



# THE FLAME TREE

# HERALD TRIBUNE

news,  
views,  
reviews,  
& off-grid  
jungle intel

november 2024

flametreestate.com

The Lost Queen

The Rocket Girl

Perfect Marmalade

Honest Cinnamon

*Chutney, Lorises, Monet, Reviews, Offers & The Hunt for the Devil Bird*

# BE JEWELLED

**Sri Lanka's tourist sites are famous. But not the Kuveni Circuit.**

Kuveni was not simply a wife and weaver of cloth, a mother, lover, and queen - but also a demon, a metamorphoser, an outcast, an avenging fury, suicide, traitor, murderess, ghost, and mistress of deception.

**A descendant of gods, she is also a goddess to the country's still living aboriginal peoples. "We may be forest hunters," said a Vedda leader recently, "but Kuveni our goddess."**

Wife of the founding father of the Sinhala people over 2,500 years ago, she was hurled down a mountain top, cursing her disloyal husband. "The curse," wrote an observer, "was not only on Vijaya but the descendants of Hela People (Singhala) as a whole." In following her wreathlike footsteps, which are still, from time to time, just about discernible in certain parts of the island, one puts together not just a travel schedule like no other; but one that takes you into the secret heart of the country itself.

***To discover the sights associated with her, download the free eBook at [www.theceylonpress.com/historyaltguides](http://www.theceylonpress.com/historyaltguides)***



# THE REAL THING



Most of what passes as cinnamon sold worldwide is as counterfeit as a North Korean election.

True cinnamon, or *Cinnamomum Zeylanicum*, comes almost wholly from Sri Lanka. Its phony forger, Chinese Cassia Cinnamon, has a thick, rough bark and a harsh, crude flavour, at odds with any kind of foodie rapture.



Ananda and the hotel gardening team, in a fever of self-sufficiency, have just added another 1208 new cinnamon bushes to the 1,300 already planted.



The plants will grow as 10 foot bushes, their inner branches peeled and harvested after 3 years.

Come taste.

In the world of spices, cinnamon reigns as the king

# AS IF BY MAGIC

Once, when life was straightforward and all ketchups were Heinz, Sri Lanka had but a single endemic loris, the Red Slender Loris. But a slight of geography enabled its mammals to develop on their own terms, when the land bridge to India collapsed. Suddenly, every species left on the Sri Lankan side had the perfect conditions to go native. And native they went – the island's endemic-ness is unparalleled in Asia: 16% of its fauna and 23% of its plants are home grown - like the loris. Chandra, a housekeeper at The Flame Tree Estate, is adamant that it was the red loris she saw. Living in a hamlet abutting the estate, she recalls its reddish fur and vast eyes.

Not without some trepidation. In island folklore the loris cries calls the devils. She sighting was exceptional. At 150 grams, lorises are so tiny as to be easily missed. And nocturnal, sleeping the day through in leaf covered tree holes. They are so rare



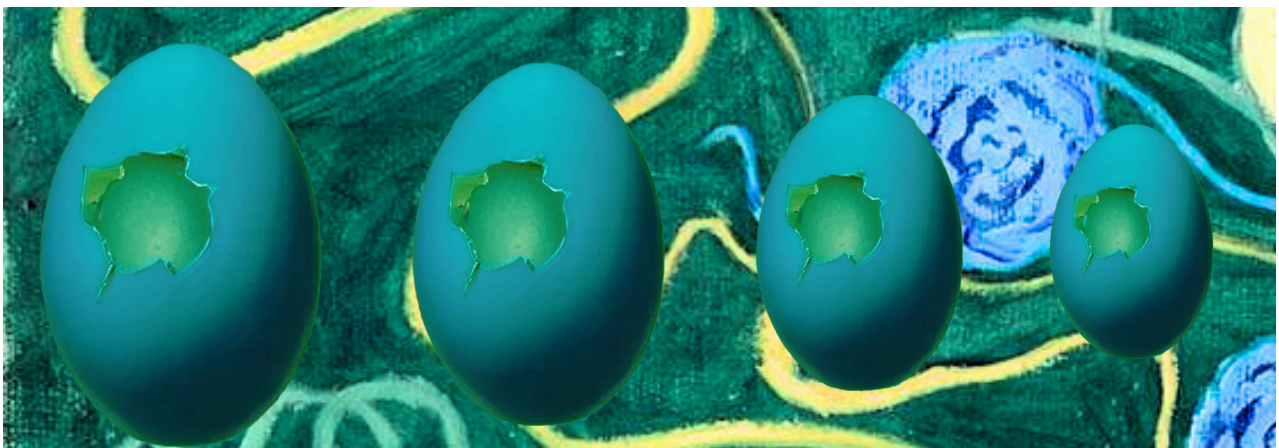
as to classified as highly endangered. They are a textbook example of what happens when species evolve as they wish. Sri Lanka's lorises are the mammalian equivalent of Darwin's finches. What was thought to be a single species is in fact 2 different sub species, one of which localised further into 2 sub sub species. The Horton Plains Slender Loris keeps itself to the mountains of south-central Sri Lanka. The Western Red Slender Loris, lives in lowland jungle but also created the Northern Ceylon Slender Loris (dry zone forests); and the Highland Slender Loris – found on hills, like the one on which Chandra lives.

