

DON'T MISS... CHEESY-GARLICKY ROAST CHICKEN • MUSHROOM & SPINACH LASAGNE • FISH & LEEK PIE • MOLTEN-MIDDLE LINDOR PUDS

SALE 1-30 NOVEMBER 2017 £4.30

delicious.

FOOD MAGAZINE OF THE YEAR

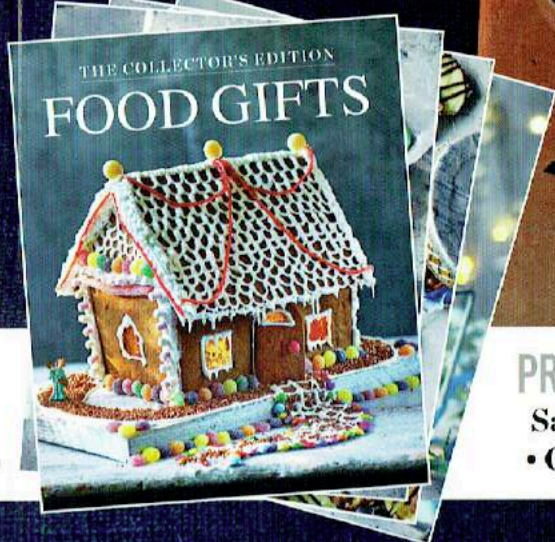
The joy of anticipation...

- Get ahead for Christmas with the best puddings, gifts & cake
- Nigel Slater's glorious comfort food

NEW recipes from
Bake Off king
Paul Hollywood

**5 STAR INGREDIENTS
TO JAZZ UP YOUR
WEEKNIGHT MEALS**

French onion braised
beef with melting
cheese toasts



PRESENTS TO SHOW HOW MUCH YOU CARE

Salted caramel whisky sauce • Tiffin truffles
• Grapefruit & brandy marmalade... And more

16
pages of
NEW recipes
to pull out
& keep



JUST A HOLIDAY ROMANCE?

If you've never thought of having egg curry for breakfast, now could be the time. As it gets jumper-chilly at home and the first frosts bite, what better than to plan an escape to Sri Lanka, island of beauty, frolicking monkeys, sublime tea and very fine food indeed. But beware – it might spoil your taste buds for a while



The food in Sri Lanka is too good. Back in England after our journey through this continent-in-miniature,

I suffered withdrawal symptoms. All the food I'd known before seemed bland and boring in comparison. Although the teardrop shaped island, just off the coast of India, packs in an array of eye-popping natural wonders, we soon discovered that Sri Lankan cuisine – fresh, spicy and colourful – is a spectacle in itself.

RICE, KANDY & SHORT EATS

Our more-than-a-holiday-romance with Sri Lanka's national dish, 'rice and curry', began on our first night in the country's capital, Colombo, in **Maniumpathy hotel** (see p134). The rice, as its billing would suggest, gets pride of place in the centre of the table. What's in the curries depends on what's in season. That first night we had snake gourd, okra and star fruit, plus pork for the meat dish, along with a spiced side dish called a sambol (this was a fresh coconut version but other sambols include my favourite, bitter gourd).

