



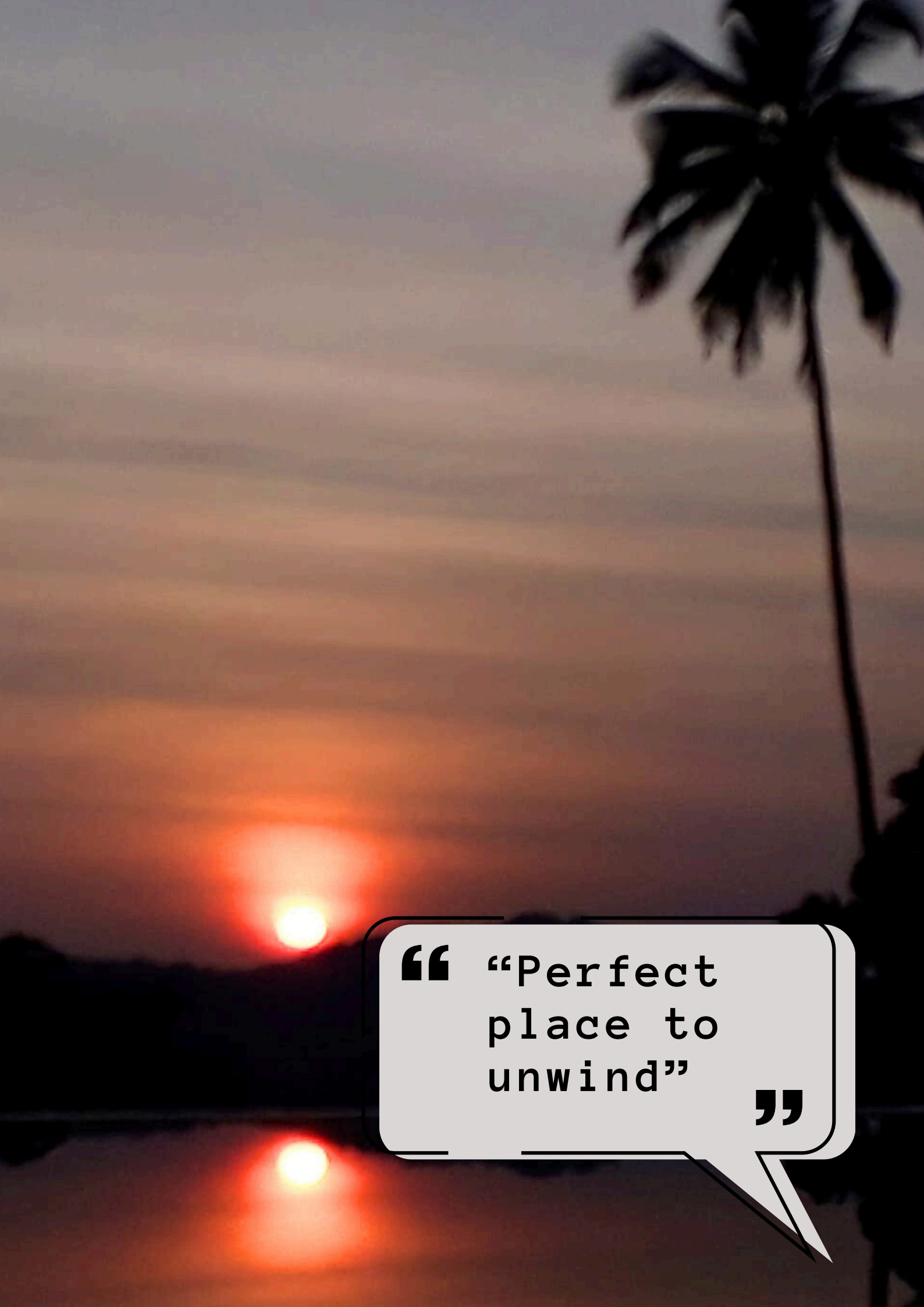
THE FLAME TREE HERALD TRIBUNE

IN
THIS
EDITION

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

THE CEASELESS CHATTER OF DEMONS
SRI LANKAN CASHEW NUT CURRY
KING OF THE MONTH
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A tropical sunset scene with a palm tree silhouette in the upper right corner. The sky is a gradient of orange and yellow, with the sun visible as a bright orange orb on the horizon. A speech bubble is overlaid on the lower right side of the image.

“Perfect
place to
unwind”

GORAKA



One of Sri Lanka's lesser-known spices is brindleberry (Goraka). In Ayurvedic medicine, it is used to treat ulcers and digestive problems.

Western medicine is now busy studying its hydroxycitric acid content to better design medicines that increase fat burning whilst simultaneously reducing fat accumulation and appetite.

Goraka fruit, which resembles doll's house-sized pumpkins, is first dried before its flesh is used in place of lime or tamarind to give dishes, especially fish dishes, a distinctly tart taste. The fruit badly needs this pre-preparation, as it is otherwise far too acidic to eat raw.

