

# Travel Counsellors and Turkish Airlines Fam Trip to Sri Lanka

NEWS  
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## SARAH SLATTERY

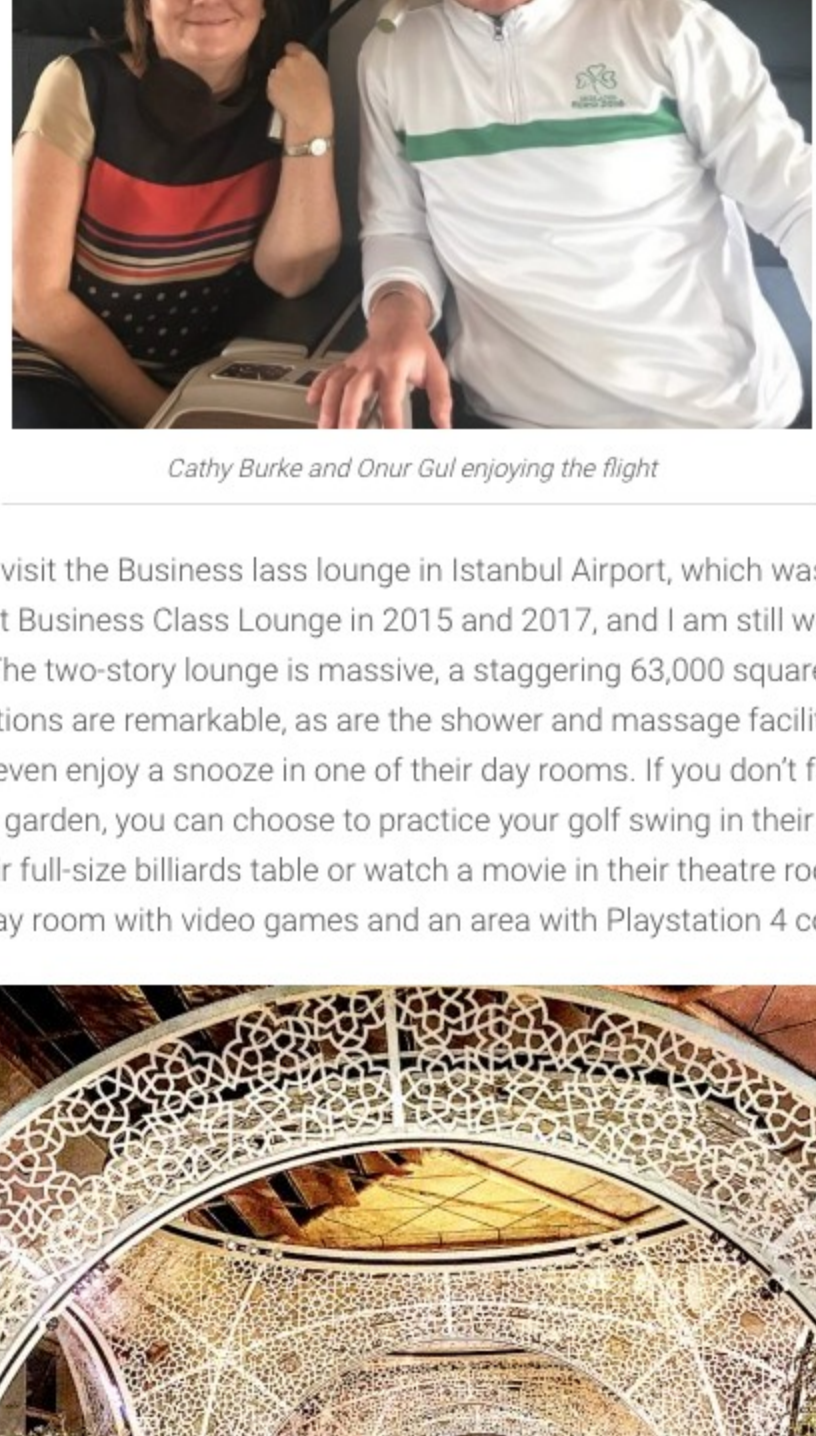
Sarah Slattery has been in the travel industry for the past 24 years, initially as a sales consultant and progressed to sales and marketing director of Skytours. Sarah's experience and knowledge led to a regular slot on TV3 as the travel expert on the Morning Show. She has her own blog [www.thetravelexpert.ie](http://www.thetravelexpert.ie) which offers advice on destinations and the best travel deals.

