



THE FLAME TREE HERALD TRIBUNE

IN
THIS
EDITION

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

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“You are
truly
relieved of
all your
worries!”

”

CURRY LEAVES



Curry leaves, the small pinnate leaves of the sweet neem tree, are a commonplace ingredient in Sri Lanka and are no longer the Mr Quiet of the spice world, becoming ever better known outside of South and SE Asia and China.

It gives all the dishes it touches an earthy, citrus-like flavour and a scent as if lemongrass and star anise had been twinned in some ecstatic horticultural coupling. It is especially delicious when fried with cashew nuts.

Picked and used fresh off the tree, like basil in Italian cooking or marjoram in Greek dishes, it can be added to almost any South Asian dish to deepen both flavour and scent. It has long been a staple ingredient in Ayurvedic medicine for treating skin and hair problems and for combating indigestion, bloating, and constipation.



“

“Particularly noteworthy is the friendly staff, who have a lot to tell you about Sri Lanka, its traditions and its herbs.”

”

THE STUART SAPPHIRE



Arguments – all but improvable – rage gently over The Stuart Sapphire. Is it from Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, India or Burma? Most experts call out Sri Lanka.

Sitting atop the very crown still worn by the Kings and Queens of the United Kingdom, it is probably the world's most visible sapphire. Weighing 104 carats, it dates back to the reign of Charles II and is on display in the Jewel House at the Tower of London.



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“The food was
the best we had
in Sri Lanka.”

”

FERAL MOGS



The Jungle Cat appears to be thriving across its distribution range – from Sri Lanka to China, the Middle East, and the Caucasus.

Wholly sandy in colour, and roughly twice the size of the house cat, it lives its very solitary life feasting on birds and small animals. I

It has a variety of subspecies, including the one in Sri Lanka (*Felis Chaus Kelaarti*), but none so distinct as to elicit definitive calls for endemic status.

It sticks to warmer areas in Sri Lanka but abounds in grasslands and forests wherever it offers the best cover and food.



“Loved every moment.”

FINE DINING



In choosing a dinner mate, avoid two particular skinks, notable for their eccentric eating habits. Though smallish in size (around 52mm), the endemic Tammanna Skink has something of a reputation for cannibalism, eating young pretenders without much thought.

At the other end of the table manners spectrum is Burton's Nessia, sometimes called the Three-Toed Snake Skink. It is found throughout the wet zones of Sri Lanka, wherever there is soft, decaying organic matter: leaves, logs, and forests. Its normal reproductive limit is two eggs per year.

Some 60mm long, it is mostly black and grey in colour, its stocky, snake-like body sporting 4 diminutive legs, each with three toes. It has the unusual dining habit of vomiting out its food if caught – presumably to put off its trapper.

An abstract painting featuring a dense composition of organic, flowing shapes in a rich palette of yellow, brown, green, red, and white. The texture is visible, suggesting a thick application of paint. A speech bubble is overlaid on the upper right portion of the artwork.

“ It was like
being invited to
stay at a long-
lost family
member's Sri
Lankan estate.” ”

THE LAST KING'S REDOUBT

Thirty-three kilometres east of Kandy are fragments of stone walls and structures – the remains of a fort and village that provided the stage for what was probably the last act of the Kandyan Kingdom. Atop Hunnasgiriya Mountain lie the remains of a fort-palace, possibly built by King Senarath, who ruled the Kandyan Kingdom until he died in 1635. Linked to it is a village called Bombure, and it was to here that hapless King Sri Wickrama Rajasingha fled with his wives and a few allies as he attempted to evade the pursuing British in 1815. Deciding that the village offered insufficient protection, the party tried to find the hidden passage that connected the town to the fort palace. The tunnel entrance lay behind a waterfall. But repeated attempts to probe the water with sticks revealed nothing but hard rock. The king remained where he was, soon to be captured and exiled to Vellore in southern India, where he was to die of dropsy. Villagers today state that the waterfall has long since dried up, but also point to a place called Dora-Bombure (Door of Bombure), which they claim was the entrance the doomed king failed to find.



“Supper was delicious sat on the veranda. Stunning views. And the staff knew what you wanted without saying a word! Just magical!”





Quisitely written... superb' Independent

FUNNY BOY

Shyam Selvadurai's novel is the sort of book to convince you that life, despite its horrors, is ultimately golden.

In the world of his large, affluent Tamil family in Colombo, Arjie is an oddity, a 'funny boy' who prefers dressing as a girl to playing cricket with his brother.