Its most famous island offering is Ambulthiyal, the classic Sri Lankan sour fish curry, where, as part of a mix of spices, the fish turns the meat a stylish black as the walls of a Soho literary cocktail bar.



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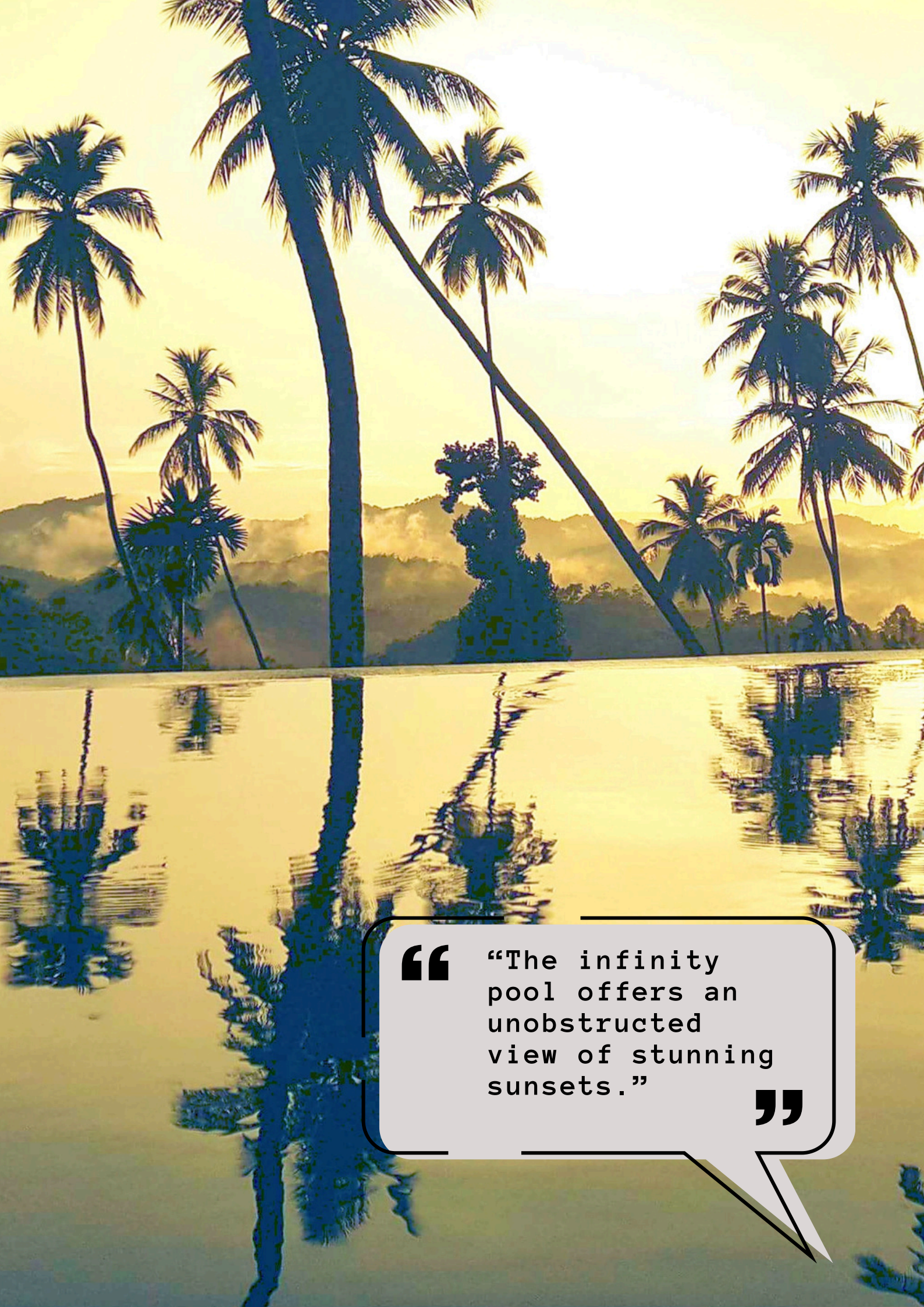
“Everything was perfect, the owner, the location, the view... We also had dinner there, probably one of the best meals we had in Sri Lanka.”

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THE STAR OF BOMBAY SAPPHIRE



Arguments still range over whether The Star of Bombay is Sri Lankan or Indian. It was discovered at a time when the British East India Company ruled Sri Lanka, and, on the balance of probabilities, it seems more than likely that the 182-carat stone was mined on the island before setting off on its world travels. Hollywood was to be its happiest home for it was bought by Douglas Fairbanks in the 1920s for "America's sweetheart," his wife Mary Pickford, the best known woman who has ever lived." Star of the silent screen, her own fame came to an abrupt halt when sound was added to the movie mix a few years after she received her glamorous Sri Lankan sapphire. Hopefully, its unusual violet-blue colour (caused by a singular mixture of titanium, iron, and vanadium) gave her some consolation in the decades that followed. On her death in 1979, it was donated to the Smithsonian Museum in Washington, D.C.



