

101 SRI LANKA

A CEYLON PRESS
TINY GUIDE



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FOR
IKRAM
WHO SOLD IT

In a
Word
or Two

Kandy's inimitable reputation belies the fact that the city is barely 500 years old, an adolescent in Sri Lankan terms, given that the country's recorded history goes back with stylish ease for at least 2,500 years. Not that anyone dares tell Kandyites this particular fact. Kandy regards itself – and to be fair, is greatly regarded by much of the rest of the country – as Sri Lanka's true and real soul. Its heart.

This characteristic is not something acquired merely because it houses the island's most precious possession – the tooth of Lord Buddha. It is also due to the city's record in having withstood wave after wave of colonial invasions. Kandy was the last island kingdom to fall to foreigners. By the time of its formal capture, in 1815, it had already resisted and survived over 300 years of colonial rule that had engulfed the rest of the island. For over 3 centuries, the kingdom held firm. In doing so, it was able to foster, protect, and develop the distinctive Sinhala culture that had once permeated the entire island. It kept the light burning.

It is, all the same, a city that demands your full attention, if you are ever to get beneath its interminable congestion; edifices inspired by recent Soviet style planning decisions; and traffic plans that could be bettered by donkeys.

It better buildings hide down other city streets, balconies and verandas, screened windows, and opaque courtyards, squirreled away secretly behind shop hoardings that have yet to be bettered anywhere on the island for their chronic ugliness. Kandy is nothing if not the most secretive of cities. Its wonders reveal themselves best to those who look most.

It took Sri Lanka's rulers 19 centuries before they bothered to seriously tame and colonise the interior, the moment happening around 1357 when one of the descendant refugee kings of the Polonnaruwa kingdom set up a new smaller kingdom in Dambadeniya, headquartered for a while in Kurunegala. This brought Kandy to within reach. Within about a hundred years, the city gained its own first king, when Vikramabahu declared UDI, morphing his governorship of the region

and breaking from the control of his
liege cousin, the Kotte king around
1469.

Its history is a byzantine tale of
competing plot lines in which kings,
caste, money, and religion complete
with such complexity as to make Human
Genome Project look like a walk in the
park. Its first line of kings from the Siri
Sanga Bo family, wrested the kingdom's
independence from an older Sri Lankan
kingdom. But beset by forcible catholic
conversions, fever, and internal strife,
they petered out, exhausted and
baffled, in 1609, barely a hundred
years later.

Its next kings, the Dinajara, arose from
an aristocratic hill country family.
During this dynasty's 150 year rule, the
kingdom entered into what doctors
sometimes refer to as Dissociative
Identity Disorder (DID), the kings having
to look defensively outwards against the
encroaching colonists as well as
inwards as an never ending line of rebel
princes, nobles, dissatisfied monks, put-
upon peasants and angry matriarchs
forced a spaghetti of shifting alliances.

alliances that are all but impossible to clearly track. That it survived this long was a remarkable achievement just of itself.

Its last kings, the Nayakars, lasted but 76 years. In a sense, they never really stood much of a chance. Coming from India, their rule was forever undermined by the unceasing power struggle they faced against the older established interests of the monks and nobles they inherited with their new kingdom.

And yet, despite all this, the kingdom survived for 300 years, building out as elegant capital in a web of tight streets around a vast new lake, surrounded by hills. It is said that nearly 500 historical buildings hide in plain sight in this way along city streets that still follow the old medieval grid that first encompassed the capital.

1 THE ROYAL BAR & HOTEL

An old walawwa typical of many of the buildings that haunt the city's tiny, crowded streets, betraying with hints of bashful sorrow, the still remaining traces of striking 17th, 18th, and 19th century vernacular architecture.

2

THE QUEEN'S HOTEL

Walauwas – or mansions as they are called in the West – abound in the city, as Kandyan nobles set up their family residences as close to the royal palace as possible. The city's greatest walauwe is now The Queen's Hotel. The walauwe was turned into a mansion for the British Governors, before transcending into the hotel equivalent of an aging maiden aunt, chasing an elusive restoration. It's unequalled site, on a corner overlooking both temple, lake, and palace, makes you want to go round and round the block just to take it all in properly.

