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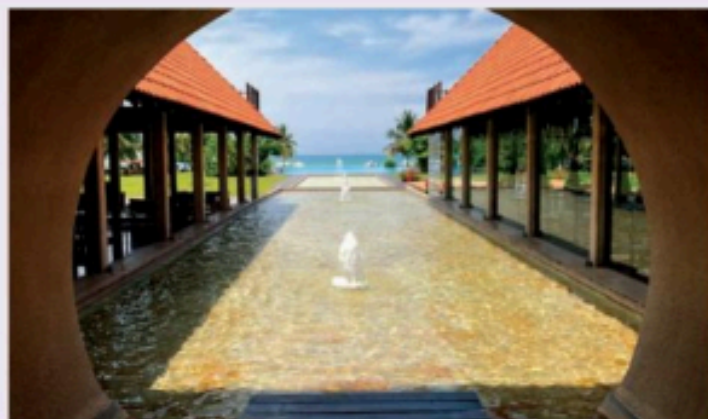
UGA BAY BY UGA ESCAPES – Sri Lanka

BY BENJAMIN COREN

THE LOCATION: On Sri Lanka's east coast, Uga Bay actually sits on the Bay of Passekudah and its semi-circle design ensures ocean views from all 46 studios. Though not close to any town, the area offers terrific scenery, clear seas and clean, sandy beaches.

THE ROOM: My 540-sq-foot Ocean Studio was on the upper level with step access only. It was light, airy, clean and comfortably furnished with a king-size bed, flat-screen TV, desk, iPod docking station, safe, wifi, outdoor balcony and a separate bathroom with shower. Beach Studios on the ground floor offer direct access to the sand.

KEY FACILITIES: There are two spa suites offering therapies including massages and facial treatments, plus a gym. The hotel also has a games and family room with a



selection of books and DVDs to borrow. Water sports and diving are available for an extra fee.

RESTAURANTS/BARS: Guests can dine in the restaurant or have dinner in their room. The main dining/bar area has inside/outside seating and combines Mediterranean and Sri Lankan

styles. Glass walls lend ample light to this comfortable dining space where guests can try various international dishes alongside traditional Sri Lankan fare and fresh locally caught fish.

Address: Coconut Board Rd, Kalkudha, Sri Lanka. ugaescapes.com/ugabay
 ☎ +94 11 567 1000

THE VERDICT

This large and welcoming property is the perfect retreat for those exploring the lesser-trodden east coast. The bay views are stunning and the beach itself is remote and peaceful, with guests very unlikely to be 'hassled'. It's easy to go out jet skiing, kayaking or windsurfing or to plan excursions to local attractions. Perfect for families, suitable for all.

RATES: A double Ocean Studio is priced from \$311 a night (low season from September 16 through to December).

THE MERRION – Dublin, Ireland

BY DOMINIC BRENNAN

THE BACKGROUND: The Main House of the Merrion is formed from a collection of four listed Georgian townhouses, whilst the newer Garden Wing overlooks two immaculate private gardens.

This five-star hotel, Dublin's



most luxurious, seamlessly blends classical and modern. Whilst the exterior is stately but simple, inside the hotel is elegant and comfortable – a place to sit back, read the papers and relax.

THE LOCATION: The Merrion is centrally located, opposite Government Buildings and close to the National Gallery and the popular Baggot and Grafton Streets.

THE ROOM: My spacious Junior Suite looked down on the hotel's private gardens. It was brimming with Irish fabrics and period-style furniture, with a king-size bed, sofa, two armchairs, a writing desk, coffee table, an Nespresso machine and a fully-stocked mini-bar. A large bathroom featured Italian Carrera marble, and a separate bath tub and shower.

KEY FACILITIES: A unique feature

of the hotel is the antiques and various artworks scattered throughout. Guest can take a 45-minute audio tour of the artworks, the largest private collection in Ireland. The Tethra Spa has a 60-ft infinity pool, treatment rooms and a gym.

RESTAURANTS/BARS: The Restaurant Patrick Guilbaud is Ireland's only two-Michelin-starred restaurant. The newer Garden Room Restaurant, overlooking the gardens, offers a range of seasonal Irish-themed fare using local ingredients. In the summer, light meals are available from the Garden Terrace. The cosy No.23 bar is off the main Drawing Room, while the Cellar Bar, set in an original 18th century wine vault, has a gastro-pub style menu. **Address:** Merrion Street Upper, Dublin 2, Ireland; merrionhotel.com

THE VERDICT

The Merrion manages to be dignified and stately without ever feeling too formal. It wears its long history with ease and has a gravitas that is obvious the moment you enter the hotel. Take tea in the Drawing Room or enjoy a top wine in the 'underground' Cellar Bar. The Garden Room restaurant is superb – try the Irish oysters, organic salmon and crab linguini.

RATES: A Junior Suite is from £810 a night (add €29 for a full Irish breakfast).