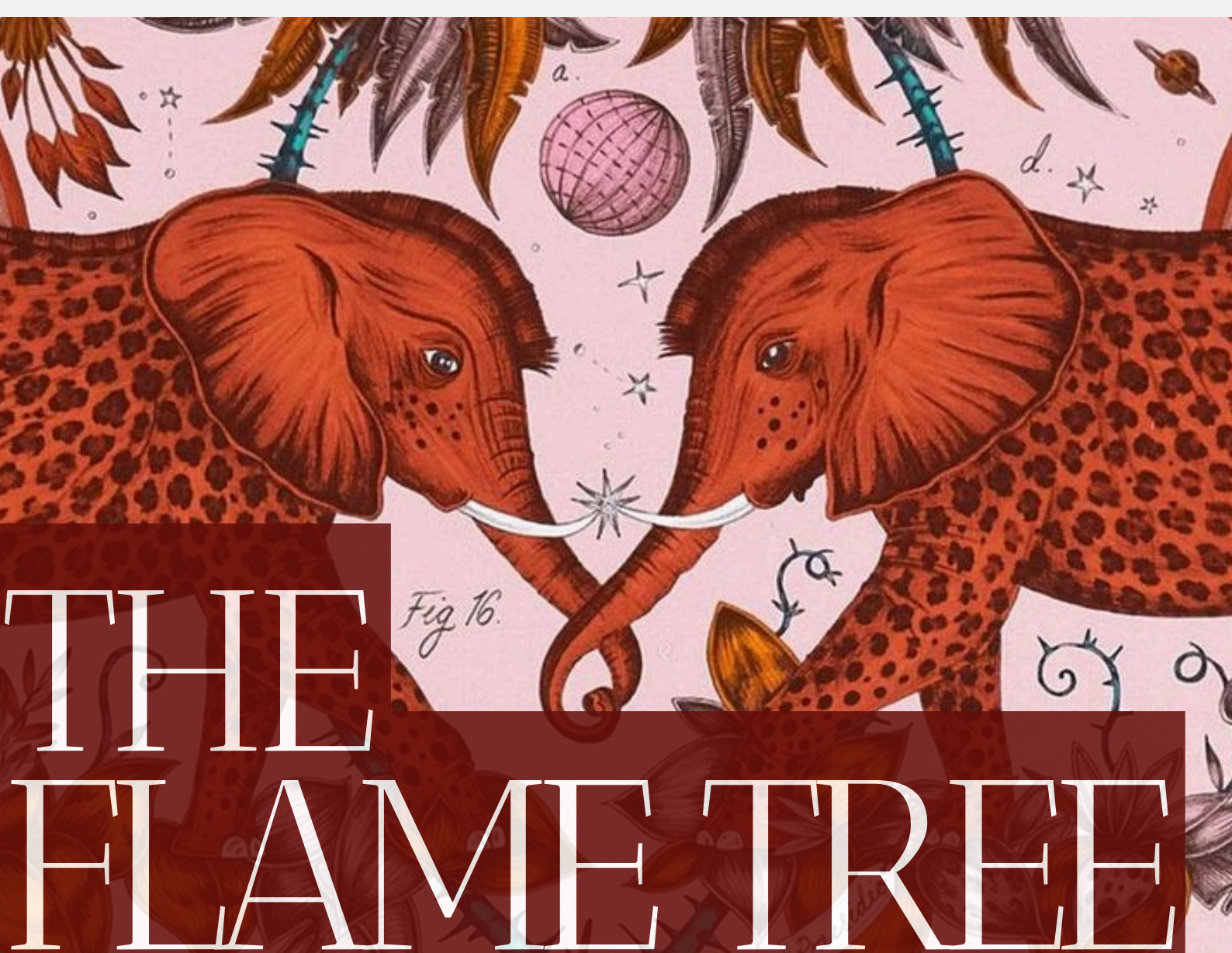




THE FLAME TREE HERALD TRIBUNE

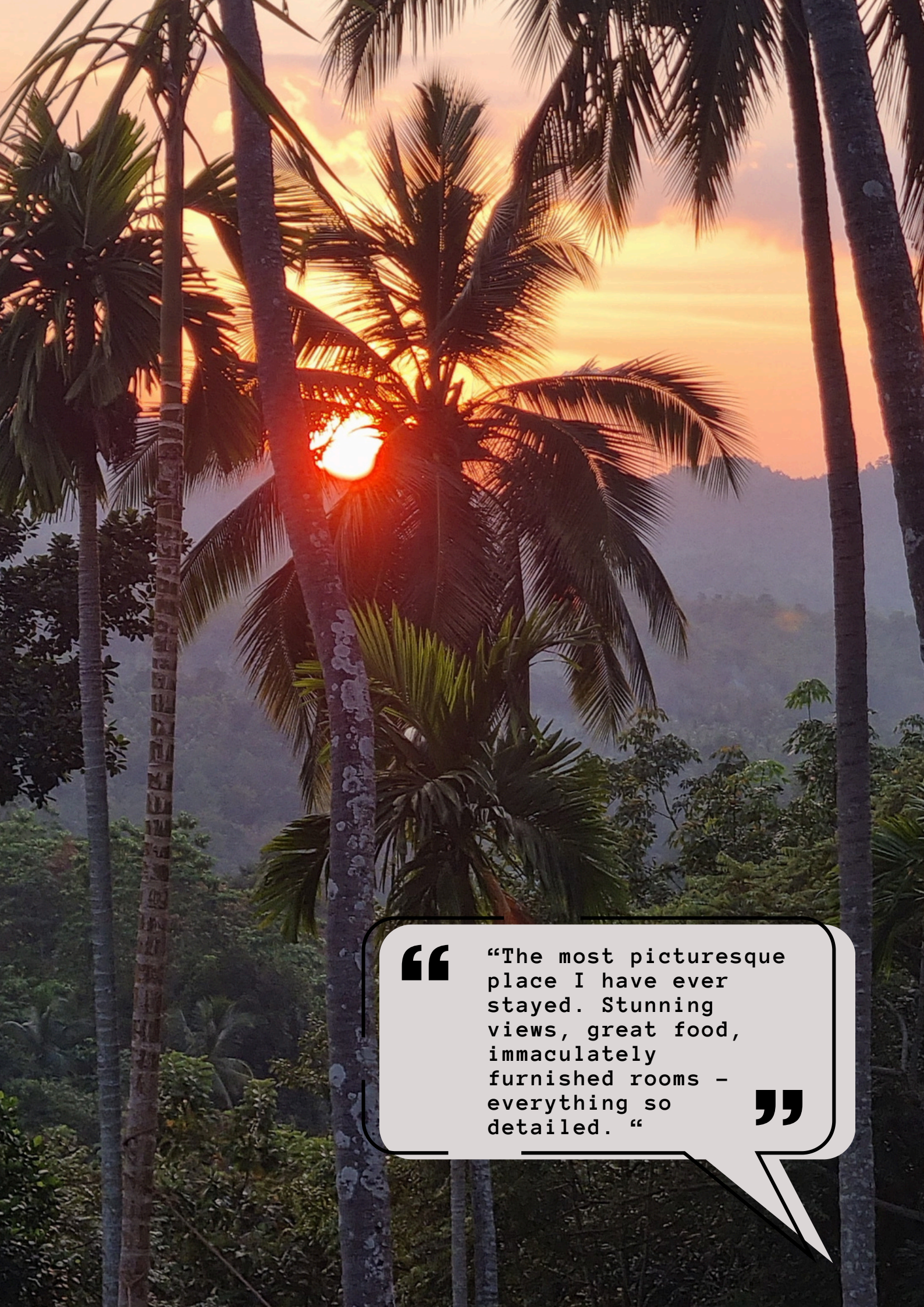
IN
THIS
EDITION

May 2026

flamefreestate.com

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

THE CATWALK CAT
FALLEN ANGELS
KING OF THE MONTH
BLUE SKINED GODS
LOST GUARDIANS
FISH-AMBULTHIYAL



“

“The most picturesque place I have ever stayed. Stunning views, great food, immaculately furnished rooms - everything so detailed. “

”

CARDAMON



Cardamom, the green pearl or Queen of Spices from India's Western Ghats, is so prized as to be the world's third most valued spice, up there with saffron and vanilla, with a scent and flavour so intensely exotic as to be deeply associated with magic potions, love remedies and spiritual practices that go back to the Hanging Gardens of Babylon.