3 FINDING GOLD

Nearly all of the city's remaining stunning and historic walauwas hide down scruffy streets as enigmatic as the families who built them. Waluwa-spotting is a rewarding game to play in the city, though it is easier to detect public buildings - the wonderful, tormented art deco railway station, for example, Ehelepola Walauwa, now a wreck; the 1920 Post Office; the Dunuwille Walawwa, now the headquarters of the Kandy Municipal Council; or Giragama Walauwa, now given over to shops.

4 KATARAGAMA DEVALAYA

A public building that especially stands out is the Kataragama Devalaya, a Hindu shrine built by an 18th century Buddhist king. It is a perfect example of a rare surviving treasure – its architecture enlivened by the most intricate carvings, and colours chosen to forever banish grey.

5 PILLAIYAR KOVIL

The dazzling Pillaiyar Kovil is a Hindu temple dedicated to Ganesh, the elephant-headed son of Siva; and was built by a Buddhist king for his Tamil Dobhi.

6 THE RED MOSQUE

The arresting Red Mosque was built around 100 years ago with a candy-striped façade in reds and whites.

7

THE PRESIDENT'S PAVILION

Above an antique road of street lawyers and notaries, their signs embossed with their professional achievements, is the chunky-as-chutney neo-classical mansion, now called the President's Pavilion which waits, Miss Haversham-like, for the elusive head of state to drop by. Built in the late eighteenth century and embellished with a trowel in the nineteenth, it is a two-storey edifice with nine bays, sporting balustraded parapets and looking out over lawns and gardens forbidden to the public and rarely seen by anyone else either.

8

THE CHURCH OF ST PAUL

Kandy's main Anglian Church is the Church of St Paul. Just two years after its completion it weathered the shattering 1848 Matale Rebellion – and then all the succeeding wars and insurrections that beset the island, protected by vast gates of wrought iron fabricated far away in Edwardian England. Inside is a majestic pipe organ donated by Muslim businessmen from Bradford, a silver-gilt communion set gifted by the King of England – and a blazing 1874 stained glass window, the gift of a planter's widow.

9 OUR LADY OF LANKA

The National Seminary of Our Lady of Lanka is situated in Ampitiya and dedicated to catholic religious education. It was founded by a Lithuanian Archbishop in 1893 at the request of Pope Leo XIII, a man fond of cocaine infused Vin Mariani, a precursor drink to Coca-Cola. This may help explain why it is such a wonderfully calm and tranquil place, sitting 2,000 feet above sea level, overlooking the panoramic beauty of the Dumbara valley.

10 ST ANTHONY'S CATHEDRAL

An ornate neo-classical catholic cathedral church in the city centre. It dates to 1875; and is typical of the high and gilded architecture of catholic Sri Lanka.

11

THE BRITISH GARRISON CEMETERY

The British Garrison Cemetery was created in 1817 - two years after the formal annexation of Kandy by the British. It is a home to almost two hundred souls, laid out like crazy paving, including John Robertson the last European to be killed by a wild elephant in Ceylon, and the colonial ruler, Sir John D'Oyly whose penchant for sarongs and beards made him the country's first foreign hippie. A visiting Englishman wrote that "many a sad tale of hardship, agony, and pain, could the tenants of these nameless graves tell, were they permitted to speak."

12

COMMONWEALTH WAR GRAVES CEMETERY

In sorrow - if not disorder - lie two hundred of the eighty-five million victims of World War Two, intombed in perfect order at the flawlessly maintained Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery. Ceylon escaped much of the horrors of that conflict but rather eccentrically found itself the location of Southeast Asia Command, set up in Kandy under Lord Mountbatten to be in overall charge of Allied operations.