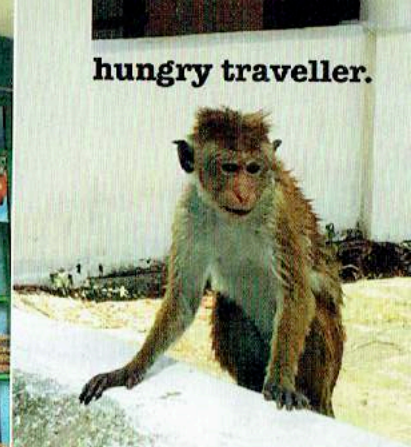
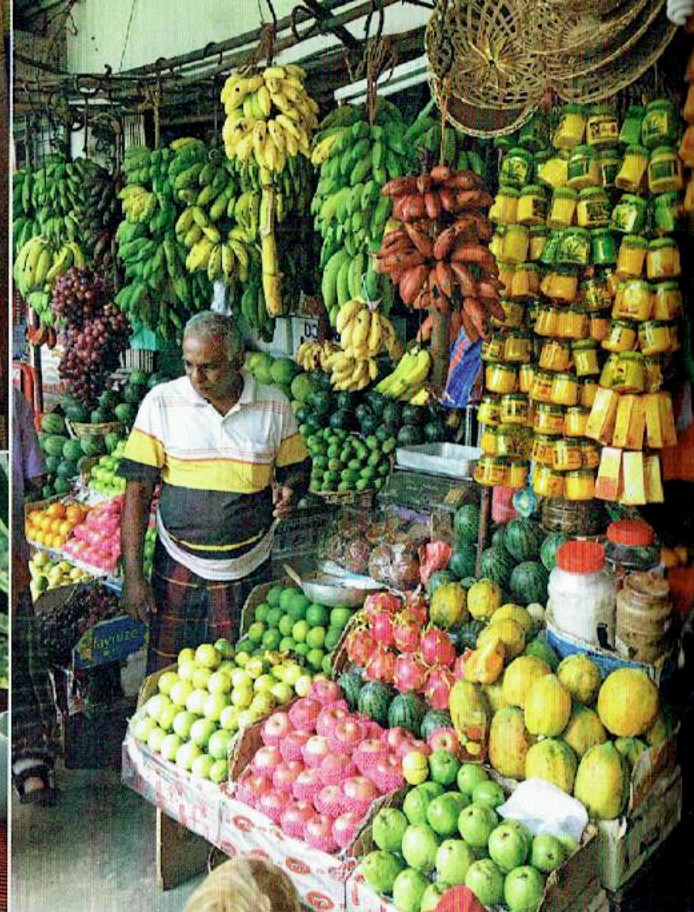
Our ardour hadn't cooled by morning. As well as breakfast curries of fish and creamy, coconutty potato, we had our first taste of hoppers. These are light, fermented rice pancakes, curved from the pan they're made in and served with a fried egg on top for breakfast. Come in, egg on toast: your time is up...

Sri Lankans are also good at snacks. So good, they even have a village that mostly sells cashew nuts. **Kajugama** is halfway between Colombo and the big tourist draw of Kandy, the island's spiritual heart. Harvested in April, the young nuts, our kindly guide Sudarshan explained, are great in – what else – curry. We bought a bag of spiced cashews and moved on, snacking happily.

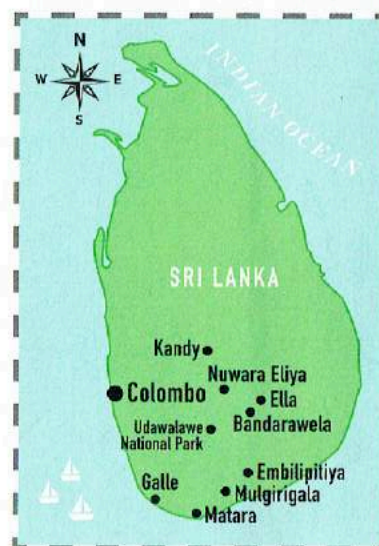
My lingering visual memory of Kandy is a dusk walk to the →

Tea pickers in Sri Lanka's lofty tea country

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Buddhas in the ancient Mulgirigala temple (land, far right, a monkey frolicking outside); fruit vendor in Kandy's Central Market; the Sacred Tooth Temple; cashews are king in Kajugama; tuk-tuks at the entrance to the preserved colonial settlement of Galle Fort; Colombo food guru Mark Forbes; wildlife in Udawalawe National Park; curry breakfast at lofty Villa Rosa



hungry traveller.



Sacred Tooth Temple with huge fruit bats darkening the sky like a squadron of Draculas. My abiding food memory is of fish buns. We had them in an order of 'short eats' from **Devon Restaurant** (Dalada Vidiya), fluffy buns with a centre of fiery hot fish paste. Short eats are brown, mainly deep-fried roadside snacks. According to Sudarshan, "We invented them so you can carrying on drinking longer." Respect to that. Kandy was also our first glimpse of the wonders of Sri Lanka's food markets. In the **Central Market** we marvelled at the tropical fruit, including the island's 12 varieties of banana. The sweet smells of papaya

and watermelon mingled with the gas-leak whiff of acquired-taste durian fruit in an olfactory melée.

ANYONE FOR TEA COUNTRY?

