



THE FLAME TREE HERALD TRIBUNE

IN
THIS
EDITION

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

CLEAVE TO CLOVE
THE DOLL'S HOUSE BAT
KING OF THE MONTH
THE ISLAND'S GREAT RIVERS
THE FOURTH WONDER OF ANCIENT LANKA
AS IF BY MAGIC

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

CHAMILA GAMAGE

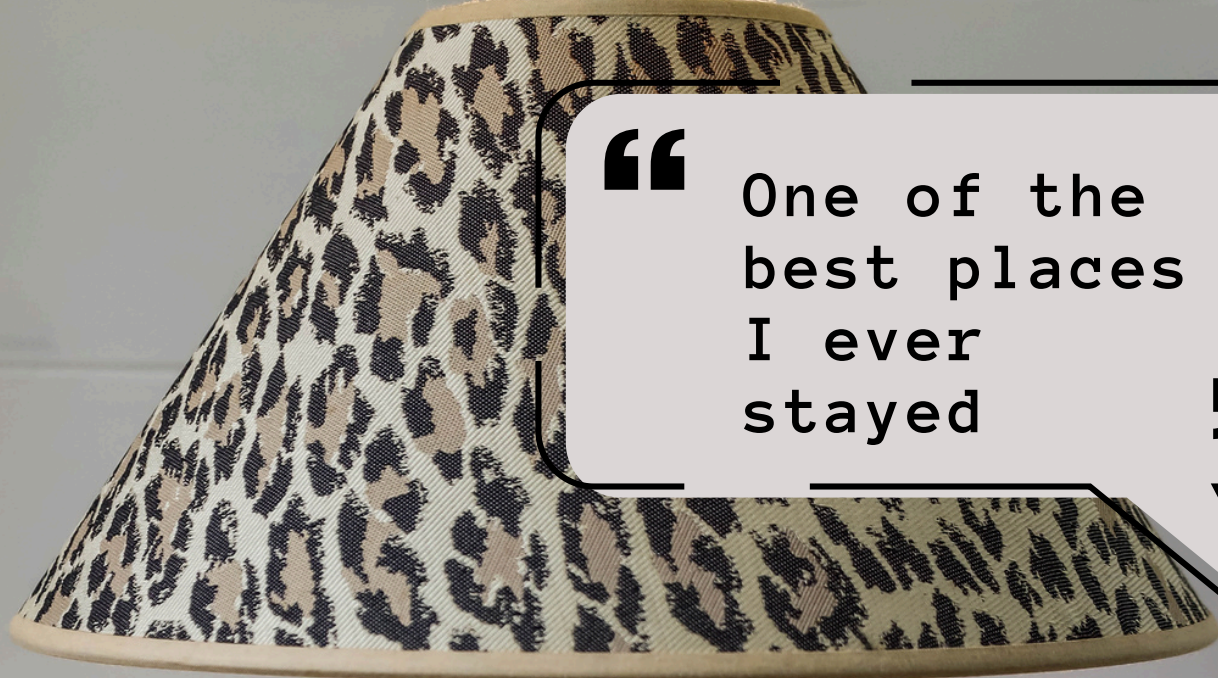


Born in 1978, Chamila Gamage is one of the twenty or so contemporary artists whose work has pushed the boundaries of island art, internationalising it and setting striking new standards for originality and quality. From painting to sculpture, digital to actual, his style ranges with confident freedom. Rarely is the human form absent from any of his paintings. Still, beyond it, his canvasses' preoccupations range from consumerism to identity, to lush, dreamy landscapes that conjure a world of magic realism.

“

One of the
best places
I ever
stayed

”



THE DOLL'S HOUSE BAT



Sri Lanka is bat country, its incredible range of environments supporting 30 of the world's 1400 bat species. They range in size from ones tiny enough to sit comfortably upon a thumbnail to those with a wingspan of 1 ½ metres and a weight of 1.6 kilos.



The species we see most here on the estate is the Pygmy Pipistrelle, so small as to be able to live with stylish ease in a doll's house, being only 6 centimetres in length. Ours are given to flying over the pool at night and – not being great swimmers – sometimes need rescuing.

They are the only mammals able to truly fly, angels excepted, and are famous for roosting upside down from their feet, viewing the world like happy drunks, a propensity made worse by their extremely poor vision. Using ultrasonic sound and the full capacity of their renowned hearing, they navigate the world, dining off insects, pollen, fruit, small beasts and even one another.



“

This is like
experiencing a
bygone era on a
colonial rubber
plantation,
luxurious,
sumptuous and worth
every Penny.