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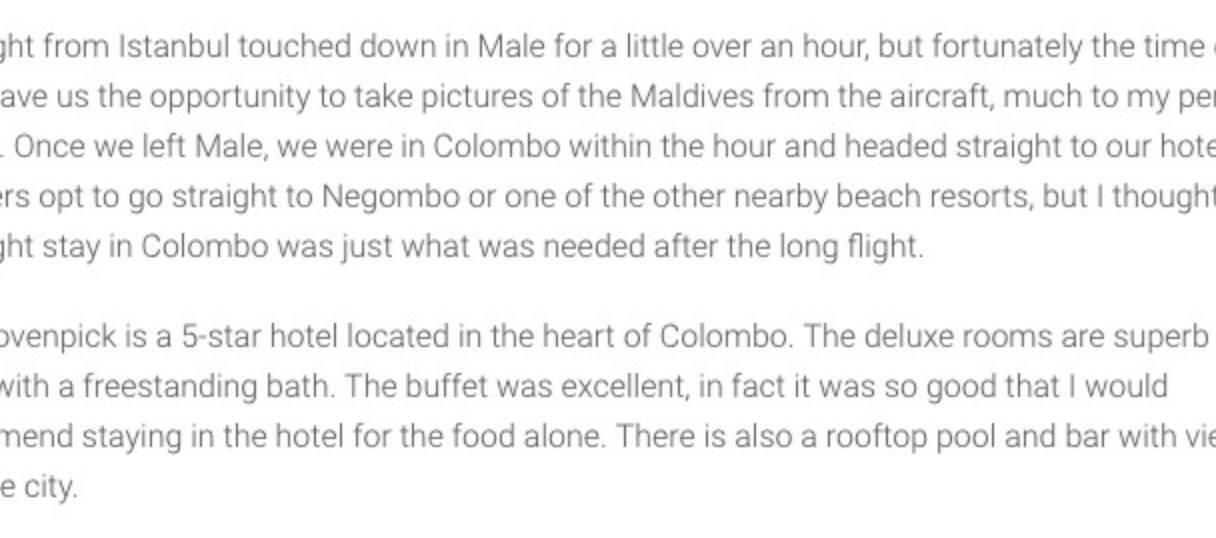
**We climbed mountains, saw herds of elephants, swam in the Indian Ocean and stayed in 5-star hotels. Sarah Slattery joined the Travel Counsellors and Turkish Airlines Fam trip to see the highlights of Sri Lanka.**

I was delighted to be asked to accompany eight Travel Counsellors and Onur Gul from Turkish Airlines, to explore this diverse country in South East Asia, that coincidentally is the same size as Ireland. We flew with Turkish Airlines via Istanbul – it was my first time to fly with the airline and I was duly impressed. The attentive staff, including their famous flying chef, were on hand throughout our flight, supplying us with copious amounts of drinks and plenty of snacks. Entertainment was top class too, on the short-haul and long-haul flights. After we solved all the problems in the travel industry, the ear phones went in and we watched one of the many movies on demand.



