



THE FLAME TREE HERALD TRIBUNE

IN
THIS
EDITION

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

FRIED KOHILA STEAK
CASTLES IN THE AIR
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THE HAMILTON CASE
CAT KING

September 2026 flamefreestate.com



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“We stayed for three days, but we would have been happy to spend three weeks. “

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GOTU KOLA



Gotu Kola is one of Sri Lanka's more demure indigenous species, something of a Mother Theresa amongst spices, awash with virtue and value. Known as pennywort, it has a subtle, earthy taste, sweet and bitter at once, and combines exceptionally well with coconut. It is popular in traditional medicine, where it is believed to promote longevity and good vision.

It stars in many island dishes, but the two most famous are as a sambal – a salad combining it with coconut, onions, lime, tomatoes, and pepper- and as a porridge. Kola Kanda, or Gotu Kola Herbal Rice Porridge, to give it its full and formal name, is a comfort food that is ridiculously easy to make. Red rice and a bit of garlic are boiled up. Gotu Kola and curry leaves are blended to a fine dust, strained, and added to the cooked rice with coconut milk.

The gorgeous green porridge is poured into breakfast bowls and served with a piece of sweet jaggery – and so begins a better day.



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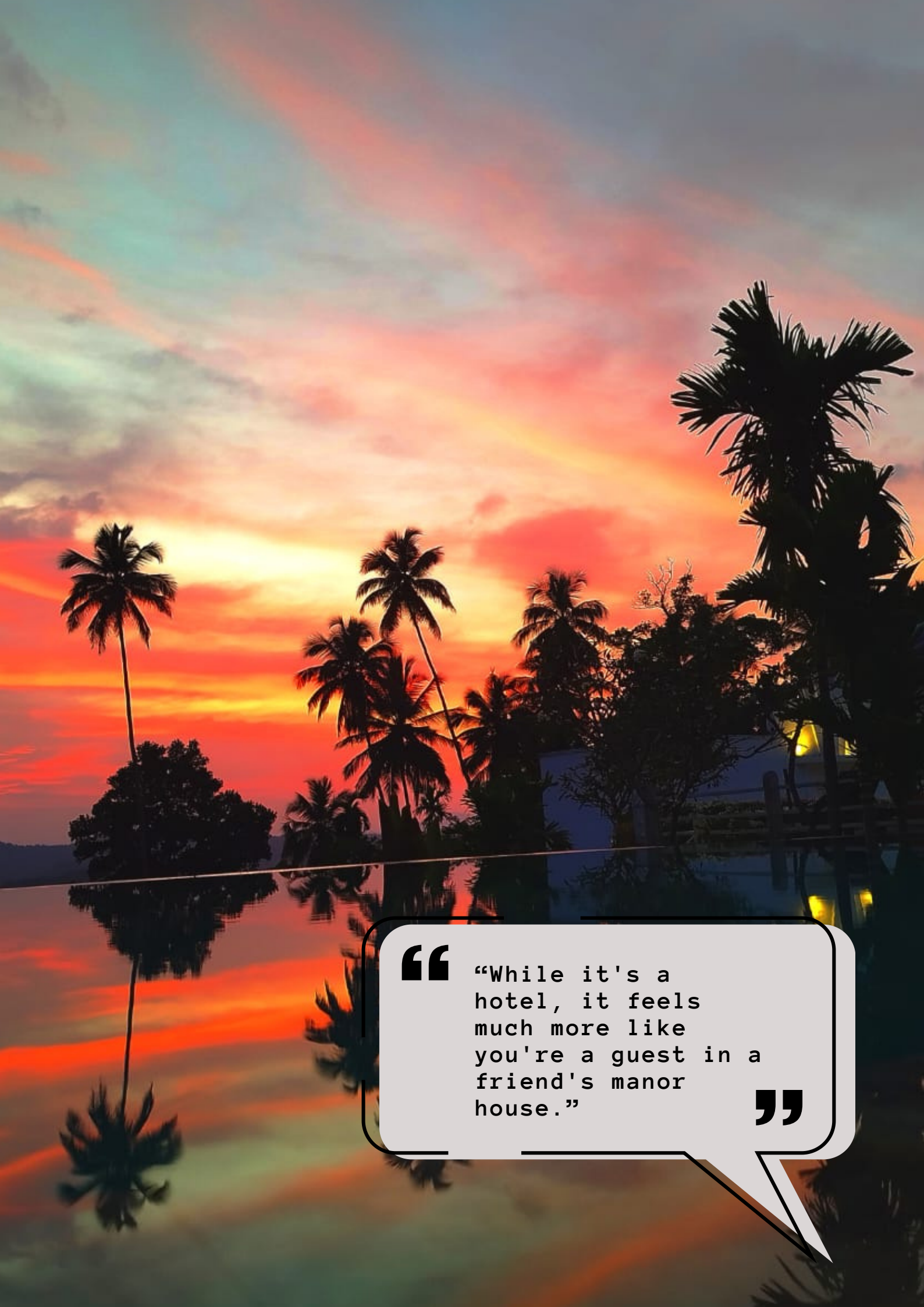
“Superb and attentive service (without being overbearing), truly excellent restaurant, delightful and charming rooms/property and the most spectacular idyllic scenery.”