13 MALWATU MAHA VIHARAYA

The headquarters of the Malwatta chapter of Siyam Nikaya - one of the two Buddhist monasteries that holds the custodianship of sacred tooth relic of Buddha. This most establishment of establishment orders runs its affairs from this complex of Buddhist temples and monasteries, based in the 14th century pleasure gardens of the earliest Kandyan kings. Like the White House or Vatican, Malwatu Maha is a power magnet, fusing religion and politics into so certain a draw as to ensure that, should you ever have problems locating the President, important ministers, notable visiting foreign dignities or ambitious politicians and celebrities, there is a more than certain chance that you are likely to find them queuing outside the doors of the chief prelate of the Chapter here.

14 GALMADUWA THE LONELIEST TEMPLE

Built by Kirti Sri Rajasigha, the Galmaduwa is the loneliest temple in Kandy. Barely anyone goes there; indeed it is not even a proper temple, its construction being abandoned by the king whose busy mind had moved from temple making to fresco painting. Yet it is an arresting building, the most Hindu of Buddhist shrines with a high tapering gateway exactly like those used to highlight the entrances to temples across Tamil Nadu.

15

DEGALDORUWA RAJA MAHA VIHARA

The frescos the king abandoned Galmaduwa Viharaya for can be seen a mile or so up the road at the Degaldoruwa Raja Maha Vihara. With hindsight, the king's change of priority was bang on for the frescos that cover the walls of this temple are among the very greatest ever commissioned by any of the island's kings. Despite being inevitably religious in character, telling with due piety, the story of Lord Buddha, their sub text, as well as their sheer artistry, marks them out as exceptional. Into their scenes are incorporated the images of their times – Portuguese firearms, for example, the uniformed attendants of the kings, processional elephants, fish, trees as stylised as corals, the inside of homes, flowers, furniture, coaches, queens, guest arrivals and dinner parties.

16

LANKATILAKA RAJAMAHA

This incomparable temple was built around 1350 by the kings of Gampola, Versillian rulers with a reputation for enjoying all the finer points of culture – through its daily visitor numbers can be recorded with the forlorn fingers of a single hand. The king enlisted the artistry of a Tamil architect famous for his Hindu temples to create a Buddhist edifice that merged the Sinhalese architecture of Polonnaruwa period with Dravidian and Indo Chinese flourishes. It could have been a car crash of a building; instead Sthapati Rayar, the architect, pulled off a masterpiece. Elegant, highly incised white walls stretch into a roof of patterned tiles across three granite stories, the inside adorned with frescos.

17 GADALADENIYA TEMPLE

A medieval temple built by the kings of Gampola to the design of a renowned Tamil architect, Ganes Varachari. It is a lavish work of art, its Vijayanagar architecture blending Dravidian, Deccan, Islamic, Hindu and Rajput features with other more common Singhala qualities.

18

EMBEKKE DEVALE

A medieval masterpiece, the temple had withstood wars, weather before being restored by Delmada Devendra Mulachari, an artist of unparalleled genius. Stepping in you enter a magical world in which formality occupies but the smallest of parts. In every section, in every place, are the surviving 500 statues of the great artist, each a stroke of artistic genius in of itself. Exquisitely carved models of entwined swans and ropes, mothers breast feeding children, double headed eagles, soldiers, horses, wrestlers, and elephants – all validate why this temple is famed across Asia for its world class carvings. But there is more. Fantasy intervenes. Erupting from a vein is a figure of a women; a bird takes on human attributes, a slight of hand reveals that an elephant is a bull; another, that is a lion.

19

THE TEMPLE OF THE TOOTH

If measured simply by faith alone, nothing on the island, still less in Kandy, competes with The Temple of The Tooth, located in centre of the city. Proof of its appeal is evident every year in the half million people who attend its 7-day Perehera, when the tooth is paraded through the town on the back of a large elephant. From Canada to Japan, several hundred million Buddhists watch the televised coverage of the festival. Within the temple's grounds are to be found all the structures and buildings of the island's last royal place too. The whole complex merges one into the other, a confusion that makes clear the unremitting opacity of the line between religion and state has always existed in the country.

