



THE FLAME TREE HERALD TRIBUNE

IN
THIS
EDITION

March 2026

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

A TREMENDOUS DRAMA OF LOVE
FAB FENUGREEK
KING OF THE MONTH
KIKIKI-KIKI-KIKI-KEEE
THE SIXTH WONDER OF ANCIENT LANKA
THE ISLAND'S GREAT RIVERS



“ The Tree
Flame Estate
& Hotel is
heaven on
earth!

”

DISAVE



A Sinhala term for the governor of a province belonging to the old Kandyan kingdom. The term was adopted by the Dutch for their maritime provinces, and was later used within the administrative hierarchy for native officials under British rule.

“

Very professional
service,
delicious
cuisine, superb
rooms. A
magnificent
infinity pool.

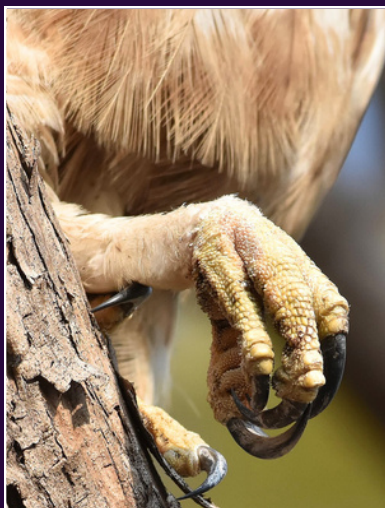
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KI-KI-KI-
KI-KI
-KI-KI-
KEEE

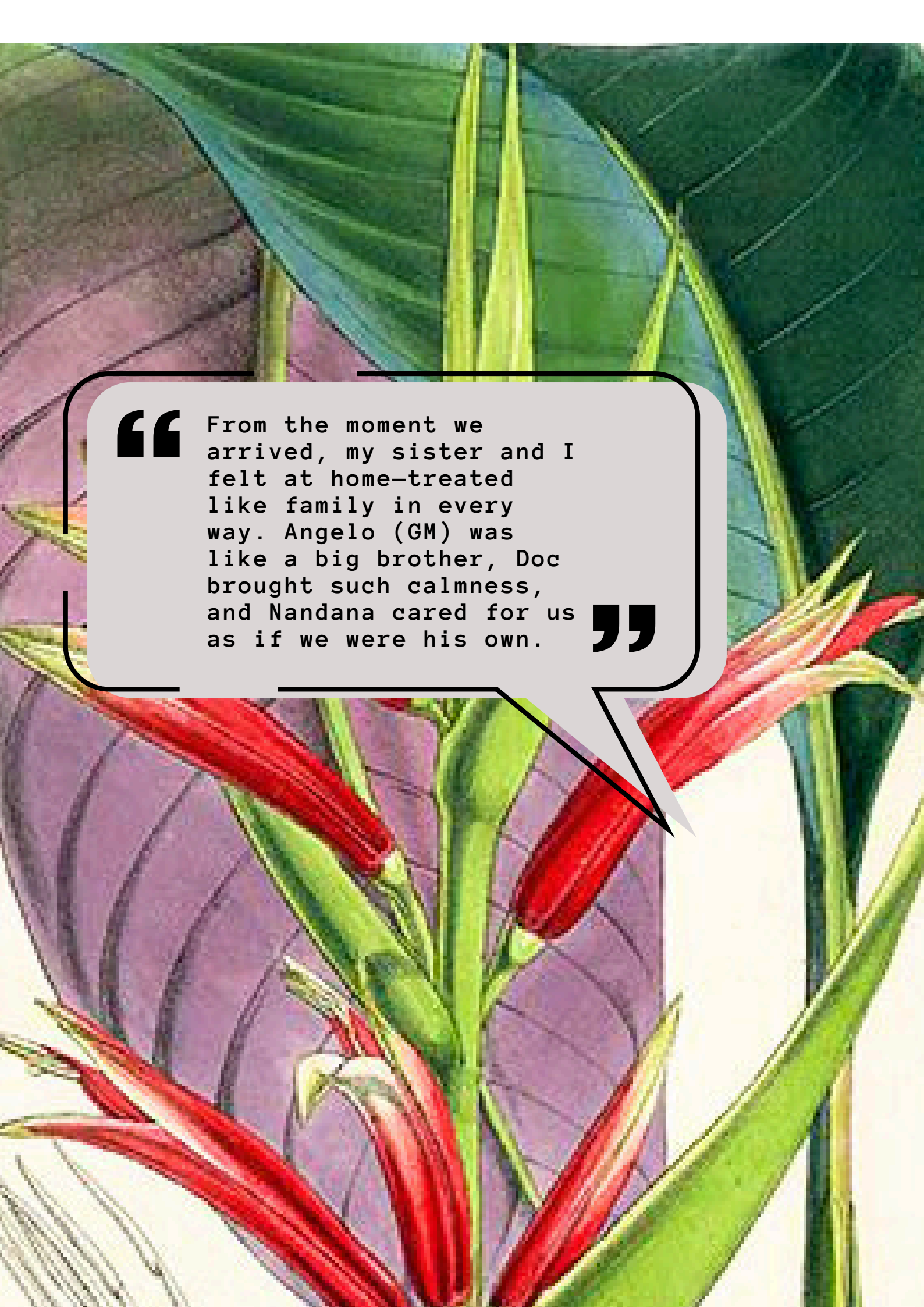


The Changeable Hawk Eagle, a relatively slender, medium-large raptor measuring 60-72 cm in length, is often found perching on our hotel trees. Here it is perfectly positioned to search for breakfast, lunch dinner and snacks – be they lizards, rodents, or birds.