# WHERE THE DEVIL BIRD SINGS



Star Wars' legendary Jedi Master. Night in the jungle is the nosiest of times, with scores of secretive creatures assembling for dinner parties – mouse deer, flying squirrels, hares, civets and lorises to wild boar, pangolins, porcupine, bats, bandicoots and choirs of painted frogs.

The hotel's hunt to record the midnight call of the Devil Bird continues, following reports of its bloodcurdling shrieks. Of the many candidates claiming responsibility, ornithologists believe the perp is a hungry spot-bellied eagle-owl, whose massive eyebrows give it the learned look of Yoda,



# NEWS SHORTS

## Shaymalee's Coconut

Statistical pundits report that 150 people die annually from falling coconuts worldwide. It is an irksome - if environmentally positive - way to depart this earth; and most escape with just a few bruises – like Shaymalee, Head Housekeeper at home last week.

"I heard a whoosh from above and turned my head; the coconut hit my shoulder not my head."

The island produces over 3 million nuts a year – but consumes 5 million. Planting new saplings is an act of gastronomic patriotism. The Hotel's hundreds of hundred-year-old coconut trees, are key to making its sambals and drinks. And, you may be glad to hear, safely cropped regularly by the same family that has tended them for over 4 generations.

"Bought marmalade? Oh dear, I call that very feeble."

Having written innumerable scripts for kedgeriee chomping earls at Downtown Abbey, Julian Fellowes knows all about real marmalade and its totemic importance at any halfway decent breakfast table. So too did Bob Hope who confessed "my blood type is solid marmalade." Homemade, he might have added. Never bought. To which end the hotel chefs have been experimenting with a luscious new recipe to better hone its bitter sweet chunky taste. Expect hints of heaven.



## Parrot Perch

Ten 20-30 feet tall endangered areca palms have been moved by man and earth mover to the safety of a lemon grove in The Flame Tree Estate & Hotel, to provide towering new roosts for the parrots, Asian paradise flycatchers, minivet, bulbuls, and babblers that already own the space.

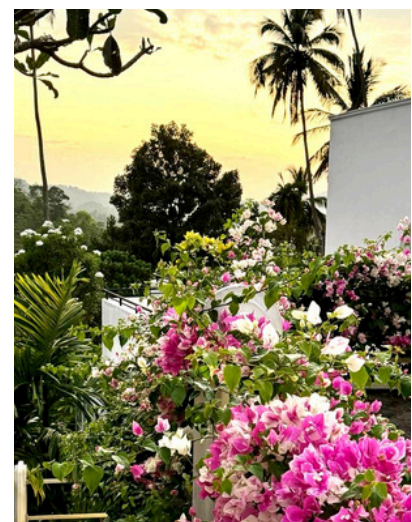


## A Flight of Chtuneys



Flights of wine are widespread in the West. Not so, flights of chutney.

The hotel chefs tried out 28 versions of 7 chutneys before selecting which to go on The Flame Tree Estate & Hotel's 6 Course Dinner Menu: chutneys of Spicy Aubergine; Pineapple; Roasted Eggplant & Red Pepper; Ginger & Mango; Indian Carrot; plus Red Onion Marmalade & Piccalilli. Tuck in, Jungle style.





