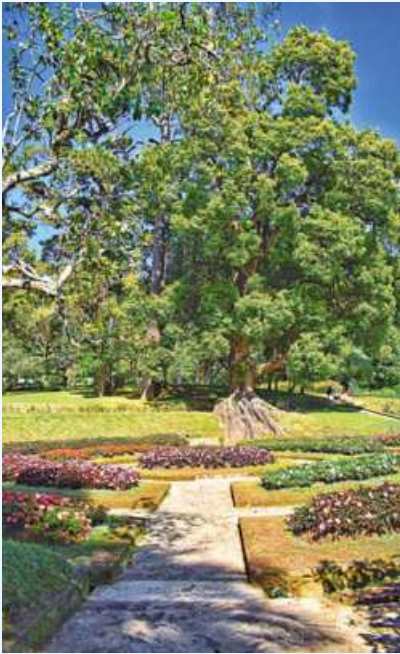


Jewel in the ocean: Sri Lanka

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This turned out to be the true surprise out of all the places we stayed at. Being budget travellers, we pick places with just decent creature comforts and good security reviews.

In Ella, we ate dinner surrounded by the lyrical rush of a large waterfall nearby, which only revealed its true beauty in the morning light. Rested in the absolute silence, we had a plentiful breakfast of hoppers, fruits, juice, tea and coffee, and fresh honey, butter and jam for warm toasted bread, while looking at the magnificent waterfall in the background, and spying a peacock

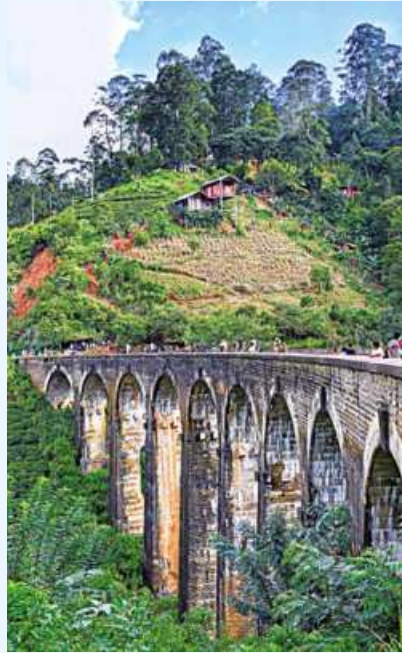


up in a tree, as well as other singing birds. The simplicity of the food only added to the pristine calm of the place, and the sincere hospitality.

MIRISSA

A small beach town in the southern part of the country, this is a typical surf and nightlife tourist town that we found

in Sri Lanka, the other cities notoriously going dark just a couple of hours after sundown. The long white sandy beaches, the yummy fresh seafood and juice bars, and the brilliantly colourful



sunsets are what set Mirissa apart in my memories forever. Despite the number of tourists at the common spots, it was quiet and thoroughly enjoyable.

This is also the place to go for whale watching. The deep blue sea is a treat in itself, but watching a whale in its own environment, up and close, is a heady feeling.

GALLE

Next up on the itinerary was Galle, the famed fortress built by the Dutch. The drive from Mirissa to Galle was wonderful in itself, with pristine, completely empty beaches, dotted with palm trees just swaying in the sea breeze.

Today a quaint city preserving the old world charm, we were lucky enough

to book ourselves a stay inside the fort, right by one of the huge walls that stand on the coral-smattered coast. It is a perfect place for leisurely walks absorbing history, and scarfing down home-made ice creams and juices, as well other delicious cuisine at the different restaurants housed inside the old hospital building. Not to mention all those gem shops just beckoning my inner magpie.

WATERFALLS

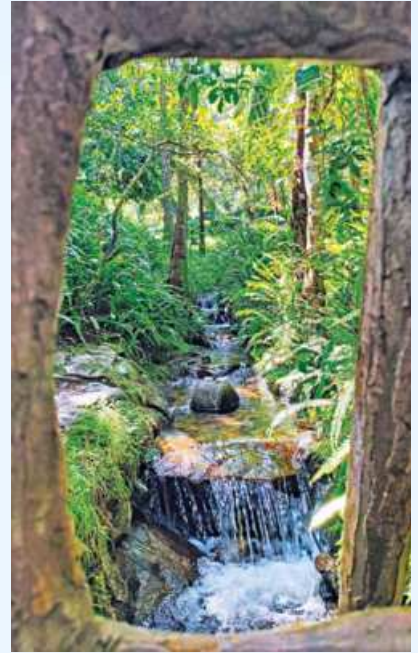
This beautiful island, for its numerous steep mountains, is home to hundreds of brooks and streams, and some spectacular waterfalls. I have a personal



fascination for them. The lovely Ravana Falls, and the pristine and powerful Bumbruella falls were just two of the beauties I must mention. For enthusiasts, there are tour sites specifically catering to this interest, and easily searchable online.

The only complain I have about

the country is due to our unhealthy lifestyles— almost the entire country seems to go home to bed promptly after sundown, except in Mirissa, and somewhat in Galle.



Sri Lanka is a vast opportunity for experiencing life. There is option for conservationists, and compassionate eaters like vegetarian and vegans, and the local food is great. There are elephant and turtle conservation projects, and miles and miles of preserved natural forests. And simple honest and beautiful life of a resilient people, spirits unbeaten, evident in their everyday lives. I wish to go back time and again, if only to imbibe more of this unyielding spirit, and to once more sit in the cold clear waters gushing down a mountainside.

By Sania Aiman

Photo: Sania Aiman

