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# COOKING UP A STORM

From learning to make your own orecchiette in Italy to mastering slow-cooked mutton curry in Sri Lanka, the best holidays combine relaxation with education



## SRI LANKA

Sri Lanka is one of the hottest destinations in Asia this year, with new hotels and restaurants opening with surprising regularity. If you want to delve a little deeper into the island's rich food heritage, however, we recommend a stay at Ulagalla, in north-central Sri Lanka. One of a small chain of hotels across the island, this one is well located for exploring the region's busy street markets but also provides a romantic and peaceful retreat to return to, with 19 secluded villas spread-out beside forests, paddy fields, rivers and lily ponds.

The kitchen gardens and restaurant are a big part of the resort's identity (all the rice and most of the vegetables served in the restaurant are grown on site). And, if you sign up for one of the resort's cookery classes you can pick up some useful tips between dips in the pool.

Classes start in the gardens, which are entered through an arch of passion fruit to find okra, fresh lemongrass and glossy purple chillies. Pick the produce you'll be cooking with, then enjoy a relaxed outdoor demonstration as local spices and Ulagalla's own coconut milk are added to dishes along with those just-picked vegetables – a perfect way to end a day, as you learn how to prepare each dish against the meditative chirrup and chimes of the forest.

**WHAT WE LEARNT** Slow-cooked, earthy mutton curry spiked with cinnamon, hot and sour aubergine, and fried okra with curry leaves and coconut milk were our favourite dishes that we learnt to cook here. As you pick the vegetables yourself, you see how big a part they play in the resulting flavours, much more so than you might imagine of a dish laced with turmeric and chilli

powder. We made the most of the surroundings, enjoying the fruits of our labour plated on lotus leaves picked from the garden, in the resort's atmospheric restaurant, a 150-year-old mansion. **DON'T MISS** Ulagalla can also arrange for you to head out on a tour of the food market in nearby Anuradhpura and be guided through stalls selling native herbs (mukunuwenna is one, used in local salads with grated coconut and onion), dried and salted fish, and more varieties of rice than you could imagine.

*Seven-night holidays in Sri Lanka, with one night in Colombo and six at Ulagalla Resort cost from £2,059 per person, including flights, transfers and b&b accommodation (kuoni.co.uk). Add-on cookery classes cost £30pp. More info: [srilanka.travel](http://srilanka.travel) »*

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