But as Arjie comes to terms with his own homosexuality and with the racism of the society in which he lives, Sri Lanka is plunged into civil war as fighting between the army and the Tamil Tigers gradually begins to encroach on the family's comfortable life.

An aerial photograph of a vast, dense forest covering a hillside. The trees are a mix of vibrant green and some yellowish-green, suggesting a tropical or subtropical environment. The forest extends to the horizon under a hazy sky.

““It's a beautifully renovated building, filled with carefully curated artefacts. Unlike anywhere else we've ever stayed.”**”**

KING OF THE MONTH

VANKANASIKA TISSA, KING OF ANURADHAPURA

The 47th recorded monarch in Sri Lanka. Although we have no dates for the new king's age, Vankanasika Tissa would have been no youngster on assuming his throne, given how long his father, Vasabha 's reign, had been. It was his great misfortune to reign at the same time as Karikala, the greatest of the early Chola emperors in Tamil India. Having taken most of South India under his control, Karikala next turned his sights on Sri Lanka. A military genius, Karikala was ever bound to win in any war, and his brief and surgical strike across the seas dealt Sri Lanka a bitter, albeit fleeting, defeat - and left it much poorer in manpower. The impetus for this particular Chola invasion appears to have been simply recruitment: Karikala, who was busy building the famous Kaveri Dam, needed builders, and, needing many of them, took away 12,000 Sinhalese men to work as slaves on his new dam. There is no evidence that the defeated Vankanasika Tissa died of anything other than a natural cause two years after taking the throne in 113 CE. He was the 20th reigning Sri Lankan monarch known to have died naturally, and his convenient departure paved the way for his son, Gajabahu I, to ascend the throne.



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“A colonial house renovated and cared for in every detail. The smells, the decor, the pool, the food, the large, welcoming room.”

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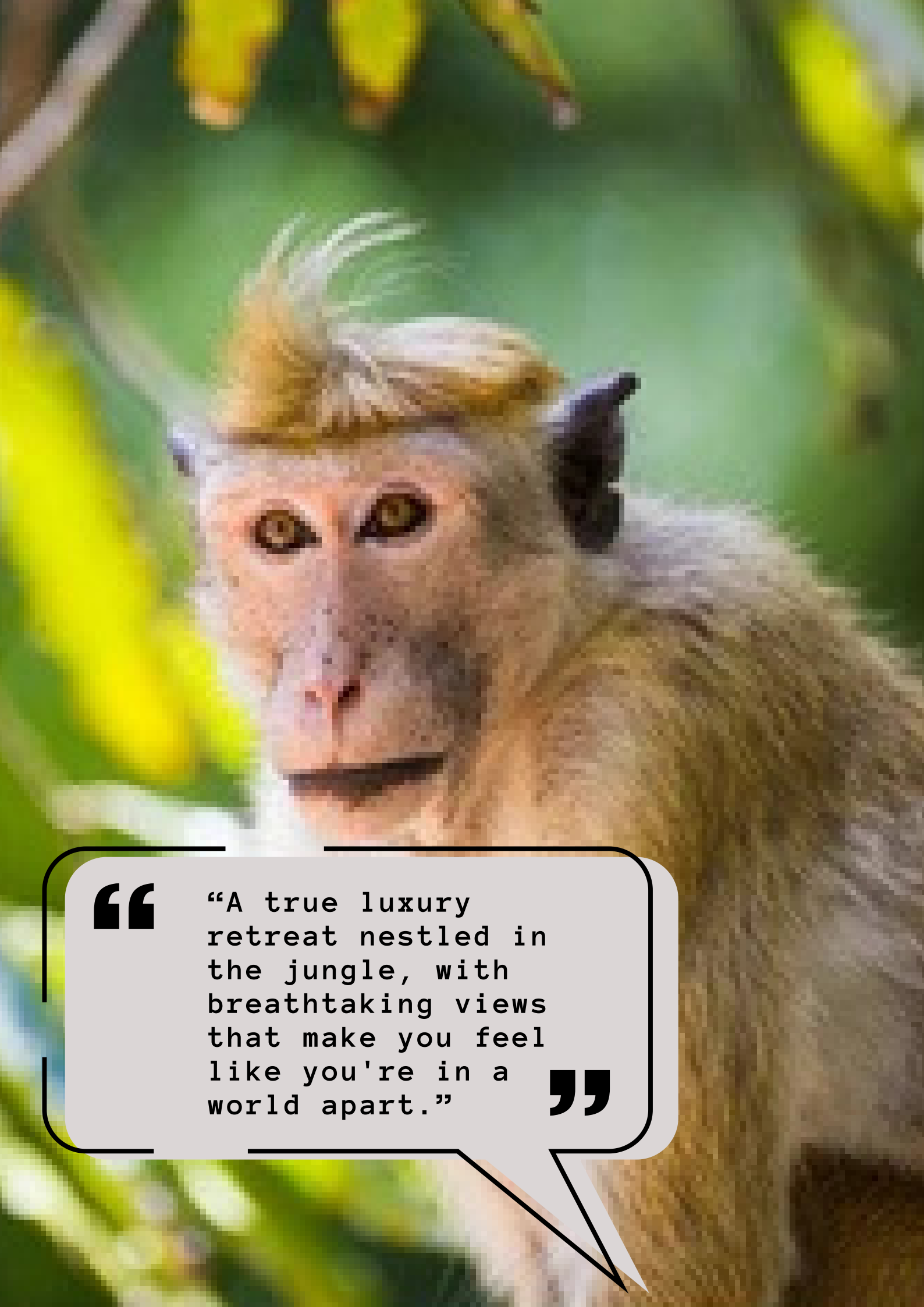