20

THE RELIC AT THE TEMPLE OF THE TOOTH

The relic - said to be Lord Buddha's left upper canine tooth - arrived on the island around 371 CE hidden in the hair ornamentation of an Indian princess. Almost immediately it became the island's most precious possession, legitimising the reign of kings and validating a priestly theocracy. Often on the move to escape war, capture, thieves, frenzied Catholics, rival warlords, or Tamil invaders, it lived in almost a dozen other temples before coming to rest in Kandy. The relic's continuing importance can be measured by the fact that a victorious President or Prime Minister's first call on winning an election here, is to the Temple of the Tooth.

For much of its existence the temple has also been a target, destroyed by weather, war, and insurrection; and the temple you visit today is in its fourth or fifth edition (depending on your definition of restoration). Its central building, designed in classic, gracious Kandyan style, has double peaked tiled roofs underpinned by a panoply of pure gold and is surrounded by a golden fence. Elaborate frescoes adorn its walls. The chamber is richly decorated with elephants, guardian stones, and moonstones. Seven caskets studded with gems and shaped like stupas fit one into another, the last holding the relic itself. Rituals are performed three times daily: at dawn, noon, and dusk. Once a week the tooth is symbolically bathed in water scented with herbs and flowers. And once a year it is paraded around the city streets in a vast Perehera procession of elephants, priests, fire eaters, dancers, and acrobats.

21

THE ULPANGE

Unhappily, many of the palace's buildings have become squats for lucky civil servants, their unbending bureaucratic domicile, twitching with room partitions, plastic furniture, and rusty fans, distorting most of the original architectural features that once made these buildings so exquisite – and the stunningly graceful Ulpange, built in 1806 by King Sri Wickrama Rajasinha as a bathing pavilion for queens, is today a police post.

22

WADAHINDINA

MANDAPPE AUDIENCE PALACE

The Wadahindina Mandappe Audience Palace is now home to the stuffed remains of Rajah, the chief elephant in the Kandy Perahera, who died in 1988, prompting a full day of national mourning.

23 THE PATTIRIPPUWA

The Pattirippuwa, an immeasurably stylish octagonal pavilion in the grounds of the Royal Palace, has been commandeered by a library.

24

THE KING'S PALACE

THE RAJA WASALA

The King's Palace, the Raja Wasala, is a now Museum. It is a long building with wide verandas, three gateways, and a courtyard, its interior plastered with stucco and terra-cotta work. During the British period, it was used by Sir John D'Oyly and his successors as their official residence.

25

THE QUEENS CHAMBERS MEDA WASALA

The Queens' Chambers, the Meda Wasala, with its fetching courtyard and veranda, has been commandeered by the Department of Archaeology; and wild horses are not likely to drive them out.

26

THE MAHA MALUWA

The Maha Maluwa, the boundless terrace adjacent to Kandy Lake, has not been encroached upon by government departments in search of fine architecture. At one end stands a stone memorial beneath which is buried the skull of Keppetipola Disawe who led the failed rebellion against the British in 1818.

27

THE MAGUL MADUWA

ROYAL AUDIENCE HALL

The palace that surrounds the temple it is a poignant shadow of its old self, the British having destroyed half of its buildings. Even so, the ones that remain are outstanding examples of the zen-like elegance of patrician hill country architecture, with wooden pillars, decorative carvings, distinctively pitched roofs, and walls and windows that open out interior spaces with so artful a restraint as to give the resulting light a unique and calming luminosity. This can be seen most immediately in The Royal Audience Hall, the Magul Maduwa, a wooden structure, built by King Sri Vikrama Rajasinha in 1783. Much good it did him - for here it was, in 1815 that the Kandyan Convention was signed, brutally ending the island's last kingdom.

28

KEPPETIPOLA DISAWE'S GRAVE

High official, landowner, aristocrat, patriot, freedom fighter, Keppetipola Disawe, who is buried here in the royal Palace, was the leader of the first great uprising against the British. His reputation grew greater in every year following his killing; and especially following Independence in 1948. In the oddest set of circumstances, his skull found its way to the Phrenological Society of Edinburgh. It took 136 years before it was returned to the city of his death to lie now beneath this monument overlooking the lake. The Sri Lankan Sunday Times reported later "the skull was transported on a gun carriage from Colombo port to Kandy and ceremonially interred amidst military honours on November 26, 1954 in a memorial which was constructed at the Kandy Esplanade opposite the Dalada Maligawa."

