shadowed by darkness and foreboding. Calling me inland are the undulating slopes of the Handunugoda Tea Estate; the giant statues in serene hilltop viharas, where the sun-baked stone scorches bare feet; and the conical towers of the Old Dutch Trade Centre in the market town of Matara. While many seaside villas are surrounded by sculptural frangipani, the Buddhist monasteries inland often exist among thoughtful banyan trees with rustling canopies.

And just like the low murmur of the sea is the gently coaxing voice of Douglas, conjuring up little nuggets of history as we coast, pointing suddenly to a shrine lit up in the sunshine or a bird hidden in a bower, the very embodiment of the goodness and grace that exists in so many people of this land. All they need is someone to listen.

#### THE SOUTH COAST STAYS

#### **GALLE**

The best places to stay are clustered in Galle Fort, the UNESCO-listed 16th-century peninsula south of town. History, romance and colonial grandeur emanate from each of the 11 suites in the Galle Fort Hotel, a 300-year-old Dutch mansion recently restored by renowned Sri Lankan architect Channa Daswatte. The Admiral Cheng Ho Suite, named after the great Ming Chinese admiral and regular Sri Lanka visitor, is a highlight with its antique opium bed and spiral staircase up to a sly soft level. Breakfasts (hoppers, curry, sambol, fresh fruit) are served beneath fragrant frangipani trees in a colonnaded courtyard, while drinks are taken on the long veranda facing the street. Just up Church Street, Amangalla is every bit as imperious in a beautiful 17th-century sandstone corner building. Even if you don't stay, it's worth visiting for the three tiers of high tea on the blue and yellow Portuguese-era tiles of the veranda. On a hilltop inland from Galle, the five-bedroom Villa Mine sits in its own 9,000 square

metres of undulating landscaped garden, with a hilltop dining pavilion, swimmable lake and pool among groves of mango, palm and rambutan.

#### WELIGAMA AND AHANGAMA

The south coast stretch with the widest portfolio of pleasure. Beside a turtle-friendly lagoon close to a surf break, the Ahangama outpost of the Soul & Surf brand (also in Kerala and the Algarve) sticks to a wellgrooved formula of sea-facing yoga, healthy communal meals and serious but beginner-friendly surf coaching with video analysis. Further inland at Malabar Hill, the arches and pillars of old Rajasthan have been audaciously reproduced amid 33 acres of hillside, with private pools and panoramic views in each highceilinged villa—and there are bird walks, nature trails and bike rides into the surrounding wetlands. In a former Ahangama coconut plantation given new life by ex-Shoreditch first-time hoteliers Laurie Spencer and Miriam Haniffa, Palm is equally serene,

but more future-facing, with six spacious black A-frame cabanas and two suites on stilts with butterfly chairs, outdoor showers and a sense of concrete-and-rattan tropical modernism.

#### HIRIKETIYA AND DIKWELLA

Around these surfing honeypots, the stays tend to be laid-back, surf-driven and eco-focusedfrom the thatched hut sand solar-powered showers of **The** Jungalows in Dikwella, which has an almost boot-camp approach to its surf teaching, to Dots Bay **House** in Hiriketiya, where Dots Surf Cafe serves great food and doubles as a workspace. The vibe is more secluded at Claughton House, a five-bedroom seaside villa on a coconut plantation, with chef and private butler. overlooking the pristine Kudawella Bay. Designed by the late Geoffrey Bawa, Sri Lanka's pre-eminent modernist, the space flows like an Indian Ocean breeze, right down to the infinity pool. With its pavilions and undulating terraces, Hiriketiya's alfresco cocktail

hotspot, Smoke & Bitters,

creates a flow state for wondrous Ceylon arrack, homemade bitters, and coconut-flesh calamari.