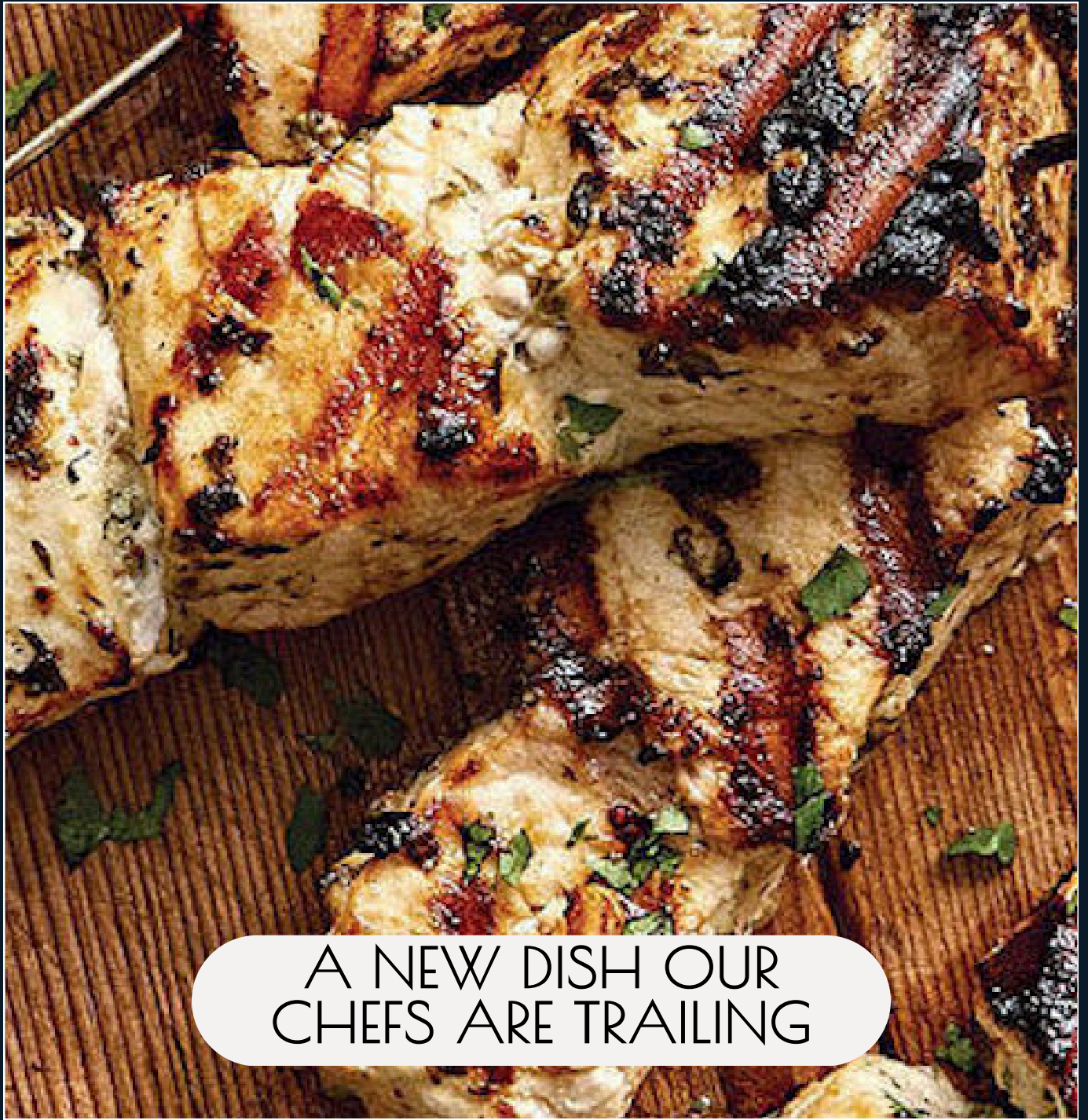
Brown above and white below, it is relatively easy to spot on the island. Although usually silent, it is not without the sort of voice that could bring traffic to a standstill.

When it is ready to mate it makes itself heard and the Sri Lankan sub species has a most singular sound – a ki-ki-ki-ki-ki-ki-keee, that rises in crescendo and ends in long, drawn-out scream, such as that you might hear at the end of a particularly satisfying horror film.



“ From the moment we arrived, my sister and I felt at home—treated like family in every way. Angelo (GM) was like a big brother, Doc brought such calmness, and Nandana cared for us as if we were his own. ”