29 SURA SARADIEL

Sura Saradiel is Sri Lanka's Robin Hood.

He was hung by the British on 7 May 1864 in Bogambara Prison Kandy, along with his childhood friend, Mammale Marikkar - the last two people to be publicly executed. To the British, Saradiel was little more than a gangster, though today his exceptional good looks would have won his modelling and TV contracts aplenty. Dacoit though he may have been, but his penchant for redistributing some of his stolen items amongst poor villagers won him, and wins him still, many fans. One of these has made him a love song in concrete, recreating in Saradiel Village fantasy hamlet peopled with craftsmen and cooks, farmers, a gypsy snake charmer; a coffee shop, toddy drinkers in a tavern; an astrologer's house, workshops for carpenters and goldsmiths.

30

THE CEYLON TEA MUSEUM

The capital of tea has, of course, a tea museum. Indeed there are several places that award themselves this moniker, though the best is probably the Ceylon Tea Museum, housed in the former Hantana Tea factory.

31

THE HANTHANA MOUNTAINS

This range of seven peaks, the tallest at 3,000 feet, is so close to Kandy centre that you can spy on the city from its ridges. Victoria Reservoir and the entire Knuckles Range are also within sight. For eager trekkers, the Pekoe Trail starts here, at the Ceylon Tea Museum. Fed by freshwater springs, it is also home to over 100 bird species and a good range of wild animals – including, it is rumoured, leopards.

32

GNOME MOUNTAIN

One mountain in the very centre of the city, stands out. Bahirawa Kanda is home to one of the tallest statues of Lord Buddha. It was once home to some atypical human sacrifice, involving a particularly beautiful girl, Dingiri Menika who lived next to the Flame Tree Estate and Hotel, in Galagedera.

Selected to stimulate the moribund fertility of a Kandyan queen, the girl was kidnapped by soldiers and propelled with banner-bearers to a stake for overnight consumption by demons. Fortunately, the king's elephant keeper got to her first; rescued her, and set up home with her in Cross Street, close to Kandy Super Phone Ltd. Soon after, the King had been exiled to India.

33

ALAGALLA

Protected by a necklace of high mountains and surrounded by dense jungle, the Kandyan kingdom's natural defences helped it withstand repeated invasions. Central to this protective chain are the Alagalla Mountains, an especial trekkers' paradise. Its range of dry evergreen, montane, and sub-montane forests are home to many species of fauna and flora, including wild boar, monkeys here, squirrel, anteaters, porcupine, monitor lizard, tortoise – but it is especially noted for its 50 recorded bird species which include Sri Lankan junglefowls, Layard's parakeets, and yellow-fronted barbets.

34

BIBLE ROCK

Close to Alagalla is Bible Rock, a stunning example of a Table Mountain. Over 5,500 feet high, its curious open book shape inspired early Victorian missionaries to give it its canonical name, though 300 years earlier it performed a vital task as a look out post for the Kandyan kings, eager to spot the latest colonial invasions, especially those of the Portuguese. A classic series of bonfires, running mountain to mountain, starting here, and ending close to Kandy was the trusted warning signal that was used. Steep though the climb is, it doesn't take long to get to the top – and one of the best views in the country.

35 BALANA

The Balana pass was a critical entry points into the Kandyan kingdom. "Balana" is the Sinhala word for "look-out," and look out it did, commanding from its perch 2000 feet about sea level, a perfect view of the entire territory that any enemy would have to cross. Balana foiled repeated Portuguese invasions; and it was here in 1638, at the Battle of Gannoruwa, that the imperial ambitions of the Portuguese finally met their grim finale. Weakened by mass desertions, just 33 Portuguese soldiers survived of the 4,000 that made up the army, reduced to heads piled up before the victorious king. Ruins of the fort remain even to this day, most especially the foundations of the higher buildings in their quadrangular layout of 3 circular bastions.

36

THE KADUGANNAWA PASS

Accessing the kingdom became an obsession after the British annexure, and Kadugannawa shot to fame in 1820 when the British, fresh from having seized the entire country and put down a major rebellion, set about building a road to connect Colombo with Kandy. At Kadugannawa they faced a rock of such magnitude that blasting it away or circumnavigating it was no option.