Cathy Burke and Onur Gul enjoying the flight

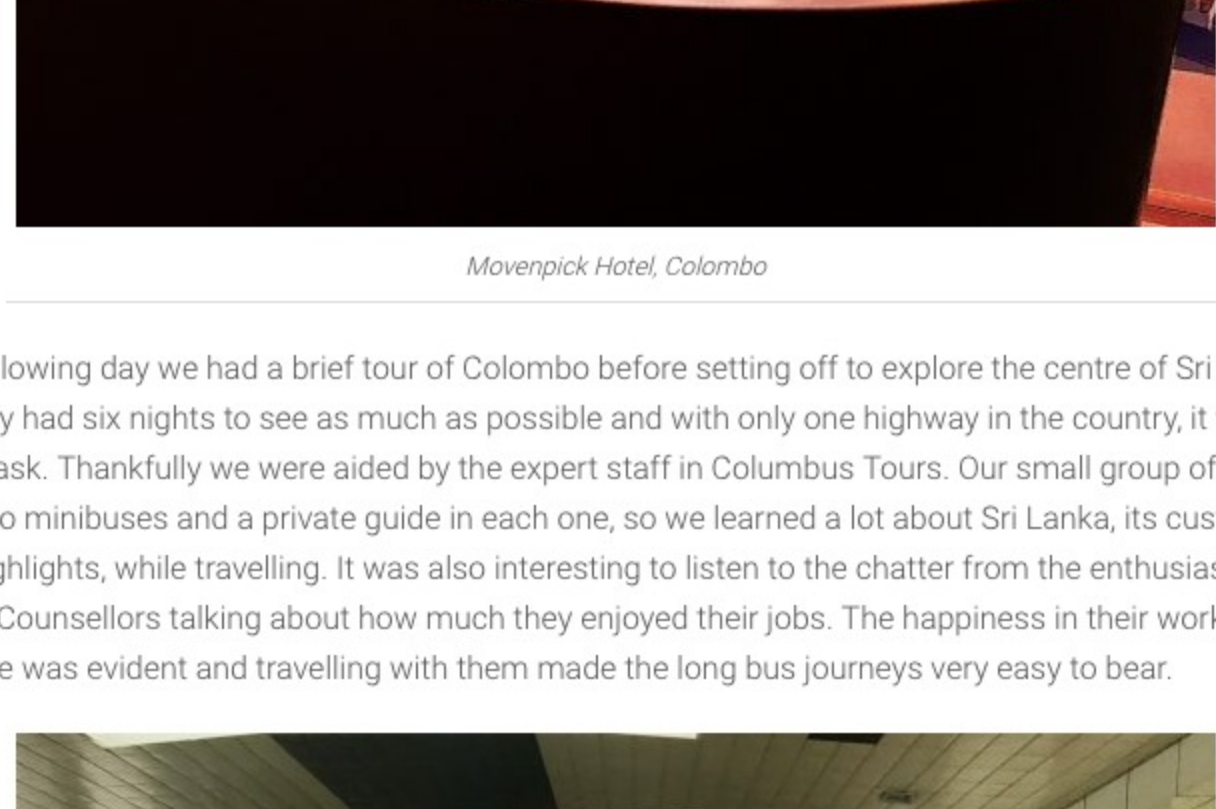
We were fortunate to visit the Business class lounge in Istanbul Airport, which was outstanding. It was voted the World's Best Business Class Lounge in 2015 and 2017, and I am still wondering why they didn't win it in 2016. The two-story lounge is massive, a staggering 63,000 square feet! The selection of bars and dining options are remarkable, as are the shower and massage facilities. If you have a long layover you can even enjoy a snooze in one of their day rooms. If you don't fancy some quiet time in their library or olive garden, you can choose to practice your golf swing in their golf simulator, enjoy a game of pool in their full-size billiards table or watch a movie in their theatre room. There is also a separate children's play room with video games and an area with Playstation 4 consoles for teenagers.