SWORDFISH WITH PERSIAN LIME & COCONUT MARINADE



A NEW DISH OUR
CHEFS ARE TRAILING

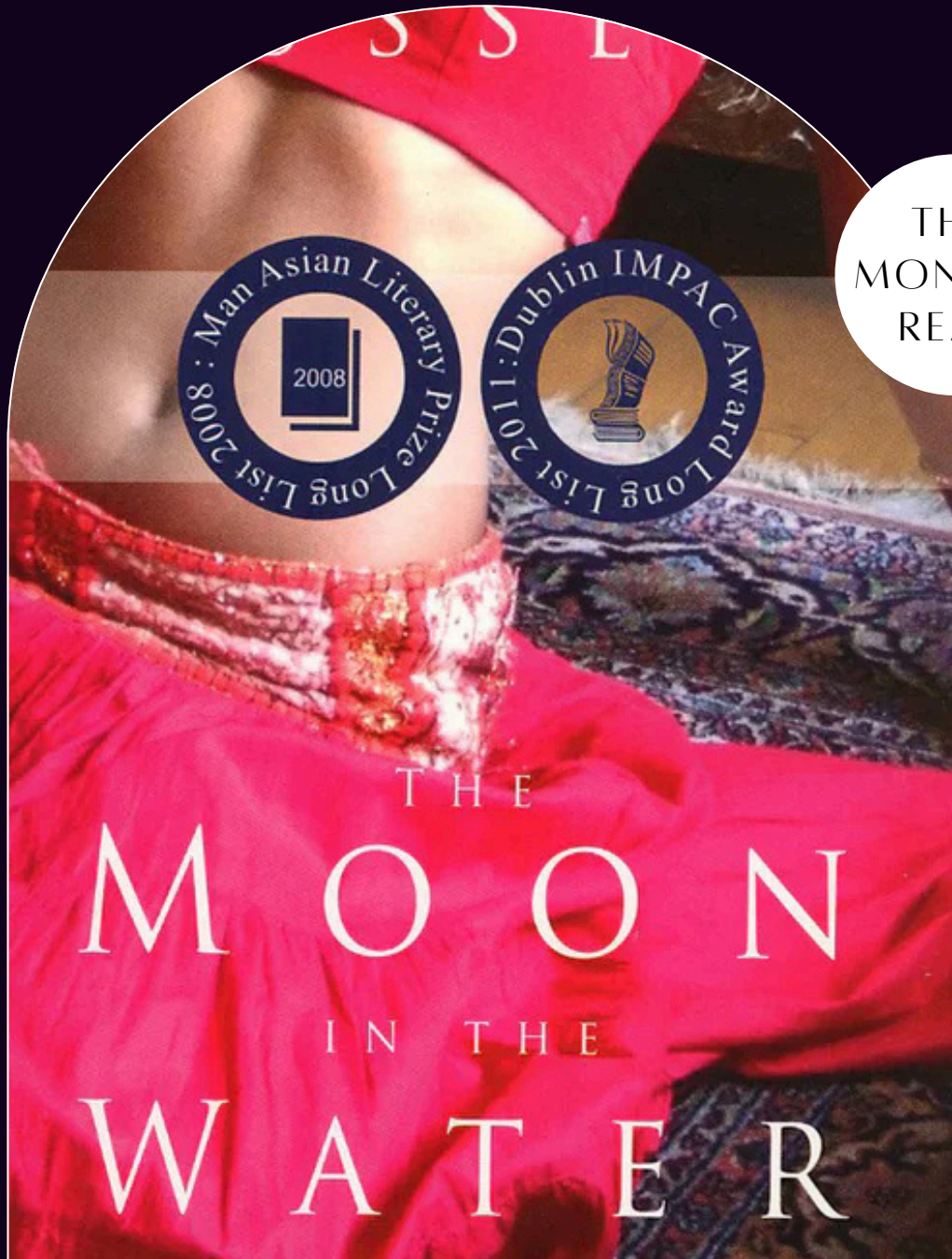
Swordfish Steaks; Coconut White Balsamic Vinegar; Persian Lime; Olive Oil; Jalapeno Pepper; Fresh Cilantro; Lime; Ginger; Sea Salt; Fresh Ground Pepper

“ 10 stars
aren't enough
for the love,
kindness, and
hospitality we
received. ”



A TREMENDOUS DRAMA OF LOVE

AMEENA HUSSEIN



THIS
MONTH'S
READ

It is impossible to think of Ameena Hussein without also thinking of her genius husband, Sam Perera. Most, if not all, of the greatest Sri Lankan writers in print today owe them a debt of gratitude for mentorship, guidance, advocacy, and, often, first publication, too.



Their publishing house, Perera Hussein, squeezed into part of a family mansion, the last in a street of once glorious Edwardian mansions, is an incubus of the best of Asia's independent publishing and an inspiration for all other indies. Busy as an editor, amongst so much else, her fiction is milled in slow exquisite grinders.