”

SWEET CORN AND JALAPENO RAVIOLI



A NEW DISH OUR
CHEFS ARE TRAILING

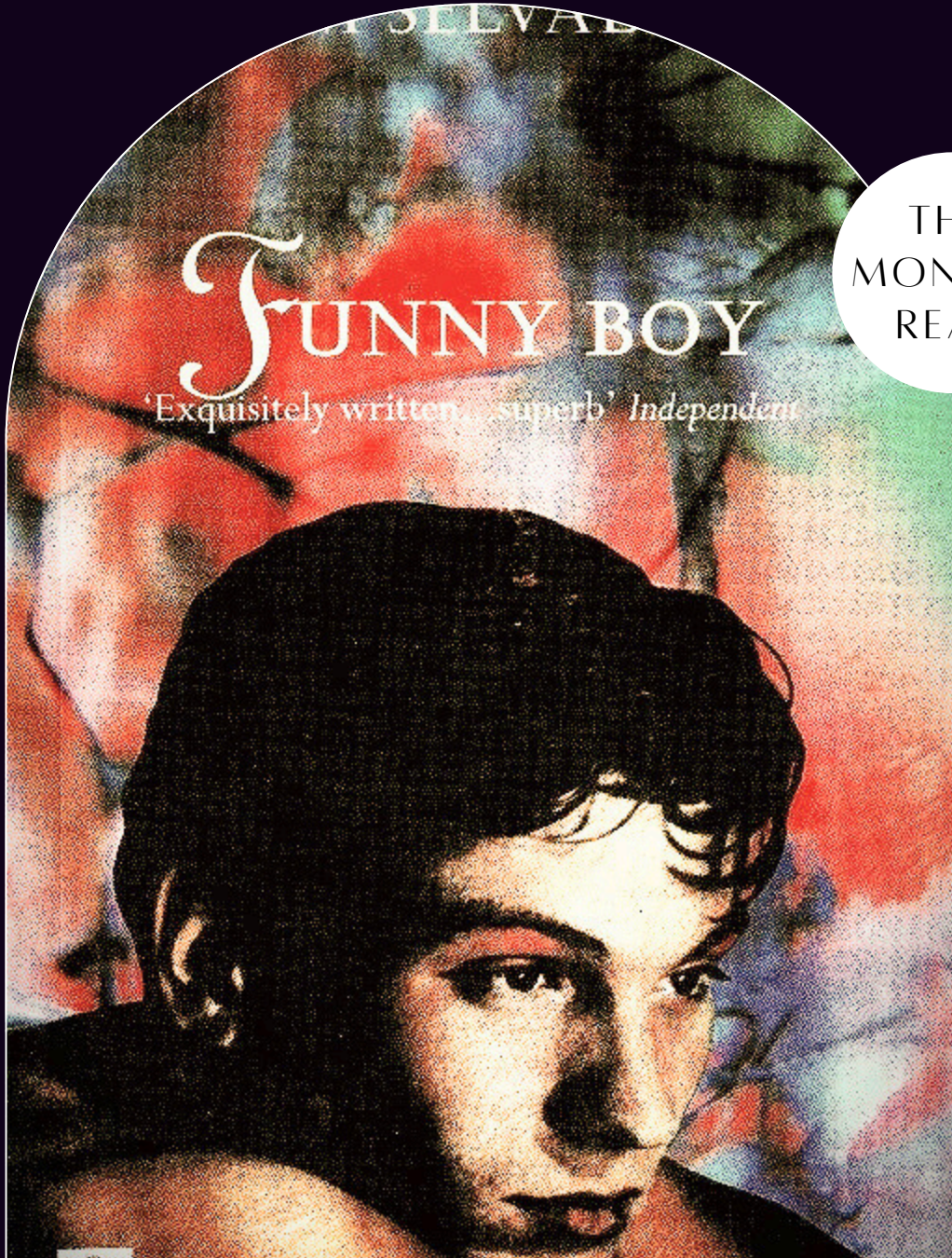
Flour; Eggs; Kernels Of Corn; Jalapenos; Scallions; Extra Virgin Olive Oil; Unsalted Butter; Salt And Pepper; Basil Leaves; Milk Ricotta; Goat Cheese; Lime Zest.