Turkish Airlines Business Class Lounge, Istanbul

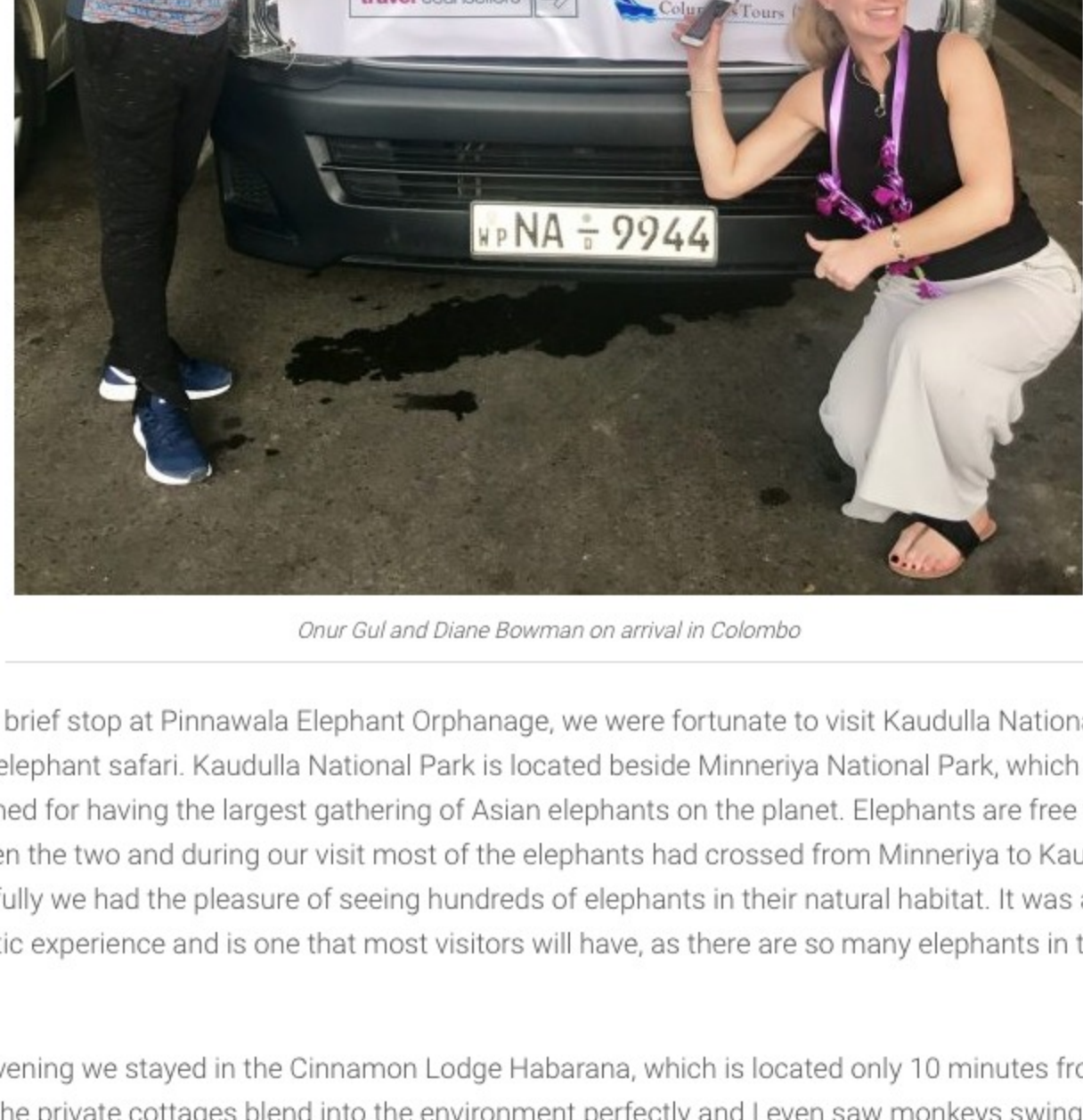
The flight from Istanbul touched down in Male for a little over an hour, but fortunately the time of the flight gave us the opportunity to take pictures of the Maldives from the aircraft, much to my personal delight. Once we left Male, we were in Colombo within the hour and headed straight to our hotel. Many travellers opt to go straight to Negombo or one of the other nearby beach resorts, but I thought our overnight stay in Colombo was just what was needed after the long flight.

