



THE FLAME TREE HERALD TRIBUNE

IN
THIS
EDITION

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

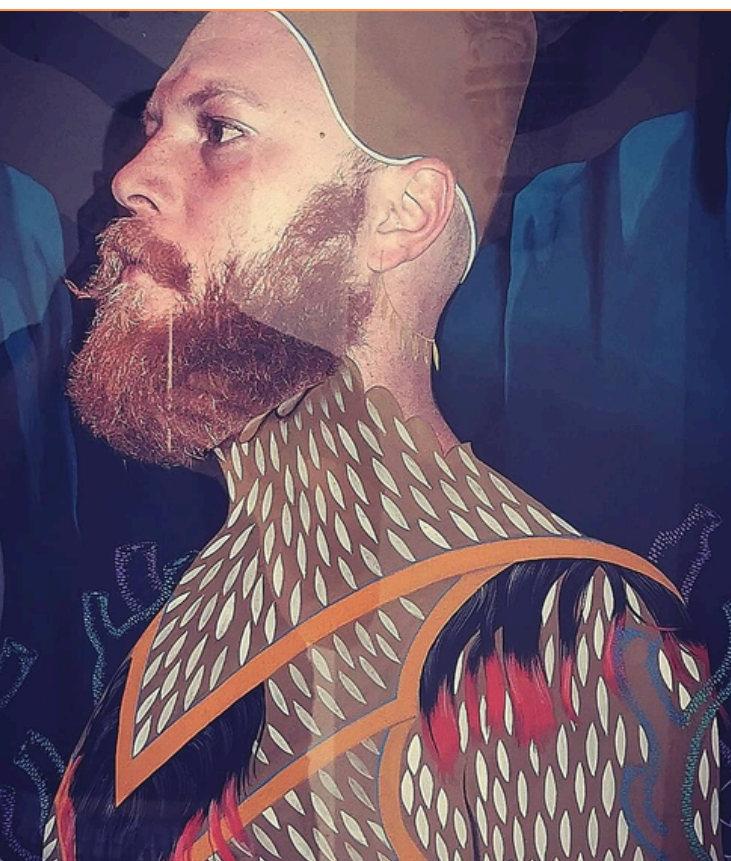
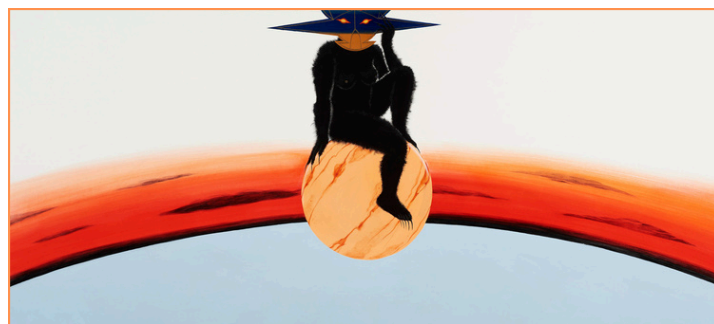
GARDEN LEOPARDS
THE LOST TRILOGY
AN OBLIQUE VIEW OF KANDY
PORNOGRAPHY
KITCHEN GOSSIP

April 2025

flametreestate.com



MUSEO JUNGLE DEL PRADO



Rajni Perera

Inspired by science fiction, Rajni Perera work sets out an inimitable world, its perspective and concerns unmistakably tinted with her homeland – Sri Lanka. Her exquisitely made paintings are representations of a future that's not often seen, incorporating fantasy and magic-realism, Indian miniatures, travellers, kings, queens, and proto feminists time travellers with a sharp sense of humour.

Working now mostly from Canada, she is renowned as a visionary artist working at an international level. Writing of the complex subjects of her paintings, a critic notes that "the world in which they live is not only beautiful but also appealing; these works call upon viewers to realize the fragility behind the remaining beauty of our world." One of her works from the Maharaja Series can be seen the hotel's collection.