It has a taste and fragrance like no other spice. The oils derived from its seeds undergo many stages of olfactory change as they are heated. Words like peppery, piney, eucalyptus, menthol, citrus, sweet, peppery, pungent, aromatic – they all land far short of quite how extraordinary it is.

Arriving in Sri Lanka, courtesy of Arab traders working the sea routes to the Malabar coast, is likely the reason it arrived here, where it is used in cakes, curries, puddings, and rice.



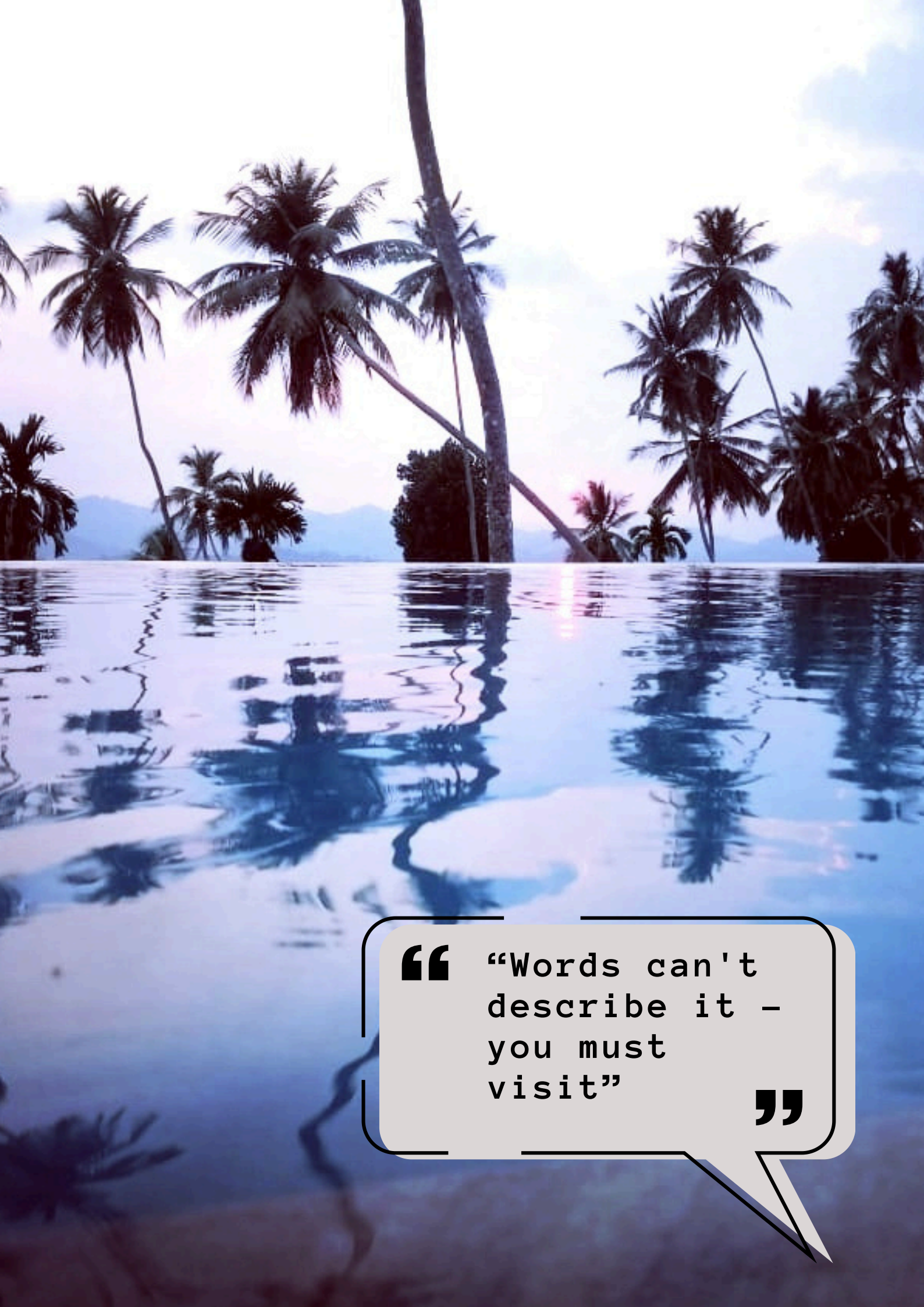
“It was so good we decided not to leave the hotel for the whole of our 3-day stay.”