# The great CONUNDRUM

The Flower Girl, a stunning stylised portrait by Sri Lankan artist Dilini Paragahawaththa, has exceeded records as the most sought after painting at The Flame Tree Estate & Hotel. A massive red flower sits atop her head, a crown, its colour reflected in her lipstick. Her dreamy eyes are closed. Gazing into her face, you encounter one of those magical moments of cultural fusion – a young Audrey Hepburn meets Gauguin meets a latter day Queen Venkata Rangammal, wife of one of the last Kandyan Kings.

The Hotel has established a gallery for contemporary Sri Lankan artists to sell to foreign collectors; and this ageless Sri Lankan beauty speaks eloquently of the world class standards of the artists working on the island today.

# TODAY'S REVIEWERS

The property is truly fantastic. Artsy, elegant, contemporary; great service. It feels cozy as if you were in your super posh friend's house. It's a perfect getaway & still close enough to Kandy.

A unique hotel located in the middle of the forest



A corner of paradise.

Doesn't get much better than this. A jungle oasis with all the trimmings.



It's a biannual visit if we can get rooms. Deep in history; magnificently furnished, great background story.



We were blown away. Angelo & the team are world class; nothing is too much.



kindest staff you can find anywhere else on the island!





# ART & LETTERS

Half a dozen new paintings has been added to the hotel's eclectic collection, ranging from 19th C Swedish landscapes, Années folles art from French; and contemporary Sri Lankan works.

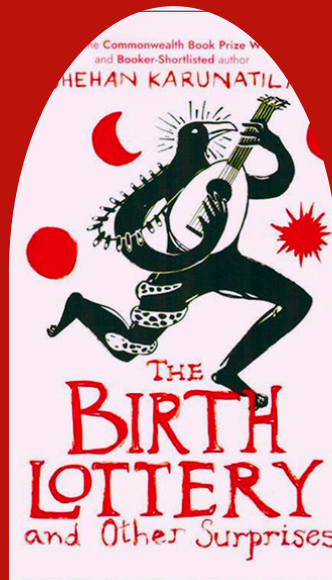
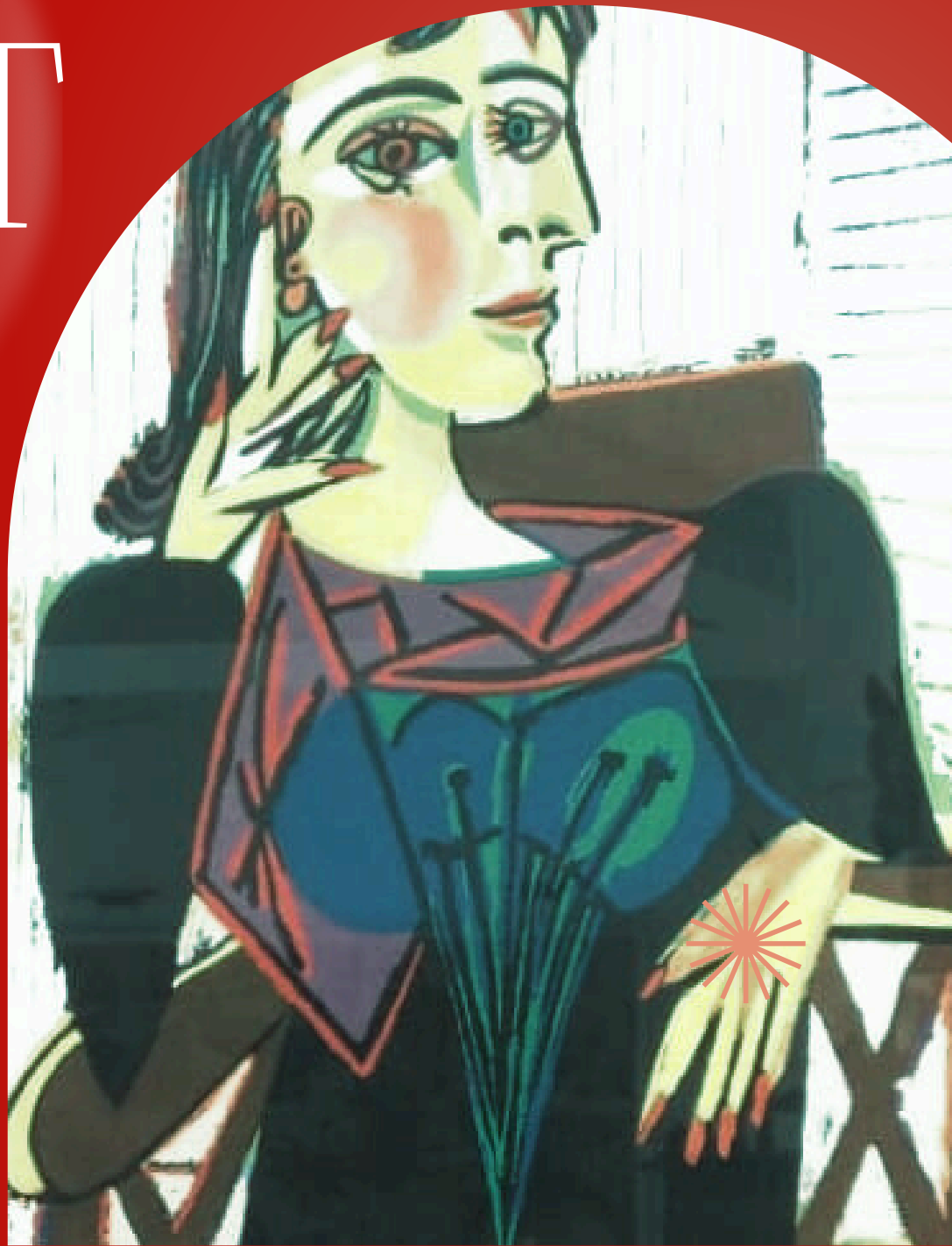
## Editor's Picks

