

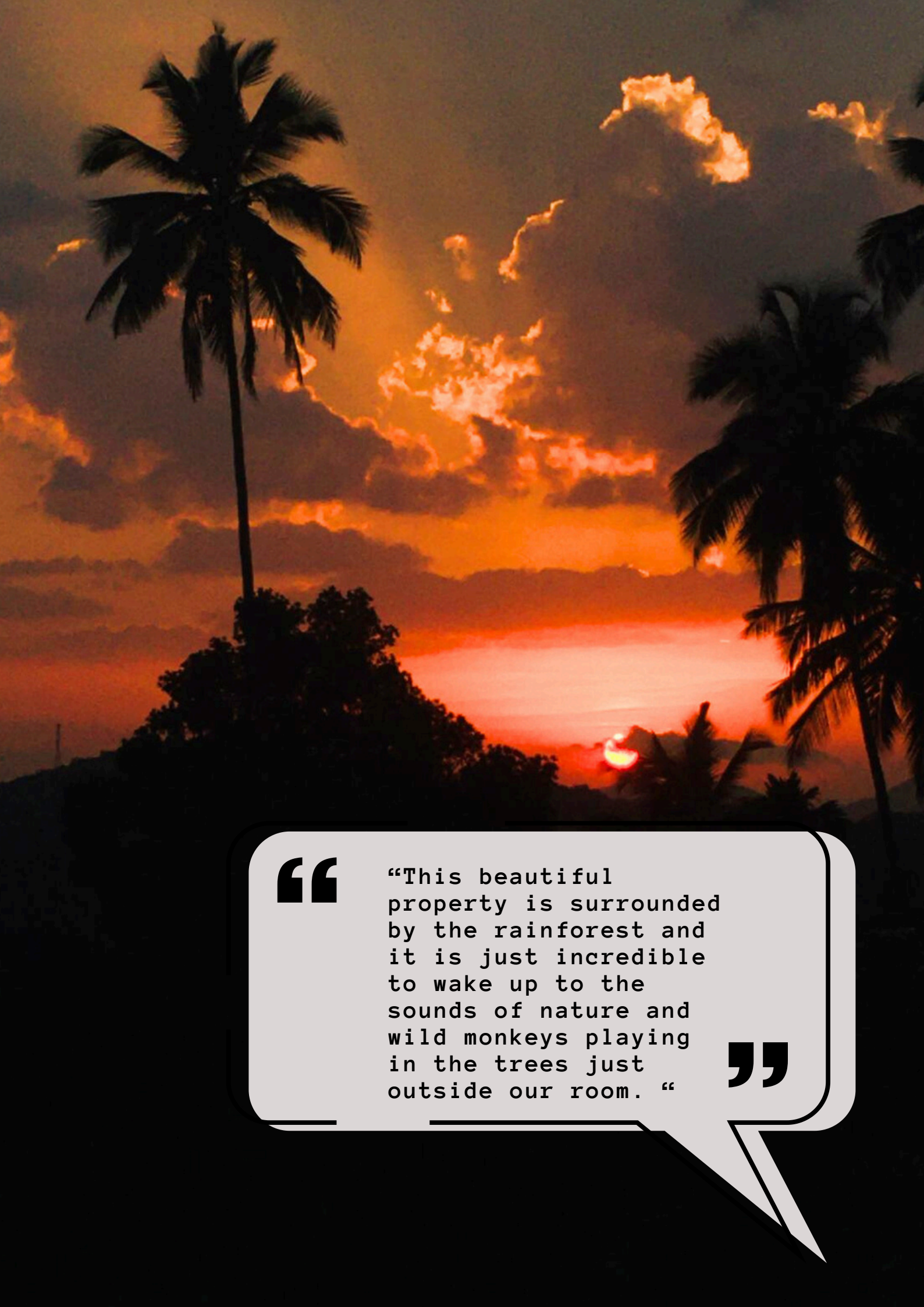
THE FLAME TREE HERALD TRIBUNE

news, views,
reviews,
& off - grid
jungle intel

IN THIS EDITION

THE SWEET & SIMPLE KIND
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KING OF THE MONTH
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THE STAR OF ARTABAN

October 2026 flametreeestate.com


“This beautiful property is surrounded by the rainforest and it is just incredible to wake up to the sounds of nature and wild monkeys playing in the trees just outside our room. “

LONG PEPPER



For real pepper buffs, black pepper has a cousin that, though little known, is infinitely grander – long pepper. Both are indigenous to Sri Lanka and belong to the genus Piper within the family Piperaceae. They differ in taste. Whereas black pepper is candidly pungent, long pepper is way more complex – hotter, sweeter, with delectable hints of incense, cloves, and nutmeg.

It grows like a catkin, so red as to resemble a runaway mulberry. For anyone seeking the ultimate recipe, look no further than Long Pepper Chicken, which first surfaced somewhat unexpectedly in the Arthashastra, a 2nd-century BCE Indian Sanskrit treatise on statecraft, politics, economic policy, and military strategy. It is a simple dish to prepare.

Add crushed long pepper, ginger, and salt to the yoghurt, then add the chicken pieces, and let them marinate overnight. Then add the mustard seeds to the hot oil, along with more peppers and the marinated chicken, and cook until it browns. Squeeze lemon over the result and try not to wolf it down disgracefully.


“I highly recommend spending some nights here. You won’t regret it.”