THERE'S A ZOO IN MY GARDEN



Doom, gloom and a sprinkling of aristocratic pride peppered my neighbour's observation that a leopard was eating his goats. Just ten kilometres away, Neighbor & Goats live a blissfully pacific life: or did so until the rumoured leopard arrived. The last one known in the area was itself murdered almost a decade ago, so this new arrival is something of a catch. Shrewd, secretive, elusive, the Ceylon Leopard is without doubt the greatest endemic jewel in Sri Lanka's mammalian crown. It is the largest of the country's four cat species. Averaging six feet in length, head to tail, and weighing anything up to two hundred and twenty pounds, they are mostly solitary beasts, largely but not always nocturnal and with a typical life expectancy of fifteen years.

PANTHERA PARDUS KOTIYA



It is beautifully attuned to hunting, an observer noting that "if the lion is the king of the jungle, then the leopard is the king of stealth," able to run seventy kilometres an hour and leap as far as six metres.



BAGATELLES

AT HOME WITH THE BUCOLIC BOOKWORM

Carl Muller
The Jam Fruit Tree

THIS
MONTH'S
READ

Winner of the Gratiaen
Memorial Prize for the best
work of English Literature by
Sri Lankan for 1993



Muller is to Sri Lankan literature what John Galsworthy's "Forsyte Saga" is to England or "The Godfather" is to New York. A saga writer celebrated for his wonderful trilogy published from 1993 onwards about the Burghers of Sri Lanka as told through "The Jam Fruit Tree," "Yakada Yaka" and "Once Upon A Tender Time." A masterpiece, now little read, it has become the island's great lost trilogy.

Born in Kandy in 1935, he was the first Sri Lankan writer to publish a book internationally, his path setting a clear road for all who came later.

His trilogy unpacks a time when the world was golden, a kinder halcyon life that the later civil war would render almost unbelievable. Curl up in the hotel library and lose yourself in a lost world.

He wrote several other novels, including a dramatic set piece story of Colombo's history beginning with the ominous arrival of a Portuguese fleet blown off-course in 1505, which still ranks as one of the best books to settle down with before settling into Colombo itself. "

"And so she died, and the shrieks and wailings and the broken sobs of the men were terrible to hear. And only Sonnaboy, dry-eyed but with an ache in his heart that could not be eased, said, 'Viva never came...Papa, Viva never came...He killed our mama, and he never came.'"

DIGIT

CHINWAGGING WITH THE FLAME TREE ESTATE & HOTEL GARDENERS

It is possible that few people know that 1978 was the year that the Dutch archer, Wietse van Alten, was born (he has since retired); or that the Romanian painter, Doina Bumbea, was kidnapped by North Korean (she never returned). Less known than any of this however, was a discovery made in the Aboriginal territories of the Bathurst Bay - that part of northern Queensland that points like a finger towards Papua New Guinea.

Out pig shooting in the jungle in 1975 a wandering botanist came across a palm he was unfamiliar with. Years of checking, investigation and discussion with the local Flinders Island Aboriginal peoples eventually led to the conclusion that it was a totally new species. In honour of the tribe, it was named *Wodyetia*, in 1978. But its uncommonly fluffy leaves, which resemble the tail of a fox, soon promoted an alternative name: the foxtail palm.

Then, slowly, slowly, over the intervening decades this rarest of rare trees became a celebrity, making appearances across the world as gardeners clamoured to buy seedlings, eager to enjoy its stately featheriness.

One grows here on The Flame Tree Estate & Hotel, and having reproduced most satisfactorily, 200 foxy babies are being incubated by Ananda and his gardening team to create, one day, a valley of feathers in amongst the teak and sapu.



THE LONG STORY

AN OBLIQUE VIEW OF KANDY CENTRAL

Twelve miles away from The Flame Tree Estate & Hotel is one of the country's loveliest bird forests: remote, wild – but accessible: UdawaththaKele Forest.