After Kandy we rose higher along a colonial-era road into tea country, where rolling hills are carpeted with tea bushes, creating a landscape whose beauty belies the harsh working conditions for the Tamil women who toil under the sun, plucking the new-growth leaves.

After a fiery cabbage curry at a hole-in-the-wall near the train station, a tea-country train journey from Nuwara Eliya to Bandarawela gave us views of soaring peaks. Our destination, **Dutch House** (see p134), made breakfast a revelation: string hoppars (rice noodles) with dhal, and an egg curry that rendered anything else we ate that day an also-ran.

At Dutch House we decided that the region's king product, strong, dark Ceylon tea (branded with the island's British-colonial name), is a top partner for spicy food. The tea industry employs 3.5 million of the island's 20 million population, and Ceylon is in the tea world's premier

league (it's not all dark stuff either – see Meet The Producer, right).

Pulling up at **Dambattenne Tea Factory**, built by Sir Thomas Lipton in 1890, we were hit by the aroma of the drying leaves. Inside we learned how they're processed and sorted by leaf condition and quality. 'Whole' is the top end of condition, 'dust' the lowest. But broken leaves of high quality can be worth more than poor-quality whole leaves. It's a complex business, as we realised when we watched a wholesale buyer tasting, approving and rejecting as the manager looked on anxiously.

INTO THE WILD

Stocked up with tea from the **Mlesna Tea Centre** (Welimada Road, Bandarawela), we headed south towards **Udawalawe National Park**, home to myriad wildlife including hundreds of elephants.

As the road descended and the temperature climbed, the landscape turned wild. In this area, the fish, mainly tilapia, comes from the rivers and is often served in deep-fried chunks. That's how we enjoyed it at **Kalu's Hideaway** (see p134), where we were also introduced to

scrumptious kiribath rice, cooked in coconut milk. The region is famous for its fresh, creamy buffalo curd, too. Drizzled with a little local palm syrup it makes a great dessert.

Further south we stopped at the **Mulgirigala temple**, sculpted into rocks, where monkeys frolicking in a water tank were as much of a spectacle as the Buddhas within. The monkeys were angling after the sponge cakes we'd bought at the sprawling **Embilipitiya market**, but they never got a sniff...

Finally we reached the south coast. At **Three Sisters**, a villa near Matara, we'd walk down onto a deserted white-sand beach each morning, returning for lunches of coconut rotis, cutlets (fishcakes) and wonderful spicy deep-fried sprats.

Along the coast we saw tuna drying in the sun, men hauling in the catch and the fishing stilts that are vestiges of a dying tradition. When we stopped at a random café for lunch, the all-knowing Sudarshan said, "I don't know it but it looks good." It was one of the best rice-and-curries of the trip. In **Galle Fort**, the town's colonial centre, afternoon tea in the →



MEET THE PRODUCER

A TEA 'UNTOUCHED BY HUMAN HAND'

Herman Handunugoda, a charismatic 72-year-old, has a lowland plantation that produces one of the world's most expensive teas, selling at \$1,500 a kilo and harvested by women in surgical gear.

Aren't the masks and gloves just theatre, though? "No," explains Herman. "It's about purity. I met a French perfumier who could smell what country jasmine had come from because he could detect the diet of the pickers in the sweat residue."

The Virgin White Tea is a beautifully delicate brew, and its success isn't just due to the rarified production methods, says Herman. "This is the world's closest tea plantation to the coast. The water, soil and climate aren't like anywhere else. I like to compare it to French wine: it's tea terroir." hermanteeas.com

COOKING IN DEEVI'S GARDEN

"We cook everything in clay pots – you get a better taste," says Deevi in a kitchen set up in her garden. Deevi shows lucky food-loving tourists in Galle how the magic of Sri Lankan rice and curry happens. She makes her coconut sambol from scratch, shaving out the coconut flesh with a special tool (I had a go – it's proper graft). That kind of effort went into everything she made. "All the ingredients are fresh from the market," Deevi assured me. When all the intricate dishes were finished, we sat down and feasted on one of the best meals I've ever had. If you love food, don't come to Sri Lanka without visiting Deevi.



posh **Amangalla hotel** (aman.com) had the feel of being in a 1980s Duran Duran video – in a good way.