THE SERENDIPITY SAPPHIRE



Weighing in at around 510 kilograms and 2.6 million carats, the Serendipity Sapphire is the world's largest star sapphire cluster. It was discovered in July 2021 in Kahawatte near Ratnapura – and entirely by accident, when Mr Gamage, a gem trader, set workmen to dig a well.

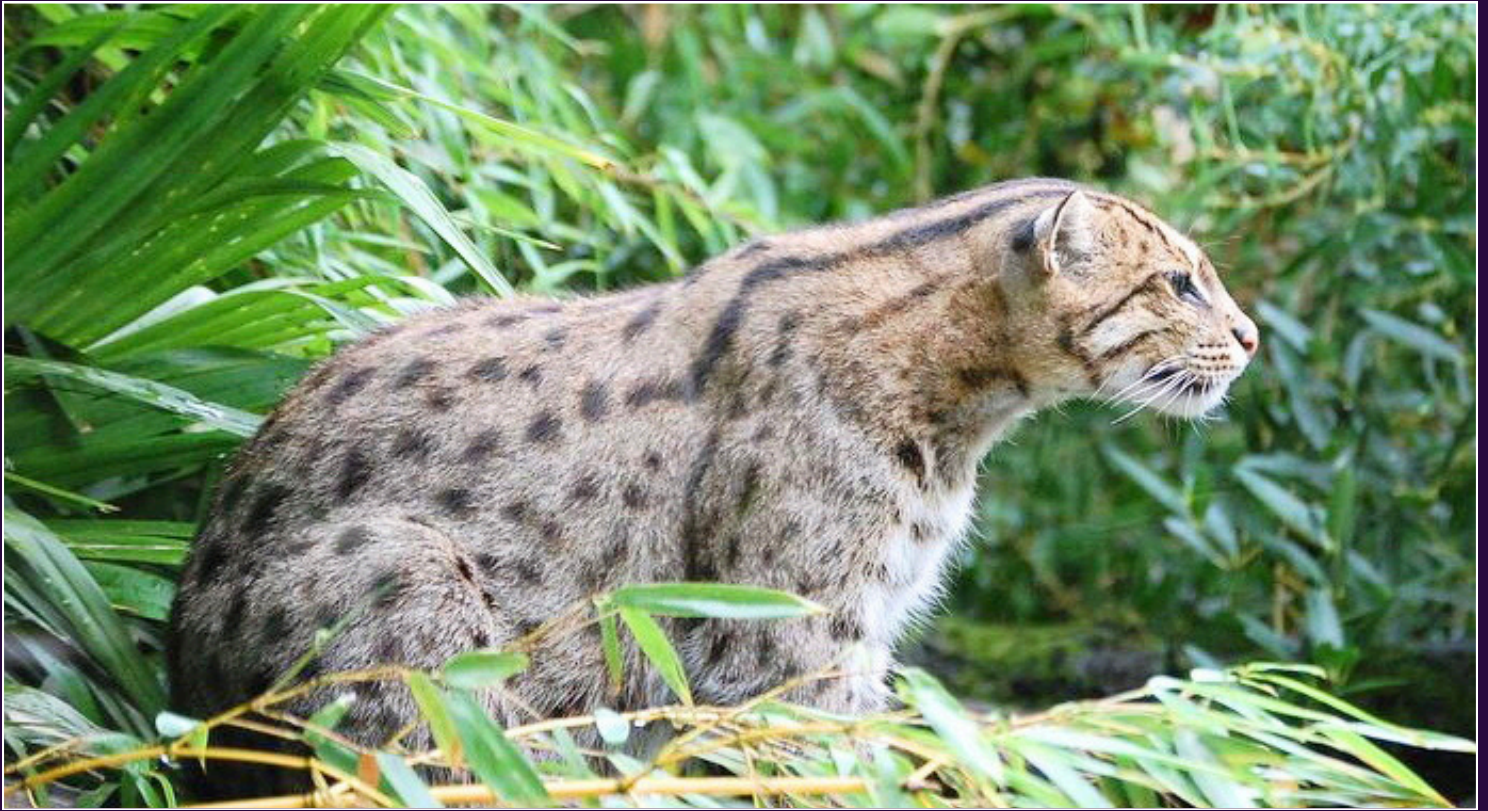
Since its discovery, Mr Gamage has wisely chosen to remain entirely silent about his home improvement bonanza.