THE STAR OF ARTABAN



Once upon a time, many centuries ago, a wise man named Artaban set off from Persia to join the three Magi on their way to visit the baby Jesus. The Bible tells us nothing about who these three wise men were. However, tradition says they were named Melchior, Caspar, and Balthazar, and that they came from Persia, India, and Arabia, respectively. Artaban, the fourth would-be magi, never actually made it to Bethlehem, despite having purchased three unforgettable gems as presents, one of which was a sapphire. This vague fable, with a sapphire at its centre, provided the perfect name for a milky-blue 287-carat sapphire from Sri Lanka, whose origins are also opaque. What little is known of the colossal stone is that it was bought in 1943 by a member of the Georgia Mineral Society and gifted anonymously to the Smithsonian Museum in Washington, D.C.


“I would highly recommend this hotel to anyone seeking a relaxing environment, proximity to nature, and a unique experience.”

RAMPANT



The Asian Palm Civet, better known as the Toddy Cat, lives in large numbers across Sri Lanka, South and Southeast Asia. It is a small beast, little more than five kilos in weight, its stocky body painted with gorgeous markings: grey fur with a white forehead, white dots under its eyes and beside its nostrils – a sort of Panda in the making.

Although primarily forest-dwelling, it has acclimatised to urban life with alacrity, making its home in attics and unused civic spaces – and, of course, palm plantations. And indeed, wherever it can best find the fruit it most prefers. Like the golden palm civet, it is also famous in some countries for producing Civet Coffee, made from coffee berries that have been defecated and partially digested.


“It is a place worth discovering.”

HEADLINE GRABBING SKINKS



Several skinks have burnt across Skinkdom like firecrackers. A groundbreaking study of skinks published in 2007 revealed that hiding under the skink taxonomy of Sphenomorphus was not just a new genus (Lankascincus), but also three other skinks hiding in plain sight within this new genus. One of these was the golden red-bronze Greer's Lanka Skink. At barely 42 mm, it was documented in Sri Lanka's south-western lowlands and is both rare and endemic. But its distribution is so challenged as to be the sort of skink Andy Warhol had in mind when he spoke of "Fifteen minutes of fame."

For Sri Lanka's skinks, 2007 was not unlike 1492 for Christopher Columbus and the discovery of the Americas. Many new skink species were unveiled that year, including the endemic Adam's Peak Lanka Skink. and Munindradasa's Lanka Skink. Ten years later, two more skinks hit the headlines. Sameera's Lanka Skink, a retiring little beast, was identified during a national lizard survey conducted nestling in fallen leaves in Matara's Morningside Rakwana Hills. And discovered in the same year was Gans's Three-Toed Snake Skink - blessed with four legs, each of which sports three toes.


“The pool is exceptional, an infinity pool with a direct view of the forest, making it the perfect location for moments of total tranquillity.”

