

HOUSE & GARDEN DESTINATIONS

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ZIMBABWE IS BACK

and unveiling **MAGICAL** *new lodges*

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Wild at heart

SRI LANKA'S EAST COAST IS A CAPTIVATING, UNEXPLORED GEM, SAYS *PAMELA GOODMAN*

Since the end of the civil war, new areas of Sri Lanka have been emerging on the tourist map. The northern city of Jaffna – the island's bastion of Hindu tradition and culture – is now accessible, while to the east a swathe of exquisite coastline is catching the eye of travellers and developers alike.

The rule of thumb has always been that the south and west of Sri Lanka is best visited between January and May, and the north and east from June to September, in accordance with monsoon patterns. However, James Jayasundera, who runs Sri Lankan specialist tour operator Ampersand Travel, will tell you that, with the exception of mid-October to mid-December when the rains are at their worst, Sri Lanka is, in fact, a year-round destination and July and August are when the island as a whole is at its best.

For a 10 to 14 day trip James recommends taking in the cultural sights of Kandy, Anuradhapura, Sigirya and Polonnaruwa with perhaps a day trip from the latter to Minneriya National Park, home to the largest collection of elephants in South East Asia, culminating on the east coast for some beach time. Unlike the west or south-west coastline, there are no busy roads or railway lines, the sand is blindingly white, shallow and wide, and azure water makes for perfect swimming. Decent accommodation is still thin on the ground, but the best is Jungle Beach (ugaescapes.com), just north of Trincomalee, where 48 cabins are set between a lagoon and the ocean. Or, on Pasikuda Bay, Amaya Beach Resort (amayabeach.com), designed by Sri Lankan architect Philip Weeraratne, a natural successor to Geoffrey Bawa. Getting back to Colombo is easy as Cinnamon Air, which offers a brilliant seaplane taxi service around the island, can zip guests to the capital or to Tea Trails, Galle and the south, should they choose to stay a little longer. **D**

ESSENTIALS

HOW Ampersand Travel (020-7819 9770; ampersandtravel.com) offers 10 to 14-day holidays in Sri Lanka from £3,550pp including international and domestic flights, private transfers, car hire, driver and guiding.