“Words can't
describe it -
you must
visit”

”

THE CATWALK CAT



Double the size of a domestic cat and weighing up to almost 40 pounds, the Indian Fishing Cat is a vanishing rarity - challenged by habitat loss right across Sri Lanka and South and Southeast Asia.

It has slightly webbed paws and, given its proclivity for fish, prefers to live around the island's wetlands, rivers, lakes and stream banks, swamps, and mangroves. If it didn't live here, its alternative address would be the catwalk, for it is a gorgeous creation.

Its striking yellow and grey fur displays confident black stripes along the head and upper back, which fray into dots and stipples further down the body.



“A hidden Gem
in the jungle.
Not to miss by
any
circumstance.” ”

FALLEN ANGELS



Despite owning 1700 different species around the world, skinks are almost as obscure as sea potatoes. More snake-like than lizards, but with legs that no snake owns, with the face of tiny dragons, the agility of squirrels, and the impish intelligence of chameleons, they live all around us, minuscule glittering versions of Rudolph Vanentino: sleek, elegant, nimble, and stylish.

They can be seen in trees, on rocks, in grassland, in buildings, in the jungle, in scrub, and on the coast. The very antithesis of McDonald's and every other soulless global brand, of the 31 skinks that call Sri Lanka home, a colossal 85% are found nowhere else but here.

So small as to be ignored; so little studied as to be mysterious; so numerous as to be everywhere, they live a life somewhere between heaven and hell, like semi-fallen angels, perfect for always being not what they seem.

“

“Great pool,
fantastic food
and exceptional
hospitality to
name a few
delights.”

”



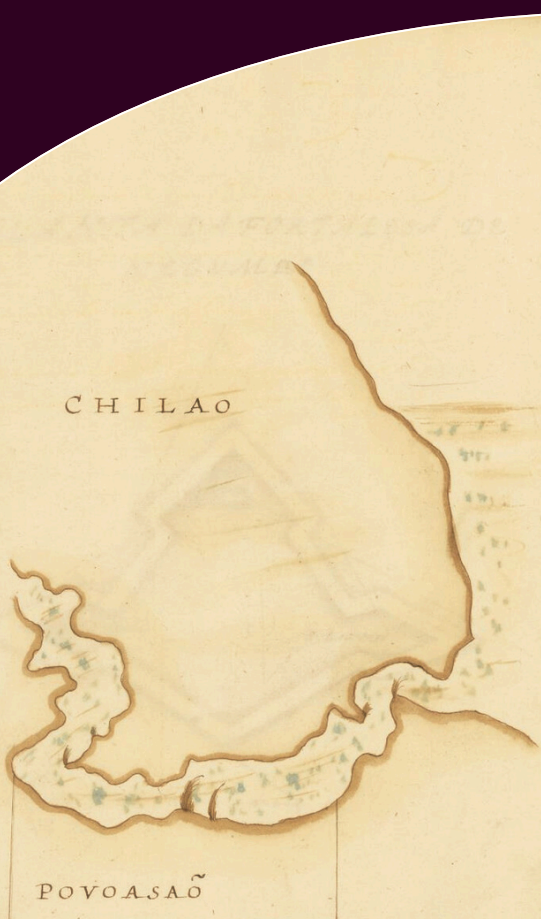
CHANDRA

LOST GUARDIAN

Just one year after they had taken control of all the Portuguese territories in Sri Lanka, the Dutch, under Governor van der Meyden, set about building a fort at Chilaw to protect the cinnamon trade and, with formidable force, guard a monopoly that was to earn them a fabulous fortune.

The Portuguese had already constructed a smaller, earlier fort, probably on the foundations of a still earlier fort built by the Kings of Kandy. This is what the Dutch had adopted as well.

Nothing of either fort remains visible today, except this map - and a tunnel – for like so many of the island's great historic fortresses, it has evaporated into the wild jungle.



Chilao.

Chilao ligt van Negumbo 8 legues lance de oost, Riddende syn barre 4 palmen water, Ritt vlecht ofte doep ligt 2 legue de rivier opwaerts, ten hooft gansch geen fortificatie noch en is van geen importantie, uwer Maj^{te} can daar cassitijn des pachteren ende oudemantien maken.

Ten hooft gansch geen jurisdictie, de saaken van het Christen den worden grimmig heetst door de paders van Compagnie.

“The perfect
chill for a
few nights in
the jungle.”

”



"Gods is a treasure."
—Kristen Arnett, author
of *Mostly Dead Things*

BLUE SKINNED GODS

A NOVEL

BLUE SKINNED GODS

S.J. Sindu's novel opens in Tamil Nadu, India, where a boy is born with blue skin. His father sets up an ashram, and the family makes a living off the pilgrims who seek the child's blessings and miracles, believing young Kalki to be the tenth human incarnation of the Hindu god Vishnu.

In Kalki's tenth year, he is confronted with three trials that will test his power, prove his divine status, and, his father tells him, spread his fame worldwide. "This marvellous novel," noted one reviewer, "offers up the most extraordinary circumstance in which to live a life.

What am I, and what am I capable of? These pages left me with the best case of culture shock, and in awe over Sindu's storytelling talent."



“

“A flawless
experience for
this 9-room
boutique hotel,
close to
perfection.”

