



Jetwings

INTERNATIONAL

March-April 2007

Singapore

A feast for all senses

Giant's Causeway

Northern Ireland's geological wonder

Parisian Palette

Art in Montmartre

City of Gold

Innsbruck—Austria's Golden Roof

Gastronomic Delights

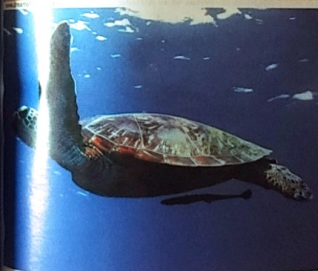
Exotic flavours of Spain

Oriental sojourn

Lighthouses, turtle hatcheries, sandy beaches and water sports—discover the vibrant South-west coast of Sri Lanka.

Text & photographs Krishnan V.

The Pearl of the Orient' shimmered in the afternoon sun as the jet made a smooth touchdown. The landscape looked much like Kerala, as did the people. Without wasting much time, we set out to explore Colombo.



FACING PAGE: Treasures of the deep—the multi-coloured ocean.
ABOVE: A firm anchor—sail out to sea in one of these boats.
LEFT: The Sri Lankan west coast is a turtle breeding area.

EXPLORING CITYSCAPES

Colombo is a vibrant city with charming hotels, pubs, casinos, shopping and a vibrant nightlife. You can club hop all night and still have places left to go to in the morning! But we decided to hit Odel, the shopping mall, for attractive, reasonably priced clothes from some of the best brands. Our shopping spirit satiated, we headed to the Galle Face Hotel for some delectable seafood. The Galle Face is ideal for a pleasant evening

walk. If you fancy a beer and enjoy a quiz, there's no better place than Clancy's, the Irish pub, on Wednesdays.

Breakfast the following morning was a spread of the popular string hoppers and spicy *chutney* (condiments) along with bread, cornflakes and fruit. Energised, we set out south towards Bentota and its beaches. Forty-three kilometres from Colombo is the town of Kalutara, situated on the banks of the Kalu Ganga river. On the highway and south of the Kalutara bridge is the famous Kalutara Temple. Motorists frequently stop at the shrine and Bo tree on the highway to pray for a safe journey.

En route is Beruwela, a large fishing town, and it is from here that the southern beach coast really starts. If you get to the fishing harbour early in the morning, you can see the *Fruits de Mer* (fruits of the sea—referring to a seafood combination) being unloaded by the ton for local auction. We

spotted tuna, shark and even a small whale. On the way to Bentota, visit the archaic home of the famous Sri Lankan architect Geoffrey Bawa at Lunuganga. His style of open, environment-inclusive architecture won him many awards and left a distinct influence on successive generations of younger architects. Today's top Sri Lankan resorts are known for this style. A major attraction in this house is the outdoor bath with the water flowing from the mouth of the 'sun'.

THE GREAT OUTDOORS

Indulge in some sporting action at the Bentota River with boating and water sports, or try an elephant ride on the beach. You can also venture up the river and enjoy the wildlife. If you prefer solitude, go further south to Induruwa and revel in your own patch of sandy beach. I felt content sitting there, watching a beautiful sunset, a cool breeze blowing through my hair. As the sun sets, the action picks up at the Bentota Beach Hotel's poolside bar with good music and eclectic cocktails. Baila music, the popular local

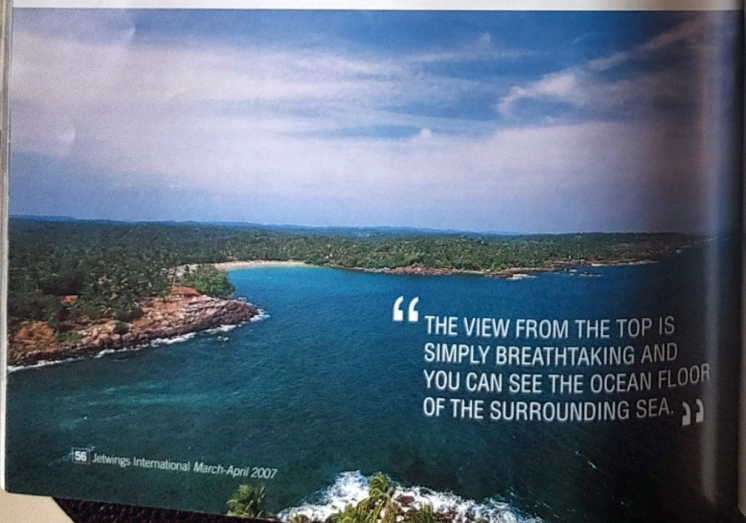
View from Dondra Lighthouse.

sound, was first introduced in Sri Lanka by the Portuguese, so, not surprisingly, it sounds similar to the music you would hear in Goa.

