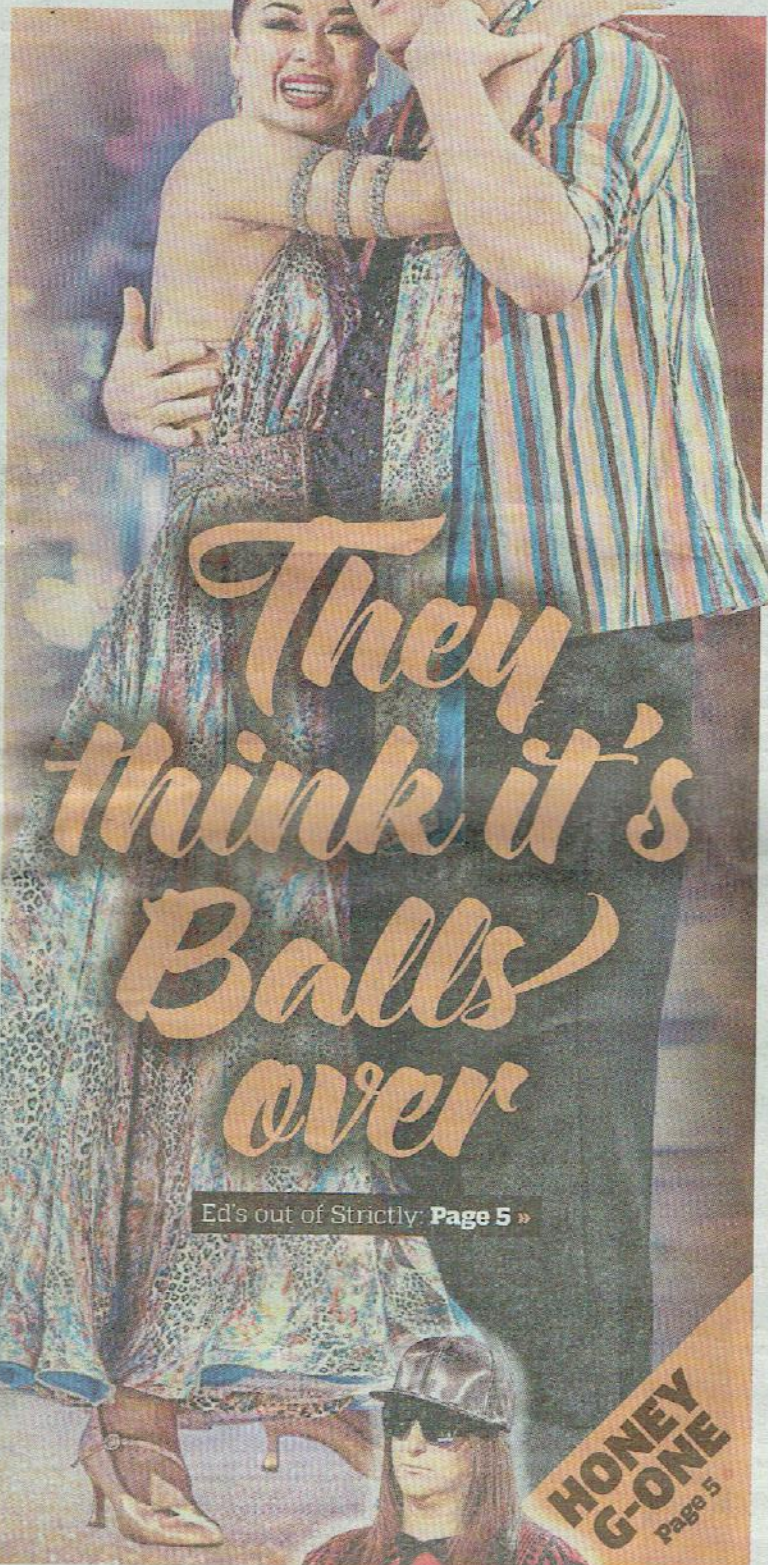


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They think it's Balls over

Ed's out of Strictly **Page 5** »

HONEY G-GONE
 Page 5



NICO NICKS IT

Rosberg is crowned F1 world champion **Pages 66-67** »

SUICIDE IN JAIL EVERY 3 DAYS

A PRISONER is committing suicide every three days in an 'epidemic' fuelled by overcrowding and budget cuts, campaigners have warned.