CRISPY SESAME EGGPLANT



A NEW DISH OUR
CHEFS ARE TRAILING

Eggplants; Green Onions; Garlic; Ginger; Salt; Sesame Seeds ; Rice
Vinegar; Dark Soy Sauce; Sugar



“

“A true luxury
retreat nestled in
the jungle, with
breathtaking views
that make you feel
like you're in a
world apart.”

”

1596

THE SEA COASTS OF ABYSSINIA, THE INDIAN SUBCONTINENT, CEYLON, AND THE KINGDOM OF BENGAL



A map created by Jan Huygen van Linschoten (1563-1611), a Dutch spy, merchant, traveller and writer who was based for several years in Goa. His covert reports about Asian trade and navigation - hidden by the Portuguese - were published in his book "Itinerario." Its highly detailed nautical data enabled the Dutch East India Company and the British East India Company to break the 16th-century Portuguese monopoly on trade with the East Indies.

A photograph of a tropical forest path. The path is covered in a thick layer of red petals or flower debris. The path leads into a dense forest of tall palm trees and other tropical vegetation. Sunlight filters through the canopy, creating dappled light on the path. A white speech bubble with a black border is overlaid on the upper right portion of the image, containing a quote.

“

“The restored colonial villa is a masterpiece: furnished with eclectic art, antique furniture and a modern touch that perfectly blends tradition and comfort. “

”

KARANDA



A twig of this tree was once in general use amongst Buddhist priests as a toothbrush. The village of Tittawelgoda had to supply 2000 of these toothbrushes annually to the Dambulla monastery.

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“The infinity pool
is a dream –
swimming there at
sunset, with the
jungle stretching
away to infinity,
is pure poetry.”

”





A TUK TUK HOP



Just a few kilometres from The Flame Tree Estate & Hotel is the woodcarving workshop run by Mahinda Jayalath, who has been carving for 30 years. His workshop is arrestingly modest – a mere covered shelter off a tiny back road where he and his three workers sit making their carvings. His work sits within a most ancient and celebrated Kandyan tradition, for it was here, in the Kandyan kingdom, that the island produced one of its most significant and most forgotten artists - Delmada Devendra Mulachari, the Grinling Gibbons of Sri Lanka. Mulachari is renowned for its proximity to Embekke Devale, a magical medieval masterpiece in which formality occupies but the smallest part. Today, the demand for wood carvings is for doors and windows, lattice work above doors, statues of Lord Buddha, and the odd elephant or cobra for the tourist market. All this, and more, is what Mahinda Jayalath and his tiny team put out. Should you be around for more than two or 3 days, he is more than likely to have enough time to make any special commission.

“

“My suite was spacious and impeccable: Super comfortable king-size bed, luxurious bathroom with outdoor shower, and high-quality products. Everything was spotless, with perfect air conditioning and Wi-Fi.”

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NOTABLE NOTES



The Brown Hawk Owl, or Boobook, is no great looker, and little more than one foot in length, but its gentle "ooo-ukkk, ooo-ukkk" sound positions it at the most musical end of feral backing bands.

Of almost all the island's owl species, this one is famously easy to spot in towns and cities as well as in the jungle, and gives Colombo as one of its main addresses.

It is found throughout South and Southeast Asia and was first scientifically recorded in 1822 by Stamford Raffles, who, while between founding Singapore and setting up London Zoo, also described new species such as a giant parasitic flower, a tropical hedgehog, and a crab-eating monkey.

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