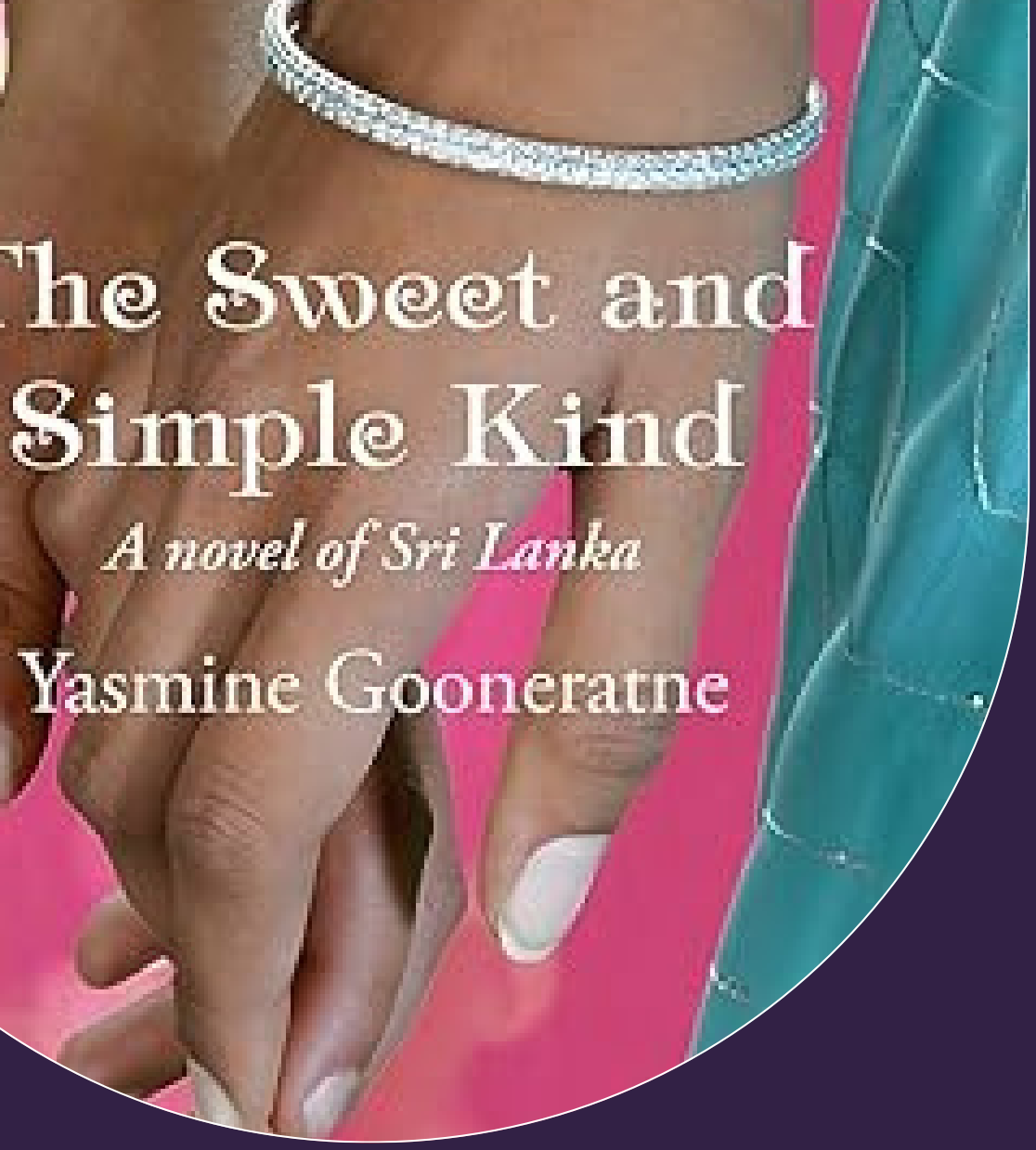
THE FABLED FORTRESS

Vijithapura is the Atlantis of the fortress world in Sri Lanka, said to have been built by Vijitha, one of the original followers of the first Sri Lankan Sinhalese king, Vijaya, in the sixth century BCE. By the time of the troubled third Sinhala king, Panduvasudeva, the fortress is said to have become a city.

Three hundred years later, the ancient chronicles mention it as second only to the great city of Anuradhapura itself: a fortress surrounded by three moats and a high wall, with access through four iron gates. Afterwards, it vanishes from the records, but historians believe a nearby village with the same name near the ancient Kalawewa reservoir may mark its spot, and that a much older temple in the town bears an antique stone the villagers claim. It was used to sharpen swords before the last battle in which the fortress figured. Other historians robustly po-po this notion, claiming that Vijithapura is closer to a village near Polonnaruwa.




“But the cherry on top was the food.”

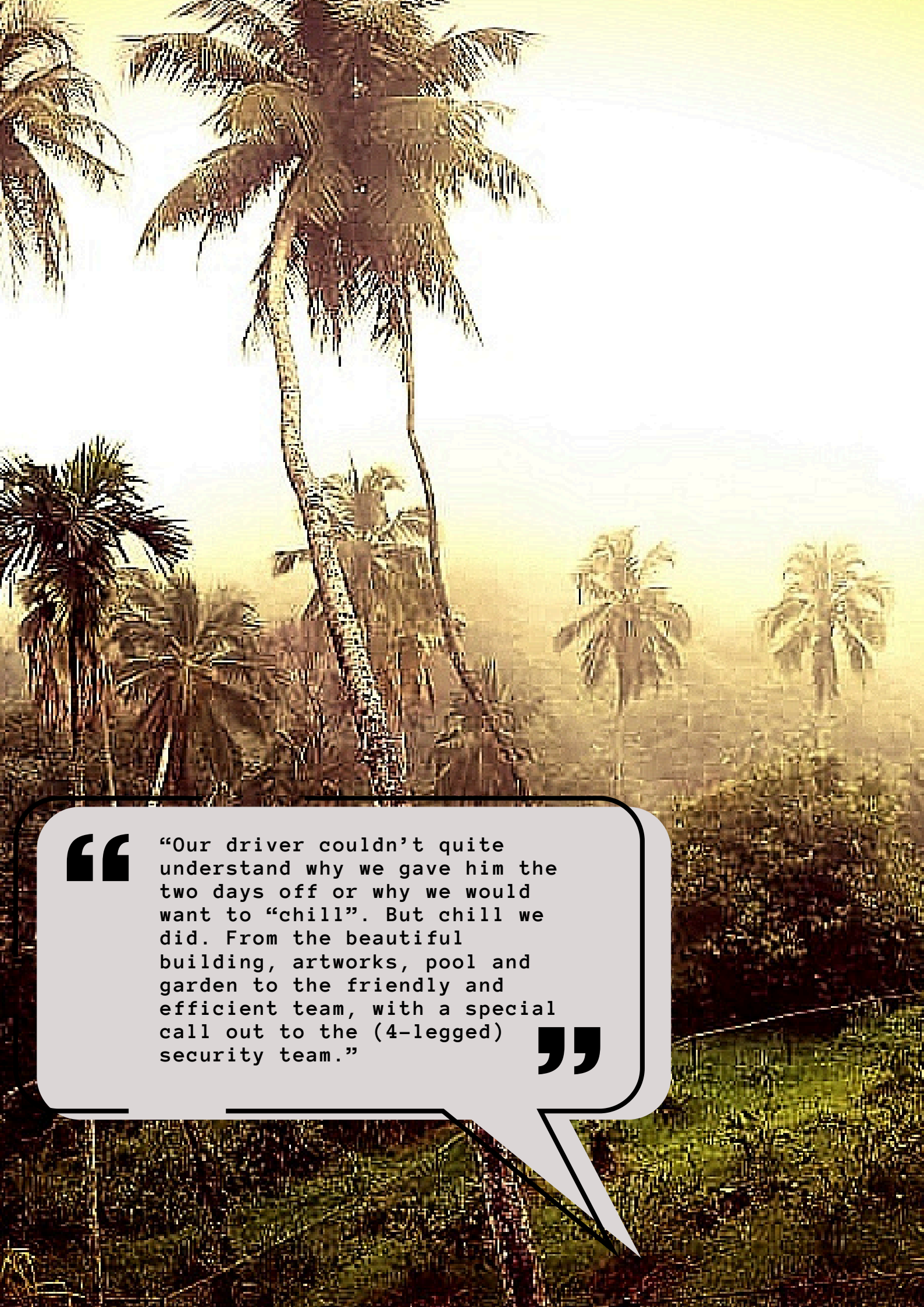


THE SWEET AND SIMPLE KIND

The Gooneratnes' mountain bungalow, overlooking rippling tea plantations, is called Pemberley, after Mr Darcy's mansion. A wall plaque commemorates Elizabeth Bennet's description of it.