The Movenpick is a 5-star hotel located in the heart of Colombo. The deluxe rooms are superb and come with a freestanding bath. The buffet was excellent, in fact it was so good that I would recommend staying in the hotel for the food alone. There is also a rooftop pool and bar with views over the city.



Movenpick Hotel, Colombo

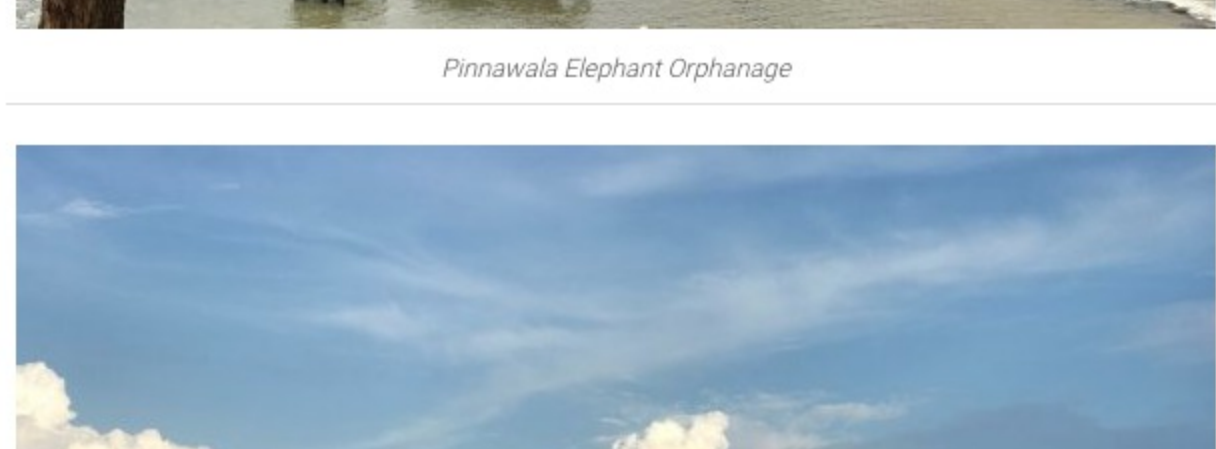
The following day we had a brief tour of Colombo before setting off to explore the centre of Sri Lanka. We only had six nights to see as much as possible and with only one highway in the country, it was a tough ask. Thankfully we were aided by the expert staff in Columbus Tours. Our small group of nine had two minibuses and a private guide in each one, so we learned a lot about Sri Lanka, its customs and highlights, while travelling. It was also interesting to listen to the chatter from the enthusiastic Travel Counsellors talking about how much they enjoyed their jobs. The happiness in their work/life balance was evident and travelling with them made the long bus journeys very easy to bear.