All creatures great and small live in its 104 hectares, along with orchids and ferns, four hundred and sixty plant species; butterflies, snakes, snails, lizards, toads, frogs, insects, monkeys, civet, deer, loris, boars, porcupine, the ruddy mongoose, giant flying squirrels, bandicoots, and bats.

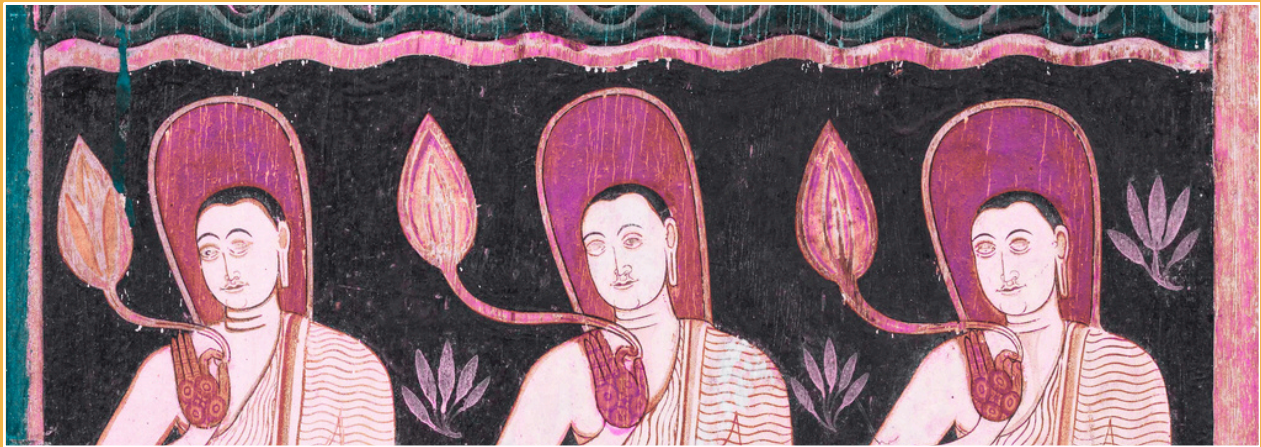
But it is of course the birds that draw most of all. Over eighty species have been recorded, many endemic, including Layard's parakeet, the yellow-fronted and brown-capped babblers, the Sri Lanka hanging parrot, the three-toed kingfisher, mynas, golden-fronted and blue-winged leafbirds, spotted and emerald doves, Tickell's blue flycatcher, the white-rumped shama, the crimson-fronted barbet, the serpent eagle, and brown fish owl.

Just beneath the forest lies the Church of St Paul, built in 1846. It has withstood more than the most expected tests of time. Just two years after its completion it weathered the shattering 1848 Matale Rebellion – and then all the succeeding wars and insurrections that beset the island, protected by vast gates of wrought iron fabricated far away in Edwardian England. Inside the dimly lit church is a majestic pipe organ donated by Muslim businessmen from Bradford, a silver-gilt communion set gifted by the King of England – and a blazing 1874 stained glass window of the Crucifixion, the Ascension, the Angel in the Tomb, and the Nativity, the gift of a planter's widow.

Outside, beyond its residual beam is Kandy Lake, and its prospect of a bracing walk. Known as the Sea of Milk, the lake is surrounded by a dramatic Cloud Wall across much of its three-kilometer circumference and is overhung by huge rain trees. Across its eighteen-metre depth lurk whistling ducks and monitor lizards, turtles, cormorants, egrets, pelicans, eagles, owls, herons, and numerous fish including an exotic and savage 9-foot-long alligator Gar – a fish with a crocodilian head, a wide snout, and razor-sharp teeth.

A circuit of the lake starting at The Temple Of The Tooth itself takes you all the way round to the Temple's back entrance where lies, most conveniently, Slightly Chilled, a hilltop bar slavishly dedicated to snacks and cold beers.





