

words by Mairead Doohan

# Sri Lanka

## Teardrop Paradise

**One Coast Magazine explores the rolling plantations, spiritual sights and rugged coastline of the Pearl of the Indian Ocean.**

It's difficult to comprehend how much an island as small as Sri Lanka can offer; that it's possible for such a landmass to bestow a diversity of riches so vast. From its eight UNESCO World Heritage Sites, looming granite Buddha's, endless verdant tea plantations rainforests and parched lowlands; 2000 years of cultural heritage encircled by a palm fringed coastline and crashing waves, this resplendent island has stolen our hearts in a way I had forgotten was possible. One Coast Magazine began our epic journey with Classic Sri Lanka by travelling north from the colonial Colombo, stopping in the tranquil Marawila before continuing up to Anuradhapura to gaze upon one of South East Asia's most evocative stupas and marveling at 'The Gathering' of elephants in Minneriya. Next, traversing the middle of the island, we stopped at Kandy to immerse ourselves in Buddhist history before ascending the highlands to sample tea at its finest in Hatton. Finally we completed our tour through the arid plains of Yala National Park before savoring a crumbling Galle Fort backdrop in the south, as we watched the sun sink into the Indian Ocean. Throughout this journey, we have sought out the most uniquely indulgent residences for you; places where bespoke design and care are imbedded in to every detail; stays sure to excite even the most veteran of travelers.



### HORATHAPOLA ESTATE

Everything about this 1920's estate is subtle and elegant; design is suggested rather than shouted, the house appears at once so settled in its surroundings that it is impossible to imagine a time when it has not stood proudly in its spot within the 50 acre coconut farm. Horathapola whispers sophisticated chic in such a way as to have you believe there is no other option. The feeling here is not that you are staying at a hotel but that you are visiting a (very rich) uncle, the house instantly feels like your own. You totter down for breakfast in the sunlit dining room, lunch on the lawn in the shade of the stately frangipani tree and when feeling lazy curl up on the veranda rocking

chairs. Nowhere here feels off limits; the very phrase 'make yourself at home' is embedded into every concept. Service is flawlessly restrained and the two long-serving butlers a credit to this hotel. For your first taste of Sri Lankan dining, or indeed your middle, last or next, you could not arrive at a better place. The quality of selection and ingredients is astounding – a hearty mix of traditional dishes allow you to experience a wide range of what is on offer on this dazzling island. In all, a highly recommended accommodation to begin your trip.

[www.horathapola.com](http://www.horathapola.com)



### ULAGALLA RESORT

Part of the renowned Uga Escapes collection, and one of the Small Luxury Hotels of the World, our expectations were high when arriving, and the 150 year old mansion did not disappoint. After being initially welcomed with a memorable ceremony of incense lighting and gong bashing we were whisked off to our private villa amongst the 58 acre estate of rice paddies and jungle trees. The villas are a standout feature of this resort – finely detailed treasures allowing for complete autonomy and seclusion whilst having every luxury at your finger-tips. The activities offered are numerous and befitting the surroundings – kayak along the edge of the jungle to glimpse hornbills, monkeys and even the occasional trundling elephant or take a horse ride out to the local villages, seeing

first-hand how many people in Sri Lanka still live and work in rural areas. We opted for a private cooking course at the on-site organic vegetable garden where the chef assists you in selecting the freshest ingredients before whisking you through a virtual tour of Sri Lankan delicacies all prepared, with your help, in an authentic clay house and open fire. For a true experience of Sri Lankan cuisine this is highly endorsed. However, do not feel that your stay at Ulagalla must be filled with such occupations – hours can be happily idled away in the main ancestral house, once home to local chieftains, or reclining by the blissfully flower bordered Olympic sized pool.

[www.ugaescapes.com/ulagalla](http://www.ugaescapes.com/ulagalla)



### THE KANDY HOUSE

Perhaps the most historic accommodation we visited, this Walawwa (ancestral manor house) was first built in 1804 and has been restored with unbelievable attention to detail and authenticity. The nine custom design rooms showcase antique marvels and boast private verandas, perfect for resting tired legs after touring Kandy town. Assisting in total relaxation is your private butler, who is on hand to cater to your every need throughout your stay; be that a pot of tea in the library or a refreshing arak cocktail on the sun-drenched courtyard. Ambling down to the jungle-enclosed pool through the beautifully refurbished bar and dining areas, we felt a million miles away from the busy main road outside. The pool itself is a remarkable feature of the hotel, surrounded on 3 sides by lush towering trees brimming with tropical birds and overlooking sprawling paddy fields. At dusk, Kandy House is transformed, sprinkled with enchanting white lights hidden amongst the trees, butlers descend with an array of fine dining options, each with a unique Sri Lankan twist. Request a private dining experience on the patio to fully absorb the calm composure of this remarkable house.

