



Ceylon sounds exotic but not many people really do know much about this exciting country now called Sri Lanka when following independence from Great Britain.

Sri Lanka is the island located off the South Eastern shores of India in the Indian ocean. It has a population around 21 Million people, of whom 75% are Sinhalese and 19% Tamil. Buddhism is the dominant religion with 70% of the people practising and the rest are Hindu with small percentages of Christians and Muslims. The average temperature of the country is 27°C which gives one an agreeable feeling all year round.

Sri Lanka is circled by 1.600kms of beautiful tropical beaches on all its shores, where one can surf by golden sands, bathed in tropical sunshine.

Legend as well as history record that Sri Lanka has always delighted visitors to its shores. For countless centuries its fragrant flora, its heady spices, priceless gems and pearls, its legendary beauty, sublime culture and extremely friendly people captivated princes, poets, traders, empire-builders (Portuguese, Dutch and British) and admirers from lands all over the world. From last August I am one of the most fervent admirers of Sri Lanka.

This country offered me the most surprising range of different attractions which I will never forget, it is a place to which I will try to go back as soon as possible and of course I will explain further to the world what I saw and experienced as it is definitely the destination to discover.

Over the years, the island's beauty, abundance and culture has earned it much praise and many admiring names. Ancient Moorish merchants called Sri Lanka the "Isle of the Delight". The early Arab traders it was "Serendib", the land of the happy surprises, and the medieval explorer, Marco Polo, described it as "the finest island in all the world". American novelist Mark Twain called it "beautiful and most sumptuously tropical". As well my much admired Mahatma Gandhi was convinced that Sri Lanka's natu-



ral beauty was "unsurpassed on the face of the earth". Today too, this beauty, abundance and variety plays a strong roll in attracting visitors: flora and fauna are just amazing and beautiful, with 242 species of butterflies, 441 species of birds, 500 species of medicinal herbs....

They provide an unique experience and a really unforgettable landscape, tropical flowers, trees and mountains. Another delightful and unique experience, is to do a safari, an elephant safari at Mineriya National Park for instance.

I suggest to divide a visit into three different areas: Ancient cities (historical sites), the Hill country (with splendid landscapes and trekking) and the beaches all around the country. Many diverse activities are to be done





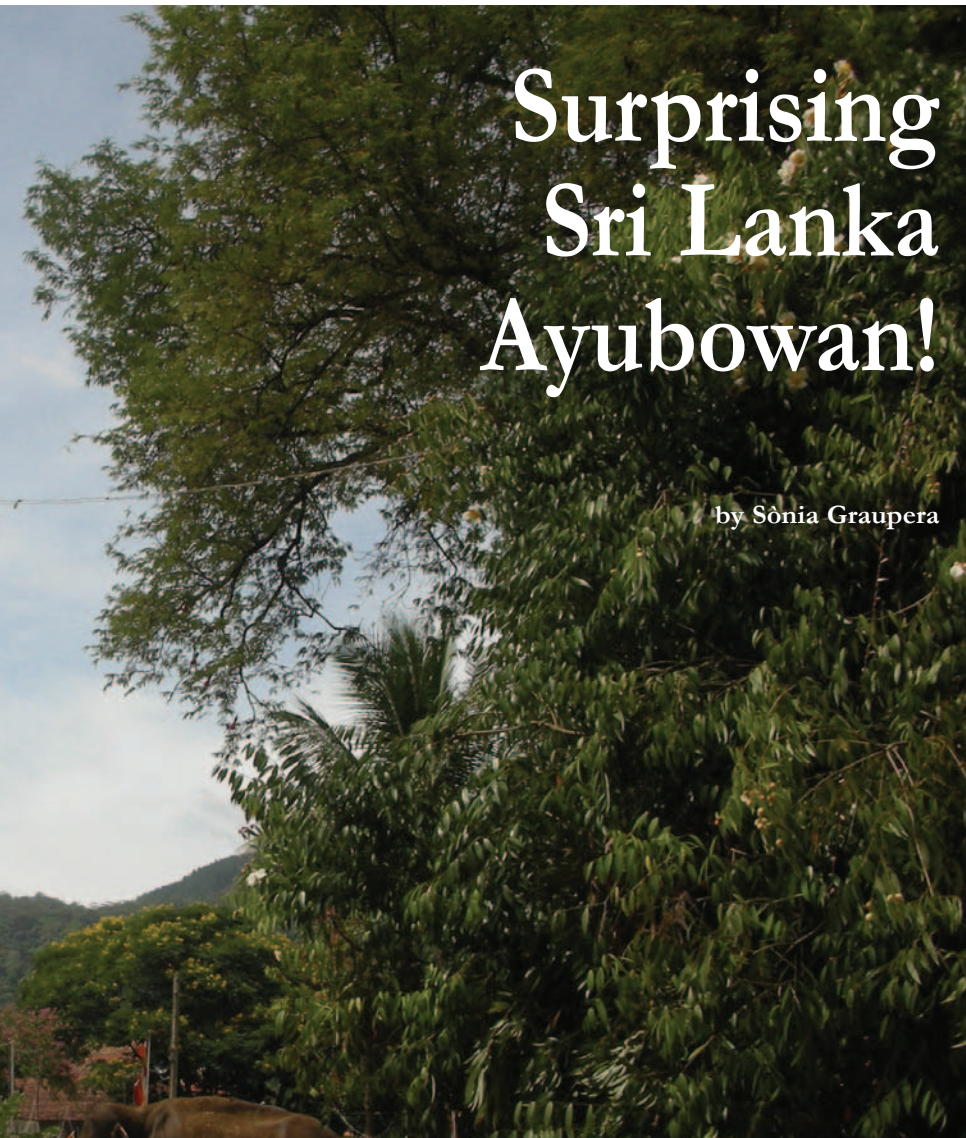
Surprising Sri Lanka Ayubowan!