Here also, just beside the temple's back door, lies the entrance to the British Garrison Cemetery, created in 1817 - two years after the formal annexation of Kandy. It is home to almost two hundred souls, laid out like crazy paving, including John Robertson the last European to be killed by a wild elephant in Ceylon; William Robert Lyte, grandson of the author of "Abide with Me;" and the colonial ruler, Sir John D'Oyly whose penchant for sarongs and beards made him the country's first foreign hippie.

In equal sorrow - if not the same disorder - lie two hundred of the eighty-five million victims of World War Two, intombed in perfect order at the flawlessly maintained Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery. Ceylon escaped much of the horrors of that conflict but rather eccentrically found itself the location of Southeast Asia Command, set up in Kandy under Lord Mountbatten to be in overall charge of Allied operations. Far from the real battlefield, Queen Victoria's great grandson, found plenty of time to invent cocktails at the nearby Queens Hotel where he is still occasionally remembered.

The hotel, once the Walauwa mansion of the British Governors, is now the hotel equivalent of an aging maiden aunt, chasing an elusive restoration as an improvised Jane Austen bride might a suitor. It's bar, where somnambulism has evolved into a competitive sport, is the ideal spot to collapse in after a visit to the Kandy's greatest and most overwhelming sites - the palace of its last kings and The Temple of The Tooth.

These two places, though part of the same complex, are easily mixed up, a confusion that makes clear the unremitting opacity of the line between religion and state has always existed in the country. To most Sri Lankans, the Temple is holier even than St Peter's is to Catholics and at least as sacred as the Kaaba's Black Stone is to Muslims. Even so, it is merely the last and latest temple to give a home to the relic that makes it so important. The relic - said to be Lord Buddha's left upper canine tooth - arrived on the island around 371 CE hidden in the hair ornamentation of an Indian princess.



Almost immediately it became the island's most precious possession, legitimising the reign of kings and validating a priestly theocracy. Often on the move to escape war, capture, thieves, frenzied Catholics, rival warlords, or Tamil invaders, it lived in almost a dozen other temples in Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, and Dambadeniya, to Yapahuwa, Gampola, Avissawella, Kotte before coming to rest in Kandy.

As a relic it has plenty of competition. Scores of alternative artefacts assert a connection to Lord Buddha – including bowls, hairs, and bones. But the tooth is considered the most important for it touched the words he uttered as he prayed.

Across the world, thirty-two other places claim ownership of Buddha's teeth. If all are credible it would account for the teacher's entire set - eight incisors, four canines, eight premolars, and twelve molars. But somehow, by dint of custom, history, worship, faith and record, the tooth now in Kandy is by far the most celebrated one.

And as for the tale that the original tooth was pounded to dust by the Portuguese Archbishop of Goa in a fit of excessive evangelical catholic excitement: well, no one really believes that.

The relic's continuing importance can be measured by the fact that a victorious President or Prime Minister's first call on winning an election here, is to the Temple of the Tooth. There, like hundreds of thousands of devotees, the winning leader receive a monkish blessing. For much of its existence the temple has also been a target, destroyed by both the Portuguese and the Dutch; by weather, war, and insurrection; and the temple you visit today is in its fourth or fifth edition (depending on your definition of restoration).

The building, designed in classic, gracious Kandyan style, has



peaked tiled roofs underpinned by a panoply of pure gold and is surrounded by a golden fence. Elaborate frescoes adorn its walls. The chamber is richly decorated with elephants, guardian stones, and moonstones restored after LTTE bomb blasts. Seven caskets studded with gems and shaped like stupas fit one into another, the last holding the relic itself. Rituals are performed three times daily: at dawn, noon, and dusk. Once a week the tooth is symbolically bathed in water scented with herbs and flowers. And once a year it is paraded around the city streets in a vast Perehara procession of elephants, priests, fire eaters, dancers, and acrobats.

The palace that surrounds the temple it is a poignant shadow of its old self, the British having destroyed half of its buildings. Even so, the ones that remain are outstanding examples of the zen-like elegance of patrician hill country architecture, with wooden pillars, decorative carvings, distinctively pitched roofs, and walls and windows that open out interior spaces with so artful a restraint as to give the resulting light a unique and calming luminosity.