In the style of a modern Jane Austen, Yasmine Gooneratne takes up the enduring and universal question of who will marry whom.

"Beautifully written, wrote one reviewer "The Sweet and Simple Kind offers a richly imagined world of love, political chicanery and family turmoil in the newly independent Sri Lanka of the 1950s and 60s."

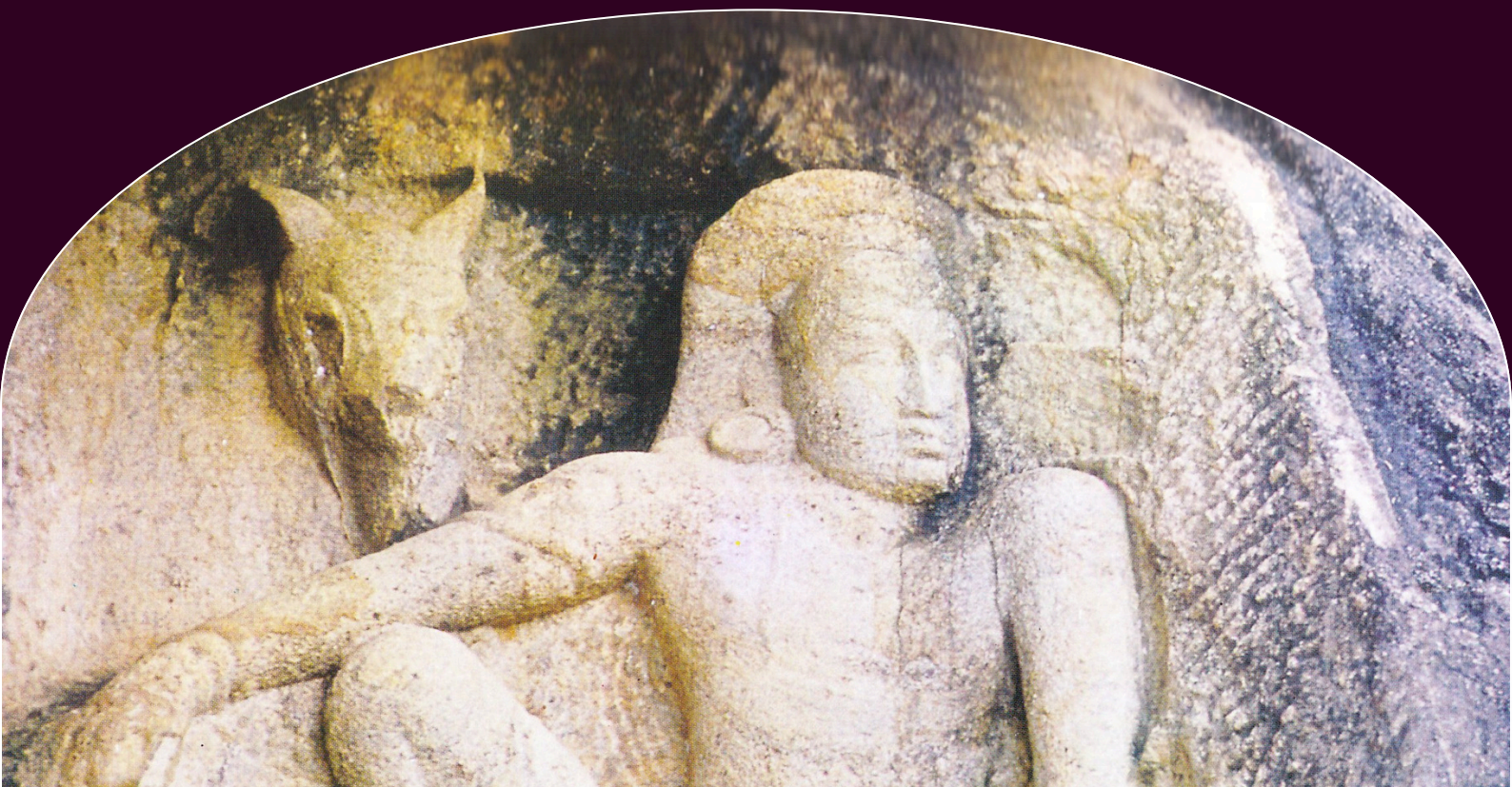


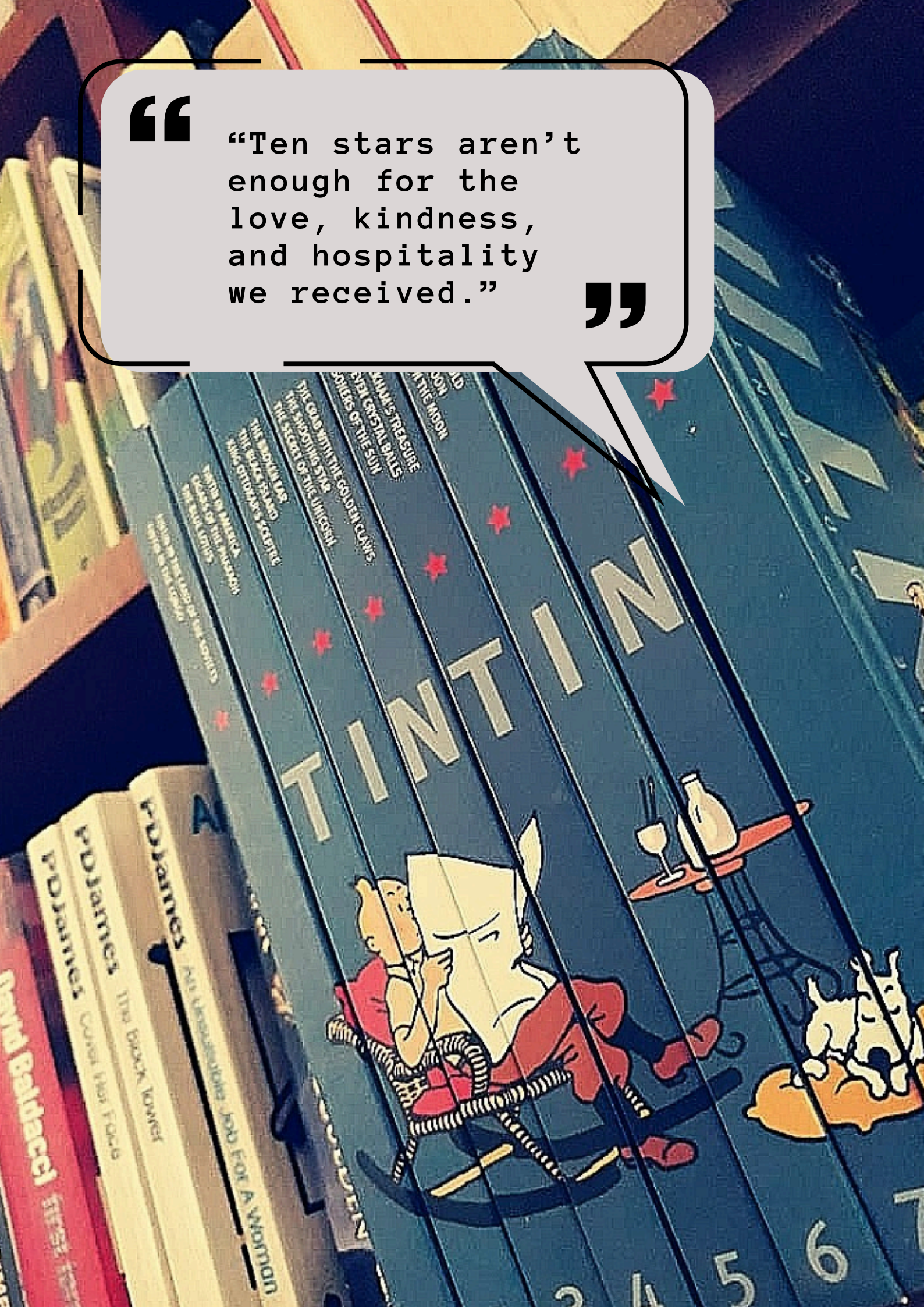
“Our driver couldn’t quite understand why we gave him the two days off or why we would want to “chill”. But chill we did. From the beautiful building, artworks, pool and garden to the friendly and efficient team, with a special call out to the (4-legged) security team.”

