

THE FLAME TREE HERALD TRIBUNE

IN
THIS
EDITION

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

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“Heaven in
the middle
of the
jungle.”

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GRAZE ON MY LIPS

SRI LANKA'S MOST EROTIC FLOWER



Sri Lanka's most erotic and most secretive indigenous spice is the blue butterfly pea flower - *Clitoria ternatea*. An immodest, fast-growing vine that reaches lengths of around fifteen feet, it is, by dint of its etymological origins, considered something of an aphrodisiac; the genus part of its name (*Clitoria*) derives from "clitoris", a shape faithfully reproduced in the plant's blossom.

Science has backed up its reputation as a love drug. A study published recently in the *International Journal for Herbal Medicine* noted that "the milk treated group showed a significant increase in body weight, sperm count, motility and sexual behaviour parameters compared to the control group." Ayurvedic texts dating back many thousands of years before this study were conducted could have told them not to bother, as the flower has long been used in traditional Asian medicine to improve overall sexual vitality. But all of this pales into off-stage mumblings compared to its colour – the pure sapphire-blue hue it gives to many recipes, especially teas.



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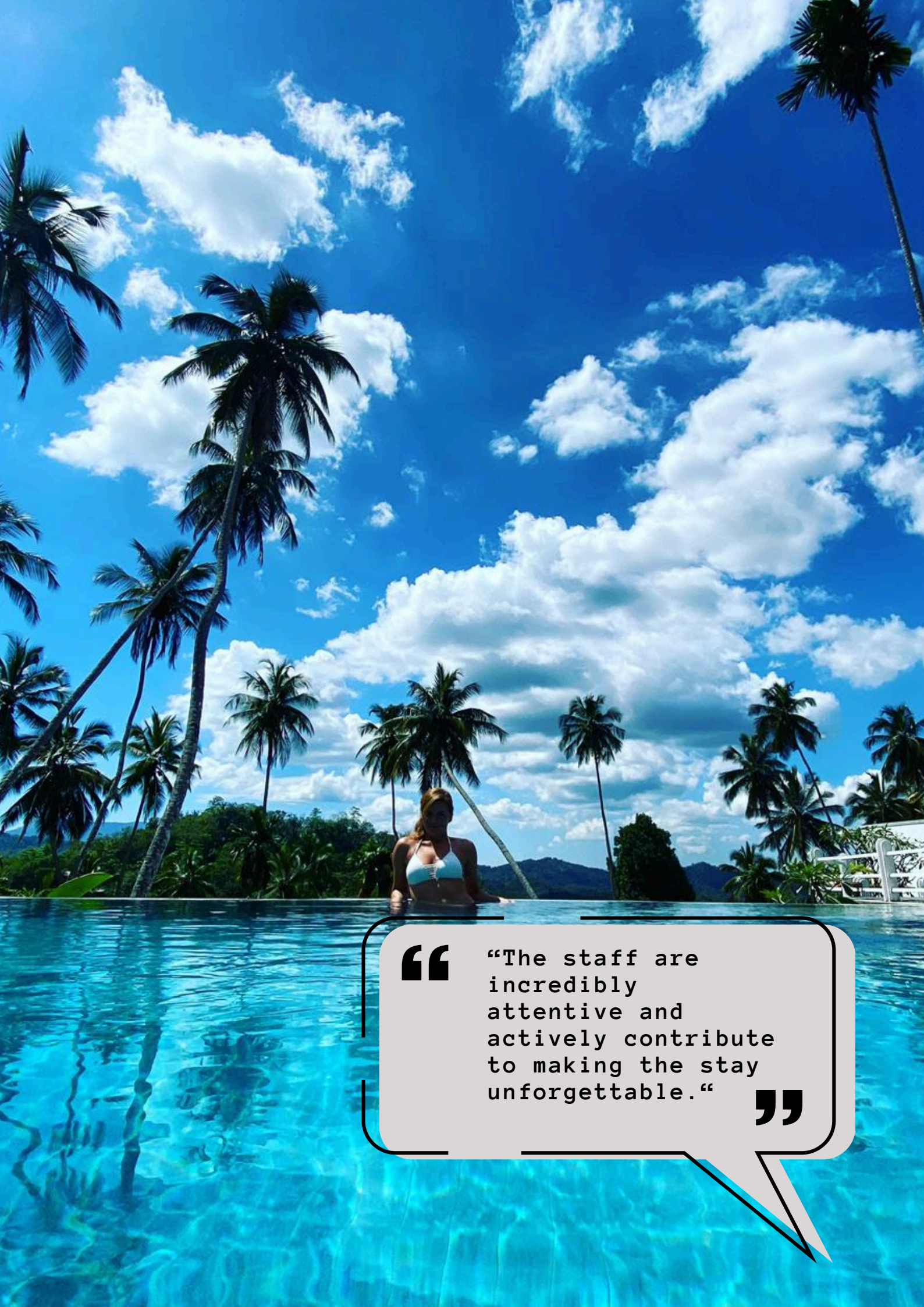
“Absolute calm in the middle of the jungle. No noise, no rush, just nature and stillness. You genuinely switch off here.”