“The infinity pool offers an unobstructed view of stunning sunsets.”

”

THE TINY TOM



The Rusty-Spotted Cat (*Prionailurus Rubiginosus*) is the world's smallest wild cat, even smaller than most domestic cats, and one of the least studied and understood of the wild cat species.

Covered in reddish fur, it is found in dry forests and grasslands and is mainly nocturnal. Found only in Sri Lanka and India, it is threatened by unending habitat encroachment, which fragments its home range. Spotting it is a rare and wonderful stroke of luck.



“It is the perfect blend of complete tranquillity and activity.”

EPIC SKINKS



Although most skinks are size-challenged, a handful stand out because they buck the trend, the trend being a nose-to-snout length of around 50 cm.

Seven skinks exceed this measure with grace. And the greatest of these is the Many-Keeled Grass Skink, also known as the Golden Skink or the Keeled Indian Mabuya. Subtly decorated in stripes of yellow, black, brown, and bronze, it is, at around 121 mm, a titan amongst skinks and often to be seen sunbathing.

Its earlier conservation status as *Eutropis carinata* was listed as "Least Concern," but now, with its new global recognition, all bets are off, and a few dedicated scientists are busy conducting field studies to determine its new status. Given how super productive it is in the egg-laying department (it lays up to 20 eggs a year) and its willingness to live almost anywhere below 1000 meters, it is more than likely that it will be found to be widespread across the island.

The background of the image is an abstract composition. The upper portion features a pattern of overlapping, rounded shapes in shades of yellow and light green, outlined in a darker green. Below this, there are several layers of horizontal, wavy bands in various shades of green, some with darker outlines. The bottom left corner shows a dark, textured area, possibly a piece of wood or a different material. A white speech bubble with a black border is positioned in the upper right, containing a quote.

“

“More or
less the
greatest
hotel in
the world.””

FORTRESS FORBEARS

To enjoy a fulfilling and ambitious professional life as a builder in the fifth century BCE, you would need to relocate to Wu, where one of the more ambitious Chinese kings was constructing the Han Canal. Or Sigiriya.

This most famous of fortresses, however, harbours one still older, for just seven hundred and fifty metres south of Sigiriya, is the remains of a fortress that predate the Lion Rock fort itself: Mapagala Fortress. A great deal of imagination is needed to reconstruct it – should a visitor ever get to the top, for there is no regular path cut.

What remains is a space bordered by immense granite boulders that envelop once substantial buildings, now only traces on the ground. Excavations have also uncovered traces of iron tools that would have been essential for preparing the stones used in its construction.



“

“The incredibly attentive staff greatly contributes to the tranquillity of the place. In short, everything is absolutely perfect! “

”



The Ceaseless Chatter of Demons



THE CEASELESS CHATTER OF DEMONS

Ashok Ferrey's story of young Sonny Mahadewala is all about a man who leads a dual life: between his adoptive England, where he cohabits with a privileged American, and the big house on the mountain belonging to his father's people in Kandy, the ancient capital of Sri Lanka, where a troubled existence has earned him both honour and shame, for Sonny's mother is convinced that demons possess this ugly son of hers.

Demons and the devil himself circumscribe the playing field of this book, and through their clever interplay, they speak of larger horrors with able grace. "This loving, surprising book," wrote Alexander McCall Smith, "will enchant and amuse. It is quite simply a triumph."

“A true
gem!”



KING OF THE MONTH

TISSA, KING OF UPATISSA NUWARA

The fifth monarch of the Vijayan Period (543 BCE - 66 CE), reigning from 454 BCE to 437 BCE.

Forcing his brother, Abhaya, into abdication, the Vijayan king, Tissa, though titular King of Upatissa Nuwara, never confidently occupied the office he had so greatly sought. He was a haunted man – obsessed by the morbid predictions of a court soothsayer who predicted that he and all his brothers would be killed by their nephew, Pandu Kabhaya, son of his only sister, Princess Citta.

An ultimately unsuccessful balancing act characterised his rule: feuding with his brothers (many of whom died in the troubles) whilst keeping at bay his nephew Pandu Kabhaya. As civil war rocked the new nation and almost brought the nascent dynasty to its knees, Tissa's repeated attempts to find and slay his nephew, Pandu Kabhaya, were foiled, and his reign came to a predictable end when Pandu Kabhaya killed him in battle.