This can be seen most immediately in The Royal Audience Hall, the Magul Maduwa, a wooden structure, built by King Sri Vikrama Rajasinha in 1783.

Much good it did him - for here it was, in 1815 that the Kandyan Convention was signed, brutally ending the island's last kingdom.

Unhappily, many of the palace's buildings have become squats for lucky civil servants, their unbending bureaucratic domicile, twitching with

room partitions, plastic furniture, and rusty fans, distorting most of the original architectural features that once made these buildings so exquisite.

The stunningly graceful Ulpange, built in 1806 by King Sri Wickrama Rajasinha as a bathing pavilion for queens, is a police post. The Wadahindina Mandappe Audience Palace is home to the stuffed remains of Rajah, the chief elephant in the Kandy Perahera, who died in 1988, prompting a full day of national mourning.

The Pattirippuwa, an immeasurably stylish octagonal pavilion, has been commandeered by a library. The King's Palace, the Raja Wasala, is a Museum. The Queens' Chambers, the Meda Wasala, with its fetching courtyard and veranda, has been commandeered by the Department of Archaeology; and wild horses are not likely to drive them out. But at least the Maha Maluwa, the boundless terrace adjacent to Kandy Lake has not been encroaching upon; and at one end bears a stone memorial beneath which is buried the skull of Keppetipola Disawe who led the failed rebellion against the British in 1818.

Whilst in Kandy there are several other special places to drop into, not least the Royal Bar & Hotel, an old walawwa that dishes out welcome bowls of chips and frosted glasses of lime juice. It is typical of many of the buildings that haunt the city's tiny, crowded streets, betraying with hints of bashful sorrow, the still remaining traces of striking 17th, 18th and 19th century vernacular architecture. Balconies and verandas, screened windows and opaque courtyards hide behind shop hoardings that have yet to be bettered anywhere on the island for their chronic ugliness. Even so, to the discerning eye, beauty is there to be glimpsed; there to remind you that all is not yet lost, architecturally.

The Kataragama Devalaya, a Hindu shrine built by an 18th century Buddhist king is a perfect example of just such a surviving treasure – its architecture enlivened by the most intricate carvings, and colours chosen to forever banish grey. Still more dazzling is the nearby Pillaiyar Kovil, a Hindu temple dedicated to Ganesh, the elephant-headed son of Siva; and built by a Buddhist king for his Tamil Dobhi. To meet the establishment, head for the Malwatu Maha Viharaya, the Ground Zero of Buddhist authority. This complex of temples and monasteries dates to the 14th century pleasure gardens of the earliest Kandyan kings and is the home of the Siam Nikaya, the largest of the two most prominent Buddhist chapters on the island, and the one so memorably supported by one of the last kings of Kandy, Kirti Sri Rajasinha.



The last kings of Kandy were actually Tamil imports from the Nayak Dynasty of Madurai, India, though this did not nothing to hinder their enthusiastic Buddhism. Kirti Sri Rajasinha was an especially passionate devotee, and it was his reforms that restored Buddhism which had been badly damaged by the unrelenting forces of colonialism, especially – at the time – from the Dutch.

Barely five miles away from Malwatu Maha is another of Kirti Sri Rajasinha's temples: the Galmaduwa, the loneliest temple in Kandy. Barely anyone goes there; indeed it is not even a proper temple, its construction being abandoned by the king whose busy mind had moved from temple making to fresco painting. Yet it is an arresting building, the most Hindu of Buddhist shrines with a high tapering gateway exactly like those used to highlight the entrances to temples across Tamil Nadu. The frescos the king abandoned Galmaduwa Viharaya for can be seen a mile or so up the road at the Degaldoruwa Raja Maha Vihara. With hindsight, the king's change of priority was bang on for the frescos that cover the walls of this temple are among the very greatest ever commissioned by any of the island's kings.