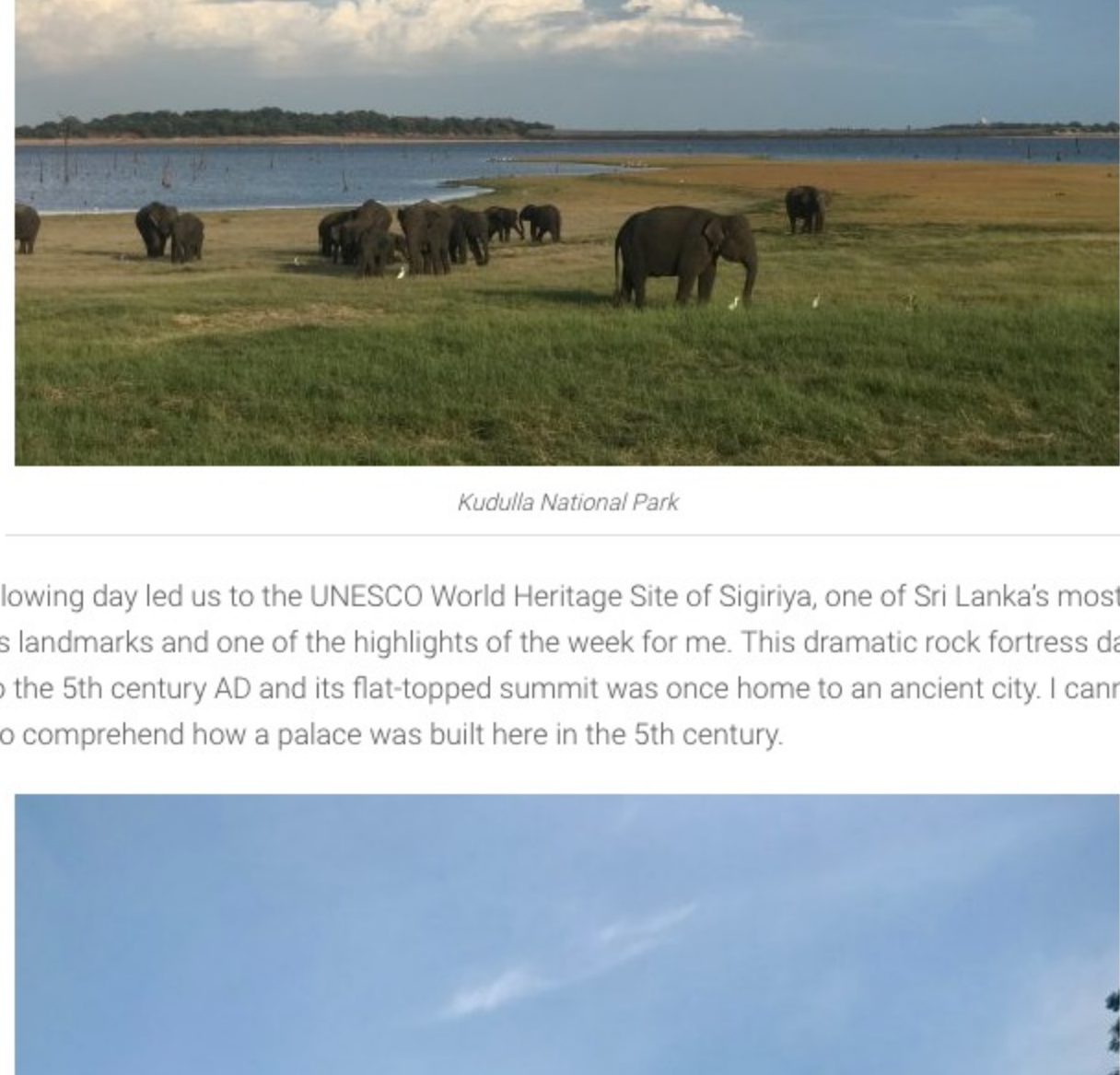
Onur Gul and Diane Bowman on arrival in Colombo

After a brief stop at Pinnawala Elephant Orphanage, we were fortunate to visit Kaudulla National Park for an elephant safari. Kaudulla National Park is located beside Minneriya National Park, which is renowned for having the largest gathering of Asian elephants on the planet. Elephants are free to roam between the two and during our visit most of the elephants had crossed from Minneriya to Kaudulla. Thankfully we had the pleasure of seeing hundreds of elephants in their natural habitat. It was a fantastic experience and is one that most visitors will have, as there are so many elephants in the area.

That evening we stayed in the Cinnamon Lodge Habarana, which is located only 10 minutes from the park. The private cottages blend into the environment perfectly and I even saw monkeys swinging from the trees outside my bedroom.