Instead an army of builders lead by Captain Dawson of the Royal Engineers, pieced a sufficiently large hole through it to allow horses and carriages access.

Although Dawson died of a snake bite before the road was completed, he was credited with building the island's first modern highway. A tower built in his memory, somewhat shakily, still stands.

37

THE NATIONAL RAILWAY MUSEUM

The country's National Railway Museum is to be found in Kadugannawa. The country's first train ran in 1858, and the network now covers 15,00 kms using a lock-and-block signalling system of such antiquity that trainspotters mark the country as their number one travel destination. Harder critics argue that little has changed because the railway department runs one of the country's greatest deficits – averaging an annual 45-billion-rupee loss. But, as Senneca said, "it is not the man who has too little, but the man who craves more, that is poor." And who can be poor who can ride in trains and carriages of such vintage beauty, with doors and windows open to catch the breeze; and – from time to time - destinations that are all to briefly reached.

38

THE TRIPLE ARCH BRIDGE OF KADUGANNAWA

The real and most secret glory of Kadugannawa is actually a bridge. Trainspotters, tourists and pontists flock like sheep to the Nine Arch Bridge, a viaduct built in 1919 between Ella and Demodara. But connoisseurs go to a smaller, older one much closer to home – the Triple Arches Bridge of Kadugannawa, built in 1887 when the first rail lines were being laid. Today it is a dreamy ruin, its arches lost in the ever-encroaching jungle. Listen hard – for here you can still catch the chatter of long departed passengers heading to the hill country.

39

UDAWATHTHAKELE FOREST

Despite the rapid growth of the city from 1815 onwards, the old capital managed to retain a key area of green wilderness – Udawaththa Kele Forest. Once a forest hunting reserve for the kings, it is now a magical 104 hectare protected nature reserve. It is home to 460 plant species; butterflies, snakes, snails, lizards, toads, monkeys, civet, deer, loris, boars, porcupine, giant flying squirrels, bandicoots, and bats. But its real draw are its birds. Over 80 species have been recorded here, many endemic, including Layard's parakeet, babblers, the hanging parrot, the three-toed kingfisher, golden-fronted and blue-winged leafbirds, Tickell's blue flycatcher, the white-rumped shama, the crimson-fronted barbet, the serpent eagle, and brown fish owl.

40 GIRAGAMA

Just outside the city centre is Giragama, a tea factory set amongst several hills of tea which offers Stalinist style tours and presentations. The factory is a short hop from where the very first tea bushes were grown on the island at -plants smuggled from China to the Royal Botanical Gardens in Peradeniya. Kandy is noted for its most classic of tea flavours. Here the tea plantations are typically at two to four thousand feet, to inspire a bright, light, and coppery tea with good strength, flavour, and body.

41 KANDY LAKE

Turtles, cormorants, egrets, pelicans, eagles, owls, herons can be found swimming away on Kandy Lake. Known as the Sea of Milk, the lake is surrounded by a dramatic Cloud Wall across much of its three-kilometer circumference and is overhung by huge rain trees. In its eighteen-metre depth lurk whistling and monitor lizards, turtles, and numerous fish including an exotic 9-foot-long alligator Gar – a fish with a crocodilian head, a wide snout, and razor-sharp teeth.

42

THE PEREDINIYA ROYAL BOTANICAL GARDENS

Refashioned in 1821, this is one of Asia's finest botanical garden; set up by Alexander Moon for the commercial experimentation of plants. The start of a massive period of deforestation followed. In 1881, 84% of Sri Lanka was forested. Within 20 years, colonial agriculture reduced it to 70%. Moon was an enthusiastic enforcer of a project begun in 1810 by Sir Joseph Banks when a garden was opened on Slave island in Colombo before finally transferring to Peradeniya. Now the gardens stretch over 150 acres with 4,000 species filling the space. Glorious, drunken avenues of Cook's Pines, Palmyra Palms, Double Coconuts, Cabbage Palms, and Royal Palms lead off into shady dells.