“ Beautifully
restored
property, very
comfortable and
spacious
bedrooms. ”

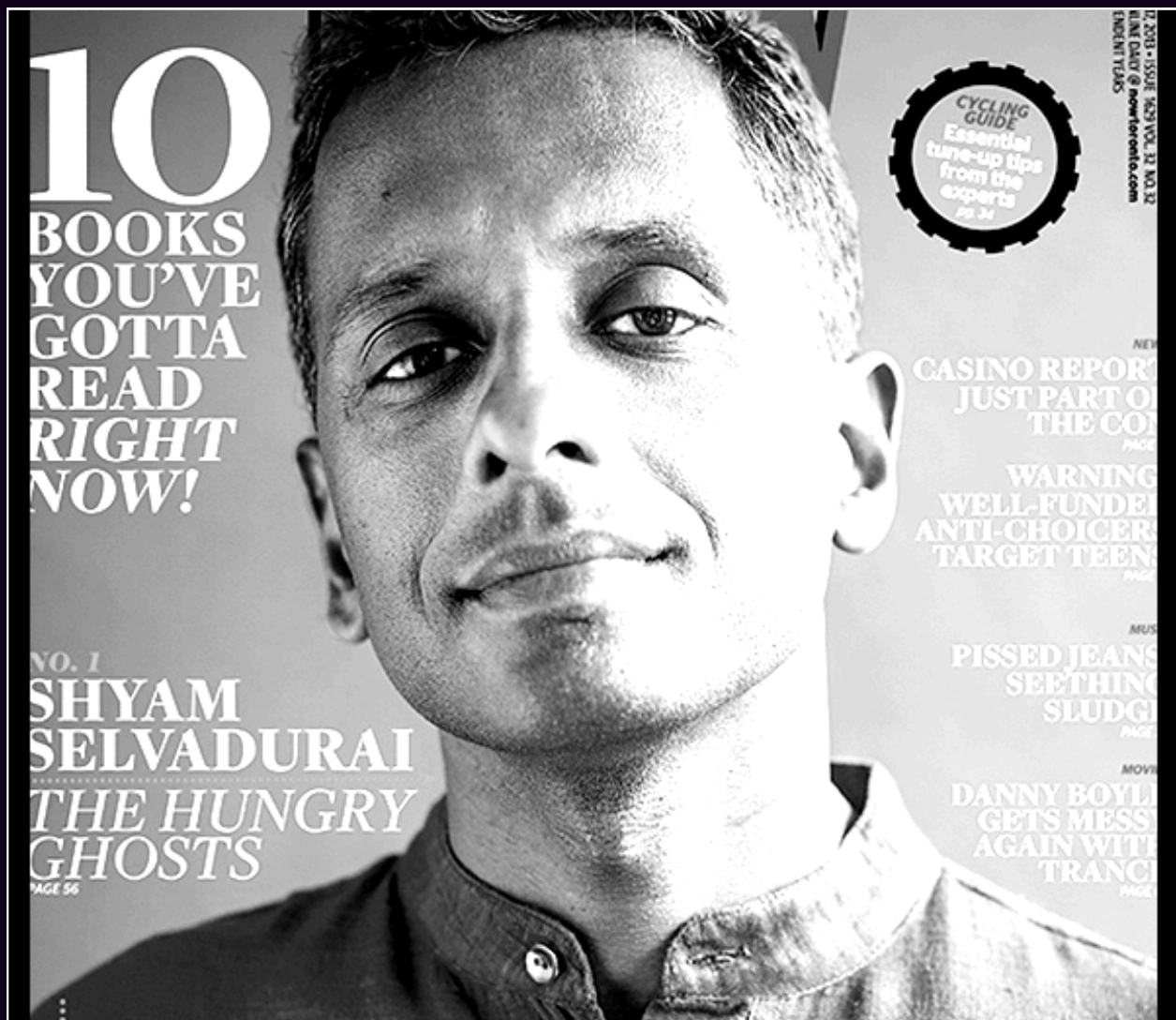


AS IF BY MAGIC

SHYAM SELVADURAI



Author of "Funny Boy," "Cinnamon Gardens", and "The Hungry Ghosts," the writer Shyam Selvadurai knows enough about identities to ensure his novels are nothing less than magnetic. Born to a Sinhalese mother and a Tamil father, exiled to Canada, gay, funny, astute, ironic, his lovingly observed books are one of the reasons why Sri Lankan English-language literature is quite as popular as it is all around the world.



Driven from his homeland after the terrible civil pogroms and riots of 1983 when he was just nineteen, it took him barely ten more years to burst back upon the consciousness of his country with “Funny Boy”, a novel described by leading critics as one that “keeps repeating with quiet conviction that the human condition can, despite everything, be joyful. You are not alone, it says to the reader, I understand you. I was there. I remember.”