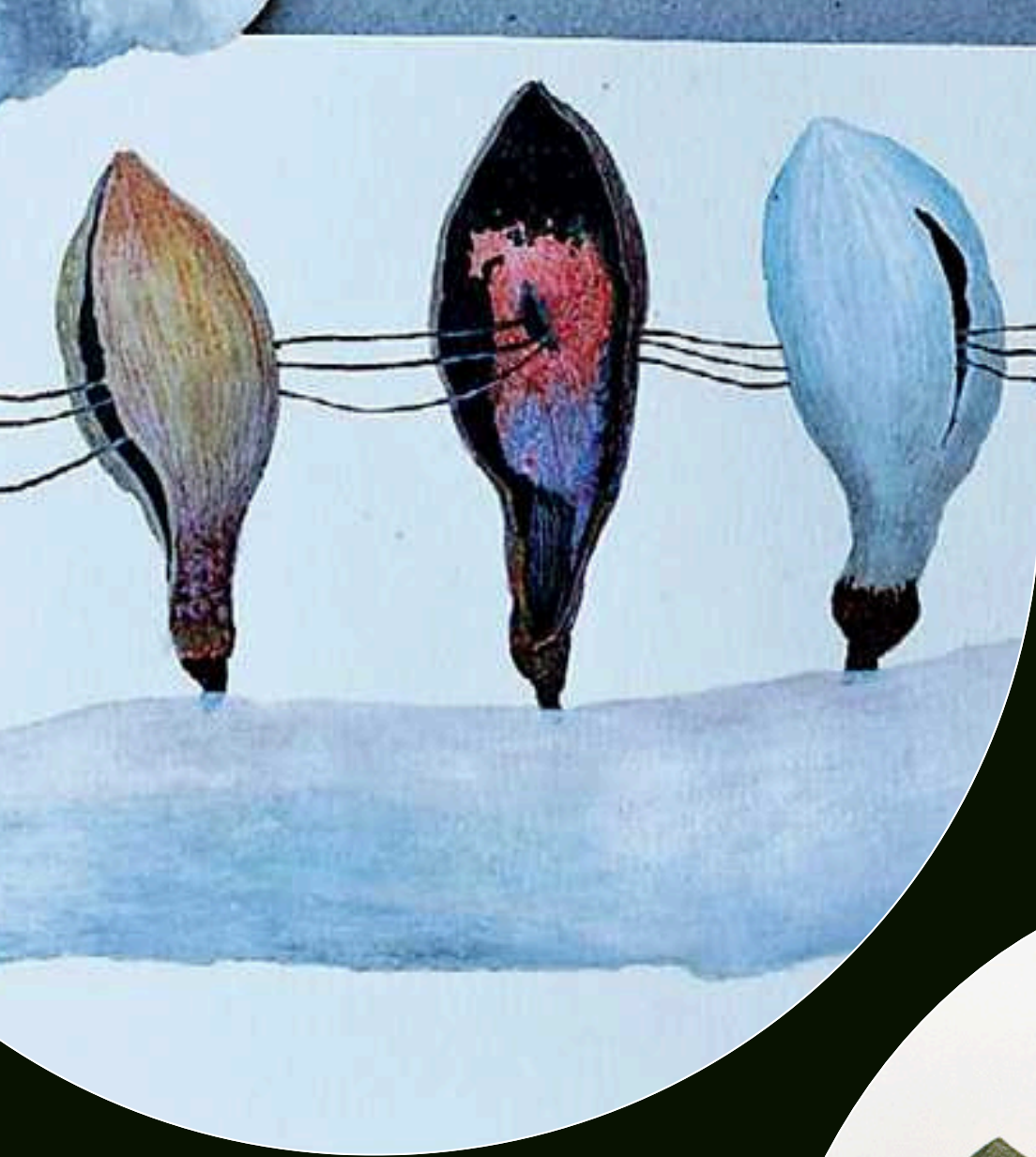
But of the three adult fiction offerings now out, they have nevertheless been worth the wait. "Fifteen," published in 1999, is a viby, sparkling collection of short stories about being young, relatively free and female. "Zillij," published in 2009, digs far deeper, with a story collection revolving around identify and family, history, and the present in modern day Sri Lanka. "Now as he walked through the devastation," she was to write, "nothing prepared him for what he saw. It was worse than a war. It was obliteration of entire communities. It was hundreds and thousands left homeless, destitute, and in shock."

It was "The Moon in the Water," also published in 2009 that brought all her passion and creativity together in a tremendous drama of love and maybe even forgiveness, about a women called back to Sir Lanka by a killing only to uncover still more terrible secrets.



“ Truly the best experience in Sri Lanka—can't wait to return! ”

RUPANEETHAN PAKKIYARAJAH



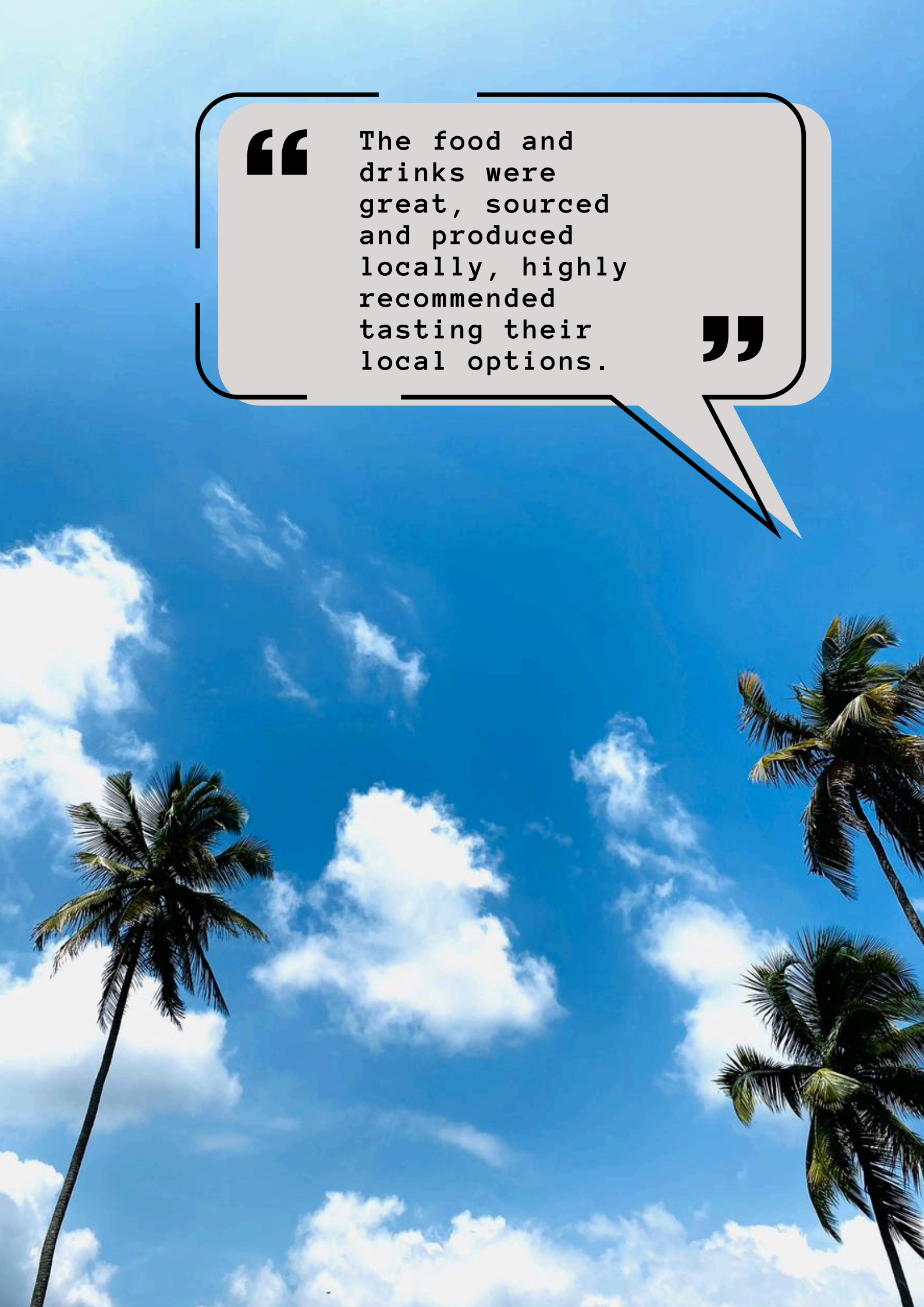
A surreal theatricality marks out the extraordinary work of Rupaneethan Pakkiyarajah, born in Batticaloa in 1991 when the civil war was entering one of more terrible phases, and one of the country's youngest and most exciting contemporary artists. By reimagining perfectly ordinary, often natural objects, and presenting them in unexpected combinations with a crisp and unrelenting focuses, his art subverts the very way in which anyone sees and senses the world around them.