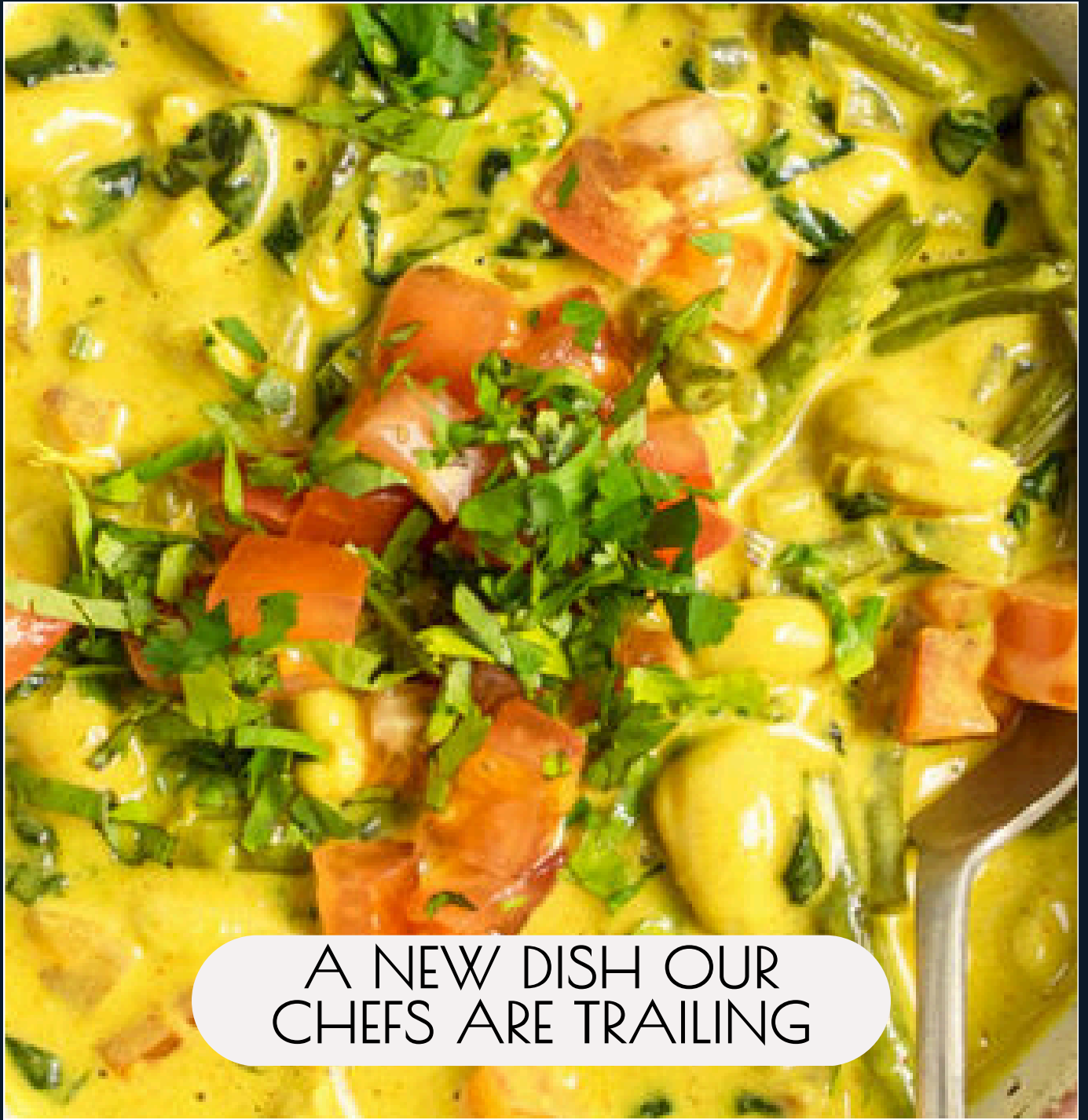
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“This place is simply incredible, set in such a wonderfully unique setting. “