In 1998, “Cinnamon Gardens” came out, cementing in (not that any building materials of any sort were ever now needed) a reputation for effortless fiction with a story set in 1920 Colombo and the hatred of splintered families of the elite. The emotions found an (almost) kinder balance in 2007 with the publication of “Swimming in the Monsoon Sea”, a love story to electrify even the most cynical heart, in which a teenage fisherman falls for his Canadian cousin.

When he published “The Hungry Ghosts” in 2013, it became immediately apparent quite how unfair talent can really be – for this novel surpassed all before it with its depiction of an influential Sri Lankan matriarch, a wily kumara hari with “an insatiable longing for land, houses, money and control”.

And in the publication of the 2022 novel, “Mansions of the Moon”, he took on, with bold and winning subtlety, the sixth-century BCE story of Yasodhara, the wife and cousin of Lord Buddha. Not all writers make you long for even their following shopping list, still less another novel, but Selvadurai does, time and again. Though interestingly, and in ways yet to be fully understood, he was most moved in 2016 when he discovered a new spider had been named after him: *Brignolia shyami*, a small goblin spider.



“

Special mention
to the hotel
manager who
treated us
incredibly.

”

“

The place,
surrounded by
different gardens
with fruits, spices,
herbs, vegetables
and what-have-you
marries old charm
with modern need

”