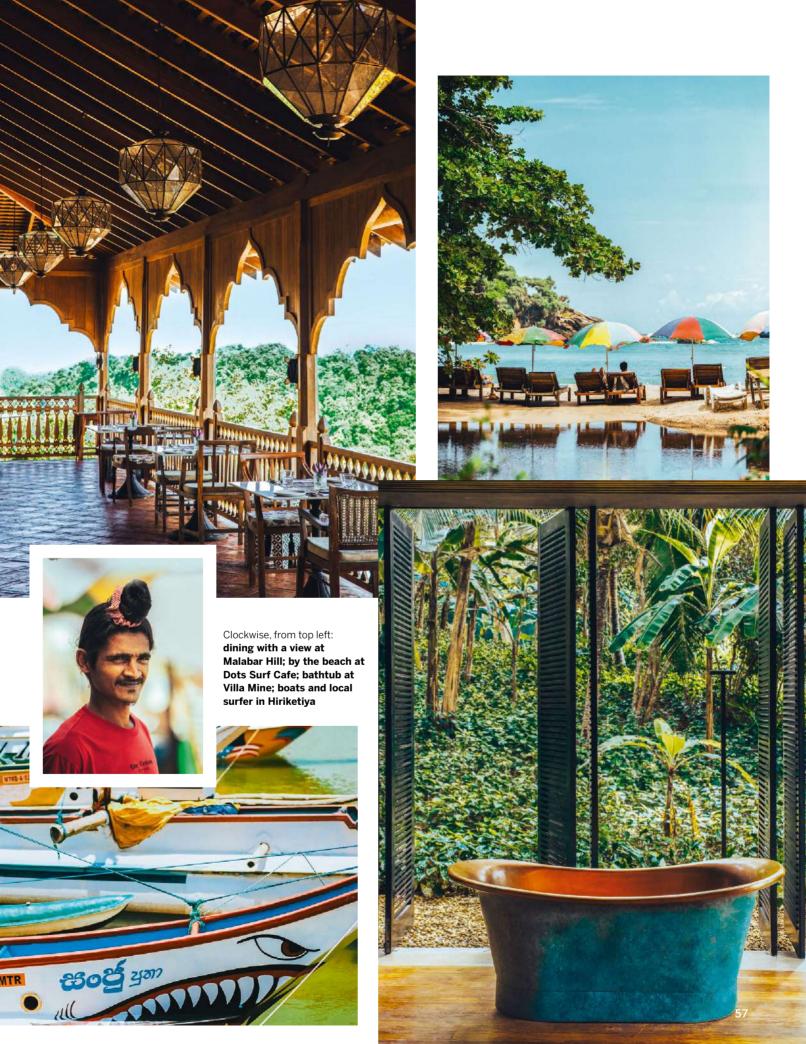
#### **TANGALLE AND YALA**

In Tangalle, east of Galle, the recently opened **Kayaam House** is a minimalist villa in white, blue and brick tones. The sound of the waves and the gurgle of cascading water radiate a monastic serenity, and the spa has a fine selection of hot-stone and deep-tissue massages. East of Tangalle in Yala National Park lies **Wild Coast** 

**Tented Lodge**: 28 giant pods set down on the ocean's edge with copper fittings, porthole windows, leather chairs and Bluetooth speakers to distract you from game drives in search of jaguars and elephants.

#### WHEN TO GO

Sri Lanka's heat cools down enough between December and April to make the south coast appealing. January and February offer the best waves for surfers. The monsoons from May to August and October to January are heavy, so plan any inland journeys accordingly.

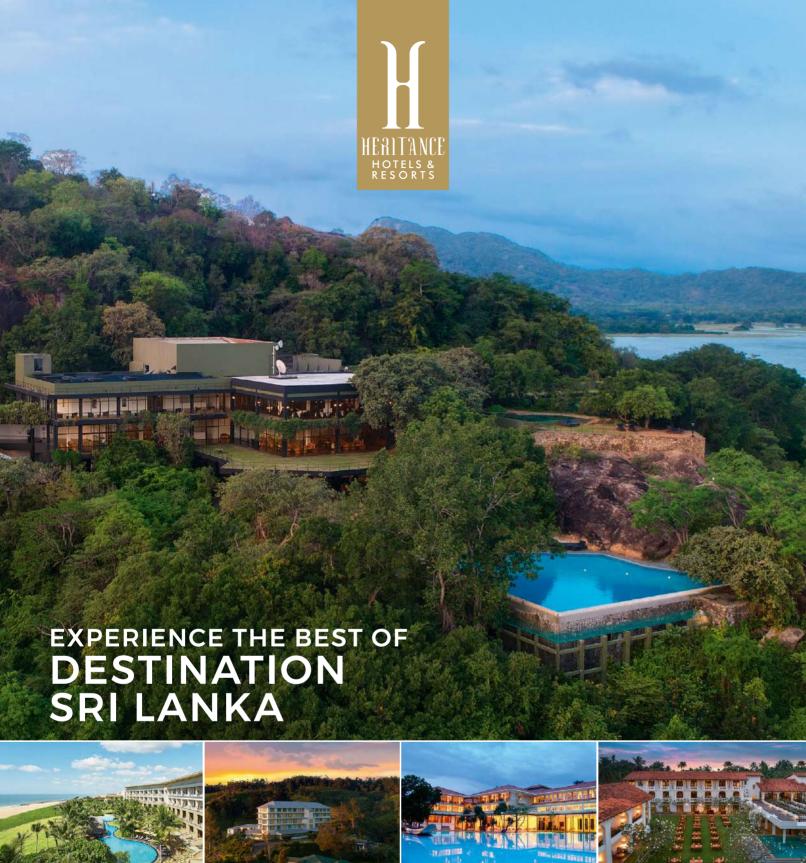


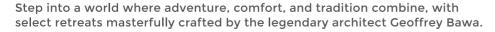
#### THE VIEW FROM HERE

#### Wild Coast Tented Lodge Yala National Park

This eco-retreat is a sparkling reflection of Sri Lanka's southeast, recognised by UNESCO for its sustainable design. Luxurious, cocoon-style tents (28 in all) swirl across the jungle and beach of this safari camp, prettily positioned around recycled watering holes that attract everything from peacocks and pelicans to wild boars and elephants. Together, they form the aerial figure of a leopard's paw print, the symbol of the Relais & Châteaux-accredited property's neighbour, Yala National Park. Beyond embracing the beauty of the surrounding bushland, it interacts with it, each suite offering jungle views, from panoramic vistas to bedroom portholes. Decked out in 'expedition chic', expect enduring elegance—handcrafted copper bathtubs, stretching four-poster beds, a saltwater infinity pool and private plunge pools. From game drives and guided nature walks to wilderness dining and beachside sundowners, with a wellness spa and library to boot, Wild Coast Tented Lodge allows guests to feast on the immense charm of Sri Lanka's backcountry. JULIAN MANNING (resplendentceylon.com; from ₹74,000 per Cocoon Suite)







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## GALLE STANDARD

There's Sri Lanka. And there's Sri Lanka with The Postcard Galle. The hotel is cocooned in a tropical retreat home to luxurious rooms and unforgettable experiences, including a transcendent Mangrove Boat Safari. Add anytime check-in, and check-out along with anytime breakfast, and you'll be sure to experience the very best of Sri Lanka at The Postcard Galle. See you soon.