“

The food and drinks were great, sourced and produced locally, highly recommended tasting their local options.

”



KING OF THE MONTH

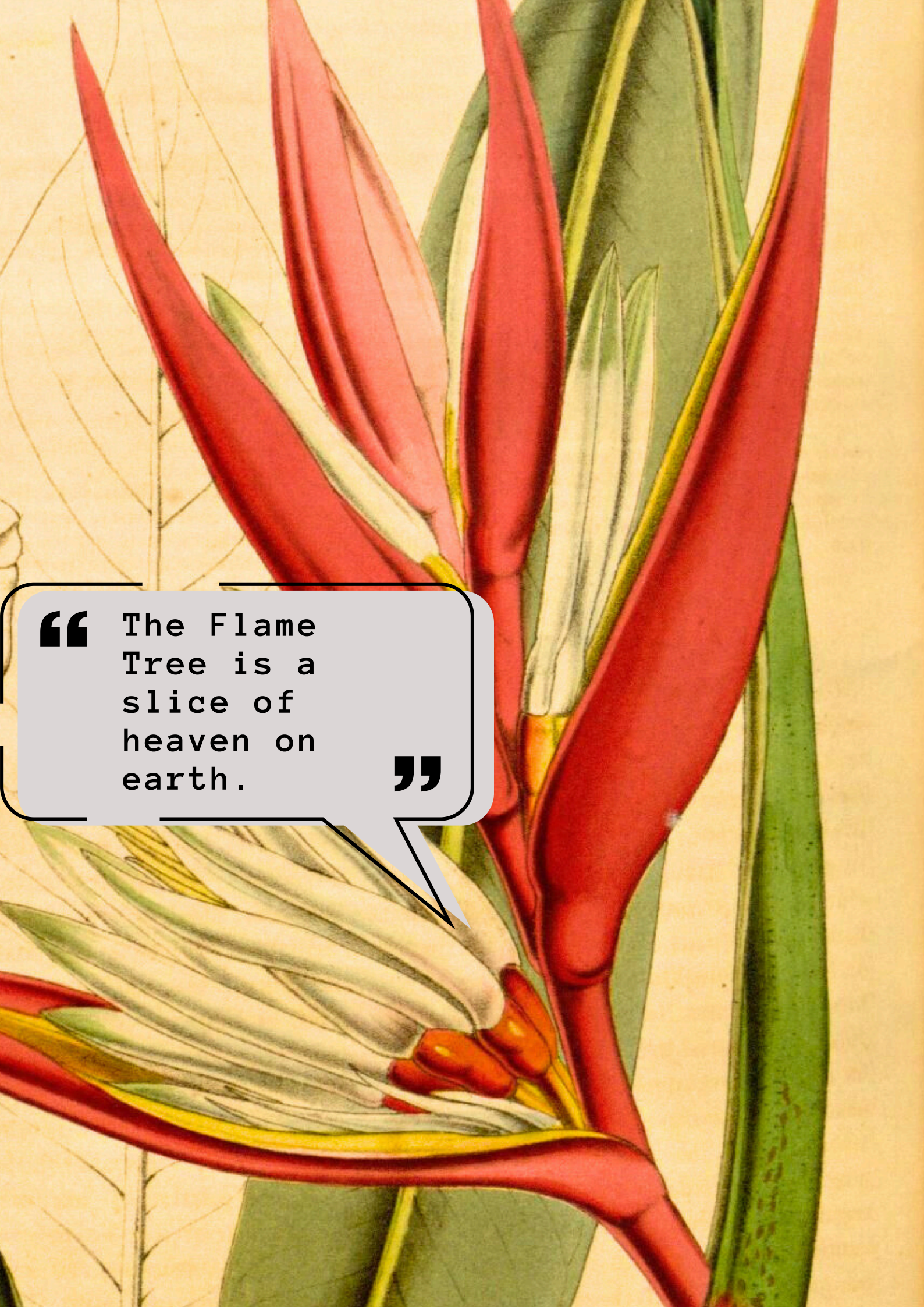
JETTHA TISSA I, KING OF ANURADHAPURA

The seventeenth monarch of the Lambakanna Dynasty (1st Period) (66 CE – 436 CE), and the 62nd recorded monarch in Sri Lanka in the line running from Prince Vijaya (543 BCE), the dates of his reign being 267 – 277 CE. Jetta Tissa, I was the son of the previous king, Gothabhaya, and something of a chip off the monstrous old block. To deal with unruly ministers at his father's funeral, he had sixty of them rounded up, staking their impaled heads in a mournful circle around the old king's body in 267 CE. This display of strong-armed governance under yet another king was probably precisely what was needed to help keep at bay the lurking regicidal tendencies inherent in the Lambakanna dynasty. Jetta Tissa's decade-long rule is unlikely to have been a comfortable ride for those around him. Indeed, the Mahavamsa Chronicle states, "he came by the surname: the Cruel." It then elaborates, with evident dismay, on the steps he took to shift patronage and resources from the orbit of Theravada Buddhism to that of Vaitulya Buddhism. Even so, he was to die in 277 CE, just the 29th reigning Sri Lankan monarch out of 62 to die of natural causes. Modest as this sounds, it was still something of a major achievement.