43

THE PALM

COLLECTION AT PEREDINIYA
ROYAL BOTANICAL
GARDENS

The palm collection at The Perediniya Royal Botanical Gardens is among the best in Asia with about two hundred and twenty species. Worth pulling out your three-volume facsimile copy of Carl von Martius's "Natural History of Palms," to identify what's what.

44

THE ARBORETUM

COLLECTION AT PEREDINIYA
ROYAL BOTANICAL
GARDENS

The garden's chief glory is its arboretum of ten thousand trees, many over a hundred years old and relied upon to flower in stunning colours. Among them is a Javan fig tree with a canopy of about 1600 square meters. The collection includes the oldest nutmeg trees in the world, planted in 1840. It also houses a magnetic arboretum of trees planted by famous people including a huge Ironwood (Tsar Nicolas II); a rather stunted Camphor Tree (Mrs Sirimavo Bandaranaike); a Yellow Trumpet Tree (King Akihito of Japan) and a Sorrowless Tree (Queen Elizabeth II). A Cannonball Tree planted in 1901 by King George V and Queen Mary of the United Kingdom is however pipped to the post for age by the one growing at The Flame Tree Estate & Hotel.

45

THE BAMBOO

FERN COLLECTION AT
PEREDINIYA ROYAL BOTANICAL
GARDENS

The Botanical Garden's bamboo collection is especially exciting and includes the giant bamboo of Burma, the largest known in the world, yellow building bamboo, feather bamboo, prickly bamboo, and Dwarf Chinese bamboo. The fern collection includes over a hundred indigenous and exotic species.

46

LOOLECONDERA

The greatest irony in the country's tale of tea is just how secretive its real origins have since become. Loolecondera, the estate where it all started, still exists just outside Kandy, surrounded by hills of tea – but it is almost entirely inaccessible. Determined tea adventurers with reliable 4-wheel drives can just about make it up to the estate. But like so much in Kandy, it hides in plain sight. It is perhaps a human inevitability that anything given half a chance to become a secret, will become so – though perhaps this is truer in Kandy than elsewhere. Even so, this was the place where James Taylor and his experiments with tea in 1852 set the island on a dramatic new horticultural course.

47

ARPICO

Sri Lankans will be long familiar with the capacious product ranges held by Arpico, the island's popular superstore chain. And for visitors no trip to the island can be said to be complete without a rummage on such shelves as these. From plastic effigies of Lord Buddha to organic Maia cheese, the shop has more than enough to satisfy all but the more wanton Bollywood / Hollywood tastes. You can even pick up a copy of Hi magazine there, the celebrity photo magazine about people who rarely shop at Arpico. The best branch is in Peradeniya.

48 HELGA

No list of Sri Lankan hotels would ever be complete without Helga Blow's famous anti-hotel. Sri Lanka's last great eccentric, Helga Blow, Dior model, and niece of the eminent architect Minette de Silva, returned to her homeland in 1988. Seeking therapeutic distractions from a tortuous divorce, she set about decorating her home with the extraordinary murals that still adorn every spare inch of wall space. Home became a hotel, and guests can still find Madame Helga (as in the Kelly Jones Stereophonics song), walking the lush corridors of her eyrie in Philip Treacy hats, doyenne of "an eccentric collision between Faulty Towers and Absolutely Fabulous."

But for something more jungle halcyon – come over to The Flame Tree Estate & Hotel.

49 THE TOOTH FAIRY

It may seem eccentric to include a dentist in a bucket list of things to do and see in Kandy - but where better is there to include such an attraction than the home of the sacred tooth relic. Dr Diane's International Centre for Dental Tourism is that rarest of dentistries – a place of supreme calm amidst inevitable odontic anguish. Sit in the bed-chair overlooking her mango and banana trees, one of her kind helpers holding your trembling hand as she goes about here uber professional work; and have your teeth given the once over.

50 THE KANDY BAZAAR

Kandy is not a mecca for hardened shoppers. This most addictive of modern hobbies may have replaced religion in most other countries, but here, in this most religious of cities, it takes a back seat. Niche boutiques are few - though there is no shortage of shops stocked with the essentials. An old bazaar, the Kandy Bazaar, sells everything from bananas to bags, batiks to bangles.