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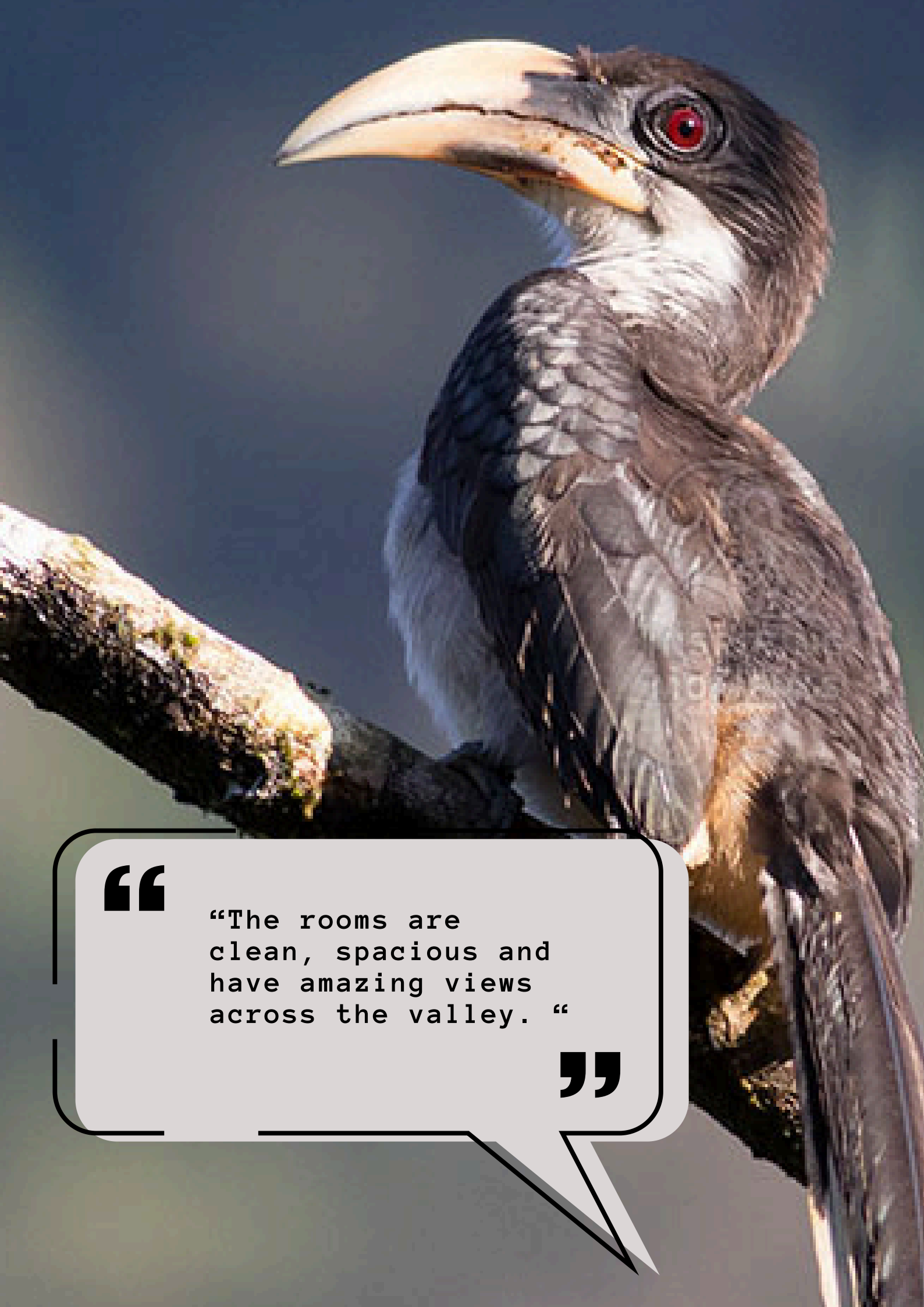


SRI LANKAN CASHEW NUT CURRY



A NEW DISH OUR
CHEFS ARE TRAILING

Spinach; Red Onion; Coriander; Ginger; Cashews; Sri Lankan Curry Powder; Green Beans; Coconut Oil; Lemongrass; Tomatoes; Turmeric; Coconut Milk; Garlic Cloves; Curry Leaves