Despite being inevitably religious in character, telling with due piety, the story of Lord Buddha, their sub text, as well as their sheer artistry, marks them out as exceptional. Into their scenes are incorporated the images of their times – Portuguses firearms, for example, the uniformed attendants of the kings, processional elephants, fish, trees as stylised as corals, the inside of homes, flowers, furniture, coaches, queens, guest arrivals and dinner parties.

PORNOGRAPHY

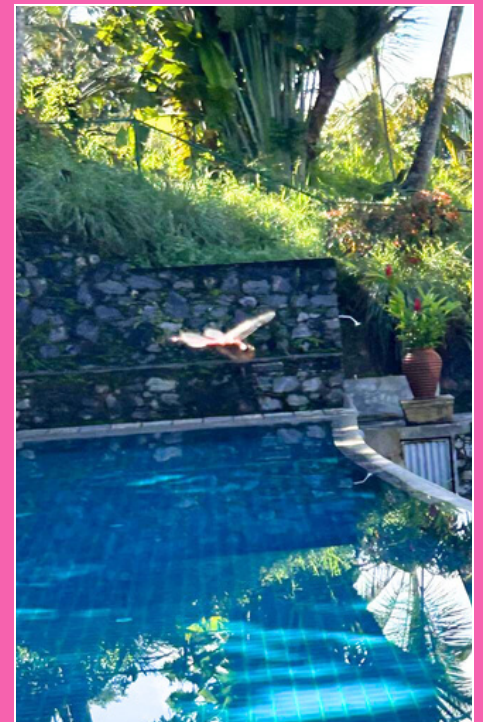
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INFINITY:
THIS MONTH'S
MODEL

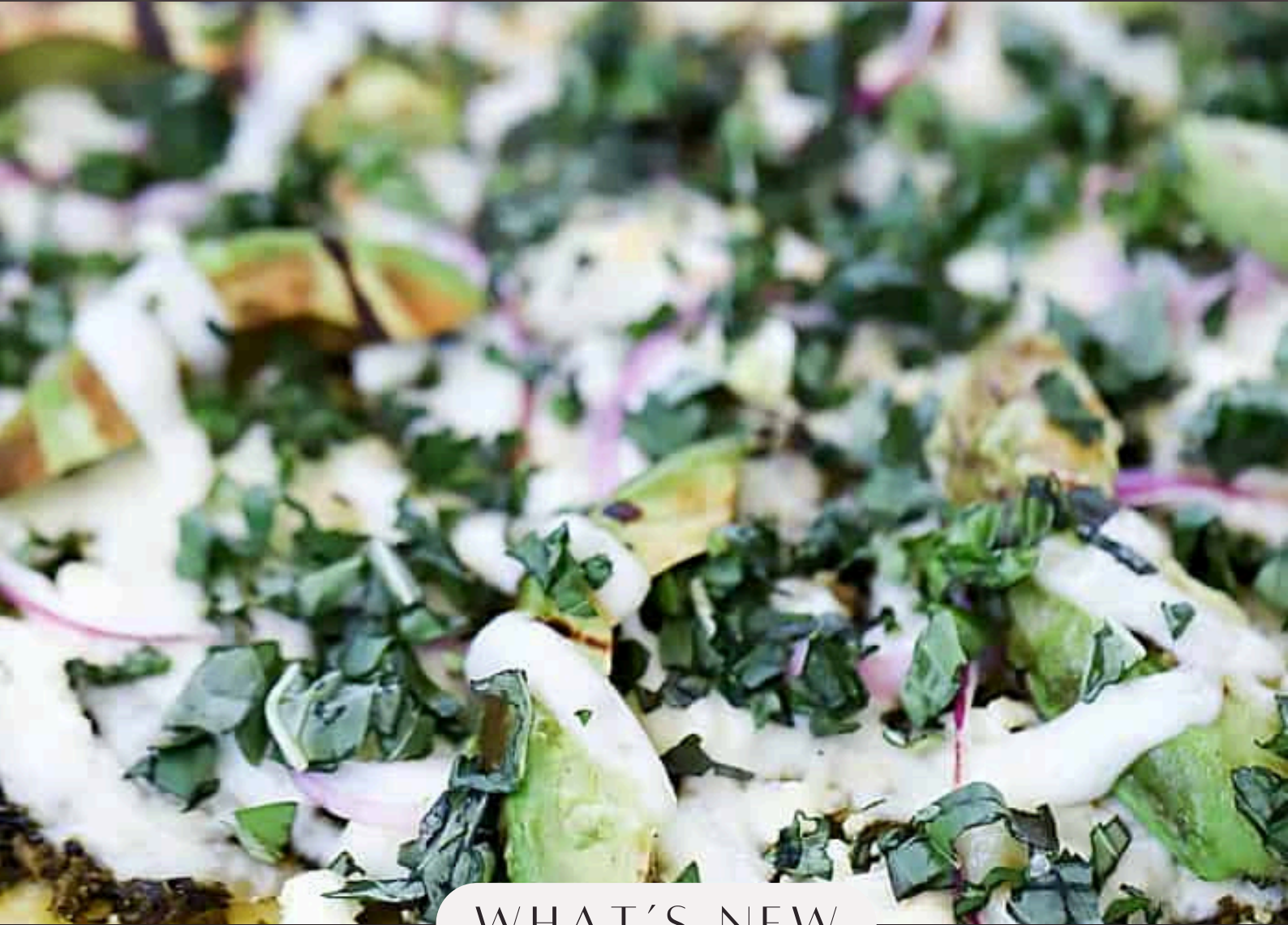
Infinity in The Collins English Dictionary