”

SKY HIGH, BLUE LOVE



Compared with other notable Sri Lankan sapphires given to the world, Princess Diana's Engagement Ring, now worn by the current Princess of Wales, Kate, is best described as small but perfectly formed. A mere 12 carats, this oval ring rocketed into the homes of anyone with a television set when the then Prince of Wales declared his love ("whatever that is") for his future wife, Lady Diana Spencer, in 1981. Her elder son later inherited it and, at some point between 2010 and 2011, resized it to fit the finger of his own fiancée, Kate Middleton, a brilliant blue reminder of Sri Lanka in any of the millions of photographs published of her around the world every week.



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“The staff are incredibly attentive and actively contribute to making the stay unforgettable.”

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A CONFUSION OF CATS



When life was simple, long ago, and beige, like black or white, came in only one colour, it was thought that the island was home to just one endemic civet. But scientists, zookeepers, and wildlife photographers concluded that the country actually hosts three endemic civets: the Wet Zone Golden, the Montane Golden, and the Dry-Zone Palm Civet.

In fact, some scientists now claim that a fourth civet also merits separate recognition: the Sri Lankan Mountain Palm Civet found only in Dickoya. But although each civet is zone-specific and distinct enough to be classified as such, it would take considerable effort on the part of armchair naturalists to tell them apart.

All three are golden beasts -more golden brown on their backs and lighter gold on their stomachs, though the Montane Golden Palm Civet is, to the trained eye, a little darker all around.

From nose to bottom, they measure 40 to 70 centimetres – like large cats- and weigh in from 3 to 10 pounds. They are mild, secretive, forest-loving creatures, living their lives on trees and in high, hollowed-out places, solitary and very nocturnal, munching their way through fruit and small animals.



“We stayed in many very beautiful hotels in Sri Lanka, but this is by far the most beautiful.”

”

GRUNGE SKINKS



Some skinks do their utmost best to present a rather grungy face to the world, eager to extend and protect their social isolation.

The Toeless Snake Skink is a great example of this. Despite being well distributed across Sri Lanka, especially in the high forested parts of Kandy, its rather drab black-bronze countenance and complete absence of legs ensure that it is forever overlooked.

Taylor's Lanka Skink is no better. Tiny – 43 mm in length and a little more – endemic and commonplace in areas such as Sinharaja, the Knuckles, Gampola, and Hantana, it is dull bronze with the merest hint of a 5 o'clock shadow down its length. It was named after an obscure Missouri zoologist, Edward Taylor, an honour it shares with nine other reptiles, eleven reptile subspecies, eight amphibians, and a milk snake once rumoured to suck cow's udders.



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“The Flame
Tree Estate &
Hotel is
different – in
the best way
possible.”

”

THE DREAM FORT

If ever there was a fort to convert into your dream home, it is the old fort in Batticaloa, built on one of the many small islands on the east coast of Sri Lanka. The fort faces the Batticaloa Lagoon and the ocean, its ramparts dotted with ancient cannons still bearing the arms of the Dutch East India Company. From its walls, the keener hearing can sometimes catch the sound of singing fish from April to September.

The original fort was built by the Portuguese in 1628 and rebuilt by the Dutch. However, the site itself dates back much further, with a first-century BCE stupa marking far earlier times – and the lost Kingdom of Ruhuna. Love, though, and some sympathetic builder-restorers, is what the fort most needs now. The isolating and deteriorating conditions at the fort, which had been considerably worsened during the long civil war, were further exacerbated by the 2004 tsunami.



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“This place is absolutely amazing. I cannot recommend it highly enough. It was by far the best place we stayed in Sr Lanka.”

