

A CEYLON
PRESS TINY
GUIDE

A TOUR OF
THE 21 BEST
HOTELS IN
SRI LANKA

HAPPIEST HOTELS



1 THE GALLE FACE HOTEL

With a Victorian era guest list that reads like Who's Who of the time, this iconic hotel is the only one in Colombo that still enjoys direct sea access. Gandhi, Noel Coward, Che Guevara, Yuri Gagarin, Nixon, Prince Philip, and Elizabeth Taylor all booked rooms. Vivien Leigh sulked in her bedroom. Little has changed since her repeated calls to room service: it is just as lovely, weathering a recent upgrade with rare, good taste. It is the best place to Wedding Watch as it hosts around one thousand society weddings a year. Enjoy them as you nibble Battenburg cakes on the terrace, sip Pimm's and watch the Crow Man scare away the birds.

2

THE MOUNT LAVINIA HOTEL

Built in 1806 by the British Governor, Sir Thomas Maitland, Mount Lavinia gained immediate fame for its not-so secret tunnel linking the governor's wine cellar to the home of his burgher lover. Successive governors would go on to use it as their out-of-town seaside retreat, enjoying its smart siting on a rock overlooking the sea and two pleasant beaches, restyling it in 1830 as an Italianate palace. With two hundred and seventy five rooms, it has been operating as a hotel since 1947, much loved as a wedding venue and brunching spot.

3 NUMBER 11

Hidden down the 33rd Lane that turns off Colombo's Bagatelle Road is Geoffray Bawa's private town house, a rambling architectural marvel and museum which, whilst not run as a regular hotel, lets out two rooms to visitors. With demand far outstripping supply, getting to stay there can prove tricky but lucky guests then have the great good fortune of having the entire museum, with its gorgeous assemblage of curios and masterpieces, all to themselves once the day trippers have gone.

4 TINTAGEL

The graceful Colombo residence of the Bandaranaike families and scene of the assassination of S.W.R. Bandaranaike, Tintagel is now an impressive boutique hotel run by the Paradise Road designer and entrepreneur, Udayshanth Fernando. If sinking into unquestionable peace and luxury is your principal need, this is the place for you.

5 UGA RESIDENCE

The landmark hotel in a small and growing local chain, Uga Residence is a 19th century mansion that has morphed delightfully into a lavish boutique hotel. Set like a delightful navel in the heart of Colombo, its bar offers an inexhaustible range of whiskeys.

6

THE FLAME TREE ESTATE & HOTEL

An art deco plantation manor close to Kandy, the Elephant Orphanage, Sigiriya and Dambulla, this little slice of heaven offers a big dose of serenity. Surrounded by jungle, and its own plantations of spices, timber, coconut, and rubber, it mixes collections of contemporary Sri Lankan art with European Modernism; and fuses classic Sri Lankan food with the best of European dishes.

7 THE AMANGALLA

A Galle heritage hotel, with deep, humbling verandas, it has wisely chosen to restrict its number of rooms to better focus on the sort of luxury you know you deserve the moment you find it.

8

FORT BAZAAR

A seventeenth century merchant's townhouse in downtown Galle Fort Bazaar is now home to a boutique hotel of handsome guestrooms, delicious food, and verandas from which to watch the busy world worry past.

9

THE FORT PRINTERS

A small eighteenth century building, Fort Printer's is now run as a boutique hotel in Galle. Its restaurant serves some of the very best food on the island, a dazzling gustation played out on Sri Lankan, Lebanese, and Pakistani themes.

10 THE LAST HOUSE

Said to be the last building created by Asia's famous architect Geoffrey Bawa, the Last House overlooks a sandy beach near Tangalle, its capacious gardens enclosing a calm and beautiful building of just five bedrooms that offers every necessary luxury.

11 LUNUGANGA

You can now do better than briefly visit Geoffry Bawa's Bentota country house estate – you can stay there too. "Each vista," wrote Michael Ondaatje, "each location feels like another elegy or another voice—the first person, then the third person, the vernacular, then the classical. You discover you wish to be at one location at noon, another at twilight, some when you are young, others later in life."

12

THE SUN HOUSE

The ideal place to avoid the tourist crowds of Galle – and yet still be as close to it as any lover, The Sun House was built by a Scottish spice merchant in the 1860s. Elegantly casual, with gardens of frangipani and an enviable menu, it is the kind of hotel that truly makes itself your home.

13

WILD COAST TENTED LODGE

A cluster of cocoon-like seed pod villa-ettes adjacent to the famous Yala National Park. Whilst offering both utter seclusion and all the amenities of a luscious hotel, it also has on hand a well-informed team of young naturalists to help you make sense of the wildlife.

14 THE AMBA ESTATE

Just a short drive out of Ella lies the Amba Estate is a 130 acre organic farm, a farm stay, the centre of the growing artisanal tea movement on the island and a true social enterprise. With stunning walks and tea tasting like no other, a stay here gives you all the pleasure of earning a gold star, with none of the accompanying and often irksome typically effort.

15 CEYLON TEA TRAILS

Established by Resplendent Ceylon, Ceylon Tea Trails is a rare Sri Lankan inclusion in Relais & Châteaux's list of Leading Hotels. Based near Hatton, it comprises 5 separate planter's bungalows perched at 1,250 metres overlooking tea. It is the kind of place Louis XV might have dropped into for a decent cup had his armies ever strayed out of India in the 18th century.