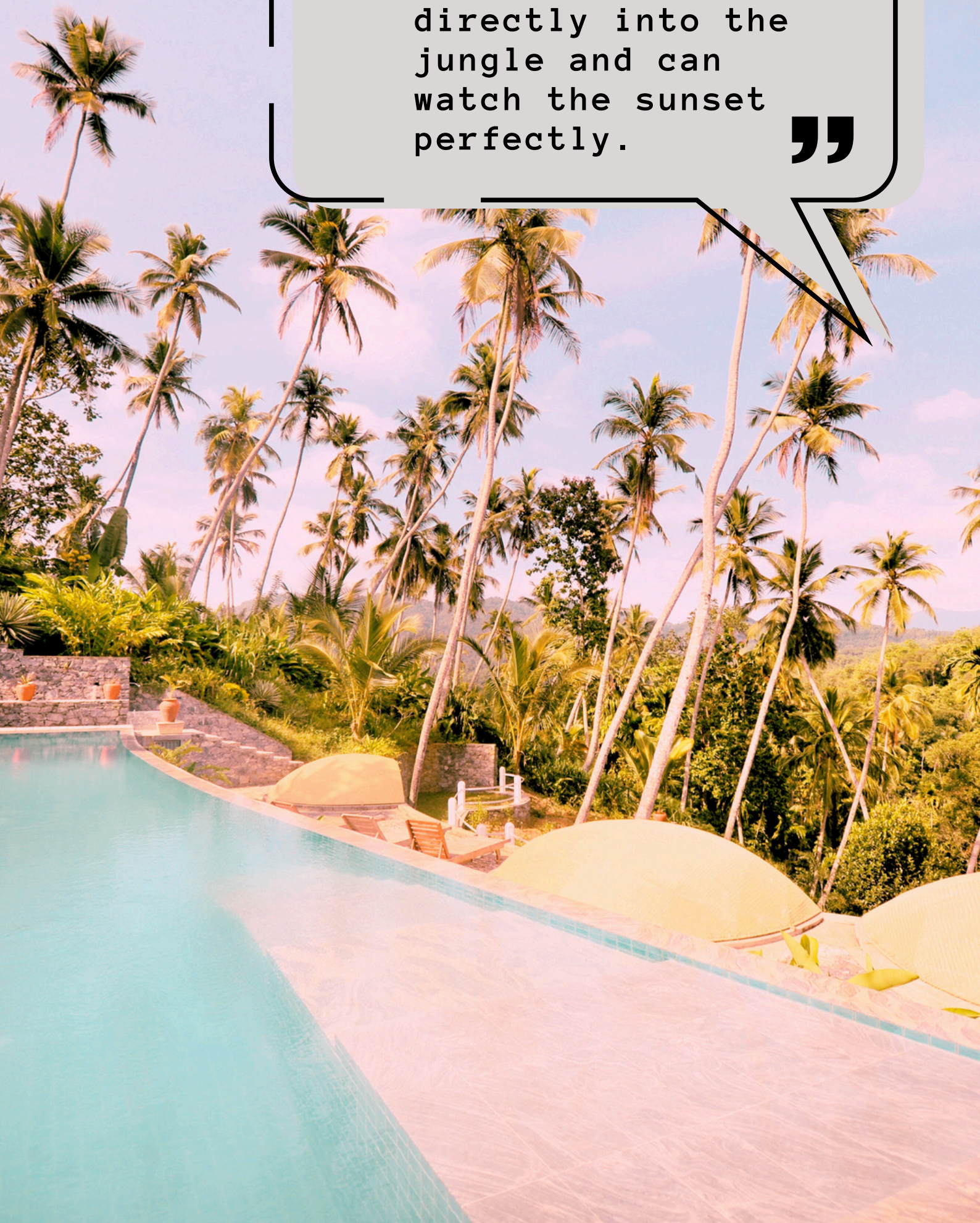
KING OF THE MONTH

GOTHABHAYA, KING OF ANURADHAPURA

The sixteenth monarch of the Lambakanna Dynasty (1st Period) (66 CE – 436 CE), and the 61st recorded monarch in Sri Lanka in the line running from Prince Vijaya (543 BCE), with a reign of 254 – 267 CE. One of 3 plotters (the other two being Sangha Tissa I and Siri Sangha Bodhi), Gothabhaya had conspired to kill the reigning king, Vijaya Kumara, in 248 CE. As the first of his murderous partners, Sangha Tissa I, was killed by the second, Siri Sangha Bodhi I, Gothabhaya set out to gain the crown in the same tried-and-trusted way. According to The Mahavamsa, he needn't have bothered for Sangha Bodhi I killed himself in a manner that was both anatomically impossible and socially impressive. Quite how he really met his death remains a mystery. The important thing was that the king was dead, leaving Gothabhaya to rule. What the new king lacked in charm, charity, and religious tolerance, he made up for with the sort of firm government that took the fizz out of regicide. For 14 years, he ruled it with the proverbial rod of iron. A man of deeply conservative religious beliefs, he was unimpressed by the Vajrayana movement, a form of tantric Buddhism that was making a slim but noticeable appearance in his kingdom. The king did all he could to thwart it, even banishing 60 monks for such beliefs. His death, in 267 CE, left behind a divided country. Several ministers refused to participate in his funeral rites, and his son and heir, Jetta Tissa I, a chip off the monstrous old block, had sixty of them rounded up, staking their impaled heads in a mournful circle around the old king's body.



“ an Infinity pool
from where you look
directly into the
jungle and can
watch the sunset
perfectly. ”



SANNI YAKUMA EXORCISM MASKS



A particular – albeit now fast diminishing - area of island folklore has it that human illness is caused by the appearance of one of eighteen demons. The tradition blends Buddhism with the earliest pre-Buddhist (often animist) spiritual traditions. From this, the country's most striking exorcism rituals developed – the Sanni Yakuma. Especially noted along the south coast, the ritual involves tightly choreographed dance and music steps in which the culpable demon is named, shamed, humiliated – and banished. The costume of the guilty demon in any performance comes with its own very particular mask, the features of which display, with shameless ease, precisely what the suffering is all about.





“ ...more than all
else, it is the
staff that really
turns the place
into something
magical...”

CLOVES



Until relatively recently, the island's source of cloves had been a matter of debate, with some historians pointing to the Portuguese and others to Arab traders. However, the discovery a few years ago of a pot containing cloves, excavated in the ancient port of Mathottam in the northwest of the island and dating back to 900-1100 CE, suggests that the clove trade was already well established long before the first European colonists arrived. Indeed, the only clove discovered anywhere else in the world that predates this one is one found in Syria, perfectly preserved since 2000 BCE. Interestingly, the Sri Lankan clove was not excavated in isolation. It was discovered alongside many other preserved cereals and grains and 11,418 pottery fragments from 123 different wares, a quarter of which were clearly imports - indicating that in this port, as no doubt in others, a dynamic and cosmopolitan settlement was in progress - like Dubai, only older and greener. Detailed research on the clove in question has since revealed that it came from the Maluku Islands in today's Indonesia - a 7,000-kilometre journey. But even before this date, the spice had long since made its way right around the world. Third-century BCE records from the Chinese Han dynasty refer to the spice, calling it "hi-sho-hiang" or "bird's tongue," and recommending that the Emperor's officers chew some before starting a conversation with their fastidious overlords. The Ayurvedic Charaka Samhita, dating back to the first century CE, also recommends it as a medicine. As did the Roman Pliny the Elder around 23-79 CE. It is probable that cloves grew as permanent features of ancient plantations in India and Sri Lanka and had already taken root well before the European colonists arrived, for the Portuguese and later the Dutch spent much time trying to uproot them, in an effort to enforce the monopoly they enjoyed with this spice from their control of its primary source in Indonesia. Because they require high humidity to ensure proper development of the flower bud, good drainage, rich soil, and abundant rainfall, cloves have since come to be grown mostly within 10 degrees north and south of the equator. Worth around seven billion dollars annually - and growing fast, almost half the production comes from Madagascar, with a little under ten per cent from Sri Lanka, especially from small plantations around Kandy, Kegalle, and Matale.