”

THE STAR OF LANKA



Weighing in at 193-carat weight, the milky blue Star of Lanka remains among the 20 celebrated Sri Lankan sapphires so rare and beautiful as to have gained both a name, a legend, and a provenance that would shame Eve. It was discovered in the early 20th century but, by 1958, was bought by the Royal Ontario Museum, and it sits there today, within the walls of an Italianate-Neo-Romanesque building, forever stared at and admired – but never worn again.



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“While it's a hotel, it feels much more like you're a guest in a friend's manor house.”

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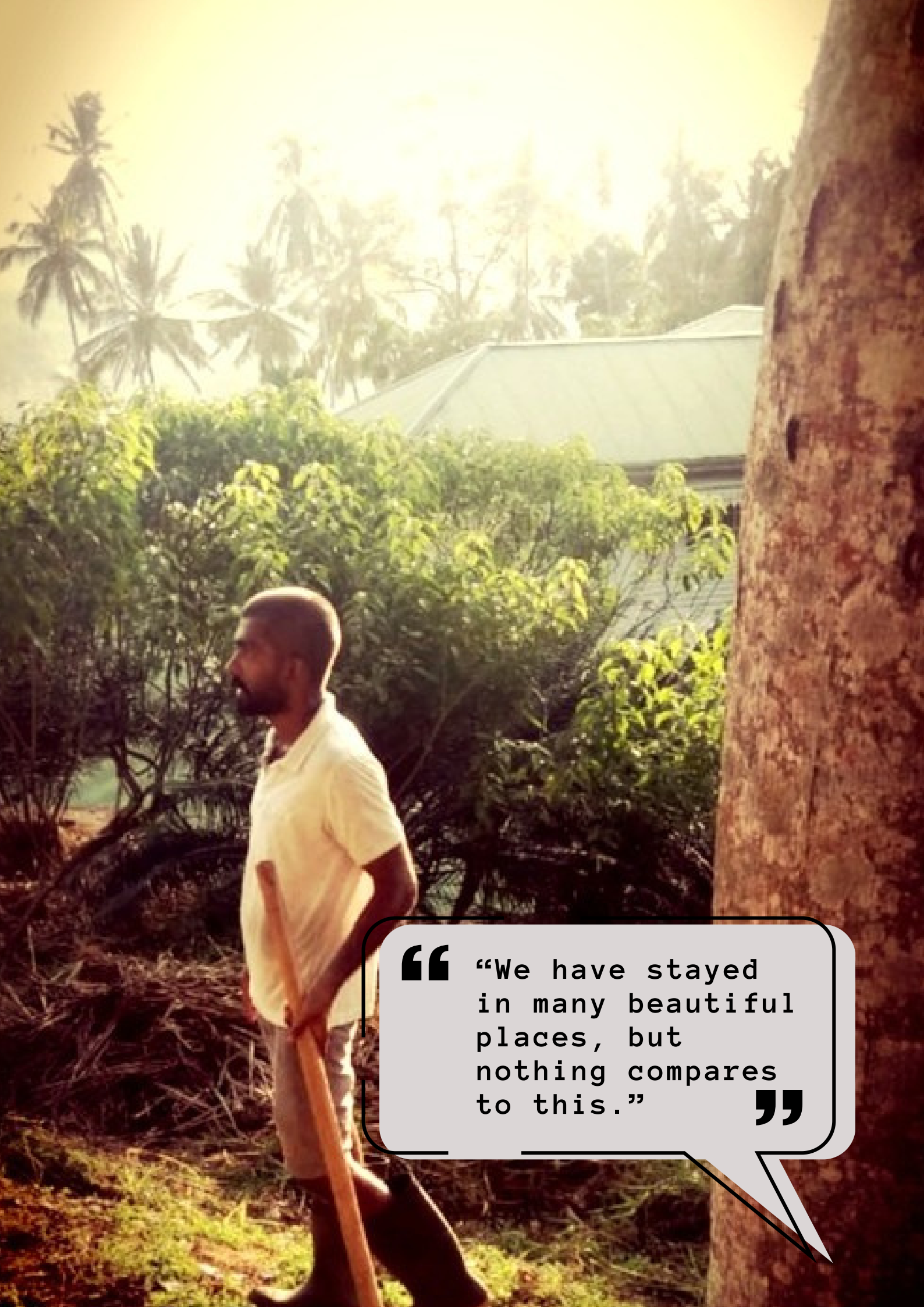
CAT KING