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ANUK
ARUDPRAGASAM

A PASSAGE
NORTH



A PASSAGE NORTH

Anuk Arudpragasam's novel begins with a message: a telephone call informing Krishan that his grandmother's former caregiver, Rani, has died in unexpected circumstances, at the bottom of a well in her village in the north, her neck broken by the fall.

The news arrives on the heels of an email from Anjum, an activist he fell in love with four years earlier while living in Delhi, stirring distant memories and desires.

Colm Tobin remarked that "at its centre is an exquisite form of noticing, a way of rendering consciousness and handling time that connects Arudpragasam to the great novelists of the past"

“Artwork adorns
the hotel,
which feels
more like
someone’s
precious home.”



KING OF THE MONTH

VOHARIKA TISSA, KING OF ANURADHAPURA

The 55th recorded monarch in Sri Lanka. What little the historical records have to say about the new king is glowing in its praise. A strong proponent of nonviolence, he enacted several reforms to promote it. Erring on the side of conservative Buddhism, he also attempted to suppress new variants of Mahayana Buddhism, which were threatening to erode the Theravada Buddhism that had dominated the island since its introduction in 2 BCE during the reign of Devanampiya Tissa. Despite (or perhaps, because of) the nature of such a king, Voharika Tissa found his throne snatched away from him by his brother, Abhaya Naga, 22 years into his reign. The Lambakanna's regicide fizzle was back. Rumoured to be fuelled by the adulterous affair Abhaya Naga, his brother, was having with the queen, the king found himself facing a Tamil mercenary army led by Abhaya Naga – and his own death, becoming the 28th reigning Sri Lankan monarch to have been murdered for the succession. The following 17 years were to see the dynasty plunged a second time into homicidal politics – though, remarkably, the new fratricidal king was to die naturally, in 245 CE. It was an achievement of sorts.



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“Our room was spacious, decorated with antique furniture and featured a secluded outdoor shower with a huge deck overlooking the jungle and sunset.”

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CABBAGE MANCHURIAN



A NEW DISH OUR
CHEFS ARE TRAILING

Cabbage; Salt; Pepper; Rice Flour; Ginger; Cloves; Red Chili; Soy
Sauce; Tomato; Onion; Capsicum; Spring Onions; Sugar

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“The infinity pool was perfect with ample loungers. Dinner was excellent with a varied menu. Be sure to take a walk around the grounds and experience an amazing massage.”