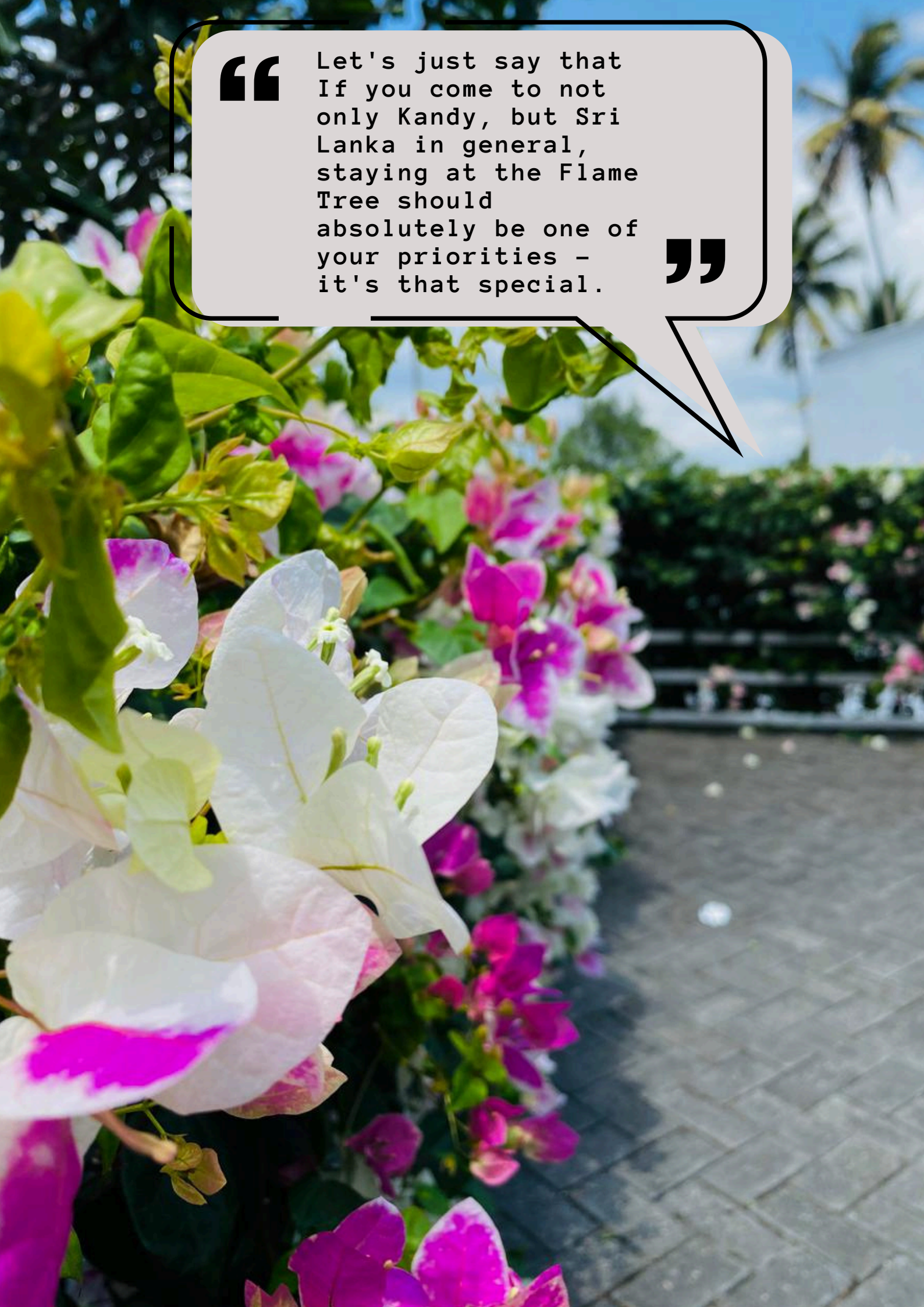
Here, the climatic conditions are so beneficial that the cloves are renowned amongst buyers for their richer, more intense oils and flavour. The trees themselves, *Syzygium aromaticum*, are slender and reach about 40 feet tall. It takes them over 6 years to grow before producing buds. But they then stick at the job for some eighty years, making clove orchards things of great value. Although they grow with relative ease and resist most animal attacks, they are challenging to manage, requiring careful, time-sensitive hand-harvesting if the flower buds are to be picked at the optimal time. Once the leafy structure that encases a flower bud changes from green to pink, and just before the petals themselves open, is the time to pluck them. They then must be separated from their stalks and left to dry gently in the sun. Traditional Chinese and Ayurvedic medicine have long used the spice for pain relief, toothaches, digestion, colds, and gum infections, mainly due to its high eugenol content. Modern science is busy reaffirming much of this. Recent studies have shown that it can reduce the SARS virus, combat oxidative stress to mitigate chronic diseases, including cancer, prevent bacterial infections, reduce rheumatoid arthritis pain, and be as effective as benzocaine in relieving tooth pain. But it is as a food item that it is most cherished. From glazed hams to candied oranges, tea to biscuits, trifles to curries – there is an unending wealth of recipes from all corners of the world that use the spice, especially in such classic Sri Lankan dishes as Garlic Clove Curry and Seeni Sambol. They have even made it the prize ingredient in Sykurlaus kryddkaka, the national cake of Iceland, and in Pickled Muktuk, a favoured Thanksgiving dish of whale blubber cooked in Alaska.