[www.thekandyhouse.com](http://www.thekandyhouse.com)



### CEYLON TEA TRAILS

One of the most memorable stops on our tour was visiting Tea Trails, the world's first bungalow resort – although I feel that simply calling these five immaculately restored colonial-era tea planters' 'bungalows' does not do them justice. As Sri Lanka's first Relais & Chateaux resort, Tea Trails had high standards to achieve, but thankfully for its guests it has exceeded beyond measure. The picturesque town of Hatton in the verdant Ceylon tea region where they lie, borders the World Heritage Central Highlands and inspires from arrival. A slash of mirrored silver slices through the green, only disturbed by the slow brush of an oar on the lake or the occasional seaplane. The five uniquely-styled bungalows are connected with scenic walking trails offering hours of daily exploration. Breakfast in Dunkeld; taking in the early morning light over this breathtaking vista from the newest and most striking bungalow. Wander to the high colonial Tientsin, one of the first planter's residences to be built in Ceylon in 1888 and famed for its spotlessly preserved rose gardens brimming with British flowers. Next it's onto the stately Summerville, which stands sentinel above the valley, for your custom-prepared lunch. The imposing colonial-style furniture at Norwood bungalow makes it the ideal setting for your afternoon, sit aside the croquet lawn to indulge in a delicately made High Tea experience. Finally, end your evening in the elegant Castlereagh bungalow, nestled in a wooded dell close to the water; this bungalow offers unrivaled views across the valley. Allow yourself to evoke the lives of the tea planters as you relax with a tippie of your choice in the cozily, fire-lit drawing room. Hatton is a world away from the vivacious Colombo or the culturally dense Kandy, but a world certainly not to be missed.

[www.resplendentceylon.com/teatrails](http://www.resplendentceylon.com/teatrails)



### LEOPARD TRAILS

Having never experienced a safari, Yala National Park, the most visited and second largest in Sri Lanka, seemed a great place to start. With one of the highest leopard densities in the world, the chances of seeing one of these rare creatures is high here, although not guaranteed. Notwithstanding the main draw, the additional variety of wildlife within the park is also noteworthy – guides proudly boast of its 215 bird species, including six endemic species, sloth bears, elephant herds and crocodiles that even a novice like myself can't help but admire. If these sightings aren't enough to lure you to Yala, the bespoke, luxury tents at Leopard Trails certainly will. Proudly redefining camping, all tents are equipped with electricity, air conditioning, hot and cold showers and designed with care and attention – undoubtedly more 'glamping' than camping. In the evening, guests come together around the open fire pit to stargaze and sip on drinks before moving on to enjoy gourmet dining amongst the wilderness and share their sightings from the day. An exceptional combination of adventure and luxury, Leopard Trails safari experience is a welcome addition to any Sri Lankan tour.

[www.leopardtrails.com](http://www.leopardtrails.com)



### CAPE WELIGAMA

After spending much of our time in the jungle and highlands, it was a refreshing treat to first glimpse the crashing waves of Sri Lanka's palm-fringed south coast. Perched on the south-west corner of the island, Cape Weligama by Resplendent Ceylon, the second Relais and Chateaux resort on the island, inhabits 12 impeccably manicured acres atop a 40m rock face, allowing for 270° panoramic views along the rugged coastline of the Indian Ocean. An iconic collection of 39 private retreats designed by one of Asia's most celebrated architects, Lek Bunnag. Villa design is immaculate, a clear cut above in an already competitive market. High-tech sound systems, steam room showers and private pool gardens tempt you back. Venturing out has its rewards – the 60m crescent-shaped infinity pool disappears over the edge along with your breath. Indulge in a glass of Pimm's with croquet on the lawn or indulge in Dilmah's finest high tea or cocktails in the Taylor Pavilion. In the evening, there is a vibrant selection of East to West menus and dining options, ranging from Rouge, their upmarket steak house, to Kumbuk with traditional Sri Lankan buffet and not to be overlooked Pola (fish market) where you can select freshly caught fish to be cooked to order in De Mauny restaurant.