KING OF THE MONTH

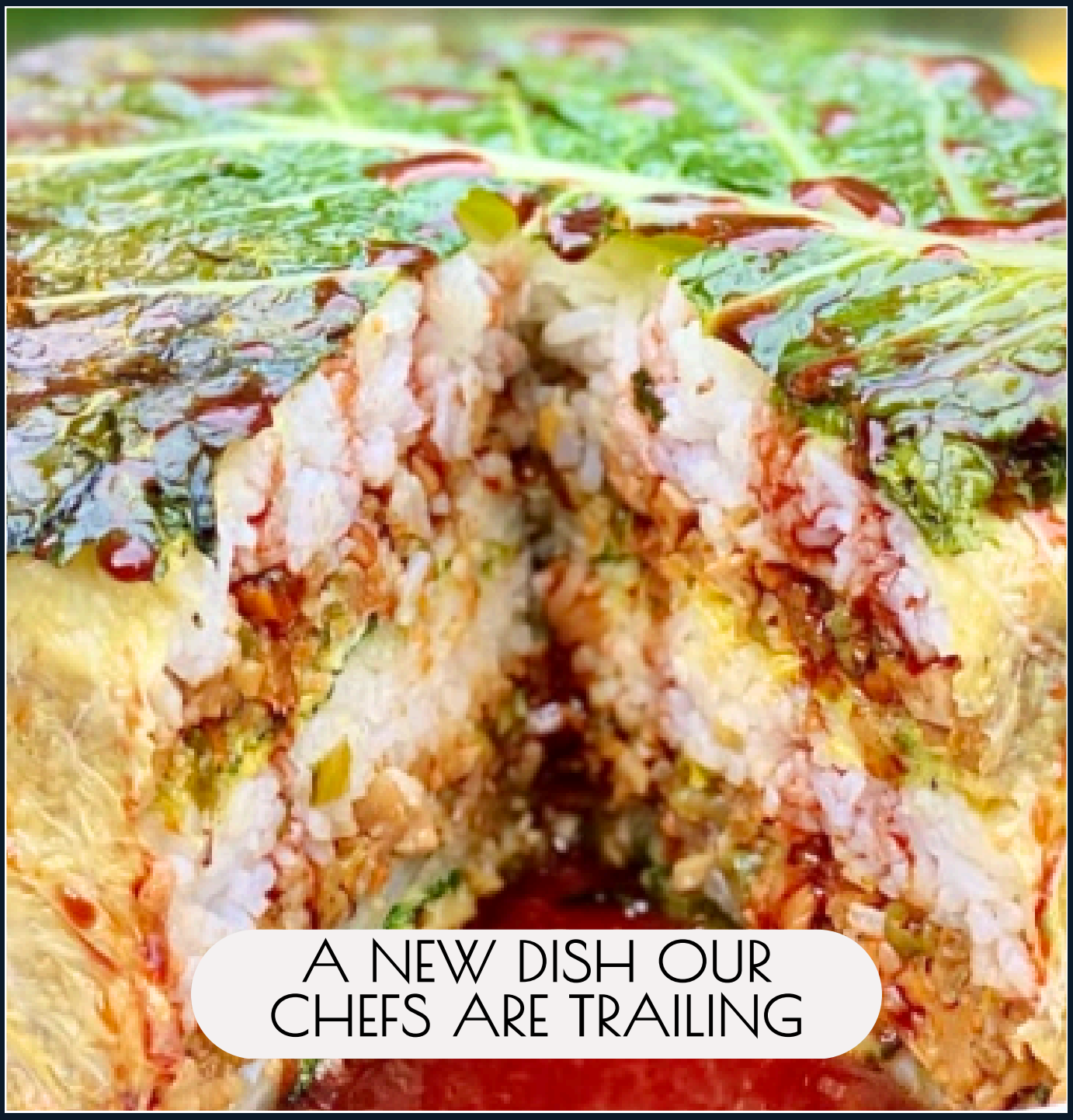
PANDU KABHAYA, KING OF ANURADHAPURA

Barely 100 years into its first royal dynasty, Sri Lanka had the tremendous good fortune to encounter Pandu Kabhaya - one of its most fabulous kings. Inheriting, at best, a kinglet, he passed on to his Vijayan successors a fully functioning kingdom that, for over a century, became a byword for opulence, sophistication, and progress. Pandu Kabhaya's (improbably long) 70-year reign would have come as a blessed relief to family and subjects alike after a prolonged and murderous run of dynastic squabbling. Pandu Kabhaya set in motion the real beginnings of the Anuradhapura Kingdom when he moved his capital to that site and, in Louis XIV-style, began building. His efforts harnessed the country's expertise