Some 102 inmates have killed themselves this year, the most since the current recording method began in 1978, revealed the Howard League for Penal Reform. It means the suicide rate in

by **NICOLE LE MARIE**

prisons is ten times higher than it is among the general UK population.

'Cutting staff and prison budgets while allowing

Continued on **Page 4** »

PLUS



SLEEPLESS NIGHTS AT No. 10 OVER BREXIT
Page 7 »



OH WHAT A KNIGHT! HOW BEATRICE CUT UP SHEERAN
Page 9 »



60 SECONDS WITH DOMINIC WEST
Page 18 »

EMAIL FROM AMERICA

END OF CASTRO, BUT NOT THE REGIME

sky NEWS

Cordelia Lynch

Page 13 »



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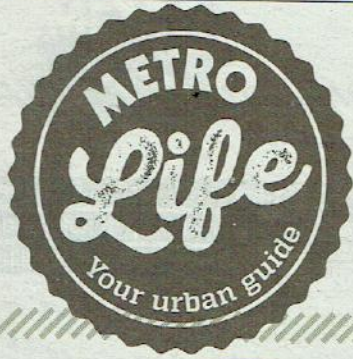
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Escape

TRAVEL SECTION OF THE YEAR



SIGHTSOUT

Why one writer has had an Eiffel of tourist spots

Page 37 »



Infinity and beyond: Chena Huts (above) is based on traditional farmers huts. Below, tranquillity at Tri hotel



Top spot: The view and pampering (main picture) at The Owl & The Pussycat. Below, a Yala National Park resident



Sri Lanka goes

SOPHISTICATED

Medicine men and a lakeside paradise await
Lisa Scott in the reinvented backpacker mecca

I'm told this is a spiritual cleansing usually preferred by locals.

We're in front of a metre-high shrine, which Rathnasiri carved from the trunk of a banana tree this morning. Next to him is a smaller shrine filled with white jasmine flowers, which

represent a fundamental Buddhist belief that all things living, no matter how beautiful, will eventually perish. I quickly fall into a trance as Rathnasiri chants hypnotically in Sanskrit while squeezing limes, an act that apparently absorbs negative energy. This spiritual spring

clean is a new offering from bespoke holiday specialist Experience Travel Group, which says that Sri Lanka, much loved for its 'India-light' qualities, is having a 'real moment'.

The island has attracted many tourists since the end of the civil war in 2009, but this year Experience reports a whopping 66 per cent year-on-year rise in bookings. It puts this surge down

Continued on: **Page 34** »

DESPITE Sri Lanka's many wellness retreats, I've opted for a grittier introduction to the island's famous remedial magic. I'm sitting cross-legged on the dusty floor of the palm-fringed Wakwella village, while a man with the whitest of hair and the bluest of eyes taps my head with a metal nut cutter.

Rathnasiri is a medicine man and, although I don't entirely understand what's going on,

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Sweet south: A stroll from The Owl & The Pussycat hotel and, below, the local wildlife

Monkeys play under ocean skies

» Continued from Page 33

to more sophisticated hotels opening across the island – especially here in the south which, until now, was known for beaches and backpackers.

The Owl & The Pussycat hotel (otphotel.com), a kaleidoscope of colour, is one of the openings leading this new charge. The 17-room seaside spot is a short tuk tuk ride from the gallery-filled Galle Fort and, quite unusually, hopes to entice young Sri

