

A CEYLON
PRESS TINY
GUIDE

A
CHECKLIST
OF THE 18
FAMOUS
SAPPHIRES
OF SRI
LANKA

SAPPHIRES



1 THE APHRODITE SAPPHIRE

Modestly sized and sitting safe in a gallery of Cambridge's Fitzwilliam Museum is one of the earliest and most beautiful Roman jewels – a sapphire, almost certainly from Sri Lanka. Carved at some point in the first century it depicts Aphrodite feeding an eagle.

2

THE BISMARCK SAPPHIRE

The ultimate honeymoon gift, the Bismark Sapphire was discovered in Sri Lanka in 1920, though rumours within the South Asian gem trade claim that it was merely sold here – but that it originated in Burma. It was bought by Harrison Willaims, an American millionaire for his third wife, the remarkable Countess Mona von Bismarck, named by Chanel in 1930 as "The Best Dressed Woman in the World." Given Harrison Williams' fortune (now valued at over 11 billion dollars) the 98.6 carat honeymoon present was but a bauble. The countess was to outlive Willaims and at some point, between her fourth and fifth husband donated the jewel to the Smithsonian Museum in Washington, D.C. Today it sits there for all to see, the sapphire mounted in a pendant necklace of diamonds and smaller sapphires.

3

THE BLUE BELLE OF ASIA

The gem was pulled from rice fields near Rathnapura in 1926; polished and processed to reveal a 392.52-carat stone and set, suspended on a brilliant cut diamond tassel pendant and white gold necklace, its deep blue prism perfected framed. It was bought by Lord Nuffield, the founder of Morris Motors Limited in 1937. Its next public airing was in the 1970s when it was examined by the Swiss based gem dealer, Theodore Horovitz. In 2014 it reappeared at an auction and was bought for \$17.29 million by a Saudi collector.

4

THE BLUE GIANT OF THE ORIENT

Weighing in at 466 carats, the Blue Giant of the Orient is one of the world's largest sapphires - though it was rumoured to be over 600 carats when it was first discovered in 1907, pulled from the waters of the Kalu Ganga. It was bought and processed by O. L. M. Macan Markar & Co, a jeweller based in Colombo, who oversaw the cutting and polishing. The cutting of the gem properly revealed the stone's massive facets which yielded to the maximum possible light saturation to render the stone an impressive corn flower blue. Its life thereafter became a mystery. Valued at \$7,000 in 1907, it was sold to an anonymous American buyer. For nearly 100 years it vanished from the public eye - to reappear unexpectedly in May 2004 at the Christie's Magnificent Jewels auction catalogue in Geneva.

5

THE EMPRESS MARIA'S SAPPHIRE

The ninth largest blue sapphire in the world, the 260.37 carat Empress Maria Sapphire was purchased by Tsar Alexander II in the London Great Exhibition of 1862. The sapphire was made into an oval brooch adorned with a further 56 carats of diamonds and for eighteen years was worn with stylish delight. On the Tsarina's death in 1880 it was donated to the State Diamond Fund, still in existence today by way of the Borovitsky Gate in the Kremlin.

6

THE HEART OF THE OCEAN

The so-called Heart of the Ocean jewel in the film "Titanic," was posthumously created following the film's success as a 170 carat Ceylon blue sapphire, set with 65 diamonds. It was worn with much acclaim in 1998 by Celine Dion when she sang "My Heart Will Go On" at the Oscars. And as is often the way with over mighty jewellery, it vanished some years later when it was auctioned for over \$2 million at a charity ball to a buyer who remains anonymous to this day.

7

THE LOGAN SAPPHIRE

At 423 carats the Logan Blue Sapphire is one of the largest sapphires in the world. It is thought to have been mined in the early 19th century, cut, and polished and sent to Paris for sale. After various owners, it eventually passed into the hands of Robert Guggenheim who gifted the jewel to his new wife, Rebecca, sometime around 1938. On his death she remarried a Mr Logan and passed the jewel onto the Smithsonian Museum. Entirely without flaws, the stunning stone emanates a lush cornflower blue with violet overtones and has been set as a brooch supported by 20 white diamonds.

8

THE MIDNIGHT STAR SAPPHIRE

A deep purple-violet star gem, the 116.75 carat gem Midnight Star Sapphire can be traced to the end of the 19th century when it was acquired by George Kunz and sold to the American financier, J.P. Morgan. Today it sits in the American Museum of Natural History in New York.

9

THE PRIDE OF SRI LANKA

The 856 carat Pride of Sri Lanka was pulled from mines in Marapanna. Displayed briefly in a glass box, it was soon to vanish altogether, bought by a buyer whose identity remains a mystery.

10 THE PRINCESS OF WALES ENGAGEMENT RING

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 for his future wife, Lady Diana Spencer in 1981. It was later inherited by her elder son and at some point, between 2010 and 2011 was resized to fit the finger of his own fiancée, Kate Middleton.

11 THE QUEEN OF ASIA

This 310 kilogram, 1.6 million carat blue sapphire was pulled from the ground in December 2021 in Batugedara near Ratnapura. Despatched for deeper examination and authentication, it was bought by a Dubai-based company for over \$100 million.

12

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 when Mr Gamage, a gem trader, set workmen to dig a well.

13 THE STAR OF ADAM

Valued at around \$300 million, this 1,444 carat sapphire was pulled from Rathnapura's mines in 2015 - Weighing 280 ounces its distinct 6-rayed star displays an effect known amongst jewellers as "asterism," deriving from the complex make-up of the stone itself which produces an internal reflection effect.

14
THE STAR OF
ARTABAN

A milky blue 287 carat sapphire from Sri Lanka bought in 1943 by a member of the Georgia Mineral Society and gifted anonymously to the Smithsonian Museum in Washington, D.C.

15 THE STAR OF BOMBAY

This 182 carat stone was bought by Douglas Fairbanks in the 1920s for "America's sweetheart," his wife Mary and is noted for its unusual violet-blue colour, caused by a singular mixture of titanium, iron, and vanadium. On her death in 1979 it was donated to the Smithsonian Museum in Washington, D.C.

16 THE STAR OF INDIA

Bought in 1905 by a British army officer from Madras. It was cut by the jeweller Albert Ramsay to leave a 563.35-carat almost flawless star sapphire. The milky quality of the stone was caused by the minerals within it that also produced its dreamy star effect, the tiny fibres of the mineral, reflecting light like cat's eyes. It is now to be found in the American Museum of Natural History in New York City.

17 THE STUART SAPPHIRE

Sitting atop the very crown still worn by the Kings and Queens of the United Kingdom, this is probably the world's most visible sapphire. Weighing in at 104 carats it can be dated back to Charles II and sits on view in the Jewel House in the Tower of London.

18 THE TALISMAN OF CHARLEMAGNE

Attributed to the 8th century Emperor Charlemagne, The Talisman of Charlemagne is a reliquary said to hold fragments of the hair of the Virgin Mary and a remnant of the True Cross. A dazzling early medieval jewel in its own right, it bears at its centre what experts at the Palace of Tau Museum in Reims, say is a 190 carat blue grey sapphire from Sri Lanka.

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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.

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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.

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