Shrewd, secretive, elusive, the Ceylon Leopard (*Panthera pardus lankae*) is, without doubt, one of the most extraordinary endemic jewels in Sri Lanka's mammalian crown.

Averaging six feet in length, head to tail, and weighing anything up to two hundred and twenty pounds, they are primarily solitary beasts, largely but not always nocturnal and with a typical life expectancy of fifteen years. It is beautifully attuned to hunting, an observer noting that "if the lion is the king of the jungle, then the leopard is the king of stealth," able to run at 70 kilometres an hour and leap as far as 6 metres.

Contrary to popular belief, they are not just found in Yala National Park but across the country's arid, dry, and wet zones, as well as its hills, forests, and plantations.



“We have stayed
in many beautiful
places, but
nothing compares
to this.”

THE HAPPY MIGRANT



Little can depress the Eyed Skink. It lives in the warmer parts of Europe, the Middle East, North Africa, and the Indian sub-continent – and, remarkably for so jet-setting a reptile, in Sri Lanka too, it now seems.

A research monograph published in the January 2008 edition of the Russian Journal of Herpetology excitedly revealed that its range, hitherto outside the island, could now confidently be said to include Sri Lanka as well. And not just here and there - for the beast was spotted in surveys right across the lowland forest areas of the island from north to south.

Its proclivity to eat practically anything may help account for its enormous size (it is about a foot in length) and its untroubled life, earning it the Conservation status of least concern.



“The estate
itself is
stunning, but it
is the people
who make it
truly special. “

Chambers
2018

CASTLES IN THE AIR

Following a most successful regicidal patricide, the Sitawaka kingdom was carved out of the Kotte kingdom and, for a while, was the scourge of both the Kandyan kings and the new colonialists. The kingdom was destined to last for but a short time, and today almost nothing remains of either the palace or Sitawaka Fort constructed there by Mayadunne, its inaugural king.

The Portuguese captured the kingdom and reduced the fort to a smaller garrison before the British later reused all its stones to build a rest house.

Today, all that remains are a few mounds of earth that the Archaeology Department are valiantly excavating. For travellers with capacious imagination, it is a place to go and ponder the mutability of impregnable citadels.



“From the moment
you arrive, you
are made to feel
like friends and
family rather than
guests. “

”



Michelle de Kretser

The Hamilton Case

'MESMERI

Daily Telegr

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Is

THE HAMILTON CASE

In Michelle De Kretser's gripping novel, a flamboyant beauty who once partied with the Prince of Wales and who now, in her seventh decade, has "gone native" in a Ceylonese jungle.

A proud, Oxford-educated lawyer who unwittingly seals his own professional fate when he dares to solve the sensational Hamilton murder case that has rocked the upper echelons of local society.

A young woman who retreats from her family and the world after her infant brother is found suffocated in his crib. It is, wrote one reviewer, "a haunting and acclaimed novel of thwarted ambition, corruption, murder and family secrets."

“

“The food, the atmosphere, the breathtaking jungle views from the pool, and above all, the genuine kindness of the staff are unlike anything we have ever experienced elsewhere.”