Finally our journey took us back to Colombo, where we joined a tour with food obsessive Mark Forbes (colombocitywalks.blogspot.com). "My friends refuse to come to the restaurants I take tourists to," he joked as we plodded down a mud road near the vast **Pettah market**. We'd only eaten Sinhalese food up to that point, but Mark introduced us to Tamil and Muslim cuisines (the former is a little spicier and heavier than Sinhalese cuisine, the latter is perhaps more like what Brits would recognise as curry).

On our last day in Colombo we gazed at the sunset over the rolling Indian Ocean waves on the patio of the **Galle Face Hotel** (gallefacehotel.com), gin and tonics in hand. It was yet another great Sri Lankan spectacle, but a nagging thought distracted me – was there time for one more curry before the airport...? *Les travelled with Experience Travel Group (020 3468 6268; experiencetravelgroup.com). A 14-night (mostly B&B) tour with guide and all activities costs from £3,825pp including flights.*

WHERE TO STAY

- **COLOMBO** Maniumpathy, formerly a doctor's house, is charming. Or swank it up at Uga Residence. maniumpathy.com; ugaescapes.com
- **KANDY** The views from Villa Rosa over the Mahaweli river are "Wow". villarosa-kandy.com
- **TEA COUNTRY** Dutch House is a colonial-style villa in Bandarawela with impeccable service. lankavillas.com
- **UDAWALAWE** Owned by an ex-cricketer, Kalu's Hideaway is handy for the national park. kalushideaway.com
- **GALLE COAST** Right on the Indian Ocean, Three Sisters is a luxury villa with a pool and a chef touched by genius. 3sistersinsrilanka.com

The Galle coast's stilt fishers have meagre pickings these days but make a few rupees hiring the stilts to tourists



Parippu vadai

SERVES 8 AS A SNACK. HANDS-ON TIME 50 MIN, PLUS SOAKING

FOOD TEAM'S TIP Fresh curry leaves are available from Asian grocers or online at spicesofindia.co.uk. If you use dried curry leaves – from most large supermarkets – use double the amount of dried to fresh.

- 300g chana dhal (split chickpeas)
- 1 red onion, finely chopped
- 5cm piece fresh ginger, finely chopped
- 3 chillies, finely chopped
- 1 tsp cumin seeds, crushed in a pestle and mortar
- 4 fresh curry leaves, finely chopped (see tip)
- ½ tsp salt
- 1 litre vegetable oil for deep-frying

FOR THE COCONUT SAMBOL

- ½ small onion, chopped
- 2 green chillies, deseeded (seeds in if you like it hot)

- 1.5cm fresh ginger, roughly chopped
- 2 fresh curry leaves (see tip)
- 100g freshly grated or desiccated (unsweetened) coconut
- Juice ½ lime
- Fresh coriander and lime wedges to serve

1 Rinse the chana dhal in a colander and put in a mixing bowl. Cover with water and soak for at least 1 hour. Drain and reserve 2 tsp of the chana dhal, then put the rest in a blender. Whizz, adding 150ml cold water little by little, to give a smooth, thick paste, then tip back into the cleaned bowl.

2 Mix in the onion, ginger, chillies, cumin, curry leaves and salt along with the reserved chana dhal. Grease your palms with a little oil and shape the mixture into 12 lemon-size balls (vadai).

3 Heat the oil in a deep saucepan to 170°C (if you

don't have a digital probe thermometer, the oil is ready when a cube of bread turns brown after 30 seconds). Take one ball at a time and flatten to create a 1.5cm thick patty, then slide it into the hot oil using a slotted spoon. Deep-fry the vadai in batches of 4 for 7-8 minutes, turning from time to time so they cook evenly, until golden brown on both sides and cooked through.

4 Meanwhile, put all the sambol ingredients except the coconut and lime in a food processor, then whizz to a fine paste. Put in a bowl and mix in the coconut using your fingers. Add lime juice and salt to taste.

5 Remove the cooked vadai with a slotted spoon onto kitchen paper, then repeat. Eat hot with the sambol, with coriander and lime wedges.

PER SERVING 482kcal, 25.4g fat (14.1g saturated), 19.6g protein, 41g carbs (6.4g sugars), 0.7g salt, 5.8g fibre