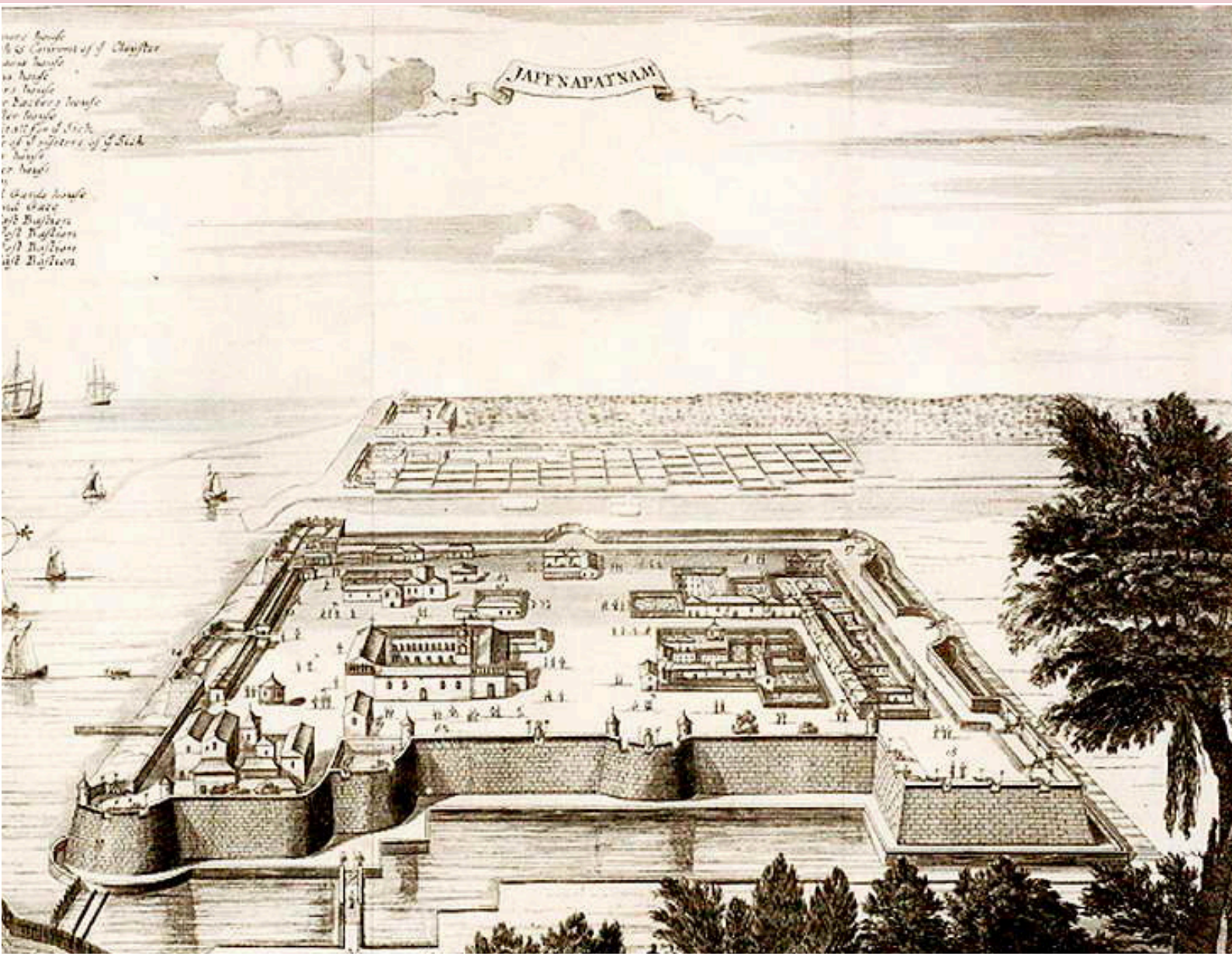


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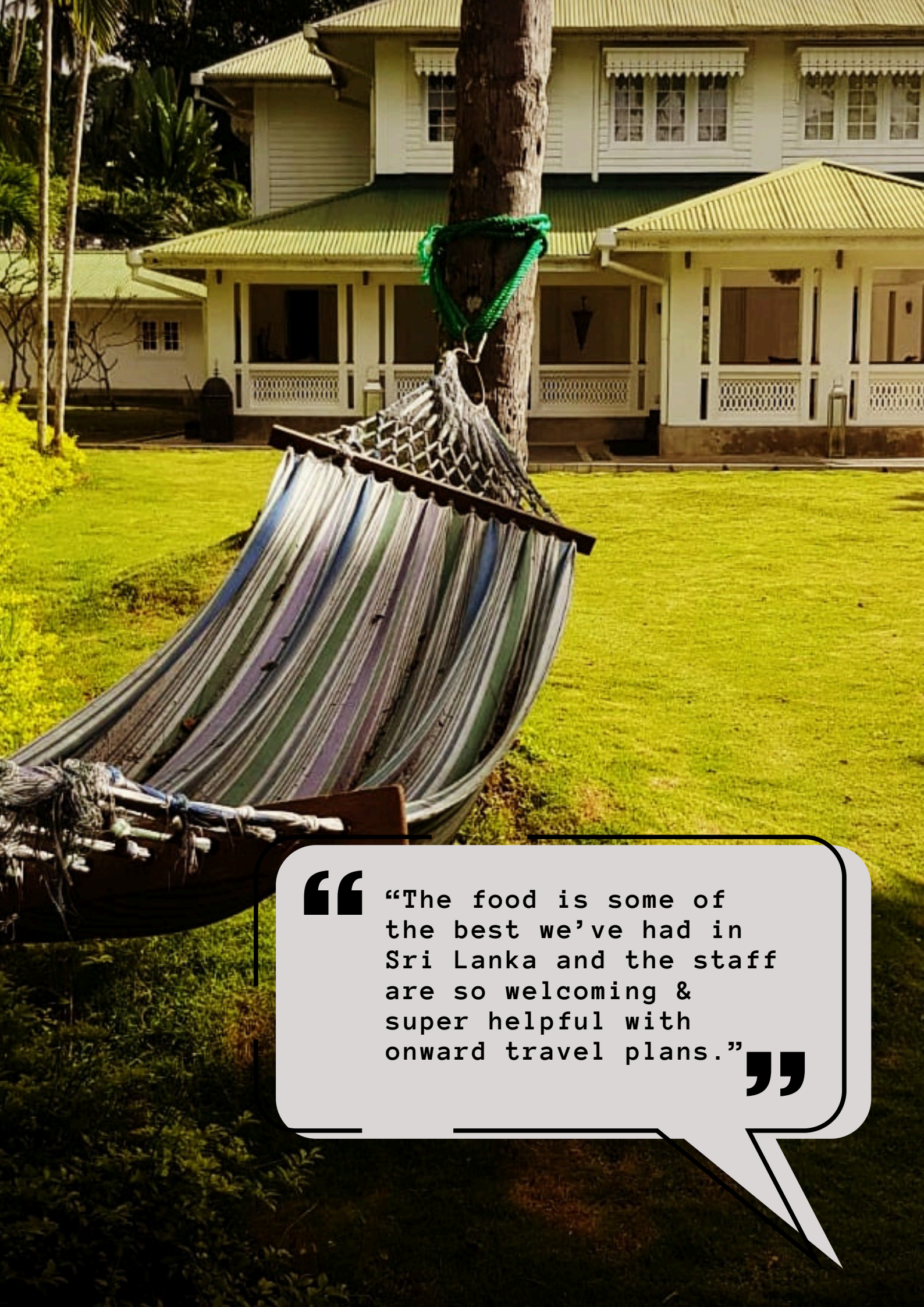
“The rooms are
clean, spacious and
have amazing views
across the valley. “