”

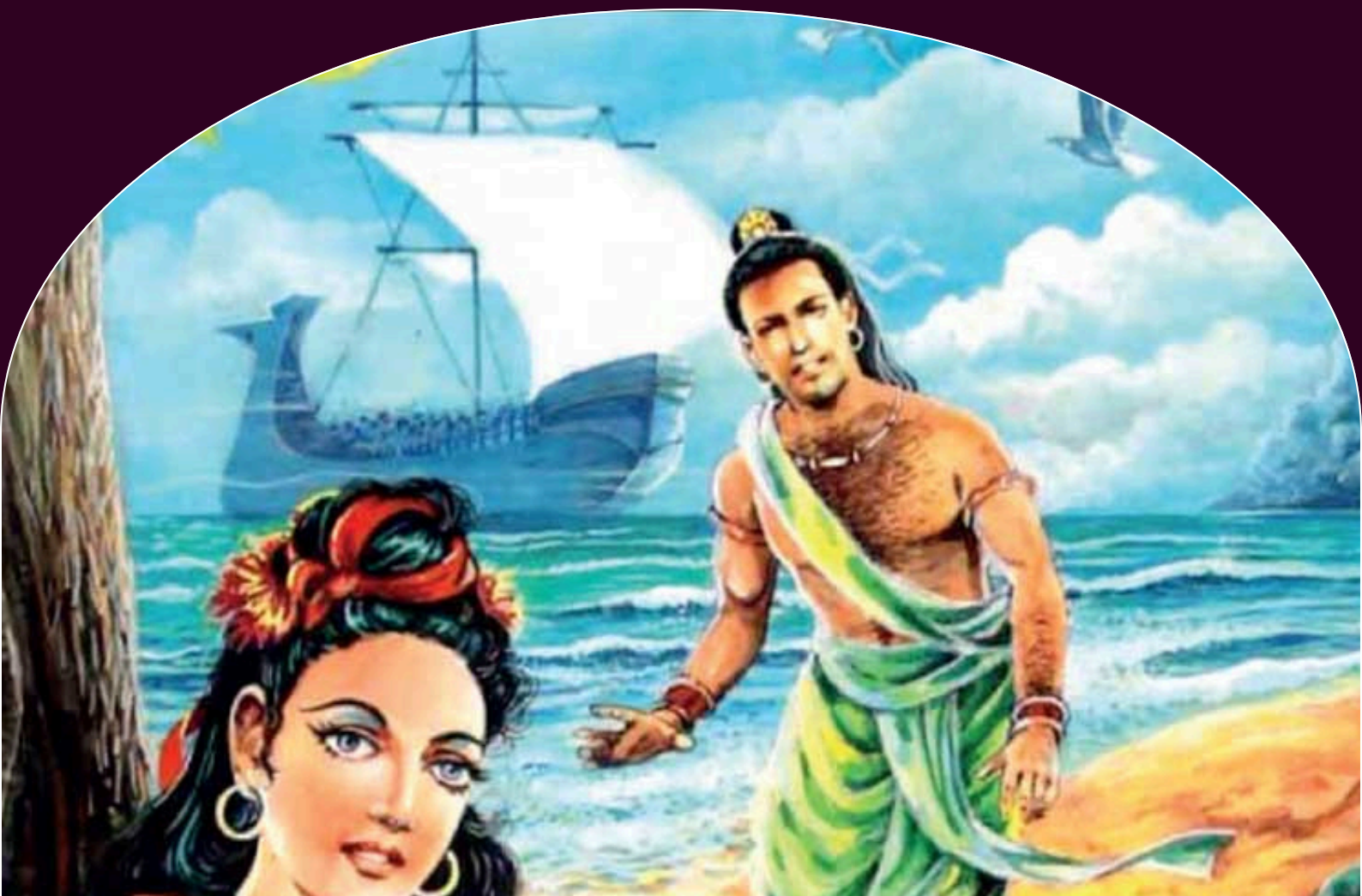
KING OF THE MONTH

VIJAYA KING OF TAMBAPANNI

Expelled from either Bengal or Gujarat by his father, Prince Vijaya, the founding father of an eponymous royal family, arrived on the island in 543 BCE. His landing kick marked the beginning of recorded Singhala history.

Although verified archaeological evidence remains scarce, documentary evidence for Prince Vijaya remains tantalisingly absent; this has not stopped him from taking centre stage as the nation's paterfamilias.