“

Let's just say that
If you come to not
only Kandy, but Sri
Lanka in general,
staying at the Flame
Tree should
absolutely be one of
your priorities –
it's that special.

”



THE FOURTH WONDER

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

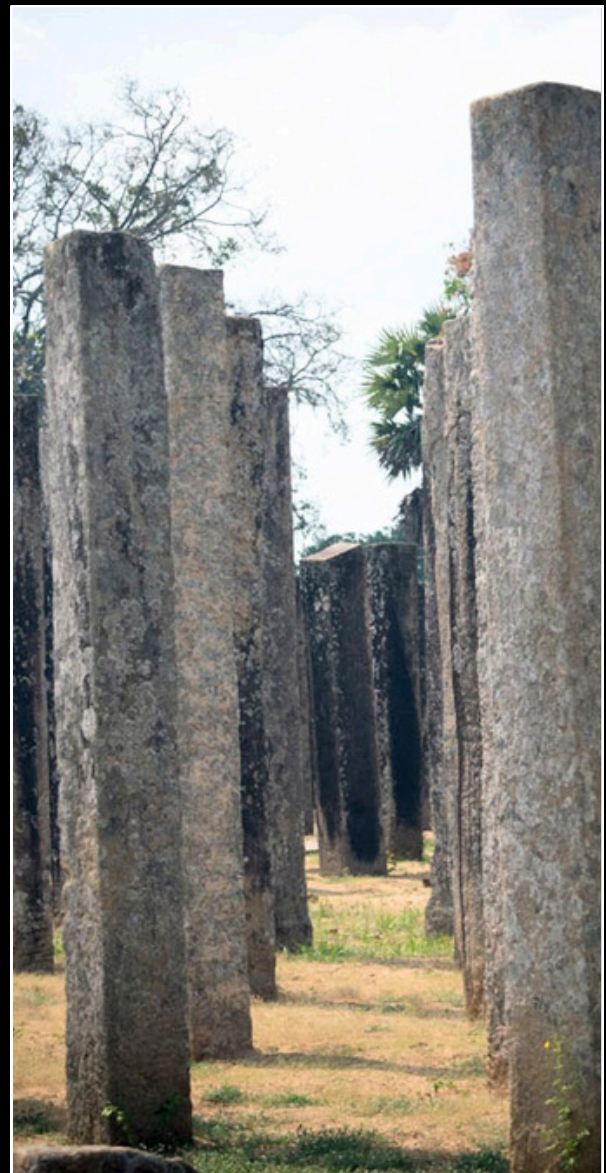
The world's first Seven Wonders comprised a garden, two tombs, two statues, a temple, and a lighthouse. It featured the Pyramids of Giza, the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, the Statue of Zeus at Olympia, the Temple of Artemis at Ephesus, the Mausoleum at Halicarnassus, the Colossus of Rhodes, and the Lighthouse 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 piece of 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 is a palace built to escape death and suffering. Built by the self-same great king, Dutugamunu, who commissioned the Ruwanweliseya, the oldest of Anuradhapura's three great stupas, the Brazen Palace, or Lowamahapaya, was built between 161 BC and 137 BC. Its name, "brazen", comes from the brass or copper roof tiles that covered it.

For centuries, this was the island's most magnificent building. The king had his architects draw up no-limit plans for an opulent palace, an obvious exaggeration, but one that

THE 7 WONDERS OF ANCIENT LANKA





was not really required. For the building was, by any standards anywhere in the ancient world, a masterpiece.