”

1672 THE DUTCH FORT OF JAFFNA PATNAM



This map was published in "A True and Exact Description of the Most Celebrated East-India Coasts of Malabar and Coromandel, and also of the Isle of Ceylon" - a 17th-century travelogue by Dutch missionary Philippus Baldaeus, detailing his observations in South India and Sri Lanka, and covering geography, culture, Hindu idolatry, flora, fauna, and conflicts between Portuguese and Dutch forces. It depicts a hilltop perspective of the fort built by the Portuguese and captured by the Dutch after a three-month siege in 1658. The kingdom of Jaffnapatnam consisted of 13 islands and four provinces, and the Dutch maintained rule for 138 years.



“The food is some of the best we’ve had in Sri Lanka and the staff are so welcoming & super helpful with onward travel plans.”

KITUL—ANDA—MURE



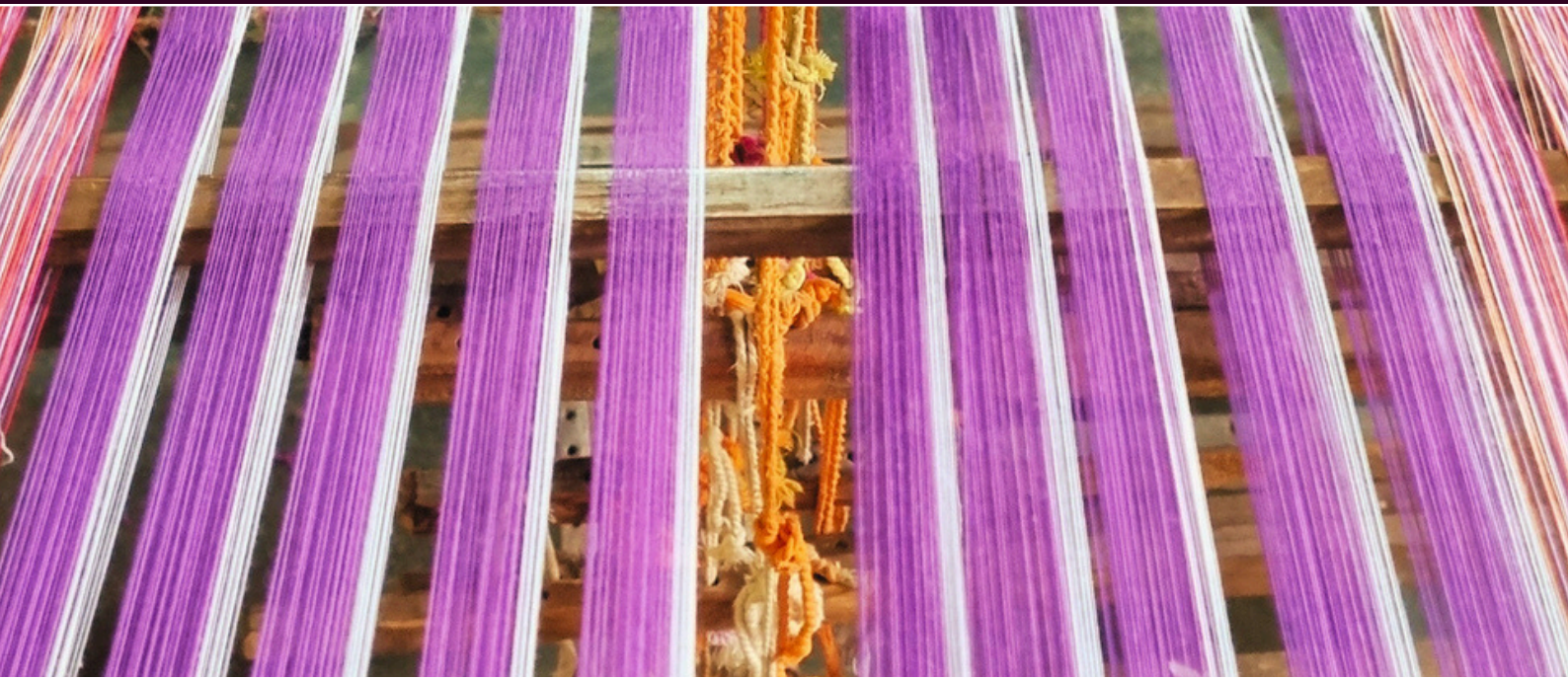
The half share of the toddy from all kittul trees tapped was, in ancient times, the due of the land's proprietor. The trees were tapped by Wahumpura tenants, who were also called Hakuro, and the toddy was converted into syrup from which jaggery, that most delicious of alternatives to sugar, was made.