“ Superb and attentive service (without being overbearing), truly excellent restaurant, delightful and charming rooms / property and the most spectacular idyllic scenery. ”





“ The Flame Tree is a slice of heaven on earth. ”



FENUGREEK



Although fenugreek originated in Turkey six thousand years ago, it became so widespread that it appeared with ease in the texts, medicines and recipes of the first Mesopotamian and Indian civilisations, as well as those of ancient Egypt, Greece and Rome. Use it, advised the Egyptian Ebers Papyrus in 1550 BCE, to embalm the dead, purify the air, and cleanse the tummy. A main component of Ayurveda and traditional Chinese medicine, it was regarded with great suspicion by Western medicine – until recently. It is now enjoying an investigative renaissance as labourites around the world probe its antidiabetic, anti-obesity, anticancer, anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, antifungal, and antibacterial properties. The plant, an annual, grows to a bushy two feet in height, happiest in full sun and is well able to tolerate drought. Its celery-tasting leaves are often used in curries and salads, but it is its seeds that attract the most use, giving dishes a nutty, maple-like taste with hints of curry, as in Aloo Methi, the Indian potato curry, or Persian Sabzi stews. In Sri Lanka, its seeds are especially enjoyed when combined with a few onions, chilli, garlic cloves, tamarind, and plenty of thick coconut milk to make a simple vegetarian curry.

“

Calm,
beautiful,
peaceful
hotel

”



THE SIXTH WONDER

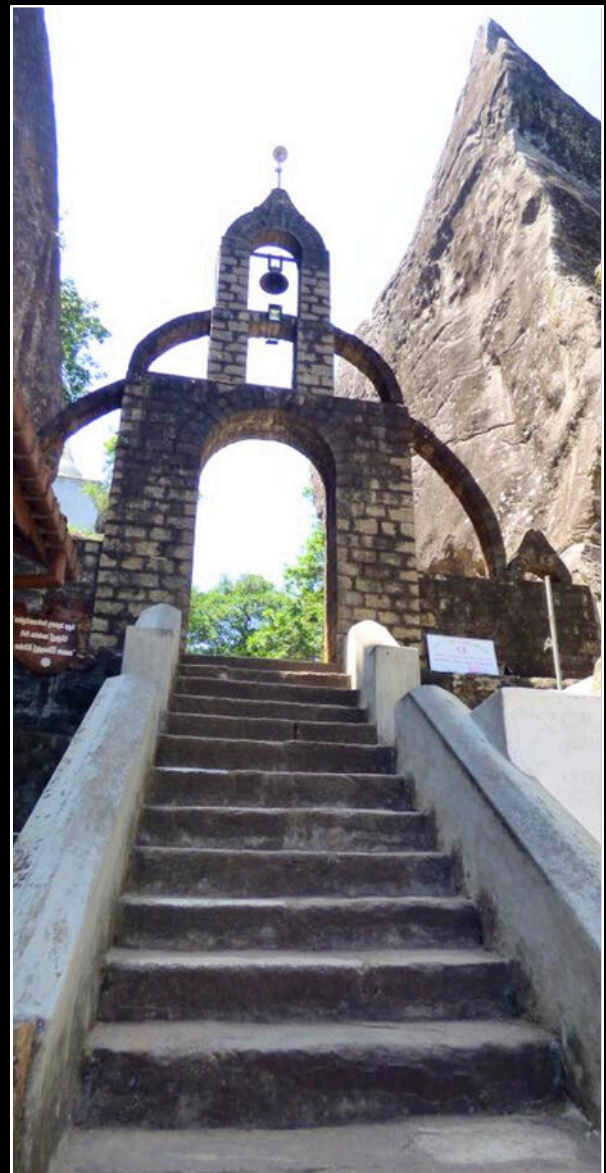
Despite their iconic status, the original seven wonders of the ancient world fall short compared to the seven wonders of ancient Lanka.

The world's first Seven Wonders comprised a garden, two tombs, two statues, a temple, and a lighthouse. It featured the Pyramids of Giza, the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, the Statue of Zeus at Olympia, the Temple of Artemis at Ephesus, the Mausoleum at Halicarnassus, the Colossus of Rhodes, and the Lighthouse of Alexandria. Sri Lanka's list, though, is not all architecture with a nod to gardens – it is comprehensive, including a painting, a monastery, a book, a revolutionary new technology that enabled a treasured dish, a shrine, a tree, and a lake.

Its first great wonder was a lake, Panda Wewa, and its second was the Sri Maha Bodhi. Its third was to comprise Asia's equivalent of the three great pyramids of Giza – the three great stupas of Anuradhapura: the Ruwanweliseya, the Abhayagiri, and the Jetavanaramaya. Ancient Sri Lanka's fourth great wonder was a palace built to escape death and suffering - the Brazen Palace, or Lowamahapaya. And its fifth is Kiribath, the ultimate comfort food.