“Is Kaavi dead?” she wrote: “**NOPE!**”

Does Amaya want to kill Kaavi? **NOPE!**

Is Spencer a decent guy?

NOOOOOOOOOOOO  
OOOPE!”



Amanda Jayatissa's steampunk novel, “The Other One” rocketed across the literary landscape when first published. Enid Blyton was, she claims, her great heroine. Also added to the hotel's library are guides to Yala and stone age cave paintings, works by Ru Freeman, Anuk Arudpragasam, Tove Jansson's Moomintrolls, and Shehan Karunatilaka's new short story collection, “The Birth Lottery and Other Surprises”. “It's a simple car bomb...” it begins.

"I would like," lamented the artist Claude Monet (rarely given to complaints), "to paint the way a bird sings."

Monet neglected to visit Sri Lanka, Algeria being the only non-European country he visited. Had he done so, the bird song he would have given his artistic soul for would be that of the Grey Hornbill, with its haunting ascending clicks and sonorous echoes.



# mongoo se

They visit the Hotel three or four times a year; and this week they are back. Two, as ever, happily quarrelling, both half a metre long; and eyeing up tree holes for possible nests that they will make as inaccessible as a sultan's harem, cementing up the entrance and the female till only a small gap for passing through food is left.



# CHRISTMAS & NEW YEAR

## A 3 DAY ADVENTURE BREAK

De Luxe Double Room. Breakfast, Picnic Lunch & 6 Course Dinner. Tours of Kandy, Temple of the Tooth, Royal Botanical Gardens, Sacred Caves of Dambulla & Royal Fortress of Sigiriya

## A 2 DAY QUICK BREAK

De Luxe Double Room. Breakfast, Picnic Lunch & 6 Course Dinner

## A 5 DAY ABSOLUTE BREAK

De Luxe Double Room. Breakfast, Picnic Lunch & 6 Course Dinner. Tours of Kandy, Temple of the Tooth, Royal Botanical Gardens, Sacred Caves of Dambulla & Royal Fortress of Sigiriya. Couples Yoga Class with Yoga Master Noyal. One-on-One healing massage with physiotherapist Rohan.

## A 3 DAY RECOVERY BREAK

De Luxe Double Room. Breakfast, Picnic Lunch & 6 Course Dinner. Couples Yoga Class with Yoga Master Noyal. One on One healing massage with physiotherapist Rohan.

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ABSCOND. ATTUNE.  
AMELIORATE.  
ACCRUE, ACTIVATE.

# Do Say Hallo.



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