by Sònia Graupera

all around: in the Hill country visit Anuradhapura the old capital, Mihintale, Polonnaruwa, the sacred rock of Sigiriya. In the Hill country wilderness reserves delight nature lovers, with over 200.000 hectares of tea plantations, high waterfalls, wild and dizzy gorges like one might find at the World's end which plunges 1.000 metres to the plains below, Adam's peak, the sacred mountain for the Buddhists, Georgian architecture in Nuwara Eliya, Kandy and its admired temple that contains the renowned relic of the Buddha's Tooth and the world famous Perahera festival.

Galle in the southwest coast with its old Dutch fort is one of the starts of the tourist destinations besides being a World Heritage Site. It is also the bustling provincial capital and administrative centre of the south.

Important memories of the visit include, of course, the local gastronomy: Sri Lanka boasts an amazing variety of food and styles of cooking. The island has a rich heritage of indigenous dishes and its regional cooking is strongly indivi-



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dual and varied. For example, Kandyan Sinhalese cooking, with its emphasis on hill country vegetables and fruits; coastal cooking, making the best of the abundant seafood with which the land is blessed. In addition to regional characteristics, some of the most popular dishes reflect influences from other lands like cooking introduced by traders and conquerors Indian, Arabs, Malays, Moors, Portuguese, Dutch and British. The dishes they contributed have been adapted to local ingredients, but retain their original character. Of course the main ingredients are the spices which enrich all tasty and delicious Sri Lankan recipes.

Additionally Sri Lanka is, together with its neighbour, India, the cradle of Ayurvedic medicine - the science of life- which comprises not only natural medicine cures but also beauty and massage treatments, and also inspires a way of living naturally.

Sri Lanka is also a real Spa destination and provides the natural way to feel great. The holistic approach to health, where body, mind and soul are liked and seek to balance the body's energies. Treatments included massage, herbal baths, oil treatments, special diets, etc. Fabulous hotels and resorts offer long stays where the Ayurvedic way of life and treatments can be enjoyed.

An incredible wealth of visitor attractions, excellent conference and exhibition facilities, infrastructure and professional services, the incredible variety of the country provides unforgettable experience for any visitor and the ideal frame for an incentive travel with happy surprises and many other qualities.

My experience has been a magical one, the country, the fauna and flora, ancient cities, beaches and relaxation... but one of the highlights for me has been the human, true and genuine contact with the most incredible friendly people. Their greeting "Ayubowan" literally means "May you have a long life". And you know when you are greeted in this way they really mean it.

Do not miss Sri Lanka!

Following 5* hotels are highly recommended for their top quality standard in services, location and premises:

Heritage Kandalama Hotel: <http://www.heritagehotels.net/kandalama/>

The Fortress Resort: <http://www.thefortress.lk/>

Heritage Ahungalla Hotel Resort:
<http://www.heritagehotels.net/ahungalla/>

Mount Lavinia Hotel: <http://www.mountlaviniahotel.com/>

The Tea Factory Hotel: <http://www.aitkenspencehotels.com/teafactory/>