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1541 TABVLA DVODESIMA ASIAE



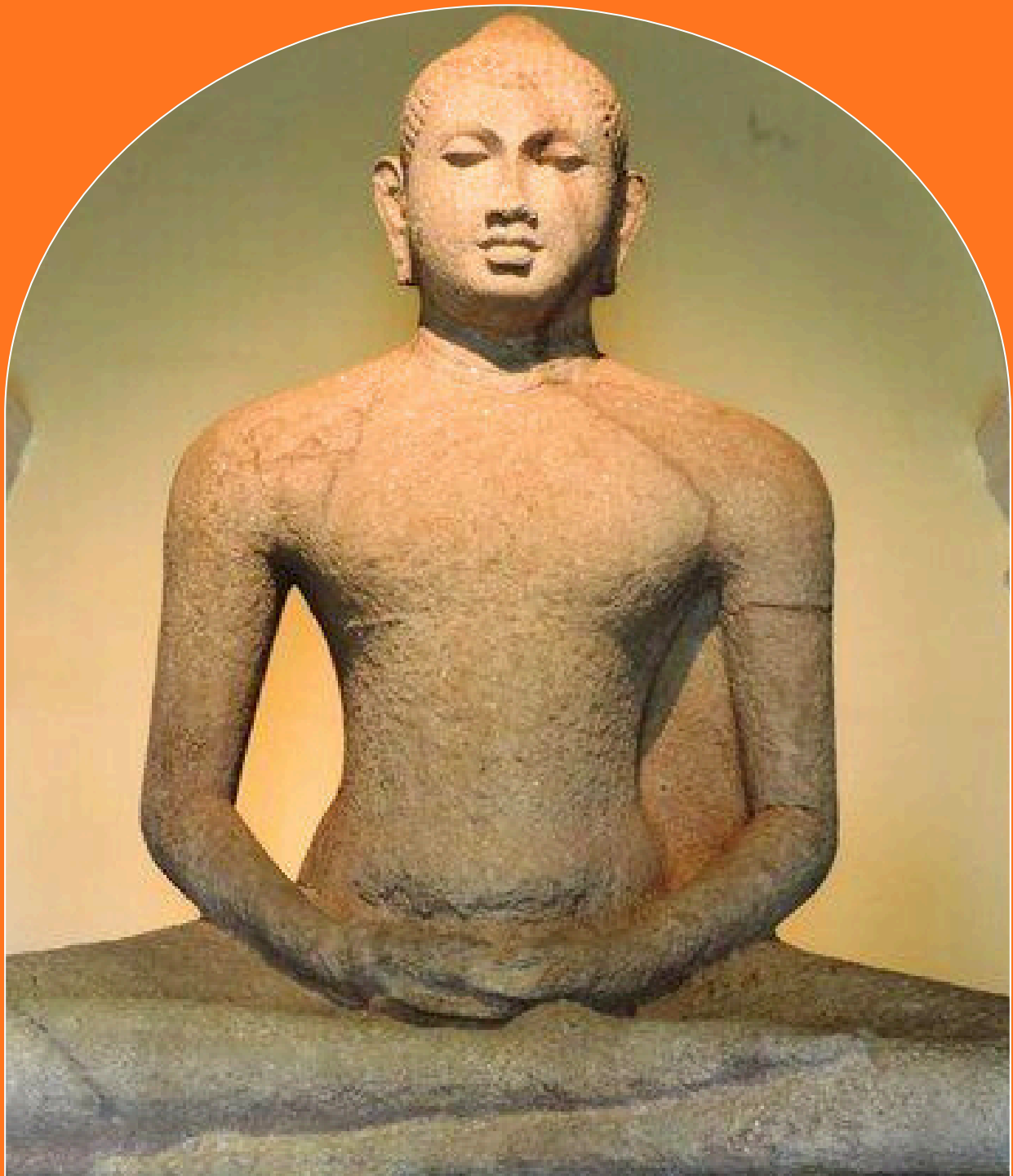
This second edition of Michael Servetus's map of Ceylon depicts Ptolemy's famous "Geographia". Michael Servetus (1509 - 1553) was a polymath, a Spanish theologian, physician, cartographer, and Renaissance humanist. His map used Lorenz Fries's woodcut maps and was published by Gaspar Trechsel in Vienna. The engraving shows a map of the island of Taprobana, which was then variously identified as Ceylon or Sumatra. Lorenz Fries, the famous physician, astrologer, and geographer, actually made the woodcuts back in 1522, and his map depicts rivers, canals, waterways, place names, fortifications, and administrative boundaries.

**“You really
won't want
to leave.”**

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BEHET-DIYA



Common in ancient times and still encountered today, this lotion, made of lime juice and other acids mixed with perfume, was used when priests washed the sacred reflection of the Buddha's head in a mirror held before an image.



“Make sure you stay for more days, or you will regret it. Absolutely loved it”



A TUK TUK HOP



Surrounded by mountains up to 2,000 feet high, Galagedera is the gateway to the hill country. Although it still lacks local branches of Harrods, Harvey Nicks, or Fauchon, it nevertheless boasts the rarest of all things in the online delivery age: a thriving high street with almost 200 shops and businesses. At almost any time of the day, it brims with pedestrians and traffic – especially other tuk tuks. Pause and watch. People talk. They pause, gossip, and trade news; they know one another. Amidst innumerable clothes shops, tiny cafes, photographers with technicolour backdrops, fishmongers and butchers, woodcarvers and timber yards, small shops selling plastic chairs from China, water tanks, clothes, fruit and vegetables, and basic household goods, and Kandurata Spice, one of 3 spice shops in the village. This one has been running for over 40 years and is now in its second generation of family owners, sourcing its crops from local farmers. Alongside very well-graded quantities of nutmeg, mace, clove, cinnamon, cardamom and pepper, it also sells rubber sheets, areca nuts and, unaccountably, brooms.



**“ Fabulous
taste of
paradise ”**

UMLAUT TRADING



The large Brown Wood Owl has a remarkable call - a cry that, if not murderous, is loud and distinctive, somewhere between a bark and a scream, the exact sound being subtly different according to their passing nationality. Found in India, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Taiwan, and South China, as well as Sri Lanka, its call ranges from soft and low in India to decidedly more forceful in Indonesia.

It is wonderfully untroubled by the bellicose excesses of human impositions, being categorised as a species under no great existential threat – though it likes to hide in deep forest, making its public appearances at night. Its plumage, brown on top but with wavy brown-white streaks on its belly, is no less lovely for coming from the Marks and Spencer's end of feather fashion.

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