1. the state or quality of being infinite
2. endless time, space, or quantity.
3. an infinitely or indefinitely great number



KITCHEN GOSSIP

HAPPY PLATES FROM THE
FLAME TREE ESTATE & HOTEL'S CHEFS



WHAT'S NEW

Typically soggy; or at best so sufficiently well endowed with a base doughy enough to build a small country house upon, many pizzas today are best avoided. Which is why we embarked on boutique pizza trails, the results eventually making it to our a la carte menu. Of course, it all took some time: four chefs labouring for weeks to make wafer-thin bases; crispy and firm. We called it Flatbread Pizza for want of a better term.

Then the toppings: but not the usual. Never the usual.

A blushing red: Pizza Rossa: Organic Cheese, Sweet Peppers & Tomato dressed in Pepper, Cardamom & Kittul Oil

The tropical: Pizza Bianca: Organic Mozzarella, Spinach, Avocado dressed in Pepper, Cardamom & Kittul Oil.

And the adventurous: Pizza Azzurro: Organic Blue Cheese, Feta, Spinach, Onions dressed in Pepper, Lemon Zest & Curry Leaf Oil.

CRITIC'S CORNER

THE LATEST ON THE FLAME TREE ESTATE & HOTEL



Holly

Magical. What a perfect little slice of paradise. Tucked away in the jungle - the perfect relaxation spot with delicious food on the menus and the most attentive staff.

Ruth

You feel like visiting with wealthy friends and reluctantly leave the property, and the tastefully decorated rooms.

Benjamin

The best meal on our trip through Sri Lanka. The local dishes and meals deserve special mention.



Janine

Our first trip to Sri Lanka and we discovered the best of the country in one place. Beautiful location, serene, peaceful, most comfortable rooms and beds, wonderful views from terraces, lovely food, and above all the very best of service from charming staff. Nothing was too much trouble, from organising our transfers. A big thank you to everyone for looking after us and making our stay so special and memorable.



Olivia

The only hotel with an adequate number of schnauzers. Though the dogs are enough to merit five stars, the style, hospitality and food are all top notch too.

Global

A stunning hotel with exceptional views and amazing food and service. Flame Tree is a stunning hotel where you are made to feel like a VIP. The rooms are beautifully curated with thoughtful touches and wonderful background music playing all day. The staff are discreet but always there when we needed something, nothing is too much trouble.

Wayne

Tropical paradise! The view, the rooms, the staff!!!

AYUBOWAN

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