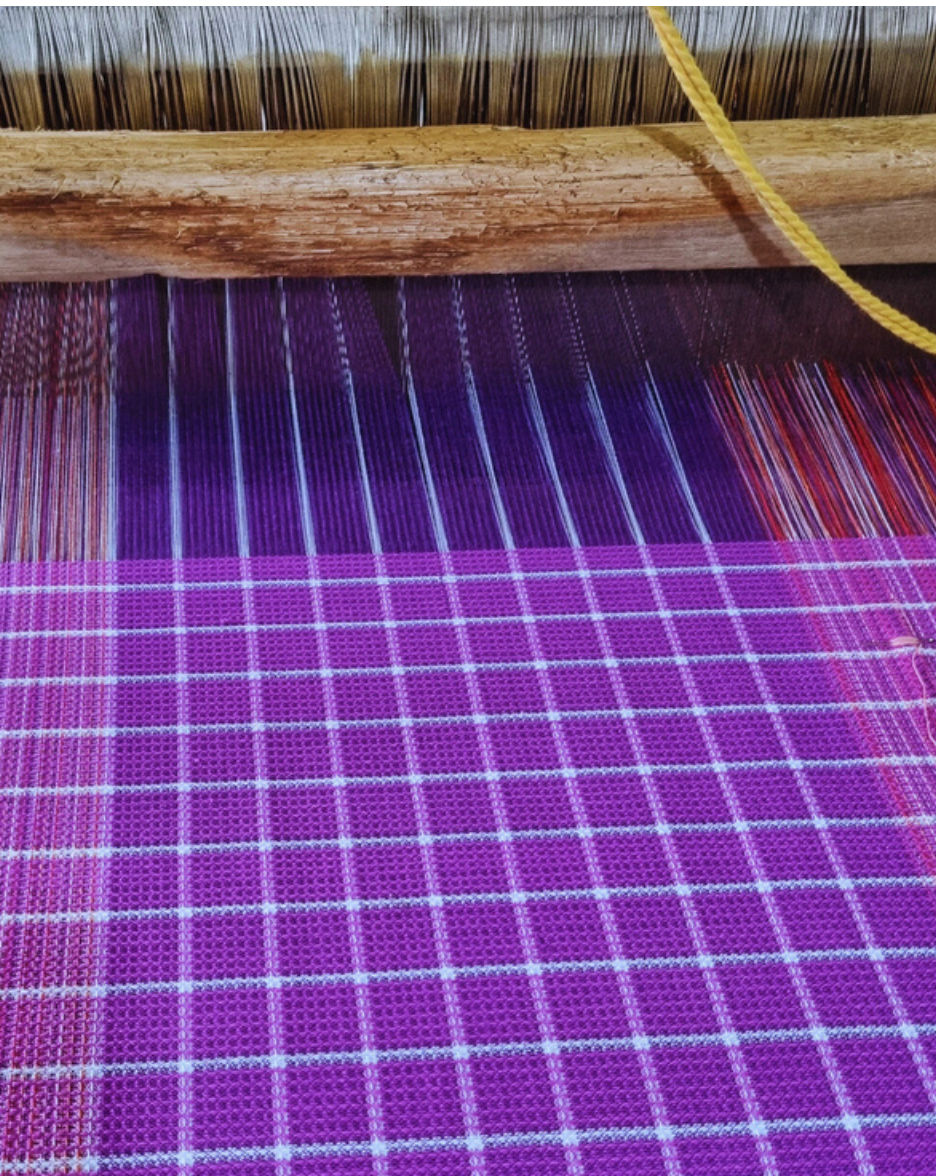
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“Everything
was excellent
from start to
finish. “

”



A TUK TUK HOP



A few kilometres from The Flame Tree Estate & Hotel is a small example of fine craftsmanship – one dedicated to handloom fabrics. This unexpected outpost of the Department of Textiles has at its heart some six ancient wooden hand looms on which women weave all manner of classic patterns in cotton. A shop next to it sells some of its wares: sarongs and lungis, saris, table mats, and bed linen – as if a small part of South Molton Street had drifted away into happier tropical mornings.

“

“The food was amazing, and the staff were incredibly caring and attentive, making us feel truly welcome.”

”

THE SHRIEKER



The Barn Owl, though not endemic, is nevertheless a common sight across the island, especially in Colombo, happy, as its name suggests, roosting around humans in old buildings. Indeed, it much prefers open spaces, uncluttered countryside, and built environments over jungle and forest.

At 13 inches long, with an unmistakable white body and white disc-shaped face, it is the Amazon Prime of the owl world, found almost everywhere except Antarctica.

Its gorgeous countenance notwithstanding, it has an ear-shattering shriek that seems to continue long after you feel it ought to cease.

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