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KING OF THE MONTH

SIRIMEGHAVANNA, KING OF ANURADHAPURA

The 64th recorded monarch in Sri Lanka, Sirimeghavanna, inherited his throne peacefully and continued his father's late religious policies of appeasement, going out of his way to make good any damage to Theravada Buddhism by building or repairing stupas and temples. He also benefited from the unexpected arrival in his Kingdom of the sacred relic of the Buddha's tooth, which was brought to Sri Lanka when a series of wars broke out in India.

It was enshrined in the Isurumuniya Temple in Anuradhapura. His death in 332 CE made him the 31st Sri Lankan monarch to die a natural death.

By now, the Lambakanna Dynasty had fully recovered from the regicidal tendencies that had rocked both it and the country, and its kingdom could enjoy a much-needed period of calm and good governance.



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“Sri Lankan
hospitality at
its best. We
can't wait to
return someday!”

”



FRIED KOHILA STEAK



A NEW DISH OUR
CHEFS ARE TRIALING

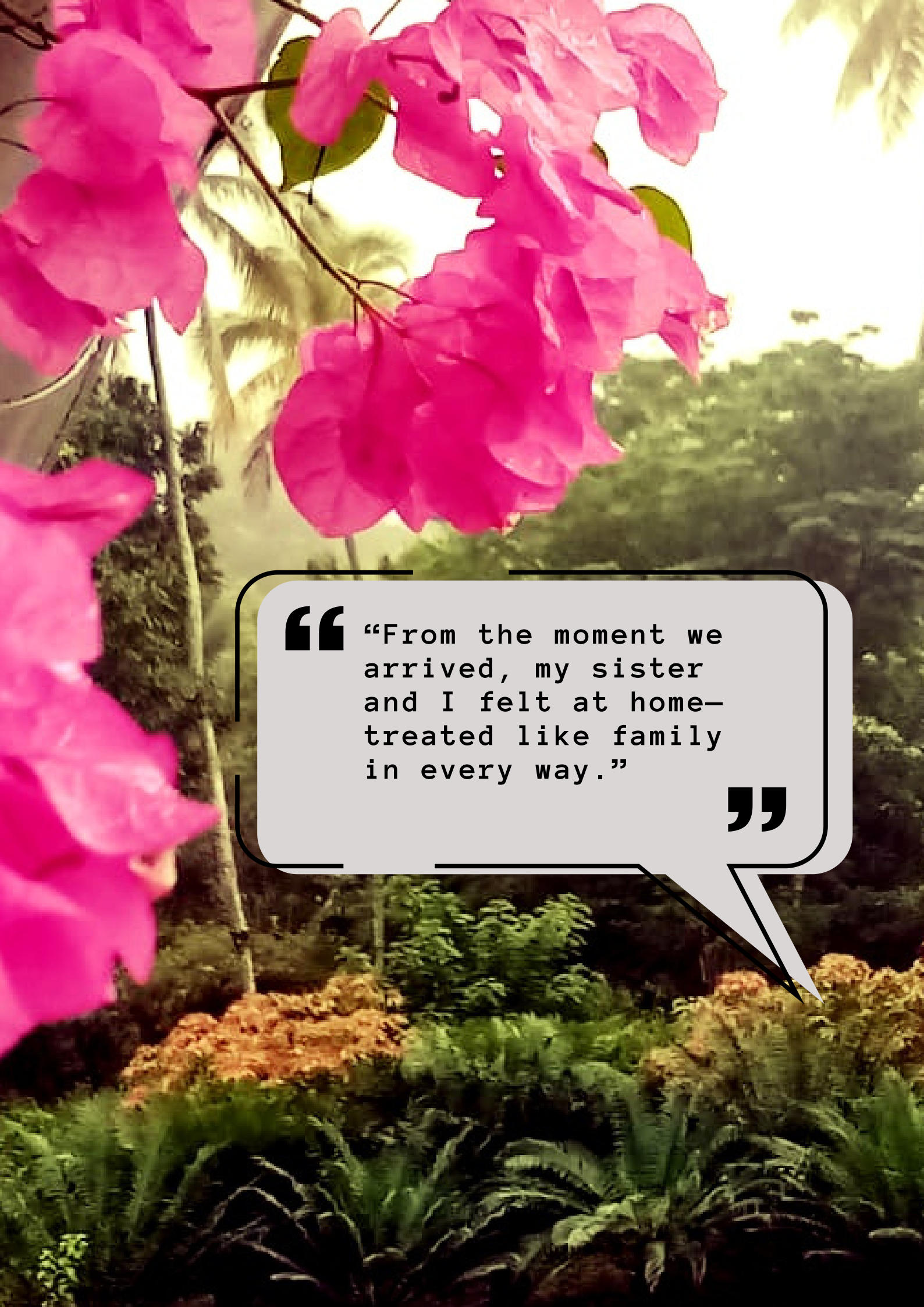
Lasia Spinosa Roots; Bell Peppers; Onion; Zucchini; Curd; Turmeric;
Masala; Lemon Salt; Pepper; Garlic; Onion; Chili; Soy Sauce; Lime