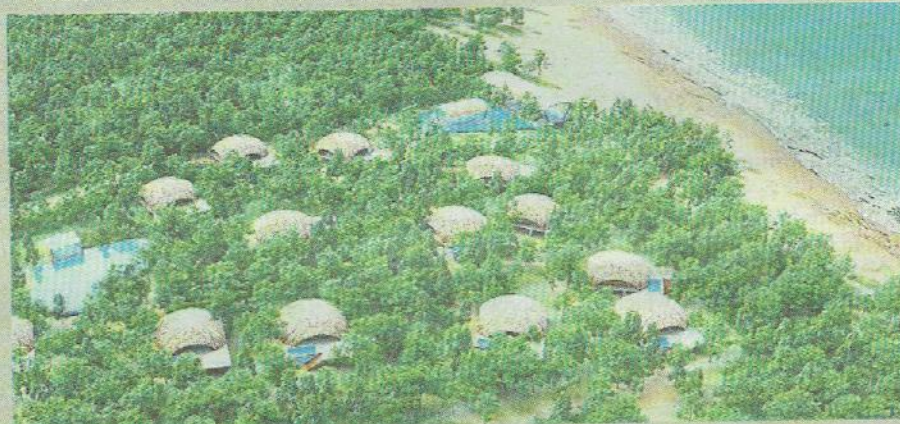
I forgo a second cocktail, knowing I'm booked for a 7am hotel yoga class. Perhaps my cleansing worked...

Lankans as well as tourists. Art is the hotel's secret weapon, owner Reita Gadkari tells me, as we eat spicy sambal and meaty para fish. 'I've employed over 20 artists from Italy, London, France, India and Turkey, who come here and teach local artists how to make replica pieces,' she says, describing bird of paradise print cushions and canvasses that were once sacks for tea leaves. 'We want to install confidence in the local artisan scene and create a glamorous place for guests and locals to hang out,' she says. When the sun sinks, I sit at the

Colour, palate: Rooms and food at The Owl & The Pussycat (above)

twinkling bar and sip a cocktail made with arrack, the local firewater, and stare out at the moody Indian Ocean. I forgo a second, knowing I'm booked for a 7am hotel yoga class. Perhaps my cleansing worked...

The Owl & The Pussycat is a busy spot so for those feeling antisocial, Reita has recently acquired a spit of sandy land surrounded by the Indian Ocean that guests can book privately. If you're after a little more solitude,



CREATURE COMFORTS IN YALA NATIONAL PARK

THREE hours into my early-morning leopard hunt, I spot striking gold and brown markings close to the jungle floor. Unfortunately, they don't belong to a big cat but a star tortoise, which boasts a shell marked with star shapes. I'm in south Sri Lanka's Yala National Park, home to one of the highest densities of leopard population in the world and the new, all-inclusive Chena Huts hotel from Uga Escapes. Its 14 thatched huts, linked by an elevated wooden path, are modelled on

traditional farmers huts – but that is where the comparison ends. Inside, I find a huge platform bed, a stand-alone bath, plunge pool and, on my doorstep, a lagoon and wild bush frequented by boar, deer, water buffalo and, if I squint, a crocodile. To ensure animals are given their space, Yala is formed of five blocks and just two are currently open to the public. If I was a smart leopard, I know which blocks I'd pad around in. From £530 per night, ugaescapes.com



From £3,296 per person for a nine-night trip staying at The Owl & The Pussycat, Tri and Chena Huts, including international flights with Sri Lankan Airlines, transfers and ETG signature experiences. experience travelgroup.com

I'd suggest driving 30 minutes inland, past stalls selling coconuts and buffalo curd-filled terracotta pots, to the new 11-suite Tri hotel (trilanka.com).

In a bold move, its owners, British photographer Rob Drummond and his yoga-instructor wife Lara Baumann, have turned their backs on the south's famous beaches, preferring the wild Koggala Lake as their backdrop.

The design of the six-acre hotel, which strives to realign guests with nature, is inspired by the curves of the Fibonacci sequence, a mathematical formula repeatedly found in nature. I can see its elegant arch in the main path, which spirals and spirals, ending at a cinnamon wood-clad Water Tower, home to three cheaper cabins.

I wake at dawn as the sun shines through my vine-draped suite's white curtains and spend the day visiting a cinnamon plantation, meditating in front of the lake and dipping in the hotel's 21m infinity pool accompanied only by a local dragonfly. Later, after a meal of miso butterfish and lake prawns, I climb to the top of the water tower, sip a beer and stare out at an indescent pink sky.

I'm hypnotised once again, this time by a large monkey who swings majestically from the branches of the dark jungle canopy.

These pioneering hotels may coax us to the middle of the Indian Ocean but Sri Lanka does the rest.



Hosts: Lara Baumann and Rob Drummond run the lakeside Tri hotel