We decided to venture further south and came across the turtle hatcheries at Kosgoda. The Sri Lankan West coast is a turtle breeding area and if you're lucky you can see turtles laying eggs on the beach at night. The country's waters have always attracted divers the world over and Hikkaduwa is ideal for scuba diving. Although the water is not exactly crystal clear, there are a few interesting wreck dives here.

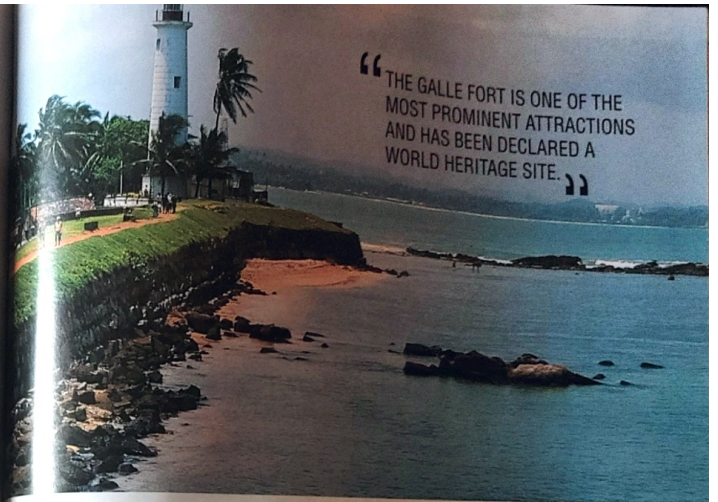
HERITAGE

Galle is a charming port town built in 1663 to take advantage of its natural harbour, where ships sailed in from as far as Egypt in the West and China in the East. The Galle Fort is one of the most prominent attractions and has been declared a World Heritage site. It was set up by the Dutch, who took possession of Galle from the Portuguese in 1640. The fort today is dilapidated, but you can see portions of what was a magnificent structure. Inside its walls is the Dutch Reformed Church and just outside is the Galle lighthouse. A short walk along the water is a kind of lookout



“THE VIEW FROM THE TOP IS SIMPLY BREATHTAKING AND YOU CAN SEE THE OCEAN FLOOR OF THE SURROUNDING SEA.”

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A beacon on the bay—Galle lighthouse, beyond the Galle Fort.

point from where cheerful young local boys, for a little money, demonstrate running jumps into the sea below. Galle now has an international cricket stadium and is a part of the Sri Lankan international cricket circuit.

Ahead of Matara town is the southernmost tip of Sri Lanka, where you can find its tallest lighthouse. The Dondra lighthouse, at 160m, is a white octagonal brick tower designed by James Douglass and constructed by William Douglass of the Imperial Lighthouse Service. Built in the year 1889, it is functional even today. Interestingly, while speaking to the caretaker of the lighthouse I mentioned my visit to the Minicoy lighthouse, which is in the Lakshadweep Islands. It turned out that the caretaker's father was stationed at Minicoy when he was in service. This small mention got me a VIP trip to the top of this incredible structure. The lighthouse emits a white flash every five seconds and has a range of 28 nautical miles. The climb through the tower, the mechanics of the revolving lanterns, the solid wood and well-maintained old nautical instruments are outstanding. The view from the top is simply breathtaking and you can see the ocean floor of the surrounding sea.

After experiencing the wonderful Sri Lankan hospitality we wanted to explore the East—the Yala Wildlife Sanctuary and further to Arugam Bay. There was so much more to see in this enchanted land; our three-day trip just wasn't enough. □

FACT FILE

GETTING THERE

Jet Airways has daily flights to Colombo from Chennai.

ACCOMMODATION

The big hotels on the beach are the Bentota Beach Hotel and Taj Exotica. If you want something more personal and exclusive, try the Bentota Club Villa, off Bentota beach. The Lighthouse Hotel, just outside Galle town, is also unique with large, comfortable rooms, delicious cuisine and a spectacular view from the hotel's terrace.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Log on to www.srilankatourism.org

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