Inside the vast structure , golden pillars held up the roof of a special throne hall, its centrepiece an ivory throne centered between the titanic images of a golden sun, moon and stars picked out in silver and pearls. The gilded roof glinted so fiercely in the sunlight that it could be seen from miles away. No expense was spared in its furnishings either. Even the water basins positioned for the washing of feet and hands at its entrance were said to be of gold.

Each floor of the building was given over for the use of monks in varying stages of sanctification as they travelled the Eightfold Path to Enlightenment. Naturally, the lowest floor, the Buddhist equivalent of Perfumes & Make Up in a Department Store, was reserved for those who had yet to achieve anything. If not quite the habitat of the hoi polloi, it was not that far off either. The second floor, however, was allocated for those who had mastered the Tripitaka – three texts in the Buddhist Pali Canon, primarily concerned with doctrinal requirements and monastic rules.

It was only on reaching the third floor of this extraordinary structure that you could encounter monks who had made a real step change, for these ones had attained Sotapatti, the first stage of sanctification – an achievement made possible by having trounced indecision and an obsession with individuality, and rituals.



The fourth floor was populated by monks who had contributed to this achievement by making serious inroads into eradicating all tendencies towards ill-will. And, more importantly, any thoughts of sensuality.

On the fifth floor lived the Anagamin monks – those who were now seeking to overcome pride, restlessness, ignorance, fine things, and immaterial cravings to become an arhat. And above them all, in the upper stories of this temple of gold, lived the Arahats themselves. This lofty station, the goal of all practising Buddhists, was reserved for those who have finally achieved Nirvana. Not for them the irksome and interminable cycle of rebirth.

Despite the building burning down, it was faithfully rebuilt in all its brilliance by King Saddha Tissa, Dutugemunu's brother. Further repairs were carried out 120 years later, and a pavilion decorated with gemstones was added. But by the time of King Siri Naga I, sometime after 195 CE, the repairs carried out on this and other buildings in Anuradhapura were noticeably more modest in their goals. Buildings such as this one were made good, but reduced in size and scope, the easier for maintaining, perhaps, or maybe because there was just insufficient money to keep them as they had been first envisioned. It was, in its own grey and mildly dispiriting way, a metaphor for its time.





Today, you need a rich imagination and a keen sense of history to imagine how the Brazen Palace would have looked – even in Siri Naga I's time. Destroyed eight hundred years later in the tenth century by Tamil invaders, it is today reduced to one thousand six hundred granite columns set in forty rows – all that survives of its once colossal walls. As Shelley might have said had he added Sri Lanka to his well-documented French, Swiss, German, Dutch, and Irish holidays: "nothing beside remains. Round the decay of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare," stretch yet more ruins, scrub, and jungle.

“

More or less
the greatest
hotel in the
world.


”



THE KALA OYA



At one hundred and forty-eight kilometres, the Kala Oya is the country's third longest river, collecting its waters in the Omaragolla Mountains in the centre of the island and snaking its way through the flat dry zone to drain into the Puttalam Lagoon near Kalpitiya. True to its long-established function, it discharges its waters into over six hundred tanks and reservoirs along its length, its most famous being the Kala Wewa reservoir built across Kala Oya, one and a half thousand years ago and still in use today. At Kalpitiya, it seeps out into the ocean through reefs, salt pans, mangrove swamps, and marshes, creating an environment perfect for nature spotters of all sorts.



“ Without a doubt, one of the best hotels we stayed at in Sri Lanka. ”

AYUBOWAN

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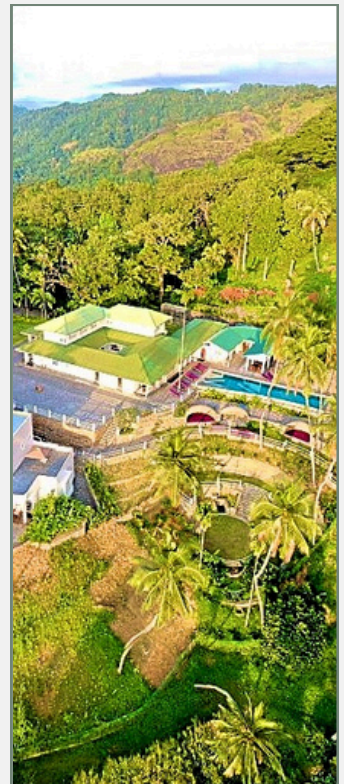


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www.flametreeestate.com





“What an amazing experience it was to stay at this beautiful, original and welcoming hotel hidden in the jungle of Sri Lanka.”