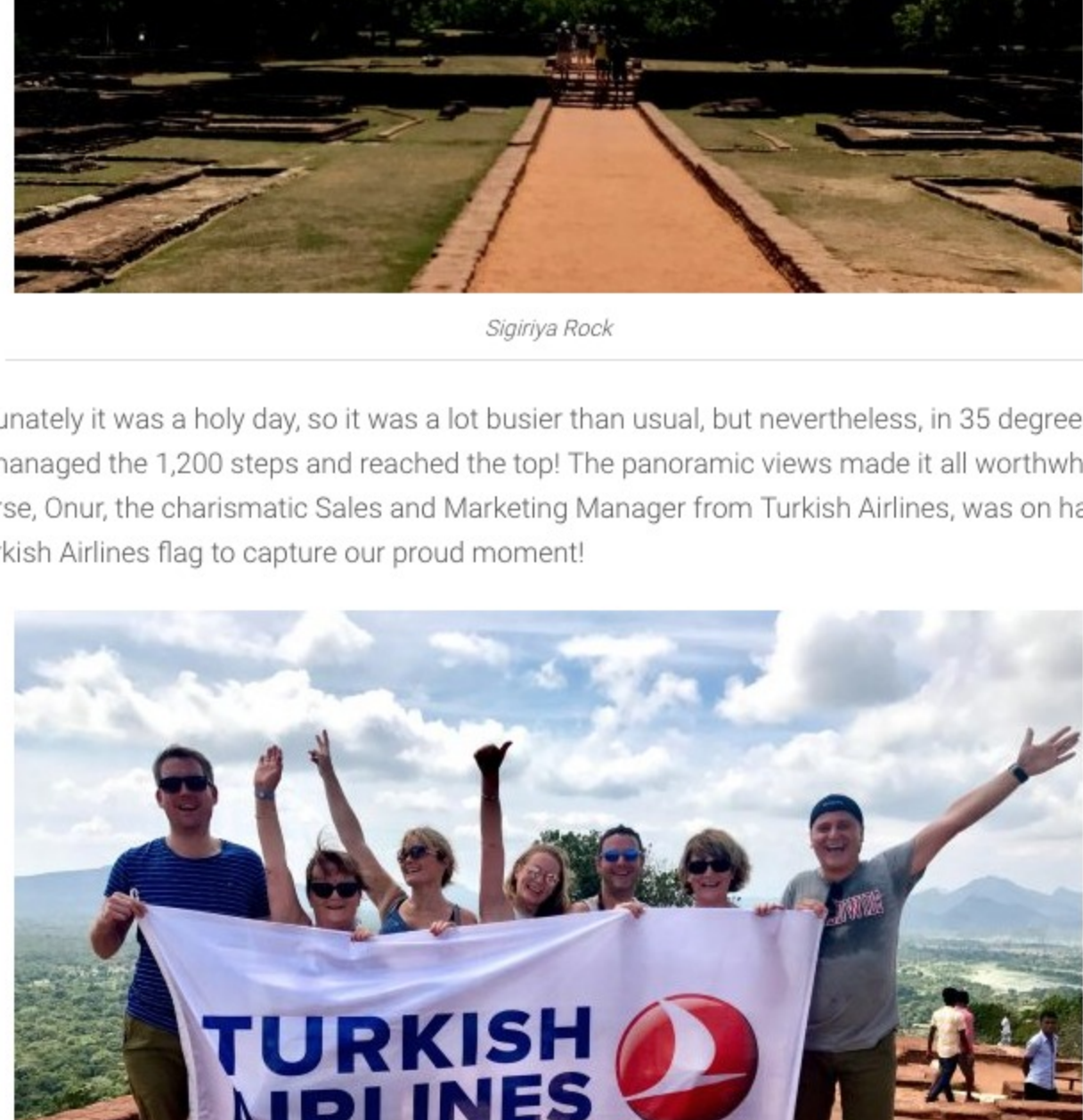


Pinnawala Elephant Orphanage



Kudulla National Park

The following day led us to the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Sigiriya, one of Sri Lanka's most famous landmarks and one of the highlights of the week for me. This dramatic rock fortress dates back to the 5th century AD and its flat-topped summit was once home to an ancient city. I cannot begin to comprehend how a palace was built here in the 5th century.