in all areas of professionalism - from farming and engineering to administration and construction. By creating an unrivalled capital city, he projected his dominance throughout the island. Anuradhapura was to become one of the world's oldest continuously inhabited cities – and, for 1,500 years, the capital of the island state. Trade thrived exponentially, and intriguing hints suggest a small group of Greek merchants lived in the royal city itself. Credited with ending the guerrilla warfare that marked the original island dwellers' resistance against the Vijayans, Pandu Kabhaya's reign not only brought stability but also bequeathed future constancy to the island.

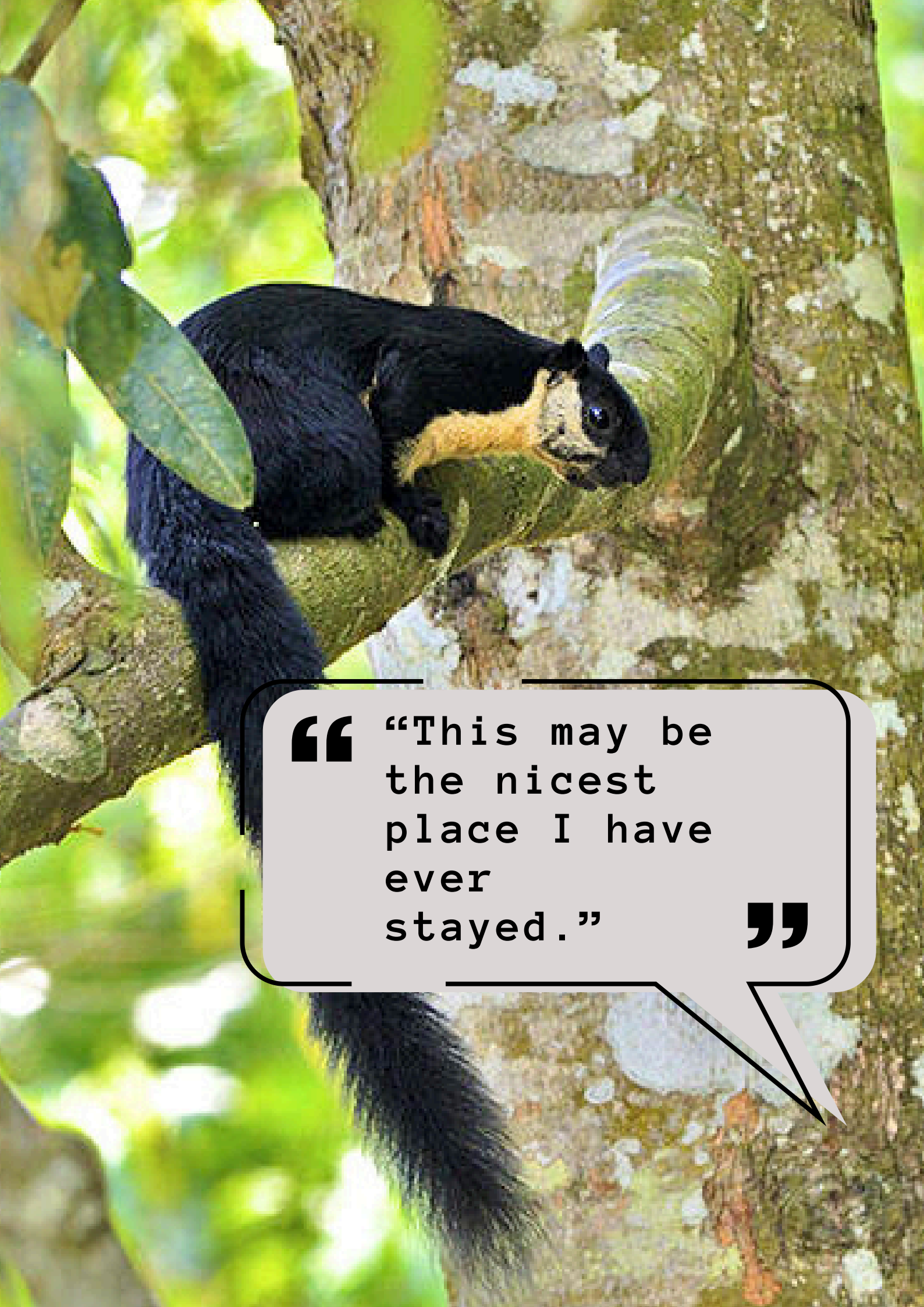



“Ten stars aren’t enough for the love, kindness, and hospitality we received.”
TINTIN