[www.resplendentceylon.com/capeweligama](http://www.resplendentceylon.com/capeweligama)



### FORT BAZAAR

Some hotels strive for luxury others aim for style and flair, but few can accomplish effortless chic like the Fort Bazaar. From the cushions to the cutlery the hotel emits graceful elegance in a way that is not easily achieved. A renovated town house, this 18 bedroom masterpiece sits around a large courtyard a mere stone's throw from the hustle and bustle of Galle's cobbled streets. When wandering down to the fort's walls at sunset, it is impossible to not immerse yourself in the lively kite-flying, cricketing and strolling of the local families as they flock to the sea line to enjoy the cool of the day. Along the winding streets, roof-top restaurants, dainty tea shops and vivid gem traders are nestled amongst 300 year old buildings; charisma and style evident everywhere in this small town. When you tire of exploring, the hotel is an oasis of calm boasting a newly added luxury spa and private cinema room to allow total escape and relaxation, an atmosphere which is reflected through every part of this distinctive accommodation. It is also the home to the highly acclaimed Christ Street Social restaurant; a vibrant eatery where the food reflects the history of its locale through a mix of Moroccan, Turkish and Middle Eastern cuisine.

[www.teardrop-hotels.com/fort-bazaar](http://www.teardrop-hotels.com/fort-bazaar)

### UGA RESIDENCE

Built in the 19th century by Sheikh Salehboy Moosajee, the Residence is one of the few remaining buildings of its kind, and unique to Colombo, Sri Lanka's capital. Originally a notable family home this grand Victorian house, with great halls, expansive gardens and elaborate stables once welcomed British governors, Indian maharajas, European nobility and the cream of colonial Ceylon society. Today, the residence still emits this timeless air of indulgence and charm. The eleven luxury suites are furnished with precision allowing the rich history of the building to shine through. Private courtyards are finished with an inviting swimming pool and sundeck - the design providing an air of peaceful calm away from the balmy hustle outside. Although Colombo possesses many significant dining experiences do not overlook the in-house restaurant Rare at Residence. Renowned for its fusion style and imaginative presentation, dishes are creative with an emphasis on Sri Lankan ingredients. Well known throughout the city and a much coveted dining spot. Without doubt, a perfect base from which to discover Colombo.

[www.ugaescapes.com/residence](http://www.ugaescapes.com/residence)



### CLASSIC SRI LANKA

With a wealth of experience in overseas tours, Classic Sri Lanka have recently begun to focus their efforts and expertise closer to home. Led by locals Riaz Cader and Rajiv Welikala, this renowned destination management company are experts at tailor-made holidays. Passionate about travel, their team have covered the length and breadth of Sri Lanka to seek out creative and unique experiences for clients. In our communications, all queries were handled swiftly and with ease, assuring us that we were in safe hands. Classic Sri Lanka have worked hard to avoid the common tour company pit-falls – our driver, Sunil, for example was friendly, knowledgeable and punctual. We couldn't have asked for a better personal guide. Similarly, great lengths were taken to personalise our itinerary with resorts and excursions picked in line with our requests and not merely given as standard. With their unrivaled understanding of Sri Lanka's main attractions and insider know-how on the best and most unique accommodation, you would be crazy to trust your trip to anyone else.

[www.classicsrilanka.com](http://www.classicsrilanka.com)  
[contact@classicsrilanka.com](mailto:contact@classicsrilanka.com)



### WHERE TO EAT..

### MINISTRY OF CRAB, COLOMBO

For decades Sri Lankan crabs, thought to be the best in the world, have been a highlight on menus all over...everywhere that is except Sri Lanka. In 2011 celebrated chef Dharshan Munidasa, decided to rectify this situation, teaming up with cricketing legends Mahela Jayawardane and Kumar Sangakkara, to create the Ministry of Crab. The restaurant, housed in a renovated 400 year old Dutch Hospital, aims to promote and reflect the distinctive bounty of the island, and is now ranked on Asia's 50 Best Restaurants. Sri Lankan lagoon crabs; already a breed apart in size and taste; are moreish beyond belief when served with Darshan's signature flavours - try the Garlic Chilli for a real treat. Other dishes include a delectable Claypot Prawn Curry and mouth-wateringly good, butter and soya sauce Clams. Try to save some space for desert though, their unique Coffee Jelly should not be missed!

[www.ministryofcrab.com](http://www.ministryofcrab.com)  
[reservations@ministryofcrab.com](mailto:reservations@ministryofcrab.com)