The sixth wonder of ancient Sri Lanka is a book, one that is still in use today, almost unchanged since it was first written - The Pali Canon. Eighty times larger than the Bible, this textbook on Buddhism reveals much more than the religion itself. It symbolises the island's enduring attachment to rules, regulations, and laws.

THE 7 WONDERS OF ANCIENT LANKA





The country's legal system is a mixture of Roman-Dutch law, English law, Kandian law, Thesavalamai and Muslim law. Overwriting all this is its constitution. But overwriting even this is what is most commonly accepted as correct, and that is largely dictated by the mores of Buddhism itself, its paramount religion.

Even the most unwritten of a country's laws have a source somewhere that was at some time described in custom, on stone inscriptions, on paper or in art - and so it is here. The source for so much that goes as said on the island can be traced back to the Pali Canon – not simply to its many instructions and recommendations but as much to the spirit of the Canon that, like the air we breathe, influences most parts of Sri Lankan society, even those that are not even Buddhist.

And for this, the country can give thanks to the remarkable Valagamba, known by some as the boomerang king for his amazing ability to bounce back from even the most disastrous encounters, and the very same monarch responsible for building the massive Abhayagiri Stupa.

Valagamba's older three brothers had been kings before him, but the last of the trio, Khallata Naga, managed to get himself murdered by his army chief, Kammaharattaka, who did his best to marginalise and even kill Valagamba. He failed. Valagamba won the ensuing fight, killed the murderous army chief and took over the throne by 103 BCE.

But within months, the new king faced and defeated the armies of 5 of his Dravidian interlopers.

His second reign was to last for over a dozen years, years in which, having taken stock of the risks to Buddhism by Tamil invasions, the ephemerality of Lord Buddha's teachings that were at time merely oral, and the increasing schisms within Buddhist orders as different monks set about interpreting Lord Buddha's teaching with every greater diversity, he decided it was time to write it all down, copy it and distribute it right across his kingdom

Under his patronage, in the Aluvihare Rock Temple 30 miles north of Kandy, 500 monks assembled to begin the task. It was to be a momentous moment for the challenge they had set themselves; the challenge was immense. Firstly, they had to recite the doctrines that were, at best, only orally remembered. That would have taken many years. Then they had to agree on an acceptable version of the teachings before transcription. That must have taken even longer. Finally came the lengthy work of transcribing them, using ola leaves from talipot palms.

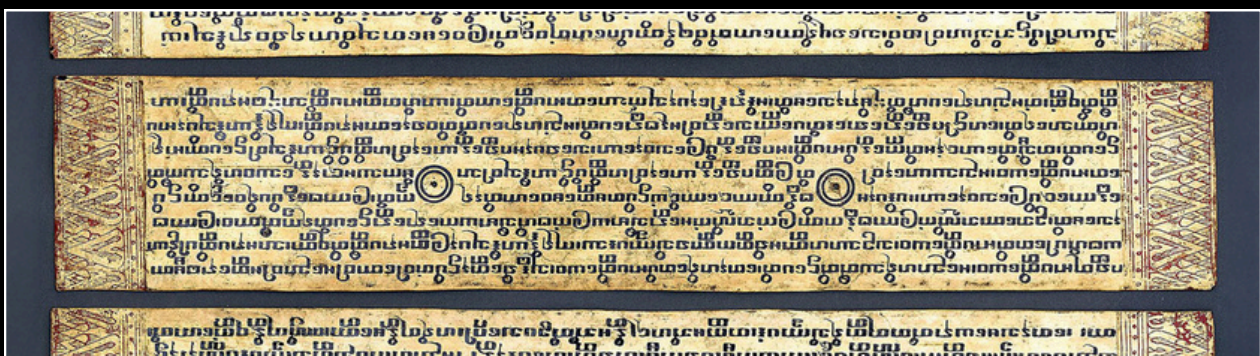
The resulting Pali Canon became the standard scripture of Theravada Buddhism. It was written in the now-extinct Pali language, an ancient Indian language thought to be the language spoken by Buddha and used in Sri Lanka until the fifth century CE.

Scholars argue (as they do) about how much of the work can be attributed to one person or to Buddha himself, but believers are largely free of such elaborate debates. The Canon lays out in unambiguous terms the doctrines and rules of conduct that Buddhists should follow. It is made up of three parts.

The first, the Vinaya, concerns itself mainly with the rules for monks and nuns. The second, the Sutta Pitaka, is the Canon's practical heart, comprising around 10,000 teachings and poems by the Buddha and his close companions that address the typical challenges of life. The last, the Abhidhamma Pitaka, is where the higher teachings sit – the ones most focused on Enlightenment.

The monks were probably still hard at work on the Pali Canon when Valagamba died in 77 BCE, bringing his adopted son, Mahakuli Mahatissa, to power. But under his patronage, copies were dispatched across the kingdom and to other Buddhist countries. Aluvihare Rock Temple still exists, its caves dotted with ancient inscriptions, but its great library was burned down during the Matale Rebellion in 1848.