Sigiriya Rock

Unfortunately it was a holy day, so it was a lot busier than usual, but nevertheless, in 35 degrees, most of us managed the 1,200 steps and reached the top! The panoramic views made it all worthwhile and, of course, Onur, the charismatic Sales and Marketing Manager from Turkish Airlines, was on hand with the Turkish Airlines flag to capture our proud moment!

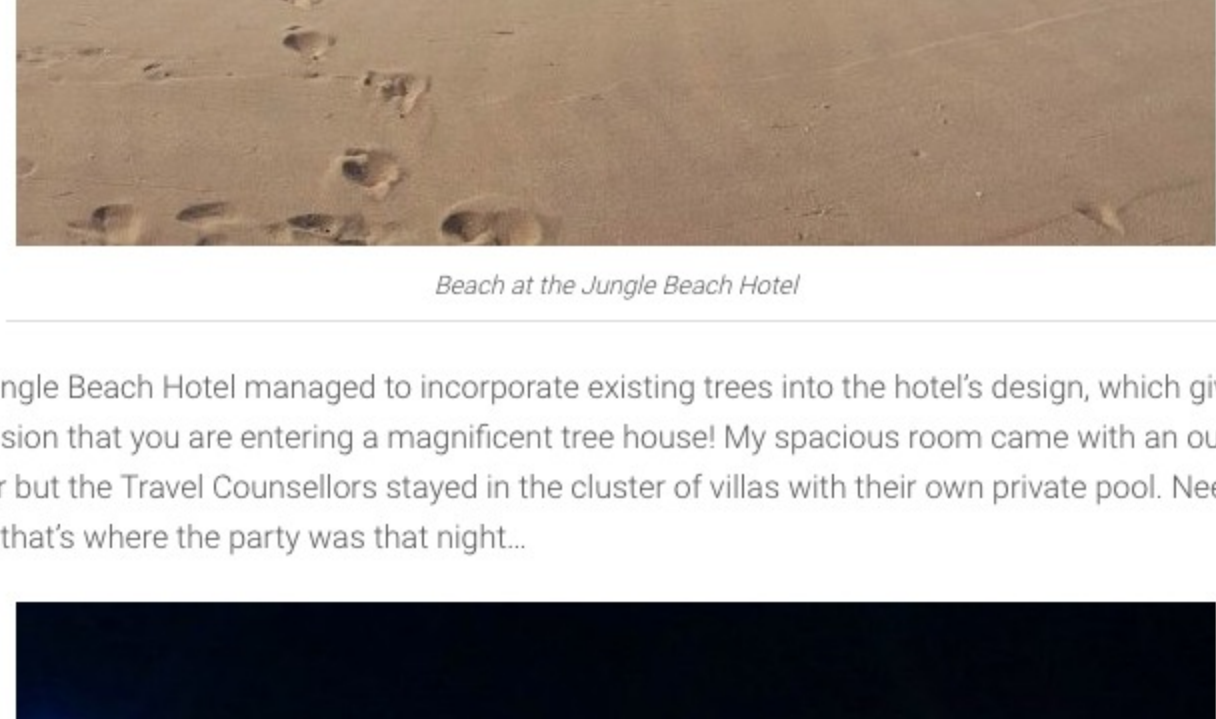


The summit of Sigiriya



Cathy Burke was clearly proud of her achievement!

After our strenuous morning we arrived at the unique on one of Sri Lanka's best beaches, and Travel Counsellors duly obliged. We deserved a rest at the exclusive Jungle Beach Hotel in Trincomalee and enjoyed a swim in the warm waters of the Indian Ocean. Another fabulous choice, this 5-star hotel is one of the exclusive Uga Escapes hotels, which are renowned for offering luxury boutique hotels that are also environmentally friendly.



Beach at the Jungle Beach Hotel

The Jungle Beach Hotel managed to incorporate the existing trees into the hotel's design, with the impression that you are entering a magnificent tree house! My spacious room came with an outdoor shower but the Travel Counsellors stayed in the cluster of villas with their own private pool. Needless to say, that's where the party was that night.



Beach fun at the Jungle Beach Hotel