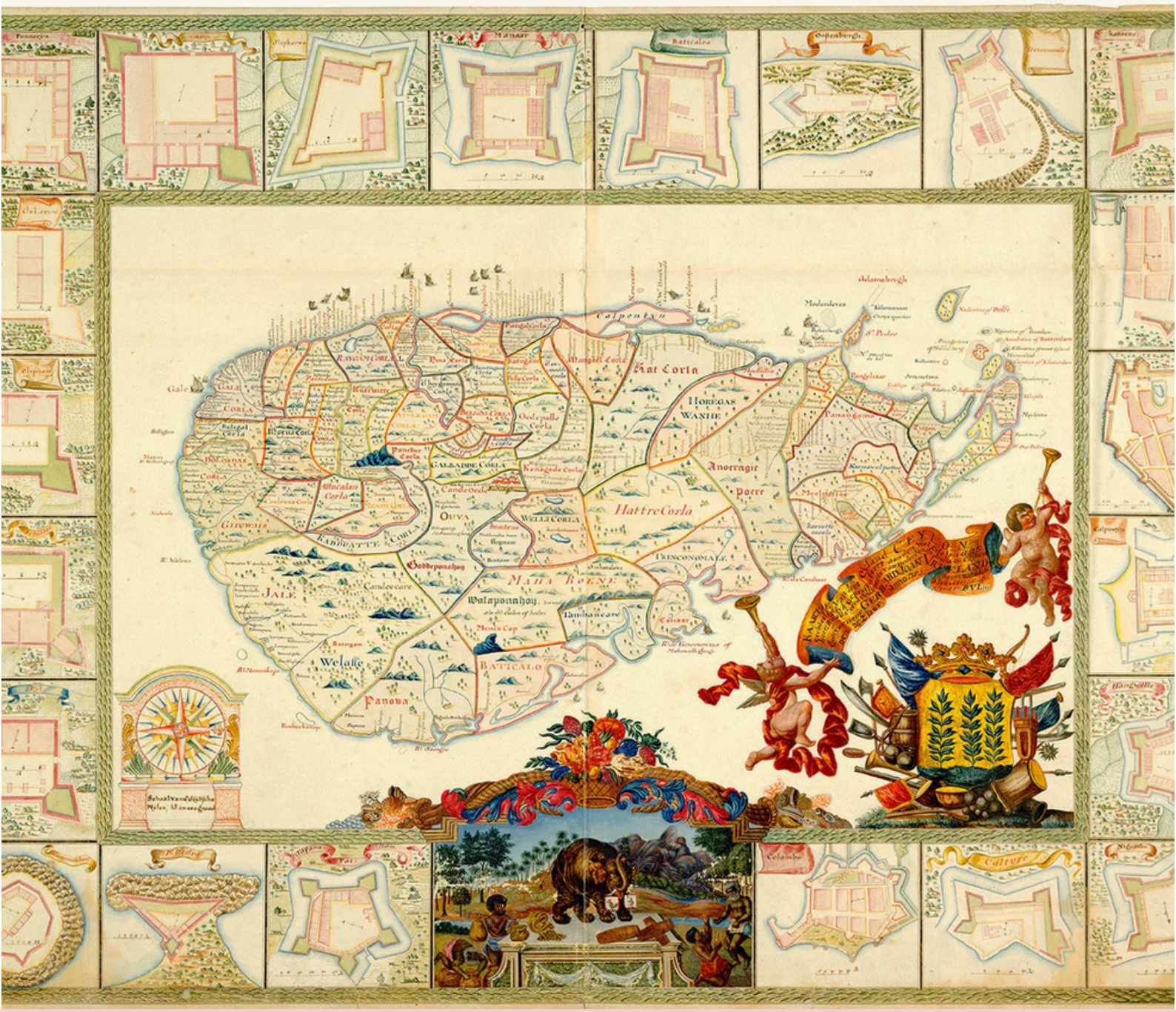
SAVOURY CABBAGE CAKE



Savoy Cabbage; Chinese Cabbage Leaves; Jasmine Rice; Garlic; Green Beans; Carrots; Bamboo Shoots; Mushrooms; Smoked Tofu; Spring Onions; Soya Sauce; Hoisin Sauce; Sesame Oil; Sugar; White Pepper; Sesame Oil; Chilli


“This may be the nicest place I have ever stayed.”

1751
VOC DUTCH CEYLON FORTIFICATIONS



This map was presented to the Governor of Dutch Ceylon, Gerard Joan Vreeland, on the day he took office, 24 September 1751. Baltus Jacobsz created it. van Lier. It depicts the plans for 22 forts on Ceylon, making clear that the VOC believed it could sustain its colonial grip through strong defensive power.


“Really enjoyed our time here and the birthday cake made on the day, such kindness.”