16 THE GRAND HOTEL

The Grand Hotel was built by as a holiday home for a busy Colonial Governor. By 1843 the home had become a hotel, to be added to over the decades with a Governor's Wing; a Southern Golf Wing, Tudor facades; and all the other opulent necessities of a first class colonial hotel. Its Edwardian luxury is now mediated by such things as a Mindfulness Studio, a dizzying range of restaurants and bars, and gardens large enough to keep at bay the ever greater crowds who cleave to the cool climate of Nuwara Eliya

17 JETWING SURF

The 20 ocean facing cabanas of Jetwing Surf offer a deliciously comfortable and luxurious bolt hole from which to enjoy the surfing rigors of Arugam Bay.

18
C BEYOND
NILAVALI

A beach boutique near Trincomalee of magical serenity and kindness filled with art and the smell of the restless ocean.

19 HERITANCE KANDALAMA

Overlooking a lake near Dambulla, the Kandalama has gained much of its reputation for being one of the unquestioned masterpieces created by the architect Geoffry Bawa. Built in 1981, the hotel is literally wrapped around a cliff and so well planted that it is all but impossible to tell where nature ends, and the reception desk begins.

20 JETWING MAHESA BHAWAN

An art deco villa tucked away in Jaffna city, this Jetwing villas serves the sort of delicious Tamil food that necessitates a glad rescheduling of the rest of the day's activities. Few tourists venture as far north as Jaffna, but its dazzling history, kovils, shallow seas and fishermen's villages make it the sort of place wiser visitors might chose to retire to forever.

21

UGA ULAGALLA

If you have not spent time in Anuradhapura, you have not been to Sri Lanka. The ruins of this once-mighty capital are mesmerising and breathtaking - and Uga Ulagalla offers a rare touch of luxury within which to reflect on all that you might have seen. Set inside 60 acres, this restored 150 year old mansion is as good a reason to hope that the nascent Uga brand might go on creating more such lovely hotels.

DISCOVER MORE

A HISTORY LIKE NO OTHER

Contrary & creative, Sri Lanka built a tropical Versailles as the West constructed in wattle & daub. When the Cold War ebbed, its own began. The Ceylon Press *History of Sri Lanka* - in eBook and Podcast - unpicks its serpentine history.

BEHIND EACH GREAT STORY

Island Stories: The Sri Lanka Podcast and the Press's *Complete Audio Books* explore the things that make Sri Lanka, Sri Lankan.

OFF PISTE

The Ceylon Press' *Alternative Guides* concern themselves with subjects and places without crowds; forgotten as they are by most academics, historians, and modern travellers.

LESS IS MORE

The Ceylon Press' *Tiny Guides* fillet the essentials of their subject from nature to history, culture to travel.

INSTANT OVERVIEWS

With their short, and readable introductions, The Ceylon Press' *Pocket Professor Very Short Introductions* illuminate Sri Lankan subjects from ancient dynasties to endemic mammals.

COMPANIONABLE LOOK-UPS

The Ceylon Press's subject *Companions to Sri Lanka* makes visible the whole island – from its arts, wildlife, & landmarks to religion, food, & history.

A LITTLE LIGHT RELIEF

And least it gets too serious, enjoy the off-grid *Jungle Diaries* blog & Podcast; and *Archaeologies*, the blank verse diaries of an occasional hermit.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Swarbrick is a publisher, planter, hotelier, hermit, and writer.

He was born in Colombo and raised, with few concessions to modernity, in India, Singapore, and the Middle East. Cornish, he gained his degrees on the Celtic fringe: at the Universities of Wales, and Stirling, prolonging an introduction to accepted working hours for as long as was decently possible.

Having worked at News Corp's HarperCollins UK as board director for various otherwise homeless departments including sales, art and marketing; and HarperCollins India, he ran Hachette's consumer learning division. Prior to this, he launched Oxford University Press's first commercial online business, Oxford Reference Online.

When the doubtful charms of boardroom bawls, bottom lines, and divas diminished, he returned to Sri Lanka, the land of his birth hundreds of years earlier, to rescue a spice plantation and set of art deco buildings that had gone feral in the jungle.

Today, as The Flame Tree Estate & Hotel, it has become one of the country's top ten boutique hotels, run by the kindest and most professional of hospitality teams; and overseen by several small schnauzers.

It also helps fund The Ceylon Press, set up to make Sri Lanka's rich and complicated story, a mystery to many, and a secret to most, more accessible. The Press' books, companions, podcasts, blogs, and guides are freely available at theceylonpress.com. The Press also publishes Poetry from the Jungle, a podcast that recasts the orthodox view of the world's best poets and poems.

ABOUT THE FLAME TREE ESTATE & HOTEL

"It's absolute paradise," wrote one guest recently; "I would fly back to Sri Lanka simply to stay in this place for a couple more days."

Centered on a 25-acre organic spice and timber plantation, The Flame Tree Estate & Hotel has been renovated and furnished with art & antiques; its healthy menus fusing street food with fine dining.

Its 1,000 high rocky hills stalled the Dutch army in 1765; and until the civil war the estate stretched over 100 acres with 3 working elephants.

Today its restored plantations grow cardamom, turmeric, ginger, cloves, pepper, cocoa; rubber, coffee, vanilla; cinnamon, coconuts - and scores of trees from ebony to sapu – best enjoyed from the vantage point of the hotel's infinity pool. Visit www.flametreeestate.com.

It also houses and funds The Ceylon Press whose books, companions, podcasts, blogs, and guides are freely available at theceylonpress.com.

A GIFT FOR READERS

As a reader of this book, you naturally qualify for special treatment should your holiday ever bring you to Sri Lanka and The Flame Tree Estate & Hotel. Simply drop the general manager a note to tell him how you came across us and to make arrangements to best suit your time and budget:

GeneralManager@flametreeestate.com