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

”



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“From the moment we arrived, my sister and I felt at home—treated like family in every way.”

”

MAKARA—TORAN



An ornamental arch over the portal of a Vihare, formed of two fabulous monsters facing each other. These monsters are said to be emblems of the God of Love (Kama) and are an introduction borrowed from Hinduism.



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“Staying at Flame
Tree Estate was
one of our
favourite things
in our two weeks
in Sri Lanka. “

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A TUK TUK HOP



Found off a tiny back road just a few kilometres from The Flame Tree Estate and Hotel, the Galayawe Sri Suvi Suddharamaya is a place of abiding serenity; simple, good work and halcyon calm. Dating back 397 years, it is not merely a temple. Within its grounds lie a lovely elongated mini stupa, over 100 years old; a dormitory for its monks; ponds of koi carp, a range of Buddhist alters; a Museum; public rooms for workshops and eating; a medical facility; and the ancient temple itself. It is presided over by Udawela Nanda Thero, whose kind and thoughtful character is almost all the argument you need to believe in the goodness of God. The temple is as much a practical expression of care as it is a spiritual one. The medical facility here opens on weekends and focuses on the needs of women and children. The temple school, which operates from 8 am to 12 noon, looks after about 30 local children aged 3 to 5. The temple itself is a marvel of carvings and paintings, covered in ancient Buddhist frescoes and guarded by carved lions and life-size statues of characters from the Buddhist scriptures, as well as horses, wild animals, mystical beasts, and tableaus depicting notable Buddhist stories.

Beside the temple sits the stupa. Over 5 decades, Udawela Nanda Thero has assembled a singular museum that, with subtle eloquence, tells the story of Sri Lanka's journey from an agrarian world to a more urban one.

“

“I had read lots of great reviews about this place, so even though my expectations were high, we were totally blown away by this place. It is truly a gem.”

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THE SHY BEAUTY



At 7.5 inches in length, the Chestnut-Backed Owlet is one of the country's rare endemic owls. Despite an absence of stylish eyebrow tufts to boast of, it is wholly adorable, its head round and dark; its solid little body bursting with compact determination and presence, its wings a chestnut brown, and its stomach clothed with white feathers flecked with dizzy brown highlights that would give any beauty salon the most enviable of professional reputations. It can be found from Colombo to the hill country, but its range has shrunk alarmingly, and its existence is ever more under threat. Unlike most owls, it lives out its life both day and night - so it is more present than most other owls. Its call, variously described as "kurr-kurrkurr," "kraw-kraw" or "kao-kao," is low-pitched and is the best clue to spotting it, for it is otherwise relentlessly shy.

THE FLAME TREE ESTATE & HOTEL

Mudunhena Walawwa, Galagedera 20100,
Kandy, Sri Lanka
Main Office Landline + 94 81246 1265
www.flametreeestate.com

ANGELO PERERA

GENERAL MANAGER

+ 94 77 189 8586

generalmanager@flametreeestate.com

CHATHURANGA WANSAPPERUMA

FINANCE MANAGER

+94 71 407 6666

finance@flametreeestate.com

RANJAN GURUGE

OPERATIONS MANAGER

+94 71 704 3980

operations@flametreeestate.com

NIMESH DE SILVA

TRAVEL AGENT BOOKINGS MANAGER

+94 77 029 6476

nimesh@manorhouseconcepts.com