MALWATTIYA



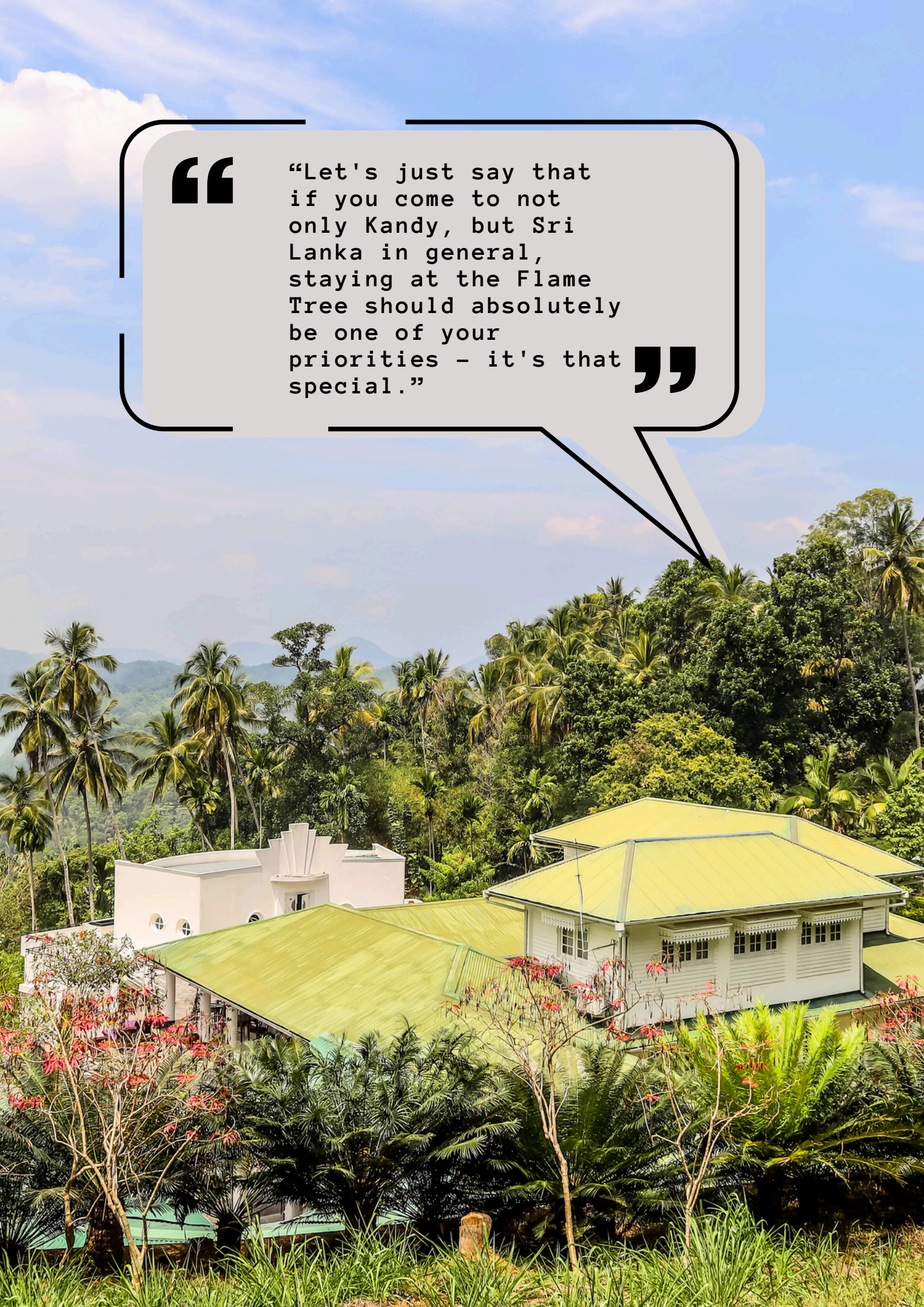
A basket or tray of flowers. One of the duties of a tenant in a mura at a temple is to supply a basket of flowers morning and evening for offering in front of the image of Buddha or in front of the shrine.


“Such great food and staff. Loved the library room and the outdoor shower. Beautiful views, the pool and of course the dogs. “



A TUK TUK HOP

Rice, in one form or another, exists at the centre of most things in Sri Lanka. On average, Sri Lankans consume 11 kilos per month. The crop is planted in two seasons per year, and its cultivation, though improved by mechanisation and disease-resistant varieties, remains elaborate. Vakkadas pierce the overall paddy track to let water in. Often, small areas are left wild to feed the birds that might otherwise eat the paddy. The land is levelled and seeds, often pre-germinated, are sown across the watery track – the water itself is typically kept at around 5 cm above the soil. Then the weeding begins. And never stops. Harvesting is usually manual and is quickly followed by drying, storing, and milling. Many people juggle regular jobs with maintaining small pieces of family paddy, tucking their farming work into off-time and weekends, and enlisting family members to help out. And this is just what Manju, our supervisor and butler, does with his piece of family paddy near the estate. The paddy is fed by one of the district's main streams – the Kospotu Oya, which flows even during the driest of dry seasons. Together with his wife, Shyamalee, our head housekeeper, and his sons, he carefully manages the paddy. It lies just below the compound where his mother and other family members live – his sister, brother, uncle, aunt, and nephews- and the immediate garden around their houses, shaded by mango trees. Surrounded by his neighbours' plots and encircled by forest and hamlets, it is a perfect picture of real country life. And a good place to come to see the crop up close and contemplate its singular importance on the island.


“Let's just say that if you come to not only Kandy, but Sri Lanka in general, staying at the Flame Tree should absolutely be one of your priorities - it's that special.”

MEETING DANNY DE VITO



The Jungle Owlet is squat, square, and small, the Danny DeVito of the island's owl world, its plumage an all-round white-and-brown series of feathery waves.

Although most active at dawn and dusk, it can be seen through the day, often perched as still as a sniper for hours on end as it waits for the perfect snack to come by.

It is not in the least threatened by the disturbing advances of humankind and gets on quite happily, raising an annual crop of new owlets from the 3 to 4 eggs they lay each year.



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