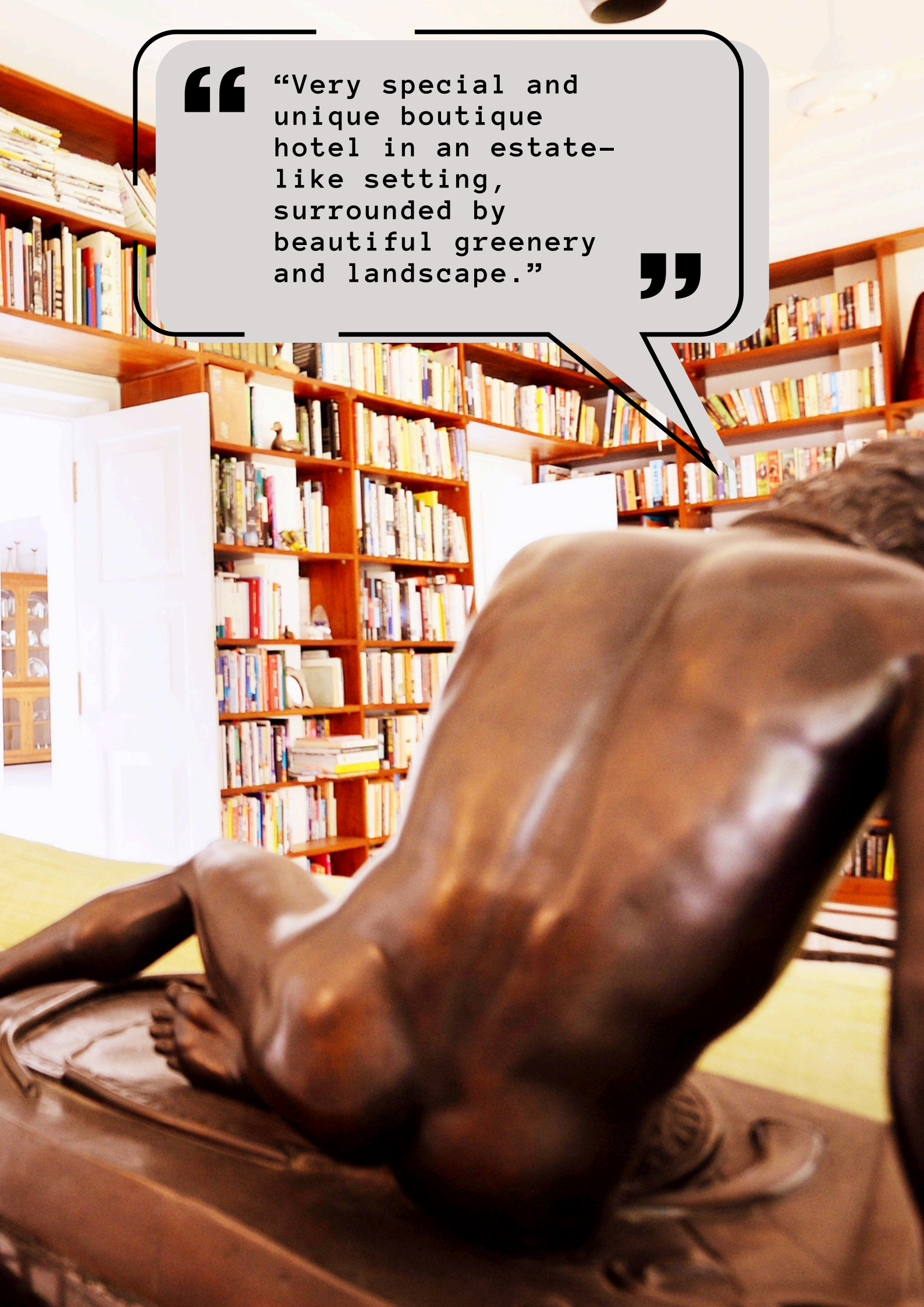
The many conflicting stories surrounding his arrival, his fights with man-eating wives, flying horses, skirmishes with indigenous tribes, protection under Buddha, and his willingness to swap his local wife, Kuveni, for a more glamorous and aristocratic Indian princess are part of the country's cherished creation myths.



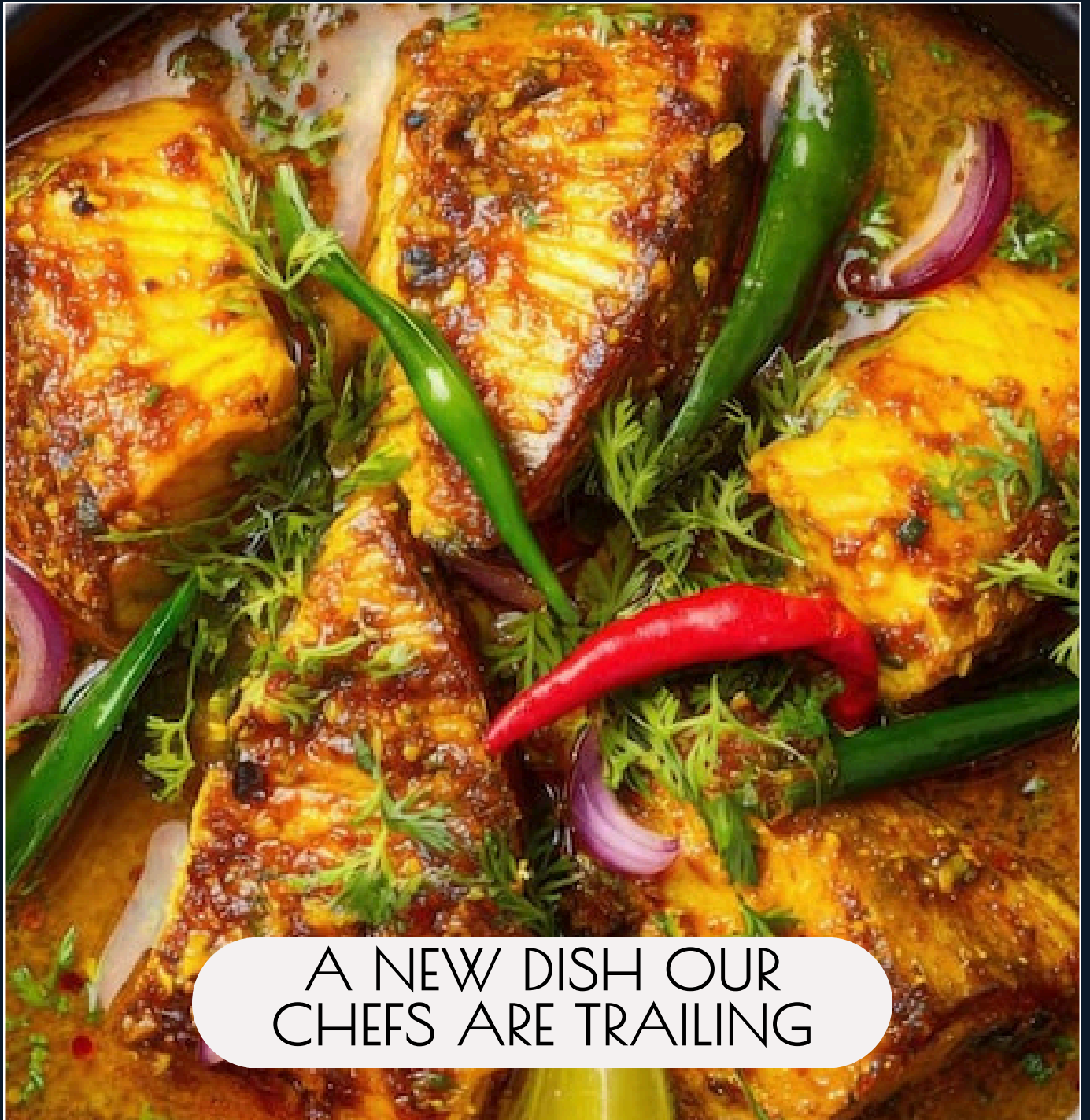
“

“Very special and unique boutique hotel in an estate-like setting, surrounded by beautiful greenery and landscape.”