51 KANDY CITY CENTRE MALL

Kandy City Centre, a ten-story mall built to an almost inoffensive architectural style in the centre of the city offers a more sophisticated range of items.

52

WARUNA'S ANTIQUE SHOP

Bucking the trend is Waruna's Antique Shop, a cavernous Aladdin's Cave of marvelous discoveries, its shelves and drawers stuffed full of ancient flags and wood carvings, paintings, jewellery, and curios.

53

PILIMATHALAWA

Every so often as you travel the island you hit upon a village dedicated to the obsessive production of just one item.

There is one that only does large ceramic pots. Another is lined with cane weavers. One, more perilously, is devoted to the creation of fireworks.

Down south is one for moonstones; another for masks. And in Pilimathalawa, next to Kandy, is one dedicated to brass and copper. The ribbon village of shops and workshops keeps alive an expertise goes back to the kings of Kandy, for whom they turned out bowls and ornaments, religious objects, and body decoration. Three hundred years later the craftsman remain, melting and moulding, designing, and decorating, stamping, and sealing, engraving, and polishing.

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BECAUSE YOU ARE WORTH IT

Eating can be a challenge in the city centre; there are plenty of restaurants but few able to lavish on you the sort of tranquility, good reliable grub and decent drinks that you may desire, and – quite possibly – deserve too. To better attend to this need, head for Slightly Chilled, a roof top bar at the far end of Kandy Lake.

DISCOVER MORE

The Ceylon Press was established to make Sri Lanka's rich and complicated story - a mystery to many, and a secret to most - more accessible. Its free-to-use eBooks, guides, companions, podcasts, and databases are available at ceylonpress.com, Amazon and podcast aggregators like Spotify and iTunes.

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ABOUT THE FLAME TREE ESTATE & HOTEL

"It's absolute paradise," wrote one guest recently; "I would fly back to Sri Lanka simply to stay in this place for a couple more days."

Centred on a 25-acre organic spice and timber plantation, The Flame Tree Estate & Hotel is a secret to most and a companion to some. Its 1,000 high rocky hills stalled the Dutch army in 1765; and until the civil war the estate stretched over 100 acres with 3 working elephants.

Renovated and furnished with art & antiques, its hills and valleys keep safe a rare seclusion.

Its restored plantations grow cardamom, turmeric, ginger, cloves, pepper, cocoa; rubber, coffee, vanilla; cinnamon, coconuts; and scores of trees – best enjoyed from the vantage point of the hotel's infinity pool. Its healthy menus fuse east with west, street food with fine dining. It can be viewed at www.flametreeestate.com.

A GIFT FOR READERS

Of course, as a reader, you naturally qualify for special treatment should a holiday bring you to Sri Lanka and The Flame Tree Estate & Hotel.

Drop the general manager a note to tell him how you came across us and to make arrangements to best suit your time and budget: generalmanager@flametreeestate.com

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Swarbrick is a publisher, planter, hotelier, writer, and hermit.

He was raised, with few concessions to modernity, in Sri Lanka, India, Singapore, and the Middle East.

He gained various degrees on the Celtic fringe: at the Universities of Wales, and Stirling, prolonging an introduction to accepted working hours for as long as was decently possible.

He launched Oxford University Press's first commercial online business, Oxford Reference Online before running various homeless units at HarperCollins UK, India, and Hachette.

When the doubtful charms of boardroom divas and bottom lines diminished, he returned to Sri Lanka, the land of his birth hundreds of years earlier, to rescue a spice plantation and set of art deco buildings that had gone feral in the jungle.

Today, as the Flame Tree Estate & Hotel, it has become one of the country's top ten boutique hotels, run by the kindest and most professional of teams; and overseen by several small schnauzers. The hotel is also the location for The Ceylon Press.

Besides running the Hotel and Press, he enjoys his hobbies of books, trees, dogs and, as a Cornishman, following the progress of the Cornish Independence Movement from afar.