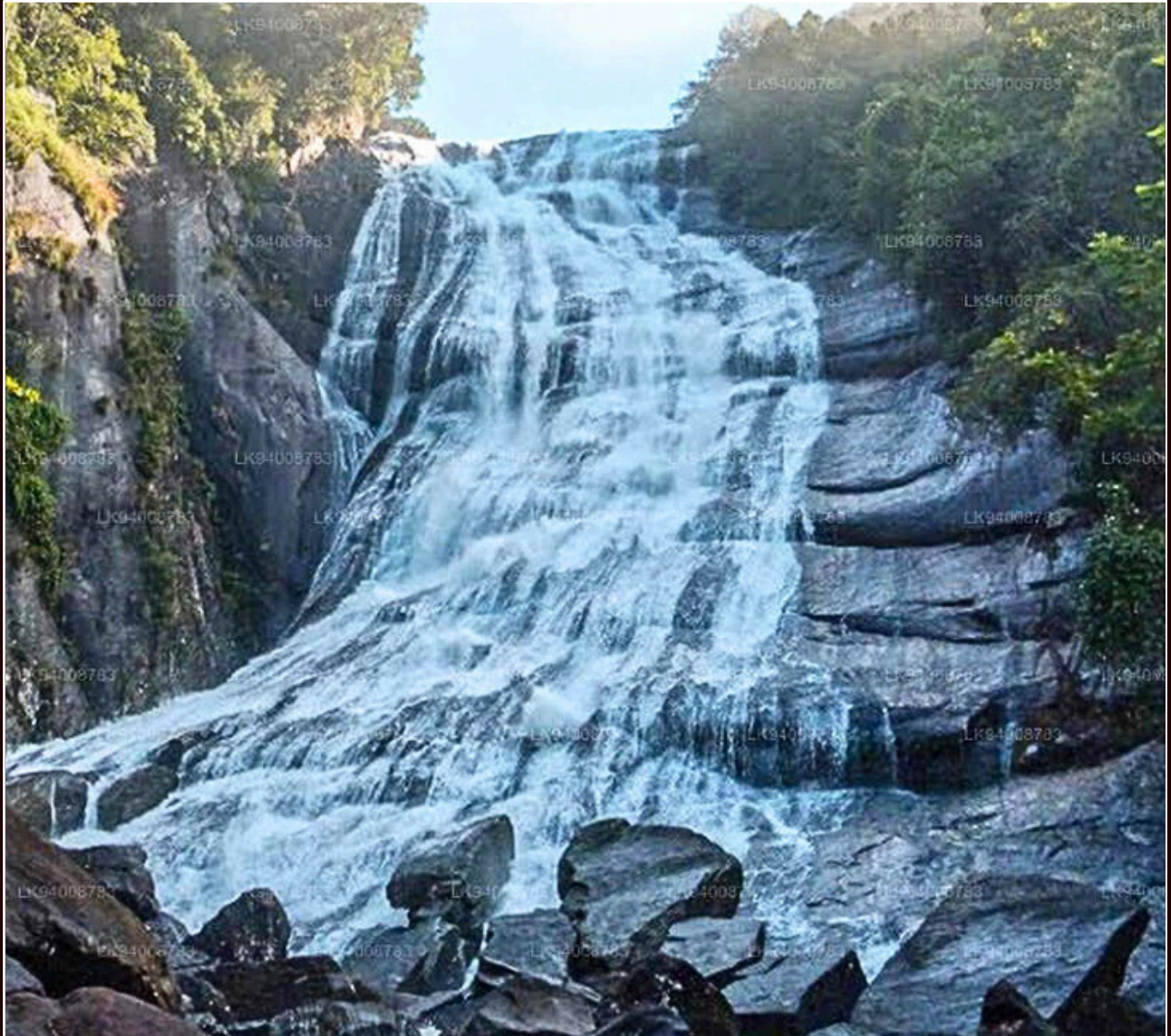
No other religion, still less any other Buddhist chapter in any other Buddhist country, has so immense and comprehensive a single document as the Pali Canon to govern its actions.





“ And the infinity pool looking out into the polar trees. Magic! ”

THE KIRINDI OYA



At 117 kilometres, the Kirindi Oya is the country's eleventh-longest river, collecting its waters in Namunukula, a spectacular mountain range near Badulla that stands so tall that the Ming Admiral Zheng was able to use its mass to navigate his way towards Sri Lanka in the fifteenth century. The Kirindi Oya then flows out into the Indian Ocean at Bundala, whose almost 4,000 square hectares of wetland support a glamorous roll call of rare native and distinguished international visitors, including the always-welcome but increasingly rare pink flamingo.

“

One of My
Favorite EVER
Stays! Beautiful!
The Peace and
Tranquility of
the forest
setting.

”



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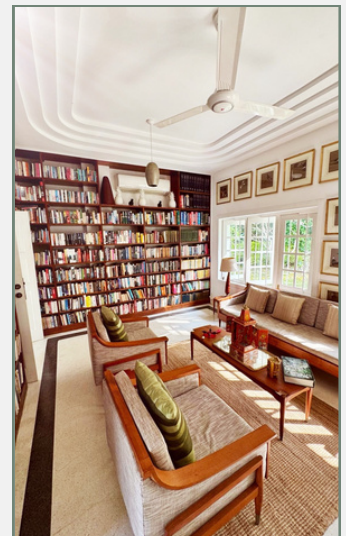
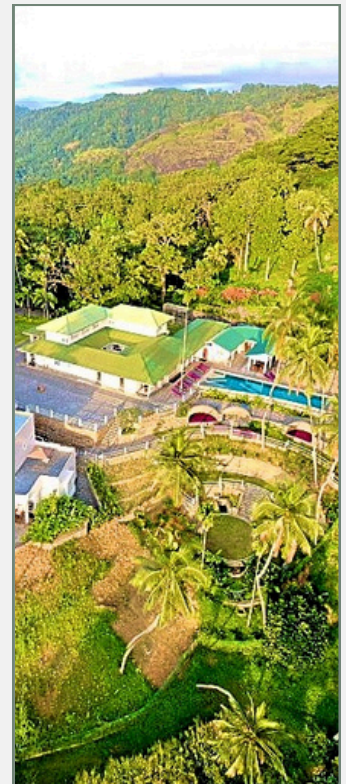


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www.flametreestate.com





“ The staff are incredibly friendly and will do anything to please you. The catering is a delight. ”