”



FISH AMBULTHIYAL



A NEW DISH OUR
CHEFS ARE TRAILING

Lime Juice; White Fish Fillets; Black Peppercorns; Chilli Powder;
Cinnamon; Fresh Root Ginger; Garlic Cloves; Fresh Green Chillies;
Fresh Curry Leaves; Tamarind Paste; Coconut Cream; Salt; Pandan
Leaves



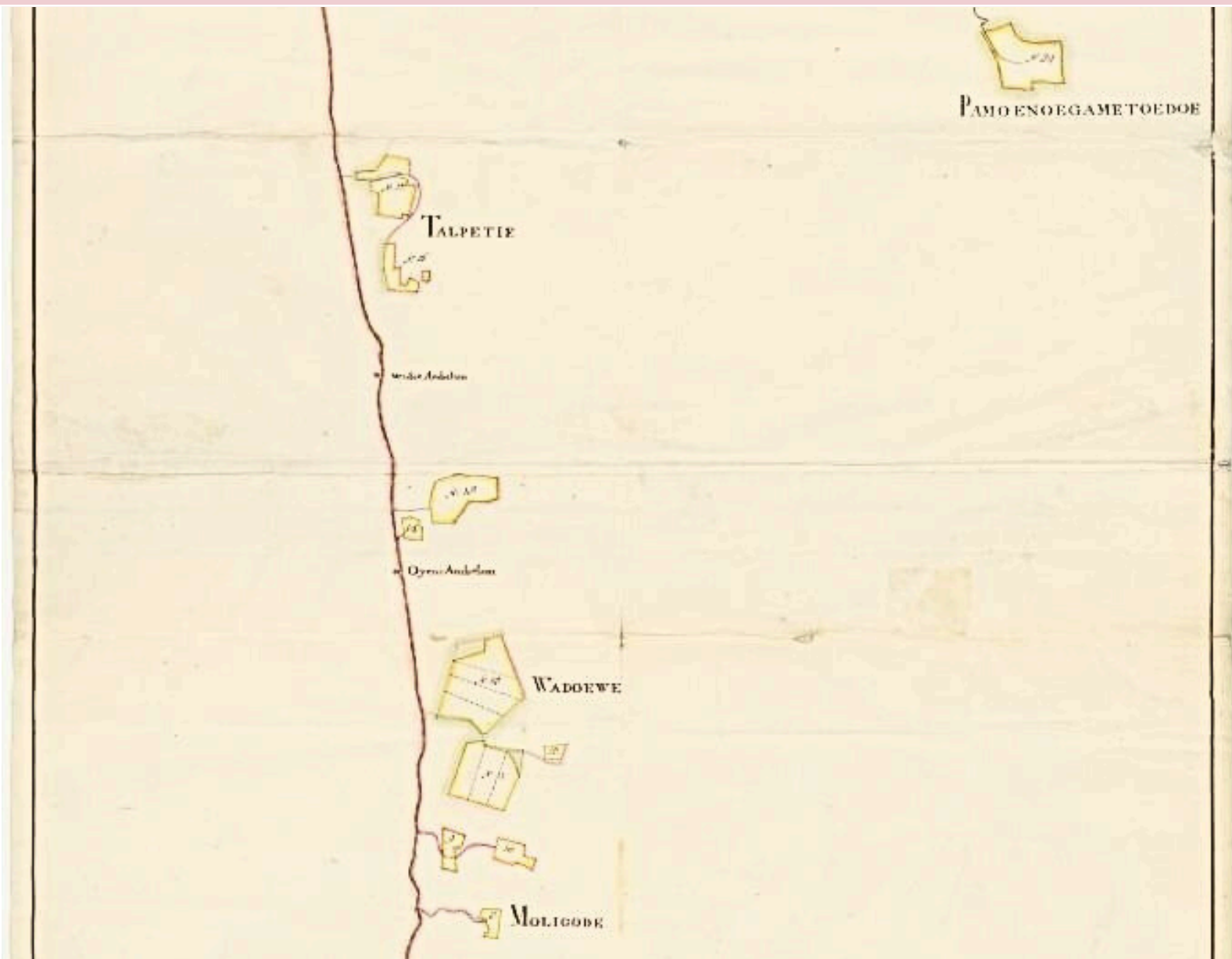
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“Beautiful
oasis”

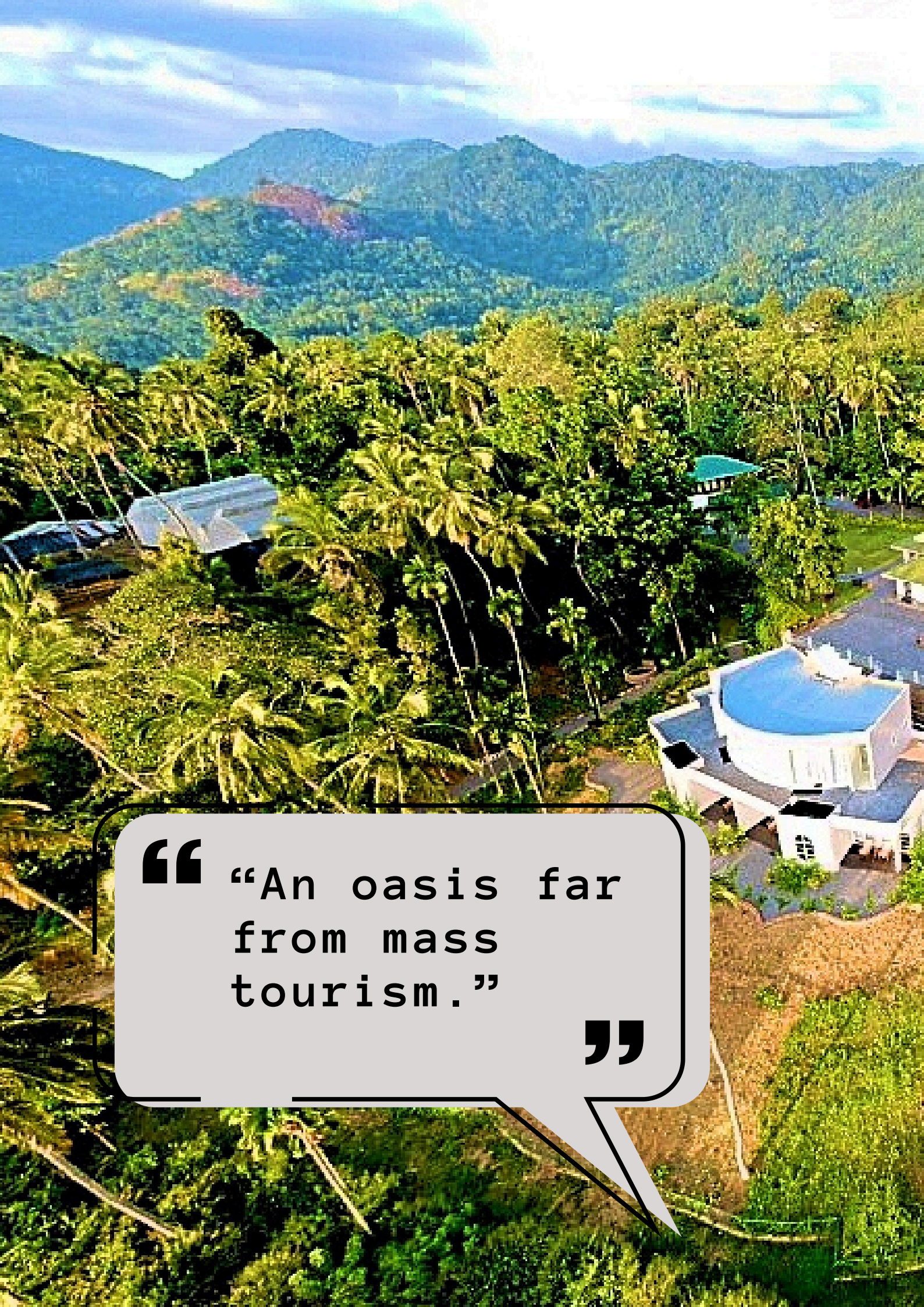
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1700

MAP OF CINNAMON GARDENS AT PANETURE, CEYLON



This map by C. van Houten was created sometime between 1700 and 1800 and shows the cinnamon gardens at Paneture, an area near Kalutara, important for cinnamon cultivation. The VOC exported around 10,000 bales of cinnamon annually, generating an unprecedented income of 2.5 million guilders per year. And they were ruthless in implementing strategies to maintain their monopoly and keep prices high. They deliberately burned wild cinnamon forests to create artificial scarcity and established strict quality controls reinforced by a monopoly

An aerial photograph of a tropical resort. In the foreground, a large, curved swimming pool with a blue roof is visible, surrounded by white buildings and lush greenery. The middle ground is filled with dense tropical forest, including many palm trees. In the background, there are rolling hills and mountains under a blue sky with scattered clouds.

**“ “An oasis far
from mass
tourism.” ”**

DIYAKEPUMA



The ceremony of cutting water with golden swords by the Kapurala of the Dewale at a ford or pond at the close of a Perehera in July or August.



“

“Perfection.”

”



A TUK TUK HOP



Hidden down tiny roads very close to The Flame Tree Estate & Hotel is the ancient cave temple of Gunadaha Rajamaha, with its lofty views and deep forest hinterland, once home to one of Sri Lanka's unluckiest kings. Valagamba became King of Anuradhapura in 103 BCE, but had first to kill Kammaharattaka, his sibling's murderer and chief general, before gaining what he regarded as his birthright - the crown. This he did, but little good came of it. Within months of taking power, the kingdom fell to Dravidian Tamil invaders. The king went into continuous hiding, including here in Galagedera, as he sought to build a guerrilla resistance against the invaders. But by 89 BCE, he had recaptured the throne and was to rule for a further 12 years. Over the following hundreds of years, the ancient little temple carried on; its caves gathering statues; its forest getting ever denser; and the walls of the rock within which it hides being chiselled with medieval drains to fend off the monsoon. Today it remains a place for solitude and prayer; a moment of stillness to carry with you, the lintel above the cave itself inscribed with a pre-Singhalese script – Brahmi, an alphabet that dates back to the 6th BCE in India.



“

“Absolutely
beautiful
property “

”

THE NEAR-CITIZEN



The Brown Fish Owl, common throughout south and southeast Asia, has inspired a healthy range of sub-variants – and the Sri Lankan version now teeters on the giddy and celebrated edge of endemism.

It is smaller and darker than its other fish owl cousins, about two feet in length and with an unremarkable white-brown plumage, not unlike a much-loved duffle coat.

Its fondness for fish means it is most easily spotted around coastlines, lakes, and rivers, but it is also regularly reported to be seen in the deeper jungle too.

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